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**PERSECUTIONS AND MASS KILLINGS OF LITHUANIAN JEWS DURING
SUMMER AND FALL OF 1941: SOURCES AND ANALYSIS**

Review by dr. Brigitte Mihok

The authors of the study present a varied analysis of the persecutions and killings of Lithuanian Jews in summer of 1941. They also analyse the circumstances, motifs and aims of the persecutions and raise an issue of perpetrators and their responsibility. They reconstruct the overall event interaction in occupied lands and the centre of German Reich, and by doing this they succeed to convey the exact picture of the events of 1941. Multipartite occupational and collaborative structures play an important role.

Based on the analysis of sources, two main issues are analysed in the study: (1) the circumstances of pogroms and shootings which happened during the first days of war and (2) the role of local institutions in the mass crimes in the provinces.

(1) The circumstances of pogroms and shootings which happened during the first weeks of war (p. 1–32)

On 22 June 1941, when German *Vermacht* entered Lithuania, the Holocaust commenced; it happened much faster than in other countries occupied by Germans. In chaotic and hurried events of the first days of the German invasion, a certain role was played both by the violence (provoked and inspired by Germans) of local people against Jews and spontaneous attacks motivated by political and ethnic views.

The authors point several interrelated factors, which were important when the hostility of the locals towards Jews and Lithuanian nationalism were being exploited:

- The National-Socialists made a decision to execute the operation *Barbarosa* as “the war of destruction” (*Vernichtungskrieg*); such soldiery actually differed from the war going on in the West Front.

- The Security Police and SD ordered the formation of killing units (*Einsatzgruppen*) which had to execute “cleaning operations” (*Säuberungsoperationen*) in the occupied lands.
- The head of the Reich’s Central Security Board (RSHA), Reinhard Heydrich, issued a secret order indicating that communists and Jews who had been working for the (former Soviet) party and authorities had to be destroyed. At the same time, it was necessary to secretly strengthen and provoke attacks of anti-Soviet locals but to execute them insensibly (*allerdings spurenlos*).
- Lithuania’s social, political and economic state enabled the implementation of the Heydrich Plan, which was to involve local people to the “cleaning campaigns”: anti-Semitic illusion, as if Lithuania is ruled by Jews, was widely spread, and the stereotype of “Jewish Bolshevism” was used and cultivated first of all by the Lithuanian Activists Front for the propaganda. The first stage of “cleaning movements” took a form of a large “Bolshevik cleaning” from collaborators and Jews.

Christoph Dieckmann analyses the multiplicity of German war against the Soviet Union and introduces anti-Semitic politics exercised by NS regime in this context (p. 12–27). On the basis of source materials, it is revealed that there were serious intentions to involve Lithuanian forces to the war of Germans. It was planned to coordinate “resistance groups” and their movement, use activities of agents and prepare Lithuanian specialists of sabotage. (p. 28–32)

Conclusions:

- On 17 June, the German Security Police was given a task to organise pogroms.
- Their aim was to shot to death as many as possible Jewish men suited for war service.
- The German Security Police intended to use non-German local people for their political aims.
- Murderous intentions of the Security Police crossed the limits of the agreement with the Wehrmacht and the future civil authorities.
- All German institutions supported the expatriation of part of Jews and killing of the remaining.

1.1. Violence and anti-Semitic attacks in KAUNAS: instigations of Germans and cooperation of Lithuanians

After the analysis of attacks, pogroms, public humiliation and shootings, the authors make the following *conclusions*:

- The attacks against Lithuanians Jews started immediately after the beginning of the war and became more frequent when the spearhead of the German Security Police headed by SS general Walter Franz Stahlecker entered Kaunas on 25 June.
- By the end of June the killings were already not public; they were moved to the 7th Fort of Kaunas. TDA battalions formed on 27 June were soon involved in mass killings. On 1 July, five companies of “auxiliary police units” were formed; two of them were subordinate to the killing unit 1B. One of these companies participated in guarding and killing of people in the 7th Fort of Kaunas. German and Lithuanian soldiers and policemen were shooters-killers as well. In general, it is considered that the German Security Police was responsible for the killings, even if the orders setting the form of mass killings in the 7th Fort were different.
- Striving to avoid discussions with the Vermacht on “totally disorganised mass shootings“ in the future, the German Security Police made a decision to form special “death squads” headed by Germans: ostensibly it was necessary to form the so-called “Hamann Squad” of Germans and Lithuanians because of “incidents” so that in the future it would be possible to “control” killings.

1.2. Aims of Germans in organising pogroms, preparation of Lithuanians

After the reconstruction of the activities of the German Security Police in the first days of German invasion, the following questions need to be answered: how pogroms were initiated, who was responsible for them and what were their aims. It is stated that two main aims, which partially coincide and complement each other, were being pursued:

- (a) One of the most important tasks of the German Security Police was to initiate pogroms against Jews as secretly as possible.
- (b) Since March 1941 there have been also from the part of the Lithuanian resistance groups (rebels) efforts and plans to prepare propagandistically riots against the Jews and in cases even to commit murder.

While executing pogroms, the forces of the German Security Police had various aims:

- a) The German Security Police intended to steer the resolution of local people towards proper direction so that it would not become politically dangerous. Germans knew that Lithuanians would neither be allowed to create an independent state nor to form a national army; for this reason their attention and energy had to be directed to allegedly “hostile Jews”.
- b) The German Security Police thought that it was important to impose the initiative for the organisation of mass killings on non-German people. Considering this, footage and photos which had to justify the statement ostensibly “the first spontaneous executions <...> were carried out by Lithuanians“ have to be evaluated as well.
- c) Besides it was necessary to show the Vermacht that local people “made the first steps at their own initiative“. The sources show that the Vermacht was informed about the events; however, it was almost not protesting against them and tolerated them.
- d) Pogroms and mass killings were the means of intimidation and terror, which, beside other things, had to facilitate the subsequent Ghettoisation.
- e) The Security Police strived to expand its competence and become the only possible force of order (*Ordnungsmacht*) – an institutional balance for the allegedly encountered chaos.
- f) The claim that ostensibly local people started to kill Jews at their own initiative could help to justify the anti-Semitic means of larger extent.

In general, the sources show that the initiative belonged to Germans and Lithuanians participated in it.

(2) Mass killings in the provinces and the role of local institutions

The formation of German civil government in Lithuania on 26-27 July 1941 was considered the *break* in the National-Socialist policy solving “the Jewish question”. These changes are visible in many decrees for Kaunas and its environs: prohibitions, disablement, humiliation, stigmatisation and isolation.

2.1. The ‘Reivytis File’ and the Jäger Reports

Despite some ambiguities, the reports of Jäger, USSR event reports, Stahlecker's documents, the 'Reivytis File' and similar initial material are considered the most important sources for the reconstruction of the events in Lithuania.

Proper analysis of the 'Reivytis File' shows the mechanism and course of the Holocaust of Lithuanian Jews and the extent to which local state and police officers were involved.

This case shows the manner of the concentration of Lithuanian Jews and the expropriation of their property, but not the extent. Only one twentieth of Jewish communities are mentioned in the case, and only the facts about the concentration and expropriation of Jews who lived in Lithuania's countryside and small towns are documented. However, the details of genocide mechanism are reviewed here and the obedient (submissive) executors of the German idea (most often rural wardens), who obeyed orders by which mass destruction was initiated, are revealed.

Officers of the Lithuanian Police played an important role in the genocide, and their responsibility cannot be underestimated. Although Jewish community was condemned, more persons could have been rescued at least.

Conclusions:

- It is clear that the decision to destroy Jews was made in Berlin, and the *Einsatzgruppe A* supervised its execution. The head of the 3rd killing unit, SS Standartenführer Karl Jäger, was responsible for the events; however, SS Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann coordinated mass destruction.
- Although Germans conceived the Holocaust, the executing power in the implementation of these plans was Reivytis and his police officers.
- Local police chiefs who had been arresting "citizens of Jewish nationality" were undoubtedly involved. And at the end of August 1941, many people understood already that Jews in the provinces are being collected not for the deportation but for killing.

The second most important place belongs to the so-called Jäger reports pointing out the scale of destruction. The reports provide meticulous, bureaucratic records of executed killings and shootings and the process. (p. 111–117)

S. Sužiedėlis points several things that should be cleared out in the future (the number of victims, their description, identity of killers). (p. 117–118)

2.2. Analysis of the events in two rural towns (p. 92–111)

After the reconstruction of the events in *Jurbarkas*, a small town near the Lithuanian-German border, and *Utena* in Lithuania's Northeast, a **conclusion** may be made that the scheme for the execution of crimes was similar:

- The initiative of Germans to completely destroy Jewish people was obvious in both cases. The readiness of Lithuanian administration and police to cooperate was unambiguous.
- Citizens of Lithuanian nationality were in various ways involved in the activities of persecution and killing: civilian and police institutions extensively cooperated in the preparation and execution of killings. Most part of Lithuanian regional and local state officers and police officers shared various jobs: determined and selected victims, separated them from other citizens, isolated, plundered and finally killed them. Although the initiative belonged to Germans, they used the space of impunity that formed due to the German anti-Semitist policy.

Institutions that participated in the genocide are reviewed **in the final part**.

The killing operations that were executed in summer and fall of 1941 were mostly coordinated by the headquarters of the 3rd killing unit located in Kaunas.

The limited forces were supplied by the cooperation of German and Lithuanian institutions; this cooperation helped to immediately name and identify victims, to take advantage of them, to expropriate, to concentrate and finally to kill them.

The following German institutions assisted the German Security Police with logistical means and staff:

- a) The *Vermacht*, mostly martial commanding offices and security divisions,
- b) German police battalions, especially the 11th and 65th battalion,
- c) Other police institutions, both civilian and military (e.g. criminal police and martial gendarmerie),

d) German civilian administration.

In order to execute mass crimes, German institutions needed many Lithuanian helpers: police and state officers. As the study shows, there were obedient executors of German ideas, and the most part of victims were killed with the help of Lithuanians or directly by their hands. The following Lithuanians participated in killings:

- a) Persons who belonged to irregular forces which emerged spontaneously and were immediately reorganised, for example, Klimaitis' group and a number of other "guerrillas";
- b) TDA units (later named "self-defence battalions"), which in literature are called "police battalions" (*Schutzmannschaften*);
- c) Kaunas Police division and newly established local departments;
- d) Agents and officers of the Lithuanian Security Police;
- e) Large part of Lithuanian civilian administration, also interim governing structures which were active during first weeks of the war and subsequent permanent institutions;
- f) The Lithuanian Temporary Government had a controversial role in the destruction of Jews: in fact it was not direct, however, it was a role. The Temporary Government which was formed on 23 June 1941 failed (at least in the beginning, when it could address the society via radio and press) to accomplish its duty to try to clearly speak against the violence against Jews;
- g) Large part of auxiliary Lithuanian forces participated in incidental activities and played a secondary role: guarded the arrested, hunted for hiding Jews, etc.

The authors presented a significant and exhaustive study, in which they analyse the until now not considered topic of modern history – multipartite occupational and collaborative structures and also the way German occupational authorities used hostility of local people against Jews and the Lithuanian nationalism for their own purposes.

The monograph is based on an excellent knowledge of sources available in all respective archives.

This study is especially useful not only because of the exhaustive analysis of the circumstances and preconditions of the invasion but also because it assuredly describes the whole spectrum of the collaboration. The initiative of mass killings undoubtedly belongs to the occupational authorities; however, it hardly could have been implemented without active participation of the Lithuanian Police and administration.

Only a few scientific papers about the circumstances of collaboration were available as yet, and even less about the role and functions of the Lithuanian Police and administration in mass killings. By evaluating the case of Reivytiš and thoroughly analysing case studies, this monograph provides a possibility to partially learn about these issues. The paper reveals that forces of local wardens were ready to execute any received order and that unconditional implementation of instructions and orders without questioning was the central factor in the life of local police forces.

The example of Hungary here is provided in order to enlighten the situation for the studying of relations and collaboration between local police and administration. A possibility to publicly name and analyse historical events and the political liability emerged only at the beginning of 1990. A hot discussion about the Holocaust continues among scientists since then; a number of studies have been publicized authors of which first of all gave their attention to the topic of a victim and a criminal and provided critical analysis of the Holocaust with the view to the liability of the then Hungarian state this way initiating *the change of a thinking paradigm*.

At the same time, it becomes clear that Hungary still lacks a well-established attitude of the society towards the Holocaust and the responsibility for it. A few changes are necessary before it happens; they have already commenced but are not finally established yet:

- Only when studies of the Holocaust will be a recognized part of the history science, society's attitude to it may evolve. This may cause a transformation of the collective memory. Besides, the history of the Holocaust must become an inseparable part of school programmes (at all education stages).

- A number of various memorials and life stories are also necessary which means that a discussion should commence in the society both with Jewish and non-Jewish recollections.
- Finally, a more intensive discussion about the Holocaust is necessary on local level (in a form of regional and local historical studies); with the help of such discussions the Holocaust could be considered a common history.

I think that the above-mentioned changes must be discussed in Lithuania as well.