

argues, “must be reconsidered through memory of the Stalin era and the late stage of heavy modernity. When we see how the Soviet period can be critical for today’s environmental concerns, we recognize that this history is unfinished” (2). The close readings are generally insightful and often penetrating; the engagement with history is more uneven, being derived from a handful of secondary sources in each case, thereby missing the opportunity to juxtapose historical primary sources with literature. The broad topics of each of the four overarching case studies are well chosen, as are the literary texts addressed in each.

The least successful happens to be the first: Part Two, “The Tired Village.” Beginning with Andrei Platonov’s *The Foundation Pit*, Barcz reads rural nature as buckling under but also subverting collectivization in a period she calls the “Stalinocene” (40), adapting the Anthropocene framing of the entire book. This effort is a rare misfire in an otherwise interesting volume. The purpose of the “-ocene” suffix is to mark off those environmental changes of such a scale that they are traceable in the geological record. Collectivization, for all its horrors, does not meet this criterion, and in the end “Stalinocene” seems to be little more than a scientized updating of the 1980s coinage *Stalinshchina*, which had the merits of being an actors’ category and distinctly rooted in the linguistics of the region. More successful is Barcz’s observation that the literary reaction to collectivization has been to romanticize the rural: “One of the responses of this period literature was to poeticize the relation with nature and the animal world, and escape from the brutality of what collectivization brought to rural traditional culture” (78).

The final three Parts are increasingly effective, drawing from Polish, Hungarian, East German, Belarusian, and other literatures to highlight both well-known and less obvious ways in which the literary imagination can reinvigorate the historian’s gaze. These three cases are coal and uranium mining in Silesia, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986 and the “exceptional language of witnessing” (127) that followed in its wake, and the forests of eastern Europe—especially Białowieża/Belovezhskaja Pushcha in Poland/Belarus. (In this last section, the brief analysis on page 184 of the Soła River, which runs past Auschwitz-Birkenau, and its communist-era damming, is particularly riveting.) The scale of each case requires a different kind of narration, Barcz argues, and each necessarily transcends national borders and individual languages. By the time we get to the forests, the reader is persuaded of the justice of the critique that was laid out in Part One. It is unfortunate that the book provides no conclusion to synthesize the implications of the case studies.

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Iron Landscapes: National Space and the Railways in Interwar Czechoslovakia.

By Felix Jeschke. *Explorations in Mobility*, vol. 5. New York: Berghahn Books, 2021. xi, 221 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustration. Photographs. Tables. Maps. \$135.00, hard bound.

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In his book, published by the prestigious publishing house of Berghahn, the promising young historian, Dr. Felix Jeschke (University of Munich), examines the phenomenon of the railway (only in relation to personal transport) in central Europe, namely in the first Czechoslovak Republic. The aim of the work, whose title page catches the reader’s attention at first glance with its image of a red train car—the

Slovenska Strela motorized express train—is to examine the “national ambivalence of the railway” using the terms “national railways” and “cosmopolitan railways” (16).

From the author’s stated aim, it is clear that this is a very innovative approach, though it comes with certain potential risks. This essayistically conceived book is unconventional in several respects. In addition to an extensive introduction and conclusion, it consists of a total of five chapters. Despite the scope of the introduction, however, we do not find in it a classical analysis of sources and literature. To some extent, this is compensated by more extensive notes, containing dozens of titles on the topic, but without comments or evaluation. The author, as can be seen from the notes, is well acquainted with both the period and contemporary professional literature of both Czech and foreign provenance, and makes use of a relevant selection of sources.

The first chapter (“Forging a Nation from the Tracks: Railway Construction and Representation in Interwar Czechoslovakia,” 25–63), concerns itself with, as the title indicates, the “forging” of the “Czechoslovak” nation with the aid of railway construction. The next chapter (“The Heart of Europe and Its Periphery: Travelling and Travel Writing,” 64–101) is devoted to the mythology of Prague (Bohemia) as the heart of Europe (J. Palacký, 1800s historian) and simultaneously its periphery and issue of travel. In this chapter, one appreciates the author’s approach and involvement of (period foreign) tourism.

Chapter 3, entitled “Germanized Territories” or “Pure German Soil”? The National Conflict on the Railways” (102–36), deals with the fascinating example of national dissonances. The author tells the story of Czech teacher Josef Jireš in the Liberec region (a territory with a predominantly German-speaking population) who wants a German-speaking conductor (an employee of the Deutsche Reichsbahn) to speak Czech with him in the Czech Republic. More than 100 km of railways in Czechoslovakia were owned and operated by the Deutsche Reichsbahn, a holdover from the nineteenth century.

The penultimate chapter (“Station between the National and the Cosmopolitan: Railway Buildings and De-Austrianization,” 137–62) tells of the relationship between the national and the cosmopolitan and de-Austrianization using the example of railway station buildings, and their appearance and importance, not only from the perspective of transportation, but also from the national and state perspective. The state built new lines based on its interests: the replacement of the north-south direction with an east-west direction. In the final, fifth chapter (“Bratislava to Prague in 4h 51min”: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and the Slovenská strela,” 163–86) Jeschke documents the relationship between the national and the cosmopolitan, on the example of the fastest Czechoslovak railway train with an atemporal hybrid engine, the *Slovenská strela* (Slovak Bullet).

The conclusion is not a classic summary conclusion, but rather an epilogue, as it briefly outlines the development up to 1989. Here it is appropriate to correct the author’s treatment of the word “national” after 1989/1993, when the adverb “national” replaced the up-to-then-used term “state,” hence the National Library, the National Archive and thus the Czech Railways as a national carrier, not in the nationalist sense, but as an expression of “separation” from the pre-November regime.

Jeschke’s new perspectives merit appreciation. This book will assuredly lead to reflection on our evaluations up to this point, without necessarily having to lead to re-evaluation, but, rather, to a more precise refinement. Unfortunately, the notes are listed only after the text of the chapter, which is not very reader-friendly, and their content presupposes knowledge of the environment and Czech on the part of the reader. Another issue is that paragraphs should not exceed the length of a page. The author’s concentration on the railway in the elaboration of the topic is fundamental,

as the railway embodied the most efficient transport factor of the time. The inclusion of rail freight would bring a further extension of the topic as well as possible corrections to its evaluation.

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The Ransom of the Jews: The Story of the Extraordinary Secret Bargain Between Romania and Israel, 2nd Ed. By Radu Ioanid. Foreword Elie Wiesel. Trans. Cristina Marine. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021. xxvi, 406 pp. Appendix. Notes. Index. \$115.00, hard bound; \$39.00, paper.
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Romanian Jews' emigration to Israel after World War II was a process that interested the communist regime in Bucharest not only politically but also financially. Between 1948 and 1989, most Romanian Jews were allowed to emigrate following confidential agreements between Romania and Israel.

Radu Ioanid is a historian and archivist for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC and presently the ambassador of Romania to Israel (from 2020). His volume opens with a concise foreword by Elie Wiesel. According to Wiesel, Ioanid's revelations "concern the transformation of the Romanian government into an extraordinary merchant of human beings during the postwar years. If 380,000 Romanian Jews established themselves in the Jewish State, it is because Romania 'sold' them as if they were slaves" (xiv).

Ioanid analyzes relationships between Communist Romania and Israel through the prism of the important and older Jewish community that was subjected to anti-semitic pressures just after the international recognition of Romanian independence at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. These currents and antisemitic policies were found abundantly also in the interwar and communist regimes, throughout the twentieth century in Romania.

A rough calculation would indicate that, between 1968 and 1989, Nicolae Ceaușescu sold 40,577 Jews to Israel for \$112,498,800, at a price of \$2,500 and later at \$3,300 per person (142). But, in a 1960 exchange of some Jewish families, the Romanian Communists were going to receive 100 Australian Merino sheep, twenty-five head of Jersey cattle, and thirty Landrace pigs (71).

Chapter 1, "The Jews Are Our Misfortune': Anti-Semitism in Romania, from the Congress of Berlin to World War II," discusses the continuing antisemitism in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth in Romania. Ioanid added, however, that in a sense, the ensuing period between 1923 and 1937 represented a golden age of human rights for Romanian Jews (5). The general policy toward Jews during the WWII was one of terror, plunder, rape, deportation, and murder (8). At least 270,000 Jews under Romanian jurisdiction died in the Holocaust, either on the explicit orders of Romanian officials or as a consequence of their criminal barbarity (8). Chapter 2, "Voting with Their Feet: Jewish Emigration before the Fall of the Iron Curtain" explores the incipient emigration of the Jews from Romania to Palestine, 1945–47. Chapter 3, "The Zionist Enemy," focus on early diplomatic relations between Romania and Israel and the first arrangements of emigration of the Jews from the communist state. Chapter 4, "Barter," presents the first important ransom of the Romanian Jews, after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania (1958). Chapter 5, "An Uneasy Relationship," presents Nicolae Ceaușescu's