

Wager, Melanie, *Der Stürmer und seine Leser: Ein analoges antisemitisches Netzwerk, Zur Geschichte und Propagandawirkung eines nationalsozialistischen Massenmediums* (Translated: 'Der Stürmer and Its Readers: An Analog Antisemitic Network. On the History and Propaganda Impact of a National Socialist Mass Medium'), Berlin, Metropol, 2024; hardcover, pp. 537, 92 b/w images, RRP €36,00 EU; ISBN 9783863317119.

Melanie Wager's book *Der Stürmer und seine Leser* (*Der Stürmer and Its Readers*) provides us with a deep insight into the mechanism of antisemitic propaganda, media history, and recipient engagement during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The weekly newspaper *Der Stürmer*, known for its notorious antisemitic slurs and infamous cartoons, was published in Germany between 1923 and 1945. Although her book is only available in German, her case study and its findings are of clear interest to the international research community in antisemitic and propaganda studies, as it provides insight into the mechanics of the newspaper, their key players, and a retrospective analysis of propaganda effects during this time period.

Melanie Wager's book is a revised version of her doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Erlangen/ Nürnberg in 2022. Whilst previous publications in this field have tackled the biographical details of *Der Stürmer's* creators, her work specifically highlights the existing gap in methodological research during the National Socialist dictatorship, due to the general lack of documented media recipient interaction during the period. Her book attempts to narrow this gap by analysing *Der Stürmer* and its interactions with readers via letters to the editors and the proliferation of public display cases, which functioned as a two-way medium reinforcing antisemitic sentiment and hatred.

Wager's study is structured into two main sections, supplemented by an extensive appendix. The first section provides a detailed portrayal of the newspaper and its publishing house, from its origins, editors, and staff, to its production, content, layout, and the various marketing and distribution strategies employed. In the second section of her study, Wager turns to her central interest: the propagandistic impact of *Der Stürmer*, which she explores through the interactions between the medium and its readership.

Through meticulous archival research, Wager's first section addresses the history of the newspaper and its founder Julius Streicher, a close associate of Adolf Hitler since the early 1920s and a fanatic antisemitic ideologue. Wager also investigated other employees of the publishing house, such as editor Karl Holz, who drove the paper's strongly antisemitic stance and heaped public hatred on the Jewish population. In total, the staff of the *Stürmer* publishing house numbered in the hundreds, including both permanent and freelance editorial employees.

Der Stürmer gained its notoriety through the often obscene anti-Jewish caricatures on its front page. A key part of Wager's discussion is how illustrator Philipp Ruprecht, using the seemingly harmless pseudonym 'Fips', developed his antisemitic views and his interpretation of antisemitic stereotypes in his drawings over the years, turning them into the newspaper's trademark. "*Der Stürmer* without Fips would not have been *Der Stürmer*", Wagner quotes from a Denazification court trial against Ruprecht after the end of the war (97). Furthermore, the technical aspects of the production, such as special editions, extra issues, and sister publications, provide an important insight into the sheer magnitude to Streicher's media empire. By the mid-1930s, Streicher was seeking diversification in his range of publications, with antisemitic illustrated books, manuals, specialist volumes and even children's books. The first such volume *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heide und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid!* ('Trust no fox on the green heath and no Jew on his oath!') from the *Stürmer* publishing house appearing in 1936 (176).

In the second section, Wager turns her focus on illuminating the interactions between the medium and its readership. Most significant here are her accounts of the mass submissions from readers, the notorious '*Stürmerkästen*' (*Stürmer* display boxes) erected on private initiative (232). She addresses the traces the paper left in both national and international press coverage. Through tracking official records, ego-documents, and legal assessments and an examination of the postwar legacy of its propaganda, *Der Stürmer* has remained synonymous with Nazi propaganda to the present day (346).

Der Stürmer thrived primarily on its direct interaction with readers, which the paper actively exploited to promote the social stigmatisation of individuals who failed to conform to its antisemitic worldview and to reinforce extremist anti-Jewish narratives. Its notorious 'letters to the editor' column exemplified the close bond between the newspaper and its readership, as many contributors began with the formula '*Lieber Stürmer*' ('Dear *Stürmer*') (204). In addition, submitted photographs of individuals were used to enable public denunciations and expose alleged misconduct – such as shopping in Jewish-owned shops – thereby further reinforcing the antisemitic worldview (228). In this context, the author refers to interactions between readers and the newspaper as an 'analogue social network' and describes the readers as 'content providers' akin to echo chambers in contemporary social media (343). Her analogy seems fitting, considering the use of privately erected display cases in which parts or full issues were presented, allowing for public reading and discussion of the paper's content. Notably, Wager has meticulously researched the locations within the sphere of influence of the German Reich and recorded in her book a chronologically arranged list of 2,128 display boxes, while acknowledging that the actual number was considerably higher.

In this respect, Wager's study demonstrates that the narrative of the 'seduced Germans' who simply fell victim to National Socialist propaganda is not sustainable (347). Far too many contemporaries participated eagerly in antisemitic narratives

and incitement, opportunistically aligning themselves as ‘*Volksgenossen*’ (National Comrades) in these campaigns.

Despite the solid substantiation of her sources, her insights remain relatively fragmentary, as questions concerning the broader impact of propaganda beyond the immediate newspaper–reader interaction remain unanswered, not least because the Nazi regime did not systematically investigate media effects (14). The study, for example, does not address how the antisemitic narrative evolved over the course of publication – from the Weimar Republic to the end of the Third Reich – nor what influence *Der Stürmer* exerted on other media.

Ultimately, Melanie Wager’s case study compellingly illuminates the history and principal figures behind *Der Stürmer*, with the strength of her research located in the analysis of the paper’s distinctive relationship with its readership. She demonstrates how this connection fostered a form of fan culture and fanaticism, transforming readers through a process of self-empowerment from passive consumers of the publication into active participants and players. *Der Stürmer and Its Readers* clearly shows how *Der Stürmer* served to reinforce an already entrenched antisemitic worldview in large parts of the population. Wager’s work constitutes a significant scholarly intervention, offering a distinctive contribution to an extensively researched historical period.

Oliver Krumholz

The University of Western Australia