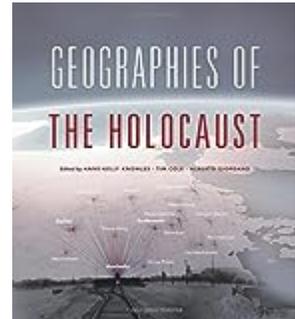




Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole, Alberto Giordano, eds. *Geographies of the Holocaust*. The Spatial Humanities Series. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. Illustrations. 260 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-01211-1.



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The Spatial Turn, the Spatial Humanities, and the Holocaust

The Holocaust marks one of the darkest chapters in human history. It is no surprise then that the Holocaust continues to stir emotions and controversy to this day. Most recently, a diplomatic squabble erupted surrounding the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camps by the Soviet army. At issue was the pointed failure of the Polish government and the organizing committee to invite Russian President Vladimir Putin to the ceremony. The omission was widely interpreted as a rebuke to Russia's ongoing interventions in and annexations of Ukrainian territory, especially since Putin had attended prior commemorations and the Polish government made a point of inviting Ukraine's president. Given the growing enmity between Russia and many of its neighbors, the contention over diplomatic niceties is a minor issue but nonetheless evokes the continued potency of the Holocaust to frame current debates between perpetrator and victim and between good and evil.

Reflecting its continued salience, the Holocaust has been the subject of much scholarship, and our under-

standing of its many victims, criminals, accomplices, resisters, and varied categories of bystanders has been greatly improved, especially with the opening of archives and other sources following the end of the Cold War. By the early twenty-first century and the passing of the last people directly involved, it might seem that there was little new ground to cover as far as the Holocaust was concerned. The edited volume *Geographies of the Holocaust* by Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole, and Alberto Giordano illustrates the folly of that assumption by offering a series of striking and innovative perspectives on the subject. The book is broadly grounded within the emerging field of the spatial humanities, part of the broader so-called spatial turn across the social sciences and humanities. As the introduction points out, relatively few scholars have applied a spatial perspective to the Holocaust, despite recent developments in spatial theory and technology. The editors make an important step toward rectifying this gap by demonstrating how much insight and understanding one can gain by asking spatial questions and employing spatial methods to investigate even the most familiar sub-

jects in the history of the Holocaustâ (pp. 1-2). In the process, the collection begins âto unearth the Nazisâ conception and education of a comprehensive geography of oppressionâ (p. 3).

The volume consists of six case study chapters that originated from an interdisciplinary research workshop held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2007. These collaborative projects teamed geographers and historians, giving the book an explicitly interdisciplinary perspective. The volume begins with a brief introduction that situates the subsequent chapters at the confluence of traditional geographical concerns with location, space, place, scale, and movement with historyâs traditional emphasis on chronology, causation, and change over time. The case studies harness new possibilities in geovisualization offered by advances in GIScience to provide an innovative and integrative bridge between these two disciplinary traditions. The chapters are firmly grounded in recent scholarship but remain highly empirical and cover a range of scales from continental-wide patterns, trends, and trajectories down to the level of individual experiences. Each chapter is distinct and stands alone, yet simultaneously the essays work together nicely to capture varied aspects of the Holocaust. Beyond the specific findings of the studies, the volumeâs overall contribution is to explore new methodological and analytical possibilities offered by GIScience, as well as ways of visually communicating those findings. The end result is a sweeping yet highly textured accounting of the varied spatial, temporal, and corporeal dimensions of the Holocaust that highlight the potential and challenges of the burgeoning field of spatial humanities.

Chapter 2, the first case study, examines the evolution of the SS concentration camp system. Most are familiar with the larger, more notorious camps, like Auschwitz and Dachau, but often overlooked is the fact that the dozen or so main camps each stood atop a network of dozens of smaller subcamps, most established toward the end of the war for construction and armaments production. The chapter maps out the distribution of the various camp networks and offers a general timeline of their establishment. The authors stress that it is difficult to generalize about the camps, because they varied significantly in terms of their purpose, size, and the social characteristics of their inmates, especially gender and ethnicity. The chapter is especially noteworthy for giving attention to mobile construction brigades dispatched from the camps to toil away across the Nazi Reich. Overall, the analysis substantiates conventional understandings of the camps

in terms of chronology, location, and function. The geography of the camp networks raises some intriguing questions concerning the degree of centralized planning and oversight versus other more contingent or local factors in shaping these places and spaces. The authors also rightly note the cartographic challenges of mapping the topic, especially the difficulty of capturing the churn of inmates, guards, and others associated with the camps.

Chapter 3 tightens the focus to regional-scale arrest patterns related to the implementation of the Holocaust in northern Italy following that countyâs occupation by Germany in 1943. The analysis is largely quantitative, breaking down arrests in terms of location, time, age, and gender, as well as nationality of the arrested and arrester. These data are used to construct a spatial analysis that identifies clusters of arrests and which factors seem to correlate to higher vulnerability to detention, deportation, and eventually murder, in the case of Italian Jews most likely at Auschwitz. The results are not definitive but rather suggestive of several tendencies and patterns. For example, arrests by Germans tended to be more clustered in space and time and also more likely to include the elderly and children than arrests by Italians. Added together, the chapter suggests that some type of selection process was at work during the processes of arrest (or non-arrest), in addition to the notorious processes of selection that occurred later in the camp systems.

Much of the general public associates the Holocaust with highly efficient, industrial-scale gas chambers ruthlessly employed for mass murder, but chapter 4 examines the often overlooked mobile execution squads that fanned out across the occupied Soviet Union as Adolf Hitlerâs forces pushed east. In contrast to the rather impersonal murders within the concentration camps, these auxiliary units, numbering only a few thousand members, shot and killed around two million people, mostly Communists and Soviet Jews, at close range. The chapter deploys mixed methodologies that bring quantitative and qualitative perspectives to bear. The former focuses on the activities of an execution squad operating in Lithuania in 1941. By examining the location, time, and scale of the mass killings, as well as the demographic profile of victims, the authors demonstrate that the squadâs murderous rampage consisted of two distinct sweeps. Specifically, a first sweep targeted military-age Jewish males, Communist functionaries, and other Soviet elites. In August, a second sweep began targeting all Jews for extermination. The second qualitative portion of the chapter speculates on the role of proximity of the perpetrators to the actual killing sites. It notes that the perpetrators and

their accomplices had considerable flexibility in determining their roles in the process from those who served as guards to those actually shooting the victims.

Chapter 5 sharpens the focus even further to examine the process of ghettoization in Budapest. The city offers an intriguing example, because Hungary was allied with the Axis powers and remained nominally independent until occupied by Germany in 1944. Yet the Hungarian government faced increasing pressure to implement anti-Semitic measures against its Jewish citizens. The result was the uneven but escalating process of ghettoization. Unlike most ghettos in German-controlled territories, Budapest followed a relatively dispersed pattern. Harnessing a variety of spatial analytical techniques, including calculating residential densities, mean centers, and kernel densities, the chapter identifies two main concentrations of Jewish residences near Pest's central district, but many smaller ghettoized spaces, some just single buildings, were scattered across the urban landscape. The chapter concludes by examining the experience of Jews living in the more concentrated ghettos versus those living in more isolated residences by estimating the general walking distances that were possible given the curfews that restricted movements of Jews. The analysis suggests that those in more concentrated ghettos were better positioned to access basic necessities, like grocery markets, within their limited windows of travel than those in the more isolated locations who were confronted by de facto invisible barriers of time and distance that restricted their daily movements.

The gradual narrowing of case studies continues with chapter 6, which examines the processes of planning and building the Auschwitz concentration camps and adjacent residential-industrial combine that would help power the Nazi war effort and Heinrich Himmler's dreams for an SS empire across the east. The chapter focuses on a key period of frenetic building activity at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, the camp most closely aligned with the public's image of assembly-line-like genocide. The camp underwent a massive and rapid expansion from mid-1943 to early 1944 as it was repurposed from a conventional concentration camp to a hybrid concentration-extermination camp that would handle the final stages of the Final Solution. The analysis emphasizes how the complex itself was in perpetual motion as new building plans were continually drafted, revised, realized, or discarded. The chapter builds on the impression from earlier chapters that instead of a carefully planned and efficient endeavor, the Holocaust was marked by a great deal of improvisation and contingency

at all levels and scales.

The final chapter investigates survivors's testimonies regarding their evacuation from the Auschwitz camp system as the Soviet army approached in early 1945. This further tightens the scale to focus on individual experiences. The chapter maps the evacuation routes and speculates on the relative positionality of inmates within the marching columns trudging to other camps away from the frontlines. The evacuation process was marked by varying degrees of order and disorder, consolidation and fragmentation. Prisoners were technically removed from the physical confinement of the camps, but the marches constituted a type of mobile confinement as the accompanying guards executed stragglers or anybody else who happened to cross them for whatever reason. Indeed, conditions were so brutal that the evacuation process is commonly referred to as death marches, although the ostensible purpose was to conserve slave laborers to further toil on behalf of the German war effort.

The volume concludes with a brief afterword restating the truism that the Holocaust was a fundamentally geographical event that was implemented through space and not merely in space (pp. 227-228). The authors argue that the preceding case studies demonstrate the fruits of greater collaboration between geographers and historians who apply multidisciplinary and varied methodologies across a range of scales.

Geographies of the Holocaust generally reaffirms consensus regarding the planning, implementation, and experience of the Holocaust. The text is well written throughout and firmly situated within relevant scholarship while still remaining engaging for more general audiences. The volume is superbly illustrated with wonderful color maps and a variety of other graphics. The volume's main contributions are showcasing innovative methodologies in a straightforward manner. The editors make this an implicit objective in two ways. First, each chapter includes a spotlight on methods section. Second, the authors weave first-person perspectives of their experiences during the research process throughout the main text. This gives the volume something of an autobiographical feeling, similar to how Art Spiegelman's *Maus* comics retrace a Holocaust survivor's recollections while simultaneously relating the later experience of recording those memories. I continue to wonder if the methodological impact might have been stronger if the spotlight sections were packaged as a single concluding chapter. My general inclination would be toward a consolidated chapter, but it is mostly a matter of personal

preference. One could also point out certain omissions, as one could of any collection of case studies, so I find those criticisms rather lazy, especially as the volume is very reasonably priced for the profuse and colorful illustrations. The editors directly acknowledge that the work in no way approaches a comprehensive geography of the Holocaust. Nor was that their intent. Instead, they want to highlight how profoundly a study of space can aid in our understanding of the complexity of policy decisions, the variable but brutally effective implementation strategies, and the particular experience of the victimsâ (p. 227). The editors and authors clearly succeed on those accounts.

Geographies of the Holocaust is an excellent collection of scholarship and a model of interdisciplinary collaboration. It brings together the humanistic traditions of the social sciences and humanities emphasizing the experiential aspects of events with cutting-edge technological advances in geovisualization and spatial analysis to seek out broader patterns, structures, and tendencies. The volume makes a timely contribution to the ongoing emergence of the spatial humanities and will undoubtedly advance scholarly and popular understandings of the Holocaust.

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