

## Review Article

# *The Emergence of Jewish Ghettos During the Holocaust*, Dan Michman, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), viii + 191 pp., Hardback, \$89.00

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Dan Michman's work on *The Emergence of the Jewish Ghettos During the Holocaust* employs what for him is a significant change of methodology. Through semantic and linguistic analysis and their cultural context he tries to understand the emergence of the term "ghetto" and the various ways in which it was used over the centuries and later by the Nazis. He seeks to understand not only the emergence of the ghetto but the various iterations of the ghetto in areas under German occupation, with path-breaking results. The word was used in many different contexts to signify rather different living arrangements and policy goals.

Holocaust scholars have often referred to the process of ghettoization as if it were a single phenomenon." No so fast, Michman argues. Ghettos existed in certain areas of Poland, but they were not established all at once, and lasted for varying lengths of time. Moreover, they were used for different purposes.

Michman's shows that when we consider which officials were engaged in the establishment of the ghetto, for what purpose it was established, and how long it remained in existence, then we begin to see ghettos as local phenomena, created in response to local needs, and

initiated at the local level ghetto system, he argues. was inconsistent, different in character and concept depending upon location. There is no evidence linking Hitler to ghettoization. The decision-making did not go that high in the Nazi bureaucracy; local officials responding to local needs had the necessary authority to create ghettos as they saw fit.

The ghetto "was not an essential component of German anti-Jewish policy". He thus forces us to examine not only the mechanism of destruction but also the motivation for the destruction of the Jews, focusing quite properly on the nature of Nazi antisemitism.

The introduction of the ghettos, Michman concludes, was "hesitant, geographically limited, and incomplete in its distribution" (p. 160). Unlike that of concentration camps and death camps, the creation of ghettos was not systematic. And unlike the "Final Solution," ghettos were a transitory, preliminary stage in the killing process.

The lasting impact of this work is that all future scholars working in this field will treat ghettos not as a single undifferentiated phenomenon but will root their understanding of each ghetto in its location and duration.

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