Kiril Feferman

*The Holocaust in the Crimea and the Northern Caucasus* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2016), 600 pp., $58.00, ISBN 9789653085053.

Kiril Feferman offers a detailed comparative analysis of the impact of the Holocaust in two little-studied regions of the Soviet Union: Crimea and the Northern Caucasus. These regions both had considerable population fluctuations during World War II, due to evacuations and the influx of fleeing Jews. As elsewhere, the German occupiers made great efforts to track down and murder Jews wherever they could find them. In total around 30,000 Jews were murdered in Crimea and some 40,000 Ashkenazi Jews in the Northern Caucasus.

Feferman’s work is distinguished from that of Andrej Angrick and others, in that he focuses mainly on the perspective given by Jewish and Soviet sources. He does not devote much attention to the German killing machinery and its personnel. Rather it is the responses of the Jews and the other local inhabitants that interest him most. In terms of German policy, his emphasis lies with the decisions they made with regard to several marginal groups. He carefully examines and clarifies the decisions German authorities took in regard to Karaites, Krymchaks, and Mountain Jews (or Tats), which had life and death consequences for those affected.

The Karaites were exempted from the policy of mass murder thanks to a Himmler decision taken in December 1941. This was based on a pseudo-scientific assessment that described them as having a “Mongol ethnic background,” despite practicing the Jewish religion. The Krymchaks, by contrast, were deemed to be Jews ethnically, and were dealt with accordingly by the German Security forces. The Mountain Jews of the Northern Caucasus, however, were treated differently from other Jews and largely spared extermination, because they did not look like Jews and were viewed as having been influenced by Islam.

In both regions the German security apparatus exterminated the Jews fairly rapidly within a few weeks, allowing the Jews little time to respond. Very few ghettos or camps were established, as *Einsatzgruppe D* proceeded straight to mass shooting once the Jewish population had been registered and assembled. In some places the Germans killed Jews using gas vans or poison. The initial waves of killings were then followed by searches for Jews in hiding, which relied considerably on the local authorities and auxiliary police units established by the German occupants.

In terms of Jewish responses there were some important differences between the two regions. In Crimea, where not all men had been drafted into the Red Army prior to the occupation, a number of the few Jews that survived joined and fought in what was a more powerful Soviet partisan movement.
than in the Caucasus. As the Jews in the Caucasus were mainly evacuees, they had few local contacts, but they did benefit from more abundant food and the ability to blend in with a heterogeneous local population that rarely carried ID documents.

Feferman clearly has a great mastery of the difficult source material available to him. However, the book is not without blemishes. Firstly, its organization into double chapters—first touching on Crimea, then on the Northern Caucasus—facilitates comparison, but does lead to unnecessary repetition. This is compounded by an overly analytical approach that attempts to provide generalized summaries of many complex phenomena. Unfortunately, this approach does not leave sufficient space for the detailed case studies necessary to illustrate these points. On some issues the reader is left confused, due to the absence of sufficient data for a clear interpretation to emerge. The text also suffers from a few mistranslations from Hebrew into English. On page 491, we learn that in the Northern Caucasus, the Germans “captivated fewer Soviet troops.”

One key aspect of the book is its emphasis on the responses of local populations. In each region the Germans found groups that were inclined to collaborate as they were strongly anti-Soviet. In Crimea, it was the Tartars who were recruited into local police forces (militias) and other auxiliary formations. These units were mostly established too late to participate in the main wave of killings, but they were active in uncovering Jews that had gone into hiding. In the Northern Caucasus, it was mainly the Cossacks that worked closely with the Germans and played a similar role.

In Crimea, the local Russian-speaking population was generally not favorable to the Germans due to economic hardship, the Germans’ preference for the Tartars, and also the presence of Soviet partisans. There was not, however, widespread sympathy for the Jews, although some cases of rescue were found. For example, in one orphanage, records were changed to enable a number of Jewish children to survive.

In the Northern Caucasus, there was some local resentment of the Jews, as almost all of them arrived as refugees, who were provided with support by the Soviet authorities. Nonetheless, there seems to have been little deep-rooted anti-Semitism among the peoples of the region. Indeed, in Krasnodar, there was even a public protest by Russian inhabitants on the day when the Jews were due to be “dispatched” from the city.

The book makes good use of the available sources, especially the testimonies at Yad Vashem, including the collection of the “Righteous Among the Nations.” Likewise, it takes advantage of microfilm collections from various former KGB archives at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as