

ABSTRACT

The Photographic Image and Its Meaning for Historical Knowledge.

The topic of the thesis is the thus far relatively seldom pursued area of unwritten visual historical sources created by photographic images. The thesis itself is divided into five parts. The first chapter examines selected circumstances and assumptions which led to the creation of photography. Aside from reference to differing perceptions of cyclical (natural) and linear (historic) time as an important assumption for various methods of capturing the past, attention is given to the illusive mimetic pictorial tradition which is characteristic for depicting reality in Western culture. On the basis of this illustrative tradition - in connection with knowledge from the natural sciences - photography was created as a product of a societal need for depiction. Attention is given to the basic factography of the inventors of photography and to how the new depiction was used and developed in society.

The second chapter is devoted to the changeable content of the term of art oscillating between activity and knowledge, and further to the results of this conflict in assessing photography. On the basis of defining the position of photography between science and art, attention is given to the three most pronounced fields which in their discourse reflect photography in relation to society. The use of photography in the field of art history and the resulting creation of photography as a work of art is mentioned. Furthermore, the approach of visual studies is mentioned, which, with the help of semiotic method, explains photography in society-wide connections as a product of culture and emphasises not only the iconic but also simultaneously understanding of the indices photography. The conclusion of the chapter is devoted to the relationship of historical science to photography - from its use as a means of reproduction through its inclusion into historic iconography to increased interest in the specific role of photography as a historical source.

The third chapter concentrates on the position of photography in the current structure dividing historic sources. It measures up to a valid typology set for unwritten sources, categories of monuments, artistic monuments and documentational-representational sources. On the basis of a semiotic approach, the symptomatic bond between photography and the reality depicted is accented; it establishes photography's expository competency as a source, differing from traditional handmade depiction. For this reason, a typology of photographic images is proposed which is based on monitoring the quality of projection of reality between the model and the resultant photographic image. For this reason latent, primary, secondary and tertiary photographic images

are distinguished, of which each has a differing level of explanatory power with regard to depicting reality. The conclusion of the chapter is devoted to the preservation and storage of photographic sources for individual entities as well as within the framework of memorial institutions. The fourth chapter deals with the means of criticism of photography as a historical source. Criticism of written sources and the iconographic-historical method applied to traditional visual pictorial sources is analysed here. Again the importance of understanding photography as a depiction of reality is recalled. It demonstrates the significance of the references and their placement on the photographic scene. The definition of the most important elements which influence the expository value of photography is gradually developed as part of photographic criticism: reference, locality, dating, authorship and context.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to the interpretation and usage of photography. The main importance is considered in the monitoring of the methods of perceiving photography, whose framework creates receivers and distributors of images. Emphasis is placed here on the variable character of photography, which acquires differing meanings according to the selected contexts and discursive frameworks. The chapter ends with a summary of photography's use in historiographic texts.

The focal point of the entire thesis is the argument that, as opposed to traditional images, photography creates a differing group of sources and requires, through its affinity, specific approaches to typological classification, criticism and interpretation. The distinction of photography is considered in that reality is depicted not only on the basis of similarity to other images, but is also its direct imprint at the same time. This symptomatic character establishes the importance for historical knowledge.