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Jörg Friedrich. *Brandstätten: Der Anblick des Bombenkriegs.* München: Propyläen Verlag, 2003. 239 S. + ca. 200 Abb. EUR 25.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-549-07200-4.

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After having caused a stir with his controversial book *Der Brand: Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland*, Jörg Friedrich has now quite literally poured some more fuel on the fire with a new book of photographs. The books complement one another, as they tell the same story: the suffering of the German civilian population under Allied bombing. The pros and cons of Friedrich's form of presentation have been discussed extensively, and a number of shortfalls have rightly been criticized.[1] Besides an apparent lack of contextualization and the deliberate drawing of parallels between the aerial warfare against Germany and the Holocaust, there is the fact that Friedrich depicts Anglo-American military strategy in an exaggerated and simplified way. The Germans are shown as mere victims, unable to defend themselves against a barbaric storm of destruction.

Friedrich's *Brandstätten* continues this tradition, and, reading the book as an answer to his critics, it does not seem as if Friedrich was impressed by the objections they raised. On the contrary, the opposite appears to be the case. In ten chapters ("Früher," "Angriff," "Abwehr," "Zuflucht," "Bergung," "Versorgung," "Trümmer," "Trümmerleben," "Partei," and "Heute"), Friedrich tells his black-and-white story of Germany's destruction. At the beginning of the book one finds the sites of German culture and tradition, representing the kind of medieval idyll typical to German cities. Cologne and Ulm, Leipzig and Lübeck appear in their "natural state," accompanied by quotations of Goethe. In Friedrich's book, it is not the National Socialists and their determination to wage "total war" that provided the reason for the bombardment, but rather the allied terror pilots to whom no monument and no German life were sacred, but who took the war to cities bare of any defense, and who killed innocent women and children. Friedrich succeeds in maintaining this pictorial pattern of narration with remarkable effect through about two hundred photographs. By far the greatest part of the book is therefore made up of pictures depicting the rescue of the wounded and the recovery of the dead, which are represented through the dominant motif of destruction and the indescribable suffering of defenseless people.

Friedrich does not provide the reader with information concerning the context, the source or the degree of representativeness of his pictures, with the last of these points being especially neglected. The author deploys an assembly of quotations most of which are taken from the recollections of people who survived the air raids. Those brief "extracts of horror" form the leitmotif of his apocalyptic vision of the destruction of Western civilization, that is, of German culture.

Text and picture do not always complement each other. In one example, a photograph shows an American pilot, who was shot down in summer 1944 in Essen and subsequently taken into custody by the German authorities (p. 59). The text added to the picture is a comment from the NSDAP's party chancellery: "Volksjustiz gegen angloamerikanische Mörder." But this caption is also Nazi propaganda, and to understand what the picture shows, it would be necessary to give us a little bit more information than a quotation of the *Parteikanzlei*.

Judging Friedrich by the goals that he has set for himself, one has to appreciate his success in cramming the perspective of the German victims into just one book of pictures both comprehensively and consistently. Most of the pictures were taken in the big cities of Germany, and the quality of reproduction is excellent. The sequence of pictures–from the raids to the "before and after" pictures of the allied raids–is carefully composed. Controversy inevitably arose over the prudence of including photographs showing how cruelly German victims were mutilated and burned. The publishing house added further fuel to the fire by adding a statement concerning this matter at the end of the book. However, the real problem was not that Friedrich and his publisher could not agree

about the level of cruelty presented to the public–what the average viewer sees on TV every day is certainly in the same league. Unusual was the behavior of the publishing house, which distanced itself from the pictures in the book, thereby evading responsibility for its own product.

At the same time, Friedrich wants to give his new book the aura of breaking taboos, as he already did in *Der Brand*. It includes pictures never seen before, and, at last, by implication, the long repressed truth about the nature of the war. This conclusion, however, is as misleading as Friedrich's whole interpretation of the air war. The images in question have been available for a long time in various collections, and for most big cities there are published document collections that provide information about the nature and the effects of the allied air raids. This material has been available for several decades. In most of these document collections, however, as in Friedrich's books, National Socialism only plays a minor role. Most of the time, it is depicted as a "friend in need," and only very seldomly is it shown as the chief actor in this play and the driving force behind the war. Like his first book, Friedrich's new volume therefore succeeds in disturbing readers and in touching them emotionally. It does not, however, provide sufficient information, and it sends out a message that is questionable in every respect.

Note

[1]. See the H-German debates on this topic at `http://www.h-net.org/\protect\unhbox\voidb@x\bgroup\def.{~}\let\futurelet\@let@token\let\protect\relax\protect\edefn{n}\protect\xdef\EU1/LinuxLibertineO(0)/m/it/10{\EU1/LinuxLibertineO(0)/m/n/10}\EU1/LinuxLibertineO(0)/m/it/10\size@update\enc@update~\egroupgerman/discuss/WWII\protect\unhbox\voidb@x\bgroup\def.{bombing/WWII-bombing}\let\futurelet\@let@token\let\protect\relax\protect\edefn{it}\protect\xdef\EU1/LinuxLibertineO(0)/m/it/10{\EU1/LinuxLibertineO(0)/m/n/10}\EU1/LinuxLibertineO(0)/m/it/10\size@update\enc@updatebombing/WWII-bombing\egroupindex.htm`.

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