



Ivo Goldstein, Slavko Goldstein. *The Holocaust in Croatia.* Russian and East European Studies Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016. 736 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8229-4451-5.

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At just over seven hundred pages, *The Holocaust in Croatia* covers in meticulous detail the instrumentalization of antisemitism in 1930s Yugoslavia, anti-Jewish legislation and persecution in early 1941, the concentration and extermination of Jews between April 1941 and May 1943, and Jewish efforts to survive the war. The book represented a major correction to widespread Holocaust denial when it was first published in Croatian in 2001, and this superb translation is the most comprehensive treatment of the destruction of Croatia's Jews in English to date. As well as telling a gripping story with solid analysis, it is an indispensable reference work for Holocaust scholars. A lot has happened in the field of Holocaust studies in the fifteen years between the original publication and its translation into English, though, and its major weakness is that it did not preempt how the field was to evolve during this time. Nonetheless, some of the observations that Ivo Goldstein and Slavko Goldstein make about the timing and execution of the Holocaust in Croatia raise important questions about how we think about the Holocaust more generally.

Both authors are well-known names among Croatian historians. Slavko Goldstein (1928-2017) grew up in the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia and narrowly escaped arrest in 1941. His father perished in an Ustaša concentration camp, while

he joined the partisans together with his mother and brother. Goldstein moved to Israel after the war, before returning to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the 1950s. Having worked as a journalist and public intellectual during state socialism, he founded the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSL) in 1989 and served as its first president. He was also an outspoken member and president of the Zagreb Jewish Community, advocating for Jewish rights and for the retrieval of Croatian Jewish history. His son, Ivo Goldstein (1958-), is a prolific writer, who has authored numerous books on the history of Croatia and Croatian Jews.

The history of the Holocaust in Croatia was particularly contested during the 1990s, when Croatia's president Franjo Tuđman wrote a history that reproduced various antisemitic slurs and minimized the program of mass murder that took place within the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) between 1941 and 1945. The NDH, Tuđman argued, had its problems but nonetheless realized the legitimate desire for Croatian statehood. Slavko Goldstein served as a member of the Commission for the Determination of Wartime and Postwar Victims, also known as the "Vokojević Commission," and was the only member of the commission to publicly speak out against its findings. Goldstein argued—correctly—that the com-

mission conflated the victims of Communism with those of the Ustaša and distorted the evidence in order to minimize the number of dead.[1] The authors dedicate one of the later chapters of *The Holocaust in Croatia* to these debates of the 1990s. While it is important for understanding the context in which the book was written, in 2019 the historiographical discussion reads like an out-of-date appendix. Distortion and denial of the Holocaust is still depressingly common in Croatia but now happens within a different political climate.[2]

Goldstein and Goldstein begin by detailing the increase in antisemitic journalism during the late 1930s. They note that Croatian antisemitism quickly died down after the First World War. The first antisemitic speech was not made in the Yugoslav Senate until 1933, and although extremist newspapers and pamphlets did publish hate speech during the early 1930s—often translations of Nazi sources—the mainstream press was slow to join in. Jews did, after all, play an important role in Zagreb’s cultural, political, and economic life, and the idea that they should be excluded and persecuted did not come easily to most people. Even Ustaša ideology was not overtly antisemitic until late 1936, when Ante Pavelić began attacking Jews in order to model his party more closely on the National Socialist German Workers’ Party. As Nazi Germany’s role in the region became more and more obvious, the political potential of antisemitism became harder to ignore. By 1937 antisemitism permeated the Serbian Orthodox Church and German cultural societies. Goldstein and Goldstein’s narrative about the sudden rise of antisemitism stands in stark contrast to prehistories of the Holocaust in Hungary, Romania, France, and Austria, where antisemitism had a long and entrenched local history. Therefore, it serves as an important reminder of how suddenly the tone of political discourse can change and how cynical the political use of antisemitism often is.

The first murders and public attacks on Jews were the work of private individuals after the NDH was established in April 1941, but the state quickly introduced anti-Jewish laws modeled on those of Nazi Germany, depriving Jews of basic legal rights. Leading Jews were arrested and forced to make large financial contributions to the state from mid-April onward, and the forcible eviction of Jews from their houses and apartments began in early May. Mass arrests of Jews took place in Zagreb in April, late May, and then late June 1941, most deportees being taken directly to transit camps, first to the Zagreb Fairground and then to Zavrtnica. The government established concentration camps at Danica and Kerestinec in April 1941. In May 1941 the Ustaša government decreed that Jews must wear distinguishing patches marked with a “Ž” for Židov (Jew). Jewish badges had been introduced in various parts of Poland during 1939 and were implemented ad hoc in the territories conquered as part of Operation Barbarossa from June 1941 onward, although Jews in the Third Reich were not required to wear them until September 1941. Croatian authorities established the Gospić-Velebit-Pag Island camp system in June 1941 and began murdering Jews almost immediately—first in the form of individual shootings, starvation, and exhaustion, and then in massacres of large groups. The Jasenovac camp system, where the largest number of prisoners perished during the war, was established in September. The timing corresponds with the beginning of the Action 14f13 “euthanasia” program in Nazi concentration camps, but Croatian death camps existed earlier than any of the death camps in Germany, Poland, or Transnistria. One can only speculate about why the Ustaša felt the need to preempt the Nazis both in introducing Jewish badges and in establishing death camps. Was it the result of wartime priorities, and if so, what does that suggest about German and Romanian uses of the same methods from 1942 onward?

Zagreb’s Jewish community was well organized and kept detailed lists of members. Gold-

stein and Goldstein write that “before the war there were some 38,000-39,000 Jews on ISC [NDH] territory, including those who had converted but who were treated as Jews according to the racial laws. Only about 9,000 of them survived the war. The numbers are similar by region: only 4,000 out of 14,000 Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina survived, just under 30 percent, and about 5,000 out of about 25,000 Jews in northern Croatia, Slavonia, and Srijem survived, or about 20 percent.... Which means that between 75 and 80 percent of the Jewish population was killed in the ISC [NDH] between 1941 and 1945” (p. 561). Far from being prone to exaggeration, Goldstein and Goldstein are careful only to make claims that they can clearly document. They openly admit whenever the sources are incomplete and distinguish between people they know died at a particular time and place and those who simply disappeared from the record after a certain point. The book does discuss Jewish victims from throughout the NDH, but as the original Croatian title makes clear, this is a history of the Holocaust in Zagreb. The idea implied by the English title that the book covers all of Croatia is misleading, to say the least. As Emily Greble’s study of wartime Sarajevo makes clear (*Sarajevo, 1941-1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler’s Europe* [2011]), the pattern and implementation of the Holocaust elsewhere in the country was different to what happened in Zagreb, where the control of the Ustaša was stronger and more direct. Nonetheless, one-third of Croatia’s Jews lived in Zagreb, and Goldstein and Goldstein estimate the number of Jewish victims from Zagreb as being between eight thousand and nine thousand people.

In their careful discussion of decision-making and responsibility, Goldstein and Goldstein conclude that “the main instigator in this period was the Poglavnik, Dr. Ante Pavelić. As in many less important matters, he also provided the general guidelines for ‘solving the Jewish question’” (p. 503). They also show how other Ustaša officials tasked with the extermination of the Jews per-

formed their roles with enthusiasm, discovering innovative and particularly cruel methods of killing and going far beyond a minimal interpretation of their instructions. Their focus on individual responsibility masks the influence of ideology and wartime contingencies in shaping the Holocaust, however. More recent research by Tomislav Dulić (*Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-42* [2005]), Alexander Korb (*Im Schatten des Weltkriegs: Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941-1945* [2014]), Rory Yeomans (*Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941-1945* [2013]) and his edited collection, *The Utopia of Terror: Life and Death in Wartime Croatia* [2015]), and Radu Harald Dinu (*Faschismus, Religion und Gewalt in Südosteuropa: Die Legion Erzengel Michael und die Ustasa im historischen Vergleich* [2013]), among others, has demonstrated that the timing of massacres was often shaped by wartime considerations and that the Ustaša propaganda machine profoundly shaped the attitudes of the killers. But Goldstein and Goldstein’s greatest limitation when it comes to explaining the shape of the Holocaust in Croatia is their exclusive focus on Jewish victims. As they quite readily admit, Jews were killed alongside Serbs and Roma, and the number of Serbian dead considerably dwarfed that of other victim groups. Explaining why perpetrators killed when, where, and how they did requires a focus on the killers themselves rather than their victims. Goldstein and Goldstein never set out to answer the sorts of questions more recent historians have been posing. However, limitation does nothing to minimize the book’s monumental contribution to the history of Croatian Jews during the Second World War.

Notes

[1]. Mark Biondich, “Representations of the Holocaust and Historical Debates in Croatia since 1989,” in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Eu-*

rope, ed. John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 137-146.

[2]. *Ibid.*, 148-155.

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