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"Jewish Councils" in Nazi Europe, 1938–1945: A Pan-European Perspective

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Jan Láníček, Dan Michman, and Laurien Vastenhout

Introduction

In March and April 2024, a television series on the Dutch Jewish Council (*De Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam*, JR) was broadcast. While there exist a handful of documentaries on the JR, this was the first time this delicate topic was presented as a drama. The series was a major hit, with favorable reviews, solid television ratings, and, most important of all, it cultivated a more nuanced understanding of the difficult position of the Dutch Jewish Council leadership under Nazi occupation among the wider public. This is perhaps best embodied by the statement of Binyomin Jacobs, Chief Rabbi of the Netherlands, who claimed that based on the series, he had changed his opinion of the JR. While he had been raised with the idea that the organization consisted of traitors responsible for the deportation and murder of more than 100,000 Jews in the Netherlands under German occupation, he now understood that the story was more complex and that the council's functionaries had cooperated in order to "prevent worse" and to "save whatever could be saved."[1]

A drama series of five episodes succeeded in what historians and documentarists had failed to achieve for decades. The positive public response contrasted with the more lukewarm reception of Claude Lanzmann's last major documentary *The Last of the Unjust* (2013). In 1975, during the preparation of his successful film *Shoah* (1985), Lanzmann conducted a multi-day interview of the last Jewish Elder of the Theresienstadt ghetto Benjamin Murmelstein. The complex story that emerged from this interview did not, in the end, make it into the celebrated documentary, but Lanzmann returned to the footage almost forty years later, producing another nearly four-hour-long documentary. A shadow hung over Murmelstein after the war as "the only survivor" among wartime

1 Binyomin Jacobs and Rob Oudkerk, interview by Hannelos Pen, *Het Parool*, April 16, 2024.

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Jewish Elders. Lanzmann could not hide his initial distance, even hostility, toward Murmelstein, but by the end of their long discussions, he had embraced Murmelstein's side of the story, and the final version of the documentary clearly intended to clear Murmelstein's name. Yet reviewers and historians remained sceptical, unwilling to fully accept Murmelstein's defense.[2]

Wartime Jewish Councils and other Jewish representative bodies under the Nazis and their allies continue to polarize historians. The fact that in the Netherlands it took almost eighty years after the Second World War for a more moderate view on the JR to spread to the wider public shows how contentious the topic still is. This is not surprising given that the function of the JR and the decisions of its leaders both in public and scholarly discourse have often been tied to the 75 percent murder rate of Jews in the Netherlands (compared to 40 percent in Belgium and 25 percent in France). In the Netherlands, more than in any other country in Western Europe, the Jewish leadership has been held responsible for the deportation of Jews from the country.[3]

Additionally, there are persistent misconceptions that keep being repeated, including the idea that JR functionaries were responsible for compiling the deportation lists.[4] As some contributions in this volume—such as those by Jan Láníček and Doron Rabinovici—show, the perspective on other "Jewish Councils" in Europe has been similarly blurred. In German-occupied Poland, discussions about Jewish leaders' level of influence over who would be deported and who would receive a (temporary) exemption from deportation had been at the core of discussions about *Judenräte* already during the war. They often overshadowed Jewish functionaries' desperate efforts in the first war years to provide social welfare

2 Ronny Loewy and Katharina Rauschenberger, eds., *"Der Letzte der Ungerechten": Der Judenälteste Benjamin Murmelstein in Filmen 1942-1975* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 2011).

3 Dan Michman, "Commonalities and Peculiarities of the Return to Life of Holocaust Survivors in their Home Countries: The Dutch and Greek Cases in Context," *Historein* 18, no. 1 (2019): 1-15.

4 The most recent example of this is *The Betrayal of Anne Frank: A Cold Case Investigation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2022). Apart from unfounded claims regarding the individual who was supposedly the betrayer of Anne Frank, this book—which was widely reported on in both the Dutch national and international media—contains false information about the work of the Jewish Council. Soon after this book's publication, a group of Dutch scholars presented a counter-report. A part of the report, which explicitly addressed the false claims regarding the Jewish Council, was published separately. See: Bart van der Boom and Laurien Vastenhout, "Réfutation du livre *The Betrayal of Anne Frank (Qui a Trahi Anne Frank?)* de Rosermary Sullivan," *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah* 2, no. 2016 (2022): 335-58.

and secure other basic necessities for hundreds of thousands of their "coreligionists" imprisoned in ghettos. As will be reflected upon more thoroughly later in this introduction, it is the aim of the present volume to overcome these misconceptions and instead show the multifaceted nature of "Jewish Councils" across Nazi Europe. The precise number of "Jewish Councils" established by Nazi authorities and in Nazi-allied countries is not known yet, but it is assumed to be (by Dan Michman) around 1,200.[5]

To thoroughly examine "Jewish Councils'" room for maneuver and how the contexts in which they were forced to operate affected their choices, it is necessary to use a comparative perspective. By studying similarities and differences across cases, we can better explain the variety of Jewish responses as well as the different nature of Jewish representative bodies in various localities. The need for more comparative studies on "Jewish Councils" became clear first and foremost from Isaiah Trunk's pathbreaking study *Judenrat*, published in 1972, which focused on the Jewish Councils in Poland and the Baltic states.[6] Even though, as Dan Michman has pointed out, this book was not comparative in nature, Trunk's discussion of case studies allowed for a more thorough understanding of how local conditions shaped the form and function of the councils, and how these distinctions influenced the choices of their leaders.

At approximately the same time, two major conferences held at YIVO in New York City in 1967 and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem ten years later offered broader comparisons of "Jewish Councils" across Nazi Europe.[7] This, in turn, led to a more nuanced understanding of their leaders' decisions, which was much needed in a historiography that was still inherently moralistic. The benefits of a comparative perspective were further highlighted by Michman, who published several articles on "Jewish Councils" across Nazi Europe in which he outlined the differences and similarities between these organizations.[8] Despite his call for

5 This estimation is based on the fact that according to the Yad Vashem *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Ghettos during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), there were at least 1,140 ghettos, almost all of which had "Jewish Councils." Additionally, there were places without ghettos where Jewish Councils were established.

6 Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

7 Rachel Erlich and Max Weinreich, eds., *Imposed Jewish Governing Bodies under Nazi Rule, Yivo Colloquium, Dec. 2-5, 1967* (New York: YIVO, 1972); *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe, 1933-1945: Proceedings of the Third Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, April 4-7, 1977* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979).

8 See, for example, Michman's work in the following venues: "De oprichting van de VJB in internationaal perspectief," in *De curatoren van het ghetto: de vereniging van*

more in-depth comparative research on the topic, very few historians have taken up such research.[9]

While not all individual contributions in this volume are inherently comparative, the fact that all authors focus on similar themes—including the German supervision of the "Jewish Councils," the terminology used to define these organizations, their relations with members of the Jewish communities they claimed to represent, as well as the social position of the Jewish leadership, and the changes in personnel—allows us to draw parallels across Nazi Europe. As such, this volume has a much narrower and in-depth thematic focus than its predecessor, the influential 1979 publication *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe, 1933-1945*, which was the outcome of the previously mentioned 1977 Yad Vashem conference. This volume also reflects research that has been published in the more than four decades since. A wide range of geographic case studies is brought together, with contributions that have a local focus (Prague, Riga, Minsk, Kraków, Berlin, Sered'), a regional focus (Transnistria and the occupied areas of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, RSFSR), a national focus (Slovakia, Romania, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Poland), and a focus on individual Jewish leaders (Henrik Fisch and Ernő Munkácsi). Given this breadth, the present volume is an important step toward a more in-depth, differentiated understanding of the Jewish Council phenomenon. We not only see how local (f)actors impacted German policies but also, as will be further elaborated

de joden in België tijdens de nazi-bezetting, ed. Rudi van Doorslaer and Jean-Philippe Schreiber (Tielt: Lannoo, 2004), 25-45; Dan Michman, "The Jewish Councils Phenomenon: New Insights and Their Implications for the Hungarian Case," in *The Holocaust in Hungary: A European Perspective*, ed. Judit Molnár (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 254-64; "'Judenräte' und 'Judenvereinigungen' unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft: Aufbau und Anwendung eines verwaltungsmassigen Konzepts," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 46, no. 4 (1998): 293-304; "The Uniqueness of the Joodse Raad in the Western European Context," *Dutch Jewish History* 3 (1993): 371-80; "De oprichting van de 'Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam' vanuit een vergelijkend perspectief," in *Derde Jaarboek van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*, ed. Madelon de Keizer and David Barnouw (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1992), 75-100.

9 Exceptions in this regard are Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews: Choices and Survival during the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België, 1940-1945: Overeenkomsten, Verschillen, Oorzaken* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011). Griffioen and Zeller's study provides a broader comparative perspective on the Holocaust in Western Europe. The role of the "Jewish Councils" is also included in the analysis.

below, dispose of some repeated misconceptions about "Jewish Councils" and their leaders' responses to persecution during Nazi rule.

Last, this volume reflects on the terminology used in the context of "Jewish Councils." As has been pointed out by various scholars, including some featured in this volume, not all these Jewish organizations were referred to as "Jewish Councils" (*Judenräte*). In both Romania and Slovakia, for example, the term "Jewish Center" was used, while we see the use of "Central Jewish Council" in the context of Hungary. In Vienna and Prague, the compulsory Jewish representative organizations were eventually referred to as "Council of Jewish Elders" (*Ältestenrat der Juden*), whereas in both Germany and Belgium, the term "Association" was employed. In France, in turn, "Jewish Council" was referred to as a "Union." In the Netherlands, the Polish example was followed, with a translation of the term "Judenrat" in Dutch ("*Joodse Raad*") used by both German authorities and Jewish communities themselves. While one of the aims of this volume is to highlight the pluriform nature of these imposed Jewish organizations and differentiate between them, "Jewish Councils" is such a widely used and understood concept in the field of Holocaust studies and beyond that in this introduction, we decided—also out of practical necessity—to use the term in quotation marks whenever general references are made to these organizations across this volume. In reference to individual case studies, we have chosen to give the authors the freedom to use the terminology they found most appropriate.

A Historiographical Overview

The historiography of the "Jewish Councils" is extensive. Whether exclusively dedicated to the Jewish Council phenomenon or more generally to Jewish communities under Nazi rule, the first studies on the topic were published soon after the war's end.[10] In the first two postwar decades, scholars such as Hans G. Adler, a survivor of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, first and foremost took a moral approach as they tried to establish whether Jewish Council leaders had been "good" or "bad." In the early 1960s, Hannah Arendt and Raul Hilberg left an indelible mark

10 See, for example: Koert Berkley, *Overzicht van het ontstaan, de werkzaamheden en het streven van den Joodschen Raad voor Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Plastica, 1945); Heinz Wielek [=E. Kweksilber], *De oorlog die Hitler won* (Amsterdam: Amsterdamsche Boeken Courantmij, 1947).

on the scholarship by accusing wartime Jewish leaders of contributing to the destruction of European Jews.[11] In the decades that followed, primarily in response to Adler, Arendt, and Hilberg, many scholars offered a more balanced perspective. These included Isaiah Trunk, Israel Gutman, Aharon Weiss, Yehuda Bauer, and Leni Yahil.[12] Far ahead of its time was the scholarship of Philip Friedman, whose publications—partly due to the fact they were in Hebrew—never gained traction in the international literature.[13] Friedman asserted that there was a need to understand local variations in Jewish Councils and include bottom-up Jewish perspectives on the councils to better understand their functioning.[14]

Since the 1990s, Holocaust research in general has significantly expanded. New generations of scholars joined the field, many archives became accessible (especially in the wake of the downfall of communism in Europe), and public interest in the Holocaust promoted a number of research initiatives. These developments changed the understanding and conceptualization of the Holocaust. For years, scholars who had tried to explain how and why the Holocaust happened could roughly be divided in two schools: 1) the "intentionalists," such as Lucy Dawidowicz, Eberhard Jäckel, and Gerald Fleming, who believed the Holocaust was the unfolding of the ideology and intentions of the National-Socialist leader-

11 Hans G. Adler, *Theresienstadt: 1941-1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft. Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie* (Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1955); Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, revised and enlarged edition (New York: Viking Press, 1964); Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (New York: Quadrangle, 1961).

12 Trunk, *Judenrat*; Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Aharon Weiss, "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland—Postures and Attitudes," *Yad Vashem Studies* 12 (1977): 335-65; Yehuda Bauer, "The Judenräte—Some Conclusions," in *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe 1933-1945. Proceedings of the Third Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, April 4-7, 1977*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Cynthia J. Haft (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 393-405; Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945,* trans. by Ina Friedman and Haya Galai (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

13 On the importance of Friedman, see: Roni Stauber, *Laying the Foundations for Holocaust Research: The Impact of Philip Friedman* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009). For Friedman's work, see: Philip Friedman, "Preliminary and Methodological Problems of the Research on the Jewish Catastrophe in the Nazi Period, Part One: Problems of Research on Jewish 'Self-Government' ('Judenrat') in the Nazi Period," *Yad Washem [sic!] Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance* 2 (1958): 95-113. Also see Friedman's various essays collected and published in *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1980).

14 Friedman, "Preliminary and Methodological Problems of the Research on the Jewish Catastrophe in the Nazi Period," 96-97.

ship (Hitler in particular), and 2) the "functionalists," including Karl Schleunes, Uwe Dietrich Adam, Hans Mommsen, and Christopher Browning, who focused more on the decision-making processes of lower-ranking individuals who radicalized policies by taking initiative. Starting in the 1990s, there was more room to integrate these two perspectives, and a consensus was reached by "moderate functionalists" that the Holocaust can be explained by a variety of factors, both top-down and bottom-up.[15] The acceptance that local Nazi leaders also influenced the process of Jewish persecution by either radicalizing ("attritionists") or temporarily slowing it down ("productionists") opened up new avenues for understanding how they interacted with local "Jewish Councils."[16] If we accept that persecution policies were not linear and differed from place to place, then we also need to continue asking whether the policies and responses of Jewish leaders could have made a difference in the local context. Consequently, historians began to pay more attention not only to the outcome of the persecution and the perceived failure of the Jewish leaders but also to the policies and motivations that underpinned their choices.

In this developing field, new studies on local Jewish communities and their wartime leaders emerged.[17] Yet while these studies have unearthed new sources and insights, not all new scholarly understandings regarding the Holocaust have been integrated into research on the "Jewish Councils,"

15 For an overview of Holocaust research since 1990, see: Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography between 1990 to 2021 in Context(s): New Insights, Perceptions, Understandings and Avenues—An Overview and Analysis* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2022); a shorter version was published as: "Characteristics of Holocaust Historiography since 1990 and Their Contexts: Emphases, Perceptions, Developments, Debates," in *A Companion to the Holocaust*, ed. Simone Gigliotti and Hilary Earl (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 211-32.

16 Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

17 It is impossible to outline here the many monographs and encyclopedic studies on the topic that have been carried out in a number of European countries. Some examples include Michal Unger, *Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004); Sara Bender, *The Jews of Białystok During World War II and the Holocaust* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2008); Guy Miron and Shlomit Shulhani, eds., *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos During the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009); Ilya Altman, chief ed., *Kholokost na territorii SSSR: entsiklopediia* [The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in the USSR] (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009); Martin Dean, ed., *Ghettos in German-occupied Eastern Europe*, vol. 2 of *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, ed. Geoffrey P. Megargee (Bloomington: Indiana University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2012); Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary* (Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013).

and some assumptions that existed in the first postwar decades still persist. In the past two decades, some studies have offered new (comparative) insights into the Jewish Council phenomenon. These include works by Rudi van Doorslaer and Jean-Philippe Schreiber, Evgeny Finkel, Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, Wolf Gruner, Beate Meyer, Doron Rabinovici, David Silberklang, and Laurien Vastenhout.[18] However, a comprehensive, transnational, and comparative study of "Jewish Councils" across Europe is still lacking.

Overcoming Misconceptions about "Jewish Councils"

A few repeated misconceptions regarding "Jewish Councils" can still be identified to this day both in the academic literature and among the wider, non-academic public. One such example is that the establishment of the "Jewish Councils" can be seen as a new stage in the escalation of the linear path to the so-called Final Solution to the Jewish question. This is an intentionalist interpretation generated with the benefit of hindsight. After all, at the time councils were established, the mass murder of the European Jews, most historians would agree, had not yet been decided.

A second issue is that the term "*Judenrat*" has often been used to describe the organizations imposed on the Jewish communities, whereas German and local authorities used different concepts and terminologies in different geographic locations and at different moments in time. As the contributions of Irina Rebrova and Wolfgang Schneider in this volume show, in occupied parts of the Soviet Union, we can find the terms "Jewish Council," "Jewish Committee," "Council of Elders," "Community Board," "*Kagal*" (the Russian pronunciation of the Hebrew word *Kahal*, which was the traditional term for the Jewish community board used in many Jewish communities), and "*Idnrat*" (or *Yidnrat*—both in Yiddish) concurrently in Russian sources. In Transnistria under Roma-

18 Jean-Philippe Schreiber and Rudi van Doorslaer, eds., *Les Curateurs du Ghetto. L'Association des Juifs en Belgique sous l'occupation Nazie* (Brussels: Labor, 2004) is a collective volume resulting from a research project; Doron Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews: The Jewish Administration of Holocaust Vienna, 1938-1945* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); David Silberklang, *Gates of Tears: The Holocaust in the Lublin District* (Jersualem: Yad Vashem, 2013); Beate Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act: The Dilemma of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, 1939-1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2013); Wolf Gruner, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia: Czech Initiatives, German Policies, Jewish Responses* (New York: Berghahn, 2019); Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration.*

nian administration, terms like "*primaria*" (mayor's officer), "*obshchina*" (community), or "*komitet*" (committee) were used.

Overall, several types of "Jewish Councils" can be identified: 1) the country-wide model in Germany, France, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and, as we will see, in the Netherlands and Hungary after an initially "local" council was established; 2) the "local" model that was generally in charge of the Jews in one specific town or city. The councils of Warsaw, Łódź, and Białystok in Poland are well known, but similar councils were set up in Transnistria by the Romanian authorities between 1941 and 1944, and in Hungary in 1944 by the German authorities in cooperation with Hungarian officials after the country was occupied by the Wehrmacht.[19] A subcategory of the local type were "Jewish Councils" in labor camps in Poland (*Lagerräte*) in the early occupation period, and later, between 1943 and 1945, in the "star camp" (*Sternlager*) of the Bergen-Belsen camp system, where Jews who could be exchanged for Germans abroad were incarcerated, or, as shown by Denisa Nešťáková, in labor camps in Slovakia. 3) Territories where one "Jewish Council"—situated in the capital city or in a major regional city—became an intermediary between the Nazi authorities and other, smaller local "Jewish Councils" in the country. This was, for example, the case of Prague for the Protectorate, Vienna for the Ostmark (German-controlled Austria), Amsterdam for the Netherlands, and Sosnowicz in East Upper Silesia (*Ostoberschlesien*) in occupied Poland.

There were also exceptions to these models. In Riga and Minsk, as Andrea Löw shows, in addition to ghettos for the local population, separate ghettos and "Jewish Councils" were established in the same city for German, Austrian, and Czech Jews, respectively, who were deported from the Greater German Reich. Irina Rebrova, in turn, shows that in the German-occupied parts of Soviet Russia, due to the small size of the Jewish population, "Jewish Councils" failed to adhere to the framework to which German authorities aspired. Very little has been written about either of these cases due to a lack of sources.[20]

19 Gali Mir-Tibon, "'Am I My Brother's Keeper?' Jewish Committees in the Ghettos of the Mogilev District and the Romanian authorities in Transnistria, 1941-1944," in *The Ghetto in Global History, 1500 to the Present*, ed. Wendy Z. Goldman and Joe William Trotter, Jr. (London: Routledge, 2018), 127-47; László Bernát Veszprémy, *Tanácstalanság. A zsidó vezetés Magyarországon és a holokauszt, 1944-1945* [Bereft of a Council: The Jewish Leadership in Hungary and the Holocaust, 1944-1945] (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2023).

20 For an exception, see: Kiril Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2016), and various entries in the Russian-language *Holocaust Encyclopedia* edited by Ilya Altman (2009).

The nature of some "Jewish Councils" changed over time. In the Netherlands, for example, the Jewish Council, whose official name was "the Jewish Council for Amsterdam," was initially a local organization. But after several months, its authority was expanded to the entire country, with local representations in each province as well as council representatives in towns with a substantial Jewish community. As the contributions of Doron Rabinovici and Jan Láníček show, we can draw parallels between the Netherlands, Austria, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in this regard as the jurisdiction of these "Jewish Councils" was initially geographically limited to the capital city, while later on, they supervised provincial and local divisions or "Jewish Councils." These three councils were also all subordinated to a local Central Office for Jewish Emigration (*Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung*).

A third idea that needs to be refined is that the Polish "*Judenrat*" model was the prototype for the Jewish Council phenomenon. In this context, Heydrich's *Schnellbrief* from September 21, 1939 and Governor General Hans Frank's follow-up decree on November 28 are generally referred to as "foundational" orders that led to the emergence of *the* Jewish Councils. However, as some scholars have shown, and this is elaborated on in the present volume, not only were Jewish representative organizations already established prior to these orders (in local communities in Poland, as well as in Germany—the Reich Association for Jews in Germany; Austria—the *Kultusgemeinde* [Religious Community], and the Protectorate—*Židovská náboženská obec/Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* [Jewish Religious Community]), "Jewish Councils" of a completely different nature were also established in other geographic contexts.[21] This necessitates a non-Polanocentric view. Moreover, as Katarzyna Person emphasizes in her essay, Jewish Councils in occupied Poland were not always established in the context of the ghetto. Instead, in the territories occupied in the autumn of 1939, Jewish Councils usually already functioned prior to the creation of ghettos, and in some ghettos, Jewish Councils were never established. This conclusion confirms Dan Michman's earlier research.[22]

21 In the context of Poland, Michman has pointed out that SS officials appointed Jewish leaders (*Obmänner*) in various communities shortly after the German occupation of these territories, the first one already on September 6, 1939, i.e., before Heydrich's infamous *Schnellbrief*. See: Dan Michman, "Why Did Heydrich Write the 'Schnellbrief'?: A Remark on the Reason and on its Significance," *Yad Vashem Studies*, no. 32 (2004): 434-37.

22 Dan Michman, *The Emergence of Jewish Ghettos during the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

From the perspective of SS authorities across Europe, the Polish local *Judenrat* was not considered a model that should be imposed everywhere. Instead, the Nazis weighed local conditions—for example, whether Jewish communities had a centralized or decentralized leadership; whether Jews lived concentrated in ghettos; and whether there were local government authorities that wished to collaborate in the establishment and supervision of the councils—and Jewish representative organizations were imposed accordingly. The nature and structure of the "Jewish Councils," and the decision to impose such organizations in the first place also depended on timing and geography. One of the main initial tasks of the "Jewish Councils" in Vienna and Prague was to support the emigration of the Jews when this was still possible, and when it was in fact the preferred solution of the Nazis (until autumn 1941). Such concerns did not exist further to the east, where the main aim was the segregation, concentration, and, eventually, the deportation of Jews.

We can therefore question whether there existed a "typical Nazi-style *Judenrat*," as Ştefan Ionescu asks in his contribution on the Jewish Center in Romania in this volume. The fact that the Jewish Center tried to help Jews by, among other things, petitioning for their rights and distributing aid to impoverished community members does not mean that it cannot be considered a typical "*Judenrat*." Most of the original "Jewish Councils" tried to slow down the progress of persecution and also established social and welfare services for destitute Jews. Apart from the fact that this volume shows that "a typical *Judenrat*" indeed did not exist, we can also establish that the numerous forms of support offered by "Jewish Councils" across Nazi Europe require us to finally move away from the idea that the organizations were merely instruments in the hands of the Germans, aiding in the process of identification, registration, despoliation, and deportation. Instead, as the contributions of Jan Láníček, Wolfgang Schneider, Laurien Vastenhout, Agnieszka Gawlas-Zajaczkowska, and others show, "Jewish Councils" carried out many social welfare tasks that were no longer provided by their governments and local non-Jewish authorities, such as health care, financial support, and education. Jewish Councils in ghettos in Poland also carried out municipal tasks such as sanitation, street cleaning, and policing. Above all, as most authors in one way or the other emphasize, the "Jewish Council" leadership across Europe was caught between their desire to aid Jewish communities and increasing pressure to fulfil the orders of German officials (and their local collaborators).

Another (fourth) established notion that needs to be overcome, and this relates to Holocaust historiography more broadly, is that there is a

tendency to speak generally of "the Germans" or "the Nazis" who established and oversaw the councils. This deflects attention from the individuals who represented specific institutions within the Nazi (or local) bureaucracy and were responsible for establishing and supervising these organizations in each locality. This is in line with the functionalist or structuralist view of the so-called Final Solution, especially its initiation and implementation. It is necessary to differentiate between these individuals and institutions in order to hold them accountable. Besides, German authorities were not in all cases (exclusively) responsible for the day-to-day functioning of these councils. This volume shows that even though they were generally established on the initiative of (or pressure from) SS authorities, some "Jewish Councils" were directly supervised by local (non-German) authorities. In Romania, for example, the Jewish Center was directly overseen by a Government Appointee for Resolving the Jewish Question (later the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs). In Slovakia, local (non-German) authorities, directly subordinate to President Jozef Tiso and in coordination with the German Advisor for Jewish Affairs Dieter Wisliceny, oversaw the establishment and day-to-day functioning of the Jewish Center. In both Belgium and France, local (non-German) authorities were similarly involved in the supervision of the "Councils." In Vichy France, the General Commissariat for Jewish Questions headed by General Commissioner Xavier Vallat was responsible for the establishment and supervision of the *Union Générale des Israélites de France* (UGIF). In some cases, as Gawlas-Zajaczkowska's article on Kraków shows, it is not possible to offer a definitive answer to the question of who specifically was responsible for the council's establishment as testimonies regarding this issue vary, and no clear official document discussing this issue exists.

Less-Explored Territories

This volume includes contributions on "Jewish Councils" that have been hitherto largely unexplored. As Andrea Löw rightly mentions in her chapter, the study of "Jewish Councils" is characterized by a persistent focus on specific councils about which a plethora of sources is available (including those in Warsaw, Theresienstadt, and Amsterdam), whereas the histories of other councils (especially the numerous local councils in smaller towns and cities across eastern Europe) remain largely untold, in part because of the scarcity of sources. But as the contributions by Andrea Löw, Irina Rebrova, Katarzyna Person, and Wolfgang Schneider

show, even with limited sources, some aspects of the histories of these "Jewish Councils" and their leaders can be reconstructed. This is necessary to provide better insight into both German or local authorities' intentions concerning these organizations and Jewish responses to them. Furthermore, examining new case studies also produces new answers, as well as generates new questions and calls for new approaches.

For example, a persistent topic in the historiography of "Jewish Councils" is whether these organizations can be considered continuities or breaks from prewar social structures. Löw's study shows that practical reality and coincidence, rather than carefully considered choices about who could best represent the Jews, defined who would take up the leadership and membership of the German "Jewish Councils" in Riga and Minsk. That is, Jewish leaders were appointed based on who the Gestapo assigned to be leaders on transports from the Reich (*Transportführer*).[23] These "Jewish Council" leaders could, therefore, not build on prewar authority, social structure, knowledge, or relationships. The situation of these German "Jewish Councils" was extraordinary on many levels because their functionaries had to fulfill the same tasks as other local Jewish Councils in occupied Europe while operating in an environment entirely unknown to them. Also, in the occupied territories of Russia, people were frequently appointed to be "Jewish Elders" only because they knew German and, thus, the occupying forces could communicate with them.

In his discussion of the Jewish leaders in Transnistria, another underresearched region, Wolfgang Schneider takes a theoretical approach to the concepts of "leadership" and "headship," both of which have been used to describe the position of the Jewish functionaries who took up leading roles in the councils. He questions Dan Michman's use of "headship" in the context of the "Jewish Councils" and proposes instead the notion of "legitimacy." Scheider's contribution offers a unique theoretical perspective that allows us to move away from the discussion of councils' continuity or break with prewar social structures. In doing so, he argues that the legitimacy of Jewish chairmen or Elders depended on other factors including whether different groups were represented in the Jewish administration; whether they spoke the language of the occupier; whether they had charisma; and whether they were successful in providing material aid to the Jewish communities.

23 For those who have focused on the level of (dis)continuity with prewar social structures in the Jewish community, see, for example: Weiss, "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland," 335-65; Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 92-141; and the contributions of Doron Rabinovici and Jan Láníček in this volume.

In addition to the aforementioned case studies, little is known about the "Jewish Councils"—presumably hundreds of them—in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, especially places further to the east and southeast of Russian territory. As the absence of official wartime records has made it difficult to investigate the role of these organizations, Irina Rebrova's contribution on the "Jewish Councils" in the occupied zones of the RSFSR, one of the fifteen Soviet Republics, is particularly valuable. Based first and foremost on interviews and the documentation of the Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK), which includes information about the establishment of the ghettos and Jewish life inside them, Rebrova has been able to reconstruct the position of the "Jewish Council" leaders. She shows that compared to other Soviet republics and eastern European countries, the role of the "Jewish Councils" in Russia was minimal.

Apart from little-explored geographic territories, there are also thematic approaches that deserve more attention. While most authors focus on the persistent question regarding "Jewish Council" leaderships' level of cooperation or collaboration with German authorities, Denisa Nešťáková instead focuses her contribution on the notion of resistance. In line with the developing historiography on "Jewish resistance," which generally has come to include a wide variety of acts that opposed the Nazi goal to destroy European Jewry and their culture, she argues that the Jewish Center's development of a public health system in Slovak labor camps can be considered a daring act of resistance against the policies of both Nazi and Slovak authorities.[24] Although scholars have employed different understandings of the concept of "Jewish resistance," we must establish that given the legal nature and function of "Jewish Councils," it is particularly interesting to examine how Jewish functionaries attempted to act against the interests of German authorities.[25] In this context, Jan Láníček also raises the question of Jewish resistance in Prague while simultaneously acknowledging the limits of Jewish leaders' efforts to resist Nazi policies.

24 Yehuda Bauer, "Jewish Resistance: Myth or Reality?," in *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 119-42; Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective. Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 217-48; Robert Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 341-63.

25 See also: Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 192-242.

A Pan-European Perspective on "Jewish Councils"

In his 1975 interview with Lanzmann, Benjamin Murmelstein characterized the position of Jewish leaders under the Nazis as situated between the hammer and anvil. They were pressured by the SS on the one hand, and, on the other, by the wider Jewish communities they were forced to represent. While the different positions of Jewish leaders force us to differentiate them according to their room for maneuver—those in western Europe, for example, could resign from their position without being punished, whereas the refusal to comply in eastern Europe often led to deportation or direct murder—scholars have indeed pointed to the "Catch 22" Jewish leaders confronted across Nazi Europe. We can identify key similarities in the case studies included in this volume. These include—to identify a few—the fact that "Jewish Councils" were all established to unite and represent Jewish communities; that pressure from their Nazi superiors increased during the war; and that Jewish leaders' room for maneuver significantly decreased when the mass deportations commenced. Both Andrea Löw and Philipp Dinkelaker refer to Lawrence Langer's notion of "choiceless choices," that is, council leaders continuously had to reassess their choices, only to find out that, indeed, their options were very limited and eventually almost non-existent.[26] Ferenc Laczó uses Primo Levi's concept of the "grey zone" to define and describe the morally ambiguous position taken by the Hungarian "Jewish Council" during the war.[27] From some of the articles it becomes clear that Jewish leaders took strikingly similar approaches—"buying time," "delaying," "race against time," and "procrastination" to the extent possible—even using the exact same wording to describe their policies.

This volume, furthermore, shows that working for the "Jewish Councils," even though it supposedly offered (temporary) protection from deportation and therefore "safety," placed Jewish functionaries in a vulnerable position. An oft-repeated claim is that Jewish leaders acted in their own self-interest and sought to work for these organizations to protect themselves and their families. Yet numerous examples show that precisely because these Jewish functionaries and their whereabouts were known to German authorities and they interacted daily with the Nazis,

26 Lawrence L. Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps," *Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 1 (1980): 53-59.

27 Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

they were easy targets, especially when German authorities sought to retaliate against or create chaos in the Jewish community.

Löw's article shows that members of the German "Jewish Council" in Minsk were murdered even before mass deportations began. Gawlas-Zajaczkowska demonstrates that the chairman of the second Jewish Council in Kraków Artur Rosenzweig was deported to Bełżec together with his family when German authorities were dissatisfied with the number of people assembled for the first transport. Láníček's article offers a unique example of how the Gestapo threatened Jewish leaders on a day-to-day basis through a so-called *Sterbetafel,* a publicly displayed overview of the Jewish leaders of the Prague Jewish Religious Community. SS-Sturmbannführer Karl Rahm tore off two photos from this board when the registration of Jews was not carried out as effectively as he wanted, which sealed their fate. Similarly, Jewish Elder Paul Eppstein was shot shortly before the start of a series of transports of around 18,400 Jews from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Threatening "Jewish Council" leaders and members was a common practice.

These examples all show that the slightest hint or suspicion of non-cooperation could endanger the lives of Jewish functionaries. Although Murmelstein's claim that he had been the only survivor among Jewish Elders was incorrect, the number of survivors among the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who took up leadership positions was dramatically low. They were uncomfortable witnesses, and even those who fully cooperated with the SS eventually shared the fate of other victims. The murder of Mordechai Rumkowski of Łódź, Moshe Merin of Sosnowiec, and Jacob Gens of Vilno, the most notorious among those accused of collaboration with the Nazis, confirms the hopeless position of Jewish leaders.

Several authors in their chapters also focus on the way ordinary members of the Jewish community perceived the "Jewish Councils" and their leaders. For many, leaders became symbols of compliance and cooperation with the Nazis, and for this reason, members had difficulties comprehending their leaders' conduct. Ionescu uses several diaries to show that their authors perceived Jewish leaders in Romania in a predominantly negative light. These observations are confirmed by Láníček for the Protectorate, although he also shows that some of the Jews recognized the unenviable position of the "Jewish Councils." In the Netherlands, the Jewish Council was often referred to as "*Joods verraad*" (Jewish treason), which sounds almost identical to "*Joodse raad*," the official name of the council.

The murky question of collaboration is further problematized by contributions that highlight the postwar investigations of the "Jewish Councils," both those initiated by Jewish communities (so-called "honor courts") and special investigations carried out by state authorities. In some cases, as Ferenc Laczó shows, Jewish leaders were judged according to unrealistic standards. A special court held Ernő Munkácsi—who had never even formally been a member of the Central Jewish Council in Budapest—responsible for the mass murder of the Jews in Hungary. Quite different was the situation in Germany, where, as Dinkelaker argues, a Jewish Honor Court seemed to have maintained double standards in their assessment of the cooperation of Jews with Nazi authorities. Because the Honor Court was partly composed of functionaries who had worked for the "Jewish Council" (the Reich Association of Jews in Germany), they exonerated their former co-workers. But, as Dinkelaker shows, individuals who had engaged in similar acts of collaboration outside the auspices of the Reich Association (so-called *Greifer*) were punished. Honor courts and other forms of transitional justice is a topic that has recently gained more traction among historians thanks to major studies by Dan Porat, Laura Jockusch, and Gabriel N. Finder, among others.[28] All these studies emphasize the need to do comparative research on the relations between Nazi administrators and Jewish leaders and Jewish responses to these during the war, as well as on how Jews attempted to rebuild their devastated communities in the postwar period.

Altogether, the Jewish Council phenomenon to this day remains a sensitive topic in the history of the Holocaust. Even though the subject has been covered extensively in the existing literature, there are many councils that have, heretofore, received little or no attention. Comprehensive studies on the form and function of "Jewish Councils" in

28 Laura Jockusch and Gabriel N. Finder, eds., *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution, and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel after the Holocaust* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015); Dan Porat, *Bitter Reckoning: Israel Tries Holocaust Survivors as Nazi Collaborators* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019); Dan Michman, "Kontroversen über die Judenräte in der Jüdischen Welt, 1945-2005. Das Ineinandergreifen von öffentlichem Gedächtnis und Geschichtsschreibung," in *Der Judenrat von Białystok. Dokumente aus dem Archiv des Białystoker Ghettos 1941-1943*, ed. Freia Anders, Katrin Stoll, and Karsten Wilke (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 311-18. For the case of Rabbi Tzvi Koretz in Salonica, see: Giorgos Antoniou and A. Dirk Moses, "Introduction: The Holocaust in Greece," in *The Holocaust in Greece*, ed. Giorgos Antoniou and A. Dirk Moses (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4; Minna Rozen, "Jews and Greeks Remember their Past: The Political Career of Zvi Koretz (1933-1943)," *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no.1 (2005): 111-66.

Nazi-dominated Europe are, moreover, often outdated. This volume addresses these problems. We furthermore hope that this collection will encourage scholars to examine (from a comparative perspective) the many "Jewish Councils" that are still un(der)researched and find new analytical frameworks and methodological approaches to investigate this complex history.

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Laurien Vastenhout

Challenging the East/West Dichotomy: Parallels and Differences between "Jewish Councils" in Western Europe and Beyond

David Cohen was professor of Classics at the University of Amsterdam and co-chairman of the Dutch Jewish Council (*De Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam*, JR) between its establishment in February 1941 and its dissolution in September 1943. After the end of the Second World War, he produced notebooks that testify to his wish to better understand the Jewish Council phenomenon in Nazi-occupied Europe. The notebooks, perhaps because of his often-illegible handwriting, have remained completely unexplored. Yet these records are worthy of attention, not least because they show how, following the war, Cohen attempted to account for his wartime decisions by seeking parallels with other "Jewish Councils" and the decisions of their leaders. In a scholarly manner, he assembled information about the Dutch Jewish Council and similar representative Jewish organizations imposed on Jewish communities in Germany, Denmark, Romania, Austria, France, Hungary, Poland, and other places. In the notebooks, eleven in total, he quoted or paraphrased books and articles he read on the topic; sometimes he supplemented these notes with his personal observations.[1]

One of the notebooks testifies to a conversation between Cohen and Leo Baeck on May 4, 1948. Baeck was the former head of the Reich Association for Jews in Germany (*Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*), the successor of the *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden,* which

1 Notebooks David Cohen, Inv. Nos. 6-9, 248-0294, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (hereafter NIOD). There were other occasions where Cohen compared the responsibilities of the Dutch Council to those in other countries. See, for example, David Cohen's unpublished report on the history of the Jews in the Netherlands written in August/September 1945: "Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland tijdens de Bezetting," p. 10, 181j, NIOD.

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was established in September 1933 to confront the problems German Jews faced under the Nazi regime. The *Reichsvereinigung* fulfilled many tasks that can be compared to those of "Jewish Councils" elsewhere, including the implementation of Nazi policies and preparations for the confiscation of Jewish property.[2] Soon after he was deported to Theresienstadt in January 1943, Baeck became the honorary head of the Council of Elders there.[3] The conversation between the two men took place during a difficult period for Cohen. The verdict of the Jewish Honor Court in the Netherlands, which ruled that the former council chairmen were no longer permitted to fulfill any representative functions for the Jewish community, had been published five months earlier. Moreover, through a Special Jurisdiction (*Bijzondere Rechtspleging*), the Dutch State conducted preliminary investigations into the Jewish Council in this period.[4] Cohen seemed to find comfort in studying how Jewish Council leaders in other countries had operated. His attempt to grasp the situation in other countries, frantically noting down everything he could find on the topic, was part of his larger effort in the immediate postwar years to contextualize and justify his wartime choices and behavior. He wanted to convince those who accused him of betrayal of the righteousness of his choices.[5] Perhaps looking at other countries was a way to show that Jewish leaders across Nazi-occupied Europe had faced the same dilemmas and that many had responded similarly. It was a way to demonstrate that his cooperation with German authorities was not unparalleled.

2 Beate Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act: The Dilemma of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, 1939-1945*, transl. William Templer (New York: Berghahn, 2013). See also Philipp Dinkelaker's article in this volume.

3 Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 50-58.

4 For further reading on the Jewish honor court in the Netherlands, see: Ido de Haan, "An Unresolved Controversy: The Jewish Honor Court in the Netherlands, 1946-1950," in *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel after the Holocaust*, eds. Laura Jokusch and Gabriel N. Finder (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 107-36; K.C. Nanno, "In 't Veld," *De Joodse Ereraad* (Den Haag: SDU Uitgeverij). For the state trial against the Jewish Council, see: Johannes Houwink ten Cate, "De justitie en de Joodsche Raad," in *Geschiedenis en cultuur—Achttien opstellen*, eds. Ed Jonker and Maarten van Rossem (The Hague: SDU, 1990), 149-68.

5 See, for example: Cohen, "Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland tijdens de bezetting," 181j, NIOD, as well as his testimonies during the preliminary investigations of the state trial against the Council leadership—which can be found at the Central Archive of Special Jurisdiction in The Hague, the Netherlands, CABR file 107481—and Cohen's memoirs, published by Erik Somers as *Voorzitter van de Joodse Raad: De herinneringen van David Cohen, 1941-1943* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2010).

Cohen, a trained historian, was ahead of his time in attempting to contextualize his wartime choices by drawing parallels with other countries, including those in Eastern Europe. In the Netherlands, like Belgium and France, it has taken scholars decades to engage in comparative analyses on the Jewish Council phenomenon.[6] The first overview of the establishment history of the Dutch Council and its activities was published as early as 1945.[7] This was followed by more general publications on the Dutch history of the German occupation that also addressed the role of the Dutch Jewish Council. There were historians who dominated Second World War historiography for decades: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser, and Loe de Jong. In 1950, Herzberg largely defended the council; in 1965, Presser approached the topic in an ambiguous and even emotional manner, claiming that the council leadership could have known the fate that awaited the Jews; De Jong followed Hannah Arendt's (in)famous line of reasoning, arguing that the council should have refused to cooperate and that it had first and foremost been an instrument in the hands of the Germans.[8]

In the broader Holocaust historiography produced during this period, studies on "Jewish Councils" were mostly focused on the local level, or limited to the boundaries of the nation-state. To this day, even though "Jewish Councils" have been a central topic in Holocaust historiography for decades, comprehensive transnational and/or comparative monographs on this topic are rare.[9] Furthermore, there

6 For comparative investigations, see, for example: Hans Blom, "The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands: A Comparative Western European Perspective," *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989): 333-51; Dan Michman, "De oprichting van de 'Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam' vanuit een vergelijkend perspectief," in *Derde Jaarboek van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1992), 75-100; Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, "UGIF in France, AJB in Belgium, Joodsche Raad in the Netherlands: Similar Strategies of Legality, Varying Contexts, Different Outcomes," *Perspectives* 26 (2021): 51-75; Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België, 1940-1945: overeenkomsten, verschillen, oorzaken* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011), 388-91, 583-633, 648-51, 672-73; Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

7 Koert Berkley, *Overzicht van het ontstaan, de werkzaamheden en het streven van den Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Plastica, 1945).

8 Bart van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad: een geschiedenis van de Joodse Raad voor Amsterdam, 1941-1943* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2022), 299-313.

9 Isaiah Trunk's study *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation*, published in 1972, allowed for comparative analyses, but it was not comparative in nature. Evgeny Finkel's work is inherently comparative but not exclusively focused on Jewish Councils: *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during*

has been little to no interaction between scholars of the "East" and "West."[10]

The aim of this article is to provide a more integrative understanding of the Jewish Council phenomenon. Using Western Europe as a case study, it builds on scholarship on Central and Eastern Europe, and draws parallels with "Jewish Councils" in other localities. While it extends beyond the limits of this article to engage in a full-fledged comparative analysis, it nevertheless identifies patterns in histories of the establishment and functioning of these organizations as well as the choices of these organs' leaders. As such, this article seeks to diminish the East/West dichotomy that still exists in Holocaust historiography in general, and the historiography of "Jewish Councils" in particular. Moreover, by highlighting the differences between and among the "Jewish Councils" in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, this article shows that Western Europe should not be considered "one bloc." Above all, by expanding the geographic focus across local and national boundaries, this article contributes to the larger objective of this edited volume: a better and transnational understanding of the nature of the "Jewish Council" phenomenon across Nazi-occupied Europe.

Jewish Councils versus Jewish Associations

On September 21, 1939, head of the Security Police Reinhard Heydrich sent his famous *Schnellbrief* to the chiefs of all the task forces (*Einsatzgruppen*) of the Security Police. This letter can be seen as an attempt to provide a model for the "Councils of Jewish Elders" (*Jüdische Ältestenräte*) or "*Judenräte*," that, according to Heydrich's plans, were to be "composed of up to 24 male Jews."[11] Standardization was necessary because, as Dan Michman has shown, just days after the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, SS officials imposed various Jewish umbrella organizations on local communities, using different desig-

the Holocaust (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*.

10 Dan Michman, "Comparative Research on the Holocaust in Western Europe: Its Achievements, its Limits and a Plea for a More Integrative Approach," *Moreshet Journal for the Study of the Holocaust and Antisemitism* 19 (2020): 286-306.

11 "Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei übersendet den Einsatzgruppen in Polen am 21. September 1939 Richtlinien für die Vorgehensweise gegenüber Juden" (dok. 12), in *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland, 1933-1945: Polen September 1939-Juli 1941*, vol. 4, eds. Klaus-Peter Friedrich and Andrea Löw (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011), 88-92.

nations.[12] Two months later, on November 28, 1939, Governor-General Hans Frank officially ordered the establishment of *Judenräte* in the *Generalgouvernement*.[13] While Heydrich's *Schnellbrief* and Frank's order differed in terms of the precise tasks they assigned the councils, both agreed that the organizations would be responsible for the execution of German orders.[14]

The Jewish Councils that were imposed on Jewish communities in the period that followed were first and foremost *local* institutions that were not anchored in law.[15] That is, there were no official statutes that formalized their inception. Instead, local town commanders or governors approached Jewish leaders and ordered the establishment of these organizations either verbally or in writing.[16] Local Jewish Councils were instituted in the territories of occupied Poland and, after 1941, also in the occupied Soviet territories. The timing of their establishment differed, and in some places, *Judenräte* never existed.[17]

Like most Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe, and unlike its counterparts in Belgium and France, the Dutch Jewish Council was initially also established as an organization with only local jurisdiction. After all, it was named *De Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam*, the Jewish Council for Amsterdam, the Dutch capital city. As I have argued elsewhere, some precise details of the council's establishment history are unknown, but we do know that Hans Böhmcker personally ordered the formation of such an

12 Dan Michman, "Why did Heydrich Write the *Schnellbrief*? A Remark on the Reason and on its Significance," *Yad Vashem Studies* 32 (2004), 434-35. For further reading on the earliest references to the "Jewish Council" concept, dating back to April 1933 (though a different terminology was then used), see: Dan Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule: The Evolution and Implementation of an Administrative Concept," in *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective: Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 161-65.

13 Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1972] 1996), 1-4; Michman, "Jewish Leadership in Extremis," 328. As Michman has argued, by deviating from Heydrich's *Schnellbrief*, General Governor Hans Frank probably hoped to regain control over Jewish affairs in his jurisdiction; see: Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule," 167.

14 Trunk, *Judenrat,* 4.

15 In the General Government, slightly different terminologies were used, varying from *Ältestenrat*, or variations of *Ältestenrat* (i.e., from 1941 to 1942 in Bendsburg: "Altestenrat der jüdischen Kultusgemeinde in Bendsburg") to *Jüdische Gemeinde* in Reichshof [Rzeszów]. See: Trunk*, Judenrat*, 11.

16 Michman, "Jewish Leadership in Extremis," 328.

17 Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule," 167.

organization.[18] Böhmcker was the Amsterdam representative of Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who was directly answerable to Hitler. The direct cause of the council's establishment was a violent clash between Dutch Nazis and Jews in the Amsterdam Jewish quarter in February 1941, and order needed to be restored. This indeed became the first task assigned to the council.[19]

In various respects, the Dutch Council was modeled after the Polish-style *Judenrat*: not only was it was (initially) a local institution; its establishment also resulted from a verbal order, there was no official statute that gave the council legal status, and around two dozen Jews took up seats on its central board.[20] As Michman has argued, the fact that Seyss-Inquart, who had been Hans Frank's deputy in Poland, agreed to impose a local *Judenrat* can be explained by the fact that he knew about this model from personal experience.[21] Moreover, the highest SS representative in the Netherlands, Hanns Albin Rauter, as well as the commander of the security police, Wilhelm Harster, had previously served in the Kraków area, where they witnessed the establishment of local *Judenräte*.[22]

Just months after the Dutch council's establishment in February, both German authorities and the two council chairmen Abraham Asscher and David Cohen wished to extend the organization's authority to the national level.[23] It is not surprising that a national model was considered more practical. After all, Jewish social and religious life in the Netherlands was generally organized nationally. For example, the Committee for Special Jewish Affairs (CBJB), founded in 1933 in response to the persecution of Jews in Germany, as well as the Jewish Coordinating Committee, which was established in December 1940 to provide aid and relief to Jews in the

18 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 62-68.

19 Notice of the permanent Commission of the Nederlands-Israëlitische Hoofdsynagoge, 14 February 1941, D003186, Jewish Museum Amsterdam. For an overview of those who eventually made up the central board of the council, see: Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 22-27.

20 Michman, "The Uniqueness of the Joodse Raad in the Western European Context," *Dutch Jewish History: Proceedings of the Fifth Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Institute for Research on Dutch Jewry, 1993), 371-80.

21 Ibid., 376.

22 Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule," 169.

23 With the help of jurist Kurt Rabl, Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart, hoping to sideline the SS in the supervision of the Dutch Jewish Council, had wanted to transform the organization into a "Verband der Juden in die Niederlanden" with national authority. This plain failed, however, probably due to intervention by SS authorities (in Berlin). See: Dan Michman, "De oprichting van de 'Joodsche Raad Voor Amsterdam' vanuit een vergelijkend perspectief," 89-90.

Netherlands, operated on the national level. Moreover, while most Jews (60 percent) were concentrated in Amsterdam, others lived scattered across the country in cities like Rotterdam, Enschede, The Hague, and in smaller towns. A central office in the capital city with local and regional departments was, thus, more in accordance with how Jewish life was organized in the Netherlands before the German occupation.

The first steps in the "nationalization" of the Dutch council were taken in spring 1941. On May 27, the council compiled a list of all Jewish non-religious organizations in the country.[24] In doing so, Böhmcker's earlier request to provide an overview of such organizations in Amsterdam was now extended to the entire country.[25] Soon, Jewish organizations across the Netherlands were either dissolved or incorporated into the Jewish Council. In October 1941, the jurisdiction of the organization was officially extended to the national level. The council's juridical—or, more precisely, non-juridical—status remained unaltered, however, despite the organization's chairmen's earlier (April 1941) request for an official statute that would enable the council "to act as a legal entity."[26] Thus, the Dutch Council, from the Western European perspective, had a unique status: it was a national organization, but unlike the situation in Belgium and France, it operated without legal recognition.

We can identify some parallels with Hungary in this regard. In March 1944, before the Nazi takeover of Hungary, members of the *Sondereinsatzkommando Eichmann* (SEK)—including Dieter Wisliceny, Theodor Dannecker (who, as we will see, had previously witnessed the establishment of the Jewish compulsory organization, the UGIF, in France), and Franz Novack—initially proposed a "Jewish Council" with nationwide authority, but which, similar to the Netherlands, would not be grounded in law.[27] The idea of a national organization was abandoned,

24 Letter Asscher and Cohen to Böhmcker, May 27, 1941, 182.26, NIOD.

25 Letter Hans Böhmcker to the chairmen of the Jewish Council, March 18, 1941, 182.26, NIOD.

26 Letter Asscher and Cohen to Böhmcker, April 7, 1941, 182.26. On November 9, the council chairmen outlined why it was problematic that German authorities had not agreed to give the organization a juridical status. Among other things, the financial resources of Jewish organizations that had been disbanded could not be transferred to the accounts of the council. See: Concept letter to Beauftrage Böhmcker, Willy Lages and Werner Schröder, November 9, 1941, 182.26. See also: the blueprint of the "Jewish Councils for the Netherlands," produced by the council leadership, in which it is proposed that the national council would be a "legal entity": Ontwerpstatuut Joodsche Raad voor Nederlands, 182.1, NIOD.

27 Dan Michman, "The Jewish Councils Phenomenon: New Insights and Their Implications for the Hungarian Case," in *The Holocaust in Hungary: A European*

however, when these SS functionaries realized the Jewish communities in Hungary were too fragmented to be united under one centralized umbrella organization. Instead, like the Dutch council, initially a local Budapest "Jewish Council" was established. Once Central Council leaders presented themselves to Eichmann's representatives, the latter, Hermann Krumey and Dieter Wisliceny, indicated that the council, through local branches, would have control over the entire country after all.[28]

While this process of expanding its jurisdiction was similar to the Dutch case, the Central Council in Budapest never obtained the centralized position the Dutch Jewish Council's main office in Amsterdam had. Instead, the decentralized nature of the interactions between the Budapest office and local branches of the Central Council across Hungary bears closer resemblance to the "Jewish Councils" in Belgium and France.[29] The nature of highly diverse Jewish communities—which in Belgium and France included large numbers of immigrants and refugees who organized themselves according to the local communities they had left behind—was such that their community representation had a strong local character, and, thus, it was nearly impossible to unite them into one central organization.[30] In Hungary, the Central Council in practice only had control over the Jews in Budapest.[31] In smaller communities throughout Hungary, "Jewish Councils" were established through different local procedures carried out independently of the Central Council and sometimes through the initiative of local SS personnel. In some cases, "Jewish Councils" were not set up at all.[32]

In Belgium and France, the respective natures of the *Association des Juifs en Belgique* (AJB) and the *Union Générale des Israélites de France* (UGIF) were very different from the Dutch Jewish Council. The AJB was modeled after the Reich Association of Jews in Germany and had

Perspective, ed. Judit Molnár (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 258. It should be noted that in order to obstruct German control over the council and ensure that Hungarian authorities could oversee the confiscation of Jewish property, the "Jewish Council" was written into Hungarian Law in April 1944; see: ibid., 261-62.

28 Michman, "The Jewish Councils Phenomenon," 259.

29 For further reading on the autonomy of the local AJB and UGIF departments versus the centralized nature of the JR in the Netherlands, see: Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 165-77.

30 For an overview of the different nature of the Jewish communities in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France on the eve of the Second World War, see: Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 21-55, 177-91. For Hungary, see: Michman, "The Jewish Councils Phenomenon," 259-60.

31 Michman, "The Jewish Councils Phenomenon," 261.

32 See, for example, in Győr and Nagyvárad. Ibid., 259, 263.

enjoyed national authority since its founding in November 1941.[33] Conversly, in France, the armistice of June 22, 1940 divided the country into a German-occupied zone and an unoccupied zone administered by the collaborationist Vichy regime. This division impacted the establishment of the UGIF in November 1941. The UGIF-Sud was operative in the unoccupied zone (renamed the "southern" zone after the German invasion of the southwest of the country in November 1942); the UGIF-Nord governed the occupied zone (later the "northern" zone). Both organizations operated independently, and despite attempts to bring the UGIF-Sud under the UGIF-Nord's umbrella in 1943, they continued to do so until they were dissolved shortly before liberation.[34]

Several factors explain why German and Vichy authorities chose to implement the national rather than the local "Jewish Council" model in Belgium and France from the outset. An important explanation is that the position of the German Security Police (SiPo-SD) was weak.[35] SS functionaries had to negotiate the establishment of the AJB and the UGIF with representatives of the Military Administration. As I have argued elsewhere, the Military Administration and, in the case of France, the Vichy regime (initially) obstructed the establishment of "Jewish Councils" as they wished to maintain their authority at the expense of the SiPo-SD.[36] This resulted in continuous discussions between representatives of the Military Administration, the SiPo-SD, and, in the case of France, Vichy officials. This not only delayed the establishment of "Jewish Councils" in Belgium and France but also necessitated compromises. As a result, the AJB, the UGIF-Nord, and the UGIF-Sud became *associations* which, as Michman has argued, was the more "moderate"

33 Dan Michman, "De oprichting van de VJB in internationaal perspectief" in *De curatoren van het getto: de vereniging van de Joden in België tijdens de nazi-bezetting*, ed. Jean-Philippe Schreiber and Rudi van Doorslaer (Tielt: Lannoo, 2004), 42. In a 1942 report on Jewry in Belgium, head of the SiPo-SD in Brussels Ernst Ehlers confirmed that the AJB had been modeled after the Reich Association in Germany. See: "Sonderbericht: Das Judentum in Belgien," January 31, 1942, pp. 37-38, SVG-R. 184/Tr 50 077, Marburg, Dienst Oorlogsslachtoffers (DOS).

34 Jacques Adler, *The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1985]), 138-43; Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 154.

35 Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, "UGIF in France, AJB in Belgium, Joodsche Raad in the Netherlands: Similar Strategies of Legality, Varying Contexts, Different Outcomes," *Perspectives* (2021): 57; Dan Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule: The Evolution and Implementation of an Administrative Concept," in *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective. Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 159-75.

36 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 73-87.

model with "national" authority.[37] While Eichmann and his representatives, when possible, opted for the local Judenrat model directly overseen by local SS and police authorities, these examples show that local contexts sometimes required alternative approaches.[38]

Unlike the local *Judenrat* model, these Jewish Associations in Belgium and France, as well as the Central Council in Hungary, were not directly overseen by local German security police authorities (exclusively).[39] Instead, they were governed by several nationally operating institutions. In France, both the UGIF-Nord and the UGIF-Sud were subordinate to the Vichy-led General Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (CGQJ). In Belgium, various German and Belgian institutions shared the supervision of the AJB: the German police, divisions of the Military Administration, and the Belgian Ministries of the Interior, Health, and Justice.[40] In Hungary, the Central Council was subordinate to Hungarian—not German—authorities.[41]

We can draw parallels between the AJB, the UGIF, and similar national organizations that were established not only in Germany (the *Reichsvereinigung*) and Hungary (the Central Council) but also in satellite states such as Slovakia, where the Jewish Center, established on September 26, 1940 by the Slovak regime in coordination with the German advisor for Jewish affairs Dieter Wisliceny, replaced all existing Jewish organizations and governed all aspects of Jewish life.[42] Without doubt, the local context of Slovakia—i. e., the close collaboration of Slovak authorities with Nazi Germany, and the fact that the Jewish Center was established at a time when the country was not occupied by the German

37 Dan Michman, "On the Historical Interpretation of the Judenräte Issue: Between Intentionalism, Functionalism and the Integrationist Approach of the 1990s," in *On Germans and Jews under the Nazi Regime: Essays by Three Generations of Historians,* ed. Moshe Zimmerman (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 2006), 395.

38 Michman, "The Jewish Councils Phenomenon," 256, 258.

39 Griffioen and Zeller, "UGIF in France, AJB in Belgium, Joodsche Raad in the Netherlands," 58.

40 Ibid., 64; Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 89-90.

41 Michman, "The Jewish Councils Phenomenon," 262.

42 "Die slowakische Regierung verfügt am 26. September 1940 die Schaffung der Judenzentrale als Zwangsorganisation der Juden" (dok. 23), in: *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland, 1933-1945: Slowakei, Rumänien und Bulgarien,* vol. 13, eds. Mariana Hausleitner, Souzana Hazan, and Barbara Hutzelmann (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), 156-57; Denisa Nešťáková, "The Jewish Centre and Labour Camps in Slovakia," in *Between Collaboration and Resistance: Papers from the 21st Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Extermination Sites*, ed. Karoline Georg, Verena Meier, Paula A. Opperman (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2020), 130-32.

army—played a role in the institution of the more "moderate" national model. Unlike local *Judenräte*—and like the AJB in Belgium, the UGIF in France, and the Central Council in Hungary—the Jewish Center in Slovakia was overseen by local authorities (i. e., it was directly subordinate to President Jozef Tiso), and it was established by an official decree.[43] The Jewish Center also had local branches in district towns.[44] The national "*Judenvereinigung*" model was, therefore, imposed in case the SS had to share its authority with other "German power centres," as Michman has argued, as well as when local governments were willing to actively collaborate in the process of establishing and overseeing these organizations.[45]

These examples show that local conditions were decisive in shaping "Jewish Councils"—whether a local or national model was adopted—and they also emphasize the transnational nature of the Jewish Council phenomenon. SS functionaries—including Wisliceny and Dannecker, who were involved in the establishment of several "Jewish Councils" across both Western and Eastern Europe—drew on the experiences they had in the one geographic location and employed this knowledge as soon as they were transferred elsewhere.[46]

The Timing of Establishment

There is an important difference between Western Europe, Central Europe, the occupied Polish territories, and other parts of Eastern Europe when it comes to the establishment histories of the "Jewish Councils." Once the Germans invaded Western Europe, it took almost a year before concerted attempts to establish "Jewish Councils" were made, as opposed to the very swift establishment of such bodies in, for example, occupied Poland. Part of the explanation for this dissimilarity might be found in the different status Western Europe had in the Nazi worldview as compared to Eastern Europe. The idea that living space (*Lebensraum*) had to be sought in the East, where inferior peoples—Slavs and Jews—lived, was inherently part of the imperial and racial ideologies of the Nazis. The so-called *Generalplan Ost* was aimed at the forced expulsion, enslavement, and eradication of these inferior groups to make space

43 Nešťáková, "The Jewish Centre and Labour Camps in Slovakia," 131n54.

44 Katarína Hradská, *Holocaust na Slovensku: Ústredňa Židov*, vol. 8 (Bratislava: Klemo, 2008), 409-10.

45 See Michman, "The Jewish Councils Phenomenon," 258.

46 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 56-87.

for the ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) who would be resettled in these territories. Even before the invasion of Poland, policies were formulated to achieve these aims. As scholars have shown, these policies radicalized quickly, not least because there was ample room for initiative and because ideological commitment was strong.[47]

Western Europe, by contrast, was occupied first and foremost out of strategic (military) motives. The Nazis believed these countries might stand in the way of their aim to create living space in the East. While the "Jewish problem" also had to be solved in the West (through the removal of Jews), the area itself and its inhabitants were perceived differently. The Dutch and Flemish were even seen as a Germanic brother peoples who needed to be Nazified, hence the appointment of Nazis with strong ideological backgrounds to leading positions in the Netherlands.[48] Furthermore, whereas Eastern Europe became the site of mass murder, Western Europe was considered useful in terms of its economic and industrial capacity to support German war industries. German interests in the West, in short, differed from those in the East.

The result of these differences was that German authorities in the West refrained from the radical implementation of anti-Jewish policies from the start because they feared this would increase anti-German sentiment, in addition to other reasons. As the Military Commander of Belgium and Northern France Alexander von Falkenhausen wrote in December 1940, the non-Jewish population did not feel there existed a "racial problem"; thus, caution was required.[49] Lacking the financial resources and personnel to directly govern Western Europe, the Nazi regime, furthermore, depended on the cooperation of local bureaucracies. To safeguard security and stability, anti-Jewish measures and policies,

47 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998); and *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* (London: Allan Lane, 2000); Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: das Führerskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburg Edition, 2002); Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2002); Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion, 1941-1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003).

48 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 48.

49 Letter from the Military Commander of Belgium and Northern France addressed to the Reichskommissar für die besetzten niederländischen Gebieten—Generalkommissar für Verwaltung und Justiz, December 21, 1940, SVG-R.184/Tr 50 077, DOS; "On 21 December 1940 the German military administration explains the measures to be taken concerning Jewish public officials in Berlin" (doc. 164), in *The Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany*, vol. 5, eds. Katja Happe, Michael Mayer, Maja Peers et al. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter and Yad Vashem, 2021), 456-58.

including the establishment of "Jewish Councils," were only gradually implemented in the West.

Even though compulsory Jewish representative organizations in the West were only established in 1941, there were earlier attempts to found such bodies. For example, the moment he arrived in France in 1940, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dannecker, Eichmann's representative for Jewish affairs in France, frantically worked to achieve this objective. He initially failed not only due to the lack of support from both the Military Administration and the Vichy government but also because in September 1940, religious Jewish leaders refused to assume responsibilities in secular organizations.[50] Throughout 1941, Dannecker continued his efforts to set up a *Zwangsvereinigung,* but only in summer 1941 did he finally manage to convince officials from the Military Administration and the Vichy regime to establish what became the UGIF in the German-occupied zone. Hoping to maintain authority over anti-Jewish policies in France, Xavier Vallat, head of the Vichy-led CGQJ, then ensured that the UGIF would be established in *both* the occupied zone (UGIF-Nord) and the unoccupied zone (UGIF-Sud).

In terms of the timing of the organizations' establishment, we can identify a significant difference between the Netherlands, on the one hand, and Belgium and France, on the other. That is, the Dutch Jewish Council was established nine months prior to its Western European counterparts (in February 1941 versus November 1941). The most important explanation for the delayed establishment of the AJB in Belgium and the UGIF in France can be traced back to differences of opinion concerning the need for "Jewish Councils" between officials of the Military Administration, the SS, and—in the case of France—Vichy representatives. In Belgium, objections to the establishment of a "Jewish Council" included the idea that the Jewish communities in the country were too fragmented to be united under one umbrella organization.[51] Other concerns included fears of alienating non-Jews and causing unrest, the belief that Belgian and French societies were not ready for an imposed Jewish body, and, in the case of France, a reluctance to implement

50 Adler, *The Jews of Paris*, 57-58. Richard Cohen, *The Burden of Conscience: French Jewish Leadership during the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 26-27.

51 "On 15 October 1941, the German military administration decides to establish a compulsory association of Jews in Belgium" (doc. 176), in *The Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany, 1933-1945*, vol. 5 *Western and Northern Europe 1940–June 1942* (Oldenbourg and Jerusalem: De Gruyter and Yad Vashem, 2021), 482-83.

anti-Jewish policies dictated by the Germans and an initial hesitation to enforce legislation that would affect Jewish immigrants and French Jewry equally.[52] Moreover, unlike the situation in the Netherlands, where unrest had broken out in the Jewish quarter in February 1941, there was no direct cause that necessitated the establishment of a Jewish representative organization through which the Germans could impose their laws in Belgium and France.

Cooperation during the Mass Deportations

During the conversation between David Cohen and Leo Baeck in May 1948, about which the former provided a two-page summary in one of his notebooks, the two men discussed the nature of the Jewish Council in the Netherlands and the Reich Association in Germany, as well as the choices they had made. After their talk, Cohen noted that the Reich Association had always negotiated with "German authorities and the Gestapo" (sic) and that Baeck had considered these negotiations self-evident because for some time, it had allowed him to help Jews emigrate from Nazi Germany. Cohen also noted that like the Dutch Jewish Council, when the deportation process started, the Reich Association attempted to save as many elderly persons and prominent figures, who were important to the Jewish community, as possible.[53] Perhaps Cohen was trying to rationalize his own wartime policies through his conversation with Baeck. Whether or not Baeck spoke from personal experience or just in general terms about the policies of the Reich Association cannot be deduced from Cohen's notes.

As Beate Meyer has indicated, it remains unclear in what kind of activities Baeck was precisely engaged during the time of the deportations, starting in October 1941; contemporaries have claimed that he withdrew inwardly from the Reich Association in this period.[54] Besides, the Reich Association did not seem to have engaged in a systematic policy of saving the elderly. Instead, the organization's work focused on all groups in need of special protection including *both* the very old and the very young.[55] Whether or not Baeck told Cohen that the Reich Association focused its

52 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 69-87.

53 Notebook No. 1 David Cohen, p. 28, Inv. No. 6, 248-0294, NIOD.

54 Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act,* 122-23.

55 Meyer has indicated that caring for groups that needed special protection was at the heart of the Reich Association. This was an important motivation for Jewish functionaries to continue their work in the organization. In doing so, they attempted

help on older people, or whether Cohen had either misunderstood or deliberately misquoted Baeck remains unclear. What *is* certain, however, was that the Reich Association, like the Dutch Jewish Council and similar German-imposed Jewish organizations elsewhere, interfered in the deportation process by attempting to have certain individuals removed from deportation lists.[56] This is probably what Baeck referred to when he indicated that the Reich Association had attempted to save those who were important to the community.

It must have felt like a relief to Cohen that Baeck outlined a similar policy for which he (Cohen) had been condemned by the Jewish Court of Honor in the Netherlands shortly before their conversation.[57] European Jews established honor courts across the continent to deal with alleged wartime collaborators and purge them from their communities. The Dutch honor court was established in early 1946, and it investigated Jews whose behavior during the German occupation had not accorded with the principle of "Jewish solidarity."[58] On December 26, 1947, the verdict of the Court of Honor was publicized. Among other things, it ruled that the establishment of the Jewish Council, the publication of its weekly *Het Joodsche Weekblad*, as well as the organization's assistance with the implementation of the yellow star policy were reprehensible (*laakbaar*) acts. The Jewish Council's cooperation in the process of deportation, and specifically the chairmen's agreement—after they had been ordered to do so by Haupsturmführer Ferdinand aus der Fünten (head of the *Zentralstelle*)—to compile lists of the names of Jews who would no longer benefit from the protection of the council in May 1943, were considered "very reprehensible" (*zeer laakbaar*).[59]

(in vain) to protect both the very old and the very young. Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act*, 137-47.

56 Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act*, 147-52.

57 At the same time the two former chairmen had the conversation Cohen summarized in his notebook, Leo Baeck provided a positive testimony about David Cohen when the latter's wartime role was investigated by a Dutch state court. Baeck gave a positive description of Cohen's character and the assistance he provided when he was still immersed in Jewish refugee aid, yet Baeck also claimed that he did not know "the course Prof. Cohen took in the Jewish Council," continuing that he was "convinced whatever he [Cohen-LV] did then, it was done in honesty and in the hope of helping the people." See: Letter of Leo Baeck, CABR 107491 VI (doos 5, map 14), NA.

58 Reglement van den Joodschen Eereraad, p. 3, Inv. No. 1, 234 (Joodse Ereraad te Amsterdam), Noord-Hollands Archief (NHA).

59 Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad, 26 December 1947, Inv. No, 9, 234 (Joodse Ereraad te Amsterdam), NHA. For a thorough substantiation of the verdict of the Jewish

In relation to the lists, Cohen stated in his defense that he had agreed to it because the Jewish leadership feared retaliations if they did not comply, and because he intended to save prominent Jews who would be able to rebuild the Jewish community after the war. He compared his choice to that of a general forced to sacrifice part of his army. The general, Cohen claimed, would also try to save his best soldiers.[60] During several meetings of the honor court, he emphasized that he had still been under the assumption that most Jews would return from "the East" when he made this decision.[61] Cohen, furthermore, noted that his sole aim had always been to serve the Jewish community at large and to save as many Jews as possible.[62]

The parallels between Cohen's defense and Baeck's words, which had been recorded by Cohen in his notebook, is clear. In the end, Dutch Council functionaries never produced a final list of those who would lose their protection. While departments of the Jewish Council started working on summaries of employees who were not longer strictly necessary for the day-to-day functioning of the organization, they had not finished the job. Mirjam Levie, secretary of the Jewish Council, described these stressful and emotional days in an unsent letter to her fiancé Leo Bolle, who resided in Palestine.[63] After days of work, it became clear that it was impossible to provide the requested seven thousand names. As a result, the head of the Security Service in Amsterdam SS-Sturmbannführer Lages initiated a mass raid in Amsterdam, arresting 3,300 Jews, including members of the Jewish Council, who were officially still exempted from deportation.[64] This was the retaliation Cohen feared.[65]

Honor Court, see its report from December 17, 1947, signed by secretary Karlsberg and chairman Bosboom: Inv. No. 8, dossier 201 (Joodse Raad), 234, NHA.

60 David Cohen, "Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland tijdens de bezetting," p. 21, 181j, Inv. No. 10; Session of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947, p. 3, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, 234, NHA. For Cohen's reflection on the course of events in May 1943, see: Cohen, *Voorzitter van de Joodse Raad,* 166-71. For Aus der Fünten's threat of retaliation, see: Meeting between SS Hauptsturmbannführer Aus der Fünten, Asscher, Cohen and Sluzker, May 21, 1943, 182.4, NIOD.

61 Sessions of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947 p. 2; March 17, 1947, p. 5, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, NHA.

62 Session of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947, p. 4, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, 234, NHA.

63 Mirjam Bolle, *Ik zal je beschrijven hoe een dag er hier uitziet. Dagboekbrieven uit Amsterdam, Westerbork en Bergen-Belsen* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact, 2005; first ed. 2003), 121-26. For further reading on this episode, see: Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 209-17.

64 Session of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947, p. 3, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, 234, NHA; Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 217-18.

65 Cohen, *Voorzitter van de Joodse Raad*, 170; Bolle, *Ik zal je beschrijven*, 124.

The question of why Jewish leaders decided to cooperate with German authorities in the face of mass deportations has preoccupied scholars for decades. Some scholars contended that this was simply an act of self-preservation. In their view, Jewish leaders were first and foremost focused on saving their own skins.[66] The historiography has significantly developed in recent decades, and this growth in the scholarship has resulted in a nuanced understanding of Jewish leaders' motivations. Studies have shown that the fear of retaliation, Jewish leaders' belief that the policy of cooperation would allow them to have influence over the deportation process, and the feeling that Jewish communities would be better off in case a "Jewish Council" functioned as an intermediary, played a part. In his seminal articles on the Jewish Council phenomenon, Dan Diner argued that Jewish leaders initially cooperated to slow down the worsening conditions for Jews and to make the Nazi deportation policies more predictable. In the face of extermination, their strategy shifted to "rescue through labor," a policy (in)famously adopted by Chaim Rumkowski in the Łódź ghetto.[67]

This policy of "rescue through labor" never materialized in Western Europe. Only in the Netherlands, when Reich Commissioner Aus der Fünten indicated to Asscher and Cohen on January 28, 1943 that concentration camp Vught, the only SS concentration camp outside Germany, would become a major "working camp," did the council leadership make concrete plans to ensure productivity of Jewish inmates. For example, under the guidance of diamond merchant Abraham Asscher, it was proposed to establish diamond industries both in Westerbork transit camp as well as in Vught: "this way, the Jews will be productive, not only for their own community, but for the common good"; this was the conclusion of a meeting between the two council chairmen and four prominent Nazis in the Netherlands.[68] In the end, even though preparations were

66 For example, Maurice Rajsfus, *Des Juifs dans la collaboration: l'UGIF 1941-1944* (Paris: Études et Documentation Internationales, 1990); Hans Knoop, *De Joodsche Raad: Het drama van Abraham Asscher en David Cohen* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1983).

67 Yisrael Gutman, "The Concept of Labor in Judenrat Policy," in *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Occupied Europe, 1933-1945*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Cynthia Haft (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 151-80; Dan Diner, "Beyond the Conceivable: The Judenrat as Borderline Experience," in *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 120.

68 Report produced by the Dutch Council leadership on their meeting with Lages, Blumenthal, Aus der Fünten and Wörlein, February 26, 1943, 182.4, NIOD. Apart from diamond factories, other propositions were also made in relation to Vught,

made, these plans were never realized.[69] This being the case, what was the motivation for Jewish leaders in the West to continue cooperating with the Germans after the start of the mass deportations in summer 1942?

In the case of the Dutch Jewish Council, historian Bart van der Boom summarized four reasons that explain why Jewish leaders continued to cooperate with German authorities: 1) fear of escalation and retaliations; 2) the hope to moderate German policies; 3) safeguarding the provision of aid; and 4) to have influence over the selection of those deported by arranging exemptions.[70] Ever since around four hundred Jewish men who had been arrested in February 1941 were subsequently sent to Mauthausen and their death notices reached their families in the Netherlands shortly thereafter, German authorities used the threat of "Mauthausen" to force the Jewish leadership comply.[71] To this we can add that Jewish leaders felt they could function, in Cohen's own words, as a "protective wall" between German functionaries and Jewish communities.[72]

In Belgium and France, cooperation between the Jewish leaders and German (and, in France, Vichy) authorities was of a different nature because the contexts in which the AJB, UGIF-Nord, and UGIF-Sud

including chemical industries, as well as the production of mattresses, clothing, and wooden shoes (*klompen*), see: Van der Boom. *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 154.

69 During the pretrial investigations of the Dutch Council leadership, people testified that some machines of the Diamant factory and Boas and Asscher's own diamond factory, both in Amsterdam, were moved to Vught. See: Dossier Abraham Asscher and David Cohen, CABR, Access No. 2.09.09, Inv. No. 107491 I (PF Amsterdam T70982), Nationaal Archief Den Haag (NA).

70 Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad,* 323-28. He argues that, in fact, Jewish leaders' motivations for cooperating did not change after the start of the mass deportations.

71 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 157-58; Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 39-53. For further reading on the arrest and fate of these Jewish men, see: Wally de Lang, *De razzia's van 22 en 23 februari 1941 in Amsterdam: het lot van 389 Joodse Mannen* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2021). On the fear of Mauthausen among Dutch Jews, see: Nannie Beekman, "'Anything but Mauthausen': The Fear of Mauthausen Among Dutch Jews During the Nazi Occupation: Dimensions and Impact" (MA thesis, University of Haifa, 2017).

72 Session of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947, p. 4, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, 234, NHA; Cohen, 'uiteenzetting over de principes van ons werk' 181j, Inv. No. 11, NIOD. Cohen listed seven principles that justified their wartime behavior. He claimed cooperation allowed them 1) to have influence over German policies; 2) to serve as a protective "wall"; 3) to delay German policies; 4) to make sure Jews would work in the Netherlands rather than in Germany; 5) to prevent raids; 6) to get a hold of lists (of Jews who would be called for transport—LV), 7) to try to influence German policies by reaching out to various officials within the German administration.

functioned were different. As has been argued, various German (and Vichy) authorities did not have as much control over the Jewish organizations in these countries as the SS had in the Netherlands. To the contrary, in Belgium, partly because the organization failed to bring all the Jews in the country under its umbrella, German authorities seem to have lost interest in the organization by late 1942. Similarly, in France, both the UGIF-Nord and the UGIF-Sud never managed to function as umbrella organizations for all Jews in the country. While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these matters in detail, German dissatisfaction with the organizations grew during the occupation.[73]

As a result, the deportation process was carried out largely outside the framework of these organizations. In Belgium in July and August 1942, the AJB distributed summonses that compelled Jews to report for "work under police supervision" (*Polizeilicher Arbeitseinsatz*) in "the East." Like the Dutch Jewish Council, the AJB leadership even encouraged Jews to comply. When this system proved ineffective because many failed to self-report, German authorities organized mass raids. In France, where the system of summonses was absent and Jews were arrested in raids, Vichy or German authorities never instrumentalized the UGIF in the deportation process like this. In the Netherlands, by contrast, the Jewish Council closely monitored the deportation process and continued to regulate the elaborate system of temporary exemptions from deportation. Only in the spring of 1943, when the Germans systematically arrested Jews through mass raids, was the Dutch Council sidelined.[74] Exemption lists included, among others, Portuguese Jews and other Jews with foreign nationality, as well Jews who had "bought" their (temporary) exemptions by handing over their diamonds and other valuables.[75] In the end, this system proved illusory because German authorities eventually revoked exemptions for most of these groups. Nothing similar occurred in Belgium and France. In these countries, Jewish leaders attempted to have individuals removed from deportation lists, but this was an ad-hoc system with little success in most cases.

The different status of the AJB, the UGIF-Nord, and the UGIF-Sud meant that Jewish leaders had more leeway to set their own boundaries. On various occasions, Jewish leaders in Belgium and France claimed that they *exclusively* wished to focus on the provision of social welfare. The first UGIF-Nord chairman, for example, was adamant that the organization

73 For further reading, see: Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 142-56.
74 Griffioen and Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België,* 583-633.
75 Idem., 631.

had a purely social role, an attitude he maintained even when Alois Brunner increased his pressure on the organization in summer 1943.[76] In Belgium, the first chairman of the AJB, Salomon Ullmann, claimed that he stepped down after the start of the mass deportations in summer 1942 in part because he feared his future tasks would stretch beyond the provision of social welfare.[77] Jewish leaders in Belgium and France were not entirely successful in their aims as they could not prevent their organizations from being used—though not systematically—to prepare the deportation process. After all, the AJB assisted with the distribution of summonses in summer 1942. In France, German authorities also sometimes used the UGIF to help organize the removal of Jews from French territory. An infamous example is that of the Jewish children who were housed in the care home of Neuilly, which was administered by the UGIF. The children were arrested in July 1944 and deported to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.[78] Nevertheless, in contrast to the Dutch Jewish Council, Jewish leaders in Belgium and France could hew much closer to their initial objective, namely, the provision of social welfare.

This is a pattern that can be identified across Europe more broadly: those "Jewish Councils" that were (initially) established as local organizations and were directly overseen by local SS authorities, including the numerous *Judenräte* in Poland, were more involved in the deportation process than were their counterparts that held a legal status and were (at least in part) overseen by local (e. g., Belgian, French, or Hungarian) authorities. Although the explanations for this differ, we can identify some commonalities. In Hungary, and to some extent in France too, the "Jewish Councils" were never indispensable because of the active collaboration of Hungarian and French (police) authorities. In all these countries, the "Jewish Councils," moreover, did not enjoy the same level of authority over the Jewish communities they were forced to represent. More transnational and comparative research is needed to address these issues.

76 Cohen, *The Burden of* Conscience, 90.

77 Laurien Vastenhout, "Filling a Leadership Void: Salomon Ullmann and the AJB during Nazi Occupation," *Les Cahiers de la Mémoire Contemporaine/Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Herinnering* 16 (2023): 171-203.

78 Michel Laffitte, *Juif dans la France allemande*, 323-27. For the conclusions of the postwar Jewish Honor Court investigation on the accountability of the UGIF for the deportation of these children, see: Comité d'Épuration, Deportation des enfants: conclusions de l'enquêteur, CRIF, MDI 311, Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris.

Afterword

In terms of the distinct histories of establishment and natures of Jewish Councils and similar imposed organizations in Europe, there are not only parallels between "Jewish Councils" in Western European countries; we can also identify some strong similarities between the Dutch Jewish Council, the *Judenräte* in Poland, and analogous organizations in Central and Eastern Europe. These similarities also extend to the choices the Jewish leaders faced. Despite the different contexts of Nazi rule and variations in anti-Jewish persecution, most "Jewish Council" leaders confronted very similar dilemmas in the end. It is, therefore, not surprising that the rhetoric of the Dutch Council chairman David Cohen resembles that of his counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe. These persons include not only Leo Baeck, as Cohen himself reflected on, but also the rabbi of Kovno Abraham Duber Cagan Shapiro, who argued that when an entire community is threatened, community leaders have a duty to save as many Jews as possible by whatever means at their disposal.[79]

Furthermore, as we have seen, transnational perspectives that stretch beyond the persistent "East" versus "West" dichotomy in Holocaust historiography are necessary to understand the impact of local conditions on German policies. They also show how much German policies were built on previous experiences and blueprints in countries with (radically) different sociopolitical contexts. To comprehend the Jewish Council phenomenon, a transnational perspective is, therefore, necessary. Numerous local studies have successfully countered the simplistic notion that Jewish Councils and similar imposed organizations were instruments of collaboration fully in the hands of the Nazis. While these studies have resulted in more nuanced understandings of Jewish leaders' wartime responses, scholars should now pay more attention to understanding how these organizations fit within the wider context of German rule during the Second World War.

79 As cited in Diner, "Beyond the Conceivable," 127.

Philipp Dinkelaker

"A Section of the Gestapo"? The Role of Jewish Auxiliaries, the *Reichsvereinigung* and the Hunt for "Illegal" Jews in Berlin between 1943 and 1945

"They sent you a message to be ready and wait in your apartment for deportation the next day or the day after. The messengers were people from the *Gemeinde*. Even 'chapel master S' delivered such death sentences, for in reality, it was nothing else. The *Gemeinde* was a section of the Gestapo."[1] A survivor from Berlin wrote this about representatives of the *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin* (Berlin Jewish Community). There was neither a *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) nor a ghetto within the prewar borders of Nazi Germany. In 1939, however, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office, RSHA) forced upon German Jews the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (Reich Association of Jews in Germany, RV), a pseudo self-administration organ to be run by German Jews under the supervision of the Gestapo. The *Reichsvereinigung* can be characterized as a prototype of *Judenräte* later established in countries occupied by Nazi Germany.[2]

The *Reichsvereinigung* was a national body that gradually incorporated all remaining German-Jewish institutions, including the Berlin *Gemeinde* in mid-1943. The Berlin *Gemeinde* was the largest Jewish community in pre-1938 Nazi Germany; 160,000 of the 530,000 to 566,000 German

1 Camilla Neumann, "Erinnerungsbericht," in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland: Selbstzeugnisse Zur Sozialgeschichte 1918-1945*, ed. Monika Richarz (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982), 414. Translation by author.

2 "German Jews" encompasses a heterogenous group that has only one thing in common: they were persecuted on antisemitic grounds between 1933 and 1945. In contrast, "Jewish Germans" describes people who were Jewish by religion/heritage and choice.

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Jews lived in Berlin.[3] By autumn 1941, 72,972 were left.[4] The Reich's capital became the focal point of the deportations of Jews from Germany. The Nazi regime deported 56,088 Jews from Berlin. The RV and *Gemeinde*'s initial strategy of supporting Jewish emigration evolved into a "rescue through work policy."[5] However, as Beate Meyer has argued, under the auspices of an unprecedented mass murder that defied economic rationale, the RV's strategy of self-preservation by cooperation transformed into aiding in self-destruction.[6] Consequently, different types of Jewish auxiliaries from the RV and the *Gemeinde* adopted police-like methods and functions. They located deportees, marched them to trains, accompanied the police during raids, and assisted with bureaucratic processes during the phase of mass deportations between October 1941 and mid-June 1943, as well as during the second phase of smaller deportations between mid-1943 and May 1945. Depicted as "worse than the Gestapo" by some survivors in hindsight, RV and *Gemeinde* staff also helped run the Gestapo *Sammellager*, that is, the "assembly camps" where Jews were held before they were deported.[7]

Existing historiography has predominantly focused on "leading" RV functionaries throughout the Reich.[8] Dozens of low-ranking RV clerks and Jewish *Sammellager* staff were accused of collaboration after the war.

3 Francis R. Nicosia, "Introduction: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany: Dilemmas and Responses," in *Jewish Life in Nazi Germany: Dilemmas and Responses*, ed. Francis R. Nicosia and David Scrase (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), Kindle E-Book Version.

4 Martina Voigt, "Die Deportation der Berliner Juden 1941-1945," in *Die Grunewald-Rampe: Die Deportation der Berliner Juden*, ed. Annegret Ehmann and Horst Neumann (Berlin: Edition Colloquium, 1993), 26.

5 Beate Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung: Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland zwischen Hoffnung, Zwang, Selbstbehauptung und Verstrickung (1939-1945)* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 21; Doron Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht: Wien 1938-1945* (Frankfurt a. M.: Jüdischer Verlag, 2000), 423.

6 Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht*, 423.

7 LBI CJH, AR 2657, Fritz Fabian Collection 1942-1962, Fritz Fabian: Lebenslauf, April 21, 1962.

8 Beate Meyer and William Templer, *A Fatal Balancing Act: The Dilemma of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, 1939-1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Gideon Botsch, "Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig: Vom preußischen Medizinalbeamten zum 'Ein-Mann-Judenrat,'" in *Jüdische Ärztinnen und Ärzte im Nationalsozialismus: Entrechtung, Vertreibung, Ermordung*, ed. Thomas Beddies, Susanne Doetz, and Christoph Kopke (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 103-16; Gideon Botsch, "Wer rettete das Jüdische Krankenhaus Berlin? Zur Frage des Widerstands Berliner Juden gegen die Vernichtungspolitik," in *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945): Formen und Facetten*, ed. Julius H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen, and Gideon Botsch (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016) 240-54; Susanna Schrafstetter,

This chapter addresses these previously understudied auxiliaries who were subject to pressure from both the Gestapo and the *Reichsvereinigung*. I am especially interested in the period of the Berlin Gestapo's intensifying hunt for Jews in hiding after spring 1943 and the problematic role of said auxiliaries in this context. During the later phase of smaller deportations between 1943 and 1945, the Berlin Gestapo's "Jew section"—subordinated to Eichmann's office—was not only tasked with the deportation of the small remnant of the Berlin Jewish population. The officers were also compelled to catch the 6,500 Jews who had evaded deportation by escaping into "illegality," i.e., hiding with someone or posing as non-Jews with fake identity cards. The Gestapo put fugitive Jews on a wanted list, and willing non-Jewish denouncers were the Gestapo's biggest help in tracking down these Jews.[9] Some escapees, however, fell victim to specialized Jewish *Sammellager* auxiliaries and/or Jewish informers, called *Greifer* ("Snatcher") or *Fahnder* ("investigators"), operating out of the Berlin Gestapo *Sammellager* from mid-1943 onward. There were small numbers of both Jews in hiding and (alleged) Jewish informers elsewhere in Germany, but in Berlin, this occurred on a larger scale than elsewhere.[10]

After the war, the phenomenon of Jews "hunting" other Jews was blamed on certain individual Jews, a stance that downplayed not only the role of the Gestapo but also the RV's obstructive policy concerning escape into hiding. Demonizing *Greifer* in the heated Jewish milieu of postwar reckoning in Cold War-era Berlin obscured the worst aspects of the police-like functions the RV had adopted. By focusing on these *Greifer*, less attention was paid to higher-ranking RV officials. Building on conflicting postwar reports, scholars made a questionable distinction: "Regular" *Sammellager* auxiliaries allegedly only followed orders, while "irregular" *Greifer* who were not attached to the Gemeinde or the RV supposedly took advantage of others for personal gain.[11] Some *Greifer*, however, were part of the regular auxiliary and at least nominally on the payroll of the *Gemeinde*/RV, whereas others were Jews who had previously been caught while in hiding and now informed on others to avoid deportation.

Flucht und Versteck: Untergetauchte Juden in München; Verfolgungserfahrung und Nachkriegsalltag (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015).

9 Carsten Dams and Michael Stolle, *Die Gestapo: Herrschaft und Terror im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Beck, 2008), 84.

10 Dams and Stolle, *Die Gestapo*, 83.

11 Doris Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat: Jüdische "Greifer" im Dienst der Gestapo 1943-1945* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2006), 72.

This chapter reassesses the alleged distinction between *Greifer* and "regular" auxiliaries and examines the RV's contribution to the Gestapo's crackdown on Jews in hiding—an insufficiently researched topic thus far.[12] It zooms in on the nexus between *Sammellager* auxiliaries' actual and perceived room for maneuver, especially during the later phase of deportations. It uses Jewish auxiliaries' room for manuever and their defense strategies after the war as a lens to learn more about how the RV's policies concerning escape into hiding developed. It also examines how these policies were perceived after the war. How did individual *Sammellager* auxiliaries navigate the dual pressure placed on them by both the Gestapo and the RV? Can their decisions be explained through the desire for personal gain, following orders, or "choiceless choices"?[13] What room for maneuver did they have? Addressing these questions, this chapter expands the existing research on the RV, *Greifer*, and the postwar reckoning among surviving Jews.[14]

Briefly touching on the overarching questions of this edited volume, the first section of this chapter offers a chronological overview of the RV's role in the process of mass deportations up to mid-1943. The second section shows that the RV adopted policing strategies to prevent individual escapes into hiding earlier than has previously been established in the literature. The third section highlights the changes of the RV's role after mid-1943 and explores the alleged difference between "regular" auxiliaries and *Greifer*.[15] The fourth and final section illustrates the postwar fates of some former auxiliaries, demonstrating how postwar retribution trials shaped narratives on collaboration.

12 Karoline Georg, "Rezension zu: Beate Meyer: Tödliche Gratwanderung. Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland zwischen Hoffnung, Zwang, Selbstbehauptung und Verstrickung (1939-1945)," *Medaon—Magazin für jüdisches Leben in Kultur und Bildung* 7, no. 13 (2013): 3.

13 Lawrence Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps," in *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, ed. Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E. Myers (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), 118-27.

14 In addition to works cited in footnote 5 and 11, see: Laura Jockusch and Gabriel N. Finder, *Jewish Honor Courts*: *Revenge, Retribution, and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel After the Holocaust* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015).

15 Philipp Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo? Berlin Jews Accused of Collaboration during and after the Shoah" (PhD diss., Technische Universität Berlin, 2022).

The Reichsvereinigung *and the Deportations, 1939-1943*

After the Nazi takeover of power in 1933, entrepreneurs, companies, and Reich and communal institutions such as the Berlin city administration and individuals enforced policies of impoverishment, "aryanization," the racial segregation of welfare, and later the impressment of Jews into forced labor.[16] Over the years, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* and the Gestapo—one of the RSHA's policing organs—became the major institutions of persecution in Nazi Germany.[17] After the November 1938 pogroms, these organs established the RV. Envisioning a centralized institution for Reich Jews, the Gestapo staffed the RV with functionaries from the previously dissolved *Reichsvertretung* (Reich Representation). The latter had been a democratically elected Jewish self-help organization and had already been closely engaged with the regime's attempts to compel the mass emigration of Jews. Former *Reichsvertretung* functionaries agreed to work for the RV because they perceived it as a chance to continue their work supporting persecuted Jews. However, rather than a care-taking institution, the RV was designed to be a tool of persecution.

In 1939, a regulation added to the Race Laws of 1935 forced every person declared to be Jewish according to the Nazis' criteria to become a member of the RV.[18] Jewish communities, welfare, educational and self-help organizations all over the Reich were forced to become RV branches. The national RV's board in Berlin answered to Eichmann's department at the RSHA, whereas local and regional branches answered to the local Gestapo and sometimes to locally powerful individual Nazis. The Berlin *Gemeinde* suffered this fate as well. It had played an important role in the city's public services before the Nazis came to power. The *Gemeinde* with all its social and educational institutions became the RV's largest district branch. Even though both organizations merged their boards in November

16 Wolf Gruner, *Öffentliche Wohlfahrt und Judenverfolgung: Wechselwirkungen lokaler und zentraler Politik im NS-Staat 1933-1942* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002); Wolf Gruner, "Armut und Verfolgung: Die Reichsvereinigung, die jüdische Bevölkerung und die antijüdische Politik im NS-Staat 1939 bis 1945," in *Juden und Armut in Mittel- Und Osteuropa*, ed. Stefi Jersch-Wenzel (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2000), 405-433.

17 Wolf Gruner, "Die NS-Verfolgung und die Kommunen: Zur wechselseitigen Dynamisierung von zentraler und lokaler Politik 1933-1941," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 48, no. 1 (2000): 125.

18 Akim Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin: Die nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik und das Sammellager Große Hamburger Straße* (Berlin: Be.Bra Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013), 115.

1941, until its dissolution in June 1943, the *Gemeinde* operated alongside the RV and partially retained its independence, answering primarily to the Berlin Gestapo.

Operating on both the nation-wide and local levels, the RV and its district branches such as the *Gemeinde* were simultaneously instruments of segregation and vehicles for self-preservation.[19] The RV provided health care, social welfare, housing, education, and even organized cultural activities while trying to mitigate the effects of some Nazi measures.[20] Effectively, the RV became the intermediary between the Nazi state and the Jewish population, Eichmann's prewar training ground and a sort of prototypical *Judenrat*.[21]

The RV's most controversial contribution to the regime's antisemitic measures was the assistance it provided the Gestapo in the deportation process. In contrast to some *Judenräte*, the *Reichsvereinigung* leadership did not encourage resistance activities. Some functionaries and lower-level employees secretly did so on an individual basis,[22] but the compliance of the RV was harshly enforced: the RSHA incarcerated and murdered some RV functionaries who refused to cooperate early on.[23] At the start of the systematic deportations from the Reich in October 1941, the Gestapo threatened *Gemeinde* and RV representatives in Berlin with pogroms and—in order to compel them to cooperate—deceived them with promises that Jews would only be "partially evacuated" to "work camps in the East."[24] The Gestapo probably believed it would be beneficial if the long-established *Gemeinde*, which enjoyed a certain degree of legitimacy among Berlin's Jews, would communicate and implement Gestapo measures. The Jewish functionaries, by contrast, believed they could save the many and shield them from the harshest measures by

19 Gerrit Schirmer, "'A Living Organisation': Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland 1943 bis 1945" (Master thesis, Touro College Berlin, 2016), 5.

20 Beate Meyer, "Gratwanderung zwischen Verantwortung und Verstrickung: Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland und die Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin 1938-1945," in *Juden in Berlin 1938-1945: Begleitband zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung in der Stiftung "Neue Synagoge Berlin—Centrum Judaicum" Mai bis August 2000*, ed. Beate Meyer and Hermann Simon (Berlin: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000), 292.

21 Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990 [1982]), 196.

22 Botsch, "Wer rettete das Jüdische Krankenhaus Berlin?," 244.

23 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 103.

24 Beate Meyer, "Das Unausweichliche Dilemma: Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, Die Deportationen und die Untergetauchten Juden," in *Überleben im Untergrund: Hilfe Für Juden in 1941-1945*, ed. Beate Kosmala and Claudia Schoppmann (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2002), 294.

helping the Gestapo deport the few. Historian Beate Meyer characterized this as an "implicit offer" of collective survival at the cost of a partial loss—a strategy of anticipatory compliance and cooperation.[25]

Merging their boards while confronting this radicalization of Nazi "Jew policy" in November 1941, the RV and *Gemeinde* provided the Gestapo with data on Jews and helped select deportees from the beginning of the systematic deportations on. At the same time, the sources on this issue are difficult to interpret. Following Gestapo orders, some provincial RV chairmen provided the names of local Jews, which the Gestapo then used to deport those not married to non-Jews.[26] In Berlin, the combined *Gemeinde* and RV board was most likely at least involved in selecting a pool of names from which the Gestapo would choose the victims of the first four deportations from Berlin in late 1941.[27] In the majority of cases, however, the Gestapo compiled the lists alone and always had the final say.

At first, the RV and the *Gemeinde* had some moderating influence. They could request people being removed from the deportation list due to pregnancy, illness, their employment at the RV/*Gemeinde*, or their forced labor assignments, but the Gestapo did not always respect such requests. For example, the protection afforded by forced labor contracts in the armament industry eroded in late 1942. By November 1942, more than half of the total number of deportees from Berlin had been concentrated, registered, and expropriated in one of the Gestapo's *Sammellager* and were ultimately deported.[28] The last thing they saw were *Gemeinde* or RV officials managing the logistics of expropriation and other Jewish auxiliaries preventing escapes from the camp.[29]

25 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 21.

26 Steffen Held, *Die Leipziger Stadtverwaltung und die Deportation der Juden im NS-Staat* (Leipzig: Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig, 2011), 17; Beate Meyer, "Handlungsspielräume regionaler jüdischer Repräsentanten (1941-1945): Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland und die Deportationen," in *Die Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland: Pläne—Praxis—Reaktionen; 1938-1945*, ed. Birthe Kundrus and Beate Meyer (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), 76-80.

27 Philipp Dinkelaker, *Das Sammellager in der Berliner Synagoge Levetzowstraße 1941/42* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2017), 49-51.

28 Dinkelaker, *Das Sammellager*, 11-17.

29 Siegmund Weltlinger, "Hast Du es schon vergessen?" Erlebnisbericht aus der Zeit der Verfolgung. Vortrag Siegmund Weltlingers anläßlich des Tages der nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung (30. Januar 1933) in der Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit im Amerikahaus Berlin am 28.1.1954," ed. Deutscher Koordinierungsrat der Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Koordinierungsrat der Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit), 25.

There were several short-lived and three more permanent Gestapo *Sammellager* in Berlin that were located in *Gemeinde* buildings such as a synagogue and a care home for the elderly. Supervised by the Gestapo, the camps were co-run by Jewish staff. This staff was headed by a Jewish camp commander appointed by the *Gemeinde* and/or *Reichsvereinigung*. The camp commander and any auxiliary answered to any Berlin Gestapo and/or RSHA officer present. Sharing its name with the ghetto police in occupied Poland, *Sammellager* auxiliaries formed the *Ordnungsdienst* ("order service") or *Ordner*. In line with permanent changes in Gestapo structures, the *Ordner*, too, underwent several changes until their policing function took primacy. During the early mass deportations, most *Ordner* had been *Gemeinde*/RV employees transferred to such assignments. Later, some *Ordner* were prisoner functionaries or forced laborers officially on the RV's payroll.[30] Generally, they worked in shifts, pairs, or task-related sub-groups, always controlling each other and marked with different color-coded armbands that indicated their access to certain camp areas or whether they were on "outbound" duties.

In 1941, *Ordner* only accompanied Gestapo officials during arrests, carrying the luggage of deportees. Over the course of 1942, however, they also arrested deportees on behalf of the Gestapo and brought them to the assembly camps with no supervision.[31] Within the camps, *Ordner* were jailers (*Schließer*) or they strip-searched new arrestees.[32] The Gestapo repeatedly warned the *Ordner* that allowing deportees to escape or transmit messages was punishable by death, thereby compelling obedience through threats of deportation on the spot.[33]

A *Gemeinde* manual for *Ordner* and other "helpers during emigration transports" from late 1941 or early 1942 emphasized that "breaches of discipline," i. e., not following Gestapo orders, would not only result in "harsh punishment" but also in collective retaliation against all Jews.[34] "Helpers" were held personally accountable by the Gestapo, and none of them assisted entirely voluntarily. Thus, we see the dual pressure on Jewish auxiliaries and also the development of the belief that preventing harm to the collective entailed persons renouncing individual acts of resistance for the greater good. Despite the pressure on them, many *Ordner* and other Jewish auxiliaries engaged in acts of unarmed resistance such as

30 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 126
31 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 383.
32 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 535.
33 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 208.
34 Centrum Judaicum Archives (CJA) 6.14 Nr. 7, Depositum Scheurenberg, Bl. 4: Jüdische Kultusvereinigung e. V., Merkblatt für die Helfer in der Levetzowstraße.

smuggling messages and tools in and out of the *Sammellager*. Ultimately, auxiliaries' existence was precarious; most were eventually deported and murdered.

The Reichsvereinigung *and* Gemeinde *and the Gestapo's Hunt for "Illegals"*

Jewish resistance, the resistance of German Jews, and the resistance of people persecuted as Jews is believed to have been disproportionally high within the Reich versus the resistance of non-Jews.[35] The Nazis responded with collective retaliation. In May 1942, the Gestapo shot 25 Jewish Berliners and deported 250 after an arson perpetrated by (mainly Jewish) communists.[36] The *Gemeinde* and RV heads wanted to avoid a repetition of these events at all costs. On October 19, 1942, Gestapo officers raided the *Gemeinde* headquarters in Berlin, ordering a roll call and announcing that there were too many employees. In fact, the *Gemeinde* and RV had employed as many people as possible because employment meant exemption from deportation in 1941 and for most of 1942.[37] The so-called *Gemeinde Aktion* that resulted from this Gestapo order ended with the selection of 533 of the 1,500 remaining employees to be deported together with their families.[38] When twenty of the selected deportees went into hiding, the Gestapo threatened the *Gemeinde* with collective retaliation and took hostages, threatening to shoot leading Jewish representatives such as Leo Baeck. Fearing a repetition of the events of May, *Gemeinde* employees served as investigators, tracking down most of their escaped coworkers who were then deported. Despite these frantic efforts, the Gestapo shot seven or eight Jews. Beate Meyer highlighted that taking on this policing function in October 1942 was the pivotal moment when the role of the RV and *Gemeinde* shifted from self-preservation to assistance in self-destruction.[39]

35 Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht*, 318-24.

36 Günther Morsch, "Die Ermordung der jüdischen Geiseln im Mai 1942 im KZ Sachsenhausen: Rede zum Gedenktag für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus am 27. Januar 2012," accessed April 30, 2021, http://guenter-morsch.de/rede-die-ermordung-der-juedischen-geiseln-im-mai-1942-im-kz-sachsenhausen-27-januar-2012/#more-15.

37 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 122.

38 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 206.

39 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 206-30.

Such incidents were, however, not isolated, and the RV/*Gemeinde* took a harsh stance toward those who had gone into hiding even before the mass retaliation of the Gestapo in May 1942. An internal RV note from April 22, 1942 sheds more light on the context of Gestapo coercion and the RV's obedience. A senior Jewish *Sammellager Ordner* named Leopold Stargardter (1889-1946) signed a handwritten document in the presence of a superior RV official serving as intermediary to the Gestapo: "I have been informed by Dr. Eppstein[40] that I have to report to the Berlin Gestapo any information that comes to my attention concerning the smuggling of individuals. When anyone asks me about my task, I am obliged to remain silent."[41]

Scholars have misinterpreted this note as evidence of Stargardter's decision to collaborate with the Gestapo, allegedly substantiating his initiative to become an informer or *Greifer*.[42] In fact, this declaration implies the opposite: a note scribbled on the corner of the document and dated April 21, 1942—a day before Stargardter signed it—says that the Berlin Gestapo ordered the *Reichsvereinigung* via telephone to assign these investigation tasks to the *Ordner*. Thus, this source does not prove Stargardter's independent decision but rather a shift in the *Ordner's* tasks due to pressure from the Gestapo and the RV. *Ordner* were to report on escaping Jews, effectively serving as informers. It is unlikely that Stargardter was the only person who received such a task or was briefed in this way. Most likely, as a senior *Ordner*, he later briefed others.

In April 1942, escapes into hiding had only just begun and were far from their peak in 1943,[43] the latter period coinciding with the emergence of the phenomenon of *Greifer*—a term that only appears in sources starting in 1944.[44] Even before escape became a major issue, the Gestapo made the *Gemeinde*/RV an accomplice in combating this form of individual Jewish resistance. Thus, a leading RV functionary tasked "regular"

40 German sociologist Dr. Paul Eppstein (1902-1944) had been a *Reichsvertretung*'s functionary before he became the RV's contact to the RSHA and Gestapo. After the May 1942 arson attack, he was taken hostage and later murdered by the SS at Theresienstadt.

41 Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, Archiv der Zentralstelle (BStU), MfS HA IX/11, PA 3472 Bd. 1, Bl. 000425: Leopold Stargardter, Schriftliche Erklärung, April 22, 1942.

42 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 194.

43 Richard Lutjens, *Submerged on the Surface: The Not-so-Hidden Jews of Nazi Berlin 1941-1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 212-22.

44 Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.1 Ball-Kaduri Collection File No 58: Else Hannach, Aussagen von Else Hannach, geb. Broder, gekommen mit dem Austausch Juli 1944, July 31, 1944.

Jewish *Ordner*—like Stargardter—with informing on other Jews before the very concept of *Greifer* was formally introduced.

This does not fundamentally alter Beate Meyer's assessment of the RV's limited options in the face of intensifying persecution. The constellation between the subordinate *Gemeinde*/RV clerk Stargardter, his superior Eppstein, and the Gestapo is paradigmatic. Eppstein decided that individual escapes had to be prevented so that collective survival would not be jeopardized. Knowing he and his children would be deported if he disobeyed, he conveyed the Gestapo orders. Stargardter was defined as a "full Jew" by the Nuremberg Laws, and because he was not married to a non-Jew, he had no protection from deportation.[45] For this reason, he was not in a position to "decide" much in the face of Eppstein's demand, and Eppstein, in his own right, had little room to maneuver too. Both men were aware that if they quit or disobeyed Gestapo orders, they and their family would be deported. Stargardter did not face the same "choiceless choice" in the sense of Langer's understanding of ethics; he was neither a prisoner in a death camp nor imminently threatened with execution.[46] Nevertheless, all of his options produced an unethical sham choice.

The Post-1943 Deportations and Jewish Auxiliaries in the Gestapo Sammellager

On the eve of the mass deportations from the Reich in autumn 1941, 6,000 *Gemeinde* employees were caring for 72,972 Berlin Jews.[47] In June 1943, 6,790 Jews remained in Berlin (9,529 in the entire Reich), mostly *Mischehe* Jews (persons in so-called "mixed marriages") administrated by four hundred employees.[48] The mass deportations of up to one thousand individuals per transport had petered out after the "Factory Action" on February 27, 1943—a massive raid that terminated the presence of Jewish forced laborers in the Berlin armament industry. Consequently, the Gestapo restructured the RV. They deported most RV personnel (including former *Gemeinde* officials) on June 16, 1943. This did not

45 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 549.

46 Lawrence L. Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps," in *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, ed. Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E. Myers (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), 120.

47 Schirmer, "A Living Organisation," 37.

48 Schirmer, "A Living Organisation," 50 and 69.

mean that the RV ceased to exist or was rebranded.[49] Rather, the Gestapo replaced some of the deported staff with Jews in *Mischehe* or Jewish *Mischlinge* ("mixed-race") and seized all remaining *Gemeinde* assets for "aryanization," which spelled the end of this institution in its previous iteration and made the position of the few remaining "full Jews" even more dire.[50] After June 1943, only approximately one hundred people were transported on each train.

Despite the appearance of continuity, the restructuring process of the RV and the dissolution of the *Gemeinde* marked a caesura. The Gestapo replaced the former shared board with the "one-man *Judenrat*" of Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig, a former *Gemeinde* employee and the head of the RV's health department who became the sole remaining functionary leading the RV from June 1943 onward.[51] As in many other places in German-occupied Europe, there were two consecutive Jewish imposed self-administrations in Berlin with a different staff. Lustig and his subordinates—mostly former government officials in mixed marriages—tried to exploit the Nazi bureaucracy to shield the remaining Jews.[52] At the same time, Lustig apparently used his position to coerce women to exchange sex for protection.[53] Now based at the Berlin Jewish Hospital in Berlin-Wedding, the RV headquarters served as the "liquidation company" of German Jewry. Presumably, the RSHA planned to keep the RV operational until the regime found a "solution" to *Mischehe* Jews, who

49 Daniel B. Silver, *Refuge in Hell: How Berlin's Jewish Hospital Outlasted the Nazis* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005); Rivka Elkin, *Das Jüdische Krankenhaus in Berlin zwischen 1938 und 1945* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1993); Dagmar von Doetinchem and Rolf Winau, eds., *Zerstörte Fortschritte. Das Jüdische Krankenhaus in Berlin, 1756-1861-1914-1989* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1989).

50 Botsch, "Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig," 113.

51 Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig was born to Jewish merchants in Ratibor, Upper Silesia in 1891 and died in Berlin in 1945. He studied medicine in Breslau, was licensed in 1915, and undertook military service as medical doctor in World War One. In 1920, he became a health department official in Koblenz. He authored handbooks on public health care practice, and was probably a member of the Social Democratic party member. In 1927, he got married and was employed as medical officer for the Berlin police, earning several promotions. However, in 1933, he was dismissed, and in 1934, he became employee of the *Gemeinde* health department and doctor's office for Jewish patients. By 1939, he was the head of the *Gemeinde* health department and was later employed at the RV health department. Lustig became the head of the "Transport Complaints" department at the Jewish Hospital in 1941, a role through which he worked to shield Jews from deportation for medical reasons. In 1943, he came the RV head, and in 1945, he became the head of health department Berlin-Wedding. He was executed by the Soviets. See footnote 48.

52 Schirmer, "A Living Organisation," 113.

53 Botsch, "Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig," 114.

made up the bulk of the remaining Reich Jews. Heretofore, this group had enjoyed very tenuous immunity from deportation but experienced increasing repression until the RSHA finally decided to deport them in January 1945.[54]

While the pre-1943 RV had overseen Jewish schools and religious communities, Lustig enforced the Gestapo's ban on what scholars understand as "cultural resistance" by "Jewish Councils."[55] Concentrating all remaining RV departments, quarters for homeless Jews, and the *Sammellager Schulstraße* located in the hospital's pathology wing, the new RV headquarters at the Jewish Hospital Berlin was called the "Hospital Ghetto."[56] The reconfigured RV was involved in organizing housing, administering the Jewish forced labor force, assisting in the deportations, and maintaining the Gestapo's "Jew index."

As in the period before 1943, the central RV was under the control of the RSHA, and the *Sammellager* was controlled by the Berlin Gestapo. Due to the RV's centralization at the hospital, however, both Nazi authorities and the remaining RV staff met at the same locality and formed a complex triangle.[57] Serving as a substitute administration for the Jews who remained in Berlin, the three RV departments—central administration, health, and welfare—organized care for the sick and children and provided legal representation for Jews vis-à-vis the Reich. The departments also created statistics, organized the RV's accounting, and administered the estates of "deceased" Jews—often those murdered in the camps.

By late 1943 and early 1944, seven RV specialist employees were tasked with the liquidation of Gestapo-seized assets. Eighty-five forced laborers under direct Gestapo supervision sorted looted Judaica, cleared rubble from Allied bombs, and worked on RSHA construction sites. The little we know about some of them reveals how the system of coercion functioned. As part of the 1943 re-structuring, the RSHA forced some RV employees to move to the hospital or other Gestapo-controlled spaces, where they and their families practically lived as hostages. The Gestapo brought back former *Reichsvertretung* and RV functionary Hans-Erich Fabian from Theresienstadt to function as a liquidation specialist, holding his family back in the ghetto. Consequently, under tremendous pressure, Fabian assisted in the Nazi state's large-scale robbery of Jewish

54 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 118.
55 Botsch, "Wer rettete das Jüdische Krankenhaus Berlin?," 254.
56 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 551.
57 Schirmer, "A Living Organisation," 39.

assets. Arthur Schönfeld, a former janitor of the *Gemeinde*'s home for the elderly, had to continue in this function when the Gestapo turned the home into *Sammellager Große Hamburger Straße*. The camp housed the Gestapo's "Jew index," which contained information on the whereabouts of Berlin Jews, and served as prison and torture chamber for many arrested "illegals." Forced to live in the building, Schönfeld's daughter (b. 1933) later testified that the family heard the cries of those being tortured and that the family was put "on transport" lists and then removed several times; thus, the family lived in a constant state of terror. On top of these inhumane conditions, Gestapo officers and other SS and police staff abused her with kicks in an effort to cow her father into submission. Even Jewish resistance fighters advanced Gestapo goals. The former Prussian government official Dr. Curt Radlauer was married to a non-Jewish woman. As one of the RV clerks forced to live at the hospital, he produced statistics on Jews remaining in the Reich until the liberation, effectively helping the regime's deportation machinery operate smoothly. Secretly, he had been part of a resistance cell that helped Jews in hiding. Even after the Gestapo broke up the group and arrested its members, Radlauer's resistance activities remained undetected until the war's end. His statistics and other RV-generated data helped the Gestapo to monitor the group of *Mischlinge.* Other RV employees proactively updated the RV's index of Jews, effectively making it easier for the regime to track down Jews.

Although they were not directly involved in arrests of Jews in hiding, such employees contributed to the efforts of fifty-one clerks who staffed the RV's "Emigration" sub-department in late 1943. This department performed a variety of duties in the *Sammellager* and assisted with deportation-related logistics. The same department had previously existed in the Berlin *Gemeinde*. Stargardter was one of these clerks. According to his RV staff index card, he had first been an unpaid "helper" in the *Gemeinde* before the "Emigration" sub-department officially employed him on August 24, 1942.[58] He held key positions in different *Sammellager* until 1945. Stargardter was involved in hunting down Jews in hiding.

There were several other similar cases that show how "Jew hunting" became a regular task of *Gemeinde* and RV clerks in cooperation with the Gestapo by mid-1943.[59] In spring 1943, the RV reassigned First World War veteran and former businessman Hermann R. from his previous

58 Bundesarchiv (BArch) R 8150/63, Bl. 156r: Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, Mitarbeiterkartei Stargardter, Leopold, August 24, 1942.

59 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 190-206.

forced labor in the RV's finance department to duties in the *Sammellager*, where he became Stargardter's fellow *Ordner.*[60] In much the same way Jewish officials had done after the raid on the *Gemeinde* in October 1942, Hermann R. interrogated at least one Jewish woman arrested after the "Factory Action" in March 1943 until she gave away the hiding place of her husband and child, sparing her a Gestapo interrogation and making the Nazis' task easier at the same time.[61] Thus, he appears as having investigated Jews in hiding—a task usually ascribed to *Greifer.* While clearly helping the Gestapo, according to witness reports, Hermann R. hid a Jew in his apartment and smuggled food and messages to prisoners. He was not the only *Ordner* who defied the dichotomy between "bad" collaborator and "good" resistance fighter.

The case of Alfred S. illustrates the specific pressures on Jewish auxiliaries in greater detail. Alfred S. was a Jewish Berliner born into a wealthy family of real estate owners and investors in 1900.[62] He was drafted into the military at the end World War One, but his unit was "overrun by the revolution" in 1918, and he could "not take part in hostilities," something he later regretted.[63] After the First World War, he became a Berlin city official and business owner, but his businesses were ruined after the 1929 stock market crash. Unable to find a different job because of his Jewish background, he worked as a construction worker. In 1937, he fell from scaffolding and damaged his lungs. According to him, an antisemitic coworker had secretly removed a plank.[64] He never fully recovered—his lungs collapsed several times until the Nazi authorities assigned him to work in a machine shop, which was physically less demanding work.

According to Alfred S.'s description, his wife Charlotte managed to convince the Nazi authorities to change her "racial" status because she had no Jewish grandparents. Because of her previous conversion and marriage to Alfred, Nazi officials could have counted her as a Jew due to her proximity to Judaism. To avoid this designation, she left the *Gemeinde*, and the couple baptized their daughter, born 1941, in the Christian faith,

60 Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) B Rep. 002 Nr. 4861, Nachlass Weltlinger, Ehrengerichtsverhandlungen, [no page]: Ehrengericht der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, Entscheidung Ehrengerichtssache Hermann R., March 22, 1948. Names of individuals accused of being collaborators are abbreviated except in cases of persons who have prominently featured in other scholarly works.

61 LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr. 38314, OdF-Akte Hermann R. [no page]: Erna Kopsch, Abschrift Schreiben, April 21, 1950.

62 Landesamt für Bürger- und Ordnungsangelegenheiten Berlin (LABO), Abt. I, Entschädigungsakte Nr. 71.247, Bl. E7: Alfred S, Lebenslauf, November 1, 1954.

63 LABO, Abt. I, Entschädigungsakte Nr. 71.247, Bl. E7.

64 LABO, Abt. I, Entschädigungsakte Nr. 71.247, Bl. E7.

thus "privileging" their *Mischehe*. Alfred S. did not have to wear the "Yellow Star" and was exempt from deportation.[65] This status saved their lives, but it also produced envy among other persecutees.

In late 1944, Alfred S. was assigned to forced labor in a machine shop. His superior recognized his mercantile training and moved him into a higher position than he as a Jew was supposed to hold. The Gestapo came after him because a denouncer employed in the machine shop told them Alfred had hidden the fact that he was Jewish and even oversaw non-Jews.[66] The Gestapo imprisoned Alfred at *Sammellager Schulstraße* located in the Berlin Jewish hospital's former pathology wing. There, Alfred became a forced laborer in the camp's sewing workshop. Eventually, the Gestapo questioned him:

> During the interrogation, which I wish on nobody, the commissioner yelled at me "why didn't you stay a coolie." I tried to explain that I was feeble and had collapsed during heavy work in the past. He wasn't having any of it, and I had to sign a paper that I had been informed that I would be sent to a concentration camp if I did not bring a certificate of employment as a load carrier as soon as possible. In passing, he mentioned that I could also sign up as *Ordner* in the assembly camp. I did that, and this is my alleged volunteering as *Ordner* in the Schulstraße camp.[67]

Alfred's *Mischehe* status protected him only in theory because the Gestapo could have used his "camouflage" as a means to justify his deportation. With his weak lungs, he would likely not have survived the winter. And more importantly, his wife and child would not have an income. As a result of this indirect threat to his and his family's survival, he decided to sign up as an *Ordner* in the employ of the RV in November 1944.[68]

Unlike Stargardter, Alfred S. had not been a *Gemeinde* employee but was "elevated" from the ranks of camp prisoners. His motives and alter-

65 LAB C Rep. 118-01 Nr. 38314, OdF-Akte Hermann R, [no page]: Hermann Rothschild, Lebenslauf zum Fragebogen zur Anerkennung als "Opfer des Faschismus," October 25, 1945.

66 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred S, Bl. 2-4: Alfred S, Anerkennungsfragebogen mit Lebenslauf, October 25, 1945; LABO, Abt. I, Entschädigungsakte Nr. 71.247, Bl. C6: Eduard Mayer, Eidesstattliche Erklärung, April 2, 1953.

67 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred S, Bl. 13-16: Alfred S, Schreiben betreffs Anerkennung als OdF, December 4, 1946.

68 BArch R 8150/9, Bl. 406: Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, Verfügung Betr. Alfred Israel S, November 23, 1944.

natives, however, resembled those of Stargardter. Alfred S.'s regular assignment was guard duty on the *Sammellager*'s outer perimeter, where he was to prevent the escape of previously caught "illegals." At times, he had to guard Jewish prisoners who undertook errands outside of the camp without Gestapo supervision.[69]

Much like Stargardter and Hermann R., the Gestapo made Alfred S. investigate Jews in hiding. The "Factory Action" of February 1943 had caused a 43 percent increase in hiding attempts, which created an awkward problem for the Gestapo since Berlin was supposed to be "Free of Jews" by the summer of 1943.[70] The approximately two thousand escapees who remained at large by the time Alfred S. became an *Ordner* in late 1944 continued to embarrass the police. To tackle the issue, the Gestapo relied on denunciations from the non-Jewish population, as well as investigations, interrogations, and surprise raids. This included *Wohnungswachen* ("apartment watches"). Alfred S. was sent to watch an address the Gestapo suspected to be a hideout. Sometimes, this meant entering the apartment and arresting the inhabitants or waiting for "illegals" to show up. Thus, Alfred S. actively searched for Jews in hiding.

Much like Hermann R., Alfred S. regularly used his position to help others. While guarding prisoners performing errands outside the *Sammellager*, Alfred S. made deals with prisoners, leaving them alone for a while and trusting them to not betray him. He smuggled food into the camp, and his wife gave him linens that he secretly passed on to mothers with babies. Even such a small "breach of discipline" could have cost him his life. He later claimed that he dared not raise the alarm when a prisoner ran away while he was on guard duty in April 1945. The Battle of Berlin began on April 16, 1945. Alfred S.'s emphasis on this date likely meant that he had raised the alarm during previous escape attempts. Even with the Soviets close by, allowing someone to escape was still risky.

According to historian Doris Tausendfreund, the Gestapo coerced up to thirty individuals using a combination of torture, false promises, and threats against family members to inform on or search for Jews in hiding; these Jewish informers or even investigators were in the service of the Gestapo and were colloquially dubbed *Greifer*.[71] Building mainly on postwar court testimony, Tausendfreund disassociated these "irregular" Gestapo auxiliaries from the "regular" *Ordner,* ascribing to the former

69 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte von Alfred S, Bl. 13-16.
70 Lutjens, *Submerged on the Surface*, 212-22.
71 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 125-210.

motivations of personal gain that set them apart from the latter.[72] After the war, only the *Greifer* were understood as having actively investigated their Jewish compatriots for selfish reasons, whereas *Ordner* with ties to the RV supposedly only passively followed orders. The examples of Hermann R., Alfred S. and Stargardter are three out of a number of cases of "regular" *Ordner* who were involved in investigations after Jews in hiding,[73] and their experiences disrupt the alleged distinction between the *Ordner* and the *Greifer*.

At least nine *Greifer* identified by Tausendfreund had been regular *Gemeinde* and/or RV employees and *Ordner*—like Stargardter.[74] Tausendfreund did not count Alfred S., Hermann R. and many others among *Greifer.* Most other *Greifer* had, in fact, been fugitives caught in hiding who became one-time or serial informers. The group of so-called "irregular" auxiliaries was not homogenous. The overall impact of *Greifer* on the number of deportees has been exaggerated in the past: apprehended fugitives were present in each "transport" during the phase of smaller deportations from mid-1943 to 1945, but contrary to common belief, most deportees were former *Mischehe* partners or people who lost their status as "protected" *Mischlinge.*[75] Also, betrayal among Jews cannot be blamed on a limited group of informers. Jews caught in hiding betraying others was the rule, not the exception. Most escapes into hiding in Berlin were spontaneous, and most escapees were not trained to withstand police interrogation.[76] Confronted with Gestapo officers not bound by law and brutalized after practicing terror for a decade, most Berlin Jews arrested in hiding "betrayed" others. Gestapo brutality targeted every form of disobedience. Those caught in hiding and those who had worked as *Ordner* shared the same basic predicament as soon as they seemed helpful in tracking down Jews in hiding or appeared to know something: a choice between cooperation with the Gestapo or possibly torture and deportation with their family. Thus, the difference between Jewish auxiliaries—*Ordner* and *Greifer*—was not their actions during the Shoah but rather how the postwar world perceived them.

72 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 90.
73 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 190-206.
74 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 125-210.
75 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 519.
76 Lutjens, *Submerged on the Surface*, 212-22.

Postwar Reckoning: Between Collaborators and "Honorable" RV Clerks

Auxiliaries with an exposed position in the *Sammellager* were often the subject of denunciations after the war. As a senior *Ordner,* Stargardter had conducted body searches of newly arrived inmates; announced the names of those destined to be deported when a train was arriving; and was present at the train station during deportations.[77] He was, therefore, literally the person who introduced arrestees to the *Sammellager* and the last face deportees saw when they involuntarily left Berlin on a deportation train. Despite the pressure he experienced from both the Gestapo and the RV, the Soviets executed him on January 26, 1946 as a "German-fascist criminal."[78] Stargardter was not a singular case. The Soviets, for example, also arrested the former janitor Arthur Schönfeld in Berlin in 1945; he shared the same fate as six of the forty-two local RV leaders who faced criminal prosecution in other parts of Germany after the war.[79] No one wanted to share this fate, so Fabian, Radlauer and many other surviving Berlin RV employees attempted to obscure their former roles in the *Reichsvereinigung* after 1945, providing each other with exculpating letters of recommendation.[80] They succeeded in evading execution because they did not hold as exposed positions as Stargardter and Schönfeld. In contrast to the fate of Schönfeld and Stargardter, Hermann R., Alfred S., and many others faced only moral and ethical accusations from survivors after the war. Their cases illustrate a pattern of attacking members of the RV who played more public roles, whereas members of both the Gestapo and the RV faded into the background.

Other former Berlin Gestapo *Sammellager* auxiliaries received prison sentences following postwar trials. Measuring them against an antisemitic double standard, both East and West German authorities found them guilty of betraying or even hunting Jews.[81] In an Orwellian inversion of cause and effect, courts ascribed to Jews significant room for maneuver

77 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 194.

78 Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten, "Datenbank Todesurteile Sowjetischer Militärtribunale Gegen Deutsche Zivilisten (1944-1947): Eintrag Stargardter, Leopold," accessed June 12, 2022, https://www.stsg.de/cms/dokstelle/auskuenfte/verurteilte-sowjetischer-militaertribunale-smt/todesurteile-sowjetischer?suchwort=Stargardter&beginn=Name+beginnt+mit.

79 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 367.

80 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 213.

81 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 190-206.

and a degree of agency that implied a moral obligation to sacrifice themselves, which in turn would serve as a manifestation of an idealized form of Jewish collective honor. At the same time, dominant German postwar discourses asserted that the actual perpetrators of the Shoah had been under duress, faced existential threats, and were left with no choice but to kill. In this climate, victims had only one "choice": they had to occupy the moral high ground, otherwise they "unbecame" victims.[82]

After liberation, there was not much room for ambiguity. Alfred S. became a Berlin city official. In March 1946, he received the legal status of *Opfer der Nürnberger Gesetzgebung* (Victim of the Nuremberg Laws, OdNG), i. e., victims of antisemitic Nazi persecution. An officially recognized OdNG received social benefits. Later that year, however, Shoah survivor Freddy W. demanded Alfred be stripped of this status. Freddy W. was furious because Alfred now claimed "that he is Jewish but did not want to be known as Jewish back then,"[83] alluding to baptisms during the Shoah. Shortly after, Freddy W. also made similar charges against Hermann R. Such resentments against formerly "privileged" couples and attempts of self-"aryanization" were frequent and relate to Jewish religious debates during and after the Holocaust as well as to the issue of "mixed" marriage.[84] Freddy W. also stated that Alfred S. had not been forced to work as an *Ordner* but was a willing collaborator.

Following these accusations, the OdNG office demanded that Alfred S., Hermann R., and many others be put on trial by the internal Jewish *Ehrengericht* (honor court). The post-1945 Berlin Jewish Community formed an internal court to deal with collaboration cases, assessing them on the moral level.[85] So far, the Berlin *Ehrengericht* has been interpreted as independent of the state's justice system, but it was not: it was intertwined with the OdNG office, and despite its lack of punitive legal power, a negative verdict could result in the loss of compensation.[86] The

82 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 151.

83 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred S, Bl. 6: Magistrat der Stadt Berlin, Hauptausschuss "Opfer des Faschismus," Betreff Alfred S, October 20, 1946.

84 Irving J. Rosenbaum, *The Holocaust and Halakhah: The Library of Jewish Law and Ethics* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1976), 3-5; Maximilian Strnad, *Privileg Mischehe? Handlungsräume "jüdisch versippter" Familien 1933-1949* (Hamburg: Nomos Verlag 2021).

85 CJA, 5A1, Nr. 0046, p. 132: Vorstand der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, Schreiben an die Repräsentantenversammlung betreffs Schaffung eines Ehrengerichts, December 14, 1945.

86 Philipp Dinkelaker, "Jewish Collaboration? Honor Court Cases Against Survivors of the Shoah in Postwar Germany," *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 33, no. 4 (2019): 254-76.

case of Alfred S. is exemplary of how a certain narrative about *Ordner* was produced. In Alfred S.'s case, the OdNG's letter demanding his trial included statements of witnesses which they deployed in order to avoid "unfair measures" against Alfred, who had supposedly "used his position to help many people."[87] Thus, the office was already on Alfred's side, revealing the heterogenous views of survivors. Among the witnesses supporting Alfred was a Jewish resistance fighter, who stated that Alfred S. "had to fulfill the same tasks as all other *Ordner*, i. e., arrest actions," but he never engaged in "anything unsavory like betraying others."[88] The *Ehrengericht* chairman Ernst Bukofzer acquitted Alfred S. and stated that "the Gestapo forced" Alfred S. "to become an *Ordner*" because no witness reported that he "fulfilled his compulsory duties to the detriment of Jewish interests at any time."[89] Notwithstanding the alleged difference between passive *Ordner* and active *Greifer* claimed by survivors later on, investigating illegal Jews and conducting "apartment watches" was not considered a violation of collective Jewish honor in the eyes of the 1946 *Ehrengericht.* The internal Jewish court acquitted most of the other former *Ordner,* RV clerks, and prisoner functionaries who had actively seached for "illegals" or assisted the Gestapo in other ways; Hermann R. and Schönfeld were among this group, having been released from East German prisons.[90]

In another trial, however, the very same judge convicted the Jewish resistance fighter Rudolf S. as a traitor. Rudolf S. had been involved in hiding over a dozen Jewish "illegals."[91] In 1944, tipped-off by captured "illegals," the Gestapo arrested and tortured Rudolf S., threatening to rape his wife and murder his children. Under pressure, he betrayed a hide-out he mistakenly believed to be "cold," which led to more arrests. Reversing his evaluation of Alfred S. and ignoring several witnesses attesting to the defendant's resistance activities, *Ehrengericht* judge Bukofzer and his co-judges stipulated that Rudolf S. should have sacrificed himself and his family rather than betray an address. Effectively, former RV

87 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred, Bl. 7-8: Julius Meyer, Antrag auf Ehrengerichtsverhandlung gegen Alfred S, October 22, 1946.

88 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred S, Bl. 10: Abteilung Opfer der Nürnberger Gesetzgebung beim Hauptausschuß "Opfer des Faschismus," Protokoll Zeugenaussage Alexander Rotholz und Adolf Metz, November 4, 1946.

89 LAB B Rep. 002 Nr. 4861 Nachlass Weltlinger, Ehrengerichtsverhandlungen, [no page]: Ehrengericht der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, Entscheidung in der Ehrengerichtssache Alfred S, December 11, 1946.

90 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 190-206.

91 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 123.

clerks retrospectively minimized Gestapo coercion and punished a resistance fighter for betraying Jews in hiding. They declared as honorable the investigation of "illegals" by *Ordner* such as Alfred S. (and several others), insinuating that these actions advanced the goal of collective survival under pressure, while at the same time portraying Rudolf S.'s forced betrayal as dishonorable. Thus, the *Ehrengericht* defined the line between legitimate activities and collaboration, along with the categories of "honorable" support of the RV's strategy of cooperation and "dishonorable" personal gain, ignoring the fact that everybody who cooperated also did so to mitigate personal consequences and protect their families.

The uneven judgements rendered by the court were the result of continuity in the personnel of the RV and postwar Berlin Jewish institutions. Some *Ehrengericht* staff had, in fact, been subject to the same forced collaboration they were now supposed to adjudicate. Rather than displaying empathy, they retrospectively defended the RV's harsh position toward individuals who escaped into hiding. Bukofzer, who was married to a non-Jewish woman, had been a forced laborer for the RV. In this role, he was compelled to catalogue Nazi-looted Jewish books on behalf of the RSHA Amt VII's "enemy studies."[92] Together with Curt Radlauer, he later coauthored the legal commentary on Berlin's compensation law and was heavily involved in shaping how exclusionary terms against alleged traitors were to be interpreted.[93] In addition to their personal networks, most former *Ordner*, such as Alfred S., and most *Ehrengericht* judges and former RV heads shared an educational, military (World War One), and social background. Their strategy of collective survival during the deportations can be seen as an outcome of the First World War: in accordance with military logic, human loss was a calculable resource in the name of the greater good.[94]

92 Utz Maas, "Ernst Grumach: Verfolgte deutschsprachige Sprachforscher," accessed October 31, 2021, https://zflprojekte.de/sprachforscher-im-exil/index.php/catalog/g/234-grumach-ernst.

93 Ernst Bukofzer and Curt Radlauer, *Kommentar zum Gesetz über die Entschädigung der Opfer des Nationalsozialismus vom 10. Jan. 1951* (Koblenz: Humanitas Verlag, 1951).

94 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 120-21.

Conclusion

It has been argued that the RV continued its cooperation with the Gestapo after 1943, notwithstanding its increasing awareness of the mass murder taking place in the occupied east. Beate Meyer demonstrated how the RV continued to support the Gestapo's efforts—despite the failure of its strategy to protect the many by deporting the few—because there were limited other options, and because they wanted to protect the dwindling number of Jews who remained in Germany. The present chapter does not change Meyer's fundamental argument but rather expands it. Fearing collective retaliation against the remaining Jews in Germany, the RV not only assisted with deportation logistics but also systematically opposed individual hiding attempts in the name of collective survival, effectively posing an additional threat to Jews in hiding. Assisting with the Gestapo's manhunt for Jews in hiding was not limited to isolated events. Rather, it must be understood as a part of the RV's structural support resulting from its overall strategy of cooperation.

Based on the available sources, the alleged distinction between RV *Ordner* or "regular" deportation camp auxiliaries and *Greifer* cannot be sustained. The year 1943 marked a caesura in the history of the German Jewish pseudo-self-administration. A closer look at its lower-ranking employees reveals how *Gemeinde* and RV functionaries were involved in the manhunt of "illegals" long before the campaign peaked in mid-1943. Their involvement in these efforts stemmed from the extreme circumstances of their employment. The interconnectedness of the *Ordner*'s passive guard duties and active investigatory measures was not deviation from but rather a continuation of the cooperation strategy adopted by the RV in response to the Gestapo's shift in focus away from mass deportations and to the hunting down of Jews in hiding. The RV's Gestapo-enforced decision to order, "pay," and house "regular" Jewish auxiliaries to inform on or investigate "illegal" Jews must be considered an integral part of the *Greifer* phenomenon.

Ordner effectively resembled auxiliary police, fulfilling the role envisioned by and answering mostly directly to the Gestapo while remaining nominally on the RV's payroll. As the examples show, some used their individual room for maneuver to support fellow persecuted Jews and, consequently, defy a clear classification. Navigating the requirements of the RV's cooperation strategy, Gestapo pressure, and the possibility of resistance simultaneously was an incriminating double role that was structured by the unethical choice between hurting others and endangering

oneself. Participation in the Gestapo's manhunt resulted from this double pressure. It was not solely the moral failure of individuals who were unable to withstand such coercion. The fact that most individuals eventually succumbed is evidence of the brutality of a regime that took advantage of the fact that people could be blackmailed with their spouses or children even if it meant harming others.

Therefore, in terms of ensuring one's survival, there is no fundamental difference between *Greifer*, *Ordner*, or other RV personnel. Just like those captured illegals who became *Greifer,* RV clerks from all the organization's departments obeyed the Gestapo and tried to remain "useful" because this is how they could save their families and themselves. All instances of compliance must be placed within this context without levelling individual differences between people who tried to survive at any cost and people who tried to help others despite the high personal risks.

The dilemmas confronted by individual RV auxiliaries shed light on the RV's continued cooperation after mid-1943. Despite the obvious failure of the initial strategy to save "the many," the remaining RV officials went through with it anyway because continuing their cooperation with the Gestapo also facilitated their individual survival. Examining how the Gestapo enforced officials' individual compliance exemplifies how the regime enabled the RV's overall functioning in the final phase of the war.

The way the postwar Berlin Jewish Community handled the cases of former *Ordner* Alfred S. and Hermann R. in contrast to that of former Jewish resistance fighter Rudolf S. illuminates clashing Jewish perspectives on the morally impossible question of the "right" Jewish response to the collective threat of mass murder. The Jewish Honor Court was shaped by a conflict between the "top-down" perspective of the former *Reichsvereinigung* personnel among the judges and the bottom-up view of those who accused former *Ordner* and others as traitors. The accusations of survivors against Jewish auxiliaries represented feelings of having been betrayed by the *Reichsvereinigung* as an institution, but they were, by and large, lodged against the organ's most visible employees, namely those who "brought" Jews to the *Sammellager*. Demanding punishment, survivors' accusations did not distinguish between the functions of *Greifer*, *Ordner,* other RV employees, and the Gestapo.

Former RV clerks among the *Ehrengericht* judges, however, redirected survivors' anger toward individuals like Rudolf S.—who had not been aligned with the RV—and protected most of the former *Ordner*. The unequal treatment of former (forced) RV clerks and those who had not been on the payroll obscured the *Reichsvereinigung*'s strategy of coopera-

tion and its negative impact on persons in hiding. It also offered a retroactive legitimization of the *Reichsvereinigung*'s cooperation with the Gestapo, in contrast to Poland, where former resistance fighters sat in judgement over former Jewish Council members who were generally assessed negatively.[95] Consequently, there was no coherent definition for acts of Jewish collaboration in postwar Germany. Determining whether someone was classified a traitor or a tragic victim of extreme historical circumstances was based not on objective acts but on postwar interests and power relations.

95 Gabriel N. Finder, "Judenrat on Trial: Postwar Jewry Sits in Judgement of Its Wartime Leadership," in Jockusch and Finder, *Jewish Honor Courts*, 83–106.

Jan Láníček

The Jewish Community Leadership in Prague during the Second World War

The Nazi Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Prague (*Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung Prag*, hereafter the *Zentralstelle*) was located in a large villa in Střešovice, an affluent district in the city.[1] The numerous rooms housed a small team of Nazi officials (mostly the SS), Czech employees, as well as representatives of the Prague Jewish Religious Community (*Pražská židovská náboženská obec*, hereafter the Prague JRC), the last of which functioned as liaisons to the Jewish town hall in the city center, the official seat of the JRC. In one room, a large board hung from the wall, displaying photos of the current Jewish leaders. Representatives of the JRC called it *die Sterbetafel* (a life or mortality board), and it symbolized the exposed position of the Jewish leaders in relation to their Nazi superiors.[2]

In October 1941, the *Zentralstelle* ordered the compulsory registration of all Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (the German-occupied Czech provinces), and in a few weeks, it tasked the JRC with preparations for the first transports of Prague Jews to Litzmannstadt (Łódź) in occupied Poland.[3] All over occupied Europe, the beginning of the deportations put new pressure on Jewish leaders who had believed and tried to persuade the wider Jewish community that cooperation with the SS was in their interest and would prevent the worst from happening.[4]

1 On the *Zentralstelle*, see: Jaroslava Milotová, "Die Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung in Prag. Genesis und Tätigkeit bis zum Anfang des Jahres 1940," *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 1997* (1997): 7-30.

2 Archiv bezpečnostních složek (hereafter ABS), V-1649 MV, Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný dnešního dne na zdejším velitelství s Krausem, Erichem, 5. prosince 1951.

3 Wolf Gruner, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia: Czech Initiatives, German Policies, Jewish Responses* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 252-93.

4 See, for example: Beatte Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act: The Dilemma of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, 1939-1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 110-15.

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The registration in Prague did not progress as smoothly as the SS expected, and only five hundred of the one thousand Jews supposed to report came to the *Zentralstelle* on the first day. After the war, Erich Jucker, one of the few top JRC officials to survive the war, described the events that followed:

> Abraham Fixler, at that time the head of the JRC branch at the *Zentralstelle*, was called to see [SS Sturmbannführer Karl] Rahm.[5] Rahm asked him who the head of the registration department was. Fixler replied that the leaders were Dr. Hanuš Bonn and Emil Kafka, after which Rahm, in a furious state, tore off from the board containing photos of all leading JRC officials the photos of Dr. Bonn and Emil Kafka, called the Gestapo in Bredovská Street, to whom he gave these 2 names, with the order that these 2 Jews be arrested.[6]

Despite interventions of Jewish communal leaders, the Gestapo sent Kafka and Bonn to Mauthausen concentration camp, where they perished in less than a fortnight.[7] In this way, the *Zentralstelle* ensured that the JRC cooperated during the deportations and sent a clear message that any potential act of resistance or non-conformity would be crushed with utmost severity. Some survivors even suggested that Rahm was only looking for a pretext to inflict a blow on the JRC.[8] It is noteworthy that the SS used a very similar method in late September 1944, when they murdered the Jewish elder of the Theresienstadt (Terezín) Ghetto Paul Eppstein. Rahm was at that time the commandant of the ghetto. Eppstein was shot shortly before the beginning of the major transports that sent around 18,400 Jewish prisoners, a significant part of the ghetto, to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Also, in this case, Rahm and the SS wanted to ensure the cooperation of the other members of the Council of Elders (*Ältestenrat*).[9]

The existence of the *Sterbetafel* and the fate of Bonn, Kafka, and Eppstein demonstrate that the Nazi regime could dispose of Jewish

5 Between 1940 and 1944, Rahm was the deputy head of the *Zentralstelle*, and from February 1944 until May 1945, the commandant of the Theresienstadt Ghetto. He was sentenced to death and executed in 1947.

6 Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích (hereafter SOA Litoměřice), Mimořádný lidový soud v Litoměřicích (hereafter MLS Litoměřice), Lsp 441/47, Erich Jucker, protocol, March 4, 1947.

7 See also: Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln and Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2005), 126.

8 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Lsp 441/47, Lev Kraus, protocol, March 6, 1947.

9 Miroslav Kárný, "Die Theresienstädter Herbsttransporte 1944," *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 1995* (1995): 7-37.

Image 1: The "Mortality Board": Members of the Council of Jewish Elders in Prague (1943-1945). Source: Archiv bezpečnostních složek, V_1649MV.

leaders using any pretext, even if they fully cooperated. Although the SS realized that for various practical and psychological reasons it was beneficial to use parts of the Jewish community as intermediaries as they were in charge of the day-to-day administration and helped enforce the persecution, they also made it clear that Jewish leaders could be easily replaced.

The Jewish leaders were also under pressure from below. Already during the war, there was a lot of resentment in the Jewish community against those who, despite the persecution and humiliation, held leadership positions. They were often accused of collaboration. For many, these leaders became a symbol of the oppressive regime that made the life of the Jews miserable and later helped organize the deportations.[10] Although ordinary members of the Jewish community were aware that the *Zentralstelle* was in charge of all these actions, they were officially announced and executed by the JRC. The feelings of resentment came to

10 Marie Bader, *Life and Love in Nazi Prague: Letters from an Occupied City*, ed. Kate Ottevanger and Jan Láníček (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 194.

a head after the end of the war. The day Prague was liberated, a crowd led by survivors attacked the Jewish town hall and publicly abused the last deputy Jewish elder, Erich Kraus.[11]

The nature of historians' discussions about the "Jewish Councils" has developed significantly. Works that would paint an overtly negative image of the JRCs in the Protectorate are scarce, though they come from prominent authors. Already shortly after the war, Hans G. Adler, a Prague-born survivor of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, condemned the community leaders in Prague and Theresienstadt for their weakness.[12] Several decades later, Helena Krejčová et al. called them "involuntary intermediaries [or middlemen]," while at the same time taking at face value propagandist reports prepared by the communist secret police in the 1970s that accused some of the Jewish leaders of working for the Gestapo, the Nazi Secret Police.[13] In contrast, Ruth Bondy, Livia Rothkirchen, Magda Veselská, and Benjamin Frommer have argued that the Jewish leaders in the Protectorate looked after the community. They also expected self-sacrifices from individuals if it was in the interest of the collective.[14] The leaders in Prague and Theresienstadt developed strategies that in their opinion and in the "race against time" would protect at least parts of the community—the young and healthy—until the anticipated defeat of Nazi Germany. This did not rule out cases of corruption and nepotism that were inherent to the system.

Lately, Wolf Gruner and Benjamin Frommer also have put more emphasis on resistance activities of the Jewish leaders and significantly expanded the definition of this term.[15] This has been in line with global

11 Jewish Museum Prague (hereafter JMP), Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 71, Erich Kraus to Kurt Wehle, February 28, 1979.

12 H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-1945: The Face of a Coerced Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 215.

13 Helena Krejčová, Jana Svobodová, and Anna Hyndráková, eds., *Židé v protektorátu. Hlášení Židovské náboženské obce v roce 1942* (Prague: Maxdorf, 1997), 21-23.

14 Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*; Magda Veselská, "'Sie müssen sich als Jude dessen bewusst sein, welche Opfer zu tragen sind …' Handlungsspielräume der jüdischen Kultusgemeinden im Protektorat bis zum Ende der großen Deportationen," in *Alltag im Holocaust: Jüdisches Leben im Großdeutschen Reich 1941-1945*, ed. Doris Bergen, Andrea Löw, and Anna Hájková (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013), 151-66; Benjamin Frommer, "Verfolgung durch die Presse: Wie Prager Bürokraten und die tschechische Polizei halfen, die Juden des Protektorats zu isolieren," in Bergen et al., *Alltag im Holocaust: Jüdisches Leben im Großdeutschen Reich 1941-1945*, 147.

15 Gruner, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia*; Benjamin Frommer, "Züruck ins Ghetto (und Dorf): Ausweisung und Umsiedlung der jüdischen Bevölkerung im nationalsozialistischen Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren," in *Delogiert und ghettoisiert: Jüdinnen und Juden vor der Deportation (Jahrbuch des DÖW, 2022)*, ed. Chris-

historiography. Yehuda Bauer has famously advocated the term *Amidah*, which encompasses a whole range of defiant activities, including acts that led to the "sanctification of life" and "meaningful Jewish survival," for example, various cultural and educational activities or social welfare provision.[16] Yet the fact remains that overt resistance on its own could rarely lead to the survival of a sigificant number of Jews.[17] Christopher Browning in this context commented, based on his research of a Jewish slave labour camp which had a much higher survival rate than other camps, that: "The Jews of Starachowice pursued strategies of survival through compliance and alleviation, in the form of labour and bribery, over resistance and fight … Those who benefited most were seldom individuals who stir our admiration."[18]

This article contributes to the discussions about collaboration and resistance of the Jewish leadership, and about the relationship between the German authorities and the Jewish leaders on the one hand, and between the Jewish leaders and the Jewish community, on the other. It argues that in the Protectorate, Jewish leaders followed the path of compliance and cooperation, with acts of resistance largely confined to the sphere of minor concessions from the Nazis and social self-help.[19] The result was the survival of some—though it is hard to tell if this was a consequence of the leaders' actions—but also lengthy tensions in the postwar community, which often stemmed from misunderstandings and the overestimation of Jewish leaders' powers. The core of the argument is based primarily on postwar recollections from those who worked for the Prague JRC during the war, as well as the interrogations of the last deputy Jewish elder Erich Kraus by the communist secret police. These are, by necessity, problematic sources because the survivors among Jewish leaders had

tine Schindler and Wolfgang Schellenbacher (Vienna: DÖW, 2022), 21-38; Benjamin Frommer, "The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia," in *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands*, ed. Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 196-234.

16 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 119-42.

17 See, for example, Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 451-74.

18 Christopher Browning, "'Alleviation' and 'Compliance': The Survival Strategies of the Jewish Leadership in the Wierzbnik Ghetto and the Starachowice Factory Slave Labor Camps," in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, ed. Jonathan Petropoulos and John Roth (New York: Berghahn, 2005), 26-36.

19 For a discussion of the terminology, see: Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

good reasons to portray the work of the "Jewish Councils" in a positive light. But a careful approach to the testimonies, and a cross-examination of their content with other sources, allows us to gain insights into the work of the Prague Jewish leadership under the extreme conditions of German occupation.

The Jewish Religious Communities in the Protectorate

In March 1939, at the beginning of the German occupation, there were a total of 136 JRCs and approximately 118,000 Jews in Bohemia and Moravia (the number decreased to 88,105 by October 1941).[20] The JRCs traditionally looked after the religious needs of the community, provided social support, and in some cases also educated Jewish children. Alongside these voluntary bodies, there was a whole range of various community social and cultural associations and institutions. The situation changed under German occupation. All the Jewish associations were disbanded, and the JRCs remained the only authorized, in fact compulsory, bodies that represented all Jews, including those who were not members of the religious community (so-called non-mosaic Jews).[21] On March 5, 1940, the *Reichsprotektor* Konstantin von Neurath issued a decree that gave the Prague JRC jurisdiction over the remaining JRCs in the Protectorate. This was part of the centralization efforts that were to help with the implementation of German and Czech Protectorate anti-Jewish measures, and it followed the Vienna model of one JRC in the capital tasked with communicating Nazi orders to the provinces.[22]

The JRC in Prague, under various names, remained in existence for the entire duration of the Nazi occupation. Over time, its composition and assigned tasks changed. The wartime history of the JRC in Prague can be divided into four stages:

1) From the German invasion to the summer of 1939, when the creation of the *Zentralstelle* by Adolf Eichmann in July and then the outbreak of the war in September led to the first attempts to centralize Jewish persecution. The war also restricted options for emigration.

20 Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 116.

21 *Reichsprotektor* Konstantin von Neurath introduced the Nuremberg Laws in the Protectorate on June 21, 1939.

22 Gruner, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia*, 387.

2) From the outbreak of the war until the second registration of the Jews and the beginning of the main deportations from the Protectorate in October 1941.
3) From the time of the main deportations until July 1943, when the last Jews without protection were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto (those who were protected lived in so-called mixed marriages [*arisch versippt*] or were of mixed origin [*Mischlinge*]).
4) The period from July 1943 until the end of the war and the liberation of Prague in May 1945.

The first three periods were characterized by the gradual centralization and radicalization of Nazi anti-Jewish policies. During the last period, only several thousand Jews remained outside of Theresienstadt, and even most of those who lived in mixed marriages were deported to the ghetto during the final transports between January and March 1945.

In 1939, the JRCs assumed new tasks such as the vocational retraining of those Jews who planned to emigrate. In fact, support for forced emigration—for example, by helping with the bureaucratic process—was initially one of their main tasks. But they also had to communicate all Nazi orders, organize forced labor battalions, collect taxes from the Jews, and maintain the register of all Jews living in the Protectorate. With increasing persecution in 1940, the *Zentralstelle* tasked the JRCs with the organization of the relocation of the Jews to selected parts of Bohemian and Moravian towns, where they had to find space for the newcomers in houses occupied by other Jewish tenants. Over time, the need to secure social welfare services, including soup kitchens, nursing homes for the elderly, hospitals, schools, and orphanages also burdened the JRCs.[23]

Starting in the autumn of 1941, the JRCs had to organize the deportations and help with the establishment of the Theresienstadt ghetto. They were also forced to clear all apartments of deportees and secure their assets, which were stored in large warehouses in Prague. For this purpose, the JRC on October 13, 1941 created a new department, the *Treuhandstelle*, led by Salomon Krämer, a Zionist from Moravská Ostrava.[24] As the deportation process unfolded, all JRCs in the Protectorate were disbanded in January 1943. Instead, the *Zentralstelle* (now under the new name *Zentralamt für die Regelung der Judenfrage in Böhmen und Mähren*

23 For the history, see: Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 116-37; Erich Kraus, "Židovské organizace za okupace" (unpublished manuscript, 1955); JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 76, Erich Kraus to Kurt Wehle, January 7, 1980; Krejčová, Svobodová, and Hyndráková, *Židé v protektorátu*.

24 Krejčová, Svobodová, and Hyndráková, *Židé v protektorátu*, 17.

[Central Office for the Solution of the Jewish Question in Bohemia and Moravia]; hereafter the *Zentralamt*) created the Council of Jewish Elders in Prague (*Ältestenrat der Juden in Prag*), which existed until the end of the war. The former JRCs across the Protectorate became its local branches, though most of them now consisted of only a few individuals. Their agenda was rather limited and focused on the registration of Jewish assets and other liquidation work.[25] At the peak of the Prague JRC's activities, some 2,102 employees worked in various departments, with around half of them employed in the *Treuhandstelle*. The number quickly dropped during the final round of deportations in the first half of 1943.[26]

JRC Leaders in the Protectorate

The relationship between the Jewish community and the leadership was, first of all, conditioned by trust and by the confidence and respect the leaders held in the community (legitimacy).[27] The existence of representative bodies was not new to Jewish community life, but the German invasion created a dilemma for established community leaders who had to decide whether to continue serving in their positions. Although they could not predict the severity of the persecution, they soon realized that they would be expected to unconditionally enforce the will of the Nazi security apparatus.[28] At the same time, the community leaders believed it was essential for recognized authorities to maintain a semblance of continuity and stability, and, at least in the beginning, use established contacts and networks to help with emigration. Both of the main Jewish groups in the Protectorate, the Czech-Jewish assimilationists and Zionists, agreed to share the burden of working for the community, though the traditional tensions did not disappear. Also a small group of Orthodox

25 Friedrich Thieberger and Karl Stein, "Die Juden zur Zeit des Protektorates in Böhmen und Mähren-Schlesien" (unpublished manuscript, undated [Stein died in 1961]), copy in author's possession; JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 82, Židovské organizace za okupace (unpublished manuscript, 1955).

26 Krejčová, Svobodová, and Hyndráková, *Židé v protektorátu*, 14; JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 76, Židovské organizace za okupace (prepared by Erich Kraus in 1955); Erich Kraus to Kurt Wehle, January 7-16, 1980. Kraus estimated that the number eventually increased closer to 2,600.

27 See also: Wolfgang Schneider's chapter in this volume.

28 H. G. Adler, "The 'Autonomous' Jewish Administration of Terezín," in *Imposed Jewish Governing Bodies under Nazi Rule. YIVO Colloquium, December 2-5, 1967* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1972), 71.

Jews, a marginal group in the Czech provinces, worked for the JRC.[29] In Prague, many of the recognized leaders who could emigrate decided not to abandon the community and helped negotiate the emigration of others.[30] Most of them eventually perished.

The composition of the "Jewish Councils" changed constantly during the war. Historian Aharon Weiss has suggested that in occupied Poland, as time progressed, the SS replaced recognized community leaders, and eventually, a significant number of elders were either new to community life or refugees from other parts of occupied Poland.[31] In the latter case, it was an intentional decision by the SS to put into key positions people without any local ties, who were often willing to enforce the strictest orders if there was the possibility of saving their own lives or receiving other benefits.[32] The situation in Prague differed. The JRC, and later the Council of Jewish Elders in Prague, were, until the liberation in 1945, led by people who had been previously active in local Jewish affairs.[33] This was not typical in the eastern parts of Europe.[34] However, most of the ordinary employees, especially those employed following the hasty creation of the large *Treuhandstelle*, were newcomers to the Jewish town hall.[35]

Leading Jewish politicians and activists assumed key positions in the Prague JRC. From the assimilationist camp, it was initially Emil Kafka (not the same man murdered together with Bonn in 1941), the last prewar head of the Prague JRC. In the summer of 1939, however, he did not return from his trip to London, where he negotiated emigration options.

29 ABS, V-1649 MV, Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný dnešního dne na zdejším velitelství s Krausem, Erichem, 5. prosince 1951; Adler, "The 'Autonomous' Jewish Administration of Terezín"; Thieberger and Stein, "Die Juden zur Zeit des Protektorates in Böhmen und Mähren," 2.

30 Ruth Bondy, *"Elder of the Jews" Jakob Edelstein of Theresienstadt* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 129-207; Margalit Shlain, "Jakob Edelsteins Bemühungen um die Rettung der Juden aus dem Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren von Mai 1939 bis Dezember 1939," *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 2003* (2003): 71-94.

31 Aharon Weiss, "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland—Postures and Attitudes," in *The Nazi Holocaust*, *Part 6, Vol. 1: The Victims of the Holocaust*, ed. Michael Marrus (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989), 440-70. The situation in Germany and Austria was similar.

32 Weiss, "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland," 449-50, and 458-62.

33 Also, for example, the head of the Vienna JRC Josef Löwenherz remained in Vienna until the end of the war.

34 Also in Germany, after the deportation of the *Reichsvereinigung* leadership, the last head of the *Rest-Reichsvereinigung* after 1943, Walter Lustig, was a newcomer to the upper echelons of Jewish communal life. See: Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act*, 330-35.

35 Krejčová, Svobodová, and Hyndráková, *Židé v protektorátu*, 17.

The chairmanship was then assumed by František Weidmann, a young leader of the Czech-Jewish movement. The Zionist camp could rely on veterans from the interwar Jewish Party, the Zionist Organization, WIZO, and the Palestine Office: Jakob Edelstein, František Kahn, Hannah Steiner, and František Friedmann. Weidmann headed the JRC until his deportation to Theresienstadt in January 1943, with Edelstein serving as his deputy until he was sent to Theresienstadt as the first Jewish Elder in December 1941. In January 1943, Weidmann's position in the newly created Council of Jewish Elders was assumed by the aforementioned Zionist Krämer, who had previously been forced to organize the first deportation of European Jews from Moravská Ostrava to the so-called Lublin Reservation in October 1939. Herbert Langer, a Czech-Jewish assimilationist, became his deputy. Both were deported to Theresienstadt in the last transport of "Full Jews" (*Volljuden*) in July 1943.[36]

The last elder, the oft-praised interwar Zionist politician František Friedmann, remained in the position until the liberation of Prague in May 1945. His prewar handicap from the Zionist perspective, namely, being married to a non-Jewish Czech woman, turned out to be an advantage in the long run. His marriage protected him against the deportation, though he died a few weeks after the liberation at the age of forty-seven.[37] Contemporary witnesses suggested that in the last years of war, Friedmann took almost sole responsibility for negotiating with the Germans, with the goal of saving remnants of the Jewish community.[38] After July 1943, the rest of the Council of Jewish Elders was composed of people who had not been involved in Jewish community life before the war. For example, Friedmann's deputy, Erich Kraus, joined the JRC only in the autumn of 1939, when the need to manage community affairs, including the registration of the Jews and their emigration, required the expansion of the staff. He did not belong to any of the Jewish ideological groups.[39] After the war, as the highest ranking official of the Prague JRC

36 JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 82, Židovské organizace za okupace (prepared by Erich Kraus in 1955).

37 Tatjana Lichtenstein, "A Life at Odds? The Political and Private Worlds of a Prague Zionist," in *Borders of Jewishness: Microhistories of Encounter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 13-15. Apparently, this was the reason he did not become a candidate for the Czechoslovak national assembly before the war.

38 ABS, V-1649 MV, Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný dnešního dne na zdejším velitelství s Krausem, Erichem, 5. prosince 1951. Dr. H. Kafka, 'Dr František Friedmann', *Věstnik Židovské obce náboženské v Praze* (hereafter *Věstník*), 3 June 1946, 6/VIII, p. 52.

39 ABS, V-1649 MV, Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný dnešního dne na zdejším velitelství s Krausem, Erichem, 5. prosince 1951.

still alive, he was the subject of a long investigation as a suspected collaborator.

The Prague JRC and Council of Elders avoided the extensive interference of the *Zentralstelle* in terms of personnel, and almost none of the leaders fully collaborated with the SS.[40] Erich Kraus believed that one of the main reasons for the lack of outsiders or people at the top seeking personal benefits was that the JRC structures were formed at moments when working for the community was not seen as desirable. The JRC expanded their administration for the first time in 1939, when such appointments prevented individuals from emigrating.[41] The Council of Jewish Elders was reconstructed in mid-1943, and its leaders came from the ranks of those living in mixed marriages. At this point in time, most of the remaining Jews tried to avoid exposed positions, hoping that their marriage offered the best possible protection. Leading positions and being in constant contact with the SS and Gestapo did not fit this plan.[42]

There were only two main exceptions when prominent positions in the JRC in Prague were staffed according to direct orders from the *Zentralstelle*.[43] First, in 1939, the *Zentralstelle* appointed Richard Israel Friedmann to a leadership position in the JRC; Friedmann was ordered to move to Prague from Vienna to help organize the emigration agenda.[44] The second direct appointee was one of the most controversial characters in Prague, Robert Mandler. He too came from Vienna already before the war, and after the German invasion, he arranged illegal transports to Palestine. Historians and survivors accused him of extracting large sums of money from people desperate to flee but he, in the end, did not help them escape.[45] The *Zentralstelle* appointed Mandler to a key position, and between 1941 and 1943, he and his team—called the "Circus" by survivors—served as the on-the-ground organizers of the deportations to Theresienstadt. At a crucial moment, the SS selected an outsider and a questionable character to instigate conflict and mistrust within the

40 JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 76, Židovské organizace za okupace (prepared by Erich Kraus in 1955); folder 76, Erich Kraus to Kurt Wehle, January 7-16, 1980.

41 JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 76, Kraus to Wehle, January 7-16, 1980.

42 Ibid. Kraus's opinion was not shared by all survivors. H. G. Adler held the opposite view. See Adler, "The 'Autonomous' Jewish Administration of Terezín," 72-76.

43 JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 82, Židovské organizace za okupace (prepared by Erich Kraus in 1955).

44 Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter YVA), O.64.2/93, Protocol with Cäcilie Friedmann, Prague, December, 5, 1945.

45 Bondy, *"Elder of the Jews" Jakob Edelstein of Theresienstadt*.

community. Mandler did not have any local ties, and it is also possible that his previous problematic behavior made him a perfect candidate for this position. Mandler thus fits neatly into the theory proposed by Weiss.[46] After the war, one survivor, Max Berger, suggested that Mandler "behaved like an SS man toward us. Only the Jewish origin of this man was an obstacle to his becoming a member of the SS. Both he and his gang could not be deterred from beating the Jews."[47] Later, the SS Office in Theresienstadt placed Mandler on the last train to Auschwitz, where he was gassed in late October 1944.[48]

Although only a small number of people who were willing to overtly collaborate with the SS reached the higher ranks of the JRC, unsubstantiated allegations of Jewish leaders' collaboration with the SS or Gestapo often circulated in communities. Such accusations could stem from the fact that especially in smaller towns, Jewish leaders had to personally report to local Gestapo offices on a regular basis, which fueled rumours.[49]

The JRC: Strategies and Role in the Deportations

The Jewish community's opinions of Jewish Elders were often conditioned by the perception of leaders' willingness to either oppose or fulfill German orders and not necessarily by the real actions of the leaders. Historians suggest that there were four major patterns of behavior among council leaders in Nazi-occupied Poland, ranging from the complete refusal to cooperate with the German authorities to full cooperation, including in deportations, with the intention to "safeguard personal interests."[50] Based on these patterns, the Prague Jewish leadership—though working under different conditions due to the milder occupation in Bohemia and Moravia—came closer to the third pattern: "Sacrificing portions of the Jewish population, thereby hoping to save others."[51] Despite some

46 Weiss, "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland." This happened also in the provinces. For example, in Mladá Boleslav, Hugo Kaiser, a refugee from the Sudetenland, entered the service of the local Gestapo and, as a reward, could stay in the town longer than the rest of the community. SOA Praha, Krajský soud Mladá Boleslav, sign. Tk VIIa 46/47.

47 YVA, O.7.cz/222, Testimony of Max Berger, undated (1945).

48 "Robert Mandler" in the database of Holocaust victims. Institute of Terezín Initiative. See: https://www.holocaust.cz/databaze-obeti/obet/108575-robert-mandler/.

49 Veselská, "'Sie müssen sich als Jude dessen bewusst sein, welche Opfer zu tragen sind …,'" 155.

50 Weiss, "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland," 467; Trunk, *Judenrat*, 420.

51 Weiss, "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland," 467.

criticism leveled against the leaders, there were rarely allegations that they acted out of self-interest.[52]

Jewish leaders in the Protectorate helped enforce all anti-Jewish measures, coordinated the registration of the Jews, helped secure their assets, and also helped organize deportations. At the same time, the general assessment of the Jewish leaders was never overtly negative. Many of them, including Edelstein, Weidmann, Otto Zucker, and František Friedmann, were officially praised immediately after the war for their work for the community in such extreme conditions.[53] The leaders initially believed that the main way to protect Jews was to emigrate, and later to try to help them survive until the liberation. But they soon realized that the SS could quickly radicalize their policies toward the Jews. In October 1939, Jews from parts of the Protectorate experienced the first deportations to the so-called Lublin Reservation in eastern Poland. Shocked by this action, Edelstein and Richard Israel Friedmann, who traveled with the deportees, returned to Prague convinced that any further deportations to occupied Poland had to be avoided at all costs because Czech Jews would not be able to survive in the conditions of eastern Poland.[54]

Historian Peter Longerich has cogently argued that most Jewish leaders in Europe "were guided by the idea that the Germans were pursuing a rationally comprehensible goal and that their behaviour was ultimately calculable or predictable."[55] Edelstein's strategy, which he pursued in Prague as well as in Theresienstadt, was to present the Jews as an essential workforce that the Germans could use for their war economy ("rescue-through-work").[56] The Jewish leadership even accepted the creation of Theresienstadt with relief, believing it was preferable to further deportations to the east, which nevertheless soon followed. Although Edelstein and the rest of the Jewish leaders ultimately failed, it was not due to a lack of effort on their side. Even Adler, one of the harshest critics, eventually recognized that Edelstein and his colleagues were guided by

52 ABS, V-1649 MV, Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný dnešního dne na zdejším velitelství s Krausem, Erichem, 5. prosince 1951. Some survivors accused Kraus of collaborating with the SS to protect his mother, who was not deported. Additionally, Friedmann's Jewish relatives were not deported.

53 Dr. E. Ornsteinová, "Vzpomínka na Jakuba Edelsteina," *Věstník*, October 28, 1945, 3/VII, 19; František Fuchs, "Dr František Weidmann," *Věstník*, October 28, 1946, 12/VIII, 107; Dr. H. Kafka, "Dr František Friedmann," *Věstník*, June 3, 1946, 6/VIII, 52.

54 Bondy, *"Elder of the Jews" Jakob Edelstein of Theresienstadt*, 219.

55 Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 170.

56 Thieberger and Stein, "Die Juden zur Zeit des Protektorates in Böhmen und Mähren-Schlesien," 3 and 10.

good intentions, though he also questioned the methods they used and what he critically perceived as an abandonment of the weaker parts of the community, including the elderly, in Theresienstadt.[57] The Jewish leaders themselves recognized their precarious relationship with the community and already during the war sought informal scrutiny from their colleagues.[58]

The main point of contention was the Jewish leaders' participation in the selection of deportees. Local Jewish representatives in smaller places in the Protectorate did not face this dilemma as the entire community was deported to Theresienstadt within several days. In Prague, with its large community, the selection for individual transports between October 1941 and July 1943 seemed to be entirely random.[59] Contemporary sources metaphorically compared the gradual process of deportation to the children's game *Plumpsack* (in English: Duck, Duck, Goose). Nobody knew who the next victim would be.[60] But there were also rumors about cases of bribery by rich individuals whose names were subsequently removed from deportation lists or that good contacts in the Jewish town hall could provide at least some protection.[61] Overall, while survivor testimonies differ in small details, the consensus has been that the *Zentralstelle* played the main role in the selection, and the JRC only had limited ability to change the deportation lists. This contrasted with the situation in other places, including Theresienstadt.[62]

After the war, Karel Gross, who had worked for and for some time led the transport department of the Prague JRC described the selection as follows:

> The transport lists were compiled at the *Zentralstelle* … The list of persons included in the transport was handed over by the Germans to the JRC, and the latter had the obligation to notify these persons.

57 Adler, "The 'Autonomous' Jewish Administration of Terezín," 72-76.

58 Fuchs, "Dr František Weidmann," 107.

59 Jiří Weil, *Život s hvězdou* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1990), 103-106. Although Weil wrote a novel, it was based on his personal experiences and completed shortly after the war.

60 Bader, *Life and Love in Nazi Prague*, 158.

61 Chava Pressburger, *The Diary of Petr Ginz 1941-1942* (Sydney: Picador, 2007), 123.

62 SOA Litoměřice, MLS Litoměřice, Lsp 441/47, Vilém Cantor, protocol, March 5, 1947; Ludvík Robert Weinberger, protocol, January 24, 1947. In Theresienstadt, the SS Office gave instructions about the groups of prisoners who would be included in (or excluded from) the following transports, but the Council of Jewish Elders compiled the lists. The situation in Prague resembled that in Vienna. See Doron Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews: The Jewish Administration of Holocaust Vienna, 1938–1945* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 99-108.

> Deported persons were called regularly 2-3 days before boarding the transport, but it very often happened that this period was shortened so that the deportees had a few hours left, sometimes only 1 hour, before they had to arrive at the assembly point. It also happened that the person in question was summoned to the *Zentralstelle* and from there was sent without luggage to Terezín.[63]

The *Zentralstelle* had a copy of the registration catalog of all Jews in Prague and randomly selected those to be deported, though sometimes they picked specific people—as a form of punishment or for other reasons. Although Gross had good reasons to minimize the role of the JRC (and himself) in the selection process, other survivors, including Erich Kraus and Karel Stein, confirmed his description of the process.[64]

Others ascribed more responsibility to the JRC. Rabbi Richard Feder and the famous composer Karel Reiner both suggested that the JRC was deeply involved in selections, and Reiner went as far as accusing the leaders of intentionally getting rid of unwanted people or those who did not belong to particular ideological or economic groups.[65] Other sources then suggest that the JRC created a list of people who were protected against deportation, at least for the time being, until the summer of 1943. Indeed, most of the survivors involved in the process agreed that the *Zentralstelle* always selected between 1,200 and 1,300 names, and the JRC had to return the final list of 1,000 names, which allowed them to remove JRC employees, their family members, and other protected individuals from the transports. Although the JRC's room to maneuver was restricted, it did not completely foreclose options for protectionism and bribery.[66] Adler, for example, in this context wrote about "shady machinations" at the top of the JRC.[67] Even Cäcilie Friedmann, who otherwise defended the memory of her late husband Richard Israel, admitted that the "limited right of reclamation … became the focus of protection possibilities"

63 SOA Praha, MLS Praha, Lsp 2876/46, Záznam pro vedení, November 3, 1946, Dr. Karel Gross.

64 ABS, V-1649 MV, Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný dnešního dne na zdejším velitelství s Krausem, Erichem, 5. prosince 1951. See also the Protocol with Cäcilie Friedmann, Prague, December, 5, 1945: YVA, O.64.2/93; Archiv Hlavního města Prahy, 36-13908, affidavit by Karel Stein, January 25, 1947.

65 Richard Feder, *Židovská tragedie: dějství poslední* (Kolín: Lusk, 1947), 34; JMP, Karel Reiner, *Naše činnost 1939-1944*. I would like to thank Benjamin Frommer for sharing this information and document with me.

66 ABS, V-1649 MV, Záznam, September 20, 1951.

67 Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-1945*, 55.

and that "ideal conditions did not prevail …The Community of Jews was no worse, but also no better, than [those] in the outside world."[68]

The JRC leadership certainly had more leverage when the *Zentralstelle* ordered the deportation of JRC employees. The JRC created a special commission that decided the order in which the employees would gradually be deported. According to Kraus, first they sent those who were not necessary for advancing the JRC's agenda as well as younger and healthier people who, in their opinion, could better cope with the conditions in Theresienstadt.[69] The situation changed in the final months of the war, when the *Zentralstelle* ordered the deportation of those living in "mixed marriages," including a large segment of the staff of the Council of Jewish Elders. In this case, the council was tasked with creating a list of employees unnecessary for the work associated with the final liquidation of the agenda in Prague. They complied, and those who were sent to the ghetto in these final transports were some of the most vocal critics of the Jewish leaders after the war.[70] They were selected for the deportation in the final months of the war and evidently considered this a betrayal on the part of their colleagues, who, at least in their opinion, should not have followed Nazi instructions until the very end.

Assessment of the Prague JRC and the Limits of Resistance

"It was the saddest chapter in the history of the venerable Prague JRC," when it became the "tool of the enemy" who wanted to destroy all the Jews. These comments concerning the recent past were made in 1945 by Kurt Wehle, the postwar secretary of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. Wehle worked for the Prague JRC until 1943, when he was deported to Theresienstadt and later Auschwitz. But his comments were not intended to blame Jewish leaders. Although the Nazis planned to utilize parts of the victim community to help with persecution, Wehle continued, "they did not count on … the courage and intelligence of their victims, their manliness, determination, and fighting spirit, their moral strength and their sense of responsibility."[71]

68 Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-1945*, 663, quoting from Cäcilie Friedmann's testimony submitted in 1945: YVA, O.64/93.

69 ABS, V-1649 MV, Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný dnešního dne na zdejším velitelství s Krausem, Erichem, 17. prosince 1951.

70 SOA Praha, Krajský soud trestní v Praze, spis. zn. Tk XVIII—16146/47.

71 Kurt Wehle, "Židovská náboženská obec za okupace a po osvobození ČSR," *Věstník*, September 1, 1945, I/VII, 1945, 3.

The JRC could not prevent the Nazis from executing their eliminationist program, but through their cleverness, they could "delay, mitigate, sabotage; they could achieve some concessions and small successes; they could push through proposals and even save certain assets."[72] Overall, Wehle asserted, the JRC behaved "honorably." Erich Kraus also believed that, on balance, the Jews benefited from the JRC's existence. He emphasized the support it provided in connection with emigration and vocational retraining, its attempts to delay the implementation of Nazi orders, its educational and cultural activities, provision of social welfare in Prague and for those deported, as well as the mere existence of a "Jewish space" in the Jewish town hall where they could meet and converse undisturbed.[73] Similar sentiments have recently been echoed in Gruner's comprehensive analysis: "Despite the strict surveillance … the Prague Jewish Community did not allow Eichmann's Central Office [*Zentralstelle*] to turn it into a mere organ of policy implementation."[74]

Others challenged this heroic narrative. Rothkirchen suggested that the JRC's policies of "retardation," of slowing down persecution, were successful only in the initial period, until the main wave of deportations commenced in October 1941.[75] Similarly, survivors expressed sentiments of distrust and resentment toward the Jewish town hall. Postwar Jewish leaders repeatedly turned to the Jewish public with appeals not to condemn the wartime JRC, and *Věstník*, the official community journal, published celebratory obituaries of the leaders who perished. They even asserted that thanks to the efforts of Edelstein and Weidmann, parts of the Jewish community survived until the liberation.[76] The existence of such articles and their tone indirectly imply an effort to reestablish trust between the community and its new leadership.

The truth remains that the real and imagined privileges the JRC employees enjoyed during the war estranged them from the community. Many believed that corruption, nepotism, and favoritism guided the decisions in the JRC, for example, about the allocation of work assignments, social support, and housing.[77] Jiří Weil, in the semi-autobiographical novel *Life with the Star* published shortly after the war, aptly

72 Ibid.
73 JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 82, Erich Kraus, "Cíle ŽNO a ŽRS" (1955).
74 Gruner, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia*, 397.
75 Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 134.
76 Ornsteinová, "Vzpomínka na Jakuba Edelsteina," 19; Fuchs, "Dr František Weidmann," 107.
77 Heda Kaufmannová, *Léta 1938-1945. Válečné vzpomínky* (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR 1999), 75.

characterized the Jewish town hall as a bureaucratic maze, with cold bureaucrats sworn to secrecy, unwilling or unable to reveal the real direction of persecution. The mentality of "them"—the JRC—against "us"—the wider community—was clearly present.[78] Troublemakers among Jewish claimants could easily be punished with worse accommodations or harsher labor assignments.[79] Adler also believed that the speed with which the JRC had to hire new employees in the initial period led to a situation in which "people with different talents, attitudes, political persuasion, and ethical values remained members."[80] But psychology, stress, and anxiety also played an important role. Victims overestimated the influence of the Jewish town hall. Any refusal to help could immediately be interpreted as a sign of corruption or an abuse of power. Doron Rabinovici, concerning this context, observed the following in relation to the Jewish Community Office in Vienna: "The powerlessness of the Jewish institutions was seen by the Jews as an unwillingness to help and their lack of authority as indifference."[81]

This resentment was often more forcefully voiced by members of the younger assimilated generation with secular leanings, especially if they were involved in anti-German resistance. One such person, Heda Kaufmannová, who went into hiding when she was summoned for deportation, described her perception of the Jewish town hall in her memoirs:

> This was the grim, worn out, sweaty, desperate reality of pre-hell; an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, anger, hatred … The JRC officials, who every now and then caught slaps and kicks from the masters at the *Zentralamt*, often could not stand the tension and in another form spread the thunder down to the subordinates, and they, in turn, to the frightened arrivals. It was absurd and undignified … When the Jewish clerk at the JRC, a man with an academic degree, yelled at me because he had to react to the feeling of fear and humiliation from the brass-hat manners of the men from the *Zentralamt*, then it was understandable, but it was outrageous and disgusting. After all, he rode on the same board as all those with the star, who at that moment depended on his delegated power—and he played for them, presumptuously, the role of an overlord; at that moment, he did not realize that he would follow the same path the *Zentralamt* was prepar-

78 Weil, *Život s hvězdou*, 17, 64, 114-15.
79 Bader, *Life and Love in Nazi Prague*, 117.
80 Adler, "The 'Autonomous' Jewish Administration of Terezín," 71.
81 Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews*, 71.

> ing, for the time being secretly, with his perhaps unconscious help: at the end of it, the chimneys of the crematoria were smoking.[82]

The perception of the JRC differed from person to person. Marie Bader was in her mid-fifties early in the war. In the letters she sent her old friend in Thessaloniki, Greece, she often alluded to the situation at the JRC. Although critical of the immense bureaucracy, she believed that individual claimants often contributed to the tense atmosphere. Early in the war, the JRC had to find accommodations for all the Jews in Prague who lived outside the allotted districts. The shortage of accommodations meant that in most cases, several families had to share an apartment or even a room divided by furniture. These housing conditions triggered conflicts:

> And then along came someone else to share the room who brought with her enough furniture for two rooms, who argues every day with the landlady, and there is a constant danger that the two women will fly at each other. Horrible scenes like that are now unfortunately the order of the day among our co-religionists, and the [JRC] is fully engaged with settling quarrels. Unfortunately most of the Prague families who have to let out part of their flats are very unreasonable and unkind and see others as intruders.[83]

The JRC, thus, functioned as middlemen not only between the *Zentralstelle* and the Jews but also between different Jewish factions, trying to settle quarrels. Anxious claimants, who were gradually losing their entire life savings, belongings, and social status, had to queue for hours with groups of similarly desperate people. This led to heightened sensitivity and perceptions that JRC employees demonstrated a lack of empathy for the plight of the claimants:

> One gets very angry when one goes to the Jewish office, where I was just now about the business with the flat. One has to wait for hours with a number and then watch as a lot of people who haven't registered go in first. Then, when it's finally one's turn, one is told by the official on some pretext to come back another day when it suits him better.[84]

But there is also the other side of the coin. Recently, in connection with the relationship between the JRCs and ordinary Jews, historians have

82 Kaufmannová, *Léta 1938-1945*, 76.
83 Bader, *Life and Love in Nazi Prague*, 92.
84 Bader, *Life and Love in Nazi Prague*, 113; See also: Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews*, 96.

begun to pay more attention to the resistance of Jewish community bodies, pointing to various administrative interventions and petitions that helped slow down the impact of the Nazi anti-Jewish measures.[85] Support for emigration, including help with the completion of all the necessary paperwork, and the administration of retraining and vocational courses belong in this category as well. The JRC's efforts to provide Jews for forced labor and Edelstein's idea to present the Jews as an essential workforce have also been considered acts of resistance in the sense that their aim was to save many Jews and delay deportations. Others have discussed cases of relief activities and social services for the Jewish community, and later for those imprisoned in the Theresienstadt ghetto and other concentration camps. The JRC, its employees, and their family members (such as Heinz Prossnitz) sent thousands of food parcels to the ghetto and to those deported further east.[86]

These attempts to help had limits. Jewish representatives could look for small holes in Nazi orders, but their exposed position made them the easy targets of Nazi revenge and, consequently, necessarily limited their capacity to resist. In the autumn of 1943, a woman with a daughter came to the JRC office in Prague seeking help. They had been living in hiding but had to leave their hiding place and had nowhere to go. The Jewish leaders, represented at that time by Friedmann, persuaded the mother that the best option was to contact the *Zentralstelle*. They reported that two persons who had not appeared for a deportation transport were now willing to go to Theresienstadt voluntarily. Awaiting the response, somebody leaked the information to the Gestapo, who immediately arrived and detained not only the mother and daughter but also Friedmann and three other employees of the Council of Jewish Elders. The Gestapo held Friedmann for a week and the rest for almost a month before they released them with a strong warning.[87] The mother and daughter were sent to the concentration camp but survived.

This proved to be sufficient warning. In January 1945, the evacuation transports with prisoners from Auschwitz were passing through the Protectorate on their way to the remaining concentration camps in the west. Some of the prisoners, freezing to death and dying of starvation in open

85 Gruner, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia*, 396-98.

86 JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 82, Židovské organizace za okupace (prepared by Erich Kraus in 1955); folder 76, Erich Kraus to Kurt Wehle, January 7, 1980; Ruth Bondy, "Ein Brotwunder. Das Hilfswerk von Heinz Prossnitz," in *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 1999* (1999), 76-104.

87 ABS, V-1649 MV, Zápis o výpovědi sepsaný dnešního dne na zdejším velitelství s Krausem, Erichem, 5. prosince 1951.

train carriages, attempted to escape. A group of escapees came to the Jewish town hall in Prague. The employees immediately reported the cases to the Gestapo, who took the escapees either to Pankrác prison or the Small Fortress of Terezín, where they soon perished due to the inhumane conditions. After the war, Erich Kraus suggested that council members were concerned that it could be a provocation because one of the escapees immediately began to share details about life in Auschwitz. Furthermore, too many people were present, which made it very likely that the Gestapo would soon be informed. At the same time, the Jewish leaders requested that a police patrol be placed in front of the Jewish town hall: "this was to warn any other escapees not to enter" and to protect the council as well.[88]

Epilogue

In the 1970s, the New York-based Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews was preparing the publication of their third volume on the Jews of Czechoslovakia, which focused on the Holocaust. Rothkirchen, the eminent Yad Vashem historian and survivor, contributed a key chapter, which also dealt with the history of the JRCs during the German occupation. The editors sent a draft to Erich Kraus, and his emotional response clearly expressed his disappointment and anger:

> Why is it assumed by … R[othkirchen]… that the existence and activity of JRC and Jewish Council of Elders was evil, caused by isufficient bravery, insufficient foresight, insufficient selflessness of their officials? With such an a priori attitude, is objectivity even possible?[89]

Kraus continued:

> With bare hands and without any rights, to be given over to the will of sadists, competing with each other in cruelty—that was the fate of the individual. In addition, the leaders were responsible for the consequences of each of their actions for the collective, without any possibility of public relations, justification, defense. This was no time for heroic poses and exalted actions.[90]

88 Ibid.
89 JMP, Kurt Wehle Collection, folder 76, Kraus to Kurt Wehle, January 7-16, 1980.
90 Ibid.

Kraus defended the Jewish leaders, believing that a lot of the criticism of the JRC originated from a lack of understanding of the immense pressure—from both the German occupation authorities and the Jewish population in the Protectorate—the Jewish leaders experienced.

In the Protectorate, the Jewish leadership mainly chose the path of compliance and cooperation. This helped approximately 26,000 Jews emigrate before the borders were slammed shut in October 1941. But their help had limits. Once the second registration was initiated and, not long after, the deportations started in October 1941, the community leadership found itself in a race against time. Survivors who served in the community leadership as well as some historians asserted that it was thanks to Edelstein's negotiations that the *Zentralstelle* agreed to create a ghetto in the Protectorate—in Theresienstadt—which at least temporarily postponed the dreaded deportation to Nazi-occupied Poland: "This would buy us time," they believed.[91] Yet the first transport to the East—to Riga—left the ghetto after only six weeks. The Jewish leadership pursued the strategy of "rescue-through-work," which required their cooperation with the Nazi authorities in the deportations. This mirrored what Beate Meyer called the "fatal balancing act" of the German-Jewish leadership.[92] In contrast, Rothkirchen, still one of the most prominent historians on this topic, characterized this period as one defined by "a total compliance" of the JRC, which did not generate any tangible benefit for the Jews.[93]

In May 1945, only small groups of Jews—around 2,803 individuals—remained in Prague and the rest of the Protectorate. They either managed to avoid the last deportation to Theresienstadt in 1945 through individual acts of resistance or they were temporarily allowed to stay and finish the liquidation of the structures of the Council of Jewish Elders. The reckoning came soon enough. Kraus, the last deputy elder, had to undergo lengthy retributory investigations carried out within the Jewish community as well as by the state judicial system. Although all the courts eventually acquitted him, doubt and suspicion in the community remained. This experience was shared by other Jewish leaders, including Benjamin Murmelstein, the last elder of Theresienstadt, who although never sentenced, suffered social ostracism until the end of his life.[94]

91 Thieberger and Stein, "Die Juden zur Zeit des Protektorates in Böhmen und Mähren-Schlesien," 8.

92 Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act*.

93 Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 135.

94 Ronny Loewy and Katharina Rauschenberger, eds., *"Der Letzte der Ungerechten": Der "Judenälteste" Benjamin Murmelstein in Filmen 1942-1975* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 2011).

Doron Rabinovici

Representatives of Powerlessness: Viennese Jewish Functionaries in the Era of National Socialist Persecution

Who presided over the Viennese Jewish community when it became the tool of the perpetrators of the Holocaust? Who were the Jewish functionaries who had to announce National Socialist decrees and pass along orders from the SS to their community? These Jewish functionaries enforced the segregation, identification, and registration of victims. In doing so, they initially enabled emigration and then, ultimately, mass murder. Where did they come from, and what became of those functionaries who survived after 1945?

In the 1930s, Vienna had the largest Jewish population of any city in the German-speaking world. The 1934 census counted 191,481 Austrian Jews, 2.8 percent of the entire Austrian population at the time. But by March 11, 1938, probably due to the antisemitic climate—in addition to other political and economic reasons—and despite the influx of refugees from the German Reich, the Jewish population in Austria had dropped to 185,028. The Jewish community of Vienna in 1934 numbered 176,034 members, 9.4 percent of the city's population.[1] Outside Vienna, there were thirty-four Jewish communities in various towns and cities across the country before 1938. The *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* (IKG), which fulfilled functions similar to that of "Jewish Councils" elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe during the National Socialist era, was the only official representative organ of Jews in Austria.

The functionaries who worked for the IKG under National Socialism had already been active representatives of the Jewish community before

1 Jewish Community of Vienna, ed. *Report of the Vienna Jewish Community* (Vienna, 1940); Herbert Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung. Die Juden in Österreich 1938-1945* (Vienna: Herold, 1978), 13.

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1938. After 1945, however, those who had worked for the IKG as leading functionaries during the Nazi period were no longer permitted to hold such positions within the postwar Jewish community.[2]

The Decapitation of the Kultusgemeinde

On March 16, 1938, a few days after the so-called *Anschluss*—the German annexation of Austria—the Gestapo stormed the offices of the IKG. Two days later, on March 18, 1938, Reich Commissar Josef Bürckel ordered the liquidation of all organizations unless they were "to fulfill vital tasks for the state and social obligations to its members."[3] The IKG was one of the organizations not considered "vital." On the same day, SS officer Adolf Eichmann initiated an SS raid on the main office of the IKG.[4] Eichmann had come to Vienna from Berlin on March 16th, and he also took part in the raid.[5] Thereafter, Eichmann as the representative of department II-112 of the SS Security Service (SD) began to coordinate antisemitic policies in Austria.[6]

During the raid on the IKG's office building on March 18, President Desider Friedmann, vice presidents Josef Ticho and Robert Stricker—the latter a former Zionist member of the Austrian parliament—administrative director Josef Löwenherz, and numerous heads of the IKG board, including the president of the Zionist National Association for Austria Jakob Ehrlich, were arrested.[7] The Jewish community was now at

2 Compare: Doron Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht. Wien 1938-1945. Der Weg zum Judenrat* (Frankfurt a. M.: Jüdischer Verlag, 2000); and Doron Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews: The Jewish Administration Of Holocaust Vienna, 1938-1945* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

3 Dieter J. Hecht, Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, and Michaela Raggam-Blesch, *Topographie der Shoah. Gedächtnisorte des zerstörten jüdischen Wien* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2018), 122-27; Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht,* 69-81; Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 34.

4 Leo Landau, in "Wien von 1909 bis 1939. Mitglied des Vorstandes der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde," report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959; YvS-01/244; 11.

5 Hans Safrian, *Eichmann's Men* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27. In his recollections, Charles J. Kapralik dates the first raid on the IKG as March 15, 1938 and says that Eichmann was already present. See: Charles J. Kapralik, "Erinnerungen eines Beamten der Wiener Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde 1938-39," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 58 (1981): 52-78.

6 Dan Michman, "roschut u manhigut. Judenrat' we 'ichud yehudim' b'jamei haschilton hanazi" (unpublished manuscript, August 1997), 31-41.

7 I. Klaber, "Report on the IKG Vienna 1938," noted in 1944 by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, Yad veShem01/74; Leo Landau, in "Wien von 1909 bis 1939. Mitglied des Vorstandes

the mercy of its persecutors as it lacked the support of its own organization. The remaining functionaries who had not been arrested attempted to temporarily preserve the organization and reopen the IKG.

During the raid, SS personnel found a donation receipt in connection with the referendum planned by Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg that indicated the IKG's opposition to Austria's unification with the German Reich; this receipt, in turn, was a welcome pretext to demand a 500,000 Reichsmark penalty, which was equivalent to the IKG's original donation. The head of the IKG's welfare office, Emil Engel, and the head of its youth welfare office, Rosa Rachel Schwarz, had managed to rescind the money from the Schuschnigg election fund.[8] Immediately after the closure of the IKG, Engel and Schwarz used these funds—unofficially—to help Jews in need. Various members of the community met as if by chance in coffeehouses or in the Jewish Rothschild hospital to donate money to those who were impoverished.[9] This financial assistance was greatly needed since most Jews had been deprived of their livelihoods due to work bans and "Aryanization" policies, as well as through manhunts and the newly established system of terror. Moreover, because the IKG was closed, social support could hardly be provided in an organized or systematic manner. Because the number of people in need of food assistance increased from 800 to 8,000 during this period, Jewish officials hoped they would receive permission to re-establish the IKG.[10]

der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde," report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959, YvS-01/244, 34.

8 Leo Landau, in "Wien von 1909 bis 1939; Mitglied des Vorstandes der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde," report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959, YvS-01/244, 11.

9 Leo Landau, in "Wien von 1909 bis 1939. Mitglied des Vorstandes der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde," report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959, YvS-01/244, 11; Willy Stern, interview by the author, June 7, 1989; Rosa Rachel Schwarz, "Zwei Jahre Fürsorge der Kultusgemeinde Wien unter Hitler," Yad Vashem Archives (Tel-Aviv, Mai 14, 1944), 2.

10 Leo Lauterbach, "The Jewish Situation in Austria. Report Submitted to the Executive of the Zionist Organization," strictly confidential, April 29, 1938, Zionist Central Archives, S25-981, 7 (hereafter Lauterbach, S25-981); Samuel Graumann, *Deportiert! Ein Wiener Jude berichtet* (Vienna: Stern Verlag, 1947), 26.

The Reorganization of the Kultusgemeinde

In the second half of March 1938, Adolf Eichmann summoned the heads of Jewish organizations to the Palestine Office, a Zionist institution of the Jewish Agency, which worked to encourage Jewish immigration to Palestine. Eichmann proceeded to insult, threaten, and mock representatives of the Jewish organizations.[11] But despite the terror he spread, Jewish leaders concluded from this meeting that Eichmann was interested in continuing the work of the IKG, albeit through a completely different structure. At this point, the National Socialist leaders aimed primarily at the targeted expulsion of the Jews. To achieve this goal—which entailed backpedaling their initial efforts to dismantle the IKG, Nazi functionaries now recognized that it was important that Jewish functionaries continued their activities.[12]

Eichmann instructed Josef Löwenherz, the director of the IKG administration (*Amtsdirektor*) who was still imprisoned, to draw up a plan for 25,000 destitute Jews to emigrate from Austria in 1938.[13] Initially, Eichmann urged Adolf Böhm to assume leadership of the community and the Palestine Office. Böhm was a merchant, the owner of a cotton wool factory, and the chairman of the Jewish National Fund. He was also a board member of the IKG and was the highly respected author of a two-volume history of the Zionist movement. However, Adolf Böhm was deemed too old and ill for this role.[14] In April 1941, Böhm was suffering from a severe nervous condition he contracted in 1938 after his encounters with Eichmann. He was killed in 1941 in Hartheim within the framework of the T4 euthanasia program.[15]

Instead of Böhm, the younger Alois Rothenberg became the head of the Palestine Office. The Gestapo told him that he had to liaise between the German authorities and Zionist organizations.[16] The Zionist envoy Georg Landauer described Rothenberg as "a well-intentioned, hard-working, but weak, very sick Zionist, completely exhausted by dealing with the Gestapo, and sometimes even shy." According to Landauer,

11 William R. Perl, *Operation Action: Rescue from the Holocaust* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1983), 10-12.

12 Letter to Ch. Barlass, Jewish Agency, Jerusalem, unsigned, Strictly Confidential, Zurich, May 7, 1938, Central Zionist Archives, S6-4564, 2 (hereafter Barlass, S6-4564).

13 Barlass, S6-4564, 2.

14 Lauterbach, S25-981, 9.

15 Hecht, Lappin-Eppel, and Raggam-Blesch, *Topographie der Shoah*, 125.

16 Barlass, S6-4564, 5.

Rothenberg sought to avoid anything that might provoke the objection of the Gestapo.[17]

Eichmann ordered Josef Löwenherz, who had been arrested, to work out a strategy to enable 25,000 Jews without means to emigrate from Austria that same year. On April 20, 1938, Eichmann had Löwenherz released from prison.[18] Rothenberg was ordered to work out a draft for a Zionist Central Association in five days and enclose a list of names of members for its advisory council. Löwenherz had to draw up a plan for the IKG with precise information concerning appointments and personnel.[19] Eichmann would not allow Löwenherz and Rothenberg to put any "organized assimilationists" on the list, i. e., members of the *Union Österreichischer Juden* (Union of Austrian Jews).[20] Moreover, Eichmann did not accept Löwenherz's initial plans.[21]

Löwenherz had been a member of the IKG Board since 1924 and later became vice president.[22] In 1936, he had moved to the post of *Amtsdirektor*.[23] President Desider Friedmann, Vice President Robert Stricker, and the president of the Zionist National Association for Austria Jakob Ehrlich had been deported to Dachau concentration camp in 1938. The decision of Friedmann and Stricker not to be restored to their former leading positions as the political heads of the Jewish community may also have been related to the fact that Friedmann and Stricker were members of the Jewish fraternal organization *B'nai B'rith*. The Nazis considered this association to be a hostile global Jewish organization. Friedmann's support for the Austrian government prior to the annexation also militated against his reinstatement as IKG president. Both Friedmann and Stricker remained in contact with Löwenherz, and both defended the IKG's strategy of cooperation in the deportations, even while in Theresienstadt.[24] Jakob Ehrlich

17 Internal, confidential report by Dr. Georg Landauer, Trieste, to Dr. Martin Rosenblüth, London, England, on his experiences in Vienna, May 9, 1938, CZA, S-5/439, quoted in Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 73.

18 Barlass, S6-4564, 2.

19 Barlass, S6-4564, 3.

20 Barlass, S6-4564, 4.

21 Barlass, S6-4564, 4.

22 Isidor Oehler, Ansprache zum 60. Geburtstag des Amtsdirektors Dr. Josef Löwenherz, 6. 8. 1944. I would like to thank Evelyn Adunka for having given me a copy of this document.

23 Willi Ritter, interview by Herbert Rosenkranz (in Hebrew), Haifa, Israel, October 5, 1988, Yad veShem 0-3/3982, 2-3. Compare: Baruch Schnittlich, interview by Herbert Rosenkranz, Tel-Aviv, October 4, 1988, Yad veShem 0-3/6002.

24 Transcript of Siegfried Kolisch before the Vienna State Police, 30. 8. 1945, criminal case against Dr. Emil Tuchmann before the Landesgericht für Strafsachen Wien als Volksgericht, Vg 3c 1955/45, 24; Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews*, 120 and 159.

was murdered on May 17, 1938 at the SS shooting range in Prittlbach near Dachau.[25] Stricker and Friedmann were transferred from Dachau to Buchenwald in September 1938. Löwenherz negotiated their release from the camp in 1939. They were, however, banned from emigrating and were deported from Vienna to Theresienstadt in the fall of 1942, where they were appointed to the "Council of Elders." In October 1944, the two men were deported to Auschwitz and murdered immediately upon arrival together with their wives.[26]

As a lawyer, Löwenherz was familiar with bureaucratic matters. Adolf Eichmann seemed to enjoy humiliating the elder academic. For example, Eichmann offered the representative of the Graz Jewish community a chair but left Löwenherz standing during an hour-long conversation.[27] Eichmann also slapped Löwenherz in the face during their first meeting.[28]

The Jewish community of Vienna became the prototype of Jewish self-administration under National Socialist rule. The re-organized IKG was a predecessor to the *Judenräte* that were established throughout occupied Polish territory from 1939 onward.[29] Löwenherz was to be solely respon-

25 Evelyn Adunka, "Jakob und Irma Ehrlich," *Chilufim—Journal of Jewish Cultural History* 7 (2009): 205-8; Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider and Rudolf Leo, "*dachaureif." Der Österreichertransport aus Wien in das KZ Dachau am 1. April 1938* (Vienna: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, 2019), 91.

26 Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 38; Dieter J. Hecht, "Robert und Paula Stricker," *Chilufim—Journal of Jewish Cultural History* 7 (2009): 169-77; Kuretsidis and Leo, *"dachaureif,"* 106-7 and 272-73; Dieter Josef Mühl, Die "Wiener Morgenzeitung" und Robert Stricker," in *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Verfolgung. Deutsch-Jüdische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften von der Aufklärung bis zum Nationalsozialismus,* ed. Michael Nagl (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2002) 256-57. "Prominententransport," accessed August 10, 2023, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prominententransport#-Liste_der_H%C3%A4ftlinge.

27 Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 72.

28 Jochen von Lang, ed., *Das Eichmann-Protokoll. Tonbandaufzeichnungen der israelischen Verhöre* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1985), 49. Compare with Bettina Stagneth, *Eichmann vor Jerusalem. Das unbehelligte Leben eines Massenmörders* (Zurich: Arche, 2011).

29 For the discussion of the "Judenräte," I want to refer in particular to: Dan Diner, "Jenseits des Vorstellbaren. Der 'Judenrat' als Situation," in *"Gedächtniszeiten." Über jüdische und andere Geschichten* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003), 135-51; Beate Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act: The Dilemma of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, 1939-1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2013); Beate Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung. Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland zwischen Hoffnung, Zwang, Selbstbehauptung und Verstrickung (1939-1945)* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012); Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*; Dan Michman, "Judenrat," in *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur*, vol. 3, ed. Dan Diner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2012), 236-42; Dan

sible for the affairs of the institution to the new rulers. The IKG's advisory board was only permitted to support Löwenherz.[30] This body consisted of eight members, six of whom had belonged to the former board of the IKG. Three were representatives of the general Zionist faction, one was from the religious Zionist *Misrachi*, and one was from the Orthodox anti-Zionist *Aguda*. Another board member, Leo Landau, had once been a candidate for the *Jüdische Partei* (Jewish Party) and had formed a coalition with the Zionists. Two members, the Zionist R. Ornstein and the anti-Zionist and Orthodox Julius Steinfeld had not been members of the previous IKG board.[31] Representatives of the *Union Österreichischer Juden* were not allowed to sit on the IKG's advisory council. The main task of the IKG board was to facilitate the emigration of Jews from Austria—whether to Palestine or elsewhere—as quickly as possible.[32]

After September 1938, only two members of the first board appointed after the *Anschluss* remained in their positions: Leo Landau and Josef Löwenherz.[33] The head of the foreign exchange office of the IKG, Charles Kapralik, reported after the war that other functionaries and rabbis had tried to leave the country as quickly as possible. Among them was Chief Rabbi of Vienna Israel Taglicht, who, after being deported to a concentration camp, managed to escape to England with his family in 1939. According to Kapralik, a bitter *bon mot* circulated among Viennese Jews: "They have gone ahead of their community."[34] Some functionaries, for example Josef Löwenherz in 1939, traveled to foreign countries to negotiate

Michman, *Jewish Leadership in Extremis: The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 319-40; Dan Michman, "Kontroversen über die Judenräte in der jüdischen Welt 1945-2005. Das Ineinandergreifen von öffentlichem Gedächtnis und Geschichtsschreibung," in *Der Judenrat von Białystok. Dokumente aus dem Archiv des Białystoker Ghettos 1941-1943*, ed. Freia Anders, Katrin Stoll, and Karsten Wilke (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 311-17; Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

30 Hugo Gold, *Geschichte der Juden in Wien* (Tel Aviv: Ed. Olamenu, 1966), 81; Kapralik, "Erinnerungen eines Beamten der Wiener Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde 1938-39," 56.

31 I. Klaber, "Report on the IKG Vienna 1938," noted in 1944 by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, Yad veShem01/74.

32 Gold, *Geschichte der Juden in Wien*, 81.

33 Leo Landau, in "Wien von 1909 bis 1939; Mitglied des Vorstandes der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde," report noted by Dr. Ball-Kaduri, January 28, 1959 and February 22, 1959, YvS-01/244, 12.

34 Kapralik, "Erinnerungen eines Beamten der Wiener Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde 1938-39," 57.

with Jewish aid organizations but came back to Vienna. The functionaries who remained in Vienna were held responsible for the return of those who were sent abroad.[35]

The Beginning of Mass Expulsions and Changing IKG Leadership

Following the *Anschluss* and the reinstatement of the IKG, an emigration department was established. This department was placed under the care of the *Fürsorgezentrale* of the IKG.[36] Within this management structure, which was directly under the authority of Josef Löwenherz, technocrats were now needed, notably individuals who were capable of organizing the mass transport of thousands without displaying compassion for the fate of individuals. In the course of a few months, they were to gain the same prominance as those who had worked as welfare workers during the initial closure of the Jewish administrative apparatus.

Eichmann tasked Löwenherz with writing a "draft of the action program of a central office to be founded for the emigration of Austria's Jews," whereupon Löwenherz outlined an institution that would have been a kind of service point, advice center, and support office.[37] Löwenherz had no idea to what extent his intentions would be twisted in the opposite direction. Upon the establishment of the *Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung* (Central Agency for Jewish Emigration) in August 1938, which was formally led by Franz Stahlecker but effectively controlled by Adolf Eichmann, the terror against the Jews escalated.[38] Alongside the Gestapo, the *Zentralstelle* became the instrument of oppression and control of the Jewish religious community and the coordinator of Nazi "Jewish policy" in Austria. At the *Zentralstelle*, Jews were forced to hand over all their belongings. That Vienna became the model city of National Socialist "*Judenpolitik*" is clear from the fact that *Zentralstellen*

35 Josef Löwenherz, Alois Rothenberg, and Emil Engel to the Geheime Staatspolizei, Leitstelle Wien, January 4, 1939, Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, A/W-165, I, 000087.

36 34th weekly report of the IKG Vienna from January 3, 1939, at the same time, activity, and situation report for the period from May 2, 1938 to December 31, 1938, Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, A/W-165, I, 3.

37 Draft action program of a newly to be founded *Zentralstelle für Auswanderung*, no date, without authorship, Yad vaShem 030/94.

38 Gabriele Anderl and Dirk Rupnow, *Die Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung als Beraubungsinstitution* (Vienna: Oldenburg, 2004), 109-12.

für jüdische Auswanderung were subsequently established in Berlin, Prague, and Amsterdam.[39]

The Jewish functionaries of the IKG were under constant stress, and in the climate of general panic and distress, the pressure on the leading functionaries only intensified. They had to appear several times a day at Gestapo headquarters; they had to accept humiliating instructions; and they tried to negotiate with Eichmann. At the same time, they had to take care of tens of thousands of victims. Before the *Anschluss*, Rosa Schwarz, Emil Engel, and Leo Landau had engaged in humanitarian activities. Yet during the course of 1938, and especially after the November pogrom, Emil Engel was psychologically unable to cope with the visits to the Gestapo and the *Zentralstelle*.[40] In 1940, Emil Engel, Rosa Schwarz, and Leo Landau escaped to Palestine. Mass emigration now became a priority for the Viennese Jewish community. Those who had taken over the welfare tasks of the Jewish community after the *Anschluss* and were considerate of individual needs now lost their standing in the community. Technocratic organizers who displayed a certain callousness toward individual fates and knew only how to think in terms of large numbers achieved greater importance. Scholar and rabbi Doctor Benjamin Murmelstein exemplifies the latter group.

Benjamin Murmelstein, born in Lemberg in 1905, came from an Orthodox Polish Jewish family and had studied philosophy at the University of Vienna and, at the same time, the *Jüdisch-Theologische Lehranstalt* (Jewish Theological College). In 1927, Murmelstein earned his doctorate.[41] On January 1, 1931, Murmelstein took up the post of community rabbi and also taught religion at various secondary schools.[42] Also in 1931, Murmelstein began lecturing at the *Israelitisch-Theologische Lehranstalt*.[43] As luck would have it, Murmelstein lived in the same house as Josef Löwenherz. Sophie Löwenherz came to appreciate Murmelstein's organizational skills in the chaotic atmosphere of March 1938. When

39 Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*.

40 Jonny Moser, *Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein, ein ewig Beschuldigter? Theresienstadt in der Geschichte der nazistischen 'Endlösung der Judenfrage,'* typescript, Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstands 24931.89.

41 Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstands 6802, as quoted in Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 37-38.

42 Pierre Genée, Record of a two-hour interview with Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein, Rome, Italy, May 1989, 3 (hereafter Genée, interview with Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein). I would like to thank Pierre Genée for making this record available to me.

43 Board of Trustees of the Israelite Theological School to Rabbi Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein, Vienna, March 22, 1931, Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People (CAHPJ), P-151/5

Josef Löwenherz, together with the other leading functionaries, had been released from prison after his arrest in the first days after the *Anschluss*, she recommended her husband utilize the skills of the young rabbi on behalf of the IKG.[44]

Murmelstein demonstrated his abilities when he compiled statistics on Jewish emigration and welfare at Löwenherz's request. Murmelstein also wrote descriptions of the *Kultusgemeinde* for foreign aid organizations, and he wrote summaries on Jewish history, various Jewish organizations, and on religion for Eichmann. Murmelstein believed that it was necessary to confront the problems of the time with harsh resolve so that the SS would have no leverage over the Jewish community. The Jewish administration itself had to ensure discipline and order.[45]

The functionaries, who as previously mentioned already held leading positions in the pre-1938 IKG—whether in the field of social welfare (Emil Engel) or as a community rabbi (Benjamin Murmelstein), or even the *Amtsdirektor* (Josef Löwenherz)—were no longer representatives of the Jewish population; they were appointed by the National Socialists. Despite differences in their personal conduct, basically all the Jewish functionaries saw no alternative to cooperating with National Socialist and state authorities in view of their predicament.[46] Viennese Jewish associations were not subordinated to Berlin Jewish organizations but remained mostly isolated from them. The IKG had to announce when Jewish envoys arrived in Vienna from abroad.[47]

By the time the German borders were finally closed to Jewish emigration in November 1941, 128,500 Jews had managed to flee Austria, and 55,505 had made their way to other European countries, where many were now, again, threatened by the the National Socialist state.[48]

44 Genée, interview with Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein, 4.

45 See: Benjamin Murmelstein, "Das Ende von Theresienstadt. Stellungnahme eines Beteiligten," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 17, 1963, 3; Benjamin Murmelstein, "Das Ende des Ghettos Theresienstadt. Die Stellungnahme eines Beteiligten. Eine Antwort an diejenigen, die nicht dabeigewesen sind," *Die Welt*, January 14, 1964, 6.

46 See, for instance: Report on the subpoena with Commissioner Brunner of June 13, 1938, Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, A/W-301, 2.

47 For example: Josef Löwenherz and Alois Rothenberg, Memo of the meeting with SS-Hauptsturmführer Eichmann, October 29, 1938, Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, A/W-465.

48 Erika Weinzierl, *Zuwenig Gerechte. Österreicher und Judenverfolgung 1938-1945* (Graz: Styria, 1969), 52.

IKG Administration during Deportation and Extermination

As soon as the numbers of Jewish refugees dropped, Eichmann threatened the remaining Jews in Austria with anti-Jewish measures and antisemitic pogroms. On June 16, 1940, Josef Löwenherz appeared before Eichmann and reported on a directive issued by the Ministry of the Interior calling for the IKG registers to be handed over to the city administration on June 30, 1940.[49] Deportations were not yet mentioned in this regulation. Löwenherz was still trying to help Jews flee Austria. On October 13, 1940, the Gestapo informed him that a ration card register had to be established for the 60,000 Jews who remained in the country, including nonpracticing Jews. The IKG was ordered to assign thirty people to set up this central register. From November 1, 1940 on, the ration cards of all registered Jews had the word "*Jude*" stamped on them.[50] Anyone, young or old, who wanted to eat had to be registered. The Jewish administration was deceived. The register that had been ostensibly created to centralize the coordination of food rations was used to maintain a record to enable the exploitation of the Jews and, eventually, help facilitate their deportation and murder.

During the first deportations in spring 1941, emigration from Vienna was still possible, so by the end of the year, more than 6,000 persecuted people were able to escape the Third Reich. In November 1941, Alois Brunner—who had officially been appointed head of the Vienna Central Office in January of that year, but who had already assumed de facto leadership in 1939 after Eichmann left Vienna—informed Löwenherz that Jewish IKG personnel was required to assist the SS in forcing Jews out of their apartments and into assembly camps (*Sammellager*) so they could be deported.[51] Löwenherz refused to provide Jewish workers for this task. Consequently, Brunner himself recruited Jewish henchmen to carry it out, selecting particularly disreputable individuals, and ordering them to proceed brutally. In this situation, to prevent the worst excesses, Löwenherz eventually agreed to recommend "reliable and decent" employees to the SS.[52]

49 Wilhelm Bienenfeld, Bericht über die IKG in der NS-Zeit, 16. 6. 1940. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands, 8919/1 (hereafter referred to as the "Löwenherz Report").

50 Julius Rosenfeld, Report, April 1956. Yad veShem 01/177, 2; "Löwenherz Report," November 1, 1940.

51 Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, 118.

52 Testimony by Wilhelm Bienenfeld, criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Viennese

The lists of those destined for deportation were drawn up by the *Zentralstelle* and later, after the dissolution of this institution in March 1943, by the Gestapo.[53] The Jewish administration had to remove from the list those who, according to the terms of the *Zentralstelle* and the deportation guidelines stipulated by the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office, RSHA), were not yet designated for transport.[54] The Jewish administration could also protect from a deporation individuals who were indispensable for the operation of its own administration, but another victim had to be found to replace each one who was "put on hold." However, the IKG was not required to select who was to be deported in place of "deferrals" during the large mass deportations since the lists of the *Zentralstelle* already included substitutes. At least for the major mass transports of 1941 and 1942, which included about a thousand persons, a list of sometimes 1,100 or 1,300 persons was given to the IKG in advance. On this point, therefore, researchers who believe that the Jewish administration itself selected replacements seem to be wrong.[55] When the files speak of the *Kultusgemeinde* "having to provide for replacements," this is expressed in bureaucratic language that meant that instead of those whose deportations were to be "postponed," other members of the IKG were designated for deportation—by the National Socialist authorities.[56]

Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45; Statement by Robert Prochnik, June 24, 1954, criminal proceedings against Robert Prochnik before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Viennese Provincial Court Archive, Vg 8c Vr 3532/48, continuation: Vg 8c Vr 41/542, 63-64.

53 Anderl and Rupnow, *Zentralstelle,* 293; Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, 120.

54 Alfred Gottwaldt and Diana Schulle, *Die "Judendeportationen" aus dem Deutschen Reich 1941-1945. Eine kommentierte Chronologie* (Wiesbaden: Marix, 2005), 61, 87-88, 139-45, 262-78, 372-83.

55 Compare, for example: Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*, 285; Lisa Hauff, *Zur politischen Rolle von Judenräten. Benjamin Murmelstein in Vienna 1938-1942* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014). Compare: Anna Hájková, review of *Zur politischen Rolle von Judenräten,* by Lisa Hauff, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus* 31, ed. Rüdiger Hachtmann and Sven Reichardt (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 195-98.

56 The postwar accounts of Wilhelm Bienenfeld and National Socialist perpetrators Johann Rixinger and Anton Brunner testify to this. See: Testimony of Wilhelm Bienenfeld, 3.10.1947, criminal proceedings against Johann Rixinger before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 11 g Vr 4866/46 /HV 1319/47, 49; Testimony of Anton Brunner (Brunner II), 12.10.1945, criminal proceedings against Anton Brunner before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 2d VR 4574/45; Testimony of Johann Rixinger, October 6, 1945, criminal proceedings against Johann Rixinger before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 11 g Vr 4866/46 /HV 1319/47.

Josef Löwenherz had known about atrocities and mass shootings in the east since the summer of 1941, but he had only heard about the systematic exterminations of Jews after the deportation of the Viennese Jewish community had already been carried out at the end of 1942. Löwenherz went to see the head of the Vienna Gestapo, Karl Ebner, to inquire about the fate of the deportees. Ebner described the incident after 1945:

> One day after 1942, probably in 1943, Löwenherz came to me completely broken and asked to speak to Huber. I asked him what he wanted, and he told me that he had heard that the Jews were supposedly being killed and that he wanted to know for sure whether this was true. I said that he would go down badly with the boss and that he might prosecute him for spreading enemy radio news. Löwenherz said he didn't care. We then went to Huber. After Huber had been informed, he called Amtschef IV of the RSHA on the direct line (Müller), and we waited outside in the meantime. When we came back inside, Huber told us that Müller had dismissed these allegations as bad news. Löwenherz was visibly relieved.[57]

In November 1942, the IKG was dissolved and transformed into the *Ältestenrat der Juden in Wien* (Council of Elders of the Jews in Vienna). The *Ältestenrat* was responsible for all those who were persecuted as Jews as a result of Nazi antisemitic and racist policies—regardless of their religious affiliation. The transformation of the IKG into the *Ältestenrat* had financial motives: under public law, the property of the institution was now to be transferred into the ownership of the German Reich.[58] From the German perspective, the assets of the IKG had served their purpose; welfare, emigration, and deportation had been partly paid for out of the property and funds of the Jewish administrative apparatus and other Jewish foundations in Vienna.[59]

Even in the months just before the liberation, when the Jewish community in Vienna had long been destroyed, the *Ältestenrat* continued to work. There were still Jewish people living in Vienna who were married and related to non-Jews and whose families the Nazis had to take into consideration. The remaining Jews had to be cared for—in the interest of the non-Jewish population. They needed medical care to prevent possible

57 Explanation by Karl Ebner, September 20, 1961, quoted in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, student edition (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 178.

58 Willy Stern, interview by the author, June 7, 1989.

59 Franzi Löw, interview by the author, June 19, 1991.

contagious diseases and epidemics from spreading to their non-Jewish surroundings. However, they were to remain under the control of Jewish institutions and were not to be admitted to "Aryan" hospitals because racial segregation had to be maintained. Marked with the yellow star, these Jews were still allowed to live in Vienna, but the machinery of extermination was waiting for them. For example, as soon as an "Aryan" husband died, his single Jewish widow, if she was not protected by other relatives, was deported.

Despite Jewish functionaries' limited room for maneuver, it is important to understand the personal differences between them. While, for instance, Benjamin Murmelstein was counting on cooperation to buy time and prevent the worst outcomes for Vienna's Jewish population, the sole remaining Jewish welfare worker, Franzi Löw, tried to support people beyond her official capacity by transgressing National Socialist laws to forge papers or aid those in hiding. Löw, born in 1916, grew up in a religious but not kosher, Zionist, and—at the same time—social democratic family, and she was a trained welfare worker who had applied for a job with the Vienna municipal government after completing her training but had been rejected. She was employed by the IKG in 1937. She remained a welfare worker for Jewish victims of persecution throughout the entire Nazi era. Two bakers agreed to give Löw two ten-liter bottles of whole milk and twenty kilos of bread every morning, which was illegal at the time. Franzi Löw carried this whole milk and bread to children in the Jewish orphanage at five o'clock in the morning across National Socialist Vienna since Jewish people, even minors, were excluded from receiving these food items starting in the summer of 1942.[60] Löw also helped people who survived in hiding, risking her own life.[61] Children who had a non-Jewish parent and were considered "half-Jews" were also saved with Franzi Löw's help. Löw even managed to free from a *Sammellager* (assembly camp) a boy whose mother had been deported in 1941. Löwenherz knew about Löw's illegal activities but kept her on as an employee.[62] Franzi Löw risked her own life, and her activities clearly demonstrate that cooperation and resistance could be intertwined.

60 Joseph Walk, ed., *Das Sonderrecht für die Juden im NS-Staat. Eine Sammlung der gesetzlichen Maßnahmen und Richtlinien—Inhalt und Bedeutung* (Heidelberg: Müller, 1981), 280.

61 Franzi Löw, interview by the author, June 19, 1991; Franzi Löw, interview, in *Jüdische Schicksale. Berichte von Verfolgten*, ed. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands (Vienna: ÖBV, 1992), 185-87; Hecht, Lappin-Eppel, and Raggam-Blesch, *Topographie der Shoah*, 281-87, 508-9.

62 Löw, *Jüdische Schicksale*, 188-90.

The Postwar Fates of Leading IKG Members

The Case of Franzi Löw

After 1945, despite all their differences—whether a functionary of the IKG had provided significant assistance during the deportations or not, and whether a person had acted benevolently like Franzi Löw or imperiously like Benjamin Murmelstein—all those who had worked for the Jewish administration were suspected of collaboration. This suspicion after 1945 affected not only those who held executive roles in the IKG under National Socialist control but also, as we will see, lower-level employees too.

After liberation in 1945, Franzi Löw entered the employ of the city of Vienna. She no longer worked for the IKG but was initially elected to its board. In 1947, a complaint against Löw was submitted by Aron Moses Ehrlich, a political opponent of hers within the IKG. In an open letter Ehrlich wrote the following about Franzi Löw: "… the same person was in Vienna during the entire Hitler era and was a frequent visitor at the Gestapo. The Jewish population demands clarity and the immediate appointment of a commission of enquiry. In particular, I was informed in a somewhat sensational way that the *Kultusrätin* Franzi Löw allegedly also enters into marriage or has already entered into marriage with a Nazi judge only recently."[63] The so-called Nazi judge was Wilhelm Danneberg, who, together with his entire family, had supported Franzi Löw's welfare work despite the constant risk to his life. Wilhelm Danneberg was even suspended from his job in 1938 because of his "friendliness towards Jews."[64]

The complaint did not lead to a trial. However, Franzi Löw drew her own conclusions and withdrew from her role in the IKG, but she served as the chief social worker at the Viennese Health Department. She married Wilhelm Danneberg in 1948. In 1966, Franzi Danneberg-Löw received the Golden Cross of Merit of the Republic of Austria, which was presented to her by the Mayor of Vienna.[65] She retired in 1979.[66] Franzi Löw-Danneberg died in 1997, and her achievements were never publicly acknowledged by the Jewish community until after her death.

63 Aron Moses Ehrlich, "Addendum to my open letter", June 12, 1947, complaint about Franzi Löw, Viennese Provincial Court Archive, Vg 5c Vr 6078/47, 2/1 KVG.
64 Franzi Löw, interview by the author, June 19, 1991; Löw, *Jüdische Schicksale*, 187.
65 Löw, *Jüdische Schicksale*, 197.
66 Löw, *Jüdische Schicksale*, 197.

The Case of Wilhelm Reisz

Jewish individuals accused of collaboration with the perpetrators were often judged more severely than National Socialist criminals. For example, Wilhelm Reisz, who was charged with collaboration, had been one of the employees selected by Löwenherz when Brunner had forced him to appoint Jewish employees to accompany SS men when removing those who were to be deported from their flats. After the war, Reisz was denounced by some survivors for having behaved brutally in this role.[67] A trial against Reisz was initiated in 1946.[68] Although Reisz denied the accusations, the Austrian People's Court, based on the witnesses' statements, found him guilty and sentenced him to fifteen years of hard imprisonment, including a quarter of a year in a camp.[69]

The sentence is particularly noteworthy, especially compared with the sentencing practices of the Austrian judiciary after 1945. For example, the notorious and brutal SS man and Blood Order bearer Ernst Girzik was sentenced to fifteen years in prison but was granted amnesty by the Austrian Federal President in December 1953.[70] Johann Rixinger, the Gestapo's Jewish affairs officer in Vienna (the *Judenreferent*) who had been vested with high-level decision-making powers during the deportations and had been involved in the administrative dimensions of mass murder, was sentenced to ten years in prison. He served only six and a half years of his sentence.[71] Reisz received five years more than Rixinger, who had already been active as an (illegal) Nazi before the *Anschluss*.

The day after Rixinger's sentence was pronounced, Wilhelm Reisz hanged himself in his cell.[72] Reisz had not expected the guilty verdict and saw himself not as a perpetrator but as a victim.

67 Criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45.

68 Main hearing against Wilhelm Reisz, July 8, 1946, Criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45, 135.

69 Judgement against Wilhelm Reisz, July 8, 1946, Criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45.

70 Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, 329.

71 Criminal proceedings against Johann Rixinger before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Vg 11 g Vr 4866/46/HV 1319/47.

72 Prison II to Provincial Court, Vienna, July 11, 1946, criminal proceedings against Wilhelm Reisz, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 1b Vr 2911/45.

The Case of Benjamin Murmelstein

Benjamin Murmelstein (Image 1) became the symbol of all the accusations made by survivors against Viennese Jewish functionaries after 1945. In January 1943, Murmelstein was deported to Theresienstadt together with eleven other leading Jewish functionaries from Berlin, Vienna, and Prague. Murmelstein soon became the second deputy of the *Judenältester* there. After his predecessors had been murdered, Murmelstein was appointed *Judenältester* of Theresienstadt on December 13, 1944.[73]

In May 1945, Murmelstein relinquished his role as *Judenältester*, and by June of the same year, he found himself under arrest. His pre-trial detention lasted eighteen months. He was accused of collaboration by other survivors. On December 6, 1946, the public prosecutor of the People's Court in Leitmeritz withdrew the indictment against Murmelstein because of insufficient evidence. Murmelstein was released the same day after he waived his right to compensation for imprisonment.[74]

In 1947, Murmelstein testified as a witness for the prosecution at the trial of camp commandant Karl Rahm.[75] In 1947, he moved to Rome because of a vacancy in a rabbinical seminary there. In August 1948, Murmelstein had to face the court of honor of the Organization of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy. However, he was again able to counter the accusations.[76] He left Rome and moved to Trieste, where he was offered a rabbinate. But he soon had to resign again. In an interview in 1979, he declared that he had gotten into a power struggle with an official of the Trieste Jewish community:

> In reality, the matter was quite simple. I was not willing be bullied by a moneybag … I said to them "it was an honor" and left … That was the most natural thing to do … I was used to other things and was no longer willing to be regarded as some petty official of the *kille*

73 Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*, 30.

74 Murmelstein, "Das Ende von Theresienstadt," 3.

75 Judgment 441/47, 30.4.1947, translated and quoted in Murmelstein, "Das Ende von Theresienstadt," 3. Compare: Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*; Anna Hájková, "Der Judenälteste und seine SS-Männer. Benjamin Murmelstein und seine Beziehung zu Adolf Eichmann und Karl Rahm," in *Der Letzte der Ungerechten. Der Judenälteste Benjamin Murmelstein in Filmen 1942-1975*, ed. Ronny Loewy and Katharina Rauschenberger (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2011) 75-99.

76 Philip Friedman, "Aspects of the Jewish Communal Crisis in the Period of the Nazi Regime in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia," in *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought*, ed. Joseph L. Blau, Arthur Herzberg, Philip Friedman, and Isaac Mendelsohn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 230.

Image 1: Benjamin Murmelstein. Source: Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, P 151/1.

> [Yiddish for community], dependent on the whims of the chairman and the committee. Don't forget that in Vienna or Theresienstadt, I had been in charge. It might have been better if it hadn't been the case, but unfortunately that's how it was. You must therefore understand, Professor, that psychologically, this demotion was a little too much.[77]

The former Elder of the Jews was no longer content to be a minor spiritual official. Benjamin Murmelstein regarded the move from Elder of the Jews in Theresienstadt under the Nazis to the rabbi of the Jewish community in Trieste a demotion of sorts. He settled in Rome with his wife and son Wolf. He attempted initially to establish his own business, then he started making money as a furniture salesman and demonstrated a talent for business.

77 Benjamin Murmelstein, several interviews by Leonhard Ehrlich, Rome, 1977. I am grateful to Professor Leonhard Ehrlich for providing me with copies of these interviews, and to Dr. Pierre Genée who transmitted them to me, Series I, Tape 2 B, 31-32.

In 1949, legal proceedings against Benjamin Murmelstein were again initiated in Vienna. The investigation seemed to come to nothing, though it continued into 1955, but this case was closed again in the autumn of the same year.[78] During the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, Murmelstein published an Italian-language book about his views on the Terezín ghetto.[79] He was not called to testify at the trial. Murmelstein lived in seclusion in Rome until his death. From time to time, he received historians or interested persons for interviews. He answered some of their written inquiries.[80] His interview with Claude Lanzmann, which served as the basis for Lanzmann's film *The Last of the Unjust*, became famous.[81] He died on October 27, 1989.[82]

Murmelstein was judged much worse than other Jewish functionaries. The theologian, intellectual, and historian was convinced that he had done the right thing. It was precisely his cold imperturbability, which at the time did not make him seem more amiable but rather pitiless, that in retrospect reinforces the significance, indeed the authenticity, of his reports and his justifications. Murmelstein remained convinced of the correctness of his actions even after the reality of the mass murder of the European Jews became clear.

The Case of Josef Löwenherz

Josef Löwenherz (Image 2) had already suffered noticeably from his position in 1938.[83] The mass deportations made Löwenherz despair. On July 14, 1941, the German-language newspaper of Palestine *Jedioth Achronoth*

78 Compare: Criminal proceedings against Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein before the Provincial Criminal Court of Vienna as People's Court, Provincial Court Archive, Vg 7a Vr 895/49, continuation Vg 8e Vr 698/55; Gauakte Murmelstein, Archiv der Republik, Zl.26 271-2/56.

79 Benjamin Murmelstein, *Terezin. Il Ghetto-Modello di Eichmann* (Bologna: Capelli Editori, 1961); Benjamin Murmelstein, *Theresienstadt. Eichmanns Vorzeige-Ghetto*, ed. Ruth Pleyer and Alfred J. Noll, trans. by Karin Fleischanderl (Vienna: Czernin, 2014).

80 Herbert Rosenkranz to Benjamin Murmelstein in Rome, Jerusalem, April 10, 1980; Benjamin Murmelstein to Herbert Rosenkranz in Jerusalem, Rome, April 27, 1980; Herbert Rosenkranz to Benjamin Murmelstein, June 1, 1980. I thank Herbert Rosenkranz for providing me with a copy of these documents. Copies of the letters in author's possession.

81 *The Last of the Unjust*, directed by Claude Lanzmann (Vienna, 2013).

82 Gabi Anderl and Pierre Genée, "Wer war Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein. Biographische Streiflichter," *David. Jüdische Kulturzeitschrift* 10 (1998): 9-20, here 18.

83 Arieh Menczer and Menczer Mordechai, interview by Herbert Rosenkranz (in Hebrew), Haifa, June 6, 1976, Yad veShem 0-3/3913, 29.

Olei Germania We Olei Ostria reported: "A news report from Zurich says that Dr Josef Löwenherz, the chairman of the Jewish Community in Vienna, had to be taken to hospital because of a nervous breakdown when he received orders from the Gestapo to assist in the deportation of all Viennese Jews to Lublin."[84] Löwenherz had burst into tears in the middle of the synagogue that day.

In May 1945, Löwenherz was arrested by the Soviet authorities.[85] Investigations of his activities were opened in Prague.[86] On August 10, 1945, the German Jewish New York newspaper *Der Aufbau* ran an article on the Löwenherz case in which the new deputy head of the IKG, Benzion Lazar, was quoted making accusations against Löwenherz. *Der Aufbau* doubted Lazar's statements.[87]

After the investigations in Prague were concluded and the accusations were refuted, Löwenherz was able to leave the country with his wife. In Palestine, Alois Rothenberg, the former head of the Palestine Office, tried to find entry possibilities for Josef and Sophie Löwenherz, and Chaim Weizmann is said to have personally requested two certificates for Prague, which were intended for the two of them.[88] But Josef and Sophie Löwenherz wanted to join their children in the United States. They traveled first to Switzerland, then to England, and then finally departed from there for New York.[89]

In the spring of 1946, Joseph Löwenherz was invited by the Association of Jewish Refugees in London to deliver a lecture on his activities within the IKG during the Nazi regime.[90] Löwenherz tried to explain that he had attempted to save human lives. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported on his lecture:

> Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Löwenherz and his colleagues, 136,000 out of a total of 206,000 Austrian Jews were able to emigrate (several thousand even during the war via Siberia or Lisbon); 15,000 died from

84 *Jedioth Achronoth Olei Germania We Olei Ostria*, July 4, 1941, 2, quoted in Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht*, 135.

85 Wilhelm Bienenfeld to State Secretary, May 22, 1945, Yad veShem 030/4.

86 Wilhelm Bienenfeld to Josef Löwenherz, September 11, 1945, Yad veShem 030/4, 14.

87 Transcript of an article from the newspaper *Aufbau*, vol. XI, no. 32 (August 10, 1945), 6, in Yad veShem 030/4.

88 Arno Erteschik to Josef Löwenherz, October 26, 1945, Yad veShem 030/4.

89 Letters from Erna Patak to Josef and Sofie Löwenherz, Yad veShem 030/4. Helga Embacher, *Neubeginn ohne Illusionen. Juden in Österreich nach 1945* (Vienna: Picus, 1945), 32.

90 Evelyn Adunka, *Die vierte Gemeinde. Die Geschichte der Wiener Juden von 1945 bis heute* (Berlin: Philo, 2000) 19.

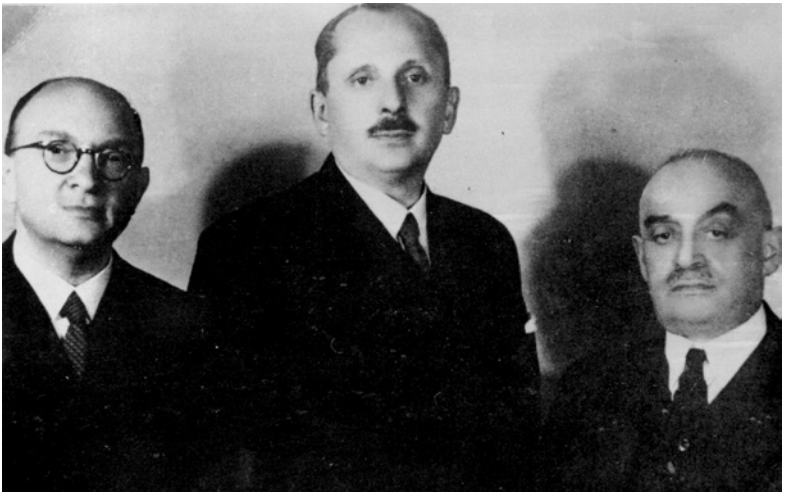

Image 2: Dr. Josef Löwenherz (middle), a lawyer and the administrative director of the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde of Vienna* together with two other Jewish functionaries, Dr. Leo Landau (left) and Dr. Ignaz Hermann Körner (right). Source: Yad Vashem Photo Archive, YvS 01/244.

> natural causes; 47,000 were deported and of these only 1,300 have returned; and 6,000 who are married to non-Jews were able to remain in Vienna.
>
> Dr. R. Bienenfeld, who was in the chair, emphasized that Dr. Löwenherz, whilst himself being in constant danger of his life, has saved the lives of tens of thousands of Jews. Of all the Jewish communities under Nazi rule, Austrian Jewry had suffered the smallest loss in proportion—about 25 per cent—in spite of the hostile attitude of the Austrian population. Amidst the applause of the audience, he thanked Dr. Löwenherz on behalf of the Austrian Jewish refugees.[91]

Löwenherz settled in New York, but it is said that he never found peace there either as he often met Viennese Jews and felt compelled to justify his behavior.[92]

91 "Former Director of Vienna Jewish Community Succeeded in Saving 136000 Austrian Jews," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 15, 1946, YIVO (Institute for Jewish Research) Archives, DP Camps in Austria, Reel 1, 0283. I am grateful to Evelyn Adunka for giving me a copy of this document.

92 George E. Berkley, *Vienna and its Jews: The Tragedy of Success* (Cambridge: Abt Books, Madison Books, 1988), 343; Embacher, *Neubeginn ohne Illusionen,* 32.

During the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, Josef Löwenherz was asked to act as a witness for the prosecution. He was already a sick man. The Israeli consul visited Löwenherz during the preparations for the trial. Löwenherz was very agitated and promised to fill out a more detailed questionnaire soon. He was never able to finish this work. The memory of Eichmann was too much for him. He suffered a heart attack and died three days later.

Löwenherz, like many of those who had worked with with the SS and Gestapo during the deportations and survived, suffered from feelings of guilt even though he was not charged with any crimes.

Conclusion

In Vienna in 1938, the National Socialist rulers saw no need to replace all of the IKG's leading functionaries. In fact, most of them retained their offices. These Jewish representatives cooperated with the National Socialist regime in order to save as many Jews as possible, but by fulfilling the obligations placed on them by the authorities, they helped the perpetrators of the Shoah murder most of the more than 60,000 Jews who remained in Vienna. It is important not to lose sight of the difference between their cooperation and complicity. Individual Jews, as well as Jewish officials, could become collaborators as a result of the coercion they faced, but non-Jewish collaborators in occupied countries participated in the crimes voluntarily. Historians such as Raul Hilberg, Isaiah Trunk, and Yehuda Bauer came to understand collaborators as the accomplices of non-Jewish groups in territories occupied by the Wehrmacht.[93] Evgeny Finkel cautiously uses the term collaboration to refer also to Jewish strategies of dealing with the National Socialist authorities, but he also sharply distinguishes it from non-Jewish behavior and especially from Jewish complicity in the Shoah.[94]

The conditions in Vienna, however, were characterized by very specific circumstances that were different from those discussed by Hilberg, Trunk, Bayer, and Finkel. Deportations started in Vienna while emigration was still possible. The nature of Jewish cooperation and the Jewish

93 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 145-48; Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews;* Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 570-75.

94 Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 72.

administration, whose attitude had already been formed when thousands fled the country, changed only gradually.

The extent of the crime became clear only after the majority of the remaining Jewish community of Austria had been killed. When the first mass deportations started in early 1941, it was still unclear what awaited the Jews in the east. Only after the largest mass deportations in autumn 1942 did the Jewish administration in Vienna hear of the systematic extermination of European Jewry. The Jewish functionaries in Austria saw no alternative to cooperating because they cherished the hope of being able to rescue some of the community. Cooperation with the Nazis appeared to be the lesser evil as the National Socialists' goal of total annhiliation was still unimaginable and incalculable.

After 1945, Jewish survivors sought a new beginning following their persecution and the extermination of their communities. The rejection of former functionaries and employees of the Council of Elders served to reconstruct Jewish identity after the mass murder. Jewish officials who had led the Jewish community in the era of National Socialist persecution, most of whom had been prominent community leaders before 1938, therefore, played no further role in postwar Jewish life.

Denisa Nešťáková

Public Health as Resistance in the Sereď Camp in Slovakia[1]

"Since the camps must exist, we must support them,"[2] declared Abraham Armin Frieder, a Neolog Rabbi and member of the Jewish Center (*Ústredňa Židov* in Slovak; *Judenzentrale* in German) in Slovakia—an institution similar to "Jewish Councils" in Nazi-occupied Europe. Established in September 1940, the Jewish Center was subordinated to the Slovak Central Economic Office (*Ústredný hospodársky úrad*, ÚHÚ) led by Augustín Morávek and supervised by the Nazi advisor for Jewish affairs in Slovakia Dieter Wisliceny.[3] If they did not directly select members, Slovak authorities approved the leaders of the Jewish Center. While the Jewish Center differed from other "Jewish Councils" in terms of its name, some local organizational elements, and the fact that it was established in a country not occupied by Nazi Germany, the Jewish Center indeed functioned as "Jewish Councils" elsewhere. Every member of the Jewish community and every person of Jewish origin was forced to become a member,[4] and the Jewish Center, in turn, was obliged to implement all antisemitic laws and orders and anti-Jewish regulations

1 This publication is a result of research in co-operation with the Claims Conference Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies funded by the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" supported by the Federal Ministry of Finance.

2 Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter YVA), M.5, File 81, Protocols of meetings, 02 April 1943–24 August 1944.

3 The Central Economic Office was established in September 1940 to manage everything connected with the exclusion of Jews from Slovak economic and social life and to transfer Jewish property to Christian Slovaks. The office was directly subordinated to the prime minister. Katarína Hradská, *Prípad Wisliceny. Nacistickí poradcovia a židovská otázka na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 1999), 31.

4 Eduard Nižňanský and Lívia Gardianová, eds., *Holokaust na Slovensku 6. Deportácie v roku 1942. Dokumenty* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2005), 41.

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introduced by the Slovak State.[5] One such task was to participate in the creation and operation of a network of concentration and forced labor camps and centers. Slovak state officials introduced this network in order to segregate Jews from the non-Jewish population, exploit them for labor, and prepare them for deportation. In autumn 1942, once the sole function of the camps became forced labor, the Jewish Center believed that by asserting control through the self-organized administration in the three main forced labor camps in Slovakia—Nováky, Sereď, and Vyhne—the Center would be able to protect inmates from deportation. In this article, I analyze the role of the Jewish Center and the Jewish leadership of Sereď—through the camp's Jewish Council (*Židovská rada*)—in developing a public health system, framing it as a daring act of resistance against the antisemitic policies of the Slovak state and the genocidal plans of the National Socialist regime.

Taking the conditions of the forced labor camps of Slovakia into consideration, I understand public health as preventing disease and promoting health through the organized efforts and informed choices of the prisoner society—including physical and psychological health and social well-being.[6] Efforts to maintain public health in Sereď included the development of strategies to promote sanitation and cleanliness in the camp, as well as the construction of a medical care system, alternative healthcare resources, and childcare facilities. This article focuses especially on the Jewish Center's contributions to the development of this public health system in Sereď between the fall 1942, when Sered' began operating solely as a labor camp, and the end of August 1944. After the suppression of the Slovak National Uprising—an armed insurrection against the collaborationist Slovak state that broke out on August 29, 1944—Nazi Germany occupied Slovakia, initiating a new phase of deportations. Nazi authorities also began using Sereď as a concentration camp starting in September 1944 until March 31, 1945.[7] Once Nazi authorities took over Sereď, the Jewish leadership in Slovakia lost most of its capacity to provide aid to Jews incarcerated in the camp.

By focusing on the Jewish Center's coerced cooperation with the Slovak state and its use of bribery to try and improve conditions in

5 Gila Fatranová, *Boj o prežitie* (Bratislava: Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2007), 48.

6 Penka D. Gatseva and Mariana Argirova, "Public Health: The Science of Promoting Health," *Journal of Public Health* 19 (2011): 205-6.

7 See Ján Hlavinka, Eduard Nižňanský, and Radoslav Ragač, "Koncentračný tábor v Seredi vo svetle novoobjavených dokumentov (september 1944–marec 1945)," *Druhá vlna deportácií Židov zo Slovenska*, ed. Viera Kováčová (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum Slovenského Národného Povstania, 2010): 50-80.

camps, this article analyzes the Jewish leadership's evolving efforts to introduce public health measures in Sereď. In order to discern the nature of Sereď's public health, I draw from records of the meetings of the Jewish Center and the Jewish Council in Sereď; documents produced by Slovak state authorities; articles published in the newspaper of the Jewish Center, *Vestník Ústredne Židov* (henceforth *Vestník*); and the testimonies of survivors. I argue that the effective public health system constructed by the Jewish leadership hindered Slovak political elites' efforts to destroy the Slovak Jewry; moreover, this system was part of a large-scale survival strategy developed by the Jewish Center. Using Sereď as an example of a public health system constructed in a society *in extremis*, I illuminate one of the core dilemmas *and* accomplishments of the Jewish leadership in Slovakia during the Holocaust. This chapter, thus, contributes to discussions concerning "Jewish Councils'" public health measures as a form of resistance to extermination.

Facilitating Public Health in Sereď

Prior to the launch of the Jewish Center's efforts to improve conditions in Sereď, the camp's main function was assembling persons in preparation for their deportation from Slovakia. Built on the premises of a former military barracks, Sereď served as a transit and concentration center; once a sufficient number of Jews had been assembled, they were deported to destinations in the General Government (German-occupied Poland) between March and October 1942.[8] But already in July 1942, Sereď began to take on an additional function as a labor camp, which was reflected in its name change—from Concentration Center for Jews in Sereď to Concentration and Labor Camp for Jews in Sereď.[9] Starting in the fall of 1942, Sereď functioned solely as a labor camp, and from January 1943, the name of the camp changed again: to Labor Camp for Jews in Sereď.[10] Once the Slovak authorities finalized plans for the deportation of Jews from Slovakia in October 1942, the Jewish Center came to believe that labor camps and their profitability would ensure the survival of camp inmates and,

8 Nižňanský and Gardianová, eds., *Holokaust na Slovensku 6.*

9 About the changes of names and functions of Sereď, see: Eduard Nižňanský, Vanda Rajčan, and Ján Hlavinka, "Sereď," in *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945*, vol. 3, ed. Geoffrey P. Megargee (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018), 881-83.

10 Eva Vrabcová, "Pracovný tábor Židov v Seredi (1941-1945)," *Archivum Sala. Archívna ročenka* 2 (2005): 110-24.

thus, part of the Jewish community of Slovakia.[11] However, any of the actions of the Jewish Council in Sereď or, for that matter, any agency of the Jewish Center was limited by Jewish organs' subordination to the Slovak state, which pursued antisemitic policies. Consequently, the Jewish community in Slovakia did not endorse the Jewish Center and its promotion of labor camps as a means of survival. Many Jews recognized the potential dangers of concentrating the Jewish population in labor camps even when such placement was promoted by the Jewish Center. In other words, the institution imposed by Slovak and Nazi authorities lacked the trust of the community.[12] But for members of the Jewish Center, and especially those active in the Working Group—a clandestine organization that sought to aid Jews and halt the deportations, the existence of labor camps was understood as one of a range of efforts to protect Jews from deportation.[13] Because there was no chance of preventing the creation of forced labor camps, the Jewish Center focused on ensuring the safety of inmates and working together with Sereď's Jewish leadership to facilitate acceptable living conditions for forced laborers in the camp system.[14]

Slovak state authorities refused to take any direct responsibility for Jewish life in the camps. On the contrary, the intentional and systematic persecution of the Jewish community in Slovakia and its pauperization through the process of Aryanization was designed to inflict as much harm on the Jewish community as possible.[15] But once the main function

11 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM), RG-60.5010, Testimony of Andrej Steiner. See also: Emanuel Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi During the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987), 104.

12 See: YVA, M.5, File 81, Protocols of meetings of representatives of labor camps, in the Ustredna Kancelaria Pracovnych Taborov (Central Office of Labor Camps for Jews), regarding the economic activities of the camps, 02 April 1943–24 August 1944; Aron Grünhut, *Katastrofa slovenských Židov* (Bratislava: PT Marenčín, 2015); Denisa Nešťáková, "Jewish Centre and Labour Camps in Slovakia," in *Between Collaboration and Resistance: Papers from the 21st Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Concentration Camps*, ed. Karoline Georg, Verena Meier, and Paula Oppermann (Berlin: Metropol, 2020,): 117-45.

13 For more about how Jewish Center members understood its role, see: Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls*; Oskar Neumann, *Im Schatten des Todes. Ein Tatsachenbericht vom Schicksalskampf des slowakischen Judentums* (Tel Aviv: Olamenu, 1956); USHMM, RG-60.5010, Testimony of Andrej Steiner.

14 Denisa Nešťáková, "'Privileged' Space or Site of Temporary Safety? Women and Men in the Sereď Camp," in *Places, Spaces, and Voids in the Holocaust*, ed. Natalia Aleksiun and Hana Kubátová (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), 315-21.

15 For more on Aryanization in Slovakia, see: Eduard Nižňanský and Ján Hlavinka, eds., *Arizácie* (Bratislava: Stimul, 2010); Nižňanský and Hlavinka, *Arizácie v regiónoch Slovenska* (Bratislava: Stimul, 2010).

of Sereď shifted to forced labor, high profits with low overhead and individual opportunities for enrichment became the main motivations behind Slovak authorities' willingness to implement some of the Jewish Center's plans for the camp. Already in mid-1942, the Jewish Center entrusted several men from its own ranks with the administration of Sereď and its workshops.[16] But only in April 1943 were these men officially organized by the Slovak authorities into the camp's administrative body, the "Jewish Council" in Sereď.[17] Sereď's self-administration gradually expanded as the Jewish Center managed to strengthen their position thanks to agreements with the Slovak state that were primarily focused on transforming the camp into a profitable enterprise. But any agreement to improve conditions in Sereď was very closely connected with "purchased sympathy," that is, bribes to important politicians and functionaries.[18] Thus, apart from collecting resources that would improve material and physical conditions for inmates and facilitate the construction of a social welfare system, the Jewish leadership had to have sufficient resources for payoffs that would allow them to implement their plans in the first place.

In September 1942, the former head of the camp guards Jozef Vozár, a man notorious for his violence toward inmates, was replaced by Imrich Vašina, who was keen to leverage his new position for his own benefit and accepted bribes from the Jewish Center. The Jewish Center created a special fund called the "Black Account" in order to improve conditions in the camp; this fund held a significant amount of money used specifically for bribing Vašina.[19] The head of the eight-member Jewish Council in Sereď and representative of the Social Department of the Jewish Center, Alexander Pressburger, provided further details about the Black Account: "It was funded by rich Jews and the Jewish Center—it should help provide sick inmates with medicine and better food, and from this fund, 10,000 KS [*Koruna slovenská*—Slovak crowns] were given to Vašina monthly … to try to secure some relief for the inmates."[20] The last Elder of the Jewish Center Oskar Neumann agreed with Pressburger and added

16 See: USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 859.

17 Slovak National Archive (hereafter SNA), Fund MV, Box 421, File 406-543-2.

18 About the corruption in the Slovak state and the Holocaust, see: Ivan Kamenec, "Fenomén korupcie v procese tzv. riešenia 'židovskej otázky' na Slovensku v rokoch 1938-1945," *Forum Historiae* 5, no 2 (2011): 96-112.

19 YVA, M.5, File 152, Legal documentation of the trial against Imrich Vašina, 01 March–22 May 1947.

20 YVA, M. 48, File 66.

that "due to the aforementioned so-called 'favors,' [Vašina]—especially in 1944—started to treat inmates better."[21] As was the case for many labor camps or ghettos, the Jewish Center believed that forced labor camps could potentially function as a form of protection for the Jews incarcerated in them.[22] The Center also proposed new projects to the Slovak state functionaries, such as establishing workshops for state companies in the camps; these plans were intended to demonstrate that the camps (and by extension the Jews imprisoned in them) were valuable assets to the national economy.[23] The Jewish Center was not exceptional in its use of bribes. Similar to what Anna Hájková has shown for the Theresienstadt ghetto, in the case of Sereď, by asserting control via the self-organized administrative structure of the camp through the help of bribes and their coerced cooperation with Slovak and German authorities, Jewish functionaries aimed to redefine Sereď. By so doing, they sought to create a social space on their own terms in order to yield some benefit from an otherwise dire situation.[24]

The poor living conditions in the camp were directly related to its original function as an assembly camp. Sered' could offer nothing more than a short and miserable stopover prior to deportation. Insufficient food, poor-quality drinking water, the lack of medical supplies, and nonexistent care for children and the elderly were among the challenges the Jewish Center and the Jewish leadership of the camp had to address. Consequently, any operational costs and resources needed for construction and maintenance had to be covered by the profits of camp workshops or with funding provided by the Jewish Center, which received donations from members of the Jewish community in Slovakia and financial aid from abroad.[25] The Jewish Center put Gisi Fleischmann in charge of securing funds for provisions for the labor camps in Slovakia; Fleischmann was an employee of the office of the Jewish Center in Bratislava and the leader of the working group in charge of cultivating

21 YVA, M. 48, File 67.

22 See Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010); Michal Unger, *Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2008).

23 Eduard Nižňanský, Igor Baka, and Ivan Kamenec, eds., *Holokaust na Slovensku 5. Židovské pracovné tábory a strediská na Slovensku 1938-1945* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimešku, Židovská náboženská obec, Vojenský historický ústav, 2004), 229-37, 276-81.

24 Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 58.

25 SNA, Fund MV, Box 175, File 1310/1943.

contacts with numerous Jewish organizations abroad.[26] Photographs showing happy, healthy young men and women and smiling children were taken by the Jewish Center as a proof that resources were being used to promote wellbeing in the camps, and they sent these images to secure more funds from abroad to further improve conditions for inmates of the camp.[27] But the assets of the pauperized Jewish community in Slovakia were shrinking, and it became more difficult to collect financial aid from abroad because the Slovak state entered the war as an ally of Nazi Germany.[28] Securing alternative sources of financial support became an existential problem for the Jewish Center. Calls to support Jewish inmates in labor camps started to appear in *Vestník*.[29] Numerous religious and literary texts highlighted charitable activity—*tzedakah*—to appeal for donations.[30] Eventually, the Jewish Center planned to establish a system through which people could make regular monthly contributions.[31]

Yet the agency of the Jewish leadership was limited by both the Slovak regime and the Hlinka Guards, who functioned as camp guards whose role was to control, punish, and enforce the objective of the camp—the segregation of Jews from the Slovak majority—and who were originally responsible for overseeing the concentration and deportation of Jews from Slovakia. Nevertheless, the Jewish administration in the camp was committed to ensuring the safety of camp inmates and improving living conditions in Sered'. The coerced cooperation of the Jewish Center and especially the bribes made to create a Jewish self-administration in the camp through the camp Jewish Council managed to shape life in Sereď. But even though forced laborers were promised they would be exempt

26 See: Katarina Hradská, ed., *Holokaust na Slovensku 3. Listy Gisely Fleischmannovej (1942-1944), snahy Pracovnej skupiny o záchranu slovenských a európskych židov* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Židovská náboženská obec, 2003), 14, 31-44. See also: Katarína Hradská, *Gizy Fleischmannová* (Bratislava: PT Marenčín, 2012); Denisa Nešťáková, "Gisi Fleischmann—przywódczyni Żydów na Słowacji podczas II wojnyświatowej," *Elity i przedstawiciele społeczności żydowskiej podczas II wojny światowej,* ed. Martyna Grądzka-Rejak and Aleksandra Namysło (Warsaw: IPN, 2017): 473-89.

27 See: YVA, Photo Archive, File Slovakia, Album of various labor camps prepared by the Ustredna Zidov (UZ) for the Slovak authorities.

28 YVA, M.5, File 81, Protocols of meetings, 02 April 1943–24 August 1944.

29 "Sociálna pomoc židovským pracovným táborom," *Vestník ÚŽ*, February 26, 1943, 1.

30 See: Denisa Nešťáková, "Židovské reakcie na antisemitské postupy na Slovensku na stránkach Vestníka Ústredne Židov (1941-1944)," in *Judaica et Holocaustica 9. Propaganda antisemitizmu na Slovensku 1938-1945*, ed. Eduard Nižňanský (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2018), 25-54.

31 YVA, M.5, File 81, Protocols of meetings, 02 April 1943–24 August 1944.

from deportation as professionals working in camp workshops, inmates were forced into unfamiliar and poorly equipped barracks where they carried out their everyday lives among strangers. The psychological impact of persecution, the poor living conditions, and the lack of sanitation in the camp posed an imminent threat to the health of the inmates.

Public Health

Unlike the two other labor camps in Vyhne and Nováky, Sereď was in an exceptional position because the Jewish Hospital in Bratislava was relocated to the grounds of the camp. Opened in 1931, the hospital had been one of the most modern medical facilities in Czechoslovakia at the time, and in July 1942, Slovak authorities forced it to move to Sereď.[32] The hospital's legal status was a matter of ongoing debate throughout its existence in the camp, and at the beginning, it was not subject to the camp's administration and was separated from the camp by a fence. Only in May 1943 was the hospital officially subordinated to the administration of Jewish labor camps, and it was supposed to serve the inmates of all three labor camps as well as Jews who were not yet incarcerated.[33] But the Jewish hospital was never directly subordinated to the Sereď camp administration, and, consequently, it was not directly involved in public health matters in the Sereď camp. For this reason, a deeper analysis of its role and function during the Holocaust is outside the scope of this chapter.

Public health activities in Sereď were undertaken by the medical staff of the camp clinic, the camp's Health Service, and later on by the Health Department of Sereď's Jewish Council—led by Dr. Jakub Herzog as well as the sub-department of the Jewish Center's Social Department responsible for health.[34] While conditions in the camp were favorable for outbreaks of disease, the Jewish leadership took action to prevent epidemics. When developing public health infrastructure in Sereď, the Jewish lead-

32 SNA, MV, Box 2473, File 406-570-86.

33 Barbora Pokreis, "Zdravotná starostlivosť v koncentračnom a pracovnom tábore v Seredi," *Acta Judaica Slovaca* 16 (2010): 27-33; Vrabcová, "Pracovný tábor Židov v Seredi (1941-1945)," 110-24; Ján Hlavinka and Eduard Nižňanský, *Pracovný a koncentračný tábor v Seredi* (Bratislava: DHS, 2009): 84-88.

34 YVA, M.5, File 68, Correspondence between the Central Economics Office and the Ministry of the Interior, the Policajne Riaditelstvo (Police headquarters), the Central Union of Jewish Communities and other institutions, regarding the confiscation of Jewish property, and a collection of certificates regarding the receipt of Jewish property and its deposit by various offices, 1940-1944. See also: Hlavinka and Nižňanský, *Pracovný a koncentračný tábor v Seredi*, 83 and 84-88.

Image 1: The Camp Clinic. Source: Slovak National Archive (SNA), Fund Slovenská tlačová kancelária (STK) [Slovak Press Office], photograph no. 444.

ership focused on two main aspects: care for the sick, and preventive measures including vaccination, ensuring the quality of food and drinking water, and overseeing sanitation in the camp. Improving hygienic conditions, providing adequate childcare, high-quality drinking water, proper toilets, and a vitamin-rich diet were seen as crucial for maintaining acceptable conditions in labor camps. Public health measures also included promoting the everyday hygiene of children, youth, and workers by distributing soap and insecticides for combating lice and performing regular disinfections. To optimize funds, sanitary products and disinfectants were produced in camp workshops established for that express purpose. One workshop prepared soaps for the camp laundry; an antiseptic for camp's clinic and later for the Jewish hospital in Sereď; tincture for eradicating fleas, bed bugs, and lice; toothpaste, tooth powder, and bleaches for teeth; oil and ointments for burns and frostbite; paraffin lotions for sore skin; and powder for children. Inmates received some sanitary products for free to prevent epidemics and infestations and to promote cleanliness and good hygiene.[35]

35 Pokreis, "Zdravotná starostlivosť v koncentračnom a pracovnom tábore v Seredi," 30.

Sanitation and Cleanliness

Overseeing hygiene and ensuring cleanliness required the cooperation of all inmates. But it was only in the beginning of 1944 that *mikveh*, the Jewish ritual bath, seventeen showers, five bathtubs, and a steam disinfection device became available. However, while sanitary facilities were constructed only gradually, the strict enforcement of sanitary procedures in the camp was introduced well before 1944.[36] All inmates were required to take a bath or shower weekly and had to write down their name when they visited the washrooms. This list was checked every fourteen days. The names of those who did not have written proof of visiting sanitation facilities were announced in public.[37] If a person avoided showering or bathing, they were reported and compelled to do so. The Jewish leadership suggested that those who rejected this enforcement were to be "publicly punished."[38] According to the report on the labor camps, any violation of the regulations of the Orderly Service would be punished with a fine, the withdrawal of benefits, additional work, or even imprisonment in the camp prison.[39] It is unclear how strictly these enforcement measures were followed or, for that matter, whether persons were literally dragged to the baths as happened, for instance, in the Vilna ghetto.[40]

Another public health measure required barbers to cut the hair and beards of inmates to reduce the risk of lice. In Sereď, there were two camp barbers, Michal Seiler and Jozef Stern, and at least one hairdresser for women, Regina Sternová, Jozef's wife.[41] Every fourteen days, men were

36 Katarína Hradská, ed., *Holokaust na Slovensku 8. Ústredňa Židov* (Bratislava: DSH, 2008), 16-17.

37 YVA, M.5, File 80, Lists, reports and certificates of the Ustredna Zidov–UZ (Central Union of Jewish Communities), regarding the help given by the UZ to the deportees to labor camps, and regarding the organization of monthly support for these labor camps, 22 April 1942–10 August 1944.

38 YVA, M.5, File 80, Lists, reports and certificates, 22 April 1942–10 August 1944.

39 YVA, M.5, File 68, Correspondence between the Central Economics Office and the Ministry of the Interior, the Policajne Riaditelstvo (Police headquarters), the Central Union of Jewish Communities and other institutions, 1940-1944.

40 See Solon Beinfeld, "Health Care in the Vilna Ghetto," *Holocaust Genocide Studies* 12, no. 1 (1998): 66-98; Mckenna Longacre, Solon Beinfeld, Sabine Hildebrandt, Leonard Glantz, and Michael A. Grodin, "Public Health in the Vilna Ghetto as a Form of Jewish Resistance," *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 2 (2015): 293-301.

41 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 710, 755, and 756.

required to visit the camp barber.[42] Because maintaining facial hair was viewed as a demonstration of men's orthodox faith, rabbis may have opposed such measures, but as of now, no source linking the influence of rabbis to this preventive measure has been found. The sources do not include any precise instructions for barbers; thus, the possibility that facial hair was accepted by camp authorities can be neither confirmed nor denied.

Often lacking in hygiene prior to internment, the influx of pauperized individuals who arrived after being imprisoned in different camps or labor centers and those who had been in hiding—who were often exhausted, filthy, infested with lice, and ill—constituted a grave risk to public health in the camp. As a preventive measure, the Central Office of Labor published a directive that persons infested with lice were not to be admitted to the camp.[43] Banning the admission of individuals infested with lice was meant to hinder any further infestation in the camp, and thus to prevent wasting resources for subsequent large-scale sanitary measures. It is, however, not clear what the procedure was if a person who had to be admitted to the camp was infested with lice. In Sereď, cleanliness was mandated and enforced by the camp's Health Service, which was overseen by a chief physician and his medical staff.[44] All inmates had to clean the barracks weekly, including airing out *paillassons*, straw-filled bed ticks. The Orderly Service and the social counselor oversaw the cleanliness of barracks, and according to the accommodation order from autumn 1942, each barrack commander and his deputy were responsible for maintaining the order, sanitation, and cleanliness of their barrack. Every week, barrack commanders selected a unit to take on cleaning duties: two women cleaned the corridors, toilets, and washrooms, and men took out the garbage. Three persons were also responsible for sweeping the area around the barrack.[45] On the weekends, each family and every inmate had to participate in a thorough cleaning of their barrack, including sleeping and living quarters, corridors, and toilets. Every inmate was obliged to air their bedding and beat mattresses.[46] The weekly

42 YVA, M.5, File 68, Correspondence between the Central Economics Office and the Ministry of the Interior, the Policajne Riaditelstvo (Police headquarters), the Central Union of Jewish Communities and other institutions, 1940-1944.

43 Pokreis, "Zdravotná starostlivosť v koncentračnom a pracovnom tábore v Seredi," 29-30.

44 YVA, M. 5, File 87, Official documentation regarding Sered camp, including the camp regulations, 19 April 1944.

45 SNA, Fund MV, Box 393, File 1021/43.

46 Ibid.

cleaning was an essential preventative public health measure ordered by the Jewish leadership of Sereď.

Medical Care

Efforts to improve the conditions in the camp took time to yield fruit. The Jewish leadership secured proper garbage removal in autumn 1942; an adequate number of toilets, showers, and baths were available by the summer 1943; and a new well that supplied safe drinking water was dug only in the first half of 1944. Nutritious food was never secure, though a sufficient number of meals were available by 1943.[47] Until the Jewish leadership was able to successfully implement these measures, inmates suffered both physically and psychologically. Despite the fact that since the very beginning, a clinic operated in each labor camp, Sereď's camp physician Dr. Jakub Herzog complained that the equipment furnishing the single room dedicated to patient treatment was primitive.[48] Medical supplies and equipment improved only in the autumn of 1943.[49] In addition to the initial shortage of medicine and medical equipment, the clinic lacked physicians.[50] The Slovak state faced a significant problem with regard to physicians with Jewish origins. In 1939, almost 44 percent of all physicians in Slovak territory were Jewish.[51] The number may have been even higher considering new converts, atheists, or those who did not claim a religion. Slovak authorities were aware that banning such a large number of doctors from practicing medicine would destroy the country's public health system. Therefore, the legal bans on Jewish physicians practicing medicine that had gradually been implemented starting in 1939 had

47 For each aspect of welfare, see: SNA, Fund MV, Box 393, File 1021/43; BArch, R 70, ID 9866760, File Bericht uber die judische Arbeitslager und -zentren in der Slowakei zum 30. Juni 1943 und uber ihre Tatigkeit im ersten Halbjahr 1943.

48 YVA, M.5, File 80, Lists, reports and certificates, 22 April 1942–10 August 1944. See also: Nina Paulovičová and Jozef Urminský, *Židovská komunita v dejinách mesta Hlohovec (1938-1945). Príbeh, ktorý prešiel tmou* (Hlohovec: Občianske združenie Ex Libris Ad Personam Hlohovec, 2009), 79 and 133; Jozef Sulaček, *Biele plášte. Tragické osudy židovských lekárov na Slovensku v období druhej svetovej vojny. II. Časť* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum. Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2006), 45.

49 SNA, Fund MV, Box 393, File D2-14-0200/24742.

50 YVA, M.5, File 68, Correspondence between the Central Economics Office and the Ministry of the Interior, the Policajne Riaditelstvo (Police headquarters), the Central Union of Jewish Communities and other institutions, 1940-1944.

51 Jozef Sulaček, *Biele plášte. Tragické osudy židovských lekárov na Slovensku v období druhej svetovej vojny. I. Časť* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum. Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2005), 44.

to be reversed or amended.[52] A consequence this course correction was that medical staff were often transferred from camp to camp, mistakenly deported, removed from the deportation lists, or freed from camps and allowed to practice medicine. The situation in Sereď was similarly chaotic.

Although medical professionals were incarcerated in Sereď, there was an overall lack of practicing physicians in the camp. After the former camp's chief physician Dr. Marcel Altman was transferred to a state hospital in Žilina, Dr. Jakub Herzog became the chief medical officer, and at one point, he was the only physician working in the camp.[53] Dr. Maximilian Schiff, who was among the Jewish physicians to be deported, eventually served as a physician most probably from October 1942 until the dissolution of the camp in August 1944.[54] Dr. Maximilian Neufeld arrived in Sereď in October 1942 and stayed for over a year until he was transferred to Vyhne labor camp.[55] In December 1942, Dr. Koloman Deutsch was appointed to be a physician in Sereď, but he too was later transferred to the Nováky camp.[56] There were four professional nurses: Margita Kleinová, Edita Rothová, Edita Neumannová, and most likely Irma Pissková.[57] The ophthalmologist and dentist were a more stable presence in the camp. Starting in October 1942, Alžbeta Kornfeldová worked as an ophthalmologist in Sereď's clinic, and she remained in her position until the end of August 1944.[58] From October 1942 until February 1943, Lily Pretzelmayerová worked as Sereď's dentist. There were two dental technicians, Ondrej Neuwirth and Alexander Adler, who both started working in autumn 1942 and were released or transferred from Sereď in January and November 1943, respectively.[59] Livia (Lucy) Pressburger, the teenaged daughter of the head of Sereď's Jewish Council, worked as a dental assistant.[60]

52 Sulaček, *Biele plášte. I. časť,* 38-58.

53 Sulaček, *Biele plášte. II. časť,* 12; SNA, Fund MV Box 410, File 1465/43.

54 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 763; YVA, O.41, File 287, List of Jewish inmates from Czechoslovakia in Sered camp, 01/1944.

55 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 568; Sulaček, *Biele plášte. II. časť,* 68-69.

56 Sulaček, *Biele plášte. II. časť,* 22.

57 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 373, 685, 589, and 617.

58 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 430; Sulaček, *Biele plášte. II. časť,* 56.

59 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 642, 593 and 5. See also *Biele plášte. II. časť,* 77.

60 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 640.

Sereď's medical staff, entrusted by the Jewish Center, closely monitored the occurrence and spread of infectious and non-infectious diseases and sanitation in the camp. The chief physicians of all three camps reported that the increased incidence of illnesses such as an upset stomach, colds, and stomach ulcers, as well as cardiac disorders were predominantly caused by "mental instability among laborers."[61] Discussions between and the reports of the three camp physicians signaled that stress and emotional distress contributed to increases in noncommunicable illnesses. In addition to illnesses triggered and/or exacerbated by stress, Dr. Herzog suggested that Sereď's location in a valley and its exposure to a direct wind from two sides produced a windy and dusty environment that led to diseases of the respiratory tract.[62] The limitations of Sereď's clinic forced physicians to send their patients to the Jewish hospital or, in complicated cases, to a state hospital. The appropriate treatment of sick inmates was essential for the camp, but preventing the spread of diseases and the early detection of symptoms of illnesses were even more important. Sereď's inmates were obliged to attend a preventive medical check-up once a month.[63] Mass immunization campaigns were conducted, and vaccines against typhoid and chicken pox were administered. One case of scarlet fever in November 1943 led to an immediate mass prophylactic vaccination campaign.[64]

Alternative Health Care Resources

Due to the inadequate supply of food and its poor nutritional value, the Jewish leadership looked for sources of vitamins and minerals available in certain foods. The Jewish Center and the Sereď Jewish Council remained concerned about a lack of specific vitamins crucial for the health and development of children, such as vitamins D and C. Physicians suggested that all members of the camp receive vitamin C supplements, but due to scarce resources, only children and pregnant women received them. However, the Jewish leadership, in particular representatives of the Health Department of the Jewish Center, understood the dangers of a vitamin C deficiency. This is why Dr. Eugen Guttmann, the representative of the Jewish Center's Health sub-department, suggested an alternative source

61 YVA, M.5, File 80, Lists, reports and certificates, 22 April 1942–10 August 1944.
62 Ibid.
63 YVA, M.5, File 87, Official documentation regarding Sered camp, 19 April 1944.
64 YVA, M.5, File 80, Lists, reports and certificates, 22 April 1942–10 August 1944.

of vitamin C: rose hip—ideally consumed as a tea, but he also provided a recipe for a rose hip jam. The suggestion was appreciated since rose hips grew abundantly nearby the Nováky camp. Rose hips would soon be collected and distributed to all the Jewish forced labor camps.[65] Baking multigrain bread was also recommended as a source of vitamins and minerals. But the Slovak state had, in general, concerns about logistics. Food shortages, rationing, and the controlled distribution of goods such as flour, sugar, and meat was a reality not only for the Jewish inmates of camps but also for the Slovak population as a whole.[66] To obtain a sufficient amount of vitamin D, a vitamin essential to human health, a sun lamp producing ultra-violet radiation provided by the Jewish Center was available in Sereď. Dr. Herzog suggested that the sun lamp could be used for groups, but there was no suitable room available for such therapy in the camp.[67] Based on physicians' recommendations, children under the age of twelve could spend a few days recovering from an illness (or even the whole summer holidays) with either their family members who lived outside the camp or with willing Jewish families identified by the Jewish Center.[68]

Childcare

Once Sereď's main function shifted to forced labor, it housed entire families, and special attention was paid to the health of babies and toddlers under the age of three. Because the camp was designed to be profitable, elderly persons, babies, and young children were not seen as cost-effective inmates. Additionally, inmates, mainly women, who provided childcare would be absent from work. In Sereď, such care was perceived as a waste of the female workforce.[69] Thus, the Jewish leader-

65 YVA, M.5, File 81, Protocols of meetings, 02 April 1943–24 August 1944.

66 On the economic situation and rationing controls in wartime Slovakia, see: Eva Škorvanková, "'Tiso, Tuka, kde je múka?' Blahobyt alebo život na prídel?," *Tisovi poza chrbát*, ed. Jozef Hyrja (Bratislava: Hadart, 2020): 133-51.

67 YVA, M.5, File 80, Lists, reports and certificates of the Ustredna Zidov, 22 April 1942–10 August 1944.

68 See: YVA M.5, File 7, Documentation of the Predstavenstvo UZ (administration) of the Central Union of Jewish Communities, including copies of 16 protocols of meetings of the center's administration regarding its current activities and departments.

69 See: Denisa Nešťáková, "'Our Mother Organized It All': The Role of Mothers of Sereď Camp in the Memories of Their Children," *If This Is a Woman: Studies on Women and Gender in the Holocaust*, ed. Denisa Nešťáková, Katja Grosse-Sommer, Borbála Klacsmann, and Jakub Drábik (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 83-100.

Image 2: The crèche and kindergarten were considered an essential part of childcare and healthcare in Sereď. Source: Moreshet Archive, The Mordechai Anielewicz International Center for Holocaust Documentation, Research and Education. Signature D 23-62.

ship in the camp had to address issues pertaining to birth, new motherhood, postpartum recovery, breastfeeding, and infant and childcare. First the inmates themselves, then the Jewish Center, and later the Slovak authorities organized nurseries and kindergartens in the camp.[70] In December 1942, after the deportations of 1942 concluded with the expulsion of approximately 57,000 Jewish individuals from Slovakia, there were around six hundred inmates in Sereď, including fifteen babies under the age of one and ten breastfeeding mothers. There were also forty-two children between the ages of one and six, and forty children between six and fourteen.[71]

While focusing on the youngest children, childcare activities also considered the wellbeing of mothers. The new roles of women outside of households did not go unnoticed by the representatives of the Jewish Center or the leadership of the camps.[72] The Jewish leadership showed

70 See: YVA, M.5, File 84, Documentation regarding matters of education, culture and religion in the labor camps, 12 December 1942–11 April 1944.

71 See: Pokreis, "Zdravotná starostlivosť v koncentračnom a pracovnom tábore v Seredi," 27-33; Vrabcová, "Pracovný tábor Židov v Seredi (1941-1945)," 110-24.

72 For more about women's experiences in Sereď, see: Denisa Nešťáková, "Žena—muž—tábor. K otázke vplyvu rodu na prežívanie holokaustu," *Historický časopis*—

their awareness of the double burden of Jewish women in the camps as mothers and laborers. Thanks to the intervention of the Jewish Center, women in the camps received a short leave from their jobs as "these women have to do housework in addition to their normal work, and therefore absolutely need a few days off to preserve their health."[73] Although they received respite only from their labor in the camp, such an intervention by the Jewish Center represented an important and gendered form of relief for the women.[74]

An extraordinary form of care was made accessible to mothers of newborns: maternity leave. From the very establishment of the camp until the end of August 1944, twenty-five children were born in Sereď.[75] It is not clear whether the provision of maternity leave for women in camps shortly before and after the birth was the result of a centralized decision applicable to all three camps, but in Vyhne, expectant mothers were exempted from work in the camp two weeks before the estimated due date as well as for one year after the birth.[76] Based on two sources, it is also seems that women who were breastfeeding had some exemptions from work, but it is not clear for how long these applied.[77] For instance, in Vyhne, mothers of children younger than three worked only in their households.[78] But in Sereď, a nursery that admitted children up to two and half years old was established in October 1942; thus, women there unquestionably had to return to work earlier than those imprisoned in Vyhne.

Additionally, photographs taken in the camp show babies in the care of nursery staff, and some appear to be even younger than one year old.[79] In Sereď, Ela Weinerová directed the nursery from October 1942 until May 1943, when she and her husband were transferred to Nováky.[80] A camp physician visited the nursery daily to ensure the health of babies and toddlers and prescribed dairy products, which were scarce in the

Prenasledovanie Židov na Slovensku v kontexte holokaustu v strednej Európe 69, no. 4 (2021): 627-54.

73 YVA, M.5, File 81, Protocols of meetings, 02 April 1943–24 August 1944.

74 YVA M.5, File 7, Documentation of the Predstavenstvo UZ (administration) of the Central Union of Jewish Communities.

75 Based on information from the card index, see: USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration.

76 YVA, M.5, File 80, Lists, reports and certificates, 22 April 1942–10 August 1944.

77 Pokreis, "Zdravotná starostlivosť v koncentračnom a pracovnom tábore v Seredi," 30.

78 YVA, M.5, File 80, Lists, reports and certificates, 22 April 1942–10 August 1944.

79 See: YVA, Photo Archives, sg. 82BO1 and sg. 3984/12.

80 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 859 and 860.

camp, to infants in danger of malnutrition.[81] In June 1943, there were already twenty babies and toddlers in the nursery, with four carers looking after them.[82] The youngest babies were most probably the children of women employed as assistants in the nursery, such as Alžbeta Gottschallová, whose son Peter was born in 1942, Malvína Kleinová, whose daughter Klára was born in 1941, and Anna Krumholzová, whose daughter Ruth was born in 1942.[83] Such a pragmatic yet empathetic decision to employ new mothers as childcare workers allowed them to stay with their newborns while still being counted among the workforce in the camp. The constant efforts to improve the camp childcare went far beyond the pragmatism of allowing adults to focus mostly on labor. The Jewish leadership in Sereď and the Jewish Center arranged for donations to improve children's diets, and they collected toys and clothes for infants as a way to create some sense of normalcy, however small, and "make life easier for the inmates."[84]

Conclusion

According to the plans of Slovak state officials, camps were to function as places where the Jewish population would be assembled and/or concentrated before deportation. Once their function shifted to forced labor, these sites temporarily generated financial profits for the state. Although the purpose of the Slovak labor camps for Jews was not murder, the camps functioned as spaces of segregation, humiliation, and exploitation. Many Jews in Slovakia feared that labor camps would lead to future deportation, and they despised the Jewish Center for participating in the creation of these camps and encouraging Jews to apply to become forced laborers. But the Jewish leadership responded to their coerced cooperation with Slovak authorities by organizing social welfare, including public health measures and infrastructure, in camps, and these activities evolved as a form of resistance to policies intentionally designed to harm the Jewish community in Slovakia as a whole. Any improvements to the conditions in labor camps depended on financial support by the Jewish Center, resources from abroad, and donations from Slovak Jewry. The

81 Pokreis, "Zdravotná starostlivosť v koncentračnom a pracovnom tábore v Seredi," 27-33.

82 SNA, Fund MV, Box 392, File 1010/43.

83 USHMM, RG 57.021, Minister of the Interior, Card Index of Arrested Persons, Sereď, Registration no. 233, 371 and 456.

84 YVA, M.5, File 81, Protocols of meetings, 02 April 1943–24 August 1944.

case study of the Sereď camp shows how the Jewish leadership in Slovakia, despite the enormous pressures they faced, developed radical solutions to ensure public health in the extreme environment of labor camps.

In a climate marked by fear and danger, but one that also reflected the religious and cultural values of the Slovak Jewry, the Jewish Center fostered a communal consciousness among the Jewish community in an effort to support the inmates of labor camps. External financial aid and donations were used to bribe officials, which ensured the Slovak authorities, among them the commander of the camp Vašina, would tolerate measures to improve the conditions of camps. Although this acceptance was purchased, it nevertheless allowed for the development and implementation of an effective system of public health. Developing preventive hygienic measures, safeguarding the health of inmates, and the creation of a childcare system were not only manifestations of the Jewish leadership's concerted effort to help their fellow Jews in need. Indeed, because the Jewish leadership was financially responsible for running the camp, ensuring the recovery of sick laborers, carrying out large-scale disinfection drives and preventative measures, and offering prolonged leave to mothers caring for their babies, etc., were undoubtedly also practical strategies to save scarce resources. At the same time, securing donations and paying bribes in order to provide basic health care and, thus, make inmates' life easier went beyond a pragmatism driven by the desire to maximize labor and profits. Through their construction of a public health system that was remarkably successful in fighting hunger, preventing diseases, and offering children decent institutional care, the Jewish leadership in Slovakia also aimed to preserve some sense of normalcy *in extremis*.

The important actions taken to improve the lives of inmates in Sereď camp represented the continuity of the Jewish tradition of welfare and demonstrate the urgency with which the Slovak Jewry acted prior to any organized communal involvement in improving the lives of forced laborers in camps. Before the Second World War, Czechoslovak Jewish organizations provided help mostly to the German and Austrian Jewry fleeing the Third Reich through Czechoslovakia following Hitler's appointment as chancellor.[85] After the Slovak state deported thousands of Jews from Slovakia to a no man's land on the Slovak–Hungarian border in November 1938, refugees obtained food, shelter, and additional clothing thanks

85 Michal Frankl, "Prejudiced Asylum: Czechoslovak Refugee Policy, 1918-60," *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (2014): 537-55.

only to the Slovak Jewish leadership.[86] In the months preceding the creation of labor camps in Slovakia, the Jewish leadership of Slovakia, now forced to organize itself within the framework of the Jewish Center, became a surrogate public health and social welfare system for Jews in need and those who had been expelled from different parts of Slovakia.[87]

The intersection of religious duty, previous experience in the organization of communal aid, and the venality of Slovak authorities enabled the Jewish leadership to develop a public health system in labor camps that advanced the greater goal of protecting Jews in Slovakia from deportation to National Socialist extermination camps in the East. The public health measures undoubtedly benefited those who were incarcerated in Sereď. But most importantly, the systematic efforts to promote public health in the camp were the manifestations of considerate communal awareness, Jewish religious tradition, and the courageous desire to obstruct and resist the Slovak state's antisemitic persecution and the genocidal program of the Nazis.

86 See: James Mace Ward, "The 1938 First Vienna Award and the Holocaust in Slovakia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 1 (2015): 76-108, doi:10.1093/hgs/dcv004; Michal Frankl, "Citizenship of No Man's Land? Jewish Refugee Relief in Zbąszyń and East-Central Europe, 1938-1939," *S:I. M. O. N* 7, no. 2 (2020): 37-49.

87 See Hradská, *Holokaust na Slovensku 8*, 26-29.

Agnieszka Gawlas-Zajączkowska

The Kraków *Judenrat* and Its Evolution

The Establishment of the Judenrat *in Kraków*

After the Germans entered Kraków, the prewar Jewish Council[1] headed by Rafał Landau self-disbanded, and the Jewish population was left without a representative body.[2] There are a few testimonies that describe how the new Kraków *Judenrat* was established and composed, with two distinct versions describing this process. The author of the first, which was published and has been repeatedly quoted, is Aleksander Bieberstein,[3] a doctor and the brother of the first head of the *Judenrat*. The memoirs of Henryk Zwi Zimmermann[4] confirm Bieberstein's version of events. Second, there is a report from the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, which was submitted in 1945 by Leon Salpeter,[5] a member of the Kraków *Judenrat*. It offers a different interpretation of events, backed up by a report published in *Gazeta Żydowska* in 1940.[6] Bieberstein and

1 This article was created from research previously published in: Andrea Löw and Agnieszka Zajączkowska-Drożdż, "Leadership in the Jewish Council as a Social Process: The Example of Cracow," in *The Holocaust and European Societies: Social Processes and Social Dynamics*, ed. Andrea Löw and Frank Bajohr (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 189-205; Agnieszka Zajączkowska-Drożdż, "Krakowski Judenrat," *Studia nad autorytaryzmem i totalitaryzmem* 37, no. 1 (2015): 51-80, Agnieszka Zajączkowska-Drożdż, *Od dyskryminacji do eksterminacji. Polityka Trzeciej Rzeszy wobec Żydów w Krakowie (1939-1943)* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020), 93-125. In the article, the terms *Judenrat* and Jewish Council appear interchangeably and refer to the same institution.

2 Henryk Zwi Zimmermann, *Przeżyłem, pamiętam, świadczę* (Krakow: Baran i Suszyński, 1997), 88.

3 Aleksander Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1985).

4 Zwi Zimmermann, *Przeżyłem*, 91.

5 Leon Salpeter, untitled testimony, Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (hereafter AŻIH) 301/448.

6 *Gazeta Żydowska*, no. 1, July 23, 1940, 5. *Gazeta Żydowska* was a propaganda newspaper controlled by the Germans, but due to its reach, it was also used by the

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Salpeter each described the composition of the Kraków *Judenrat* differently, and in both cases, these descriptions differ from the one that appears in the German document.[7]

All of the accounts agree that the *Judenrat*, as a representative office of the Jews in Kraków, was established at the beginning of September 1939; that it was headed by Marek Bieberstein; and that the position of deputy was held by Wilhelm Goldblatt. The headquarters of the Jewish Council was located at 41 Krakowska Street. According to Aleksander Bieberstein's account, the occupation authorities ordered Marek Bieberstein to establish the *Judenrat*.[8] The reasons given for his appointment were that he was a teacher and a well-known social activist in Kraków, and that prior to the war, he had cooperated with the city administration. For these reasons, the vice mayor of the city of Kraków, Stanisław Klimecki, recommended Bieberstein to a representative of the Gestapo. On September 8, 1939, Marek Bieberstein received a written order from SS-Oberscharführer Paul Siebert requesting the creation of a *Judenrat* consisting of twenty-three people with Bieberstein at the helm.[9] According to this account, Bieberstein managed to convince the Zionists to join the new body, which was officially established on September 12, 1939. Initially, it consisted of sixteen people. An additional seven members joined later. The new Jewish body was given the authority to determine how it would carry out the functions with which it was charged. The council was also divided into separate departments, which over time were either expanded or reduced depending on the situation and needs of the community. The most important departments focused on social welfare, housing, finance, health, and the economic and general administration of Kraków's Jewish community.

The first meeting took place after the German mayor of the city, Karl Schmid, approved the composition of the council. According to Aleksander Bieberstein's memoirs, during that meeting with the occupation authorities, Paul Siebert clarified the position of the *Judenrat* to all present: "Do you think we appointed you to have power? You are here to obey our orders fully and without question and to follow our commands carefully. All matters must be carried out under the supervision of the

Germans to inform Jews about new regulations and decisions. In some cases, this newspaper may be considered a useful source of information.

7 The German document *Ältestenrat der jüdischen Gemeinde in Krakau*, AŻIH 241/24. Archiwum Ringelbluma, sygn. Ring. I/785/1, Obwieszczenie z 17 IX 1939 r. o powołaniu nowego zarządu Tymczasowego Zarządu Gminy Wyznaniowej w Krakowie.

8 Similar information can be found in Zwi Zimmermann, *Przeżyłem, pamiętam, świadczę*.

9 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 156-57.

officers present here; you should only contact them at the Gestapo headquarters at 2 Pomorska Street."[10] Moreover, he stated that the Germans were in Kraków as victors and had no intention of supporting the Jews. The head of the *Judenrat* was directly responsible for the activities of the whole council, and all Jews were subject to the orders of the security police (*Sicherheitspolizei*), meaning that they were not allowed to negotiate with any other authorities.[11] Henryk Zwi Zimmermann offers a similar description of these events.[12] He refers to an interview with Marek Bieberstein's daughter, from whom he obtained information on Bieberstein's appointment to serve as chairman of the Judenrat.

A different version of the events is recounted in the testimony of Leib Salpeter.[13] According to Salpeter, it was Polish vice mayor Stanisław Klimecki who ordered the establishment of a temporary council consisting of members from the Jewish community—to be appointed by him—shortly after German troops entered Kraków. The reason for this was that because representatives of the prewar Jewish community had fled Kraków, the Jews had been left without any formal representation. The temporary management board consisted of twelve members headed by Marek Bieberstein. Only at the beginning of 1940, on the orders of the Gestapo, was the council reorganized. Twelve members proposed by the Jews and approved by the Gestapo were added, and the composition of the *Judenrat* was approved by the Gestapo clerk for Jewish affairs, Oskar Brandt. Salpeter described the first meeting of the new council differently than Aleksander Bieberstein. According to Salpeter, it took place in mid-February 1940 in the presence of Brandt. The new members received their papers, and they established different commissions to function as advisory bodies. The commissions consisted of both members of the council and people from outside its ranks.[14]

In the July 1940 edition of *Gazeta Żydowska*, there was an article that contained information about the Jewish community in Kraków that tends to confirm Salpeter's account. It stated that the departure of the Jewish representatives from the city after the outbreak of the war created

10 Zwi Zimmermann, *Przeżyłem, pamiętam, świadczę*, 91; Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 18. All translations in the article are the author's.

11 Dora Agatstein-Dormontowa, "Żydzi w Krakowie w okresie okupacji niemieckiej," *Kraków w latach okupacji 1939-1945. Studia i materiały*, *Rocznik Krakowski* (Krakow: Towarzystwo Miłośników Historii i Zabytków Krakowa, 1957), 187, Dawid Szlang, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/240.

12 Zwi Zimmermann, *Przeżyłem, pamiętam, świadczę*.

13 Salpeter, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/448.

14 Salpeter, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/448.

a very difficult situation for the Jewish population of Kraków. Additionally, the financial situation of the community was dire; thus, on the initiative of the Jews, an aid department was established which later transformed into the *Judenrat*. The report continued:

> With the encouragement of Marek Bieberstein and Dr. [Wilhelm] Goldblatt and their understanding of the current state of affairs, including the need to take care of the local Jewish population … and the requirements of the war refugees, who arrived in the thousands during the war, wandering the streets without shelter, food, or a livelihood, the Aid Department, composed of several Jewish men who were regarded as very responsible, was approved by a resolution of the then municipal board, which turned the Aid Department into the Temporary Board of the Jewish Religious Community in Kraków.[15]

It is not known what caused the discrepancies in the descriptions of the *Judenrat*'s establishment. It is also difficult to judge which version was true, especially because both descriptions fit with what we know about how Jewish Councils were often created in different places across occupied Poland. They also correspond with the behavior of the German occupiers and Jewish communities in Poland during the first months of the war. Aleksander Bieberstein, Zimmermann, and Salpeter were all social activists involved in the life of the Jews in Kraków both before and during the war who witnessed and often participated in the described events. A significant point to make is that while both Bieberstein and Zimmermann published their memoirs many years after the war, Salpeter's account dates back to 1945 and was submitted to the Central Jewish Historical Commission at the Central Committee of Jews in Poland immediately after the end of the war.[16] For this reason, the version of events presented by him may be considered more plausible even though his account is nowadays less familiar to researchers. Furthermore, the report in *Gazeta Żydowska* also supports the claim that the initiative to establish a Jewish representative office in Kraków did not come from the occupation authorities. As part of the *Judenrat*, the *Ordnungsdienst* (OD)—the Jewish police force—was also established, initially to help maintain order; however, it quickly became independent from the *Judenrat*.[17]

15 *Gazeta Żydowska*, no. 1, July 23, 1940, 5.

16 Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna (CŻKH) przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce (CKŻP).

17 The Ordnungsdienst (OD–Jewish Police), headed by Symche Spira, carried out Gestapo orders; its duties included, in particular, performing police functions in

It is very important to consider the ways *Judenräte* were established alongside the motives behind them. This approach allows us to understand the attitudes of members of the Jewish communities at the beginning of the war to the new political reality forced upon them, in addition to helping us grasp the perilous situation Jewish inhabitants of Polish cities were faced with. If we assume that the prewar Jewish Council in Kraków (later transformed into the *Judenrat*) was established on the initiative of the Jews, this indicates that the Jewish community elite felt a sense of responsibility, a willingness to both help and attempt to organize the lives of Jews in rapidly deteriorating conditions. It also suggests that they (community elites) were *able* to get involved for the good of the community. It is also worth emphasizing that by creating the Jewish Council, the Jews of Kraków demonstrated courage and initiative, showing their desire to have an impact on the further fate of the Jewish community in the city.

The process of forming *Judenräte* in occupied Poland turned out to be very difficult as leading social activists refused to join bodies that had to cooperate or negotiate with the German authorities.[18] This was also the case for the Jews in Kraków. Zwi Zimmermann recalled that even though activists recognized that there was a need to support the Jewish community, they were reluctant and fearful not only of cooperating with the occupation authorities but also of the responsibility that came with it.[19]

In return for working on the council, members were given certain privileges such as the ability to inhabit their personal residence. Additionally, both their residences and possessions were protected from searches and confiscation, and they had the ability to move freely after the curfew was announced.[20] At the same time, they bore personal responsibility for carrying out German orders and were in danger of being punished for executing orders improperly.

the ghetto, transporting Jewish workers from the ghetto to places of forced labor, and guarding the ghetto gates. This institution also took an active role in actions related to deportations, participating in the creation of transport lists, house searches, and escorting people to trains. In various postwar accounts, Symche Spira is described as a person who ruthlessly followed the orders of the Germans, provoking fear among the inhabitants of the ghetto. To read more about the OD in Kraków, see: Zajączkowska-Drożdż, *Od dyskryminacji,* 137-39.

18 Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 17-21.

19 Zwi Zimmermann, *Przeżyłem, pamiętam, świadczę*, 89-90.

20 Salpeter, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/448.

The Agenda of the Judenrat

The main task of the *Judenrat* was to implement German regulations. Initially, these orders related mainly to the organization of the Jewish community's life. The first regulations concerned the registration and marking of Jews and their property with the Star of David. During the first phase of the occupation, which lasted until the creation of the Kraków ghetto in March 1941, the *Judenrat* carried out orders concerning the maintenance of statistics, the execution of a census, and the need to register the Jewish population and businesses, allocate food to Jewish residents, as well as announce and implement the orders of the occupiers. Initially such orders included organizing Jews for forced labor, but later the *Judenrat* was enlisted to coordinate the resettlement of the majority of the Jewish residents from Kraków.[21]

At the same time, the *Judenrat* was obliged to provide all the necessary equipment to run offices and buildings occupied by German officials attending to the increasing number of German residents in Kraków.[22] Salpeter wrote: "Due to the fact that the German authorities chose Kraków as the capital of the General Government, thus, various offices were established here which the Jewish community had to furnish. To this end, the *Judenrat* was forced to confiscate furniture and other items from the Jews and buy a whole range of items for these authorities."[23]

Acts of Terror

From the beginning of the occupation, the Germans used violence and terror against the Jewish population without sparing the members of the *Judenrat*. An example of such harassment and threats was the order issued by the German authorities on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur (September 22-23, 1939), which forced the Jews to fill in all the anti-aircraft ditches that had been dug by the Polish army before the German invasion.

21 In accordance with Hans Frank's decision to reduce the number of Jews in Kraków, an order was issued on May 18, 1940, stating that Jews were to vacate Kraków. Only 15,000 Jewish workers were allowed to stay in the city. The resettlement of Jews lasted from May 1940 to March 1941. Jews were resettled mainly in nearby villages. See: Zajączkowska-Drożdż, *Od dyskryminacji*, 39-65.

22 Agatstein-Dormontowa, "Żydzi w Krakowie w okresie okupacji niemieckiej," 188.

23 Salpeter, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/448.

All members of the *Judenrat* were threatened with the death penalty if the Jews failed to complete the order.[24]

The Germans also organized raids on the Jewish quarter during which they searched apartments and confiscated personal property. These raids took place in Kazimierz—the Jewish quarter of Kraków—on December 5 and 6, 1939, and in Podgórze in February 1940. In both cases, the Germans plundered inhabitants' property.[25] Some of the most heinous crimes against the Jews, including members of the *Judenrat*, were reported by Eugeniusz Redlich, who explained that on December 5, 1939, his uncle Maksymilian Redlich, who was part of the *Judenrat*, was taken by the Germans to the synagogue on Issaac Street and ordered to set it on fire. His uncle refused and was shot dead as a result.[26]

The Germans used terror and intimidation to compel Jews' obedience. The members of the *Judenrat*, who were also victimized by the occupiers, sought to alleviate the impact of the terror. Aleksander Bieberstein described the first months of the *Judenrat*'s activity as follows:

> Countering and mitigating the harassment of the occupier was one of the main tasks of the council. This activity was very costly and consisted mainly of giving gifts and money to the Germans, in particular, SS members. This activity absorbed the strict leadership of the council to such an extent that other matters were often handled by the heads of particular council departments, as well as by the heads of different social institutions. The interventions of the members of the Council of the Jewish Community with the German authorities were generally effective, especially during the first period of the occupation.[27]

The Organization of Social Assistance

As the situation of Jews in Kraków under the German occupation grew increasingly difficult, one of the most important tasks of the *Judenrat* was the organization of social assistance. The activities of all prewar Jewish charitable and social institutions were suspended due to the lack of funds and because the mass flight to the east, away from the approaching

24 Salpeter, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/448, Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 19.
25 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 22-23.
26 Eugeniusz Redlich, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/779.
27 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 17.

Wehrmacht, caused chaos.[28] Another important motive for organizing social assistance was the broad resettlement policy of Germany, which especially affected Poles and Jews from the territories incorporated into the Reich, as well as Jews and Roma expelled from Germany to the General Government in the first months of the war. This caused the number of Jews in Kraków to balloon. Moreover, the Jews were gradually excluded from economic life: they were deprived of their sources of income, their accounts were frozen, and they were not allowed to work in certain professions.[29] Bieberstein described the situation at the time as follows: "The pauperization of Kraków's Jewish population was increasing. Poverty was growing among pensioners … the disabled, as well as among clerks who had been fired, and especially among the constantly growing number of displaced people."[30] Salpeter also emphasized:

> It should be noted that, in addition to the refugees, a large number of Jews from Kraków remained homeless because the Germans were expelling Jews from their flats, which were located in the streets outside of … the Jewish district of Kazimierz.[31]

Many similar descriptions can be found in archival documents. For example:

> There were many people in need of help because first, there were numerous Jewish public officials and pensioners who had been deprived of their positions and salaries by the Germans. Second, many workers were closed in barracks in labor camps located near Kraków. They were supported with cash and in-kind benefits.[32]

The *Judenrat* soon realized that they had to provide the community with social assistance. Bieberstein wrote: "Helping these people was of special concern to the council."[33] The *Judenrat* began setting up administrative structures to ensure assistance was provided to those most in need and established a Social Welfare Department, among other things. It also created shelters for the homeless, kitchens to provide free food, a sanitary commission, and a housing department. Bieberstein recalled:

28 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 17.
29 To read more, see: Zajączkowska-Drożdż, *Od dyskryminacji,* 11-63.
30 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 29.
31 Salpeter, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/448.
32 Anonymous testimony, AŻIH 301/5093.
33 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 29.

> The housing office of the Jewish Community, headed by Dr. Emil Wasserlauf, tried to solve the increasingly difficult housing problems; the homeless were placed partly in private Jewish apartments in Kazimierz and partly in both collective quarters and shelters.[34]

The *Judenrat* also called on the Jewish inhabitants of Kraków to help refugees. An example of this request appears in a document that somehow was preserved. It states that the Council of the Jewish Community in Kraków was informed that some Jewish owners of real estate in Podgórze refused to allow refugees who had been taken in by the Jewish Community to access water. The council demanded that all Jewish owners of properties neighboring the refugee centers unconditionally allow refugees to draw water from their homes during a transitional period, until the water supply in the refugee centers was repaired. Any Jew who did not obey the order was threatened with immediate punishment, though the document did not specify what those penalties were.[35]

Another very important task facing the *Judenrat* was the need to create soup kitchens for the most impoverished. Bieberstein recalled:

> The matter of food was no less a concern; communal kitchens were established, often thanks to the spontaneous initiative of private individuals who obtained funds from charity donations to run them. When these funds turned out to be insufficient, the Jewish Community imposed an additional tax on the Jewish inhabitants in order to support the communal kitchens and shelters. In October 1939, there were only a few kitchens, and in the spring of 1940, the number reached 50.[36]

In January 1940, *Gazeta Żydowska* presented an analysis of the data available from the kitchen at 3 Dajwór street, according to which between five hundred and six hundred meals were served daily either for a minimal fee or completely free of charge. The announcement also explained that "due to the difficult financial condition of the Jewish community, the kitchen relies on the dedication of Jewish society."[37] According to the financial

34 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 29, Salpeter, untitled testimony, AŻIH 301/448.

35 *Do żydowskich właścicieli realności w Krakowie—Podgórzu!*, March 13, 1940, RG-15.072M/5001, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); and AŻIH 218/4.

36 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 29.

37 *Gazeta Żydowska*, no. 4, January 14, 1941, 3.

report of the Jewish Council in Kraków, for the period September 1939 to September 1940, communal kitchens served about 3.5 million meals.[38]

In addition to soup kitchens, the *Judenrat* also supplied funding to support other aid institutions, such as hospitals, dormitories, an old people's home, among others. Dr. Maurycy Haber, a member of the *Judenrat* board, came up with an initiative to establish a Sanitary Commission that could help oversee the condition of personal hygiene to avoid possible epidemics among Jewish inhabitants of Kraków. After his appeal, 156 doctors and 110 other medical staff volunteered to work at the Commission for free. The first meeting was held on 26 February 1940. Before the ghetto was created (March 1941), the commission functioned in three districts of Kraków: Kazimierz, Stradom, and Podgórze. It played a very important role during the war, until the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto in March 1943. Its main tasks included controlling and maintaining the level of cleanliness mainly in collective quarters but also in private apartments. In addition, campaigns which raised awareness on the basic principles of hygiene, targeted at the Jews in Kraków, were conducted by the committee. The *Judenrat* also established a Disinfection Department. As a result of the activities of these institutions, no epidemic ever broke out in the Kraków ghetto;[39] however, the situation changed in 1943, when the Nazis liquidated the ghetto and sent the remaining Jews to the Plaszow camp, where a typhus epidemic broke out.[40]

The above-mentioned examples of *Judenrat* members' involvement in social matters and the ways in which they tried to solve the problems of everyday life indicate that they were fully committed to maintaining the most important elements of the functioning of the Jewish community. As long as they could, every effort was made to organize help for those most in need.

Composition of the Kraków Judenrat

All *Judenräte* played a very important role in the implementation of the German policy toward the Jews. Due to the fact that both German policies and their goals were constantly evolving, the nature and role of the *Judenräte* also kept changing. At the beginning of the occupation, the

38 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 35.
39 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 175.
40 Julian Aleksandrowicz, "Ludzie Służby Zdrowia w okupowanym i podziemnym Krakowie," *Przegląd Lekarski*, no. 1a, (1963): 132.

Germans strived to isolate Jews from society by concentrating them in larger cities using a resettlement policy, took control of how the Jewish communities functioned, and enclosed Jews in ghettos. During this period, the Kraków *Judenrat* performed administrative functions, and at the time, local Jews saw the institution as representing their interests, and they were still treated as part of the Jewish community, regardless of the orders they had to implement.[41] At the same time, their members had to be very skilled at different tasks to be able to meet the German requirements. The newly established Kraków *Judenrat* consisted of people who had previously had a positive impact on the Jewish community and who, before the war, had performed various functions in communal structures. They were also well-known locals who had authority in the community. The first chairman, Marek Bieberstein, was a teacher, and his successor Artur Rosenzweig was an attorney. Attorney Dr. Dawid Szlang and pharmacist Leon Salpeter, among others, dealt with various social matters.

The education, prestige, and competences of the *Judenrat* members were of fundamental importance for the Germans at the beginning of the occupation. Their responsibilities required a wide range of skills and abilities related to, among others, logistics and legal and social issues. In addition, knowledge of the German language was essential. Henryk Zwi Zimmerman, who worked in the Social Welfare Department, recalled: "Many of us received clerical positions in line with our education or talents. In this way, we could help and have a certain influence on what was happening."[42] Moreover, the Germans introduced terror as well as the threat of very strict penalties for failing to comply with their orders. This allowed the Germans to fully utilize the combined skills of all the council members.[43]

We can observe a fundamental tendency when analyzing the attitudes of the members of the *Judenrat* and the ways they cooperated with the German authorities. As the Nazis radicalized their anti-Jewish policy, it became increasingly valuable for the Germans that the character traits of the *Judenrat* members changed from the skills already mentioned to submission, that is, showing a willingness to cooperate and carry out all German orders without hesitation. At this point, it is worth emphasizing

41 See: Raul Hilberg, "The Judenrat: Conscious or Unconscious 'Tool,'" in *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe 1933-1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 31-44.

42 Zimmermann, *Przeżyłem, pamiętam, świadczę*, 93.

43 See: Aharon Weiss, "Jewish Leaderschip in Occupied Poland—Postures and Attitudes," in *The Third International Historical Conference* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977), 335-65.

that in Kraków, the chairman of the *Judenrat* decided the direction of the council's policies and, together with his deputy, personally maintained contact with the Germans. Therefore, it is justified to characterize the *Judenrat* and its activities by analyzing the attitudes of its chairmen.

The first chairman, Marek Bieberstein, was a well-known and respected social activist who had been involved in many charitable activities and had cooperated with the Kraków city authorities before the war. He held this position until his arrest in September 1940. The main challenges he and his team had to deal with were related to the introduction of a number of regulations that ultimately limited the rights of the Jews: for example, the organization of forced labor, the sudden increase in the numbers of Jews being resettled in Kraków and, subsequently, the process of displacing them from the city, which according to the Germans orders had to be freed from the Jews.[44]

At the time, the members of the *Judenrat* cooperated with each other to fulfill German demands, which were mostly implemented without delay. Bieberstein, together with the other members of the board, put in a lot of work into helping displaced people survive this difficult period in Kraków. They established kitchens that supplied free food, night shelters, as well as a sanitary commission and fundraisers for the homeless and most destitute. Because of the intervention of the *Judenrat*, the situation was soon brought under control. One of the challenges they faced was the displacement of Jews from Kraków, in response to which Bieberstein tried to bribe a member of the resettlement commission, the Volksdeutscher Eugen Reichter, to obtain permission for more Jews to stay. Unfortunately Bieberstein was arrested along with others for the part he played in this plan and prosecuted. A document from Bieberstein's interrogation during the trial in German courts has been preserved. In it, he explained: "I was aware that I was acting against the law … Nevertheless, I still decided to act in this way, convinced that as a superior, I could help my Jewish brothers the best I could …"[45] Marek Bieberstein was sentenced to eighteen months in prison.[46]

This event illustrates the willingness of the first *Judenrat* to help their fellow Jews. It is also important to underline that the members of the *Judenrat*, at that time, were willing to take huge risks and make sacrifices in the hope that these could improve the situation of the Jewish population.

44 As the capital of the General Government.

45 Postępowanie procesowe, Kraków, dn.13.09.1940, AŻIH 218/2, published in: Andrea Löw and Marcus Roth, *Krakowscy Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939-1945* (Krakow: Univeritas, 2014).

46 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 33.

Artur Rosenzweig was the second chairman of the *Judenrat*. He held this position from the beginning of 1941 until his deportation from the Kraków ghetto on June 4, 1942. During his term in the office, many important events took place including the creation of the ghetto, the allocation of housing in the ghetto, the organization of forced labor, and the first deportation of Jews to the extermination camps. Tadeusz Pankiewicz described Rosenzweig as a highly decent man who treated his new position as a burden.[47] He also wrote that Rozenzweig was accused by the broader Jewish community of inactivity and reacting too passively. This was explained by his resignation and powerlessness in the face of violence, which deprived him of believing in the effectiveness of any of his efforts.[48] Aleksander Bieberstein also confirmed that Rosenzweig was forced to take the position of chairman of the Jewish Council, and that he found this position extremely unpleasant and burdensome.[49]

As the *Judenrat*'s composition changed, so too did its relationships with both the German authorities and the Jewish population. During the functioning of the second *Judenrat*, as the situation of the Jews deteriorated, we find information in memoirs about the council's reluctance and lack of faith in striving to help the Jewish population, as well as its lack of commitment to carrying out German orders.[50] As chairman, Rosenzweig—among others—was responsible for the efficient deportation of Jews to the extermination camps. During the first deportation to Bełżec, the Germans were not satisfied with the outcome of the operation because the number of people collected was not sufficient; thus, they ordered the search be repeated several times in order to reach the allocated number. To punish Rosenzweig, the Germans dismissed him from his position and deported him to Bełżec together with his family. This situation was witnessed by Pankiewicz, who wrote:

47 Tadeusz Pankiewicz was the Polish owner of a pharmacy which, after the creation of the Kraków ghetto, was located within its walls. Pankiewicz managed to keep the pharmacy and continued working in it throughout the functioning of the ghetto. The pharmacy was situated at Plac Zgody, from where all transports from the ghetto departed. Pankiewicz witnessed all the key events in the ghetto, and he published his memoirs: Tadeusz Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003). See also: Anna Pióro, *Magister Tadeusz Pankiewicz* (Krakow: Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa, 2013).

48 Pankiewicz*, Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 96-97.

49 Alicja Jarkowska-Natkaniec, "Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst in Occupied Kraków during the Years 1940-1945," *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 11 (2013): 150; Testimony of Michał Weichert, AŻIH 302/25, p. 200.

50 Pankiewicz*, Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 227.

> After a few minutes, Rosenzweig appears: he is walking slowly without his hat, with slightly disheveled graying hair, an elderly gentleman. He stops in front of both the Gestapo and SS men and bows his head slightly. After a moment of silence, words of woe are uttered from the mouth of one SS man: "Rosenzweig, you are now dismissed from your position, the operation did not offer satisfactory results either in terms of the numbers or in terms of the technical delivery of people to the square. You are guilty for it!" While saying this, he hits Dr. Rosenzweig on the head. … Dr. Rosenzweig does not say anything, bows his head slightly again, and walks away.[51]

Such brutal treatment of the second *Judenrat* chairman was a clear signal that working in the Jewish administration, even holding the highest position, did not shield one from deportation. Failure to comply with German orders was synonymous with death.

Dawid Gutter became the new *Judenrat* chairman. Before the war, he had been a shopkeeper. During the war, he first worked for the *Judenrat* in Tarnów before going on to collect orders for local workshops. He then moved to Kraków to reorganize the craft workshops before being chosen to serve in Kraków's *Judenrat* as an outsider.[52] However, even after his appointment, he was formally recognized only as a ghetto commissioner. He remained in this position until the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto. During his tenure, the Germans deported Jews to Bełżec and reduced the ghetto area in October 1942, before finally liquidating the ghetto on March 13-14, 1943. Unlike previous leaders, the new chairman was actively involved in helping the German authorities implement their extermination plans. This was allegedly due to his low social status before the war as well as the ease with which the Germans bribed him.[53]

Pankiewicz wrote about Gutter as follows:

> A former traveling salesman and a salesman of journals, an extremely nervous man, as if constantly busy, with uncoordinated movements, sly, with a great enthusiasm for listening to and obeying German orders … Since the Germans elevated him into such a "high" position, he became conceited, he had a superiority complex which distracted him … During the deportation, he ran from one German to another like a madman, screaming and gesturing madly with his hands.[54]

51 Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 94-96.
52 Weichert, AŻIH 302/25, p. 286.
53 Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 227.
54 Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 96.

In memoirs, Gutter's rule is widely regarded as the period when the Germans treated the Jews in Kraków with increased brutality.

Finances

From the beginning of its operation, the Kraków *Judenrat* had major financial problems. Aleksander Bieberstein recalled that in September 1939, "the finances of the community board were scarce."[55] The *Judenrat* needed an abundance of money to both launch social institutions and carry out the orders of the occupation authorities. One of the most important sources of income both before and during the war, in addition to taxes, was fundraising in the Jewish community. During the first year of the occupation, it constituted a significant percentage of the communal budget.[56] In the period from September 1939 to September 1940, the *Judenrat* also received some funding from the municipal authorities to support social welfare institutions and displaced people; unfortunately, these amounts were not sufficient.[57] Jews in Kraków also received financial support from Jewish Social Self-Help (Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna—Jüdische Soziale Selbsthilfe)[58] and the AJJDC (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee).[59]

One of the ways the *Judenrat* tried to improve the financial situation was to take advantage of the forced resettlement policies the Germans imposed on the Jewish population in Kraków, as wealthier Jews were willing to pay large sums to the *Judenrat* for permission to remain in the city. Michał Weichert, chairman of the Jewish Social Self-Help, recalled in his account that "Stadthauptmann allowed the *Judenrat* to accept financial donations from the wealthier (Jews), turning the proceeds from this source into support for the poor evacuees. In this way, it was officially possible for people to buy themselves out of resettlement, and,

55 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 17.
56 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 36.
57 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, *36.*
58 Jewish Social Self-Help was established in the summer of 1940 and operated throughout the entire General Government. It was subordinated to the Department for Population and Social Welfare under the government of the General Government; its headquarters was located in Kraków at Stradom Street 10. After the establishment of the ghetto, it was then moved to Józefińska Street 18. The chairman was Michał Weichert. See: Sabina Mirowska, *Dzieje zakładu sierot w Krakowie podczas okupacji niemieckiej,* AŻIH 301/2048, p.11-17.
59 Elżbieta Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim w latach 1939-1945* (Rzeszów: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2014), 241-42.

thus, the Council had a displacement fund."[60] Survivor Zenon Szpingarn also described this situation in his account:

> The community, chronically suffering from financial difficulties, tried various tricks in order to bring in profits. In this case, the council was too eager to fulfill this task … So they displaced very wealthy people who bought themselves out from this practice for a few thousand.[61]

The *Judenrat* also created a reserve funded by money paid by people who had been called up for forced labor but wanted to avoid it.[62] Szpingran recalled:

> Everyone had to work cleaning the streets etc. … There was, however, a convenient alternative from which the council, wanting to supplement its meager budget, profited. Whoever wanted to avoid forced labor paid the community 5 złoty a day; however, someone replaced those who paid for 2 złoty a day.[63]

Starting on October 1, 1940, the *Judenrat* introduced a compulsory community contribution of 10 złoty per month for every Jew over the age of twenty-one.[64] Those who were unable to pay were exempt, while those who could afford to pay more were required to pay a higher fee called an extraordinary tax.[65] Szpingarn justified these actions of the *Judenrat* as follows:

> If the pressure and blackmail of the German authorities … forced the council and its enforcement body, the O.D. [the Jewish Police], to take harsh and ruthless steps against its fellow believers, it should be emphasized that in such a difficult situation, the council was able to set up many charitable activities. A perfectly furnished hospital, self-help kitchens, allowances and assistance for widows and orphans, matzah baking, potato distribution—all of these can be remembered, with relief, to give a good account of the unfortunate council.[66]

60 Weichert, AŻIH 302/25, p. 95.
61 Testimony of Zenon Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, p. 8.
62 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 19.
63 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, p. 8.
64 *Gazeta Żydowska*, no. 23, October 3, 1940, 3.
65 *Gazeta Żydowska*, no. 23, October 3, 1940, 3; *Gazeta Żydowska*, no. 27, October 21, 1940, 3.
66 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, pp. 8-9.

After the ghetto had been created, the *Judenrat* held many fundraising events. Bieberstein recalled:

> The financial difficulties the Jewish Council faced meant that all social institutions were largely supported by donations from the society and through money collected through fundraising on the street taking place every Sunday. The proceeds from these collections and events organized for charity purposes were divided among individual institutions.[67]

Szpingarn also wrote: "The community's budget was constantly empty. In order to support it, a theater and a buffet were created in the Optima space."[68] The *Judenrat* frequently requested voluntary donations to support its activities, and these calls were usually effective.

The *Judenrat* used all possible methods to obtain additional funds to help run the institutions inside the ghetto, an example of which was the establishment of a post office. According to an anonymous testimony, "This depot was an organ of the Jewish Council; it had separate clerical staff and several postmen. Since special fees were charged for each delivery as well as for the receipt of a registered letter, parcel, or money order, and, in addition, from the sale of postage stamps, this institution turned out to be a profitable enterprise, especially because the quantities were very high there."[69] The Germans banned this activity in July 1942.

The food available for ghetto inhabitants depended on rations. The Kraków City Board decided on the amount of food to be delivered to the ghetto. Meanwhile the *Judenrat* established a special unit in the ghetto, the *Vermittlungsstelle* (Special Distribution Unit), to distribute food cards (rations). The sale of the rationed products took place in local stores run by the *Judenrat*.[70] Many reports show that the population in the ghetto did not suffer from hunger. Bieberstein confirms this:

> The official food rations were more than modest: 100 g of bread a day and 200 g of sugar and the same amount of fat per month … Additional food was supplied to shops, public kitchens and institutions such as hospitals and the orphanage … Food was brought in via an illegal route, mainly through the wide gates of Podgórze Market

67 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 53.
68 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, p. 8.
69 Anonymous testimony, AŻIH 301/5093, p. 7-11.
70 *Gazeta Żydowska*, no. 27, April 4, 1941, p. 4.

> Square, opened by policemen for bribes. Horse-drawn vehicles and vans with supplies entered the ghetto through these gates mainly at night. Garbage trucks also brought significant food supplies to the ghetto. I have been involved in the retrieval of such illegal shipments several times.[71]

Szpingarn also recalled:

> Smuggling has developed on a large scale. As a result, wealth was earned. The Germans and the police were given large bribes for allowing carts with food to enter. The charge was between 20 to 1000 złoty. There were few people suffering from hunger back then. The intelligentsia, unprepared for similar living conditions, suffered the most. Not having cash or entrepreneurial possibilities, they lived in poverty, using folk kitchens and communal benefits …[72]

In Weichert's account, we read: "Food delivery was good, also the difference in the price of food products between the ghetto and the Aryan side was relatively low."[73]

The situation deteriorated after the Jews were more tightly controlled and when the work columns leaving the ghetto were closely escorted by the Germans. In addition, barracks for the Jews at workplaces were established, which prevented people from returning to the ghetto. Both of these changes had a great influence on the amount of food available in the ghetto. The reduced numbers of interactions with people from the "Aryan side" made it more difficult to smuggle food into the ghetto. "On the streets of the ghetto, one could see more and more emaciated, malnourished people," reported Bieberstein.[74]

The Judenrat *and the Deportations to the Extermination Camps*

The Kraków *Judenrat* cooperated with the Germans during the organization of the deportations of the Jews to extermination camps. During the first deportation, it had to review the residents' identification cards

71 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 52.
72 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, p. 14.
73 Weichert, AŻIH 302/25, p. 196.
74 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 69.

and work certificates. People with a certificate of employment received a stamp that gave them permission to remain in the ghetto. However, office workers, with the exception of the council and the Jewish Social Self-Help, were refused stamps. *Judenrat* members also participated in the inspection of documents, bringing people without stamps to Plac Zgody, from where they were later taken to the Bełżec death camp.[75] As Szpingarn recalled: "The Council members were responsible, with their lives, for … finding those in the ghetto without a stamp. So they were zealously carrying out their task."[76]

It is difficult to say whether the *Judenrat* members already knew the destination of the deportation trains. Aleksander Bieberstein wrote that

> In June 1942 we had already known about the existence of a death camp in Bełżec. The messages had come from Polish railway conductors, who accurately described the siding diverging from the main railway route into the forest. They had described trains full of people leaving this siding, heading into the forest and returning from the forest empty after a short time.[77]

Only in November 1942, one of the transported Jews, the dentist Buchner,[78] managed to escape from Bełżec and returned to the Kraków ghetto, where he informed people about what was happening with those deported to the death camp. Pankiewicz recalled: "It was from him … that the ghetto inhabitants learned that it is true, that there are camps in which the Germans murder, gas, and burn the transported prisoners." Despite the information at hand, the *Judenrat* continued to carry out the German orders.[79] During the deportation process, the *Judenrat* organized bread to be distributed to the deportees: Carts full of bread are still coming. The last gift displaced people could receive from the rest of the community."[80]

In October 1942, during the second deportation from the ghetto, *Judenrat* members actively participated in its organization. After the deportation had commenced, they made an announcement stating that all those going to work had to appear in front of the local office buildings. The only buildings that were exempt from inspection were those of the

75 Agatstein-Dormontowa, "Żydzi w Krakowie w okresie okupacji niemieckiej," 210.
76 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, p. 20.
77 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 57.
78 He is mentioned in the accounts as the dentist Buchner, without a first name.
79 Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 111.
80 Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 85-86.

Judenrat and the Jewish Social Self-Help organ; thus, all the representatives, together with their entire families, took refuge in these buildings.[81]

Before the Germans started the final liquidation of the ghetto, the *Judenrat* tried to postpone the decision. This was recalled by Szpingarn: "The ghetto population has long been aware of the planned liquidation of the district. News was circulating about being resettled to special barracks."[82] The commander of the Płaszów camp Amon Goeth ordered the *Judenrat* to deport Jews working outside of the ghetto to the camp every day, according to a specific plan which started on March 10, 1943. The *Judenrat* chose the date when individual workplaces would move to the Płaszów camp.[83] However, due to the fact that the expectations of the Germans about the numbers of people displaced were not met, they ordered that all Jews from the ghetto would be resettled to Płaszów on March 13, 1943. On that day, the *Judenrat* received an order stating that within the next six hours, all the inhabitants of ghetto A, which housed all those recognized by the Germans as able to work, must be relocated to Płaszów. On the other hand, the inhabitants of ghetto B—people unfit for work—were to be gathered at Plac Zgody on March 14, and then, as the Germans ordered, moved to the "Ostbahn" barracks, where they were to be employed.[84] The lack of apartments in Kraków was used as the pretext for the resettlement.[85]

The *Judenrat* tried to delay the liquidation of the ghetto, as evidenced by the following statements: "The community did whatever it could to revoke this terrible moment of resettlement."[86] In addition: "The Jewish Council, headed by Gutter, tried to postpone the liquidation of the ghetto at all costs for several days in a row."[87] Despite their strenuous efforts, it was not possible to postpone the deportation date. Therefore, the ghetto inhabitants were informed about the planned resettlement. Szpingarn declared:

> At 11 o'clock, the community delegates returned with commandant Goeth and announced that all those working, including children

81 Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 71-72; Agatstein-Dormontowa, "Żydzi w Krakowie w okresie okupacji niemieckiej," 214.
82 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, p. 28.
83 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, pp. 36-37.
84 On December 6, 1942, the ghetto was divided into two parts: A and B. See: Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 164.
85 Agatstein-Dormontowa, "Żydzi w Krakowie w okresie okupacji niemieckiej," 218.
86 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, p. 37.
87 Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 180.

> over 14 years of age, were to move to the barracks within the next two hours. The rest of the people were to stay in ghetto B, along with the children in the kindergarten.[88]

The next day, those who remained in ghetto B were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

After the ghetto was liquidated, members of the *Judenrat* remained there for additional two weeks before the Germans sent them to Płaszów. A few weeks later, the head of the *Judenrat* Gutter and his deputy Streimer were executed together with their families.[89]

Conclusion

The shifting German policies targeting the Jews largely influenced the constantly shifting dynamics and character of the *Judenrat*. During the war, the Kraków *Judenrat* underwent an evident transformation from being helpful toward the Jewish community to following German orders, whatever the consequences.

In many accounts and recollections, the feelings toward the Kraków *Judenrat* are either positive or indifferent, although there were also critical voices. For example, Pankiewicz, a non-Jewish observer, stated:

> For honest people who worked in the Judenrat, it was very harsh. Carrying out orders against one's will, circumventing the law, stalling, finding moderation and peace in convincing thousands of people that the Judenrat did not give orders but only obeyed German ones was not easy. Many people criticized the activity of the Judenrat in the ghetto, although its members could not be accused of anything specific apart from, of course, a few exceptions. … the accusations against members of the Judenrat were raised only after the war, when the circumstances and atmosphere in the ghetto had been forgotten; in addition, most accusations were made by those who survived the occupation, away from Poland.[90]

The *Judenrat* could not influence the basic principles of Nazi anti-Jewish policies. However, it did enjoy authority among the Jews, and it was

88 Szpingarn, AŻIH 302/8, p. 38.
89 Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 220.
90 Pankiewicz, *Apteka w getcie krakowskim*, 120.

apparent that its actions could influence the fate of individual people. Providing aid and following a humanitarian approach toward the Jewish community was easier to implement in the initial period of the war. Over time, members of the *Judenrat* faced tragic circumstances, and regardless of the decisions they made, the community they led was doomed from the outset.

Ştefan Cristian Ionescu

Providential Rescuers or Collaborationist Traitors? Depictions of Romania's Jewish Center (*Centrala Evreilor*) and Its Leaders in Jewish Diaries, 1942-1944

During the Second World War, Nazi authorities appointed "Jewish Councils" (*Judenräte*) to help with the administration of the non-ghettoized and ghettoized Jewish communities in regions occupied by Germany or in the German sphere of influence. Ghettoization was envisaged as an intermediary (and convenient) stage before the implementation of a "final solution" to the so-called Jewish Question. During and especially after the war, many Jews criticized members of the *Judenräte*, the ghetto police, and prisoner functionaries as Nazi collaborators and traitors. After the defeat of Nazism, some of the surviving "Jewish Council" members were attacked, marginalized, or prosecuted for their wartime conduct in criminal and/or honor courts.[1] Busy with the work of reconstruction, postwar societies across Europe and Israel celebrated the heroic models of human behavior under Nazi rule embodied by partisans, ghetto fighters, and other armed resistors. Consequently, little attention was paid to the diversity of the aims and positions of Jewish functionaries during the controversial cooperation-collaboration of "Jewish Councils" with German occupation authorities.

Only from the 1970s on has a more complex understanding of the difficult position and dilemmas faced by the "Jewish Councils" and the agency they displayed developed among historians, survivors, and Israeli and European societies. Books by scholars like Isaiah Trunk, Yehuda

1 On Jewish postwar honor courts, see Laura Jockusch and Gabriel N. Finder, eds., *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel After the Holocaust* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015).

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Bauer, and Primo Levi have played a major role in changing perceptions of the "Jewish Councils."[2] These authors showed that in light of the Nazis' murderous policies and the desperate situation of Jewish communities, Jewish leaders' options were extremely limited, and in general, each "Jewish Council" behaved quite differently. In spite of the extreme conditions confronting Jews in occupied Europe, many "Jewish Councils" tried to save their communities—often through the "rescue through work" strategy—and provided food, healthcare, education, and other social services to their co-religionists. Additionally, they sometimes supported underground militia groups as they prepared for armed revolts.[3]

The concept of resistance itself changed from an initial narrow emphasis on armed resistance to a broader resistance informed by the Hebrew term *Amidah* ("standing up against"), which encompassed forms of non-military resistance such as rescue, food smuggling, intra-communitarian help, education, religion, and spiritual resistance.[4] While the past decades have witnessed a boom in scholarship examining the ghettos and "Jewish Councils" in those parts of Europe that were in the Nazi sphere of influence, there are still many gaps in the scholarship on the "Jewish Councils," especially for countries like Romania, the country that was second only to Germany in the amount of the Jews murdered by state authorities and their paramilitary collaborators.

As a result of the pressure applied by Nazi authorities and the staff of the German Legation in Bucharest—especially the SS expert in Jewish affairs Gustav Richter—and inspired by both Germany's model and local antisemitism, the pro-Nazi, antisemitic, and genocidal regime of Marshall Ion Antonescu that governed Romania between September 1940 and August 1944 abolished the traditional umbrella organization of the local Jews, the Federation of the Union of Jewish Communities of Romania (FUCER) in December 1941. FUCER was replaced with the equivalent of a collaborationist and centralized organization called the *Centrala Evreilor din România* (hereafter, the Jewish Center). Resembling a Nazi-

2 Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (London: Macmillan 1972); Yehuda Bauer, *They Chose Life: Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1973); Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2001); Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

3 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust,* 119-42.

4 See, for instance: Trunk, *Judenrat*; Bauer, *They Chose Life*; Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*; Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*; Robert Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 345-47; Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 217-48.

style *Judenrat* and similar organs established in France and Slovakia, the Jewish Center was placed under the supervision of Radu Lecca, the (gentile) Government Appointee for Resolving the Jewish Question (the title changed in 1943 to Commissar for Jewish Affairs). Local Jewish and gentile elites saw Lecca as a German spy and an antisemite.[5] The new organization commenced its activities in February 1942 and was dismantled in October 1944, several months after the demise of Antonescu.[6] During its approximately two and a half years of existence, the Jewish Center was in charge of local Jewish affairs, including daily administration, taxation, housing, welfare, healthcare, the "donation" of assets to the state treasury and other agencies and social welfare organizations, and carrying out a census of Jewish inhabitants and their assets. According to the 1942 census, a total of 292,149 Jews lived in Romania, of which 272,573 Jews lived on the core territory of Romania (Wallachia, Moldova, Southern Transylvania, and Banat) and another 19,576 in Bessarabia and Bukovina.[7]

5 Radu Lecca was a Romanian boyar educated in Vienna who was convicted as a spy in 1930s France and was close to Nazi circles as a collaborator of Alfred Rosenberg. Lecca wrote economic articles for the *Völkischer Beobachter* and other Nazi newspapers; had close relationships with Nazi diplomats in Bucharest; and acted as a mediator between the German Legation in Bucharest and the Antonescu regime. Lecca wrote his memoir in the 1960s while serving a long prison sentence for his wartime actions. He tried to justify his wartime activity; downplay his involvement with the Antonescu regime; and claimed that he struggled to improve, and ultimately save, the lives of the Jews. While the general framework of his memoirs about his fair, just, honest, and philosemitic behavior is highly problematic, some of the technical details he offered about the Jewish Center are corroborated by official documents and Jewish sources, and for this reason, they represent a useful source. Radu Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat pe evreii din România* (Bucharest: Roza Vânturilor, 1944). On Lecca as a greedy, corrupt, and antisemitic individual who spied for the Germans, see Lya Benjamin, ed. *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944: Legislația antievreiască* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1993), XLII; Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 115, 246-47, 284-86.

6 Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 303, 461; Benjamin, *Evreii din România*, XLII–XLVI; Tuvia Frilling, Radu Ioanid, and Mihail Ionescu, eds., *Final Report: International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania* (Iasi: Polirom, 2004), 212; Hary Kuller, *Evreii în România anilor 1944-1949* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2002), 93; Corneliu Pintilescu, "The State of Siege and the Holocaust in Romania: An Incursion into the Origins of the Legal Framework for the Operation of the Camps under the Antonescu Regime," *Holocaust: Studii și Cercetări* 14 (2021): 339-67; Bela Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism: The Center of the Jews of Romania, 1942-1944," in *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe, 1933-1945*, ed. Israel Gutman and Cynthia J. Haft (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 287-309.

7 Viorel Achim, "Evreii în cadrul recensământului general al României din 6 Aprilie 1941," *Caietele Institutului Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România "Elie Wiesel,"* no. 2 (2008): 35.

An era of retributive justice followed Romania's decision to abandon the Axis powers and join the Allies on August 23, 1944, which included criminal trials at the People's Tribunal between 1945 and 1946 (an ad hoc court established as a result of the Armistice Agreement to prosecute the Antonescu regime's war crimes), as well as purges, the confiscation of property, and professional sanctions. During this period, the new state authorities, public opinion, and many Jews stigmatized and prosecuted most of the Jewish Center's leaders as collaborators and traitors for their activities during the Antonescu years. The former leadership of the Jewish Center, including Matias Grünberg (alias Willman), Nandor Gingold, and Adolf Grossman-Grozea, received long prison sentences and also had their property confiscated by the People's Tribunal.[8] After consolidating its power by 1947, the communist regime sentenced other Jews based on flimsy evidence and accusations of Jewish nationalism (Zionism), economic sabotage, and treason as it purged society and the communist party of "unreliable" and "cosmopolitan" elements.[9]

While historians of Romania and the Holocaust—including Bela Vago, Jean Ancel, Lya Benjamin, and Radu Ioanid—have examined some aspects of the Jewish Center's wartime activities and its interactions with the Antonescu regime based on official documents, the topic remains under-explored.[10] For example, very little is known about how Jewish inhabitants regarded the Jewish Center and its activities during the war.

8 Iuliu Crăcană, *Dreptul în Slujba Puterii: Justiția în Regimul Comunist din România 1944-1958* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2015); Frilling et al., *Final Report*, 316; Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism," 305-8; on post-Antonescu retributive justice, see: Cosmin Sebastian Cercel, "Judging the Conducator: Fascism, Communism, and Legal Discontinuity in Postwar Romania," in *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*, ed. Uladzislau Belavusau and Aleksandra Gliszczyńska-Grabias (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 228-245; Emanuel-Marius Grec, "Romania: Historiography on Holocaust and Postwar Justice Studies," *Eastern European Holocaust Studies* 1, no. 1 (2023): 259-70; Andrei Muraru, "Justiție Politică Românească: Holocaustul şi procesele criminalilor de război: Cazul Transnistriei," *Holocaust: Studii şi Cercetări* (2018): 89-184.

9 Liviu Rotman, *Evreii din România în perioada comunistă: 1944-1965* (Iasi: Polirom, 2004); Veronica Rozenberg, *Jewish Foreign Trade Officials on Trial: In Gheorghiu-Dej's Romania 1960-1964* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022); Veronica Rozenberg, *Destinul unui evreu comunist într-o democrație populară* (Oradea: Ratio et Revelatio, 2022).

10 Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*; Lya Benjamin, *Prigoană şi Rezistență în Istoria Evreilor din România, Studii: 1940-1944* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2001); Benjamin, *Evreii din România*; Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*; Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism," 287-309.

Addressing this question would reveal Jews' perspectives—based on personal documents produced by Jews—on the local *Judenrat* and its interactions with the Antonescu regime, offering contemporaneous insight into how educated Jews (the only group who wrote diaries in Romania during the Second World War) of different generations and genders perceived the "Jewish Councils." This approach would go beyond the sources produced by perpetrators as well as "Jewish Councils'" official discourses and justifications for their wartime activity in the postwar era, which is the source base most historians have relied on until recently. For this reason, this essay analyzes depictions of the Jewish Center—its activities and its interactions with the Jewish community—in (educated) Jews' diaries written during the Antonescu era in Romania.[11]

During the last few decades, Holocaust diaries have captured the attention of various scholars who have assessed their usefulness as sources for understanding Jewish individual and communal life during the Second World War, notably their authors' and communities' experiences, as well as their responses to the Nazis' and their collaborators' genocidal policies. Diaries written during the Holocaust are especially valuable for understanding what the experience of living under the constant threat of death meant to their authors. They provide crucial and invaluable evidence of the human dimension of this genocide, which is difficult to discern from other types of primary sources. Properly contextualized and critically analyzed, diaries are important historical sources. Historians such Alexandra Garbarini, Amos Goldberg, David Patterson, and Alexandra Zapruder have emphasized the various uses and importance of Holocaust diaries for their authors and for postwar societies, in addition to scholars who seek to reconstruct Jewish experiences and understand their trauma, their struggles to redefine their identities, and their responses to the Nazi occupation.[12]

11 I have examined eight Jewish diaries written during the Antonescu regime by Maria Banuş, Emil Dorian, Wilhelm Fidlerman, Hilda Kliffer, Petre Solomon, B. Brănişteanu, Miriam Korber-Bercovici, and Mihail Sebastian. They were published after 1990. Only the first five first journals contain references to the Jewish Center.

12 Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Amos Goldberg, *Trauma in First Person: Diary Writing in the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017); David Patterson, *Along the Edge of Annihilation: The Collapse and Recovery of Life in the Holocaust Diary* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Alexandra Zapruder, *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaus*t (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

The Antisemitic Policies of the Antonescu Regime and the Jewish Center

One of the major preoccupations of the Antonescu regime was how to "solve" the so-called Jewish Question. Ion Antonescu, a high-ranking military officer, came to power in September 1940, when his predecessor, King Carol II—a self-proclaimed dictator since 1938—abdicated in favor of his son Mihai I and transferred executive power to Antonescu, who became the "leader" (*Conducător*) and prime minister of Romania. Antonescu, the new dictator, and his initial governing partners, fascist members of the Legion of the Archangel Michael (hereafter, Legionaries), expanded the antisemitic laws and policies initially adopted by Carol II. This was done by adopting new and more radical anti-Jewish restrictions, carrying out systematic Aryanization (called Romanianization), and perpetrating mass violence (for example, the Legionaries' attacks on Jewish individuals, their homes, businesses, and communities). The two partners disagreed on the style and pace of antisemitic policies and methods of governance more generally. While both Antonescu and the Legionaries were radical antisemites, the former envisioned a gradual and "legal" persecution of Jews, while the latter pursued a fast, more violent form of persecution. Vying for control of the state, the two groups engaged in a civil war in January 1941 (known as the Legionary Rebellion), which was won by Antonescu, who benefited from the army's support. After the purge of the Legionaries, Antonescu ruled Romania as a military dictator until August 1944, when he was deposed in a coup organized by King Mihai I, opposition parties, and the military. After the Legionary Rebellion, Antonescu did not abandon antisemitism. On the contrary, when Romania joined the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Antonescu further radicalized Romania's antisemitic policies. The Jews of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria (an occupied Soviet territory bordering Romania) were the primary targets of these policies. The Antonescu regime adopted numerous—though inconsistent—antisemitic laws and engaged in mass murder, ghettoization, internment, and deportation, especially in Romania's Transnistrian "colony," which caused the deaths of up to 420,000 Jews by August 1944.[13]

13 For example, according to the reports sent by Bucharest-based German diplomats to Berlin, the Romanian racial (antisemitic) laws stipulated twenty-four legal definitions to determine who was Jewish. These contradictory laws created confusion among the local bureaucrats who had to implement them. See Frilling et al., *Final Report*, 181-204; Ştefan Cristian Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to 'Romanianization,' 1940-*

Aiming to "cleanse" the reconquered provinces of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina of Jews, Romanian state officials engaged in the mass murder of tens of thousands of Jews during the first months of the anti-Soviet war and deported the survivors of these killings into the former Soviet territory of Transnistria, which was administered by the Romanian military. For a while, Transnistria seemed to be a "promising" location for the deportation of Bukovinian, Bessarabian, and other allegedly "disloyal" Jews, and for Romania's colonization and empire-building efforts. After Antonescu's hopes to push the Jews deported from Transnistria into the German administered *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* were crushed by German military officials' refusal to accept more Jews into their occupation zone, Antonescu decided to use Transnistria as a dumping ground for undesirable Jews and Roma while he awaited the results of military operations in the Soviet Union and the potential forced emigration of Jews from Romanian territory.[14]

The Antonescu government continued to discuss various solutions to the Jewish Question, including their deportation to occupied territories in the Soviet Union or their emigration to Palestine. According to decree no. 319 adopted on January 30, 1942, which established the Jewish Center, one of its main goals was to prepare for the emigration of Jews from Romania (article 3, paragraph d).[15] Until the clarification of the military

1944 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 34-65; Goran Miljan and Anders E. B. Blomqvist, "The Unwanted Citizens: The 'Legality' of Jewish Destruction in Croatia and Romania during World War II," *Comparative Legal History* 11, no. 2 (2023): 226-255; on Romania's participation in the Holocaust, see, for instance Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*; Frilling et al., *The Final Report*; Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime: Romania, 1940-1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*.

14 See, for instance, Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*; Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Grant T. Harward, *Romania's Holy War: Soldiers, Motivation, and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021); Armin Heinen, *România, Holocaustul şi logica violenţei* (Iaşi: Editura Universităţii Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2011); Michelle Kelso, "Recognizing the Roma: A Study of the Holocaust as Viewed in Romania" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010); Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017); Svetlana Suveica, "Local Agency and the Appropriation of Jewish Property in Romania's Eastern Borderland: Public Employees during the Holocaust in Bessarabia (1941-1944)," *European Holocaust Studies* no. 2 (2019): 133-156; Marius Turda, Adrian-Nicolae Furtună, "Roma and the Question of Ethnic Origin in the Holocaust in Romania," *Critical Romani Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 8-33.

15 On the Antonescu regime's plans for solving the Jewish Question through emigration, see: Mihai Chioveanu, "The Paper Solution: Jewish Emigration from

operations and their relocation or emigration, Antonescu decided to keep approximately 275,000 Jews under surveillance in Romania and Transnistria, to concentrate them and appoint Jewish collaborators to oversee them, and to exploit them economically. The result was the creation of a national Jewish council known as the Jewish Center. From the German perspective, this compulsory expatriation meant "relocating" Romanian Jews to Bełżec death camp in occupied Poland, and by summer 1942, Nazi leaders convinced Romanian officials, including Ion and Mihai Antonescu, to approve of this plan and deport the remaining Romanian Jewish population, which numbered around 275,000 persons from the core provinces of Romania (Wallachia, Moldova, Southern Transylvania, and the Banat) to Bełżec. In the fall of 1942, the Romanian decision-makers changed their mind, postponed the deportation, and abandoned the Bełżec plan.[16] Because Nazi leaders needed Romania's participation in the anti-Soviet war and its raw materials (especially oil), they resigned themselves to the idea that Romania would carry out an autonomous Jewish policy—including limited emigration to Palestine—until the end of the war.[17]

Established in February 1942, the Jewish Center was tasked with reorganizing, centralizing, controlling, expropriating, and preparing for the emigration/deportation of Jews from Romania.[18] The initial draft law was prepared by *Hauptsturmführer* Gustav Richter, the German Legation's

Romania during the Holocaust," *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* 9, no. 3 (2009): 425-44; Dalia Ofer, "Emigration and Immigration: The Changing Role of Romanian Jewry," in *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu Era*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). The goal of facilitating Jewish emigration resembles the tasks assigned to other Jewish organizations in Nazi Europe. See the case of the Reich Association of the Jews in Germany and the General Union of French Israelites in France.

16 Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 457-509; Frilling et al., *Final Report*, 215; Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 238-58.

17 Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 238-58; Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 177-93. In his autobiographical report published in 1944, Zionist leader Mişu Benvenisti recalled that during his first meeting with Richter, the main message he received from the Nazi SS specialist in Jewish problems was Germany's opposition to Jewish emigration to Palestine. Benvenisti, *Sionismul în vremea prigoanei* (Bucharest: Viaţa Evreească, 1944), 11-12.

18 Decree no. 319 was published in the Official Bulletin, *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 26 on January 31, 1942. See: *Colecţie de Decrete Legi şi Regulamente, Decizii, privitoare la organizarea evreilor din România* (Bucharest: Editura Centralei Evreilor din România, 1942), 5-12; Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania,* 494-95; Benjamin, *Evreii din România*, XLIV; Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 34-35.

special advisor for matters related to the Jewish Question and Aryanization, who submitted the draft law to the Romanian government.[19] Romanian ministers, especially Mihai Antonescu, who was behind the policy of legalized persecution of Jews, agreed in principle with the main ideas in the draft law, but he disagreed with significant parts of it, such as ghettoization and the demand that all Jews in Romania wear a yellow star. Consequently, Mihai Antonescu assigned Lecca to modify the law so as to tailor it to the Romanian authorities' plans for the Jews, which mainly sought to "solve" the Jewish Question in such a way that it would not negatively affect the country's economy. Lecca abandoned Richter's calls for the compulsory yellow star and the segregation of all Jews into ghettos and labor camps, and he removed other stipulations he suspected would be economically harmful to Romania. The result was a significantly revised draft that aimed for the gradual dispossession, exploitation, and emigration of Romanian Jews.[20] The Nazi officials in Romania opposed the idea of allowing Jews to immigrate to Palestine or Allied or neutral territories and kept trying to persuade Romanian officials to agree to the deportation of all the country's Jews to the German-occupied General Government (occupied Poland). Ultimately, as historian Bela Vago has shown, Romanian authorities played the decisive role in choosing most of the Jewish Center's leaders and planning and controlling its activities. Indeed, they rejected German requests to control this organization, though the Nazis did have some indirect influence through their agents who had infiltrated the Romanian government.[21]

The foundation of the Jewish Center was preceded by the dismantling of the traditional organization of Jews in Romania, FUCER, and the removal of its leader Wilhelm Filderman, who had decades of experience defending the rights of his co-religionists. The attack on established Jewish organs and leaders seemed to have been one of the main goals behind this restructuring of organized Jewish communities.[22] A few of the new Jewish leaders were chosen by Richter on the advice of a counselor

19 On the role of Gustav Richter during the Antonescu regime, see Constantin Iordachi and Ottmar Trașcă, "Ideological Transfers and Bureaucratic Entanglements: Nazi 'Experts' on the 'Jewish Question' and the Romanian-German Relations, 1940-1944," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascism Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 48-100.

20 Benjamin, *Evreii din România*, XLII–XLIII; Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 176-87.

21 Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism," 289-90.

22 Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 34. On Filderman's history of defending Jewish rights in Romania, see: Ştefan Cristian Ionescu "Legal Resistance through Petitions During the Holocaust: The Strategies of Romanian Jewish Leader Wilhelm Filderman, 1940-44," in *Resisting Persecution: Jews and their Petitions during the Holocaust*,

for the German Legation in Bucharest, Herman von Ritgen; these new leaders were among the latter's friends and business partners who seemed to be compliant and opportunistic. Various officials suggested potential employees for the new organization: Lecca and Ion and Mihai Antonescu approved some of the names proposed by the Germans and added their own recommendations, and other Romanian officials suggested potential Jewish leaders too.[23] The replacement of the old Jewish leadership with new Jewish leaders took place suddenly and without notice. Lecca, several of his Jewish collaborators (and future leaders of the Jewish Center), and other people (probably plainclothes policemen) showed up at FUCER's headquarters in Bucharest the evening of December 17, 1941, and took over the building. Summoning the staff together, Lecca told them that everyone would keep their jobs except Filderman, who Lecca claimed had harmed the Jews. Lecca also requested that employees hand over all correspondence sent to Great Britain and the United States, as the Antonescu regime was suspicious of Jewish leaders' connections with international Jewish and non-Jewish organizations and their advocacy attempts on behalf of Jews that were directed toward the Allied Powers' governments.[24]

Based in Bucharest, the Jewish Center established branches in every county (*judeţ*) in the core provinces of Romania (the Old Kingdom, Southern Transylvania, and the Banat) and significantly increased the number of the official Jewish community's administrators as compared to its predecessor.[25] This new bureaucracy included many former leaders and high-level administrators who had worked for FUCER. Notably, the Jewish Center did not have any branches in the newly "liberated"/occupied areas of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria, which had a different legal status than zones under military administration.

ed. Wolf Gruner and Thomas Pegelow Kaplan (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 92-113.

23 Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 176-80.

24 Wilhelm Filderman's "Note on the installation of the Jewish Central Office, December 17, 1941," in Wilhelm Filderman, *Memoirs and Diaries*, vol. 2: 1940-1952 (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Yad Vashem, Tel Aviv University, 2015), 262.

25 Frilling et al., *Final Report*, 212; Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 229. The significant expansion of the Jewish community's bureaucracy in Antonescu's Romania was caused by the need to respond to the regime's goals to control and exploit the Jews, and by the need to provide more social services to the impoverished Jews. This resembles similar developments throughout Nazi Europe among the "Jewish Councils" in countries such as Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: "Jewish Councils" in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

A number of women worked for the Jewish Center; they were usually relegated to lower-level positions typically seen as "feminine" jobs, such as secretary, typist, and social worker. All the high-level positions that also came with higher salaries, social prestige, and power were held by men. In his autobiography, Zionist leader Mişu Benvenisti noted the contribution of Zionist women, together with other Jewish women, to the Jewish Center's social welfare activities, which aided Jewish deportees in Transnistria.[26] Overall, in terms of its personnel, the Jewish Center reflected older gender hierarchies, which resembled the structure of many "Jewish Councils" throughout Nazi Europe.[27] The only Jewish woman who occupied a position of (limited) authority in wartime Romania was Mela Iancu. She headed the Jewish Center for the Protection of Mother and Child, which was an educational-welfare organization that supplied food, education, clothes, healthcare, and shelter to thousands of women and children, including orphans from Transnistria.[28]

Administratively, the Jewish Center consisted of eight main departments: finance, welfare/aid, education, healthcare, publishing, professional retraining, emigration, and religious affairs.[29] Lecca appointed several local pro-German Jews who had not held any leadership positions prior to the war as the main leaders of the Jewish Center. They were almost unknown to the Jewish public. Thus, the journalist Henric Ştefan Streitman, a former convert to Christianity who returned to Judaism and enjoyed good relations with Romanian elites, became the Center's

26 Benvenisti, *Sionismul*, 24.

27 On the presence of women among the Jewish Center's employees, who composed around 23 percent of the staff according to some partial postwar data, see: Centrul pentru Studierea Istoriei Evreilor din România "Wilhelm Filderman" [The "Wilhelm Filderman" Historical Research Center of the Romanian Jewish Community, hereafter, CSIER], Fond VII, File 196/1945. For the rare presence of women in leadership positions in Nazi Europe, see: Anna Nedlin-Lehrer, "Women in Dror and Gendered Experiences of the Holocaust," in *Is This a Woman? Studies on Women and Gender During the Holocaust*, ed. Denisa Nešťáková et al. (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 123-141; and Laurien Vastenhout, "Female Involvement in the 'Jewish Councils' in the Netherlands and France: Gertrude van Huijn and Juliette Stern," in *Is This a Woman?*, 142-60; Joan Campion, *In the Lion's Mouth: Gisi Fleischmann and the Jewish Fight for Survival* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987).

28 Sylvia Hershcovitz, "Jewish Women's Activities during the Holocaust in Romania: Mela Iancu, Director of the Jewish Center for the Protection of Mother and Child," *Holocaust: Studii şi Cercetări* 13 (2020): 73-93.

29 *Activitatea Centralei Evreilor din România* (Bucharest: Tipografia Informaţia Zilei, 1944); Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 191-229; Emil Dorian, *The Quality of Witness: A Romania Diary, 1937-1944* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Society of America, 1982), 195.

president; physician Nandor Gingold was appointed secretary general (in fact, the real head of the Center); and William Grunberg, a journalist and former Zionist who became an adept proponent of "territorialism," was appointed the director of the Center's press.[30] According to historian Jean Ancel, when Filderman was replaced, he asked other Jewish notables to remain in the Jewish Center and not resign in solidarity with him. Many stayed. Several Zionist leaders, such as Mişu Benvenisti, also joined the Jewish Center and held important positions, justifying their choice by arguing that they realized it was the only way they could help ordinary Jews and especially those who were the most endangered by Antonescu's and Nazi Germany's policies.[31] Overall, there was no shortage of employees as working for the Jewish Center came with major benefits, including the exemption from forced labor and deportation, high salaries, a reduced work schedule (until noon), travel permits, the authorization to practice professions, and the potential for economic enrichment through bribery.[32] In 1943 and 1944, the importance of the Jewish Center decreased, and its activities significantly diminished because it was no longer able to raise the money required by the authorities, who frequently negotiated with former traditional and Zionist Jewish leaders—even though they were not part of the official organization—over important issues like emigration from Romania because these men were better-known abroad.[33]

Overall, as Bela Vago and the Elie Wiesel International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania have argued, the Jewish Center did *not* transform into a typical Nazi-style *Judenrat* as was envisioned by officials of the Antonescu regime and their Nazi partners. This happened because in spite of its collaboration with German and Romanian authorities in controlling and dispossessing Jews, organizing forced labor, and assisting with selective deportations, the Center also tried to help the Jews in Romania. It did so by petitioning for their rights; collecting and distributing financial and material aid to impoverished community members and deportees; providing legal aid for Jews targeted by Romanianization

30 Frilling et al., *Final Report*, 212-21; Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism," 291-92; on Jewish territorialism, see: Laura Almagor, *Beyond Zion: Jewish Territorialist Movement* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2022).

31 Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 495; Benvenisti, *Sionismul*, 9-19; S.C. Cristian, *Patru ani de urgie* (Bucharest: Timpul, 1945), 105-15; Filling et al., *Final Report*, 217.

32 Cristian, *Patru ani de urgie*, 105-10; Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 191-93, 222, 229; see: the internal correspondence of the Jewish Center, CSIER, Fond III, File 315/1943.

33 Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism," 296-302.

policies and forced labor; and organizing rescue and repatriation operations on behalf of Jews in Transnistria. Leaders of the Jewish Center, such as Gingold, also enlisted the assistance of former community leaders including Filderman, "sometimes for tactical reasons, sometime out of convictions." Vago aptly summarized the Jewish Center's activities as an "ambiguous form of collaboration."[34] Historian Lya Benjamin also offered a nuanced evaluation of the behavior of the Jewish Center's employees: she argued that Jewish bureaucrats were, in general, competent and well-intenioned in spite of the organization's official mission, which called for controlling the Jews of Romania and isolating them in a special "ecosystem" shaped by their inferior and precarious legal status.[35]

In his memoirs, the former Chief Rabbi of Romania Alexander Safran also gave a balanced assessment of the behavior of those among the Jewish Center's leaders who collaborated/cooperated with the Antonescu regime. While Safran considered Gingold, Streitman, Grossman, and William to be "collaborators and traitors," he recognized that other officials, such as Theodor Loewenstein and Dr. Kammer, who occupied second-tier positions were "honest people and good Jews" who helped the Jewish community.[36] He also recalled that Gingold and Grossman claimed that they respected him and supported his efforts to save the Jews during the war and expected him to help them after the war "through the bad times that were awaiting them."[37] Safran acknowledged that in spite of the Jewish Center's initial reluctance to help the deportees in Transnistria on the pretext that the territory fell outside its jurisdiction (which only covered Romania proper), the organization eventually participated in large-scale humanitarian operations in the province.[38]

34 Frilling et al., *Final Report*, 217; Benjamin, *Evreii din România*, XLIV; Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaboration," 296-302.

35 Benjamin, *Evreii din România*, XLIV.

36 Safran, *Resisting the Storm*, 87-91. On the major role of Theodor Loewenstein in helping Jewish orphans and assessing their psychological health during and after the war, see Dana Mihăilescu, "Early Postwar Accounts on Jewish Orphans from Transnistria," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 36, no. 3 (2022): 353-71.

37 Safran, *Resisting the Storm*, 139-40.

38 On the Jewish Center's participation in humanitarian aid for the deportees in Transnistrian camps and ghettos, see: Ștefan Cristian Ionescu, "Jewish Humanitarian Aid for the Transnistria Deportees," in *More Than Parcels: Wartime Aid for Jews in Nazi-Era Camps and Ghettos*, ed. Jan Láníček and Jan Lambertz (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2022), 227-54; Ana Bărbulescu, "The Underlife of Transnistria's Ghettos: Recategorizing and Reframing Social Interaction," *Journal of Holocaust Research* 35, no. 3 (2021): 196-213.

Jews' Perceptions of the Jewish Center

Forced to live without their traditional organizations, ordinary Jews recorded their views about the Jewish Center in their wartime diaries, focusing on their interactions with the organization and its employees and leaders. There is significant variation in the content devoted to the Jewish Center in these diaries, ranging from a few lines to numerous entries. While diarists generally criticized the Jewish Center, they also recorded neutral, technical details about the functions of local Jewish Center's branches or reported on their interactions with them. Petre Solomon was one such diarist.

A young student from Bucharest who aspired to become a writer, Solomon (b. 1923) was enrolled in the Jewish College Onescu in Bucharest between 1941 and 1944. His first poems were published in 1944. From the 1930s to the 1960s, Solomon kept a diary, part of which was posthumously published together with other autobiographical writings in the 2000s. Solomon survived the war, never emigrated from Romania, and became a well-known writer and translator. His diary contains only sparse references to the Jewish Center as this topic did not seem to be a main topic of interest. Most of his entries refer to literature and encounters in his daily life. At the same time, his diary reveals that he had a negative perception of the Jewish Center. On October 2, 1942, he confessed that he somehow obtained an exemption from forced labor (after he completed three months of forced labor in 1941) through the Jewish Center, but he did not refrain from criticizing the organization and its mission. He considered the Jewish Center to be "an institution created to systematically and rationally destroy the Jews through the centralization of all their personal data."[39] Solomon continued to pay attention to the activity of the Jewish Center and discussed the publication of *Gazeta Evreiască* (*Jewish Gazette*, GE), the newspaper edited by the Jewish Center, and its editorial activity. He mentioned its announcements of numerous antisemitic regulations and restrictions and GE's advice on how to avoid the practical and legal problems that resulted from breaking these laws.[40]

Usually, ordinary Jews perceived the Jewish Center and its leaders through the lens of their daily interactions with employees of its local branches. Thus, the practical problems people encountered in their daily lives while trying to comply with numerous antisemitic laws and regula-

39 Petre Solomon, *Am să povestesc cândva aceste zile: Pagini de jurnal, memorii, insemnări,* vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Vinea, 2006), 111-12.

40 Solomon, *Am să povestesc cândva aceste zile*, vol. 1, 133-34.

tions and, at the same time, earn a living and survive the war informed their—usually negative—opinions about their local Jewish Center's leaders and employees, even as they simultaneously maintained a rather positive view of the (national) Jewish Center's leaders in Bucharest. The capital was far away, and its Jewish leaders enjoyed prestige that stemmed from their remoteness and peoples' hopes (sometimes illusions) that they would be able to gain justice for the Jews of Romania. The diary of Hilda Kliffer offers an example of this perspective.

A teenage girl from Târgu Frumos, Kliffer (b. 1929) wrote a diary that covers the period from 1941 to 1944. During those years, she was not deported and stayed in her hometown together with her family. The diary stops in 1944, around the time the Red Army arrived, and it is unclear what happened to the author in the postwar period. In addition to many entries about her private life, Kliffer's diary contains frequent references to the Jewish Center, which illustrates her preoccupation with the leadership of the local Jewish community.

She frequently recorded her hatred of the head of the local branch of the Jewish Center, a man named Solomon Lederhordler, whom she described (on July 20, 1943) as a cunning man, a crook, a charlatan: "the worst enemy of my family … and a vampire to Jewish humanity."[41] Kliffer stated that Lederhordler refused to help her family on many occasions. Specifically, she recorded that her father had an argument with Lederhordler related to the local community's contribution to the special tax levied on Jews—the enormous sum of four billion lei—by the authorities of the Antonescu regime in 1943. Hilda hoped the tide would turn, Lederhordler's fortune would reverse, and she would be able to take revenge on him for the harm done to her family.[42] On July 22, 1943, Hilda complained again in her diary about Lederhordler: "We had the misfortune to have a leader who, instead of taking care of his community, tried to profit personally from the laws that recognize some rights for Jews."[43] From a comparative perspective, this would place Lederhordler within the category of Jewish leaders like Chaim Rumkowski, who during the Holocaust collaborated with the authorities and were willing to sacrifice individual Jews to save the community and enjoyed the profits and power of their position.[44] Kliffer also blamed Lederhordler for

41 Dan Petre Popa, ed., *Jurnal de fata din Tg. Frumos* (Bucharest: Albatros, 2007), 14-17.

42 Popa, *Jurnal de fata*, 11, 14-15, 16-17, 28, 31. See, for instance, the diary entries from July 20 and 22, 1943 and August 1, 1943.

43 Popa, *Jurnal de fata*, 16.

44 On the complexity of Jewish leaders' conduct and limited choices ("choiceless choice" in Lawrence Langer's words) in other parts of Nazi Europe, see Bauer,

adding her uncle Avram to the list of men to be recruited for forced labor in spite of the fact that he had an exemption as a useful employee.[45] Kliffer's father tried to intervene with local policemen by showing them Avram's exemption certificate and the law that extended the validity of that legal certificate, but to no avail. Their advocacy was only successful after the family paid a bribe to the policemen.[46] Blaming Lederhordler for selfishness and clientelism and for protecting two of his friends with whom he was engaged in shady business, the diarist cursed him and expressed her wish to strangle him with her own hands.[47] Kliffer believed that Lederholder ran a corrupt dictatorship from which he and his friends profited, including by stealing from the community's soup kitchen and poor children's rations.[48]

Kliffer also mentioned in her diary that her father had another threatening incident with Lederhordler, who accused him of sabotaging the state budget by refusing to contribute money to buy equipment for the Jewish forced labor detachments. He then threatened to denounce Kliffer's father to the police. Eventually, her father contributed a small sum, but he decided that if the Jewish Elder continued to harass his family, he would lodge a complaint about Lederhordler's behavior at the Jewish Center headquarters in Bucharest and at the prosecutor's office.[49]

Kliffer's diary suggests that some Jews perceived the activities of local Jewish Center leaders as unconstructive for the community and as primarily driven by self-interest and self-enrichment. In general, Kliffer's assessment of Jewish Center leaders was nuanced. While she expressed her distrust of local Jewish officials and their willingness and efficiency to help poor Jews or those who had already been deported, she admired Fred Şaraga, a Jewish official from Iaşi who spearheaded efforts aimed at aiding deportees in Transnistria, especially Jewish orphans. Together with other Jewish notables, Şaraga managed to accomplish the repatriation of the orphan children to Romania from the camps and ghettos in Transnistria in 1943-1944.[50]

Rethinking the Holocaust; Gordon Horowitz, *Ghettostadt: Łódź and the Making of a Nazi City* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008); Lawrence Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," *Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 53-58; Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*.

45 On Jewish forced labor in Romania, see: Dallas Michelbacher, *Jewish Forced Labor in Romania, 1940-1944* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

46 See the entries on August 3 and 4, 1943. Popa, *Jurnal de fata*, 30-31.

47 Popa, *Jurnal de fata*, 16, 22, 28.

48 Popa, *Jurnal de fata*, 69.

49 Popa, *Jurnal de fata*, 59-61.

50 Popa, *Jurnal de fata*, 76, 95. On Fred Şaraga's role in helping Jewish deportees, see: Matatias Carp, ed., *Cartea Neagră: Suferinţele evreilor din România: 1940-1944,*

A Bucharest physician, journalist, and writer who had a leftist democratic worldview, Emil Dorian kept a detailed diary from 1936 to 1956. This is one of the most important diaries written by Romanian Jews, and it reflects the author's mature and insightful understanding of the Jewish community, Romanian society, and domestic and international politics, as well as the author's numerous social connections and sources of information. He frequently recorded in his diary information about the Jewish Center and his negative perception of the institution, highlighting the self-interest, corruption, irresponsibility, and entitlement of the Jewish Center's leaders. On February 7, 1942, Dorian recorded the publication of the law that established the Jewish Center and its goals and blamed it for closing down the Jewish newspaper *Renașterea Noastră* (*Our Resurrection*), to which he was a contributor.[51] A few days later (on February 26, 1942), Dorian again criticized the Jewish Center's leaders for surreptitiously summoning Jewish notables to a synagogue where officials of the Antonescu government declared them hostages to be shot if the Jews or communists perpetrated crimes against the state. The authorities eventually released the hostages, but Dorian recorded the outrage of one of the hostages, a lawyer L. S., who futilely questioned the Jewish leaders about "why he had been chosen and how come none of the *Centrala*'s [Jewish Center's] leaders was on the list."[52] On June 7, 1942, Dorian again criticized the Jewish Center for acting as a government mouthpiece in transmitting the Antonescu authorities' recommendation not to visit the cafes located in downtown Bucharest to avoid any potential antisemitic incidents, which triggered panic among the Jews. No such violence took place at that time.[53]

A few days later, Dorian criticized a Jewish Center's women's committee—recruited from the wealthy *haute* bourgeoisie—that organized a public meeting in a school and tried to raise funds to feed orphans in Transnistria by using classist arguments to appeal to the public's generosity. According to Dorian, who attended the meeting, the wealthy ladies argued that Transnistria's orphans, on whose behalf they were fundraising, came from good families and were accustomed to a life of comfort and plenty before the war and, thus, had to be rescued quickly. The implication of this "blunder," as Dorian termed it, was that orphans from

3 vols., 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Diogene, 1996); Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 408; Mihăilescu, "Early Postwar Accounts"; Safran, *Resisting the Storm*.

51 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 195.

52 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 198-99.

53 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 211.

poor families did not need urgent aid because they were already used to poverty and deprivation, which outraged his sense of social justice.[54]

Sometimes Dorian interacted directly with Jewish Center leaders and recorded details about these meetings in his diary. For example, on July 6, 1942, he was visited in his home by Streitman, the president of the Jewish Center and a former journalist who knew Dorian from prewar press and literary circles. Dorian observed that Streitman was not altered by his influential job and remained an intellectual and socialite who continued to have an ambivalent and flexible approach to morality: "He is still a master of metaphysics; he cultivates books, people, and paradoxes, and adheres to that position between 'black and white' which reflects so well his extreme flexibility."[55] Streitman shared with Dorian his idea that the Jews should change and adopt "a more heroic attitude toward life … he cannot understand the Jews' immense love of life, of life under any circumstances and at any price," which would have allegedly improved the government's attitude toward them. Dorian criticized Streitman's cynicism, cheap philosophizing, and conformism, and especially his idea of changing the Jews in the middle of a Europe-wide mass murder that explicitly targeted them.[56]

Dorian also criticized some of the new upper-level employees of the Jewish Center for (what he saw as) their negative influence on the Jewish community. On August 4, 1942, he noted that many lawyers joined the Jewish Center for easy jobs, forced labor exemptions, bribes, and access to power after being expelled from the Bar Association as a result of Antonescu's racial laws:

> A gang of Jewish lawyers who lost their jobs have descended like a swarm of locusts on the Jewish community. They are all crowded in the leadership of the Central or have camouflaged themselves in various bureaucratic organizations which bear down in the Jews' work, purse, and morale. To avoid forced labor, they have infiltrated all the combines [committees] where the decisions are made about the future of Jews; they have resumed their ways as racketeers, bribetakers, denouncers. This is a plague we will not be rid of until the end of the war.[57]

54 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 212-13.

55 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 214-15. On Streitman's flexible morality, see: Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaboration," 291-92.

56 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 214-15.

57 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 217.

Dorian also noted that it took most of the Jewish public only a few months to figure out the real goals behind the foundation of the Jewish Center—the control and surveillance of Jews as the prelude to their exclusion from Romania—and after several months of neutrality and even a welcoming attitude, they subsequently became hostile to the Center's leaders.[58] In general, Dorian distrusted the Jewish Center and its leaders, who he accused of being willing to fully collaborate with the pro-Nazi Antonescu regime on the total exclusion of Jews in Romania by supporting the regime's antisemitic legislation and policies concerning forced labor, dispossession, and deportation. This distrust is evident in his diary entries from August 8, 1942 and May 12, 1943.[59] Another entry (from November 5, 1942) similarly illustrates Dorian's distrust toward the Jewish Center: when bookstores in Bucharest displayed lists of names and personal details of Jewish authors whose books had been banned, Dorian suspected that the Jewish Center had supplied the data to the authorities.[60]

Dorian was particularly harsh toward the Jewish supervisors of the forced labor battalions who showed unnecessary zeal, mistreated the men, and denounced them for breaching regulations and not working long or hard enough. He blamed the Jewish Center for ignoring the terrible impact of forced labor on the men who performed it.[61] Dorian also criticized the new head of the Jewish Center in Bucharest Nandor Gingold—who took over as leader in 1943—for his insistence that even though he was not Jewish (Gingold converted to Christianity in 1941), he was dedicated to rescuing the Jews from destruction. Dorian also condemned Gingold for his shallowness, describing how Gingold showed off Antonescu's response—good wishes for those Jews who were "good Romanians"—in his New Year's (1944) greetings and claimed that receiving them was a personal distinction.[62]

During the final year of the Antonescu regime (1944), Dorian wrote in his diary less frequently and usually discussed military and political

58 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 219.

59 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness,* 217, 220, 280.

60 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness,* 241.

61 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 217. This accusation is problematic as many other sources show that the Jewish Center supplied the forced labor battalions with necessary materials and even hired lawyers to defend men accused of breaching the forced labor regulations or advocated in support their requests for exemption from forced labor. See, for instance, the 1942-1943 internal correspondence of the Jewish Center, CSIER Fund III, Files 319/1942, 392/1943, 395/1942, 390A and 390B/1943.

62 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 302. On Gingold's resignation, see: Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism," 303-4.

events, his fears of potential antisemitic violence, and hopes for liberation. Only three entries refer to the Jewish Center, its leaders, and their behavior. On April 3, 1944, he recorded the news that Gingold had resigned from his leadership position and commented ironically on Gingold's wartime role and motives for resignation, speculating that Gingold, opportunistically, was trying to escape possible retribution as the Red Army was fighting its way across Romania's eastern borders:

> Dr. Gingold, leader of the *Centrala*, has resigned from the "high, self-sacrificing position" he held in order to bring happiness to the Jews of Romania. They say … [he had been declared an honorary Romanian and] he requested to be drafted in the army. No one can figure out what prompted him to desert at the eleventh hour. Whose wrath did he seek to avoid? Where does he want to hide?

Calling his resignation "appalling," Dorian also jotted down that the Jewish man who informed him about this development accompanied the news with a terrible curse directed at Gingold, and that many other Jews shared his opinion.[63]

The Bucharest writer and former lawyer Maria Banuş kept a diary from 1927 to 1999 (during the Second World War, it covered the years 1943 and 1944 especially well). In her diary, Banuş rarely referred to the Jewish Center; only from time to time did she record her interactions with and opinions about the Jewish Center, its leaders, and employees. Banuş's diary entries focused mostly on her struggles in daily life, her romantic life and dreams, intellectual life, and her cooperation with the communist underground. Born into an assimilated Jewish family and married to a construction engineer who managed to keep his job during the war, Banuş did not engage in formal paid work, but she studied, wrote, tutored students, and helped the communist party clandestinely by fundraising and hosting communist activists hiding from the authorities.

In her diary entries, Banuş usually criticized the Jewish Center and its leaders. On March 29, 1943, for example, Banuş complained that her husband waited in a long line in the courtyard of the Jewish Center to authenticate his college degree in order to be able to continue to practice his profession and, thus, to avoid the dreaded forced labor detachments.[64]

63 Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 305. Gingold was replaced by Grossman-Grozea. See: Kuller, *Evreii în Romania*, 93.

64 Maria Banuş, *Însemnările mele,* vol.1 (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2011), 368.

On April 4, 1943, Banuş criticized the Jewish Center's leaders, particularly Gingold, as privileged "big shots" for not responding to the appeals of struggling actors from the Jewish theater Baraşeum, who wanted to be paid on time. She also complained that Jewish Center leaders failed to help the professors and students of the Jewish College Onescu who needed to obtain exemptions from forced labor. Banuş emphasized how Gingold tried to run away from his responsibilities when confronted with the requests of the desperate Jewish professors and students and tried to brush them off by sending them to Radu Lecca, who did not help them.[65] On May 21, 1943, Banuş again criticized the head of the Jewish Center for supporting Antonescu's demands that the Jews contribute to the financing of the anti-Soviet war with the vast sum of four billion lei.[66] Banuş continued to express her frustration a few days later, when she complained that the Jewish Center increased members' contributions to its budget by 25 percent.[67] Banuş also recorded, usually in negative terms, her interactions with mid-level Jewish Center bureaucrats who came to assess the value of the property owned by Banuş's family.[68]

Together with other Jewish women, boys, and teenagers, Banuş participated in the provision of aid to deportees in Transnistria, which was organized by the Jewish Center's subcommittee on aid, located in a synagogue in Bucharest. In spite of the committee's good intentions, Banuş noted the defective management of the collection process, including the use of inaccurate addresses of potential donors and the problematic recruitment of personnel, some of whom (especially those from wealthy families) seemed completely disinterested in their work.[69]

At the same time, Banuş also noted some of the achievements of the Jewish Center, no matter how meager they were in her opinion. For example, on July 15, 1943, she wrote in her diary that Gingold was able to secure Antonescu's promise to postpone the payment of four billion lei as a military tax on the Jews.[70] Several months later, on November 12, 1943, she recorded that the Jewish Center gave a pair of shoes to an orphan who had returned from Transnistria barefoot.[71]

Wilhelm Filderman, the deposed leader of the Jewish communities, whose December 1941 removal was one of the main goals of the initiative

65 Banuş, *Însemnările mele,* vol. 1, 376.
66 Banuş, *Însemnările mele,* vol. 1, 404.
67 Banuş, *Însemnările mele,* vol. 1, 415.
68 Banuş, *Însemnările mele,* vol. 1, 421-23.
69 Banuş, *Însemnările mele,* vol. 1, 433.
70 Banuş, *Însemnările mele,* vol. 1, 406.
71 Banuş, *Însemnările mele,* vol. 1, 472.

to replace FUCER with the Jewish Center, also wrote a diary during the war, which was recently published together with his memoirs. Understandably, his diary (and memoir) reflect a negative opinion—partially informed by his resentment about losing his position—about the Jewish Center's leadership, as he wrote in his farewell letter addressed to FUCER employees in late December 1941: "The leaders of the Central Office are puppets in the hands of Radu Lecca, who is an agent of the Germans."[72]

The diaries of educated Jews suggest a pattern of criticism toward the Jewish Center and its leaders, who were usually blamed for collaborationism, personal profiteering, and communal neglect. The diaries also rarely acknowledged the difficulties faced by the Jewish leadership or their achievements (especially in the realm of social work). These assessments were based on diarists' interactions with the Jewish Center and its leaders; on authors' personal observations of the Jewish Center's activities; or on rumors that circulated in the Jewish community, and they seem to have been strongly influenced by powerful emotions, fears, hopes, subjectivity, and perhaps some bias. Although the diarists usually complained bitterly about the problems affecting the work of the Jewish Center—clientelism, corruption, self-interest, and inefficiency—most maintained their faith that they would survive the war, and they sometimes acknowledged the merits of the Jewish organization. This attitude was probably rooted in the fact that the diarists had not been deported from their homes and cities or cut off from their social networks, even though they had been subjected to other antisemitic measures such as forced labor and various forms of dispossession.[73]

Conclusion

On the one hand, from the ego documents analyzed in this chapter, it is clear that Romania's wartime Jewish Center collaborated with the Antonescu regime, collecting and surrendering financial and material contributions to the public treasury, and, with regard to the antisemitic laws, refrained from organizing or engaging in armed resistance or even directly challenging the regime and its policies. Furthermore, some of the Center's leaders abused their power, attempted to enrich themselves

72 Filderman, *Memoirs and Diaries,* vol. 2, 262-63.

73 On the Romanian Jews' hopes that they would survive the war and regain their rights and assets, see Ştefan Cristian Ionescu, "Debates on the Restitution of Romanianized Property During the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 34, no. 1 (2020): 45-62.

through corruption, and exaggerated their importance. On the other hand, the Jewish Center simultaneously played a significant role in helping many Jews survive Antonescu's genocidal policies. This was achieved especially by providing social welfare services to impoverished members of the Jewish community in Romania, and offering crucial legal aid to Jews who legally contested the Romanianization of their property and their conscription into forced labor battalions—in addition to other antisemitic regulations. The Jewish Center also sent critical—though insufficient—aid to Jewish deportees in Transnistria and advocated for the repatriation of some orphans and other vulnerable groups of deportees from camps and ghettos in Transnistria. Archival sources and ego documents demonstrate that these achievements were the result of the work of numerous dedicated mid- and lower-level employees of the Jewish Center—many of whom were former functionaries of the Federation of the Union of Jewish Communities of Romania (FUCER) and of other Jewish organizations and political parties—and the Aid Commission, and were not the results of efforts made by the leadership of the Jewish Center.[74] The latter seemed more inclined to accept the antisemitic laws, directives, and measures adopted by Romanian and German officials and lived in fear of being replaced or deported to the camps. In spite of these partial achievements, which improved the lives of some Jews, most Jewish eyewitnesses held a predominantly negative opinion of the Jewish Center, its leaders, and employees, which they recorded on the pages of their diaries.

The diaries of educated Jews usually show their authors' lack of understanding of the complexity of the situation and the difficult choices faced by Jewish Center leaders who were caught between their desire to help their coreligionists and pressure from extremely antisemitic Antonescu officials, who until fall 1942 engaged in mass violence against and the dispossession and deportation of Jews in Romania—sometimes directly targeting Jewish leaders (through hostage taking and deportations). These perceptions were probably due to the acute material needs, shortages, expectations, and constant threats they confronted in their daily lives, in comparison to the relative normalcy of the prewar years and diarists' lack of insight into all the Jewish Center's activities. The diarists could not easily and quickly grasp the Jewish Center's struggle to navigate the

74 Filderman established the Aid Commission to help Jewish victims of Romania's antisemitic policies by collecting and distributing material aid to those who faced violence, poverty, forced labor, and deportation. From 1942 on, the Aid Commission was formally affiliated with the Jewish Center but maintained its autonomy.

pressures placed on it by both the Antonescu regime and Germany while maintaining their non-military efforts to ensure the physical survival of the community. Educated Jews' perceptions did not reflect the real achievements of the Jewish Center and its local organs, and this corresponds to a widespread pattern among many Jews living in other countries under Nazi influence who had difficulty comprehending some of the positive aspects of "Jewish Councils"—especially related to social work and material aid—and focused mostly on negative aspects like corruption and self-aggrandizement.

Scholars, such as Alexandra Garbarini, who have examined Holocaust diaries produced in areas under direct German administration in Central, Eastern, and Western Europe have noted an evolution in their tone from initial hope to a sense of despair, an observation especially relevant for the period of 1942 through 1943, when an increasing number of Jews understood the scale and intensity of Nazi genocidal policies and abandoned writing or were killed. However, the diaries produced by educated Jews in Romania only partially reflect this pattern. Many of them continued to write and hope that they would survive the war. Diary entries from the latter days of the Antonescu regime (1943-1944) that discuss the activities of the Jewish Center seem to be more positive compared to those from the previous years and more willing to acknowledge the organization's efforts—though insufficient and sometimes flawed—to help Jews survive the war. This partially positive assessment probably reflects the distinctive features of the Romanian chapter of the Holocaust in which officials of the Antonescu regime gradually softened its antisemitic policies (from fall 1942 on), notably in the core provinces of Romania, abandoning mass murder and allowing intra-community aid, partial repatriation from Transnistria, and limited immigration to Palestine.

After the collapse of the Antonescu regime, most of the Jewish Center's leaders, including Gingold, Grunberg-Willman, and Grossman-Grozea, were arrested and prosecuted for war crimes at the People's Tribunal in a special trial focused on the group associated with the Jewish Center. In February 1946, the court sentenced the former Jewish leaders to lengthy prison terms, but all were released early. The only leader who seems to have escaped a brush with the postwar criminal justice system was zStreitman.[75]

75 Frilling et al., *Final Report,* 316; Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism," 305-8.

Wolfgang Schneider

Precarious Legitimacy: Jewish Ghetto Functionaries' Community Recognition as Leaders in Transnistria

The following chapter deals with the legitimacy of Jewish ghetto functionaries in Romanian-occupied Transnistria. It asks whether or not these functionaries gained legitimacy among the respective ghetto populations. The argument unfolds as follows. First, I provide the historical background of the Holocaust in Transnistria under Romanian rule. Next, I turn to the theoretical foundations of my analysis, the starting point of which is Dan Michman's conceptualization of "Jewish Councils" as "headships" rather than "leaderships."[1] Michman concluded that "Jewish Councils" lacked key characteristics of "leadership" and were thus best understood as a "headship." I argue that the distinction drawn by Michman is similar to the one drawn by sociologist Max Weber between "power" and "authority." For Weber, authority depends on whether the ruled see their rulers as legitimate—a turn to motives of compliance resembling that which stands at the heart of Michman's distinction between leadership and headship.[2] To combine the two terminologies: legitimacy equals leadership, and the lack of legitimacy equals headship. Thus, the debate on "Jewish Councils" can be connected to a broader theoretical debate. As the leadership–headship distinction does not offer any new insights into the theoretical debate, I propose using the more familiar concept of legitimacy. To operationalize "legitimacy" and further refine its conceptualization, I then draw on political scientist David Beetham's work on legitimacy, introducing several of his key concepts to the study of Jewish ghetto functionaries.

1 Laurien Vastenhout is also critical of the concept: Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 2n2.

2 Andreas Anter, *Theorien der Macht zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2012), 66.

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Finally, I empirically test select concepts drawn from Weber and Beetham using the activities of the Jewish ghetto functionaries of six ghettos in Transnistria. The discussion includes aspects of continuity, representation, and justifiability by emphasizing common interests and qualifications. I argue that ghetto populations afforded legitimacy to functionaries if they had held prewar leadership positions in their communities (or acted accordingly). Populations also valued the representation of different groups of Jews in ghetto administrations. If ghetto functionaries were able to provide for ghetto populations materially, this could also bolster their legitimacy. Lastly, speaking the language of occupiers or having formal training and/or charisma could also allow functionaries to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Jewish population.

Ultimately, legitimacy was precarious because Romanian perpetrators severely constrained Jewish functionaries' room for maneuver. Nevertheless, some functionaries had limited success, and at least some segments of ghetto populations accepted them as legitimate. Besides differences in how the Romanians persecuted different functionaries and ghetto populations, individual factors such as functionaries' qualifications also introduce a high degree of variability.

Sources and Methods

The main source base for this analysis is Soviet investigative case files from the trials launched against former Transnistrian Jewish ghetto functionaries for their alleged collaboration with the Axis Powers. Between 1944 and 1949, the Soviet authorities charged at least fifty-one former functionaries. Most witnesses in the investigations and trials were Jewish survivors of the respective ghettos. I triangulate those investigation and trial materials with ghetto survivors' oral history interviews and memoirs. Many of the following assertions concerning witnesses' and defendants' testimonies are based on a qualitative content analysis of Soviet investigative case files from ten separate investigations of Jewish functionaries in the Balta, Mohyliv-Podil's'kyi, Odesa-Slobidka, Rîbnița, Sharhorod, and Tul'chyn ghettos.[3] This analysis included the protocols of 310 pretrial

3 Margrit Schreier, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, ed. Uwe Flick (London: Sage, 2014). A note on names and toponyms: I refer to individuals whose names were transliterated into Russian in Soviet investigative case files. If documentary evidence or historiographical literature allows me to reconstruct the original spelling used in the source, I use that spelling. If not, I transliterate the Russian into Latin characters. For place names, I

witness testimonies and 179 defendants' interrogations. In total, twenty-six defendants and 247 individual witnesses provided these testimonies. The present chapter's source base does not include Romanian-language materials such as the files of state security services, oral history, among others, because of my linguistic limitations. Furthermore, this chapter is a part of a much larger project focusing on the Soviet judicial (and extra-judicial) treatment of Jewish ghetto functionaries. For this reason, the main emphasis is on Russian-language materials (even though many of those who gave testimony were not Soviet citizens). The bulk of the Soviet archival materials cited here have never been analyzed in the historiography.

Historical Background: Transnistria and Its Jewish Ghetto Functionaries

Transnistria's story is best told by beginning further west, with Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. These regions belonged to Romania in the interwar period but were annexed by the Soviet Union in June 1940 as part of the Hitler–Stalin Pact.[4] Romania reconquered both territories in 1941, and Romanian units murdered approximately 60,000 Jews in these lands between June and October 1941.[5] In the summer of 1941, Romanian and German troops also conquered territories in Soviet Ukraine and Moldova. The area between the Dniester river in the west and the southern Bug river in the east, and between the Black Sea in the south and the town of Zhmerynka in the north was awarded to Romania and given the name "Transnistria," that is, the lands beyond the Dniester.[6] Einsatzgruppe D and Romanian units murdered around 60,000 local Jews in

use the names of these places in the language of the country to which they belong today. In quotations, I retain the Russian/Russianized names and toponyms.

4 Svetlana Burmistr, "Transnistrien," in *Arbeitserziehungslager, Ghettos, Jugendschutzlager, Polizeihaftlager, Sonderlager, Zigeunerlager, Zwangsarbeitslager*, ed. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (Munich: Beck, 2009), 390.

5 Vladimir Solonari, "Patterns of Violence: The Local Population and the Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, July–August 1941," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 4 (2007), 755.

6 Jean Ancel and Ovidiu Creangă, "Romania," in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945,* vol. 3, *Camps and Ghettos under European Regimes Aligned with Nazi Germany*, ed., Joseph R. White, Mel Hecker, and Geoffrey P. Megargee (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 575 (hereafter *Camps and Ghettos under European Regimes Aligned with Nazi Germany*); Solonari, "Patterns of Violence," 755.

this region—Transnistria—in the summer of 1941.[7] Romanian units perpetrated another wave of murders between November 1941 and March 1942, killing tens of thousands of local Jews from the southern parts of Transnistria (especially Odesa).[8] Starting in July 1941, the Romanians also deported about 180,000 Jews to Transnistria, mainly Jews from Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, as well as southern Bukovina and the Dorohoi region.[9] In Transnistria itself, the Romanians interned the surviving Jews in some 175 camps and ghettos.[10]

Despite extremely harsh living conditions, illness, violence, forced labor, and malnutrition, Transnistria became an "'island of life'" for Jews.[11] When the Axis Powers' defeat at Stalingrad became clear in late 1942 and early 1943, the Romanian leadership relaxed its persecution of the Jews in order to improve its negotiating position with the Allies.[12] Romanian officials ceased their joint planning with the Germans to deport Jews in the Romanian sphere of power to German extermination camps in occupied Poland.[13] They also allowed the Central Jewish Council in Bucharest (*Centrala Evreilor din România*, hereafter CER) to deliver aid to the Jews in Transnistria.[14] In the Romanian Old Kingdom, the regime's antisemitic persecutions had been less severe throughout the war, and the Romanian regime allowed the Jews in Romania to support the Jews in Transnistria.[15] Consequently, Transnistria is a paradox within the

7 Burmistr, "Transnistrien," 397.
8 Ancel and Creangă, "Romania," 576.
9 Ancel and Creangă, "Romania," 576.
10 Herwig Baum, *Varianten des Terrors*: *Ein Vergleich zwischen der deutschen und rumänischen Besatzungsverwaltung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2011), 527.
11 Vadim Altskan, "On the Other Side of the River: Dr. Adolph Herschmann and the Zhmernika Ghetto, 1941-1944," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 13.
12 Mariana Hausleitner, "Rettungsaktionen für verfolgte Juden unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bukowina 1941-1944," in *Holocaust an der Peripherie. Judenpolitik und Judenmord in Rumänien und Transnistrien 1940-1944*, ed. Wolfgang Benz and Brigitte Mihok (Berlin: Metropol, 2009), 123.
13 Hausleitner, "Rettungsaktionen für verfolgte Juden," 123; Bert Hoppe and Hildrun Glass, "Einleitung," in *Sowjetunion mit annektierten Gebieten I: Besetzte sowjetische Gebiete unter deutscher Militärverwaltung, Baltikum und Transnistrien*, ed. Bert Hoppe and Hildrun Glass (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011), 70.
14 Bela Vago, "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism: The Center of the Jews in Romania (1942-1944)," in *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe, 1933-1945: Proceedings of the Third Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, April 4-7, 1977*, ed. Israel Gutman and Cynthia J. Haft (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 287-89.
15 Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 300-301; Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime: 1940-1944* (Chicago: Dee, 2000), 214.

history of the Holocaust. On the one hand, approximately 330,000 Jews became victims of Romanian perpetrators; on the other hand, nowhere else in occupied Soviet territory did so many Jews survive.[16]

In his Order No. 23 issued on November 11, 1941, the Romanian governor of Transnistria Gheorge Alexianu decreed that all Jews in Transnistria would be confined to camps and ghettos and denied them free movement beyond the boundaries of these spaces, threatening them with the punishment of death.[17] Furthermore, he ordered the appointment of a "chief" "from among the Jews" in all camps and ghettos.[18] The Jews were to be registered and were expected to "support themselves on their own account and by work," meaning that they should perform forced labor.[19] Moreover, the Jewish functionaries were personally responsible for ensuring that the Jews remained in place, followed Romanian orders, and performed forced labor.[20]

Due to the chaotic and corrupt administration, overlapping competences, and the strong position of the Romanian "*praetors*" in Transnistria, Order Nr. 23 was implemented differently from ghetto to ghetto.[21] Local Romanian perpetrators often created Jewish ghetto administrations of varying sizes under "chiefs" and gave them tasks that had not been stipulated in Alexianu's order.[22] Sometimes Jewish ghetto police forces were also established and tasked primarily with implementing forced labor duties but sometimes also with maintaining order in the ghettos and monitoring entrances and exits.[23] Moreover, Alexianu's order

16 Ancel and Creangă, "Romania," 580; Dennis Deletant, "Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004): 2; Baum, *Varianten des Terrors*, 576.

17 "Die Verordnung Nr. 23 des Zivilgouverneurs von Transnistrien, Gheorghe Alexianu, 11. November 1941," in Benz and Mihok, *Holocaust an der Peripherie*, 249-52; Hildrun Glass, "Transnistrien in der Forschung: Anmerkungen zu Historiografie und Quellenlage," in Benz and Mihok, *Holocaust an der Peripherie*, 144.

18 "Verordnung Nr. 23," 250.

19 "Verordnung Nr. 23," 249.

20 "Verordnung Nr. 23," 250.

21 Dalia Ofer, "The Holocaust in Transnistria: A Special Kind 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. Lucjan Dobroszycki (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1993), 141; Burmistr, "Transnistrien," 404; Jean Ancel, "The Romanian Campaigns of Mass Murder in Trans-Nistria, 1941-1942," in *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1997), 91.

22 For an overview of such tasks, see: Dalia Ofer, "Life in the Ghettos of Transnistria," *Yad Vashem Studies* 25 (1996): 260.

23 Dalia Ofer, "The Ghettos in Transnistria and Ghettos under German Occupation in Eastern Europe: A Comparative Approach," in *Im Ghetto 1939-1945: Neue Forschungen zu Alltag und Umfeld*, ed. Christoph Dieckmann and Babette Quinkert

often just sanctioned from the top what was already happening at the local level. Through Jewish initiative or by order of Romanian or German officials, some form of Jewish Council had already been established in many places (see below).[24] Finally, the Jewish Councils played the key role in the provision of social welfare in Transnistrian ghettos. Councils often developed their own social support systems (hospitals, public kitchens, orphanages, and so on) and distributed aid delivered from Romania by CER and international organizations.[25]

At this point, some terminological clarification is necessary. I use "Jewish ghetto functionaries" as an umbrella term for Jewish Council members and Jewish ghetto policemen. These analytical terms refer to various words in the sources: "Jewish Councils" in Transnistrian ghettos are primarily referred to as "*primaria*" (mayor's office), "*obshchina*" (community), or "*komitet*" (committee).[26] Accordingly, the heads of these bodies are called "*primar*" or "*predsedatel' komiteta*" (mayor or committee president), and so on,[27] and the members of these bodies are referred to as "*chlen komiteta*" (committee member), etc.[28] Policemen are often called "*politseiskii*" (police officer) or "*brigadir*" (brigadier), which highlights one of their primary tasks: the enforcement of discipline in relation to forced labor.[29]

Some individuals, however, held both "job titles" (police and council) simultaneously.[30] Moreover, the tasks of council members and policemen

(Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 44; Ofer, "Holocaust in Transnistria," 147; Deletant, "Ghetto Experience," 4-5.

24 Ancel and Creangă, "Romania," 577.

25 See, for example: Iemima Ploscariu, "Institutions for Survival: The Shargorod Ghetto During the Holocaust in Romanian Transnistria," *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 1 (2019): 128-29, https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2018.16; Arad, *Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 300-301; Ioanid, *Holocaust in Romania*, 214-18.

26 See the testimonies in: Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, D5916, Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrainy (Odes'ka oblast') (Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, Odesa) (hereafter HDA SBU OO), 33.

27 Rubinshtein Pinkhos Itskovich, D7435, HDA SBU OO, 63-64; Sherf Isaak Lazarevich. Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrainy (Vinnyts'ka oblast') [Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, Vinnytsia] (hereafter: HDA SBU VO), 71-72.

28 Shtern Ignatii Samoilovich, D85-p, Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrainy (Chernivets'ka oblast') (Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, Chernivtsi) (hereafter HDA SBU ChO), 23-25; Vitner Gerbert Maksovich, D2395-o, HDA SBU ChO, 118-19.

29 Shtern Ignatii Samoilovich, 28; Akhtemberg, Moisei Iakovlevich, RG-54.003*01, War Crimes Investigation and Trial Records from the Republic of Moldova, 1944-1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMM), 5-7.

30 Akhtemberg, Moisei Iakovlevich, 23-24; Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, RG-54.003*44, War Crimes Investigation and Trial Records from the Republic of Moldova, 1944-1955, USHMM, 58-60 (hereafter Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich).

differed due to location, and such differences were often only a matter of degree. A *primar* could physically impose forced labor discipline, and a *brigadier* or a policeman could assist in administrative tasks.[31] Thus, "Jewish ghetto functionary" refers to people both in primarily administrative and primarily executive roles. Because the boundaries between the two were often blurred, subsuming both under one umbrella term offers clarity.

Conceptualization: Headship, Leadership, and Legitimacy

Rather than summarizing the various conceptualizations of "Jewish Councils" that appear in the historiography, I take Michman's approach as a starting point for my theoretical discussion. Michman's key concepts of "leadership" and "headship" make it possible to connect the debate around Jewish ghetto functionaries to the broader theoretical debate about legitimacy, enabling us to draw useful concepts from this comparison. Reviewing decades of scholarship on "Jewish Councils," Michman identifies a scholarly consensus, according to which "Jewish Councils" were "leaderships," but he argues that the term inadequately captures what "Jewish Councils" were. He also eschews "leadership" because of its normative implications and proposes using "headship" instead.[32]

Michman quotes a five-point definition by psychologist Cecil Gibb detailing the differences between the headship and leadership, highlighting the definition's second and fifth points as "especially relevant":

> 2. The group goal is chosen by the headman in line with his interests and is not internally determined by the group itself …
>
> 5. Most basically, the two forms of influence [i.e., leadership and headship] differ with respect to the source of the authority which is exercised. The leader's authority is spontaneously accorded him by his fellow group members, and particularly by the followers. The authority of the head derives from some extra group-power which he has over the members of the group, who cannot meaningfully be

31 Rubinshtein Pinkhos Itskovich, 56-58.

32 Dan Michman, "On the Historical Interpretation of the Judenräte Issue: Between Intentionalism, Functionalism and the Integrationist Approach of the 1990s," in *On Germans and Jews Under the Nazi Regime: Essays by Three Generations of Historians: A Festschrift in Honor of Otto Dov Kulka*, ed. Moshe Zimmermann (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2006), 389.

> called his followers. They accept his domination on pain of punishment, rather than follow.[33]

Gibb's "most basic" and crucial point mirrors Max Weber's distinction between "authority" (or "legitimate rule") and "power," a distinction that revolves around the notion of legitimacy. Gibb already mentioned the possibility of connecting the two terminologies, and he highlighted "the possibility that headship has the essential quality of leadership so long as group members perceive the directive attempts of the head as legitimate."[34] This strikes me as an essentially Weberian argument.

For Weber, legitimacy stabilizes authority and differentiates it from power.[35] Weber defined authority as "the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons."[36] The underlying "motives of compliance" of the ruled may vary, but for authority to be stable, they must include a "belief in legitimacy."[37] Weber described different types of belief in legitimacy, two of which I discuss below: legal and charismatic. Rulers foster such beliefs by formulating corresponding claims to legitimacy.[38] Authority is, thus, something different than power, defined by Weber as the "probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests."[39] Lacking legitimacy, power *can* merely rest on forms of coercion that disregard "motives of compliance."

To combine Gibb's and Weber's terminologies: If subjects believe in rulers' legitimacy, they "accord authority" to them and treat them as a leadership. If they do not believe in it, subjects merely "accept [their] domination on pain of punishment" and treat their rulers as a headship. In other words, legitimacy equals leadership, and the lack of legitimacy equals headship. As it is easily translated into more familiar and common

33 Dan Michman, *Die Historiographie der Shoah aus jüdischer Sicht: Konzeptualisierungen, Terminologie, Anschauungen, Grundfragen* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2002), 105-6.

34 Cecil A. Gibb, "Leadership," in *Group Psychology and Phenomena of Interaction*, 2nd ed., ed. Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969), 213.

35 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, with the assistance of Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 215.

36 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 53.

37 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 212-13.

38 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 213.

39 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 53.

theoretical terms, the headship–leadership distinction does not seem to add anything significant to the theoretical debate. Therefore, we should simply ask about legitimacy. The question, then, is how to operationalize "legitimacy" for the study of Jewish ghetto functionaries.

David Beetham's work further distinguishes important aspects of legitimacy and provides some inroads for the operationalization of these concepts. Building on Weber, Beetham emphasized that those who hold power draw their legitimacy from the legality of their rule, that is, by conforming to

> rules which determine who shall come to acquire the power of property, position or function, and by what means, confer the right to its exercise and the corresponding duty to acknowledge and respect it on the part of others.[40]

Regarding legality, I focus on how Jewish functionaries were appointed, and whether there was continuity in those who held positions of power before and during the Holocaust. Beetham criticized Weber for his focus on belief in legitimacy and argued that some aspects of legitimacy, such as the legality of a power relationship, are facts independent from people's beliefs.[41] This point is valid, but I see no reason why one should not still ask whether subjects accepted the rule of power holders as legal regardless of its actual legality.

Moreover, Beetham understands legitimacy in terms of "justifiability." Thus, a "power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be justified in terms of their beliefs."[42] Beetham, therefore, turns away from measuring belief in legitimacy to "an assessment of the degree of congruence, or lack of it, between a given system of power and the beliefs, values and expectations that provide its justification."[43] Consequently, we are then no longer looking for a belief, say, in the traditional holiness of a social order or the exceptional "charismatic" qualities of a ruler. Rather, we are interested in whether what rulers do is "congruent" with the broader attitudes of those ruled. This still concerns people's attitudes, but it allows for a more indirect measurement of legitimacy. As I argue below, following Beetham, the power relationship between Jewish ghetto functionaries and ghetto populations

40 David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 2nd ed. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 65.
41 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 12.
42 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 11.
43 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 11.

was often not justifiable because Jewish ghetto functionaries failed (and had to fail due to the circumstances created by perpetrators) to secure even minimal sustenance for ghetto populations. That ghetto functionaries held positions of power was often not justifiable because these functionaries failed to prove that by holding such positions, they were serving the common interests of both the ruled and rulers. That is a more indirect assessment of legitimacy than looking for beliefs in charisma or legality.

Beetham distinguishes between the sources of rules and their content in a given power relationship.[44] He further argues that "the most common *source* of legitimacy in contemporary societies is the 'people.'"[45] For this reason, representation is a key element of the justifiability of domination. Put differently, the dominant must claim to represent their subordinates in some credible form. As I argue below, this often concerned the representation of different groups of Jews in Transnistrian ghetto administrations.

Besides its source, justifiability also concerns the content of rules. Here, justifiability is governed, first, by the "principle of community."[46] Power holders must prove that they act not only in their own interest but also in that of their subjects. Most basically, "… it is the failure to guarantee subsistence and the means of livelihood that is destructive to legitimacy."[47] Regarding the common interest, I analyze a value framework that focused on the survival and subsistence of ghetto populations. Ghetto functionaries' legitimacy varied with their ability to ensure ghetto inmates' survival and provide for them. Moreover, the "principle of community" could take the form of a "community of suffering." I argue that when ghetto functionaries lost relatives in the ghetto, that could increase their legitimacy among the ghetto population.

Second, the principle of community has a complementary "principle of differentiation." The former links the dominant and subordinate through common interest; the latter distinguishes them from one another.[48] Differentiation "justifies their respective access to and exclusion from essential resources, activities and positions" and "[r]ules of power. … are considered rightful in so far as they select the qualified and exclude the unqualified …"[49] To this we may add the Weberian term of

44 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 70.
45 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 75.
46 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 77.
47 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 83.
48 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 76-77.
49 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 77.

"charisma" as a further element of differentiation.[50] Weber described charisma as "the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person" as perceived by subjects.[51] To be legitimate, rulers must be qualified and/or charismatic. Concerning "differentiation," I focus on ghetto functionaries' qualifications, either linguistic or professional, for holding positions of power. Moreover, I briefly touch on the charisma that ghetto inmates ascribed to individual functionaries.

The agenda for the remainder of the chapter is as follows: I examine whether Jewish ghetto functionaries in Transnistria could rely on legality and justifiability to achieve legitimacy, with justifiability differentiated by the representation of "the people," the principle of community, and the principle of differentiation. If we find these elements, Jewish ghetto functionaries in Transnistria had legitimacy; if we do not find these elements, the functionaries lacked legitimacy.

Legality: Appointment

Regarding legality, Jewish functionaries could gain legitimacy in the eyes of their subordinates, or at least achieve the recognition of their congruence with their subordinates' value structures, through continuity. Continuity of leadership, therefore, could amount to continuity of legitimacy.[52] Consider the head of the Sharhorod ghetto's Jewish Council, Meir Teich. He was deported to Sharhorod from Suceava in southern Bukovina together with the Jewish community there.[53] As "President of the Jewish Community of Suceava," Teich remained in a dominant position throughout the deportation and even in the ghetto, which meant that local Soviet Jews and deportees from other places were now also among his subordinates.[54] At least for

50 I diverge from Beetham's conceptualization here. He is critical of Weber's notion of charisma. See: Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 156.

51 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 215.

52 Vastenhout advances a similar argument for the Netherlands and Belgium: Laurien Vastenhout, "Remain or Resign? Jewish Leaders' Dilemmas in the Netherlands and Belgium Under Nazi Occupation," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 36, no. 3 (2022): 422-23, https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcac038.

53 There were several cases of leadership continuity in Transnistria. See: Ofer, "Life in the Ghettos," 241.

54 Meir Teich, "The Jewish Self-Administration of Ghetto Shargorod (Transnistria)," *Yad Vashem Studies* 2 (1958): 220; Ovidiu Creangă, "Şargorod," in White, Hecker, and Megargee, *Camps and Ghettos under European Regimes Aligned with Nazi Germany*, 752.

the Jews from Suceava, Teich did not need to acquire legitimacy because he already had it.[55]

A counterexample is Paul Moscovici, who headed the Balta district bureau for Jewish labor.[56] His case shows how the modalities of functionaries' appointments could limit their legitimacy. Moscovici was a prominent communist lawyer in interwar Romania and defended party notables like Nicolae Ceauşescu and Ana Pauker in political trials.[57] The Romanian authorities arrested Moscovici, along with many other Jewish communists, even before Operation Barbarossa was launched.[58] Eventually, they interned Moscovici in the Vapniarka concentration camp for political prisoners in Transnistria.[59] Mosovici was later summoned to appear before Governor Alexianu in Odesa. Alexianu appointed Moscovici head of the Balta district bureau for Jewish labor and sent him to the Balta ghetto, warning him that should he be unsuccessful in mobilizing the Jews in the district for labor, Alexianu would have all of them transferred to the German zone across the Bug, where they would be shot.[60] Moscovici arrived in the Balta ghetto only in January 1943, significantly later than most of the Jews confined there, and separately from any of the prewar Jewish communities (or what was left of them) sent to the ghetto.[61] Moreover, many witnesses regarded Moscovici as effectively deposing the existing Jewish Council and assuming total control of the ghetto, which further alienated him from the community.[62] Thus, compared to Teich, Moscovici could not have arrived to Balta with "inherited" legitimacy.

For the local Soviet Jews in Transnistria, no *visible* leadership continuity was possible. Romanian officials viewed them collectively as "latent

55 Though this legitimacy eroded for a segment of the Suceava Jews over time. Ploscariu, "Institutions for Survival," 125.

56 Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, 40-41.

57 Liviu Pleşa, "Vasile Luca În Anii Ilegalităţii," in *Comuniştii Înainte De Comunism: Procese Şi Condamnări Ale Ilegaliştilor Din România*, ed. Adrian Cioroianu (Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2014), 63-68; Dumitru Lăcătuşu, "Procesul Anei Pauker De La Bucureşti Şi Craiova (27 Februarie 1936 Şi 5 Iunie–7 Iulie 1936)," in Cioroianu, *Comuniştii Înainte De Comunism*, 223, 229, 244, 252.

58 Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, 16.

59 Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, 17; Paul A. Shapiro, "Vapniarka: The Archive of the International Tracing Service and the Holocaust in the East," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 120, https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dct003.

60 Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, 18, 61.

61 Only one of the twenty witnesses in the case knew Moscovici from Bucharest. See: Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, 18, 30-31, 37-38.

62 Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, 43-44, 73-75, 76-78, 79-81, 82-84, 85-88, 89-92, 110-12, 120-23, 124-26, 129-31.

Bolsheviks" and allowed relatively few to take up positions as ghetto functionaries.[63] The Romanians excluded anyone with a background in Soviet local government. Among the fifty-one Jewish ghetto functionaries from Transnistrian ghettos whom the Soviets later accused of collaboration, there were thirteen local Soviet Jews. None of these was a Communist Party member nor had any worked for a Soviet governmental institution. Oral history testimony suggests that former Soviet government officials' position was especially precarious in the ghettos, and even their relatives faced heightened Romanian repression or at least the threat thereof.[64]

Nevertheless, some Jewish ghetto functionaries in Transnistria achieved a form of covert leadership continuity by supporting the Soviet underground, thereby winning legitimacy among local Soviet Jews who knew about their support. Pedutzir Schreiber, a Bukovinian Jew who headed the production department of the Tul'chyn ghetto, extensively supported the communists among the local Jewish community.[65] He provided false papers for members of the underground, warned them of Romanian raids, gave false testimony on behalf of those who had been arrested, and bribed Romanian officials to have them released.[66] Moreover, Schreiber saved several girls who were Soviet Komsomol members. When they turned to Schreiber for help, he registered them under false names and helped them hide in the ghetto.[67] When the Soviets later arrested Schreiber, his previous efforts earned him exonerating witness testimonies and a collective letter of support from ten local Soviet Jews.[68] In the parlance of the era, the letter claimed that Schreiber had "won the attention of the youth and the vanguard people of the ghetto," suggesting that the authors accepted him as acting in the spirit of their prewar government

63 Ofer, "Life in the Ghettos," 253; Altskan, "On the Other Side," 12.

64 Faina Shlizerman, Segments 74–75, Interview 38100, Visual History Archive (VHA), University of Southern California, Shoah Foundation (USC), January 12, 1998.

65 On Schreiber's position, see: Vitner Gerbert Maksovich, 20-22. The Soviet case file allows us to corroborate previous findings based on the memoirs of Schreiber's son Gerhard. See: Vadim Altskan, "The Closing Chapter: Northern Bukovinian Jews, 1944-1946," *Yad Vashem Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 18.

66 Shraiber Pedutsii Borisovich, D1595, HDA SBU ChO, 22-23, 28-31, 32-34, 35, 38-39.

67 Shraiber Pedutsii Borisovich, 22-23, 28-31, 32-34, 35.

68 Shraiber Pedutsii Borisovich, 28-31, 38-39. Meir Teich similarly supported the communist underground in Sharhorod and thus gained supporters pushing for his release from Soviet custody. See: Wolfgang Schneider, "From the Ghetto to the Gulag, from the Ghetto to Israel: Soviet Collaboration Trials Against the Shargorod Ghetto's Jewish Council," *Journal of Modern European History* 17, no. 1 (2019): 91-95, https://doi.org/10.1177/1611894418820266.

(i. e., the Soviet state).[69] However, such legitimacy was necessarily limited to a minority of the local Soviet Jews, primarily those who knew about Schreiber's clandestine support, which put him at risk of reprisal by the Romanians.[70] So, Romanian Jewish ghetto functionaries could gain legitimacy through legality in the sense of continuity in the eyes of at least some Soviet Jews.

Besides the clandestine nature of support, another limiting factor for such legitimacy and leadership were the strong incentives ghetto functionaries deported to Transnistria from Romania had to publicly present themselves as anticommunist. Romanian propaganda justified the persecution of Jews as anticommunist self-defense; dictator Ion Antonescu's first orders to murder the Jews labeled them as "'pro-Communist members of the minorities.'"[71] Incentivized thusly, Romanian Jews petitioning the Romanian government for repatriation from Transnistria regularly seized upon this trope, stressing their anticommunist convictions.[72] As exposed individuals in regular contact with Romanian officials, these incentives were especially relevant for Jewish functionaries. But anticommunist statements carried the potential to alienate them from local Jews loyal to the Soviet government (which was far from everyone). For ghetto functionaries, publicly cursing the Soviet Union could be useful to dispel Romanian officials' suspicions of links to partisans and curry favor with these officials. However, this strategy meant that later allegations of anti-Soviet agitation were directed even against functionaries who had strongly supported the Soviet underground in the ghetto.[73] When functionaries displayed disloyalty to the Soviets, this alienated local Soviet Jews who were loyal to their government and also undermined ghetto

69 Shraiber Pedutsii Borisovich, 38.

70 By order of the local Romanian commander, anyone who illegally sheltered people was "considered as participants in acts of communism and spies" and accordingly "treated with the same standards of the laws on spies." See: Colonel Ion Lazăr, Ordonanța No. 6, November 17, 1941, Reel 7, fond 2242, opis 2, delo 76, RG-31.004M, Odessa Oblast Archives Records, USHMM. I am grateful to Emanuel Grec for translating this document for me.

71 Quoted in: Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* (Lincoln and Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press; Yad Vashem, 2011), 218; Burmistr, "Transnistrien," 395.

72 Ana Bărbulescu, "In Dialogue with the Authorities: Petitions Referring to the Jews Deported to Transnistria, 1941-1944," *Holocaust. Studii şi cercetări* XIII, no. 14 (2021): 314, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1007531.

73 See the following witness testimony claiming that Meir Teich committed anti-Soviet agitation in the Sharhorod ghetto: Taikh Maer Mendelevich, D633, Derzhavnyi arkhiv Vinnyts'koi oblasti (DAVO), 32.

functionaries' legitimacy.[74] The pattern is clear in Soviet investigative casefiles: of the 216 witness testimonies of local Soviet Jews, forty-two contain accusations of anti-Soviet agitation or opinions. In conclusion, Soviet Jewish ghetto inmates rarely saw Romanian Jewish ghetto functionaries as legally legitimized through a continuity of rule.

Justifiability I: Communal-Class Representation

According to Beetham, power holders must claim to represent their subordinates ("the people") in some shape or form. In the following section, I argue that one common understanding of "the people" among the Jews in Transnistrian ghettos was all Jews confined there, regardless of their "communal-class" background. Jewish functionaries' actions were justifiable if they did not discriminate between the different groups of Jews in ghettos.

The three principal groups of Jews in Transnistrian ghettos were deportees from northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, deportees from southern Bukovina, and local Soviet Jews.[75] On average, these groups differed in terms of language, education, culture, politics, wealth, and status.[76] Historian Gali Tibon termed this "communal-class separation."[77] These differences stemmed from developmental paths as well as from differences in how German and Romanian perpetrators persecuted these groups starting in 1941. For example, the Jews of southern Bukovina had never lived under Soviet rule, those from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina had experienced brutal Sovietization in 1940, and the local Soviet Jews spent decades under Soviet rule. Their divergent political histories affected property relations, occupational distribution, education,

74 An example of similar accusations in oral history is: Iosif Gel'fer, Segment 41, Interview 34646, VHA, USC, July 29, 1997.

75 To simplify things, I do not treat the Dorohoi Jews separately in the remainder of the article but lump them with the Jews from southern Bukovina. On key issues such as their prewar development, modes of persecution and deportation by the Romanians, etc., their experiences were similar enough to those of the Jews from southern Bukovina to treat them together. Of course, any in-depth study focusing specifically on the ghettos where Dorohoi Jews were interned would need to treat them separately. However, for the present chapter, this seems unnecessary.

76 Hoppe and Glass, "Einleitung," 62-63.

77 Gali Tibon, "Am I My Brother's Keeper? The Jewish Committees in the Ghettos of Mogilev Province and the Romanian Regime in Transnistria during the Holocaust, 1941-1944," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 30, no. 2 (2016): 113, https://doi.org/10.1080/23256249.2016.1173338.

religious life, and community structures.[78] German and Romanian perpetrators murdered local Jews in Transnistria and Jews in Bessarabia and northern Bukovina *en masse* in the summer of 1941.[79] Moreover, the Romanians deported Jews from Bessarabia to Transnistria on foot, murdering, raping, and robbing them along the way.[80] In contrast, many Jews from southern Bukovina arrived at the border crossings for Transnistria by train, which somewhat eased their journey and allowed them to retain some of their valuables.[81] These factors stratified ghetto populations and generated social conflict.[82] Therefore, the issue of Jewish communal-class representation in the ghetto Jewish Councils became significant.

Some Jewish administrations in Transnistrian ghettos represented their diverse populations. Jewish Councils in Balta, Mohyliv-Podil's'kyi, Sharhorod, and Tul'chyn included individuals from the different communal-class groups confined in these ghettos. In Balta, six of the first nine Jewish Council members were local Balta Jews, and two others were from Bessarabia (the last member could not be identified as belonging to either of these groups).[83] In Mohyliv-Podil's'kyi and Sharhorod, local Jews and deportees initially had separate Jewish Councils which then merged.[84] In Tul'chyn, the Germans first appointed a Jewish Council from local Jews in 1941, which the Romanians left in place when they took over. After the influx of thousands of deportees from northern Bukovina in 1942, a second council was formed from the previous one, and it also included several deportees.[85] Triangulating judicial sources with oral histories proves that many people in these ghettos were acutely

78 Ofer, "Life in the Ghettos," 233.
79 Burmistr, "Transnistrien," 395-97.
80 Ancel and Creangă, "Romania," 576.
81 Baum, *Varianten des Terrors*, 486.
82 Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 113.
83 According to the testimony of the former head of the Jewish council: Rubinstein: Rubinshtein Pinkhos Itskovich, 20-21.
84 On Mohyliv-Podil's'kyi, see: Grinberg Mikhail Iosifovich, D10092, HDA SBU ChO, 22, 34-35, 50-52. On Sharhorod, see: Ploscariu, "Institutions for Survival," 124; Teich, "Jewish Self-Administration," 229. See also the testimony of Arkadii Frenkel', whose father represented the Jews from Bessarabia on the council: Arkadii Frenkel', Segments 81-82, Interview 49253, VHA, USC, November 21, 1998. For a differing analysis of the relationship between the different groups in the ghetto and on the council, see: Gali Tibon, "Two-Front Battle: Opposition in the Ghettos of the Mogilev District in Transnistria 1941-44," in *Romania and the Holocaust: Events—Contexts—Aftermath*, ed. Simon Geissbühler (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2016), 161-63.
85 Eidler Iakov Bentsionovich, D3834, HDA SBU OO, 14, 64, 75-77, 125-27, 138, 251; Vitner Gerbert Maksovich, 37. See also an undated list of Jewish council members

aware of functionaries' communal-class backgrounds, as were many of the witnesses called during Soviet investigations and trials.[86]

Both ghetto inmates and Jewish functionaries described communal-class discrimination as negative and solidarity as positive. Ghetto survivors frequently accused Jewish functionaries of communal-class discrimination in connection with social welfare, taxation, forced labor, and deportations.[87] In their pre-trial depositions and during their trials, defendants denied such accusations and argued that they treated everyone equally regardless of communal-class background.[88] In oral history interviews, survivors positively highlight inter-group solidarity and the support they received from Jewish functionaries that came from other groups.[89] Meir Teich's memoir corroborates this from the perspective of former functionaries and from a source untouched by the Soviet judiciary's filter.[90]

These sources suggest that despite their differences, there was a shared value framework in which it was justifiable that functionaries assumed positions of power as long as there was communal-class representation, and their actions were considered justifiable if they did not discriminate along communal-class lines. Some functionaries succeeded in achieving limited legitimacy in this way.[91]

But it was extremely difficult to ensure the equal treatment of all groups in the ghettos and camps in Transnistria. For example, Shaia Vainsthok, head of the Rîbnița ghetto, explained why the Jewish Council began taxing the ghetto population and why some taxes targeted the most vulnerable. Vainsthok described how a typhus epidemic ravaged the Rîbnița ghetto in the winter of 1941.[92] Yet in 1941, the Jewish Council did

in Tul'chyn: Tabel nominal de membrii Oficiului județean al Evreilor, Tulcin, 13/2264/1122, RG-31.004M, Odessa Oblast Archives Records, USHMM, 12.

86 On Shargorod, see: Estra Fleishman, Segment 51, Interview 40588, VHA, USC, February 16, 1998; Arkadii Frenkel', 81-82; Ida Guz', Segment 47, Interview 24081, VHA, USC, December 4, 1996; Grigorii Raibman, Segment 139, Interview 45874, VHA, USC, June 14, 1998.

87 For Balta, see: Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, 73-75, 82-84, 124-26, 127-28, 129-31, 189-90, 191-92, 201-2; Rubinshtein Pinkhos Itskovich, 48, 49-50, 51-52, 53-55, 56-58, 59-60, 71-72.

88 Moskovich Pavel Mikhailovich, 55, 64-65; Rubinshtein Pinkhos Itskovich, 26-30.

89 On Balta, see: Khaia Bol'shaia, Segment 133, Interview 29919, VHA, USC, April 1, 1997; Gennadii Rozenberg, Segment 86, Interview 39548, VHA, USC, December 18, 1997; Boris Zaidman, Segments 46-47, Interview 31952, VHA, USC, May 27, 1997.

90 Teich, "Jewish Self-Administration," 229.

91 Ploscariu, "Institutions for Survival," 125.

92 Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, 160-61.

not yet have "a connection to the central community in Bucharest" (CER).[93] Vainsthok argued that the Rîbnița Jewish Council needed to "provide medical help through drugs and nutrition for the poor and the sick, besides [helping] the [Jewish Council's] staff" find "the necessary things for the Jewish hospital with 50 beds, the children's home with around 33," and, lastly, collect "bribes for the authorities, first that they would not send [us] to camps, would not abuse us, and would not beat Jews during work."[94] For these reasons, the Jewish Council began taxing the ghetto population, which included demanding money from the most vulnerable, namely "illegals" who lacked official registration.[95] According to Vainsthok, this was necessary because Romanian officials would only register "illegals" in exchange for bribes.[96] Witnesses alleged that local Soviet Jews, being poorer than the deportees from Romania, suffered more under this system, with several dozen being shot by the Romanians due to their lack of documents.[97] Moreover, witnesses alleged that Soviet Jews bore the brunt of forced labor duties because deportees could pay the Jewish Council and have someone else go in their place.[98] Soviet Jewish witnesses saw this as communal-class discrimination rather than an expression of functionaries' powerlessness and lack of resources.

Romanian perpetrators gave the Jewish Council only highly constrained room for maneuver. This affected the extent to which the council's actions could be justifiable according to the ghetto population's value system: it was impossible to provide for everyone regardless of communal-class background. This made it more likely that functionaries lacked legitimacy in the eyes of at least some Jews.

93 Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, 160.
94 Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, 160.
95 Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, 160-61.
96 Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, 160-61.
97 Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, 29-30, 71, 78-79. Dumitru provides a detailed description of the accusations against Vainsthok. Unfortunately, she does not juxtapose the accusations with Vainsthok's version of events, which is why I cite him here. See: Diana Dumitru, "The Gordian Knot of Justice: Prosecuting Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Stalinist Courts for 'Collaboration' with the Enemy," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 22, no. 4 (2021): 741-42, https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2021.0051.
98 Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, 152.

Justifiability II: The Common Interest

A broader issue concerning legitimacy is the "principle of community." At the most basic level, power holders must show their subjects that they serve the common interest by ensuring their "subsistence" and "means of livelihood."[99] Jewish ghetto functionaries could gain legitimacy and be perceived as leaders as long as they succeeded in keeping the ghetto population alive. Again, success or failure often depended on factors completely out of ghetto functionaries' control.

Nevertheless, Soviet investigation and trial records suggest that ghetto inmates judged functionaries' actions within a survival and subsistence framework. In a sample of 310 witness testimonies, the most common accusations are (percentages indicating the share of documents that contain at least one accusation related to a given category): forced labor mobilization—45 percent; expropriation (by physical force, taxation, extortion, etc.)—40 percent; deportations (organizing and physically conducting them)—33 percent; violence (actually performing beatings or ordering or assisting with them)—30 percent; arrests (either performing, ordering, or assisting with them)—25 percent; neglect and the denial of aid (nutrition, medicine, etc.)—21 percent. The most common positive acts witnesses described concerned social welfare provision—14 percent; and rescuing, helping, or defending inmates from harm (warnings of impending raids, assistance in hiding, the provision of false documents, intervening in beatings, etc.)—11 percent. Anything functionaries did that enabled ghetto inmates to survive was described as good. Anything that endangered inmates' survival was described as bad. Within the survival and subsistence framework, ghetto functionaries' success could equal legitimacy, whereas failure equaled the lack thereof.

The principle of community could also take the form of a community of suffering. That was the case when ghetto functionaries' relatives died in the ghetto. Meir Teich lost his son and wife in the ghetto: his son died of illness, and his wife committed suicide.[100] Judging from oral history interviews, a common response was sympathy toward Teich's suffering,

99 Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 83.

100 Teich, "Jewish Self-Administration," 219. The Teich family apparently settled in a room of the Bergang family's home. Iosif Bergang recalls that Teich's son Alexander suffered from polio, "could not move," and that his mother Anna "did not leave his side." According to Bergang, Teich's wife committed suicide after the death of her son. Iosif Bergang, Segments 43-45, Interview 37037, VHA, USC, October 14, 1997.

emphasizing community rather than difference.[101] Whether ghetto functionaries gained legitimacy in the eyes of ghetto inmates could also depend on whether these functionaries experienced personal suffering.

Justifiability III: Differentiation through Qualification and Charisma

Jewish leaders' personal qualifications and their charisma played an important role in the justifiability of their positions and actions. As discussed above, justifiability is also based on the principle of differentiation either through qualification or charisma.

For Transnistrian ghetto functionaries, one type of qualification was knowledge of languages (German and, more importantly, Romanian). Being able to speak Romanian was a skill commonly cited when historians discuss why Jews were appointed or elected to ghetto functionary positions in Transnistria.[102] It was simply necessary to be able to speak to the occupation authorities. This also applied to local Soviet Jews. The Tul'chyn Jewish Council was appointed by the Germans who initially occupied the town, and the first two members were selected because they both spoke German.[103] In Soviet investigation and trial materials, witnesses and defendants frequently mentioned such linguistic qualifications.[104]

However, qualification could also mean formal qualifications, that is, education and professional training. Witnesses and defendants mentioned Jewish ghetto functionaries' formal qualifications frequently. A typical example is the following:

> Question: Tell me who was in charge of ghetto life in the Tul'chin ghetto during your stay there.
>
> Answer: To supervise the ghetto, the Romanian gendarmerie had a ghetto chief, a lawyer named Dr. Fikhman, who now lives in Cherno-

101 Estra Fleishman, Segment 52, VHA; Dora Monastyrska, Segment 61, Interview 17342, VHA, USC, July 12, 1996; Serafina Klueger, Segment 101, Interview 38671, VHA, USC, December 5, 1997; Iosif Bergang, Segments 43-45.

102 Ofer, "Life in the Ghettos," 249; Altskan, "On the Other Side," 11; Dumitru, "The Gordian Knot of Justice," 737.

103 Eidler Iakov Bentsionovich, 125-27.

104 Rubinshtein Pinkhos Itskovich, 75-77; Bosharnitsan, Samuil Samuilovich, RG-54.003*06, War Crimes Investigation and Trial Records from the Republic of Moldova, 1944-1955, USHMM, 94, 129; Grinberg Mikhail Iosifovich, 22; Shtrakhman, Nakhman Mortkovich, 10-11; Vitner Gerbert Maksovich, 112.

> vtsy … The administration also included the lawyer Dr. Mozner … who controlled the ghetto industry and the workforce … Also, the lawyers Dr. Iakob and Dr. Brender.[105]

Oral histories also provide ample anecdotal examples of survivors mentioning functionaries' qualifications. Let us consider two examples, one from a local Soviet Jew and one from a deportee. Both link qualifications to positive assessments of functionaries' achievements in the Sharhorod ghetto:

> Well, they probably achieved a bit more … because at the head of the community stood fairly intellectual people, fairly intellectual. Let us not look at what they did for themselves in the first instance; surely they did something for themselves, but they also tried to do a great deal for the people who were in the ghetto.[106]

> In this Jewish leadership, in this committee, shall we call it that, there were lawyers but also people who snuck in, those who wanted to live a little better, because of course they had more security, in the first place, that one should not send them and their families to the Bug [i.e., to German-controlled territory and thus to almost certain death, WS].[107]

As the second example shows, there is also a complementary concept of anti-qualification (people who "snuck in"). In Soviet investigative case files, a frequently mentioned form of anti-qualification are contacts as the decisive factor for appointment to the Jewish Council. For example:

> He arrived in Mogilev-Podol'skii, and owing to his acquaintance, or rather kinship, with the former head of the Jewish committee Danilov Mikhail, he was accepted by Danilov into the Jewish committee as the chief for sending the workforce of Jews to forced labor for the occupation authorities.[108]

A comparison of the frequency with which defendants and witnesses referred to contacts or formal qualification shows that defendants stressed qualification significantly more often (13.4 percent of documents) than

105 Vitner Gerbert Maksovich, 104-5.
106 Arkadii Vinner, Segment 41, Interview 5211, VHA, USC, October 12, 1995.
107 Rita Rosenfeld, Segment 59, Interview 12114, VHA, USC, March 15, 1996.
108 Grinberg Mikhail Iosifovich, 34-35.

witnesses (4.2 percent of documents), while both mentioned contacts equally often (witnesses 3.9 percent, defendants 3.5 percent, respectively). This suggests that defendants were aware of the legitimizing effects that qualifications could have. If Jewish ghetto functionaries succeeded in appearing qualified in the eyes of the ghetto population, this bolstered their legitimacy.

Another element of differentiation is charisma, i. e., being ascribed extraordinary personal qualities.[109] Some former internees of the Sharhorod ghetto described Meir Teich as a charismatic figure in this sense. One survivor claims, "we were lucky in Shargorod" to have Teich, who was "a very popular person, intelligent."[110] Another survivor describes him as "the personality of the town."[111] A third wants to "inscribe in gold into the book, the Jewish book, people like Dr. Teich."[112] Teich's charisma differentiated him from the ghetto population and made him appear qualified to rule, which, in turn, gave him legitimacy in the eyes of some ghetto inmates.

Conclusion

The questions at the core of this essay are: Did Jewish ghetto functionaries in Transnistria have legitimacy, and if they did, why? The answer has three components: strong constraints, limited success, and individual variability. Jewish ghetto functionaries' legitimacy was precarious because Romanian perpetrators constrained their room for maneuver to an extreme degree (which also varied between functionaries). Nonetheless, some functionaries did achieve legitimacy among ghetto populations (or segments of these populations). If we add individual factors such as qualifications and charisma, legitimacy varied from functionary to functionary.

Some Jewish ghetto functionaries in Transnistria achieved legitimacy through continuity. This was relatively easy for prewar Romanian Jewish community leaders vis-à-vis their original communities. When these functionaries were deported from Romania to Transnistria, it was much harder for them to achieve legitimacy through continuity with local

109 I diverge from Beetham's conceptualization here. He is critical of Weber's notion of charisma. See: Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 156.

110 Mikhail Zhvanetskii, Segments 94-95, Interview 38462, VHA, USC, December 3, 1997.

111 Serafina Klueger, Segment 101, VHA.

112 Arkadii Vinner, Segments 42-43, VHA.

Soviet Jews. Supporting the Soviet underground meant constructing some sort of continuity to prewar Soviet rule, but by definition, this happened clandestinely, and few persons were aware of their support.

Jewish functionaries could also gain legitimacy in the eyes of ghetto populations if they represented "the people," which meant populations in their entirety beyond communal-class divisions. Failing to do so meant alienating at least part of the ghetto population, thereby losing legitimacy in their eyes. Moreover, ghetto populations judged Jewish functionaries within a survival and subsistence framework. If ghetto functionaries succeeded in ensuring people's survival and subsistence, their rule became justifiable in terms of the common interest, and they achieved legitimacy (as a basic requirement for justifiability in the sense of a principle of community). However, success or failure in securing ghetto populations' survival was often almost completely beyond functionaries' control. A most bitter form of "common interest" was what I call the community of suffering, when ghetto functionaries lost loved ones like nearly everyone else in the ghetto. Such losses could increase functionaries' legitimacy.

Complementary to the principle of community, Jewish ghetto functionaries could also gain legitimacy if they proved they held special qualifications for positions of power according to the principle of differentiation. Qualifications could be linguistic (speaking the language of the occupiers), professional (education or professional training), or charismatic (being perceived as an extraordinary individual). To varying degrees, such differentiation provided Jewish ghetto functionaries in Transnistria with legitimacy. Therefore, the question of whether these ghetto functionaries were a "headship," a "leadership," or something in between is an empirical one that scholars need to examine in every concrete case. Michman was right to challenge the scholarly consensus of viewing "Jewish Councils" as "leaderships." But relying on the concept of headship alone is equally ill suited for analyzing "Jewish Councils." Whether Jewish functionaries had legitimacy, that some saw them as legitimate and some did not—these are empirical questions, not issues to be solved on a terminological level by way of definition.

Andrea Löw

The German Jewish Councils and the Organization of Life in the German Ghettos of Riga and Minsk[1]

"He had quite extensive powers at that time and was, so to speak, the mayor of a small town of 13,000 inhabitants." This is how Lore Israel, in a letter written shortly after liberation, characterized Max Leister from Cologne in his position as Elder of the German Jews in the Riga Ghetto, the so-called *Ältestenrat des Reichsjudenghettos in Riga*.[2]

In the winter of 1941/42, thousands of Jews were deported from the Greater German Reich to the ghettos in Riga and Minsk. Here, unlike the situation in occupied Poland, special ghettos were established for German, Austrian, and Czech Jews, and they also had their own German Jewish Councils. Due to the lack of sources, we do not know much about these Jewish administrations.[3] Using testimonies written by survivors, this chapter reconstructs these councils' histories and how they organized life and work in the ghettos. The picture cannot be complete and is rather descriptive due to the very fragmented nature of the available sources. This is especially true for the Minsk ghetto, about which only a few dozen German and Austrian Jews who survived could testify after the war. Due to the limited availability of sources, this article focuses on Riga.

1 This article was made possible thanks to the author's tenure as a J. B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Senior Scholar-in-Residence at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

2 Lore Israel, *Letter to Mrs. Aronsfeld*, trans. Wiener Library [hereafter WL], P.III.h. (Riga) No. 162, 2.2. The primary sources and testimonies cited in this essay are originally in German and English. The English translations of the German sources are my own unless otherwise stated.

3 Isaiah Trunk did not write about these German Jewish Councils. See Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

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Unlike the Jewish functionaries they discussed, those who survived had the benefit of hindsight. In the cases described here, we do not have, for example, letters written by council members that shed light on their mindset and tactics.[4] In a way, however, this reflects a problem we more generally confront when researching the history of these councils. Whereas there are some "Jewish Councils" in occupied Europe that left behind a large amount of contemporary documentation, such as those in the ghettos of Theresienstadt and Litzmannstadt,[5] there are many cases where documentation is lacking, especially in smaller places in Eastern Europe. This is the reason why we know very little about many "Jewish Councils" outside of major cities.[6]

Background: Systematic Deportations

In the fall of 1941, the systematic deportations of Jews from the German Reich began. From mid-October to the beginning of November 1941, the National Socialists deported to the Łódź ghetto about twenty thousand Jews in twenty-four transports from various cities of the "Old Reich," Luxembourg, Vienna, and Prague, as well as five thousand Roma from Burgenland. Local authorities in Łódź protested further transports to the overcrowded ghetto. Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich decided to direct transports further east, to areas that had only recently come under German control following the attack on the Soviet Union. Between November 8, 1941 and February 6, 1942, approximately thirty-two transports carrying one thousand people each traveled to the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, namely to Riga and Minsk. In November 1941, five transports of Jews from the Reich also arrived in Kaunas in occupied Lithuania, where they were murdered upon arrival.[7]

4 Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) demonstrates to what extent the councils' interpretations and actions can be properly interpreted using these letters.

5 On Litzmannstadt, see: Michal Unger, *Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004); Monika Polit, *Mordechaj Chaim Rumkowski—Wahrheit und Legende* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2017); Andrea Löw, *Juden im Getto Litzmannstadt. Lebensbedingungen, Selbstwahrnehmung, Verhalten* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006). On Theresienstadt, see: Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

6 See the introduction to this volume.

7 Alfred Gottwaldt and Diana Schulle, *Die "Judendeportationen" aus dem Deutschen Reich 1941-1945. Eine kommentierte Chronologie* (Wiesbaden: marix, 2005); Birthe

At these new destinations, German officials "made room" for the deportees by murdering large segments of the local Jewish population. In Riga, the SS and police forces together with Latvian auxiliary police units murdered, according to German reports, 27,800 Latvian Jews in the Rumbula forest on November 30 and December 8-9, 1941. In Minsk, the SS murdered about seven thousand residents of the ghetto on November 7, 1941, and another five thousand on November 20, 1941.[8]

At roughly the same time these murders were carried out, the first Jews in the German Reich received orders to present themselves at predetermined assembly points for deportation. They were only allowed to take hand luggage and a suitcase. They frequently had only vague knowledge that they were to be taken "to the East." The Gestapo determined which representatives of the Jewish community would be assigned to the transports. In most cases, these personnel decisions concerning who would be designated as transport leaders (*Transportführer*), meaning those responsible for groups of deportees during the transport and for keeping discipline in the trains, also played a role in who would hold positions in the ghetto administration. Max Leiser, later the Eldest of the Jews in the German ghetto in Riga, for example, was a transport leader during his deportation from Cologne, and Gustav Kleemann from Würzburg was responsible for the first transport from Franconia to Riga and later became the Eldest of the Jungfernhof Camp, which was located at an estate on the outskirts of Riga.[9] Berthold Rudner, who was deported from Berlin to Minsk, sharply criticized his transport leader Günter Freudenthal in his diary, describing Freudenthal as "out of place, at best knows how to handle animals, and the rations of the Berlin

Kundrus and Beate Meyer, eds., *Die Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland. Pläne—Praxis—Reaktionen 1938-1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004); Andrea Löw, "Die frühen Deportationen aus dem Reichsgebiet von Herbst 1939 bis Frühjahr 1941," in *"Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre, vielleicht sein Leben." Deutsche Juden 1938-1941*, eds. Susanne Heim, Beate Meyer, and Francis R. Nicosia (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 59-76.

8 Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga: Exploitation and Annihilation, 1941-1944* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 130-74; Wolfgang Scheffler, "Das Schicksal der in die baltischen Staaten deportierten deutschen, österreichischen und tschechoslowakischen Juden 1941-1945. Ein historischer Überblick," in *Buch der Erinnerung. Die ins Baltikum deportierten deutschen, österreichischen und tschechoslowakischen Juden*, eds. Wolfgang Scheffler and Diana Schulle (Munich: Saur, 2010), 1-43, here 4-5; Petra Rentrop, *Tatorte der "Endlösung." Das Ghetto Minsk und die Vernichtungsstätte von Maly Trostinez* (Berlin: Metropol, 2011), 139-42; Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 624-25.

9 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 205-14.

transport were the worst." Rudner announced: "I will make this scandal public later."[10]

Upon arrival, chaos and violence reigned: as much as the Jews were already familiar with exclusion and the capriciousness of the authorities from their hometowns, the arrival in Riga or Minsk was a deep shock. After arriving in Riga, German security police and Latvian police forces drove the people out of the wagons, beating them. Everything had to be done quickly, which was especially difficult for the elderly after the long and exhausting journey. In Riga, the first deportees had to march to Jungfernhof as there was still not enough space for them in the ghetto. Only after the second mass murder of local ghetto inmates on December 8 and 9, 1941 were deported Jews brought directly to the ghetto. From there, many men were selected for the Salaspils camp. Both Jungfernhof and Salaspils had to be constructed by the first prisoners.[11] On December 10, 1941, a transport from Cologne arrived in Riga. The deportees were the first to march from the station to the ghetto, where they were directly confronted with the traces of the massacres of the last two days. Lilly Menczel described this: "On the day of our arrival in the ghetto, we saw everywhere traces of the fact that people had been murdered there shortly before: There was frozen blood in the streets—a terrible sight. We found food on the table in the apartment; they hadn't even let the poor condemned people finish their meal."[12]

In Minsk, available reports speak of violence and shouting on the part of the guards upon arrival. Gerhard Hoffmann from Hamburg described this in a letter written shortly after liberation: "To the left and right of the train we saw SS troops standing in a close chain. The train stopped, and we were chased out of it with whips. The first shots were heard—that was our reception. We saw the first corpses."[13] Again, the deportees had to march several kilometers to the ghetto on foot, and some were transported in trucks. For many, the so-called Red House, a former school, was the first stop. The building was completely overcrowded; people

10 Susanne Heim, ed., *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933-1945,* vol. 6: *Deutsches Reich und Protektorat, Oktober 1941—März 1943*, VEJ 6/60 (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 246. Source edition abbreviated VEJ, together with the volume and document number in subsequent notes.

11 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 202-14.

12 Lilly Menczel, *Vom Rhein nach Riga. Deportiert von Köln: Bericht einer Überlebenden des Holocaust*, ed. Gine Elsner (Hamburg: VSA, 2012), 26.

13 Translation of letter written by Gerhard Hoffmann, October 22, 1945, Archive Memorial Flossenbürg, Acc. No. 2015.0123, 2.

were laying tightly packed in the rooms and in the corridors. After a few days there, they arrived at their actual accommodations. Berthold Rudner wrote about it in his diary: "The quarters turned out to be miserable wooden houses, plundered and demolished, which were also in an indescribable condition that a Central European would not be able to imagine."[14]

The Organization of Life in the Ghetto

In both Riga and Minsk, the ghettos of German-speaking Jews were separated from those of the local Jews, which differs from the situation in occupied Poland. In Minsk, there were two "special" ghettos for those carried on the various transports from the Reich; in Riga, there was the so-called German ghetto and the "Small" ghetto where the local Jews lived. These two ghettos were separated by fences. In both Minsk and Riga, the most important positions in the German-Jewish self-administration were filled by persons who arrived on the first transports; in Riga, these were persons from Cologne, and in Minsk, those from Hamburg. In Minsk, German authorities appointed Edgar Franck, a doctor of economics and former owner of a banking house in Hamburg, as chairman. In Riga, Max Leiser was appointed the chairman of the Council of Elders of the Reich Jews in the Ghetto; Leiser was the former head of the Jewish social affairs office in Cologne. Both Franck and Leiser had been transport leaders, so their leadership appointments in Riga and Minsk, respectively, had already been influenced by the Gestapo in their hometowns.[15] Frieda Marx, Leiser's secretary in Cologne, was appointed Ghetto Commander Krause's secretary in the German ghetto in Riga.[16]

Alfred Winter, who survived the Riga ghetto after he was transported there from Düsseldorf, described the creation of the Jewish Council and some of its departments at length in a manuscript/memoir written by Winter in English more than five decades after the war. He summed up some of the problems of the ghetto administration and criticized some German-Jewish officials:

14 Heim, *Deutsches Reich und Protektorat, Oktober 1941—März 1943*, VEJ 6/80, 291.

15 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 214; Björn Eggert, "Biografie Edgar Franck," in *Deutsche Jüdinnen und Juden in Ghettos und Lagers (1941-1945). Łódź. Chełmno. Minsk. Riga. Auschwitz. Theresienstadt*, ed. Beate Meyer (Berlin: Metropol, 2017), 110-22.

16 Testimony Frieda Marx, Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Institute for Contemporary History, hereafter IfZ), Archive, Gh02.05-1-138 [German].

> A so-called Judenrat was formed under the leadership of Leiser. The group leaders of the various transports held their office and some became members of the Judenrat. A police unit was formed and Chief of Police was a watchmaker from the transport Duesseldorf with the name of Frankenberg. A Ghetto Labor Office was installed to which each group had to report all able-bodied males and females. In charge of the Labor Office was a fellow named Schulz from the transport Cologne. Schulz was no angel and his behavior was short of collaboration with the Germans. He controlled every one's life in the Ghetto more than anybody else. He could assign a person to a good or bad work commando. This made him open for bribes and corruption since his food ration was not much better than the rest of the Ghetto inhabitants. The Germans gave those in charge better housing and additional bread. Also their families were protected during the action when all those who could not work were taken out of the Ghetto. In the final end the Germans put them in the same category and their families suffered the same fate, like any other Ghetto inhabitant. Each transport group had their own labor office which reported to the central labor office. The office leader in the group Cologne was a fellow with the name of Simons. He had 7 small children and therefore many mouths to feed. His behavior was so bad that he got to be known with the group members as "Little Napoleon."[17]

As described here, every transport after arrival constituted a specific group in the ghetto, named after its place of origin. Moreover, every group had an eldest who became a member of the Jewish Council, and every group eldest had a deputy. The elders and their deputies had an office in one of the group's buildings. In Riga, these delegates served under Leiser's command. The work assignments of the respective groups were under the control of Max Schultz (Schulz) from Cologne.[18]

One of the most infamous group elders was Günther Fleischel from Hanover, a Christian and former SA man who only in the mid-1930s found out about his Jewish origin and whom Ghetto Commander Kurt

17 Alfred Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance, 1941-1945* (Monroe, CT: Manuscript, 1998), 25.

18 Gertrude Schneider, *Journey Into Terror: Story of the Riga Ghetto.* New and Expanded Edition (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 29; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM), Edith Brandon Papers, RG-10.250*5, Bl. 37, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute (hereafter USC Shoah Foundation Institute), VHA #21541 Liesel Ginsburg, Segment #49; USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #9538 Ruth Foster, Segment #48.

Krause appointed as group elder.[19] Gerda Gottschalk recalled after the war that Fleischel was feared like an SS man as he beat people with a stick.[20] For the Hanover group, Selma Sollinger was responsible for the labor assignments; she was the first and one of the very few women within the ghetto administration.[21]

However, the activities of the council went far beyond designating Jews for labor. As Werner Sauer recalls: "Each group had its work assignment, its own ambulance with a doctor and nurses, its food distribution, craft shops and even hairdressers."[22] They also organized schools for the children. These groups were, in many respects, the first institutional points of contact for deported Jews. As such, the German Jewish Councils in Riga and Minsk were less hierarchically structured than many other *Judenräte*.[23] Food rations, for example, were provided in small stores for each group, which underscores the decentralized nature of the provision of social welfare by these councils. These distribution points received their supplies from a central food distribution point.[24]

Initially, the situation of the deportees was extremely difficult. As Alfred Winter recalls, in the spring of 1942, not everything was in place yet, and the deported Jews did not really understand what was going on, that they had arrived to a place of terror, hunger, and ultimately murder. In this context, his comments about the German Jewish Council make a clear distinction between these councils and others in occupied Eastern Europe: "During that time, the leaders of the different transport groups were eager to fill any German request because they felt they were Germans first and not Jews."[25]

Soon after their arrival, everything became more and more organized and, consequently, also more complicated, as Gertrude Schneider, survivor and historian of the Riga Ghetto, describes:

19 Herbert Obenaus, "Vom SA-Mann zum jüdischen Ghettoältesten in Riga. Zur Biografie von Günther Fleischel," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 8 (1999), 278-99; *Testimony Bernard Stein*, Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter YVA, O.33/89, 2-3.

20 Gerda Gottschalk, *Der letzte Weg* (Konstanz: Südverlag, 1991), 33-34.

21 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 16.

22 Testimony Werner Sauer, YVA, O.33/4126, 28 [German].

23 See Peter Klein, "Die Ghettos Theresienstadt und Riga. Vergleichende Bemerkungen zu den Strukturen ihrer jüdischen Selbstverwaltung während der Gründungsphase," in *Lebenswelt Ghetto. Alltag und soziales Umfeld während der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung*, eds. Imke Hansen, Katrin Steffen and Joachim Tauber (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 106-16, here 112-13.

24 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 30.

25 Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance,* 33.

> As the ghetto grew, so did its bureaucracy; the German authorities insisted on detailed reports, which, for lack of typewriters, were written out by hand at the groups' offices and were delivered to the *Kommandantur* by 11:30 each morning by the *Ordonnanz* of the group. These communications were equivalent to "morning reports" in the army. They contained the following information: the number of people in the group as of that day, the names of those who had died during the night, how many were out sick for the day, how many were employed at jobs within the ghetto, the number of children, and the number of people who had gone to work on jobs outside the ghetto. At the main office, the reports were then tallied against the lists of the outgoing labor details made by Baum and Schiff [in the Labor Deployment Central Office] earlier that day.[26]

The Nazi authorities announced their latest regulations and orders to the Jewish Council, which then communicated these to the offices and the various groups that served under their leadership. These offices, in turn, informed their members.[27] Communications between the Council of Elders and their respective groups were documented in a journal where the group Elders would write down all orders they received. Unfortunately, only one such journal survived. The journal of the Dortmund group consists of ninety-eight handwritten pages and covers the period from February 15 to September 4, 1942.[28] This journal shows how extensive the correspondence of the Jewish administration was and what kind of documentation was lost. The level of organization and detailed regulations documented here illustrate the deported Jewish administration's attempt to maintain order in the chaotic reality of the ghetto.

In Minsk, one Jewish Council oversaw both German ghettos. As mentioned before, the SS appointed Edgar Franck, the transport leader of the very first transport from Hamburg, as Eldest of the German Jews in Minsk. Karl Loewenstein, a survivor of the Minsk ghetto, indeed calls him *Judenältester* in his memoir. Other appointed Jewish Council members had also been on this first transport, including Biber, Behrend, Kohn, Jakob, Satz, Spiegel, and Rapolt. Unfortunately, further information on them is lacking. The council was in contact with the German

26 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 29-30.

27 Ibid., 33.

28 *Journalbuch der Gruppe Dortmund*, Lettisches Historisches Hauptarchiv Riga (LUVA), P132 Materialien der Außerordentlichen Kommission – Bezirk Lettland. The author wishes to thank Peter Klein for a copy of this important source. See Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 214 and 230n53.

Ghetto Commander Michael Schmiedel—who was responsible for the two German ghettos in Minsk until the spring of 1942—and the German police and received their orders from them. Similar to Riga, the German Jews organized themselves in groups according to the cities from which they had been deported. Each of the so-called camps (*Lager*) had a leader in charge of the group.[29]

The few survivors of these ghettos assessed the responsibility and scope of action of the council very differently. Manfred Alexander recalled that "they tried to run the ghetto in conjunction with the German soldiers, the German SS," and also that the "Judenrat had the last say."[30] Hersh Smolar, a Russian Jew, made a similar observation about the Minsk *Judenrat* leadership as had Alfred Winter regarding the Riga *Judenrat*:

> At first the attitude of the Hamburg's [the local Jewish population called the German Special Ghetto the Hamburg Ghetto as this was the place of origin of the first transport] toward the German civil administration was different than toward the Jews of Minsk. With the Germans they acted almost as fellow countrymen.[31]

Conversely, Gerhard Hoffmann had a more realistic recollection:

> Soon we had to arrange for our own camp leaders to reign within the ghetto. Of course they did this under the strictest SS supervision, and they [the SS] came more than once daily to keep control over them as well as us.[32]

29 Karl Loewenstein, *Minsk*, *im Lager der deutschen Juden* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Heimatdienst, 1961), 17; Shalom Cholavsky, "The German Jews in the Minsk Ghetto," *Yad Vashem Studies* XVII (1986): 219-45, here 230; Hersh Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Publications, 1989), 49; Rentrop, *Tatorte*, 180.

30 USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #49006 Fred (Manfred) Alexander, Segment #45.

31 Smolar, *Minsk*, 49.

32 Letter written by Gerhard Hoffmann, October 22, 1945, trans., Archive Memorial Flossenbürg, Acc. No. 2015.0123, 3.

Medical Help

In both the Riga and the Minsk ghettos, each group had excellent doctors. To organize medical care, the Jewish Councils in both ghettos established Jewish hospitals. Additionally, there were medical stations within the individual groups where doctors tried to help as much as they could. There was, however, a serious lack of medicine and necessary space for treatment. Almost all survivors praised the efforts of doctors and nurses but also stressed how terrible the conditions in which they had to operate were. Edith Blau reflected on the limited possibilities the medical personnel had: "Oh, but what have these people accomplished."[33]

In Riga, the so-called *Zentral Lazarett* was erected in a former school building. The ghetto's main doctor, Dr. Hans Aufrecht from Cologne, had his office there. Some survivors sharply criticized him for being egoistic and not really trying to help his fellow Jews.[34] There are also positive accounts regarding the medical support offered by Jewish functionaries in the ghetto. Among them was the testimony of Ruth Foster, who worked as a nurse in the Central Hospital. She testified about the excellent doctors and about the fact that it was mainly Latvian Jewish doctors who smuggled medicines into the ghetto and thus saved many lives, at least temporarily. She also recalled the abortions and other risky operations they had to perform to save women.[35] In fact, most of the operations doctors had to perform were abortions as Jews were not permitted to give birth in the ghetto.[36] Ruth Foster summed up the doctors' achievements: "Under these bad conditions, they performed miracles."[37] These doctors were under extreme pressure, and the hospital was a dangerous place for patients to be: Ghetto Commander Krause visited it regularly, and he often insisted on being present and watching abortions. He frequently threatened to have the parents sterilized as becoming pregnant was considered a crime. After a while, the Jewish authorities set up a secret room for abortions to protect pregnant women from Krause.[38]

33 USHMM, Edith Brandon Papers, RG-10.250*5, 38 [German]. See also Oral history interview with Sophie Nathan, USHMM, RG-50.323.0007, Min. 29; Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance*, 36; Testimony Edith Sophia Marx, geb. Wolff, 15.7.1969, USHMM, RG.14.101M, Reel 188, B162/3070, p. 1550; Testimony Inge Rothschild, 15.1.1946, AŻIH, 301/1507, p. 1.

34 See, for example: Testimony Werner Sauer, YVA, O.33/4126, p. 97; Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance*, 31.

35 USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #9538 Ruth Foster, Segments #49 and #60.

36 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 31; Testimony Werner Sauer, YVA, O.33/4126, 97.

37 USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #9538 Ruth Foster, Segment #68.

38 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 31.

In Minsk, a primitive hospital was hastily erected. The lack of resources was similar to that in Riga, as Chaim Berendt remembers: "There were enough doctors but hardly any medical instruments or medicines, so that the actual medical treatment could only be inadequate."[39] As Karl Loewenstein remembered, the situation was so bad, a surgeon from Brno "had to perform his operations with a kitchen knife." In the Central Hospital, they had about twenty patients in a single room that smelled terribly.[40]

Organizing Work

From the German authorities' perspective, the most important thing was the distribution of Jewish workers to all kinds of departments, factories, and other workplaces where they could work for different companies as well as the German army. In the beginning, many Jews had to clean the streets of Riga from snow or unload goods in the port. After the mass murder of the Latvian Jews, workers were in short supply. So, the most important Jewish department for the German rulers was the Labor Deployment Central Office, which served as a contact for the German employment office.[41] This office, directed by Herbert Schultz from Cologne, assembled laborers every morning. They left the ghetto under guard and marched to work sites, only to return in the evening. Every group in the ghetto had a delegate to the German employment office, and these persons had to support the Labor Deployment Central Office in trying to remain up to date concerning how many workers were available in each group.[42] Work as a possible salvation, the tactic for which Chaim Rumkowski in the Łódź ghetto is probably best known,[43] played a significant role in Riga too. Here, however, the initiative did not come from the Jewish administration. Immediately after their arrival in the ghetto, German officials and various companies requested the deportees as workers. The Jewish administration then set up the organization to coordinate this labor deployment. Due to the widespread use of the

39 Chaim Behrendt-Baram, *Where Was the Sun, 1939-1945* (Israel[?]: Gideon Behrendt, Manuscript 1996), 8.

40 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 35-39.

41 Peter Klein, "Die Ghettos Theresienstadt und Riga," 109.

42 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 215; Hilde Sherman, *Zwischen Tag und Dunkel. Mädchenjahre im Ghetto* (Frankfurt: Ullstein 1984), 41.

43 For Łódź, see, for example: Michal Unger, *Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004).

Jewish labor force and the dependencies this created, the ghetto existed until November 1943, and thousands of Jewish workers continued to be used in and around Riga even after that, until they were evacuated in the summer of 1944 due to the approach of the Red Army.[44]

After the war, survivor Hermann Neudorf praised the Jewish Council's work in this respect: "Thanks to the excellent work of the Jewish ghetto leadership, the division of labor gradually became better organized."[45] This praise did not include Herbert Schultz, however. Most ghetto dwellers criticized him after the war: "Schultz acted like a dog which had won the first prize in obedience for his master and did everything to please his German masters."[46] I will return to Schultz later.

In Minsk, a man named Spiegel, who had been deported from Hamburg, was initially in charge of the Labor Deployment Office, but later on, this position was given to Karl Loewenstein, who was deported from the Reich even though he had converted to Protestantism in 1919 and had been a Freikorps fighter. He described his work as follows: "The activity consisted of fulfilling the requirements of manpower from the SS, the military, private companies, Organization Todt, and the Reichsbahn, as well as other services."[47] The office created the labor groups—so-called *Arbeitskommandos*—and sent them to various workplaces.[48]

As the workers in both Riga and Minsk went to their labor assignments outside the ghetto, they were able to exchange some of their few remaining belongings for food with local non-Jewish workers. They then smuggled this food into the ghetto in the evening. Given that rations were always too small, this was necessary to avoid death by starvation. But it was dangerous: Survivors from Riga report that time after time, they returned in the evening and found murdered Jewish men hanging from the gallows of the ghetto. They were hanged because they smuggled. Riga Ghetto Commander Kurt Krause also frequently shot women convicted of smuggling in the Jewish cemetery, as did Ghetto Commander Adolf Rübe in Minsk. In both ghettos, a German Jewish police or Order Service existed, and some of its members denounced Jews who tried to smuggle food into the ghetto or helped German guards search for these goods.

44 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 336-50, 366-78.
45 Hermann Neudorf, "Das war Riga," USHMM, Acc. Nr. 1994.83.2 Hermann Neudorf papers, Series 1, fol. 6: Personal testimony, 1945, Bl. 2 [German].
46 Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance*, 34-35.
47 Loewenstein 1961, *Minsk*, 30-32.
48 Behrendt-Baram, *Where Was the Sun,* 8.

Smuggling and the Jewish Police

As with the other issues discussed here, evaluations of the behavior of the Jewish police forces set up in the German ghettos in Minsk and Riga vary widely. Some accused its members of being responsible for the death of their loved ones. Riga ghetto survivor Ingeborg Benjamin, for example, accused the Chief of the German-Jewish police Friedrich Frankenberg of having sent a Jewish policeman to her cousin's apartment. He took all her belongings and reported the case to Commander Krause, who shot her cousin. Summing up what she thought about Frankenberg, she wrote: "He was among the vilest criminals in our own ranks."[49] Sophie Nathan remembered that some Jewish policemen were very strict when prisoners returned to the ghetto in the evening, while others only pretended to search for smuggled goods.[50] Werner Sauer recalled that Rudi Haar, Frankenberg's deputy, saved some Jews from certain death. Overall, he offered a mild judgment of Jewish functionaries in the ghetto: "In general, it must be said that the ghetto notables in Riga did not exploit their position in the same way as the Kapos and Elders in the concentration camp later did."[51]

German authorities, probably Ghetto Commander Schmiedel, also ordered the establishment of a police unit in Minsk, with Karl Loewenstein as its chief. Members included former soldiers with military ranks from the German, Austrian, and Czechoslovak armies. Its tasks were—as in other ghettos—keeping order, stopping theft and trafficking, distributing food, caring for the sick, and burying the dead.[52] Survivor Martin Stock in his testimony also mentioned another task: "A police force was formed by us, who guarded the camp. These did not wear uniforms, they were later identified by armbands. They had to ensure order within the camp and were also posted as gate guards."[53]

Karl Loewenstein recalled the great meaning of bartering and smuggling for the hungry ghetto population: "Bartering was forbidden and punishable by death, but that did not stop anyone, because hunger

49 Letter written by Ingeborg Benjamin, 4.1.1950, WL, P.III.h. (Ghetto Riga) No. 1011/b, p. 1 [German].

50 Oral history interview with Sophie Nathan, USHMM, RG-50.323.0007, Min. 56.

51 Testimony by Werner Sauer, YVA, O.33/4126, p. 28 [German]. For the organization of the Jewish police, see Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 214-15.

52 Cholavsky, "The German Jews," 230; Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 19.

53 Testimony Martin Stock, Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe [hereafter GLA Karlsruhe], 465 h Nr. 10384, p. 123. See also: Behrendt-Baram, *Where Was the Sun*, 9.

hurts."[54] As he described in his testimony, he wanted to organize some kind of warning system with his Order Service to alert ghetto dwellers that SS guards were approaching to search them, but the Elder of the Jews, Franck, opposed this:

> The only one who did not agree with the bartering was Dr. Frank [sic!], because he was satiated. He not only banned the trade but also confiscated the bartered food himself or had it taken from the people by his successor Harf, who came from Bremen. If he discovered a barter trade, he even beat those people with his rubber truncheon or had Harf beat them. Yes, Frank [sic!] even searched the apartments himself. Power had gone to his head, and in him, too, the saying proved true: power corrupts, more power corrupts more![55]

It has to be stressed here that it is quite problematic to deal with these questions when Karl Loewenstein was the only member of the Jewish Council who survived and was able to testify about these complicated issues and the council's responsibilities. On the other hand, it is rare that we have such a testimony, especially in a case like this, where no contemporary sources are available; thus, this is our only chance to understand at least partially the form and function of the Jewish Council and police in Minsk.[56]

In Riga and Minsk, as in other ghettos, the local Nazi officials involved the Jewish Council functionaries and policemen in their terror measures, for example to enforce collective punishments to prevent escapes and resistance. These Jewish functionaries had to act within the confines of their limited room for maneuver, which always was a balancing act. When three prisoners fled the Berlin camp of the Minsk Ghetto, SS-*Oberscharführer* Michael Schmiedel requested three hundred ghetto dwellers be delivered to him. Loewenstein knew that this meant these persons were to be murdered. He discussed the terrible dilemma with Franck, and they tried to buy time. He then negotiated with Schmiedel, who reduced the number of the victims to one hundred, and later to thirty. Loewenstein had doctors select persons with cases of open tuberculosis:

54 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 35.
55 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 35-36.
56 Interestingly enough, H. G. Adler is full of praise for Loewenstein, his character, and his work in the Jewish self-government in Theresienstadt, where he was later imprisoned. See H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005; Reprint Mohr Siebeck, 1960), 138-41.

> I told myself that if, contrary to expectations, the three escapees actually did not come back, it was still better to offer victims who would not survive the harsh winter and inadequate nutrition anyway than healthy people.[57]

Loewenstein's tactics here were the same as those we know about from the responses of other "Jewish Councils" when facing terrible choices: If they were required to select people from the ghetto to be turned over to the German occupation authorities, they often sacrificed those who were sick, who could not work, who might not survive anyway. Soon after having reached this difficult decision, Loewenstein was informed that the three fugitives had been caught: "The reaction to this news began with me immediately: within a few minutes, I was thoroughly wet with sweat, despite the severe cold. The water ran down my entire body, as if I were standing under a shower." The next day, the ghetto residents had to line up and, as a deterrent, watch the SS shoot the three escapees—one woman and two men.[58]

Mass Murder in 1942: Cooperation and Powerlessness

The terrible dilemmas the Jewish Council leaders faced have already become clear. When the mass murder of the deported Jews in Riga and Minsk began, like other "Jewish Councils" in occupied Europe, their position became even more difficult. In the spring of 1942, segments of the German and Austrian Jews in Riga became victims of an annihilation action, the so called "*Aktion Dünamünde*." Allegedly, there was a fish cannery in Dünamünde where elderly and sick people were supposed to live and work under better and easier conditions. In fact, however, the people selected were shot not far from the Jungfernhof camp and the ghetto; the trucks returned empty after only a short time. When the Jewish Councils were ordered to prepare and hand over lists of the ghetto dwellers, they did not know anything about the fate that awaited these people. They had been in the ghetto only for a few weeks and had not seen what the Latvian Jews had seen and experienced. Even when they had heard about the mass killings that happened before their arrival, many of them still thought that their fate might be different because, like the perpetrators, they were Germans.

57 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 25-26.
58 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 25-27.

On February 4, 1942, Agnes Scheucher, a member of the administration of the Berlin Group, received an order from Max Leiser to compile a list of all the sick and old people from the Berlin Group as they were to be taken to a home for the elderly. A day later, a German SS man lined those on the list up and selected victims, all of whom were taken away on trucks.[59] After the war, Jeanette Wolff was very clear about responsibilities in preparation of this mass murder: "If an unrighteous elder had anyone he wanted to finish off, that person was included on the dispatch list." The German ghetto's chief physician, Hans Aufrecht from Cologne, had Wolff's twenty-eight-year-old daughter put onto the list of deportees, but she was released after a German intervention.[60]

In the Jungfernhof Camp, some survivors blamed the Jewish Elder Kleemann for participating in the selection, but others saw this differently and stressed that he could not have known what awaited these deported Jews:

> It is possible that the camp elder Kleemann had a hand in the selection for Dünamünde, but only insofar as he carried out the order to draw up a list of certain age groups purely schematically. I simply cannot believe that Kleemann would have known what was going to happen to those on the list.[61]

Another survivor emphasized that Camp Commander Seck selected the victims "in cooperation with a Jewish Council of Elders or camp committee. However, its members are no longer alive since they were all intended for Aktion Dünamünde themselves."[62] As happened in the Jungfernhof Camp in Riga, in Minsk, some members of the Jewish Council were murdered in the spring of 1942. This clearly demonstrates how helpless these Jewish functionaries ultimately were.

59 WL, P.III.h. (Ghetto Riga) No. 1035/a. See also Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 34.

60 Jeanette Wolff, *Sadismus oder Wahnsinn: Erlebnisse in den deutschen Konzentrationslagern im Osten* (Dresden: Sachsenverlag, 1946), 11. The Dortmund group journal confirms that it was Aufrecht—and not the Germans—who had her daughter put onto this list. *Journalbuch der Gruppe Dortmund*, LUVA, 51.

61 Testimony Julius Ceslanski, IfZ Archive, Gh02.05-1-55 [German].

62 Testimony Hans Werner Loszynski, IfZ Archive, Gh02.05-1-39 [German].

The First German Jewish Council in Minsk is Murdered

Members of the German Jewish Council in Minsk were murdered even before deported Jews fell victim to raids that resulted in mass murder. The entire German Jewish camp leadership—Franck, Bieber, Behrend, Cohn, Jacob, Satz, Spiegel, and Rappolt—was imprisoned at the beginning of 1942, which caused great distress in the ghetto because it was unclear why this was done. The motives soon became clear, however: a German policeman had befriended these *Judenrat* members and had offered to smuggle mail for them, which was strictly forbidden in both Riga and Minsk.

The ghetto inhabitants heard nothing about the affair for weeks until one day, a horse-drawn sleigh came into the ghetto with Edgar Franck lying on it, barely alive. The scene was dramatic, as Chaim Berendt from Berlin recalled:

> The Jewish guard stopped the sledge near the Ghetto headquarters. A man with long stubble lay on it. Incomprehensible sounds came out of his mouth. A doctor, who was immediately called, recognized the emaciated man as our Dr. Frank [sic!]. He was taken straight away to the Ghetto hospital, where all possible care was extended to help him regain consciousness, to hear where he had been, what they had done to him etc. But all help was in vain. The next day the incomprehensible mumble also ceased: he was dead.[63]

Karl Loewenstein, who recalled that this happened on March 8, 1942, suspected that the Germans poisoned Franck. The others were brought back to the ghetto on April 13th, after which SS-*Obersturmführer* Kurt Burckhardt shot them.[64] Richard Frank remembered this terrible scene: "As these victims were brought back to the ghetto from detention to be shot, they were so battered and physically weakened that they could hardly hold themselves upright. They had to take off each other's shoes, stand in the deep snow for about half an hour in the worst cold, only then were they shot."[65] Werner Blumert, Spiegel's nephew, heard from his aunt who had to watch how her husband was killed: "My uncle Spiegel was not immediately dead but resuscitated 2 more times and

63 Behrendt-Baram, *Where Was the Sun*, 9; Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 31.
64 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 31.
65 Testimony Richard Frank, GLA Karlsruhe, 465 h Nr. 10379, p. 275 [German].

then received a mercy killing."[66] Their murder demonstrates in a very clear way how powerless the *Judenräte* were. They could try to improve the situation within the ghettos, and they could also try to improve their own situation. Yet ultimately, as was the case with the "Jewish Councils" in other ghettos, it was the Germans who determined their fate. On the members of the later German Jewish Councils in Minsk, survivor Heinz Menzel said after the war: "These men always disappeared after a short time in an inexplicable way."[67]

1943—The Liquidation of the Ghettos in Riga and Minsk

Those Jews who survived several murderous "actions" moved daily in columns to their various work sites, and this continued until the ghettos were dissolved in October 1943 (Minsk) and November 1943 (Riga). However, even workers were never safe. Selections took place, still-existing families were torn apart, and people were murdered in Bikernieki near Riga or Maly Trostenez near Minsk. During the ghetto liquidation in Minsk, mainly young, single men were deported to labor and extermination camps in occupied Poland.[68] The remaining ghetto residents in Riga were sent to the newly built Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp in the north of the city beginning in the summer of 1943. On November 6th, the last ghetto residents were taken there. For many, this was a transit camp where they were registered and then sent on to other camps or to the barracks of their factories.[69] With the Red Army's approach, the SS began to relocate Jews who were still alive. For most of them, the further path of suffering took them, by ship, to Danzig, and from there they were marched to Stutthof concentration camp.[70]

66 Testimony Werner Blumert, GLA Karlsruhe, 465 h Nr. 10384, Bl. 156a [German].

67 Letter by Heinz Menkel to the Jewish Community Bremen, 6. 8. 1947, GLA Karlsruhe, 465 h Nr. 10379, p. 274.

68 On Gerhard Hoffmann's fate, see: Archive Memorial Flossenbürg, Acc. No. 2015. 0123.

69 See: Franziska Jahn, *Das KZ Riga-Kaiserwald und seine Außenlager 1943-1944. Strukturen und Entwicklungen* (Berlin: Metropol, 2018).

70 Andrea Löw, "Die 'Hölle' bezeugen. Frühe Berichte überlebender deutscher Jüdinnen und Juden aus Riga," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (2023), 155-207.

German Jewish Councils in the Final Phase

Not much is known about Minsk. Karl Loewenstein, who wrote extensively on the earlier phase, was released from Minsk in 1942, sent to Vienna, and then brought to the Theresienstadt ghetto, where he again became a member of the Jewish Council.[71] Franck's successor Erich Harf from Bremen was murdered in the summer of 1942; the exact circumstances of his death are unknown.[72] Günther Katzenstein recalled in an interview many years later: "The camp leadership, these were German Jews. The camp leadership, well, I survived eight camp leaderships, the camp leaderships, they were not alive for long."[73] As far as we know, Karl Loewenstein was the only member of the Jewish administration in the ghetto who survived.

When it comes to the German Jewish Council in the Riga ghetto, probably only Herbert Schultz from Cologne survived. Günther Fleischel, who after so-called Operation Dünamünde in spring 1942 had been appointed Elder of the groups Hanover, Berlin, and Vienna, celebrated the first anniversary of his appointment with a big party in March 1943. Later that year, it became clear that he already knew back then that he was seriously ill and probably would not survive. In September 1943, he died of stomach cancer.[74] Some Jewish Council functionaries were still alive after the dissolution of the ghetto. When the first inmates were sent to Riga-Kaiserwald in 1943, there were rumors about bad conditions and violence in the camp. As Alfred Winter recalled, Max Leiser, who was still in charge then, organized a meeting and told them that he did not have any control over the new place, which was then still called *Kasernierung Sauer* (Albert Sauer was the first commander of the camp). He hoped this situation would not last long. Winter criticized him for this: "In doing so, he tried to quiet down the Ghetto and deceived every inhabitant because he must have had some knowledge that the Kasernierung Sauer was actually the concentration camp Kaiserwald."[75] Max Leiser was later deported to Stutthof concentration camp. From there, in November

71 Adler, *Theresienstadt*, 138-41.

72 "Peter Christoffersen, Erich Harf," accessed October 31, 2022, http://www.stolpersteine-bremen.de/detail.php?id=723.

73 Julius Günther Katzenstein, Interview *Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Düsseldorf*, November 6, 1998, GED-31-001-100.119, Transkript, Bl. 10 [German].

74 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 79, 95; Obenaus, "Vom SA-Mann zum jüdischen Ghettoältesten in Riga."

75 Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance, 1941-1945*, 47.

1944, he was sent to the KZ sub-camp Hailfingen, where he died in December 1944.[76]

Herbert Schultz (or Schulz) survived several camps, and after a death march from Hamburg to Kiel, he ended up in Sweden after the war. Many survivors sharply criticized him and the role he played in Riga—both in the ghetto and in later camps. Toni Jakubowicz wrote the following about him: "The camp elder Schulz cooperated with the SS in the ghetto. He was present at the selections and actions, he could have saved some, because he had the ear of the SS, but he was too bad to help people."[77] In contrast, Erwin Sekules testified how Schultz helped him later on in the camp Mühlgraben near Riga; Sekules had been transferred to a penal command, and Schultz supported him by bringing him fresh laundry.[78]

After the war, Schultz testified against SS-*Untersturmführer* Kurt Migge, who was responsible for food distribution to the ghetto. Schultz accused Migge of never having brought enough food to the ghetto because of his greed, and of constantly enriching himself:

> When the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) ordered that the food supply in the ghetto be improved by means of heavy and very heavy worker allowances, Migge defied this order. Only after we explained our situation to Ghetto Commandant Krause were these allowances introduced, but Migge always kept the best ready for his own purposes.[79]

The dilemma of the Jewish Councils becomes very clear in this statement as there was not much Schultz could do if the German authorities were not willing to provide him with the proper food rations.

In another statement concerning the late ghetto commander Eduard Roschmann, his terrible dilemma becomes even clearer. Schultz explained his involvement in the compilation of a list used for the deportation of children from the so-called ABA (Army Clothing Office) 701 barracks camp in April 1944. He had been called to Camp Commander Müller, "where Roschmann demanded a list of all children who were under the age of 12. He explained that the children were not yet included on the rations list, and they would have to be registered statistically." Schultz

76 Volker Mall, Harald Roth and Johannes Kuhn, *Jeder Mensch hat einen Namen. Die Häftlinge des KZ-Außenlagers Hailfingen/Tailfingen. Daten und Porträts aller Häftlinge. L bis Z* (Herrenberg: KZ Gedenkstätte Hailfingen Tailfingen, 2020), 5.

77 Letter of Toni Jakubowicz, WL, P.III.h. (Muehlgraben nr. Riga) No. 1034/b [German].

78 Testimony of Erwin Sekules, WL, P.III h. (Muehlgraben nr. Riga) No. 1034, Bl. 4 [German].

79 Testimony of Herbert Schultz, WL, P.III.i. (Latvia) No. 1032a, Bl. 1-2 [German].

was worried about an upcoming special action (*Sonderaktion*), and this indeed took place. He testified: "On April 22, 1944, all children under the age of 10, and one over the age of 10, were taken and deported, and were never heard from again. This includes my own 2 children."[80] A more dramatic situation than drawing up a list that would be used to coordinate the deportation to death of one's own children hardly seems imaginable. Years after the war, Schultz lived a very secluded life in Minden, Germany. In an interview, another survivor named Liesel Ginsburg said that Schultz knew that he was unpopular among the survivors. He died in Minden in 1977.[81]

Conclusion

Ever since 1939, the ways Jewish communities and the "Jewish Councils" reacted to Nazi persecution have been the subject of heated debate. Many Jews accused Jewish leaders of collaboration with the Germans; sometimes they even held them responsible for the persecution and annihilation of Jews. After the war, there were discussions about whether the councils supported the Nazis in accomplishing their murderous plans or at least made it easier for them. Starting in the early 1970s, researchers came to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of "Jewish Councils'" room for maneuver, their interpretations of the situation, and their intentions. They recognized councils' efforts to organize Jewish life and emphasized that one should not assess the history of the councils with the benefit of hindsight. The strategies councils adopted did not work, but how could they have known this? In the situation these people found themselves, the hope to survive because of rational action turned out to be an illusion. Indeed, for most of them, survival was not even a possibility, no matter which strategies they or Jewish officials chose.[82]

The situation of the German Jewish Councils in Riga and Minsk was very distinct. They were thrown into a foreign and brutal world and, without knowing the place to which they had been deported, had to fulfill the same tasks as other local "Jewish Councils" in occupied Europe. Furthermore, in Minsk and Riga, as in some ghettos in the Lublin District, the German authorities had more contact with the ghetto populations—

80 Testimony of Herbert Schultz, WL, P.III.i. (Latvia) No. 1032/b., Bl. 1.

81 USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #21541 Liesel Ginsburg, Segment #104; Franz-Josef Wittstamm, "Schultz Herbert," *Spuren im Vest*, accessed October 31, 2022, https://spurenimvest.de/2021/06/09/schultz-herbert/.

82 For the historiography of the councils, see the introduction to this volume.

unlike some of the more closed ghettos like Litzmannstadt, and this seemed to be the reason they set up a German Jewish Council or at least appointed German members to the Polish councils. In cases like Litzmannstadt and Warsaw, German Jewish representation did not seem necessary.

The German Jewish Councils had very similar structures and tasks as local Jewish Councils even though their position was arguably more difficult because they were forced to function in a completely foreign environment. As such, they could not build on prewar structures, knowledge, and relationships. Moreover, due to the postal ban in Riga and Minsk, German Jewish Council leaders were not in touch with other Jewish communities or aid organizations; thus, they could not receive any outside information. At the same time, they were confronted with the reality of German mass murder immediately upon arrival, even before they began their work. But while they knew about the murders at the places to which they had been transported, they also may have thought for quite some time that their fate would be different from that of the Jews of Eastern Europe. After all, like the perpetrators, they too were Germans and Austrians. Unfortunately, we cannot say when this perception changed or how the Jewish Council functionaries eventually interpreted their situation.

Similar to Jewish Council leaders elsewhere, Jewish officials in Riga and Minsk faced a terrible moral dilemma: they were confronted with situations from which there was no real escape. None of their decisions could lead to the salvation of the ghetto population. Lawrence Langer very appropriately calls what they had "choiceless choices." Ultimately, they had to fail because survival was not the fate assigned to them in the system into which they were forced. For a long time, neither the officials nor the general population knew where persecution would lead. Consequently, they could not properly interpret or respond to their situation.

Overall, the German Jewish Councils in Riga and Minsk were organized in a less hierarchical manner than, for example, the Jewish Council in Litzmannstadt as they were divided into groups according to place of origin. Nevertheless, survivors' testimonies repeatedly criticize these bodies as well. As is common in the case of "Jewish Councils" elsewhere, it is difficult to judge the actions of the Jewish Councils in Minsk and Riga. Thus, Sophie Nathan's words about the Jewish Council's work in the Riga ghetto capture the complex context: "I don't think they were helpful to the Jews." But, and this seems to be the most important point here, she also stressed: "I don't think they had very much choice."[83]

83 Oral history interview with Sophie Nathan, USHMM, RG-50.323.0007, Min. 31.

Irina Rebrova

Unwilling Pawns: The Role of Jewish Councils in the Occupied Zones of the Russian Soviet Republic during the Second World War

Mark Frenkel, a former elder of the Jewish ghetto, wrote a note during the Soviet investigation of Nazi crimes in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union. This document explained his forced participation in compiling lists of Jews living in the ghetto of the city of Kaluga (former Tula, now Kaluga region), in western Russia:

> Regarding the lists of Jews in ghettos during the German occupation of the city of Kaluga, I want to inform you that on November 27, 1941, by order of the former city government, I was asked to compile a list of Jews in the ghetto as of November 28, 1941. I made the list myself and titled it: "A list of residents of the Jewish settlement," and I signed it as: "the Elder of the Jewish settlement." For these descriptions, the chief of the police [member of the German local authorities] whipped me on my head twice, tore up the list, and ordered me to compile another [list], and title it "A nominal list of the Zhyd settlement," and sign it as: "the Elder of the Zhyd settlement."[1]

Frenkel wrote this no earlier than December 30, 1941, after Kaluga, which was occupied for two and a half months, was liberated by the Red Army. A large proportion of the ghetto inmates in Kaluga survived, indicating that the Red Army intervened before the German forces could organize

1 Explanatory note of Mark Frenkel, the former elder of the Jewish ghetto in Kaluga, on the results of compiling the lists of Jews, State archive of Kaluga region (GAKO), f. R-975, op. 1, d. 2, l. 8. The note was published in Maya Dobychina, *Evreiskoe getto v Kaluge (noiabr' — dekabr' 1941): Uchebnoe posobie* (Kaluga: Grif, 2012), 70. All Russian sources cited have been translated by the author.

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the systematic liquidation of the ghetto.[2] According to the memoirs of one of the survivors of the ghetto, Naum Zisman, Frenkel was arrested by the Soviet authorities and was under investigation for some time on suspicion of complicity in Nazi crimes.[3] The elders and members of Jewish Councils were often appointed by Nazi authorities or were sometimes chosen by Jews themselves in accordance with German requirements. The note from the Kaluga ghetto's elder is unique because it is almost the only wartime source that provides information on Jewish Councils' role in the occupied areas of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).[4]

Members of Jewish Councils became Holocaust victims in most of the occupied Russian regions. The absence of official wartime records makes it difficult to investigate the role of these Jewish Councils. Only in a few cases has some information about the German regulation of Jewish life and lists of the ghettos' inmates been preserved.[5] The files of the Extraordinary State Commission, hereinafter the ChGK, are the primary Soviet sources on the history and everyday lives of Jews in the ghettos on Soviet soil, particularly in the RSFSR.[6] They include a number of final

2 Martin Dean, "Kaluga," in *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945*, vol. 2, *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*, Part B, ed. Martin Dean (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 1796.

3 Interview with former juvenile prisoner of the Jewish ghetto in Kaluga, Naum Zisman, July 20, 2010, Kaluga, cited in Dobychina, *Evreiskoe getto v Kaluge*, 99. It is unclear whether Frenkel was imprisoned by the Soviets. He died in 1961.

4 To facilitate understanding, I will sometimes replace the name of the RSFSR with Russia in the text. At the same time, when I mean the state formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, I will use the term Russian Federation. Additionally, all territorial designations indicated in the article are historical, corresponding to the period of the Second World War, when there were union republics (the RSFSR was one of them), autonomous regions, and autonomous republics within the RSFSR, including the Adyghe Autonomous Region and the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR).

5 See: Order No. 8 of the Kaluga City Administration of November 8, 1941, GAKO, f. R-970, op. 3, d. 1, l. 10.

6 Founded on November 2, 1942, the full name of this commission was the "Extraordinary State Commission on Reporting and Investigating the Atrocities of the German Fascist Occupiers and their Accomplices and the Damages They Caused to Citizens, Kolkhozes, Public Organizations, State Enterprises of the USSR." On the critical analysis of its functions and collected evidence, see: Marina Sorokina, "People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 4 (2005): 1-35; Irina Rebrova, *Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory: The Case of the North Caucasus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2020), 60-91.

regional reports that provide general information about the establishment of the ghettos, Jewish life inside them, the ghettos' subsequent destruction, and the mass killings of inmates.[7] Such reports were compiled on the basis of eyewitness accounts of non-Jews who had friends or Jewish family members living in the ghettos and, in some cases, were able to secretly visit them. Additionally, Jews who survived the war offered rare information about everyday life in the ghettos.[8] A small number of interviews with Holocaust survivors who testified about the role of particular members of some Jewish Councils were included in the wartime collection gathered by the "Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War" at the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union.[9] Fragmentary evidence of the councils' role can also be found in *The Black Book of Soviet Jewry*, which was prepared for publication by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman in the 1940s but was not published in Russia until the post-Soviet era.[10]

7 See: ChGK Report for the city Klintsy of April 5, 1944, in State archive of Bryansk region (GABO), f. 6, op. 1, d. 54, part 2, l. 282, 285-288; ChGK Report for the city Zlynka of September 27, 1945, GABO, f. 2749, op. 1, d. 4, l. 134; Records of interrogation with the former head of the district police Ivan Blinov about the mass killings of civilians in the Monastyrshchinsky district of Smolensk region during the occupation of October 1, 1943, State Archive of Russian Federation (GARF), f. R-7021, op. 44, d. 628, l. 65.

8 See: Memoirs of neuropathologist Maria Faingor and the head of the pharmacy Anna Veller "79 days in Nazi captivity," December 1942, GAKO, f. R-3466, op. 1, d. 8, l. 19-23 (hereafter Memoirs of Faingor and Veller); Essay by Boris Wolfson "The Bloody Atrocity of the Germans in the Crimea," in State Archive of the Republic of Crimea (GARK), f. P-156, op. 1, d. 34, l. 1-20.

9 Transcript of a conversation with a citizen of Simferopol, a pharmacy department employee Ilya Sirota of February 16 and May 28, 1945, GARK, f. P-156, op. 1, d. 40, l. 112-126. See the published transcripts of conversations collected by the Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War in the Crimean ASSR: Mikhail Tyaglyy, ed., *Peredaite detiam nashim o nashei sud'be. Sbornik dokumentov, dnevnikov i vospominanii* (Simferopol: BETs "Khesed Shimon", 2001), 100-36. For more on publications on the commission's records, see: Jochen Hellbeck, *Die Stalingrad-Protokolle. Sowjetische Augenzeugen berichten aus der Schlacht* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 2012); Sergei Zhuravlev, ed., *Vklad istorikov v sokhranenie istoricheskoi pamiati o Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine: na materialakh Komissii po istorii Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny AN SSSR, 1941-1945 gg.* (Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi akademii nauk, 2015).

10 See: Letter from L. Tarabukin and D. Goldstein to the writer Yury Kalugin 'On the massacre in Essentuki,' GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 963, l. 116-118; Transcript of a conversation with a citizen of Simferopol Evsei Gopshtein of August 16-17, 1944, GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 961, l. 48-64. On the fate of the Black Book, see: Ilya Altman, "The History and Fate of the Black Book and the Unknown Black Book," in *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories*,

Whereas the topic of Jewish Councils and their role in the ghettos was quite scarce in sources produced during the war, the existence and duties of Jewish elders became one of the central themes of oral interviews with Soviet Jews recorded in Israel starting in the 1970s. Very often, interviewers asked detailed questions about members of Jewish Councils in the ghettos, the attitude of ordinary Jews toward them, and the role of such Jewish representatives in daily life.[11] Such questions became rare in interviews by 1990s since the majority of Jews who gave testimonies in this later period were either children or teenagers during the war and, therefore, had limited knowledge and memories of the governing structures within ghettos.

The study of "Jewish Councils'" role in the Holocaust in the Soviet Union began only in the early 1990s, and mainly focused on the Baltic states, Ukraine, and Belarus.[12] During the entire postwar period, Holocaust victims were not specifically distinguished from "Soviet peaceful citizens" who were the main victims of the Nazis according to Soviet historiography. Externalization was a principal feature of Holocaust studies in the Soviet Union, which means that the crimes against Jews were treated as such, but Holocaust history was understood as taking place outside the borders of the Soviet Union, with attention placed on mass killings of Jews in the death camps established in other parts of Eastern Europe.[13] The mass killings of Jews on Soviet soil were not researched for decades. Holocaust history within the Russian Federation began to be officially studied only after the establishment of the Holocaust Center, a Russian research and educational institution in Moscow, in 1992. Published in 2011, the Russian-language *Encyclopedia of the*

ed. Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), XIX–XXXVIII.

11 "Interviewer Guidelines" and "Pre-Interview Questionnaire," University of Southern California Shoah Foundation website, accessed November 12, 2022, http://sfi.usc.edu/vha/collecting; "Oral History Interview Guidelines Written by Oral History Staff of USHMM," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, accessed September 28, 2024, link to guidelines accessible at https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/about/oral-history.

12 See: Dina Porat, "The Jewish Councils of the Main Ghettos of Lithuania: A Comparison," *Modern Judaism* 13, no. 2 (1993): 149-63; Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 141-210; Evgeny Rozenblat, "Organizatsiia iudenratov, uchet i registratsiia evreiskogo naseleniia zapadnykh oblastei Belorussii v 1941 g.," in *Kholokost. Doklady na 8-i mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii po iudaike*, ed. Viktoriia Mochalova (Moscow: Sefer, 2001), 3-9.

13 For more on the term externalization, see: Olga Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 2.

Holocaust in the USSR highlights key cases of mass killings of Soviet Jews during the Second World War. It also identifies the location of such crimes and provides the exact or approximate numbers of Jews who perished on Soviet soil.[14] Additionally, since the 2000s, local researchers in some Russian regions have been working to piece together Holocaust history and the memories of survivors. The history of Jewish Councils, however, is still largely understudied because of the limited range of available sources. Three historians—Ilya Altman, Vadim Dubson, and Alexander Kruglov—use essentially the same sources or cite the works of colleagues in their studies, creating a closed circle of researchers examining this topic.[15] Kruglov and Dubson were among the authors of articles on the history of the ghettos in the former Soviet Union published in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's (USHMM) *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*.[16] Mikhail Tyaglyy slightly widens the range of sources in his investigation into the roles played by Jewish Councils in the ghettos established in the territory of the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR) while maintaining the same general conclusions as the historians mentioned above.[17] Little research has been done on Jewish Councils in Russian cities where ghettos were not founded. This can be explained partially by the fact that they are barely mentioned in wartime sources (as a rule, only the printed name of a famous Jewish person from the city appears on the "Appeal to the Jewish Population," which consisted of the order to be registered as a Jew and then to come to a designated location with hand luggage at an appointed day and hour under the pretext of "relocating to a new, safer place of residence").[18]

Furthermore, little has been written on the Jewish Council members' personal lives, despite the fact that their surnames are known in many

14 Ilya Altman, ed., *Kholokost na territorii SSSR: Entsiklopediia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011).

15 Vadim Dubson, "Getto na okkupirovannoi territorii Rossiiskoi Federatsii (1941-1942 gg.)," *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta* 3, no. 21 (2000): 157-84; Alexander Kruglov, "Unichtozhenie evreev Smolenshchiny i Briansh chiny v 1941-1943 godakh," *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve*. 3, no. 7 (1995): 193-220; Il'ja Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses: Der Holocaust in der UdSSR 1941-1945* (Gleichen: Muster-Schmidt, 2008), 135-64.

16 Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945*, 2:1756-1839.

17 Mikhail Tyaglyy, "Evreiskie komitety v okkupirovannom natsistami Krymu: postanovka problemy," *Kholokost i suchastnist. Naukovo-pedahohichnyi buleten' Ukrainskoho tsentru vyvchennia istorii Kholokostu* 11 (2003): 160-68.

18 See, for example: "Appeal to the Jewish Population of the City of Voroshilovsk," GARF, f. R-7021, op. 17, d. 1, l. 95.

cases. Most of the available evidence suggests that in occupied regions of Russia, the Jewish Council members or elders were imposed Jewish representatives with no real authority since the duration of ghettos was very short. As a result, Holocaust survivors hardly ever recounted their experiences with councils in later memoirs and testimonies. In this study, I reconstruct the overall organizational structure and work of Jewish Councils without paying attention to regional specificities. In the first part, I describe the fundamental process that led to the establishment of Jewish Councils in various Russian regions both inside and outside of ghettos, with a specific emphasis on the Holocaust in the RSFSR. Then, after describing general characteristics of Jewish Councils as a powerless and imposed structure to better control the Jews before their murder, I analyze the main tasks of the Jewish Councils. Through this analysis, I show that Jewish Councils and elders were unwilling pawns; I also offer reflections on their nominal leadership even on the brink of their own imminent demise.

Fate of Jews in the Occupied Regions of the RSFSR

In June 1941, at the moment of the German invasion, the RSFSR was one of fifteen Soviet republics. The length of the borders of the territory of Russia under Nazi occupation was the longest among the union republics: from the Gulf of Finland in the north to the Black Sea in the south. At the same time, only the European parts of the Russian Soviet Republic were occupied, but the largest cities with the highest concentration of Jews (primarily Moscow and Leningrad, now St. Petersburg) were never captured.[19] According to the All-Union Population Census of 1939, more than 956,000 Jews lived in the RSFSR.[20] In the areas occupied during the war, there were roughly 200,000 Jews,[21] but this number does not include those who fled from Poland and the western Soviet republics (the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and Moldavian SSRs) since 1939. The entirety of the RSFSR's occupied territory (using contemporary borders, this equates to twenty-three Russian regions) was under the control of the German military administration. Here, both Einsatzgruppen and Wehr-

19 Ilya Altman, "RSFSR," in *Kholokost na territorii SSSR: Entsiklopediya*, 871.

20 "Natsional'nyi sostav SSSR po respublikam, kraiam i oblastiam. RSFSR," in *Vsesoyuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda: osnovnye itogi*, ed. Yury Poliakov (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 59.

21 Altman, "RSFSR," 871.

macht military units were active and, together with local auxiliaries, were responsible for killing thousands of Jews and other victim groups.

According to available sources, fifty-six ghettos were created within the borders of the occupied RSFSR: forty-eight in the western regions of Russia, and four each in the North Caucasus and Crimea.[22] They were primarily established in Russia's western regions either immediately following the start or during the early months of the occupation. These ghettos were relatively small, housing only a few hundred people. The reason for this was that with the exception of Nalchik in the North Caucasus, where mountain Jews[23] lived and where the so-called open ghetto was created, none of the occupied Russian cities in which ghettos were established had a prewar Jewish population larger than three thousand persons.[24] The ghettos operated for a few days or up to eleven months (in Smolensk). The relatively long existence of the Smolensk ghetto (August 5, 1941 to July 15, 1942) may be explained by the German army's need for labor in the city, which was a strategically important railway junction in the direction of Moscow.[25] In order to organize control over Jews, the German authorities often, but not in every known ghetto, appointed a nominal government, a Jewish Council, composed of councilors or elders. Most able-bodied men and occasionally young women were killed first in order to prevent any potential resistance during the later ghetto's liquidation.[26] That is, the involvement of Jews in forced labor, which could be economically significant, was not typical in the occupied Russian regions. According to different estimates, between 25,000 and 33,000 ghetto prisoners were killed on Russian soil.[27] Over

22 See maps for Russia and the Crimea, in Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 2:1760, 2:1787-88.

23 For more detailed information about mountain Jews, see: "Gorskie Evrei," in *Kratkaia evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, ed. Oren (Nadel') Itskhak and Mikhael' Zand (Jerusalem: Keter, 1982), 2:182; Valery Dymshits, ed., *Gorskie evrei: istoriia, etnografiia, kul'tura* (Jerusalem/Moscow: DAAT/Znanie, 1999).

24 Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses*, 131.

25 Jews from this ghetto were involved in forced labor on the railroad. See: Lev Kotov, "Kak bylo unichtozheno Smolenskoe getto," in *Krai Smolenskii*, no. 2 (1990): 40-48; "Smolensk," in Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 1820-23.

26 The same tactic was used in the ghettos of Eastern Byelorussian SSR. See: Daniil Romanovsky, "Sovetskie evrei pod natsistskoi okkupatsiei (na materiale Severo-Vostochnoi i Severnoi Rossii)," in *Kovcheg: Al'manakh evreiskoi kul'tury* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 302-3; Mordechai Altshuler, "The Unique Features of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and in the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1995), 176.

27 Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses*, 316-17; Martin Dean, "Occupied Russian Territories," in Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 2:1782.

3,500 Jews were saved when the Red Army liberated several regions in the winter of 1941/42, which was quite exceptional.[28] Only a few hundred Jews managed to survive from the other ghettos in German-occupied Russian territory either because they hid among the local population or because they joined the Soviet partisans.[29]

While ghettos existed in the western regions of the RSFSR, they were not created in the southern regions, which were partially occupied from the summer of 1942 until the winter-spring of 1943. This was not a traditional region of Jewish settlement (with the exception of Rostov-on-Don and Nalchik). However, after the summer of 1941, large streams of refugees from the western regions had fled there and ended up staying in the rather warm climate, where there was better access to food. Eventually, they also found themselves under occupation.[30] Mass killings of Jews were organized during the first weeks of the occupation. In many southern cities, several Jews were appointed to transmit German orders to the entire Jewish population, which mainly involved registration. After their registration, all Jews were ordered to come to a designated location under the pretext of "relocating to a new safer place of residence."[31] They were then taken to the outskirts of a city or a village where they were shot or killed in special gas vans. The corpses were dumped into mass graves, which were often dug by the local non-Jewish population, Soviet prisoners of war, or sometimes by the future victims themselves. If we consider the more or less accepted number of Holocaust victims in Russia (between 120,000 and 140,000 people), scholars suggest that more than half of them were killed in the southern Russia regions (between 58,000 and 87,000 people).[32]

28 This includes about 3,000 mountain Jews of Nalchik, whose status was investigated for a long time by the Nazis, and as a result, they were able to survive thanks to the liberation of the region, together with about 470 people from the ghettos of Kaluga and Pskov regions. Pavel Polyan, *Mezhdu Aushvitsem i Bab'im Iarom: razmyshleniia i issledovaniia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010), 142; Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses*, 129.

29 Dean, "Occupied Russian Territories," 1785.

30 On Holocaust history in the North Caucasus see: Crispin Brooks and Kiril Feferman, ed. *Beyond the Pale: The Holocaust in the North Caucasus* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020); Rebrova, *Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory*, 39-54.

31 "Appeal to the Jewish Population for Stavropol region of 1942," GARF, f. R-7021, op. 17, d. 1, l. 95.

32 See the table "Number of Holocaust Victims in the North Caucasus," in Rebrova, *Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory,* 343.

General Characteristics of Jewish Councils and Elders as a Nominal Government

Despite distinctions between the Holocaust in the RSFSR's western and southern regions, German authorities established Jewish Councils almost everywhere to control and manage the life of Jewish communities. Different terms are used in Russian-language sources to refer to these councils: "Jewish Council," "Jewish Committee," "Council of Elders," "Community Board," "*Kagal*," and "*Idnrat*" (in Yiddish, *Yidnrat*). In Russian-language historical studies, however, the term "*Judenrat*" has become the norm, and "Jewish Councils" is used less frequently.[33] Various German orders and directives regulated the establishment of Jewish Councils as representative bodies of the Jewish community both inside and outside the ghetto. These organs were developed as the Wehrmacht advanced deeper into the Soviet Union, and they were based on Germans' previous experience formulating anti-Jewish laws in the German Reich and other occupied territories. Additionally, the Soviet Union was given special consideration as in the eyes of the Nazi authorities, Jews posed a greater threat there than in other European nations because Soviet Jews "were strengthened in their self-confidence to a great degree during the quarter century of Jewish-Bolshevik rule. They appeared to be not only self-assured but even arrogant in many cases when the German troops entered."[34]

Researchers have cited a number of directives in their analyses of the establishment of Jewish Councils on Soviet soil, including administrative order No. 2 of the Rear Commander of Army Group Center dated July 13, 1941.[35] A "*Judenrat*" was to be established in each locality in

33 See: Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972); Rozenblat, "Organizatsiia iudenratov," 3-9; Eliiakhu Iones, *Evrei L'vova v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voyny i Katastrofy evropeyskogo evreistva 1939-1944* (Moscow: Rossiiskaya biblioteka Kholokosta, 1999), 110-22.

34 "Ereignismeldung Nr. 31 of 23. Juli," 1941, in *Die "Ereignismeldungen UdSSR" 1941. Dokumente der Einsatzgruppen in der Sowjetunion*, ed. Klaus Michael Mallmann et al. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgeselschaft, 2011), 167. English translation: Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, Shmuel Spector, and Stella Schossberger, ed., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign against the Jews July 1941–January 1943* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), 42-43.

35 See: Dubson, "Getto na okkupirovannoi territorii Rossiiyskoi Federatsii," 166; Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses*, 137; Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews,* vol. 1 (New York: Holmes and Meyer, 1985), 350.

accordance with this order. The number of the council members varied according to the number of Jews living in the settlements. For communities with fewer than 10,000 residents, there would be twelve council members, and for communities with more than 10,000 residents, twenty-four members would be appointed. Jews were responsible for electing a chairman and selecting council members. The composition of such governing bodies had to be approved by the local military commander and members of the German security police. All members of the community were required to obey the Jewish Council's orders, which were based on German directives. The field and local commandant's offices had the authority to impose the harshest punishments—up to and including the death penalty—on those who resisted as well as members of Jewish Councils who disobeyed German orders.[36] Another document, the report of Einsatzgruppe B from July 23, 1941, offers further details about the composition and duties of the Jewish Councils:

> In each city, a provisional chairman of a Jewish Council was appointed and tasked to form a provisional Judenrat of three to ten people. The Judenrat bears collective responsibility for the behavior of the Jewish population. Besides, it has to immediately begin registering Jews living in the area. In addition, the Judenrat must organize work groups consisting of all male Jews aged 15-55 to carry out cleaning and other work for German [civilian] officers and the Army. Also, a few female work groups are to be set up for the same age-group.[37]

Due to the small Jewish population in occupied Russian settlements, the composition of the Jewish Councils did not closely adhere to the German directives. Where there was only one chairman of the Jewish Council, he was known as the elder of the ghetto. They were typically members of the intelligentsia who spoke German. According to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and brief references to the activities of Jewish Councils in official Soviet sources, the membership of Jewish Councils in each locality was decided arbitrarily regardless of the number of Jews. For example, there were approximately one hundred Jews in the Toropets ghetto (Kalinin, now Tver' region), and the Jewish Council had three members,[38] whereas there was only one elder in the Kaluga ghetto, which

36 Cited in: Dubson, "Getto na okkupirovannoi territorii Rossiiskoi Federatsii," 166.
37 "Ereignismeldung Nr. 31 of 23. Juli, 1941, 167."
38 Cited in: Alexander Kruglov and Martin Dean, "Toropets," in Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 2:1830-31.

held 160 Jews.[39] In his interview, survivor Lev Sorin recalled how Jewish Councils were established in the Tatarsk ghetto (Smolensk region), where about six hundred people were imprisoned: "The Judenrat was formed, three persons considered themselves head and shoulders above us. It was Belenky, Khazanov, and I forgot the third one."[40]

Under German pressure, elders were frequently selected rapidly and haphazardly. The selection of council members in the Kaluga ghetto is described in the memoirs of Maria Faingor and Anna Veller:

> Kupfer, the chief of [the German] police, came into the ghetto one day and told everyone, "Choose a zhid prefect from your zhid kagal." The Jews called out M. I. [Mark Isaevich], Frenkel's name. Kupfer instructed Frenkel to submit lists of all zhids the following day; and then he left.[41]

Since not a single Jew appointed to the role of elder survived in places without a ghetto, we do not know how the process of their selection or appointment took place. Further, because all of the available "Appeals to the Jewish Population" were typewritten copies that could easily be used by the Germans without the elders' permission, it is likely that these individuals became victims of circumstance and did not physically sign any orders.

In his study of the composition and activities of Jewish Councils in the Crimean ASSR, Mikhail Tyaglyy stated that at some point, it was difficult for the German administration to appoint a well-known or reputable council leader. Having captured this or that settlement, the Nazis did not have accurate information about the size of the Jewish population.[42] Besides, communal forms of Jewish life were destroyed under the Soviet authorities decades before the war started both in Crimea and other settlements with a historical Jewish presence.[43] The majority of Jewish organizations and authoritative community leaders (rabbis, public figures, and politicians) to whom the Nazis could turn were no longer present, in contrast to the eastern European countries where, according to some

39 Memoirs of Faingor and Veller, 21.

40 Interview with Lev Sorin, July 10, 1996, Visual History Archive of the University of South California Shoah Foundation (VHA USCSF), code 17264.

41 Memoirs of Faingor and Veller, 21.

42 Tyaglyy, "Evreiskie komitety v okkupirovannom natsistami Krymu," 162.

43 Shmuel Spector, "The Holocaust of Ukrainian Jews," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 48.

sources, about 60 percent of "Jewish Councils" were composed of members who had been actively engaged in Jewish communal life before the war.[44] As a result, the German authorities took the following actions: "Yevpatoria [the Crimean ASSR] was occupied by Germans on October 31 [1941]. Three days later, the Gestapo showed up. Ten Jews, including my friend Berlinerblau, were detained on the street on November 5th in the evening. All of them were appointed to the Jewish Council."[45] In a 1944 account for the forthcoming *Black Book*, Evsei Gopshtein, a survivor from Simferopol, Crimean ASSR, recalled the establishment of a Jewish Council in the city:

> In Simferopol, there was a man without a specific occupation named Zeltser, who worked in a housing cooperative. The German command gave him instructions to set up a Jewish Council. … Perhaps Zeltser was the first to get in touch with them. … The council's members were average, unassuming, and culturally inappropriate for the positions for which they had been nominated.[46]

According to Gopshtein, the Jewish intelligentsia was motivated to assist the council in its work due to the fact that there was a lack of authoritative leadership within the Jewish community. In his monograph and the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in the USSR*, Ilya Altman presents the table "Jewish Councils in Russia," compiled on the basis of sources for seventeen ghettos. He shows the numerical and professional composition of the Jewish Councils. Twelve physicians (including one pharmacist), three accountants, one teacher, one writer, and one artist were among the at least forty-three members of the Jewish Councils in the Russian ghettos.[47] The occupations of twenty-six persons remain unknown.

44 Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses*, 140.

45 Letter by Fishgoit (Yevpatoriia), in *Chernaia kniga o zlodeiskom povsemestnom ubiistve evreev nemetsko-fashistskimi zakhvatchikami vo vremenno okkupirovannykh raionakh Sovetskogo Soiuza i v lageriakh Pol'shi vo vremia voiny 1941-1945 gg*, ed. Vasily Grossman and Ilya Ehrenburg (Vilnius: Yad, 1993), 206-7.

46 "Transcript of a conversation with a resident of Simferopol, Evsei Efimovich Gopshtein, of August 16-17, 1944," in *Neizvestnaia "Chernaia kniga": materialy k "Chernoi knige,"* ed. Ilya Altman (Moscow: AST CORPUS, 2015), 240-41.

47 Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses*, 151, Al'tman, "RSFSR," 874.

Tasks of the Jewish Councils' Members and Elders

The elected or appointed members of the Jewish Councils in the RSFSR had the same responsibilities as similar organizations in other Soviet republics and Eastern European countries. However, the significance of their duties was minimized because of the short lifespan of Jewish communities in the occupied zones of Russia. According to the available sources, the Jewish Councils in Russian localities were primarily responsible for a number of different tasks.

First, councils were responsible for registering the Jewish population and compiling lists of Jews. Registration was the German authorities' first step in identifying and accounting for the Jewish population, and it was frequently carried out prior to the establishment of a ghetto. Otto Ohlendorf, the former leader of Einsatzgruppe D, claimed at the Nuremberg trial that the Jews registered themselves; that is, the Jewish Councils were given instructions to register community members.[48] The "*Judenrat*" was established in Nevel' (Kalinin, now Pskov region) soon after the occupation started. It was responsible for registering the entire Jewish population. It also had to ensure that Jews wore a distinguishing emblem in the form of a yellow star.[49] The registration, the formation of the Jewish Council, and the establishment of the ghettos occurred simultaneously in Smolensk.[50]

Registration was required for the further organization of Jewish life and forced labor in several localities. Shortly after the occupation of Yessentuki (Ordzhonikidze, now Stavropol region), the *Ortskommandant* (local commander) ordered the establishment of a Jewish Council consisting of five members. It was responsible for carrying out the registration of all the Jews in the town, which then included 507 able-bodied Jews and around 1,500 persons deemed unfit to work, including children and elderly people.[51] Registration was also conducted in regions where ghettos were never established. For example, the first "Appeal to the

48 International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal "Blue Series,"* vol. 4, 1945, https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.law/llmlp.2011525338_NT_Vol-IV, 324.

49 Alexander Kruglov and Martin Dean, "Nevel'," in Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 2:1808; "Ereignismeldung Nr. 73 of 4. September 1941," in Mallmann et al., ed., *Die* "*Ereignismeldungen UdSSR*" *1941,* 406.

50 The ChGK report for the city of Smolensk of September 28, 1943, State archive of Smolensk region (GASO), f. R-1630, op. 2, d. 19, l. 5-6.

51 Letter from L. Tarabukin and D. Goldstein to the writer Yury Kalugin, 237; Aleksei Tolstoi, "Korichnevyi Durman," *Pravda*, August 5, 1943.

Jewish Population" of the city of Rostov-on-Don (Rostov region) was published on August 4, 1942 on behalf of Sonderkommando 10a Einsatzgruppe D and was signed by the famous local Jew Dr. G. Lur'e, who was appointed the chairman of the puppet Jewish Council.[52]

Compiling lists of Jews was also part of the registration process. The introduction of this essay quoted the explanation offered by the elder of the Kaluga ghetto for his complicity in the process. Intriguingly, the elder Mark Frenkel compiled six different lists of Jews, listing them by name, address, age, gender, and number of family members.[53] As the military campaign dragged on in the autumn of 1941, it became clear that the Wehrmacht was not prepared for winter conditions since it had wrongly assumed that victory would follow soon after the German invasion. In order to make up for the lack of resources such as food and warm clothing, Jewish property was confiscated. The lists of Jews provided detailed information about the size and property of local Jewish communities.

Second, councils were charged with coordinating the relocation of Jews into ghettos or organizing their "resettlement" to locations without ghettos. The first task of Jewish Council members was coordinating the relocation of Jews into ghettos in the occupied western Russian regions. This was the task, for example, of *Judenrat* members in Velizh (Smolensk region). According to the memoirs of survivor Bronislava Brook, some Jews ended up living in a pigpen in this ghetto, while those who bribed the *Judenrat* lived in houses.[54] In Yalta (the Crimean ASSR), the Jewish Council was responsible for organizing the transfer of Jews into the ghetto as well.[55] In localities without ghettos, gathering Jews for "resettlement" was again the last task of elders or members of Jewish Councils. In Rostov-on-Don, the second "Appeal to the Jewish Population" was also signed by Dr. Lur'e. It called for Jews to gather at six assembly points in the city for further "resettlement."[56] The elder, whose name was randomly selected by the German authorities, was among the assembled Jews killed in Zmievskaia *balka* (ravine) on the outskirts of Rostov-on-Don on August 11 and 12, 1942.

52 A photocopy of the appeal was published in Evgeny Movshovich, *Ocherki istorii evreev na Donu* (Rostov-on-Don: ZAO "Kniga," 2011), 143.

53 The lists were published: Dobychina, *Evreiskoe getto v Kaluge*, 42-70.

54 Testimony of Bronislava Brook, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), 03/4646, p. 138.

55 Martin Dean, "Eastern Ukraine and Crimea Region," in Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 2:1757.

56 "Appeal to the Jewish Population of the City of Rostov of August 9, 1942," State Archive of Rostov Region (GARO), f. R-3613, op. 1, d. 1, l. 2. A photocopy of the "Appeal" was published in Movshovich, *Ocherki istorii evreev na Donu*, 144.

Third, councils were responsible for organizing and controlling everyday life in the ghettos. The Jewish Council's responsibilities in the Kaluga ghetto included overseeing the daily activities of the inmates, assigning labor, and ordering Jews to work.[57] The elders in Smolensk and Zlynka (Orel, now Bryansk region) maintained order within the ghetto.[58] In Yalta, the Jewish Council was made responsible for organizing workshops, a hospital, and a Jewish police force inside the ghetto.[59] Due to the increasing death rates in the Kaluga ghetto, elder Mark Frenkel applied to the commandant's office for permission to open an ambulatory station. The assistant director of the health department, Dr. Milenushkin, refused the request and even forbade anyone to dispense prescription medicine without his personal approval. As any urgent medication required at least two days to arrive, the medical staff was unable to provide sick Jews with emergency care. At the same time, Jews were denied medical care in the local hospital. Ghetto doctors were only able to help with kind words.[60] The local German military administration was only interested in maintaining order in the ghetto, for which elders were responsible. Jews were denied medical care and other assistance, and elders could not do anything about it.

Fourth, Jewish Councils communicated with the German local military administration. The Jewish Councils' primary role was to carry out all orders issued by the German local administration and police units. According to the files of the ChGK, the *Ortskommandant* appointed a Jewish elder in the Velikie Luki ghetto (Kalinin, now Pskov region), a sixty-five-year-old dentist Labas (the first name is unknown). Labas had to give a daily report in writing that all the Jews in the ghetto were present and that the total number was correct. If any inmate was missing, Labas would be beaten. German records indicate that fifty-nine Jews were registered in Velikie Luki in September 1941.[61] The elder in the Kaluga ghetto was "the only channel for communication with the German authorities; all other Jews were strictly forbidden from entering any institutions."[62] The same duties were carried out by the Jewish Council in Velizh.[63] In his interview,

57 Memoirs of Faingor and Veller, 21.
58 Testimony by Vladimir Khivser, YVA, 03/4671, p. 229; Interview with Mikhail Liubkin, Novozybkov, Russia, May 30, 1997, VHA USCSF, code 37882.
59 Dean, "Eastern Ukraine and Crimea Region," 2:1757.
60 Memoirs Faingor and Veller, 21-22.
61 Information about the destruction and atrocities committed by the Nazi invaders in certain areas of the Kalinin region, 1943, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 26, d. 4, l. 1.
62 Memoirs Faingor and Veller, 21.
63 Testimony by Isaak Brook, YVA, 03/4389, p. 8.

Zlynka ghetto survivor Mikhail Liubkin recalled that the ghetto had an elder named Gunitsky (the first name is unknown): "I don't remember the others; he was in charge. He had contacts with the authorities, they gave him some tasks and assignments."[64] In this way, Jewish Council members and elders served as the bridge between the Jewish community and the German authorities. These individuals, however, were not granted any privileges in the ghettos in Russia. On the contrary, there were instances when the community's leaders rather than common citizens were held accountable for even the smallest violation or delay in the implementation of orders.[65]

Fifth, Jewish Councils were charged with coordinating their community's involvement in forced labor. During the brief existence of ghettos in various cities and towns of Russia, Jews were forced in some localities to perform the hardest and dirtiest jobs: sawing and carrying firewood, digging up stumps, cleaning streets, and scrubbing toilets. Jews were beaten during their forced labor.[66] In some regions, Jewish labor was used to unload and load heavy materials. In Gusino (Smolensk region), Jews were forced to clear snow from the railway tracks; in Liubavichi, they repaired roads and bridges; and in Khislavichi (both in Smolensk region), they were forced to build pillboxes (concrete, dug-in guard posts with holes for firing weapons).[67] In Petrovichi (Smolensk region), the elder was required to "report to the commandant's office every day for a work order."[68] Lev Sorin, a survivor of the Tatarsk ghetto, recalled in an interview that "if the Germans needed work to be done, then they would appoint someone to clean something or chop firewood through the Jewish Council."[69]

Jews were typically prohibited from working in their field of expertise in the ghettos, which was done deliberately to humiliate them by forcing them into the dirtiest jobs. The ghettos of Velizh and Khislavichi were exceptions, and the Germans used Jewish artisans' labor and killed them last.[70] In Smolensk, the German commandant appointed Dr. Painson

64 Interview with Mikhail Liubkin.
65 See: Petr Nesterenko "Kak eto bylo," July 5, 1944, YVA, P.21.2, file 8, p. 3.
66 Testimony by Tatyana Mil'kheker, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 47, d. 352, l. 3.
67 Testimony by Nikolai Smirnov, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 44, d. 630, l. 219; Testimonies by Miron Ioffe and Elisaveta Voinovskaya, YVA, 033/3275, p. 1, 113.
68 Valentina Maksimchuk, "Tragediia v Petrovichakh," in *Bab'i iary Smolenshchiny: poiavlenie, zhizn' i katastrofa smolenskogo evreistva*, ed. Iosif Tsynman (Smolensk: OOO "Rus'," 2001), 183.
69 Interview with Lev Sorin.
70 Testimonies by Emma Budrianovich and M. Berdnikova, YVA, 033/3275, p. 43-44, 170-71.

(first name unknown), a well-known dentist, as the elder in charge of the ghetto's affairs. In the words of one witness, Painson "complained many times about this onerous duty, which he had to carry out in the interests of the Jewish population but without any prospect of a good outcome."[71] He organized the Jews for forced labor in accordance with the commandant's orders and enforced security inside the ghetto. Military personnel and government officials in Simferopol benefited personally from the work of Jewish artisans, and Jewish elders were responsible for organizing this labor:

> There was no ghetto in Simferopol, so Jews were required to travel to the community [office] daily; the Germans then took them to their jobs. All of the dirty work was done by Jews. Women were brought to the hospital, which used to be the first Soviet hospital, and they were put to work cleaning the restrooms and washing potatoes at the cannery.[72]

Obviously, the Germans were not interested in the professional qualifications of Jews; it was more important to dehumanize them through forced labor.

Sixth, councils were responsible for the despoliation of the rest of the Jewish property on behalf of German authorities in order to meet the needs of the Germans. Jewish elders also organized the collection of valuables and other items demanded by the Germans. According to the memoirs of Holocaust survivor Busya Liubkina, the Jewish Council served as a means by which the occupation authorities gradually robbed the Jews living in the Zlynka ghetto: "They advised the Jews to make extensive preparations for this and then gradually took away everything from them. The ghetto received regular police visits."[73] In Il'ino (Smolensk, now Tver' region), a Jewish elder was chosen. Once when the police chief called him in, the chief insisted that he receive a gray suit from the Jews or else the elder would be shot. Another time, the police chief demanded white paper. The elder was responsible for fulfilling every single one of the police chief's orders.[74]

71 Testimony by Professor Boris Bazilevsky of September 28, 1943, FSB archive of Smolensk region (AFSBSmO), case 9856-S, p. 28.

72 Tyaglyy, *Peredaite detiam nashim o nashei sud'be,* 121.

73 Interview with Busya Liubkina, Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, November 24, 1997, VHA USCSF, code 38878.

74 Cited in: Dubson, "Getto na okkupirovannoi territorii Rossiiskoi Federatsii," 173.

Local German military authorities consistently imposed fees on the inmates of ghettos. Jews were required to turn over gold, furs, and cash. The wide range of property seized from Jews is shocking. Along with the bare necessities, the Germans also took items that had no connection whatsoever to the demands of war. In Yalta, members of Sonderkommando 11a were mainly responsible for introducing anti-Jewish measures. All money and valuables had to be surrendered to the Germans through the Jewish Council.[75] In Simferopol, the Germans established a *Judenrat* and compelled the Jews to make large monetary contributions.[76] Shortly before the liquidation of the Smolensk ghetto, a large fee was imposed on the Jews. In a letter dated July 5, 1942, the appointed mayor of Smolensk B. Men'shagin reported the following to the leader of Einsatzgruppe B unit: "By request of the commandant's office, 60 sets of bedding and three sewing machines were seized in the ghetto. The Jewish Council received a 5,000 ruble fine for the delay of the bedding delivery."[77] The confiscation of property was done not only to supply the German army during the winter of 1941/42 but also to allow the command staff and the German military administration to make a meager profit.

Finally, councils participated in preparations for the executions of Jews. On the order of the Security Police and *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), members of the Jewish Councils in some ghettos had to help organize the transfer of all Jews to killing sites. With the aid of a detailed registration list, they put family after family onto trucks that departed and then returned for more families. The members of the Jewish Councils checked off those who had been taken away.[78] The last truck took away the members of the Jewish Councils.

Epilogue: The Fate of Jewish Councils' Members and Elders

Ilya Altman identified several types of elders based on the sources that discuss the activities of Jewish Councils in the Soviet Union. The first type includes those who bluntly refused to assist the Nazis. These people were either killed immediately during the mass killings of Jews or they

75 ChGK report on the crimes of the Nazi-German occupiers in the city of Yalta of July 17, 1944, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 9, d. 59, l. 25.

76 Ibid.; Dean, "Eastern Ukraine and Crimea Region," 2:1757.

77 Kotov, "Kak bylo unichtozheno Smolenskoe getto," 45. According to other sources, a fine of 7,000 rubles was imposed on the ghetto. Testimony by Aleksandra Beinerovich, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 44, d. 15, l. 41.

78 Cited in Tyaglyy, "Evreiskiie komitety v okkupirovannom natsistami Krymu," 166.

committed suicide. The second includes Jewish elders who took part in resistance movements either directly or indirectly. The third type includes people who complied with the fundamental demands of the Nazis while also purposefully disobeying orders, engaging in sabotage, attempting to improve detention conditions, and aiding prisoners. The fourth type followed all Nazi orders except for anything that contributed to mass executions (compiling lists, delivering the doomed, searching for fugitives). The fifth obeyed orders without question or after engaging in some "bargaining" with the occupation authorities.[79] Of these five types of elders, the third and fifth were most prevalent in occupied Russian regions. The ghettos' relatively brief existence, small size, and the presence of large numbers of refugees from other areas (and consequently the discord this influx produced within the community itself) generated more oppressive conditions that made the open resistance of members of the Jewish Councils impossible.

The position of the Jewish elders, whether elected or appointed, did not significantly differ from that of other Jews living inside or outside ghettos. A survivor of the Velizh ghetto named Isaak Brook wrote in his memoirs that "the elders of the Judenrat themselves did not know anything detailed; they were unhappy people."[80] Professor Boris Basilevsky later claimed that the elder of the Smolensk ghetto "repeatedly complained about the heavy burden that he had to bear in the interests of the Jewish population with no prospects of a successful outcome."[81] During the German confiscation actions or mass killings, Jewish Council members and elders frequently became hostages of such measures. Jewish elders did not have the slightest chance of affecting the fate of other Jews. In fact, Jewish Council members and elders almost everywhere on Russian soil became victims of mass executions themselves.

All Jewish Council members and elders were killed either during the liquidation of ghettos or alongside other Jews in areas without ghettos, with the exception of a few rare instances when elders were able to flee. Many of those who survived until the liberation were accused by the Soviet government of being Nazi auxiliaries and were sentenced to death by Soviet tribunals. The documents from these trials are still not accessible to researchers in the Russian Federation. Those individuals who were permitted to leave the Soviet Union later appeared before "courts of

79 Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses*, 152-57.

80 Testimony by Isaak Brook, p. 8.

81 N. Il'kevich, "Smolensk vo vlasti nepriiatelia: 26 mesiatsev okkupatsii," *Smena. Smolensk*, July 23, 1994.

honor" in Israel and other states.[82] The few survivors from the same ghetto frequently had opposing opinions about the actions taken by the members and elders of Jewish Councils. Unlike in the other Soviet republics and Eastern European countries, the role of Jewish Councils in the occupied zones of the RSFSR was minimal, and their members and elders were, according to available sources, completely powerless.

82 Al'tmann, *Opfer des Hasses*, 151.

SOURCE COMMENTARY

Ferenc Laczó

The Henrik Fisch–Ernő Munkácsi Controversy: A Jewish Investigation and Public Hearing Regarding "Matters of the Jewish Council" in Budapest in Early 1948

On January 7, 1948, Henrik Fisch requested a formal internal investigation among the surviving remnant of Hungary's Congress Jewish community on the role the Central Jewish Council played in 1944. Following several acrimonious conversations and mutual threats exchanged by Fisch and Ernő Munkácsi in late 1947, Fisch was given the opportunity to detail his personal accusations against Munkácsi in front of a special committee in Budapest on January 29, 1948. Speaking as one of the few surviving representatives of Hungarian Jews living outside of Budapest, Fisch made numerous harsh accusations concerning Ernő Munkácsi's actions, or lack thereof, in the spring and summer of 1944. He thereby answered, rather vehemently and controversially, the question of Munkácsi's alleged responsibility for the near wholesale murder of his co-religionists from outside the capital city during those devastating months less than four years earlier.

The main idea behind the January 29th session organized by Congress Jewry, colloquially known as the Neologs,[1] was to investigate "the deporting national Jewish leadership." As the accused Munkácsi did not fail to point out, the explicit aim of performing an investigation was in tension

1 Due to their profound disagreements in 1868-71, the Jews of Hungary created three separate nationwide organizations: Congressional, Orthodox, and Status Quo Ante. Congressional Jewry—colloquially known as Neologs—tended to be moderately reformist, liberal conservative, and interested in Hungarian acculturation and social integration. The Israelite Community of Pest for which Ernő Munkácsi served as chief secretary belonged to the Neologs. It was by far the largest community in the country, consisting of about 200,000 members at its peak.

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with the fact that the session was organized as a public hearing. It was as part of this public hearing that he had the opportunity to respond to Fisch's numerous accusations, and he did so in a detailed manner.

The originals of both key documents from this consequential special session—the accusation by Henrik Fisch and the response by Ernő Munkácsi—are located in the Hungarian Jewish Archives (in MZSML XX-L-10 and MZSML XXXIII-5-a-1, respectively). The contents of the two were printed together for the first time in Ernő Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt? Adatok és okmányok a magyar zsidóság tragédiájához*.[2] This volume was edited by Kata Bohus, László Csősz, and me. My brief summaries and interpretations rely heavily on the contents of this volume. I draw especially on the original biographical reconstruction entitled "Versenyt futunk a végzettel" ("We Are Running a Race with Fate") penned by my excellent colleagues Kata Bohus and László Csősz.

The accuser whose charges launched the special investigation, Henrik Fisch (1907-86), was the former Rabbi of Kápolnásnyék, a village some forty kilometers southwest of Budapest whose Jewish community, which had numbered around one hundred individuals, had been murdered almost without exception. Having survived Auschwitz while losing his family and community to the genocide of Jews, Fisch moved to Budapest to act as the secretary of the National Association of Rabbis (*Országos Rabbiegyesület*) in the early postwar years and was also affiliated with the Zionist movement. In 1947, he published a volume on antisemitism that contained key documents on the Hungarian Upper House's reactions to the anti-Jewish laws of 1938 and 1939 as well as a heart-wrenching introduction to the material.[3]

The person Fisch directly accused, Ernő Munkácsi (1896-1950), was a member of the Hungarian Jewish community elite during the regency of Miklós Horthy[4] and a representative of the Congress (Neolog) community of Pest, which was by far the largest segment of Hungarian Jewry—and one of the most significant Jewish communities in all of modern Europe. Munkácsi played prominent roles in this community during the interwar period and the Second World War, including that of chief

2 Ernő Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt? Adatok és okmányok a magyar zsidóság tragédiájához* (Budapest: Park, 2022), 397-408, 413-21.

3 Henrik Fisch, *Keresztény egyházfők felsőházi beszédei a zsidókérdésben. 1938-ban az I. és 1939-ben a II. zsidótörvény kapcsán* (Budapest: Neuwald I. utódai, 1947).

4 Regent Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) was the head of state of the Kingdom of Hungary between March 1, 1920 and October 16, 1944. His quarter-century-long regency was characterized by discriminatory anti-Jewish laws, various forms of antisemitic persecution, and mass violence culminating in genocide.

Image 1: "In the state room of their headquarters at 12 Síp Street, the Pest Israelite Congregation, representing Budapest's Neolog Jews, is gathered here for its general assembly, circa 1937. On the wall at left is a portrait of the banker Mór Wahrmann (1832-1892), the first Jew elected to the Hungarian Parliament (in 1869). At right hangs the portrait of Wolf "Sáje" Schossberger, president of the Pest Israelite Congregation from 1869-71. The small man with white moustache on the dais next to the speaker is Samu Stern, president of the Pest Israelite Congregation. Seated next to him is Ernő Munkácsi, then chief counsel and secretary of the Pest Israelite Congregation. A few years later, when Adolf Eichmann ordered the creation of a Hungarian Judenrat in March 1944, requiring that it be run by men with authority in the community, Samu Stern became president and Ernő Munkácsi secretary of the Jewish Council." (Caption of image by László Csősz, in Ernő Munkácsi, *How It Happened: Documenting the Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), 10. Photograph by Sándor Diskay. Source: HJMA F 96.323, General Assembly of the Pest Israelite Congregation, Magyar Zsidó Múzeum és Levéltár.

attorney and president of the newly established Jewish Museum. He was to assume the role of *főtitkár* (roughly, managing director) of this most influential community in 1942. In a disturbing irony, Ernő Munkácsi thus reached the peak of his impressive career among the Hungarian Jewry during the Europe-wide genocide.

After the end of the war and the Holocaust, Munkácsi became the managing director of the National Office of Hungarian Israelites (*Magyarországi Izraeliták Országos Irodája*),[5] which was headed by Lajos Stöckler at the time.[6] Stöckler had arguably played the leading role in the fourth and last Central Jewish Council in the months of Arrow Cross rule starting in mid-October 1944.[7] (Historians tend to distinguish four

5 The National Office of Hungarian Israelites (NOHI) was the central administrative body of the Congressional (Neolog) Jewish Communities from the time of the great split in 1869 until 1950. In 1950, the organizations of the Jewish communities were united under the pressure of the communist state, and the NOHI was renamed the year after.

6 Lajos Stöckler (1897-1960) was an industrialist and member of the Jewish Council starting in July 1944. During the Arrow Cross regime, which came to power in mid-October, he became the *de facto* head of the Council (even as Samu Stern nominally remained its president). He proved effective in organizing food supplies and providing protection for Budapest ghetto residents. After the war, he became president of the Pest Israelite Community and the National Association of Hungarian Jews. In 1950, Stöckler was appointed head of the National Representation of Hungarian Israelites, the organization sanctioned by Hungary's communist regime. In 1953, as part of the anti-Zionist campaign in communist bloc countries, he and other Jewish community leaders were arrested on false charges. Stöckler was convicted but was subsequently released. In 1956, he emigrated to Australia.

7 In the spring and summer of 1944, following a pattern established in other occupied countries, the Nazi Germans and their Hungarian allies established approximately 150 *Judenräte* or Jewish councils in Hungary. Due to the swift deportation of Hungary's Jews, including members of the councils, the councils outside Budapest typically ceased functioning within a few weeks. By contrast, the Budapest-based Hungarian Central Jewish Council, whose sphere of authority was effectively restricted to the capital city, continued to act from March 20, 1944 until the liberation of the remaining Jews of Budapest in January 1945. Scholars typically distinguish four phases of the Council's activities. The "First Council" was headed by Samu Stern, who largely controlled the Council with his two deputies, Ernő Pető and Károly Wilhelm. The "Second Council" was established toward the end of April 1944, when the Jewish Council, now officially recognized by and brought under the purview of Hungarian authorities, was renamed the Interim Executive Board of the Association of Jews in Hungary. A few new members joined at that stage. July 14, 1944 marked the beginning of a "Third Council," when the group was expanded and modified with the addition of a separate Interim Executive Board of the Alliance of Christian Jews of Hungary, consisting of nine members (which was created to represent converts to Christianity). The final phase (the "Fourth Council") began with the Arrow Cross Party's seizure of power in mid-

phases of the Central Council's activities in German-occupied Hungary in 1944-45, which also correspond to important changes in its membership.) Munkácsi was among the earliest interpreters who addressed in detail the Holocaust in Hungary and the controversial role the Central Jewish Council played in 1944, releasing his essential volume *Hogyan történt? Adatok és okmányok a magyar zsidóság tragédiájához* as early as 1947.[8]

The special committee to assess the merits of Fisch's accusations and hear Munkácsi's defense in early 1948 was appointed by the national leadership of Congress Jewry. It included seven community presidents and was headed by István Földes, who had—somewhat curiously—also been a member of the Central Jewish Council in the months of Arrow Cross rule.[9] The notary appointed to the investigation was István Kurzweil, who was otherwise—as Fisch complained at the very beginning of his speech held on January 29th—a subordinate of the accused.[10] Clearly, all key actors were profoundly implicated one way or another in the grave matters that were tackled so confrontationally on that midwinter day.

The harsh public accusations Henrik Fisch voiced in 1947 and early 1948 were certainly not the first to be made in connection with the activities of the Central Jewish Council in Budapest. Even though Ernő Munkácsi was never formally a member of the Council, several of those accusations concerned him personally. In fact, the raging polemics surrounding the Council's activities largely defined the final years of Munkácsi's life.

Munkácsi's past was first investigated in 1945, when an *igazolóbizottság* (literally, verification committee) consisting of seven appointees from various Hungarian political parties came together to pass judgement on his behavior during the previous months. Munkácsi provided the first

October 1944. While the Council went through several phases, operating under various names and with different personnel, its basic mandate remained unchanged throughout its existence. Of the altogether twenty-five men who served on the Hungarian Central Jewish Council, twenty-two survived the Holocaust.

8 English translation: Ernő Munkácsi, *How It Happened: Documenting the Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry,* edited by Nina Munk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018).

9 István Földes (1882-1953) was a prosecutor by profession, who also acted as a leading representative of the Israelite (Neolog) Community of Pest and co-director of the Israelite Hungarian Literary Society.

10 István Kurzweil (1897-1958) was an employee of the Pest Israelite Community's Public-Interest Housing Office and a leading official in the Jewish Council's housing department.

detailed account of his recent activities to the verification committee as early as May 1945. Remarkably, the initial judgement of this Hungarian committee was that he was unsuitable to continue performing his role within the Jewish community since he had irresponsibly left his post for months during the Arrow Cross's brutal and violent rule. In other words, by applying a rather perverse logic, this non-Jewish verification committee retroactively held Ernő Munkácsi, who clearly was among those persecuted in late 1944 and early 1945, to an unrealistic standard of unimpeachable public behavior. Fortunately for Munkácsi, a People's Court accepted his subsequent appeal in the fall of 1945 in which he correctly emphasized that he did not enjoy any form of protection in late 1944 through the Jewish community or otherwise and was, thus, forced to flee.

In the summer of the same year, the socialist Zionists of Ihud Mapai led by Béla Dénes launched a trial at their unofficial people's court—which they rather grandiosely named *néptörvényszék* in Hungarian—to pass judgement on the Jewish Council from within the Jewish community.[11] The proceedings in July 1945, which were arguably motivated primarily by political considerations and social resentments, lasted for two days and went beyond examining the Council's activities in a highly critical light. They contained more general accusations against the previous Jewish leadership, including their supposed collaboration, corruption, treason, and neglect of religion. While Munkácsi was not personally critiqued in this case, he clearly belonged to the community elite the socialist Zionists sought to discredit.

The January 1948 public hearings within the Neolog community impacted Ernő Munkácsi much more directly. Due to the initiative of Henrik Fisch, Munkácsi suddenly found himself in the role of main defendant. Not only was his moral and professional integrity publicly questioned in this case; the accuser explicitly argued that Munkácsi was personally implicated in the mass murder of his co-religionists. Even though the committee established to oversee the investigation and assess its results closed the case without passing judgement and recommended

11 Béla Dénes (1904-59) was a Hungarian physician, author, and Zionist leader. Active as a social democrat at first, he joined Poale Zion in the 1930s. In 1942, he was arrested for hiding and supporting Jewish refugees. In 1944, he went into hiding. Between 1945 and 1948, Dénes was a leading Zionist representative in Hungary. In 1949, he was accused of spying for the State of Israel and spent five years in prison. In 1957, he emigrated to Israel. His memoirs *Ávós világ Magyarországon. Egy cionista orvos emlékiratai* (*The Rule of State Security in Hungary: Memoirs of a Zionist Doctor*) were published posthumously.

that no more public sessions be held, Munkácsi—who had been seriously ill for years by then—was apparently profoundly shaken by the affair and felt slighted that his dedicated efforts on behalf of the Jewish community in Hungary and his manifold achievements over the decades had been overlooked.

After the case was closed, Ernő Munkácsi no longer wanted to act as managing director of the National Office of Hungarian Israelites and assigned his tasks to his deputy (and former notary of this strange public investigation) István Kurzweil. Munkácsi was formally pensioned in July 1948, at the age of fifty-two. He passed away two years later.

What sort of content is contained in these especially valuable and equally disturbing sources?

Henrik Fisch began his speech by emphasizing how "indescribably grave" the matter to be examined was, how "limitless" the responsibility of the committee appointed to examine it, and how he personally had never felt such inner pressure and blockage before, not even during the worst days of persecution (all translations from Hungarian are my own—FL). Fisch then turned to his broader subject, which he specified as "the problems that arise in connection with the extermination of provincial Jewry." Speaking in front of a high-profile Neolog committee at this public session, Fisch posed his confrontational key question thusly: "Does the Jewish leadership of today identify itself with the leadership of 1944, which led the country during the deportations from the provinces?" Fisch also made his narrower, more concrete aim clear early on. He wanted formal recognition of his conviction that, based on the record of his behavior in 1944, Ernő Munkácsi had disqualified himself from participating in the "new, democratic public life of Jewry."

Fisch went on to argue that numerous people directly responsible for "our Jewish tragedy" continued their lives across the country "without any punishment or with a disproportionately minor one," and there was still an urgent need to publicly dissect "the matters of the Jewish Council." He elaborated on what he saw as the four main reasons behind this need: that a "morally cleansed Jewry" could make public demands in Hungary with much greater force; that the last will of close relatives who had been murdered oblige the few survivors to demand such accountability; that the currently dominant image of Jews as a dehumanized group undeserving of freedom would need to be effectively countered in the interest of future generations; and that Jewish ethical ideals would need to be restored, not least by proving that the leadership of recent times should not be seen as the true representative of Jewish spirit, ideals, and morality.

When expanding on his third point concerning the dehumanization of Jews, Fisch aimed to oppose what he saw as a key accusation: that Jews were so "debauched" that they continued to believe the Germans and their Hungarian collaborators as late as 1944. Fisch claimed that this had not been the case at all. In his interpretation, the masses of Hungarian Jews "only trusted, and naturally at that," their siblings in leadership positions—and those siblings ended up betraying them. Fisch emphasized that this was a crucial point: it needed to be demonstrated that Jews were "not an immoral nation deserving of its fate" but rather "the tragic victims of traitors." According to him, the latter was far from unprecedented and something much less shameful than the former.

Having provided his more theoretical justifications for the case, Fisch's speech went on to explain why the focus of his charges was Ernő Munkácsi. Fisch began by trying to counter what must have sounded to many like an obvious objection: Munkácsi was not a member of the Central Jewish Council in 1944. Fisch intriguingly argued that this should not be seen as a decisive criterion: members of the Council had been responsible to those who appointed them, he argued, and Jewish responsibility for what happened in 1944 should rather be measured by assessing those whom Jews trusted among their own leaders. It should be clear, he added, that Jewish trust was neither based on nor, certainly, enhanced by the fact that Nazi German and Hungarian leaders appointed someone to the Council. At the same time, significant trust was placed in certain leading personalities, he claimed, such as Samu Stern,[12] László Bakonyi,[13] Zoltán Kohn,[14] and Ernő Munkácsi: so long as someone like Munkácsi was continuing in his role as managing director of the Israelite (Neolog) Community of Pest, the Council would also be trusted, Fisch reasoned. Of all the leaders who avidly cultivated their fellow Jews' trust and thereby betrayed them, only Munkácsi was still alive; hence, he was the most logical person to target now, Fisch asserted.

12 Samu Stern (1874-1947) was a businessman who was president of the Pest Israelite Community as of 1929 and the National Office of Hungarian Israelites as of 1932. He served as the president of the Central Jewish Council from March 21, 1944 to the end of October 1944, when he went into hiding.

13 László Bakonyi (1891–?) was a lawyer and writer who acted as executive secretary of the National Office of Hungarian Israelites between 1927 and 1944. After the German occupation, he served as a legal adviser to the Jewish Council.

14 Zoltán Kohn (1902-44) was a teacher at Pest's Neolog Jewish high school, editor of the literary journal *Libanon* between 1936 and 1941, and co-editor of the yearbook of the National Hungarian Association to Assist Jews (*Országos Magyar Zsidó Segítő Akció*).

Fisch escalated his accusation against Ernő Munkácsi by making two claims: that the latter actively misled the Jewish masses by repeatedly claiming in 1944 that there was "no reason to worry," and that escape options would have been available but were not pursued. Fisch explained in harrowing detail how hundreds of "wives and children"—including his own daughter—could have easily found shelter and been saved had they not believed in the reassuring messages of those they considered trustworthy leaders. Fisch formulated his main charge in the following pointed way: "Solely due to the treason of Jewish leadership was my child brought to Auschwitz." This amounted to the crime of "handing innocent people to their murderers," Henrik Fisch concluded. The new policies he demanded in front of the special Neolog committee were that there should be a clear separation between the present (postwar) leadership and "the old one," and that Munkácsi be banned for life from holding any position in the Hungarian Jewish community.

Whereas Fisch started his remarks by complaining about what he perceived as the lack of neutrality of the appointed notary, Munkácsi began his rebuttal by emphasizing how he fully accepted that an internal (i. e., Jewish) investigation would be conducted prior to him launching any potential libel case against Fisch, but that he was incredibly and unpleasantly surprised by the fact that what was supposed to be an internal investigation took the shape of a public hearing. Observing the matter as a qualified lawyer, Munkácsi considered this an unjustified case of holding a trial without having conducted a proper investigation.

Munkácsi considered Fisch's main argument that the "trusted" community administration was more responsible than the Central Jewish Council, which had issued various commands to Jews across the country, to be inadmissible. His main counterarguments to Fisch's grave personal charges were that he played no administrative or influential role in connection with the Jews from outside Budapest in 1944. He was employed by the Jewish community of Pest and not by the National Office prior to 1945, Munkácsi explained. Second, he asserted that he was no more than a person of "third rank" during the mass deportations from the country.

While trying to respond to Fisch's numerous personal accusations point by point, Munkácsi maintained, more generally, that from early April 1944 on, he completely disagreed with the Council's policies regarding the Germans (*a németekkel való politikát április eleje óta teljesen helytelenítettem*); that back then, he consistently propagated the idea that Hungarian resistance had to be strengthened (and, as he explained, he even helped write and distribute a relevant underground pamphlet

addressed to the "Christian middle classes," for which he was subsequently investigated); that the dichotomy Fisch suggested between privileged elite access to accurate information and the ignorance of the Jewish masses kept in the dark by them was invalid (news about the deportations was widely circulated at the time, and Munkácsi argued that he had no early access to the Auschwitz Protocols nor did he fully believe its assertions at the time);[15] and that while he was not in a competent position to advise others whether to stay or try and flee, he "personally recommended going into hiding to everyone." In other words, beyond directly challenging the admissibility of Fisch's charge on legal premises, Munkácsi contested them on more political, epistemological-moral, and personal grounds.

Ernő Munkácsi concluded his response by stating that, in his assessment, he had served the Jewish community with dedication and honor for some twenty-eight years; that Henrik Fisch's accusations against him were issued in the "exalted style of a blood libel charge"; and that he (Munkácsi) intended to take legal action against his accuser, who could not possibly have acted on his own—adding that this would require examining Fisch's mental state.

15 The first version of the Auschwitz Protocols of April 1944, also known as the Vrba-Wetzler report, was the first detailed and reliable eyewitness account of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex. Dictated or handwritten by Rudolf Vrba (originally Walter Rosenberg) and Alfred Wetzler, Jewish prisoners who escaped from Auschwitz in early April 1944, the report not only attempted to quantify the number of people imprisoned and killed in this major Nazi camp complex but also explained precisely how prisoners were "selected," murdered, and cremated, and included sketches indicating the layout of the gas chambers and crematoria. After reaching Žilina, Slovakia, in mid-April, Vrba and Wetzler told their story to members of the Jewish Center of Slovakia, who in turn typed up the report. The Auschwitz Protocols, completed in late April, was translated from Slovak into German and then Hungarian almost immediately. It was narrowly circulated in Budapest just as Hungary's Jews were being deported to Auschwitz *en masse* between May and July 1944. The leaders of Hungary, including Regent Miklós Horthy, received a copy of the Protocols—the precise date of this remains a matter of dispute. Equally controversial is that while certain Hungarian Jewish leaders, including members of the Jewish Council and prominent Zionists, knew of the contents of the Vrba-Wetzler report (possibly even earlier than their Hungarian persecutors), they refrained from sharing the information more widely. The first English version of the report, which combined the Vrba-Wetzler report with shorter reports by other Auschwitz escapees (Arnošt Rosin, Czesław Mordowicz, and Jerzy Tabeau), was published on November 25, 1944 by the United States War Refugee Board under the title "German Extermination Camps—Auschwitz and Birkenau." The joint reports, known colloquially as the Auschwitz Protocols, were used as evidence during the Nuremberg Trial.

Ernő Munkácsi felt a deep sense of injustice about being placed alongside the accused among Neolog Jewry shortly after the Holocaust. As he saw it, his intense, decades-long constructive involvement with the Jewish community had practically been ignored. The sole part of his past to be scrutinized in the early postwar years—and scrutinized with great vigor and, as he experienced it, inexplicable malevolence—concerned his role in and responsibility for the persecution and genocide of 1944, a devastating series of events he barely survived.

The detailed response he offered on January 29, 1948, though making a strong case on multiple grounds, avoided several of the most controversial points where the evidence was more ambiguous. It was true that, for several reasons, Munkácsi's role in Jewish communal affairs gradually diminished in the course of 1944. It was similarly true that he still belonged to the inner circle of key decision-makers even after the Nazi German occupation and heightened Hungarian collaboration in March 1944. He was technically correct to assert that the Council and the Jewish Community of Pest had parallel administrations. However, their competencies were not that clearly separated, and there remained overlaps in their actual tasks.

More concretely, Munkácsi was correct to emphasize that he was employed in the administration of the Pest Israelite (Neolog) Community as managing director and thus played no formal role in connection with Jews from outside Budapest in 1944. It was also at least partially true that he was considered an important contact person across the country—and desperate requests from the ghettos and camps outside Budapest would, therefore, land directly on his desk during those fatal months. Munkácsi was also correct to recall that he had not been fully loyal to Hungarian state authorities or the Nazi-appointed Jewish leadership throughout 1944. It is also clear from the historical evidence that he benevolently and naively trusted the rationality and moderation of Hungarian state authorities well into the years of anti-Jewish persecution and was arguably far too slow and cautious in reassessing his relationship to those he tended to perceive as Hungarian Jews' Christian-conservative partners.

Beyond the burning desire to name responsible persons and vehemently demand their punishment that many among the surviving Jewish remnant must have felt, which could, at times, manifest in exaggerated or downright false accusations, the harsh polemic and irreconcilable disagreement between Henrik Fisch and Ernő Munkácsi also reflects in a striking fashion the unbridgeable gap between the diverse existential experiences within the Hungarian Jewish community during the Holocaust,

as well as the profound implicatedness and tragedy of the Neolog community elite. Ultimately, the 1948 dispute between Fisch and Munkácsi also reveals the contrast between, on the one hand, a discourse that clearly emerged out of existential despair and was built around stark moral concepts of trust, treason, and moral cleansing, and, on the other, a discourse that carefully delineated and rejected legal responsibility in a defensive manner but seemed unable or was simply unwilling so shortly after 1944 to more substantially grapple with the moral ambiguities—the vast grey zone—that shaped the history of the Central Jewish Council in Hungary in that most devastating year.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Katarzyna Person

Judenräte and the Jewish Communities of Eastern Europe

This essay provides an overview of work-in-progress on the social history of small ghettos in occupied Poland. Small ghettos, classified here as those established in towns and villages with Jewish communities numbering fewer than five thousand persons in September 1939, were the majority of ghettos in occupied Poland. According to the USHMM *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, there were 579 ghettos established in communities with fewer than five thousand Jews, including 237 in communities with fewer than one thousand Jews.[1] But aside from studies of individual communities, their collective story remains untold. My research project challenges this lacuna, exploring various aspects of these ghettos' existence and the everyday life and death of their inhabitants. One part of this story is the functioning of *Judenräte* (Jewish Councils)[2] in these communities, which was very different from the Jewish Councils in large ghettos, which are the prism through which we usually look at Jewish administration in occupied Europe. Thus, exploring smaller Jewish Councils greatly enriches our understanding of victims' experiences of the Holocaust.

Judenräte were defined by historian and Holocaust survivor Philip Friedman as "all forms of the quasi-autonomous bodies imposed by the Nazis on the Jewish community."[3] In Western and Central Europe, these meant such diverse organs as the *Union Generale des Israelites de France* (UGIF), or the *Reichsvereinigung* (German Association). In Eastern Europe,

1 USHMM, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos,* vol. 2, *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe,* ed. Martin Dean (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

2 In this article, I use the term "*Judenrat*" to underline its German-imposed character and denote its separation from earlier Jewish communal bodies.

3 Philip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust* (New York: Conference on Jewish Social Studies, 1980), 540.

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and in particular occupied Poland (pre-1939), the *Judenräte* were, in the vast majority of cases, limited to local communities. But here, too, they reflected different regional practices of genocide as they evolved over time.

Following the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, setting up *Judenräte* was one of the first steps related to Jews undertaken by the SS and representatives of the German police. The policy was formulated in writing in the *Schnellbrief* sent by the head of the Security Police, Reinhard Heydrich, to Einsatzgruppen commanders on September 21, 1939, while the military conquest of Poland was still ongoing. It dealt with, in part, the "Jewish Councils of Elders" or "Jewish Councils," which were to be "made fully responsible (in the literal sense of the word) for the exact execution according to terms of all instructions released or yet to be released."[4]

In territories occupied by Germany in the autumn of 1939, *Judenräte* usually functioned long before the establishment of ghettos, as well as in communities where ghettos were never established (e.g., Kraśnik). In territories occupied in the summer of 1941, *Judenräte* and ghettos were established in cities such as Vilna, whereas in other cities with large Jewish populations, such as Vinnitsa or Zaporozhe, no ghettos were established. In other locations, Jewish Councils were founded at the beginning of the occupation, but ghettos were only set up following deportations and mass shootings (such as in Żółkiew). In still other places, ghettos—considered short-term temporary holding areas for persons soon to be murdered—were administered by non-Jewish auxiliary forces rather than by a *Judenrat* (Chashniki). In the vast majority of ghettos operating in the summer of 1941, *Judenräte* existed for a very short period of time, with massacres of entire communities carried out almost immediately after the German invasion. In many other localities occupied during that period, the situation was similar: *Judenräte* were set up, sometimes only to organize forced labor and often, as the second step, to supply lists of names that would facilitate the murder of the local community. Unlike in those regions occupied by Germany in 1939 where members of the *Judenrat* were usually murdered during the final stage of deportations, in areas occupied in 1941, membership in the *Judenrat* did not guarantee even temporary protection. Indeed, in many localities, members of the *Judenrat* were the first to be killed.

4 Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 2.

When examining the history of the *Judenräte*, key questions usually relate to their membership, especially the motivations of their members and the pressure they were under. In the majority of cases in Eastern Europe, the *Judenrat* was built around a leader initially appointed by the local administration and later approved by Nazi officials. The leader then appointed other members of the council, who collectively acted as an advisory board and were responsible for various functions of the community. According to Heydrich's *Schnellbrief*, the *Judenrat* was to be "as far as possible composed of the remaining influential personalities and rabbis." The size of the council was set at twenty-four men, but further details about the composition of *Judenräte* were provided by Hans Frank's decree, which noted that this number applied only to communities of over ten thousand people. In less populous localities, *Judenräte* were smaller, and they included women (among others, those in Łuck, Smolensk, and Proskurov). There were also *Judenäte* with more than one leader (Kiwerce).

As a general rule, it can be claimed that the *Judenräte* established at the beginning of the occupation of Poland were mainly composed of people who were members of pre-existing systems and structures of communal leadership. While enlisting elites might have been used as a strategy to project legitimacy—that is, to strengthen the sense that a council effectively replaced old power structures and acted in the best interest of ghetto inhabitants—it also strengthened the image of the *Judenrat* as a collaborationist body, with local elites seen as having made a deal with the occupiers.

Over time and as a result of the evolutions in Nazi policy, the composition of *Judenräte* changed. *Judenräte* installed or reorganized later in the war were usually selected directly by the Germans and tended to include more members drawn from among the new elite. As one wartime testimony remarked, "Those were 'new people.'"[5] By this time, prewar social mobility networks had already been replaced by an entirely new system.

A particular case of this dynamic may be observed in the Polish territories occupied by the Germans in mid-1941—which had already experienced the considerable destruction of Jewish communal life and institutions during the Soviet occupation—and in occupied prewar Soviet territories with no existing Jewish administrative structures. Leadership positions in those localities were often given to German-speaking

5 NN., Relacja pt. "Pł–k" [Płock], Jewish Historical Institute Archive, ARG I 965 (Ring. I/886), ARG I 725 (Ring. I/801).

refugees. Yet here, too, *Judenräte* were often headed by rabbis or other prewar community leaders (Turzysk near Kowel) or professionals. In many ghettos, the *Judenrat* was set up by those from "among wealthier Jews."[6]

Although the appointment of the *Judenrat* was carried out by the German administration, those who joined the *Judenrat* usually retained a degree of choice. People joined the councils for various reasons, depending on their own views and the situation of their community. A key role was undoubtedly played by the initial belief that wartime "Jewish Councils" were, indeed, to be a continuation of prewar communal bodies. However, the German authorities also had the means to mobilize members of the Jewish population into their service. A key instrument at Germans' disposal was the exemption of *Judenrat* members from forced labor. Depending on the locality, *Judenrat* members received other benefits including access to free health care, protection against the requisition of their apartments, and sometimes passes that allowed them to temporarily leave the ghetto. In the territories occupied during Operation Barbarossa, where *Judenräte* were established after the first wave of killings, which often targeted prominent members of the community, the fear of reprisals played an important part in shaping the behavior of *Judenräte* members. At the same time, because of the shifting boundaries of acceptable behavior and growing corruption, membership in the *Judenrat* and its agencies could (and for many did) become a significant source of additional income mainly due to bribes.

The initial duties of the *Judenräte* were, to a large degree, a continuation of the prewar tasks performed by the Kehilla. Gradually new tasks that had been the domain of non-Jewish municipal authorities were added to their remit. The *Judenrat* was responsible for key functions including registering the population; organizing social welfare for the local population and refugees; and coordinating food distribution, medical care, and education, as well as religious needs. These needs were pressing, and they began immediately after the *Judenrat* was established and before the ghetto was set up. For example, the *Ältestenrat* in Włoszczowa was set up in October 1939 and instantly confronted one of its greatest challenges, which was linked to the specific context of war: mass displacement.[7] *Judenräte* often received very little advance notice about the arrival of masses of impoverished deportees in the ghetto, all of whom

6 *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945,* vol. 2, 1416.

7 Korespondencja Prezydium ŻSS z Radą Żydowską i Delegaturą ŻSS we Włoszczowej, Jewish Historical Institute Archive, 211/1114.

were destitute and in dire need of food and housing as well as medical attention in order to ensure that the mass influx of persons did not lead to the outbreak of epidemics. The first census showed that already in the first month of the war, the 2,700 Jews in Włoszczowa had increased to three thousand, almost all of whom required food and lodging. The first responsibility of the *Judenrat* was, thus, social aid, and the council began organizing campaigns to collect donations from among the local community. Collecting donations was an urgent task because the Jewish Council in Włoszczowa, which was forced to pay a substantial contribution to the German authorities after the occupation, had no funds of its own. It was only after a group of representatives from the community went to Warsaw to seek assistance from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) that the council secured additional funds to help refugees and carry out the council's other social functions.

In December 1939, the community was enlarged by another 217 Jews deported from Poznań region, mainly elderly people and women. They were placed in the local Beth Ha-misdrash, a common choice that illustrated the evolution of the prewar and wartime tasks of the Jewish Council. Soon after, hundreds of people began to arrive from Łódź. As the author of a December 1939 *Judenrat* report stated, "The lack of food and fuel provisions, a hard winter, and resulting lack of transport, made this work difficult to the point that it sometimes seemed completely impossible to carry out." The situation was further complicated by an outbreak of typhus. The Jewish Council was asked to build and equip a hospital at its own expense within two days. "With an inhuman effort, we managed to carry out the full refurbishment of the building designated for the hospital. Over 24 hours, 25 beds were produced, 25 bed covers were sewn, a few hundred pieces of bedding and underwear were gathered."

In January 1940, representatives from Włoszczowa went to Warsaw again to ask for more money from the JDC. In February, 440 deportees from Włocławek arrived in the town, the vast majority of whom were ill following their torturous journey. With dwindling funds from Jewish agencies, which increasingly focused their work on the needs of the Warsaw community, the council had to tax all inhabitants of the town, leading to widespread protests and the use of force against those unwilling to pay. On July 10, 1940, the ghetto was established in Włoszczowa. The situation of local Jews became catastrophic, and with no income from donations or obligatory contributions, essentially all social work was suspended.

The establishment of the Jewish Councils created the illusion of self-government: the potential to make choices and negotiate with German

authorities. Yet, while they may have focused on the everyday needs of the community initially, *Judenräte* were established primarily as tools to facilitate the implementation of German policy in Eastern Europe and often to represent their communities to the German authorities. As Dan Diner wrote, *Judenräte* became "trapped between total subjugation and a modicum of self-organization."[8] The functioning of the *Judenräte* mirrored both the chaos of Nazi administration in Eastern Europe and the Jews' lack of understanding of it. Additionally, *Judenräte* were further destabilized due to the involvement of local non-German authorities, the influence of which was strongest, it seems, in smaller towns far away from centers of German administration. While it quickly became clear that the "Jewish autonomy" promised in Nazi propaganda should be ruled out, there was still the basic question of survival, both theirs and their communities'.

Members of the *Judenrat* made decisions based on what they knew at the time. Whether they thought about the good of their community, were primarily concerned with protecting their own lives and families, or whether their actions were motivated by opportunism, they believed in the need to cooperate with the occupier, at least to some degree. Thus, attempting to deflect arbitrary measures that would harm the Jews by second-guessing German intentions and assessing the potential success of various survival strategies were responsibilities assumed by the *Judenräte* on behalf of their communities. The situation of *Judenräte* in small towns was particularly dire. They had even less access to reliable sources of information than those in large cities and towns, and they had to rely on gossip, rumors, and hearsay regarding German regulations. A document from Hrubieszów reported that its *Judenrat* found it necessary to "run from officer to officer and from official to official to uncover some bit of information [hidden] behind the curtain, but their efforts yield nothing."[9]

A growing number of local studies, especially those related to areas occupied during Operation Barbarossa and looking beyond the large ghettos of Warsaw, Łódź, Bialystok, and Vilna, show that the key to understanding the *Judenräte* is appreciating the diversity of members' attitudes and individual motivations, as well as the influence of wartime realities: namely, the brutality of everyday life under occupation and the blurring of acceptable behavioral boundaries. It is also necessary to

8 Dan Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

9 NN. (Hrubieszów), List z 26. 06. 1942 r. do NN, Jewish Historical Institute Archive, ARG I 773 (Ring. I/812).

understand that the complete hopelessness of the "Jewish administration" in face of the Holocaust does not preclude studying them as groups of autonomous individuals who fulfilled their directives notwithstanding the circumstances in which they found themselves. The actions of the *Judenrat* were the result of a complex calculation of benefits and costs that individuals thought they could decipher at the time, before their full consequences could be known.

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DENISA NEŠŤÁKOVÁ is a historian focusing on twentieth-century East Central Europe, far-right movements, the Holocaust, and gender studies. She graduated from Comenius University in Bratislava with a doctorate in General History. Her dissertation was dedicated to Arab-Jewish relations in the British Mandate for Palestine through the perspective of the German Temple Society. Currently, she works as research associate at the Herder Institute and is concluding her postdoctoral project "Privileged to be in Hell: Jewish Women in the Sereď Camp," which has been carried out thanks to the Saul Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies and a postdoctoral fellowship from the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah. Her examination of the history of family planning, conducted as part of the three-year project "'Family Planning' in East Central Europe from the 19th Century until the Authorization of 'the Pill,'" resulted in her 2023 book *Be Fruitful and Multiply: Slovakia's Family Planning under Three Regimes 1918-1965* (2023). Nešťáková's publications include the edited volume—together with Katja Grosse-Sommer, Borbála Klacsmann, and Jakub Drábik—devoted to the Holocaust and gender entitled *If This is a Woman: Studies on Women and Gender in the Holocaust* (2021). She has published extensively in both English and Slovak on issues related to the history of the Holocaust as perpetrated in Slovakia and on women's history and reproductive rights.

KATARZYNA PERSON is a historian and the Deputy Director of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum. She has worked on the history of Jews in Poland during the Holocaust and in the immediate postwar period. Person is the author of *Assimilated Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto 1940-1943* (2014); *Warsaw Ghetto Police: The Jewish Order Service during the Nazi Occupation* (2021); *Przemysłowa Concentration Camp: The Camp, The Children, The Trials*, with Johannes-Dieter Steinert (2023); and *Polnische Juden in der amerikanischen und der britischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands, 1945-1948* (2023), among other works. She is also the author and co-author of five volumes of documents from the Ringelblum Archive, and she heads the Full Edition of the Ringelblum Archive publication project at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

DORON RABINOVICI, born in Tel Aviv in 1961, has lived in Vienna since 1964. He is a writer and historian. Rabinovici studied at the University of Vienna and earned his doctorate in history in 2000 with his dissertation, "Instanzen der Ohnmacht: The Viennese Jewish Community Leadership from 1938 to 1945 and Their Reaction to National Socialist Persecution and Extermination." The dissertation was published as *Instanzen der*

Ohnmacht: Wien 1938-1945. Der Weg zum Judenrat by Jüdischer Verlag bei Suhrkamp. It was also published in English by Polity Books in 2011 under the title *Eichmann's Jews.* In addition to this book, Rabinovici's body of work comprises short stories, novels, and academic articles, as well as theater plays and audio dramas, including the novel *Die Außerirdischen* (2017—longlisted for the Austrian Book Prize) and the novel *Andernorts* (2010—shortlisted for the German Book Prize), which has been translated into English by Tess Lewis as *Elsewhere* and published by House Publishing. Rabinovici's theater work includes productions at the Burgtheater in Vienna of the survivor project *The Last Witnesses* (2013/15) and the reading drama "The Seventh of October" (2023), a collage of a prologue and reports from victims of the Hamas massacre. Together with Natan Sznaider, he published the anthologies *New Anti-Semitism?* in 2004 and 2019, which reflected the international debate on the topic. In addition to his literary work, Rabinovici has frequently taught at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and the University of Vienna in recent years. Rabinovici is a member of the Academy of Sciences and Literature in Mainz. For his work, he has been awarded, among other honors, the Anton Wildgans Prize, the Jean Améry Award, and the Honorary Prize of the Austrian Book Trade for Tolerance in Thought and Action.

IRINA REBROVA is a historian of the Holocaust and other Nazi victim groups in the Soviet Union during the Second World War. She defended her PhD thesis at the Center for Research on Antisemitism at Technical University Berlin (TU Berlin), and in 2020, she published her book entitled *Re-constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory: The Case of the North Caucasus*. She holds a Russian PhD degree (candidate in science of history) and an MA in sociology (gender studies). She has published a number of articles on oral history, gender history, and the social memory of the Second World War in Russian-, English-, and German-language academic journals and edited volumes. She held the Claims Conference Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies from 2015 to 2017, and was a fellow at the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Institute for Contemporary History, Munich in 2016 and at the USC Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research in 2017. From 2014 to 2022, she was a Research Associate in Hadassah Brandeis Institute at Brandeis University (USA). Since 2022, she has been a member of the board of the German non-profit association KONTAKTE-КОНТАКТЫ, which promotes intercultural tolerance, education about history, and donations for the victims of the Nazi era in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia through international exchange. Her latest project "Remember us …"

deals with the history and memory of people with disabilities who became Nazi victims in the occupied regions of Russia during the Second World War (http://nsvictims.ru/). In November 2023, she began her term as Alfred Landecker Lecturer at the Center for Research on Antisemitism TU Berlin.

WOLFGANG SCHNEIDER works in public service. In 2023/2024, he was a lecturer in Heidelberg University's Department of History, Chair of Eastern European History. Between 2016 and 2023, Schneider acted as project coordinator for the German-Ukrainian research project "Civilian Victims on the Eastern Front of World War II" (funded by the Volkswagen Foundation). Schneider was the 2017/2018 Edith Milman Fellow at the Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In October 2022, he defended his dissertation entitled "From Gray Zones to Red Courts: Soviet Collaboration Trials of Jewish Ghetto Functionaries from Transnistria, 1944-1949."

LAURIEN VASTENHOUT is a researcher and lecturer at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She holds a PhD in History from the University of Sheffield (UK). In recent years, her research has focused on victims' responses to persecution from a comparative perspective, with a specific emphasis on Jewish responses to Nazi policies during the Second World War. Vastenhout has published extensively on the Jewish Council phenomenon, and her publications on this theme include "Remain or Resign? Jewish Leaders' Dilemmas in the Netherlands and Belgium under Nazi Occupation" (*Holocaust and Genocide Studies*) and "The Jewish Council of Amsterdam: A (More) Useful Tool in the Deportation Process?" (*Beiträge zur Holocaustforschung des Wiener Wiesenthal Instituts für Holocaust Studies*). In 2023, her book *Between Community and Collaboration: 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (2022) received the Yad Vashem International Book Prize for Holocaust Research. A Dutch translation of this book appeared in spring 2024. Vastenhout has received numerous grants and prizes including the Claims Conference Research Fellowship in Shoah Studies and the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds Young Talent Award. She was a fellow at various research institutions including Mémorial de la Shoah (France) and Yad Vashem (Israel). In 2023, Vastenhout was awarded the prestigious Dutch Research Council (NWO) VENI grant for her new project on "Jewish"/"non-Jewish" "mixed" marriages during the Holocaust.