

"The Jews will never forget that 6 million of their countrymen perished in the fumes of the crematoriums during World War II, or, like the absolute majority of the 220-thousand-strong Lithuanian community, were murdered in the side-road gutters and forest ditches.

("History Darkness Still Darkens the Present", V.Bartasevičius, "Lietuvos Rytas", 29.09.2003.)

At the beginning of 2005, I was invited by the Director of Vilnius Gaon Jewish Museum to visit Mrs. R. Kostanian, who proposed to me to organise an exhibition about the murder of the Jewish community of the town of Butrimonys during the Shoa. As I agreed, we signed a contract for me to present the exhibition project in April of 2005.

I have submitted the project at the agreed time and proposed to organise its public presentation. I have received my remuneration in accordance with the contract; however, a public presentation of the project did not take place and its implementation dragged on.

Several months later, Mr. M.Zingeris, a representative of the International Commission for the assessment of the Soviet and Nazi crimes in Lithuania, was appointed the Director of the Museum. I addressed him immediately with a request to solve the issue of the implementation of the project I had prepared. However, the director was slow to decide.

On October 10, the director found out that I went to the hospital to be operated on. He promptly organised a meeting on the same day with his deputy, Mrs. R.Kostanian, and a new employee, department head Ms. D.Epšteinaitė.

One issue was on the agenda: the project of the exhibition "Shoa in the Town of Butrimonys" prepared by myself, that consisted of four parts:

1. Pre-war Jewish community of the town of Butrimonys.
2. The political situation of the Jews in pre-war Lithuania and particularly in Alytus district, which included the town of Butrimonys, on the eve of the war between Germany and the USSR.
3. Shoa in Butrimonys.
4. Butrimonys - Jewish cemeteries at Butrimonys and the neighbouring towns.

It was a consistent story about the terrible murder of the Butrimonys Jewish community, based on authentic documentation, published articles on the events, the eyewitness evidence, and the book written by a local resident Ms. R.Bogomolnaja on the

Shoa in Butrimonys.

In the course of the exhibition material preparation, the names of the people, who had helped the Jews in the face of fatal danger, came into light. Among them, brothers Petras and Boleslovas Golembovskis, who had been shot dead for hiding the Jews.

On the basis of my information, the museum presented them for decoration, and the President awarded them posthumously with the Cross of Life Saviours.

In the summer of 1941, when the Nazis broke into Lithuania, the head

of the police in Butrimonys, L.Kasperiušas, organised "a herd" of young Jewish girls caught in Butrimonys and the surrounding areas to serve the invaders and the local officials. After some time, the girls were murdered and buried at the Jewish cemetery of Butrimonys.

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On the basis of Ms. R.Bogomolnaja evidence, I applied to the municipality of the region with the request to tidy up the burial place of the young women and indicate the names of the victims. The burial place was set in order later on. The opening of the monument was transmitted on the air and shown on TV. A regional paper published an article about it.

Ms. D.Epšteinaitė, who took part in the meeting, was not able to say anything substantial; she was beating about the bush, "criticized" my previously prepared exhibitions, which had had the most favourite notes at the museum (in the guest books). However, it did not stop the director from rejecting my project; he asked Ms. D.Epšteinaitė to prepare a new one.

After the decision had been made, a "marathon" of meetings took place at the director's office where more and more ambitious plans were born. Nevertheless, years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 passed, 2009 started, but the exhibition still was not in place.

The minutes of the museum Council d.d. 10.09.2007. show that the director proposed to organize a movable exhibition on the murder of the Jewish people of Butrimonys during Shoa on the basis of the material collected by J.Levinsonas. How-

ever, two years later nothing has been known about the preparation of such an exhibition.

Ms. D.Epšteinaitė has planned an exhibition called "If I could have forgotten...", a kind of historic overview of the Jewish community of Butrimonys. It consists of 15 sections, among them - a modest section titled "The Fifth Commandment", dedicated to the Shoa in Butrimonys. Mentioning the horrible persecution and murder of the Jewish community in the town, the author writes mysteriously: "The Nazis exceeded themselves in their murder atrocities", and not a word on

had been made by the local residents of Butrimonys and neighbouring villages who had been brought there by the local policemen (...) 740 Jewish men, women and children were shot dead." (underlined by me - J.L.)

The exhibition has not a word mentioned about it.

It is surprising that the exhibition does not mention the terrible anti-Semitic propaganda by LAF and the anti-Jewish decrees adopted by the provisional government that helped annihilate the Lithuanian Jewish community within a few months.

ded to Mr. J.Levinsonas' letter.

"JoL" editor has participated in the presentation of the exhibition "If I could have forgotten...". Ms. D.Epšteinaitė's article on the exhibition was published by "JoL" (2009, No 1-2) titled "One of the many - a unique".

The editor's office cannot serve as arbitration to solve the dispute about whose idea is better: the unrealised one by Mr. J.Levinsonas or the implemented one by Ms. D.Epšteinaitė. We can only add that Mr. J.Levinsonas tried to organise the exhibition in an informal way: he made his contribution to the posthumous

ON SHOAH IN THE TOWN OF BUTRIMONYS

(Letter to "JoL" editor's office)

The exhibition was on display in Vilnius in April this year; now it is ready to take "a tour" around Lithuania.

The question is where the Vilnius Gaon Jewish Museum is drifting?

The Holocaust, as a lesson of history, has painfully demonstrated to the future generations what can be done by a person who has lost the spiritual balance and moral responsibility. Thus, according to Carl Jaspers, the Nazi epoch survivor and German philosopher, the Jewish Holocaust has to be constantly commemorated. It is an event that became possible, and, thus, it can be repeated at any minute. It is the knowledge that is able to prevent it. ("Shoa (Holocaust) in Lithuania", part II, p. 13.)

Josifas LEVINSONAS

WORD FROM THE EDITOR.

The editor's office has submitted Vilnius Gaon Jewish Museum director Mr. Markas Zingeris and the former museum employee, Ms. Dalija Epšteinaitė, with Mr. J.Levinsonas' letter. According to the director, the museum has met its obligations to its former employee, Mr. J.Levinsonas. In response to Mr. J.Levinsonas' reproach that the exhibition prepared by Ms. D.Epšteinaitė has "not a word mentioned about the local police, the white-straps and the 13-th Lithuania Police Battalion", Mr. M.Zingeris replied that the issue is extensively discussed in the article "The Annihilation of the Butrimonys Jewish Community in 1941" by Dr. Arunas Bubnys included in the exhibition catalogue.

Ms. D.Epšteinaitė has not respon-

awards given to brothers Golembovskis. Mr. J.Levinsonas managed to have the Holocaust victims burial place tidied up. It clearly shows that Mr. J.Levinsonas' personal attitude towards his work has not been restricted to the exhibition material alone.

Mr. J.Levinsonas' reproach to the authors of the exhibition (not of the catalogue!) about it not reflecting the anti-Semitic propaganda, the anti-Jewish decrees of the Lithuanian provisional government and the role of the local Nazi collaborators in the execution of the Butrimonys Jews is an unquestionably reasonable.

Unfortunately, during recent years in Lithuania one can notice the strive of influential political circles to deny the status of the Holocaust as an unprecedented historic tragedy and compare it to the deportations to Siberia, and, what is more important, to keep silent about the crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators.

Some in Lithuania want the ignorance about the local collaborators' participation in the savage Nazi atrocities to become a prevailing tendency in the Holocaust education. In many secondary schools around the country the topic of the Holocaust is being treated in a formal way and the textbooks provide sparing information about it; thus, there is no reason to believe that the topic is being taught satisfactorily in Lithuania. The exhibition on the Holocaust in Butrimonys can hardly help the teachers and the students understand the scope of the Jewish and Lithuanian tragedy even in that small town and name its perpetrators.