

Review of Dr Bubnys research “Holocaust in the Province of Lithuania in 1941”

The extensive investigation of Dr Bubnys deals with a very relevant topic from the scientific-cognitive point of view – the mass Jewish massacre in the province of Lithuania is one of the problems of the Holocaust history in Lithuania which has been touched upon very little. The lack of archive, document sources, makes the scientific and objective research of this problem very difficult. This point should be taken into account when evaluating the research results of Dr Bubnys.

The investigation refers to various sources, such as the material from the main Lithuanian archives (LCVA, LYA), funds, memoirs, the published documentary evidences, and even the material collected by the specialists of regional studies, the works of Lithuanian and foreign authors. Therefore, the research source basis is quite sound.

Since one could notice the lack of reference to the newest works related to the investigated topic, the study of Dr Bubnys seems to have been prepared quite a long time ago. The monograph of Eidintas “Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust” (“Žydai, lietuviai ir holokaustas”) (Vilnius, 2002. – 477 page) could be considered an important work in elucidating the Holocaust history in Lithuania.

The Holocaust in Lithuania was covered referring to 6 Lithuanian counties (Alytus, Kaunas, Kretinga, Trakai, Utena and Vilkaviškis). The choice of these particular counties for the research object could be considered logical and acceptable, since the main regional counties of Lithuania were investigated in the study. However, Samogitian (here relatively more Jews survived) and Eastern Lithuanian (where the majority of the population were Poles and Russians) counties could have been examined closer for a more general overview on the Holocaust process in the province of Lithuania. Kretinga County was the German frontier county at the time and the process of the Holocaust had distinctive features as compared to the whole of Samogitia.

The author analyses the Holocaust process in the province of Lithuania analysing different counties. Maybe this kind of approach is the right one, however, the investigation of counties in alphabetical order seems illogical here. The research firstly deals with the county of Alytus and at the end touches upon the county of Vilkaviskis. In this way two frontier counties (Kretinga and Vilkaviskis) happen to be far away from each other in the research. It seems that it could have been more

logical, purposeful and coherent to analyse the Holocaust process starting with Kaunas County, introducing the general historical background of events of 1941 (the anti-Soviet rebellion in June and other events of the beginning of German occupation related to the Holocaust). Also, the study could have touched upon the repression and Jewish annihilation structures organized in Kaunas by Germans and Lithuanian collaborators since the author emphasizes Kaunas as the key place in the Holocaust history (l. 14), it could be considered as the Jewish massacre model of the province of Lithuania.

It would have been more logical to organize the research material starting from Kretinga County as Germany frontier county, which chronologically was devastated by the Holocaust at the earliest stage. The author reasonably underscores that the Jewish massacre in Gargzdai was the first mass Jewish massacre in Lithuania or maybe in the whole territory of the former USSR.

In evaluating the results of the research in general, it should be emphasized that Dr Bubnys re-established the major events, facts and horrible results of the Holocaust in a very thorough, thoughtful and detailed manner referring to the documentary facts of various sources. His approach to the problem is objective without any tendency to hide or trivialize the responsibility of Lithuanians for the Holocaust. The study shows how consistent and systematic was the mass massacre of almost all Jews of the Lithuanian province in 1941. In general the facts and data of the study do not raise any doubts. The author evaluates critically the Soviet sources and tries to establish at least approximate number of the Holocaust victims. All this is a big advantage of the study.

The investigation reasonably concentrates on the process of mass Jewish massacre, the operations of killing. However, it seems that the expulsion of Jews from the spheres of public life, isolation, persecution processes and their mechanism, the primary preparation stage of the Holocaust, needs more thorough investigation. Also, the study could have touched upon such questions as, what was the attitude of local people towards the Holocaust in the province, (with some details in the regions), what was the motivation of local groups which were involved in the Holocaust process? What was the activity of local government structures, their responsibility, etc.? The investigation might lack the more problematic attitude towards the Holocaust processes, related events and phenomena as well as the answers (or attempts to answer) to the principal questions of historiography. The author introduces a lot of new facts, not known in

historiography or known very little. For example, the fact that there was no one who wanted to shoot Jews in Merkinė region (1.100) as well as the fact that the residents of Jonava town were very unsatisfied with Jewish (1.20), the residents of Eišiškės villages and surrounding areas were supporting and actively helping the Jews (1.54). However, these interesting and important facts of the Holocaust history are not emphasized and singled out, they “disappear” among other facts and data.

The author proves referring to historical facts that the squad of Hamann was carrying out the mass massacre in the province. There is a question of a principal matter – how many Jews of the Lithuanian province were killed by rebel squads and local police, how many of them were killed before the German invasion, where there any rebel attacks directed only to Jews, spontaneous pogroms of Jews, analogous (though little ones) events to the ones in Kaunas (in “Lietūkis” garage in the district of Viliampolė). The author only guesses that partisans and the police killed quite a lot of Jews. These are important issues; they are approached in a different way in the works of Jewish and Lithuanian authors. Therefore, they had to be analysed more in the study; the opinion of the author must have been expressed.

The author reasonably distinguishes two stages in the process of the Holocaust: the first one is when the political considerations played the most important role in Jewish massacre; they were killed as former communists, workers of the Soviet service, etc. The second stage is a period of racial genocide. The first period dates back to the end of June – the middle of July 1941. The chronological frame of the first stage might be too broad and the conclusion itself too categorical and formal (especially when it is in the conclusions of the research). The massacre of Jews on racial considerations started in June 1941 in German frontier counties (the facts of the study witness that as well), “racial genocide” operations were also carried out in other counties of Lithuania before the middle of July.

In summarizing the research results of Dr Bubnys it could be concluded that taking into account that the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania hasn't been investigated a lot, despite some drawbacks and the remarks of a critical manner, the study is evaluated positively. It offers a substantial basis for the Commission to make conclusions on the Holocaust in the province of Lithuania in 1941.