

## More Than Parcels: Wartime Aid for Jews in Nazi-Era Camps and Ghettos

**Edited by Jan Láníček and Jan Lambertz. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2022. Pp. ix + 367. Paperback \$39.99. ISBN: 978-0814349229.**

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Between fifteen and twenty million people starved to death in World War II, and many Jews in wartime Axis Europe suffered from hunger and want. This essay collection sets out to put relief packages sent to the latter on the academic map. The contributors try, on the one hand, to systematize the existing research about these parcels, and on the other to revise the dominant opinion that parcels were of little help to persecuted Jews. In their attempt to rehabilitate the helpers, contributors stress mental support through the parcels more than their material impact. Much more than earlier scholars, they emphasize cooperation rather than competition between aid organizations, and point to helpful transnational networks. Bureaucratic and legal obstacles are central among the volume's topics, which often also deals with transportation problems and issues related to finding contact addresses.

The book offers a complex picture of the problems and debates involved in sending aid parcels to Jews – mostly across borders, while domestic help is rarely mentioned. The authors find the issue of food and hunger crucial to the Jews' situation and link it to economic warfare by the 'liberal' Allied powers, which was all the more important as most food deliveries into Axis Europe were outlawed and prevented, no matter what humanitarian issues were involved. Aid organizers needed to work around such restrictions, often through neutral states which put up their own hurdles. And yet, the volume shows that the Axis countries were "not hermetically sealed off" from the rest of the world economy by the Allies (Jan Lambertz in his introduction, 5). On the German (and Romanian) side, many packages and their contents were confiscated or embezzled, but despite policies of destruction and of starving the Jews, at no point does there seem to have existed a central ban on food parcels to Jews; at most, there were local and temporary regional ones.

Due to the available sources, the contributions deal more with senders than recipients, but many try to cover both and link them. The book is more about aid by organizations than private individuals; more about using funds than fundraising; more about NGOs than official aid; and, usually, about Jewish organizations. It largely provides a customary normative political history (with predominantly male historical actors).

The volume is fairly cohesive, without major controversies among contributors. They differ slightly concerning the question whether food and other packages were of significant help to their recipients in a material sense or not. The twelve authors, three of whom work at commemorative institutions, are a mix of junior and senior scholars. Most chapters have a clear structure (less so Gerald Steinacher's overview of the ICRC's relief efforts, 147–178), and the quality of the contributions does not vary greatly. All have a broad empirical basis. With two exceptions (the introduction and Stefan Cristian Ionescu's chapter on Romania/Transnistria), this includes the extensive use of archival sources. However, sometimes the use of existing scholarship is a bit selective, especially when it comes to broader contexts and theoretical backgrounds.

Perhaps the following comparison is of interest. One finds some themes in this volume that are also familiar from research about today's aid industry, such as, in many cases, the question of effectiveness (claims about persons 'reached,' etc.) and, mostly, a leadership or managerial perspective on aid. Questions of selectivity regarding the recipients,

inequality, and envy (also among Jews) are raised sometimes; those of bureaucracy within aid organization and the corruption involved, occasionally (Rebecca Erbelding on the U.S. War Refugee Board and Ionescu on Romania/Transnistria, respectively).

Other issues that would nowadays be familiar are not raised: aid conditionality, dependence through aid, and paternalism of aid organizers. The same goes for the nature of bourgeois charity, how much of the funds was used for staff salaries, or links between aid and inflation. For example, what did it mean if, as Eliyana Adler writes, food and other goods to be sent or given to Polish Jewish displaced people in/from the Soviet Union were procured in Iran and India in 1942-1943 (35), when these countries underwent deadly famines caused precisely by the massive extraction of resources by Allied occupiers or colonizers? In fact, Polish exiles coming from the Soviet Union to Iran received far more food than most Iranians at the time.

This is to say, famines are complex and ridden by social conflicts, and looking at one group affected involves risks. Jews were not always the population group suffering the worst under-supply, though often they were desperately in need (in wartime German internment camps and Romanian and big German ghettos; see the chapters by Alicja Jarkowska on the Jewish Aid Agency in the General Government, Katarzyna Person on the Warsaw Ghetto, Jan Láníček and Silvia Goldbaum Tarabini Francapane on Theresienstadt, Laurie Blake on France, and Ionescu on Romania). Hundreds of thousands of Jews died from such misery. Relief parcels helped prevent famine in Vichy France's internment camps in 1941-1942 (Blake, 203) because Jews in particular had many middle-class helpers, unlike many of the 40,000 inmates of French mental institutions who starved to death in the same period (not mentioned by Blake). There were many Jewish organizations which tried to send packages with food or clothes to Jews, unlike to other groups. On the other hand, the Allies did not apply their economic blockade (that prevented most aid shipments to Jews) to 24 million packages to Allied POWs in German captivity (Steinacher, 168). All packages sent to Jews mentioned in the volume totaled about two million, and often, only 10-15 percent reached the addressees.

In sum, certain weaknesses stem from contextualization that should be even broader than provided (including a global perspective) and, many times, from an approach based on the self-documentation of organizations perceived by their analysts as principally good and judged by the organizations' self-evaluations. As a side note, the volume includes many images, but most serve only as illustrations. However, in addition to much empirical material, the contributors do provide many valuable insights into a relevant topic, which makes this book important.

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## **Fire and Steel: The End of World War Two in the West**

**By Peter Caddick-Adams. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.  
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The sheer volume of studies on the Second World War in Europe suggests that it would be unlikely for a work published in 2022 to provide any new insight. However, Peter Caddick-Adams argues convincingly that many of the works which begin with the Normandy invasion or the Battle of the Bulge give a very abbreviated account of the last several months of the war in West Europe and frequently also impart the misleading