

Translated from Lithuanian

Review of the Study *Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania, Murder of Civilian Population (1941-1944)* by Dr Rimantas Zizas

The research under review can be adequately read, understood and assessed only if one knows who - the author or the client - owns the title and the choice of the perspective. The width of the topic and the scope of the research are important factors, as well, and they are determined by a) the contract between the client and the author, b) the scientific-methodological approach, or c) are dictated by coincidence. As the reviewer was not aware of any of these circumstances, he tried to leave all of them aside, and relied on a technical assumption that Dr Zizas was the author of all aspects. Therefore, it is on the Commission themselves to distinguish between what belongs to those who formulated the task and to the clients, and what is owned by the author of the research under review.

First, as usual, one wishes to identify the mission and objectives of the research. The title of the study is slightly controversial and tempts us to make not only academic innuendoes. The first part of the two-sided title *Persecution of non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania* makes us regard the text as an incompletely independent part of a larger research work, the essence of which is *Mass Murder of Jews in Lithuania*. A certain scientific suspicion emerges upon reading a phrasing like this. If the emphasis fell on the word "persecution", the mission of the work would cover almost the entire history of repressions by the Nazi occupational power and the Lithuanian self-governance regime, i.e. it would include (and, in fact, it does) everything including killings and seized piglets).

The second constituent of the title *Murder of Civilian Population* refers to a different field of research: it implies the highest level of repressions marked by physical annihilation of people. If this path is followed, even a small scope-study makes a

distinction between general punitive policies of the occupational regime and the direct murder possible, though, again, the problem would be analysed in relation to all nationalities: Jews, Russians, Poles, Gypsies and Lithuanians who made up the civilian population of Lithuania. The current wording of the title does not help to set tighter limits of the research or to separate the most important aspects from second-rate stories in terms of the mission of the research.

The text of the research is less controversial; its logical sequence is acceptable, comprehensible and well reasoned. In the introduction, the author opts out of comments on the choice of the topic (which is, as I tried to prove above, controversial), he does not comment on the historiography context, which is implored by the *Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania*; rather than that, he says simply:

*The purpose of the research is to provide a generic overview of the historiography of the issue of the murder (loss) of non-Jewish Lithuanian citizens, to distinguish categories of victims and the scope of the repressions during the warfare and the Nazi occupation, to give approximate figures of the number of victims, to reveal the causes, procedure and processes of the murder (loss) of the population, to present the most important facts related to the murder. (p.2)*

In essence, Dr Zizas honours the promises and meets the readers' expectations. The material examined by him, his interpretations and generalisations are emotion-free, politically correct and academically moderate. His trenchant criticism is mainly levelled at the low-quality tendentious historiography of this issue up to now. He reveals the ways and reasons of inflating the numbers of civilian victims in the publications of the Soviet period and is critical of their reliability. He notes the tendencies of émigré authors to slightly increase the suffering and losses of Lithuanians due to Nazi policies. Dr Zizas's critical approach helps us to understand the value of the works produced up to now, their degree of tendentiousness, and even to perceive the reasons behind that. Nonetheless,

there are several points in the manner of researching the problem that enable the reviewer to find faults with.

First: while including the works of official Soviet commissions that functioned in Lithuania into the category of *historiography*, Dr Zizas leaves aside most of the less known authors of that period who did not mention figures of the victims straightforward, but tried to find their own ways of describing the Nazi occupation in the country. To draw a more distinct boundary between research conducted by academic historians and propaganda-guided, memoir-type, dilettante works is a worthwhile attempt which is extremely useful in cases of our (and not only our) traumatic and dramatic topics.

Second: due to that, the limits between sources that we would like to see as direct in a research like this, and fruits of the work or imagination of historians melt. A methodological morass opens up here, the morass that is encountered not only by Dr Zizas, but also by all those who try to look into subjects that the man in the street or a witness would describe as follows: *"It was so terrible that I will never be able to tell about. And it was so terrible that I will never succeed in forgetting it..."* I have in mind the methodological instrumentation of the research employed for the analysis of the most dramatic topic of the epoch which left extremely scant direct evidence. What concerns convincing data, as if in a fair trial, they are by far not too much for the history of the slaughter during World War II. The way evidence and figures are extracted from indirect sources is a matter of professional artistry of historians. Dr Zizas proves to be a researcher who has stayed in archives extremely long, however, while using texts of radiograms or later reports by Soviet partisans he does not emphasise enough that reliability of each message is the primary task of the critics of the source. I would say that the introduction is the part that could have contained broader considerations on the evaluation of the entire array of such archival data, on the ways to distinguish which of them can be proved by other data, and which have just to be trusted as no additional facts exist.

Nonetheless, there is one task that the author seems to have accomplished consistently. He dispels every doubt and proves in a reasoned way that most of the established figures defining the scale of the murder that used to be, and still are, quoted by Lithuanian and foreign authors are, to a great extent, provisional, inflated rather than real. In other words, he does a very important historian's work: by referring to the material gathered by other researchers, comparing it with available archival sources, he brings the numerical panorama of 1941-1944 repressions in Lithuania closer to the actual level. Maybe the figures presented in the conclusions of the research are slightly contrasting. For instance, in the description of the larger punitive operations (the murder in Švenčionys environs in May 1942), he doubts even some figures offered by the respected officials of Nazi government (p.37-38), while in the Conclusions most of the doubts disappear and the author is satisfied with what he has. This, probably, is unavoidable when some figures are not fully reliable, and other, better-founded ones, are in short supply.

Dr Zizas is very consistent in defining the sequence of the occupant operations related, directly or indirectly, to the repressing or killing of the civilian population. The research material is presented in a gently chronological order, though its ordering according to the relevance of the problems is much more discernible. Losses on the first days of the Nazi-Soviet warfare as well as sporadic revenge operations and misunderstandings are the purpose of the first chapter.

The author takes a close look at the murder of and repressions against Soviet activists, which, as it turns out, were often quite soft, and it was not always that former members of the Young Communist League ended up in the ditches of executions. Due to different motives, most of them *did their penance* for the sins committed during their earlier collaboration with the Soviets in Nazi services. The inclusion of these episodes should be considered a great merit of the author. He tempts others to conduct further research into the occupational regime, which would become by far more vivid if future works embraced more instruments of historical anthropology and oral history. On the other hand, alongside issues related to Soviet partisans and civilians associated with them who

fell victim to the regime, a special mention should have been made of the scope of repressive operations provoked by the Lithuanian national anti-Nazi underground.

Two chapters deal with the punishment of Soviet underground activists and their supporters (or suspects). The author gives a rather detailed picture of these facts because Soviet historians and authors of rather plentiful memoirs have handed down more or less real reflections. Though these subjects are not wrapped up in a language of figures or arguments, they reveal very clearly views that prevailed among the population and behaviour of the pursuers of Nazi policies.

The author also gives a rather close attention to measures employed by the occupants in order to do away with the most typical feature of the resisting Lithuanian nation and society, i.e. massive careful stubborn refusal to obey instructions of the authorities. He observes that the massive stanza of Lithuanians to passively jib at carrying out the orders (not to rush to the German mobilisations or to refuse to pay tolls in agricultural products) met with a rather mild reaction. Dr Zizas provides figures that would in no way allow us to call the punishments of Lithuanians massive.

Beyond any doubt, the work is capable of integrating in the most interesting way the subjects of repressions against people who saved Jews and other civilian Lithuanians in danger of death. Speaking up about the real threat that was hanging over the Lithuanian people determined to save Jews in a language of more specific figures would mean a huge step forward in the research of the tragedy of World War II as a part of the Lithuanian history. However, in this respect, the author failed to achieve anything tangibly new.

Summing up, it has to be admitted that the work performed by the author is constructive in academic terms, the results reached enable us to take a realistic look at the crimes committed and damage made by the Nazi occupation in Lithuania. It makes a positive contribution to the historiography of this period. Although the text badly needs an editor and a stylist, these tasks are easy to cope with in a professional publishing process.

Therefore, I firmly give a positive assessment to the text in the hope that it will provoke further research.

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