

Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust: OUN and UPA's Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941-1944

By John-Paul Himka. Stuttgart: ibidem, 2021. Pp. 540. Paperback \$55.00. ISBN: 978-3838215488.

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The involvement in the Holocaust of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its military arm, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) remains one of the most contentious historical issues in Ukraine. Many see these organizations and the individuals who served in them as heroic defenders of Ukrainian independence, whereas others point to their collaboration with the Germans in committing anti-Jewish atrocities on Ukrainian soil. Vladimir Putin's false claims that his war on Ukraine is justified as a war on fascism have only served to further obfuscate and politicize the issue.

John-Paul Himka's sober and informed analysis finally provides a balanced if devastating account of how involved the OUN and the UPA actually were in the killing of Jews on Ukrainian soil during the period 1941-1944. Himka writes in a cool and calculated voice, almost as though setting up a legal case, carefully laying out for readers in the first hundred pages the historiography as it stands and the sources on which his study is based. As he notes, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's recent digitization of large numbers of postwar Soviet trial records from the archives of the Security Service of Ukraine and the archives of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commissions have made it much easier to conduct this type of research, although Himka's source base goes well beyond these digitized Soviet documents to include Ukrainian and German official documents, memoirs, diaries, and various sets of oral histories. Part of the challenge the sources pose is the proliferation of fabricated diaries and documents, many of which Himka convincingly debunks. Additionally, Himka draws generously upon the outstanding research that has recently been conducted on the Holocaust in Ukraine by scholars such as Diana Dumitru, Alexander Kruglov, Wendy Lower, Dieter Pohl, Alexander Prusin, Vladimir Solonari, Kai Struve, and others.

Himka shows that although Ukrainian nationalist leaders had generally opposed pogroms during the 1918-1921 wave of anti-Jewish violence, by the mid-1930s the OUN began trafficking in antisemitic rhetoric, most notably by equating the Jews with communism but also by portraying Jews as exploiters and deliberately excluding them from the Ukrainian nation. "[The] OUN had clearly become an antisemitic organization by the late 1930s," he continues, but the organization "was not obsessed with Jews in the way the German national socialists or Romanian legionnaires were" (171).

The bulk of Himka's study then focuses on the period after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Beginning with the pogroms that followed in the days and weeks after the initial invasion, Himka shows that "the Germans normally relied on local collaborators to instigate and orchestrate pogroms" and "the primary local accomplice of the Germans in such anti-Jewish violence in Galicia and Volhynia in the summer of 1941 was the Ukrainian National Militia established by the OUN" (201). In dozens of localities within these regions, each carefully analyzed and meticulously documented by Himka, members of the OUN's militias rounded up Jews, participated in pogroms against Jews, assisted the Germans in executing Jews, and, at times, conducted their own executions of Jews.

The OUN was quickly disappointed in the Germans, who dismissed the Ukrainians' yearnings for an independent state and, once the Ukrainian nationalist leadership had served its

immediate purpose, arrested many of its leading members, including Yaroslav Stetsko and Stepan Bandera. By the late summer of 1941, the Germans had realized that they could more effectively carry out anti-Jewish executions without first inciting pogroms and began to break up the Ukrainian nationalist militias and replace them with police forces or battalions.

Members of the OUN, though, gained prominence in the civil administration and police forces the Germans established, especially in Galicia and Volhynia, where the links between the OUN and the police were particularly strong. In these regions, police forces, often staffed by members of the OUN, played important auxiliary roles in the murder of the local Jewish communities. Sometimes entire OUN battalions were converted into police forces, such as the *Nachtigall* battalion, commanded by Roman Shukhevych, which became *Schutzmannschaft* battalion 201. In Galicia and Volhynia as well as throughout the *Reichskommissariat*, Ukrainian police implemented the transfer of Jewish populations into ghettos and guarded the perimeters of the ghettos. During these roundups, Ukrainian police assisted Germans in shooting Jews and sometimes shot Jews themselves. Himka notes that “the notion that the Ukrainian police were reluctant to engage in anti-Jewish actions and did so only under duress is not supported by anything I have found in police records themselves—quite the contrary” (331).

The final section of Himka’s book deals with the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which was established by Bandera’s faction of the OUN in the fall of 1942 as a form of resistance against the Soviet Union, the Polish Underground State, and the Germans. The chaotic and clandestine nature of the insurgency makes it particularly difficult to tease out exactly which units were acting under whose auspices, but Himka makes an admirable effort to distinguish the so-called *Banderites* from other insurgent groups and collects ample testimonies that claim units of the UPA perpetrated atrocities against Jews in 1942 and 1943 throughout Volhynia and Galicia. Although he cannot find definitive evidence from UPA documentation, Himka concludes that the murder of Jews reflects “a genuine OUN-UPA policy” (410). “Indeed,” he writes, “in addition to killing Jews because they were Jews and because they were allies with the Poles, UPA killed Jews who were associated with or protected by the Soviet partisan movement” (400).

Himka’s book is not for the faint of heart. The descriptions are chilling, and the level of detail is more than most readers will need. The prose is, at times, repetitive and even tedious. But the evidence and argumentation are exacting, and the conclusions are convincing. There can no longer be any reasonable doubt that the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army were complicit in committing atrocities against Jews during the Holocaust. Whether evidence, argument, and corroboration will convince any true believers, though, is another story altogether.

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Messengers of Disaster: Raphael Lemkin, Jan Karski, and Twentieth-Century Genocides

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Raphael Lemkin and Janusz Koziielewski (Jan Karski) came from two different worlds, though in 1943 and 1944, respectively, they helped inform the world of the genocidal horrors that had