How “spontaneous” the miraculous rescue in Denmark?

*Holocaust historians work with a number of “determining factors” when explaining the “Final Solution,” including geographical factors, size of Jewish populations, national governments, occupying Nazi regimes, and timing of deportations* [Hans Kirchhoff]

All of these factors serve as “brakes” on the Jewish persecution in Denmark:

- Concentration of population in Copenhagen
- Proximity to neutral Sweden
- Timing of planned deportation/late in the War (Sweden had adopted new refugee policy) Radio broadcast of Oct. 2.
- Danish Resistance late in war was organized and assisted the infrastructure of rescue
- Relatively small Jewish population, small enough that rescue *was* possible. (No anti-Semitic legislation/ 1940-1943/Little anti-Semitism in a relatively homogeneous population/limits).
- Danish police did not assist in round-up (ordered to stay out)
Most recent scholarship: a major determining factor in the Danish rescue = German “lack of enthusiasm” regarding the deportation:

- Lack of “enthusiasm” in persecution on the part of German troops/individual German soldiers in Denmark [Herbert Pundik via Emmy Verner]

- Georg F. Duckwitz (German Foreign Ministry) significant role in sabotaging deportation plans [Hans Kirchhoff via Emmy Verner]

- Werner Best’s “double-deal” (deliberate leaking of warning on Sept. 28), which was aimed at saving himself [theory of Herbert Pundik/Thærkel Stræde]

Related factors:

- Gestapo had orders not to break down doors. Few arrested in homes.

- Most refugee assistants delivered to Danish police (not shot as in Poland)

- Danish naval fleet destroyed after August 29; few/no German ships for patrolling coast until November 1943 (“repair” of patrol boats).

- Best withheld the 1,800 extra policemen which could have been used to search coast.
• Best negotiated with Adolf Eichmann (responsible for mass murder apparatus) not to send Danish prisoners “east” and to allow Danish Red Cross to rescue [Pundik/Stræde]

• Result of this: only 480 Danish Jews were deported to concentration camp Theresienstadt, all but 52 survived and returned to Denmark.

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• Historians still dispute that Flight to Sweden could have been “staged” by Germans themselves.

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All of these factors, put the Danish “contribution” in a relative perspective:

Personal Testimonies:

• Thousands of personal accounts of Danish Jews tell of the overwhelming and spontaneous help they received from ordinary Danish people who offered driving, money, shelter in homes, food, and clothing.

• Hundreds/thousands of testimonies of ordinary Danish citizens who assisted spontaneously in rescue.

• Danish leadership: Massive numbers of institutions (from the King to the military, from Labor Unions, Church leaders, Schools, to
politicians) made public pronouncements against the persecution in Oct. 1943.

Sources:


