

Raz SEGAL: *Genocide in the Carpathians. War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence 1914-1945*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016, 211 pp., ISBN: 978-0-8047-9666-8.

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Ethnic Cleansing in the Sub-Carpathian Region, 1914-1945

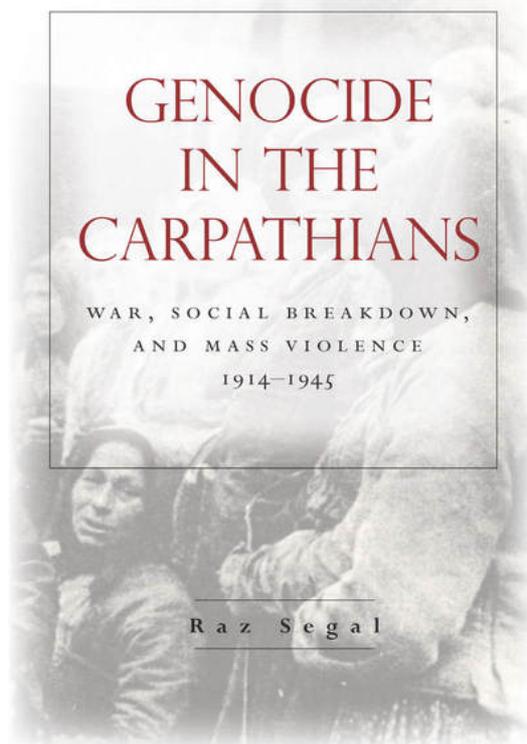
At the beginning of his book *Genocide in the Carpathians*, Raz Segal introduces his readers to its focus in the following way:

assumes a broad view and constructs a narrative of the intertwined pasts of the groups that together composed society and culture that came under pressure and attack by several central and regional state authorities as they strove to realize visions of nation and state building (p.13).

What are these groups, what are their relations, who was pressured and what is the nucleus of this superbly written and researched book? First, what were the important historical events in the region that the author so elaborately and insightfully documented during his one year stay in the region? In the Introduction we read that the lands of Eastern Europe have been researched extensively since World War II, however research of the borderlands of Eastern Europe has been very limited and the Subcarpathian Rus' studies have been neglected. Because this region was a borderland space between Czechoslovakia and Hungary during the interwar period and World War II it has experienced shifting of powers, social and political violence.

The author undertakes a valuable and quite substantive task of explicating the historical, political and social situation of the area between 1914-1945 and covers the historical period meticulously with great detail. In the book the reader can find many perspectives and sources produced by the authorities of the states that governed the region together with those people living there during two global wars and who experienced shifting borders. The main focus of the book under review is the exploration of the relations between people within the region. It also mentions the linkages between state policies and mass violence.

The book consists of five chapters. In Chapter 1. *Carpathians Rus Until World War I: A Culture Across Ethnic and Religious Boundaries*, Chapter 2. *The World Beyond the Mountains: Embittered and Embattled Modernists in Interwar Czechoslovakia*, and Chapter 3. *A Little World War: Carpatho-Ukraine*, the author explores the historical past



of the Carpatho-Ruthenians and the Jews until World War II. First, these relations were based on common respect and living together in relative peace. The religious point of view about supernatural powers also united the community. However, after the First World War these shared experiences became strained as the region was annexed to Czechoslovakia. The relationships between Carpatho-Ruthenian and Jewish people deteriorated; the Jewish children were sent to Czech rather than to local schools. People believed that Jews preferred to support a foreign power, not their neighbours. It was a difficult political situation and it caused unfriendly feelings towards Jews. The so far neglected area of research on Romani in that period gets some mention in the book. Raz explains that Roma remained vulnerable in the interwar period; Romani lived on the margins of the society in segregated camps on the outskirts of the towns and they were treated with suspicion as well as subjected to legal surveillance and discrimination. The Ukrainian nationalists who came from the other side of Carpathian Mountains caused more upheaval in the region. With political and religious tensions on the rise, the social setting both between, and within, groups became strained; for example, the Jewish communities in the Subcarpathian Rus' saw the bitterest conflicts between Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Judaism at the time. A similar struggle occurred between Greek Catholic and Orthodox Christian Carpatho-Ruthenians.

The following two Chapters, 4. *A big World War: "Greater Hungary" and Genocide in the Carpathians*, and 5. *Site of Hatreds: Destruction in Subcarpathian Rus'* respectively may be of special interest to readers interested in the fate of different communities of Carpatho-Ruthenians, especially the Jews and the Romani, and the violence against them in that region. After the German invasion of Hungary in March 1944 and after WWII, the Hungarian state kept rejecting the claims of settlement of non-Magyars in Subcarpathian Rus'. Hungarian politicians were planning to integrate this region into the 'Greater Hungary.' The relationships between Carpatho-Ruthenians, Hungarian occupiers and Jews were not founded on resentment. The author mentions that Jewish survivors who returned to the area after the war in search of families and properties did not experience violence or hostility. However, once Carpatho-Ruthenians realized how much the sociopolitical status of the Jews had deteriorated, anti-Jewish political antagonism became common in Subcarpathian Rus'. On May 4th, 1939 the Hungarian authorities used the Second Anti-Jewish Law to define *Jew*; many non-Jews had their documents verified in Ungvar stating they were born Christians. The *Race Protection Law* established on 8 August 1941 prohibited 'mixed' marriages as it aimed to preserve the purity of the blood of the Magyar race. The legal attack against Jews culminated in September 1942, when law was passed prohibiting Jews to acquire agricultural land and enabling the government to confiscate land owned by Jews. Jews along with Roma were deported from Subcarpathian Rus' in the summer of 1941 and imprisoned in Korosmezo. In the chapter *Making Life Unbearable: Carpatho-Ruthenians and Roma, 1939-1943* the author stresses how the Roma population suffered the most in the region because 'Gypsies' were undesirable elements (p.77). The rationale for persecution of Roma emanated from the acute impulse to remove nomadic 'Gypsies' who had no income and were perceived as foreign, unreliable, inherently diseased and dirty (p.77). Romani, as it has been for centuries, were labelled asocial on the basis of their race. As the German army entered Hungary on 19 March 1944, Adolf Eichmann was keen to see deportation of Jews to Nazi camps. In the summer of 1944 a mass deportation

of nearly 440,000 Jews from the slopes of the Carpathian Mountains began the period of torture and mass robbery by the Hungarian authorities.

The Roma's testimonies from this region show that the violence against them grew in 1944 after the conclusion of Jewish deportations. At that time, the vast majority of Carpatho-Ruthenians refused to cooperate with Hungarian and German authorities but as the author states, they «lent little help to their Jewish neighbours» (p. 104). They were labelled as “bystanders” but the terminology is not clear in this context and as the author states himself «we see these people through the lens of sources produced by Jews or the perpetrators» (p.104).

The book is very detailed and well documented with notes that cover pages from 129 to 193. The selected bibliography is up to date, relevant and can be found on pages from 193-205. It is a very important, valuable and worthwhile project and the author's conclusion is convincing. Segal has written an important contribution to the history of the genocide (holocaust?) in the region. He wrote a very much needed study in which he goes into depth into the relationships between Jews and Subcarpathians; there is no mention of the relations between Romani and Jews. This remains still a largely neglected area of study. This book would also benefit and attract the attention of non-academics if all the research could be complemented with some other documents, such as memoirs, letters and diaries of local residents who lived through this period. The suffering of the Roma is mentioned and given its place in the history of the region under study, both in between the wars and during the war. The terminology such as holocaust and genocide causes much confusion amongst many readers and it would be useful to explain and define both concepts further.

Raz Segal's superb study would be truly novel if the details of the genocide (holocaust?) of Roma were explored in greater depth, if such material is available to researchers. Both Jewish and Roma people were persecuted and as the writer states in conclusion:

examining these borderlands facilitates an understanding of the history of Hungary during World War II *as a whole*-without viewing March 1944 as a point of rupture, and involving non-Jews and well as Jews, Hungarian designs and policies in addition to those of Nazi Germany, and local, regional and national initiatives rather than collaboration” (p 119).

All in all, Segal's book gives readers an excellent historical context. It is an original, insightful, and very well researched study that adds to the current research on the Jewish and Roma genocide (holocaust?) in the region even if it is not flawless. Scholars will find this book stimulating and useful. His reasoned arguments rest on a strong evidential sources. He does not resort to conjectures if the sources are ambiguous or absent. His prose style is readable and, more importantly, free of any academic jargon that would make it difficult to read for people interested in the topic. In short, it is a fine achievement. It also opens the possible further research opportunities for those interested in a detailed knowledge of the Roma's genocide (holocaust?) in the region. It would be useful to continue this research in the near future before the still living witnesses of the Nazi's atrocities pass away.