Photographing the Holocaust – Interpretations of the Evidence by Janina Struk.
I B Tauris 2004.

Quite unexpectedly, for I imagined that this book would be as focussed as its title suggests, Photographing The Holocaust now numbers among the top ten books on the Shoah that I have ever read.

The author, a freelance photographer and former senior lecturer in photography at the University of Westminster, seeks carefully and sensitively to explore the way in which photography has been used in connection with the Holocaust, both in terms of contemporary material from the war years, largely taken by Nazi photographers, but including Jews also, within the ghettos of Eastern Europe, pictures taken by the liberating Allied armies in the camps, material used in retrospective exhibitions, including permanent ones such as that in Washington DC and the Imperial War Museum in London, and modern film cinematography, both documentary and commercial.

In every case she explores both the resulting work and the motivation of the photographers themselves, particularly with regard to some of the unbelievably gruesome photo albums compiled by the Nazis, in a distorted kind of holiday album style. She also considers the secret Jewish photographers like Mendel Grossman who risked so much to document the evil that had enveloped them and the courage of many of their fellow Jews.

With carefully selected quotations by others, as well as her own reflections, Janina Struk forces the reader to think again, not just about the matter of using photography as a means of recording scenes of depravation and deprivation that numb the mind, but of dimensions of the Holocaust that can all too easily get ignored as one struggles to grasp the bigger picture.

Photographing the Holocaust has a raw power that far exceeds its 216 pages of text and should be essential reading for all who seek an ever deeper understanding of an almost incomprehensibly evil series of events that have scarred the modern world forever.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh