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Chapter 1

Introduction: Writing the Digital History of Nazi Germany

The digital has become ubiquitous in everyday life. Digitization¹ has also impacted the humanities and specifically the field of history: Recent years have seen a plethora of publications that deal with new methods, historical insights, and historiographical opportunities and challenges afforded by digital innovations.² This book aims to join this conversation by zooming in on digital history projects

¹ The terms “digitization” and “digitalization” are often used synonymously. As editors of this volume, we prefer the term “digitization” in this introduction. In the different chapters, we have preferred to follow the respective authors’ usage of either or both term(s).

² While acknowledging the new (practical) possibilities afforded by digital approaches, researchers in digital history consistently point out potential methodological and epistemological implications that technical advances might entail for the practice of history; see Wolfgang Schmale, *Digitale Geschichtswissenschaften* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010), 123; Jörg Wetzläuffer, “Neue Erkenntnisse durch digitalisierte Geschichtswissenschaft(en)? Zur hermeneutischen Reichweite aktueller digitaler Methoden in informationszentrierten Fächern,” *Zeitschrift für digitale Geisteswissenschaften* (2016), accessed October 20, 2020, doi: 10.17175/2016_011; Rüdiger Hohls, “Digital Humanities und digitale Geschichtswissenschaften,” in *Clio Guide – Ein Handbuch zu digitalen Ressourcen für die Geschichtswissenschaften*, edited by Laura Busse et al., A.1–1 – B.1–34 (Berlin: Clio-Online and Humboldt-University Berlin, 2018), 22, accessed October 16, 2020, doi: 10.18452/19244; Andreas Fickers, “Digitale Metaquellen und doppelte Reflexivität,” in *H-Soz-Kult*, January 26, 2016, accessed October 20, 2020, www.hsozkult.de/debate/id/dis_kussionen-2954. There are growing calls for greater integration of findings from digital history into the general historiographical discourse; see, for example, Arguing with Digital History Working Group, “Digital History and Argument,” white paper, (Fairfax, VA: Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media and George Mason University, 2017), 12, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://rrchnm.org/argument-white-paper/>. At the same time, digital innovations in the field of history are still sometimes regarded apprehensively or even with strong skepticism, see Sybille Krämer and Martin Huber, “Dimensionen Digitaler Geisteswissenschaften,” special issue, *Zeitschrift für digitale Geisteswissenschaften* 3 (2018), section one, accessed October 14, 2020, doi: 10.17175/sb003_013; furthermore, there is an ongoing debate among historians whether “Digital History” should be considered a mere tool in research or should be treated as a stand-alone academic field; see, for example, Hohls, “Digital Humanities”; Arguing with Digital History Working Group, “Digital History and Argument”; Gerben Zaagsma, “On Digital History,” *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128, no. 4 (2013), 14; or Patrick Sahle, “Digital Humanities? Gibt’s doch gar nicht!,” in “Grenzen und Möglichkeiten der Digital Humanities,” ed. Constanze Baum and Thomas Stäcker, special issue, *Zeitschrift für digitale Geisteswissenschaften* 1 (2015), accessed October 17, 2020, doi: 10.17175/sb001_004.

and approaches that focus on the history of Nazi Germany, World War II, and the Holocaust.³ It presents a collection of essays on how the digital can be used to present and analyze topics and sources related to the period of Nazi Germany, written by authors in the light of their own experiences of actually doing so. The book evolved out of papers given at a workshop which took place at Jacobs University Bremen in December 2019.⁴

Working on Nazi Germany as an area of history presents unique issues and challenges. When digital history encounters these features, two points are salient. First, in this field, scrutiny of how best to work (digitally) with historical sources when doing research must be complemented by consideration of how to most effectively and appropriately present and disseminate such sources and the results of related research using new digital formats—be it in the educational settings of schools and universities or in museums, exhibitions, and at memorial sites. This strong public history dimension is especially characteristic of work on Nazi Germany, particularly so in Germany itself, where remembrance of and education about this time period and its crimes, victims, and perpetrators play an important role in contemporary society and politics. Second, and relatively, there is a specific urgency in this area to pay attention not only to the methodological and heuristic challenges that possibly emerge from digital history approaches, but also to the ethical questions that could likewise emerge. When it comes to remembering and exhibiting the history of Nazi Germany, concerns about appropriateness and suitability are always especially pertinent, and become perhaps even more so when considering employing digital solutions.

An example of such an ethical concern about responsible and appropriate usage of digital solutions arising and then being successfully dealt with is the novel digital visualization employed at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial in Lower Saxony, Germany. Bergen-Belsen was a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp and concentration camp, run by the Nazi regime between 1939 and 1945. Today, the former barracks that once housed 120,000 people have long vanished and only empty

³ The history of Nazi Germany, World War II, and the Holocaust is the general historical background considered in this chapter (and this book). However, in the following, to enhance readability, we will use the contracted phrase “Nazi Germany” to refer to this larger context. Also, for the sake of readability, we will use the established term “Nazi” instead of the fuller “National Socialist.”

⁴ The workshop was called “Zeugnisse des Nationalsozialismus, digital – Projekte, Methoden, Theorien” (“Digital Testimonies of National Socialism – projects, methods, theories”). For the conference report, see Friederike Jahn, “Tagungsbericht: Zeugnisse des Nationalsozialismus, digital – Projekte, Methoden, Theorien, 13.12.2019 – 13.12.2019 Bremen,” *H-Soz-Kult*, March 19, 2020, accessed October 16, 2020, www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-8695.

heathland remains at the site. But, thanks to digital technology, visitors can now borrow tablets at the Bergen-Belsen museum that allow an Augmented Reality (AR) tour of the site. The tablet screen superimposes representations of the vanished buildings onto a live image of the heath where they once stood. Thus, looking at the tablet is like looking through a window that frames a different time. However, when the project was originally proposed by a former inmate of the camp, there were still serious concerns about the appropriateness of using AR reconstruction. This worry is not unique to Bergen-Belsen; the debate among scholars and historians about employing Virtual Reality (VR) and AR is vigorous, and sometimes even antagonistic. Some voices laud digital tools as the future for Holocaust remembrance,⁵ while others strenuously warn that some of these tools could contribute to a “transformation of the Shoah into a [sensationalistic] ghost play [*Geister- und Gespensterstück*].”⁶

For the Bergen-Belsen memorial, such ethical concerns were alleviated when, as Stephanie Billib, head of the project, puts it: “we realized that we weren’t dealing with a representation in the style of video games or Walt Disney.”⁷ The developers of the app decided to render the images in a deliberately simplified and relatively featureless way, so that it makes “buildings become visible again, yet deliberately only in shadowy form.”⁸ The tension between the use of AR in tandem with somewhat unreal abstract images of the past is cru-

⁵ See, for example, Adam Brown and Deb Waterhouse Watson, “The Future of the Past: Digital Media in Holocaust Museums,” *Holocaust Studies* 20, no. 3 (2014), accessed October 20, 2020, doi: 10.1080/17504902.2014.11435374. In general, this discourse on the various forms and best practices of “Digital Holocaust Memory,” has produced a growing body of literature. On this, see, for example, the bibliography “Reading about Digital Holocaust Memory” provided by Victoria Grace Walden on the blog Digital Holocaust Memory, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/digitalholocaustmemory/2020/07/10/reading-about-digital-holocaust-memory/>.

⁶ Micha Brumlik, “Hologramm und Holocaust: Wie die Opfer der Shoah zu Untoten werden,” in *Erinnerungskulturen: Eine pädagogische und bildungspolitische Herausforderung*, ed. Meike Sophia Baader and Tatjana Freytag (Weimar: Böhlau, 2015), 27. Specifically, Brumlik refers here to digital, “hologram”-like representations of Holocaust survivors giving testimonies.

⁷ Jan D. Walter, “Mit dem Tablet durchs KZ,” in *Deutsche Welle*, May 5, 2016, accessed October 21, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/de/mit-dem-tablet-durchs-kz/a-19230698>. (Translated from German by the authors.)

⁸ Andrea Schwyzer, “Erinnerung digital. Mit der App durch Bergen-Belsen,” *NDR*, January 21, 2020, accessed October 28, 2020, <https://www.ndr.de/geschichte/chronologie/kriegsende/KZ-Bergen-Belsen-Gedenkstaette-per-App-erkunden,bergenbelsen520.html>. (Translated from German by the authors.) See also Memory in the Digital Age, “Bergen Belsen on Site with Augmented Reality,” accessed October 28, 2020, <http://www.belsen-project.specs-lab.com/summers-fruits-a-new-app-version/>.

cial to the project's development. This evolution of the Bergen-Belsen app is a perfect example of how ethical, technical, historical, and educational aspects intertwine and guide considerations in this special field of history. What is technologically possible is not always educationally desirable or ethically appropriate.

New forms of visualization made possible through digitization are also of increasing importance to research work focusing on the history of Nazi Germany.⁹ Additionally and as in history overall, digital methods have been applied to deal with big data sets¹⁰ (methods which may, of course, also involve visualization). Some of the chapters in this book will also consider such innovations, as well as related practical, technological, and ethical concerns. The authors featured in this book are all actively engaged in “writing the digital history of Nazi Germany.” Some draw in their contributions from their work for online editions of digital sources, archives or museums, where they employ digital solutions to present and disseminate historical sources and knowledge about this period. Others draw from their scholarship on Nazi Germany as part of digital history and digital humanities research projects and programs.

The book is organized in three parts. These are intended to mirror three stages in the process of knowledge production and dissemination with the aid of digital tools and approaches—from a consideration of digital sources, databases, and archives in Part I, through an examination of digital research projects and their findings in Part II, to a discussion of forms of presentation enabled or enhanced by digital technologies as realized in museums and memorial sites in Part III.

Part I, entitled “Digitally Researching the History of Nazi Germany, World War II, and the Holocaust,” looks at digital sources, databases, and archives that focus on aspects of the history of Nazi Germany. It begins with a contribution by Sonja Dickow-Rotter and Daniel Burckhardt. Their chapter presents and discusses an online source edition called *Key Documents of German-Jewish History* (*Hamburger Schlüsseldokumente zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte*), which is maintained by the Institut für die Geschichte der deutschen Juden in Hamburg.¹¹

⁹ Seminal work in this regard has been done by the Holocaust Geographies Collaborative at Stanford University. Its book *Geographies of the Holocaust* (2014) not only utilizes digital methods to produce new insights into various aspects of Holocaust history, but also exemplarily discusses and problematizes the digital methodologies used: Anne Knowles, Tim Cole, and Alberto Giordano, *Geographies of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ For an introduction, see Shawn Graham, Ian Milligan, and Scott Weingart, *Exploring Big Historical Data: The Historian's Macroscope* (London: Imperial College Press, 2016).

¹¹ *Hamburgische Schlüsseldokumente zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte* can be found at <https://juedische-geschichte-online.net/>, last accessed October 28, 2020.

The edition spans 400 years of Jewish history; thus, it also presents Judaism beyond the context of the victimization of the Holocaust. Still, the history of Hamburg's Jews between 1933 and 1945 remains a focal point of the edition. Dickow-Rotter and Burckhardt reflect on best practices and ethical responsibilities when providing digitalized sources about the Holocaust on the internet. For example, since digitizing the sources led to their being mostly decontextualized, the edition seeks to reverse this process by providing topical introductions as well as source interpretations and metadata on the origin of the sources. Dickow-Rotter and Burckhardt give a detailed description of both the historiographical and presentational strategies and the technical issues behind the edition's web presence, revealing how much thought and expertise at multiple levels is necessary to build a digital source edition and put it online. They also see the edition as an example of how a user-friendly website can be built while preserving and highlighting scholarly standards in digitizing sources. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that the benefits of an online edition in comparison to a printed one in raising awareness and disseminating knowledge of Jewish history are worth the extra complexity required in producing it. The chapter also highlights the usefulness of online formats in respect to learning about an edition's audience. The availability of online analytic tools can help improve user experience of a digital edition, enhance the edition's responsiveness to its audience and reception, and develop in response to ongoing research findings, in a way that paper editions simply cannot.

In Chapter 3, Christiane Charlotte Weber continues this discussion about best practices and ethical responsibilities in regard to online archives, considering the challenges, pitfalls, and benefits of making sensitive files related to the history of Nazi Germany openly accessible. Weber's chapter focuses on exploring the work of the Arolsen Archives, formerly the International Tracing Service (ITS), which was established by the Allied forces as a tracing service for millions of Displaced Persons during World War II. With holdings of around 30 million documents, this is the world's most comprehensive archive on victims of Nazi persecution. To date, 26 of its 30 million documents have been digitized. In her chapter, Weber describes the benefits of the Arolsen Archives' policy to make documents of Nazi persecution accessible online, a policy grounded in profound commitment to the right to remembrance. She also explains the e-Guide developed by the archives to help with historical contextualization of the online accessible sources.¹² Weber's chapter concludes with some more general reflections on the ways sources change when they are digitized, discussing

¹² The e-Guide can be found at <https://eguide.arolsen-archives.org/>, accessed October 28, 2020.

changes related to their character as well as how they are retrieved and reused, and in regard to their contextualization and users' interaction with them.

The authors of both these first two chapters make strong cases for enabling widely available online access to historical sources. At the same time, they remind us of the sensitive nature of the sources involved. Because of this, the authors of both chapters argue that contextualization is especially urgent: As Weber puts it, when opening the online gate to archives and sources, a “gatekeeper”—possibly itself in digital form—is needed to minimize misuse of the documents and sources that are made freely available on the internet.

The book's second part, “Digitally Writing the History of Nazi Germany, World War II, and the Holocaust,” focuses on how digital tools can be used to research the history of Nazi Germany, for example tools such as digital discourse analysis, and digital methods that allow work with big data. In Chapter 4, Sebastian Bondzio explores the work of the Gestapo by analyzing the card index file of the Gestapo's Osnabrück office. The file is made up of index cards generated by Gestapo officers to organize information about individuals, noting biographical information as well as misdemeanors and sanctions issued. Examining this source body in its entirety, he argues, enhances our understanding of the Gestapo's practices and how it tried to implement the ideology of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in German society. However, given the large volume of the Osnabrück index, which comprises about 48,000 file cards, such analysis could only be feasibly achieved by employing digital tools.

Bondzio's chapter is based on his work with a research project at the University of Osnabrück,¹³ for which a digital replica of the Osnabrück Gestapo's card index was created. This digitization opened up possibilities for computer-aided simulations of the index's operation and for an analysis of its historical big data with a digital approach in the tradition of Data Driven History. Working with the serial sources of the Osnabrück Gestapo files in this manner, unintentionally inscribed patterns and structures can be made visible, which in turn allow for new insights into the Gestapo's practices. Bondzio's chapter discusses forms, numbers, frequencies, and the duration of punishments noted in the Gestapo file cards, shedding light on the inner workings of the secret police. At the same time, and since the file cards also note agencies and institutions that were cooperating with the Gestapo, the digital data set also allows him to provide new

¹³ The research project, funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [DFG]) is called “Überwachung. Macht. Ordnung – Personen- und Vorgangskarteien als Herrschaftsinstrument der Gestapo” (“Surveillance. Power. Order. Personal- and Process-Card Indexes as an Instrument of Rule of the Gestapo”); DFG project number: 394480672.

insights into the Gestapo's collaboration with other institutions in Nazi Germany and thus into the Third Reich's larger disciplinary system.

Bondzio's analysis shows that it would be wrong to think of the Gestapo as the center of Nazi terror; rather, the Gestapo has to be seen as an integral part of a larger—center-less—disciplinary network. His chapter also emphasizes how much the Gestapo relied on data gathering and knowledge production, and that its disciplinary actions were closely related to the aim of implementing the Nazi-envisioned “racial community” or *Volksgemeinschaft*, as well as fermenting an intimidating public image.

Bondzio's findings rely on a digital analysis of the Osnabrück Gestapo files, an analysis which would have been impossible or at least much more difficult and time-consuming to conduct in an analog fashion and without the comprehensive digitization of the card index. His chapter thus serves as an example of how digital approaches can enhance our understanding of historical contexts, especially if they are—as in the case study in the chapter—applied in conjunction with a historical critical perspective.

Mark Dang-Anh and Stefan Scholl also work with big data. Their chapter is based on research indebted to Linguistic Social History and focuses on communication in Nazi Germany. It provides two examples of the ways in which digital discourse analysis can enrich our understanding of how German society used language during the Nazi dictatorship from 1933 to 1945. First, analyzing more than 1,000 speeches given by Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, Dangh-Anh and Scholl show how the concept of *Lebensraum* (living space) was linguistically constructed by central Nazi spokespersons, embedded into German society, and tied to *Volk* (people) and other central (discursive) concepts. The authors discuss the different methodological approaches that led their analysis and argue that, while a digitally driven research process will suggest various possibly fruitful paths, the decision which of these paths to follow demands adequate analytico-hermeneutic decisions by the analysts throughout.

In addition to the rhetoric of Nazi leaders, Dangh-Anh and Scholl look at letters of complaint sent to Nazi officials between 1933 and 1939. The texts in this second sample potentially include more various and complex linguistic elements such as figures of speech or sarcasm. To deal with this complexity, a different method of analysis was applied. The letters of complaint were manually tagged for informative or interesting phrasing, figures of speech, etc. Database tools can then be used to collate and analyze these tags. Even though this part of their project is still ongoing, Dangh-Anh and Scholl can already point to different patterns that appear across the letters—such as the appropriation by complainers of patterns specific to Nazi discourse. Such tagging allows specific patterns to be discerned more quickly and easily than in “traditional” serial reading. However,

the authors grant that this method of analysis, to which manual tagging is essential, is rather time-consuming and more fitting for short or medium-length texts.

Similar to Bondzio, Dangh-Anh and Scholl's contribution highlights new research questions and methods that are possible when working digitally on historical source material. However, both chapters make it clear that their analyses would have been incomplete without also applying "traditional" forms of historical methods and source criticism.

In the last part (Part III), this book looks at how digital tools and approaches can innovate and enhance the presentation of the history of Nazi Germany. To that end, it considers across three chapters various types of "Digital Exhibitions and Digital Forms of Commemoration." This section begins with a contribution by the members of the Valentin3D project at Jacobs University Bremen, an ongoing digitization project centered on one particular historical site, namely the large (if never quite completed) Nazi submarine pen Bunker Valentin located in a village near Bremen.¹⁴ This bunker was built by thousands of forced laborers during World War II. Today it houses a memorial and an exhibition. The chapter focuses on technical methods used for 3D-mapping physical remnants. It discusses the complexity and challenges connected with the mapping of a diverse and sometimes dangerous environment. Inaccessible areas of the bunker, such as a flooded basement, have now been explored thanks to solutions provided by the Jacobs Robotics group. The results have been integrated into a 3D-model, which will be available online, allowing research on the bunker to be done remotely from around the world. The chapter also highlights how the exploration and 3D-mapping furthered knowledge about the bunker's history and reflects on the possibilities and challenges data created in this manner present for research and commemoration. The authors also point out that new findings on the history of Bunker Valentin would not have been possible without connecting the exploratory results with traditional analog methods and sources, namely around 400 blueprints, none of which had been analyzed before the project.

In Chapter 7, Jannik Sachweh looks more closely at exhibitions and, specifically, at how digital aids can be used in exhibitions on topics related to Nazi Germany. His chapter focuses on the memorial site at the prison in Wolfenbüttel, Lower Saxony, which provides an exhibition about the history of the prison and

¹⁴ The project is called "3D Mapping of the U-Boot Bunker Valentin Memorial by Air-, Ground-, and Underwater-Robots" (3D Erfassung der Gedenkstätte U-Boot Valentin durch Luft-, Boden- und Unterwasserroboter)—or Valentin3D—and is funded by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung [BMBF]), accessed October 10, 2020, <http://robotics.jacobs-university.de/projects/Valentin3D>.

the penal system in Nazi Germany. Sachweh discusses a digital map developed for the memorial's new permanent exhibition. This map depicts places of persecution connected to the Wolfenbüttel prison within the then state of Brunswick. Sachweh's chapter explores the advantages of such a digital map, which allows visitors a more interactive and thus more individualized access to historical information: The map uses digital layers to link background information and, if available, further material such as pictures and historical sources to the locations it depicts. With this digital tool, visitors can more actively curate the input they receive according to their interest. However, Sachweh also highlights the challenges connected to creating such a digital map. Selecting the places to be depicted is not trivial, as he explains in regard to his Wolfenbüttel case study. Following specific definitional frameworks, such as "places belonging formally to Brunswick's state judiciary," would lead to the omission of important information about the complex network and activities of the Wolfenbüttel prison within the larger Nazi penal system. However, to prevent the map becoming too overwhelming or confusing, certain choices must be made. In sum, as Sachweh contends, digital maps in exhibitions can certainly be informative and visually engaging for visitors but will equally unavoidably contain—and sometimes even create—blind spots. While some of this might be already true for analog maps, this danger is plausibly heightened when dealing with digital tools since they seem to suggest to their audience a greater degree of completeness.

The book's final chapter, by Christian Günther, considers again the potentialities and challenges of digital tools used by memorial sites. Less focused on just one particular project, Günther explores the usage of VR and related technologies in German sites that memorialize the crimes of Nazi Germany. His discussion is guided by an examination of the term authenticity and the role it plays at these sites. This is of particular concern when considering the challenges memorials face when introducing immersive technology into their exhibitions and existing modes of presentation on the history of Nazi Germany. Basing some of his considerations on theories from Games Studies, Günther points out that authenticity—one of the major assets of memorials—is created for and by the visitor through communication with the exhibition. That is, the participation of visitors is crucially important. Here, Günther sees an opportunity for digital tools, claiming that they could enhance participatory experience (and, hence, authenticity), as, for example, when visitors are given the chance to enter a dialog with the virtual presentation of a witness giving testimony. Furthermore, the chapter discusses whether visitors should not only be treated as recipients but also as co-creators when implementing VR, and the ramifications of such a move for memorial site professionals.

Through these different contributions, this book, first, wants to shed light on projects that use digital forms and approaches to research and display the history of Nazi Germany from new angles. As any book can highlight only a few projects in detail, the present volume also offers an annotated bibliography listing some digital activities—both concluded and ongoing—related to the history of Nazi Germany. In doing so, the book endeavors to complement the more in-depth insights of the individual chapters with a brief survey that offers some insight into the ever-growing breadth of activities in this field.

Although the different chapters are explicitly about individual projects, a recurring theme permeates the book, as each chapter also considers how these emerging digital approaches and methodologies relate to more traditional forms of researching and displaying topics and sources on Nazi Germany. The different chapters all have in common that they consider whether and how these digital approaches add to our understanding—and learning and teaching—of this history.

In this regard, a first and central question mostly concerns the research side of historians' work. It asks whether and how historians' practices ought to change or adapt in the digital era. Of course, on a general level, all chapters in this book deal with this in that they describe such changes and their potentials through exploring the particular methodological or practical interventions of actual working historians as facilitated by digitization in their individual projects. One clear change is that digitization has certainly led to new ways of dealing with sources; for example, historians can now analyze much larger bodies of sources than previously possible or even imaginable, as is illustrated in Chapter 4 by Bondzio, whose examination of Gestapo files is only realizable because of digital methods, and in Chapter 5 by Dang-Anh and Scholl, who employ a digital discourse analysis of language use in Nazi Germany. So, digitization has generated new forms of research. However, as is pointed out in several instances in this book, it is only in conjunction with "traditional" research methods that these innovations can develop their full potential.¹⁵ Additionally and relatedly,

¹⁵ Such calls for the combination of methods can also be found in scholarship dealing more theoretically and epistemologically with digital history. For example, in regard to analyses based on big data, Zaagsma has emphasized that their aim "should not be the replacement of the historian's interpretive and hermeneutic work," demanding rather an "integration of both approaches"; Zaagsma, "On Digital History," 24. Schmale argues in the same vein when he stresses that "there are no quantitative analyses without qualitative analyses in the humanities;" Wolfgang Schmale, "Big Data in den historischen Kulturwissenschaften," in *Digital Humanities: Praktiken der Digitalisierung, der Dissemination und der Selbstreflexivität*, ed. Wolfgang Schmale (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2015), 137. (Translated from German by authors.)

of course, digitization not only affects historians' research methods, but also the "stuff" with which they work: primary sources. They now have to deal with digital sources, a development that has led to calls for historians to more actively consider methods and processes of "digital source criticism."¹⁶ However, as our texts tend to show, digital source criticism can best be understood more as an update to historians' armamentarium than a fundamental transformation of their craft. The traditional practice of source criticism is still applicable, and its application very much required, perhaps even more so than ever.¹⁷ This book illustrates how important digital sources have become, especially for those who work on Nazi Germany with a focus on education and in the field of public history. Here, digital sources afford, in particular, very welcome opportunities to better visualize historical data and contexts. This is very clear in Chapter 7 by Sachweh, but also features in the project discussions provided by the Valentin-3D team and Günther in Chapters 6 and 8.

A second major issue pervading many discussions at the workshop and in this book is particularly prominent in the contributions by both Weber and by Dickow-Rotter and Burckhardt: that of providing sources digitally online and the potential repercussions and drawbacks of such practices. First, there is no doubt that digitizing sources and subsequently making them available via the internet will greatly improve their accessibility. Furthermore, there is a compelling argument that this is inherently beneficial. Thus, the larger range achieved via the open access approach can be considered a step to further democratizing both research and education of history in general and that of Nazi Germany in particular. In the same vein, it certainly can be argued—as in this book by Weber, for example—that both the breadth and strength of remembrance work can be enhanced if archives, museums, and other institutions provide online digital source material on the crimes of Nazi Germany and its victims, as in this manner wider audiences can be reached, unlimited by geography or, to an extent, economic factors. However, there are also some concerns. Enabling such

¹⁶ See, on this especially, the publications by Andreas Fickers, e.g., Andreas Fickers, "Update für die Hermeneutik. Geschichtswissenschaft auf dem Weg zur digitalen Forensik?," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 17, no. 1 (2020), accessed July 6, 2020, doi: 10.14765/zzf.dok-1765. See also the 2018 dissertation by Pascal Föhr on source criticism in the digital era, Pascal Föhr, "Historische Quellenkritik im Digitalen Zeitalter" (PhD diss, University of Basel, 2018).

¹⁷ We have further developed these considerations elsewhere; cf. Frederike Buda, Julia Timpe, and Christiane Charlotte Weber, "Digitale NS-Geschichtsschreibung: Herausforderungen im Umgang mit digitalen Quellen in der Geschichtsforschung und -vermittlung zum Nationalsozialismus," in *Raumdefinitionen –Stadtkonstruktionen –Architekturpraktiken in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Digital Humanities und die "Messbarkeit" des NS-Regimes*, ed. Richard Nemec (forthcoming).

(potentially unlimited) access to digital sources on Nazi Germany might also introduce problems. For example, there is the risk of violating the right of privacy of victims on a personal or more collective level. A rather different type of concern is the worry that users accessing the sources would lack the skills and knowledge needed to work properly with the material, so that the result of democratized information access might—through misleading interpretations—generate actual misinformation. While that risk is one of mischance, there is a related risk, especially when it comes to visual sources, that making them available widely might create opportunities for malicious manipulations and de-contextualization.

One way to mitigate such potentially damaging developments would be for archives, online editions, and researchers to act consciously and devise strategies to balance both the opportunities and challenges when providing access to digital sources online. In a sense, they might have to adopt the role of a gate-keeper—that is, taking seriously the role of guiding the public when publishing primary sources and providing historical contextualization. But of course, this has always been the responsibility of historians and, what is more, will only perpetuate the role of memory institutions in safekeeping and “authorizing” knowledge. As Günther points out in his chapter, a better way might include participatory elements that involve visitors/the audience in certain decisions, though this would also entail that archives, museums, and so on change their approach to internal and external communications.

To an extent then, some of the challenges that emerge when looking at newer digital approaches are, on closer inspection, actually older challenges. Differently put, one could speak of an “old wine in new bottles” scenario. This is not meant to dismiss the new challenges and the need to address them. In fact, such considerations are important and beneficial for all historians, regardless of their direct engagement with digital tools, as they allow us to re-calibrate our tasks and methods as historians. Nevertheless, it is useful to recognize that some of the challenges identified in discussions related to (the) digital history (of Nazi Germany) are in fact older concerns which now re-appear connected to digital approaches and sources. Historians have always been—or should always have been—compelled by the argument that increasing access to sources is inherently a good thing, but equally aware of the need to provide contextualization and guidance to that access; digitization does not create, but rather renews this. The sentiment about new wine in old bottles is equally apt, of course, in regard to historians’ work with digital sources. As highlighted above, the “old” hermeneutic tool kit is generally well equipped to deal with “new” digital sources. Indeed, one of the most exciting aspects of the projects described in the various chapters is how they demonstrate historians combining their hermeneutic tech-

niques with the possibilities of digital technology. In this regard, as seems to become clear throughout this volume, “writing the digital history of Nazi Germany” is most fruitful when done hand in hand with traditional, analog approaches and principles. As we hope to show in this book, if both approaches align, then more can be learned.

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