

The Jews of Pinsk, 1939-1943,  
Through the Prism of New Documentation  
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On October 21, 1941, the Polish schoolboy Georg Marsonas, wrote to the German *Gebietskommissar* (district commissioner)<sup>1</sup> in Pinsk, explaining how he intended to help his mother:

“I am 13 years old and I want to help my mother because she is having a very difficult time making a living. I cannot work because I have to go to school but I can earn some money as a member of the municipal band because it plays in the evenings. Unfortunately, I do not have an accordion, which I know how to play. I know a Jew who has an accordion, so I very much ask your permission to have the instrument given or lent to the municipal band. That way I’ll have a chance to fulfill my wish—to be useful to my family.”<sup>2</sup>

This document and many others pertaining to the Jews of Pinsk in 1939–1943, can be found in the State Archives of the Brest District<sup>3</sup> and its branch in Pinsk, Belarus. In recent years, photocopies of this archival material have been procured by Yad Vashem.<sup>4</sup> The new archival material—copious and

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<sup>1</sup>The *Gebietskommissar* at the time was evidently Paul Gerhard Klein.

<sup>2</sup>Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M-41/863. The year is not marked, but it is almost certainly 1941, because the Jews of Pinsk were not ghettoized until May 1942.

<sup>3</sup>Brest is known by several names in several languages, corresponding to various historical eras: Brest-Litovsk, Brześć, and, among the Jews, Brisk.

<sup>4</sup>The documentation described in this article is part of the vast and extensive documentation stored in various archives across the former Soviet Union. However extensive the archival documentation on Pinsk, one may also assume that additional material exists in other archives, in Pinsk itself or in other state archives. The original documentation was sorted into Record Groups. Each Record Group *Fond* is composed of lists (*Opis*), which are divided into files (*Del*). Almost all the material on the German occupation is kept in Record Group 2135; documentation on the Soviet regime was placed in Record Group 200. Since the databases cannot be searched and accessed directly, material is ordered on the basis of the description of the Record Group, which is not always accurate. Therefore, requests for material are not filled immediately and might not accurately indicate the exact source.

The following survey of the Jewish community of Pinsk, from its origin until its demise, is based partly on secondary sources but, mainly, on this new documentation that now exists in the Yad Vashem Archives as Record Group M-41 (Documentation from Archives in Belarus), especially in respect to the years 1939–1943. Much of the history of the Jews under Nazi occupation in Pinsk was related accurately, in 1966, by Nahum Boneh, “The Holocaust,” in Nahman Tamir (Mirski) and Zeev Rabinowitsch, eds., *Pinsk, Book of Testimony and*

diverse, written in Russian, German, and Polish—sheds light on various aspects of the Jews' lives in the final years of the Pinsk community; that is, under Soviet rule in 1939–1941, and the German occupation in 1941–1943.

On the basis of the documentation, we are able to estimate the Jewish population in Pinsk on the eve of the Nazi occupation and, on this basis, to estimate the number of Jews who perished in the large *Aktion* in August 1941. It also enables us to trace the community's struggle to survive after this *Aktion* and to gauge the Judenrat's activity on behalf of the Jewish population. Lists of names drawn up after the August 1941 *Aktion* provide the most accurate picture possible of the ghetto population shortly before its final liquidation.

The Pinsk Jewish community was established in 1506, when the prince in that area, Feodor Yaroslavski, granted residency privileges and congregational status in the city to some fifteen families that had been driven out of Lithuania (evidently residents of Brest). The Jewish population of the city grew steadily—to 21,819, or 77.3 percent of the city's population, in 1896, and to 28,063, 72.5 percent of the total population, in 1914. The Jewish population was estimated at 20,200 shortly before the beginning of World War II and at 26,000 when the Nazi occupation began (July 1941).<sup>5</sup>

Pinsk was the cradle of the Hasidic court in Karlin (a suburb of the city in the eighteenth century), and Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev officiated as rabbi there for a decade (1775–1785). In the course of the nineteenth century, the community was a hub of commerce and petty industry, and much of the city's

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*Commemoration for the Pinsk-Karlin Community* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Organization of Pinsk-Karlin Jews in Israel, 1966) B, pp. 325–360. Boneh based his work almost solely on testimonies. The new documentation now at Yad Vashem allows us to corroborate much of what he wrote. Recently, too, a study about the Jews of Pinsk was written in Brest: E. Rozenblat and I. Yelenskaya, *The Jews of Pinsk 1939–1944* (Russian), (Brest: University of Brest, 1997). The study is significant because it is the first time that researchers in Belarus have written about antisemitism among the people of that country—an antisemitism that began to grow during the months of Soviet rule and erupted during the Nazi occupation. (The most common explanation for this is that the Jews collaborated with the Communists.) The study is based on Belorussian anti-Jewish propaganda that appeared in the Belorussian press during those years. However, it also contains statistics on Jewish labor, mortality, occupations, and private enterprises. The authors also appended lists of partisans and survivors.

<sup>5</sup>*Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), vol. 13, p. 538. Most authors on Pinsk estimate its Jewish population shortly before the war at 30,000. See, for example, Aharon Yisraeli, *The Pinsk Community* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Education and Culture, in conjunction with the Ghetto Fighters' House, 1970), p. 4; Benzion Dinur, "On the Historical Image of Pinsk," Tamir and Rabinowitsch, eds., *Pinsk, Book of Testimony and Commemoration*, B, pp. 14–15. These statistics are discussed and reexamined below in light of the new documentation.

economy was in Jewish hands. At the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, the Hibbat Zion movement made inroads in Pinsk; Chaim Weizmann and Jacob Shertok (father of Moshe Sharett, Israel's second prime minister) were among its active members. However, the Bund, the Jewish socialist party, was also very influential there.

World War I and the Polish-Russian war had serious effects on the Pinsk community, and its numbers were reduced from 28,000 in 1914, to only 15,000 or so. On April 5, 1919, some young Jews called an assembly in the city; however, on the pretext of its being a Communist gathering, it was forcibly dispersed, and Polish soldiers shot to death thirty-five participants.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the community regrouped in subsequent years. Some refugees who had fled or had been expelled from the city returned, and Jewish public life—internal politics, economic affairs, education, and culture—resumed within the framework of the independent Polish state.

On the evening of September 17, 1939, the first tanks of the Soviet advance force entered the city (in accordance with the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact). This development elicited delight but also concern among Orthodox Jews, activists in Zionist political parties and youth movements, and owners of property and businesses. The Communists, who had been operating underground, went to the outskirts of the city to greet the Soviet advance force. “Pinsk bustled and throbbed like an orchestra tuned up before the conductor arrives. The conductor has arrived, but no one knows what melody is to be played.”<sup>7</sup>

The next day, a new civil administration, composed of outsiders, was established, and the Polish mayor was imprisoned. Within a few days, large numbers of civil servants moved in and took up the posts of senior Polish officials, many of whom had managed to escape. Those who remained in the city were arrested and banished to the Soviet interior by the NKVD. The new officials were housed in rooms that had been expropriated from homeowners.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Moshe Melamed, *A Path Taken by Foot* (Hebrew) (Shefayim: Privately Published, 1991), p. 24.

<sup>7</sup>Y. Margolin, “In the Days of the Soviet Occupation 1939–1941,” Tamir and Rabinowitsch, eds., *Pinsk, Book of Testimony and Commemoration*, B, p. 311; see also Azriel Shohat, “In the Second World War up to the Nazi Occupation,” *ibid.*, A, pp. 287–292.

<sup>8</sup>See below in regard to the nationalization of dwellings and lists of new officials in Pinsk.

The banks were shut down; in their stead, a government bank was opened, and residents were ordered to deposit their savings there. Factories, cinemas, and theaters were expropriated and nationalized. New committees were organized in large workplaces; these were actually Communist Party cells that were mainly supposed to educate the workers in loyalty and devotion to the new regime. Numerous assemblies were called at workplaces, and attendance was compulsory. The extensive pre-war trade that had been paralyzed by the outbreak of the fighting was not resumed. Food shortages developed. Prices skyrocketed, and queues trailed at the grocery stores. Officials, soldiers, and officers snapped up leather and haberdashery products and paid for them in zlotys.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the new documents at Yad Vashem deal with nationalization. Regulations and guidelines set forth by the Belorussian People's Council of Commissars (Soviet Narodnikh Komisarov—S.N.K.)<sup>10</sup> (May 10, 1940–January 15, 1941), for example, stipulated that buildings smaller than 113 square meters, two-family homes belonging to two owners, and houses of which 60 percent of the space was in poor physical condition must not be nationalized. What was to be nationalized? The property of erstwhile officials in the Polish state, members of “reactionary groups,” and estate owners, as well as theaters, museums, libraries and indoor monuments, and, of course, buildings larger than 113 square meters.<sup>11</sup>

A distinction should be made between the municipal and national nationalizations. In the case of municipal nationalization, the owners of the confiscated property, mainly dwellings, had to take in additional tenants and pay rent, whereas in national nationalization, owners had to move 100 kilometers away from the city (and in most cases were deported later to the Soviet interior). Since the documentation in our possession deals mainly with municipal nationalizations, the lists of homeowners whose property was seized by the Ispolkom (Ispolnitelny Komitet, the Executive Committee) includes the names of many Jews. The types of property confiscated indicate

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<sup>9</sup>Shohat, “In the Second World War,” p. 288.

<sup>10</sup>As it was called from that time until the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

<sup>11</sup>Orders of the people's commissariat of economics concerning the nature of nationalization of civilians' property, February 26, 1941, YVA, M-41/2273.

that a rather large stratum of affluent Jews lived in large houses made of stone (considered an expensive building material) in the center of the city.<sup>12</sup>

Many Jews contacted the authorities and asked them to repeal decisions to nationalize their property. Most of these requests were turned down, but in not a few cases applicants' claims were found just and nationalization orders were canceled. Some applicants also contacted the city prosecutor to resolve disputes among various authorities; the prosecutor often complied.<sup>13</sup>

In January 1940, the zloty was taken out of circulation, and one could convert up to only 300 zloty at the banks. Many families were left without savings.

The economic situation of the working classes in Pinsk did not take a perceptible turn for the worse. Although they lost their freedom and were not allowed to leave their jobs without permission, they were given an opportunity to vacation at resorts. Workers filled the cinemas and theaters (evidently receiving free tickets). Books were available at low prices, and evening classes in arithmetic and Russian were given free of charge.

The community hospital and private hospitals were shut down; the government hospital, in contrast, was expanded. Several physicians and medical personnel who were transferred there became government employees. While private practice was prohibited, medical aid was given at no charge.<sup>14</sup>

All but five lawyers were disbarred. Schools opened about two weeks after the occupation began, and, at first, they underwent no substantive changes. A month later, however, the study of Hebrew language and literature was prohibited, and Yiddish was declared the language of instruction for all subjects in Hebrew-speaking schools. The curriculum was totally revamped; teachers from Russia were brought in. Study of Bible and the works of Hebrew poets and authors, even in Yiddish translation, was prohibited. All textbooks were replaced with textbooks imported from Soviet Russia. Jewish

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<sup>12</sup>Orders concerning nationalization of dwellings, lists of homeowners whose dwellings were nationalized, requests to cancel nationalization, and correspondence in respect to nationalization, 1939–1941, YVA, M-41/2252–2661.

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, repeals of nationalization decisions, January–May 1941, YVA, M-41/2270, 2276, 2277, and 2278.

<sup>14</sup>Margolin, "In the Days of the Soviet Occupation," p. 312; for a description of the lives of refugee doctors, see Fanny Solomian-Luc, *A Girl Facing the Gallows* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Moreshet, 1971), pp. 40–41.

national education was banned, and the schools resounded with anti-religious propaganda.<sup>15</sup>

Jewish political parties ceased to exist; youth movements went underground. Since we still lack detailed documentation on this subject, our knowledge is based on survivors' testimonies. Nisan Reznik, who attended the Tarbut school in Pinsk and had belonged to the Zionist Ha-No'ar ha-Ziyyoni youth movement from age nine, relates that, when the war broke out, many refugees from western Poland, as well as members of the Zionist pioneering youth movements, understood that they had to go underground:

“We mobilized the active members of the cell. We hid the movement archives in metal containers in the ground, as I recall.... We had a large and important library. We were aware of their attitude toward the Hebrew language.... Our library was large and included hundreds and thousands of books, and we attempted to divide up most of the books among the members ....We had no intention of changing the Soviet regime. Our intention was to maintain the national spirit, the pioneering spirit.”<sup>16</sup>

Orthodox Jews suffered severely. Sunday was declared the day of rest; Jewish holidays were canceled and replaced with November 7 (the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution) and May Day. A law promulgated on June 22, 1940, revoked the right to desist from work on Saturdays by determining that a worker who reported more than twenty minutes late would be fined 15–20 percent of his wage for three to six months. A second tardiness would result in three to six months in prison. The main synagogue became a theater and halls of religious study were closed. Acrid anti-religious propaganda was conducted and it became dangerous to perform weddings according to Jewish tradition.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Shohat, “In the Second World War,” p. 288.

<sup>16</sup>Testimony of Nisan Reznik, YVA, 03–3931, p. 2; for more on this activity, see Yehuda Helman, “At the Onset of the Soviet Occupation,” Tamir and Rabinowitsch, eds., *Pinsk, Book of Testimony and Commemoration*, B, pp. 186–187.

<sup>17</sup>Shohat, “In the Second World War,” p. 291; Pesach Pakacz, “Soviet Rule in Pinsk,” Tamar and Rabinowitsch, eds., *Pinsk, Book of Testimony and Commemoration*, A, p. 320.

The authorities' suspicious attitude toward the citizens was augmented by their negative attitude toward refugees, who flooded Pinsk immediately after the war broke out. The Jewish residents received them warmly, invited them into their homes, and offered them food, drink, and shelter. Cafés and restaurants were filled from morning until late at night. The Jewish community spared no effort to ease the refugees' sufferings, but the new authorities did no such thing. Since the ban on residency in the district capital adversely affected the refugees, most of them refused Soviet citizenship when the compulsory citizenship law promulgated by the Supreme Soviet on November 29, 1939, became known. They rejected the Soviet ID card that they were offered, which contained a clause limiting their civil rights, and began to register to return to what had become the *Generalgouvernement*. Those who failed to return to the German-occupied areas were exiled to Siberia. Some 383 Jewish families (with up to six persons per family) were exiled to the Soviet interior.<sup>18</sup>

According to the card catalogues concerning residents' migration, prepared by the Interior Ministry, some 2,000 Jews passed through Pinsk. The catalogues note the migrants' age, place of origin and next destination, and the dates on which they reached and left the town. The cards also report changes of address in Belorussia, places and dates of birth, places of departure and arrival, and the names and nationalities of refugees from Poland who had fled via Pinsk. Many reached the large city from nearby villages; others came as workers for political parties.<sup>19</sup> However, as noted, not all were allowed to remain in the city.

The cards allow us to examine whether, and to what extent, Jews collaborated with the Soviet authorities and replaced local officials. The cards, questionnaires, and *curricula vitae*, clearly illuminate the extent of Jews' involvement in the Communist regime during those years. The data also allow us to determine the sectors that the Jews who meshed well with the

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<sup>18</sup>Lists of Jewish workers in Pinsk, April–May 1942, YVA, M-41/993, p. 104; Solomian-Luc, *A Girl Facing the Gallows*, p. 42; Yosef Litvak, *Jewish Refugees from Poland in the Soviet Union 1939–1946* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute for Contemporary Jewry, 1988), p. 89.

<sup>19</sup>Migration (arrival and departure) cards in Pinsk and the vicinity, 1939–1941, YVA, M-41/2292-2661.

Communist regime belonged to, how old and well educated these Jews were, from where they had come, and what proportion of them held high-ranking positions. The personal cards of party members (starting in 1940) who came to Pinsk in order to work for Gorkom (Gorodskoii Komitet Partii, the municipal committee of the Communist Party) show that about 25 percent of them were Jews and that some were senior officials, such as party secretaries.<sup>20</sup> Thus, most Jewish officials were brought to Pinsk from elsewhere. When we study the *curricula vitae* of candidates for membership in Ispolkom in Pinsk starting in December 1940, we find Jews in the following positions: laborers, a personnel manager at a meat factory, a bookkeeper, and the director of the municipal health department (who had little schooling).<sup>21</sup> Appointment announcements make reference to Jewish workers who became department managers, e.g., in a match factory and a meat plant.<sup>22</sup>

More than 50 percent of the names on the lists and in the opinions of members of precinct committees in the electoral districts of Pinsk (October 1939–February 1940) are Jewish. Some of these Jews had been Communists before the war; a few were workers who had connections with the Communist regime.<sup>23</sup> We also find numerous Jewish Communists in the minutes of meetings in the Pinsk District concerning the appointment of comrades to new positions.<sup>24</sup>

Since the Jews had been an underprivileged group during the Polish era, in a way the Communist regime set matters aright and gave Jews jobs and occupational opportunities that had been denied to them previously, foremost in the government bureaucracy. Therefore, their numbers among position-holders grew; however, it never reached their relative proportion in the population at large.

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<sup>20</sup>Questionnaires of Party Conference members, YVA, M-41/2530; lists of secretaries of Party organizations, 1940, YVA, M-41/2536; cards of Communist Party candidates, 1940, YVA, M-41/2527; questionnaires of delegates to the district conference of the Communist Party, April 1940, YVA, M-41/2587.

<sup>21</sup>*Curriculum vitae* of candidates for membership in the Ispolkom in Pinsk, December 15, 1940, YVA, M-41/2533.

<sup>22</sup>Notices about appointments of local workers in the Communist Party, October 1940, YVA, M-41/2531.

<sup>23</sup>Lists and opinions of members of election committees in Pinsk, 1939–1940, YVA, M-41/2532.

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, lists of secretaries of Party organizations, 1940, YVA, M-41/2536.

Not all Jewish officials belonged to the Communist Party, and not all posts required party membership. A thorough and painstaking examination of the newly available documents and various figures concerning the occupations of Jews would help us reexamine the assumption that numerous Jews “served” and benefited from Communism.

The Jews in Pinsk had no knowledge whatsoever of events in Poland. Soviet radio did not describe the horrors that were being perpetrated there, and even those who listened to foreign stations—defying the ban on this activity—could not glean any real information on developments in that country.

When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Jews of Pinsk were gripped with fear. They sought avenues of escape but found none. The trains, apart from being filled with retreating soldiers, were targets for enemy bombardment. Other motor vehicles were not available. Some Jews set out on foot toward Luniniec, 65 kilometers east of Pinsk, but were detained on the way by Soviet soldiers who made them turn back.

At dusk on July 4, 1941, the first members of the German advance force reached Pinsk. The Germans immediately began confiscating large buildings for the Gestapo, the *Ortskommandatur* (city major’s headquarters), and, later, the *Gebietskommissariat* (district commission).<sup>25</sup>

Schools turned into soldiers’ barracks; hotels were transformed into officers’ quarters; and the best dwellings were earmarked for the high-ranking German bureaucracy. As the occupiers needed hands for physical work, and having no agency to regulate labor, they abducted workers in the streets. The abductions were accompanied by beatings and the shearing of sidelocks and beards. At first, the abductees were allowed to return to their homes each evening, beaten and injured; subsequently, they made sure not to appear in the streets. The Germans kidnapped sixteen Jews on the main street, Listowski, on the pretext of taking them to work. The Jews were led to the district court building in Karlin, where the Wehrmacht had established its headquarters. The next day, it became known that they had been taken to the nearby Leszcze forest, where they were shot and buried. Only one of them

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<sup>25</sup>Pinsk was annexed to the *Reichskommissariat* of Ukraine as soon as it was occupied, and the *Gebietskommissar* reached the city in early September 1941. It was the German practice in occupied Soviet territories to install a military administration and replace it with a civilian one, usually at the time the ghetto was established.

managed to escape after having lain wounded under the pile of corpses; he related what had occurred.<sup>26</sup>

In the first days of the occupation, the Germans made use of the Polish police, who helped the occupiers in looting, abusing civilians, and denunciations. The commander was Anatoli Sologov, a former court clerk; his deputy was the son of the attorney Dmitrij Śmigieliski. Concurrently, the Polish police began to arrest people who had served as officials during the Soviet regime.<sup>27</sup>

On July 30, 1941, an order to establish a Judenrat was issued, signed by the local military commander, Genppert, and forwarded to the Polish mayor, Felicjan Śliwiński. The order said nothing about the entity that would have to choose the Judenrat members, but, as things developed, it stands to reason that the Council was elected by Jewish community leaders whose identities are unknown. The Judenrat was given two tasks: to mediate between the commander and the Jewish population; and to carry out the former's orders. The Judenrat was to have twenty-four members, including a chairman, who would visit headquarters and deliver a report on each member of the Council. In the conventional pattern, the chairman had to obey the German military administration and the police and meet the Germans' demands. Finally, the order stated that Council members who failed to discharge their duties would be put to death. A list of Judenrat members was composed quickly and approved by the commander two days later. The commander reserved the right to make changes and ordered the Judenrat to commence its work at once.<sup>28</sup>

The principal of the Tarbut High School, David Alper, was elected to chair the Judenrat. However, he resigned two days later, realizing that his task was to obey the Germans' orders. Ten days after his resignation, Alper and other Judenrat members were murdered in the first *Aktion*. Several obeisant members (evidently eight in number) were allowed to remain alive. Benjamin Buksztański was chosen to replace Alper as Judenrat chairman (the identity of

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<sup>26</sup>Nahum Boneh, "The Holocaust and the Uprising in Pinsk," *Yalkut Moreshet* (Hebrew), 7 (July 1967), p. 81.

<sup>27</sup>Nahum Boneh, "The Holocaust and the Uprising," Tamir and Rabinowitsch, eds., *Pinsk, Book of Testimony and Commemoration*, B, p. 326; Solomian-Luc, *A Girl Facing the Gallows*, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup>Correspondence between the Judenrat and the Municipal Administration, July 1941-January 1942, YVA, M-41/945, pp. 4, 7.

those who chose him is not known) and was placed in charge of economic affairs. Mottl Miński was named his deputy but, in fact, became the acting chairman. A former resident of Danzig who was fluent in German, Miński served as a liaison with the Germans and focused mainly on the daily contacts with the district authorities.<sup>29</sup>

Some Jews felt hostile toward the Judenrat, which had played an active role in gathering up the thousands who had been murdered in the first *Aktion*:

“Prominent people who had been noted for their social activity were recruited from around the city to work with the Pinsk Judenrat.... At first I did not understand exactly what the nature of the Judenrat was, but I related to it unsympathetically from the first moment. When I was also invited to join it as a rank-and-file employee, I refused. I preferred to take on the post of a municipal cleaning worker who would sweep Nadbrzeźna Street.”<sup>30</sup>

Anti-Jewish orders were posted on bulletin boards—the requirement to wear a yellow star on the chest and the back (from August 1941; until then, the Jews had to wear a white armband with a Star of David on the left arm) on pain of a prison term; an injunction against walking on sidewalks; and detention of hostages for ransom. In Fanny Solomian-Luc’s opinion,

“Here the Judenrat displayed initiative: it gathered money [and] negotiated with the Germans.... They believed that by satisfying the Germans’ appetites they could get by, that the Germans might content themselves with money, with gold, and would eventually choke on curtains that they had looted from a children’s room....”<sup>31</sup>

The August 1941 *Aktion* took place about a month after the Germans arrived. On August 2 or 3, 1941, Franz Magill, commander of the mounted unit (Reitende Abteilung) of the SS Second Cavalry Brigade, received the following order (evidently from Himmler):

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<sup>29</sup>Lists of Jews who worked in Pinsk, April–May 1942, YVA, M-41/993, pp. 97–98.

<sup>30</sup>Solomian-Luc, *A Girl Facing the Gallows*, p. 58.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

“By order of the RFSS, all Jews aged 14 and over who are found in areas being combed shall be shot to death; Jewish women and children shall be driven into the marshes. The Jews are the partisans’ reserve force; they support them. The killing by gunfire shall be carried out in accordance with orders from the local SD offices. In the city of Pinsk, the killing by shooting shall be carried out by cavalry companies 1 and 4, which are to be transferred to Pinsk. This *Aktion* is to begin at once. A report on the implementation shall be submitted.”<sup>32</sup>

Magill forwarded the deadly order to the cavalry companies, and the killings took place on August 6–8, 1941.<sup>33</sup> There are differences of opinion as to the number of Jews murdered in this *Aktion*. The court in which Magill was prosecuted ruled, in 1964, that approximately 4,500 Jewish men, out of 20,000 Jews in Pinsk at the time, were murdered in the *Aktion*; it rejected Jewish witnesses’ estimates of approximately 11,000 victims.<sup>34</sup>

Nahum Boneh, one of the witnesses who testified to the figure of 11,000, bases himself on the assumption that there were 30,000 Jews in Pinsk when the Germans entered. In his estimation, the Jewish population evidently grew between the 1931 census and 1939 in two ways: natural increase; and the arrival of additional Jews from nearby and more distant localities. The aforementioned migration catalogues,<sup>35</sup> prepared by the Soviets in 1939–1941, may support this hypothesis. However, only a painstaking examination of these catalogues and a count of persons entering as against persons leaving might lead to a more precise estimate of the number of Jews in Pinsk on the eve of the first *Aktion*.

If we accept the assumption that the Jewish population had indeed grown because some Jews who passed through Pinsk stayed there, then perhaps

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<sup>32</sup>Verdict against Franz Magill, et al., 1964, YVA, TR–10/516, pp. 65–66 (original in Schwurgericht Braunschweig 2Ks I/63).

<sup>33</sup>For a detailed account of the way the murder was perpetrated, see *ibid.*, pp. 70–87.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98. See explanation in *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen, Sammlung Deutscher strafurteile wegen Nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945–1966* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1979) (25 vols.), vol. 20, pp. 62–63.

<sup>35</sup>Migration catalogues (arrivals and departures) in Pinsk and the vicinity, 1939–1941, YVA, M-41/2292-2661.

Boneh's estimate of 30,000 Jews in Pinsk when the Germans entered should be accepted. However, on January 15, 1942 (after the *Aktion* against the men), there were 18,017 Jews in Pinsk—6,106 men and 11,911 women.<sup>36</sup> If 11,000 men were murdered, then more than 17,000 of the 30,000 Jews in Pinsk before the *Aktion* were men. However, a ratio of seventeen men to thirteen women does not stand to reason, unless an overwhelming majority of refugees who remained in Pinsk were men. Nevertheless, the court's estimate is also grossly inaccurate. If 18,017 Jews remained alive in Pinsk after the *Aktion*, one cannot accept an estimate of only 20,000 Jews in the city on the eve of the war, since some of the Jews who passed through Pinsk did remain there. Afterward (mainly at the time the ghetto was established), Jews from surrounding localities were also delivered to Pinsk. Still, there is no proof that the number of Jews in Pinsk reached 30,000 shortly before the Nazi occupation. It appears, therefore, that there were about 26,000 Jews in Pinsk shortly before the Germans entered, and 7–8,000 of them perished in the first *Aktion*, leaving some 18,000 or more Jews in the city.

The victims were men and teenagers who belonged to various classes and had various occupations, excluding doctors. Practically speaking, a large majority of the men were exterminated. Why were women and children spared? Why were all the Jews of Pinsk not exterminated? After all, Himmler had ordered the aforementioned cavalry units to murder all Jews in Pinsk by gunfire or by eviction to the marshes. Moreover, in the course of August 1941, almost all Jews in nearby towns such as Janow, Motol, Luniniec, Lachwa, Dawidgrodek, Drohoczyn, Lohiczyn, and other localities were murdered.<sup>37</sup>

The moratorium on murder extended the lives of the remaining Jews in Pinsk, mostly women and children, by one year and three months. Yehoshua Büchler presumes that the extreme departure from Himmler's explicit order to murder all the Jews in Pinsk was prompted by constraints in the field, such as the inefficiency of shoving women and children into the marshes at that time of the year, or that Himmler himself modified the order to avoid involvement in

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<sup>36</sup>Boneh, "The Holocaust and the Uprising," p. 89; Statistical Report of the Municipal Department of Statistics, January 1941-May 1942, YVA, M-41/898.

<sup>37</sup>*Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, pp. 55–57.

an action of the Einsatzgruppen—the exclusive fiefdom of Heydrich.<sup>38</sup> Be this as it may, the inconsistent Nazi policy regarding the murder of Jews in occupied Soviet territories stands out.

Several weeks after the massacre, the civil authorities moved into Pinsk, headed by a *Gebietskommissar* and his deputy. The chairman and deputy chairman of the Judenrat were summoned to their bureau and instructed to obey orders painstakingly. One example was the order to collect 20 kilograms of gold; in the event of noncompliance, all the Jews would be deported. The Judenrat established a special committee to gather the gold. Later on, additional belongings of the Jews, including furs, were looted. Violators of the order were hanged.<sup>39</sup>

The new archival material contains almost no documents from the Judenrat, such as minutes of meetings, although various activities of the Judenrat are documented. For this reason, and since the new material includes copious documentation of actions by the municipal administration, this material should not be considered the Judenrat archives. The documents pertaining to the relevant era deal with several matters: labor, nutrition, supplies, welfare (especially in regard to concern about the orphanage), housing, health, and sanitation (including deaths), taxes and fines, confiscations and contributions, statistics, and personal matters. Here, too, the names of Jews, observable in almost every document—lists, inquiries, orders, fines, etc.—are especially important.

After the August 1941 *Aktion*, the Judenrat was ordered to prepare lists of Jewish workers. When we consult these lists to determine who worked, where, and in what fields, we find Jews working in various municipal departments, such as commerce, agriculture, transport, supply, sports, and housing.<sup>40</sup> They were assigned to forty-four workplaces, most outside the ghetto. They served German agencies (such as the Wehrmacht and the shipyards) and the population of the city (including Christian households) and

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<sup>38</sup>Yehoshua Büchler, "Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS: Himmler's Personal Murder Brigades in 1941," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 1:1 (1986), pp. 11-25.

<sup>39</sup>Boneh, "The Holocaust and the Uprising," pp. 91–92; see, for example, a document from the Judenrat amidst correspondence between the Judenrat and the *Gebietskommissar* concerning allocations of food, January–October 1942, YVA, M-41/881, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>List of Jewish workers, prepared by the Judenrat, October–December 1941, YVA, M-41/936.

labored in factories, artisan workshops, and sawmills.<sup>41</sup> How many Jews worked? About a month after the ghettoization, the chairman of the Judenrat wrote to the *Gebietskommissar*. “Of the Jewish population in Pinsk, 4,150 work every day and the rest of the able-bodied population, approximately 8,000 Jews, work in various locations at the behest of the Labor Office roughly every third day.”<sup>42</sup>

Men aged fourteen to sixty and women aged sixteen to fifty were subject to compulsory labor. The document that spells out orders pertaining to compulsory labor of Jews notes that “Jews will be sent to labor only if ‘Aryan’ forces are not available” (Paragraph 4) and that “wages will not be paid” (Paragraph 5).<sup>43</sup> Just the same, orders were given to pay Jews who were employed as metal smiths, mechanics, shipyard workers, and so on.<sup>44</sup>

The Judenrat labor department employed a very large number of officials. It prepared lists of workers and placed thousands of them in various jobs. Most of the placements were permanent; others were for temporary labor. Both the municipal administration and the Judenrat submitted labor requests. There is documentation of orders from the municipal headquarters to the chairman of the Judenrat to send workers (July–November 1941), stipulating the type and location of the work, and there are reports and lists of workers that the Judenrat prepared (in September 1941) pursuant to these orders. In addition, there are lists of workers in various jobs.<sup>45</sup> The municipal administration demanded workers for various tasks and issued labor-mobilization orders (February–October 1942), noting the addresses and workplaces to which the inducted individuals were to report.<sup>46</sup> However, the Judenrat chairman also

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<sup>41</sup>Nahum Boneh used the new documentation to trace the workplaces and the number of workers in each; see Nahum Boneh, “Jews of Pinsk in the Ghetto—A Situation Portrait,” *Yalkut Moreshet* (Hebrew), 64 (November 1997), pp. 57–65.

<sup>42</sup>Correspondence between the Judenrat and district authorities in regard to food allocations, January–October 1942, YVA, M-41/881, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup>The file contains Judenrat orders concerning payment of contributions, October–December 1941, YVA, M-41/942.

<sup>44</sup>Requests and applications for residency permits, 1941, YVA, M-41/929, pp. 10, 15, 22.

<sup>45</sup>Orders from municipal command headquarters to chairman of Judenrat to send Jewish workers, July–November 1941, YVA, M-41/900; lists arranged by addresses, September 1941, YVA, M-41/910; list of workers prepared by Judenrat, February–October 1942, YVA, M-41/947. For more on the same, see M-41/901, 910.

<sup>46</sup>List of workers whom the Judenrat dispatched to perform miscellaneous jobs, September 1941–January 1942, YVA, M-41/904; correspondence concerning eviction of Jews from their homes, January–March 1942, YVA, M-41/900, 901, 914.

made specific efforts to request various labor permits for the purpose, *inter alia*, of making their holders eligible for food and ration cards.<sup>47</sup>

In one of the interesting requests to the Farm Administration in Pinsk on January 21, 1942, the Judenrat chairman wrote:

“Jewish women and men are working in various plants, workshops, and factories, and are of great use to the German authorities, while, apart from bread, they are given practically no commodities. They also lack sufficient warm clothing (having surrendered it to the Wehrmacht) and firewood. Under these conditions, bread is the main foodstuff of the Jewish population in Pinsk. For these reasons, the Judenrat wishes to increase the daily bread ration for the adult population in Pinsk from 100 grams to 200 grams.”<sup>48</sup>

In all, nearly two-thirds of the Jewish population (12,000 out of the 18,000 in the ghetto in April 1942, before Jews from the vicinity arrived) were working. Jews asked the local administration for permission to open businesses and workshops (July–December 1941) and received provisional permits.<sup>49</sup> We also find labor permits that include the name of a Jewish worker and a request not to delay his wages.<sup>50</sup>

At the beginning of the occupation, the Germans distributed no basic commodities other than bread. Jewish laborers who worked in the city bartered with peasants in the vicinity, obtaining food in exchange for clothing and knitted fabrics. Not until November 17, 1941, did the Food and Agriculture Department of the *Gebietskommissariat* issue an order to assure food for Jews in the Pinsk area. The order stated that the Judenrat shall provide food in consideration of the allocations of rations set forth: “Foodstuffs will be delivered to the Judenrat, which will be in charge of distributing [them]

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<sup>47</sup>See, for example, correspondence between the Judenrat and the *Gebietskommissar* concerning food allocations, January–October 1942, YVA, M-41/881, pp. 3, 6; and requests from Jewish pupils to the *Gebietskommissar* for labor permits, August–December 1941, YVA, M-41/863.

<sup>48</sup>YVA, M-41/881, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>Provisional permits to open workshops, given to Jews by the municipal administration, July–December 1941, YVA, M-41/959.

<sup>50</sup>An example of such a payment, itemized by gross, withholding, and net, is kept among labor permits for Jews from the municipal administration, January–December 1942, YVA, M-41/935, p. 9.

correctly and frugally.”<sup>51</sup> Jews were not allowed to buy food in shops and restaurants of “Aryans,” in markets, at government distribution points, and from farmers. Nor were they allowed to barter. Paragraph 6 stipulated, “Farm produce and stocks of food of Jews shall be recorded and a reckoning with the owners shall be performed.” The order ended with a threat: violators would be severely punished.

The Judenrat worked prodigiously to keep the Jews fed, mainly with bread. Repeatedly, it asked the *Gebietskommissar* for bread, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, beets, and even meat. The Judenrat also went out of its way to feed the horses, since horse-carts were the only permitted means of transportation (and, even then, only after permission to rent them from peasants was obtained), and the cows, in order to maintain their flow of milk. The requests were honored, although not always fully.<sup>52</sup>

Every request from the Judenrat was accompanied by a calculation based on a food ration for each Jew. The daily bread ration was reckoned at 200 grams per adult and 100 grams per child; meat was figured at 200 grams per person per week.

The Judenrat established a public kitchen for Jews and stockpiled food for the winter. It arranged the opening of bakeries and supplies of flour. Its requests were usually honored in part; for example, when it sought permission to open four or five bakeries, it was allowed to open three. The Judenrat regularly submitted its requests in a phased process. For example, first it asked for permission to open bakeries and, after this was approved, followed up with an additional request: “Now that you have approved the bakeries, we are applying for flour.” Once this was accomplished, the Judenrat sought permission to sell bread to Jews for two rubles per kilogram, arguing that “this way we can use one ruble for our expenses.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Order concerning dietary supplies for Jews in the Pinsk area, from the Gebietskommissariat Food and Agriculture Department, December 22, 1941, YVA, M-41/880. For additional orders concerning food supplies to the ghetto and correspondence about food allocation, see October–December 1941, YVA, M-41/879; and January–July 1942, YVA, M-41/881.

<sup>52</sup>For example, the Judenrat requested fifty tons of fodder and was allowed only twenty and asked for ten tons of salt and was given five; see requests for food allocations, January–June 1942, YVA, M-41/881.

<sup>53</sup>October 14, 1941, YVA, M-41/879.

Due to its importance, bread was a main issue in the Judenrat's correspondence. Between July 1941 and April 1942, it monitored the consumption of bread and the quantities of flour manufactured, compiled a list of bakeries and the quantities of bread baked there, put together an income and expenditure report in regard to the sale of bread,<sup>54</sup> and recorded the names of Jews who received ration cards in January–August 1942.<sup>55</sup> The Judenrat went to special lengths for the orphanage and petitioned the director of the Food and Agriculture Department indefatigably, asking for linseed oil on one occasion and for basic foodstuffs on another. Most of the requests were honored.<sup>56</sup>

The Judenrat also dealt with housing. Jews applied for permanent residency permits in Pinsk. These Jews fell into two categories—those whom the Soviet authorities had expelled from Pinsk because it was a district capital, and those who had been sent away from the city to study (mainly bookkeeping in Bialystok) and had been cut off from their families by the war. The requests poured in from September to December 1941, and included applications for passports (which served as ID cards) that had been lost for various reasons, e.g., arrests by the NKVD and confiscations of Russian passports. Almost all of these requests were answered favorably, and the Jews in question were entitled to resume their residency in Pinsk. The documents include authorizations of new addresses and approvals from Judenräte in other ghettos concerning relocation of Jews or return to Pinsk. Jews returned from Bialystok, Luniniec, Janow, Luck, and Kobryn. The authorizations usually included the person's name and workplace or the place where he had stayed with relatives.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Among other things, there are records of applications from bakery owners to the municipal administration concerning the quantities of bread that they had baked: YVA, M-41/957, 961, 964–969, 972–982, 984. File M-41/966 contains two lists: one comprised of nineteen bakeries; and the other including the quantity of flour that each bakery consumed for baking. The lists begin in July 1941; presumably, the number of bakeries was reduced as time passed.

<sup>55</sup>Lists of Jews for issue of ration cards, 1941–1942, YVA, M-41/907–910.

<sup>56</sup>February–March 1942, YVA, M-41/881, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>57</sup>Applications for residency permits, submitted by Jews to the municipal administration, July–December 1941, YVA, M-41/886–888; October 1941, YVA, M-41/929; applications for and receipt of residency permits in Pinsk, August–September 1941, YVA, M-41/930; communications and requests from Jews, October 1941, see, for example, letter dated April 22, 1942, YVA, M-41/867.

Those who wished to relocate to and within Pinsk sometimes accompanied their applications by a request for permission to move household effects (with a list of items attached), usually furniture and clothing. The municipal Order Department generally approved the transfer of these items but limited it to one day.<sup>58</sup> In several cases, Jews who wished to move belongings had to provide confirmation from witnesses as to their ownership.<sup>59</sup>

In November 1941, an inventory of buildings under Jewish private or community ownership was drawn up. In several buildings, the grounds were surveyed and the rooms and tenants were counted. The list was meant to facilitate the confiscation of these buildings at some later time.<sup>60</sup> The eviction of Jews from their homes evidently explains many requests for permits to move items from one dwelling to another.

As this went on, non-Jewish inhabitants in the ghetto area were evicted, and their dwellings were confiscated. Here, too, a description of the buildings appears. The exact date is unknown; apparently, the documentation precedes the establishment of the ghetto and dates to the authorities' efforts to gather the Jews into one area and to evict other inhabitants for this purpose.<sup>61</sup>

The ghettoization order was issued on April 30, 1942. Jews who did not live on streets included within the ghetto were given until 16:00 the next day to move to the specified area.

The Judenrat attempted to prevent the ghettoization. The plans for this action were easy to discern because fences for the ghetto were being erected and the Judenrat had received reports about ghettos that had been established elsewhere. A week before the ghettoization, the Judenrat presented various arguments to the *Gebietskommissar* in the attempt to thwart the implementation of this policy—foremost, the poor sanitary conditions, the shortage of water, and concern about the spread of contagious diseases due to the severe congestion that would prevail in the cramped ghetto area. However, the ghettoization decree remained in effect.

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<sup>58</sup>YVA, M-41/886. The permits appear in three languages.

<sup>59</sup>YVA, M-41/886, 914.

<sup>60</sup>List of Jewish-owned buildings in Pinsk, January–October 1942, YVA, M-41/915–916. In regard to the surveying, see M-41/913.

<sup>61</sup>List of inhabitants evicted from the ghetto area and dispossessed of their homes, 1942, YVA, M-41/988, 989.

Jews were permitted to take kitchen utensils, bedding, and small quantities of clothing to the ghetto. At dawn on the appointed day, the streets bustled with Jews carrying bundles. Those whose homes were inside the ghetto helped those who were about to join them. Every homeowner was ordered to lock his house, record his name and address on the key, and hand the key over to the Judenrat. Local residents moved into the evicted Jews' homes.

Nahum Boneh describes the move to the ghetto: "At every street corner, Nazis stood together with Polish policemen and the rabble, prodding the walking [Jews] to move more quickly by shouting and, *en passant*, searching their bundles and taking whatever appealed to them."

About 20,000 people entered the ghetto, including Jews from the surroundings. The Judenrat had already prepared a plan for the distribution of rooms based on 1.20 square meters per person. However, the disorder on that day thwarted the distribution; and three or four families moved into each room. The courtyards were filled with people. There were only two water pumps in the entire ghetto, and lengthy queues formed near them. The Jewish police maintained order.<sup>62</sup>

As the Judenrat expected, health conditions in the ghetto deteriorated severely, especially when the ghetto was on the verge of liquidation. The most common diseases were dysentery and typhoid fever. Many Jews also starved to death. The new documentary material includes hundreds of records of patients who had contracted contagious illnesses and of those who died. The records provide the patient's name, address, and age, the disease contracted, the patient's whereabouts, and information on whether and when he or she had been hospitalized. Diagnoses and the dates of surgical procedures and treatments<sup>63</sup> allow us to make a statistical examination of the number of patients, the types of diseases, the mortality rate among various age groups, and the pace of mortality. Thus, according to the lists, 185 Jews died in 1941 (August–December), and 843 Jews died in 1942 (from January until the

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<sup>62</sup>Boneh, "The Holocaust and the Uprising," pp. 334–335; reports of investigations, indictments, and verdicts in trials of members of Police Battalion 306, 1963, YVA, TR–10/790, p. 129 (original in Lg Frankfurt/Main U Js 901/62).

<sup>63</sup>Diagnoses, the Jewish clinic, February–April 1942, YVA, M-41/948; notices from the Gebietskommissariat Health Department about the contraction of contagious diseases among Jews, January–December 1942, YVA, M-41/868.

ghetto was liquidated)—about 5 percent of the Jewish population.<sup>64</sup> The death records also include death by starvation and fatal injury caused by firearms.<sup>65</sup>

The Judenrat employees who staffed the burial society conducted dozens of funerals every day. The casualties were buried at the cemetery in Karlin, the fences of which had been dismantled. Medical opinions, most of which are from October 1942, shortly before the ghetto was liquidated and after several months of internment in the ghetto, accurately portray the Jews' poor living conditions and the actions that the Judenrat took in an attempt to improve the situation.

The Judenrat incessantly petitioned the *Gebietskommissariat* in regard to the severe conditions in the ghetto and the spread of epidemics. Correspondence with the district physician lists actions that should be taken to improve sanitation and health conditions, as well as a list of Jewish doctors with dates of birth, addresses, certificates, and education. Many Jewish doctors worked in “Aryan” clinics.<sup>66</sup> A simple document permitting the use of electricity (electricity in the ghetto had been turned off) informs us of the medical institutions that operated in the ghetto for the Jews and explains how long they did so.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, we find that the ghetto had a hospital, a pharmacy, and a general clinic. The list also notes the names of dentists, bacteriologists, and dental technicians. Jews in other ghettos called on the doctors of Pinsk, and extensive correspondence was conducted regarding the employment of Jewish physicians in Pinsk and the district, requests from other ghettos to send doctors from Pinsk, permits to work in “Aryan” clinics, and requests to appoint Jewish doctors in various locations.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to its efforts with regard to health, food supplies, and labor arrangements, the Judenrat, insofar as we can see from the documentation now available, did not deal at all with cultural activities. . Most veteran

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<sup>64</sup>List of Jews in Pinsk who died in 1941–1943, YVA, M-41/921. The examination was conducted by Rita Margolin of the Yad Vashem staff.

<sup>65</sup>Medical opinions concerning Jewish deaths, January–December, 1942, YVA, M-41/868–870.

<sup>66</sup>Lists of Jews who worked in the Pinsk health system in January–August 1942, YVA, M-41/903. For additional lists of doctors, from August 1942 on, see YVA, M-41/992. Since the list was drawn up before ghettoization, the home addresses are in areas outside the ghetto.

<sup>67</sup>Lists of Jewish workers in Pinsk, April–May 1942, YVA, M-41/993, p. 75.

<sup>68</sup>For example, see YVA, M-41/993; labor permits issued by the *Gebietskommissar* to Jewish physicians, April–July 1942, YVA, M-41/873.

teachers, intellectuals, and public functionaries had perished in the August *Aktionen*. There was no one to organize a school, and no parties or entertainment evenings are known to have taken place under Judenrat or any other sponsorship. Neither is there any indication of youth-movement or political-party activity.<sup>69</sup>

The ghetto existed for seven months. As time passed, starvation became increasingly prevalent and so did attempts to smuggle in food. German and Polish police killed Jews who disobeyed orders but also, to amuse themselves, opened fire on “children who crawled through the barbed-wire fences, carrying a loaf of bread that they had obtained on the outside from Christians.” They also shot women who, throwing caution to the winds, obtained potatoes or potato peels. “Death for a loaf of bread. Death for potato peels. Death for no reason at all.”<sup>70</sup>

The Judenrat’s duties transcended the need for work and food. The Council also had to order the Jewish public repeatedly to pay contributions and bear the burden of dispossession and similar actions. Thus, in November 1941, the municipal administration ordered the Judenrat to provide the gendarmerie with a certain quantity of varied household items by 6:00, specifying their size and intended purpose, e.g., five frying pans for meat. In December 1941, the Judenrat was ordered to provide the Wehrmacht command with a large rug and curtains for seven windows.<sup>71</sup>

Much of the documentation deals with the Germans’ monetary demands. The Judenrat had few fundraising possibilities but attempted to maneuver among them. For example, it not only “donated” household items to the municipal administration but also sold various items, and the bills from these sales are included in the documentation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Boneh, “The Holocaust and the Uprising,” p. 336. The absence of education and culture was not unique to the Pinsk ghetto. These areas of life were also ignored in Grodno and Lublin. In other ghettos, in contrast—such as those in Vilna and Bialystok—both the Judenrat and culturally active people ensured the existence of such endeavors.

<sup>70</sup>Solomian-Luc, *A Girl Facing the Gallows*, p. 64.  
<sup>71</sup>Orders to pay contributions, October–December 1941, YVA, M-41/926; correspondence between Jews and the municipal Order Department concerning payment of contributions and collection of taxes, October–November 1941, YVA, M-41/942.

<sup>72</sup>Bills from the Judenrat to the administration for the sale of household items, October–November 1941, YVA, M-41/943.

Demands from the Pinsk municipal administration to the Judenrat concerning tax remittances reveal which artisans (shoemakers, hairdressers, hatters, furriers, tinsmiths) were liable to taxes via the Judenrat.<sup>73</sup> The most interesting documents are those dealing with demands from the Judenrat to the Jewish public to pay contributions. Such communications were recorded on October 19 and October 20, 1941, all phrased identically and in Russian: “With regard to the contribution imposed on the Jewish population of the city of Pinsk, the Judenrat of Pinsk demands that 50 rubles be deposited in its account at 24 Albrechtowska Street by 17:00 hours today.” The order included a threat: if the sum were not remitted, the Judenrat would be compelled to add the recalcitrant taxpayer’s name to a list that it would submit to the *Gebietskommissar*. Most people who received such summonses paid up, as evidenced by the rubber stamp affixed to the back of the order.<sup>74</sup> Some Jews, however, not only criticized the Judenrat’s actions but also resisted them and refused to pay the ransom.

Another kind of remittance was the fines that the municipal Order Department imposed for various offenses. Fascinating material of this type may be found in orders to pay fines and remit penalties for tax infractions and in requests to repeal fines.<sup>75</sup> The “transgression” of absence from work for one day or longer resulted in a fine of 60 rubles or six days in prison. These orders were given during the Nazi occupation, from August 1941 until the ghetto was liquidated. How did the Jews respond? The correspondence shows that a few of them, considering themselves the victims of an injustice, contacted the municipal Order Department and explained why the fine should be repealed. One of the documents is a communication from Golda Lieberman, on March 4, 1942, in which she argued that there had been a misunderstanding: “They apparently called someone named Gleiberman at work and my name is Lieberman. I was at work that day. The Judenrat can attest to that.”<sup>76</sup> In another letter, Lajche

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<sup>73</sup>List of Jews liable to taxes and documents on the number of Jews in Pinsk, February–July, 1942, YVA, M-41/953.

<sup>74</sup>YVA, M-41/942, pp. 42–43. Most of the orders stipulated this sum, but there are also orders in the sums of 100, 150, 200, 250, 300, 400, and 500 rubles, evidently commensurate with the individual Jew’s affluence.

<sup>75</sup>Orders from the Order Department to impose fines on Jews, January–March 1942, YVA, M-41/932.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

Garbosz asserts that she is altogether blameless—a minor whom the Judenrat had not assigned to a work place. Therefore, she asks the Order Department to repeal the fine of 45 rubles or six days in prison that had been imposed on her.<sup>77</sup> Frida Kuznir lent her horse and cart to a resident of a nearby village, who did not return them. She sought both the restitution of her property and the repeal of a fine imposed on her for being absent from forced labor.<sup>78</sup> Etlá Chaya Frizman was fined 100 rubles or ten days in prison for owning a grocery store that had not been registered with the municipality. It was alleged that her shop did not have a posted list of prices and that the prices were very high. She was found to have violated the law, and Polish witnesses were found to prove her culpability.<sup>79</sup>

Sometimes denunciation by local residents brought offenses to the authorities' knowledge, as in the case of Devorah Grynberg, who had gone into the street without a yellow star. The informer even had a theory about why the Jewish woman had removed the star: she did it “to circulate among the wagoners.” The “defendant” offered a different version of affairs: it was true that she had been in the street without the star, but, she claimed, she had forgotten to put it on because she had run into the street to look for her brother, who would give her a permit to obtain bread at the bakery. She was tried, but it is not clear how the case ended.<sup>80</sup>

The foregoing discussion makes it appear that both the Judenrat and the municipal administration were very diligent in preparing lists of Jews by various categories. In addition to the lists mentioned in this article, the municipal administration drew up lists of 6,400 Jewish women—an alphabetical list in Russian, including serial numbers, and a list arranged by the serial numbers that appear in the previous list.<sup>81</sup> The Judenrat also prepared a list of Jewish men. However, unlike the lists of women, we have no

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>78</sup>Orders to pay fines, October–December 1941, YVA, M-41/926, p. 26.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 35–37.

<sup>80</sup>January–February 1942, YVA, M-41/933, pp. 4–6. For further information about the fines, see directives of the municipal Order Department concerning the imposition of fines against Jews, February–March 1942, YVA, M-41/949, 950.

<sup>81</sup>Lists of Jewish women, January 1942, YVA, M-41/922, 923, 890 (undated).

index for this list.<sup>82</sup> There are directives with instructions on how to prepare lists of Jews, and lists including dates of birth, addresses, places of work, and occupations were indeed prepared.

Documents classified as personal (*Personalausweis*) are also very important. Since they were first prepared in September 1941, important documentation of this sort is lacking on those who were murdered in August 1941, making it difficult to estimate their number. The documents include an inscription in Russian and German and include the number of the personal document, first name and surname, year of birth, occupation, family status, religion, nationality, address, place of work (including the unemployed), a photograph, and a rubber stamp.<sup>83</sup>

A new directive was issued on October 20, 1942: Jews were to remain at home in the evenings, so that the Jewish police could compile a population registry. Jews did not leave for work for several days and were gripped with fear. Minski alleviated the tension by announcing that the Jews of Pinsk would remain alive.<sup>84</sup>

The Pinsk ghetto was the last ghetto to be destroyed within the sphere of operations of the RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt—Reich Security Main Office) branch in Pinsk. On October 27, 1942, Himmler ordered Hans-Adolf Prützmann, the HSSPF (*Höhere SS und Polizeiführer*—senior SS and police commander) in the district, to liquidate the ghetto:

“Military command headquarters informs me that the Brest–Gomel line is increasingly susceptible to attacks by gangs, thus disrupting supplies to the fighting forces. On the basis of the notices placed before me, the Pinsk ghetto should be regarded as the center of the gangs’ activity in the Pripet Marshes. Therefore, I instruct you to liquidate and destroy the ghetto in Pinsk at once, even though there are economic considerations against doing so. If the *Aktion* makes it possible, set aside [among the ghetto population] a force of 1,000

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<sup>82</sup>List of Jewish men prepared by the Judenrat, August 1941, YVA, M-41/940. It is not clear whether the missing documentation has not been delivered to Yad Vashem or does not exist at all.

<sup>83</sup>Personal documents of Jews, September 1941, YVA, M-41/893–895. For additional personal documentation, see personal permits from the Judenrat and the municipal administration, January–October, 1942, YVA, M-41/934, 939.

<sup>84</sup>Solomian-Luc, *A Girl Facing the Gallows*, p. 75.

male workers and make them available to the army for the construction of wooden shelters. However, these 1,000 laborers should be put to work only in a closed and carefully guarded camp. If such guarding cannot be assured, they too should be exterminated.”<sup>85</sup>

Since the liquidation of the ghetto had been planned for some time, *Gebietskommissar* Klein had made the necessary preparations. Ackerman,<sup>86</sup> a member of the *Gebietskommissariat* staff, ordered local residents and civilian prisoners to dig seven pits at an abandoned airport about 3 kilometers from Pinsk. All available SD men from the branch offices in the area were brought to Pinsk, and all police units stationed in the vicinity of Pinsk were gathered, insofar as their services elsewhere were dispensable.

On the morning of October 29, after a briefing, the police units surrounded the ghetto in accordance with the order. At 6:30 the Jews were ordered to gather near the Jewish cemetery. Most of them obeyed without resistance. The police units and the local militia combed every building for Jews who had stayed behind. At the gathering point, about 400 Jewish workers were set aside for subsequent employment at the plywood factory, the match factory, and other workshops. The others were ordered to turn over their valuables and were led in files, guarded by police units, to the firing pits. About 10,000 people were murdered that day.<sup>87</sup>

The cavalymen were stationed about 1 kilometer away on both sides of the road along which the Jews were led and deployed around the site of the execution at the same distance. Their task was to capture escaping Jews. Members of Police Battalion 310 blocked access to the killing site.

On October 30–31 and November 1, the ghetto was combed again in order to flush out concealed Jews. With the help of tracking dogs, such Jews were driven out of their hiding places. Hand grenades were used to break into some of the hideouts. Ill Jews and young children whose mothers had had to leave them behind were shot in the ghetto. SD men killed the patients in the Jewish

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<sup>85</sup>Investigation reports, indictments, and verdicts in trials of members of Police Battalion 306, 1963, YVA, TR–10/790, p. 126.

<sup>86</sup>No details about him are known.

<sup>87</sup>YVA, TR-10/790, pp. 128–129. The units were Police Battalion 306, Company 2 of Battalion 310, the 2nd Police Cavalry Platoon, and Company 3 of Battalion 320.

hospital at that time; they shot ambulatory patients in a shack nearby after having hurled bedridden patients out of the hospital windows. To bury the corpses of the Jews who had been shot in the ghetto, 200 of the selected Jewish workers were ordered to dig two pits near the Jewish cemetery. These workers were summarily shot after they had completed their task. Jews who had gone into hiding under the floor of the contagious diseases hospital were also shot and were buried in the pits. Killings of Jews en route to the pits also took place. Jews who collapsed on the way were shot.<sup>88</sup>

After the extermination *Aktion*, only 143 craftsmen remained alive. They were housed in two buildings in the so-called “small ghetto” and worked as tailors, shoemakers, and printing workers.<sup>89</sup> On December 23, 1942, this remnant of the ghetto was also obliterated. The Jewish community of Pinsk no longer existed. The local population profited from the Jews’ tragedy. The following three documents attest to this: a list of clothing handed over to “Aryans,” including bills for the sale of these items, prepared by the SS commander;<sup>90</sup> a request to purchase a Jewish home, presumably answered in the affirmative;<sup>91</sup> and requests from residents of Pinsk to exempt them from rent for their occupancy of formerly Jewish-owned houses. The requests date from July 1942, i.e., after the ghettoization, and the houses in question had been inhabited by Jews and were considered the Jews’ property until they were expropriated.<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

During the years the Jews spent under Polish rule, they attempted to maintain their internal organization; they invested their energies in developing Jewish community institutions and struggled for their rights as a national minority. During the months of Soviet rule, the Jews adapted to the new situation and tried to make the best of it. They acknowledged the directives

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 131–132.

<sup>89</sup>Boneh, “The Holocaust and the Uprising,” p. 112.

<sup>90</sup>List of clothing of Jews in Pinsk handed over to “Aryan” residents, March–December 1943, YVA, M-41/885.

<sup>91</sup>Request from resident of Pinsk to the *Gebietskommissariat* to buy a Jew’s house, January–December 1943, YVA, M-41/878.

<sup>92</sup>Request to the *Gebietskommissar* concerning rent, July 25, 1942, YVA, M-41/876.

and orders of the new regime and challenged them when they considered them unjust. However, they acted as individuals. They had neither a community administration nor specifically Jewish institutions. They were equal citizens although this equality was injurious to their autonomous systems, at least they could work and make a living.

The Nazi occupation transformed the entire order of life. Yet, even then the Jews dared to submit requests. As stated, some of their requests, such as applications for residency in Pinsk, were answered in the affirmative. Even when they were fined for offenses, some asked to have the fines revoked. The Jews continued to behave as they had for years—wherever they were able to take action, they did so and never tired of trying. This time, however, even when they managed to extract a few benefits, their gains were for appearances' sake only, since they—like all the Jews—were doomed to extermination under Nazi occupation.

The documentation surveyed here allows us to reconstruct the Jews' lives during those grim months. It permits us to sketch a portrait of the Judenrat and its activity on the Jews' behalf. The eradication of the community institutions by the Soviet regime encumbered the Jews and forced them to reorganize. From this standpoint, the Judenrat acted quickly and efficiently. It pinpointed areas in need of immediate care and invested its time and energy there. It put the emphasis on sustaining daily life and spared no effort to seek ways and means to assure the Jewish population's survival. It attempted to maneuver between the authorities' demands and the Jews' needs and to repeal various decrees by petitioning the authorities repeatedly. It fought disease by hiring doctors, operating a hospital, and finding medicines, and resisted starvation by keeping the ghetto population employed, distributing ration cards, and improving food supplies. However, the Judenrat also pressured the Jews whenever contributions and confiscations of belongings were necessary. Its actions will surely be criticized, but it operated under conditions of continual pressure and threats—from the August 1941 *Aktion*, continuing with ghettoization, and ending with the final liquidation *Aktion*. It was, in fact, a rump Judenrat, eviscerated after many of its members were murdered immediately after their appointment.

Translated from the Hebrew by Naftali Greenwood

## Appendices

1. Order from Field Headquarters to the mayor of Pinsk concerning the establishment of a Judenrat, July 30, 1941, YVA, M-41/945.
2. Directive concerning compulsory labor, from Field Headquarters to the mayor of Pinsk, August 11, 1941, YVA, M-41/942.
3. List of Jewish-owned bakeries (marking is being examined).
4. Example of personal document.
5. Program for the provision of meat for the Jewish population, prepared by the Judenrat, October 14, 1941, YVA, M-41/879.
6. Directive to assure nutrition for Jews in the Pinsk District, issued by the *Gebietskommissar*, November 17, 1941, YVA, M-41/880.
7. Request from the Judenrat to the District Administration for hay for cows, September 13, 1941, YVA, M-41/881.
8. A request for contributions, presented to the Jews by the Judenrat, October 19, 1941, YVA, M-41/942.
9. Payment of fine, from the municipal Order Department, November 4, 1941, YVA, M-41/925.
10. Size of the "Aryan" and the Jewish populations of Pinsk, from the Administration Department, May 14, 1942, YVA, M-41/898.
11. Residency permit in Pinsk, from the municipal Order Department, September 30, 1941, YVA, M-41/929.

**Source: *Yad Vashem Studies, Vol. 29, Jerusalem, 2001, pp. 149-182***