



Paul A. Hanebrink. *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism.* Cambridge: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2018. 353 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-04768-6.

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It would be almost too obvious to say that this is a timely book. With the resurgence of overt anti-semitism in recent years—not least the online proliferation of "cultural Marxist" as a thinly veiled alt-right slur—Paul Hanebrink's excavation of the Jews-as-communists myth arrives at a grimly appropriate time. Primarily focused on East Central Europe while also pulling in material from across the continent, the result is an engaged and sophisticated genealogy of one specific strand of anti-semitic paranoia. As the book adeptly illustrates, the assumption that communism was a Jewish plot was "a core element of counterrevolutionary, antidemocratic, and racist ideologies in many different countries" (p. 4). Thus, apprehending the myth of "Judeo-Bolshevism" is necessary for understanding the nature of Far-Right politics in both the past and present.

Hanebrink begins with an interwoven analysis: the claim that communism was (and is) a uniquely Jewish project has been time and again systematically debunked, and yet it has a persistent half-life, acting as a convenient vehicle for anxieties about national sovereignty and perceived threats to the regnant social order. In Poland and Romania after World War I, such anxieties were legion and the fear of Judeo-Bolshevism, like the fear of Jewish capitalism, was "a phantasmagoria that crystallized broader sets of political

and cultural anxieties" (p. 7). Post-1917 allegations that communism was a Jewish plot operated within (and were fertilized by) "transnational networks of anti-Communist thought and practice" (p. 9). Hanebrink adeptly highlights the workings of these networks and the political work that the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism did for them, while also justly recognizing that "a search for the origins of Judeo-Bolshevism can easily lead to a series of near-infinite regressions" across the febrile world of the early twentieth-century European Far Right (p. 27). The gendered and sexual anxieties that percolated with the Judeo-Bolshevism myth are regularly hinted at by Hanebrink—"Throughout the last years of the 1930s, the pages of newspapers like *Je suis partout* and *Gringoire* were filled with visions of a France brought low by Judeo-Bolshevik power, racial and sexual contamination, and French emasculation" (p. 109)—though they remain an unexplored avenue of the book.

Hanebrink tracks these accusations about Jewish Bolshevism chronologically. From the earliest moments of the Russian Civil War, Ukrainian White propaganda portrayed their communist enemies as insidious Jewish agents. As a 1917 pamphlet asserted: "the sun shone in Kiev and the tsar often came here. Now the Jews are everywhere! We want to throw off this yoke, we cannot bear it any longer! They will destroy the Fatherland. Down

with the Jews! Give us back the tsar!" (pp. 56-7). By the early 1920s, various Catholic thinkers and writers were expounding the myth. Bishops in Poland wrote an open letter to the international church hierarchy in July 1920, describing Bolsheviks as not just an irreligious menace but as "the living embodiment of the Antichrist on earth" (p. 26). The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* enjoyed a certain resurgence in Europe after the Russian Revolution; reprints appeared via Catholic presses in France and Italy in 1921 and later in the decade in the British *Morning Post* and in Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* (p. 29). Antisemitism and anti-communism were simultaneously evident in these publications.

Hanebrink meticulously dismantles the antisemitism of interwar Romanian nationalists, for whom, at a macro level, "Jews" symbolized a shadowy, foreign intrigue that plotted against the nation. On a more individual level, one particular generational cohort latched on to antisemitism as a way to explain their own personal frustrations. Extreme nationalism found a ready purchase in Romanian universities; enrollment had risen greatly, but universities remained underfunded and overcrowded and offered little preparation for a weak job market. Romanian students were often markedly antisemitic: "Popular lectures by antisemitic professors ... warned darkly of the Jewish invasion that was taking over Romania" and stoked the rage of these undergraduates (p. 65).

In the book's overarching narrative, then, Nazism and fascism do not appear as an aberration in broader European history, but as a continuation (of sorts) of a particular discourse that habitually equated "Jew" and "communist." Nazism picked up on an already extant Catholic and Protestant attitude that "associated Jewish Bolsheviks with the dangers of secularization and the inversion of moral and social order" (p. 91). Likewise Spanish fascists, who saw their enemies as agents of, simultaneously, Communists, Jews, Freemasons, and "similar parasites" (p. 94). In Hanebrink's

description, Nazis attempted to unify potential supporters across the continent into "a Europe united in an anti-Bolshevik crusade" (p. 98). And this leads to a modified functionalist account of the Holocaust: "it was common wisdom within the SS that Jews would resolutely line up with the enemy [the USSR]. That belief would play a crucial role in the origins of the Final Solution" (p. 131). The violently racialized core of the Judeo-Bolshevik myth came more to the surface during the war, with Nazis talking of their supposedly defensive actions against the "Asiatic cruelty" that they identified in the "demonic" and "un-European" Soviet Union (pp. 146-7).

Such claims about Jewish communist perfidy certainly found purchase among collaborators in Hungary and Romania, and after 1945, "Communist Party leaders struggled to counter the perception that theirs was a Jewish party" (p. 182), highlighting, of course, that the Judeo-Bolshevik slander lived on in the Eastern Bloc. The newly installed communist leadership often played up to these slanders, either by using terms like "shirker" and "parasite" as shorthand for "capitalist"—"knowing full well that those images were - commonly understood as Jewish traits" (p. 182)—or, more subtly, by downplaying any particular Jewish role in the wartime struggle against fascism, and thus downplaying any particular Nazi threat to Jews, in favor of a more universal story of shared working-class antifascism.

The penultimate chapter, focusing on the capitalist West, also studies acts of elision and intentional forgetting, as Hanebrink recounts how the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism was replaced by an (equally false?) myth of a shared Judeo-Christian heritage that would be a natural Cold War bulwark against communism (and in which Nazism and communism were collapsed together into a theory of undifferentiated "totalitarianism"). Moving far to the west, this chapter is certainly a noticeable shift in content and focus from the rest of the

book, but as a standalone piece it is a worthy investigation.

Hanebrink ends with a contemporary focus, moving through the memory of the Holocaust since 1989, the controversy of Arno Mayer's *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken* (1988) that ascribed Nazi Judeophobia to the supposedly more central concern of anti-Marxism, and twenty-first-century Islamophobia. There is a hint of the unfair in Hanebrink's assessment of Mayer and his claim that *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken* is "is now largely forgotten" (p. 244) despite it being re-released in a new edition as recently as 2012. His assessment that Islamophobia is the successor to the Judeo-Bolshevism myth, though, is far stronger and means that he ends his book on a timely and serious note. And in general, this is a work of serious archival rigor while still being of great relevance for contemporary political debates.

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