

STUDIES OF THE VENERABLE BEDE, THE GREAT FAMINE OF 1315-1322, AND  
LIBRARIES IN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS

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Trista Stephanie Raezer-Stursa

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota  
State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Dr. Gerritdina (Ineke) Justitz

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Chair

Dr. Verena Theile

---

Dr. Mark Harvey

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Approved:

October 19, 2017

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Date

Dr. Mark Harvey

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Department Chair

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper includes three studies about the Venerable Bede, the Great Famine of 1315-1322, and libraries in prisoner of war camps. The study of the Venerable Bede focuses on his views on and understanding of time, especially its relation to the Easter computus. The second study is a historiography of the Great Famine of 1315-1322, with an emphasis on the environmental aspects of the catastrophe. The third paper is a study of the libraries that were provided for German soldiers in prisoner of war camps in the United States during World War II, which includes an analysis of the role of reading in the United States' attempt to re-educate the German prisoners.

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## THE VENERABLE BEDE: FROM PAGAN CHAOS TO CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Venerable Bede was a monk famed for his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, a history of Christianity in England from the invasion of Julius Caesar in 60 B.C.E. to 731 C.E. He was born into the hectic and unstable world of eighth-century Northumbria. Bede was responsible for the education of the monks at his monastery of Jarrow and Wearmouth. Thus, he composed over forty books to edify his students on scripture, the natural world, history, and time. These works show evidence of a devout and intelligent man who desired to impose structure, stability, and unity onto an otherwise chaotic world. In this unstable Christian world, there was not yet a unified system to calculate when Easter should be celebrated, which was of vital importance to Christians. Easter celebrates Jesus's resurrection after death, is the oldest Christian holiday, and is considered to be "the corner-stone upon which faith is built ... the connecting link between the Old and New Testaments."<sup>1</sup> Christianity itself was still coalescing and developing as conversion and communication expanded throughout the continent. England was not yet a unified nation, and Christianity was still not completely cohesive within the British isle. Bede grappled with the need for a universal celebration of Easter and promoted his desire for order and coherence in his works *On the Nature of Things*, *On Times*, *The Reckoning of Time* and the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. These four works show that Bede found spiritual unity in time, with the ultimate culmination of this unity found in the sacred calculation of determining when Easter was to be celebrated by all Christians.

Bede was born in 672 or 673 on lands that belonged to the monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow in the kingdom of Northumbria. At the age of seven he entered the monastery at

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Holweck, "Easter," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 5. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), <http://newadvent.org/cathen/05224d.htm/> (accessed February 26, 2017).

Wearmouth as an oblate under the care of the monastery's founder, Abbot Benedict Biscop, and then later Abbot Ceolfrith, who raised the young boy and were immensely influential to him. Bede would later write biographies about the two men. Wearmouth was a new monastery, founded in 674, and Jarrow, its twin monastery seven miles away, was founded when Bede was a small boy in 681. It was at Jarrow that Bede had the traumatizing experience of being one of only two people to survive the plague of 686 at his monastery, an event that may have shaped his need for stability. According to the anonymous author of the *Life of Ceolfrith*, "In the monastery over which Ceolfrith presided, all who could read or preach or recite the antiphons were swept away, except the abbot himself and the one little lad nourished and taught by him."<sup>2</sup> Many scholars believe that Bede was this small boy.

Bede was fortunate to be in the relatively safe haven of a wealthy, landed monastery, where he was exempt from toiling in the fields. Wearmouth-Jarrow was not like typical Northumbrian monasteries; it "represented a spiritually and intellectually more intense version than that experienced by religious in other communities."<sup>3</sup> Benedict Biscop, the founder of these monasteries and caretaker of the young Bede, had been a member of the court of Oswy, king of Northumbria, and traveled to Rome five times during his life, bringing back books and art.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Bede lived under the influence of a highly placed and educated man. Bede's days were divided into the eight daily prayers of the Divine Office, and he performed some light labor, wrote, and taught. Historian Leo Sherley-Price notes that Bede had "a deep and lasting love for the Church's regular Hours of worship, and in a letter ... in reference to Bede's latter years: It is

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<sup>2</sup> Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (London: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Foot, "Church and Monastery in Bede's Northumbria," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 60.

<sup>4</sup> George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Woodbridge, U.K.: The Boydell Press, 2009), 3-4.

told how blessed Bede ... said ‘I know that the angels are present at the canonical Hours. ...’<sup>5</sup>

Clearly Bede was devoted to time and found evidence of God in its sacred structure. Bede’s entire life was framed by a predictable daily timeline, with every aspect of his life fitting neatly into its frame.

Bede became a monk at the age of nineteen, despite the fact that canon law stated that one could not become a monk until age twenty-five, and he was ordained a priest at thirty.<sup>6</sup> His abbot must have considered him to be quite an exceptional young man. During his lifetime, Bede was one of a few in the entire West who had a working knowledge of Greek.<sup>7</sup> He never left Northumbria during his life; his furthest travels only took him to York and Lindisfarne. One of the most painful moments of his life was when his mentor Ceolfrith left to live in Rome.<sup>8</sup> Little else is known about Bede’s personal life. Teaching and writing were his two passions. At the end of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede lists the titles of the thirty-seven books he wrote, which does not include a few more he wrote later.<sup>9</sup> His main interests were to write commentaries on the scriptures, educational works for his students, natural science, history, and hagiography. His first book was probably written in 703, and he wrote continuously until his death in 735 at the relatively old age of about 62.

At Wearmouth and Jarrow Bede had access to a library of about 200 books, brought from Gaul and Italy by Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith.<sup>10</sup> This library had more books than Oxford or

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<sup>5</sup> Leo Sherley-Price, “Introduction,” in *Bede: A History of the English Church and People* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Sherley-Price, “Introduction,” 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, with *Bede’s Letter to Egbert* and *Cuthbert’s Letter on the Death of Bede*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, revised R. E. Latham (London: Penguin Group, 1990), 329-331.

<sup>10</sup> Rosalind Love, “The World of Latin Learning,” in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 43.



Cambridge would have 700 years later.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately there is no surviving list of books; they can only be known through Bede's writings. Only one book for certain remains, now housed in the Durham Cathedral Library.<sup>12</sup> The books were mostly in Latin, with a few in Greek. Many of these books, written by great authors such as Jerome, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Pliny, Ambrose, and Isidore of Seville, inspired Bede's prolific writings. Unusual for the time, this library even had a complete Bible, as opposed to a collection of individual books from the Bible.<sup>13</sup> The main genres covered by the library were commentaries on the Bible, theological treatises, sermons and letters, rules for monastic communities, Latin grammars, histories, stories of the saints, Latin hymns, and poetry.<sup>14</sup> Despite its robustness, the library lacked books that would have been essential for a monk. It did not contain any of the major works of philosophy from classical antiquity.<sup>15</sup>

Bede's writings cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the world he was born into, which was poor and ravaged by plague, famine, invasions, and war. The population of England began declining in the third century CE, after the Anglo-Saxon invasions, leaving behind a weakened economy and dilapidated ruins abandoned by the Romans in 410.<sup>16</sup> The average life expectancy of a woman was 31 and 38 for men.<sup>17</sup> The island contained many kingdoms, ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. The kingdom of Northumbria was a fragile union of the former kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia. Instability was further compounded by

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Tombs, *The English People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 28.

<sup>12</sup> Love, "The World of Latin Learning," in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* 44.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Love, "The World of Latin Learning," in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* 43.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Joel T. Rosenthal, "Ecclesiastical History and the Material Conditions of Anglo-Saxon Life," *Journal of British Studies* 19 (1979): 4-6.

<sup>17</sup> Tombs, *The English and Their History*, 18.

insecure royal inheritance, constant warfare, the exiling of nobles, and the existence of slavery. Christianity had only a tenuous and recent hold on the region.<sup>18</sup>

Northumbria was the center point of two converging Christian missions. Originally, Roman missionaries from the south succeeded in converting the Northumbrian king in 627, but they withdrew after the king's successor apostatized in 633. A year later, a new king brought with him Irish missionaries from Iona in the north, which is in present-day Scotland. Roman missionaries from Kent in the south eventually returned, conflicting with the Irish on minor and major theological points, especially on when to celebrate Easter. These conflicts were resolved during the Synod of Whitby in 664, and the Irish missionaries left.<sup>19</sup> Historian Robert Tombs notes that, "this Church transcended the boundaries of the various kingdoms. . . . The English Church would create its own distinctive culture. It adopted Roman practices in dogma and liturgy rather than older British and Irish traditions, as confirmed at the Synod of Whitby."<sup>20</sup> Thus, Bede was born into a Church that had only recently resolved some major conflicts, and was only in the initial steps of solidifying into one unified "English" church. Bede even knew people who had been present at the Synod, a very recent memory for his older contemporaries. This Synod would play a vital role in Bede's writing and scholarship on time.

A synopsis of how timekeeping developed before Bede's lifetime provides context to the various systems with which Bede grappled in his writings. Historian Diana E. Greenway claims that "one of the primary forces driving the keeping of time and the construction of calendars has

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<sup>18</sup> James Campbell, "Secular and Political Contexts in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 26, 34, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Foot, "Church and Monastery in Bede's Northumbria," in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 57-58.

<sup>20</sup> Tombs, *The English and Their History*, 26.

been the necessity to observe special religious rituals on particular days.”<sup>21</sup> This need can definitely be applied to Bede’s interest in time. There is evidence that humankind has been keeping track of time since the Paleolithic era. Early humans would have noticed the cyclical patterns provided by the sun, moon, stars, and seasons. During the Neolithic era, grand monuments, such as Stonehenge, were erected in the British Isles and western Mediterranean, which were most likely used to track the movement of the sun, moon, and stars.<sup>22</sup> The first evidence of a society using years to calculate time dates back to the Sumerians around 3500 B.C.<sup>23</sup> Some societies, such as the Babylonians, calculated their years according to the cycles of the moon. The moon completes its cycle of phases between twenty-nine and thirty days. However, the Earth takes between twelve and thirteen moon cycles to go around the sun, which does not correlate well with months based on the lunar cycles. The Babylonians forced the lunar year to comply with the solar year by having seven years of thirteen months followed by twelve years of twelve months, otherwise known as the Metonic cycle. The Jewish calendar is modeled on this method, while the Islamic calendar is strictly lunar, without taking into consideration the solar year.<sup>24</sup>

Julius Caesar reformed the Roman calendar by inserting a leap year every four years to take into account that the solar year is about 365.25 days long. Since a fraction of a day cannot be inserted into the calendar, a leap day every four years makes up the loss. This Julian calendar alternated thirty day and thirty-one day long months, with February being twenty eight days

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<sup>21</sup> Diana E. Greenway, “Dates in History: Chronology and Memory,” *Historical Research* 72 (1999), 132.

<sup>22</sup> Dan Falk, *In Search of Time: The Science of a Curious Dimension* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> Duncan Steel, *Marking Time: the Epic Quest to Invent the Perfect Calendar* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 36.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

long. Bede explains that a solar year, “is [completed] when [the sun] returns to the same place with respect to the fixed stars after 365 days and 6 hours.”<sup>25</sup> (It was believed at this time that the sun rotated around an immobile earth.) Thus, by Bede’s lifetime the length of a solar year was firmly set. However, when the New Year started had not thus far been set, which would complicate dating events for Bede.

Even though years, months, days, and hours were well established in the early medieval mind, time intervals larger than a year were viewed dramatically different than they are now. Greenway describes two dating methods used in pre-modern Europe: person-centered and “date-centered history where there is an independent time-line.”<sup>26</sup> The second method is obvious; events happen on a certain day in a certain month in a certain year along a timeline that has a starting point and continues into the distant future. For current Western society the start of the “Common Era” begins with the birth of Jesus, known to Christians as the Incarnation. The Incarnation was literally when the “word was made flesh,” meaning that Jesus was both divine and a physical human being. Thus, his birth started the new Christian era and separated it from the pagan past.<sup>27</sup>

Person-centered time keeping is what Bede’s contemporaries would have been more familiar with. This method dates events according to a person, usually a king or ruler, and how many years he or she has reigned. These were called regnal years. For example, a person in eighth-century Northumbria might say, “I was born during the third year of King Osric’s reign, and moved to Jarrow in his sixth year.” This method was used in the Bible and by the Romans.

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<sup>25</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, trans. Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 103.

<sup>26</sup> Greenway, “Dates in History,” 128.

<sup>27</sup> Walter, Drum, “The Incarnation,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 7. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07706b.htm/> (accessed February 26, 2017).

Sometimes years were numbered according to major events, such as how many years since the Exodus, or the founding of Rome, or the first Olympiad.<sup>28</sup> Since regnal cycles could start during different times of the year, this form of dating was imprecise. Bede used this method of dating throughout his *Ecclesiastical History*, since this would be the dating system his readers were most familiar with.

During Bede's lifetime a third form of dating, the indiction, was also used. This was the Roman taxation cycle, which lasted fifteen years. Thus each year was numbered by the first indiction, second indiction, and so forth. These years started on September 1<sup>st</sup>, and were legislated by Emperor Constantine in 312.<sup>29</sup> Bede devotes a chapter in *The Reckoning of Time* to indictions, explaining its purpose: "When ... a certain emperor lays down his life ... in the middle of the year, it might come about that one historian would assign that year to the time of that king ... while another historian would consider that it ought rather to be assigned to his successor. ... Lest an error be introduced into the chronology ... [the Romans] decreed the indictions ... [to] preserve the integral flow of time."<sup>30</sup> Pope Gregory made reference to both the regnal and indiction year in a letter he wrote on June 22, 601, "Given the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Kalends of July in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of our most devout lord Mauricius Tiberius Augustus ... the 4<sup>th</sup> Indiction."<sup>31</sup> Along with regnal years, Bede used indiction years throughout the *Ecclesiastical History* as well.

In the sixth century a monk named Dionysius Exiguus created a new table to calculate Easter. He decided that he did not want to continue numbering the years from the date of

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<sup>28</sup> Greenway, "Dates in History," 130.

<sup>29</sup> Steel, *Marking Time*, 132-133.

<sup>30</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 130.

<sup>31</sup> Steel, *Marking Time*, 132.

Diocletian's ascent to the Roman imperial throne, because Diocletian had been a pagan who persecuted Christians. Dionysius Exiguus changed the year from 247 "Anno Diocletiani" to 532 "Anno Domini," thus commemorating the number of years that had passed since Jesus's birth, the Incarnation.<sup>32</sup> Nearly two-hundred years after its creation, Bede was one of the first to use the Incarnation dating system. The *Ecclesiastical History* is the first historical work to use this dating method, though it does still include indiction and regnal dating. Each chapter title mentions the Incarnation year, and the last chapter gives a short chronological overview of the book, much like timelines in modern history books. According to historian D. P. Kirby, "Bede appears to have been the first writer to introduce dating by the year of the Incarnation into the north. ... Eddius, writing c. 710, dates no events from the Incarnation."<sup>33</sup> Thus, in 731, Bede introduced a time innovation to England that his contemporaries were not yet using. However, unlike today, the year did not start on January 1<sup>st</sup> in the Western world. Different areas in Europe had different New Year days. It could be on January 1<sup>st</sup>, March 1<sup>st</sup>, March 25<sup>th</sup>, the day of Easter, September 1<sup>st</sup>, September 24<sup>th</sup>, or December 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>34</sup> January 1<sup>st</sup> as New Year's became more common across Europe over time, and was established in most countries by the time the Gregorian calendar was established in 1582. However, England did not move New Year's Day to January 1<sup>st</sup> until 1752.<sup>35</sup> Most historians agree that Bede believed New Year's Day to be December 25<sup>th</sup>, while some claim it was September 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Greenway, "Dates in History," 133.

<sup>33</sup> D. P. Kirby, "Bede and Northumbrian Chronology," *The English Historical Review* 78 no. 308 (July, 1963), 514.

<sup>34</sup> Steel, *Marking Time*, 140.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 165, 170.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Wood, "Bede's Northumbrian Dates Again," *The English Historical Review* 98 no. 387 (April, 1983), 280.

Bede was able to determine the number of years after the Incarnation that events occurred in England by calculating backwards the number of years that each king of Northumbria reigned, which must have been a painstaking undertaking for him.<sup>37</sup> By doing this, Bede aligned time more closely with Christianity, emphasizing his belief in the unity of time as it originates from God. This system provides a stable timeline and eliminates much of the chaos inherent in determining years by the regnal or indiction methods. Historian Faith Wallis notes that, “The Christian concept of time is remarkable for its linear focus, its boundedness, and its exclusivity. Time began at Creation, and will end at the Last Judgment. It goes in only one direction, forwards.”<sup>38</sup> It denies the validity of the cyclical view of time created by regnal and indiction cycles, thus justifying Christian time. Bede’s writings reflect the linear concept of time. Time belonged to God, not an emperor or ruler.

The most vital aspect of time for Bede was *Computus*, which is the calculation of the day when Easter should be celebrated. Easter is the most important holiday in the Christian faith that is not celebrated on the same day each year. Jesus was crucified when he went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. According to Christian theology, he rose from the dead three days later. Historian George Hardin Brown claims that for people of Bede’s time, “Easter [was] the defining moment when God and humankind were reconciled.”<sup>39</sup> The Jewish holiday of Passover is, according to the Bible, to be celebrated “beginning on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the year, when the barley is ripening.”<sup>40</sup> The first month of the Jewish calendar is in spring. Christians

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<sup>37</sup> Kirby, “Bede and Northumbrian Chronology,” 515.

<sup>38</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 354.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41.

wanted to commemorate their annual celebration of Jesus’s resurrection near the time of Passover. Since the Jewish calendar is lunar, the date of Passover, and hence Easter, does not fall on a fixed day in the Julian calendar. Given the need to observe Lent before Easter, Christians could not wait until spring to observe the moon’s cycle to figure out when to celebrate Easter.<sup>41</sup> Computus, the calculation of the day when Easter is to be celebrated, was developed to address this problem. However, calculating Easter every year became cumbersome as Christianity spread. Determining Easter for many years to come would ensure that all Christians everywhere were celebrating Easter on the same day without waiting for an announcement from distant Rome. Thus, computus tables had to be created to determine Easter for decades to come.<sup>42</sup> To complicate things further, Easter is not calculated based on astronomical observations, but on the basis of a “calendrical convention for the date of the equinox and mathematical formulae of the phases of the moon.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, determining the “correct” date of Easter would prove to be confusing and error-ridden.

Early Christians celebrated Easter on Passover, no matter what day of the week it fell on. Starting in the second century, some Christians insisted on celebrating Easter on a Sunday, in memory of Jesus’s resurrection. Eventually the early Church agreed in a series of synods in the late second century that Easter would be on a Sunday, but the next conflict was whether Easter should be celebrated the same day as Passover if that holiday fell on a Sunday.<sup>44</sup> The Council of

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<sup>41</sup> Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Faith Wallis, “Introduction,” *The Reckoning of Time*, trans. Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), xx.

<sup>43</sup> Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus*, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Eusebius, *Church History from A.D. 1-324, Life of Constantine the Great, Oration in Praise of Constantine*. in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II*. Ed. by Philip Schaff, trans. by Arthur Cushman McGiffert (Grand Rapids: Wm. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1885), [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Nicene\\_and\\_Post-Nicene\\_Fathers:\\_Series\\_II/Volume\\_I/Church\\_History\\_of\\_Eusebius/Book\\_V/Chapter\\_23/](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Nicene_and_Post-Nicene_Fathers:_Series_II/Volume_I/Church_History_of_Eusebius/Book_V/Chapter_23/) (accessed February 26, 2017).



Nicaea in 325 concluded that Easter would be pushed forward a week if Passover fell on a Sunday.<sup>45</sup> However, various calculations existed, meaning there was still no unity within the Church. For example, Rome and Alexandria used different calculations for many centuries. The computus created by the monk Dionysius Exiguus, who also created the “anno Domini” dating system, proved to be the most accurate and was adopted by Rome.

Knowingly celebrating Easter on the wrong day was in fact a grave sin. In the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede claimed that the death of 1,200 monks during a battle was attributed to retribution from God for their refusal to celebrate Easter according to the correct computus.<sup>46</sup> The importance of the entirety of Christendom celebrating Easter on the same day throughout the world cannot be overemphasized. The very day itself is sacred and sacramental in nature. Bede explains, “Easter does not return on the same day of the year like the season of our Lord’s Nativity. In the latter case only the memory of his birth is held to be solemnized. But in the former case the mysteries of the life to come should be celebrated and its gifts received, and that is why Easter is called ‘Pasch’, which signifies the transition from death to life.”<sup>47</sup> For Bede, time and faith intersected in perfect harmony on Easter.

These conflicting calculations came to a head in Northumbria, which was the meeting point of missionaries from southern England and western Scotland. A monk named Augustine arrived in England from Rome in 597, converting the kingdom of Kent and introducing the Dionysian calculations. However, the Northumbrians, converted by the Irish missionaries from the north, were celebrating Easter by earlier calculations. The Celtic Church in Scotland, founded

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<sup>45</sup> Wallis, “Introduction,” *The Reckoning of Time*, xxxv-xxxvii.

<sup>46</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 104-107.

<sup>47</sup> Bede, *On the Nature of Things and On Times*, trans. by Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 116-117.

by Columba in the late 500s, had refused to use Dionysius Exiguus's new tables.<sup>48</sup> Thus, when the king of Northumbria, Oswy, married a princess from Kent, he found himself celebrating Easter on a different day than his wife.<sup>49</sup>

Benedicta Ward outlines the difference in Roman and Celtic calculations succinctly. These two computuses agreed on four points: Easter was celebrated on a Sunday; it fell in the first lunar month of the year; it was after the Vernal Equinox; and it was held after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox. However, the Romans did not celebrate Easter on Passover. If Easter was to fall on this date, it was moved to the next Sunday. The Celts had no qualms about celebrating Easter on Passover. The Romans considered the Vernal Equinox to be on March 21<sup>st</sup>, the Celts on March 25<sup>th</sup>. The Romans began the liturgical day at evening, the Celts at morning. Thus, the full moon could end up appearing on different days for the two groups, who sometimes celebrated Easter on the same day, a week apart, or four weeks apart.<sup>50</sup> The unity of Christendom in England now hung in the balance. Oswy called for a synod to be held at Whitby Abbey in 664. King Oswy's daughter, Aelfleda, was a novice at Whitby. Oswy, his wife, and daughter, were later buried there.<sup>51</sup> Bishop Colman of Lindisfarne represented the Celtic tradition, and Abbot Wilfrid of Ripon, later archbishop of York, spoke for Rome. Oswy ultimately accepted Wilfrid's argument, based on the belief that the Pope received the keys of heaven from Jesus himself, which gave the Pope the ultimate authority on the date of Easter. Thus, Christian unity was upheld, and all Northumbrians were compelled to celebrate Easter on the same day, the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after March 21<sup>st</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Wallis, "Introduction," *The Reckoning of Time*, lx-lxi.

<sup>49</sup> Steel, 120-122.

<sup>50</sup> Benedicta Ward, *A True Easter: The Synod of Whitby 644 A.D.* (Oxford: SLG Press, 2007), 1-3.

<sup>51</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 184.

It was in this rough world of recent Christian conversion and Easter conflicts that Bede became an educator. He began his writing career and probably his teaching career in 703, around the time he became a priest. According to Brown, “Bede’s educational manuals were designed to provide basic instruction for reading, interpreting, and expounding Scripture and history.”<sup>52</sup> His first two works were *On the Nature of Things*, a scientific treatise on creation and nature, and *On Times*, a short explanation of Easter computus and time in general. These two short volumes were meant to be used together as textbooks. Nearing the end of his career, in 725, Bede wrote a much longer and more comprehensive text expanding on and combining the previous two treatises called *The Reckoning of Time*,<sup>53</sup> which was, “about measuring time and constructing a Christian calendar ... [and was] the earliest comprehensive treatment of this subject.”<sup>54</sup> According to historians Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, monographs on time keeping and nature, “had an ethical purpose: to refute superstition by setting forth rational explanations of the nature of the universe. ... A second related purpose was to foster pious admiration for the beauty and order of the world.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, Bede’s works on time and nature were intimately interwoven with his deep faith. He wanted to emphasize to his students time’s connection to God, and how time ordered the world. The theme of time was integral to his masterpiece written in 731 a few years before his death, the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

*On the Nature of Things* and *On Times* were Bede’s first textbooks. Bede taught from these books and also expected his fellow monks to use these manuals during private study.<sup>56</sup> *On*

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<sup>52</sup> Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>54</sup> Wallis, “Introduction,” *The Reckoning of Time*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>55</sup> Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, “Introduction,” in *On the Nature of Things and On Times*, trans. Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> Wallis, “Introduction,” *The Reckoning of Time*, xxxi.

*the Nature of Things* explains what the world is made of, the various elements, astronomy, the zodiac, natural phenomena such as lightning and thunder, weather, the ocean's tides, and other aspects of nature. His inspiration for this book came from Isidore (c. 560-636), archbishop of Seville, who also wrote a book called *On the Nature of Things*, around 612.<sup>57</sup> *On Times* gives an overview of the various measures of time (hours, days, months, etc.), computus, and the ages of the world. Historians Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis believe that Bede created these works closely together in order to "Teach his students the elements of God's plan as revealed in the natural world and how they could be used to calculate the proper time to celebrate Easter."<sup>58</sup> Bede was also the first person to include computus in a scientific book.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Bede found an intimate connection between nature and time. After all, God created both. Jesus was the manifestation of God on earth and in nature, while time was the otherworldly manifestation of God.

The most interesting aspect of *On Times* was Bede's recalculations of the "ages of the world." Bede learned about the six ages of the world from Isidore of Seville, Augustine (354-430), and Eusebius (c. 260-340).<sup>60</sup> Each "age" corresponded to a period in a person's life. These ages were: from Adam to Noah (infancy); Noah to Abraham (childhood); Abraham to David (adolescence); David to the Babylonian captivity (prime of life); captivity to Jesus (old age); and Jesus to the end of world (death). Bede's innovation was to attempt to calculate how long each age lasted and giving each age long chronologies in both *On Times* and *The Reckoning of Time*. "Appeal[ing] to his orderly mind and strong sense of divine architectural planning," Bede

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<sup>57</sup> Bede, *On the Nature of Things*, 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Faith Wallis, "Bede and Science," in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 120.

<sup>60</sup> Bede, *On Times*, 179.

calculated how long he believed each age was, instead of accepting Eusebius's calculation of over 5,000 years from the beginning of time to the birth of Christ. Closely studying the years mentioned in the Bible and other histories, Bede believed that 3,952 years passed from creation to Christ's birth.<sup>61</sup> Bede's new calculations were so revolutionary that he was accused of heresy at a banquet he had not attended. Bede wrote a strongly worded letter to a friend to defend himself. Fortunately, the accusation of heresy was never taken seriously by anyone in power.

In his introduction to *The Reckoning of Time*, Bede wrote that his students thought that *On the Nature of Things* and *On Times* were too short and persuaded him to write more.<sup>62</sup> Thus, around 725, he wrote *The Reckoning of Time*, which expanded greatly on his two previous works and proved to be his most popular textbook.<sup>63</sup> Its seventy-one chapters cover calculating time; the Julian calendar; the sun's, moon's and tidal wave's involvement in "creating" time; computus and Paschal tables; and the seven ages of the world.

During Bede's lifetime, science and nature were intimately tied to time because nature, in a sense, created time. The rotation of the sun around the Earth (it would still be a few hundred years before it was recognized that the Earth rotated around the sun), the moon's phases, and the tides, the stars and the zodiac, were responsible for the passage of time. Bede believed that time started on the first day of creation when the sun began to rotate around the Earth, establishing the first day.<sup>64</sup> He even went so far as to calculate that time began on March 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>65</sup> It was well known that the Earth was a globe, due to different stars being seen from different locations, and the fact

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<sup>61</sup> Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Wallis, "Introduction," *The Reckoning of Time*, xvi-xvii, lxxxvi.

<sup>64</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 27.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

that days were longer in the summer the further north a person went.<sup>66</sup> It was even known that the moon and tide appeared to be in sync with each other.<sup>67</sup> Natural time included days, months, and years. Unnatural, or manmade, time included hours. Bede states, “[t]hese divisions of time are not natural, but apparently are agreed upon by convention.”<sup>68</sup> Unnatural time also included, of course, indictions and regnal years.

Throughout *The Reckoning of Time* Bede connects various measures of time to God.

Bede explains,

[T]here are three kinds of time-reckoning: it operates either according to nature, or according to custom, or according to authority. This authority is itself twofold. It is either human authority ... or divine authority, as the Lord in the Law commands that the Sabbath be kept the seventh day.<sup>69</sup>

Nature was also commanded by God. The fact that the Earth is round, leading to day on one side and night on the other, was believed to be “by the firm decree of God’s law.”<sup>70</sup> Bede described the movement of the sun, which creates the four seasons, “according to the universal solicitude of Divine Wisdom.”<sup>71</sup> God’s hand was found throughout every aspect of time.

The most important date handed down by God to Christians was Easter. Out of the seventy-one chapters in *The Reckoning of Time*, twenty-one are devoted to computus. As noted by historian J. Robert Wright, for Bede and his Christian contemporaries, “if [Easter] was celebrated at exactly the right time, then all was in harmony.”<sup>72</sup> In order to determine this “right time,” the criteria for the correct calculation of the Easter celebration had to be established. The

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<sup>66</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 32-33.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 29.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>72</sup> J. Robert Wright, *Companion to Bede: A Reader’s Commentary on The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 135.

criteria were theological and came from the Bible, and the calculation was “mathematical and astronomical.”<sup>73</sup>

Bede’s deep belief in the importance of Easter is beautifully expressed in chapter sixty-four in *The Reckoning of Time*. First, he explains that the actual day that Easter takes place is holy. “The time when Easter is ordained to take place is, like the Paschal celebrations as a whole, redolent with sacred mystery.”<sup>74</sup> Next, he explains that the timekeeping mechanism for Easter, the moon, can also be used as an allegory for people to find deeper meaning in Easter. “Its revolution rightly signifies the mystery of our Easter rejoicing, in which we are taught to turn all the splendor of our mind away from the visible delights and transitory partialities and to fix upon the light of heavenly grace alone.”<sup>75</sup> The phases of the moon hold various symbolism. “Again the Moon, increasing towards men, shows us the symbol of the active life, and when turned back towards the heavens, of the speculative life.”<sup>76</sup> Finally, he connects the seven days of the week to the seven gifts of the spirit. “Because the gift of this Spirit is sevenfold, it can, not inappropriately, be understood by the number of the seven lunar days through which this aforementioned first day of the week – that is, Sunday – circulates.”<sup>77</sup> His most powerful metaphor is comparing the light of the sun and moon to Jesus’s “light” shining on the Church, which reflected that “light” back. The sun’s light “wins victory over the ... night ... and the Moon ... illuminates ... the night. ... Virtually no one doubts that this refers to the sacrament of Christ and his Church.”<sup>78</sup> By using the “sacrament” Bede refers to Jesus’s sacrificial crucifixion,

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<sup>73</sup> Wallis, “Introduction,” *The Reckoning of Time*, xxxiv.

<sup>74</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 151.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>78</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 132.

which led to the founding of the Christian Church. Bede uses his many metaphors and analogies to remind his readers of the deep levels of meaning they can find in time, which all point to God.

The many chapters devoted to computus are filled with formulas for determining lunar cycles, indictions, lunar epacts, and solar epacts. (Epacts were the difference between the solar and lunar year, about eleven days.) These various formulas, if used correctly, would allow anyone to calculate Easter, including every Easter in the past, and every Easter in the future until the year 1063. (Future generations would have to deal with calculating Easters after that year.)<sup>79</sup> Knowing the correct formula was vital because there were still three different kinds of computuses being used in the British Isles, despite the Synod of Whitby. The correct system was the Dionysian tables introduced by Rome. The southern Irish were still using the Victorian tables, and a scattering of people were still using the old Celtic tables, that were refuted at Whitby.<sup>80</sup> Bede not only wanted to promote the correct computus, but also to ensure that one did not have to travel to Rome to learn computus.<sup>81</sup> The *Ecclesiastical History* elevated the importance of Whitby, which assured Christian unity, above other synods, agreements, and conversions regarding Easter.

Bede ends *The Reckoning of Time* with the Six Ages of the world. Bede expanded greatly on the timeline he created in *On Times*. This chronology went beyond chronicling events in the Bible, but included the history of Christianity, along with secular and spiritual events in England, such as Claudius's invasion, the building of Hadrian's Wall, the Irish and Pict takeover of Scotland, the invasion of the Angles and Saxons, and the conversion of various kings.<sup>82</sup> *The*

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<sup>79</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 156.

<sup>80</sup> Wallis, "Introduction," *The Reckoning of Time*, lxiii.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 198, 219, 220, 221.



*Reckoning of Time* appears to be a precursor to his *Ecclesiastical History*, and shows his desire to fit England into the biblical and Christian narrative of world history. Obviously, he also included the dates when various Easter computation tables were written, and when the Irish and English accepted the correct Easter computations.

However, Bede goes much beyond what he included in *On Times* regarding the six ages of the world by including a seventh and eighth age, which were the ages yet to come. The seventh age correlated with the Resurrection. In this age souls ascended to Heaven after the end times. In the eighth age everyone's soul is restored to his or her body in Heaven. By adding these ages, "Bede [did] what no previous computist had ever attempted: to turn the reckoning of time into a *figura* of eternity. The calculation of Easter merges into a meditation upon the last things, a spiritual exercise whose purpose was to rise through contemplation of time to the perception of eternity."<sup>83</sup> Looking into the future, rather than just the present and the past, was an innovation of computists, and Bede went further by peaking behind the curtain to eternity.<sup>84</sup> Bede ends his book with the following: "And so our little book concerning the fleeting and wave-tossed course of time comes to a fitting end in eternal stability and stable eternity."<sup>85</sup> For Bede, all thoughts on time lead to the ultimate structure of eternity.

Six years after completing *The Reckoning of Time*, Bede wrote his famed masterpiece, the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. This book earned Bede the posthumous title "Venerable," as well as being declared a Doctor of the Church in 1899. This first history of the English church, and one of the earliest histories of England, was extraordinarily popular from the

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<sup>83</sup> Wallis, "Introduction," *The Reckoning of Time*, lxxi.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 249.

time it was written up to the current day. About 160 medieval copies survive, and Dante mentions Bede in the *Divine Comedy*. Bede's bones are enshrined at Durham Cathedral. As Wright notes, no historian can write a book on the early history of England without using Bede as a major source.<sup>86</sup>

At nearly sixty years old, Bede drew on his many decades of learning, teaching, and writing to compose his "sacred, not secular, history."<sup>87</sup> This history was meant to fulfil his goal to, "weave his people into the broader fabric of the Christian story of salvation. ... Indeed, the very concept of 'Englishness' stems from Bede's attempts to construct a collective identity for the melee of peoples inhabiting the former Roman province of Britannia."<sup>88</sup> Even though England had not yet unified as one nation, historian Alan Thacker notes, "[t]he *Ecclesiastical History* is notable for its treatment of the English as, in some sense, a single people ... albeit one divided into separate kingdoms."<sup>89</sup> Spiritual and cultural unity, however, could not be achieved without the entire island celebrating Easter on the same day.

Unlike Bede's previous works on time, the *Ecclesiastical History* covers only the sixth age of the world, which spans from Jesus's death to the end of time. Bede starts his history with a geographical study of England, reflecting his strong interest in natural science. He cannot help but note that the nights are short in the summer, due to England's northern latitude.<sup>90</sup> Next, he turns his focus to the English people. At the beginning of the sixth age the English people were comprised of many different ethnic groups, which were unified by Christianity. Bede presents

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<sup>86</sup> Wright, *Companion to Bede*, 1-9.

<sup>87</sup> Rosenthal, "Ecclesiastical History," 2.

<sup>88</sup> Brown, *Companion to Bede*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Thacker, "Bede and History," 175.

<sup>90</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 38.

the history of England's development from pagan chaos to a unified and converted people. The *Ecclesiastical History* climaxes with the Synod of Whitby, then discusses Iona's eventual conformity, and concludes with a summary of events and a chronology.<sup>91</sup> Bede's history of England during the sixth age is divided into five books, which mimic the first five ages of the world. The first book covers the "infancy" of England, then goes through adulthood and so forth.<sup>92</sup> According to Ward, "Bede's account of the English is therefore a world history in miniature."<sup>93</sup>

Bede emphasizes the importance of Easter and computus throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*. He even devoted an entire chapter to the explanation of the correct computus. One of Bede's main purposes in writing the book was to condemn those who celebrated Easter on the wrong date, and to celebrate the eventual communion of all islanders rejoicing on the correct day. "Divergence between churches on such a matter as Easter was not a trivial matter. It was a rent in the seamless garment, and it is not surprising that Bede, who was by far the most learned man of his day on computation, would have devoted much of his history to this issue."<sup>94</sup> In the same way Bede sought to show how the many disparate groups in England came together in orderly political and Christian unity. However, he must have been well aware that his claim of unity stretched the truth, and true unity, in Easter, politics, and faith, had not quite been reached.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 114-115.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>94</sup> Wright, "Companion to Bede," 135.

<sup>95</sup> Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 111.

The chapters leading up to the Synod of Whitby include the consequences faced by those who celebrated the wrong Easter. As previously mentioned, Bede believed that 1,200 monks perished in a battle for refusing to follow the correct computus given to them by Bishop Augustine. This kind of refusal signaled grave arrogance. The Ionians were guilty of this arrogance, which angered Pope Honorius, who “wrote to the Irish whom he learned to be in error about the observance of Easter. ... He earnestly warned them not to imagine that their little community, isolated at the uttermost ends of the earth, had a wisdom exceeding that of all churches ancient and modern throughout the world...”<sup>96</sup> Bede was just as unforgiving, even of the great and revered Bishop Aidan, who reconverted the Northumbrians. Bede exclaimed, “I greatly admire and love all these things about Aidan...but I cannot approve or commend his failure to observe Easter at the proper time, whether he did it through ignorance ... or in deference to the customs of his own nation.”<sup>97</sup> A man could be a saint (which Aidan became in the 10<sup>th</sup> century), but celebrating Easter on the wrong date was unforgivable. However, Bede could be forgiving. The Picts celebrated the wrong date for Easter until 715; however, “In observing the great Feast of Easter they followed doubtful rules’ for being so isolated from the rest of the world, there was no one to acquaint them with the synodical decrees about the keeping of Easter. But they diligently followed whatever pure and devout customs they learned in the prophets, the Gospels, and the writing of the Apostles.”<sup>98</sup> Bede clearly sees the devout Picts as being innocent since their isolation prevented news of a new computus. He most likely believed that the Picts would have followed the right path if presented with the correct computus.

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<sup>96</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 138.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

Bede is also keen to show how celebrating Easter on the wrong date led to chaos. In the chapter on the Synod of Whitby, Wilfrid says to Colman, the Ionian, “But you and your colleagues are most certainly guilty of sin if you reject the decrees of the Apostolic See, indeed of the universal Church, which are confirmed by Holy Writ.”<sup>99</sup> Thus, a rejection of the correct computus was a rejection of the entire Church. This meant being no better than a pagan or apostate. Furthermore, when priests were ordained by bishops who celebrated the wrong Easter, “The Holy See does not consider the men they ordain as being in communion with her – anymore than she does those who consort with schismatics.”<sup>100</sup> This is as good as an accusation of heresy.

Bede probably took great comfort in the unity that came from a universal Easter celebration. On a personal level, an Easter miracle brought about the conversion of his homeland of Northumbria. When King Edwin’s daughter Eanfled was born on Easter night, the king thanked his pagan gods; but Bishop Paulinus, who was present, thanked Jesus. Edwin said he would convert if he won his next battle, which he did, so Eanfled became the first Northumbrian to be baptized.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, Bede most likely believed that he grew up in a Christian land due to Easter.

Many scholars have noted that the chapter on the Synod of Whitby in the *Ecclesiastical History* is placed in the center of the book.<sup>102</sup> The outcome of the Synod is the climax to the story of Christian unity in England, the pivotal point to Bede’s history. Although Bede wrote the

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<sup>99</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 191.

<sup>100</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *The Age of Bede, Bede: Life of Cuthbert, Eddius Stephanus: Life of Wilfrid, Bede: Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow with the Voyage of St. Brendan*, trans. J. F. Webb (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 118.

<sup>101</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 114-115.

<sup>102</sup> Wright, *A Companion to Bede*, 79.

*Ecclesiastical History* about sixty-seven years after the Synod of Whitby, many people were still celebrating Easter on the wrong date during Bede's lifetime, which partially influenced his desire to write *The Reckoning of Time*. Bede includes three examples of post-Whitby incidences in the *Ecclesiastical History*: an Ionian monk converts to celebrating Easter on the correct date in 703; a priest writes a treatise to convert Britons to the correct date around 705; and Nechtan, the King of the Picts, converts to celebrating the correct date in 710.<sup>103</sup> It was not until 715 that the Ionans gave up the old calculation completely due to the monk Egbert, who was blessed to die on Easter day.<sup>104</sup> Bede mentions that one of the reasons for the Synod of Whitby to be convened was because, "[it] began to trouble the minds and consciences of many people, who feared that they might have received the name of Christian in vain."<sup>105</sup> Bede hoped that anyone who still had a troubled conscience would quickly come to accept the outcome of the Synod of Whitby after reading the *Ecclesiastical History*.

Bede's discussion of the Synod of Whitby unifies England with the aid of time. Whitby produced a single, coherent resolution to a controversy that had both political and spiritual dimensions. Ward explains, "It was not just the desire for uniformity or an exercise in authority that caused Bede to think and write so earnestly about the correct dating of Easter. ... Here was the point where time crossed with eternity and all the symbols of heaven and earth had to be focused to bring this into view."<sup>106</sup> Politically, Bede believed that Whitby unified Northumbria with the rest of England. Spiritually, Whitby decided the correct way to determine Easter based on the most accurate calculations. It was crucial to have a politically unified Church without any

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<sup>103</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 293, 298, 308.

<sup>104</sup> Steel, *Marking Time*, 122. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 322.

<sup>105</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 183.

<sup>106</sup> Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 28.

inconsistencies in the observance of Easter. Likewise, the observance of Easter had to be based on the divine laws of time and nature which were derived from God.

Bede used his books *On the Nature of Things*, *On Times*, *The Reckoning of Time*, and the *Ecclesiastical History* to connect time to God and unify an unorganized world. The ultimate intersection of time and God was Easter. This most sacred of holy days commemorated the miracle of Jesus's resurrection, which meant a break from paganism and departure from Jewish time. Bede, a man with a scientific mind and knack for education, viewed time as sacred and coming from God. He incorporated this view in his use of dating years from the Incarnation, and calculating the exact day that all Christians around the world were to celebrate Easter. The computus is a mathematical formulation that relies on God's timepieces, the moon and sun. Thus, it combined the natural world and spiritual world in perfect harmony. Harmony meant unity; Bede's greatest desires. Through his writings he could impose unity on the English people both politically and spiritually. Easter was the great unifier, bringing together many peoples into one nation, and all Christians into perfect harmony with one another and God.

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## **DEARTH AND DEATH: THE GREAT FAMINE, 1315-1322**

The Great Famine of 1315 to 1322 was the worst famine in recorded European history. Occurring just prior to the Black Death of the 1340s-50s, the Great Famine has long been overshadowed by the later disaster. However, just as during the Black Death, millions of northern Europeans suffered. The famine, linked to endless rains that destroyed crops, was exacerbated by illnesses that wiped out the sheep and cattle populations, astronomically rising food prices, and war. The Great Famine, directly connected to the transition between the Medieval Warm Period (circa 800 BCE to 1300 CE) and the Little Ice Age (circa 1300 to 1850 CE), has increased in popularity as a topic of interest among historians. The Great Famine has the unique position of being uncontestedly caused by environmental factors. This historiography shows that this rich topic needs to be examined more fully by environmental historians. As the field advances, an interdisciplinary approach between historical, economic, archeological and scientific research of the Great Famine gives a clearer picture of the devastation during the years of dearth and death.

The Medieval Warm Period was an unusually warm era in Europe that lasted from around 800 to 1300 CE. Evidence shows that this climate anomaly only affected the northern hemisphere, most likely due to the North Atlantic Oscillation, a weather pattern that affects Europe's climate due to an oscillation between pressure points above Iceland and the Azores Islands. For reasons unknowable, this oscillation favored Europe with nearly a half millennium of stable and advantageous weather. Europe's population rose as crops were able to grow at more than 1000 feet above sea level, vineyards grew in England, and unproductive land produced for

the first time. Vikings pushed farther west and settled in Greenland and parts of current day Canada because there was no treacherous ice to get in the way of their ships.<sup>107</sup>

The average temperature in Europe was about 1.8°F higher than twentieth century averages. The largest glacier in the Swiss Alps retreated to altitudes that would not be seen again until after 1950, with trees growing above 2,000 meters above sea level.<sup>108</sup> Marginal soils were now producing, which led to massive assarting across Europe. England's forest cover decreased from 80% in the fifth century to 30% by 1300. France's acreage of forests was reduced from 74 million acres to 32 million acres.<sup>109</sup> Coastal lands were reclaimed by dikes, and marshes were drained.<sup>110</sup> Poor soils were plowed and exposed to the elements. Peasants began to farm their land relentlessly, no longer fallowing fields to replenish nitrogen in the soil. While short-sighted, lords were greedy for large crops, and peasants needed to eat. The population grew dramatically as more food was grown due to six week longer growing seasons.<sup>111</sup> In fact, England's population peaked in the late 1200s at five million people; a level that would not be seen again until the 1700s.<sup>112</sup> Overall, Europe's population rose from 38.5 million in the year 1000 to 73.5 million in the year 1340.<sup>113</sup> The growth steadied in the early 1300s, as the large European population put pressure on how much the land could produce.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> William Rosen, *The Third Horseman: Climate Change and the Great Famine of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century* (Viking: New York, 2014), 12-17.

<sup>108</sup> Richard C. Hoffman, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 321-322.

<sup>109</sup> Rosen, *The Third Horseman*, 18.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>112</sup> Ian Kershaw, "The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England 1315-1322," *Past and Present*, 59 (May, 1973): 3.

<sup>113</sup> Josiah C. Russell, "Population in Europe," in Carlo M. Cipolla, ed., *The Fontana Economic History of Europe, Vol. I: The Middle Ages* (Glasgow: Collins/Fontana, 1972), 25-71.

<http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pop-in-eur.asp>

<sup>114</sup> William Chester Jordan, *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1996), 12.

Unbeknownst to the people of Europe, the fourteenth century was a transition point between the Medieval Warm Period and the Little Ice Age. Evidence from dendrology and isotope variations in ice cores from Greenland and Antarctica show that the Little Ice Age began around 1300.<sup>115</sup> The fourteenth century was the “coldest [in Greenland] for the previous seven hundred years, and 1343-62 the most frigid, averaging 10 C below average.”<sup>116</sup> Winters began to last two to three months longer.<sup>117</sup> While the cause of the Little Ice Age is unknown, evidence shows that changes in the Great Ocean Conveyor Belt may have been a contributing factor. When ocean water flows north to the Arctic, it cools, sinks, and begins to flow south to Antarctica and to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These northern and southern moving flows mix and transfer heat towards Europe. However, when the Little Ice Age began, deep water was colder near Antarctica than near the Arctic, which meant that the ocean water flows were not drawing heat to Europe. After 1850, about when the Little Ice Age ended, deep water began to be colder near the Arctic rather than near Antarctica.<sup>118</sup> The Little Ice Age peaked from about 1570 to 1600, again during the 1690s and the 1810s, and lasted until about 1850.<sup>119</sup>

In the spring of 1315 it began to rain in northern Europe. While not unusual, people began to become uneasy when the rain failed to stop. There was massive flooding and crop failure. The rain washed away seeds, planting and harvesting was difficult, the rain leached the soil of nutrients, plant diseases such as mold and rusts proliferated, and crops did not ripen. The rains came back again the next year, and to a lesser extent the year after that. Every spring and

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<sup>115</sup> John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (Routledge: London, 2000), 11.

<sup>116</sup> Hoffman, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, 327.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>118</sup> Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1500*, (Basic Books: New York, 2000), 56-57.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 52.

autumn harvest until 1321 was affected negatively in some way.<sup>120</sup> The years 1315 to 1318 were about ten percent wetter than normal, and the 1320s were about ten to twenty percent drier.<sup>121</sup> The winters proved to be so cold and stormy that the Baltic Sea froze over, preventing the delivery of food and goods, in the winters of 1315-16 and 1321-22.<sup>122</sup>

The endless rains did more than kill crops and hinder transportation. Wine production plummeted. The rains encouraged mildew, and the grapes did not ripen. The little wine that could be produced tasted terrible. The vintages 1315 and 1316 were considered to be complete disasters, and some areas in France did not see good wine again until the late 1320s.<sup>123</sup> Salt production also failed. Salt was a vital mineral not only for flavor, but for preserving meat. Salt was produced in salt pans built near the ocean, where the water would either evaporate or be boiled away with fire. Obviously, the rain prevented evaporation and open fires. The price of salt quadrupled.<sup>124</sup>

Another devastating effect of the rains was a massive dying off of bovine and sheep. Murrain, a general term used to encompass various diseases, decimated the sheep population in northern Europe, devastating the wool market, especially in Flanders, where England exported wool for weaving. Sheep become vulnerable to diseases when grazing in wet and flooded pastures.<sup>125</sup> Besides murrain and liver fluke, lambs died at birth due to the bitter cold during lambing season. England lost nearly seventy percent of its sheep.<sup>126</sup> This loss was compounded by the fact that hay could not dry, and wet hay rotted or self-combusted from methane build-up

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<sup>120</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 31.

<sup>121</sup> Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 12.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>123</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 34-35.

<sup>124</sup> Rosen, *The Third Horseman*, 151.

<sup>125</sup> Kershaw, "The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England 1315-1322," 20.

<sup>126</sup> Rosen., *The Third Horseman*, 197-199.

when stored.<sup>127</sup> One priory in England had over 3,000 sheep entering 1315, but had only 913 in 1317.<sup>128</sup> Bovine were also devastated by a highly fatal viral disease called rinderpest. While rinderpest did not begin to affect the bovine population until 1319, it was another devastating blow after a few years of failed crops.<sup>129</sup> According to William Rosen, the virus, for unknown reasons, can become epizootic, meaning it becomes an epidemic.<sup>130</sup> The highly contagious virus spread rapidly and killed nearly sixty-two percent of England's cattle in a year. This period of bovine death was known as the Great Bovine Pestilence. Suddenly farmers did not have oxen (male castrated bovine) to plow fields when the weather improved, and milk, a vital source of protein, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, and calcium, became scarce. It took ten years for the oxen and twelve years for the cows to recover to eighty-five percent of the pre-rinderpest levels.<sup>131</sup> Fortunately, swine were not affected by diseases or the failing crops during this time period. However, people resorted to eating them in great number in absence of bread, beef, and mutton.<sup>132</sup> Some areas lost nearly ninety-five percent of their swine due to overconsumption.<sup>133</sup>

The population of northern Europe faced an untenable situation that only got worse. Europe's fledgling integrated market economy did not react well to the dearth of grains, and the price of food rose astronomically. Grain prices in France rose 800 percent in three years.<sup>134</sup> In England a quarter of wheat (eight bushels) sold for five shillings prior to the famine. The price

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<sup>127</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 37.

<sup>128</sup> Kershaw, "The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England 1315-1322," 22.

<sup>129</sup> Sharon DeWitte and Philip Slavin, "Between Famine and Death: England on the Eve of the Black Death – Evidence from Paleoepidemiology and Manorial Accounts," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 44 no. 1 (Summer, 2013): 49.

<sup>130</sup> Rosen, *The Third Horseman*, 186.

<sup>131</sup> DeWitte and Slavin, "Between Famine and Death: England on the Eve of the Black Death," 49.

<sup>132</sup> Fagan, *The Little Ice Age*, 41.

<sup>133</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 56.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

rose to seven shillings in September, 1315, then ten shillings by Christmas. April, 1316 brought the price to sixteen shillings, then twenty-four shillings in the summer.<sup>135</sup> Salt prices rose so much that many peasants, and even lords, reduced the amount of preserved meat set aside for winter.<sup>136</sup> Salt was also needed to make cheese and butter.<sup>137</sup> Animal products, such as cheese, butter, grease, and eggs rose in price as well, and became scarcer as animals died off or were eaten instead of being allowed to reproduce.<sup>138</sup> According to historian Philip Slavin, the increase in prices was overwhelmingly dramatic, compared to any other famine in history. “In the Great Famine prices reached their maximum in a mere eleven months, while in other major Western Famines prices seem to have risen considerably more slowly.”<sup>139</sup> Needless to say, any food that was available was unaffordable.

The obvious consequence of the failed crops and animal deaths was mass starvation. Eighty percent of Europe’s population received eighty percent of their diet from grain products, such as bread and ale, making the lack of grain more dire than it would be for people in the twenty-first century.<sup>140</sup> There was also a lack of proper storage facilities for the long term storing of food.<sup>141</sup> Compounded by the dearth of beef, mutton, and eventually pork, desperate people resorted to eating highly valuable horses, dogs, long dead animals, and inedible things such as grass, leather, dirt, grubs, and animal dung. Some chroniclers, such as John of Trokelowe, claim that cannibalism happened. Stories included people eating freshly buried corpses, people in

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<sup>135</sup> Philip Slavin, “Market Failure during the Great Famine in England and Wales (1315-1317),” *Past and Present*, 222 (February, 2014): 16.

<sup>136</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 54.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Slavin, “Market Failure during the Great Famine in England and Wales (1315-1317),” 23.

<sup>140</sup> Rosen, *The Third Horseman*, 154.

<sup>141</sup> Slavin, “Market Failure during the Great Famine in England and Wales (1315-1317),” 24.

prisons eating each other, and parents eating children and vice versa. Many historians regard these stories as metaphors or literary tropes used to emphasize how terrible life was becoming at the time.<sup>142</sup>

Most historians concur that five to ten percent of northern Europe's population died. However, these deaths were not literally from starvation, but from the increased morbidity that comes from extreme malnourishment.<sup>143</sup> An entire generation of Europeans were physically weakened by this long-term lack of sustenance. This vulnerability led to skeletal emaciation in infants, kwashiorkor (protein deficiency), ulcers, blindness, pellagra (vitamin B<sub>3</sub> deficiency), diarrhea, dermatitis, dementia, scurvy, ergotism, extreme lethargy, and an increased vulnerability to contracting infectious diseases. Unfortunately, these weakened people could no longer fight off infections. Infections reduce metabolism, which reduces the absorbance of nutrients, which turns into a vicious cycle for starving individuals. Ergotism, which resulted in convulsions, psychosis and gangrene, was contracted from fungus that grows in damp grain, which proliferated during these wet years. Before death, the afflicted experienced extreme hallucinations, spasms, and gangrene.<sup>144</sup> For those who truly did starve to death, it was after weeks or months of no food; a truly agonizing death indeed.<sup>145</sup>

The people of northern Europe did not passively sit by and slowly starve to death. In desperation, many turned to God. Processions and pilgrimages to monasteries and holy sites increased. Many believed that the Great Famine was God's punishment for humanity's many

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<sup>142</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 148-150.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>144</sup> Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 18.

<sup>145</sup> Rosen, *The Third Horseman*, 158-160.



sins.<sup>146</sup> Monasteries struggled to give out alms to all who needed it. Unfortunately, charity could do little to feed the masses. Over fifty people were crushed to death as hordes of poor people tried to squeeze through the gates of the Friars Preachers in London when alms were distributed.<sup>147</sup> Many starving people left the countryside and roamed to towns and cities in hopes of employment and food. Less scrupulous people turned to crime. Most of these crimes involved the theft of food.<sup>148</sup> Crime rose by 400 percent in Norfolk, England from 1315 to 1317.<sup>149</sup> The famine years also saw an increase in family members suing each other over land and goods ownership in England. “In the struggle for survival, external tensions could drive a family apart...”<sup>150</sup>

Unfortunately, the woes of the famine were compounded by the Hundred-Year’s war between England and Scotland, and between France and Flanders. Edward II of England needed food for his army and turned to purveyance to take food from his own subjects. On top of that, he raised taxes to fund his war. Animals were often taken away from peasants who could not pay their taxes, which starved them even further.<sup>151</sup> The situation had become completely untenable. Some lords and rulers tried to set prices, forbid exports of food and encourage importation of food, but there was little they could do to actually feed the people. To make matters worse, the Scots raided and destroyed farms, crops, and herds.<sup>152</sup> Perhaps the only positive aspect of the

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<sup>146</sup> Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 26.

<sup>147</sup> Barbara A. Hanawalt. “Reading the Lives of the Illiterate: London’s Poor,” *Speculum*, Vol. 80 no. 4 (October, 2005): 1078.

<sup>148</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 111-112.

<sup>149</sup> Mark Baily. “Peasant Welfare in England, 1290-1348.” *The Economic History Review, New Series*, Vol. 51 no 2 (May, 1998): 240.

<sup>150</sup> Barbara Hanawalt Westman. “The Peasant Family and Crime in Fourteenth-Century England.” *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 13 no. 2 (May, 1974): 8.

<sup>151</sup> Buchanan Sharp, “Royal Paternalism and the Moral Economy in the Reign of Edward II: the Response to the Great Famine,” *The Economic History Review*, 66 no. 2 (2013): 644.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 631.

torrential rains was when the French King Louis X had to call off an attack on Flanders because his soldiers and horses literally became stuck in the mud. This was probably the only time the Flemish were thankful for the crop-killing rains.<sup>153</sup>

Henry S. Lucas claims to be the first historian to write exclusively about the Great Famine in his article, “The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316, and 1317,” published in 1930.<sup>154</sup> According to William Chester Jordan, Lucas was not the first, but he was one of the earliest and most cited within Anglo-American historiography.<sup>155</sup> In 1973 Ian Kershaw wrote “The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England, 1315-1322.” Lucas and Kershaw were pioneers on this topic; nothing more was written on the Great Famine until the late 1990s. Thus, their works were groundbreaking and cited in almost all further studies.

The sharpest difference between the works of Lucas and Kershaw is the causation of the Great Famine. As far as Lucas was concerned, the Great Famine was due exclusively to the endless rains of 1315 and 1316. The majority of Lucas’ sources are chroniclers from the time period, with a few history monographs and articles as secondary sources. Lucas also believed that the Great Famine was over by 1318, while Kershaw rightly notes that it did not truly end until 1322, and lastly, Lucas did not question manuscripts that claimed that cannibalism happened. “They were forced to feed themselves as best they might; they ate dogs, cats, the dung of doves, and even their own children. Cannibalism certainly was common.”<sup>156</sup> Kershaw took these claims with a grain of salt, and took it as an exaggeration to show how extreme the famine

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<sup>153</sup> Fagan, *The Little Ice Age*, 31-32.

<sup>154</sup> Henry S. Lucas, “European Famine of 1315, 1316, 1317,” *Speculum*, 5 no. 4 (October, 1930): 344.

<sup>155</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Lucas, “European Famine of 1315, 1316, 1317,” 355.

was.<sup>157</sup> Kershaw is much more nuanced about the cause of the famine, taking into account war, the decimation of livestock, and the types of soils brought under cultivation.<sup>158</sup> He looked beyond the testimony of chroniclers, examined economic data from manor rolls and priories, and used a much larger number of secondary sources, covering agrarian and economic history.

Kershaw also notes the difference between his methodology and Lucas's. "Lucas gave insufficient attention to another aspect of the agrarian crisis – the devastating series of livestock epidemics which afflicted most areas of Britain in this period."<sup>159</sup> Kershaw also remarks on the contemporary theory first formulated in the 1950s that there had been a major climate shift in the late medieval period. "It has been suggested that underlying climatic changes, resulting in long-term trend towards colder and wetter weather, began about this time...but it is nevertheless difficult...to agree with the assertion that the Famine years marked the onset of a long-term deterioration in the weather."<sup>160</sup> At the time researchers may not have found enough evidence for complete acceptance of the theory, but Kershaw at least gave it some credence, albeit with caution. The two authors wrote pioneering works on a topic hardly touched on in the past. While Lucas's evaluation was somewhat simplistic and left out the important component of the Bovine Pestilence, it was a groundbreaking work. Kershaw's work, which came forty years later, was also groundbreaking by re-evaluating the topic and including the Great Bovine Pestilence and the possibility of climate change.

While it is now universally accepted that the Great Famine resulted from climate change, few authors have approached the topic in an environmental or scientific fashion, other than in

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<sup>157</sup> Kershaw, "The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England 1315-1322," 10.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

brief passing. However, four authors have recently done so, bringing a new and innovative perspective to the topic. András Vadas, a student at Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences in Budapest, Hungary wanted to determine if there was scientific and primary source evidence that the climate change of 1315 to 1317 affected the Carpathian Basin, which is in modern day Hungary. He points out that “[i]t is...a general problem of natural scientific and archaeological research that in most cases changes can be detected, but it is difficult to differentiate the main reasons: it is uncertain whether mainly human impact or a possible climate change is more responsible for the changes.”<sup>161</sup> He then notes, “It [does], however, appear rather clearly that general change in environmental conditions can be detected in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century Hungary.”<sup>162</sup> Vadas scoured manuscript materials such as charters from both Hungary and surrounding areas for contemporary mentions of floods and grain prices. From his careful case study he concluded that, “signs of...crisis and famine were presented and caused problems in different parts of contemporary Hungary.”<sup>163</sup> While Vadas’s short article does not add much to the literature of the Great Famine, it is most likely the first careful investigation into whether the climate change of 1315 to 1317 affected an area of Europe, traditionally considered not to have been affected.

Sharon DeWitte, assistant professor of Anthropology and Biology at the University of South Carolina, and Philip Slavin, faculty lecturer in Economics and History at McGill University, teamed up to write an interdisciplinary and innovative paper based on the study of skeletons of plague victims in England. DeWitte and Slavin hoped to discover if the Great

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<sup>161</sup> A. Vadas, “Documentary Evidence on Weather Conditions and a Possible Crisis in 1315-1317: Case Study from the Carpathian Basin,” *Journal of Environmental Geography*, 2 no. 3-4 (2009): 25.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Famine made people more susceptible to dying from the plague by studying 491 skeletons from a plague cemetery in London.<sup>164</sup> They looked for signs of physiological stress on the skeletons of people who would have been born before or during the Great Famine. All of the victims in this cemetery died around 1348 from the Black Death. The authors discuss how they determined age and sex, and what physiological markers they looked for on the skeletons.

DeWitte and Slavin did not reach any firm conclusions since their sample size led to no statistically significant differences between the groups born before or after the Great Famine. However, there was some evidence that the famine targeted shorter females. Skeletons of men and women born after the famine had more stress markers than those born before, which meant that those who were vulnerable during the famine died and the more robust individuals lived to experience and die from the plague.<sup>165</sup> The most interesting finding, however, was the great impact of the Bovine Pestilence of 1318 to 1320 on the post famine population. “The cattle plague...created a long-term deprivation of dairy products, which were at the time the single most important source of protein, calcium, and Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.”<sup>166</sup> It took over a decade for the bovine population to recover, so individuals born after the famine were still affected by the dearth of cattle. “The strategy of replenishing oxen more steadily and quickly than dairy cattle had serious consequences for nutrition between c. 1320 and 1340.”<sup>167</sup> Post famine skeletons showed some evidence of calcium deficiency. Accordingly, “The Great Bovine Pestilence, which resulted in a catastrophic and long-term dearth of dairy products, did not produce high human mortality...but it could have created a generation of relatively weak people....Hence, the Great

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<sup>164</sup> DeWitte and Slavin, “Between Famine and Death: England on the Eve of the Black Death,” 38.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Bovine Pestilence, we suggest, could have been more responsible than the Great Famine for the high mortality associated with the Black Death.”<sup>168</sup> This astonishing finding shows that historians may successfully work inter-disciplinarily with other scholars to add new and profound knowledge to past events that could have not been known otherwise.

Professor of Archaeology Brian Fagan, of the University of California at Santa Barbara took on the monumental task of writing an entire book on the environmental history of the Little Ice Age. His book covers over a thousand years of climate history. The first two chapters deal with the Medieval Warm Period and the Great Famine. These two chapters act to set the stage for the Little Ice Age, so they do not provide an extraordinary amount of analysis on the famine. However, Fagan’s book was the first to explain the science behind the climate change. Some authors briefly state that there was a Medieval Warm Period that gave way to a Little Ice Age, and that the Great Famine was the cusp between the two, but Fagan is the first to explain *why* this happened. He explains the science behind the North Atlantic Oscillation, how it caused the Medieval Warm Period and then the Little Ice Age. He connects historic events, such as Vikings settling Greenland, directly to these weather anomalies.

Fagan combines scientific writings with historical secondary sources into a well written, fascinating read geared towards a general audience. He separates himself from environmental determinism by stating,

In *The Little Ice Age* I argue that human relationships to the natural environment and short-term climate change have always been in a complex state of flux. To ignore them is to neglect one of the dynamic backdrops of the human experience. ...Environmental determinism may be intellectually bankrupt, but climate change is the ignored player on the historical state.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> DeWitte and Slavin, “Between Famine and Death: England on the Eve of the Black Death,” 57.

<sup>169</sup> Fagan, *The Little Ice Age*, xv.

Environmental determinism was the late nineteenth/early twentieth century widely accepted paradigm, which held that, “Environmental factors were asserted as the determinative cause of racial differences, cultural practices, moral values, ingenuity and the ultimate capabilities of any given population.”<sup>170</sup> This theory has been roundly debunked, due to it being used to uphold many racist theories. Fagan wants to show his readers that climate change can have a profound effect on a population, without falling into the environmental determinism trap. Fagan is the first to include the Great Famine in an environmental history monograph and is cited by many of the most recent scholars on the Great Famine.

While all historians agree that the Great Famine was caused by a massive climate abnormality, some believe that it was exacerbated by human influence. Four historians, Philip Slavin, Buchanan Sharp, Mike Davies and Jonathan Kissonock argue this from an economics standpoint. Slavin, who examined plague victim skeletons, wrote a compelling paper showing that the Great Famine disrupted the food market due to instability in supply, demand, and prices. The failing food markets made the Great Famine worse. He argues, “The crisis *began* with nature, but was *intensified* by purely endogenous factors.”<sup>171</sup> Slavin uses the Great Famine as a case study to examine the theory of Amartya Sen, who contends that famines occur “not because of an absolute lack of food resources but because of a decline in ‘entitlements’ to (depleted) food resources.”<sup>172</sup> This means that as food resources decline, the lower classes “lose their entitlement to food when the better off, at the expense of the rest, increase their own supply of food.”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Gabriel Judkins, Marissa Smith and Eric Keys. “Determinism within Human-Environment Research and the Rediscovery of Environmental Causation,” *The Geographical Journal*. Vol. 174 no. 1 (March, 2008) :20.

<sup>171</sup> Slavin, “Market Failure during the Great Famine in England and Wales (1315-1317),” 11.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, the poor could not afford to buy food due to rising prices, and food became scarcer to come by when the rich began hoarding food. Slavin examined manorial accounts in England to discover how an unstable market took food out of people's mouths. His four major conclusions were that the famine was aggravated by: "highly aggressive short-term price behavior," "variation in prices between different crop-trading loci," "collapse of the 'just price'," and "the corresponding rise of 'preferential trade' and uneven and unsteady chronologies of crop supply and distribution."<sup>174</sup> This new market economy could not handle this crisis.

In medieval England, markets were not yet fully capitalist, as the then prevailing "Law of Just Price" morally declared that food had to cost the same in all markets. However, as the Great Famine progressed, prices varied widely from location to location, and the integrated market system fell apart and became segmented. Yet lords could purchase at any price they wanted, and, "their relative freedom gave lords and merchants the opportunity to behave in a completely arbitrary and opportunistic manner in order to maximize their profits through the exploitation of widespread chaos and starvation."<sup>175</sup> Lords hoarded food to sell later for higher prices.<sup>176</sup> Foreign traders were deprived of information on market prices. Therefore, "neither vendors nor purchasers knew *what the right price was*."<sup>177</sup> Thus, poor people could not afford prices that were for the most part arbitrary.

With prices being so unfair and wildly fluctuating, people began to lose trust in each other, especially since no one had legal recourse in this situation. Slavin states, "there can be little doubt that the absence of legal and punitive mechanisms capable of enforcing the 'just

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<sup>174</sup> Slavin, "Market Failure during the Great Famine in England and Wales (1315-1317)," 12.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.



price' at market may have prompted both vendors and buyers to switch to the much more reliable model of 'particularized trust.'"<sup>178</sup> This meant that buyers and sellers would no longer trade with anyone, but only those they felt they could still trust, such as family. Thus, "the market failure of 1315-17 created a widespread phenomenon of 'preferential trade,' based on personal networks, social capital and status, on the one hand, and discrimination against 'outsiders' and weaker elements on the other."<sup>179</sup> Slavin concludes, "There can be little doubt that the Great Famine would not have been great without the man-made complications that turned this event into arguably the single worst subsistence crisis in recorded Western history."<sup>180</sup> Slavin's ability to go beyond the "Famine due to rain" narrative and examine how the actions of people could make the famine worse is quite commendable.

Mike Davies and Jonathan Kissonock of the University of Wales, Newport, approach the economy during the Great Famine by analyzing feet of fines in England. A foot of fine was a "copy of an agreement reached in a court of law...following a dispute over land ownership...it soon became a way in which the transfer of freehold land could be effected."<sup>181</sup> They argue that "an increase in the number of land transactions was contemporary with and a consequence of the extraordinary events of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>182</sup> Davies and Kissonock entered the data from the feet of fines into a database that created graphs and that was linked to a GIS mapping system. Therefore, they were able to examine land transfer change geographically and over time. Davies and Kissonock discovered that "there is a clear relationship between the number of transfers of

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<sup>178</sup> Slavin, "Market Failure during the Great Famine in England and Wales (1315-1317)," 36.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>181</sup> Mike Davies and Jonathan Kissonock, "The Feet of Fines, the Land Market and the English Agricultural Crisis of 1315-1322," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30 (2004): 216.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

freehold land and property and the price of grain across period 1315-1322.”<sup>183</sup> The poor sold their land in order to buy food, settle debts, and pay taxes. The rich were eager to buy up this land in anticipation that times would get better and the land would become profitable.<sup>184</sup> Thus, they conclude that climate change had a direct effect not only on the food market, but also on the land market. Thus, the famine affected many aspects of social and economic life.

While most of the Great Famine literature concentrates on the causes and events of the famine, Buchanan Sharp of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and John Aberth, former associate academic dean of Castleton State College in Vermont, evaluate reactions to the Great Famine. Sharp writes specifically about the reaction of Edward II of England. Edward experienced two major barriers to helping his people. Before the Great Famine there is little evidence that the English government ever responded to famines. However, the Great Famine was so terrible Edward had to do something, but he had no example or precedent to follow.<sup>185</sup> He was also involved in a long-standing war against Scotland and was forced to take food from his people to feed his troops and raise taxes to fund the war.

Edward’s first response to the Great Famine was to fix prices for meat, wheat, and ale. There was precedent for price fixing, but in the past it had not been for the good of the poor, rather, “the role of the Crown in enforcing regulations was to ensure that foodstuffs should be sold at reasonable prices, which produced moderate rather than excessive profits for the seller.”<sup>186</sup> Edward’s attempt, however, backfired. Sellers wanted to make a profit, so they

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<sup>183</sup> Davies and Kissonock, “The Feet of Fines,” 220.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>185</sup> Sharp, “Royal Paternalism and the Moral Economy in the Reign of Edward II,” 630-631.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 630.

withdrew their goods from the English market and went elsewhere, making food scarcer.<sup>187</sup> Edward then wrote a letter to all bishops, exhorting them to discourage their parishioners from hoarding grain, which was keeping food out of the mouths of the poor. “No doubt the king’s extraordinary letter had little practical effect, but it appears to be the earliest surviving example of a written statement by an English monarch that he regarded meeting the food needs of his subjects in time of scarcity to be a moral obligation.”<sup>188</sup> Yet, once again, there is no evidence that this letter had any positive results. Sharp argues that Edward’s most significant response was prohibiting the export of grain and encouraging the import of grains from abroad.<sup>189</sup> Sharp contends, “It appears that under Edward II government policy was to encourage the movement and marketing of grain as much as possible in the hope that it would enable whatever surplus grain might exist to get to areas with shortages.”<sup>190</sup> Edward ultimately failed, and went down in history as a terrible king who failed at every endeavor, and who was possibly killed by his bitter queen.

John Aberth’s book, From the Brink of the Apocalypse, published in 2010, includes a chapter on famine, focusing primarily on the Great Famine. Like Sharp, he discusses reactions to the famine, economically and socially. However, unlike many Great Famine scholars, he devotes a large section of this chapter to the science behind the climate change, citing Fagan and other climate historians. What makes Aberth’s work so interesting is his unique analysis of the reaction of the population to this crisis. Riots broke out in urban centers, crime increased, and vagabonds wandered the land. Mass graves were dug outside of towns, where the dead were

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<sup>187</sup> Sharp, “Royal Paternalism and the Moral Economy in the Reign of Edward II,” 634.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 638-639.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 640.

unceremoniously dumped on a daily basis.<sup>191</sup> People ate strange foods and rumors of cannibalism were in the air.<sup>192</sup> Aberth also notes a connection between the Great Famine and witchcraft. Aberth claims, “I believe that famine played a crucial role in the genesis of accusations of weather magic, and perhaps of witchcraft in general. Famine had long accustomed churchmen to a belief that the elements could be manipulated through appeals to the supernatural, and it was but a short step from inferring divine to demonic aids.”<sup>193</sup> Aberth connects the increase in accusations of witchcraft to weather patterns, down to the eighteenth century, another legacy of the Little Ice Age.

Aberth, however, is not the only historian to connect witchcraft to the Little Ice Age. Historian Wolfgang Behringer, economist Emily Oster, and agricultural climatologist Gerald Stanhill present evidence that storms, poor weather, and failing crops were blamed on witchcraft during the Little Ice Age. Stanhill begins his short article with the speculation that William Shakespeare’s *Tempest* may have been based on a storm that stranded Princess Anne of Denmark and King James VI of Scotland in Norway, which resulted in witch trials. Shakespeare included storms created by witches in *Macbeth*. Many other medieval sources also connect storms and poor weather to witches, such as Pope Innocent VII in 1484 and Ulrich Molitor’s 1489 treatise on witchcraft.<sup>194</sup> Behringer shows that increased witch trials and accusations can be used as evidence to show the duration of the Little Ice Age. He states, “[t]his article proposes that it was the influence of the climatic deterioration known as the *Little Ice Age* which contributed decisively to the development of a new category of crime, previously only rarely accepted by the

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<sup>191</sup> Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 23-25.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>194</sup> Gerald Stanhill, “Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, witchcraft, and the Little Ice Age,” *Weather*, (April, 2016), 101-102.

authorities: *witchcraft*.”<sup>195</sup> While the belief in witches and witch trials existed long before the Little Ice Age, Behringer points out that the Church had previously been reluctant to connect bad weather to witchcraft, but that began to change in the 1300s, when the Little Ice Age began. “During the 1480s the image of the weather-making witch was finally accepted by the Church.”<sup>196</sup> Oster connects the rise of witch trials during the medieval era to “a deterioration in economic conditions...brought on by a decrease in temperature and resulting food shortages...[which] coincides ... [with] the ‘little ice age’.”<sup>197</sup> Oster reiterates Behringer’s claims: witches were not blamed for bad weather until the thirteenth century.<sup>198</sup> While her paper concentrates on the mid sixteenth to late eighteenth century, long after the Great Famine, her data showing a correlation between lowering temperatures and increased witch trials suggest that the troubling weather of the Great Famine could lead people to consider evil manipulation.

Only two monographs have been written strictly on the Great Famine. William Chester Jordan, Professor of History and Director of the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University, wrote the definitive academic work on the topic in 1996. Rosen, former editor and publisher at Macmillan, Simon & Shuster and the Free Press, wrote a popular book on the subject in 2014 for a general audience. Jordan was vital in giving the famine the academic monographic treatment it deserves, while Rosen brings an obscure topic to a wider audience, making it both interesting and accessible. Both books have strengths and weaknesses but serve different purposes in important ways.

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<sup>195</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, “Climate Change and the Witch-Hunting: The Impact of the Little Ice Age on Mentalities,” *Climate Change*, (September, 1999): 335.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, 336.

<sup>197</sup> Emily Oster, “Witchcraft, Weather and Economic Growth in Renaissance Europe,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18 no. 1 (winter, 2004): 216.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

Jordan's book, The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century, is the first and only comprehensive academic book on the Great Famine and is cited by all Great Famine scholarship that was published afterwards. Like most Great Famine scholars, Jordan is less concerned about the environmental causes, and more about how human actions made the famine worse than it had to be. "Even the best researchers have hitherto been seduced by chronicle evidence into believing that the Great Famine of the Middle Ages was solely a production crisis caused by a massive failure of appropriate weather and that there was nothing, or nearly nothing, that could be done about it. They have therefore ignored or barely mentioned other possible factors, like war and government policies."<sup>199</sup> Jordan's book has three main themes: the initial crisis caused by the weather, the economics and demography of the people affected in rural society, and the economics and demography of urban populations.

The first part of Jordan's book covers the weather anomaly, and how, compounded by war, it affected the harvests and animals. He gives a brief historiography of the topic, including the classic authors Lucas and Kershaw. This section sets the foundation for the rest of the book, and does not cover anything unique not already covered by other authors, except that he notes that the weather affected barnyard fowls, such as chickens, ducks and geese. Like other farm animals, these birds did not fare well, but were able to reproduce quickly, so their numbers were able to recover quickly once the weather became better.

Jordan's next two sections, on both rural and urban populations, are the most profound additions to the Great Famine historiography. Most scholars only write on what happened to the food-producing rural populations. Jordan's section on rural people includes the cost of living,

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<sup>199</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 15.

prices of commodities, and wages for both the poor and rich. By investigating how both were affected, Jordan is able to show that the fates of the two groups were interconnected. Some rich lords did profit slightly at first, as the price of food skyrocketed, and peasants gave more donations than usual to monasteries in hope of God's redemption. However, most rural lords depended on rents paid by peasants, and soon that income dried up. "On balance the fiscal situation in the countryside was negative for lords...even the greatest seigneurs with huge resources found it difficult after the first year or so of bad weather and bad harvests to maintain profit levels."<sup>200</sup> Overall, Jordan gives a compelling view on rustic society, how it entered the famine, and how it survived.

Urban economies were vastly different from rural ones. Towns and cities relied on the peasants and estate owners for food, and they in turn sold goods and commodities, such as clothing and artisan good, back to them. Urban people also had guilds and city governments to turn to when times became bad. However, the famine hit urban centers hard. Townsfolk had less access to food, and close proximity assisted in rapidly spreading diseases through urban centers. The rural indigent gathered outside of town gates in hopes for alms, and they brought diseases with them.<sup>201</sup> Urban society began to break down in the face of the crisis. Foodstuffs were being stolen, and bakers were adding inedible ingredients into their bread to stretch what little flour they had. Violence erupted in some towns, such as in Bruges.<sup>202</sup> Jordan gives a vivid picture showing that the Great Famine nearly toppled the new and growing urban centers in a rural society.

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<sup>200</sup> Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 86.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

Jordan uses a plethora of both primary and secondary sources. Besides visiting archives across Europe, he used over 180 published primary sources and over 650 secondary sources, in English, Latin, French, Polish, and German. Jordan's secondary sources are mostly agricultural, social, and economic history. Besides a few geography and archaeology secondary sources, there are no interdisciplinary works used as sources. The lack of scientific sources is the major weakness of the book. However, the book is very well researched, well written, and already well used by historians.

The main theme of Rosen's book is that, while the environment did not determine the course of history, centuries of excellent weather did increase the population and arable fields, which led to cataclysmic consequences when the weather began to fail. He argues that constant warfare and unstable politics contributed to the drastic effects of the Great Famine. When peasants were constantly dealing with soldiers burning their crops, and when war-hungry and greedy kings were raising taxes and rents, peasants could barely feed themselves when the weather was good.

Rosen's main strength is that his book is readable, entertaining, and easy to follow. He weaves a powerful tale of conflict between Scotland and England, with France, Flanders, and the Holy Roman Empire playing supporting characters. However, his strength, the ability to tell compelling stories of war, political intrigue, and nation building, was also his largest weakness when it comes to this book being an environmental history. While Rosen claims to be writing an environmental history, and does include science and analysis of the medieval environment, the book comes off as being more of a military history with an emphasis on the politics and economics of war. Thus, this highly readable history does not give as much insight into the environmental history of medieval northern Europe as the reader hopes for. Rosen includes



minute details about battles, and the failings of Edward II, which do not add to the environmental history theme of the book, nor support Rosen's overall argument regarding the causes of the Great Famine. Despite Rosen's weaknesses, he uses a wide range of reputable sources. Besides primary sources from archives, Rosen also uses a wide range of histories, and scholarly articles written by agriculturalists, climatologists, veterinarians, economists, and demographers. Rosen's argument that the medieval warm period and the beginning of the Little Ice Age contributed to the Great Famine is successful because he does include the caveat that the historical outcome was not determined entirely by the environment, but by a perfect storm of politics, economics, human choices, and the environment. Overall, the book is enjoyable and a good introduction to environmental history for readers of popular histories, but not for academic environmental historians.

The Great Famine is becoming a more popular topic for historians to write about. Long over-shadowed by the Black Death, the Great Famine is a fascinating topic that environmental historians are starting to grapple with. The majority of the literature examines the social aspects of the crisis rather than environmental. Of those who have written on the topic, the major themes have been environmental causes, effects on the food and land economies, and reactions to the crisis. Other topics touched upon are whether cannibalism happened, how long the famine affected Europe's population, and connections to the plague. The majority of the sources examine England to the greatest extent, with a smaller focus on France and the Low Countries. For the most part, this is due to the fact that England has the most sources available; however, historians should expand their research into other areas of northern Europe, and even southern Europe. Scholarship on the Great Famine has only scratched the surface. An interdisciplinary approach to this rich and complex topic holds great potential for the environmental historian.

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## LIBRARIES IN AMERICAN GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS DURING WORLD WAR II

During World War II nearly a half million German soldiers were interned on American soil as prisoners of war (POWs). Between 1941 and 1946, they lived in almost every state in nearly six hundred different camps.<sup>203</sup> Despite their prisoner status, they were not treated harshly. The United States strictly adhered to the rules for the treatment of POWs set by the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War signed on July 27, 1929.<sup>204</sup> Thus, the United States provided the internees with comfortable shelter, food, religious services, education, and leisure activities.<sup>205</sup> However, the United States disregarded the spirit of the Convention, which forbade denationalization through re-education, when the Provost Marshal General's Office (PMGO) and the Special Projects Division (SPD) used the selection and censorship of POW camp library books as a form of subtle re-education and denazification.<sup>206</sup> In late 1944 the SPD formed a re-education program that relied heavily on the selection of books as well. Thus, re-education and denazification efforts received considerable assistance through camp libraries, which provided the POWs with reading materials that celebrated Christian ideals and a love for America and its democratic ideals, in opposition to the spirit of the Convention.

The PMGO, which created and directed the SPD, established camp libraries for the POWs not only to fulfill the obligations of the Geneva Convention, but also to re-educate and influence the minds of the POWs. The SPD carefully censored camp library books and created

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<sup>203</sup> David Fiedler *The Enemy Among Us*. (Saint Louis, MI: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2003,) 1.

<sup>204</sup> The singular use of "Convention" in this paper refers to the Geneva Convention of 1929. Plural usage refers to all Geneva Conventions that convened between 1864 and 1929.

<sup>205</sup> John Brown Mason, "German Prisoners of War in the United States," *The American Journal of International Law* 39, no. 2 (April 1945): 198.

<sup>206</sup> Ron Robin, *The Barbed Wire College: Re-educating German POWs in the United States during World War II*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 8.

approved and unapproved book lists in order to subtly influence the POWs into accepting democratic ideals and American ways of life, despite the fact that re-education violated the Geneva Convention. The POWs in turn appreciated the access they had to books and used the libraries for entertainment and self-education, not realizing that their reading materials were geared towards re-education and denazification. Books helped to distract the POWs from the psychological trauma of being prisoners far from home. Books also provided the POWs with much needed intellectual diversion and stimulation. Most POWs left America with a positive attitude and brought books home with them as souvenirs, thus demonstrating that the careful selection of books influenced POWs.

The Geneva Convention, signed in 1929 in Geneva, Switzerland, by thirty-seven countries, spelled out how POWs were to be treated by their captors. This Convention, the third since 1864, resulted from the international community's concern regarding modern warfare. This was the world's first attempt at applying international laws to ameliorate the devastating effects that war had on civilians and soldiers alike. The first Geneva Convention of 1864 was the brainchild of humanitarian Jean Henri Dunant, who also founded the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863. The 1929 Convention covered the basic needs of everyday life for POWs. Food, shelter, clothing, hygiene and medical care had to be adequate and equal to the levels provided for the army of the country holding POWs. The United States had to inform Germany and the Red Cross of the names and camp addresses of the POWs. The men were required to give their name and rank, but nothing else. The prisoners were allowed to send a card to family members to notify them of their health and provide an address for packages and letters.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Geneva Convention, Article 36.

The Convention made sure that POWs had more amenities than convicted criminal prisoners. Besides intellectual pursuits, the men were allowed to have a canteen where they could purchase toiletries, food, and magazines; have access to regular religious services of their own denomination; and receive their pay for being a soldier. The Convention emphasized that besides providing basic needs and intellectual comforts, captors should keep POWs safe and not inflict severe punishment. “All forms of corporal punishment, confinement in premises not lighted by daylight and, in general, all forms of cruelty whatsoever are prohibited.”<sup>208</sup> POWs could not be punished for escaping if they were recaptured.

The Convention included three articles which led to the existence of camp libraries. Article 17 states, “Belligerents shall encourage as much as possible the organization of intellectual and sporting pursuits by the prisoners of war.”<sup>209</sup> Article 39 clarifies the status of books for POWs. “Prisoners of war shall be permitted to receive individually consignments of books which may be subject to censorship. Representatives of the protecting Powers and of duly recognized and authorized relief societies may send works and collections of books to the libraries of prisoners’ camps. The transmission of such consignments to libraries may not be delayed under pretext of difficulties of censorship.”<sup>210</sup> Further, as stated in Article 57, the withdrawal of books cannot be used as punishment. “Prisoners of war undergoing disciplinary punishment shall be permitted to read and write and to send and receive letters.”<sup>211</sup> The Convention thus protected the existence of camp libraries and ensured the rights of the

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<sup>208</sup> Geneva Convention, Article 46.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 17.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 39.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 57.

imprisoned readers. While books could be censored, this censorship was not supposed to be used for re-education and denazification purposes.

Shortly after the United States entered the war in 1941, a system had to be devised to deal with German POWs that followed the Convention. Many of the Germans were captured in North Africa or France and few resources existed to keep these men there. Moreover, being held near enemy lines encouraged prisoners to escape. The most obvious solution was to transport POWs to America. Ships transporting supplies to Europe returned empty, so they could easily be filled with POWs. Separated by an ocean, the men were not likely to escape. Also, these men could be used as labor on farms to fill in for the American men who left to fight in the war.<sup>212</sup> Nearly a year after Pearl Harbor there were only 431 POWs on American soil.<sup>213</sup> In August of 1942, the United States accepted 50,000 POWs from Great Britain and the flow of POWs could hardly be stopped.<sup>214</sup> The population of German POWs in America peaked at 371,683 men in May of 1945.<sup>215</sup>

The POW camps were located in almost every state. Locations for these new POW camps were based on the security of the site and could be no closer than 150 miles from Canada and Mexico. Each camp, built to house 2,000 to 4,000 men, contained a mess hall, workshop, canteen, infirmary, administrative building, post office, warehouse, chapel, showers, and a recreation field. Enlisted men and officers were usually separated into their own camps. One camp at Clinton, Mississippi, was set aside for the forty generals and three admirals who were captured. Their prestige and influence on German society meant that the US wanted to make sure

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<sup>212</sup> Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 6.

<sup>213</sup> Arnold P. Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1996), 1.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

they had a favorable view of the US after they were repatriated, thus earning these generals special treatment, which included a large library. Branch camps were created to house POWs close to work sites so that transportation back and forth to work would be minimized.<sup>216</sup>

With so many German POWs on American soil, a system was needed to care for them. On July 18, 1941, the War Department and the Department of Justice agreed that the PMGO would be responsible for the POWs.<sup>217</sup> Major General Allen W. Gullion acted as the first provost marshal general.<sup>218</sup> The PMGO ran the camps and took care of the POWs from beginning to end. The PMGO was also responsible for acting as liaison between the Swiss Legation, German Foreign Office, Red Cross, YMCA, individual camps, POWs, and the State Department. On March 31, 1942, before the large waves of German POWs arrived, Major General Gullion wrote to the YMCA's War Prisoner's Aid to accept its offer of recreational and welfare aid. This included "the furnishing of libraries and special books."<sup>219</sup> This letter established the start of a long relationship between the YMCA and the PMGO.

A typical camp library is described by historian Allan Kent Powell, whose book concentrates on the POW camps in Utah. Shortly after the Ogden camp was established in September 1944, it boasted a library of nearly 400 titles consisting of German novels and history books, textbooks, religious works, classics and poetry collections, and a few English books. Less than a year later the number of books had increased six fold to about 2,500 volumes. During May

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<sup>216</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 26-35.

<sup>217</sup> Robert D. Billinger Jr., *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 11.

<sup>218</sup> Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 10.

<sup>219</sup> Major General Allen W. Gullion to John R. Mott and Tracy Strong, 31 March 1942. Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General. Decimal Files, 1943-1946. National Archives. Box No. 1606. Hereafter referred to National Archives.



1945, 75 percent of the books were in constant circulation and 60 percent of the POWs used the library and reading room. Specific requests were for German classics by Goethe and Schiller and for local history books. The library was open daily, except Sundays, from 9:00 to 11:00 A.M., 2:00 to 4:00 P.M., and 7:00 to 9:00 P.M. Books could be checked out for a week and magazines for two days. Some of the available magazines were *Life*, *Times*, *Look*, *Newsweek*, and *Coronet*. Used magazines were sent over from the officers' club at the Ogden depot, and the men could subscribe to magazines and newspapers as well as purchase them in the compound canteen.<sup>220</sup>

Late in the war, the Special Projects Division (SPD) attempted to create library standards to be followed at all camps. On April 23, 1945, Colonel A. J. Lamoureaux wrote a memo for all POW camp commanders. His goal was to establish the expectations of the camp libraries. He opened his letter with a stirring tribute to the importance of books. He argued that, "People have become increasingly accustomed to a plentiful supply of books and magazines in civilian life. They provide friendship when a man is lonely; stimulate his mind when he is bored; serve as a release for his tensions; broaden his horizons; fortify his spirit; and deepen his understanding. The easy availability of books has become one of the fundamentals of our democracy."<sup>221</sup> After this appeal, Lamoureaux established a protocol stunningly similar to what any professional librarian would desire in a well-established library. "[Books] fulfill their functions only when properly arranged, displayed and made available. A library is not a room full of books; a library is a service."<sup>222</sup> Lamoureaux continued to describe the ideal camp library. Each camp was

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<sup>220</sup> Allan Kent Powell, *Splinters of a Nation: German Prisoners of War in Utah* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1989), 57, 179.

<sup>221</sup> Memorandum to Camp Commanders, Prisoner of War Camps from Colonel A. J. Lamoureaux, 23 April 1945. Box No. 1652. National Archives.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

authorized to have a POW librarian. This librarian needed to have “patience, pleasing personality, liking for books, intelligence, and a sympathy for democratic ideals.”<sup>223</sup> An academic background was not needed, but being a social worker, teacher, publisher or bookstore worker in civilian life was ideal. Lamoureaux wanted each camp library to have tables and chairs and books arranged by subject and alphabetically by author. He determined that the library should be open when the POWs had free time and that each book should be cataloged in a card file system. A separate accession list was also recommended to help keep track of books. If time allowed, the camp librarian was encouraged to create a card catalog for the POWs’ use.<sup>224</sup> Lamoureaux viewed an organized and accessible library as representing American democratic values.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Lamoureaux’s ideas was that he devoted a third of his memo on how to promote the use of camp libraries. The desire for outreach and marketing shows that the SPD did not just provide books for the POWs, it also had a strong desire to get the POWs reading for re-education purposes. Lamoureaux’s ideas included articles about the libraries in the camp newspapers, displays, posters created by the art class, book reviews, discussion groups, and visible shelf arrangement. Mostly, he wanted books to be tied in as much as possible to other areas of the POWs’ lives. For example, he suggested including book displays at music programs and featuring books by authors or subjects studied in courses in the education

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<sup>223</sup> Memorandum to Camp Commanders, Prisoner of War Camps from Colonel A. J. Lamoureaux, 23 April 1945. Box No. 1652. National Archives

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

program. Lamoureaux was also confident that the camp commanders would come up with other good ideas.<sup>225</sup>

While Lamoureaux authorized the use of POWs as librarians, the prisoners are rarely mentioned in reports about camp libraries. The few who are mentioned demonstrate how seriously the camp commanders took the librarians' work. Finding the right librarian for a camp was an important undertaking. One camp explained a change in librarians. "It is recommended that Walter Ressel be replaced as librarian by Wolfgang Poesngen ... who holds a PhD degree in bibliography, was a librarian in civilian life."<sup>226</sup> His political leanings were anti-Nazi.<sup>227</sup> Thus this camp had the ideal librarian on their hands: educated, experienced, and politically compliant.

The work of the POW librarians was appreciated and needed, but sometimes red tape got in the way. At another camp, the librarian was working hard on cataloging the collection, but was pulled away from his work. The reviewer for this library explained, "The delay in cataloging has been due to the fact that the librarian has been taken off of that job and put on manual labor since, there is no provision made for classifying such an activity as constituting [POW labor]."<sup>228</sup> Even though this librarian was doing important work that the SPD needed to have done, being a librarian did not fulfill the requirement that POWs work. Fortunately, the camp was working on getting the librarian off of manual labor and back to cataloging.

The goal of the SPD's re-education efforts resulted in the development of book selection policies which presented to the POWs a completely different world view, one that was

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<sup>225</sup> Staff Study on the Intellectual Diversion Program for PW Camp, Camp Ashby, Virginia, 24 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Camp Report, n.d. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

compatible with American goals and values. The key to this new world view were books promoting ideas of democracy and America as a unified nation untouched by the cultural and ethnic unrest of the “Old World.” The Book Department, a subsidiary of the Recreation Section of the Special Projects Division (SPD), was responsible for filling the camp libraries with books. The Book Department was “to make available to all prisoners of war a liberal and varied assortment of books in English and in their native language as intellectual and moral stimuli, providing relaxation and contentment and a more tolerant understanding of the world and its people.”<sup>229</sup> The fulfillment of this re-education mission relied on the selection of books. “The success of the mission depends greatly on the style of books selected. Books which further the mission are recommended; books contrary to this aid are not approved.”<sup>230</sup> This was achieved by the creation of lists of approved and unapproved books. Historian Ron Robin explains, “The approved reading material effectively rewrote the history of Germany by emphasizing disproportionately the presence of consistent humanist and democratic trends in Germany’s recent political past.”<sup>231</sup> Any books emphasizing any form of democracy in Germany’s past was enthusiastically put onto the list. Any book that mentioned the problems of race, class, materialism, isolationism and loss of culture in America was swiftly banned.<sup>232</sup> Major Davison, head of the SPD, reminded all reviewers of this in a memo. He reiterated the need to block books that criticized American culture or emphasized materialism. Swiftly banned were German books that mentioned the Versailles treaty as a “stab in the back,” emphasized a “Nordic” race, had

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<sup>229</sup> Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Branch, from Major George Krys, 7 November 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 94.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

negative views on allied nations, mentioned “Jewish Bolshevism” or “Jewish Imperialism,” or included any mention of the Nazi need for “living space.”<sup>233</sup>

Henry Ehrmann, one of two civilians working in the higher echelons of the SPD, made most of the book selections for POW libraries. Hired to be the educational advisor, he reviewed German language books, developed a German history survey course, and “crash courses” on democracy.<sup>234</sup> A Jew born in Berlin in 1908, Ehrmann studied law and earned a doctorate in jurisprudence in 1932. After his arrest, in 1933, by the Gestapo due to his connections with the German Social Democratic Party, he was sent to a concentration camp. After a daring escape from Germany to Czechoslovakia, he made his way to France and worked there as a journalist until 1940. He was involved in an anti-fascist group and later escaped to America with his wife via another escape over the Pyrenees Mountains to Spain.

Thus, Ehrmann was highly motivated to assist in the re-education of the German POWs. Along with a few assistants, he reviewed and censored the books that made it into the hands of the POWs, established lists of approved and banned books for the libraries, and determined how camp libraries would be organized. Ehrmann’s team created the “basic library” list, which consisted of 300 books that should be in every camp library. Ehrmann’s goal was to have this list published so that libraries of approved books could be swiftly set up and make the work easier for camp commanders and assistant executive officers (AEOs), and should “be procured with the shortest possible delay for all prisoner of war camps.”<sup>235</sup> A second “basic library” list, which contained 500 titles, was created for the AEOs, who helped run the camps and wanted to expand

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<sup>233</sup> Criteria for the Selection of Books, 20 October 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

<sup>234</sup> Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 51.

<sup>235</sup> Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Division from Henry Ehrmann, 27 November 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

their camp libraries. Therefore, there were 800 titles that camp commanders did not have to seek approval for.<sup>236</sup> This not only made the work of creating a camp library easier, but also ensured that the books, which Ehrmann believed to be essential reading for the POWs, were making it into their hands. Criteria for the “basic library” of 300 title list included:

- a. Best samples of works in different fields of literature by representatives of various nations.
- b. Will give prisoners composite picture of free human thought.
- c. Types varied to reach prisoners of all educational backgrounds.
- d. Will serve as guide in establishment of new libraries.
- e. contains a few specially selected works for this program.
- f. No text books on this list.
- g. Procurement source stated whenever possible.<sup>237</sup>

Ehrmann’s list was broken down into eight categories: fiction and drama (general), one hundred and thirty books; fiction and drama (U.S.A.), forty books; anthologies, thirteen books; history of art, literature and music, nineteen books; history, biography, politics (general), twenty-seven books; history, biography, politics (U.S.A.), twenty-seven books; travel, twenty-two books; and philosophy and psychology, twenty-three books.<sup>238</sup> Ehrmann also worked on lists of banned books and banned authors.<sup>239</sup> These were books that were under no circumstances to be included in the camp libraries. His list was created so that the AEOs could quickly go through their camp library books, requested books, or books in consideration, and immediately know what to not get.

Ehrmann created his lists by reviewing the books already in camp libraries. When POWs began to arrive in America, the German Red Cross and the German government began to send

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<sup>236</sup> Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Branch, from Henry Ehrmann, 6 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

<sup>237</sup> Book Plan Outline, n.d. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

<sup>238</sup> Comment on Book Plan Outline, n.d. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

<sup>239</sup> Memorandum for Executive Officers from Henry Ehrmann, n.d. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

books, but it soon became obvious to the PMGO that many of these books were filled with Nazi propaganda.<sup>240</sup> In late 1944, the approved book list (separate from the “basic book list”) contained 5,500 titles and the disapproved book list contained 150 titles.<sup>241</sup> To find more books for these lists, members of the SPD, such as Ehrmann, Captain Michael Ginsburg, and Ginsburg’s secretary Mrs. Acton, personally visited book warehouses to inspect books. These warehouses belonged to publishers that sold books to the SPD. This proved to be time consuming and often took days at a time.<sup>242</sup>

In support of the re-education program, Ehrmann carefully created rules for the selection of books of different genres for his lists. German books could be especially troublesome. Extra care had to be taken if a book was published after 1933, was dedicated to a known Nazi, or contained a quote from a known Nazi. Fiction could not exalt military deeds in German history, cover World War I experiences, talk about the Versailles Treaty, criticize the Weimar Republic, praise the Nazi Movement, cover the “blood and soil” theory, talk about the superiority of the Nordic race, talk about American materialism, or contain erotica. History books had to be reviewed for how they treated the rise of Prussia, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, Pan-Germanism, German colonial policy, World War I, the treaty of Versailles, the Weimar Republic, Nazism, the United Nations, American materialism, American imperialism, race questions, Woodrow Wilson, and labor conflicts.<sup>243</sup>

Ehrmann and his dedicated assistants painstakingly wrote reviews of each book they examined. These reviews give insight into how Ehrmann and the SPD made their book selection

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<sup>240</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 206.

<sup>241</sup> Memorandum for Director, Prisoner of War Division, 3 November 1944. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

<sup>242</sup> Stoffels, Scarsdale Lists, 10 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

<sup>243</sup> Supplementary Memorandum No. 15, n.d. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

decisions. The book review form asked the reviewer to list the title, author, publisher, subject, a detailed review, suitability, usefulness, and whether it should be translated into German or not. Some appraisals seemed obvious. The review for The Prince by Machiavelli, for example, simply had “not recommended” written on the form; it was obvious to the reviewer that the book was a dangerous guide for POWs.<sup>244</sup> A spy novel called Cause for Alarm easily made the grade since it “does not rate above the average of entertainment novels.”<sup>245</sup> Thus, it did not cover anything controversial, and it would easily entertain. Serious thought and time were put into these reviews. For example, Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels was clearly a British satire that had no connections to Germany or Nazism. However, the reviewer took time to explain why it was acceptable. “To many prisoners, who in their childhood were captivated by the expurgated translation, a second reading might be a help in deflating their unrealistic Weltanschauung (world view), besides giving them a more accurate idea about that eminent author.”<sup>246</sup> This review gave an intellectual interpretation of a popular novel, keeping re-education in mind. Two other classic books on the approved lists were The Travels of Marco Polo and The Moon is Down by John Steinbeck. The choice of Marco Polo was made, according to its review, because it was a classic novel that most POWs probably never had time to read.<sup>247</sup> As for John Steinbeck’s novel, “[it] gives a very good psychological picture of a conquered people as well as of the conquerors without making the conquerors members of a master race.”<sup>248</sup> Steinbeck’s novel, published in 1942, is about an invading army that tries to control a small town’s coal

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<sup>244</sup> Report on Niccolo Machiavelli’s *The Prince and other Discourses*, 26 December 1944. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

<sup>245</sup> Report on Eric Ambler’s *Cause for Alarm*, 1 January 1945. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

<sup>246</sup> Report on Jonathon Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, 26 December 1944. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

<sup>247</sup> Report on John Steinbeck’s *The Moon is Down*, 1 January 1944. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.



mines. The town's people resist the occupation and are successful in their resistance against the repressive regime of the enemy. This book clearly represented not only the current state of the war in Europe, but also showed that the townspeople in the story did not have to belong to a "master race" to successfully resist the occupying force.

Some books were deemed acceptable only for anti-Nazi POWs. For example, America, by Stephen Vincent Benet, contained two chapters, "America and the World" and "And after the War," which reviewers feared would anger passionate Nazi POWs. However, the reviewers felt this book might prove interesting to anti-Nazis educating themselves on the American way of life. The Next Germany, written by a group of Anti-Nazis would certainly be "reject[ed] as a propaganda of German emigrants, [but anti-Nazi POWs] are really interested in these kind of problems, concerning their personal future in the reconstruction task of a new country."<sup>249</sup> Yet, not every anti-Nazi-themed book was automatically added to the approved list. According to the review for We Cannot Escape History, a book criticizing Nazism "gives more propaganda about Nazism than real facts and reflections."<sup>250</sup> Such a book would not be useful for re-education purposes.

While the library book lists represented a form of censorship, denazification, and control over the POWs' reading, they also served the purpose of ensuring that the camp commanders gathered together a library that covered a wide array of subjects and reading levels. Left to their own devices, these commanders might have just gathered up every book in German they could find. With the "basic book" lists, all of the POWs were bound to find something appropriate and

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<sup>249</sup> Report on *The Next Germany* by a group of Anti-Nazi Germans, 1 January 1945. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

<sup>250</sup> Book Review on *We Cannot Escape History*, 19 December 1944. Box No. 1596. National Archives.

interesting to read. The key was to get the POWs to read, not just fill up a room with books. The approved book lists also helped the camp commanders collect and get books to the POWs quickly and not waste time censoring every book they acquired. The disapproved book lists helped to keep out Nazi literature, which likely reduced any political conflicts that might arise among the POWs. With both ardent Nazis and anti-Nazis living together in the camps, a copy of Mein Kampf could lead to strained relations between the POWs, and set back re-education efforts.

Censorship had to occur before any books reached camp libraries. The Office of Censorship, created a few days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, was divided into six divisions, one of which was postal censorship.<sup>251</sup> The Office of Censorship District Postal Censor was also responsible for censoring American publications that were mailed to POW camps. The only foreign books sent to America that did not have to be censored by the Office of Censorship were books published before 1930 or shipped into the country before December 7, 1941.<sup>252</sup> After November 1944, books published within the United States only needed to be censored by local camp commanders. However, the camp commanders could send publications to the District Postal Office if they needed help with censorship, such as with publications in foreign languages.<sup>253</sup> The reason commanders were allowed to make some of their own censorship choices was because, “a newspaper or magazine which may be harmless or even beneficial for prisoners at one installation sometimes has an entirely opposite effect on prisoners of war at

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<sup>251</sup> Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 6, 45

<sup>252</sup> Major Edward Davison to E. T. Colton, 27 July 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>253</sup> Colonel Alexander Adair to the Provost Marshal General, 30 December 1944. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

another installation.”<sup>254</sup> Local camp commanders after all were the ones who knew their POWs best.

Censorship of books published in the United States and bound for POW camps was yet another responsibility of the Special Projects Division (SPD). It was hard for the SPD to get their hands on copies of the books they were supposed to censor. Some of the censors, such as Captain T. L. Sullivan, only received lists of book titles, making it nearly impossible to properly censor the material. Sullivan complained, “I am no authority on Nazi literature. I mean by that that it is perfectly possible that judging from title alone—all I have to go by, —I might allow some to pass that may for all I know be worse than ‘Mein Kampf’, and possibly, also, condemn some that may have been utterly harmless.”<sup>255</sup> The alternative to trying to find a copy of every book was to visit warehouses full of the books bound for the camps. On December 29, 1944, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Siegmund Betz and his secretary Mrs. Acton visited the Stoffel Seals Company in Scarsdale, New York, to physically examine hundreds of books. Captain Michael Ginsburg, approving of the visit, reminded his superiors why this was an efficient process. “It is estimated that the accomplishment of the equivalent amount of work through checking in libraries would have required approximately four days. The accomplishment of an equivalent amount of work would have entailed the writing of several pieces of correspondence with a normal drain upon the supply of time and stenographic help.”<sup>256</sup> Censorship continued to proceed using both methods, of reviewing lists of titles and reviewing the actual books.

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<sup>254</sup> Brigadier General B. M. Bryan to Mr. William L. Shirer, 17 September 1945. Box No. 1597. National Archives.

<sup>255</sup> Captain T. L. Sullivan to Major Hemans, 1 November 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>256</sup> Memorandum for Director, POW Special Project Division from Captain Michael Ginsburg and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Siegmund Betz, 30 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

The Geneva Convention allowed censorship of books, though it did not state to what extent censorship was acceptable before it became propaganda.<sup>257</sup> Censorship suggested re-education, which was against the Geneva Convention. However, as the war progressed feelings against overt re-education of POWs began to soften. The Departments of State and War, which wanted to denazify Germany once the war was over, had few options in doing so. Thus, re-education programs for German POWs were proposed, since the POWs would return to Germany and reintegrate into German society. News that the Russians were successfully re-educating German POWs into model communists also gave the U.S. government pause and cause for alarm.<sup>258</sup> The new Provost Marshal General, Archer Lerch, supported the idea of a re-education program whole heartedly.<sup>259</sup> Thus a program of re-education through “logical persuasion” instead of “rehabilitation-through-annihilation” originally proposed by the President Roosevelt commenced. Books was a huge component of “subtle” re-education, and would be a component of the overt re-education program. The general re-education program was set up towards the end of 1944.

The SPD realized that the very nature of books made them much more than mere recreational tools. Major Davison said,

Books must be selected with greater care than films. While the impression a film might make wears off after a certain period of time, the impression of a book does not. The book actually remains in the possession of the prisoners. It can be re-read and made the basis for subversive Nazi activities.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Geneva Convention, Article 39.

<sup>258</sup> Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 28.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>260</sup> Office Memo #15, 20 October 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

Thus, flurries of memos and opinions were exchanged among members of the SPD and PMGO as to what books needed to be read by the POWs and which needed to be kept far away. Article 17 of the Geneva Convention became the basis for the justification of the re-education program.<sup>261</sup> “Belligerents shall encourage as much as possible the organization of intellectual and sporting pursuits by the prisoners of war.”<sup>262</sup> Accordingly, the PMGO defined its re-education program in this way: “The prisoners would be given facts ... to correct misinformation and the prejudices surviving Nazi condition. The facts, rather than being forced upon them, would be made available through such media as literature, motion pictures, newspapers, music, art, and educational courses.”<sup>263</sup> Thus, Article 17 was used to justify re-education.

In order to keep censorship secret from the POWs, removal of disapproved books from the camp libraries had to be handled with the utmost care. Memorandum after memorandum reminded the camp commanders that “these books will not be withdrawn from the libraries by means that might cause prisoners of war to suspect a design to control their reading material. It is suggested that the withdrawal of the undesirable books be given the appearance of a routine library rotation.”<sup>264</sup> This low-key effort not only kept the lists and censorship secret, but also avoided problems that had already occurred on a few occasions. Judith Gansberg gives an excellent overview of the process through which censored books were replaced and which served the goals of the re-education program.

One of the ... things the AEOs [Assistant Executive Officer] could do immediately was make a survey of the libraries, and gradually, so that it would appear to be regular rotation and avoid arousing suspicion, replace many of the books. They discarded “injurious” material, filled gaps, and estimated the popularity of given texts. Books by

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<sup>261</sup> Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State*, 141.

<sup>262</sup> Geneva Convention, Article 17.

<sup>263</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 197.

<sup>264</sup> Major General J. A. Ulio to the Commanding Generals, 17 February 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

such authors as ... Dr. Joseph Goebbels ... and dozens of other pro-Nazi or chauvinistic German writers began disappearing from the shelves. ... German classics, pre-Nazi fiction, books proscribed by the Nazis, and translations of English-language works found their way on the shelves. Maxwell McKnight [said]: "We got all the books banned in Germany and distributed them in the camps. And in the camps where they weren't burned by the Nazis, they were a real breakthrough, because all the years of the Nazis and their thought control was over. It was like opening a floodgate to nurse a Sahara."<sup>265</sup>

Lt. Colonel Davison reminded Major Gemmill that "In one or two cases [removal of books] has been too violently attempted and some trouble has resulted."<sup>266</sup> Worried that panic over unapproved books in camp libraries might have Assistant Executive Officers (AEOs) getting carried away and violently removing books, an official known by the initials W. S., wrote to Lt. Colonel Davison and Major McKnight, "Unless we keep our shirts on about undesirable books in prisoner of war libraries, we will all be nervous wrecks in a very short time. ... We hate to think in terms of raids into prisoner of war libraries. We must, therefore, avoid creating suspicion on the part of the prisoners, and we should not apply any high pressure methods."<sup>267</sup> Above all else, the POWs needed to remain ignorant to the fact that their reading was censored. Secondly, they were now reading books had been banned in Germany by Nazis, exposing the POWs to materials they had never seen before.

The SPD did not want the POWs and the general public to know about the censorship of books or the existence of approved and unapproved book lists.<sup>268</sup> This secrecy also protected the goals of the re-education program and prevented the POWs from realizing that their reading was

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<sup>265</sup> Judith M. Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A. The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 90-91.

<sup>266</sup> Memorandum for Major Gemmill from Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, 23 March 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

<sup>267</sup> Memorandum for Lt. Colonel Davison and Major McKnight, 25 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>268</sup> Lt. General Styer to Commanding Generals, First through Ninth Service Commands, n.d. Box No. 1652. National Archives.

orchestrated. In a speech delivered to camp commanders of the Eighth Service Command, Major Samuel Pace outlined how secrecy was to be maintained.

The assistant executive officer must avoid being secretive and mysterious. ... When friends ask him what kind of work he is doing, the stock answer is that his job is primarily education and recreation of prisoners of war for two reasons: first, to get reciprocal treatment for Americans imprisoned in Germany; second, to get more contentment, order and security, and more work, out of the Germans. [If he] tries to be coy about it he can not fail to arouse suspicion.<sup>269</sup>

He explained that the re-education program needed to be kept secret. Nazis and anti-Nazis were segregated in the re-education program. The term “Intellectual Diversion” was used to hide the program’s true purpose.<sup>270</sup> When an outsider did learn that there was some sort of book list coming out of the SPD, its purpose could still be kept secret. Captain Ginsburg reminded his superior, “It is apparent that this basic list will shortly be known to the book trade generally as having official approval, although the classified *intent* with which the list was published is not necessarily being compromised.”<sup>271</sup> Thus, the SPD hoped nothing could be gleaned by someone coming across the basic book lists.

A Prisoner of War Circular from the War Department explained what was expected of the POW education program in all the camps. “Prisoners will be aided in developing among themselves classes, lectures, studies, and discussion groups. ... Prisoners may select from their number a director of studies to organize and promote their educational and recreational activities. ... Prisoners may select from their number qualified teachers and instructors subject to the approval of the camp commanders.”<sup>272</sup> The education programs were successful in that most of

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<sup>269</sup> An Address Delivered by Major Samuel Pace, Prisoner of War Branch Security and Intelligence Division, Eighth Service Command, 31 January 1945. Box No. 1635. National Archives.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Memorandum for Director, POW Special Projects Division from Captain Ginsburg and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Siegmund Betz, 30 December 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

<sup>272</sup> Prisoner of War Circular No. 46, 13 October 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

the POWs were interested in taking classes and were pleased that the Reich Ministry of Education in Germany allowed POWs to complete their high school degrees and gain university credit in the POW camps. About 103 American universities set up correspondence classes for more advanced POWs.<sup>273</sup> Classes were held in English, mathematics, the sciences, history, the humanities, and music and ranged from elementary school level to university level. POWs were enthusiastic about classes for the most part. A memorandum mentioned that the POWs “seem to be imbued with the desire to learn and to use their time as prudently as possible.”<sup>274</sup> The classes were yet another distraction from prison life and gave the POWs a sense of usefulness and hope that they could use their new knowledge to gain jobs in their postwar lives.

According to the SPD, books provided the link between re-education and the libraries and were the best way to achieve re-education. The men involved in selection worked in the re-education program as well. In fact, their academic backgrounds led them to believe that books were the way to re-educate.<sup>275</sup> E. T. Colton of the YMCA mentioned in a statement, “Increasingly, if slowly, German prisoners on their own initiative are asking for literature to implement reading and courses that present aspects of our American life, system and institutions. Hundreds of them are asking for working relations with our Universities that will facilitate such constructive and legitimate studies.”<sup>276</sup> When the re-education program became public knowledge after VE Day on May 8, 1945, an article by Peter Edson published in the *NEA Staff Correspondent* explained that re-education was achieved mainly through reading. “To re-orient

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<sup>273</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 63.

<sup>274</sup> Memorandum: Report on Intellectual Diversion Program, Prisoner of War Camp, Concordia, Kansas, 27 December 1944. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>276</sup> Not for Publication: Concerning Educational Activities in U.S. POW Camps, n.d. Box No. 1606. National Archives.



Nazi thinking of German prisoners of war brought to the United States, books, newspapers, magazines, camp papers, schools, lecture courses, correspondence courses, pamphlets, guidebooks, radio, phonograph records and movies are employed.”<sup>277</sup> The SPD greatly believed in the power of books to mold the minds of the POWs, as well as any other medium that could be used for re-education purposes.

The inner working of the SPD is revealed through specific examples of censorship, by what was censored, and how the censorship process worked. Censorship began even before the re-education program was fully articulated and started. A book would be censored for various reasons, based on the author, subject matter, or political leanings of the publisher. A book that topped all unapproved book lists was Hitler’s Mein Kampf. Yet controversy was raised when Dr. Lohmann of *Time Magazine* insisted that he saw copies of Mein Kampf all over the camps. Lt. Colonel Davison was certain that there were no copies of Mein Kampf in the camp libraries, and if there were any copies in the camps they were hidden.<sup>278</sup> There is no certainty if this book was at any of the camps.

No matter how innocuous a book may have seemed, if it was of a subject matter banned for POWs, it was not passed along to them. For example, books about radios were banned across the board when POWs at Camp Alva, Oklahoma, tried to change radios into short wave receivers.<sup>279</sup> Books on chemistry were also banned.<sup>280</sup> Certain contents of a book and not just its overall subject could condemn a book as well. One sentence out of the textbook Soldat und

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<sup>277</sup> German Prisoners of War De-Nazified by Army’s Unique Re-orientation Plan, n.d. Box No. 1597. National Archives.

<sup>278</sup> Memorandum for Major Gemill from Lt. Colonel Edward Davison, 23 March 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

<sup>279</sup> Lt. Colonel Horatio R. Rogers to International Red Cross Committee, 4 March 1944. Box No. 1614. National Archives.

<sup>280</sup> Lt. Col. A. M. Tollefson to Office of Censorship, 25 October 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

Beruf put it on the list of objectionable Nazi propaganda. The sentence states: “We are still in the midst of the war. The German people’s power is gathered and united in order to defeat the foe and to fight for our victory and in order to form a new Europe in a new world.”<sup>281</sup> An issue of an otherwise perfectly acceptable evangelical church newspaper had to be censored because it contained the death notice of an American soldier. While this sad notice seems harmless, it was still considered to be military information, which was not to be shared with the POWs.<sup>282</sup>

Ehrmann’s book lists were sent to the individual Assistant Executive Officers (AEOs) and camp commanders. The AEOs were also told where the books could be acquired. Ehrmann encouraged obtaining catalogs from local booksellers and contacting local universities to see if these institutions would donate books to the camps.<sup>283</sup> However, Ehrmann made it clear that the YMCA War Prisoners Aid and International Committee of the Red Cross would be the first places to get books. Only after these sources were exhausted would the AEOs look for books locally.<sup>284</sup> Nearly all books donated or sold by publishers and individuals went to these two contributors for distribution.

During World War II the YMCA, based in Geneva, Switzerland, started the War Prisoners Aid Program, which provided humanitarian aid to both Axis and Allied POWs. The YMCA War Prisoners Aid was one of the largest contributors of books to POWs in the world. It had the money, international support, and infrastructure to provide books to every camp in the United States and many camps in Europe. Twenty-eight world governments recognized the

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<sup>281</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Alexander Lakes to The Commanding General, Eighth Service Command, 25 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>282</sup> Major T. L. Sullivan to Colonel Tollefson, 24 February 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>283</sup> Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Division from Henry Ehrmann, 27 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>284</sup> Memorandum for Executive Officers from Henry Ehrmann, n.d. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

neutrality of the YMCA and its function to provide recreational, intellectual, and spiritual welfare for POWs.<sup>285</sup> The program lasted seven years in thirty-three counties.<sup>286</sup> Due to the provisions of the Geneva Convention, Swiss and American representatives from the YMCA were allowed to visit POW camps in America and inspect the libraries for themselves, just like representatives from the Red Cross could. The YMCA and Red Cross also received book requests directly from the POWs, though they did have to notify the SPD of these requests.<sup>287</sup> The relationship between the YMCA War Prisoners Aid and the PMGO and SPD began in March of 1942 under the direction of Provost Marshal General Gullion.<sup>288</sup> Camp spokesmen represented all of the men at the camp and often contacted groups like the War Prisoners Aid of the YMCA, the Red Cross (which provided over a million and a half books to POWs around the world by the end of the war) and other national groups that offered aid to POWs.<sup>289</sup> These letters are invariably polite and extremely thankful. These men were thrilled to have received books and knew exactly what else they and their campmates wanted. Spokesman F. J. Schmidt wrote to the War Prisoners Aid that “first of all I want to thank you, also in the name of all men of our camp, for the many things you supplied us with. . . . I personally have to thank you too for those theological books by Kirkegaard, Brunner, and Niehbur. . . .”<sup>290</sup> Another POW spilled his heart with emotion: “In your eyes perhaps these things you are doing for us are details, but for us

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<sup>285</sup> Memorandum on Services to Prisoners of War Held in the United States by E. T. Colton, n.d. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

<sup>286</sup> Armed Services YMCA, Camp Pendleton, “History,” [https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/2246025/Branches/Camp\\_Pendleton/mission%20and%20history%20\(2\).pdf?t=1507076654805](https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/2246025/Branches/Camp_Pendleton/mission%20and%20history%20(2).pdf?t=1507076654805).

<sup>287</sup> Memorandum for Executive Officers from Henry Ehrmann, n.d. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>288</sup> Allen W. Gullion to Mr. John R. Mott and Mr. Tracy Strong, 31 March 1942. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>290</sup> Uffz. F. J. Schmidt to War Prisoners Aid of the Young Men’s Christian Associations, 18 October 1944. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

inside the barbed wire your work is of the greatest importance. Always in all our remaining life we will remember what you have done for us during this difficult time.”<sup>291</sup> POW Werner Kloos wrote, “In the last months I and numerous German prisoners ... received ... many very important and valuable books. ... For me it was one of the happiest and most surprising events in this first year of my prisoner-life. ... You could not have done a thing of greater practical and spiritual importance. ... I hope to be able, after the wartime, to prove this feeling to the Y.M.C.A.”<sup>292</sup> It is apparent that reading was an important diversion for these POWs. They were not only thankful, but also hopeful that they would receive more materials for their studies and enjoyment.

Many of the POWs’ book requests were for educational purposes. Spokesman Willi Jungel explained to the YMCA that “during wintertime we intend to intensify our lessons. ... We are very short of instructive books.”<sup>293</sup> Spokesman F. J. Schmidt from Camp Fort Sheridan in Illinois reminded the YMCA that the men would pay for their books, when he requested lesson books for “mathematics, algebra and geometry for beginners in German, and a manual for playing chess, also in German. ... I need some textbooks of economic geography, chemistry, and physics.”<sup>294</sup> He also needed forty German/English dictionaries, sixty copies of the Junior Classic German Dictionary, twenty copies of Kleine Englische Sprachlehren, and ten copies of Goode’s School Atlas, Physical, Political and Economic. The desire for learning materials was strong among these men, and they were willing to use their hard-earned money to gain them.

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<sup>291</sup> Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Clinton, Mississippi, 14 May 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

<sup>292</sup> Werner Kloos to the YMCA Headquarters, 9 May 1945. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>293</sup> Spokesman Willi Jungel to War Prisoners Aid of the YMCA, 29 September 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>294</sup> Uffz. F. J. Schmidt to War Prisoners Aid of the Young Men’s Christian Associations, 18 October 1944. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

The spokesman for Camp Opelika, Alabama, was desperate for materials. The camp was recently reoccupied after a temporary shut-down, and it lacked any sort of recreation or diversion. The spokesman addressed his request to the War Relief Services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference and asked for “books, especially instruction books such as mathematics, technical books, and general fiction.”<sup>295</sup> Spokesman Johannes Oertel from Camp Clinton, Mississippi, demonstrated the need for materials, “The books cited under 1) are urgently needed. This camp has one copy of each only. ... The desires for books among the comrades are great ... and we are very glad to be allowed to submit our requests.”<sup>296</sup> The camp spokesman for Camp Swift, Texas, wrote the YMCA in thanks for not only the books recently received, but also for eight bookbinding sets.<sup>297</sup> On March 20, 1946, a delegation from the Red Cross visited the Eastern Branch of the United States Disciplinary Barracks, where criminal POWs were held serving five-year terms for crimes committed in camp. These hardened criminals only had three questions of dire importance to ask the Red Cross delegates. They were desperate to know about the status of mail, their personal funds, and the possibility of getting more books.<sup>298</sup>

Book publishers and donors helped to supplement the YMCA War Prisoners Aid and YMCA provided to the camp libraries. While publishers, especially publishers of books in German, sold books to the camp libraries to make a profit, individuals donated books for four main reasons: religious evangelism, re-education, common German heritage, or because they had

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<sup>295</sup> Camp Spokesman, Camp Opelika, Alabama to War Relief Services, 15 November 1944. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

<sup>296</sup> Spokesman Johannes Oertel to the German Red Cross, 23 September 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>297</sup> Camp Spokesman, Camp Swift, Texas to Young Men’s Christian Associations War Prisoners Aid, 31 October 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

<sup>298</sup> United States Disciplinary Barracks, Eastern Branch, Greenhaven, New York, 20 March 1946. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

relatives in the camps. Those who submitted books for re-education purposes had no way of knowing that the government was already attempting to do so.

Book publishers and individual book donors who sold and gave books to the POW camps had to follow regulations and gain approval from the PMGO. The PMGO was inundated with requests from individuals and organizations that wanted to donate books and periodicals. The PMGO managed to streamline these requests by creating strict rules. Individual book donors could not donate books to individual POWs. The donor would have to purchase the book from a publisher and have it sent to the camp directly from that publisher, most likely in order to ensure that the book had already been reviewed and deemed acceptable. If the donor wanted to donate books to the camp libraries, the PMGO directed them to contact the YMCA or Red Cross. All used books had to be unmarked.<sup>299</sup> Publishers, on the other hand, could send books to individual POWs and camp libraries directly once the books been reviewed by the Office of Censorship.<sup>300</sup>

Publishers were thrilled to have a new market to sell their books, especially their German language books. They were anxious to provide their catalogs and pricing to the PMGO and to obtain lists of the camps to send more catalogs to.<sup>301</sup> The camp commanders were anxious to learn about these publishers as well, since the stock of the German language books at local booksellers was picked over and running low.<sup>302</sup> Wilcox & Follett Co. was one such publisher who provided hundreds of thousands of books to POW camps by May of 1944.<sup>303</sup> Prentice-Hall,

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<sup>299</sup>Lt. Colonel Earl L. Edwards to Mrs. H. A. Pyhrr, 7 December 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives; Lt. Colonel Earl L. Edwards to Mrs. H. A. Pyhrr, 7 December 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives; Colonel I. B. Summers to Commanding General, Fourth Service Command, 11 November 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives; and Colonel I. B. Summers to Harry P. Jeffrey, 15 October 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>300</sup> Colonel A. M. Tollefson to Rev. Severin Lamping, 12 April 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>301</sup> Allen S. Wilber to Provost Marshal General, 15 March 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>302</sup> Colonel Joseph I. Greene to Commanding Officer, Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, 2 April 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

<sup>303</sup> Wilcox & Follett Co. to Col. A. M. Tollefson, 9 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

Inc. tried to entice business with the PMGO by providing a 40 percent discount, and Didier Publishers sent a free book to Provost Marshal General Lerch together with an ad for the top sellers.<sup>304</sup>

Many Americans and German-Americans who fled Nazi Germany were also highly motivated to take advantage of the opportunity to supply reading materials to the German POWs being held in America. Here was a chance to re-educate, denazify, and humanize the POWs. Of course, this was exactly what the SPD was already trying to do. The public was not made aware of the SPD's re-education efforts until after VE Day, so some civilians believed that this effort was falling on their shoulders. These included publishers of German periodicals, groups of German-Americans, and some individuals who had access to German language books.<sup>305</sup>

These donors were eager to spread the values of democracy to the POWs, within the bounds of the Geneva Convention as they understood it. Joseph Kaskel, representative of the *Deutsche Blaetter* periodical, wrote to the PMGO:

Refraining from propagating the political persuasion of the editors in an obtrusive form, [*Deutsche Blaetter*] offer[s] to these prisoners writings of literary value which should convey to them the ideas governing the democratic world in a dignified form. The desirability of the *Deutsche Blaetter*, from the American viewpoint and with regard to the Convention of Geneva, is increased by the fact that the magazine does not serve the ends of any single political party, confession or group.<sup>306</sup>

Paul Merker of the *Latino American de Alemanes Libres* wrote, "*Freies Deutschland* is the only democratic literary, cultural, and political periodical in German which at present exists on this

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<sup>304</sup> Harry Berke, Didier Publishers to Provost Marshal General Lerch, 30 April 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives; and H. Carter, Trade Book Dept. to Lt. Frederic W. Handschy, 28 March 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

<sup>305</sup> E. H. Starkel to Prisoners of War Department, 1 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>306</sup> Letter from Joseph Kaskel, n.d. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

Continent.”<sup>307</sup> J. H. Biden of the *New Jersey Freie Zeitung* explained, “We ... are pro-American in every detail. ... There are a number of people who would like to subscribe for additional copies of our paper in order to Americanize ... the German prisoners.”<sup>308</sup> Spreading democracy to the POWs via reading material seemed like the best route for these newspaper men.

German-American and German refugee societies were also eager to share democratic reading materials. The Victory Committee of German-American Trade Unionists went so far as to adopt a resolution entitled, “Making Democratic Literature Accessible to German War Prisoners,”<sup>309</sup> adopted at their conference on November 20, 1943. The committee felt strongly about this cause. “We feel that only through the re-education of the future citizens of the New Germany to be constituted after the defeat of Hitlerism, will a firm foundation be established for a Democratic Germany.”<sup>310</sup> The committee contacted the PMGO and wished to meet with them to discover how they could follow through on their firm resolution to make a difference for the POWs who held a common heritage.

Other German groups collectively gathered together their German language books to send to the POWs. These groups—the Federation of German-American Societies, Inc., the German Club of Wausau, Wisconsin, and a group of German refugees from Cambridge, Massachusetts—all clamored in their letters to the PMGO to send their book donations to the camp libraries. As Dr. E. R. Meyer, owner of The Book Collection, put it, “The younger Nazis

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<sup>307</sup> Paul Merker to War Department, Office of Propaganda and Information, 30 September 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>308</sup> J. H. Biden to General B. M. Bryan, 22 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>309</sup> Making Democratic Literature Accessible to German War Prisoners, 20 November 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>310</sup> Michael J. Obermeier to Office of the Provost Marshal General, 14 January 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.



have practically no education in modern thinking outside of their Nazi indoctrination and that it would be very desirable to furnish them with works in German.”<sup>311</sup>

An entirely separate group of people wanted to share literature with the POWs, not so much because they believed that re-education and denazification needed to be done, but because they were called by a higher power. Numerous Christians and Christian societies wanted to give reading materials to the POWs because they felt it was their Christian duty to bring comfort to the POWs and also because it presented a unique opportunity to evangelize them. Churches interested in contributing to this effort ranged from Catholic, to different Protestant denominations, and many other non-denominational Christian groups. In a sense, this evangelism was also a form of re-education. These Christians declared that once the POWs had been proselytized with Christian ideals, they would also obtain a love for America and democracy. Reverend Harry A. McGimsey of the American Desert Mission wrote to the PMGO, “We believe if we could reach these men now with Christian Literature that when the war is over that they will go back to their nation with a love for our land instead of hatred for America.”<sup>312</sup> Congressman William A. Pittenger of Minnesota connected Christian literature with the goals of the United States government. “I can’t think of anything more in keeping with the policies of the government than a little Christian education of the Axis powers.”<sup>313</sup> Other Christian book donors were less political in their message; they claimed that they only wanted to spread the Christian message, without any other ulterior motives. Frank F. Bunker, manager of the *Herald of Christian Science*, reassured the PMGO that his newspapers “are written solely for the purpose

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<sup>311</sup> Dr. E. R. Meyer to Prisoner of War Division, 17 May 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>312</sup> Rev. Harry H. McGimsey to Provost Marshal General, 28 February 1944. Box No. 1944. National Archives.

<sup>313</sup> William A. Pittenger to General James A. Ulio, 3 September 1943. Box No. 1944. National Archives.

of affording spiritual and religious comfort and uplift to the reader.”<sup>314</sup>Mr. and Mrs. Emil Wollschlaeger, a Christian couple from Texas, simply wanted to save souls. “If their education has been as godless as reports would lead us to believe, surely they need to become acquainted with the Prince of Peace.”<sup>315</sup> These letters from Christian book donors suggest that animosity and hatred towards the POWs was not common among Christians, or at least these Christians attempted to cure what they believed was lacking in the lives of these POWs. The generous gifts of reading material were one of the few things these groups of Christians could do to relieve the discomfort of prison for POWs and to spread their message to a group they would otherwise never be able to reach in Germany. A feeling of doing their patriotic duty was also a motivator and tied in neatly with their Christian beliefs.

Many German-Americans still had relatives in Germany and some of these relatives became POWs. These Americans knew POWs not as Nazis or the enemy, but as their beloved family members. A nun in Kansas wished to send a religious German language newspaper to her cousin, a priest held at Camp Alva, Oklahoma.<sup>316</sup> Another man wished to send a monthly German language newspaper published in Milwaukee to his German cousin.<sup>317</sup> A woman wished to send some German magazines to the brother of her parish priest.<sup>318</sup> Donating books and periodicals to these loved ones was really the only way these Americans could make a difference for their relatives in the camps. These donors saw the POWs in the most personal way possible:

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<sup>314</sup> Frank F. Bunker to Colonel I. B. Summers, 14 October 1943. Box No. 1944. National Archives.

<sup>315</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Emil Wollschlaeger to Official Censor, 14 January 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

<sup>316</sup> Sr. M. Callista to Office of the Provost Marshal General, 27 March 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>317</sup> Carl Zeisberg to Provost Marshal General, 9 March 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>318</sup> Mrs. S. Arnold to Office of the Provost Marshal General, 20 February 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

as family, as friends, and mostly as human beings caught up in the realities of war and imprisoned in a foreign land.

Another provider of reading materials was the camp canteen, where POWs could buy books and magazines, along with other personal materials, such as cigarettes and toiletry articles.<sup>319</sup> These purchases were made with canteen coupons, which represented the amount of money held by the POWs in credit. POWs were not allowed to personally keep money tender, so the government held onto the money for them, to be credited after their repatriation. The Assistant Executive Officers (AEOs) were in charge of materials sold in the canteens. From the PMGO they received lists of approved books and magazines to sell. It was important to keep sales high and carry popular materials. Otherwise POW morale suffered and the canteen made little profit to use for camp improvements.<sup>320</sup> Gansberg writes about an AEO who,

Pored over catalogues and selected publications for his canteen. . . . He particularly liked photographic books that offered alluring pictures of the best the United States had to offer. He placed them for sale in the canteens noting: “We experimented in one . . . camp where there was some talk about ‘propaganda.’ A sign ‘Souvenir Books of America’ fixed that and sales boomed.”<sup>321</sup>

Materials sold in the canteens came from many different sources. Popular American magazines and newspapers, such as *Collier's*, *Esquire*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Time* were sold, along with a selection of foreign magazines.<sup>322</sup> Publishers from around the country could apply to be put onto the approved booksellers list and send their catalogues to AEOs. Publishers had to prove that they were a “bona fide” publisher and send their catalogue

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<sup>319</sup> Helmut Hörner, *A German Odyssey: The Journal of a German Prisoner of War* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1991), 273.

<sup>320</sup> The Offence II-Books and Publications, n.d. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

<sup>321</sup> Gansberg, *Stalag: U.S.A.*, 91.

<sup>322</sup> Prisoner of War Circular, 9 January 1945. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

and other “pertinent information” to the PMGO.<sup>323</sup> These publishers included Oxford University Press and Infantry Journal, along with many others that specialized in German language books or sold locally.<sup>324</sup> Other popular sources of books for the canteen included books from the Modern Library series and the Pocket Book Editions series.<sup>325</sup> Series of reprinted books were sold as well, such as the aforementioned Pocket Book Editions, Penguin Series and Modern Library. These reprints included classics such as Brothers Karamazov, Crime and Punishment, David Copperfield, Don Quixote, Gulliver’s Travels, Madame Bovary, The Three Musketeers, Walden, Wuthering Heights, Moby Dick, and War and Peace.<sup>326</sup>

The canteen was the perfect place for the PMGO to sell its own materials since POWs went there to eat, fraternize, and buy needed goods. The *Buecherreihe Neue Welt* (New World Bookshelf) was a series of books reprinted exclusively for POWs. Sold for twenty-five cents apiece, these books were not allowed into the camp libraries until their sale had been promoted in the canteen.<sup>327</sup> These novels were mostly written by refugee German authors who escaped Nazi Germany and were another small attempt on the part of the PMGO to re-educate and influence the POWs.<sup>328</sup> These authors included Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, and Carl Zuckmayer.<sup>329</sup> Other titles included in this series were works by Willa Cather, Mark Twain and Jack London. *Buecherreihe Neue Welt* proved to be popular among the POWs. One camp sold

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<sup>323</sup> Lt. Col. A. M. Tollefson to Provost Marshal General’s Office, 17 December 1943. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>324</sup> Major Maxwell S. McKnight to Commanding General Army Service Forces, 18 December 1944. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

<sup>325</sup> Status Report, Review Branch, Prisoner of War Special Project Division, 22 June 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

<sup>326</sup> Infantry Journal Book List, n.d. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

<sup>327</sup> J. A. Ulio to Commanding Generals, 23 January 1945. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>328</sup> Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 96.

<sup>329</sup> Memorandum for Chief, Review Branch from Henry Ehrmann, 3 April 1945. Box No. 1645. National Archives.

45,000 books from the series alone in one year. These books usually sold out. The Status Report of the Review Branch for June, 1945, announced that the initial 7,500 copies of each book in the series distributed had to be raised to 10,000 to keep up with demand.<sup>330</sup> Clearly, placing these books in the canteens was leading to excellent sales.

Historian Arnold Krammer confirms that book sales in the canteens were high and that many camps had to place many orders to keep up with demands.<sup>331</sup> However, historian Ron Robin notes that some of these sales may have been due to POWs wanting souvenirs to bring home, or ardent Nazis buying up the stock to keep it out of the hands of the other POWs.<sup>332</sup> Major Neuland mentioned that during a visit to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, “books purchased by the prisoners in the canteen, were being carefully kept in their possession. ... There is no doubt that most of the prisoners of war will be taking back the literature we want them to upon their repatriation.”<sup>333</sup> Thus, this re-education effort with books in the canteens was successful, especially since these POWs were planning on bringing these books home to Germany, where German family and friends were probably going to read the books as well.

After putting so much effort and time into creating the libraries, the Special Projects Division (SPD) was eager to learn about the conditions of the camp libraries. Meticulous surveys were taken by SPD staff to determine the status of extracurricular activities at each of the camps. Part C of the field service camp survey contained thirteen questions and statements about the “Library and Reading Rooms.” The questions and statements are as follows:

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<sup>330</sup> Status Report, Review Branch, Prisoner of War Special Project Division, 22 June 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

<sup>331</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 207.

<sup>332</sup> Robin, *Barbed Wire College*, 105-6.

<sup>333</sup> Memorandum for the Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division from Major Paul A. Neuland, 7 September 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

1. Are library and reading room facilities adequate for the use of all prisoners of war?
2. How many volumes are contained in the library?
3. What percentage of the books are in constant circulation?
4. Attach a list of all books in the library, exclusive of textbooks, by title, author, and language.
5. If the present supply of books is inadequate, how many additional books and what type are needed?
6. What percentage of the prisoners of war use the library and reading rooms?
7. What is the chief source of supply for books?
8. Has a system of rotation of books between base and branch camps been arranged?
9. Have the prisoners of war specifically requested that certain books be placed on sale in the canteen?
10. Are sufficient German-English and English-German dictionaries available?
11. Attach a list of the newspapers and magazines in English and German now in the camp and also those requested by the prisoners.
12. Are the prisoners of war informed about such sources of books as the Modern Library, Pocketbook Editions, and *Infantry Journal*-Penguin Series?
13. What action is recommended as necessary in the field?<sup>334</sup>

Unfortunately, these surveys were filled out haphazardly and with little care. Some questions were answered simply yes or no and some were not answered at all. Yet these surveys, along with reports compiled by the Red Cross and YMCA, provide a view of library conditions and POW reading habits.

Out of 22 surveys, in answer to the first question, whether the libraries and reading rooms were adequate for all POWs, thirteen answered no, eight answered yes and one did not answer. The second question, about the number of books, was answered in all reports but one. Between these twenty-one libraries, there were 64,985 books in all, with an average of 3,095 books per library. The largest library had 9,000 and the smallest housed only 35 books. Most likely due to the small number of books per camp, the percentage of books in constant circulation was high, with an average of 63 percent among eighteen camps. Five of the camp reports did not include a

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<sup>334</sup> Field Service Camp Survey, February 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

circulation percentage, or answered in words, such as “most” or “quite a few.” Twelve of the camps had a circulation of 50 percent or higher, six were 80 percent or higher. Only six were 25 percent or less. The percentage of POWs using the books was high as well. Among eighteen camps, 60 percent of the POWs used the library. At seven of the camps the rate was 90 percent or higher. Only seven of the camps had a rate under 50 percent. The remaining survey questions were either not answered, or the answers were not substantive enough for evaluation. These reports, while poorly filled out, clearly show that the library facilities were mostly inadequate, had few books, but were highly used by the POWs.

The size and condition of POW camp libraries varied widely from camp to camp. They ranged from fifteen religious books provided by a chaplain at Camp Colona, Michigan,<sup>335</sup> to the 9,000 book collection at Camp Dermott, Arkansas.<sup>336</sup> The conditions of the reading rooms also varied widely. At one camp, Captain Herman Greupner found a reading room that discouraged its own use. “Although a library room is set up in a company day room building, it did not appear to be properly run. Books were lying about here and there in a haphazard manner. The average prisoner of war reads ‘on his bunk’, there is no ‘reading room set up,’ although sufficient space is available.”<sup>337</sup> Yet, at Camp Concordia, Kansas, the reading room rivaled that of the best public libraries. Major Neuland wrote: “There are two libraries at Concordia, one a resplendent Wissenschaft or technical library containing 2,593 books and an incompletely constructed fiction library of 3,663 books. The enlisted men have 1,026 books in their library. The library building is one of the finest seen by Captain Lakes. It has an excellent color scheme, fine paintings on the

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<sup>335</sup> Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Branch Camp, Coloma, Michigan, 1 August 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

<sup>336</sup> Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 53.

<sup>337</sup> Camp Report from Herman W. Greupner, n.d. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

wall, a superb division of subject matter on various shelves and study alcoves with tables and chairs.”<sup>338</sup>

The surveys showed that adequate libraries were considered to be so for two reasons: number of books and quality of the reading room. Adequate libraries received such praise as: “the library and reading room are ample,” “the library is fairly good,” “the library and dayroom are comfortable,” “library and reading room facilities are adequate for the use of all,” and “the library room is one of the largest I have seen in a camp.”<sup>339</sup> The other factor that demonstrated a good library in the eyes of the reviewers was a large number of books. These reports reveal that the SPD was mostly concerned with the POWs feeling comfortable enough to relax and read a wide range of titles.

The largest issue with inadequate libraries was not enough books. Some camps had dismally small collections. One had only fifteen books, another thirty-five, and another sixty-five.<sup>340</sup> Camp Clearfield, Utah, was a bit better off with 200 books, but about 150 of them were religious in nature, leaving those not interested in reading that subject out of luck.<sup>341</sup> Camp Eldora, Iowa, had a group of POWs with voracious reading habits, but they had to share 125 books. The reviewer noted that all of the books were checked out except for “only about twenty

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<sup>338</sup> Report on Camp Concordia, Kansas, 18 April 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

<sup>339</sup> Camp Report from Major Paul A. Neuland, 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives; Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Branch Camp (Algona) Owatonna, Minnesota, 21 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives; Prisoner of War Camp West Point, New York, 20 March 1946, Box No. 1608. National Archives; Memorandum for the Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division from Major Paul A. Neuland, 26 March 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives; and Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Devens, Massachusetts, 23 November 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

<sup>340</sup> Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, New York, 15 March 1946. Box No. 1608. National Archives; Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Yankton, South Dakota, 26 April 1945. Box No. 1608. National Archives; and Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Branch Camp, Coloma, Michigan, 1 August 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

<sup>341</sup> Camp Clearfield, Utah, Visited by Mr. P. Schnyder, 31 May 1945. Box No. 1611. National Archives.



very old German books and text books on American social problems and public relief.”<sup>342</sup> Yet another camp had a library of fifty books, which were all personally owned by the POWs. Only the kindness in making their books available to the other POWs allowed the camp to have this pathetically small library.<sup>343</sup> Three other libraries were considered inadequate due to the reading rooms or the quality of the books. One camp’s reading room was unorganized and uncomfortable.<sup>344</sup> Camp Ashby, Virginia, had a library with no table or chairs and was only accessible through the spokesman’s office.<sup>345</sup> Lastly, one unfortunate camp had a large collection of 5,500 books, but they were in such bad condition that they needed to be destroyed.<sup>346</sup> These reports reinforce the fact that the SPD wanted POWs to have a comfortable reading experience with access to enough titles to go around.

The SPD was also anxious for the POWs to learn English so they could read English books for re-education purposes.<sup>347</sup> However, the camp libraries contained books mostly in German, some in English, and, on rare occasions, in other languages such as French or Italian. According to reports, about three-fourths of the books were in German, a fourth in English, and a smattering in other languages. At Camp Crossville, Tennessee, 3,175 of the books were in German, 1,137 in English, and 71 in other unnamed languages.<sup>348</sup> One camp only had 12 percent

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<sup>342</sup> Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Edora, Iowa, 5 December 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

<sup>343</sup> Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Bliss, Texas, 29 January-2 February 1945. Box No. 1609. National Archives.

<sup>344</sup> Camp Report from Herman W. Geupner, n.d. Box No. 1611. National Archives.

<sup>345</sup> Staff Study on Intellectual Diversion Program for PW Camp, Camp Ashby, Virginia, 24 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

<sup>346</sup> Prisoner of War Camp, Camp Atterbury, Indiana, 10 April 1946. Box No. 1609. National Archives.

<sup>347</sup> An Address Delivered by Major Samuel Pace, Prisoner of War Branch Security and Intelligence Division, Eighth Service Command, 31 January 1945. Box No. 1634. National Archives.

<sup>348</sup> POW Camp Crossville Report, n.d. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

of their books in English, another 7 percent, yet another only 5 percent.<sup>349</sup> On the other hand, some camps had a substantial number of books in English. Camp Devens, Massachusetts had 1,145 books, or 20 percent of its collection, in English.<sup>350</sup> Another camp was fortunate to have 44 percent of their books in English.<sup>351</sup>

The SPD also wanted to know what the POWs thought of the libraries. A survey conducted in 1945 by the SPD of 13,996 prisoners held in New England revealed that “light reading” accounted for 79 percent of the books checked out. This percentage accounts for 18,368 of the 23,250 book loans. These New England camp libraries contained 2,559 books in all. Instructional books accounted for about 10 percent of the reading; inspirational books were 5 percent, political books were also 5 percent of the reading, and history was about 1 percent of the books.<sup>352</sup> POW reading habits may also have been influenced by their education levels. According to Major George Kryz, 90 percent of the POWs only had a grammar school education. Only 8 percent were high school graduates and a mere 2 percent could boast of a technical school or university education.<sup>353</sup> Yet, despite education level, reading was a popular activity. Howard Hong of the YMCA observed, “Apparently the main activity outside work is reading. For twenty minutes I stood in the library-canteen watching the sanitary corpsman-librarian receiving and issuing books. At least forty men came during that time.”<sup>354</sup> At Fort Devens,

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<sup>349</sup> Staff Study on the Intellectual Diversion Program for PW Camp, Camp Ashby, Virginia, 24 November 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives; and Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Fort Crockett, Texas, 21 July 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

<sup>350</sup> Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Devens, Massachusetts, 23 November 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

<sup>351</sup> Report of Visit to Prisoner of War Camp, Dermott, Arkansas, 18 October 1945. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

<sup>352</sup> Special Projects Activities in First Service Command, 1945. Box No. 1628. National Archives.

<sup>353</sup> Memorandum for Chief, Special Projects Branch from Major George Kryz, 7 November 1944. Box No. 1602. National Archives.

<sup>354</sup> Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Eldora, Iowa, 5 December 1944. Box No. 1608. National Archives.

Massachusetts, Major Kryns noted that the POWs read on average seven hours a week.<sup>355</sup>

Reinhold Pabel, a POW who daringly escaped from his camp, lived as a normal American, and was not found until 1953, recalled in his memoirs his strong desire for reading materials while he was a POW. “I was always on the lookout for reading material of any kind. My sources of supply were pretty limited; I had to rely... on whatever the guards disposed of, and I soon got tired of the girlie magazines. Once I tried to persuade a GI I had made friends with to subscribe to a book club for me.”<sup>356</sup> Unfortunately, it seems that he was at a camp that did not have a library.

Reading was not only a popular distraction from prison life; it also allowed POWs to keep abreast with their interests, world news, and their education goals. Many POWs had been students before they were drafted or volunteered for the military, and they were allowed to finish their studies at most of the camps. POWs were able to request literature through the camp spokesman. The requests were for, above all else, books. Other items asked for included musical instruments, games, theater gear, art materials, sports equipment, and phonograph records. The books requested varied dramatically, from Sophocles’ *Oedipus* to medical books.<sup>357</sup>

When the war ended, there was concern over how many personal belongings the repatriated POWs could bring home with them. In August of 1945, Major Stephen M. Farrand, Deputy Director of the POW Operations Division, assumed that soldiers could only bring four pounds worth of possessions home with them.<sup>358</sup> This limit concerned the POWs. Farrand asked his colleagues, “How about books which certain POWs who are students or professionals may

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<sup>355</sup> Report on Camp Devens, Massachusetts, 8 December 1944. Box No. 1216. National Archives.

<sup>356</sup> Reinhold Pabel, *Enemies are Human* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1955), 155.

<sup>357</sup> Spokesman Johannes Certel to World Student Services Fund, 20 November 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives; and R. V. Bartsch-Salgast to War Prisoners Aid World Committee of the YMCA, 23 October 1944. Box No. 1644. National Archives.

<sup>358</sup> Memorandum for the Record from Major Stephen M. Farrand, 14 August 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

have acquired during their internment, as, for example, legal, medical, or other scientific books which are usually large and heavy?”<sup>359</sup> Books were one of the few sources of property that a POW could legally acquire.<sup>360</sup> Thus, Captain Robert L. Kunzig, a staff member of the SPD, requested that extra bags and suitcases be allowed so that POWs could bring home extra “books, papers, and manuscripts.” The Provost Marshal General asked for unlimited packages to be mailed to family members so that they could hold onto these books and manuscripts for the POWs until the war was over.<sup>361</sup> The Provost Marshal General and various officers in the program probably would not have bothered to ask for these exceptions were the POWs not anxious to bring their books back home.

The end of the war also confirmed to the POWs that books were more important than ever. Books were one of the few constants in their uncertain lives and distracted them from the reality they would face after repatriation. Tracy Strong of the Red Cross wrote to PMGO Lerch in August 1945, “Recent reports indicate an even greater appreciation of our work by both the prisoners and many of the commandants at a time when the prisoners are confronted with the deadly effects of the loss of freedom, disillusionment, and defeat.”<sup>362</sup> Olle Axberg of the YMCA explained in a library report that “they have been anxious to bring good books with them to Germany, where books are scarce, they understand.”<sup>363</sup> Books were among the few contributions these defeated POWs could bring with them when they went home to their broken country and their broken families.

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Exceptions to War Department Memorandum Number 580-45 from Captain Robert L. Kunzig, 26 June 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

<sup>362</sup> Tracy Strong to Provost Marshal General Archer L. Lerch, 1 August 1945. Box No. 1606. National Archives.

<sup>363</sup> Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp Fort Devens, Massachusetts, 2 April 1946. Box No. 1612. National Archives.

Libraries, books and reading were an integral and important part of life for German POWs in American camps during World War II. The Geneva Convention required the provision of camp libraries, which the United States took seriously. Special divisions within the PMGO, such as the Book Department, were created specifically to address this requirement. The POWs were grateful for access to books, and were eager to take home as many as they could at the end of the war. The tedious life of a prisoner was made easier by reading. However, books were also used as re-education tools, and the Geneva Convention, which forbade re-education, was ignored so that an education program could be created. The PMGO recognized that books were a powerful tool to accomplish a measure of re-education and denazification.

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