

(southern Russia, Ukraine and Siberia). However, this designation in contemporary Russia denotes, in addition to the historical Cossacks, military formations that took part in the military conflicts at the collapse of the Soviet Union, including Russia's current war with Ukraine. The author also introduces the 'Council for Religious Affairs' with caution, leaving aside its affiliation with the KGB. Furthermore, Köllner repeatedly notes the deep entanglement on a personal level between political authorities and the church. The use of personal connections indicates an important mechanism of social interactions in Russia, far beyond the relationship between 'politics and religion'. It can also be denoted by other terms such as the operation of social networks or clientelism.

The monograph by Tobias Köllner is an in-depth insight not only into the relationship between "politics and religion", but also into the fabric of everyday life in Russia. Dedicated to the public aspects of Orthodoxy, the study offers a comprehensive view of its contemporary state. The book is a significant and memorable contribution, both theoretical and empirical, to the anthropology of Christianity as a whole.

MILENA BENOVSKA,
South-West University of Blagoevgrad

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DARA HORNOVÁ:

Lidé milují Židy mrtvé. Zprávy z děsivé přítomnosti

[People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present]

Prague: Kalich, 2023, 200 p.

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Thousands of Years of Experience

In her new book *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present*,¹ Dara Horn presents twelve essays that critically examine various current issues facing the contemporary Jewish community. From the very first page, she demonstrates her intent to attract attention not only with a provocative title, but also with unconventional, often controversial, yet always interes-

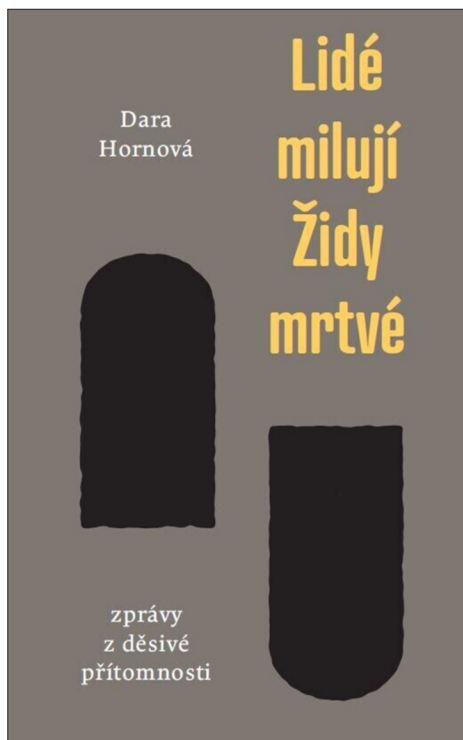
1 The author of the review read the publication in the Czech edition and translation; the original was published by W. W. Norton in New York in 2021 (editor's note).

ting and well-argued opinions. In this context, she can be considered one of those authors who, with varying degree of success, challenge seemingly unquestionable beliefs.

In the first chapter, titled “The (Second) Most Popular Dead Jew of All”, the author examines the personality (and diary) of Anne Frank. The reader, expecting the usual nostalgic and celebratory approach, may be shocked by the opening words, which also serve as the title of the book: “People love dead Jews. Not so much the living ones”. She then explains how her visit to Anne Frank’s house in Amsterdam inspired her. During this visit, she learnt that a Jewish museum employee was banned from wearing a yarmulke at work. The stated reason was that the institution aimed to maintain neutrality and that Jewish headgear might “disrupt independent attitudes”. (The museum management eventually waived its requirement, but “the bad feeling remained”). Based on the above inspiration, the author analysed the creation process and content of

the world-famous diary to ultimately formulate the conclusion with disturbingly merciless accuracy. In her opinion, the success of Anne Frank and her work is based on the fact that she was murdered, because if she had survived, everything would probably have been different: “This is precisely the most frightening truth about Frank’s posthumous success, the shadow of which hides her real experiences: we know what she would say, because others have said it too, but we do not want to hear it.” In this, she indirectly follows up on *A Time of Wolves* by the German author Harald Jähner, who analysed German society in the decade after the defeat of fascism. In one of the essays in this book, he stated: “The Holocaust played a shockingly small role in the minds of most Germans in the post-war period. Many were aware of the crimes on the Eastern Front and admitted some basic guilt for the fact that the war had even begun; however, the murders of millions of German and European Jews had no place in their thinking and feeling.” (Jähner, 2022).

Perhaps because I am currently dealing with this topic, I was particularly interested in the chapter devoted to the fate of the large and rich Jewish community in the Chinese city of Harbin. As in several other places in the book, in what might seem a difficult text from the point of view of Slovak realities, a few words or sentences suddenly fit into the mosaic of my thinking and turned into a key that opened the door to solving (or at least better understanding) the problem I have been recently struggling with. I also refer to the frequent (and often unilaterally used and sometimes abused) term “Jewish cultural heritage” in Slovakia. Horn describes this neutral and generally accepted phrase as a brilliant and seemingly completely harmless marketing move: “It is a much better term than ‘property stolen from the Jews’. When we call such places Jewish cultural heritage, all those nasty moral feelings – like why these ‘monuments’ exist – evaporate in a haze of goodwill. And not only goodwill aimed at you, a Jewish tourist. These



non-Jewish citizens and their generous government decided to maintain this cemetery or renovate this synagogue or found this museum purely out of deep respect for the Jews who once lived here (and who for unspoken reasons no longer live here) and in the sincere hope that you, a Jewish tourist, may come someday.” She helped me, in a yet unpublished study, to formulate what I had intuitively felt for a long time: the ambivalent attitude of Jews, who on the one hand gladly welcome the restored beauty of devastated synagogues, but at the same time realise with sadness that these buildings will not fulfil the functions for which they were originally built. The result is the resentment of the majority, which instead of the expected manifestations of enthusiastic faces the difficult to understand “ingratitude” of the Jews....

The critical eye of Dara Horn also noted the seemingly indisputable elements of the Jewish past. This category includes, for example, the widely held belief that changes in Jewish surnames, which often occurred when entering a new homeland, were forced. It is often claimed that uneducated and incompetent U.S. officials were unable to correctly write down the “strange” names of their ancestors, so they simply “Americanized” them. Based on her research, the author presents a different picture: “Immigration police officers were not private security guards but highly qualified people who had to be fluent in at least three languages. Additionally, there were translators who worked there. Secondly, the immigration process at Ellis Island did not resemble an inspection at today’s airports. It was a long interview, lasting twenty minutes or more, because the aim of the whole process was to exclude anyone who could become a ‘recipient of state aid’. So it was not a situation where some idiot at the table would just deal with the queue.” She therefore comes to the unpleasant conclusion that the numerous cases of surname changes represent a voluntary response to the anti-Semitism of contemporary American society, serving as indirect but clear evidence of this phenomenon. In the dispute between Horn and the outraged descendants, I am more inclined to the author’s opinion, but I also see another possible reason for this step. As Ruth Bond notes, the Tolerance Patent of Joseph II obliged Jews, among other things, to adopt German surnames (Bondyová, 2006, Czech translation). The richer ones fared well (Diamond, Kohn, Levy, and the like). At best, the poorer found themselves in the neutral category of “coloured” (Weiss, Grün, Blau, Schwarz); at worst, they were given unflattering or even vulgar names. In this case, it is no wonder that they quickly and happily got rid of this uncomfortable burden.

An attentive reader would find inspirational passages in every part of this book. The chapter “Executed Jews”, devoted to the fate of the once-famous Jewish comedian, Venyamin Zuskin, is no exception. He worked in a Yiddish theatre for many years, believed in the promises of the Soviet regime, and became its loyal supporter. Despite this, like many others, he was executed. Horn had written his story earlier. Years later, she met Zuskin’s daughter Alina (then 92 years old). When asked how she was able to understand her father so deeply, even though they had never met, two words were enough for the writer: “A thousand years of experience”.

It is also interesting to compare different conclusions in traditional Yiddish literature and modern works. Thanks to the author, I understood, among other things, why I like to end sentences with ellipses (or question marks) in my works, which correctors change to a single period with unpleasant consistency... The explanation is that traditional Jewish stories are characterised by an open end, which signals that the plot is still ongoing: “Stories with a definitive end are not necessarily an image of the conviction that the world is meaningful, but reflect faith in the power of art that can give it meaning. However, in Jewish stories, we find something else – a kind of realism that comes from humility, from the awareness that one cannot comprehend the full human experience while pretending that the world is inherently meaningful. They reflect faith in art that can imbue meaning into life. They are stories without

an ending, yet full of perseverance and resilience.” Even with a seemingly neutral topic, Horn could not help but draw a provocative conclusion: she mentioned that Holocaust novels “often tell of non-Jewish rescuers who risk or sacrifice their own lives to save Jews. Interestingly, the “righteous non-Jews” officially recognized by the Israeli National Memorial to the Victims of the Holocaust and the Yad Vashem research centre for their efforts in saving Jews from the Holocaust number less than thirty thousand out of nearly three hundred million inhabitants of Europe at that time, which is 0.001 percent. Even if we assume that the official recognition is tens of thousands of times underestimated, these individuals would still constitute basically a rounding error.”

Dara Horn’s insightful opinions deserve much more space than the journal allows the reviewer. Equally compelling are the chapters on founding legends, such as the extensive article about the little-known rescuer Varian Fry and the reactions of the people he saved, which includes sharp self-criticism. The title *Dead Jews, Who Have Become a Blockbuster* will undoubtedly pique interest in the reasons for the criticism of the generally acclaimed exhibition “Auschwitz: Not long ago, not far away”. Reflections on current anti-Semitic attacks in the USA and other unmentioned essays also deserve attention. Despite the somewhat constrained brevity of this text, I believe that at least some readers will find interest in this review and will give the book by Dara Horn the attention it deserves. They certainly won’t regret it. A careful reading of her often provocative opinions provides ample motivation to ponder (not only in connection with the described Jewish phenomena) whether even in “their” cases, it is sometimes true that everything is different...

PETER SALNER,

Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology SAS, Bratislava

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ZUZANA BEŇUŠKOVÁ, VERONIKA KOTRADYOVÁ:
Podpoľanie (Regionálna materiálna kultúra: východiská
pre súčasnú prax 1)
[Podpoľanie (Regional Material Culture: The Basis
for Contemporary Practice 1)]
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The regional publication *Podpoľanie* authored by two professors, ethnologist Zuzana Beňušková and designer Veronika Kotradyová (Beňušková, Kotradyová, 2023), represents the first and boldly pioneering publication output of the interdisciplinary project IDENTITA SK (Identity