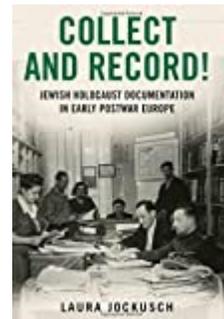




Laura Jockusch. *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. XV, 320 S. \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-976455-6.



Reviewed by Susanne Urban (International Tracing Service)

Published on H-Judaic (September, 2013)

Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

They Spoke, Wrote, and Collected: Early Testimonies and Jewish Holocaust Documentation

It has frequently been suggested that Holocaust survivors didn't speak about their experiences immediately after liberation. Survivors created a conspiracy of silence. They needed the impact of the Eichmann trial in 1961 to start to talk. The recording of survivor interviews only really started after 1994 when Steven Spielberg established the Shoah Foundation. They started too late and now the survivors are dying before they can provide their stories. Holocaust research only started in the 1960s, carried out by historians such as Raul Hilberg or, in Germany, Martin Broszat. Holocaust historiography needed time to develop because it needed distance from the events.

These statements, repeated time and again in media, universities, and other institutional surroundings, have led to the assumption that a broad academic discussion and Holocaust education were impossible for the last several decades because of a lack of substantial systematic research and collection of testimonies. But there was early Holocaust research and early testimonies were given. As a result early commemoration also took place.

But there was not a significant enough echo and therefore these early efforts to write, record, and collect sank as various collections deep into archives. These treasures have only been unveiled in the past ten years. Today scholars and media continue to be surprised by how much material was left by early historians and survivors.

Laura Jockusch, a German-born historian, now the Martin Buber Society Fellow in Jewish History at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, earned her PhD from New York University with a thorough study of early Holocaust historiography. She follows the footprints of those early historians and collects and records the sources for her impressive study from numerous archives. Jockusch's research spans the period from 1943 to 1953. She not only includes those survivors who later worked as historians, or historians who returned to their profession after the Holocaust. She also explores efforts to analyze, preserve, and document the Holocaust during the event itself, as historian Emanuel Ringelblum and his colleagues in the Warsaw Ghetto did.[1] Collectively, those who perished and those who survived wrote history from a Jewish

perspective, laid the foundations of Holocaust historiography, and began the first academic debates regarding the methods and the aims of such research.[2] Jockusch focuses on early Holocaust historiography in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and Poland. This European view mirrors partly the European-wide politics of extermination as well as the survivors' post-Holocaust circumstances: they were scattered around Europe in Displaced Persons (DP) camps where much historical work took place. Following the closing of the DP camps the survivors emigrated to Israel, the United States, and other countries. Leaving Europe, historians and members of Jewish historical commissions such as Philip Friedman, Israel Kaplan, and Moshe Yosef Feigenbaum took their knowledge and academic approaches with them.[3] Some of those who had worked in Warsaw, Lublin, Paris, and Austria stayed and some emigrated. But their documentation was not centralized for a variety of reasons, including the Cold War. A few collections which had been gathered in Europe were brought, for example, to newly created or reopened institutions such as the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Historians and other participants in creating this early historiography shared a common commitment: to document the Jewish world as it was before the Holocaust and to show the loss through Nazi documents, testimonies, photographs, film material, and artifacts. But their collections of material were then scattered in various countries just as the survivors were.

As a historian, Jockusch undertakes the enormous task to make us aware of these early collections, their origins, and their whereabouts today. She analyzes and compares the methods and research angles. She also provides a short biographical appendix with notes on specific historians and members of commissions to show that this research was deeply connected to their own traumas, losses, and personal experiences. Jockusch shows that these affected the historians deeply but didn't interfere with their academic and analytical approaches. Debates fueled by Martin Broszat and his German colleagues in the 1980s about the "professionalism" of Jewish historians and their research on the Holocaust would have been moot if they had taken into consideration this early Holocaust historiography. But they did not and the Jewish historian Josef Wulf had already committed suicide in 1974, not only because of his trauma and personal losses, but also because of the academic ignorance he was confronted with in Germany.[4]

The sources early Jewish historians collected and cre-

ated, had to be used and researched, had to be taken out of oblivion, as Jockusch, underscores: "Scholars' use of the abundant materials collected by postwar Jewish documentation has so far been selective, focusing largely on perpetrator documents and the collections compiled by DP camp commissions on the lives of the surviving remnant in the postwar period. The thousands of survivor testimonies and questionnaires still await their use by historians and other scholars." At a time when the generation of survivors is dwindling in numbers, it is all the more important that scholars and the wider public acknowledge and fully use the records that the postwar documentarians so carefully assembled under extreme conditions soon after the catastrophe (pp. 205-206).

This is the necessary appeal to scholars working in manifold disciplines, and awareness of these early texts and testimonies is increasing. However, present-day readers who use these sources for research and educational purposes must be aware of the nuances in the texts and have to decipher the subtexts of the early testimonies, which both record and are influenced by loss and trauma, the hope to rejoin loved ones, and the individual wish for justice—sometimes these are expressed in only a single sentence.[5] This impressive, comparative study, written in a style which is easily readable but retains a high academic level, does not spare emotions, and is a must-read for every Holocaust historian or educator. It is important for reconnecting to these long-forgotten academic roots and for bringing awareness of these archival sources to a broader public.

If we unveil all these early historiographical sources and testimonies we do what Holocaust scholar Saul Friedlander has encouraged—listen to individuals: "It is in particular due to her nature, by virtue of her humanity and freedom, that an individual voice which, all of a sudden, stands out in the flow of the ordinary historical narrative of events like those portrayed here, may break through a smooth interpretation and the (mostly involuntary) self-complacency of scholarly distance and objectivity." [6]

Notes

[1]. Samuel Kassow, *Who Will Write our History: Emanuel Ringelblum and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

[2]. Ada Schein, "Everyone Can Hold a Pen: The Documentation Project in the DP Camps in Germany," in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, ed. David

Bankier and Dan Michman (Jerusalem/New York: Yad Vashem/Berghahn Books, 2008), 103-134.

[3]. Roni Stauber, *Laying the Foundations for Holocaust Research: The Impact of Philip Friedman*, Search and Research: Lectures and Papers Vol.15 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009).

[4]. Klaus Kempfer, *Joseph Wulf. Ein Historiker-schicksal in Deutschland*, Schriften des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts 18 (G ttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

2012).
[5]. See also several articles in the second year-book of the International Tracing Service: *Freilegungen 2.  berlebende - Erinnerungen   Transformationen*, ed. Rebecca Boehling, Susanne Urban, and Ren  Bienert (G ttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2013).

[6]. Saul Friedl nder, *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination* (London/New York, Continuum Publishers, 2010), 23.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-judaic>

Citation: Susanne Urban. Review of Jockusch, Laura, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. September, 2013.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38888>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.