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Anton Weiss-Wendt. *Murder without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009. 476 S. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-3228-3.

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Estonia's Holocaust: Ideological or Pragmatic Murder?

During the past two decades, Holocaust research has focused on the killing fields of central and eastern Europe, with Poland, Yugoslavia, and the various regions of the Soviet Union receiving the bulk of the attention. In comparison, the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and especially Estonia have been relatively neglected, particularly in English-language literature. Anton Weiss-Wendt addresses this lacuna with an impressively detailed study of the Holocaust on Estonian soil. While Estonia's miniscule Jewish population–fewer than a thousand by the time of German arrival in 1941–certainly differentiates it from the eastern European norm, the relatively small number of victims allows Weiss-Wendt to examine their fates on an individual basis, providing a more intimate examination of those murdered than generally found in the literature.

The question of Estonian ideological commitment to the Holocaust is one of the primary issues investigated by the author and it proves to be one of the more contentious aspects of the book. Weiss-Wendt begins by examining the development of the independent Estonian state during the interwar period. A relatively ethnically homogenous nation, its largest ethnic minority was the Baltic Germans, who became the most troublesome minority for the Estonian state, especially after the 1919 Land Reform destroyed the power of the Baltic German landlords by redistributing the land to Estonian peasants. In contrast to its awareness of this vocal minority, the Estonian population generally regarded the Jews in Estonia–numbering only 4,434 in 1934–with indifference. Weiss-Wendt describes relations between the two groups as "friendly yet superficial" (p. 7) and argues that Estonian Jews were in many ways isolated from mainstream culture and society. Antisemitism, which became such a powerful ideology throughout central and eastern Europe during the interwar period, never gained much traction in Estonia. Even the radical Right refrained from following Nazi racial ideas; here, resurgent Estonian nationalism saw Baltic Germans–not Jews–as the primary threat to the state and thus distanced itself from Nazism and its ideological tenets.

The turning point in Estonian attitudes towards Jews appears to have come with the Soviet occupation of the state in 1940. According to Weiss-Wendt, Estonia's meek response to the Red Army's advance led to a demoralized and humiliated population, one further unsettled by the deportation on June 14-15, 1941, of over 10,000 people to the interior of the Soviet Union. Included in this deportation were 415 Jews, which as Weiss-Wendt notes, constituted some 10 percent of the state's Jewish population. Despite having suffered under Soviet rule in a similar fashion to ethnic Estonians, Jews nonetheless were linked to Soviet terror in "Estonian collective memory" (p. 51). The population believed that special Soviet shock battalions were most responsible for implementing Soviet terror and that Jews were disproportionately represented in these formations. He also states that "the perceived threat of a Russo-Jewish conspiracy stemmed

from the popular belief that held Jews as quintessential Communists" (p. 50). Despite making such claims, he then paradoxically argues that "there were simply not enough Jewish Communists in Estonia to sustain the Judeo-Bolshevik myth" (p. 56).

This somewhat contradictory approach to the issue of Estonian motivations for murdering Jews mars Weiss-Wendt's otherwise detailed and penetrating examination of native police and their participation in the Holocaust. He has utilized the existing police files of some four hundred investigations undertaken against the fewer than a thousand Jews still remaining in the country during the German occupation. On the basis of these files, Weiss-Wendt provides an extraordinary look at the ways in which cases against individual Jews were constructed. At the core of these prosecutions was what the author describes as "a dispute regarding Jews' allegiance to the Estonian state" (p. 158). In other words, the police were investigating the links between Jews and communists during the Soviet occupation. He further notes that "at the bottom of all accusations was the belief that the Jews had placed themselves in opposition to the Estonian state and the Estonian people" (p. 163). If it was impossible to determine whether Jews had actually worked with Soviet power against the Estonian state, then "Jewish origin automatically became a criminal offense" (p. 163). On each of these four hundred cases, either "communist suspect" or "accused of subversive activities" was stamped on the file. Weiss-Wendt argues that "only infrequently" was the word Jewish added, which demonstrated that "Estonians went first and foremost after Communists, real and imaginary" (p. 174). But if every Jew in Estonia was targeted and condemned to death for working for Soviet power, then it seems somewhat disingenuous to argue that no ideological agenda directed particularly at Jews lay behind the action. To me, at least, an evaluation of the evidence presented by the author seems to indicate that the pernicious idea of "Judeo-Bolshevism" took root in Estonian society to some degree, especially among police organs and nationalist paramilitary units.

Weiss-Wendt offers a different motivation for Estonians' participation in the Holocaust: a quest to prove their worth to Germany with an eye on their position in the future National Socialist order. The relationship between the Third Reich and Estonia had been close since the 1930s. Germany's desire for the shale oil deposits of the Baltic led to such close economic ties that by 1939, the Estonian economy was all but dependent on Germany's. In addition to these economic connections, each country viewed the other as a possible partner; from Tallinn's perspective, Germany offered security against the reimposition of Bolshevism, while many racial theorists in Berlin viewed the Estonians as the most racially developed group in eastern Europe. The combination of these factors–as well as a local German leadership, unusually attuned to the national Estonian psyche, that did its best to placate the locals–led to a strong relationship between the two states during the war. As Weiss-Wendt notes, "Estonia was probably the only country in occupied Eastern Europe without armed anti-German resistance" (p. 74).

The desire to ensure an independent position in Nazi-dominated Europe led Estonians not only to acquiesce to German rule, but also to participate willingly in the Holocaust. Since the eradication of European Jewry was one of the Reich's overriding war aims, Estonian cooperation would only serve to further ingratiate them with Germany. Linking this willingness to the notion of destroying communism strengthened Estonian national identity by "wip[ing] away the shame and humiliation caused by the Soviet takeover of 1940" (p. 337). The overriding desire to regain the short-lived sovereignty of the interwar period led Estonians to "sacrifice not only their own lives but also the lives of others" (p. 339). In fact, they became "eager collaborators," as this was the only way to restore an independent state and their national pride (p. 343). While such a line of argumentation provides some important insight into Estonia's role in the Holocaust, it still seems to complement the idea that Estonians did indeed subscribe to the idea of a Judeo-Bolshevik threat.

While one can dispute some of Weiss-Wendt's interpretations, the tremendous amount of archival research–sixteen archives in six different countries–allows him to present a very detailed narrative of the Holocaust in Estonia while at the same time putting it into the context of the experiences of other Baltic states. His discussion of the Estonian police highlights the independence and doggedness of this group in their attempts to make Estonia *judenfrei*. Once this "goal" was fulfilled, however, the murder of Jews within Estonia did not stop. Transports of Jews from Czechoslovakia and Germany were sent to camps in Estonia. There, Estonian guards liquidated virtually all of the arriving Jews. Their co-religionists from Latvia and especially Lithuania also died in Estonian camps. According to Weiss-Wendt, 8,614 Jews died in Estonian territory during the war. Even after the primary killing campaigns ended, Jews still suffered there as their labor was exploited in various labor camps, with the most important being linked to the shale oil deposits so desperately needed by the Germans, especially once the

Romanian oil fields were lost to the Reich. In these sections of the work, the author's focus on individuals truly pays dividends as he breathes life into both victims and perpetrators, fully exploring how people experienced the Holocaust at the lowest levels.

Murder without Hatred is without question the most detailed study available in English on the German occupation of Estonia and the latter's collaboration in the Holocaust. Weiss-Wendt has done yeoman labor in cataloguing the various labor camps that sprung up throughout Estonia as well as by putting a human face on the dry statistics that tend to camouflage the brutality and violence of the Holocaust. And one cannot overlook that he has mined archives throughout the Baltic region whose languages have made such materials generally inaccessible to a Western audience. Though his interpretations are in some cases open to question, Weiss-Wendt has certainly advanced the state of the literature regarding Estonia's experiences during the Second World War and made a real contribution to Holocaust historiography as a whole.