

Theo Gerritse, *Rauter. Himmlers vuist in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2018, 748 pp., ISBN 9789461055286).

In recent years, National Socialist perpetrators increasingly have become the object of scholarly research on the German occupation of the Netherlands.¹ Even more so than in the case of Dutch collaborators, the biographical exploration of German officials offers empirical insights into how the highly ideologically indoctrinated civil administration under Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart operated in everyday life. It does so by combining ‘functionalist’ and ‘intentionalist’ approaches which for all too long have been considered as mutually exclusive in the study of the Greater German Reich.

One of the historiographical gaps in the field of research on perpetrators has been bridged by Theo Gerritse in 2018. By publishing his doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Amsterdam, the former Dutch journalist presents a biography of the Austrian National Socialist Hanns Albin Rauter. This is welcome because the commander of police forces and ss-units in the Netherlands – on whom Gerritse had already published a book in 2006 – was responsible for the largest part of the brutal and bloody facets of German occupation during the Second World War. Although quantitatively the focus is clearly on the Dutch period of Rauter’s career, the book is concerned with the whole life span of its protagonist.

The first part, which covers about a fifth of the book, goes far beyond the designation ‘Prelude’ chosen by the author. In fact, this part elucidates Rauter’s social and political development in Austria and Germany from 1895 to 1940. Gerritse consulted an impressive number and broad array of hitherto unknown sources. Furthermore, Rauter’s trajectory from the Austrian-Hungarian army during the First World War to paramilitary right-wing organisations including the ss and the Styrian Homeland Security Movement (*Steirischer Heimatschutz*) in the interwar period is solidly grounded in earlier research on early-twentieth-century Austria. The same goes for Rauter’s participation in legendary ‘combats of defence’ (*Abwehrkämpfe*) against Hungary and the kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in the aftermath of the First World War, and for his involvement in an authoritarian putsch directed against the Republic of Austria in 1931. By unfolding Rauter’s deliberate embedding in right-wing extremism, the first part sheds fresh light on the man who, in May 1940, was to become – as the title of the monograph has it – ‘Himmler’s fist in the Netherlands’. Seen against this background, the biographical lacuna for the period between the incorporation of Austria into the Greater German Reich in March 1938 and the *Westfeldzug* leaves readers

dissatisfied. They have to content themselves with remarks on the ‘merits’ Rauter had gained in the eyes of his superiors during the ‘Night of Broken Glass’ in Breslau/Wrocław.

Compared to the first part, the remaining two parts dealing with Rauter’s function as ‘Himmler’s fist’ in the Netherlands and his post-war trial and execution appear less innovative. Here, too, highly relevant historical material is studied in depth. Yet many of the sources have been used in earlier scholarship.² Moreover, in several chapters Gerritse reports the current state of research, rather than presenting a new interpretation on his own.

In addition, key chapters of the second part reveal some shortcomings. In the first instance, topics related to Rauter’s double function of *Höherer ss- und Polizeiführer Nordwest* (HSSPF) and *Generalkommissar für das Sicherheitswesen*, which subordinated him respectively to Heinrich Himmler and to Seyss-Inquart, are dispersed over several chapters. Thus, aspects like the persecution of the Jews, the treatment of the National Socialist Movement of the Netherlands (NSB), of the Germanic ss, of the *Landwacht* and of other fascist organisations, and the famous instruction 54/42 by which Martin Bormann tried to settle the responsibilities between NSDAP, ss, and public administrations in dealing with domestic fascists in Denmark, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands, are presented in a scattered and partly redundant way. Chapter 11 of the second part, then, mixes diverse topics that lack coherence. Repeatedly, the focus on Rauter tends to get lost in those chapters that deal with the persecution of the Jews, the compulsory service of Dutch people in Germany, the large-size espionage against the United Kingdom (*Englandspiel*), the anti-German strike of April and May 1943 or German interference into the composition of the leadership of Dutch fascist organisations.

1 Johannes Koll, *Arthur Seyß-Inquart und die deutsche Besatzungspolitik in den Niederlanden (1940-1945)* (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar 2015); Andreas Schrabauer, ‘„... die österreichische Invasion“. Zur Beteiligung des „Donauklubs“ an der Beraubung, Verfolgung und Ermordung der Jüdinnen und Juden im Reichskommissariat Niederlande’, in: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (ed.), *Täter. Österreichische Akteure im Nationalsozialismus* (Vienna 2014) 195-218; Joggli Meihuizen, *Richard Fiebig en de uitbuiting van de Nederlandse industrie 1940-1945* (Amsterdam 2018); Joggli Meihuizen, *Het Proces-Fiebig. Over exploitatie en plundering van de Nederlandse industrie in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*

(Amsterdam 2018). Also see my review of the latter two books: Johannes Koll, ‘Joggli Meihuizen, *Richard Fiebig en de uitbuiting van de Nederlandse industrie 1940-1945*; Joggli Meihuizen, *Het Proces-Fiebig. Over exploitatie en plundering van de Nederlandse industrie in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*’, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 134:2 (2019). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10675>.

2 Such as Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (ed.), *Het Proces Rauter* (The Hague 1952), and Nanno Klaas Charles Arie In ’t Veld (ed.), *De ss en Nederland. Documenten uit ss-archieven 1935-1945*, 2 volumes (The Hague 1976).

Unfortunately, Gerritse has omitted Rauter's involvement in the persecution of Sinti and Roma and his participation in the complex preparation of decrees and ordinances within the *Reichskommissariat*. His contention that Rauter left the implementation of the deportation of the Jews to subordinate SS-officers (303) falls short. Gerritse's occasional credulousness vis-à-vis his protagonist is irritating. When mentioning Rauter's post-war contention, for instance, that in the summer of 1942 he had rejected the execution of hostages in retaliation for assaults on Dutch railways undertaken by resistance fighters (342), Gerritse does not take into account that the HSSPF *Nordwest* had at the time praised the execution of five hostages as 'fantastic in political terms'.³ In contrast, aspects like Rauter's ultimately unsuccessful efforts to nazify Dutch police forces, and the evolution of his position within the German civil administration in the occupied Netherlands from the angle of power politics are presented in a compelling way. Thus, it becomes plausible that Rauter's power in The Hague increased the more the prospect of an ultimate victory by Germany waned. This biographical observation might contribute to explaining the cumulative brutalisation of German occupation in the last two years of the war.

Although the monograph is not free from obviously erroneous quotations from sources and misses several opportunities for the period ranging from the *Anschluss* of Austria to Rauter's execution in the dunes near The Hague in March 1949, Gerritse has tackled an issue which historiography has ignored so far. In the end, the author manages to depict the life of 'Himmler's fist in the Netherlands' in an enlightening manner. Therefore, Gerritse deserves credit for having integrated, for the first time, the available literature and a considerable amount of partially unknown source material into a consistent biography on Rauter. The author does so by focusing on the identifiable effects of his protagonist's life-long devotion to right-wing movements and readiness to use politically motivated violence. At the same time, he leaves Rauter's private life largely unexplored. Gerritse's journalistic skills make his text, the result of a huge scholarly effort, eminently readable. Given the relevance of the topic, a translation into German or English would be desirable. At any event, the findings of the book might be perceived as an invitation to study the other General Commissioners of the occupied Netherlands with comparable intensity.

Johannes Koll, Vienna University of Economics and Business

3 Letter by Rauter to Himmler on 10 September 1942, cited after Koll, *Arthur Seyß-Inquart und die deutsche Besatzungspolitik in den Niederlanden*, 391.