

HOLOCAUST IN LITHUANIAN PROVINCE IN 1941

By Dr. Arūnas Bubnys

Introduction

The Holocaust in Lithuanian province still remains one of the least researched aspects of Jewish genocide both in Lithuanian and foreign historiography. So far, research has mostly focused on general history of the Holocaust, extermination of Jewish communities in Vilnius and Kaunas, criminal activity of the German Security Police and SD action squads as well as special squads in the Baltic States, and collaboration of Lithuanian local authorities with the Nazis during the Holocaust (particularly in reference to Lithuanian Soviet and Israeli historiography). The purpose of this work is to analyse the process of extermination of the Jews in the province and reveal one of the key stages, features and results of this process.

Efforts were made to use all the archival sources and literature available to the author. The document collections of the Lithuanian Central State Archives (hereinafter LCSA) and Lithuanian Special Archives (hereinafter LSA) served as the main reference. The document collections of some of the county governors (e.g. those of the governor of Trakai County, doc. col. R-500; governor of Kaunas City and County, doc. col. R-1534, etc.) were particularly important for the topic in question. These document collections contain the surviving documents from the Nazi occupation on legal discrimination of the Jews, seizure and use of Jewish property, statistics on the Jews living in counties and rural districts, etc. There are very few documents on physical extermination of the Jews left. The document collections of German and Lithuanian police authorities kept by the LCSA are very important for the topic in question. Among the document collections of the aforesaid category mentioned here should be those of Kaunas Commander's Office (doc. col. R-1444) and those of liaison officer of Pavienė Police Service under the chief of Public Order Police in Lithuania (doc. col. R-683). The said document collections contain orders to Lithuanian Police Battalion (including Kaunas TDA Battalion which was "notorious" for Jewish extermination) and correspondence between the Director of Police Department, V. Reivytis, with the police chiefs of the County on the operations for detention and gathering of the Jews in August 1941.

LSA keeps a very important inventory schedule No. 58. The latter contains several hundreds of criminal files on persons convicted in the post-war years under the soviet government for collaboration with the Nazis and taking part in the Jewish massacre. Although there are inaccuracies in these files as a result of concealment or confessions obtained by force, comparison of evidence about the same events by several or several dozens of persons allows for restoring a considerably reliable picture of events. The said files contain evidence by the Jews who lived through the Nazi occupation and that by the "observers" who did not take part in the Holocaust. Other LSA document collections and inventory schedules (e.g. doc. col. K-1, inv. sched. 15 – files of the KGB district branches), doc. col. 3377, inv. sched. 55 (collections of interrogation minutes of persons accused of collaboration with the Nazis and shooting of the Jews) are very important for the Holocaust studies. Other LSA files are also important in this respect as they reveal the process of the Jewish genocide in different parts of Lithuania. Numerous archival materials give a possibility of basically restoring the process of the Holocaust in all the counties of Lithuania. So far historians have relatively insufficiently used this material in their research of the Holocaust. The author also uses an opportunity to present unpublished works of regional studies on the Jewish life in different towns of Lithuanian by history teachers and pupils.

We still have very little history literature on the Holocaust in Lithuanian province. Research of this kind only contributes to the growth in its number. Among the published works mentioned here should firstly be Vol. 2 of the collected documents "Masinēs žudynēs Lietuvoje" (*Mass Killings in*

Lithuania).¹ This book contains Lithuanian archival records about the killings of communists, members of the Young Communist League, soviet activists and Jews in ten counties of Lithuania. Despite the publication of these collected documents as early as 1973, even today they still remain valuable source of the Holocaust studies. Another valuable source is the collection of documents by Dr. V. Brandišauskas “1941 m. birželio sukilimas” (*The Rebellion of June 1941*).² This collection covers valuable information on the actions of Lithuanian rebels and partisans in Lithuanian province, attitude of local (Lithuanian) authorities and behaviour with respect to the Jews during the first weeks of the Nazi occupation. The recently published book by Prof. A. Eidintas “Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla” (*The Case of the Killing of Lithuanian Jews*)³ contains a chapter on killings of the Jews in Lithuanian province. Research articles on the Holocaust in the province were written by historians A. Bubnys, S. Buchaveckas, A. Rukšėnas, R. Puišytė.⁴ Foreign authors, including German historian J. Tauber, J. Matthaeus and Ch. Dieckmann, also contributed their research articles on the Jewish massacre carried out by the Tilsit (Tilžė) Gestapo action squad in Gargždai, Kretinga and other towns on the Lithuanian-German border.⁵

Nevertheless, the Holocaust in the Lithuanian province basically remains a “grey spot” in Lithuanian historiography. So far, there has been no fundamental scholarly work containing the analysis of the Jewish genocide in all the counties (there were 22 of them in Lithuania in 1941), and research touched upon only separate parts of Lithuania. In this work, the term “province” equals to the concept of Lithuanian counties, except for the biggest towns of Lithuania – Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and Panevėžys. The author has not included Klaipėda Region seized by the Nazis in 1939 into the topic under discussion as well as Ašmena and Svyriai Counties which were incorporated into the Major Region of Lithuania in 1942. The latter counties are now within the territory of the Republic of Belarus. The aforesaid territories were not studied due to the shortage of archival records. The author studied the Holocaust in all the 22 counties of Lithuania. However, taking into account the size limits of this work, he presents only six counties, i.e. Alytus, Kaunas, Kretinga, Trakai, Utena, and Vilkaviškis, as an example. Selection of the said counties was based on a regional principle, i.e. selection of counties from all the most important regions of Lithuania: Samogitia (Kretinga), Suvalkija (Vilkaviškis), Dzūkija (Alytus), Upper Lithuania (Utena), Vilnius Region (Trakai) and Central Lithuania (Kaunas). The volume of surviving archival materials also predetermined the choice of the said counties. Available materials were sufficient to reconstruct a sufficiently detailed process of the Holocaust. The study focused on the killings of the Jews not only in the county centres but also in those rural districts with numerous Jewish communities. I believe that the number of selected counties is sufficient to get the idea of the Holocaust model for the entire country and make adequate conclusions that would be relevant not only to the selected counties but also to the entire province. This work analyses not only physical extermination of the Jews but also offers the history of each Jewish community from the old days to the Nazi-Soviet War by paying most of the attention to the life of Jews and Lithuanian-Jewish relations

¹ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” 1941-1944, collected documents, Vol. 2, V., 1973, compiled by G. Erslavaitė.

² “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents, V., 2000, compiled by V. Brandišauskas.

³ “Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla,” collected documents and articles, V., 2001, compiled by A. Eidintas.

⁴ A. Bubnys, “Mažieji Lietuvos žydų getai ir laikinos izoliavimo stovyklos 1941-1943 metais”, (*Small Ghettos and Temporary Isolation Camps of Lithuanian Jews, 1941-1943*), *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis (Lithuanian History Annals)*, 1999, V., 2000, p.p. 151-180; S. Buchaveckas, “Lygumų ir Stačiūnų valsčiai nacių okupacijos metais”, *Lietuvos valsčiai: Lygumai. Stačiūnai (Lygumai and Stačiūnai Rural Districts during Nazi Occupation; Lithuanian Rural District: Lygumai. Stačiūnai)* V., 2001, p.p. 254-272; A. Rukšėnas, “Veliuonos žydų genocidas” (*Genocide of Veliuona Jews*), Veliuona, V., 2001, p.p. 264-270; R. Puišytė, “Holokaustas Lietuvos provincijoje. Jurbarkas (1941 m. birželis – 1941 m. rugsėjis)”, (*Holocaust in Lithuanian Province. Jurbarkas (June 1941-September 1941)*), *Lietuvos archyvai (Lithuanian archives)*, V., 1999, No. 13, p.p. 77-85.

⁵ J. Tauber, “Garsden, 24 Juni 1941”, *Annaberger Annalen*, 1997, No. 5, p.p. 117-134; J. Matthaeus, “Jenseits der Grenze: Die ersten Massenerschiessungen von Juden in Litauen (Juni – August 1941)”, *Zeitschrift fuer Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1996, No. 44, p.p. 101-126; Ch. Dieckmann, “Der Krieg und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden”, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*, Herausgegeben von Ulrich Herbert, Frankfurt am Main, 1998, p.p. 292-329.

during the independence of Lithuania. In addition, it covers the events at the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet War and grouping of Lithuanian rebels (partisans) in the province, their approach and action with respect to soviet officials and the Jews, the most crucial moments of the Jewish persecution (deprivation of civil rights, segregation from non-Jews, seizure of property, arrests, setting-up of ghettos and temporary isolation camps, mass killings and looting of the victims' property). Particular attention was paid to the statistics on the Holocaust victims, as this area still lacks consistent and reliable studies. With reference to what was available, efforts were made to define the number of persons who performed the executions (Jew-shooters) as well as their formal subordination (German Gestapo, policemen, white-bands, solders of self-defence battalions, etc.). The findings on rescue of the Jews, which became available during the research, were also included into this work.

ALYTUS COUNTY

Alytus

The Jewish community of Alytus was one of the oldest communities in Lithuania. There were tombstones in the old Jewish cemetery with epitaphs as old as 400 years. Alytus went through a very rapid development at the end of the 19th century and became one of the most important towns in Southern Lithuania. According to the data of the 1897 population census, there were 482 Jews residing in the town (33.6 % of the urban population).¹

Alytus was the county centre and the biggest town of Dzūkija during the Lithuanian Independence and German occupation. P. Biržys–Akiras who visited Alytus in 1930 wrote that there were 7,500 people living in Alytus, including 5,000 Lithuanians, 2,300 Jews, 150 Poles, 30 Russians and 20 Germans. Lithuanians had only 39 shops in the town whereas the Jews owned 139 shops. The Jews also had 10 butcher's shops, 2 canteens, 6 hotels, 2 saunas, a slaughterhouse, 2 cinemas, 2 Jewish *Volksbank*, a credit union, mills and sawmills, blacksmith's, and other business entities.²

The Jewish community of Alytus had its own house of prayer, schools, yeshiva, and a large library. There were sections of Jewish political parties and organisations functioning in the town. A part of the Jewish youth left for Palestine during the inter-war period. Some of the sources state that approximately 4 thousand Jews lived in Alytus on the eve of the Nazi-Soviet War.³ According to the unofficial data of the Board of Statistics 8,030 Jews (4.70 % of the population in the county) lived in Alytus County on 1 January 1941.⁴

The German troops occupied Alytus on the first day of the war (22 June). The Lithuanian administration and police were re-established and so-called partisan company (TDA) was set up already on the first days of the war. Former intellectuals, riflemen, participants of the anti-Soviet underground and officials of the Independent Lithuania actively participated in this process. When the German Military Commander's Office was set up in the town, it armed the activists (members of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF)) and partisans. During the first days of the occupation, the Lithuanian Military Commander's Office functioned along the German Military Commander's Office. Capt. Domininkas Jėčys was commander of the former. Soon Maj. Gen. of Staff Juozas Ivašauskas replaced him. The Lithuanian Military Commander's Office carried out registration of the public servants and officials newly arriving to Alytus Town and their distribution into different services. The Commander's Office closely co-operated with the re-established police, it also collected information on people sharing anti-German moods and the Red Army soldiers in hiding. The Commander's Office also organised hunt after them. The Germans had no trust in the Lithuanian Commander's Office and dismissed it for a couple of times; however, the latter would re-establish itself for several times. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian Commander's Office was finally liquidated several weeks later.¹

On the night from 22 June to 23 June 1941, two German patrols were killed close to Maršakas mill in Alytus. The perpetrators were not identified. As a result, the Germans shot a number of residents of Alytus (150, in the opinion of some people). Non-commissioned officer of the German Security Field Police (*Geheime Feldpolizei*) led the shooting of the civil population. The Germans carried out search in the vicinity of Kauno and Seirijų Streets and arrested all the males of 15–50 years of age irrespective of their nationality. The shooting was carried out from 23 to 24 June in the groups of 20-25 persons. The execution took place on the hillsides of Kauno Street, in Vilniaus Street, and behind the bridge in the

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, Northvale, New Jersey, London, 1996, p. 55.

² P. Biržys-Akiras, "Alytaus apskritis: Dzūkų kraštas" (*Alytus County: Dzūkija Region*), Kaunas, 1931, p.p. 28-29.

³ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 55-56.

⁴ Data of the Board of Statistics of 1 January 1941 on the national composition of Lithuanian population, LCSA, doc.col. R-743, inv.sched. 5, file 46, p.172.

¹ Materials of interrogation of Jonas Borevičius, LSA, doc.col. 1, inv.sched. 1, file 98, p.p. 28-32.

direction of Vilnius. There were also several Lithuanian policemen who were on duty on the streets and had no German documents among the victims, including Valiulis, Rapolas Čėsynas, Linkevičius and another three policemen. Meškėlis, teacher of physical education of Alytus Gymnasium, was killed, too.²

Arrests of those who were considerably active under the first soviet occupation, including communists, members of the Young Communist League, officials of the soviet government and the Red Army soldiers hiding in the forests, started already during the first days of the occupation. The activity survey of a TDA company stated that “36 local communists, 9 Red Army soldiers and a considerable number of the Jews” were arrested and detained following citizens’ information.³ The persecution of the Jews became particularly tough starting from the middle of July 1941. On 12 July 1941, Alytus County Governor Stepas Maliauskas and Alytus Defence Chief (Commander) Maj. Gen. of Staff Juozas Ivašauskas issued an order which gave details on the situation of the Jews. All the Jews of Alytus County were ordered to wear the yellow Star of David on their clothes. They were allowed to buy food in shops and on the market only from 11 a.m., they could not to buy up foodstuffs from farmers and by the roadsides, hire non-Jews, enjoy public parks of the town, leave their residence without a permit of the county governor, etc. Moreover, the Jews had to perform public works and hand their radio-sets, bicycles and motorcycles over to the local authorities and the police.⁴

On 16 July 1941, the Chief of Alytus County Police, Aviation Capt. Stasys Krasnickas–Krosniūnas, addressed his subordinates with a speech full of hatred: “[...] the Jewry represents a degenerated nation which employs the measures of top-level sadism and wants to suppress the entire humanity under the cover of the Red Flag and brutalise it, nevertheless it will be soon managed with the radical measures of Führer of the German people. This question can be considered resolved already, however, one or two Lithuanians, even policemen (*policistas*), appear and even try to resolve this question in their own way. I have already told you that that there may be no two different opinions on this issue. There should be only one opinion, and it should, by a 100%, be the one that is clearly stated in the book “Mein Kampf” by Adolf Hitler [...]”.¹

The resolution of the Jewish issue soon started as defined by A. Hitler’s “opinion”.

In the middle of August 1941, the Jews of Alytus County were transferred to Alytus prison. 89 Jews (26 women among them) were arrested in Jieznas Town and were moved to Prienai on 16 August 1941. Later (by 31 August 1941) 38 Jews were detained in Jieznas. This time, they were transported to Alytus. A part of the Jews hid themselves in the surrounding forests.² All in all, ca 1000 Jewish men and women were delivered to Alytus from rural districts.³ They were kept in the yard of Alytus prison. The first mass killing of Alytus Jews was carried out on 13 August 1941. The registration of the Jews of Alytus Town took place before the shooting. The Jews were driven to the yard of the Security Police and listed by name. After the registration, the Jews were moved to the territory of the former barracks of the 2nd lancer regiment, and then to the place of the massacre in the forest. At that time, 617 Jewish men and 100 women were gunned down. By 31 August 1941, another 233 Jews of Alytus Town and County were killed.⁴ According to the witness by Alfonsas Nykštaitis, former Chief of the Criminal Police of Alytus Area, Obershturmführer J. Hamann and four other non-commissioned officers came to Alytus. He instructed the Chief of Alytus Security Police Pranas Zenkevičius to deliver a defined number of men and women from rural districts to Alytus. The chiefs of Alytus Camp of War Prisoners and J. Hamann

² Ibid., p.30.

³ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje”, Vol. 2, p. 61.

⁴ V. Brandišauskas, “Lietuvių ir žydų santykiai 1940 – 1941 metais” (*Lithuanian-Jewish Relations, 1940-1941*), in *Darbai ir dienos*, 1996, No. 2 (11), p. 56.

¹ Quotation from “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 63.

² “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p.p. 86-87.

³ Minutes of the interrogation of A. Nykštaitis of 29 June 1960, LSA, doc. col. K-1, inv. sched. 58, file 47337/3, Vol. 10, p. 191.

⁴ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p.p. 133-134.

agreed to use the prisoners of war for digging ditches. The ditches were dug in the Vidzgiris forest close to the prison. The German SD officers, Alytus policemen, and “partisans” under command of J. Hamann carried out the first execution of the Jews in Alytus (in August 1941). Chief of the Security Police of Alytus District P. Zenkevičius was also present at the site of the execution. Soviet prisoners of war buried the bodies of the victims.⁵

A couple of days later J. Hamann returned to Alytus bringing together Lieut. B. Norkus from the 1st Battalion. J. Hamann ordered P. Zenkevičius to execute the Jews of Alytus County using a special squad under command of B. Norkus (3rd company of the 1st battalion – A. B.). Following the order by J. Hamann, B. Norkus had to collect valuable items possessed by the executed Jews (including golden rings, watches etc.). The day following the arrival, J. Hamann and B. Norkus jointly plotted a new operation for extermination of the Jews. This time it claimed lives of approximately 50 Jewish men. Four German non-commissioned officers and local “partisans” carried out the firing. An elderly Jewish rabbi was among those victims. He was shot by Maj. Gen. of Staff S. Ivašauskas, Commander of Alytus County.¹

The squad under command of B. Norkus and Jr Lieut. J. Obelenis came to Alytus for several times after the said killing. Generally, this squad (ca 20–30 men) would come from Kaunas by bus. The Jews were shot in the forest close to the so-called Kaniūkai Bridge over the Nemunas River.²

The biggest massacre of Alytus Jews took place on 9 September 1941. The Jews were gunned down by the squad from Kaunas under command of B. Norkus and J. Obelenis. The victims were driven to the place of killing and were guarded by local policemen and white-bands. Before the shooting, the Jews were deprived of valuable possessions (watches, rings, and cash). The execution lasted for a few hours. Then B. Norkus’ squad left for Seirijai to kill local Jews.³

According to K. Jäger’s report, on 9 September 1941, 1279 Jews, including 287 men, 640 women and 352 children, were killed in Alytus.⁴

On the same day (9 September 1941) before the said event, the squad under B. Norkus’ command had already killed the Jews of Butrimonys Ghetto. Not only local but also Stakliškės and Punia Jews were forced into Butrimonys Ghetto. On the day of the killing, Butrimonys policemen and white-bands drove the Jews to the place of the execution (ca 2 km away from the town close to Klidžionys Village). The driven Jews were gunned down by a soldier of B. Norkus’ squad. In total, 740 Jews of Butrimonys Ghetto were killed.⁵

Private possessions of the victimised Jews (walnut furniture, crystal dishes, golden and silver items, etc.) were shared by senior secret police officers of Alytus Town, officials of the town and county authorities, white-band leaders and other activists who had a chance to get hold of the Jewish property. Following the directions by the Germans to evaluate the Jewish property, the aforesaid persons set up commissions which priced Jewish property at an extremely low price and then contributed very small amounts to local authorities. Different low value items and clothing of the victims were sold in an auction. The sales were organised by municipalities. Houses of the surviving Jews were nationalised and house managers were appointed to take care of them. The land owned by the Jews and all other inventory were leased to the “meritorious” German collaborators and their relatives. Better housing was

⁵ Interrogation minutes of A. Nykštaitis of 29 June 1960, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47337/3, Vol. 10, p.p. 191-192; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p.p. 67-68.

¹ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p.p. 71-72.

² Ibid., p. 72.

³ Interrogation minutes of V. Barauskas of 20 August 1968, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched.58, file 45788/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 14-15.

⁴ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of A. Jauneika of 9 December 1960, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 46392/3, Vol. 2, p.p. 102-103; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p.134.

taken over by German institutions. Mills, sawmills and other enterprises were transferred to the management of the Industrial Division of the Board.⁶

Butrimonys

Butrimonys used to have one of the oldest Lithuanian Jewish communities. During the times of Tsarist Russia Butrimonys was a part of Trakai County and Alytus County at the time of the Lithuanian Republic and Nazi occupation. Several hundred Tartars also lived in Butrimonys Towns and its environs.

In 1930, Butrimonys was home to 887 Jews. The local Jewish community had a brick synagogue, Hebrew school, charity organisations, 52 shops (out of 54), pubs, bakeries and other business entities. The Jewish *Volksbank* of Butrimonys had had 230 members before World War II (WWII). A part of the Jewish youth left for Palestine during the inter-war period.¹

The German troops seized Butrimonys on 22 June. A Lithuanian partisan (activists) squad was set up in Butrimonys Town of Alytus County during the first days of the German occupation. It had 40 members. Partisans started arresting communists, members of the Young Communist League, and soviet government activists.² In his report of 15 July 1941, the Chief of Butrimonys Police Station, K. Pilonis, informed the Police Chief of Alytus County that by that time 1 communist had been shot and 10 communists had been handed over to the Germans, and additional 17 were kept in the isolation ward. As far as the Jews were concerned, the said report noted that that “issue is very urgent, as there are over 2,000 Jews living in the town and they should be taken good care of in the near future”.³

The first mass arrests of Butrimonys Jews were carried out on 10-12 August 1941. During those days, the Jewish men of 18-40 years of age were subject to arrest. The then Police Chief of Butrimonys Leonardas Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis issued an order to seize golden and silver rings, watches and good clothes from the Jews subject to arrests. L. Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis would invite the head of Butrimonys’ Jews and, pointing to the list, order who of the selected young Jews had to contribute to public works and be brought to the market square. As soon as the selected Jews gather, local policemen and “partisans” would arrest them and drive them to the isolation ward of Butrimonys and later to Alytus. Before the Jews were transferred to Alytus, they were deprived of jewellery and other valuables. Ca 120-150 Jews were detained at that time.⁴ The shooting of the Jews from Alytus and other neighbouring towns of the county (as well as from Butrimonys) started on 13 August 1941.

The second wave of arrests of Butrimonys Jews rolled on 15-17 August (on 22 August as identified by other sources). Police Chief L. Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis called for the head of Jews once again and ordered the Jews to come to the market square. This time the policemen selected approximately 400 people, including women, children and the elderly. The detainees were firstly driven to the isolation ward of the town and then (on the same day) to Alytus. They were put in prison and later shot dead.¹

At the end of August following the order by L. Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis, Chief of Butrimonys Rural District Pranas Proškus-Praškevičius concerned himself with the founding of a ghetto. Totorių Street was selected as the place of the Ghetto where the remaining Jews of the town were settled (ca 600-1000 persons). The Jews from Stakliškės and Punia were also transferred to Butrimonys Ghetto.

⁶ Materials of interrogation of J. Borevičius, LSA, doc.col. 1, inv.sched. 1, file 98, p.p. 43-44.

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 79-80; P. Biržys-Akiras, “Alytaus apskritis: Džūku kraštas,” p. 628.

² Certificate from LSSR KGB Alytus Town Division of 23 February 1972, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 46, file 1167, p. 46.

³ Quotation from “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p.78.

⁴ Interrogation minutes of A. Jauneika of 9 December 1960, LSA, criminal case No. 46392/3, Vol. 2, p. 101; interrogation minutes of P. Senovaitis of 31 August 1944, *ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 131.

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 132; LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 46, file 1167, p. 46.

The Ghetto was guarded by the police.² Butrimonys Ghetto operated only for about two weeks. On the eve of the liquidation of the Ghetto, all the Jews of Butrimonys were driven to the primary school of the town. The following day (9 September 1941), a bus with 20 soldiers of Hamann's special squad came from Alytus. After the lunch, local policemen and white-bands started forcing the Jews out of the school and lined them up. The Jews who wore better clothes were ordered to undress to underwear. The Jewish column was driven to Klydžionys Village in the vicinity (2 km away from Butrimonys). Pits had already been dug there. The condemned were seated in the meadow close to the pits, then driven to them closer in groups and gunned down. The firing was carried out by soldiers of a special squad, whereas local policemen and "partisans" guarded the Jews awaiting their death. The execution was observed by a German officer with a camera. The execution of the Jews ceased in the evening. After that, the executioners returned to Butrimonys and celebrated their "deed" in the canteen of the town with homemade vodka and beer.³ According to the information available to the German Security Police and SD chief in Lithuania, 740 Jews (67 men, 370 women and 303 children) were killed in Butrimonys on 9 September 1941.⁴ That was how the last Jews from Butrimonys, Stakliškės and Punia perished.

However, Chief of the Police Station L. Kaspariūnas-Kasperskis was transferred from Butrimonys to the equivalent office in Birštonas for his self-action. When he left Butrimonys, the property seized by him was transported by 14-15 big carriages. Observing the scenery, local population would say: "The King of Jews Kasperskis is going".⁵

Jieznas

The Jews settled in Jieznas in the middle of the 19th century. During World War I (WWI) (1915) Tsarist government deported the Jews to Russia. A part of them returned to their native town after the war. There were 319 Jews in Jieznas in 1921, and 68 Jewish families lived there in 1930. Like in other towns in Lithuania, their majority was engaged in trade and crafts. Ca 1930, the Jews of Jieznas owned 16 shops (out of 18), two mills, 3 pubs (out of 6), 2 state alcohol shops, and a branch of Jewish *Volksbank*. There was also a synagogue in the town, a Hebrew school with 50 pupils, a primary school (teacher Ida Kibarskaitė), and a Jewish library.¹

The Lithuanian administration was restored during the first days of the war (under the Nazi occupation Jieznas Rural District was a part of Alytus County). Jurgis Randis became Chief of the Rural District, Vladas Bajerčius became Chief of the Police Station of the Rural District, and Jonas Valatka became Commander of Jieznas partisan platoon (which was later named riflemen's platoon of 80 men).²

Local communists, members of the Young Communist League, and soviet activists fell under persecution during the first weeks of the Nazi occupation. The detainees were locked-up in the cellar of the municipality building of the Rural District and a neighbouring building. All in all, several dozens of people were arrested. Some of the arrested were later transported to Alytus prison.³ Five detainees were shot by the Germans and local riflemen in the forest outside Jieznas on 30 June 1941.⁴

² Extract from the interrogation minutes of P. Proškus-Praškevičius of 19 September 1945. *ibid.*, p. 176; interrogation minutes of J. Jaseliūnas of 9 November 1960, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 252.

³ Interrogation minutes of A. Jauneika of 9 December 1960, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p.p. 102-103; interrogation minutes of J. Jaseliūnas of 9 November 1960, *ibid.*, p.p. 252-253.

⁴ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p.134.

⁵ Materials of interrogation of J. Borevičius, LSA, doc.col. 1, inv.sched. 1, file 98, p.p. 38-39.

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 383-384; P. Biržys-Akiras, "Alytaus apskritis: Dzūkų kraštas," p.p. 666-667.

² Extract from the interrogation minutes of A. Narkūnas of 23 September 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 45, file 1293, p. 35.

³ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 2, p.p. 85-86.

⁴ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Randis of 30 September 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 45, file 1293, p. 38.

In the middle of August 1941, like in the other parts of Lithuania, mass arrests and shootings of the Jews started. Chief of the Police Station V. Bajerčius asked Chief of the Rural District J. Randis to make up a list of all Jews of the town and their property. Such lists (of 350 persons of the Jewish nationality) were completed by the middle of August. Soon after, local policemen and riflemen started arresting Jieznas Jews who were suited for manual labour. On 16 August 1941, Chief of the Police Station V. Bajerčius informed the Director of the Police Department that 89 Jews, including 26 women, were detained in Jieznas Town.⁵ With the start of the arrests, a part of the town Jews hid away in the neighbouring villages and towns. Jieznas Jews who were transported to Prienai were shot dead together with the Jews from other towns on 27 August 1941. Several dozens of the Jews from Jieznas who were sent to Alytus were also gunned down in August 1941.⁶

On 1 September 1941, policemen and riflemen from Jieznas arrested the remaining Jews of the town, including women, children and the elderly. Jewish men were detained in the cellar of the municipality building of the Rural District, whereas women and children were kept in the synagogue. On the same day, men of the town were driven to the lake (on left bank of the Mekšrupys River) to dig a trench of 50 m long and 5 m wide. On the following day (2 September 1941), 5 officers and approximately 20 soldiers arrived at Jieznas. Three officers were German, two officers were Lithuanian, whereas the soldiers were Lithuanians only. They are likely to have been the notorious flying squad of Hamann, which was made up of several Germans and the squad of the 3rd company of the 1st battalion. The officers visited the Chief of the Police Station, V. Bajerčius. Soon after, the Jewish men (ca 50 persons) were taken from the cellar of the isolation ward and were ordered to undress to underwear. Then Hamann's strikers and local policemen together with the riflemen drove the condemned to the place of execution. The same was done with women and children kept in the synagogue.¹ The Jewish men were the first to die. Women and children were killed after them. The firing was carried out not only by the members of Hamann's squad but also by volunteering local riflemen (and there were seven of them). Other riflemen and policemen guarded the territory of the massacre. According to the report by K. Jäger, 144 Jews, including 26 men, 72 women and 46 children, were killed in Jieznas.²

Marcinkonys

During the German occupation, Marcinkonys was a part of Grodno County of Belarus Major Region.

Before WWII, the Lithuanians and the Jews had enjoyed good relations. Local population recalled the Jews as particularly just people. They would sell food and other goods to the Lithuanians on loan. The debts could be paid back in half a year or even a year, i.e. when the borrowers received money. Senior residents of Marcinkonys recalled doctor of Marcinkonys Leitman with respect as the latter often treated poor people of the town free of charge. During the Nazi occupation, Leitman and his family was driven to the Ghetto. A number of residents of Marcinkonys asked to leave the Leitmans free but the government ignored the request. Later somebody from the local population helped the Leitmans to escape from the Ghetto and hide away. However, a traitor appeared and informed the occupant government about the place of hiding of Leitman family. The doctor's family was arrested and shot.³

⁵ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 2, p. 86.

⁶ Ibid., p. 87, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p.133.

¹ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Randis of 30 September 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 45, file 1293, p.p. 39-40.

² "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p.134; extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Palionis of 10 October 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 45, file 1293, p.p. 41-42.

³ "Lietuviai ir žydai Varėnos rajone iki 1943 m." ("Lithuanian and Jews in Varėna District before 1943") (recollections of witnesses). Recorded by the teacher of history of Nedzingė Secondary School, Jadvyga Matijoškaitė. Manuscript, 1997, p. 4.

Marcinkonys Ghetto was set up at the end of 1941. The Ghetto was close to Marcinkonys railway station. It occupied the territory of 1.5 ha. The Ghetto territory was surrounded with barber wire. The Jews from Marcinkonys, Rudnia, Kabeliai, and most probably a part of Varėna Jews, were placed in the Ghetto. The number of Jews in the Ghetto reached several hundred.

Marcinkonys Ghetto was liquidated on 2 November 1941. The prisoners of the Ghetto were likely put on a train and driven in a non-identified direction (probably to a German concentration camp – note by A.B.). The operation had to be carried out by German policemen jointly with the German customs officers, foresters etc. (29 men in total) Reich Germans. Pariečė Hauptwachmeister d. Gendarmerie Wietzke was appointed to lead the operation.

The Germans surrounded the Ghetto ca 5 a.m. in the morning. Before the operation, they were given a direction to shoot those who would try escape or hide Jews. When the German policemen came to the Ghetto, they invited the representatives of the Jewish Council (*Judenrat*) and informed them about the forthcoming evacuation of the Ghetto. All the population of the Ghetto was ordered to gather with all their belongings at 8 a.m. in the square of the Ghetto. Ca 80 Jews came to the square on the set hour. The policemen ordered all those who gathered to go and see whether any other Jews remained in the buildings of the Ghetto. Finally, about 150 Jews gathered in the square. They were ordered to line up. All of a sudden, the Jews started running: some sought escape in the forest through the damaged fence of the Ghetto, whereas others ran back to the building of the Ghetto. The Germans started shooting at the running Jews from automatic rifles and pistols. Ca 90 Jewish men, women and children of different age were shot on the side. Later the Germans started walking from door to door and look for the Jews in hiding. When found, the Jews were shot on the spot. Having searched the houses in the Ghetto, the Germans found five secret bunkers. The Jews refused to get out of the bunkers, thus the policemen destroyed the bunkers with grenades. 132 Jews were killed at the time of liquidation of the Ghetto, however ca 200 Jews (mainly young men) succeeded to escape to the nearby forest. The killed Jews were buried in the forest.¹ The recently erected monument in memory of the victims of Marcinkonys Ghetto informs that on 3 November 1942 “the Nazi executioners and local collaborators killed over 600 Jewish children, women and men of Marcinkonys”. I believe that this number of victims is exaggerated by several times.

Those Jews from Marcinkonys Ghetto who escaped joined the squads of soviet partisans in the forest. Attacks by soviet partisans in Marcinkonys environs became rather frequent after the liquidation of the Ghetto. A part of the Jews hiding in the forest were betrayed to the occupant authorities by local population. Quite a few Jews who escaped from the Ghetto were in hiding close to Musteikos Village. They had bunkers in the forest and lived there (in total, 21 Jews, including 7 women). Resident of Musteikos Village Domas Tamulevičius showed the hideout of the Jews to the Germans. When the Germans arrived, they forced the Jews out of bunkers and shot them dead. However, there were other people in the Village who would bring the Jews food and help them in other ways (Janina Averkienė and others).

After the war (on 28 June 1945), an NKVD unit arrived at Musteikos Village. There were surviving Jews from Marcinkonys among them. NKVD arrested and shot 14 men of the Village (traitor D. Tamulevičius among them). Those who helped the Jews under the Nazi occupation were left unharmed.¹

Merkinė

¹ Hauptvachtmeister Wietzke’s communication of 6 November 1942 to the commanders of Grodno Police Department, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv. sched. 46, file 1303, p.p. 1-36 – 1-39.

¹ Story by Vldas Averka, resident of Musteikos Village of Varėna District. Recorded by pupil Jolanta Česnulytė from Varėna 1st Secondary School on 15 February 1997. The copy is kept in the personal archives of the author.

Merkinė Town had one of the largest Jewish communities in Alytus County. The first Jews settled in Merkinė as early as at the beginning of 16th century. According to the population census of 1897, 1900 Jews (73 % of the population) lived in Merkinė.

As in other bigger and smaller towns of Lithuania, the majority of the Jews were engaged in crafts and trade. In 1930, Petras Biržys-Akiras visited Merkinė and shortly described the life of Merkinė Jews. He based his observations on the story by 50-year-old resident of Merkinė Joselis Cirelštein. At that time there were 1700 Jews in Merkinė and 3 synagogues. Rabbi Dovydas Stupelis lived in Merkinė for 30 years. In 1924, US Jew Z.H. Fishel came to Merkinė to visit the tombstone of his father. He found the burnt Merkinė synagogue. Fishel contributed his money to the building of a brick synagogue which cost him approximately USD 10,000. All in all, there were 3 synagogues and 7 cheders (primary schools) in Merkinė. The local Jewish community had their bank during the inter-war period (in 1929, 325 Jews were its depositors) and a bookshop with over 1000 books in Hebrew, Yiddish and Lithuanian set up in 1900. There were even 145 shops (and almost all of them were owned by the Jews), 5 pubs, 1 inn, hotel, brickyard, and different workshops at the time when P. Biržys visited Merkinė.²

The Jews made up the majority of the population in Merkinė. There were 300 Jewish families there (no less than 1000 people) before the Nazi-Soviet War. The Soviets had deported some of the richest and most educated Jews from Merkinė to Siberia just before the war (e.g. the teacher from Merkinė Pro-gymnasium Kobačnikas and his family, etc.). 8-10 families were deported to the Siberia from Merkinė, all in all.³

The Germans troops occupied Merkinė on 23 June 1941. The town suffered severely from the military actions. The majority of the buildings was burnt. Shops were looted during the shootings by German soldiers and local people. 8 –10 people perished as a result of the military action. The passing by German military units gunned down 24 people, allegedly communists. During the first days of Nazi occupation, the German Military Commander's Office was set up in Merkinė, a provisional committee was established (and chaired by teacher Kazys Valiukas), and so was a partisan squad of 75 persons (with K. Valiukas as a commander) and a police station. 5 policemen served there. Juozas Kvaraciejus became Acting Chief of the Police Station of the Rural District (Bonifacas Naujokas became Chief of the Police Station in the middle of July 1941). During the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, the remaining communists, members of the Young Communist League, and soviet activists were subject to persecutions. In the middle of July 1941, 14 persons were detained in Merkinė isolation ward. Another 14 persons had to register themselves in the local Commander's Office.¹ On 6 July 1941, the list signed by Acting Chief of Merkinė Police Station J. Kvaraciejus included the names of 18 persons detained in Merkinė isolation ward for communist activities. There were 3 Jews, 1 Russian and 14 Lithuanians among them.² The list of "persons engaged in the anti-State activity" signed on the same day by J. Kvaraciejus included the names of 98 persons from Merkinė Rural District. The absolute majority of the listed persons were Lithuanians, though there were 15 Jews among them.³

At the beginning of the war, Merkinė Rabbi D. Stupelis hid himself. The German Commander of Merkinė ordered to find and deliver the 84-year-old rabbi. 50 more famous Jews of Merkinė were arrested. Not only the arrested Jews but all the Jewish population of the town were threatened with execution. Rabbi D. Stupelis dressed himself in festive clothes and came to the German commander.

² Akiras-Biržys, "Lietuvos miestai ir miesteliai" (*Lithuanian Towns*), Vol. 1 ("Alytaus apskritis: Dzūkų kraštas"), Kaunas, 1931, p.p. 478-479.

³ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 193-194; J. Perednienė, "Žydų bendruomenė Varėnoje XIX a. pabaigoje – XX a. I-oje pusėje" ("The Jewish Community of Varėna in the Late 19th Century and Early 20th Century"), 1997, manuscript, p.p. 5-6. The copy is kept in the personal archives of the author; "1941 m. birželio sukilimas," collected documents, compiled by V. Brandišauskas, V., 2000, p. 217.

¹ "1941 m. birželio sukilimas." Collected documents, p. 217.

² "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 2, p.p. 88-89.

³ Ibid., p.p. 90-94.

The executioners mocked at the rabbi and then killed him in a most sadistic way. The remains of the chopped body of the rabbi were buried in Merkinė Jewish cemetery.⁴

Soon after, the turn came for the surviving Jews of Merkinė to be killed. At the beginning of September 1941, policemen and white-bands of Merkinė drove Merkinė Jews to the synagogue and school, as ordered by Chief of the Police B. Naujokas. The Jews were told that they would be taken away for labour. The arrested Jews were kept in the synagogues and the school for 5-6 days. Their selection was made there too. Firstly, men up to 40 years were selected and taken away. Younger women and girls were taken somewhere on the following day. According to some witnesses, two large Jewish groups (one of 300 persons and the other one of 400 persons) were driven to Alytus prison by local white-bands.⁵ The arrested Jews of Merkinė were made starve. The Lithuanians who tried to help the Jews were pushed away. More Jews were brought to Merkinė from Leipalingis, Seirijai and Liškiava.⁶

Young men from Vilkiutinis, Papiškės and Navikas Villages of Liškiava parish were forced to dig ditches for the Jew-shooting by the policemen. The digging lasted the whole night. By the morning, a car with two Germans came. One of the Germans asked who was willing to shoot the Jews, but nobody volunteered. Then the German got very angry and ordered them to go home immediately and tell nobody what they were doing the whole night.¹

Merkinė resident Kazys Poguželskis gave evidence about the killing of the Jews: "I saw through the window of my house how Merkinė Jews were driven to the ditch. First, the Jewish men with tied hands were driven. Three policemen were ahead running up the hill; they were followed by the condemned surrounded with drunk policemen and SS officers. The victims had been evidently beaten by sticks and butts of rifles and were forced to run. When they reached the top of the hill, they were made to lie and were beaten again; finally they were driven to the nearby ditch. When they did away with the men, the turn came for women. I recall this as if everything has happened today and see teacher Mansauskienė who was loved by all the population of Merkinė passing by my house together with the crowd of those condemned to the place of their death, hand in hand with her children. Other women also carried their children. The picture was horrible. One of the girls suddenly started running away from the group. Unfortunately, she was not lucky to get away far. She was shot near the steep bank of the Stangė Brook close to my house. I have lived up to 83 years, but I have never seen such a horrifying and touching picture..."²

Merkinė Jews were shot on 10 September 1941. On the eve of the execution, two cars full of soldiers in Lithuanian and German uniforms came from Alytus. The following morning (10 September) the arrivals and local white-bands drew the Jews to the pine-tree grove behind the Jewish cemetery. Before the execution, the condemned were undressed and forced to the ditches and shot from above. First, the Jews of the working age were shot, then women, children and the elderly followed. Some white-bands from Merkinė also took part in the shooting. Chief of the Police B. Naujokas was also present in the place of the massacre. A part of the victims' clothes were taken by the Jew-shooters themselves. According to the report by K. Jäger, 854 Jews, among them 223 men, 355 women and 276 children, were killed in Merkinė.³ That was how the old and famous community of Merkinė Jews was exterminated.

⁴ E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry*, p. 221.

⁵ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Janulevičius of 4 November 1946, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 140, p.p. 37-41.

⁶ J. Perednienė, "Žydų bendruomenė Varėnoje..." ("Jewish Community in Varėna"), manuscript, p. 8.

¹ J. Perednienė, "Žydų bendruomenė Varėnoje..." p.p. 8-9.

² Quotation from J. Perednienė, "Žydų bendruomenė Varėnoje..." p. 8.

³ Extract from the court session of the War Tribunal of 19 October 1944, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 140, p. 122; Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Janulevičius of 4 November 1946, *ibid.*, p.p. 124-125; "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 2, p. 390; *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 135.

Seirijai

There were ca 400 Jewish families in Seirijai before WWI and 1050 Jews in 1921.⁴ As far as its size is concerned, the Jewish community of Seirijai submitted to the Jewish community of Alytus in size. In 1930, upon his visit to Seirijai, P. Biržys-Akiras briefed about the Jews of Seirijai in his notes: “There are over 200 Jewish families in Seirijai, they have 2 synagogues, one of them is over 100 years old, a wooden one; the other synagogue is also wooden and was built in 1927. Local Rabbi Izraelis Guldinas has lived in Seirijai for 22 years; he left for America in 1929 together with Rumšiškis Rabbi to raise funds for the Holy Jewish Seminary in Kaunas. They say that the rabbi of Seirijai has already settled in Rochester Town and would not return to Lithuania.

The Jewish *Volksbank* was set up in Seirijai on 9 January 1921. It had 212 depositors [...]”.¹

The Jews owned the majority of the shops in the town. Some of the Jews (Josifas Grebarskis, Fruma Vezbotskis) were the owners of big estates, other had breweries and a liqueur factory. The local Jewish community also had a Hebrew school (with 120 pupils), large library, sections of different Jewish political parties, charity organisations, sports clubs “Makabi” and “Hapoel”, and a team of Jewish firemen. A part of Seirijai Jews left for USA, Mexico, South Africa and Palestine during the inter-war period.²

The German troops occupied Seirijai on 23 June 1941. The town had been shelled by the German aviation, thus, the majority of houses were burnt. When the Germans occupied the town, the local population informed them that the communist of Jewish nationality, Joselis Garbarskis, had been shooting at the Germans. The Germans took him away and shot dead. They also shot Jeruchomas Garbarskis who tried to defend his father and several other Jews.³

During the first days of the Nazi occupation, former officer of the criminal police Alfonsas Nykštaitis and Chief of the Rural District Antanas Maskeliūnas organised an armed “partisan” squad in Seirijai. The squad co-ordinated its activity with commander of the German Secret Police in Seirijai Böhme. The registration of former soviet officials and activists was announced. During the first weeks, 20 soviet activists were killed in Seirijai (the majority of them were Lithuanians). Jews of the working age were forced to hard labour. Although the Jews of the town lived in their homes until August, they had to wear the Yellow Star of David. The Jews were used for labour following the instructions by Commander Böhme.⁴

Even before the mass killing of the Jews in Seirijai (11 September 1941), a part of the town Jewish men had been taken to Alytus. The Jews were told that they are taken away for labour. The Jewish men were delivered to Alytus prison by Seirijai white-bands.⁵ The Jews who were transferred to Alytus from Seirijai were later gunned down together with the Jews from other rural districts of Alytus County. Before the mass killing, the Jews from Seirijai were kept in a vocational school. On 11 September 1941, the squad of the 1st battalion under command of B. Norkus and J. Obelenis came to Seirijai from Alytus by bus. Firstly, men were brought to the place of execution in Barauciškės forest (ca 3 km South East of Seirijai). They were laid down in the ditches and shot by the self-defence battalion from above. After that women and children were taken to this place. They were shot in another ditch.

⁴ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 262.

¹ P. Biržys-Akiras, “Alytaus apskritis: Dzūkų kraštas,” p. 406.

² N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 262-263.

³ E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry*, p. 244.

⁴ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p.p. 98-102.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of B. Skliutas of 25 June 1960, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 46373/3, Vol. 2, p.p. 130-130 a.p.

Local “partisans” drove the Jews to the place of the execution and guarded them during the shooting. After the shooting the “partisans” drank beer in Seirijai pub.¹

According to the report by K. Jäger, on 11 September 1941, 953 Jews, including 229 men, 384 women and 340 children, were killed in Seirijai.²

Simnas

On the following day (12 September 1941), the squad under command of B. Norkus shot 414 Jewish men, women and children in Simnas.³ Search for more information on the participation of the “flying squad” in the killings in Simnas were not successful. What is available is that the “flying squad” killed no less than 3,386 Jews during its operation in Alytus County from 9 to 12 September 1941.

Varėna

Varėna Town started growing during the second half of the 19th century with the construction of a railway, setting-up a ground and barracks. According to the data of the 1897 population census, there were 2,624 people, including 1473 Jews in Varėna. Varėna was severely damaged during WWI. A lot of houses were burnt and quite a few people left the town. There were 70 farmsteads and 407 people in Varėna in 1923. After the war, the town was divided between Poland and Lithuania. The demarcation line went along the Merkys River. Lithuania had Varėna I (which became a part of Alytus County), and Poland had Varėna II. During the Independence, Varėna I was the centre of the Rural District.⁴ The majority of Varėna Jews stayed in the Lithuanian part of Varėna. Upon his visit to Varėna in 1930, P. Biržys – Akiras described the life of local Jews, too. He talked with Varėna Rabbi Hirša Jankelis Bleimanas who came to Lithuania from Crimea in 1922. P. Biržys – Akiras wrote: “there were 3 Jewish synagogues and approximately 600 families in Varėna before the war. Now there are only 70 families left. There were 3 people’s schools, and only one of them remained. There was one synagogue, restored in 1922. The Jews also had their *Volksbank*, established in 1920, which had one million litas turnover in 1929”.⁵ During the inter-war period, Varėna Jews had fourteen shops, carton factory (property of Dovydas Jaršanskis), and a bookshop. A part of Varėna Jews emigrated to USA, Argentina and Palestine during the inter-war years.¹

The German troops occupied Varėna on 26 June 1941. During the first days of the occupation, the persecution of the remaining communists, soviet activists and Jews started. The town population were acquainted with the order by Varėna commander, which threatened with capital punishment for disobedience to the occupant government. Curfew was imposed in the town. All the Jews were ordered to register themselves at 8 a.m. every morning at the Police Station.² Soon the Jews were ordered to wear the Yellow Star of David. The Jews were anxious about their future. At the beginning, they thought that they were taken for labour. Thus, Varėna Jews sent their delegation to Director of the Sanatorium Doctor Grigaitis asking for his pleading. At that time, Wermacht colonel stayed in the sanatorium. However, nobody provided any assistance to the Jews.³

¹ Interrogation minutes of J. Celiavičius of 17 May 1960, *ibid.*, p. 201; interrogation minutes of K. Macedulskas of 29 March 1960, *ibid.*, p.p. 204-204 a.p.

² “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134.

³ *Ibid.*, p.135.

⁴ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 207; B. Kviklys, “Mūsų Lietuva” (*Our Lithuania*), V., Mintis, 1989, Vol. 1, p.p. 413-414.

⁵ P. Biržys-Akiras, “Lietuvos miestai ir miesteliai,” Vol. 1, p. 565.

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 208.

² “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p.p. 112-113.

³ J. Perednienė, “Žydų bendruomenė Varėnoje XIX a. pab. – XX a. I-oje pusėje,” p. 7.

During the first days of September local policemen and white-bands forced Varėna Jews to the synagogue of the town. They were kept there for several days. On 10 September 1941, Chief of Alytus Security Police Pranas Zenkevičius, his deputy Juozas Kvedaravičius, and 30 – 40 strikers came to Varėna. The arrivals jointly with the local collaborators made the Jews undress to underwear and drove them in the direction of Druckūnai Village. The people of the town were ordered to sit at home and close the curtains. The Jews were taken to the former grounds of the Tsarist Army and gunned down in two trenches at the forest. The witnesses say that several people from Varėna took part in the shooting. According to the report by K. Jäger, 831 Jews, including 541 men, 141 women and 149 children, were killed in total.⁴

Only Parson of Varėna Jonas Gylys dared to express his open protest against the killings. On the eve of the massacre, he addressed Chief of Varėna Police Station Juozas Kvaraciejus by asking to let him visit the Jews kept in the synagogue. Although the Chief of the Police banned this visit, J. Gylys came to the synagogue on his own where he comforted and consoled the condemned. The guards drove the parson away from the synagogue. After the execution of the Jews, J. Gylys openly and severely condemned the killing of innocent lives from the pulpit (14 September 1941): “the innocent people were beaten by the Lithuanians in uniforms who also pushed old people and pregnant women, they also shed innocent blood in Varėna forest. The victims suffered as Christ suffered from the Jews. And they already looted their property without waiting for the blood to dry”.⁵ J. Kvaraciejus reported about this brave deed of J. Gylys to his superior, i.e. Chief of Alytus County Police. In 1942, Parson J. Gylys was moved from Varėna.

The report of 1 December 1941 by K. Jäger on the Jew-shootings in Lithuania by the German Security Police and SD action squad No. 3 makes it possible to conclude that in August and September 1941 no less than 6,165 Jews were killed in Alytus Town and its environs. The real number of victims had to be higher, since the report by K. Jäger did not include the record of those Jews who were killed as communists and soviet activists during the first days and weeks of the war. Moreover, it is known that several dozens of Jews from Jieznas were sent to Prienai (Marijampolė County) and were killed together with the Jews from Prienai. Therefore, the comparison of the number of the Holocaust victims with the statistical data of 1 January 1941 results in certain difference (8,030 – 6,165 = 1865 people). It is likely that a small number of the Jews from Alytus County succeeded in escaping to the depths of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the war, although their number should not be very big, since the German troops occupied the whole territory of Alytus County during the two first days of the war.

⁴ S. Samulevičius, “Negyjanti 60 metų žaizda: Kraupią Varėnos krašto žydų tragediją prisiminus” (“Uncured Wound of 60 Years: Recalling the Horrible Tragedy of the Jews from Varėna Region”), in *Merkio kraštas*, 8 September 2001, No. 69; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 135.

⁵ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 113.

KAUNAS COUNTY

Kaunas County occupies almost the central role in the history of the Genocide (Holocaust) of the Lithuanian Jewry. Kaunas was the administrative and political centre of Lithuania during the Nazi occupation. Namely Kaunas Town and County were the first grounds for practising political measures of the Nazi occupant (including those with respect to the Jews). There were 16 rural districts within Kaunas County under the Nazi occupation. There were numerous Jewish communities in almost all the centres of rural districts (excluding Raudondvaris, Pakuonis, Aukštoji Panemunė, and Lapės). All of them had been exterminated by the start of September 1941.

When the Nazis occupied Lithuania (Kaunas County was occupied during the first three days of the war – note by A.B.), the persecution (arrests, beating, and shooting) of the remaining communists, members of the Young Communist League and soviet officials started. The first weeks of the occupation (ca until August 1941) was the time when the Jews in Kaunas County were often persecuted for political reasons, i.e. as collaborators and supporters of the soviet occupant regime, rather than for those racial or national (for being Jews). Jewish communists, members of the Young Communist League, soviet officials and activists, mainly men, suffered most. Mass persecution of the Jews in Kaunas County started in August 1941, as in the majority of Lithuania counties, with the introduction of German civilian administration in Lithuania. SA Oberführer Arnold Lentzen was appointed Commander of Kaunas Military District (which was composed of Kaunas, Kėdainiai, Marijampolė, Šakiai, Alytus, Vilkaviškis and Lazdijai Counties) by the end of July. According to the unofficial data from the Board of Statistics, 83,161 (86.91 %) Lithuanians and 4,363 (4.56 %) Jews lived in Kaunas County on 1 January 1941.¹

It is known that the end of June 1941 marked the start of mass killings of the Jews in Kaunas. According to the report by K. Jäger, Chief of the German Security Police and SD 3rd Action Squad (the latter took over the functions of the Security Police in Lithuania on 2 July 1941 – note by A.B.), the first wide-ranging killing of the Jews of Kaunas County took place in Vandžiogala on 9 July 1941. 32 Jewish men, 2 Jewish women, 1 Lithuanian woman, 2 Lithuanian communists, and 1 Russian communist were killed at that time.² The Nazi resolution of the “Jewish issue” was in the hands of the German Security Police and SD, however, an efficient and quick resolution of the issue was impossible without the assistance of Lithuanian administration (first and foremost without the police and so-called partisans (white-bands)). As K. Jäger wrote in his report, extermination of the Jews “could be achieved only thanks to the flying squad of selected men and commanded by Obershturmführer Hamann who clearly understood my goals and was capable of ensuring co-operation with Lithuanian partisans and corresponding civil institutions”.¹

However, the Jews had been also persecuted in other ways before their mass killing. First of all, attempts were made to deprive them of civil and human rights and segregate them from people of other nationalities. Later they were driven to ghettos and camps of temporary isolation and their property was seized. Finally, they were entirely exterminated. Commanders of German military districts issued adequate decrees on the Jewish issue. For instance, Commander of Kaunas District A. Lentzen issued a communiqué of 4 August 1941 No.3 to Kaunas District. Following the communiqué the Jews who ran away from the town during the war were not allowed to return to Kaunas District. All the owners and managers of houses were strictly ordered not to give shelter to the returning Jews. The Jews were also banned to sell and realise in any way their movable and immovable property. Failure to obey the provisions of the communiqué would result in the severest punishment.² Thus, from the very start the Nazi occupant the government was interested in the registration and taking over of the Jewish property. On 6 August 1941, the governor of

¹ National composition of the Lithuanian population according to the data of the Board of Statistics of 1 January 1941, LCSA, doc.col. R-743, inv.sched. 5, file 46, p. 172.

² “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 131.

¹ Quotation from “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 138.

² “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 29.

Kaunas County sent a letter to all the chiefs of rural districts within the county where he obliged them to report by 13 August on the amounts that the Jews failed to pay in different taxes (national, local, etc.), the debts of the Jews to the people of other nationalities, banks, co-operatives, etc. and the Jewish property which had not been nationalised so far (by the soviet government): building, farms, different enterprises and property which is not used in households.³ Soon, the chiefs of rural districts reported corresponding information to the governor of the county.⁴ County governor shortly replied to the chiefs of rural districts that “according to the directives of Kaunas District Commander the remaining Jewish property within the boundaries of rural districts, including inventories etc. are transferred to the chiefs of rural districts who will take care of proper management and protection of this property”.⁵

The process of the registration and seizure of Jewish property went along the concentration of the Jews in ghettos and temporary camps. On 7 August 1941, Kaunas County Governor Bortkevičius gave instructions to all the chiefs of rural districts and chiefs of police stations concerning settlement of the Jews in ghettos by 15 August 1941. The so-called partisans had to guard ghettos. The Jewish men of 12 –60 years of age who were in ghettos had to be listed according to professions and the lists had to be transferred to municipalities, police stations and Kaunas County governor. To maintain order within ghettos, the Jewish police of 5-15 persons had to be organised and “armed” with wooden sticks. Jewish committees (of 12 persons) had to be elected in ghettos to manage internal issues. The Jews have to take care of food on their own account; they received reduced ratios without the right to get meat and dairy products, fat and eggs. Food allocated for ghettos had to be handed over to the Jewish committee, which took care of its distribution. Chiefs of rural districts and police stations of rural districts were made responsible for setting up ghettos and maintenance of the established order.¹

Noted here should be the fact that ghettos were not established in all the centres of rural district within Kaunas County. Larger ghettos were set up in Jonava, Vilkija, Garliava, and Darsūniškis. Generally speaking, ghettos were set up in synagogues and neighbouring Jewish houses. After the mass killing in Kaunas 7th Fort in July 1941, mass execution of the Jews started in Kaunas County in the middle of August. In the past the Jews who were suspected to be engaged in communist activities or support to the soviet government fell victims of the massacre most often, however, from that time on, the extermination of all the Jews was lunched (including men, women, and children), and it was based on racial-anti-Semitic ideology of the Nazi. Thus, real genocide (Holocaust) started, and the Jews were killed on the grounds of their race (nationality). In the middle of August, the Nazi authorities enjoyed more favourable preconditions for mass killing of the Jews as the latter were concentrated in ghettos. The Jews of Kaunas Town were in ghetto by that time, thus the Nazi administration had more capacities and time to “solve” the Jewish issue in Kaunas and other counties.

On 16 August 1941, upon the instructions by the German Security Police and SD, Director of the Police Department Vytautas Reivytiš sent a secret circular No. 3 to the Chief of Kaunas County Police: “Upon the receipt of this circular, arrest all the Jewish men over 15 years of age and the women who during the Bolshevik occupation were distinguished for their Bolshevik activities or are still distinguished for this activity or their impertinence, as detailed in the notes. The detainees have to be gathered on the main roads and information about them has to be sent to the Police Department immediately with special means of communication. This communiqué should specify the place and the number of detainees and the kind of detained Jews.

Arrangements should be made to supply the detainees with food and appropriate protection, thus auxiliary police can be employed to this end.

³ Letter by Kaunas County Governor of 6 August 1941 to all the chiefs of rural districts and Kaunas County Tax Inspector, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 193, p. 39.

⁴ List of immovable Jewish property in Kaunas County, which was nationalised and remained in the Jewish hands, *ibid.*, b.191, p. 691.

⁵ Letter by Kaunas County Governor to all the chiefs of rural districts, *ibid.*, b.191, p. 200.

¹ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p.p. 290-291.

This circular has to be carried out within two days from its receipt. The detained Jews will be guarded until they are taken and transferred to the camp.”² The said circular was sent to the chiefs of police of other counties. The chiefs of police stations would keep the Police Department informed about the procedure for implementation of the circular. The process of gathering of Jews and their preparation for killing was very fast. 34 Jews were detained in Babtai where they were locked-up and kept in the synagogue.

73 Jewish men and 46 women were detained in Garliava, all in all. They were also kept in the synagogue. By 17 August 1941, 83 men and 20 women were arrested in Jonava. The Jews from Kruonis Rural District were settled in Darsūniškis Village. Only about 50 old Jewish women and ca 30 children below 15 years of age were left in Kruonis Rural District. 54 Jews were gathered within the boundaries of Petrašiūnai Police Station. They were settled in the premises of Petrašiūnai municipality.¹

30 Jews who were detained in Vandžiogala were sent to Babtai. 280 men and 120 women were transferred from Vilkija (the documents do not specify where – note by A.B.). Only 18 women were left in Vilkija synagogue. 21 Jewish women from Čekiškės, 14 Jewish women from Veliuona, 62 Jewish women from Serežius, and 14 Jewish men were also kept there. All in all, 129 Jews were kept in Vilkija synagogue.

67 Jews, including 29 from Zapyškis, 2 from Jankai and 36 from Paežerėliai were kept in the isolation ward of Zapyškis Police Station.²

Before their execution, the Jews were registered and plundered by the way of “contributions”. On 21 August 1941, following the instructions of Kaunas district commander, the governor of Kaunas County sent his decree to the chief of rural districts (unedited text – note by A.B.): “Following the instruction by the district commander I hereby order you no later than 25 August to charge the Jews (of both genders) within the boundaries of the rural district with contributions and demand from them the following amounts: from 1 to 10 Jewish heads – 1000 roubles, from 11 – 20 Jewish heads – 2,000 roubles, etc.”

This requirement has to be submitted to the senior representative of the Jewish Committee (*balabos*) with the warning that in case of the failure to pay the required contributions within 24 hours, each of them will be subject to the punishment of shooting.

The extracted amounts were put on the special account of the municipality.

Upon the completion of this order, a report should be delivered to me no later than 26 August and contain a detailed description of this task”.³

Shortly, the chiefs of rural districts started sending reports to the county governor about the collected contributions. The reports make it evident that in total 2,945 Jews of Kaunas County paid 298,100 roubles as contributions by 25 August 1941.⁴

On 22 August 1941, Kaunas District Commander A. Lentzen urged Chief of Kaunas County Bortkevičius to complete gathering of the Jews in the county and clarify their approximate number in the county.⁵

Following the order by the district commander, Kaunas County governor authorised the chiefs of rural districts to deliver the following information on their rural districts by 28 August 1941: 1) Jewish men of 12 – 60 years of age, 2) Jewish men of over 60 years of age, 3) Jewish women from 12 to the old age, 4) Jewish children (girls and boys) below 12 years and 5) the total number of the Jews. An order was also

² Secret circular by the Police Department of 16 August 1941 No. 3, LCSA, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p. 1

¹ Reports by the chiefs of police stations to the Police Department, LCSA, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p.p. 20-89.

² Ibid.

³ Letter by Kaunas County Governor of 21 August 1941 to all the chiefs of rural districts, LCSA, doc.col.R-1534, inv.sched.1, file 190, p. 1.

⁴ Reports of the chiefs of the rural districts of Kaunas County to the County Governor about contributions paid by Jews, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched.1, file 190, p.p. 2-21.

⁵ Letter by the Commander of Kaunas District of 22 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, *ibid.*, file 186, p. 5.

given to include into the specified number of men all those men who had previously been detained, irrespective of where they were taken to.¹

Following the order of the county governor, the chiefs of rural districts kept informing their superior about the number of the Jews in their rural districts. At that time (28 August 1941), there were no Jews in Lapės and Aukštoji Panemunė Rural Districts. In total, data were collected on 3,220 Jews in Kaunas County by 28 August 1941.² The majority of the Jews from Raudondvaris Rural District were transferred to Vilijampolė Ghetto in the middle of August 1941. The Jews from Lapės Rural District (20 people) were also moved there.³

28 August 1941 marked the start of mass killing of the Jews throughout Kaunas County. The majority of the executions not only in Kaunas County but also in the entire Lithuania (except for Vilnius and Šiauliai Districts) were related to the aforementioned flying (mobile) squad (*Rollkommando Hamann*) of SS Obershturmführer Joachim Hamann. Thus, who were they, the said Hamann and his squad? On the eve of the Nazi – Soviet War, the German Security Police and SD action groups (*Einsatzgruppen*) were set up and charged with the task to kill the Nazi enemies in the occupied counties. On the eve of the war with the Soviets, the Nazis set up four action groups – A, B, C and D. The commanders of the action groups were directly appointed by H. Himmler and R. Heydrich. One action group was set up for each army group (Northern, Central and Southern). “A” Group was attributed to the Northern Army Group which was charged with the task to occupy the states round the Baltic sea and Leningrad. “A” Action Group was made up of the 2nd and 3rd Action Squads (*Einsatzkommandos*) and 1a and 1b Special Squads (*Sonderkommandos*).⁴ “A” Action Group was first commanded by SS Brigadeführer Walter Stahlecker. The 3rd squad (hereinafter 3/A) of “A” action group was commanded by SS Shtandartenführer Karl Jäger. This Action Squad had over 120 members who were divided into three smaller squads (*Zuege*). J. Hamann was commander of one of the squads and adjutant of K. Jäger.⁵ J. Hamann was known as active anti-Semite. K. Jäger and J. Hamann are believed to have arrived in Kaunas as early as the first days of the German occupation. The latter was charged with the task by Commander of “A” Action Group W. Stahlecker to organise a flying squad for mass killing of the Jews and communists.⁶ The German Security Police and SD did not have enough capacities to carry out these tasks. Therefore, 3/A Action Squad invited the soldiers of the National Labour Defence (TDA) Battalion which was about to be formed in Kaunas for help. It happened so that 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion was often assigned mass killings of the Jews. J. Hamann’s flying squad did not function permanently nor it had its special place of location. Generally speaking it would be formed for carrying out specific operations involving several German Gestapo officers and several dozens soldiers of the TDA. J. Hamann himself very often refrained from going to the executions in the province and limited his duties to charging the soldiers of the 1st Battalion with this task (i.e. Lieutenants A. Dagys, J. Barzda, and B. Norkus). One might guess that the following officers of SS would often represent the German side: Hauptsharführer Porst, Stuetz, Salzmann, Mack and Planert. SS Hauptsharführer H. Rauca was J. Hamann’s deputy.¹

The so-called flying squad would go on missions only when all the preparatory work was completed, i.e. the Jews condemned to death were gathered in one place, all local police and “partisans” were charged with guarding them, a more remote place is chosen for the execution of the Jews (often in a forest or remote fields), and ditches were dug. As a rule, soldiers and volunteers of 3rd Company appointed for the mission would often be engaged in killings in the province. Several German Gestapo officers would also arrive at

¹ Letter by Kaunas County Governor No. 973 (undated) to all the chief of rural districts, *ibid.*, file 186, p. 8.

² Communiqué of the chiefs of rural districts to Kaunas County Governor on the number of the Jews in rural districts, *ibid.*, file 186, p.p. 9-33.

³ *Ibid.*, file 193, p. 46; file 190, p. 16.

⁴ H. Krausnick, *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen*, p.p. 124-125.

⁵ K. Stang, *Kollaboration und Massenmord*, p.p. 154-155.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.155.

¹ K Stang, *Kollaboration und Massenmord*, p. 160.

the planned place of the massacre by car. The report by K. Jäger of 1 December 1941 contains a long list of place names where Hamann's squad jointly with the Lithuanian "partisans" carried out the Jewish massacres. According to the available archival data, it can be stated that not all the places listed in K. Jäger's report (particularly those in the province) involved the soldiers of TDA Police Battalion (later named the 1st Battalion). It is possible to guess that the Jews from quite a few places of Lithuania were killed by local police and "partisan" squads without Hamann's flying squad taking part.

Petrašiūnai

Although Petrašiūnai was only a suburb of Kaunas, the notorious report by K. Jäger notes it as a separate place of the Jew massacre. That is why the massacre of Petrašiūnai Jews is here attributed to Kaunas County rather than to the killings in the town. Moreover, executions of Petrašiūnai Jews were completed by the time when other Jewish massacres were completed in the towns of Kaunas County.

During the first days of the war, former rifleman Vladimiras Nefiodovas organised a squad of rebels. Rebels had several fights with the withdrawing Red Army groups in Petrašiūnai environs. The squad of V. Nefiodovas operated on 25-29 June 1941 and was later formed out. Petrašiūnai rebels shot 10 and took as captives 30 Red Army officers, captured ca 50 retreating carriages of the Jews and returned them at the disposal of Kaunas Commander's Office.²

Petrašiūnai Jews were likely executed on 30 August 1941. The surviving letter of Kaunas County Governor Bortkevičius indicates that on that day the prisoners of war buried the Jews in Petrašiūnai.¹

On the day of the killing, ca 40 soldiers of 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion led by Lieutenants A. Dagys and Bronius Pauliukonis left for Petrašiūnai in two lorries. Warrant-Officer Z. Arlauskas read the list of the soldiers who had to carry out the operation.²

The lorry came to the valley covered with bushes in the vicinity of Petrašiūnai. Two trenches of over a dozen meters long were dug. The Jewish men, women and children were driven to the place. They were guarded by local armed men dressed as civilians. The condemned were forced to the edge of the trenches in groups, their backs facing the shooters. According to the command by Lieut. A. Dagys and Warrant-Officer Z. Arlauskas, the Jews were shot simultaneously at both the trenches. The soldiers of the 3rd Company carried out the shooting, whereas the locals guarded the place of the massacre and the victims who waited for their turn. When the execution was over, the soldiers of self-defence returned to Kaunas by lorries.³

German Gestapo officers did not take part in the killing of Petrašiūnai Jews. According to the report by K. Jäger, 125 Jews (including 30 men, 72 women and 23 children) were killed in Petrašiūnai.⁴

We will further examine the operation of killing the Jews in rural districts of Kaunas County.

Jonava

Jonava was home to the largest Jewish community in Kaunas County. The Jews started settling in Jonava from the very founding of the town (1775). During the inter-war period, the Jews made up the majority of the town population. 2,710 Jews (65% of town population) lived in Jonava in 1932, and their number reached 3,000 on the eve of the war (in total, there were 5 thousand people in Jonava at that time). The Jews lived intensive economic, public and cultural life. The majority of the Jews in the town were engaged in industry, crafts and trade. The Jews had 7 synagogues, religious and circular schools, libraries,

² "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p.p. 298-299.

¹ Letter by Kaunas County Governor of 5 November 1941 to Commander of Kaunas District, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 191, p. 172.

² Interrogation minutes of J. Palubinskas of 1 October 1961, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47337/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 332-333.

³ Interrogation minutes of J. Palubinskas of 1 October 1961, *ibid.*, p.p. 334-336.

⁴ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p. 134.

political, cultural and sports organisations in Jonava. In 1929, Jewish *Volksbank* in Jonava had 560 depositors.⁵

When the war broke out, many of the Jews in Kaunas and Jonava tried to recede. The receding Jews and soviet activists were shelled and bombed by German aircraft and Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans. A part of the fugitives were killed or injured, others hid themselves in neighbouring villages or returned home, some of them succeeded at escaping for Russia.

On 24 June, Lithuanian partisans launched their activity in Jonava region. They blocked the roads from Jonava and made the receding Jews return back to Jonava. On the same day, Lithuanian partisans fired at the soviet military train heading from Kaunas to the East¹.

German troops occupied Jonava on 25 June 1941. There was a fierce battle for Jonava between Germans and Soviet units, which also claimed lives of civilians from Jonava and resulted in the destruction and burning of many building in the town. Some of the Jews from Jonava tried to hide in Kaunas. There they were arrested and shot in the 7th For at the beginning of July 1941².

During the first days of the war, a partisan squad organised themselves in Jonava. About 50–60 men joined the squad. The squad was led by Reserve Officer Vladas Kulvicas. Later the partisan squad was renamed into self-defence battalion. This squad was subordinate to the local Commander's Office of Wermacht, moreover, it had to carry out instructions by the German Security Police (Gestapo). During the first days of the occupation, the self-defence battalion did not carry out repressive tasks. The members of the squad took care of the destroyed town, gathered and buried bodies of the perished German and Russian militaries and civilians. In addition, the members of the squad gathered arms that remained and brought them to the headquarters of partisan (self-defence) squad based in municipality. The squad also guarded the bridge over the Neris River, railway and other significant objects of military importance. Several weeks later, the squad was fully armed and supplied with clothing of Lithuanian army brought from Kaunas. The operational functions of the squad were extended. Officers of the Security Police Simas Dolgačius and Jokūbas Alekna started increasingly interfering in its activity. They started using the squad for persecution and extermination of soviet activists and Jews³.

On 7 August 1941, the governor of Kaunas County issued instructions to all the chiefs of rural districts within the county and chiefs of police stations on the settlement of Jews in ghettos by 15 August 1941⁴.

At the start of August, the soldiers of self-defence squads drove all the Jewish men to the barracks close to the Neris River. The Jewish ghetto had to be established namely there. It is likely that the detained Jews dug several large pits in Girelka (Giraitė) forest outside Jonava (ca 1.5 km Northeast). The Jewish men were kept in the barracks for several days. On 14 August 1941, the Jews were lined up by the self-defence battalion and accompanied to Giraitė forest. The arrested were told that they are that they were driven to work. Several German Gestapo officers and a squad of soldiers arrived at the place of the execution from Kaunas. A group of Jewish men who realised what was happening started running away from the forest. The majority of the fugitives were shot, however, 6 men succeeded to escape. Later 5 fugitives were arrested and shot and only one of the fugitives Nachumas Bliumbergas lived up to the end of the Nazi occupation. The Jews were forced into the pits and shot by German and Lithuanian self-defence soldiers.¹ According to the report by K. Jäger, 552 Jews (497 men and 55 women) were killed in Jonava on 14 August 1941.² There were quite a few party and soviet activists among those shot.³

⁵ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 378-382.

¹ Interrogation minutes of N. Bliumbergas of 30 October 1945, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47536/3, Vol. 2, p. 183 a.p.

² E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry*, p. 284.

³ Interrogation minutes of V. Gineitis of 25 April 1967, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p.p. 55–56.

⁴ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p.p. 290–291.

¹ Interrogation minutes of N. Bliumbergas of 30 October 1945, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47536/3, Vol. 2, p. 183 a.p.

² "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p. 133.

³ Interrogation minutes of S. Kaplan of 8 June 1967, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47536/3, Vol. 1, p. 256.

At the end of August 1941, Jr Lieut. Jonas Jurevičius was appointed commander of the Jonava self-battalion instead of V. Kulvicas who abused alcohol.⁴ After the first mass killing of the Jews from Jonava, the surviving Jewish families spent a couple of weeks in their flats. After that the soldiers of self-defence battalion forced all the Jews who lived in their flats to the barracks (“ghetto”). The Jews left a great many of their belongings in their flats. As a result, mass loitering of their flats started. The barracks were constantly guarded by 12 soldiers of self-defence battalion. The Jews spent a couple of days in the barracks before their execution. However, before the killing the Jews had to pay contribution. On 23-24 August, Jonava Jews paid 120,000 roubles in contributions⁵. There were 1257 Jews in Jonava Rural District before the execution⁶. The second mass execution of the Jews from Jonava took place in late August and early September (between 31 August and 2 September). On the day of the execution, following the instructions of the Chief of Jonava Security Police, Jr Lieut. J. Jurevičius appointed 16 men from his squad to carry out the execution⁷. The Jews were driven to the place of the massacre in the Giraitė forest in groups. Before the escorting, soldiers of self-defence battalion were given vodka. Chief of Jonava Security Police and Commander of Self-defence Battalion Jr Lieut. J. Jurevičius was also present in the place of the massacre. As soon as the first group of the condemned was killed, TDA Battalion Lieutenants B. Norkus and Vladas Malinauskas came to Giraitė forest from Kaunas. They continued commanding in the execution jointly with the chief from Gestapo. J. Jurevičius returned to Jonava and did not join in the killing later⁸. The shooting was done not only by the members of Jonava squad but also by the “partisans” from other areas and several Germans who were all dressed as civilians. At the beginning men were shot, and later women and children followed. Before the shooting the victims had to undress to underwear. As soon as one group was executed, the bodies were buried under sand and chalk, later another group was brought to the pit and shot. Even some of executioners could not stand the horrible scenery. Member of Jonava squad L. Gineitis was even locked-up in the isolation ward of the German Commander’s Office for “recreant behaviour” at the shooting⁹.

1556 Jews (112 men, 1200 women and 244 children) were killed during the second execution in Jonava¹⁰. Only 200 women and children were left in Jonava Ghetto¹¹.

Jonava population was very dissatisfied with the shooting of the Jews. The then Police Chief of Jonava Rural District, Juozas Stankevičius, informed his superiors in Kaunas about that. The Police Chief of Kaunas Town, K. Renigeris, invited J. Stankevičius to come to Kaunas. J. Stankevičius arrived in Kaunas and together with K. Renigeris went to see the German military commander. The latter phoned to the Gestapo and said that the remaining Jews from Jonava would be transported to Kaunas Ghetto. Upon his return to Jonava, Stankevičius found agreement with the Chief of the Rural District on the appointment of carriers for transporting the Jews to Kaunas. On 4 October 1941, Jonava Jews were taken to Kaunas Ghetto. In November 1941, the Germans arrested J. Stankevičius for his assistance to Jews and made criminal changes against him. He was sentenced 2 years in prison. In autumn 1942, J. Stankevičius was in Kaunas prisons.¹ After the Jews were transferred to Kaunas Ghetto, a numerous Jewish community of Jonava ceased to exist.

In 1943, Jonava self-defence squad was incorporated into the Lithuanian 257th Police Battalion.²

⁴ Interrogation minutes of J. Jurevičius of 8 October 1949, *ibid.*, file 13545/3, p. 24.

⁵ Letter by the Chief of Jonava Rural District of 25 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 6.

⁶ Letter by the Chief of Jonava Rural District of 30 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, *ibid.*, file 186, p. 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25; interrogation minutes of V. Gineitis of 29 April 1967, *ibid.*, file 47536/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 66-67.

⁸ Interrogation minutes of J. Jurevičius of 8 October 1949, *ibid.*, b. 13545/3, p.p. 25-26.

⁹ Interrogation minutes of V. Gineitis 29 April 1967, *ibid.*, file 47536/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 67-71.

¹⁰ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134.

¹¹ Interrogation minutes of S. Kaplan 8 June 1967, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47536/3, Vol. 1, p. 257.

¹ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Stankevičius of 28 September 1954, LSA, doc.col.3377, inv.sched.55, file 138, p.p. 158-159; interrogation minutes of S. Kaplan 8 June 1967, *ibid.*, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47536/3, Vol. 1, p. 257.

² Interrogation minutes of V. Gineitis 20 May 1967, *ibid.*, p. 118.

At the end of Nazi occupation (summer 1944), the Germans tried to eliminate the trace of their crime in Giraitė forest. For almost two weeks, the Jewish remains were recovered and burned in the place of the massacre. The place of their incineration was surrounded with soldiers and non-authorized persons were strictly forbidden to get closer.³

The Holocaust survey on other rural districts of Kaunas County will be presented in an alphabetic order.

Babtai

There were ca 1200 people living in Babtai before WWI, of whom 80% were Jews. The number of Jews decreased at the times of the Independent Lithuania. A part of them emigrated to USA or moved to other towns of Lithuania. There were 153 Jews (ca 20% of the town population) in Babtai in 1923.⁴

The German troops occupied Babtai on 24 June 1941. Local authorities were restored in the town. Justinas Janušauskas who performed his duties under Smetona's rule became Chief of the Rural District, and Kazys Trebunevičius (other sources identify him as Tribinevičius) was appointed Chief of Police of the Rural District. A "partisan" (white-bands) squad was organised of former riflemen. The squad was led by Stanislovas Aniulis from Varekonys Village. "Partisans" carried out orders of the chiefs of the Rural District and the Police.⁵ As early as the first days of occupation, arrests of communists, members of the Young Communist League and soviet activists started. Several Russian people (among them Stepanida Patyševa and two her sons – 17-year-old Leonid and 15-year-old Pimen) were shot.⁶

On 17 July 1941, 8 communists and soviet activists, including 6 Jews, were killed in Babtai.¹

Mass persecution of Jews started in August 1941. At first, the Jews were registered. On 11 August 1941, Chief of Babtai Rural District informed the Governor of Kaunas County that there were 93 Jews living in town.² Several days later the secret instruction by V. Reivytiš was carried out, and 34 adult Jews were arrested and locked up in the town synagogues. 30 Jews from Vandžiogala were also brought here.³ The Jews were also ordered to pay contributions. Thus, they paid 9 thousand roubles.⁴ The Jews from Babtai and Vandžiogala were shot between 28 August and 2 September 1941. According to the majority of witnesses, the executions were carried out at the beginning of September.

In the morning of the execution, the chief of Babtai Town brought several dozens of men from the town and neighbouring areas to the selected place in Babtai forest near the Nevėžis River. He ordered the men to dig up a ditch of 50 m long, 1 m broad and 2 m deep. It was completed about 2 p.m.⁵ When the ditch was ready, two lorries with the soldiers of 3rd Company of 1st Battalion (ca 50 men) arrived at the site. They were led by Officers B. Norkus, J. Barzda and A. Dagys. The detained Jews were driven by local "partisans" and policemen from the town to the place of the execution. A part of the Jews who had moving problems (old people, small children) were brought in carriages. The Jews were undressed to underwear, driven to the ditches and lined up facing the trench on its very edge. Following the command by an officer, the soldiers fired at the backs of the victims. A couple of local "partisans" also joined the shootings. Firstly, men were killed, then women, children and the elderly followed. All the soldiers of the 3rd Company who

³ Copy of the interrogation minutes of V. Kreičmaris of 29 September 1944, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 162 a.p.

⁴ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 76.

⁵ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p.p. 291-294.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.p. 293-296.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

² Letter by the Chief of Babtai Rural Police of 11 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 193, p. 40.

³ Reports by the Chiefs of Police Stations to the Police Department, *ibid.*, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched.2, file 2, p.p. 20-89.

⁴ Letter by the Chief of Babtai Rural District of 25 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 6.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of V. Žlobekas of 15 June 1962, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47337/3, Vol. 8, p.p. 39-40.

arrived fired in turns. The execution lasted for several hours. According to the evidence by witnesses about 300–400 Jews from Babtai and Vandžiogala were executed. After the executions, local executors and arrivals shared clothes and other more precious items of the victims among themselves.⁶ According to the report by K. Jäger, 83 Jews from Babtai and 252 Jews from Vandžiogala (in total, 335 people) were executed.⁷ This closely coincides with the number of victims identified by witnesses of the execution (300–400 persons). According to the evidence of one of the witnesses, a German with a camera also observed the massacre of the Jews from Babtai and Vandžiogala.⁸

Čekiškė

Situated on the banks of the Dubysa River, Čekiškė Town was a very important point on the Kaunas–Raseiniai road. About 200 Jewish families lived in Čekiškė before WWI. During the inter-war period, the number of Jews in the town decreased significantly. Ca 60 Jewish families lived in Čekiškė before the Nazi-Soviet War (making up 45% of the urban population).¹

The majority of the Jews were engaged in crafts and vegetable-growing. Local Jewish community had its own bank during the Lithuanian Independence (with 60 people as its members), synagogue, Hebrew school and a library. Šmuelis–Zevas Melamedas was the last rabbi of Čekiškė.²

Lithuanian administration started operating in Čekiškė during the first days on Nazi-Soviet War, like in other counties and rural districts of Lithuania. One of the initiators of the administration in Čekiškė was a big farmer (who owned 103 ha farm in A. Smetona's times) and member of the nationalist party as well as member of Kaunas County Board, Bronius Semaška. On 24 June 1941, a meeting was called in the town, where a decision was made to set up a provisional committee that would take care of re-establishment of authorities. The meeting proposed to elect Stumbras Chief of Čekiškė Rural District, and Stasys Minelga Chief of the Police of the Rural District. The candidates had to be approved by Kauno County governor and chief of the police of Kaunas County. The said nominations were approved by the Commander's Office in Kaunas on 26 June 1941. Permit was granted to set up a police station with 5 staff members in Čekiškė. The organisation of an auxiliary police (white-bands) squad also started.³ Soon persecution of communists, members of the Young Communist League, soviet activists and Jews was launched. 4 communists and soviet activists, among them Povilas Sadauskas, brothers Vincas and Kazys Žiaukas and Stasys Karpavičius were shot in Čekiškė during the first days of the Nazi occupation.⁴ On 4 July 1941 Aleksas Skuodis was appointed Chief of the Police of Čekiškė Rural District (instead of S. Minelga). The former received the order from the chief of Kaunas County police to arrest communists and soviet activist first and then take care of the arrests of the Jews. The arrested communists and soviet activists had to be interrogated concerning their activity under the soviet occupation, and their interrogation files had to be transferred to the Security Police in Kaunas. In July 1941, Kazys Mikelionis, Chief of Kaunas District of the Lithuanian Security Police came to Čekiškė. He made a list of communists and soviet activists to be arrested jointly with A. Skuodžius. From July to November 1941, the police of Čekiškė arrested over a dozen of communists, members of the Young Communist League, and soviet activists.⁶

⁶ Interrogation minutes of P. Matiukas 2 October 1961, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47337/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 157-161.

⁷ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p. 134.

⁸ Interrogation minutes of V. Žlobeckas 15 June 1962, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47337/3, Vol. 8, p.p. 39-42.

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 80.

² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³ Extract from the court session of the War Tribunal of 24-25 November 1944, LSA, doc.col.3377, inv.sched.55, file 154, p.p. 94-95.

⁴ Certificate by the Executive Committee of Čekiškė District DŽDT of 5 October 1944, *ibid.*, p. 102.

⁶ Extract from the court session of the War Tribunal of 24-25 November 1944, LSA, doc.col.3377, inv.sched.55, file 154, p. 98,101.

Stasys Gudavičius, Commander of the Armed Squad of Vilkija Commander's Office, was one of the organisers of an auxiliary police squad in Čekiškė. As soon as he came to Čekiškė, he held a meeting with the population and encouraged the latter to set up an armed squad for fighting communists, soviet officials, and the Jews. After this visit quite a few volunteers appeared and joined the armed squad. S. Gudavičius visited Čekiškė several times. Generally speaking, he visits would result in shooting of individual Jews.¹

Wide-ranging mass persecution of Jews started in August 1941. In the middle of the month, ghettos were set up and arrests of the Jews started in Kaunas County.

There was no ghetto established in Čekiškė. In the middle of August, local policemen and white-bands gathered Jews in the town synagogue and a few days later accompanied them to Vilkija. Vilkija was one of the best known points of gathering of the Jews in Kaunas County. On 16–18 August 1941, Jews were brought to Vilkija from Seredžius, Veliuona, Lekėčiai and Čekiškė Rural Districts. They were kept in Vilkija synagogue. The Jews were also gathered during the weeks that followed.² The Jews who were escorted from Čekiškė to Vilkija were allowed to take clothes, footwear and valuable things. Jewish immovable property stayed under the supervision of the Rural District authorities.³

On 22 August 1941, commander of Kaunas District sent a letter to Kaunas County governor where he demanded to complete gathering of the Jews immediately and get the exact number of those who lived in the county.⁴ On its own behalf, Kaunas County Governor sent a letter to the chiefs of rural districts by obliging them to deliver information by 28 August 1941 on the number of Jews by age within the rural districts.⁵

In his reply to the letter of the superior, the chief of Čekiškė Rural District informed that there were 144 Jews, of whom 70 women and 42 children in the Rural District.⁶ At that time, a part of the Jews from Čekiškė could have been taken to Vilkija. In the middle of August 1941, a bigger part of the Jews from Vilkija were taken to Kaunas, thus, they were likely a group of the Jews from Čekiškė among them. The other part of Vilkija Jews was shot in Pakarklė forest (2 km away from Vilkija) close to Jaučakė Village on 28 August 1941. The Jews brought from Vilkija synagogue were shot by the 3rd Company (Commander Lieut. J. Barzda) of the 1st Auxiliary Police Service Battalion (former TDA Battalion).⁷ 402 Jews, including 76 men, 192 women and 134 children, were shot at that time.⁸ The Jews from Čekiškė who were over there were also shot together with Vilkija Jews.

Another execution of Čekiškė Jews was held on 4 September 1941. That day marked the shooting of not only Čekiškė but also Veliuona, Seredžius and Zapyškis Jews. 146 Jews of Čekiškė, including 22 men, 64 women and 60 children were killed.⁹ The author is not aware of the details of these killings.

Like is other rural districts, the Jews from Čekiškė Rural District had to pay contribution before the shooting took place. Čekiškė Jews (144 persons) paid the contribution of 15,000 roubles.¹

In his letter on the Jewish property issue of 5 September 1941, Kaunas District Commander A. Lentzen specified that household items could be sold in an auction. However, the ban was put on selling

¹ Ibid, p. 100.

² A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m." (*Genocide of the Jews of Veliuona Rural Districts, 1941*), in "Lietuvos valsčiai: Veliuona" ("Lithuanian Rural Districts: Veliuona"), V., 2001, p. 268.

³ Extract from the court session of the War Tribunal of 24-25 November 1944, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 154, p. 96.

⁴ Letter by Kaunas County Commander of 22 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 186, p. 5.

⁵ Letter of Kaunas County Governor No. 973 (undated) to all the chiefs of rural districts, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 186, p. 8.

⁶ Letter by the Chief of Čekiškė Rural District to Kaunas County Governor, *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷ A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", Veliuona, p.p. 268-269.

⁸ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p. 134.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹ Communiqué of the Chief Čekiškė Rural District to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 14.

metal items, art values, and carpets of good quality in the auction. An order was issued to register the latter and keep the district commander informed about the process.² A special commission was set up for registration and evaluation of the surviving Jewish property in Čekiškė and B. Semaška chaired the commission. Almost 50,000 roubles were received for the sold Jewish items. The money was put on the account of the municipality of the Rural District. B. Semaška himself bought a wardrobe, table, two beds, and 4 chairs.³

Garliava

400 Jews (about 100 families) used to live in Garliava before WWI. In 1921, the town was inhabited by 206 Jews, and before the Nazi-Soviet war, it was home to 70 Jewish families. The majority of the Jews in the town were engaged in small trade, crafts, and vegetable-growing. There were also rich Jews, including owners of estates, mills and workshops. Josifas Švarcas had a big estate in Julijanava (several kilometres away from Garliava). The Jewish community of the town had a synagogue, *Yavne* * (with 45 pupils) and an Yiddish school (which was attended by a similar number of pupils). During the inter-war period, a part of the Jews of the town emigrated to USA, Canada, South Africa and Palestine.⁴

On the first days of the Nazi-Soviet War, Lithuanian partisan squads were very active in Garliava Rural District. Even three squads of partisans were gathered: one of them was in Julijanava Village, another one in Juodvaris Village and the third one in the environs of Stanaičiai–Garliava. They joined approximately 120 men.⁵

Mass persecution of the Jews started in August 1941. Following the instruction of the occupant authorities, the Jews were registered and arrested. On 12 August 1941, the chief of Garliava Rural District informed Kaunas County governor that there were 285 Jews in the Rural District.⁶

Before the shooting the Jews were registered once again and deprived of their property with the imposed contributions. By the end of August, 247 Garliava Jews paid 25 thousand roubles in contributions.⁷

According to the report by K. Jäger, Garliava Jews were shot between 28 August and 2 September 1941.¹ As stated in the witness by participants and observers of the massacre, Garliava Jews were killed at the very end of summer, most probably between 28 and 31 August. A couple of weeks before the shooting (middle of August) local policemen and “partisans” drove the Jews of Garliava and neighbouring villages to the town synagogue. On the day of the execution, policemen and “partisans” drove several dozens of men to the valley close to Rinkūnai Village (1 km to the East of Garliava) and ordered them to dig up a trench, for the alleged release of water. Having understood what the trench was for, the Jews refused to dig it. Then the policemen brought several dozens Lithuanian men from Garliava. The latter dug up a trench 50–60 m long, 2 m wide and 1.5 m deep.²

On the day of the massacre, several dozens of soldiers were selected from the 3rd Company of the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion barracks in Žaliakalnis. They were brought in two lorries, led by Lieut. J. Barzda (other witnesses mention Lieutenants A. Dagys and B. Norkus) to Garliava. The lorries stopped at the synagogue of the town where the Jews were kept. Local policemen and “partisans” (white-bands) drove

² Letter of Kaunas District Commander of 5 September 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, *ibid.*, p. 85.

³ Extract from the court session of the War Tribunal of 24-25 November 1944, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 154, p. 96.

* A Jewish religious school for children.

⁴ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 107.

⁵ “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents, p.75.

⁶ Communiqué by the Chief of Garliava Rural District of 12 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 193, p. 17.

⁷ Letter by the Chief of Garliava Rural District of 25 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, *ibid.*, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 14.

¹ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134.

² Interrogation minutes of J. Ivanauskas of 20 March 1962, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched.58, file 47337/3, Vol. 8, p.p. 26-28.

the Jews out of the synagogue and forced them to the place of the execution. Not only did they drive men, women and children to the place. The policemen and white-bands surrounded the place of the execution and brought the Jews to the trench in groups. Firstly, Jewish men were killed. They were lined up on the edge of the trench and fired at the back from a distance of several metres. Firing was executed following the command of officers.³ The execution started in the late afternoon and was over at night. Some of the soldiers of the battalion had torches and finished the injured victims under the torch light. About 300 Jews were killed according to the witnesses. K. Jäger specifies that 247 Jews, among them 73 men, 113 women and 61 children, were killed in Garliava. After the execution the soldiers of the 3rd Company returned to Garliava and drank beer in a pub. At the same night they returned to their barracks by lorries.⁴ The trench was buried under soil by men from neighbouring villages. Witnesses do not mention the German participation in the killing of Garliava Jews. It is likely that everything “was placed in order” by the 3rd Company, local policemen and “partisans”.

Kruonis

There were several Jewish families in Kruonis Town during the inter-war period. When the occupant authorities carried out registration of the Jews and their property at the end of July 1941, 153 Jews were registered in Kruonis Rural District. The Jews of Kruonis Town had 1 synagogue, 20 living houses, 19 cowsheds, 6 barns, and 7 stockyards. All the buildings were wooden and of little value.¹

On the first days of the Nazi-Soviet War, residents of Kruonis Juozas Jurevičius, Jonas Jankevičius and Jonas Arlauskas set up a rebel squad. This squad registered itself in the Commander’s Office of Kaunas on 25 June 1941. It had 25 men.² They would fire at and arrest small groups of the Red Army soldiers or individual soldiers who retreated along Alytus–Kaunas road. During the first days of the war, member of the squad Antanas Jakubauskas cut the telegraph wire of the unit headquarters of the Red Army and shot the soldier who guarded it. Before the arrival of the Germans member of the squad Jonas Sventickas tore away the red flag from the Executive Committee of the Rural District replacing it with the three-coloured Lithuanian flag. After that he went home and turned on the radio at its full volume, which transmitted the anthem of Lithuania at that moment.³ During the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, former partisans (white-bands) started terrorising communists, members of the Young Communist League, soviet activists and the Jews who remained in the town. Pranas Maleckas was appointed Police Chief of Kruonis Rural District. He had five subordinate policemen. The arrested communists and soviet activists were locked up in isolation ward. In summer 1941, 70 non-Jewish communists and soviet activists were arrested. The majority of them were sent to Kaunas and some time later released. No less than 6 of the detainees were shot at the site on the edge of Kruonis.⁴ On 29 June 1941 (Sunday) policemen and white-bands forced local Jews to the square of the town, mocked at them in different ways and beat. Member of the Squad Pranas Pūras beat Jews Judelis and his old mother. Armed J. Arlauskas broke into the flat of Kurganas and forced all the family out to the square. Kurganas family were beaten severely. Then, the white-bands harnessed Kurganas and made him carry the carriage of firewood round the square. Other Jews were ordered to roll timber logs from one place to another. On the night from Sunday to Monday, white-bands killed the Jewish families of

³ Interrogation minutes of J. Vosylius of 10 April 1961, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched.58, file 47337/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 36-38.

⁴ Interrogation minutes of J. Palubinskas 12 October 1961, *ibid.*, p.p. 310-315; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p.134.

¹ Letter by the Chief of Kruonis Rural District of 13 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched.1, file 193, p. 19.

² “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents, V., 2000, p.p.73, 75.

³ Certificate by LSSR KGB of 9 April 1959 on the rebel squad of Kruonis of 1941, LSA, doc.col.3377, inv.sched.55, file 149, p.p. 164-165.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.p. 165, 167.

Chackelis and Pikšterai. Later the Jews were systematically driven by the white-bands to perform different manual labour and were beaten often.⁵

Following the 16 August 1941 order on the arrests of the Jews issued by Director of Police Department V. Reivytius, the Jewish men of Kruonis Rural District (in total, 87 persons) were driven to the ghetto set up in Darsūniškis Village at the second half of August. A ghetto was not established in Kruonis itself. 25 Jewish women were shot in Gojus forest (3 km away from Kruonis) at the end of August 1941.⁶ They were likely to have been shot by the white-bands of Kruonis Town. The surviving Jews of Kruonis were killed between 28 August and 2 September 1941 in Darsūniškis. According to the report by K. Jäger, 99 Jews (10 men, 69 women and 20 children) were shot there.¹ The circumstances of this killing in not know to the author.

Before the killing, the Jews of Kruonis had to pay a pecuniary contribution. The authorities of the Rural District collected 8 thousand roubles from the Jews.² A part of the property of the victims was taken by the white-bands.³

Pakuonis

In the middle of July 1941, Juozas Stankevičius from Kaunas was appointed Chief of Police of Pakuonis Rural District. By late July and early August, J. Stankevičius received the letter from Chief of the Police of Kaunas Town Kęstutis Renigeris ordering to arrest all the Jews of the Rural District. J. Stankevičius replied to K. Renigeris informing the latter that he had no capacities to arrest all the Jews. Then Renigeris ordered to arrest as many as possible. Pakuonis policemen arrested 14 Jews. The arrested were transferred to Garliava Ghetto (where they were most probably killed together with the Jews from Garliava – note by A. B.). J. Stankevičius tried to maintain order and tempered particularly active anti-Semites. Criminal charges for beating Jews and looting their property were instituted against white-band Žekas. In connection with this, J. Stankevičius was transferred to the office in Jonava by his superiors.⁴ When the Jews were arrested, they were also registered. According to the data of 11 September 1941, 45 Jews lived in Pakuonis Rural District.⁵ Soon, over a dozen Jews of Pakuonis were transported to Garliava Ghetto. Pakuonis Jews were made to pay a pecuniary contribution. On 23 August 1941, 22 local Jews paid 3 thousand roubles.⁶ The destiny of the remaining Pakuonis Jews was not bright. They seem to have been killed between 28 August and 4 September 1941, like the majority of the Jews from other rural districts within Kaunas County.

Rumšiškės

Ca 100 Jews lived in Rumšiškės before WWI. In 1915, the Tsarist government deported the local Jews to Russia. After the war, a part of them returned to the hometown. During the inter-war period, about

⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

⁶ Ibid., p. 167; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 392; Letter by Kaunas County Governor to Kaunas District Commander on the number of Jews registered in the County of 28 August 1941, LCSA, doc.col. 1534, inv.sched. 1, file 186, p. 33.

¹ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134.

² Communiqué of the Chief of Kruonis Rural District to Kaunas County Governor, undated, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 4.

³ Certificate by LSSR KGB of 9 April 1959 on the rebel squad of Kruonis in 1941, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 149, p. 167.

⁴ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Stankevičius of 28 September 1954, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 138, p. 156.

⁵ Letter by the Chief of Pakuonis Rural District of 11 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 193, p. 45.

⁶ Letter by the Chief of Pakuonis Rural District of 23 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, ibid., file 190, p. 11.

50 Jewish families lived in Rumšiškės. The local Jewish community was engaged in trade and crafts, it had its house of prayer, a Hebrew school and charity organisations.⁷

During the first week of Nazi-Soviet War, a partisan squad of 30 men organised itself. Kazys Žydavičius, reserve Jr Lieut. Leonas Šimaitis and reserve Lieut. Kazys Medzevičius stood at the founding of the squad. Already on 26 June 1941, the partisans started arresting communists, soviet government supporters and Jews who had liking for the soviet government. Members of the squad also arrested small groups of the Red Army soldiers and the Jews who retreated from Kaunas to Vilnius. The arrested red army soldiers were transferred to the units of the German Army.¹ The arrested Jews were often robbed by partisans. In August, the local white-bands arrested almost all the Jews in the town and locked them up in Rumšiškės synagogue. Only the family of local pharmacist was left free. Young Jewish men and also the arrested fugitives from Kaunas were moved to Kaunas. Only Jewish women, children and the elderly were left in Rumšiškės synagogue. They were used by different manual labour.²

On 19 August 1941, the chief of Rumšiškės Police Station reported to the Director of the Police Department on the situation of the Jews in Rumšiškės Town: “[...] there were 140 Jews (men, women and children) in Rumšiškės Town. They were concentrated in one area and supervised by the police.

On 15 August, the units of the German and our army arrived. Under command by Expedition Lieut. Skaržinskas, all the Jewish persons from 15 to 70 years of age who had contributed to Bolshevik activities by assisting the communists and were dangerous for the currently established rule and public order were transported from Rumšiškės. In total, 70 persons were taken away and 70 remained, who were basically children and the elderly. The remaining Jews were gathered and settled in one neighbourhood where they were supervised”.³

Before the shooting, 78 Jews of the town had to pay the contribution of 8 thousand. It was paid by the Jews on 23 August 1941. The collected money was kept in the accounting office of the Rural District municipality.⁴

The Jews who were left in Rumšiškės had to be killed shortly. They were killed by the soldiers of the Lithuanian self-defence unit from Kaunas (probably 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion – A. B.). They were killed on the edge of Rumšiškės forest close to the old Rumšiškės–Pieveliai road. The family of the local pharmacist was also among those executed. The last Jews in Rumšiškės (ca 70–80 persons) were shot on 29 August 1941.⁵

The property of the arrested and detained Jews was sold in actions. They took place in Rumšiškės on 19, 25, 26 August and 20 September 1941. 30,123 roubles were received in exchange to the Jewish property in addition to 8 thousand collected through contributions.¹

Seredžius

In the middle of 19th century Seredžius had a numerous Jewish community (1090 persons in 1847). According to the data of the 1897 population census, 1174 Jews lived in the town, and 800 in 1914 (90% of the town population). The number of the Jews in Seredžius started decreasing at the end of 19th century as a

⁷ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.257.

¹ “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents, compiled by V. Brandišauskas, V., 2000, p.p. 84-85.

² Interrogation minutes of M. Virbickas of 14 June 1967, LSA, doc.col.K-1, inv.sched.58, file 47533/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 53-54.

³ Report by the Chief of Rumšiškės Police Station of 19 August 1941 to the Director of the Police Department, LCSA, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p. 63.

⁴ Letter by the Chief of Rumšiškės Rural District of 25 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, *ibid.*, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 3.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of I. Šimkūnas of 1 June 1967, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47533/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 93-95; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 393.

¹ Letter by the Chief of Rumšiškės Rural District to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 32.

result of emigration to USA and South Africa. In 1915, Jews were deported to Russia by the Tsarist government, the majority of whom came back after the war. A great many of the Jews in the town were engaged in trade, crafts and farming. The Jews also had a small liqueur factory. In 1924, the Jewish *Volksbank* in Seredžius had 143 depositors. During the years of independence the local Jewish community had a synagogue, two *cheders*, a Hebrew school, a library, sections of different political parties, charity organisations, and “Makabi” sports club.²

112 Jewish families (356 persons) lived in Seredžius Rural District in 12 August 1941.³ In the middle of August, when Jewish arrest and gathering operation were carried out in Kaunas County, 62 Jewish women and 14 men (who were likely killed in Vilkija on 28 August 1941 – note by A. B.) were transferred from Seredžius to Vilkija Ghetto.⁴ Prior to the killing, Seredžius Jews were forced to pay a contribution. 188 Jews of Seredžius Rural District paid the amount of 18,000 roubles.⁵ According to the report by K. Jäger, the Jews of Seredžius were killed on 4 September 1941. On that day, 193 people (6 men, 61 women and 126 children) were killed in the environs of Skrebėnai Village (2 km away from Seredžius).⁶ The author is not aware of all the circumstances of this tragedy.

Veliuona

100 Jewish families lived in Veliuona before WWI. During the war, the Tsarist government deported the local Jews to Russia. After the war, a part of the Jews returned. In 1921, 258 Jews lived in Veliuona and there were about 400 of them before the Nazi-Soviet War. Like in all other small towns of Lithuania, the majority of Jews were engaged in small trade and crafts, others grew vegetables and sailed cargo along the Nemunas River. At the end of 19th century schools of rabbis (*yeshivas*) were established in Veliuona, moreover, there were two synagogues and a Yiddish school in the town.¹

The German troops occupied Veliuona Rural District on the first day of the war. As early as the first day of the occupation, local authorities were set up in Veliuona: provisional committee, police station and squad of partisans (white-bands). Kazys Ramonas from Kaunas became the first Chief of the Police Station of the Rural District, and Juozas Milius led the partisans. The Police Station and partisan squad established themselves in the building of Veliuona Police.²

Already during the first days of the German occupation, local police and partisans started arresting the remaining communists, soviet activists, and the Red Army soldiers. 55–60 of the said persons were arrested, including a couple of Jews. The majority of the arrested were interrogated, some were released, others were convoyed by the white-bands to Kaunas and handed over to the Security Police (in total, ca 15–20 persons).³

At the beginning of July 1941, the chiefs of Veliuona Rural District authorities were changed. The officials from A. Smetona’s times returned to their offices. Benadas Cvirka, who carried out corresponding duties in 1934–1940, became Chief of the Rural District, and the Office of the Chief of the Police Station of the Rural District were taken over by Kazys Tautkus who arrived from Kaunas. The squad of partisans

² N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 296-297.

³ Letter by the Chief of Seredžius Rural District of 12 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 193, p. 22.

⁴ Reports by the chiefs of police stations to the Police Departments, *ibid.*, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p.p. 20-89.

⁵ Letter by the Chief of Seredžius Rural District (undated) to Kaunas County Governor, *ibid.*, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 9.

⁶ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p.134; Vol.2, p.393.s

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 361-362.

² Interrogation minutes of J. Gudelis of 1 September 1944., V. Kvietkauskas of 1 October 1944, J. Sabaliauskas of 7 October 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 34255/3, p.p. 94-95, 204, 237.

³ Manuscript of A. Rukšėnas’ article “Veliuonos valsčius pirmąsiais nacių okupacijos mėnesiais” (“Veliuona Rural District during the first months of the Nazi occupation”), p.p. 7-8, copy kept in the personal archives of the author.

(white-bands) grew up to 60 persons. By the middle of September 1941, the squad was dispersed and its Commander J. Milius left Veliuona.⁴

The persecution of Veliuona Jews started already in July 1941. At the beginning of the month, occupant authorities ordered Chief of the Police Station K. Tautkus and Chief of the municipality of the Rural District B. Cvirka mark the houses of Jews in the territory of the Rural District. The Jewish houses were marked with the inscription "Jude". The Jews were banned to walk on the pavement, get on the street at the specified time, they were forced to perform public works (dig trenches, clean streets etc.). Later lists of Jewish property and its seizure were carried out.⁵

The first Jews of Veliuona were killed in the Jewish cemetery of the town at the end of July following the order by Commander of the "partisan" squad J. Milius. Three Jews were shot, and the fourth one had a lucky escape (he was not a local, as he originated from Jurbarkas). These Jews were shot as soviet activists.⁶

The second execution of Veliuona Jews took place in the pine-tree grove at the Gystus River around 20 August 1941. At that time, a group of 15 armed men came by lorry to Veliuona from Seredžius. They had the list made by the Security Police and ordered the chief of the Rural District and chief of the Police to deliver the enlisted Jews. In total, 40–50 middle-aged Jewish men were arrested and brought to the synagogue. On the following day they were killed in the pine-tree grove at the Gystus River (1.5 km away from Veliuona).

Thus, during the two days of July, 50–60 Jewish men were executed in the Jew killing operations in Veliuona.¹ They were killed by local white-bands and those activists who came from Seredžius.

In the middle of August 1941, the operation of arrests and gathering of the Jews was launched in the entire Kaunas County. It marked the start of the preparation for mass extermination of the Jews. At the end of 1941, four German Gestapo officers came to Veliuona and ordered the chief of the Rural District and the chief of the Police Station to arrest all the Jews and sent them to a ghetto which was being founded in Vilkiija. The chief of the Rural District commissioned the white-bands with compiling the lists of the Jews to be transferred to Vilkiija. Local white-bands locked up the Jews in the town synagogue.² On 9 August 1941, the chief of Veliuona Rural District informed Kaunas County governor that there were 237 Jews in Veliuona Rural District at that time.³

Veliuona Jews were transported to Vilkiija Ghetto in several phases. According to the evidence of Veliuona post office employee J. Sabaliauskas, 60 Jewish women and children were transported to Vilkiija at the beginning of August, about 100 at the end of August, and about 200 at the beginning of September. Other witnesses say that at the beginning of September 1941, about 150 women and children were taken to Vilkiija. According to the data of the special commission of 1945, 74 Jewish families were transported from Veliuona in the direction of Kaunas, 271 persons all in all.⁴ The Jews of Veliuona transported to Vilkiija were killed together with the Jews in Vilkiija Ghetto in August and September 1941. Before the execution, the Jews from Veliuona were charged with contribution payment. On 22 August 1941, 160 local Jews (on 9 August, there were 237 Jews in Veliuona – note by A. B.) paid 16,000 roubles which were transferred to the accounting office of the municipality.⁵

⁴ Ibid., p.8.

⁵ A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", Veliuona, 2001, p. 265.

⁶ Interrogation minutes by B. Mickūnas of 14 December 1959, J. Danilaitis of 13 June 1959, P. Lukošius of 16 June 1959, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 45116/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 46-47, 217-218, 219-220.

¹ A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus žydų genocidas 1941 m.", Veliuona, p.p. 265-266.

² Ibid., p.268.

³ Letter by the Chief of Veliuona Rural District of 9 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 193, p. 57.

⁴ A. Rukšėnas, "Veliuonos valsčiaus...", Veliuona, p. 268.

⁵ Letter by the Chief of Veliuona Rural District of 25 August 1941 to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 2.

The report by K. Jäger indicates that on 4 September 1941, 159 Veliuona Jews (2 men, 71 women and 86 children) were executed. According to historian A. Rukšėnas, that did not mean that they were killed namely in Veliuona. In the opinion of the historian, this date likely meant the time they were convoyed to Vilkija and shot in Vilkija. After 4 September 1941, no Jews remained in Veliuona.⁶

The seizure and transfer of Jewish property took place in parallel to their arrests and shooting. More valuable things were listed, Jewish houses were sealed. 8 commissions were set up as ordered by Veliuona Rural District, and they had to evaluate and sell the Jewish property. The Jewish property had to be sold through auctions. On 18 September 1941, it was transferred to poor people of the town, on 19 September to “partisans” (white-bands) and employees, on 20 and 22 September to farmers of the Rural District. 200 thousand roubles were gained through the sale of Jewish property of Veliuona.¹

Vilkija

The Jewish community settled in Vilkija at the end of the 18th century. In 1915, Tsarist government deported the Jews to Russia. In 1921, about 800 Jews (80% of the town population) resided in Vilkija. During the inter-war period, the number of the Jews was decreasing. On the eve of the Nazi-Soviet War, about 400 Jews (48% of the town population) resided in the town. The main source of income of local Jews was trade (they were engaged in active trade even with Eastern Prussia). During the years of Independence, the local Jewish community had two synagogues, a Hebrew school, there were sections of Jewish political, charity and sports organisations in operation. During the last years of Independence, some local Jewish youth moved to live in Kaunas or emigrated to Palestine.²

Following the German occupation of Lithuania at the end of June 1941, a German Military Commander’s Office was set up in Vilkija, which was led by SS Obersturmführer Missenbaum. A “partisan” (white-band) company was formed at the Military Commander’s Office, led by Bailiff Stasys Gudavičius. This company had to be on various guards, to arrest communists, soviet activists, groups of Red Army soldiers in hiding, etc. It was later used for arresting and shooting Jews.³

On 7-8 July 1941, on the order of Commander Missenbaum, the white-bands of Vilkija arrested about 150-200 male Jews. Most arrested persons were convoyed to Kaunas, and 21 Jews were shot near Jagminiškiai Village close to Vilkija.⁴ This company of Vilkija would also be sent to other rural districts of Kaunas to arrest and execute Jews.

In August 1941, the mass terrorisation of the Jews commenced. Vilkija became one of the major gathering centres of the Jews of Kaunas County. The Jews from other rural districts were also transferred to Vilkija Ghetto. In the middle of August, 603 Jews lived in Vilkija Rural District.⁵

On 18 August 1941, the chief of the Police Station in Vilkija Rural District informed V. Reivytis that 138 Jews were gathered from Vilkija, Seredžius, Čekiškė, Veliuona, Lekėčiai: 23 men and 115 women.⁶ A part of the Jews arrested in Vilkija were taken to Kaunas and subsequently executed in Kaunas Forts.

⁶ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134; A. Rukšėnas, “Veliuonos valsčiaus...”, p.269.

¹ A. Rukšėnas, “Veliuonos valsčiaus...”, p. 270; Letter by the Chief of Veliuona Rural District of 12 September 1941, to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 191, p. 383.

² N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 334-335.

³ A. Rukšėnas, “... of Veliuona Rural District”, p. 268.

⁴ Interrogation minutes of S. Gudavičius of 7 August 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 44463/3, p. 9; interrogation minutes of J. Dailidė of 17 October 1944, *ibid.*, file 27754/3, p.p. 20-21.

⁵ Letter by the Chief of Vilkija Rural District (undated) to the Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 193, p. 25.

⁶ Letter No. 2 of 18 August 1941 by the Chief of the Police Station of Vilkija Rural District, addressed to Director of the Police Department V. Reivytis, LCSA, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p. 62.

According to the letter by the chief of Vilkija Police Station to Director of the Police Department V. Reivytis, 280 men and 120 women were taken from Vilkija.¹

Prior to shootings, the Jews of Vilkija were imposed a contribution. 21,400 roubles were collected from 222 local Jews, which were at that time located in Vilkija.² Besides local Jews, there were other 119 Jews from different Rural Districts held in Vilkija Ghetto at the end of August 1941.³

The execution of the Jews gathered in Vilkija Ghetto was carried out on 28 August 1941. According to the report by K. Jäger, 402 persons were shot on that day: 76 men, 192 women and 134 children. On the day of the massacre, about 25-30 (according to other data, about 40) soldiers from the 1st Police Battalion arrived from Kaunas to Vilkija by two lorries, under the command of Lieutenant J. Barzda and Warrant-Officer Z. Arlauskas. They were awaited by several German officers and soldiers in the town. The Jews were kept in a synagogue. They were lined up in a column and taken to the place of the massacre in Pakarklė forest (about 2 km from Vilkija) near Jaučakiai Village. Some local white-bands surrounded the place of shootings, while the others took the Jews in groups to the trench. The condemned were shot by soldiers of the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion from Kaunas. Before and during shootings Warrant-Officer Z. Arlauskas treated soldiers with vodka. Upon carrying out the massacre, the company returned to Kaunas.⁵

Zapyškis

Before WWII, about 50 Jewish families resided in Zapyškis.⁶ During the first days of the Nazi-Soviet War, a Lithuanian partisan company started its operations in the vicinity of Zapyškis. It was led by teacher Kostas Barkauskas. On 23 June 1941, the partisans arrested a group of soviet officers who were going to Kaunas. The arrested persons were taken to the partisan headquarters in Kačerginė forest enterprise, and later to the forest near Kačerginė where they were kept in a trench. About nightfall, a unit of Red Army soldiers arrived at Kačerginė and partisans, upon learning thereof, made a getaway. Taking advantage of this turmoil, the arrested soviet officials got free as well.⁷ The partisan company in Kačerginė was comprised of 40 men.⁸

After the occupation of Zapyškis District by Germans, arrests of communists and soviet officers continued. At the beginning of July 1941, white-bands attached Stalin's portrait to the back of an arrested Lithuanian woman and ordered her to walk among the Jews gathered in the street. The Jews were forced to kiss Stalin's portrait.¹

In the middle of August 1941, in carrying out the circular of Director of the Police Department V. Reivytis concerning the gathering of Jews, 67 Jews were taken into custody in Zapyškis: 29 from Zapyškis, 2 from Jankai and 36 from Paežerėliai.² There are data that about 40 male Jews were shot near Dievogala Village (1 km south-east from the town of Zapyškis) at the end of the summer of 1941.³ On 13 August 1941, chief of Zapyškis District A. Jankūnas informed the Board of Kaunas County that 141 Jews resided in Zapyškis District. He also sent a list of the Jews from Zapyškis District, which owed various amounts of

¹ Report of 18 August 1941 by the Chief of the Police Station of Vilkija Rural District to Director of the Police Department V. Reivytis, LCSA, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p. 62.

² Statistical data on the Jews situated in Vilkija on 25 August 1941 and collected contribution, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 21.

³ Ibid., file 186, p. 32.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of P. Zelionka of 8 December 1968, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47588/3, Vol. 2, p.p. 227-228; interrogation minutes of J. Belskis of 26 September 1944, *ibid.*, file 38506/3, p. 16.

⁶ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 261.

⁷ Interrogation minutes of Vincas Bučinskas of 31 October 1949, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 55, p.p. 200-201.

⁸ "1941 m. birželio sukilimas," collected documents, V, 2000, p. 75.

¹ Interrogation minutes of Genė Plenaitienė of 17 November 1947, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 55, p. 202.

² Reports on the detention of the Jews by chiefs of police stations to the Police Department, LCSA, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p.p. 20-89.

³ "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 2, p. 394.

money to the State or other institutions (banks, co-operatives, etc.). The total debt amounted to 6,066.31 roubles.⁴

The Jews of Zapyškis, like other Jews from rural districts of Kaunas County, were also imposed a contribution. By 23 August 1941, the Jews of Zapyškis paid a contribution of 18 thousand roubles (this contribution was paid by 178 Jews).⁵ The Jews of Zapyškis were shot on the western border of the town on 4 September 1941. According to the witness evidence, a lorry of armed men arrived from Kaunas (possibly, the notorious 3rd Company of the National Labour Defence Battalion – note by A. B.). They, along with local white-bands, took the Jews to the place of shootings. There were also several Germans with cameras at the place of shootings. According to the report by K. Jäger, 178 Jews in total were executed in Zapyškis: 47 men, 118 women and 13 children.⁶ After the shootings, a sale of Jewish property by auction was organised (on 13 and 20 September 1941).⁷ A part of Jewish property was taken by local authorities and residents. For instance, the Police Station in Zapyškis took 1 book cabinet and 1 clock; the municipality of the Rural District took 1 cupboard, 1 desk, 6 chairs, etc.⁸

By October 1941, there were no Jews left in Kaunas County. The overall majority of Jews were executed and their inconsiderable part (roughly several hundreds of people) was transferred to Kaunas Ghetto. In October 1941, the governor of Kaunas County reported to the commander of Kaunas District that “there are no Jews left in Kaunas County. The last Jews from Jonava have been conveyed to the Ghetto in Kaunas, Vilijampolė”.⁹ According to rough estimates (based on the report by K. Jäger dated 1 December 1941), 4,211 Jews were executed in Kaunas County during July – September 1941. This number more or less corresponds to the number of the Jews that lived in Kaunas County before the Nazi–Soviet War (i.e. 4,363). It is possible that some tens of the Jews mentioned in K. Jäger’s report managed to escape from the place of the massacre and to find shelter with villagers. A major part of Jews from Kaunas County were shot by the 3rd company of the National Labour Battalion, while the others were executed by local white-bands and policemen.

On the completion of the massacre, the issue of Jewish property was under further consideration. The German occupation government thought that the white-bands, policemen and other persons, who participated in the massacre of the Jews, had taken too much of Jewish property. Thus, Commander of Kaunas district A. Lentzen ordered the governor of Kaunas County to collect information on “how much treasure and money was taken by the officials of Kaunas County that were involved in the extermination of Jews”. On 5 September 1941, the governor of Kaunas County sent a letter to Chief of the Police of Kaunas Town and County Juozas Dženkaitis concerning Jewish property: “[...] If chiefs of police stations or yourself had any property or money of the said kind, information should also be provided and evidence submitted in relation to their use”.¹

In September 1941, the sale of Jewish property was carried out. The commander of Kaunas District allowed selling by auction domestic utensils of the Jews to residents. The German commander reminded Lithuanian administration of the fact that “all Jewish property is now the property of the Reich”. It was prohibited to sell precious metal wares (golden, platinum, silver), valuables of art, well-kept carpets, as well

⁴ Letter of 13 August 1941 by the Chief of Zapyškis Rural District to the General Department of the Board of Kaunas County, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 193, p. 26.

⁵ Letter of 23 August 1941 by the Chief of Zapyškis Rural District to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 18.

⁶ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134; interrogation minutes of Genė Plenaitienė of 17 November 1947, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 55, p. 202.

⁷ LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p.p. 51, 72.

⁸ Data on the Jewish movable property, which was given to institutions or persons for use, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 188, p. 61.

⁹ Letter of October 1941 by Kaunas County Governor to the Commander of Kaunas County, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 186, p. without No (between p. 33 and p. 41).

¹ Letter of 5 September 1941 by Kaunas County Governor to the Chief of Police of Kaunas Town and County, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 191, p. 264.

as silver, lead and consumables. These types of articles had to be registered on an individual basis and notified of to the commander of the District. The money collected on the sold articles had to be deposited into a special savings bank account of the county governor. The commander of the District ordered the County governor to inform about the amount of money collected from the contributions of the Jews or by means of appropriation, as well as similar income.²

The top Nazi officers did not avoid taking over the property of the executed Jews either. Commander General of Lithuania A. von Renteln visited Kulautuva in the autumn of 1941 and ordered the director of the resort to repair the former Jewish villa and reserve it for him.³

On 16 September 1941, the governor of Kaunas County notified chiefs of rural districts that first authorities, then businessmen, craftsmen and other residents should be provided with former Jewish houses in towns.⁴

On 27 September 1941, the Governor of Kaunas County, on the basis of the order by the District commander, obligated chiefs to announce that every person or institution, having acquired or taken any Jewish property, must register it with the municipality of the Rural District. The lists of registered property had to be submitted by 20 October 1941. It was threatened that failure to register would result in a pecuniary penalty of up to 10,000 roubles or a forced labour camp for 1 year.¹

In carrying out the order of the county governor, the registration of the Jewish property acquired or taken after 21 June 1941 was carried out in rural districts. Correspondence in relation to Jewish property continued in 1942 as well. On 29 June 1942, the commander of Kaunas District issued an order concerning the appropriation, disposal and use of Jewish property. The disposal of Jewish property was delegated to county governors. Ownerless property was compared to Jewish property. All natural persons, institutions and enterprises, which failed to legally acquire Jewish property, had to immediately register immovable Jewish property with the office of the county governor. A different procedure was provided for military authorities. Police authorities (German and Lithuanian) had to register Jewish property in the office of the chief of the district police in Kaunas (Donelaičio St. 27). Any sale of the registered former Jewish property was prohibited. This could have been allowed only in specific cases (such cases were not specified – note by A. B.).² No information on further implementation of these provisions has been found in archives.

² Letter of 5 September 1941 by the Commander of Kaunas County to Kaunas County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 190, p. 85.

³ Letter of 25 November 1941 by Kaunas County Governor to the Commander of Kaunas District, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 191, p. 666.

⁴ Letter of 16 September 1941 by Kaunas County Governor to chiefs of Rural Districts, *ibid.*, p. 373.

¹ Letter of 27 September 1941 by Kaunas County Governor to chiefs of Rural Districts, *ibid.*, file 188, p. 1.

² Order of 29 July 1942 by the Commander of Kaunas District in relation to the appropriation, disposal and use of Jewish property, LCSA, doc.col. R-1534, inv.sched. 1, file 194, p. 358.

KRETINGA COUNTY

Kretinga

The first Jews settled in Kretinga approximately in the middle of the 17th century. According to the data of 1897 popular census, there were 1203 Jews residing in the town (35% of the urban population). During the years of Lithuania's Independence, the number of Jews in Kretinga dropped to 800, however, after the Nazi occupation of Klaipėda Region it again increased to 1000 (a part of the Jews from Klaipėda Region settled in Kretinga). Most urban Jewish population was engaged in trade and crafts. In 1932, the Jewish National Bank comprised 233 members. The local Jewish community had a synagogue, a Tarbut* school and a library. The major part of politically active urban Jewish population was engaged in the activities of Zionist parties and organisations.¹ According to the data of the Board of Statistics, there were 4,016 Jews (3,42 % of the county population) resident in Kretinga County on 1 January 1941.²

During the first soviet years, Kretinga became an important border point. It saw an intensive and secret movement to Germany. Violent soviet terror raged in Kretinga as well. There were some carriers in the town who for a certain consideration would take people fleeing from Lithuania to Germany across the border. However, such carriers included a lot of NKVD agents, who used to betray fugitives to the soviet security. The prison in Kretinga was constantly overcrowded with people caught by NKVD. After the German occupation of Kretinga, the place of NKVD tortures and of buried burnt corpses was discovered near the pond of the monastery. Hands of some corpses were skinned, heads were scalped, etc.³

As far back as the end of 1941, anti-Soviet resistance groups started to emerge in Kretinga County. Some groups established relations with the Lithuanian Activist Front set up in Berlin. Various proclamations and instructions were received from Germany. With the beginning of the war, Lithuanian partisans started acts of sabotage. Vladas Purvėnas cut off telephone wires that connected soviet field guards with artillerists; partisans damaged 7 lorries and drove away Russians who intended to blow warehouses.⁴

The German army occupied Kretinga on the first day of the war. On the same day the local LAF headquarters were established in the town. Along with Germans, Pranas Jakys, an agent of SD Tilžė sector, arrived to Kretinga from Germany. During Lithuania's Independence he worked as the chief of the Security Police of Kretinga Region. After the Soviet occupation of Lithuania he escaped to Germany. P. Jakys was vested by the Gestapo with major authorities; he was appointed Police Chief of Kretinga County and became the key organiser of arrests and shootings of Jews and communists in Kretinga County. P. Jakys, together with the local LAF headquarters, started drawing up lists of communists, young communists and soviet activists. These lists were forwarded to the Gestapo and the military commander of Kretinga Town.¹

On 24 June 1941, the military commander ordered all men in Kretinga Town aged 14 to 60 years to gather in the market place at 10 o'clock. The disobedient ones were threatened with severe penalties. About 2 thousand persons gathered in the market place. They were surrounded by German soldiers and local white-bands. Gestapo officers ordered Jews, communists, young communists and other soviet activists to step forth from the crowd. Only several persons stepped forth. Then the white-bands got into the crowds and started picking out suspects at their discretion. This also involved the settlement of personal scores.² The arrested persons were forced to their knees, beaten and tortured in various ways. In the evening they were

* Tarbut school – a Hebrew school in the Republic of Lithuania in 1918–1940.

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 152-153.

² Unofficial data of the Board of Statistics of 1 January 1941 about the national composition of the Lithuanian population, LCSA, doc.col. R-743, inv.sched. 5, file 46, p. 172.

³ "Bolshevik Hell in Kretinga", in *Į Laisvę*, 21 July 1941, No. 24, p. 3.

⁴ "1941 m. birželio sukilimas," collected documents, V, 2000, p.p. 96-97.

¹ "Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje," ("Hitlerian Killers in Kretinga," V, 1960, p.p. 19-20; J. Matthaues, "Jenseits der Grenze: Die ersten Massenerschiessungen von Juden in Litauen (Juni – August 1941)", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1996, 44.Jahrgang, Heft 2, p.104.

² "Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje," p. 20.

driven into the former soviet farm for overnight. The following day they were taken to build a bridge and to repair roads.

Towards the evening of 25 June 1941, Gestapo officers from Tilžė action squad put male Jews in vehicles and drove them to Kveciai forest. Later on soviet activists of the Lithuanian nationality were also driven to the forest. The Jews were ordered to dig a large trench. Several Gestapo commanders and P. Jakys accompanied by his deputy (senior criminal inspector of the Lithuanian Security Police in Kretinga Region) Gabrielius Bražinskas* also arrived at the place of the massacre. They started the so-called court. The arrested persons were called one by one and P. Jakys would briefly tell Gestapo officers about the occupation of a particular person during the years of soviet government. Then the “accused” were sent to the left (subsequently they were set free) or to the right (condemned to death). 35 persons were set free, including three Russian engineers and two military drivers. Then shootings commenced. During the shootings the Lithuanians were kneeling on one knee facing the trench, while the Jews were standing facing the shooters. The execution was carried out by Gestapo officers from Tilžė action squad and German policemen from Klaipėda. In total, 214 men and one woman were executed. The major part of the victims was Jews.³ A part of the Jews from Kretinga, who were not shot, were locked in the town synagogue. On the same day (25 June), another deputy of P. Jakys (criminal assistant of the Lithuanian Security Police in Kretinga Region) Vincas Smilgys set the synagogue on fire. Since the day was dry and windy, the fire spread to other buildings and nearly the entire centre of the town was in flames. Local firemen did not manage to fight the fire, thus, a fire brigade from Klaipėda was called up. German soldiers wearing gasmasks started plundering burning houses. They were joined by local criminal elements. During the fire nearly the entire centre of the town was burnt down, as well as the synagogue was burnt. Most Jews that were locked in the synagogue burned in flames.⁴ Jewish women with children from Kretinga were temporarily left alive. However, the massacre of Jews and communists in Kretinga did not end. Prisoners kept in Kretinga custody used to be taken to the Jewish cemetery to dig a trench. During several days a trench of about 6 metres in length, 2.5 metres in width and 2 metres in depth was dug out. Then the prisoners sentenced to death were put in two tarpaulin-covered lorries (about 40 persons in total) and taken to be shot. The Jews kept in custody suffered cruel taunts of supervisors; some of those Jews were also shot during the first weeks of the nazi occupation. Massacres were usually carried out in the Jewish cemetery in Kretinga. Official of the Security Police V. Smilgys was especially distinguished for his cruelty. This sadist used to kill Jewish women in the cemetery with an oak stake.¹ In July 1941, P. Jakys called V. Smilgys to his office and said that 17 Jewish women would have to be exterminated that night “without any voice and noise”. V. Smilgys, together with “partisans”, dug out a trench in the Jewish cemetery, took women there and together with other white-bands killed them with shovels. This massacre was carried out at night.² It seems that there were more similar cases because some people saw V. Smilgys killing Jewish women at dawn as well.³

The Jewish women with children from Kretinga that were temporarily left alive were confined in a ghetto set up in Pryšmančiai estate. However, senior criminal assistant of the German police Franz Behrendt started pushing the authorities of Kretinga County to exterminate the live Jewish women with their children as “useless eaters” as soon as possible. P. Jakys began recruiting Lithuanian volunteers for the extermination of “useless eaters”. The Jewish women with children confined in Pryšmančiai estate were killed at the

* During the inquiry on 15 December 1942, G. Bražinskas denied his participation in the execution on 25 June 1941. See “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p.p. 58–59.

³ Ch. Dieckmann, “Der Krieg und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden”, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*, Frankfurt am Main, 1998, p. 297; “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p.p. 21-22.

⁴ “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p. 107; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 25.

¹ “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p.p. 23-25.

² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 25; extract from the interrogation minutes of A. Bekštys of 21 November 1944, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 138, p. 166.

juncture of August and September 1941. They were executed by Lithuanian policemen and white-bands under the supervision of German officers. According to an eyewitness, “Women were stripped naked and brutally beaten. Children were severely taken from the hands of their terror-struck mothers, stabbed and thrown to the mass grave as bunches of rags. Other children, in front of their mother, were drowned in the pond. Executioners admired wild, heartrending screams of horrified mothers. Most women were beaten with metal sticks. Yet, when filling the mass grave, some were still moving...”⁴ Unfortunately, the author is not aware of how many people were killed during this action.

After the execution of Jews, more valuable belongings of the victims (watches, rings, money), their better clothes would be taken by their killers: Gestapo officers and policemen from Tilžė and Klaipėda, Lithuanian policemen and white-bands from Kretinga and Palanga. Sometimes Germans would be strict with those persons, who robbed Jewish property without their authorisation. For instance, during the first days of the war, German soldiers and two Lithuanian civilians, Pergaliauskas and Čeriauka, were arrested and sentenced to be shot by the order of the court martial of Karaliaučius. After the shooting of the Jews from Palanga, P. Jakys with his company loaded a lorry with various clothes, which were promised to be given to the Red Cross in Kretinga. However, when the lorry arrived at the police building in Kretinga, it was surrounded by public and criminal police officers who did not take part in the shooting and who stole the majority of better clothes.¹

In the summer of 1941, a group of 40-50 Jews was driven to Kretinga from Mosėdis. P. Jakys ordered to search the Jews and to take more valuable items from them. Money, golden things, bars of soap were taken from the Jews, put into a suitcase and handed over to Police Chief of Kretinga County A. Petrauskas.²

In 1941, P. Jakys conducted the shooting of Jewish women in Veiviržėnai where 300-400 women were killed. About 6–8 thousand roubles, clothes, bedclothes and other items were taken from the victims. A part of the items of the Jewish women were delivered to the warehouse of the Security Police in Kretinga Region, while other items were divided among the participants of the killings. The money was used to buy stationery for the security body, as well as to maintain the vehicle of the security body. Some money was spent on the purchase of vodka and the treatment of killers.³

The Security Police under the command of P. Jakys would receive instructions to shoot (“exterminate”) the Jews and political prisoners of non-Jewish nationality from the officers of the German Security Police (Gestapo). P. Jakys himself maintained good relations with the Gestapo in Tilžė and Chief of Bajorai Gestapo (Klaipėda Region) Morasch. Where communications of the Gestapo did not specify the date for the extermination of the condemned, this issue would be settled by P. Jakys with G. Bražinskas. When larger groups of the arrested were executed, German Gestapo officers also frequently participated. Usually executions would also involve officers of the Lithuanian security, criminal and public police. Some of them would carry out shootings themselves while the others would be on guard. In the absence of Gestapo officers, executions were usually conducted by P. Jakys or G. Bražinskas.⁴

The atrocities of P. Jakys, G. Bražinskas and V. Smilgys in Kretinga reached an enormous scale. In abuse of their official position, these men settled their personal scores, forged cases, as well as arrested and killed persons with actually anti-communistic views. Yet, the atrocities of P. Jakys’ company also came to an end. On 15 December 1942, criminal actions were brought against P. Jakys, G. Bražinskas and V. Smilgys for the killing of people, the torture of the arrested, the abuse of women, the appropriation of the property of the executed persons and the forgery of documents. Yet, P. Jakys was set free after the inquiry. The fate of G. Bražinskas and V. Smilgys is not known. When the war was coming to an end P. Jakys

⁴ Quotation from “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 28; Ch. Dieckmann, “Der Krieg und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden”, Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945, Frankfurt am Main, 1998, p.297.

¹ “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p.p. 117-118.

² Ibid., p.p. 144-145.

³ Ibid., p. 146.

⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

escaped to Germany and was convicted by the court in Ulm in 1958 together with other officers from the action squad of the Gestapo in Tilžė. P. Jakys was accused of the murder of 818 persons. He was sentenced to only 7 years in prison.⁵ Nevertheless, after his arrest in 1942 P. Jakys was not reinstated in his office (as the chief of the Security Police in Kretinga Region). Local residents could finally relax. During the examination in 1942, Konstantinas Kubilius, who witnessed against P. Jakys, expressed a common opinion of Kretinga residents: “Local population were terrified so much that they were afraid of passing by the premises of the body (Security Police – note by A. B.). When people sensed that Jakys is no longer in Kretinga, everybody felt happy and talked only about it. There are even anecdote like conversations that the “king” has died and the like. Everybody is happy: workers and officials, and they even arrange parties for this purpose. There are some people, however, who fear that if Jakys returned to Kretinga those formerly questioned might die”.¹

By the beginning of September 1941, all Jews of Kretinga and a significant number of communists, young communists, soviet activists of the Lithuanian nationality and even persons with anti-communistic views, who failed to please P. Jakys, were virtually exterminated. A special commission in Kretinga County, which investigated crimes of Hitlerites, wrote in its report that 4,000 persons were killed in Kretinga Town during the years of nazi occupation.² I would believe that this number is significantly overstated. The number of the Nazism victims in Kretinga Town (including people of all nationalities) would scarcely exceed 1000 persons. Yet, it is obvious that the absolute majority of victims were Jews.

Darbėnai

Jews settled in Darbėnai at the beginning of the 19th century. In 1897, 1129 Jews (about 80% of the town population) already resided in the town. On the eve of the Holocaust, about 800 Jews (40% of the town population) lived in Darbėnai. During the inter-war period, a part of local Jews emigrated to Canada, the USA, South Africa and Palestine. At the times of Independent Lithuanian the Jewish community of Darbėnai had a meeting house, a Hebrew school, two cheders (religion elementary schools for boys), charitable societies, two libraries, a dramatic club, “Makabi” sports club and sections of political parties.³

The German Army occupied Darbėnai on the first day of the war. The Jews living in the town, including the elderly and children, were immediately mobilised for various works. They were forced to clean lavatories, to sweep streets and do other dirty and heavy work. Those Jews who were unable to work were beaten with sticks. On 24 June 1941, Germans set Darbėnai Town on fire, while the blame was put on the Jews. On the same day, the German commander of the Town ordered all the Jews to sew yellow patches on their breasts and shoulders. Jewish men would be arrested, beaten with sticks, whips and gunstocks.⁴ On 25 June, Raizmanas*, who had retreated from Darbėnai, was driven from Skuodas. He was battered on his way to Darbėnai. In Darbėnai, Raizmanas was dragged onto a platform that remained after the May Day and was told to shout various soviet cries. Since Raizmanas was severely beaten, he had no strength to shout. Then one Gestapo officer started putting a burning cigarette into his mouth, forced to drink vinegar, and subsequently dragged him beaten and unconscious to the guardhouse. The following day (26 June) Raizmanas was shot in the forest behind the Jewish cemetery.¹ On 28 June 1941, local white-bands gathered all the Jews living in Darbėnai (about 600 persons) for sending them to Kretinga. On the same day Germans

⁵ Ibid., p.p. 11-15, 158.

¹ Ibid., p. 91.

² Ibid., p. 10.

³ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 84-85.

⁴ “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p.p. 33, 36.

* According to other witness evidence, brothers Leiba and Izraelis Raizmanas, as communists, were shot in the first half of July 1941, See: *ibid.*, p. 38.

¹ Ibid., p. 34.

set fire to the house of killed Raizmanas, while the Jews were ordered to fight the fire. The white-bands arrested at home Darbėnai rabbi Iser Vaisbord and beat him to say who had set fire to Raizmanas' house. The rabbi was beaten to unconsciousness, and then dragged by his legs to the burning house. At that time Vaisbord was already dead. Shortly three German officers arrived by car. They took Jew Mote Bloch away from the crowd and shot him in the presence of everybody there and then. Later on they picked out another 6 Jews and took them to the river to dig a trench, where Vaisbord and Bloch were buried. Then the Jews of Darbėnai were sent to Kretinga on foot. On the way German soldiers unharnessed horses and harnessed 5 Jews to the cart. The Jews pulling the cart were beaten with whips and gunstocks. The Jews of Darbėnai brought to Kretinga were seated near the Jewish cemetery. They were photographed and 2 hours later sent back to Darbėnai. On the way back to Darbėnai the column of the Jews stayed overnight by the roadside. On 29 June 1941, the Jews were kept for the whole day on the edge of the town in the air. They did not receive any food for two days. On the same day 6 German officers arrived, who separated Jewish men from women and took them along Palangos Street. There were about 150 Jewish men and 4 soviet war prisoners taken in total. The condemned were taken outside the town and executed on the edge of the forest, on the left side of the road Darbėnai–Lazdininkai. They were executed with automatic rifles by Germans.² Jewish women and children were taken to the town synagogue in the evening of the same day (29 June). The women were kept there several weeks, and then distributed to farmers of neighbouring villages to work on farms. While women were kept in the synagogue of Darbėnai, local white-bands would often abuse of them: the women would be beaten, sometimes they would not be given any food for days. Once a town white-band took four Jewish old women from the synagogue and killed them in the Jewish cemetery.³

On 15 August 1941, the chief of the Police Station in Darbėnai* informed the chief of the Police of Kretinga County that there were still over 400 Jews kept in the synagogue in Darbėnai. He said that the number of local police officers was not enough to guard the Jews and transport them to work, as auxiliary policemen did not want to do this job without any pay. The chief of the Police Station in Darbėnai asked the chief of the police of Kretinga County to allow having five freelance policemen at the Police Station “until the local Jews were sent to camps”.¹ Soon it became clear what this sending of Jews to camps meant. Around the beginning of September 1941 the chief of the local police and two “partisans” arrived at the synagogue, one of them named Memgaudis. The chief of the police told the Jewish women that this place was too small for them and a part of them would be sent to another camp today. The chief of the police drew up a list of women who had small children and left. The chief of the police returned to the synagogue in the evening accompanied by 7 “partisans”. Those women who had been entered on the list during the day were ordered to step out. About 100 women and an unknown number of children stepped out. They took Vaineikių Street to the forest about 1 km away from Darbėnai. The women and children were brutally killed there. They were killed with sticks, forks, and axes and thrown to trenches. Small children were by their legs thrown to the trench alive. The rest Jewish women and girls were killed in a week. Only R. Šatlienė, who was taken for work by a Lithuania farmer from a village after the first killing of women, and her friend Asia Šubicaitė escaped this killing. The massacre of the women and children of Darbėnai was conducted by the local chief of the police. Over 400 Jewish women and children were killed in total.² The commission of Kretinga County, which investigated crimes of nazis, stated in its act of 11 April 1945 that 596 persons were killed in Darbėnai Town during Hitler's occupation.³ The absolute majority of victims were Jews of course. It seems that this number of victims is close to reality.

Gargždai

² “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p.p. 36-38; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 395.

³ “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p. 38.

* There are data that this office was held by Ignas Simonaitis (See: LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 6, file 42, p. 17).

¹ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 144.

² “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p. 39; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 395.

³ “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p. 10.

The first Jews settled in Gargždai as far back as 16th century. In 1639, King of Poland and Lithuania Vladislov IV granted Jews civil rights and privileges. According to the data of 1897 popular census, 1455 Jews lived in Gargždai (60 % of the town population); in 1921 they amounted to 1148. On the eve of the Holocaust, about 1000 Jews resided in Gargždai (including the Jews who retreated from Klaipėda Region in 1939). The Jews of Gargždai were engaged in intensive trade with Eastern Prussia and according to the standard of living the local Jewish community was among the most prosperous ones in Lithuania. In 1929, the Jewish National Bank had 269 members in Gargždai.⁴ The town had a Jewish synagogue and *beit midrash*, Jewish charitable societies, Hebrew and Yiddish schools, libraries, “Makabi” sports club, sections of Zionist parties and organizations.⁵

The German Army (61st infantry division of 18th Army) occupied Gargždai on the first day of the war. As opposed to other places at the German – Lithuanian border, Gargždai were occupied only after desperate fights at about 15 o'clock.¹ Commander of A Action Squad, SS-Brigadeführer and Major General of the Police W. Stahlecker came to Tilžė in the evening of 22 June 1941. There he met Chief of the Local Gestapo Office SS-Sturmabführer Hans-Joachim Boehm. W. Stahlecker ordered Boehm to start carrying out massacres of communists and Jews on the 25 km borderland in Lithuania. Since the forces of Tilžė Gestapo were not enough, W. Stahlecker suggested that policemen of SD Tilžė sector and Klaipėda (Memel) should be involved in actions.² At that time Tilžė Gestapo consisted of three divisions and affiliates in Gumbinė, Insterburg (Įsrutis) and Heidekrugh (Šilutė). The total staff of Tilžė Gestapo consisted of 60-65 officials; the Border Police Commissariat in Klaipėda employed about 40, and SD Tilžė sector – about 15 persons.³ The instructions of W. Stahlecker to Boehm to carry out the massacre of communists and Jews in Lithuania early in the morning on 23 June 1941 were also approved by the Reich Security Head Office (RSHA) in Berlin. Tilžė Gestapo ordered Commander of the Border Police Commissariat in Klaipėda Frohwann to arrest all the Jews and communists in Gargždai. In addition, instructions were given to spread rumours that the civilians resisted to the German Army in Gargždai. On the same day (23 June) Frohwann with a group of policemen from Klaipėda went to Gargždai (17 km away from Klaipėda). Frohwann ordered to arrest Jewish men and communists in Gargždai. About 200 persons in total were arrested. Jewish women with (about 100 persons) were separated from men and placed in a barn near Gargždai. The arrested men were driven to the German border and kept in the field in the air. They were guarded by German policemen.⁴ On the eve of the war with the Soviet Union, a special police rapid reaction force (*Alarmzug*) was formed in Klaipėda. Its task was to prepare for fights with soviet paratroopers and spies. The force consisted of about 20-25 men. In the evening of 23 June 1941, this force received an instruction of the commandment of the police in Klaipėda to get ready for the execution of the Jews from Gargždai that would take place the following day. The force was commanded by Lieut. Werner Schmidt-Hammer from Karaliaučius. In the morning of 24 June 1941, the special police force from Klaipėda left by lorry for Gargždai. Tilžė Gestapo officers and SD officials also gathered at that place. Director of the police of Klaipėda, SA Oberführer Bernhard Fischer-Schweder and Governor of Klaipėda County Grau also came to watch the planned killing.⁵ Pending shootings B. Fischer-Schweder told policemen from Klaipėda that severe penalty was necessary because the arrested civilians shot at German soldiers (that was a lie – note by A. B.). Before shootings more valuable items and clothes were taken from the condemned. They were also told to bury the bodies of the perished Red Army soldiers and to deepen the trenches left behind by the

⁴ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 104.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.p. 104-105.

¹ J. Tauber, “Garsden, 24 Juli 1941”, *Annaberger Annalen*, 1997, No 5, p. 118.

² *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³ *Ibid.*, p.p. 120-121.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123; Ch. Dieckmann, “Der Krieg und Die Ermordung der litauischen Juden”, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945*, p. 295.

⁵ J. Tauber, “Garsden, 24. Juli 1941”, *Annaberger Annalen*, 1997, No 5, p.p. 125-126.

soviet army. Gestapo officers would take a group of 10 persons and order to run to the trench. They would be lined up facing the line of policemen from Klaipėda. The condemned were shot under the command of Lieut. W. Schmidt-Hammer. The wounded would be finished off with gunshots by W. Schmidt-Hammer himself and Gestapo officers. The Jews under execution also included the Jews who flee from Klaipėda to Gargždai in 1939. Some Jews recognised their old acquaintances among the shooters. Former Director of Klaipėda Soap Factory Fainstein recognised his former neighbour and friend Wachtmeister of the police Knopens among the shooters. Before dying Fainstein shouted at him: “Do not miss, Gustav”. 200 men and one woman, who was married to a soviet commissar, were killed in total. Nearly all executed persons were of the Jewish nationality. After the massacre, Tilžė Gestapo officers treated policemen with vodka and they all took a common picture.¹ The massacre of the Jews from Gargždai were the first mass extermination of Jews from Lithuania, and maybe even from the entire former Soviet Union. It can be said that the genocide of Lithuanian Jews (holocaust) started namely in Gargždai.

After the shooting of men, Jewish women, children and elderly were arrested and confined in the so-called Ghetto in Anelinia (Aneliškės?) estate (about 1 km outside Gargždai in the direction of Vėžaičiai). The estate accommodated about 250–300 Jews in total. They were kept there for about a month.² Around the beginning of September 1941, young able-bodied women were taken from the Ghetto as if to work in Plungė. According to witness evidence, under the order of German government, policemen and white-bands from Gargždai took about 100 arrested persons by carts to Vėžaitinė forest (about 11 km from Gargždai in the direction of Kuliai). There were two large trenches dug in the forest. Shootings were conducted Chief of the Auxiliary Police Ildefonsas Lukauskas. He ordered women to take their upper clothes off before shootings. Then Jewish women in groups of 8-10 were taken to the trenches and shot. After the massacre executors filled up the trenches themselves and, having packed up the clothes of the victims, returned to Gargždai.³ This massacre involved not only policemen and white-bands from Gargždai, but also white-bands from Kuliai.⁴

The rest Jewish women and children were executed in about a week (end of September 1941) in the same place in Vėžaitinė forest, only in other ditches. About 100 Jewish women and children were killed at that time. Shootings were carried out by policemen and white-bands from Gargždai. The condemned were put in carts in Aneliškės estate. The column turned to the forest near Ašmoniškiai Village. The arrivals were awaited there by Police Chief of Gargždai Rural District Mackus with a group of policemen. Having realised what would happen, the Jewish women with children started screaming and crying. Having gone into the forest about half a kilometre, the carts stopped in the clearing. There was a ditch of about 10 m in length dug up.⁵ Vėžaičiai dean Jonas Aleksiejus also witnessed this massacre. On the day of the massacre he was bicycling from Gargždai to Vėžaičiai. On his way he caught up with the Jews convoyed by guards. The women started begging the priest to go with them. In the forest, the priest asked the guards to mercy the women and not to kill them, but the executors did not mind his requests. In case of pending shootings, Police Chief Mackus would ask women whether they wanted to adopt Catholicism. The women asked whether they would be pardoned for that. Mackus' reply was negative. Nevertheless, some women were baptised, however, they were still shot. The women were told to undress before the shooting, but at the priest's request they were allowed to leave their underwear on. The women were taken in groups to the ditch and shot. Pending shootings mothers held their babies in their arms. Shootings were carried out by policemen and white-bands from Gargždai. According to some witness evidence, the massacre was conducted by Police Chief Mackus, according to the others – by Ildefonsas Lukauskas. The indicated

¹ Ibid., p.p. 126-128; Ch. Dieckmann, “Der Krieg und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden”, Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945, p.p. 296-297.

² Extract from the interrogation minutes of P. Gubista of 28 July 1945, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 138, p. 53.

³ Ibid., p. 53; Extract from the interrogation minutes of B. Saliklis of 1 August 1945, ibid., doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 106, p. 72.

⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of A. Puzneckis of 26 October 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 38501/3, p.p. 19-24.

number of victims is also different. About 100-300 Jewish women and children were killed in total. A part of the property of the victims was stolen by the executors themselves.¹ Some authors indicate that the massacre of women and children from Gargždai were carried out on 14 and 16 September 1941.² The commission of Kretinga County, which investigated crimes of nazis in 1945, established that 751 persons were executed in Gargždai Town during German occupation.³

Kuliai

During the first days of the Nazi–Soviet war, a partisan company was formed in Kuliai Town. As far back as 26 June 1941, local “partisans” (white-bands) started mass arrests of the Jews living in the town. After a while the arrested Jews were executed near Vieštovėnai Village.⁴ The author is not aware of the exact time and circumstances of this massacre. The shooting of the Jews in Vieštovėnai also involved white-bands of Kuliai Town. A nominal list of the Jews executed in Vieštovėnai was drawn up after the war. It comprised 85 names. The last on the list, Etė Odesaitė, was killed in July 1944, not in 1941.⁵

The Jews from Endriejavas (about 50 women, children and elderly) were taken by local white-bands to Kretinga and handed over to the police in July 1941. In a short while they were killed in Kretinga.⁶

Palanga

The first Jews settled in Palanga as far back as the 15th century. In 1639, by the edict of King of Poland and Lithuania Vladislov IV allowed the Jews to engage in crafts and to buy land. At the end of the 19th century, 1100 Jews lived in Palanga, after WWII – about 950 Jews (40% of the worn population). In 1939, there were about 150 Jewish families (less than 700 persons) living in Palanga. The Jewish community of Palanga had a big synagogue (built in 1878); there were several meeting-houses, two *cheders* and *Yavne* school, sections Zionist parties and charitable organisations operational in the inter-war period.¹

The German Army occupied Palanga on the first day of the war. During the first days of occupation, Lithuanian administration was also re-established. An Interim Town Committee was set up which undertook municipal functions. The local Lithuanian police was also renewed. The police chief in Palanga was Jazdauskas, his deputy – Juozas Adomaitis (the latter was appointed the chief of the town police on 14 July 1941 and replaced Jazdauskas).² The persecution of local communists, soviet activists and Jews began in the first days of Nazi occupation. At the beginning of the war, Palanga fell under the jurisdiction of the action squad of Tilžė Gestapo. The house of detention and the synagogue in Palanga were overcrowded with the arrested persons, including a lot of women and girls. Since the house of detention was overcrowded, a part of the arrested (about 15–20 persons) were taken to Kretinga. Five residents of Palanga, who were taken to Kretinga, were executed, the others were released.³

On 26 June 1941, Chief of the Security Police in Kretinga P. Jakys ordered to arrest all the Jews from Palanga. German Gestapo officers who came to Palanga asked the commandment of the local police to

¹ “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” V., 1960, p.p. 40-41; interrogation minutes of A. Puzneckis of 26 October 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 38501/3, p.p. 19-24.

² E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanians Jewry*, p. 196.

³ “Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje,” p. 10.

⁴ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Norkus of 24 December 1945, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 106, p. 5; extract from the interrogation minutes of P. Žilius of 4 February 1946, *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵ List of the Jews killed in Vieštovėnai Village in 1941, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 145, p.p. 77-79.

⁶ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Simanavičius of 24 May 1946, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 106, p. 115.

¹ N. Schoenbueg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 222-224.

² Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Adomaitis of 29 March 1946, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 107, p.p. 60-61.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

appoint Lithuanian policemen for arrests of Jews.⁴ Police Chief of Palanga Jazdauskas satisfied the this request of Gestapo officers. Nearly all Jews of Palanga were arrested that day (26 June). Arrests were carried out in 2 hours. The Jews were detained in the synagogue and guarded by policemen. On 27 June, German Gestapo officers took Jewish men to the sea and shot them in the dunes near Birutė hill. According to the documents of the German Security Police and SD, Tilžė and Klaipėda Gestapo and police officers executed 111 Jews from Palanga.⁵ During trial proceedings against Nazi war criminals in Ulm Town in 1958, former Chief of SD Klaipėda section Sakuth also related about the massacre of the Jews from Palanga. After the massacre Sakuth remembered that there was a Jewish paediatrician, who had not been executed yet. Gestapo officers began looking for the Jewish doctor. He was found at the medical station of the Wehrmacht, busy with bandaging the wounded German soldiers. After some argument with the health officer of the Wehrmacht Gestapo officers took the Jewish doctor out and shot him. He was entered on the condemned list as No 111. Later on, former Chief of SD Tilžė section Werner Hersmann boasted: “The Jewish doctor would have practically escape. But we wiped him out”.¹

After the execution of men, Jewish women and children were confined in a special camp in (Valtariškės?) Village. The camp was guarded by Lithuanian auxiliary policemen. The arrested persons were imprisoned there until the liquidation of the camp (12 October 1941). Chiefs of the Security Police in Kretinga P. Jakys and G. Bražinskas, Police Chief of Kretinga County Antanas Petrauskas and Police Chief in Palanga J. Adomaitis visited Valtariškės before the liquidation of the camp. The Jewish women were brought to the square of the camp. P. Jakys told the Jewish women that they would be transferred to a ghetto near Darbėnai. Then P. Jakys told the women to give their money and valuables away. The collected valuables of the Jewish women were handed over to the burgomaster of Palanga.² Afterwards P. Jakys went to the German commander in Palanga and called J. Adomaitis to the Military Commander’s Office. P. Jakys and J. Adomaitis went to the forest near Kunigiškiai Village (about 4 km from Palanga) to choose a place for shootings. It was decided to carry out killings in the trenches excavated for the construction of military fortifications. In about 7–10 days, on the eve of killings, P. Jakys phoned J. Adomaitis and told him that at night they would have to shoot the Jewish women with children from Valtariškės Camp. There were volunteers among policemen from Palanga to shoot the Jewish women. Thus, P. Jakys ordered to assign some policemen to guard the place of shootings, while he would bring shooters from Kretinga himself. At about 22 o’clock in the evening, J. Adomaitis summoned about 20 policemen to the police office. Some of them were ordered to convoy the women with children to the place of shootings, while the others – to surround the place during shootings. The women with children were taken from the Camp to the forest by two lorries.³ About 15–30 persons would be placed in one lorry. About 10 trips were made in total.⁴ Killings started after midnight and ended at dawn. The shooting was carried out with the lights of lorries on. The massacre was conducted by P. Jakys. The women in groups were taken to the trenches and shot. Before that they were stripped to their underwear. Executors from Kretinga (official of the Security Police G. Bražinskas and others) were mainly involved in those shootings. According to some testimonies, policemen from Palanga did not shoot themselves; according to the others, they participated in the shooting of the last women group. The massacre of Jews involved 7 policemen from Palanga.⁵ 200–300 Jewish women with children or so could have been killed in total. The special commission, having examined the place of

⁴ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Adomaitis of 13 March 1946, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 107, p. 57.

⁵ Ibid., p. 59; Reports from the USSR No 14, BAP, R 58/214, p. 82.

¹ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 26.

² Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Adomaitis of 29 March 1946, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 107, p. 62.

³ Ibid., p.p. 62–63.

⁴ Extract from the interrogation minutes of K. Mažeiva of 1946, *ibid.*, file 107, p. 76; extract from the interrogation minutes of M. Vigelis of 25 November 1945, *ibid.*, p.p. 80–81.

⁵ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Adomaitis of 29 March 1946, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 107, p.p. 63–64; extract from the interrogation minutes of A. Petrauskas of 6 January 1946, *ibid.*, p. 105.

shootings after the war, stated that 350-400 persons were killed near Kunigiškiai Village, in the glade of the forest about 800–900 m from Palanga road.⁶ I would believe that the latter number is slightly overstated.

After the massacre P. Jakys and his henchmen loaded two vehicles with the belongings of the victims and left for Kretinga. Policemen from Palanga buried the bodies and returned home.¹

Plateliai

According to the data of 1897 population census, there were 171 Jews residing in Plateliai (28% of the town population). Some Jews of the town emigrated to the USA and South Africa in the inter-war period. Plateliai had a synagogue, but the local Jews had no other institutions (e.g., schools, charitable or political organisations, etc.).²

On the even of the Nazi–Soviet war, there were 18 Jewish families in Plateliai (about 90 persons)*. During the war, the total population of Plateliai was about 500 persons, the absolute majority whereof were Lithuanians.³ Upon the beginning of the Nazi–Soviet war, on the very first day of the war Juozas Poškus and teacher Vladas Barkauskas organised a partisan company. This company functioned for about 1.5–2 months.⁴

In July 1941, there were four “partisan” companies operating in Plateliai Rural District: Plateliai, Gintališkės, Šateikiai and Notėnai. They comprised about 200 men. At first Plateliai company was led by Juozas Poškus, who soon became Police Chief of Plateliai Rural District. His leadership of the “partisan” company was taken over by teacher V. Barkauskas. Gintališkės company was led by Juozas Daukantas, Šateikiai company – by Leščinskas, and the leader of Notėnai company is unknown.⁵ The headquarters of Plateliai partisan company were located in the building of the district municipality. The members of the company wore white bands on their left hands and were armed with Russian guns.⁶ From the first days of nazi occupation Plateliai “partisan” (white-band) company started persecuting those communists, young communists, soviet government officials and supporters that remained in the town. Those arrested by white-bands were handed over to the German Gestapo. From 23 June to 20 July 1941 several tens of communists and soviet activists were arrested. Some of them were shot.⁷ According to the testimony by a witness, Jewish men from Plateliai (about 35 persons) were arrested at the juncture of June and July 1941. They were confined in the synagogue, did hard physical work and were often beaten. Jewish women and children were distributed to farmers from neighbouring villages and did various work. The Jews kept in the synagogue were guarded by the local white-bands.⁸ According to witnesses’ evidence, the shooting of the Jews from Plateliai was arranged several times. Instructions from the police in Kretinga were received to arrest and shoot physically strong and sound Jewish men. 8-9 men were taken from the synagogue for the first time

⁶ Act of the Special State Commission of 8 April 1946, *ibid.*, p. 98.

¹ Extract from the interrogation minutes of A. Petrauskas of 8 January 1946, *ibid.*, p. 106.

² N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 218.

* According to other sources, about 100 Jews lived in Plateliai before the Holocaust.

³ Certificate of 12 November 1944 on the economic – political situation in Plateliai Rural District of Kretinga County, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 106, p. 128.

⁴ Decision of 31 January 1972 in the criminal case of J. Poškus, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 2700/3, p. 240.

⁵ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Žvynys of 26 January 1949, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 107, p. 130.

⁶ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Markvaldas of 12 December 1948, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 106, p. 17.

⁷ Decision of 31 January 1972 in the criminal case of J. Poškus, LSA, doc.col.K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 2700/3, p.p. 240, 242.

⁸ Interrogation minutes of P. Mikalauskas of 28 June 1946, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 106, p. 52; extract from the interrogation minutes of K. Norvilas of 25 November 1948, *ibid.*, file 106, p. 30.

(around the beginning of July 1941). They were executed in Laumalenkai forest (about 4 km from Plateliai). The shooting was carried out by the white-bands from Plateliai under the command of V. Barkauskas.¹

In a short while, in the middle of July 1941, the second massacre of Jewish men took place. About 15-20 Jewish men were taken and shot in the hills outside the town (about 0.5 km from Plateliai). It seems that the execution was carried out by Germans at that time.²

At the end of July 1941 (around 21 July), Juozas Žvynys undertook the office of the Chief of the Police Station of Plateliai Rural District. He was appointed to this office by Pranas Jakys, who was Chief of the Lithuanian Security Police in Kretinga Region notorious for his cruelty. Before then J. Žvynys worked as Police Chief of Molėtai Rural District. P. Jakys gave instructions to J. Žvynys to identify communists and soviet activists, to arrest them and to maintain public order in the Rural District. J. Žvynys had 4 policemen and the local “partisan” company under his command.³ When J. Žvynys started working in Plateliai Jewish men had already been executed. There were about 70 Jewish women, children and elderly left in the town. They were kept in Plateliai synagogue and guarded by local white-bands. Around the end of August 1941, J. Žvynys received an order to shoot the remaining Jews signed by P. Jakys. J. Žvynys had discussions concerning the execution with chief of the white-bands V. Barkauskas. It was decided to carry out killings by the lake, a couple of kilometres away from the town. By order of the police, residents of Plateliai dug a trench in Laumalenkai forest. Jewish women with children were taken from the synagogue to the place of shootings. Before shootings, the women were undressed, lined by the trench and shot from a distance of several meters. Small children were not taken to the trench. They were shot to their heads and then thrown to the trench. These shootings were carried out by some volunteers of Plateliai white-band company. The shooting was conducted by J. Žvynys and V. Barkauskas. The killers shared a part of the clothes of the shot Jews. About 70 persons were killed in total.⁴

Prior to the shooting of women and children, J. Žvynys appointed Jonas Markvaldas, a member of the white-band company, responsible for the property of the arrested Jews. Any more valuable property of Jews that was left in houses and apartments was delivered to the warehouse so that residents could not steal it. J. Markvaldas had keys to all Jewish houses and apartments. During the shooting of Jewish women J. Markvaldas looked after their property left in the synagogue. Having completed the execution of all the Jews from the town, a special commission was set up (consisting of J. Žvynys, J. Markvaldas, V. Barkauskas and Bronius Avižonis), which distributed Jewish property among members of the white-band company.⁵

In September 1941, the police chief in Kretinga County issued an order concerning the disbandment and disarmament of the “partisan” company. Upon the liquidation of Plateliai white-band company, 9 its members joined the police of Plateliai Rural District. J. Žvynys delivered about 50 guns of the company to the police of Kretinga County.¹

Salantai

Jews started moving to Salantai as far back as the 17th century. The local Jewish community was rapidly increasing in the following years. According to the data of 1897 population census, 1106 Jews lived in Salantai. After WWI, the number of the Jews in the town decreased. A part of local Jews emigrated to

¹ Extract from the interrogation minutes of V. Barkauskas of 26 June 1947, *ibid.*, file 107, p. 160; extract from the interrogation minutes of K. Norvilas of 25 November 1948, *ibid.*, file 106, p. 30.

² Extract from the interrogation minutes of V. Barkauskas of 26 June 1947, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 107, p. 161.

³ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Žvynys of 25 January 1949, *ibid.*, file 107, p.p. 125-126.

⁴ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Žvynys of 26 January 1949, *ibid.*, p.p. 130-134.

⁵ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Markvaldas of 12 December 1948, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 106, p.p. 18-19.

¹ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Žvynys of 26 January 1949, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 107, p. 135.

South Africa, America and Palestine. On the eve of the Holocaust, about 150 Jewish families lived in Salantai (about 500 persons).²

Like in other Lithuanian towns, local Jews were engaged in trade and crafts. Market days were Tuesday and Friday. Local Jews led an active religious, cultural and social life. Salantai had an old synagogue, beit midrash*, Hebrew schools, a Jewish library (in 1923 it contained 1600 books), charitable organisations, a fire-brigade, as well as sections of political parties and organisations.³

The German Army occupied Salantai on 23 June 1941. Scattered Red Army units and soviet activists were retreating through Salantai towards Latvia. Salantai had no government in the evening of the first day already. Chief Non-commissioned Officer Jonas Petrauskas from Gedgaudžiai Village began to organise a partisan company in the morning of 23 June 1941. Non-commissioned Officer Antanas Ereminas and Junior Non-commissioned Officer Petras Kadys were the first to join the company. During 2–3 days Salantai partisan company was joined by over 20 men. On 25 June 1941, Jr Lieut. Ciprijonas Skridaila came from Plateliai Rural District to Salantai and undertook the command of Salantai company.⁴

The headquarters of the partisan company was established in the former building of the militia. It received about 50 guns from Šateikiai partisan company. The partisans patrolled in the town at night, guarded the bridge, MTS and other more important buildings, went to neighbouring villages to search for Red Army soldiers and soviet activists in hiding. Hunting for communists, young communists and soviet activists commenced.⁵

During the first days of the war, partisan companies were formed not only in Salantai, but also in some neighbouring villages. The company in Grūšlaukė church village (about 20 former riflemen) was commanded by Jonas Benetis. This company disarmed 5 Red Army soldiers in Grūšlaukė. On 25 June 1941, Grūšlaukė company joined Salantai partisan company.¹

Non-commissioned Officer Pranas Baltuonis came from Kretinga to Salantai at the very end of June. He was appointed Chief of the Police Station in Salantai Rural District by order of the chief of the County Police. The local partisan company became subordinate to P. Baltuonis; however, Jr Lieut. C. Skridaila remained in charge of the company. During the first days of nazi occupation local partisans (white-bands) arrested about 10-12 communists and soviet activists in Salantai Rural District. Four arrested were shot by white-bands, while the others were taken to the detention house in Kretinga. Their further fate is unknown.²

At the beginning of July 1941, German government instructions to draw up a list of male Jews aged 12 to 60 were received from Kretinga. It was explained that such a list was necessary for assigning Jews for various work. The list was drawn up by Deputy Chief of the Police Station in Salantai Rural District Pranas Skruibys. The list contained over 10 persons.³ At that time the Jews from Salantai were already taken by local white-bands to the town synagogue. In a few days, two vehicles of German SS officers and Lithuanian white-bands arrived at Salantai from Kretinga. The Germans selected about 40 men from the arrested Jews and took them with shovels to Žvainiai Village. The Jews were ordered to dig a trench there, near the Jewish cemetery. Shortly, an unknown German officer arrived from Kretinga. He brought P. Baltuonis and C. Skridaila with himself to the place of killings. The Germans decided to shoot those Jews, which dug the trench in the beginning. Those Jews who wore better clothes were ordered by the Germans to undress and to stand on the edge of the trench. That was how one group of the condemned after another were executed.

² N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 257-258.

* Beit midrash – religious study and meeting house.

³ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 258.

⁴ “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents, V., 2000, p. 98.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of C. Skridaila of 12 January 1951, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47462/3, Vol. 1, p. 222.

¹ “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents, V., 2000, p.p. 98, 99.

² Certificate of LSSR KGB of 30 April 1959 on crimes of nationalists in Salantai in 1941, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 161, p. 2.

³ Extract from the interrogation minutes of C. Skridaila of 29 November 1950, *ibid.*, file 106, p. 137.

According to witnesses' evidence, the Germans shot over 150 Jewish men in total in Žvainiai Village. This massacre took place in the first half of July 1941.⁴

In about a week after the shooting of the men, Chief of the Police Station in Salantai P. Baltuonis was called to Kretinga. There he received an order to shoot Jewish women. Salantai white-bands asked Šateikiai white-bands to help them with that criminal task. The shooting was planned in Šateikiai forest. P. Baltuonis ordered C. Skridaila to ensure the guard of the place of killings. A road going through the forest had to be blocked, and the place of shootings had to be surrounded by guards. Under the instructions of wardens, there were carriers assigned from villages to transport women to the place of shootings. About 10–12 white-bands from Salantai company left to Šateikiai forest at midnight. They were awaited by white-bands from Šateikiai, who dug a huge trench for killings.⁵ By order of the police, the carriers that came from villages with their horses went to the synagogue. Over 60 Jewish women and children were taken out of the synagogue. Policemen and white-bands loaded the condemned into carts and ordered to take them to Šateikiai station. Each cart would be loaded with 15-16 elderly Jewish women and 2-3 guards. At about 6 km to Šateikiai station the column turned to Šateikiai forest. Shootings started at dawn and were carried out in the same order as carts with the condemned Jews were arriving in the forest.¹ The women were told to undress before shooting, then to jump into the trench and lie with their faces down. The executors standing on the edge of the trench shot lying women and children. Some more valuable belongings of the victims were taken by the shooters, while the rest was taken to the police.²

The exact date of the shooting of elderly Jewish women and children is not known. According to the evidence of some witnesses, it took place in the middle of July (around 20).³ After the completion of the massacre, C. Skridaila warned the participants of the massacre not to tell anybody about it, otherwise they would be treated like Jews. Then he gave every white-band 20 roubles and they all went home.⁴

Around the middle of July 1941, younger Jewish women and girls were taken from Salantai to Šalynas estate and worked in the field there. In a month (end of August 1941) they were taken by white-bands to Šateikiai forest and shot there (about 35 women and girls were killed in total). Only Basia Abelman escaped, as till the end of nazi occupation she was hidden by Pranas Kasperaitis, a farmer from Imbarė Village.⁵

Even before the shootings the arrested Jews were deprived of their money, golden jewellery and other valuables. The seized things of Jews were transferred to the state bank. Members of the white-band company were paid a monthly salary of 450 roubles from this seized money. A special commission for the acceptance of Jewish property was set up in Salantai, which was led by teacher Vladas Vilkas. The seized Jewish property was transferred to the communists-operative and later on sold to local residents.⁶

Skuodas and Dimitravas Camp

The settlement of Jews in Skuodas began at the end of the 17th century. According to the data of 1897 population census, the town inhabited 2,292 Jews, and in 1939 – 2,500 Jews (about 50 % of the urban

⁴ Interrogation minutes of C. Skridaila of 12 January 1951, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47462/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 223-224.

⁵ Ibid., p. 224.

¹ Certificate of LSSR KGB of 30 April 1959 on crimes of nationalists in Salantai in 1941, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 161, p.p. 6-7.

² Interrogation minutes of C. Skridaila of 12 January 1951, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47462/3, Vol. 1, p. 224.

³ Certificate of LSSR KGB on archival criminal case No 44458/3, undated, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47462/3, Vol. 1, p. 299.

⁴ Certificate of LSSR KGB of 30 April 1959 on crimes of nationalists in Salantai in 1941, LSA, doc.col.3377, inv.sched. 55, file 161, p.p. 6-7.

⁵ Extract from the interrogation minutes of D. Vaičius of 9 April 1945, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 138, p. 184; "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 2, p. 147.

⁶ Interrogation minutes of P. Kadys of 14 April 1949, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47462/3, Vol. 1, p. 232.

population). The major part of the Jews was engaged in crafts and trade, while the others were employed as workers in industrial enterprises, transport or engaged in agriculture. Having annexed Klaipėda Region to Lithuania, Skuodas experienced a rapid growth of industry and trade. Local Jews were engaged in active trade with Kuršas (Liepoja).

Skuodas had several synagogues, beit midrash, an old cemetery, 2 cheders, Hebrew and Yiddish schools, a Jewish library, sections of different Jewish parties and organisations, an orchestra and a dramatic club. A part of young Jews emigrated to Palestine in the inter-war period.¹

The German Army occupied Skuodas on the first day of the war, i.e. 22 June 1941. During the first days of war, a Lithuanian “partisan” company was formed in Skuodas, which was led by Kostas Vasaris. The company comprised several tens of men. Skuodas “partisan” company would arrest communists, soviet activists and the Red Army soldiers.² Afterwards former “partisans” and riflemen formed the basis of an auxiliary police squad. The first shootings of Jews in Skuodas began as far back as the end of June 1941. The arrested Jewish men would be taken in groups out of the hall of the Riflemen Union and shot on the edge of the town, together with soviet activists and Russian war prisoners. Members of the company led by K. Vasaris were most often involved in shootings.³

The arrested Jewish men from Skuodas were kept in the house of the Riflemen Union, while women and children were kept in the synagogue in Kudirkos Street. The men would be often taken to clean the streets from ruins since a lot of buildings in Skuodas were either destroyed or burnt during the military actions. Around 10 July, members of K. Vasaris’ company brought about 20 Jewish men from the riflemen hall to the Jewish cemetery and executed them in the pits turned up by aviation bombs. After several days following that killing, the auxiliary police squad of Skuodas together with German soldiers shot several tens (about 30-35) of Jewish men near Kulai Village (about 2 km from Skuodas), in the gravel-pit. In a short while, about 30 Jewish men were driven from Skuodas to the same place (near Kulai Village) again. They were shot by the same auxiliary police squad. Several Germans also participated in the shooting. They finished off the wounded.⁴ After the said shootings only about 20 Jewish men confined in the house of the Riflemen Union and about 500 Jewish women and children in the synagogue were left in Skuodas.⁵

At the end of July 1941, the Jewish women and children from Skuodas were taken to Dimitravas Camp (41 km from Skuodas) on foot. The column of the Jewish women was convoyed by about 20 participants of the auxiliary police squad of Skuodas. The duration of the trip was two days. The women and children spent the night in the open air near Darbėnai Town. Those women who lost their strength and could not walk further would be shot by the guards. The guards would order peasants of surrounding villages to bury their bodies.⁶ When the column arrived in Dimitravas, some policemen returned to Skuodas by bikes, while the others remained to guard those women and children.⁷ The Jewish women with children were accommodated in two empty barracks. In about a week (3 August 1941), Edmundas Tyras came from Kaunas to Dimitravas Camp. By the order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs he was appointed the temporary chief of Dimitravas Camp. He was charged with the organisation of the Camp administration and guard. Maj. Julius Šurna was appointed the real chief of Dimitravas Camp on 1 October 1941.¹ On 15 August 1941, some auxiliary policemen of Skuodas came to Dimitravas Camp. They visited the barracks in the evening and told the girls to stay and the women with children to step out to the yard. There were already

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 282-284.

² Judgement of the Criminal Proceedings College of the LSSR Supreme Court of 14 March 1964, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file No. 47423/3, Vol. 11, p. 278.

³ Extract from the interrogation minutes of A. Arbačiauskienė of 10 January 1963, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 194, p. 106; extract from the interrogation minutes of K. Kuprys of 29 March 1963, *ibid.*, p.p. 136-137.

⁴ Extract from the interrogation minutes of A. Baužys of 27 May 1945, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 197, p.p. 3-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7; interrogation minutes of J. Embrasus of 29 April 1963, *ibid.*, inv.sched. 58, file 47423/3, Vol. 2, p. 98.

⁷ Extract from the interrogation minutes of A. Baužys of 27 May 1945, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 197, p. 8.

¹ Interrogation minutes of E. Tyras of 15 February 1945, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47423/3, Vol. 9, p.p. 149-150.

several huge pits dug up at the foot of Alka hill in Jazdai forest, 1.5 km from the Camp.² The women with children were taken in large groups to the pits in the forest, undressed, pushed into those pits and shot. About 20 participants from Skuodas squad and 4 local volunteer residents from surrounding villages carried out those shootings. Shootings were conducted by Mykolas Vitkus, a member of the squad. After the shootings, the pits were filled up by killers themselves and peasants brought from surrounding villages. A lot of children were just thrown to the pits and buried alive. When the shootings were over, the auxiliary policemen returned to Skuodas. The participants of the shootings shared the clothes of the shot persons among themselves.³

In December 1944, the commission investigating the place of killings on Alka hill recovered four graves. The commission found 510 bodies of killed persons (31 children, 94 teenagers and 385 women). No gunshot wounds were found in the bodies of the children. They were all buried alive.⁴

20 Jewish men that remained in Skuodas were shot at the same night as the women and children from Dimitravas.⁵

In September 1941, Jewish girls still in Dimitravas (about 40) were taken by the Camp guards to Darbėnai Town and placed in the synagogue. In a short while they were also killed.⁶ Later on Dimitravas Camp was used for political prisoners only. In the autumn of 1941, the Jews of Kretinga County were exterminated.

It is very difficult to establish even a rough number of the Jews from Kretinga County that were killed. Until 2 October 1941, killings of Jews in Šiauliai District were organised by German Security Police and SD action squad No 2, therefore, the killings of Jews carried out in that district were not included in the report of K. Jäger dated 1 December 1941. Thus, we can give only indicative numbers of holocaust victims in Kretinga County. On the basis of the above research, it can be stated that about 3,900-4,000 Jews were killed in Kretinga County in 1941. I believe that this number is close to reality since, according to the data of the Board of Statistics on 1 January 1941, 4,016 Jews lived in Kretinga County.

² Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Soloveičikienė-Šarnickienė of 8 January 1963, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 194, p. 78.

³ Interrogation minutes of J. Embrasus of 4 May 1963, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47423/3, Vol. 2, p.p. 106-119.

⁴ Act on the exhumation and examination of bodies. 17 December 1944, LSA, ibid., file 47423/3, Vol. 9, p.p. 127-130.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of A. Baužys of 27 May 1945, ibid., Vol. 8, p. 193.

⁶ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Soloveičikienė-Šarnickienė of 8 January 1963, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 194, p.p. 79-80.

TRAKAI COUNTY

Trakai

From the times of Vytautas the Great, Trakai were inhabited by Karaites transferred from the Crimea.

They observed the Judaism religion, but were not considered Jews. The exact time when Jews came to Trakai is not known. According to the data of 1897 population census, 818 Jews and 424 Karaites lived in Trakai.¹ In the autumn of 1941, the total population of Trakai was 2,640 persons.² According the data of the Board of Statistics on 1 January 1941, 4,305 Jews lived in Trakai County (2.61 % of the county population).³

Local communists and NKVD officers got into a huge panic on the very first day of the Nazi-Soviet War. There was a small Red Army unit (80 soldiers and one political instructor) located in Trakai. They were charged with a task to blow up military depots of the regiment and to retreat eastwards. Local Lithuanians started organising an armed defence squad. They established relations with the Lithuanian soldiers in the Red Army and decided to prevent the blowing of ammunition depots.

Lithuania rebellions wounded 2 and captured 18 Red Army soldiers during a short exchange of shots (on 23 June). The ammunition depots were protected. Local government started arranging in Trakai, as well as an Interim Committee was established. The German Army occupied the town the following day (on 24 June). A German Military Field Commander's Office was established in Trakai.⁴ Public, criminal and security police was organised in Trakai Town and county during the first weeks of the war. In July 1941, from former Red Army Lithuanian soldiers Captain Antanas Mėšlius organised a self-defence battalion of about 120 men. This battalion guarded military depots and convoyed Russian war prisoners to Onuškis, Semeliškės and Šventežeris where war prisoners were taken over by other military units. In August 1941, the battalion under the command of A. Mėšlius was transferred to Naujoji Vilnia.⁵

As in entire Lithuania, the Jews first of all suffered legal discrimination. The issue of national relations (especially between Lithuanians and Polish) was rather urgent in Trakai County. Government had to alleviate tense national relations; however, this approach did not apply to Jews. On 1 August 1941, the governor of Trakai County gave instructions to the burgomaster of Trakai Town, chiefs of rural districts and chiefs of police stations to equally treat people of all nationalities in public institutions, except for Jews.⁶ By the order of the military commander, weekly food rations established in Trakai County in respect of the Jews were twice less than those in respect of non-Jews. The Jews were also deprived of radio sets, which under lists were transferred to the commander of Trakai County.¹

On 25 July 1941, acting Governor of Trakai County P. Mačinskis sent out instructions to the burgomaster of Trakai Town and all chiefs of rural districts. These instructions required that every Jewish community should establish a representation, i.e. a Jewish council. It (council) should comprise 5% of the community Jews and consist of 3–12 persons. Jewish councils had to elect their manager and his deputy as soon as possible. Councils were authorised to accept and fulfil all orders by public authorities and the police. Instructions by councils were obligatory for all the Jews within the community.²

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 315-316.

² LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 4, Vol. 2, p. 750.

³ Unofficial data of the Board of Statistics of 1 January 1941 about the national composition of the Lithuanian population, *ibid.*, doc.col. R-743, inv.sched. 5, file 46, p. 172.

⁴ "1941 m. birželio sukilimas," collected documents, V., 2000, p.153.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.194; interrogation minutes of A. Mėšlius of 22 December 1969, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 45, file 1847, p.p. 203-204.

⁶ Letter of 1 August 1941 by Trakai County Governor of, LCVA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 40.

¹ *Ibid.*, p.p. 49, 134.

² Letter of 25 July 1941 by Trakai County Acting Governor to the Burgomaster of Trakai Town and chiefs of rural districts, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 184.

Preparations for forcing Jews to ghettos started at the end of July 1941. By the order of the governor of Trakai County, the burgomaster of Trakai Town and chiefs of rural districts had to immediately submit projects concerning the displacement of Jews to isolated locations. Such a project had to be accompanied by the map of a town, marking the place where Jews were expected to be displaced, as well as the capacity of housing (whether it would be sufficient to accommodate the displaced persons).³

On 16 August 1941, Commander of Vilnius District H. Wulff issued regulations on the issue of Jews. These regulations were sent to governors of Vilnius, Švenčionys, Trakai and Alytus counties. They specified that all the Jews must wear appropriate marks and reside in ghettos. The same requirements were applicable to half-Jews, i.e. such persons whose parents are real Jews from one side.⁴ Besides, under the instruction of Commander of Vilnius District H. Wulff, every County of Vilnius District should have special officials appointed to deal with Jewish matters.⁵

In carrying out the instructions of the governor of Trakai County, the Jewish community in Trakai Town elected its council. It consisted of 12 members. Šimonas Kucas was elected the manager of the Jewish council, his deputy – Ovsiejus Levinas, secretary – Cvi Šimonas.⁶

Until September 1941, the Jews of Trakai lived in their houses and apartments. During the first days of September, the police forced the Jews of the town to a ghetto that was located in summerhouses over the lake. Jews were taken to the ghetto by boats and small ships. About 400 Jews from Trakai Town were taken to the ghetto in total. A little later, policemen of rural districts took Jews from Aukštadvaris, Onuškis and Lentvaris to Trakai Ghetto. Some policemen stayed in Trakai Ghetto to guard the Jews until its liquidation. The Ghetto was also guarded by policemen from Trakai.¹ In a week or so after the establishment of the Ghetto, Governor of Trakai County P. Mačinskas told Police Chief of Trakai Town Kazys Čaplikas that it would be required to shoot the Jews residing in the Ghetto and that would have to be done by policemen from Trakai Town. According to K. Čaplikas, he refused to carry out this task and said to do the same to his subordinates. After a week, about 20-30 policemen from Vilnius special force came to Trakai by passenger bus. A German non-commissioned officer came together with them. According to the evidence of some former participants of the special force, it was SS Officer Martin Weiss who came to Trakai. The Jews were shot in Varnikai forest near the lake, about 3 km from Trakai. The massacre began in the morning and ended after lunch. The Jews were taken in groups to the pit and shot. Local policemen and white-bands surrounded the place of the massacre. The shooting was carried out by executors from the special force. After the shooting they returned to Trakai and were treated to meals and vodka in the local canteen. Drunk after the feast, the killers left for Vilnius singing.² According to the report by K. Jäger of 30 September 1941, 1446 Jews were shot in Trakai: 366 men, 483 women and 597 children.³

After the extermination of the Jews, occupation government started worrying about the sanitary status and protection of mass graves. By his letter of 8 November 1941, the governor of Trakai County instructed the burgomaster of Trakai Town and chiefs of Žiežmariai, Semeliškės and Eišiškės Rural Districts to fence the places of mass killings by 13 November 1941 “so that animals and people could not access them and would not wade through, destroy or damage those places”. Those graves had to be strewn with chloride of lime, and fences had to be 120 cm in height.⁴ Correspondence concerning Jewish graves also took place in 1942. On 8 July 1942, V. Paškevičius, a doctor in Trakai County, informed the

³ Ibid., p. 152.

⁴ Letter of 18 August 1941 by Governor of Vilnius District K. Kalendra, *ibid.*, file 4, Vol. 1, p. 138.

⁵ Letter of 23 August 1941 by Commander of Vilnius District H. Wulff to K. Kalendra, *ibid.*, p. 233.

⁶ Letter No 80 of 1941 (date not specified) by Trakai County Governor to the Commander of Trakai District, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p.p. 237a.p. – 238.

¹ Interrogation minutes of K. Čaplikas of 19 May 1970, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 45, file 1847, p.p. 237 a.p. – 238.

² *Ibid.*, p.p. 238-239; interrogation minutes of J. Martišius of 20 November 1969, *ibid.*, file 1851, p. 97.

³ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 137.

⁴ Letter of 8 November 1941 by Trakai County Governor to the Burgomaster of Trakai Town, chiefs of Žiežmariai, Semeliškės and Eišiškės Rural Districts, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 4, Vol. 2, p. 794.

Commander of Vilnius District about the status of the graves. He indicated that the mass graves of Trakai County are located in Trakai, Semeliškės and Žiežmariai Rural Districts. In 1941 these graves were strewn with bleach and filled with land. In the spring of 1942, the mass graves were disentombed again, strewn with bleach and fenced.⁵

Semeliškės

Before WWI Semeliškės inhabited 60 Jewish families. Most Jews in the town were engaged in trade. The local Jewish community had a meeting house and a religion school (*Yavne*) in the inter-war period.⁶

In carrying out the order of the German local commander of 21 July 1941, the Jewish community in Semeliškės (261 Jews resided in the town at that time) elected a Jewish council, a manager and a deputy manager in the synagogue. 12 persons were elected into the council. 60-year-old rabbi Šaja Mauša Šeškinas was unanimously elected the chairman of the council, Jokūbas Berezauskas was elected as his deputy. The elected persons were approved by the German Commander, chief of Semeliškės Rural District and chief of the Police Station in Semeliškės.¹

Around the second half of September 1941, the Jews of Semeliškės were displaced to a ghetto. The Jews from Vievis and a part of Jews from Žasliai were also confined in this ghetto. They were guarded by local policemen and policemen from Vievis, Žasliai and Žiežmariai. Tax exempt Jews were kept in the synagogue, school and some other large buildings. Semeliškės Ghetto existed for about two weeks. During the first days of October, about 20-30 Security Police and SD special force policemen came by lorry from Vilnius to Semeliškės. One German came with them by car. Together with the chief of Semeliškės Rural District and the chief of the Police Station, he went to examine the future place of killings. A trench was dug up about 2 km from Semeliškės in the direction of Trakai, near the lake. The German did not like the selected place, however, and he ordered to dig a trench in another place on the edge of the forest. While another trench was dug, the killers of the special force stayed in Semeliškės. The extermination of Semeliškės Ghetto was carried out on 6 October 1941. The policemen from Semeliškės, Vievis and Žiežmariai, who guarded the Ghetto, started in the morning taking the Jews to the place of killings. The other part of policemen were assigned to be on guard around the trench. The Jews were laid at the trench. Executors from the special force would take small groups of Jews to the trench and shoot them. Killings lasted several hours. The shooters were drunk when they returned to Semeliškės. The policemen on guard did not get any vodka.² According to the report by K. Jäger, 962 Jews were killed in Semeliškės on 6 October 1941: 213 men, 359 women and 390 children.³

Aukštadvaris

There is some information that the Jews lived in Aukštadvaris already in the middle of the 16th century. Before WWI, 70 Jewish families resided in the town. During the war, the majority of local Jews retreated to Vilnius, but at the end of the war they returned to their native town. During the times of Independent Lithuania there were 65 Jews families (272 persons) in Aukštadvaris. Local Jews were engaged in trade (17 shopkeepers) and crafts (carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, etc.), grew kitchen gardens. Markets took place every Wednesday, and 6 times a year – fairs (*jomarkai*). A part of local Jews emigrated to the USA, Mexico and Palestine in the inter-war period. The majority of Jews in the town had their own houses along the central street. The Jewish community in Aukštadvaris had a synagogue, Yiddish and

⁵ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 378.

⁶ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 262.

¹ Minutes of the meeting of Semeliškės Jewish community of 21 July 1941, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 168.

² Interrogation minutes of J. Ragavičius of 17 August 1970, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 45, file 1851, p.p. 155-157;

interrogation minutes of B. Kapačiūnas of 11 September 1970, *ibid.*, file 1847, p.p. 236-236 a.p.

³ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 136.

Hebrew schools, a library, a dramatic club, an orchestra and “Makabi” sports club (consisting of 30 members).¹

The German Army occupied Aukštadvaris on 24 June 1941. As a result of military actions, a part of buildings in the town burned, including a wooden synagogue. During the first weeks of occupation, while arresting communists and soviet activists, several Jews were also arrested. 14 men, including Jews from Aukštadvaris Elis Balzamavičius, Kaplanas and Leiba, were already shot at the end of June in Rūdiškės forest for the said activities.²

At the end of July 1941, by the order of the governor of Trakai County, Jewish representations (councils) had to be set up and Jewish ghettos were established in all rural districts in the County. In carrying out this order of the county governor, the Jewish community in Aukštadvaris also elected its council. It consisted of 11 members. Abelis Abramavičius was elected the manager of the Jewish council, Jokūbas Šapiršleinas was elected as his deputy.³ No Jewish ghetto was established in Aukštadvaris. Until the very killings, local Jews lived in their houses. Before arrests, the Jews from Aukštadvaris were required to wear yellow six-pointed stars, later on – yellow squares with the letter “J”. The arrests of the Jews from Aukštadvaris began on 21 September 1941. They were kept in the premises of the Board of the Rural District, and then taken by policemen and white-bands to Trakai Ghetto. The Jews from Aukštadvaris were shot together with the other Jews in Trakai Ghetto on 30 September 1941.⁴ Some Jews escaped arrests and managed to hide. Michel Farber escaped being arrested hiding at Mamertas Sinkevičius’. His daughter Judita hid with him. Jewish Chaja hid in the family of Jokūbas Tamaševičius. After the war, she gave her house as a present to the family which saved her. They all lived to see the end of nazi occupation and around 1960 emigrated to Israel. Abelis Abramavičius with his son also escaped arrests, but in February 1942 they were betrayed by someone. Policemen arrested the Abramavičius and took them to the Jewish cemetery to shoot. On the way to the cemetery the condemned started running. The father managed to run to the forest, but the son was caught and taken to the trench. Seeing this, the father stepped out of the nearby forest and surrender by saying: “If you are killing my son, kill me too”. The policemen shot them both.⁵ Today only the old Jewish cemetery remained from the Jewish community of Aukštadvaris.

Kaišiadorys

Before WWI Kaišaidorys acquired importance as a railway junction. The number of the town’s inhabitants was growing rapidly. Jewish families were also moving to the town. On the eve of WWI, Kaišaidorys was home to around 60 Jewish families. During the war, the Tsarist authorities deported Jews to the distant parts of Russia, but after the war many Jews returned to the native town. In the inter-war period a deteriorating economic situation encouraged a certain proportion of Jews to emigrate into the USA., South Africa, Uruguay and Palestine. On the eve of the Holocaust, about 60 Jewish families (other sources make reference to 150 families)¹² were living in Kaišaidorys. In the summer of 1941, a total of 2,100 residents lived in Kaišaidorys.¹³

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 369-373.

² Vydas Narvidas, “In the footsteps of the exterminated nation (Jews from Aukštadvaris)”, p. 3, a copy of the manuscript is kept in the personal archive of the author.

³ Letter No 80 of 1941 (date not specified) by Trakai County Governor to the Commander of Trakai District, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 160.

⁴ V. Narvidas, “Išnaikintos tautos ...”, p. 4; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 137.

⁵ V. Narvidas, “Išnaikintos tautos...”, p. 4.

¹² N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 167-168.

¹³ LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 4, Vol. 2, p. 750.

During the German occupation Kaišiadorys Rural District was a part of Trakai County. During the first weeks of the war, the Rural District administration and police were organised in Kaišiadorys.¹⁴

Discrimination against the Jews in Kaišiadorys was unleashed on the first weeks of the occupation. As in other parts of Lithuania, the Jews were deprived of their civic rights, driven into ghettos and temporary isolation camps, and then executed collectively. The governor of Trakai County, acting on the basis of the order by the German Field Commander, established weekly food rations for Jews, which were one half of the rations for non-Jews (e.g. Jews were given 875 grams of bread, non-Jews – 1.75 kg etc.).¹⁵ Jews had their radio sets confiscated from them and transferred to the authority of the County Commander.¹⁶

A ghetto in Kaišiadorys was to be located in the whereabouts of Vytauto and Vilniaus Streets.¹⁷ However, the Jews in Kaišiadorys were placed in several locations. Apart from the above-mentioned Vytauto-Vilniaus Streets Ghetto, the Jews were also placed in the town's synagogue (it burned down later) and in Kiemeliai Village. Not just local, but also Jews from surrounding towns (Žasliai, Žiežmariai) were taken to Kaišiadorys Ghettos.¹⁸

On 5 August 1941 the chief of Kaišiadorys Rural District briefed the Governor of Trakai County on the situation of the local Jews. At that time 105 Jewish families (375 persons in total) were living in the town. The Jews were to be taken into the houses No. 40-60 on Vytauto Street and houses No. 12-14 on Vilniaus Street. A total of 23 residential houses were assigned to the Ghetto. The Jews were supposed to move to the Ghetto by 10 August 1941. The local authority encountered greater difficulties when it tried to draw up a representative body within the Jewish community. In the beginning Jews refused to set up a Jewish council. Only following a repeated urge the Jews of Kaišiadorys set up their council. Rabbi Aronas Jofanas, Zelikas Feldmanas, Chaimas Gansas and Elija Judelevičius were among its elected members. The chief of Kaišiadorys appointed A. Jofanas Chairman, and Z. Feldmanas – Deputy Chairman of the Council.¹⁹

In the mid-August preparations were undertaken for the campaign of Jews slaughter. Following a confidential letter on the detention of the Jews by Director of the Police Department Reivytis No. 3, 80 Jewish men and 14 women were arrested in Kaišiadorys, 3,636 men and 85 women in Žasliai, and 282 Jews (among them 89 women) in Žiežmariai. The Jews arrested in Žasliai and Žiežmariai were delivered to Kaišiadorys.²⁰ Thus, in the mid-August of 1941, a total of 824 Jewish men and women were arrested (the number of detained children is not specified). On 26 August 1941, Director of the Police Department V. Reivytis asked SS Obersturmführer J. Hamann what to do next with the Jews who had been detained all over Lithuania. V. Reivytis, among other things, pointed out that contagious diseases were spreading among the detainees at the speed of lightning, while in Kaišiadorys one fatal case has even been recorded.²¹ J. Hamann's reaction was instant. Jews of Kaišiadorys (also Žiežmariai and Žasliai) were killed on 26 August 1941 (other references indicate 27 August). Author [of the document] is not aware of the circumstances of this tragedy. Report by K. Jäger indicates that in Kaišiadorys 1911 Jewish men, women and children were executed. It is known that the Jews were being shot in Strošiūnai forest, about 3 km north from Žiežmariai, at Vladikiškiai Village. Victims were buried in three dozen metres-long ditches²². On 1

¹⁴ "1941 m. birželio sukilimas," collected documents, V., 2000, p. 194.

¹⁵ Letter by Trakai County Governor of 19 July 1941, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 134.

¹⁶ Letter by Trakai County Governor of 31 July 1941, *ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Schematic plan of Kaišiadorys, 1941 *ibid.*, file 4, p. 236.

¹⁸ Extract from the interrogation minutes of A. Dvilevičius of 10 October 1952, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 186, p. 264.n

¹⁹ Letter by the Chief of Kaišiadorys Rural District of 5 August 1941 to Trakai County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, doc.sched. 1, file 4, Vol. 1, p. 235.

²⁰ See Reports by the chiefs of police stations to the Police Department, LCSA, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p.p. 20-89.

²¹ Letter of 26 August 1941 by V. Reivytis to Obersturmführer J. Hamann, *ibid.*, inv.sched. 2, file 2, p. 82.

²² "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 2, p. 410; interrogation minutes of A. Dvilevičius of 30 October 1952, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 186, p.p. 264-265

September 1941, the chief of Kaišiadorys Police Station reported to the Trakai County governor that the Jews of Kaišiadorys had been executed on 27 August 1941. They were executed by an auxiliary police squad which came from Kaunas and German soldiers.²³ Apparently, it must have been the notorious J. Hamann's "Flying Squad". The governor of Trakai County in his turn informed the leadership of Vilnius County about the fact that "not a single person of Jewish nationality any longer remains in Kaišaidorys, Žasliai and Žiežmariai" and asked for the instructions "on handling the movable and immovable property that used to belong to the Jews".²⁴ The property of the executed Jews was temporarily placed under the authority of Rural District self-governments. After a few days the governor of Trakai County instructed the chiefs of rural district self-governments to draw up an inventory of all the property of the Jews by creating individual documents on each family. The local administration was also instructed to put up the immovable property of the Jews for lease in auctions to the local people, and sort out the movable property and retain it within the police authority until a special order came.²⁵

After the slaughter of Kaišiadorys Jews in 1941, a ghetto in Kiemeliai Village still remained which later was turned into a labour camp for the prisoners of Kaunas Ghetto. This Ghetto was located on the northern side of the Village, close to Kaišiadorys cemetery at the old Kaišaidoys-Kiemeliai road. There was a homestead of Juozas Šliumba on the opposite side of the road. Several wooden barracks stood on the Ghetto's territory. The Ghetto itself was fenced with barbed wire with guards' towers. Close to it was a place where peat was dug, and narrow rails ran to it. Workers were manually transporting the peat loaded on to hand lorries. Around 500 Jews could be imprisoned in Kiemeliai Ghetto. Women and men from the Ghetto were driven to cut the forest. Sometimes the guards allowed Jewish girls to visit farmers to have a rest and ask for food. When Jews were taken from the Ghetto, villagers from Kiemeliai Village massively plundered the remaining property: clothing, bedding and other items. A certain portion of the Jewish property was taken to Kaišiadorys.²⁶

The fact that in 1943 Jews were working in Kaišiadorys is substantiated by the diary of Secretary of Jewish Council of Kaunas Ghetto A. Tory. In it several references are made to the Jewish labour camp in Kaišiadorys. Prisoners from Kaunas Ghetto were digging peat in it. In his entry made on 6 June 1943 A. Tory notes that 100 Jews from Kaunas Ghetto were sent to dig the peat in Kaišiadorys.²⁷

On 2 July 1943, A. Tory entered in his diary a note that around 1400 Jews are digging peat in Kaišiadorys. Although the conditions of life and meals there were bearable, still a number of workers from this camp escaped to Kaunas Ghetto. The Gestapo ordered the Ghetto's administration to locate the fugitives and return them to Kaišiadorys.²⁸

On 1 August 1943 the Ukrainian guards who guarded the camp staged an uprising and killed a German chief of Kaišiadorys Camp, a specialist from Holland, and two Ukrainians loyal to Germans, and escaped to the forest afterwards. Administration of the Kaunas Ghetto was fearsome that these events may provide a pretext to exterminate all Jews who worked in the Camp.²⁹ Apparently, the Germans did not resort to any retaliatory actions following the events in Kaišiadorys. Judging from A. Tory's diary, the

²³ Report by the Chief of Kaišiadorys Police Station of 1 September 1941 to Trakai County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 4, Vol. 1, p. 258.

²⁴ Letter by Trakai County Governor of 31 August 1941 to Vilnius County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 4, Vol. 1, p. 250.

²⁵ Letter by Trakai County Governor of 3 September 1941 to the chiefs of rural districts and chiefs of police stations, *ibid.*, doc.col. R-713, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 6.

²⁶ Story told by Genė Butrimavičiūtė-Putnikienė. Chronicled by Petras Karlauskas on 3 December 1999, Kaišiadoriys Museum, file 243, p.p. 2-3.

²⁷ A. Tory, *The Ghetto of Kaunas: Day After Day*, p. 379.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.p. 410-411.

²⁹ A. Tory, *The Ghetto of Kaunas...*, p. 458.

labour camp in Kaišiadorys was still functioning late September 1943.³⁰ The author [of the present paper] is not aware of the date of its liquidation.

Žiežmariai

The Jewish community in Žiežmariai existed already in the mid-18th century. Prior to WWI around 700 Jews lived in Žiežmariai. On the eve of the Soviet-Nazi War around 200 Jewish families were residing in the town. A certain proportion of local Jews in the inter-war period emigrated to the USA, Uruguay and Palestine. Žiežmariai Jews were engaged in crafts, commerce, vegetable-growing and fishing. In the period of the independent Lithuania local Jewish community had its own bank, a school where the language of instruction was Hebrew, a library, drama studio and an orphanage.³¹

On the first weeks of the Nazi occupation, the Jews of Žiežmariai were not subjected to massive arrests and execution, however, legal discrimination of Jews was taking place since the very start of the occupation. On 25 July 1941 the governor of Trakai County instructed the chiefs of rural districts to order the local Jewish communities to elect Jewish councils, which were to elect the chairman and his deputy.³² Žiežmariai Jewish Council elected seven members to their council. Benjaminas Benesevičius was elected Chairman of the Jewish Council, and Dovydas Stražas – his deputy.³³

Preparations for the killing of the Jews started in the mid-August 1941. Pursuant to the orders by the Police Department, almost everywhere in Lithuania the campaign of Jews' arrest was launched. At that time 282 Jewish men and women were in Žiežmariai.³⁴ They were delivered to the Kaišiadorys Ghetto and shot on 26-27 August together with the Jews from Kaišiadorys and Žasliai. The arrests and conveying of Jews were supervised by the then Chief of Žiežmariai Police Station Teofilis Kilbauskas.³⁵

Soon after this campaign local policemen and white-bands, according to the testimonies by witnesses, arrested about 150 Jewish women with children and placed them in the town's synagogue. The next day the detainees were driven to the forest several kilometres away from Žiežmariai and executed there on the land of Triliškiai estate. Allegedly, they were shot by the German soldiers who came from Kaišiadorys.³⁶

K. Jäger's report notes that on 29 August 1941, 784 Rumšiškės and Žiežmariai Jews were executed. The number of victims indicated by Jäger raises doubt. The major proportion of Žiežmariai Jews were killed in Kaišiadorys on 26-27 August 1941. At that time only 70-80 Jews remained in Rumšiškės. Once 282 Jews from Žiežmariai were sent to Kaišiadorys Ghetto, hardly more than 200-250 Jewish women and children could still remain in the town. Probably K. Jäger included Jews from other locations into the number of executed Jews from Rumšiškės and Žiežmariai.

On 31 August 1941 the governor of Trakai County informed the governor of Vilnius Region that "not a single person of Jewish nationality remains in Kaišiadorys, Žasliai and Žiežmariai".³⁷

Personal items of the killed Jews were brought to Žiežmariai synagogue. Later a special commission was set up (Chief of Žiežmariai Rural District Jonas Slanina was appointed its Chairman), which distributed the property of the Jews among the Lithuanian inhabitants of the town.³⁸

³⁰ Ibid., p.486.

³¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 395.

³² Letter of Trakai County Governor of 25 July 1941 to the Burgomaster of Trakai Town and chiefs of rural districts, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 184.

³³ Letter by the Governor of Trakai County to the Commandant of Trakai County, undated, *ibid.*, p.159.

³⁴ Letter by the Chief of Žiežmariai Police Station of 17 August 1941 to the Director of Police Department, *ibid.*, doc.col. R-683, inv.sched.2, file 2, p.58

³⁵ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Ališauskas of 26 January 1952, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 145, p. 181

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

³⁷ Letter by Trakai County Governor of 31 August 1941 to Vilnius County Governor, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 4, Vol. 1, p. 250.

Still, the execution of Jews in 1941 did not bring to an end the story on the presence of Jews in Žiežmariai. Historical sources contain frequent references to the Jewish labour camp in Žiežmariai. Apparently it was established in the spring of 1943, when the ghettos in Švenčionys, Ašmena and Michališkės were liquidated. About one and a half thousand prisoners from Ašmena Ghetto were transferred to the labour camps in Žasliai, Žiežmariai, Kena and Naujoji Vilnia.³⁹ About 1000 Jews were working on Žiežmariai Camp located at Vilnius-Kaunas highway. The Camp was subordinate to Vilnius Ghetto, however, assistance to its inmates came also from Kaunas Ghetto. Conditions of life in this Ghetto were especially difficult. Not only men and women, but also old people and children were forced to work, there was an acute shortage of food, bedding, and medication, contagious diseases were spreading. In May 1943 the Nazi authority resolved to liquidate the Ghetto in Žiežmariai. A part of the inmates were to be transferred to Pskov Region, close to the frontline, another 400 – to Kaunas Ghetto.⁴⁰ On 6 June 1943 to Kaunas Ghetto from Žiežmariai Camp, instead of 400 prisoners as originally planned, 680 people were successfully delivered. They met a very welcome reception and were accommodated at the former “Lituanika” cinema and the synagogue on Miškinio Street. Administration of the Ghetto supported the newcomers as much as it could. Another 140 skilled Jewish professionals stayed behind in Žiežmariai, however, no information is available about their fate.⁴¹ The precise date of liquidation of Žiežmariai labour camp is unknown either.

The report by K. Jäger of 1 December 1941 leads us to the conclusion that in 1941 in Trakai (excluding Eišiškės Rural District, which became a county in 1942) at least 4,319 Jews were killed. This figure is practically identical with the data of the Statistics Department of 1 January 1941 on the number of the Jews who resided in Trakai County (4,305 persons). If we add to the said number the number of the Jews killed in Eišiškės (3 446 persons), the number of the Jews executed in Trakai County is then 7,765 persons.

Eišiškės

According to the population census of 1897, some 2,376 Jews lived in Eišiškės (comprising 70% of the town's population). Prior to the outbreak of the Nazi-Soviet War the number of inhabitants in Eišiškės was 3,413. In the inter-war period, Eišiškės was home to the Great Synagogue and two more houses of prayer (beit-midrash).⁴² Jewish communities were also living in the neighbouring towns: Šalčininkai, Turgeliai, Jašiūnai, Dieveniškės, Valkininkai. The majority of Eišiškės Jews were engaged in crafts and commerce. They owned shops, shoe-maker's and other shops, smitheries, inns, butcher's, groceries' and other shops. Jewish houses of prayer (synagogue and beit-midrash) stood in close proximity. After WWII one of them was converted in to a cinema, the other – into a sports' school, and premises of the third have not survived. Majority of Jews had their houses in the town centre (on the current Vilniaus Street). Well-off Jewish families lived in red-brick houses.⁴³

³⁸ Extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Ališauskas of 26 January 1952, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 145, p.p. 181, 182

³⁹ Y. Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, p. 359.

⁴⁰ A. Tory, *Ghetto of Kaunas* ..., p.p. 321-322, 329-330.

⁴¹ A. Tory, *Ghetto of Kaunas*..., p.p. 375-380; I. Guzenberg, *Labour Camps of Vilnius Ghetto and the Population Census of 1942*, Lists of Vilnius Ghetto Inmates, Vol. 2, p. 18.

⁴² N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 95-96; LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 4, Vol. 2, p. 750.

⁴³ A. Peško, A. Šalupajev, “Massive Killings of the Lithuanian Citizens Jews on the Territory of Šalčininkai Region during the Years of World War Two”, a copy of the typescript in Russian, personal collection of the author, p.p. 1-3.

The German Army occupied Eišiškės on 24 June 1941. German Military Commander's Office and the gendarmerie opened their office in the premises of the former secondary school. Later several Lithuanian policemen were sent to patrol in the town.⁴⁴

Until the spring of 1942, Eišiškės Rural District formed a part of Trakai County; later a separate Eišiškės County was created. Local Jews lived rather peacefully until the end of July 1941. Late July German military formation (around 50-70 troops) was sent to Eišiškės; they established their headquarters in the premises of the post office. This formation had to supervise renovation of the road segment between Vilnius and Grodno. With the German motorised units massively travelling to the Eastern front, the road suffered significant damage. For the renovation work Jews of Eišiškės were used. They were driven to work in large groups (of 100-150 people) and supervised by German soldiers. Their work was hard and they had to work 8-10 hours per day, no pay was offered for the work. Jews at that time were ordered to display the Star of David. Upon completion of road renovation works, Jews were forced to perform various meaningless jobs (e.g. carry construction material from one location to another) or do different physical exercises. The German guards variously drove Jews to exhaustion and humiliated them. In the mid-September 1941 German military units left and only the local police remained in Eišiškės.⁴⁵ On 25 July 1941 the governor of Trakai County ordered the chiefs of rural districts to set up a Jewish council in each Jewish community. The council in turn had to elect its chairman and deputy chairman. Jewish councils had to abide by all orders of the authorities and police.⁴⁶ As many as 12 members were elected to the Jewish council of Eišiškės Town. Abraomas Kaplanas became the council's chairman.⁴⁷

According to the recollections of inhabitants of Eišiškės, on the evening of 21 September (Sunday) 1941, a group of people from Vilnius dressed in plain clothes, yet armed, arrived in Eišiškės. The locals referred to them as riflemen. The newcomers spoke in Lithuanian. On Monday (22 September) local people woke up to the sound of shooting. Armed Lithuanian "partisans" and policemen drove all the Jews out of their homes and into the three Eišiškės synagogues. Those who could not be squeezed into the synagogues were placed in the fenced market-place with guards. Only several dozen Jews escaped the arrest, as they either managed to find hiding at their neighbours homes or leave the town. At about 10 a.m. armed guards took outside from one of the synagogues around 400-500 Jewish men (18-40 years old). The column was convoyed by 80 Lithuanian "partisans" (white-bands). The Jewish men while being driven walked with dignity, neither protested nor showed any resistance. Head of the Jewish community in Eišiškės Švarcas was walking at the front of the column. Local Poles started shouting that the Jews were being driven to be killed. They knew that in the old Jewish cemetery outside the town graves have already been dug for them. Jews taken to the site of the execution were told to take off their upper clothes. After that they were driven in groups into ditches and told to lie down in close ranks at the bottom of the ditch. Then the executioners would start shooting from the side of the grave. Although some survived being only hurt after the shooting, they were covered with a layer of soil by the local Poles driven from the town. Many executioners were either drunk or under the influence of alcohol. Towards the evening as many as 7-8 large groups of Jews had been executed. They were laid into full graves, in layers one on top of the other. In the evening the killers returned to Eišiškės to spend the night. Several young men managed to save themselves having hidden in the piles of clothes, and then escaped unnoticed.⁴⁸ The killings continued for at least two days. On the second day Jewish women and children were being executed. They were shot on the side of town (in a different location from the one where Jewish men had been killed). Guards under the influence of alcohol convoyed the condemned people to the site of execution. Jews not only from Eišiškės, but also

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.p. 7-8

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.p. 16-18.

⁴⁶ Letter by Trakai County Governor of 25 July 1941 to the Burgomaster of Trakai Town and Chiefs of Rural Districts, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 184.

⁴⁷ Letter by Trakai County Governor to the Commander's Office of Trakai County. Undated, LCSA, doc.col. R-500, inv.sched. 1, file 1, p. 161.

⁴⁸ A. Peško, A. Šalupajev, "Massive Killings of the Lithuanian Citizens Jews ...", p.p. 16-18.

Valkininkai (around 300 people) and Kalesninkai (about 100 people) were being executed. Germans filmed the killing and took pictures. According to the evidences by the locals, after a few weeks local Poles were taken to the cinema and shown the pictures of the killing of Eišiškės Jews. On the third day of the killing slaughter old Jews were shot. They were killed nearby a Catholic cemetery. After the mass killings, killers were visiting Jewish homes looking for Jews in hiding and plundered their property left behind. Discovered Jews were executed. Differently from the evidence of witnesses, according to K. Jäger report, the slaughter of Eišiškės Jews took place not only on 22-23 September 1941, but also on 27 September 1941. It is possible that K. Jäger mentioned only the last day of the killings, since, according to the evidence by witnesses, killings in Eišiškės lasted several days. As K. Jäger's report stipulates, 3,446 Jews were killed: 989 men, 1636 women and 821 children.⁴⁹

It is not known precisely who carried out the killing of Eišiškės Jews. According to the stories told by the sentenced persons and local inhabitants, policemen and white-bands from Trakai County (Kaišiadorys, Žasliai) and armed young men from neighbouring villages were involved in the gunning-down. Allegedly, Police Chief of Eišiškės Rural District Astrauskas commanded the shooting. Germans were also present at the site of killing. It is not known precisely if Germans were shooting themselves, or whether they only issued orders and filmed.⁵⁰ According to the testimony by certain sentenced members of Vilnius Special Squad, this squad also took part in the killing of Eišiškės Jews. It is maintained that several Roma families were executed alongside with Jews.⁵¹

As it has already been mentioned, several dozen Jews escaped death. Among those who managed to save themselves were a family of a rich Jew Mauša Sonenzon, 6-member family of Chackel Koniuchovsky and other families. Bikievičius who lived on Lebednikai estate was providing shelter to 5 Jews, Kazimiežas Korkutis who lived in Korkutėnai Village in his specially designed hideout was hiding 28 Jews. All of them lived to see the end of the Nazi occupation. After the war they were awarded the title of the Righteous Among the Nations by Israel. A certain number of Jews escaped death by finding a refuge in Rūdinkai forest. Later some of them joined the Soviet partisans units that were establishing themselves at that time.⁵²

Jews of Šalčininkai Town, according to the recollections of local inhabitants, in the autumn of 1941 were collected and driven in the direction of Varanavas (Belarus). Later they had been executed in Varanavas District.⁵³ The author is not aware of more precise information about the circumstances of this slaughter.

Dieveniškės

Jews came to settle in Dieveniškės in the Middle Ages. In 1776 the town was home to 94 Jewish people. In total at the end of the 18th century around 400 people lived in Dieveniškės, a third of them (mostly) Jews were engaged in commerce and crafts. Dieveniškės grew in the 19th century. As shown in the data on population census of 1897, as many as 1710 inhabitants lived in Dieveniškės, among them 1225 Jews. The town became an important commercial centre. At the end of the 19th century, three times a year fairs were held in this town, there were several dozens of shops, a pharmacy and 8 inns. The Jews of Dieveniškės had their own school and two synagogues. In the inter-war period the town was inhabited by around 2 thousand people, 2/3 of them being Jews. Many Jews lived in the town centre, in brick houses. Religious and cultural life of local Jews centred around synagogues. One synagogue was erected at the

⁴⁹ A. Peško, A. Šalupajev, "Massive Killings of the Lithuanian Citizens Jews ...", p.p. 8-10, 26-27; "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p. 136; interrogation minutes of D. Krasnauskas of 26 August 1945, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 138, p.p. 39-41.

⁵⁰ Interrogation minutes of D. Krasnauskas of 26 August 1945, LSA, doc.col. 3377, inv.sched. 55, file 38, p.p. 40-41; A. Peško, A. Šalupajev, "Massive Killings of the Lithuanian Citizens Jews ...", p.p. 9, 23.

⁵¹ Interrogation minutes of P. Černiauskas of 14 June 1976, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 45, file 495, p. 189.

⁵² A. Peško, A. Šalupajev, "Massive Killings of the Lithuanian Jews...", p.p. 11-13.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 14.

beginning of the 20th century, decorated with frescoes. However, both of Dieveniškės synagogues were destroyed during the years of WWII.⁵⁴

In the wake of Lithuania's occupation by Nazis, Dieveniškės Rural District was merged with the general region of Belarus. The spring of 1942 saw the establishment of Eišiškės County, and Dieveniškės Rural District found itself within the boundaries of this county. In September 1941 following an order of the Nazi authorities a ghetto was established in Dieveniškės (it was created close to the synagogues). The Jews were ordered to attach the Star of David and to display the sign "Jude" (Jew). Every day the Jews were driven to perform hard physical labour (most frequently to take care of the town's streets). According to the testimonies by local inhabitants, Germans who guarded the Jews were humiliating the Jews constantly: they told them to perform meaningless jobs, to run around, jump, to undress, to "weed" the grass, sometimes they fired above the heads of Jews. Local rabbis quieted the Jews in town saying that this is the punishment from the God upon the Jewish nation for the sins committed. Once a German asked a Jewish woman to surrender the sewing-machine. The woman tried to protest, then the German shot her and appropriated the machine. A Jewish Council (*Judenrat*) was created in the ghetto. It consisted of five members. Germans ordered the Jewish Council to collect a necessary amount of golden decorations. Such requirements were issued repeatedly, until Jews surrendered all their expensive jewellery and other items of value. Around the end of September 1941 from Vilnius side to Dieveniškės came a group of armed people dressed in civilian clothes. Inebriated newcomers were shouting loudly and driving the Jews into synagogues. Some Jews managed to go into hiding in the neighbouring villages and forests. Local inhabitants were ordered to deliver horse-drawn carriages. Jews were placed into carriages and taken in the direction of Varanavas (Belarus). There they were executed. A total of about 1 000 people were killed. The author is not aware of more detailed circumstances of this massacre.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ S. Kučinskaja, "Fate of the Dieveniškės Town Jewish Community", 1998, a copy stored in the author's private collection, p.p. 4-5, 14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.p. 17-19.

UTENA COUNTY

Utena

One of the oldest Jewish communities in Lithuania lived in the Utena Town. The first Jewish settlements were founded here back in the sixteenth century. According to the census of 1897, Utena had Jewish population of 2,405 (75 per cent of the entire population), and in 1923, they totalled to 2,485. The data of the Board of Statistics of 1 January 1941 indicate that there were 5,443 Jews in the entire County of Utena (4.73 per cent of the total county population).⁵⁶ Sizeable Jewish communities resided in Anykščiai, Molėtai, Užpaliai and Tauragnai. During the period of the German occupation, Utena County was composed of 12 rural districts. In the time of Independent Lithuania and the German occupation, Utena was the centre of the county. The urban Jewish community played an important role in the economic life of the town before the Nazi-Soviet War. Like in other parts of Lithuania, the majority of Jews were involved in trade and crafts. Jewish houses and shops were located in the then centre of the town (Utenio Square and Kauno Street). Before the Nazi occupation, Utena had 4 synagogues: one on Kauno Street, another in Utenio Square, the other two in the Market Square. During the years of Independent Lithuania, the local Jewish community had pro-gymnasiums instructing in Hebrew and Yiddish and an elementary school with the Yiddish language of instruction. About 770 children attended them. Utena had a public Jewish library, various charity organisations, divisions of political parties and sports clubs, as well. A part of the local Jews emigrated to South Africa, the USA, Cuba and Argentina between the two world wars.⁵⁷

Following the outset of the Nazi-Soviet War, anti-Soviet Lithuanian partisan squads began their activities in Utena County. In July 1941, a list of partisan squads operating in Utena County was drawn up with 484 names of men.⁵⁸

On 23 June 1941, brothers Juozas and Povilas Streižys, residents of Nemeikščiai Village (4 km away from Utena), gathered 40 men, and next day, they occupied Utena. The partisans disarmed 4 militiamen and released all prisoners from the NKVD custody. Partisans used to disarm small Red Army groups crossing the town and retreating Soviet activists. In the evening of 24 June, two NKVD lorries came to Utena. A battle started between the partisans and the NKVD men. After it, the partisans left the town. Next day (25 June), on the highway from Utena to Ukmergė, a fierce fight over the town broke out between German and Soviet military units. In the same evening, Utena was occupied by Germans.⁵⁹

German shelling seriously damaged the centre of Utena, which was mainly resided by Jews. 3 Lithuanian partisans were killed in clashes with the Soviets. Immediately after the arrival of Germans, a Lithuanian Commander's Office was opened and a squad (80 persons) of auxiliary police (partisans) of Utena Town was set up. Cp. Benediktas Kaletka took the office of the Military Commander of Utena for the interim, and Jr. Lieut. Alfonsas Patalauskas became the commander of the partisan squad⁶⁰.

The absolute majority of the town's Jews stayed in Utena and did not even attempt to move to the depth of the Soviet Union. The persecution of Jews began on the very first days of the occupation. At first, Jews were forced to perform various public works, their property was looted, and Jewish houses were marked with special inscriptions. Religious books, other assets were plundered from all Utena synagogues, Rabbis were treated with scorn. Jews were ordered to wear the yellow Star of David, they were prohibited

⁵⁶ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 321; *Lietuvos gyventojai*, K., 1923, p. 25; Unofficial data of the Board of Statistics of the 1st January 1941 about ethnic composition of the Lithuania population, LCSA, doc.col. R-743, inv.sched. 5, file 46, p. 172

⁵⁷ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 321-322; L. Bekeris, "Utenos ir apylinkių žydų žūtis 1941 m.", p.p. 3-4, in Russian, a copy of the manuscript is stored in the personal archive of the author.

⁵⁸ "1941 m. birželio sukilimas," collected documents; compiled by V. Brandišauskas, V., 2000, p.p. 163-174.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.p. 158, 263

from walking on pavements, etc. The synagogues were turned into temporary custody houses. Some of the arrested Jews were closed in the prison of Utena Town.⁶¹

On 14 July 1941, posters were put up all over the town stating that all Utena Jews must abandon the town in 12 hours time. Those who would refuse to obey the order were threatened with shooting. Utena white-bands started driving Jews from their homes to Šilinė forest. Ca 2 thousand Jews were gathered in the Camp within the forest. Nearly every day, a group of young Jews (from 35 to 40 men) used to be taken out from the camp and executed in Rašė forest. In the Camp, the jewellery, money and other valuables were taken away from Jews.⁶²

The first mass execution of Utena Jews was carried out on 31 July 1941. 235 Jewish men and 16 women were shot in Rašė forest (ca 2 km away from Utena) by the “flying squad” led by Obersturmführer Hamman from Kaunas together with local white-bands.⁶³

Utena Ghetto was small. Most Utena Jews were kept in the Camp in Šilinė forest, others were locked in prison. The Ghetto in Utena was located in the synagogue on Ežero Street. It was fenced with barbed wire with installed gates. People in the Ghetto lived under unsanitary conditions, food was in very short supply. An epidemic of typhus broke out there. On 7 August 1941, the second killing of Jew took place. On that day, the squad led Hamman together with local white-bands gunned down 483 Jewish men and 87 women in Rašė forest.⁶⁴ Members of the “partisan” squad founded on the first days of the occupation were active in arresting and killing Jews. The squad was commanded by the above mentioned Jr. Lieut. Alfonsas Patalauskas. He had links with the German military commander in Utena Capt. Guss and executed orders issued by the latter. The squad by Patalauskas (76 people in total) arrested Utena Jews and drove them to the Camp in Šilinė forest and Ghetto on Ežero Street, guarded Jewish imprisonment places and sites of execution while Jews were being shot. The white-band squad commanded by A. Patalauskas was deactivated in early September 1941. Member of the squad A. Jodėnas was the governor of Utena Ghetto.⁶⁵

The Ghetto of Utena and the remaining Utena Jews were killed on 29 August 1941. This time, not only adult men and women, but also children, babies and old people were shot. Hamman’s squad together with Utena white-bands murdered 3,782 Jews from Utena and Molėtai.⁶⁶ The Soviet Commission, which investigated Nazi crimes in 1944, discovered three large ditches and several pits in Rašė forest. The Commission estimated that ca 9 thousand people had been executed there⁶⁷. Nonetheless, it is more likely that Nazis and local collaborators killed ca 4,600 Jews from Utena towns and closest neighbourhoods of the county. Only a few Jews from Utena town managed to survive.

Anykščiai

According to the data of the 1897 census, Anykščiai had a population of 2,754 Jews (69.7 per cent of the total population). The town was demolished during WWI, and most Jews escaped to the depth of Russia. The town was rebuilt in independent Lithuania. Local Jews received a considerable support from Jews living abroad and the *Joint* organisation. In 1923, 1748 Jews resided in Anykščiai. Most of them were tradesmen or craftsmen (there were 166 Jewish craftsmen in the inter-war period), some worked in small industrial companies as workers, launched rafts in the Šventoji and Nemunas Rivers towards Eastern Prussia. The Jewish *Volksbank* in Anykščiai had 275 depositors. The local Jewish community had six

⁶¹ Reznia v mestečke Utian. Vospominanija Codika Bleimana, Neizvestnaja čionnaja kniga, p. 312.

⁶² Ibid., p. 313-314; Manuscript by L. Beker, p. 17

⁶³ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 132

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

⁶⁵ Interrogation minutes of Šyvis of 16 December 1985, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 46, file 1212, p.p. 5-7; Excerpt of the interrogation minutes of F. Kazlauskas of 10 May 195, ibid., p.p. 22-23, 41.

⁶⁶ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134.

⁶⁷ 15 November 1941 Act of the Special State Commission, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58. No. 41468/3, p. 319.

houses of prayer, a small yeshiva, Yiddish and Hebrew schools, a kindergarten, two large libraries, a drama club, “Makabi” and “Beitar” sports clubs, and divisions of political parties.⁶⁸

The German Army occupied Anykščiai on 27 June 1941. Like in other districts of Utena County, Anykščiai, too, formed a so-called partisan squad (white-bands). It was commanded by Juozas Vyšniauskas. The squad consisted of several dozen of men.⁶⁹ Already on the first days of the occupation, the white-bands started arresting the remaining communists, members of the Young Communist League, soviet activists and non-local Jews visiting Anykščiai. Many Jews from other counties tried to move to the depth of the Soviet Union via Anykščiai, however, due to extremely fast invasion of the German Army to the East, they failed to leave. Jewish refugees were closed in synagogues. A part of the arrested communists, Soviet activists and Jews were shot on the first days of the occupation.⁷⁰ Having returned from Kaunas prison, Anykščiai parish priest Juozas Čepėnas (who was arrested and imprisoned in Kaunas by the NKVD before the Nazi-Soviet War) urged his parishioners to abstain from revenge and from participation in the executions of the Soviet activists and Jews. Čepėnas himself visited German commander in Utena and asked him not to kill innocent people; the latter, however, answered that this was out of his control and advised the priest not to appeal to any other institution with the same request if he wanted to avoid any troubles.⁷¹

Before execution, Anykščiai Jews were made to perform various hard physical works. At the end of July (ca 28th) 1941, Jewish men were separated from women and children, tortured and shot⁷². Jewish women, children and old people from Anykščiai were executed on 29 August 1941 at the foot of Liudiškės mound. The total number of killed Jews amounts to 1500. They were shot by more than 20 members of Anykščiai white-band squad.⁷³ The property of the executed Jews was brought to the hall of the Riflemen Union. Later, a part of the property was divided among Anykščiai white-band members⁷⁴.

Tauragnai

According to the 1897 census, 596 Jews lived in Tauragnai (56 per cent of the total population of the town). And in 1923, they were 477. Between the two world wars, a part of the local Jews emigrated to South Africa, the USA and Palestine. On the eve of the Nazi-Soviet war ca 200 Jews resided in Tauragnai. The years of independent Lithuania saw active life of the Jewish community in the town. The local Jewish community had a house for prayer, Yavne School and a cheder.⁷⁵

During Independent Lithuania, the Jews and Lithuanians coexisted peacefully, they were used to mixed families. At the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet War, Tauragnai suffered a huge damage. Most of the town was put aflame by the withdrawing NKVD units.⁷⁶ On the very first days of the war, a squad of Lithuanian partisans was established in Tauragnai under command of Kazys Žiedas. The squad was composed of ca 40 men. The partisans used to shoot at the withdrawing groups of the Red Army forces and took ca 10 Russian soldiers to captivity. Later, local white-bands launched massive arrests of remaining communist, members of the Young Communist League and soviet activists. 10 of the arrested were executed by the white-bands. In summer 1944, Jews from all the town were driven to the so-called ghetto on the street known as Ateities today (*it was inhabited only by Jews before the war, and local people used to call it ‘the Jewish street’ – author’s comment*) Some Lithuanians used to support Jewish families with food,

⁶⁸ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 58-59; *Lietuvos gyventojai*, p. 25.

⁶⁹ “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents (compiled by V. Brandišauskas), V., 2000, p.p. 172-173.

⁷⁰ E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry*, p. 183; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p.p. 310-311.

⁷¹ Interrogation minutes of J. Čepėnas of 12 March 1951, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 34837/3, p. 116.

⁷² E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry*, p. 183.

⁷³ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 411; interrogation minutes of J. Medžiulis of 5 January 1945, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 38531/3, Vol. 1, p.p. 10-11.

⁷⁴ Interrogation minutes of J. Čepėnas of 25 January 1951, *ibid.*, file 34837/3, p. 56.

⁷⁵ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 305; *Lietuvos gyventojai*, p. 305.

⁷⁶ “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents (compiled by V. Brandišauskas), V., 2000, p.158

though authorities prohibited that. In about August 1941, all Tauragnai Jews were taken to Utena by the local white-bands and shot together with other Jews from Utena County in Rašė forest on 29 August 1941⁷⁷.

Užpaliai

Jewish community lived in Užpaliai as early as in the middle of the 18th century. According to 1897 census, there were 691 Jews in Užpaliai (the total population being 740). In 1923, 551 Jews resided in Užpaliai District.⁷⁸ Some sources say that in 1941, the town had 345 Jews.

Like in other towns of Lithuania, most Jews were engaged in trade and crafts. During the Independent Lithuania, the better-off Jews of Meiričkis Town, Žiūsmanas, Dovatskis had rather large manufacturing workshops, Žutskis had a leather shop, Mendelis held a pedlary, Birgeris owned a restaurant, etc. Most Jewish houses were in the centre of the town, on Basanavičiaus and Laisvės (now Astiko) Streets and in Užtiltė. Two synagogues and a bathhouse were built on the left bank of the Šventoji River. The town also had a Jewish elementary school in Hebrew.⁷⁹

The relationship between Lithuanians and Jews were neighbourly in independent Lithuania. Jewish tradesmen often sold goods to Lithuanians on the slate. Tension in the mutual relationship appeared in 1940 after the Soviets occupied Lithuania. Some of the town's Jews received Soviets in a favourable spirit: they took part in their meetings, marched along the streets of the town with red flags in hands and Russian songs in their lips, etc.⁸⁰

On the second day of the Soviet-Nazi War, a squad of Lithuanian rebels (partisans) (about 60 men) was formed. It was commanded by Juozas Namikas, the second in command was Kazys Gabė. The squad consisted of several dozens of men. Partisans started occupying more important public institutions and other bodies. The militia headquarters were occupied, the district authorised agent Pranas Novakas was injured. In addition to that, the post office, the executive committee of the Rural District (secretary of the party organisation Feliksas Skirskus, who was there at that time, was arrested and shot by partisans in the Jewish cemetery), the co-operative and other institutions were occupied. Local members of the Young Communist League informed the Soviet authorities in Utena about these actions. On the same day (23 June), a group of NKVD workers and militiamen came to Užpaliai from Utena. They liberated the young communists and Soviet activists (39 people in total) from the custody house. There was a gunfight between the NKVD people and the partisans. The NKVD arrested a few partisans (Repšis, Dagys Jonas, brothers Antanas and Povilas Ramaška etc.) and took them to Utena. Next day, when the Soviets retreated, the prisoners were released⁸¹.

At the beginning of the Nazi occupation, Jews were ordered to attach yellow Solomon seals in their chest and on the back. They were prohibited from walking on pavements, communicating to Lithuanians etc. Shortly afterwards, all Jews of the town were enclosed in a territory surrounded by barbed wire – ghetto. They stayed there until they were taken to Utena and executed in Rašė forest. Some local Jews were gunned down even earlier, in Užpaliai. Witnesses say that in July 1941, at night time, local “partisans” (white-bands) shot about 12-15 Jews in the pine forest owned by Kazys Garunkštis close to the Catholic cemetery. Among the executed was Zelman. Small groups of Jews were shot by local white-bands in the Kaimynai forest and in Dvarašilis. Rich Jewish families were shot at night time by the Orthodox cemetery, and their corpses were thrown into potato holes. In Užpaliai, the white-bands killed ca 40-50 Jews in total (almost all of them being men). Other Jews of the town (ca 300 people) were taken by the white-bands to

⁷⁷ 25 August 1972 Note by the LSSR KGB Utena Regional Division about Tauragnai punitive squad, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 15, file 3388, p.p. 144-147.

⁷⁸ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 319; *Lietuvos gyventojai*, p. 25.

⁷⁹ S. Udraitė, “Užpalių žydai gyventojų atmintyje”, p. 1, a copy of the manuscript is stored in the personal archive of the author.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents, compiled by V. Brandišauskas, p.p. 321-323; 28 August 1972 Note by the LSSR KGB Utena Regional Division about Užpaliai punitive squad, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 15, file 3388, p.p. 144-147.

Utena at about the end of August 1941. They were executed there alongside other Jews of the town and county of Utena in Rašė forest on 29 August 1941. The property left by Jews (furniture, bedding, kitchenware, etc.) was looted by local white-bands, while less valuable items were later sold to the townsmen.⁸²

Vyžuonos

The Town of Vyžuonos was inhabited by an old Jewish community. Historical sources mention the Jews of Vyžuonos as early as in the middle of the 17th century. Before WWI, 130 Jewish families lived here, and in 1923, when a census was conducted, ca 50 families. Most of the Jews earned their living by crafts and trade. Trade fairs were organised here twice a year. The Jewish *Volksbank* in Vyžuonos had a membership of 114⁸³.

At the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet War, in Vyžuonos, like in other districts of Utena County, a squad of Lithuanian partisans was set up under the command of Juozas Marcinkevičius. The squad included 40 men. The partisans (white-bands) used to shoot at withdrawing Red Army groups, communists, members of the Young Communist League and Soviet activists. In summer 1941, a Jewish ghetto was established in Vyžuonos. It was guarded by local white-bands. Even before the local Jews were taken to Utena, in summer 1941, the white-bands executed ca 18-20 Jews in a forest adjacent to Lukniai Village. In August 1941, the Vyžuonos Jews were taken to Utena and shot together with other Jews from Utena County in the forest of Rašė on 29 August 1941⁸⁴.

Molėtai

The first Jewish residents came to Molėtai in the 18th century. According to the 1897 census, Molėtai had a population of 1948 Jews (80 per cent of the total population of the town). The 1923 census found that 1343 Jews lived in Molėtai District. In the period between the two world wars, some of the Jews emigrated to South Africa, USA and Uruguay. On the eve of the Nazi-Soviet War, Molėtai had less than 400 Jewish families. The town had 4 Jewish prayer houses, schools instructing in Hebrew and Yiddish. Some local young Jews studied in Kaunas, Ukmergė and Utena. Most Molėtai Jews were tradesmen⁸⁵.

After the outbreak of the Nazi-Soviet War, the partisans of Molėtai started forming a force. On 23 June 1941, 8 men gathered in Kairionys Village close to Molėtai (ca 3 km away). At first, they were commanded by Dubingiai Priest Jonas Žvinys. On the same day, the partisans broke the telephone line between Molėtai and Alanta.⁸⁶

Soviet officials and some of the Jews began withdrawing from Molėtai on the 23 June. Next day, the town was, in fact, controlled by the Lithuanian partisans. However, on the same day (24 June 1941) the town was entered by a Red Army unit. Communists and Soviet officials still remaining in the town showed the whereabouts of more active local partisans. The Soviets attacked the partisans and took rifleman Alfonsas Vižinis captive. A short distance away from Molėtai, the Soviets shot Vižinis on the same day.⁸⁷

⁸² S. Udraitė, "Užpalių žydai gyventojų atmintyje", p. 2; Note by the LSSR KGB Utena Regional Division about Užpaliai punitive squad, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 15, file 3388, p.p. 112-113; "Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje," Vol. 1, p. 134.

⁸³ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 374-375; *Lietuvos gyventojai*, p. 25.

⁸⁴ "1941 m. birželio sukilimas," collected documents, compiled by V. Brandišauskas, p. 172; 28 August 1972 Note by the LSSR KGB Utena Regional Division about Vyžuonos punitive squad, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 15, file 3388, p.p. 95-99.

⁸⁵ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 180-181; *Lietuvos gyventojai*, p. 25.

⁸⁶ "1941 m. birželio sukilimas," collected documents, p. 160.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.p. 320, 332.

After the withdrawal of the Soviet Army, partisans once again took control over Molėtai. Before withdrawing, the Soviets killed Molėtai priest Matas Lajauskas⁸⁸. Even after the Soviets left the town, the partisan squad “combed” surrounding forests, arrested remaining Red Army soldiers, communists, members of the Young Communist League, and Soviet officials. The squad increased to more than ten men. On 28 April, Molėtai partisan squad disarmed a group of withdrawing Red Army soldiers. The same was repeated several times afterwards, whenever small Red Army groups were encountered. On 1 July, the squad returned to Molėtai. In July Klemas Liubartas, head of the flax buying shop in Molėtai, took over the command of the squad⁸⁹.

In the post of the commander, he was succeeded by Antanas Kancevičius and Vincas Kavalnis⁹⁰.

Mass persecution of Jews started on the first days of August 1941. Upon the order by Police Chief of Molėtai District Tomas Valiukonis and Chief of the District Alfonsas Žukauskas, Jews had to move from their flats to a separate quarter (ghetto) on Kauno, Dariaus ir Girėno and Ažubalių Streets. Some Jews settled in a few synagogues. Jews spent a few weeks before their execution there. One Jewish family from Videniškės Town and a few families from Alanta Town were taken to Molėtai Ghetto, as well. More than a dozen of local Jews were taken to Utena prior to the mass murder. Jewish men and women, supervised by guards, had to perform various hard physical works, to repair roads, bridges etc. A few days before the mass murder, all Molėtai Jews were closed in synagogues and guarded by local white-bands (former partisans). Chief of Molėtai District A. Žukauskas issued an order to transfer the entire Jewish property from their homes to the former houses by Gordon and Rudaševskis on Vilniaus Street⁹¹.

On the eve of the murder, all Jews doomed to death were robbed. Before the execution, every Jew was searched to deprive them of all valuable belongings. A table was placed by the largest synagogue, and members of the special commission sat at it: Police Chief T. Valiukonis, T. Žvinys and several others. Jews were taken to the table one by one and searched. During the mass search (ca 800-900 persons were searched), watches, jewellery, and money were taken. The town’s police took the seized valuables⁹².

Upon the order of Police Chief T. Valiukonis, ca 40 men were gathered from the town on the eve of the murder. They were taken to a field in between two roads leading from Molėtai to Giedraičiai and to Videniškiai, about 1 km to the Northwest off the town. The police chief ordered to dig a pit of ca 50-m long, 3-4 m wide and 4 m deep in the field. While working, the men were guarded by the local white-bands. The ditch was being dug for almost 24 hours. After it was finished, on the day of the murder (29 August 1941), a few SS officers came by car and told them to drive Molėtai Jews to the ditch.⁹³

In the morning of the murder day, the squad of the white-bands were called to their headquarters in the building of the Riflemen Union. 20 men came altogether. In the hall of the headquarters, there was a German officer, an interpreter dressed in plain clothes and Police Chief of Molėtai District T. Valiukonis. The latter said that the German officer and the interpreter had arrived from Utena. The German officer speaking through the interpreter said to the white-bands that they would have to shoot Jews on that day. Beside that, he added that Jews were a harmful nation and exploiters of people, thus they had to be executed. Afterwards, the members of the white-band squad went to the synagogues⁹⁴. First, men from 16 to 45 years of age were told to leave the largest synagogue. They were aligned outside the synagogue. The line consisted of about 180 men. Ca 10-15 white-bands escorted the line of Jews to the site of murder. The German officer and the interpreter drove to the site of murder by car. By the ditch, Jews were told to dress

⁸⁸ *Naujoji Lietuva*, 2 August 1941, No. 31

⁸⁹ “1941 m. birželio sukilimas,” collected documents, p.p. 160-162; 25 February 1966 Indictment, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47482/3, Vol. 5, p. 308.

⁹⁰ Interrogation minutes of A. Žukauskas of 26 March 1945, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47482/3, Vol. 5, p. 202.

⁹¹ 22 October 1965 interrogation minutes of J. Budrys, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p.p. 42-43; 17 November 1965 interrogation minutes of M. Narcevičius, *ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 98; 26 March 1945 interrogation minutes of A. Žukauskas, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 201.

⁹² 24 March 1945 interrogation minutes of T. Žvinys, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 205

⁹³ 1 August 1944 interrogation minutes of P. Kraujelis, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, p.p. 191-192.

⁹⁴ 24 December 1965 Interrogation minutes of J. Budrys, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, p.p. 85-87.

off, leaving only underwear, and to get into the ditch. Then, the German officer told them to lie down in the ditch face down. The white-bands surrounded the ditch. Upon the order of the German officer, they opened fire on the Jews in the ditch. Ca 15 white-bands and several Germans performed the execution. The first group of Jews was shot in 10 to 15-minutes time. About an hour later, the second line of Jews was brought to the site of murder consisting of men, women and children. They were shot in the same manner as the first group. The corpses of the dead were covered with a thin layer of soil by the diggers who stayed by the site of execution. The second group of Jews was executed by the same white-bands⁹⁵. Then followed the third line of Jews. It was composed of old men, women and children of different age. Some of the old people who were incapable to walk were taken to the site of murder by cart. This group was killed in the same way as the two previous groups. Some witnesses indicate that three lines of Jews were formed, while others claim that they were four or five. The slaughter of Jews took about 5 hours. At the end of the execution, the clothes of the victims were loaded to a cart, taken to Molėtai and put in the largest synagogue⁹⁶. Some witnesses say that the process of execution was photographed by the German officer⁹⁷. The precise number of victims is not known. According to the report by K. Jäger, on 29 August 1941, 3,782 Jews were killed in Utena and Molėtai, however, no figures about individual towns are provided⁹⁸. Witnesses of the murder claim that in Molėtai from 700 to 1200 Jewish men, women and children might have been killed.⁹⁹

The execution of Jews was followed by looting and selling of their property. The white-bands involved in the arrests and murder of Jews plundered the Jewish property without any records and free of any charge. A part of the property was divided for free to those who dug the ditch and covered Jewish corpses afterwards. A special commission was set up for the selling of the remaining assets. It was chaired by Chief of Molėtai District A. Žukauskas and his deputy Tadas Žvinys. The commission had eight members. The property left after the murder was taken to three houses and four synagogues in Molėtai. On Kauno Street, the selling of Jewish property was arranged by A. Žukauskas, and on Dariaus ir Girėno Street by T. Žvinys. The total property sold to the townsmen was worth 30 thousand roubles. The money was transferred to the chief of the County. Moreover, in 1943, some of the wooden houses belonging to Jews were sold to local population. Some residents who had no accommodation were settled in Jewish houses. The commission for the selling of Jewish property functioned until October 1941¹⁰⁰.

According to data described above, in 1941, ca 6160-6170 Jews were killed in Utena County. This is more than the total population of Jews in Utena County, as unofficial data of 1 January 1941 (5,443 people) indicate. Most doubts arise about the number of Jewish victims in Anykščiai, because this murder is not included into the report by K. Jäger. It is possible that in Anykščiai the number of murdered Jews was lower than indicated in the “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje” (i.e. 1500 persons). On the other hand, it has to be born in mind that in Anykščiai, Jews from other counties of Lithuania were killed after their unsuccessful attempts to move to Russia.

⁹⁵ 25 December 1965 interrogation minutes of J. Budrys, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, p.p. 88-91.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.p. 92, 93; 20 September 1944 interrogation minutes of F. Vidžiūnas, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 182.

⁹⁷ 1 August 1944 interrogation minutes of P. Kraujelis, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 193

⁹⁸ “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 1, p. 134.

⁹⁹ Indictment of 25 February 1966, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47482/3, Vol. 5, p. 309; “Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje,” Vol. 2, p. 411.

¹⁰⁰ 26 March 1945 interrogation minutes of A. Žukauskas, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47482/3, Vol. 5, p.p. 201-202; 24 March 1945 interrogation minutes of T. Žvinys, *ibid.*, p.p. 204-206.

VILKAVIŠKIS COUNTY

Vilkaviškis

Jews settled down in Vilkaviškis in the 16th century. A good geographical location (it is in the vicinity of the German border) served as a good basis for the town to become an important trade centre between Russia and Germany in the 19th century. In ca 1623, one of the oldest synagogues in Lithuania was built in the town (*it was burned down by the German Army on 22 June 1941 – note by A.B.*). In the 19th century Jews made up the biggest share of the town's population. According to the 1897 census, the Jewish population of Vilkaviškis totalled to 3,480 (60% of all the population). However, according to the 1923 census, the Lithuanians totalled to 3,228 (47.7%) and the Jews to 3,166 (45.2 %). According to unofficial statistical data of 1 January 1941, the Jews made up 6,994 (7.37%) of all the inhabitants in Vilkaviškis County.¹⁰¹ During the German occupation, there were 11 districts in Vilkaviškis County. More numerous Jewish communities lived in Vilkaviškis, Kybartai, Virbalis and Pilviškis. In other districts, the Jewish population was scarce or not present at all (i.e. in Pajevonis District). During Lithuania's Independence, Vilkaviškis started to play a less significant role as the main trade town of Suvalkija, as it was taken over by Marijampolė. Still, the town remained a rather important centre of trade and industry. In the first years of independence the local Jewish community played a very important part in the town's cultural and political life. In 1924 September elections to the town's council, the representatives of Jews got the majority of votes. Mauša Kleinšteinas was elected the Head of the Council.¹⁰² In the inter-war period the majority of the town's Jews were engaged in trade or had some sort of their own business: processed bristle or produced tobacco, soap, confectionery. The companies of Kabaker, Fisher and other exporting agricultural production were known not only in Suvalkai Region but also behind its boundaries. There were also a few large Jewish factories operating in the town: a cigar factory, an oil factory, a few soap workshops, a bristle processing enterprise and horsehair trade enterprise. In 1929 the bank of the Jewish people had 348 members.¹⁰³

After Lithuania's declaration of independence in 1918, there was a Jewish primary school founded in Vilkaviškis, which was quite different from the before existent *cheders*, where only religion and the Hebrew used to be taught. In 1919 one of the first Jewish gymnasiums was founded in the town. In the times of the Republic of Lithuania about 360 students graduated from it. Furthermore, the local Jewish community had divisions of various political parties, libraries, nursing homes for old people, sports clubs and other institutions.¹

The German army occupied Vilkaviškis on the first day of the war. The town was severely bombed and hammered by the heavy artillery. Meanwhile, at the border there was a stiff battle going on between the *Wermacht* divisions and the Soviet frontier troops. After the occupation of the town, Germans burned many Jewish houses and the old synagogue. After that they established a German Military Commander's Office, founded Lithuanian police and a squad of "partisans" (white-bands). The Jews were told to put on yellow patches on their breasts and backs.²

After a few days local *white-bands* started to arrest communists, members of the Young Communist League and the Jews. On 30 April the arrested Jews were herded to the former three storied building of Vilkaviškis seminary which was barbed and guarded by the local *white-bands* and the police. There, the imprisoned Jews were brutally beaten, searched and robbed. On 14 July 1941 the arrested were moved from

¹⁰¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 344 – 345; Population of Lithuania: data of the first population census, 17 September 1923, Kaunas, 1923, p. 25, Data on the ethnic composition of the population of Lithuania of the Department of Statistics, 1 January 1941, Lithuanian Central State Archive, doc.col. R-743, inv.sched. 5, file 46, p. 172.

¹⁰² J. Sliesoraitiene, *The Jewish Community of Vilkaviškis town 1918 – 1944*, manuscript, 1.3, a copy is kept in the private archive of the author.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.p. 4-7.

¹ *Ibid.*, p.p. 9 – 10; N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p. 346

² E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jews*, p.p. 276 – 277.

the seminary to the barracks. The guards continued to beat the Jewish and to make fun of them in different ways. Every day able-bodied Jews were taken to the town to clean the streets and the ruins.³

At the end of July the arrested Jews were taken to the grounds not far away from the barracks and in three days they dug up a 25-m long and a few metres deep ditch. On 28 July the arrested were taken out to the yard of the barracks and divided into some groups. One of the prisoners' groups was sent to the storage of the barracks to clean guns. Soon two lorries full of German Gestapo soldiers drove into the yard. A quite large group of Lithuanian communists and members of the Young Communist League from the town prison were also brought over. The Lithuanian policemen took the arrested to the dug up ditch in groups. The destined were shot by German soldiers. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian policemen guarded the barracks and the shooting place in the firing grounds. The massacre lasted for 3 – 5 hours. That day about 500 – 700 Jews and 60 – 70 Lithuanian communists and soviet activists were shot. Only 7 Jewish men escaped the death.⁴

After the massacre, 1 – 1.5 months later, the remaining Jewish families were ordered to move from their flats to the barracks. E. Oshry wrote that the Jewish women and children of Vilkaviškis were shot on 24 September 1941. However, this massacre has not been mentioned in K. Jäger's report. It can be presumed that the massacre was carried out not by the Hamann but by Tilžė Gestapo squad. The Jews who were allowed to move could take their valuables with them. In 1941 soviet war prisoners dug up new ditches. On 15 November 1941 the remaining Jews of Vilkaviškis Town were shot. In his report K. Jäger, the head of the German Security Police and the SD, dated 1 December 1941, recorded that on that day in Vilkaviškis all in all 115 Jews were killed (36 men, 48 women and 31 children). That time the Jews were shot by Vilkaviškis policemen. The property of the massacred Jews was later sold out to the local population.¹ The massacre of Vilkaviškis Jews was the last massacre of Jews in the Lithuanian province in 1941.

Only few Jews escaped from death. A seventeen-year-old Jewish girl Faktorovskytė was one of the lucky ones. The family of Čižauskienė helped to save her life and hid the Jewish girl at her relatives' place in the countryside. During all the Nazi occupation period the family of Eugenija Dimšienė hid the son of Vilkaviškis sweet factory owner Juozas Demontas. Although the neighbours knew that Dimšas family raised a Jewish boy, nobody gave them in. There were more cases like that. Unfortunately, they were not recorded on time and remain in oblivion.²

Kybartai and Virbalis

Kybartai was a very important railway border crossing point between the Tsar Russia and Germany and during the inter-war period – between the Lithuanian Republic and Germany. Namely Kybartai was a very important import and export route to and from Germany.

According to the census of 1897, the Jewish population in Kybartai totalled to 533 (50% of all the inhabitants of the town). During WWI the town was burned down by the withdrawing Russian army. During the inter-war period Kybartai Town was rebuilt. In 1923, there were 1253 Jewish inhabitants (20% of all the inhabitants of the town). The majority of the Jews made their living from trade, some were engaged in agriculture (vegetable-growing). Some Jews (Dovydas Šenšteinas) were the owners of quite big farms. In

³ Interrogation minutes of S. Belkin of 16 November 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, file 8929/3, p.p. 211-212; An extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Valaitis of 14 November 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 194, p. 249.

⁴ Interrogation minutes of S. Belkin of 16 November 1944, *ibid.*, p. 213; An extract from interrogation minutes of J. Valaitis of 14 November 1944, *ibid.*, p. 249; Other sources give that on 28 July 1941, 780 Jews were shot. Among the victims – Vilkaviškis Rabbi Abraom Pultinov and members of the Jewish Council (*Judenrat*): E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jews*.

¹ *Holocaust in Lithuania*, Part 1, p. 135; extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Valaitis of 14 November 1944, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 8, file 249-250; E. Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jews*, p. 277

² J. Sliesoraitiene, *The Jewish Community of Vilkaviškis town 1918 – 1944*, p. 13

1929, the membership of the local Jewish bank totalled to 150 people. The local community of Kybartai Jews had their prayer houses, a rabbi and a school instructing in Hebrew.³

According to the 1897 census the Jewish population in Virbalis totalled 1219 (37% of all the inhabitants of the town). In the inter-war period Virbalis was outgrown by Kybartai. The number of the town's inhabitants dropped. In 1939 there were 150 Jewish families living Virbalis (about 600 people). Local Jewish bank had 342 members. The Jewish community of Virbalis was quite well educated and active. The ideas of Zionism and the Hebrew language soon became very popular. The local Jews had houses of prayer, various schools, divisions of political parties, a library, different charity organisations, a drama club.⁴

The Germans occupied Kybartai and Virbalis on the first day of the war (22 June 1941). Soon afterwards, municipal institutions of the inter-war Lithuania (district municipality and the police) were re-established. Stasys Valiukaitis was appointed the head of the district police, however, he was soon replaced by Juozas Staugaitis. Local police was profoundly influenced by Gestapo officials Ticas and Lėmanas (in some sources – Leiman), who used to come over from Eitkūnai. On the first days of the occupation in Virbalis an auxiliary police squad was founded, the chief of which was Feliksas Krivinskas.¹

On 29 June, 1941 Kybartai police had an order from the Gestapo member Lėmanas to arrest all the Jewish men of the town and to lock them in Jurgis Giedraitis barn, situated approximately 2 km from Kybartai, not far from a sand pit. Approximately 106 – 116 men were closed in that barn, among which there were a few Lithuanian soviet activists and communists. Early in the morning, on Monday (30 June), Lėmanas arrived at the barn together with a 6 – 7 German soldiers and in bad Lithuanian said that the arrested would have to be shot. The Germans were accompanied by the head of Kybartai police S. Valiukaitis and a few other policemen. The arrested were taken in groups of 10 to the sand pit and gunned down by the Germans and a few Lithuanian policemen. After the shooting, the corpses of the victims were buried by the policemen.²

During the first days of the occupation, in Virbaliai, an auxiliary police squad was formed. Soon the members were dressed up in military uniforms and it was called a self-defence unit. The soldiers of this unit were responsible for guarding the railway and the bridges. However, soon they started to be used for the purposes of the Nazi repressive policies and genocide. The Jews and the soviet activists, arrested at the beginning of the occupation were closed in the facilities of the former manor house of Raudondvaris. In the middle of July 1941 (circa 10 July) a squad of German officers and soldiers arrived by lorry to Virbaliai. They organised and carried out the massacre of the people imprisoned in Raudondvaris. It was decided to carry out the massacre in the vast fields, called Vigainis by the locals (about 400 m from the manor). There was a long anti – tank ditch dug up before war. 300 Jewish men and 20 Lithuanians were kept in the manor. The destined were herded to the ditch in two groups – the Lithuanians and the Jews separately. Corpses of the victims were buried by the members of Virbalis self-defence squad, who guarded the arrested in the manor before the shooting began. There were 12 – 15 men.³ After two weeks (ca 29 July), the second massacre action was carried out. Again, it was aimed at shooting the Jewish men and the Lithuanian soviet activists. There was also one woman among the victims: Matilda Andriukaitienė. The second action was also organised by the Germans. There were around five of them who came to Virbalis. They gave orders to the head of the auxiliary local police (self-defence unit) squad F. Krivinskas, who mobilised his subordinates. The new group of the destined were herded to the same Raudondvaris facilities, from which they were taken to the anti-tank ditch. The Germans said that at that time the Lithuanian policemen would have to do the shooting themselves, as the German soldiers would not be available. The brought over people

³ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 130-131.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.p. 363 – 365.

¹ LSSR KGB account on the activities of German Penal Administration in Virbalis and Kybartai, 12 February 1962, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47363/3, Vol. 2, p.p. 62-65.

² Interrogation minutes of J. Vaitkevičius of 17 October 1961, *ibid.*, file 46890/3, Vol. 1., p.p. 276-278. G. Jurkynienė *Kybartai Jewish Community*, p. 11, a copy of the manuscript is kept in the personal archive of the author.

were undressed and laid down by the ditch on the ground. Later they were taken to the ditch in small groups and shot at from the side of it. In all there were 100 people killed. They were shot by 15 auxiliary policemen. The corpses of the victims were buried by the executors themselves.¹

Evidence supplied by the witnesses of the massacre carried out circa July 1941 is very different. Especially concerning the number of the victims. Some maintain that 28 people were killed, others say that there were 40 – 50, some more hold that there were about 100. All of the witnesses agree only on one fact - the Lithuanian soviet activists were executed together with the Jews. It could be possible that in Virbaliai there were more than two shootings of different size human groups. During one shooting two Lithuanians were granted their life. After that massacre the German made an “educational” speech and threatened to shoot them in the future if they worked for the communists.²

After the Jewish men of Virbalis were shot, the Jewish women with children were driven to the Ghetto in Vištyčio and Maironio Streets. They were kept there until the shooting.³

Likewise, the Jewish women, children and the old men of Kybartai, after the Jewish men were shot down, were herded to the Ghetto to the rooms of the customs office. In the autumn of 1941, following the order of Head of the Police Station J. Staugaitis, the policemen herded all the Jews to a few houses of Kybartai. Next day, Juozas Paukštaitis, the head of the county police together with some policemen arrived to Kybartai from Vilkaviškis. A part of older and ailed Jewish women were taken by the lorry and the remaining ones were herded on foot in Virbalis direction. They were locked in the barn of Puniška in Raudondvaris together with the Jewish women of Virbalis. The white-bands (self-defence squad) of Vilkaviškis and Virbalis arrived.⁴ In all there were 205 women and children brought over from Kybartai. The shooting took place in the same anti-tank ditch. Before the shooting, the women were undressed not far from the ditch. Most of the executors were from the white bands (self-defence squad) of Vilkaviškis. They were also assisted by a few white bands from Virbalis.⁵

It is very complicated to determine the exact number of the killed Jews of Kybartai and Virbalis. According to the soviet calculations it is maintained that over 4 thousand Jews, about 40 soviet activists and a large number of soviet war prisoners were killed in that ditch.⁶ In my opinion, the number of the Jewish victims has been at least doubled. Up to the Nazi-Soviet War there were not more than 2 thousand Jews living in Kybartai and Virbalis. So the number of the shot could be similar.

Pilviškiai

In 1897, the number of Jewish inhabitants in Pilviškiai totalled to 1242 (53% of all the people of the town). After WWI the Jewish community of the town decreased. In the inter-war period quite a lot of local Jews immigrated to the USA, South Africa and Palestine. In the eve of the Holocaust there were about 1000 Jews living in Pilviškiai district. The community had a synagogue, schools, a kinder – garden, a library, a drama club and Zionist youth and sports organizations.¹

During the first days of the war, a German Military Commander's Office was established in Pilviškiai Town. Martin was the head of the office and his deputy was Dylba, a German from Klaipėda Region. There was also a district police station established in the town, and Kazys Bridžius became its chief. Furthermore, a self-defence squad, which was subordinate to Vilkaviškis self-defence squad was formed.

¹ Ibid., p.p. 46-49.

² Interrogation minutes of J. Vizgirda of 6 September 1961, *ibid.*, p.p. 173-174; interrogation minutes of J. Zabilavičius of September 16, 1961, *ibid.*, p.p. 175-176.

³ Interrogation minutes of S. Stankauskas of 22 December 1944, *ibid.*, file 47363/3, Vol. 2, p. 52.

⁴ Interrogation minutes of V. Glinskis of 11 October 1961, *ibid.*, file 47363/3, Vol. 2, p. 10.

⁵ Interrogation minutes of J. Vaitkevičius of 17 October 1961, *ibid.*, file 46890/3, Vol. 1., p.p. 278-279.

⁶ LSSR KGB account on the activities of German Penal Administration in Virbaliai and Kybartai, 12 February 1962, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv.sched. 58, file 47363/3, Vol. 2, p. 62

¹ N. Schoenburg, S. Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, p.p. 216-217.

Juozas Ramanauskas was appointed as the head of that squad. The squad was responsible for guarding Pilviškiai railway bridge. In the summer of 1941 Pilviškiai police and self-defence squad carried out massive arrests of the former communists, soviet activists and a bit later, of the Jews. All in all there were about 100 soviet activists and about a thousand Jews arrested.²

The first massacre of Jews was carried out at the end of August, 1941 (ca on 27 – 29 June), when the Jewish men of Pilviškiai district were shot. The massacre was carried out in Baltrušiai Village (about 2 km from Pilviškiai), in the land belonging to a large agrarian Jonas Lozoraitis. Before the shooting the Jewish men were arrested and closed in the barn belonging to the Jew Kovenski in Pilviškiai Town. In the early morning, before the massacre, the Jewish men were herded to Lozoraitis plot of land (the field) and were made to dig up two ditches. In the digging process, the policemen brought a former communist Kostas Kairiūkštis to the place of the massacre and shot him on the spot.³ Then about 300 – 350 Jewish men and some dozens of soviet activists, among which there was a group of female members of the Young Communist League, were herded to the ditches. Before the shooting, the victims had to undress to underwear and then in small groups placed in front of the ditch and shot down by the Germans and a few policemen from Pilviškiai squad. 10 – 15 executioners were shooting in one round. The victims were shot at their backs, from the distance of approximately 10 meters. The execution was photographed by the German officers.⁴

In the middle of September 1941 (ca on 15 September), the Jewish women, children and old men were shot. The massacre was carried out at the same place as the shooting of the Jewish men. On the day of the massacre a lorry with German soldiers from Vilkaviškis arrived. The Germans from Pilviškiai Military Commander's Office and some local policemen from the self-defence squad arrived. The Jewish martyrs were brought together in the market square and from there taken to the field near Baltrušiai Village. Before the shooting the victims were told to sit down, take off their outerwear and to give in all the jewellery. After that the Jewish women, children and the old men were taken in small groups to the ditch and shot. The shooting was led by the German soldiers from the Commander's Office. For the shooting the Germans used sub – machine guns and the Lithuanians – the rifles. In the middle of the massacre a lorry with the soldiers from Vilkaviškis self-defence company arrived to the shooting place. They took over the shooting from the local police and from the members of the self – protection squad. According to the testimony of the members of the massacre 'the view was absolutely outraging'. In all there were about 700-800 women, children and the old men shot. Clothes and personal possessions of the victims were taken to the storage and later distributed among the killers or sold to the local inhabitants.¹

Although there were two massacres carried out in Pilviškiai, not all the Jews of the district were shot at the time. A part of Pilviškiai Jews were taken to Marijampolė, Vilakaviškis and Kaunas Ghettos. Some of the lucky ones from Kaunas Ghetto survived and lived up to the end of the Nazi occupation.²

It is very difficult to determine the number of the victims of the Holocaust. K. Jäger's report only describes the Jewish massacre on 15 November 1941, in Vilkaviškis Town. In other places, the number of the victims of the massacre can be calculated only on the interrogation protocols of the witnesses. Therefore, gross errors can occur. On the basis of the above-mentioned figures, the possible number of the Holocaust victims in Vilkaviškis County could be about 4,000 people. Compared with unofficial data of the Department of Statistics, dated January 1, 1941, (6,994 Jewish inhabitants – comment by A.B.) there is quite

² LSSR KGB account on the activities of German repressive authorities in Pilviškiai, 12 February 1962, LSA, doc.col. K-1, inv. sched. 58, file 47363/3, Vol. 2, p.p. 62-62, file 47318/3, p. 61 – p. 62.

³ Interrogation minutes of J. Lozoraitis of 21 September 1944, *ibid.*, p.p. 189-190; interrogation minutes of B. Šergalis of 2 September 1944, *ibid.*, p.p. 178-179.

⁴ Interrogation minutes of K. Kaminskas of 4 April 1963, *ibid.*, p.p. 24-29; extract from the interrogation minutes of J. Ramanauskas of 1947, *ibid.*, inv.sched. 8, file 154, p. 153.

¹ Interrogation minutes of K. Kaminskas of 25 May 1963, *ibid.*, p.p. 65-68; interrogation minutes of V. Kirvilaitis of 3 September 1944, *ibid.*, p. 187

² Interrogation minutes of A. Freiberg of 17 December 1946, *ibid.*, inv.sched. 8, file 154, p. 141.

a big difference (about three thousand people) between these figures, which at the moment cannot be explained due to the lack of data. Perhaps the investigation of the German archives (especially the trial material of the members of Tilžė Gestapo squad) could clarify the situation.

Conclusions

Based on the above given research the following conclusions can be made. The persecution and the elimination of the Jews in the province can be conditionally divided into two stages:

- 1) End of June – Middle of July 1941. During this period persecution was based on political motives. Most often the Jews were arrested, imprisoned and shot in the same way as the former communists, members of the Young Communist League, officials of the soviet rule and their followers. Persons of other nationalities, sharing the same beliefs were persecuted for the same reasons (Lithuanians, Polish, Russians, etc.). During that period mostly the Jewish men were terrorised. The Jewish women and especially children were not so systematically and massively shot. The initiative of persecution was taken over by the German occupation government authorities (military officers, Nazi Security Police and SD operational squads, later – by the county military commissioner). At the same time Nazi institutions monitored the persecution and killing of the Jews. From the beginning of the Nazi occupation Lithuanian administration was also involved in the process (heads of the counties, heads of the municipalities), the Lithuanian police and the so-called ‘partisan’ (white band) squads.
- 2) The second stage (End of July – November 1941). It was the period of racial genocide. The Jews were persecuted not because of political reasons but because they were Jews. In that period almost all the Jews from the Lithuanian provinces were killed. The most extensive massacre took place from August to the middle of September. Temporary Jewish ghettos and isolation camps were being established until the massive elimination of Jews in the province was finished. It was the preparation period for the massacre. That process started circa at the end of July and continued to the middle of August. A very important moment at that stage was a secret order No 3 of the Police department director V. Reivytiš on the detention and concentration of Jews in specially chosen places. That order was applied not only in Alytus, Marijampolė, Kėdainiai, Šakiai Counties, but possibly in other counties in Lithuania as well (we do not have any information if it was applicable in Vilnius or Šiauliai districts). Following the orders of the Nazi and the Lithuanian officials all the Jews from the province were taken to the ghettos and the isolation camps. A lot of Jewish men and teenagers were shot, even before the final liquidation of many ghettos and isolation camps. In the final stage of the Jewish elimination from the provinces, all the remaining alive Jews were shot: women, children, old men. The massacre was usually carried out in the forests or fields, situated a few kilometres from the ghettos. The main executors of the Jewish massacre were: the *flying squad* of the SS obersturmführer J. Hamann (it was based on the third company (National Work Protection Company)), local self-defence companies (Zarasai, Kupiškis, Jonava and others), local squads of ‘partisans’ (*white bands*) and the policemen from the police stations. Massive shootings were sometimes led by the officials of the German Gestapo, however, there were some towns, where the Jews were eliminated without the direct participation of the German officials. Local policemen or the white-bands were usually responsible for taking the victims to the massacre places. They also guarded the place of the massacre and often they used to shoot the victims themselves. The final massacres were carried out in Lazdijai (3 November 1941) and in Vilkaviškis (15 November 1941). Up to the middle of November practically all the Jews from the province were eliminated. Only very few local Jews escaped death or were saved by the local people (it could not be more than 3 – 5 %).

If we looked at the timing tendencies of the Holocaust in separate regions of Lithuania, we could see that first the most extensive Jewish massacre started in the counties bordering with Germany (it is particularly relevant to Kretinga County). In the eastern counties of Lithuania (Vilnius, Trakai) and Lazdijai

County Holocaust began and finished the latest. The role of the German Nazi institutions was relatively higher in the counties neighbouring with Germany than in the ones situated in the Middle or Eastern Lithuania. German Gestapo soldiers took part in the executions of the Jews in Kretinga, Tauragė, Raseiniai Counties more often than in other regions of Lithuania. However, the extent of the Holocaust and the percentage of the killed Jews was practically the same in all the counties.

Jewish property was officially held the property of the Third Reich. A part of the more valuable property (furniture, golden jewellery) was taken over by the German authorities, a part was looted by the killers and the remaining part (clothes, small house wares) were cheaply sold or given out to the local people.