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The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide. By Zoltán Vági, László Csősz, and Gábor Kádár. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2013. LXVII, 442 pp.

Part of the *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context* series, which presents "original historical documents on the Holocaust within an explanatory narrative" (p.xi), this important publication by leading Hungarian Holocaust historians Zoltán Vági, László Csősz, and Gábor Kádár offers penetrating analyses of "how [the Holocaust in Hungary] came about, what drove it, and what it meant for those who were targeted" (p.xxx). It features selected sources many of which are made available in English for the first time.[1] Characterizing the Holocaust in Hungary as "not only the final major chapter of the Nazi genocide but also the peak of its evolution" (p.xxx), the volume consists of a substantial introduction and ten chapters that have been organized thematically and chronologically. It also contains a selected bibliography, a substantial glossary and a chronology, as well as a few maps and tables. The only thing missing as an appendix is a list of primary sources.

In their introduction, Vági, Csősz, and Kádár discuss the interactive decision making process involving both Germans and Hungarians that resulted in the plan of complete deportation in the spring 1944.[2] They highlight the widespread and willing cooperation of the Hungarian authorities, which was essential for the barbarously efficient implementation of this large-scale plan. The introduction also presents several crucial specific features of the Holocaust in Hungary, such as its special timing and unprecedented rapidity. Following the German occupation of Hungary on 19 March, 1944, a mere fifty-six days were adequate for the preparations and another fifty-six proved sufficient for the deportation of 437,402 Jewish individuals. Apart from some 15,000, all of those deported arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau and over 300,000 were immediately murdered there. Hungarian Jews thereby ended up constituting the single largest group of victims of the most infamous Nazi camp complex. In fact, it was this

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2 This process is explored in greater detail in Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *A végső döntés. Berlin, Budapest, Birkenau 1944* [The Final Decision: Berlin, Budapest, Birkenau 1944] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2013).

unprecedented campaign that made Auschwitz a synonym for the annihilation of European Jewry.

Individual chapters of the book present central issues, such as the consequences of Hungary's anti-Jewish laws prior to 1944, Jewish and non-Jewish reactions to persecution, the complete disenfranchisement and physical isolation of Hungarian Jews in 1944, their horrific experiences in the Nazi camp universe, and the expropriation of Jews and subsequent fate of Jewish property. The first chapter examines the series of anti-Jewish laws adopted in Hungary as of the late 1930s and provides an account of their primary consequences. Vági, Csősz, and Kádár explain that these Hungarian laws not only caused major material losses for Hungarian Jews and increasingly meant severe intrusions into the most intimate spheres of their lives, but also fostered nepotism and corruption and only escalated tensions and hatred. The second chapter also covers developments in the years prior to 1944, focusing on local anti-Semitic measures, the so called "Labor Service," the first mass murders, and German–Hungarian negotiations regarding the "Jewish question." Studying interactions between various levels of state power, the authors discuss how anti-Semitic initiatives originating at the lower levels often violated the harsh discriminatory laws in place ("illegal anti-Semitism") and how a host of regulations with anti-Semitic effects were implemented ("bureaucratic anti-Semitism"). Moreover, this chapter also explores the particularly severe policies applied in territories Hungary had re-annexed between 1938 and 1941, highlighting that the mass deportation of Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia in particular, which emerged as an aspiration of officials at the highest echelons of the Hungarian state as early as 1941.

In their chapter on the disenfranchisement of Hungary's Jews and their physical isolation in ghettos and collection camps, Vági, Csősz, and Kádár explain that local authorities and sometimes even civilian populations could substantially influence the specifics of ghettoization. As a result, various models of segregation emerged. Conditions in the short-lived Hungarian ghettos varied greatly, although radical manners of implementation clearly predominated. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on the extreme brutality of the deportations, symbolized by the humiliating body searches as well as the fact that some 6,000 to 7,000 Jews had already died by the time their trains arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau (p.217). Chapter seven examines the specifics of the Nazi camp universe, following the trails of the deported into Auschwitz-Birkenau and other major Nazi camps, such as Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück, Buchenwald and

Mauthausen, while also highlighting that Jews from Hungary ended up in a total of about 600 concentration and forced labor camps, factories, and production plants scattered across Europe.

The book also carefully contextualizes Horthy's decision to halt the deportations, documenting Hungarian intentions to continue them beyond July 1944 and arguing that changes in the military situation proved to be the decisive factor. However, deportations resumed following the assumption of rule by the Arrow Cross party in mid-October 1944. In November and December, the Arrow Cross authorities herded about 50,000 people westwards, many of them on foot. As the authors highlight, international protests played a major role in persuading Ferenc Szálasi to stop the deadly marches and organize two large ghettos in Budapest instead, the fate of whose Jewish inhabitants increasingly rested in the hands of lower level representatives of the Arrow Cross party.

The particularly insightful chapter on the material side of 1944 explains that "no independent budget existed for the plunder, ghettoization, and deportation" (p.190), and the genocide against Hungarian Jews was "self-financing: the victims paid the costs of their own murder" (p.178).[3] Illuminating the key measures, agencies, and beneficiaries of robbery, Vági, Csősz, and Kádár show that Hungarian authorities may have prepared hundreds of thousands of inventories of property and assets, but they ultimately proved overwhelmed by their involvement in genocide: they "managed neither to store properly nor to distribute this massive amount of plunder, lacking the time and personnel" (p.208). At the same time, the cynical vileness of some decision makers could hardly have been greater, as the state not only aimed to seize the last spoon and wineglass from every Jew, but also collected their taxes for the whole year of 1944 in advance (p.189).

The chapter on non-Jewish reactions highlights that the vast majority of the Hungarian population passively observed and widely accepted the persecution of Jews. The authors clarify that Hungarians may have murdered less than 10 percent of the more than 500,000 victims of the Holocaust in Hungary, but, in some way or another, hundreds of thousands of them took part in the massive "de-Jewification" campaign. In addition to clarifying that no vacuum of state

3 This part closely relates to innovative previous works of Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Self-Financing Genocide: The Gold Train, the Becher Case and the Wealth of Hungarian Jews* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004). See, in Hungarian, Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Aranyvonat* [Golden Train] (Budapest: Osiris, 2001) and Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Hullarablás. A magyar zsidók gazdasági megsemmisítése* [Robbing a Corpse: The Economic Destruction of Hungarian Jewry] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2005).

power existed and no "popular" anti-Semitic outbursts were unleashed during the deportations, the chapter explores the controversial role of the Christian Churches and the impressive rescue attempts initiated by the neutral diplomatic corps. Toward the end of the war, and triggered, above all, by the open brutality of the Arrow Cross, a host of civilians and even some members of the police took an active part in coordinated rescue operations that brought assistance to tens of thousands.

The chapter on Jewish responses to persecution confirms a long-accepted view according to which in Hungary most attempts at survival involved unarmed resistance. It contests, however, the image of complete Hungarian Jewish passivity, noting the ways in which regional and temporal differences affected people's ability and inclination to resist. While the traditional Jewish leaders of Hungary notoriously proved largely incapable of reassessing their relationship with the authorities in 1944, tens of thousands of Jews in the capital city chose the path of "illegal" opposition during the Arrow Cross era. The last chapter sketches the situation of Jews and the memory of the Holocaust in the postwar period, covering developments into the early twenty-first century. Vági, Csősz, and Kádár argue that while the legal rehabilitation of Jews was partly achieved, there was no real economic or financial compensation or restitution, and Jews were not effectively protected from postwar anti-Semitism (p.342). Nevertheless, the closing pages of the book reiterate the ascent, catastrophe, and revival narrative of modern Hungarian Jewish history (p.365).

In sum, *The Holocaust in Hungary* provides an up-to-date overview of its subject and constitutes a substantial addition to the English-language literature on this major chapter of the Holocaust, which has been relatively inadequately researched. The volume also includes a wide variety of documents and traces the various life trajectories of their authors to great effect. It reveals the specificities of the Holocaust in Hungary and shows parallels with events in a host of other countries. Still, it remains essentially a national narrative in which relevant developments outside Hungary, particularly those in Nazi Germany, tend to be hinted at rather than systematically explored. The authors are entirely correct to emphasize that the radicalization of Hungarian anti-Semitism was largely an internal process. Still, the chronology of this radicalization strongly suggests the relevance of transnational trends that researchers still need to explore in detail. Second, while gender aspects are recurrently highlighted in this volume, gender could have been made a major theme to considerable effect. Last but not least, the book is characterized by a restrained and largely analytical tone. It shows

acute awareness of moral issues and stakes, but without exploring in detail the peculiar moral notions behind anti-Semitic persecution in Hungary, another potentially fruitful avenue for future researchers, who will certainly build on this impressive achievement.

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