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"The Trostinets extermination camp: documents, hypotheses, memorialization"

Good afternoon! My name is Tatyana Viktorova. I am a student in the master's programme in Russian history at Vladimir State University. I wish to express my appreciation for giving me the opportunity to be here today and to present my research "The Trostinets extermination camp: documents, hypotheses, memorialization".

Vladimir is an ancient Russian city, situated 200 km from Moscow. It was not occupied during the Second World War. However, my university pays much attention to the War and the Holocaust. My research area is the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. They symbolize the criminal Nazi regime, which caused pain and suffering to people of my country and other Europeans. These camps have become the symbol of the Holocaust, aimed to destroy the Jewish people and other ethnic groups.

Despite a significant number of studies on Nazi concentration camps, there is little data on the camps, situated in the occupied territory of the USSR.

Trostenets extermination camp operated in 1941-1944 near Minsk. By various estimates, several hundred thousand people of different nationalities, mostly Jews, were killed there. This huge camp complex, where Soviet and European Jews were slaughtered, is a vivid example of understudied crimes of Nazism. Only the construction of the Trostenets Memorial Complex on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko in June 2014 attracted researchers' attention to the history of this camp.

The aim of my work is to find out the significance of this camp in the history of the Holocaust based on an analysis of documents of Russian and Belarusian archives.

The archives of the Extraordinary State Commission investigated the crimes of the Nazis and their allies in the occupied territory of the Soviet Union. Members of the Commission began to work on the place of the former camp of Trostenets in summer of 1944, almost immediately after the liberation of Minsk.

The documents and evidence collected by them has quite contradictory information about the nationality, social status and number of victims.

I draw your attention to two acts of the Minsk Extraordinary State Commission on the results of the investigation of the remains of the camp complex. The first (dated July 25, 1944) indicated that Soviet citizens as well as the Jewish population from Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany and Poland were murdered there. The commission determined the minimum data of the killed people in the camp area as 546,000. According to German documents, the number of victims is only about 60,000.

But the second act of this commission, dated August 13 1944, has different information: citizens of foreign states were not in the lists of murdered prisoners of the camp and the total number of killed people was set at 156.5 thousand people. Thus, the number of victims was decreased several times.

Due to further study of the documents the following conclusions were made:

Contradictions in the information about the prisoners and the victims of the camp were made, first, due to the lack of sufficient documentary evidence about the presence of foreign citizens, in particular Jews, in the camp. Secondly, the main purpose of the commission was to find out information about Soviet citizens in Trostenetz, thus the commission did not get the additional task of investigating the problem of murder of foreign citizens. However, nowadays the fact of the killing of the Jewish population of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Poland and France in Trostenetz is confirmed by witnesses among the prisoners and the survivors of the camp.

As for the number of victims of Trostenets, to find the reason for such a huge contradiction in the conclusions of the commission is impossible due to a lack of sources. The determination of the number of Trostenets victims was prevented by the so-called "1005" operation which was aimed to destroy traces of Nazis crimes in Trostenets in 1943. Nevertheless, in our opinion, the methodology for calculating the victims of Trostenets, described in the documents of the Minsk Commission, gives grounds to consider the number of the victims in the first act as more objective.

A result of my research was the discovery of a distortion of data on the national composition of the victims. The Jewish victims were singled out in the first Act, but they were paid less attention in the final version.

To sum it up, a study of the Trostenets documents suggests that in the Nazi camp, located on the territory of Belarus, the Nazis destroyed a significant number of Soviet prisoners of war, underground rebels and partisans, as well as civilians of Minsk and several cities and regions, including ghetto prisoners. A significant part of the victims were foreign citizens, consisting mainly of European Jews.

The history of the Trostenets camp is quite illustrative. It shows that the crimes of nazism against humanity are not fully revealed. They require further research, the implementation of new methods, the search for additional evidence and a unique estimate of this tragedy in society. To forget about these terrible pages of the history of the Second World War means to prepare the ground for a reemergence of Nazism and the Holocaust in modern society!

Thank you!