



The Icon Curtain: The Cold War's Quiet Border

Yuliya Komska

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The Iron Curtain did not exist—at least not as we usually imagine it. Rather than a stark, unbroken line dividing East and West in Cold War Europe, the Iron Curtain was instead made up of distinct landscapes, many in the grip of divergent historical and cultural forces for decades, if not centuries. This book traces a genealogy of one such landscape—the woods between Czechoslovakia and West Germany—to debunk our misconceptions about the iconic partition.

Yuliya Komska transports readers to the western edge of the Bohemian Forest, one of Europe's oldest borderlands, where in the 1950s civilians set out to shape the so-called prayer wall. A chain of new and repurposed pilgrimage sites, lookout towers, and monuments, the prayer wall placed two long-standing German obsessions, forest and border, at the heart of the century's most protracted conflict. Komska illustrates how civilians used the prayer wall to engage with and contribute to the new political and religious landscape. In the process, she relates West Germany's quiet sylvan periphery to the tragic pitch prevalent along the Iron Curtain's better-known segments.

Steeped in archival research and rooted in nuanced interpretations of wide-ranging cultural artifacts, from vandalized religious images and tourist snapshots to poems and travelogues, *The Icon Curtain* pushes disciplinary boundaries and opens new perspectives on the study of borders and the Cold War alike.

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