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Johannes Sachslehner, *Kat z Listy Schindlera. Zbrodnie Amona Leopolda Gótha* [‘An executioner from Schindler’s List: The crimes of Amon-Leopold Góth’], Kraków, 2010; 408pp.

“More than sixty years have passed since the horrifying crimes committed by the Nazi murderers”: so opens the introduction to a very interesting book by Johannes Sachslehner, *An executioner from Schindler’s List: The crimes of Amon-Leopold Góth*. The introduction’s title is very telling too: ‘Memory, a hope for a future’; this introductory section is not one of the ‘typical’ such sections normally appearing in historical books: instead, it is an appeal that the mankind never forget of the cruelties of World War 2, and of the Holocaust nightmare. “Meanwhile, the victims’ faces become decreasingly distinct, the names of the thousands of criminals sinking in an abyss of anonymity”: this sentence summarises, to an extent, the study’s purpose. Its intent was namely to present to us a little-known figure of one of the worst torturers in the Nazi machinery of killing: Amon-Leopold Góth, the ‘god and king of Płaszów’.

By this far, the Holocaust literature has said a lot on the topic as a whole: Auschwitz and other well-known concentration camps and mass extermination sites are mostly recognisable. This is not necessarily pertinent to the labour camp and, later on, concentration camp in Płaszów near Krakow. Steven Spielberg’s movie *Schindler’s List* has shown the camp fairly well, and this particular film remains today the main source of knowledge for those not initiated. We believe that this gap has now been filled up by J. Sachslehner’s book, which implies a need to continually expand and drill down the Shoah issues.

The author skilfully manoeuvres between our contemporary time, when he was seeking for evidence of the crimes on site, and the past, with its executions and mass killings. This method enables the reader to ‘visit’ these sites, through the author’s eyes, trying to figure out the enormity of the disaster, see the heroes’ faces, etc.

Like any book whose task is to explore the past, *Kat...* is divided into sequences, each portraying the tormenter-to-be in a different situation. First, as a child; then, as a young man joining the ranks of the Nazi party NSDAP; subsequently, his ex-

periences gained in the course of the *Reinhardtaktion*; then, as commandant of the Płaszów camp; and, then on, accused by the SS court for financial embezzlement; subsequently, a prisoner of the U.S.; lastly, sentenced by the Polish court to death by hanging at the Płaszów camp site, where he had killed so many defenceless people, to his personal satisfaction and pleasure.

The book has no footnotes, but is a type of publication that could do without them. There is, instead, a rich bibliography provided at the end, including archival sources, memoirs/reminiscences and accounts of eyewitnesses who have survived the camp's nightmare, plus a list of reference literature. This makes the book targeted at a broader public, rather than professional historians; yet, it must not, by any means, be neglected by the latter group – particularly with regard to the source material it provides and processes.

One finds numerous photographs of Amon Göth – as a smiling child seated in a chair; a gallant gentleman; a commandant delivering a speech to his SS reports; a man reading a book; and, a man with a rifle ready to fire and kill at any moment. These pictures complement the profile of a man who, once grown-up, 'divided and ruled' in the Płaszów camp domain.

A very interesting idea of the author was to offer a broader presentation of those who have, or have not, survived the camp's inferno, and of their torturers. Those people are not anonymous: these individuals' first names and surnames are known, each having its documented personal history; this enables us to avoid their reification. We are aware that such (sense of) identity had been taken away from an enormous number of the killed; still, having the surviving data at hand, the book can restore – at least to an extent, be it slightest – the memory of those who had had the cruel luck of not having survived till the camp was liberated. For those willing to get to know more on the individual characters, the name index provided will certainly be helpful.

Lastly, one may consider whether this book enables us to reply to the major Holocaust-related question, that is: "How was it possible at all that this 'normal' citizen, an intelligent and educated man, father of three, could all of a sudden turn into a murderer that would never put his arms and his whip aside?" (p. 371). This question has already pervaded a number of scholars; seemingly, the Sachslehner book does not give an answer in the way it would be expected to do so. Is it so that the author, an Austrian himself, has tried his best to comprehend Mr. Göth, his compatriot? Let this open question be answered by the readers themselves.

To sum up, the publication is very useful, full of evidenced theses concerning the Holocaust, and of little-known accounts on Płaszów-camp episodes; full of suffering, helplessness, sorrowfulness and, lastly, afterthoughts on those who are no more among us – and on those who were responsible.