BOOK REVIEWS

Kai ksenofobija virsta prievarta. Lietuvių ir žydų santykių dinamika XIX a. – XX a. pirmoje pusėje [When Xenophobia Turns into Violence. The Dynamics of Lithuanian-Jewish Relations in the Nineteenth and the First Half of the Twentieth Centuries], eds. V. Sirutavičius and D. Staliūnas, Vilnius: LII leidykla, 2005. Pp. 272. ISBN 9986-780-70-5.

Scholars from the Lithuanian Institute of History have written a book devoted to the history of the development of Lithuanian-Jewish relations. In recent years research into the history of Lithuanian Jews acquired a systemic character. Previously popular and scholarly works in this field were characterised by journalistic sensationalism, superficial discussion and presentation of the material, while now certain conceptions (although sometimes hypothetic) and a strategy of scholarly research can be observed. Additionally, the number of translated and original Lithuanian books on this subject is increasing steadily.

The authors of the articles in this collection carefully examine historical facts and assess them through the concepts of historical sociology. It must be added that historical sociology generally differs from social history in that the former evaluates historical material by means of the concepts of sociology and at the same time raises problems of a sociological nature. The comparison of historical phenomena makes sociology and history similar disciplines. ‘The investigation of the features of Lithuanian anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and historical memory does not lack hasty, injudiciously conceived repentance and the striving to hasten to join “the Shoah industry”’. The historian Vygantas Vareikis further writes: ‘Before the Second World War anti-Semitism was more or less widespread among all social circles, however merely politically, religiously or economically motivated anti-Semitic attitudes did not advocate participation in the killings or justify the mass murders of women and children’ (p. 157). At the same time he indirectly criticises the pre-WWII history of the European Jewry presented frequently in a vulgar manner by some *internationalist historians* according to which at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries European anti-Semitism of Western, Central and Eastern Europe created preconditions for the mass extermination of Jews during the Second World War. It should be noted that the authors of the publication under review use the concepts of historical sociology which ‘safeguard’ the investigations based on copious archival material from subjectivity and, as

is often the case in such works, from indulging in trivial ideologisation. The use of the concepts of social psychology by many authors of the papers should also be recognised. In general, dealing with such a sensitive topic as the development of anti-Semitism is fraught with the danger of vulgarisation and the temptation of defence on the one hand, and of indictment on the other. After all, in the history of the Lithuanian-Jewish relations (hostility, co-existence, and indifference) the key problem is that of *understanding* which cannot be tackled without a solid theoretical grounding, wide-ranging erudition and interdisciplinary knowledge. The peasants (or Ruritanians, in the terminology of the sociologist Ernest Gellner) and the Jews co-existed quite peacefully in Europe until the middle of the nineteenth century, since that was ensured by stable and closed ways of life of the two communities. This 'useful symbiosis', in the words of Zenonas Ivinskis, began to disintegrate as a result of the modernisation processes in constructing the future of the communities which lacked clearly cut contours. To what degree the anti-Semitism of Polish society affected the Lithuanians, how (if at all) rural anti-Judaism turned into anti-Semitism, what was the integration of the contemporary Jewish community into the societies of authoritarian Lithuania and other European states – these and other questions await further serious research and interpretation.

This collection of papers is not easy to review because the authors not only use much archival material, they also demonstrate good theoretical knowledge by originally interpreting it and making it speak for itself.

In his paper 'A tale of three cities: the pogroms of 1881 as viewed from Kiev, Warsaw and Vilna' the American historian Theodore R. Weeks examines a turning point in the Jewish history of the Russian Empire – the rise of a wave of pogroms and anti-Semitism following the assassination of the emperor Alexander II. Analysing the outbursts of anti-Semitism in the aforementioned cities the author paradoxically remarks that it is 'impossible to determine precisely why pogroms took place or failed to take place'. Nevertheless, the historian hypothetically relates them to ethnicity and religion. In the Ukrainian provinces, where the Orthodox population was predominating, the rumour that allegedly 'the Tsar ordered to beat the Jews' mobilised the people on the side of Tsar, while such solidarity was hardly acceptable for the Catholics. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the historian disregarded the massacre of the Jews by the Cossacks in the mid-seventeenth century. It was not accidental that the 1648 Cossack Uprising led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky which subsequently developed into a fierce war between Muscovy and the Commonwealth of the Two Nations was marked by the killings and plunder of the Jewish communities in the towns and shtetls of the GDL; these events are known in the history of Jewish martyrology.

Darius Staliūnas' paper 'Anti-Jewish excesses in the Northwest Region (in the early 1880s)' investigates the dynamics of the anti-Semitic sentiments and the actions of the population of this part of the Russian Empire. He has reservations concerning a view formerly prevalent in historiography about the organisation of pogroms by the authorities. Drawing on the basis of ample source material (anti-Semitic leaflets, accounts of local officials, etc.) the author argues that many of these excesses in the Northwest Region were committed spontaneously as a consequence of drinking, conflicts in the market, or squabbles. The officials nearly always suppressed such disorders; they also had noticed that the misdemeanour of one or another Jew could 'make the whole community an object of attack' (p. 61). Such a 'cultural code' was associated with anti-Jewish sentiments and the image of the Jew as an alien among the peasantry of Eastern and Central Europe. The rising tensions of the socio-economic life in the late nineteenth century could cause such pogroms as the one in Prienai in 1882 on the pretext of a bitten apple.

The article of Vladas Sirutavičius 'From prejudice to violence: Accusations that the Jews used the blood of Christians. An analysis of some instances in Lithuania' is devoted to the analysis of three typologically similar cases – the peasants accusing Jews of alleged use of Christian blood for religious rituals. In March 1801 the four-year-old son of a peasant family disappeared and later was found dead; in 1861 a four-year-old girl left home and did not come back in the Šiauliai District; a two-year-old boy was killed in the township of Buivydžiai, Vilnius District in 1908. The Jews were accused of using the children's blood for religious purposes. The researcher raises the sociological problem of weakening neighbourhood contacts conditioned by the growth of economy, the appearance of new ideologies and political changes. None of the aforementioned accusations brought against the Jews were proved; and the real causes of the outbursts of the aggression and actions of the peasants directed against the Jews were historical, religious and, in the last case, political.

In her article 'Violence against the Jews in Northern Lithuania in 1900. Events and their interpretation' Vilma Žaltauskaitė presents a complex analysis of the tensions between the Lithuanians and Jews in the Panevėžys and Šiauliai Districts of the Kaunas Gubernia. Following a rumour about a girl abducted in Vaškai, a scuffle broke out after church on 4 June and soon spread to Žeimelis and Žagarė. The author investigates those events drawing on the contemporary illegal Lithuanian press and formulates a paradoxical question: 'Was it the illegal press itself or measures taken by the authorities (surveillance, searches and arrests, against which it was fought) that introduced greater discord between the two ethno-confessional communities, the tension between which sometimes spilled over into violence?' (p. 93). The places of press dissemination often

coincided with those of the conflicts between the Lithuanians and Jews. Like the American historian, Žaltauskaitė does not offer a monocausal assessment of the pogrom: 'thus there is no one concrete answer and account because that was the effect of several circumstances' (p. 98).

Algimantas Kasparavičius' paper 'Lithuanians and Jews on the eve of the Catastrophe: challenges and images' presents the development of the political and socio-cultural images and phobias of the Lithuanian population in the inter-war period. Neither the leftist parties nor the political regime that was established after the 1926 coup tolerated open anti-Semitism. The author remarks that the embassy of the USSR in Kaunas closely watched the dynamics of the Lithuanian-Jewish relations and the rise of anti-Semitism between 1938 and 1940. In his account the Soviet diplomat Nikolai Pozdniakov (it must be remarked with pleasure that a Lithuanian historian could use such interesting, formerly inaccessible archival documents) wrote: 'The end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939 were marked by anti-Jewish moods', and in particular by anti-Semitic sorties of the students of the University of Vytautas Magnus and members of the business corporations (p. 146). The ideological panorama including the publications of the newspaper *Verslas* and the deliberations of some intellectuals on nationalism are reviewed in the article, too. Meanwhile the 'cultural' worker of the Soviet embassy Fiodor Molochkov 'worked on several fronts' recruiting Lithuanian and Jewish intellectuals and exploiting them for the benefit of his country. Following the loss of statehood, the Lithuanian people of various nationalities were faced with danger, which, instead of uniting, aroused deeper hostility between the Lithuanians and the Jews. The 'symbiosis of coexistence' came to an end.

Vygantas Vareikis' article 'Confrontation and conflicts between Jews and Lithuanians in interwar Lithuania' examines the stages of the coexistence and confrontation of the two ethnicities and their growing alienation and enmity. Acknowledging that up to the present time the phenomenon of modern or political anti-Semitism raises many unanswered questions, the researcher makes an attempt to identify the features of Lithuanian anti-Semitism, which, as it turns out, are not specific in any way. The author maintains: 'There is a certain devaluing continuity. People learn and alter their minds by directly participating in various campaigns, watching, endorsing, justifying or tolerating them' (p. 161). The historian introduces a recently popular concept of 'the other'. The assessment of 'the other' is particularly evident in Lithuanian witch trials. The main pretext for these trials was property matters. In the opinion of the peasants, the strangers were the destroyers of the customs and of the traditional way of life and could bring disaster to the village – illnesses, crop failure or curse bad luck. The striving for welfare, ignoring the mechanism of surplus value, jealousy, and the clash of personal interests were obvious already in feudal times. This contraposition in the rural community generated an ambivalent attitude of the peasantry. In folk

culture the image of the Jew was not at all uncommon, and it comprised both positive and negative features. The Jews were held in respect for their religiousness and attachment to the traditions of their ancestry. The historian concludes that 'acts of violence were more widespread in the lower social strata in little towns and amidst the middle social strata in bigger towns'. In the provinces members of the Lithuanian Riflemen Union and of the organisation 'Young Lithuania' often participated in anti-Jewish actions, while university and secondary school students were more active in Kaunas (p. 165).

In his paper 'A glance at the anatomy of one pogrom in inter-war Lithuania' Dangiras Mačiulis analyzes the circumstances of perhaps the most notorious pogrom in the town of Leipalingis on 18 June 1939. Like a number of other authors of this collection, Mačiulis bases his arguments upon the concepts of social psychology. In addition to a careful investigation of the fact, he employs the argumentation of social psychology and sociology. The rise of social tension and the weakening of the state legitimacy led to ethnic cohesion.

At the same time there appeared a possibility of uncontrolled social actions, including aggressive ones. During critical social periods ethnic identity acquires particular importance. Legal non-observance and social instability condition the decline of the potential of "me". Many people, who were weak and unsure of themselves, rejected "me" and began looking for a strong "us" (p. 194).

The nationalist press often blames the Lithuanians themselves for Jewish domination (incidentally, on the decline then) in commerce and the sphere of various public services, as in the way Lithuanian women 'spoil themselves': 'Meanwhile a Jewish woman washes their heads, they have their hair permed by a Jew, their eyebrows are shaped by a Jew, their lips are rouged by a Jew, they are manicured and pedicured by a Jew, and they are massaged by a Jew'. The conclusion is: 'We must stop merely digging the soil and being a *Dungervolk*'.

Gediminas Bašinskas' paper 'Conflicts between the Lithuanians and the Jews at the beginning of the Soviet occupation in the summer of 1940: continuation or a turning point?' investigates a sudden change in the Lithuanian anti-Jewish sentiments. He proposed the concept of the *nationalising state*, which was created mainly by one nation, and ethnic minorities lived in it as tolerable enough neighbours or guests; this creation collapsed in the summer and autumn of 1940 when Lithuania was Sovietised and a fair number of Jews became officials of Soviet institutions.

The collection comprises two publications of documents: 'Acts of Violence against Jews in the Former Lithuanian-Polish Lands in 1919' and 'Lithuanian Jerusalem' in the diplomatic visions of Petras Klimas. The first document deals with the actions of Polish and Lithuanian soldiers directed against local Jews – the killings and plunder of their property by Polish legionaries in Vilnius on 22–25 March 1919 and with

almost simultaneous and analogous events in Lida. In the latter case the image of the Jew as a Communist was clearly exploited. 'The community resolutely protests against false accusations that all Jews belong to the Bolsheviks and that namely they suggested that resistance should be offered to Polish soldiers' (p. 235). 'Provocative rumours, which were spread among the soldiers by suspicious persons, significantly affected the course of events. It was rumoured that, firstly, the Jews shot at the soldiers out of the windows of the houses, and secondly, they killed a legionary and cut off his tongue' (p. 241). This accusation became a pretext for pillaging the property of the Lida Jewish community. It is noteworthy that several days after the pogrom the Polish general forbade even the mentioning of this event. The shooting by Lithuanian soldiers at the participants of a Zionist meeting in Ukmergė in the afternoon of 10 July 1919 is worth noting. Rumours circulated that 'the Jews threw grenades and shot from revolvers at the soldiers' and that they spoke against the Lithuanian government and army. It can only be wondered how a peasant soldier could understand what the participants of the meeting were talking about in Yiddish. The functioning of the image of the Jew as a Communist in the Lithuanian milieu is already obvious. Hostilities against the Bolsheviks continuing, the formation of such an image was inevitable and foreseeable because Socialism and the Bolshevik coup in Russia were linked to the Jews. Lithuanian Socialists were often referred to as 'servants of international Jewry': 'the more the Christians are at each other's throats, the more goys on both sides lose their lives, the better it is for the Jews'. It is noteworthy that similar charges – 'Jewish bomblets, shooting out of the windows, revolvers, Communists' – were current in Lithuania in the summer of 1941. How should the similarity of these twenty-year-old allegations be accounted for? I believe that the outlook formulated in 1919 was revived as a legitimization of assumed Jewish crimes and the participation in the Holocaust.

In his letter to the minister of foreign affairs, the prominent Lithuanian diplomat Petras Klimas wrote about the necessity of the integration of the Jewish community of the Vilnius region into the political and socio-cultural life of Lithuania. In his memorial of 12 April 1940 he proposed the following *modus vivendi* with the Jews of the Vilnius region: 'In Vilnius we should not adopt the Polish principle which disclaimed a determinative role of the Jews because that was to the interest of the Poles. We are interested and concerned with having the Jews in Vilnius as Lithuanian citizens, which must solve the present-day Lithuanian question of Vilnius' (p. 258). Here an anti-Polish policy formulated already in 1918 is quite obvious; and in it the Jewish community had to play an important role. At the same time it must be noted that in this memorandum the Jews were treated as a 'political card'.

This publication does not give an answer to the following question: was closer integration of the Jewish community into contemporary so-

cial life in Lithuania feasible? Theoretically, it could be realised only at various assimilation levels, although in the then political context it was not realistic because after the creation of the Lithuanian state the Lithuanians themselves instituted their civilising phenomena (theatre, ballet, museums), although theoretically they could be an assimilating nation. The publication lacks a polemic view of the division of anti-Semitism by some historians into political, economic and cultural phenomena. In general, in further studies it would be interesting to see the attitudes of different political and social Jewish groups to the Lithuanians and Lithuanian political power. On psychological and ethno-linguistic levels, Jews who spoke Lithuanian and those who did not were treated and accepted differently. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian government did not conduct a conscious deliberate anti-Semitic policy, and that enables some historians, e.g. Johnson, to maintain that inter-war Lithuania was a country where it was good for Jews to live and work. The Polish government, in particular after the death of Józef Piłsudski, introduced tougher political measures to oust the Jews by encouraging their emigration to Palestine and in 1936 proposed a project of settling the Jews in Madagascar, which subsequently for some time was considered by the Nazis as a part of their plan for the solution of the 'Jewish question'.

Further research into the history of the Jewish community in Lithuania would often 'rediscover' (and that is not a paradoxical idea any more) not a Lithuanian (in the interpretation of Adolfas Šapoka), but a Lithuanian and a non-Lithuanian in their common tragic history.

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