

time, Iwaszkiewicz's fellow writer, Maria Dąbrowska, widely respected for her public criticism of antisemitism in Polish universities in the late 1930s, reacted with callous indifference. Dąbrowska saw Polish-Jewish relations as a zero-sum game, and even after the murder of millions of Polish Jews, expressed resentment about Jewish communists and about the Jews' seeming obsession with their own suffering.

Another fascinating example analyzed by Feldhay Brenner is the case of Stanisław Rembek, who before the war was an ardent Polish patriot and admirer of Polish military valor. Rembek's wartime diary, like Dąbrowska's, showed little interest in the Jewish tragedy. But Rembek clearly experienced a stunning transformation after the war. In the *Sentence of Franciszek Kłos*, Rembek condemned the moral corruption of wartime Polish society and the involvement of many Poles in the denunciation and killing of Jews. The war caused him to rethink his previous assumptions about his compatriots and his own reactions to the mass murder that he witnessed.

One of the most engrossing chapters discusses Zofia Nałkowska, who wrote, on May 14, 1943 that "the drowning [Jews] who are pulling me into the abyss, still linger close by. The suffering of others has become more acute, more intense than one's own. Why am I tormenting myself? Why am I ashamed to live? Why am I unable to bear it?" (101). Nałkowska was haunted by the disparity between the horror that she saw and the seeming futility of finding the right language to describe it. In 1946 Nałkowska published an important collection of short stories, *Medallions*, based on testimony she had heard as vice-president of the Main Commission for investigating German War Crimes in Poland. This became one of the earliest, and most important examples, of what would subsequently become "Holocaust literature." Feldhay Brenner ends this challenging and important book with an important insight about the connection between these wartime diaries and present day attempts to discuss the Holocaust: "The spectrum of the struggles with the reality of the Holocaust that the five diaries represent provides an invaluable lesson about the nature of witnessing. The variety of responses to Jewish suffering—from Dąbrowska's deliberate dismissal, to Rembek's willful belittling, which he corrected in his postwar *Sentence*, to Iwaszkiewicz's altruistic dedication and humanistic despair, to Wyleżyńska altruistic moral self-correction, to Nałkowska's traumatic silence which she broke in her post-war *Medallions*—teach the complexity and variability of responses to another's plight. . . . It brings to the fore the injunction of moral self-examination on the present-day witness of present-day atrocities . . . (170)."

This is an excellent book that deserves to be widely read.

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***The Clandestine History of the Kovno Jewish Ghetto Police.*** By anonymous members of the Kovno Jewish Ghetto Police. Trans., ed. Samuel Schalkowsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. xx, 389 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Figures. Tables. Maps. \$35.00, hard bound.

Post-war testimony and memoirs by members of the Jewish ghetto police are rare, because few survived and even fewer were eager to speak or write about the controversial and most often deprecated role they had played in the life of the ghettos. Contemporary reports written by ghetto policemen are even rarer. For this reason alone, the report of the Kovno Jewish Ghetto Police would be a special document. But it is more than that. The detailed content as well as the analytical and critical quality of the report, combined with the superb introduction by Samuel D. Kassow, make this book a landmark of Holocaust historiography.

As Kassow points out, the Kovno Jews experienced three distinct periods of persecution: the decimating onslaught from the Nazi invasion in late June and ghettoization in August through the Great Aktion of late October 1941 that cumulatively took the lives of half of Kovno Jewry; the period of precarious “normalization” to November 1943; and the period of dissolution that ended in July 1944. The police report covers the first period and twelve months of the second period, ending its detailed coverage in November 1942, though parts of it were still being written a year later. One of the literary qualities of the report is that it captures both the terror and horror of the first period and the incredible ability of the ghetto inhabitants to establish a strange kind of normalcy during the respite offered in the second period. There is an open pride in the ability of the incarcerated and exploited Jews to recreate trade and supply themselves so skillfully and ingeniously. Twice the report proclaims that “what Jews are able to do, no other people in the world can do” (176, 177). Detailing various techniques of smuggling and bribery, the report boasts: “However absurd this may seem, it is a fact that the average ghetto Jew lived better than the average German in Germany” (297).

The anonymous authors of the report (one lead author and several co-authors) analyze the role and dilemma of the Jewish ghetto police both critically and apologetically. On the one hand they identify some of the positive duties that the ghetto police performed: enforcing necessary sanitation regulations, guarding the ghetto gardens against pilfering, and adjudicating both criminal and civil cases within the ghetto. More important to sustain the viability of the ghetto strategy of survival through labor, the police had to conduct the immensely unpopular searches and roundups to meet the habitually under-filled labor quotas imposed by the Germans and allocated by the Council of Elders and ghetto Labor Division. And finally the police had to keep order at the ghetto gate, where desperate pushing and shoving for advantage was endemic.

Aware of the unpopularity of the police that resulted from dragging shirkers out of bed for forced labor and beating unruly crowds of Jews who would not stand in their columns at the gate, the authors attributed their unpopularity to two clusters of factors—systemic and personal. Among the first was the ghetto inhabitants’ absence of fear of and refusal to obey Jewish policeman, leaving the beleaguered police no choice but to exert force. More important, the key decisions were made by the Council of Elders and Labor Division, who always left the “dirty work” of visible enforcement to the police. It was the failure of these two institutions to reform or alter the glaring inequity with which labor assignments were made that brought such odium on the police enforcers. On the personal side, the first generation of top police leadership, however well-meaning, was quite inadequate and unable to assert themselves for the benefit of the police collectively. And individual policemen notoriously succumbed to corruption and learned habits of brutality that tainted all police.

What is absent in the report but essential for any ultimate assessment of the Kovno ghetto police is the role that it played in the resistance. The authors could not risk including information in the report that would be fatal if it fell into German hands. Moreover, the involvement of the police and other ghetto leaders in supplying communist partisans in nearby forests with young recruits and material did not begin in earnest until the arrival of the partisans in 1943. Also absent from the report is the torture and murder of the police leadership in March 1944, for refusing to reveal information about either the partisans or hiding places in the ghetto. Fortunately, Kassow’s introduction provides this crucial information.

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