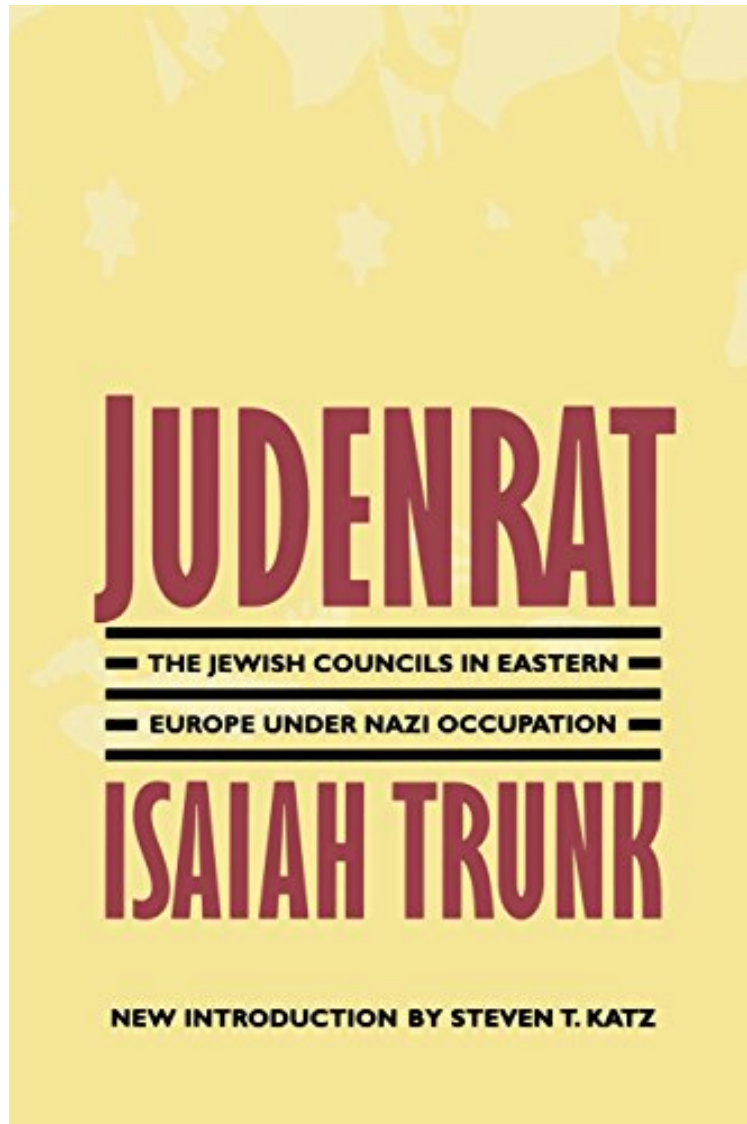


Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation

Isaiah Trunk

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Isaiah Trunk : Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Important book but not without flaws By melwest This has long been considered the go-to book on the subject of the Jewish Committees appointed by the Germans to run the affairs of the

Jewish communities in occupied lands. This volume deals mainly with three communities in Poland: Warsaw, Lodz, and the communities of Upper East Silesia, which combined 26 individual community councils under the "Central" Judenrat in Sosnowiec run by Moshe (Monyk) Meryn (Merin). As it happens, by research centers on this last area. I read Trunk's various accounts quite carefully. I became uneasy when I started noticing much of his narrative depended on a single source, a memoir/diary by Pawal Wiederman, titled "The Blond Beast." Huge sections of Trunk's work relies on this work, which is duly footnoted. Still, as any reporter knows, a single source can be tricky. Through friends and colleagues, I got hold of an unpublished English translation of this book. The original was published in German in 1957 and is now out of print. The author, Wiederman, says quite openly that much of what he has written is based on diaries of events at the time, but much is reconstructed immediately after the war. So huge swaths of conversations, including fat paragraphs of direct quotes attributed to Meryn, are not from texts of speeches or contemporaneous letters, but reconstructed after the war. This is fine, except Trunk never bothers to point this out. Nor, from what I could tell, does he have a lot of corroboration of some really controversial quotes for third parties. That Meryn was an egotist with an outsized sense of his destiny and unbendable belief in the path he followed is not the issue. To me, it's in quoting lengthy speeches and statements whose only source may be reconstructed, not contemporaneous. Others have quoted Wiederman at length, but have hinted at the potential problems in relying on one witness' account. Trunk should have pointed out this weakness to the reader. I cannot speak to other sections of Trunk's work, which is truly breathtaking in its scope. This book deserves to be a resource for anyone studying the subject. Just study the sourcing carefully.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By SatisfiedAs advertised!
6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. The Modus Operandi of the Judenrats and the Jewish Ghetto Police; Corrections Needed
By Jan Peczkis
This encyclopedic work includes arcane details about the origins and function of the Judenrats, including such things as organization, administration, religion, education, economics, medical issues, public welfare, and much more. There is also much on postwar trials of Jewish collaborators, including trials in Israel (1951-1964). A middle view is followed that avoids the extremes of unmitigated guilt and unilateral exoneration owing to the extremity of circumstances. Just as the Polish Blue police was sometimes forced by the Germans to carry out the shooting of ghetto Jews, so was the Jewish police on many occasions (p. 483). Polish help to Jews is occasionally mentioned. (e. g., p. 523, p. 539). At other times, however, Jews refused offers of Polish help, choosing to remain in the ghettos. (e. g., p. 442). This decision almost always doomed them. "Open and secret agents, who supplied information to their German masters, were active in the ghettos". (p. 504). "Nihilism and lawlessness became widespread among the ghetto police, leading to far-reaching collaboration with the Germans." (p. 500). "...shameless blackmailers, and thieves." (p. 538). "The ghetto police actively participated in uncovering hidden Jews in many ghettos. Familiar with the topography of the ghetto, the layout of the apartments, and the nooks where people might try to hide, the ghetto police was given the task of sniffing out Jews in hiding." (p. 513). Trunk incorrectly claims that only Polish Communist guerilla units accepted Jews. (p. 452). There were, in actuality, openly Jewish soldiers in the NSZ and AK, including its top echelons. He also says that cooperation with the Germans was compelled in the case of Jews (e. g., the Judenrats), while that of non-Jews (e. g., the 260,000 Poles in the German-ruled administration: p. 572) was voluntary. This is incorrect. For example, no sooner had the Germans conquered Poland than they demanded that the prewar Polish criminal police report for duty under threat of death for no-shows: Hence the Polish Blue Police (Policja Granatowa). (Also, one of my uncles fled and hid to avoid service in the German administration). "They [Jewish Council members] were in danger of going to the extreme in cooperating with the Nazis, not so much in the illusory belief of interceding for the common good of the Jews as for their own benefit. In an atmosphere of moral nihilism, corruption of Nazi officialdom, and inhuman terror, it was not easy for such Council members to be on guard against crossing the fine demarcation line between cooperation and collaboration." (p. 573). (The same held for the Polish Blue Police, albeit under less severe circumstances. But the similarity ends there. Jewish collaborators weren't liquidated by Jewish insurgents until well into the "resettlements", and then only sporadically. In contrast, the Polish Underground regularly liquidated Poles who had drifted into collaborationism. The extremity of circumstances didn't change this. For instance, Poles turned informers as a result of being broken by Gestapo tortures were liquidated just the same.) Let's take this further. Trunk doesn't address Hannah Arendt's contention that, without the massive Jewish collaboration, the Germans wouldn't have been able to kill anywhere near 5-6 million Jews. Suppose, instead, that any Jew who took part in the "resettlements" was promptly assassinated, regardless of circumstances. Would the Germans have proceeded anyway, or would they have decided that the Jewish genocide was too disruptive to complete during wartime? Pointedly, Hans Frank already favored the latter (see the Peczkis review of HANS FRANK).

During World War II, more than five million Jews lived under Nazi rule in Eastern Europe. In occupied Poland, the Baltic countries, Byelorussia, and Ukraine, they were stripped of property and resettled in ghettos. The German authorities established in each ghetto a Jewish Council, or Judenrat, to maintain minimal living standards. The Judenrat was required to carry out Nazi directives against other Jews, to supply forced labor, and eventually to cooperate in the Final Solution. Did the Jewish leaders of the ghettos, who were also victims, assist their murderers? If

cooperation with the Nazi oppressors was morally defensible during the first stage in organizing the ghettos, what about later, when deportations to death camps began? Trunk analyzes situations where the Councils and ghetto police were forced to send their own communities to death. Some Council members chose suicide rather than supply lists to the Nazis; others used delaying tactics. Some handed over the lists. Some joined their families in the gas chamber. In assessing guilt and innocence, Trunk never allows the reader to forget that the impossible choices facing the Jewish leaders were created by the Nazis.

"Judenrat confirms one conclusion: the Nazis created a hell on earth where the best could falter and the worst could show a flash of decency. Suddenly, one realizes what happens to people in a world of absolute evil. Mr. Trunk again teaches us that we must distinguish between victims and criminals, as well as between criminal victims and criminals. The greatest virtue of this important book based upon half a decade of research and sound scholarship is that it is not an objective study. Objectivity would be indecent here." [London] Times Literary Supplement