

Yehuda Bauer on the Jewish Populace of of Baranowicze, Poland

Jewish Baranowicze in the Holocaust

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This monograph on Baranowicze has two aims—first, to describe the town and its history during the Holocaust, and, second, to provide a basis for comparison with other towns and cities in Poland and Lithuania.¹

Baranowicze is unique in several respects. Unlike most towns in these countries, which could boast of long histories, Baranowicze was not founded until the late nineteenth century. In 1941, Baranowicze had a relatively large number of Jews for a town its size (about 12,000, which was half the population). It was a railroad junction with an active economy. It was also the center of a flourishing Jewish religious life, with local branches of all the organizations typically found in Jewish communities in Poland.

The questions addressed in this article will be directed from the Jewish perspective: What kind of Jewish life was there in Baranowicze before the war? What influence did the brief Soviet occupation have on the Jews as a community and as individuals? How did the many refugees from German-

¹ In the vast literature about the Holocaust, very few studies have been written about Jewish towns. In Eastern Europe—Poland, the Baltic states, Bessarabia, and Carpathorus (according to the 1938 borders)—research has only just begun. Towns in the Soviet Union require a separate study. For our purposes we have defined a “Jewish town” as an urban settlement of between 1,000 and 15,000 Jews who constituted at least 35 to 40 percent of the total population. This article uses the pre-war Polish spelling of the town’s name— Baranowicze; in Russian it is Baranovichi; and today— Baranavičy (in western Belarus).

The sources for the present study include the Baranowicze community Memorial Book, other books published in Israel, and a volume in Yiddish published in the United States. I have also examined many testimonies preserved in the Yad Vashem Archives and other archives in Israel (including archival material sent to Yad Vashem from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and from other places), as well as testimonies collected by the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles and material from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Nevertheless, this monograph is an incomplete attempt and research report, because I did not attempt to hunt down *all* possible sources: I made no attempt to elicit testimony from survivors who are still alive (nor am I certain that this would be of any real benefit at this late date); nor did I review the testimonies held in a number of collections in the United States. The state of the sources with regard to this particular town resembles what exists regarding Jewish towns in general. Our study focuses on internal Jewish life, so that German and Polish sources are almost irrelevant; Soviet sources are relevant only to a limited extent. It follows that the main sources cited here are Jewish testimonies; the methodological problem is how to correlate them to obtain a possible picture that can support historical analysis.

occupied Poland affect the community? What was the nature of the Judenrat and the Jewish police force established under the German occupation? Was there “resistance” of the type known from the large ghettos? How did individual Jews react to the deteriorating situation? What were their hopes and illusions? What were the characteristics of the underground as compared to other places?

We shall also look into German policy, the relations between Jews and the local Belorussian and Polish populations, and cases of assistance extended to Jews by non-Jews, including Germans.²

The Town Until 1939

Baranowicze was founded in 1883, on the lands of the Polish Count Rozwadowski; it quickly developed into an important urban center because three rail lines connected it to Minsk, Moscow, and Warsaw. As early as 1897, its population of 4,692 included 2,171 Jews, even though Jews were not allowed to live there officially until 1903.

During World War I the town suffered greatly, and many Jews left, but they returned when the war was over. Baranowicze passed back and forth between the Poles and the Soviets until the borders between the two countries were demarcated by the Treaty of Riga (1920). This treaty left it within Poland until World War II. In 1921, its population of 11,471 included 7,796 Jews (67.9 percent). Ten years later it had 22,818 residents, including 9,680 Jews (42.4 percent). It seems likely that, by 1939, the population was around 23,000, with about 10,000 Jews. At the end of the Soviet interlude (September 1939–June 1941) there were about 9,000 Jews in the town, supplemented by 3,000 refugees from German-occupied Poland.

Although there was no heavy industry in Baranowicze, there were a number of factories, chiefly related to the railroad: a metal foundry, a large plant for repairing locomotives, and the like. Like most towns, Baranowicze had an agricultural hinterland and was the site of meatpackers and factories that produced oil, furniture, equipment for flourmills, and so on. People from the

² Partisan activity is a separate topic and is addressed in Shalom Cholawski’s study, which provides a basis for a discussion of this issue. See Shalom Cholawski, *Partisan Revolt and Combat: The Jews of Belorussia during the Second World War* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Yad Vashem and Moreshet, 2001).

rest of Poland came there on vacation because of the dense forests and beautiful lakes in the district. There were also a municipal hospital, and a Polish army base was located there because of the proximity to the Soviet border.³

Jewish public life in Baranowicze was typical of Jewish communities in Poland in general and the border region in particular. Every few years there were elections for the community's governing institutions, and various parties campaigned. The community supported a variety of welfare and philanthropic associations: as early as the 1890s there was a "Kosher Food" organization that provided food to Jewish soldiers stationed in the town; during the inter-war period a Linat Zedek society (to provide overnight lodgings for poor travelers) and a Bikkur Holim society (to visit the sick) were founded, as well as a small Jewish hospital that expanded over time. The local branch of the Jewish health organization, TOZ, was very active; in the 1930s it was headed by Dr. Chaim Nachumowski. The Joint Distribution Committee established a free loan fund in Baranowicze and supported a number of the local charitable institutions; HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) attempted to organize emigration to destinations other than Palestine.

The community was involved in municipal life. While the mayor was Belorussian (as this was the majority group), the deputy mayor was usually a Jew. Poles and Russians also lived in the town, and there was much inter-ethnic tension.

About ten Jewish banks, or loan societies, operated in Baranowicze in the 1920s, but most of them collapsed during the depression in the 1930s. Only the Agudat Israel bank and free loan society survived.

The Jews of Baranowicze engaged chiefly in crafts and commerce. Most factory-owners were Jews, and they constituted an emerging wealthy class. In the 1930s there was an increase in the number of engineers, physicians, and other professionals, but there is no reliable data on this subject.

Educational, cultural, and intellectual life was well developed in Baranowicze, along with partisan political activity. The government opened Polish-language

³ See Nechama Zukerman, ed., *Struggle For Life of the Jews of Baranowicze: Collection of Memoirs on the Holocaust by Survivors and Fighters of the Baranowicze Ghetto* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Arieli, 1992); Joseph Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction and Resistance* (Yiddish) (New York: Baranovitsher Farband of America, 1964).

schools for Jews, the so-called *shabsówka* (schools for Jews that did not hold classes on Saturday), which incorporated some Jewish content into the curriculum. Nor did the Polish authorities oppose schools in which the language of instruction was Yiddish or Hebrew. The Orthodox and the religious Zionists had several educational institutions: the ultra-Orthodox Hinnukh, which taught in Hebrew; Yavneh and Tahkemoni; and the Agudat Israel Yesodei Torah for boys and Beth Jacob for girls. There was a secular Yiddish school run by C.Y.S.H.O. (Central Yiddish School Organization), and another Yiddish institution affiliated with the autonomous Shul un Kultur Farband. The first Hebrew-language Tarbut school was founded in 1923, only to close some years later—over the protests of its pupils—because of financial difficulties. The school soon reopened, chiefly thanks to the intervention of members of Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir.⁴

Baranowicze was an important center of orthodoxy in Poland, largely on account of Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman (1875–1941), the dean of the Ohel Torah *Yeshivah*, which had an enrollment of more than 400 students. The Riga-born Rabbi Wasserman had studied in the Volozhin and Telz *yeshivot* and was influenced in particular by Rabbi Israel Meir Ha-Kohen of Radun (known as the Hafez Hayyim, 1838–1933), one of the greatest Orthodox thinkers of his age. Wasserman came to Baranowicze at the end of World War I, after stays in several communities. As an anti-Zionist he forbade his students to read newspapers other than those published by Agudat Israel. Nor would he even allow them to participate in the Oneg Shabbat gatherings in the local synagogues, lest they be exposed to Zionist influences. Wasserman was not only a Halakhic authority but was also well versed in philosophy and knew German.⁵ His brother-in-law was Rabbi Hayyim Ozer Grodzinski (known as the “Ahiezer,” 1863–1940), the most important Orthodox leader of the period. His personality and connections made Wasserman one of most prominent leaders of World Agudat Israel. His attitude toward the contemporary scene was reflected in his essay “Footsteps of the Messiah,” written in the spring and autumn of 1938. Viewing the spread of Nazism and, *mutatis mutandis*, of

⁴ Zev Livne (Lerman), “Educational Institutions in Baranowicze,” in A. S. Stein, ed., *Baranowicze Memorial Book* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Irgun Yotzey Baranowitz, 1953), pp. 179–199.

⁵ Rivka Kowenski, *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, pp. 210–211.

Communism and Zionism, Wasserman asserted that the loss of identification with *da'at Torah*—the steadfast adherence to the Torah in its ultra-Orthodox acceptance—and the pursuit of vain ideologies such as Zionism, socialism, communism, and liberalism, were the reasons for Divine punishment of the Jews. While it was the Nazis who were implementing this punishment, they were merely a tool.

Initially, Wasserman thought that the Jews could avert the catastrophe if they repented, which included shunning all those who did not observe the precepts. But, in 1938–1939, he reached the conclusion that it was too late; hence the Jews should accept lovingly the imminent disaster, in which a portion of the nation would perish and the unbearable situation would stir Divine mercy and the coming of the Messiah to save the remnant of His people.

Rabbi Wasserman returned to Baranowicze shortly before the war broke out, but, with the Soviet conquest, he closed the *yeshivah* and fled to Vilna. When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, he was in Kovno. He was murdered at the Ninth Fort in Kovno on July 6, 1941, along with twelve other rabbis.⁶

There is only one statement by a former student of Wasserman's who survived the Holocaust in Baranowicze,⁷ and it does not shed any light on the extent to which his views influenced the public at large. In the wealth of available testimonies there is also no mark of any influence. It is true that Wasserman was not the only Orthodox leader in Baranowicze. There was another important *yeshivah*, Toras Hesed, and, at various junctures between the wars, there was significant Hasidic representation there. Beyond all this, the community's religious life was directed by the chief rabbi, David Weizel (from 1906), who was exiled by the Soviets in 1941, and consequently survived the Holocaust, although his family perished.

⁶ *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, pp. 256–259. See also Gershon Greenberg, "Elhanan Wasserman's Response to the Growing Catastrophe in Europe: The Role of Ha'gra and Hofets Hayim Upon His Thought," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 10 (2000), pp. 171–204.

⁷ The testimony is of Bernard Kudevich, Survivors of the Shoah Foundation, interview No. 06107 (1995). According to a NKVD report, dated February 19, 1941, and signed by Capt. Krasinov (YVA, M.41/2583), by then only ten or twelve students from the two *yeshivot* were still in Baranowicze; the rest had all managed to get away to Vilna. Even if we assume that some of them returned later, there were no more than a handful in Baranowicze. I would like to thank Shlomit Rozumny for translating all the Russian language material that I used.

During the inter-war period Orthodox influence declined in Baranowicze. Most of the Jews were attracted to other currents, chiefly Zionism and the Bund. However, we do not know how this change was reflected in the elections to the community institutions or the Baranowicze city council in the 1930s, because no sources with precise figures have been found.⁸

Partisan political life in the Baranowicze community was quite vigorous. Six Yiddish weeklies represented all shades of opinion. The Zionist movement had a large following: He-Halutz had its Shahariyah training farm not far from the town; Po'alei Zion and Ze'irei Zion had local branches from 1918; Mizrachi from 1919; Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi from 1927; and Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir from 1924 (by the end of the 1930s it had about 1,000 members in the Baranowicze region). Betar had a branch from the late 1920s, with some 200 members and a training camp near town. Ha-Shomer ha-Dati and Freiheit–He-Halutz ha-Za'ir (Dror from 1938) were also active. The Bund, too, was influential. Its local affiliate, founded in 1904, organized Jewish workers to fight to improve their working conditions; it was also involved in cultural and sports activities. In the 1930s the Bund organized protest demonstrations against the pogroms in Przytyk and Minsk Mazowiecki. There was also a small underground Jewish Communist cell in Baranowicze. In 1938, the Bund, Po'alei Zion, and the P.P.S. (the Polish Socialist Party) established a joint front.

Relations with the Polish authorities were rather complicated. The Jews were interested in maintaining good relations with the Poles, but the antisemitism of Polish nationalists and other more radical right-wing groups spread in Baranowicze, too.⁹

The Soviet Interlude

⁸ In fact, I have not seen any figures on elections or election results in Baranowicze. For Poland as a whole, see Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland* (Berlin and New York: Mouton, 1983). Marcus asserts that in 1938/39, in Poland as a whole, 38 percent of the Jews voted for the Bund (and in the major cities, such as Warsaw and Łódź, the Bund won an absolute majority), 32 percent voted for the various Zionist parties, and 23 percent for Agudat Israel and its allies among the merchants and artisans (*ibid.*, p. 469).

⁹ Many of the details about Baranowicze are taken from a volume of *Pinkas Hakehilot* (provisional title, “Poland and Lithuania”) currently being prepared at Yad Vashem. I would like to express my thanks for permission to make use of these materials.

We have little information about Baranowicze during the Soviet occupation (September 1939–June 1941) but quite a bit of information about western Belorussia in general. In 1939, the region was home to about 485,000 Jews; after the Soviets ceded the Vilna district to Lithuania, its Jewish population stood at about 422,000.¹⁰ The Soviets favored the Belorussian majority over the Polish and Jewish minorities. In the elections to the Belorussian Soviet, on March 24, 1940, the 198 delegates included only nine Jews (4.5 percent), even though Jews accounted for 8.5 to 9 percent of the population.

In general, the Jews “received the Red Army with open arms,”¹¹ because the alternative was the Germans. Among the first to be arrested and deported were western Communists suspected of Trotskyism. But many Jews, especially the older generation, were afraid of the new regime or, at least, had serious reservations. Many of the quarter of a million refugees who streamed to western Belorussia from the German-occupied sector of Poland were deported because they refused to accept Soviet citizenship and were considered unreliable. There were several waves of deportation to Siberia: on February 8, 1940; in April of the same year; in June–July 1940; and shortly before the German invasion in June 1941. If there were 10,000 Jews in Baranowicze at the start of the Soviet period and only 9,000 at its end, some of the missing thousand must have been deported to Siberia; others returned to German-ruled Poland to be reunited with their families; while still others fled to nearby villages, anxious about the unknown future.¹²

In any case, the entire complex structure of community institutions, both secular and religious, collapsed like a house of cards when the Soviets took over what is now referred to as western Belarus.¹³ The Zionist organizations and the Bund also fell apart. Nothing is known of any underground activities

¹⁰ The general information about the region comes chiefly from Shalom Cholawski, *The Jews in Belorussia During World War II* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Moreshet and Sifriat Poalim, 1982), especially pp. 28–55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30. See also Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern Europe Jewry Under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1995), pp. 33–35.

¹² Levin, *ibid.*, pp. 191–197. The chief rabbi since 1906, Weizel, was among those deported. He survived the war, although his family was murdered by the Germans.

¹³ The NKVD reported on a hard core of 300–400 religious Jews, who held prayer services under the direction of the rabbis still in the city. They also made contact with the Great Synagogue in Moscow, from which they received “fruits for the holiday”—evidently meaning *etrogim* (citrons) for *Sukkot*. Before the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, there was also interaction between this core group and Jewish centers in Vilna; see YVA, M.41/2583.

during the Soviet period, except for a clandestine *yeshivah* with about thirty students, reported by the NKVD.¹⁴ Young Jews were enthusiastic about the Soviets because they now had opportunities to acquire an education and make a living, opportunities they could never have dreamt of under Polish rule.

The Jewish schools were merged in an arbitrary fashion. The Yiddish school, for example, was combined with the ultra-Orthodox Beth Jacob and Yesodei Torah.¹⁵ At the same time--or, at least at the beginning of this period--some attempt was made to encourage Jewish culture in Soviet disguise; and perhaps also, Soviet culture in Yiddish garb. In 1940, a traveling Yiddish theater troupe visited the town.

After the Soviet occupation, there was a movement of *yeshivah* students and other Jews, as well as a few members of the Zionist youth movements, to Lithuania, which was still neutral. For example, thirty students of the Toras Hesed *Yeshivah* relocated to Tavrig (Taurage).¹⁶ Although we have no further details, most of the Jews of Baranowicze evidently accommodated themselves in some fashion to the new regime.

The Destruction of the Town

The Germans occupied Baranowicze on June 25, 1941. The 59th German Army, which continued eastward, did not manage to maintain a continuous front near Surash (Suraż), chiefly because of topographical conditions, creating what was known as the Surash or Briansk gap. The marshes and forests there soon proved a convenient route for infiltration behind German lines by partisan groups dispatched from Soviet-controlled territory. This route also led to the Baranowicze area, which is one of the main reasons why such groups were to be found there relatively early in 1942.

As we know from German sources,¹⁷ a unit of Einsatzgruppe B—141 men of Einsatzkommando 8 (EK8), commanded by Dr. Otto Bradfisch, passed

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Testimony of Haya Bar-Yohai, YVA, O.3/7741.

¹⁶ Levin, *Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 325, n. 19. The dean of the *yeshivah* was Rabbi Moshe Ribner.

¹⁷ Regarding German policy in Belorussia in general and in Baranowicze in particular, I rely chiefly on Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999). Gerlach states that the city was occupied on June 25, but most witnesses say it was occupied on June 27. The explanation is simple:

through Baranowicze in July. In September, EK3 of Einsatzgruppe A was in town briefly. The Germans immediately established an auxiliary police force of 170 local men, at first mainly Poles but later Belorussians. From July there was a Sipo post in Baranowicze.

In the early days of the occupation, the town was an important center for the SS. Himmler visited on July 31, and again on August 14, 1941; Hermann Fegelein, the commander of a special SS cavalry unit (and Hitler's future brother-in-law) announced in the town, on July 27, that "we must deal with the Jews to a large measure as bandits. ... Females and children should be ... deported"—instructions that Himmler repeated five days later in a more extreme fashion, when he ordered that the men be killed and the women and children expelled to the marshes.¹⁸ In September it was decided to liquidate the entire Jewish population. Later, when the authorities realized that Jewish slave laborers were indispensable—at least for the time being—the policy was modified. Jews fit for work were separated from the others and allowed to live, temporarily, with or without their families. However, the Germans did not give up their intention of ultimately killing all the Jews.

Reports indicate that more than 400 Jewish men were murdered during the first weeks of the German occupation. Dr. Zelig Lewinbok testified that, on July 9, 1941, seventy-three (or perhaps seventy-one) men were killed and that members of EK8 seized 350 (or 381) other young men and murdered them on July 17 or 18.¹⁹ The testimony corroborates the German documents (and the reliability of the testimony given by Jews after the war).

At first the Baranowicze municipal government, including the police, was confided to Poles, as in many other places in this region, chiefly because the more educated and experienced Poles could do a better job than Belorussians. A military government was established under a military headquarters (*Ortskommandatur*). The Germans—evidently subunits of the

German units bypassed the city two days earlier and correctly announced its fall, because there was no longer any Soviet military presence there.

¹⁸ Around this time this cavalry unit was responsible for the murder of thousands of Jews in the region of the Pripjet marshes; see Yehoshua Büchler, "Kommandostab Reichsführer SS: Himmler's Personal Brigades in 1941," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 1:1 (1986), pp. 11–26.

¹⁹ According to German reports (YVA, TR.10/541), 500 Jews were rounded up and killed in this incident, but the Jewish version seems to be more reliable; see Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 518 and 550, as well as the testimony of Dr. Zelig Lewinbok in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, pp. 511–636.

Einsatzgruppen--continued to hunt down “Communists,” meaning Jews; here, as in many other places, Poles fingered Jews as Communists.²⁰

When the area was handed over to the German civilian administration, on September 1, 1941, Rudolph Werner was appointed *Gebietskommissar*, or governor, as part of the *Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien* (“White Ruthenia”). In Baranowicze (and several other places that the Germans deemed important), there was a *Hauptkommissar* subordinate to the regional governor. The *Hauptkommissar* in Baranowicze was Friedrich Fenz, but, despite his key position, he is almost never mentioned in Jewish testimonies. Werner, by contrast, is mentioned and is said to have played an active role in murdering Jews. The political supervisor (*politischer Leiter*) in Werner’s office was the particularly cruel lawyer, Max Krampe. At first the civilian administration had a very small staff (six Germans on September 4, 1941), but it increased over time to fifty-three Germans and 161 locals in early 1943.²¹

Jews were picked off the streets at random and conscripted for forced labor. As in many other places, this was the major impetus for a Jewish initiative to establish a committee to deal with the authorities.²² At the initiative of Reb Mendel Goldberg of Agudat Israel, Jewish leaders met in a synagogue in early July and set up a committee headed by Yehoshua (Owsiej) Izykson, who was elected unanimously. Its treasurer was Mordechai Schiff. On German orders this committee became a Judenrat in early September. The committee’s chief immediate task was to provide forced laborers, but its establishment did not keep the Germans from continuing to abduct Jews. The yellow badge was imposed, as well as a curfew from 7 P.M. until 6 A.M.²³

The Judenrat quickly developed into a true bureaucracy with multiple departments, like those all over Eastern Europe. All the survivor testimonies praise the Judenrat, and especially Izykson and his secretary/assistant, Genia Mann.²⁴ Mann, who came to Baranowicze with her husband from Kovno, was

²⁰ Testimony of Dr. Zelig Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 102–107.

²¹ Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 167.

²² See Shlomo Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranovich Ghetto, 1942–1943” <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Baranovich1/bar110.html> (unattributed English translation of “The Baranowicze Judenrat, Structure and Function” [Hebrew], in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 110–126).

²³ Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 10.

²⁴ For example, that of Isaac Feigelstein in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 67–97.

idolized by the Jews as the “mother of the ghetto” and won broad esteem for her readiness to help out wherever she could. Izykson and Mann established an efficient administration and spared no effort to protect the members of the community. Non-members were also invited to Judenrat meetings: Shlomo David Weinberg, the young *rebbe* of Slonim, whose court was in Baranowicze, and Dr. Ajzik Busel, who was considered to be the representative of the intelligentsia. The *dayyan* Rabbi Nishe (Nisan) Scheinberg served as Izykson’s adviser.²⁵

As a result of Baranowicze’s importance as a railway junction, many German military units passed through the town, and it became a significant rear-echelon center. It had workshops to repair damaged locomotives and clean and refurbish weapons; there was also an important Luftwaffe base where many Jews were employed.

The local Sipo was organized in September 1941, when the Nazi civil administration was installed. The Jews, not particularly expert in the different arms of the Nazi apparatus, referred to all of the Sipo as Gestapo or SD (which were part of Sipo). The SD employed many Jews in the headquarters of Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, the regional commander of the SS and police (*Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer*, HSSPF), who took up residence in Baranowicze. The town was also the base from which Sipo units and battalions of the Ordnungspolizei (Orpo), which was also part of the SS apparatus and under the command of the HSSPF, launched their extermination and policing activities. The head of the Sipo in Baranowicze (KdS Weissruthenien, Aussenstelle Baranowitsch) was *SS-Obersturmführer* Adolf Lerner.

In the autumn of 1941, *SS Untersturmführer* Waldemar Amelung was placed in charge of Jewish affairs for the Gestapo. Amelung, a native of Riga and fluent in Russian, was sent to Baranowicze from Kovno; he was assisted by a Lithuanian named Józef Gurniewicz, referred to as “Litwin.” Amelung used Baranowicze as his base for sorties to other towns for the mass murder of Jews, such as in Slonim (November 14, 1941). Another murderer was a Ukrainian named Diachenko, who was in charge of the political department of

²⁵ Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranovich Ghetto.”

the Belorussian police established by the Germans. This force organized “hunting units” (Jagdzüge) whose prey, of course, was chiefly Jews.²⁶

The SS detachment in Baranowicze also included Police Battalion 11, and soon also Battalion 322, commanded by Gottlieb Nagel, and a Lithuanian police battalion. The Wehrmacht was also represented, at first by units of the 707th division, which reported the extermination of small groups of Jews in October and November 1941, and of the military police (Feldgendarmarie), stationed there on October 10. At that stage most of these units and German institutions in general focused on exploiting the Judenrat in order to confiscate and steal Jewish property.²⁷

The Germans were assisted by many local non-Jewish collaborators. A veteran policeman named Bachar, whose service went back to czarist days, was appointed chief of police and set out to hound the Jews. His main focus was conveying Jewish property to local Gentiles. The Belorussian mayor, Sobolewski, was also hostile to the Jews. The Germans pressed the Belorussians to hand over property and money, and the latter passed on these exactions to the Jews. Later the Germans appointed another Belorussian, Dr. Voitenko, as mayor; formerly friendly to the Jews, he now changed his attitude. As the German administration became more effective, the army and Luftwaffe demanded Jewish workers. The Jews were deluded into believing that working for the German military would save their lives.²⁸

Soon after the Germans arrived, on July 18, 1941, the Jews were ordered to pay a ransom for the release of men who were ostensibly in detention (but had in fact been killed the previous day): one million rubles, 10 kilograms of gold, and 100 kilograms of silver. In early September another ransom was demanded: 5 kilograms of gold, 10 kilograms of silver, and one or two million rubles (there are conflicting testimonies about the precise sum); and this, too, was quickly collected. Of course, the ransom was intended to reduce the Jews to penury and extort funds for German institutions and individuals. There were

²⁶ Ibid. Kless has their names as Gurniewicz and Dushenko.

²⁷ Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 622.

²⁸ Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranovich Ghetto.”

other “contributions” of various commodities, including soap, boots, suits, shoes, and so on.²⁹

The local Belorussian authorities, eager to seize Jewish real estate, favored the idea of setting up a ghetto outside of town. According to Lewinbok, some Jews were moved out, but Izykson and a group of women appealed to *Gebietskommissar* Werner, and the decree was annulled. The Jews returned to their houses, but, in the meantime, they had been plundered by their Belorussian neighbors. When Dr. Voitenko was informed that the establishment of a ghetto would lead to the spread of disease, which would also affect the non-Jewish population, he replied that it didn’t matter: any Jew who fell ill would be shot at once. On December 12, 1941, the Jews were confined to a ghetto in the southern part of the town.³⁰

Most of the Jewish physicians, who also treated the Germans and the local population, were allowed to remain outside the ghetto and were also employed in outlying towns where no other physicians remained. According to Lewinbok, this caused tension between the physicians and the Judenrat. For the time being, a number of factory-owners and skilled craftsmen also continued to live outside the ghetto. Lewinbok and others reported that these privileged men assisted the ghetto with food and in other ways. Jewish women married to non-Jews also remained outside the ghetto and were not initially persecuted. In one case a convert and his children remained outside the ghetto while his wife was forced to live within. Jews who had been baptized were also confined in the ghetto, but the daughter of one such man was allowed to return to her Gentile husband outside the ghetto on condition that she be sterilized.³¹

The ghetto was terribly overcrowded. Some 12,000 Jews were accommodated in sixty buildings. Each person was allotted only 1 square meter, which meant that between fifteen and twenty-five persons lived in a

²⁹ David Mishenke (David Kolpynicki), “Nikto nie chotel umirat” (“No one wanted to die”), manuscript (2001). I am extremely grateful to Mr. Kolpynicki for allowing me to see his manuscript, written in Russian. Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranovich Ghetto,” speaks of 20 kilograms of gold, silver and jewelry, and an additional one million rubles, on December 17, 1941.

³⁰ Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 518.

³¹ Six families associated with one of the factories were granted permission to live outside the ghetto in the factory compound. See the testimony of Haya Bar-Yohai, YVA, 0.3/7741; Abraham Wolanski, “From the Bunker to the Paratroopers,” in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 205–210. On baptized Jews, see Lewinbok, in *ibid.*, pp. 24 and 29; *idem*, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 535.

single room. People slept in bunk beds to save space. The toilets posed a grave health hazard, and, because of the crowded conditions, a typhus epidemic broke out, as in many other ghettos, but it was concealed from the Germans and eradicated by medical and paramedical teams.³² In general, the health services functioned very efficiently. The sanitation department was headed by Dr. Fejwel Sawczyć, who became a sworn enemy of the underground; survivors allege that he collaborated with the Nazis.

To make life bearable in these crowded conditions, the tenants set up communes, which they called “kolkhozy.” Cooking was done in common. However, the situation was fertile ground for quarrels and disputes,³³ and the Jewish police were frequently forced to intervene to resolve them. Nevertheless, there was a collective will to survive, and every kolkhoz had two or three night watchmen whose job was to warn the Jews of an impending *Aktion*.³⁴

In the winter there was no firewood, and the Jews had been forced to hand over their warm clothes to the Germans. The bathhouse was outside the ghetto, so people were transported there by inspection committees that the Judenrat sent from house to house to insure personal and public hygiene.³⁵ Welfare activities were overseen by Chaim Cukierman and Abba Zachin, who enjoyed public trust. Economic affairs were coordinated by the former factory owner Fiszel Sawczycki, an unsympathetic figure according to members of the underground. Food distribution was not part of his domain but the responsibility of Moshe Litwak, who was trusted and respected.³⁶ The daily ration included 100–125 grams of bread,³⁷ a handful of goats, an occasional potato, and a bit of vegetable oil.

Even though food was scanty, there was no mass starvation, evidently thanks to widespread smuggling. Lewinbok tells about a tunnel that led into the

³² Dr. Shabtai Shternfeld, “The Health Service in the Ghetto,” in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 506.

³³ See, for example, Sholem Shnadovitch, *Reminiscences of My Experiences in World War II* (New York: n.p., 1963).

³⁴ Mordechai Gur (YVA, O.3/9599) maintains there was “mutual assistance ... and everyone was considerate of other people” and that relations “were very reasonable.” Evidently the situation varied from kolkhoz to kolkhoz.

³⁵ Kolpynicki, “Nikto nie chotel umirat,” p. 73.

³⁶ Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranovich Ghetto.”

³⁷ Lewinbok, *Baranowicze Memorial Book* p. 536; Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranovich Ghetto”; Shmuel Jankielewicz, “On the Ruins,” in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 500.

ghetto from the yard of a non-Jew, through which food was smuggled, about kosher slaughtering (evidently carried out outside the ghetto), and about a Passover *seder* where the wine was replaced by herbal tea. As Shlomo Kless put it, “no one starved in the Baranowicze ghetto.”³⁸ Moreover, despite the strict ban and their own suffering, the Jews helped Soviet prisoners of war in the vicinity as best they could, chiefly with food.³⁹

When the Judenrat was established, it set up a fifty-to-sixty-man police force, under the command of Chaim Weltman, formerly the head of the craftsmen’s association and a prominent voice on behalf of poor Jews before the war. In contrast to the situation in most ghettos, survivors are full of praise for the Jewish police in Baranowicze. Thanks to them, Kless notes, there was no violence in the ghetto. The ghetto and its two gates were guarded mainly by Belorussian policemen armed with machine guns, under a German commander. The German demanded that these policemen honor Izykson by standing up and saluting him—an expression of the Germans’ psychological sadism.⁴⁰

In Baranowicze, as elsewhere, there was a liaison between the Judenrat and the Germans. Shmuel (Mulik) Izrael filled the position in Baranowicze. Unlike his counterparts in other ghettos, however, Izrael was favorably remembered by most survivors, except for Eliezer Lidowski, who describes him as an informer and traitor (although he does not mention him by name).⁴¹ Evidently, he performed his job faithfully and in coordination with Izykson.

Many witnesses report that the Germans or Belorussians demanded that the Jews supply them with sixty girls for brothels—whether for Germans or Belorussians is not clear. Izykson categorically refused. Dr. Lukeshniy, a Russian physician, traveled to Vilna and recruited sixty non-Jewish prostitutes

³⁸ According to Mordechai Gur, YVA, O.3/9599, “there was no hunger in the ghetto.” Gur mentions a Jewish woman, a former brothel keeper, “a magnificent woman who helped with food.” According to Siemion Rodkop, the Judenrat distributed 200 grams of bread a day; see Borys Pietrowicz Szerman, “Różne losy (wspomnienia z Baranowicz czasu zagłady), *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce*, 4/160 (1991), pp. 67–71.

³⁹ Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 521.

⁴⁰ Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranowichi Ghetto,” writes that there were forty policemen, most of them former members of the Maccabi sports organization. On the Belorussians’ saluting Izykson, see Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 536.

⁴¹ Eliezer Lidowski, *Not Like Sheep to Slaughter* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Alef, 1983), pp. 43–47. Lidowski refers to Izrael in connection with Muniek Muszynski, who tried to smuggle bullets into the ghetto; see further below.

and brought them to Baranowicze.⁴² It is implausible that the Germans would use Jewish girls in a brothel for their troops, considering the harsh racial laws, but the demand may have been advanced by the Belorussians, with the support of some German official (civilian or police). Lukeshniy was later executed by the Germans because of his contacts with the partisans and for providing assistance to the Jews.⁴³

According to Jankielewicz, about 5,000 Jews were employed outside the ghetto. The relative quiet of the summer of 1941, was disturbed by news of the murder of all the Jews of Hancewicze, a small town about 50 kilometers southeast of Baranowicze. The Jews saw this as retaliation for the local Jews' contacts with the partisans.⁴⁴

The first *Aktion* in Baranowicze took place on March 4, 1942, which was the Shushan Purim holiday, at the explicit command of District Governor Werner. In fact, the signs were unmistakable even before the *Aktion*. The Sipo requisitioned some 10,000 bullets from its warehouse, and the Germans ordered the Labor Department to provide a complete list of all workers in the ghetto. The *Aktion*, which the Jews referred to as "slaughter," was carried out by Belorussian, Lithuanian,⁴⁵ and Latvian police, commanded by Sipo officers headed by Waldemar Amelung.⁴⁶ According to Lewinbok, members of the German military police and of the civil administration also took part in the *Aktion*. The Jews were loaded onto trucks and transported to a murder site prepared in advance.⁴⁷ During the *Aktion*, Rabbi Scheinberg told his flock to dance, because it was Purim.

⁴² Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 519; Kless, "The *Judenrat* of the Baranowicze Ghetto." The incident is recounted, more or less in the same fashion, in the testimony of other survivors as well.

⁴³ Zelig Lewinbok, "Ghetto Diary," in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 524.

⁴⁵ The third battalion of the Lithuanian Schutzmannschaft, later replaced by the 15th battalion; see YVA, TR.10/1133.

⁴⁶ Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 81.

⁴⁷ One of the murderers, Alfred Metzner, was caught by survivors in Germany on September 18, 1947, and tried by the Americans. He had been sent from Slonim to participate in the *Aktion* and commanded a unit of three Germans and seventeen to twenty locals. He concealed nothing, unlike the vast majority of the Nazi murderers. In his words, "I myself also killed children" in the cruelest fashion. He also confirmed that Latvians took part in the *Aktion*. According to him, his unit alone killed between 1,200 and 1,500 Jews; see YVA, M.21/187.

Before the *Aktion* the Judenrat was given 3,000 “life certificates” to hand out to workers; naturally, this led to total chaos.⁴⁸ After that the Germans gave out another 3,000 certificates, and they, too, were distributed. There is no indication of any Judenrat discussion about the distribution of these precious certificates. As things turned out, however, many of those who received them were murdered as well in this *Aktion*. The ghetto was divided into two parts, and the Lithuanian police assembled those who had received a certificate in one part. Most of the victims came from the other part of the ghetto; mainly, old people, the infirm and the feeble, as well as women and children. But since a quota of 3,000 Jews seems to have been set in advance⁴⁹ and there were not enough Jews without certificates to fill it, the Germans also picked up 1,000 (according to another account, 1,400) persons with certificates from the workshop area of the ghetto. Some people were saved by the military commanders of their places of employment, who did not want to lose their workers.

There is also testimony about a number of Belorussian policemen who helped individual Jews. In the first stage of the *Aktion*, the Belorussian policemen tried to use the Jewish police to find Jews in hiding, but the latter did not cooperate. Lewinbok relates that the Germans demanded that Izykson provide them with a list of the old and infirm, but, after consulting with the *rebbe* of Slonim, he refused to comply: “I have given you everything you demanded of me, but I will not give you Jews, because I am not the master of human life.”⁵⁰ This is probably not an exact quote, but the incident is mentioned by other witnesses as well and evidently the line reflects the Judenrat chairman’s attitude. We are also told that when Izykson realized that

⁴⁸ On Rabbi Scheinberg and his exhortation as he and the Jews were being led off to their deaths, see Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 545. Certificates were also distributed in Kovno; see Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, Dina Porat, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 43ff.

⁴⁹ Gerlach presents another version, based on German documents. He writes that the toll of this *Aktion* was 2,007 persons, most of them old, infirm, or unfit for work; see Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 691. I think the Jewish accounts are more reliable, since I do not believe that the Germans kept a precise record of all those killed.

⁵⁰ Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 528. See also Isaac Feigelstein in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 67–97. Kolpynicki reports that Izykson said, “I am not God; I will not decide who lives and who dies” (Kolpynicki, “Nikto nie chotel umirat,” pp. 85–91). He also writes that members of the Judenrat advised Izykson to go into hiding, but he refused; if he did so, he countered, the Germans would execute all the members of the Judenrat.

an *Aktion* was imminent, he issued certificates to rabbis and other community leaders.

Among the victims of the *Aktion* were Izykson and Mann, as well as the entire Jewish police force, with their commander, Chaim Weltman. For some reason Max Krampe brought Izykson and Mann to the murder site separately, in a private car. The *Aktion* was over at about 2:00 P.M.; the last truck that brought Jews to the site was sent back, and the passengers were released.

Following the *Aktion* the Germans reported with satisfaction an improvement with regard to the nutritional conditions since there were now fewer Jews. Of course, they were referring not only to the murder of the Jews of Baranowicze.⁵¹ But it is also possible that this was a rationalization post facto.

The new chairman of the Judenrat, Shmuel Jankielewicz, and his deputy, Józef Leiman, continued the policy of Izykson and Mann. The new police force established after the *Aktion* was headed by Józef (Yoshke) Rotkiewicz, but the real power was his deputy, A. Warszawski, who was a member of the underground. The new police force numbered twenty-five men, seventeen of whom were members of the underground.⁵²

The physicians, who had previously remained outside the ghetto, were now relocated inside. The mood in the ghetto was similar to that in other ghettos after an *Aktion*. There was no one who had not lost relatives and friends. People were broken and depressed. Some helped themselves to the property and food left behind by the victims. Witnesses say that some people entrusted their children to Christians, but we do not know whether any of these children survived the war. There were Jews who gave up hope and committed suicide. Kolpynicki recounts that some of the young people gave up their struggle to survive; those who had property sold it and squandered the proceeds, practicing “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die”—but principally so as not to leave anything behind for the Germans.⁵³

⁵¹ Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 691.

⁵² Eliezer Lidowski, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 469. According to other evidence (see below), fifteen of the twenty-two policemen were members of the underground.

⁵³ Kolpynicki, “Nikto nie chotel umirat,” p. 114; testimony of David Bojarski, YVA, M.1.E/1447; Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 551; Leon Berkowicz, “A Physician among the Partisans,” in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 137: “We closed our eyes to the terrible reality and lived in illusion and hope.”

At the same time, people in the ghetto were getting married and having children. Under the direction of the teacher Miszlewski, a system was organized to teach young children the *alef-bet*, prayers, and *humash*, as in the *heder* of bygone decades. Older men, who in any case could not go out to work, went from *kolkhoz* to *kolkhoz* and taught the children in small groups.⁵⁴

There was also religious life in the ghetto. In the evenings former *yeshivah* students got together to study Talmud. The old men studied Mishnah, recited Psalms, and prayed. One witness says that there was a “synagogue” in the ghetto—evidently referring to the *minyán* that met in the house of Reb Mendel Goldberg.⁵⁵ After every *Aktion* the tendency to hold fast to traditional customs seems to have been reinforced, even among those who were not religiously observant.⁵⁶ It is impossible to determine the proportions of those who adhered to religion and of those who did not. The general impression provided by survivors’ testimonies is that people stuck to their pre-war lifestyles—religious or non-religious.

After the *Aktion* the Germans “returned” to the Jews the section of the ghetto that had been emptied, and the Judenrat built a number of workshops there. The best buildings were given to the Judenrat. The Germans even allowed the ghetto to keep a cow, but continued to abuse and humiliate the Jews.⁵⁷ The ghetto was split into two parts, with a narrow passageway between them; as in many other places, the “productive” workers were concentrated in one part.⁵⁸

The residents of the ghetto did not organize active resistance. The Belorussian and Polish surroundings were hostile, and partisan activity in the region, not yet under Soviet auspices, was still in its infancy. Thus, there was no one on the outside to help the Jews.⁵⁹

Throughout this time bad news continued to reach the ghetto. Reports about the *Aktionen* in Horodyszczce and Nowogródek reached Baranowicze with

⁵⁴ Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranovich Ghetto”; Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 561.

⁵⁵ Rachel Litwak, YVA, O.33/11523.

⁵⁶ Kolpynicki, “Nikto nie chotel umirat,” p. 115. After the first *Aktion*, Kolpynicki and his friends recited the evening service and said *kaddish*, even though none of those present was religiously observant.

⁵⁷ Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 558.

⁵⁸ Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 40–41.

⁵⁹ David Bojarski, YVA, M.1.E/1447.

refugees from those places. At the same time, rumors spread that there were partisans in the region. Lewinbok tells of an incident in which three peasants were hanged as partisans. There is testimony about the construction of bunkers (*skhrones*, or “safe places”), and quite a few people seem to have hidden in them during the first *Aktion*.

After the *Aktion* the population of the ghetto was about 7,700, according to Jankielewicz; other witnesses place it at around 9,000. It may be that the lower figure was correct at first, but that the number of residents increased during the summer as hundreds of people who had survived *Aktionen* in nearby towns found their way to Baranowicze or were sent there by the Germans. From Międzyrzec, for example, 350 Jews arrived on the verge of collapse, and the community mobilized to help them.⁶⁰

The nature of those who perpetrated the crimes in Baranowicze was no different from that of other murderers during the Holocaust. In Baranowicze, as in other places, there were a number of somewhat older Germans who demurred at the killing and even a few who actively assisted Jews. Two German soldiers are reported to have urged the Jews not to register and offered advice on how they should behave in the ghetto.⁶¹ At the same time, a Belorussian policeman who was asked how he “managed” with his job as a killer said that at first it was sickening, but after a while he got used to it.⁶²

On July 4, 1942, the Germans murdered thirteen physicians and dentists on the direct order of *Hauptkommissar* Fenz (and not of the SS).⁶³ Dr. Lewinbok, too, was summoned, but he arrived late, and this saved him. Before the murder became known, the Germans even demanded that the ghetto provide food parcels for the thirteen. The killing of these Jewish physicians who were providing medical care for Belorussians and Germans as well says something about the Nazi scale of priorities – that their ideology clearly prescribed that Jews should be killed regardless of the benefit they might provide.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Shnadovitch, *Reminiscences of My Experiences in World War II*. From his town, Maitchet (Molczadz), 220 Jews arrived in Baranowicze on April 22, 1942. On Międzyrzec, see the testimony of Blanche Povany, Survivors of the Shoah Foundation, no. 05487—the Jews from Międzyrzec were separated from the main ghetto by a barbed-wire fence. There were several towns in pre-war Poland with this name. It is not clear from which one these refugees came.

⁶¹ Testimony of Abraham Wolanski, Survivors of the Shoah Foundation, interview no. 22720 (1997).

⁶² Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 563.

⁶³ Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 675; Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 47.

On July 31, 1942, a train arrived in Baranowicze carrying Jews from Theresienstadt, ostensibly bound for Minsk. According to Lewinbok, there were 3,000 Jews on board, accompanied by Czech officials. They were told to disembark in Baranowicze for lunch. The women were made up; the men's shoes were polished. The Jews were forced to strip and then were killed on the spot in gas vans (or by Belorussian or Lithuanian policemen, according to Lewinbok).

There is, of course, no first-hand account of this story, and, obviously, no Baranowicze Jew saw the murder. The story about well-dressed women and men with polished shoes seems to be a myth; by the summer of 1942, the residents of Theresienstadt were in fairly bad condition—although, compared to the rags that the Jews of Baranowicze were wearing, the clothes of deportees from Theresienstadt might well have appeared the height of style. The “Czech officials” were evidently Czech Railway employees who operated the train and were murdered along with its passengers.

We now have fairly precise information about this train: its number was Da 221, and it left Theresienstadt on July 28, 1942, with 999 persons on board. There is German documentation of the use of two gas vans in this killing.⁶⁴ The Jews from Theresienstadt were murdered in Baranowicze because the day they arrived in the region, July 31, was the last day of the *Aktion* in Minsk, and the Germans did not want the train to continue there.⁶⁵

A group of Jews from the nearby Koldyczewo camp were brought to cover the victims' graves; they were killed as soon as they had finished the job. For some time thereafter ghetto residents were still sorting through the victims' suitcases in Baranowicze. According to the testimony of survivors who were members of the underground, Jews who processed the suitcases took some of what they found in them, sold the goods, and purchased arms with the proceeds.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ YVA, TR.10/1071 (1962), judicial investigation against Dr. August Backer and Friedrich Pradel; TR.10/599 (1965), judicial investigation against Backer, Pradel, and Harry Wentritt. See also Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 5, 79.

⁶⁵ See YVS, M.41/2229, a letter from *Obersturmbannführer* Dr. Heuser of the Minsk Sipo to the management of the railways in “White Ruthenia,” July 31, 1942: “*Aus technischen Gründen (wurde Ustrmführer) Amelung angewiesen bereits in Baranowitsche auszuladen.*” Around this time 100 Jews on another train (it is not clear which one) arrived at the Koldyczewo camp from Theresienstadt.

⁶⁶ Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 46.

This seems to be a good example of the importance of oral testimony. On the surface the witnesses are not reliable, and a very sad folklore grew up surrounding the incident. But the testimony is important all the same. If we did not have German documentation, only the oral testimony could tell us about the existence of this train, its passengers who were killed in gas vans, and the Czechs who accompanied the train and were also killed.

In the spring and summer of 1942, it was clear to all of the Jews in the ghetto what they could expect from the Germans. The excavation of bunkers thus became widespread. The area of the ghetto was curtailed, exacerbating the overcrowding; according to Jankielewicz, the new allocation was only 70 square centimeters per person. At the same time the ghetto suffered an epidemic of lice that could not be eradicated.⁶⁷

Meanwhile an underground began to form (see below). It is possible that word of this reached the Germans, since, on August 29, 654 men fit for forced labor were removed from Baranowicze and taken to Mołodeczno, 140 kilometers from Baranowicze. It is possible that the Germans wanted to remove Jews who they felt could offer resistance.

German documentation, however, supports a different theory; namely, that there was a shortage of workers after the mass murders of Jews, prisoners of war, and local men. Some of those taken to Mołodeczno, about 300 (including twenty-three women) were put to forced labor in Wilejka Stary, not far from Mołodeczno. This camp belonged to the Todt organization and was guarded by the SS. Their job was to build a 50-kilometer stretch of railway on the line between Mołodeczno and Braslaw. Twenty who proved to be too frail were detached from the group; seventeen of them were murdered; and three managed to escape. The Jewish camp overseer, Jakob Goldberg from Lachowice, tried to protect the people, unlike his deputy Greb. Goldberg managed to receive permission to bring in occasional shipments of food and clothing from Baranowicze, although the camp commandant confiscated some of these supplies and sent them to his family in Germany.

About forty men organized an underground in the camp. On March 9, 1943, thirty-eight of them managed to escape; sixteen survived the breakout. The

⁶⁷ Jankielewicz, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 502.

others were unable to get away, because a Jew named Schulzinger from the town of Szczuczyn informed on them. All those left in the camp were killed, except for one man. Some of the Jewish forced laborers in Mołodeczno, too, escaped to join the partisans, including the German-appointed overseer, a Warsaw Jew named Adam Mazorek, who was later executed by the partisans on suspicion of being a British spy (sic!).⁶⁸

Jews were also sent to work in places other than Mołodeczno and Wilejka, since the Todt Organization reported it had conscripted 1,400 Jews from Baranowicze to build roads. It is possible, however, that the Todt Organization report includes Jews from the smaller towns and villages in the region and not only from Baranowicze itself.⁶⁹

In the summer there was another incident that affected the mood in the ghetto: one of the most sadistic murderers there, *SS-Obersturmführer* Grünzfelder, who had replaced Amelung, was killed on June 9, 1942, in a battle with partisans—a skirmish in which ten Germans and eleven Lithuanians were killed.⁷⁰ A rumor, evidently unfounded, spread in the ghetto to the effect that there had been Jews among the partisans. Amelung was sent back to serve as the Sipo chief in Baranowicze until October 1943, when he was replaced by Alfred Renndorfer, who saw to the murder of the remaining Jews in the district.

In the summer of 1942, Baranowicze Jews escaped to the partisans for the first time—quite likely after this incident—but most of them were killed by antisemitic partisans. Among the first to flee was Tanja Jasinowska, the daughter of a dentist who had once been the head of the Baranowicze community. Jasinowska was hidden on an isolated farm by a Christian family (of unknown nationality) for two years until the liberation. Sonja Mirski, the wife of a physician, got away to the village where her family was living; some of them were killed by bandits disguised as partisans, but the rest, including Sonia, linked up with Soviet partisans and survived.

The relationship between the Jews and the Belorussian majority in the city—that is, the civilians who did not serve in agencies set up by the Germans—

⁶⁸ See Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 583, and the testimony of Baruch Kudewicki in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 13–15.

⁶⁹ Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 62.

⁷⁰ Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, p. 122; Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 697.

was rather complex. Jews who had entrusted their property to Belorussian friends when the ghetto was established were afraid to ask for it back, lest their “friends” inform on them. Many Belorussians, of course, were delighted to enjoy the property they had plundered from the Jews. Some Belorussians, interested in the elimination of a particular Jew, denounced him to the Germans as a Communist; those informed on were killed.⁷¹ On the other hand, there is testimony about Belorussians who sent food and money to the ghetto. Lewinbok tells of pious Catholics—Poles, apparently, since all of them were Catholics—who hid Jews without demanding payment. It is hard to say how many did so.⁷²

The second *Aktion* began on September 22, 1942—the day after Yom Kippur—and continued until October 2. About 6,000 Jews were killed, some of them in gas vans.⁷³ Around this time the Germans upgraded the status of the local Sipo office: Amelung was named *KdS* (*Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei*). Wilhelm Kube, the *Generalkommissar* of White Ruthenia, whose seat was Minsk, and the *HSSPF Ostland*, Friedrich Jecklen, who was then overseeing the campaign against the partisans, code-named *Sumpffieber* (“Marsh Fever”), declared that most of the surviving Jews of Baranowicze should be liquidated.⁷⁴

In the second *Aktion* the Germans deceived the victims, evidently to forestall active resistance: the German policemen wore the uniforms of the Todt Organization, which was responsible for Jews who worked outside the ghetto. This time, too, Belorussian police and a Latvian unit assisted the Germans. During the course of the *Aktion*, arms were discovered in the ghetto. The Germans allowed young Belorussians who were not members of the Belorussian police to run amok in the ghetto, plundering and killing. The patients in the Jewish hospital were killed on the spot with great savagery. Some Jews revealed the location of bunkers in return for a promise to spare their lives—a promise that was not kept, of course.⁷⁵ Lewinbok estimates that

⁷¹ See the testimony of Pinchas Mordkowski, in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 3–4.

⁷² Lewinbok, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 576.

⁷³ See Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 703.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 66.

there were about 500 bunkers in the ghetto and that the search for them continued for three weeks after the end of the *Aktion*.

There were also some Jews who resisted. A Latvian officer was stabbed to death by a Jew; the barber Zubak used his razor to cut the throat of a Belorussian policeman.⁷⁶ According to reliable testimony, Judenrat Chairman Jankielewicz and a policeman named Schneidler attempted to transfer Jews from the “unproductive” to the “productive” ghetto. Over two nights they moved and thus saved many people. Jankielewicz himself recounted that, in the course of this attempt, he bribed a German policeman; but something went wrong the time he tried to bring over a group that included his wife and child, and they were killed.⁷⁷ About 200 persons got away to the forests, including Jankielewicz and his friend the policeman. Warszawski, the chief of the ghetto police, and a Judenrat member named Edelsztajn (or Idelczyk) were killed. According to one report, Warszawski was severely beaten by the Germans, who brought him back to the ghetto and demanded that he lead them to the bunkers where Jews were hiding. Warszawski showed them places that had already been uncovered and were now empty. When the Germans caught on to what he was doing, they tortured him to death.⁷⁸

After the second *Aktion*, a new Judenrat was appointed, headed by Mendel Goldberg,⁷⁹ a master metalworker who was co-opted to the Judenrat after the first *Aktion*. Goldberg was a refugee from Suwalki in western Poland and fluent in German; his colleagues forced him to take the position.⁸⁰ The new (and last) commander of the ghetto police was Dr. Józef Lubraniecki, a refugee from Łódź.

It was obvious that the final liquidation was imminent. Goldberg favored the idea of trying to escape to the Koldyczewo camp, where he believed the odds of surviving were better. But he also supported fleeing to the forests. Goldberg

⁷⁶ Jankielewicz, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 504.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Herman Kruk (on the basis of testimony by someone from Baranowicze), in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 6–12. Kruk’s text, written in Vilna in January 1943, can also be found in Yiddish, with a German translation; see Herman Kruk, *Zwischen den Fronten* (Hannover: Laurentius, 1990). An English translation is now available: Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania*, Benjamin Harshav, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 626. On Jankielewicz, see Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 54.

⁷⁹ Not to be confused with Mendel Goldberg of Agudat Israel, a member of the first Judenrat.

⁸⁰ Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 74; Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranovichi Ghetto.”

provided medicines to partisans in the forests, a gesture that brought him into conflict with Fejwel Sawczyć, the head of the health department.⁸¹

Living conditions deteriorated further after the second *Aktion*: the space per person was reduced to about 60 square centimeters. The Jews again dug bunkers. The young and vigorous looked for ways to escape to the underground or the forests. The Judenrat, at German instructions, banned the construction of bunkers, but this directive was, of course, ignored.

On December 12, 1942, a Jew named Judel Oszerowski threw a hand grenade at a German, killing both the German and himself. On December 15, Jewish partisans, commanded by Icze Madras, entered the ghetto to assassinate a Judenrat member alleged to be collaborating with the Germans, but in the end they stayed their hand. Two days later the Germans surrounded the ghetto and perpetrated the third *Aktion*, which claimed nearly 3,000 victims. This was part of the wave of mass murder that swept through Belorussia in the last weeks of 1942. It was also part of a major anti-partisan campaign code-named “Hamburg.” The Germans considered the Jews to be one of the mainstays of partisan resistance and planned to kill all of the Jews anyway, so the two goals merged to promote the liquidation of the last Jews in Baranowicze. It should also be noted that, in a report submitted in early 1943,⁸² Fenz wrote that some 6,000 Jews had managed to get away to the partisans in the Baranowicze district under his command.

The *Aktion* to liquidate the ghetto was carried out chiefly by the Belorussian, Ukrainian, and Latvian police. This time the Germans were dealing with people who knew exactly what to expect and made every attempt to escape. Many Jews hid in well-concealed bunkers; others ran away. Two women, Zajdman and Mirke Wigdorcik, ripped open the canvas walls of the truck in which they were being transported, and all the Jews on it managed to escape to the forests. A number of mothers abandoned their children in order to save themselves. The hunt for Jews in hiding continued for about a month.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Cholawski, *Partisan Revolt and Combat*, pp. 163–164. On February 17, 1943, Fenz went hunting; partisans under the command of Karol Orłowski, who treated Jewish fighters well, ambushed and killed him. The band of twelve partisans included three Jews; see also Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 706 and 865.

⁸³ Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 73.

The story of Baranowicze in the Holocaust is inextricably linked with that of the Koldyczewo concentration camp, on the estate of the Polish nobleman Szalewicz. The camp, 18 kilometers from Baranowicze, was set up by the Baranowicze SD in the early summer of 1942. Its inmates included anti-Nazi Poles and Belorussians, as well as Jews from the nearby small towns and the Baranowicze ghetto. The Jews were housed in a former stable, in atrocious conditions, and assigned extremely arduous work. Among the prisoners was the young *rebbe* of Slonim, Shlomo David Weinberg. The other Jews tried to protect him and facilitate his observing the precepts to the extent possible, but he was murdered on November 24, 1942.

On January 31, 1943, about 300 Jewish inmates of the camp were killed. The guards at Koldyczewo were Belorussians, under the command of Stefaniuk and his deputies Nikolai Kolko and Sergei Bobko.⁸⁴ According to survivors' testimony, the Belorussians were worse than the Germans. The attitude of the camp commandant, a German named Fritz Jörn, was, relatively speaking, more humane. The Jewish camp boss was Leibel Segar, who is remembered favorably in the survivors' testimonies; not so the Baranowicze Judenrat member, Fejwel Sawczyć, who was also in the camp, and is remembered most negatively.⁸⁵

From September 1, 1942, Dr. Zelig Lewinbok was the Jewish physician in the camp. After his death in Israel in 1956, his widow Manya added a postscript to his memoirs about the unique relationship between the Lewinbok family and the German commandant Jörn. The latter had allowed Manya Lewinbok to join her husband in the camp and later agreed that she could bring her young son there from Baranowicze as well.⁸⁶ The Lewinboks lived apart from the other inmates and received the same rations as the camp policemen. Manya

⁸⁴ On Kolko and Bobko, see Pesach Mordekowski, in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 3–4; see also the testimony of Lyuba Porzen, in *ibid.*, pp. 17–18, about Kolko's trial in the Soviet Union in 1962; Kolko and three other policemen were convicted and executed. According to the testimony of Lyuba Sloczek (*ibid.*, pp. 46–49), another Belorussian deputy camp commandant, Victor Dira, was tried in Danzig in 1949. Joseph Halpern (YVA, O.3/1053) knew Bobko personally before the German occupation; he and several other Jews testified on his behalf after the war, stating that he had saved their lives. As a result, Bobko was spared the death penalty and spent only a few years in a Polish prison. These efforts to save a few Jews cannot counterbalance the murderous sadism that Bobko displayed toward most of his Jewish victims.

⁸⁵ Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 447, where he is referred to as "Dr. F.S."

⁸⁶ Mordechai Gur (YVA, O. 3/9599), too, recounts that he was saved by Jörn; Manya Lewinbok, "The Story of Manya Lewinbok," in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 103–106.

adds that a devout German Catholic in the camp offered to give them a gun so they could kill themselves and attain paradise if they converted to Catholicism. The Lewinboks rejected his generous offer. On October 31, 1943, Lewinbok, his wife, and his son managed to escape from the camp. About 22,000 persons were murdered in Koldyczewo, most of them Jews and many of them from Baranowicze.

The Jewish artisans' camp in Koldyczewo originally held about 120 prisoners, including seven women, who came from various places in Belorussia, including Baranowicze; most of the latter were workers from the Todt Organization camp, transferred to Koldyczewo after the second *Aktion*. Later another 120 workers were brought from Baranowicze. After the *Aktion* in the camp itself (January 31, 1943), only ninety-three Jews remained, all of them skilled craftsmen. A group led by Romek Friedman and the shoemaker Shlomo Kushnir planned an escape. They managed to acquire two handguns, poisoned the watchdogs, and broke out on March 22, 1944, evidently right before the Germans were going to liquidate the camp completely. The Germans launched a dragnet for the escapees. Twenty-four were killed, but nearly seventy managed to get away; most of them joined the Bielski brothers' partisan group, while others linked up with other groups. The last hundred or so Jews in Koldyczewo, who were confined in a different sub-camp, were killed on the night of June 29–30, 1944, on the eve of the Soviet reoccupation of the district.⁸⁷

In late 1942, after the final liquidation of the Baranowicze ghetto, about 700 Jews survived in the Mołodeczno labor camp, plus another 350 in the Todt Organization camp near Baranowicze. Between thirty and forty Jews escaped from the latter to the partisans; the rest were transferred to Koldyczewo, where they were killed on November 5–6, 1943. The 250 Jews who were still working at the Luftwaffe base outside Baranowicze were murdered in January

⁸⁷ The escape is described in a number of testimonies. All the stories overlap, except for an imaginary account of explosives that are supposed to have killed a number of Germans. The Soviet partisans through whose territory the escapees had to pass to reach the Bielski group wanted to kill them, suspecting that they had been sent by the Germans on an espionage mission. Dr. Lewinbok, who was related to the Bielski brothers, managed to dissuade them; see also Survivors of the Shoah Foundation, no. 29847, testimony of Dr. Joseph Lewinbok, 1997.

1943. Another 100-125 Jews remained in the Sipo/SD camp.⁸⁸ The Germans appointed Mendel Goldberg, the last chairman of the Judenrat, as *Oberjude* of the camp. Survivors report that he did his best to take care of the people and spearheaded the attempt to organize resistance and escape. This group also included Beloskurnik, another former Judenrat member (responsible for the warehouses), who is remembered unfavorably by the survivors. On November 1, 1943, the Germans came to liquidate the group. The Jews put up a stiff fight, and about forty of them escaped to the forest; the rest, including Goldberg, were killed.⁸⁹

Not only Jews were murdered in Baranowicze. In 1941, the Germans killed many Soviet prisoners of war by starvation or mass executions. Killings on a smaller scale continued in 1942. According to German sources, during the course of the war, about 700,000 Soviet prisoners were killed or died in Belorussia, including 88,704 prisoners in the Lesnaya camp on the outskirts of Baranowicze.⁹⁰

Baranowicze was liberated by the Red Army on July 8, 1944. The Germans set fire to most of the city before withdrawing. Only 250 of the 12,000 Jews who had been living in Baranowicze in 1941 were alive after the war, having fled to the forests. Evidently, between half and two-thirds of those who had escaped to the forests died there; hence, between 500 and 750 Jews must have managed to escape from the ghetto. Thus, 2 percent of Baranowicze Jews survived, of the 4 to 6 percent who had escaped to the forests at various times during the ghetto's existence. About 100 of the survivors returned to the city after the war; along with fifty Jews from elsewhere, they constituted a temporary community in Baranowicze before they migrated west, to Poland and beyond.

Underground, Revolt, and Escape to the Partisans

⁸⁸ An interesting detail is that the Jewish workers in this camp did not wear yellow badges, as if they were “free” workers. This was evidently because, after the third *Aktion*, Baranowicze had been declared *Judenrein*, so the SD had to camouflage the fact that it was still employing Jews (YVA, O.3/9599, testimony of Mordechai Gur).

⁸⁹ Lewinbok, in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 86.

⁹⁰ Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 856, 1158.

The testimony of Eliezer Lidowski, the founder of the united underground, and other survivors, provide us with a fairly complete picture of the underground in the Baranowicze ghetto.⁹¹ Originally, there were four small organizations, headed by Mamme (Antek) Kopelowicz, Elisha Zarickiewicz, Dr. Abrasha Abramowski, and Lidowski. According to one testimony, Kopelowicz's group was formed even before the first *Aktion*, in the winter of 1941/42.⁹² Lidowski's group was founded, he says, on March 17/18, 1942, after the first *Aktion*. It had 120 members, divided into five-person cells; four cells constituted a "battalion." Warszawski, the deputy police chief after the first *Aktion*, joined the underground around the time that it was unified, along with fifteen of the twenty-two policemen.⁹³ Warszawski even helped the underground at its first meeting: the police pretended to arrest the participants so they could carry on their consultations undisturbed at police headquarters.

Kopelowicz's group had twenty-four members, while Zarickiewicz's had forty. Kopelowicz, who was twenty-four (or, according to other testimony, twenty-six), did not trust older people; his group consisted entirely of young members of Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir. According to Lidowski, Kopelowicz only grudgingly accepted the idea of unification after the first *Aktion*. According to Kolpynicki, a member of Kopelowicz's group, its members were suspicious of Lidowski, did not rely on his judgment, and believed he was leading the underground to failure. Nevertheless, at the time of unification, the underground numbered about 200 members, including fifteen women.⁹⁴

Dr. Abrasha Abramowski, identified with the Bund, was a respected figure in the ghetto. According to Józef Zygelbojm, the son of Szmul Zygelbojm, Abramowski's group, like Kopelowicz's was founded before the first *Aktion*;

⁹¹ Eliezer Lidowski, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, pp. 465–506. Lidowski also published two small volumes—*Not Like Sheep to Slaughter* (Tel Aviv: Aleph, 1982), and *In Old Age* (Tel Aviv: Berit Rishonim, 1990)—but they merely recapitulate what he wrote in the *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, except for parts of his own personal story, which develops from book to book.

⁹² Kolpynicki, "Nikto nie chotel umirat," p. 74.

⁹³ Lidowski says, as noted, that seventeen of the twenty-five policemen belonged to the underground.

⁹⁴ Noah Roitman also disparages Lidowski and describes him as a big mouth (Survivors of the Shoah Foundation no. 50670 [1997]).

Zygelbojm even gives the names of the founders. Most of the members seem to have been Bundists.⁹⁵

The vast majority of the underground's members were teenagers and young adults: 60-70 percent were aged sixteen to thirty, and almost all of them were graduates of Zionist youth movements or the Bund.⁹⁶ Most of the underground fighters came from outside Baranowicze; only a few (5 percent, according to Lidowski) had families that had survived the first *Aktion*.

Judenrat welfare head Abba Zachin, who was well liked in the ghetto because of his integrity, assisted the underground, even though he believed that it should not revolt, fearing that all the surviving Jews would be killed. Józef Lerman,⁹⁷ an observant Jew from the ghetto labor office, also helped the underground despite his opposition to its plans; he preferred that the Jews die sanctifying God's name and proposed mass suicide (evidently following the tradition of martyrdom during the Crusades). He was not alone in this view. Dr. Nachumowski, the head of the ghetto health services, another highly esteemed figure, also preferred suicide and refused to accept a certificate that would have guaranteed his survival.

Two members of the Judenrat, Beloskurnik and Sawczyć, threatened to hand over the members of the underground to the Germans. A third member of the Judenrat, Sawczycki, begged the underground to consider their responsibility to the ghetto population as a whole and not to stage an uprising; he was evidently unaware that his wife was the head of the women's branch of the underground. The local rabbi also cautioned the underground against revolt. Dr. Leon Berkowicz recounts, for example, that the rabbi complained that the

⁹⁵ Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 43-49. Szmul Zygelbojm was the Bund representative in the National Assembly of the Polish Government-in-exile. He committed suicide in May 1943, in protest of the failure to make any attempt to save the Jews of Poland.

⁹⁶ Noah Roitman, "Partisan Stories" in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 193-204. In the forests these young people enjoyed a fairly sympathetic reception from the Belorussian peasants, but sharp antisemitism from the Zhorkin partisan unit, which was responsible for the murders of Dr. Abramowski and Kopelowicz. In the end, Roitman joined a unit commanded by Pugachev, which also included Lidowski.

⁹⁷ I have not been able to discover whether this is the same person as Józef Leiman, head of the labor department and deputy head of the Judenrat.

young people “do not believe in sanctifying God’s name. They want to die gloriously.”⁹⁸

The members of the underground swore an oath to take revenge against “the Fascist murderers.”⁹⁹ This reflects a Soviet influence—plausible enough, given that the underground wanted to make contact with the Soviet partisans who began to haunt the forests (only 17 kilometers from Baranowicze) as early as the end of 1941.

Chaim Becker, who survived, was in charge of the unified organization’s arms store. Kopelowicz was responsible for supplies; Zarickiewicz for finances; and Lidowski for organization. The underground’s major task was to acquire arms and smuggle them into the ghetto or store them in hidden caches in workplaces outside the ghetto. Many Jews worked in German arms depots (which were generally full of captured Soviet arms) and were able to acquire a fair quantity of weapons. These were smuggled in carts used for removing sewage or other wagons that were brought into the ghetto and which could be fitted with false bottoms.¹⁰⁰

From the beginning there were disagreements among the members of the underground. Kopelowicz and Zarickiewicz wanted to escape to the forests; they proposed that the families hide in bunkers while the fighters left the ghetto. Some people actually followed this advice—evidently when they tired of the debates. Others believed that an uprising should be staged only during an *Aktion* or in association with one.¹⁰¹

Lidowski supported a revolt and mass escape; he wanted to seize the initiative for the uprising and not wait for a German provocation. His opinion carried the day. According to the plan drawn up, Warszawski would give the sign, a hand grenade would be thrown, and police headquarters would be set on fire as the signal for the members of the underground—most of whom were employed outside the ghetto, at the Luftwaffe base, in arms workshops, in the railroad sheds in the city, and in Gestapo or SD facilities—to rise up, set fire to

⁹⁸ It is not clear which rabbi is referred to here. Leon Berkowicz, “A Physician Among Partisans” (Hebrew) in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, p. 138; see also Hayyim Stolorowicz, “A Scout Among Partisans” (Hebrew), in Zukerman, *ibid.*, pp. 174–191.

⁹⁹ Lidowski, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 470.

¹⁰⁰ Kless, “The *Judenrat* of the Baranowicze Ghetto”; Lidowski, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 486.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 476–477.

their workplaces, and flee to the forests. The women were supposed to poison the Gestapo kitchens where they worked. It was easier to organize underground cells in workplaces outside the ghetto—evidently except for the SD headquarters—because the German bosses in these places were generally older men with whom it was possible to get along. There were only about thirty members of the underground in the ghetto itself; the plan was for them to join their comrades during the mass breakout. It was also decided that anyone who failed to carry out his assignment would be killed.

The revolt was set for July 19, 1942, but two weeks earlier a proposal was raised at underground headquarters to postpone the revolt until the day before the next *Aktion*. Lidowski accepted the majority decision; however, his three colleagues in the leadership decided to escape from the ghetto and forgo the idea of an uprising there. They organized about forty persons, most of them refugees from nearby towns who had no family in the ghetto, and decided to escape through the sewers. When their plan came to the attention of the Judenrat, a squad of policemen was sent to arrest Lidowski and Zarickiewicz. Lidowski persuaded Zarickiewicz to give up the idea, which meant abandoning the other members of the underground to their fate. In the meantime, however, other members of the underground stormed the Judenrat building and threatened to kill its members if the detainees were handed over to the Gestapo. The precise date of when all this took place is not certain, but it seems likely that it transpired in the early autumn of 1942, before the second *Aktion*.¹⁰²

The underground reorganized and divided the ghetto into four sectors, each with its own commander. Then there was another hitch. Muniak Muszynski, a refugee from Częstochowa, a member of Abramowski's group and one of the most important arms smugglers in the ghetto, decided on his own initiative to smuggle gunpowder for cartridges into the ghetto. A child who saw him at work was beaten until he identified Muszynski. The Germans sent two policemen to Shmuel Izrael, their go-between with the Judenrat, and demanded Muszynski's arrest. Lidowski told Izrael that if he did not fix the matter with the Gestapo, the underground would start shooting. In the

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 477–478.

meantime, however, the affair became public knowledge in the ghetto, and a crowd started chasing Muszynski, who tried to commit suicide by jumping into a deep well. The policemen pulled him out and arrested him. Some members of the underground, seeing no way out of the situation, wanted to start shooting at the Germans and then flee to the forests. After feverish consultations it was agreed to instruct Muszynski that if Schlegel, the Gestapo commander, came to take him, he should commit suicide by swallowing poison outside the ghetto. In the end Izrael managed to persuade the Germans that Muszynski had planned to use the gunpowder to eradicate lice; with the help of a bribe, the matter was hushed up.¹⁰³

Some parts of this story are quite implausible. It hardly seems likely, for example, that the Germans believed the excuse that Muszynski wanted to fight lice with gunpowder. It does seem likely, however, that a huge bribe was paid. Only Izrael could have done this, so Lidowski's negative opinion of him is surprising. But the core of the story, which is supported by several witnesses, is extremely interesting. It runs parallel to the well-known Wittenberg affair in the Vilna ghetto and a similar incident in the Minsk ghetto, as reported in Hersh Smolar's memoirs.¹⁰⁴ In Minsk and Baranowicze, the Judenrat or those acting on its behalf found a way to save the underground fighter whose surrender was demanded by the Germans. In Baranowicze, as in the Wittenberg affair in Vilna, the ghetto residents exerted strong pressure to hand the "culprit" over to the Germans, but in Baranowicze this was averted. Thus, the outcome in Vilna—where Wittenberg ultimately was turned over to the Germans—was not the norm.

On the eve of the second *Aktion* in the ghetto, the underground was in possession of seventy rifles, two machine guns, forty handguns, 15,000 bullets, 500 hand grenades, and a few sticks of dynamite.¹⁰⁵ The different versions are fairly consistent on this point. In any case, it is clear that, in comparison to the arms store of, for example, the Warsaw ghetto

¹⁰³ Testimony by Noah Roitman, Survivors of the Shoah Foundation, no. 50670; Lidowski, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, pp. 483–484.

¹⁰⁴ Hersh Smolar, *Soviet Jews Behind the Ghetto Barrier* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Moreshet, Sifriat Poalim, 1984), pp. 120–123; Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1982), pp. 387–395.

¹⁰⁵ Lidowski, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 486.

underground, the Baranowicze underground was well equipped. This was the result of its members' easy access to the German arms depots where they were forced to work.¹⁰⁶

In the interim other groups organized to escape to the forests. They were encouraged by the report of an ambush set for a SS unit on June 9, 1942 (mentioned above). It was clear that the Germans were aware of the existence of an underground in the ghetto and were employing Jewish spies to acquire information about it.

During the second *Aktion*, the underground prepared to act, but its plans were ruined by the Germans' deception. As noted, the SS troops disguised themselves as members of the Todt Organization. Warszawski, who was supposed to give the signal for the revolt, hesitated because he saw people dressed in the Todt uniforms and did not think it was an *Aktion*. Abramowski, who was to command the uprising inside the ghetto, was also misled. To make matters worse, on the eve of Yom Kippur, two days before the *Aktion*, a heavy hammer had fallen on Lidowski's foot, breaking it.

The Germans separated the two parts of the ghetto. Abramowski's fiancée, who was supposed to have served as the liaison between the two sections, was killed. Some people had been taken out to work earlier in the day. Total chaos reigned. After the fact Lidowski said that had there been an uprising they would all have been killed, whereas about 100 members of the underground exploited the opportunity and escaped. Lidowski hid with a group that had one rifle and a few hand grenades. The women hiding in the bunker begged them not to fight, for fear of their lives. The *Aktion* was suspended at 5:00 P.M.

In the end some members of the underground managed to break through the ghetto wall and get out; others decided to wait until the laborers had been brought back to the ghetto from their workplaces. Eighteen fighters hid with weapons in the attic of the Jewish hospital, but a girl who feared for her boyfriend's life called out that the Gestapo had come. Some of those in the attic, including Kopelowicz and Zarickiewicz, ran madly to the ghetto, while

¹⁰⁶ See YVA, O.3/9599; Mordechai Gur, who was a member of Kopelowicz's unit. See also the testimony of Hilke Boryszewski, "My Route to the Forests," in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 170–173.

others were captured in the hospital. Ninety persons were supposed to escape from the ghetto that night. However, when noncombatants unexpectedly joined them, the escape was again postponed, since there was no chance that 200 people could slip away undetected.

The next day the *Aktion* continued. The victims were chiefly women and children, but the skilled workers were hardly touched. Finally, after four or five days of the *Aktion*, it was decided to make a break for the forests from the workplaces. The groups that were to escape took almost all of the ghetto's weapons with them.

This was the moment that Lidowski was forced to abandon his family. "The emotional pangs were terrible," he said. His wife, a former activist in Po'alei Zion and evidently a strong and stubborn woman, refused to escape, believing that their two children could not possibly survive in the forests. In his old age, when Lidowski related the moment in greater detail, he wrote that later he had slipped back into the ghetto from the partisan base, come to his wife, and begged her to join him with their two children. She refused:

Leizer, I'm staying here in the ghetto. I suggest that you, too, stay in the ghetto after you find some excuse for the days you missed work. I'm afraid that otherwise the Germans will execute the entire family. I don't care about my life, after watching the deaths of thousands of our townspeople, our relatives and acquaintances. I don't think I'm any better than they were. But the lives of our two children are very precious to me. If they stay here—perhaps a miracle will occur and they will survive. But there in the forests, among the antisemitic goyim—and you've already had personal experience of their antisemitism—no miracle will happen there: there is only certain death.¹⁰⁷

Lidowski acknowledges that this is not an exact quote, but it evidently reflects the spirit of what his wife said and indicates the terrible dilemmas faced by people in this tragic situation.

An initial group of eleven made its way out of the ghetto, followed by another group of seventeen. These fugitives included Kopelowicz. Next came a band

¹⁰⁷ Lidowski, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, pp. 491–495; idem, *In Old Age*, p. 63.

of twenty-four, headed by Lidowski.¹⁰⁸ This group got away from the Luftwaffe base where Lidowski was employed. A teenager from Łódź who also worked there betrayed the others and informed the German commander about the underground group, but for some reason the German did not react. Later he summoned the boy and expressed his astonishment that a Jew would betray other Jews. Lidowski recounts that during the third *Aktion* this German (name unknown) helped Jews.

In a short book that Lidowski published in 1982, he tells a slightly different story: the German was a vicious killer, but when the members of the underground escaped, he changed his attitude and decided to support the Jews. He admired their bravery, and even shot the betrayer dead.¹⁰⁹ This later version seems less likely if only for psychological reasons—a brutal murderer and Jew-hater would not be persuaded to help Jews because they decided to run away from him. Lidowski's earlier account seems more plausible, but, in any case, both versions corroborate the main point: flight from the workplace with the assistance of its German commander.

These three organized bands moved south, to the Krywoszyn district, near the Szczara River, not far from the village of Zaluże, where they found a group of forty-five Jews, all or most of them from Baranowicze. These were people, partly, who had not been affiliated with the organized underground but had escaped earlier, in addition to underground members. Ultimately, about 130 refugees from Baranowicze gathered there.¹¹⁰ Other fugitives went north and east, joining various partisan groups, or settling in family camps. The Soviet commanders' attitudes toward them ranged from extremely bad to reasonable. There were a few exceptions who were distinctly sympathetic.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Cholawski, *Partisan Revolt and Combat*, p. 159. Other details about the directions of their flight and the partisan background are also taken from Cholawski's book and from several testimonies, including Survivors of the Shoah Foundation, no. 14913, Leon Kay (Kancopolski).

¹⁰⁹ Lidowski, *Not Like Sheep to Slaughter*, pp. 48–54.

¹¹⁰ Cholawski, *Partisan Revolt and Combat*, pp. 160–161.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, et passim. Hayyim Stolowicki recounts that he was a member of a group of twelve persons who made their way to the partisans after the third *Aktion*, with the help of Eduard Chacza. Their commander was Jakob Melchowski, a blacksmith, who spoke fluent Russian. The partisan band that took them in—part of the Dzerzinski Brigade-- included ten Jews out of its 150 fighters (Stolowicki, "A Scout Among Partisans," in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 174–191). This story is typical of many similar tales told by survivors. Frequently they mention Jewish leadership figures who knew the forest paths and/or the local language, or had been manual laborers, as in this case.

Of the 125 Jews employed by the Sipo and the SD (including, as noted, Mendel Goldberg, the former chairman of Judenrat, who perished), about forty or forty-five reached the partisans.¹¹²

The flight to the forest was complicated and dangerous; every attempt was a separate tale. When they left the ghetto, the fugitives required temporary shelter and guidance to their destination—the partisan units. Eduard Chacza is mentioned in many survivor testimonies as playing a major role. But there were also many individuals who took other paths. Leon Berkowicz, for example, tells of his father's contact with a Belorussian farmer.

Berkowicz's description of leaving the ghetto parallels Lidowski's, except that it involves his mother: "I lowered my head in shame and despair that I was leaving without telling her that I was leaving." The tragedy, of course, was that most of those who fled were young men who left behind their families in the ghetto. In the case of Berkowicz, the farmer did show up and hid him in his pigsty. He led Berkowicz to a partisan unit, which initially placed him in detention. He says that the unit's commissar told him, "we're familiar with heroes like you, *zhid*." The military commander was more sympathetic, and the unit needed a physician. The fact that even a doctor was not received with open arms among the partisans says something about the difficulties encountered by the Jews in the forests. Nevertheless, Berkowicz later found his place among the partisans.¹¹³

Relations with the Surroundings—Enemies or Rescuers

The non-Jews of Baranowicze--Belorussians and Poles--were generally hostile to their Jewish neighbors. Nevertheless, the survivors' testimonies indicate that the number of non-Jews favorably inclined and willing to help Jews in Baranowicze and its environs was relatively high as compared to other places in pre-1939 Poland--and certainly as compared to the large cities in the region, such as Brest-Litowsk.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Lova Sluczak, "Partizaner-Vidershtands Grupes," in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, pp. 46–49.

¹¹³ Leon Berkowicz, "A Physician Among Partisans," in Zukerman, ed., *Struggle for Life*, pp. 138–139, 144.

¹¹⁴ On Brest-Litowsk, see Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 149–163.

Of course, any such conclusion is one-sided: almost every Jew who survived was assisted at some stage or another by non-Jews, and usually by several non-Jews. But only a few survived. The overwhelming majority of Jews were murdered by the Germans and their local collaborators—many after being fingered by informers—and are not around to give their evidence.

After the *Aktion* in her town, for example, nineteen-year-old Helen Finn of Horodyszcze ran away to Baranowicze, where she was concealed by a Polish acquaintance. When another Pole evidently informed the Germans, Helen and her mother escaped to the ghetto. In early 1943, after her mother had been murdered, Helen hid with a Belorussian woman. Later she found her way to the partisans and became a radio operator.¹¹⁵ We have many similar stories, so there must have been a fair number of non-Jews who helped and saved Jews. But it is impossible to arrive at any numerical ratio between them and those who stood by or were actively hostile to Jews.

Yad Vashem has recognized two Righteous Among the Nations who were active in Baranowicze—the Pole Eduard Chacza and the German M. Sgt. Hugo Armann. After he was wounded on the eastern front, Armann, born in a small town in Thuringia in 1917, the son of a Protestant schoolteacher, was posted to head a small unit responsible for finding space on trains for soldiers returning to Germany on furlough. During the last two *Aktionen* in Baranowicze, Armann hid six Jews in his house and then helped them escape to the forests with the assistance of Chacza, with whom he was in contact. Armann also brought ammunition and ten rifles to Jews who worked for the SD and provided food to Jews on various occasions. Approximately ten Germans who worked with Armann knew what he was doing—some more and some less—and could easily have turned him in, but none of them did. When asked why he had done what he did, he replied that “it was humane assistance that goes without saying.” This was what many rescuers answered. In a letter to Yad Vashem, he wrote, “Did I do a lot? Too little? Did I do my duty?” Armann died in 1989.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ S. Bank, in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 37–38. See also the testimony of Isaac Feigelstein, *ibid.*, pp. 97–107.

¹¹⁶ YVA, M.31/3254. The number of accounts that mention German rescuers or helpers, generally Wehrmacht soldiers, is astonishing. For example, Abraham Wolanski mentions the warnings his family received from two German soldiers in the early days of the German occupation (Abraham Wolanski

The decency of Eduard Chacza, a Polish Catholic who worked in the municipal sanitation department and was responsible for the Catholic cemetery, stands out. Chacza was born in 1918, in western Poland; it is not known when he moved to Baranowicze. He seems to have been a coal miner, since this was his employment after the war. He was married to Julia Iwanowa. The couple had one daughter and a house in the town. Chacza seems to have had contacts with Jews even before the German occupation; he may have done business with them both before and after the ghetto was established.

During the first *Aktion* he encountered a Jewish acquaintance named Arkadi Lipkin, sheltered him, and helped him reach the forests. There seem to have been two Lipkin brothers, and they subsequently served as a liaison between Chacza and the partisans. It appears that they survived the war.

Survivors' accounts focus on two prominent incidents. In the first Chacza saved a woman and a girl and later Shmuel (Mulia) Jankielewicz, the chairman of the second Judenrat; and the second in which he saved two women who at first were afraid he would hand them over to the Germans. In fact, Chacza saved many more Jews. Many testimonies recount that his house was open to fugitives and that he frequently hid them in the mortuary of the Catholic cemetery. He fed them and gave them time to recover their strength before helping them reach the forests. He is said to have had three or four non-Jewish colleagues who helped in his rescue work. In early 1943, he was able to save a group of thirty-five of the last Jewish workers in the SD camp.

After all the Jews had been murdered, Chacza served as an intelligence source for the partisans in the district and was arrested twice. The first time the Germans let him go. He was arrested again in November 1943--whether for his assistance to Jews or assistance to the partisans is not known. He was brutally tortured and incarcerated in a series of camps (we do not know which) until the liberation. Chacza alone saved between sixty and 150 persons. Additional details are hard to come by, because he gave no testimony and he

testimony, Survivors of the Shoah Foundation no. 22720 [1997]). There are also testimonies that mention German Communists who fought in partisan units; see, for example, the testimony of Haya Bar-Yohai, YVA, O.3/7741.

was recognized as a Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem very early (in 1962).¹¹⁷ There is no doubt, however, that many of the Baranowicze survivors owe their lives to Chacza.

Analysis and Conclusions

What can we learn from the complicated story of Baranowicze?

Let us begin with the underground. There is no doubt that graduates of the Zionist movements and the Bund were its driving spirit: Lidowski had belonged to Dror-Freiheit, Kopelowicz to Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir, and Abramowski and Zygelbojm to the Bund. There is also evidence that other groups were represented in its ranks. Most of the members were very young. An overwhelming majority were refugees from outlying places in the region or from western Poland, rather than natives of Baranowicze. This meant that they did not have to deal with the problem of responsibility for their families—a dilemma that loomed large in many other places. Nevertheless, some members of the underground felt a collective moral responsibility for the future of the entire ghetto; this is why the July 1942 uprising was aborted.

In Baranowicze, as in the larger ghettos of Poland (Bialystok, Vilna, etc.), there was a “classic” debate between those favoring an uprising in the ghetto and those favoring escape to the forests. Ultimately, because there was no uprising in the Baranowicze ghetto, a relatively large number did get away to the forests. As was the case in several other ghettos (e.g., Vilna)—but, to a larger extent in Baranowicze—these escapees were joined by others who had not belonged to the underground.

Relations with the Judenrat were ambivalent. Lidowski describes Izykson as a “wonderful” fellow; his two successors as chairman of the Judenrat supported and helped organize resistance. Other members of the Judenrat disagreed. Beloskurnik and Sawczyć, as well as Sawczycki, were opposed to the underground; only tangible threats kept them from turning in its members to the Germans. In contrast, most of the Jewish policemen were involved with the underground, and the second chairman of the Judenrat, Shmuel

¹¹⁷ The Chacza file is YVA, M.31/13, but it does not contain an abundance of information.

Jankielewicz, was among those who reached the forests and joined the partisans.

The Muszynski case raises the decisive question of the extent to which the ghetto leadership supported the underground. As in most other places that have been studied, it seems that in Baranowicze the ghetto population did not totally support the underground--for the familiar reasons. But the evidence is not unambiguous and is biased by the fact that most of those who survived were underground fighters. Their reports, therefore, do not necessarily reflect the sentiments of the Jewish population in general. It is clear, however, that the inhabitants of the ghetto wanted to hand Muszynski over to the Germans.

Lidowski's account of the women in his bunker who pleaded for their lives during the second *Aktion* may be typical: it is clear that most residents of the ghetto had absolutely no chance of surviving. They knew that hiding was a solution born of despair; they could not reach the forests, while an uprising would end in their immediate murder. The solution proposed by Lidowski--mass flight in the wake of an uprising--was unrealistic. It would have been almost impossible for a large and disorganized group to reach the forest 17 kilometers from the ghetto, through a hostile environment, trailing behind a small armed band and pursued by Nazi forces. The Jews confined in the ghetto, in the heart of an unsympathetic population, clearly had no way out. Lidowski scornfully dismisses the attitude of the "intellectuals," without specifying to whom he was actually referring, who plunged into total despair after the first *Aktion* and said there was nothing to do. He compares them to the "common folk," who were more optimistic (or perhaps were deluding themselves).

Weinberg, the *rebbe* of Slonim, supported the underground--perhaps with reservations--but we do not know about many observant Jews who were involved in the organization (except for Noah Roitman, an underground fighter and partisan who had belonged to Ha-Shomer ha-Dati). We may assume that the *rebbe* of Slonim regarded the Judenrat as the legitimate representative of the Jewish population and thus entitled to support and assistance, while deeming the underground to be an appropriate Jewish reaction to the situation. This is why he was esteemed by all sides.

What motivated the members of the underground? There is no doubt that the thirst for revenge, which comes up again and again in their recollections, was paramount. Similarly, their strong desire to survive must have played an important role in the activities of these young people. The ideological factor, as manifested in the anti-fascist oath, was certainly present, but it cannot be regarded as a key element. Their identification with the movement—whether Zionist or Bundist—was certainly in the background and found expression in the paths they chose after the war; but in those dark days, this, too, played only a marginal role. Jewish identity, anger, and hatred for the enemy were all important components but, obviously, these are difficult to reconstruct.

Did the Jewish underground have contact with anti-German elements among the Gentile population? Lidowski and Zygelbojm mention contacts with a Polish Communist or the local underground, but do not go into detail. Lidowski writes about sabotage that he and his comrades carried out (such as damaging the locomotives they were forced to repair for the Germans), perhaps at the request or instructions of the underground. But it is clear that most of the Belorussian population was hostile. Lidowski relates that peasants, along with their wives and children, brought their wagons to the second *Aktion* in order to plunder and steal the victims' property.¹¹⁸

Are our sources reliable? As a crosscheck of a significant number of the testimonies discloses a fair amount of consistency among them, we may conclude that the descriptions are reasonably trustworthy.

What can we learn from the history of Baranowicze during the Holocaust? We seem to have enough material to analyze the historical development of Baranowicze and also to compare it with other places studied in recent decades. Baranowicze is not typical in the sense that it was a “new” town, founded only in the late nineteenth century. Jews were part of its growth and development from the very beginning. On the other hand, the town's economy and that of its Jews was similar to a string of relatively developed towns that were better off than the Polish average, especially in eastern Poland.

The Jews of Baranowicze maintained Jewish institutions and organizations just like Jews throughout the country. In Baranowicze before the war, as in

¹¹⁸ Lidowski, in *Baranowicze Memorial Book*, p. 493.

many towns in eastern Poland, the influence of Orthodox Judaism was on the wane and Zionism and the Bund were increasing their strength as sociopolitical movements. The competing Zionist youth movements became much stronger during the 1930s in Baranowicze and other places in eastern Poland, despite the general downturn in support for the Zionist movement in the rest of Poland.

There are few sources about the Soviet period. To a large extent, the memories of the extermination blotted out that brief interlude. It is clear, however, that this period took a very heavy toll on the Jews, socially and politically. The Soviets deported some local Jews to Siberia. The refugees who streamed to Baranowicze from the German-occupied sector of Poland seem to have made up the bulk of the deportees (although this, of course, saved their lives). Most young Jews were delighted by the new opportunities that the Soviet regime opened up for them and consequently sympathized with it. The local Zionist movements did not set up an underground. Public religious life was almost totally suspended, although the NKVD report cited above (note 13) indicates that a few hundred religious Jews held stubbornly to their traditional lifestyle. Unlike the youth, the older generation in Baranowicze, as elsewhere, was not overjoyed with the Soviets. I have not been able to find out whether the Soviet interlude fanned Gentile animosity toward the Jews in Baranowicze, as it did in some other places.

In the territories they annexed, the Soviets found it astonishingly easy to bring an abrupt end to community life and the public educational and religious institutions that had been carefully fostered over the centuries. Within a few weeks--in some cases, a few days--the organized Jewish communities collapsed, sometimes even without any overt Soviet pressure. People were afraid and withdrew to the privacy of family and individual life. Jewish agents of the Soviet secret police penetrated every corner; everyone was terrified of being denounced and deported. Is this the fate of any traditional culture when it encounters a dictatorship of this sort?

And then the Germans came. The shock of the murders of the men and the first discriminatory and humiliating measures created a totally new atmosphere in the town. As we learn from survivors' accounts, about a quarter of the local Jewish population were not natives. In the first Judenrat, though, these refugees were barely represented.

What distinguishes Baranowicze from most other places is the character of its Judenrat in its three successive compositions.¹¹⁹ The survivors remember the two leaders of the first Judenrat (July 1941 through March 1942), Yehoshua Izykson and Genia Mann, as near-saints. Almost all of the accounts I have seen also present Izykson's two successors, Shmuel Jankielewicz and Mendel Goldberg, as honest men and faithful public servants.¹²⁰ Izykson and Goldberg perished, but Jankielewicz survived and immigrated to Israel—evidently the only Judenrat chairman to reach the country and pass away there—lauded by most of his fellow survivors.¹²¹

Were the Judenräte in these former Polish border districts viewed more favorably by the public than the councils elsewhere? This does seem to be the case--perhaps because the Zionist groups and the Bund had grown stronger here before the war. Izykson was certainly a well-to-do and distinguished man, a Zionist, a typical Jewish public figure. Jankielewicz was more from the rank and file and, evidently, totally without any interest in politics. Too little is known about Goldberg to profile him; in any case, even though he was a refugee from western Poland, his mode of leadership was not much different from his predecessors'. Even the go-between with the Germans, Izrael, is not recalled negatively in most accounts, although Lidowski accuses him of betrayal.

There were traitors and enemy agents in the ghetto, as reported by some witnesses,¹²² but they seem to have been a marginal phenomenon. Nevertheless, they must have been the source of the Germans' information about the existence of an underground in the ghetto. The Jewish police force was esteemed, and most of its members belonged to the underground. In this respect Baranowicze was unusual, an exception from the usual pattern found

¹¹⁹ On this question, see the essential articles by Aaron Weiss: "Toward an Evaluation of the Judenräte" (Hebrew) *Yalkut Moreshet*, 11 (1969), pp. 108–112; "On the Judenräte of Southeastern Poland" (Hebrew) *Yalkut Moreshet*, 15 (1972), pp. 59–122; "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland: Postures and Attitudes, *Yad Vashem Studies*, 12 (1977), pp. 335-365.

¹²⁰ In Kolpynicki, "Nikto nie chotel umirat," p. 122, there is a remark that could be interpreted as criticism of Jankielewicz: he and his deputy, writes Kolpynicki, did everything the Germans told them to.

¹²¹ See, for example, the account by Isaac Feigelstein in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 97–107. Some of the expressions used by the survivors to describe the Baranowicze Judenrat border on the hagiographic.

¹²² Pinchas Mordekowski, in Foxman, ed., *Baranowitsch in Destruction*, pp. 3–4, does not agree: "There were no traitors in the ghetto," he states categorically.

in the historical literature about the Holocaust. It seems plausible that this had something to do with the nature of the Judenrat; that is, the police reflected the character of their Jewish superiors. This is somewhat unexpected, since Baranowicze was a young town without a venerable tradition of community life, and whatever had existed was destroyed during the Soviet interlude. Should we conclude, then, that precisely in places that did have a long tradition of community life the patterns of Jewish leadership were uglier? Can we compare Baranowicze with other towns, such as Brest-Litowsk or Minsk?

The story was different in Lithuania. The Vilna Judenrat was headed by Jacob Gens, a somewhat dubious character, but the chairmen of the Judenräte in Kovno and Shavli were closer to the image of Izykson and Jankielewicz. This was also the case in Bialystok, where the Jewish resistance was quite remarkable, propped up by a significant underground movement. The underground leaders viewed the real head of the Judenrat, Ephraim Barasz, as honest and upright, although given to illusions. However, before making sweeping generalizations, we must study the Jewish leadership elsewhere in Belorussia and western Ukraine.

Did Baranowicze represent an example of *amidah* and unarmed resistance aimed at preserving the Jews' human image even in the impossible conditions of the ghetto? It seems that, at least to some extent, this was the case. The forced Jewish collective residences (*kolkhozy*) paralleled the well-known house committees in the Warsaw ghetto. Their residents engaged in mutual assistance and evinced general concern for everyone who lived in the building. The inevitable quarrels among neighbors living in such terribly overcrowded conditions were resolved—if not by the residents than with the help of the sympathetic police. As teachers were forced to work at manual labor, the children's education was in the hands of elderly people who could no longer go out to work. This meant that the educational methods were taken back a few generations: whereas most Jewish children in pre-war Baranowicze had studied in the secular schools of the Bund and Zionist groups, or in Polish schools, now education became the province of old-time teachers with old-time methods and syllabi drawn from the traditional *heder*.

Religious life was also maintained in the ghetto, although almost none of the former *yeshivah* students were still alive during the ghetto period.¹²³ The *rebbe* of Slonim and Rabbi Mendel Goldberg played a key role in preserving religious traditions in the ghetto.

After the first *Aktion*, the remnants of the political movements and of the youth movements merged into a single fighting underground. There does not seem to have been any underground activity before this; Zygelbojm's hints that Bundists had started organizing previously are not persuasive. Unlike the situation in many other Polish towns, the underground's first achievement was to unite the ranks. Its members were graduates of the Zionist movements and the Bund. Most of them were still in their teens; Lidowski, who was in his thirties, and Dr. Abramowski were exceptions.

This underground, like similar undergrounds in other places, failed because it did not initiate an uprising, as it had hoped, and its plans to respond to the second *Aktion* were frustrated by the Germans' sophisticated ruse. Looking back, Lidowski said, with a large measure of justification, that this failure was really a stroke of luck, because very few would have survived had the Jews revolted at the start of the second *Aktion*. Slipping away in relatively small groups or as individuals offered a much better chance; indeed, hundreds fled, and 250 of them survived the war.

The story of Baranowicze is a story of Jewish endurance--of both the general public and the leadership, of both unarmed opposition and fighting resistance. What made this possible? Here one can only offer a conjecture, a thesis that certainly may be contested. The three decades before the Holocaust seem to have been enough for an identified Jewish community, with all its rival sectors, to coalesce in the town. This climate allowed the local Jews to take in the many refugees who reached Baranowicze from western Poland and nearby towns. The tradition of the Jewish revolutionary movements--Zionist and Bundist--provided the fertile soil in which a serious underground movement could grow. This is also what made possible the emergence of a leadership under siege that performed its duties honorably. This is despite the fact that there were some exceptions--agents and traitors--and even though not all Judenrat officials were saints and there were not a few distressing incidents in the horrible circumstances imposed by the Nazis.

¹²³ Bernard (Baruch) Kudevich, who escaped from the Stara Wilejka camp to the partisans, had been a student at Rabbi Wasserman's *yeshivah*; see *Survivors of the Shoah Foundation* no. 06107 (1995).

Even though we have dealt here with only one town out of hundreds and it is too early to generalize, there is no doubt that Baranowicze is an example of a town that was destroyed but did not give up.

Translated from the Hebrew by Lenn J. Schramm

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