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Foreword: Historians in troubled times

In his famous essay “The Historian and His Day,” first published in 1954, Jack Hexter ridiculed the view that a historian’s experience and work are unavoidably permeated by the passions, crises and tensions of his own day. He went on to describe his own—markedly unperturbed—routine on which the great crises of the contemporary world impinged but faintly, if at all, and concluded that the professional efforts of a large number of historians have “precious little to do” with those crises.¹ This appraisal probably did fit well many American historians of the Eisenhower era, and it may indeed be largely accurate with regard to many a historian who lives in a stable, prosperous, Western-type democracy today. Yet not every historian had the luck to live and work—as Hexter did—in St. Louis, Missouri, and New Haven, Connecticut. There are such historians as Aron Yakovlevich Gurevich—once decried by a Soviet apparatchik as a man to be shunned “because he thinks”²—who courageously published his masterpiece *Categories of Medieval Culture*³ in open dissent from the reigning Marxist ideology. Many historians still live today in totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian regimes and/or face war or violence. Many others have undergone such experiences in the past.

How did historians cope with such situations, and to what extent did these affect their work? Strangely enough, this subject has not been systematically studied. But studied it should be, so as to better understand the grave constraints under which many past historians

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- 1 Jack Hexter, “The Historian and His Day,” in his *Reappraisals in History. New Views on History and Society in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1961), pp. 1-13.
 - 2 Aron J. Gurevich, “Free Norwegian Peasantry Revisited,” *Historisk Tidsskrift* (1990), 275-284. Despite the title, the article amounts to a rudimentary intellectual autobiography.
 - 3 Aron J. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. G.L. Campbell (London, 1985). The Russian original appeared in Moscow in 1972. In conversation with the first author Gurevich remarked on the great discrepancy between the attention given in the West to the difficulties dissident writers and authors had to face and the virtual silence regarding the plight of dissident historians.

acted, and perhaps also to offer some guidance to present and future historians who find themselves in such unenviable circumstances.

When we focus on medievalists who were at work during the Second World War, we come upon a vast array of behaviors. Here are some examples.

In September 1939, at the age of 53, Marc Bloch volunteered to serve in the French army and witnessed its breakdown in the summer of 1940; soon thereafter he wrote *L'étrange défaite*, a brilliant analysis, based in part on his personal observations, of the French collapse.⁴ One of the very few Jewish professors allowed to continue teaching under the Vichy regime, he chose subjects with such topical connotations as “the Barbarian invasions”; and the book he was writing in 1941-43, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien*, is colored, from the dedication onward, by the times in which it was written.⁵ In March 1943 Bloch decided to stop his professional work and join the underground; a year later he was arrested by the Gestapo, tortured, and on 16 June 1944 executed. His actions may be compared with those of Lucien Febvre, with whom he had co-founded the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* in 1929. Febvre, who remained in occupied Paris and regarded the continued publication of the *Annales* a patriotic duty, repeatedly explained to Bloch that because of the racial laws the journal could continue its existence only if he were no longer listed as its co-proprietor and co-editor. After an agonizing exchange between the two friends, Bloch complied. The journal resumed its appearance under the title *Annales d'histoire sociale*, with Febvre listed as the sole “responsible director” and Bloch’s contributions published under a pseudonym.⁶

Johan Huizinga (1872-1945), who aroused the Nazis’ ire as early as 1933 and was 68 when the Wehrmacht overran the Netherlands, turned down an invitation in August 1940 to emigrate to the United States, even though his name had already been placed on a list of potential hostages. In February 1941 he helped to draft a declaration against the anti-Jewish measures that were being introduced by the Germans; in April 1942, protesting German interventions in university matters, he chose to retire. At the same time he was relieved of his position at the Dutch Academy of Sciences. In August 1942 he was interned in a camp

4 Marc Bloch, *L'étrange défaite. Témoignage écrit en 1940* (Paris, 1946).

5 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien*, ed. Étienne Bloch (Paris, 1993).

6 For the relevant letters see Marc Bloch, *Lucien Febvre et les Annales d'Histoire Économique et Sociale. Correspondance*, ed. Bertrand Müller, 3 vols. (Paris, 1994-2003), 3:115-171.

for hostages. Two months later he was released on account of his poor health but forbidden to return to his home in Leiden. In March 1943 his books were banned in the Netherlands. He died on 1 February 1945.⁷

Roberto Sabatino Lopez (1910-1986), who left his native Italy in the wake of the racial laws of November 1938, found refuge in the United States, where, in 1942, he added an American Ph.D. to his Italian Litt.D. earned ten years earlier. Some findings in this additional dissertation were to appear in the trenchant article that significantly revises Henri Pirenne's Muhammad/Charlemagne thesis.⁸ But Lopez did not then embark on a scholarly career. He moved to New York, where he tried to enlist in the U.S. Army but was persuaded instead to join the recently established Office of War Information (OWI). For about a year he worked in the Italian section of Voice of America, composing addresses that underlined time and again the distinction between the Italian people vs. the Fascists and their accomplices; King Vittorio Emanuele III and the house of Savoy figured prominently among the latter. After Mussolini's deposition Lopez fulminated against "Hitler's war on Italian soil; the war of Hitler, of Badoglio and of Vittorio Emanuele." When he learned that the Allies were hoping the king and Badoglio would declare war on Germany, and that the OWI was directed to change its propaganda line vis-à-vis Italy, Lopez promptly tendered his resignation on 10 September 1943. He thereupon assumed the position of instructor in history at Brooklyn College, doubling up as foreign news monitor-editor at the Columbia Broadcasting System listening station.⁹

Carl Erdmann (b. 1898) revolutionized our understanding of the genesis of the crusade idea with his *Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens* of 1935.¹⁰ The book has been interpreted as an account of the perversion of medieval Christianity that hinted at the danger of a Nazi corruption of spiritual ideals.¹¹ Perhaps. In any case, Erdmann made no secret of

7 Christoph Strupp, *Johan Huizinga. Geschichtswissenschaft als Kulturgeschichte* (Göttingen, 2000), pp. 39-42.

8 Robert S. Lopez, "Mohammed and Charlemagne: A Revision," *Speculum* 18 (1943), 14-38.

9 For a detailed, abundantly documented account see Antonio Varsori, *Roberto Lopez: l'impegno politico civile (1938-1945)* (Florence, 1990).

10 Carl Erdmann, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens*. Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Geistesgeschichte 6 (Stuttgart, 1935).

11 Cf. Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages. The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1991), p. 403. On Erdmann's courageous stance see also Anne Christine Nagel, *Im Schatten des Dritten Reichs. Mittelalterforschung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1970* (Göttingen, 2005), pp. 37, 61.

his opposition to National Socialism. During questioning by an official of the Education Ministry in January 1935, the following exchange took place:

Official: Your attitude toward National Socialism is not entirely clear. Can you tell us something about it?

Erdmann: Well, a National Socialist I am not.

Official: Not even as far as your convictions go?

Erdmann: No.

The official then instructed him to meet with the prominent Nazi historian Walter Frank, and, as Erdmann was to update his friend Gerd Tellenbach a few days later, he was extremely outspoken during that meeting, mounting one attack after another against National Socialism. To Erdmann's surprise, Frank was impressed by his candor, yet Erdmann knew very well that henceforth he would be labeled an enemy of the state.¹² Indeed, despite his major contributions to medieval history he did not obtain a teaching position at a university, and in the summer of 1936 he was notified that his *venia legendi* had been declared dormant, a formulation Erdmann ridiculed.¹³ Henceforth he made a modest living working as a researcher at the Monumenta Germaniae Historica in Berlin. On 19 September 1943 he was conscripted into the Wehrmacht, where he turned out to be, as he put it, a rotten soldier, trained also as an interpreter. From July 1944 onward he served in Albania, where he experienced a "mood beyond fear and hope," as well as "elated days" during a week as interpreter with a unit of Italian blackshirts, which ended with a Partisan attack at close quarters that almost wiped out the unit. Thrilled by being, at his age, in the midst of military action, Erdmann wrote to Tellenbach on 4 September 1944: "Had we not suffered, unfortunately, four casualties, I would have perceived this occurrence, too, as a welcome enrichment one should be thankful for."¹⁴ One may only wonder how Erdmann's experiences as a soldier would have affected his research had he survived the war. But he did not. On 7 March 1945 he died in a military hospital in Zagreb.

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In the present book we have chosen to focus on Karl Bosl (1908-1993), for some historians one of postwar Germany's most prominent

12 Erdmann to Tellenbach, letter of 27 January 1935, quoted in Gerd Tellenbach, *Aus erinnerten Zeitgeschichte* (Freiburg/ Br., 1981), pp. 87-88.

13 Erdmann to Tellenbach, letter of 14 June 1936, *ibid.*, p. 90.

14 Erdmann to Tellenbach, letter of 4 September 1944, *ibid.*, p. 92.

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Bosl in the Third Reich: Autobiographical remarks, 1974-1990

In his writings, Bosl abstained from dealing squarely with his doings during the Third Reich. In an autobiographical sketch first published in 1974 Bosl chose to mention only two Nazi-related occurrences. First, he wrote that having witnessed, as a student at Munich University at the end of the 1920s, the struggles between Nazis and Socialists, he resolved to engage in politics, was elected to the AStA (Allgemeiner Studentenausschuss, i.e., General Student Union), and there joined the ranks of the Nazis' opponents. "I perceived the tough dispute as a struggle for democracy and the Weimar Republic, whose representatives and freedom I decided to support." Second, Bosl emphasized that in the late 1930s and early 1940s he chose to study subjects that were not opportune at the time, such as the policies of Emperor Henry III, "who was banned from the history books of the Third Reich," and of Frederick Barbarossa, for whom there was no place in the Reich's official myth; the question whether such studies would be advantageous in the academic sphere was of little concern to him.¹⁹

These chosen incidents suggest that Bosl opposed the Nazis before 1933 and kept his distance from them thereafter; but his exact political stance during the Third Reich can only be guessed at. In the same vein Bosl stated in a speech of 1983 that Ansbach—the town in which he lived from 1937 to 1945—was for him the Golgotha at which he "sorrowfully experienced and endured political history, together with young and older friends, through the death of one of [his] students."²⁰ This somewhat enigmatic statement refers to the execution of Robert Limpert (see below) and divulges that Bosl and his friends were deeply

19 Karl Bosl, "Versuch eines Lebensbildes," in Karl Bosl, *Böhmen und seine Nachbarn. Gesellschaft, Politik und Kultur in Mitteleuropa* (Munich-Vienna, 1976), pp. 9-10.

20 "Karl Bosl über sich selbst. Worte am 11. November 1983 in München im Bayerischen Nationalmuseum anlässlich seines 75. Geburtstages," in Karl Bosl, *Vorträge zur Geschichte Europas, Deutschlands und Bayerns*, vol. 1: *Europa von der Christianisierung bis Johannes Paul II*, ed. Erika Bosl (Stuttgart, 1998), p. 2.

shocked by it; but here too we are left in the dark as to his overall political attitude. Again, in an autobiographical speech given in 1984 in Cham, the city in which he was born, Bosl mentions that he well remembers Pankraz Habrunner, a local official whom the Nazis transferred because of his opposition to the Third Reich, and that a Nazi professor prevented his, Bosl's, appointment as *Privatdozent* (university lecturer).²¹ All these statements tend to insinuate that Bosl was critical of the regime in one way or another, but they stop short of explicitly presenting him as an outright opponent. On the other hand, in a moving double portrait of his parents as model "little people" Bosl admiringly relates that his mother told menacing Party officials to their faces that she would never give the greeting "Heil Hitler!" and would stick instead to "Grüß Gott!" ("May God greet you"), and that his father unbendingly rejected the Third Reich and its adherents high and low.²²

In two interviews, one given to Benjamin Z. Kedar in 1986, the other to Karl N. Renner in 1990, Bosl repeated these claims in greater detail.²³ On both occasions he mentioned his parents' adamant stance against the Nazis, adding in the second interview that it had strongly influenced him.²⁴ In both interviews he spoke of his activity in 1928-29 in the AStA, and of the *Holzschietelschlacht* (logwood battle) against the Nazis in which he took part; in the earlier interview he spelled out that he was active in that organization as a member of a Catholic fraternity.²⁵ On both occasions he asserted that his history teaching at the Ansbach Gymnasium (grammar school) led several of his pupils to

21 Karl Bosl, "Meine historischen Wurzeln. Autobiographische Rede, gehalten am 10. Februar 1984 anlässlich der Verleihung des Ehrenbürgerrechts der Stadt Cham," in idem, *Vorträge zur Geschichte Europas, Deutschlands und Bayerns*, vol. 3: *Vorträge zur bayerischen Landesgeschichte*, ed. Erika Bosl (Stuttgart, 2002), p. xii. The assertion regarding Bosl's appointment is certainly incorrect; see below, pp. 21-25.

22 Karl Bosl, "Der kleine Mann – die kleinen Leute," in idem, *Oberpfalz und Oberpfälzer. Geschichte einer Region. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Konrad Ackermann and Erich Laßleben (Kallmünz, 1978), p. 347.

23 The interview given to Benjamin Kedar appears in Appendix 18 below and is hereafter referred to as the 1986 interview; the interview given to Karl Renner is printed in "Karl Bosl als Zeitzeuge zur bayerischen Geschichte," in *Karl Bosl. Eine Bibliographie* (above, n. 16), pp. 14-30, and is hereafter referred to as the 1990 interview.

24 1986 Interview, pp. 144, 150; 1990 Interview, pp. 17, 19.

25 1986 Interview, p. 143; 1990 Interview, pp. 18-19.

1. Bosl's NSDAP record

Bundesarchiv Berlin, NSDAP Zentralkartei

Name <i>Bosl Carl</i>	Name: <i>Bosl Carl</i>
G. D. <i>M.M. 18</i> Ort <i>Umm</i>	Geb.-Datum: <i>M. 11. 18</i> Geb.-Ort: <i>Umm</i>
Estand <i>Einl. Offizier</i>	Mitgl.-Nr.: <i>1884319</i> Aufnahme: <i>1.5.38</i>
Mitgl.-Nr. <i>1884319</i> Eingetr. <i>1.5.38</i>	Aufnahme beantragt am: _____ genehm.: _____
Ausgetr. <i>24. 10. Bayer. Ostmark 8/35/135</i>	Wiederaufn. beantragt am: _____ genehm.: _____
Wiedereingetr. <i>J. R. P. L. / B. Osten v. 14.6.38</i>	Austritt: _____
Nr. <i>33</i>	Geldsch.: _____
Wohnung <i>Blumenkriegerstr. 10 Umm</i>	Ausschl.: _____
D. G. <i>Umm Schwaben</i>	Aufgehoben: _____
<i>Umm Schwaben 14.6.38</i>	Gestrichen wegen: _____
Wohnung <i>Umm</i>	Zurückgenommen: _____
D. G. <i>Umm Schwaben</i>	Abgang zur Wehrmacht: _____
<i>Umm Schwaben 14.6.38</i>	Zugang von Wehrmacht: _____
Wohnung <i>Umm</i>	Gestorben: _____
D. G. <i>Umm Schwaben</i>	Bemerkungen: _____
<i>Umm Schwaben 14.6.38</i>	

U. B. Osten 7 39/11 (339) Umm

Wohnung: *1. Rosinzhof, Umm*

Ortsgr.: *Umm* Gau: *Franken*

Monatsm. Gau: _____ M. _____ D. _____

L. R. / _____ vom _____

Dr. Sabine Dumschat of the Bundesarchiv in Berlin, in a letter of 27 October 2006 to the first author, explicated the crucial abbreviations as follows:

Ausgetr. [agen:] Str[eichung gemäß Meldung des Gaues] Bayer. Ostmark 8/35/i35 ["35" referring to the year 1935].

Wiedereingetr. [agen] l[aut] M[eldung an] R[eichs] L[eitung durch Entscheid des Gaues] B[ayer.] Ostm[ark] v[om] 14.6.[19]38.

Dr. Dumschat concluded that „Man kann somit von einer ununterbrochenen Mitgliedschaft ausgehen.“ As for the cancellation of 1935, she observed that although it may have been variously caused, reasons of a bureaucratic/bureautechnical character (like the non-payment of member dues)—inferable from relevant complementary documentation—were presumably behind it. Subsequently, in a letter of 3 November 2006, she drew attention to the relevance of Bosl's NSLB file.

Monatsmeldg. Gau:	Mr.	Bl.
Lt. RL./	vom	
Wohnung:		
Ortsgr.:	Gau:	
Monatsmeldg. Gau:	Mr.	Bl.
Lt. RL./	vom	
Wohnung:		
Ortsgr.:	Gau:	
Monatsmeldg. Gau:	Mr.	Bl.
Lt. RL./	vom	
Wohnung:		
Ortsgr.:	Gau:	
Monatsmeldg. Gau:	Mr.	Bl.
Lt. RL./	vom	
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The date under Bosl's photo appears to indicate that the NSDAP membership booklet was handed out to Bosl in 1938: Dr. Sabine Dumschat to Benjamin Kedar, 27. October 2006. If so, this would amount to a further proof of Bosl's membership during the two years preceding 31 October 1938, for these booklets were handed out after a two years' probation (see above, n. 160).

18. 26 August 1986: Karl Bosl interviewed by Benjamin Kedar

(*Transcript of recording*)

Kedar: Fangen wir an mit den Dokumenten. Haben Sie irgendwelche Aufzeichnungen aus der Zeit des Zweiten Weltkrieges, oder zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus, die Sie nicht veröffentlicht haben?

Bosl: Nein, ich hab darüber eigentlich noch gar nichts gemacht. Die wichtigsten Dokumente, die ich habe, die sehen Sie hier an meinen Wänden.

K: Ja?

B: Die sind alle von einem meiner Freunde, einem eigentlich, der der geistige *Spiritus rector* unseres Kreises war, der Heinrich Pospiech, ein Oberstudienrat aus Ansbach, ein begnadeter Maler und auch Bildhauer. Das sind die Posaunen von Jericho, die hat er am Ende des Dritten Reiches gemalt. Das ist ein stilisiertes Bild von Ansbach vom Herriederturm in Ansbach, und er war auch weiterhin politisch tätig. Das hat er zur Kultur- und zur Studentenrevolution von 1968 gemalt. Und das hat er geschnitzt zur Geburt meiner Tochter, und mich hat er gemalt. Ich war so der *Spiritus rector* eines kleinen Kreises in Ansbach, in dieser mittelalterlichen --- Ich war damals Studienrat oder Studienassessor am Gymnasium, weil es schwer war, damals an der Universität überhaupt unterzukommen, und deshalb bin ich in den mittleren Schuldienst gegangen, und da haben wir uns zu dritt und viert getroffen. Der dritte in unserem Kreise war ein Schüler und der vierte, waren zwei Schüler von mir am Gymnasium. Der eine ist eine Stunde vor dem Einmarsch der Amerikaner von einem wütenden Oberst der Luftwaffe an einem Haken des Rathauses in Ansbach aufgehängt worden, er ist allerdings --- wir haben schon dafür gesorgt, dass er dann auch vor Gericht gestellt wurde und er ist bestraft worden. Ich habe da draussen (das zeige ich Ihnen hernach) eine Art Totenschild, hat dann Heinrich Pospiech für den gemacht, der hiess Robert Limpert, war mein Student. Und ein anderer war auch noch dabei, Wolfgang Hammer, der dann bei mir hier mit drei Büchern über Hitler und den Nationalsozialismus promoviert hat, er ist heute Pfarrer in Sankt Moritz in der Schweiz, in Graubünden; Wolfgang Hammer. Wir haben nicht sehr viel darüber gesagt, geredet, gel. Unsere Tätigkeit war im Grunde, wir haben nicht eigentlich, mit Ausnahme von Pamphlets und Plakaten, haben wir nichts geschrieben; ich will erst in meinem Ding darüber schreiben.

K: Plakate?

B: Wir haben während des Dritten Reiches, sagen wir mal, ich bin seit '37 in Ansbach gewesen, haben wir selbstverfasste Plakate immer wieder als Gegenpropaganda, diese verteilt in den Zügen, auf den öffentlichen Plätzen usw. Und haben uns zusammengefunden und haben auch, mei so weit es halt ging, etwas anderes war nicht möglich. Unsere schlimmste Geschichte oder unser schlimmstes Los war dies, dass wir versucht haben, die Stadt Ansbach vor dem Einmarsch der Amerikaner durch die Besetzung der SS zu befreien. Wir haben das Nachrichtensystem der SS zerstört und dabei ist vor allem unter Tage ein Schüler, das ist der Robert Limpert, ein sehr geistvoller, gescheiter junger Mann, erwischt worden und ist eben gehängt worden, und die anderen, wir andere, waren eigentlich von ihm getrennt und konnten in der Zeit nichts machen. Eine Stunde darauf sind die amerikanischen Soldaten in Ansbach einmarschiert. Und das war unsere --- --- Denn wir sind keine --- --- Man sollte keine grosse Sache daraus machen, aber wir haben unseren Teil dazu beitragen wollen, erstens die Leute aufmerksam zu machen auf das, was Hitler uns Schlechtes angetan hat; wir haben auch alle Nachrichten verbreitet, die wir hörten, auf solchen Pamphleten und Zetteln und Plakaten, wir haben keins, denn wir mussten uns [hüten], Ansbach war eine Stadt, die, wie soll ich sagen, die sehr gut nazistisch organisiert war, in der man sich sehr hüten musste. Ich hab zwar allerdings als Lehrer, war ich eine Art kleiner Mittelpunkt, auch für Geschichte, in dem Gymnasium. Zum Beispiel, der Wolfgang Hammer, der Pfarrer in der Schweiz in Graubünden, der erzählt mir immer noch, wie sie aus dem Geschichtsunterricht viele Tatsachen gegen das Dritte Reich entnommen haben, und so. Aber wir wollten aus dieser ganzen Geschichte, im Gegensatz zu vielen anderen, kein, wie soll ich sagen, kein grosses Lamento machen, weil wir es für unsere Pflicht gehalten haben und weil wir jugendlich dagegen so begeistert waren, dass wir, wie soll ich sagen, dass wir froh waren, dass der ganze Spuk zu Ende ging und dass wir uns innerlich sagen konnten, wir haben auch an unserem Platz ein klein bisschen beigetragen.

K: In Ihrer biographischen Skizze²⁴⁴ erwähnen Sie, dass Sie schon als Student gegen die Nazis aktiv waren.

B: Ja, ich hab mich zwar, man muss das auch sagen, ich hab, um überhaupt eine Stelle zu bekommen, ich wurde einmal gezwungen

244 Bosl, "Versuch eines Lebensbildes" (above, n. 5), p. 9.

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 BDC-NSLB 330001143, NSLB-Akte zu Karl Bosl
 NSLB- Akte Pospiech, Heinrich
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- Nürnberg, Bayerisches Staatsarchiv. Staatsanwaltschaft Ansbach, Nr. 650/1: Herbert Frank, "Leben und Kampf Robert Limperts"
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