



ISSN 1392-0588 (spausdintas)

ISSN 2335-8769 (internetinis)

<https://doi.org/10.7220/2335-8769.85>

2026. 85

In our quest to deepen and diversify the journal's topics, we are continuing the tradition of thematic issues established by our editors-in-chief, professors Leonas Gudaitis and Egidijus Aleksandravičius. The articles in this volume of *Deeds and Days* are based on the presentations given by participants at an international conference marking the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Stutthof concentration camp. Here, the reader will find a wide range of topics – from the phenomena of memory and meaning to analyses of the imagery created by Balys Sruoga – a “forest of gods” quite strongly recognizable in the Lithuanian context – depicting the prisoners’ daily lives, their sufferings, and the final journey before liberation. The analyzed personal accounts not only supplement systematic knowledge but also attest that the experiences at Stutthof, no matter how much time has passed, have remained in the prisoners’ memories and correspondence.

Stutthof – one of the hallmarks of the Nazi repressive system – is, in Lithuanian historiography and collective memory, arguably the most recognizable and most studied site, and it primarily represents the systematic massacres carried out by the Nazis, which directly contributed to the extermination of the Lithuanian people. Arūnas Bubnys¹ has published a brief but systematic recent analysis; in addition to the aforementioned Sruoga, several former Stutthof prisoners – Stasys Yla, Vladislovas Telksnys, and Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas, who is often mentioned in the context of Stutthof imprisonment – have also shared their insights. This – the Stutthof phenomenon – clearly illustrates both the general trends of the mid- to late 20th century and the potential lessons and future projections in the contexts of both research and memory.

On the map of Nazi massacres, Stutthof stands out first and foremost as a site of Lithuanian suffering. In contrast, Auschwitz-Birkenau has become a symbol of Nazi barbarism, primarily associated with the Holocaust. However, the significance of research and remembrance regarding both Stutthof and Auschwitz-Birkenau lies in the fact that these places transcend ethnic boundaries – as clearly highlighted in

¹ Bubnys, Arūnas. *Lietuviai Štutthofo koncentracijos stovykloje 1942–1945 (Lithuanians in the Stutthof Concentration Camp, 1942–1945)*. Vilnius: Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Center, 2023.

the testimonies of survivors – where nationality, social status, and the like lose all significance, and humanity, compassion, and solidarity come to the fore. Therefore, from today's perspective, Nazi crimes – which were, in principle, largely motivated by racial and ethnic criteria – take on a broader meaning and offer lessons: it is not nationality or social status that defines humanity, nor is it merely pragmatism and logic that help one survive and remain human. A part of human nature that is clearly perceptible but difficult to rationalize and verbalize remains not only a heuristic mystery but also an emotional and ontological one. The binary opposition identified by Yla – humans and beasts – remains one of the fundamental yet unanswerable questions in today's world: what elements lie at the core of human nature, and what helps or hinders their manifestation?

In his article “Ethics of Memory and the Ethics of Remembering,” Clemens Sedmak explores the dialectics of memory and recollection – what we can and must remember, and how to shape memory related to trauma and traumatic knowledge. The unimaginable atrocities witnessed by survivors are documented and articulated, and today's academic ethics raises a legitimate question: to what extent must this traumatic experience be recounted? In this context, Clemens Sedmak also raises the question of language – what form of expression would be appropriate to describe traumatic experiences, and how can we convey what, according to our emotional and psychological equilibrium, would be pushed into the hidden corners of the mind as a humiliating and traumatic experience? Germany's culture of remembrance is often presented as a good example. Still, the article highlights not only ethical considerations but also the fact that analyzing and presenting complex topics requires openness and humility, just as one must be able to discern a moment of hope even in the most difficult situations.

In her article dedicated to Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas, Elżbieta Grot analyzes his underground pastoral activities at Stutthof from 1943 to 1945. The analysis demonstrates that Lipniūnas became one of the central figures in religious life at Stutthof, not only through his pastoral work but also by serving as a source of support and an example to people who had no connection to religious practices. The paper gives considerable attention to the evacuation phase of the Stutthof prisoners, during which Father Lipniūnas was particularly active. According to survivors' testimonies, even as the Death March began, the priest distributed his food rations to the weakest, while he himself carried religious items and books. And even during this stage – the cruelest and one constantly marked by the shadow of death – he celebrated Holy Mass and provided other religious services, becoming a pillar of support for those who had lost hope. Despite the tragic fate of Alfonsas Lipniūnas, he was and remains a symbol of hope and victory over oblivion.

Reimer Möller's article focuses on the evacuation of Stutthof prisoners by sea. His analysis is based on extensive archival sources that attest to an extremely difficult and disastrous transfer of prisoners; therefore, the author's argument that this evacuation by sea can essentially be considered an analog of the so-called "death marches" is insightful and well-founded. In historiography, the forced marches of former concentration camp prisoners – which have been analyzed more extensively and attested to by a wealth of memoirs – were euphemistically referred to by the Nazis as "evacuations"; in principle, for many, they meant certain death due to unbearable travel conditions, exhaustion, and the cruelty of the guards. R. Möller's article rightly demonstrates that the situation was essentially no different when ferries and ships were used – although the distance traveled on foot was shorter, the unbearable conditions and the cruel behavior of the guards, including those who were not directly part of the Nazi camp system, made this method of evacuation deadly for a significant portion of those who participated in it.

Dixie Henri le Fèvre Simonsen's article examines the fates of Stutthof prisoners, focusing on their experiences during the evacuation. It begins with the brutal hardships of the transfer imposed by the Nazis, which claimed the lives of many prisoners, and ends with the calmer, yet still quite problematic, resettlement of the prisoners once they found themselves in the midst of the anti-Nazi coalition environment. Quite often, once a complex and brutal phase has ended, people almost instinctively assume that the new phase was ordinary and easy.

Simonsen's article highlights the challenges of accepting and integrating prisoners once they have reached safe havens. Although this aspect is not explored in great depth, it nevertheless offers a promising direction for further research. Indeed, life for former prisoners was not particularly easy after they left detention facilities. This article focuses on broader, collective experiences rather than a single case study, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of the evacuation and subsequent resettlement. The emphasis on Sweden as a host country is also significant, and the use of its archives and diplomats' personal documents is innovative and adds to the established body of knowledge.

In her publication "Forms of Silence in the Works of Stasys Yla", Aurelija Mykolaitytė analyzes the imprisonment experience of Stasys Yla, a priest and one of the Lithuanian prisoners at Stutthof. Alongside Sruoga, Yla is another prisoner who published his memoirs about this concentration camp. The article analyzes not only Yla's memoirs *People and Beasts in the Forest of the Gods*, but also his poetry, offering a conceptual analysis of the meaning of silence and its expressions. The author highlights a peculiar conventional dichotomy: memories and experiences are primarily conveyed through language and imagery, but when these experiences transcend "normal" experiences and emotions, silence becomes an eloquent means of expression that conveys more than words.

In her article, Neringa Markevičienė analyzes the fictionalized memoirs of the most famous Stutthof prisoner – Balys Sruoga – *Forest of the Gods*, to reconstruct the authentic text and the author's voice, which were distorted by Soviet censorship. The article compares three editions of the book, analyzing each successive edition – which draws more heavily on the original text – as well as other potential sources that have not yet been utilized in preparing new editions. It reveals the most characteristic instances of redaction and provides examples, assessing why such actions were taken. Finally, the article makes it clear that even the latest edition of *Forest of the Gods* is not yet the authentic work that Balys Sruoga left behind. However, with each new edition, the work gradually approaches the author's original vision and legacy.

Nerijus Pipiras examines the repression of Catholic priests and monks during the Nazi occupation. Since Catholicism is associated with one of the forms of Lithuanian identity, this publication on the repression of Catholic priests and monks from 1941 to 1944 is sure to attract attention. It is based on a certain paradox: the Nazi occupation was expected to improve the situation of the Catholic Church following the Soviet Union's open repressions and atheistic policies. However, the publication demonstrates that the reality was quite different. Following the principles of ecclesiastical structure, Pipiras documents and briefly presents the repressions against representatives of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Vilnius and other Lithuanian dioceses. The author found that most of the repressions took place in the Diocese of Vilnius; thus, singling it out is both logical and interesting, given that Vilnius – and by extension the diocese – remained under Polish rule for several decades. The author's conclusion is clear (but it may also encourage further research and discussion) – the Nazis repressed Catholic priests and monks primarily for their pastoral activities and evangelization while their political activities and motivations remained secondary.

In her article, Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė analyzes the postwar correspondence between two Stutthof prisoners, Stasys Vainoras and Vytautas Meilus, who were living in Sweden at the time and writing to their prewar friend Teodoras Bieliackinas from Kaunas, who then was living in Iceland. In their private correspondence, they also did not overlook their experiences of imprisonment. After presenting biographical details of all the correspondents, the author analyzes the content of these personal documents, which were previously unknown in scholarly circles – these letters were found in a private archive. The article not only presents the content itself but also analyzes and extensively comments on it. Traditionally, history is understood as a coherent, organized sequence of causes and effects, and fairly clearly defined positions and values. However, it is precisely the personal perspective that can bring us closer to a true assessment of life and the environment. What is treated as a personal position and perspective in the present is quite often labeled in the historical context as subjective, inaccurate, and to be evaluated with

caution. Therefore, highlighting an authentic personal perspective and presenting it analytically helps to understand better not only specific historical episodes but also the broader context of life, which is rarely clearly schematized or straightforward.

The articles included in this volume of *Deeds and Days* will not only enrich readers with new insights and interpretations, reveal heuristic and academic innovations, but will also remind them of the fundamental questions of existence and memory. We extend the same wishes to the new editorial board, which will hopefully succeed in continuing the publication of the journal until its centennial in 2030. With this volume, editor-in-chief Rūta Petrauskaitė, who oversaw 15 volumes of *Deeds and Days* between 2019 and 2026, bids farewell to her readers.

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