

Review of
“Disruption of Cultural Life and Confiscation Of Property”
by Linas Jašinauskas

The research of L. Jašinauskas, submitted for reviewing, has been conducted on the significant topic that has not yet been investigated thoroughly from the scientific point of view. The occupational politics of Nazi Germany in the field of culture as well as its consequences remain in the shadow of well-researched themes and researches conducted into Holocaust, political (resistance), social and other historical processes. Undoubtedly, the field of the research is important and significant for the research topics investigated by the Commission.

The title, the object and the aims of the research in question could be formulated more exactly and clearly. The issues provided in the title and the emphases put by the author are both discussible. Should not the issue of “disruption of cultural life” be phrased more subtly, more problematically and more carefully? Did the Nazi occupants consciously seek and disrupt Lithuanian cultural life in respect of, first and foremost, the majority of the population, i.e. Lithuanians? The phrase “confiscation of property” featured in the title is also ambiguous. Considering the content of the paper, it is obvious that the author means “cultural property”, or more exactly, “cultural heritage”. Therefore, the title should be made more accurate, too.

The research of L. Jašinauskas consists of the Introduction, the sections named “Disruption of Educational and Science Institutions and Their Subjection to War Objectives” (p. 5-21); “Control of Press, Book Publishing and Radio” (p. 21-25); “Restriction of Cultural Life” (p. 25-29); “Looting and Annihilation of Culture Institutions” (p. 29-35); the Conclusions (p. 35-37); and the Appendices.

The researcher rather thoroughly discusses the historiography, refers to the works of other authors, and employs the data of the new archival sources. It is praiseworthy that the author does not expand too much but makes an effort to disclose the phenomena and the processes concisely and with generalisations.

On the one hand, it could be said that the paper elaborates on the relevant issues. On the other hand, the aforementioned key phrases of the research (and others) as well as the very structure of the research show that the author has followed traditional approach developed by other, mainly Soviet, authors. It seems that the research has been conducted relying on too much Soviet historiography.

In the introduction of the historiography, the researcher for the most part limits himself only to the presentation of “bibliographic” data, that is, which authors researched what topics. One could miss the aspects of historiography evaluation, or the analysis of its achievements, flaws and principal trends. First of all, the paper would benefit from the evaluation of the historiographical contribution of the Emigration, the authors of Independent Lithuania, individual authors, etc.

Most probably, the author should have better explored the issues of the Soviet historiography and the resulting difficulties. After all, propaganda and ideological evaluations, stereotypes, criteria and myths characterise Soviet historiography rather than scientific or unbiased evaluations.

The research also lacks the description of the cultural politics of Nazi Germany, its goals and objectives in the occupied countries of the East Europe and, more specifically, in Lithuania: a) during wartime; b) in a broader historical perspective. In addition, the author should have provided a concise review of historical developments and changes of the cultural life in the Independent Lithuania in-between wars, and equally short analysis of the Sovietisation processes of cultural life in 1941-1944, which have terminated the natural development of Lithuanian culture.

These two additional sections would not be formal because they would be relevant from the methodological respect as the point of departure for identifying or evaluating the consequences of the German occupation in the field of culture, and for better understanding of the related phenomena. From the point of methodology, this would have assisted in identifying the (actual) effect of the cultural politics of the German occupants a) on the Lithuanian culture; b) on the Sovietisation processes conducted before the war. In Soviet historiography, these two different outcomes were discussed together, therefore, the resulting picture of the cultural losses was distorted, exaggerated and politically-impregnated.

Were the destruction of the Soviet propaganda books and textbooks, the liquidation of reforms, conducted in the Lithuanian cultural field for the Soviet purposes, and other similar processes really so disastrous for the Lithuanian culture?

The author fails to provide an in-depth review of the political model of culture brought by the Nazi occupants to Lithuania. It is well-known that the Soviets followed the theory of “the struggle of classes”, therefore, the cultural model they imposed was, in essence, cosmopolitan. Meanwhile, the German Nazis followed the racist theory (which constituted a part of State politics), they classified nations and conducted their politics according to the races. This policy was far from being the same in respect of the Lithuanian, the Polish, the Russian, the Jewish, etc. These nations residing in Lithuania at that time were given very different conditions for the preservation of their culture, education, national identity, etc.

After the Germans, the Lithuanians were the nation that was provided with the best conditions for the protection and preservation of their ethnical culture. The Lithuanians had both protection and privileges in respect of culture.

Most probably, in certain aspects, Lithuanian culture during the period of Nazi occupation actually enhanced and flourished (unfortunately, sometimes at the expense of other nations). Throughout the Nazi occupation, the number of the Lithuanian elementary schools and their pupils only increased (the author provides the respective data). In addition, it should be stated that 2,890 elementary schools, attended by about 300,000 children, functioned in Lithuania at the beginning of 1944 (“Tėviškė”, 04 April 1944).

Positive phenomena in the Lithuanian culture include not only schools but also the flourishing of theatre, opera, operetta, poetry and other arts. This was admitted even in the Soviet historiography (see *History of the Lithuanian SSR*, Volume 4, Vilnius, 1975, p. 106-108). Also check M. Treinys *Gyvenimas – meteoro skrydis: žurnalisto ir rezistentu Antano Valiukėno, jo kartos ir idėjų likimo apybraiža (Life as the Flight of a Meteor)*, Kaunas, 2003, pages 368-370, etc.

Aside from the Jewish, the Polish were the most discriminated in cultural respect, they were followed by the Belarusians, Russians and other minorities. Vilnius Region

was intensely, even brutally Litanianised, all Polish schools were closed here, children were taught Lithuanian, the Polish intelligentsia were repressed, etc.

Consequently, when researching the processes of the Lithuanian culture during the Nazi occupation, not only disruption, destruction and looting, but also the complexity and the inconsistency of the processes should be discussed. Differentiated Nazi politics in respect of different nations determined varying cultural and other losses, incurred substantial national tension and conflicts. For example, because of the said reasons, one of the Polish Communist sources of Summer 1944 states that in Vilnius “national relations were horrible, “savage” hatred towards Lithuanians was felt” (LYA, funds 1771, folder 7, file 79, p. 42-43).

As mentioned above, the author should have taken a closer look into certain other disclosed issues and problems. Some statements about great numbers of imprisoned (Lithuanian) cultural figures, who have died in the places of imprisonment, looting and annihilation of culture institutions, etc. sound a bit too flat.

Essentially negative attitude of the author towards certain phenomena of cultural life during the Nazi occupation could be probably explained by the too strong influence of the Soviet historiography. Was the intensified teaching of the German language really a malady and the sign of Germanisation? Were school regulations pertaining to the discipline, dutifulness, pupil conduct and appearance as well as other various cultural reforms so harmful? Did the German (and Italian) culture, which was in essence Western culture, really cause only disruption and evil in the cultural field, even though it was brought on the bayonets of the German soldiers?

In general, the research carried out by L. Jašinauskas leaves a bit contradictory impression. The research would only benefit from deeper, more challenging, more summarised and reflected stance on complex and paradoxical phenomena of cultural history, while the research subject could be broader, too. However, when evaluating the research, it would be hard to overlook the creative efforts made and the huge research conducted by the author as well as the results he achieves. Meanwhile, the unfavourable situation of the historiography and its achievements should also be taken into account. In comparison to the entire paper, the author’s conclusions leave a good impression, but they certainly require revision, improvement and adjustment. I believe that after the paper is slightly improved and complemented, it could be submitted for the consideration of the Commission.

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