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Randolph L. Braham, Attila Pok, eds. *The Holocaust in Hungary Fifty Years Later.* New York and Budapest: Columbia University Press, 1987. 783 pp. $112.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-374-0.

Cecil D. Eby. *Hungary at War: Civilians and Soldiers in World War II.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998. xx + 318 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-01739-6.

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Jews and Gentiles, Soldiers and Civilians: Hungary during World War II

The Holocaust arrived rather late to wartime Hungary. Until its occupation by the *Wehrmacht* in March 1944, Hungary was a haven for Hungarian Jews, the existence of anti-Jewish legislation and the maltreatment of Jewish conscripts in some labour battalions notwithstanding. Jewish refugees to Hungary from the East, and Jews in certain war-zones occupied by the Hungarian army, were not safe. And when the Holocaust arrived, it came with a vengeance. As is well-known, the deportation of Jews from the Hungarian countryside took place in a very short time–in less than two months. One reason for this, according to more than one author in Braham's volume, was the high degree of cooperation on the part of Hungary's security organs with Eichmann's special force in charge of the operation. But other factors played roles as well.

Perhaps the most important was the effectiveness of the deception to which those being deported were subjected. Everyone was told that Jews would be shipped to work in German war industries, and the moving of entire families was presented as a "humanitarian" measure. Just when those concerned realized the falsehood of these claims is the subject of heated controversy. One author in this volume, Auschwitz escapee Rudolf Vrba, asserts that the leaders of Hungary's Jewish community saw through this deception early, but did not spread the truth lest this would prejudice their own chances of avoiding deportation. Still another reason for Eichmann's high degree of success was the refusal of the Allies to bomb Auschwitz and nearby Birkenau, an operation that could have reduced these camps' capacity to receive prisoners.[1]

The Holocaust in Hungary consist of some 30 essays that were read at an international conference in Budapest in 1994. One of the purposes of the gathering, the first such meeting in a former Warsaw Pact country, was to evaluate the lessons of the Holocaust. About half of those taking part in the conference were from Hungary. The volume's editors are Braham, the world's leading scholar of the Holocaust in Hungary, and Pok, the Deputy Director of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' (HAS) Institute of History.[2] I should add that this volume has been reviewed at length by Istvan Deak of Columbia University.[3] My own review aims mainly to supplement his.

The papers in this volume are divided into four categories: 1, preliminaries; 2, studies dealing with historical, social, economic and ideological antecedents; 3, essays dealing with the introduction and/or implementation of anti-Jewish regulations before and after the occupation of Hungary by the Nazis; and 4, papers on the Holocaust's impact on Hungary's Jews as well as its aftermath. The preliminary papers appear both in Hungarian and English, while others are presented in one or the other of these languages, each accompanied by a summary of the study's contents in the other language. While this practice is very helpful, it does more harm than good if the summaries do not adequately reflect the content of the study being summed up. Alas, this is the case occasionally; perhaps the most blatant case being the summation of Szinai's essay to be described below. In the case of studies that appeared in both languages, I relied on the Hungarian original. For the convenience of the English-speaking reader, however, my references are to the English version.

As is the case in the proceedings of most conferences where scholars from different disciplines and countries participated, the resulting volume is a collection of works of varying length, dissimilar approaches, and varied basic assumptions concerning the subject. As might also be expected, the volume's authors re-visit many histori-

cal controversies. Some of these are touched on in Ferenc Glatz's introductory essay. Glatz, then Director HAS' Institute of History and now President of the HAS, begins by observing that for centuries Hungary's leaders had held on to the territories of the thousand-year-old Hungary with the help of one or more of the Great Powers. When Hungary was left without friends in the wake of World War I and these territories became lost, the Hungarian "middle classes" continued to think along these lines and hoped to recover these lands through cultivating the friendship of Germany. Glatz suggests that a better alternative would have been "coming to an agreement" with Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia (p. 23). While this concept sounds praiseworthy, one inevitably asks what might have been the chances of its success? The prospects of Hungary attaining more than nominal frontier rectifications through negotiations with the Little Entente were next to nonexistent, given the widely-held belief in these countries that the Treaty of Trianon did not take enough territory from Hungary.[4] We might also remember that Oscar Jaszi, who had for many years after 1919 advocated this approach, in later life admitted its problematic nature.[5]

Which path was more appropriate to solve Hungary's Trianon quandary? The truth is that there was probably no viable solution to the problem. For contemporary Hungarians to admit this was impossible. One must fully agree with Glatz when he says that "the Hungarian middle classes were not able to recover from the shock of Trianon." I have suggested elsewhere that this failure to recover from the shock of Trianon resulted in pervasive anti-Trianon propaganda in Hungary, which later forced the country's governments to subscribe to Hitler's re-drawing of the map of Eastern Europe. Could a nation, brainwashed by irredentist propaganda, be told in 1940 for example that Northern Transylvania could not be readmitted to Hungary because the Germans might expect some favours in return?[6]

Most readers will probably agree with Glatz's other observations. Without German occupation, "the Holocaust would not have extended to Hungary." However, Hungary was psychologically prepared for the "final solution" through the anti-Jewish laws enacted between 1938 and 1941– admittedly partly as a result of growing Nazi influence in Eastern Europe, but leading to a situation in which the state no longer protected all its citizens. Admittedly also, the "civilized" West was also permeated at the time by anti-Semitism, which resulted in the exclusion of Jewish refugees from nearly everywhere. Despite its anti-Jewish laws, its mistreatment of some Jews (some of those in labour service, and those who had taken refuge in eastern Hungary), and rabid anti-Semitism among elements of its population, Hungary was a "haven for Jews up to March 19, 1944" (p. 28).

Until 1938, there had been a national tradition of tolerance in Hungary. In that year, the forces of xenophobia began to gain momentum. Six years later, a vocal and aggressive minority–with the aid of a foreign power –was able to attain the upper hand. This minority failed to cherish the Hungarian national tradition of tolerance and could not resist the wave of anti-Semitism sweeping Europe. According to Glatz, this story has a lesson, which is that the threat to Hungarian culture comes not from the so-called historical "enemies" of Hungarians, but from the those among them who would exclude from Hungarian society those citizens who are not considered true Magyars (p. 29).

Many of Glatz's conclusions are echoed in the first paper of the volume's second part, by Tibor Hajdu. Hajdu believes that rabid anti-Semitism is the characteristic of a society in crisis, one faced by seemingly insurmountable problems. And the crisis Horthyite Hungary faced was its inability to deal with the situation imposed by the Treaty of Trianon. Trianon also contributed to conditions that led to the growth of Zionist sentiments among Jews, which in turn gave ammunition to anti-Semites. Hajdu concludes that it could not have made much difference whether Hungarian society was willing to cooperate with Eichmann or not, for with the Nazi occupation of the country Hungarian Jewry was doomed. Nevertheless, the fact that during 1941-43 in Hungary–and in areas occupied by Hungarian forces–Jews perished by the thousands cannot be attributed simply to Hitler. Hungary prior to 1944 may have been a haven for Hungarian Jews, but it was also a ghetto increasingly "surrounded by invisible walls" (p. 67).

In the next paper Attila Pok contrasts some of the ideas of two of Hungary's leading thinkers of the early twentieth century: the historian Gyula Szekfu and sociologist Oscar Jaszi. Both searched for an explanation for the cause of contemporary Hungarian society's weaknesses. Szekfu found it in the liberalism that had been foisted on Hungarian society, while Jaszi found it in the lack of liberalism. Pok suggests that these opposing interpretations both pointed an accusing finger at the Jews (p. 76).

Next, Zsuzsanna Ozsvath explores the role Hungary's literary figures played in fanning the flames of anti-Semitism. She finds that writers, whether conservative or populist, contributed to a trend which saw Jews identified

as the nation's enemies. "The complicity of these writers [in the Holocaust] reveals not only their shortcomings as human beings,... but also their failure to remain true to their supposed mission as keepers of the Hungarian ethos of freedom and justice...." (p. 110). Deak, in his review, deems Ozsvath's views strident and one-sided, as her study virtually neglects to mention the fact that, by the time of the Nazi era, many of Hungary's non-Jewish writers had become defenders of human rights.

In his essay, historian Lorant Tilkovszky outlines the story of Hungary's anti-Jewish laws of 1938-1941. He concludes that, while the enactment and enforcement of these laws cannot be compared with the genocidal persecution of the Jews that took place in Hungary in 1944, they had "prepared the ground"for the Holocaust of the Hungarian Jewry. The lesson, according to Tilkovzsky, is that in the future tendencies pointing toward racial discrimination should not be tolerated.

In the following study Miklos Szinai looks at the responsibility of the gentry middle class. He comes to the conclusion that, while the country's aristocracy (the "conservative elite") turned against the forces of the radical right, and the population had largely abandoned the Arrow Cross by 1943, the gentry persisted in their anti-Semitic attitudes. The gentry's influence in Hungary's civil service, security agencies, and armed forces provided support for the Nazis' "final solution."

Szinai also explains how this gentry and allied elements had transformed themselves from the foremost exponents of liberalism and freedom in the nineteenth century into opponents of these concepts. Szinai blames the leadership of the Hungarian army for not defending the Hungarian nation against the *Wehrmacht* in March 1944. Though it might well be true that elements of the officer corps were not willing to fight the Germans, one wonders what they would have accomplished if they had tried. Probably not much more than what Horthy accomplished on October 15th–the failure of which action Szinai also blames on the Army's leadership. One also wonders how many of Hungary's officers refused to fight the Wehrmacht because they were imbued with the Nazi spirit, or because they felt that doing so would lead to much bloodshed without any hope of success.

The essay by Ivan T. Berend points out how economic backwardness or, more precisely, the failure of attempts to escape such backwardness, contributed to feelings of disappointment and hopelessness in Hungary, which in turn led to the rise of radical ideologies. Among these were the conservative as well as the populist branches of the anti-capitalist movement, both of which were breeding grounds of anti-Semitism. While some elements of Hungary's population, especially the Jews, managed to adapt to the country's capitalist transformation, other elements did not. Many of Hungary's peasants found it difficult to adjust to this metamorphosis, while the gentry on the whole did not even try. It was easier to declare capitalism to be "alien" to Hungarian traditions and culture, and its representatives–the Jews–"foreigners" (pp. 200-203).

The other rebellion against capitalism, Marxism, also contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism. It, too, was declared un-Hungarian and the fact that many of its adherents were Jews made them scapegoats for what the communists had inflicted on the country, particularly during 1919. Without Hitler, Nazism, and Hungary's occupation by the Nazis in 1944, there would not have been a Hungarian Holocaust, Berend concludes. Without Hungarian anti-Semitism, however, there would not have been a Hungarian identification with Hitler and his war, and Hungarian complicity in the Fuhrer's final solution (pp. 210f).

While limitations of space do not permit a review of every essay in this volume, a few more deserve mention. One of these is the late Peter Hanak's autobiographical account of his days in a labour battalion, and the other is Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera's biographical study of Endre Laszlo, one of Eichmann's principal Hungarian collaborators–until Horthy put an end to his activities in early July. As a conclusion to this story, Nagy-Talavera quotes C.A. Macartney, who declared the worst feature of Hungary's wartime regime was the fact that such a man, "whose vices and madness were well known ...," could assume an enormously important role–even though for just a brief period. (p. 375).

Also worthy of mention is Jeno Gergely's work on the role of the Churches. I liked his balanced treatment, though I regretted not seeing any references to the related publications of Leslie Laszlo.[7] Then there is George Barany's overview of the state of research on Raoul Wallenberg' work in Hungary and his fate after 1945. Thirty pages of text can hardly do justice to this large subject. Yet, when all the research and the recent spate of books on Wallenberg are considered, we are still left with unanswered questions. The field is as complex as Wallenberg's mission had been. Indeed, it is now fairly evident that both Himmler and Stalin had tried to use him for their nefarious ambitions, and his death in Soviet captivity might have been the result of his refusal to cooperate with his captors. I was glad to note that Barany did not even mention the charges that an oper-

ative of Britain's Special Operations Executive, Andrew Durovecz, levelled against Wallenberg in his autobiography, i.e. that Wallenberg was a double agent–for whom saving Jews was only a "cover" –who aimed to facilitate peace between the Nazis and the Western Allies in order to keep the Soviets out of Central Europe.[8]

This is an inadequate review of a massive volume. Not only have I not commented on essays dealing with other than historical topics, I have also neglected some of the extensively documented papers that deal with very specific aspects of the subject, including one that explores anti-Semitism in today's Hungary. In this connection, I wish to cite Deak's optimistic final sentence, which envisages a modest symbiosis between Hungary's small Jewish community and other Hungarians. To this I might add that Braham's collection suggests that the study of the Holocaust in Hungary is alive and well in the Hungary of the 1990s.

Cecil D. Eby, a retired Professor of English, turned his attention to World War II in Hungary after publishing books on American military history, the Spanish Civil War, and an assortment other subjects. The result is a well-written and attractively-produced book with some shortcomings.

Eby reconstructs the history of Hungary's participation in the war with the help of an assortment of mainly English-language secondary sources, and enriches the story with mini-biographies of nearly one hundred individuals whom he had interviewed between 1988 and 1995, mostly with the help of Eleonora Arato of Budapest. The vast majority of these interviewees were ordinary citizens, as the persons in leading positions during the war had died by 1988. In fact, the majority of Eby's informants had been young adults during the war. Their stories offer glimpses of the lives of civilians and soldiers in wartime Hungary. As parts of the book deal with the fate of Jews, we might add that there are glimpses of the lives of Jews and Gentiles. As Eby interviewed many women, their lives–struggles, humiliations and sufferings–are also illustrated.

Eby has no sympathy for the totalitarian regimes involved in the conflict; nevertheless, he strives to be fair to all concerned and tries to avoid ideological or ethnic biases. Sometimes he is not critical enough of the information he obtained. This is the source of the book's main weakness, and has resulted in some misleading information. I mention only one. On p. 217 one of Eby's informants reports having received news to the effect that "Colonel Finta… had been tried [after the war] in Budapest and hanged…" In reality, Finta had escaped and lived amidst affluence in Canada until old age when his past almost caught up with him. Finta was the first person in Canada to be tried for crimes against humanity. Not being able to produce convincing evidence more than four decades after the events, the prosecution lost its case, and the Canadian government changed tactics. From the Finta trial on, suspected World War II criminals have been deported from the country rather than tried in Canadian courts.

Aside from such errors, the one statement in this book that this reviewer has to take issue with is the claim in the preface that historians in the West have written too little about Hungary's role in the war. The massive works of the late C.A. Macartney of the UK and Peter Gostony of Switzerland, not to speak of the publications of such American scholars as Braham, Deak, Nagy-Talavera, and Sakmyster, cast doubt on this statement. True, there has not been a popular history dealing with the subject in English, and Eby has filled that need.

Hungary at War is not a work that a professional historian would have undertaken; but history may be too important to be left to historians. Scholars and members of the reading public will not want to read this book for new information concerning high policy or the role of Hungary's leaders; nevertheless they might enjoy reading the many heart-rending accounts of soldiers and civilians in times of crisis.

Both books reviewed here have much to offer, yet neither can be considered the most important new work to appear in recent times on the subject of Hungary and World War II. That honour should probably go to Krisztian Ungvary's *Budapest ostroma* [The Siege of Budapest] (Budapest: Corvina, 1998). Hopefully, in the not too distant future this book will be translated into English.

Notes:

[1]. Stuart G. Erdheim, "Could the Allies Have Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau?" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 7 (1997), pp. 129-70. A different view is presented by Richard H. Levy, "The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited: A Critical Analysis," ibid., 6 (1996), pp. 267-98.

[2]. Ten years earlier Braham had edited another anniversary volume on the Hungarian Holocaust with the help of Bela Vago of Tel-Aviv: *The Holocaust in Hungary: Forty Years Later* (New York: Social Science Monographs; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1985). Some of the contributors to this work are also featured in the volume under review.

[3]. In *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12 (Spring 1998).

[4]. After all, Romania got less in 1921 than the Treaty of London had promised, and did not get back all the lands purported to have belonged to ancient Dacia, and the Czechoslovaks and Yugoslavs never got the "corridor" that some of their leaders had hoped for to connect their countries (and separate Hungary from Austria).

[5]. See my paper "Oscar Jaszi and the Hungarian Problem: Activities and Writings during World War II," in *Oscar Jaszi: Visionary, Reformer and Political Activist*, Dreisziger and A. Ludanyi, eds. (Toronto and Budapest, 1991), pp. 59-79. This article appeared in a special double issue of the *Hungarian Studies Review*, v. 18, 1-2 (Spring-Fall 1991), pp. 59-79.

[6]. Still another historical controversy that Glatz revisits is whether Horthy should or should not have resigned after the German occupation of Hungary. He answers this question in the positive, admitting though that Horthy's remaining in office was a "restrictive factor for the extreme right." Glatz also acknowledges that in July of 1944 Horthy was able to save the Jews of Budapest. Horthy had also tried–and it is most unlikely that any other leader of post-March 1944 Hungary would have been able to do this–to take the country out of the war. Though this attempt was, in the words of his American biographer, "muddled" in its preparations, its positive impact was not on immediate events but on national historical consciousness. Cf. Thomas Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral on Horseback: Miklos Horthy, 1918-1944* (Boulder; New York: East European Monographs, Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 369. For the review of this book that appeared on HABSBURG, see http://h-net2.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?-path=16501888515436.

[7]. Above all, his T. Laszlo Laszlo, *Szellemi honvedelem: katolikus demokrata mozgalmak es az egyhazak ellenallasa a Masodik Vilaghaboru idejen Magyarorszagon* (Roma: Katolikus Szemle, 1980).

[8]. Andrew Durovecz, *My Secret Mission* (Toronto: Lugus, 1996), pp. 219f.

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