



**Martin Holz.** *Evakuierte, Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene auf der Insel Rügen 1943-1961.* Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2004. XIII + 677 S. + 15 Diagr. EUR 54.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-412-14102-8.



**Reviewed by** Amy Alrich (Institute for Defense Analyses, Alexandria, Virginia)

**Published on** H-German (April, 2006)

### Expellees on the Island of Rügen:

Historian and pastor Martin Holz begins and ends his book with quotes from an interview with Gerda W., an expellee from Sandow, Hinterpommern, who now resides in Schaprode, a community on the island of Rügen. The quote that sets the stage for the book describes one of the rumors that arose from the urgency some expellees felt to return to their lost *Heimat*: "Zuhause sagten sie denn: 'Zietlosch, hast du all hÄrt, zur Zeit der Kirschblüte, steht in der Bibel, zur Zeit der Kirschblüte, kommen wir nach Hus!'" Gerda W. suggested that the hope that many of these displaced Germans had for a reunion in their *Heimat* persisted, but, "Nun sind schon fünfzig Kirschblüten vorbei, und wir sind noch immer hier;" The book also closes with a quote from Gerda W. in which she describes her first trip back to the *Heimat*, now Polish, in 1967: "Hach, ich hab die Heimatluft eingesogen, ach, war dies herrlich. Dann war es eigentlich noch alles erträglich. Dann haben wir auch diejenigen, die unsere Wohnung wohnten, besucht, der war Postbote, und wir konnten rein, und haben uns freundlich aufgenommen" (pp. xiii, 582-583).

Holz conducted interviews with twenty expellees,

but as he states in the introduction, this monograph—an expansion of both his master's thesis and dissertation, which he completed in 2001 at the University of Greifswald—is based primarily on archival sources. Despite the prominent locations of these two interview excerpts, anecdotes from the interviews Holz conducted appear only sporadically in a few chapters in this almost 700-page book. As the appended ten-page list of the archives Holz visited indicates, the author based his comprehensive examination primarily on local, state and federal records, as well as church documents and newspapers. As a result, Holz has succeeded in producing a complete chronicle of the demographic scene, as well as economic, political and bureaucratic policies towards the displaced Germans in the communities on the island Rügen. Published as part of the series "Forschungen zur Pommerschen Geschichte," this volume presents the history of the region in the postwar period as permeated by the presence of the expellees.

In the ambitious introductory chapter, Holz briefly tackles many thorny issues, including the different categories of the displaced and the diversity of their fates;

the effect of the expellees on the history of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as a large segment of the population; the historiography on expellees, both East and West; and theories on integration and the political approach taken in the SBZ/GDR. This introduction sets the tone for the chapters that follow, but is not indicative of the direction taken in this monograph. Holz's book is instead an exhaustive presentation of the local, church, state and federal policies towards the expellees in these RÄ¼gen communities, with case studies exploring the impact of these policies on several specific expellee subgroups.

In the chapters that follow, Holz examines the economic structure of the communities on RÄ¼gen (chapter 2); the different types of evacuations and displacement brought about by the war (chapter 3); the unsuccessful attempts made by many refugees to return in the first summer months following the end of the war (chapter 4); the "wild expulsions" in late summer 1945 and resulting administrative challenges (chapter 5); the conditions and capacity of the camps on RÄ¼gen (chapter 6); a case study involving the resort town Binz, where many refugees were housed in former luxury hotels (chapter 7); examples of economic and social welfare organizations (chapter 8); charity through the churches (chapters 9, 10); land tenure reform as a form of state assistance for many Germans, including some expellees (chapter 11); and, finally, some case studies, including expellee fishermen and expellees involved in small industries (chapter 12). In general, Holz focuses on social, economic and administrative issues, which he complements with a large number of graphs, tables and maps. Unsurprisingly, Holz's

examination of these matters is meticulously thorough.

This book is peppered with some interesting insights—not fully explored by Holz—worthy of further examination. For instance, he notes that those who fled as refugees and then tried to return home in early summer 1945, ended up experiencing the often harsher fate of expellees, arriving more disadvantaged than before and at a time when there was really nothing left to give them. He also notes that the displaced indigenous farmers who lost their land through the Soviet Zone land reform experienced a similar situation as expellees in the sense of being uprooted and losing their possessions and property. He raises the point that expellee pastors served in some communities as focal points for expellee identity and accordingly the government paid attention to them as potential sources of political discord. Further, with respect to the *Bodenreform*, Holz notes that displaced Germans who arrived early and did not attempt to leave were often more likely to meet with success with their applications for land; expellees who either applied or arrived late often found little land left. Holz mentions these results, as well as other insights worthy of further exploration.

This book is a careful, thoroughly researched, meticulous dissertation-turned-book that contains a tremendous amount of information about the social, economic, and administrative history of expellee policies on RÄ¼gen. As such, Holz's work is an important contribution to the growing historiography of expellees in the Soviet Zone/GDR.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

**Citation:** Amy Alrich. Review of Holz, Martin, *Evakuierte, Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene auf der Insel Rügen 1943-1961*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 2006.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11683>

Copyright © 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.org](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.org).