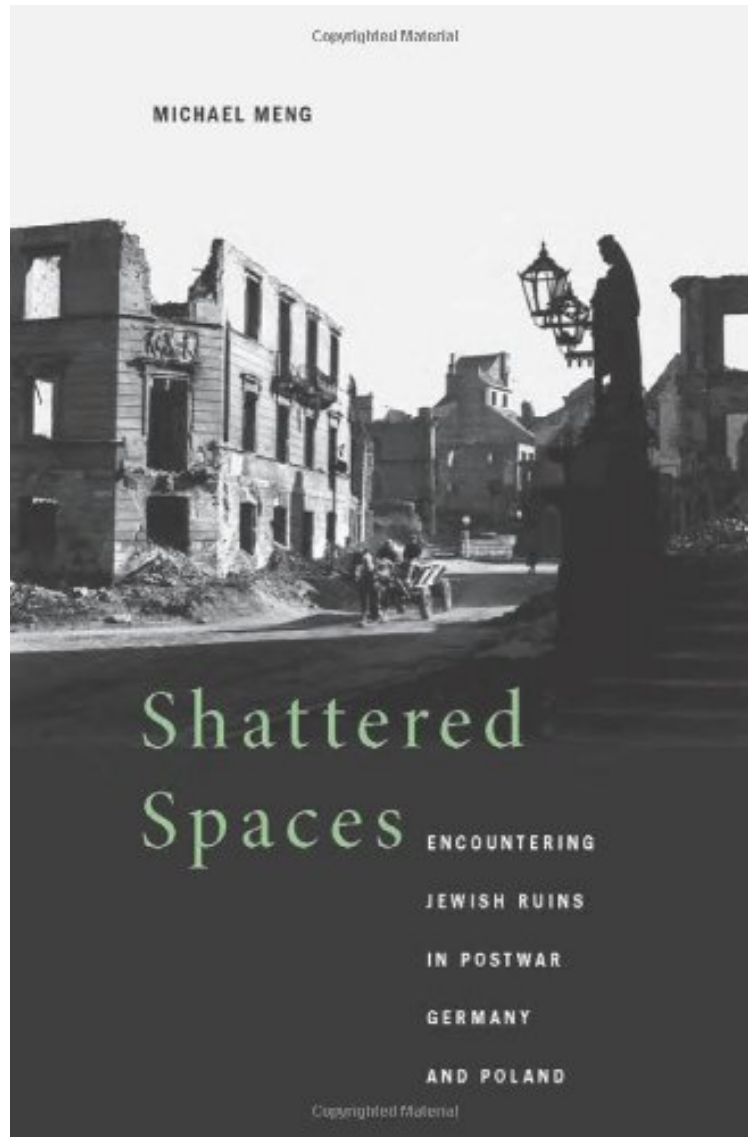


(Read ebook) Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland

# Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland

*Michael Meng*

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**Michael Meng : Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Kindle Customer Fascinating, thoughtful, and non-

partisan.2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Poland's Imagined Guilt. A Thinly-Veiled Support For the Holocaust Industry. Another Boring Rerun of Jan T. GrossBy Jan PeczkisHaving read and reviewed hundreds of works on Poland's Jews, being unfamiliar with the author, and learning of the acclaim that this book has gotten, I had expected much more of it. It turned out to be a disappointing repetition of tired, Judeocentric ideas amidst a body of novel information on Germany. This book tacitly juxtaposes Germany and Poland, which itself is objectionable in that it relativizes the two in the reader's mind. It ever-so-subtly puts Poles and Germans on the same side. In this review, I focus exclusively on Poland. The serious reader need not waste any more time on Meng's book. The facts are clear: Poles are not responsible for German crimes. Nor are Poles responsible for the consequences of German crimes. Individual cases excepted, Poles owe the Jews NOTHING in terms of property restitution. In fact, all claims have long been completely satisfied by past German payments to Jews. Please click on, and read my detailed English-language review, of Nie musimy placic Zydom!. THE STANDARD ANTI-POLISH LINE The historical background section of this book employs the predictable black-and-white dialectic: Poles were bad, and the Jews were victims that never did anything wrong. In common with many authors, Meng is in deep denial about the fact and the scale of Jewish-Soviet collaboration, which he dismisses as "the myth of Zydokomuna". In reality, the Jewish crimes committed by the Zydokomuna, and the harm that they did to Poland, were very real. For example, please click on, and read my detailed review of, and first Comment under, The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority (Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies). The author misrepresents the massacre at Jedwabne as a Polish deed. (p. 21, 218). In actuality, and contrary to media spin, the evidence for responsibility is inconclusive. In fact, the investigative Polish commission (IPN, or INSTYTUT PAMIĘCI NARODOWEJ) was unable to assign an unambiguous role for either Poles or Germans in the barn-burning. [See the first Comment under this review.] Author Meng provides the reader more details, about the Nazi German extermination of gentile Poles, than do most Holocaust-related authors. However, he does not internalize it. He just snaps back into the "Jewish suffering is special" mentality. At times, the author lapses into standard Polonophobic formulations. He repeats (p. 72, 109) the customary Jewish attack on Poland as thinking of herself the "Jesus Christ of Nations". He shows his fundamental hostility to Poland in other ways. Instead of examining the grotesque distortions of history inherent in, for example, Claude Lanzmann's SHOAH, Michael L. Meng uncritically accepts it as a self-evident truth, and, what's more, attacks Poles for questioning various falsifications of Polish history. (e. g, pp. 160-161, 171-172, 181). In other words, Poles are attacked, and then they are attacked again for trying to set the record straight. POLES ARE "OBLIGATED" TO REMEMBER THE JEWS Over and over again, Meng faults Poles for not remembering Poland's Jewish past, as if they were self-evidently supposed to. Why? Are Jews special? In fact, complaints about not remembering a bygone past defy common sense. How many Ukrainians and Russians, living on former Polish territory (the KRESY) feel a need to memorialize the past Polishness of these territories? For that matter, how many American Jews, most of whom are descended from Poland's Jews, feel a need to remember Poland? (And when they do, it is almost always only in a selective, derogatory manner.) All this time, Meng makes no attempt to objectively examine the possible causes for Poles forgetting about Jews until fairly recent times. He does not tell the reader that, for centuries, Jews had lived in self-imposed apartheid, effectively a separate nation on Polish soil, and had frequently sided with Poland's foreign rulers when they found it expedient to do so. Clearly, Jews were in the Polish nation but not of it. Why, then, for this reason alone, is it surprising that Poles did not make it a priority to memorialize Poland's Jewish past? The informed reader probably realizes that American Jews, especially, had been reviling Poland for decades. Surely, these did not exactly endear Poles to the Jewish past of Poland. GUILT PEDDLING: THE POLITICS OF SHAME IN ACTION [DERIVED FROM THE PEDAGOGIKA WSTYDU] Meng realizes that it was the Germans, and not the Poles, who had exterminated Poland's Jews, but he would have us believe that it does not matter. Poland is still guilty. This bizarre ideation is taken straight from neo-Stalinist Jan T. Gross. After all, there is money to be made by the Holocaust Industry. Thus, Michael Meng writes, (quote) The Nazis confiscated a large amount of Polish property, deported hundreds of thousands of Poles into forced labor, and killed nearly 2 million of them. Poles could easily dismiss or simply not even think about restituting crimes committed by someone else during a brutal occupation that they had opposed and experienced. But the Nazi occupation of Poland, while horrific, did involve collusion from Poles. Possibly hundreds of thousands became involved in the management, seizure, and use of Jewish property. Returning this now "formerly Jewish property" would involve a material loss and would require confronting Polish complicity in crimes more comfortably thought to have been carried out exclusively by someone else. (unquote). (p. 59). To follow Gross even more, Meng revives Gross' imaginative "psychoanalysis" of Poles. He repeats Gross' argument that Poles erased visible traces of Poland's Jewish past because they did not want to be reminded of their guilt. Yeah, right. What is good for the goose is good for the gander. If Polish complicity in the Holocaust, no matter how tangential, means that Poland now owes money to the Jews, then it also means that Jews now owe Poland money for Jewish complicity, even if it was tangential, in the 1939 and 1944 Soviet subjugations of Poland. Either that, or there is a dual morality in existence--one for Jews and one for Poles. Apart from the crushing poverty, there was a desperate housing shortage in Poland during and after WWII. What were Poles supposed to do--let the post-Jewish properties stand vacant out of reverence to the murdered Jews? [See comments] Let us demystify property acquisition. It is standard practice for the living to acquire the property of the

dead, and for much property to change hands as an outcome of a major war, moreover regardless of nationality. This was particularly true of WWII. There was and is nothing remarkable, much less guilt-producing, about this process. The accusations of Jan T. Gross, all recycled by Michael L. Meng, have the Holocaust Industry written all over them. They are part of the "politics of shame", which is a derivative of the old Communist-era PEDAGOGIKA WSTYDU. The only way that Poles can begin to redeem themselves, assuage the guilt that they are supposedly repressing, and to "come to terms with the past", is to pay off those who keep trying to extort "reparations" (actually, tribute) money from Poland. No!

**THE STORY OF MR. ROSENBAUM: A SATIRE OF THE HOLOCAUST INDUSTRY**

In order to make the thought process of Jan T. Gross and Michael Meng clear to the reader, I have made up the following story: Mr. Rosenbaum, an American Jew, lived in New York in the early 1940s, and was murdered by a Nazi agent. He left no heirs, and so his property reverted to the state, exactly as prescribed by law. Now, 75 years after the fact, the Holocaust Industry is announcing to everybody that the United States is a Nation of Robbers because it appropriated Mr. Rosenbaum's property as its own. We are told, in accordance with the imagination of the likes of Jan T. Gross, that the USA is riven with long-repressed guilt for its ill-gotten gain. What's more, even though few Americans collaborated with the Nazis, the USA is still complicit in the Holocaust because Americans benefitted from the death of the Jew Rosenbaum. The only remedy is clear: The USA must "come to terms with the past", "face up to dark chapters in its history", and pay property restitution monies, to the self-appointed members of the Holocaust Industry, for Mr. Rosenbaum's long-stolen property. Such is the situation facing Poland today. It would be a surreal joke were it not for real.

**AUTHOR MICHAEL MENG'S LIBERAL AGENDA CLARIFIED**

Towards the end of the book, the author focuses on the recent revival of interest in Jewish matters in Poland. He also treats a so-called cosmopolitan Polish identity as somehow better than the traditional "Polish-Catholic" identity. (pp. 250-251). Says who? And who determines what kind of nation Poland should be? Dare Poland be her OWN nation?

0 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

**Redemptive Cosmopolitanism, to reclaim Jewish Ruins**

By James Denny

"Redemptive Cosmopolitanism" is just one of several original terms coined by author Michael Meng in describing the rise in interest in recognizing and reclaiming former Jewish spaces in Postwar Germany and Poland. Meng selected five cities for his research: East and West Berlin; Essen; Potsdam; Warsaw; and Wroclaw, (formerly Breslau), to study what had been Jewish spaces in the pre-Nazi period and to explain what happened to them in the years since the War ended. Prior to the War, each of these five cities had a significant Jewish presence with recognizable Jewish spaces. However, instead of focusing on people, Meng's focus in "Shattered Spaces" is on the physical spaces themselves: schools; synagogues; mercantile districts; residential districts; and cemeteries. His research is mostly original. He discerns patterns in the differences among these former Jewish spaces in each of "his" cities. There are consequential differences in the perception and treatment of the former Jewish spaces in Poland (Warsaw and Wroclaw) with the former Jewish spaces in Germany (the two Berlins, Essen and Potsdam). Neglect and abandonment of former Jewish spaces characterized the immediate Postwar period. However, by the early 1980's, the tide had turned. The rise of the new urbanism, initiatives in both Germany and Poland to reclaim ruins and underused urban space, the tear-down of the Berlin Wall and German reunification and the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe were major issues behind the reclamation of former Jewish spaces in both nations. On a philosophical level, survivor guilt, redemptive cosmopolitanism, sheer curiosity, heritage tourism and Holocaust tourism became rising issues with economic and political ramifications for reclaiming these former Jewish spaces. Meng has included period maps and historic photographs that provide a detail-level focus for neighborhoods in each of the five cities. There is some redundancy in the narrative which with tighter editing would have made for an easier read since "Shattered Spaces" is meant for a general audience. There is the odd rant and an occasional spike toward the polemic. Those minor issues aside, the originality and quality of scholarly research, the superb documentation, precision and level-of-detail make this an informative read for a student of urban studies and urban planning, Holocaust studies and for those interested in Postwar Germany and Poland. Five stars.

After the Holocaust, the empty, silent spaces of bombed-out synagogues, cemeteries, and Jewish districts were all that was left in many German and Polish cities with prewar histories rich in the sights and sounds of Jewish life. What happened to this scarred landscape after the war, and how have Germans, Poles, and Jews encountered these ruins over the past sixty years? In the postwar period, city officials swept away many sites, despite protests from Jewish leaders. But in the late 1970s church groups, local residents, political dissidents, and tourists demanded the preservation of the few ruins still standing. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, this desire to preserve and restore has grown stronger. In one of the most striking and little-studied shifts in postwar European history, the traces of a long-neglected Jewish past have gradually been recovered, thanks to the rise of heritage tourism, nostalgia for ruins, international discussions about the Holocaust, and a pervasive longing for cosmopolitanism in a globalizing world. Examining this transformation from both sides of the Iron Curtain, Michael Meng finds no divided memory along West-East lines, but rather a shared memory of tensions and paradoxes that crosses borders throughout Central Europe. His narrative reveals the changing dynamics of the local and the transnational, as Germans, Poles, Americans, and Israelis confront a built environment that is inevitably altered with the passage of time. *Shattered Spaces* exemplifies urban history at its

best, uncovering a surprising and moving postwar story of broad contemporary interest.

An excellent book. Meng deftly describes how the material legacy of the Holocaust continues to force people in Eastern and Central Europe to confront the past. He brings ideological concerns, questions of identity and nationalism, architectural ideals, and even quotidian construction issues into a seamless narrative. Debunking any simplistic divide between West and East, he offers a much more nuanced and ambiguous picture that takes into account the complex factors that characterized post-WWII Europe. (Brian Porter-Szcs, author of *Faith and Fatherland*) Meng deals with a highly original and interesting topic, which has been largely unexplored, in its comparative, transnational aspects. His research is extremely thorough, and his choice of Jewish "shattered sites" in Warsaw, East and West Berlin, Wroclaw, Potsdam and Essen is very judicious, as it allows us to observe both the big scene and smaller local initiatives. (Saul Friedlander, author of *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933-1945*) In his pathbreaking and perceptive study, Meng digs through the neglected ruins of Jewish urban life after 1945 to uncover fascinating clues about the complex ways in which Germans and Poles dealt with the physical legacy of genocide. Rigorously researched and commendably comparative, the book makes an important contribution to the fields of Jewish history, Holocaust history, and memory studies. (Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, author of *Building after Auschwitz*) An extraordinary study of remembering and the sites of memory in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Meng poses important questions and offers illuminating insights, while comparing Jewish sites in West Germany, East Germany, and Poland. This is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the relation of the Holocaust to postwar Central Europe. (Larry Wolff, author of *The Idea of Galicia*) About the Author Michael Meng is Assistant Professor of History at Clemson University.