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Course Proposal YIVO February 2015

The Tragedy of Europe's Jerusalem: Lithuania's Jews and the Holocaust

Vilna is often referred to as “Europe’s Jerusalem,” largely because of the Lithuanian capital’s celebrated history as a hub of Litvak culture and for its rich intellectual and religious Jewish traditions. This course will examine several critical aspects of the history of Lithuania’s Jews during the twentieth century and will consist of three sessions. The first lecture and discussion will examine the important transformation of the region after the Great War, which had a profound effect on Jewish society. In the Republic of Lithuania, which emerged in 1918, the Jews faced the challenge of adjusting to the unfamiliar situation of life in a state dominated by ethnic Lithuanians. The Jews of the Vilnius region, once a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, lived a different life under Polish political and cultural dominance. During the two decades before the Second World War, the divergence in the development of the two communities, now separated by a hostile border, had important consequences, especially regarding the changes in the relationship of the Jews with their Gentile neighbors.

The second sessions will be devoted to an evaluation of the Holocaust which resulted in the destruction of more than 90% of Lithuania’s Jews. This part of the course will consider Nazi plans for the conquest of the East, especially the program of racial persecution and genocide, which were integral components of the Reich’s war strategy with special emphasis on its impact on Lithuania. The first large-scale massacres of Jews began in Lithuania and Ukraine. There will be an overview of the persecution and mass murder of the Jews and an analysis of the stages of the genocidal process during 1941-1944. The lecture will present an outline of the geography and

statistics of the Holocaust in Lithuania, as well as a discussion of how the Shoah here differed from processes in Western Europe.

The third part of the course will entail a survey of important topics specific to the Holocaust in Lithuania with an emphasis on local history and case studies of selected locales and personal histories. Some primary source material will be presented to illuminate historical issues, including the problem of institutional responsibility, the degree and nature of local collaboration, the extent of resistance, and attempts at rescue. A part of the session will be devoted to the way in which new archival sources, especially from formerly inaccessible regional archives, have affected the writing of history. A brief discussion of the impact of Holocaust research on contemporary Lithuanian society will conclude the course.

Suggested Readings

Below is a list of preliminary readings for the course. A more comprehensive bibliography will be available before the first session. Students with facility in other languages will be accommodated.

Arad, Yitzhak. *Ghetto in Flames. The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust*. Jerusalem 1980.

Dieckmann, Christoph and Saulius Sužiedėlis. *The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941: Sources and Analysis*. Vilnius, 2006. (.pdf file of the text will be made available.

Eidintas, Alfonsas. *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*. Vilnius, 2003.

Gaunt, David, Paul A. Levine and Laura Palosuo, eds. *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. Bern: 2004.

Kruk, Herman. *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939-1944*. Edited with introduction by Benjamin Harshav. Translated by Barbara Harshav. New Haven, 2002.

Levin, Dov. *Baltic Jews under the Soviets, 1940-1946*. Jerusalem: 1994.

_____. *Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941-1945*. Translated by Moshe Kohn and Dina Cohen. New York, 1985.

Levinson, Joseph, ed. *The Shoah in Lithuania*. Vilnius, 2006.

Liekis, Šarūnas. *A State within a State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania*. Vilnius, 2003.

Mishell, William W. *Kaddish for Kovno: Life and Death in a Lithuanian Ghetto 1941-1945*. Chicago: 1988.

Nikžentaitis, Alvydas, Stefan Schreiner and Darius Staliūnas, eds. *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*. Amsterdam, 2004.

Prusin, Alexander V. *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992*. New York, 2010.

Sakowicz, Kazimierz. *Ponary Diary, 1941-1943. A Bystander's Account of Mass Murder*. Edited by Yitzhak Arad. New Haven, 2005.

Sutton, Karen. *The Massacre of the Jews of Lithuania: Lithuanian Collaboration in the Final Solution, 1941-1944*. New York: 2008.

Sužiedėlis, Saulius. "The Historical Sources of Antisemitism in Lithuania and Jewish-Lithuanian Relations during the 1930s." In *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, edited by Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner and Darius Staliūnas, 119-154. New York, 2004.

Tory, Avraham. *Surviving the Holocaust: the Kovno Ghetto Diary*. Cambridge, 1990.

Van Voren, Robert. *Undigested Past: The Holocaust in Lithuania*. New York, 2011.