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Allen Paul. *Katyn: Stalin's Massacre and the Triumph of Truth.* DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010. xxiii + 422 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87580-634-1.

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“Still there are trees growing which have seen this”

As no other place in the twentieth century, the Russian village Katyń has found its way to the Polish landscape of memory. The murder of thousands of captured Polish officers by the NKVD (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) under Joseph Stalin's direct order in 1940 became the central topic of Polish-Russian relations because of decades of denial of the crime by Soviet leadership and the forced silence about it in Communist controlled Poland. The crash of the Polish presidential aircraft in the surroundings of that place in spring 2010, in which all of the ninety-six passengers who were on their way to a commemoration ceremony were killed, has increased the mystification of this event once again.

Since the discovery of the graves of Katyń and the propagandistic exploitation of the finding by German National Socialist propaganda, the subject has moved both the European and the American public. A lot has been investigated on this issue; some things have also been hushed up. For over twenty-five years, American journalist Allen Paul, who was born in the year of the outbreak of World War II, has dealt with this subject. Already in 1991 he presented his first book. Extended versions followed in 1996 and now in 2010. The author aims to connect “big politics” of World War II with the concrete experiences of the affected persons and their families. In addition, he has selected some personal tragedies about which he has elaborated over the years. He personally has met some survivors and their children who have lived predominantly in the United States since 1989, and

thus has learned their history.

Paul outlines the history of investigation and the concealment of the events of Katyń. In his discussion, Soviet attempts to shift responsibility for the crime on the Nazis come across as less irritating than the concealment of known facts by American and British politics during and immediately after World War II. It is probably not an exaggeration to speak of a gloomy chapter that fits smoothly in the betrayal of the Polish ally committed on the war conferences in Teheran and Yalta, when future borders of the Polish state were determined without participation of the Poles themselves. Of course it is possible to find good reasons for such behavior, like the need for a narrow military alliance with Moscow during the war—particularly as the war continued in the Pacific even longer; in the end, the proceedings at the conferences nevertheless cannot be excused. Based on personal tragedies, this book goes far beyond the specific events in the woods of Katyń. The author creates an elaborate picture of the destiny of the Polish population especially under Soviet—and to a smaller degree under German—rule. In addition, the book incorporates traumatic experiences of women and children who were deported to the inner parts of the Soviet Union, deportations that are quite unknown in the West in spite of impressive reports by Aleksander Wat, Ola Wat, and Gustaw Herling-Grudziński. Their studies depict the transport of some survivors as part of the so-called Anders Army via Iran and the Middle East to freedom (Aleksander Wat, *My Century: The*

Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual [1988]; Ola Wat, *Der zweite Schatten* [1990]; and Herling-Grudziński, *A World Apart* [1951]). Even though Paul conducted the interviews many years after the events occurred, thereby limiting the historical value, his patchwork method makes the book easier to read than these other studies, especially for not so well-informed readers.

Though the history of the discovery of the common graves has been described in other studies in detail—for example, the eyewitness reports briefly cited in Józef Mackiewicz's book *The Katyn Wood Murders* (1951) are quite unknown—the single elements in Paul's book fit together neatly to create a persuasive whole, without the author giving up his deep sympathy and empathy for Poland. Unlike many Polish journalistic works of the national Right, Paul's study avoids sweeping statements. He allows relatives of the deceased a chance to speak; they warn against speaking badly about "the Russians" in general. Instead, some interviewees describe their positive experiences with Russians who even saved the lives of Polish deportees.

Some of Paul's assessments should be questioned: Is it really true, for example, that the crime of Katyn was a part of the attempts to sovietize Poland (p. xi)? Instead, is it not that the murders have to be associated with gen-

eral methods of the Moscow regime's violence, which ran through different phases and until today cannot be brought into line with a coherent (chrono-)logical connection in spite of numerous studies on that topic? (For instance, although unfortunately not quoted in Paul's work, see Victor Zaslavsky's *Class Cleansing: the Katyn Massacre* [2008]; and on the question of violence, see Jęrg Baberowski's *Der rote Terror, Geschichte des Stalinismus* [2003].) Furthermore, is it useful to disinter the old conspiracy theories on the tragic death of the Polish prime minister, Władysław Sikorski, in 1943? It was not the subject of this book, but it belongs in the context of how the Katyn affair was handled in Poland before as well as after 1989. The author could have included a few words about the fact that at least in the political underground since the 1970s Katyn indeed was something to be discussed. By that time, practically nobody in Poland doubted Soviet culpability, even if they could not say that outspokenly.

All things considered, the combination of world history and human experiences in Paul's book have been well received, especially in the English-speaking world. Readers who like this kind of the presentation with its mixture of contemporary witness reports and analytical discussion, will be very well served by this work.

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