

him to challenge certain assertions or views that emerged well after the fighting in Europe had ended. Overall, this is a valuable and extensive study of the concluding weeks of the Allied war effort in West Europe which, along with the Soviet advance from the East, culminated in the unconditional surrender of Germany. The level of detail and length would make this book challenging for undergraduate students, but graduate students and scholars will benefit from the insights and extensive notes provided by this work.

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## **Max Merten. Jurist und Kriegsverbrecher – Eine biografische Fallstudie zum Umgang mit NS-Tätern in der frühen Bundesrepublik**

**By Gerrit Hamann. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022. Pp. 792. Hardcover €90.00. ISBN: 978-3525352243.**

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At the outset of the 1960s, members of both the Jewish and the non-Jewish communities all around the world followed with bated breath the Jerusalem trial of the Holocaust architect, Adolf Eichmann, in the media and on their first-ever television sets. At the same time, West Germany and its chancellors struggled with how to frame the guilt of Hans Globke and other Nazi *Schreibtischtäter*. Greece, coming to terms with the dark past of German occupation and World War II in its own way, might had been reconsidering the extradition to West Germany of the recently convicted Max Merten (1911–1971), the only Nazi criminal ever tried in Athens for the extermination of the Jews in Greece. Although Eichmann and Globke still resonate in research on World War II and the Holocaust, Merten has been somewhat forgotten. This has happened despite – or perhaps because of – many mentions of Merten in the hearings of both Globke and Eichmann as well as those of former Greek collaborators established in the top echelons of postwar Greek politics. In this respect, Gerrit Hamann's new book on Merten makes a thought-provoking addition to the scholarship, since no biography of this intriguing Nazi figure has been ever written before. Beyond the biographical aspect, Hamann's well-researched study is a thorough contribution to the field of contemporary European history and the legacies of World War II.

Hamann's primary objective is to explore the life and actions of Max Merten, a German jurist who played a considerable role in the Nazi occupation of Greece and specifically Thessaloniki, the second largest city in the country and a maritime center on the Aegean Sea. The analysis is situated within the broader context of wartime and Cold War politics, postwar justice, and the complexities of reconciliation with the Nazi past. Meticulously researched, Hamann's biography provides in-depth insight into Merten's life and career. In the best tradition of German history writing, the author draws on a wealth of primary sources, including Hans Globke's personal archive, to provide a nuanced and insightful portrayal of Merten's life, deeds, whereabouts, and networks, from his prewar studies to his prosecution as a war criminal and his attempts to escape justice and restore his reputation in postwar Germany.

Next to the challenges of prosecuting Nazi war criminals, the author – himself a lawyer by training – soberly describes the dilemma of reconciling different national narratives about

the war. Hamann's work is particularly relevant in light of ongoing debates about the legacy of World War II in Europe, and the need for a shared understanding of this period. First, he provides a comprehensive account of Merten's life in Germany and his actions in Greece during World War II by showing how Merten used his position of *Kriegsverwaltungsrat* in Thessaloniki to enrich himself and reward those loyal to him. Shedding light on the extent to which the Nazi regime was supported by a broad network of individuals, he elaborates on both the representatives of the German administration and on Greek bystanders. After that, Hamann examines Merten's postwar life. He shows how Merten used his legal training and connections to avoid prosecution, and how he continued to deny his responsibility for the Holocaust even after his conviction.

The book is divided into five parts, organized chronologically. The first part examines Merten's life before the war, highlighting his political views and career, and how they were formed in the interwar period and prior to his military posting to Thessaloniki in the summer of 1942. In the second part, Hamann explores Merten's role in Greek Macedonia during the war. This section provides a detailed account of Merten's involvement in local affairs and the deportation of Greek Jews to Auschwitz. The author's analysis is based on extensive archival research, and it provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Holocaust in Greece.

The third part looks at Merten's new beginning in postwar (West) Germany. Hamann illustrates how Merten tried to use his legal training and political connections, including but not limited to Hans Globke and Gustav Heinemann (along with many other actors important for the story, both are introduced in short but valuable biographies at the end of the book), to rebuild his life and avoid prosecution for his crimes. The fourth part then analyzes how Merten's Nazi past haunted him throughout his life. Shedding light on the long-term consequences of war crimes and the challenges of reconciliation and healing in the aftermath of war, Hamann shows how Merten's wartime actions, however carefully concealed, continued to influence his life long after the war was over. In the fifth and final part, Hamann explores how Merten sought to rehabilitate his reputation, thus illuminating the challenges of holding war criminals to account.

Drawing on a wide range of primary sources, Hamann provides a nuanced and sophisticated analysis of the challenges of prosecuting war criminals and the long shadow of World War II. Nonetheless, one area where the book falls short is in its lack of engagement with Greek sources and perspectives. While Hamann exhaustively utilizes German sources, there is a noticeable absence of Greek perspectives, especially given the significance of Greece in Merten's story. Moreover, while Hamann does draw upon some English-language archives on the Holocaust and transitional justice, the book is limited in its engagement with East European and Israeli sources and discourses as well as with newspaper coverage of Merten in the West. This absence is particularly notable given the Cold War context of Greek history, especially with regard to the persecution of the Greek political left and the significance of the World War II hero Manolis Glezos, who appears in leftist and communist discourse as the counterpart of (West) German criminals.

Although the author decided to frame his book as a "historical attempt at interpretation" (673), the book could benefit from an additional layer of interpretation based on, for example, the concept of transnational history, to place Merten's actions in the broader context of Holocaust interpretation and commemoration in Greece and Europe in general. By doing so, the author could make a stronger argument and draw more attention to the challenges of transitional justice and the difficulties in holding war criminals to account, especially in the aftermath of a devastating war. Still, the book undoubtedly provides a compelling and detailed portrait of Max Merten's life and offers valuable insights into the mindset and motivations of Nazi officials and collaborators.