

Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day. Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars*, Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2015. 283 p. ISBN 978-963-386-097-7

In April 1827, several days after Easter, in the village of Zdonišké Mannonr in Tel'shi District in the Šiauliai governorate, Juozapas Petravičius, the seven-year-old son of a peasant, disappeared. Augustinas Žukovskis, who was out herding together with the boy, related how two Jews had grabbed Juozapas and dragged him into the forest. Having heard the news, a local land-owner, Petras Dimša, organised a search party for the boy that same day, but to no avail. Two weeks later, the boy's body was found by a nearby lake. The young shepherd Augustinas Žukovskis kept to his story: allegedly, the boy had been grabbed by two Jews, he even gave detailed descriptions of them, and later identified one, Hirsha Katz. Not long afterwards, the teenager's story was indirectly confirmed by new witnesses: a local girl, Karolina Kumzova, remembered how that same day two Jews had tried to grab her too, only she managed to escape. Another person claimed to have seen two Jews, one of whom tried to disguise himself, riding on horses not far from where the body was found. Another peasant family, the Jucys, disclosed that their son Jonas had also disappeared at a similar time.

Rumours and hearsay shrouded the incident, and all the blame for 'suspicious' behaviour fell on the Jews: it was alleged that local Jews had bribed the policeman so that he would not take any action; other Jews did not allow horses to be grazed near the storehouse where the boy was said to be hidden; while converts from Judaism 'revealed' that before the feast of Passover, Jews had to have Christian blood, and that bribes were usually given to conceal ritual murders. As the situation grew more tense, local Jews complained to the governor-general, who sent a special envoy, Kermensky, to investigate. Under interrogation, Augustinas Žukovskis confessed that Juozapas Petravičius had drowned accidentally, and afraid of being blamed for the boy's death, he made up the story about the Jews. In his words, it was natural to put the blame on Jews, because he had heard stories about Jews kidnapping Christian children. Karolina Kumzova also admitted that she had made up her story about how she had been chased by Jews; while the Jucys family, who had reported their child missing, also confessed that he had simply been sent away to school. The landowner Dimša, who had led the search party, must have played a large part in putting the blame on the Jews, as an old Polish book had

helped him find grounds for his suspicions: it was written that Christian blood was absolutely necessary for Jews. Although Kermensky's investigation at first glance could be an example of how the intervention of state institutions was able to stop the ball of local justice from rolling too far, this particular story, framed amid the relations between Lithuanians, Jews and the Imperial Russian administration, is actually hard to decipher: when the first witnesses retracted their testimonies, the investigation process was still far from over. The case was handed over to the Tel'shi Castle Court, where orders were given to extend the collection of evidence, and most likely, in this way confirm the legitimacy of the anti-semitic superstitions.

The book *Enemies for a Day* by the historian Darius Staliūnas is an interesting examination of this strange and depressing situation. The behaviour of officials who participated was very telling, as the lower-ranking civil servants obviously supported the anti-semitic accusations, while the higher-ranking officials (in this case, the special envoy Kermensky, an outsider) were already convinced that the accusations were based purely on superstition. The most specific form of these superstitions, blood-libel, is presented and analysed in the first part of the book. The author seeks to reveal the foundations of Lithuanian-Jewish tensions along the western periphery of the Russian Empire, that is, Lithuania, in the early 19th century. According to the author, the peasantry's mentality was influenced by religious traditions and priests, the position of the estate, custom law and oral traditions. Threatening children to behave or they'd find themselves made into 'Jewish matzah balls' was an accepted form of disciplining, so it should come as no surprise that very often it was juveniles who were the first to blame Jews (p. 56). In addition, in many cases, all this searching for a culprit was mixed with what we would call today, at least, the non-supervision of children: the first accusation of blood-libel in the 19th century was made after parents and relatives who were binge-drinking could not find their four-year-old Maciejus Luberskis, to make him drunk on vodka for their amusement (pp. 26–27).

On the other hand, Yuri Slezkine in *The Jewish Century* showed that confrontations might have arisen because Jews, like the other social groups, considered the local peasantry uncivilised, crude and illiterate (pp. 18–19). However, in this book, which seeks to look at anti-Jewish violence in a rounded way, including even Jewish behaviour strategies, this motive is not given further discussion. As no research on this aspect has been conducted, we can look at examples such as those given by Slezkine. In *The Jewish Century*, he mentions a special code used in Lithuania among Jews to describe their non-Jewish (*goya*) neighbours. The code was usually associated with sexual, diet-specific and language impurities: 'They might be called *sherets* and *shrotse* (reptiles); the word *shvester* (sister) became *shvesterlo*; *foter* (father) *foterlo*, *muter* (mother), *muterlo* [...] according to M.S. Altman, when Jews of his shtetl referred to Gentiles' eating, drinking,

or sleeping, they used words normally reserved for animals. The Yiddish for the town of Bila Tserkva ('White Church') was Shvartsetume ('Black Church', the word *tume* generally denoting a non-Jewish place of worship).¹

But, of course, we cannot describe Jewish-Lithuanian relations in the 19th century as having been solely dark and negative: otherwise, in the traditionally very anti-semitic Žemaitija, in the early 20th century, people would not have believed that meeting a Jew on the road was a good omen.² According to Staliūnas, senior civil servants, such as Kermensky, viewed accusations of ritual crimes as myths. Nevertheless, while the press ban on text in the Latin script was still valid, Povilas Višinskis, one of the founders of the Lithuanian Democrat Party, also wrote about the anti-Judaism of Lithuanian peasants with a hint of irony, and based his reasoning on political illiteracy: 'Ask him what nationality he is, he'll reply "Catholic", who is his enemy "the Jew", while the most powerful person who could improve his life, who he could tell all his problems to, that was "his Grace, the tsar"!' ³ Approaching the beginning of the 20th century, more democratically inclined politicians and intellectuals started to take a similar position. For example, in 1907–1912, Andrei Bulat (Andrius Bulota), a deputy in Russia's Second and Third State Duma, wrote in his memoirs about early 20th-century Lithuanian-Jewish relations, saying that in the 'dark and little-conscious strata of our peasantry, anti-semitism has sprouted with all its ulcers' (p. 22). A similar opinion was being expressed in the press in the early 20th century as well. In 1907, amid a polemic on anti-semitic views in *Vilniaus žinios*, the first legal Lithuanian daily, it was acknowledged that illiteracy and professional inflexibility, not Jews, were to blame for Lithuanians' dismal economic situation: 'The greatest culprit of our poverty, if we can say so, is *ignorance*, in other words, an inadequate scientific, political and sociological cognition. Our economic management dates to the times of Napoleon, trade is in poor shape, and even then, it will soon be in the hands of foreigners (Jews), and there are very few societies: what a gloomy expression of our present existence!' ⁴

This idea about Jews and their economic advantage was a regular feature in the Lithuanian press in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, often in an effort to show what difficulties local Lithuanians had to face. For example, in a presentation about the popular mineral water resort of Druskininkai, readers were reminded that 'Here, all trade is in the hands of the Jews, and they hold the top positions in every other field: doctors,

¹ Y. Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (New Jersey, 2004), p. 110.

² P. Višinskis, *Raštai*, p. 214.

³ [Povilas Višinskis] Review of notes ('Lietuvos ūkininkų kalendorius ant metų 1901'), *Varpas*, no. 3 (1901), p. 30.

⁴ Taučius [Mykolas Krupavičius], *Ir man teip rodos!*, *Vilniaus žinios*, no. 3(612), sausio 4 (1907), p. 2.

dentists, masseurs and other artisans, all are Jews.’⁵ The quote fits the anti-semitic rhetoric in the second half of the 19th century, whereby Lithuanians tried to become more established, politically, culturally, and, most importantly, economically. The last decades of the 19th century, even in this rather grim province of the Romanov empire, were politically, culturally, economically and socially intense, and raised the question of principles for co-existence between different social, religious, national and linguistic groups, prompting their reconsideration. According to Staliūnas, it was precisely during this period that Lithuania’s Jews started to be viewed no longer as intermediaries, but as competitors (pp. 69–80). As in the rest of Europe, so too on the periphery, the rise in nationalism was accompanied by a wave of violence against Jews.

The author chooses to examine a specific form of that violence: – the pogroms, whose title, as we know, started to be used after the anti-Jewish attacks that broke out in south west Russia in 1881–1882. He uses the definition of a pogrom offered by the German sociologist Werner Bergmann: ‘One-sided and non-governmental form of social control, as “self-help by a group” that occurs when no remedy from the state against the threat which another ethnic group poses can be expected. The pogrom is different from other forms of control, such as lynching, terrorism, and vigilantism, in that the participants in a pogrom hold the entire out-group responsible and therefore act against the group as a whole, and also in that it usually displays a low degree of organisation.’⁶ Staliūnas supplements this definition with local parameters of scale and space, allowing him to distinguish those ‘small’ and ‘everyday’ conflicts between young Jews and Lithuanians that usually broke out on market days. In this case, violence during a pogrom had to last at least a few hours, they had to involve several dozen people, and the pogrom itself would occur ‘in a place of mass congregation (such as on a market square) or spread within a certain inhabited area’ (p. 6).

The book *Enemies for a Day* is probably the first collection of its kind to gather all such cases of violence in one place (the body of material from Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, Latvian and Belarusian memoirs and archives is truly impressive), the contents are catalogued and feature comprehensive commentaries. Accomplishing this task is a unique achievement in Lithuanian historiography (and, in my opinion, far beyond national boundaries). This kind of methodological stance, as is noted by the anti-semitism researcher John Klier, should assist in avoiding *a priori*

⁵ Žiemkintis, Druskininkai, *Vilniaus žinios*, rugpj. 20 (rugs. 2), (1905), p. 3.

⁶ W. Bergmann, ‘Ethnic Riots in Situations of Loss of Control: Revolution, Civil War, and Regime Change as Opportunity Structures for Anti-Jewish Violence in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe’, *Control of Violence: Historical and International Perspectives on Violence in Modern Societies*, eds. W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner and A. Kirschner (New York, 2011), p. 488.

assessments and ahistorical interpretations.⁷ Based on typical socio-economic arguments, Staliūnas supplements them with insights on the cultural turn paradigm, suggesting looking at ethnic violence as a culturally constructed, discursively mediated, ritually regulated phenomenon (p. 11). As is demanded of any good scientific study, the work is not only about anti-semitic and/or anti-Jewish violence, and other instances of discrimination against Jews: it includes everyday contact with Christian peasants, and later reciprocal estimation of Lithuanians or Poles and Jews. There is also an overview of the established informal hierarchy.

The book as a whole, and especially in the second and third chapters ‘Antisemitism in Lithuania’ and ‘Lithuania during the “Storms in the South” (Early 1880’s)’, contains volumes of material suitable for intellectual 19th-century history. The wide source base allows us to see how anti-semitic and anti-Jewish moods and arguments changed, not just in the Lithuanian public discourse, but also among Poles and Belarusians who lived in Lithuania at the time (pp. 62–83). Sometimes it appears the cultural approach could have been developed more in the book: there is almost no mention of the cultural practices that existed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, for example, the dominant meanings popular in the press or in packed theatre halls, which not only formed certain stereotypes but also expressed the public’s expectations. Even though anti-semitic positions were in widespread published circulation in the public discourse (for example, the humorous magazines published in Lithuania stand out, especially the caricatures in *Brukowiec*),⁸ which certainly does not suggest adequate communication between different ethnic groups, there were still some environments where meanings that did not comply with the official discourse prevailed. From the perspective of cultural history, theatre performances are worth closer attention. One example is the play *Jews* (by Chirikov), inspired by the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, which was immediately banned across the empire. Its culmination, a pogrom scene, was staged in Vilnius in 1905. Vsevolod Meyerhold re-staged this play, whereupon it became a symbol of resistance to such reactionary forces, and it was part of the Vilnius theatre repertoire in the 1907–1908 season. The play was staged in places where there was no threat of a Russian-Jewish clash erupting. In this period in general, there was an increase in the number of Jewish-authored works on the Vilnius stage, some of which spoke directly about the oppression Jews were suffering (Semion Juške-

⁷ J. Klier, ‘The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History’, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. J.D. Klier, Sh. Lambroza (Cambridge, 1992), p. 34.

⁸ L. Laučkaitė, ‘Žydo stereotipas XX a. pradžios Vilniaus žurnalinėje grafikoje’, *Vilniaus kultūrinis gyvenimas: tautų polilogas 1900–1945*, ed. A. Lapinskiene (Vilnius, 2012), pp. 45–56.

vičius' *Jews*, Sholem Alejchem's *Jewish Family*, Osip Dymov's *Listen, Israel!* and Piotr Nevezhin's *Pogrom* were staged when funds were being collected for the victims of the Białystok pogrom).⁹

The avoidance of cultural sources is partially countered by the fact that in this book, as in earlier works by Staliūnas, great attention is paid to official policy, centre and periphery officials, and the analysis of police documents and activities (pp. 85–127). The incorporation of Imperial bureaucratic correspondence is very important, for several reasons: it shows the large number of officials who did not like Jews and discriminated against them; on the other hand, it denies the widespread myth that precisely this layer of society, especially its leaders from the governorates or the empire's capitals, organised pogroms in Lithuania (pp. 114–119). Of course, this by no means suggests that 'individual officers, police officials, or military officers and soldiers did not incite the pogroms, or join the perpetrators after pogroms started' (p. 234).

The comparative perspective given in the book shows that in Lithuania, unlike in neighbouring Belarus, and more like in Eastern Galicia a little further away, the number of reported pogroms was rather small, while violence, with one exception, did not usually end in death. Staliūnas explains this through the prism of an agrarian economy and slow modernisation, and the ancient ethnic division of labour that dominated in the country. Alongside these socio-economic reasons, it is important to remember that the elite from these ethnic groups had much more serious 'enemies' than local Jews, the Poles being leaders in this class. In the case of Belarus, anti-Jewish violence is explained by the fact that the majority of the population consisted of Orthodox civilians, who were usually in favour of the central government, among whom religious-patriotic impulses were much easier to incite (pp. 227–230). Nevertheless, as the already-cited Yuri Slezkine noted, even in the relatively placid Lithuania or Eastern Galicia, violence was an essential part of Jew and non-Jew (*goya*) relations, rarely lethal, but always in the air as a possibility.

At this point, the recollections of Perec Hirshbein, then a young Vilnius Jewish playwright, are very telling. In his memoirs, he writes about the suppression of the 1905 revolution: censorship was reinstated, gangs of Cossacks marched along the main streets in Vilnius, arrests, imprisonment and deportation of activists began, and desperate acts of terror mixed with bloody attacks perpetrated by the Black Hundreds (an extremist reactionary organisation, noted for xenophobia, anti-semitism, incitement of pogroms, and Russo-centric ideas). At the time, many Vilnius dwellers had no doubt that such a blind-spot would end in a major pogrom. Temporarily fleeing to the city's outskirts, Hirshbein joined the secret Užupis defence unit,

⁹ V. Bakutytė, 'Teatrinio sąjūdžio Vilniuje metamorfozės 1905–1907 metų visuomeninių įvykių akivaizdoje', *ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

and while on guard, he started writing the play *Eyzame veltn* (Yiddish for ‘lonely worlds’). The play that came out of this critical period of a lack of mutual communication portrayed old and young people whom circumstances had forced into one shared, dark apartment in a cellar.¹⁰ ‘These people [wrote Hirshbein] are right next to each other, they are almost touching one another, yet they do not say a word to one another at all’.¹¹ The play ends darkly, with no hero or allusion to any solution. Its literary interpretation highlights signs of Early Modernism, and the work is considered a metaphor for a fragmented and unfamiliar reality.¹² However, the historical context of the work’s appearance appears much more hopeful, for we know that the very likely pogrom in Vilnius never eventuated, while in Mogilev and Białystok, they did.

According to Staliūnas, this was the achievement of the city’s government, the elite (especially the members of the city дума and even the anti-semitic Vilnius bishop), and the leftist, Democratic and Labour Union forces (pp. 178–179). This can be read as one of the most important moments, not just in the book, but in the history of ethnic co-existence in 19th-century Lithuania in general, when the city, left without a real government, with rumours running rife, and numerous ‘examples’ within such easy reach, managed to go beyond its convictions and the presumptions existing in society. It appears that the author, who devoted most attention to anti-semitic and anti-Jewish violence, does not really expand on these glimmers of mutual relations, but by doing the hardest task, he has opened up this potential for others.

Juozapas Paškauskas

¹⁰ M. Kvietkauskas, *Vilniaus literatūrų kontrapunktai. Ankstyvasis modernizmas / 1904–1915* (Vilnius, 2007), pp. 160–161.

¹¹ Cited from: *ibid.*, p. 161.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 165.