Persecution and Rescue, by German professor of Politics and Public Administration Wolfgang Seibel, is an exhaustive study of the relationships between Vichy France and the German occupying authorities over the so-called Jewish Question following the capitulation in June 1940. From its short opening chapter, which looks at the nature of Nazi occupations across Western Europe, the book moves into a discussion of the complex relationship between the French and the Nazis (including the fact that the Germans saw a need to establish an embassy in occupied France, under Otto Abetz). From there, Seibel examines the Holocaust in France and the complications generated by the two administrations working side by side.

This is an outstanding volume that highlights just how fractured the expansion of the Holocaust was in France between 1940 and 1944, and focuses on the dynamics of antisemitic persecution. Across twelve densely researched chapters, Seibel outlines a case that refuses to find simple solutions to some extremely multifaceted questions; indeed, the depth of research undertaken by Seibel would not have allowed for such an approach to begin with.

Overall, this is a book to be commended to anyone with an interest in the Holocaust, in France under Nazi occupation, or in the intricacies of Nazi occupation policies generally. No higher praise can be offered to any piece of scholarship than to say that it marks a shift in the nature of the existing literature; with this book, Wolfgang Seibel has achieved precisely that.

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Alexander Prusin's Serbia under the Swastika is a systematic analysis of German occupation and administration of Serbia during World War II, providing nuanced discussions of the people, events, and processes that gave the period meaning. It is based on an impressive array of archival materials and a thorough reading of secondary literature in Serbian, German, Russian, Slovene, French, and English (and perhaps more) languages. It is concise, convincing, and well-written, all in all an excellent book.

Serbia under the Swastika is organized thematically for the most part, although the early chapters do trace the events leading to the occupation and the establishment of German control of Serbia. The thematic organization enables Prusin's most important contribution, which is to discuss in depth the origins, motives, ideas, and practices of several personalities who until now for English speakers existed largely as either quick references or caricatures. Here, Milan Nedić (who chaired the “Government of National Salvation,” which made him the Germans’ puppet-in-chief), Milan Aćimović (chairman of the “Council of Commissars”), Dimitrije Ljotic
(head of Zbor, the Serbian fascist organization), and Dragi Jovanović (mayor of Belgrade under occupation) all receive much more extensive and subtle treatment than most earlier work in English has provided. One cannot avoid the conclusion that all of these Serb collaborators were sympathetic to Nazi aims and, while no doubt wishing to avoid extreme German reprisals, were willing allies to the Germans. In this vein, Prusin accepts the argument that Nedić was more Pétain than Pavelić, an ultraconservative nationalist rather than a fascist, motivated by hatred of communists, equating communists and Jews, but not exceeding “the official policies of the time” (p. 129). The willingness of the Serbian puppet government to sacrifice Jews and Roma in place of Serbian hostages calls this contextualization into doubt—but Prusin’s care with the issue is welcome.

Prusin’s treatment of various resistance movements and the responses they provoked is equally careful. Here the author demonstrates a fundamental understanding of the relationships of the various forces at war in Serbia. His discussions of the Chetniks and Partisans, and their relationships with each other, the Germans, and the collaborationist Serbian state are balanced and responsible, betraying no particular bias for or against any of them (which may well mean his study will satisfy none of them, given the still-burning rivalries between the various actors and the ideologies that sustained them). Prusin’s discussion of multiple instances of reprisal by not only the Germans but also their Serbian helpers is more detailed than we are accustomed to, and thus more damning. One of the more interesting passages in this book, which is full of interesting passages, concerns Chetnik plans to take power with the assistance of Nedić’s forces after the expected defeat of the Germans in 1944 and to build a new Serbian state. The plan failed, but its existence reminds us that the policy of non-resistance pursued by the Chetniks and the Nedić government was part of a larger plan, and not simply a response to overwhelming German force.

As with any book concerning Eastern Europe and World War II, this one must also treat the slaughter of Jews. As is often the case, and as may in fact be unavoidable, here Prusin delegates a discrete chapter to the topic rather than attempting to integrate it into the broader narrative. As noted above, the author leaves the impression that he believes that the Nedić government basically went along with Nazi characterizations of Jews and with Nazi precedents for the treatment of Jews in Serbia. The Jewish community of Serbia did not survive the war; individuals and families did, and Prusin makes clear that while Serbs did protect individual Jews, perhaps in higher numbers than other Yugoslavs, they also participated without resistance in the work of gathering, transporting, and killing the vast majority of their Jewish neighbors.

This book will not settle any of the issues that enliven the study of World War II in southeastern Europe; however, it will serve as an excellent, concise contribution to the discussion, marred by no particular loyalties, ideological or ethnic, and based on a solid foundation of archival and secondary study.

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