



Review of the publication: Ekaterina Makhotina, , Ekaterina Keding, , Włodzimierz Borodziej, , Etienne François, , Martin Schulze Wessel, *Krieg im Museum. Präsentationen des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Museen und Gedenkstätten des östlichen Europa*, Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2015, ISBN 978-3-525-37309-5

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This volume of essays addresses the representation of the Second World War in museums and memorials in Eastern Europe. It is the product of a research project funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, bringing together fourteen detailed accounts in German and English of the historical development of such institutions in a range of contexts, including Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and Romania. Apart from one anomalous chapter that details the development of the Dachau concentration camp memorial, the central focus of the volume is on the transition between the antifascist narrative propagated by state socialist regimes in the region to a variety of post-socialist memory cultures. These memory cultures have been determined in each case both by domestic politics in the individual countries and their respective geopolitical circumstances.

In particular, the case studies show how museums and memorial sites in the region have dealt with the shift from the relative marginalisation of Jewish suffering by communist regimes towards a memory culture more open to Western (European) models of remembrance, in which the Holocaust takes on a central role in the narrative of the Second World War. Such Holocaust-focused memory also implies a recognition of local complicity in the genocidal policies of the German occupation, whether the non-Jewish population were bystanders to atrocities or, in some cases, active participants in them. Perhaps the most fraught debate on these issues has occurred in Poland, and chapters on various Polish museums and memorial sites by Monika Heinemann, Hannah Maschein, Piotr M. Majewski and Sabrina Lausen demonstrate how these issues have resonated in shifts in memorial and museological practice. In cases such as Hungary and Romania, which had their own authoritarian governments that were allied to National Socialist Germany during the War, the issue of state complicity in the persecution of Jews must also be negotiated in relevant museums, as Martin Jung and Regina Fritz illustrate in their respective chapters.

Eastern Europe's struggle to come to terms with the complex and controversial history of German occupation has already been the subject of a good deal of scholarship by those interested in the politics of memory and heritage, and this volume will provide further valuable material to researchers interested in these issues. This is particularly the case where the chapters present less widely known examples, such as the regional and local museums that are dealt with in the chapters by Ekaterina Keding, Christian Ganzer, Ekaterina Melnikova and Iryna Sklokina in the first and longest section of the book. The further three sections of the volume consider memorials to villages destroyed by the German occupiers, the representation of the Holocaust in museums and, finally, Holocaust memorials. All of the analyses are a testament to diligent historical research, drawing on archival sources and interviews with heritage professionals and civil society actors involved in the creation of the institutions in question.

Despite these strengths, the volume represents a missed opportunity in terms of developing a comparative analysis of the sites in question. One of the volume's editors, Etienne François, makes a claim for the importance of comparative work in the concluding chapter, yet seems less able to identify what the purpose of such a comparison might be. He points, instead, to the importance of acknowledging a "variety" of approaches to representing the War across the different contexts analysed, both before and after the fall of state socialism. This is not an unimportant

point, given that the volume provides plenty of evidence for divergent practices both within the region and within individual countries that call into question any lazy assumptions about a homogenously "Eastern European" memory of the Second World War.

Nevertheless, the volume's two introductory chapters, including a particularly enlightening analysis of the qualities of the museum as medium and the relationship of that medium to the representation of war by Thomas Thiemeyer, appear to promise more programmatic cohesion than the following chapters are able to deliver. This is perhaps inevitable in a multi-authored volume, but the different emphases explored by the individual researchers mean that the intriguing questions that are raised in the introduction by Ekaterina Makhotina and Martin Schulze Wessel are not satisfactorily developed throughout. For example, museums are described here as "Leitmedien der Erinnerung" (the leading media of memory), suggesting that the opening, closure or redesign of museums reflects shifts in the official memory that dominates in a given state. At the same time, as Makhotina and Schulze Wessel insist, "history museums and memorials do not simply reflect state memory policy, but are instead actors in the memory discourse" (p. XX). [1] The individual contributions to the volume certainly provide evidence of this, especially in the first section of the book, which addresses the role of local museum professionals and the institutional contexts for their work. However, in other instances, the focus on documenting the design of the museums and memorials results in a relative lack of consideration being given to the actors who created these exhibitions.

A case in point is Heinemann's chapter on the museum in Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory in Krakow, which documents the experience of German occupation. Heinemann's analysis is in many ways excellent in terms of the attention it pays to the museological strategies employed in the museum, which makes room for an ambiguous multiperspectivity before apparently returning to a more traditional division of the historical protagonists into good and evil. While Heinemann may be justified in interpreting this as an attempt to restrict the visitor's freedom to draw their own lessons from the historical evidence they have seen, more could have been done to analyse the process that led to that particular design. If the approach of the curators was contradictory, it may have been that certain political or strategic concerns were in play, but there is no attempt to reconstruct these. For instance, one might well ask whether the return to the relatively conventional division of historical actors into good and evil at the end of the exhibition might have been a consensual strategy that made it possible to introduce more controversial material earlier on. Museums are not in the business of offending their (paying) audiences, after all, and one wonders whether there might have been a strategic decision to wrap up the more challenging content in a more digestible overarching narrative.

This is more generally a problem in the volume. Although in some cases the motivations, professional norms and institutional strategies and constraints of the museum and memorial makers receive some attention, as in Ekaterina Melinkova's fascinating contribution on divergences between local museums in Northern Lagoda, this aspect receives relatively little attention elsewhere. This undermines the stated aim to consider museums and memorials not simply as reproducing official memory discourses, and also makes comparisons more difficult, as it is unclear whether we are observing common patterns of agency in the different cases. Furthermore, if museums and memorials really are agents in the memory discourse rather than simple transmitters of that discourse, the question of reception would seem to be key. Although with the historical examples of now defunct exhibitions it might be difficult to reconstruct visitor reaction from the archival sources, the analyses of contemporary exhibitions would have benefited greatly from some consideration of the responses of visitors.

The majority of the contributions subscribe to a view of museums and memorials that foregrounds the presentation of particular narratives. As Iryna Sklokina puts it in her chapter, the museum "is one of the most influential public institutions which aim to construct a coherent narrative of the past and communicate this narrative to a wider public." While it is clear from the accounts of the various sites discussed in the volume that heritage institutions can have very strong narrative voices in terms of their design and the vision of history they wish to communicate, this again leaves open the question of the relationship of visitors to these narratives. Museums may wish to "communicate" a particular account of history, but how do visitors respond and do they, for example, bring with them existing interpretations that challenge or are challenged by the presentation of history in museums and memorials? This volume raises such questions, but it does not attempt to resolve them.

In summary, there is much careful and detailed scholarship to be found in these essays, and researchers with an interest in the representation of the Second World War in museums and memorials, along with those working in the fields of memory studies and heritage studies more widely, will find thought-provoking case studies that will provide

the starting-point for further investigation. The documentation of the development of these museums, some at significant and well-known historical sites associated with the Second World War and the Holocaust, will undoubtedly be useful to scholars looking for an overview of contemporary developments in the region. The chapters are also helpfully illustrated with photographs of the museums and memorials under analysis. However, due to the lack of cohesion in terms of focus and theoretical framing, coupled with a predominantly descriptive approach, the volume misses an opportunity to set the agenda for further research in this area.

[1] Reviewer's own translation.

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