UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES

Lithuania and the Jews
The Holocaust Chapter

Symposium Presentations

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Foreword

Centuries of intellectual, religious, and cultural achievements distinguished Lithuania as a uniquely important center of traditional Jewish arts and learning. The Jewish community of Lithuania created extensive libraries; great teaching colleges, seminaries, and yeshivas; eminent spiritual leaders, such as the "Gaon of Vilna" (the great eighteen-century scholar Elijah ben Solomon Zalmon); Jewish literature, newspapers, and publishing houses; Yiddish theaters; YIVO (the Yiddish Scientific Institute), dedicated to the study of Yiddish and East European Jewish culture; and the movements of Haskalah, Zionism, and Jewish Socialism.

Jewish life deteriorated in Lithuania during the 1930s, however, with the rise of nationalism and antisemitism. Increased economic and political discrimination endangered the foundations of traditional Jewish life there. In June 1941, only days after invading the Soviet Union, the Nazis occupied Soviet-controlled Lithuania and immediately instigated the near-total annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry. Fewer than 25,000 Lithuanian Jews survived from a total prewar Jewish population of approximately 250,000.

Little of the once-vibrant community remained after the Holocaust. Along with 90 percent of the Jewish community, much of the collected work of centuries of Lithuanian Jewish life also perished. The images, words, and records—some only recently discovered and acquired from individual and Jewish-organizational sources—that did survive, however, have invigorated new research by scholars eager to understand the Jewish perspective of this dark and difficult history.

In support of this work, the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies (CAHS) of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City co-sponsored in October–November 2003 a three-part program entitled *Lithuania and the Jews*. Our intention was to further research in the field and enhance our understanding of this history. In addition, this series of programs on Lithuanian Jewry addressed a more specific aim shared by the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research: acknowledging and exploring the crucial ties among scholars in Holocaust studies and Jewish studies by focusing on Jews and Jewish communities before, during, and after the Holocaust.

For decades, Holocaust scholars primarily focused on the source materials and documentary records produced by the perpetrators. Jewish source materials that survived were generally underutilized. As a result, the victims tend to be depersonalized in much scholarly output on the Holocaust. The victims' perspectives are important to consider, however. Can we presume to study the Holocaust without examining the language, society, history, and culture of European Jewry? The Center's International Archival Programs Division is making great strides toward rectifying this imbalance by making available in the Museum's archives a vast array of source material from Jewish communities across Europe. The Center has also embarked upon an integrated Jewish Source Study Initiative, designed to stimulate study of the ways in which Jews drew on the personal, communal, institutional, cultural, and spiritual resources at their disposal to respond to the assault, and to affirm and then re-affirm Jewish values during and after the Holocaust. While YIVO has never considered itself to be an institution where the primary purpose is to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, it was in a unique position to contribute to understanding of who the victims were, and was well positioned from 1945 to 1955 to acquire vast quantities of printed materials and eyewitness accounts relating to the destruction of European Jewry. From the 1950s through the 1970s, YIVO played a leadership role in a project that produced a series of foundational scholarly guides and bibliographies of the Holocaust. Through its network of Zamlers (collectors), YIVO continues to this day to receive important Holocaust collections.

Eleven scholars participated in this symposium, which began in New York City on October 1, 2002, with the session entitled *The Intellectual Contributions of Lithuanian Jewry from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*. The symposium continued in Washington on October 28 with a panel examining *Lithuania and the Holocaust*, and concluded in New York City on November 13 with the third session entitled *Jewish Life under Soviet-Occupied Lithuania and Today*. His Excellency Vygaudas Ušackas, Ambassador of Lithuania to the United States, opened the symposium by remarking on the shared heritage and culture of Jewish and non-Jewish Lithuanians, and the importance of honest reflection on the history of Nazi occupation and on the role of Lithuanian perpetrators.

The three papers included in this volume stem from the second panel presentation, entitled *Lithuania and the Holocaust*, held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Collectively, they explore Lithuanian Jewry's confrontation with

near destruction by the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators. The session began with Michael MacQueen, Chief of Investigative Research in the United States Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations (OSI), where he investigates crimes committed in German-occupied Lithuania, Belorussia, and Poland. Mr. MacQueen illustrated through case studies that Lithuanians were willing and often eager to collaborate in the "Final Solution." He detailed several factors motivating those directly involved in killing Jews and noted that many killings and lootings occurred in rural villages, where Lithuanians often inflicted brutal violence on their longtime Jewish neighbors.

Jürgen Matthäus, Senior Applied Research Scholar at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies and 1994–1995 Pearl Resnick Postdoctoral Fellow at the Museum, shared new research on German anti-Jewish policy and the perpetration of the "Final Solution" in Lithuania. He emphasized timing, totality, and technique as defining characteristics of this policy and its implementation. Beginning with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Dr. Matthäus discussed the step-by-step destruction that provided "structure as well as momentum to prejudices, hatred, self-interest, and visions of a New Order" and resulted in the murder of almost half of Lithuania's Jewish population within the first months of the military campaign.

David Roskies, the Sol and Evelyn Henkind Chair in Yiddish Literature and Culture and Chair of the Department of Jewish Literature at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, concluded the Washington panel with a thoughtful examination of Jewish cultural life in the Vilna ghetto. Roskies described the turn of some influential ghetto intellectuals to traditional Judaism as they realized that the Nazis intended to eliminate Jewish emancipation and forms of self-expression. After the mass killings that accompanied ghettoization, these leaders reached into the Jewish past in preparation for an unknown future. As a result of their efforts, the Vilna ghetto was distinguished for its literary and theatrical productions.

The mission of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies is to promote research and study of the Holocaust, to encourage the growth of the field of Holocaust studies at American universities, to foster strong relationships between American and foreign scholars of the Holocaust, and to ensure the ongoing training of future generations of scholars capable of doing research on and teaching sensitively about the Holocaust.

The articles in this collection are not verbatim transcripts of the papers as presented. Some authors extended or revised their presentations by incorporating additional information and endnotes, and all of the contributions were copyedited. Although the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum makes every reasonable effort to provide accurate information, the Museum cannot guarantee the reliability, currency, or completeness of the material contained in the individual papers. The papers represent work in progress. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Museum.

The symposium *Lithuania and the Jews* was made possible through the support of the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. The Center and YIVO deeply appreciate the many contributions to this program by YIVO consultant Dr. Evan Zimroth, Professor of English and Associate Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Queens College, The City University of New York. Many members of the Center's staff also deserve thanks for their work on the symposium and proceedings: Robert M. Ehrenreich, Suzanne Brown-Fleming, and Lisa Grandy for devising, developing, and organizing the series; and Aleisa Fishman, Eliot Werner, and Ellen Blalock for preparing the papers for publication. Finally, and most important, the scholars deserve our greatest thanks for their excellent presentations and their subsequent participation in the editing of those presentations for this publication.

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Lithuanian Collaboration in the "Final Solution": Motivations and Case Studies

Michael MacQueen

Almost 95 percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish population, as many as 220,000 individuals or more, perished in the Holocaust. While the guiding hand was almost invariably German, in a high percentage of cases, the bloody hand of the murderer was Lithuanian. Many and perhaps most Lithuanians have historically denied their willing national participation in the Holocaust[1] or (at most) grudgingly admit participation by their countrymen, but label the Lithuanian participants in genocide "elements from the social margins"—as if the killers had sprung from a lurking criminal class that, given license by the Germans, gave vent to its preexisting appetites for mass murder. This categorization allows a dismissal of this element from the central corpus of the nation and an abdication of the need for social self-examination and responsibility.

In his new work *Žydai, Lietuviai ir Holokaustas*, Alfonsas Eidintas offers a catalog of motivations of those who directly participated in killing Jews: (1) a notion of revenge, taken by persons who suffered repression (or who had family members who were shot or deported) under Soviet rule;[2] (2) opportunism, manifested by those who were determined to make the best for themselves under the German occupation regardless of what was required of them; (3) expiation, involving those who had severely compromised themselves by service to the Soviet government or Communist party organizations (particularly youth who had been active in the Komsomol) and felt a need to "cleanse themselves with Jewish blood";[3] (4) antisemitism, driving the adherents of the prewar fascist-nationalist movement who had been suppressed under the prewar authoritarian leader Antanas Smetona; and (5) self-enrichment, which motivated those who saw the opportunity to profit from stolen Jewish property.[4] Another category should be added: mass murderers by chance, the "accidental genocidaires." A number of these separate elements can be identified in individual killers' case studies, which will help profile some of the actors who perpetrated the Holocaust in Lithuania and will demonstrate how these motivations operated in practice.

The climate was heavily primed for outbursts of antisemitic violence. Propaganda leaflets, sometimes of the crudest form and content, were circulated by anti-Soviet resistance cells in many parts of Lithuania prior to the invasion; one of these, from the Panevėžys district, called on Lithuanian workers and peasants to strike down the "thieves"

(specifically identified as Communists) and Jews.[5] German radio propaganda broadcast in Lithuanian likewise incited people to anti-Jewish violence.

The atmosphere of licensed violence against Jews should be understood within the context of the generalized violence that characterized the initial period of the German occupation in June–July 1941.[6] In a series of bloody acts of retribution, a minimum of 5,000 Lithuanians were seized and shot by anticommunist insurrectionaries.[7] Lithuanian-on-Lithuanian violence was particularly concentrated in north-central Lithuania.

CASE STUDY #1: JONAS BARKAUSKAS, PANERIAI KILLER/LOOTER

In 1972 Polish authorities arrested three men (one purely Polish, the other two of mixed Polish-Lithuanian ethnicity) on charges that they had been members of the Special Detachment (*Ypatingas Burys* [the Lithuanian equivalent of *Sonderkommando*]), the notorious Vilnius killing squad. One of them, the Pole Jan Borkowski, had been known during the war under the Lithuanian name of Jonas Barkauskas.[8] At the end of the war, he apparently found it convenient to reassert his Polish identity. When arrested in 1972, he was employed as first trombonist in the orchestra of the Warsaw Opera.

Borkowski was born in 1916 near Vilnius and grew up and went to school in what was then Polish Wilno. In early August 1941, after the German occupation of Lithuania, he was fired from his job as a warehouseman because he did not speak Lithuanian. An ethnic Russian neighbor said that he could help him with a job, and together they went to the headquarters of the Ypatingas Burys. There Borkowski was asked a few questions in Russian by a Lithuanian officer, photographed for an identification card that bore Borkowski's name in Lithuanian orthography as Jonas Barkauskas, and told to report for work the following day. His duty station was the "base" at Paneriai, some eight kilometers south of Vilnius, a forested place where before the war the Soviet authorities had commenced the excavation of large circular pits in the sandy soil for the foundations of oil storage tanks.

In the beginning Borkowski was posted as a sentry at the sole gate in the barbed-wire fence that surrounded the site; pine boughs had been interwoven in the wire to form a screen. On his second day, a group of about 100 Jewish men was brought to Paneriai under guard; Borkowski was assigned to assist in moving these men (in groups of ten) from one pit where they had been shoved provisionally to the edge of another, where they were lined up and shot. In the following days, more Jews were brought to Paneriai—not just men but women and children as well. Borkowski was ordered by one of his Lithuanian superiors to

rotate to shooting duty, which he did without resistance. He not only shot; he also looted. From the belongings of the murdered Jews, he outfitted himself with a pair of knee-high boots and a pair of dark green trousers that, together with a Lithuanian Army shirt and cap, completed his makeshift uniform. By his own admission, he helped himself to three suits; four jackets; a man's fur coat; a leather jacket; two children's sheepskin coats that he gave to his nieces; dresses, shoes, and a fur coat for his wife; and a Longines wristwatch. He also stole money that he found sewn in clothing, as well as items of jewelry.[9] He traded some of the items for food at a house not far from the killing site; other members of the Ypatingas Burys traded looted items for sex.

After a few months of regular participation in mass shootings, Borkowski feigned an injury and managed to transfer to the headquarters in downtown Vilnius, where he stood guard and helped process dead Jews' property that had not been looted at Paneriai.[10] He went into hiding in summer 1944 and later that year enlisted in the Communist Polish 1st Army, which assigned him to a military band.

When questioned by Polish authorities about what had motivated him to spend more than two months as a killer assigned to the execution squad at Paneriai, Borkowski said that he had no reason to mourn the Jews since antisemitism had been "beaten into his head" when he served in the Polish border guards before the war and he believed that the Jews were "parasites." But now he cursed the day that he had joined the Sonderkommando.[11] In terms of motivation, Borkowski brought together self-enrichment, a confessed antisemitism, and the accident of circumstances that led him to join the Sonderkommando. He and the two others received death sentences that were commuted to twenty years in prison.

CASE STUDY #2: ANTANAS GEČAS-GECEVICIUS, MILITARY OFFICER/MOBILE KILLING SQUAD COMMANDER AND OPPORTUNIST EXTRAORDINAIRE

Antanas Gečas was born in 1916 into a family of landowners. He completed the Lithuanian Military Academy in 1937 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the small Lithuanian Air Force. When the Germans invaded Lithuania in June 1941, Gečas hastened to sign up for service in a Lithuanian auxiliary unit known as the Battalion for the Defense of National Labor, a German-sponsored formation established in Kaunas at the end of June. As this unit grew and was divided into further battalions, Gečas drew the assignment he would keep for some time: commander of the 1st Platoon, 1st Company, 2nd Battalion,

which the Germans soon called the Schutzmannschaft ("Protective Battalion").[12] On joining the battalion, Gečas sent the local commander a letter (written in German) in which he asserted that his true family named was Gecewicz, an "old German family," and that he had dedicated himself to the military success of the Reich and the greater glory of Adolf Hitler.[13]

Gečas was what one might term an eager volunteer, for his past easily could have earned him a bullet. Shortly after the Soviets occupied Lithuania in 1940, he left the armed forces and went to work as an undercover agent for the NKVD. Lithuanian Security Police (*Saugumas*) arrest warrants issued for him on October 13 and 16, 1941, showed that he had worked as a Soviet police spy in several towns in western Lithuania.[14] At the time the warrant was issued, however, Gečas had already been out of Lithuania for a week: on October 6 the 2nd Battalion departed Kaunas for Minsk, where it fell under the command of the 747th Regiment of the 707th Infantry Division of the Wehrmacht.

German policy toward the Jews in occupied western Belorussia can be briefly summarized. Jews who were necessary to the German war effort were concentrated in urban ghettos at Minsk, Slutsk, Baranovichi, Novogrudok, Slonim, and other centers. Citing repeatedly his conviction that there was an unshakable connection between Jews and Soviet partisans, the commander of the 707th Division, General Baron Gustav von Bechtholsheim, launched "Operation Free-of-Jews" (*Aktion Judenrein*) in autumn 1941.[15] The Wehrmacht regiment, with the Lithuanian 2nd Battalion and two companies of the German 11th Reserve Police Battalion attached, set about this task. In essence they were charged with the complete eradication of Jews in the small villages and towns and the countryside of western Belorussia; the Jews outside the ghettos were to "disappear without a remnant."[16]

The grim toll was recorded in Wehrmacht reports: on October 8, 630 suspected Communists and Jews near Uzlany; on October 9–11, 800 Jews and suspected partisans at Rudensk; on October 14, 1,300 Jews at Smilovichi; on October 16, 625 "Communists" at Minsk; on October 18, 1,150 "Communists" at Minsk; on October 21, 1,000 "Jews and Communists" at Kojdanov—and on and on. At the very least, the 2nd Battalion murdered 19,000 Jews, Red Army prisoners of war, and suspected Communists in October–November 1941; a letter dated November 7, 1941, from the leaders of the Lithuanian Nationalist Party to General Petras Kubiliūnas, head of the Lithuanian collaborationist administration, asserted that the number of those shot was approximately 46,000.[17] The 2nd Battalion's crowning achievement in fall 1941 was the massacre at Slutsk.

On October 27, 1941, the 2nd Battalion and two companies of German police descended on Slutsk with orders to liquidate the town's 8,000 Jews, regardless of the fact that most of them were employed in critical war-related production. The actions of the perpetrators were described in a contemporary complaint filed by the German administrator of the area; that document was used as an exhibit at Nuremberg. The mixed force swept through the workshops and dwellings of Slutsk, shooting all who sought to evade the roundup, including local Belorussians caught in the chaotic melee. They then herded Jews in groups to pits outside the city and shot them. After the war a number of Gečas's men described his role at the pits, directing executions and rotating the several platoons between assignments (shooters and escort guards); they also testified that Gečas used his pistol to kill Jews who had not been killed with the first shot.[18] Gečas spoke German and received orders concerning the conduct of Aktionen directly from his German superiors. The German civil administrator of Slutsk, who managed to save some 3,000 Jewish workers and family members from the killers, later requested of his superior "whatever you do, keep this battalion away from here."[19]

Gečas went on to win an Iron Cross from the Germans for his actions in fighting Soviet partisans. In summer 1944 his battalion, depleted by losses and desertions, was dissolved. With a number of his men, he was transferred to the Italian front to serve in a Luftwaffe labor unit assigned to assist the Hermann Göring Division. In October 1944 he and some 120 men under his command crossed the frontlines, surrendered to American forces, and were sent to a POW camp. In mid-November he wrote a letter to a commander of Polish forces in Italy; in it Gečas claimed that he stemmed from a family of Polish nobility long-settled in Lithuania, saying "I feel and have always felt Polish, and wish to give my best efforts to Poland . . . and wish to serve the Polish Army."[20] His wish was granted and he served in the Polish Army until the end of the war, winning both Polish and British decorations.

CASE STUDY #3: ALEKSANDRAS LILEIKIS,
SELF-MADE MAN/BUREAUCRATIC KILLER

Aleksandras Lileikis left the United States on his own volition after his denaturalization in 1996. Before his death in September 2000, he published a memoir—albeit not an entirely accurate one when it comes to his service as chief of the Lithuanian Security Police (*Saugumas*) in Vilnius from August 1941 until summer 1944.[21] Thus the details of his life are well known.

Lileikis was born in 1907 into a poor peasant family. He put himself through high school while living away from home, working summers as a farm laborer and doing odd jobs. In 1927 he moved to Kaunas and began to study law at the university. Finding that he could not support himself, he accepted employment with the State Security Department and ended up in the Saugumas, where he worked his way through the ranks and completed his law studies part time. When Vilnius was restituted to Lithuania in 1939, he was named deputy Saugumas chief in that city and contributed to the work of suppressing the Polish underground movement and controlling noisome elements amongst the Polish refugee population, many of whom were Jews.

When the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in June 1940, Lileikis and a large number of other Saugumas functionaries—harboring no illusions about their futures under Soviet power—slipped over the German border just in time. Some of the Saugumas refugees were set to work by the German Security Police in occupied Poland.[22] Until approximately the third week of August 1941, Lileikis appears to have been in Berlin, and in June 1941 he applied for German citizenship. In the period June–August 1941, he must have received a detailed briefing on what his duties would be in the now German-controlled Saugumas, and on about August 20 he resurfaced in Vilnius as head of the Saugumas for Vilnius city and province, in charge of a force of approximately 130 men.

Immediately on his arrival, Lileikis reorganized the Saugumas to mirror the functional divisions of the Gestapo model, with a special section for Jews and Communists (*Komunistų-Žydų Skyrius*). He issued guidelines that specified the jurisdiction of the Saugumas versus the other police agencies: the Saugumas had exclusive responsibility for cases of Jews in hiding, Jews suspected of communist links, persons who provided false documents or other assistance to Jews, and—after the ghettoization of September 6—the cases of Jews who had escaped from the ghettos. The regular police scrupulously observed Lileikis guidelines; Jews caught in flagrant violation of the anti-Jewish decrees (e.g., no Star of David, attempting to purchase food at markets that were off limits) were simply handed over to the prison and held there until they were taken to Paneriai and shot. But Jews in hiding, Jews with false papers, non-Jews who hid Jews, and Jews attempting to escape the ghetto were the province of Lileikis's efficient service. Paperwork prepared in the cases of Jews who fell into the clutches of the Saugumas demonstrates Lileikis's role as what the Germans call a "desk-bound perpetrator" (*Schreibtischtäter*).

On December 22, 1941, an execution was conducted at Paneriai. Among the victims were fourteen Jews who had been prisoners of the Saugumas, one a six-year-old

girl who had been captured with her mother while in hiding on a farm outside Vilnius. The Saugumas investigated this case for it had to determine how they had escaped, the circumstances of their hiding, the sources of their papers, and other support.[23] After the execution the clerk at the office of the Ypatingas Burys completed small file cards on each victim.

> Kaplan, Gitta, Jewess, born 1896. K. was arrested on 28 November 1941 and treatedaccording to orders [*Befehlsgemäß behandelt*] on 22 December 1941. Kaplan, Fruma, Jewess, born 1935. K. was arrested on 28 November 1941 and treatedaccording to orders on 22 December 1941.[24]

Lileikis signed the documents ordering that the Kaplans be "turned over to the German Security Police," the bureaucratic euphemism that had replaced the more specific "turned over to the Ypatingas Burys" used earlier in 1941.

On December 11 Lucina Pojevonskaite-Schustarka, born in America in 1889, was arrested by the Saugumas "on suspicion of being a Jew" and imprisoned in Lukiškis. On December 17 Lileikis ordered her transferred "to the disposition of the German Security Police."[25] Her execution card reads:[26]

> Pojevonskaite-Schustarka, Lucina, Jewess, born 1899 in America. P. was arrested on 10 December 1941 and treated according to orders on 22 December 1941.[27]

On November 26 two young Jews, Saulius Varšavskis and Jenta Rachmaniene, were arrested by the uniformed police "for escape from the ghetto" and handed over to the Saugumas. On the same day, Lileikis ordered them imprisoned at Lukiškis, and on December 6 he ordered them "transferred to the disposition of the Chief of the German Security Police."[28] The Ypatingas Burys execution card for the Varšavskis boy contains the following information.

> Varšavkis, Saulius, Jew, born 1923. V. was arrested 24 November 1941 and treated according to orders on 22 December.[29]

In his role as Saugumas chief, exercising his authority and making decisions that had lethal results for the Jews involved, Lileikis fit the definition of the bureaucrat who kills with a pen rather than a gun. It is disingenuous to assert that Lileikis did not know the fate of the Jews whom he handed over. In earlier documents—for example, one from August 22 in which he listed 52 Jews with whom the Saugumas was finished—he used the

words "hand over to the Ypatingas Burys";[30] the people employed in the security services at the time knew that the Ypatingas Burys had only one task: to kill. He betrayed his own foreknowledge of the Jews' fate in a July 18, 1996, interview with the Vilnius daily newspaper *Respublika*. Describing the September 6, 1941, ghettoization of the Jews, Lileikis stated "they still did not know they were going to be destroyed." It was all too clear that Lileikis, however, did know.

CASE STUDY #4: THE COMPOSITE RURAL KILLER

A substantial part of the killing occurred in the shtetls outside of the larger cities, in places such as Darbenai, Kupiškis, Švenčionys, Joniškis, and others. Who did the killing at these places? It varied.

In Švenčionys it was Vincas Valkavickas, a peasant with four years of grade school, who was paid 19.17 Reichsmarks for helping to guard 4,000 Jews held in an old barracks near the town for twelve days (September 27–October 9, 1941), when the Ypatingas Burys came from Vilnius to do the actual shooting; Valkavickas convoyed groups of Jews from the barracks to the pits and guarded them until they were shot.[31] The mayor of Švenčionys helped organize the transfer of Jews to the killing site, arranged for their moveable property to be auctioned, and—a week after they were killed—was himself arrested for having stolen two suitcases full of valuables that were supposed to have gone to the Germans.[32]

In Kupiškis it was Petras Bernotavičius, a youth who graduated from high school on June 21, 1941, and a week later became adjutant to the German commandant of the town, a former teacher at that high school. In this role he helped coordinate the smooth flow of mass executions—first of some 400 Lithuanians, alleged Communists, and sympathizers, and then of the town's remaining 1,400 Jews. He may have become a participant for revenge; a number of his schoolmates had participated in an ill-timed insurrection in nearby Panevežys, before the Germans arrived, and had lost their lives.[33]

In Joniškis it was the career policeman Juozas Sutkus, the chief of police, who organized the shooting of the town's 355 Jews in August 1941 (after personally having shot a number of them singly); in a toast at the local beer garden after the killing, he praised his men for their service to the fatherland. When informed that some of the Jews in the killing pit were still alive, one of his men (Juozas Ožalas, who confessed after the war) cavalierly tossed in a hand grenade. It failed to explode and he had to finish off the wounded Jews with his rifle.[34]

In Darbenai it was the chief of police who locked 400 Jewish women and children in the synagogue throughout July–August 1941, in hot and unsanitary conditions, until the order—with which he complied—came to take them out and shoot them on Rosh Hashanah in late September.[35]

CONCLUSION

In numerous small towns and villages across Lithuania, peasant killer-looters murdered local Jews and then helped themselves to their property. A number of common threads tie the rural killers together. (1) They killed people whom they knew and with whom they had lived in close proximity for years; there was an intimacy to their participation in genocide. (2) Statements of survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators emphasize that the degree of brutality and cruelty in the rural setting exceeded that found in the more organized urban killings. (3) The motivation of personal enrichment at the expense of Jewish victims seems to have played a stronger role in the rural setting. Ultimately, however, all of the motivations listed by Eidintas were operative in the countryside.

NOTES

1. Father Juozas Prunskis suggested in his pamphlet "Lithuania's Jews and the Holocaust" (Chicago: Lithuanian American Council, 1979) that the Germans "dressed their own executioners in Lithuanian uniforms and then filmed them, to give the impression that the annihilation of the Jews was carried out by Lithuanian units."

2. The chief of Einsatzgruppe A, SS General Walter Stahlecker, wrote in his "Comprehensive Report" of October 15, 1941, "in the assignment of Lithuanian and Latvian forces to the execution squads, such men who had had family members and relatives murdered or deported by the Russians were particularly sought after." "Einsatzgruppe A: Gesamtbericht bis zum 15. Oktober 1941," p. 30. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), RG–238, Nuremberg Document L–180.

3. See conversations with Saulius Sužiedelis on the antisemitic content of the pre-invasion radio propaganda of the Lithuanian Activists Front, these conversations published in the Chicago-based Lithuanian-American journal *Akiričiai* (Horizons), nos. 9–10 (1991) and no. 1 (1992).

4. See Alfonsas Eidintas, *Žydai, Lietuviai ir Holokaustas* (Jews, Lithuanians, and the Holocaust) (Vilnius: Vaga, 2002), section "Žudikai ir jų Motyvacija" (The killers and their motivations), pp. 235–51.

5. See records of the Institute of Party History, Vilnius, fond 3377 (the "Baranauskas Collection"), series 55, folder 116 ("Bourgeois-Nationalist Terror in Panevėžys District"). The file contains original mimeographed leaflets that likely were seized by the NKVD.

6. See Michael MacQueen, "Nazi Policy toward the Jews in the Reichskommissariat Ostland: From White Terror to Holocaust in Lithuania," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 91–103.

7. Liudas Truska, "Ir atleisk mūsų tėvų ir senelių nuodėmes" ("And forgive the sins of our fathers and forefathers"), *Kulturos Barai* 5 (1999), pp. 101–16; cited in Alfonsas Eidintas, *Lietuvos Žydų Žudynių Byla* (The case of the murder of the Jews of Lithuania) (Vilnius:

Vaga, 2001), p. 108.

8. The other two were Władysław Butkun, a/k/a Vladas Butkunas, and Józef Miakisz, a/k/a Juozas Mikašius. The records of their arrest, interrogation, trial, and sentencing are held in the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance [Main] Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation, under the reference "SWWW 73" (Military Court for Warsaw Voivodship). The records contain a detailed, gruesome account of the mass murder of Jews at Paneriai.

9. Protocol of Interrogation of Jan Borkowski, January 30, 1973, Main Commission Archive, Warsaw, file SWWW 73.

10. Many Jews shot at Paneriai were told that they were being taken to a labor site outside Vilnius. They were permitted to take with them bundles of personal possessions, bedding, and other items. At Paneriai these bundles were confiscated, loaded onto the trucks that had brought the Jews from Vilnius, and taken to the building that housed the Ypatingas Burys and the German and Lithuanian Security Police. There the goods were searched and sorted. Most items were handed over to the Raw Materials Office (*Rohstoffzentrale*), which was tasked with the economic disposition of the goods. Protocols that record the autumn 1941 handover of tons of materials originating at what was termed the "Paneriai base" (*Ponarenlager*) are preserved in the records of the German Commissioner for Vilnius-City at the Lithuanian Central State Archive [hereafter cited as LCVA], collection R–614, series 1, folder 409a.

11. Protocol of Interrogation of Jan Borkowski, February 23, 1973.

12. Records of the 2nd Battalion (for the period late June–December 1941 only) are held in the Lithuanian Central State Archives as collection R–1444 (Kaunas Military Commandant). They are available on microfilm at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

13. This letter is held by the Scottish Crown Office, which investigated but declined to prosecute Gečas.

14. LCVA, collection R–681 (Lithuanian Security Police), series 1, folder 2, pp. 419, 443. The warrants refer to underlying (Soviet) documentation; the October 16 warrant shows as the originating source the "K-Ž Sekcija" (the "Communists-Jews") Section of the Saugumas.

15. The term "*Aktion Judenrein*" does not appear on any of the surviving documents. It was repeatedly cited by former Order Police Captain Willy Papenkort, commander of the 2nd Company, 11th Reserve Police Battalion, during his interrogations as a suspect. See Protocol of Interrogation of Willy Papenkort, May 19, 1960, in record of the proceedings against Franz Lechthaler et al., file reference 3a Js 72/60, State Attorney's Office, Kassel.

16. Order no. 22 of the Commandant in Belorussia, Abt. Ia, dated Minsk, November 13, 1941. Von Bechtholsheim used the term "*restlos verschwinden*." State Archives of the Republic of Belorussia, Collection 378 (Main Railways Directorate), opis 1, file 698, p. 31. For a description of Aktion Judenrein that places it in the context of the overall program of the destruction of Belorussian Jewry, see Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland, 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), pp. 609–28.

17. Letter from Zenonas Blynas, leader of Lithuanian Nationalist Party (the only Lithuanian political party [briefly] tolerated by the Germans) to the chief councillor, General Petras Kubiliūnas, November 7, 1941. Lithuanian Special Archive, fond K–1, opis 58, folder 34897/3, punishment file of Klemensas Brunius.

18. See protocols of interrogation of former 2nd Battalion soldiers Zenonas Kemzura, September 25, 1961; Juozas Knyrimas, October 19, 1961; and Jonas Davalga, October 25, 1961, in Records of Investigation and Trial of Antanas Impulevičius et al., Lithuanian Special Archive (former KGB), file ref. 47386/3.

19. See correspondence between Gebietskommissar Heinrich Carl, Generalkommissar Wilhelm Kube, and Reichskommissar Hinrich Lohse, October 30–November 1, 1941. NARA, RG–238, Nuremberg exhibit PS–1104.

20. This letter is held by the Crown Office in Edinburgh (see note 13 above).

21. Aleksandras Lileikis, *Pažadinto Laiko Pėdsakais* (In the footsteps of times past) (Vilnius: Valstiečių Laikraštis, 2000). Valstiečių Laikraštis (The peasant's newspaper) won notoriety for publishing antisemitic articles during the Lithuanian investigation and attempts to prosecute Lileikis.

22. See Trial of Bernhard Fischer-Schweder et al., Oberlandgericht Ulm, 1957, file ref. AR–Z 15/1958. Among the defendants at Ulm was Saugumas officer Pranas Lukys, who served in the Security Police in Lublin after fleeing Lithuania in 1940. He returned to Lithuania with the invading German forces and was named Saugumas chief for Kretinga district. In 1943 he was imprisoned by the Germans for the unlawful appropriation of Jewish property and the misuse of his authority to settle personal scores.

23. See Lukiškes Prison file of Gita and Fruma Kaplan, arrested December 1, 1941, by the Saugumas for fleeing the ghetto and going into hiding with peasants at Baltoji Voke, south of Vilnius. LCVA, collection R–730 (Lukiškes Prison), series 1, file 827.

24. See execution file cards created in the office of the Vilnius Sonderkommando, LCVA collection R–1673, series 1, envelopes 1425–426.

25. Lukiškes Prison File of Lucina Pojevonskaite-Schustarka, LCVA collection R–730, series 1, folder 1953. Schustarka had apparently been living on papers that described her as a Catholic, for that is the religion entered on her personal data sheet in her prison file.

26. LCVA collection R–1673, series 1, card 2676.

27. Execution file card of Lucina Pojevonska-Schustarka, LCVA collection R–1673, series 1, card 2676.

28. Lukiškes Prison File of Saulius Varšavskis, LCVA collection R–730, series 1, folder 2437.

29. Execution file card of Saulius Varšavskis, LCVA collection R–1673, series 1, card 3715a.

30. Copies of this execution order are preserved in the prison files of a number of the victims named on it, including that of Ester Sandleryte, an eighteen-year-old woman who was alleged to have been a "Soviet activist" in nearby Trakai. LCVA collection R–730, series 5, folder 95.

31. List of Policemen and Partisans, with request for payment for service in the Švenčionys "Jewish action" (*Judenaktion*), submitted by the Švenčionys district administrator to the chief of the Lithuanian Administration for the Vilnius Rural District, December 12, 1941. LCVA, collection R–1548 (Vilnius Rural District), series 1, folder 1, pp. 226–31.

32. See correspondence between Gebietskommissar Wilna-Land Wulff and Lithuanian administrator Kostas Kalendra, October 11 and November 22, 1941, in which the arrested Mayor Jonas Blažys's wife wrote to Wulff seeking to exonerate her husband. She claimed that he had not taken any gold and silver as charged but only "some damaged furniture, two pillows, a blanket and some crockery" and that he had not stolen them but was holding them for safekeeping because the policemen were busy guarding Jews. Besides, he had to make an inventory of Jewish property; thus he brought these items to their house for that sole purpose. LCVA, collection R–1548, series 1, folder 2 pp. 122, 141.

33. The local newspaper, *Panevežio Apskričio Balsas* (Panevežys district voice), carried lurid articles on the murders of two surgeons and a nurse at the Panevežys hospital on June 25, 1941, by Komsomols and NKVD men, and on the shootings of the doomed rebels at the sugar factory on June 26, 1941.

34. Some of the activities of the local "Committee for the Regulation of Jewish Affairs" are spelled out in a document, the "Protocol of Meeting of Joniškis LAF Staff," dated July 17, 1941. LCVA, collection R–739, series 1, folder 4, p. 7. The remaining details of the events at Joniškis derive from the Lithuanian Special Archive (former KGB), file 1356/3, record of the investigation and trial of Edgardas Zubrevičius, Eduardas Brinklis et al.; Decision of the Court in the Cases of Kakliauskas, Sutkus, and Ožalas, August 3, 1961, Lithuanian Special Archive, file 46599/3; Statement of the former policeman Jonas Ožalas, January 25, 1961 (in detention), Lithuanian Public Organizations Archive, collection 3377, series 55, folder 150.

35. In a document dated August 15, 1941, the chief of police of Darbenai stated that he was holding 400 Jewish women and children in his "ghetto" (the town synagogue) and sought authority to hire contract policemen to guard it. LCVA, collection R–1665 (Kretinga District Police), series 2, file 36. After the war a survivor of Darbenai, identified only as "R. A. Šateliene," gave a statement in which she confirmed the role of the local police in the Rosh Hashanah massacre. See *Hitleriniai Žudikai Kretingoje* (Nazi killers in Kretinga) (Vilnius: Lithuanian SSR State Political and Scientific Publishing House, 1960).

Key Aspects of German Anti-Jewish Policy
Jürgen Matthäus

In 1994 historian Dina Porat published an article that highlighted three unique aspects of the Holocaust in Lithuania: the speed and scope of the killings, the involvement of local collaborators, and the perception of the catastrophe by Lithuanian Jews.[1] The term "uniqueness," when applied to the Holocaust, means different things to different people. Clearly the survivors of German rule have first claim to this term since the Holocaust is part of their personal history; when it comes to the general features of the events, the picture gets more blurry. Nevertheless, even if we limit our discussion to German planning and policy, the unprecedented nature of what happened in Lithuania cannot be overlooked. The totality, timing, and technique of persecution formed the basis for the deadly effectiveness of the "Final Solution" in Lithuania.[2]

THE GERMAN OCCUPATION (1941–1944)

Operation Barbarossa, the German attack on the Soviet Union that started on June 22, 1941, led to the death of approximately 25 million Soviet citizens—including an estimated 2.4 million Jews.[3] Lithuania, occupied within days after the attack and under German control for about three years, lost roughly half of its total Jewish population of approximately 250,000 within the first months of the military campaign; only approximately 10 percent of Lithuanian Jews survived the war.[4] Obviously figures provide but a faint idea of the incredible suffering and pain inflicted on the victims, not to mention the total destruction of Jewish culture and property.

In addition to the extent and consequences of the killings, another element in the totality of events faced by Lithuanian Jews was the complete and rapid breakdown in social patterns. Established moral norms were no longer applicable and social relationships with the Gentile world were for the most part reduced to extremely lopsided interactions between victims and perpetrators or bystanders. Many local Jews remembered the German occupation of Lithuania during the First World War as not intolerable; despite the news that they received after 1933 from refugees about the Third Reich's Jewish policy, it was impossible for them to imagine that German rule meant mass murder.[5]

There can be no doubt that the impulse and momentum for murderous violence came from the Germans. However, at the same time, the assault on the Soviet Union ignited increasingly combustible local circumstances with explosive results. After the

summer 1940 incorporation of the formerly independent Baltic states into Stalin's empire, many nationalists found refuge in Nazi Germany where they established groups such as the Lithuanian Activists Front (LAF) that helped the German security police gather information and disseminate propaganda east of the border. In March 1941 the LAF issued a leaflet addressed to its sympathizers in Lithuania calling for subversive acts against Soviet installations to prepare for "the hour of Lithuania's liberation" and warning Jews that "their fate has been sealed." On the eve of the German attack, the LAF published another statement according to which "[t]he crucial day of reckoning has come for the Jews at last. Lithuania must be liberated not only from the Asiatic Bolshevik slavery but also from the Jewish yoke of long standing."[6]

Once the Wehrmacht had crossed the border, many Lithuanian soldiers changed sides. In several dozen places, anti-Soviet activism by parts of the population erupted in violent riots against local Jewish men even before the Germans had moved in.[7] Lithuanian activists felt that there was hardly a better way of placing Lithuania on the map of Nazi-dominated Europe than to demonstrate zeal and determination in addressing the domestic "Jewish question." Traditional Lithuanian antisemitism merged with Nazi racial policy that had increasingly gathered momentum since 1933. Deep-seated stereotypes about "Eastern Jews" had already prepared the ground for physical violence in Poland (beginning in fall 1939) and would do the same in the occupied Soviet Union. Collectively perceived as the vanguard of bolshevism, Jews were victimized by the German occupiers as well as by many of their former neighbors. If German institutions did not themselves participate directly in the first acts of violence, they turned a blind eye to the pogroms that swept the country.[8]

In Kaunas (Kovno, Kowno) in late June 1941, some 3,800 Jews were murdered within five days and nights (June 23–27); in outlying Lithuanian villages, several hundred more fell victim to anti-Jewish violence.[9] One of the best-documented pogroms occurred on June 26, 1941, at the Lietukis garage in Kaunas, where German soldiers and Lithuanian civilians watched Jewish men being clubbed to death or killed with high-pressure water hoses. After the war Jewish survivors and German observers gave evidence about the crime scene: Jew after Jew had to step forward to be hit on the head by young men while civilian spectators—including women with small children—watched, some of them applauding. None of the German soldiers present at the site intervened; informed about the pogrom taking place close to his headquarters, the commander of the 16th Army shrugged and noted that there was nothing he could do.[10] The commander of Rear Army Area North

(Befehlshaber des rückwärtigen Heeresgebiets Nord), General Franz von Roques, commented on the events in Kaunas that pogroms did not solve the "Jewish question"; this aim could only be achieved by mass sterilization.[11] Some Gentiles offered help, warning "Don't go out! They are abducting men on the streets. Find shelter! Don't go to Vilna [Vilnius] Street today, people are being robbed there! Don't go to Slobodka, people are being massacred there!"[12]

The German Army and security police were eager to foster "self-cleansing actions" and "direct them into the right channels in order to achieve the aim of this cleansing as rapidly as possible,"[13] but German officials had no doubt that pogrom-like activities could continue for a limited time only since they involved the risk of escalating out of control. Local participants in the pogroms were rewarded, although the hope that many held for a national rebirth remained unfulfilled. Self-appointed Lithuanian agencies (for example, a provisional government) were permitted to exist until August 1941; meanwhile, German authorities transformed the bands of militant collaborators into auxiliary police units that became a crucial factor for implementing the goals of ideological warfare not only in Lithuania, but in all parts of the occupied Soviet Union and beyond.[14]

THE HOLOCAUST TAKES SHAPE

Collaboration was not the only regional aspect that had impact on the overall course of events. It was in Lithuania that the Holocaust, defined as the organized mass murder of the Jewish population, first took shape. This transformation from persecution to genocide occurred in the context of a German war of destruction against the Soviet Union. Even in the planning stages of the German military attack, internationally accepted rules of warfare were discarded. Fighting the Red Army was accompanied by violent actions against civilians, especially those regarded as Nazi Germany's ideological archenemies: Communists and Jews.[15] In the minds of the occupiers, the groups were inseparable. The stereotype of the communist Jew or the Jewish communist was nothing new. Since the end of the First World War, it had struck deep roots in the conservative and nationalist strata of German society, over time becoming one of the key propaganda issues that Hitler would use for creating public support—first for his party, and later for his regime.[16]

Wehrmacht commanders were asked and prepared to show no mercy toward Red Army soldiers, even after they had surrendered. In some areas the daily death rate among Soviet prisoners of war was higher than that among the Jewish population: two million

Soviet POWs were deliberately starved to death in the first year of the campaign; in Lithuania alone, more than 200,000 prisoners died in the first six months of German occupation in camps run by the Wehrmacht.[17] Atrocities against civilians had been committed by German forces in Poland as early as 1939. There, and more so farther east, the occupying force regarded the local population with a mixture of disgust and anxiety, perceiving the whole region as part of the vast new Lebensraum in which there was little room for the concerns of other peoples. German soldiers, policemen, and administrators carried stereotypes—among them antisemitic ones—as invisible baggage when coming to "the East," to the extent that they accepted ruthless violence against the local population as a key part of a successful occupation policy.[18]

This disposition toward terror was probably greatest among special units of the German Security Police and Sicherheitsdienst, the Nazi party intelligence service headed by Reinhard Heydrich, and the Einsatzgruppen that were deployed behind the frontline. Einsatzgruppe A, led by SS-Brigadeführer Dr. Walter Stahlecker and comprising fewer than 1,000 men, followed Army Group North into the Baltic states and parts of Belorussia. A subunit, Einsatzkommando 3 under SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger, covered much of Lithuania. As it turned out, Einsatzgruppe A could rely on the help of the Wehrmacht, other German agencies, and local collaborators in its campaign of terror against Jews and other undesirable groups.[19] Its task was to "pacify" (*befrieden*) the occupied areas and create the groundwork for the German version of law and order by eliminating actual or potential resistance.

Prior to the attack on the Soviet Union there was no German master plan in place that called for the killing of all Jews.[20] In the first days after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, however, various factors combined to point to the physical extermination of Lithuanian Jews. This course of events was not a predestined development, but rather a process that involved conscious decisions by a great number of German officials from a variety of agencies (not only the police and SS) motivated by factors ranging from hatred to greed and opportunism. The wave of violence that accompanied the German military campaign provided the stimulus for early killings. A few days after the beginning of the attack, the first massive acts of anti-Jewish violence took place east of the German-Lithuanian border. In three "operations" (*Aktionen*), a total of 526 persons—the majority of them Jews, including two women—were murdered not by members of an Einsatzgruppe proper, but by Gestapo and "ordinary policemen" (many of whom knew their victims) from the nearby city of Tilsit, and who were acting on the Gestapo's behalf.

LOCAL DYNAMICS

Despite postwar statements to the contrary by some of the perpetrators, Stahlecker and top Berlin officials (Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler) were informed about and agreed to these first killings only afterward; the initiative seems to have come from local German SS and police officers who had been called in by the Wehrmacht to secure the area.[21] While they had no knowledge of high-level decisions, these officers anticipated superior approval for "drastic measures" against a potential threat. They decided on these measures based on the perception, firmly embedded in Nazi ideology, of Jews as the archenemy, and also upon the opportunity created by the war of destruction against communist Russia. Their superiors in Berlin were more than willing to sanction the initiatives taken in the field and to point to these new, radical measures as a model for how security matters should be handled along the front line. As a result of the interaction between periphery and center, German policy in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union progressively increased in violence. Working closely with the Einsatzgruppen, the Wehrmacht followed a similarly destructive agenda behind the front line while other agencies—most notably the German civil administration, which was established in summer 1941 in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* as a regional institution of Alfred Rosenberg's Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories—adapted to the general course of anti-Jewish policy in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union and added to its destructive dynamic.[22]

Germans and their assistants swept through Lithuania with incredible and unprecedented speed targeting "enemies of the Reich" as well as other outgroups: Jews, Communists, persons with mental disabilities, Russians, Gypsies, and Poles. Within the broad range of victims, one group quickly became earmarked for total destruction. Lithuania was the first occupied country in which the Germans murdered not only Jewish men but also, beginning in August 1941, Jewish women and children on a massive scale. Breaking down this last barrier toward genocide required—like the passing of earlier thresholds in the process of persecution—a consensus among German officials on all levels as to where anti-Jewish policy should be heading, combined with the eagerness of functional elites to take the lead in bringing about the desired Final Solution. Members of the Einsatzgruppen and their local auxiliaries were best prepared for this quantum leap toward the Final Solution.

Jäger's Einsatzkommando 3 systematically "cleansed" the Lithuanian countryside of Jewish inhabitants and kept meticulous records about its actions, listing the number of men, women, and children murdered throughout the country. He established a subunit, headed by SS-Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann, that comprised fewer than ten Germans and approximately fifty Lithuanian auxiliary policemen. Hamann was one of several participants in a training course at the SS school in Fürstenberg who in summer 1941 were sent to the Eastern front and distributed among the Einsatzgruppen, where they found the opportunity to transform antisemitic theory into murderous practice.[23] By mid-September 1941 the death toll among civilians in Lithuania exceeded 76,000; by February 1942 Jäger's men had executed 138,272 persons of whom more than 136,000 were Jews.[24] In early December 1941 Jäger reported "the aim to solve the Jewish problem for Lithuania" had been achieved. What remained to be disposed of, at any time deemed convenient, were the comparatively small number of Jews in the ghettos.[25]

Once the officers of Einsatzgruppe A were acclimated to mass murder and the necessary functional elements were in place, the killing of Jewish civilians required primarily the most effective technique. Jäger described mass executions as "an organizational question" to be solved by adopting the proper preparation for each "action." Mass graves had to be dug, the Jews had to be rounded up, and transportation had to be arranged. In Rokiškis, about 180 kilometers northeast of Kaunas, it took Hamann and his men a full day to bring more than 3,200 persons to a pit located 4.5 kilometers away from the collecting point. Those who tried to escape were killed on the spot; the others were lined up and shot point-blank in the back of the head so that they would fall into the pit, while the next victims arranged the corpses to fit as many as possible into the mass grave. Compared with the problems faced by Jäger's small mobile subunit in the countryside, the urban setting provided more favorable conditions for mass executions. Jäger described the killings in Kaunas as "a shooting exercise like during a military parade [*Paradeschiessen*]."[26]

Unlike in Poland, where the first ghettos had been created in fall 1939, concentration and organized murder in occupied Soviet territory were commonplace from the very beginning. In Lithuania the Germans established ghettos in the major cities of Vilnius and Kaunas, as well as in a number of other towns. In early 1942 Jäger reported that he had also planned to kill Jews in the large Lithuanian ghettos, but that "this was not desired [*unerwünscht*] and had to be stopped" because "the Jews were needed as laborers."[27] Most smaller ghettos had been liquidated by the end of 1941; the larger

ghettos were hit by waves of mass murder designed to select "useless eaters" from among the remaining workforce and their families.[28] The concept of ghettos, including that of auxiliary Jewish administrations in the form of councils (*Judenräte* or *Ältestenräte*), had been a familiar feature in German anti-Jewish policy in occupied Eastern Europe since the war against Poland;[29] however, separating the "useful" from the "useless" and relegating the latter to immediate death was something new, conceptually as well as organizationally.

THE KAUNAS AKTION

Avraham Tory provides a poignant account of the "big action" in Kaunas on October 28, 1941, which caused the death of about one-third of the roughly 30,000 ghetto inmates. On behalf of the German authorities, the Jewish council (*Ältestenrat*) under Elchanan Elkes had posted Yiddish and German announcements in the ghetto on the previous day; these announcements ordered all Jews to assemble at 6:00 a.m. on October 28 in Demokratu Square. There the Jews found themselves trapped.

> The ghetto fence was surrounded by machine guns and a heavy detachment of armed German policemen. . . . A crowd of Lithuanian spectators had gathered on the hills overlooking the ghetto. They followed the events taking place in the square with great interest, not devoid of delight, and did not leave for many hours. The ghetto inmates were lined up in columns according to the workplace of the family head. The first column consisted of the Council members, followed by the column of the Jewish policemen and their families. . . . Three hours went by. The cold and the damp penetrated their bones. The endless waiting for the sentence had driven many people out of their minds. Religious Jews mumbled prayers and Psalms. The old and the sick whimpered. Babies cried aloud. In every eye the same horrible question stood out: "When will it begin?!" At 9 a.m. a Gestapo entourage appeared at the square. . . . The square was surrounded by machine-gun emplacements. Rauca [a member of Jäger's security police detachment in Kaunas] positioned himself on top of a little mound from which he could watch the great crowd that waited in the square in tense and anxious anticipation. His glance ranged briefly over the column of the Council members and the Jewish ghetto police, and by a movement of his hand he motioned them to the left, which, as it became clear later, was the "good" side. Then he signaled with the baton he held in his hand and ordered the remaining columns: "Forward!" The selection had begun.
>
> The columns of employees of the ghetto institutions and their families passed before Rauca, followed by other columns, one after another. The Gestapo man fixed his gaze on each pair of eyes and with a flick of the finger of his right hand passed sentence on individuals, families, or even whole groups. Elderly and sick persons, families with children, single

women, and persons whose physique did not impress him in terms of labor power, were directed to the right. There, they immediately fell into the hands of the German policemen and the Lithuanian partisans, who showered them with shouts and blows and pushed them toward an opening especially made in the fence, where two Germans counted them and then reassembled them in a different place.[30]

Those sent to the right were later driven to Fort IX, a fortress-like structure in Kaunas used by the Germans as the site for mass executions, and murdered. The image of a German flicking his fingers to the left or right, to death or temporary survival, is one we usually correlate with selections at Auschwitz; nevertheless, the case of Lithuania shows that this method of separating the "useful" from the "useless" was already employed months before the death camps in Poland came into operation.

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE GHETTOS

Local exigencies in addition to German interests pointed toward keeping at least some Jews alive for the time being. Employers such as the Wehrmacht or private companies involved in business enterprises in Lithuania needed a steady supply of workers. Other sources for forced labor were rapidly drying up: in Kaunas alone the daily death rate among Soviet POWs rose from fifty in August 1941 to 300 in September, so that by the end of the month almost all had perished.[31]

In addition to the need for workers, other factors were involved. The ghettos whet the appetite of many German functionaries not only in regard to potential exploits for the Reich, but also for themselves. While the Aktionen offered large-scale (though shortlived) opportunities for looting, the ghetto served as a cornucopia for personal enrichment. Chief German Administrator (Stadtkommissar) Hans Cramer retreated from Kaunas in July 1944 with a railroad car filled with valuables. His subordinates, especially those involved in "Jewish affairs," had reason to hope that—in addition to avoiding the front line—they could send boxes of expensive items back to Germany. In his postwar account, Gustav Hörmann (the official at the Stadtkommissariat responsible for Jewish work details) provides examples of the degree of corruption endemic among German officials; the list of looted objects ranged from food items to carpets, clothing, furniture, gold, apartments, and houses.[32]

The liquidation of the Lithuanian ghettos resulted from regional developments in conjunction with interference by Berlin. With time it became obvious that German control over the occupied territory and even over the ghettos was anything but total. Beginning in

mid-1942 the partisan movement gained strength. In the remaining ghettos, clandestine groups were formed—sometimes with full knowledge of the Jewish council, as in the Kovno ghetto—that looked for ways out of the impasse, either by organizing resistance or preparing escape routes. Despite the great risks involved, Jews fled the ghetto and joined those already hiding in the forests.[33] Existing partisan groups were often reluctant to accept Jews as members, especially when among them there were considerable numbers of women and children.[34] As reflected in reports by the security police in Lithuania, Germans and their local accomplices did whatever they could to track down and kill Jews hiding in the forest or seeking shelter with Gentiles.[35]

The Germans viewed the final destruction of the ghettos as both an integral element of their antipartisan warfare and their aim to leave no trace of Jewish existence. This applied even retroactively. Starting in late 1942, as part of a coordinated effort to destroy evidence of their crimes, all over Lithuania the Germans had mass graves dug up and the corpses burned. In June 1943 Himmler ordered "that all Jews still remaining in ghettos in the Ostland area be collected in concentration camps"; those "not required" for forced labor were "to be evacuated to the East"—i.e., killed.[36] This order brought about a decisive (though gradual) change in the administration of Jewish affairs accompanied by new selections and further waves of violence. With Soviet troops approaching, the remaining Jews in the Baltic states were deported in early July 1944 to concentration camps in the Reich—men to Dachau, women to Stutthof. There and during the ensuing death marches, more were to die. Only a few evaded deportation and managed to survive the destruction of the former ghettos. Of the approximately 50,000 Jewish prisoners of the concentration camps in the occupied Soviet Union, only 2,500 lived to see the end of the war.[37]

CONCLUSION

Totality, timing, and technique define the characteristics of the Lithuanian case in the context of German anti-Jewish policy as much as they characterize the implementation of the Final Solution as a whole. The murder of the European Jews was (for the most part) not merely a gigantic pogrom or orgy of violence, but the result of a step-by-step process that provided structure as well as momentum to prejudices, hatred, self-interest, and visions of a New Order. In Lithuania between June 22, 1941, and the German retreat three years later, the incredible death toll to Lithuanian Jewry resulted from a mixture of several factors—most notably German prewar anti-Jewish policy, the will of German occupiers to

destroy the stereotypical archenemy, and the acceptance within parts of Lithuanian society of the notion that Jews should have no place in the country. Sudden, massive eruptions of violence set new standards for anti-Jewish policy and were quickly transformed into a deadly routine of destruction targeting Jewish men, women, and children. The German determination to bring about a Final Solution implied the murder of all European Jews; however, there were few regions under Nazi rule where the killing process unfolded as quickly, violently, and totally as it did in Lithuania.

NOTES

1. Dina Porat, "The Holocaust in Lithuania: Some Unique Aspects," in *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, ed. David Cesarani (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 159–74.

2. On the Holocaust in Lithuania, see Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1981); Michael MacQueen, "Nazi Policy toward the Jews in the Reichskommissariat Ostland, June–December 1941: From White Terror to Holocaust in Lithuania," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 91–103; Konrad Kwiet, "Rehearsing for Murder: The Beginning of the Final Solution in Lithuania in June 1941," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12 (1998), pp. 3–26; Wolfgang Benz and Marion Neiss (eds.), *Judenmord in Litauen: Studien und Dokumente* (Berlin: Metropol, 1999); Christoph Dieckmann, "Der Krieg und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden," in *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1998), pp. 292–329; Jürgen Matthäus, "Assault and Destruction," in *The Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto*, ed. Dennis B. Klein (Boston: Little, Brown, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1998), pp. 15–24; Vincas Bartusevičius, Joachim Tauber, and Wolfram Wette (eds.), *Holocaust in Litauen: Krieg, Judenmorde und Kollaboration im Jahre 1941* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003).

3. The 2.4 million Jewish victims figure represents the number of Jews killed within the Soviet Union's borders as of June 1941.

4. Figures on the prewar Jewish population, wartime losses, and survival rates vary. Compare Arad, *Ghetto*, pp. 27ff.; Kwiet, "Rehearsing," p. 4; Michael MacQueen, "The Context of Mass Destruction: Agents and Prerequisites of the Holocaust in Lithuania," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12 (1998), p. 41; and Dieckmann, "Der Krieg," p. 293.

5. See Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge

University Press, 2000); Jürgen Matthäus, "German Judenpolitik in Lithuania During the First World War," in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. 43 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), pp. 155–74.

6. Quotation in E. Rozauskas (ed.), *Documents Accuse* (Vilnius: Gintaras, 1970), pp. 123–24. On the situation in Lithuania prior to the German attack, see MacQueen, "Context"; Siegfried Gasparaitis, "Verrätern wird nur dann vergeben, wenn sie wirklich beweisen können, daß sie mindestens einen Juden liquidiert haben: Die 'Front Litauischer Aktivisten' (LAF) und die antisowjetischen Aufstände 1941," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 49 (2001), pp. 886–904.

7. Dieckmann, "Der Krieg," pp. 303–304.

8. See Christoph Dieckmann, "Deutsche und litauische Interessen: Grundlinien der Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941 bis 1944," in Bartusevičius, pp. 63–76.

9. MacQueen, "Context," pp. 35ff.

10. See Kwiet, "Rehearsing," p. 14; Klaus-Michael Mallmann, Volker Rieß, and Wolfram Pyta (eds.), *Deutscher Osten 1939–1945: Der Weltanschauungskrieg in Photos und Texten* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), pp. 61–69.

11. Jürgen Förster, "Die Sicherung des 'Lebensraumes,'" in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg, vol.4: Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), p. 1045.

12. Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary of Avraham Tory*, ed. Martin Gilbert (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 8ff. On rescue efforts see also Joheved Inčiūrienė, "Rettung und Widerstand in Kaunas," in Bartusevičius, pp. 201–17.

13. Report by Stahlecker on the activities of Einsatzgruppe A until October 15, 1941, Gosudarstvennyy Voennyy Arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii (State Military Archives of the Russian Federation; former Osobi Archive) Moscow 500–4–93 (copy in United

States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives [USHMMA] RG–11.001M.01 reel 14); Nuremberg document L–180/USA–276 NARA, published in excerpt in International Military Tribunal, Trial of the Major War Criminals, vol. 37, pp. 670–703.

14. On the recruiting of Lithuanian auxiliaries, see Knut Stang, "Das Fußvolk und seine Eliten: Der Beginn der Kollaboration in Litauen 1941," in Benz and Neiss, *Judenmord*, pp. 69–90.

15. On the destructiveness of the German military campaign in the East, see *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944*, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (Hamburg: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 2002); Mallmann et al., *Deutscher Osten*; Christopher R. Browning (with Jürgen Matthäus), *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), chap. 7.

16. See Hans-Erich Volkmann (ed.), *Das Rußlandbild im Dritten Reich* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1994).

17. See Dieckmann, "Der Krieg," p. 318; Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978).

18. For examples of the German perception of "the East," see Mallmann et al., *Deutscher Osten*, pp. 13–52.

19. Report by Stahlecker on the activities of Einsatzgruppe A until October 15, 1941. Similar figures are given in his second report covering the period October 16, 1941, to January 31, 1942, Osobi Archive Moscow 500–4–91 (copy in USHMMA RG–11.001M.01 reel 14).

20. See Christopher R. Browning, "Beyond 'Intentionalism' and 'Functionalism': The Decision for the Final Solution Reconsidered," in *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution*, ed. Christopher R. Browning (Cambridge, UK:

Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 88–101.

21. Stapostelle Tilsit to RSHA IV, July 1, 1941, Osobi Archive Moscow 500–1–758, fol. 2–5 (copy in USHMMA RG–11.001M.01 reel 10).

22. See Timothy P. Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942–43* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 1989).

23. Knut Stang, "Kollaboration und Völkermord: Das Rollkommando Hamann und die Vernichtung der litauischen Juden," in *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg: "Heimatfront" und besetztes Europa*, ed. Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), pp. 464–80.

24. "Gesamtaufstellung der im Bereiche des EK 3 bis jetzt durchgeführten Exukutionen [sic]," September 10, 1941, Osobi Archive Moscow, 500–1–25, fol. 107; "Exekutionen bis zum 1. Februar 1942 durch das EK 3," February 9, 1942, Osobi Archive Moscow, 500–1–25, fol. 128; fragmentary report by EK 3 on Jews in Lithuania, n.d. (February 1942), Central State Archive Riga, 1026–1–3. In his first report, Stahlecker claims that 71,105 Jews had been killed in Lithuania as of October 15, 1941, 3,800 of those during the pogroms (report by Stahlecker on the activities of Einsatzgruppe A until October 15, 1941).

25. On ghettoization in Lithuania, see Arad, *Ghetto*.

26. "Gesamtaufstellung der im Bereich des EK 3 bis zum 1. Dezember 1941 durchgeführten Exekutionen," December 1, 1941, Osobi Archive Moscow, 500–1–25, fol. 116.

27. Fragmentary report by EK 3 on Jews in Lithuania, n.d. (February 1942), Central State Archive Riga, 1026–1–3.

28. See Arad, *Ghetto*, pp. 101ff.

29. See Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

30. Tory, *Surviving*, pp. 50–51. On the Kovno ghetto, see also Klein, *Hidden History*; Solly Ganor, *Light One Candle: A Survivor's Tale from Lithuania to Jerusalem* (New York: Kodansha International, 1995).

31. Ulrich Herbert, "Vernichtungspolitik: Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des 'Holocaust,'" in Herbert, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik*, p. 50.

32. Statement Gustav Hörmann at Historical Commission Landsberg, September 2, 1946, Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen Ludwigsburg, Sammlung Versch. Heft 5, reprinted in Benz and Neiss, *Judenmord*, pp. 117–32.

33. See Arad, *Ghetto*, pp. 221ff.

34. For a notable exception, see Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

35. See Konrad Kwiet, "'Juden und Banditen': SS-Ereignismeldungen aus Litauen 1943/1944," in *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung,* vol. 2, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1993), pp. 405–20.

36. Order by Himmler, June 21, 1943, reprinted in Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot (eds.), *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union* (New York: KTAV, 1982), pp. 456–57.

37. See Arad, *Ghetto*, pp. 441–61.

Jewish Cultural Life in the Vilna Ghetto
David G. Roskies

Each Nazi ghetto was different, and each Nazi ghetto was the same. The historian's task is to reconstruct the life of each ghetto in relation to its past, specific surroundings, and chronology of destruction. In terms of size, location, demography, languages, and politics, Vilna was as different from Warsaw as Warsaw was from Lodz. Samuel Kassow, in his meticulous comparison of the two great ghetto diaries by Herman Kruk and Emanuel Ringelblum, has demonstrated that without knowledge of the Polish language (for example), one cannot understand the inner working of the Warsaw ghetto. In Vilna, by contrast, a knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew is sufficient.[1]

However, the various forms of Jewish self-expression in the Vilna ghetto were quite similar to those of other ghettos: theater and cabaret, concerts and choirs, sermons and communal prayer, eulogies, classes for children and adults, journalism, public lectures and colloquia, scholarship, sports, popular songs, epic and lyric poetry, the graphic arts, proclamations, and diaries. What is more astounding: the comprehensive scope of this list, a whole culture reconstituting itself in the face of total destruction; its internal coherence—the same forms everywhere—testifying to the extraordinary viability of Jewish culture throughout central and Eastern Europe; or the degree to which secular modes of self-expression so far outweighed the classical forms? Other than sermons and communal prayer, eulogies, and popular songs, these forms of self-expression had entered the culture of Yiddish-speaking Jews barely a century before—and some, such as sports and proclamations, much more recently than that.

THE COLLOQUIA OF JACOB GENS
Because the forms of self-expression were so numerous and varied, we are able to hear the many voices of the ghetto even when the source material is incomplete. Thus it is relatively easy to document the colloquia—held over a glass of tea—in the home of Jacob Gens. Here the leading ghetto intellectuals, all of them male, were invited by the ghetto chief to discuss the history and fate of the Jews. The formal lecture was generally followed by a heated discussion.

On one occasion the select group of invitees was so shaken by the latest news from Warsaw—the house-to-house arrest and execution of leading cultural activists on the night of April 17, 1942—that each spontaneously began to relive his own

miraculous survival during the horrific first months of the Nazi occupation. The third to speak was the twenty-nine-year-old poet Abrasha (Abraham) Sutzkever. He revealed to his fellow survivors how in the wake of the liquidation of Ghetto Two and the murder of his mother, he decided to commit suicide, and only the portentous reappearance of a crow stopped him from jumping to his death on the cobblestones below. Everyone in the orange-painted room had a similar trauma to relive.[2]

These colloquia are well documented because two of the regulars—Kruk and Zelig Kalmanovitsh—kept diaries, and where one diary has pages missing (as does Kruk for June 6–9, 1942), the other fills in the blanks.[3] But even when the two diaries overlap, they do not necessarily tell the same story.

Unlike Kruk, the official ghetto chronicler who—according to his English-language editor Benjamin Harshav—made the most basic errors in the spelling of the Hebraic component of Yiddish, Kalmanovitsh kept his ghetto diary (replete with scriptural and rabbinical quotations cited from memory) in Hebrew; and whereas Kruk, the card-carrying Bundist (socialist), betrayed an open animus toward observant Jews, Kalmanovitsh deeply mourned the spiritual crisis of his pious brethren.[4] In fact, were it not for Kalmanovitsh—the wartime voice of Vilna's Orthodox community—Vilna's claim to be called the Jerusalem of Lithuania would be altogether silent.

Despite his daily regimen sorting out Jewish books for the Germans to loot, his various commissions to translate Jewish scholarship into German, his proclivity to stay home, and his fifty-seven years, Kalmanovitsh made a point of attending services and even delivered the sermon himself on a few remarkable occasions. Thus in the fragment of his ghetto diary recently discovered in the Lithuanian Central Archive and published in 1997 both in its Hebrew original and Yiddish translation in the *YIVO-bleter*, Kalmanovitsh records the first public fast held in the ghetto, on the May 31, 1942, attended by 300 men and women—a huge crowd by ghetto standards—complete with a precis of the rabbi's complicated sermon. Kruk makes no mention of this important milestone in the cultural life of the ghetto.

Another regular at Gens's colloquia was Zemach Feldstein, the Hebrew pedagogue from Kovno and editor of the official Vilna ghetto bulletin. In marked contrast to the Warsaw ghetto, where every group—from the Communists to the Orthodox and anti-Zionist *Agudas Yisroel*—issued and distributed its own underground publication, there was no underground press in the Vilna ghetto except for an occasional mimeographed news bulletin distributed among members of the United

Partisans' Organization (FPO). Although an outsider, Feldstein was handpicked to edit the *Geto-yedies* on account of his impeccable German; the entire contents had to be translated into German before it could be published. Furthermore, Feldstein supported the survival-through-productive-labor strategy of the Jewish Council (*Judenrat*) and he was a born pedagogue.

In his weekly editorials, Feldstein adduced two sources of consolation: the Judenrat's recent record at improving the quality of ghetto life and the Jewish historical record, both in Vilna and throughout the Jewish past.[5] Three of the extant editorials are eulogies for the secular intelligentsia of Vilna's glory days: Dr. Zemach Szabad, who died in 1935 (issue #23, January 24, 1943); and Yankev Gerstein and Dr. Moyshe Heller (issues #7, October 4, 1942, and #13, November 16, 1942, respectively), who died in the ghetto. To be sure, there was something consoling in the very act of eulogizing individual great men in the midst of so much mass murder—all the more so when each man exemplified Vilna Jewry's cultural, philanthropic, and scientific achievements, which would never be forgotten.

Digging deeper still were those editorials that celebrated the cycle of the Jewish holidays, notably Feldstein's history lesson about the true meaning of Hanukkah. Here the modern Jewish pedagogue labored to dispel "the naive romantic attitude toward the military and political achievements of the Hasmoneans." The true legacy of Hanukkah, he averred, was encoded in the blessings that one recited over the candles: the absolute primacy of spirit over matter (issue #14, December 7, 1942).

Did Feldstein's editorial on the meaning of Hanukkah place him at the forefront of some pacifist fringe group or, worse yet, brand him a Nazi collaborator? How are we to explain the fact that in the Vilna ghetto, as distinct from Warsaw, the Jewish cultural enterprise—the library, theatrical performances, concerts, competitions, exhibitions, classes, public lectures, and soccer games—all took place under the aegis of the Judenrat or the Jewish Police? What are we to make of the presence at Gens's colloquia of Salk (Salek) Dessler and a Vienna Jew named Oberhardt, the hated chief officers of the Jewish Police and de facto rulers of the ghetto? How are we to judge the behavior of Gens himself? Why did he issue special rations to thirty-three "Members of the Cultural Department"[6] and why, indeed, should this former Lithuanian Army officer have bothered convening colloquia in his home? Because his Christian wife and only daughter were hidden on the Aryan side and he had nothing better to do in the early evenings before the curfew?

THE DESTRUCTION OF EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWRY

The surviving members of the secular intelligentsia, who gathered in Gens's home and otherwise enjoyed special privileges, developed a three-pronged strategy. Alongside the daily effort to counteract apathy and anarchy by re-creating the prewar Jewish cultural network, they made elaborate plans to establish a ghetto museum (complete with a scale model and a detailed history) that was commissioned from the two honorary Vilner, Feldstein and Kruk. Jointly and severally, moreover, the secular intellectuals tried to comprehend what was happening to them in light of the distant past. After Feldstein lectured the group on Jews and Judaism, someone protested that by constantly touting Jewish genius, the Jews themselves had provoked the envy and hatred of the world.[7] What wisdom, then, did the ghetto intelligentsia gain when taking the measure of history? Members of the older generation, led by veterans such as Feldstein and Kalmanovitsh, were struck by the continuities, whereas the youthful members of the FPO (Abba Kovner, Shmerke Kaczerginski, Sutzkever, Kruk, Leon Bernstein) began to understand that what was happening now had never happened before.

For Kalmanovitsh the destruction of Eastern European Jewry did not begin with the Holocaust; it culminated therein. The dress rehearsal had been the year-long Soviet occupation of Lithuania. Here, almost in its entirety, is Kalmanovitsh's diary entry for July 19, 1942, written against the psychological backdrop of great fear and expectation:[8]

> God's purpose in destroying the community of Vilna was perhaps to hasten the redemption, to alert whomsoever might still be alerted that there is neither refuge nor hope for life in Exile. The Vilna community had served as a model and exemplar of a Jewish settlement in Exile with its own distinctive culture. Many, oh so many, did not perceive the net that lay hidden within this culture. And now the fortress of exilic Judaism has been breached, its temple has been destroyed forever.
>
> But if we take a hard look we can see that it was necessary for the destruction to come from without. The fortress had already been destroyed and laid waste from within. Vilna had put up no resistance to the assimilation and the obliteration of the Jewish character, had not stood up to the spiritual destruction decreed by the Red conquerors.
>
> The death of Rabbi Chaim Oyzer Grodzenski on the very day that the Reds entered Vilna . . . can serve as a symbolic sign. The funeral . . .

brought out tens of thousands of Jews—one might have thought it was a veritable demonstration of Vilna Jewry behind the hearse of its most distinguished son, the Vilna Gaon's truest disciple, who displayed its honor and beauty for all the world to see; a last demonstration of Vilna's Jewish spirit [*yiddishkeit*], a vain attempt to prove that it still lived. But this proved be its last manifestation.

(I confess that it wasn't until I looked into Chaim-Oyzer's archive that I apprehended a little something of his greatness.) Our world of freethinkers, separated from him by 10,000 walls, also gained sustenance from his glory, and lived thanks to this cracked vessel, which is to say, the cracked vessel of traditional Judaism. And together we were all of us smashed, as it is written [Isaiah 31:3], "the helper shall trip and the helped one shall fall" ["Oyzer" in Hebrew means "Helper"]. I do not know for certain, but I want so much to believe that somewhere, in the mystical recesses, somewhere in the depths of the true believers, those spiritual giants, a hidden protest lay burning, and that they were yet contemplating to carry out acts of sanctification of God's name [*Kiddush Hashem*], [as it is written,] "The remnant of Israel shall do no wrong" [Zephania 3:13], save for those [of their number] who had succeeded in fleeing overseas. But from the outside—from the outside it appeared as if the Satanic Force had scored a complete and total victory, once and for all.

And later, when the full [Nazi] evil was revealed, and the decree of total annihilation was enacted in full—must we not admit that God, in his beneficence to the Jews of Vilna, reserved for them a beautiful death? [As David said to Gad,] "Let us fall into the hands of the LORD; and let me not fall into the hands of men" [2 Samuel 24:14]. A martyr's death is preferable to becoming degenerate. And if the Old Synagogue was laid waste, and all that remained was a heap of stones and bare walls, is that not a better fate than that young profligates appear who desecrate her sacred objects and turn her into a theater or museum? For the very stone of these walls absorbed the prayers and sighs of our ancestors, their supplications for redemption, which ascend like an offering upon the altar. And we will be reminded of them whenever we long for the stones of our homeland, and we will take them into our hearts, and pass their memory on to our children and children's children in our liberated Zion. And these undesecrated stones will serve as a memorial to our Exile, for their merit was not to have been desecrated through the hands of their own children, by those who had once built the walls, but rather, through the hands of a savage nation, acting as the emissary of God. May their sacred memory serve to sweeten and soften our hearts, to recall and to guide the way for the children of Abraham.

What we have here is a sermonic text, a traditional theodicy, an attempt to justify God's inscrutable (and hidden) plan. Why, asks Kalmanovitsh, did God allow the Covenantal Community of Vilna to be destroyed? Because the destruction in two stages would serve as a sign (1) that what was once a proud Jewish community was already rotting, crumbling from within, and (2) that future generations—unaware of this decay and left only with the detritus of the external destruction—would have something useful, even inspiring, to remember.

During the first stage, the Soviet conquest of Lithuania, there was a false ray of hope. The vast outpouring of grief at the funeral of Rabbi Grodzenski, which occurred (according to Kalmanovitsh) on the very day of the Soviet occupation, was a false portent of religious solidarity and steadfastness. In retrospect, however, this turned out to be the last such manifestation. It was a sign that Satan had already triumphed, for even religious Jewry—schooled in the ideal of Kiddush Hashem and bearing witness to God's name through acts of martyrdom—had capitulated.

Then came the second stage, when God chose the Germans—the most savage nation—to be the rod of his wrath. After slaughtering every last Jew, Kalmanovitsh prophesied, the Germans would leave only the stones of the ruined Great Synagogue, heir to the Temple in Jerusalem. Because these stones were sacred, however, having absorbed the spiritual fervor of generations of pious Jews, these stones and the memory that they engendered would be revered by the Surviving Remnant of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel—the only place where a Jewish life would be reconstituted. Thus while the future hope of the Jewish people would derive from the spiritual greatness of Vilna, its utter degradation on the eve of the war will have been forgotten.

VOICES OF THE VILNA GHETTO

This diary entry is by no means unique in Kalmanovitsh's wartime writings and sermons. For anyone who cared to listen, he had been warning of the impending destruction since the late thirties, most forcefully in the pages of a remarkable journal, published in Paris, called *Afn sheydveg* (*At the Crossroads*). His was the commanding voice of the Vilna ghetto because it spoke with the moral and intellectual authority of the entire Jewish experience. He was the man whom Sutzkever immortalized as "The Prophet" while the ghetto walls were still standing. He was the man whose moral guidance Kovner sought out twice—and unbeknownst to his comrades-in-arms—before carrying out the first acts of armed resistance.[9]

The more Sutzkever and Kovner spoke from out of the Jewish past, and the more each of them fashioned a response to the Nazi onslaught out of the inherited fund of Jewish responses, the more their voices were hearkened to. Sutzkever became the poet laureate of the Vilna ghetto on the strength of his epic verse, a genre he perfected in the ghetto, each line steeled with an alloy of rage and sorrow. "The Grave Child," the epic tale of a lone escapee from Ponar who sought refuge in the Jewish cemetery, there to give birth in an empty grave, was awarded first prize for poetry in July 1942 by the Union of Artists and Writers in the Vilna ghetto. Sutzkever's most transhistoric poem "Kol Nidre," a mythic retelling of the terrible Yom Kippur "Operation Free-of-Jews" (*Aktion Judenrein*) of 1941, was the subject of heated debate in Gens's living room; later, on the strength of a handwritten copy that a partisan carried from the Lithuanian forest to Moscow, Abrasha and Freydke Sutzkever won passage to freedom.[10]

Skeptics will argue that this was false consolation since the ghetto was doomed anyway. Finding ancient analogies was no more than a mental exercise that fostered inaction. Yet when the calls to arms eventually came, they too resounded with ancient echoes, beginning with Kovner's epoch-making proclamation of January 1, 1942, and culminating in Sutzkever's epic poem "The Lead Plates at the Rom Press." When the twenty-four-year-old Kovner read his proclamation to the members of the Marxist-Zionist Young Guard (*Hashomer Hatzair*) on that New Year's Day, he did so in Hebrew (as well as Yiddish) so that his opening words ("Let us not be led like sheep to the slaughter") would pack their biblical punch.[11] "*Kaseh lattevah yuval*" ("like a sheep being led to slaughter") is a quotation from the Prophet Isaiah (53:3). And in his farewell to Vilna, retroactively dated September 12, 1943 (the day he left for the forest), in the final stanza of his poem, Sutzkever rhymed YERUSHALAYIM with BLAYEN and KLEZAYIN. He perceived a direct and powerful link between the destruction of *Jerusalem*, the *lead* plates of the Vilna Talmud (the greatest intellectual achievement of Diaspora Jewry), and the *weapons* wielded by the Vilna partisans in their desperate last stand against the Germans.[12]

By using Orthodox Jews as the sole measure of Jewish solidarity and self-sacrifice, Kalmanovitsh had issued a savage indictment, yet the language and theological tenor of his own writings bore witness to a cultural consolidation that was taking hold within the ranks of the secular intelligentsia. After absorbing the initial shock of ghettoization, which in Vilna was preceded by the mechanized mass killings

of men, women, and children chosen at random, the surviving ghetto elite—social workers, scholars, poets, actors, artists—responded to the radical diminution of Jewish space with a renewed emphasis on Jewish time. That is why Gens convened colloquia in his home; why Feldstein marked each and every Jewish holiday with a special editorial; why Kruk reread Ansky's *Khurbn Galitsye*, the famous chronicle of Jewish suffering during the First World War; and why the longest waiting list in the ghetto library was for Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. *War and Peace* itself was situated both inside and out—inside, because after the one hundred thousandth book had been borrowed from the ghetto library, a great public celebration was held to mark the occasion, proof positive that the Jews were still to be considered the "People of the Book"; outside, because when the library staff was commissioned to study reading habits in the Vilna ghetto, it was revealed that the vast majority preferred reading Russian and Polish to Yiddish and Hebrew. Zionists and Yiddishists alike saw this as a bad omen.[13]

This dialectic between inside and out points to a sea change in the Jewish response to modernity. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the defining dream of the Jewish future was the dream of emancipation. For the Jews of Europe, that dream came to an end in the Nazi ghettos. Even without knowing that their elimination from the European body politic had only just begun, the specter of real ghetto walls guarded day and night was traumatic since emancipation had been predicated on the ideal of open space, of a political, civic, economic, and cultural landscape devoid of all boundaries. Jewish merchants, bankers, actors, lawyers, and laborers had imagined that neutral spaces would open up for them to inhabit alongside their neighbors. Now the urban landscape was everywhere divided between the "Jewish quarter" and the "Aryan side." Enlisting the tools of modernity, forms of self-expression that they had only recently learned to master, the purveyors of Jewish culture in the Vilna ghetto reached back and within in order to prepare for the final hour.[14]

CONCLUSION: PUBLIC MEMORY

How much of this cultural activity survived in postwar public memory? A dozen theater songs, without their attendant scripts, a few partisan hymns, Kovner's call to arms, and a few diaries and memoirs. That the condemned ghetto Jews performed concerts and produced artwork and their children wrote poetry the world would learn through the story of Terezin. Why should this be so? Perhaps because the surviving Yiddish speakers were either silenced (in the Soviet Union), subjected to state

censorship (in communist Poland), stigmatized (in the nascent State of Israel), or sentimentalized (in the United States). Or perhaps it was easier to transmit that part of wartime culture that seemed to require the least amount of decoding—children's drawings and poems. The purpose of postwar memory of the ghettos was outreach; by privileging those forms of self-expression that were most universally accessible, the hope was to break down the ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries that had defined the ghettos.

Eventually, thanks to a growing body of available translations, it was discovered that the Vilna ghetto had distinguished itself in literary and theatrical production of a very high order; thus the most comprehensive anthology of Holocaust literature to date, Lawrence Langer's *Art from the Ashes,* allots ample space to Vilna.[15] Here Sutzkever occupies a place of honor among only six poets whom Langer deems to have successfully found "a form for chaos by including chaos as part of the form." What this baroque formulation already tells us, however, is that Sutzkever will not be represented by the rhymed and metered, neoclassical epic verse that made him the poet laureate of the ghetto, by the poems that disassembled the unfolding horror into its recognizable, archetypal parts, but only by those poems that fit Langer's formula, that successfully render "chaos" in radically individual terms. For the Holocaust to bear meaning in Langer's scheme, it must stand alone, outside the annals of historical catastrophe and outside the purview of European and Jewish culture.

Langer's anthology includes one full-length play, the longest selection by far: the translation and adaptation from Hebrew of Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto* (1983). Inspired by the Yiddish cabaret theater in the Vilna ghetto, Sobol adopts the familiar play-within-a-play technique through which, in Langer's words, the audience is invited "to experience simultaneously history as performance and performance as history." Langer should have written "history as political propaganda and performance as historical perversion," for what Sobol has done is to turn the Zionist revisionist Gens into a Likud party functionary and the Bundist chronicler Kruk into the humane alternative to the exercise of raw power (i.e., a stand-in for Yitzhak Rabin).

As for the actors and directors of the ghetto theater, Sobol has them performing throughout for the special—and obscene—pleasure of Nazi officer Bruno Kittel. Who actually performed before the chief executioner of Vilna Jewry and used the theater as a means of currying favor with the outside world? Was it Kasriel Broyde? Shabse Bliacher? Leyb Rosental or his daughter Khayele? Or was it perhaps the Israeli

playwright Sobol, who revised the play for its German-language debut in 1984 and then again for its English-language audience, the latter time complete with new songs written by Broadway lyricist Sheldon Harnick?[16] Small wonder that when Sobol was doing research for this play, Sutzkever would not let him in the door.

For it is Sutzkever and the rapidly thinning ranks of the Vilna "compatriots" (*landslayt*) who model the responsible way to study Jewish cultural life in the Vilna ghetto: not from the outside in, with trendy notions of "chaos" and "performance" or (worse yet) with a gross political agenda, but from the inside out. To do so requires thorough mastery of a rigorous mental curriculum, because the Jewish cultural response was specifically designed to plumb the depths of the Jewish past, to counteract the radical diminution of neutral space with the total emancipation of Jewish time.

NOTES

1. Samuel David Kassow, "Vilna and Warsaw, Two Ghetto Diaries: Herman Kruk and Emanuel Ringelblum," in *Holocaust Chronicles: Individualizing the Holocaust through Diaries and Other Contemporaneous Personal Accounts,* ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1999), pp. 171–215.

2. Zelig Kalmanovitsh, "Togbukh fun vilner geto (fragment)," ed. Shalom Luria, trans. Abraham Novershtern, *YIVO-bleter* 3 (1997), pp. 58–59 (entry for June 7, 1942). That Gens's apartment was painted orange I learned from a conversation with Samuel Bak.

3. Except for the recently discovered "fragment," the whole of Kalmanovitsh's Hebrew diary was published as *Yoman begeto Vilna ukhtavim miha`izavon shenimtsa baharisot,* ed. Shalom Luria (Tel Aviv: Moreshet and Sifriat Hapoalim, 1977).

4. On Herman Kruk, see Benjamin Harshav, "Introduction: Herman Kruk's Holocaust Writings," in *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939–1944,* trans. Barbara Harshav (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, in association with YIVO, 2002), pp. xl–li. On Kruk's misspellings, see p. l.

5. "Tsum moment: Dr. Tsemakh Feldshteyns editoryaln in vilner geto, 1942–1943," *YIVO-bleter* 3 (1997), pp. 114–205. Like the Lodz Ghetto Archive, the surviving part of the Vilna Ghetto Archive was split into three parts after the war and is now located in the Lithuanian Central Archive, YIVO, and the Moreshet Archives in Israel. Thus the issues of the *Geto-yediyes* that I reported as missing are actually deposited in the Moreshet Archives.

6. Sutzkever-Kaczerginski Archive, file 343.

7. Kalmanovitsh, "Togbukh (fragment)," pp. 51, 83 (entry for May 27, 1942). The page numbers refer to the Hebrew original and Yiddish translation, respectively.

8. Kalmanovitsh, "Togbukh (fragment)," pp. 76–78, 102–103 (entry for July 19, 1942). The page numbers refer to the Hebrew original and Yiddish translation, respectively.

9. See David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 4–5, 196–97, 244.

10. Ibid., chap. 9.

11. See Abba Kovner, "Nisayon rishon lehagid," *Yalkut Moreshet* 16 (1973), p. 11, where the precise wording is "*lo nuval katson latevah*." A much longer Yiddish version of this summons to resistance, of unknown provenance but also originating from within the ranks of the Zionist underground, is translated by Lucy S. Dawidowicz in *A Holocaust Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1976), pp. 334–36.

12. For the bilingual text, see Abraham Sutzkever, "The Lead Plates at the Rom Press," trans. Neal Kozodoy, in *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*, ed. Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk (New York: Viking, 1987), pp. 678–79. On the composition of the poem, see Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse,* pp. 250–52.

13. See Feldstein's editorial "Durkhgeleyent hundert toyznt bikher," *Geto-yedies* 17 (December 14, 1942), and Kruk's entry for December 13, 1942.

14. See Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (New York: Schocken, 1971), chap. 24.

15. Lawrence L. Langer, *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

16. See the definitive Hebrew version of the playscript, *Geto*, 2nd ed. (Tel Aviv: Or-Am, 1992).

Appendix:
Biographies of Contributors

MICHAEL MACQUEEN is Chief of Investigative Research in the United States Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations (OSI) in Washington, DC. Since 1988, he has been deeply involved in the investigation of crimes committed in German-occupied Lithuania, Belorussia, and Poland. He has authored several articles on the Holocaust in Lithuania and on Swiss dealings with Nazi Germany and served as a consultant to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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