

How the Jewish Police in the Kovno Ghetto Saw Itself

by

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This article represents the first English-language publication of selections from a unique document written in Yiddish by the Jewish police of the Kovno (Kaunas) ghetto in Lithuania. The introduction describes briefly the history of the Kovno ghetto and sheds light on the document's main elements; above all, those involving the Jewish police in the ghetto. As the historiography of the Holocaust includes extensive research, eyewitness accounts, photographs, and documents of all kinds, this introduction is intended to provide background material only, as an aid in the reading of the following excerpts.

The document was composed over many months at the height of the Holocaust period in the Kovno ghetto. It focuses primarily on the key sector of the ghetto's internal authority – the Jewish police. The official name of the police was Jüdische Ghetto-Polizei in Wiliampole (“Jewish Ghetto Police in Vilijampole”), and, in the nature of things, since the Holocaust, this body has become practically synonymous with collaboration with the occupying forces. Ostensibly a chronicle of police activities during the ghetto period, the document in fact reflects an attempt by the Jewish police at self-examination and substantive commentary as the events unfolded.

The History of the Ghetto¹

On June 24, 1941, the third day of the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany, Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania's second largest city, famed as an important cultural and spiritual center, was occupied. Kovno had a distinguished name in the Jewish world primarily because of the Knesset

¹ The primary sources for this chapter are: Leib Garfunkel, *The Destruction of Kovno's Jewry* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1959); Josef Gar, *The Destruction of Jewish Kovno* (Yiddish) (Munich: Association of Lithuanian Jews in the American Zone in Germany, 1948); Josef Rosin, “Kovno,” *Pinkas Hakehillot: Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities – Lithuania* (Hebrew), Dov Levin, ed. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), pp. 443-455.

Israel Yeshivah, located in the old Jewish suburb of Slobodka, or, in Lithuanian, Vilijampole.

Shortly before the German army entered Kovno, armed Lithuanians perpetrated murderous pogroms against the Jews of Slobodka, which also spread to the other parts of the city and continued with redoubled force after the German occupation. Some 8,000 Jews, snatched off the streets and from houses, were thrown into jail and shot after the cruelest tortures. At the same time, the head of the municipal German government in Kovno (Der Stadtkommissar Kauen) and the Lithuanian municipality issued a series of oppressive and humiliating decrees applicable to the Jews, such as the prohibition of walking on the sidewalk and the obligation to wear a yellow star on the chest and back. Before long all the Jews were compelled to move to the ghetto set up for them in Slobodka.

When the ghetto was sealed off on August 15, 1941, some 30,000 Jews were crammed inside it, including around 6,000 who had previously lived in this part of town. During the three years of its existence (until mid-July 1944, when those left were transferred to concentration camps in Germany), the ghetto was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, with Lithuanian sentries posted along its entire length. German guards were also stationed at the ghetto gates. The area of the ghetto was reduced some five times, particularly after many of its residents were executed or transferred to various labor camps in Lithuania and elsewhere.

The most lethal period for the ghetto's residents in terms of the numbers of victims began immediately after it was sealed off and was dubbed "the murder period." It lasted for two and a half months (August 15 – October 29, 1941). In addition to burning down the hospital—with its patients still inside—the cold-blooded murder of hundreds of Jews for "disciplinary infractions" (such as walking on the sidewalk and not on the side of the road, buying groceries in the market, and so on), during this time extremely well-planned mass murders were carried out in the framework of a series of *Aktionen*, or raids. The last of these raids, the "Great *Aktion*," began on October 28 (8 Heshvan 5702) at 6 o'clock in the morning, when all the Jews had assembled in Democrats

Square² inside the ghetto for an “inspection.” Germans were posted around the square, together with armed Lithuanian “partisans.”³ Crowds of curious Lithuanians clustered on the surrounding hills. At 9 o’clock, SD personnel and the man responsible for Jewish Affairs in the Gestapo, Helmut Rauca, turned up, together with personnel from the German municipality, and the man responsible for Jewish Affairs in the German Civil Administration, Fritz Jordan.⁴ The selection activities continued all day long. Those whom Rauca determined should live were allowed to go to their ghetto homes, while the rest—some 9,200 men, women, and children—were all transferred under heavy guard to the “Small Ghetto.”⁵ There they were accommodated in apartments vacated after the previous *Aktionen*. At dawn the next day, they were all removed and made to walk to the adjoining murder site—“The Ninth Fort” (one of the nine fortresses built round Kovno in 1909, for fear of an attack by Germany). At the site the victims were pushed into giant pits that had been prepared in advance and machine-gunned by Germans and Lithuanians.⁶

At the end of this blood-soaked period, a total of 17,412 Jews (9,899 women and 7,513 men)—most of them of working age—remained in the ghetto. The “Quiet Period” that followed continued for some two years (from November 1941 to September/October 1943), during which the ghetto’s inhabitants were systematically transferred to labor camps. Although this period was relatively quiet compared with that which preceded it, it included terrible events and oppressive decrees. These included the execution (by hanging), both at the Ninth Fort and inside the ghetto, of Jews accused of a range of offenses; the dispatching of hundreds of men and women to labor sites outside the city,

² “Democracy Square”—a large-scale area created from the natural addition to Demokratu Sreet of non-built-up areas on both its sides.

³ The Lithuanians who volunteered to collaborate with the Nazis and enthusiastically took part in the massacres of the Jews called themselves “partisans.”

⁴ Jordan was also a *Hauptsturmführer* in the SA.

⁵ This was the name for the north-western part of the ghetto along all of Panerių Street, one of the ghetto’s four quarters (see note 14). It was excluded from the ghetto territory after the “*Aktion*” of October 4, 1941, when most of its inhabitants were taken away and murdered at the Ninth Fort.

⁶ See Avraham Zvie A. Brown and Dov Levin, *The Story of An Underground: The Resistance of the Jews of Kovno (Lithuania) in the Second World War* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1962), p. 30; Gar, *Destruction*, pp. 72-82; Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno’s Jewry*, pp. 73-76. Further horrifying details about the “Great *Aktion*” are cited in the police manuscript referred to below, pp. 7, 64-75.

such as the Riga ghetto; the prohibition of pregnancies; the evacuation of ghetto residents from part of Panerių Street and the Vienožinskio area, which was also called the “Brazilke” neighborhood; the stationing of the “German Guard” within the ghetto; the confiscation of books; the closure of educational and religious institutions; the ban on using money, and so on.

At the same time thousands of ghetto residents continued to be tormented on a daily basis in an exhausting and humiliating fashion by being marched a distance of 8 kilometers outside the city, under armed guard, to the most dreadful work site—the airfield in the suburb of Aleksot (Aleksotas). There they worked outdoors in all sorts of weather and sustained further torments for twelve to fourteen hours a day.

Still, during this period, conditions were somewhat eased for some of the ghetto inhabitants when the number of work places increased in the city itself, thanks to the establishment of workshops producing articles for the German war effort. At the height of their operations, some 4,000 workers were employed in these workshops within the ghetto. At the same time, the activities of the ghetto’s own institutions were consolidated, and something of a cultural and social revival took place.

The fragments of the pre-war Jewish movements and parties reorganized themselves during this period and became increasingly integrated into the unified underground activities in the ghetto.⁷ The climax of these activities was when some 350 underground members (out of over 600) escaped from the ghetto to the forests, where most of them joined the Soviet partisans who were fighting against the Germans.⁸ Even though this daring operation could have manifestly endangered the continued existence of the ghetto, it won the sympathy of all the inhabitants, as well as the protection and logistical and technical support from the ghetto leadership, particularly the Jewish police. Several policemen belonged to the different underground factions.

This state of affairs continued even during the last, critical period in the history of the ghetto, i.e., the period of upheavals and liquidation that began in September/October 1943. This was when the ghetto was transferred to the

⁷ For details on this subject, see Brown and Levin, *Story of an Underground*, pp. 70-128, 210-248.

⁸ Dov Levin, *Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry’s Armed Resistance to the Nazis 1941-1945* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), p. 174.

control of the SS authorities and was gradually turned into a central concentration camp. This was after most of its inhabitants had been dispersed among smaller camps in the vicinity of their places of work around Kovno.

At the beginning of this period (October 26, 1943), some 2,700 men, women, and children were taken away from the ghetto and transferred to labor camps in Estonia. Most of them died as a result of the selections—whether in the framework of the executions frequently carried out, or because of the dreadful conditions there. Those who remained in the ghetto as well as those who were imprisoned in the labor camps in the Kovno area suffered terribly. The worst calamity was the *Aktion* of the children and the elderly, which took place on March 27-28, 1944, and claimed over 1,300 victims.⁹ During those two days, the Germans also settled accounts with the Jewish police (primarily officers and sergeants) for collaborating with the ghetto underground, murdering them following brutal interrogations and torture at the Ninth Fort.¹⁰ Following this, the Jewish police was disbanded and replaced by an *Ordnungsdienst* (“order service”), which carried out the Germans’ orders with excess faithfulness. The internal, representative leadership of the ghetto’s Jews was also dismissed, with the exception of its head—Dr. Elhanan Elkes. Some 100 days later (July 8, 1944), as the Germans were about to retreat from Kovno in the face of the Red Army attack, they began to evacuate those Jews still in the ghetto, as well as in the labor camps in the vicinity, and to take them to concentration camps in Germany. Over 1,500 Jews who refused to be evacuated and, instead, barricaded themselves in hiding places, perished as a result of the fragmentation and incendiary shelling unleashed by the Germans on every single house. Just ninety people out of those who went into hiding survived.

⁹ Some of those who hid during the *Aktion* were handed over to the Germans by Jews, including policemen. Some of the policemen agreed to do so after the Germans had threatened to execute them and murder their relatives. For details, see Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno’s Jewry*, pp. 180-181.

¹⁰ For eyewitness testimony about the proud bearing of the policemen during their interrogations and torture prior to their execution, see Moreshet Archives, A. 571; cf. Hirsch Neiburger, “In the Kovno Ghetto” (Hebrew), *Yalkut Moreshet*, no. 18 (November 1974), pp. 159-161; Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno’s Jewry*, pp. 183-184; Brown and Levin, *Story of an Underground*, p. 355.

In addition, some 2,500-3,000 from concentration camps in Germany survived, as well as a further 700 of those who had fought with the partisans or had been hidden by peasants.

The Internal “Government” in the Ghetto and the Police

The conduct of internal affairs in the ghetto from its establishment onward, together with the representation of its residents to the authorities, were the exclusive province of the Ältestenrat.¹¹ The head of this body, which, in theory, was the supreme instance in the ghetto, was Dr. Elhanan Elkes, who was elected unanimously by thirty local Jewish public figures prior to the establishment of the ghetto.¹² Michael Koppelman was elected commander-designate of the Jewish police (Polizeichef), which was due to operate in the ghetto.¹³

In order to meet the German administration’s demands for the supply of forced laborers and the like, but also in order to deal properly with the vital needs of the ghetto’s inhabitants, the Ältestenrat was assisted by an administrative/ executive apparatus. Following standard practice for all municipal bodies, it was generally called the “magistrat” (city council). Apart from the police, which was the Ältestenrat’s exclusive executive and

¹¹ In German this body was called the Ältestenrat der Jüdischen Ghetto-Gemeinde Kauen (“Council of Elders of the Jewish Community of the Kovno Ghetto”), in Yiddish, the “Eltestenrat,” and colloquially also the “Komitet.” In most of the ghettos this institution was known as the “Judenrat.” The “Ältestenrat” was also known in Hebrew as the “Committee of Elders of the Community.” A blue-and-white sign with this inscription was fixed to its office door.

¹² Officially, Dr. Elkes was elected at the same extraordinary meeting of August 5, 1941, to the office of “Head of the Jews” (*Oberjude*) as demanded by the Germans; see Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno’s Jewry*, pp. 47-48.

¹³ Unlike Dr. Elkes, who was involved in the Jewish community and a greatly esteemed physician, Koppelman was among those who had been minimally, if at all, involved in the Jewish community. Nevertheless, as one of the heads of the largest insurance companies in Lithuania (Lietuvos Lloydas), Koppelman was very close to wide-ranging Lithuanian circles, in particular from the economic domain. Early discussions about this position took place on July 9, 1941, in the Komitet- the public committee, part of which became the Ältestenrat. Among other things, it was decided at that time to organize a group of young people to establish order in the apartment used by the Komitet. This assignment was given to Michael Bramson, an officer in the reserves and a senior figure in the association of Jewish front-line fighters in the Lithuanian war of independence, who, for many years, had been a senior teacher in Jewish educational establishments. He perished in a concentration camp in Germany. When Koppelman was chosen as commander-designate of the ghetto police, Bramson was chosen as his deputy. It was also determined that Koppelman would rank second in importance to Elkes vis-à-vis outside bodies. See “The Manuscript,” pp. 16-18; on “The Manuscript,” see below.

multipurpose arm, the magistrat, as in most Judenräte, also included a series of offices, sub-offices, and various institutions that were in charge of specific areas. These included labor, housing, nutrition, health, fire-fighting, welfare, education, culture, legal service, population registry, and statistics.

During most of the ghetto's existence it was divided into three quarters.¹⁴ Each quarter—a “Revier,” or precinct—had a police station, fire station, and other services. Next to the ghetto's main gate, at 24 Krikščiukaičio Street and the corner of Ariogalos Street (known in Yiddish as “Maysim Gessl,” street of the dead), there was a special police base, which operated round the clock. This was known as the “gate guard” (*Torwache*) and was also manned by men from the German and Lithuanian police who controlled the ghetto.

As in most ghettos during the Nazi occupation, in the Kovno ghetto, too, the duties of the Jewish police can be divided into two main categories:¹⁵

(1) Complying with the demands of the German authorities as imposed on it either directly or through the intermediary of the Ältestenrat. These included recruiting people for forced labor outside the ghetto; making arrests of individuals and groups; taking part in consignments to labor camps outside the ghetto; collecting and confiscating articles, valuables, apparel, and various materials.

(2) Dealing with the internal needs of the ghetto's inhabitants, such as carrying out inspections for cleanliness and orderliness; dealing with criminal matters and bringing offenders to trial; guarding the entire inside of the ghetto fence and its gates and related matters.

As a result of the firmly entrenched view at the time that the ghetto existed solely by virtue of the forced labor performed by its inhabitants – labor which contributed to Germany's war effort—this subject received paramount importance in Ältestenrat policy and influenced administrative activities,

¹⁴ On August 17, 1941, two days after the Jews' incarceration in the ghetto, the boundaries of the ghetto's four quarters were determined for administrative and other purposes. After an *Aktion* was carried out on October 4 of that year among most of the inhabitants of the first quarter, the “Small Ghetto” neighborhood, the area of this quarter was removed from the ghetto, leaving it with only three quarters. Accordingly, the ordinal numbers of the three remaining quarters were also changed from 2-4 to 1-3. This division continued up to January 1, 1944, when all of Quarter 1 was removed from the ghetto, leaving it with only two quarters of the original ghetto.

¹⁵ See Aharon Weiss, “The Relations Between the Judenrat and the Jewish Police,” Yisrael Gutman, ed., *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe, 1933-1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), p. 211.

logistics, and so on. The Labor Office (*Arbeitsamt*) had the general responsibility for meticulously filling the “labor quota” (*Arbeitseinsatz*) imposed on most of the ghetto’s inhabitants (men aged 16-57; women aged 17-46). In order to locate, arrest, and punish shirkers, the *Arbeitsamt* made use of the police apparatus. In addition to enforcement of compulsory labor and other orders issued by the ghetto authorities, the Jewish police also—not infrequently—had to participate to varying degrees in sending Jews away from the ghetto, in *Aktionen*, and, in rare cases, to comply with the demands of the German security institutions to hand Jews over to them, despite the attendant risks. For example, when ghetto resident Nahum Meck was caught red-handed shooting at a German symbol and the Gestapo threatened to take drastic measures against the entire ghetto population, the police were forced “broken-hearted to arrest as hostages twenty people who were known in the ghetto as prostitutes, feeble-minded men, as well as a number of terminally ill people.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is known that in certain instances the ghetto leadership and the police acted hand in hand with the leaders of the underground in taking stringent measures (including executions) against Jews who committed murders in the ghetto, as well as against Jews who had divulged to outsiders information that was likely to harm the underground and jeopardize all of the ghetto’s inhabitants.¹⁷

At the beginning of September 1941, some two weeks after the sealing off of the ghetto, the number of those serving in the police totaled 270.¹⁸ Many of them, particularly the commissioned ranks, had previously served in the army and been members of athletic clubs, or of Zionist and other movements and parties. Some of them had secondary or higher education. Frequently police-manning levels were cut back, with reshuffles in the middle and senior command echelons, for various reasons, such as unsatisfactory performance, pressures by outside bodies (such as the German security authorities and their representatives inside the ghetto), as well as in the wake of constant organizational changes.

¹⁶ Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno’s Jewry*, p. 136. For various reasons, the Germans did not harm these hostages.

¹⁷ For details, see Brown and Levin, *Story of an Underground*, p. 237; and cf. also Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno’s Jewry*, p. 175.

¹⁸ “The Manuscript,” p. 133; on “The Manuscript,” see below.

Even after the 1942 cutbacks in manpower,¹⁹ the police remained the best-organized and strongest body in the ghetto. Unlike other ghettos, most of the Kovno ghetto policemen had previously lived in the same city, and many of them had been closely involved in Jewish communal life. As a result, many of them were known to the ghetto's residents. Even if this fact positively influenced the image of the police among the ghetto's residents to some extent, it could not forestall criticism (sometimes rather harsh) of its general functioning and the behavior of certain policemen in particular.²⁰

The Ghetto Police in Their Own Eyes As Depicted in the Police Manuscript

Acutely aware of the national task, which, in their opinion, the ghetto police was carrying out for the sake of the Jewish public, on the one hand, and the criticism directed at it by vast numbers of the ghetto residents, on the other hand, the heads of the police—apparently in 1942²¹—secretly assigned one or several of its members to prepare a written Manuscript (referred to here as

¹⁹ In fact, manpower was gradually reduced: 235 at the end of September 1941; 224 on March 17, 1942; 177 on May 15, 1942, and slightly over 150 in November 1942. From then until the liquidation of the police in March 1944 (see below), the numbers remained practically constant.

²⁰ This phenomenon is expressed in different ways in a considerable part of the historiography of the Kovno ghetto; see, for example, Gar, *Destruction*, p. 304; Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno's Jewry*, p. 184; his above-mentioned book also quotes two ghetto songs ("When We Return from Work" and "Tell Me, Jew from the Ghetto") that contain stinging sarcastic remarks about corruption and profligacy among the policemen; *ibid.*, pp. 284-291. Also see below in this connection.

²¹ No precise date for "The Manuscript" has yet been found. An authentic reference to this undertaking was given in the testimony taken by Mrs. Rivka Gutman in Munich, in 1946, from a former policeman in the Kovno ghetto, Hirsch Neiburger: "Thanks to the ghetto police, and in particular thanks to the police commander, Yehuda Zupovitz, a start was made on collecting material about the history of the ghetto in Kovno"; Neiburger, "In the Kovno Ghetto," p. 156. Josef Gar wrote in his book, published in 1948: "The ghetto police also clandestinely kept lists of the events in the ghetto. Some of these lists fell into the hands of a ghetto inhabitant named Lippman, and as to what happened to all of this – nobody knows"; Gar, *Destruction*, p. 385. One way or the other, it is possible to determine that all the above sources refer to "The Manuscript" discussed here. There is no doubt that it was not the only such work in the ghetto, since in other sources reference is made to specific people (such as D. Itzkovitz, A. Balosher, Dr. S. Gringaus, Dr. R. Volsonok, B. Tubin, A. Cohen, Y. Kaplan, Ch. N. Shapira, and others) who recorded the events in the Kovno ghetto, whether with the blessing of the Jewish establishment or on their own initiative. Writing about one of them, Abba Balosher, "one of the senior Zionist figures in the city of Kovno, intellectual, scholar, and littérateur," Garfunkel comments (*Destruction of Kovno's Jewry*, p. 237) that "in the ghetto he was given the task of keeping the book of chronicles of the events in the ghetto." Cf. also Gar, *Destruction*, p. 385; *Pinkas Hakehillot Lithuania*, p. 543; Dov Levin, *Between Spark and Flame: The 'Brit Zion Organization' in the Second World War* (Hebrew) (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1987), p. 31.

“The Manuscript”) on the history of the Jewish police in the Kovno ghetto from the day that it had been established. The original name of this manuscript in Yiddish was: “*Di geshichte fun der Vilijampoler Iddisher geto politsai*” (“The History of the Jewish Police in Vilijampole”). The writers were provided with relevant documentary material and would appear to have had relatively reasonable conditions for reviewing facts and writing them down. “The Manuscript” was buried in a tin-covered chest in the ghetto, apparently on March 28, 1944. It was discovered by chance twenty years later, in 1964. The material remained in the possession of the Soviet security authorities (KGB) for about a year. For the next twenty-five years it remained hidden in the Lithuanian national archives, until it was partially revealed little by little to interested parties. It was not until 1997 that two chapters were first published in the original Yiddish.²²

“The Manuscript” was typewritten on 253 folio pages,²³ comprising eleven chapters, a preamble, an introduction, and a detailed table of contents (see Appendix). Most of it deals—generally in chronological order—with the activities of the Jewish police, set against the background of the history of the ghetto over a year and a half—from August 1941 to the end of 1942—with its addenda continuing to the beginning of 1943. The entire Manuscript, apart from a few words, is written in Yiddish, which was the vernacular of Lithuanian Jewry between the two wars, but there is an occasional tendency to use

²² According to Esther Meirovitz-Schwarz, the senior archivist who dealt with the material in the state archive, in the box together with “The Manuscript” additional material was found, including files of documents and various objects of the Kovno ghetto police, dating from August 16, 1941, to November 1943. At the end of the 1980s, she helped researchers from YIVO, New York, to obtain some of this material, including “The Manuscript,” and when, in 1990, she immigrated to Israel she brought with her an additional copy, of which a copy is in the Yad Vashem Archives, S.N. 14391. Two chapters of “The Manuscript” (Chapters 6 and 11) were published verbatim under the title of “History of the Kovno Jewish Police (Excerpts)” (Yiddish), together with an introduction by Esther Meirovitz-Schwarz and notes by Dov Levin in *YIVO Bleter, New Series*, Vol. III (1997), pp. 206-295. See also the testimony of Azriel Levi, “Coming of Age Under the Soviets and the Nazis,” (Hebrew, unpublished ms., 1995), p. 12. Levi relates that he was one of three members of an underground squad of Irgun Brit Zion sent to retrieve two tin-covered sealed crates, containing the police ghetto archive, from the home of the murdered police officer Ikkah Greenberg on March 28, 1944. The squad buried the crates that night in the ghetto.

²³ Every page is headed by three running numbers, which are not identical. It may logically be assumed that the numbering was provided during different time periods. The last set of numbering— on the right-hand side of the pages— was apparently written many years after World War II by the staff of the State Archives of Soviet Lithuania. This numbering will be used from now on for reference purposes and for notes about various details in “The Manuscript”.

idioms from Germanized Yiddish, known as “*Daitschmerisch*.” Despite the generally clear and lucid style of writing, “The Manuscript” contains a fair number of repeated subjects, dates, and so on. The text contains quite a few spelling mistakes and transposed letters in words. This apparently occurred when a handwritten original was transcribed to a typewriter. Here and there are penned-in corrections.

From text analysis and references, both direct and indirect, in various places in “The Manuscript,”²⁴ it can be determined that most of it was written in the second half of 1942, and through 1943 (including the fall months), when the process of turning the ghetto into a concentration camp was already fully underway. In the course of recounting the history of the police, much background information is related (sometimes forming complete chapters) about all the events in the ghetto, as well as details relating to the people involved in these events. There are also some comments about a number of people referred to in “The Manuscript”, together with assessments of their activities—whether in empathy, or with critical overtones, in particular with regard to former officials. Less and more muted criticism of people still occupying senior positions (both formal and informal) in the ghetto leadership generally, and in the police command specifically, is occasionally voiced. One such comment relates to the police chief himself. It says that K. (Koppelman) had failed to take appropriate measures against policemen who acted corruptly “because of his weak and irresolute character.” Nevertheless, in this connection emphasis was put on the fact that “personally he is as straight and as clean as pure water.”²⁵

“The Manuscript”—particularly the chapters quoted here—also abounds in fairly severe criticism of “a number of the policemen who do not behave as those maintaining public order on behalf of the population, nor as those sharing suffering in those conditions and troubles, but as privileged people.” A

²⁴ Such as on page 89, where reference is made to the way that the inhabitants of the ghetto adapted to the ongoing suffering and a parenthetical comment is made to the effect that this referred to twenty months. From this it may be deduced that this sentence was written in June 1943. On page 158, it says explicitly that “these lines were written at the end of August 1943.” Elsewhere in “The Manuscript” (p. 243), it is noted that the money-less economic system, which was introduced in the ghetto in August 1942, has continued to today - November 1943.

²⁵ “The Manuscript,” p. 115 Most of them are referred to in “The Manuscript” by means of their first letter only. This applies also to institutions such as the Gestapo, referred to by means of the letter “G,” and so forth.

little later this statement is qualified: “Not all policemen are like this,” and, nevertheless, “the general impression is that the police constitute a special caste of select, privileged people.” Elsewhere it is even asserted that, in many cases, the policemen had learned haughtiness, arrogance, and brutality from the Germans in relating to the ghetto population.²⁶

Apart from these and other passages, expressing biting self-criticism and indicating instances of moral corruption among senior policemen, such as a licentious and debauched party on the night of April 13, 1942, with the participation of senior officers,²⁷ throughout the entire Manuscript (perhaps because of a lack of perspective) there is practically no hint of the nature of the role that, retrospectively, the Jewish ghetto police could be seen to have played as an efficient tool of the German government vis-à-vis the Jewish population. This painful and frustrating subject is touched upon indirectly in one sentence ascribing formal responsibility for everything that happened in the ghetto to the Ältestenrat, since “the police is subordinate to the Ältestenrat.”²⁸ Nevertheless, the text states that the ghetto population “hates only the police.”²⁹ Similar opinions and more vehement comments directed against the police and its behavior did indeed correspond to the feelings of the ghetto’s inhabitants and, in particular, of those who considered the police to be responsible for the loss of their families. Accusatory and hostile references to the ghetto establishment, including the police, are also evident in a number of popular poems and various personal memoirs written both during and after the ghetto period.³⁰

For understandable reasons, “The Manuscript” contains no references to the involvement of police personnel in the activities of the anti-Nazi underground

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 119-120. The quotations are on page 120.

²⁷ When this event became known in the ghetto, a committee of inquiry was appointed by the Ältestenrat, and several officers were removed from office; *ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 106.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 122.

³⁰ Sarcastic jibes at authority (police) figures in the Kovno ghetto are to be found in popular songs such as “Der Komitetshick” (The Ältestenrat Functionary), “Yalles” (Dignitaries), “Nit Ayer Mazel” (Your Luck Didn’t Hold), “Hoicher Mann” (The Tall Man), Gar, *Destruction*, pp. 407-412, and cf. also one of the commonest sayings in the ghetto: “*Yeder yalle / hot zain kalle / un politsai / hot zu tsvai*” (“every dignitary has his lovely / and a policeman has two”); *ibid.*, p. 417. On a stern conversation at the end of 1943, between a Jewish policeman and a young ghetto resident whose relatives had been sent, by that policeman, to labor camps whence they never returned, see Dov Levin, “Ruins and Remembrance,” *Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto*, p. 227 (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1997), and cf. note 20 above.

or any other clandestine activities, even though policemen are known to have been involved in such activities.

The preface to “The Manuscript” refers directly to the writers’ awareness of the long-term significance of their work:

The authors of these chronicles are themselves policemen; and so they will look at things, so to speak, through police lenses; nevertheless, they will try their very best to maintain objectivity... The future historian should find in this text fairly objective material about the history of the Jews of Kovno in the terrible years of 1941 and 1942... and this is the primary purpose of the following lines.³¹

Indeed, an examination of “The Manuscript” shows that the authors would appear to have fulfilled their undertaking. However, this was mainly because, when it came to “delicate” and controversial matters, they made do repeatedly with feeble generalizations or entirely failed to refer to them. Thus, in Chapter 11, which deals with the last quarter of 1942, there is a glaring absence of two events that at the time terrified the ghetto and in which the Jewish police were involved (against their will): the shipping of 349 men, women, and children to the Riga ghetto on October 23, and the public hanging, on November 18, of a ghetto resident, Nahum Meck, referred to earlier, who had shot a German commander of the Ghetto Guard.³²

It would be worthwhile to compare systematically the important topics cited throughout “The Manuscript” with the greatest possible array of relevant sources about the Kovno ghetto—the hundreds of documents, memoirs, and research studies published around the world since the Holocaust. Such a comprehensive research study of the Kovno ghetto will hopefully be carried out one day. However, the limited framework of this article does not allow for a thorough discussion of all eleven of “The Manuscript”’s chapters. What follows

³¹ “The Manuscript,” p. 5.

³² Since January 11, the German ghetto guard (Ghettowache) had been located in the center of the ghetto in Stulginskio Street, in order to closely control its inhabitants. The guards, headed by the commander – the *Ghettokommandant* (whom the Jews called “the Kommandant”) – would not infrequently treat the ghetto’s Jews with brutality (including killings) even for the most minor “offense”, and so their mere appearance was terrifying. The guard personnel were stationed around the ghetto fence and therefore quite frequently interfered in what went on inside the ghetto. On numerous occasions the Kommandant would punish “criminal” Jews by means of complaints submitted against them to the Jewish police, including compelling the latter to detain them in the local jail.

is excerpts from three chapters: one on the “Great *Aktion*” (Chapter 3.7) and two (Chapters 6 and 11) that deal with the administrative and organizational system of the Kovno Ghetto Police—an important subject that impacted on a number of areas of ghetto life.

At a time when the subject of the administrative system of the Jewish police has not been sufficiently elucidated in the overall historiography of the ghettos, including the Kovno ghetto, “The Manuscript” under consideration contains an impressive concentration of systematic information on this subject, particularly in Chapters 6 and 11. Chapter 6 addresses police activities in the Kovno ghetto from November 1941 to April 1942, i.e., at the beginning of the “Quiet Period.” According to the contents of this chapter, apparently up to December 1941, the police in fact had no real authority; therefore, it was not obeyed by the ghetto population and was even treated with contempt.

In December 1941, major changes occurred in the top echelons of the police command: the appointment of a young officer, Yehuda Zupovitz,³³ as police chief and of Avraham Shulman as head of his office, and this resulted in a series of personnel and organizational changes. Chapter 11 (which is also the last chapter of the text of the extant Manuscript) relates to a considerable part of the police activities in the Kovno ghetto in September-November 1942, i.e., in the middle of the “Quiet Period.” The information and statistical data in these chapters provide a comprehensive picture, as well as clear and systematic details about the structure of the police and its activities to a greater extent than in the other chapters.

Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that this material, as well as the technical-functional details of the general administrative system in the ghetto are likely to contribute quite considerably to comparative research of the internal life in other ghettos in Eastern Europe generally and, specifically, in

³³ Yehuda Zupovitz, a former army reserve officer and active member of Betar and the Irgun Zva'i Leumi, and the commander of the third precinct, was appointed to replace Michael Bramson. Zupovitz steadily rose through the ranks of the ghetto police command, eventually reaching the position of police inspector and deputy to the police chief, Moshe Levin, after the latter replaced Michael Koppelman in this post. There is a great deal of material in “The Manuscript” about the central role played by Zupovitz in heightening public and national awareness among the Jewish police (see p. 249). At the end of March 1944, he was among the forty or so Jewish policemen murdered at the Ninth Fort for assisting the ghetto's underground and refusing to reveal the hiding places of the ghetto's children.

Lithuania. One of the most important comparative topics is the nature of the relationship between the Jewish police and the anti-Nazi underground movements in a series of ghettos that share a certain common denominator, as well as sufficient relevant documentary material.³⁴

The excerpt from Chapter 3.7, dealing with police activities during the “Great *Aktion*,” can provide something of an introduction to this subject. The “Great *Aktion*” was a major trauma to the Jewish public, and a watershed in how the police force was organized (Chapter 6 begins three days after the conclusion of the subject of Chapter 3.7). This chapter is written in a spirit of identification with the suffering Jewish public and also out of a desire to justify the authors and be depicted as partners of the Jews, not the Germans. The accounts of rescue attempts in this chapter reflect the close ties of many of the policemen with the people. The willingness of a number of them to act clandestinely against the Germans’ plans during the *Aktion* fits into the subsequent picture of cooperation between certain policemen and members of the underground.

In “The Manuscript” this cardinal issue is, above all, embodied in a dramatic passage describing a solemn Hebrew and Yiddish police swearing-in ceremony with Jewish nationalist overtones. On November 1, 1942, each of the 152 policemen and their commanders signed a written undertaking to the police “to devote all my abilities and the best of my experience to the benefit of the Hebrew community of the ghetto.”³⁵

Almost forty³⁶ of those who signed this undertaking (including the senior commander who initiated the event and the policeman who expressed solidarity during the ceremony) later abided by it honorably. At risk to their own lives, on March 27-28, 1944, during the *Aktion* against the children and elderly, they refused to comply with the Germans’ demands that they disclose where the underground and the children were hiding. These policemen were

³⁴ Among others, the reference is to the ghettos of Kovno, Riga, and Zhetl (Żdzięcioł; Diatlovo) on the one hand, and the ghettos of Vilna, Warsaw, and Minsk on the other. There is a relatively large amount of material on these ghettos.

³⁵ The full text appears in chapter 11 below (from page 251 of “The Manuscript”). The wording of the undertaking together with the signatures of all those who thus committed themselves first appeared in the article by Aya Ben-Naftali, “The Written Oath Sworn by the Jewish Police in the Kovno Ghetto” (Hebrew), *Massuah*, 21 (1993), pp. 271-274.

³⁶ According to the list of names cited in Brown and Levin, *Story of an Underground*, pp. 354-355, thirty-nine policemen were murdered. A similar figure is also cited in other sources. See Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno’s Jewry*, p. 183; Gar, *Destruction*, p. 216. In contrast, Hirsch Neiburger, “In the Kovno Ghetto,” p. 156, refers to thirty-three.

brutally tortured and murdered, leaving an inscription in Yiddish on the wall of the Ninth Fort, which reads: “Jews, if one of you remains alive, know that here there perished in a terrible fashion the men of the Kovno ghetto Jewish police. Our hands are clean of Jewish blood. Death to the murderers! Long live the Jewish people.”³⁷

In contrast to these policemen and officers, there were those who actually volunteered to assist in locating the victims and to serve the Germans faithfully in the new police framework of the *Ordnungsdienst*.³⁸

Indeed, both types were to be found among the men of the Jewish police in the Kovno ghetto.

Translated from the Hebrew by Ruth Morris

Chapter 3.7: The “Great Aktion” – October 28, 1941

What did the police do at the square, what did they do for the population?

The police had freedom of movement at the square; they could pass through undisturbed from one side to the other because they were already checked, and visible due to their uniform. Their foremost task was to maintain order in the square.

Jewish police guards surrounded all the people who were selected to the right. From this people began to think that right is good, because those on the left were taken aside by the Partisans, and on the right—by our own Jewish police.

A little later, when we, so to speak, realized what was happening, the police, besides its official assignment, began its unofficial mission, which was, in as much as possible, to rescue people on the right side. The possibilities were

³⁷ Ben-Naftali, “The Written Oath,” p. 274.

³⁸ This organization, comprising some fifty people, was formally headed by the Gestapo representative in the ghetto, Benno Lipcer, and run de facto under the command of Police Sergeant Tanhum Arnshtam, previously known for his brutal behavior. After the war the Soviets sentenced him to an extended prison term. Gar, *Destruction*, p. 218; cf. Brown and Levin, *Story of an Underground*, pp. 355, 360.

very limited, and the practical results—which were later evident—were also not substantial....³⁹

The scenes and tragedies that took place at the square, where we were but silent witnesses, are not easily relayed. There were many scenes and heartbreaking tragedies. There were cases in which people lost each other at the square and could not find one another. The crowd was extremely large, and the rush and congestion so great, that if one got lost, it was difficult to find him. It happened that a wife and her children would go to the left, the husband to the right, or vice versa. There were also cases in which families were split by the Germans—half to the right, half to the left. In cases where large families themselves split into two groups, it would happen that a part went right and a part left. There were also cases in which people, who were already standing in the column on the left, would run over to the column on the right. Many times the partisans or the Germans would notice this, and while beating them, would drag them out of the column, chasing them to the left....

At approximately 6 o'clock, the selection was completed, the guards were removed, the Germans and Lithuanians left. It was announced to those who remained that everyone would soon be allowed to go home.

When they came to announce that people could go home, the police first announced that five hundred people were needed for the night shift [at the airport], and that these people were requested to present themselves voluntarily. All those who would remain here would continue to live in the ghetto only on the basis of work at the airport, and therefore, all those obligated to work, are ordered to present themselves voluntarily.

It was characteristic that those who had just stood on the edge of the abyss and who only by chance, remained on this side, just a minute later were engaged in propaganda claiming that the airport and fulfilling labor obligations meant their existence...

The crowds streamed home; frozen, tired and hungry, they all rushed back. Everyone was happy that he himself had survived but with a stricken heart over dear ones who were torn away.

³⁹On individual rescue acts by Elkes and Jewish Police Chief Koppelman during the *Aktion*, see also Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 52-54.

When everyone dispersed, remaining on the square, left lying on the ground, abandoned and forgotten by all, were the sick...

This is the way it was with all the sick: the sick and the old, who could not walk, were sent to the left, and because there were no means of transportation, they were ordered to be laid down on the ground at the side, to the left, in one row, and to take them later on wagons into the small ghetto. During the day Jordan passed by the row of those old and sick lying down and counted them. At that time there were twenty-eight people, and he ordered for them to be brought later into the small ghetto. In the evening when they [the Germans] had already reached their quota of people on that side, the sick, who were laid aside in order to be transported, were completely forgotten.⁴⁰ Later when everyone went home, the police who were the last to remain in order to clean the square, found forty-something sick and old people lying there. What should they do now? One thing was clear, that the twenty-eight that Jordan had counted must be delivered to the small ghetto, this could not be helped...

The rest of the sick who remained lying in the square each had to be taken to their home. The few wagons could not manage, and many of the sick had to be carried by hand. There were heartbreaking scenes and each one asked to be taken as soon as possible. There were few wagons; there was no way and no strength to take everyone home. Family members of a few of the sick came and took them; others who had no one, or whose relatives did not know [that they were there], were at the mercy of God, and thus, some of the sick were carried into the houses near the square, in order that they be taken home the following day.

Eight babies were also found alive at the square. They lay among the sick and old, wrapped in swaddling clothes and in rags, frozen and weak, but they were still alive. The policemen carried the babies to a nearby house for the night, so that they could make arrangements for them the following day. This is

⁴⁰Garfunkel, in *Destruction of Kovno's Jewry*, p. 75, notes that the weak and ill that remained in the houses were loaded onto trucks and sent to the Ninth Fort. The version in "The Manuscript" seems more reliable. Garfunkel adds (*ibid.*, p. 76) that twenty corpses of elderly people remained in the square after the selection. Tory, *Surviving*, p. 55, mentions in passing "several dozen bodies of elderly and sick people who had died of exhaustion." Here, too, "The Manuscript" seems more reliable.

characteristic of the relations between people by some of our Jews. The babies were forcibly left in the nearby homes, which by no means wanted to take in the frozen, hungry, little orphans, who were scattered on the ground, overnight. With force and threatened that if they would not take in some of the children, they themselves would be taken to the small ghetto, they barely agree.⁴¹

What took place that night in the small ghetto? As some who saved themselves that night and early the next morning have recounted, many of those who came into the small ghetto were sure that they would remain there and live....

Early the next day, October 29, at four o'clock, multitudes of Partisans and Germans came to the ghetto and began to chase everyone from their homes amidst beatings....

People began to be transported to the Ninth Fort; long columns continued for hours without stop and without an end. Ten thousand people continued up the hill in an unending death procession; they were pushed and chased by the Partisans to death and annihilation. We at the bottom stood at the fences and windows and watched, looking with eyes flooded with bloody tears, and wounded hearts, at how our unfortunate parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, dear close ones, innocent, good, Jews were being lead up the hill to the gruesome, unprecedented mass annihilation.

Today we are one hundred percent certain that all 10,000 Jews were murdered without any remnants. According to what Lithuanians related, after the Jews were stripped of their clothing, they were driven in groups into the ditches and shot to death with automatic weapons. The children, the innocent babies, were taken from their mothers, thrown alive into the ditches, and

⁴¹Garfunkel (ibid., pp. 73-76), who oversaw the police on behalf of the Ältestenrat, hardly mentions rescue activity by Jewish policemen at this stage. This chapter relates rescue initiatives by policemen that seem to have been more effective than the known rescue attempts by individual policemen in other ghettos. Such was the case in Warsaw, Siedlce, and elsewhere. In contrast, policemen in the Będzin and Kraków (second deportation) ghettos consciously avoided such rescue activity. See Aharon Weiss, *The Jewish Police in the Generalgouvernement and Upper Silesia during the Holocaust*, (Hebrew) Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1973, pp. 104, 150-151, 159, 178, 358-360. The Jewish police in the Otwock ghetto also had freedom of movement, but they were deceived and their families were included among the deportees. According to Calel Perechodnik, the police were "incapable of any act, thought, and even speech..."; Calel Perechodnik, *Am I A Murderer? Testament of a Jewish Ghetto Policeman*, edited and translated by Frank Fox (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), p. 37

blown apart by hand grenades. Words cannot describe the horrific scenes which, according to the Lithuanians, took place at the Ninth Fort during the shooting of the 10,000 Jews...⁴²

This was the finale of the Great *Aktion*, which, with blood-soaked letters, is transcribed into our tormented history.

October 28 becomes for us, if we will remain alive, one of the blackest days in the history of the ghetto.

Chapter 6:

The Development of the Administrative and Police Apparatus After the “Great *Aktion*”

As mentioned, following the Great *Aktion* we slowly entered into a second period, a time in which everything began to slowly stabilize and calm down. Then, one could not control the transition—the transition period, but now, when we look back to that time, we see that it was the beginning of a new period of time.

New offices were established and existing ones⁴³ were reorganized and stabilized...In the course of time, the police [force] was also swept up, things began to run differently. An entire array of reforms were implemented that set the work up differently, and gave it another more orderly character.

Before we get to the reforms, we will give a brief overview of the development of the internal work of the police, from the first day forward, and then will gradually reach the various changes and transformations that took place in the police, from its founding until March 1942.⁴⁴

When establishing the police, the organizers did not have a clear picture of its future assignments. There was no concept as to how it would

⁴²This number seems to have been rounded off upward by a few hundred and has become the commonly-referred to number.

⁴³Before the Great *Aktion*, the following offices (*Amten*) functioned in the ghetto, in addition to the police and the fire department: Labor; Housing; Health; Economy; Nutrition; Statistics; Social Welfare. Each office had various sub-divisions.

⁴⁴Based on what is discussed in the following paragraphs, it can be surmised that the administrative and professional development of the police was halted in March-August 1942, as a result of a number of events, including the intervention of Gestapo-functionary Josef Caspi-Serebrovitz (see note 69 below).

appear, be formed and organized, just as we had no concept at all as to how life altogether in the ghetto would appear. One thing, however, was clear to the organizers, that the police should and must be an organization which is based on military discipline.

As already stated above, immediately in the first days, the administrative office was established.⁴⁵ Right from the first days a matriculation point was sectioned off in which all cases of births and deaths in the ghetto were registered.⁴⁶

In the first days, people were not scared of the police (the practice of beating was [only] later mastered by our police), because it did not have and means of enforcement. There was, as yet, no prison; monetary fines as punishment was then impossible, after the “Gold-Aktion.”⁴⁷ Thus, the police operated only by moral persuasion, with which one could not accomplish much. The policemen would agonize over every Jewish woman. Therefore, there were many cases in which, due to the lack of respect and fear of the police, multitudes of people—especially those who burst into the vegetable gardens and removed the fences⁴⁸ —attacked the policeman who forbade them to do these things, and [then] beat him up.

All of the work in the initial period bore an organizational-social character, and not a police one....

[The Changes in the Senior Command]⁴⁹

The actual greater reforms within the police, after which the internal work was completed and implemented, began in the month of December [1941].

⁴⁵This unit is first mentioned in “The Manuscript,” p. 28. This was the highest-ranking unit in the ghetto police and was composed of the police chief, his deputy, the police inspector, field commanders, the head of the office’ and several assistants.

⁴⁶According to “The Manuscript,” p. 29, the first death in the ghetto was recorded by the police on August 17, 1941.

⁴⁷This was the name of the German decree of September 4, 1941, ordering the Jews to hand over all gold and silver items, silver currency and negotiable notes, and precious gems still in their possession. The items were to be delivered to collecting stations set up by the Ältestenrat and the Jewish police. Shirkers would be shot, together with their families and neighbors.

⁴⁸Following the riots that erupted when many ghetto inhabitants broke into the remaining vegetable gardens in the ghetto in order to take potatoes and other vegetables, the police issued a stern warning, on August 25, 1941, against such acts. Similar prohibitions were issued against dismantling wood fences and houses, which Jews were doing to get cooking fuel and, later, for heating fuel.

⁴⁹Bracketed sub-headings are additions by the author.

On December 1 a reform in the command was implemented. The new deputy [police] chief Mr. Z[upovitz], a young man with little life experience was, however, full of youthful courage and energy, and was not long out of officer school. The knowledge that he gained there he applied energetically and widely—although often times a little overdone—[into his work] within the ghetto police, and one must note, not without success.

The chief's administrative office was reformed, and was now called the Polizei Zentrale or Center in short. An authentic stately administrative office was established. We were transferred to a new building . The new administrative chief Mr. A. Sh. [Avraham Shulman], a veteran of many years of service—a typical bureaucrat—set up the work in the administrative office in an orderly fashion.

The older, physically weaker [people] were fired, and later, in January, a whole series of younger and more energetic people were employed....

In connection with the reforms and cuts, during the month of December twenty-nine men were removed from the police [force].... As well, during this month of reforms a criminal department was established.

The personnel chart for December 1941, ... that is until January 1, 1942, shows... 208 men.⁵⁰ The general total was relatively not much less, while the number of assignments to fulfill increased and became more branched out.

[Regulations]

It [the work] began to function as in a normal state apparatus. Everything, the entire service implementation, the relations with the population, all the rights and duties – emanated from the basis of the authority by which everything was done. The basis of all police work was the statute of regulations, the law of internal order. The regulations were publicized in December 1941.⁵¹ They encompass the entire internal work of the police, determine the rights and

⁵⁰This includes 158 policemen and commanders, investigators, medical staff, registration office, and more.

⁵¹Although the date here is not complete, it can be surmised that it was December 18, 1941, as indicated in "The Manuscript," p. 147.

assignments of all functionaries in the fulfillment of their duties. The statute of regulations consists of 63 paragraphs divided as follows:

General Rules.

Police Officials

Police Departments.

In number three, the following are subdivided: a) the Central Office; b) police chief and his deputy; c) on-duty commander; d) police inspector and officials for special cases; e) police prosecutor and investigators; f) precincts.

Penal Regulations.

The Police and the Population ...⁵²

4. Penal Regulations

In order that the work of the police be performed precisely, the police activity is based on the principle of discipline. Every violation of the established disciplinary regulations is punished. The seniors in rank who punish the policemen must base their reasons not emotionally, but must objectively and strictly investigate the case, and then punish the violator accordingly.

The punishments include:

Warning

Reprimand

Extra Service

Service Reprimand

Internment

Demotion

⁵²Part 1 addressed disciplinary regulations for the police and the ghetto population. Part 2 related the police ranks (policeman, sergeant, deputy precinct commander, precinct commander, commander for special matters, police inspector, deputy police chief, police chief) and the administrative workers. Part 3 detailed the functions of the Central Office headed by the police chief and his deputy, and the functions and jurisdictions of the various commanders. The police divisions were: the Central Office, three precincts, the criminal department, the population registry office, the prison. Parts 4 and 5 are in the text above.

All of these punishments are administered by the precinct chiefs and deputies,, the police inspector, and the police chief. Only rarely is the punishment implemented in full.

Further, the procedure was set for a policeman to appeal to the police chief regarding the punishment imposed by his commander.

The Police and the Population

The police officials must treat the inhabitants courteously, strictly and justly.

The police can only in exceptional cases use physical force against undisciplined and disobedient citizens.

The policemen must, on the spot, transcribe a full protocol according to the determined forms. The protocol is submitted to the commander, namely the precinct commander, who examines the case and punishes within the limits of his authority, or, transfers the case with his remarks to the police chief.

The police chief considers the entire case and makes the appropriate punishment decision.

The precinct commander has the right to impose a fine of up to fifty rubles⁵³ and arrest of up to three days. The police inspector—up to 100 rubles and five days arrest. The police chief—up to seven days.

The decision of the police chief can be appealed to the chairman of the Ältestenrat via the police chief according to paragraph eighteen of the police statute of regulations.

This, briefly, is the police statute upon which the entire police work was established and ordered....

[Patterns of Work]

It is characteristic that the police work was conducted in Lithuanian. The commands, reports, accounts, protocols, the entire paperwork, the official conversations among the officials – all in Lithuanian (until February 1, 1943,

⁵³Ten rubles were worth one Reichsmark. A loaf of bread cost approximately forty rubles on the black market.

when everything was passed over to Yiddish).⁵⁴ This was not because the management or the policemen loved the Lithuanian language so much, on the contrary, the hatred of the Lithuanians, who carried out unheard of, horrible massacres, was great. They and their language were deathly hated. There was, however, here another deeper psychological significance.

The entire youth was familiar with the Lithuanian language from military service, schools and universities. One was psychologically used to hearing a command, an order to follow in Lithuanian. It appeared that giving a command in Yiddish was out of place; one would not really obey, and it would sound non-military ...

Thus, psychologically, a non-Jewish approach to everything was developed, namely – no hair splitting, no questioning, no insubordination, and, doing what was requested.

The simple policeman was courteous and obeyed the commander. The precinct chief, and everyone else, maintained the appropriate distance from the management. One is fearful and one obeys. A certain military discipline rules everywhere. A given order must immediately be carried out.

In the daily order of October 28, 1941, the ranks of the police officials were determined. In that same order, the ranks were detailed in order, as was the form of the insignias...

The level of discipline increased in the period of the new management. This was due to both objective and subjective reasons ... From the first day, the management attached importance to external appearances and to discipline. It was insisted upon that a policeman should outwardly make a good impression, should without question fulfill his duties, should, to a certain extent, be a soldier.

The new administration is disliked perhaps because it focuses too much on the outward impression- it reeks, somewhat, of snobbism- which under the ghetto circumstances is completely out of place. This is perhaps

⁵⁴Prior to this date sentences in Yiddish increasingly crept into the internal paperwork of the police. It is not clear why the full transition to Yiddish happened on this date, but it can be surmised that upon seeing that the Germans were not interfering with their partial use of Yiddish, and since this was the “quiet period,” the police decided to go over to Yiddish for a trial period. This was for internal affairs.

correct, however, one thing must be emphasized, that the new administration introduced more order- one is fearful of being punished and one obeys.

[The Center]

Externally, everything became better ordered. The Center, as mentioned, was transferred to a new building that was nicely renovated. One could only enter the administration office with advance notice. Everything, every [piece of] paper, had its place and its file. Nothing is lost. Everything is registered and arranged. Every citizen who submits a request or complaint receives a reply, regardless- a positive or simple one, but nothing is lost. Everything receives its process and form. If a citizen is punished, he is informed why, and according to which paragraph in the police statute. Additionally, at the same time [he is informed as to] where, and in what manner he can appeal the punishment.

Together with the administrative personnel the Center already constitutes a certain small unit: twenty-one men.⁵⁵

On January 26, 1942, with the permission of the Gebietskommissariat,⁵⁶ a telephone for internal use installed in the ghetto. This was a great achievement, that such a thing, which would facilitate life, was permitted in the ghetto. All the prior decrees had the sole purpose of making life difficult. Previously, there were special messengers who would run about from the gate to the precinct, according to what was needed. Now, if at the gate men are lacking something for work duty, one does not have to send runners, but can communicate and take care of everything via the telephone. In truth, they allowed for the installation of the telephone not for us, but for themselves. The ghetto guard was within the ghetto and they had to have a telephone.

Whatever the case may be, we benefited, thanks to them, when telephones were set up in all of the police units, and in all important offices of the magistrat. Later the [use of] the telephones was so extended, that telephones were installed in almost all offices, as well as [in the offices of]

⁵⁵These included a prosecutor, investigators, medical staff, administrative workers, and messengers.

⁵⁶The German administration in the Kovno district – Gebietskommissariat Kauen.

leading personalities in the ghetto. The entire technical arrangement of the telephones was administered by three policemen-telephone-operators, who were experienced in the field from the good days...

There was also a petty cash box in the Central Office. The police had various expenses, and money was needed to cover them. This too, was instituted in a stately fashion. The “cabinet of ministers,” in this case the Ältestenrat, gave the police money in the form of advance payments, according to a deduction-system: namely, the Center, from time to time, had to provide a precise account of how much, and where the money was used. The police had to contribute to the income of the Ältestenrat from the reports and fines that they collected, and entered these into the account, and, of course, benefited from the money and used it for its [own] needs. Genuinely state-like: contribution for income incorporated into the expenses, according to a deduction system- a true state, almost like in Eretz Yisrael... No need to elaborate...

[The Criminal Department]

As stated, in December 5, 1942, together with the new management, a new office was established within the ghetto police- the criminal department. It was established initially because, along with the development and normalization of ghetto life, cases of theft and break-ins began to increase. The Jews learned the trade no worse than the non-Jews...

As mentioned earlier, there were many dishonest people who sat in the different offices. There were cases of abuses, thefts, in which the guilty could not be discovered, cases of corruption and other similar crimes that were committed by the “trustee-thieves.” An office was needed to take care of the entire gang, to quietly investigate their activity and inspect their sources of income, how and from what did they make a living.

The founders of the criminal department undertook an additional assignment, a unique one, peculiar to the conditions in which we live. For the leaders of the ghetto it was known that there exist among us in the ghetto, Jews who serve the “G” [Gestapo]. Unfortunately a repulsive and sad phenomenon, but a fact. These Jews inform the “G” about everything that takes place in the

ghetto, remain in contact with them, go there very often and cause us not a few problems.

The names of the people who serve the “G” are known; where they work and live. The founders of the criminal department undertook the assignment of closely watching these people, to find them and follow them, check with whom they meet, what they speak about – to know precisely everything about them. Every step they take, in order that, in as much as possible, their activity be restricted in time.

The criminal department did not conduct the task of supervising the activity of the officials of the magistrat. Only a few cases can be noted in which conscienceless officials- or, better stated, simple thieves- were discovered. For example, some of the officials from the warehouse that held the belongings of those deported were apprehended stealing... In other cases, when the criminal department would want to pursue an investigation of an official, the push of a button would come from above [ordering] that these investigations be halted, because it was not appropriate and it was not necessary. Such investigations by the criminal department had to be interrupted due to “technical reasons”

In the name of objectivity it should be noted that not all of the officials of the criminal department were worthy, in light of their own performance, of conducting such types of investigations. Whatever the case may be, they did not achieve anything in this field.

In the matter of keeping an eye on the people who serve the “G”, very little was accomplished. The informers’ names and where they worked were known, and with this it ended. Not too much in this matter was done, this, too, out of fear.

Thus, in fact, the criminal department remained a body to fight criminal violators. As such it exists to this day. In this respect the criminal department was very successful, hundreds of cases of thefts were solved, the stolen goods were returned to their owners and the criminals punished. Here, too, the internal work was established with a system and with order. Every case, which was made against a citizen, had its file and its number. Each specific case was precisely investigated, with testimony and confrontation...

The criminal department is a separate unit, subordinate to the Central Office like a precinct, with the difference that a precinct conducts its activity within a limited territory, while the criminal department conducts its work throughout the entire territory of the ghetto, with a restricted field of activity. The head of the criminal department is higher in rank than a precinct commander, and has the rights of a police inspector.

...Later, it was instituted that every month the criminal department had to submit precise statistics in with data on... crimes committed ... All cases and incidents are precisely noted, classified, and have their appropriate place in the police archive.

[Prison]

At the same time a prison was established in the ghetto.⁵⁷ An innovation in the ghetto, Jewish prisoners imprison each other: a prison within a prison.

The creation of a prison was a necessity... The labor field-court, and later the mobilization department, would punish the [work] shirkers with internment or monetary fine.

With the establishment of the prison, the authority of the official offices grew.

The fear of being put in prison- or as it was referred to by us by its Lithuanian name “*dabokle*”⁵⁸ —caused many men to more accurately comply with the labor duty. Generally, it became a means to punish cases of [work] evasion, criminal violations and other offences.

The prison was accommodated in the courtyard of the “*Reservat*”,⁵⁹ in a block that remained empty after the Great *Aktion*.⁶⁰

The administration of the prison was made up of six men: one officer, one secretary, one sergeant, and three prison guards. The internal

⁵⁷ Apparently the reference is to the prison established in August 1941, on the edge of the ghetto, far from the main ghetto.

⁵⁸ *Dabokle* means detention room.

⁵⁹ This was the name by which the long, barrack-like building at 107 Krikščiuikaičio Street was known, where homeless people, invalids without families, and social cases lived in the beginning of the ghetto period.

⁶⁰ During the Great *Aktion*, most of the people in the “*Reservat*” were taken to the Ninth Fort and shot.

arrangement in the prison was conducted according to statutes and instructions certified by the police chief ...

The arrangement was flimsy in the first period...⁶¹ The commander of the third precinct, “G” [Yehoshua Ikkah Greenberg]⁶² was assigned as the provisional prison commander in order to set everything up orderly and systematically, and slowly, everything did in fact become arranged so that it became a proper prison, a place where there are men who must atone for a crime...

There was, however, another factor that placed the prison in the center of police duty, due to the workshops⁶³ established by the Stadtkommissariat.

As mentioned earlier, workshops were established in the ghetto that functioned exclusively for the Germans. The policemen were obligated, according to their daily orders, to guard the workshops day and night. The prison was located in the same courtyard as the workshops; both places had to be guarded day and night. Therefore, the entire matter was united, and the chief of the prison became, at the same time, the chief of the on-duty policemen in the workshops, too...

[Crimes and Misdemeanors – October 1941 – February 1942]

The offenses for which one could be put into prison were diverse. Many of them, for example criminal offenses, theft, fraud, and administrative [offenses], disturbing the public peace, fights, etc, were, in normal states daily occurrences and such things were punishable everywhere.

In the ghetto circumstances many things were, however, different. There were ghetto-specific offenses [committed by] citizens, which, under normal circumstances, would not be considered offenses, or which, for the most part, could not take place. However, in the ghetto, things were different. There were laws peculiar to our peculiar, exceptional life, and as a matter of

⁶¹“The Manuscript,” p. 149, describes prison conditions as follows: “The prison guards were not in their places. The prison was neglected and filthy. Everyone did whatever he wanted...”

⁶²Greenberg had been a reserve officer in the Lithuanian army and a senior member of the Irgun Brit Zion organization in the ghetto. He was among the forty policemen murdered at the end of March 1944, at the Ninth Fort for hiding the children and assisting the ghetto underground.

⁶³These were the ghetto workshops established on orders of the Stadtkommissar in December 1941. Hundreds of Jews were engaged in work for the German war effort.

course, also punishments for violating these specific laws. There were administrative offenses that were committed by citizens as a result of their bitter need, despair and indifference. In many cases the police would consider the circumstances and the individual who committed the offense and many times turn a blind eye. Most of the cases, however, had to be detected and punished according to the law, in order that it not occur again; such cases which create chaos and disturb internal order...⁶⁴

The ghetto guard, the N.S.K.K.⁶⁵ is located inside the ghetto itself and not like in the past, outside of it. The entrance of the ghetto guard ... into the ghetto made an impression on the entire internal life in the ghetto. They, the Germans, were everywhere, their presence was felt everywhere. They supervised and checked [to make sure that] the Jews kept their badges well sewn on, and warned the Jewish police to inspect this and punish. (Earlier, one had to wear yellow Stars of David made from cloth, and somewhat later they decreed that they be knitted into the clothes with yellow wool. A few months later, they regretted [this decision] and ordered that one wear only the yellow cloth Stars of David.)

A few times in the ghetto they apprehended Jews with badges that were not sewn on properly, or which were not properly knit in, and would beat [these Jews] because of it. The Jewish police in such cases had to intervene in order to spare the Jews from being beaten. Thus, they themselves punished those whose badges were not in order.

The Germans would also supervise the black- out of the windows; places that were not blacked-out would often be shot into through the windows. Luckily, for the most part, they did not hit the people [inside], and the matter ended with fear and damage. The Jewish ghetto police began to very strictly supervise the blackening [of the windows]...

⁶⁴This chapter includes monthly statistical tables on crime in the ghetto for the period August 1941 – February 1942. Six people were punished in August, and the numbers grew during this period, reaching 207 in February (see below). In October, twenty-one people were punished, seventeen of them for “resisting and insulting the police.” In November, 111 were punished: eighty-eight of them for “disobeying sanitation regulations,” and sixteen for “resisting and insulting the police.”

⁶⁵This was Company 4 of a German police transport unit called N.S.K.K. (Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps). It was assigned to guard the ghetto in January 1942. Its commander, until June 17, was *Truppenführer* A. Tiele.

Those punished for “violating the orders of the authorities” were, for the most part, those who the Germans apprehended going through, or doing business through the fence. There were also those who at the fence, returning from the city, were found with an unkosher package.⁶⁶ The commander would deliver the people to the Jewish police with the appropriate order as to how many days or weeks this person was to be interned in prison.

Another offense was trade between people. Street-trade developed. Trade in itself was forbidden. When one would trade on the side streets, the police would pretend not to see. The police and the Ältestenrat only warned that in the area of the Ältestenrat and on other more central streets—on which, for the most part, Germans and Lithuanians move about—it is strictly forbidden to do trade. The Jews did not obey and actually traded in forbidden areas. By order of the Ältestenrat, the police would therefore punish...

In February 1942, ...207 people were punished.⁶⁷

The month of February was marked by the mobilization of 500 people from our ghetto for work in Riga. We called this the Riga *Aktion* [February 8]...

All the dirty work, the recruiting of the people and leading them to the prison was, as always, in the hands of the police. It is [clear] that no one voluntarily wanted to travel to an unknown place. They had to be recruited with force. There were many cases of resistance, fighting and disobeying, for which people were also punished.

Many people in order not to fall among those who were being sent to Riga, copied police armbands and caps and wore them to the infamous Democracy Square, where Jordan called everyone to gather and where the people were selected. The police discovered this and the guilty were punished...

Chapter 11:

⁶⁶That was the term used by the ghetto inhabitants for packages of forbidden foods brought from the city.

⁶⁷Of these, 114 were punished for “disobeying registration orders.” This referred especially to those who were hastily removed from their homes on Vienožinskio Street, also known as the “Brazilke” area, on January 11. Thirty-seven were punished for “resisting and insulting the police,” and thirty-four for “disobeying the orders of the authorities as given by the German *Kommandant*.” This last item reflects the *Kommandant*'s intervention in the day-to-day affairs of the ghetto; see “The Manuscript,” p. 153.

The Police in the Last Quarter of 1942⁶⁸

Following Caspi's⁶⁹ departure from us, we in the police [force] were somewhat revived, breathed a bit more freely. Previously everything that one wanted to do, one had to first ask— what will Caspi say. When everyone said day, he said night...

During the entire fall and beginning of winter 1942, various changes took place in the internal service of the police, as well as changes due to the addition of new units [...]

[The Establishment of an Additional Prison]

On August 15, a second detention house was established in the ghetto. The motive for establishing another prison was mainly geographical. The existing one in the ghetto was situated, as mentioned, near the workshops on the other side of the ghetto.

The regulation of the entire labor force, the various requirements of people so that the quota would be met—all took place at the gate. Every day there would be dozens of cases in which people had to be cut off⁷⁰ from one brigade in order that a half hour later, they be sent to another site, from which an urgent order for manpower came, or simply, men had to be forcibly mobilized to a specific worksite. There was no place to hold those gathered by the police until the required number was achieved. To simply hold them in place could not be done because they scattered. To lead them to the other prison was, for the time being, too far —everything done near the gate had to be done quickly. Therefore, it was decided to establish a detention house near the gate, specifically for the labor force. Initially the detention house was called

⁶⁸The contents of this chapter actually address a longer period—at least the last third of 1942, and the beginning of 1943.

⁶⁹Josef Caspi-Serebrovitz had been a teacher and a journalist. He was known for his volatile personality and unstable behavior. Following the German conquest of Kovno, he worked openly for the Gestapo. He, his wife, and their two children were exempted from moving into the ghetto and from wearing the yellow star. He visited the ghetto frequently in the line of duty and often imposed his will on ghetto institutions, interfering with their work routine. For example, he pressured the police to fire Yehuda Zupovitz. "The Manuscript" devotes fifteen pages to Caspi (pp. 200-214). At the end of the summer of 1942, he and his family were transferred to Vilna, where they were executed.

⁷⁰This refers to the practice by the Labor Office representatives at the ghetto gate of separating part of the people gathered there in the morning for work. These people would be moved from their regular work detail to a different one that was short of workers.

“detention house for work duty shirkers.” Here, in this detention house, those whose offenses were related to work duty compliance were incarcerated. The other prison held the felons, the administrative offenders, and those punished by the ghetto *Kommandant* and the SD and they went to work outside the ghetto, where felons and SD detainees were not sent.⁷¹ All those arrested for work duty offenses who were incarcerated for a specific period, would be sent during the day to work, and in the evening, at the gate, would again be confined in the detention house.

Guard duty in the new detention house was done by the policemen of the first precinct. The new detention house, which was located near the gate on Kriščiukaičio 23, was accommodated in the former Abba Hazkel prayerhouse in Slobodka. The Jews themselves turned it into a prison for Jews. This will certainly be unbelievable to those who will later read this. The synagogue was already semi-destroyed because in the initial period in the ghetto, when every square meter of living space was a problem,⁷² many homeless families moved into the houses of study and prayer ... The same building in which prayers were previously sung to God—through which generations passed with their suffering and joy—these same walls now hear the groans and cries of Jews arrested by Jews for not fulfilling the duties ordered by our rulers...

The administration of the detention house was conducted by the gate guard, in effect, those from the first precinct, because the detention house was then—as was the entire guard duty—in the hands of the first precinct. The official chief of the detention house was the commander of the first precinct, actually the commander of the guard duty at the gate, who was the second deputy commander of the second precinct. There was [consequently] confusion and chaos concerning questions of the official and practical fulfillment of duties. Together, all of these things initiated the idea of separating the gate guard from the first precinct—that it become a unit in itself, with its own permanent people, and that it retain control not only of the gate but the detention house as well—a unit with specific assignments and

⁷¹This is the phrasing in the original. Apparently, the writers meant to indicate that the felons and the SD detainees were not sent to the same work sites outside the ghetto as were the labor shirkers.

⁷²Due to the severe shortage of space, especially in the first period, each person was assigned 3 sq. meters of living space. This was later reduced to 2.5 sq. meters.

duties. As a separate unit it was similar to a precinct, directly subordinate to the Center.

[Establishing a Separate Workshops' Guard]

As for reforms, one was implemented in the workshop guard in order to improve the internal service and the guarding of that important post...

The guarding of the workshops and of the prison was conducted by policemen who were sent from the precincts. In time, the duties there were expanded, the workshops grew. The camps contained things worth millions, which the authorities took special care to strictly guard. Many cases of theft by the laborers of the workshops were discovered. Those policemen who were posted at the gates were ordered to search the workers on their way out. The police posts were not, however, in one place, and they would not stand exactly in the determined spots, allowing through the gates people unchecked and not supervising sufficiently. The head of the workshops guard and the prison [Sergeant Itzhak Melamdowicz] was reprimanded on a few occasions by the workshops' German supervisor and by the workshops' Jewish management [...]

The police leadership therefore decided to designate a permanent unit to guard the workshops....

Until then, every policeman in the precinct had one day of regular precinct duty, the following day—night duty in the precinct, and the next, regular precinct duty, and on the following day he would leave for twenty-four hours in the workshops. After completing the workshop duty, the policeman would be free until the next morning. In effect, the policeman had regular precinct duty three days a week, the remaining time was spent outside the precinct. The work in the precinct suffered because of this as the policeman was [like a] guest in the precinct.

During that summer, which will later be dealt with, it was ordered that the entire precinct be divided into quarters and patrols. Every policeman had his own patrol, which was comprised of a few streets, which the policeman had to visit a few times a day to inspect cleanliness and carry out various assignments in his district ... Consequently this new reform had dual results.

[Penal Department]

Together with the growth of the units and their reorganization, the duties of the Central Office as the supreme supervising and command authority were also expanded. The Center's authority included six police units: three precincts, a criminal department, gate and detention house guard, prison and workshop guard. Besides these, the court—the penal department.

Daily reports and a variety of papers have to be dealt with in the Center, as do all the court matters...

In a case in which a citizen whose crime or offense is punished with arrest, it is again the police itself who solves the case, decides and itself carries out that same decision. Normally three offices should have considered such cases: the police, the courts and the prison, which are three distinct offices, independent of each other. Here, everything was concentrated in the hands of the police.

The penal department—the new office that was incorporated into the police—was established on August 16 and operated according to a specific statute certified by the chairman of the Ältestenrat on August 20, in the framework of a supplement to the general police statute.

The rights and authority of the penal department were determined in the following manner: The Jewish ghetto police become temporarily authorized to handle all criminal accusations and civil cases of the ghetto inhabitants. The penal department is made up of a committee of three people who are appointed by the police chief specifically to fulfil these duties...

The committee handles and judges all cases submitted by the criminal department, the precincts and other divisions, as well as requests and accusations made by private individuals.

The committee's work is based on the judicial statutes of the former Lithuanian Republic, in as much as they pertain to the ghetto's conditions, and do not contradict the injunctions of the Ältestenrat.

The committee's sentences become operative following their confirmation by the police chief, and are final. The chairman of the Ältestenrat can, in exceptional cases, by request of the interested party or based on his own

initiative, annul the decision, and is authorized to deal with the matter anew. It is then handled by another composition of the committee members who are designated by the police chief.

All cases of the previous ghetto courts,⁷³ which were not dealt with there, are transferred to the Central Office of the Jewish ghetto police. Over time, the penal department instituted its work after the three members of the committee became permanent. They took over all of the cases of both the previous courts, and the new ones, which came in from the criminal⁷⁴ and other departments. They accommodated for themselves a special space for meetings, and a very experienced court secretary was appointed for them. The work proceeded normally just as it did before in the ghetto courts...

The criminal department during the period from April 1 to December 31, 1942, had to deal with the various cases of thefts, fraud, forgeries etc. There were many complicated and confusing cases, which the criminal department was successful in solving – punishing the guilty and compensating the victims. The crimes, which were carried out by local thieves, were, for the most part, solved....

During the period of the establishment of the criminal department, from April 1 until December 31, the cases brought before the office are noted in the following table:

| | April | May | June | July | Aug. | Sept | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Theft, fraud, forgery | 90 | 133 | 62 | 104 | 42 | 52 | 68 | 62 | 97 |
| Cases solved | 15 | 88 | 12 | 117 | 114 | 51 | 19 | 5 | 3 |
| Cases in progress | 519 | 626 | 709 | 769 | 569 | 374 | 105 | 81 | 38 |
| Cases forwarded to the Courts | 13 | 29 | 5 | 20 | 24 | 32 | 35 | 26 | 38 |
| Interrupted cases | 18 | 59 | 7 | 97 | 90 | 62 | 24 | 24 | 22 |
| People tried | 24 | 51 | 12 | 20 | 27 | 36 | 29 | 20 | 39 |
| People detained | 4 | 5 | — | 24 | 34 | 5 | 19 | 17 | 8 |

⁷³The ghetto court that was opened on December 8, 1941, was closed by the order of the German authorities on August 5, 1942.

⁷⁴The criminal department was established on December 5, 1941.

The table shows that during three-quarters of a year of regular activity of the criminal office, a total of 700 criminal offenses were committed in the ghetto. Of these, 424 were solved, 222 were transferred to the courts—in total 646, i.e., approximately 90% ...

It can be assumed that 80 % of the crimes committed in the ghetto itself were solved. The penal department, which began its regular activity from the first of September, dealt with ... 192 civil and criminal cases until October 31.⁷⁵

The handling of the dozens and hundreds of cases, which increased in the months of July and August when the court was adjourned, and all of its incomplete cases were transferred to the police center—took up a significant place in the activity of the police center within the administrative realm.

[Instituting an ID Card (“Passportization”) – 1942]

Another non-police assignment that was taken over by the police, or rather, that was included into the police activity within the administrative realm, was the issuing of passports. The need for a personal [identification] document for every ghetto inhabitant became very actual. On the average, it was difficult to determine the personal details of a resident, especially if that person had an interest in denying something...

In the initial period [of the ghetto], anyone could actually give a false name and “go find him”...

All of these things together gave rise to the idea of introducing a general, uniform document for all of the ghetto inhabitants, without exception – the so-called ghetto pass [*ausweis*].⁷⁶ The idea originated from the Ältestenrat, and was dealt with in the initial period by the Secretary [Avraham] Golub....⁷⁷

On June 7 [1942], the police chief made it known that by July 1, every ghetto inhabitant was obligated to acquire a ghetto pass.

Every inhabitant received the pass, which was sent to his home by the appropriate police precinct and the house manager, who would later conduct

⁷⁵The original includes a table with statistics through the end of December. In this period, the penal department dealt with 113 civil cases and seventy-nine criminal cases. Sixty-four criminal cases brought a conviction, and fifteen an acquittal.

⁷⁶ It was called “*Ausweis*” by the Germans, and this word was transliterated into Yiddish parenthetically here.

⁷⁷Golub (Tory) was secretary of the Ältestenrat until he fled the ghetto during its last stage of existence.

a general verification that all of the residents of their precinct had acquired the passes. Every resident was required to have a pass regardless of their gender or age. The passes for minors up to the age of fifteen were issued to the parents (father or mother). If the juvenile had no parents, it was issued to the person with whom he resided.

Every ghetto inhabitant from the age of fifteen was obligated to carry the pass on his person at all times, and upon demand required to present it to the officer of the Jewish police, or to those such persons who were authorized by the police or the labor office to conduct a verification of the forced laborers...

Every ghetto inhabitant who changed his place of residence was obligated to report his new place of residence to the police precinct within twenty-four hours. This report was noted by the police in the pass ...

The information in the pass is sparse. It was possibly purposely done in such a manner so that the information in the pass was the most necessary for the determination of personal details ... The pass does not relate to marital status because the issue of weddings is, in the ghetto, a grievous one. There were hundreds of men and women in the ghetto whose first husband or wife was missing—escaped, disappeared in the *Aktionen*, in the prisons etc. Many registered with new spouses. Those who are not present are assumed by us to be dead, although it is possible that one of them will appear. This sore question was therefore left open.

The pass was sufficient for all of the information that the ghetto offices required for work duty verifications; police related work, food supply offices etc.

In order to anchor the pass into ghetto life, the Ältestenrat issued, on August 1, a compulsory order to all of its offices that from August 5, 1942 (until then all of the ghetto inhabitants had received their passes), the ghetto pass would be the sole identification document for the ghetto inhabitants ...

After all of the ghetto inhabitants were issued the passes, it was almost impossible for misunderstandings and fraud to occur within the overall activity of the ghetto offices.

One basic flaw was contained in the ghetto passes—they did not contain a photograph. This enabled a resident to take someone else’s pass and claim that it was his.

With the implementation in the police precincts of the quarters and patrols—when every policeman had his own patrol, in which he would visit almost every home every day, and with the passing of time was personally acquainted with all of its residents—these misunderstandings, that one would use another’s pass, occurred very seldomly.

[Punishment, Crimes and Misdemeanors (March-December 1942)]

The entire administration of the quarters, which was in the hands of the police, was in fact not police work but purely municipal. In addition the police fulfilled the duties of a civil punishment apparatus....

Throughout the initial period [in the ghetto] the police punished with fines or detention ... Later, when the prison was created, and trade in the ghetto allowed for money to spread, these penalties became effective. The punished would be detained or pay a fine .

Later, in August 1942 when the “moneyless” economy was instituted, fines as a means of punishment was dropped. (Officially any monetary transaction was forbidden, as it is until this day, November 1943.) The only means of punishment that remained was detention. The offenses were massive and one had to catch and fight them.

Not having a pass was not considered a crime but a negligence. However, in order to anchor the pass into ghetto life and raise it to the level of an absolute necessity, it was necessary to catch [the offender] and punish with detention. The detention for this offense was a few hours. To hold one for twenty-four hours for such offenses was too much....

In September... 69 people were punished.

Within the police there was a special group to guard the gardens, which was called “garden protection,” under the leadership of Padison,⁷⁸ the official for special matters. This group of policemen, which was raised from various

⁷⁸Peretz Padison had been one of the leaders of the Jewish veterans’ organization and a public figure. He assisted the underground extensively in the ghetto and joined the partisans as one of its members in January 1944. Years later he retired in Israel.

precincts, guarded the gardens night and day and arrested every resident who attempted to pick the vegetables. These [violators] were later punished by the Central Office....

In the month of December... 20 people were punished.

From all of these tables...,⁷⁹ one can see that the police, in every place, in every situation, under various conditions and circumstances, reacted, punished and maintained peace and order in the ghetto ...

A large part of police activities is devoted to sanitation service. Slobodka, mainly the old streets, were always famous for their old, dirty, neglected shacks, among which there were trash boxes that had not been cleaned for years. The dirt in the courtyards and partly also in the homes increased when the Jews were put into the ghetto. Right from the first days of their entrance into the ghetto, the police began to regulate the sanitation work. Later, in the beginning of spring 1942, a big sanitation operation began, and likewise, a specific ordinance was instated that every resident of a house had a specified day on which he is required to sweep and clean the courtyard and the street. The police patrol commander comes every day to inspect, and if it is not in order, that resident whose turn it is to clean that day, is punished.

Besides this, the police had the regular daily assignments, such as patrolling the streets, the permanent guard posts, the implementation of various sentences, the notification of the population concerning various laws and ordinances from the Ältestenrat and the authorities, as well as the regulation of residents' complaints concerning disturbances, fights, conflicts, grievances—dozens and hundreds of cases, each one directed to the nearest police precinct, and the police were obligated to listen, react, punish and maintain order

[The Police Swearing-In Ceremony and the Establishment of the Policemen's Club]

⁷⁹“The Manuscript” contains monthly tables. The numbers cited here are the summary statistics for two months. There is no explanation given for the drop in crime at the beginning of 1942. It is likely that this was partially the result of the stabilization of conditions in the ghetto and the economic improvement.

In the beginning of 1942, after which, as stated, the material conditions in the ghetto greatly improved, people in the ghetto began to think a little about spiritual and communal work, and so too did the police attempt to bring in some cultural activity into the police , within the narrow confines of ghetto possibilities.

On the initiative of police inspector Zupovitz, the idea of establishing a Policemen's Club began to circulate within the administration. It was anticipated that a type of sporthouse be created, where the policemen would undergo physical and drill exercises. Lecture series by experts on communal, administrative and judicial questions were planned, as were special lectures about Jewish History.

In January 1942, this type of Policemen's Club was established on Vienožinskio Street, however it did not last long. The policemen showed very little interest in it ...

In October 1942, police inspector "Z"[upovitz] (presently, already the second deputy police chief), again renewed his old idea of creating a Policemen's Club. The stimulus for its creation was a special event in police life—the solemn "swearing-in ceremony" of all police officers before the Ältestenrat , which took place on November 1, 1942.

Mr. "Z" was the father of the idea of organizing a general police march and ceremony, in which a solemn oath would be taken by all police officers. The entire idea was clearly for show, "playing soldiers." The police were to gather together, tightly line up, straight as arrows, report, run back and forth, play. In our conditions and in our situation it seemed more than comical.

There was however another point, one that had to be kept from the public eye – a demonstration of national sentiment, resolution, hope, and national pride. We could not allow for such a demonstration, even a quiet one, in the ghetto conditions. It smelled of death. However, in such a swearing-in ceremony—which was officially called a loyalty-oath of all the police officers to the Ältestenrat—national feelings, the deep sorrow for yesterday and today, and the hope for tomorrow, could indirectly be expressed. This was the second motive for organizing the oath, the unofficial motive but the true one.

The Ältestenrat accepted this idea, and the proceedings for the entire ceremony occurred in the following manner:

A fine orchestra, under the leadership of the conductor Hofmekler,⁸⁰ was specially ordered to play at the swearing-in ceremony. All the policemen appeared at the assigned time,⁸¹ and they lined up in front on the commands of Police Inspector Zupovitz, commands which were for the first time in police life, not given in Lithuanian but in fine Hebrew. Soon the vice chairman of the Ältestenrat L.Garfunkel⁸² appeared (the chairman Dr. Elkes who was generally not a well man, was sick that day) accompanied by the general secretary Golub, Ältestenrat member Goldberg,⁸³ and the representative of the labor office, Lipcer.⁸⁴ Police inspector Z[upovitz], oversaw the exercises in fluent Hebrew.

Mr. Garfunkel opened the ceremony with a speech on the matters of the day. Following him, Police Chief Koppelman spoke, and in the name of the policemen Ben Zion Klotz spoke.⁸⁵

Following this, the actual ceremony of the swearing-in commenced. The text was written in block letters in Yiddish and Hebrew, on artistically painted parchment paper, rolled like a megilla scroll, and bound with a wide white and blue ribbon.

The text was read aloud by the general secretary of the Ältestenrat Golub, first in Hebrew and then in Yiddish, and then, word by word, in Yiddish, which was repeated by all.

The following is the text of the oath:

⁸⁰Misha Hofmekler was a policeman and a relative of the famed violinist of the same name.

⁸¹December 1, 1942, at 2:20 P.M.

⁸²Leib Garfunkel had been a socialist-Zionist leader before the war and a member of the Lithuanian Sejm. He survived the ghetto and a series of concentration camps and emigrated to Israel after the war.

⁸³Yaacov Goldberg was a lawyer and a leading member of the Jewish war veterans. He was arrested during the Soviet period (1940-41) and released upon the German conquest. He moved to South Africa after the war.

⁸⁴Benno (Benjamin) Lipcer had been a travelling salesman before the war and was appointed soon after the German conquest to be the head of the Jews working in maintenance and services in the Gestapo offices in Kovno. He won the trust of his employers and used this in order to gain influence and to intervene in the work of the Ältestenrat, the police, and the labor office. He succeeded, with German backing, to accrue positions of power and titles. He also sometimes intervened on behalf of individuals. He was executed by the Germans prior to the liquidation of the ghetto.

⁸⁵Klotz had been a General Zionist activist before the war. He was among the forty policemen murdered at the end of March 1944.

21 Heshvan 5703 1\11\1942

I, officer of the Jewish Ghetto Police in Vilijampole, solemnly and consciously accept in the presence of the chairman of the Ältestenrat, and chief of the Ghetto Police, the following oath:

To fulfill all assignments and commands conscientiously and unconditionally, regardless of time, person, and danger;

To fulfill all duties without regard for personal requests, kinship, friendship or acquaintance;

To strictly keep private all service related secrets and information;

I undertake to devote all my strength and experience to the welfare of the Jewish community in the ghetto.

I swear.

After repeating the entire text, they approached the table by rows and signed the text of the oath.. The entire time that the policemen walked from the line to the table to sign the oath, the orchestra played national songs, which lent a festive character to the entire swearing-in ceremony.

After signing the text, the entire group lined back up in their places. The marching out command was given, the orchestra blared the known touching national march song “When the Lord brought back...”⁸⁶ The sounds of the tune exhilarated the policemen and part of the audience....With [tear]filled eyes, the entire audience sang the words of the prophecy of freedom and liberation, of the fulfillment of our wishful dreams, and holiest hopes, which today, are all but fantasies, and may tomorrow perhaps become reality.

To the sounds of the orchestra, and the singing of the policemen and those gathered, everyone, under the deep impression of the demonstration of national will, dispersed.

Following this swearing-in ceremony, the idea of establishing a Policemen’s Club with a permanent police orchestra took form—a house for the musical and cultural needs of the police and the ghetto inhabitants.

⁸⁶Psalms 126:1-6.

On November 28, 1942, the establishment of a Policemen's Club on the grounds of the former Yeshiva was announced in the order of the day. Guidelines were worked out for operating the Policemen's Club, which was certified by the chairman of the Ältestenrat on January 3, 1943 ...

The Policemen's Club was rebuilt and renovated, a proper concert hall was arranged, completely decorated like in the good times. Musical concerts took place every Saturday and Sunday, which were attended by hundreds of people.

Singers and actors who sang and gave recitations were also drawn to work.

The creation in itself of a concert house in the ghetto, at that time, provoked very much commentary and criticism. It was said that the ghetto is not the place to hold concerts, that this is not the place for creating musical endeavors, and to be merry. We do not have any right or desire to forget everything that we have experienced.

At the same time, however, it became clear that the concerts had a positive side, in the sense that even in the ghetto one had to have a few hours in the week to forget a little, take a break from the daily nightmare, and somewhat rise above the daily drudgery into a nicer world which is filled with hope and gives courage.

The second argument won over. The concerts still take place without interruption, and are a positive event in ghetto life.

Who would have believed a year ago that Jews in the ghetto would hold concerts? Life itself creates such things that normally could never have taken place. A more normal life, a little peace and, as it were, security and light and already people create, do, build, and unload pent up energy.

The Policemen's Club—a product of its circumstance—of the improved living conditions in the ghetto.⁸⁷

Texts translated from the Yiddish by Carrie Friedman

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⁸⁷The writers sensed the decline in the conditions and safety in the ghetto. The creation of the Policemen's Club and the related activities, such as concerts, were, therefore, indeed part of the peak of the "quiet period."

