

PHD RESEARCH

MARIE-ANNE WEISERS

Judging Crimes against the Jews : Germans before Belgian Courts

(1941-1951) - [Original Title : *Juger les crimes
contre les Juifs : des Allemands devant les
tribunaux belges, 1941-1951*]

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Lagrou.*

This thesis addresses the issue of the prosecution and trials of the crimes committed against Jews in occupied Belgium during the Second World War. The research sheds new light on the work of the Belgian military tribunals by placing the trials in a historical context which dates back to World War I. In addition, it documents Jewish persecution in Belgium, for beside the prosecution and trials, much attention is payed to the crimes themselves.

The first part outlines the national and international legal framework which after the war served as bedrock for war crimes trials, whereas the second embarks upon specific case studies. The first case is the trial of Otto Siegburg, a German policeman, “Jew hunter” and head of an arrest team of the Brussels Sipo-SD’s Jew section. His case is exceptional, for the defendant was not sentenced to death for war crimes, as was the usual procedure, but for crimes against humanity. This important legal classification has so far been ignored by Belgian historians and legal scholars alike. This and the second case underpin the major conclusion of the thesis, namely that, in contrast to what is widely believed, the Belgian judicial authorities were not indifferent or hardly sensitive to the crimes against the Jews. On the contrary, the archives consulted show in Ganshof van der Meersch, who was the Chief Military Prosecutor, but also in the case of the magistrates and judges

of the Military courts, a real determination to prosecute and punish the criminals.