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Tuskulėnai Victims or Jew-Shooters?

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by Rimantas Varnauskas

The names of about 200 murdered Lithuanian resistance members, partisans who were imprisoned and later killed in the basement of the NKGB-MVD internal prison, are inscribed on the outside of the former KGB building in the center of the capital [Vilnius]. Recently information has been discovered that some of them might have taken part in the mass murder of Jews, or were simply criminals. The government and historians were at a loss and didn't know what to do with those names inscribed in granite.

“This is a tricky problem, although we have reviewed many cases and collected much information over a long period. And these issues need to be considered more widely, rather than the Center assuming all responsibility,” said Teresa Birutė Burauskaitė, General Director of the Center for Research on the Genocide and Resistance of Lithuanian Residents, when asked what she makes of information beginning to come out about people buried at the Tuskulėnai Memorial Park who possibly participated in the mass murder of Jews.

Burauskaitė recounts that there was an attempt to compose a symbolic composition at Tuskulėnai called “Hands Destroying, Hands Building.” She says if the project is considered on its own, it looks good, but different question marks arise once you explore the factual material a little more deeply. When in 1994 on the personal orders of [then President] Algirdas Mykolas Brazauskas, an investigation began, when mass graves were exhumed, there was a very Christian plan to rebury those remains and create a memorial.

“Unfortunately, not all cases were reviewed, because there are more than 700, and that’s not an easy job. When some of the cases had been reviewed, a certain portion of people were selected who had been freedom struggle participants, priests, students, because at that time members of the gymnasium underground organization were also shot. After agreement was reached with political prisoner and deportee organizations, a project was drafted, and the names were engraved on the plinth course portion of the KGB building, because they all were shot in this same building in the former cell,” Burauskaitė recalled.

“As we know, war is the kind of activity that creates additional negative things as well. For example, much looting and marauding take place. During the time of the Nazi occupation there were many instances of collaboration. And it turned out that here are some people who were convicted, as they say, ‘for the affair’ [an idiomatic expression meaning they were subject to show trials?]. Truly they did great damage to society, because some of them were criminal elements, who very brutally robbed deserters, and there were instances of murder,” Burauskaitė said. “For example, there was an ethnic Russian woman in that mass grave, although I believe that criminals don’t have an ethnicity, who chopped up an entire family. She was sentenced to death. There were Self-Defense Battalion people who were convicted. The remains of 717 [people] lay there, and the variety of biographies is very great.”

So far anthropologists have identified more than forty of the people and some of their relatives have taken the remains and reinterred them. The bishopric of Telsiai has taken the remains of Bishop V. Borisevičius.

“That which is in the boxes in the columbarium is essentially a common grave and it is not known whose remains are where. So what is the question? That we will appropriately and aesthetically honor them in common, and how that will look from an ethical perspective? That we also honor criminals? If we view it in a Christian manner, when a person lies under the ground, then his judge is elsewhere, no longer on our earth.

“That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t name criminals and their crimes. But our situation is such that we can’t sort out those bones,” Burauskaitė said. “If we take the common mass graves of those shot at Kuropat or Levashov I think we would also find there different people, and not just especially good

people. Speaking of remains, perhaps we should not consider them all victims, because they might have victims of circumstance rather than repressions. Because those two people, Stalin and Hitler, created frightful totalitarian regimes, they also created situations wherein many people who might have lived out their little lives without committing any crimes against humanity became criminals. But this in no way minimizes responsibility or guilt.”

Asked specifically whether there are firm data that the list of more than 200 names engraved on the KGB building contains many Holocaust participants, Burauskaitė said categorically: “No, not a single such name has been engraved! Where do you get such things from?”

Burauskaitė said the names of partisans are inscribed on the KGB building. “Back [when] D. Kuodytė [formerly head of the same Genocide Research Center] [she] reviewed all the names and filtered them out, no de-rehabilitation case had been begun for any of them, and law enforcement structures didn’t indicate that they had been involved in the Holocaust. It’s not true. I cannot be the arbiter because the lists were made when I was not in this post, but I know that these matters were always viewed in a very responsible manner,” Burauskaitė said reassuringly.

[Translator’s note: The following paragraph or two may be citations or paraphrases from Ms Burauskaitė; they do not have quotation marks in the original:]

The [Center] nonetheless has got to work and it is carefully reviewing anew all the cases of those murdered [and now buried] at Tuskulenai. If information is found that someone took part in the mass murder of Jews, this information will be turned over to the Prosecutor General. [Ms Burauskaitė did not reject] the theoretical possibility that one or another person might be found to have been involved in the Holocaust in some way or another.

It is thought that the suspicions about partisans whose names are inscribed on the KGB building might have arisen because there might have been people of Jewish ethnicity among the post-war Soviet activists and those who established “kolchozes” [collective farms] that were being liquidated [by the partisans].

Mistakes, if there were any, need to be corrected.

“I have not heard that the names engraved on the walls of the KGB building participated in the destruction of Jews, so there is nothing to comment upon,” [the former Genocide Center director and] current member of parliament Dalia Kuodytė said, refusing to comment. The above mentioned project was implemented when she was in charge of the Center. “The current director has been tasked with checking, and if she’s done something wrong, ask her about it. If there had been information about that which you speak of here and now, back during my time of leadership, do you think that I would have allowed inscribing those names on the walls? I can say completely responsibly that this information is not known until now.”

Kuodytė said there might be all manner of talk, and new information could appear, but that that’s what the Center was created for, to check such information. And it would either confirm it or reject it. “It needs to be said clearly whether mistakes were made somewhere at some time. If there really were and are, that needs to be admitted and corrected,” Kuodytė said.

A 4.9 hectare parcel of land was allocated for the Tuskulenai Memorial Park. The main component of the memorial is the columbarium. This is a distinctive architectural construction meant to recall a grave mound, under which the chapel and the crypt gallery are located. The cupola of the chapel features the mosaic by Gitenis Umbrasas called Trejybe [Trinity] and a sculpture by Gediminas Karalius bringing to mind a crown sitting atop the mound. The remains of people tortured and murdered by Soviet security from 1944 to 1947 were discovered on the grounds of the Tuskulenai Manor and are laid to eternal rest in the crypts of the columbarium.

The basement of the white house there is currently set to be unveiled and will host a museum exhibit called “Secrets of Tuskulenai Manor” which is intended to acquaint visitors with biographies of the victims buried there and the perpetrators of the murders, as well as historical research materials.

During archaeological digs on the Tuskulenai Park territory from 1994 to 1996, the remains of 706 victims were discovered. More remains of another 18 people were discovered in 2003. On February 2, 1998, the [Lithuanian] government created the Victims of Tuskulenai Memorial Commission. At the commission’s suggestion, the government adopted resolution No. 932 on June 19, 2002 (it was changed to resolution No. 322 on March 28, 2007), which approved a program for creating the Tuskulenai Memorial Park. It

was decided that the territory of the former Tuskulenai Manor would host the Tuskulenai Rest Park, whose main elements were to be manor buildings and the columbarium where the remains found in the Tuskulenai Park territory of victims of the Soviet regime would be reinterred.

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