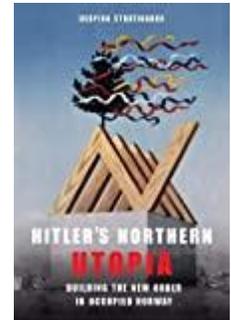


Despina Stratigakos. *Hitler's Northern Utopia: Building the New Order in Occupied Norway.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. Illustrations. 352 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-19821-7.



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Many readers of this network's reviews will be familiar with the heinous nature of the Third Reich and Adolf Hitler's vision to establish a greater German empire during the Second World War. Focused primarily on an eastern orientation, Nazi attempts to establish a "Garden of Eden" in the occupied territories precipitated the genocidal actions euphemistically referred to as the "Final Solution." Indeed, such works as Timothy Snyder's excellent *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2010) detail the horrors of Hitler's actions to consolidate his empire in such countries as Poland, the Baltic states, Ukraine, and Russia. A new book by Despina Stratigakos reminds us that Hitler had designs on the North as well, in particular Norway. While Germany's actions to consolidate its empire took on a very different nature here than the brutal oppression of the Eastern European populations, the Reich's heinous designs to incorporate Norway are clearly evident in the author's unique and original narrative.

In a broad context, *Hitler's Northern Utopia* is about Germany's complex relationship with its northern neighbor, which it sought to incorporate into a greater German empire. Stratigakos effectively sets the stage by describing a naval cruise Hitler made in Norwegian waters in the summer of 1934. Even then, Hitler had his sights on the country and the potential role it would play in a future Reich. Just six years later, Germany had a much more malign intent, invading Norway and forcing King Haakon VII and his government into exile in England. This set the stage for its five years of occupation and domination by the Third Reich, albeit of a very different nature than most of the Reich's victim populations experienced. The author is quick to note that the book is neither a detailed nor a comprehensive history of the German subjugation of Norway. It does, however, present a unique view of specific aspects of the occupation, greatly enhanced by her access to recently available archival material. Additionally, Stratigakos explores topics that have seldom been

examined in detail, relying on her powers of observation and expertise as an architectural historian.

Norway was different from most of the countries conquered by the Reich. Stratigakos effectively points out that the Nazis considered Norwegians to be their racial superiors, so clearly the Reich had to approach its policy toward the country in a unique manner. Historian Nicholas Stargardt echoes this sentiment, noting: “Nazi policy-makers, their reasoning based on a mix of racial policy and economic utility, regarded Norway as more ‘Aryan’ than the Reich and—by German standards—the country underwent a ‘model’ occupation.”[1] The Nazis could not rely on brute force in its dealings with Norway; in fact—quite the opposite—the author notes that Germany invested more heavily in Norway than anywhere else. This represents a significant contrast to the Reich’s normal treatment of its subject countries, which was marked by extreme violence and exploitation. However, this is not to suggest that Germany deferred to Norway in any substantive manner, despite its attempts to place Norway at the fore of the relationship in certain aspects, at least for public consumption and propaganda purposes.

After her portrayal of Hitler’s prewar foray into Norway, Stratigakos gets into the core of the book—all facets of which clearly underscore Germany’s dominant position in the relationship. In the first of five chapters, titled “Romanticizing the North,” the author sets the context by examining, through German press accounts, how the Reich put an optimistic spin on its relationship with Norway, emphasizing themes of cooperation and friendship rather than occupier and occupied. Thus, the Nazi narrative was all about the positive aspects of Norway’s incorporation into the German sphere, and not about the damage the Nazis wreaked—and would continue to wreak—on Norway. After all, the German presence in Norway was sizable, numbering about 450,000 soldiers and civilians, so the press had to emphasize tales

of cooperation and partnership to ensure the relationship went as smoothly as possible. In particular, Reich propagandists emphasized themes that incorporated nationalist socialist ideals, to include the purity of the Nordic races, a sense of a people’s community with strong ties to the land, and a respect—almost mythical—for the natural beauty of the countryside. Propagation of such a narrative underscores the “New Order” the Nazis hoped to achieve and sets the context for the remaining chapters of *Hitler’s Northern Utopia*.

In chapter 2, “Norway in the New Order,” Stratigakos details Hitler’s scheme to impose his will, both psychologically and socially, on his Norwegian subjects. Here, the author is equally adept at describing Nazi infrastructural plans to enact that vision, from a four-lane autobahn connecting Norway to the North and South, to such social projects as the Reich-sponsored *Lebensborn* (“fount of life”) program, designed to pair German fathers with Norwegian mothers to produce racially acceptable offspring for the Reich. In addition to its signature highway, Nazi plans included a massive number of defensive positions throughout the country. Germany placed the Organisation Todt in charge of the overall effort regarding its infrastructure plans in Norway, with special emphasis on incorporating the country’s scenic beauty wherever possible. Other Reich projects in its northern neighbor included telecommunication centers, plants, and smelters—all designed to support the Reich’s vision of a postwar northern utopia.

Nazi infrastructure programs had a much darker side; as Stratigakos points out, the Reich employed 130,000 forced laborers in Norway, of whom 17,000 perished. Additionally, there were over five hundred prisoner-of-war (POW) camps in Norway, housing a major source of captive manpower. Even the *Lebensborn* social program had its negative impact; it produced over eight thousand children, many of whom were ostracized after the war. It should also be noted that

the country's Jewish population was not immune to Germany's implementation of the Final Solution; renowned historian Saul Friedlander observes, "By the end of February 1943 the Jewish community of Norway had ceased to exist: More than 700 Jews had been murdered and some 900 had fled to Sweden." [2] While these numbers pale in comparison to victims of Nazi atrocities committed in the East, they show the Third Reich's determination to apply its genocidal schemes, even in a country considered its racial superior. In this regard, the Reich applied similar rules it used in the East, buoyed by a false narrative that emphasized communal bonds and cooperation between the two countries.

Chapters 3-5 examine further attempts by the Reich to mold an occupied Norway in its own image through its use of soldiers' homes, its "Germanization" of Norway's cityscapes, and its creation of a new city—Trondheim—respectively. This last project was a Hitler priority; the Germans placed special emphasis on this secret project, to the total exclusion of Norwegian participation in its design. In particular, these three chapters showcase the author's expertise as an architectural historian, as Stratigakos makes excellent use of recently available archival material regarding the Organisation Todt, Hitler's primary mechanism responsible for major engineering projects both inside and outside the Reich.

Each of these chapters underscores Germany's dominant role in its relationship with Norway, despite Reich efforts to minimize it publicly. For example, in the author's excellent analysis of the Reich's establishment of soldiers' homes in Norway, local women were generally banned from attendance, so as not to mingle with *frauleins* visiting German troops. Soldiers' homes were in essence little slices of sovereign German soil in Norway; their construction, design, and *décor* were all geared toward making the German soldier feel at home. Stratigakos captures the architectural essence of these structures very effectively and sup-

plements her narrative with excellent photographic illustrations. The German public contributed to the homes through monetary donations, which served to tie Norway with the home front, in addition to defraying the cost of the structures without affecting the burgeoning Reich wartime budget. Hitler himself was personally involved in their design as well, making sure the homes conveyed the essence of Reich ideology and their inherent "Germanness," especially in isolated areas where idleness and long winters adversely affected troop morale. While an important feature of Germany's "New Order" infrastructure in Norway, Stratigakos notes, many of the soldiers' homes were aspirational and never built; additionally, the Reich was forced to destroy the ones it did build upon its retreat from Norway toward the war's end.

Stratigakos next addresses the Nazification of Norwegian cityscapes in chapter 4. During the invasion in 1940, Germany destroyed over fourteen thousand buildings across Norway; hence, redesigning urban areas provided another opportunity for the Reich to leave its imprint on the country. To implement this program, Germany put Reich commissar Josef Terboven in charge of its Norway efforts, with advice from Hitler's top architect, Albert Speer. A renowned local architect, Sverre Pedersen, headed the country's entity charged with laying out new plans for reconstruction—the BSR—or Burn Site Redevelopment (*Brente Steders Regulering*) organization. In a recurring theme, Germany desired Norway built in its own image but also wanted local architects to take charge, albeit under close supervision. This often put architects of both countries at odds; the Reich preferred classical styles and motifs emphasizing Nazi themes, especially in the most visible urban areas, such as city squares and town centers. Reich architects criticized their Norwegian counterparts for narrow thinking, lack of imagination, and their preference for modern, functional architectural styles. Of course, the Nazis preferred national socialist architectural motifs with an emphasis on openness and space—as ex-

emplified by Hitler's grand stylings for his future Nazi capital, Germania. In essence, Norway sought to maintain the status quo by emphasizing individualism and functionalism in architectural design, and its designers were at constant odds with their Nazi counterparts.

As a result, the process of rebuilding cityscapes was an uneasy one at best; the Germans exercised strong oversight and sought approval from the top on all projects, while the Norwegians wanted to rebuild their destroyed cities as quickly as possible. Norwegian architects toured Germany to learn the essentials of what the Reich wanted, which included adherence to Nazi Party ideals, especially *Volksgemeinschaft*, or "people's community," which emphasized the traditional connection between the people and the land. Thus, Nazi themes always took precedence, as reflected in the prominence of community halls in the town centers, the secondary position of churches, and the preeminence of the local Nazi Party headquarters buildings. Despite all the plans and dialogue, Stratigakos notes, actual reconstruction of the destroyed cities was limited, especially as Germany's war fortunes changed after their 1943 defeat at Stalingrad. With an excellent narrative and effective illustrations, Stratigakos underscores the inherent tension between the German and Norwegian architects in the rebuilding process. Despite their cultural and ethnic similarities, there was no doubt as to the Reich's dominant position in the partnership.

In chapter 5, the author examines Germany's grandiose scheme for a "New Trondheim," Hitler's vision for an exemplar city outside of the Reich, combined with a state of the art naval base. New Trondheim was to be on par with one of Hitler's specially designated "Führer Cities," with the Reich's top architect himself—Speer—in charge of its design. Like many of Germany's plans for its New Order, New Trondheim was to be grand in scale and scope, incorporating many of Hitler's priorities, especially in the cultural and physical

realms, with plans for an art gallery, an opera, a sports stadium, and pools, among other features. According to the author, Hitler saw such cities developed outside of the Reich as bastions of German culture and critical to his personal legacy. To underscore New Trondheim's importance, Germany kept the plans secret and excluded Norwegian architects from participating in its design. Unfortunately, plans for New Trondheim did not survive the war, and—like many of the other German dreams for its New Order—visions for the city vanished once the fortunes of war turned against Germany. However, the author's analysis of the preparation, study, and bureaucratic infighting in the planning for New Trondheim provide fascinating insight into the mentality of the Third Reich, always focused on the long-term establishment of a greater German empire, even when the realities of war caused them to redirect priorities.

Stratigakos concludes the book with a compelling assessment of the legacy of Germany's occupation of Norway and its attempts to impose its will in a number of domains covered previously. Her observations effectively capture the aftermath of the German occupation. Although Norway's plight cannot compare to the devastation that occurred in the killing fields of Nazi-occupied territories in the East, there were significant negative impacts nonetheless—to include the destruction wrought on Norway during the initial invasion, forced labor and prisoners of war enlisted to build Nazi infrastructure projects, and the deportation of Norwegian Jews. As the war was coming to its close, the Germans imposed a modified scorched-earth policy, destroying many of their previous construction projects. Even the social projects, such as the *Lebensborn*, had their long-term negative effects, as those German-fathered children born to Norwegian mothers were scorned and "othered" after the war. Stratigakos fairly notes, however, that some positive outcomes resulted from the occupation era. Norway brought many of the BSR projects to fruition after the war, minus the trappings of Nazism. Additionally, the infra-

structural improvements helped spark the Norwegian postwar economy. Overall, the author captures the difficult relationship the two countries had, despite their racial and cultural similarities —“In the eyes of the occupiers, it seems, the Norwegians, even with their superior Aryan blood, were not quite good enough” (p. 222).

Hitler’s Northern Utopia provides an original and fascinating perspective on a lesser-known aspect of the Third Reich’s vision to create a thousand-year empire during the Second World War. Lavishly illustrated with black-and-white photos that effectively accompany its lively prose, *Hitler’s Northern Utopia* presents a unique view of Germany’s attempt to incorporate a neighbor with

which it shared deep-rooted racial and social ties. The book’s accessibility and unique perspective from an architectural historian will no doubt be of interest to students of World War II, the Third Reich, the history of its occupied countries, and the use of art and architecture as instruments of the state.

Notes

[1]. Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation under Arms, 1939-1945* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 278.

[2]. Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 454.

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