

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES

Ghettos 1939–1945
New Research and Perspectives on
Definition, Daily Life, and Survival

Symposium Presentations

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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Foreword

In the ghettos of the Middle Ages Jewish contact with the outside world was carefully regulated. “The gates of the ghetto were closed at night—from the outside in those localities where the object was to confine the Jews, and from the inside where the gates served chiefly as protection against attack.... Seclusion from the outer world,” as *The Jewish Encyclopedia* vividly expressed it in 1903, “developed a life apart within the ghetto, and close communion among the members was in a certain way a power for good, fostering not only the [social and] religious life, but especially morality.”ⁱ A highly developed hierarchy of officials ran ghetto government, courts, police, and religious institutions. The last of the major ghettos established in medieval times finally disappeared with the European revolutions of 1848.

Did the Nazi- and Axis-made ghettos of Europe between 1939 and 1945 share any characteristics with those of the Middle Ages? Clearly they were closed “from the outside,” but did Jews perceive themselves as better protected inside? For how long? And based on what assumptions, information, or lack of information? Furthermore, what were the aims and policies of those establishing the ghettos? How monolithic was the process of ghettoization, deportation, and destruction experienced in the most populous ghettos, those of Warsaw and Lodz? How different were the ghettos of Eastern and Western Europe, and what about the case of Transnistria? Can ghettos be defined with clarity or consistency in Nazi-dominated Europe?

These questions beget further important questions about the nature of Jewish life—and the struggle for life—within ghettos. What was the nature of the “life apart” that developed within ghetto confines? Can we characterize civil and religious institutions, economic structure, family life, and cultural creation? For whom did the Jewish Councils—the *Judenräte*—work? For the perpetrators? For fellow Jews? For themselves? How did Jews subjected to ghettoization understand what was happening to them? Through observation and logic? Through a religious prism? On the basis of political ideology? And, if so, was it a Jewish or secular ideology? By psychological adaptation to preserve sanity? What were their responses to an unknown future? How did Jews preserve the dignity of life under Nazi onslaught? What of the strong, the weak, the rich, the poor, Jewish officials, and resisters?

These were some of the questions addressed during the symposium *Ghettos, 1939–1945: New Research and Perspectives on Definition, Daily Life, and Survival*, organized by the Museum’s Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies as part of its continuing series of scholarly symposia. The mission of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies is to support scholarship and publications in the field of Holocaust studies, to promote the growth of Holocaust studies at American universities, to foster strong relationships between American and international scholars, to collect Holocaust-related archival documents worldwide, and to organize programs to ensure the ongoing training of future generations of scholars.

The symposium was divided into two sessions. The first session, entitled *Definition, Administration, and Resistance*, began with Christopher R. Browning, Frank Porter Graham Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Professor Browning discussed Nazi ghettoization policy in Poland, detailing the administration, stages, and motives of the perpetrators. Dennis Deletant, Professor of Romanian Studies at University College London, explained how the ghetto experience in the eastern Transnistrian town of Golta differed from ghetto experiences in German-occupied Europe, where Jews were concentrated in Jewish communities with established social infrastructures to assist them. Dan Michman, Professor of Modern Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University, reevaluated the emergence, function, and form of Jewish Councils, exploring their varied areas of authority and to whom they were subordinate. Sara Bender, Professor of Jewish History at the University of Haifa, compared the ghettos of Bialystok and Kielce, revealing that the process of ghettoization, deportation, and destruction was not monolithic even in Poland. Lenore J. Weitzman, Clarence J. Robinson Professor of Sociology and Law at George Mason University, addressed the subject of *kashariot*, female couriers in the Jewish resistance who carried information, secret documents, and various forms of aid among the Polish ghettos, working to circumvent Nazi efforts to isolate the Jews.ⁱⁱ

The second session, *Daily Life, Culture, and Religion*, “offer[ed] insights,” to quote the paper of one of our contributors, “into individuals’ ongoing attempts to make sense of and accommodate themselves to a world of constantly shrinking prospects.” Gustavo Corni, Chair for Contemporary History at the University of Trento, Italy, described daily life in the ghettos throughout Eastern Europe, detailing characteristics—overcrowding, hunger, contraband, religion, and culture—of the “life apart.”ⁱⁱⁱ Alexandra Garbarini, Assistant Professor of History at Williams College,

contributed a moving analysis of two ghetto diaries, highlighting how Jews used theology, history, and rationalism to interpret an unknown future. Gershon Greenberg, Professor of Philosophy at American University, described the theological and religious turmoil of Rabbi Talmud of Lublin, who used the prism of religion to try to make sense of the ghettoization, deportation, and destruction around him. Henry M. Abramson, Assistant Professor of History and Judaic Studies at Florida Atlantic University, discussed the psychological and social mechanisms used by Warsaw Hasidim as they reacted to events unfolding in the ghetto. Vadim Altskan, Program Coordinator in the Center's International Archival Programs Division, closed the session by highlighting opportunities for new research in recently released archives from the former Soviet Union, such as oral and written testimonies that reveal how Jews forced into ghettos made sense of what was happening to them.

At the end of the symposium one of our panelists remarked, "There are so many questions and so few conclusions we can be sure of. Looking at ghettos from the inside out gives very different answers than looking from the outside in. How [can we, as scholars, best attempt] to encompass the diversity of [the ghetto] experience? It is clear that we are just at the beginning of this research[, and that] our generalizations must all be reassessed." I hope that the seminar made a contribution to that crucial process.

The symposium *Ghettos, 1939–1945: New Research and Perspectives on Definition, Daily Life, and Survival* was made possible through the support of The Tamkin Foundation and The Helena Rubinstein Foundation. Many members of the Center's staff also deserve thanks for their work on the symposium and proceedings: Robert M. Ehrenreich, Suzanne Brown-Fleming, and Lisa Grandy for devising, developing, and organizing the series; Geoffrey Megargee and Peggy Obrecht for their smooth moderation of panels; and Aleisa Fishman, Eliot Werner, and Ellen Blalock for preparing the papers for publication. Most important, the scholars deserve our thanks for their excellent presentations and their subsequent participation in the editing of those presentations for this publication.

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NOTES

- i. Richard Gottheil and S. Kahn, “Ghetto,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, vol. 5, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1903), p. 653. For additional information about Jewish life in the Middle Ages, see Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); James Parkes, *The Jews in the Medieval Community* (New York: Hermon Press, 1975); Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (New York: Schocken, 1993); and R. Po-chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann, eds., *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 1995).
- ii. See Professor Weitzman’s article, “Living on the Aryan Side in Poland: Gender, Passing, and the Nature of Resistance,” in *Women in the Holocaust*, eds. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 187–222.
- iii. Professor Corni dealt with this subject in his *Hitler’s Ghettos: Voices from a Beleaguered Society, 1939–1944*, trans. Nicola Rudge Iannelli (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

BEFORE THE “FINAL SOLUTION”: NAZI GHETTOIZATION POLICY IN POLAND (1940–1941)

Christopher R. Browning

On August 2, 1941, Hinrich Lohse, the Reichskommissar Ostland, sent to Higher SS and Police Leader North Hans-Adolf Prützmann a draft of “temporary guidelines for treatment of the Jews.” Jews were to be cleared from the countryside and concentrated in those sections of cities where the predominate portion of the Jewish population already resided. “There ghettos were to be created” and those Jews capable of work were to be put to forced labor as needed.¹

When Franz Stahlecker—chief of Einsatzgruppe A in the Baltic—received a copy of these guidelines, his reaction was immediate and negative. The guidelines were not compatible with orders that he had received governing the treatment of Jews. Lohse, he noted, was obviously seeking to regulate the Jewish question in the Ostland that corresponded to the situation that had been created in the General Government, and thereby failed to take into account the radical treatment of the Jewish question now possible for the first time in the East. Stahlecker considered a discussion with Lohse to be imperative, “all the more because the draft to a great extent touches on general orders from a higher authority to the Security Police that cannot be discussed in writing.”² For Stahlecker, Lohse’s proposal for the construction of ghettos was perceived as a measure that would hinder rather than facilitate the mass murder of the Jews. Stahlecker subsequently advised his Einsatzkommandos that the “Final Solution” to the Jewish question was to be achieved “with utterly different means than those envisaged by the Reichkommissar.”³

When the ghetto managers in Łódź learned in mid-September 1941 that they were to receive 60,000 Jews from the Reich, they protested to Heinrich Himmler. “If the Łódź ghetto were a pure decimation ghetto, then one could contemplate a greater concentration of Jews,” but the ghetto was a “finely tuned and thereby extremely sensitive component of the defense economy.”⁴ Their protest was to no avail. Shortly thereafter, when the Gestapo and Labor Office in Łódź wished to take Jewish workers from the ghetto for their own purposes, ghetto administrators again protested, this time noting that “the Łódź ghetto as a pure decimation ghetto can give up no Jews, because they are needed for its own military production.”⁵ Given the anticipated decimation of

the ghetto population in Łódź, ghetto administrators now argued that at least in terms of working Jews, they had not too many but too few.

At a meeting of German occupation officials in Warsaw on October 15, 1941, the man in charge of the ghetto’s economic affairs, Max Bischof, confessed that the Warsaw ghetto’s economy was a “field of ruins.” Therefore he urged emphatically that the ghettoized Jews “should be integrated into economic life” as “extensively as possible,” both to harness their labor to the war effort and relieve the Germans of the need to subsidize the ghetto. In addition to removing the policies and practices that stood in the way of German and Jewish entrepreneurship in the ghetto, Bischof argued that it was “above all necessary” that working Jews be sufficiently fed. If his recommendations were adopted, it was still possible that Jewish labor could serve “the urgent needs of the Reich in the final battle for the future.”⁶

Bischof’s boss and commissar of the Warsaw ghetto, Heinz Auerswald, also spoke. He asked, “So long as the Jews cannot be completely removed from . . . the General Government, does the construction of Jewish quarters actually constitute the advisable solution to the Jewish question?” Auerswald answered his question affirmatively under two conditions—that all ghettos were hermetically sealed on the Warsaw model, and that a food supply sufficient for at least subsistence existence be provided. Only then could the spread of epidemics be prevented and Jewish labor be harnessed to production. Indeed, these policies should be pursued regardless of whether “the Jews could be deported out of the General Government already in the coming year.”⁷

At the same time that officials of the district government were meeting in Warsaw, the public health officials of the General Government were meeting at the mountain resort of Bad Krynica to discuss the threat of epidemics spread by starving Jews fleeing the ghettos. Dr. Jost Walbaum, Hans Frank’s head of public health, concluded brutally:

Naturally it would be best and simplest to give the people sufficient provisions, but that cannot be done. . . . Thus shooting will be employed when one comes across a Jew outside the ghetto without special permission. One must, I can say it quite openly in this circle, be clear about it. There are only two ways. We sentence the Jews in the ghetto to death by hunger or we shoot them.

Walbaum's remarks were greeted with "applause, clapping."⁸

It is worth noting that the views of Lohse and Stahlecker were exchanged just days after Himmler visited the Baltic and just days before Karl Jäger's Einsatzkommando 3 altered its targeting and began the systematic mass murder of Jewish women and children on August 15. The reactions of the Łódź ghetto administrators occurred in the first days of October, when both the deportation of Reich Jews and the founding of the death camp at Chełmno were imminent; the speeches in the General Government were presented just two days after Himmler met with Odilo Globocnik on October 13 and approved the construction of the death camp at Bełżec, and two weeks before the construction of that camp began. This array of contradictory German perceptions and attitudes on the very eve of the Final Solution illustrates that among the Germans themselves, there was no clear perception about the relationship between ghettoization and the ensuing mass murder of Jews.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF GHETTOIZATION

With the advantage of hindsight, however, historians have constructed two major arguments about such a relationship. The traditional interpretation, expressed by an earlier generation of historians such as Andreas Hillgruber, Philip Friedman, and Isaiah Trunk, portrayed ghettoization as a calculated, preparatory step for the Final Solution. For example, Friedman wrote that Nazi Jewish policies in Poland from 1939 to 1941 "were not of a spontaneous or accidental nature, but were rather part and parcel of an unfolding plan, which began with the concentration and isolation of the Jews." Furthermore, the "ghettos were designed to serve the Nazis as laboratories for testing the methods of slow and 'peaceful' destruction of whole groups of human beings."⁹

A younger generation of historians, emphasizing local initiative rather than central planning, has portrayed the ghettos as a means by which local authorities first prevented any stabilization of Jewish living conditions and then exploited untenable circumstances to provide them with leverage to press the central government for ever more radical measures. For instance, Ulrich Herbert has recently written:

The administration of the General Government therefore endeavored to portray as ostentatiously as possible that the living conditions of the Jews were "untenable." . . . To the reports coming from everywhere over the "untenable circumstances" and the urgent inquiries as to what now must be done with the Jews, the Berlin authorities reacted with continual instructions

or subsequent sanctioning for ever more radical measures, which once again accelerated the anticipatory actions taken regionally.¹⁰

Neither interpretation is convincing. Certainly with hindsight, we can see how the ghettos served to concentrate the Jews, weaken them physically through hunger and disease, divide and demoralize them through the control mechanism of the Jewish Council (*Judenrat*), and finally provide the ideal staging area for deportation to the death camps. If the Germans had known where they were going from the beginning, they could scarcely have devised a more effective mechanism than the ghetto to achieve their goal, but it is unclear that such a motive and premeditated calculation lay behind ghettoization.

Nor was the ghetto exploited by local authorities to create untenable circumstances in order to press the central government to approve or sanction ever more radical measures, including ultimately mass murder. From the beginning there was a struggle over ghettoization policy on the local level between two groups, the “productionists” and “attritionists.” Initially the former prevailed—in no small part because the latter could find no allies among either central or regional authorities for a policy of mass murder—but the victory of the productionists was both temporary and partial. The untenable circumstances within the ghettos and the problems that they posed to frustrated German administrators caused many to long for the day when the Jews would finally disappear. Nevertheless, most ghetto administrators continued to seek solutions within a productionist framework. When Berlin finally opted for mass murder, it found on the local level both eager attritionists who felt that their day had finally come, as well as exhausted productionists who either made no objection to being relieved of an intractable problem or quickly adapted to the new situation. Let us look more closely at German ghettoization policy as it moved through these stages.

STAGES OF GHETTOIZATION

The first stage—the process of creating ghettos in the first place—stretched over many months for one reason: there was no centrally ordered, uniform policy for ghettoization. The ghettos of Poland were created at different times in different places in different forms for different reasons. In his “express letter” (*Schnellbrief*) of September 21, 1939, Reinhard Heydrich had stipulated the immediate concentration of Jews “in ghettos” in order to facilitate “a better possibility of control and later deportation.” But aside from ordering the setting up of Jewish Councils, Heydrich left other arrangements

to local authorities. “Obviously the tasks at hand cannot be laid down in detail from here,” he conceded.¹¹ Heydrich’s plans for deportation came to naught and with it his order for immediate ghettoization as a preparatory measure. Not only the details of ghettoization but the actual decision to ghettoize was henceforth left to local German authorities.

In the Warthegau local authorities were dismayed that the deportation of their Jews would not take place, but they decided to turn a disappointment to advantage. Claiming that the Jews “hoard colossally,” Gauleiter Arthur Greiser ordered that they be placed in ghettos “until what they have amassed is given back in exchange for food and then they will be expelled over the border.”¹² If the Łódź ghetto was to be an instrument for extracting Jewish property, it was also to be temporary rather than permanent. As Regierungspräsident Friedrich Übelhör noted, “The creation of the ghetto is of course only a transition measure. . . . The final goal in any case must be that we burn out this plague-boil.”¹³ The Germans sealed the ghetto on April 30, 1940, and initially expected it to be evacuated the following July. As the first major ghetto in the German empire, it not only became a model to be studied prior to the creation of other ghettos but also “a ‘tourist attraction’ that never failed to excite the most lively interest of visitors from the Old Reich.”¹⁴

In the neighboring General Government, a major economic conference was held in June 1940. The economic planners concluded that to ensure a reliable and rational use of Jewish labor, “it was necessary that the nomadicized Jews be settled in cities” and that all cities in turn should erect work camps, concentration camps, and ghettos “so that the Jews cannot move about freely.”¹⁵ This was as close as the General Government ever came to establishing a uniform policy for ghettoization. However, it was almost immediately nullified the following month when Frank ordered a halt to all ghetto building, which was now deemed “for all practical purposes illusory” in view of the impending deportation of Europe’s Jews to Madagascar.

In Warsaw, where various earlier plans for ghettoization had proven stillborn, local officials became increasingly frustrated that “until now clearly no unified treatment of the Jewish problem has been established in Kraków.”¹⁶ In September 1940 alarmed public health officials pressured Frank with dire threats of spreading epidemics, and on September 12 he approved a sealed ghetto in Warsaw, “above all because it is established that the danger of the 500,000 Jews is so great that the

possibility of the roving around of these Jews must be prevented.”¹⁷ The ghetto was sealed on November 16, 1940.

In southern Poland—especially the district capitals of Kraków, Radom, and Lublin—ghettoization followed yet another pattern. In April 1940 Frank found it “absolutely intolerable” that “thousands and more thousands” of Jews were occupying apartments when the city faced a critical housing shortage. His solution was to make Kraków “the most Jew-free city” in the General Government through “a vast evacuation operation.”¹⁸ The goal was to expel 50,000 Jews and keep only some 5,000 essential workers. Increasingly ferocious measures were needed to force out the Kraków Jews since they had nowhere to go. Finally the remaining Jews—some 18,000 rather than 5,000—were ghettoized in Podgorze in March 1941.

That same spring the massive German military buildup before Operation Barbarossa made demands for housing even more acute, and local German officials in Radom and Lublin followed the Kraków model of shrinking the Jewish population through expulsion to the surrounding towns and villages and then ghettoizing the remnant.¹⁹ In Lublin, for instance, Frank’s state secretary noted that “urgent military considerations have necessitated the immediate evacuation of 10,000 Jews from the city of Lublin into the district.” Governor Ernst Zörner thereupon explained the anticipated domino effect. Poles were being moved into the vacated Jewish quarter and “the freed-up Polish quarter was being placed at the disposal of the Wehrmacht.”²⁰ But expulsion measures in Lublin were even less successful than in Kraków, and the ensuing ghetto there held close to 40,000 Jews—twice the intended number. Though primary, the Barbarossa connection should not be overemphasized to the exclusion of other factors. The move toward expulsion combined with ghettoization had begun the winter before in both Radom and Kielce,²¹ and ghettoization continued even after the departure of the German Army to the East relieved the immediate housing shortage.²²

It should be noted that the series of decisions to ghettoize first in Łódź, then in Warsaw, and finally in Kraków, Radom, and Lublin had wider ramifications for the surrounding areas. Ghettoization throughout the Warthegau and the western Warsaw district was spurred in spring 1940. The same occurred for the eastern portions of the Warsaw district in fall 1940, and for the districts of Kraków and Radom in spring 1941. Only the district of Lublin remained relatively unghettoized.²³

Indeed, whatever the particular initial motives for triggering ghettoization in different parts of Poland, the German authorities developed a common set of after-the-

fact justifications. Economically, ghettoization was viewed as a means to combat Jewish black marketing. Politically and culturally, Jewish influence on Polish life was allegedly removed. Administratively, control of the Jewish population was achieved with a relatively small claim on German personnel. And aesthetically, “beautification” (*Verschönerung*) was sought through removing the “Jewish imprint” from Polish cities. Unquestionably ghettoization was fully consonant with the basic assumptions of Nazi Jewish policy. As Auerswald in Warsaw wrote, “Decisive for it [ghettoization] was first of all the desire to segregate the Jews from the [A]ryan environment for general political and ideological reasons.”²⁴

CONSEQUENCES OF GHETTOIZATION

Despite this apparent consensus on the reasons for ghettoization, local German authorities were sharply divided over what should follow. Particularly in the two largest ghettos, Łódź and Warsaw, the incarcerated Jewish populations faced skyrocketing death rates from starvation and disease just months after all economic ties with the surrounding population had been severed. The crisis struck first, of course, in Łódź, where authorities had expected to extract the wealth of the Jews in short order and then deport them in July 1940. The scheduled deportation was indefinitely postponed and death rates rose ominously. For the attritionists this posed no problem. Their champion, Alexander Palfinger, argued vehemently, “Tuberculosis and other non-infectious children’s diseases, as well as other sicknesses that result in a rapid rise in the death statistics, do not interest the German authorities.” For Palfinger “a rapid dying out of the Jews is for us a matter of total indifference, if not to say desirable.”²⁵

But Palfinger did not prevail against the productionists, ghetto manager Hans Biebow and city mayor Karl Marder. They held that as long as the ghetto was a “transition measure” not intended to last the year, the major task had been the “drawing off of the wealth of the ghetto inhabitants.” Now the character of the ghetto had to be “fundamentally altered” since it was clear “that the ghetto in Łódź must continue to exist and everything must be done to make the ghetto self-sustaining.” This meant mobilizing Jewish labor to turn the ghetto into “a one-of-its-kind large scale enterprise.”²⁶ The first Nazi experiment in large-scale ghettoization, Łódź was also destined to be the first Nazi experiment in the creation of a self-sustaining ghetto economy.

The disappointed Palfinger left for Warsaw, where he again joined forces with fellow attritionists Waldemar Schön and Karl Naumann to eliminate virtually all food supplies to the ghetto. In March 1941 Frank’s economic advisers warned of a looming crisis and that one could either view the ghetto “as a means to liquidate the Jews” or as a source of labor that had to be sufficiently fed to be capable of productive work. If ghetto production were not organized within three months, one would have to reckon with “a considerable loss of life.”²⁷

A climactic policy confrontation took place before Frank on April 3, 1941. Warsaw District Governor Ludwig Fischer defended his men by retreating from a position of outright advocacy of attrition to one of feigned denial. He claimed that the ghettoized Jews had “considerable means” and that “in the next months there is no danger at all of famine.” Frank’s head of economics, Walter Emmerich, brushed this fantasy aside. “In all economic reflections regarding the ghetto, one must free oneself from the notion that it is still going well in the ghetto. . . . The starting point for all economic measures has to be the idea of maintaining the capacity of the Jews to live,” and that required organizing productive labor.²⁸

Emphasizing that the ghetto was not to be a “permanent burden” but rather a temporary wartime measure and “lesser evil,” Frank sided with the productionists.²⁹ Within a month Schön and Palfinger were removed, Auerswald was appointed ghetto commissar, and the Austrian banker Bischof was hired to oversee the ghetto economy.

The ghetto managers in Łódź and Warsaw faced enormous difficulties in their attempts to create self-sufficient ghetto economies. The ghetto areas had been pillaged of virtually all productive capacity. The Jewish populations had been stripped of their property and weakened by malnutrition and disease. Moreover, the ghettos—as temporary wartime phenomena—and Jews (who stood at the bottom of the Nazi racial hierarchy) always ranked lowest in any claim on scarce machinery, raw materials, and especially food. And there was no shortage of unreconciled attritionists who were all too eager to make trouble for the ghetto managers and misery for Jews out of predatory greed and sheer spite.

In neither Łódź nor Warsaw did the food supplies ever remotely reach the level needed to sustain a healthy workforce, despite the constant pleading of the ghetto managers and the occasional promise of increases that they extracted. Nonetheless, death rates first stabilized and then began to decline. Employment and production rose

steadily in the Łódź ghetto, and belatedly did likewise in Warsaw during the first six months of 1942.

CONCLUSION

These difficult and only partially successful experiments in ghetto self-maintenance were not calculated preliminary steps to the death camps. Men who conceive of themselves as part of a covert scheme to decimate the Jewish population do not openly appeal for improved rations or boast to their superiors of their success in combating epidemics, lowering death rates, and harnessing the ghetto population to self-sustaining labor. Nor does the behavior of the ghetto managers indicate that they were the source of local initiative and pressure on the central government for radicalization through creating untenable circumstances. They were aware that such untenable circumstances had been created at least in part by German policies, but their primary response was to urge greater economic rationality and utilitarianism.

The war of destruction against the Soviet Union, however, dramatically altered the political landscape. On Soviet territory German officials such as Lohse urged the creation of ghettos on the Polish model. This was indeed done, but with one key modification. As in southern Poland, ghettoization occurred for a reduced Jewish population or surviving remnant, but this time the initial reduction took place not through expulsion but rather through mass murder. If some aspects of ghettoization were transferred from Poland to occupied Soviet territory, the key question was whether the killing actions on Soviet territory would be extended to Poland. Some local Germans in Poland—such as the notorious Rolf-Heinrich Höppner—pleaded for this course of action and German public health officials were openly receptive.

As for the ghetto managers, the terms in which they discussed the vexing food question gradually changed. Initially they argued that work had to be found for able-bodied Jews so that the ghetto populations might be fed. As war production in the ghettos became more successful, they altered their argument to the effect that Jewish labor had to be fed so that important work could be performed. When Berlin opted for mass murder, by their own revised argument, they had already abandoned non-working Jews to their fate—although this was not the intended consequence for most of them.

In any case, the ghetto managers always saw their task as a holding action, not an ultimate solution to the Jewish question. As Auerswald noted in late 1941, “The best solution would apparently still be the removal of the Jews to some other place.”³⁰ They

always knew that one day the ghettos would disappear, and they never dreamed of resisting or opposing when that day came. They sought to stabilize the ghettos by making them productive because that is how they conceived of their duty to the Third Reich. Once Berlin resolved how to kill Jews and the local confusion that prevailed in fall 1941 had been resolved, their new duty was to facilitate the liquidation of the very ghettos that they had previously sought to maintain.

NOTES

1. Lohse guidelines, August 2, 1941, reprinted in Wolfgang Benz, Konrad Kwiet, and Jürgen Matthäus (eds.), *Einsatz im "Reichskommissariat Ostland": Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weissrussland 1941–1944* (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), pp. 38–42, especially p. 41.
2. Stahlecker position paper, August 6, 1941, reprinted in Benz et al., *Einsatz im "Reichskommissariat Ostland,"* pp. 47–48.
3. Stahlecker to Einsatzkommandos, August 29, 1941, reprinted in Benz et al., *Einsatz im "Reichskommissariat Ostland,"* pp. 45–46.
4. National Archives and Records Administration microfilm, T–175/54/2568668-70 (Übelhör to Himmler, October 10, 1941).
5. Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter cited as YVA), JM–800: Aktennotiz by Ribbe on meeting of October 9, 1941.
6. Archiwum Panstwowe m. st. Warszawy, Amt des Distrikts Warschau, sign. 132, pp. 22–31: Max Bischof, "Referat über den Wirtschaftsverkehrs mit dem jüdischen Wohnbezirk in Warschau," Regierung-Sitzung in Warschau, October 15, 1941.
7. Archiwum Panstwowe m. st. Warszawy, Amt des Distrikts Warschau, sign. 132, pp. 33–37: Heinz Auerswald, "Referat für die Tagung in Warschau," October 15, 1941.
8. YVA, O–53/145/57–265: Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Gesundheitswesen, Bad Krynica, October 13–16, 1941.
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20. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RH20–17/83, Bühler to Heydrich, copy to Stülpnagel, March 11, 1940. Frank, *Diensttagebuch*, p. 338 (Regierungssitzung, March 25, 1941).
21. Officials in Radom began expelling Jews in December 1940 because the area envisaged for the ghetto was too small for the existing Jewish population. Attempts to enact similar measures in Kielce in January 1941 were stopped by Governor Karl Lasch.

22. For the case of Checiny, ghettoized in August 1941, see the correspondence in the Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter cited as USHMM), RG–15.031m, roll 13, file 129.
23. The exceptions in the Lublin district were Pulawy, Kranystaw, and Piaski, where local authorities had carried out ghettoization on their own. See Pohl, *Von der "Judenpolitik" zum Judemord*, p. 67; Musial, *Deutsche Zivilverwaltung*, p. 131.
24. For these after-the-fact justifications, see YVA, O–53/48/792–816: Schön report, January 20, 1941; Frank, *Diensttagebuch*, p. 343 (Fischer speech, April 3, 1941); YVA, JM–1112: Auerswald report, "Zwei Jahre Aufbauarbeit," October 1941; USHMM–RG–15.031, roll 13, file 129, frames 911–95 ("The Jewish Residence Areas in the General Government, *Ostland*, May 15, 1941). On "beautification" see also Musial, *Deutsche Zivilverwaltung*, pp. 129–30.
25. YVA, JM–799/174: Palfinger, Aktennotiz, October 20, 1940; YVA, O–53/78/76–82: Palfinger report, November 7, 1941.
26. *Dokumenty i materialy do dziejów okupacji niemieckiej w Polsce, vol. 3: Getto Łódzkie* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej przy C. K. Żydów Polskich, 1946), pp. 102–04 (conference of October 18, 1940) and pp. 177–79 (Marder to Übelhör, August 4, 1941).
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28. Quotation in Frank, *Diensttagebuch*, pp. 343–46 (conference of April 3, 1941).
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**ASPECTS OF THE GHETTO EXPERIENCE IN EASTERN
TRANSNISTRIA:
THE GHETTOS AND LABOR CAMP IN THE TOWN OF GOLTA**

Dennis Deletant

The Holocaust in Romania—where the murder of Jews was carried out by the Romanian authorities under the 1941–44 military dictatorship of Marshal Ion Antonescu, a sovereign German ally—differed from the Holocaust in other parts of Europe and the Soviet Union. In Romania the deaths of Jews resulted not only from systematic assembly-line killing, but also from deportation and its consequences.

The systematic murder of Jews can be seen in the deaths of 12,000–20,000 Jews in Bessarabia and Bukovina. These are calculated to have been shot by the Romanian and German armies in July–August 1941,¹ while Romanian forces alone put to death an estimated 15,000–20,000 Jews in Odessa in a similar manner in October of the same year. Of the 147,000 Jews who were deported from Bukovina and Bessarabia to Transnistria between 1941 and 1943, at least 90,000 died—the majority from typhus and starvation.² Between 130,000 and 170,000 local Ukrainian Jews are also estimated to have perished in Transnistria during the same period.³

These figures, totaling almost 300,000 Jews, give the Antonescu regime the sinister distinction of being responsible for the largest number of Jewish deaths after Hitler's Germany. (The deportation of 500,000 Jews from Hungary to the death camps in Poland, including 151,000 from northern Transylvania, was carried out after the Germans occupied that country on March 19, 1944.⁴) It is noteworthy, however, that Romania's "Jewish policy" was independent of the country's alliance with Germany. Proof of this is the fact that Antonescu changed his mind in summer 1942 about acceding to German requests that the remaining Jewish population of Romania—from the Banat, southern Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia—be deported to the death camps in Poland.

ANTISEMITISM AND ANTONESCU'S "JEWISH POLICY"

Just as Antonescu's solution to the "Jewish problem" differed from that of Hitler, so too did his antisemitism. Whereas for Hitler Jews were a deadly disease, infesting and debilitating the "Aryan" race, for Antonescu they were unpatriotic, disloyal to Romania, and economic exploiters. But the greatest danger that the Jews posed to

Romania in Antonescu's mind was their predilection for Bolshevism. The epithet "Judeo-Bolshevik" was frequently employed by Antonescu and Vice-President Mihai Antonescu to characterize Jews, especially the Russian-speaking ones in Bessarabia (the Jews in Bukovina predominantly spoke German).

Ion Antonescu's obsession with the Bolshevik menace drove his policy toward Jews. The vast majority of those living in the provinces bordering on, and occupied by, the Soviet Union between 1940 and 1941—Bessarabia and Bukovina—were deported to Transnistria; more than sixty percent were murdered or died from disease and starvation. Among Transnistrian Jews, more than eighty percent are estimated to have perished. On the other hand, Jews in the old kingdom of Romania (in the provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia) and in southern Transylvania—which remained in Romanian hands after the Vienna Award of August 1940 gave the northern half to Hungary—were more assimilated and deemed by the Conducator to be less Communist in their propensities, and were therefore largely spared.

Transnistria was the name given by the Antonescu regime to the region of the Ukraine between the Dniester and the Bug rivers, which the Romanians occupied after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. As a separate administrative entity, Transnistria had no historical pedigree; it had never been ruled by Romanians and the Romanian proportion of the population (2,500,000 in the Soviet census of 1926) amounted to only ten percent. The majority of its inhabitants were Ukrainians and Russians, but there was a significant Jewish population of about 300,000.

Under Ion Antonescu, Transnistria was the graveyard of 220,000–260,000 Jews⁵ and 10,000–20,000 Roma and Sinti (Gypsies).⁶ Most of these deaths resulted from inhuman treatment and a callous disregard for life rather than institutionalized killing. The forced marches of Jewish deportees (including the young, old, and sick) to the eastern extremity of Transnistria with the intention of driving them across the Bug into German hands; the murder by Romanian and Ukrainian guards of those unable to keep up with the columns; the massacre by the Germans of those who did cross; the eventual German refusal in late summer 1941 to accept any more for fear of spreading typhus beyond the Bug; the consequent herding of Jews into makeshift camps without proper food or health care—all these actions resulted in the initial wave of deaths through malnutrition and disease in autumn–winter 1941. Later several thousand Jews were shot in 1942–43, largely by SS units and German colonists in the southeastern part of the province. At the same time, administrative incompetence and endemic

corruption brought death to most Jews who were trapped in or deported to Transnistria between 1941 and 1944. As a result, tens of thousands who might otherwise have survived ultimately died.

When we examine the fate of Jews at the hands of the Romanians and Germans in Transnistria, it is important to distinguish between the Romanian Jews deported to Transnistria from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina after these areas were reannexed by Romania in July 1941, and the fate of local Jews in Transnistria itself.

DEPORTATION

According to Vice-President Mihai Antonescu, the decision to deport Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina was not made at a cabinet meeting but “was taken by the Marshal when he was in Moldavia, near the front.” Under pretrial questioning on April 17, 1946, Mihai Antonescu declared that Ion Antonescu made the decision “to begin the deportation of Jews from Cernăuți [Chernovtsy] and from Chișinău” while he was in Iași in early July 1941.⁷ On July 8 Mihai Antonescu reiterated his support for the expulsion of Jews at a meeting of the cabinet over which he presided in Ion Antonescu’s absence. “At the risk of not being understood by some traditionalists who may still be among you, I am for the forced migration of the whole Jewish population in Bessarabia and Bukovina, which must be expelled *over the frontier* [emphasis added]. Similarly, I am for the forced migration of the Ukrainian population which has no place here at this time.”⁸ In practice expulsion meant driving the Jews across the Dniester into German-controlled territory. It is also worth noting that Mihai Antonescu spoke here of “the whole Jewish population in Bessarabia and Bukovina.”

An insight into Ion Antonescu’s motives is provided by his response to two petitions submitted in October 1941 by Wilhelm Filderman, head of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania (FJCR), which protested the deportations. Replying on October 19, Antonescu asked Filderman to remember events of the previous summer during the Romanian withdrawal from Bessarabia and Bukovina.

What did you do last year when you heard of the Jews’ behavior in Bessarabia and Bukovina towards our withdrawing troops who up to then had protected the peace and wealth of those Jews? I shall remind you. Even before that appearance of the Soviet troops the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina, whom you defend, spat on our officers, ripped off their epaulettes, tore their uniforms, and when they could they beat our soldiers to death in a cowardly fashion. We have proof. These same bastards welcomed

the Soviet troops with flowers and celebrated their arrival with wild enthusiasm.⁹

Although allegedly there was photographic evidence of these accusations, and there were several reports of such incidents from the Romanian troops withdrawn from the two provinces,¹⁰ this behavior was not representative of most Jews—especially the more wealthy among them, who had every reason to fear for their fortunes at the hands of a Communist regime and showed that concern by withdrawing with the Romanian forces. Moreover, if retaliation against Jews for their treatment of withdrawing Romanian forces from the provinces in June 1940 was a motive for deportation, then it made no sense to include Jews from southern Bukovina and Dorohoi county in northern Moldavia since the latter territories were not annexed by the Soviet Union and remained part of Romania.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of August, Romanian gendarmes began to drive columns of Jews on foot—including the young, old, and sick—from the whole of Bukovina and Bessarabia toward the north of the latter province and across the Dniester into what was at the time German-controlled territory. Those who had the opportunity took clothes, food, money, and jewelry. The Germans were unwilling to accept large numbers of these Jews and sent many back. The Romanian gendarmes in Soroca, in northern Bessarabia, reported on August 5 that there were about 20,000 Jews from Hotin and Storojineti whom the Germans had refused to receive at Mogilev. Three days later the Gendarme Inspectorate in Cernăuți telegraphed that 20,000 Jews from the county of Hotin had been driven across the Dniester, but that the Germans had begun to send back from the Ukraine everyone from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina irrespective of their ethnic background.¹¹ In the words of a German Security Service report, the Jews were “chased back and forth until they dropped. . . . Old men and women lay along the road at short distances from each other.”¹²

With nowhere to send Jews, the Romanian gendarmerie set up “transit camps” at Secureni, Edineti, and Vertujeni into which more than 50,000 Jews were herded. Poor sanitation, a shortage of water, and a lack of food quickly led to the outbreak of disease and a high mortality rate. The dumping ground for these Jews, once the military situation permitted, was Transnistria. In a cabinet meeting on September 6, 1941, Ion Antonescu declared that “we have tens of thousands of Jews whom I intend to cast into Russia.”¹³ At the beginning of October, the deportation of the occupants of the “transit camps” began.

The deportees were packed into railroad cars without sufficient food and water for their six-day journey. Some died enroute; many survivors succumbed to typhus in the Transnistrian camps. Between October 13 and November 15, when the deportations were suspended because of bad weather and a shortage of freight cars, 28,391 Jews were deported to Transnistria in fourteen trains under the supervision of the gendarmerie. In addition, 395 Jews identified as Communists or considered undesirable were deported.¹⁴ Jews in professions that were considered essential to the functioning of the city were spared: as a result, 16,569 Jews received authorization to remain in Cernăuți.¹⁵ A commission established by Antonescu to investigate the conduct of deportations from Bukovina found that as of the end of January 1942, there were approximately 21,626 Jews left in Cernăuți—of whom 16,391 had permits, 235 were Communists suspects awaiting deportation, and around 5,000 had remained illegally.¹⁶ At the end of March, Ion Antonescu approved a request from Governor Constantin Voiculescu of Bessarabia that 425 Jews who remained in ghettos in the province or free “according to orders from above” be sent to Transnistria by train.¹⁷ Shortly afterward Antonescu ordered the resumption of deportations from Bukovina.

A balance sheet of the progress of deportation, provided at Antonescu’s request by Governor Voiculescu on August 21, 1942, reported that 55,867 Jews from Bessarabia and 45,867 Jews from Bukovina (via Bessarabia) had been deported to Transnistria. Following the resumption of deportations in May 1942, an additional 231 Jews had been deported from Bessarabia.¹⁸ On the same day, Governor Corneliu Calotescu of Bukovina informed Antonescu’s office that during July, 4,094 Jews had been deported from Bukovina and another 19,475 remained to be deported. He proposed to deport all of the latter except those who had been assigned to compulsory labor and those who were exempt under previous orders. Subtracting those in the two latter categories left a figure of 6,234 Jews to be deported from Cernăuți and 592 from the town of Dorohoi; their deportation was planned for October.¹⁹

THE ROMA (GYPSIES)

Jews were not the only victims of deportation. Driven by a mixture of social and racial prejudices, Antonescu adopted a similar policy toward the estimated 208,700 Roma Gypsies.²⁰ More than 25,000 Romas—that is, approximately twelve percent—were deported.²¹ Although Antonescu made his decision to deport Romas in May 1942, not all Gypsies were targeted. On May 22 the Marshal’s orders to deport Romas who were

considered to be “a problem” were communicated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Three days later the police and gendarmerie conducted a census to determine which Romas should be included in this category;²² those included were nomadic Romas and their families, and (among sedentary Romas) those who had a criminal record, reoffenders, and the unemployed. A total of 40,909 Romas were recorded, of whom 9,471 were nomadic and 31,438 were sedentary.²³ With a few exceptions, the approximately 25,000 Romas who were deported to Transnistria figured on these lists.

Deportation of the Romas was carried out in two stages. The first to be rounded up were nomadic Romas who, beginning on June 1, 1942, were assembled by the gendarmerie in county towns and then taken to Transnistria. The nomadic Romas traveled on foot with their wagons, from one gendarmerie post to another, and their journey lasted several weeks. This particular operation was brought to a close on August 15. Those Romas who at the time of deportation were at the front, or those who were called up by the army and stationed in Romania, were removed from army records and sent to join their families in Transnistria. In this category of nomadic Romas, a total of 11,441 (2,352 men, 2,375 women, and 6,714 children) were deported.²⁴

The gendarmerie was ordered to screen sedentary Romas identified in May 1942. The first group targeted for deportation was Romas who were considered “dangerous and undesirable” and their families, a total of 12,497 persons; the other 18,941 were to be moved later. The families of Romas who had been called up by the army, or who were eligible for call-up, were left in situ even if they were part of the group considered dangerous. Although the deportation of nomadic Romas was under way, however, the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not have a plan for dealing with the removal of sedentary Romas. Should they be sent to Transnistria or interred in Romania proper? Eventually the ministry selected the former option.

The initial plan—which envisaged the transport of Romas in July by boat, first down the Danube and then across the Black Sea—was prepared to the last detail but was abandoned in favor of transport by rail, which was judged to be far easier to implement. Antonescu fixed the starting date of the operation for August 1; however, due to the change in plan, it did not get under way until September 12. During a period of eight days, nine special trains from various towns in the country converged on Transnistria with sedentary Romas.²⁵

Gendarmerie records show that 13,176 sedentary Romas considered to be a threat were deported in September 1942. Romas who had avoided the two major

deportation operations, been released from prison, or placed at a later date on the list of “undesirables” (totaling several hundred Romas) were sent to Transnistria after October 1942. The last deportation of Romas took place in December 1943, when a transport of fifty-six Romas from the town of Pitești and the county of Argeș crossed the Dniester; of these twenty were described as “redeployed.” This transport increased the number of Romas deported to Transnistria between June and December 1943 to over 25,000. At the beginning of October 1942, when the two major waves of deportation had been completed, there were 24,686 Romas in Transnistria of whom 11,441 were nomads and 13,176 were sedentary; another sixty-nine had been deported after being released from jail.²⁶

Once in Transnistria the Romas were settled in villages in the southeastern part of the territory—on the banks of the Bug—in the counties of Balta, Berezovka, Golta, and Ochakov. Most nomadic Romas were placed in Golta and almost all of the sedentary ones in Ochakov. For some their dwellings were hovels dug out of the earth with a cover of reeds or maize stalks (*bordeie*); the more fortunate were given houses. To make room for them, the local Ukrainians had to move into neighbors’ homes. Several villages on the Bug were completely evacuated toward this end and the Ukrainian population was moved inland. These villages, termed “colonies” (*colonii*) by the Transnistrian authorities, contained several hundred people. They were neither camps nor ghettos—as in the Jewish experience—even though Romanian documents also use these terms, but areas reserved for Romas in the center or on the periphery of a village. The deportees were guarded by gendarmes but were allowed to move within the village or commune in order to earn their living.²⁷

Many deported Romas died in Transnistria from hunger and illness. Unlike in the case of the Jews, there were no organized executions of Romas by the Romanian authorities, but there were instances of Romas being shot by the gendarmerie—for example, at Trihati in Ochakov county, where a report from May 1943 states that gendarmes killed a number of Romas who had arrived in search of work.²⁸ The total number of Roma who died in Transnistria is unknown. A May 1944 gendarmerie assessment of the number who returned to Romania after the abandonment of the territory two months earlier found only 6,000 persons, but this census was conducted during a period of upheaval: areas of eastern Romania were already occupied by Soviet troops, and Romas were still drifting back and were no longer available for the census. Some Romas who lived in tolerable conditions may well have remained in Transnistria.

It is unlikely that as many as 19,000 of the 25,000 Romas deported to Transnistria died, but it is almost certain that more than half did.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GHETTOS IN TRANSNISTRIA

The conditions under which all Jews (both deportees and local Jews) were to live were first outlined by General Hugo Schwab, a Romanian of German background. His orders to the Romanian Army in Transnistria expressed in Ordinance No. 1—which was displayed in August 1941 on the streets of the province in three languages: Romanian, German, and Russian—stipulated that

The Jews will live in ghettos, colonies, and labor camps. All Jews at present in Transnistria who do not report to the authorities within ten days from the posting of this present order for the purpose of the fixing of their place of residence, will be executed. The Jews are forbidden to leave the ghettos, labor camps and convoys without the approval of the authorities. Those who do not respect this order will be punished by death. . . . Every Jew brought to Transnistria who tries to cross, or has crossed, into Romania without the approval of the authorities will be executed. Anyone who gives shelter to the Jews . . . will be sent to prison for a period of between three to twelve years and fined between 100 and 200 marks.²⁹

Once they had established themselves in their county seats, the prefects instructed local Jews in certain towns to declare themselves to the authorities, leave their houses, and move into ghettos. On September 3, 1941, Colonel Vasile Nica, the prefect of Balta county, ordered all the Jews—or “kikes” (*jidani*) as he termed them in the ordinance—in the town to move into the ghetto (in an area restricted to four streets) within three days. He appointed the Jewish elder Pribluda Shloimu Abramovici as head of the ghetto, allowing him to select colleagues to assist in administration. An independent bakery, pharmacy, and hospital staffed solely by Jews were to be established; flour for the bakery was to be provided by the town of Balta as an advance against payment for its products. A market was to be set up where the inhabitants could buy and sell produce between 9:00 a.m. and noon. The head of the ghetto was also authorized to organize a Jewish police force to protect the lives and belongings of the residents.

Entry to and exit from the ghetto between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. was allowed only with a permit issued by the ghetto commandant (a gendarmerie officer). All Jews between the ages of fourteen and sixty were required to present themselves daily at 7:00 a.m. at the ghetto center for work assignments, which were allocated by the commandant. All Jews were to be issued identity cards signed by the ghetto head and countersigned by the commandant, as well as a number that they would sew on their clothing next to the Star of David, in order to monitor their movements and activities. Without this number Jews could not go into the town. All Jews were to be entered into a register for census purposes; those who failed to register would be denied bread, even on payment. All other Jews—be they from elsewhere in the town or county, or others who arrived in the district—were to be sent to the ghetto. Any act of insubordination, revolt, or “terrorism” on the part of a Jew would lead to his or her punishment by death, as well as death for twenty other Jews.³⁰

Nica’s order, which also provided for the establishment of ghettos in other towns in Balta county, was followed by similar decrees in other areas of Transnistria. Thus Colonel Ion Lazăr, the prefect of Tulcin county who reached his seat somewhat later owing to its distance from Odessa, ordered that ghettos be established in the towns of Tulcin, Spicov, and Bratslav. His order, which warned that 100 Jews in the ghetto would face execution in addition to the party deemed guilty of any transgression,³¹ was even more draconian than that of Nica.

The gendarmerie was charged with rounding up Jews throughout Transnistria. According to Gendarmerie Order No. 1, issued on September 8, 1941, they were to check the number of Jews in each town and village, verify the creation of ghettos, and drive Jews deported to Transnistria “into ghettos in the garrison towns of companies or squads under tight security so that they did not trickle back across the Dniester” into Bessarabia.³² By the middle of October, Colonel Emil Broșteanu—head of the gendarmerie in Transnistria—reported to Governor Gheorghe Alexianu that the concentration of local Jews in ghettos had been completed.³³ However, this was not the case in all counties.

LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE GHETTOS

The official determination of living conditions for all Jews in Transnistria (deported and local) was set out in Decree No. 23 issued by Governor Alexianu on November 11, 1941. Here the term “colony” was introduced to describe those communities of Jews

living in towns and villages. Later in the language of official reports (for example, in Golta county), “ghetto” and “colony” were sometimes used interchangeably (the ghetto comprising no more than three or four houses) while the distinction between “colony” and “labor camp” (*lagăr de muncă*) was occasionally blurred, the term “labor colony” (*colonie de muncă*) being employed. Alexianu’s decree also performed linguistic acrobatics, avoiding use of the word “deported” and its derivatives, preferring instead the euphemistic “evacuated.”³⁴

Decree No. 23 provided a regulatory framework for Romanian Jews who had survived deportation and local Transnistrian Jews who had escaped murder by the invading German and Romanian armies. Ghettos were established in both towns and villages. Mogilev county—which according to a gendarmerie report had 35,826 deportees from Bukovina, Bessarabia, Dorohoi, and the Old Kingdom (Wallachia and Moldavia) in November 1943—was the most densely populated with fifty-three ghettos and one camp. In twenty-six ghettos there were fewer than 150 detainees. Fifteen ghettos housed 150–300 people, five ghettos from 300 to 500, and two ghettos between 500 and 1,000. Only five ghettos had more than 1,000 Jews, the largest being Shargorod with a population in September 1943 of 2,971 Jews. The county capital of Mogilev itself sheltered more than 13,000 deportees in September 1943, but many lived outside the ghetto.³⁵

For thousands of Jews in Transnistria, the camp rather than the ghetto circumscribed their existence. There were basically two kinds of camps: concentration and labor. Concentration camps, into which many deported and local Jews were herded in autumn 1941, were usually located on former Soviet state farms—in abandoned barns or pigsties—in the vicinity of villages or towns. Labor camps were places of punishment where Jews were gathered to carry out particular tasks such as road, bridge, or building construction. The laborers were deported Jewish Communists or Jews in Romania proper (Wallachia, Moldavia, southern Transylvania, and the Banat) who had avoided compulsory forced labor duties.

Alexianu’s decree provides a misleading outline of the living conditions of Jews. It should be remembered that Ion Antonescu’s original intention was to cast Jews beyond Transnistria into Russia. The Germans’ refusal to allow this caught Alexianu and the Marshal completely unprepared. The ghetto experience in Transnistria, therefore, was unlike that in German-occupied Europe where Jews were concentrated in Jewish communities that had a social infrastructure to assist them. As has been pointed

out, the fate of the Jews in Warsaw—where tens of thousands of Jews were amassed—was appalling, but even under such dreadful conditions, the death toll was 12–15 percent; in Transnistria it reached 30–50 percent during winter 1941.³⁶

When Jews arrived in Transnistria, they found the area ravaged by war. Many towns and villages in which ghettos had been established bore the marks of bombardment, and often Jews were placed in half-destroyed houses that were open to the elements and lacking sanitation. Ragged, dirty, and hungry, and having spent what money they had to buy food in order to survive the ordeal of deportation, they presented a woeful sight to the local population. Their weak physical condition made them even more vulnerable to endemic typhus. Survivors' accounts relate the appalling conditions against which they struggled. Adults were often only half-dressed, while children wore rags since they had sold their clothing for bread.³⁷

The chances of survival in the ghetto depended on a number of factors, the first of which was the rigidity with which the prefect interpreted the regulations. This depended on the degree to which he and his officials could be persuaded to bend or overlook them for financial or material gain, which in turn hinged on the enterprise, resources, and authority of ghetto leaders. Furthermore, the nature of the ghetto population contributed significantly to the nature of their existence.

In some cases (in Suceava, Bukovina, for example) an entire community was transplanted to a single ghetto and all these factors were instrumental in deciding the fate of Jews. On learning of the intended deportation of his community, Dr. Meir Teich—head of the Suceava Jews—organized transport for them so that they would not be driven on foot; nevertheless, some were robbed by soldiers and gendarmes and, according to Teich, murdered. He bribed his way to Shargorod (their destination) in order to prepare accommodations. Once in Shargorod he organized aid for the poor by deducting a small commission from each person who used him to obtain money from relatives in Romania.³⁸ A similarly enterprising and authoritative figure (also from Bukovina) was Siegfried Jagendorf, an engineer from Rădăuți who was deported to Mogilev and for a time was head of the Mogilev Jewish Council. Jagendorf secured the prefect's agreement to rebuild the town's foundry with fellow Bukovinan Jews from the ghetto and then sell its products—largely spare parts for agricultural machinery—thereby ensuring a relatively tolerable existence for more than 1,000 Jews. He and key Jewish workers were permitted to live outside the town.³⁹

This privilege highlighted the ambiguous position of some ghetto leaders vis-à-vis their communities and the Romanian authorities. In Jagendorf's case his enterprise made him indispensable to the economic cycle in Mogilev county, and he used that position to extract concessions from the authorities—not only for himself, but also for the skilled members of his workforce. Yet these concessions fostered resentment among fellow members of the Jewish Council in Mogilev, nonskilled workers in the ghetto, and the poor who formed the majority. The position of head of the ghetto carried with it considerable responsibilities, the exercise of which often raised ethical dilemmas. Egalitarian rules were established for participation in and exemption from forced labor, but there were many breaches in their observance.

Article 6 of Decree No. 23 required the ghetto head to provide a list of Jews available for forced labor, yet he had to contend with the instinct for self-preservation. Many Jews attempted to avoid this work, since it was often carried out far from the ghetto and they lived in miserable conditions. A tiny number of Jews were in a position to buy themselves out of the labor pool by paying the ghetto leader. Jews with close ties to the head of the Jewish Council, or to other members of it, often used their connections to obtain a clerical post and avoid manual labor. This was the case in Mogilev and Shargorod, where the head and members of the council were from the same town and (in some cases) were even relatives or close friends.⁴⁰

THE JEWISH AID COMMITTEE

The greatest contribution to the alleviation of living conditions of Jewish deportees in Transnistria was made by Romanian Jews themselves. This was done through an Aid Committee (*Comisiunea de Ajutorare*) that was established in February 1942 to distribute food and clothing to Jews.⁴¹ The committee operated within the Central Jewish Office in Romania (*Centrala Evreilor din România*) and was offered—but did not always accept—advice given by leading Jews in Romania, most notably former FJCR head Filderman; Misu Benvenisti, a leading Zionist; and Chief Rabbi Alexander Safran.

The Central Jewish Office was a government-controlled institution set up by Marshal Antonescu on January 30, 1942, to replace the autonomous FJCR, which had been disbanded on December 16, 1941.⁴² Among other things, it was charged with the exclusive representation of the interests of Romanian Jewry, the organization of Jewish “work projects” and other forms of forced labor, and the creation and updating of files

on all Romanian Jews (including the issuance of identification cards with photographs that Jews had to carry). Its general secretary was Nandor Gingold.

The existence of the Aid Committee was unusual. The idea that an aid committee could function under a regime that was committed to removing unwanted Jews, not to mention the fact that the committee was Jewish in inspiration and action, seems unbelievable. Furthermore, Ion Antonescu's willingness to have direct personal communication with Filderman, albeit only while he was head of the FJCR (they exchanged letters and held meetings to discuss the plight of Jews), suggests a small measure of ambivalence in the Marshal's attitude toward the Jews.

When news of the ordeals experienced by Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina reached Filderman, he appealed to Ion Antonescu to change his mind. His plea fell on deaf ears. Subsequent representations from Filderman and others to allow the Romanian Jewish community to send aid and money to the deportees were more successful. On December 10, 1941, Marshal Antonescu's decision to allow the FJCR to send money and medicine to the deportees in Transnistria was relayed to the relevant government bodies, but it took several months for Alexianu and the Central Jewish Office—the successor to the FJCR—to devise a means for providing the aid. It was agreed in March 1942 that money could be sent through the National Bank in Bucharest in the account of the Transnistrian government and that medicine should be sent to the prefect's office in Mogilev, from where it would be distributed by the province's drug administration.⁴³ Initially sums were deposited individually by the deportees' relatives and friends, but this practice caused such confusion that Ion Antonescu subsequently ordered that all money should be channeled through the Aid Committee.

Unfortunately for the deportees, they often failed to receive the money sent to them or were shortchanged. A similar fate occurred with money sent through illegal couriers, most of whom were Romanian officials or gendarmerie personnel stationed in Transnistria; several of the latter were court-martialed for acting as intermediaries and sentenced to short prison terms. But it was not only Romanian officials who were deemed guilty of corruption: the Aid Committee received complaints that a number of ghetto heads sold the food and clothing that had been sent in their care to Jews in the ghetto, or in some cases embezzled the funds transmitted through the Central Jewish Office.⁴⁴

In 1943 a significant change took place in the method of distributing aid. Acting on the recommendations of a delegation of Romanian Jews headed by Fred Saraga,

which visited several ghettos and camps in Transnistria between January 1 and January 14, the Aid Committee targeted its assistance at specific ghetto heads who enjoyed the trust of their communities.⁴⁵ As a result, there was a significant increase in the flow of money and goods to their intended recipients. That said, it should be kept in mind that the local Ukrainian Jews received no such assistance and watched enviously as their fellows from Bukovina and Bessarabia were afforded the means of making their lives just a little more bearable.

THE MASSACRES AT BOGDANOVKA, GOLTA COUNTY

The approximately 200 camps and ghettos in Transnistria had several things in common: they were cold and crowded; the food supply was meager and in many cases at starvation level; they were ravaged by typhus; and the death rate, particularly in the period between October 1941 and spring 1942, was calamitous. In the thirty months of their existence, the camps and ghettos witnessed the death of tens of thousands of Jews. Fear of the spread of typhus to Romanian and German soldiers led to several cases of premeditated mass murder by the Romanian authorities, the most notorious being the killings at the Bogdanovka camp in Golta county.

The original areas for concentrating Jews on the Bug, in preparation for their expulsion into the German-controlled area of Ukraine, were listed as Mitkin, Pechera, and Rogozna in northern Transnistria; the town of Obodovka and the village of Balanovka in the county of Balta; Bobrek; Krivoye Ozero; and Bogdanovka, a large state farm in the county of Golta. However, the large number of deportees involved created huge logistical problems for the Romanian authorities, who had not made plans for feeding or caring for them. A typhus epidemic among Jews led the Transnistrian government to divert all Jewish convoys in southern Transnistria to the county of Golta. Prefect Modest Isopescu, a lieutenant colonel in the gendarmerie, was ordered to concentrate the convoys around the Bogdanovka state farm, and by November 1941 some 28,000 Jews had been assembled. On November 13 Isopescu sent a confidential report to Alexianu describing the situation in his county.

When I took over the county I found several camps of *jidani*, some of whom had been assembled in the towns here, while the great majority had been sent from across the Dniester. Approximately 15,000 had gathered in the village of Vazdovka in the district of Liubashevka, a Romanian commune, while there were about 1,500 each in Krivoye Ozero and Bogdanovka. Those in Vazdovka were stricken with typhus and about

8,000 died, including those who died of starvation. The mayor of the commune appealed in despair for permission to move them because of the continual danger of infection. I ordered the 20th Infantry Regiment, which was quartered there, to place a guard on them so that the civilian population did not come into contact with them, and to transport them to Bogdanovka, a village on the banks of the Bug, with the intention of sending them across the Bug. Those from Krivoye Ozero were sent to Bogdanovka as well, and were placed in the pigsties of the state farm.

Before the convoy of *jidani* from Vazdovka arrived, 9,000 kikes were sent from Odessa, so that today, with those who were already there and those who arrived in the meantime, there are 11,000 kikes in pigsties which could not hold seven thousand pigs. The mayor of the village and the manager of the state farm came to me today in despair because they were told that there were 40,000 more *jidani* on the way from Odessa.

Since the state farm cannot hold them all, and those outside the sties kill those inside in order to take their places, and the police and gendarmes cannot keep pace with the burials, and since the waters of the Bug are being used as drinking water, an epidemic will soon spread over the entire area.

They are not fit for labor, for of the 300 brought to Golta for construction work almost 200 have died, while another 50 are dying despite being relatively well-cared for. The majority have tuberculosis, and suffer from dysentery and typhus.

To avoid contamination of the region we beg you to give the order immediately that no more *jidani* should be sent to this area. I hope to be able to soon send those already here across the Bug, so that we will soon have the air completely clean. I ask, however, that we should not be infected again by new convoys of *jidani*.⁴⁶

It goes without saying that the herding of Jews into pigsties was the ultimate debasement of their dignity.

Like Governor Alexianu, Isopescu was under the impression that it would be possible to send Jews across the Bug into German hands. In his report of November 19, Isopescu noted, "There are still Jews hiding out in the villages. I ordered searches so that they could be brought to Bogdanovka where we could concentrate them in one place before transferring them over the Bug, and we are negotiating with the Germans to this end."⁴⁷ By the end of November, the situation at Bogdanovka—and at the other improvised camps at Domanevka and Akhmechetka—had reached a crisis through overcrowding and the spread of typhus, which had attained endemic proportions among the inmates. At Bogdanovka there were about 48,000 Jews (most of them from Odessa), but with some 7,000 from southern Bessarabia, Domanevka held an estimated

18,000 Jews gathered from three districts in the south of Transnistria; the Akhmechetka camp, located on an abandoned pig farm situated halfway between the other two camps, had some 4,000 sick, elderly, and women who were described by the gendarmes as unfit for labor.⁴⁸ Still the convoys of Jews continued to arrive, despite Isopescu's pleas to Governor Alexianu that the populace of the town of Golta was itself in danger of infection. Contact between Jews and the local Ukrainian inhabitants (who went to Bogdanovka to sell food) and the Ukrainian militia and Romanian gendarmes (who guarded the camp) had spread the disease, while at Domanevka able-bodied Jews were assigned to work the land.

By the middle of December, Isopescu's nightmare had become reality. He estimated the number of Jews in Bogdanovka at 52,000; some were crammed into approximately forty cow sheds while others were living in the open, scattered over a three-kilometer area on the west bank of the Bug, thirty-five kilometers south of the town of Golta. Overcrowding, typhus, and temperatures of -10 degrees Fahrenheit contributed to a sudden rise in the death rate; in the cow sheds, the living and dead lay next to each other. According to the gendarmerie commander based in the camp, Sergeant Major Nicolae Melinescu, the death rate jumped from 50–100 to 500 Jews per day.⁴⁹

An added torment for the Jews was Governor Alexianu's order to Isopescu, issued by telegram at the beginning of November, to "collect" valuables from the Jews—i.e., the money, gold rings, and jewelry that they had taken with them to trade for their survival. These belongings were transferred to the Romanian National Bank. On November 19 Isopescu reported to Alexianu that some Jews "had items on them of great value in gold and jewels. The guard over them at the state farm is weak owing to a shortage of men. . . . I found that even the local [Ukrainian] police who had been summoned to assist with the guard had robbed them and then killed them. All these policemen have been arrested."⁵⁰

Yet according to statements made by survivors at his trial in 1945, Isopescu—in concert with his deputy Aristide Pădure, Melinescu, and Golta Praetor Gheorghe Bobei—grossly abused their positions by keeping many valuables instead of transferring them to the National Bank. Their method of collection was original and based on extortion. As the food shortage in Bogdanovka took its toll on hapless Jews, Bobei set up a bakery with the help of a Jewish inmate called Izu Landau. The bakery was capable of producing 500 loaves of bread a day for a population that stood at about

48,000 at the end of November. Bobei and Landau offered bread to deportees at five gold roubles per loaf. This extortion lasted only a few days since most of the Jews did not have such sums and the bakery ran out of flour.⁵¹

Isopescu's description of the Jews' plight at Bogdanovka and his pleas that no more columns should be sent to his camp prompted Alexianu to take drastic measures. Unsurprisingly given that similar portentous orders were never communicated in writing, a complete paper trail leading directly to the massacre of Jews in Bogdanovka is lacking. But the available records relating to events at Bogdanovka indicate that a special envoy delivered an order from Alexianu to Isopescu, verbally and in person, directing that the Jews in the camp should be shot. Isopescu passed the order down to Pădure who saw nothing criminal in it, committed it to paper, and sent it on to Vasile Manescu, the praetor of Domanevka. The latter in turn forwarded the order to Melinescu. At this point, as the indictment against those involved in the massacre relates, "Melinescu showed a spark of humanity. He knew how to rob the Jews, he knew how to torture them, he knew how to shoot them from time to time, or to beat them, but the extermination of those 48,000 persons was something he told [Manescu] that he did not understand and could not carry out. He could not."⁵²

In the face of this refusal, either Isopescu or Pădure (or perhaps both) decided to use local Ukrainian police to carry out the mass murders. Seventy policemen were assembled at Golta and placed under the command of Afanasie Andrushin, a fifty-one-year-old Ukrainian policeman born in Chişinău. His knowledge of Romanian was fragmentary: he could not read or write the language. Before leaving for Bogdanovka, he received—according to Melinescu—a written order from Pădure dated December 13 to shoot all Jews remaining in Golta, with the exception of a number of "specialists" (including doctors). This was Pădure's solution to the problem of typhus. There were no survivors of this operation; the only information about it comes from declarations made during the 1945 trial.⁵³

After the Golta Jews had been murdered, Andrushin received a written order signed by Pădure to shoot all Jews in Bogdanovka camp. He presented this order to Manescu, who kept the order and instead gave Andrushin a signed piece of paper on which he had copied the original order. Andrushin reached Bogdanovka on the morning of December 20 and told Melinescu that he had written orders to shoot all Jews. Melinescu asked to see the order but Andrushin, who could not read Romanian, was unable to identify it among his papers and left them on Melinescu's desk. Melinescu

found the order, summoned two of his men, showed it to them, and (contrary to instructions) kept the piece of paper until 1943, when he showed it to a court-martial investigating abuses committed by civilian staff in Golta and members of the gendarmerie. The paper signed by Manescu was quoted during the 1945 trial.

Gendarmerie post Bogdanovka: Mr. Andrushin from Golta will report to you with seventy policemen who will execute the Jews in the ghetto. The gendarmes will not take part. The valuables will be collected by me. Tear up this piece of paper.

Vasile Manescu, December 20, 1941⁵⁴

The massacre began the following morning. According to the prosecutor's statement at the postwar trial, the intended victims were split into two groups, the first of which (the sick, elderly, and infirm) was crammed into stables. Hay was scattered on the stable roofs, doused with petrol, and then torched. It is estimated that 4,000–5,000 souls perished in the inferno. The remaining 43,000 Jews were driven in groups to a nearby forest, stripped of their belongings, made to kneel at the edge of a ravine, and shot in the nape of the neck. The murders took place during the course of several days. The bodies were cremated on Isopescu's orders; such was the number of dead that the cremations lasted throughout January and February 1942.⁵⁵

At his 1945 trial, Manescu was also found guilty of ordering the murder of 18,000 detainees at Domanevka. Many Jews were suffering from typhus and the massacre seems to have been driven by fears that the disease would spread. Once again the executioners were local Ukrainian policemen, this time under the command of Mihail Cazachievici, a Ukrainian-born Romanian. The shootings began about January 10, 1942, and continued until March 18.⁵⁶

Several thousand Jews (estimates range from 4,000 to 14,000) perished from disease and hunger in the camp at Ahkmetchetka. Beginning in May 1942, Isopescu sent the sick and emaciated from all the camps in the Domanevka district to Ahkmetchetka to die a slow death. The camp, a former state pig farm Akhmetchetka Ponds, was located twelve kilometers from the village of Akhmetchetka. Jews lived in dilapidated barracks with neither doors nor windows, surrounded by deep ditches and guards. The camp served as a giant sickness center in which infirm and sick Jews were concentrated. Isopescu allowed the patients to die from hunger, providing them with only the most meager supplies consisting principally of cornmeal that the inmates ate

raw since they were unable to cook. According to depositions made at his trial, Isopescu often showed up drunk at the camp and took photographs.⁵⁷

The record of bestiality shown by the Romanian authorities at Bogdanovka, Domanevka, and Akhmetchetka ranks with the most horrific acts of mass butchery carried out in the twentieth century. Based on trial records, a figure of about 70,000 Jews has been computed as the number murdered in the three localities between December 21, 1941, and the end of February 1942. This was solely a Romanian affair; the part played by the Germans was largely that of spectators. They may well have put pressure on Alexianu to give the initial orders to Isopescu, fearing that a typhus epidemic would spread across the Bug into their own area of the Ukraine, but the evidence suggests that they did not participate directly in these murders. Through his initial decision to deport Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina, and the later one regarding those from Odessa, Ion Antonescu bears the ultimate responsibility for the deaths of Jews from typhus, starvation, and mass shooting.

REVERSAL OF THE DEPORTATION POLICY

In summer 1942 Ion Antonescu made a fundamental change in his “Jewish policy” that underlined a basic difference in approach to what both he and Hitler and termed the “Jewish problem.” The change involved two momentous decisions. The first was the Marshal’s refusal to participate in the “Final Solution”; the second was his reversal of the policy of deportation to Transnistria. Not only did he decide against acceding to German requests that the remaining Jewish population of Romania—from the Banat, southern Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia—be sent to the death camps in Poland, but he also suspended the deportations to Transnistria.

On July 10, 1942, Colonel Radu Davidescu, the head of Marshal Antonescu’s office, instructed the Ministry of Internal Affairs to compile figures for the number of Jews in Transylvania and to study the feasibility of sending “to the Bug all the Jews in Transylvania except the intellectuals essential for our needs (doctors, engineers, etc.) and the industrialists necessary for the management of different enterprises in order to make room for the shelter of the Romanian refugees from the ceded part of Transylvania.”⁵⁸ Rumors of a plan to deport Jews from southern Transylvania and the Banat startled Jewish leaders, particularly those in the regions targeted. The Romanian Intelligence Service reported that Baron Alfred Neuman, a wealthy Jew from Timișoara and the owner of textile and chemical factories in Arad, traveled to Bucharest “around

August 20” in an effort to get the deportations postponed until the following spring “when the conditions for transport would be better.”⁵⁹

The leaders of the democratic parties raised their voices in protest, much to the annoyance of the Marshal. On August 10 he wrote on a report giving statistics of the urban Jewish population, “I shall ignore everyone and every difficulty in cleansing this nation totally of this blight. I shall castigate in due course all those who have come—the most recent being Mr. [Iuliu] Maniu—and will come to stop me from responding to the wishes of the vast majority of this nation.”⁶⁰ According to a 1961 declaration by Chief Rabbi Safran, Archbishop Nicolae Bălan of Transnistria had a particular impact on the Marshal.

The interventions which we attempted to make with the government and with Romanian persons of influence had been unsuccessful. There was a last chance: an approach to the Metropolitan of Transylvania, Monseigneur Bălan. The latter, in reply to my personal request, came from Sibiu, the bishop’s residence, to Bucharest, to talk to me. My meeting with the prelate took place in the house of General [Artur] Vaitoianu. It was dramatic. After only a few hours, Metropolitan Bălan informed me that he had persuaded the Marshal to cancel the decision to deport the Jewish population of Transylvania.⁶¹

On September 12 Iuliu Maniu, the Peasant party leader, stated that the “Jewish Question” was becoming a matter of great international importance in the wake of Roosevelt’s message and Churchill’s declaration, which announced that those countries that deported Jews would be subject to unprecedented punishments. Two days later Ion Mihalache, Maniu’s deputy, voiced his disapproval of the deportation, adding that (according to his information) these measures had been taken at the suggestion of foreign circles “alien to the humanitarian traditions of our people.” On September 16 Maniu declared, “I have said it once and will go on saying it: we will pay dearly for the mistreatment of the Jews. I have been told, for example, that important wealthy Jewish families have also been removed from Arad and Timișoara. Why wealthy families? I do not understand.” Constantin Brătianu, the Liberal leader, was even more forthright. Speaking on September 25, he expressed his outrage. “The deportation of the Jews is continuing under different pretexts which discover new guilty persons who are dispatched. These horrors, which represent a slap on the country’s face, are all the more revolting because in their innocence, the old, women and children are being sent to their death.” At a meeting of the board of the Romanian Bank on October 7, 1942,

Bratianu said that Maniu had the impression that he had furnished the Marshal with arguments that had made him reflect more closely on the consequences of deportation.⁶²

On an international level, the interventions of Papal Nuncio Andrea Cassulo had a considerable impact on Ion Antonescu's thinking. In July 1942 there was discussion in Jewish circles of the news that the nuncio had instructed Catholic parishes to hold a special service on Wednesdays for Jews deported to Transnistria.⁶³ And in September President Roosevelt sent a special representative, Myron Taylor, to personally convey to the Pope his concern about the Nazis' physical destruction of the Jews.

The decision to suspend the deportation of Jews to Transnistria was conveyed by Mihai Antonescu to a meeting of the Council of Ministers on October 13 from which the Marshal was absent. Since the beginning of July, rumors had been circulating in Bucharest about Ion Antonescu's health. Throughout the summer he had been troubled by a mysterious ailment that had severely limited his public appearances.⁶⁴

Ion Antonescu's refusal to participate in Hitler's Final Solution came in the face of pressure exerted by SS Hauptsturmführer Gustav Richter, Counselor for Jewish Problems at the German legation in Bucharest, for Romania to apply the policy against its own Jews. On July 22, 1942, Richter reported to Berlin that Mihai Antonescu had actually given his government's agreement to the deportation of Romanian Jews to the death camps in Poland.⁶⁵ Four days later Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, was informed that preparations for the deportations were under way and that the first of a number of trains would leave "around September 10" for the district of Lublin "where those fit for labor would be put to work, while the rest would be subjected to the special treatment [liquidation]."⁶⁶

On September 23 the director general of the Romanian railroad, General T. C. Orezeanu, wrote to Radu Lecca (plenipotentiary for Jewish affairs in Romania) informing him that the head of the German railroad Ost-Berlin had convened a conference for September 26–28 to draw up a timetable for special trains carrying Jews from Romania to the General Government (German-occupied Poland) and requesting details for the Romanian delegates to the conference.⁶⁷ In his reply of the following day, Lecca confirmed that Marshal Antonescu had "given orders that the evacuation⁶⁸ of the Jews from Romania be prepared in the smallest detail by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on the basis of instructions given by Mr. Mihai Antonescu."⁶⁹ At the same time, however, Franz Rademacher, head of the Jewish Department of the German

Foreign Ministry body responsible for the “Jewish Question” (*Abteilung Deutschland*), relayed to Berlin the information from “two sources in Romania, Dr. Emil Hoffman (the press attaché at the German legation in Bucharest and an adviser to the Romanian government), and a member of the Iron Guard, that [Marshal] Antonescu in fact had no intention of deporting the Romanian Jews.”⁷⁰

Ion Antonescu’s real intentions on this subject are a puzzle. Certainly Lecca’s reply to the director general of the Romanian railroad bears out Richter’s report of Mihai Antonescu’s assent to deportation. If Lecca is to be believed—and since he was writing to a Romanian official and not a German one, perhaps he should be—Mihai Antonescu was telling Richter the truth when he said that his government had agreed to deportation, but then the Marshal changed his mind.⁷¹ Whatever the explanation, steps to implement the deportation of Romanian Jews to Poland were never taken. Romanian railroad representatives failed to attend the September 26 meeting in Berlin (organized by Adolf Eichmann) at which they were expected to discuss the transport of Jews from Romania “by special trains” every other day, each carrying 2,000 Jews to Belżec. A German railway expert was sent to Bucharest to make arrangements, but no deportations took place.⁷² Marshal Antonescu may well have considered capitulation to German pressure as an affront to Romanian sovereignty since the German plan not only targeted Jews from the Regat, the Banat, and southern Transylvania, but also proposed their deportation to a foreign territory.⁷³

The postponement seems to have resulted from appeals and actions by Romanian Jews themselves and others. The Jewish communities of the Banat and southern Transylvania, scheduled to be the first to be deported, contributed 100 million lei—with the help of Baron Neuman—for the construction of the “Palace of the Handicapped”; the project director, Dr. Stoenescu, was Ion Antonescu’s personal physician.⁷⁴ Others who made strong representations on behalf of the Jews were the Queen Mother, Swiss Chargé d’Affaires René de Veck, Apostolic Nuncio Cassulo, and Archbishop Bălan of Transylvania.⁷⁵

Reversals on the Eastern Front in winter 1942 convinced Marshal Antonescu of the wisdom of reconsidering his “Jewish policy.” He therefore decided to transfer Jews from the labor camps to the ghettos where they would be less exposed to the ravages of winter. At the same time, he intended to maximize their work potential. Resolution No. 2927, promulgated by Alexianu in the Marshal’s name on December 7, 1942, when the Battle of Stalingrad was at its height, recognized the Romanian authorities’ urgent need

for labor in order “to meet the requirements of all branches of economic and industrial activity in Transnistria.” For this reason “all Jews in Transnistria, as well as those who were to be released from camps according to Marshal Antonescu’s Approval No. 2087 of 1942, will be settled in towns or villages according to possibilities and needs, and required to live in ghettos and perform labor demanded of them, receiving the rights laid down in Ordinance No. 23.” The Inspectorate of Gendarmes would produce statistics for Jews in Transnistria according to profession and trade; all qualified professional persons would be placed at the disposal of the relevant departments in order to be used where appropriate; no Jews were to be allowed to work in Odessa, except with the permission of the governor of Transnistria; all Jewish engineers and architects would be employed in factories; all doctors would be employed to combat epidemics and provide health care for the whole population; other professional Jews, such as accountants and lawyers, would be used as accountants in factories and on farms; all other able-bodied Jews between the ages of twelve and sixty would be formed into teams who would work in clothing and boot workshops and in general stores in every county and district (*raion*) except the cities of Odessa and Tiraspol.⁷⁶

By mid-December 1942, with deportation no longer an option, Ion Antonescu had concluded that emigration was the solution to the “Jewish problem” in Romania. On December 12 the German minister to Bucharest, Baron Manfred von Killinger, informed the German Foreign Ministry that Lecca had received instructions from the Marshal to organize “the emigration of 75,000 to 80,000 Jews to Palestine and Syria.” The only condition for emigration was payment by each emigrant of 200,000 lei.⁷⁷ German objections were to no avail. Unfortunately, however, emigration was not an option for Jews surviving in Transnistria because Governor Alexianu had expressly forbidden them from returning to Romania unless a case for wrongful deportation could be made. Transnistrian Jews resigned themselves to life in the ghettos and the camps.

While memoir literature has focused a spotlight on the major ghettos of Transnistria such as Mogilev, Bersad, and Sargorod,⁷⁸ the small ghettos have received less attention—hardly a surprising situation given that the latter often housed less than 200 persons, and therefore are less likely to be the subject of memoir literature. The collection of papers from the Nikolayev Oblast in the Ukraine (located in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) provides details of the organization, administration, and conditions in the ghettos in the town of Golta, located in a remote eastern corner of Transnistria close to the Bug River and some 100 miles north of

Odessa. Not only do these details enrich our knowledge of the ghetto experience in Transnistria, but they also allow us to draw comparisons with the ghettos in German-occupied Europe.

THE GHETTOS AND LABOR CAMP IN THE TOWN OF GOLTA

Despite the mid-October 1941 report by the head of the Transnistrian gendarmerie that local provincial Jews had been concentrated in ghettos, the correspondence between Golta Prefect Isopescu and the Transnistrian government shows that this was untrue.⁷⁹ In the first instance, an administrative infrastructure for the county—formerly known by its Soviet name Krivoye Ozero (derived from the eponymous county seat) and renamed Golta on October 13, 1941—was in an embryonic stage:⁸⁰ it was only on October 7 that Isopescu was appointed prefect by Governor Alexianu. (He held this position until February 1944, when the Romanian administration was withdrawn from the area.) In the second instance, the newly designated county seat of Golta required considerable repair. According to a Romanian report, the Soviets had burned down hundreds of buildings in the town—including factories—and had blown up the Bug River railroad bridge.⁸¹ On October 28 Romanian and German officials divided the town, including its factories, with the Bug River marking the frontier between the two administrations.

On November 6, 1941, Isopescu requested permission to move the county seat from Krivoye Ozero to Golta. Although the latter was more centrally situated, it was some distance from the railroad; however, Golta's location on the Bug was of greater strategic and economic importance. Much commercial traffic crossed the Bug at Golta and it became an important customs point between Transnistria and the German-controlled Ukraine. Together with the towns of Olviopol and Bogopol on the left bank of the Bug, the town of Golta formed an administrative hub called Pervomaisk ("May 1" in Russian). Isopescu recommended that Pervomaisk be rechristened as Golta, its name in tsarist days.

Isopescu's ideological imprint left its mark on his description of Golta in a report dated January 28, 1942. "The town is a woeful sight following the Judeo-Bolshevik war and the unmitigated hate which the Christian population felt toward everything 'kikish' which, until the establishment of an administration, [led it] to raze to the ground the former homes of the kikes."⁸²

It was not until several months later that Isopescu received an order from the governor's office that all Jews in Golta be "interned in ghettos and assigned work in factories and in the fields" and that a report on the measures taken be submitted. Isopescu replied on June 7, 1942, but apparently his report was not delivered since the order was repeated on August 14. In his response of August 27, Isopescu stated that:

1. The majority of frail Jews, women, and children are in the Akhmechetka ghetto, isolated and placed under police guard.
2. Those fit, unskilled Jews work as agricultural laborers.
3. The skilled ply their trades, being housed in communal dwellings under police supervision.⁸³

There is no mention here of a ghetto in the town of Golta although the phrase "communal dwellings" may well refer to one. Isopescu's reference to Akhmechetka as a "ghetto" underscores the latitude given to the term; a more apt description would be a "concentration camp," but even this term hides the hideous conditions there since it was once a pig farm. Situated eighteen kilometers south of the infamous Bogdanovka and sixty kilometers southeast of Golta town, Isopescu chose this place at the beginning of March 1942 as a camp for all Jews incapable of work.⁸⁴

Most Jews who were deported to Golta county had been murdered at Bogdanovka in December 1941 and January 1942.⁸⁵ How few survived can be ascertained from a report sent to the Transnistrian government by Isopescu (dated June 23, 1943), which indicated that "we have 3,025 kikes and 9,117 Gypsies in Golta county."⁸⁶

The term "ghetto" was employed in the context of the town of Golta. There almost 500 Jews were held in two ghettos and one labor camp; the latter was also often designated "Ghetto No. 3" in official Romanian documents, although its occupants were Jews who had been sentenced by a military court for compulsory labor offenses (mainly failure to report for duty). An undated table drawn up by the Golta gendarmerie lists 303 inmates of the camp: 251 Jews from Bucharest, eleven from Chişinău (Bessarabia), nine each from Arad (the Banat) and Târgu-Neamţ (Moldavia), eight from Sculeni (Bessarabia), seven from Brăila (Moldavia), four from Galaţi (Moldavia), two from Cetatea Albă (Bessarabia), and one each from Cahul and Soroca (Bessarabia).⁸⁷ A similar table for Ghetto No. 2 specifies that the numbers refer to "those Jews in the ghetto on January 1, 1943 and who have been in Golta since December 9, 1942." It lists sixty-five Jews—forty men, twenty-three women, and two

children—and states that thirteen were from Bessarabia, seven from Botoșani county, seven from Iași, and five from Hunedoara county. Since the table gives a rubric for them but does not specify a number, we can conclude that the remaining thirty-two were from Transnistria.⁸⁸

In a report on the ghettos in Golta compiled for Isopescu dated February 20, 1943, his deputy Pădure recorded the following information.

On the present situation of the three [sic] ghettos for *jidani* in the town of Golta, I have the honor to report:

In Ghetto No. 1 there are 125 souls (fifty-one men [a typing error for fifty-five], forty-five women, twenty-three children and two missing). Some of them are from Bessarabia, others are of Ukrainian origin, while yet others are from Bukovina. Of these thirty-four are skilled; a number of them are employed in the workshops in the basement of the prefecture building, while the unskilled remainder perform manual labor on request either at the town hall, or at the prefecture, or at another institution.

In Ghetto No. 2 there are sixty-seven souls, plus four who are missing and two dead, of whom forty are men, twenty-three women, two children and two are at the Court Martial. Among these are thirty-four skilled persons, while the unskilled remainder perform manual labor on request, as in the case of those in Ghetto No. 1.

In Ghetto No. 3 (in the camp next to the M.T.M [an engineering facility]) there are 296 souls, among whom 118 are skilled tradesmen, while the remaining 178 (men, women, and children) are unskilled.

At the time of writing only twenty of the 118 are in employment, while of the 178 unskilled, 20–30 are used daily for manual labor in loading and unloading wood, materials, and produce, etc. It results from these figures that of 488 kikes, 202 are skilled, of whom only 104 do proper work, while the remaining 286 unskilled do nothing. All of these persons are fed by the Golta mayor's office which spends on average each day 250–300 RKKS [Reichskreditkassenscheine].⁸⁹

[Isopescu's marginal note: "bad" (*rău*).]

According to Ordinance No. 23 which regulated the situation of the *jidani*, each should receive a meal coupon from the person for whom they are working to the value of one day's labor, one day's labor being reckoned at one RKKS for manual laborers and two RKKS for skilled workers. It is a question, then, of only *jidani* who work. In fact, the following three situations arise:

- a) The income received by the mayor's office from the workshops where the *jidani* work is smaller than that spent by the mayor's office to support them.
- b) The unskilled *jidani*, who work either in groups or individually, receive no payment.

[Isopescu's marginal note: "but they receive food."]

c) Skilled *jidani* who work eat alongside those skilled *jidani* who do not work and with those who are unskilled, among whom too some work and others do not.

This situation is unfair and is especially detrimental to the mayor's office which feeds a host of people who are parasites, while the Ordinance states categorically that only those who work will be paid.

[Isopescu's marginal note: "the Ordinance should be applied."]

Bearing in mind that the problem of the *jidani* should be resolved both from the security and the health standpoint, and that a privileged position has been created for some *jidani* in that they sleep in private houses while others live in ghettos,

We propose

(1) The decongestion of ghettos in the town of Golta, especially of Ghetto No. 3, by sending them to other areas (Domanevka) where they should be available to the district and commune authorities for every kind of skilled and unskilled labor as laid down in Ordinance No. 23.

[Isopescu's marginal note: "[sent] to Akhmechetka where they should support themselves."]⁹⁰

(2) The assignment of all skilled *jidani* to workshops to work effectively. We propose the removal of all present workshops from the basement of the prefecture on security and health grounds, and the establishment of large central workshops where absolutely all skilled craftsmen will be employed, thereby gaining an income for their livelihood.

[Isopescu's marginal note: "as urgently as possible."]

(3) The assignment of skilled *jidani*, bookkeepers, and typists to the other districts where they can be of use, but they are not to work in the praetor's office (as stipulated by government order).

(4) A complete and absolute ban on the movement of *jidani* without the approval of the prefect, as laid down in Article 4 of Ordinance No. 23.

[Isopescu's marginal note: "Ordinance No. 23 must be obeyed."]

Across the top of the report, Isopescu wrote, "March 7, 1943. Both Ordinance No. 23 and orders . . . stipulate that the only *jidani* to receive payment are those who work. The rest must support themselves on their own account."⁹¹

It is tempting to view Isopescu's words with a good deal of cynicism. "Supporting themselves on their own account" was impossible for Jews who were sick. Being unable to work, the sick received no food and therefore became weaker, thereby entering a spiral toward death. Yet Isopescu himself recognized this in his report for the Transnistrian government dated June 23, 1943. He pointed out that since Resolution No. 1875 of May 3 (which fixed the level of remuneration of Jews) categorically stated that "all previous resolutions were superceded" by this new one, it followed that "those

Jews without work and infirm would die of hunger, since Ordinance No. 23, which had fixed a food ration for them, had been annulled.”⁹² The archives do not tell us whether Isopescu received clarification from the authorities in Odessa, but in its absence—and given Isopescu’s record in the treatment of Jews—we are left to draw a somber conclusion.

Although surviving documents relating to the Golta ghettos are unclear, a selection had already been made on either February 4 or March 4, 1943, of the Jews to be transferred, presumably to Akhmechetka. Eighty-one Jews were listed, with two names deleted: fifteen were drawn from Ghetto No. 1, six from Ghetto No. 2, and the remainder from the labor camp. A list of Jews from Ghetto No.1, annotated on April 1, 1943, by ghetto leader David Haiss (a shoemaker at the town hall), indicates that all Jews slated for transfer had left the camp by April 1. By contrast, a handful of Jews on a similar list from Ghetto No. 2 were not transferred. The number of Jews remaining in the two ghettos at the beginning of April was 162—126 men, thirty women, and six children.

For those who remained in the ghettos in Golta, Isopescu issued secret instructions on March 29 governing their labor duties and freedom of movement. Among Isopescu’s orders were:

(1) No Jew was allowed to circulate in the town of Golta without a work permit signed by Isopescu and countersigned by his deputy Pădure and the head of the town gendarmerie. Transgressors would be sent to the Mostovoi labor camp, where conditions were particularly harsh since most Jews there lacked food and clothing.

(2) All Jews, without exception, were to wear a white Star of David five centimeters in diameter, sewn on the chest and the back of their clothes. Those found not wearing the star would be sent for trial.

(3) Labor duties would be established by the prefect through the mayor, who would submit a daily request for the number of Jews required for labor at various building sites in the town. The gendarmerie would communicate the request to those guarding the ghettos, who would assemble the Jews required for labor.

(4) Medical exemption from labor would be certified by the chief doctor; those excused from work for more than eight days would be considered unfit and sent to Akhmechetka.

(5) Tools sent from Romania (usually by relatives) would be distributed among the Jews according to their craft.

(6) A commission under the direction of Deputy Prefect Pădure would examine the Jews in the two ghettos and labor camp and select those fit for skilled and unskilled work.

(7) After satisfying the needs of the town of Golta, the remaining skilled Jews, bookkeepers, and typists would be sent to other districts in the county according to need.

(8) In order to live outside the ghetto, a special permit signed by the prefect and countersigned by the head of the gendarmerie was required. In all workshops an attendance register would be kept to ensure that only those Jews who worked would receive food.⁹³

Action on Isopescu's recommendations of March 7, scribbled on Pădure's report of February 20, was taken in mid-April. Pădure submitted a list of Jews for transfer to Isopescu; it contained 119 names and additional figures, which with subtractions (which may have indicated deaths) brought the total to 133. On April 16 Isopescu—in his bold, imperious hand—wrote over the first page that those listed should be sent to the camp at Akhmechetka where they would be assigned work; the gendarmerie was to provide the guard necessary for dispatching the Jews, while the office of the district official (*pretor*) was to supply the means of transport.⁹⁴

EXISTENCE IN THE GOLTA GHETTOS

Without the food, clothing, tools, and money sent by the Aid Committee of the Central Jewish Office, life would have been considerably more miserable than it was for the occupants of the ghettos and labor camp. As we see from the official correspondence, a daily food ration of the value of two RKKS was established for Jews who worked and one RKKS for those who did not. For the latter the ration was to be made up as follows:

Millet	100 grams	0.05 RKKS
Olive oil	33 grams	0.32 RKKS
Onion	10 grams	0
Salt	20 grams	0.03 RKKS
Beetroot + or Cucumber	50 grams 100 grams	0.06 RKKS
Cabbage	50 grams	
Tomatoes	10 grams	0.01 RKKS

Potatoes	500 grams	0.08 RKKS
Bread	300 grams	0.45 RKKS
	Total	1 RKKS ⁹⁵

Similar details of the rations for Jews who worked are lacking.

To what degree such rations were actually distributed is difficult to ascertain; an element of doubt is cast by a confidential note received by the governor's office on June 2, 1943. Expressed ungrammatically—it is unclear whether the forty persons referred to in the camp are Roma (Gypsies)—its message is nevertheless clear. “From verified sources, the Jews in the county of Golta have not been given food for months. Similarly, neither have the Gypsies nor has the labor camp in Golta, where there are forty persons. All of the above work and they are required to work, even though they keel over through hunger.⁹⁶ A handwritten, unsigned message from the Golta prefecture to the Inspectorate of Gendarmes bearing the same date hints at a food shortage for the Romas. “The Jews and prisoners [of the labor camp] are given sufficient hot food while the Gypsies are given only what food we have available.”⁹⁷

In addition to these food problems, the lack of clothing for labor camp inmates also became a cause for concern by the Golta authorities. On April 29 Isopescu sent this report to the Transnistrian government.

At Golta there is a camp for criminals with 189 souls. The majority come from Bessarabia and Bukovina, and are currently used for labor in return for which they are given food. A good number of them have no clothing, since the clothes they once had were torn over time during the work they were doing. In view of the fact that within a month or two many of them will no longer be able to go out to work, and we will nevertheless be obliged to feed them; and considering their requests that they be allowed to send letters and to receive parcels with underwear and clothes from their relatives in Bessarabia and Bukovina, we ask that their requests be approved, or that you intervene with the military command for clothing from prisoners of war to be given to them.⁹⁸

The outcome of this request is not known, but it should be remembered that any parcels would be received through the good offices of the Jewish Aid Committee.

To the dismay of the Aid Committee in Bucharest, it received accusations from relatives of those in Golta that the head of the Jewish Council, Alfred Follender, and his deputy Avram Creștinu (both bookkeepers from Bucharest⁹⁹) withheld some of the

money remitted to them for distribution to occupants of the ghetto and sold medicine and clothing for their own profit.¹⁰⁰ The opportunities for personal gain open to these two persons were magnified by the fact that they also sat on the “work committee” of the ghettos that assigned labor duties.¹⁰¹

WORK AND REMUNERATION IN THE GOLTA TOWN GHETTO

The Nikolayev Archives reveal that Jews in the ghettos were assigned a variety of jobs in the town. Among the men these occupations included dentist, bookkeeper, watchmaker, plumber, carpenter, plasterer, tailor, shoemaker, glazier, and mechanic; the women worked as typists, cleaners, seamstresses, and cooks. Their workplaces ranged from the gendarmerie headquarters, prefecture, town hall, Bank of Transnistria, and military hospital to a local factory. One Jew is listed as being employed as a pianist, perhaps to entertain the local dignitaries, while a seventeen-year-old boy worked as a house servant for the mayor. A total of twenty-seven Jews (men and women) are recorded as living outside the ghetto; among them were two doctors, two dentists, and five bookkeepers and their families.¹⁰²

Like many of the ordinances and resolutions issued by Governor Alexianu, the regulations regarding the remuneration of Jews for work were constantly changing. Under Resolution No. 1875 of May 3, 1943, all working Jews were to be paid at the same rate as local Transnistrian workers according to the salary levels then in force.¹⁰³ However, calculations made by the Directorate of Labor in Transnistria indicated that the productivity of Jews was only one-third to one-half that of Ukrainian workers in the province. Basing his decision on the “need to pay the Jews in relation to their productivity, therefore below the minimum salaries imposed by ordinances and resolutions for local workers,”¹⁰⁴ Governor Alexianu resolved that beginning on August 1, 1943, Jews should receive only seventy-five percent of the salaries paid to Ukrainians.

CONDITIONS IN THE GHETTOS AND LABOR CAMP IN GOLTA TOWN

On October 20, 1943, Corneliu Ciureanu, director of the Labor Office in Golta, was instructed by Isopescu to inspect all ghettos in the county. His report provides a graphic description of these conditions. Ciureanu was ordered to report on a number of issues, including the amount of food and payment that Jews received. Isopescu also told Ciureanu to take certain measures to improve the Jews’ lot: missing windowpanes were

to be replaced; straw was to be supplied for beds if there were no mattresses; and weekly baths and delousings were to be provided.¹⁰⁵

Ciureanu was swift to carry out the order; on October 22 he reported his findings of the previous day on the ghettos in Golta town. While not addressing several of Isopescu's specific questions, his findings bear quoting in detail.

Everywhere indescribable filth, and in addition a number of persons who cannot be accommodated in the insufficient space. The lack of cleanliness is due in large part to the indolence of the Jews: all are dirty and unwashed, the board-beds are uncovered (all the Jews heap up their clothes at the bedhead), and to better illustrate this indolence, I should mention that at 9:30 a.m. I found women still asleep, and in the ghetto on the pretext that they were cooking a meal for their husbands out at work.

Ghetto No. 1 is inhabited by ninety-seven persons. The majority are used for labor by the mayor's office in workshops and on different building sites. They live off the daily wage that they receive and which varies between two and four RKKS. They are dissatisfied with this form of payment and ask to be given food. At the suggestion of the mayor's office we issued an order to this effect, but even today it has still not been carried out. There is no heating, the walls have not been given a coat of paint and are covered with flies, there are all kinds of clothes scattered at random, people who are sick and have not been seen by a doctor, in short, everywhere there is an extremely disgusting sight.

In the small ghetto (No. 3), there are somewhat cleaner conditions. Here too, however, twenty-five persons inhabit four small rooms. The floor is earth, with deep depressions. Those who live here are some of the educated persons employed in different institutions and offices.

In the labor camp there are no longer any Jews, or rather I found nine who were packing their belongings for departure to Romania. In one room in the large pavilion there were 140 Bessarabians and Ukrainians brought from Vapniarka. Although they are used by the mayor's office for labor, they complain that they are not given any food.

In order to remedy the above, I propose the following:

The building which houses the camp has four spacious rooms; in addition there are another two smaller buildings, each with two rooms. Because of a shortage in the town of dwellings for important purposes, and since we have long been intending to gather all the Jews in the town in one place, the camp is the most suitable solution. For the time being, we would need only two of the larger rooms which could be quickly arranged with everything required for residence. The Jews would fit fairly comfortably into one of them, and the detainees in the other. Of the small buildings, one would take the guards while the second could take the few intellectuals and their families. The kitchen is in a separate block and at

present has two cauldrons in which food for everyone could be cooked. There are also rooms which could be turned into a sick-bay and a laundry.

To sum up, with a little effort by the mayor's office, we could in a short time have a place there for all the Jews and detainees, supervised by the eighteen rural gendarmes, while at the same time giving them a disciplined program of work and life.

I respectfully await your orders,
Ciureanu
Director of the Labor Office¹⁰⁶

To what extent Ciureanu's report was acted on, if at all, is not known.

FLIGHT FROM THE GHETTO

In late summer 1943, reports from the gendarmerie in Golta point to a growing number of escapes from the ghettos and camps. News of the German defeats at the front had reached Jews and the prospect of falling into the hands of the retreating Germans filled them with terror. Their alarm was compounded by rumors about the fate of their fellows who had been sent across the Bug to work on various German projects.

Since the Germans had executed Jews in their jurisdiction once they were considered superfluous to requirements, the authorities in the Reichkommissariat Ukraine requested Jewish workers from Transnistria when the German need for labor became pressing. Deals were struck between the Organization Todt and other German construction agencies and the Transnistrian government for the supply of Jewish labor. In some cases the prefects welcomed this opportunity to rid themselves of recalcitrant or infirm Jews, whereas in others they were happy to hand over Jews merely to avoid the problem of feeding them—and on occasions both. The first detachment of 3,000 Jews had been dispatched in June 1942. The old and children among them were immediately shot by units of the SS composed largely of German colonists from the area; most able-bodied survivors, after performing the labor required, suffered the same fate. It has been estimated that at least 15,000 Jews supplied from Transnistria met their death in this way between 1942 and 1944.¹⁰⁷

One Organization Todt project in Golta county was to construct a bridge (built by German companies) across the Bug to link southern Transnistria and the Reichkommissariat Ukraine, between Trihati on the west bank and Ochakov on the east. Work began in spring 1943 and was finished in December. Marshal Antonescu himself approved the dispatch of Jews for labor. Four thousand Jews, the majority of whom were deportees from Romania, were provided and concentrated in three camps

on the Romanian side of the Bug at Trihati, Varvarovka, and Kolosovka. More than 800 Jews from Golta county were handed over to the German authorities to work on the bridge.¹⁰⁸

On learning of these developments, several Jews took their fate into their own hands by fleeing from the ghetto. Poor security and the proximity of the railroad line facilitated their escape. Some escapes resulted from the connivance of Romanian officials with Jews who worked in the Golta prefect's office and falsified identity cards.¹⁰⁹ On October 28 the Police Directorate in Bucharest issued a general alert for the arrest and deportation back to Transnistria of forty-two Jews who had escaped from Golta town during the previous month; replies from regional police headquarters throughout Romania show that none was apprehended.¹¹⁰ Romulus Ambruș, commander of the gendarmerie in Golta county, advised Isopescu to extend the hours of confinement in the ghettos "since under the present schedules we cannot carry out an effective control of the Jews in the ghettos, because work ceases at 7:00 p.m. when it is already dark and the Jews can take advantage of this by easily disappearing, as we have been notified daily of such occurrences."¹¹¹

Isopescu acted. In an order issued on September 16, 1943, he defined the working day for Jews as 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. without a lunch break. Jews were required to return to the ghetto by 3:00 p.m. and were not allowed to leave until 6:00 a.m. the following day. On a copy of the order, now in the Nikolayev Archive, Isopescu wrote, "Not a single kike, man nor woman, is permitted to sleep in a private house. All without exception are to sleep in the ghetto."¹¹²

The order had little impact and Jews continued to abscond (fifteen of the forty-two Jews escaped after Isopescu issued his instructions). Those taking flight from the labor camp were, in fact, merely anticipating events. Pressure from two fronts was beginning to have an effect on Romanian policy toward the deported Jews. The first was the Eastern Front, where Soviet advances reminded the Romanian dictator and his closest associates about the precariousness of their position and a probable reckoning with the Allies. The second was Filderman, who bombarded Antonescu and General Vasiliu (the head of the gendarmerie) with memoranda demanding the repatriation of all Jews from Transnistria.

Some progress was made when on September 30 the Romanian Council of Order (*Consiliul de Ordine*), a new state body for repatriation, ordered the gendarmerie in Transnistria to repatriate all Jews who had been sentenced for contraventions of the

forced labor requirements and had completed their terms of punishment. On arriving in their places of origin, the Jews concerned were to report to the local police. A November 2 security police report from Chişinău stated that “on October 17, 1943 thirty-four Jews passed through Ungheni [on the border of Bessarabia and Romania] by train, of whom nine, originally from Cernăuți, have been released from the labor camp in Golta, Transnistria, and twenty-five, originally from Bucharest, from the labor camp in Ananiev, Transnistria.”¹¹³ Another group of thirty-one Jews “evacuated from the town of Golta” was reported to have passed through Ungheni station on January 14, 1944, some with Timișoara as their destination, others with Arad. The message from the police chief in Bălți does not specify the grounds for their release.¹¹⁴

In November 1943 Vasiliu considered the repatriation of other categories of Jews, but no firm action was taken. It was not until December 8 that the repatriation of Jews from Dorohoi and a small group of Jews deported for political reasons was ordered. Between December 20 and December 25, 6,107 Jews—mostly from Dorohoi—were moved from Transnistria to Moldavia. Only on March 14, 1944, with Soviet forces already in Transnistria and retreating German troops venting their anger in murderous fashion on Jews whom they encountered, did Marshal Antonescu agree to allow the return of all Jews from Transnistria.¹¹⁵

By this time Isopescu had already left Golta.¹¹⁶ Presumably the ghetto was disbanded on his departure although the record is silent on this issue. Isopescu’s report for the Gendarmerie Inspectorate in Odessa (dated January 20, 1944) states that Jews in Golta town were still subject to what he termed a “ghetto regime.”

Until a short time ago, the Jewish ghetto was in certain dwellings in the center of town, the property of the town hall. With the approach of the battlefield, however, the town has become extremely overcrowded since an immense number of German troops have been quartered here and the Jews have been subject to eviction from their dwellings by them, at the dead of night, and have even possibly been physically mistreated.

As a measure for their security, I have decided therefore to move the ghetto into a block of houses in the very center of the county [labor] camp, for the reason that there is a proper guard there, no outsiders can enter, and thus the Jews are safe from anything disagreeable which could happen to them at the hands of German troops looking for accommodation in the old ghetto.

All that has changed is their place of residence; they are still subject to the same “ghetto” regime as before.

As regards the Gypsies, every measure has been taken that they should be well fed. They cannot be moved for the time being in the county for the reason that the camps for Gypsies are also full, while on the other hand we do not consider a transfer of the Gypsies opportune.¹¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Life for Jews in the ghettos of Golta was a microcosm of the ghetto experience in Transnistria between summer 1942 and the Romanian withdrawal in March 1944. Despite the appalling conditions in the two ghettos and the labor camp and the callousness of Romanian authorities, especially that of the prefect of the county, most Jews who came to the Golta ghettos in late spring 1942 survived their ordeal. This is astounding given that many had undergone a lottery with death during deportation and had resisted typhus and starvation before ending up in Golta.

The Aid Committee of the Central Jewish Office played a significant role in their survival: without the committee's assistance, many Jews would have undoubtedly succumbed to the extreme cold of winter, starvation, or the ravages of typhus. Endemic corruption among Romanian officials also helped Jews alleviate their plight and enabled some to flee the ghetto.

In effect, the experience of Jews in Golta underscores the manner in which Ion Antonescu's treatment of the Jews differed from that meted out by Hitler. While German and Romanian forces joined in mass executions of Jews in Bessarabia and Bukovina in summer 1941, after that date Romanian treatment of the Jews followed a separate course. If—as in the German case—discrimination was followed by deportation, the latter in the Romanian case did not lead to the gas chamber. Tens of thousands of Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria were indeed shot in Golta county (on Romanian orders) in the period from winter 1941 until early spring 1942, but subsequently the plight of the Jews in Transnistria was characterized by degradation and callous neglect. Jews residing in the Ukraine beyond Transnistria were likely to suffer a quick death by shooting at the hands of the Germans, but in Transnistria Jews often faced a slow death by typhus or starvation. The contrast between German and Romanian actions is illustrated by the fact that during World War II, the largest proportion of Jews to survive Axis rule in the Soviet Union was in Transnistria. The fate of the Jews in Golta town is eloquent in this regard.

APPENDIX

Decree No. 23 of November 11 Regarding the Establishment of Ghettos in Transnistria

With regard to the fact that there is a large Jewish population on the territory which has been evacuated from various battle-zones, in order to protect the rear of the front;

With regard to the need to organize communal living for this evacuated population;

Seeing that this population must find a means of existence on its own account and through labor;

By virtue of the full powers accorded by Decree No. 1 of August 19, 1941, issued at Tighina;

WE COMMAND:

Article 1. All Jews who have come from the battle-front in Transnistria, as well as Jews from Transnistria, who for the same reasons were moved into various centers, or those who remain to be moved, are subject to the rules of life established by this present ordinance.

Article 2. The Inspectorate of Gendarmes in Transnistria determines the localities where the Jews can be housed. The Jews will be housed with regard to the size of their family in the dwellings abandoned by the Russian or Jewish refugees. Each family of Jews who receive a dwelling will be obliged to tidy it up forthwith and to keep it clean. If there are not enough of these dwellings, the Jews will also be housed in private homes, which will be allocated to them, for which they will pay the determined rent.

Article 3. All the Jews in a commune will be listed into a special register, in which will be entered:

- (1) Their name and first name;
- (2) Their nationality;
- (3) Their religion;
- (4) Their age;
- (5) Their profession;
- (6) The locality from which they come.

Each Jew will be issued an identity card with all the above details.

Article 4. A Jew can only leave the commune in which his domicile has been fixed if he has the authorization of the county prefect.

Article 5. All the Jews in a commune form a colony, which is administered by a head of the colony appointed by the district commander/governor [pretor].

The colony head is assisted by group leaders.

Each colony head will appoint a group leader for every twenty Jews, and he will be responsible for the whereabouts of all group members, for the well-being of the group, and will bring to the notice of the authorities any transgression by a member of the group.

The colony head and the leaders of the group are personally responsible for the whereabouts of all the Jews in the colony and for the executions of all the orders handed down by the administration and by the gendarmerie.

Article 6. The head of the colony is obliged to make a list of all the professional persons, the craftsmen and all able-bodied people in the colony. On the basis of the lists submitted by the colony head, the mayor of the commune will organize labor in the colony and in the commune in the following manner:

Craftsmen will be obliged to perform any service according to their skills that is required.

Professional persons will make themselves available to the commune authorities and will be used whenever the need arises.

Manual laborers will make themselves available to the town-hall and will perform any labor required of them for the benefit of the colony and the commune, or public service tasks;

They will be used for agricultural labor, for road or bridge repairs, for wood-cutting in the forests, quarrying stone or any other materials.

In return for labor duly performed the laborer will receive meal coupons to the value of one-day's labor, one-day's labor being valued at one mark a day for manual laborers, and two marks a day for qualified professionals.

The gendarmerie will continuously inspect and control the Jewish colonies, and will report their findings to the higher authorities.

Article 7. The use of Jews from one commune for labor in another, will be made with the approval of the county prefect.

The movement of specialists from one county to another in order to perform work will only be permitted with the approval of the Director of Administration and Labor of the [Transnistrian] government.

Article 8. Any Jew found in a place other than that in which his residence is fixed without the approval of the authorities, will be considered a spy and immediately punished according to military law in time of war.

Article 9. Jewish specialists may be used with government approval on all projects necessary for the reconstruction of industrial plants destroyed by war, for the reopening of factories, or for any other uses that may be deemed necessary.

Article 10. County prefects and the Inspector of Gendarmerie are charged with the implementation of the present ordinance.

Issued in our office, today, November 11, 1941¹¹⁸

NOTES

1. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, in association with the United States Holocaust Museum, 2000), p. 108. In *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu* ([Bucharest: Hasefer, 1998], pp. 124–47), Ioanid estimates the number of Jews murdered by Romanian and German (Einsatzgruppe D) units in the first weeks of the war as 23,513, of whom 6,348 were victims of the Einsatzgruppe D. In an analysis of Ioanid's figures, Dinu Giurescu (*România în al doilea război mondial* [Bucharest: All, 1999], p. 156) argues that of the number of victims attributed to the Romanian Army (i.e., 16,805), 5,841 were murdered by soldiers from identified units whose deeds are documented in archives or memoir literature, and 10,964 are “persons murdered without supporting documentary evidence.”

2. These figures (based on the reports sent to Antonescu by the governors of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria) represent the numbers of Jews deported and surviving in Transnistria on November 15, 1943. See the records of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs held in the Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter cited as USHMM/RMFA), RG–25.006M, reel 10, file 21, 133–35; reel 11, file 21, 589. Ioanid (*The Holocaust in Romania*, p. 174) estimates a similar death toll. Dorel Bancoș (*Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu* [Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 2000], p. 173) gives a similar figure of 149,000 for the number of Jews deported to Transnistria by Antonescu and puts the total number of victims among the Jewish community in Romania at the hands of the Antonescu regime at 119,000. If we add the estimate of 130,000–170,000 local Ukrainian Jews who perished in Transnistria under Romanian administration, we have a total figure of between 250,000 and 290,000 Jewish dead.

3. A reflection of the callousness of the Romanian authorities in Transnistria toward the local Ukrainian Jews is the cavalier attitude with which names and numbers were recorded. This makes it difficult to arrive at an accurate calculation of the numbers of Ukrainian Jews who perished. Furthermore, there is no reliable figure for the number of Ukrainian Jews who left Transnistria with the Soviet forces in summer and autumn 1941. Consequently, the researcher is limited to an educated estimate. Of the 300,000 Jews recorded in the 1939 Soviet census of the region, Ioanid (*The Holocaust in Romania*, p. 177) estimates that 100,000–150,000 remained behind when the Soviet forces withdrew. Estimates of Ukrainian Jewish victims in the period from September 1941 to November 1943 range from 130,000 (Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, p. 289) to “at least 170,000” (see Jean Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 3 [Bucharest: Atlas, 1998], pp. 300–301). According to the latter, “Between September 1941 and November 1943 at least 170,000 Ukrainian Jews were killed—the majority by the Romanians—or were handed over to the local German settlers, who butchered them (especially in the county of Berezovka).” Regarding the provinces of Bessarabia and Bukovina, Ioanid (*The Holocaust in Romania*, p. 172) concludes that a total of 124,000 Jews (81,000 from Bessarabia and 43,000 from Bukovina) withdrew from these provinces with the

Soviets in July 1941, leaving approximately 190,000 to face the Romanian and German advance.

4. Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Hungary numbered 564,000. Sixty-three thousand were murdered before the German occupation. The 501,000 murdered afterward included 132,000 Jews from Hungarian-annexed northern Transylvania. See Randolph L. Braham, "Northern Transylvania," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, vol. 4, ed. Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 1476–78. An undated report of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania (reprinted in *Martiriul Evreilor din România, 1940–1944: Documente și Mărturii* [Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1991], p. 264 [doc. no. 143]) gives the number of Jews in northern Transylvania before deportation in May 1944 as 165,061; the number deported as 151,180; the number in compulsory labor brigades between 1942 and 1944 as 14,881; the number of survivors returning to Transylvania in September 1945 as 15,769 (9.4 percent); the number of survivors in other countries as 10,000 (6.1 percent); and the number murdered in the death camps as 130,000.

A separate report by the Romanian section of the World Jewish Congress (*La population juive de la Transylvanie du Nord* [Bucharest: Section de Roumanie du Congrès Juif Mondial, 1945]) presented the following details about the fate of the Jews from northern Transylvania under Hungarian occupation. The Jewish population of northern Transylvania, according to the Hungarian census of January 31, 1941, totaled 151,125 persons. The number surviving as of September 1, 1945, was put at 29,405. Between May and June 1944, 137,486 Jews were deported from the region by the Hungarian and German authorities to labor and death camps in Poland and Germany. Of these 15,769 had been repatriated to northern Transylvania by September 1, 1945; 13,636 Jews from northern Transylvania escaped deportation, either by working for the auxiliary services of the Hungarian Army or by hiding.

5. The figures for Jews are reached by combining the 90,000 Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews who died after deportation with the 130,000–170,000 indigenous Transnistrian Jews who are estimated to have perished (see note 2 above).

6. It is impossible to give a more precise number since supporting data are lacking.

7. Quotation in Jean Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Atlas, 1998), p. 126.

8. Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ministers, July 8, 1941, reprinted in Lya Benjamin, ed., *Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944, vol. 2: Problema Evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996), p. 266 (doc. no. 99).

9. Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol. 3 (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), pp. 259–62.

10. See United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Romanian Ministry of National Defense, RG–25.003, reel 116, file 941.

11. For the German reaction to the expulsions of Jews by the Romanian authorities, see Andrej Angrick, “The Escalation of German-Romanian Anti-Jewish Policy after the Attack on the Soviet Union,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998), pp. 203–38.

12. Quotation in Alexander Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule*, (Iași: Centre for Romanian Studies, 1998), p. 211. This study was originally prepared as a Rand Corporation Report no. RM–1875 in 1957.

13. Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ministers, September 6, 1941, reprinted in Benjamin, *Evreii din România*, vol. 2, p. 303 (doc. no. 108).

14. Ion Șerbănescu, ed., *Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944, vol. 3, 1940–1942: Perioada unei Mari Restrișiți, part 2* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1997), p. 39 (doc. no. 367).

15. Ibid.

16. Bancoș, *Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu*, p. 162.

17. Șerbănescu, *Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944*, vol. 3, p. 228 (doc. no. 513). Confusingly, the Inspectorate of Gendarmes (see Șerbănescu, *Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944*, vol. 3, p. 182 [doc. no. 476]) reported that on January 1, 1942, there were only 401 Jews left in Bessarabia.

18. Ibid., p. 248 (doc. no. 534).

19. Ibid., p. 252 (doc. no. 538).

20. I am grateful to Viorel Achim for information about the deportation of the Romas.

21. The estimate came from the Central Institute of Statistics, which was subordinated to the Presidency of the Council of Minister—i.e., to Antonescu. The institute’s director was Sabin Manuilă.

22. Viorel Achim, “Deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria,” *Anuarul IRIR 2002* (2003), pp. 130–31.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p. 133.

25. Ibid., p. 132.

26. Ibid., p. 133.

27. Ibid., p. 134.

28. Ibid., p. 139.

29. Quotation in Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, pp. 66–67. Schwab’s order was periodically renewed in the three languages—hence the reference to “marks” in this version from 1943. Jean Ancel, personal communication.

30. For a facsimile of the order, see *ibid.*, p. 315.

31. *Ibid.* p. 68.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

34. See the appendix to this paper.

35. Dalia Ofer (“Life in the Ghettos of Transnistria,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 25 [1996], pp. 236–37) writes that “in the Balta region, populated by 12,477 Jews, there were twenty-one ghettos and camps. Four ghettos housed between 800 and 1,400 deportees each; the exception was the town of Bersad, in which 5,261 deportees lived in September 1943. Five ghettos numbered between 200 and 500 persons each, whereas the remainder held a few dozen Jews each.”

36. Dalia Ofer, “The Holocaust in Transnistria: A Special Case of Genocide,” in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, ed. Lucian Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), p. 143.

37. One of the most graphic accounts of the Bersad ghetto appears in Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Ruth’s Journey: A Survivor’s Memoir* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).

38. Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, pp. 160–64. Meir Teich, “The Jewish Self-Administration in Ghetto Shargarod (Transnistria),” *Yad Vashem Studies* 2 (1958), pp. 219–54.

39. Siegfried Jagendorf, *Jagendorf’s Foundry: Memoir of the Romanian Holocaust, 1941–1944*, ed. Aron Hirt-Manheimer (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

40. These points are raised in Ofer, "The Holocaust in Transnistria," pp. 144–45.
41. Its official name was the Aid Committee attached to the Aid Section of the Central Jewish Office (*Comisiunea de Ajutorare de pe lângă Secțiunea de Asistență a Centralei Evreilor din România*).
42. For details of the relevant decrees, see *Activitatea Centralei Evreilor din România* (1944; reprint ed. Bucharest: Editura Alma Tip, 1998), pp. 12–13.
43. USHMM/RMFA, RG–25.006M, reel 10, vol. 21, p. 245.
44. Among the recommendations in a December 22, 1943, report by two delegates of the Central Jewish Office, which was compiled on completion of an inspection of conditions in several Transnistrian ghettos, was "the replacement of ghetto heads who, through perversity or weakness, carry out a veritable embezzlement of clothing, medicines or monies which are sent." Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol. 5 (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), p. 535).
45. Șaraga's report can be found in the Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Romanian Security Service (hereafter cited as USHMM/RSS), RG–25.004M, reel 9, file 2710/33, pp. 106–63.
46. Quotation in Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, pp. 155–56.
47. Quotation in *ibid.*, p. 174.
48. Jean Ancel, "Antonescu and the Jews," *Yad Vashem Studies* 23 (1993), p. 258.
49. Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol.1, p. 169.
50. Quotation in *ibid.*, p. 171.
51. Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, p. 183.
52. Quotation in Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol.1, pp. 181–82.
53. USHMM/RSS, RG–25.004M, reels 19, 20, file 40011, vol. 6.
54. Reprinted in Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, p. 184.
55. For a detailed description of the massacre, taken from survivors' statements presented at the postwar trial, see *ibid.*, pp. 183–84; Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol.1, pp. 185–90.

56. Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, p. 208.
57. Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, pp. 185–86.
58. “Transylvania” meant southern Transylvania since the northern part had been ceded to Hungary in August 1940.
59. Benjamin, *Evreii din România*, vol. 2, p. 537 (doc. no. 179).
60. Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol. 10 (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), p. 215.
61. Declaration of Alexander Safran, Geneva, January 10, 1961, reprinted in Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol. 8 (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), p. 599.
62. Benjamin, *Evreii din România*, vol. 2, pp. 538–39 (doc. no. 179).
63. *Ibid.*, p. 539 (doc. no. 179).
64. Some claimed that he had suffered a nervous breakdown, others that he had contracted syphilis as a young officer and its effects had resurfaced. Mihai Antonescu gave a blander explanation: the problem was food poisoning. See the diary of Swiss Minister René de Weck (*Jurnal* [Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000], p. 135).
65. Larry Watts, *Romanian Cassandra: Ion Antonescu and the Struggle for Reform, 1916–1941* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1993), p. 362.
66. Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol. 4 (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), p. 120.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 250. *Martiriul Evreilor din România*, 1991, p. 218 (doc. no. 106).
68. “Evacuation” was the official term for deportation.
69. Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 4, p. 252. *Martiriul Evreilor din România*, p. 219 (doc. no. 107).
70. Quotation in Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, p. 363.
71. *Ibid.*

72. Christopher R. Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat DIII of Abteilung Deutschland 1940–1943* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978). Light is shed on the absence of Romanian railway officials from Eichmann's meeting by a report of the director general of the Romanian Railway, General T. C. Orezeanu, to Antonescu dated October 27, 1942: the German Railway Directorate Ost-Berlin had convened a conference on September 26, 1942, to arrange for special trains of Romanian Jews to be sent to German-occupied Poland. Orezeanu had no prior knowledge of this matter and approached the Ministry of the Interior and Radu Lecca, the plenipotentiary for Jewish affairs in Romania; both, he wrote, were also unaware of the issue. Orezeanu sent a request to the German Railways to postpone the conference, but his request was ignored and it went ahead without a Romanian representative.

According to information received by Orezeanu, it was resolved at the conference to provide special trains for the deportation of 280,000 Jews made up of fifty wagons and one passenger car (for the guards) that would carry 2,000 Jews every other day. The trains would depart from Adjud in southern Transylvania for Bełżec via Orășeni and Sniatyn, the frontier station for the General Government (Poland). In view of this situation, Orezeanu asked Antonescu for instructions. Antonescu replied simply in a handwritten note, "At the meeting of the Council of Ministers on October 13, 1942, I stopped the deportations of the Jews" (quotation in Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, p. 364). See also Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 10, pp. 237–38.

73. Such was Richter's enthusiasm for the deportation of Romanian Jews to the death camps in Poland that he drew up his own detailed plan.

74. Radu Ioanid, "The Antonescu Era," in *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1994), p. 162.

75. Some deportations continued nevertheless. On September 16, 1942, almost all Jews (407) among the Communists interned in Târgu-Jiu were deported to Vapniarka camp in Juguastu county, Transnistria. In addition, 523 Jews who had requested repatriation to the Soviet Union after the loss of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina in June 1940—and whose names had been found in the Soviet legation in Bucharest after the withdrawal of Soviet representation in June 1941—were deported on the same date. The latter were sent to Slivina camp in Oceacov county. Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră: Suferințele Evreilor din România, 1940–1944, vol.3: Transnistria* (Bucharest: Doigene, 1996), p. 449. Out of a total of 1,312 inmates (which included Christian common law criminals), there were 619 Communists in the camp at Vapniarka in November 1943.

An exception to those Jewish Communists deported was Iosif Chișinevski, who remained in Caransebeș. Born in 1905 in Bessarabia, Chișinevski is believed to have studied at the Communist party school in Moscow during the late 1920s. He was arrested in 1941 as the head of a Bucharest Communist cell and sent to Caransebeș jail. He was spared deportation to Transnistria because only Jews with sentences of less than ten years were sent to the province. Those with heavier sentences—such as

Chişinevski, Simion Zeiger, and Radu Mănescu—stayed in Caransebeş until their release on August 23, 1944. See Pavel Câmpeanu, “Pe marginea unei recenzii. Mistere și pseudo-mistere din istoria PCR [Partidul Comunist Român],” 22, no. 34, August 23–30, 1995, p. 12).

76. Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Odessa Archives (hereafter cited as USHMM/Odessa), RG–31.004M, reel 18, folder 2359, opis 1, part 6.

77. Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol, und Marschall Antonescu: Die Deutsch-Rumanischen Beziehungen, 1938–1944* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1965), p. 241.

78. For Mogilev see Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry*; Naftali Rabinovich, *My Town and I* (Tel Aviv, 1965 [Yiddish]). For Bersad see Gold, *Ruth's Journey*. For Sargorod see Teich, “The Jewish Self-Administration,” pp. 219–54.

79. Born in 1895 in the village of Frescăuți in the county of Rădăuți in Bukovina, Isopescu was an active gendarmerie officer whose batallion entered Chişinău after the capture of the city in July 1941. On August 15 the battalion was sent to Balta to establish the first gendarmerie post there. By the end of September, Isopescu was in Golta, reporting to Governor Alexianu that 1,000 Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina—the first convoy to reach the Bug—had been murdered by the Germans in Pervomaisk (on the east side of the river) with the help of armed Ukrainians. See Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, pp. 135–36.

80. Situated in the easternmost elbow of the River Bug, it covered an area of 4,000 square kilometers. Bounded in the north by the county of Ananiev, in the south by Berezovka, and in the west by Balta, it was primarily an agricultural area consisting of fertile black-earth plain. The principal crops were wheat, sunflower, and maize. See the Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Nikolayev Archives (hereafter cited as USHMM/Nikolayev), Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 1, file 470, pp. 189–90. In an undated table issued by the Golta prefecture, but one that from the accompanying documents in the Nikolayev files can be assumed to be from 1943, the total population of the county—excluding Jews and Gypsies—can be computed at about 115,000. USHMM/Nikolayev RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/134.

81. USHMM/Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 1, file 470, p. 192.

82. USHMM/Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 3, 2178/1/5, p. 264.

83. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/67.

84. Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, p. 218.

85. For a detailed description of this massacre in which tens of thousands of Jews were shot—the figure of 48,000 was given in the Bucharest war crimes trials—see Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, pp. 183–84; Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, pp. 185–90.

86. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008 Microfiche 2178/1/77. A table of the “ghettos” in Golta county—which, following earlier official practice, includes the concentration camps on the former Soviet state farms and the labor camp in Golta—sent by Isopescu on October 6, 1943, to the Transnistrian government, lists thirty-six “ghettos” with a population of 2,980 Jews. In fact, thirty-two of the sites mentioned were former Soviet state farms on which Jews were forced to work; one was the internment camp in the town of Golta, also described in documents as a “labor camp”; and three were ghettos, all of which were located in the town of Golta. This list distinguishes between a Ghetto No. 3 (housing seventeen persons) and the labor camp there (with 109 Jews), which in a February 20, 1943, report of the deputy prefect of Golta (see below) is also designated “Ghetto No. 3.” USHMM/Odessa, RG–31.004M, reel, 6, file 2242/1/1561, p. 53. The list follows, with the number of Jews in each “ghetto.”

1.	Akhmechetka	25
2.	Duca-Vodă	205
3.	Mezamojna	47
4.	Coșter	86
5.	Semihatca	144
6.	Bogdanovka	116
7.	Venograd sat	25
8.	Calinovka	14
9.	Marienburg	20
10.	Novocantacuzenca	6
11.	Brosco	5
12.	Berisovca	10
13.	Moldavca Ferma	59
14.	Moldavca	3
15.	Secția II Duca-Vodă	87
16.	Domanevca	541
17.	Cazarino	22
18.	Sfarteva	24
19.	Zabera	8
20.	Vladimirovca	3
21.	Maiorse	19
22.	Novosilovca	5
23.	Novoalexandrovca	3
24.	Basarabia Ferma	57
25.	Alexandru cel Bun	272
26.	Mareșal Antonescu Ferma	543
27.	Staro-Helenova	7
28.	Nicolaievca	41

29.	Bucovina Ferma	10
31.	Trei-Bubi	23
32.	Liubașevca	101
33.	Golta Ghetto No. 1	105
34.	Golta Ghetto No. 2	68
35.	Golta Ghetto No. 3	17
36.	Golta Labor Camp No. 1	109
	Total	2,980

Gendarmerie figures submitted to the Ministry of the Interior on September 16, 1943, listed 820 Jews from Bessarabia and fifty-four from Bukovina in Golta county, a total of 874. Carp, *Cartea Neagră*, vol. 3, p. 458. Simple subtraction leaves just over 2,000 local Jews.

87. USHMM/Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 3, p. 59. Comparing the names of the occupants of the labor camp and those of “Ghetto No. 3” shows that they were one and the same. See these lists in USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/77, p. 33, and unnumbered pages that follow.

88. USHMM/Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 3, pp. 42a–b.

89. The Romanians adopted these special marks that had been introduced when the Germans arrived in Transnistria; the official ratio was one RKKS to sixty Romanian lei.

90. See the list of Jews from Ghetto No. 3 (the labor camp) who were designated to leave. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/77; USHMM, Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 3 (n.p.).

91. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/77. A list of Jews in the Golta labor camp puts the number at 303; from its sequence in the Nikolayev record group file, it dates from the same time as Pădure’s report of February 20 to Isopescu. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/77.

92. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008, Microfiche 2178/1/77.

93. Ibid. Copies of permits for travel between the ghetto and workplace can be found in USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/77.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/67.

97. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/57.

98. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/77.

99. At the time they were forty-four and forty-six years old, respectively.

100. These accusations were borne out by a December 22, 1943, report compiled by two delegates of the Central Jewish Office on their completion of an inspection of several Transnistrian ghettos, including those in Golta. In respect to Golta, where aid was channeled through the committee in Ghetto No. 2, they recommended that “given the experience with the Creștinu-Follender leadership, we are advised that crates of goods should be despatched through Tighina-Tiraspol; those for Domanovka [Domanevka] should not be opened in Golta, and, if possible, they should be sent care of engineer Osias Grunberg, David Cervinski, or Leon Kornfeld, persons of good faith.” Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 5, p. 535.

101. The other members of the Golta council (as of August 13, 1943) were Aladar Brauch, Isac Cohn, and Avram Lupescu. All were residents, like Creștinu and Follender, of Ghetto No. 2. USHMM/Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 3, 2178/1/368, p. 39. Shortly after the war, both Creștinu and Follender were arrested and tried for war crimes in separate trials in May and June 1945. They were accused of embezzling money given to them for food by Jewish internees in the camps of Vigoda and Alexandrovka, and of doing the same with funds given by these same Jews for food supplies in anticipation of their deportation eastward to Bogdanovka, even though the Romanian authorities had warned Creștinu and Follender about the length of the journey. Locked into freight cars, many Jews died during the seventeen-day rail journey from lack of food and water. Both accused were found guilty and given jail terms: Follender was sentenced to eight years. USHMM/RSS, RG–25.004M, reel 29, file 40013, vol. 6, pp. 344–45; and reel 30, file 40013, vol. 6, pp. 358–59.

102. USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 2178/1/77.

103. USHMM/Odessa, RG–31.004, reel 18, 2358/1/60.

104. USHMM/Odessa, RG–31.004M, reel 13, folder 2264, opis 1, part 9; USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008M, Microfiche 1594/3/10. A shortage of manpower for public projects in Golta led Isopescu in late July to call on all inhabitants in the town of Golta to perform “labor for the public good” (*munca de folos obștesc*). All able-bodied citizens between the ages of sixteen and sixty were required to work five days “public labor” per month without payment; an extra day’s work would be paid. Exemptions were given to employees of state institutions and factories, women who were five-months pregnant, women who had children under five years of age or who had more than three children under ten, and students during the school year. Merchants and the self-employed were also exempted on payment of a tax of fifteen RKKS per

day. The penalty for not carrying out this obligation was a fine of 50–300 RKKS; persistent offenders would be interned in a labor camp for a period of one month to a year. Ordinance issued on July 23, 1943; USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008, Microfiche 2178/367.

105. USHMM/Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 3, 2178/1/73, p. 220.

106. USHMM/Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 3, 2178/1/368, p. 150.

107. Jean Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura Atlas, 1998), p. 226.

108. *Ibid.*, pp. 229–30.

109. General Constantin Tobescu, head of the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, informed Isopescu on September 19, 1943, that “to date fifteen Jews have escaped from the camps and ghettos in Golta, all of them with the incorrect [sic] assistance of Romanian officials.” In one case cited, a Jewish employee of the prefecture falsified an identity card. Tobescu ordered Isopescu to inform him about the measures that he intended to take. An irritated Isopescu wrote over the top of Tobescu’s letter, “All kikes to be moved to Akhmechetka on October 25” (USHMM/Nikolayev, RG–31.008, Microfiche, 2178/1/57). A report from a representative to the Aid Committee dated October 1943, on which the signature is illegible, mentions that Isopescu had told him that he had already given the order for the first transport of Jews to Akhmechetka to proceed. Whether other transports followed is not clear. Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 5, p. 501.

110. One was from Ghetto No. 1, five were from Ghetto No. 2, and the rest from the labor camp. See United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Central Archives of the Republic of Moldavia (hereafter cited as USHMM/CARM), RG–54.001M, reel 18, file 46372; USHMM/RSS, RG–25.004M, reel 6, fond 10626, vol. 7.

111. USHMM/Nikolayev, Accession 1996.A.0340, reel 5, file 2178/1/62.

112. *Ibid.*

113. USHMM/CARM, RG–54.001M, reel 18, file 46372. A gendarmerie register of Jews who completed their term of punishment by forced labor between October 14 and October 19, 1943, listed twenty-six Jews from Golta camp, eight from Ananiev, and one each from Balta and Berezovka. Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Czernowitz Archive, RG–31.006M, reel 12 (no file number).

114. USHMM/CARM, RG–54.001M, reel 17, file 680.1/4634.2.

115. Antonescu's indecision on repatriation is charted by Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, pp. 249–58.

116. He returned to Romania in February 1944. See Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, p. 249, n. 214.

117. USHMM/RSS, RG–25.004M, reel 20, fond 40011, vol. 7, p. 303.

118. Issued by Governor Alexianu of Transnistria, reprinted in Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1, pp. 389–93.

REEVALUATING THE EMERGENCE, FUNCTION, AND FORM OF THE JEWISH COUNCILS PHENOMENON

Dan Michman

A student or scholar interested in the Jewish Councils (JCs) will find abundant studies on the shelves of every Holocaust library. Indeed, the literature sometimes seems to be too overwhelming to be able to absorb it. Yet on reading through even only a partial segment of this literature, one will find that most of it depicts the histories of councils (and/or their chairmen) in local settings. Almost sixty years after the end of World War II, there is no in-depth comparative and not even one comprehensive study encompassing the whole phenomenon throughout Europe and during the Nazi period.

Moreover, all studies basically repeat conceptual approaches to the JC phenomenon that were conceived at a relatively early stage of Holocaust research thirty to forty years ago. Despite the enormous developments in research on all facets of the Nazi regime, and especially our understanding of the emergence of the “Final Solution”—developments that demand reassessment of related issues¹—no equivalent development can be monitored regarding the JC issue.

The basic scholarly concepts and views that dominate the field were shaped in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s by Raul Hilberg, Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Trunk, and on a minor level by Aharon Weiss who can be counted as belonging to the “Trunk school” (the first half of the 1970s). Trunk, however, actually carried out an enterprise started by Philip Friedman in the late 1940s and early 1950s.² All researchers dealing either with the JCs themselves or with their role in other contexts repeatedly follow the conceptual frameworks established by these authors. Consequently, the built-in background assumptions concerning the nature of the Third Reich and its anti-Jewish policies that shaped the views of the founders of JC research are also accepted by new generations of researchers. The existing views on the origins, framework, functioning, and structure of the JCs are so deeply ingrained that they blind scholars from seeing that their own data sometimes diverge from or even contradict the conventional wisdom. The time has come to reevaluate the JCs and the research literature dealing with this phenomenon.

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE JC RESEARCH CANON

Raul Hilberg, author of the authoritative *The Destruction of the European Jews*, is usually viewed as a historian and forerunner of the “functionalist” school.³ Both characterizations are only partially true. Hilberg’s basic approach is that of an organizational political scientist, not a historian. From his perspective the Holocaust is a well-defined event running from 1933 through 1945 that should be analyzed as a closed unit. Its singular feature is that of a modern state bureaucracy functioning as a machine and focused on the destruction of a specific group (i.e., Jews).⁴ Within this framework Hilberg speaks about dates, stages, and developments (definition, expropriation, emigration, concentration, extermination); however, these are not real historical (i.e., multifaceted and dynamic) stages and developments but consecutive organizational ones.

Hilberg is indeed a functionalist in that he emphasizes the role of the bureaucracy instead of Hitler and the non-preconditioned existence of murderous intentions. However, Hilberg—because of his organizational approach—is close to the “intentionalist” school in Holocaust research in his depiction of a fundamentally linear development (i.e., escalation) of anti-Jewish policies (what might be called “proto-intentionalism”⁵). Within this actually static conceptual framework, the JCs are viewed as an essential link in the German machinery of destruction. Thus for Hilberg certain questions—e.g., who conceived the idea of the JCs, when the idea emerged, why the JCs were not applied everywhere, why there were deep differences between them—never arise.

Hannah Arendt was a political philosopher and moralist. She presented her evaluation and understanding of the JC phenomenon in a series of articles on the Eichmann trial and later published as a book entitled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.⁶ The major framework of her interpretation of Nazism and the Holocaust was totalitarianism, an issue to which she had devoted her most important study *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.⁷

The essence of the totalitarian state, in Arendt’s eyes, was to suppress and destroy all that makes human beings real human beings: plurality, spontaneity, creativity. “The totalitarian attempt at global conquest and total domination has been the destructive way out of all impasses. Its victory may coincide with the destruction of humanity; wherever it has ruled, it has begun to destroy the essence of man,” she wrote in the preface to the first edition of her book.⁸ This destruction is carried out through

the centralized structure of the totalitarian state, which includes four basic elements: it is led by a leader whose dynamic “will” is the supreme law; it divides the world into two hostile camps; it is characterized by a bureaucracy and front organizations; and it employs terror imposed through a secret police.⁹

According to Arendt, the Holocaust was a totalitarian act carried out by a smoothly functioning bureaucracy and prepared many years before the actual murder campaign started. But it could not have been carried out through (German) bureaucratic obedience only; Jewish collaboration was essential—even the cornerstone for the final grand success, in her eyes—and this link was found in the JCs, which were composed of Jewish leaders. “The establishment of Quisling governments in occupied territories was always accompanied by the establishment of a central Jewish organization.” Without this Jewish cooperation, “there would have been chaos and plenty of misery,” but the extermination program would not have reached the level that it actually did (between 4.5 and six million victims) because of a serious lack of German manpower. “For a Jew, the role carried out by the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people, is undoubtedly the darkest chapter in this whole dark story,” she concluded.¹⁰ Thus according to Arendt, the JCs were an integral and essential part of the Nazi totalitarian extermination project and were established “always” and “everywhere” by the German bureaucracy and composed of Jewish leaders. These leaders did not measure up to the moral standards required from leaders vis-à-vis a totalitarian regime.

As is well known, Arendt’s moral judgments on the behavior of Jewish leaders caused widespread controversy. In the wake of this controversy, more systematic research on the JC phenomenon was undertaken. Jacob Robinson, who published an extensive reaction to Arendt’s book,¹¹ recruited Trunk to carry out a comprehensive research project on the JCs in Eastern Europe and complete the project initiated by Friedman. Although the resulting book (*Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation*) was criticized for the accuracy of its sources,¹² Trunk introduced the Jewish aspect—“internal Jewish history” in his formulation—of the JCs: their importance in maintaining the organizational structure and functioning of the separated and isolated Jewish communities (although they were created by the Germans).¹³ Weiss reinforced this aspect in his studies of a variety of JCs and Jewish police organizations in Poland.¹⁴

Trunk’s volume is descriptive and not very analytical (there are only five pages of analysis compared to 569 pages of description), yet Trunk clearly had a general

concept of German policies in mind. “Although the ultimate fate of the Jews under Nazi rule in these territories was everywhere identical, there were some local differences in the process of persecution and extermination, depending on how the principle of ‘local leadership’ was applied and on the general lawlessness prevailing.”¹⁵

Thus in his eyes there were differences in the application of the local leadership system, but it was an overall system and it was applied everywhere. Moreover, Trunk also believed that the JCs were an integral part of overall Nazi persecution policies leading to extermination. Consequently, he did not ask background questions about the emergence of the JCs; the first chapter of his book deals with the “official decrees establishing the Jewish Councils” and mentions Reinhard Heydrich’s “express letter” (*Schnellbrief*) of September 21, 1939, as the first decree.¹⁶ The remainder of the book is devoted to a topical description of different aspects and functions of the JCs throughout the 1939–44 period, but without relating these to a clear framework of historical development and context (except for a division made between the predeportation and deportation periods). One may conclude that in Trunk’s eyes there was not even a question if the Germans wanted to establish JCs at all: it was an axiom that they wanted to have them.

Summarizing the studies of Hilberg, Arendt, Trunk, and Weiss, we can say that they held several assumptions in common.

(1) There was a harmonized (intended or escalating) German anti-Jewish policy toward Jews (“conspiracy”¹⁷) of which the JCs were an essential and integral corollary. Therefore when speaking about the fact of their establishment and who stood behind it, the general formulation “the Germans” is always used. In addition, the JCs are usually seen from the perspective of the Final Solution, and it is assumed that they were part of the ghettoization and isolation process that preceded it and therefore existed “everywhere.”

(2) Because Jews led the councils, their behavior has been perceived as directly related to the pregnant question of collaboration. Indeed, in analyzing the councils’ activities, two schools of thought may be discerned: the “Hilberg school,” which regards the councils foremost as instruments that did the bidding of the Nazi administrative system; and the “Trunk-Weiss school,” which stresses the councils’ positive aspect in light of their organizational functions on behalf of the Jewish community. Yet despite the protracted dispute between these two schools, both agree that the councils functioned as a Jewish leadership. This consensus about the core of

the issue leads to disagreements in evaluation. People have expectations of leaders and opinions about what they should be doing (this is what stood behind the stormy “Arendt controversy”).

WHY SHOULD THESE ASSUMPTIONS BE QUESTIONED?

The assumptions inherent in these conceptualizations of the JC phenomenon dominated the first two decades of Holocaust research. Beginning in the mid-1960s, however, the functionalist school of research gradually emerged and changed our understanding of Nazi anti-Jewish policies.¹⁸ Criticisms have been raised against functionalism, especially the extreme versions proclaimed by scholars such as Hans Mommsen; mainstream Holocaust research today usually adopts a more moderate version that also includes intentionalist elements (the centrality of Hitler, for instance).¹⁹ Nevertheless, functionalism has altered our views about the operation of the Third Reich in a fundamental way and has resulted in a better understanding of anti-Jewish policies.

Which contributions of functionalism should be taken into account when dealing with the JC issue?

(1) The “road to Auschwitz” was “twisted,” as Karl Schleunes formulated it in 1970.²⁰ In other words, there were ups and downs, trials and failures, and not a constant, linear escalation.

(2) Anti-Jewish policies, even with a general framework and direction, were shaped through ongoing power struggles between different authorities in the Third Reich that “worked toward the Führer,” as Ian Kershaw termed it.²¹

If this was indeed the situation, the following questions should be asked about the JC phenomenon.²²

(1) Who conceived of the JC idea, the Germans in general or some specific body or person(s) in the bureaucracy?

(2) Did the idea emerge as part of the Final Solution or for another reason?

(3) When and how did the idea emerge, during the occupation of Poland and as formulated in Heydrich’s Schnellbrief or in some other way and at a different time?

(4) Was it indeed applied everywhere?

(5) Should the JCs be seen as the leadership of the Jewish communities under occupation?

TERMINOLOGY OF THE JC PHENOMENON

Although “Jewish Councils” has become an accepted technical term for the organizational bodies imposed on Jews by the Third Reich, one can find additional terms used at the time—e.g., *Ältestenräte*, *Obmann*, *Oberjude*, *Interessenvereinigung*, *Kultusgemeinde*, *Judenvereinigung* (to mention a few). Since some of these bodies differed considerably from each other, is it proper to use one term for all?

Moreover, because the officials of the JCs have traditionally been perceived as leaders, one should ask if they really were. Did not the very fact of their forced nomination by the Germans change their status as leaders? Do we not have enough examples to show that in many cases people who had no leadership background in the community were appointed to the JCs? In addition, were there not many other Jewish leaders during that period—rabbis, leaders of youth movements, or community leaders (in places where the community continued to coexist with the JC, such as in the Netherlands and France)?

If so, we should consider using another term that can provide a better understanding of the JC phenomenon: “headship.” This term, coined by sociologists in the 1930s to differentiate between leadership and a similar—yet different—phenomenon of appointed heads within organizational frameworks, has been defined by Cecil Gibb as follows:

- (1) Domination or headship is maintained through an organized system, and not by the spontaneous recognition by fellow group members of the individual’s contribution to group locomotion.
- (2) The group goal is chosen by the head man in line with his interests and is not internally determined by the group itself.
- (3) In the domination or headship relation, there is little or no sense of shared feeling or joint action in the pursuit of the given goal.
- (4) There is in the dominance [or headship] relation a wide social gap between the group members and the head, who strives to maintain this social distance as an aid to his coercion of the group.
- (5) Most basically, the[se] two forms of influence [leadership and headship] differ with respect to the source of authority which is exercised. The leader’s authority is spontaneously accorded to him by his fellow group members. The authority of the head derives from some extra-group power, which he has over the members of the group, who cannot meaningfully be called his followers. They accept his domination on pain of punishment, rather than follow.²³

The second characteristic in Gibb's list (choice of goals by an exogenous force) and the fifth characteristic (an exogenous source of leader authority) are relevant to the phenomenon of the JCs and correspond to it especially well. This is not to say that the JCs did not have leadership functions too: they had, but this was not their main characteristic.

HEADSHIPS AND THE GENERAL CONDUCT OF ANTI-JEWISH POLICIES

There is no record of a single order by a supreme authority of the Third Reich that established headships. Usually the research literature focuses on Heydrich's Schnellbrief as such an order, but that is incorrect. This "express letter" was a summary of orders given by Heydrich to the commanders of the Einsatzgruppen in the context of the invasion of Poland;²⁴ it did not apply to other countries conquered later (the Netherlands, for instance) and surely did not cover earlier situations (Vienna, Prague, Danzig, Germany proper). That so many headships actually existed derived from a phenomenon of gradual spreading. What caused this phenomenon?

Moreover, anti-Jewish policies—economic spoliation; arrests of intellectuals and leaders, political activists, or transgressors of racial purity (those who committed "racial disgrace" [*Rassenschande*]); restrictive legislation—developed and were applied without using Jewish headships regardless of whether they existed. This was the situation in Germany in the 1930s and in many countries (in Western Europe, for instance) before—and apart from—the creation of headships.

How, why, and by whose initiation did the idea emerge? The term "Judenrat" is first found in a proposal for anti-Jewish policies prepared by an interdepartmental committee in April 1933. The term was apparently borrowed from medieval terminology used to describe the Jewish community councils (the Nuremberg community council in the fourteenth century, for instance, was called "Judenrat"; other communities had "Ältestenräte," another term used by the Nazis for headships). "Judenrat" in the 1933 proposal meant a Jewish government for a separated (but not isolated) Jewish community continuing to live in Germany. It was foreseen that this Judenrat would be democratically elected every four years. This proposal encountered much opposition in governmental circles, and consequently was not applied.

In 1937 a new idea emerged within the Jewish Department (*Judenabteilung*) of the SS Security Service (SD), where Adolf Eichmann worked. This department harshly criticized current anti-Jewish policies as being too lenient and unfocused. Its officials

believed that the emigration of Jews from Germany (i.e., “cleansing” the country of Jews) should be the primary goal. Until that time anti-Jewish policies had been shaped on a general level—propaganda, legislation, directives, and the like—and applied only to individuals. The officials in the Jewish Department felt that in order to achieve effective mass emigration, pressure should be exerted on the Jewish community as a whole. This could be done only through leaders or heads of a well-organized Jewish community. Such a body should be controlled by a supervising authority.

These ideas were first proposed in 1937, especially in a January report entitled “On the Jewish Problem.”²⁵ The important point is that the origins of the headship idea are found in a dispute among designers of anti-Jewish policies over how to best carry out those policies. The SD experts believed that this should be done through tight control over the Jewish community. Despite the fact that the SS and police were united (but not yet unified) under Heinrich Himmler’s command as early as summer 1936, they still had strong rivals in other power centers in the Third Reich (Hermann Göring, Joseph Goebbels, and others). Thus although some initial steps to apply the concept were undertaken, many obstacles remained. The Jewish Department was therefore waiting for the right moment to implement its plans.

This moment came with the *Anschluss* in March 1938. Immediately after the occupation of Austria, Eichmann traveled to Vienna and reorganized the local Jewish community in what could be called the prototype of the Judenrat system. Initially he supervised it in his position as an official of the local SD branch; in August 1938, however, a Central Office for Jewish Emigration (*Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung*) was created to supervise the community, and Eichmann was appointed its de facto director (it was officially headed by Franz Walter Stahlecker). A similar organizational structure was created in Prague in July 1939 after the occupation of the Czech part of Czechoslovakia (henceforth called “Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia”), and in Danzig between the end of 1938 and March 1939.

The characteristics of these bodies—they were still called “Jewish community” (*Jüdische Kultusgemeinde*)—included the limitation of their authority to one locality, at least on their establishment; their having all local Jews under their control; their establishment by an oral order, not a decree; their establishment shortly after occupation; and their direct functioning under a supervising SS or police authority. This was the organizational structure preferred by the Jewish experts of the SS. At this stage

the newly organized Jewish organizations were mobilized mainly to promote emigration, but they also dealt with education and welfare.

In the aftermath of *Kristallnacht* (November 9–10, 1938), Heydrich proposed to apply the same system to Germany proper. Apparently there was still some resistance from other German authorities, who feared that the creation of such a body would centralize control over Jews to the increasingly powerful SS and police establishment. Whatever the background struggles were, in Germany in 1939 a variation on the first model (a countrywide organization of Jews called the Reich Union of Jews in Germany [*Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*]) began to function in February and was anchored in an official law in July that linked it not only to the police and SS, but also to the Ministry of Interior. Thus on the eve of the invasion of Poland, there were two models of Jewish forced organizations: a local one, preferred by the Jewish experts of the SS and police; and a countrywide one, which resulted from compromise among various governmental agencies.

During the years of German expansion, we can see an interesting distribution of those two models. Wherever the SS and police were strongly represented—e.g., Poland, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union, Tunisia—the local model (Judenrat) was applied. Whenever these institutions were weak and had to compromise—e.g., Germany, Belgium, Slovakia, Romania, Algeria—the countywide model (a Union of Jews [*Judenvereinigung*]) was applied. The two models had very different characteristics.

Characteristic	Judenrat Model	Judenvereinigung Model
Time of formation	Shortly after the onset of the occupation (usually within a few days or weeks)	Long after the beginning of the occupation (sometimes up to 1.5 years)
Method of formation	On the basis of verbal order or in letter tendered personally by the German local commander to the “elder of the Jews”	On the basis of legal regulation
Official status	No <i>ab initio</i> legal anchor	Anchored <i>ab initio</i> in the local legal system. (Posts were filled only after the law or regulation was promulgated.)

Characteristic	Judenrat Model	Judenvereinigung Model
Subordinate to	A German local or town commander or (more often) the local German security apparatus	A government ministry of the occupied state (i.e., a non-German authority)
Areas of authority	Local, sometimes district	Countrywide (with local branches)
Chairman's authority	Decisive	Limited; decisions made collectively by the committee
Formal and initial duties	Concentration, census, and registration of Jews; organization of forced labor; maintenance of community order	Emigration, education, social welfare

In a number of places (e.g., Italy, Croatia, Denmark), no headships were created at all. Moreover, there is evidence that the Judenvereinigung model was used as a counter-model to the Judenrat model, a counter-model that was proposed by rival authorities to limit the expansion of SS power, which was undermining the authority of others. This was the case in Bohemia-Moravia (December 1939), the Netherlands (May 1941), and France (October-November 1941).

In a similar vein, the Hans Frank decree of November 28, 1939—which established Jewish Councils in the Generalgouvernement in Poland—should be interpreted not as an expansion of but as a counter-step to Heydrich's Schnellbrief; the intent of the decree was to recover the Generalgouvernement's authority over the Jews after it had been appropriated by the SS security wing (the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, created in September 1939) during the early stages of occupation. Thus Frank's decree should not be coupled with Heydrich's Schnellbrief as a founding decree of the headship system, but should be viewed as an expression of a power struggle among the German authorities (interestingly, Frank's decree was applied only in a limited number of cases). In other words, anti-Jewish policies were not a domain apart from the general functioning of the Third Reich, and can be fully understood only in that context. Moreover, the headship system shows that the widely accepted division between Eastern and Western Europe does not apply: Western European Amsterdam and southern European Salonika had an Eastern European-style Judenrat, while central and

Eastern European Slovakia and Romania had Western European-style Judenvereinigungen.

HEADSHIPS, THE GHETTO SYSTEM, AND THE FINAL SOLUTION

The idea of headships developed over time and in varying forms. The most important consequence of this notion is to undermine the belief that Heydrich's Schnellbrief is the starting point of the JC phenomenon. The belief that there is a basic distinction between developments in the pre-September 1939 period in Germany and later developments in Poland and the rest of Europe is so strongly ingrained among researchers that they tended—and still tend—to overlook their own contradictory findings. Trunk himself mentioned that

as was frequently the habit of the Germans in regard to other anti-Jewish measures, local officials did not wait for the higher echelons of the occupation authorities to order the establishment of the Councils. They nominated or confirmed the representatives of the Jewish population on their own, even prior to Heydrich's *Schnellbrief* of September 21, 1939.²⁶

Trunk also provides several examples. Yet this passage, in Chapter 2 of his book, comes some twenty pages after his presentation of the Schnellbrief (in Chapter 1) as the starting point and an additional remark that Chapter 2 will deal with “the emergence of the Councils and their transition from theory to practice.”²⁷

The actual situation—the emergence of the councils before the Schnellbrief—suggests an opposite development: from practice to theory. Perhaps there is another explanation, but neither Trunk nor others were concerned with this obvious problem. The question is whether orders regarding the JCs were given *before* the invasion. Indeed, this question is linked to a larger one: did anybody prepare anti-Jewish policies in Poland before the invasion? An amazing facet of Holocaust research in general (and on Poland especially) is the axiom that these policies developed only after the invasion. Not a single study deals with the issue of possible preparations.

However, the establishment of JCs before the Schnellbrief suggests that the latter scenario is the correct one. Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm hinted at this in their book about the Einsatzgruppen but did not prove it.²⁸ Yet documents of the SD Jewish Department show that it was preparing for the future expansion of the Reich, which would result in the inclusion of additional Jews, as early as late 1938. Thus it started to assemble information about Jews in the countries neighboring

Germany.²⁹ A document of May 9, 1939, emphasized contacts with Poland in order to prepare material for files to be used in a possible military campaign (*Einsatz*).³⁰ This is the missing link between (on the one hand) the creation of headships in Germany, Austria, Bohemia-Moravia, and Danzig in the late 1930s, and (on the other) the beginning of anti-Jewish policies and the establishment of the JCs in Poland.³¹

This leads us to two other observations. Conceptually the JC phenomenon is usually linked to both the ghetto system and the Final Solution. However, the headship idea existed from an early period; its goal was to serve as a tool to implement policies developed by the SD. On the other hand, as Christopher Browning has convincingly shown, the ghetto system developed independently and only after the invasion of Poland.³² Thus headships existed before ghettos were established, and in many places where there were no ghettos. Moreover, there were headships in forced labor camps in Poland in 1940–41 (an issue not treated by Trunk in his book) and in later years in certain concentration camps that had a special status (e.g., Theresienstadt, Bergen-Belsen, Vught). Indeed, there was almost no ghetto without a headship: such an organizational body was obligatory where Jews were physically separated from the surrounding society. Nevertheless, the two phenomena are not inherently related.

As for the Final Solution, once again it should be emphasized that its emergence occurred in the beginning of the 1940s after the headship system had already been shaped. This emergence did not depend on the headships, and the headships never played a role in the considerations and ideology promoting the Final Solution. Moreover, the murder campaign during the first weeks after the invasion of the Soviet Union that started in the area of Einsatzgruppe A (the Baltic states)³³ did not make use of the JCs; actually most JCs in this area were established when certain Jewish groups and localities were temporarily exempted from murder—i.e., in order to maintain the life of these communities. On the other hand, in the area of Einsatzgruppe B (Eastern Galicia), a wave of establishment of JCs took place after the invasion, but there the murder campaign started only in the fall. Thus there was no direct connection between the murders as such and the establishment of the JCs. After being established, however, they were used later when murderous actions were again carried out.

CONCLUSION

The headship system, which was invented to serve the anti-Jewish policies of the SS, evolved over time. Headships were viewed as an instrument and thus were not linked to

a fixed goal: in the beginning the system was used to promote emigration, later to serve the organization of forced labor and maintenance of Jewish life in legally or physically separated realms, and only in the end to be one link in the deportation and extermination machinery (and even that not everywhere). Within the headship system, there were considerable differences between the two models—Judenrat and Judenvereinigung—the importance of which became especially clear at the time of deportations associated with the extermination plan.

An examination of Jewish headships that operated under Nazi rule shows that Judenräte were always under greater pressure than unions to collaborate with the authorities. This was not primarily due to the personal characteristics of those who headed these entities: the chairmen of Unions of Jews (e.g., rabbis Leo Baeck in Germany and Salomon Ullman in Belgium) were often weaker in character (and softer in their emotional makeup) than many chairmen of Judenräte, but this did not inspire the former officials to greater collaboration with the German authorities.

When it was time to implement the deportations, the SS itself decided to minimize or totally eschew the use of Unions of Jews and their chairmen³⁴ because urgency and efficiency were of supreme importance for the deportation machinery; the SS people did not wish to waste time in discussions with less centralized bodies that tried to play out their organizations' legal anchors and seek the intervention of local authorities. Instead, there are several indications that these SS people tried to coerce local Jewish officials to cooperate under pressure. In most cases the Einsatzgruppen and Wehrmacht embarked on systematic murder in the occupied Soviet Union in summer 1941, even before Judenräte were established. Sometimes even where Judenräte were formed, they were not initially asked to serve the needs of the extermination operation. Elsewhere (for example, in Croatia in 1941–43 or in Italy in 1943) the extermination machine went about its work although Judenräte were not established at all.

The Jewish headship was an instrument invented by the Jewish experts of the SS, used by the Germans when they deemed it useful, and circumvented when they did not. The Judenrat model was more efficient than the headship model, but it too was a means and not an end; for this reason the headship method was neither completed nor perfected in all parts of Europe. Thus our analysis explains in structural terms the origin of the headship idea as applied and disseminated in the Third Reich. It may also explain the degree of collaboration among various Jewish headships and the German

occupation authorities, with greater emphasis on understanding the structural perspective and less emphasis on—although not total disregard of—the personal, psychological, and moral aspects of the people who acted under the auspices of Jewish headships.

NOTES

1. For an overview of the history of Holocaust research, see Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography—A Jewish Perspective: Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches, and Fundamental Issues* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), part IX.
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THE BIAŁYSTOK AND KIELCE GHETTOS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Sara Bender

During the past two decades, scholars have written research reports and monographs about several Jewish communities in Poland that were destroyed in the Holocaust. Archivists in the United States and Israel conducted a massive campaign to gather testimony from Holocaust survivors and some of the major World War II and Holocaust testimonials have been computerized. An invaluable aid to those engaged in studying the history of the Polish Jews during the period of the German occupation, these tools have enabled scholars to conduct comparative studies of the ghettos—for example, of two ghettos in Poland (Białystok and Kielce) to which Holocaust historians had previously accorded scant attention.

FROM SOVIET TO GERMAN OCCUPATION

In accordance with the terms of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, the Soviet Army entered eastern Poland on September 17, 1939, and, within a month, annexed this territory. One of the major cities annexed was Białystok (known for its textile industry), with a Jewish population of some 50,000.

The remainder of Poland was divided into two parts: western and northern Poland, annexed by the Reich; and central Poland, which as of October 1939 became a single political administrative unit known as the Generalgouvernement; this unit was subdivided into four districts: Warsaw, Lublin, Kraków, and Radom. The city of Kielce, whose Jewish population in September 1939 numbered approximately 20,000, was located in the Radom district.

The Soviets controlled Białystok for a little less than two years. On June 27, 1941, the Germans invaded Białystok and within a month imprisoned Jews in a ghetto. Thus the German occupation of Białystok began only in late June 1941, while the Jews of Kielce came under German occupation in early September 1939.

Under the terms of an order issued by Reinhard Heydrich on September 21, 1939, Jews were to be concentrated in large cities.¹ However, ghettos were set up in various parts of the Generalgouvernement in spring 1941, coinciding with Germany's plans to invade the Soviet Union that summer. Until April 1941, when the ghettos in the three major cities of the Radom district (Kielce, Częstochwa, and Radom) were

sealed, Jews continued to live alongside their Polish neighbors as they had done before the war.²

KIELCE

Jewish life in Kielce during the nineteen months between the German occupation and the establishment of the ghetto was characterized by the nationalization of businesses, shops, and personal property; the issuing of orders to many Jewish residents to evacuate their apartments, which were then expropriated by the new regime; the imposition of forced labor; the arrival of thousands of Jewish refugees from the western areas of Poland annexed by the Reich; a serious food shortage; the outbreak of epidemics due to poor hygienic conditions; the creation of a Jewish Council (*Judenrat*); and a lack of financial resources.³

In November 1939, two months after the occupation, the German civil administration established a Judenrat in Kielce. The person chosen to head the Judenrat was Dr. Moses Pelc, a physician fluent in German who had close ties to Kielce's Polish intelligentsia. During the 1930s Pelc had served on the municipal council. His home had a strongly Polish character and his children attended Polish schools.⁴ It seemed a logical choice for the Poles, who knew that Pelc was a respected member of the Jewish community, to recommend to the Germans that they appoint him head of the Judenrat.

During the few months following the occupation, the situation of the Jews of Kielce drastically deteriorated. Unemployment and hunger became widespread; the outbreak of disease reduced the number of Jews available for forced labor assignments and increased the number needing assistance from the Judenrat. Another factor was the arrival in Kielce of Jewish refugees from the Warthegau, Pomerania, and Upper Silesia districts, which by March 1940 increased Kielce's Jewish population to 25,400. Three thousand Jewish refugees from Kalisz and Kraków arrived the following August and 1,000 Jews from Vienna arrived shortly thereafter. Although some refugees were subsequently transferred to towns in the vicinity of Kielce, at the time of the creation of the ghetto in April 1941, Kielce's Jewish population numbered about 27,000.

As a result of these deteriorating conditions, the Kielce Judenrat had unfamiliar problems with which to contend. According to available documentation, it is clear that Pelc lacked leadership ability, had no inclination for politics, and was unable to handle the rigorous demands as head of the Kielce Judenrat. In summer 1940, after serving for nine months, he took ill and asked to be relieved of his duties. He had likely concluded

that he could not effectively serve the Jewish community and used his illness as a pretext to persuade the German officials to appoint his deputy in his stead.

Sixty-year-old Hermann Levy had been an active figure in the Jewish community and was known by most Kielce Jews as an industrialist with connections and considerable influence. The occupation authorities did not object to Pelc's proposal for Levy to become head of the Judenrat.⁵

After assuming leadership of the Judenrat in August 1940, Levy reorganized the council and saw to it that every segment of Kielce's Jewish population—including the thousands of newly arrived refugees—was represented. The Judenrat established ten departments, including a financial department responsible for preparing the Judenrat's overall budget, setting the taxes to be levied on the Jewish community, and registering all Jews so that their property and income could be assessed by the Judenrat. This latter function was of crucial importance since, under Pelc, the Judenrat's coffers had been completely depleted.

Within a few months, the Judenrat energetically set about reorganizing Jewish communal life in Kielce. But at the end of March 1941, the German governor of the city ordered the establishment of a ghetto and everything that the new Judenrat had begun to build fell apart. The Jews were required to move to the new "Jewish neighborhood" within five days and no Jew was allowed to reside outside the ghetto.⁶

The Germans chose the poorest, most rundown part of town—where most of the houses were single-story structures, lacked running water, and were not connected to a municipal sewage system—for the location of the ghetto. Nearly 27,000 Jews were crowded into some six hundred buildings in an area consisting of twenty-six city streets. The living conditions were intolerable and the lives of many were in peril. On April 5, 1941, the ghetto was surrounded by a fence. Signs that read "Closed zone – Entrance prohibited" in several languages were posted every few dozen meters, and beside the ghetto's five gates the signs read "Jewish neighborhood." Once physically shut off from the outside world, the ghetto was declared a zone "contaminated with infection" and no one was permitted to enter or leave the ghetto under any circumstances.

The transfer of Kielce's Jews to the ghetto led to a further deterioration in the living standards of the Jewish population. The gap between the minority of affluent Jews who possessed most of the available cash, and the thousands of Jews who were left without any visible means of support, was wide. A new war for survival had begun.

BIALYSTOK

In late June 1941, when the Jews of Kielce had been under occupation for twenty-two months and isolated in the ghetto for three months, the Germans occupied Białystok. Within two weeks the Germans liquidated 7,000 of the 50,000 Jews living in the city.

A Judenrat was organized in Białystok a few days after the Germans entered the city. The city's chief rabbi, Rabbi Dr. Gedaliah Rosenmann, was appointed head of the Judenrat; however, the functions associated with this position were actually performed by Efraim Barasz, a professional engineer who served as acting Judenrat chairman until the ghetto was liquidated in August 1943.⁷ As the Judenrat's effective head, Barasz realized that he would need to win the favor of the new rulers, while at the same time trying to create a bearable life for the ghetto's residents and protect Białystok's more than 40,000 Jews—for whose fate he felt personally responsible.⁸

Rabbi Rosenmann handed over the directorship of the Judenrat to Barasz not only because of the latter's extensive prewar experience in public life, but also because the Rabbi had faith in Barasz's ability to handle day-to-day contacts with the German authorities in Białystok. Barasz, a native of Wolkowysk, had moved to Białystok in 1934 to manage the administrative affairs of the local Jewish community. Owing to his impressive achievements in this position, he was subsequently appointed community president. Barasz and his wife were active in the Zionist movement and raised their three children to be proud Jews and proud Zionists.⁹

The ghetto in Białystok was established a month after the German occupation. When Barasz learned that it was to be located in the city's poorer sections, he lobbied the Germans to relocate the ghetto to an area that contained Białystok's factories, most of whose laborers were Jewish. Thanks to his persuasive efforts, the ghetto was established in a better part of town encompassing more land and with larger and newer houses.

Barasz became the undisputed head of the Białystok ghetto by emphasizing a number of principles, the foremost of which was to save the Jews through productive work. Barasz began to establish manufacturing plants inside the ghetto walls after he witnessed the mass murder of thousands of Białystok's Jews in the days following the German invasion. He hoped that by the creation of these plants and the transformation of the ghetto into a hub of productivity, he could prevent future deportations. Barasz firmly believed that if the Jews of the Białystok ghetto could become a cheap, diligent,

and vital labor force serving the economic interests of the German Reich, the chances of the ghetto inmates' survival would increase. This idea, which seemed so logical at the time that no one dared question it, explains why the concept of work as a means of rescue became a major principle for a significant number of Jews in the ghetto.

The Białystok ghetto gradually became a sort of work camp that produced everything from shoelaces to fur coats. This was its outstanding characteristic and accounts for why, with each passing day, Barasz became more convinced that the benefits that the Germans were deriving from the productivity of ghetto Jews was improving the German authorities' attitude toward its residents.¹⁰

In addition, Barasz also developed a good working relationship with the German authorities in charge of the ghetto. Through these officials Barasz succeeded in establishing direct contacts with military officers attached to the Reich Ministry for Armament and Munitions. Barasz regularly asked these high-ranking military officers to intercede with the Reich's leaders in Berlin on behalf of the Białystok ghetto. He wanted them to explain to their superiors the advantages that the ghetto offered. Through his lobbying Barasz hoped to buy the time that he needed for "his" ghetto to survive the war.

Memoirs and testimonials by Holocaust survivors confirm that day-to-day life in the Białystok ghetto gradually stabilized and became relatively tolerable for a community living under occupation. The ghetto's population actually believed that as long as conditions remained stable, they would survive the war. Two factors contributed to this optimistic atmosphere. The first was the discovery by Białystok's Jews in January 1943 that their ghetto was still intact, despite the fact that tens of thousands of Jews living in the Białystok district—specifically, those residing in such places as Grajewo, Grodno, Lomza, Sokolovka, Sokolka, and Wolkowysk—were sent to the death camps. The second factor emerged less than a month later, in the "operation" (*Aktion*) carried out in the ghetto in early February 1943, when the Germans deported 10,000 Jews to Treblinka and Auschwitz. Keeping their promise to Barasz that they would not evacuate the laborers and their families who took shelter in the factories during the *Aktion*, the Germans let about 30,000 Jews remain.¹¹ That the only Jewish community in the entire district as of February 1943 was the Białystok ghetto encouraged Barasz to believe that the Germans would settle for the partial *Aktion* and that Jews remaining in the ghetto would survive. This belief was shared by the ghetto's residents, whose confidence in Barasz increased.

LIQUIDATION

The situation in the Kielce ghetto was the precise opposite of that in Białystok. The transfer of Jews to the ghetto dealt a severe blow to Jewish-owned businesses, which for the most part were located outside the ghetto. The shortage of jobs inside the Kielce ghetto became one of its gravest problems and people refused to work outside the ghetto because they feared being sent to forced labor camps far from Kielce.

During most of its existence, the Kielce ghetto was a restricted area. Poles were denied permission to enter and the exchange of food for various products was impossible. Under these circumstances the death from starvation was very high. With the extreme overcrowding, the lack of running water, the absence of a properly functioning sewage system, and the shortage of medication, typhus and tuberculosis reached epidemic proportions. Other vital items in short supply were clothing and fuel for heating homes; as a result, many ghetto residents suffered greatly from the cold and dozens of Jews died daily. The continual despair felt by the Jews of Kielce grew more intense with the passage of time as life became increasingly unbearable.¹²

In contrast with Białystok, the Germans in charge and the German police were a constant presence in the Kielce ghetto and terrified its residents. Judenrat head Levy always took the route of compromise and carried out the orders of his German superiors, but he was unable to reduce the severity of their decrees.

Unlike in Białystok, where the Judenrat collected taxes, the absence of an effective taxation system in Kielce reduced its already meager coffers. Without financial resources the Judenrat was unable to overcome the massive shortages of essential commodities and services in the ghetto and poverty inhabited every corner.

The poor, miserable life of the Kielce ghetto ended suddenly and relatively quickly in late August 1942. Seventeen months after it was established, the Kielce ghetto was liquidated in three *Aktions* in the course of only five days. The evacuation of the ghetto was conducted in a particularly brutal and violent fashion. Since the number of freight cars that arrived for the evacuation could not hold all the evacuees, the Germans shot the elderly, sick, handicapped, and children. About 2,000 Jews (including Levy and his family) were left in the ghetto as forced laborers while thousands were sent to their death in the extermination camp of Treblinka.¹³

In contrast, the Białystok ghetto managed to hold out for an additional year. Life in this ghetto was somewhat more bearable: there was enough food and work for

its 30,000 residents and the Jews there remained hopeful. However, in August 1943—without any advance warning—the Germans evacuated nearly all the Jews of Białystok within five days. About 1,000 Jews remained to collect the industrial equipment located there; among them were Barasz and his family, Rabbi Rosenmann and his daughters, the head of the Jewish police in the ghetto, the members of the Judenrat, and vital workers. Three weeks later these Jews were evacuated and deported to Lublin. Their departure marked the end of the Jewish community of Białystok.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Life in the ghettos that the Germans established in Poland and in the “eastern territories” depended on two central factors. The first was the German officials in charge of the ghetto; the second was the head of the Judenrat.

In Białystok a relatively unique set of circumstances provided both the Germans and Barasz with a mutual interest in keeping the ghetto intact until the end of the war. The Germans wanted the ghetto to remain because of its remarkable level of productivity, because they preferred to serve there rather than on the Eastern Front, and because (not the least important factor) they received substantial bribes from Barasz. Barasz knew that the war would end some day and wanted to buy time for “his” ghetto; by cooperating with the German authorities, he hoped to save his people. In fact, he saw himself as a person “chosen” to mediate between the Jews in the ghetto and the Germans—in the respected tradition of the Jewish lobbyists (*shtadlanim*) who, throughout Jewish history, have managed to save their people from being destroyed by their enemies.

Barasz never turned to unsavory measures; nor did he become a slave to his German superiors. He succeeded in maintaining his personal integrity and code of ethics to the very end. He simply refused to believe that a twisted, insane ideology could lead the Germans to relinquish the vital services of the Białystok ghetto since he could not conceive of any rational regime murdering its slaves. Unfortunately Barasz found himself in a trap. He did not know, nor did he have any opportunity to learn, that German policy toward the Jews was not driven by utilitarian or rational considerations and that in the long run it had nothing to do with the inclinations or wishes of local German officials.

Barasz’s unique policy produced a well-organized and creative ghetto that enjoyed favorable economic conditions and living standards that never deteriorated to

the catastrophic levels of famine, overcrowding, and epidemics that characterized other ghettos.

In Kielce the circumstances were very different. The German officials in charge there were fanatical and regarded every Jew as an enemy or a parasite. The two leaders, Pelc and Levy, failed to effectively negotiate with the occupation authorities and were unable to create a tolerable living standard for the thousands of Jews who lived in the ghetto under highly distressed conditions.

Pelc was suspected of subversive activity in collaboration with the Polish intelligentsia in the city and was sent to Auschwitz in early 1941, even before the ghetto was established. He was eventually murdered in Auschwitz. Levy was suspected of trying to obtain forged documents, and in June 1943 the Germans murdered him in Kielce's cemetery along with his wife and their two sons. On November 3, 1943, Barasz and his wife and son were killed in one of the camps in the Lublin area during the Aktion code-named "Erntefest."

In the collective memory of the Holocaust, Kielce will be remembered as one of the ghettos liquidated during "Aktion Reinhard" in summer 1942. Białystok will be forever associated with the aspirations and hopes of Barasz, its tragic leader who strove for the ghetto's survival even in the face of certain annihilation and who believed that the Białystok ghetto would outlast the war.

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**A TALE OF TWO DIARISTS:
A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENCES IN
EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE¹**

Alexandra Garbarini

Hundreds and probably thousands of European Jewish men and women from different national backgrounds and linguistic-cultural traditions and in various wartime contexts kept diaries during the Holocaust.² The diaries that have been recovered (through painstaking care taken by the writer and/or by chance) comprise an extraordinary body of source material, offering insights into individuals' attempts to make sense of and adapt to a world of constantly shrinking prospects. In their diaries Jewish men and women recorded their shifting interpretations of Nazi persecution, which eventually culminated for some in the realization that their fate was collective annihilation. Looked at together, diaries represent a broad social, intellectual, and cultural phenomenon that often unwittingly linked European Jews during the war years.

THE DIARISTS

Despite the commonality of diary writing, Jews wrote diaries for many reasons. We can compare the divergent responses of two diarists—Chaim Aron Kaplan (born 1880, Horodyszcze, Belorussia; died 1942 [?], Treblinka [?]) in the Warsaw ghetto and Lucien Dreyfus (born 1882, Westhouse, Alsace; died 1943 [?], Auschwitz-Birkenau [?]) in the south of France—to the suffering and murder of European Jews, and the roles that diary writing played for each of them.³ By means of their preexisting belief systems, both Kaplan and Dreyfus attempted to make sense of the Nazi persecution of Jews and the complicity or indifference of most non-Jews and the Allied nations. Neither was able to assimilate Jewish wartime experiences into his prior conceptions of God and humanity. Kaplan questioned the Hebrew God and relied on rationalism and historical justice to ensure that Jews' suffering would not be forgotten and would have meaning in the future. Dreyfus became disillusioned with European liberal enlightened society and invested history with theological significance to fill the existential void. The story of these diarists' responses does more than elucidate two of many possible reactions. It establishes spectrums of Jewish responses: between those who moved toward deeper religiosity and those who could no longer believe in divine providence, and between those who despaired of and those who continued to place their faith in

liberal enlightened society. Many Jews may not have responded in the same ways as Kaplan and Dreyfus, but they were pulled in these opposing directions. Indeed, the moral and theological questions with which Kaplan and Dreyfus struggled were central not only for Jews during the war, but also for Holocaust survivors and postwar theologians and philosophers.

Kaplan's and Dreyfus's perceptions were complex products of their backgrounds and wartime experiences. The national and geopolitical contexts in which their lives unfolded were obviously distinct. Kaplan was born in Belorussia, received a Talmudic education at the celebrated yeshiva in Mir, attended the Government Pedagogical Institute in Vilna, and settled in Warsaw around 1902, where he founded a Hebrew elementary school that he ran for forty years.⁴ Dreyfus was a native Alsatian and strong French patriot who deserted his rabbinical studies in Berlin at the turn of the century and subsequently taught modern languages and history at a high school (*lycée*) in Strasbourg.

In other respects, however, Kaplan's and Dreyfus's biographies bore striking similarities. Each belonged to the generation of writers born in the 1880s whom literary scholar David Roskies identified as having authored "some of the central responses to the Holocaust" because of the perspectives on upheaval and catastrophe gained over their lifetimes.⁵ Both men were educators, published writers, and Zionists. Dreyfus, like his Eastern European counterpart, had kept a diary for several years prior to the war and continued to record entries until deportation. Furthermore, during the war both Dreyfus and Kaplan were separated from their children, who had reached the safer shores of the United States and Palestine, respectively.

THE MEANING OF THE HOLOCAUST

Despite these shared traits, these two men interpreted the meaning of the Nazi destruction of Jewish life and the function of diary writing in dramatically different fashion. The actions of the Nazis and other Europeans against the Jews provoked a crisis of identity for Dreyfus, but they did not for Kaplan. Kaplan had always embraced a particularist conception of his Jewish identity that supported the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and opposed Polish acculturation.⁶ The events of World War II confirmed for Kaplan that he had been right all along, that Zionism was the only viable political option for Jews. He placed his hope for the Jewish future in the creation of a Jewish state, and German and Polish antisemitism only deepened that conviction.⁷

Like Kaplan, Dreyfus's support for Zionism predated the war; however, his backing of a Jewish nationalist politics had not precluded his adopting French culture.⁸ He had defended the premise that Jews could "have Jewish souls, [while] speaking the French language"⁹ and believed that the Jewish and French aspects of his identity were complementary, a conviction that was consonant with the ideology of "Franco-Judaism."¹⁰ France's collapse and the Vichy regime's anti-Jewish policies called into question his identity as equally French and Jewish and, what was more, provoked him to question the fundamental morality of Western civilization.¹¹ During the first two years of the war, his confidence in the humanitarian instincts of bourgeois society collapsed entirely, and he became convinced that "the success of the patron of Berchtesgaden [Hitler] can only be explained by the complicity of the entire European bourgeoisie who shared his antipathies or exploited them."¹² He conjectured that, ultimately, the bourgeoisie's hateful instincts and need "to be superior to their fellow man" had fueled disdain for the stranger and made war a necessity.¹³ Thus he condemned as amoral all of European bourgeois society.

The news that Dreyfus first heard in early July 1942 about the massacre of 700,000 Jews in Poland only served to confirm his belief that the entire Western world shared responsibility for "the catastrophe of this war."¹⁴ "Everyone is guilty," he declared.¹⁵ From his perch on the Mediterranean coast, he did not comprehend the full scope of the ensuing Nazi extermination of the Jews, but he still regarded Western civilization as having become morally bankrupt. He attributed its decline to people's abandonment of religion, and wartime events proved to Dreyfus—who had struggled with his faith before the war—that religion was as necessary to human society in modern times as before.

The decline of the religious idea facilitated the explosion of anti-Jewish hatred and the catastrophe of this war. . . . That which does not agree with science and human reason can all the same be indispensable to life in society. It is necessary to prove that science and reason have in themselves destructive tendencies, and this reflection forces a person to the necessity of recognizing a [higher] authority.¹⁶

Dreyfus assigned responsibility for the war and the murder of Jews to liberal enlightened society (the proponents of "science and human reason") as well as to the obvious perpetrators, the Nazis. He determined that science and reason were themselves harmful, and this conclusion led him to despair of the possibility that human

beings would create a just society without religion.¹⁷ His turn to religious faith was a desperate effort to rescue hope in justice and morality.

KAPLAN'S FAITH IN HISTORY

Whereas Dreyfus rejected science and reason as systems of morality and meaning-making tools, Kaplan did not undergo a similar disillusionment with Western civilization. Indeed, Kaplan's faith in liberal enlightened society was the fundamental underpinning of his belief that modern history would render Jewish suffering meaningful. Convinced as he was that "Hitlerian Nazism will ultimately be defeated, for in the end the civilized nations will rise up to defend the liberty which the German barbarians seek to steal from mankind," he wanted to ensure that the Allied nations would know about the Nazi crimes against the Jews.¹⁸ He considered his diary to be a contribution to future justice, and as a diarist he sought to participate in the struggle to defend liberty against German barbarism.

As was the case with many Eastern European ghetto diarists, Kaplan's drive to preserve evidence of the Nazi treatment of Jews was also driven by his deep historical consciousness. His sense of the importance of history emerged in part from his knowledge that in the past Jews had written history in response to tragedy. However, his historical consciousness was equally a product of the centrality of modern Jewish historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "as a cultural and spiritual phenomenon within Jewry itself."¹⁹ Indeed, essential to his Zionist vision was the role that history played—a rationalist, positivist history—in defining Jewish national culture. Furthermore, his use of Hebrew in his diary was as much an outgrowth of his Zionist vision for a new Jewish future as it was a reference to Jewish literary tradition.²⁰ His imbrication of the traditional and modern reflected his Eastern European Jewish milieu as well as his notion that modern Jewish culture represented both a continuation of and a departure from the Jewish past.

From his first wartime entry, in which he stated that "[w]e are now witnessing the dawn of a new era in the history of the world," Kaplan suggested that his impulse to write was not merely in keeping with the tradition in Jewish culture to bear witness to history as the realm of God's activity.²¹ He sensed from the beginning of the war that the events then transpiring were unlike any that had come before. Within this "new era," he viewed himself as a witness to this break with the past and to the daily occurrences of "these historic times." He promised himself that he would write every

day in order to preserve some sort of record because, among other reasons, he was filled with foreboding about the implications of this new era for Jews. On September 1, 1939, Kaplan declared, “Wherever Hitler’s foot treads there is no hope for the Jewish people. Hitler, may his name be blotted out, threatened in one of his speeches that if war comes the Jews of Europe will be exterminated.”²²

Throughout the first two years of the war, Kaplan conveyed a tension between looking at the present from a modern historical viewpoint—in which he sought to identify and analyze the specificity of Jewish persecution by Nazi hands—and from a literary-archetypal viewpoint, in which he regarded the present in cyclical terms as a return to the past or revival of the past.²³ In his early entries, on the one hand, he conveyed his sense that Jews were on the brink of untold persecution and that the nature of such persecution was potentially unprecedented. On the other hand, his formulation for cursing Hitler (“Hitler, may his name be blotted out”) recalled the curse against Amalek, the biblical enemy of the Jews. This traditional imprecation placed Hitler, the new Amalek, in line with past enemies of the Jewish people. In so doing, Kaplan suggested that the suffering of the present resembled that of the past and that, like other times in history, the Jewish people would persevere.

Whereas Dreyfus had come to distrust science and reason, Kaplan had tremendous faith in them, attributing to them not only analytical properties but also ethical ones. He trusted that future historians would be able to understand and explain the motives of the perpetrators through psychology and social science analysis, and he recorded what he judged to be the key elements of Nazi psychology in order to assist them. He adduced that “when an individual is afflicted with a psychological illness it is a private matter for the doctor who is treating him. But when an entire community has been afflicted with a psychological illness it is a sign of the times, and is of interest to historians of the future as well.”²⁴

Even with this sense of the historically new, what did conform to a historical pattern in Kaplan’s eyes was the Jewish response to persecution, which—despite its heterogeneity—he for the most part characterized as a display of “adaptability” in keeping with the creativity of Jews in the Diaspora. Kaplan continued to place the present loss of Jewish lives on a continuum with past catastrophes. “We live broken and shattered lives; lives of shame and dishonor; lives of suffering and grief. But the power of adaptability within us is miraculous. . . . From historical experience we have learned that there is no permanence in life; that everything changes; that all is

transitory.”²⁵ In other words, the historically unprecedented nature of the perpetrators’ actions did not provoke a concomitant response in the victims; they showed a hopefulness and resourcefulness much as they had throughout time.

The community’s survival made Kaplan’s writing particularly valuable for him since he felt accountable to the Jewish nation and its history. During the first two years of the war, he imagined that the author and primary audience of future history writing would be the Polish Jewish community. On October 26, 1939, he wrote, “Individuals will be destroyed, but the Jewish community will live on. Therefore, every entry is more precious than gold.”²⁶ He inscribed a “scroll of agony” of the Jewish people to help them remember these events in the future.²⁷ Of the role that he would play in the community’s memorial effort, he “sense[d] within me the magnitude of this hour, and my responsibility toward it, and I have an inner awareness that I am fulfilling a national obligation, a historic obligation that I am not free to relinquish. . . . My record will serve as source material for the future historian.”²⁸ He hoped that his diary would be an essential contribution both to the community’s future memorial effort and to future historians’ analyses of their experience.

A modern historical consciousness had taken root in Eastern Europe to such an extent that Kaplan—who was not a historian—looked to history writing as a form of collective memory and a guarantee of earthly justice. While lamenting the dearth of poets who would be able to immortalize the suffering of Polish Jewry under the Nazis, Kaplan attributed more space in his diary to history’s potential to ensure the transmission of memory.²⁹ The historian, along with the poet, became a “primary custodian” of Jewish memory.³⁰ Eastern European Jews’ ghetto diaries often reflected this modern historical consciousness as much as traditional Jewish “archetypes of destruction.” Indeed, in Poland and Lithuania during the interwar period, autobiographical writing had become associated with the efforts of Jewish social scientists to document the history of the Jewish nation.³¹ Kaplan was not atypical in hoping that historians would confer meaning on the death of untold numbers of Polish Jews. His trust in history attested to his abiding faith in science and reason as essential frameworks of understanding. Through his diary Kaplan sought to contribute to Western civilization’s triumph over barbarism.

Kaplan’s hope that historians would make sense of Jewish suffering was linked to his struggle with religious faith. The extraordinary suffering that he witnessed in the Warsaw ghetto and the murder of Jews in Lublin caused him to reject the image of the

Hebrew God as historically active and justice seeking, leaving Kaplan only with faith in history. While faith in God's righteousness became attenuated for Kaplan, during the first two years of the war, he still tied the abiding faith of Jews around him to their remarkable will to survive. He analyzed how messianic faith fueled hope in this-worldly redemption and worked as a social glue to keep the community fighting for survival. Kaplan considered the hopes of his fellow ghetto Jews to be illusory and yet drew inspiration from their optimism. He recognized that coping with ghetto life required some form of messianic dreaming, even for him. Faith—like the historical endeavor of diary writing—became a way of acting in the face of evil, a defiant stance against the deprivations of ghetto life.³²

Kaplan became increasingly critical of the Jewish masses' inclination to hope as conditions in the Warsaw ghetto became more horrific in the months prior to deportation. At that time he deduced, as many Jews did not, that they would not live to see the defeat of Nazi Germany.³³ With news of the extermination of the Jews of Lublin, Kaplan realized that the Nazis were acting and would continue to act in a manner entirely consistent with Hitler's apocalyptic pronouncements about the fate of European Jewry. As metaphors became reality and words became meaningful in horrifically literal ways, Kaplan persisted in planting "the seed of history," convinced that "[f]or future generations, every word will be valuable."³⁴ Now, however, the historian for whom Kaplan continued to collect documentary material would not belong to his own generation, but to a succeeding one.

Implicit in Kaplan's hopes for history was his sense that history could function either as a medium of redress or as a final stage in the extermination of a people. While the Germans endeavored to destroy all traces of their murder of European Jewry, Kaplan—like many other victims of that genocide—produced a written testament in order to ensure that the memory of their extermination would not become the Nazis' final victim. Kaplan's loss of faith in divine justice left him with the hope of historical justice, but even the latter was not guaranteed. Kaplan's final words attested to his fear that his exhaustive efforts to preserve evidence for the future historian would fail. "If my life ends," he wrote, "what will become of my diary?"³⁵

DREYFUS: FROM HISTORY TO FAITH

For Kaplan history was a nationalist endeavor associated with the continuity of the Jewish nation—and thus tied to tradition and modern Jewish culture and politics.

Dreyfus also contemplated the value and implications of history writing, and he also regarded history as a nationalist endeavor. However, he associated history with French nationalism during the Third Republic rather than Jewish national politics, and thus tied it to reason and science and the failure of liberal enlightened society.³⁶

Not surprisingly, therefore, in contrast to Kaplan, Dreyfus did not place his confidence in history to render Jewish suffering meaningful, nor does it seem that he envisioned his diary as a contribution to the historical enterprise. Quite the contrary: since he had lost faith in Western civilization, he was highly critical of its commitment to history writing.³⁷ Even before the outbreak of the war, he had been skeptical of historians' belief in their ability to be rational and objective, and the experience of wartime dislocation only reinforced his distrust of historians. His critique of history was part of his broader critique of science and Third Republic intellectuals. Whereas history for Kaplan was both a scientific and moral pursuit, for Dreyfus the historical project that Kaplan esteemed was part of the wider culture that had betrayed him.

Religious faith filled the void created by Dreyfus's disillusionment with France and Western civilization. He yearned for a theological explanation to account for Jewish suffering. He linked the Jews' present suffering to the dilemma of how to reconcile belief in a just and all-powerful God with the existence of evil in the world. He explained:

These ideas correspond to my temperament, and if in these notebooks I occupy myself with nothing other than the highest principle of man, the fact is that the rest of what preoccupies my loved ones, even the war, is nothing vis-à-vis the problem posed by the Bible. There is a God who punishes and rewards. . . . I will not seek to convince those opposing, but I intend to keep intact the spiritual traditions that date back to Sinai.³⁸

To account for Jewish suffering, he returned to a traditional Jewish view of history. Beginning with the Bible, Jews injected history with meaningfulness (as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi explained) since "it was human history that revealed his [God's] will and purpose."³⁹ God was radically other, his ways inscrutable, and yet human history offered clues about how God judged his creation's exercise of free will. Dreyfus thus revisited what Yerushalmi deemed "the paradoxical struggle between the divine will of an omnipotent Creator and the free will of his creature, man, in the course of history; a tense dialectic of obedience and rebellion."⁴⁰ Dreyfus resorted to theodicy in his attempt to make known God's reasons for "punishing" the Jews. He speculated—as did

many Orthodox Jews during and after the war—that Jewish assimilation had provoked God’s wrath.⁴¹

During the war diary writing became part of Dreyfus’s theological quest, yet his theological reflections did not preclude him from using his diary for other, more quotidian purposes. In particular, he used his diary to communicate with his absent children, a function that was not uncommon among Jewish parents who were separated from their children.⁴² Since he could neither talk to them nor send a letter, he recorded in his diary his desire to tell his children that they had been right to leave France.⁴³ A few weeks later, he transcribed a letter that he had received about the sale of their jewelry by the Commissariat-General for Jewish Affairs so that “the children know the text of the letter.”⁴⁴ Dreyfus clearly imagined his children reading his diary in the future, and through it he communicated information that he could not relay to them by other means.

Dreyfus’s religious belief remained intact until his diary was interrupted on September 20, 1943: shortly thereafter he was deported to Drancy and then to Auschwitz-Birkenau. However, the solace that Dreyfus found in faith was not the same as that for the Jewish masses in Warsaw depicted by Kaplan. Religious faith allowed Dreyfus to believe that there was a reason for Jews’ suffering, but it did not lead him to hope for a this-worldly redemption—in other words, that he would survive the war. He seemed to know that he was going to die in the impending catastrophe. The prospect of seeing his life, as well as the lives of massive numbers of other Jews, end prematurely did not alter his belief that divine justice would prevail. Possessing no other choice for action than to determine his attitude toward death, he responded with dignified resignation and faith.

CONCLUSION

Kaplan’s Eastern European background made his wartime trajectory fairly predictable, whereas Dreyfus’s Western European background made his trajectory more surprising. Unusual among Polish Jewish ghetto diaries for being written in Hebrew and not Yiddish or Polish, Kaplan’s diary nevertheless exemplified the trilingual cultural “polysystem” of interwar and wartime Polish Jewish life.⁴⁵ Although scholars have more often pointed to the contrasts between Kaplan’s diary and the “historical” diaries of Emanuel Ringelblum (who spearheaded the creation of the Warsaw ghetto’s underground archive) and Herman Kruk from the Vilna ghetto, their similarities in

focus and intention are striking.⁴⁶ As different as the writers' tones may have been (Kaplan's diary has been described as "a diary to bare one's soul"), they all recognized the importance of modern historical methods in preserving evidence of the suffering of the Jewish masses.⁴⁷

Like Ringelblum and Kruk, Kaplan stressed the objectivity and comprehensiveness of his writing. He did not perceive an inconsistency between his tone of lamentation and his goal to record "facts," writing that "a future historian will find material here that may be relied upon, not just stories out of the imagination."⁴⁸ He shared the perspective of his contemporaries, for whom "there was no felt contradiction between a subjective point of view, an intimate narrative voice, and strict adherence to observable reality."⁴⁹ As Kaplan himself contended, "It is beyond my capabilities to record every event in organized form. Perhaps other people will do this when the appropriate time comes. But even events recorded in reportorial style are of historical value."⁵⁰ Kaplan, like many other Jewish diarists, produced a written testament out of his steadfast confidence in the morality of Western civilization. He wanted to ensure that the civilized world would learn about the Nazis' barbarity and that the memory of the victims would be passed down to future generations.

Dreyfus's religious awakening was not representative of French Jews. Indeed, he felt alienated from other French Jews—a likely product of the different path that he took during the war. Yet from the perspective of Jewish tradition, his turn to God for answers was a familiar response to catastrophe. Indeed, his theological interpretation was common among Orthodox Jews during and after the *Shoah*. Dreyfus's attempt to render meaningful the catastrophe befalling the Jews recalled the process at work in the biblical book of Lamentations. As described by Hebrew literature scholar Alan Mintz, the

[a]lleviation of the pain comes only when, by asserting a willed recollection of past truths, the sufferer makes the connection between suffering and sin. This realization releases him from his isolated victimization and allows him to join in a communal appeal to God. God remains silent in Lamentations, but the sufferer's emergence from soliloquy to prayer enables him at least to recover God as an addressable other.⁵¹

During the war Dreyfus recovered his faith in God and developed a notion of divine justice out of his loss of faith in mankind. Since he could no longer participate in the

French society and culture that had betrayed him, he turned to the divine realm for answers. In so doing, he made use of an age-old Jewish strategy of interpretation: he incorporated the Jews' new suffering by placing it within the framework of past suffering, which rendered history as theologically meaningful.

Both men sought to understand the causes of Jewish suffering and hoped that some meaning could be attributed to it or extracted from it. In their respective searches for meaning, they ultimately grappled with different questions. For Dreyfus the theological question of why this calamity was befalling the Jews was the central issue. The question that Kaplan sought to answer was how to historically contextualize and explain the underlying causes of the Nazi extermination. For both men the function and meaning that they attributed to diary writing were inextricably related to their strategies of interpretation.

NOTES

1. This article is based on research that I conducted for my dissertation. See Alexandra Garbarini, “‘To Bear Witness Where Witness Needs to Be Borne’: Diary Writing and the Holocaust, 1939–1945” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2003).

2. Emanuel Ringelblum (“O. S.,” in *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor! Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives “O. S.”* [Oneg Shabbat], ed. Joseph Kermish [Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1986], p. 18), the Polish Jewish historian and head of the Warsaw ghetto’s underground archives Oneg Shabbat, estimated that perhaps hundreds of Jews kept diaries in the Warsaw ghetto alone, although the vast majority of them were lost or destroyed in the massive deportation of Warsaw’s Jews to Treblinka and in the demolition of the ghetto by the Nazis following the ghetto uprising in April 1943.

3. This article relies on the published English translation of Kaplan’s Hebrew-language diary (Chaim Aron Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*, trans. and ed. Abraham I. Katsh [1973; reprint ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Museum, 1999]). My analysis of Dreyfus’s diary is based on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s (hereafter cited as USHMM) microfiche copy of the original notebooks, which were written in French. All translations from Dreyfus’s diary are my own. Dreyfus’s diary was donated anonymously to the USHMM Archives. It was mailed to the museum without a sender’s name or address, one notebook at a time, by regular, uncertified first-class mail. There are seven notebooks spanning the period from January 22, 1925, to September 24, 1943. Gaps in the chronology and notebook numbering suggest that notebooks that once existed are now missing. It is possible, therefore, that more notebooks of the diary exist in private hands or were lost in the mail. Lucien Dreyfus, RG–10.144.02–08, Lucien Dreyfus Collection, USHMM.

4. For biographical information on Kaplan, see Yisrael Gutman’s foreword and Abraham Katsh’s introduction to *Scroll of Agony*, pp. 5–7 and 9–17 respectively. For information on Dreyfus, see Joseph Bloch, “In Memoriam Lucien Dreyfus,” [Periodical Unknown and n.d.] in Folder “General Information on Lucien Dreyfus,” RG–10.144.10, Dreyfus Collection, USHMM.

5. David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 200.

6. Kaplan had harsh words for Jews who were not Zionists, especially for “Polonized” Jews or Jews who were Polish identified. He rejected the particularism of the Jewish Socialist Bund, which sought the recognition of Jews as a separate nationality within the Diaspora. “As far as we know,” he wrote in *Scroll of Agony* (p. 320 [entry for April 26, 1942]), “Bundism and Zionism have nothing in common, but the Nazi ‘sandwiches’ them together and ‘eats’ them as one.” He expressed tremendous rancor toward Jewish

converts to Christianity (for example, see *ibid.*, pp. 78–79 [entry for November 30, 1939]).

7. When Palestine too faced the threat of German occupation, Kaplan (*Scroll of Agony*, p. 366 [entry for July 2, 1942]) feared that “if she [Palestine] is conquered,” it would constitute “total destruction for the hope of a people.”

8. Dreyfus criticized French Jews who did not support the Zionist settlement of Palestine. See Dreyfus, January 1, 1926, RG–10.144.02, USHMM.

9. Dreyfus, September 17, 1925, RG–10.144.02, USHMM. His support of Zionism was typical of Alsatian Jews. According to Renée Poznanski (“Le Sionisme en France pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale: Développements institutionnels et impact idéologique,” in *Les Juifs de France: Le Sionisme et l’Etat d’Israel*, vol. 1, ed. Doris Bensimon and Benjamin Pinkus [Paris: Actes du Colloques International and Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, 1987], pp. 194, 215 n. 9), the Zionist movement in Alsace was better organized and more widely supported than elsewhere in France before the war. Freddy Raphaël and Robert Weyl (“La double demeure: Les juifs d’Alsace et le sionisme,” in *Regards nouveaux sur les juifs d’Alsace*, ed. Freddy Raphaël and Robert Weyl [Strasbourg: Librairie Istra, 1980], p. 271) maintain that the majority of Alsatian rabbis and notables supported Zionism because they saw it as a means of preserving Judaism against the pressures of modern urban life.

10. On “Franco-Judaism” see Vicki Caron, *Between France and Germany: The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, 1871–1918* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 9.

11. See Dreyfus’s entries from December 20, 1940, and March 16, 1941, *Cahier A*, RG–10.144.04; June 23, 1942, July 4, 1942, and July 6, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06 (all USHMM).

12. Dreyfus, March 16, 1941, *Cahier A*, RG–10.144.04, USHMM.

13. Dreyfus, May 14, 1941, *Cahier B*, RG–10.144.05, USHMM.

14. Dreyfus, July 6, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM. Dreyfus recorded the news about the murder of 700,000 Jews in Poland in an entry for July 4, 1942 (*Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM), but did not cite his source for this information. The BBC first broadcast news of the killing of Jews on July 2, 1942; it is also possible that Dreyfus read an anonymous pamphlet circulating in Nice saying that 700,000 Jews in Poland had been shot, drowned, or killed by gas. The pamphlet (“Circular enclosed in dispatch from American Consulate in Nice to U.S. Embassy in Vichy,” NARA, RG–59, Box 18, 841.1-Jews) cited by Mary Felstiner in *To Paint Her Life: Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 192, 269n), urged the French to help their Jewish neighbors. On the dissemination to the West of news about the

extermination of Polish Jewry, see Dariusz Stola, “Early News of the Holocaust from Poland,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11 (1997), pp. 1–27. Stola disagrees with Gutman and David Engel and argues that the Polish government-in-exile did not purposefully suppress news of the killings of Polish Jewry.

15. Dreyfus, July 4, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM.

16. Dreyfus, July 6, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM.

17. Dreyfus’s view of science and reason powerfully resonates with the writing of other thinkers, most famously in the thesis of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno that civilization and barbarism stand in dialectical relationship to one another within “enlightenment.” Indeed, according to Horkheimer and Adorno (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming [1944; reprint ed., New York: Continuum, 1997], pp. xvi–xvii), “[n]ot merely the ideal but the practical tendency to self-destruction has always been characteristic of rationalism, and not only in the stage in which it appears undisguised.” Zygmunt Bauman (*Modernity and the Holocaust* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989], p. 12) argued, “I propose to treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society.”

18. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 19 (entry for September 1, 1939).

19. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 87. On history as a response to tragedy, see Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 34–39, chap. 3.

20. This argument differs from that made by James E. Young (*Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988], p. 27), who interpreted Kaplan’s use of Hebrew as evidence of his desire “to locate events in the sanctified linguistic sphere of scripture, rabbinical disputation, and covenant.” Young’s contention does not take into consideration Kaplan’s longstanding personal commitment to the use and vitality of Hebrew as a modern spoken language. Kaplan’s Hebrew-language school taught Hebrew as a spoken language. Furthermore, as a public speaker at Zionist gatherings in the Warsaw ghetto, Kaplan elected to deliver his speeches in Hebrew even when his fellow speakers used Yiddish.

21. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 19 (entry for September 1, 1939). On the traditional Jewish concept of history, see Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 5–26, 31–52.

22. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 20 (entry for September 1, 1939). See also his entries for September 5 (pp. 25–26) and September 14, 1939 (pp. 30–31).

23. I am proposing a literary-archetypal viewpoint that other scholars have argued is historical. For example, Roskies (*Against the Apocalypse*, p. 202) wrote that the Nazis' employment of images from the past in their persecution of Jews made all Jews into historians because they sought and found historical analogies to their present suffering. I would argue that this "search for archetypes" is precisely not historical because it regards the present not in its particularity, but as a return to the past.

24. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 334 (entry for May 19, 1942).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 86 (entry for December 13, 1939).

26. *Ibid.*, p. 58 (entry for October 26, 1939).

27. As early as September 14, 1939, Kaplan (*ibid.*, p. 30) referred to his diary as a "scroll of agony."

28. *Ibid.*, p. 104 (entry for January 16, 1940).

29. *Ibid.*, p. 79 (entry for November 30, 1939).

30. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. xiv.

31. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 197. On the development among Polish Jews of a modern historical consciousness and the professionalization of history writing in Poland, see David Roskies, "Landkentenish: Yiddish Belles Lettres in the Warsaw Ghetto," in *Holocaust Chronicles: Individualizing the Holocaust through Diaries and Other Contemporaneous Personal Accounts*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1999), p. 12; Artur Eisenbach, "Jewish Historiography in Interwar Poland," in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, eds. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz, and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989), pp. 453, 459–60; David Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 16–20, 32, 35–36; Lucjan Dobroszycki, "YIVO in Interwar Poland: Work in the Historical Sciences," in Gutman, et al., *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, pp. 494, 498–99. On the influence of sociologists W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki on Polish social scientists—Jewish and non-Jewish—to gather autobiographical materials for the study of social phenomena and personal experience, see Janina Markiewicz-Lagneau, "L'autobiographie en Pologne," *Revue française de Sociologie* 17 (1976), pp. 591–93; Daniel Soyer, "Documenting Immigrant Lives at an Immigrant Institution: Yivo's Autobiography Contest of 1942," *Jewish Social Studies* 5 (1999), pp. 219–20. For an analysis of the relationship among autobiographical writing, reading, and concepts of individualism within Jewish society in Eastern Europe during the interwar period, see Marcus Moseley, "Life, Literature: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Interwar Poland," *Jewish Social Studies* 7 (2001),

pp. 1–51. A volume of YIVO’s collection of youth autobiographies from the interwar period was recently published in English: Jeffrey Shandler, ed. *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth before the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

32. See Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 46 (entry for October 5, 1939), pp. 57–58 (entry for October 26, 1939), p. 111 (entry for January 31, 1940), p. 139 (entry for April 12, 1940), p. 192 (entry for September 5, 1940), pp. 209–10 (entries for October 14–15, 1940), pp. 234–35 (entry for December 26, 1940), pp. 268–69 (entry for October 10, 1941).

33. See *ibid.*, pp. 296–97 (entry for February 2, 1942), pp. 312–13 (entry for April 7 [sic], 1942), pp. 347–48 (entry for June 7, 1942).

34. *Ibid.*, p. 314 (entry for April 7 [sic], 1942).

35. *Ibid.*, p. 400 (entry for August 4, 1942).

36. On the role of history in France in the Third Republic, see François Dosse, *New History in France: The Triumph of the Annales*, trans. Peter V. Conroy, Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), chap. 1; Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times*, 5th ed. (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 80.

37. For Dreyfus’s view of history writing, see his entries for June 10 and June 23, 1942, *Cahier C*, RG–10.144.06, USHMM.

38. Dreyfus, June 18, 1941, *Cahier B*, RG–10.144.05, USHMM.

39. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 8.

40. *Ibid.*

41. The most visible postwar proponent of this view was Rabbi Yoel Taitelbaum, leader of the ultra-Orthodox Satmar movement and author of the 1952 tract *And It Pleased Moses (Vayo’el Moshe)*. See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 307–08.

42. Examples of diarists who specified writing for their loved ones are Erich Frey, RG–10.041.03, Alfred H. Elbau Papers, USHMM; Max and Frieda Reinach, diary, 1939–42, Acc. 1999.A.0215, USHMM; Grete Steiner, diary from Scheveningen, Holland, File no. 1064, Lohamei Ha’Ghetaot; A. B., diary from Theresienstadt, JM/13, Yad Vashem Archives; and Richard Ehrlich, “The History of Our Negative Emigration,” ME 1101, Richard A. Ehrlich Collection, Leo Baeck Institute Archives.

43. Dreyfus, May 13, 1943, *Cahier D*, RG–10.144.07, USHMM.
44. Dreyfus, May 27, 1943, *Cahier D*, RG–10.144.07, USHMM.
45. On the concept of a trilingual polysystem, see Chone Shmeruk, “Hebrew–Yiddish–Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture,” in Gutman, et al., *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, pp. 285–311.
46. On the “historical diaries” of Ringelblum and Kruk, see Samuel David Kassow, “Vilna and Warsaw, Two Ghetto Diaries: Herman Kruk and Emanuel Ringelblum,” in *Holocaust Chronicles: Individualizing the Holocaust through Diaries and Other Contemporaneous Personal Accounts*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1999), pp. 171–215. See the discussions of Kaplan’s diary in Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, pp. 27, 35–36; Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey through Language and Culture* (New York: Free Press, 2000), pp. 195, 198–202. Roskies (*Against the Apocalypse*, pp. 200, 209–11) grouped Kaplan apart from “historical diarists” such as Ringelblum and Kruk, thereby deemphasizing the incredible historical awareness displayed by Kaplan and his fundamental questioning of biblical archetypes and faith to confer meaning on Jewish suffering.
47. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 200.
48. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 58 (entry for October 26, 1939).
49. Roskies, “Landkentenish,” pp. 13–14.
50. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 121 (entry for February 20, 1940).
51. Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 4.

THE THEOLOGICAL LETTERS OF RABBI TALMUD OF LUBLIN (SUMMER–FALL 1942)

Gershon Greenberg

Carbon copies of two typewritten Hebrew letters by Rabbi Hirsh Melekh Talmud (Tsevi Elimelekh Talmud, born 1912, Glogów Małoposki) survived the Majdan-Tatarski ghetto and are held by the State Archives in Lublin. The letters offer rare access to the existential turmoil of the Jewish religious mind within the ultra-Orthodox world at the very center of the Holocaust.¹

When the Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Talmud—a graduate of the Hakhmei Lublin Yeshiva founded in 1924 by Meir Shapiro—was one of five functioning city rabbis of Lublin (the others were Yosef Mendel Preshisukha, Leizer Ezra Kirschenbaum, Avraham Yosef Schlingenbaum, and Yisrael Hirsch Finkelman) and served in the civil office for marriage and burials. After the Lublin ghetto was opened in March 1941, he served on the Jewish Council (*Judenrat*). He was the only city rabbi to survive the March–April 1942 deportations, when most of the ghetto’s 30,000 Jews were taken to Belżec, and was among the some 5,000 moved to the Majdan-Tatarski ghetto (established on April 19, 1942) that was situated between the Lublin ghetto and a Majdanek subcamp. He continued to serve on the *Judenrat* (at least through August 1942) and as a religious judge (*Dayan*) with responsibility for birth certificates and officiating at marriages; he also officiated at the divorce of the notorious Shammai Greier, before Greier went on to marry a seventeen-year-old girl in a raucous ceremony in the midst of the ongoing mourning. When Majdan-Tatarski was liquidated on November 19, 1942, he and the other inmates were herded to Majdanek where he was murdered sometime in 1943, probably only in his early thirties.²

FIRST LETTER (JULY 28, 1942)

The first letter was sent to Hayim Aryeh Berglas, a star pupil of the Hakhmei Lublin Yeshiva who was born in Kraków.³ When after a three-year silence Talmud received a letter from Berglas, he swallowed the words like “a ripe fig before summer” (Isaiah 28:4). They brought him to tears of relief and joy, when the misery was such that there was no water left for him to cry (see “I am about to take away the delight of your eyes from you through pestilence, but you shall not lament or weep” [Ezekiel 24:15]) and made “the crooked straight” (Isaiah 40:4). Talmud wanted to respond by pouring out

the story of suffering for the sake of the book of historical memory. Perhaps, he thought, a new and worthy generation of Jews would arise and hearken to the unnatural, terrible troubles.

But like all Jews, he was torn apart within (“All my bones shake” [Jeremiah 23:9]) and lost in darkness. The objective reality was overwhelming. The “cup of trembling” poured over Talmud: his mother, older sister with three children, and younger sister from Glogów Małoposki were all sent to Reisha (Rzeszow) and from there to “places unknown” (presumably Bełżec); his brother and brother-in-law had disappeared into unidentified camps. Other family members were imprisoned or burned to death.⁴ As for his people, “the ashes of tens of thousands of Jews were strewn over places which sunlight did not reach. Men, women, and children were leaving Warsaw for the valley of tears (‘Thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee’ [Isaiah 49:17]).” No break in the “flood of fire and columns of smoke” (Joel 3:3) could be seen or anticipated.⁵ The realities precluded the very concept of an open future: the recent past was filled with criminal rampages, the present with one disaster after another (Ezekiel 7:26), and the future would surely be calamitous (Jeremiah 4:20).

When people are walking around like shadows of death; when their lives are so full of fear of the enemy that these lives are called death; when the “flaming sword turns every way” [Genesis 3:24]; when Torah scrolls are burned, the letters flying into the air [*Avodah Zarah* 18^a]; when we are embracing dunghills [Lamentations 4:5], how could a scribe take a pen and record memories of the past [for a future generation]? When the foreseeable future is filled with foreboding? When there is no respite?

Even strangers were telling Jews that there was no hope for them. The troubles left Talmud bereft of historical consciousness and, for that matter, of all thought and intentionality. He had only a pained heart, there to express itself without restraint. What, then, did his heart have to say?

Talmud could not grasp how God could be present amid the calamities. He was inclined to attribute them to divine presence in terms of punishment.

Were this only an individual, localized matter! The entire house of Israel is in great trouble. There has been nothing like this since the days of the destruction [*Hurban*] of the Temple. [But this time] the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not pouring out His fury on the wood and stone [of the Temple] but [directly] upon His entire nation of Israel. And each day His curse is greater than [before].

Assuming he shared the widespread view (see, e.g., Avraham Yitshak Bloch of Tels and Elhanan Wasserman of Baranowitch in 1938),⁶ this was a reference to “And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone. As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you” (Ezekiel 20:32–33), relating divine fury to assimilation. But divine presence in terms of punishment of such proportion seemed impossible.

I have doubts that even [God’s] rod of discipline [Proverbs 22:15] or, to take an extreme example, Dante [Alighieri], could depict [i.e., circumscribe (*letsayer*)] the real shadow of death [Jeremiah 13:16] which circulates around the abyss and [the oblivion into which] thousands of us have been lost. None who go there [ever] return; none ever regain the path of life [Proverbs 2:19].

The terrible and dangerous condition, Talmud wrote, brought him “to terrible despair, to the deepest of questions, questions to which there were no answers (*She’elat hatehom, she’elah she’ein alehah teshuvah*)”—and “for these things I weep” [Lamentations 1:16].

Talmud’s despair reached to metahistory—i.e., God’s covenantal relationship with Israel in the historical context. He believed that the eschatological drama was unfolding. The current destruction of Warsaw, the “Jerusalem of Poland,” blended in his mind with the destruction of the Temple. Earlier the voice of Torah was heard in Warsaw day and night, but now the foxes ran over it. According to Jeremiah, foxes roamed the desolate mountain of Zion (Lamentations 5:18). When Rabbi Akiva came to Mount Scopus in Jerusalem with Rabbi Gamaliel, Rabbi Eleazer ben Azariah, and Rabbi Joshua, they saw a fox emerging from the ruins of the Holy of Holies (*Makkot* 24^b). Talmud described the city of Warsaw as a widow, evoking “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become a widow” (Lamentations 1:1). He also spoke of the fact that the Hasidim (the pious of Israel) had fallen while the lower ones (slanderers and power seekers) were on the rise—evoking the upside-down universe at the end of history described in *Sanhedrin* 97^a; and when young men would insult the old and old men would stand before the young to give them honor. He also invoked the well-known description in the 1873 edition of *Even Shelema* by the Gaon of Vilna (citing *Ra’ayah Mehemnah: Parashat Naso*) of how in the end of days, the

rabble would take control and treat the Torah and its adherents with contempt; and of how they would pervert the “tail” into the “head,” emulating Jacob’s retinue in which the handmaids and their children came first, Leah and her children came second, and Rachel and Joseph came last (Eliyahu ben Shlomo, Ha-gaon Mi-vilna, “Be’inyanei Erev Rav Vehevlei Mashiah,” in *Even Shelemah* [p. 125]).

In this first letter, Talmud’s thought, intention, and historical consciousness were set aside. He was (he said) speaking out of pain, and in pain he could not grasp how God could be present. He envisioned a disastrous end. But his references implied a messianic aftermath. Rabbi Akiva confronted the foxes at the Temple ruins and envisioned the realization of Uriah’s prophecy of disaster (Jeremiah 26:20; Micah 3:12), but to him this meant the imminent fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy of salvation (Zechariah 8:4; *Makkot* 24^a). The reversal of values at the end of history was the birth-pains of the messiah. Talmud ended the letter:

There is not a single household left in which someone has not died. Not a family which is not eulogizing [at least] one of its members. Fathers are bereft of sons. Sons bereft of fathers. Men are left without wives. Women without their babies. “[This will prevail] until Shiloh shall come to Judah” [Genesis 49:10] and fathers return to their children.

According to the rabbinical school of Rabbi Shila, Shiloh was the messiah’s name (*Sanhedrin* 98^b). The destruction of historical consciousness and the paralysis in discerning God’s metahistorical presence moved Talmud to the catastrophic denouement to history, but this implied the messiah. From anxiety about divine presence, Talmud moved to the resolution of redemption.

SECOND LETTER (OCTOBER 1942)

Berglas responded, and after some delay Talmud wrote back in October. He explained that the delay was due to distress, both internal and external, but also to the fact that he was called on to lead one of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services conducted in the ghetto and he needed to prepare—this being the first time for him. He asked if Berglas had any news about Hakhmei Lublin Yeshiva graduates in Radom or elsewhere: in time, it turned out, 332 would be killed in the Holocaust.⁷

Talmud spoke of the “epoch-making moment” (*Sha’ah harat olam*). More than any individual tragedy, it involved tens of thousands—indeed millions—caught in destruction. Some Jews went to their slaughter thinking that they were being sent to the

East to work under the administration of Reichsminister für die besetzten Ostgebiete Alfred Rosenberg, imagining that they were moving “from strength to strength” (Psalms 84:8), only to reach the city of the shadow of death (Jeremiah 13:16) and realize that they were about to die. But the Jews in Majdan-Tatarski, Talmud wrote, knew otherwise.

Here we already see and know how millions of Jews are being sent to be killed. Every moment, every hour, transports pass by us like sheep, filled with men, women and children. Some people, the healthy and whole, are selected for work. It is hard labor which breaks down the body and crushes the soul until the body is destroyed—sick from hunger and swollen from famine, beaten indescribably. The others, men, women and infants, go directly to the shadow of death, suffering terribly: “Who by water, who by fire, who by strangling and who by stoning” [*Unetanne Tokef*,” *Musaf, Rosh Hashanah*]. And the ashes are scattered to the wind.

He had some sense that, amid all the horror, God remained present. He related to Berglas that one of their colleagues of the Hakhmei Lublin Yeshiva, Rabbi Mosheh Friedman (the Admor of Bayon), had escaped from Kraków after the Nazis seized the city in early September 1939. He had written Friedman about the deportations from Lublin (“Sent to Azazel” [see Leviticus 16:10]) and enclosed some money that, despite Friedman’s own misery, he gave to others.⁸ Unlike Jews in Lublin such as Rabbi Shimon (Engel) Mizelechow—who attributed the troubles suffered by the Lublin community to the separation from the Hakhmei Lublin Yeshiva, thereby pouring salt on the open wounds of fellow Jews—Friedman demonstrated sanctity and integrity in the face of the oppressors’ fury (Isaiah 51:13). Talmud finally heard from Friedman after writing to him three times. The fact that he survived when only few in his city had been left alive meant that God was indeed watching over those who loved him, “that even at the time of the community’s⁹ Hurban, the holy ones were in His hand.”¹⁰ But this was exceptional.

In the first letter, Talmud intimated doubts about God’s presence, but he did not challenge it and instead moved toward an eschatology that carried messianic implications. About three months later—and only weeks before deportation to Majdanek—the intimations became explicit questions about divine presence, and the questions became declarations about God’s absence.

Talmud related to Berglas that he received a letter from Rabbi Yehoshua Boymel of Opoczno, outside Lublin. Boymel, known for his efforts to strengthen the

yeshiva following the trauma surrounding the death of the great Rabbi Shapiro in October 1933, served in Opoczno until the Nazi invasion.¹¹ But then he was expelled, Talmud related, and his apartment was raided. He continued:

[Boymel] is the beautiful, living embodiment of moral and ritual holiness [*Parashat Kedoshim*: Leviticus 19:1–20, 27]. What is it [*mah lo*] to the enthroned [God], the praise of Israel [*“Yoshev tehilot yisrael”*: Psalms 22:4] for this to happen to His chosen children? Woe to those children whose father would discipline them so [see Proverbs 19:18; 29:17]. Is the existence of eternal Israel [*“Netsah yisrael”*: I Samuel 15:29] really [as it seems] coming to an end? Is God content to let the lands of Kush (Ethiopia) and Teiman (Yemen), black invaders and the Moors of Spain [oppress His people]?¹² [Is He content with] shooting the arrow of His fury against the foundation, the pillar of the nation of Israel, [namely] the Jews of Europe, which God forbid will destroy them?

Talmud could not reconcile suffering with the holiness of a Rabbi Boymel. He did not doubt the reality of God’s providence and presence, but he pitied any nation whose God could punish so and wondered if the relationship with God could invoke the end of Israel—that in the name of discipline, God would let the people be oppressed to the point of destruction. He reported how the community of Reisha informed him that another yeshiva graduate, Yosef Riterman,¹³ was not listed in the “registry” (*Avidnatsiah*)—a response, he said, that usually meant deportation. Yet another, Rabbi Barukh Weiss of Dalina, did not acknowledge the receipt of the 500 zehovim that Talmud had sent him in Ternopol two months earlier: the organized community of Ternopol did not respond to his query about whether Weiss was alive. Was he killed? Dead from starvation? What did all this suffering imply about the God of Israel?

Talmud then spoke of Warsaw’s tragedy.

All the masters and teachers [*Admorim*], rabbis, authors, editors, leaders, and judges of Warsaw have gone into the enemy’s captivity. [God once] took pity with Jonah’s gourd [granting Jonah protection from his grief in response] to Jonah’s prayers to Him overnight [Jonah 9:2–6]. Why was he not having mercy on the entire nation [now], His chosen nation of Israel?

The fact of God’s presence was still, in itself, not doubted. But God’s attributes were open to question (and this only because His presence was assumed), a move that was prohibited by rabbinical tradition.¹⁴ How could God allow His people to be punished to the point of extinction? How could He be helpful to one and seemingly oblivious to all?

The universe was collapsing (“The doorpost would shake” [Isaiah 6:11]), personal agitation was endless, the sun was eclipsed as “savaging plague,” and “pestilence” took over (Deuteronomy 32:24); the sons and daughters of Israel were being tyrannized and slaughtered in front of others. The situation was hopeless. “Neither is it in our power to redeem them’ [Nehemiah 5:5]. ‘What then shall become of us?’ [*Hagigah* 55^a]. To where will this disgrace lead?” But God was not in sight. “Wherefore should the nations say, ‘Where now is their God?’ [Psalms 115:2].”

In the first letter, Talmud intimated doubts about God’s presence. Now he asked explicit questions, and the questions set the framework for answers. To answer, he first affirmed that God was present and that His attribute of righteousness could not be questioned. “He is the rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are [righteous and straight]” (Deuteronomy 32:4, substituting “*kal derakhov tsedek veyasha*” for “*kal derakhov mishpat*”). If God’s attributes could be questioned for their destructiveness and inconsistency while He was in fact righteous, the only possible conclusion to be drawn was that righteousness for man was not righteousness for God. Appearing to divide God from man, to split metahistory apart, Talmud proceeded from invoking Deuteronomy 32:4 to a declaration of the absence of divine righteousness from his perspective amid the catastrophe.

It is difficult for me. It is impossible for me in any way [*Aval kasheh li, i efshar li, beshum ofen*] to reconcile myself with the idea that we are all so guilty, that our sins are so [terrible] as to evoke [*kal kakh ad asher*] such a flood of “blood and fire and columns of smoke” [Joel 3:3].

This extended to the individual.

It is difficult for me to reconcile myself with the idea that I, my wife and only son, a son who is so much like his father (“The pumpkin can be told from its stalk” [*Berakhot* 48^a]), [a son] who is known for his intellect and charm, for his pleasing appearance and his beauty, are going into the pyre [*al hamoked*] to be killed with the cruelty of the era of Torquemada and Isabel the Spaniard.

With this implication that God’s righteousness may not have been comprehensible during the Inquisition, Talmud continued:

I tried to console myself with the promises of the prophets [that catastrophe was followed by consolation]. But real life (more correctly, real degeneracy)

takes its own path [and defies them]. How could we [ever] console ourselves by the future, when it is [surely] not for us? When it is not for us, but [indeed] for our enemies?

Having passed to questions about how the suffering could be reconciled with the God of metahistory to the declaration that God was righteous for Himself but not righteous in human terms, Talmud probed the realm of God itself. He concluded that God could not bear the suffering, objective and existential, for which He alone must be responsible and so he hid from it. Referring to Him as the one who was in heaven (*Hayoshev ba-shamayim*)—intimating how God was in heaven but not with man on earth—he said that God was hiding His face (*histir panov* [see, e.g., Psalms 44:25]). God’s inmost self was weeping (*Ubamistarim tivkkeh nafsho* [Jeremiah 13:17]); He turned within to cry. (According to the Midrash, when God wept at the destruction of the Temple, the angel said, “Sovereign of the Universe, let me weep but don’t you weep.” God replied, “If you don’t let me weep now, I will go to a place where you have no permission to enter, and will weep there” [*Midrash Aykha Rabbah*: Proem 24]). The suffering of Israel was so great that God, weeping, had to remove Himself from it. Talmud also cited “My head is too heavy for Me, My arm is too heavy for Me”—evoking what the divine presence (*Shekhinah*) said when the people of Israel suffered (*Sanhedrin* 46^a).

With the metahistorical relationship shattered, God’s righteousness remained intact from on high. Sitting in heaven, removed from man, God wept. And as He wept over a suffering that (for Talmud) He alone could have caused, the people of Israel remained without a God to save them from misery. Talmud, however, did not stop at this point. He sought to reconcile the disjunction between the righteous God of eternity and the abandonment of His people in time. Redemption (he believed) would repair the break and restore the metahistorical rapport between God and Israel, between God of Himself and the human comprehension of God. Surely, Talmud asserted, the messiah was about to come.

May the revenge for the blood of His servants [“He will avenge the blood of His servant”: Deuteronomy 32:43] be known among the nations and before our eyes [i.e., historically and metahistorically]. May a savior arise for Israel [*yakum mashiah be’yisrael*] and [actually] deliver us from [out of] the depths.

Why would the messiah soon come? Because the tension between God and Israel was now unbearable; because God allowed the suffering—rooted in His punishment—to reach the point of destroying His people. The messiah had to come: if he did not Israel and God’s relationship with Israel would be destroyed. And that was inconceivable.

And if not now, when [will the savior arise]? If not in such an hour, when we are already at the forty-nine gates of destruction [of the flames of Nebuchadnezzar’s red-hot furnace wench darted beyond the oven to the height of forty-nine ells], then when will the rescuer rescue and the savior save us [*hamatsil lehatsil vehamashiah lehoshi ’einu*]?

Until this point the second letter resembled the first—God’s relationship with Israel was being upset, but redemption would resolve everything—even if it radicalized the themes of the first letter. But at this point it broke away.

All the ends [to history] have already taken place [i.e., all misery has been expressed], and we have not been rescued. [See “May the very essence of those who calculate ends suffer agony. For they say ‘since the date of the end we calculate has arrived and the messiah did not come, he will never come’” (*Sanhedrin 97^b*).] We are in terrible danger. There is not even the [smallest] spark of hope that we will be saved.

That is, God had abandoned His people to disaster and there was no redemption. At this point Talmud surrendered. Not even his letter would survive.

My desire was that there remain some memorial of my name and the name of my father [see “And let my name (Israel) be named on them and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac” (Genesis 48:16)], and of my only son whom I’ve loved with all the love in the world. I wanted by my letter, at least, to remain as a memory forever. In this I would be consoled. But not even this is given to us. Our seed, our name, creation itself are being annihilated without protest.

With the eclipse of redemption, Talmud’s frantic search to restore Israel’s (and his own) relationship with God collapsed. This drove him mad—in his words, made his hair stand on end. The ideas, anxieties, and pains took hold of him, and he could not free himself.

But even then Talmud was unable to stop believing. He told Berglas that his words were spoken in pain, that he should not be blamed for them, and “May the good

God forgive these words and their implications.” How was God there for Talmud? He said that he burst out crying.

Only the gates of tears have not been closed to us. Only to cry over the *Hurban* of the daughters of our nation [see “And they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people lightly” (Jeremiah 8:11)]. All that remains possible and allowed us is to mourn over the hurt of our destroyed nation; and to steer the river of tears together with us to the grave. That will not be taken from us.

In his first letter, he spoke of there being no answer to the deepest of questions (*She'elat hatehom*), cited Jeremiah (“For these things I weep” [Lamentations 1:16]), and proceeded to speak of catastrophe bringing redemption. Now the weeping came after hopelessness about redemption itself.

Talmud’s letter did not end at this point. As if transformed by his tears, he turned from God to man and declared:

Let us make ourselves responsible, not only for our fellow children of Israel, but even for the acts of deviance and evasion [*Na'aseinu areivim lo be'ad hevreinu aheinu benei Yisrael bilvad ki im gam al ma'aseh setiah v'teshiah*]. And we shall endure their trespasses [i.e., if we assume responsibility for what we do in confronting them]. Woe that this has befallen us. Woe that this came upon us in our day.

The Jew must continue to practice Judaism. Talmud reported how people prayed in many places in the ghetto during the high holidays (a testimony from Ida Rapaport-Glickstein speaks of people praying with great commitment to God [*Devekut*] even as they contended with God about why the tragedies had occurred in the first place).¹⁵ Extremist Jews (*Kitsonim*) who had never worshiped in public before participated, and not only to recite the memorial prayer (*Hazkarat neshamot*) but in the entire service. And they managed to have the ritual articles needed for Succot (*Etrog, Arba'a minim*) that were rare in Poland by this time. Of course Talmud himself had led the worship on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Having changed his focus from how God related to Israel in history to the autonomous sanctification of human life, Talmud’s letter came to an end.

But there was one more paragraph. Referring to the continued terror and specifying the fact that Majdan-Tatarski had been divided into thirteen distinct work sections, he said that he heard that an order was issued from on high (presumably

Berlin) for a rest period—and “May God grant that evil not befall us, that God will watch over the entire house of Israel.” And then, invoking the *Avinu Malkeinu* of the *Yamim Noraim*:

Let us hope that all the evil will disappear as smoke, that the year of redemption will begin for us and for all of Israel [and we will] be rescued [*lehinatset*] from all troubles and disasters; and the Holy One, Blessed be He, “will remove pestilence, sword, famine, captivity and slaughter from us and from all children of the covenant” [*“Avinu Malkeinu”*].

Talmud’s final message was that if God abandoned Israel and there was not even redemption to hope for, still the Jew would care for his fellow Jew, endure torture and death, practice Judaism, and believe in God and redemption amid the absolute void.

Shimon Turkltoyb writes that in Majdanek Talmud said to him:

If the heavens were made of iron and copper, and there was one listening there and seeing the sighing and the crying of the women and children, and if the heavens were not shaken and a savior [*moshia*] did not descend from heaven—this was a sign that there was nothing in heaven.

Turkltoyb went on to say that Talmud made liturgical calendars and baked matzot for Passover in the oven (*hatanur*)—presumably the same oven that burned the corpses.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Talmud, identified by Turkltoyb as a student of Rabbi Shapiro, surely imbibed his theme of divinely ordained suffering to purify Israel. On “Shabbat Nahamu” (Isaiah 40:1) in 1931, for example, citing “I the Lord will hasten it in his time,” Shapiro explained that redemption would be hastened if Israel was worthy, but take time if Israel had yet to become worthy through Torah study. In the course of history leading to redemption, penitent return (*Teshuvah*) played a role. To this end the principle of “sufferings wash away all the sins of man” (*Berakhot 5^a*) applied. In turn, this required man to recognize that the sufferings were not accidental but were attributable to God. Shapiro, referring to troubles with their neighbors in Lublin at the time, called for *Teshuvah*.¹⁷ His student Boymel wrote that the terrible persecutions in Poland, the hunger and want, the fact that crime and murder were nothing exceptional, all meant that the Jew had to dedicate himself to Torah. Precisely in bitter times—and these were in fact the times of birth pangs of the messiah (*Hevlei leida*)—Torah had to be the

primary concern. History remained under God's aegis, suffering was a function of Torah, and suffering would be eased by Torah study and practice.¹⁸

Talmud believed that the suffering was God's doing, and if the relationship between suffering and God's presence became problematic, it would be resolved with redemption. But the near total deportation of Jews from the Lublin ghetto to the death camps made the existence of God and the suffering of Israel irreconcilable, even in anticipation of redemption. God surely existed, but hidden (by Himself) from man. Nor was there any redemption in sight to restore the metahistorical relationship. In tears, Talmud accepted a separation between God and Israel that started in time but did not end in eternity. It was then that he turned to the sanctity of man. In human life and the manner of human death, in the carrying out of ritual in whatever way possible, in the utterance of God's name in the universe emptied of divinity, lay the endpoint for the Jewish religion of Majdan-Tatarski.

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NOTES

1. This essay focuses on the theological and religious turmoil of Talmud as reflected in the two letters. Hopefully the letters of Berglas, Friedman, Boymel, and Shimon Mizelichow will be discovered and made available to provide context. Further study should explore the impact of Talmud's yeshiva training on his religious outlook. The last yeshiva head of Hakhmei Lublin was Shlomo Eiger; according to Tadeusz Radzik's documentation, he was deported from Lublin—for which the deportation point (*Umschlagplatz*) was the Maharshal (Shlomo ben Yehiel Luria) synagogue. On Meir Shapiro see Aharon Sorsky, *Rabi Meir Shapira Bamishnah Ba'omer Uvama'as* (Benei Berak, Israel: Netsah, 1963); and *Meir Nitsotsei Or Hameir: Mivhar Ra'ayonot Al-Hatorah . . . Vesihot Hulin* (Benei Berak, Israel: Netsah, 1973).

2. Tadeusz Radzik, *Lubelska dzielnica zamknieta* (Lublin: Wydawn, 1999), pp. 205–206. Robert Kuwalek, “Urzedowi rabini lubelskiego Okregu Boznic znego 1829–1939,” in *Zydzi w Lublinie: Materialy do dziejów spolecznosci zydowskiej Lublina*, ed. Tadeusz Radzik (Lublin: Wydawn, 1995), pp. 27–65. Ida Rapaport-Glickstein, “Di Getos fun Lublin un fun Majdan-Tatarski,” in *Dos Bukh fun Lublin*, ed. M. Litvin and M. Lerman (Paris: Parizer Komitet far shafn a Monografye vegn Yidishn Yishuv in Lublin [Former Residents of Lublin in Paris], 1952), pp. 383–419. Shimon Turkltoyb, “Maidanek,” in *Entsiklopedyah Shel Galuyot, vol. 5: Lublin*, ed. Nahman Blumental and Meir Kuzhin (Jerusalem: Hevrat Entsiklopedyah, 1953), pp. 730–39. Nahman Blumental, *Te'udot Mi-geto Lublin: Yudenrat Le-lo Derekh* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1967), pp. 144, 263, 361. Dieter Pohl, *Von der “Judenpolitik” zum Judenmord: Der Distrikt Lublin des Generalgouvernements 1939–1944* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993). Jozef Marszalek, *Majdanek: The Concentration Camp in Lublin* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1986). “Lublin,” in *Pinkas Ha-kehilot: Polin. Entsiklopedyah Shel Ha-yishuvim Ha-yehudiyim Le-min Hivasdam Ve-'ad Le ahar Sho'at Milhemet Ha-'olam Ha-sheniyah*, ed. D. Dombrowska, Avraham Wein, and Aharon Vais (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976–), pp. 27–36.

3. Berglas was killed in the Holocaust. See Meir Vunder, *Me'orei Galitsyah: Entsiklopedyah Le-hakhmei Galitsyah*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Makhon Le-hantsahat Yahadut Galitsyah, 1978), p. 96; and *Sefer Hayovel Lemaharam Shapiro* (Jerusalem: Mash'abim, 1982), p. 102.

4. On July 8, 1990, a certain “David Talmud” in Reims completed a page of testimony (*Daf Ed*) for Yad Vashem (nos. 2221128–32), which reported that his mother Regina (née Birnfeld) and sisters Tauba (born 1910) and Rahel (born 1916) were deported from Glogów Małoposki; his brothers Tsevi Elimelekh (born 1912) from Lublin and Mendel (born 1908) were arrested; and his father Yisrael Layb (born 1884) was deported to Auschwitz (March 27, 1944). Barukh Shimon Schneorson lists Rabbi Tsevi Elimelekh Talmud (son of Yisrael Aryeh Talmud) of Glogów Małoposki as lost or killed in the Holocaust, but the file in which Hirsh Melekh Talmud's letters were found in Lublin mistakenly carries the first name “David.”

5. Talmud wrote that the terrible river of “blood and fire and columns of smoke” (Joel 3:3) was not on the banks of the Don[ai] and Doniets but the rivers G”G,” which I could not identify.

6. See Gershon Greenberg, “Holocaust and Musar for the Telsiai Yeshiva: Avraham Yitshak and Eliyahu Meir Bloch,” in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, ed. Alvydas Nikzentaitis, Stefan Schreiner, and Darius Staliunas (Amsterdam: Rodoei, 2004) pp. 223–62; and “Elhanan Wasserman’s Response to the Growing Catastrophe in Europe: The Role of Ha’gra and the Hofets Hayim,” *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 10 (2000), pp. 171–204.

7. Barukh Shimon Schneorson, “Reshimat Talmidei Yeshivat Hakhmei Lublin,” in Meir Shapiro, *Sefer Marganita De-rabi Meir: Kolel Hidushim ‘Amukim Be-filpul . . . He-arot Ve-he’arot . . . ‘Al Seder Ha-shas Veba-rambam*, ed. Barukh Shimon Schneorson (Jerusalem: Ma’yan Ha-hokhmah, 1967), pp. i–iv.

8. According to Blumental’s documentation (*Te’udot Mi-geto Lublin*, pp. 300–61), Talmud was distributing money as late as August 9, 1942.

9. I have translated “*Klal*” as community and “*Kehillah*” as organized community.

10. Engel, known as a “living Talmud encyclopedia,” was a resident scholar at the Lublin Yeshiva but left following Rabbi Shapiro’s death amid a controversy with the administration. He served as a yeshiva head in Kraków, from where he was deported and killed in 1943. See A. Wolf Jasny and Laybush Vaysleder, “Shimon Engel Mizelechow,” in *Yizkor-Bukh fun der Zshelekhover Yidisher Kehile*, ed. A. Wolf Jasny and Laybusg Vaysleder (Chicago: Tsentraler Zshelekhover Landsmanschaft in Chikago, 1953), pp. 37–38.

Friedman was a member of the Council of Torah Sages (*Mo’etsat Gedolei Hatorah*) of the Orthodox Union (*Agudath Israel*). Yisrael Eis and the Sternbuch family in Switzerland were able to secure him a visa to Paraguay, but it did not arrive in time. According to Hillel Seidman (“Harav Mosheh Friedman: Admor Miboyan,” in *Eleh Ezkerah: Osef Toldot Kedoshei, 700–705*, ed. Isaac Lewin [New York: Hamakhon Le-heker Ba’ayot Ha-yahadut Ha-haredit, 1956–72], pp. 109–17), Friedman was killed in Belżec on September 3, 1943, but according to Esther Mark (“Arba Teudot Mi’auschwitz-Birkenau,” *Galed* 1 [1973], pp. 309–32), Friedman went from Vittel to Auschwitz and was murdered during Passover 1944. See also Mosheh Friedman, *Sefer Da’at Mosheh* (Jerusalem: Kolel “Da ‘at Mosheh,” Mekhon “Kerem Yisra’el,” 1983), pp. 237–43.

11. Boymel was born in 1913 in Buczacz and, after graduating from the Hakhmei Lublin Yeshiva, succeeded his father as rabbi of Kroskienku-Szczawnica Nizna and then of Opoczno. He authored a Yiddish-language biography of Meir Shapiro that survived the war and came into the hands of his brother Joseph in Brooklyn, who

published it (*Harav Hagadol: Masekhet Hayav Shel Maran Hagadol Hakadosh Rabi Meir Shapiro* [Jerusalem: Mash'abim, 1990]). He also helped found the Organization of Hakhmei Lublin Yeshiva Graduates (*Igud Hanikhei Yeshivat Hakhmei Lublin*) to restore the yeshiva after Meir Shapiro's death in October 1933—but when asked to lead it, suggested his friend Berglas instead. Most of his writings were destroyed in the Holocaust, but some of his studies in law (*Halakhah*) and religious thought (*Aggadah*) were published in *Hatalmid Hagadol: Sefer Zikaron Leharav Hagaon Rabi Yehoshua Boymel* (Jerusalem: Mash'abim, 1990). He was killed at the age of twenty-nine with his wife, two children, and mother in Treblinka. Yosef M. Boymel, "About the Author," in Yehoshua Boymel, *A Blaze in the Darkening Gloom: The Life of Rav Meir Shapiro of Blessed Memory* (Spring Valley, NY: Feldheim, 1994), pp. xxi–xxvii. Hillel Seidman, "Harav R. Yehoshua Boymel-Krushtsnika," in *Eleh Ezkerah: Osef Toldot Kedoshei, 700–705*, ed. Isaac Lewin (New York: Ha-makhon Le-heker Ba'ayot Ha-yahadut Ha-haredit, 1956–72), pp. 290–97.

12. The allusion to Kush, Yemen, black invaders, and the Moors of Spain in particular is unclear.

13. Schneerson ("Reshimat Talmidei Yeshivat Hakhmei Lublin," pp. i–iv) lists Riterman, who was also killed in the Holocaust, as coming from Kraków.

14. On prohibitions against reflecting on God's attributes to the point of criticizing them, see Gershon Greenberg, "The Religious Response of Shlomoh Zalman Ehrenreich (Simleul-Silvaniei, Transylvania) to the Holocaust (1940–43)," *Studia Judaica* 9 (2000), pp. 65–93.

15. "In zayere groyse Vaytikn hobn di Mentshn zikh oysgetenhet mitn Rebono shel Olam, halemai dos iz zay gekumen" [In their great tribulation, people argued with the Sovereign of the World: Why did this happen?]. Rapaport-Glickstein, "Di Getos," p. 411.

16. Turkltoyb, "Maidanek," p. 737.

17. Meir Shapiro, "Derush Tokhehah Mirabeinu z"l Beshabbat Nahamu 5691," reprinted in Yisrael Ya'akov Moskovitsh, *Sefer She'erit Ya'akov: Leket Me-hidushei Torah Ve-divre Agadah* (London: S. Moskowitz, 1956–57), pp. 108–12.

18. Boymel, "Hevlei Mashiah: Devarim Nikhtavu Shanim Ahadot Lifnei Hashoah Hanatsit," in *Hatalmid Hagadol*, pp. 107–109.

DECIPHERING THE ANCESTRAL PARADIGM: A HASIDIC COURT IN THE WARSAW GHETTO¹

Henry M. Abramson

In the future . . . [God will] say to Isaac, “Your children have sinned against me.”

Isaac [will reply], “Master of the Universe! Are they my children—and not Your children? At the time that they answered you with ‘we will do and we will hear’ [Exodus 24:7], did You not call them ‘My child, My firstborn’ [Exodus 4:22]? Now they are my children, and not Your children? And furthermore—how much could they have sinned? How many years has a man: seventy [cf. Psalms 90:1]. Take away twenty, for which You do not punish [see Rashi on that passage]; this leaves fifty. Take away twenty-five years for the nights; this leaves twenty-five. Take away twelve and a half for prayer, eating, and using the facilities, this leaves twelve and a half. If You can tolerate this, fine, and if not, let half be my responsibility and half Your responsibility. And if You will say it is all my responsibility, behold, the sacrifice of my life is before you [cf. Genesis 22].”

Talmud, Shabbat 89a

Why is it only in the future that Isaac says to the Holy One, “behold, the sacrifice [of my life stands before you]”? Why didn’t he say this at the time of the destruction of the Temple, or at the time of any other Jewish tragedy, requesting from the Holy One that the Jewish people receive atonement because of Isaac’s self-sacrifice? The deeds of the ancestors are a paradigm for their descendants [*maase avot siman le-banim*]. This [binding of Isaac] represented the beginning of Divine Worship among Jews, such that in all of our prayers we say, “God of Abraham and God of Isaac.” In this manner, the binding of Isaac was not simply a personal test for him alone, rather it was the inception of Divine Worship through self-sacrifice to God and the Jewish people. Since the test of Abraham and Isaac was in the form of will and thought, which were not completely fulfilled in deed, in so far as the angel said to Abraham, “Do not send forth your hand upon the lad”—each time that a Jew is killed by a non-Jew, which is the opposite—deed without thought—this represents a fulfillment of the binding of Isaac. [The binding of Isaac] was the beginning, in thought and will, and now is the completion in deed. The binding of Isaac and the subsequent murder of every Jew afterwards constitute one event.

The Piaseczno Rebbe,
on the first anniversary of the death of his only son
(October 18, 1940, pp. 72–73)²

This passage is characteristic of *Esh Kodesh (Holy Fire)*, one of the few surviving Holocaust sources that sheds light on how Hasidic Jews reacted to the unfolding events of World War II. A collection of nearly 100 sermons delivered to Warsaw audiences between September 1939 and July 1942 (with annotations as late as January 1943), *Esh Kodesh* provides an unequalled opportunity to understand the world of Warsaw Hasidim through the weekly Shabbat discourses of Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro (1889–1943), otherwise known as the Piaseczno Rebbe.³ *Esh Kodesh* was discovered, along with several other writings of the Piaseczno Rebbe, buried in the rubble of the ruined ghetto in a manner similar to the Oneg Shabbat Archives, and was eventually published in Israel in 1960 by the surviving Piaseczno Hasidim. While *Esh Kodesh* has been analyzed from theological and literary perspectives, its arcane and enigmatic nature has made it largely impenetrable to historians who wish to mine its resources for information on the inner life of Warsaw Jews during the Nazi occupation.⁴

While *Esh Kodesh* is a dramatic work of twentieth-century Hasidic theology, viewing it as a historical source illuminates the ways in which Hasidim attempted to comprehend the steadily intensifying Nazi occupation.⁵ A close reading of *Esh Kodesh* reveals a public attempt to place the Holocaust in the context of traditional rabbinical theology by framing the increasingly unsupportable persecution within what Gershon Greenberg calls “metahistory,” transforming the quotidian suffering of Warsaw Jewry under the Nazis into a primordial struggle between good and evil.⁶ In other words, *Esh Kodesh* demonstrates how the Piaseczno Rebbe helped his followers cope with the theological dissonance posed by the Nazi occupation by giving it metaphysical import, arguing that their experience of suffering was crucial to the very survival of the universe.

A STUDIED SILENCE: THE ENIGMATIC NATURE OF *ESH KODESH*

As a historical source, *Esh Kodesh* has both positive and negative qualities. On the one hand, it is distinguished from most conventional sources by its public nature: unlike diaries or journals, or even the monographic studies of Emanuel Ringelblum, it was intended for public dissemination on a weekly basis. As a result, it may be considered as more than the view of a single author since it had to meet the demands of its audience—i.e., the attendees at his weekly Shabbat meetings.⁷ Moreover, his message had to be couched in terms consistent with the mythic content of their shared belief.

Although the Piaseczno Rebbe was one of the more significant Hasidic leaders in prewar Poland, this broader social base lends the work a great degree of legitimacy.⁸

Second, since it was written in fairly regular weekly installments, a careful comparison of the Rebbe's discourses with the history of the ghetto during the preceding week sheds light on how the Piaseczno Hasidim dealt with the incremental unfolding of events during the Nazi occupation. Hasidim, and possibly non-Hasidim as well, came to these discourses to gain some religious perspective on the horrific events of their times, and the Piaseczno Rebbe clearly attempted to meet this need in *Esh Kodesh*.⁹ Judging from several allusions in this work, the Rebbe was clearly aware of this important aspect of his role in community life.¹⁰

On the other hand, *Esh Kodesh* presents formidable difficulties as a historical source. Even after deciphering the cryptic references to obscure Talmudic and Kabbalistic sources, *Esh Kodesh* is almost totally devoid of any direct reference to specific events. Entries in the standard Hebrew edition, for example, are not dated: the reference to the weekly Bible reading (*parashah*) was sufficient to connect the text to its metahistorical context. Nowhere are the words "Nazi" or "German" mentioned, and indeed the war itself is only referenced in oblique terms. As a typical example, consider the entry for November 18, 1939 (pp. 12–13) when the weekly Bible reading was *Vayetse*, which includes Jacob's dream of the angels ascending and descending a ladder reaching to Heaven (Genesis 28).

And behold, God was standing over him. Rashi explains, "to protect him." One must ask, wouldn't it have been sufficient for one of the many angels to protect him? Furthermore, the verse later states, *behold, I am with you and I will protect you.* Why was it necessary here for God Himself to stand over and protect him? Even though it is possible to interpret that the words *and I will protect you* in the later verse refer to protecting [Jacob] on his journey, and the protection mentioned earlier refers to that night in particular, nonetheless one must ask, why were two acts of protection necessary, and not one continuous protection from the present until Jacob returned?

The following interpretation is possible. There is a well-known Midrashic teaching which states that the angels who were ascending and descending the ladder were in fact the ministering angels of the nations of the world. Consequently, when hostilities erupt between these ministering angels, this one ascends and casts the other down, and vice-versa, under these circumstances the Jew needs Divine mercy to such an extent that it is necessary for God Himself to stand over him and protect him. This is because an angel *will not forgive your sin*, whereas the Blessed One is

endlessly merciful. God says to [the Jew], *I am the God of your father*, such that “even if, Heaven forbid, you yourself have no merit, and I can no longer say ‘I am your God,’ but only ‘I am the God of your father.’” Due to ancestral merit alone, He will still stand over him and protect him.

During this period of stress, as we endure the rise and fall of ministering angels, among many other tribulations, we are humbled and fearful before the Blessed One. We must engrave this in our hearts, this humility and fear should remain within us, so that when God will speedily help us with all of our tribulations, we will be subservient to Him, and serve Him in truth, love and fear.

This is an example of one of the more accessible entries in *Esh Kodesh*. The Rebbe begins with a simple question based on a verse from the weekly Bible reading and Rashi’s commentary (*khumesh-rashi*) and then connects it to Midrash, thus placing the question in both contemporary and metahistorical contexts (that is, the ministering angels as the warring nations). Then a more complex idea is introduced (not translated here), concluding with a homiletic message: God will personally protect Jews during this time of international conflict. Yet what is not said is perhaps more significant than what is made explicit. The previous week of entries in Chaim Kaplan’s famous diary include the following passages.

First, the newspapers were shut down. Only one special newspaper exists, fruit of their hands and their spirit. Through this rag all outside news is filtered, and its single topic is invective and vituperation against England: she is unequaled in lying, stealing, murdering, and all the sins in the world; she is being defeated on all fronts and within the country there is starvation and illness. The French are not touched. Altogether the newspaper has two pages, one of them for announcements. This is the well from which we draw our political and military information. . . . Wild rumors spread in whispers. There is a rumor that Mussolini is fighting against Hitler? Can it be possible? A comment crept into the conqueror’s press that the Duce wishes to activate his army. Against whom? Will salvation come from an unexpected source? We try to comfort ourselves that our liberation is close at hand, and our distress makes room for all kinds of fantasies and visions. [November 11]

News—a bombshell! A plot against the Führer. Even before the news was announced officially, rumors had spread that his assistant, Hess, was killed in the plot. Never has there been so ripe a time for those who exaggerate, for sowers of frightening rumors, and for spreaders of panic as in our days. And now the fantasies have happily become a reality. . . . But the news is meager, now that our radio sets have been taken away and everybody who listens to broadcasts in secret is liable to punishment.

There is therefore a broad field for the imagination, which in time of distress is very active. [November 14]

And here there is room for various fantasies which can be created only in the sick imaginations of the unfortunates who are in the midst of these troubles. Sometimes the storytellers throw themselves on the mercy of Stalin, “the compassionate”; sometimes on Roosevelt, who “has pity on the poor,” and who threatened the Führer that if he did not stop persecuting Jews, the Germans would be thrown out of America. The soil is ready even for religious Messianism. [November 17]¹¹

The Piaseczno Rebbe’s comments clearly fit into the context of the intense rumors circulating throughout the ghetto during the week. His message is tailored to the specific needs of his audience, providing an authoritative religious response to the wildly shifting and contradictory reports that were the currency of ghetto conversation. There is little doubt that Warsaw Hasidim would have been buffeted by these powerful waves of stormy rumors no less than non-Hasidic Jews, and the Rebbe-centered nature of Hasidic society would have rendered the Piaseczno Rebbe—to extend the metaphor—into a veritable lightning rod. Hasidim would have eagerly anticipated the Rebbe’s sermon as an opportunity to receive much needed guidance from their sacred tradition and holy leader. It is precisely this aspect of *Esh Kodesh* that makes it a social document: it serves a social purpose and tells us much about the psychological and sociological mechanisms employed by Hasidic Jews in their attempt to maintain group integrity, religious tradition, and in some cases personal sanity.

AESOPIAN LANGUAGE AND THE METAHISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Piaseczno Rebbe uses two distinct literary techniques to convey the message of consolation and encouragement that permeates *Esh Kodesh*.¹² First, he addresses the events of the week in what is known in Eastern Europe as “Aesopian language,” an oblique system of symbolic terminology that serves to disguise the true message. The term dates from the period of late tsarism in the Russian Empire, when revolutionaries would avoid censorship by publishing critiques of government policy in coded terminology understood by fellow opponents of the regime.¹³ In the case of *Esh Kodesh*, it is unlikely that the Piaseczno Rebbe concealed his intent out of concern for Nazi censorship (the very fact that Jews were gathering to discuss Torah violated Nazi policies); rather, he uses Aesopian language as a literary tool to connect his audience with the ultimate metahistorical message. His audience would understand the subtext of the message, even when it was not explicit. For example, shortly after losing his son,

daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law in the initial bombing of Warsaw, his heartbroken mother passed away on October 20, 1939. Immediately after the mourning period had ended, the Rebbe delivered the following discourse (November 4, 1939, pp. 9–10).

It is written in the holy work *Maor va-Shemesh*, at the beginning of *Parashat Vaera*, in the name of the holy rabbi, the man of God, our teacher and master, Menahem Mendel of Rimanov (may the memory of the righteous and holy be for a blessing), regarding the Talmudic passage: “a covenant is made with salt, and a covenant is made with afflictions. Just as salt makes meat palatable, so too afflictions purify [the individual of sin]”: “just as one cannot derive pleasure from meat that has been excessively salted, rather only if it was properly salted, so too afflictions should be meted out in such measure that they can be tolerated, and with an admixture of mercy.” Rashi explains that “the death of Sarah was juxtaposed to the binding of Isaac because [with the news that her son was being bound and was about to be sacrificed] her soul burst forth from her and she died.” That is to say, Moshe our Teacher, the faithful shepherd, juxtaposed the death of Sarah to the binding of Isaac in order to advocate on our behalf, indicating what results from excessive afflictions, Heaven forbid—“her soul burst forth and she died.” Furthermore, if this was the case with the tremendously righteous Sarah, who was as blameless at the age of one hundred as a twenty-year-old, and all of her years were equally good, yet despite this she was unable to withstand such horrible afflictions—how much the more so does this apply to us.

It is also possible to argue that Sarah the Matriarch, who was so heartbroken with binding of Isaac that her soul burst forth, did so for the benefit of the Jewish people, to demonstrate to God how it is impossible for the Jewish people to tolerate excessive afflictions. Even for one who remains alive after such afflictions by the grace of God, nevertheless some of his strength—his mind and spirit are broken and destroyed. Is there a difference between partial and total death?

Clearly in the Rebbe’s discussion of the death of Sarah the Matriarch, the audience would have heard his personal comment and prayer on the death of his own mother—“her soul burst forth” because of the excessive suffering, an example of “meat that has been excessively salted”—as a sanctioned note of protest expressed within the metahistorical context of the weekly Bible reading.

On a larger, scale, consider the discourse from December 9, 1939 (pp. 15–16). In the week preceding the discourse, the major news among Warsaw’s Jewish population was the official visit to the Generalgouvernement of a Jewish diplomat from the USSR, Maxim Litvinov. The incongruity of the Nazis welcoming a Jew—Kaplan

refers to “royal honors”—must have inspired many Warsaw residents to believe that perhaps this Jew would engineer some relief for their suffering.¹⁴ The visit occurs immediately before the weekly Bible reading of *Mikets*, in which the patriarch Jacob gives a blessing to his sons before they travel down to Egypt to face the viceroy once again, unaware that he is actually Joseph their brother.

And may Kel Shakai provide you with mercy before the man. Let us understand: is it possible that Jacob the Patriarch would provide them with the blessing that the man that he thought was an Egyptian [i.e., Joseph] should have mercy on them? Why didn't he give them a blessing that the man should have no ability to harm them, and that God have mercy on them and save them?

The *Midrash Rabah* states that the Divine Name *Kel Shakai* refers to the One who said to the world, “enough!” Had God not said, “Enough,” the processes of creation would remain unbounded. While we have no grasp of what reality was at the time of the creation of the universe, yet for our purposes the biblical account of the events of creation alludes to the concept that God created the universe in order that His blessed Kingdom thereby be made manifest. God created the universe in such a way that it is governed by the laws of cause and effect, and the laws of nature, and therefore there are times when events must continue to unfold over a protracted period of time until their positive resolution, and thus His Sovereignty is made manifest. For example, when God cures a sick person, His salvation and blessed Kingdom are revealed. As the salvation of healing is clothed in causality—it is brought about by means of a particular medicine, by means of a particular doctor, who has to arrive, and who has to get the medicine—this process requires a certain amount of time. When, however, the patient is so endangered, Heaven forbid, that he could not survive such an extended process, then The Holy One says, “Enough of the process of the unfolding of events! May he be saved immediately, and thereby make manifest the Kingdom of Heaven.” This is the case with other acts of salvation. When the Jewish people can no longer withstand their sufferings until such time one power conquers or another power is victorious, then the Holy One says, “Enough of the process!” and immediately they are saved.

“Originally, God's intention was to create the universe with the attribute of Divine justice. He saw [that the universe could not exist] and thus created the attribute of Divine mercy first and joined it to [the attribute of Divine justice].” Why was it necessary for Divine mercy to come first? Would it not have been sufficient merely to place them in partnership, if the universe would not survive without mercy? This is the fundamental point: when the universe cannot continue to exist, the

attribute of Mercy must first be sent, so that it arrives prior to its predestined time.

Jacob the Patriarch saw that his salvation must come about through “the man.” Since the hardships had become unbearable, however, he said, *may Kel Shakai provide you with mercy “before” the man*, that is, that He should provide you with mercy “before” the man shows mercy; may God have mercy and save you. For this reason, he used the name *Kel Shakai*, referring to the one who said “enough!” to His universe. Enough to the unfolding of events—may salvation come swiftly and immediately.

Here the Aesopian language apparently disguises the message that while Litvinov’s visit might indeed mean some relief for Jews (“Jacob the Patriarch saw that his salvation must come about through ‘the man’”), nevertheless the religious approach should be to appeal directly to God for salvation rather than rely on human intervention. The Piaseczno Rebbe exploits the ambiguity inherent in the word “before” (present in the Hebrew original and in the English translation) to say that in light of the extreme suffering, Jews should pray that God save them prior to any salvation that might be forthcoming through diplomatic events.

In both these examples, the Piaseczno Rebbe uses Aesopian language to connect current events (the death of his mother in the first citation, and the visit of Litvinov in the other) to events in the weekly Bible reading (the death of Sarah, the blessing that Jacob bestows on his children). This explicit connection of quotidian life to the current *parashah* is an expression of the rabbinical concept that the deeds of the ancestors are a paradigm for the children (*maase avot siman le-banim*). As the medieval commentator Nahmanides explains (Genesis 12:6):

A great principle in all the coming chapters [*parshiot*] regarding Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a great principle indeed: our rabbis refer to this in an abbreviated form, saying [Tanhuma 6], “Whatever happened to the ancestors is a paradigm for the children [*siman le-banim*].” Therefore the verses go on at length about their travels, and digging wells, and other happenstance, such that one might think that they are extraneous and of no benefit—but all of them are for the purpose of clarifying future events, such that when something happens to a prophet, he will contemplate the three Patriarchs and know what has been decreed for later generations.

This concept of *maase avot siman le-banim* provides the basis for the Piaseczno Rebbe to connect the Warsaw ghetto to a metahistorical context. Rather than speaking directly about the immediate events of ghetto life, he need only speak in an Aesopian

sense about the events of the weekly Bible reading. The silence regarding historical *realia* actually serves to reinforce the metahistorical impetus in the sense of “voicing the void,” a term used by Sara Horowitz in her study of Holocaust fiction, where silence acts in such a way that

the political and personal ideologies of readers and participants are brought into active engagement with the collectively recollected history. Midrash functions to fill textual gaps in Torah—missing transitions, conversations, events. In so doing, Midrash itself produces gaps that in turn require interpretive narrative and the active participation of a reader who must “write himself.”¹⁵

The unspoken message—that the biblical reading has direct relevance to our specific circumstances—serves to reinforce the faith by requiring the listener/reader to frame his or her experiences in terms of the metahistorical narrative.

“BREAKING THE EAR” AND THE METAHISTORICAL CONTEXT

In analyzing patterns of religious response to the Holocaust, Greenberg argues that during the ghetto period, “the original metahistorical meaning became reversed (Passover, e.g., came to mean imprisonment instead of liberation).”¹⁶ A close reading of *Esh Kodesh* clearly demonstrates the truth of this assertion. A powerful aspect of the sermons is the exceptionally creative use that the Piaseczno Rebbe makes of traditional sources, reading them “against the grain” (to use Horowitz’s phrase) and deriving entirely new conclusions that serve his overall metahistorical agenda. The typical structure of a discourse in *Esh Kodesh* is the citation of a verse, followed by a comment from Rashi, then a more complex idea, concluding with the metahistorical message that links the biblical verse to the present day.¹⁷ *Esh Kodesh* is distinguished by the Piaseczno Rebbe’s ability to take well-known rabbinical passages (often from Rashi) and turn them upside down, a technique that also furthers the audience’s connection to the metahistorical. This is done in the sense of “breaking the ear”—i.e., using dramatic language to engage the listener and convey a complex idea.¹⁸

For example, his audience would have been intimately familiar with the following three texts.

(1) The classic statement of Jewish monotheism in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One,” which is followed by the verse “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your

might.” Both verses are recited twice a day in the liturgy and the Rebbe’s audience would certainly have memorized them from childhood.

(2) The well-known story of the death of Rabbi Akiva at the hands of the Romans, recorded in the Talmud and also included in the high holidays liturgy:

When they took Rabbi Akiva out to be killed, it was the time to recite the Hear O Israel prayer. They raked his flesh with iron rakes, and he accepted upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven [i.e., he recited the prayer].

His students said to him, “Our teacher—to this point?”

He replied, “All my life I have been troubled by this verse, *with all your soul*, [and with its rabbinical interpretation], ‘even if he takes your soul.’ I said, ‘When will I have the opportunity to fulfill this?’ Now that I have the opportunity—will I not fulfill it?”

He lengthened [his pronunciation of the word] “One” until his soul left him on that word “One.”

A Divine Voice called out, “Happy are you, Rabbi Akiva, for your soul departed on the word ‘One!’” The ministering angels spoke before the Holy One who is Blessed: “this is Torah—and this is its reward?”¹⁹

(3) The rhetorical question of the ministering angels (“this is Torah—and this is its reward?”) is echoed in a third well-known Talmudic passage (*Menahot* 29b), when Moses is mystically transported into the future to listen in as Rabbi Akiva teaches Torah.

[Moses] said to Him, “Master of the Universe! You have a person such as this [Rabbi Akiva], yet you choose to give the Torah through me?”

[God] responded, “Silence! Thus it rose in thought before Me [*kakh alah bamahashavah lefanai*, i.e., this was My plan].”

[Moses] said to Him, “Master of the Universe! You have shown me his Torah—show me his reward!”

[God] said, “Turn around.”

He turned around, and he saw them weighing [Rabbi Akiva’s] flesh in the markets.

[Moses] said, “Master of the Universe! This is Torah—and this is its reward?”

[God] said to him, “Silence! Thus it rose in thought before Me.”

The Piaseczno Rebbe takes these passages together, and on December 6, 1941 (pp.135–37) combines them in a manner that truly “breaks the ear,” forcing a radically different interpretation.

It is the task of the Jew to ascend and draw close to the Mind of the Blessed One and to draw it down into speech and action, in order that this kindness be made manifest in the lower world, instead of judgment and the hiding of kindness. Therefore when a Jew details his petitions of prayer for healing and sustenance with heartfelt feeling, and also learns Torah which is the Will and Mind of the Blessed One, then he ascends to the Will of the Blessed One and his Mind, that is, to the hidden kindness that exists there, and brings it down to speech in his words of Torah and prayer. In this manner, he reveals the kindness in the lower world, into physical reality [*asiyah*].

This is what the students said to Rabbi Akiva: *Our Rabbi—to this point?* This is because he was stretching out the word “One” with his self-sacrifice and the ascendance of his mind. He did not continue with the following phrase, *and you will love*, to draw down the Mind of the Blessed One into words, which would make the kindness manifest even in the lower realm. Thus his students asked him—*to this point? Will you not say “and you will love”?* This is what God answered Moses our Rabbi regarding Rabbi Akiva: “*Silence! This is how it [he] arose in My Mind,*” that Rabbi Akiva rose in [God’s] Mind and did not wish to draw down into words. Therefore, the kindness was not revealed in the lower realm, which remained in hiddenness and judgment.

To restate his argument in contemporary speech: through prayer and Torah study, a Jew may enter supernal realms and then draw down lovingkindness [*hesed*] into this lower world. At the moment of his ultimate persecution, Rabbi Akiva reached an exalted level of spiritual elevation, into the very Mind of God, and had the potential of bringing down great *hesed* into the world had he only continued his recitation of the “Hear O Israel” prayer to the very next verse “and you will love.” This is the meaning of his students’ question, “to this point”; i.e., will you stop your recitation now, and not bring down *hesed*? Now Moses’s earlier question to God must be reexamined: Moses was not asking God why Akiva suffered, he was asking why the students’ demand was rejected! God’s answer is not a bold statement of Divine authority, in the sense of “this was my plan.” The phrase *kakh alah bamahashavah lefanai* must be translated as “thus rose Rabbi Akiva in thought before Me”; i.e., Rabbi Akiva reached so high in My Mind that I was not, so to speak, able to deny his wish and force him to return to the lower world. With this reading, as it were, Rabbi Akiva actually forced his own martyrdom on God.²⁰

This radical statement completely transvalues the question of Moses and the ministering angels: this is Torah—and this supernal ascension is in fact its tremendous

reward. It is in this sense that the Rebbe wrote early in the war (September 16, 1939, p. 9):

The holy book *Arvei nahal, Parshas Masei*, discusses an oral tradition from a responsum from the *Maharam*, stating that a person who is martyred in sanctification of the Blessed One does not feel any pain whatsoever. The author of *Arvei Nahal* explains that the martyr is set ablaze with such an intense desire to be killed for sanctifying the Divine Name that he elevates all his senses to the world of pure intellect, such that his entire being is clothed in intellect, and all his senses, sensations, and physicality are stripped from him. Thus he feels only pleasure.

CONCLUSION

Esh Kodesh—a masterful work of contemporary Hasidic thought in its own right—is also an unparalleled source for the internal spiritual life of Warsaw Hasidim in the Holocaust. A careful comparison of the day-to-day events of the ghetto with the weekly sermons of Rabbi Shapiro provides insight into how this community struggled to cope with the unprecedented challenge that Nazi occupation posed to its way of life. Specifically, the Piaseczno Rebbe attempted to place the quotidian life of the ghetto within a metahistorical context for his followers, showing them how the ancestral paradigm described in the weekly Bible readings applied in a concrete manner to their immediate personal circumstances. Using a variety of techniques, most notably the employment of mythic “Aesopian” language and a challengingly creative rereading of the traditional texts, the Piaseczno Rebbe heroically struggled to contain the centrifugal forces unleashed by Nazi persecution that threatened to tear his community apart.

Unyielding to the mounting pressure of Nazi occupation, the Piaseczno Rebbe continued to perform this function for his Hasidim until the Great Deportations of summer 1942. It was this heroic stubbornness, this “stiff-necked” quality, that the Rebbe praised in his sermon of November 2, 1940 (pp. 78–81).

In truth, being stiff-necked is one of the greatest character traits, for a person who is not stiff-necked is easily vacillates—for a time he is one way, and for a time he is another way, and it is difficult to come to terms with him. At one time he wants to serve God, and at another time it is as if he is another person—and in particular, if he has to withstand some suffering, God forbid—he is not up to the task. This is not so with the stiff-necked person. He is straightforward when one speaks or works with him. When he decides to serve God, then you can be sure that he will, and

the more stiff-necked he is, the more he will be able to withstand whatever suffering comes his way.

The Piaseczno Rebbe had an ancestral paradigm—the weekly Bible readings and the wealth of supporting rabbinical literature—and without vacillation or hesitation, with a stiff-necked quality of awe-inspiring proportions, he used his last years to decipher that paradigm for the benefit of his anguished followers in the Warsaw ghetto.

NOTES

1. Before burying his manuscripts, Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro added a brief note to his relative in Tel Aviv asking that any publications of his work bear testimonial to his family, all of whom (with the exception of his wife) were killed in the Holocaust. In keeping with his wishes, this paper is dedicated to his mother Hanah Brakhah, daughter of Rabbi Hayim Shmuel ha-Levi; his wife Rahel Hayah Miriam, daughter of Rabbi Yerahmiel Moshe; his son Rabbi Elimelekh Ben Tsion; and his daughter-in-law Gitl, daughter of Rabbi Shlomo Hayim. Rabbi Shapiro also prayed that his daughter Rekhil Yehudis, taken in the “operation” (*Aktion*) of August 14, 1942, be returned to him. She was probably murdered in Treblinka, and thus this article is written in her memory as well.

I am grateful for the careful reading of my colleague Rabbi Shlomo Ackerman, with whom I prepared an earlier draft of all translations appearing here. All errors of fact or interpretation are my responsibility alone.

2. Kalonimus Kalmish ben Elimelekh (Shapiro), *Sefer Esh Kodesh: Imrot tehorot mi-shenot ha=Sho'ah: 700–701–702 she-ne'emru be-Shabatot ve-y"t be-Geto Varsha* (Jerusalem: Va'ad hasidei Piasestna, 1960). References to *Esh Kodesh* in this paper will be made by date, page number in the original Hebrew edition, and where relevant the name of the weekly *parashah*.

3. Biographical treatments of Rabbi Shapiro's life may be found in Aharon Sorasky's essay appended to the end of *Esh Kodesh*, as well as at the end of later (undated) printings of Rabbi Shapiro's 1932 work *Hovat ha-Talmidim* and in the English edition of that work, translated by Micha Odenheimer (*A Student's Obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* [Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995]). The essay also appears, together with extensive supporting documentation and photographs, in Kalonimus Kalmish Shapira (Shapiro), *Zikhron kodesh le-ba'al "Esh Kodesh": Rabi Kalonimus Kalmish mi-Piasetsna hy"d* (Jerusalem: Va'ad hasidei Piasetsna-Grodzhisk, 1994).

The corpus of Rabbi Shapiro's writings also include *Sefer Derekh ha-Melekh* (Jerusalem: Va'ad hasidei Piasetsna-Grodzhisk, 1995); *Kuntres bene mahashavah tovah* (Jerusalem: Va'ad hasidei Piasetsna-Grodzhisk, 1989); and a single volume that includes three works: *Sefer hakhsharat ha-avreikhim: Mavo ha-she'arim (le hovat ha-avreikhim)*, *Tsav ve-ziruz* (Jerusalem: Va'ad hasidei Piasetsna-Grodzhisk, 1965). Translations of uneven quality have been published by Jason Aronson: *Hovat ha-Talmidim* was published as *A Student's Obligation* (trans. Micha Odenheimer, 1995); *Tsav ve-ziruz* appears as *To Heal the Soul: The Spiritual Journal of a Chasidic Rebbe* (trans. Yehoshua Starrett, 1995); *Kuntres bene mahashavah tovah* as *Conscious Community: A Guide to Inner Work* (trans. Andrea Cohen, 1996); and most recently *Esh Kodesh* under the title *Sacred Fire* (trans. J. Heshy Worch, 2000). In these English translations, the publisher transliterates the Polish spelling of the Piaseczno Rebbe's name (Szapiro) as “Shapira.”

4. On the discovery of the text, see Baruch Duvdevani's brief foreword to *Esh Kodesh* (n.p.). Major studies of *Esh Kodesh* include Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994); Mendel Paikazh (Piekarz), *Ha-te'udah he-Hasidit ha-sifrutit ha-aharonah 'al admat Polin: Divre ha-Rabi mi-Piasets'nah be-geto Varsha* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979); and Shapira, *Zikhron kodesh le-Va'al "Esh Kodesh."* See also Mendel Paikazh (Piekarz), *Hasidut Polin: Magamot ra'ayoniyot ben shete ha-milhamot uvi-gezerot 700–705 ("ha-Shoah")* (Jerusalem: Mosad Biyalik, 1990); Pesach Shindler, *Hasidic Responses to the Holocaust in the Light of Hasidic Thought* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1990); and Eliezer Schweid, *Wrestling until Daybreak: Searching for Meaning in the Thinking on the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994).

5. For studies of *Esh Kodesh* that employ this historical approach, often using analytical tools borrowed from theological and literary studies, see Henry Abramson, "The Prince in Captivity: Reading Hasidic Discourses from the Warsaw Ghetto as Social and Intellectual History," *Journal of Genocide Studies* 1 (1999), pp. 213–25; "The *Esh Kodesh* of Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro: A Hasidic Treatise on Communal Trauma from the Holocaust," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 37 (2000), pp. 321–35; and "Metaphysical Nationality in the Warsaw Ghetto: Non-Jews in the Wartime Writings of Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro," in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. Joshua Zimmerman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 158–69.

6. Gershon Greenberg ("Jewish Religious Practice through the War: God, Israel, and History," unpublished paper presented at Yad Vashem, April 4, 2001, available on the Yad Vashem website http://www1.yadvashem.org/research_publications/research/jewish_religious_life.pdf [accessed December 16, 2004], pp. 1–2) credits Yitshak Breuer as the creator of this term, defining it as "the encounter and its retention in time and space . . . of God's relationship to the nation of Israel through the covenant in history—where the vessels of time and space are permeated with the theme of divine intervention (collectively but also individually) into empirical history. See also Greenberg's discussion of a prayer composed in the ghetto by the Piaseczno Rebbe (pp. 4–6).

7. We do not have reliable statistics for attendance, but anecdotal evidence indicates that it must have been significant. Rabbi Shimon Huberband, one of Ringelblum's circle of historians, reported that 150 people were present at the Rebbe's table on Shavuot 5700, which fell in June 1940. A larger group would be expected for a festival, but it seems reasonable to imagine that on a regular Shabbat, the Rebbe would draw two or three dozen people—particularly in the early years of the war. See Shimon Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland during the Holocaust*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock and Robert S. Hirt, trans. David C. Fishman (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1987), p. 64.

8. Besides his title as the Rebbe of Piaseczno (a small town outside Warsaw), Rabbi Shapiro was head of a major rabbinical seminary (Da'at Moshe) in Warsaw, where some 1,500 of his followers lived. He was also descended from a major Hasidic dynasty (Grodzisk) and was named after an illustrious grandfather, Rabbi Kalonimus Kalman Epstein, author of the classic work *Ma'or va-Shemesh* (1842). The Piaseczno Rebbe, however, published under the diminutive form “Kalonimus Kalmish” rather than “Kalonimus Kalman” and used the initial “K.” on his calling card. This was probably out of a sense of modesty, wishing to distinguish himself from his famous namesake.

9. Readers of Worch's fluid translation of *Esh Kodesh* are disadvantaged by the fact that the entries are presented without historical context, making it impossible to perceive a major dimension of the Rebbe's words.

10. See, for example, his prewar comments in *Sefer hakhsharat ha-avreikhim* (pp. 35ff.) and his comments on January 6, 1940 (pp. 17–18).

11. Chaim Aron Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*, ed. and trans. Abraham I. Katsh (reprint ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Museum, 1999]).

12. It is noteworthy that the Piaseczno Rebbe never relinquished his faith in God or divine justice. While the majority of the entries in *Esh Kodesh* were written for the weekly Shabbat gatherings, he apparently reviewed the entire work and made several dated annotations immediately before burying the manuscripts in early 1943. The annotations often bear corrections to his earlier discourses; the most widely cited being his December 1942 comment on the Hanukkah discourse that he had delivered a year earlier. In mid-December 1941 (p. 139), he argued that the persecutions of the Nazi era were broadly similar to those suffered by previous generations of Jews. A year later he added a private note.

Only persecutions such as those that were inflicted until the end of 5702 [fall 1941] had earlier precedent. The grotesque persecutions, however, and the terrible, grotesque deaths that the unnatural wicked murderers created for us, the house of Israel, since the end of 5702—according to my knowledge of the words of our Sages of blessed memory and the histories of the Jews in general, there has never been anything like this. May God have mercy on us and rescue us from their hands in a blink of an eye.

The Piaseczno Rebbe had ample opportunity to express fundamental doubts of faith, yet he refused to do so.

Polen (*Holy Fire*, pp. 104–105), however, has clearly pointed out that the tone of the Rebbe's language changes dramatically as the war progresses. “We find a

movement to extremity of language and absolute forms of discourse . . . toward formulations that are progressively more penetrating, direct, and sharp. . . . Where Rabbi Shapir[o] had generally tended to place the more extreme words of questioning and protest in the mouths of biblical characters, in the final year they emerge from his pen quite undisguised.” In one of his last discourses, delivered just one month before the Great Deportations of July 1942, the Rebbe wrote (June 27, 1942, p. 187),

In truth, it is amazing that it is possible for the universe to continue existing after so many shrieks such as these. . . innocent children, pure angels, even great and holy Jews, murdered and slaughtered simply because they are Jews. . . . [T]hese shrieks fill every void within the universe, yet the universe does not revert to [primordial] water, rather it stands in its place as if nothing touched it, Heaven forbid.

13. The transcript of the March 1949 trial of American Communist Eugene Dennis includes a definition of the term “Aesopian language” citing Lenin’s “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism.” “[B]y hints in that Aesopian language—in that cursed Aesopian language to which Tsarism compelled all revolutionaries to have recourse whenever they took up their pens to write a ‘legal’ work” (see <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/dennis-opening.html> [accessed December 16, 2004]). Ironically, the tool known as “Aesopian language” in the hands of revolutionaries becomes “doublespeak” in the hands of the Soviet regime, and it is in this sense that Lucy Dawidowicz (*The Holocaust and the Historians* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988], pp. 34–38) refers to Nazi euphemisms as “Aesopian language.”

Unlike the Eastern European sense of the term, however, it should be pointed out that there is a major distinction between the way that Aesopian language is understood in the political context and the traditional Jewish context. In the former—as in the original fables of Aesop—once the parable is understood, its literary vehicle is emptied of meaning; i.e., the “tortoise and the hare” could just have easily been the “snail and the cheetah” without damaging the essence of the fable. In the traditional Jewish context, on the other hand, the original metahistorical template—the Bible, Talmud, and so on—retain their original sanctity, albeit subject to widely varying interpretations.

14. See Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, p. 84.

15. Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 23.

16. Greenberg, “Jewish Religious Practice,” p. 2.

17. It is important to note that Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitshaki [1040–1105]) is easily the most popular commentator, and Rabbi Shapiro’s audience would have been intimately

familiar with his commentary from years of study since childhood. Indeed, the Talmud mandates that every Jew must review the weekly portion twice in the Hebrew original and once in the canonized Aramaic translation of Onkelos (*Berakhot* 8a). Rashi's medieval Hebrew-language commentary is considered so authoritative, however, that the Code of Jewish law rules that "the commentary of Rashi is considered the equivalent of the [Aramaic] translation of Onkelos" (*Orah Hayim* 285:2).

18. The phrase "*leshaber et ha-ozen*" occurs several times in rabbinical literature, particularly in Rashi's commentary (see, for example, Exodus 19:18). Some commentators vowelize the phrase as "*lesaber*" rather than "*leshaber*," meaning "to provide for" (i.e., explain to) the ear. This style of interpretation is also quite characteristic of Hasidic literature.

19. *Berakhot* 61b.

20. This example is consonant with the theology that Greenberg ("Jewish Religious Practice," pp. 2–3) associates with the forced labor and concentration camps, in which "the realm of human activity came to encompass sanctity."

SOVIET ARCHIVAL SOURCES FOR STUDYING THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE DURING THE HOLOCAUST

Vadim Altskan

In an article published in 1993, the late Lucjan Dobroszycki recalled a conversation between historians in Warsaw in the late 1950s. Wondering what they would find if the Soviet Archives ever opened its doors, one scholar quipped, “I am afraid we’d find nothing but piles of *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*.”¹ Of course this remark, made more than fifty years ago, represented a pessimistic school of thought; more optimistic individuals predicted that once the heavy doors to the Soviet Archives swung open, the true history of the period would at last be revealed.

As is often the case, reality lies somewhere between these extremes. But there is no doubt that the period since 1991 has been truly momentous for Western historians granted access to neglected, long-lost, or newly discovered material from the Soviet Archives. To date the most spectacular findings to emerge from the Soviet Archives are the “twice plundered” collections,² which range from the official records of the Auschwitz camp to Joseph Goebbels’ diary.

TYPES OF ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Most findings from local archives at the oblast level in Ukraine have been far less dramatic. With the exception of Transnistria, the quantity and quality of archival material becomes more modest as one moves from the western to the eastern part of the country. Scholars working in the former Soviet Union should not expect to bring to light anything even remotely resembling the Oneg Shabbat archives of Warsaw or the chronicles of the Łódź ghetto.³ Similar ghetto records will not be found because they were not created in the first place. This situation indicates not only a difference in structure and objectives between ghettos in eastern Ukraine and western Ukraine and Poland, but also the divergent histories of Jews in these regions. And most significant, this should be seen in the light of the area’s history during the twenty years preceding the war, the period of Sovietization.

It is crucial for scholars to understand not only the various types and contents of the available archival sources, but also their utility for researching the history of Jewish ghettos in the Soviet Ukraine during the German occupation.⁴ Four key types of sources are “ego-documentation” (oral and written testimonies such as memorial books,

memoirs, diaries, and letters); “trophy documents” (bureaucratic paperwork produced by occupation authorities and their collaborators); legal testimonies (investigation and trial records); and newspapers.

EGO-DOCUMENTATION

Regrettably only a relatively small number of survivor testimonies from the Soviet Ukraine are available to researchers. This situation can be attributed both to the low survival rate within this particular area (i.e., in order to write or dictate a survivor testimony, one must have survived long enough to leave a testimony); and to the postwar fate of those who survived in the Soviet Ukraine (until recently most survivors had no opportunity to leave this territory, which is not generally celebrated for its freedom of expression).⁵

A relatively large group of survivors—former Polish citizens from western Ukraine (eastern Poland)—did manage to leave after the war. Newly settled in Israel or the West, and with the help of their former fellow townspeople through *Landsmanshaften*, they soon embarked on a monumental project to create “memorial books” (*Yizkor-bikher*) to honor their destroyed communities. At the same time, the official Soviet attitude toward the Holocaust—which denied that Jews had suffered more than other nationalities during the “Great Patriotic War”—inhibited survivors from making their stories public or openly memorializing their devastated hometowns. At most, Soviet Jews felt comfortable discussing their wartime recollections only in private, informal survivor gatherings held at memorial sites. In such circumstances one could not even conceive of establishing a *Landsmanshaft* or publishing a memorial book. As a result, out of 145 memorial books published about communities in present-day Ukraine, only fifteen concern localities formerly situated inside the pre-1939 boundaries of the Soviet Ukraine.⁶

The case is similar for survivor memoirs and testimonies found in public archives. In the Yad Vashem Archives, for example, one can find more than forty survivor memoirs and testimonies for the western Ukrainian and formerly Polish city of Lvov, but only four for Kiev, the Ukrainian capital and largest city located in the Soviet-dominated East.⁷

The same striking contrast occurs with the oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors. After working on a three-year project about Jews in the southwestern Podolia region of Ukraine, I was able to locate and interview only about twenty

survivors—both in the United States and in Ukraine—from a half-dozen localities in the region. This can be compared with the work of Shmuel Spector, who in his excellent book about the Holocaust in Volhynia⁸ referred to some 300 testimonies from several dozen regional localities. Such resources are simply not available to the researcher studying the history of neighboring Podolia.

With all their limitations of quality and—in the case of the Soviet Ukraine—quantity, testimonial sources are crucial for the scholar of ghetto life.⁹ Moreover, in cases such as the Soviet Ukraine, written or oral testimonial data may be the only surviving information about a certain small village or shtetl. Special attention must also be paid to the nature of the information available, again only in testimonial form. For example, consider this statement drawn from the oral testimony of a survivor from the village of Zinkov in southwestern Ukraine. Only nine years old at the beginning of the war, she recalled:

During our life in the ghetto people suddenly became religious again. Most women covered their heads with their kerchiefs. Men also started covering their heads and we children had to say prayers in the morning and at night. It was kind of unusual for us: kids who had gone to Soviet schools. My grandmother got sick, she had the flu. She was about ninety-two years old. We all prayed that she would die and therefore would be spared. . . . As it happened, she recovered and later on was killed among many others.¹⁰

Following is another example, this time from a published memoir of the Letichev ghetto.

During the “operation” [*Aktion*] we went into our hiding place. We stayed there all night. During that night my grandfather and other old folks told us youngsters about the Jewish pogroms during the Civil War.¹¹

This particular recollection is quite telling. Neither the grandfather nor anyone else in the hiding place—at least in the context of this testimony—can yet grasp the difference between an “ordinary, everyday” pogrom and the *Aktion*, the act of genocide taking place outside. Yet the survival wisdom accumulated by previous generations proved useful at least to the extent that the grandfather, who survived the Civil War, knew how to build a bunker (a hiding place). We still see, however, that despite persistent rumors about the mass killing of Jews, most inhabitants of the Letichev ghetto—as well as those of other ghettos—failed to accept the grim reality.

The researcher must appreciate the futility of trying to locate information from any source other than oral or written testimony, including the testimonies of bystanders and perpetrators in the Soviet Ukraine (available in the many postwar court trial records). Unfortunately in the case of ordinary non-Jewish witnesses to the events,¹² we can speak only in terms of lost opportunities since the number of such witnesses has dwindled to a mere handful.

TROPHY DOCUMENTS

The second important group of documents is the German (or Romanian, or Hungarian) trophy documents, the wartime records produced by perpetrators of any nationality in the occupied Ukraine (or respectively Transnistria and Transcarpathia) or the various puppet administrations established in the region. Such documents often ended up in their present archival locations by a convoluted route. For example, because the Germans destroyed most documents in the occupied area of the eastern Ukraine during their retreat, only a few collections at the level of the District Commissariats in the Nazi-occupied territory of the USSR (*Gebietkommissariats*) survived in the Zhitomir and Kamenets-Podolski oblast archives and perhaps a few other places. The situation, however, was quite different in the Romanian-controlled territories of Transnistria: documents were removed and transported to Romania proper in spring 1944 and it was only toward the end of 1946 that the surviving material was returned to archives in the Odessa, Chernovtsy, Vinnitsa, and Nikolayev oblasts. In another instance documents from the Transcarpathia region were left nearly intact in the area after the withdrawal of the Hungarian administration. As a result, we have more existing documents of the occupying Romanian and Hungarian authorities from these two areas than in the rest of Ukraine combined.

Again with the exception of Transnistria (the Nikolayev, Odessa, and Vinnitsa oblasts), we almost never find any sizeable collections of this type in the Nazi-occupied Soviet Ukraine. For example, the collection of records of the Kamenets-Podolski Gebietskommissariat in the Khmelnytsky Regional Archives contains a mere ten folders,¹³ three of which include detailed inventories of property plundered from the Jewish population. Meticulously recorded, these inventories list not only undamaged pieces of furniture but also describe broken furniture, pillowcases, and blankets with (when applicable) an enumeration of the number of holes in the material.¹⁴ The utility of these documents appears to be quite narrow, but they may provide an excellent

illustration of social and economic conditions in the area before the war and during the first months of the occupation.

The records of the local Ukrainian authorities established by the Nazis in the occupied areas form another archival collection type, one that has survived with fewer casualties. Along with many folders of their own paperwork, these officials also received a significant number of copies of documents from their German superiors. Such documents were usually sent to ensure the implementation of German orders. These collections include record groups of documents ranging from city administration (*uprava*) to village administration (*starosta*), auxiliary police units (*ukrains'ka politsia* or *Schutzmannschaften*), labor departments (*birzha truda*), and other secondary executive bodies. The documents within these collections may include orders, regulations, and announcements regarding Jews, as well as regulations concerning the local non-Jewish population.¹⁵

After the first Aktion, on August 28, 1941, several hundred surviving Jews in Kamenets-Podolski—mostly “specialists” (skilled workers and trained professionals) and their families—were confined in the newly established “second” ghetto. Less than two weeks after the massacre, most were looking for work and many were therefore busy writing an almost standard petition for employment, one that listed their skills and qualifications. In many cases these petitions were accompanied by letters of support from the newly appointed managers of local factories, characterizing certain Jews and their skills as a vital resource for a particular industrial shop.

The value of these documents is apparent: they provide a clear picture of Jewish involvement in the local economy before the war and during its first months, as well as an image of the local economy during the war. In a more general sociocultural sense, these documents also underscore people’s desperate belief that despite the recent mass killings—which had taken the lives of women, children, and the elderly—life could still return to some degree of normality. Those Jews who remained were trying to adjust to a new reality.¹⁶

LEGAL TESTIMONIES

Another important type of historical source is material from the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission to Investigate Crimes of Nazi Invaders and Their Collaborators on the Territory of the Soviet Union. This commission was created in March 1942 to investigate Nazi crimes in the formerly occupied areas of the USSR, including the

Baltic countries. Commissions were created on all three levels of the Soviet administrative structure: district, region, and republic. The lowest branch of the commission investigated and collected material on a district (*rayon*) level in the towns, villages, and collective and state farms and forwarded this material to the regional (oblast) level, which in turn forwarded it to the capital city of that republic. The final reports, including copies of what were considered the most important documents, were forwarded to Moscow. Because the specific criteria employed by the local authorities can never be known, in many cases the researcher is obligated to examine not only the holdings of the Central Commission in Moscow, but also the regional archives where the original records may yet remain.

Finally, at least several regional commissions did not transfer their records to Moscow. A typical file (*arkhivna odynutsia* or *sprava*) covering one rayon includes lists of perpetrators and victims, a blueprint or map of the massacre site, testimonies of Jewish survivors and non-Jewish perpetrators and eyewitnesses received by an NKVD officer, a statement by a forensic expert, and a summary statement.¹⁷ The level of details, comprehensiveness, and therefore usefulness of such records will of course differ from case to case.

Despite many negative factors (such as superficiality, lack of professionalism—and sometimes even illiteracy—on the part of the investigators, schematization, and ideological and methodological limitations), this collection type remains one of the largest and most important pools of documents awaiting further exploration. Again, the historian must understand that in many cases the information recorded by the commission may be the only data source available about a particular locality during the years of the war and occupation. The same is true for another, very similar type of record: courtroom proceedings of postwar trials.

From several hundred cases¹⁸ examined for the archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, we see that documents from court proceedings and postwar trials are unique. As in the case of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission, some trial records and investigative proceedings may be the only documentation available concerning the fate of the Jewish population in certain areas. In rare instances they may complement material from the commissions and testimonies, but more frequently they represent the only documentation available for a given village or shtetl.

For instance, the records of the Extraordinary Commission for the Kiev region and for Kiev itself are very poor, whereas the regional archives of the Security Service

of the Ukraine (SBU) have more than 100 criminal case and trial records for those accused of committing crimes in the Kiev area. Prosecution of Nazi collaborators by military courts started as early as 1943. However, many criminal investigations conducted from this period to the mid-1950s have proved less comprehensive and rich in details when compared with the trials conducted from the 1960s through the 1980s. As a rule, criminal cases have a standard selection of documents such as interrogations of perpetrators, testimonies of witnesses and survivors, cross-interrogations of defendants and witnesses, evidence collected during investigations, and the like. (In some cases these records include interesting historical sources. For example, the criminal case against Gavriil Zhuk—the former Burgomeister of Vasil’kov in the Kiev region—includes an original book of orders issued by that mayor in 1941–42.¹⁹) Finally, when working with this type of documentation, the researcher has to keep in mind the means and tools of the Soviet investigative process that in many cases forced defendants to admit to crimes not committed as well as those committed.

NEWSPAPERS

Although the existence of this material is well known, only a few scholars have incorporated it into their research. One reason for this situation is obvious: newspapers shared the fate of many ephemeral publications created during this period. But another reason is less obvious: for fifty years after the end of the war, researchers were not allowed access to local newspapers, which were kept out of sight in secret sections of the regional archives.

According to rough estimates, 300–400 newspapers and other periodicals were published in the occupied territory of the USSR. Each region had its own central newspaper, and in addition almost every rayon published something of its own. As in the case of any newspaper, the most interesting sections are those devoted to local news. Along with orders and directives of the local administration and various announcements, here we can find information about the local Jewish population, census statistics, facts about misuse of confiscated Jewish property, notes about Gentiles hiding Jews, market prices, exchange rates between Soviet money and the new currency, and the like. Of special interest to researchers are articles about Jewish crimes and domination under the Soviet regime, or the “commissar stories” linking Bolsheviks with Jews in the process of creating “Judeo-Bolshevism.” Such writing fostered and propagated a negative perception of Jews and was used to justify actions against them.

Clearly newspapers must be included in the source base for research on the Jewish experience during World War II. As a chronicle of the spirit of the time (zeitgeist) and in terms of “historical purity,” newspapers compare favorably with the diaries and letters created during these years.

UTILIZING SOURCES

Of course the most important issue with sources is how they are utilized. Robin Collingwood’s well-known comment that history is “made with glue and scissors”²⁰ easily applies to this aspect of Holocaust research. Therefore the utilization of historical documents can also be limited to “glue and scissors”—that is, cutting one fact or date after another and then gluing them together to make an article or book. The only way to avoid such simplification is to question our sources and look for something beyond the bare facts. Marc Bloch, in *The Historian’s Craft*, wrote that documents speak only when they are properly questioned.¹

On September 9, 1941, more than thirty local residents of one of the boroughs of the town of Kamenets-Podolski signed a plea to the Burgomeister to permit the Jewish barber Hirsh Gelman and his son Zanvil to continue their work in the area and not be relocated to the newly established second ghetto. According to this petition, the main argument for exempting the barber was that he “did not participate in any Soviet establishment, has had good relationships with Ukrainians, and has worked in this neighborhood all his life.”²² This statement demonstrates two new criteria for good behavior. The first and quite obvious one is that, in order to be a good citizen, one must not have associated with the Soviet authorities. The second criterion is more complicated. Just a few weeks earlier, the barber’s relationship with local Ukrainians would not have been considered important at all. Why had it become important?

When we look at the date of the document (September 1941) and compare it to the other documents in the file, things become a little clearer. News of the collapse of the short-lived independent Ukraine²³ had not yet reached this part of the country. Ukrainian nationalists who had arrived as emissaries with the advancing German Army, as well as local Ukrainian activists, still played important roles within the local administration. Residents of the town were not aware of the drastic changes confronting the independent Ukraine. Every issue of the local newspaper contained notices of upcoming Ukrainian theatrical performances and announcements of new books of prose

and poetry; one might even be tempted to speak of an unexpected renaissance of Ukrainian culture.

Still, what was the main motivation for this plea? The frightening prospect of losing the only decent barber in the area? Quite unlikely. The exemplary behavior and honesty of a Jewish barber as compared to other local Jews? The well-known notion about “good” or “our” Jews as opposed to others? Or a simple show of compassion toward someone who had lived in the town for so many years? And finally, who would sign such a petition and who would not? Of course some of these questions are simply rhetorical, but nevertheless they have to be asked. Only at this point can a simple document turn into something more significant than seemingly straightforward facts. The same record may allow us a greater understanding of the events that occurred in this region during the Nazi occupation.

CONCLUSION

We are familiar with the statement describing the Holocaust as the most well-documented event in world history. However, resources for the study of Jewish history in the Soviet Ukraine are limited and in some cases are available only in unique sources. Therefore our opportunity to balance records representing different sides and points of view, and verify details or facts, is limited. Nevertheless, no obstacle is significant enough to prevent scholars from assuming this difficult task. One must always be conscious of the fact that “historical sources, hypothetically, are boundless; their cognitive possibilities depend on the ability of historians to question them, and to approach them from a direction which has not been looked at before.”²⁴

NOTES

1. Quotation in Lucjan Dobroszycki, "Captured Nazi Documents on the Destruction of the Jews in the Soviet Union," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), p. 217.
2. Patricia K. Grimsted, "'Twice Plundered' or 'Twice Saved'? Identifying Russia's 'Trophy' Archives and the Loot of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15 (2001), pp. 191–245.
3. Lucjan Dobroszycki, ed., *The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto, 1941–1944* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984).
4. Present-day Ukraine within 1939 boundaries.
5. The first wave of Soviet Jews left the USSR in the mid-1960s and was followed by two subsequent waves, the first from the mid-1970s through the 1980s and the second after the beginning of perestroika in 1985.
6. Robert Moses Shapiro, "'Yizker-Bikher' as Sources on Jewish Communities in Soviet Belorussia and Soviet Ukraine during the Holocaust," in Dobroszycki and Gurock, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, p. 232.
7. Collection of Testimonies, Memoirs, and Diaries, part 1, compiled by Bronia Klibanski, Yad Vashem Central Archives, Jerusalem, 1990.
8. Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews 1941–1944*, trans. Jerzy Michalowicz (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990).
9. Daniel Romanovsky, "The Holocaust in the Eyes of *Homo Sovieticus*: Survey Based on Northeastern Belorussia and Northwestern Russia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13 (1999), pp. 355–82. Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*.
10. Interview with A. G. conducted by Dina Voskoboynik, Brooklyn, January 2000.
11. Vladimir Goykher, *The Tragedy of the Letichev Ghetto* (Brooklyn: V. Goykher, 1993), p. 17.
12. With the exception of rescuers.

13. State Archives of the Khmel'nitsky Region (*Derzhavnyy Arkhiv Khmel'nits'koi Oblasti*), fond P-418, opis 1, Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter cited as USHMM/DAKHO), A-1996.A.0150.
14. USHMM/DAKHO, fond P-418, opis 1, folder 2-4.
15. USHMM/DAKHO, fond P-434, opis 1, folder 3.
16. USHMM/DAKHO, fond P-434, opis 1, folders 3, 5.
17. USHMM Archives, RG-22.002M.
18. State Archives of the Security Service of the Ukraine (*Derzhavnyy Arkhiv Sluzhby Bezpeki Ukrainy*), Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter cited as USHMM/DASBU).
19. USHMM/DASBU of the Kiev Oblast, Zhuk G. I., criminal case no. 43111.
20. Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 257.
1. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 17.
22. USHMM/DAKHO, fond P-418, opis 1, folder 4.
23. Ukrainian independence was proclaimed in Lvov in July 1941.
24. Aron Gurevich and Marc Bloch, *Apologia istorii, ili, Remeslo istorika* (Moscow: Id-vo "Nauka," 1986), p. 204.

Appendix: Biographies of Contributors

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CHRISTOPHER R. BROWNING is Frank Porter Graham Professor of History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; 2002–2003 Ina Levine Scholar, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies; 1996 J.B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Senior Scholar-in-Residence, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies; and Member, Academic

Committee, United States Holocaust Memorial Council. Professor Browning's book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* won the National Jewish Book Award in 1993 and established him as one of the world's leading experts on the motivations of Holocaust perpetrators. His most recent book is *The Origins of the Final Solution* (with a contribution by Jürgen Matthäus), part of Yad Vashem's multi-volume comprehensive history of the Holocaust, was published in 2004 and likewise received the National Jewish Book Award in the Holocaust category that year.

DENNIS DELETANT is Professor of Romanian Studies, University College London, and the 2000–2001 Rosenzweig Fellow for the Study of the Fate of Jews in Transnistria, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. An internationally recognized expert on Romania, Dr. Deletant has written numerous books and articles in addition to serving as expert on Romania to several institutions and agencies. His current research concerns the ghettoization of Romanian Jewry in southern Transnistria.

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GERSHON GREENBERG is Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion, American University, Washington, D.C. He is the author of *Holy Land in American Religious Thought, 1620–1948* (1993), numerous articles on Jewish responses to the Holocaust, and two definitive annotated bibliographies (1997 and 1999) published by the Institute for Holocaust Research, Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Professor Greenberg was Consultant in Religion for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum from 1995 to 1997.

DAN MICHMAN is Professor of Modern Jewish History and Chair of the Institute of Holocaust Research and Chair of the Institute of Research on Diaspora Jewry in Modern Times, Bar-Ilan University, Israel. He is also Chief Historian at Yad Vashem. Professor Michman is a member of the editorial boards of *Yad Vashem Studies* and *Gesher* and the author of many publications on Dutch and Belgian Jewry. He is the author of *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective. Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues* (2003; also published in Hebrew, 1998; French, 2001; German, 2002; and Russian, 2005); *The Jewish Refugees from Germany in the Netherlands, 1933–1940* (1978); and *Days of Holocaust and Reckoning*, volumes 1–12 (1983–1992); and the editor of *Post-Zionism and the Holocaust* (1997) and *Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews, Belgians, Germans* (1998).

Available Occasional Papers

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