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Crimes of Nazism in the Days of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 in Documents from the Archives of the North-West of Russia and the Republic of Belarus

Abstract

The article draws on archival documents to show the nature of the Nazi occupation regime on the border territories of the North-West of Russia and in Belarus. The relevance of the study springs from the region's specifics in the wartime due to its long occupation by the Nazi armies and formation of stable occupation administration, active resistance to the invaders and existence of partisan zones. The chronological framework is 1941–44, i.e. the period of occupation of the region. The significance of the problem of occupation of border territories of the North-West of Russia and Belarus has incited considerable research interest. The study uses comparative-historical and statistical methods, as well as methods of source studies, structural/diachronic and system analysis. The source base is numerous archival documents, primarily, acts of the Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Atrocities of the German Fascist Invaders and Their Accomplices and the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organizations, State Enterprises and Institutions of the USSR (ChGK), acts of local (district, city and regional) commissions, eyewitness accounts, dispatches and special reports of intelligence officers and partisans, reports, information notes, transcripts and minutes of meetings of the party and Soviet bodies, materials of medical examinations of mass graves of victims. The documentary base also includes documents of personal provenance: letters and memoirs. A large group of documents is made up of acts of district and village commissions to investigate the atrocities of the Nazi invaders. The acts contribute to identification and investigation of the atrocities in form of murder, torture, humiliation, and violence against Soviet citizens and prisoners of war, as well as deportation to slave labor. The acts contain information on the activities of the Nazi punitive detachments. The plight of Soviet citizens abducted to Germany can be assessed in their memoirs and letters to relatives and friends. The brutal crimes of Nazism committed on the border territories of the North-West of Russia and Belarus are also evidenced in interrogation protocols of residents as witnesses of the events. The fonds of the Leningrad and Belarusian headquarters of the partisan movement store documents of investigations conducted by partisan formations, which not only show the scope of the anti-fascist struggle in the region, but also contain information on the situation in the areas occupied by the enemy. German documents also deserve attention. They contain information on the structure of administrative and economic institutions, state of agriculture and industry, taxes and fees. The article notes that the entire complex of archival materials reveals the criminal nature of the Nazi occupation regime. New archival documents are still being found, containing data on most serious crimes and atrocities, responsibility for which has no limitations period.

Keywords

Great Patriotic War of 1941–45, North-West of Russia, Belarus, Nazism, crimes, occupation, archives, documents.

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