Diana Dumitru. ***The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union*.** New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xvii, 268. $99.99.

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In the twenty years leading up the Second World War the Romanian nation-state engaged in a systematic attempt to privilege ethnic Romanians by disempowering and persecuting Jews in the historical region of Bessarabia. During this same period, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic emphasized ‘national equality’ and ‘the friendship of peoples’ through a policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization). In this striking book, Diana Dumitru argues that different state policies towards ethnic minorities during the interwar period resulted in locals treating Jews differently during the Holocaust. Bessarabians had watched the Romanian state persecute Jews since 1918, and between 1940 and 1944 they actively participated in the mass murder of Jews. The inhabitants of the newly-created region known as Transnistria, on the other hand, had seen the Ukrainian SSR treat Jews as equals, and not only did they fail to participate in violence against Jews to the same extent that Bessarabians had done, Transnistrians also helped Jews in greater numbers than Bessarabians.

Violence against Jews began in Bessarabia during the summer of 1940, when the region passed from Romania into the hands of the Soviet Union. With the help of sympathetic locals, retreating Romanian soldiers carried out pogroms in a number of towns and villages, during the largest of which roughly 200 Jews were killed. Massacres began again when Romanian soldiers reconquered the region as part of Operation Barbarossa. Locals accused Jews of sympathizing with the Soviet regime and participated enthusiastically – together with Romanian and German soldiers – in the mass murder of tens of thousands of Jews. Axis armies had penetrated well into the Soviet Union by mid-August 1941, and the Romanian state designated the region between the Dniester and Southern Bug Rivers as an occupied territory known as Transnistria. The authorities systematically massacred local Jews in Transnistria and established ghettos and concentration camps where they interned and massacred hundreds of thousands of Jews deported from elsewhere in Romania. Bessarabians robbed and murdered deportees as they passed through their region, but Dumitru notes that ‘archival materials and hundreds upon hundreds of testimonies, show not a single anti-Jewish episode of mass violence initiated or carried out by local civilians in Transnistria in the wake of the invasion.’ (143) Some locals in Transnistria did assist in genocidal actions against Jews, but never on the scale or with the frequency seen in Bessarabia. Moreover, oral history interviews record numerous incidents of locals giving food to deportees, paying them for work done, sheltering Jews, and adopting Jewish children. Far fewer stories of this nature survive about locals in Bessarabia.

Dumitru ignores the fact that most Bessarabian Gentiles saw the Romanian army as liberators whereas Transnistrians experienced them as an occupying force and she marginalizes the influence that grassroots antisemitic activists had in interwar Bessarabia, but otherwise she is convincing when she argues that there are few explanations for the differences in local collaboration other than that of state policies during the interwar period. Ethnic Ukrainians were no less antisemitic than Romanians, nor were there significant differences between the two populations in terms of resentment against Jews, fear of a Soviet victory, the temptation to plunder, or the length and timing of the interactions. ‘Thus,’ she writes, ‘the only major difference between the two populations is an intervening two-decade period during with one state, the USSR, actively fought against antisemitism and aggressively pursued the integration of the Jewish minority.’ (5) The two neighboring regions thus constitute an almost ideal experiment about the impact of long-term state policy on collaboration with state-level perpetrators of genocide, and ‘Soviet citizens who received this sustained, inclusivist “treatment” were less likely to abuse and more likely to aid their Jewish neighbors than was the majority population of the other territory.’ (5)

In addition to contemporary published sources in both Romanian and Russian, Dumitru draws on archival collections held in five different countries as well as on hundreds of oral history interviews, many of which she conducted herself. She also received responses to a postal survey from over 60 survivors, which she coded for evidence of ‘conflictual’ or ‘cooperative’ behavior experienced by Jews in the two regions. Dumitru’s methodology makes the book invaluable for teaching with because she takes two very different approaches to her sources. Throughout most of the book Dumitru analyses traces of collaboration found in oral histories and archival records relating to both regions. Then in the final chapter she quantifies her findings and graphs the frequency of conflict or cooperation according to which prewar region they took part in. The quantitative findings strongly reinforce the patterns that Dumitru had already identified in her qualitative analysis, showing convincingly how historians can use both approaches in complementary ways. Not only does Dumitru’s book enrich our empirical understanding of the Holocaust in Romania, it also raises important questions about the impact of state policy on subject populations and the causes of inter-ethnic conflict, making it a valuable study indeed.