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Callum MacDonald, Jan Kaplan. *Prague in the Shadow of the Swastika: A History of the German Occupation, 1939-1945.* Vienna: WUV UniversitÖ¤tsverlag, 2001. 215 pp. EUR 30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-85114-651-6.

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Images of Occupation: Wartime Prague in Pictures

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Early in the morning of 15 March 1939, a half year before the outbreak of the Second World War, German troops marched into Prague. Not until 9 May 1945, the day after the Allies declared victory, did the Red Army reach the once-and-future Czechoslovak capital, finally bringing the Nazi occupation to a close. Conquered before the war began, liberated after it ended, the city endured more than six years of Nazi rule. In *Prague in the Shadow of the Swastika* Jan Kaplan and Callum MacDonald have created a riveting photographic montage of those 2,248 days.[1]

Despite the interminable Nazi occupation, Prague escaped the devastation suffered by many other Central European cities. As scholars and World War Two enthusiasts well know, the Czechs did not offer armed resistance to the Germans either in March 1939 or throughout most of the subsequent years. Accordingly, *Prague in the Shadow of the Swastika* presents few images of atavistic violence that typify most Second World War photographic collections. The absence of vivid scenes of death, however, does not prevent the reader from perceiving the humiliation that Czechs felt on a daily basis as they confronted their defeat and helplessness. >From bilingual signs, where German type stood in first position, to Nazi flags draped over Czech national symbols, the subjugated state of the once proud city is manifest throughout the pages of the collection.

For those unfamiliar with the history of the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the text provides a very good narrative to accompany the photographs. But for scholars of the period there is little new here. For greater detail and analysis, interested readers may wish to consult classics by Detlev Brandes, Vojtech Mastny, and the recently published compendium on *Czech Fascism* by Tomas Pasak.[2] Of course, the primary purpose of the book is not to offer a new interpretation of the Nazi occupation, but to help the reader to visualize it. And, over seven fascinating chapters, photographs convey what text (and this review) surely cannot.

Chapter 1, "Hitler over Prague," begins with the infamous photograph of the F=hrer gazing over the city from a window of the Castle (p. 17). The *Hrad,* seat of Bohemian kings, Holy Roman emperors and Czechoslovak presidents, forms the backdrop for more than a dozen dramatic photographs scattered throughout the book.

One striking example of the New Order is seen in the photo of German soldiers jackbooting through the main Castle gates below baroque statues of two giants (pp. 14-15). Even today the grotesque figures are disturbing, but in this context the giants' glistening daggers poignantly evoke Germany's murder of the Czechoslovak state. A number of similar photographs feature *Wehrmacht* soldiers, SS officers, and SA men marching, patrolling, and even relaxing on Charles Bridge or the Vltava quay below the omnipresent Castle. Clearly, these camera shots were as popular with the Germans then as they are with tourists today.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4, "The New Masters," "SS City" and the "Palace of Death," take the reader from the beginning of the war in September 1939 to the outbreak of the Prague Uprising in early May 1945. Here we see the Nazis, their Czech collaborators, and those who resisted them. To its credit, *Prague in the Shadow of the Swastika* does not shrink from candid discussion of collaboration. For example, the authors stress the role that "the army of Czech informers" played in the maintenance of Nazi subjugation. Challenging traditional myths of a united Czech nation, the authors claim, "The Gestapo was never short of accusations" (p. 55).

Denunciation, however, is an intrinsically secretive act that leaves few images behind. The photographs accompanying the text on Czech collaboration are actually of Germans: Hitler Youth marching in shorts outside Czernin Palace, *Wehrmacht* soldiers gathering in front of the Old Town Hall, and SS officers elegantly dining on a restaurant terrace. Perhaps the snowbound *Winterhilfe* rally on Old Town Square catches Czechs in a moment of collaboration, but the photograph offers only a faceless crowd (pp. 56-59).

The underground also furnished few lasting images, mainly because resistance is also secretive. German proscriptive proclamations provide a negative proof of passive resistance, for example, in the posted warnings that listening to foreign radio was punishable by death (p. 55). The volume's best example of the undercurrent of opposition can be found in a trailer shown in Prague movie theaters: "We kindly request the audience to refrain from loud comments during the newsreel" (p. 42).

The exception to the absence of violent resistance was, of course, the 1942 assassination of SS chieftain Reinhard Heydrich, carried out by Czechoslovak parachutists sent from abroad. Thanks to MacDonald's previous publication on the subject, the text on this topic is the best in the book.[3] A Gestapo photograph of the Nazi leader's car, with a gaping hole in its side, and a blurry shot of the corpses of Heydrich's assassins convey the drama and terror of the historical moment (pp. 78, 82). But for the actual assassination, the book is forced to rely on a reenactment filmed long after the fact (p. 77). In a volume full of arresting images, the passages on collaboration and resistance illustrate the limits of photography.

The book is not replete with gruesome images of mass murders or death camps, but the authors do not ignore the Holocaust. In the excellent fifth chapter, "The Prague Jews," the reader witnesses the demonization, exclusion, expropriation, and finally deportation of the Jews from the Bohemian capital. Ominous images foreshadow the horror that was to come: we see Jews desperately seeking refuge in the British Embassy, carts laden with their former possessions, and signs indicating that an air-raid shelter was only for "Aryans"–a category that ambiguously included Czech gentiles (pp. 114-19).

For those familiar with the archetypal images of countless personal effects sorted by type, the chapter offers a new variation on the theme: in this case we confront not the final seizure of glasses and shoes on the threshold of the gas chambers, but the earlier and far more lucrative expropriation of violas, pianos, and tea and coffee cups from Jews' homes. Along with photos of such quotidian possessions, there are images of "confiscated and catalogued" torahs, the budding collections of the Nazi "Museum of the Extinct Race" planned for *judenrein* Prague (pp. 124-25). Only the stark winter shot of the rails leading out from the Prague-Bubny train station, from whence the city's Jews were deported, darkly hints at what remains unseen, the Final Solution (p. 130).

The sixth chapter, "Occupational Hazards," presents a visually arresting look at everyday existence in occupied Prague. Perhaps the most permanent wartime change was vehicular: earlier in the volume two posters urge, "As of 26 March [1939] we'll drive on the right" and "In Prague too one drives on the Right!" (pp. 35-36). In a display of fascism's power to reorder the ordinary, the Nazis successfully forced Czechs overnight to stop driving on the left side of the road. In chapter 6 those interested in material culture will find automobile and cigarette advertisements along with incongruously placed calls for conservation and representative ration cards.

Cultural life did not come to an end during the war, as the eye-catching magazine covers of Adina Mandlova and other Czech movie stars indicate. But the Germans increasingly harnessed the Czech film industry for their

own ends. To illustrate this point, the volume presents uniformed Nazi officials as they "inspect" the Barrandov studios (p. 149). Like many others, this photograph is clearly staged, an important aspect of the collection that the authors do not directly address. The absence of photo credits, beyond a brief endnote that the images "come from the Kaplan/MacDonald Archive and private collections" (p. 209), makes it difficult to assess the provenance and historical value of individual photographs.

The penultimate chapter, "The Hour Has Come," covers the May 1945 Prague Uprising and the city's double liberation, first–and ironically–by the collaborationist Russian Vlasov Army, and only thereafter by the celebrated Red Army. Readers familiar with the city's magnificent Old Town Hall can contrast their memories of today's remnant with photographs of the building before and after the Nazis set it on fire (pp. 56, 178-79). The chapter also portrays the beginnings of the expulsion of the Germans. In one striking photograph German refugees carry their meager possessions away while in the background Prague's Jan Hus statue, then as today a Czech national symbol, reigns supreme over Old Town Square (p. 191).

The final chapter, "Aftermath," returns us immediately to the familiar scene of the Castle's gates, only there are no longer any German troops to be seen. The site so favored by Nazi photographers now hosts President Edvard Benes's triumphant return to power. In contrast to the demonic images that hovered above the *Wehrmacht* soldiers, the statues, now viewed from a distance, are muted and unthreatening (pp. 196-97).

The collection ends with a contemporary book cover that portrays a mounted Soviet soldier gazing away from the viewer as his horse drinks from the Vltava River. With the liberation of Prague, the endless, hard-fought journey from the gates of Moscow is complete and he and his weary mount can now finally rest. The title, in block letters above, promises, "For all eternity" [Na vecne casy] (p. 207). The authors' inclusion of this picture is clearly meant to be ironic–in retrospect the cover presages the imminent Communist takeover. But today the not-so-hidden message seems dated, too heavily steeped in Cold War rhetoric and, thus, out of place in a post-1989 publication. After all, as we now thankfully know, neither the Nazis nor the Soviets were "for all eternity."

Readers may also be interested in another impressive photographic collection that Jan Kaplan has compiled (together with Krystyna Nosarzewska). Entitled *Prague: The Turbulent Century*,[4] the volume masterfully chronicles the evolution of Bohemia's capital from its Habsburg days to the collapse of communist rule and beyond. Following an introduction in English, German, and French, the first chapter, "Under the Double Eagle," presents a virtual tour of fin-de-siecle Prague. Staid portraits of the imperial family are contrasted with bourgeois entertainment (films, skating, and tourism), modern art (cubism, art noveau, and advertisements) and technological transformation (planes, trams, and automobiles). The stunning picture of the Charles Bridge after the flood of 1890 rent several holes through it is especially poignant today after the floods of August 2002.

Chapter 2, "The Reign of the Czech Lion," offers up the First Czechoslovak Republic in all its glory and despair, from the rejoicing crowds of autumn 1918 to the angry mobs of autumn 1938. In this chapter the emphasis is squarely on culture. A seasonal pictorial takes the reader from winter through autumn using covers from the women's magazine *Eva* and other photos to illustrate fashion and custom. No look at interwar Czechoslovakia would be complete without the Bat'a shoe company–in one advertisement the glamorous Czech actress Lida Baarova, looking uncharacteristically dowdy, promotes a candy-cane-colored sandal for the masses. Posing alluringly in a bathtub awash in suds, Baarova reappears in the next chapter, only now the authors note her prewar affair with Nazi leader Joseph Goebbels. In this chapter, familiarly named "Under the Swastika," *The Turbulent Century* presents a precis of the images we can find in *Prague in the Shadow of the Swastika*.

The final chapter, "In the Shadow of the Red Star," has a wonderful montage of the infamous Prague Stalin monument, which for a brief period (1956-1962) was the largest statue of the Generalissimo in the world. There is a priceless shot of five Barrandov studio employees posing for the sculptor. Behind a Stalin impersonator stand an industrial worker, a peasant woman, an office employee, and a soldier–a sort of socialist realist Village People. A spread of the monument in all its glory is followed on the next page by an image of its explosion and, finally, a photograph of the Michael Jackson statue (with skateboarders in the foreground) that briefly filled the empty spot in 1996. Whereas *Prague in the Shadow of the Swastika* will appeal mainly to Second World War enthusiasts and specialists, *Prague: The Turbulent Century* truly has something for everyone interested in the region.

Even after one has set these books aside, numerous photographs remain vivid to the eye. The collections convey concepts and emotions that cannot be captured in

simple prose. As such, the two volumes form an excellent accompaniment to more traditional histories of the city. Both *Prague in the Shadow of the Swastika* and *Prague: The Turbulent Century* belong on the shelves (and, in the latter case, the coffee tables) of scholars and the interested public alike.

Notes

[1]. Strangely, this new edition makes no mention of two earlier editions, one in Czech, the other in English, both published in 1995. The Czech version carries a slightly different subtitle, "The Truth about the German Occupation," that suggests a sensationalism thankfully lacking in the text. Callum MacDonald and Jan Kaplan, *Prague in the Shadow of the Swastika: A History of the German Occupation, 1939-1945* (London: Quartet Books, 1995); Callum MacDonald and Jan Kaplan, *Praha ve stinu hakoveho krize: Pravda o nemecke okupaci, 1939-1945*, trans. by Jan Brazda (Prague: Melantrich, 1995).

[2]. Detlev Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter deutschem Protektorat: Besatzungpolitik, Kollaboration und Widerstand im Protektorat B=hmen und M=hren*, vols. 1 and 2 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1969 and 1975), Czech edition in one volume, *Cesi pod nemeck=m protektor=tem. Okupacn= politika, kolaborace a odboj 1939-1945* (Edice Obzor 27, Praha: Prostor, 1999); Vojtech Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule: The Failure of National Resistance, 1939-1942* (East Central European Studies of Columbia University, New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); Tomas Pasak, *Cesky fasismus 1922-1945 a kolaborace 1939-1945* (Prague: Pr=h, 1999).

[3]. Callum MacDonald, *The Killing of SS Obergruppenf=hrer Reinhard Heydrich* (London: Macmillan, and New York: Free Press, 1989); German edition *Heydrich - Anatomie eines Attentats* (Munich: List, 1990).

[4]. Jan Kaplan and Krystyna Nosarzewska, *Praha - Prag - Prague: The Turbulent Century* (Cologne: K=nemann, 1997); see also Jan Kaplan et.al., *Prag 1900-2000: Hundert Jahre einer hundertt=rmigen Stadt* (Praha: N=rodn= Galerie, 1999).