

# The Nazi Period in the Baltic States

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A Dichotomous Feature of Persecution | Mobile Killing Units | Latvia | Estonia | Auschwitz-Birkenau

➤ *In the Baltic States the killing of Roma started immediately after the German attack in 1941. SS and German military murdered the Roma who fell into their hands. Later on, when the mobile forces were transformed into stationary units and augmented by police units, they proceeded with support from civil occupation authorities. In Estonia only 5 to 10 percent of the pre-war Roma population survived the German occupation.*

## INTRODUCTION

The German attack on the Soviet Union and the Baltic States in summer 1941 from the very start had the character of a racist war of conquest and extermination. For this campaign four task forces (“Einsatzgruppen”) – mobile killing units of the SS (“Schutzstaffel”, protective squadron) – were created. The “Einsatzgruppen” together with other SS units, German military and civil occupying forces murdered the Roma who fell into their hands, but did not search for them with the zeal employed in ferreting out Jews and communists. However, when the “Einsatzgruppen” were transformed into locally fixed units of the Security Police (“Sicherheitspolizei”) and augmented by units of the German Order Police (“Ordnungspolizei”), as in the Baltic region, they proceeded to systematically kill Roma. From 1941 to 1943, in Latvia probably a half of the 3,800 Roma were mas-

## OCCUPIED SOVIET UNION AUTUMN 1942

Ill. 1 (based upon Kenrick / Puxon 1995, p. 88, and Zimmermann 1999, p. 141)

### 1 REICHSKOMMISSARIAT OSTLAND

REICH

### 2 REICHSKOMMISSARIAT UKRAINE

GENERAL-GOUVERNEMENT

Frontline,  
Autumn 1942  
Route of the  
Einsatzgruppen  
A, B, C, D

sacred. In Estonia more than 90 percent of the 750-850 Roma were murdered. The case of Lithuania needs further investigation, but historians estimate that the vast majority of the Roma population living there were shot. In addition, in early 1944 2,000-3,000 Roma were deported to Auschwitz Birkenau from Belarus and Lithuania.

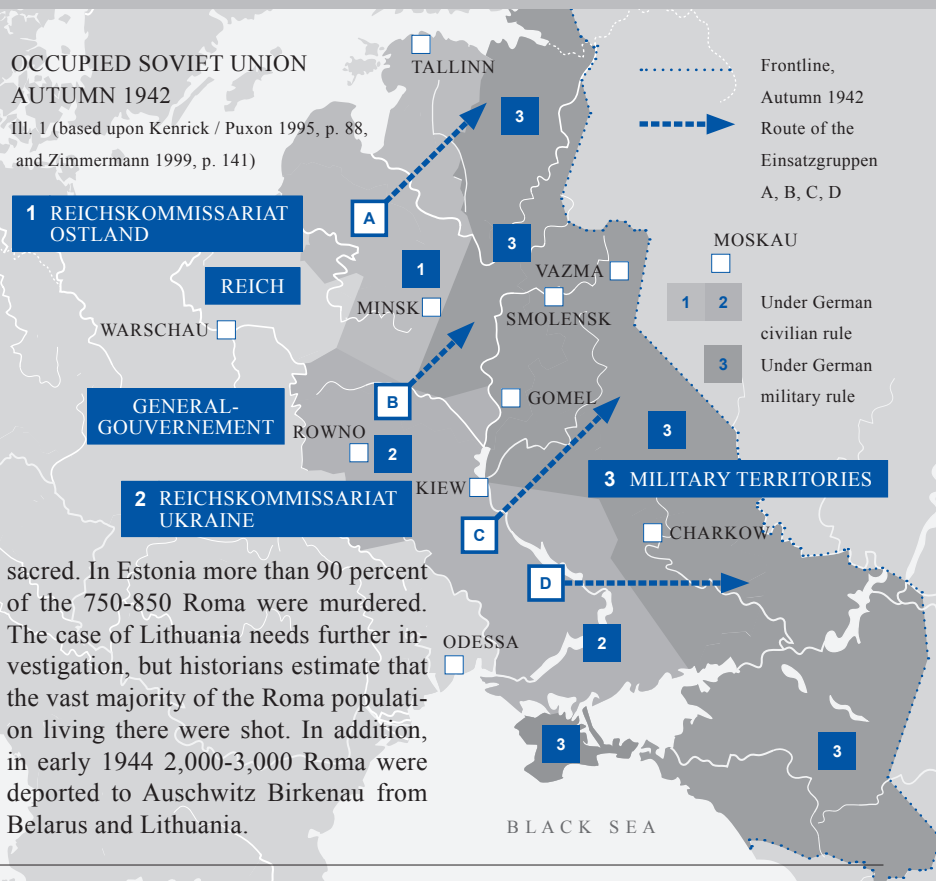
tures: the primary target of “Gypsy” persecution in Germany were the putative “Zigeunermischlinge”, “Gypsies” of “mixed blood” who, according to the racial hygienics theorist Robert Ritter, had “deviated from their original biological nature.” The domestic policy did not target the small group of itinerant Roma, who married only among themselves and were classified as “racially

pure”. However, in the German-occupied territories precisely the reverse policy prevailed after 1939: wandering Roma were in greater peril than the sedentary Roma.

This dichotomous feature of “Gypsy” persecution in turn derived from emphasising differing facets of the hostile image of the “Gypsy Other”. Within the Reich proper it was believed

## A DICHOTOMOUS FEATURE OF PERSECUTION

National Socialist persecution of the Roma hinged on the conception that the behaviour of social groups was rooted in biological parameters and genetic factors. With respect to the Roma, this racist notion had two characteristic fea-



<p><b>Schleimhautoberlippe:</b> dünn - mittel - dick - walzig Amorfbogen</p> <p><b>Schleimhautunterlippe:</b> dünn - mittel - dick - walzig - gerade - geschwulst</p> <p><b>Haarfarbe:</b> Bartfarbe ergraut frühere Haarfarbe Glätze</p> <p><b>Haarform:</b> straff - schlücht wellig - engwellig - lockig - kraus fein - mittel - dick</p> <p><b>Haargrenzen:</b></p> <p><b>Wirbel:</b> (n. II. Kopf)</p> <p><b>Schnuppe:</b></p> <p><b>Brauen:</b> schwach - mittel - dicht - buschig</p> <p><b>Haar:</b> schmal - mittel - breit Häzel, einzelne Haare B. d. N.</p> <p><b>Wirbel:</b> r. l.</p> <p><b>Wimpern:</b> auffällig lang stark nach oben gebogen</p> <p><b>Hinterhaupt:</b> steil - flach - gewölbt mäßig - stark ausladend Torus occ. Prot. occ.</p> <p><b>Horizontales Gesichtspröfil:</b> schwach - mäßig - stark</p>	<p><b>Mundklaffenarbe:</b> scharf - weich - fehlend</p> <p><b>Zähne:</b> Prognathie Caries mark - schwach Gebissform: 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p><b>Augenfarbe:</b> <i>grün</i></p> <p><b>Irisstruktur:</b></p> <p><b>Augen:</b> liefliegend - mittel - überflücht - vorquellend</p> <p><b>Oberliderrand:</b> niedrig - mittel - hoch</p> <p><b>Tarsalfalte:</b> niedrig - mittel - hoch</p> <p><b>Lidspalte:</b> weit - mittel - eng gerade - schief - ansteigend - schief - abfallend</p> <p><b>Faltenbildung:</b> Deckfalte 0 1 2 3 Deckklaffenarbe Jongelen-Hattenlottenfalte Tarsalfalte-Randlinie-Sulc. tars. Lidrandfalte-medial-lateral; Mon- gotendoppelgefalte; Epicanthus</p> <p><b>Fiederung:</b></p> <p><b>Stirn:</b> niedrig - mittel - hoch steil - gewölbt - flach stark gewölbt Stirnhöcker - Arcus supercil.</p> <p><b>Kinn:</b> gerade - vorspringend - zurücktretend schmal - mittel - breit spitz - eckig - rund geteilt - ungeteilt</p> <p><b>Grübchen:</b></p> <p><i>Regelmäßiges Teufelchen am Kinn &amp; Kinn</i></p>	<p><b>Knochenbau:</b> fein - mittel - grob</p> <p><b>Vierfingerfurchen:</b> p.</p> <p><b>Riße:</b> f</p> <p><b>Fingerfingel:</b> f</p> <p><b>Nasenwurzel:</b> hoch - mittel - tief schmal - mittel - breit</p> <p><b>Rücken:</b> gerade - wölbig (schw. Knochen) - hoch - stark</p> <p><b>Knochen:</b> schmal - mittel - breit</p> <p><b>Knorpel:</b> schmaler - gleich - breiter</p> <p><b>Spitze:</b> aufw. - vorw. - abwärts</p> <p><b>Flügelans.</b> hoch - mittel - tief</p> <p><b>Flügel:</b> anliegend - gewölbt - gebüht - knick</p> <p><b>Steg:</b> geteilt - ungeteilt</p> <p><b>Nasolabialfurchen:</b> schwach - mittel - stark</p> <p><b>Nasenlöcher:</b></p> <p><b>Ohr:</b> abstehend Hohlrand Hörwein H. Lappchenform Verwachsung Crua cymbale Tub. bei fossale Cymbale Platula auris Knorpelböcker</p> <p><b>Hautfarbe:</b> dunkelbl. schw. mittel fahl stark</p> <p><b>Haut:</b> durchbl. schw. mittel fahl stark</p> <p><b>Haut:</b> rötet bräunt - stark - mittel - schwach Sommer: oson</p> <p><b>belehrt:</b> hell - gelbl. dhl. - gelbl. Ohrschimmer anbelehrt: hell - gelbl. dhl. - bräunl. Hiltschimmer</p>
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III. 2  
One of Robert Ritter's forms for recording biological data on Roma. (from Hancock 2002, p. 44)

4.8.41	anevysy	362 Juden, 41 Jüdinnen, 5 russ. Komm.	422
		14 lit. Kommunisten	
5.8.41	nasainiai	213 Juden, 66 Jüdinnen	279
7.8.41	Utaha	483 " , 87 " , 1 Litauer, war Leichenfledderer an deutschen Soldaten	571
11.8.41	Ukmerge	620 Juden, 82 Jüdinnen	702
12.8.41	Kauen-Fort	484 " , 50 "	534
13.8.41	anevysy	450 " , 48 " , 1 lit. 1 russ. K.	500
13.8.41	Algtus	617 " , 100 " , 1 Verbrecher	719
14.8.41	Jonava	497 " , 55 "	552
15. und 16.8.41	Hokiskis	3200 Juden, Jüdinnen und J.-kinder, 5 lit. komm., 1 Pole, 1 Artisaner	3207
9. bis 16.8.41	nasainiai	294 Jüdinnen, 4 Judenkinder	298
27.6. bis 14.8.41	Hokiskis	493 Juden, 432 Russen, 56 Litauer (alles aktive Kommunisten)	981
18.8.41	Kauen-Fort IV	698 Juden, 402 Jüdinnen, 1 Polin, 711 Intell.-Juden aus dem Ghetto als Heyrenalis für eine Sabotage- handlung	1812
19.8.41	Ukmerge	290 Juden, 255 Jüdinnen, 1 olitr. 86 Judenkinder, 1 russ. Kommunist	645
22.8.41	Dünaburg	3 russ. Komm., 5 Letten, dabei war 1 "Ordner, 1 russ. Cardist, 1 Polen, 3 "Agauer, 1 "Ligeunoria, 1 Zigeu- nerkind, 1 Jude, 1 Jüdin, 1 Ar- bitr., 2 Olitruks (Cefignis-ber- eifung in Dünaburg)	21
			16 152

III. 3  
An "Einsatzgruppe" report filing 16,152 people killed, including Roma. (from Kenrick / Puxon 1995, p. 91)

that the main folk-racial threat stemmed from the "Gypsy Mischlinge", partially or totally sedentary in lifestyle, who were allegedly "degenerating" the "German folk body" through their more in-

tensive social contacts with the majority population. Outside the Reich, especially in the occupied Eastern Territories, the phantasmal construct of the "Gypsy Other" was projected mainly onto the

itinerant Roma. It was argued that their "mobile" life style merely camouflaged spying activities against the Germans in the service of the "Jewish-Bolshevik world enemy". [III. 2]

MOBILE KILLING UNITS

Historians investigating the policies of the National Socialists towards Roma are in agreement that it was the Second World War – set in motion by the Nazi regime on September 1, 1939, with its attack on Poland – that led to an immense increase in oppression and persecution ending in genocide. In particular, the German attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, from the very start had the character of a racist war of conquest and extermination. For this campaign four "Einsatzgruppen" (A, B, C, and D), mobile killing units of the SS, were created. They received their primal instructions from the Reich Security Main Office. In all, the four task forces A, B, C and D comprised some 3,000

men. They were to kill over a million people. [III. 1]

The "Einsatzgruppen" used broad guidelines to select the targets for their killings. Precise definitions did not interest them. Task Force A, which carried out murders in the Baltic states and the northern parts of Russia, calculated the number of its victims up to February 1, 1942, at 240,410. Together with 218,000 Jews shot and another 5,500 killed in pogroms, they listed categories of dead as "Lithuanians crossing the border, communists, partisans, mentally ill and others". The composition of the 311 "others" was not further detailed. Roma may have been classified among the "partisans" and "others". [III. 3]

Roma were indeed among the victims of the "Einsatzgruppen" and other SS units on Soviet and Baltic soil. Their initial target group had been Jews in the

Soviet state and communist party bureaucracy, the Jewish intelligentsia and any Jews considered ready to offer resistance. Yet already during the first month of the Soviet campaign, the "Einsatzgruppen" radicalised their actions. Now they began to murder as many people of the Jewish population as possible. Simultaneously, the killing was extended to the Roma.

In the USSR and the Baltic States German "Wehrmacht" (military) units were often not directly involved in the extermination of Roma. But the Military Police, the Secret Military Police and in particular the army's rear area "Sicherungsdivisionen" in particular handed over "itinerant Gypsies" to the "Einsatzgruppen" to be shot. Over and above, "Wehrmacht" units provided considerable organisational and technical assistance in conjunction with the executions perpetrated by the "Einsatzgrup-

## THE IMAGE OF THE “ENEMY”

*The activity of the “Einsatzgruppen” and other SS units was based on a hierarchically articulated image of the enemy. At its apex were Jews and communists and their phantasmal meld in the form of a “Jewish-Bolshevik world conspiracy”. In this ideological pyramid, “Gypsies” occupied a subordinate though not insignificant rung. They figured as “racially inferior”, purportedly “asocial”, as “partisans”, “spies”, and “agents” of the imaginary “Jewish world enemy”. Viewed by the “Einsatzgruppen” as fifth-column informers in the service of “Jewish Bolshevism”, they in particular targeted travelling Roma whenever the killing units learned of their existence. Regarded solely as auxiliaries of the “world enemy”, their liquidation was not given first priority.*

III. 4

Die im Lande umherirrenden Zigeuner bilden eine Gefahr in doppelter Hinsicht:

- 1.) als Überträger von ansteckenden Krankheiten, insbesondere von Fleckfieber,
- 2.) als unzuverlässige Elemente, die sich weder den Vorschriften der deutschen Behörden beugen, noch gewillt sind, eine nutzbringende Arbeit zu verrichten.

Es besteht begründeter Verdacht, dass sie durch Nachrichtenübermittlungen im feindlichen Sinne der deutschen Sache schaden. Ich bestimme daher, dass sie in der Behandlung den Juden gleichgestellt werden.

III. 5

*Hinrich Lohse’s letter of December 1941. In rationalisation of the racially motivated killing of Roma in Libau, Lohse described the “Gypsies wandering around in the country” as acting as carriers of infectious illnesses, in addition to being “unreliable elements who would neither obey the orders of the German authorities, nor be willing to carry out useful work.” Further, he claimed, there was well-founded suspicion that they were harming the German cause through passing on information. Labelled in this way as spies, antisocials and a menace to the people’s health, the “Gypsies” were presented by Lohse as fit for slaughter: “I declare that they should be treated in the same way as Jews.”*

(from Zimmermann 1999, p. 143) (Detail)

pen”. The “Einsatzgruppen” murdered the Roma who fell into their hands, but did not search for them with the zeal employed in ferreting out Jews and

communists. However, when the mobile “Einsatzgruppen” were transformed into stationary units of the Security Police and augmented by units of the German

Order Police, and could count on support from civil occupation authorities, as in the Baltic region, they proceeded to systematically kill Roma. [Ils. 4, 5]

## LATVIA

While we are so far insufficiently informed about the killing of Roma in Lithuania, we know precisely that in Latvia the systematic murder of Roma started on December 4, 1941, with the shooting of some one hundred Roma from the town of Libau. The perpetrators were members of the German Order Police division in that town. This murder was the reason for an initiative of the Commander of the Order Police in “Ostland” (which included the Baltic States and Belarus) Georg Jedicke. He arranged for the “Ostland” State Governor Hinrich Lohse to write a letter that signalled his agreement to the murder of the Libau “Gypsies”. In this letter, Lohse declared that the “Gypsies ... wandering around in the country ... should be treated in the same way as Jews.” [III. 5]

Lohse’s circular of December 4, 1941, had neither defined how a person should be classified as a “Gypsy” nor whether the phrase “Gypsies wandering around in the country” meant also sedentary Roma. The German Security Police in Latvia interpreted the statement of the state governor in the sense that “settled Gypsies who have regular work and who were not a danger to society in a political or criminal sense” should be exempted from arrest and shooting. On the other hand, their counterparts in the Order Police who arrested Roma and handed them over to the Security Police took the phrase “Gypsies wandering around in the country” to mean all “Gypsies”. Therefore, in Latvia, the Baltic state with the largest Roma population, both nomadic and settled Roma were handed over for shooting to the Security Police in the first months of 1942.

The lack of clarity that prevailed between Security Police and Order Po-

lice about the definition of the murder victims led Karl Friedrich Knecht, the Commander of the Order Police for Latvia, to issue an explanatory circular in March and again in April 1942. According to this circular, it had been decided, after discussion with the commander of the Security Police in Latvia, that in future “only wandering Gypsies” should be arrested and handed over to the Security Police. During 1942 and 1943, throughout Latvia, Roma lost their lives as a result of this vague circular which created no exact boundary between “wandering” and settled “Gypsies” and thus gave the police a free hand in the following months in the selection of the victims in the following months. An estimated half of the some 3,800 Roma in Latvia were killed. Those Roma in Latvia who were not shot received the order not to leave their place of residence.

## ESTONIA

The first shootings of Roma in Estonia took place immediately after the German invasion in June 1941, at Estonian initiative. In the absence of a coherent anti-“Gypsy” policy, the conflicting orders regarding the treatment of the “Gypsies” issued by the Reich Security Main Office, the German Ministry of the Occupied Eastern Territories, and the “Wehrmacht”, created a state of disorientation, which probably counted for the survi-

val of the majority of Estonian Roma through the early fall of 1943. By the late 1941 - early 1942, the Estonian Criminal Police, acting under German command, started screening the Roma. Some of them were deported to a concentration camp near Tallinn. By the summer 1942, all Roma in Estonia were subjected to compulsory labour. The first mass shooting that claimed the lives of one third of the Estonian Roma population took place in October 1942.

During January and February 1943, the remaining Roma were deprived of their property and put in the

Tallinn concentration camp. The remnants of the Estonian Roma were shot in early October 1943. Some weeks before, the Soviet army had started an offensive against the “Wehrmacht” in Northern Russia. As the Soviet troops got closer to German occupied Estonia the Security Police murdered the Roma detained in the Tallinn concentration camp, labouring under the racist delusion that these Estonian Roma would act as a “fifth column” of the Red Army. Only between 5 and 10 percent of the 750-850-strong pre-war Roma population of Estonia survived the German occupation.

## AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

In early summer 1942, as the German Ministry of the Occupied Eastern Territories began to consider “Gypsy” policies, arrests and mass shootings by the German Security Police were already in full swing. The discussion about the proposed circular, “Treatment of the Gypsies in the Occupied Eastern Territories”, continued in the

Ministry for the East until early 1943. It was now proposed that all “Gypsies” should be brought together and put under guard in special camps and settlements, the nature of which was not defined. Heinrich Himmler, as the leader of the SS, rejected the Ministry of the East’s proposal. Now he was of the opinion that settled “Gypsies” should be treated as the other inhabitants and all “wandering Gypsies” should be placed under the same regulations as Jews. While in 1942 those labelled as

“wandering Gypsies” had been shot, now, in 1943, it was proposed that they should be brought into concentration camps. This was, in concealed language, an instruction to concentrate the itinerant Roma of Eastern Europe in Auschwitz-Birkenau where the SS had set up the special “Gypsy” section in early 1943. In 1944, 2,000-3,000 Roma were deported to Auschwitz from Brest-Litovsk, which belonged to German occupied Belarus, and from Lithuania.

## CONCLUSION

It is hardly possible to calculate precisely the number of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Roma murdered in the

Baltic States proper and in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In Latvia the mobile “Einsatzgruppe” A and stationary police units killed about one half of the 3,800 Roma. In Estonia between 90 and 95

percent of the 750-850 Roma living there were murdered. The case of Lithuania needs further investigation, but historians estimate that the vast majority of the Roma living there was murdered.

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