

Plunder of Jewish Property in the Nazi-Occupied Areas Of the Soviet Union

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One of the by-products of the mass murder of the Jews in the Nazi-occupied areas of the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944, was the confiscation and plunder of their property. This also fit into the broader policy of the Nazi exploitation of slave labor and economic resources in the occupied territories for the benefit of the German war economy. The aim was to supply the needs of the German armies in combat on the Eastern Front and of the German administration and its institutions in the occupied zones, and to help meet the essential needs of the population in Germany proper for agricultural produce.

Due to the prevailing conditions in the Soviet Union, the murder and plunder of the Jews there differed from the murder in other German occupied countries. Soviet Jews were murdered at killing pits near their homes, and not in distant extermination camps. Consequently, all their money, valuables and other property were left on the spot at the disposal of the local authorities. Another significant difference lay in the concept of “private property” in a communist state including the property belonging to the individual Jew, which was different from the property kept by Jews in capitalist countries occupied by Nazi Germany. An array of German authorities operated in the occupied Soviet territories: the Wehrmacht and military administration, various SS formations, and the German civil administration. As a result, jurisdictional competition and the question of who rightfully “controlled” confiscated Jewish property were distinctive features associated with this pillage.

Since Jews and non-Jews often lived in close proximity, broad sections of the non-Jewish local population also participated in the plunder of Jewish property.

This article describes German policy regarding individual Jewish property in the Nazi-occupied areas of the Soviet Union, the various authorities that

commandeered these assets, the manner in which the pillage was carried out, and the frictions among the various German authorities. The sources for this study include archival materials and relevant research published over the years, newly-available documentation from former Soviet archives, and new research and documentation published in the successor states of the former Soviet Union.

The Nature of Jewish Property in the Soviet Union

German “plunder of Jewish property” in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union refers to all assets and anything of economic value that was in Jewish possession. The scope of such property, however, was generally limited. In the first years after the Bolshevik Revolution, during the period of “Military Communism,” the Soviet authorities confiscated property from all Soviet citizens, including industries, workshops, large buildings, land, banks and other property privately owned by Jews. Jewish communal property, such as schools, synagogues, hospitals and cultural institutions belonging to local Jewish communities, organizations and political parties, suffered a similar fate. World War I, the revolution and subsequent civil war, along with the pogroms and pillage that accompanied them reduced the Jews to economic ruin. A portion of the property that small traders and Jewish artisans were able to acquire in the years of the “New Economic Policy” from 1921 to 1928 was later confiscated by the Soviet state during the era of collectivization in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Like other Soviet citizens, Jews were allowed to own very little: an apartment, generally small, along with furnishings and household items, clothing and personal belongings. In the kolkhoz collective farms or in small towns, Soviet citizens were permitted to own a few animals, such as a cow or goat. Private possession of a limited amount of currency and certain valuables was also permitted. This was the extent of Jewish property in the “old” areas of the Soviet Union; that is, within the Soviet boundaries before September 1939 and the outbreak of World War II.

The economic situation of the Jews in territories annexed by the Soviets in 1939-1940 in western Belorussia, western Ukraine, the Baltic States,

Bessarabia and the northern Bukovina differed slightly. Most Jews there belonged to the middle class, and a small number were even wealthy. However, in the first weeks and months of Soviet rule, the Soviet administration in the annexed territories took immediate steps to nationalize the banks and their deposits, along with factories, businesses and apartment buildings. Apartments and their contents were usually left in their owner's possession, except in the case of persons regarded as "enemies" of the Soviet state. The latter were arrested or deported to interior areas of the Soviet Union. The Jews were hard hit financially by these measures and many were reduced to the barest minimum for existence.

Nevertheless, since the Soviet rule had only been in power for a short time in these annexed areas, the Jews there still had more property than Jews within the "old" territory of the Soviet Union. However, even without having exact data, there can be little doubt that individual Jews throughout the Soviet Union ("old" and new territories) had less personal assets of all kinds than the Jews in Central and Western Europe. Moreover, unlike the Jewish communities there, Soviet Jews had no communal property, like hospitals, schools, clubs, synagogues, etc. On the other hand, because there were far more Jews within the German-occupied Soviet Union than in Central and Western Europe, the small amount of private property and valuables that were owned by Jews added up to a substantial sum. What did that property consist of? First, all the dwellings and their contents left behind by hundreds of thousands of Jews who had fled or who had been evacuated eastward, inside the Soviet Union, on their escape from the approaching German forces. Second, the hundreds of thousands of apartments (and their contents) formerly occupied by Jews who had been evicted and removed to the killing sites or to ghettos as interim stage on their way to extermination. Third, all personal belongings, currency and valuables stolen from the victims at the sites where they were murdered.

The Structure of the German Administration:

Economic Exploitation of Occupied Soviet Territories

The orders for Operation Barbarossa also set down the policy aims for the economic exploitation of the occupied areas in the Soviet Union. Instructions issued on March 13, 1941 by the Wehrmacht Supreme Command (OKW) in advance of the attack on the Soviet Union, pertaining to operational objectives to be pursued by army commanders in the rear areas, stated:

1. Exploitation of the country and protection of economic assets of value to the German economy.
2. Exploitation of the country for supply of the forces in accordance with the requirements of the Army Supreme Command [OKH]...
3. The Führer has charged the Reichsmarschall [Göring] with the coordination of the economic administration ... the latter has delegated this task to the head of the Armaments Office.¹

To implement this economic aim in the areas occupied by the army, Göring set up the Supreme Economic Staff-East (Wirtschaftsführungsstab Ost) under his leadership, subordinating to it the Economic Staff-East (Wirtschaftsstab Ost). It had branch offices in all army groups down to regional, local and city military administrations (Feldkommandanturen, FK, Ortskommandaturen, OK). In the areas under German civil administration, economic matters and exploitation for the war economy and the needs of this administration was in the hands of the Reich Commissars and the administration organs subordinate to them. Exploitation for the needs of the Wehrmacht was handled by branches of the OKW Office of War Economy and Armaments (Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt, WRA), commanded by Gen. Georg Thomas. These operated independently within the areas under civil administration. Thomas also had authority over the economic exploitation staffs active in territory under military administration.²

¹ Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), p. 154.

² Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), pp. 355-357; Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945* (London: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 314-316.

Within the frame of their overall mandate, these official bodies also considered themselves the sole authority for the disposition of Jewish property and its utilization. In contrast, SS authorities, in particular the Einsatzgruppen and branches of the Sipo and SD claimed that they had been invested with supreme authority over all matters pertaining to the Jews, including the fate of their property and valuables. As a result, a raft of arguments and differences of opinion developed among the various German authorities.

An additional and extremely important factor in the seizure and plunder of Jewish possessions was the local population. Local inhabitants pillaged large amounts of Jewish property, with or without the permission of the German occupation authorities. Economic exploitation also encompassed Jewish forced labor, but this is beyond the purview of this article.

Orders and Directives on Jewish Property

With regard to Jewish property, a memorandum from the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, entitled “Instructions for Dealing with the Jewish Problem,” stated:

It is necessary to seize and confiscate all Jewish possessions, except for what is essential for their existence. As rapidly as possible and to the extent that the economic situation permits, Jews must be dispossessed of their property and belongings by means of orders and additional measures by the senior officials of the Reich Commissariats. This is necessary in order to put an immediate halt to the transfer of property [into the hands of others].³

In the temporary orders given on August 18, 1941 by the Reichskommissar of the Ostland⁴ Hinrich Lohse, Para. IV F stipulates that Jewish property should be confiscated and registered, though no date for implementation is specified. In any event, Jews were ordered immediately to

³ Nuremberg Doc., PS-212.

⁴ The Reichskommissariat Ostland encompassed the Baltic countries and much of occupied White Russia. The civil administration in the Ostland and Reichskommissariat Ukraine had a hierarchy of “commissars” or “commissioners” who were the ranking officials, from Reich Commissar on down to Generalkommissar and Gebietskommissar.

hand over all domestic and foreign currency in their possession, aside from the sum of 2 rubles a day per person for one month, to cover daily living expenses – far too little even for minimum subsistence.⁵ They were also ordered to deliver all stocks, bonds and other valuables, such as gold, diamonds and other precious metals and stones. In addition to its specific stipulations, the order was also meant to call the attention of all military and SS authorities to the civil administration’s legal competence regarding the disposition and ownership of Jewish property.

Yet by the time that Lohse and the newly established civil administration began to act, they discovered that various bodies and persons had already begun the seizure and plunder of Jewish property. The army and military administration that controlled the area prior to the establishment of the civil administration had seized many buildings owned by Jews and had commandeered large amounts of furniture and equipment for their offices and units. They had also taken a sizable amount of currency and valuables worth millions of RM. The Einsatzgruppen and units of both the German and local police that had carried out *Judenaktionen* had seized the belongings and valuables of their victims for themselves. Many local inhabitants had taken their apartments and furnishings, plundering everything they could lay their hands on – and even moving into the apartments after the Jews had been taken to the pits to be shot.

Lohse’s “temporary orders” of August 18, 1941, had been somewhat unclear regarding Jewish property; they did not stress the urgency of seizing this property lest others, outside the civilian administration, take control of it instead. Nor did these orders refer in any way to the question of Jewish property already confiscated by other persons or authorities. In order to deal with this situation, Lohse issued a detailed order on October 13, 1941, entitled “Order for Settlement of Jewish Property in the Reich Commissariat Ostland.” It stated:

1. All property, both movable and immovable, in the possession of Jews within the territory of the Reich Commissar Ostland is to be confiscated...

⁵ Nuremberg Doc., PS-1138.

2. Property is understood to mean movable and immovable chattels, their appurtenances and all associated rights...
3. The confiscation is to be carried out by the Reich Commissar Ostland or the offices he has authorized. ... The confiscation does not include the following:
 - a. Household goods and effects necessary for basic needs.
 - b. Cash and bank deposits up to the value of 100 RM.
4. The penalty of imprisonment and/or a fine will be placed on:
 - a. All persons attempting to conceal from the German civilian administration or its representatives any article of property or attempting in another way to prevent its confiscation or to reduce the amount confiscated.
 - b. Anyone who by intent or through negligence fails to fulfill his obligation to report or give notice in accordance with this directive [on Jewish property].
 - c. ... if the accused acted for motives of willful resistance, or if the case involves a particularly serious offense, the accused is to be sentenced to death. ...
5. The order takes effect from the day of its official publication.⁶

On December 1, 1941, Lohse issued an order to set up a “Trustee Administration” (Treuhandverwaltung) to centralize operations dealing with Jewish property. That authority maintained branch offices in the four Generalkommissariats: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and White Russia.⁷

The most difficult problem facing the German occupation administration was in gathering accurate information on Jewish property, in particular on the large number of apartments and their contents. In the main, these had been seized by local police officers and officials of the local administration or by the

⁶ Verkündungsblatt des Reichskommissars für das Ostland, October 24, 1941, in *My Obvinianiem* (Riga: Liesma, 1967, pp. 72-73), Latvijas Pārvalsts Centrālās Valsts Oktobra Revolūcijas un Sociālistiskās Cēltniecības Arhīvs, Fond 18 (Generalkommissariat Riga) Opis 1, No. 2.

⁷ Letter from the ‘Trustee Administration’ Minsk, June 23, 1942, on confiscation and subsequent handling of Jewish property, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive (USHMMA), RG 53002-M, Reel 22.

neighbors of Jews from the local population. The task of recording Jewish property was assigned to the Gebietskommissare (regional commissars). They in turn utilized the local officials subordinate to them for carrying out this job, namely the mayors and village heads (*Soltys*). For example, Minsk Gebietskommissar Hans Kaiser's order of October 14, 1941, stated:

"It is necessary to report by November 1, 1941 on all Jewish property. Anyone possessing or utilizing property belonging to Jews, and anyone who has or can exercise disposition over that property by legal or practical means, is required to file a report. Consequently, I demand to be provided with a report, particularly by persons safeguarding Jewish property or who have taken possession of it by one means or another. All these are required to file a report with mayors in the regions and counties."⁸

Three days later, on October 17, Kaiser issued a supplementary order stating that "all Jewish property belongs to the state."⁹ Subsequent to Kaiser's order, the Belorussian county chief of the Minsk district, the Belorussian M. Kontovt, issued an instruction stating that "all the property left behind by Jews should be handed over to the Gebietskommissariat Minsk by October 25, 1941. In the case of animals, they should be reported and temporarily remain where they are."¹⁰ This directive made no mention of apartments. Similar orders were also handed down by other Gebietskommissars.¹¹ In an order in October 1941 on Jewish property issued by Dr. Walter Alnor, Gebietskommissar of the Libau (Liepaja) region in Latvia, mayors and village heads were given the responsibility of safeguarding Jewish property and providing Alnor with an inventory of this property. Alnor, cognizant of the

⁸ Raisa Andreevna Chernoglazova, *Tragedie Yevreiev Belorusii v Gody Niemetskoj Okkupatsi 1941-1944* (Minsk: Izdateli Dremach-Galperin, 1995), p. 69.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1982), pp. 200-201, order issued by Hans Hingst, Gebietskommissar, Vilna.

problematic nature of this matter and in order to encourage his subordinates to file a report, noted:

“I agree that it is necessary to give household objects of minor value to the needy and the deserving, even requesting a certain payment in return. As to other property, it can be appropriated and utilized only on the basis of my direct authorization.”

Later in the order, he noted that there was a lack of furniture and other household effects in various offices in Libau. Consequently, there was a need for such items that had been left behind by Jews in the cities and towns of the region.¹²

Jewish property, like Jewish forced labor, was a means to help finance the budget and maintenance of the German civil administration and its activities, which is why that administration struggled to ensure that income from this property would be channeled into its coffers. At the beginning of August 1942, Lohse transferred the authority over Jewish property from the Trustee Office to Dr. Karl Friedrich Vialon, head of the Budget Department in the Reichskommissariat Ostland.¹³ On August 27, 1942, Vialon issued an order to all Generalkommissars, entitled “Administration of Jewish Ghettoes,” stipulating that while the administration of the ghettos came under the authority of the Political Department of the Reichskommissariat, all the financial aspects connected with property were to be handled by the Budget Department. He noted that this was in accordance with instructions from the Reich Ministry for the Eastern Territories. The order stated:

“The minister for occupied territories in the East has delegated the authority for administration of property to budget departments ... Articles of gold and silver should be confiscated, carefully inventoried, sent to the Reich Credit Bank in Riga and put at my further disposal. ... Their transfer to the Utilization Office [for valuables, Verwertungsstelle] in Berlin will be handled centrally

¹² Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M-33/1045, JM 10606.

¹³ Letter, August 11, 1942, USHMMA, RG-53002-M, Reel 22.

from Riga. ... Cloth and fabric collected and not passed on to the procurement departments are to be sent to the central and local branch offices of Ostlandfaser GmbH. In the case of objects sold, the funds received should be transferred immediately for deposit in the special account of the Finance Office of the Reichskommissariat. ... No other special accounts should be opened for this purpose.”¹⁴

One reason for Vialon’s order was to ensure that funds from Jewish property would not remain in the hands of the Generalkommissars in Minsk, Kovno (Kaunas) and Riga, but would be deposited to the credit of the Reichskommissariat Ostland.

The problems concerning Jewish property and its seizure continued to engage the top echelon of the civil administration in the occupied Soviet Union. On September 7, 1942, the Ministry for the Eastern Territories issued a document for the Reichskommissars of the Ukraine and Ostland regarding confiscation and sale of Jewish property, property of the Soviet state and ownerless property, based on decisions issued by Minister Alfred Rosenberg on June 18, 1942. In order to expedite the seizure of property not yet in the hands of the civil administration or other German authorities, announcements were to be published in the press and by other means threatening punishment to any person who failed to report such property. The document referred also to the necessity of establishing special investigation units. Special warehouses should also be set up in order to store Jewish property, and a detailed inventory kept of the items. The document stipulated to which central offices in Berlin the property should be transferred, what items Reichskommissars were permitted to leave in the hands of local administration authorities (furniture; household utensils) and what should be sold off (clothing, fabric, etc.). Funds from the sale of precious metals in Berlin were to be transferred to the account of the Ministry for the Eastern Territories.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Administration of Jewish Ghettos,” YVA, 053/161.

¹⁵ V. I. Adamushko and G. D. Knatko et al., eds., *“Nazi Gold” from Belarus, Documents and Materials* (Minsk: State Committee on Archives and Record Keeping of the Republic of Belarus, 1998), pp. 110-113. The documents in the

On October 14, 1942, Lohse issued a supplementary order by which all past claims by Jews from any third party for money or other assets were also considered as confiscated by the German civil administration. Any person who owed money to Jews was therefore required to report this to the authorities. In other words, the civil administration was now considered the owner of all claims by Jews from any non-Jewish individual. Lohse's supplementary order also stipulated that all persons or institutions, including German and local offices, possessing Jewish property or now located in formerly Jewish-owned premises were obliged to report this.¹⁶ Lohse's sought to establish unequivocally that the civil administration and not any other authority, was the body authorized to confiscate and even to retain formerly Jewish property, currency and valuables. The civil administration circulated a letter and questionnaire in which various authorities were ordered to report in detail on any Jewish or ownerless property they had in their possession.¹⁷

The confiscation of Jewish property in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine encompassing Polesje, Volhynia and the eastern Ukraine as far as the areas along the Dnieper River – and the problems of locating and collecting this property, resembled the situation in the Reichskommissariat Ostland. Compared with German documentation on the Ostland, documentation on Jewish property in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine is, as with other aspects of the Holocaust, relatively scanty. That difference is not due to the nature of Jewish property there or the manner in which it was handled. Rather, it stems from the limited amount of paper work on the whole topic of property in the Ukraine, a consequence of the differing personalities of the individual Reichskommissars. Lohse was a punctilious bureaucrat interested in detail and issued numerous documents; by contrast, Erich Koch, Reichskommissar of the Ukraine, prepared fewer documents and was less concerned about details.¹⁸ Commenting on the Ukraine, Hilberg notes:

book are given in the German original, with a translation into English and Russian.

¹⁶ Order on Jewish Property, YVA, JM 10606, M-33/1049.

¹⁷ Document, Commander of the Regular Police (KdO) in Latvia, December 22, 1942, YVA, JM.10606, M.33.1049.

¹⁸ Dallin notes that Lohse's work style led to "a flood of directives, instructions and decrees which covered thousands of pages," Dallin, *German Rule in*

“Reichskommissar Koch, was far less ambitious in his efforts to collect Jewish belongings. On September 7, 1942, Koch received a directive, prepared in the East Ministry, [Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories] to seize all Jewish and abandoned property... Koch replied that the implementation of this decree was a “political and organizational impossibility.” He had already confiscated Jewish valuables, “particularly gold.” The remainder of the Jewish property consisted primarily of furnishings, part of which he was using in his offices and the rest of which he had burned... “To make lists now... to pay Jewish debts – that in my opinion is a presumption about my administration that cannot be justified in war-time...”¹⁹

In the territory under military administration, which included eastern White Russia (except for the cities of Minsk and Slutsk), the Ukraine east of the Dnieper River and the occupied territories of the Russian Federation, authority for all matters relating to Jewish property rested with the “Economic Staff-East” and its branch offices in various cities and districts. There too problems surfaced and other persons or authorities seized control of Jewish property or property formerly belonging to the Soviet state. An order handed down by General Max von Schenkendorff, Rear Area Commander of Army Group Center, on October 19, 1941, stated:

Seizure of Jewish and Enemy Assets

It is emphasized once again that in respect to all matters relating to confiscation or other orders dealing with all categories of property, be it Jewish, enemy, formerly in German possession or commandeered by the Soviets, the sole responsible authority is the “Economic Staff-East.”²⁰

Russia, p. 186. Dallin also notes that Koch had less interest in what was happening in the Ukraine and points out the fact that Koch did not establish residence as Reichskommissar in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, but rather in Rovno, 300 km to the west, *ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁹ Hilberg, *Destruction*, p. 365.

²⁰ Order on Confiscation of Jewish Property, YVA, JM.13084, 0.51.310.

Plundering Jewish Money and Property

“Contributions” were among the first forms of plundering Jewish currency and valuables. In many localities, the German administrations, both military and civil, imposed a special levy on the Judenräte, either monetary or calculated in valuables equivalent to a certain sum. The task of the Judenräte was to collect this levy from the Jews within an extremely short period of time and then to pass this on to the German administration. The Jews dubbed this levy a “contribution.” These exactions had two purposes: first, to rob the Jews of their funds in order to harm them economically and reduce them to ruin; and, second, to serve as an initial and immediate source of funding for the German administration to help meet its local needs. The amount was arbitrarily determined, it was not formally registered, and no receipt was given. Part of the assets, particularly gold and other valuables, were also pocketed privately by administration officials. One such example was the contribution imposed on the Jews of Vilna.

On August 6, 1941, Franz Murer, in charge of Jewish affairs in the Vilna Gebietskommissariat, summoned representatives of the Vilna Judenrat to his office and ordered them to deliver two million rubles [10 rubles = 1 German Mark] or its equivalent in other valuables to him by 9 A.M. the next morning and an additional amount of three million rubles by the end of the day. He threatened that if the Judenrat representatives failed to deliver the money by the appointed hour, the remaining members would be required to come one hour later to pick up their dead bodies. The rest of the Judenrat members soon learned about the fine and the news spread quickly among the Jews of the town. Neighborhood committees were formed and began to collect money, gold and other valuables.

Fear gripped the Jewish community. To collect such huge sums of money from a population that had been worn down by the war and Soviet rule to the point of destitution was an extremely difficult undertaking. The time allotted was short, and, to complicate matters, Jews were under a strict curfew from six in the evening until dawn. By the time Murer’s deadline arrived, 667,000 rubles had been collected, along with half a kilo of gold, gold watches and diamonds. Many Jews believed that handing over the required sum would

ensure their survival and help in the return of thousands of persons who had been abducted and about whose fate nothing was known. The money and valuables that had been collected were handed over to Murer at the designated hour. He was informed that the collection of the balance was continuing. Two of the three Judenrat representatives who brought the money were taken into custody. After threats and prolonged negotiations between the Judenrat and Murer, he agreed to postpone the final deadline for several more days. He was finally given a total of 1,490,000 rubles, 16.5 kilograms of gold and 189 watches. Murer did not provide any receipt for the money or other valuables. The meetings between him and the Judenrat members were held on the street, not far from the building in which the civilian administration was housed.²¹ There were no witnesses or written protocol of what was said. All this suggests that a portion of the money and valuables, if not indeed the greater part, found its way into the private pockets of administration officials.

On July 18, 1941, the military administration in Baranowicze ordered the Judenrat to collect five kilograms of gold, 10 kg of silver and one million rubles from the local Jews. The civil administration, which took over in August 1941, instructed the Judenrat to hand over an additional two million rubles.²² The Jews of Brest-Litovsk were ordered to pay five million rubles; the Jews of Pinsk were commanded to hand over 20 kilograms of gold; the Jews of Rovno were ordered to pay twelve million rubles.²³ The Jews of Lvov (Lemberg) were told they must pay twenty million rubles under the pretext that this sum was needed to repair the damage in the city caused by the war, which the Jews had allegedly caused.²⁴ The Jews of Minsk were required to provide the Minsk municipality with a “contribution” of 300,000 rubles, supposedly to cover

²¹ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 94-98.

²² A. S. Stein, ed., *Baranowicz, Sefer Zikaron* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Association of the Survivors of Baranowicze in Israel, 1953), pp. 516-517.

²³ Shmuel Spector, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities – Poland: Volhynia and Polesie* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), vol. 5, pp. 198, 236, 295-296; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Yad Vashem and Sifriyat Poalim, 1990), vol. 1, p. 240.

²⁴ Eliyahu Yones, *Jews in Lvov During World War Two and the Holocaust 1939-1944* (Hebrew), Ph.D. dissertation, (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1993), p. 68.

expenses for their confinement in the local ghetto.²⁵ In Borisov in eastern Belorussia 300,000 rubles were exacted from the Jews; in Dnjepropetrovsk, an “contribution” of millions of rubles was imposed on the Jews.²⁶ In Kharkov, the Jews were ordered to pay several contributions, and each time a greater amount was demanded.²⁷ In Orsha in eastern Belorussia, the Jewish community was ordered to present over 150,000 (or 250,000) rubles to the administration.²⁸ Similar levies were imposed on the Jews in numerous other cities and towns in the occupied territories, such as Drohoczyn, Kobryn and Luck.

Even though the civil and military administrations regarded themselves as the sole authority in matters relating to Jewish property in the areas under their control, in actual practice all the German authorities in the field plundered the Jews or demanded, at times via the Judenräte, an array of items. The Judenräte, which understood that the Jews’ survival depended on these authorities were compelled to deliver what was demanded. A unique document in this respect is the Brest-Litovsk Judenrat’s list, “Contributions of the Judenrat in Brest-Litovsk for the German Authorities from October 5, 1941 to February 10, 1942.” The document details the plundering authorities and the items of Jewish property demanded and received, as well as their monetary value. Some of the eight German bodies listed were part of the civil administration, others were not: the Generalkommissariat, SS, German municipality, Wehrmacht, Gebietskommissariat, Regional Agricultural Administration, Labor Office and other authorities (apparently implied are the local municipality, the local police, etc.). The list encompasses 115 items,

²⁵ Hersh Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans Against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), pp. 12, 21; Vassily Grossman and Eliah Ehrenburg, eds., *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime Against The Jewish People* (New York: Nexus Press, 1981), p. 454.

²⁶ Grossman and Ehrenburg, *The Black Book*, pp. 366-368. Regarding Dnjepropetrovsk, it is stated that on September 26, 1941 the Jews were ordered to collect thirty million rubles. This amount seems exaggerated, and it is likely the source is in error.

²⁷ Ilya Altman, Yitzhak Arad et al., eds., *Neizvestnaya Chernaya Kniga* (Moscow and Jerusalem: Garf and Yad Vashem, 1993), p. 86.

²⁸ *Sudebnyi Process po delu o Zlodeyaniach Nemecko-Fashistovskich Zachvatchikov v Beloruskoi SSR* (Minsk: Gosudarstrenniye izdetestvo BSSR, 1947), pp. 155-156, 167.

grouped into six categories: furniture, bedding, kitchen utensils and other items, tools, footwear accessories and winter clothing. The total value of all the objects handed over was estimated at 293,560 RM, equivalent to 2,935,600 rubles. This sum also included the value of the items presented to the German authorities during the preceding summer (July-September 1941).²⁹ All the German institutions that set up their offices and apartments in Brest-Litovsk were fitted out almost entirely with furnishings taken from the Jews. The cash in the Jews' possession in Brest-Litovsk was seized at the start of the occupation, when they were forced to pay a "contribution" of five million rubles. These amounts and the various objects itemized in the document did not include the apartments and their remaining contents when the Jews of the city were evicted and relocated to the ghetto in November-December 1941. Likewise not included was what the Jews left behind when the ghetto was liquidated in October 1942, and its residents were murdered. The total value of that property cannot be estimated, even in terms of local criteria at the time. In almost all the cities and towns in the occupied Soviet Union, Jewish property suffered a similar fate.

On September 25, 1941, a few weeks after the Jews had been removed to the ghetto, the Vilna municipality sent a report to the Vilna Gebietskommissar regarding the confiscation of 429 Jewish dwellings, 71 workshops belonging to Jews, etc. The report was incomplete and stated that further information would be provided in the near future on the buildings, furnishings, clothing, tools and other confiscated items.³⁰ Another report from Vilna, dated October 22, 1941, stated that after the Jews were murdered in Ponary, clothing and other objects totalling 6,350 kg were transported to the warehouse of the "Center for Raw Materials" in Vilna.³¹ On December 17, 1942, in accordance with Vialon's instructions cited above, the Vilna Gebietskommissar sent the Reichskommissar in Riga a shipment containing some 1,200 gold objects, among them 516 wedding rings and approximately 150 gold ruble and dollar

²⁹ "Leistungen des Judenrates in Brest-Litowsk für die Deutsche Behörden," YVA, 0.51.333.

³⁰ E. Rozauskas, ed., *Documents Accuse* (Vilnius: Gintaras, 1970), pp. 225-226.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

coins.³² On June 2, 1942, Petersen, the Gebietskommissar in Glębokie, shipped 4.267 kg of gold to the Reich Commissar of White Russia. On July 2, 1942, Petersen sent another shipment containing 3.069 kg of gold, 20 gold ruble coins embossed with the portrait of the Russian czar and 210 gold dollar coins.³³

After Lvov was annexed to the Generalgouvernement in Poland, German firms and businessmen arrived on the scene immediately. They received permits from the local German authorities to evict Jews from their apartments and to confiscate the premises and their contents. In general, these were large apartments in which prosperous Jewish families had lived in the past. Maurycy Elerhand, a professor at Lvov University and one of the Jewish communal leaders in the city during the 1920s, had his apartment confiscated and handed over to a private German firm. He recorded in his diary:

“On August 6, 1941, a man came to my room ... and read from a slip he was holding: “This apartment has been confiscated. It is permitted to take only clothing and underwear, gold and silver. Everything else must be left in the apartment.” He then went on to state that the apartment had to be handed over by noon the following day, otherwise the police would be brought in, and added: “Then you’ll get out of here in worse condition ...” The person who brought the confiscation order was director of the Viennese firm “Kompos” ... The apartment had a library with several thousand volumes ... It contained many rare valuable editions ... I had the following paintings [a detailed list of dozens of paintings, their titles and names of the artists followed, Y.A.] ... There were many stylish furnishings in the apartment, I owned more than ten Persian rugs ... The chandelier in the salon was ancient Venetian. The large glass case contained many Japanese statuettes ... bronze figures.”³⁴

³² Ibid., p. 266.

³³ Chernoglazava, *Tragedia Yevreiev Belarusii*, pp. 73, 75.

³⁴ Bella Gutermann, ed., *Days of Horror: Jewish Testimonies from German Occupied Lemberg 1941-1943* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and Moreshet, 1991), pp. 38-41.

In another diary from Lvov, Shmuel Chortkover described the plundering of Jewish property on December 8, 1941, simultaneous to a German *Judenaktion* and the removal of the Jews to the ghetto:

“Two trucks arrived accompanied by units of the Schupo [Schutzpolizei] under the command of a major. They broke up into several squads and burst into the houses ... entering each and every apartment on the pretext they’re searching for foreign currency. The frightened occupants were herded into a second room and then, over the span of two to three hours, they combed methodically through the rest of the possessions, from one end to the other. Not pausing, they packed their vehicles with suitcases, silver objects, candlesticks, cutlery, couches, mattresses, oil, smoked meats. ... The occupants, young and old, male and female, were forced to strip down naked for a body search. They had to carry down the heavier sacks themselves.”³⁵

The plundering of the Jews continued even after they were evicted and confined to ghettos. Though the methods sometimes differed, the result was the same: Jewish property was robbed. In Kovno, the authorities gave the Jews a month to move out into the ghetto but allowed them to take all their belongings along. That “generosity” on the part of the German administration was short-lived and apparently, was for its own convenience. They expected it would be easier for them to seize property from the Jews inside the ghetto rather than to take it from thousands of apartments scattered throughout the city. A few days after they entered the ghetto, from August 19, 1941 to the first week in September, teams of German and Lithuanian police conducted house-to-house searches there. They confiscated currency, gold and silver objects, good-quality clothing, linens, shoes, electrical appliances, medical instruments, furniture and anything that caught their fancy. All the spoils were transported to several synagogues, which had been turned into storage depots. Leib Garfunkel, who witnessed these search operations, wrote:

³⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

“During the searches the Germans were rough and extremely brutal ... The Germans forced all the women into one room, ordered them to undress and then conducted a thorough body search to check whether they might have hidden something. Some of the women were subjected to a “gynecological” examination. During the final days of the searches, the soldiers did not suffice with beatings; each day, they also murdered a few Jews who supposedly had tried to conceal something ... This in order to terrify the Jews so they would give them anything still in their possession ... On September 6, the Ältestenrat was ordered by Jordan [the official in the Gebietskommissariat responsible for ghetto affairs, Y. A.] to send over several representatives immediately ... Jordan was furious when they came in ... You Jews living in the ghetto had to hand over all your possessions to us ... I’m giving you an order: go tell the community immediately that they must deliver ... all the currency and other valuables still in their possession to the Ältestenrat ... Each family may keep only 100 rubles (10 RM) ... For every valuable found in the possession of a Jew, that person will be shot, together with 100 Jews from among his neighbors ... The ghetto is faced with two possibilities: loss of life or loss of possessions. The next day, there was a constant stream of Jews from morning till evening. They came by the thousands to give up their beloved and cherished belongings ... Mementos from their personal and family life and the lives of their fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers ... watches, rings ... precious pictures, rugs, cameras ... huge piles of paper money and foreign currency ... Every day, men from the SA came from the municipal administration, group after group, suitcases in hand. They filled the suitcases with Jewish belongings. The Gestapo and other German authorities heard the rumor about the huge “emporium” in the ghetto. They came to the ghetto by the dozens, entered the collection rooms ... supposedly only to satisfy their curiosity ... while in actual fact intent on filching something from all that loot for themselves.”³⁶

³⁶Leib Garfunkel, *The Destruction of Kovno’s Jewry* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1959), pp. 58-61. Garfunkel was one of the members of the Ältestenrat that Jordan summoned. See also Joseph Gar, *Downfall of Jewish Kovno* (Yiddish) (Munich: Association of Lithuanian Jews in the American Zone in Germany, 1948), pp. 57-60.

In Jevpatoria in Crimea, the Jews were ordered to surrender all their valuables and money, except for the sum of 200 rubles per person. The order concluded with the words: “failure to comply will result in execution.”³⁷

Events in Lvov, Kovno, Jevpatoria and many other ghettos could be defined as “official plunder.” Along with this, there was a great deal of “private plunder” in many ghettos as well. Police officers and German soldiers would break into the ghetto at night to seize the few belongings the Jews still had. Commenting on the situation in the Minsk ghetto, Hersh Smolar noted: “Most terrible of all were the night raids...groups of German soldiers – marauders – who more and more frequently began visiting the ghetto at night. They would break into houses, conduct ‘inspections,’ steal whatever came to hand.”³⁸

Testimony on events in the short-lived ghetto in Kharkov located in the shacks of the tractor factory noted:

“Robbery and murder became a daily occurrence. Generally, the Germans would storm into the rooms on the pretext they were looking for weapons and then would steal anything that caught their eye. Anyone who protested was taken outside and shot. A day before Christmas [1941] we were required to gather food and money for drinks for the camp guards. The people, poor and famished, were forced to take the last morsel of sugar and oil from their children for the sake of the thieves’ little celebration. In addition, every day the devilish Nazis used to demand watches and expensive cloth from us. These demands were met because they came with the threat of execution.”³⁹

A distinct aspect of the pillage of Jewish property involved collecting furs for the German army. The Wehrmacht was not prepared for winter combat; its attack on the Soviet Union was based on the assumption that victory would be achieved before the onset of winter. Consequently, the army was not equipped with winter clothing. In late December 1941, Goebbels called upon the German people and other nations in Europe to contribute their fur coats or

³⁷ Grossman and Ehrenburg, *Black Book* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1991), p. 234.

³⁸ Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto*, p. 22.

³⁹ Altman and Arad, eds., *Neizvestnaya Chernaya Kniga*, pp. 87-88.

other fur pieces to be used to sew coats for the army. While the Germans and others were asked to contribute voluntarily, the Jews were ordered to surrender their fur coats, and in some places other warm winter clothing; they were given a deadline of a few days in which to hand them over. The order came with a threat: anyone found in the possession of an article of fur after the appointed deadline would be executed. The Judenräte issued the call for the collection.⁴⁰ Hermann Kruk mentions Goebbels' appeal in his diary and even notes he had attached to his diary the original German proclamation. Kruk wrote on the collection of furs in the Vilna ghetto:

“December 27 [1941] ... Today at noon a group of Germans came to the ghetto. Immediately after that Jewish police went from house to house, announcing: all fur coats, fur collars and anything else made of fur had to be handed over to the Judenrat within half an hour. Failure to do so would be punished by death. The residents immediately began to bring their [furs] and by eight p.m. the building was piled high with fur coats and other fur garments ... On the street you can see men wearing overcoats with collars where the fur has been removed and replaced by a piece of cloth.”⁴¹

Local heads of town councils and mayors appointed by the German authorities also utilized Jewish property as a source of income and funding for their activities. On November 27, 1941, the mayor of Kiev, V. Bagazii, announced that by December 16, all city residents were required to submit a written report detailing all types of Jewish and ownerless property in their possession and indicating whether they were interested in purchasing any of these objects. The announcement also enumerated the types of property: furniture, clothing, household utensils, books, etc. A special municipal committee would estimate their value and residents would pay the municipality accordingly. The announcement warned that residents who failed to report this property would be severely punished. Property that local

⁴⁰ See, for example, the January 4, 1942 proclamation, signed by the head of the Lvov Judenrat, Dr. Rotfeld, Gutermann, ed., *Days of Horror*, p. 201.

⁴¹ Herman Kruk, *Diary of the Vilna Ghetto* (Yiddish) (New York: YIVO, 1961), pp. 102-103.

residents did not wish to purchase for themselves should be handed over to the municipality. The special municipal committee would also determine the prices of objects returned by the population and these would then be offered for sale to the public.⁴²

There was no uniform standard practice regarding ownership of property left behind by Jews in their apartments or which authorities were entitled to dispose of the income from their transfer or sale. In Kiev, as can be understood from the mayor's order, the German administration permitted the municipality to utilize income from the sale of such property for its own needs. In Belaja Cerkov in the Ukraine, the mayors were ordered on October 15, 1941 to collect all the Jews' clothing, bedding, tools, etc. and to bring these to the local military headquarters.⁴³

In areas of the military administration where Jews were murdered, the administration used the Jews' money and other valuables to finance its local activities. The standing practice was that currency would remain in the hands of the military administration while valuables had to be transferred to the Reich Central Bank in Berlin. In return for these valuables, the central bank transferred cash to the local administration equivalent to the value of the items it had received. Hauptmann Paul Aik, Officer for Special Tasks in the Feldkommandatur in the town Orsha in eastern Belorussia, testified:

"The cash was not transferred anywhere. It remained for funding the management of the town's affairs ... The municipality in Orsha had no other financial means at its disposal ... I was ordered by the Military Administration to send the gold, silver and other valuables to Berlin... The [Orsha] municipal administration could receive the monetary value in return from the bank in Minsk."⁴⁴

In many localities, the orders issued for Jews to assemble for imminent "resettlement" – i.e., removal to the killing pits – stated that they were to take

⁴² For the text of the announcement by the mayor of Kiev, see YVA, M-52/205.

⁴³ For the text of the order, see YVA, M-52/198.

⁴⁴ Sudebnyi Process po delu o Zlodeyaniach, pp. 155-156.

along all their cash and valuables, since they might require these in the new places to which they were going. In Rostov, Jews were told: “It is recommended that Jews take along their valuables and cash.” Jews in Feodosia in Crimea were ordered to return from the assembly point back to their homes in order to take the concealed valuables they had left behind in their apartments. There were similar situations elsewhere.⁴⁵ In the assembly areas, before the Jews were brought to the pits to be shot, and still unaware of what awaited them, they were commanded to hand over all their currency and valuables. Whoever failed to comply would be shot on the spot. Avraham Shmoish from Murovanyie-Kurilovtsy southwest of Vinnitsa in the Ukraine testified:

“In the square where the Jews assembled ... SS men opened large sacks. They ordered us to throw all our valuables into them for the benefit of the German army. People removed their rings, earrings and bracelets and dropped them into the sacks. The SS men warned us that if they found any valuable object concealed on a person, those individuals would be shot. When this handover of valuables was completed, they seized Itzik Frishkolnik and ordered him to strip naked. They conducted a body search, carefully checked his clothes and then allowed him to redress. They announced that a similar search would be done on everyone. People started tossing everything they still had hidden on them into the sacks. After that one of the SS men announced: “OK, it looks to me like you’ve handed over everything you’ve got for the German army.” The sacks were tied shut and loaded onto vehicles.”⁴⁶

Similar methods of plundering money and valuables were utilized by officials of the German administration in Berdichev and in most extermination operations.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Lev Ginzburg, *Bez dna* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel, 1967), pp. 65-66; the destruction of the Jews of Gaisin in the Vinnitsa district, YVA, M-33/224, M-33-78, M-33/76.

⁴⁶ Testimony of Avraham Shmoish, YVA, 03/7064.

⁴⁷ YVA, M-33/114, 033/3133, pp. 14.

A portion of the property taken from the Jews in the course of murder *Aktionen* was not passed on to officials of the civil or military administration but remained in the hands of the Einsatzgruppen that had perpetrated the carnage. In general, they transferred the money and valuables to the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt, RSHA*) in Berlin. In certain cases, mainly in the early period of the occupation, the Einsatzgruppen sent on currency and valuables seized from Jews to the War Booty Office within the Reich Central Treasury (*Reichshauptkasse Beutestelle*). Wehrmacht units that participated in killing operations and the plunder of Jewish property, and military administration officials who had come into possession of money and valuables taken from murdered Jews also shipped portions of these spoils to the War Booty Office.⁴⁸ Einsatzgruppen reports cover not only the murder of Jews but also note the spoils pilfered from them. A July 13, 1941 report dealing with the murder of Jews in Vilna states: “About 500 Jews... are liquidated daily. About 460,000 rubles in cash, as well as many valuables belonging to Jews who were subject to Special Treatment, were confiscated as property belonging to enemies of the Reich.”⁴⁹

An Einsatzgruppe report of October 26, 1941 states that Sonderkommando 7b seized 46,600 rubles in the possession of Jews liquidated by the unit. Over the entire period of operations by Einsatzkommando 8 in the occupied Soviet Union, the killing squad confiscated a total of 2,019,521 rubles. Other reports cited similar seizures worth tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of rubles.⁵⁰

As a rule, the objects left behind by the victims at the scene of their murder, sometimes along with belongings abandoned back in their apartments as well, were sent on by the Einsatzgruppen for distribution

⁴⁸ Martin Dean, “Research Note. Jewish Property Seized in the Occupied Soviet Union in 1941 and 1942: the Records of the Reichshauptkasse Beutestelle,” in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 83-101. The article cites reports that detail the currency and valuables received by the War Booty Office.

⁴⁹ Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski and Shmuel Spector, eds., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), pp. 22-23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Report No. 125, p. 208, and Report No. 133, p. 235.

among the local ethnic German population (*Volksdeutsche*).⁵¹ Responsibility for *Volksdeutsche* matters rested with Himmler and the SS department, charged with attending to ethnic Germans in Nazi-occupied Europe.

The October 4, 1941 report noted the widespread poverty among the *Volksdeutsche* population in the Ukraine between the Dnieper and Bug Rivers (Transnistria), adding that Einsatzgruppe D, which was operating in that region, provided them with apartments, furniture, children's beds and other essential items that had been seized from Jews.⁵² The Einsatzgruppe report of October 7, 1941, dealing with the liquidation of 33,771 Jews in Kiev and 3,145 Jews in Zhitomir also commented on this.⁵³

The Einsatzgruppen report of January 16, 1942 stated that after Sonderkommando 4a had murdered 1,538 Jews in Poltava, their clothing was passed on to the mayor. He then distributed it among the local population, with priority to the *Volksdeutsche*.⁵⁴ A similar comment can be found in the report of local command, No. 1/853 in Nikolajev, at the end of September 1941. It notes that Sipo distributed the clothing of Jews "evacuated" (i.e. liquidated) to needy *Volksdeutsche* and Ukrainians. The mayor was ordered to confiscate the Jews' apartments, to hand over a portion of the movable goods to army units and to allocate the apartments to *Volksdeutsche* who lacked proper housing.⁵⁵

Such currency and valuables seized by the Einsatzgruppen during the eviction and transfer of the Jews to ghettos and in the course of liquidation operations, mentioned in reports sent to Berlin, constituted only a fraction of what the victims actually left behind. A large portion of the money and valuables remained in the hands of Einsatzgruppe personnel, the German and local police. In his testimony, Leonid Langman from Pikov in the Vinnitsa region stated:

⁵¹ The *Volksdeutsche* migrated to Russia in the second half of the eighteenth century, during the reign of Catherine the Great. They settled in sparsely populated areas in the Volga region and the southern Ukraine, in the districts of Nikolajev, Zaporozhe and Dnjepropetrovsk. There were some 400,000 *Volksdeutsche* in the Ukraine on the eve of World War II.

⁵² Arad, et al., eds., *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, report 103, p. 169.

⁵³ Ibid., Report No. 106, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Report No. 156, p. 281.

⁵⁵ Nuremberg Doc., NOKW-1729.

“Almost every day, the Ukrainian police would enter one of the Jewish dwellings and steal whatever they could lay their hands on. They then opened a shop with the items they had plundered. These they sold, almost for nothing, to Ukrainians, and used the cash to buy drinks. It is likely that a portion of the items was sent on to regional authorities in Kalinovka, but the lion’s share from these sales went for drinks. Those Ukrainian police officers rarely looked sober, and that was the condition in which they went about their duties, plundering and beating.”⁵⁶

As Jews in Kharkov were being removed for liquidation, the police officers demanded they hand over the valuables on their person. They broke and cut off fingers in order to remove gold rings and pulled gold crowns from the teeth of the living. Senior officers also engaged in plundering valuables from Jewish victims. A committee of the Reich Auditor’s Office (Reichrechnungshof) found money and valuables in the command post of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Hans Krüger, commander of the branch office of the District Command of the Sipo and SD (Kommandatur der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD) in the Stanisławów district (today Ivano-Frankovsk). This loot was to be distributed among Krüger and several of his own men. The committee report noted:

“An especially extreme case has been uncovered in the branch at Stanislau in Galicia. Large amounts of confiscated money and jewels were retained there. During a local inspection of the rooms of the responsible administrative official, police Secretary B., officials of the Reich Auditor’s Office (RAO) discovered large amounts of cash, including gold coins, and all sorts of currency – even \$6,000 – as well as entire chests full of extremely valuable jewels. These were stored in all manners of boxes and containers, desks, etc. None of this had been listed or registered. In some containers, there was a slip with the original amount; but in most, there was no written record of any kind. It was no longer possible to determine how much had originally been there. The RAO had to limit itself to establishing the exact contents of what

⁵⁶ YVA, 03/7201, p. 23.

was found there in order to prevent further valuables from disappearing. The cash alone amounted to 584,195.28 zloty. Added to this were the jewels uncovered there; their precise value could not be determined, but it is likely to be in the range of several hundred thousand Reichmarks.”⁵⁷

The army, under whose jurisdiction the Einsatzgruppen operated, also wished to benefit from the valuables pilfered from the murdered Jews. General Otto Wöhler, chief of staff of the 11th Army operating in Crimea sent an inquiry to Einsatzgruppe D, which was active in the army’s sector and subordinate to it, regarding the fate of the watches of the Jews who had been liquidated. Otto Ohlendorf, commander of Einsatzgruppe D, replied on February 12, 1942 to the 11th Army commander:

1. The watches confiscated during the course of operations against the Jews ... The valuable pieces (gold and silver watches) have been sent on in accordance with orders to the Treasury in Berlin. The others, of little value, were passed on to members of the armed forces (officers and enlisted men) and to men of Einsatzgruppe D, in return for a token price or as a gift, depending on the specific instance.
2. The money seized during the course of operations against the Jews has been forwarded in accordance with standing orders to the Reich Credit Bank, aside from a small sum retained for official purposes (salaries, etc.).⁵⁸

That reply did not satisfy the 11th Army command. Ohlendorf was ordered by telephone to hand over the watches in his possession. In a second letter on February 12, 1942 Ohlendorf wrote:

⁵⁷ Dieter Pohl, “*Hans Krüger and the Murder of the Jews in the Stanislawów Region (Galicia)*,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. XXVI (1998), pp. 258-259.
⁵⁸ Nuremberg Doc., NOKW-631.

“In a telephone call from the commandant of Simferopol, I was informed that the Commander-in-Chief [of the army] has demanded the watches still in our possession seized during operations against the Jews. They are to be utilized for official purposes. Consequently, I am forwarding 120 watches which have in the meantime been repaired. An additional 50 watches are still in repair, and some of these can be fixed ... Please inform me whether the army also requires the remainder of the watches.”⁵⁹

Alongside the last sentence, the document contains a hand-written “yes.” The German authorities also distributed Jewish belongings to persons who collaborated with them against Soviet partisans, especially those who had sustained injuries as a result. A November 12, 1943 German document mentions N. Tarasiuk among the citizens who had suffered from the partisans and were evacuated to receive aid. He was given two robes, two women’s coats, etc., a total of twenty-six items of clothing, from confiscated Jewish belongings.⁶⁰

Thousands of apartments were seized by local residents after their Jewish neighbors fled. Jews who attempted to flee but failed later returned to find their apartments had been ransacked and looted. In many instances, local residents had occupied them and did not even allow the former Jewish occupants to enter.⁶¹ Some of the apartments were requisitioned to accommodate the German authorities in various towns and to house military personnel. Others were taken over by members of the local police, the local administrations and their relatives. In localities where temporary ghettos were set up, the inhabitants who had been living in those neighborhoods had to be evacuated elsewhere. In return for the apartments they relinquished, they were presented with living quarters confiscated from Jews. As a result of bombardments and combat in numerous localities, many residents were left homeless; for them, the apartments seized from the Jews were a welcome solution. Moreover, there were some locals who wanted to move to a larger

⁵⁹ Ibid., NOKW-3238.

⁶⁰ Chernoglazova, *Tragedia Yevreiev Belorusii*, p. 76.

⁶¹ Daniel Romanovsky, “*Sovetskie Yevrei pod natsiskoi okkupatsiei*,” *Almanach Yevreiskoi Kultury* (Moscow and Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 307-308.

apartment. A woman named Z. Grunievitch in the town of Belaya Cerkov in the Ukraine, wrote to the municipal housing department stating that she and the members of her family were living in cramped quarters. She wanted the former apartment of the Jewish family Pjatigorksi, who had been living in the same building, as it had two rooms and a kitchen.⁶² The letter is dated September 2, 1941, some two weeks after the Jews in the city had been murdered. The Pjatigorski family was undoubtedly among the victims. Sova Timnova, a student at the Art Conservatory in Kiev, asked to be given the piano in the apartment next-door from where Jews had been “evacuated,” so she would be able to continue with her playing.⁶³

Yaakov Ganin, from the town of Beshenkovichi west of Vitebsk in eastern Belorussia related:

“They gradually began to take the apartments from the Jews. Generally the police took them for themselves. We had a math teacher, Ivan Michaelovits Ivitski (he was my teacher), he became police chief. He took a Jewish house for himself, and the cow to boot. Other policemen also grabbed houses and moved in ... We were living in a house together with the Gurewicz family, but one of the policemen took a liking to the place and we were all forced to move out.”⁶⁴

For the local residents to enrich themselves from the Jewish property, the right time to pounce was when the Jews were being evicted and transferred to the ghetto or while being transported to the killing pits. During this interval, the police were busy with removals or liquidation operations, leaving the apartments and their contents abandoned and free for the taking. An article on events in Berdichev in the Ukraine during *Judenaktionen* there on September 14-15, 1941 relates:

⁶² YVA, M-52/200, the source is housed in Kievskiy Oblastnoy Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv, P-2225-1-639.

⁶³ YVA, M-52/213, *ibid.*, P-2412-2-23.

⁶⁴ YVA, 03/4676; for similar testimony on a house taken by a policeman and the eviction of the Jews living there, see YVA, 03/4677.

“The local vermin also took part in the slaughter, scum from the underworld who were greedy to cash in on the terrible calamity, profiteers whose aim was to enrich themselves at the expense of the innocent victims. Policemen and their families and girlfriends of German soldiers descended on the apartments being emptied and plundered their contents. In full view of the living dead, they grabbed dresses, pillows and cushions. Some of them even crossed over the barrier and tore off kerchiefs and woolen knitted blouses from the women and girls who were standing there, waiting to die.”⁶⁵

Incidents similar to those in Berdichev occurred in most of the cities and towns in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union. In a paragraph dealing with the local population, the operations report for November 1941 filed by Security Division 454, operating in the central Ukraine, noted: “the locals sought to enrich themselves, taking the now ownerless Jewish property illegally, and thanks to the profits from the property they sold or bartered in exchange for food, they are able to live even without having to work.”⁶⁶

The main profiteers in the local population were members of the local administration and the local police. This led to envy and quarreling. For example, on January 22, 1942, a group of Lithuanian collaborators (“Partisans”) in Ignalina in eastern Lithuania, wrote a letter of complaint to Svencionys District Agricultural Chief, the German Josef Beck.

“The police in Ignalina and the former town mayor, Tijunelis, as well as the present mayor, Albertas Olejunas, seized many objects of Jewish property for themselves. Police personnel and the two mayors hid these things with their relatives and friends in the villages ... We know that the police has the following in its possession: 220 gold rings, 55 gold watches, 35 sofas in good condition, 45 cabinets, 180 beds including mattresses, 45 cows, some 50 fur coats, 250 tanned hides. In addition, there are many items that have been sorted, including clothing, shoes, etc. Only a tenth of the Jewish property was sold to the local residents when the Jews were liquidated. For example, gold,

⁶⁵ Grossman and Ehrenburg, *Black Book* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1991), p. 40.

⁶⁶ Nuremberg Doc., NOKW-2926.

hides and other valuables were not offered for sale at all, and were not passed on to the German army. We, the partisans from Ignalina, are extremely grateful to the German army that liberated us.”⁶⁷

Some 150 Jewish families lived in Ignalina before the war, and they were murdered together with all the Jews of the Svencionys district on October 7-8, 1941. The property mentioned in the above letter belonged to them. In many hundreds of small localities in the occupied Soviet Union where there were no German officials on the spot, a large portion of the Jewish property suffered was seized by locals.

Members of the military and civilian German administration located in the cities, however, endeavored to prevent local residents from taking possession of the apartments vacated by the Jews. Their aim was to sell off these apartments. Working through the local administration, the Gebietskommissars or military governors appointed committees to appraise the value of the Jewish real estate. The committees passed their reports on to the mayors, who approved their suggestions, and on that basis the apartments were sold. The report presented to the mayor of Mogilev in eastern Belorussia noted:

“Date: November 20-21, 1941. The committee, consisting of city engineer M. Gromakov, head of the municipal housing department, Martinov, representative of the finance office, Y. Shembelev, and in accordance with the instructions of Mayor Felitskin, appraised the value of the houses formerly owned by Jews. In accordance with an order from the Feldkommandatur, they were offered for sale to the Russian inhabitants of the city of Mogilev. We ascertained this by an on-the-spot inspection.”⁶⁸

Later in the report there is a table listing the names of local residents who had called attention to the apartment and expressed their interest in acquiring it, its address, the name of the former Jewish owner, the condition of the apartment and its appraised value. The sale prices of the apartments in the

⁶⁷ Lietuvos tsr Centrinis Valstybinis Archyvas, R-613-1-62, p. 211.

⁶⁸ USHMMA, RG-53006-M, Reel 5; Mogilevski Oblastnyi Arkhive, Fond 418, Opis 1, Delo 1.

two reports presented at the end of November 1941 ranged between 2,500 and 18,000 rubles, depending on their condition. According to the partial lists available to us, in Mogilev alone in the period from February to April 1942, more than 300 Jewish dwellings were sold to local residents. The Feldkommandatur certified the sale of the apartments.⁶⁹

An article in the newspaper *Nova Ukraina* published in the occupied city of Kharkov noted that in December 1941, 1,700 Ukrainian families received new apartments.⁷⁰ These were apartments that had belonged to Jewish householders. In Odessa, under direct Romanian rule, the mayor Herman Pintia forbade local residents from entering the empty apartments of Jews.⁷¹

It was the mayor's intention to keep those apartments for personnel of the Rumanian administration and the Romanian population who would be living in town and to sell a certain number of the apartments in order to turn a profit.

The Struggle over Jewish Property Among the Various German Authorities

Parallel with the German administration's efforts to acquire the Jewish property seized by the local population or to obtain their monetary value, frictions and struggles emerged among the various German authorities over the Jewish property that these bodies had in their possession. In the main, the friction was between the civil administration on the one hand, and the army and officials of the Sipo and the SD on the other. This struggle is reflected in a report by the Gebietskommissar of Wolmer (Valmiera), in northeastern Latvia on events in October 1941.

"We confiscated the property of Jews just liquidated as well as of Jews who had been liquidated earlier. In the course of this, we encountered special difficulties in getting the army and Sipo to hand over the extensive confiscations they had carried out. The army refused to surrender the property, in the main furniture and various items in the homes of the officers. I

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Yuri Liakhovitski, *Zeltaia Kniga* (Kharkov: Bensiakh, 1994), p. 13.

⁷¹ Order of the Rumanian authorities, YVA, M-52/242.

issued an instruction based on the order of the Reichskommissar [Lohse] to fully implement the handover of confiscations. In any event, the items should be handed over with the departure of the army units ... The Sipo are of the opinion that the items confiscated belong to them. They have already credited an enormous amount of Jewish property to their account. I feel it necessary to note that I find the present behavior of the Sipo intolerable.”⁷²

The SS in the occupied territories had depots where stolen Jewish property or belongings that had remained with the victims were stored. In his testimony, Richard Dannler, who served in Riga in the headquarters of Higher SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) Friedrich Jeckeln, noted:

“My official duties brought me into frequent contact with *Sturmbahnführer* Neurath, the man responsible for dealing with all matters related to the clothing and other belongings that were left behind after liquidation [of Jews]. In a large warehouse in Riga, I saw huge piles of clothes, some of it drenched with blood. I estimate this was part of the personal effects of at least 30,000 persons. In the offices of Transport Unit No. 9, located in the building that housed HSSPF headquarters, I saw boxes full of silver, gold and diamonds. Currency and bank notes were sorted into bundles and sent to the Deutsche Handelsbank in Riga. There were large amounts of diamonds, jewelry and gold watches. Jeckeln selected out the best pieces for himself. Sometimes when I would bring him the mail I’d notice various precious objects lying on his desk.”⁷³

The squabble over who was authorized to dispose of Jewish property that had been seized or that Jews had left behind before their murder – and to precisely which German authorities operating in the areas under civil administration such property belonged – reached as far as the top echelon in Berlin. Rosenberg and Himmler decided the dispute in favor of the civil

⁷² USHMMA, R-69-1a-18.

⁷³ Nuremberg Doc., NO-5124.

administration. On March 3, 1942 Himmler ordered all HSSPFs in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union:

“Gold, silver and other valuables confiscated during house searches or the evacuation of the Jews shall be registered in the presence of two officials and then deposited with the KdS [Kommandatur der Sicherheitspolizei] for safekeeping. Once a month, the items seized are to be transferred to the finance office of the appropriate Reichskommissariat, which is to issue a receipt. It is forbidden to hold back even small amounts. If the KdS or the KdO [Kommandatur des Ordnungspolizei] wish a portion of the monies confiscated to be retained for their use, I am in agreement that in exceptional cases, they may request permission from the Reichskommissar to keep the property. His consent should be certified in writing.”⁷⁴

In practice, Himmler’s last two sentences allowed SS men to negotiate and bargain to keep a portion of the confiscated money and valuables under their control and final disposition.

Himmler’s order was not implemented in full; differences of opinion and controversy continued. The Sipo and the SD believed they had the final say in all matters pertaining to the Jews and the officials of the civil administration felt they had rights to the property.

On June 15, 1942, the commander of the Estonian branch of the Sipo, Ain-Ervin Mere, informed the Generalkommissar of Estonia, Karl Litzmann, that he had forwarded to Berlin the gold and silver coins confiscated from the Jews and communists. He added that the valuables still in his possession would also be sent to Berlin.⁷⁵ Mere proceeded in this matter in accordance with instructions he had received from his superiors in Sipo. On November 26,

⁷⁴ USHMMA, R-70-5-34, Reel 5; Hilberg comments on the meeting between Rosenberg and Himmler, which took place already on November 15, 1941. They also dealt with the question of Jewish property and the complaints by Lohse and Wilhelm Kube, Generalkommissar for Belorussia, against members of the SS who had taken the items for their own use. See Hilberg, *Destruction*, pp. 336-364.

⁷⁵ V. Y. Leede, A. T. Matsulevitch and B. L. Tamm, eds., *Nemetsko-Fashistskaya Okkupatsya v. Estonii* (Tallinn: Institut Istorii Partii, Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennyi Archiv, 1963), p. 105.

1942, the RSHA ordered all Jewish property in Sipo and SD hands to be transferred to the authority of the finance departments of the competent Reichskommissariats (Ukraine and Ostland), except for precious metals, precious gems and foreign currency. These were to be sent to the WVHA (Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt) SS Economic and Administrative Main Office. However, implementation of the order to transfer the currency was delayed for months. Not until May 1, 1943 did the KdS in the Ostland report to Lohse that he had received the funds:

“The money confiscated by the Sipo and SD in the Ostland is now being transferred on a continuous basis to the Generalkommissars. In addition, the RSHA is transferring funds seized in 1941 and 1942. ... The confiscated funds mentioned in the letter of March 19, 1943, an estimated one million RM, have already been transferred by the Sipo and SD in Lithuania. On April 22, 1943, instructions were given to deposit the 1.8 million RM from confiscated Jewish property in the bank. In the meantime, that amount should have been received by the Reichskommissar in Riga.”⁷⁶

The civil administration protested that SS officials were appropriating the valuables and currency for their own use. Only eleven months after the order of November 26, 1942, did the RSHA issue instructions for these items also to be transferred to the authority of the civil administration. On October 23, 1943, the KdS in the Ostland wrote to Lohse:

“In concurrence with the WVHA, the order of November 26, 1942 has been amended: in the future, precious metals, precious jewels and foreign currency will also be transferred to the financial departments of the respective competent Reichskommissariats, except in cases where additional investigation is required.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ USHMMA, R-70-5-34, Reel 5.
⁷⁷ Ibid.

At this juncture, Sipo's agreement was of no great importance, as it related only to the future. They had concurred: after the ghettos and all their inhabitants had already been liquidated and there were but few Jews still left in the labor and concentration camps, virtually all the valuables and foreign currency plundered from the Jewish victims were in the hands of the SS in Berlin, and they had made no commitment to return these to the authority of the civil administration.

The June 30, 1943 report by Fritz Katzmann, SSPF in the Galicia district, describes the implementation of the "Final Solution" in eastern Galicia and goes into extensive detail on the Jewish property seized and transferred to the staff of "Operation Reinhard." Thus, we can have some idea as to the extent of the value of the goods that were plundered.

The report enumerates various gold objects totaling 206.58 kilograms that were sent on. The total weight of silver objects was in excess of 5,400 kgs. There were twenty-nine types of paper money and foreign currency (US dollars, British pounds, Polish złoty, rubles, etc.), including the sum of \$261,589.75. The report also mentions that in the framework of the "fur operation," 35 freight cars with furs and fur coats were sent on in December 1941.⁷⁸

This report deals exclusively with what was forwarded to "Operation Reinhard" staff. It did not include the property that remained in the pockets of local administration officials, which may have been in excess of the amount transferred.

Conclusion

The plunder of Jewish property in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union and the struggles among various authorities over its disposition and distribution commenced with the retreat of the Red Army and the beginning of the German occupation. The pillage and associated struggle for control continued during the entire period.

Many benefited from that property:

⁷⁸ Nuremberg Doc., L-18.

1. Various SS and other formations involved in the murder of Jews: the mobile Einsatzgruppen, branch offices of the Sipo and SD, Orpo battalions, German soldiers, etc.
2. The German military and civil administration, German institutions and banks in Berlin and throughout the Reich, and Germans who served in the various branches of the German administration in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union.
3. Local policemen, collaborators and a sizable segment of the local population.

Jewish property was an important source for financing the activities of the German administration in the occupied territories. The property was distributed to *Volksdeutsche* and local non-German bodies and officials as recompense for their collaboration and in order to attract additional collaborators.

Many of the local inhabitants who were allocated or seized Jewish property and apartments had a vested interest that their former Jewish owners should never return. As a result, some of them became interested parties desirous of a German victory.

There is no way of determining the precise monetary value of the Jews' property in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union, including the "contributions" of tens of millions of rubles. There are no figures available on the value of the currency and valuables that various administrative and SS officials transferred to central banks and to the War Booty Office in the Reich Central Treasury in Berlin. There is likewise no way to estimate the value of the Jewish property that local inhabitants took for themselves or purchased for a small sum from German administrative personnel. However, the very fact that there was friction and struggles among the various German authorities over these assets and their disposition points to the huge value of this property. The 2.8 million RM (28 million rubles) seized from Jews and forwarded by the Sipo and SD in the Ostland to the civil administration in spring 1943 doubtless represented but a small portion of what had actually been pilfered.

Katzmann's report only detailed that part of the property that had been seized from the Jews in the Galicia district, and transferred to the "Operation Reinhard" staff, but it is possible to analogize on its basis and gauge the likely magnitude of the property plundered from Jews in other areas as well. Moreover, a substantial portion of the silver, gold and valuables of the Jews of Galicia did not remain in Katzmann's possession but was transported to the Belzec extermination camp. As this was not under his control, it was not even included in his report. In other areas of the occupied Soviet Union, the Jews were generally murdered on the spot and their property also remained nearby. Those belongings and assets, including currency and valuables, movable possessions of various kinds, thousands of houses and apartments, were worth many hundreds of millions of RM - perhaps even several billion.

Translated from the Hebrew by William Templer

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