

Review of the Paper

Disruption of Cultural Life and Confiscation of Property

[during the Nazi occupation]

by

Linus Jašinauskas

Although Linas Jašinauskas avoids to provide a clear definition, it is obvious that in his paper the term “cultural life” includes phenomena related to education and high education, periodicals and book publishing, libraries and museums, theatres and music. The author attempts at clarifying and describing how the Nazi regime affected the institutional sphere of culture in Lithuania, yet the metaphor of “life” is most often used when there is a voluntary attempt to break away from the sphere of institutional and political culture. After all, cultural life consists of both institutional and private everyday spheres. However, the most important thing in this paper relates to *the impact of the Nazi cultural politics on the culture and educational institutions functioning at that time in Lithuania.*

The author does not make any attempt at conceptualising his research, yet that should probably be attributed to the fact that this paper is actually only a section of a larger paper, about whose research approach the reviewer cannot form an opinion.

Jašinauskas tries to “touch upon only a few aspects of Lithuanian cultural life in 1941-1944 more extensively”, and also elaborates on “the Nazi politics aimed at the disruption of Lithuanian cultural life and closely related theme of the confiscation of property” (p. 1). However, the author is well aware that the paper of thirty or so pages may not describe

consistently, and in depth, the entire process of the depression and the disruption of culture in 1941-1944.

The author evaluates all work that has been directly or indirectly carried out by other researchers to date. Historiography or the history of revealing the issue he is focused on is introduced accurately in terms of facts, but, at the same time, this is done slightly too formally like in an accounting book. Numerous authors who have touched upon this topic 20 or 30 years ago either witnessed or themselves served the indoctrination of the Lithuanian culture implemented by the Soviet government. The issues of the Nazi politics used to be depicted so as to eliminate any opportunity to envisage the similarities with the Soviet cultural repression policies. A great number of issues were not taken up at all. Jašinauskas does not try to make more strict evaluations of the historiography, although in essence he performs the most important function of a scientist, that is, he explains both which episodes of the topic are most extensively researched to date and which ones need thorough research or archives. However, the value of material from certain funds (as well as the historiography characteristics) could have been evaluated in the introductory review.

Obviously, the author has explored the principal archives on education during the Nazi occupation in-depth. In this field, he is the first to reveal the intents and the strategy of the Nazis as well as to show how the implementation of the Nazi plans was associated with the events in the war field. Jašinauskas consistently demonstrates that gradual closing of the institutions of Lithuanian high and further education was related not only to the arguments that had been usually provided in traditional historical literature, for example, on the reasons for the university closing in Spring 1943. The most usual explanation is the punishment of the occupants for the disobedience, i.e. the refusal of the Lithuanian young people to join SS legions. However, Jašinauskas proves that this

fact was actually only a significant pretext, while the destiny of the high education in Lithuania was determined by the earlier plans.

The development of the education system, and the relations between the Lithuanian and the Nazi administrations in this field are depicted consistently and supported by direct archival sources. Factographic surface of the paper does not raise any doubts as to its originality and quality. On the other hand, the paper would have only benefited from the following parallel: specifying the actions of the Nazis that were analogous in respect of the Lithuanian students and the policies in the Reich's universities, as well as the actions that were done only in respect of Lithuanian universities. The author himself mentions this possibility when admitting that German students of the Faculties of Humanities and Social Studies were also forced to leave for the front together with their professors (p. 17).

The development of the destiny of publishing and other cultural institutions was indeed inconsistent under the Nazi's rule. Germanisation of culture that is usually revealed through the bonfires of books or censorship is more difficult to prove in music or applied arts. For the discussion of these fields of culture, the author relies on the works of other historians much more heavily by following their steps, repeating their arguments and lacking sufficient possibility to check these arguments by referring to the newly-discovered archival sources.

That is where the statements contradicting the facts on works of art annihilated by the Nazis in Vilnius or the demolition of one third of Vilnius Old Town by the retreating Nazis (taken from rather dubious and already outdated *History of Lithuanian Art* by J.Jurginis) appear in the text (p. 30). Rhetorical efforts of the Special State Commission for the Evaluation and Investigation of the Crimes of German Fascist Invaders and their Accomplices, set up by the Soviet government in 1956, to conceal whose bombs demolished Vilnius Old Town during the Soviet

attack in Summer 1944 should not be presented in the paper of a contemporary historian as they are (without critical reservations).

The paper sheds less light on the Nazi policies concerning Lithuanian cultural property confiscation. Underground press featured lots of reports on the direct license in this field. However, the paper would have benefited from the reasoning about the extent to which property confiscation or destruction was the outcome of the official occupants' policy, and to which it was merely the looting of retreating army. After all, certain occupants may successfully write-off the disappearance of works of art or other property to the account of other occupants. The occurrence of such phenomena was discussed by the reviewer with Prof. Vladas Drėma a while ago. The fate of valuables of art is still very unclear and attracts those who like solving historical riddles.

On the whole, I should admit that Jašinauskas has managed to perform his task, conducted professional analysis of available archival sources and consistently revealed the catastrophic situation into which the Lithuanian education, academic life and culture institutions were pushed. Undoubtedly, this is a paper of a young historian marked by scientific novelty, therefore, it should be favourably assessed.

Egidijus Aleksandravičius

History Professor of Vytautas Magnus University