

Warsaw Ghetto Police: The Jewish Order Service during the Nazi Occupation

By Katarzyna Person. Translated by Zygmunt Nowak-Soliński. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2021. Pp. 248. Cloth \$32.95. ISBN: 978-1501754074.

Svenja Bethke

University of Leicester

Katarzyna Person's monograph, originally published in Polish and now available in English translation, offers a highly innovative perspective on the role of the Jewish police as one of the most sensitive topics of the Holocaust. It looks at the case study of the large Warsaw Ghetto, established by the Germans in Nazi-occupied Poland in 1940. Shortly after the attack on Poland in September 1939, the Germans forced the newly established Jewish Council to set up an auxiliary force that was recruited among the Jewish population to enforce changing German demands. After the establishment of the ghetto, this was then transformed into a Jewish police force that operated under German and Polish authority within the ghetto. The tasks and duties the Jewish police were forced to fulfill changed to the extent that the German plans and demands changed. In summer 1942, this meant participation in the preparation of the deportations from the ghettos and the Jewish policemen being perceived by many as "traitors to their own people" (3).

The topic is thus closely interconnected with the question to what extent the Jewish policemen were taking part in the preparation for and the realisation of the systematic mass murder of the Jews by the Germans – and what kind of scope for action they had, and made use of, under German occupation. Building on crucial earlier works by scholars such as Aharon Weiss, the comparative study *Judenrat* by Isaiah Trunk (1972), and more recent studies of everyday life in the Warsaw Ghetto, Person's monograph represents the first monograph to systematically consider the perspective of the Jewish Police in the Warsaw Ghetto during Nazi occupation.

Person does not, as many others do, mainly focus on the forced participation of the policemen in the deportations. Instead, she is interested in the development of the Jewish police force in order to explore how the tasks and demands on the police and the resulting perception by the ghetto inmates changed. She shows how ghetto inhabitants tried to make sense of the fact that they perceived the Jewish police from the beginning as "people with agency, who chose to carry out orders against the interest of other Jews" (76) while the policemen were perceived by their family members or close friends as "the honourable exceptions" (78) Furthermore, Person focuses on the changing perceptions of the Jewish police over time and, most importantly, on the motivations and struggles of the Jewish policemen themselves. This change of emphasis can be attributed to the use of primary source material that had not been considered systematically before. Drawing on an impressive range of archival material from numerous archives in Poland, Israel, Germany, and the United States, the book makes several important contributions to scholarship.

The main contribution of Person's excellent work lies in the integration of the perspective of the Jewish policemen. With the important use of survivor memoirs and diaries in research on the Holocaust generally and ghettos specifically, the story of the Jewish police has been mainly written from the perspective of those perceiving them as selfish, cruel, and in cahoots with the Germans, with the consequence of trying to mark the policemen as "outsiders" and exclude them from the Jewish (survivor) community. While considering this perspective, which also includes some ghetto inhabitants' admiration for the Jewish

policemen in the early phase of the ghetto's existence, Person adds to it the motivations and consideration of those who joined the Jewish police themselves. What were their reasons, what hopes did they have, and how did these change with the change of the German plans and the coercion they were confronted with? Resisting moral judgement and black-and-white dichotomies, Person seeks to understand their decision to join the police force as an attempt to improve their own situation and the situation of their families and, once the deportations started, their survival and the survival of their families.

The book is structured into ten short thematic and chronological chapters. They both cover the establishment of the Jewish police and address the question to what extent the issues that lie at the core of the ghetto inmates' criticism of the Jewish police were anchored in the way the Jewish police was set up and the duties and tasks it had to fulfill. The work exhibits commendable knowledge and analysis of the primary sources and the relevant literature. The book is illustrated with numerous photographs of the Jewish policemen, which, even if not analyzed, show us how we even perceive these pictures differently, once a voice is given to those portrayed.

Person's important monograph fits into the growing scholarship on everyday life in the ghettos, often inspired by approaches from cultural history, and research by Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, Andrea Löw, Anna Hájková, and Svenja Bethke, which calls for the integration of ambivalent "Jewish" behaviour and the acknowledgement of a "gray zone" (Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* [1988], 48) in the history of the Holocaust. As such, the book addresses one of the most sensitive topics: the question of collaboration and Jewish survival with consequences beyond the end of the war that often meant exclusion from Jewish communities, both in the ghettos and in the postwar survivor communities. It shows us how historiography is always dependent on the perspective of the primary sources that we use. In integrating the perspective of the Jewish policemen with an image that was mostly based on survivors' reports and memoirs, we are reminded of the fact that the role of the Jewish police was not set up from the beginning as a story that ended in what was perceived by many as a "betrayal of their own people." These contributions and the overall relevance of the book could have been made a little more explicit, especially for non-expert readers. The contextualisation of the topic with reference to relevant scholarship is only discussed briefly in the conclusion. The introduction is very brief and makes it difficult for the non-expert reader to understand the relevance of the topic. This does not affect the overall high quality of the scholarship but would have allowed the author to communicate this point beyond the audience of Holocaust scholars.

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Beyond the Pale: The Holocaust in the North Caucasus

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Victoria Khiterer

Millersville University

While many monographs have been written about the Holocaust and the Nazi concentration and death camps, the "Holocaust by bullets" in the Soviet Union is a less researched topic.