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The most fascinating aspect about this book is that it is an unexplored rich source of historical narratives. I choose to use the word "unexplored" because very little has been either written or discussed about Chelmno, in spite of it being the first Nazi death camp, beginning its operations in early December 1941. Chelmno or *Kulmhof* (as it was known during the Nazi occupation) is located fifty kilometers north of Łódź in central Poland. Chelmno has often been referred to as the pilot project of the Nazis, where the Jews were murdered in gas-vans. The experiences from Chelmno (as mentioned in this book) reveal the absolute sufferings and atrocities that individuals and families faced in this death camp and what followed. Yet, as the authors point out in the foreword, "the importance of Chelmno in the development of the Holocaust is also not well understood and is certainly under researched" (p. 15).

Meticulous detailing by the authors about this under-researched area of the Holocaust is a significant selling point of this book. Author Chris Webb has worked on the Holocaust for over forty years and is the author of a trilogy on the Aktion Reinhardt camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, and on the Auschwitz death camps. His co-author, the late Artur Hojan, also had several years of research and journalistic engagement with Nazi war crimes behind him. He had set up the Tiergartenstrasse 4 Association in 2005 to conduct research on Nazi war crimes. Both authors, with the support of other researchers and experts in this region, such as Cameron Munro, have condensed not only strategies that were implemented in Chelmno but also the lived experiences of those who managed to escape the death camps.

As the title of the book suggests, this book's purpose is essentially threefold. It is an attempt to speak about the history, biographies, and remembrance attached to the Chelmno death camp. The authors argue that Chelmno was unlike the other death camps set up in Poland, such as Belzec, Lublin, Sobibor, and Treblinka, primarily because it was a pilot project where the grounds were being tested. At Chelmno, "after the people had been gassed in the gas-vans, the victims were driven in
the gas-vans to the so-called Waldlager in the Rzuchów forest. In the forest the mass graves were located within the camp's area, where the victims were buried. In the other extermination camps, the mass graves were located near the stationary gas chamber facilities" (p. 35).

It is pertinent to foreground here that Chelmno was chosen by the Nazis for specific reasons. The authors clearly point out that Chelmno was in a central location within the Warthegau and also had important transport links with Kolo through the railroad line. By using the rail transport system and roadways, Nazis transported Jewish deportees either by the narrow gauge track to Powiercie and from there the journey to Chelmno was completed using trucks or by road from the Łódź ghetto and locations in the vicinity of Chelmno. Łódź was one of the first large-scale Jewish ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe. Therefore, multiple logistical factors were kept in mind while choosing Chelmno as the first site of extermination. A detailed description of the manor house, gas-vans, and the liquidation of the ghettos in Chelmno are some of the appalling highlights revealed through this research work. The constant emphasis on the "Final Solution" pushed by the Nazis is also reiterated throughout this book to make readers across the globe informed about the historical past of this region.

The final destination in Chelmno for the Jewish deportees was the nineteenth-century manor house of Baron von Bistram. This house was "transformed into a place of extermination by the Nazis during 1941. It was partly destroyed during the First World War and was under State supervision from 1918. It was located at the edge of the village, about 150 meters from the road, on the high bank of the valley of the River Ner, which is a tributary of the River Warta. The Manor House was also known as the Mansion, the Palace, the Schloss (Castle), or simply the Haus (House)" (p. 34). A detailed description of the manor house is provided along with a description of the transformation of this three-story building into an extermination camp. The entire building, be it the garden façade or cellars or even the rooms, was manipulated to hide the ultimate purpose of the camp.

Detailed day-to-day accounts of the developments in Chelmno and the persecution methods followed and improvised by the Nazis are also noted throughout the book. Since Chelmno was the first death camp to be built in Poland, it was a secret campsite, about which even the residents of the nearby villages were unaware. The authors also stress that there were constant attempts to eradicate the traces of the heinous crime that was underway in Chelmno. This resonates with the scorched-earth policy that is often considered a military strategy.

The book consists of 523 pages (including a glossary of Nazi terms, a selected bibliography, and an index of names), out of which the main content of the work is described in part 1, titled "The Hell Called Chelmno." This part consists of various aspects about Chelmno divided into ten well-knit chapters. Divided into five chapters, part 2, titled "Survivors, Victims, Perpetrators and the Aftermath," includes enthralling details about the Jewish survivors, perpetrators, and various other testimonies. Furthermore, the authors have painstakingly included war crimes trials. This book is therefore highly evidence based and includes such sources as letters, lists, documents, drawings and maps, and photographs taken by the authors to support the narratives. The order of the book aims to achieve both precision and perfection, as is evident from not only how narratives have been alphabetically organized but also how relations and interlinks between these narratives have been established.

This book speaks to the reader directly without any inhibitions and in a matter-of-fact way points out how developments in Chelmno were closely observed by the SS and improvised at numerous stages: for example, when there were
some cases of people fleeing the camp, their feet were chained, or instead of a separate truck, the gas-vans were sometimes used to carry workers from the manor house to the site of the graves in the forest. The interconnections between the events occurring in Chelmno and other camps established for killing the Jews assist the reader in understanding the missing puzzles of the larger Jewish question. There are persistent references to the film *Shoah* (1985) throughout the book, and in some sense, the narratives shared in the film support the ones shared here and vice versa.

For historians and students alike this well-researched account on Chelmno demonstrates the significant role played by the camp and also demands further documentation of the region to prepare a holistic account of the terrible tragedy that was the Holocaust.

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