

JEWS IN THE FACE OF THE HOLOCAUST: attitudes and survival strategies

Context

This text addresses primarily the situation of the Jewish population in occupied Polish territories, where conditions for its survival significantly differed from those in West European countries. By and large, despite legal restrictions, Jews lived in their own homes in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, France or Belgium until deportation. They were also considerably more assimilated within those societies than Jews in pre-war Polish territories. In the General Government, they were confined to ghettos as of 1940 and subjected to various forms of repression. Their lives were subordinated to highly specific regulations limiting movement, mandating forced labour, or visual distinction from the rest of society. Similar limitations also existed in other East European countries (occupied by the Germans as of 1941) and the Baltic states seized by Germany and also, over a certain period, in Hungary and the Balkans. Not all countries can be described here, which is why this issue will be presented using the example of the prevalent situation in the GG, where the Jews' attitudes and survival strategies varied greatly. Such diversity stemmed from highly autonomous Jewish social life and its organisation in pre-war Poland that had no similar form in West European countries. Moreover, Poland had Europe's largest Jewish population, which is why the Germans deported Jews from other countries and constructed death camps there to murder them on a mass scale.

Attitudes of Jews in the face of the Nazi policy of limiting their rights, exclusion from social life and,

over time, confinement in ghettos and physical extermination varied greatly. Contrary to popular belief, Jews engaged in underground activity and adopted various forms of resistance, primarily of a civil nature, already in the initial months of the war. Legal restrictions imposed by the Germans as well as difficult living conditions in ghettos led to organisation of public self-help and healthcare at the start of the occupation. Clandestine education was also vital. Jewish political parties and their youth wings as well as scouting organisations resumed their activities. Just like leaders of public organisations, they provided aid to those in need and expanded their civil resistance networks. This mainly occurred in larger cities. The fundamental role of these networks was to seek and pass on information on current events, also on the occupier's actions, as well as on public needs. Over time, they also distributed leaflets and underground press. Through these underground networks it was possible to hide people facing, for example, arrest or forced resettlement. Contacts were also maintained between ghettos in various cities.

One form of the civil resistance of Jews in ghettos was to oppose limitations introduced by the Germans. Despite prohibitions, Jews engaged in secret schooling as well as cultural and religious life. Artists continued to paint, appeared publicly and created literary works. A particular form of Jewish expression was poetry. In the Warsaw ghetto, there were theatres and cabarets. Concerts, frequently serving charitable causes, were organised in many

larger and smaller ghettos. In breach of bans, collective prayer and religious song concerts took place in ghettos on major Jewish holidays.

Another form of civil resistance by Jews was academic and documentation activity. Despite exceptional difficulties during the occupation, some academics continued their studies and even commenced new projects. An example is work on the starvation disease conducted in the Warsaw ghetto by, among others, Izrael Milejowski. Particularly noteworthy is the activity of the historian Emanuel Ringelblum. At his initiative, a secret archive was established in the Warsaw ghetto. It functioned under the cryptonym *Oneg Szabat*, or 'Saturday joy' and in 1940–1943 was staffed by approximately 50–60 people. Its purpose was to document everyday life, the persecution of Jews, as well as social, political and underground activity. Similar archives, although at a much smaller scale, also appeared in several other ghettos: Bialystok, Kaunas, Lodz and Vilnius.

The above actions and all other subsequent forms of everyday resistance by Jews changed when the stage of their physical extermination began. The deportation of Jews to death camps accelerated the formation of armed resistance groups. They were mainly launched by young people. Symbols of armed resistance during the Second World War include the Jewish Military Union (Polish acronym ŻZW) and the Jewish Combat Organisation (Polish acronym ŻOB), both founded in the Warsaw ghetto. The ŻZW was formed earlier, already in November 1939 (until 1943 it operated under the name the Jewish Military Organisation) by persons involved in the youth organisation Betar and revisionist Zionists. It was headed by Paweł Frenkel. It is estimated that the ŻZW had approximately 100 members in 1940 and by April 1943 this number doubled. The organisation grouped Jewish officers and junior officers of the Polish Army as well as members of the Jewish intelligentsia. Jewish Military Union members established cooperation with the Polish armed underground, including the Home Army, i.e. clandestine military structures of the Polish Underground State. In this manner, they purchased some of their weapons. Military training was conducted within the ŻZW with preparations for armed resistance. Weapons were collected for that purpose, together with own production of grenades, while bunkers, shelters and transit tunnels were built within the Warsaw ghetto. A

vital element of ŻZW activity was the elimination of traitors and Gestapo agents whose actions could harm not only the civilian population of the ghetto but also all members of the resistance movement.

Another significant armed group was the Jewish Combat Organisation, which emerged in the face of the *Grossaktion* (Great Action) of deporting Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to the death camp in Treblinka. Its founding members included Mordechaj Anielewicz, Icchak Cukierman, Cywia Lubetkin and Arje Wilner. In addition to the central branch, field units were also established in Bialystok, Krakow, Częstochowa, Sosnowiec and Będzin. In the autumn of 1942, members of the Bund, Poalej Syjon and communists joined. Mordechaj 'Little Angel' Anielewicz led the Warsaw ŻOB, whereas the organisational section was headed by Icchak 'Antek' Cukierman and the intelligence unit by Johanan Morgenstern.

ŻOB activity were carried out under the motto 'We will not give even a single Jew'. Its members organised attacks on collaborators and spies, including Józef Szeryński, the Commandant of the Jewish police in the Warsaw Ghetto, Jakub Lejkin, a Jewish policeman – deputy commander of the Jewish Order Service (*Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*) and the suspected informer Alfred Nossig. Starting from early 1943, they began to produce weapons. Smaller campaigns were also conducted such as extracting people from the ghetto or setting fire to workshops and sabotaging them. In order to gain access to weapons, ŻOB members established contact with the Home Army. Until the end of 1942, only several revolvers were obtained from the Polish armed underground. This is also because the Polish armed underground at that time did not have enough weapons. In January 1943, several dozen weapons, grenades and explosives were sent to the ghetto. This was influenced by the resistance of Jewish fighters against the Germans during deportations in mid-January. The effect of the actions carried out by Jewish underground members was rebellions and uprisings in ghettos, e.g. Bialystok, Częstochowa and others. The largest of them, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, lasted from 19 April until 16 May 1943. Revolts and insurrections also broke out in several death camps: Treblinka, Sobibor and KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

Noteworthy are attitudes toward the Holocaust and behaviour on the part of leaders and members of

Judenrats and officials of the Jewish Order Service, which still elicit controversy and discussion. Jewish leadership elites are charged with frequently excessive subservience to the occupier, passivity and discouraging their local residents from resistance and hiding on what was called the Aryan side. Most criticism is directed against officials of the Jewish Order Service, who are accused of assisting the Germans in deportation of Jews to death camps. Some Jews decided to serve in the police in the belief that this would allow them and their families to survive. This was nevertheless a short-term perspective, because many of them met the same fate after deportations were completed. It is nevertheless difficult to assess the degree to which they were aware of this fact when deciding to enter the service.

Another group that should not be overlooked is Jewish informers serving the Gestapo. Their motives varied yet most certainly the desire to survive was of paramount importance. Given the complexity of the situation, moral reckoning became secondary for these people in the light of what had to be protected: one's own life and that of those dearest. There is no doubt that this strategy of survival – cooperation with the occupier – was chosen by a statistically small number of Jews. Informants, as this group was called, sought to survive the occupation in conditions better than those created by the Germans for most Jews. Actions that could improve material and living status for some could nevertheless cause suffering and even death to others.

A widespread conviction prevailed among Jews that they would be spared from 'deportation' to the unknown as long as they worked and were needed to the Germans. The German authorities exploited the faith of Jews in 'survival through labour' and confirmed their beliefs. This type of thinking was tied to experiences prior to 1942, when the Germans herded Jews to perform forced labour on a mass scale. Also, initial deportations already taking place during Operation Reinhardt were promoted as travelling 'to the east' to work. Permission was given to collect baggage, food rations were distributed and groups who could stay in the ghetto were selected, thus dulling vigilance of the Jews, disorienting them and cheating them in various ways. Many, at least up until a certain time, were unaware prior to reaching their final destination of what awaited

them. Various prophecies, rumours, hearsay and information concerning deportees circulated in ghettos. They spoke of horrible crimes committed by the Germans or confirmed beliefs that there was nothing to fear. Generally, escapees from death camps returning to ghettos were not believed or were considered mad with their accounts considered to be merely 'harmful gossip'.

Even more diverse were Jewish reactions to deportation. Most obeyed German orders and were willingly transported in the hope that they would survive that way. Yet some attempted to escape. It is not known exactly how many people decided to escape during the liquidation of ghettos. This depended on many factors, for instance how the Germans conducted their campaign, positions of *Judenrat* members and the Jewish police (whether they warned of planned deportations), the degree of assimilation of Jews (religious ones rarely escaped), the topography of the terrain, financial means, friends on the Aryan side and others. Often, a decision to escape was preceded by thinking and even consultation (time permitting). As regards deportation, others saw escape from the ghetto or concentration point in front of it as the last chance to save one's life. Some escapees had contacts on the Aryan side from whom they first sought help. Some did so in the absence of any contacts in the hope that they would be able to hide from the Germans anyhow.

Survival on the other side of the ghetto was mostly possible with 'Aryan papers' or through hiding. The former option applied only to some: those who looked 'properly' and were able to secure false documents (baptism certificate, work certificate, proof of registration, identity card). Appropriately prepared documents provided a new identity and potential security in the event of detention. They offered an opportunity to find work or accommodation. Financial means not only covered the cost of living, which frequently was not low, but also payments to potential blackmailers. This was one of the most important factors facilitating survival outside the ghetto.

Knowledge of the local culture and Christian religion by Jews in hiding also increased their chances of survival. Additionally, very important was a sound knowledge of the local population's language or German and speaking it without an accent or inflection. Therefore, people from

assimilated families or with good contacts stood the greatest chance of functioning on the Aryan side. A vital element of staying legally outside the ghetto was pre-war personal acquaintances. A strong physical and psychological condition was also required to safely survive on the other side. This required intense vigilance, constant self-control and shrewd observation of surroundings. An 'improper' appearance, fear or other elements of behaviour betrayed Jews to blackmailers. It also happened that people deciding to live on the

Aryan side voluntarily returned to a ghetto after some time. Others considered a petition to work in Germany as a safer option. Jews, particularly those looking 'properly', had less fear of controls and discovery of their true identity. Life on the Aryan side with an assumed identity concerned only few Jews, mainly dwellers of large cities. Many escapees could only survive in hiding. They organised or were provided hideouts: temporary or long-term, independently or with support and, depending on location, in towns or villages.

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Chart 1. CIVILIAN RESISTANCE

Unit 1



The famous opera singer Dotlinger performing on a street in the Warsaw ghetto. USHMM

An excerpt from an article in *Gazeta Żydowska* on artistic life in the Warsaw ghetto:

Ms B. Sklut was blessed as a beautiful soprano, predisposed to be a coloratura singer, who earned a place in the public heart. This young singer, who already now displays great singing culture and excellent voice conditions, manifests the refined school of the experienced teacher, Ms Sklut, a student of Ms Cidy Lau-Fischer, and, if her artistic development continues along this path, her future looks very bright. Ms H. April, who has a lovely voice, presented herself to the public with a duet from *Troubadour* [...] and subsequently sang three arias in French. [...] Ms E. Kreisberg-Kołogórska conquered the audience with a *Sommerfeld* waltz. The young and charming dancer demonstrated that she can effectively execute her artistic ideas, however small, on the stage without lacking invention or a pantomime plot. [...] The concert was accompanied by Ms R. Freundlich.

Gazeta Żydowska, 51, 27 June 1941.



Sztuka (Art) café in the Warsaw ghetto at Leszno Street 2, ca. 1941–1942. Public Domain

A description of the Sztuka café by Stanisław Różycki:

Gertner's place on Leszno St has been taken over by Sztuka, whereby most cafés are located in former offices, institutions or private homes. Aside from five or six, all of them are small, one or two rooms. Interior design is quite tasteful in nearly all cafés, and in Sztuka and L'OursorArizona even matching pre-war cafés. [...] Here [namely in Sztuka], christened Jews prevail, an educated bourgeoisie leading the ghetto 'highlife' proud that they were rich before the war. Their yearnings are released at Sztuka. Ms Czarnecka, the co-owner (christened, her husband works in the District Office), proudly walks among the tables, checks if everything is okay, looks after her sheep. Ms [...] is in charge, as is lady ambassador at her receptions, even though a drink costs 11 zlotys. The waitresses, educated from the 'best circles', are appropriately incompetent and also appropriately arrogant, reluctantly serve guests and frequently err in their checks.

Stanisław Różycki: 'Cafés' in: *The Ringelblum Archive*.

The Warsaw Ghetto, vol. V, Warsaw 2011, p. 73.



A man on the street playing the violin in the hope of receiving food or money, September 1941. The photograph taken by German soldier Heinrich Jöst, who signed it as follows: 'This man played the same sound on his violin again and again. His eyes followed me, but whether out of fear or because he hoped to receive a coin I do not know.'

USHMM

Władysław Szpilman (1911–2000) was a pianist and composer. From 1935, he worked at Polish Radio and wrote many popular melodies. He was in the Warsaw ghetto during the war and subsequently hid on the Aryan side. Shortly after the end of the war, he wrote down his recollections of survival in Warsaw in a pamphlet entitled *Death of a City*. It was re-published under the title *The Pianist* in 1998. On its basis, the film director Roman Polański made a popular film in 2002 under the same title. (Photo: post-war).



Public Domain

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- What scenes do the photographs present? Who are the people shown in them? Describe their behaviour.
- Compare the photographs. Note the expression on faces of the listeners and artists. Describe the prevalent mood on the photos. What feelings do these photographs elicit from you?
- How is artistic life in the Warsaw ghetto described by Gazeta Żydowska? Can it be concluded from this description that concerts took place in the ghetto?
- How did the Sztuka café present itself against the background of other cafés in the Warsaw ghetto?
- Who was its owner? Who were the waiting staff? Who were her clients?

Search for additional information and think:

- Who were the artists performing in the Warsaw ghetto? What did the ability to appear on stage signify for them?
- Why were cafés concerts and theatre productions performed in the ghetto?
- Was this allowed by the Germans? Who could afford paying for them?
- What did the ability to take part in cultural life mean for Jews enclosed in the ghetto?
- Find out who Władysław Szpilman was. What was his artistic career and private life? How was he able to survive the Holocaust?
- See Roman Polański's film *The Pianist* and say how the cultural life of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto is depicted.

Unit 2

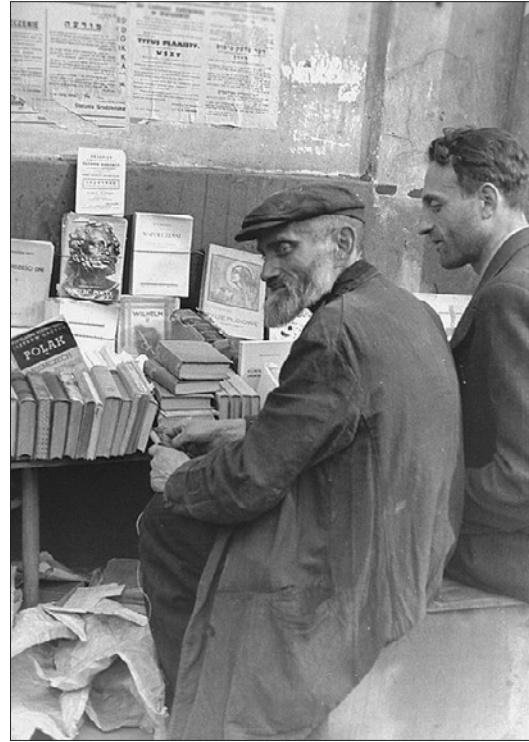
The title page of *Gazeta Żydowska* published in the Krakow ghetto. From the State Archives in Krakow

Gazeta Żydowska was published in the Krakow ghetto with the consent of the Germans. It appeared in 1940–1942 in the Polish language. Some of its articles, primarily propaganda, concerned the situation on the Second World War fronts. However, it also included many texts dedicated to current events. This was mainly information on the situation in ghettos, news on various cultural and social events, as well as a regular column called 'Our Gazette' dedicated to children and young people. Short stories on various subjects were published, as were titbits, jokes, competitions, as well as poems and other works contributed by the readers.





A boy selling Jewish newspapers in the Warsaw ghetto, 1941 (a photo by Willi Georg). Willy Georg Collection/Bundesarchiv/Public domain



A stand with books in the Warsaw ghetto, 1941 (a photo by Willi Georg). Willy Georg Collection/Bundesarchiv/Public domain

An excerpt from Samuel Bak's memories of the Vilnius ghetto:

I got to know books in Yiddish in the ghetto. Encouraged by my favourite teacher, Rachel, I read literary classics in that language. The books originated from the Straszun library and, as a result, I was able to stay away from the school in the ghetto with its swarm of flea-ridden children. In the dark and dirty library, my thoughts travelled to unknown worlds. I became immersed in the history of the Jews and life of the diaspora in inhospitable lands. I devoured Polish books for young people that my mother encouraged me to read. When I was ten, maybe eleven years old, she brought me 'real' books – for adults [...].

S. Bak, *Słowem malowane. Wspomnienie Wilna*, Sejny 2006. p. 514.

An excerpt from Eugenia Manor's memories of the Krakow ghetto:

Ms Pawlikowska, whose husband worked in the Kurier Codzienny print shop, brought the press to the ghetto. Every morning, she would bring a pile of Krakauer Zeitung – a German newspaper, and Kurier, which Jews were not allowed to read... She would throw them through a cellar window in the morning. I went into the cellar when it was still dark. I took the pile of newspapers, put it on a coat and then distributed them to people who paid me several groszys.

Wojna to męska rzecz? Losy kobiet w okupowanym Krakowie w dwunastu odsłonach, A. Czocher (ed.), Krakow 2011, p. 70.

An excerpt from Henryk Mandel's memories of the Krakow ghetto:

As for cultural assistance, we organised Hebrew language courses in the ghetto. They were taught by members of the former Gordonia [a Zionist youth organisation] twice a week. The meetings took place at a private apartment on Czarnieckiego Street. One time, a Hanukkah evening was organised.

AIYV, case. O.3/2670, accounts of persons surviving the Holocaust, Henryk Mandel's account, sheet 9.

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- What was the title of the newspaper that could be legally sold in the Krakow ghetto? What were its contents?
- Who could have been the people trading at bookstands, and who their customers? What circles did they come from and why did they do this?
- What did it mean to Samuel Bak to read books in Yiddish and Polish?
- What newspapers were Jews not allowed to read in the ghetto?
- What did it mean to Eugenia Manor to sell prohibited newspapers in the ghetto?
- What cultural activities in the Krakow ghetto does Henryk Mandel recall?

Search for additional information and think:

- Was it possible to have a library and schooling in the ghetto?
- What was the 'bulletin press'? What significance did it have for the Germans and the Jews?
- Why did the Germans not allow the Jews to read newspapers published outside the ghetto walls?
- What was the purpose of Zionist organisations conducting Hebrew language courses in the ghetto?
- What significance did the ability to practise religion and observe Jewish holidays in the ghetto have for Jews?

Unit 3



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Janusz Korczak together with wards from the orphanage he founded, Warsaw 1923. Public domain

Janusz Korczak (pen name of Henryk Goldszmit) (1896–1942) was a physician and educator of Polish and Jewish children. Before the war, he ran an orphanage in Warsaw. He created a system of education based on recognition of children as human beings in their own right. In opposing the prevailing common pedagogical practice of 'instilling discipline' in a child, he excluded corporal punishment and condemned the 'shaming of children'. In 1926–1929, he published a popular pamphlet *Mały Przegląd* jointly with children under his care. In 1935–1936, he aired popular talks for children and parents on Polish Radio entitled 'Playful Pedagogy'. In the ghetto, he ran an orphanage for children at Krochmalna Street 29. He died on 6 August 1942 in a gas chamber at the death camp in Treblinka together with children he took care of.

**An excerpt from
Władysław Szpilman's
memoir *The Pianist*:**

He told the orphans that they were going out into the country, so they ought to be cheerful. At last they would be able to exchange the horrible suffocating city walls for meadows of flowers, streams where they could bathe, woods full of berries and mushrooms. He told them to wear their best clothes, so they came out into the yard, two by two, nicely dressed and in a happy mood. The little column was led by an SS man...

Władysław Szpilman, *The Pianist*, New York 2000.

**An excerpt from Mary Berg's
Diary:**



Miriam Wattenberg (Mary Berg)
and her friend Mickie Rubin
posing in the Warsaw ghetto,
20 August 1940. USHMM

Dr Janusz Korczak's children's home is empty now. A few days ago we all stood at the window and watched the Germans surround the houses. Rows of children, holding each other by their little hands, began to walk out of the doorway. There were tiny tots two or three years old among them, while the oldest ones were perhaps thirteen. Each child carried a little bundle in his hand.

— Mary Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg*, New York 2007.

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- Who was Janusz Korczak? What did he do before the war? When and how did he die?
- How does Władysław Szpilman describe the departure of children from the orphanage during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto?
- Why did Korczak tell the children that they were going on a trip?
- How does Mary Berg describe the appearance of the orphanage after its liquidation?

Search for additional information and think:

- What were Janusz Korczak's achievements in education?
- What did he do in the Warsaw ghetto?
- Why did he decide not to escape from the ghetto?
- How do you assess Korczak's behaviour during the liquidation of the orphanage in the ghetto?
- What has Janusz Korczak become to symbolise?
- Who was Mary Berg? Read her memoirs in which she describes daily life in occupied Warsaw and subsequently in the Warsaw ghetto. What meaning did the writing of a diary have for the author?

Unit 4

Unloading and distribution of food that reached the Warsaw ghetto thanks to the Jewish Self-Help. These goods were sent, among others, by the Central Welfare Council and the American JOINT. They included flour, potatoes, cans of tuna, condensed milk as well as clothing. USHMM



Jewish Self-Help in the Warsaw ghetto.

It is difficult times when the noble side of people sometimes reveals itself. It has never before been possible to witness so many examples of devotion and self-sacrifice as at this hour. Countless individuals hurry to answer every call for help from the Jewish Community or the Jewish Self-Help and sometimes, on their own initiative, they give aid where the need arises.

A Social Welfare department was set up under the Jewish Self-Help [Polish: Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna, or ŻSS] with the departments: Finance, Clothes Collection, Emergency Aid, Sanitation and Housing for the Homeless. In addition, Local Committees were established in various sections of the city. In this way, a fairly complicated and widespread system of public assistance penetrated through every level and part of the Jewish public and reached into the most distant areas populated by Jews.

A separate chapter worth noting in the work of the House Committees is child care. Since schools were not open, many children of school and kindergarten age remained without care and supervision, particularly when their parents were sometimes forced to leave their homes to make a living.

Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Y. Arad, I. Gutman, A. Margalit (eds.), Jerusalem 1999, p. 207–208.

EXERCISES:

Examine the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- What did Jewish self-help in the Warsaw ghetto consist in?
- Who provided it and who benefited from it?
- What were its organisational forms and scope of activity?
- How can the great involvement of ghetto residents in helping needy people be explained?

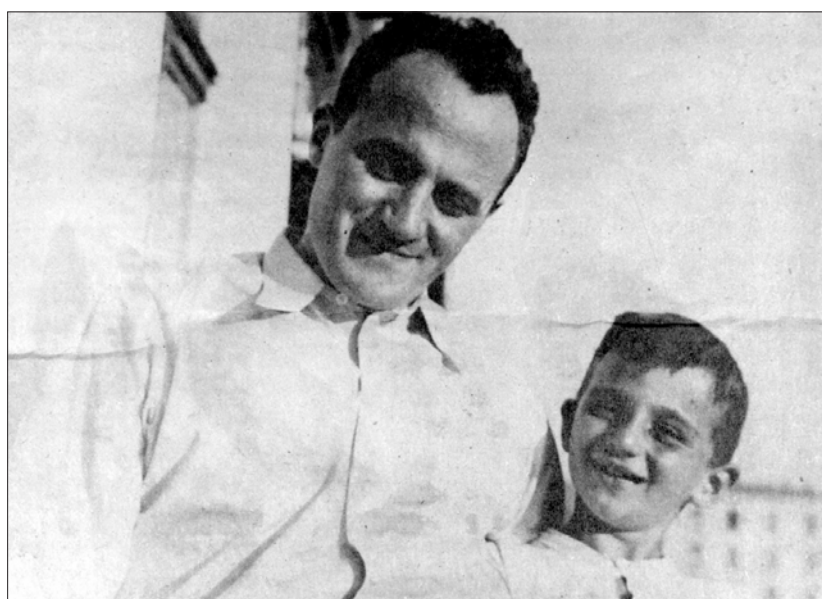
Search for additional information and think:

- What was the Jewish Self-Help's aim and form of activity?
- What national and international organisations helped the Jews?
- How did Jews secure funds to purchase food and other necessary items?
- Why did people in difficulties decide to help others?

Unit 5

Emmanuel Ringelblum with his son Uri (a pre-war photo).

Public domain



Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944) was a historian and social activist as well as a key leader of the Jewish underground in the Warsaw ghetto. He was the creator of the secret ghetto Oneg Szabat archive, also known as the Ringelblum Archive, documenting the fate of Jews during the Holocaust. He advocated armed resistance and drafted reports on the situation of Jews, which couriers of the Polish underground then brought to the West to alert the world. He was deported to a camp in Trawniki near Lublin during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943. With the help of friends from the Polish underground, he managed to escape and take refuge in a collective shelter at Grójecka Street in Warsaw. On 7 March 1944, acting on a tipoff, the Gestapo arrested all those in hiding and sent them to the Pawiak prison where Ringelblum, his wife Judyta and son Uri were executed.

Academics at the Jewish Historical Institute sorting through documents originating from the Ringelblum Archive. They were concealed in two milk bottles and found in 1950 in the ruins of a building in the former ghetto. The first part of the documents, hidden in ten metal boxes, was found in September 1946. Jewish Historical Institute

An excerpt from the 'Testament' of Rachel Auerbach, a member of Oneg Szabat, dated 26 July 1942.

On 26 July 1942, I pass on this unfinished work to the archive. Fifth day of action. Such atrocities may have already happened in Jewish history, but such disgrace has not yet occurred. Jews as tools. I wish to remain alive, I am ready to kiss the feet of the commonest boor to only live the moment of REVENGE. (...) For the fear of the elderly, the pain of small children, for the helpless despair of men and women in the prime of their life. Maybe this is my testament – REVENGE!

Ringelblum Archive, JHI

Emanuel Ringelblum's memories of 'Oneg Shabbat', the Jewish Underground Archives in the Warsaw ghetto.

The ghetto archives were established by a group that called itself 'Oneg Shabbat' (Shabbat gathering) in the course of three and a half years of war. The strange name derived from the fact that this group's discussions were held on the Sabbath – for the sake of secrecy the entire institution was called 'Oneg Shabbat'. I laid the foundations of the archives in October 1939...

[...] The creation of the ghetto and the shutting away of Jews within the walls brought about even greater opportunities for work on the archives. We reached the conclusion that the Germans took very little interest in what the Jews were doing amongst themselves. There were meetings on subjects and in a manner that would not have been possible before the war. [...] 'Oneg Shabbat' grew and grew and so much valuable material was collected that we concluded that even if the time had not yet come to consolidate the material we could in any case make summaries of various problems and important events in Jewish life. If this plan had been carried out it would have made a very important contribution to the history of the Jews in Hitler's time.

Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Y. Arad, I. Gutman, A. Margalit (eds.), Jerusalem 1999, p. 235–236.

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- What were the circumstances surrounding creation of the archive and the Warsaw ghetto?
- What was the idea behind the name 'Oneg Shabbat' and what does this codename mean?
- Why did the archive have to be kept secret from the Germans?
- What were the nature and contents of materials in the archive?
- Were the authors of these documents aware of their purpose?
- What did they wish to pass on and maintain for posterity?
- How were the documents secured against destruction?

Search for additional information and think:

- Who was Emanuel Ringelblum and what were his achievements in creating the archive in the Warsaw ghetto?
- What was the purpose of collecting materials documenting the life of Jews under German occupation?
- How did the documents survive the war? When were they found? Where are they now?
- What value does the Ringelblum Archive have now?

Unit 6

Photographs illegally taken by members of the Sonderkommando at KL Auschwitz in 1944. They show naked women being herded by SS men to the gas chambers and the burning of bodies of those killed there. Public domain PMAB



EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs and answer the following questions:

- *What do the photographs show? How do they differ?*
- *Who took them, when and how?*
- *What reveals that the photographs were taken secretly?*
- *Why did the Germans forbid taking photographs at the camp?*

Search for additional information and think:

- *What was the story behind these photographs?*
- *Who organised and conducted this campaign?*
- *How were these photographs taken out of the camp?*
- *Who did they reach and what happened to them later?*
- *What meaning do these photographs have for us today?*

Chart 2. ARMED RESISTANCE

Unit 1

Abba Kovner (center) poses with Ruska Korczak (left) and Vitka Kempner (right) on a street in Vilna the day of the city's liberation. UHMM



Abba Kovner (1918–1987) was a poet and novelist writing in Hebrew. He co-founded one of the first Jewish armed organisations, the United Insurgent Organisation, which operated from the end of 1941 in Vilnius. He was one of the leaders of the uprising in the Vilnius ghetto and subsequently co-organised Jewish partisan units in the Vilnius region. He emigrated to Palestine after the war. In 1961, he served as a witness in the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem.



Soldiers of Tuvia Bielski and their families from a camp in Naliboki Forest north of Novogrudok in Belarus. Public domain

Tuvia Bielski (1906–1987) was the head of a partisan unit and family camp for Jews hiding in forests near Novogrudok in Belarus. He returned to Poland after the war and subsequently left for Palestine. In 1954, he emigrated to the US.

A testimony of Zorach Arluk, who became a partisan in a Russian partisan group:

If someone tells you that he was motivated by a desire to take revenge when he joined the partisans, he is incorrect. All of us left the ghetto in the hope of staying alive. We just hoped for a chance. If not to survive, at least one wanted to die differently from the way most Jews were dying. Not to be shot in a mass grave and not to go to a concentration camp. I think that these motivations were similar for all who ran away from the ghetto. They did not leave to fight, they left to live.

Nechama Tec, *Defiance. The True Story of the Bielski Partisans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 66.

A testimony of Tuvia Bielski:

The children were carried on our shoulders. People with children went up front. The swamp began several hundred meters from our camp. It deepened as we progressed. The mud thickened and stuck to us. However, there was no fear of meeting anyone in the swamp. The stronger ones and those carrying arms walked last. In some spots we sank up to our navels, though this was not for long distances. We finally crossed, but with supreme effort. The water became increasingly shallow. After each deep spot we had to stop and check and make sure that everyone had crossed safely. We made very slow progress in the water and mud, it took three hours to cover a distance of three kilometres.

Nechama Tec, *Defiance. The True Story of the Bielski Partisans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 165.

A testimony of Chaja Bielski, Asael Bielski's wife:

The more we walked, the deeper the mud was. My mother became weak and could not move her legs. The mud reached up to her hips. My brother tied her with a rope to himself. He dragged her after him. We walked and walked, but were still close to our camp. The mud covered a wide area. The reeds in it were high. When you step into a marsh with one leg it is hard to pull out the second one. But, if hundreds of people enter at once then everyone sinks more deeply.

<https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/solidarity-bielski-brothers.html>

Hanan Lefkokowitz, a member of a Russian partisan group, recalls visits to the Bielski family camp:

I was amazed. I thought that it was all a dream. I could not get over it... there were children, old people, and so many Jews. When the guard stopped me, I spoke Yiddish. I met people who knew me. That first time I could stay only an hour. After a few days, I went back and then again and again [...]. It gave me hope.

<https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/solidarity-bielski-brothers.html>

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- Who are the people depicted in the photographs? Were all of them partisans?
- How were the Jewish partisans uniformed and armed?
- Who did they take into their ranks and why?
- What motivated Jews to escape the ghetto and join the partisans?
- Explain the meaning of Zorach Arluk's words 'They did not leave to fight, they left to live'.
- Where did Tuvia Bielski's partisans make their camps? What did the road that ghetto escapees travelled to reach the camps look like?
- What were the conditions in Bielski partisan camps? For whom were they particularly difficult?
- With what other partisan groups did the Jewish partisans cooperate?

Search for additional information and think:

- What was the contribution of Abba Kovner and Tuvia Bielski to the development of the Jewish armed resistance movement?
- When did the uprising in the Vilnius ghetto break out and what was its course?
- Why did the partisans decide to take women, the elderly and children into their camps? What role did they play in the structure of family camps?
- What role did partisan family camps play in the struggle of Jews for survival?
- What were the relations between Jewish partisans and other partisan groups in these territories?

Unit 2

Cywia Lubetkin (1914–1978). Before the war, she was an active participant of the Zionist youth organisation Dror.

After the war broke out, she found herself in the Soviet occupation zone, where she organised underground Dror structures. After reaching Warsaw, she organised the Jewish resistance movement in the ghetto, was a co-founder of the Jewish Combat Organisation (Polish acronym 'ŻOB') and a member of its Central Command. She took part in the April 1943 uprising, as well as in the Warsaw Rising in 1944.

After the war, she left for Palestine together with Icchak Cukierman, where she co-founded the Ghetto Fighters' kibbutz.



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Icchak Cukierman ('Antek') (1914–1981) was a member of the Dror youth organisation, one of the leaders of the Jewish underground in the Warsaw ghetto. An editor of the underground press, he arranged clandestine education in the ghetto. In 1942, he co-founded the Jewish Combat Organisation (Polish acronym 'ŻOB') and served as a deputy to M. Anielewicz. In December 1942, he took part in an attack on German officers in the Cyganeria café in Krakow. During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 he stayed on the Aryan side, where securing help for those fighting inside the ghetto. He represented the ŻOB when contacting the Polish armed underground (Home Army and People's Army). After the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, he remained in hiding until the outbreak of the Warsaw Rising in August 1944, when he fought within the ranks of the People's Army. In 1947, he left for Palestine together with Cywia Lubetkin.

Until his death, he lived in the Ghetto Fighters' kibbutz, which he co-founded.



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An appeal of the Jewish Fighting Organisation to the Polish Underground requesting arms, 13 March 1943.

The coming days are likely to see the end of the Jews of Warsaw. Are we ready? From a material point of view it is very bad. Of the 49 weapons that have been allocated to us only 36 can be used for lack of ammunition. Our position as regards arms has worsened after the many operations of the past few weeks during which much ammunition was used. At the present moment there are no more than 10 bullets for each weapon. This is a catastrophic situation. [...].

Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Y. Arad, I. Gutman, A. Margalit (eds.), Jerusalem 1999, p. 306.

The quelling of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The photographs from the 'Stroop Report' written in May 1943 by Jürgen Stroop, the leader of the German liquidation forces in the Warsaw ghetto. It presents the German version of events during the uprising. AIPN



The last letter from Mordechai Anielewicz, Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commander, 23 April 1943.

It is impossible to put into words what we have been through. One thing is clear: what happened exceeded our boldest dreams. The Germans ran twice from the ghetto. One of our companies held out for 40 minutes and another – for more than six hours. The mine set in the 'brush-makers' area exploded. [...]

It is impossible to describe the conditions under which the Jews of the ghetto are now living. Only a few will be able to hold out. The remainder will sooner or later die. Their fate is sealed. In almost all the hiding places where thousands are hiding it is not possible to light a candle for lack of air.

With the aid of our transmitter we heard a marvellous report on our fighting on the Shavit radio station. The fact that we are remembered beyond the ghetto walls encourages us in our struggle. Peace be with you, my friend! Perhaps we may still meet again! The dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defence in the ghetto will have been a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent and heroic fighting of Jewish men of battle.

M. Anielewicz

Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Y. Arad, I. Gutman, A. Margalit (eds.), Jerusalem 1999.



EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- Who were the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and from what circles were they recruited?
- What was their fate after the crushing of the uprising and where did they go after the war?
- What was the state of weaponry of the Jewish fighters? What can you say on this basis about the chances of success of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?

- *How does Mordechaj Anielewicz describe the uprising?*
- *Why does he say that what occurred went beyond his wildest dreams?*
- *How does he assess the attitude of the insurgents and their chances of survival?*
- *What, in the view of Anielewicz, gave the Jewish fighters strength and solace in their difficult situation?*
- *Why did he feel that the dream of his life became a fact?*
- *How did the quelling of the uprising by German forces happen?*

Search for additional information and think:

- *When and why did the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising take place?*
- *Who led it? What armed Jewish groups took part?*
- *How was the decision on the uprising received by the Jewish and non-Jewish public?*
- *What support did the insurgents receive from the Polish underground?*
- *Did an armed uprising in territories occupied by the Germans have a chance of success in the geopolitical situation of the day?*
- *When did the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising end? What were its consequences? Did the insurgents achieve their objective?*
- *Name the ghettos where uprisings staged by Jews took place. How did they end?*
- *What was the post-war fate of leaders who survived the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?*
- *Why did some of them decide to stay in Poland (like Marek Edelman) whereas others left for Palestine (e.g. Cywia Lubetkin and Icchak Cukierman)?*
- *When and by whom was the Ghetto Fighters' kibbutz founded in Israel? What makes it exceptional? What activity has been conducted there since 1950 at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum and the Study and Documentation Centre?*

Unit 3

A revolt at the Sobibor Extermination Camp.

...as though in response to an order, several axes that had been hidden under coats appeared and were brought down on his head. At that moment the convoy from the second camp approached. A few women who were frightened by what they saw began to scream, some even fainted. Some began to run crazily, without thinking and without purpose. In that situation there was no question of organising or maintaining order, therefore I shouted at the top of my voice: 'Forward comrades!' 'Forward!' someone echoed behind me on the right. 'For the Fatherland, for Stalin, forward!' The proud cries came like thunder from clear skies in the death camp. In one moment these slogans united the Jews of Russia, Poland, Holland, Czechoslovakia and Germany. Six hundred men who had been abused and exhausted broke into cries of 'Hurrah!' for life and freedom.

[...] It is difficult to say for certain how many people escaped from the camp. In any case, it is clear that the great majority of the prisoners escaped. Many fell in the open space that was between the camp and the forest. We agreed that we should not linger in the forest, but divide up into small groups and go different directions. The Polish Jews escaped in the direction of Chelm. They were drawn there by their knowledge of the language and area. We, the Soviets, turned east. The Jews who had come from Holland, France and Germany were particularly helpless. In all the wide areas that surrounded the camp there was none with whom they had a common language.

Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Y. Arad, I. Gutman, A. Margalit (eds.), Jerusalem 1999, p. 356–357.



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Alexandr Aronovich Pechersky ('Sasha') (1909–1990) was an officer of the Red Army. On 23 September 1943, he was sent to the Sobibor death camp in a group of 2,000 Jews from Minsk. He co-organised the camp resistance movement and on 14 October 1943 headed a rebellion and escape of Jewish prisoners. He subsequently fought in a Soviet partisan unit and from the summer of 1944 in the Red Army. In 1948, he was arrested and imprisoned by the NKVD in connection with an anti-Semitic campaign known as the 'struggle against cosmopolitanism'. He was released after the intervention of foreigners, including former Sobibor death camp inmates.

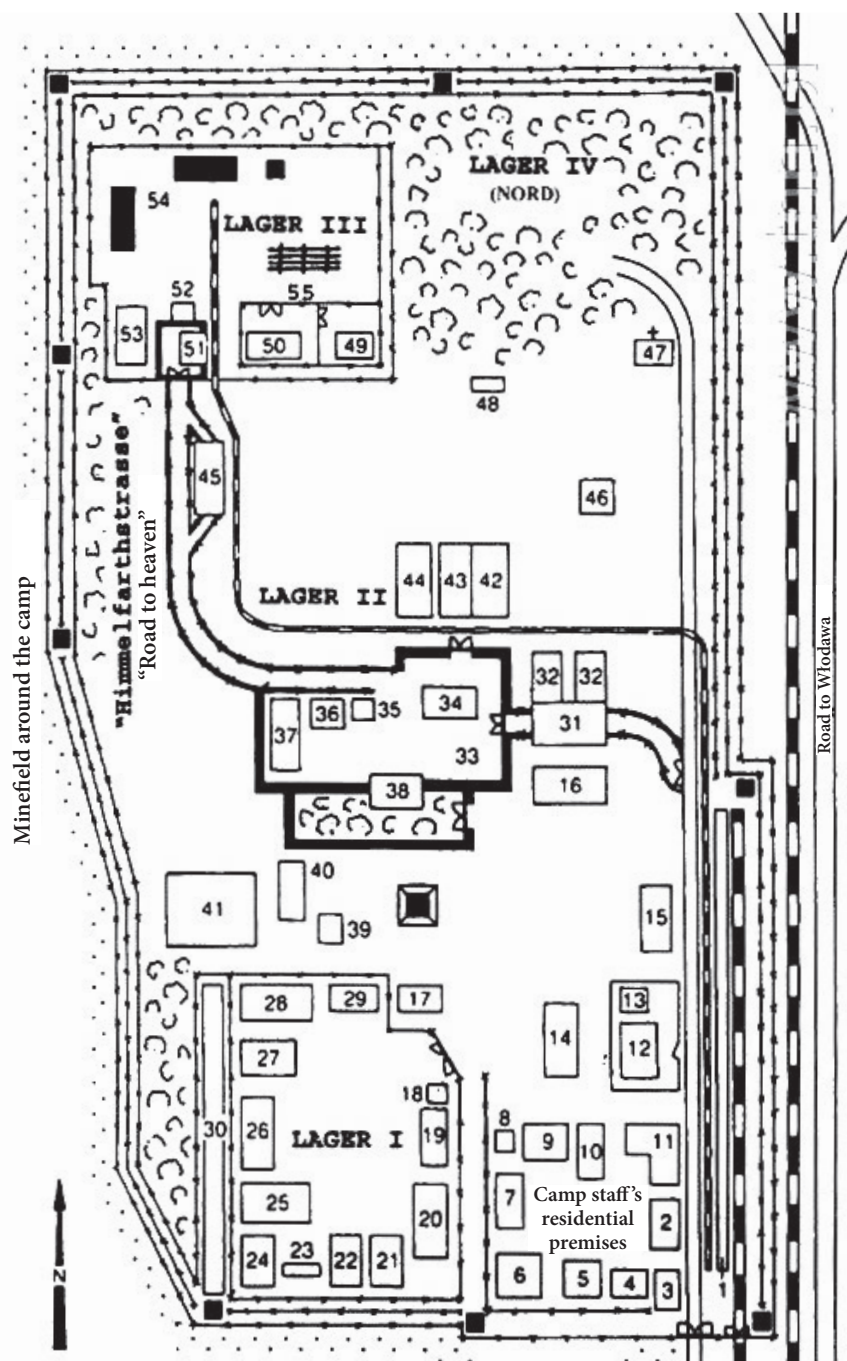
The layout of the death camp in Sobibor.

Public domain



The main gate to the Sobibor death camp as it looked in March 1943. The fence was thatched with pine branches in order to block the view inside.

USHMM/Public domain



EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- Who led the uprising of prisoners at Sobibor?
- What significance did his military experience have in this rebellion?
- What countries did the Jews taking part in the uprising come from?
- What did the start of the uprising look like? How did prisoners behave? What encouraged them to fight?
- What strategy of escape did the surviving Jewish escapees have?
- Which group of escapees have the least chances of survival and why?

Search for additional information and think:

- What were the conditions for development of a resistance movement in death camps?
- What were the preparations for the uprising at Sobibor?
- What was the course of the uprising? How did it end?
- How many prisoners were able to escape? Who saved them and how?
- Name the death camps where Jewish prisoner uprisings took place.
- Who organised them? How did they happen and end?

Chart 3. IN HIDING

Unit 1

An excerpt from Adina Blady-Szwajgier's memories of the difficulties of hiding Jews:

In double jeopardy – for resistance to their oppressors and for their origin – creeping through the streets [...] There were breakdowns and splices of various frequently tragic events, illnesses and deaths that had to be covered up, despair and fear. Extortionists and people of goodwill. [...] There was also own fear, which could never be revealed, but it was there. Coiled tightly, like a twisted spring in the stomach, it would sometimes wake up and take over his whole body with an icy shiver. It was. There can be no hiding this fact. And one had to – despite the fear.

Adina Blady-Szwajger, 'Świadectwo', *Solidarność Walcząca*, Łódź 1987, p. 3.

An excerpt from a book by Szymon Datner on moral dilemmas surrounding help to Jews:

When an unknown Jew knocked on the window of a farm hut at night, the entire Jewish problem in those years also knocked with the entire a combination of implications, risks, dangers, together with the need to make a decision and associated spiritual dilemmas. [...] A peasant faced the question: how to react? He was aware that a moral and human problem knocked on the window that could not be denied humanity and that a great humanitarian issue also knocked. An eternal problem accompanying thousands of generations: the problem of temporary prevalence of evil, the problem of the prosecutor and prosecuted. At such a moment, one faces the need to test himself, to confront his attitude with the moral imperative. Risk associated with siding with good – on the side of the prosecuted – was always great. However, in 1939–1945 the dimension of this risk was incomparably vast.

Szymon Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych*, Warsaw, 1968, p. 27.

EXERCISES:

Read the texts and answer the following questions:

- What difficulties did Jews in hiding face?
- What dangers awaited them on the 'Aryan side'?
- What was the psychological and physical condition of Jews in hiding?
- Why could even one's own fear not be revealed?
- How does Szymon Datner explain the complex problem of helping Jews during the occupation?
- What were the moral dilemmas of the people from whom Jews sought help?
- What risks did siding with good against evil entail?

Search for additional information and think:

- What were the strategies of survival for Jews on the 'Aryan side'?
- What dilemmas did Jews face when escaping the ghetto?
- What consequences did this decision have for them and their dearest?
- What moral dilemmas accompanied Jews seeking help?
- Can people be expected to risk their own life to help others?

Unit 2

The Gawrych family and some hiding Jews (Fryda Szpinger, Abram Słomka, Tirca Zylberberg and her husband Chaskiel Papier) in front of a forester's lodge close to Mińsk Mazowiecki (occupied Poland), 1942. At the bottom is Abram, who gave violin lessons to the children.

POLIN



Aleksandra and Jan Gawrych and their children lived in a forester's lodge in a Mazovian village (occupied Poland). People often came to them asking for a glass of water and food, also Jews hiding in the surrounding forests. One day Abram Słomka came to their doorstep. He was a violinist and a fugitive from the Warsaw ghetto earning a little cutting people's hair. He noticed a violin in the Gawrychs' house, took it in his hands and played. Aleksandra suggested that he stay longer and teach her children to play, and so he did. Whenever anyone came, he would hide in the loft.

Fryda Szpinger, a daughter of friends from before the war, hid at the Gawrychs', too. There were also Tirca (Teresa) Zylberberg and her husband Chaskiel Papier, who came from time to time. They were hiding in a barn in the field.

On the evening of 18 March 1943, the house was surrounded by the Gestapo and plain-clothes police. Fryda, Abram, Tirca and her husband fled immediately, but pregnant Tirca came back for her jacket. They shot her in the yard. They took Jan Gawrych away and killed him, too. Their house was looted and burnt down. The violin was taken away. After escaping from the Gestapo raid Abram committed suicide. Afterwards, Aleksandra found out that a woman who was their neighbour had denounced them to the Germans.

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- *Where did Abram Słomka hide?*
- *How did the Gawrych family help Abram and other Jews?*
- *What relations existed between Gawrych family members and those in hiding?*
- *Who informed the Germans that Gawrych was hiding Jews?*
- *What fate met the Gawrych family and the hiding Jews?*

Search for additional information and think:

- *Where was it easier to find a place to hide Jews: in the city or in the country?*
- *In what parts of villages did Jews most frequently find shelter?*
- *What were the forms of camouflage and ideas for hiding Jews?*
- *What precautions had to be taken to avoid discovery?*
- *In what conditions did betrayal and exposure of hideouts usually take place?*
- *Who did those in hiding and their helpers fear most and why?*

Unit 3

Domicèlè Pajojutė with Chaim and Jehoshua in Telšiai, 1937. Domicèlè had been taking care of the boys since they were born. Before that, she had worked for 20 years for the family of the famous photographer Chaim Kaplansky, whose granddaughter Rachel Taic-Zinger was also rescued from the Holocaust by Domicèlė.

Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum,
courtesy of Jehoshua Shochot



Jehoshua Shochot lived with his mother and year-and-a-half older brother Chaim in Telšiai, a small town where one-half of the population was Jewish. The boys were raised by a Lithuanian nanny, Domicėlė Pagojutė (Lithuanian), to whom they were very attached. When the German-Soviet war broke out, they were little boys, Jehoshua just seven years old. The family went through camps (stovyklos) as well as the ghetto established by the Germans and their local collaborators. Since its liquidation in late 1941, the Shochots went into hiding.

Domicėlė came to help them. She then worked as a nurse in a clinic located in the Shochots' house, where she also lived. She hid them there at one critical moment, even though the Gestapo office was just across the street. With the active help of relatives and friends, Domicėlė arranged successive shelters for the Shochots in many villages and visited them as often as she could. The boys had to change shelters more than a dozen times while their mother was hiding in 22 places. They all survived the war.

Domicėlė also provided help to Rachel Taic-Zinger, a granddaughter of her former employer. Domicėlė and 13 other people who helped the Shochots have been honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

An excerpt from Jehoshua Shochot's recollections:

I am the only one to survive all my Jewish school classmates. During the war, I lived an illegal life and hid in 15 places. It was all possible thanks to the extraordinary help and courageous dedication of Domicėlė and other Lithuanians.

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- *Who was Jehoshua Shochot? Where did he live? In what family did he grow up?*
- *How was he and his family able to survive?*
- *Who was Domicėlė Pagojutė? Where did she live and work?*
- *What type of aid did she provide to Jehoshua and his family?*
- *Why did hiding Jews have to frequently change their shelters?*
- *Who helped Domicėlė find hideouts for Jews?*

Search for additional information and think:

- *What factors augmented and mitigated the chances of Jews surviving the occupation?*
- *Did good relations with non-Jews before the war positively affect the ability to find help for Jews?*
- *How could good neighbourly relations help rescue Jews?*

Unit 3

Leon Feiner's forged
Kennkarte. POLIN



Leon Feiner's forged Kennkarte made out in the Polish name of Wacław Wendyński. Jews possessing false papers and "good looks" could pretend to be Polish. Others, alone or with the assistance of Poles, had to hide. Feiner was a member of the Council for Aid to Jews codenamed Żegota, which operated from December 1942 under the aegis of the underground Polish state. Its aim was to provide assistance to Jews in hiding: arranging hideouts as well as providing forged documents and financial aid.

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, donated by Władysław Bartoszewski

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- Who was Leon Feiner? How was he able to survive?
- Under what assumed identity did he hide?
- How did he help other Jews in hiding?

Search for additional information and think:

- What organisations and institutions dealt with the issue of false documents for Jews?
- What Jews could allow such a form of concealing their own identity?
- Did false documents guarantee full security for Jews in hiding?
- What did Jews do to avoid exposure?
- How did the Germans verify the authenticity of documents?

Unit 3

Secondary-school classmates from the Calvinist High School for girls in Cluj-Napoca, early 1940s. Hanna, in a white shirt, kneeling second from the right, Magda, wearing braids, standing next to her. From 1942, Hanna continued her education at the Jewish High School but kept close contact with Magda.

INSHR-EW





Magda Stroe, in the picture as a high school student, 1944. She was born in 1925 in a Romanian-Hungarian family. After giving her identity papers to Hanna, she stayed home most of the time, leaving it rarely only to visit friends in the quarter and to do some shopping. INSHR-EW

Magdalena Stroe was 15 years old when Cluj-Napoca, a city in the Transylvania region where she lived, came under Hungarian rule. Hanna Hamburg, a Jewish girl, became one of Magda's new classmates. After two years, Hanna changed school to a Jewish one in 1942, but the girls' friendship remained strong.

In spring 1944, soon after the German invasion of Hungary, deportations of Jews living under its power began. Jewish families from Cluj-Napoca had to move to the Kolozsvár ghetto. They were allowed to only take several most necessary items with them. Magda witnessed this. 'It was tragic to see them forced to leave their homes and carry nothing but a single suitcase,' she recalled after the war.

Hanna went to Magda to say goodbye. She said the only way to avoid deportation was to get 'Aryan' papers which would allow her to join her mother in Hungary. Although she was not asked, Magda gave Hanna her own birth and baptism certificates, so she could leave safely.

Magda lived with no documents for months, until the Soviets came. She could barely leave home, as walking in the streets without papers could cause a mortal danger. The only document she had was her matriculation diploma that she carried when out of the house. Still, she would shudder whenever she saw a man in uniform in the distance.

Both girls survived the war. Hanna went back to Cluj-Napoca only for a couple of weeks and then moved to Budapest.

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- Who was Hanna Hamburg? Where did she live and what school did she attend? What were her relations with girlfriends at school? Who was her friend?
- How was Hanna able to avoid deportation to Auschwitz? Who helped her and how?
- How do you assess the behaviour of Magdalena Stroe, who provided Hanna with her documents?
- What danger did Magdalena expose herself to through her act?

Search for additional information and think:

- What Jewish communities (assimilated or not) had greater chances of survival? Justify your reply.
- Why did private and friendly relations help in finding aid?

Chart 4. COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION

Unit 1

Chaim Rumkowski in the
Litzmannstadt (Lodz) ghetto,
ca. 1941–1944. Public domain



Chaim Mordechaj Rumkowski (1877–1944) was an industrialist, a Zionist activist and head of the council of elders (Judenrat) in the Lodz ghetto. Before the war, he represented a Zionist party in a local denominational society. After the Germans took control of the city, he was ordered to set up a Judenrat, which he headed until the ghetto was liquidated in August 1944. He was a proponent of complete submission to German demands and orders, including economic exploitation of the ghetto, in the hope of its survival. Together with his family, he was taken in the last transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he perished in a gas chamber.

Rumkowski's address at the time of the deportation of children from the Lodz ghetto, 4 September 1942.

I cannot give you comfort today. Nor did I come to calm you today, but to reveal all your pain and all your sorrow. I have come like a robber, to take from you what is dearest to your heart. I tried everything I knew to get the bitter sentence cancelled. When it could not be cancelled, I tried to lessen the sentence. Only yesterday, I ordered the registration of nine-year-old children. I wanted to save at least one year – children from nine to ten. But they would not yield. I succeeded in one thing – to save children over ten. Let that be our consolation in our great sorrow.

There are many people in this ghetto who suffer from tuberculosis, whose days or perhaps weeks are numbered. I do not know, perhaps this is a satanic plan, or perhaps not, but I cannot stop myself from proposing it: 'Give me these sick people and perhaps it will be possible to save the healthy in their place.' I know how precious each one of the sick is in his home, particularly among Jews. But at a time of such decrees one must weigh up and measure who could be saved, who can be saved and who may be saved.

Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Y. Arad, I. Gutman, A. Margalit (eds.), Jerusalem 1999, p. 283–284.

Adam Czerniaków at his office and the Warsaw ghetto. ca. 1941–1942. Public domain



Adam Czerniaków (1880–1942) was an engineer, social and political activist, publicist and pedagogue. He was a well-known figure in the Warsaw Jewish community who supported the Association of Jewish Craftsmen and organised Jewish vocational training. In 1931, he was elected to the Polish Senate. He was also a city counsellor and deputy chairman of the Temporary District Management. In September 1939, he assumed the post of District Chairman at the order of the city mayor. He headed the Judenrat in the Warsaw ghetto, co-organised civil resistance and social welfare and helped create an underground ghetto archive. Czerniaków opposed armed resistance against the Germans. He committed suicide on 23 July 1942 after refusing to sign an announcement of a forced expulsion of Jews that meant their deportation to death camps.

An excerpt from the Adam Czerniakow's diary on the eve of his deportation from the Warsaw ghetto, 1942.

20 July 1942

At the Gestapo at 7:30 in the morning. I asked Mende how much truth there was in the rumours [about the deportation]. He answered that he knew nothing of the kind. To the question of whether a thing like that could nevertheless happen, he answered that he knew nothing. I came away unsure. I went to his superior officer, Commissar Böhm. He said that it was not his department, that perhaps Hoheman might be able to make some statement in connection with the rumours. I observed that, according to the rumours, the deportation was due to start at 19:30 today. He answered that he would certainly know something if it were so. [...] Finally, I asked whether I could inform the population that there was no reason for fear. He said that I could, that all the reports were nonsense and rubbish. [...]

22 July 1942

At the Community at 7:30 in the morning. The borders of the small ghetto are guarded by a special unit in addition to the usual one... At 10 o'clock Sturmabführer Höfle appeared with his people. We disconnected the telephone lines. The children were moved out of the little garden opposite.

It was announced to us that Jews, without regard to sex or age, apart from certain exceptions, would be deported to the East. Six thousand souls had to be supplied by 4 o'clock today. And this (at least) is how it will be every day...

Sturmbanführer Höfle (in charge of the deportation) called me into the office and informed me that my wife was free at the moment, but if the deportation failed she would be the first to be shot as a hostage.

* Czerniaków committed suicide the following day.

Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Y. Arad, I. Gutman, A. Margaliot (eds), Jerusalem 1999, p. 279–281.

EXERCISES:

Look at the photographs, read the texts and answer the following questions:

- Who were Chaim Rumkowski and Adam Czerniaków? What did they do before the war?
- How did they understand their obligations toward their Jewish fellowmen during the war?
- What was their attitude to carrying out German orders?
- Where did they see their chances of rescuing as many Jews as possible?
- How did they behave when the Germans demanded their assistance in the deportation of Jews to death camps? Assess their behaviour.

Search for additional information and think:

- Why did the Germans establish Judenrats in ghettos? What was the scope of their activity and freedoms?
- What moral dilemmas did Judenrat members have?
- Can they be called collaborators?
- What strategies for the survival of people locked up in ghettos did Judenrat leaders adopt? Which of them proved to be the most effective?

Unit 2

A Jewish Warsaw ghetto police armband, the early 1940s.

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A Jewish police unit of the streets of the Warsaw ghetto. The Jewish Order Service appeared in October 1940. Its ranks included 2,000 policemen directed by Józef Szeryński, a pre-war officer of the Polish State Police.

Public domain/Bundesarchiv

A Jewish policeman chasing away children in the Warsaw ghetto. A shot from a German propaganda film. <https://m.interia.pl/nowa-historia/news,nld,2282730>



Emanuel Ringelblum on the Jewish police:

The Jewish police had a very bad reputation even before expulsion. In contrast to the Polish police, which did not take part in roundups to a labour camp, the Jewish police took on this disgusting work. It also distinguished itself with horrible corruption and demoralisation. However, it reached the low point of ignominy during the expulsions. There was not one word of protest against the abhorrent role of leading brothers to slaughter. The police was spiritually prepared for this dirty work, which is why it was zealously performed. Now, the brain scrambles to solve the puzzle: how could it happen that Jews – mostly intelligent, former lawyers (most officers were lawyers before the war) – themselves contributed to the Holocaust of their brethren.

E. Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego*, Warsaw 1983, p. 426.

EXERCISES:

Look at the photograph, read the text and answer the following questions:

- *When was the Order Service created in the Warsaw ghetto?*
- *Who was its head and how many members were there?*
- *How were Jewish policeman uniformed and armed?*
- *What tasks did they carry out in the ghetto?*
- *Why did ghetto residents not think much of the Jewish police?*

Search for additional information and think:

- *For what purpose did the Germans create the Order Service?*
- *From what communities were Jewish policeman recruited?*
- *What motivated those entering this formation?*
- *What tasks did Jewish policeman carry out?*
- *Is this formation rightfully accused of collaboration in the Jewish Holocaust?*
- *Could service in the Jewish police be considered a strategy for surviving the Holocaust?*

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MINISTRY
OF HUMAN CAPACITIES

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