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Perpetrators, Victims, and Memory: The Holocaust in Ukraine, 1941-2008

By mid-1941, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic had the largest population of Jews in Europe. The addition of the eastern provinces of Poland in late 1939 as well as the seizure of sections of Romanian territory in June 1940 led to some 2.7 million Jews living within the borders of the newly enlarged republic. Some four years later, 1.6 million of these Jews had died at the hands of the Germans and their allies and auxiliaries. Unlike the majority of the Holocaust's victims who died in the industrialized mass murder of the death camps, the overwhelming bulk of Ukraine's Jews died in mass shootings during the initial stages of the war. This murder on a massive scale is examined from a multitude of perspectives in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, edited by Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower. The editors have assembled an impressive collection of international experts and, in conjunction with Indiana University Press and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, have advanced the existing state of the literature regarding occupation and genocide in Ukraine. Utilizing both broad overviews as well as case studies, the volume examines a wide range of issues. Some of the more important include German policy in the Soviet republic, the complicity of Romanians and Ukrainians in the murder of Ukrainian Jewry, and the ways in which the Holocaust has been erased from the collective memory of the Ukrainian nation-state that emerged from the rubble of the Soviet Union.

Dieter Pohl's opening chapter provides an overview of German military and civilian policies towards Ukrainian Jews. In his examination of military occupation practices, Pohl discusses the intersection of two different policies: economic exploitation of the occupied territories for Germany and its war effort, and the implementation of an "antisemitic and anti-Communist security policy of terror that required the murder of every person seen by the Germans to pose a potential threat" (p. 27). In order to ensure the first policy was carried out, the Germans planned on separating urban areas from the agricultural hinterland, keeping the surplus for themselves. Since some 85 percent of Ukrainian Jews lived in cities, it is clear that they would have been severely decimated even without a calculated plan to exterminate them root and branch. This indirect method of murdering Jews was complemented by a much more violent method based upon alleged security needs. Here, the Wehrmacht and the SS and its associated police units worked together, though it was the latter that drove the increasing tempo of mass murder. As Pohl makes clear, the frequent mass shootings (such as the 23,600 killed at Kamianets-Podilsky in late August 1941) took place under Wehrmacht rule of the conquered areas. In line with recent research, Pohl emphasizes the responsibility of the Order Police for carrying out the mass shootings in Ukraine. He notes that "the six police battalions [in Ukraine] ... killed considerably more Ukrainian Jews than Einsatzgruppe C and Einsatzgruppe D combined" (p. 40).

Pohl then examines the civilian administration's responsibility for the implementation of the "Final Solution" in Ukraine. While the newly established Reichskommissariat Ukraine (RKU) certainly continued the destruction of the Jewish community, they also attempted to maintain some sort of independence from the SS police forces in the area. This institutional conflict led the RKU to protect some Jewish workers during the final months of 1941; here, a pragmatic issue was used as a shield against the ideological cudgel of the SS. By spring 1942, however, the civilian administration had decided to exterminate the surviving Jewish population and urged the SS to finish the job. Pohl concludes that by early 1942, "the SS and police appear not as a separate center of power, but much more as an executor of RKU policy" (p. 59).

While Pohl looks at the upper echelons of the Wehrmacht, RKU administration and SS police forces, Wendy Lower investigates the actions of the county commissars for the General Commissariat Zhytomyr. Lower argues persuasively that the dual policies discussed by Pohl—economic exploitation and the implementation of ruthless security policies—created an "extremely unstable ruling apparatus that was in many ways inherently self-destructive" (p. 226). This fundamental problem, which plagued German occupation throughout the war, was only exacerbated by the men charged to rule the area. Lower scathingly describes these men as a "motley ensemble of middle-ranking bureaucrats, party hacks and marginalized officers of the Storm Troops (SA)" (p. 226). Of the twenty-five county commissars in the Zhytomyr district, thirteen fit into the category of "leftovers in the Nazi system" (p. 231), while the remaining twelve were graduates of an *Ordensburg*. Attending such an institution allowed individuals, such as one master baker who later became a certified teacher of racial hygiene, to ascend the Nazi hierarchy and become a county commissar who wielded wide powers over life and death in the East. Lower details how these commissars became intimately involved in the Holocaust in rather isolated rural areas through their cooperation with SS police forces and other organizations (such as Organization Todt) in the region. Such coordination between, at times, rival and competing institutions, constituted the county commissars crowning "achievement" in carrying out the Holocaust in Ukraine.

Andrej Angrick approaches German anti-Jewish policy from a new and intriguing perspective that implicates a wide number of German institutions and bureaucracies in the murder of Ukrainian Jews and challenges the

predominant view of the SS as a single-minded, monolithic organization. Angrick focuses on the development of Thoroughfare IV, the major supply route for German forces operating in Ukraine. While Organization Todt was given the initial responsibility for maintaining the road, the SS soon became involved in its upkeep and it used Jewish workers in a "calculated system of extermination" (p. 194) for this purpose during the opening months of Operation Barbarossa. Following the failure of the initial invasion, the German leadership, particularly Heinrich Himmler, placed more emphasis on Thoroughfare IV. Negotiations between the SS and Organization Todt led to a division-of-labor agreement between the two institutions in constructing the route: while the latter provided the technical know-how, the former supplied the labor and provided security. By 1942, a high percentage of such labor was comprised of Jews who had somehow survived the first sweeps of the Einsatzgruppen and Order Police. Forced labor on the road, however, was in itself a death sentence. Angrick details the fate of those forced to perform back-breaking work amidst disease and hunger. The majority of Jews who died working on the road were murdered by the Germans in a series of routine killings designed to weed out laborers no longer physically capable of labor. Angrick claims that these deaths, however, falling as they do outside of the mass shootings in the Soviet Union, point to an internal division within the SS. While Heydrich staked out his claim of overall responsibility for the "Final Solution" at the Wannsee Conference, his RSHA had little control over the construction of Thoroughfare IV. Here, intimates of Himmler, such as Hans-Adolf Prützmann, held the reins of power. Such a division within the SS suggests, according to Angrick, that the SS was not nearly as monolithic as it appears in the historiography and that personal encounters and relationships between Himmler and high-ranking SS officers in the East played an important role in jumpstarting various murder programs.

German institutions and individuals were the motor behind the murder of Ukrainian Jews; however, they received significant assistance from various national groups in the region. The largest state-level support came from Romania. Dennis Deletant's contribution examines Romanian state policy in Transnistria. Deletant convincingly details the evolution of Romanian policy as it developed in Bucharest. This course of action was not simply a case of Ian Victor Antonescu aping German policy in an effort to appease Berlin; rather, it was part of the Romanian leader's own attempt to create an ethnically homogenous empire. On July 3, 1941, Antonescu lec-

tured his staff at the Ministry of Internal Affairs: "We find ourselves at the broadest and most favorable moment for a complete ethnic unshackling, for a national revival and for the cleansing of our people of all those elements alien to its spirit" (cited on p. 161). Such thinking formed the basis for Romanian actions towards Jews in both the reacquired areas of Bukovina and Bessarabia as well as in Ukraine. Jews were deported from the former provinces into the latter and these deportations were carried out with the usual brutality that marked such forced population transfers during the Second World War; the shooting of stragglers and the sick and elderly were interwoven into the process. Deportations and executions were carried out by both the Romanian Army and the Gendarmerie as they drove the Jews towards camps of unimaginable suffering in Transnistria. In the summer of 1942, however, Antonescu reversed track. Not only did he oppose pressure from Berlin for the deportation of Jews from Romania proper to the death-camps, he also halted the deportation of Jews into Transnistria. Antonescu did not make such momentous decisions based on humanitarian considerations; as Deletant points out, pressure from the Allies and the war's changing fortunes were the most likely reasons for the shift in policy. Deletant also highlights the major difference between German and Romanian policy: while the Germans were determined to exterminate European Jewry and established an elaborate system to do so, Romania focused on ethnically cleansing its newfound empire, and the Jews who died during this process were primarily victims of callous neglect, administrative incompetence, and starvation.

Not only outsiders to the region murdered Jews; ethnic Ukrainians and Poles also participated in the Holocaust. Timothy Snyder provides a broad overview of the evolving relationship between Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians in western Volhynia from 1921 through the end of the war. In the years before the German invasion, Jews managed to survive relatively unmolested by first the Polish and later the Soviet authorities, as they seemed to be a lesser threat than Ukrainians were to the former and Poles to the latter. In fact, Snyder quotes a former governor of Volhynia who claimed that the Jews were "cut off from the people and the world" (p. 77) and lived in relative peace with their Catholic and Orthodox neighbors. Certainly the situation changed with the imposition of Soviet rule in late 1939, but this was not necessarily viewed as a negative by Volhynian Jews, as the alternative of Nazi rule appeared much worse. Snyder makes clear, however, that Jews were in no way over-represented within the new political hierarchy—only one

local Jew actually served on the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet—and while they had achieved equality with other national and religious groups, this status made them "legal equals in a system in which all were subject to deportation and terror" (p. 88).

The German invasion of 1941 considerably aggravated the situation for western Volhynian Jews. The speed of the German assault, however, paradoxically gave these Jews some breathing space as the switch to a policy of mass-murder only occurred after the Germans had advanced into central Ukraine. German rule quickly restructured the social hierarchy; Ukrainian nationalists, who had been harassed by both Polish and Soviet authorities, utilized their newfound status and power to persecute Jews, whom they incorrectly viewed as stooges of the previous regimes. While such attitudes constituted the predominant Ukrainian perspective towards Jews, Snyder does discuss Ukrainians who saved Jews from certain death—either by allowing them to join partisan units or by hiding them in their homes. The near total breakdown of authority in western Volhynia in 1943, as Soviet Ukrainian partisans, nationalist Ukrainian forces, Polish guerilla units, and German police units engaged in a multi-faceted dirty war that included ethnic cleansing, presented further challenges for Volhynian Jews. As Snyder makes clear, for those Jews who survived the German occupation and the subsequent Sovietization of Volhynia, their isolated and traditional communities were no more. The diverse, multi-cultural, multi-confessional society that had existed for hundreds of years became yet another victim of the war.

Frank Golczewski examines the question of Ukrainian complicity in more detail in his contribution. He provides a nuanced discussion of the relations between Ukrainians and Jews as well as Ukrainians and Germans in Galicia. In an attempt to explain why and to what degree Ukrainians participated in the murder of the Jews, Golczewski examines both "historical experiences over the centuries" and "contemporary events within the recent memory of the actors" (p. 115). He argues that despite temporary disturbances, relations between Ukrainians and Jews in Galicia were relatively amicable from the late sixteenth century up through the First World War. The crumbling of dynastic Europe and the birth of national states, as well the emergence of Bolshevism and the hardships caused by the Great Depression, however, led to a stridently nationalist Ukrainian movement determined to create its own ethnically homogenous state. Ukrainian perceptions of Jews in Galicia were especially aggravated following the

Soviet annexation in 1939. Golczewski argues that Jews suffered as much as ethnic Ukrainians during this period, but perceptions overwhelmed this reality and this turned nationalist movements solidly against Jews. The Germans exploited this nationalist feeling, especially in regards to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). While the OUN has shouldered the brunt of the blame for Ukrainian participation in the Holocaust, Golczewski argues that Ukrainians who joined German-sponsored units rarely did so out of nationalist feeling; rather, they were attempting to escape prisoner of war camps or deportation to Germany for forced labor. They were, in effect, trying to survive and make a living, and not waging an ideological war in the German sense. Nationalist partisan units, however, were largely led by the OUN and they did try to ethnically cleanse Galicia of both Jews and Poles. Golczewski concludes that "historical predispositions worked against a more human stand against the Holocaust" (p. 147). A bit more specificity on this point would help, as it would seem that short-term developments—from 1917 on—played a much larger role than those in the pre-World War I era.

Ethnic Germans, on the other hand, "made a particularly conspicuous and potent contribution to the effectiveness of the regional and county-level SS and police forces ... which were charged with the murder of Ukraine's Jews" (p. 250). Martin Dean examines a rather neglected aspect of the Holocaust in the occupied East by examining the actions of this group. Neither the Wehrmacht nor the RKU had enough manpower to effectively rule the area and both were forced to utilize native manpower to fill out their administrations. Ethnic Ukrainians were used to a large extent, but ethnic Germans were given the overwhelming majority of leadership positions at local levels of power. Within the Ukrainian militias established by the Germans, ethnic Germans occupied the bulk of the NCO ranks. They also served as the link between the occupiers and the civilian population through their service as translators. Dean then examines the motivations for ethnic Germans who became ensnared in the gears of destruction. He argues that negative experiences at the hands of the Bolsheviks during the 1930s were the most important factor in driving them into the arms of the Germans. As the war progressed, however, the "communal experience of complicity in the occupation" led to a much closer relationship between the two groups, one which eventually fused with Hitler granting German citizenship to ethnic Germans who served in either the Waffen-SS or the Wehrmacht (p. 263). Dean concludes that "double vic-

tim" identity (first Stalin, then Hitler) propagated by ethnic Germans in the postwar period has only served to overshadow their role as perpetrators in the Holocaust.

The issue of identity and memory is effectively examined by Omer Bartov's extremely interesting contribution on the region of Galicia and Karel Berkhoff's more focused examination of Dina Pronicheva, a survivor of the Babi Yar massacre. Drawing on his most recent book-length study, Bartov describes his travels through western Ukraine, which formed the historic province of Galicia. Once a thriving area of cultural diversity, a borderland where Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, and Jews lived together in relative peace, western Ukraine is now an ethnically homogenous area in which the memory of its former inhabitants is obscured and, at times, denied. While Bartov examines the development of memory in several cities, his examination of Lviv (Lwów/Lemberg) is symptomatic of his findings. Bartov notes that while certain aspects of the city's diversity are celebrated (such as the Armenian Cathedral, which had important national meaning to Poles), others are not. Here, he discusses the Golden Synagogue, built in the late sixteenth century. Destroyed by Germans in 1942, the synagogue's memory is kept alive only by a small plaque. The site of the building is now a garbage-strewn lot. No mention is made of the seven to ten thousand Jews murdered during the German occupation. In fact, Bartov only locates scattered remnants of Jewish life in the city—stars of David on the old Jewish Hospital—and no attempts to explain their historical significance. The most blatant attempt to create a more palatable Ukrainian history of the war years is found at the site of the former Janowska forced labor camp, where some two hundred thousand people—primarily Jews—were murdered during the war. Due to the efforts of a camp survivor, a memorial was placed outside of the gates; however, no mention is made of "Jews" on the inscription. Instead, "Nazi-genocide victims" are remembered (p. 324). A plaque later added to the memorial only further obfuscates the issue by mentioning only "victims." As Bartov notes, "this text allows the local population to view the victims of the camp as 'belonging' to them rather than a category of people whose history has been largely erased from public and collective memory and whose presence in the region has been almost entirely eliminated" (p. 324). This, according to Bartov, is a conscious attempt by Ukraine to cultivate a Ukrainian identity built upon their suffering during both the Second World War and under communist rule. Such a narrative of suffering allows for no other victims. The parallels to the development of a German

identity based on suffering and victimization during the 1950s and early 1960s are quite striking. Any parallel ends, however, as the men who committed the majority of the crimes against Jews in Ukraine—members of the OUN—are now celebrated as the founding fathers of the Ukrainian state. While German identity in the late twentieth century incorporated guilt for the actions of the Third Reich, Ukrainian identity is based upon a narrative of Ukrainian victimization that leaves no room for Ukrainians as perpetrators.

Berkhoff examines the many lives of Dina Pronicheva's story of the Babi Yar massacre. Pronicheva described her experiences twelve times to a variety of people and institutions. Berkhoff compares the twelve narratives in an attempt to discern just how reliable each account is and which is the most useful for a historian in attempting to recreate the events of the massacre. He concludes that two of these testimonies—one given to Soviet investigators in 1946 and a later one, given to a German court at the trial of members of Sonderkommando 4a in 1968—provide the most accurate recounting of events. Of course, the most well-known of Pronicheva's narratives is found in Anatolii Kuznetsov's historical novel *Babi Yar*, first published in installments in the Soviet Union in 1966, but not receiving its definitive treatment until the 1970s, following Kuznetsov's emigration to the United Kingdom in 1969. Berkhoff, however, effectively challenges the historical usefulness of Kuznetsov's version, which appears to combine of two different testimonies. Such a mixing of source material renders this version problematic for historians. Based on his painstaking, side-by-side comparison of these twelve narratives, Berkhoff concludes that despite a few minor inaccuracies, Pronicheva's testimonies are remarkably consistent and her detailed description of Babi Yar provides historians with a gateway to understanding such horrific events.

Recent research into the Holocaust in Ukraine has allowed for a much more definitive examination of the total numbers of Jews murdered by the Germans and their helpers. Alexander Kruglov, who has published extensively in Ukrainian on this topic, summarizes recent research in his contribution to the volume. Kruglov pro-

vides both a chronological as well as a regional approach to this issue. Extremely useful charts detail Jewish deaths at the Soviet *oblast* level as well as by the month (for 1941) and the year (for 1942-43). Such a detailed breakdown yields very interesting information. For example, while the Germans murdered some 1.6 million Jews in Ukraine, this terror fell unevenly across the region. In Ternopil *oblast*, 97 percent of the 136,000 Jews living there in 1939 were killed during the war; in contrast, only 9.1 percent of the nearly 137,000 Jews living in Kharkiv *oblast* died during the Holocaust (p. 284). Such an approach highlights regional disparity of German policies on Ukraine: western areas suffered far higher death rates due to both the Germans' rapid seizure of these areas, which forestalled any attempts at evacuation, and a radical Ukrainian nationalist movement that only fell under Soviet power following the annexation of eastern Poland in 1939 and therefore had deep enough roots in society to survive Sovietization. Kruglov also presents some truly staggering numbers: during the last six months of 1941, Germany and its allies murdered 85,000 Jews per month or, even more startling, 2,600 per day. This number decreased to just over 2,000 a day in 1942 to 400 a day during 1943. Kruglov's and Berkhoff's chapters neatly complement one another, as Pronicheva's story puts a human face on the somewhat sterile statistics.

In sum, this is an excellent volume that approaches the Holocaust in Ukraine from a variety of angles. One quibble with the volume is that while all of the areas discussed in the book are within present Ukrainian borders, during the war years, they were ruled by various states and governments with differing historical traditions. This is certainly not a major problem and the editors effectively address it in their introduction, but it does add another layer to the Holocaust in Ukraine, one not present in similar examinations of the Holocaust in France or Denmark, for example. On the other hand, the volume's attempt to grapple with the various ethnic and national groups as well as sovereign states involved in both carrying out the murder of Ukraine's Jews and the creation and erasure of memory for such horrific events highlights the complexity of the "Final Solution" in Ukraine.

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