Gruner, Wolf. Die Judenverfolgung im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren. Lokale Initiativen, zentrale Entscheidungen, jüdische Antworten 1939-1945.

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Offering a new look at the Holocaust in Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia, Wolf Gruner aims to tackle a promising subject and fill in a gap in the historiography. Since the landmark, but currently outdated, studies by Miroslav Kárný[1] and the series of volumes *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente*, the research on this topic lost much of its traction. Promising ongoing projects and several published local studies, dissertations, or memoirs notwithstanding, we lack fresh synthetic views as well as critical insights into the cohabitation and interaction of Jews with other inhabitants in the occupied Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia. From this perspective, this is a unique book with no comparison to any study as yet published.

The largely chronologically organized book guides readers through the stages of persecution of Bohemian and Moravian Jews from the Munich Agreement until the end of the war, through exclusion from public spaces, state service, confiscation of property and forced labor, emigration and finally deportation. Gruner challenges existing research by foregrounding the situation of Jews in the Protectorate and only marginally dealing with the history of the Theresienstadt ghetto. The most substantial studies on the Holocaust of Bohemian and Moravian Jews take the opposite approach and analyze the persecution before deportation more as an introduction to Theresienstadt.[2]

Gruner makes two over-arching claims. First, he argues that historians of the Holocaust (including, for instance, respected authorities like Raul Hilberg or Saul Friedländer, himself born in Prague) paid only limited attention to the Protectorate. Through his previous research and publications (especially his pioneer work on forced labor[3], the transition from expulsion to deportation,[4] and on the Protectorate[5]), Gruner is obviously well qualified to integrate the study of the development

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[1] See for instance: *Kárný,* Miroslav: "Konečné řešení". Genocida českých židů v německé protektorátní politice ["Final solution". The Genocide of Czech Jews in the Policy of German Protectorate]. Praha 1991.

[2] See for instance: *ibid; Lagus,* Karel/*Polák,* Josef: Město za mřížemi [City behind Bars]. Praha 1964; *Adler,* H. G.: Theresienstadt 1941-1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft. Tübingen 1955; *Kryl,* Miroslav: Osud vězňů terezínského ghetta v letech 1941-1944 [The Fate of the Prisoners of the Theresienstadt Ghetto during the Years 1941-1944]. Brno 1999).

[3] *Gruner,* Wolf: Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis. Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938-1944. New York 2008; *Gruner:* Der geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938-1943. Berlin 1997; *Gruner:* Zwangsarbeit und Verfolgung. Österreichische Juden im NS-Staat 1938-45. Innsbruck, Wien, München 2000 (Der Nationalsozialismus und seine Folgen 1).

[4] *Gruner,* Wolf: Von der Kollektivausweisung zur Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland (1938-1945). Neue Perspektiven und Dokumente. In: *Kundrus,* Birthe (ed.): Die Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland. Pläne – Praxis – Reaktionen, 1938-1945. Göttingen 2004 (Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus 20) 21-62.

[5] *Gruner,* Wolf: Das Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren und die antijüdische Politik 1939-1942. Lokale Initiativen, regionale Maßnahmen, zentrale Entscheidungen im „Großdeutschen Reich". In: Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 12 (2005) 27-62; *Gruner:*

of anti-Jewish policies in Nazi Germany and in the Protectorate. The strength of Gruner's approach is best illustrated by his analysis of the process leading to the introduction of the obligatory Star of David. He traces the origins of this initiative in the Protectorate and in the proposals sent to Berlin by K. H. Frank (the Protectorate state secretary), which finally fed into the decision in Berlin to introduce the measure for all Jews in the "Reich" and the Protectorate (p. 188-190). What started out as anti-Jewish campaigns in the Protectorate, in the wake of the invasion into the Soviet Union, turned into a Reich-wide exclusionary measure.

Second, following up on current trends in the Holocaust Studies, he highlights local actions and policies in the persecution of Bohemian and Moravian Jews and demonstrates the contribution of local, often "Czech", initiatives in shaping anti-Jewish policies not only in the Protectorate, but also in the "Reich". By doing so, Gruner confronts well entrenched narratives that emphasize the role of the Nazi occupiers in triggering and structuring the patterns of anti-Jewish persecution in the Protectorate and in which the Holocaust is generally subordinated to the Nazi plans to "Germanize" the occupied territory. Where others located the most consequential anti-Jewish acts in the hands of the Nazi administration, with the Reichsprotektor at the helm, Gruner gives much more weight to the decisions taken within the semi-autonomous Czech administration, the Czech government, and its branches or local self-administration. He invites us to ask questions beyond simplified views of Czech non-participation in the Holocaust and demonstrates the significance of further research in how local actions played out against and together with plans and orders on the higher level.

Even though "Jewish responses" are invoked in the subtitle and Gruner repeatedly disputes the notion of Jewish passivity, the diversity of Jewish reactions received only limited attention. Selected quotations and episodes from diaries and oral history interviews (at least those conducted in English and German) enrich the otherwise fact-heavy narrative, but seem to be used more as an illustration rather than the subject of an in-depth analysis in their own right. While Gruner devotes much space to forced emigration, it appears more as a series of figures and statistics rather than a critical exploration of emigration strategies and ways in which potential migrants built on their family and professional networks and cultural and educational capital. While devoting long sections to the officially reported work of the Jewish community (or the "Jewish council"), the book pays only very limited attention to its inner workings, leeway for action, and the dilemmas of its officials.

The indisputable strengths of the book notwithstanding, many arguments are far from persuasive, especially when the actions of local Czech authorities and groups are assessed. Numerous factual mistakes point to this problem. A few randomly selected examples include: the Czech-Jewish movement was not created first with the establishment of the Czechoslovak nation state in 1918 as Gruner claims (p. 28); the deportation of Slovak Jews into Southern Slovakia took place in November, not

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Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In: *Gruner/Osterloh,* Jörg (eds.): The Greater German Reich and the Jews. Nazi Persecution Policies in the Annexed Territories 1935-1945. New York 2015 (Studies on war and genocide 20) 99-135.

October, 1938 (p. 37); and the 88 children from Lidice were not brought to Theresienstadt (p. 246), but rather to Litzmannstadt (Lodz). The unstable usage of place names (in their Czech or German forms, or their combinations) and mistakes in person names (for instance, "Marowetz" instead of "Morawetz", p. 29) also strengthen the impression of a hasty completion of the book as well as of the author's lack of orientation in Czech contexts. While these mistakes (the list of which could be significantly extended) do not by themselves negate Gruner's overall hypothesis, their unusual quantity gives an indication where the book is weaker in sources and arguments.

Paradoxically, in contrast to his original intentions, Gruner's narrative remains on a much safer ground when discussing German occupation policies and their function within the wider context of Nazi Germany (for instance, in the case of his analysis of deportations to Nisko). However, whenever the focus shifts towards Czech contexts, local or national, the inaccuracies multiply. On the whole, Gruner is much more successful integrating the Protectorate into Holocaust history than integrating the Holocaust into Czech history. His thoughts about the role of Czech antisemitism only superficially contribute to a better understanding of why and how, against the background of the more liberal inter-war Czechoslovakia, Czechs participated in the exclusion of Jews.

In part, this seems to be related to his choice of sources. Although Gruner makes use of an impressive array of collections and published studies, the book is characterized by an almost complete omission of Czech language documents. Gruner also does not make much use of recent Czech research (for instance, the book by Magda Veselská on the history of the Prague Jewish Museum[6]). While Czech publications, such as local studies on Jewish history and the Holocaust, often fail to ask challenging questions or to apply recent methodologies, the documentation is a necessary precondition for any research of the patterns and processes of exclusion in local conditions. The history and nature of the sources in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and in Yad Vashem, on which the author heavily relies to build much of his argument, also seem to have an effect. In particular, the selective copies from Czech archives (especially from the National, formerly State Central, Archives) for the USHMM reflect the state of research in the 1990s and the preference for government and central sources, providing no strong basis for the examination of the Holocaust in the Protectorate from below and for research of the behavior of local actors. In many cases, Gruner bases his argument mainly, or even solely, on the press; this clearly influences the quality of the sections devoted to the post-Munich Czechoslovak "Second Republic", which relies on a folder in the Yad Vashem Archives containing clippings from German-language Nazi newspapers. Recent Czech publications on the Second Republic[7] are not evaluated.

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[6] *Veselská,* Magda: Archa paměti. Cesta pražského židovského muzea pohnutým 20. stoletím [The Arc of Memory. The Jewish Museum in Prague's Journey Through the Turbulent 20th Century]. Praha 2012.

[7] For instance: *Gebhart,* Jan/*Kuklík,* Jan: Druhá republika 1938-1939. Svár demokracie a totality v politickém, společenském a kulturním životě [The Second Republic, 1938-1939. The Battle Between Democracy and Totalitarianism in Political, Societal and Cultural Life].

Gruner draws intensively on the collection of reports of the Prague Jewish Community for the Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung (Central Office for Jewish Emigration, most of which are kept in Yad Vashem Archives) and highlights the significance of this extensive, yet not completely preserved, source for the study of the Holocaust in the Protectorate (even though his claim to be the first researcher to use them seems to be exaggerated). Gruner relies on these reports for much of his factual information about Jewish emigration, retraining, social work, as well as concentration camps, forced labor, and deportation. However, he fails to subject them to the necessary source criticism and to address their inherent limits and biases. In fact, the reports provide a very one-sided view of the activities of the Jewish community, since its leadership formulated them to make its activities appear as orderly as possible. While it is true that these reports have not been exploited to their full potential, more attention should be paid to what is not reported and to their confrontation with other sources.

The selective use of sources, sadly, makes some of the central arguments of the book unsupported, particularly with respect to the interplay of local initiatives and central actions – in the Protectorate between the Reichsprotektor Office, the Czech pseudo-autonomous government, local authorities and police, as well as nationalist or Fascist organizations. For instance, Gruner rightly highlights the role of the spatial concentration of Jews within communities in the long interim period between the abrupt end of deportations to Nisko and the launch of large-scale deportations to Lodz and Theresienstadt in autumn 1941 (and demonstrates how Czech authorities were involved in the exploitation of the Jewish forced labor). Yet, his analysis of the resettlements is typically restricted to enumeration of locations where Jews were moved, offering no insights into what local authorities and groups were involved, how, and why. His account often makes a schematic impression, illustrated also by the regular usage of the passive voice – for instance (p. 148): "Auch in der dritten Augustwoche [1940] ereigneten sich neue 'Umsiedlungsaktionen', so in Neu Bidschow (Nový Bydžov) und Libochowitz (Libochovice)." But the weekly report of the Jewish community in Prague, on which this statement is based, offers no way to assess the role of different agencies and groups in these "resettlements."

Yet, while pointing out many local Czech "initiatives," his sources and narrative do not add much clarity to the interactions and deliberations behind local decisions and actions, nor do they allow evaluation of to what degree some of these "initiatives" were actually sponsored from above, or how this relationship evolved over time, with the tightening grip of the German authorities over the Czech administration.[8] Depending on context, the meaning of "local" seems to take different meanings, from communities through the "autonomous" government of the Pro-

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Praha, Litomyšl 2004; *Benda,* Jan: Útěky a vyhánění z pohraničí českých zemí 1938-1939 [Flight and Expulsion from the Czech Borderland, 1938-1939]. Praha 2013.

[8] For a promising from below analysis, see for instance: *Frommer,* Benjamin: Verfolgung durch die Presse. Wie Prager Bürokraten und die tschechische Polizei halfen, die Juden des Protektorats zu isolieren. In: *Löw,* Andrea/*Bergen,* Doris L./*Hájková,* Anna (eds.): Alltag im Holocaust. Jüdisches Leben im Großdeutschen Reich 1941-1945. München 2013 (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte 106) 137-150.

tectorate to the Office of the Reichsprotector. Moreover, the position of the book within the field of Holocaust Studies is more difficult to assess due to the missing methodological reflection of how the historiographic approach to local initiatives, developed around the notion of the competition between state agencies, party, communities, and other actors, can be translated to reality in an occupied country – and, moreover, one in which actors from both sides are often motivated by the long-established patterns of a nationality conflict.

Gruner makes important new arguments that could catalyze the largely absent historiographic debate about the Holocaust in the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia. Yet, at the same time, he undermines them in his failure to reflect research and sources in Czech. Writing Holocaust history without the local language and with only limited consideration of local historical contexts might be a false start to the otherwise badly needed debate about local initiative and involvement. In the end, Gruner's critical take on the history of the Holocaust in the Protectorate opens as many questions as answers it provides. Of the three facets announced in the subtitle, the exploration of both Jewish responses and local initiatives remains tentative at best. Yet, on a more positive note, the book should be read as an impetus for future research, outlining desiderata and making clear the factual and methodological gaps.

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