

Review of Dr. Bubnys's article *Holocaust in the Lithuanian Province in 1941*.

Dr. Bubnys's article *Holocaust in the Lithuanian Province in 1941* is worthy of recognition. His article is based on vast archival material that until then had not yet been examined. Dr. Bubnys certainly invested a lot of time in this research project.

This article deals with the six counties out of the Lithuanian twenty-two counties. It is extremely important that Dr. Bubnys continue with this work for the Historical Commission which is to comprise all twenty-two counties. This will be an extremely important contribution both to the research and the knowledge on the Holocaust in Lithuania.

Even though I have a great deal of appreciation for Dr. Bubnys's work, I would like to point out a few of its problematical elements. In order to depict a complete description of the Holocaust in the Lithuanian provinces, it is imperative to base it also on a wide variety of Jewish sources, mostly testimonies from survivors who were there, personal memoirs and diaries that were written in Yiddish and Hebrew. Dr. Bubnys did not have access to those materials that are found mostly at Yad Vashem and at other institutions' archives in Israel. The use of Jewish source material would certainly have contributed much to the description of events that occurred in the cities and the towns which Dr. Bubnys mentioned in his article. If utilized, this material would possibly have affected his conclusions and summaries.

In conclusion to his article Dr. Bubnys writes:

The persecution and the elimination of the Jews in the province can be conditionally divided into two stages:

- 1) *End of June – Mid July 1941. During this period persecution was based on political motives. Most often the Jews were arrested, imprisoned and shot in the same way as the former Communists. Persons of other nationalities, sharing the same beliefs were persecuted for the same reasons (Lithuanians, Polish, Russians, etc.)...*
- 2) *The second stage (end of July – November 1941). It was the period of racial genocide. The Jews were persecuted not because of political reasons but because they were Jews....*

I cannot accept this division. In the first period too (end of June – middle of July 1941) thousands of Jews were killed not because they were Communists or activists in Soviet institutions, but simply because they were Jews. A lot of information can be found in many documents and this issue has been dealt with to a large extent in the Yad Vashem publication of Encyclopedia of Lithuanian Communities (*Pinkas Kehillot Lita* (Hebrew), edited by Professor Dov Levin. Moreover, Dr. Bubnys's description of the events in those first weeks in the Lithuanian province relates to the fact that hundreds and even a few thousand Jewish men were killed only because of racist reasons and out of antisemitism among certain sectors of Lithuanian society. I shall cite only a few of those places mentioned in Dr. Bubnys's research where Jews were killed in this period without distinction:

Palanga – All the Jewish men were shot there on 27 June 1941.

Salantai – One hundred-fifty men were shot in the first half of 1941.

Skuodas and Dimitravas – All the Jewish men were shot in July 1941.

Kretinga – Two hundred-fourteen men and one woman, most of them if not all were Jews, were shot on 26 June 1941 (According to the Jewish sources, two hundred were Jews.)

Darbenai – One hundred-fifty Jewish men and four Soviet war prisoners were shot at the end of June 1941.

Gargzdai – Two hundred men and one woman were shot at the end of June 1941, most of them were Jews among whom were Jewish refugees from Klaipėda. These refugees had arrived to the area in 1939.

The above-mentioned cases are only a part and a random sample from Dr. Bubnys's research. One can locate many more similar examples in his work. In all the cases I have alluded to, Dr. Bubnys did not write that the victims were Communist activists. It is clear from what he writes that most of them were Jewish men who were killed because they were Jews and not for any political reason. I would also like to mention that 150 people were shot in Alytus between the 23-24 June 1941 as a form of retaliation for the killing of two German soldiers. Most if not all of those murdered were Jews. When Dr. Bubnys wrote about this massacre, he simply stated that they were residents of Alytus.

There is no doubt that there were some Jews who were also Communist activists among the victims of this preliminary period (end of June to mid July 1941), but they were not the majority. It is also important to point out that among those thousands of Jews (to my estimation 12,000) that succeeded to escape to the Soviet Union there was a vast majority of Communist activists who had some kind of transportation available to them. A smaller number of these activists remained in Lithuania, but they probably went into hiding in the first weeks.

This first period between the end of June and the middle of July 1941 is a problematical and difficult period regarding the attitude of large segments of the Lithuanian society toward Jews. In that period thousands of Jews were also murdered in the Seventh Fort in Kaunas and in other places such as Viliampolė, Lietukis and Jurbarkas and pogroms were perpetrated against different places in Lithuania. To define the motivation for the murder of Jews in that period as political would be very untrue, inconsistent with the historical truth and unacceptable to me. It would purge the guilt of those responsible for the killing of thousands of Jews in those days. The Historical Commission should not accept the distinction that the killing of Jews in the first period was out of political motivation (equating it with the killing of Lithuanian Soviet activists, Poles, and Russians) and, to claim that only during the second period the murder of Jews was on the basis of race. If a division into two periods is necessary, then the first period needs to be redefined and given another title and possibly be extended until the end of July 1941.

Despite everything that I have related to you, I would like to point out my deep appreciation for Dr. Bubnys's work.

I would like to have these comments dispersed among all of the Commission's members.

Sincerely,

Dr. Yitzack Arad