

Trudy Gold | Jewish History in Latvia and Estonia, Part 1

- Well, good evening everyone, and tonight continuing on from William yesterday, I'm going to be talking about the history of the Jews in Latvia and Estonia. Those of you who've been listening to Lockdown for a while will remember that a while back I dealt with the Jews of Lithuania, because of course they had a very distinct history, being part of the Lithuanian Polish Commonwealth. But no doubt at some stage, I'm going to have to bring it all together, because this is one of the issues. So many of you have been, are new to the programme. So we'll see how we go. But today I'm concentrating on Jewish history in Latvia and Estonia, but before I can do that, and of course yesterday William talked about general history. I really need to add to that a little bit, because what I think is very important in order to understand what's going to happen in the 19th and 20th century, is to get a picture of really how that region was founded, and it was really a world of various tribes during the, and it wasn't until the Middle Ages that you had distinct regional identities, the Semigallians, the Latgalians from the Baltic, Finnish peoples, they all come together in the area that's known as Livonia, and later on it becomes Latvia and Estonia. Now, it was important because of the trading network at the mouth of the Daugava River. Now we've got to remember that trade has always been an important part of history. And how was trade conducted? It was conducted through the great river networks. So the Daugava takes up the trade that stretches through Scandinavia, along to Kievan Rus', and also into the Byzantine Empire. And what was so important on the coast of the Baltic, and I'm sure many of you will already know that, that was amber. Now what is going to happen in that region though, is there is going to be a German invasion. Can we see the first slide? What you need to understand is that, of course, when you're dealing with the tribes that lived in this area, some from the Baltics, some from Finnish tribes, they were pagan, they didn't write things down, and they lived according to their various tribal gods. And what happens is that beginning at the end of the 1100s, there's a pope called Innocent III. He is really zealous for Christianity, and in, what had happened was the crusading movement, which began in 1095, was of course to conquer the land of Israel from the Muslims. And it was also a way that the Church could take power over the various rulers, the Christian rulers of Europe. But of course, in 1190 there is a terrible defeat, Acre falls, and many of the characters come back now who were, the Teutonic Order and various orders had been established to actually protect the pilgrims and the knights on their way to the Holy Land.

Now what happens, is the Pope declares that the pagans are just as important to be converted, that a crusade can be, later on of course there's going to be crusades against heretics, but a crusade can be against Muslims, it can be against pagans, and of course it can be against heretics. And what begins is a crusade in the Baltic. Now, the

people who perpetrate the crusade are actually Livonian knights. Can we see a Livonian Knight of the Sword? This is actually the uniform of a Livonian knight, which is a sort of sub-branch of the Teutonic knights. The Teutonic knights, most of their activity was actually in Prussia, Prussia which later became Prussia. And what you have is this missionary Christian movement that is going to take Prussia, and is going to take the lands of the Baltic for Christianity. And it really begins with a man called Saint Meinhard. He begins his mission and, but the real founder of Germanic power in the region was Bishop Albrecht. He creates Riga, which of course later on becomes the capital of Latvia. He founds Riga in 1201, and this is all described in the "Chronicles". Can we see a picture of Innocent III, please? Because this is the Pope who's behind all these crusades. He was a man who was totally zealous for Christianity. He wanted to usurp power from all the Christian princes and kings in his dominions. He was the man who proclaimed at the Lateran Council that heathens must be converted by the sword, and both Jews and Muslims who are living in the Christian world must be branded outside of society, and he was the first one to establish the wearing of the Jew badge. And ironically, it was England that was first, in 1215, that was the first country to establish it. He was also the pope who went against the heretics, the Albigensians, in the southwest of France. He is considered to be, he was an incredibly powerful pope. The Fourth Lateran Council was where he convened this incredible meeting of over a thousand clerics to lay it all down. He also was involved in the Fourth Crusade, which ironically led to the sack of Constantinople. So basically the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian knights, who were they? They were tended to be the younger sons of aristocrats. They were landless, they were devoted to the notion of spreading Christianity by the sword. And it was quite an extraordinary phenomenon. And if you are looking for, I suppose, the roots of Prussian nationalism, even Latvian nationalism, it's going to be the conflict between the Baltic tribes, the Prussia tribe, and the clash with these soldiers of Christ.

Now, these soldiers of Christ were really a terrifying instrument. Let's go back to Tabby, and look at the picture of the Livonian knight, if you don't mind. You see, he wears the cross. They are devoted to the cult of Mary. They live an ascetic life. Their only possession should be a sword. They lived on bread and water, but they were the zealous, really the zealous crusaders of Christ, and their campaign against the pagans was a terrible thing. It was brutal, it was bloody and it was, it was a Holy war. And they made a lot of progress. However, what also happens, the great progress, what they do is they settle peasants from the German lands into the Baltic and also into Prussia. And they gradually press the original tribes people into what becomes Lithuania. Lithuania is also pagan, but in 1240 there is a huge battle led by the Russian Orthodox Alexander Nevsky and the Teutonic knights. By this time, the Livonian order has folded into the Teutonic knights, and it's an important battle because the Rus', who are Russian Orthodox, Kievan Rus', with their allies. Some of them

were Ukrainian warlords, some of them were Polish warlords. They came together to battle the Teutonic knights. Now I'm going to show you a clip from a film, a film made by Sergei Eisenstein in 1938. It's his incredible film, "Alexander Nevsky". It's a propaganda film, but he also illustrates the incredible enmity between the Germanic peoples and the Russian peoples. But in 1938, this is before the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement, this film was to really inspire the Russians against the threat of Germandom. And of course, if you've never seen "Alexander Nevsky", the film, it's absolutely brilliant. It's a silent film set to the music of Shostakovich. And of course what happens is, in the film, the sequence I'm going to show you is when the troops of Alexander Nevsky lure the knights onto the ice. So let's have a look at the Battle of the Ice. And before we do that, I'd like to first mention, what about Jews? Well Jews, it's absolutely obvious that there would've been a few Jewish traders coming to Riga because of its incredible position on the river, but there's not going to be any Jewish settlement for a while. But I wanted to set the scene, just as to really emphasise what William had been talking about, because it's very important. When you're dealing with the Baltic, you are looking at existing Finnish tribes, existing Livonian tribes and also German immigrants in, and now you have the Battle of the Ice. And let's have a look at it, it's an extraordinary scene. Thank you, Judi. Remember, this is a Russian propaganda film. Watch the faces of the Teutonic knights.

- Okay, thank you very much. Anyway, thanks Judi. So look, basically I've shown you that sequence because it's very important to remember that this enmity between the Germans and the the Russians goes all the way back to this time of Alexander Nevsky. And also this is the battleground. And what happens in the particular area that later becomes known as Latvia and Estonia, is that it's going to keep on changing sides. Think of the emerging empires, the Empire of Sweden, the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, and then of course the growth of the Russian Empire. And Riga, which was the important port, and later the capital of Latvia is going to change hands, time and time again. Now, the Jews of Riga, let's go back to the Jews of Riga. Now, the first documentary evidence of any Jews is the record of a sale to a Jew named Jacob in 1536. This is how we gather evidence. In mediaeval times there isn't enough evidence, and you have to look for these kind of documents. And we know that during both Polish and Swedish rule, there are restrictions imposed on Jewish residents, but by 1645, we know there was a Jewish inn where visiting merchants had to stay. You see, this is the point. It's an important trading post, and who are such good merchants? Who do you think is responsible for much of the merchanting of that particular region? It's of course Jewish traders. So they are religiously hated. The Swedes by this time are Lutheran and also violently anti-Jewish, and of course the Russians are Orthodox. But in 1710, this whole area is incorporated into the Russian Empire. What happens is of course, is that Peter the Great, it's the Northern war between Sweden and Russia, and Peter the Great,

think Putin, think what's going on now, he wanted to secure and enlarge Russian access to the Baltic. So he conquers re Riga in 1710, and there's a terrible plague in that whole area. It's a terrible, terrible time. But in 1713, the Russians establish a governorate, and Sweden gives up all claims to that area. Now, what the treaty does, because in many ways, Peter the Great, he was an enlightened monarch. He allows the privileges and freedoms of the Baltic German aristocrats, because of course, who had taken control of that area? The peasantry of course were the original tribes, although many of them have been pushed historically into what becomes Lithuania, which was the last country in Europe to be Christianized. But it is the German ex-Teutonic and ex-Livonian knights who have the land, and the peasantry of course, are made up of the original Baltic tribes, and they don't have the written language. Ironically they are, and William was talking about this yesterday, they actually are going to be given their freedom earlier than the serfs of the Russian Empire. So by 1725, so we know there's a Jewish inn, and this is actually reported by English merchants, and they also report that Jews and Catholics are given a certain amount of religious freedom in Orthodox Russia. Now in 1725, a few privileged Jews were allowed to reside out of the Jewish inn. Also that same year they were given a burial ground in Riga. Look, they are accursed religiously, but the point is they are very useful for trade. And before that, they'd actually have to take their dead to Courland, further away. But now, because they're useful to the city and to trade, however, the Empress Elizabeth expels them. But in 1766, under Empress Catherine, they were allowed back to Riga, although they were only allowed to visit for six weeks, and again they had to stay at the Jewish inn, and only a few very useful Jews are allowed to stay elsewhere. In 1785, permission was then granted for Jews to stay in Sloka, which is a nearby town, and they were also permitted to open a prayer room. A few then managed to settle in Riga, but the ban is still in force. And we know by 1798 there are seven Jewish families living in Riga, and that number goes up to 736 by 1811.

Now important, when Russia takes over the majority, you see you've got to remember, and this is one of the rules of Jewish history, the outside world acts, all the Jews can do is react. And of course what happens is that Poland, which had once been such a centre of Jewish life, the Poland Lithuanian Commonwealth, was usurped by the Russians. The Russians take it over, and the bulk of world Jewry that had been living in Poland now comes under Russian rule. Now the Jews are confined by Russian edict, and we've studied this in great depth, to an area known as the Pale of Settlement. Now Riga was outside the Pale. It's still part of the Russian Empire, but it's not included in the Pale of settlement. And we also know that Jews were allowed to engage in crafts in Riga. Riga is an important port, and they need to to develop the area. So consequently, Jews are given a lot more freedom than they were given in the rest of the Pale of Settlement. And also another point to remember, this is the period of the

Enlightenment in Germany. There's a lot of German merchants remember, there's also a lot of German aristocrats in the region, and the Enlightenment ideas spread through the Baltic, and also it's going to be very important in the creation of Latvian identity. In fact, a man called Gotthard Stender was the first Latvian to create a German-Latvian dictionary, and also an illustrated Latvian alphabet. Remember, it was not a written language. And another figure of the Enlightenment called Merkel, in 1796 he published that a book called "The Latvians", which tells the story of the growth of Latvian tribes. So what you begin to see is the growth of Latvian identity. Now what about the Jews living in Riga? They are going to be influenced by ideas of the Enlightenment. And by 1840 they're allowed to open a school in Riga, and a young German Jew called Max Lilienthal, this is now the reign of Nicholas I, and Max Lilienthal is allowed in to set up to become principal of the school, and it is financed by wealthy Jewish traders. Now what kind of goods are they trading in? Remember Riga is a port. They're trading in timber, they're trading in tobacco, they're trading in all sorts, in amber. So it's one of the few modern institutions of the Jews in the Russian Empire. So the Jews of Riga, and the numbers are now growing. Let's have a look at the population figures, please Judi. Yeah, so in 1868, there are 5,224 Jews. But you see, this is Riga. By 1897, you're going to see that the numbers have gone up, and it's 8.6% of the population. By 1913 it's gone down, but it's still 6.5% of the population. Now by 1841, Jews are allowed to officially register in Riga, and then they're allowed to build synagogues. They're allowed to own land, and to officially, they're now officially allowed to engage in commerce. And there you have a look at the city of Riga. I mean, I've travelled there many times. It's actually a very, very beautiful city. The organised community is founded in 1842. And as I've already explained, they're there because they are playing a very important part in export-import. Remember, you have a German aristocratic population, many of whom are flirting with the Enlightenment. And you also have in the main part, a peasant population. And Jews get very heavily involved in grain. Riga's going to become a very important port for Jewish settlement, as of course is Odessa. They get involved in the import-export of flax, banking, the crafts, they own timber mills, they own tanneries. They become involved in the manufacture of clothing and shoes.

Now those of you who have family who later left Latvia or Lithuania, or really the whole of the Pale, many of the trades and professions that they were practising there, they're going to take with them whether they go to America or to Britain or to South Africa, whatever, they're taking these ideas with them. And also, Jews were involved in the liberal professions. Before World War I, 20% of the doctors in Latvia were Jewish. Ironically the majority of dentists, a large percentage of the lawyers. There was many synagogues, there was also modern orthodoxy, there was also Hasidic prayer rooms, because you've got to remember, they're squeezed between the Enlightenment of Germany. Jews of Germany are emancipated, remember in 1870, 1871. But

also they're squeezed with the Pale of Settlement, with the more traditional population. So also you have Hasidic prayer rooms, hedera, libraries, charitable institutions, various clubs, and also the growth of Zionism. In 1897 the Jews of Riga, the Zionist organisation was established and they sent a representative to the first Zionist Congress. And of course, those of you who are interested in Zionist affairs will know that it is 125 years since Theodor Herzl convened his first Zionist Congress in Basel. So in 1897 a representative from Riga attended, and also in 1898, a Society for the Promotion of Culture was founded. Now you will remember, that had been established first in St. Petersburg, then in Odessa, and now it's established in Riga to promote the culture of the outside world, to promote either German culture or Russian culture. The whole issue that has always dogged Jews in the modern world, can you walk the tightrope? Now of course, when war broke out, when the first World War erupted, what happens is that the Czarist authorities, remember Riga's outside the Pale, but the Czarist authorities didn't believe they could trust the Jewish population. And as the Germans invaded, they frog-march, men were conscripted into the army, they frog-marched over half a million Jewish women, elderly men and children into the Russian interior. And during World War I, Riga Jews gave refuge to Jews who'd been driven out by the Czarist authorities. So they also had to set up many, many charitable organisations. So already by the first World War, Jews are playing a very important role in the economic life. And then what happens is, World War I erupts. And as you all know, because we've studied, I know many of you have done this from your own reading, we've already studied this in Lockdown University, there isn't a decisive battle in the East. What happens is, the Czarist army collapses, Nicholas II, the most ineffectual of all the czars, he is deposed. You have Kerensky revolution followed by the communist revolution. And the Red Army is then led by, of course, Lev Davidovich Bronstein, better known as Trotsky, goes to war because it all erupts. The Czarist empire is over, and what happens is various peoples go for independence. The Poles go for independence. The Ukrainians go for independence. The Latvians go for independence. And during the Latvian War of Independence, the Latvians are actually invaded by the Soviet Union. And it's not until the 11th of August, 1920, that the Peace Treaty of Riga is signed. Now ironically, many historians believe that the number of Jews in the revolution were one of the biggest causes of antisemitism post World War I. Look, the majority of Jews were not revolutionaries, and I can say this until I'm blue in the face, but because so many of the leaders, particularly the fact that Trotsky had created the Red Army, led to this notion that all Jews were communists. And what happens is, on the 5th of December, 1918, when the Latvians declare independence, they finally, they manage to hold the Soviet army, and then you have the Peace of Riga. The war involved the Latvian provisional government, and the Latvians were supported by the Estonians, who also went for independence. I'll be talking about that on Thursday. But the Poles and the Western allies, particularly the British Navy, and of course as William told you, the Latvians were

particularly proud that the British had been the first country to actually recognise them, and the British Navy was very, very useful. And they're recognised by the international community in 1921. Now the population of Latvia in 1921 wasn't very big, it's under two million. Riga, you have a population of 225,000.

Now when the elections were held, the largest number of seats went to the Social Democratic Workers Party, then you had the Farmer's Union. But there was incredible instability, because the problem was after the war, just think of the ravages of the first World War, the economic situation, and the Great Depression. The Latvians and the Estonians signed a military alliance and a trade agreement. But by the end of the 1920s, Latvia's largest trading partner was actually Germany. 30% of Latvia's import-export business was with the Germans. With Britain, it was 21%. Now Jews in independent Latvia, the Jewish population grows and the Jews of Riga actually form 50% of Latvian Jewry. And it was the, Riga is the economic, the cultural, and the religious centre of Latvia, and it actually set up all sorts of Jewish schools. There was the Chabad, but there was the ORT schools, there was, as I said, there's already the Society for the Promotion of Culture. There was a yeshiva in Riga, and there was a very, very strong community. But in 1934, can we go onto the slides please? Two of the, there you have a map of the region.

Actually I think we should have a good look at that, because now the Russian Empire is destroyed, and you can see the various independent nations, independent Estonia, independent Latvia, independent Lithuania. You see East Prussia split by the Polish Corridor. This is all very, very important. And the question is, is any of it viable? Anyway in 1934, because of the terrible economic situation, it leads to a bloodless right wing coup. And can we have a look at the two characters? Karlis Ulmanis, here you see Karlis Ulmanis, and Janis Balodis, they were the two leaders of the coup. They had been both involved in the creation of Latvian independence, and now they dissolve the parliament, and from now on it's going to be a very strong authoritarian state. Now before the coup, the Yiddish Theatre of Riga had had a huge reputation. There were several sports clubs headed by Maccabi. There'd been three Yiddish dailies, but also there was a Karaite community in Riga. And one of the things that, they're interesting, they owned a couple of cigarette factories. But what happens is that after this coup, Jewish life is going to be restricted. The only organisation that really had the support of the regime was Agudath Israel, and of course their political view was to suppress Yiddish, and also to suppress any kind of secular culture. So by 1934, all Jewish political organisations were outlawed, all Yiddish schools were closed. And for example, and this is actually Agudath Israel, they forbid the teaching of Bialik, they even forbid the teaching of Simon Dubnow's "History". Simon Dubnow one of the great figures of Jewish history, he'd written his monumental work, which was being used in Riga schools, and it's forbidden. Now then of course you

have the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement. I showed you before the scene in "Eisenstein", that film was made in 1938. But then in August, 1939, everything changes. And shall we have a look at the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement? Can you imagine just how dark it, can we see the next slide, please Judi? Yeah, there you have it. Stalin and Ribbentrop, Ribbentrop who later was to be executed at Nuremberg. Ribbentrop, who for a while had been the German foreign minister, had been the German ambassador to London, and a great friend of Wallis Simpson, those of you who like the byways of history. And here you see the signing. Can you imagine how astounded the outside world was? The two traditional enemies, the great hatred between Russia and Germany, the two traditional enemies, the two authoritarian, major authoritarian states sign an agreement, and the Germans agree to leave the Baltic states except for Lithuania, which is later going to be ceded in exchange for the oil-rich regions of Poland. They are under the Soviet sphere of influence. So between October to December, 1939, what happens is the Germans initiate the evacuation of Baltic Germans from Estonia, 13,700 from Estonia, and nearly 53,000 from Latvia. And they are going to be resettled in Polish territories, which are incorporated into Nazi Germany. So in the summer of 1940 after 20 years of independence, Latvia loses its sovereignty and was annexed by the Soviets. And of course it had been bad enough in the last six years of authoritarian rule, and now it's going to have a devastating effect on the community. All Jewish parties are outlawed, 'cause this is communism in action now. So student associations, Zionist groups, Jewish libraries, schools, they are all shut. They're all shut, because what has to happen, and this happens wherever the Soviets come in, remember, "We are one people now. All the divisions between people will disappear." Hebrew language is outlawed. Yiddish was more or less tolerated, but that's it. The former Jewish theatre is restricted, it's only to be used now for propaganda. The economic life of the Jews is going to deteriorate because all the factories, plants, and financial institutions that were owned by Jews were all private endeavours. Also those owned by Latvians, they were all nationalised. And on the 14th of June, 1941, the Stalinist regime launched reprisals against 15,000 people who they considered to be enemies of the state, capitalists, industrialists. Now nearly 10,000 of them were Jewish, and what happens is, they're going to be deported into remote parts of Russia. The majority of Zionists were deported, and members of non-communist Jewish parties, businessmen, financiers, many heads of families, single men, sent to corrective labour camps. Families were deported to special settlements. It was a terrible, terrible time. Hunger, deprivation, backbreaking labour. But having said that, ironically, ironically, it saved the lives of at least half of them because what's going to happen is going to be much worse. And these barbaric policies saved the lives of those who were strong enough to endure the horrors of Stalin's camps. And then of course, the German invasion, Operation Barbarossa. Many refugees fled the country into the Russian interior. Ironically, about 15,000 Latvian Jews reached deep into Soviet Russia, and they are going to be saved, because they

knew, although the conditions under Stalin were barbaric, they've got a chance of life now. And the occupying German forces in the main were very well received by the Latvian population, because of their treatment by the Soviets. And also it's going to be many of the Latvians that are going to turn against the Jews. Can we see a map of Ostland? Because following the German army into battle, of course are going to be the Einsatzgruppen. What the Germans do is they create Ostland. Ostland, you can see what is incorporated into the German Reich, it's the Reichskommissariat, can you see it? Kommissariat, it's called Ostland, and that is the area which is incorporating Latvia and Estonia. You can also see the Reichskommissariat of Ukraine. The general government, of course, is part of Poland that is under the control of the appalling Hans Frank. You can see Bohemia and Moravia, the Czech lands under the control of Heydrich, and you can see those areas that have been incorporated into the German Reich. This is Germany on the march. And of course there are many who say that the kind of militarism of Prussia goes back to the time of the Teutonic knights, these soldiers of Christ.

Now of course you have a pagan regime, because I'm not mincing my words here. Even though the majority of people who joined with Hitler were Christian, the actual inner circle were pagan, and they are the people who are going to create this nightmare world. So as I've said to you, the occupying forces are well-received in the main by the Latvians, and who of course are the scapegoats? And tragically it's the Jewish community. And there was actually a fascist party that had been going since the '30s, and after the Nazi occupation, they took over the home of a Jewish banker called Shmulian to use as headquarters, And they publish a magazine called "Fatherland", and they begin to spill out more and more anti-Jewish propaganda. July the 11th, 1941, for example they have, the lede in their newspaper was, "The Jews Are the Source of Our Destruction". And it's in Latvia in particular, that the Germans are going to find some very willing helpers in the shape of the Arajs Commandos led by a real Nazi collaborator called Victors Arajs. And they are going to create the Latvian Auxiliary Police who are going to be those who begin the first pogroms against the Jews. Now following the German army into battle, remember, go the Einsatzgruppen, and by this time there can be no Jundenland Reich, and the decision has already been taken to murder the Jews of Europe. Even though you know, when I say those words, it chills my blood as I'm sure it chills yours. Because how do we get from this to what is going to be extermination? How do we get into a world where people are no longer regarded as human beings? Yes, there had been incredible brutality in this region. Think of the first World War, the cheapening of life in the first World War, then that terrible pandemic, and then the economic hardship, and then of course a semi-fascist regime from 1934 to 1940, then the Soviet invasion under the barbarism of Stalin. And now you have the liberation, inverted commas. Many Latvians saw the Germans as liberators. So let us have a look at the picture of Victors Arajs. Here you see, actually go back a second

Judi.

Here you see Latvia, that's September, 1944, how the division is, just to give you a closer idea of the division. And unfortunately on that map you will see some of the major killing fields, particularly the Rumbula Forest. So can we have a look at Victors Arajs? What an extraordinarily handsome monster he was, and you'll see his dates. I'm going to spend a bit of time on him, because one of the things I am so fascinated by is, what makes a perpetrator? And I promise you in this presentation, particularly when I look at Estonia, I'm going to look at rescuers too. Because I feel only by examining the lives of these individuals, can we come to some sort of resolution as to what creates monsters, and on the other hand, what creates the others. Now he was born in a spa resort in a beautiful part of Latvia, of course in Czarist Russia. His father was a blacksmith. His mother was a Baltic German. He went to a gymnasium, he did his national service, he was in the Latvian army. He studied law at the University of Riga. He became a member of a very elite student fraternity, Lettonia, because by this time the students were very proud Latvian nationalists. Important to remember, this kind of nationalism is very, it's new and it becomes more and more intense. Don't forget, Germany wasn't united till 1871. So the nationalism, the pride and difference in separatism becomes far more intense. He joined the Latvian Police Force, and during the Ulmanis regime, he was provincial police officer. He didn't graduate in law until 1941. He had a reputation for being power hungry, and for being an extremist. And it was on the 1st of July, 1941 when the German troops finally took Riga, and then followed by the Einsatzgruppen, and under their commander, Walter Stahlecker, who I'm going to talk about on Thursday. Now one of their translators was a friend of Arajs, and he was introduced to Stahlecker, 'cause Stahlecker was looking for pro-German Latvians. And he was asked to establish a particular special commando unit as part of the Latvian Auxiliary Police. Now all of them were volunteers. They're going to fight with the Germans, and they become known as the Arajs Commandos. And within 24 hours, they were asked to organise, if you like, what we would call a spontaneous, a spontaneous pogrom. And the Germans boost, they actually boosted the number by running a recruitment ad in the fascist newspaper, "Fatherland", and which I've already, and this is what it said. "All patriotic Latvians, members of Perkonkrusts," which is the Ultra nationalist party, "students, officers, militiamen, and citizens who are ready to take part in the cleansing of our country of undesirable elements should enrol." So the advert put out in the magazine asking for volunteers to join the Latvian Auxiliary. And initially there were about 500 who joined. By 1942, this volunteer unit had reached 1,500. Now of the 95,000 Jews in Latvia at this period, about 15,000 had made it into Soviet-held territory. Now Hitler remember, wants a Judenland Reich, and Arajs is going to be instrumental in this. And this is when the absolute horror begins. From the German point of view, Jews have to wear the yellow star, bank accounts are frozen, Jews are hounded. They're not allowed onto public

transport. They're not allowed to go to any public facilities. And those of you who have been to Riga, it is such a stunningly beautiful city, particularly the art deco part, the art bigge part, the art nouveau part, that it's almost impossible when you are there, this becomes of course, the command centre of Ostland, the Nazi province. And I've always found it difficult to take the notion of physical beauty, love of music, along with the horror that goes with it. And what happens is, these are the storm troops that are going to be responsible for the beginnings of pogroms and the burning of synagogues, and the trapping of Jews in synagogues, mainly women and children. Men are sent off to labour camps. And the burning of the synagogues, all perpetrated by the Latvian unit under the command of the Nazis. And I think I'm going to stop there because as I said, this is going to be a two-week presentation, two-session presentation, and I know you're going to have a lot of comments on this.

Q & A and Comments

Q: Wallace asked, "Did Estonians participate in the killing of Jews like the Lithuanians and Latvians?"

A: Not to the same extent Wallace, and I'll be talking about that.

Oh, this from David, "There's an excellent piece on the history of Latvia and the Soviet Union in the July, 2022 issue of the "New York Review of Books". Thank you.

Q: "Is that Jew badge where the Nazis got the idea from the yellow star?"

A: Yes Tim, nothing is new under the sun, unfortunately. And ironically, you see, I think one of the problems, look, Jews are mobile people, not allowed to be part of Christian guilds, having to slip into the niches of various countries and economies in order to survive. And then of course you have the European Enlightenment of the 18th, 19th century, where Jews believe they can become part of it in the West, certainly. And because of their own strange history, you do have a success story. But the tragedy was the scapegoating, that when society fractures, as it obviously did in places like Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, particularly in Germany where nationalism is newly bought, plus of course the horror of the first World War, the point was you're dealing with what Robert Wistrich called "The Longest Hatred". Anti-Judaism has transmitted into anti-Semitism. The tragedy of the Jew, the Jews saw themselves as at the forefront of so many of these countries, wanting so hard to be part of it. And yet in the end, the upswing in nationalism meant that they couldn't be. And I think the other point to remember Tim, is also the Jew badge. The Jew badge was invented by the Church. There is no organisation more zealous for Christianity than the Catholic Church. And it was only in the '60s

that the Church forgave the Jews for the crime of Deicide for all generations. And even then, they still blame the Jews of Jesus' day. So it is a terrible issue. How you deal with it is another story. The Jew badge Paula, changes from country to country. In England, it was a tablet of the law.

Q: "What is the idea of converting by the sword?"

A: Because they believe, conversion by the sword, you have to. Because you have to see your place in Jesus. If people didn't convert, they were murdered.

Oh, beg your pardon, yes of course it's Prokofiev, not Shostakovich. My brain isn't working today Tommy, thank you. Yes, the score is wonderful.

Q: "What is the reason for this enmity between the Russians and the Germans, then?"

A: It goes all the way back to Alexander Nevsky. It goes back to the Battle on the Ice. It goes back to Ivan the Terrible, this traditional enmity. Look where Prussia is, Prussia, East Prussia, it borders with Russia, think about it, the Baltic states. There was only one Jewish inn in the 1700s that Jews had to stay in.

Q: "When did Vilnius become the centre of Jews?"

A: Ah that's, remember Vilnius is Lithuania. And after the first World War, it was part of Poland. I've already done a couple of sessions on Vilnius. Vilnius was different. The Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, which lasted really from the 1300s right up to its dismemberment beginning in 1795, finishing in 1815, Vilnius was one of the most important centres under the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was the home of the Vilna Gaon, it was also in the 19th century, very, very important in Jewish affairs. It was at the centre of the boom. But I spent a whole session on Vilnius, and I think once the website is up, you'll be able to have a copy of that lecture.

Yes, the school in Riga was called the Captain School, thank you Arlene, this is from Tim. "Some of the Lithuanian Jews came to Ireland." Yes, there's a small Jewish community.

This is from Shirley. "Our very large family in Riga were involved in a small way importing the liquor Kirsch. When the family had to lead between 1880 and 1905 and dispersed to Britain, France, and the US, five of the nine brothers set up as wine importers in the countries they settled in." Yes it's fascinating, isn't it, Shirley, that they bring with them the trades and professions that they used in Eastern Europe. And don't forget, they were mill owners, they were tanners. Next week, I'm going to be talking about somebody born in Riga, Isaiah

Berlin, his family were in the timber business. Chaim Weitzman's family, by the way, were in the lumber business. "Where did the Jews who went to," they were already, many of them were there, they came from other parts of Eastern Europe. Jews always go where they can earn a living and live in relative peace.

This is from Barbara, "Several years ago I visited Riga, as my grandmother and her family came from there. I met with the registrar who showed me ledgers that they'd kept of Jewish families. My great-grandparent was listed as bourgeois. They also kept a separate ledger of all Jewish boys born." She met a lady called Rita. Yeah, so your great-grandparent, he would've been one of those characters that would've been in trouble under Stalin. "And this is also from Dvinsk." Yes, yes, I will come on, tragically I'll come onto that, yes. The majority of them were, of the Jews of Riga, were murdered in the Rumbula Forest, yes. Yes I will do that Julian, give me time. I will talk about other communities. Yes, some Jews left Latvia, of course during the reign of al of Nicholas II, yeah. After 1881, a lot of Latvian Jews got out, because the Czarist authorities were tightening up. Riga was outside the Pale, so it was slightly better. But you always went where you could have a better life. But ironically, you see, I think this is one of the problems. I think that was one of the problems for the Jews, that you went to places where you could best survive, and you were always dependent on outside factors.

Yes Arlene, "The part of Latvia west of the Daugava was Courland, and was sold to Denmark." Yes, yes, you see, this is the problem. It was Denmark, it was Sweden, it was Finland. And the language of the Courland Jews was was German, yes. "Estonia has got a lot in Courland." Yes, I'm going to be talking about Estonia, yes. Oh this is interesting, it's from my friend Sandra. " Could you add that the Jews deported to Stalin's gulag post Operation Barbarossa from Riga didn't know that the war was over till 1947. They had no contact with the outside world. The gentleman I interviewed was in Karaganda, Kazakhstan." This is an extraordinary character that Sandra interviewed. "And the German Jews were the last to be released, and it took three months to get back to Vienna." Yes, because what happens in Riga is after tragically they've murdered the Jews of Riga, they began deporting German Jews to Riga. And ironically, as Sandra says, it saved him from the Holocaust.

Q: "How did Arajs survive the war?"

A: I'll be talking about that next on Thursday. Not only did Arajs survive the war, his second in command, a man called Herberts Cukurs survived the war. We've got a lot to talk about.

Q: "When did Jews start going to South Africa? How did they get into South Africa?"

A: Barry, basically South Africa wanted immigrants. So did America, look at America after the American Civil War in particular, South Africa wanted white immigrants, and Jews would go where they thought they could earn a living. And of course the community in South Africa is mainly Lithuanian and Latvian.

Shelly says, "Voltaire and the Enlightenment, Jews were hating the exclude." Yes of course the Enlightenment itself, some of the thinkers of the Enlightenment were very complicated. After the Eindhoven, we're going to be looking at the Jews of France, and we will be doing sessions on this.

Q: "Why was Aarons not tried as a criminal?"

A: Ah, well wait for that Michael. We're going to talk about that next week.

Q: "And why did the yellow star become the identification of the Jew?"

A: There were different identifications. The yellow star was used by the Nazis.

This is from Pauline, "I just came back from a trip to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. I was shocked by the hatred towards their ethnic Russian citizens, especially so in Riga. The guides and the people we met in the museum or the hotel spoke about ethnic Russians with hatred, that reminded us so much of the hatred of the Jews and turned us off completely." Partly it can be explained by the Soviet occupation, but these Russians are born and bred in the Baltic countries.

"By the way, the Baltic countries are beautiful." Yes Pauline, physically they are incredibly beautiful. And you know, a lot of German Jews went to the seaside resorts around Riga for their holidays in the '20s and '30s.

"It's a very complicated state of affairs in Eastern Europe." Yes, because don't forget that by 1944, the Soviet army sweeps in and conquers, Stalin conquers. And they lived under Stalinist rule for a long, long time until the walls came crumbling down. And yes, they hated Russia. So this is the problem, it's the problem. When we're under economic, social, or political threat, we tend to become tribal and we tend to hate, and that is so tragic.

This is from David, "In the 1960s, there were a large number of Estonians and Latvians in my engineering class. I was made very aware that I as a Jew was allowed to communicate with them, but they made it clear I was not welcome." Yep, yes, yes, yes. You see the other point, a lot of the wanted war criminals in Europe at the end of the war were Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians.

Q: "I have to ask how religious leaders who force conversion with the sword can be considered as men of God."

A: Rod, that is a very interesting question. I'm sure you can guess my views on that.

"Yes, Riga was part of the Hanseatic League of trading." Of course, Naomi. You see, one of the problems we have when we're dealing with Jewish history, I have to give a little bit of history in order to understand how the Jews fitted in.

Q: "How was Begin deported to the Gulag?"

A: Begin was deported as a Zionist. So that's another story though.

This is from Gene, "Read 'The Good Assassin' to see the horrors of Riga in the 1940s."

And this is from Shirley, "In the UK, the brother who set up a very successful wine-importing business, Blumenthal's, eventually taken over by Forte."

This is from Beverly. "My grandfather was born in Tallinn. He was a watchmaker and he went to Eberau to work there, then he went to South Africa because his sister was there," yeah, yep.

This is from Hazel. "My mother's family from Jacobspils before moving to Leipaja, and they were all tinsmiths. He was the only one to survive by going to South Africa." Yes, it's a terrible, terrible, terrible story. Jacobspils, thank you Arlene. It's always good to have you online.

And this is from Linda. "My grandfather went to South Africa from Lithuania."

Betty, "Canada needed immigrants to settle the West. They gave the property to new immigrants to homestead. Many Jews arrived, despite not being farmers. During and after World War II the policy was, none is too many." Yeah, that is another tragedy of course. It's not even during and after, it's in the '30s, '20s and '30s, that the West tightens up against immigration. A lot to do with a fear of communism, of course.

This is Adele, "Sammy Marks was the first one of the first Jews to arrive in South Africa from Lithuania. He was very successful. The word got around South Africa about it being a country of opportunity." Sure, America, South Africa, Britain. What can I tell you? I'm not going to finish on such a dark note, because one of the great historians who tragically was murdered in Riga, he said something very

special about the Jews. And he says this, "Every generation in Israel carried within itself the remnants of worlds created and destroyed during the course of the previous history of the Jewish people. Each generation in turn builds and destroys worlds in its form and image, but in the long run continues to weave the thread that binds all the links of the nation into the chain of generations. Thus each generation in Israel is more the product of history than its creator." And this is so important, and I really believe this.

"We the people of Israel living today, continue the long thread that stretches from the days of Hammurabi and Abraham to the modern period. We see further that during the course of thousands of years, the nations of the world have borrowed from our spiritual storehouse and added to their own without depleting the source. The Jewish people goes its own way, attracting and repelling, beating out for itself a unique path amongst the nations of the world." Yes, and I believe that. So despite the horror I'm talking about, and I know many of you, your families were affected by this terrible, terrible tragedy. And yet we go on in a different form now, and in a different way now. The majority of Jews live in the Jewish state. So we are the people of history. And when I talk about Isaiah Berlin, who after all was a subject of Riga, he actually says, "Any Jew who is in any way conscious of their Jewish identity is steeped in history. We are the people of history." So even though I am dealing with terrible darkness, don't forget that there is this light, that we go on. So I'm going to stop there, and I will continue this story on Thursday.

– Thursday, Trudy–

– Thank you, Judi.

– [Judi] Trudy, sorry Trudy. Can you just remind us who said those words that you just read out?

– Simon Dubnow, and I will repeat them again for you. I will start with them again on Thursday, because they are absolutely extraordinary, Simon Dubnow. And maybe Judi, I can give them to you that we could send them around 'cause it's rather special.

– We can do that.

– Okay. Thank you very much everyone.

– [Judi] Thank you Trudy, and thank you everybody. Bye-bye.

– Bye.