

Joachim Tauber, *Arbeit als Hoffnung. Jüdische Ghettos in Litauen 1941–1944 (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte)*, Herausgegeben vom Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Band 108, Oldenbourg: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2015. 452 p. ISBN 978-3-11-041476-9

Joachim Tauber's Holocaust research has never been short of relevant and provocative material,<sup>1</sup> and the monograph reviewed here *Arbeit als Hoffnung. Jüdische Ghettos in Litauen 1941–1944* is no exception either. The analytical part of the book consists of six chapters: on the course of the establishment of ghettos and the massacre of Jews in Lithuania (until the end of 1941) (pp. 17–111), the ghetto as an economic phenomenon (pp. 113–264), the ghetto as a community of survival and enslavement (pp. 265–326), Lithuanian-Jewish relations (not just in terms of massacres, but in the context of the social and economic network of the ghetto labour force) (pp. 327–344), and the impact of the liquidation of ghettos in Lithuania on the system of the exploitation (use) of Jewish workers (pp. 345–376). The sixth chapter summarises the monograph, in which the author reveals specific details about the ghetto labour force in Lithuania, basing his arguments on a comparative study of the ghettos in Riga, Bialystok and Belarus (pp. 377–406).

The strongest aspect of this monograph is its use of primary sources: archival material, personal documents (journal entries), and memoirs. Archival sources gave the author probably the most opportunities to realise his idea of showing the changes in the situation of the ghettos in

<sup>1</sup> Of note are the studies by: J. Tauberis, 'Tarp laisvės kovos ir masinių žudynių: 1940–1944 metų fiktyvios lietuviškos biografijos įvadas', *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis. 2002 metai, I* (Vilnius, 2003), pp. 99–120; J. Tauber, 'Antisemitizmas Vokietijoje ir Lietuvoje', L. Truska, V. Vareikis, *Holokausto prielaidos: antisemitizmas Lietuvoje: XIX a. antroji pusė–1941 m. birželis* (Vilnius, 2004), pp. 9–13; J. Tauber, '14 Tage im Juni: Zur kollektive Erinnerung von Litauern und Juden', *Holocaust in Litauen: Krieg, Judenmorde und Kollaboration im Jahre 1941*, Hrsg. V. Bartuševičius, J. Tauber, W. Wette (Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2003), pp. 40–50; J. Tauber, "'Juden, eure Geschichte auf litauischem Boden ist zu Ende!'" Litauen und der Holocaust im Jahr 1941', *Jahrestagung 2003=Suvažiavimo darbai*, Litauisches Kulturinstitut=Lietuvių kultūros institutas (Lampertheim, 2004), pp. 147–167; J. Tauber, "'Gesplante Erinnerung". Litauen und der Umgang mit dem Holocaust nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg', *Umdeuten, verschweigen, erinnern. Die späte Aufarbeitung des Holocaust in Osteuropa*. Hrsg. M. Brumlik, K. Sauerland (Frankfurt/New York, 2010), pp. 47–70.

Lithuania from the perspective of the ghetto workers (the labour force). In this regard, documents concerning the administration of the Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai ghettos, and the organisation and controlled use ('rent' and 'hiring') of this labour force, were of most significance to the study. But the documentary material used in the research differs in terms of its content. For example, when examining the Vilnius ghetto, not only was material from the German Labour Battalion (*Arbeitsdienst*) and the Vilnius Municipality Commissariat (*Gebietskommissariat*) important, but also documents about the smaller ghettos in the Vilnius region, the Lithuanian administration, the police, state enterprises, and civilian companies that hired ('rented') the ghetto labour force. Documents that were especially important in the research allowed for the reconstruction of details of the process of organising the establishment of ghettos in the autumn of 1941, and their subsequent operation. Tauber states that a great deal of important information came from Wehrmacht documentary material, as many ghetto workers in Lithuania were used in various Third Reich military locations, and this fact is reflected in various aspects of the correspondence between military structures and institutions. In the case of the research into the Vilnius ghetto labour force, documents from the SS, which took control of the ghettos in Lithuania in the autumn of 1943, were particularly important. The author also indicates what material offered less information for his study, namely material associated with the Kaunas ghetto from the German Labour Battalion branch in Kaunas, the Kaunas Municipality Commissariat and the Kaunas District Commissariat. On the other hand, documents from the Kaunas ghetto police proved to be very valuable for the research. Their analysis allowed for the presentation of the everyday life of ghetto workers and the impact of the labour force, as a determining factor, in order to create an image of the development of the structure of everyday life in the ghetto. In this sense, the correspondence (reports, accounts of events) of the Kaunas ghetto council (*Judenrat*) to the Kaunas Municipality Commissar is very important. The material on the Šiauliai ghetto constitutes the smallest portion of sources used in the monograph. These are documents collected by the Jewish Museum, founded in Vilnius in 1944, which ended up in the Lithuanian Central State Archives following the museum's 'reorganisation' (liquidation) in 1949. The author has managed to find a number of significant details that enhanced his research in the German Federal Archives (Berlin-Lichterfelde), the Military Archive of the German Federal Archives (Freiburg im Breisgau), the National Archives of Latvia (Riga), the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (New York), and the Yad Vashem Archive (Jerusalem). A description of all archival sources is given in the monograph (pp. 417–419). Thus, a fundamentally rich base of primary sources was used for this study. On the other hand, I should note that the author does not refer to material from the Lithuanian Special Archives (such as collection K-1, 3377, 1771), which I would say could have helped clarify certain factual details.

Highlighting the importance of personal documentary sources, the author singles out the journals of Hermann Kruk and Abraham Tory as some of the most informative. However, he notes that a no less significant aspect of these journals is their authors' recorded disagreements over the organisation and exploitation of the ghetto labour force. As we know, Kruk took the Bund's ideological and political line, and so sternly criticised the decisions of the Vilnius ghetto chairman Jacob Gens. Tory was a Zionist, had ties with the Kaunas ghetto council, and tried to reflect the political, social and even psychological (moral) provisions of its decisions (p. 10). There are grounds for believing that the views of Kruk and Tory were aligned, and reflected many of the collective provisions of the 'enslaved communities' that formed in the ghettos. A supplementary group of sources is the testimonies of those who survived the Holocaust (such as material from the Central Committee of Liberated Jews German History Commission), as well as memoirs published later (see the bibliography, pp. 421–430).

The monograph begins with a preamble on the genesis of the premises for the Holocaust, discussing its course in Lithuania, and exposes the historiographical controversies that have arisen over time (pp. 1–15). We can agree with the author's statement that the genesis of ghettos in terms of the exploitation of labour is a topic that has hardly been covered in historiography. It is not the fact that the topic has not attracted attention from earlier researchers that is of fundamental research value, but trying to understand why this is the case. Tauber tries to reflect on this question by highlighting the judicial, historic and moral aspects. His presentation of the judicial-historic treatment of the ghetto labour force is especially convincing. He notes that on 20 June 2002, the German Bundestag passed a law on social security pensions for prisoners who survived Nazi concentration camps (around 90% were German citizens). The main principle of this law was compensation for former concentration camp prisoners for the work they were forced to do, thus recognising the crime of genocide status for the forced labour policy applied by the Nazis (pp. 1–2). This provision does not apply to former ghetto prisoners in Lithuania or other East European countries that were occupied by the Wehrmacht, who also worked in various Third Reich state and private sector companies. At this point, in Tauber's view, the different reception of the Holocaust experience in Western and Eastern Europe collides (pp. 3–4). In the West European way of thinking, the Holocaust was concentration and death camps, where, besides other means of extermination, the practice of 'exterminating labour' was also applied. Meanwhile, in the historical memory of East Europeans, the Holocaust was the massacre of Jews in the first months of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, and the establishment of ghettos in the autumn of 1941 until the summer of 1944 (in Lithuania's case, August 1941 to September 1943). Some prisoners from the Vilnius ghetto that was liquidated in September 1943, and the Kaunas and Šiauliai ghettos,

liquidated in July 1944, ended up in Nazi concentration and death camps in Poland and in the territory of the Reich in the final stages of the war, and it was precisely from this moment that, according to the law passed by the German Bundestag, they could be considered victims of the Nazis' forced labour policies. So, in a judicial sense (and partly from the eventual historical treatment), the work of ghetto prisoners in Lithuania differed from the forced labour done by prisoners in Nazi concentration camps. The main point of this controversy is that ghetto prisoners in Lithuania worked on a voluntary basis, while concentration camp prisoners were forced to work. In addition, Tauber's research shows that ghetto workers strived to work as much as possible, and as well as they possibly could. Basing this find on historical dialectical criteria (objective and subjective aspect models, circumstances, variants dictated by the given situation, etc), for ghetto prisoners, working was the only way to survive and avoid the 'selection strikes', a death sentence (after the Yom Kippur Action in the Vilnius ghetto in October 1941, and the Great Action in the Kaunas ghetto, most prisoners were convinced that their only chance of staying alive was to work), not just for themselves, but also for their close family who were unable to work (especially the elderly and children) (pp. 294–313). Thus, working in the Wehrmacht's institutions, civil administration structures and state companies, in Lithuanian businesses and repressive Nazi structures (when the SS established 'labour camps' in the autumn of 1943) gave a hope of survival (*Arbeit als Hoffnung*), even though in effect this was a way of surrendering to the pressure of repressive Nazi policies (ghetto prisoners who could not work, and were thus 'not useful', faced death). This formed a particular collective identity among ghetto prisoners (the 'ghetto phenomenon'), which people tried to silence in the postwar period and during the period of (self-)actualisation of the memory of the Holocaust, as the experience of the ghettos as a 'period of stability' or a 'period of peace' contrasted with the experiences of Nazi concentration and death camp prisoners (pp. 408). Over time, this premise created conditions for reducing the understanding of the genesis and development of the ghettos, showing them as the Nazis' genocidal 'Medieval' policy (introducing the ban on Jews walking on the pavement and appearing in public places, and introducing the mandatory display of the Magen David (Star of David), in order to isolate Jews (as 'enemies' of the Third Reich and the German nation), and by establishing ghettos in parts of Lithuania's larger cities (often in places where ghettos had historically existed). We should admit that this kind of assessment of the ghettos, affected by the 'repression' (*Verdrängung*) reaction to experiences not complying with the dominant canon of the Holocaust memory, is noticeable in historiography. In this sense, Tauber's position is rather radical: according to him, not questioning the fact that the chances of violence (due to the actions of the guards and ghetto police) and death were quite high in the ghettos, nevertheless,

in Lithuania they were not just prisons for the helpless and condemned; they were uniquely organised communities of prisoners (the subjugated), that formed their own networks, both social (the ghetto administration, police, work groups, official and 'black market' figures), cultural (such as the Vilnius Ghetto Theatre, library and schools), and political (based on underground Bundist, Zionist and Communist activities) (pp. 410–411). In this sense, the author reviews the fable entrenched in historiography and the Holocaust memory discourse that the ghettos in Lithuania were essentially a local version of concentration camps. He notes: 'In the autumn of 1941, ghettos in Lithuania's largest cities were established as centres for gathering a workforce, which gradually became labour camps, and from the autumn of 1943 were transformed into concentration labour camps that came under the direct control of the SS' (p. 4). In this way, he formulates his preliminary thesis: even though ghettos in Lithuania were essentially an intermediate phase between the first massacres in 1941 and the concentration and death camps in the final stages of the war in 1944–1945, they were actually neither concentration camps nor death camps. In the view of the Nazi regime and Lithuanian government institutions, they were a source of labour; while according to the ghetto prisoners, they could be considered as 'communities of enslaved', in which a specific means of social interaction applied in line with everyday (ghetto) norms of coexistence (p. 410).

The author verifies this thesis by referring to controversies in historiography and the Holocaust memory. Tauber has grounds to state that some authors claim that Lithuania's ghettos were an intermediate stage in the organisation and implementation of the Jewish genocide in Lithuania (which is why the establishment of the ghettos is considered one of the phases of the Holocaust in Lithuania). This provision gives some researchers grounds for their claim that ghetto prisoners in Lithuania were essentially slaves, while their labour was part of the Nazi policy of extermination. The author confronts this position with Dan Michmann's claim that, even though according to Nazi logic and based on certain historical archetypes the concept of the ghetto was associated exclusively with regions in Eastern Europe, their establishment during the Nazi occupation of Lithuania had more rational leitmotifs than just the 'reconstruction of ghettos' (pp. 3–4). The author maintains that the process of establishing ghettos in Lithuania was based on pragmatic aims: to concentrate the most able-bodied Jews (gradually 'eliminating' the incapable or 'unqualified' contingent, and leaving only the 'specialists') in certain parts of the largest cities (the most suitable locations from the point of view of logistics, infrastructure and control requirements) (pp. 67–89). Thus, the ghettos in Lithuania were a rather specific tactical way of concentrating the Jewish labour force, which was formed after the Nazi administration, repressive structures (SS and SD) and the Wehrmacht leadership considered the results of the massacre of Jews and the experience of some of the 'temporarily untouched' Jews

(women and the elderly) in various rural locations in Lithuania for their exploitation/use in agriculture and infrastructure work (road maintenance and repair) in late June to September 1941 (pp. 94–111). Paradoxically, the Nazis' aspirations coincided with the hopes of Jews who survived the wave of massacres of late June to October 1941 for eventual 'stabilisation' (pp. 39–51). The ghetto councils (Judenrat) played a fundamental role at this level. In their view, they relied on the realistic, and, from a Nazi point of view, pragmatic goal of gathering the rest of the most able-bodied Jews in the ghettos, thereby creating the eventual possibility for the survival of at least some Jews (interestingly, in later memoirs, people who ran certain Wehrmacht businesses and had 'rented' ghetto workers used similar arguments about their 'saving' role) (p. 410). This kind of tactic was related to the unavoidable moral dilemma concerning the fate of the 'non-able-bodied' (such as the case of the head of the Vilnius ghetto Jacob Gens). For this reason, in Tauber's view, we should agree with Isaiah Tunk's thesis that the genesis of the ghettos (the so-called 'stabilisation phase') was essentially determined not so much by preferred aspects of the Nazi genocide policy as by the political manoeuvring of ghetto councils in Lithuania and their ability to predict the eventual change in the provisions held by the Nazi occupying regime in Lithuania, which depended on the changing war situation (p. 6). Especially since the Nazi administration and military institutions in Lithuania did not reject the possibility of being able to exploit/use ghetto labour for their own purposes. The author's statement that the circumstances for the emergence of the concept of the establishment of ghettos as a source of labour among Nazi occupation structures in Lithuania and Lithuanian government institutions were much more favourable here than in other Wehrmacht-occupied areas in the USSR is particularly significant. For example, there was no point in 'protecting Jews' in the Bialystok ghetto (there was no shortage of labour in the 'Slavic slave' contingent there), while Jews deported from the Reich were concentrated in the Riga ghetto (following the mass executions of December 1941), the majority of whom, according to the Nazis, did not stand out as being very able-bodied (for this reason, the fate of Riga ghetto prisoners often depended only on the decisions of the German Labour Battalion) (pp. 377–406).

For these reasons, Tauber is rather critical of attempts to define the ghettos in Lithuania based on the ghetto classification models accepted in historiography. In his view, the Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai ghettos do not meet any of the known definitions of ghettos. Even though, based on their basic functions (the formation of a labour force), these ghettos were essentially similar, they were notably different to others according to certain structural features. According to the author, the trend to attribute ghettos in Lithuania to the 'closed type' of ghetto should be avoided, as the Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai ghettos were not strictly isolated, and had constant contact with the outside world (p. 7). This contact was ensured by ghetto

workers who worked for numerous companies in and on the outskirts of these cities. Often, ghetto prisoners' contacts were assured, as they suited the interests of the 'employers' to use ('rent', 'hire') the ghetto labour force. Tauber says that the insight of Martin Dean would fit the case of Lithuania's ghettos best, where the ghettos were a 'grey zone' (p. 7). On the other hand, in the author's opinion, from a historical point of view, the most accurate choice would be to identify ghettos in Lithuania as labour force or workers' ghettos (especially since, as we know, this title was used not only by the Vilnius municipality commissar SA Sturmbanführer Hans Christian Hingst, but also by more junior Nazi officials).

One of the most important moments, according to Tauber, is that despite the many researchers who have looked at the structural and statistical aspects of ghettos as bases for the exploitation of the labour force in Lithuania (such as the work of Yitzhak Arad, Christoph Dieckmann and Arūnas Bubnys), the phenomenon of ghettos as 'survival by working' has nevertheless still not been analysed constructively. He claims that the issue has not received any attention in Lithuanian historiography at all, even though a closer look at Holocaust historiography in Lithuania would indicate that this claim is rather rash.<sup>2</sup> The basic question has less to do with the quantitative aspect of researching the organisation and exploitation of the ghetto labour force in Lithuania as the moral and political problem of people's realisation of the Holocaust in Lithuania. Indeed, the facts revealed in Tauber's monograph are not completely new in terms of Lithuanian historiography, but it is undoubtedly important that a new interpretation of them encourages us to confront the provisions entrenched in the official Holocaust memory discourse in Lithuania. One critical question would be whether there are grounds to claim that the labour of ghetto prisoners in Lithuania was only forced. The majority of ghetto prisoners were in favour of working, as this ensured not only better chances of survival, but also a better position in the ghetto's social structure (in the 'community of the enslaved', where those who received a better [easier, 'more profitable'] job could rise in the ghetto social hierarchy, pp. 294–311). According to Tauber, it was not important what kind of social status an individual had prior to coming to the ghetto, as a person's situation determined what kind of job he was able to carry out, and how it could help him become established in the ghetto 'community of the enslaved'. This model of social relations often determined how ghetto workers could provide for their non-able-bodied

<sup>2</sup> Other authors have tried to analyse the situation of ghetto workers in Lithuanian Holocaust historiography and to present certain preliminary conclusions: *Vilniaus getas: kalinių sąrašai*, t. 1, sud. I. Guzenberg (Vilnius, 1996); *Vilniaus getas: kalinių sąrašai*, t. 2, sud. I. Guzenberg (Vilnius, 1998); *Šiaulių getas: kalinių sąrašai. 1942*, sud. I. Guzenberg, J. Sedova (Vilnius, 2002); *Ašmenos, Svierų, Švenčionių apskričių getai: kalinių sąrašai, 1942*, sud. I. Guzenberg, O. Movšovič, J. Sedova (Vilnius, 2009).

family members (the elderly, children, the sick), as no sympathy was shown at any level of the ghetto administration, or in ghetto communities, for such vulnerable groups (p. 413). So, for individual ghetto prisoners, ghetto communities, and especially for the ghetto councils (*Judenrat*), this labour force was the only chance of providing and gathering economic resources (the meagre portion from ghetto worker 'rents' that the Nazis left was enough to fund necessities) for the maintenance of the ghetto (if they had to deal with issues of the maintenance of the ghetto, the Nazis would not have put off their decision to liquidate them). Especially since ghetto labour was often used to meet the ghetto's internal needs. That is why in Lithuanian ghettos, according to some who survived the Holocaust, even though the prisoners often faced the threat of starvation, food resources could always be found (note that starvation would have been a serious reason for eliminating the ghettos). Incidentally, the exploitation/use of labour beyond the ghetto's walls made it possible to establish beneficial ties with 'shadow economy' groups that operated in the ghettos (pp. 248–264), which played an important role in the ghetto social system (economic ties often helped influence the ghetto administration and police). In turn, it was possible to earn a profit on the ghetto 'black market' from underground economic groups operating beyond the ghetto walls. So, the ghetto system could not function without the labour force. Gradually, labour preferences, as the fundamental factor ensuring stability, determined the internal social structure in Lithuania's ghettos. The most important role was played by the system of the division of labour, whose effectiveness was coordinated by ghetto labour offices, which in turn had an unquestionable impact on everyday life in the ghetto. There was an ardent struggle in the ghettos to secure a better job, while appointment to a better or worse position (in this case, issues such as where one had to work, in the city or the outskirts, for whom one had to work, a German or a Lithuanian business) could depend on more than just a worker's physical abilities, but also on their ability to manoeuvre in the layers of the ghetto administration and the contingents responsible for coordinating labour. Based on this, as Tauber notes, very different survival/life experiences formed in the ghettos: in the memory of some survivors, they associated working on a brigade with the ability to adapt to the specially difficult conditions and survive critical situations; for others, it was associated with corruption and violence suffered at the hands of the ghetto administration (in some cases, these experiences were closely intertwined) (p. 412).

Another question worth attention that arises from the monograph is whether it is right to assume that the collaboration by some Lithuanians with the Nazi occupying administration and repressive structures was limited only to their participation in the massacres. This question makes us take note of a fact repeated several times in the monograph that it was not only Nazi occupying structures that exploited the ghetto labour force for their

own needs, but also companies that belonged to Lithuanian businessmen (some were returned to their former owners after the denationalisation decrees announced in July 1941) (pp. 327–344). They fulfilled profitable orders from Wehrmacht and state enterprises, and satisfied the needs of the local labour market. So, by requesting to ‘hire’ (or ‘rent’) the cheaper ghetto labour force, some of these Lithuanian companies were inclined to maintain close ties with Nazi administrative institutions and repressive structures. On the other hand, the Lithuanian company labour market gradually grew dependent not just on the occupying ruling structures that controlled ghetto worker quotas, but also on the ghetto administration. This situation can be viewed on one hand as an additional aspect of the collaboration of part of Lithuanian society with the Nazi occupying regime, and on the other hand it could have helped to form useful contacts for ghetto workers and their supporters (and eventual saviours). We could say that the use of the ghetto labour force by Lithuanian companies was viewed positively in the ghetto councils as well, as it allowed ghettos to provide much-needed resources, to establish infrastructure contacts (not completely avoiding the element of corruption), and to broaden their networking possibilities. As a result, the ghetto administrations did not lack the motivation to ensure the stable provision of a labour force for their clients: the profits received from ‘renting out’ ghetto workers could help convince the Nazis of the benefits that Jewish workers offered, and to postpone the genocide for some time. This explains in part why during the liquidation of the ghettos in Lithuania, quite a few ghetto prisoners, who were judged as ‘valuable workers’, were deported to concentration camps and labour camps in Latvia and Estonia, from where a certain contingent were transported to concentration camps in Germany (pp. 345–376). There they came into direct contact with the machine of the genocide system (which is why only fragmentary memories of their former ghetto experiences survive), leaving hardly any survivors.

The facts presented in this monograph basically correct the idealised image of ghettos that has become established in historiography (concentration zones for the condemned, forced labour, illness, starvation, and the constant threat of death), and encourage us to rethink the still-existing concept of collaboration with the Nazis (assisting in the organisation and implementation stages of the massacres). Hopefully, the questions analysed in the monograph that have been discussed here will serve as guidelines for historians to undertake the constructive verification and criticism of the theses presented in Tauber’s monograph.

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