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Holocaust Historiography in Latvia: The Road Toward Research Infrastructure

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With some exceptions,¹ it seems that Holocaust research has revalued the belief that the topic of the extermination of Jews in the Soviet Union is a taboo. In the territory of Latvia, the topic was, indeed, discussed. However, it cannot be ignored that the extermination of Jews in Latvia was not associated with the notion of the Holocaust and instead framed according to the theoretical and practical deformations of Soviet ideology.² The Soviet-era propaganda inherited by the Republic of Latvia more than 25 years ago was multi-layered. First was the exaggeration regarding the role of Latvians during the Holocaust, apparent in the thesis about the approximately month-long period of no power, or interregnum, during which the local inhabitants started to exterminate Jews on their own,³ as well as other remnants of Soviet rhetoric. Second was extended resistance to the topic and denial of the fact that any Latvians were self-initiative in the implementation of the Holocaust, and attempts to discuss this by downplaying the impact of Soviet propaganda.

The third and the most significant fact is that the disguise presented by Soviet crimes became the key focus and objective of Latvia's remembrance policy in 1990s. As early as 19 September 1990, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia adopted a declaration condemning genocide and antisemitism in Latvia,⁴ but the Nazi occupation was labeled a 'lesser evil' compared to the terror and politics experienced during the Soviet period.⁵

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¹These exceptions still exist; for instance, Heinz-Dietrich Löwe writes, "Average Soviet readers never got any information on Nazi extermination measures against Jews." See Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, "Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union," in Albert Lindemann and Richard S. Levy, (eds.), *Antisemitism: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 186.

²Didzis Bērziņš, "Sotsialnaia pamiat holokosta v populiarnoi kulture Latviiskoi SR: analiz nekotoryx iarkih primerov," in Svetlana Amosova, (ed.), *Utrachennoe sosiedstvo: Yevrei v kulturnoi pamiati zhiteliei Latgalii. Materiali ekspeditsii 2011–2012* (Moscow: Centr naustnih rabotnikov i prepodovatelej iudaiki "Sefer," and Riga: Jews in Latvia Museum, 2013), pp. 334–356. Overall, the Holocaust has a modest place in the historiography of Soviet Latvia. The Holocaust was mostly described as a part of the terror against the Soviet citizens as a whole. Although in some cases special attention has been paid to the extermination of Jews during the World War II, in these cases it has only been within the context of the suffering of Soviet people or citizens. However, in the most important publications of that time, for instance in the volumes about the history of Soviet Latvia, the extermination of Jews was mentioned only in some examples, or only a short paragraph was dedicated in the context of general politics and the terror of Nazi occupation.

³This approach is known nowadays as the 'non-German Holocaust' in Latvia. This version first appeared in the Soviet historiography of the 1960s. See Aivara Stranga, "Holokausta vēstures pētniecība un holokausta piemiņa Latvijā," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, (2006), vol. 18, p. 14.

⁴Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, "Par genocīda un antisemitisma nosodījumu un nepieļaujāmību Latvijā," *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, accessed September 19, 1996, <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=72591>.

⁵The Declaration on Latvia's Occupation, 1996 adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia stated, 'During occupation, the USSR accomplished targeted genocide against the Latvian nation,' while 'Nazi Germany, which established a regime, carried out deportations and other repressions against inhabitants.' See Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, Declaration on the Restoration of Independence of Latvia, *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, accessed August 27, 1996, <http://lpra.vip.lv/deklaracija.html>.

As a result, Holocaust research was far from the historiographical priorities of the renewed state. Fourth, the situation was made even more complicated by the antisemitic images created by the Nazi and Soviet propaganda. These images could be found not only in public places, but also, in some cases, in academic discussions and settings. At the same time, sociopolitical changes offered the opportunity to publish articles related to the Jewish extermination. The first significant pioneers brought forth the topic of the Holocaust during the Third Awakening (1986–1991), the movement that led to the restoration of Latvia's independence. The most outstanding example was 'Arājs Kommando' by emigration historian Andrew Ezergailis.⁶

After this and other early publications at the beginning of 1990s, the role of the local population during the Nazi occupation became the first significant Holocaust-related topic discussed in public in Latvia, led primarily by the abovementioned Ezergailis and Marģers Vestermanis, a Holocaust survivor and the founder of the Jews in Latvia museum, who at the time mostly published his articles in German,⁷ but had also been involved in promoting the topic of the Holocaust during the period of Awakening.⁸ The polemics⁹ between the two authors continued after Ezergailis' groundbreaking publication about the Holocaust in Latvia published in English in 1996¹⁰ and in Latvian in 1999.¹¹ Despite his position, which mainly focused on the functional aspects of how the Holocaust was implemented and carried out, Ezergailis' research caused a lack of understanding among the Latvian audience worldwide,¹² especially in the United States. Latvian emigrants blamed Ezergailis for exaggerating the guilt and ignoring the suffering of Latvians.¹³

Ezergailis' research was the exception in the 1990s, serving as another basis for the public tensions between the historians. At the time, there was no infrastructure to support Holocaust research in Latvia, and any interest in the topic was based on the self-initiative of the researchers. For the most part, the topic of the Holocaust did not become a part of the remembrance politics of the Renewed Latvia, and when discussed in public settings, it mostly caused contradictions and tension.¹⁴ A telling example was

⁶In 1988, Ezergailis' research was published with a remark from academic Vilis Samsons that 'It could be interesting and thought provoking for the reader of Soviet Latvia in the conditions of social pluralism to be introduced to the peculiarities of the emigrant liberals in the evaluation of Fatherland's history.' See Andrew Ezergailis, "Arāja komanda," *Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, (1988), vol. 10, pp. 113–130.

⁷For example: Margers Vestermanis, "Retter im Lande der Handlanger," in Wolfgang Benz and Juliane Wetzel, (eds.), *Solidarität und Hilfe für Juden während der NS Zeit*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Metropol, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 231–273.

⁸See Margers Vestermanis, "Cilvēcibai bija jāklūš," *Literatūra un Māksla*, (November 25, 1988), vol. 6.

⁹In their public exchange of opinions, Ezergailis emphasized the presence of the Nazi regime, the execution of orders, and direct supervision, while Vestermanis emphasized the Latvian self-initiative and the opportunities of local organizations.

¹⁰Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941–1944: The Missing Center* (Riga: Historical Institute of Latvia, and Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996).

¹¹Andrejs Ezergailis, *Holokausta vācu okupētajā Latvijā* (Riga: Latvijas Vēstures institūts, 1999).

¹²After World War II, the largest Latvian émigré communities were located in the United States, Canada, Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, and Australia.

¹³Some groups of Latvian émigrés had opposed Ezergailis' publications and presentations since he commenced his research on the Holocaust. See Uldis Neiburgs, "No piena pudeļu mazgātāja vēstures profesoras," *Mājas Viesis*, accessed December 9, 2005, http://zagarins.net/sveiks/2005/120905_Ezergailis_Majas_Viesis.htm.

¹⁴Marģers Vestermanis knew what he was saying when presenting at a conference in the 1990s in Germany:

Fifty years have passed since the Holocaust and this is the first chance for me to speak about it. It is good that it happens in Germany, but it would be better, if it could happen in my fatherland, in Latvia.

A shortened version of Vestermanis' essay, which he read on June 15, 1991 at the Soviet German historian conference in Berlin, was published: Marģers Vestermanis, "Es geht um das Warum und das Wie," *Die Tageszeitung*, June 22, 1991.

the commemorative event in Rumbula in 1991, at which Anatolijs Gorbunovs, the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia, stated, "The Jewish nation, too, can look back self-critically on the role of their predecessors in history, especially the revolution in 1918 and the events which took place in Latvia in 1940."¹⁵

The decision to establish committees of historians in all three Baltic states caused significant changes in the status of Holocaust research. This decision was made mostly due to political pressure, as the implementation of official Holocaust remembrance infrastructure, including detailed analysis of the historical events, was one of preconditions for Latvia to join Euro-Atlantic organizations.¹⁶ The historian commission would pay special attention to the issue of the fate of Jews in World War II and the role of local inhabitants in it, but would continue its work until its members had concluded that all available archive materials had been analyzed.

The Commission of the Historians of Latvia (CHL) was established on 13 November 1988 with the support of the president of the state, Guntis Ulmanis. Its official task was to investigate the crimes against humanity during two occupations (1940–1956) and 'reduce stereotypes [and] look for new approaches in teaching history as well as in forming historical understanding.' During the opening speech at the first international conference organized by the newly established structure, President Ulmanis emphasized,

It is important to clarify with which hands and under the cover of whose ideas they were committed. It is important to know the degree of involvement the inhabitants of Latvia had in the Soviet and Nazi regimes, how many of them became followers and participated in the criminal repressions to the civilians. As for any European state, for Latvian society, too, it is important to gain a *more detailed truth* about World War II and the totalitarian period.¹⁷

From this moment on, Holocaust research in Latvia flourished, conducted primarily within the institutional framework of the historian commission. Holocaust research was recognized to be the CHL's priority, and a special sub-commission, Holocaust in the Territory of Latvia 1941–44, was formed, led by Aivars Stranga, a professor at the University of Latvia.¹⁸ One of the first challenges of this sub-commission was to recruit suitable researchers, which, though not easy, it did successfully. Over the next decade, the commission performed extensive work, organizing international scientific conferences and supporting Holocaust research by publishing 28 extensive volumes in total, 6 of them dedicated exclusively to Holocaust themes. Holocaust-related research has been published in other, non-commission, volumes as well.¹⁹

Aleksandrs Ivanovs, a historian on the commission, writes that the scope of Holocaust research in Latvia, based on the number of institutions and researchers involved, which greatly exceeds the number of professional historians, shows that since the establishment

¹⁵See Didzis Bērziņš and Paula Oppermann, "Latvia. The Rumbula Memorial. History and Present," in *Methodical Materials "Holocaust Commemoration in the Baltics"* (Riga: Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia, 2016), http://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/projekti/jsc/publikacijas/METHODICAL_MATERIALS.pdf.

¹⁶For some aspects of political pressure, see Kārlis Kangeris, "Western Pressure in the Writing of Latvian History," in Baiba Metuzale-Kangare, (ed.), *Inheriting the 1990s: The Baltic Countries* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2010), pp. 191–198.

¹⁷Valsts prezidenta Gunta Ulmaņa uzruna, "Priekšvārds," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2000), vol. 1, p. 15.

¹⁸See the 'Commission of Historians' section on the website of the President of the Republic of Latvia: http://www.president.lv/pk/content/?cat_id=7.

¹⁹Kārlis Kangeris, Dzintars Ērglis, Rudīte Viksne, Aigars Urtāns, Arturs Žvinklis, Edvīns Evarts, Juris Pavlovičs, and other authors have written about important aspects of the Holocaust under the auspices of the CHL.

of the CHL, the Holocaust has become a permanent focus in Latvian historiography.²⁰ Considering that researching the extermination of the Jews in Latvian towns has been one of the CHL's priorities, and despite the fact that doing this successfully is directly linked to the sources available nowadays, it is widely believed that the Holocaust in Latvia, including within the country's towns, has been researched in its entirety.²¹

Despite its ambitious work, the commission has been criticized for not having achieved its goal of bridging the gap in collective memory of the different communities.²² The CHL's weakness has been in communicating and transmitting the knowledge gained to the wider Latvian society as well as to the academic community. Additionally, the international audience that deals with Holocaust research has remained only partially informed of the CHL's activities. At one point, the members of the commission, too, admitted that there was a need for a new, summarized monograph about the Holocaust in Latvia;²³ so far, however, this has not happened. Currently, there is no clarity with regard to future CHL projects. In the last decade, its activities have diminished, though some are planned for the future.

In any case, after mid-2000, the historian commission was only one of the most significant actors in the Holocaust-research infrastructure scene in Latvia, as several other scientific and popular-science bodies were created. The Jews in Latvia museum, founded by Mārgers Vestermanis, has played a special role in Holocaust research.²⁴ In 2001, the museum was accredited by the state, and it is now successfully led by director Ilja Ļenskis. The museum has gathered an extensive collection of materials and witness statements about the Holocaust, and it continues to work actively in the field of Holocaust research and remembrance. Under the leadership of researcher Meyer Meler, the museum's employees inspected and researched Holocaust remembrance sites in Latvia extensively, and in 2013, their findings were compiled in the publication *Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember. Latvian Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust*.²⁵

The museum has also participated in several cross-institutional events related to the Holocaust research and raising awareness. For instance, it has been involved in the Sefer expedition program led by the Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization

²⁰See Aleksandrs Ivanovs, "Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā: izpētes gaita Latvijas jaunāko laiku historiogrāfijā, izpētes rezultāti un perspektīvas," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2011), vol. 27, p. 30. The author does not clarify what 'the community of professional historians' is and how many participants it comprises, nor does he state the number of the Holocaust researchers. However, excluding the CHL's historians, regional researchers, employees of museums, and professors also studied this question. The studies by historian and museum employee Aigars Urtāns and regional researcher and professor Josifs Ročko must be mentioned as examples.

²¹See Dzintars Ērglis, "Ebreju slepkavošana 1941. gada vasarā Krustpils ebreju kapsētā," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2009), vol. 1, p. 173; Meijers Melers, *Latvijas ebreju kopienas vēsture un holokausta piemiņas vietas* (Rīga: Rīgas ebreju kopienas muzejs "Ebreji Latvijā"; LU Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, 2013), p. 378.

²²For more detailed critiques, see Eva-Clarita Pettai, "The Convergence of Two Worlds: Historians and Emerging Histories in the Baltic States," in Martyn Housden and David J. Smith, (eds.), *Forgotten Papers in Baltic History: Diversity and Inclusion* (New York: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 263–280; Eva-Clarita Onken, "The Politics of Finding Historical Truth: Reviewing Baltic History Commissions and Their Work," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 38:1 (2007), pp. 109–116.

²³See Aleksandrs Ivanovs, *Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā: izpētes gaita Latvijas jaunāko laiku historiogrāfijā, izpētes rezultāti un perspektīvas* (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2011), p. 31.

²⁴Since the period of Awakening, the Jews in Latvia museum has collected witness statements about the Jewish communal life and documented different tragic events of the Holocaust; for a long time, it was the only museum dedicated to the history of the Jewish community.

²⁵Also in 2011, on the 70th anniversary of the mass murder in Rumbula, in cooperation with the Latvian Museum of Occupation, the exhibition *Rumbula. Anatomy of Crime. 1941* opened. In 2015, the exposition *Holocaust in Nazi-Occupied Latvia, 1941–1945: No One Was Spared!* opened at Jews in Latvia.

to towns where Jews made up a significant part of the pre-World War II population. The goal of these expeditions is to gather information and study the image of Jews from the point of view of their non-Jewish neighbors. The results of this research were compiled in two publications.²⁶ The project manager, Svetlana Amosova, plans to dedicate a special publication to these non-Jewish inhabitants' Holocaust-related memories. The museum also plans to publish the lifelong work of its founder Mārgers Vestermanis about the rescuers of Jews in Latvia.²⁷

Since its founding in 1998, the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia led by Professor Ruvin Ferber has played an active part in Holocaust research, raising awareness about Jewish culture, history, and traditions and contributing significantly to Holocaust education and research. Ferber and the Israeli professor Herman Branover have also organized an international conference, Jews in a Changing World, every two to three years since 1995. The conference focuses on the history and culture of Jews in Latvia and the Baltics, and a considerable part of it is devoted to Holocaust research. Eight volumes of conference proceedings, edited by Branover and Ferber, have been published in Russian, and they continue to inform about the Holocaust in Latvia. Professor Aivars Stranga is the vicechairman of the board of the Center for Judaic Studies. A highly regarded and respected expert on the Holocaust in Latvia, he also leads the CHL's Holocaust sub-commission. He has published extensive research about Jews in the Baltics²⁸ in 2008, offering balanced and significant information about the Holocaust in the Baltic states, including Latvia.

Since 2002, the Center for Judaic Studies has run a significant and internationally recognized research project, Jews of Latvia: Names and Fates, 1941–1945.²⁹ As part of this, the center has undertaken enormous research efforts to recover the names, personal details, and fates of all the Jews who lived in Latvia on the eve of the Holocaust.³⁰ This information is stored in the center's very unique database. While most Holocaust databases, such as Yad Vashem's, for example, take the 'direct' approach – that is, mostly testimonies – the Latvian database takes the 'indirect' approach, relying primarily on extracted archive information, which is continually cross referenced and expanded upon.

The Žanis Lipke Memorial, which was inaugurated in 2013 to honor the memory of the most important Latvian rescuer of Jews, has also been actively involved in promoting the topic of the Holocaust. It serves as a significant and topical platform for discussions, offers comprehensive lectures, and has increasingly become involved in larger scale projects, including some related to questions of Holocaust research. It also serves as a great

²⁶Svetlana Amosova, (ed.), *Utrachennoe sosiedstvo: Yevrei v kulturnoi pamiati zhitelei Latgalii. Materiali ekspeditsii 2011–2012* (Moscow: Centr naustnih rabotnikov i prepodovatelej iudaiki "Sefer," and Riga: Jews in Latvia Museum, 2013); Svetlana Amosova, (ed.), *Utrachennoe sosiedstvo II: Yevrei v kulturnoi pamiati zhitelei Latgalii. Materiali ekspeditsii 2011–2015* (Moscow: Centr naustnih rabotnikov i prepodovatelej iudaiki "Sefer," and Riga: Jews in Latvia Museum, 2016).

²⁷Vestermanis' research about the rescuers of Jews in Latvia is expected to be published in the near future. At the beginning of 2014, the collected information told about 417 rescuers (170 of whom were not identified), who had hid 729 Jews, 546 of whom survived, while 183 were caught and killed. See Ineta Lipša, "Šāvēji un glābēji: Saruna ar A. Strangu, M. Vestermani, K. Zelli," *Tiraksts*, 2:2 (2014), p. 63.

²⁸Aivars Stranga, *Ebreji Baltijā. No ienākšanas pirmsākumiem līdz holokaustam. 14. gadsimts–1945. gads* (Rīga: LU žurnāla "Latvijas Vēsture" fonds, 2008).

²⁹See <http://names.lu.lv>; the Center for Judaic Studies continues its prolific activity and created the Holocaust Memorial Places in Latvia project, which maps the Jewish killing sites in Latvia and makes the information available online. In 2016, the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia published "Holocaust Commemoration in the Baltics": http://www.szf.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/projekti/jsc/publikacijas/METHODICAL_MATERIALS.pdf.

³⁰The results of the project were published online in the <http://names.lu.lv> database.

example of successful communication about the past and the promotion of democratic values.

Under the leadership of Rabbi Menachem Barkahan, there is an active religious congregation and association, Šamir, which also addresses Holocaust research and commemoration in its scope of activity. Among other things, the association established the Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, which actively promotes knowledge about different aspects of the Holocaust in Latvia, organized four international conferences (Holocaust Museums and Memorial Places in Post-Communist Countries: Challenges and Opportunities), and in 2009 published a series of lectures entitled Extermination of Jews in Latvia, 1941–1945.³¹

Besides the abovementioned works of Aivars Stranga, Andrew Ezergailis, and Mārgers Vestermanis, there have been several other contributions to the field: Leo Dribins' publication about the history of Jews and antisemitism in Latvia,³² Kaspars Zellis' monograph about Nazi propaganda in Latvia,³³ and Uldis Neiburgs' publications about the history of World War II,³⁴ to name a few. The late Grigorijš Smirins worked as the scientific editor for countless scientific editorials, diaries of Holocaust witnesses, memoirs, and other publications, and wrote about the Holocaust in Latvia himself.

Several foreign researchers have written about the Holocaust in Latvia and contributed to the knowledge about this tragedy as well. Richards Plavnieks, in the United States, wrote his dissertation on the postwar trials against Latvian Auxiliary Security Police members, known as Arajs Kommando.³⁵ One of the most prolific researchers on the topic of Jewish history and the Holocaust and its aftermath in Latvia was the late Israeli professor Dov Levin.³⁶ To name a few more important studies, the monograph about the extermination of Jews in Riga by Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein³⁷ (Germany) published in 2006 contributed greatly to the overall research on the topic, and in 2011 and 2016, this research was supplemented by the work of Katrin Reichelt (Germany) on the role of Latvians in the Holocaust³⁸ and on Jewish rescuers in Latvia during the Holocaust, respectively.³⁹ By emphasizing their contribution to foreign research on this topic, especially tackling

³¹However, the scientific quality of the paper has been evaluated ambiguous; for instance, historian Andrew Ezergailis has criticized it.

³²Leo Dribins, "Antisemitisms nacistiskās okupācijas laikā izdotajā presē Latvijā (1941–1945)," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, vol. 1, pp. 360–372; Leo Dribins, "Antisemitisms un tā izpausmes Latvijā: vēstures atskats," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, vol. 4.

³³See Kaspars Zellis, *Ilūziju un baiļu mašīnērija. Propaganda nacistu okupētajā Latvijā: vara, mediji un sabiedrība (1941–1945)* (Riga: Mansards, 2013). Among multiple publications about Nazi propaganda, Zellis has also written about the aspects of the extermination of Latvian Jews and Roma in different regions of Latvia.

³⁴See: Uldis Neiburgs, "Dievs, Tava zeme deg": *Latvijas Otrā pasaules kara stāsti* (Riga: Lauku Avize, 2014); Uldis Neiburgs, *Draudu un cerību lokā. Latvijas pretošanās kustība un Rietumu sabiedrotie (1941–1945)* (Riga: Mansards, 2017).

³⁵Forthcoming in the fall of 2017: Richards Plavnieks, *Nazi Collaborators on Trial during the Cold War: Viktors Arājs and the Latvian Auxiliary Security Police* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

³⁶See Dov Levin, "The Jews and the Sovietisation of Latvia, 1940–1941," *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 5:1 (1975), pp. 39–56; Dov Levin, "On the Relations Between the Baltic Peoples and Their Jewish Neighbors Before, During and After World War II," *Holocaust Genocide Studies*, 5:1 (1990), pp. 53–66; Dov Levin, "Some Basic Facts on Latvian Jewry – Before, During and After the World War II," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, vol. 2, pp. 143–152.

³⁷Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein, *Die "Endlösung" in Riga: Ausbeutung und Vernichtung 1941–1944* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2006); for the English translation, see Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein, *The 'Final Solution' in Riga: Exploitation and Annihilation, 1941–1944* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).

³⁸Katrin Reichelt, *Lettland unter deutscher Besatzung 1941–1944. Der lettische Anteil am Holocaust* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2011).

³⁹Katrin Reichelt, *Rettung kennt keine Konventionen: Hilfe für verfolgte Juden im deutsch besetzten Lettland, 1941–1945* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2016).

topics that have sometimes been avoided or downplayed by local authors, such as collaboration, the role of the local population, antisemitic attitudes, and broadening the scope of the research, these works have also opened themselves to criticism⁴⁰ for insufficient knowledge of the local context and ignorance regarding the latest research conducted by Latvian historians, which accordingly has led to inaccuracies and mistakes and, in some places, unsubstantiated generalizations.⁴¹

In evaluating the contributions of myriad researchers and the Latvian state, which since the end of the 1990s has been involved in the promotion of the topic mostly, but not exclusively⁴² through the work of the CHL, it must be noted that the most recent comprehensive monograph about the Holocaust in Latvia was written more than two decades ago. The classical work by Andrew Ezergailis served as a fundamental breakthrough and has become an important reference for international publications;⁴³ however, there is a range of new research materials available, which questions several of Ezergailis' theses (his functional perspective regarding the explanation of the Holocaust is questionable in itself, especially the aspect of collaboration by locals, which, in his last publication, expanded into unconditional defense and justification of Herberts Cukurs⁴⁴) and therefore necessitates the publication of new and, if possible, comprehensive research, including the latest discoveries by historians.

Despite the many detailed studies, several significant questions about the Holocaust in Latvia remain unanswered. Compared to the Jews, the history of other victims of the Nazis, such as the Roma⁴⁵ and the mentally handicapped,⁴⁶ has been researched less. There are also other questions, such as those regarding the roles of different people in the Holocaust in Latvia, which has enabled the emergence of a wide range of people not professionally involved in the field of history. The most outstanding example is the personality and role of Herberts Cukurs in the Holocaust in Latvia, which has become the subject of many popular culture products.⁴⁷

The widely available publications found in Latvian bookstores targeting the country's Russian-speaking population indicate the topicality of the Holocaust. These publications

⁴⁰For a vivid example, see Andrew Ezergailis, *Caur velna zobiem: vācu laiki šodien: 1941–1945: esejas un domas* (Rīga: Atvērtās krātuves, 2016), pp. 197–218.

⁴¹Not only have there been oversimplified generalizations about the motivations and attitudes of local inhabitants, but also, in some cases, the general conclusions about the Baltic states have been extrapolated from the analyses of examples almost exclusively from Lithuania. See Dov Levin, "Disinformation and Antisemitism: Holocaust Denial in the Baltic States, 1945–1999," in John K. Roth and Elizabeth Maxwell, (eds.), *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 847–857.

⁴²Detailed analysis of the recent activity and Latvia's involvement in promoting the knowledge about the Holocaust: https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/ihra_final_11012016.pdf.

⁴³For example: Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015).

⁴⁴See Andrew Ezergailis, *Caur velna zobiem: vācu laiki šodien: 1941–1945: esejas un domas* (Rīga: Atvērtās krātuves, 2016), p. 479.

⁴⁵Research and essays by Matthew Kott, Kaspars Zellis, and Aigars Urtāns are exceptions. Also, the exhibition *Roma Genocide in Latvia (1941–1945)* opened in 2015 at the Academic Library of the University of Latvia: <http://www.acadlib.lv/index.php?1&1&view=cat-browse&catid=461>.

⁴⁶An exception is studies by Rudite Viksne. See Rudite Viksne, "Garīgi slimo iznīcināšana Latvijā nacistiskās okupācijas laikā," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2003), vol. 8, pp. 334–341.

⁴⁷Several authors have mentioned publications in which Herberts Cukurs has been subjectively depicted in a positive manner and his participation in the crimes of the Holocaust has been diminished or has not been evaluated completely; in several cases, heroic features of Cukurs can also be observed. The works of Roberts Klimovičs, Baiba Šāberte, Elita Veidemane, Juris Millers, and Armands Puče serve as bright examples. In the end, Andrew Ezergailis also joined this uncritical group of whitewashers. See a critical review of his latest work: Didzis Bērziņš, "No vēstures profesora propagandistos?" *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 1:98 (2016), pp. 183–195.

repeat the core Soviet theses about Latvian collaborationists, bloodshed in the Salaspils death camp,⁴⁸ the hundreds of thousands of foreign Jews exterminated in Latvia, and the thousands of Jews burnt alive at Riga's Great Choral Synagogue. The best example is the disquisition by Maksim Margolin, a doctor by profession, about the Holocaust in Latvia, whose subtitle is 'Kill all Jews!'⁴⁹

Determined, external propaganda⁵⁰ has on occasion delayed passionless research of the Holocaust in Latvia, sometimes requiring researchers to automatically take defensive positions and thus become less critical. The thesis of interregnum – the period of no rule during which local inhabitants initiated the Holocaust on their own – which is still spread by some 'history writers' and can, as a result, be found in some publications by international authors has created the reverse effect: exaggerated emphasis of the 'Germanism of the Holocaust' in the work of several Latvian authors, particularly Inesis Feldmanis and Andrew Ezergailis. Although there are still significant topics to be studied in-depth – local expressions of collaboration; how the Holocaust unfolded in different towns; decision-making in the various regions, including the cooperation between different levels; the role of local authorities; Jewish resistance; rescuers of Jew and the process of saving (which is due to be published shortly, as previously mentioned) – with ever-growing support from the state, the infrastructure of Holocaust research has developed rapidly throughout Latvia's 25 years of independence and is now capable of answering the most significant questions about the Holocaust in Latvia during World War II.

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⁴⁸Soviet myths dedicated to the Salaspils concentration camp have been analyzed and disputed in this publication by Latvian historians: Kārlis Kangeris, Uldis Neiburgs, and Rudite Viksne, *Aiz šiem vārtiem vaid zeme. Salaspils nometne 1941–1944* (Riga: Lauku Avīze, 2016).

⁴⁹The author depicts what he sees as the inevitable result of the national development of Latvia as a country:

For teams of ploughmen, including several hundreds of other murderers, this work became the crown for an antisemitic campaign, which was implemented by extreme right-wing nationalists in Latvia during the two decades between wars. When Hitler's supporters arrived, it became as the magic potion for them, because now their dream could come true – to kill all Jews. All! Each and every one of them!

See Maksim Margolin, *Holokost v Latvii. "Ubit' vsekh evreev!"* (Moscow: Veche, 2011), p. 17.

⁵⁰Russian historian Boris Sokolov has highlighted that the majority of Russian historians, publicists, and journalists believe that an audit of history, or even its falsification, is taking place in the Baltics, and in publications by historians dedicated to the topic of Latvia in World War II, the importance of repression at the hands of the Soviets is typically decreased, while the role of local collaborationists in the crimes committed by Nazis is exaggerated. Moreover, during Vladimir Putin's presidency, this perspective has become the cornerstone of Russian propaganda concerning the Baltics. See Boris Sokolov, "The Baltic States during the Second World War in the Public Opinion of Modern Russia," *Symposium of the Commission of Historians of Latvia*, (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2009), vol. 24, pp. 432–439. The operation of some official Moscow-related historical research institutions proves this, the most obvious being the Historical Memory Foundation, which shows special interest in Latvian history during World War II, thus keeping alive the above-mentioned presumptions about the Holocaust in Latvia. Due to its objectively negative and propaganda activity, the director of the fund, Alexander Dyukov, and its head of research programs, Vladimir Simindey, were declared *persona non grata* in Latvia as of 2012.

Notes on contributor

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