



**Andrew Handler.** *A Man for All Connections: Raoul Wallenberg and the Hungarian State Apparatus, 1944-1945.* Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996. xiv + 123 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-95214-3.



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## Wallenberg in Hungary

The purpose of this short study (only 116 pages of text and footnotes) is to provide the Hungarian political context for the humanitarian mission of Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest in the last months of World War II. Andrew Handler contends that the previous studies of Wallenberg have created “misleading images and perceptions” and have led to “inaccurate interpretations and conclusions” (p. x). He emphasizes the key role of various representatives of the Hungarian state apparatus as collaborators, to a greater or lesser degree, with Wallenberg, and asserts that without the covert aid of such individuals Wallenberg’s efforts would have had little or no success.

The first four of the five chapters of the book are devoted to a sketch of the Hungarian regime between the wars and political developments during World War II. The author, himself a Hungarian survivor of the Holocaust, emphasizes the relatively favorable treatment of Jews in Hungary compared to wartime conditions elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe. His treatment of the material in this section of the book is workmanlike, but he has little new to say and in effect he merely summarizes the findings of such scholars as Randolph Braham

and Gyorgy Ranki. However, there are some major omissions in the secondary sources Handler has consulted. He makes very little use of the pioneering work of C.A. Macartney, and seems unaware of the important books of Mario Fenyo on Hungary in World War II and Margit Szollosi-Janze on the Arrow Cross Movement.[1] My own study of Admiral Horthy and his regime [2] apparently appeared too late for Handler to use. Because the author has not made a systematic study of the secondary literature, his narrative lacks comprehensiveness and his interpretations are at times problematical.

The fifth chapter, in which Handler focuses more directly on the activities of Wallenberg, contains more useful and interesting material. Here he examines the complex story of how Wallenberg bargained and negotiated with representatives of the Arrow Cross regime of Ferenc Szalasi. Making good use of recently published memoirs and the records of the trials of Szalasi and his colleagues in 1946, Handler throws new light particularly on the role played by the Foreign Minister, Gabor Kemeny; and by a journalist, Pal Szalai. Yet here too the author’s account is far from comprehensive, and neither here, nor in

a one-page conclusion, does he convincingly argue the point that Wallenberg could not have succeeded without the assistance of these individuals. Given the title of the book, surprisingly little attention is paid to the actual activities of Wallenberg in Budapest. Moreover, the sources Handler employs to construct his narrative in this chapter are quite narrow in scope. He relies almost exclusively on Jeno Levai's study of Wallenberg, which was published in 1948.[3] There is considerable merit to Handler's argument that Levai's book is an important source that has been overlooked by those who have written about Wallenberg, most of whom could not read Hungarian. Yet many of the dozens of books on Wallenberg in the last two decades contain much useful information, some from Swedish archives. Handler simply ignores these works, as well as an important article by Eva Szabo, a Hungarian historian, that deals specifically with the Hungarian context of Wallenberg's mission.[4]

Andrew Handler is the author of a number of valuable books on aspects of the history of the Jews in modern Hungary, including an important study of Gyozo Istoczy, the founder of modern Hungarian anti-Semitism.[5] The book under review, however, is a disappointment. It is poorly edited (for example, in chapter four the footnotes are not synchronized with the text) and ultimately adds little to our understanding of the topic. The important material could have been condensed into a journal article. Those interested in the mysteries surrounding Wallenberg's mission in Budapest would do better to turn to a book recently published in Hungary [6], where it is suggested that Wallenberg was working closely with certain Hungarian military officers active in the anti-Nazi resistance. These officers apparently persuaded Wallenberg to accept for safekeeping a group of resistance records, including material on the Katyn Forest massacre provided by Polish officers hiding in Hungary. The Swedish Embassy safe in which Wallenberg deposited these docu-

ments was later opened by the Russians, and it is possible that the discovery of such sensitive material led to Wallenberg's arrest and abduction to the Soviet Union.

[1] Mario Fenyo, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary. German-Hungarian Relations, 1941-1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Margit Szollosi-Janze, *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1989).

[2] Thomas Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral on Horseback. Miklos Horthy, 1919-1944* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1994).

[3] Jeno Levai, *Raoul Wallenberg regenyese elete, hos kuzdelmei, rejtelyes eltunesenek titka* (Budapest: Magyar Teka, 1948).

[4] Gilbert Joseph, *Mission sans retour. L'affaire Wallenberg* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1982); Per Anger, *With Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1981); Eva Szabo, "A magyarorszagi sved mento-akcio tortenetehez (1944)," *Tortenelmi Szemle*, 30 (1987-88), 379-94.

[5] Andrew Handler, *An Early Blueprint for Zionism: Gyozo Istoczy's Political Anti-semitism* (Boulder: New York: East European Monographs; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1989). East European Monographs, No. 261.

[6] Vilmos Bondor, *A Miko-rejtely. Miko Zoltan es Raoul Wallenberg kapcsolata a magyar ellenallasban, 1944-45* (Budapest: Puski, 1996).

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