

## **Jewish Resistance in Provincial Lithuania in 1941**

### **ABSTRACT**

Prior to Operation Barbarossa there were 220,000 Jews living in Lithuania, of which approximately 120,000 in small towns and villages. These provincial Jews were totally annihilated within the first five months of the German occupation. Extermination camps were not yet in existence, and the Jews were not even imprisoned in ghettos during the initial period. It could have been expected that the harsh German and Lithuanian violence against the Jews would be met with an active response. However, the article reveals very limited resistance, whether active or passive, by any of the Jews. In order to explain the phenomenon of so few acts of resistance, the article proposes to analyse these acts along the timeline of the stages of the extermination process, which were aimed to prepare the Jews for their deaths. Examining those acts in light of the circumstances and the physical and mental condition of the Jews in each of those stages separately, enables a better assessment of the acts of resistance that did take place during each stage, as well as a more convincing interpretation of the reasons for the limited extent of Jewish resistance in the Lithuanian province.

Keywords: Holocaust perpetrators; provincial Lithuania; Jewish resistance; provisional ghettos; extermination.

### **Introduction**

On June 22, 1941 the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa, and in ten days conquered the Soviet Lithuanian Republic.<sup>1</sup> At that time there were 220,000 Jews living in the republic,<sup>2</sup> among them approximately 100,000 in the four large cities.<sup>3</sup> The remainder lived in hundreds of smaller towns and villages – in some only a few Jewish families and in others up to several thousand Jews.<sup>4</sup> These Jewish communities were totally annihilated, including their elderly and children, within the first five months of the German occupation.

Unlike the extensive historiography regarding the fate of the Jews from Lithuania's large cities, very little has been written about the rapid destruction of the provincial Jews. The only studies that are comprehensive and supplement each other are Arūnas Bubnys's essay, "Holocaust in Lithuanian Province in 1941," based on a collection of documents, investigations and testimonies of the murderers and collaborators, and David Bankier's work, *Expulsion and Extermination*, which is based on a collection of survivors' testimonies.<sup>5</sup> Bankier's book exposes acts of extreme hostility and violence on the part of the Lithuanian inhabitants towards their Jewish neighbors immediately at the onset of the war, and the abject powerlessness of the Jewish population in the face of these acts. According to both of the aforementioned studies, this harsh situation of the provincial Jews deteriorated in the following months until their final extermination. It would seem that neither of these scholars imagined that under the dreadful conditions that prevailed at that time in the provincial towns any significant resistance on the part of the Jewish victims could take place. Indeed, despite the detail found in their researches there is no mention of substantial Jewish resistance: Bubnys notes one incident of Jewish men who resisted digging a long death-pit in the small town of Gudleve (Garliava), south of Kovna,<sup>6</sup> and Bankier emphasizes in the beginning of his section 'Resistance' that 'rarely is there information in the testimonies about Jewish resistance,'<sup>7</sup> and only brings one instance.<sup>8</sup> Another important study that attempted to investigate the fate of provincial Jews through test cases was that of Christoph Dieckmann "Holocaust in the Lithuanian Provinces: Case Studies of Jurbarkas and Utena." Dieckmann specifies two instances of Jews who attacked Germans,<sup>9</sup> and summarizes: '... the Jews were trapped... the majority saw no way out and had no chance to escape or resist – the terror from the Germans and Lithuanians was too overwhelming and the environment too hostile.'<sup>10</sup> Also Dieckmann's comprehensive work *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944*, that deals with the Lithuanian provinces as well, only mentions individual instances of Jewish resistance there,<sup>11</sup> and emphasizes again the harsh conditions that did not permit Jewish resistance.<sup>12</sup> Is it really possible that among the more than hundred thousand Jews living in the Lithuanian provinces there was no significant resistance to their oppressors? Is it suitable to use the well-known tragic phrase 'like sheep to the slaughter' in reference to the rapid and total annihilation of these Jewish masses?<sup>13</sup>

This article aims to answer these questions by examining a broad spectrum of testimonies of survivors from the Lithuanian provinces. It acknowledges the problematic nature of using survivors' testimonies as a primary source.<sup>14</sup> In cases where there was a number of such testimonies as well as testimonies of collaborators, a comparison and sometimes a critical judgment was made. However, on many towns in Lithuania there were testimonies of only a handful of survivors, if any. In order to base the arguments on a stable basis, the approach of this article was to classify Jewish resistance, despite its scarcity, according to special characteristics and 'severity', and to reveal parallel behaviors in several testimonies on various towns.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the testimonies were gathered by Leib Koniuhovsky – a Lithuanian-born survivor of the Kovna ghetto – in the early post-war years when the details of the traumatic events experienced by the survivors were still fresh in their memories. Being aware of the problematic aspects of such testimonies, his desire was to maintain historical accuracy. Koniuhovsky compared the details, names and dates collected from a witness on a particular town with the testimonies of other witnesses from that same place, and did not hesitate in correcting dates that appeared in a number of testimonies. The examination of the 150 testimonies of the Koniuhovsky Collection in the Yad Vashem archives, as well as testimonies from other Yad Vashem sources and from anthologies and memorial books,<sup>16</sup> proves that there were acts of resistance and even active ones on the part of the humiliated and down-trodden Jews, but they were not numerous. In order to characterize these acts of resistance and evaluate them properly, they were cross-referenced with the stages of the extermination of the Jews of Lithuanian provincial towns and examined each one in light of the circumstances of its surroundings. It would seem that only in this way it is possible to explain the limited extent of Jewish resistance in the Lithuanian provinces.

## **Background**

Jews and Lithuanians lived side-by-side in hundreds of towns and villages in stable neighborly relations for centuries. Although prejudice against Jews was rooted in the Lithuanians' Catholic religious conceptions, hatred of Jews was expressed in public on rare occasions or in times of crises.<sup>17</sup> This

situation did not change fundamentally during most of the period of Independent Lithuania (1918-1940). Although the authorities systematically harmed the economic and commercial life of the Jews and prevented them from gaining a foothold in the government apparatus, only a few Jews suffered open hostility or physical violence. Moreover, the conservative dictatorship of President Antanas Smetona, who was one of the leaders of the coup d'état of 1926, shielded Jews from anti-Semitic outbreaks.<sup>18</sup> However, infiltration of Nazi propaganda from neighboring Germany aroused sporadic incidents, sometimes violent, against Jews from the middle of the 30's.<sup>19</sup> The atmosphere of hatred significantly strengthened following the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviets on June 15, 1940. Lithuania lost its two decades of independence, and after a rapid process of Sovietization, was incorporated on November 3, 1940 as a republic within the Soviet Union. The open sympathy of young Jews towards the Soviet soldiers who entered the cities of Lithuania aroused feelings that the Jews had betrayed the Lithuanians. Moreover, the visible appearance of Jews in the new governmental administration ignited hatred of Jews among wider sections of the Lithuanian population.<sup>20</sup>

This sharp change in the attitude of the Lithuanians towards the Jews was encouraged by Lithuanian nationalist elements that sought to restore Lithuania's independence and had distinctly anti-Semitic tendencies.<sup>21</sup> They joined a new organization established in Berlin on November 17, 1940 by anti-Soviet exiles, the Lithuanian Activists Front (LAF). Its underground cells were deployed in Lithuanian cities and towns and engaged in guerilla warfare against the Soviet rule and in organization of espionage networks. Besides their intentions against the Soviets, they spread virulent anti-Semitic propaganda by identifying the Jews with Soviet Bolshevism. This propaganda further intensified the anti-Jewish atmosphere.<sup>22</sup> On June 14, 1941, the Soviets launched mass arrests of 'counter-revolutionary' elements, especially nationalist ones, and deported them from Lithuania. Again, Jews were identified among the Soviets who carried out the arrests, and hatred of Jews and feelings of revenge rose to a climax.<sup>23</sup> This rapid process of deterioration in Lithuanian-Jewish relations is a major factor in the causes and

circumstances that led to the discrimination against the Jews and the humiliating torment to which they were subjected by the Lithuanians in provincial Lithuania after the onset of the German-Russian war.<sup>24</sup>

Immediately at the beginning of the German invasion of Lithuania on June 22, 1941, armed members of the underground cells began to attack the Soviet forces but also to maltreat Jews. Jews, especially young people, began to flee their towns in an attempt to reach the borders of the Soviet republics of Latvia and Belarus, but the borders were closed.<sup>25</sup> Finding no alternative, the Jews returned to the place from which they had come. In the course of flight, many encountered the armed Lithuanians. The Jews were easy prey, and the Lithuanians robbed, tortured or murdered not a few of them.<sup>26</sup> However, most of the Jewish population remained in its place.

Lithuanian Provisional Government was established by LAF members after the German invasion of Lithuania. Its purpose was to become the ruling authority after restoring Lithuania's independence. It formed the National Labor Service Battalion (TDA) from mostly former Lithuanian soldiers and underground nationalists, intended to be a basis for a future Lithuanian Army, and its members were called 'White Armbanders' for wearing white armbands on their sleeves.<sup>27</sup> One of the other major goals of the Provisional Government was to dominate the local administration in the towns.

What really happened in those early days in the Lithuanian provincial towns? Most of the Soviet officials and army personnel quickly retreated towards inner Russia. LAF members and other Lithuanian nationalists set up municipal councils, police, and administrative institutions that were entirely Lithuanian. Many of these Lithuanians were responsible for brutal and murderous violence towards local Jews in the first days of the Nazi invasion.<sup>28</sup>

The Germans did not recognize the Provisional Government, although it cooperated fully with the occupation authorities. However, the German forces that entered the towns did not interfere with the new local Lithuanian administration, since its LAF members were considered allies of the Germans and actually did the work for them.<sup>29</sup> After a short stay, the most of the Germans continued on their way east.

The Jews of the provincial towns were subjected from then on to a systematic process of extermination that took place over several months. *SS-Obersturmführer* Joachim Hamann's mobile unit,

known as *Rollkommando* and consisting mostly of Lithuanian troopers, was very active in this process.<sup>30</sup> It went on special flying squad missions to the towns, and there it carried out the planning of the killing operations. German policy dictated action behind the scenes, hence only a limited number of Germans were openly involved in direct murder. Hamann's unit got help especially from the 3<sup>rd</sup> company of the TDA, which was assigned to the *Rollkommando*, but also from Lithuanian collaborators, such as the town's police, members of irregular forces, significant elements of the civilian administration and other civilian volunteers of all the strata of the local Lithuanian society, from the clergy and the intelligentsia to the most marginal groups. They were those who were at the front, and cooperated extensively in the preparation and implementation of the mass shootings.<sup>31</sup> So it happened that the Jews hardly saw the Germans. Their reactions were thus not in response to the actions of the occupying German forces, but mainly to the Lithuanians, some of whom lived nearby and in the recent past could even have been their classmates.<sup>32</sup> The Jews felt that these Lithuanians betrayed them and showed them their true face.

Were all the other local Lithuanians just bystanders? Indeed, the majority of the Lithuanians were passive and did not intervene or interrupt the White Armbanders and the other police or civilian collaborators. Some even opposed the abuse of Jews. For example, White Armbanders from Telz (Telšiai) came to the nearby town of Olshad (Alsėdžiai) in northwest Lithuania to murder the local Jews on the spot. The priest Dambrauskas was the one who prevented them from doing so.<sup>33</sup> Another priest, from Pilvishok (Pilviškiai) in southwest Lithuania, could not prevent the execution of the Jewish women and children on September 15, 1941, the day of their murder. This is a testimony about his desperate response:

Suddenly the church bell rang, followed by the prayers of the Priest Pestinikas, mixed with his trembling sobs. The priest was a friend of the Jews and could not stand the cruelty of his Lithuanian brothers against the innocent Jews. Everyone knew that he asked God to spare the Jews.<sup>34</sup>

There were also cases of assistance given by Lithuanians without reward and at a great risk.<sup>35</sup> However, these and some other righteous Lithuanians were the exception. Many were ready at any moment to hand over Jews who were in hiding to the local administration, and it was nearly pointless to try and find shelter

with an acquaintance or isolated villager. Moreover, some Lithuanians were simply waiting to get rid of the Jewish neighbors in order to plunder their property or participate in auctions of clothing that the Jews had stripped off before being shot.<sup>36</sup>

### **Survey of the Process of the Extermination of Provincial Jewry**

One of the jobs of the new Lithuanian administration was to control the lives of the local Jews.<sup>37</sup> To this end, it began by enacting a long list of anti-Jewish decrees. From a very young age Jews were required to wear a yellow star on the left side of the chest and on their back. It was forbidden for them to leave their homes from early evening until morning, they were not permitted to walk freely on sidewalks but only single-file or on the right side of the road, and they could not visit parks, speak with Lithuanians, buy in Lithuanian stores, use public transportation, or own real estate, radios, bicycles and cameras.<sup>38</sup>

In those early days of the German occupation, Jews were required to register at the local council and go out on work details. In most cases these were unpaid, undignified jobs, and their entire purpose was to humiliate the Jews. They were forced to pluck weeds out of the sidewalks, to clean the marketplace, to sweep the streets, to clean the townspeople's bathrooms, to peel potatoes in the prisons, to repair roads and to prune trees. This work was accompanied by ridicule, curses and murderous blows by the armed Lithuanian guards.<sup>39</sup>

The obvious hostility to Jews on the part of the new Lithuanian town administration, expressed by restrictive decrees and public works projects, created an atmosphere of legal and permissible violence. Armed Lithuanians entered the homes of the Jews from time to time and shamelessly plundered them as the residents looked on helplessly.<sup>40</sup> Lithuanian inhabitants, including the local intelligentsia, would occasionally gather on Sundays around the market square, and the Jewish neighbors were called upon to put on a 'show.' In these shows the Jews were forced to perform odd and ridiculous exercises and sing prayers and Soviet songs.<sup>41</sup> There should be mention of incidents of rape and murder that were everyday events in the towns as well.<sup>42</sup> There were no places of refuge from this depressing reality. The lives and property of the Jews were free for the taking.

It would be right to see this treatment as the primary stage of the extermination process of the Jews from the provincial towns.<sup>43</sup> The next stage began with their concentration under one roof, in local makeshift ghettos.<sup>44</sup> The crowding in each ghetto was terrible; the lack of food was severe. Armed Lithuanians occasionally went into the ghettos, and with varied excuses plundered the remaining property of those interned, and sometimes even abused them. In addition to allowing close supervision of the Jews before executing them,<sup>45</sup> these ghettos had another important goal in the eyes of the German planners and their Lithuanian helpers, namely to physically and mentally weaken the Jews in advance of their impending death. Indeed, in not a few towns the men were tormented by hunger and murderous beatings until there was no fear of their resisting their murderers.<sup>46</sup>

The last stage of the extermination process was the actual annihilation. After being kept in the ghettos, sometimes for only a short time, the Jews were taken in groups when they were already exhausted from systematic beatings and starvation on the part of the Lithuanians. In this way the strong and healthy men were murdered in many of the towns in July 1941. The elderly, women and children were given more time to live, a miserable life indeed, until their total liquidation in September-October of that same year.<sup>47</sup> Most of the murders, which took place next to pits that had been prepared in advance, were carried out by the armed Lithuanians themselves, and in each location two or three Germans stood by and just took pictures.<sup>48</sup>

By November 1941 there was no living remnant of Jews in the provincial towns of Lithuania, and all their property had been pillaged.<sup>49</sup>

### **Acts of Resistance**

The brief survey of the extermination of provincial Lithuanian Jewry shows that its stages actually isolated the Jews from their neighbors, lowered their spirits, left them without property or food and brought them to a physical and mental nadir before their mass execution. It is clear that in this very rapid process and the manifest atmosphere of annihilation, it was almost impossible to resist. Indeed, resistance was rare. Hence,



any act was very meaningful, especially since the hope of its success was null, and the fate of the brave man or woman destined to be dire and bitter.

Jewish resistance in the Lithuanian town could not normally be planned in advance because of the difficult circumstances of time and space. It was also not a natural response to an attack. The actual resistance was characterized by ad-hoc disobedience of individuals to orders of the perpetrators. It was expressed in a wide spectrum of modes, beginning with the simple self-defense, whether passive, such as escape or refusal to fulfill an instruction, or active, such as attacking the perpetrator, verbally or physically, and ending with the most extreme activities of defiance or revenge. These actions were ignored in the perpetrators' documents. This article tries to balance the accepted picture by exposing the acts of resistance of Jewish individuals mentioned in the victims' testimonies, which have not been regularly used until recently.<sup>50</sup>

Some of the acts of resistance took place during the first period of the German occupation, while the Jews were in an initial state of shock due to their neighbors' rejection and mockery and the armed Lithuanians' terror.<sup>51</sup> Other acts of resistance were initiated when reality changed to organized attacks on Jews during their expulsion from homes and imprisonment in makeshift ghettos. Yet other acts of resistance occurred when Jews were marched to their deaths, or when they were standing before the death-pits while White Armbanders surrounded them and treated them without mercy. Hence, the acts of resistance should not be regarded as if they were all under identical conditions.<sup>52</sup> It is necessary to examine them according to their place in the extermination process of the Jewish communities, which as aforesaid took place in three major stages or during three time periods.<sup>53</sup>

### ***The First Period: Humiliation, Robbery and Murderous Violence***

This period was characterized by marking the Jews, isolating them and forcing them to take part in degrading work. A typical illustration of these events which took place in most of the towns is described in the testimony of a survivor from Dubinik (Dubingiai), a town in eastern Lithuania:

The morning after the day the war broke out, Monday June 23, 1941, it was impossible to find anyone from the Soviet police or Red Army in the town. The Germans had not yet arrived, but on that day the Lithuanians hung up a big sign that incited the local population to begin settling accounts with the Jews. Armed Lithuanians from the town and the area immediately organized themselves into a force of 40 men and began to rob the Jews. They went to the more affluent Jews and took whatever seemed to them to be valuable. On the same day they assembled all the Jewish boys and girls and forced them to clean the toilets of the Lithuanian townspeople. Towards evening they sent the young people home.<sup>54</sup>

In this discriminatory and violent atmosphere, the armed Lithuanians were involved in arresting Communists and young Jews and murderously abusing them, as well as robbing Jewish property. Lithuanian takeover of local life was a new reality, and it was possible to expect that Jews would organize and resist their oppression, since they still had their strength. This did indeed take place in Rakishok (Rokiškis), in northeast Lithuania. The Soviets who had ruled there prepared for the arrival of the German army and organized to counterattack. They distributed arms to the Komsomol youth, both gentile and Jewish, and these youths were integrated into the plan for local defense. However, the Soviet army was quickly evacuated from Rakishok, and on June 27, 1941 the town was left without any government. On that day, armed Lithuanians began a pogrom against the Jews, and a bloody battle was fought between the armed Jewish youth and the Lithuanians. The battle lasted more than 2 hours, and 12 young Jews fell, as well as Lithuanians.<sup>55</sup> But this was an exceptional case. For the most part, the Jews had no weapons, and they were unable to openly oppose the armed Lithuanians. Actually in Kupishok (Kupiškis), also in northeast Lithuania, several young Jews rose up against a gang of Lithuanian gymnasium students in the early days of the German invasion.<sup>56</sup> Also in Shirvint (Širvintos) in eastern Lithuania, where the Germans began on August 11, 1941 to seize Jewish men and put them onto wagons, many resisted and were sentenced to be burnt alive,<sup>57</sup> but usually group resistance was rare.

Indeed, nearly all the acts of resistance in that period were the acts of individuals. When armed Lithuanians came to take Jews to forced labor in Mariampol (Marijampolė) in southwest Lithuania, Ze'ev Papirnik, age 24, refused to go with them. The Lithuanians tried to force him. He grabbed a rifle from one

of them and shot and killed him, and wounded another.<sup>58</sup> In Haydutsishok (Adutiškis), a town in the extreme east of Lithuania, the local Soviet administration began to flee in the morning of June 26, 1941. Immediately groups of armed Lithuanians appeared in the town, arrested several young Jews and accused them of pro-Soviet sympathies. One of the young people, Avrom Yoḥelman, did not acquiesce to his arrest. The 25 year-old young man struck the Lithuanian who was leading him in the head and succeeded in fleeing.<sup>59</sup> In Ushpol (Užpaliai) in northeast Lithuania, the armed Lithuanians began their attacks on the Jews with assaults on individuals. One of those attacked was Rabbi Leib Kamrazh, the son of Aharon, the town's aged rabbi. His daughter was raped in front of him, and he was taken by the Lithuanian rapist outside of the town to dig a death-pit for himself. As he was digging, he attacked the Lithuanian and strangled him.<sup>60</sup>

Some of the Jews acted out of their recoil at showing disrespect towards Jewish holy objects. In Vainute (Vainutas) in western Lithuania, for example, the Germans went into the synagogue on July 18, 1941 and ran wild, tearing the Torah scrolls. The local rabbi Yosef Yaakov Shur was shocked and threw a piece of wood at the Germans. He was badly beaten. On the next day, the Sabbath, the injured rabbi was brought to the synagogue and ordered to set the Torah scrolls on fire. He refused and was beaten once more. The Germans brought the beadle, but he also refused to light the fire, and they beat him murderously.<sup>61</sup>

Other reactions were characterized by spontaneous naiveté: in Mariampol the Jews were ordered to greet every German by removing their hats and bowing their heads. The local teacher Tzvi A'irov did not notice a German soldier as he was walking, and did not greet him. The soldier slapped him, and A'irov, without thinking twice, slapped him back several times. He was immediately arrested and murdered in prison.<sup>62</sup> In the large town of Sventzian (Švenčionys) in eastern Lithuania, able-bodied men were taken for degrading labor. Armed Lithuanians tried to hurry up one group's walking, and as was their custom, beat them mercilessly. A young man, Alter Grazul, could not control himself and rebuked the Lithuanian who was beating them for his cruel behavior. The Lithuanians did not take his act lying down. Grazul was taken behind the town and shot to death.<sup>63</sup>

No matter what the motives behind the reactions were, an examination of the numerous testimonies shows that acts of Jewish resistance in the provincial towns in the early period after the outbreak of war were few. The paucity of reactions, and the near total absence of physical resistance in particular, show that most of the Jews were in a state of shock and helplessness. It would seem that they did not yet realize the gravity of their situation. But even those who understood the serious danger did nearly nothing. It would appear that the drastic and rapid change in the status of the Jews, and the fear that the Germans and armed Lithuanians instilled in them, weakened them and prevented them from pulling themselves together and reacting in a more organized and significant manner.

### *The Second Period: Ghettoization*

Despite the ruthless and deadly violence of the Germans and Lithuanians in the first period of the conquest of Lithuania, many Jews still believed that this turbid wave of aggression and degradation would soon pass. They recalled quite well the fair neighboring relations with the Lithuanians before the war, and they had a concealed hope that the situation would eventually return to its former state. But the bitter realization that this was an illusion became clear at a new stage in the process of their elimination – the expulsion from their homes by armed Lithuanians and their concentration in makeshift ghettos, mostly in synagogues, Study Halls, barracks, barns, stables, or in the most miserable neighborhoods of towns. Hundred ghettos were established throughout Lithuania during this stage, which began in some towns in early July 1941. By November 1941 ghettoization of all towns was completed.<sup>64</sup>

It would seem that the single acts of partially active opposition to the expulsion order took place in Shaki (Šakiai) in southwest Lithuania and in Visoki-Dvor (Aukštadvaris) in southern Lithuania. In Shaki, the White Armbanders expelled the Jewish women and children from their homes to a local ghetto. A girl, Ethel Ravel, beat several of them with her shoe and shouted, ‘I know you're going to shoot us, because nothing else can be expected from murderers like you. A day will come and you will pay dearly for our blood!’ The Lithuanians tied her to a moving wagon and beat her to death.<sup>65</sup> In Visoki-Dvor, the Jews were required to move to the local ghetto on July 24, 1941. A young Jewish woman, Ida Broyde,

turned to a German commandant and protested against the decree. For this 'crime' the woman was sentenced to death.<sup>66</sup> The rest of the acts of resistance were even more passive. In Mazheik (Mažeikiai) in northwest Lithuania, for example, the Jews were ordered in the beginning of July 1941 to move into the *Beit Midrash* (Study Hall), which had been designated as a temporary ghetto. A local dentist, Dr. Fanya Lampe, refused the Lithuanians' order to leave her home. They shot her together with her daughter.<sup>67</sup> A similar incident occurred in Zhosle (Žasliai), located between Vilna and Kovna, on Saturday night, August 16, 1941 while White Armbanders collected outside the doors of the Jewish homes of the town. The Jews had already become used to looting and robbery on the part of the local armed Lithuanians and were afraid to open their doors. The White Armbanders broke into the Jewish homes and forced all the men, girls age 16 and older, and women with grown children to go out and gather in the local council building and in the home of one of the Jews. From there they were meant to be led to a temporary ghetto – a large shed in the neighboring town of Koshedar (Kaišiadorys). One girl showed courage and refused to leave her home. The Lithuanians did not hesitate much and shot her in the leg. There were another few acts of such passive resistance in the town. The Lithuanians beat those that resisted with whips and forced them to leave their homes.<sup>68</sup>

A unique example of passive resistance occurred in Koshedar itself, where about 80 Jewish families lived. They were taken to the shed near the Koshedar train station, where a day before the expelled Jews of Zhosle had been driven. A ten year old boy, apparently by virtue of his sharp senses, realized the gravity of the situation. He did not want to leave his home, and hid beneath a wagon. The armed Lithuanians noticed this, found his hiding place, and ordered him to come out. When the child did not do so, they shot under the wagon and killed him.<sup>69</sup>

What happened in the ghettos themselves? As was already mentioned, they served as a temporary holding place for Jews before their execution. The Jews did not know this, and despite the harsh conditions there were no significant acts of opposition among them,<sup>70</sup> certainly not organized resistance. It appears that the one common act worthy of mention took place in Vabolnik (Vabalninkas), in northeast Lithuania. Three weeks after the beginning of the war all the local Jews had been taken to the ghetto and

from there, on August 18, 1941 to a *Beit Midrash* and school building, later to be moved to the next town, Posvol (Pasvalys). When the intentions of the Lithuanians became known, one couple, the Gertners, encouraged the Jews imprisoned in the school to respond. They all worked to break a hole in the fence surrounding the school. Gertner persuaded the Lithuanian guard, a teacher by profession, to turn a blind eye, and the Jews escaped through the gap.<sup>71</sup>

There were also attempts to escape from other ghettos, but in all of these cases individuals fled rather than organized groups. For example, Jews were brought to the aforementioned shed in Koshedar from the neighboring town of Zhezhmer (Žiežmariai) as well. Most accepted their fate, but one of the young women, Esther Gordon, felt that her end was drawing near and decided to act. She fled from the shed and hid in the surrounding area. To her great misfortune, the Lithuanians found her out and shot her in her hiding-place. Another few women from Zhezhmer fled and hid with villagers in the area, but in the end they too were turned over to the White Armbanders and were murdered.<sup>72</sup>

An exceptional incident took place in Krakinove (Krekenava) in central Lithuania. Jews from this town had been expelled from their homes to a local *Beit Midrash* that had been defined as a ghetto. This cramped building was guarded by an armed Lithuanian. Shmerl Levin, one of the imprisoned Jews, asked the guard to allow him to go outside. When he refused, Levin stabbed him with a knife.<sup>73</sup> The uniqueness of this behaviour teaches us the general rule: nearly all the reactions, which were even fewer than those in the previous period, were acts of passive resistance, and included flight and hiding. Most of the Jews chose not to resist, from fear of what would be done to them, and preferred to accept the new decrees silently and submissively in the hope that they would survive this difficult period.

### ***The Third Period: Extermination***

A short while after incarcerating the Jews in ghettos, the White Armbanders began to remove them in groups. Ominous signs few days earlier had already indicated that something very serious was about to happen – the forced labor had been stopped and guarding the ghettos had been greatly intensified. In some cases the Lithuanian guards even informed the Jews that they were about to be executed. At that stage, it

became to some of the Jews that they had no hope of remaining alive. There was no chance of escape, and even if someone thought he might be successful in fleeing, there was nowhere to hide. Furthermore, the Jews were already exhausted from the beatings and starvation forced upon them by the armed Lithuanians, and they saw no alternative other than to accept their bitter fate. However, there were some individuals who thought differently, and with their last ounce of strength tried to act. These actions took a number of forms. I will open with a testimony from the ghetto on the Vishevian (Viešvėnai) estate located seven kilometers from Telz in northwest Lithuania, in the middle of July 1941. It is possible to learn from this testimony about the characteristic way of suppressing the Jewish men in order to weaken them physically and mentally before the White Armbanders murdered them:

The partisans stood the men in a circle and again began the horrible ‘devil’s dance’ – this is what the ‘Inquisition’ was called in the camp... The women heard the never-ending running of the men, beatings with sticks and whips and loud shouts of ‘Sh’ma Yisroel’ [Hear, O Israel]... There were older men left lying on the ground... The rest of the Jews, bloodied, were arranged in rows, four in a row... At that moment the wife of Dr. Zaks from the town of Riteve (Rietavas) broke through the gate of the barn, and with a small child in her arms, wild and angry as a tigress, ran furiously to the marching convoy, where her husband was... She turned to the partisans with a heart-rending cry: ‘Remember, murderers, they will not be silent about this! The world will not be silent about what you are doing! I am a Communist! I want to die together with my husband.’ The partisans tore the child from her arms. She fell upon them with her fists. They returned the child to her and led her together with all the men, with her husband. After about half an hour shots were heard from the forest.<sup>74</sup>

It was not only fervently Communist Jews who dared to defy the White Armbanders.<sup>75</sup> The Jewish men in Pilvishok in southwest Lithuania were crowded in a barn on one of the town’s streets. There they were maltreated and given no food. Other Jews, men and women from the surrounding villages, joined them. On August 27, 1941 more than 400 of the people in the barn were taken to the nearby village of Tilčius and were shot there. One of the murderers, Jonas Adomaitis, told after the shooting that Dr. Dembovsky, who was popular in the entire surrounding area, gave a speech before he was murdered to the Lithuanian police and White Armbanders and warned: ‘We Jews are being murdered for no reason! Our blood will

yet be avenged!' The Lithuanians split open his head with their rifle butts and abused him until he died.<sup>76</sup> Even ordinary Jews did not refrain from protest. In Meretch (Merkinė) in southern Lithuania, for example, many of the local Jewish men had already been murdered by Lithuanians in the early stages of the German occupation. The women and children, the elderly and the sick, as well as the few men who remained were crowded in the synagogue and adjoining *Beit Midrash*, which had been designated as a ghetto. On September 8, 1941 armed Lithuanians entered the ghetto and told the Jews that they would all be executed that night. Naturally, the Jews could not sleep due to distress and fear. This is a testimony of what happened afterwards:

In the early morning, armed murderers entered the ghetto. They chose a group of men and ordered them to take off their shoes and outer garments. They led the Jews in their underwear through the town towards the Jewish cemetery. The townspeople stood in the streets and many expressed their joy, clapped their hands, cursed and spat on the Jews who were walking quietly with their heads lowered on their last way to their death. Among the men in the first group there was a Jew named Moshe Miller. When his group was already standing at the edge of the pit... Moshe Miller then addressed the armed Lithuanians, his voice full of pain: 'Today we are powerless. Here I stand together with my three small children. You have the weapons. But know, you leprous and filthy swine, that you cannot shoot all the Jews in the world. Our brothers and the better part of humanity will avenge our blood.' The murderers shot him. Moshe Miller fell into the pit like a tree that was cut down.<sup>77</sup>

In the few examples just mentioned, individual Jews defied their murderers as they were on their way to the ditches or as they were standing next to them before their death. Kalman Raḥmil of Mazheik in northwest Lithuania went further. On August 3, 1941 the Jewish men of the town were led to the death-pits and were shot there. Suddenly Raḥmil rose up among the dead and wounded in the ditch and gathering his last shreds of strength spoke out against his murderers. He was immediately shot.<sup>78</sup>

The Jews did not only protest in their last moments. Some Jews chose not to follow the orders of the murderers when it came to their moral feelings. In the town of Virbaln (Virbalis) in southwest Lithuania, all the Jewish men were taken to the death pits on July 10, 1941. Dr. Kagansky was ordered to



verify the death of the men falling into the pit, but he refused and even spoke out forcefully against the White Armbanders.<sup>79</sup> A number of testimonies indicate that there were individuals who defied the order to remove their clothing next to the pits before being shot. In Vilkovishk (Vilkaviškis) in southwest Lithuania, on September 24, 1941 the Lithuanians took the Jews out of the local ghetto and led them to the ditches. First the men were massacred, and then the women were taken there, in groups of 30-40, together with their children. By the pit, the women were compelled to strip almost totally naked. Some women refused. With the rifles' bayonets, the Lithuanians ripped the women's clothes and flesh together.<sup>80</sup> In Tavig (Tauragė) in western Lithuania, on August 13, 1941 armed Lithuanians took the Jews out of the ghetto and transported them in trucks to a pit at the edge of the town. This is a testimony about what happened by the ditch:

Before the shooting, the [Lithuanian] murderers ordered the men and the women to remove all their clothing. Henneh Yezner, a girl in her twenties, refused to disrobe. The murderers began to beat her. Henneh, still alive, jumped into the ditch in her clothing. Henneh was very beautiful, and the licentious Lithuanians wanted to rape her before her death. This story is known to all the Lithuanians in Tavig.<sup>81</sup>

Not only women refused to undress. In Erzhvilik (Eržvilkas) in western Lithuania, it became known to the Jews on September 13, 1941 that their days were numbered. Immediately, 48 men and women fled the town. The rest stayed in their place because they could not flee, and many did not even believe the rumor. Two days later the rest were brought to Batok (Batakliai), the adjoining town, and there all of them were forced to completely disrobe next to the killing pit. Hirshel Yoffe refused. The Lithuanians broke his arms and legs and threw him into the pit alive.<sup>82</sup> In other towns there was nearly group resistance to undressing before being murdered.<sup>83</sup>

Unlike the reactions in the second period which were characterized by mainly passive resistance, this time besides the acts of resistance already mentioned – which could be considered very courageous under the circumstances – there were also acts of active resistance. Some of these were for the purpose of escape and others only for revenge, but all of them are greater due to the unbearably difficult conditions

under which they were performed. I will open with an example of resistance that took place on the way to the death pits: The early liquidation of the men of Meretch in southern Lithuania has already been mentioned.<sup>84</sup> Most were caught one by one by the Lithuanians, put into groups and taken to the ghetto in nearby Alite (Alytus), and there they were murdered. However, there were some groups whose members were arrested and imprisoned in buildings in Meretch itself. The following is a testimony of the fate of one of these groups:

The murderers gathered the Jews in a small stable with the Tatar Gembitzky. An armed guard watched over the Jews in the stable, and they were not given food or water... The Jews in the stable were tortured all the time in the cruelest way possible... The murderer Matulaitis, son-in-law of Mačiulskis [a teacher in the elementary school], promised the families of the imprisoned Jews in the stable that he would not allow them to be taken to Alite. But he demanded money, gold and valuables in exchange... and actually did not take the prisoners to Alite. At night he took the prisoners out of the stable and shot them outside the town. **No resistance was possible.** The Jews in the stable were starved, thirsty, without strength and broken. But when Moshe Zhmotsky was taken outside the town, he grabbed a fence pole and split open the head of the murderer Pinkevičius [a local stone mason]. Immediately, Moshe was shot by another [Lithuanian].<sup>85</sup>

There were occurrences of group resistance as well. In Yurburg (Jurbarkas), for example, the remainder of the women and children were led to their death on September 7, 1941. The mothers attacked the Lithuanians with their fists, and in the general confusion a few young women succeeded in fleeing.<sup>86</sup> These instances of active resistance, including group resistance, were carried out based on self-generated initiative and impulse rather than as a result of coordination in advance. A more organized activity took place in the village of Pravenishok (Pravieniškės), next to Kovna. There, few thousand Jews were being held in a work camp. When the Germans decided to liquidate the camp in early September 1941, the Jews were taken by White Armbanders to their deaths in groups. The hundred members of the last group, who heard the screams and the shootings, spoke among themselves and decided to attack the Lithuanian shooters by the death pits. Their plan succeeded and most of them fled.<sup>87</sup>

This last incident shows that active resistance on the part of Jews on their way to the pits emanated, in some cases, from the hope to escape. This concealed hope was not lost even as they stood on the edge of the death-pit itself.<sup>88</sup> A salient example of Jews' hope to flee and survive occurred in Kelm (Kelmė), in the western part of central Lithuania. The men were assembled in a barn in a watched camp on the edge of the town. Those who remained alive in this camp were transferred to another barn in an agricultural tract next to Kelm. On August 22, 1941 the Lithuanians began to take members of this group to be shot, leaving only ten men alive. Their end arrived on the same day when four White Armbanders took them out of the barn. This is the story of one of those last Jews, Yaakov Zak, who survived the war:

The ten men were brought to a field near a pit where several dozens of men were waiting their turn to be murdered by shooting... It was already dark... the Lithuanian Mikalauskas from the village of Pupšiai was guarding Yaakov and his friends, and stood next to Yaakov. The Lithuanian lit a match in order to smoke. By the light of the match Yaakov saw the murderous countenance of Mikalauskas. At that moment it occurred to Yaakov to attempt to escape, and to remain alive so that he could bear witness before the whole world against the Lithuanian murderers. In a split second he grabbed the automatic rifle from the Lithuanian and crushed his head. The Lithuanian fell. With his last ounce of strength Yaakov began to run towards the nearby forest.<sup>89</sup>

Other incidents of active resistance on the edge of the pit in attempt to be saved took place in Keidan (Kėdainiai) in central Lithuania, where there were 2500 Jews before the war. They were concentrated in a crowded ghetto. Another 1500 Jews who were brought from the adjacent towns of Shat (Šeta) and Zheim (Žeimiai) were added to the local Jews. On August 15, 1941 the Lithuanians emptied the ghetto and transferred the Jews to a horse-stable at the edge of the town. There they sat in crowded conditions and without food, receiving only black coffee. After 13 days, many White Armbanders arrived, selected the young and strong among the Jewish men, and began to take them out of the stable in groups of 60 towards a ditch that had been dug in the fields near the town. The local Lithuanian intelligentsia, amongst them the priest, came to the ditch to watch the 'show'. The Jews were forced to undress and get into the ditch. There they were shot by the armed Lithuanians who stood around it. Keidan was exceptional, because the

one locally in charge of the killing was a German officer; in most of the killing areas the visible Germans were only involved in photographing the proceedings. Keidan was unique as well in the number of acts of resistance that took place during the executions. One of the Jews succeeded in wounding an armed Lithuanian with his pocket-knife, and another, Boruch Meir Tchesler, even grabbed a rifle from a Lithuanian, but did not know how to use it. As he attempted to flee, he was shot.<sup>90</sup>

There were also actions that were not aimed at saving lives. Jews already felt that their deaths were immanent as they stood on the edge of the pit or inside it. Their only desire was to avenge their murderers and to save the honor of their people in some small way. An incident such as this, the most famous in Keidan, occurred when the second group of men was brought to the pit. One of the men was Tzodok Shlapobersky, who had served as the head of the town's fire-brigade before the war.<sup>91</sup> A Lithuanian truck-driver who transported barrels of lye and crates of vodka and beer to the place of the murder, and afterwards brought the old people to the pit as well, described what happened:

I stood at the edge of the pit and saw that one of the men was refusing to undress. A man wearing civilian clothes and armed with a pistol approached him and grabbed him by the jacket in order to undress him by force. Next to him stood a Jew who had already undressed [this was Tzodok]. He grabbed the man wearing civilian clothes (afterwards I found out it was Čizas) by his collar and pulled him towards the pit, where there were many men. This Jew grabbed the pistol from Čizas and shot the German commandant who then stood on the edge of the pit, but he missed. The commandant jumped into the pit. Then the Jew released Čizas, and as he held the German he hit him in the head with the pistol...<sup>92</sup>

This was not the only show of courage by the pit or actually inside it. Such extraordinary reactions took place in other towns too.<sup>93</sup>

## **Summary**

Lithuania was the first country in Europe where mass extermination of Jews took place.<sup>94</sup> At the time the German-Russian war broke out, the Nazi extermination method in closed camps had not yet been activated.<sup>95</sup> The annihilation of the Jews in July–November 1941 in Lithuanian towns was carried out by

gathering them by the edges of long pits on the outskirts of the towns and shooting them in groups. These mass murders did not occur suddenly. They were preceded by protracted 'preparation' of the victims through maltreatment, systematic starvation and vicious beatings. This article shows the gradual deterioration of the living conditions of the Jews, deterioration that impacted their motivation to rise up against their tormenters in two opposing directions:

- Strengthening the desire to resist through their understanding of the goal of the growing organized violence of the armed Lithuanians and the realization that their lives were increasingly in danger.
- Weakening their capability of resistance due to the increased and tightened control of the Lithuanians and the growing physical and mental exhaustion.

In the early period after the outbreak of the war, the physical condition of many of the Jews was still reasonable. As long as they were living in their own homes, they felt a certain degree of freedom, and the surrounding conditions allowed them to resist the maltreatment of the armed Lithuanians and the Germans. Indeed, a few Jews did resist, and even succeeded in acting forcefully. However, it is clear that there was little resistance. A sense of shock had overcome the Jews, caused by the sudden change in their treatment on the part of the Lithuanians, the large number of weapons in the hands of the Lithuanians, and the murderous violence unleashed against them. This feeling, accompanied by the illusion that the difficult times were temporary and that they could survive if they did the bidding of the Germans and Lithuanians,<sup>96</sup> stifled any desire or motivation for resistance or opposition.

In the second period, when the Jews were concentrated in ghettos, they had already recovered from the initial feelings of shock and were well aware of the murderous behaviour of the armed Lithuanians. Nevertheless, their physical condition had deteriorated severely due to a lack of food and the repeated beatings they experienced in the ghettos. Moreover, they were denied the relative freedom to act that they had while living in their own homes. As a result, an emotional equilibrium was formed between their increasing desire to resist and the growing difficulty involved in any sort of opposition. This was a

situation that paralyzed the Jews' reactions and significantly decreased expressions of resistance, which were nearly always passive. It would seem that in the desire to justify this paralysis the Jews wanted to believe that even their relocation to the ghettos was not sufficient to endanger their very existence. One of the survivors from Utyan (Utena) in eastern Lithuania bore witness to this: 'Even those doomsayers among us could not imagine this... no one even raised the possibility that Lithuanians or Germans would take out innocent people and carry out **premeditated murder!**'<sup>97</sup> This way of thinking – stemming from the human tendency to repress and refuse to accept harsh reality – was expressed even in the final days of the Lazdei (Lazdijai) ghetto in southern Lithuania, as is described in the following testimony:

On October 26, 1941 the partisans closed the ghetto gate and took no more [people] for work. A tighter armed guard of partisans was positioned around the ghetto. The Jews then understood well that little time was left to live... Other Jews from the sheds saw clearly how ditches were being dug for them... The young people organized and considered the possibility of taking the weapons of the guards, cutting the telephone cables and fleeing with the weapons that would be taken... Regarding saving the women and children, the old and sick, there was nothing to think about. However, some were against this sort of plan in hope that **perhaps despite everything** the execution would not be carried out, but if there was resistance then no one would remain alive. The rabbi of Lazdei and other rabbis asked that no heedless steps be taken, and requested to have mercy on the women and children. Zeff [the witness] and his friend Miḥnovsky asked them at least not to interfere with saving the young people. But the opinion of the rabbi and those that agreed with him prevailed.<sup>98</sup>

From this testimony can be discerned a clear echo of shards of hope – up until the very moments of liquidation – that paralyzed Jews and prevented any possible action. The situation was such that even when witnesses came and reported that they saw entire groups that were murdered – the living refused to believe their testimony.<sup>99</sup>

In the third period, in which the Jews were taken out of the ghettos and brought to the death-pits, all the illusions were shattered and it became clear to them that their end was very near. The motivation to resist should have been at its highest, since resistance was the only way to be saved from certain death. However, the Jews were guarded even more watchfully and this made it much more difficult to resist.

Moreover, mental exhaustion prevented many acts of resistance, and an obvious example of this is found in the aforementioned testimony regarding the execution of the men of the town of Kelm.<sup>100</sup> As was mentioned, the last of the men were held in a barn in an agricultural estate near the town before being shot. One of the men, the witness Yaakov Zak, recognized the two armed Lithuanians who were guarding the barn, and suggested to his friends a simple plan for escape: he would approach the two murderous acquaintances, and when he gave the signal, his friends would attack the two guards, take them into the barn, strangle them and flee. The plan was decided upon. Yaakov went to talk with his acquaintances and gave the agreed-upon signal, but his friends did not react at all! Afterwards they explained that they had lost their interest in living because their families had already been shot. Just as was already recounted, they were taken out of the barn on August 22, 1941, and treading slowly through the mud on their tired feet they went towards the pit. This was Yaakov's account:

At that moment Yaakov thought of his relatives, who were already surely lying cold in the pit. An 'unnatural' urge suddenly pushed Yaakov to act. The desire to remain alive unexpectedly overcame him. He persuaded his friends to begin to run at the same moment... he suggested that they run in every direction and attempt to save themselves. 'What God decrees – that is what will be!' – the men answered Yaakov.<sup>101</sup>

Mental and physical exhaustion is what prevented Yaakov's friends from acting in the two opportunities to save themselves that arose before their execution. This submitting to fate was the archetypal attitude of most of the Jews from the towns in the last stage before their death. The overwhelming majority had lost their will to live after they had been 'softened up' – in the language of some Lithuanians – and had reached the end of their physical, and especially emotional, strength. Their only desire was to return their souls to the Creator quickly and without further suffering. In this situation, in which they were utterly exhausted, and it had become clear that nearly any attempt to save themselves was pointless, it is easy to understand why there were so few instances of resistance.<sup>102</sup> These difficult circumstances serve to inspire even greater recognition of the importance of study of the few instances of resistance that took place during the last stage of Jewish existence in the provincial towns. It would seem that similar recognition

deserves a completely different kind of resistance chosen by other Jews, more ‘regular’, as a last means of their salvation. On September 27, 1941, the Jews from all the towns in the Sventzian district were concentrated in the Polygon army-camp near Nai-Sventzian (Švenčionėliai) in eastern Lithuania. One of the survivors of the camp, Fruma Hołman, testified as to what occurred there on October 1, the last *Yom Kippur* [Day of Atonement] in the Jews’ lives:

Immediately in the morning, old Jews who were not able to work gathered from all the barracks and prayed, wearing tallis [prayer shawl] and kittel [white robe]. On that day, bearded Jews braced up and tried a means that was thousands of years old. The last means, the one and only means to be saved from murderers. They concentrated [on their prayers] with all seriousness, with all the enthusiasm of their bleeding hearts... A heart-rending cry was torn from their hearts against the murderers, a protest about everything towards God, who had in such a terrible way neglected and forgotten His people... Tears flowed from their eyes... The shoḥet [ritual slaughterer] Moshe Mendel Berlin, who served as the prayer-leader, had a most difficult task this time... the shoḥet from Sventzian on this *Yom Kippur* had to attain from God that which no one had been successful in attaining for many generations. But he felt he had to attain it, since an entire congregation was standing a few steps away from death. He, the innocent who had been sentenced to death with all the other Jews, prayed with such fervor, accompanied by so many tears, like he had never prayed in his life.<sup>103</sup>

It seems that this awe-inspiring event in the last days of the many Jews who were interned in the camp can also teach a great deal about the importance of first-person sources from Jewish perspectives. Although part or even most of them may lack the global picture, their great advantage is the detailed presentation of the Lithuanian town. Apart from their ‘dry’ details, such as the names and numbers of the murdered Jews, and the names and professions of the abusers, their account of the development of the local extermination process is very important as all this is missing in most of the perpetrators’ documents. Moreover, these sources share with the reader the victims’ mindset, their fears and reactions. This article chose to focus only on a specific type of reaction – the resistance, but the last example indicates the possibility of other reactions, and the survivors’ testimonies are an inexhaustible source for the recognition and study of such responses.



## Notes

- \* This article is based on the author's lecture delivered at the international academic conference "That Terrible Summer: 70 Years to the Annihilation of the Jewish Communities in Provincial Lithuania," held on November 24, 2011 in Efrata College of Education, Jerusalem.
1. Only on July 2, 1941 the German army reached eastern Lithuania, namely Sventzian (Švenčionys) and the surrounding towns Ignaline (Ignalina), Haydutsishok (Adučiškis) and others (see the Koniūhovsky Collection in the Yad Vashem archives [henceforth: YVA-O.71], files 23, 27, 29).
  2. There is no exact figure accepted by scholars regarding the number of Jews in Lithuania on June 22, 1941. Yitzhak Arad estimated their number at 215,000 to 220,000 (Arad, "The Murder," 176); Dov Levin – 225,000 at least (Levin, *The Litvaks*, 135, 199). The figure mentioned in the text is a derivation and in some way a correction to those numbers. Attention should be paid to the unofficial figure of 208,500 Jews for Jan. 1, 1941, published by the Lithuanian Board of Statistics. The number of non-Jews then was 2.8 million (Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 280).
  3. In Vilna (Vilnius) – 58,000 Jews out of 210,000 citizens; Kovna (Kaunas) – 32,000 out of 156,000; Shavl (Šiauliai) – 6,000 out of 32,000 and Ponivezh (Panevėžys) – 6,000 out of 27,000 (Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 282-283).
  4. Jews and Lithuanians lived side-by-side in some 600 towns, villages and estates. Prior to First World War, the Jews were a central component in many of them. Their percentage declined significantly due to this war and to the large emigration following it to the large cities and to foreign countries. Examine of the percentage of towns in which Jews were still more than one-third of their population reveals 34% of the 65 small towns (with 500-1000 residents), 38% of the 90 middle-size towns (1000-5000 residents) and 30% of the 17 large towns (over 5000 residents). In comparison, the percentage of Jews in the four large cities was 20-28% (Levin, *Pinkas hakehillot*, 113-705).
  5. Bubnys's study was written for the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, and did not receive its approval. The testimonies of survivors upon which Bankier based his book are from the Koniūhovsky Collection in the Yad Vashem archives.
  6. Bubnys, "Holocaust in Lithuanian Province," 26. Gudleve is located 10 km south of Kovna. Bubnys also mentions cases of resistance in two other towns (*ibid.*, 10, 61), but it should be noted that at that time these towns were outside the borders of Lithuania.
  7. Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 40.
  8. *Ibid.* This instance, in the Postov (Postawy) ghetto, was also 6 km outside the Lithuanian border!

9. Dieckmann, "Holocaust," 76, 83.
10. Ibid., 80.
11. Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 377.
12. Ibid., 1196.
13. See Dina Porat, "L'ma hakavana b'ketson Latevah'?" [What is the meaning of 'Like Sheep to the Slaughter'?), *Yisrael Hayom*, May 2, 2011; Keshev, *Ketzon Latevah?*, 19.
14. On this problematic nature, see Browning, *Remembering Survival*, 4-12.
15. In such cases, only one example was presented in the text, while its parallels were mentioned in the note.
16. Especially the Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection of the Central Historical Committee in Munich [henceforth: YVA-M.1.E]), the detailed anthologies of the Jews' fate in the provincial towns Erslavaitė, *Masinės žudynės*; Barak, "Arei hasadeh;" Levin, *Pinkas hakehillot*, 113-705; Dean, *Encyclopedia*, 1038-1157; Vitkus and Bargmanas, *Holokaustas žemaitijoje* and memorial books on Lithuanian towns.
17. See, for example: Levin, *Pinkas hakehillot*, 672; Garfunkel, "Ḥamisihim shana," 5. Cf. Sužiedėlis, "The Historical Sources," 119-122.
18. Sužiedėlis, "Jews and Lithuanians," 100, 115. On the governmental attitude towards the Jews see Levin, *The Litvaks*, 141-143.
19. Levin, *The Litvaks*, 182-185.
20. Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution*, 100; Truska, "The Upsurge," 31. On the actual percent of Jews in the governmental apparatus see Truska, "The Upsurge," 11-12.
21. Truska, "The Upsurge," 21-22. These elements included Voldemarists (named after Augustinas Voldemaras, the leader of the radical wing of the Nationalist party) as well as former members of the Lithuanian police and the paramilitary Riflemen's Union (known as Shaulists).
22. Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution*, 117-118; Truska, "The Upsurge," 22-26, 29.
23. Truska, "The Upsurge," 1-2. On the actual number of Jews in the Soviet repressive institutions in Lithuania see *ibid.*, 12-15; Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 170-171. On the percentage of Jews among the deportees see Truska, "The Upsurge," 18.
24. On these causes see, for example, Arad, "The Murder," 188-191; Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution*, 100; Bubnys, *The Holocaust in Lithuania*, 50-51; Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 171-177.

25. Latvian soldiers did not let anyone, either Jews or Soviet officials, to pass the Latvian border (Rot'holtz-Kur, "Mayn gviyes-eydus," 385-386). For exceptional cases of opening a border, see for example: *ibid.*, 386; Farbstein, *Mi'Telz ad Telz*, 224.
26. Levin, *The Litvaks*, 199; Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 42; Sužiedėlis, "The Burden of 1941." See, for example, a testimony from Aniksht (Anykščiai): YVA-O.71, 116.
27. Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution*, 121.
28. Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 29.
29. Cf. Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution*, 120. The civil administration that the Germans established on July 17, 1941 drained the Provisional Government of its authority until it disbanded on August 5, 1941.
30. For the background of its formation see *ibid.*, 142.
31. Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 33-35, 97, 205; Sužiedėlis, "Lithuanian Collaboration," 157-158.
32. Dieckmann wrote: 'From the Jewish point of view, the Lithuanian perpetrator stood out over all others. Often the German appeared only marginally, and sometimes not at all. This is especially true in the towns and the many places in the country's periphery' (*Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 379; translated from the German).
33. Barak, "Arei hasadeh," 246. Telz: 65 km west of Shavl; Olshad: 14 km northwest of Telz (with 30 Jewish families).
34. YVA-O.71, 154 (translated from Yiddish). Pilvishok: 50 km southwest of Kovna (with 700 Jews).
35. Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 164.
36. *Ibid.*, 39, 163-164.
37. Bankier states that this was the principle function of the new administration (*Ibid.*, 28). See also Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 364.
38. Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 28-29, 42-58; Dieckmann, "Holocaust," 77 ;Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution*, 144. Bubnys mentions this policy in individual towns alone ("Holocaust in Lithuanian Province," 31, 57, 62-63, 65).
39. Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 58-72. These events are also briefly mentioned by Bubnys ("Holocaust in Lithuanian Province," 28, 39, 45, 59, 61-62) and by Dieckmann as well ("Holocaust," 77, 82, 84).
40. See, for example, a testimony on Pilvishok: YVA-O.71, 154.
41. Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 29, 72-81.

42. Ibid., 29-30.
43. Bankier and Dieckmann found it difficult to see this treatment, which concurrently appeared all over Lithuania, as a spontaneous and random reaction (*Expulsion and Extermination*, 42-43; *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 377-378). Bubnys was mistaken in his claim that in that period the persecution was only political rather than racial (“Holocaust in Lithuanian Province,” 74. Regarding this, see Arad, “Review,” 1-2). This article will not deal with the question whether the abuse in the first period was really planned offstage in an ordered program to exterminate Lithuanian Jewry, since its perspective is from the viewpoint of the Jewish victims.
44. Dean pointed out the resemblance of these makeshift ghettos to labor camps or prisons rather than to traditional full scale ghettos (*Encyclopedia*, 1035). For the essential difference between the character of the ghettos in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union as compared to the ghettos in Poland, see Michman, *Hageta’ot hayehudiyim*, 98.
45. Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 82; Dieckmann, “Holocaust,” 79; Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution*, 145.
46. Cf. a notion in Pravenishok (Pravieniškės) that a Lithuanian doctor from Kovna suggested giving an herbal soup to the Jews to kill their desire to resist before their murder (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 339).
47. The last mass murders took place up until the middle of November 1941.
48. This situation is repeated over and over in the testimonies in the Koniohovsky Collection and is mentioned in passing in Bubnys, “Holocaust in Lithuanian Province” as well.
49. The exception was those few towns where Jews were interned in work camps.
50. See Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 202.
51. Regarding the shock of the Jews at their neighbors’ behavior, see: *ibid.*, 51, 75, 165; Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 379.
52. In contrary to the attitude of other researches mentioned in the ‘Background’ section above.
53. These suggested three major periods did not occur at the same time in the various towns. Thus, they should be considered as schematic periods or stages, which are especially meaningful from the victims’ perspective. For another division in the provincial towns, from the perpetrators’ point of view, see Bubnys, “The Holocaust in Lithuania,” 212-213.
54. YVA-O.71, 99 (translated from Yiddish). Dubinik: 40 km northeast of Vilna (with 30 Jewish families).

55. Ibid., 80; Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 370; Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 362. Cf. Rot’holtz-Kur, “Mayn gviyes-eydus,” 386. Rakishok: 80 km northeast of Ponivezh (with 3000 Jews). The German army entered the town on June 28, 1941.
56. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 343. Kupishok: 40 km northeast of Ponivezh (with 1200 Jews).
57. Niger, *Kidush Hashem*, 417. Shirvint: 45 km northwest of Vilna (with 700 Jews). The next period in Shirvint occurred only at the end of that month.
58. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 312. Mariampol: 50 km southwest of Kovna (with 2800 Jews). Several other incidents of active resistance by Jews occurred in that town (ibid.)
59. YVA-O.71, 27. Haydutsishok: 95 km northeast of Vilna (with 1000 Jews). The German army entered the town only on July 2, 1941.
60. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 242. Ushpol: 70 km east of Ponivezh (with 100 Jewish families).
61. Ibid., 269. For a slightly different version of the event see YVA-O.71, 17. Vainute: 60 km southeast of Meml (Klaipėda; with 55 Jewish families). Cf. similar acts of resistance by the rabbis of Naishtot-Tavrig (Žemaičių Naumiestis; YVA-O.71, 16) and Shvekshne (Švekšna; YVA-O.71, 14; YVA-1547/104-7) and by a respected Jew from Shat (Šeta; YVA-M.1.E, 1569).
62. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 313.
63. YVA-O.71, 23. Sventzian: 75 km northeast of Vilna (with 2000 Jews). Cf. verbal protests towards German and Lithuanian injustice in Aniksht and Gorzd (Gargždai; Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 248, 258 respectively).
64. Dean, *Encyclopedia*, 1032-1033.
65. YVA-O.71, 153 (translated from Yiddish). Shaki: 55 km west of Kovna (with 600 Jews). There is no specific date in this testimony to the ghettoization of the women and children.
66. Sapirshtein, “Umkum fun Visokidvorer jidn,” 1874-1875. For a somewhat different version of the events see YVA-O.71, 88. Visoki-Dvor: 50 km southwest of Vilna (with 200 Jews).
67. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 309. Mazheik: 75 km northwest of Shavl (with 1200 Jews).
68. YVA-O.71, 84. Zhosle: 45 km east of Kovna (with 900 Jews); Koshedar: 10 km west of Zhosle. Cf. other incidents of resistance to leaving homes in Virbaln (Virbalis) and Kruk (Kriūkai nearby Shaki): Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 278, 353 respectively.
69. YVA-O.71, 84.
70. The testimonies mention the Vishtinetz (Vištytis) ghetto, where the young man Manne Estersohn and the local rabbi Zalman Sudelnitsky refused to dig death pits (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 279).
71. ibid., 264. Vabolnik: 35 km northeast of Ponivezh (with 50 Jewish families); Posvol: 25 km northwest of Vabolnik.

72. YVA-O.71, 84. Zhezhmer: 8 km south of Kosheadar (with 200 Jewish families). Cf. another incident of Haya Friedman who fled from the Betigole (Betygala) ghetto as well (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 253).
73. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 355. Krakinove: 25 km southwest of Ponivezh (with 60 Jewish families).
74. YVA-O.71, 37 (translated from Yiddish). Riteve: 30 km southwest of Telz.
75. Nearly all the declared Communists were murdered in the early stages of the German occupation of Lithuania (see Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 35 [fn. 41], 82 [fn. 66]).
76. YVA-O.71, 154 (translated from Yiddish). For Dr. Dembovsky’s speech see also Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 335; Farbstein, *The Forgotten Memoirs*, 378. Cf. similar expressions of defiance by Jews standing by the death pits – the member of the revisionist movement Yitzhok Bloh in the Rainiai ghetto next to Telz and the rabbi of Tzitevian (Tytuvėnai; =Azriel Medyn) who had been led to nearby Rasein (Raseiniai; YVA-O.71, 35; Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 361, respectively).
77. YVA-O.71, 121 (translated from Yiddish). Meretch: 80 km south of Kovna (with 800 Jews). Cf. other protests before being murdered made by Osher Miller in Visoki-Dvor (Sapirshstein, “Umkum fun Visokidvorer jidn,” 1880-1881), Yoheved Shkliarsky in Doig (Daugai), Rochel Shalmok in Leipun (Leipalingis) and the young woman Orle Tzin in Plungian (Plungė; Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 261, 306, 338 respectively). The event in Plungian is well known there to this day, but is described in the memoirs of Jakovas Bunka as active resistance rather than just a protest (Bunka, Jakovas. *The Jewish Page*).
78. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 309.
79. Ibid., 278. At the same time, some of the young men spoke out against the murderers before their death as well. Virbaln: 75 km southwest of Kovna (with 600 Jews).
80. YVA-O.71, 160. Vilkovishk: 60 km southwest of Kovna (with 3600 Jews). Cf. another incident of refusal in Shilel (Šilalė), where Tamara Arenberg, the wife of the town veterinarian, had not let the White Armbanders to undress her two children, and the Lithuanians shot her and her children in their embrace (Ibid., 8).
81. Ibid., 7 (translated from Yiddish). Tavrig: 90 km southeast of Meml (with 2000 Jews).
82. Ibid., 45. At that same occasion another two Jews attempted to escape the pit. Erzhevlik: 110 km southeast of Meml (with 150 Jews); Batok: 15 km northwest of Erzhevlik. Cf. another incident of a refusal of a man, Motel Punsky, in Vilki (Vilkija; Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 275).
83. In Vendzigole (Vandziogala) and in Salok (Salakas; Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 281, 322 respectively).
84. See text near note 77 above.
85. YVA-O.71, 121 (translated from Yiddish; my emphasis). Alite: 30 km northwest of Meretch. Cf. struggles against the murderers of Efraim Gozhansky who forcefully opposed the Lithuanians in Doig

- and of Yitzhok Malkenzon, a strong Jew from Shkud (Skuodas), who even succeeded in choking one of the Lithuanian guards (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 261; YVA-O.71, 67, respectively).
86. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 296. This reaction is not mentioned in YVA-O.71, 49; Levitt, “Hurbn Yurburg,” 1853-1854. Yurburg: 85 km west of Kovna (with 600 families). Cf. the incident of Jews of Posvol, who had been taken to their deaths on August 26, and fell upon their captors (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 332).
  87. Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 339 (the original testimony at Yad Vashem archives is missing). While these Jews were quickly caught and doomed to be murdered, two of them were able to escape; afterwards they even killed two armed Lithuanians who captured them nearby Kovna. Pravenishok: 20 km east of Kovna.
  88. One of the exceptional cases of resistance took place in Zhager (Žagarė). Many of the town’s Jews were doomed to be executed in the town square rather than by a pit. Due to the resistance of two of them, many Jews succeeded in escaping (YVA-M.1.E, 931).
  89. YVA-O.71, 47 (translated from Yiddish). Kelm: 40 km southwest of Shavl (with 2000 Jews); Pupšiai – a village 65 km west of Kelm. Cf. the incident in Shilel where one hundred men and boys were taken to the pits on July 7, 1941. The elderly sexton of the synagogue asked for a cigarette from the Lithuanian who was standing guard next to him. When the guard lowered his weapon to get the cigarette, the sexton fell on him and bit him in the throat (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 369).
  90. Ronder, “Hatevaḥ hahamoni,” 234; YVA-M.1.E, 1415. Keidan: 40 km north of Kovna; Shat: 15 km east of Kėdainiai; Zheim: 20 km southeast of Kėdainiai.
  91. Regarding Tzodok Shlapobersky, a well-known figure in Keidan, see Hittin, “Min hanof ha’enoshi,” 223-224.
  92. Erslavaitė, *Masinės žudynės*, 140-141 (translated from Lithuanian). For similar versions see YVA-O.71, 40; YVA-M.1.E, 1415.
  93. For example, the struggles of the shoḥet [ritual slaughterer] and the Vinnik brothers in Betigole and of Hirshke Friedman and Shmerl Shapiro in Yaneve (Jonava) with the Lithuanian murderers (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 253 and Blumberg, “Yemey-ha’enuṯ,” 176, respectively), the attempts of Pertsikovitch in Butrimantz (Butrimonys) and Elozor Segal in Ponivezh to strangle armed Lithuanians, and the grabbing the leg of one of the Lithuanian murderers and severely beating him by Binyomin Rothschild in Shaki (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 252, 331, 373 respectively).
  94. Regarding the circumstances that allowed it, see Arad, “The Murder,” 188, 193. See also Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution*, 147.

95. The first of the death camps, Chełmno, was activated in December 1941, after the extermination of the Jews in the provincial towns of Lithuania.
96. Clear evidence to this is quoted in Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*, 59-60.
97. Ghetto Fighters House Archives, 20730, 5 (translated from Hebrew; my emphasis). Utyan: 90 km northeast of Vilna (with 100 Jewish families). Cf. a similar formulation in testimony about the town of Krozh (Kražiai; Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 350). See also the testimony of Jews who were assembled in the aforementioned shed in the town of Koshedar: ‘Not a few could still have been saved and run away. But it seems that no one believed that their lives were in danger, and they did not run away from the shed’ (YVA-O.71, 83; translated from Yiddish).
98. YVA-O.71, 132 (translated from Yiddish; my emphasis). Lazdei: 80 km southwest of Kovna (with 1200 Jews). Alite and Marijampol are both 40 km from Lazdei. Cf. a similar incident in Keidan (YVA-M.1.E, 1415).
99. A resident of the town of Shukian (Šaukėnai), for example, told the few who remained alive that the Jews of the town who had been taken out of the barn (designated as a ghetto) were murdered. His listeners refused to believe him (Barak, “Arei hasadeh,” 367).
100. See text near note 89 above.
101. YVA-O.71, 47 (translated from Yiddish).
102. Keshev wrote about the results of losing hope: ‘When all hope of salvation was lost – any desire to fight, to resist, to raise hand or foot was lost as well. Then an abysmal despair takes over the soul, whose expression is the anticipation of the redeeming death that should come quickly and release from this life that cannot be saved’ (*Ketzon latevah?*, 57; translated from Hebrew).
103. YVA-O.71, 24 (translated from Yiddish). See also Svirsky-Holtzman, “Ih bin geven in Polygon,” 569, regarding this event. Nai-Sventzian: 10 km west of Sventzian.

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