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Raz Segal. *Genocide in the Carpathians: War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence, 1914–1945.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 232 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-9666-8.

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R. Segal: Genocide in the Carpathians

âGenocide in the Carpathiansâ, the rather brief but densely argued first monograph of Raz Segal, draws on the correspondence and reports of Hungarian state authorities, contemporary personal documents as well as postwar testimonies and memoirs to account for the range of mass violence planned and implemented in Subcarpathian Rusâ during WWII. In accordance with innovative recent studies on countries allied to Nazi Germany by the likes of Vladimir Solonari, Holly Case or Alexander Korb, Segalâs book presents an integrated approach to occupation policies, interethnic relations, anti-Jewish attitudes, and mass violence. The book offers an integrated history also in the sense that it studies mass violence both as it was viewed by the authorities and as it was experienced by the inhabitants of Subcarpathian Rusâ.

Whereas chapters one through three, the first half of the book, trace how common feelings of a shared society gave way to hostility and conflict in the region before WWII, chapters four and five explore the experiences of and evolving relations between Jews and their Carpatho-Ruthenian neighbors as they both faced a violent Hungarian state after 1938â39. The book begins by explaining that Subcarpathian Rusâ remained largely isolated and stagnant well into the twentieth century. Segalâs main motivation behind sketching the years prior to 1914 seems to be to clarify the factors which may account for the substantial common ground that existed between Jews and Carpatho-Ruthenians and the corresponding absence of significant local anti-Semitism.

Referring to developments during WWI surprisingly briefly, the book continues by arguing that the âsocial breakdownâ in Subcarpathian Rusâ began when a new state building project extended to the region from Prague. The author shows how, as new national and ethnic horizons gained more traction among the majority population in the interwar years, the pursuit of a Jewish âallianceâ with the Czechoslovak regime resulted in a new rift. Segal ultimately presents the rise of anti-Jewish resentment, as opposed to hatred, among Carpatho-Ruthenians as derived from a sense of deservingness followed by anger due to feelings of deprivation and injustice (for which Jews were perceived as responsible). Chapter three of the book also promises to probe the meanings Carpatho-Ruthenians attached to âUkrainianismâ further, but it is ultimately rather a key shortcoming of the authorâs otherwise impressive research in five languages which becomes palpable here: he has not had access to sources in the language of the majority of local inhabitants. More generally, the book may be explicitly interested in the meanings Jews and Carpatho-Ruthenians attached to identities, social encounters and shared memories as they tried to make sense of political and social changes, but it rarely gives voice to the historical actors.

The second half of âGenocide in the Carpathiansâ is directly concerned with the history of mass violence shortly before and during WWII. While focusing on the social and political dynamics of a multiethnic and multireligious borderland, these two chapters clearly aim to challenge mainstream interpretations of the Holocaust in

Hungary. On their pages, Segal first shows how âGerman war plans, the eventual helplessness of Czech authorities to hold on to the region, Hungarian irredentism and colonialism, and unfulfilled dreams of Ukrainophiles brought about the first instances of ethnic violence in Subcarpathian Rusâ in 1938â39, initially and on a smaller scale by Ukrainian nationalists against Jews and then, more lethally, by the Hungarian occupiers against Carpatho-Ruthenians (p. 63). The author continues by arguing how images of disloyalty and foreignness fed animosities against Jews, Roma, and Carpatho-Ruthenians during the period of Hungarian âre-annexationâ, and that special âmoments of opportunityâ brought multilayered attacks targeting all three groups, even if in various ways and to varying degrees.

Segal attaches particular importance to the fact that as early as the summer 1941, the goal of the Hungarian authorities was to deport as many Jews from Subcarpathian Rusâ as possible. As he explains, about one-fifth of the local Jewish population was indeed deported from the region years prior to the main phase of the Holocaust in Hungary, with most of them soon being murdered. The urgency with which Hungarian officials acted upon the German invasion of 1944 is equally crucial for the authorâs argument: it is taken as evidence that they understood their actions âas continuous with the anti-Jewish campaign in the period before 1944â (p. 93). One of Segalâs key conclusions regarding the destruction of local Jewish communities is thus that the genocidal process was rooted primarily in Hungarian contexts and circumstances. His observations on the eminent responsibility of Hungarian authorities for the genocidal process are largely convincing, but they actually amount to a less original conclusion than the author makes it sound.

More problematically, the bookâs repeated insistence on the âwide consensusâ such measures of persecution enjoyed among agents of the Hungarian state paint these authorities as all too homogeneous; his insistence ultimately leaves Segal too little room for the discussion of individual agency, including the concrete deeds of actual perpetrators. As a more minor point of criticism, it may be brought up that the authorâs dichotomy between (German) âNazi ideologyâ and âHungarian ethnonationalismâ is not fully apt either. After all, a key transnational process a historian of the period may want to trace is precisely how Hungarian ethnonationalism came to be impacted by Nazi ideas in international circulation.

Next to focusing on Hungarian authorities in a rather generalized manner, chapters four and five restore agency to those usually called bystanders to argue that the âschismâ, which had already begun to separate Carpatho-Ruthenians from Jews in the interwar years, turned into full-fledged enmity during WWII. In his words, âthe persecution that descended on Carpatho-Ruthenians cemented their choice to turn away from their Jewish neighborsâ (p. 85). As the chapters show, their vast majority may have refused to cooperate with Hungarian and German authorities, but due to their new fears enhanced by resentment, they lent little help to their Jewish neighbors and in effect âsanctionedâ the mass violence against them.

Raz Segal presents a largely convincing case when he asserts that anti-Jewish ideas, positions, and policies intermingled with other interests and evolved into actions in the pursuit of multiple goals. Its focus on the interrelated nature of Hungarian mass violence against various groups in a borderland is one of the most important and original aspects of the monograph â even if a special emphasis on violence in the borderlands might be even more apt in the case of Romania or Bulgaria than that of Hungary (where an opposition between borderlands and core territories can no longer be posited for 1944). On a similarly critical note, âGenocide in the Carpathiansâ may in its conclusion plead for âan understanding of the history of Hungary during World War II *as a whole*â (p. 119), but its arguments remains largely confined to a highly specific region.

Next to its more concrete reconceptualization of the case of Hungary based on suggestive, though only partially convincing evidence from an underexplored region, reading âGenocide in the Carpathiansâ has several major analytical gains. It elaborates convincing critiques of key concepts of its broader field such as antisemitism, collaboration, or bystanders. Instead of employing such imprecise or even misleading terms, Raz Segal emphasizes, not uncontroversially, the colonial argument to grasp the internal radicalization of a Nazi ally while also offering insights into the benefits of a new history of emotions. These two characteristics in particular make âGenocide in the Carpathiansâ into a thought-provoking monograph, which opens highly promising perspectives â and also leaves substantial agendas for future research.

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