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Jews in Chmielnik, 1556-1946: The Rise and Fall of a Polish Jewish Community

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Jews in Chmielnik, 1556-1946: The Rise and Fall of a Polish Jewish Community

by

Rivka Chaya Schiller

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Touro University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Today, there are no openly practicing Jews residing in Chmielnik, a small town in eastern Poland. In 1939, on the eve of World War II, Jews comprised at least 80 percent of the overall population: an estimated 10,275 out of 12,500 people. In October 1945, the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* stated that there were precisely 61 Jews registered in Chmielnik.¹ What happened to the other 10,214? This thesis attempts to find out. In my monograph I provide a microhistory of Chmielnik—a town whose Jewish roots trace back to 1556—with a special emphasis on World War II. Since the town itself was founded in 1551, only a few years prior to the establishment of the local Jewish community, it is worthy of note that there was a Jewish presence in Chmielnik since the town's earliest days. My examination culminates in the war's immediate aftermath, at which point, the town's demographic profile had shifted entirely. Given the fact that the majority of the town's Jews perished in the Holocaust, Chmielnik's few returning Jews then comprised a miniscule fraction of the town's overall population. But it is not only the Jewish demographics that have shifted; the population of the town has decreased by more than half since the eve of World War II. As of 2007, it totaled about 4,000 residents, in 2018, 3,743, and in December 2021, 3,557.² According to local historian Piotr Krawczyk, that overall decline is linked directly to the fact that there are no longer any Jewish residents there. In his words, "No Jews here; no

¹ "Anti-Jewish Terror Still Continues in Poland; Jews Killed in Several Towns," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York], October 15, 1945, 2.

² See: "Statistics Poland," Local Data Bank <https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/bdl/dane/teryt/tablica#>; "Chmielnik," World Jewish Travel <https://worldjewishtravel.org/listing/chmielnik-5> (accessed 3-18-23).

people.”³ In other words: there can be no history of Chmielnik without the history of Jews there. Nor can there be any future.

Unfortunately, despite several modern-day efforts at preserving Jewish Chmielnik, the fact is that this town, as it existed for almost 500 years, is no more. There were hundreds of Jewish towns all over Poland—to say nothing of greater Europe—whose Jewish populations were annihilated by the Holocaust. Put succinctly, the story of Chmielnik is the story of most of Poland’s Jews. It is a microcosm of towns just like it, with Jewish populations around 10,000 and primarily Jewish in their population makeup. Despite the plethora of Holocaust literature that abounds, smaller Jewish communities have traditionally received short shrift in Holocaust-related monographs. This is in contrast to the treatment of large Jewish communities like Warsaw, or Łódź, for example. This is particularly surprising, and problematic, because the “shtetl”—defined as “a township with 1,000 to 15,000 Jews, who formed at least a third of the total population” by historian Yehuda Bauer⁴—holds such a prominent place in European Jewish life, and so many caricatures have been drawn based on this paucity of knowledge. Few attempts have been made to find out what actually happened in the years leading up to and during the

³ Ruth Ellen Gruber, *National Geographic Jewish Heritage Travel: A Guide to Eastern Europe* (National Geographic Society, 2007), 33.

⁴ Bauer also mentions that the lives of the Jews in his working definition of a shtetl were “regulated by the Jewish calendar and by customs derived from a traditional interpretation of the Jewish religion.” Yehuda Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 3. Even in cases where the Jewish versus non-Jewish makeup of a town was not so heavily skewed numerically in favor of its Jews, the term shtetl still applied. Some of the leading hallmarks of a shtetl were that it was a face-to-face community in which people tended to know one another intimately; that the primary language spoken by its Jewish residents was Yiddish—as opposed to the local lingua franca (frequently a Slavic language); that its Jewish inhabitants engaged in a wide range of different occupations; and that in many regards it was a self-contained entity in which Jews were, to a certain degree, autonomous. For these additional definitions of a shtetl, see for instance: Samuel Kassow, “Introduction,” in *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, edited by Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 2; Samuel Kassow, *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, s.v. “Shtetl” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/shtetl> (accessed 10-16-22).

Holocaust. The towns' destruction seems to be the most important event that ever took place in them. This dissertation represents a small effort to change that regrettable trend.

Among the subject matter addressed in this thesis is the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath, the persecution of Chmielnik Jewry under German occupation, Jewish collaboration with the Nazi authorities; Polish-Jewish relations under German occupation; and the abortive attempts of Chmielnik's surviving Jews at rebuilding Jewish communal life. This dissertation also strives to account for the relatively larger pool of Chmielnik Jews who survived World War II. In order to better understand Jewish responses during the war, I will also discuss Jewish communal life in interwar Chmielnik insofar as its religious, educational, cultural, socio-political, ideological, and philanthropic institutions and movements; as well as Polish-Jewish relations in Chmielnik during the interwar period.

Dedication

In memory of my maternal grandparents, Shloime Pinkus (née Pinkusiewicz; 1904/5-1998) and Tola (Tobe Sure) (née Pszenica; 1921-1999) Pinkus, my second set of parents and Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors who were my constant role models and stewards in navigating the world's challenges. It is greatly due to them that I was imbued early on in life with a genuine interest in my own Polish Jewish ancestry and a deep curiosity for Jewish history, in general. Finally, it is thanks to this unique heritage that I was drawn to the story of Jewish Chmielnik.

In memory of all the members of Chmielnik's former Jewish community who were either brutally murdered during World War II, or who survived that hell, but have since passed away.

May their memory—and the memory of my grandparents—be for a blessing.

*

In gratitude to my parents, Dr. Harvey and Miriam Schiller and the rest of my Schiller family, for supporting me every step of this journey—both in life, collectively, and more specifically, in pursuing my doctoral degree.

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Introduction

Set back from the curb about 30 feet, behind arched, wrought iron gates and a stretch of a meticulously maintained grassy lawn, the building stands six stories high. Imposing because of its height but even more so because of its place—both physical and spiritual—in the center of the town, the Chmielnik Synagogue is a giant expanse of white: white decorative molding along the building's entire perimeter, white brick corner columns that seem to reach up to the sky, white arched windows whose ledges, at least a foot deep, suggest to visitors they have visited Renaissance Italy rather than a small town in Poland. Inside, the once-famous octagonal stone cupola that surrounded the sanctuary's *bimah* has been replaced by a modern glass structure—still eight-sided, but rather dissonant in its departure from the rest of the building's strong Renaissance style. Presumably, the glass is an attempt to recreate the past without turning it into something kitschy.

Today, after many years of hibernation, the building is once-again filled with voices—voices of tourists, docents, and 19-year-olds on spring break. It is a museum. But the sounds of a *chazan* singing the opening lines of *Kol Nidre*, or the *kohen* reciting the priestly blessing on Shabbat? These voices are silent. They have been for almost 80 years.

The descendants of the Chmielnik Synagogue's weekly congregants are now scattered across the globe—in Canada, Israel, the United States, and elsewhere. Today the town has fewer than 4,000 people—none of them Jewish. Yet, every year the town celebrates the Jewish

residents who once made-up 80 percent of its population, with a Festival of Jewish Culture. Presumably, there are some Jews in attendance from Israel, North America, and elsewhere.

Miraculously, the Chmielnik Synagogue is still standing. It is the only physically intact vestige of the once bustling town's vibrant Jewish center. It is also a physical reminder of a community that was the majority of this place.

What does this town's history tell us? Why should we study it?

Usually, when one hears about small-town Jewish life in countries such as Poland and Russia, the conversation tends to invoke simplistic, one-dimensional images of *Fiddler on the Roof*, the internationally acclaimed musical based on Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye and his Daughters*. In large part, this is because so little is known about these small towns, or shtetls. That is, other than that they perished in the Holocaust. Jewish historical literature deals largely with population centers like Warsaw and its counterparts, and this is particularly true when it comes to Holocaust literature. Only 23 percent of Poland's Jews lived in the large urban centers of Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, Lublin, Lwów, and Wilno (Vilna).⁵ In other words, most of Poland's Jews lived in medium-sized cities or small towns. Yet, the images of these towns are painted in broad brush strokes, forming little more than silhouettes. Terms like "quaint," "charming," and "parochial" come to mind, and truly little else. My aim in studying the town of Chmielnik is to develop a deeper understanding of the modern Jewish experience in east-central Europe by

⁵ This percentage was obtained by adding the total Jewish populations, respectively, for the above cities and dividing that sum of 701,000 by three million, the estimated total number of Jewish residents in Poland on the eve of World War II. These city-based Jewish demographics were obtained via the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's website and its online *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. See: <https://www.ushmm.org/>; <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/> (accessed 10-20-22).

focusing on one small town in central Poland. This town will serve as a microcosm for possibly understanding small-town Jewish life in general.

Smaller Jewish communities in Poland of fewer than 10,000 people have traditionally received short shrift in Holocaust-related monographs. This is in contrast to the treatment of large Jewish communities in Poland, such as Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, Lublin, and Lwów.⁶ In his book *The Death of the Shtetl*, Yehuda Bauer argues that in spite of the shtetl's long-standing significant place in central-eastern European Jewish life, there is a paucity of sociological or historical analysis of the shtetls for the 1930s or the Holocaust period. Nor is "the literature about the internal life of Polish Jews in the thirties abundant,"⁷ according to Bauer, who states that few attempts have been made to relate the changes the shtetls underwent during the interwar years, especially during the 1930s. Indeed, in Bauer's estimation, little has been done in general to "find out what happened to the shtetlach during the Holocaust, beyond documenting their destruction."⁸ Bauer's words are a source of motivation to me in my close study of Chmielnik, which places a great emphasis on the interwar years—particularly the 1930s. For it is crucial that we not lose sight of the lives that were lived for centuries in these shtetls prior to their relatively swift and recent downfall and destruction.

⁶ Sara Bender, "Die Juden von Chmielnik unter deutscher Besatzung (1939-1943)," in *Im Ghetto 1939-1945. Neue Forschungen zu Alltag und Umfeld*, edited by Christoph Dieckmann and Babette Quinkert (Goettingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2009), 74. For further information about the Jewish population in major Polish cities as of the most recent pre-World War II Polish census taken in 1931, see: Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 23.

⁷ Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl*, 2.

⁸ Ibid.

There is much to be garnered from the close study of smaller sized Jewish communities such as Chmielnik—not only as an end unto themselves, but as a yardstick to compare to larger cities—and other small ones, as well. One such work that highlights what occurred in a small Jewish community prior to and during the Holocaust is Omar Bartov’s recent study of the Jewish community of Buczacz, Poland (today, Buchach, Ukraine): *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (2018). Although technically a city, Buczacz is frequently referred to as a town that—like Chmielnik—was majority Jewish up until at least the late 1920s.⁹ By studying what transpired in Jewish communities like Chmielnik and Buczacz, one can determine whether the experiences of Jews in smaller Polish localities were necessarily similar—or, whether there still existed between them certain distinct differences.

For example, did the demographic breakdown between the general population versus the Jewish population in such localities influence the degree of antisemitic activities or positive interactions between the two populations prior to World War II? Did these demographics and pre-war behavioral patterns have a further impact on the number of Righteous Gentiles—non-Jews who rescued Jews during World War II—within a particular locality? Did the socio-economic, political, and/or religious makeup or standing of the given Jewish community contribute to its being similar to or different from other smaller sized Jewish communities? Finally, it appears that a “relatively” considerable number of Jews from Chmielnik survived World War II in comparison to other nearby towns—and certainly, when compared proportionately, to larger metropolitan areas. Why might this have been the case? These are but a

⁹ Even the subtitle of Bartov’s book about Buczacz reveals this tendency toward categorizing the city as a town. Bartov states that during Poland’s elections of 1928, Buczacz had a “majority Jewish population.” Omar Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 133.

few of the many research questions that I have vis-à-vis the smaller sized Jewish community of Chmielnik.

Microhistory only scratches, by its nature, at the surface. Or perhaps the better analogy is that it is a mile deep but only an inch wide. There were at least 500 small, significantly Jewish, towns in Poland before the war.¹⁰ My hope is that this study of Chmielnik will propel other historians to look into them, and that little by little, we can assemble a more nuanced and colorful mosaic that *accurately* represents Jewish life in Poland before its demise—and, perhaps, address some of these questions above. A microhistory of Chmielnik offers a context for subjects such as Polish-Jewish relations, the socio-economic infrastructure of the Jewish community, and shifting religious and ideological generational trends among local Jews.

Still, with so many towns to choose from, why focus on Chmielnik? Here I confess some personal connections. Chmielnik was my maternal grandfather's mother's—and my namesake's—birthplace. Rywka Gorlicka Pinkusowicz was likely born in 1872, in Chmielnik, and died, according to documentation from the Polish State Archives' Kielce division, on September 3, 1923, in Kielce.¹¹ My grandfather was relatively young, and highly distraught, at the time of her

¹⁰ This pre-war number is based on Dr. Samuel Kassow's best approximation, from an email correspondence of 08.29.22. Thank you to both Drs. Kassow and Nancy Sinkoff for helping to address my question regarding the estimated total number of shtetls in pre-World War II Poland. Nancy Sinkoff, Research-related question re: Polish shtetlekh, August 29, 2022.

¹¹ The reason for my lagging knowledge about Chmielnik stems from the fact that my grandfather's mother's family—the Gorlickis—resided in another locale, which my grandfather, evidently, did not visit much, when he was growing up. The uncertainty associated with Rywka Gorlicka Pinkusowicz's date of birth pertains to the fact that all of the town's vital records (including birth records) were destroyed in a major blaze that took place in Chmielnik in 1876. Since no birth record has been uncovered for Rywka Pinkusowicz to-date, one must assume that she was born prior to this fire. At the same time, since the documentation associated with Rywka Pinkusowicz's death states that she was 51 at the time of her death in 1923, assuming that that information is correct, this would indicate that she was born in 1872. For access to the death certificate of Rywka Gorlicka Pinkusowicz, see: the State Archives in Kielce (Poland), Selected Records of the City Kielce, Attachments to the Death Certificates of the Kielce Synagogue

death. According to his memory, he was around 11 years-of-age when his mother died.¹² In conducting research on Chmielnik, I have vicariously, and somewhat unexpectedly, gained a great deal of knowledge about my own family, the Gorlickis. Based on the numerous references I have seen to this surname in the *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*] and in various other Jewish sources, it has become evident to me that the Gorlickis were a sizable family, which despite their lower middle-class status, exerted noteworthy influence insofar as Chmielnik's Jewish community was concerned.¹³ Prior to encountering references to the Gorlicki family in the Chmielnik memorial book, the notion of my having any personal ties to this town were more the stuff of legend, rather than fact. Only once I encountered the surname of my namesake numerous times throughout *Pinkes Khmielnik* did the oral tradition I had heard as a child from my grandfather cease being the stuff of legend and shifted to the realm of historical fact.

District Until the Year 1923, RG 122, Files 21/122/0/-/2913, Documents 243-244. I would like to thank Dr. Daniel Kazez, President of the Częstochowa-Radomsko Area Research Group (CRARG), and Judy Golan, JRI-Poland Kielce-Radom-Sandomierz Area Coordinator, for helping me access these archival records.

¹² Yet, according to the archival documentation from the Polish State Archives, my grandfather would have been 18 or 19 years old at the time of his mother's death. I cannot rectify this discrepancy in age, other than to attribute it to my grandfather's poor memory and the trauma he likely experienced at the time of his mother's death (and subsequently). There is no surviving headstone among the few surviving headstones in the Kielce Jewish Cemetery to either confirm or negate these proposed dates of birth and death.

¹³ According to the literature and the accounts I have heard from uncovered family members, the Gorlickis were primarily invested in the carpentry business and in wood-carving enterprises. Some members were also, apparently, tailors. Based on the family tree that has been and continues to be compiled by Gorlicki family descendants, it is clear that the family was linked via marriage to many of the other families that I have encountered in my research. In a town the size of pre-World War II Chmielnik, in which the Jewish community numbered roughly 10,000, endogamy was highly commonplace; the town's Jewish residents generally appear to have married fellow Chmielnikers. The high rate of endogamy and intimacy within Chmielnik's Jewish community is further substantiated by former resident, Meir Mali, who stated that "... everyone in Chmielnik was either a neighbor or a relative, everyone knew everyone here." Meir Mali, *Spacerkiem po chmielnickim shtetlu* ["Walking Around the Shtetl in Chmielnik"], [2010], YouTube, [Walking around the Shtetl in Chmielnik - YouTube](#) (accessed 4-28-21).

My initial entry into the documented history of Chmielnik’s Jewish community came by way of the aforementioned Chmielnik memorial book, *Pinkes Khmielnik*, from which I singled out a few preliminary articles in Yiddish and Hebrew on which to cut my teeth. Among the first pieces I translated referenced the aforementioned Chmielnik synagogue, with its beautifully adorned interior. Later, I learned that the synagogue—unlike numerous synagogues throughout Poland—had remarkably survived the destruction of the German occupation during World War II. Such a rarity had to be further explored.

The final detail about Chmielnik that made it stand out to me is this: Chmielnik was located rather close to other sites noted for their history of antisemitic outbreaks—namely, Kielce and Przytyk, among others—yet it did not have a reputation for anti-Jewish tensions.

For all of these reasons, Chmielnik was of significant interest to me.

Most of Chmielnik’s Jewish residents were what one would call in Yiddish, *proste Yidn*—common, everyday Jews (or people). Emanuel Ringelblum, the now-famous force behind much of the documentation we have from inside the Warsaw ghetto, insisted on remembering “not only the ‘Sabbath Jews’ but also the ordinary weekday Jews, those who not only prayed and studied but also slaved to earn their daily bread.”¹⁴ These were the majority of Polish Jewry. Hence, in producing a scholarly study of one such community, I hope to add to the larger mosaic of Jewish life in Poland—one that I consider to be composed of many such “Chmielniks.”

¹⁴ Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?: Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 342.

Chmielnik is both typical and unique when it comes to Jewish/Polish demographics. By 1931, the year in which the last census of the Second Polish Republic was conducted, three-quarters of Polish Jewry resided in urban settings. In towns with over 20,000 inhabitants, Jews comprised one-quarter of the total population, whereas in towns with fewer than 20,000, they made up nearly one-third of the total population.¹⁵ Yet, as of 1939, Chmielnik's total population was well under 20,000 inhabitants, while its Jewish population stood at 80 percent.¹⁶ Hence, this set Chmielnik apart from other towns of its size, making it a Jewish shtetl with a Gentile minority.¹⁷ Chmielnik merits closer study for the sheer fact that its demographics were considered somewhat atypical for such a recent period in Polish-Jewish history. For example, according to Jewish demographer and sociologist, Jakob Lestschinsky (Yankev Leshtshinski, 1876-1966), by 1921 in Congress Poland, the region of Poland in which Chmielnik was situated, cities in which Jews comprised 75 percent or more of the general population represented only 1.5 percent of Poland's overall Jewish population. In 1921, the Jewish population of Chmielnik was

¹⁵ Roy Francis Leslie, *The History of Poland Since 1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 145; Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 87; Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl*, 3.

¹⁶ For the demographic situation in 1939 Poland, refer to the population chart included in this work.

¹⁷ Bender states that the total population count of Chmielnik on the eve of World War II was roughly 9,000 inhabitants, whereas the Jewish population was approximately 7,000. Even though these numbers diverge somewhat from the numbers presented in my population chart, they still indicate the same fact: that the Jewish population stood at nearly eighty percent of the general population—a relative exception for a town of this size. See: Bender, "Die Juden von Chmielnik," 75.

estimated to be approximately 77 percent, thereby making it representative of the type of city that Lestschinsky described as being relatively uncommon for Poland by that point in time.¹⁸

Historiography and Methodology

The Scholarly Works of East European Jewish Historians

In focusing on a particular town and community, one that did not have a special or exemplary name within the annals of great Jewish communities (such as Warsaw, for example) or as a center of religious Jewish learning (such as Vilna/Wilno; today Vilnius, Lithuania, for example), my goal was to follow in the footsteps of Jewish historians: Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), Majer Bałaban (1877-1942), Emanuel Ringelblum (1900-1944), and Philip Friedman (1901-1960). Polish Jewish historians were inspired by the 1891 rallying cry of Dubnow, Russian Jewish historian and ideologue of Jewish Diaspora nationalism. Dubnow invoked average Jews to begin collecting Russian Jewish historical sources, such as minute books from local and regional communities, as well as oral histories conducted with older members of these communities. Dubnow viewed this act of collecting and documenting as an imperative for Jews as part of a greater Jewish collective and national effort.¹⁹ In the interwar period, the project was conducted by Jews who collected documents on behalf of the YIVO.²⁰ All of these early 20th

¹⁸ For further information about Lestschinsky's statistical findings as they relate to Chmielnik, see: Jakob Lestschinsky, "Yidn in di gresere shtet fun Poyln" ["Jews in the Larger Cities of Poland"], *YIVO bleter* 21 (1943): 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9; Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21-22.

²⁰ Founded in 1925 in Wilno (Vilna), Poland, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (*Yid. Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut*), which relocated to New York in 1940, remains one of the leading archival repositories in the world for the documentation of Jewish life in east-central Europe—Poland in particular—prior to World War II.

century and interwar historians of Jewish life in Poland and the Russian Empire stressed the need to collect documentation and reconstruct history of local Jewish communities.²¹

Bałaban, considered the founder of Polish Jewish historiography, wrote large monographs on Jewish communities in Kraków, Lublin, and Lwów, and stressed “the importance of local and regional Jewish history.”²² Friedman began his foray into Jewish history by drafting his dissertation on Galician Jewry’s struggle for emancipation. Subsequently, he also wrote a major work on the history of Łódź Jewry.²³ Although born in the aforementioned Buczacz, then part of Polish Galicia, Ringelblum wrote his first scholarly study about the Jews in Warsaw up until 1527. This, in turn, was followed up by further social and cultural histories about Warsaw Jewry in the 18th century.²⁴

²¹ Israel M. Biderman, *Mayer Balaban: Historian of Polish Jewry* (New York, NY: Dr. I. M. Biderman Book Committee, 1976), passim. For an excellent synthesis of the historians mentioned above (and others) and their place in east European Jewish historiography, see: Samuel Kassow, *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, s.v. “Historiography: An Overview” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) [YIVO | Historiography: An Overview \(yivoencyclopedia.org\)](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/Overview) (accessed 5-20-21). Philip Friedman refers to the local and regional Jewish historical works published, especially by Bałaban and many of his protégés, including Ringelblum. He further elaborates on specific works of local and regional Jewish history authored by Bałaban and a younger generation of mainly Polish Jewish historians. For additional details, see: Philip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980), 467-468, 480-482. Regarding Friedman and his focus—especially in his earlier career—on monographs of Jewish communities, see for example: Natalia Aleksion, “Philip Friedman and the Emergence of Holocaust Scholarship: A Reappraisal,” in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* ([S.l.]: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Gm, 2012), 342-343.

²² Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 468, 480, 482.

²³ See: Friedman, Filip [Philip]. *Dzieje żydów w Łodzi, od początków osadnictwa Żydów do r. 1863: stosunki ludnościowe, życie gospodarcze, stosunki społeczne* [The History of Jews in Łódź, from the Beginning of Jewish Settlement to 1863: Population Relations, Economic Life, Social Relations]. Łódź, Nakł. Łódzkiego Oddziału Żydowskiego Tow. Krajoznawczego w Polsce, 1935.

²⁴ Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 480-481.

This direction of documentation and research continued under the German occupation. In the Warsaw ghetto, Ringelblum established the *Oyneg Shabes* Archive, whose ultimate goal was to serve as an everlasting testament to Jewish life that had formerly existed in Poland—not only during the ghetto period, but even before. As part of the Archive’s mission, Ringelblum tasked numerous associates to collect, or *zaml*, raw materials. He also encouraged Jews who had come to the Warsaw ghetto from the provinces to begin writing local histories of their home towns.²⁵ Following the war, Friedman frequently devoted his attention to monographs pertaining to the fate of Jews in specific Polish Jewish communities including Lwów, Auschwitz/Oświęcim, and the Warsaw ghetto.²⁶ Although the aforementioned localities would certainly not qualify as shtetls, my point here is to offer former models of written histories—monographs—that focused on local Jewish communities and/or sites in which Jews forcibly congregated during the German occupation.

My dissertation uses Ringelblum as a model. He did not devise or employ the scholarly term to examine everyday life—*Alltagsgeschichte* (German for “history of everyday life”). Nevertheless, he believed in presenting the history—or often, microhistory—of everyday life approach to his subjects.²⁷ Microhistory is defined as a genre of history that concentrates on

²⁵ Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?*, 9-10.

²⁶ Aleksion, “Philip Friedman and the Emergence of Holocaust Scholarship,” 333, 338.

²⁷ This historical doctrine is a form of microhistory that emerged in West Germany in the 1980s. The doctrine’s chief proponents were historians Alf Luedtke and Hans Medick. *Alltagsgeschichte* is rather compatible with the Marxian historical school of ‘history from below,’ something that would most likely have appealed to Ringelblum’s own Marxian sentiments. For further context regarding *Alltagsgeschichte*, see for instance: Andrew I. Port, “History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, edited by James D. Wright (Amsterdam: Elsevier Ltd., 2015), 108.

“small social units consisting of concrete individuals.”²⁸ In the words of historian Samuel D. Kassow: “A cornerstone of Ringelblum’s prewar historical credo had been his admiration for the Jewish masses and his determination to use history to record their resilience and creativity and to rescue forgotten Jews from oblivion.”²⁹ Such is my model in undertaking a close analysis of the Jewish community of Chmielnik, Poland. While Ringelblum himself studied the Jewish community of Warsaw, which was by no means a small-town like Chmielnik, the social- and microhistory approach that he employed in analyzing this particular population is one that I emulate and toward which I, too, aim.

Sources

My research consists of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include newspaper press articles, primarily in Yiddish, and ego documents—namely, written vignettes about one’s life, diaries, written and oral testimonies. But most of my research comes from Jewish residents of Chmielnik who survived. These residents included both natives of Chmielnik as well as those who found themselves imprisoned in the town during World War II. In particular, a wealth of primary sources describe what transpired shortly before and during World War II in Jewish Chmielnik.

Among the earliest primary sources from the post-World War II period are Holocaust survivor registries, which in the aftermath of the war, provided information about the numbers

²⁸ Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 14.

²⁹ Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?*, 342.

and current whereabouts of survivors from various places of origin. For example, as of October 1945, the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* reported that “at present” there were 61 Jews registered in Chmielnik.³⁰ By 1946, the publication of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Munich entitled, *Sharit ha-platah: An Extensive List of Survivors of Nazi Tyranny*, stated that at that time there were at least 76 survivors of Chmielnik registered primarily in Bavaria.³¹

Additional names that were not accounted for in 1946, that appear in the *National Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors*, subsequently renamed the *Benjamin and Vladka Meed Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors*,³² suggest that a relatively sizable pool of Chmielnik Jews survived the Holocaust. Many of these individuals not only had their names registered, but also provided written and oral testimonies about their lives in Chmielnik before, during, and possibly after World War II. The process of collecting testimonies started shortly after the war

³⁰ “Anti-Jewish Terror Still Continues in Poland; Jews Killed in Several Towns,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York], October 15, 1945, 2. This tabulation of Jews in Chmielnik in the early months following the end of World War II is also consistent with the total Jewish tabulation presented for Chmielnik as of August 15, 1945, in Lucjan Dobroszycki’s book, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland*. At that time, precisely two months prior to the date presented by the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, there were 57 Jews accounted for in Chmielnik. See: Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland: A Portrait Based on Jewish Community Records, 1944-1947* (Armonk, NY; London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 760.

³¹ The complete citation for this registry is *Sharit ha-platah: An Extensive List of Survivors of Nazi Tyranny Published So That The Lost May Be Found and the Dead Brought Back to Life* (Munich: Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Bavaria, 1946). According to this registry, as of 1946, the last known locations of most of the Chmielnik survivors were localities throughout Bavaria and greater Germany. Also represented here were sites in Austria and Sweden. I was able to search this registry for Chmielnik survivors online via JewishGen’s Holocaust Database, at the following URL: <https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Holocaust> (accessed 9-9-21). Among the other resources that I consulted at this same website concerning registered Chmielnik survivors, c. 1945 are: the Jewish Agency for Israel. Search Bureau for Missing Relatives, *Register of Jewish Survivors: List of Jews in Poland* (Vol. 2) (Jerusalem: Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1945) and the World Jewish Congress in New York, *Surviving Jews in Kielce District* (New York, 1945-46?). Each of these resources, in turn, yielded some additional names of Chmielnik survivors that were not included in the 1946 *Sharit ha-platah* publication.

³² See: *Benjamin and Vladka Meed Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors* (Vol. 2) (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in cooperation with the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, 1996), 113; *Ibid.*, Vol. 3 (2000), 79; Vol. 4 (2000), 193-194.

and continues in Israel and in the diaspora. As in the case of surviving Jews from numerous communities that were destroyed during the Holocaust, the Jewish survivors of Chmielnik also took great pains to compile a record book of their community that includes 1,300 total pages of over 200 pages of research articles, memoirs and descriptions, and 520 photographs depicting Jewish life in pre-World War II Chmielnik.³³ The Chmielnik memorial book or *yisker bukh* (Yid.) was of particular importance for my work, as it included a number of first-hand accounts recounting both the Holocaust years, as well as the prewar period. In addition, numerous personal testimonies appeared on the pages of the bulletin entitled, *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora*, a joint production of former residents of Chmielnik residing in Israel and throughout the world. This publication had a surprisingly long run of at least 30 years, commencing in 1962 and culminating sometime in the 1990s,³⁴ and thereby serves as a veritable treasure trove of information pertaining to Chmielnik's Jewish community. Furthermore, it sheds light on what eventually became of many of the Holocaust survivors who hailed from Chmielnik.

Another major source for my work was the Jewish—namely the Yiddish—press of interwar Poland, accessible today via the National Library of Israel's Historical Jewish Press website,³⁵ which provides the closest thing to a live time snapshot of what was transpiring in

³³ H. Ben-Efraim, "Pinkes Khmielnik," *ha-Tsofe* [The Observer; Tel-Aviv, Israel], November 18, 1960, 4.

³⁴ One of the few libraries in the world to hold a complete or near-complete run of this periodical is the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York. Other libraries, such as the New York Public Library's Jewish Division, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, appear to have less complete runs of this publication.

³⁵ The Historical Jewish Press website may be accessed at the following link: [Historical Jewish Press \(nli.org.il\)](http://nli.org.il) (accessed 11-1-21).

Chmielnik during the years leading up to the Second World War. Among the newspapers to feature the most articles about Chmielnik from this period are: *Der moment*, *Haynt*, *Folks hilf* (all published in Warsaw, Poland), and the *Kieltser tsaytung* (published in Kielce, Poland). The *Forverts* (or *Forward*, published in New York City) ran several articles pertaining to Chmielnik during the interwar and postwar periods. Also published in New York City, though in English, the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* provided a non-Yiddish-speaking Jewish audience with information about what was taking place in Chmielnik from the prewar through the postwar periods. In that regard, it perhaps informed an even broader non-European-based Jewish audience about the happenings of Chmielnik, than did the widely read *Forverts*.

Among the leading forums for the collection of testimonies of Holocaust survivors who hailed from and/or resided in Chmielnik before, during, or after World War II in recent years, is the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (VHF). Now under the auspices of the University of Southern California (USC), the renamed USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive (VHA) began as the brainchild of filmmaker Steven Spielberg, while directing *Schindler's List* in the early 1990s. The USC Shoah Foundation, proper, has 106 such testimonies associated with the search terms, "Chmielnik, Poland."³⁶ If one also includes the other Holocaust testimony collections that the USC Shoah Foundation has subsequently absorbed and indexed³⁷ in this same search, then the total number of testimonies reaches 122. Of

³⁶ The reason for including "Poland" in my search terms is to distinguish this town from that of the similarly spelled town of Khmelnik (or Khmilnyk), Ukraine, which in Polish is also spelled "Chmielnik."

³⁷ Among the other Holocaust testimony collections that the USC Shoah Foundation has absorbed are those of the Blavatnik Archive Foundation (New York City), the Florida Holocaust Museum (St. Petersburg, FL), the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus (Farmington Hills, MI), the Holocaust Museum Houston, the Jewish

these, I was able to gain access to 31 testimonies given by Jews who lived in Chmielnik under Nazi occupation. From these, I garnered invaluable information to augment what I learned from other, mostly print sources, both primary and secondary sources. Perhaps more than anything else, the oral testimonies provided me with a cross survey and network of family microhistories of Jewish Chmielnik—something that I could never have gleaned to this same extent by merely reading primary and secondary print sources about the town. Overall, these first-person accounts heightened my sensitivity to the interconnected nature of Chmielnik Jewry, and irreversible impact that the Holocaust had on this community.

Other venues in the United States bearing eyewitness accounts of Chmielnik survivors include: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C.;³⁸ the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York;³⁹ Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies;⁴⁰ the Tauber Holocaust Library and Education Center's Oral History Collection in San Francisco, California; and the Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive under the aegis of the University of Michigan-Dearborn.⁴¹ Outside of the United States,

Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Museum of Jewish Heritage (New York City), and The Azrieli Foundation in Toronto.

³⁸ While the USHMM's online catalog yields 99 results for Jewish survivors associated with the search term "Chmielnik" in its "Oral History Catalog," most of its actual visual testimonies are simply those recorded by the University of Southern California. Nonetheless, the USHMM does have its own unique oral testimonies, as well as those of other smaller archival collections, which are relevant to Chmielnik.

³⁹ The eyewitness testimonies of Holocaust survivors housed at the YIVO are primarily written accounts, many of them recorded on paper shortly after World War II. The specific collection in which I located some such material is Record Group 104 Eyewitness Accounts of the Holocaust Period 1939-1945.

⁴⁰ According to its online catalog, the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies has four such testimonies.

⁴¹ Among the last three venues for visual and oral testimonies mentioned here, the eyewitness accounts found in their online holdings are quite small in quantity and overlap either in part or in entirety with those found in the USHMM's online catalog.

the leading venues for Holocaust research are Yad Vashem: The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, Israel, and the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, Poland, both of which contain archival holdings (i.e., testimonies), as well as secondary literature regarding Chmielnik.

Sadly, given the fact that it is now more than 75 years since the end of World War II, and since the vast majority of Holocaust survivors came of age during the interwar period, the pool of survivors has drastically declined during the past eight years or so. It is for that reason that I have turned increasingly to the aid of the “second generation”—the children of these Chmielnik Holocaust survivors—to garner information, family artifacts, and the like, which pertain to their late parents and to their ancestral town. This is reflected in several interviews that I conducted with the children of Chmielnik natives. Most of those individuals happen to live in the greater Toronto area, although a few also reside in Montreal, the New York City area, Israel, and elsewhere. While I am grateful to the “second generation” Chmielnikers who agreed to speak with me about the experiences of their parents in Chmielnik, there are obvious innate challenges when it comes to obtaining accurate and detailed memories from individuals who are at least one generation removed from the actual events, individuals, and surroundings that they are describing.

Despite the wealth of primary sources, there are relatively few secondary sources about the history of Chmielnik.⁴² Moreover, within this small pool of literature, the scope of material

⁴² My findings concerning the paucity of secondary literature about Chmielnik confirm Bender's observation that “there are scarcely any monographs about smaller cities in Poland.” Furthermore, the limited amount of literature

published in English is even further limited.⁴³ The following is a brief survey and analysis of what I consider to be the most significant published secondary literature on the subject:

The most recent study is Sara Bender's, *In Enemy Land: The Jews of Kielce and the Region, 1939-1946*, which appeared in 2018 and is the English translation of Bender's 2012 Hebrew publication: *Ba-erets oyev: Yehude Keltsa ve-ha-sevivah 1939-1946* [In the Land of the Enemy: The Jews of Kielce and the Surrounding Region 1939-1946].⁴⁴ Moreover, Bender published two articles about Chmielnik, which pertain primarily to the years during which Chmielnik was under Nazi occupation: 1939-1943.⁴⁵ Bender's publications are all generally well-organized and footnoted, but they do not provide significant or nuanced information about Chmielnik's Jewish community beyond the period of World War II.

Local Polish historians, Marek Maciągowski and Piotr Krawczyk, published *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, in 2007. Published by the Chmielnik Town and Municipality Office, the book provides an overarching popular history of Chmielnik and its Jewish community. It also aims to promote the town and thereby strives to place Chmielnik in a positive light. Partially for this

about a given place appears to be dependent more on the absolute total number of Jews than necessarily the overall Jewish versus Gentile ratio. See: Bender, "Die Juden von Chmielnik," 74.

⁴³ Most of the secondary, as well as primary written literature that I have encountered about Chmielnik is in Hebrew, Polish, and Yiddish, and does not have an English-language equivalent.

⁴⁴ Although this work pertains chiefly to Kielce, Poland, during the Holocaust period, it likewise, has a brief section that is specifically about Chmielnik. I thank my professor, Dr. Natalia Aleksun, for obtaining a scanned version of this book, in its entirety, for me, from Israel.

⁴⁵ The titles and publication information of these articles, which are more or less the same in terms of content, are as follows: Sara Bender, "Die Juden von Chmielnik unter deutscher Besatzung (1939-1943)," in *Im Ghetto 1939-1945. Neue Forschungen zu Alltag und Umfeld*, edited by Christoph Dieckmann and Babette Quinkert (Goettingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2009), 74-96; Sara Bender, "Żydzi z Chmielnika w czasie okupacji niemieckiej (1939-1943)," *Zagłada Żydów Studia i Materiały* 3 (2007): 42-61. Bender incorporated both of these articles in her recent monograph, which only became accessible to an English-reading audience a couple of years ago, in 2018.

reason, one must be cautious when taking into consideration statements made by the authors, particularly, regarding recent and potentially sensitive history, namely the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations before, during, and after World War II. The other major shortcoming of this work is the fact that it does not contain any footnotes, which makes it virtually impossible to verify any of the statements made by its authors.

Several other chapters examine Chmielnik. Monika Murzyn-Kupisz published a chapter, “Rediscovering the Jewish Past in the Polish Provinces: The Socioeconomics of Nostalgia,” devoted to Chmielnik.⁴⁶ Included in Erica Lehrer’s and Michael Meng’s edited volume titled, *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, it focuses on the town’s contemporary-day activities and image vis-à-vis the commemoration of former Jewish life; Polish Christian-Jewish perceptions and relations; Jewish tourism; and how all of this translates economically for Chmielnik today (post-2010). For example, there is little detail devoted in this single book chapter to Chmielnik during the interwar period, Second World War period, or in the war’s aftermath. In Agnieszka Sabor’s *Shtetl: Auf den Spuren der jüdischen Städtchen: Działoszyce—Pińczów—Chmielnik—Szydłów—Chęciny: Reiseführer*⁴⁷ an entire chapter of this work is devoted specifically to Chmielnik. While this work provides an informative intermix of past history and present-day travelogue impressions of Chmielnik and the other nearby towns included in the above title, this

⁴⁶ See: Monika Murzyn-Kupisz, “Rediscovering the Jewish Past in the Polish Provinces: The Socioeconomics of Nostalgia,” in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, eds. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 115-148.

⁴⁷ *Shtetl: Auf den Spuren der jüdischen Städtchen: Działoszyce—Pińczów—Chmielnik—Szydłów—Chęciny: Reiseführer* was published in 2008 by Austeria, a Kraków-based publishing house that specializes in Judaica. The original version of this work appeared as *Sztetl: śladami żydowskich miasteczek: Działoszyce—Pińczów—Chmielnik—Szydłów—Chęciny: przewodnik* and was published by the same publisher of the German version, in 2005.

work is not without its own shortcomings. Chief among those—as in the case of *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*—is the lack of scholarly apparatus.

Last, but not least, the volume of *Pinkas ha-kehilot, Polin* [*Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities*] includes a section devoted to the town of Chmielnik, authored by Daniel Blatman, a scholar of the Holocaust in Poland. While *Pinkas ha-kehilot* is unquestionably an invaluable resource, it does not offer a detailed or in-depth review of the day-to-day functions, or character studies of the residents that both typified and were unique to Chmielnik. Notwithstanding the somewhat superficial character, necessitated by its encyclopedic nature, Blatman's entry provides a useful foundation for further research. This may be seen particularly in light of the bibliography that he provides, which is heavily comprised of newspaper citations from the pre-World War II and World War II periods.⁴⁸

In addition, at the YIVO, I uncovered highly informative autobiographical accounts of Jewish youths in Chmielnik from the 1930s, as well as intriguing documentation from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which reflected on the financial climate of much of Jewish Chmielnik on the eve of World War II.⁴⁹

One of the methodological challenges in describing the events that transpired in a town such as Chmielnik, especially, just prior to, during, and shortly after the Second World War, is the fact that the Holocaust influenced how survivors came to remember their town in the pre- and

⁴⁸ An English-language version of Blatman's entry about Chmielnik exists in the now-defunct, *Kielce-Radom SIG Journal* 7, no. 2, 13-18. Blatman's text was translated from the Hebrew by Shlomo Wygodny.

⁴⁹ The pre-World War II autobiographical accounts are referenced in an earlier footnote. The Records of the American Jewish Joint Distribution, Landsmanshaftn Department, or Record Group 335.7, provide a file devoted to "Chmielnik," which sheds much light on the town's last few years leading up to World War II.

postwar periods. In other words, the persecution that Chmielnik's surviving Jews experienced during the war years may, for example, have heightened the sense of nostalgia they had for the prewar childhoods they experienced in the town. Similarly, it may have influenced the way in which those who returned to Chmielnik following the war perceived certain events. That is not to say that these events did not actually happen, but it is still important to bear in mind all of the variables that factor into the testimonies that these and other Holocaust survivors have left to future generations. Due to the frequently tragic and traumatic nature of what these survivors experienced (e.g., rampant starvation, disease, ghettoization, forced labor, hiding for one's life, roundups, deportations, and shootings), it is understandable that their memories may have become blurred in the face of such events. As a result, it was often difficult for me to pinpoint information such as exact numbers, statistics, or dates of when certain events transpired.

Yet another challenge posed by the use of written and oral testimonies that were recorded several decades after the events they describe is the question of accuracy and the reliability of memory. Indeed, there are discrepancies between the testimonies of survivors in their descriptions of the very same events. They offer different details about how a certain event occurred, or how many individuals this particular event may have affected. As we have learned from the memory-related research findings of world-renowned psychologist, Dr. Elizabeth Loftus, and the Israeli war crimes trial of John Demjanjuk (1920-1912), memory is malleable and therefore not always accurate. This is especially true when memory is forced to conjure up people, places, and events from many years before. "False memory" is one form of this malleability, and is not uncommon in cases where an individual was so traumatized by the actual endured events, that he/she unintentionally creates altered or distorted memories as a

psychological coping mechanism and in order to distance him/herself from the actual traumatic events.⁵⁰ Again, I have been sensitive to the memory discrepancies of survivors and have taken much effort to account for them in my footnotes. I have also made a point of comparing several testimonies describing the very same incidents, so as to arrive at a more definitive picture of what actually transpired and under what set of circumstances it transpired.

Recording history is not a perfect science, especially microhistory like this. The aforementioned challenges make that impossible. Still, there is a plethora of relatively untouched information available on Chmielnik if only some one looks for it, and that is what this dissertation will do: reconstruct Jewish Chmielnik and breathe life back into it through the myriad archives, documents, and personal testimonies that abound. We will begin at the beginning: the town itself.

⁵⁰ For further information about Dr. Elizabeth Loftus, “false memory,” and how this played a role in the initial guilty verdict of John Demjanjuk, a Ukrainian-American who was tried in an Israeli court in 1987 for allegedly being the notorious Treblinka extermination camp guard, “Ivan the Terrible,” see: Bennett L. Schwartz, *Memory: Foundations and Applications* (Los Angeles: Sage, c2011), 223-225.

Chapter One: Chmielnik: How It All Began

“Belz, mayn shtetele Belz.” When Jacob Jacobs wrote the lyrics to this iconic song in 1928, he could never have imagined that they would become an unofficial elegy for all of Eastern European Jewry. Yet, almost a century later, most people who use the term “shtetl” hold in their minds the images conjured up by this song: crowded, single-room homes whose candlelight glitters in the countryside, children laughing at the riverbank after *shul* on *Shabbes*, poverty and small pleasures because larger ones were not to be had. Jacobs acknowledges this nostalgia-tinted image when he writes, in the opening stanza, “Az ikh tu mir dermonen mayne kindershe yorn punkt vi a kholem zet dos mir oys.” *When I recall my childhood, I feel like I am having a dream.*⁵¹ Yet, this century-old dream-like notion of the shtetl is what has stuck, receiving relatively little investigation to assess how accurate these depictions actually were.

If asked, the lay person on the street might say that a shtetl is a “small Jewish town in Europe before World War II.” But even this simple translation is clumsy; for instance, what constitutes a “Jewish” town and how small must it be to fit into this category? Since the job of this dissertation is to assemble a mosaic of *non*-urban Jewish life in prewar Poland—i.e., the shtetl—we must first understand what a shtetl is. Historian of eastern European Jewish history Samuel Kassow says that the term connotes a “Jewish settlement with a large and compact Jewish population who differed from their gentile, mostly peasant, neighbors in religion, occupation, language, and culture,” and that over time, “‘shtetl’ became a common term for any

⁵¹ “Mayn Shtetele Belz,” JewishGen KehilaLinks, 2017.
<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/balti/mein%20shtetele%20belz.htm> (accessed 10-30-22).

small town in Eastern Europe with a large Jewish population.”⁵² He further asserts that the shtetl differed from other Jewish diasporic communities—in Babylonia, France, Spain, or Germany—because the linguistic element (Yiddish) distinguished Jews from their surrounding Gentile neighbors. In other communities, the Jews mainly spoke the lingua franca of the given country. And they did not form the majority of the population in their towns. In contrast, in the shtetl, Jews sometimes comprised as much as 80 percent or more of the population. This was certainly true of Chmielnik, in which the Jewish population hovered at around 80 percent—if not more—from the late 19th century up until the outbreak of World War II.⁵³

The function of this chapter is to provide an overall context for our study of Chmielnik since this is the shtetl where we have decided to set our case study. First we will zoom out and look at how Polish towns are birthed, and how the Jewish populations in them evolved from small to larger—in this case, 80 percent. While Chmielnik does not reflect every small town in Poland, it does reflect many of them (as noted before, over 75 percent of Poland’s Jews did *not* reside in the big cities on the eve of World War II, and considering that the early 20th century already saw a huge migration from the rural towns to these big cities, Chmielnik probably represents more of these shtetls than the numbers show). When using Chmielnik as a case study, it is important to know both how similar to and how different it was from other cities of its

⁵² Samuel Kassow, “Introduction,” in *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, edited by Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

⁵³ Ibid. For an expanded explanation of what the shtetl was and how it functioned over time in various parts of east-central Europe, see also: Antony Polonsky and Shimon Redlich, eds., *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 17 (2004): *The Shtetl: Myth and Reality* London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004, passim.

population size. The context must be laid out in full, so we can isolate variables, draw parallels, and locate patterns—or anomalies.

So, this is where we will begin: with Chmielnik’s secular history—its location, economics, political history, and general demographics. Then we will zoom into the Jewish story more specifically, including Chmielnik’s synagogue and cemetery, its status as a Hasidic center, its treatments of its Jews, and finally, the birth of the Jewish intelligentsia movement—specifically, Zionism.

Chmielnik: Foundation, Economy, Demography

Chmielnik is a small town—in Yiddish, a *shtetl*⁵⁴—situated in southeastern Poland, in historic Galicia, or Małopolska (Polish for Lesser Poland) approximately 112 miles south of Warsaw, and midway on the road between Kielce and Busko-Zdrój, a resort town.⁵⁵ The name Chmielnik is derived from *chmiel*, the Polish word for hops. The *szlachta*, or Polish nobility, used the hops that grew in areas such as Chmielnik, to brew beer.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, *shtetl* is the “Yiddish diminutive for *shtot* meaning ‘town’ or ‘city,’ to imply a relatively small community.” Insofar as quantifiable numbers, the criteria for a *shtetl*’s size “were vague and ill-defined, as the actual size could vary from much less than 1,000 inhabitants to 20,000 or more.” Given the fact that Chmielnik’s prewar population in 1939 peaked at a total count (which included both Jews and Gentiles) of approximately 12,500, it fell well within the range of this definition of a *shtetl*. See: Mark Zborowski, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Vol. 14), s.v. “Shtetl” (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 1466.

⁵⁵ N. M. Gelber, “History of the Jews in Chmielnik,” translated by Mark Froimowitz, *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal* 5, no. 1 (2001): 28; David Newman, *Hope’s Reprise* (Toronto, Canada: The Azrieli Foundation, 2015), 1. For a map concentrating on the Kielce and Radom *gubernias* (1867-1917), see for instance: Warren Blatt, “Kielce and Radom Gubernias—Geographic History,” *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal* 1, no. 1 (1997): 8.

⁵⁶ Moshe Domb, “From Chmiel to Chmielnik,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 185.

In 1551, King Zygmunt II Augustus (1520-1572; reigned 1548-1572)⁵⁷ granted Magdeburg town rights to Samuel and Mikołaj Oleśnicki (c. 1558-1629), elevating Chmielnik from a village to the status of a privately-owned town bearing municipal rights.⁵⁸ Magdeburg town rights (or Magdeburg Law) were a series of town privileges that regulated the degree of self-autonomy cities and villages in central European countries possessed, as determined by the local ruler.⁵⁹ According to Polish-born historian and pastor, Kazimierz Bem, by the mid-1560s there was a significant Protestant following in Chmielnik. In 1565, the town's minister became a Unitarian, and the town itself hosted a school and seven Unitarian synods. "By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Chmielnik and a few surrounding villages had a Reformed plurality, if not an outright majority."⁶⁰ In the 17th century, Chmielnik became a center of the anti-Trinitarians, also known as the Arians, Socinians, or Polish Brothers pacifist movement. This was a Protestant sect of Christianity that opposed the concept of the Trinity, and which existed in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the years 1565 to 1660.⁶¹ By 1661, members of

⁵⁷ For a chronology of King Zygmunt II Augustus' (or Zygmunt-August) and other Polish kings' reigns, see: Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland* (Vol. 1) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), xxxi. Davies characterizes Zygmunt-August as a ruler who "lacked the assertiveness of the typical Renaissance prince." He was both mild-tempered and a progressive thinker, who "refused categorically to be drawn into the religious quarrels of the age." Ibid., 145. For information about the privileges: *serwitory* or *faktery* of the crown that Zygmunt-August granted Jews, see: Gershon David Hundert, "Was There an East European Analogue to Court Jews?" in *The Jews in Poland* (Vol. 1), edited by Andrzej K. Paluch (Kraków: Jagiellonian University, 1992), 69.

⁵⁸ Daniel Blatman, s.v. "Chmielnik," translated by Shlomo Wygodny, *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal* 7, no. 2 (2003): 13; Marek Maciągowski and Piotr Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik* (Kielce: Wydawn. XYZ; Chmielnik: Town and Municipality Office in Chmielnik, 2007), 17.

⁵⁹ For further discussion about the Magdeburg Law and its implications as implemented specifically in Poland, see for instance: William Fiddian Reddaway, ed., *The Cambridge History of Poland* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 133-136.

⁶⁰ Kazimierz Bem, *Calvinism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1548-1648: The Churches and the Faithful* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, [2020]), 212.

⁶¹ Murzyn-Kupisz, "Rediscovering the Jewish Past," 121.

this sect had been expelled from Chmielnik, in keeping with the general expulsion from the country of anti-Trinitarians under the hostile Catholic King Jan II Kazimierz (1648-1668).⁶² Nevertheless, Bem states that Chmielnik's status as a town with a majority that followed the Reformation continued onward until the Church's destruction, as late as 1691.⁶³

In the 18th century, Chmielnik played a significant role as a trade and transport route from the Commonwealth to Prussia and Silesia. Among the chief products and industries transported between these regions were grain, wood, cattle, textiles, and haberdashery.⁶⁴ In 1795, during the third partition of Poland, Austria took over Chmielnik and controlled it until 1809, at which time it became part of the Duchy of Warsaw until 1815. From 1815 to 1837, it became part of the Russian Empire, first, under the administration of Sandomierz voivodeship⁶⁵ of the Kingdom of Poland, and from 1837-1914, as part of Kielce *gubernia*.⁶⁶

By the early 19th century, a period that witnessed growing construction industries in the Polish lands, Chmielnik and the voivodeship of Sandomierz lagged behind in their overall development. For example, historian N. M. Gelber states that in 1826, there were 204 brick

⁶² Gelber, "History of the Jews in Chmielnik," *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, 28; Stefan Krakowski, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, s.v. "Chmielnik" (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 656. See also: Magda Teter, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 54-56.

⁶³ Bem, *Calvinism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, 212.

⁶⁴ Gelber, "History of the Jews in Chmielnik," *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, 28.

⁶⁵ A voivodeship is a high-level administration subdivision of Poland that has existed since the 14th century. See: Czesław Sojecki, et al., *Mała Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, s.v. "Wojewoda "; "Województwo" (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970), 1150.

⁶⁶ A *gubernia* is a province or subdivision of the Kingdom of Poland. Ten *gubernias* existed in the Kingdom of Poland from 1867 to 1917. For further information about *gubernias*, see: Blatt, "Kielce and Radom Gubernias—Geographic History," 3.

houses built in Polish cities, whereas in Sandomierz voivodeship, there was only one such house built during the same period.⁶⁷ Yet, by the latter half of the 19th century, Chmielnik began to see growth in industry; it had several factories that employed a considerable number of workers. This included tanneries, a soap factory, a candle factory, a brewery, a machine factory that contained iron works for raw materials, factories that manufactured several types of fabrics, and a workshop for agricultural tools. At the turn of the 20th century, Chmielnik witnessed further industrialization, with its expanding factories, particularly in the areas of textiles, wood and building materials, metals, chemicals, and graphic arts, most of which were in Jewish hands.⁶⁸

As we will see in the next section, which focuses on Jewish Chmielnik, the town's economic and demographic development cannot be separated from the development and flourishing of its Jewish community, which occurred simultaneously. Even from the town's inception, there was a Jewish presence there.

Jewish Chmielnik

The old Jewish cemetery in Chmielnik constitutes the earliest evidence of Jewish life in the town, dating back to the 12th century.⁶⁹ According to Gelber, who bases his own writings on

⁶⁷ N. M. Gelber, "History of the Jews in Chmielnik," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 75.

⁶⁸ Gelber, "History of the Jews in Chmielnik," *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, 29; Miryam Grinberg, *Hayim ve-Hanah Virz'ba* [Wierzba]: *sipurim shel aba ve-ima* (Israel: self-pub., 2008), 11.

⁶⁹ Blatman, s.v. "Chmielnik," 13. Gelber states similarly, that the old cemetery near Chmielnik's main synagogue has gravestones with inscriptions from 800 years ago, and that according to tradition, the first Jewish inhabitants of Chmielnik were escaping Jews from Spain. See: Gelber, "History of the Jews in Chmielnik," 59; Joseph Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. (USHMM), RG-02.176, 2; Avraham Price, "A Little Bit of Chmielnik's Jewish History," *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 20 (1981): 4; Newman, *Hope's Reprise*, 1.

testimonies from residents, “there are gravestones dating back 800 years.” However, the first written document that mentions Jewish settlement in the town dates back to 1556.⁷⁰ Similar to other Polish towns, the old cemetery in Chmielnik was established near the town’s main synagogue.⁷¹ Jews voluntarily concentrated themselves within the vicinity of the synagogue and the cemetery; hence, this became the so-called Jewish quarter.⁷²

The pride of Chmielnik’s Jews was their synagogue. Indeed, it was said to be famous throughout Poland. And, its building was evidence of the general demographic and economic growth and prominent place of Jews in Chmielnik. Although the exact date of construction is uncertain, some historians opine that it was established sometime during the years 1633-1634, while other opinions state that the synagogue was completed in or by 1638.⁷³ This is due to the

⁷⁰ Blatman, s.v. “Chmielnik,” 13; Grinberg, *Hayim ve-Hanah Virz’ba* [Wierzba], 11.

⁷¹ One of the best-known examples of the close proximity between a given Polish town’s/city’s synagogue and its old cemetery may be seen in Kraków, wherein the synagogue is known as the Remuh Synagogue. Another such instance is mentioned in conjunction with Piotrków, whose old cemetery was founded in 1679 and “occupied the entire plot of land to the east of the synagogue and *beys medresh*.” See: Shimon Huberband, et al., *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the Holocaust* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Pub. House, 1987), 283.

⁷² Due to the compactness of this limited area, the cemetery was quite small. This necessitated families to bury their dead in single plots, with one family member being buried over the grave of another. Although this was perhaps not the ideal or most usual form of Jewish burial, the practice is not unheard of, and is discussed in the *Shulchan Aruch*. For further information about the halachic ramifications of burying two caskets in one grave, see for example: “CCAR Responsa: Two Caskets in One Grave,” Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011, <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/tfn-no-5751-8-117-118> (accessed 7-21-21). This very subject is likewise discussed in conjunction with the old Jewish cemetery in Kraków, in which the comment is made that sometimes, Jewish communities “could not purchase new land for a cemetery,” and that when it became highly necessary, “a decision was made to add a new layer of earth and continue to use the old cemetery.” Leszek Hońdo, “The Old Jewish Cemetery in Cracow,” in *The Jews in Poland* (Vol. 2), edited by Sławomir Kapralski (Kraków: Jagiellonian University, 1999), 243.

⁷³ Jerzy Baranowski, “The Synagogue in Chmielnik,” *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal* 2, no. 4 (1998): 9. This article also appeared in Polish, under the following citation: Jerzy Baranowski, “Synagoga w Chmielniku,” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce BŻIH* 36 (1960): 95-106; Newman, *Hope’s Reprise*, 2; Piotr Krawczyk, “Dzieje Gminy Żydowskiej w Chmielniku” [The History of the Jewish Community in Chmielnik], *Nowy Kurier Chmielnicki* [New Courier of Chmielnik], June 15, 2003, 4; Murzyn-Kupisz, “Rediscovering the Jewish

fact that the community was granted a privilege for its construction by Chmielnik's then owner, Krzysztof Gołuchowski, which was dated 1630.⁷⁴ The land on which the synagogue was built belonged to the Catholic Church, which did not want to sell this area to Jews. Instead, the Church agreed to lease the entire "Jewish quarter" to the town's Jewish community for an annual sum of money.⁷⁵

This synagogue, which stands at 14 Wspólna Street, was famous in Poland, as its aesthetic architectural structure resembled the Remuh Synagogue in Kraków.⁷⁶ Even into the 19th century, the synagogue, which was one of the mightiest structures in the vicinity, remained a leading visual point in Chmielnik. Photographs of the synagogue from the 1930s and World War II depict it as a sturdy-looking edifice whose interior revealed a carved Torah Ark and various ornate decorations.⁷⁷ David Davidovitch (1905-1993), the author of several books pertaining to synagogue architecture and art in Poland, underscores that the type of elaborate, Renaissance-style architecture found in the Chmielnik synagogue was not unique. Indeed, in his

Past," 121; Suzan E. Hagstrom, "Polish Synagogue Renovation Brings Sensitivity—and Holocaust Tourism," *Times of Israel* [Jerusalem] July 2, 2013 [Polish synagogue renovation brings sensitivity -- and Holocaust tourism | The Times of Israel](#) (accessed 5-21-21).

⁷⁴ The Gołuchowskis, who were Calvinists, were one of the families that inherited control of Chmielnik in the early 17th century. See: Baranowski, "The Synagogue in Chmielnik," 9. See also: Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 18.

⁷⁵ Gelber, "History of the Jews in Chmielnik," *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, 30; Avraham-Aharon Price, "Chmielnik in History: Synagogues, Houses of Study, Rabbis, Ritual Objects, and Customs," in *Sefer ha-zikaron: a ner-tomid unzer shtetl Chmielnik* (Tel Aviv?, 1955), 7.

⁷⁶ For images of the synagogue, which still exists today (c. 2022) in Chmielnik, prior to and since World War II, see appendix. The Remuh Synagogue was built in 1553 by the father of Rabbi Moses Isserles (c. 1520-1572) in Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter of Kraków, with a permit granted by King Zygmunt II Augustus. David Davidovitch, *Bate kenestet be-Polin ye-hurbanam* [Synagogues in Poland and Their Destruction] (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook and Yad Vashem, 1960), 20.

⁷⁷ For photographic images of the synagogue's exterior and Torah Ark from the 1930s-1940s, see: Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 35, 72.

work *Shuln in Poyln* he makes a case for the “centrality of the Renaissance synagogue” in Poland, which proliferated during the reign of Zygmunt I Stary (1506-1548) and his son, Zygmunt II August (1548-1572), who were both admirers of and strongly influenced by this Italian mode of architecture.⁷⁸

In addition, in his book *Bate kenestet be-Polin ye-hurbanam*, Davidovitch provides a map of pre-World War II Poland in which he has indicated all of the towns and cities that were once noted for having a Renaissance-style synagogue in their midst.⁷⁹ While these types of synagogues do not appear to have been in the majority, they certainly were well-represented in Poland, prior to the Holocaust period. According to Davidovitch, these synagogues were generally more common “in the southern parts of Poland: the provinces of Kraków, Kielce, Lublin, and Lemberg region,” than in other regions of Poland.⁸⁰ This observation applies to Chmielnik, which is located in Poland’s southern hemisphere.

In the case of Chmielnik, the synagogue was built six stories high⁸¹ and 300 meters north of the market square, with its front façade facing a street that led directly from the northeastern corner of the square. The aforementioned cemetery was located on its northern side.⁸² Internally, the Torah readers’ platform stood in the middle of the synagogue and was built of stone with

⁷⁸ David Davidovitch, *Shuln in Poyln* [Synagogues in Poland] (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1961), 422-423.

⁷⁹ A copy of Davidovitch’s map is included for the sake of reference in the appendix to this work.

⁸⁰ Davidovitch, *Shuln in Poyln*, 497.

⁸¹ Mordechai Gutman, “Small Synagogues and Houses of Study,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 542.

⁸² Baranowski, “The Synagogue in Chmielnik,” 10.

“eight corners over which stood stone columns decorated with refined ornaments, adornments from the Renaissance era, which remind one of the old Greek `Odeon.’”⁸³ Furthermore, the synagogue was once adorned with a number of highly valuable ark curtains, including one that dated back to the Baroque period, in the 17th century.⁸⁴

In the words of Chmielniker, Yankev Freidman, who recollected what was arguably the Jewish centerpiece of his town: “The city of Chmielnik owned a renowned synagogue, a mighty intensive construction of white walls. Nobody knew exactly in which century it was built. However, people knew to relate that the same master-architect had also built such a synagogue in Kraków.”⁸⁵ Malka Owsiany (b. 1924), who had family in Chmielnik and fled there from her nearby village of Raków during the war, remarked that the synagogue was a source of immense pride to the local Jews and that the beautiful, massive structure was built in the olden “fortress” style, hundreds of years before, for the purpose of defense in case of war.⁸⁶

⁸³ Gelber, “History of the Jews in Chmielnik,” *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, 30; “The Chmielnik Synagogue and its Altar,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 20 (1981): 1. See also: Adam Penkalla, “The Synagogue in Chmielnik,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 20 (1981): 4-5; “The Ancient Synagogue of Chmielnik and its Torah Reader’s Podium,” in *Sefer ha-zikaron: a ner-tomid unzer shtetl Chmielnik* (Tel Aviv?, 1955), 6.

⁸⁴ Gelber, “History of the Jews in Chmielnik,” *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, 30. David Davidovitch further observes that not only did the structural adornments and decorative features found in synagogues such as those in Chmielnik and Kraków, draw heavily from Italian-Renaissance architectural inspiration, but they also reflected the influences of the surrounding Polish culture, “both in the architecture of the structure itself, as well as in its interior adornments, or in its furnishings.” Davidovitch, *Shuln in Poyln*, 497.

⁸⁵ Yankev Freidman, “The Shtetl as I Remember It,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 255. See also: Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 3.

⁸⁶ Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseytl*, 46-47. Owsiany further adds that during World War II the Nazis wanted to destroy the synagogue, but that due to its massive size, they were unsuccessful in their mission. See: *Ibid.*, 47. Mordechai Goldstein bolsters this claim with his own recollection that the Germans attempted to burn down the synagogue. However, due to its being built from heavy concrete and bearing iron forms, the structure itself remained

There are a number of key points we learn from both the external and internal architectural features and adornments of Chmielnik's synagogue. On the one hand, the synagogue's large and centralized presence—only a short distance from the town's market square—demonstrates that the local Jewish population perceived itself as having attained a certain degree of upward mobility. At the same time, though, the synagogue's somewhat simple and non-descript outside appearance signifies that Jews there were not altogether secure about their position vis-à-vis the surrounding Gentile population. Jews, regularly on guard against antagonizing their Christian neighbors, frequently kept the exterior decoration of their synagogues to a minimum.⁸⁷ Nor was there any particular Jewish ethos exhibited by the exterior of Chmielnik's synagogue.⁸⁸ As previously mentioned, the Chmielnik synagogue was architecturally consistent with other synagogues in the vicinity. This may be seen, for example, in the case of Staszów's former synagogue, which was built by 1860 and torn down in the aftermath of World War II.⁸⁹ Based on photographs taken from the synagogue's exterior and interior, its sturdy structure, yet simple, almost non-descript facade, was quite similar in appearance to that of Chmielnik's synagogue. Furthermore, it also bore an ornate looking eight-

intact even after this intentionally set conflagration. See: Mordechai Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa'am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]* (Israel: M. Goldstein, 2004), 26.

⁸⁷ Batsheva Goldman-Ida, "Synagogues in Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Modern Period," in *Jewish Religious Architecture: From Biblical Israel to Modern Judaism*, edited by Steven Fine (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 184.

⁸⁸ This is due to the fact that Jewish law does not mandate or "define a single architectural style for the synagogue." Ibid., 186.

⁸⁹ I thank Dr. Passi Rosen-Bayewitz, author of the dissertation, "The Story of Jewish Staszów: Its History, Memory, and Representation 1525-2021," who informed me of the history of Staszów's former synagogue. See also: "Staszów," Świętokrzyski Sztetl http://swietokrzyskiszetel.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=252&sub=173; "Staszów: History," Virtual Shtetl <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/node/658/99-history/138069-history-of-community>; "Staszow: Świętokrzyskie," International Jewish Cemetery Project <http://iajgscemetery.org/eastern-europe/poland/staszow> (accessed 10-28-22).

columned bimah, which was likewise similar in appearance to the bimah that formerly stood within the Chmielnik synagogue's prayer chapel.⁹⁰ Another synagogue that is exceedingly similar to the Chmielnik synagogue and also situated nearby, is that of the Great Synagogue of Chęciny.⁹¹ As with Chmielnik's synagogue, the extant synagogue in Chęciny, which is said to resemble typical Renaissance synagogues, was built during the 1630s—in 1638-1639, to be more precise. Finally, the aforementioned Remuh Synagogue in the larger urban center of Kraków, constructed in the 16th century, was also built in a late Renaissance architectural style and is not wholly dissimilar in appearance from the Chmielnik synagogue. The takeaway message here is that the Jews of Poland's shtetls took for granted that they would be living in this area for the foreseeable future and saw fit to invest in this (very) public work. But they also took care that the synagogues' external markings were decidedly unrecognizable, even if everyone knew they were the physical and spiritual heart of the community. Polish shtetl Jews faced their future with realistic optimism. They would always be strangers here in Poland. But, profoundly, they would always be here.

By the 18th century, Chmielnik's Jewish community was so well-established that it had become a Hasidic center. According to Chmielnik native and author of the memoir, *Hope's Reprise*, David Newman (formerly Najman, b. 1919), the first Hasidim who ever made “*aliyah*”

⁹⁰ For images of Staszów's former synagogue and bimah, see: “Staszów,” Świątokrzyski Sztetl http://swietokrzyskiszetel.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=252&sub=173; “The Staszów Book (Poland),” JewishGen <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/staszow/staszow.html>; Municipal and Communal Office of Staszów <https://staszow.pl/en/1773-1918.html> (accessed 10-28-22).

⁹¹ For an image of the Great Synagogue of Chęciny, situated at ul. Długa 19, see for instance: “Chęciny: Synagogue ul. Długa 19,” Virtual Shtetl <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/file/86699?ref=art&nid=83430> (accessed 10-28-22).

(literally, Hebrew for “ascension”) to what was then still Palestine, hailed from Chmielnik.⁹²

Historian N. M. Gelber, who contributed to the Chmielnik memorial book, bolsters this claim by indicating that among the first Hasidim in Safed in 1830 was a former resident of Chmielnik named Rabbi Moyshe Shimen Wolf.⁹³ Furthermore, it was also the Hasidim who established Chmielnik’s first yeshiva and continued to exert their strong influence on the local Jewish community well into the 19th century.⁹⁴ Among these Hasidim were followers of Dov-Ber of Mezeritch (Mezhirichi, Ukraine, 1704-1772), also known as the Magid of Mezeritch, Rabbi Pinchas of Korets (Korzec, Ukraine, 1726/28-1790), and Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (c. 1700-1760), the Baal Shem Tov, himself.

By the 19th century, various Hasidic sects had migrated to Chmielnik, including followers of Ger (Góra Kalwaria), Aleksander (Aleksandrów Łódzki), Modzhitz (Modrzyce), Lublin, Radomsk (Radomsko), and Kuzmir (Kazimierz Dolny).⁹⁵ Hasidism’s stronghold on Chmielnik was so pronounced that it saw the arrival of Hasidic “zealot” Rabbi David Landau, who assumed the position of the chief rabbi.⁹⁶ Although the Mitnagdim, the opposing religious

⁹² David Newman, *Hope’s Reprise* (Toronto, Canada: The Azrieli Foundation, 2015), 2.

⁹³ Gelber, “History of the Jews in Chmielnik,” 87. See also: Rivka Embon, “Rabbi Shmuel Heller (1803-1884) and His Role in the Jewish Community in Safed” (dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 2016), 117, 397.

⁹⁴ Newman, *Hope’s Reprise*, 2.

⁹⁵ Among these various Hasidic groups, those adhering to Ger (Góra Kalwaria) and Kotsk (Kock) were considered especially influential in Chmielnik. Blatman, s.v. “Chmielnik,” 14-15. According to Mordechai Gutman, by the time that he was growing up in Chmielnik in the 20th century, the town had thirteen Hasidic *shtiblekh* (or small synagogues), and roughly fifty percent of the Jewish inhabitants adhered to a particular Hasidic ideology. In addition to the groups mentioned above, he recalled the following groups of Hasidim (and their corresponding town and city names): the Chentchiner (Chęciny), Keltser (Kielce), Pintshever (Pińczów), Ozsherover (Ozarów), Kotsker (Kock), Shidlever (Szydłów), Nayshtoter (Nowy Korczyn). Mordechai Gutman, “Small Synagogues and Houses of Study,” 541.

⁹⁶ Gelber, “History of the Jews in Chmielnik,” 87.

group, waged a long-term battle with the Hasidim in Chmielnik, even attempting to remove Rabbi Landau from his position, his presence changed the general spiritual-cultural zeitgeist of the town in favor of Hasidism. The fact that he was quite learned and the scion of a rabbinical family that included the noted Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (1713-1793), also known as the “Noda be-Yehudah” for his monumental two-volume work,⁹⁷ certainly helped Landau to secure this appointment. Of the various Hasidic factions, that of Kotsk [Pol. Kock] became the most prominent in Chmielnik. By the latter half of the 19th century, Chmielnik’s Jewish community appointed Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman (1851?-1928),⁹⁸ a Kotsker Hasid, its chief rabbi.⁹⁹

Chmielnik’s Hasidic demographics seem to be consistent for small towns of this location and time period. Raków, about 18 miles away, was also heavily Hasidic. So was Chęciny, about 20 miles away—the seat of the Chentchiner Hasidim. Działoszyce, approximately 27 miles away, carried this same trend, as did towns farther away, like Przytyk, roughly 81 miles away, and Kozienice, close to 82 miles away. Kozienice’s reputation as a Hasidic center was reflected in its well-known Hasidic leader, the “Magid of Kozhenits.”

⁹⁷ Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, son of Yehudah, was born in Opatów [Yid. Apt], Poland, but ultimately became the chief rabbi of Prague, where he remained from 1754 until his death in 1793. His major work, the *Noda be-Yehudah*, was issued in 1776 and 1811. For an in-depth study of Rabbi Yechezkel Landau and his rabbinic colleagues, see: Sharon Flatto, *The Kabbalistic Culture of Eighteenth-Century Prague: Ezekiel Landau (the 'Noda Biyeudah') and His Contemporaries* (Oxford, UK; Portland, Or.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010).

⁹⁸ Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman’s questionable date of birth is based on a Yiddish article from 1923 that does not explicitly mention him by name but lists his age as 72. His date of death is indicated as having been in the Jewish calendar year of 5689 on the eve of Yom Kippur, which on the secular calendar corresponds to 1928. See: “Polish Officer Beats Up 72-Year-Old Rabbi from Chmielnik, Galicia,” *Forverts* [New York], July 28, 1923, 1; Mordechai Fridnzon, “Rabbinic Dispute,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 545.

⁹⁹ Gelber, “History of the Jews in Chmielnik,” 87.

Chmielnik's Jews blossomed both religiously and economically. As in many other private towns in the Polish Crown, Jews traded in wheat, cattle, and wood in regions including Podolia, Prussia, and Silesia. Some traded at Polish fairs, particularly in textiles.¹⁰⁰ While they had begun their settlement in the confines of the Jewish quarter, they soon moved out of it—even permeating Chmielnik's town center. This expansion began in earnest following the expulsion of the anti-Trinitarians from Chmielnik, around 1660.¹⁰¹ Jews took over the homes and stores of these former residents, and in time, the Jewish population increased to the point that the number of Jews in Chmielnik overtook that of the Christians. Furthermore, this demographic pattern continued until the Holocaust period, such that by 1939, Jews comprised at least 80 percent of the total population.

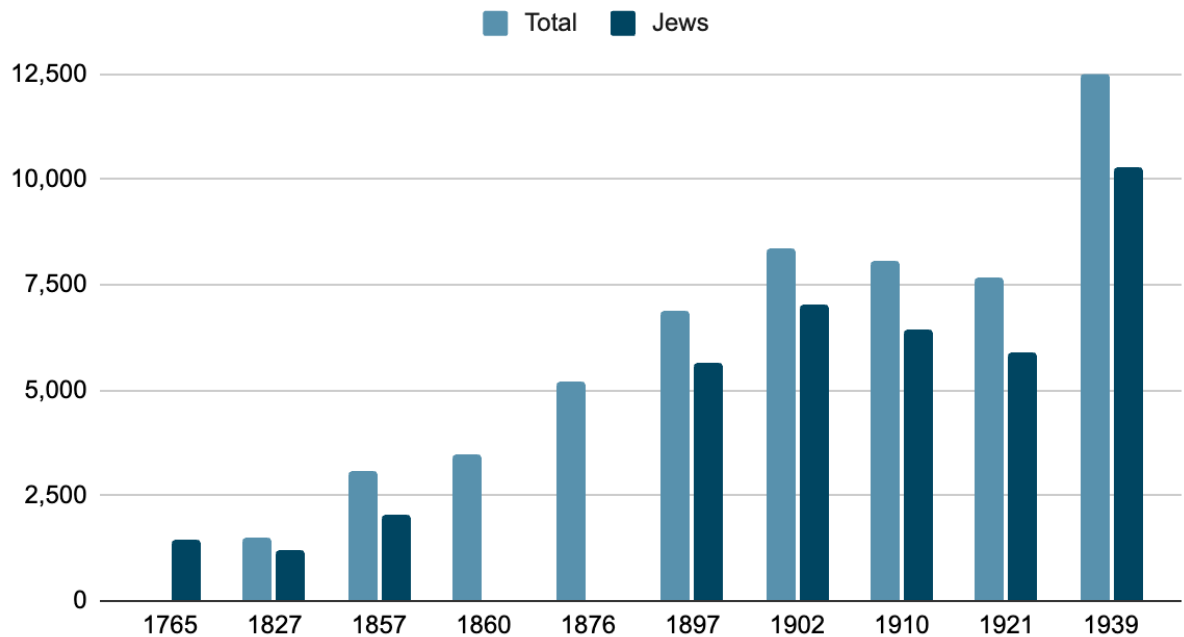
The following bar graph compares the Jewish versus general population in Chmielnik, beginning with the latter part of the 18th century and concluding with the eve of World War II.¹⁰² As is evident below, the ratio of Jews to Gentiles was always quite high.

¹⁰⁰ Blatman, s.v. "Chmielnik," 13; Krakowski, "Chmielnik," 656.

¹⁰¹ Some historians maintain that the remnants of the anti-Trinitarian influence continued to pervade Chmielnik and the vicinity, thereby contributing to a more sanguine attitude among the local population toward the Jews, up until the end of the 18th century. See: Krakowski, "Chmielnik," 656.

¹⁰² This chart is represented in Gelber's previously cited article, on page 36 (or on page 68, in the original Hebrew version of the article). A similar, yet somewhat divergent chart that spans the years 1766 to 1921, may be seen in the previously cited article by Daniel Blatman, on page 13 (or on page 228, in the original Hebrew version of the article).

Jewish and Gentile Population in Chmielnik, 1765-1939



* Demographic documentation for the years 1765, 1860, and 1876 is lacking.

In 1656, during the Swedish invasion of the Polish Commonwealth, the Jewish community of Chmielnik was attacked by Polish troops and nearly destroyed. According to Bernard D. Weinryb, “the Swedish armies demanded contributions, high excise taxes, and requisitions that affected the Jews as much or more than the Christian population.”¹⁰³ Yet, he also claims that there is evidence that the Swedes singled out the Jews for “special mistreatment,” and that in several places, “the Swedes killed the Jewish population.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Bernard D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100-1800* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982), 190.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

The Polish Army under the command of Stefan Czarniecki (1599-1665) liberated Chmielnik from the Swedes. Yet, at the same time, the Poles put to death 150 local Jews, whom they accused of collaborating with the enemy.¹⁰⁵ During this campaign, Czarniecki's soldiers tortured or killed a number of Jews in other towns.¹⁰⁶ Included among these victims was the first rabbi to serve the Chmielnik Jewish community prior to 1656 and about whom we have written evidence; he was known simply as "Rabbi Yitzchak."¹⁰⁷ Even though Chmielnik's Jewish inhabitants were increasingly becoming a part of the town's fabric and contributed a great deal to its flourishing, they likely recognized the precariousness of their existence in Poland, and Chmielnik, more specifically. This is reflected in the imposing type of synagogue the local Jewish community built, ironically only a brief time before the aforementioned violent attacks on Chmielnik's Jews.

Chmielnik's Jewish community rebuilt itself after the Swedish invasion and the consequent attacks on its Jews, but it underwent periods of boom and bust thereafter: competition with Gentile traders led to economic downturn toward the end of the 18th century, but this situation improved quite a bit by the 19th century. To some degree this positive development stemmed from the passage of an agreement in 1808 between the Chmielnik Jewish

¹⁰⁵ Suzan E. Hagstrom, *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik* (Spotsylvania, VA: Sergeant Kirkland's Press, 2001), 22. Marek Maciągowski and Piotr Krawczyk also reference the murder of 150 Jews in the context of the Swedish invasion of Poland in the 17th century. Nevertheless, they are of the opinion that this event never actually took place; because, as they argue, historical documents do not testify to such a large community of Jews having lived in Chmielnik at the time when this massacre was said to have taken place. See: Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 20-21.

¹⁰⁶ Weinryb further remarks that according to one Jewish source, Czarniecki's troops killed 3,220 or 3,580 Jewish families—roughly 16,000 to 21,000 Jews—in 27 to 30 towns and cities. In addition, in many of these cases, the entire town was apparently burned down. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland*, 191.

¹⁰⁷ Blatman, s.v. "Chmielnik," 14; Gelber, "History of the Jews in Chmielnik," 63.

community and the town's district governor, Józef Chłapowski, which permitted local Jews to produce vodka, as well as brew and tap beer.¹⁰⁸ In 1852, local Jewish investors were able to acquire a permit granting them the right to establish workshops and factories in Chmielnik. Among these factories was the noted textile factory of Zalmen Posner.¹⁰⁹

In 1876, a fire broke out in Chmielnik, which destroyed most of the town's houses and many Jewish businesses.¹¹⁰ Indeed, this tragedy was emotionally described shortly after its occurrence in the Warsaw-based Hebrew newspaper, *ha-Tsefira* on August 30, 1876, by a representative of the nearby town of Działoszyce as: "How great was the conflagration and the calamity that happened ... during these days, due to the fires ... We cannot imagine the calamity of distant Chmielnik."¹¹¹ The article proceeds to bewail how adversely affected Chmielnik's local Jewish community of "approximately 1,000 families" was by one of these conflagrations, such that there was "a collapse of commerce" and "an outcry for lacking bread" there.¹¹² This, in turn, led the Jewish community of Działoszyce to collect donations on Chmielnik's behalf and its sending "two wagons filled with bread, as well as some sum of money."¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ "Chmielnik: History," Virtual Shtetl <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/node/690/99-history/137163-history-of-community> (accessed 10-28-22).

¹⁰⁹ Blatman, s.v. "Chmielnik," 14.

¹¹⁰ According to Mordechai Gutman, the fire of 1876 destroyed everything in Chmielnik; only the synagogue remained intact. Mordechai Gutman, "Small Synagogues and Houses of Study," 542.

¹¹¹ "Działoshits" [Działoszyce], *ha-Tsefira* [Warsaw, Poland], August 30, 1876, 260.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Nonetheless, by the end of the 19th century, there was a rejuvenation of economic life, “and a small professional class of Jews emerged.”¹¹⁴ In a survey conducted in 1897, which reflects this improved economic climate, we find four physicians, one lawyer, and three clerks—all Jews. Also counted at that time were 77 independent businessmen; 589 industrial workers and craftsmen, 49 of whom were in the textile trade, and 63 of whom dealt in wood; 25 building laborers; 11 in the metal industry; and 251 tailors. Additional trades and professions counted among Jews at that time were wagon drivers and transport workers; teachers and *melamdim*; religious communal service workers; and agricultural workers.¹¹⁵

In contrast, many members of the young Jewish intelligentsia strove to support secularization and modernization at the end of the 19th century. In keeping with the project of remaking the Jewish community, they hoped to change the character of Jewish education in Chmielnik. They collected funds toward establishing a modern Talmud-Torah, in which Hebrew would be taught alongside Polish, as well as vocational skills. However, this experiment proved unsuccessful because the old communal establishment opposed it. It was also during the late 1800s that the first Zionist association was organized in Chmielnik. It collected money toward the Zionist shekel fund and distributed Hebrew newspapers among the town’s Jews.¹¹⁶

In most major respects, Chmielnik seems typical of the towns in its vicinity. It grew from a nobleman’s property to a small town that traded in wheat, cattle, wood, textiles, and other goods—reflecting the larger economic patterns post Industrial Revolution. Like Chmielnik, the

¹¹⁴ Blatman, s.v. “Chmielnik,” 14.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

nearby town of Działoszyce also began as a nobleman's property and was granted rights as a private town based on Magdeburg Law.¹¹⁷ It, too, found its economic base from trade and crafts, including carpentry, smithery, shoemaking, tailoring, and haberdashery.¹¹⁸ Such was also the case for Staszów, which specialized in shoemaking, hairdressing, tailoring, garment manufacture, and textiles;¹¹⁹ Nowy Korczyń, which traded in grain and agricultural products and specialized in hide processing, tailoring, wood and wicker work;¹²⁰ Przytyk, which traded in cattle, horses, and grain and specialized in cap-making, tailoring, and other related crafts;¹²¹ and for Kozienice, which had a reputation for excellence in shoemaking.¹²² These towns, which were all in Kielce Province during the interwar period, were heavily Jewish. While some, in 1921, were at least half Jewish (Staszów was approximately 58 percent, Nowy Korczyń was 67-68 percent),¹²³ others were a much higher percentage: Działoszyce was 83 percent, Przytyk was 90

¹¹⁷ "Działoszyce," Świątokrzyski Shtetl http://swietokrzyskisztetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=192&sub=173 (accessed 10-28-22).

¹¹⁸ "Działoszyce: Local History," Virtual Shtetl <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/node/335/96-local-history/66795-local-history> (accessed 10-28-22).

¹¹⁹ "Staszów," Świątokrzyski Shtetl http://swietokrzyskisztetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=252&sub=173 (accessed 10-28-22).

¹²⁰ "Nowy Korczyn: History," Virtual Shtetl <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/node/404/99-history/137762-history-of-community>; History - Nowy Korczyn Homepage <http://www.nowykorczyn.com/GeneralHistory.htm> (accessed 10-28-22).

¹²¹ "Przytyk," Świątokrzyski Shtetl http://swietokrzyskisztetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=239&sub=173; "Przytyk: History," Virtual Shtetl <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/towns/p/653-przytyk/99-history/137902-history-of-community> (accessed 10-28-22).

¹²² "Memorial Book of Kozienice (Kozienice, Poland): The Jewish Artisan in Kozienice," JewishGen <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kozienice/koz238.html> (accessed 10-28-22).

¹²³ "The Staszów Book (Poland): History of Staszów," JewishGen <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/staszow/sta025.html>; "Nowy Korczyn: Świątokrzyskie," International Jewish Cemetery Project <http://iajgscemetery.org/eastern-europe/poland/nowy-korczyn>; "Nowy Korczyn: History," Virtual Shtetl <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/node/404/99-history/137762-history-of-community> (accessed 10-28-22).

percent.¹²⁴ Thus, the flourishing of Chmielnik's Jewish community, in particular its growing Hasidic identity, was the norm, not the exception. Also evident—based on the Gentile community's violent reactions to the Swedish invasion and the particular design of the community synagogue—is that antisemitism was an underlying fact of the town's existence.

¹²⁴ "Działoszyce," Świątokrzyski Sztetl http://swietokrzyskiszetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=192&sub=173; "Przytyk: Świątokrzyskie," International Jewish Cemetery Project <http://iajgscemetery.org/eastern-europe/poland/przytyk> (accessed 10-28-22).

Chapter Two: World War I and the Interwar Period

World War I was a turning point for the entire globe—Poland’s shtetls included. Many historians argue that World War II was only an extension of World War I—a tying up of the loose ends that the Treaty of Versailles created—and so any substantive exploration of Chmielnik must include a discussion of what transpired there during World War I, and how the town was impacted in the years after. It is difficult to fully understand what happened in 1939 if we do not understand the precursor events that led up to that point in time. Hence, this chapter will focus on Chmielnik’s experience of World War I: the outbreak, Chmielnik under foreign occupation, and the aftermath of the war. More specifically, we will look at how the interwar period saw the birth of secular movements such as Zionism, as well as economic downturns and generation gaps that fueled Chmielnik’s youth to migrate to the big cities.

World War I Breaks Out

According to the 1934 autobiographical account of a person we will call D. P., so as to respect his privacy,¹²⁵ who was a young child when World War I broke out,¹²⁶ Chmielnik did not witness any of the war’s major battles. Still, from time to time, saddening news from the

¹²⁵ Initials have been used here and throughout this work to represent YIVO’s autobiographers from Chmielnik. This has been done, so as to respect the original privacy stipulations that YIVO issued to potential contestants in the 1930s. D. P. wrote this autobiographical account as a submission for the YIVO-sponsored writing contest for Jewish youth conducted in 1934. The YIVO Institute, then located in Vilna (Wilno), Poland, sponsored three autobiography contests for Jewish youth, in 1932, 1934, and 1939. Ido Basok, “Youth and the Values of Youth in the Youth Movements of Interwar Poland,” in *The Broken Chain: Polish Jewry through the Ages*, edited by Israel Bartal, et al. (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2001), 573. The second competition, for which D. P. submitted his autobiography, yielded 252 entries. See: Michael C. Steinlauf, “Jewish Politics and Youth Culture in Interwar Poland: Preliminary Evidence from the YIVO Autobiographies,” in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, edited by Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 95.

¹²⁶ b. December 4, 1912.

battlefront would trickle into the town. D. P. recalls the summer day when the war became a reality for him. He was in Cheder (Yid. *kheyder*) at the time, and there was a sudden great noise—followed by a rush of in-marching adversarial military detachment units. He knew the enemy was at the gates. D. P.’s rabbi instructed his pupils to evacuate, and they all rushed downstairs, taking cover in the cellar. He writes:

On the street one can hear the marching of the soldiers’ shoes, along with the clatter of horseshoes and the heavy wheels of cannons, and we, little pupils, are restraining [the beating of] our hearts, while raising our eyes upward to the black ceiling of the cellar. After several hours under voluntary arrest, all of the pupils crawl out of the cellar; and I, wanting to be a hero, run out of the Cheder and onto the street. I am greeted by a cruel silence, as though the entire city had perished.¹²⁷

In spite of a debilitating sense of fright, D. P. managed to reach the steps of his house, where he recalls the following scene: “I fall into my mother’s arms in a faint, barely reviving myself. This deathly silence and the hammering of the door and window shutters had a frightening impact on me, like the blasting of cannons that reached me at that moment.”¹²⁸

D. P.’s experience reflected the greater reality that Chmielnik was not a place of any real consequence, and its residents certainly had no say in any matters of border disputes. Nevertheless, they perceived the general panic and disorientation of being passed back and forth between warring powers quickly, in the space of only a few years. From what we can piece together based on the Chmielnik memorial book, the German army took over Chmielnik in September 1914. A short time later—we cannot determine an exact date—German and allied

¹²⁷ D. P., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO’s Writing Contest, c. 1934, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3692, 6-7.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 7.

Austrian armies retreated and the Russian army gained control.¹²⁹ In the spring of 1915, the area passed back to Austrian control. It is not clear how long the Austrians controlled the town, but by the time the war ended in 1918, Poland had gained its independence for the first time in 123 years and Chmielnik was now finally “Polish.”

As mentioned above, the German takeover came first. Of this, Motl Rozenblum, a Chmielniker, writes, “Once it grew still, the shots subsided, and people went out into the streets. They at once encountered the Germans. Many divisions marched with lots of combat tools, such that a fear fell upon everyone. Gradually, however, they calmed down because they could communicate with the Germans.”¹³⁰

If the Chmielnik memorial book is any indication, Chmielnik’s Jews did not have a good sense of what was happening on the battlefield. Rozenblum further states, “Small groups congregate in the market [square]. Everyone wants to know what is going on. If somebody arrives from Kielce, Warsaw, or Lodz, he is soon surrounded by curiosity seekers who want to hear the latest news. And if somebody from the first arrivals brings with him a Jewish newspaper from Warsaw, he is simply beleaguered by people.”¹³¹

D. P.’s reminiscences of taking cover in a cellar, as well as his references to cannons, parallel some of the first-person accounts of Chmielnik natives that appear in the Chmielnik

¹²⁹ The Russian Empire had previously controlled Chmielnik and this majority region of "Congress Poland" prior to World War I.

¹³⁰ Motl Rozenblum, “Memories from the First World War,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 270.

¹³¹ Ibid., 269.

memorial book. For example, Chmielnik native, Leon Kleinplatz, writes that approximately two months after World War I began,¹³² as Chmielnik shifted from German and allied Austrian control to Russian control, there was a great deal of military movement within the town as the Austrian army retreated and Russian Cossacks overtook the area.

Russian Control During World War I

According to Kleinplatz, the town did not initially realize that it was being surrounded by Russian Cossacks. At the time, Russian cannons stood on one side of the town and Austrian cannons on the other side. Suddenly, a resounding sound could be heard—so much so that children began to cry and cling to their parents. People then fled to cellars, as the cannons fired from both sides of Chmielnik. Finally, shouts of “Hooray!” could be heard. This served as a signal for those who were hiding in cellars to come out into the open again. Yet, with their emergence from the cellars, they were greeted by the new leading forces in town: the Russians.¹³³

News of the Russian takeover was met with fear, since Chmielnik’s Jews had been hearing rumors for weeks about how the Cossacks behaved in nearby towns. Rozenblum writes, “Sorrowful news arrived from the surrounding shtetls [regarding] what the Cossacks had done with the Jews. In ... Staszow and in other towns, yet they took the Jews out of the synagogues

¹³² Although specific dates are not mentioned in Kleinplatz’s account, the First World War broke out on July 28, 1914. This would mean that his recollections pertain to events that took place around late September 1914.

¹³³ Leon Kleinplatz, “The War Broke Out,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 265-267.

and hanged them in their prayer shawls and *kitlen*,¹³⁴ which they had worn while praying, in the middle of the market [square]. In many towns they stole Jewish possessions, raped women, and murdered lots of men.”¹³⁵

According to Rozenblum, the Germans’ entry into Chmielnik occurred on Yom Kippur 1914, which would have been on the 29-30 September, approximately two months following the war’s outbreak.¹³⁶ Like D. P. and Kleinplatz, Rozenblum recalls the resounding shots of cannons, which he states did not let up that entire winter [of 1915]. Indeed, he makes the indelible remark that “in Chmielnik, the window panes did not stop shaking until after Passover [1915].”¹³⁷

First-person accounts of former Chmielnik residents describe waves of Russian (“Cossack”) violence against the Jews. Jewish food and property were confiscated, and three Jews were arrested and executed on charges of espionage.¹³⁸ Among the more graphic accounts is that of Yankev Freidman, who illustrates how the “Cossacks” surrounded Jewish homes and Jewish-owned shops that had already closed early on account of Yom Kippur. According to Freidman, the Cossacks tore off the locks and iron bars from doors and smashed in window

¹³⁴ *Kitlen* is Yiddish and plural for *kitl*, which is a long white linen coat worn by men on solemn Jewish holidays, such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

¹³⁵ Rozenblum, “Memories from the First World War,” 270.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹³⁸ According to the aforementioned Kleinplatz, the three Jewish “spies” were accused of hiding telephones beneath their beards, which they supposedly used to communicate with the enemy. Their punishment for this crime was death; they were all summarily shot and subsequently left to hang for public display. Kleinplatz, “The War Broke Out,” 267-268.

panes. In addition, they broke into civilian homes and “threw themselves with animalistic gusto upon Jewish women and girls, committed criminal acts.”¹³⁹

In one case, a Cossack even forcibly dragged out a Jewish girl from her home and her parents were overwrought because they could not find their daughter. Ultimately, though, they succeeded in locating and freeing her from her captors. As a result of the genuine danger perceived by Chmielnik’s Jews that Yom Kippur Eve (presumably) of 1914,¹⁴⁰ they did not dare attend the Kol Nidre service. The synagogues, religious houses of study, and small Hasidic synagogues (Yid. *shtiblekh*) did not open. In Freidman’s assessment, this was perhaps the first time in the history of Jewish life in Chmielnik that Jews did not attend the Kol Nidre service within a public forum. Rather, they remained in the seemingly safer confines of their own homes to pray in smaller groups.¹⁴¹

Austrian Control During World War I

Ironically, although World War I was a difficult and terrifying time for Chmielnik Jewry, once under Austrian rule—beginning in the spring of 1915—the Jewish community witnessed certain changes that some former natives considered positive. For one thing, commercial life seems to have returned to normal. A railroad was built at this time, connecting the nearby towns

¹³⁹ Yankev Freidman, “Episodes from the First World War,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 286.

¹⁴⁰ Freidman indicates that this was the Yom Kippur Eve of 1916. However, I believe that this is either a typo or an outright error, given that the German and Austrian armies had already pushed the Russian forces out of Poland—all the way back to Kiev—in the spring of 1915. See: *Ibid.*, 284; Rozenblum, “Memories from the First World War,” 272.

¹⁴¹ Freidman, “Episodes from the First World War,” 286-287.

of Jędrzejów and Pińczów.¹⁴² Motl Rozenblum states in his first-person account that, “Chmielnik ... thanks to the Austrians, began to develop culturally.”¹⁴³ By 1916, the Austrians were the ruling force in Chmielnik, and Ezriel Sametband, another former native of Chmielnik, marks 1916 as the year in which multiple new cultural, educational, and political enterprises took root and proliferated within the town. Among these new enterprises, which focused heavily—though not exclusively, on the youth—was the founding of libraries, the organizing of workers, the initiation of a Jewish scout club, “Hashomer,” the growth of Zionist movements, theatrical productions staged both by locals and visiting actor troupes, group outings, lectures, workshops, and educational courses that taught people how to read and write.¹⁴⁴ Also worthy of note, although this was not specifically aimed at the local Jewish community, was the opening in 1916 of the District Hospital in Chmielnik (Pol. *Szpital Powiatowy w Chmielniku*).¹⁴⁵

Consequences of World War I on Chmielnik’s Jews

According to Sametband’s recollections of the period under Austrian control, these aforementioned additions signified a definite shift toward modernity—and to some degree, a break from the safeguarded religious traditions of his parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

This may be seen, for example, in the following episode, as illustrated by Sametband: In 1916,

¹⁴² Velvl Hershtkop, “On Weekdays and Holidays,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 306.

¹⁴³ Rozenblum, “Memories from the First World War,” 274.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ The hospital building, which likely stood in the vicinity of the Chmielnik Synagogue, was destroyed during World War II. See: “History of the District Hospital in Chmielnik,” *Szpital Powiatowy w Chmielniku* [District Hospital in Chmielnik] <https://www.szpital-chmielnik.pl/index.php/o-szpitalu/historia-szpitala> (accessed 12-13-22).

there was a rented salon in Chmielnik's marketplace, which served as a gathering locale every Saturday night for girls and boys. Dances were even held there to the accompaniment of musicians. In Sametband's estimation, this was the first time in Chmielnik's history that boys and girls interacted together in such an overt, social manner. However, this ongoing activity soon reached the ears of "the Rabbi"—presumably Chmielnik's chief rabbi at the time, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman—and elicited his ire. The Rabbi's representative then appeared at the salon-turned-dancehall one Saturday night to inform the youths of the following: "The Rabbi ordered that you should stop dancing, boys and girls together. It can, Heaven forbid, lead to a misfortune for the town on account of the actions of the boundary breakers [i.e., transgressors]." ¹⁴⁶ Yet, in Sametband's words, this initially did nothing to alter the situation, as he and the other youths present at the time categorically refused to stop their activity. Shortly thereafter, though, the Rabbi himself made an appearance at the salon to reiterate the same message about how the mixed-gender dancing needed to cease. Apparently, even the youth would not dare to openly transgress the Rabbi, since the dances suddenly came to a halt. ¹⁴⁷

But the shift to modernity was not the only consequence of war; another, more predictable consequence was food insecurity. "The Jewish department opened a food warehouse for the refugees and a public tea house in Chmielnik," ¹⁴⁸ wrote V. Hershkop, a former resident of Chmielnik, in a 1952 "letter to the editor" of the Yiddish newspaper, *der Tog*. According to

¹⁴⁶ Rozenblum, "Memories from the First World War," 274; Ezriel Sametband, "Life during the First World War," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 278.

¹⁴⁷ Sametband, "Life during the First World War," 277.

¹⁴⁸ Blatman, s.v. "Chmielnik," 14.

Hershtkop, during World War I, when Jews were driven out of the cities bordering on Russia, a large contingency also made its way to Chmielnik. In response to this situation, “the poor shtetl did all in its power to find a place and to help provide for these helpless [Jews]. A kitchen was established right away. Youths volunteered to help, even in excess of what was needed. The group of helpless [Jews] felt that a whole Jewish community was commiserating with them in their poor fate.”¹⁴⁹

A final consequence of war for Chmielnik’s Jews was population decline, a theme that, according to historian Bernard Wasserstein, was also common to “entire populations of Jews in *shtetlakh* of the Pale and Austrian Galicia.”¹⁵⁰ Many residents fled the town during the war. It is unclear, however, due to the wartime chaos and lack of documentation, precisely where these Jews went and how many of them fled during this time. However, we do know that Chmielnik’s pre-World War I compared to its post-World War I Jewish demographics declined somewhat, because in addition to the number of Jews who fled the town during the war—never to return—the postwar era and the early 1920s witnessed a stream of emigration to the Americas, Canada, and British-controlled Palestine.¹⁵¹ For instance, in 1910, there were an estimated 6,452 Jews out of 8,073 total residents in Chmielnik. In 1921, the number was 5,908 out of 7,690. residents.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ V. Hershtkop, “On the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Destruction of the Polish Town, Chmielnik,” *der Tog*, November 17, 1952, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55.

¹⁵⁰ Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

¹⁵¹ Gelber, “History of the Jews in Chmielnik,” 68.

¹⁵² These demographic figures may be viewed in the chart featured earlier-on in this work. See also: Krakowski, “Chmielnik,” 657.

The end of the war also paved the way for Poland's independence. The aforementioned D. P. acknowledges that this brought a major change in national status of the Jews, and led to the establishment of many welfare agencies, which were greatly needed in the war's aftermath.¹⁵³ Consequently, there was a growing awareness in this new Poland, and more specifically, in Chmielnik, of the acute need for social action in dealing with those whom World War I had affected directly.

World War I officially ended on Nov. 11, 1918, with the silencing of the guns and the drawing up of the Armistice. But there is no special marking in the Chmielnik *yisker bukh* of this date. In fact, the end of the Great War actually overlapped with Poland's war with Ukraine (November 1918-July 1919) and an increase of antisemitic acts, discussed later in this chapter. (In fact, the first infamous Kielce pogrom actually took place on Armistice Day and Poland's National Independence Day, which can hardly be a coincidence.) Thus, if the *yisker bukh* is any indication, the end of the war was not especially celebrated—or even noticed. Still, its consequences were many: cultural and industrial advancements under the Austrians, renewed fear of the Russians, a brush with modernity and the first birth pangs of a religious generation gap, and decline in the town's population. As we will see next, it also gave Chmielnik's Jews hope that, with Poland's independence, there would also be greater independence for them.

¹⁵³ D. P., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO's Writing Contest, c. 1934, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3692, 7.

Post-World War I: Poland's Independence and What It Meant for Jews

Following World War I, there was an optimistic sense among some Polish Jews that not only would Poland be independent, but that they as Jews would likewise have greater rights and liberties.¹⁵⁴ This initial optimistic mindset was encouraged in part by the fact that in 1917, England issued the Balfour Declaration, which presumed that the British were prepared to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This move made a major impact on Polish Jewry as a whole, but particularly on its Zionist-leaning factions. For World War I had proven exceedingly difficult for Polish Jews insofar as the economic hardships that it created.¹⁵⁵ The thought that there might be a Jewish homeland to which to immigrate was for many Polish Jews like a light at the end of a dark tunnel, which increasingly took the form of significant anti-Jewish violence.

Another encouraging sign for Jews and other minorities then residing in Poland was Poland's signing of the Minorities Treaty on June 28, 1919.¹⁵⁶ The Treaty, which was part of the Versailles Peace Agreement, ostensibly stated that Jews would now be recognized as a distinct minority group with special autonomous rights. Poland would now have to recognize its Jewish citizens as a non-territorial nation, not merely as a religious group. As part of this agreement, they were guaranteed recognition of minority languages in public life and funding for Jewish schools that taught Jewish languages including Hebrew and Yiddish.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 69-70.

¹⁵⁵ Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe*, 49.

¹⁵⁶ Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 72.

¹⁵⁷ A lengthy discussion about what led up to Poland ultimately signing the Polish Minorities Treaty and an outline of the twelve articles presented in this treaty, which served both Jews and other minorities residing in Poland, may

However, in reality, these terms were never actually fulfilled: Jews were forced to pay for their own schools. Jewish schools were often denied state accreditation.¹⁵⁸ What is more, overall, political elites and ethnic Poles greatly resented the Minorities Treaty, which they perceived as a violation of Poland's sovereignty and a result of undue Jewish influence. Indeed, it cannot be denied that leading American Jewish figures of the day, such as Louis Marshall (1856-1929) and Julian Mack (1866-1943), were highly involved in drafting and securing the Minorities Treaty.¹⁵⁹ As an overt exhibition of this resentment projected at Jews, anti-Jewish disturbances that were unparalleled in Polish history began to spring to the fore in various parts of Poland.¹⁶⁰

Among the worst of these violent attacks on Jews was the Lwów pogrom of 1918, news about which contributed to the decision about drafting the Minority Treaties.¹⁶¹ Yet, far closer to

be found in the following: Oscar I. Janowsky, *The Jews and Minority Rights (1898-1919)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 344-369.

¹⁵⁸ Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 17.

¹⁵⁹ References to both Louis Marshall and Julian Mack and their engagement in the drafting and enactment of the Minorities Treaties abound in *The Jews and Minority Rights (1898-1919)*. On the matter of Jewish involvement in these treaties, Janowsky further conveys how both American and west European Jews sought to aid their east European brethren by having direct influence on the very drafting of the clauses included in the Minorities Treaties. See: Janowsky, *The Jews and Minority Rights*, passim; 7-8.

¹⁶⁰ Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 72; Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe*, 49.

¹⁶¹ Contemporary historians and journalists including David Engel, William W. Hagen, and Grzegorz Gauden; and the late writer and journalist, Israel Cohen (1879-1961), have all addressed the 1918 pogrom in Lwów in their writing, as seen in the following cited works: David Engel, "Lwów, 1918: The Transmutation of a Symbol and Its Legacy in the Holocaust," in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and in Its Aftermath*, edited by Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 32-44; William W. Hagen, "The Moral Economy of Popular Violence: The Pogrom in Lwów, November 1918," in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland*, edited by Robert Blobaum (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 124-147; Grzegorz Gaugen, *Lwów—kres iluzji: opowieść o pogromie listopadowym 1918* [Lviv—the end of an illusion: the story of the November 1918 pogrom] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, [2019]). The footnoted diary that Israel Cohen kept during the mission he made in the aftermath of World War I to Poland, from December 1918 to February 1919, provides many first-hand accounts pertaining to antisemitic pogroms that occurred in Poland. Chief among those discussed is the Lwów pogrom, which transpired in late

home in terms of Chmielnik's own Jewish community, was the previously mentioned pogrom that took place in Kielce, on November 11, 1918, in which four Jews were brutally murdered and approximately 400 others were maimed.¹⁶² In Chmielnik proper, there were likewise excesses perpetrated in November 1918, the month in which Poland officially regained its independence from foreign rule. This was reported at the time in the December 4, 1918, edition of the New York-based *der Tog* [The Day], in which the events in Chmielnik were superficially mentioned in conjunction with pogroms that had taken place in a series of towns throughout Galicia.¹⁶³

According to Malka Owsiany, a native of the nearby town of Raków, due to Chmielnik's predominantly Jewish makeup, the Polish minority there feared that with Poland's newly found independence, the Jews would declare Chmielnik a "Jewish kingdom"—and that perhaps, in turn, they would attempt to take over all of Poland.¹⁶⁴ This incident underscores the interethnic tension that accompanied the new political reality. The irony is that Poland's hard-fought independence was accompanied by a wave of violence, including antisemitic violence.

What follows is a detailed account of that tragic day in Chmielnik as expressed by local Chmielnik Jews who witnessed the violent events, and by the Yiddish press of the day. Mendl Klarman and Kalman Przewarski, both of whom were members of the Poale Zion at that time,

November 1918. For further insight into Cohen's encounters, see: Israel Cohen, "My Mission to Poland (1918-1919)," *Jewish Social Studies* 13, no. 2 (1951): 149-172.

¹⁶² Pinhas Tsitron, *Sefer Kelts: toldot kehilat Kelts mi-yom hiyasdah ye-'ad hurbanah* [The Kielce Book: History of the Kielce Jewish Community from the Day She was Established and up to Her Destruction] (Tel-Aviv, Israel: Irgun 'ole Kelts be-Yi'sra'el, [1957]), 52; "Concerning the Pogrom in Kielce," *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], November 17, 1918, 3; Robert L. Cohn, "Constructions of the Kielce Pogrom," *Midstream* July/August 2006: 17.

¹⁶³ "New Horrible Pogroms in Rozvadov ... Kelts, Khmelnik [Chmielnik] ... and Pshemishel," *der Tog* [New York], December 4, 1918, 1.

¹⁶⁴ Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 45.

“the largest workers’ party in decidedly Jewish Chmielnik,”¹⁶⁵ recall attending a mass meeting in the local synagogue on a Thursday evening, during which well-known Poale Zion activists spoke. Local Jews believed in using this opportune moment to demonstrate in a public forum that they, too, were jubilant about Poland’s independence. The synagogue is described as being jam-packed, something akin to a major holiday, such as Yom Kippur. The speakers not only spoke, but also rallied the crowd to sing and march together from the synagogue, across the breadth of the marketplace, and up to the Poale Zion’s organizational locale. Przewarski and Klarman describe the march as having been led by members of the Poale Zion party carrying the Poale Zion flag, and that everyone sang workers’ songs, “songs of revolution, songs of liberation.”¹⁶⁶

Suddenly, as the crowd was crossing the marketplace square and approaching city hall, gunshots rang out overhead. In Przewarski’s words, “Jewish Chmielnik that evening paid the dear price of three young victims, girls who were shot at the corner of Magistrate Street.”¹⁶⁷ All three girls were 18 years old. Nikha Vishlitski and Malka Tarek were shot dead on the spot, while the third girl, Esther Leah Tizan, was seriously wounded in her right leg. Panic immediately ensued with members of the crowd fleeing in every direction into the town’s enveloping darkness. Hearing the shots, Gentile peasants who lived on the outskirts of Chmielnik came running, fearing—in Przewarski’s words—that the local Jews “want to take over their

¹⁶⁵ Kalman Przewarski, “November 1918,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 293.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 294; Mendl Klarman, “The Liberation of Poland,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 292.

¹⁶⁷ Przewarski, “November 1918,” 294.

Poland.”¹⁶⁸ Thinking that the local police were under attack, the peasants wished to offer their help. To that end, they stormed the town with hatchets, pitchforks, and crowbars in hand, only to learn from the head of the militia that everything was already “in order.”¹⁶⁹

According to Przewarski’s account, the commander of the newly formed civilian militia in Chmielnik was a man of Russian background named Pietrek Slomka, who was a noted antisemite. It was he who issued the order to shoot at the marching group of Jews.¹⁷⁰ Strikingly, according to the account of Sh. (“Samek”) Finkelstein, yet another Chmielniker, nobody was ever brought to justice for this crime.¹⁷¹

In her recap of the incident, Malka Owsiany refers to it as the “first Jewish victims of Polish ‘independence’ in Chmielnik.”¹⁷² And, the *American Jewish Yearbook* listed it under its “Events in 5679: Attacks Upon Jews” section as: “Chmielnik: Jews march in procession as demonstration for equal rights. Militia fire on the procession and kill three girls.”¹⁷³ But it was not simply an antisemitic incident; it quickly taught the Jews of Chmielnik that not only were they not immune to the type of anti-Jewish violence perpetrated in larger Polish cities such as Lwów and nearby Kielce, but also, that Polish independence had little resonance as far as Jews

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 295.

¹⁶⁹ “In Chmielnik 3 Jewish Victims,” *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], November 17, 1918, 3.

¹⁷⁰ Przewarski, “November 1918,” 296.

¹⁷¹ Sh. (Samek) Finkelstein, “Memories of Youth of the Old Home,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 28 (1989): 12. I have not been able to confirm or negate Finkelstein’s allegation, as it appears that there was no detailed coverage of this crime in the historical Jewish or Polish press.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ *American Jewish Yearbook*, Vol. 21 (1919-1920), “Events in 5679: Attacks Upon Jews” (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1920), 273.

were concerned. Although the Holocaust was still more than two decades away, this and other events like it during this post-World War I period were a precursor to even greater anti-Jewish violence that was yet to come on a far more widespread scale.

Chmielnik Between the Wars: Physical Layout, Industry, and Mundane Life

The town of Chmielnik was surrounded by a number of orchards, meadows, and wheat fields. It sat in a valley, was surrounded by evergreen woods,¹⁷⁴ and had two rivers to its east. One of these rivers was situated near Pintshever veg [Pińczów Way] and had an old mill, which produced oil. The second river had a new mill that was known as Leyzer Podchaler's mill.¹⁷⁵ Chmielnik was said to have a noticeably different appearance than the nearby towns, in that it had several sturdily built houses with red metal rooftops that bore generally flat surfaces. These rooftops had in turn been hammered out and affixed in such a manner as to connect adjacent homes. The town itself had four main streets that local Jews referred to in Yiddish as: Keltser gas [Kielce Street], Busker gas [Busko, i.e., Busko Zdrój Street], Shidlever gas [Szydłów Street], and Pintshever gas [Pińczów Street].¹⁷⁶ The largest of these streets was Shidlever gas, which was the

¹⁷⁴ As Morris Kwasniewski recalled his hometown's physical milieu, the general surrounding scenery was pretty. Owing to differences in land elevation, one would, according to him, descend upon entering Chmielnik, and conversely, ascend when exiting the town. Morris Kwasniewski, interview by Richard Bassett, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995.

¹⁷⁵ Penina Weinberg-Cohen, "Fifty Years Ago," 222.

¹⁷⁶ As of 1910, there were 21 streets in Chmielnik, which, according to their Polish names were called: Kielecka, Pocztowa, Bóżnica, Poprzeczna, Edwarda, Furmańska, Zaulek, Pińczowska, Bednarska, Starobuska, Szewska, Przejazd, Browarna, Kościelna, Szydłowska, Lubańska, Mrucza, Nowobuska, Plac Kościelny, Stodolna, Szuliszewska, as well as the town's main square. The town's municipal council prepared 52 plates in the early 20th century featuring all of these street names in two languages: Russian and Polish. The Yiddish versions of these street names were not included on the streets' official name plates. Hence, Chmielnik bore two parallel geographies: Gentile and Jewish. See: Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 86.

main thoroughfare leading into and out of Chmielnik.¹⁷⁷ These street names were derived from neighboring towns and cities.¹⁷⁸

Chmielnik had a large, broad marketplace with broad, cobblestoned walkways. According to the Garfinkel siblings, the flagstone-paved square contained a water pump and newsstand.¹⁷⁹ The market area was surrounded by shops of varying sizes selling all sorts of wares, including sewing materials, ironworks, and food. There was also a smaller marketplace, where Moyshe Feingold's ironworks shop and one of the only bookstores in town—owned by Shloyme Zonshein¹⁸⁰—were located. In addition, there was a designated area in town in which horses, cows, and pigs were sold, referred to by local Jews in Yiddish, as “the *Meritse*.”¹⁸¹

The busiest day of the week for Chmielnik was its market day, which, according to Morris Kwasniewski, was one of the largest in the entire Kielce Province, and was held on Thursdays,¹⁸² except for major Jewish holidays. Indeed, Malka Owsiany bolsters Kwasniewski's

¹⁷⁷ Freidman, “The *Shtetl* as I Remember It,” 254.

¹⁷⁸ In most—if not in all cases—the colloquial Yiddish street names were simply translations of the official Polish street names.

¹⁷⁹ Hagstrom, *Sara's Children*, 21.

¹⁸⁰ It was at Zonshein's bookstore, as Gitla Fastag (née Shulsinger) recalled, that she would purchase her school books. Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012.

¹⁸¹ Freidman, “The *Shtetl* as I Remember It,” 257-258. “The *Meritse*” was likely the Yiddish equivalent for the street known in Polish as *Mrucza*, which means to buzz, growl, or groan—all sounds that animals are known to make. See: Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 86; Agnieszka Sabor, *Shtetl: Auf den Spuren der jüdischen Städtchen: Działoszyce—Pińczów—Chmielnik—Szydłów—Chęciny: Reiseführer* (Kraków: Wydawn. Austeria, 2008), 73.

¹⁸² Morris Kwasniewski, interview by Richard Bassett, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995. For a lively and colorful depiction of the marketplace and particularly, Thursday market days in Chmielnik, see for instance: Mary Kleinhandler-Scheiber, “Chmielnik—The Marketplace,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 31 (1992): 56.

former statement regarding the absence of market days on Jewish holidays. Since Chmielnik was so heavily Jewish, if there was a conflict between a Jewish holiday falling on a Thursday, market day was canceled that week. If a peasant from the surrounding area were to forget this reality and show up in Chmielnik on one of these days, he would be struck with disappointment, as he had no choice but to return home.¹⁸³ The peasants from the surrounding towns and villages used to come to the town to sell their produce and to purchase wares from the local shopkeepers. It was on this day of the week that more of a Gentile presence could be felt in Chmielnik than on all other days of the week.¹⁸⁴

Mundane life in Chmielnik was hard. Women's jobs within the domestic sphere were particularly laborious, since few homes in Chmielnik had electricity and none had indoor plumbing.¹⁸⁵ Hence, the perfunctory task of washing clothes, for example, could consume up to 24 hours, and required one to fetch water from wells.¹⁸⁶ Other accounts also point to great economic difficulties faced by Chmielnik's Jewish inhabitants. Ezjel Lederman characterized his

¹⁸³ Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 45.

¹⁸⁴ Freidman, "The *Shtetl* as I Remember It," 257; Kalman Przewarski, "The Market," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile [Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community]*, edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 313; Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012.

¹⁸⁵ In his USC Shoah Foundation Institute testimony, Irving Buchbinder (b. 1927) recalled growing up in Chmielnik without any running water, and how it was necessary to pump buckets of water outside. He further added that each family had its own private outhouse unit, replete with a key. Irving Buchbinder, interview by Simon Zelcovitch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Willowdale, Canada, April 3, 1995. Former residents of Chmielnik, Arthur Ferleger and Charlotte Goldlist (née Liberman), likewise recalled how bathroom facilities in Chmielnik existed outside, in the yard. Additionally, Goldlist remarked how she had grown up without electricity. See: Arthur Ferleger, interview by Elisa Arden, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, North Miami Beach, FL, February 12, 1998; Charlotte Goldlist, interview by Rona Arato, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, October 25, 1995.

¹⁸⁶ Hagstrom, *Sara's Children*, 31.

hometown as a site referred to in Yiddish as “‘Melech Evion’s Geeter,’¹⁸⁷ which translates as: ‘The Estates of the King of Paupers,’” and remarked that the inhabitants—who were 80 percent Jewish—“eked out an existence by serving as artisans—cobblers, tailors, merchants, and mechanics—for the surrounding population of farmers.”¹⁸⁸ Similarly, Morris Kwasniewski (b. 1917) described pre-World War II Chmielnik as a town of the poor, characterized by primitive housing conditions, and large families typically occupying a single-room that consisted of “the kitchen and everything.”¹⁸⁹

Chmielnik was famous for its geese. Yiddish journalist, Y. Shmulevitsh (b. 1911), a native of Kielce, recalls how Chmielnik was unique for the fact that its Jews were engaged in “‘stuffing’ geese; that is, raising and pasturing fat geese to sell to Jews for religious Jewish holidays.”¹⁹⁰ According to Joseph Kiman, the town “exported a lot of feathers from geese to the United States. Many Jews were engaged in the raising of geese that were later sent to the larger

¹⁸⁷ This same sobriquet was used by former resident of Chmielnik, A. Steinfeld, to describe his hometown. See: Testimony of A. Sztajnfeld [Steinfeld], Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/524, 1. Interestingly, according to Y. Shmulevitsh, himself a native of Kielce, Poland, states that the heavily Jewish shtetls of central Poland, not far from Kielce—Chmielnik certainly included among these—were designated by this particular moniker. See: Y. Shmulevitsh, “In the ‘Estates of the King of Paupers,’” *Forverts* [New York], September 15, 1978, 3. L[eon] Rodal, also a Yiddish journalist and native of Kielce, likewise states that the towns in the district of Kielce were known by this same nickname. See: L[eon] Rodal, “What Is Happening in Kielce?: The Jewish ‘Flying Brigade’ in the ‘Estates of the King of Paupers.’ Round Trip of the Kielce Aid Committee Delegation for German Refugees,” *Kieltser tsaytung* [Kielce, Poland], November 25, 1938, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Esther Lederman and Ezjel Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives: Esther's Story: Followed by the Same Events as Remembered by Ezjel Lederman, Her Husband, and Bogdan Zal, Their Rescuer* ([S.l.]: Booksurge Publishing, 2007), 134.

¹⁸⁹ Morris Kwasniewski, interview by Richard Bassett, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995.

¹⁹⁰ Y. Shmulevitsh, “In the ‘Estates of the King of Paupers,’” 3.

cities of Warsaw and Lodz.”¹⁹¹ Such was the case with Moyshe Glajt, the father of Max Glait (née Melech Glajt), who raised and fattened geese for slaughter. In fact, Glait’s father wanted him to follow in his line of work by becoming a ritual slaughterer, so that Glait could slaughter the fattened geese for export to larger Polish cities.¹⁹² Likewise, the maternal grandfather of Gisele Weiss, whose mother, Mania Poper Cherston (b. 1922) was a native of Chmielnik, was in the goose breeding trade.¹⁹³ In this same vein, the Garfinkel siblings recalled how Chmielnik’s goose sausage was sold throughout Poland and exported to Germany, while “the goose feathers and down were sent to the United States to make pillows and bedding. The quills went to France for use as toothpicks. Even the goose droppings were converted into fertilizer.”¹⁹⁴

But geese were not everything. Among the town’s mostly lower middle-class Jewish population there were a few wealthy industrialist families whose livelihood was tied to natural resources. For example, Chmielnik featured a beer brewery owned by Itche Meir Domb, and leather factories, some of which were owned by the Gutman family and employed a large number of Jews. On Busker veg [Busko, i.e., Busko Zdrój Way], just outside of town, stood the

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 2. Apparently, the revenue acquired by Chmielnik’s Jews via the sale of goose meat and goose-products provided most of the financial aid needed to support the local Jewish community. Millions of slaughtered geese would be exported annually, and according to former Chmielnik resident, Yosef Kleinert, this business lay entirely in Jewish hands. See also: Yosef Kleinert, “Between Two World Wars,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 513; Ann Nudelman, telephone interview with author, written transcript, September 1, 2012.

¹⁹² Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989.

¹⁹³ Gisele Weiss, telephone interview with author, written transcript, May 16, 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 30. See also: Penina Weinberg-Cohen, “Fifty Years Ago,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 221.

Blanks' sawmill, which produced planks of wood that came from the forests—likewise owned by the Blank family. This industry also employed a large number of Jews, bookkeepers, and unskilled laborers. On Keltser veg [Kielce Way] stood lime kilns, which produced some of the finest lime in the region. The kilns' owner was Shimen Koyfman [Kaufman], who also owned a nearby lumberyard.

Jewish Life in Chmielnik Between the World Wars

Jewish postwar accounts describe Chmielnik in the Second Polish Republic as predominantly Jewish and traditional. According to the recollections of the five surviving Garfinkel children: Nathan Garfinkel, Bela Soloway Hurtig, Sonia Nothman, Helen Greenspun, and Regina Muskovitz,

Despite occasional outbursts of anti-Semitism, life in Chmielnik before World War II had a tranquil rhythm set by the seasons, Jewish holidays, and the Shabbat, or Sabbath. School and play occupied the children; managing their households and caring for their families consumed the women, while synagogue attendance and business transactions absorbed the men.¹⁹⁵

Chmielnik was so decidedly Jewish that even the secretary of the town's city-hall was a Jew. Moreover, according to one memoirist, Chmielnik was supposedly "the only Polish city to have a Jewish postman."¹⁹⁶ On Saturdays—the Jewish Sabbath day—Chmielnik's Jewish majority was particularly omnipresent. In Penina Weinberg-Cohen's words, on that day, the

¹⁹⁵ Hagstrom, *Sara's Children*, 30.

¹⁹⁶ Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 3. Nonetheless, Kiman further relates that in 1937, this same postman was said to have been dismissed without any reason—possibly a sign of growing antisemitism. Former resident of Chmielnik, Marta Cherston (née Poper), bolsters Kiman's claim about the Jewish postman, stating that this individual had held his position for many years. Nevertheless, he was ultimately forced to leave his job—due to the fact that he was a Jew—which was then promptly taken over by a Gentile. Marta Cherston, interview by Leo Rechter, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Flushing, NY, May 23, 1995.

Gentile peasants from the outlying villages did not even bother to enter the center of town, since they could neither buy nor sell anything in Chmielnik on that sacred day of the week.¹⁹⁷ David Newman echoes these sentiments by stating that on *Shabes* and *yontoyvim* [i.e., religious Jewish holidays] the stores in town were closed, since small trade was overseen by Chmielnik's Jewish majority. As such, on those special days, "one got the impression that the population of Chmielnik was 100 percent Jewish."¹⁹⁸

Former Jewish residents remembered the physical layout of Chmielnik in both written and oral testimonies as a highly Jewish space, overtly marked by its various Jewish institutions and shops owned primarily by Jewish shopkeepers. Similarly, a hand-drawn map of the town is included in the Chmielnik memorial book, sketched by Mary Kleinhandler (née Scheiber).¹⁹⁹

The town's Gentile minority attended the Catholic Holy Trinity Church (Pol. *Kościół Trójcy Świętej*)—a prominent structure with sturdily-built walls that took up a full block between Busker gas and Shidlever gas.²⁰⁰ Other religious structures in town, aside from the aforementioned synagogue, included the two large religious houses of study (Yid. *bote-medroshim*). One of these was situated 40 meters from the synagogue and was referred to as the 'common house of study,' which simply meant that it was established and frequented by non-Hasidim, who had their own, separate house of study. "The common house of study was a large,

¹⁹⁷ Penina Weinberg-Cohen, "Fifty Years Ago," 221.

¹⁹⁸ Newman, *Hope's Reprise*, 2.

¹⁹⁹ A copy of this map (in English translation) is included as a point of reference in the appendix to this work.

²⁰⁰ Freidman, "The *Shtetl* as I Remember It," 254. A postcard depicting the church in the early 20th century is included in the appendix.

attractive building with several divisions. Among them [were] the kehilla, yeshiva, women's synagogue [i.e., prayer gallery inside the synagogue], [and] two apartments for two beadles."²⁰¹ The Hasidic house of study was predicated on religious study, and at one point, contained up to 200 young, male students, who came from various classes: wealthy, middle-class, and poor.²⁰²

Also situated nearby the synagogue—just behind it, on Shul gas [i.e., Synagogue Street] across from the old and new Jewish cemeteries—was a shelter (Yid. *hegdesh*)²⁰³ that was maintained by the local Jewish community. It received poor travelers, impoverished and ailing individuals, and mentally unbalanced residents of Chmielnik.²⁰⁴ According to William M. Glicksman, the *hegdesh* was a regular and important feature of Jewish communities in Poland that dated back several generations. Furthermore, it was part of a network of welfare institutions supported by the given community. When individuals in-need came to the *hegdesh*, they were “cared for by permanent occupants of the institution who were known as *Anshey Hekdesh*. These

²⁰¹ Mordechai Gutman, “Small Synagogues and Houses of Study,” 543.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid., 542; Yechiel Gotovizne, “Chmielnik Before the First World War,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 232. The Yiddish word that I have transliterated above as *hegdesh*, in keeping with the late Yiddish linguist, Uriel Weinreich (1926-1967), is derived from the Hebrew, in which it is pronounced *hekdes*. The movement from the Hebrew -k to the Yiddish -g is due to a shift between velar and uvular consonants—in this case, the voiceless -k and the voiced -g. This pattern may also be seen, for example, in the shift between the Hebrew word *hakdama*, to the Yiddish word *hagdome*.

²⁰⁴ Freidman, “The *Shtetl* as I Remember It,” 255; Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2-3.

Anshey Hekdesh were available to spend a night at the home of a sick person who needed help; they also would take care of a burial, for a stated fee.”²⁰⁵

The *hegdesh* is described more derogatorily by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog as, “the city hospice, a miserable construction on the edge of town, ‘somewhere out beyond the bathhouse.’”²⁰⁶ They further remark that in the shtetl vocabulary—in other words, in Yiddish—the *hegdesh* “has become synonymous with the most wretched slum.”²⁰⁷ These negative portrayals of this particular welfare institution are also more in line with the manner in which Natan M. Meir, in his recent publication on the shtetl’s marginal entities, *Stepchildren of the Shtetl: The Destitute, Disabled, and Mad of Jewish Eastern Europe, 1800-1939*, presents the *hegdesh*. In Meir’s estimation, the *hegdesh* was a “poorhouse”—a site in which “undesirables” resided: “The hekdesch was for the poorest of the poor and the lowest of the low; in general, it was meant for those who had nowhere else to go and no one to support them.”²⁰⁸

Despite its somewhat taboo status, Meir avers that the *hegdesh*’s location in the shtetl was quite central, near the *shul-hoyf* (synagogue courtyard) or in the *shul-gas* (synagogue street), close to the prayer houses and houses of study (Heb. *batei midrash*). Although Meir’s general argument is that the *hegdesh* was one of the principal symbols of those who were most

²⁰⁵ William M. Glicksman, *Jewish Social Welfare as Described in the Memorial (Yizkor) Books (Studies in Jewish Communal Activity)* (Philadelphia: M. E. Kalish Folkshul, 1976), 21.

²⁰⁶ Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 203.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. Similarly, historian Natan M. Meir presents an old Yiddish adage that likewise attributes filth and abandonment to the *hegdesh*: “‘*shmutsik vi in altn hekdesch*’ (‘dirty as in the old hekdesch’).” Natan M. Meir, *Stepchildren of the Shtetl: The Destitute, Disabled, and Mad of Jewish Eastern Europe, 1800-1939* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 68.

²⁰⁸ Meir, *Stepchildren of the Shtetl*, 63, 65-66.

marginalized by shtetl society, he also agrees that in cases where the *hegdesh* was more centrally located, this may have been an indication that the *hegdesh* was actually well-integrated within the local Jewish milieu.²⁰⁹ Indeed, as previously mentioned, the *hegdesh* in Chmielnik was centrally located, rather close to the synagogue, on Shul gas. Perhaps that is why the *hegdesh* is discussed within the context of Chmielnik as being a significant institution—even if it was said to always house beggars who could have served as prototypes from Mendele Moykher-Sforim’s short story, *Fishke der krumer* [Fishke the Lame].²¹⁰

The Rise of Zionism in Chmielnik

The traditional, semi-tranquil life of Chmielnik’s Jews had satisfied most of the generations prior to World War I. But the world around this small town was changing, and the new generations sensed it. The sleepy ways of this town no longer held the same appeal for the youth growing up during the interwar period. For this reason, former Chmielnik resident Gitla Fastag (née Shulsinger) commented that when the youth grew up, they would try to go to America, since “there was nothing for them to do in Chmielnik.”²¹¹ Or, for the sizable number of Jewish youths in Chmielnik who embraced Zionism, Poale Zion—particularly Poale Zion-Left—

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 71.

²¹⁰ Mendele Moykher-Sforim [i.e., Mendele the book peddler] is credited with being the “grandfather” of modern Yiddish literature. The author’s authentic name was Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (1836-1917) and *Fishke der krumer* was published in 1869. The novel revolves around a simpleminded handicapped man who relates the story of his life in the Jewish underworld to Mendele, the book peddler, and Alter, a bookseller. This work, like other emerging examples of European literature at the time, brought a new focus to poverty, society’s lower rungs, and issues of morality. For further details about Mendele Moykher-Sforim, his life, and publications, see for instance: Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 81-127.

²¹¹ Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012.

offered yet another potential route out of this status quo existence in the form of left wing politics, as well as the possibility of going on “aliyah” to the Jewish homeland.

Former Jewish residents of Chmielnik remember the growing influence of Zionist ideology of some variety among the younger generation. Among the leading Zionist activists in Chmielnik was an individual named Isachar Kanercukier,²¹² who in 1919, helped establish the town’s first Zionist association, a branch of the Jewish scouts’ organization known as Hashomer Hatzair [i.e., The Young Guard].²¹³ As early as 1918, Kanercukier’s name appears in the short-lived Polish-language monthly youth periodical, *Moriah* [Vienna, Austria], among a listing of Jewish youths who aided in fundraising efforts on behalf of the two Zionist-leaning monthlies, *Moriah* and *Haszomer* [Vienna, Austria] (affiliated with the Hashomer Hatzair organization).²¹⁴ He was also instrumental in founding Zionist branches in other towns, and in organizing evening courses of Hebrew and Tanach. Chmielnik native, Uri Diamant (b. 1917), remembers Kanercukier in particular, for teaching him how to play chess and for introducing him to all sorts of cultural literature by Jewish writers such as Theodor Herzl, Ber Borokhov, Mendele Moykher-

²¹² One such example of Kanercukier’s strong involvement in the Zionist movement may be seen in light of an article published in 1926 in which he is mentioned in conjunction with Chmielnik among a lengthy list of individuals throughout Poland who have donated money toward the “Geulat ha-Arets Ring,” (Redemption of the Land Circle). This fundraising event, whose aim was the purchase of land in Palestine, was conducted under the patronage of Yitzhak Gruenbaum, a Zionist leader in interwar Poland who would subsequently become a leading figure in the Jewish Agency executive in Palestine. Although not explicitly stated in the newspaper column, the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (or the Jewish United Fund) had a land-redemption model that had consolidated by the time British rule came into effect (c. 1920). “Geulat ha-Arets Ring Under the Protectorate of Deputy Yitzhak Grinboym [Yitzhak Gruenbaum],” *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], December 9, 1926, 3; Naftali Greenwood, “Immigration to Israel: ‘The Redeemers of the Land.’” Jewish Virtual Library. October 18, 1999. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-redeemers-of-the-land-quot> (accessed 6-1-21).

²¹³ Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 98.

²¹⁴ “List of the ‘Moriah’ and ‘Haszomer’ Press Funds,” *Moriah* [Vienna, Austria], February 1, 1918, 225.

Sforim, and Sholem Aleichem.²¹⁵ As a result of his activism and popularity, Kanercukier was ultimately elected one of the town's council representatives in 1929. At the time, Kanercukier was listed as being a merchant and a Zionist.²¹⁶

The Zionist contingency in Chmielnik founded several Jewish enterprises: the town's first Jewish library, named for the Yiddish writer, I. L. Peretz;²¹⁷ a "Tarbut" school;²¹⁸ Hebrew courses; a Yiddish-speaking "TSYSHO" [i.e., Yiddish for Central Yiddish School Organization] public school that catered mainly to the children of poorer families;²¹⁹ and amateur

²¹⁵ Uri Diamant, interview by Naomi Oron, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Rehovot, Israel, February 9, 1998.

²¹⁶ Tzadok Kanercukier, "Isachar Kanercukier," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 463; Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 94, 106.

²¹⁷ According to the aforementioned Ezriel Sametband, in 1916, this library's administrative body voted in a contingent of Poale Zion-Left as its majority. Among the various efforts spearheaded by this leadership were workshops for organizing workers, methods in reading, and evening courses for those who could neither read nor write. See: Ezriel Sametband, "Life during the First World War," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 278; Sabor, *Schtetl*, 88. Morris Kwasniewski further added that Chmielnik had several libraries, which were both Jewish and Gentile-run. However, of all of these, the largest one was run by the town's Poale Zion-Left contingency. Morris Kwasniewski, interview by Richard Bassett, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995.

²¹⁸ For additional information regarding the network of Zionist schools run by Tarbut in Poland, see for example: Adina Bar-El, *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, s.v. "Tarbut" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tarbut> (accessed 9-8-12).

²¹⁹ Blatman, s.v. "Chmielnik," 15. For further information about TSYSHO, an acronym for "Di Tsentrale Yidishe Shul-Organizatsye (Central Yiddish School Organization)," see: Joshua D. Zimmerman, *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, s.v. "Tsysho" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tsysho> (accessed 9-8-12). For a discussion about the Poale Zion-Left and its role—as well as that of the Bund—in conjunction with the Tsysho school system, see: Samuel D. Kassow, "The Left Poalei Tsiyon in Interwar Poland," in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, edited by Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 76-77.

performances. It was also from among this contingent that some of the first Zionist pioneer groups were forged, and several of their members sent on “aliyah” to Palestine.²²⁰

Notwithstanding Zionist developments, many of the modern educational institutions in Chmielnik were not long-lived—due to lacking funds and a shortage of teachers.²²¹ Significantly, Jewish schools in Chmielnik such as TSYSHO were forced to close before the fall of 1939. This is because, as Bernard Wasserstein states, “TSYSHO schools suffered from chronic financial difficulties ... [and] the Great Depression accentuated TSYSHO’s plight.”²²² For example, I. D. G. relates in his autobiography how his mother enrolled him at the age of eight (c. 1924) in the TSYSHO elementary school, but that “today, the school no longer exists in the town.”²²³ In a similar vein, D. P., who recorded his own autobiography in c. 1934, states that the elementary school that taught Yiddish, Yiddish grammar, and history—the same one that catered to poor children—was “liquidated, due to financial short-comings.”²²⁴

Shlomo Schweizer (1903-2002), who was active both in Poale Zion-Right and Poale Zion-Left, observed that in Chmielnik and the surrounding region—what Schweizer referred to as the “Chmielnik Republic”—there was a major attachment to Poale Zion, in general, and that

²²⁰ Kleinert, “Between Two World Wars,” 511.

²²¹ Blatman, s.v. “Chmielnik,” 15; Kleinert, “Between Two World Wars,” 511-512.

²²² Wasserstein, *On the Eve*, 324.

²²³ I. D. G. submitted his autobiography to YIVO in the third and final round of its autobiography contest, held in 1939. Like D. P., who came from an impoverished family, so too, I. D. G. (b. 1916) came from a working-class family in the carpentry and woodwork business. I. D. G., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO’s Writing Contest, c. 1939, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3691, 4.

²²⁴ D. P., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO’s Writing Contest, c. 1934, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3692, 12-13.

this could be perceived especially during city council elections. In Schweizer's words: "Very quickly the organization ruled the Jewish street. The Jewish population comprised 80% of the [general] population. At all the later elections in independent Poland, Poale Zion in Chmielnik had five councilmen in the city council out of the twenty-four selected ... At all the elections Poale Zion received the largest number of votes."²²⁵

The most popular of the various Zionist groups in Chmielnik and the catalyst behind many of the aforementioned enterprises was that of the Poale Zion-Left, which was both Zionist and Marxist in orientation.²²⁶ In Malka Owsiany's words, of all the various Jewish parties, the strongest one in Chmielnik was that of Poale Zion-Left, which was "literally a stronghold for the organization."²²⁷ Active in Chmielnik already before World War I, it tended to attract members of the Jewish working-class who wanted to change the status-quo of the "old establishment" and bridge the gap between the upper and lower echelons of society. It also strove, more than any other Zionist party, to synthesize the opposing forces of the diaspora and Palestine.²²⁸

According to the 1934 autobiography of D. P., his (unnamed) father was one of the organizers behind Chmielnik's Poale Zion-Left branch. Furthermore, D. P.'s acute observations of the organization noted that it "took in many of the skilled crafts, [as well as] physical, and

²²⁵ Shlomo Schweizer, *Shures Poaley-Tsiyon: portretn* [Rows of Poale Zion: Portraits] (Tel-Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Perets, 1981), 181-182.

²²⁶ For further information about Poale Zion-Left, see: Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe*, 46; Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915-1926* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 136-161; N. Kantorowicz, *The Zionist Labor Movement in Poland (1918-1939)* (New York: Labor Zionist Organization of America, [1968?], 37-41.

²²⁷ Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseyt*, 46.

²²⁸ See: Kassow, "The Left Poalei Tsiyon," 71.

intellectual workers,” and that it was constantly growing and expanding, “because it was the only proletarian organization in our city.”²²⁹

The children’s movement that was affiliated with Poale Zion-Left was called Yungbor, an abbreviation for “Yung Borokhovisten” [i.e., Young Borokhovists]. It was named for the Labor Zionism founder and strong proponent of Yiddish, Ber Borokhov (1881-1917), and was chiefly a scouting organization beginning in 1927 for children ages 10 to 14.²³⁰ Yungbor was popular in Chmielnik almost from its inception. According to an article in the March 1, 1928, edition of the children’s newspaper, *di Kinder-velt* [The Children’s World; Warsaw, Poland], the Yungbor organization, which was founded a few months prior, now had (only) 16 members in Chmielnik. The reason for the relatively small number of members and difficulty of the organizational work, in the words of the article, “School Children Must Work for Master Craftsmen,” was because a number of the children who went to school before midday also had to do apprentice work in the afternoons.

As for the type of functions conducted by the “Yungborists,” the article states that: “We oversee special talks about Borokhov’s teachings. We read stories and also articles from ‘*di Kinder-velt*.’”²³¹ The article concludes by asking for readers—particularly those familiar with the activities of Warsaw’s “Yungborists”—to write in and share what forms these activities took in

²²⁹ D. P., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO’s Writing Contest, c. 1934, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3692, 8.

²³⁰ Bina Garncarska-Kadary, *Di linke Poaley-Tsiyon in Poyln biz der Tsveyter Velt-Milkhome* [Poale Zion-Left in Poland Until the Second World War] (Tel-Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Perets, 1995), 334-335.

²³¹ H. Dzialoszycki and B. Guza, “School Children Must Work for Master Craftsmen,” *di Kinder-velt* [Warsaw, Poland], March 1, 1928, 17.

Poland's capital, so that Chmielnik's "Yungborists" could also create these same forms for themselves, provided this would not involve excessive expenses. The article is signed by "H. Dzialoszycki and B. Guza (students from the 4th division of the Jewish Elementary School in Chmielnik)." ²³²

Gitel Garfinkel-Bresco (née Glajt, b. 1910), a native of Chmielnik who wrote a diary in Yiddish during her later years in Montreal, recalled attending a Poale Zion-Left school and being active in the Yungbor organization in her hometown. The aspiring teacher of Yiddish who dreamt of attending the Jewish Teachers' Seminary in Vilna with the help of Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, ²³³ states that she and another local Poale Zion-Left activist established the organization's Chmielnik branch:

I also, together with Shmuel Szentel, the leader of the Poale Zion-Left youth organization in Chmielnik, founded a students' group to which my girlfriends from the Polish school, belonged. We held lessons on Jewish history, Yiddish literature, and Borokhovism, planting in them a love for the mother tongue, Yiddish, Yiddish culture, love for the Jewish people, and for Eretz-Israel. I led the Yungbor, notwithstanding the fact that I was busy several hours of the day ... in order to prepare myself for the Jewish Teachers' Seminary exams. ²³⁴

Although Glajt was ultimately unable to attend the Vilna Seminary, due to financial constraints, she continued to be active in educating Chmielnik's Jewish youth—particularly poor and

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Garfinkel-Bresco explicitly mentions Ringelblum, "who was a member of the central committee of the Jewish secular school, 'TSYSHO,'" within the context of being sent study materials to prepare for the Seminary's entrance exams. She further states that Ringelblum and a Dr. Eisenstadt subsequently examined her and approved her as an incoming student of the Seminary. Gitel Garfinkel-Bresco, "Memories of My 80 Year Lifespan" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), typescript.

²³⁴ Ibid.

underprivileged ones—in how to read and write Yiddish. Indeed, these fundamental skills were among the central priorities of the Poale Zion-Left, Borokhovism, and Yungbor.

Yet another youth organization affiliated with Poale Zion-Left, which worked in parallel with Yungbor, was that of Yugnt [i.e., Youth], founded in Tarnów and Kraków, Galicia in 1904.²³⁵ According to Polish-born and raised sociologist, Moyshe Kligberg (1901-1975), who was invested in the problems of Jewish working-class youth, Yugnt—like Poale Zion-Left—was, in general, “categorically Yiddishist” in its orientation.²³⁶ It also participated in TSYSHO schools and placed a major emphasis on the education of Jewish working-class youth, which it addressed by implementing special community evening schools.

In Chmielnik, as elsewhere in Poland, Yugnt took root in 1919,²³⁷ which may be seen in the heading of an article published in *di Kinder-velt* in 1929: “The Yungborists in Chmielnik Have Celebrated in Unison the 10th Year Anniversary Celebration of the Local ‘Yugnt’ Organization.”²³⁸ The article itself relates how a public celebration was held in Chmielnik on Friday, March 15 [1929], and that the local “Yungborists” wore their specially designated

²³⁵ Jacob Kenner, *Kvershmit (1897-1947)* [Cross-Section (1897-1947)] (New York: Central Committee of the Poale Zion-Left in the United States and Canada, 1947), 107.

²³⁶ Moyshe Kligberg, “The Jewish Youth Movement in Poland Between the Two World Wars,” in *Shtudyen vegn Yidn in Poyln, 1919-1939* [Studies on Polish Jewry, 1919-1939, edited by Joshua A. Fishman (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1974), 221.

²³⁷ Kligberg, who does not single out any specific sites, notes that Yugnt groups already began to organize themselves in Poland as of 1919. Thus, Chmielnik’s actions were entirely concurrent with developments at this same time in other parts of Poland. See: Ibid.

²³⁸ Toybe and Beyle, “The Yungborists in Chmielnik Have Celebrated in Unison the 10th Year Anniversary Celebration of the Local ‘Yugnt’ Organization,” *di Kinder-velt* [Warsaw, Poland], March 1, 1929, 21.

costumes, which we are told, “made an extremely nice impression.”²³⁹ The Chmielnik Yungbor’s choir also sang songs, and its gymnastics group organized a march with flags in hand, which greatly appealed to the audience.

The Yugnt celebration continued into the afternoon of the following day [Saturday, March 16], when member, “Kener,”²⁴⁰ presented a reading and public talk, and in the evening, at which time a tea “get-together” was held until 10:00 p.m. Also invited to this affair were “Yungborists” from the nearby towns of Staszów and Busko-Zdrój. Indeed, we are informed that the female “Yungborists” from Staszów even taught the Chmielnik “Yungborists” new dances and songs with which they had not been previously familiar.²⁴¹ The article concludes by emphasizing that the Chmielnik “Yungborists” hope to draw in more members, since Yungbor’s sympathies lie with the working class, and there are certainly many Jewish working-class children in Chmielnik.

Clearly, based on the aforementioned sample articles, both “Yungbor” and “Yugnt” worked together in some capacity to help promote the political ideology of Poale Zion-Left, Ber Borokhov, and the Marxist class struggle, in particular. Furthermore, it is evident from the aforementioned descriptions that these were popular youth groups—not only in Chmielnik—but

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 22. “Kener” refers to Yankev Kener (1884-1951), or “Jacob Kenner,” who was considered to be the father of the “Yugnt” movement—particularly in Galicia. Kener was also selected to be the chairman of the “Yugnt’s” Central Committee Executive prior to the outbreak of World War I. Furthermore, he was a friend and party comrade of historian, Emanuel Ringelblum, who was likewise active in the Poale Zion-Left and Yugnt. See: Garncarska-Kadary, *Di linke Poaley-Tsiyon in Poyln*, 330; Kenner, *Kvershnit (1897-1947)*, 110; Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?*, 23, 29, 35.

²⁴¹ Toybe and Beyle, “The Yungborists in Chmielnik,” 21.

also in other Polish localities, and that the culture of Jewish organizational life was in itself prominent, fashionable, and widespread in interwar Poland.

The second largest political-ideological group in Chmielnik during the interwar period was that of Poale Zion-Right, which was non-Marxist and favored a more moderate socialist program than Poale Zion-Left. It also placed less emphasis on class struggle, and advocated Hebrew rather than Yiddish, in contradistinction to Poale Zion-Left.²⁴² The two factions split in 1918-1920, as a reaction to “renewed aliyah and to the Russian revolution.”²⁴³ Prior to this balkanization, which occurred officially at the fifth conference of the World Union of Poale Zion in Vienna in 1920, the two factions had been known as a single entity: Poale Zion.

The autobiography penned by I. D. G. suggests that Poale Zion-Right enjoyed great popularity in Chmielnik in the 1930s, particularly among the younger generation. In contrast to D. P., I. D. G. became affiliated with the children’s organization, “Fray Skoyt” (Yiddish for Free Scout)—associated with Poale Zion-Right—probably around 1932/1933.²⁴⁴ Apparently, I. D. G. was attracted to this organization on account of some newly found friends who were politically-inclined, and with whom he became engaged in discussions. Early on in his affiliation with the organization, I. D. G. was appointed secretary, and not long thereafter, group leader. He relates how he found inspiration in the organization—via their “Hora” dances (which he mastered)—at

²⁴² Alfred Katz, *Poland’s Ghettos at War* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), 18.

²⁴³ Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, 136.

²⁴⁴ Between its affiliated youth movements, “Dror” (Hebrew for freedom) and “Fray Skoyt” (free scout), the Poale-Zion-Right had an estimated 10,000 members in Poland. Katz, *Poland’s Ghettos at War*, 18.

meetings, and how he read a lot; at the discussions he was able to demonstrate his wealth of knowledge to the other members.²⁴⁵

Although both of the left-leaning Poale Zion factions had their own ground upon which to stand in Chmielnik, it appears that the Bund—which had a stronghold in many other Jewish communities in Poland—did not gain true momentum in this mostly working class and heavily Jewish town.²⁴⁶ This reality is supported by the Shoah Foundation testimonies of Morris Kwasniewski and Uri Diamant, neither of whom was a member of the Jewish Labor Bund. Rather, Kwasniewski started out at age seven attending the Zionist organization, Hashomer Hatzair, with a cousin. But later on, he gravitated to the youth Communist organization.²⁴⁷ Diamant started out and remained with the Hashomer Hatzair organization, becoming a life-long Zionist and even training for future life in “Eretz Israel” by going on “hachshara” [i.e., Zionist pioneer training] at age 17 in 1934.²⁴⁸

In the words of Kwasniewski concerning the Bund’s non-presence in Chmielnik, “Chmielnik had all the Jewish organizations with the exception of the Bund. The Bund could not

²⁴⁵ I. D. G., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO’s Writing Contest, c. 1939, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3691, 10-11.

²⁴⁶ Sametband, “Life during the First World War,” 278; Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 46.

²⁴⁷ Morris Kwasniewski, interview by Richard Bassett, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995.

²⁴⁸ Uri Diamant, interview by Naomi Oron, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Rehovot, Israel, February 9, 1998. Literally, “hachshara” (also spelled alternate ways in Latin characters) means “preparation” in Hebrew. It is a term used in reference to training programs and agricultural centers in Europe and elsewhere. At these sites Zionist youth were taught technical skills in preparation for emigration to Israel and kibbutz life. For further details about how the “hachshara’s” pioneer training penetrated the Zionist youth of interwar shtetl Poland, see for instance: Samuel D. Kassow, “Community and Identity in the Interwar *Shtetl*,” in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, edited by Yisrael Gutman (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1989), 218; Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl*, 28.

go into Chmielnik ... Because there were no members.”²⁴⁹ Diamant, in an almost identical vein, remarked that Chmielnik’s Jewish youth belonged to all sorts of Zionist groups, “though not especially to the Bund.”²⁵⁰ In sharp contrast, however, to the Bund’s absence in Chmielnik, it is worth mentioning the strong presence felt by the religious factions in this same town—specifically, Agudas Yisroel.²⁵¹

Unlike the aforementioned Poale Zion, the religious political organizations in Chmielnik were not well-organized. Despite their division into various groups, they enjoyed the support of the influential Union of Handworkers. Of these various religious splinter groups, Agudas Yisroel was the most noteworthy and well-organized.²⁵² Established in Chmielnik in 1925, the “Agudah” founded a Beys-Yankev (Beth Jacob) school in which hundreds of religious and less-religious Chmielnik girls were educated.²⁵³ The school system was, in fact, so successful, that it was “also

²⁴⁹ Morris Kwasniewski, interview by Richard Bassett, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995.

²⁵⁰ Uri Diamant, interview by Naomi Oron, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Rehovot, Israel, February 9, 1998. See also: Sametband, “Life during the First World War,” 278.

²⁵¹ Founded in 1912, Agudas Yisroel, ostensibly began purely as a religious movement that sought to unite all Orthodox Jews and defend them against the negative effects of secularization. In Poland, its greatest stronghold was among Gerer Hasidim in formerly Russian-controlled “Congress Poland,” which also happened to be the seat of Chmielnik. See: Wasserstein, *On the Eve*, 55; Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914 to 2008* (Oxford; Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 64-65.

²⁵² Peretz Pasternak, “Agudas Yisroel,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 638.

²⁵³ Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim* [*In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews*], 8. Helen Greenspun (née Garfinkel) and her sister, Sonia Nothman (née Garfinkel), were among the many Jewish girls in Chmielnik to attend the Beys-Yankev school. At that time, according to Greenspun, she and the Polish Gentile girls attended separate schools and did not fraternize with one another. Helen Greenspun, telephone interview no. 2 with author, written transcript, May 26, 2021. Sonia Nothman mentioned attending Beys-Yankev and then later, a second school, a Cheder called “Yardena.” Sonia Nothman, interview by Donna Miller, Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, USHMM Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive, Farmington Hills, Michigan, January 4, 1983.

recognized among non-religious circles. Many non-religious parents sent their children to learn in `Beys-Yankev.’” As a corollary, boys were educated at a number of yeshivas, the most famous of which was the Nowaredok (Yid. Novardok) Musar Yeshiva, `Beis Yosef.’²⁵⁴

The Economic Decline of the Town, and Its Response

The worsening financial situation in Poland—particularly toward the late 1930s—affected both the general and Jewish population of Chmielnik. Thus, there was a growing need in communities like Chmielnik for welfare aid.²⁵⁵ A number of different charitable agencies were established in the town during the interwar period to aid the poor and indigent. One of the leading establishments of this nature was a free loan society, established in Chmielnik in 1926, and formally known as the “*Kasa Dobroczynno-Bezprocentowa Gmilus-Chesed w Chmielniku*,” or the “*Yidishe Onprotsentike Kase Gmiles Khesed in Chmielnik*.”²⁵⁶

According to the aforementioned William M. Glicksman, tradesmen, itinerant peddlers, self-employed handicraftsmen, and a host of other struggling entrepreneurs were always lacking

²⁵⁴ Pasternak, “Agudas Yisroel,” 637; Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 46. Correspondence regarding the “Vaad Hayeshivot” institution, dated August 15, 1920, and written on the stationery of “`Beis-Josif” w Chmielniku” [Beis Yosef in Chmielnik], may be viewed in the YIVO Archives, Records of the Vaad Hayeshivot [Council of Yeshivot], 1924-1940, RG 25, Box 4, Folder 61. A copy of this document is included in the appendix to this work.

²⁵⁵ Poland’s monetary crisis in the 1930s was due, in part, to the world economic depression at that time. However, this hardship, coupled with that of growing Polish nationalism and xenophobia that advocated “economic war against the Jews,” found Polish Jewry in a particularly dire and economically dependent position. See: Steinlauf, “Jewish Politics and Youth Culture,” 97.

²⁵⁶ Blatman, s.v. “Chmielnik,” 15; Moyshe Zonshein, “The Free Loan Society,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 518; Penina Weinberg-Cohen, “Fifty Years Ago,” 222. The previously mentioned autobiographer, D. P., used stationery from the “Gmiles Khesed,” where he was employed as a bookkeeper, to write an introduction to the directors of YIVO. This stationery sample is included in the appendix. Similarly, a photo of the pre-World War II staff of Chmielnik’s free loan society is included in the appendix to this work.

the revenue necessary to maintain their source of livelihood. The banks generally refused to extend credit to such individuals, and this, in turn, resulted in the need for an institution that would provide low interest rates or interest-free loans. This need was fulfilled in the form of the free loan society found in nearly every Jewish community, of which Chmielnik was just one case example.²⁵⁷

Much of the institution's support came from the Joint Distribution Committee (otherwise known as the "Joint") headquarters in Warsaw. In 1933, the society had 384 members and gave away loans totaling 58,635 złoty (approximately 13,382 USD by today's standards).²⁵⁸ By 1938, Chmielnik's economic infrastructure—much of which was dependent on the maintenance, survival, and by-products of geese²⁵⁹—had grown so precarious, that the society was unable to fulfill the financial needs of its members. Members of the society's board began sending appeals by way of the Joint to Chmielnik *landsmanshaftn* (mutual aid societies) in North America, namely the United Chmielniker Relief Committee and the Chmielniker Sick and Benevolent Society in New York, and the Hebrew Chmielniker Aid Society in Toronto.²⁶⁰ In June 1938, the

²⁵⁷ Glicksman, *Jewish Social Welfare*, 62.

²⁵⁸ Blatman, s.v. "Chmielnik," 15; Zonshein, "The Free Loan Society," 518.

²⁵⁹ Some of the correspondence and an undated article from an unidentified Warsaw-based Yiddish newspaper, entitled, "The Geese-Keepers' Cries of Woe," make specific mention of the fact that the economic crisis in Chmielnik has had a direct negative impact on the upkeep of the town's geese. This, in turn, has hurt the overall community, since so much of its revenue is generated by the sale of geese and goose-products. See: YIVO Archives, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Landsmanshaftn Department, 1926-1950, RG 335.7, Subseries 2, Box 2, Folder 56. See, also: Nechemia [Norman] Gilmovsky, Correspondence from "The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc.," June 19, 1939, YIVO Archives, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Landsmanshaftn Department, 1926-1950, RG 335.7, Subseries 2, Box 2, Folder 56.

²⁶⁰ Zonshein, "The Free Loan Society," 519, 523-524. Correspondence with the aforementioned *landsmanshaftn*, primarily from 1938-1939, has been preserved in the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Landsmanshaftn Department. Also included in this collection are several loan appeals from Chmielnik, as well as a list of loans culminating in a sum of 35,002 [units of money not indicated] already issued by the Chmielnik-based

Joint transferred 1,500 złoty to the Chmielnik free loan society, for the purpose of providing financial aid to impoverished families that had lost their only means of income.²⁶¹

As a further outcome of this dire situation, the Joint attempted to generate donations, by agreeing to match whatever the *landsmanshaftn* gave, up to \$2,000. The following is an excerpt from one such plea made by the Joint to the Hebrew Chmielniker Aid Society in Toronto, dated August 29, 1938:

The Joint Distribution Committee is, of course, doing what it can to aid the Gemiloth Chessed Kassa²⁶² in Chmielnik, along with the other 870 kassas which the Joint Distribution Committee has helped to build up and continues to subvention throughout Poland. But, you can understand, that it is not possible for the Joint Distribution Committee to meet all of the urgent needs of these institutions. We can only do as much as our funds permit. It is, therefore, of vital importance for Landsmannschaften here, interested in aiding their brethren in the various communities in Poland, to make every effort to come to the aid of the Gemiloth Chessed Kassas which are the very backbone of Jewish self-help in Poland.

In this connection, may we explain that in order that Landsmannschaften in this country might be stimulated to give the greatest measure of assistance in [*sic*] behalf of Jews in their native communities abroad, the J.D.C. has recently made an arrangement with Landsmannschaft organizations whereby the J.D.C. will match amounts up to \$2,000, contributed by Landsmannschaften for the support of Gemiloth Chessed Kassa activities or other constructive projects to be undertaken in specific towns in Poland.²⁶³

“Gmiles Khesed” society to 364 residents of Chmielnik between August 1, 1937, until January 31, 1938. See: “List of Persons Who Borrowed Loans from the Free Aid Society during the Period 1 August 1937 until 31 January 1938,” YIVO Archives, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Landsmanshaftn Department, 1926-1950, RG 335.7, Subseries 2, Box 2, Folder 56.

²⁶¹ Blatman, s.v. “Chmielnik,” 15.

²⁶² Gemiloth Chessed Kassas [and other variant spellings] were Jewish free loan societies in which Jews could receive interest-free loans. The absence of interest stems from the fact that the Torah prohibits Jews from charging fellow Jews with interest. This tradition continues up until the present day in Jewish communities around the world.

²⁶³ Henrietta K. Buchman, Correspondence Concerning the “Gemiloth Chessed Kassa in Chmielnik,” August 29, 1938, YIVO Archives, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Landsmanshaftn Department, 1926-1950, RG 335.7, Subseries 2, Box 2, Folder 56, 1-2.

Indeed, a rallying cry on behalf of the Joint's new, matching donations initiative may be seen as late as August 24, 1939, as evidenced by a correspondence between the Joint and the United Chmielniker Relief Committee in New York.²⁶⁴

The financial situation in Chmielnik had become so dire by 1939 that it was mentioned specifically in the JDC's yearly budget. Therein is a section pertaining to the "Reconstruction Fund." This Fund aimed at helping Jewish communities in Poland that had fallen on challenging economic times, due to the combination of the Great Depression and the government-condoned anti-Jewish boycotts of Jewish shops, businesses, and other sources of livelihood. Within this section is a specific sub-section entitled "Fattening of Geese," in which attention is called to the fact that funding is especially needed for towns such as Chmielnik and nearby Chęciny. According to this document, the situation in Chmielnik had grown particularly critical since, "at Chmielnik all goose fattening coops have been pulled down by order of authorities," and "applications made by owners for installing them at other places, have been of now [*sic*] avail."²⁶⁵

As a result of this worsening situation, the report demonstrates in chart format that 3,400 złoty were allocated for the "G.CH. Kassas," the free loan society treasuries, from the "G.CH. fund" in 1938, of which only 1,305 złoty were repaid by the G.CH. Kassas that same year. In addition, 700 additional złoty were paid to the C.CH. Kassas in the first half of 1939, yet none of this sum was repaid as of the latter half of that same year. This chart clearly demonstrates that

²⁶⁴ Norman V. Gilmovsky, "Re: Chmielnik," August 24, 1939, YIVO Archives, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Landsmanshaftn Department, 1926-1950, RG 335.7, Subseries 2, Box 2, Folder 56.

²⁶⁵ JDC Archives, 1933-1944 New York Collection, Folder #807, "Budget of the American Joint Distribution Committee in Poland for the Second Half Year 1939," 1939.

the Chmielnik Jewish community was increasingly in debt to the free loan society treasuries—a situation that certainly never improved by the time of World War II’s outbreak in September 1939.²⁶⁶

Chmielnik’s Youth Migrate to Bigger Cities

By the 1930s, Chmielnik’s growing financial hardships, coupled with its paucity of professional and educational opportunities, found many Jewish youths feeling a general sense of discontent and entrapment, and facing a dead-end future. These sentiments are crystallized in the following closing words of autobiographer D. P., c. 1934: “Without a better society and an outlook on a better future, with constant jealous pursuits, I gravitate toward leaving this small, provincial place, where one spends his time on nothing. Oh! How quickly my youthful years have disappeared!”²⁶⁷

Gitel Garfinkel-Bresco, who provided private evening lessons in Yiddish and general subject matter to working class youths in Chmielnik, namely to young apprentices, expresses similar sentiments as D. P. in her own diary; that “once the tailor and shoemaker youths more or less already knew the trade, they went to the large cities. For they saw that in Chmielnik there was no future for them.”²⁶⁸ She further remarks that she herself was ultimately in the same

²⁶⁶ Ibid., under: “Appendix II, Table 3, Voivodship of Kielce.”

²⁶⁷ D. P., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO’s Writing Contest, c. 1934, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3692, 31.

²⁶⁸ Garfinkel-Bresco, “Memories of My 80 Year Lifespan.”

situation as her students: “I also became disgusted by the small town. I went to Lodz, where my brother, Wolf, had a knitwear factory.”²⁶⁹

The YIVO autobiographies confirm the trend of leaving home. Both D. P. and I. D. G. characterized Chmielnik as a small town, or *shtetl* in which they have little in the way of options. They both remark that they have no choice but to stop attending school at an early age and learn a trade, so as to help support the family. When I. D. G. overheard his father telling his mother one night that he [I. D. G.] would be finishing up the school year (the fourth division or grade) and then begin working in the shop [as a carpenter], “It was like a slap in the heart.”²⁷⁰ This is, in fact, what came to pass: following I. D. G.’s Bar-Mitzvah, his father made him abandon his studies, for the sake of becoming a regular worker in I. D. G.’s father’s [carpentry] shop.²⁷¹

I. D. G.’s small source of consolation, just prior to being pulled out of school, was a work that he wrote, entitled “Shloymele Longs for School.” In this clearly autobiographical tale, I. D. G. relates how a young boy—the son of a shoemaker—wants to continue his studies and learn something useful. But his father screams that he will never amount to a doctor or a lawyer, and accordingly, takes him out of school. As a result, Shloymele cannot help but envy the other children who are permitted to continue their studies, and greatly longs to return to school.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ I. D. G., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO’s Writing Contest, c. 1939, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3691, 8.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 10.

²⁷² Ibid., 8-9.

I. D. G. felt disenfranchised by his status quo and compelled to leave Chmielnik for the big city, where he hoped to find his rightful place:

... I decide that given these worst conditions, I must set out for the great unknown. First, I was thinking that I want[ed] to see if I have [had] the strength to exist without the assistance of my home. Also, the youth in town had begun to sit around doing nothing. I saw that my life here was without content. Mostly, people [would] walk back and forth on the “treading grounds.” Or they [would] gather together a few groszy from a whole week, and on Saturday [night?], sit in the bar, drinking beer and wasting their time on nonsense. And I can’t [couldn’t] get used to this. I decide[d] to set out for the great big world. After thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that the best [place for me] would be Warsaw, [because] it is the capital, and also the cultural center.²⁷³

In Warsaw, I. D. G. faced the harsh reality of trying to find a means of supporting himself via the same trade (i.e., carpentry and woodwork) that he was forced to learn from an early age, at his father’s side. He immediately realized the challenge of competing against professionally trained artisans who attended trade and engineering schools. Furthermore, the trade itself stood on a higher plane in Warsaw than it did in Chmielnik. Thus, I. D. G. was stuck having to accept whatever low-level, exploitative, and poorly paying positions he could muster up.²⁷⁴

In the case of D. P., who worked for a while both in a print shop and as a bookkeeper for Chmielnik’s Jewish free loan society, he was soon faced with unfavorable economic times, and no longer had a steady job. Accordingly, like I. D. G., he too decided to head to a larger city—Warsaw—where he hoped to find more job opportunities, and he could seek out a means of employment. Regarding this journey, which he made in 1932, he remarks, “... it was the first time in my life that I was traveling alone, without anybody’s help, in such a large city, replete

²⁷³ Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 23-25.

with all of its dangers.”²⁷⁵ Once in Warsaw, he sought out positions in print shops, but was disheartened by the high degree of unemployment among the city’s printing sector. For six weeks he strove to find a position, but eventually returned home, exasperated by his inability to acquire a stable job.²⁷⁶

But economic opportunity was not the only reason Chmielnik’s young people were leaving for the big cities. In many cases, the sentiments that Chmielnik had no future were also steeped in the impermeability of the older generation(s) to make religious concessions to modernity such as reading non-religious books, working on the Sabbath, and attending institutions of higher education,²⁷⁷ or in their unwillingness and inability to stand up for themselves in the face of heightening antisemitism. Indeed, several of the Chmielnik survivors featured in *Sara’s Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik* echo these very remarks. For example, Israel Steinfeld of Toronto states that antisemitism led to a growing political awareness among younger Chmielnik Jews. This, in turn, promoted the development of a generational gap. On one end of the spectrum stood the parents, who were absorbed in Orthodox (traditional) Judaism and shunned the outside world. Their stance was that “God would take care of

²⁷⁵ D. P., Autobiographical Submission for YIVO’s Writing Contest, c. 1934, YIVO Archives, Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland, 1932-1939, RG 4, File 3692, 27.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 27-28. Michael Steinlauf confirms the disheartening experiences recounted by D. P. and I. D. G., in the vocational and professional spheres. According to his observations regarding the children of the working class, it was they who were “shunted into seasonal and unskilled labor” and “a great many [of them] were unable to find work at all.” Steinlauf, “Jewish Politics and Youth Culture,” 97.

²⁷⁷ Penina Weinberg-Cohen alludes to the impermeability of the older generation, as well as the divergent drives between the parents’ and the children’s generations, when she remarks that: “The Jews in Chmielnik were religious ... Every new thought was considered heretical, Gentile, un-kosher. People kept their children close to them, as they did not trust them insofar as emigrating.” Penina Weinberg-Cohen, “Fifty Years Ago,” 222.

everything,”²⁷⁸ whereas their children stood at the other end of the spectrum. Unable to accept their parents’ unquestioning status quo approach, they turned to reading secular books filled with modern notions, questioned, and even rejected the system.²⁷⁹

Regina Garfinkel Muskovitz confirms the notion of a religious generational schism by using her father and brother as prime examples of these two divergent approaches. According to her, the traditional direction taken by her father had many limitations and did not lead to anything bearing fruit. In her words, “Why would anybody want to follow in a father’s footsteps? To go to synagogue and pray and barely make a living. The old lifestyle didn’t take you anywhere. The youth must have been looking for a way out. Jews couldn’t have a higher education. My brother was reading different books. Nathan was very devoted to the family but rebellious at the same time.”²⁸⁰ Nathan Garfinkel, though, was not an anomaly. There were clearly many Chmielnikers like him who grew up during the interwar years and were torn between their love for and loyalty to their family, while at the same time, felt stifled by their small-town surroundings and the outmoded forms of thinking and ideology that were so prevalent among the older generation/s.

Small-town life and its unswerving attitudes toward tradition, was yet another factor behind members of the younger generation leaving home—either on “*aliyah*” or simply, to larger cities in Poland—such as Warsaw and Łódź. For this reason, Bela Garfinkel Soloway Hurtig, the eldest of the Garfinkel daughters, asked her parents at age 12, to allow her to go live with

²⁷⁸ Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 26.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 27.

relatives in Łódź, which she found exciting and sparkling “as a cultural and commercial center.”²⁸¹ Additionally, she found that its urban milieu “offered a greater variety of activities, a higher quality of education, and more young people than Chmielnik.”²⁸² Although these two localities were only about 100 miles apart, they were light years removed in terms of their “old world” versus “new world” sensibilities. According to Bela, who much preferred Łódź over Chmielnik, it was markedly more forward.

This feeling of a generation gap may be seen in the following vignette from Chmielnik native Meir Mali (1920-2021), who recounts the first time he saw a car in the town. Chmielnik still used horse-drawn buggies as “the main mode of transportation,”²⁸³ so when the first automobile was spotted on the streets of Chmielnik, it was such a major novelty that a crudely rendered report started to circulate that there was a cart that moved on its own without any accompanying horses. Following the town’s initial confrontation with an automobile, Mali remarked that the Kleinhendler²⁸⁴ family purchased a Benz car. That, in turn, soon became the talk of the town.²⁸⁵ This seemingly insignificant memory helps illuminate the widening gap between major Polish cities like Warsaw and small towns like Chmielnik, where the technological advances of the modern world were still rare. It is no wonder that the younger

²⁸¹ Ibid., 58.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Referred to elsewhere in this work as Kleinhandler.

²⁸⁵ Mali does not specify when the first automobile was spotted in Chmielnik or when the Kleinhendler family purchased a Benz car. However, given that he was born in 1920, it was quite likely at least in the mid-1920s. See: Świętokrzyski Sztetl, *Spacerkiem po chmielnickim sztetlu* [“Walking Around the Shtetl in Chmielnik”], YouTube Video, 18:41, February 26, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUE5k-u5CLQ>.

generation felt they were out of place here and wanted to be part of the momentum of progress, rather than remain static in their hometown.

In his book, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt* [The Way to Our Youth], Max Weinreich (1894-1969)²⁸⁶ reinforces these observations with regard to Chmielnik's Jewish youth in the 1930s. His assessment was that this was a "youth without a future"²⁸⁷ that "either assimilated, emigrated, or flocked to political organizations, particularly Zionist ones, in an effort to escape their hopeless situations,"²⁸⁸ rather than dealing with them—in Weinreich's opinion, in a more mature manner—in the here and now. In summation, Weinreich viewed the situation as follows: "The path of the Jewish youth is fenced in not only economically and politically, but also by psychological obstacles."²⁸⁹ Indeed, one might say that his was also a decidedly apt portrayal of Chmielnik's Jewish youth in the decade leading up to World War II.

The bleak image presented here of Jewish youth in the final years prior to the Second World War is further bolstered by a similarly gloomy image illustrated by Yiddish author, Chone Gottesfeld (1890-1964), who visited his Polish hometown of Skala, then located in eastern

²⁸⁶ Dr. Max Weinreich, a linguist and proponent of the standardization of Yiddish, was a founding member of the YIVO, or *Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut*, which was established in Wilno (Vilna), Poland in 1925, and later relocated to New York. As somebody who was highly invested in the psychological study of youth, he composed *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt*, which "drew on the autobiographies submitted to the first two [YIVO] contests." He also used this work to outline the methodology behind his own YIVO-sponsored research project concerning Jewish youth. See: Jeffrey Shandler, ed., *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland before the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xxv.

²⁸⁷ Steinlauf, "Jewish Politics and Youth Culture," 102. More specifically, Weinreich speaks about "a youth without a tomorrow" and "a generation without hope," two phrases that he extracted from the autobiographies of Jewish youth submitted to the YIVO Institute in the 1930s. See: Max Weinreich, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt* [The Way to Our Youth] (Vilna: Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut, Optsvayg yugnt-forshung, 1935), 210.

²⁸⁸ Steinlauf, "Jewish Politics and Youth Culture," 102.

²⁸⁹ Weinreich, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt* [The Way to Our Youth], 208.

Poland, in 1937. Although Skala and Chmielnik were located in different regions of Poland, their situations vis-à-vis the status of Jewish youth were remarkably similar. What Gottesfeld witnessed during his brief sojourn in Skala, he could just as likely have witnessed, had he then visited Chmielnik. In Skala, Gottesfeld encountered extremely shabbily dressed, pale and dour looking young adults of 18 years-of-age—males and females alike—who had little to do for pleasure aside from congregating at a local Poale Zion meeting. In spite of their own blatant poverty and lack of prospects, these wizened youths bitterly decried the fate of Spain, which was struggling against a fascist menace in the then-ongoing Spanish Civil War. Gottesfeld could not help but be struck by this irony, and indeed, echoed Weinreich’s sentiments with the following observation of his experience with the Jewish youths: “The entire time I sat and looked at the tremendous earnestness of these young people, who were living under the most terrible circumstances, without a today and without a tomorrow, and were worried about Spain.”²⁹⁰

Polish-Jewish Relations in the Interwar Period

Another major trend of the 1930s, aside from the flight of the youth toward the big cities, was the rise of antisemitism. While Hitler was coming to power in Germany, xenophobic and formerly fringe political groups like the Endeks, or National Democratic Party (NDP), were becoming increasingly emboldened and influential in Poland. These had been kept in relative “check” previously by Józef Piłsudski, but with his death in 1935, their nationalist ideologies became more mainstream. Indeed, with Hitler spewing his Nazi ideology practically “next door,”

²⁹⁰ Chone Gottesfeld, *Mayn rayze iber Galitsye* [My Journey Through Galicia] (New York: Faraynigte Galitsianer Idn in Amerika, 1937), 147.

it was hard not to be swept up in this antisemitic momentum.²⁹¹ The Endeks, specifically, played into anxieties about Poland's ability to maintain its newly won independence, and claimed that the Jews posed a particular threat to Poland's ethnic "purity." Against the towering backdrop of the Great Depression, Jews provided a welcome scapegoat, and nationalist ideology supplied the legitimization narrative.

Not surprisingly, Chmielnik was not exempt from any of this. Some of the Chmielnik Jews interviewed for the USC Shoah Foundation Institute Visual History Archive suggest that there was a theological aspect of antisemitism. This may be seen in the following example. On July 22, 1923, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman, the town's then elderly and financially reduced rabbi, was physically assaulted and nearly killed, in a targeted and publicly witnessed attack that even made the pages of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, based in New York City.²⁹²

In this incident, the rabbi, while taking his usual daily stroll, was singled out by a Polish army captain named Świeczkowski,²⁹³ who was part of the Fourth Legions Infantry Regiment.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 78.

²⁹² See: "Aged Rabbi Beaten by Polish Office[r] [*sic*]," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York], July 31, 1923, 2.

²⁹³ All the American-based English and Yiddish newspapers—including the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* and the *Forverts*—that ran articles about this incident present the Polish army Captain's surname as slightly different than the identical version presented by the European-based Yiddish newspapers, *Haynt* (Today) and *Unzer fraynd* (Our Friend). Nevertheless, it is clear that all articles have in mind the same culprit. See: *Ibid.*; "Aged Rabbi Beaten by Polish Officers," *The Sentinel* [Chicago, IL], Aug. 3, 1923, 25; "Aged Rabbi Beaten by Polish Officer," *The Reform Advocate* [Chicago, IL], Aug. 18, 1923, 54; "Polish Officer Beats Up 72-Year-Old Rabbi from Chmielnik, Galicia," *Forverts* [New York], 1; "A Rabbi Bloodily Beaten: Interpellation from the Jewish Club," *Haynt* [Warsaw, Poland], July 26, 1923, 1; "A Rabbi Bloodily Beaten: Interpellation from the Jewish Club," *Unzer fraynd* [Wilno, Poland], July 29, 1923, 2.

²⁹⁴ The identical article that appeared both in *Haynt* and *Unzer fraynd* specifically referenced the culprit's position in the Fourth Legions Infantry Regiment, which was part of the Polish army at the time of Captain Świeczkowski's attack on Rabbi Sylman. For further information about this particular Polish military regiment, see: Kazimierz Satora, *Opowieści wrześnieowych sztandarów* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1990), 33-34.

Świeczkowski initiated the abuse by yanking so hard and relentlessly on Rabbi Sylman's beard, that he ultimately fainted.²⁹⁵ When the weak rabbi finally came to, the captain retrieved a revolver and threatened him that he go straight home and not speak of this incident to anyone—lest the captain shoot the rabbi. Shortly thereafter, a crowd began to gather. After all, Rabbi Sylman, who is referred to in the *Forverts* (Forward) newspaper's front-page piece as “extremely popular in Chmielnik,” and similarly, on the front page of the *Haynt* (Today), as “known and respected within the community,” was widely recognized in his hometown.²⁹⁶

Due to the shouts of the crowd, a police sergeant soon came running, only to realize that an elderly rabbi had been roughed up. Once that much was clear, the police sergeant encouraged Captain Świeczkowski, whom the local townspeople clearly knew both by name and appearance, to continue with his physical assault on the rabbi.²⁹⁷ The captain then proceeded to beat Rabbi Sylman to the point at which he was bleeding. Although we learn from the newspaper article that the local residents of Chmielnik were in an uproar over what had occurred, we never do learn

²⁹⁵ “Polish Officer Beats Up 72-Year-Old Rabbi,” 1. All the previously mentioned English language press that covered this story stated that Rabbi Sylman lay “virtually unconscious” following the attack that was perpetrated against him by Captain Świeczkowski. Only the *Haynt* and *Undzer fraynd* articles made no reference to Rabbi Sylman becoming virtually or fully unconscious as a direct result of this attack.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.; “A Rabbi Bloodily Beaten,” *Haynt*, 1.

²⁹⁷ At this point in the story, the identical account portrayed by the *Haynt* and *Undzer fraynd* diverges somewhat from the other standard account presented by the aforementioned English newspapers and the *Forverts*. Unlike those other publications, the *Haynt* and *Undzer fraynd* stated that the gathering crowd of people demanded that the military captain be taken into police custody. However, the local police station refused to admit Rabbi Sylman. At the same time, Captain Świeczkowski, who had apparently been taken to or went on his own accord to Chmielnik's police department, was seen exiting the building in the company of an unnamed police sergeant. It was at this point that the captain continued to beat Rabbi Sylman, shouting: “He ought to be slugged!” “A Rabbi Bloodily Beaten,” *Haynt*, 1; “A Rabbi Bloodily Beaten,” *Unzer fraynd*, 2.

whether the Polish army captain and/or the police sergeant was/were ever properly brought to justice for his/their brutal and seemingly theologically steeped antisemitic acts.²⁹⁸

We do know that Jewish members of the Sejm (Polish parliament)²⁹⁹ brought an interpellation to Poland's Minister of the Interior and Minister of War during the Sejm's meeting on Wednesday, July 25—only three days after the attack on Rabbi Sylman had taken place—“demanding a sharp punishment for Captain Świeczkowski and for the police sergeant.”³⁰⁰ But there was no sign in the press that anything had been done—or would be done, for that matter—to reprimand Captain Świeczkowski or the unnamed police sergeant. Thus, by mid-August 1923, at which time the last of the aforementioned newspaper articles pertaining to this upsetting account was issued, the Sejm had most likely already made a conscious decision to disregard this case and seek no legal action against the perpetrators of this crime.³⁰¹

In other cases, antisemitism was purely economic—meaning, it took the form of boycotts of Jewish business, as will be further elaborated later in this section. Frequently, it was a combination of these two ulterior motivations. From Chil (“Charles”) Gorlicki's (b. 1928)

²⁹⁸ “Polish Officer Beats Up 72-Year-Old Rabbi,” 1; “Aged Rabbi Beaten by Polish Office[r] [sic],” 2; “Aged Rabbi Beaten by Polish Officers,” 25; “Aged Rabbi Beaten by Polish Officer,” 54.

²⁹⁹ The Jewish members of the Sejm belonged to what was called the Jewish Sejm Club, or in Polish: *Kolo Żydowskie*. This group, which was founded in 1922 and dominated by the Zionists, represented the political, national, and economic interests of Polish Jewry in the Polish parliament. For further information about this institution, see for instance: Hershel Edelheit and Abraham J. Edelheit, *History of Zionism: A Handbook and Dictionary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 408.

³⁰⁰ Sejm of the Second Republic of Poland, *Interpellation by Mr. Lewin and his companion from the Jewish Club to Messrs. of the Ministers of the Interior and Military on the attack on Rabbi Sylman of Chmielnik. 1923-07-25*, by Aaron Lewin, 56, dated 1923-07-25 (break/s 3), Warsaw, Poland: Polish Parliament, 1919-2001; “A Rabbi Bloodily Beaten,” *Haynt*, 1; “A Rabbi Bloodily Beaten,” *Unzer fraynd*, 2.

³⁰¹ The fact that I was unable to locate any follow-up documentation online from the Biblioteka Sejmowa, the Sejm Library, pertaining to this interpellation on behalf of Rabbi Sylman, may indeed be the ultimate indicator that no legal action was ever taken against the perpetrators of this crime.

perspective, growing up in Chmielnik in the 1930s, antisemitism, at least in part, stemmed from the propaganda of hate spewed by the Catholic Church. For this reason, he maintained, attacks on Jews were especially prevalent around Christmas time, since the Christians believed that the Jews had killed Jesus Christ.³⁰² Ezjel Lederman also recalled that during the holidays of Christmas and Easter, in Chmielnik, “it was not safe to stray into a neighborhood that was not strictly Jewish,” since, as one of his childhood friends [Maciejewski] revealed to him, he was responsible for having “killed his [Maciejewski’s] God.”³⁰³

Another sign of the rise in antisemitism was the *numerus clausus*, a quota that was introduced in Polish universities. This had a significantly deleterious effect on Jewish enrollment,³⁰⁴ and Jewish students began to face acts of outright physical violence. Ultimately, the goal of antisemitic and xenophobic factions, namely the “Endeks” or members of the National Democratic party, and their supporters, was to establish a *numerus nullus* as far as Jews and higher education was concerned. This worsening status for Jews was most palpable, though, according to Nathan Garfinkel (1920-2006) after 1935, following the death of Marshal Józef

³⁰² Chil Gorlicki, interview by Diana Ritch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Maroubra, Australia, June 26, 1995.

³⁰³ Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 137.

³⁰⁴ As Bernard Wasserstein elucidates, between 1921 and 1939, the proportion of Jewish students enrolled at Polish universities declined from 25 percent to 8 percent. See: Wasserstein, *On the Eve*, 329.

Piłsudski.³⁰⁵ For he had “forged alliances with Jews, and, together, they fought against Russian Communists in 1919.”³⁰⁶

Many sources, both scholarly and anecdotal, bolster Garfinkel’s claim regarding the turn-for-the-worse for Poland’s Jews in the latter half of the 1930s, following Piłsudski’s death. One such example that occurred in the general vicinity of Kielce, approximately 131 kilometers (or roughly 81 miles) northeast of Chmielnik, was that of the notorious Przytyk pogrom of March 9, 1936, that scholars including Joanna B. Michlic, Adam Penkalla, Jolanta Żyndul, and Kamil Kijek have closely examined.³⁰⁷ According to David Newman, the Jews of Chmielnik were

³⁰⁵ During Piłsudski’s 10 years in office, from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, he succeeded in keeping extreme antisemitic factions in check. He also welcomed the involvement of Jews in his government lists during Sejm (Polish congress) elections. Jews mourned him upon his death as a “lesser evil,” by comparison to his “National Democratic and fascist-leaning opponents.” See: Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe*, 69.

³⁰⁶ Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 25. Garfinkel, in an interview conducted with what would later become the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, prior to the publication of the previously cited, *Sara’s Children*, espoused similar views as those stated in the book. At that time, he further added that as of 1933—after Hitler rose to power—one could begin to feel the growing antisemitism in Poland, although this was not as blatant as it became following Piłsudski’s death, two years later. According to Garfinkel, the Nazi Party was then in Poland, although not officially. See: Nathan Garfinkel, interview by Charles Silow, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Southfield, MI, November 26, 1995. Irwin Wygodny (1920-2009), a Holocaust survivor who grew up in a village called Śladków, just outside of Chmielnik, and who spent much of his childhood in Chmielnik and was later incarcerated in the Chmielnik ghetto, echoes Nathan Garfinkel’s views. He further adds that following Piłsudski’s death, Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły (1886-1941) rose to power, and that he was not terribly kind to the Jews, in the way that Piłsudski had been. See: Irwin Wygodny, interview by Elana Daniel, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Wilmette, IL, June 11, 1995.

³⁰⁷ For further details surrounding the Przytyk pogrom, see for instance: Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 110, 114, 121-123, 128-129; Adam Penkalla, “The ‘Przytyk Incidents’ of 9 March 1936 from Archival Documents,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 5 (1990): 327-359; Jolanta Żyndul, “If Not a Pogrom, Then What?,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 17 (2004): 385-391; Kamil Kijek, “The Road to Przytyk: Agitation and the Sociotechnique of Violence in the Kielce Region, 1931-1936,” *Gal-Ed: On the History of Polish Jewry* 26-27 (2021): 59-102.

terribly frightened by the pogrom, lest they be the next targets for such heightened anti-Jewish violence.³⁰⁸

And what were the respective responses of the Polish Government and the Roman Catholic Church to this type of anti-Jewish violence—of which Przytyk was far from the only example?³⁰⁹ Gen. Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski (1885-1962), appointed prime minister of Poland only a few months after the pogrom, was noted for making the following revealing comment before the Sejm: “Economic struggle, certainly yes, but without inflicting harm.”³¹⁰ Similarly, Primate August Hłond (1881-1948) and Archbishop Adam Sapieha (1867-1951) of Kraków (along with the Church’s support) both issued pastoral letters in which they endorsed economic boycotts of Jewish shops and business, while also condemning violence against Jews. Yet, these two leading religious figures in pre-World War II Poland took their unified anti-Jewish sentiments a step further than Sławoj-Składkowski by blatantly blaming the Jews for their own misfortunes—brought about by their so-called atheism, Bolshevism, dissemination of pornography, and other vices and forms of corruption.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Newman, *Hope’s Reprise*, 4.

³⁰⁹ In addition to the pogrom in Przytyk, there were several other pogroms that broke out in Poland at around the same time. For example, there was one shortly after Piłsudski’s death in Grodno, in June 1935; another one took place in May 1937, in Brześć nad Bugiem (or Brest); and yet another one in June 1937, in Częstochowa. Finally, in August 1937, “350 violent incidents against Jews took place in 80 locations throughout Poland. In most cases, the police stood aside.” Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry Under Soviet Rule, 1939-1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 26.

³¹⁰ Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 123. See also: Emanuel Melzer, “Antisemitism in the Last Years of the Second Polish Republic,” in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, edited by Yisrael Gutman (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1989), 128; Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, 71; Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 86.

³¹¹ Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 122-123; Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, 71.

Antisemitism took many forms, and one of the harshest was the 1936 ban on “*shechita*,” Jewish ritual slaughter, against which the Sejm went so far as to take legislative action. Not only did this ban hurt kosher meat consumers, but it also led to a sizable number of Jewish butchers losing their jobs.³¹² Indeed, between 1936-1938, about half of the Sejm’s parliamentary time was devoted to this specific matter, thereby becoming a focal point for the antisemitic establishment’s political campaign. Furthermore, the “*shechita*” ban is mentioned in many autobiographical accounts of Holocaust survivors from Poland, such as those of David Newman and Mordechai Goldstein.³¹³

The ban also, understandably, drew major criticism on the part of Jewish religious leaders, such as the noted Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzieński (1863-1940) of Wilno, Poland, who argued that “*shechita*” is one of the fundamental laws of Judaism and that by outlawing the Jewish slaughter of (kosher) animals, this would necessarily affect the more than three million Jews then residing in Poland, and went so far as to advocate that Jewish communities in the Holy Land and throughout the Diaspora stage a general public fast, in order to draw attention to the Polish Jewish plight.³¹⁴

³¹² Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 86.

³¹³ Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919-1939* (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter Mouton, 1983), 358; Szymon Rudnicki, “Ritual Slaughter as a Political Issue,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 7 (2008): 147-160; Newman, *Hope’s Reprise*, 4; Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 8.

³¹⁴ See for instance Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzieński’s letter to Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank (1873-1960), then Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, dated 28 Shevat 5696 [February 21, 1936], in which he outlines the dangers the “*shechita*” ban poses to Polish Jewry, and proposes that Jews in the Holy Land and in other communities stage a public fast as a form of protest against this edict: *Edut ne’emanah: sh. u-t. ‘al ma’avak ha-shehitah be-Eropah’* [Trustworthy Evidence: Responsa on the Shechita Struggle in Europe] (Vol. 1), edited by Eliyahu Munk, Yechiel Aryeh Munk, and Yisrael Meir Levinger (Brooklyn, NY; Jerusalem: Bet ha-midrash Gur Aryeh ‘a. sh. ha-Maharal zal, 1974), 226-227.

Some of Grodzieński's correspondence to his fellow rabbinic leaders in Poland and elsewhere decrying the Sejm's acceptance of the "*shechita*" ban and its implementation throughout Poland, may be seen in the responsa literature in the form of *Edut ne'emanah: sh. u-t. 'al ma'avak ha-shehitah be-Eropah* [Trustworthy Evidence: Responsa on the Shechita Struggle in Europe], compiled by Rabbis Eliyahu and Yechiel Aryeh Munk and Dr. Yisrael Meir Levinger.³¹⁵ Amidst this correspondence is a "Declaration of the Rabbinat in Poland," dated March 2, 1936, signed by 827 different rabbis.³¹⁶

Included within this declaration are the following statements and appeals:

We rabbis, guardians of the souls of the Jews of Poland ... declare: In accordance with the resolution adopted at the conference at Warsaw on February 13, 1936 (Shevat 20, 5696): The ritual method of slaughtering is one of the cardinal prescriptions of the Jewish religion. Any infringement of this prescription ... renders the meat unconditionally forbidden to Jews (terefa). In accordance with this, we must consider the bill proposed in the Sejm to prohibit ritual slaughtering an assault upon one of the fundamentals of the Jewish religion. We appeal to the sense of justice of the Polish people, government and legislative chambers not to permit this assault.³¹⁷

Among the hundreds of rabbis who signed this declaration was Rabbi "T[oivye]. Sylman" of "Chmielnik."³¹⁸

³¹⁵ This work of responsa literature is a two-volume publication that also provides a review of the medical aspects of "*shechita*."

³¹⁶ *Edut ne'emanah: sh. u-t. 'al ma'avak ha-shehitah be-Eropah* [Trustworthy Evidence: Responsa on the Shechita Struggle in Europe] (Vol. 2), edited by Eliyahu Munk, Yechiel Aryeh Munk, and Yisrael Meir Levinger (Brooklyn, NY; Jerusalem: Bet ha-midrash Gur Aryeh 'a. sh. ha-Maharal zal, 1976), 68.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ *Edut ne'emanah* (Vol. 1), edited by Eliyahu Munk, et al., 227-228; *Edut ne'emanah: sh. u-t. 'al ma'avak ha-shehitah be-Eropah* [Trustworthy Evidence: Responsa on the Shechita Struggle in Europe] (Vol. 2), edited by Eliyahu Munk, Yechiel Aryeh Munk, and Yisrael Meir Levinger (Brooklyn, NY; Jerusalem: Bet ha-midrash Gur Aryeh 'a. sh. ha-Maharal zal, 1976), 72.

In Poland, the anti-“*shechita*” camp emerged in 1923 with the antisemitic National Democratic Party’s struggle for power. The argument raised at that time was mainly one of a humanitarian nature. However, the Polish movement against ritual slaughter gained significant momentum in 1935, following the death of Piłsudski. Increasingly, the opposition to “*shechita*” pertained to the fact that kosher meat was more expensive than “better quality” non-kosher meat and that “both the sale and the slaughter of cattle constituted a Jewish monopoly.”³¹⁹ Yet another economically steeped rationale for opposition to ritual slaughter came from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, which declared that “*shechita*” was an obstruction to the organization of the meat trade.³²⁰ Religious Christian entities in Poland such as the Catholic Press Agency also made the argument against ritual slaughter—which it labeled “murder”—on the basis that it is “a disgusting superstition” and therefore worthy of “severe punishment.”³²¹

The Polish law against “*shechita*,” which was modeled on Nazi German precedents of 1933—ironically, also in the name of humanitarianism³²²—was later amended on the grounds that a complete ban would violate constitutional rights of religious practice. As a governmental concession, sufficient kosher slaughtering was permitted to meet religious requirements.³²³ However, had World War II not broken out in 1939, it appears almost certain that there would

³¹⁹ Rudnicki, “Ritual Slaughter as a Political Issue,” 149.

³²⁰ Ibid., 151.

³²¹ Ibid., 150.

³²² “Campaign to Restore Hitler’s Ban on Schechitah Grows in Germany,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York], March 31, 1954, 5.

³²³ “Polish Senate Passes Shechita Bill; Becomes Law Jan. 1,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York], March 29, 1936, 3.

have been additional anti-“*shechita*” legislation passed by the Sejm. Again, this was a sign of the times for Polish Jews, who correctly viewed this major act as yet another measure taken by the Polish government against their emancipation.³²⁴

The rise of antisemitism was also evident in Poland’s changing immigration laws. From 1936 until the outbreak of World War II, Polish authorities, including political leaders and followers of the National Democratic Party, advocated the forced mass emigration of Polish Jews. This was an attempt to relieve Poland of its so-called “Jewish question” (or “Jewish problem,” perhaps more aptly). The “Jewish question” pertained to the fact that many Poles believed that Jews were too foreign a minority entity in its midst—due to their different religion, language (i.e., Yiddish), manner of dress, and the fact that they were scattered throughout the country—not dwelling more or less in certain regions as in the case of other Polish minority groups (e.g., namely the Ukrainians, Belarussians, and Germans). There was also a sincere concern that since Jews were heavily urbanized and tended to have positions in commerce and in the learned professions, whereas Poles were yet more agrarian and overall, less well-educated than Jews, the Jews would ultimately overtake the Poles.³²⁵

As with the “*shechita*” ban, the subject of forced Jewish emigration understandably became highly contentious among Polish Jewry. So much so, that it was even discussed by

³²⁴ Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 22; Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, 73; Natalia Aleksun, *Conscious History: Polish Jewish Historians Before the Holocaust* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization; Liverpool: In association with Liverpool University Press, 2021), 164.

³²⁵ For additional information on the subject of the “Jewish question” and forced emigration—or even “banishment”—of Jews from Poland during the interwar period, see for instance: Szymon Rudnicki, “Anti-Jewish Legislation in Interwar Poland,” in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland*, edited by Robert Blobaum (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 169; Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919-1939*, 391-395; Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 152.

leading Jewish figures of the day before the Sejm. For example, according to Natalia Aleksium, in 1939, Jakub Trockenheim, a cofounder of Agudas Yisroel, member of the Warsaw city council, and a president of the Warsaw *kehillah*, defended the rights of Polish Jews to continue residing in Poland, their homeland for many generations, in the following: “‘One must not tell Jewish citizens who have lived in Polish lands for over eight hundred years: you must leave because you are Jews.’”³²⁶

By October 1938, Hitler had already been in power for more than five years, and his anti-Jewish Nuremberg race laws had been in effect for just over three years. Germany’s annexation of Austria in March 1938 caused the Polish government to fear a mass return of Polish Jews living abroad. Indeed, according to a census conducted in 1933, over 57 percent of the foreign Jews living in Germany were Polish.³²⁷ Thus, the Polish government, which then feared an influx of Jews from the Reich, took drastic measures to isolate its Jewish citizens who were then living abroad by issuing a law that affected the passports of all Poles who had been living outside of Poland for over five years. Passports owned by such individuals now had to be stamped and endorsed in order to remain validated. Without this stamp—needed by the end of October—the aforementioned individuals would lose their Polish citizenship status and not be permitted entry into Poland.

Thousands of Polish Jews then living in Germany proceeded to present their passports at Polish consulates, only to be denied the necessary endorsement for assorted reasons. In other

³²⁶ Aleksium, *Conscious History: Polish Jewish Historians Before the Holocaust*, 167.

³²⁷ Trude Maurer, “Die Ausweisung der Polnischen Juden und der Vorwand für die Kristallnacht” in *Der Judenpogrom 1938: Von der Reichkristallnacht zum Völkermord*, Walter H. Pehle, ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 54-56.

words, the Polish government purposely saw to it that Jews residing abroad (particularly in Germany) would be faced with a “catch-22” situation, ultimately leading to a status of “statelessness.” As an outcome of this situation, the Germans enacted the so-called “*Polenaktion*” (Polish Action), during which some 17,000 Polish Jews were arrested and subsequently shipped to the Polish border, where they resided in transit camps in a no-man’s land on the Polish-German border called Zbąszyn.³²⁸

According to David Newman, at around this same time, thousands of Jews who were sent to Zbąszyn, shortly thereafter arrived in Chmielnik.³²⁹ Although I have not found much documentation to support Newman’s statement,³³⁰ at the very least, it is certain that the plight of the Jewish refugees from Germany was known to Chmielnik’s Jews, as well as to numerous other Jewish communities across and even beyond Poland.

This may be seen, for example, in the informative article penned by L[eon] Rodal (1913-1943), a native son of Kielce with many relatives in Chmielnik,³³¹ who ultimately perished in the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Rodal was part of an aid delegation dispatched from his hometown of

³²⁸ Some sources place the total number of Jewish refugees deported from Germany to Zbąszyn at this time at 15,000, whereas other sources state that it was even higher, roughly 18,000 Jews. For additional information regarding the events surrounding the “*Polenaktion*,” see for instance: Alina Bothe, “October 28th 1938: Deportation, Refugee Life and Jewish Solidarity” (JDC Archives Public Program, JDC Archives, NY, May 15, 2019); Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919-1939*, 380-381; David Cymet, *History vs. Apologetics: The Holocaust, the Third Reich, and the Catholic Church* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 122.

³²⁹ Newman, *Hope’s Reprise*, 4-5.

³³⁰ Indeed, Kalman Mapa, in his Shoah Foundation testimony, states that some of the German Jews fled to Poland. However, mostly they went to big cities—not to his town. Nevertheless, news of what had befallen Jews in Germany also permeated Chmielnik, according to Mapa, simply by word-of-mouth. See: Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992.

³³¹ Moshe Zohari-Zonshein, “Moshe Prajs, May God Avenge His Blood,” *Pirume muze’on ha-lohamim veba-partizanim* 9 (1970): 25.

Kielce in November 1938, which made a round trip throughout the district of Kielce, visiting various provincial Jewish communities there, in an effort to collect charity on behalf of the Jewish refugees from Germany. From this article, the reader receives a snapshot view of several Jewish communities, their respective economic situations, and philanthropic tendencies. Among those communities featured is that of Chmielnik, about which the following generally positive image is illustrated:

When we arrived in Chmielnik, we already found close to 50 men in the kehillah meeting hall. It turned out that the police commander had fulfilled our request and simply alarmed all the social activists about our coming ... In the kehillah meeting hall it was well-lit and clean. Everything was in order. There even hung the portrait of the first Polish President Narutowicz ... The meeting in Chmielnik was short, but productive. Following the talks given by delegation members was a discussion regarding the execution of the campaign.³³²

Included among those present from the Chmielnik Jewish community were some of its leading figures, including *kehillah* secretary, Domb, one of the town's chief rabbis, Rabbi Eliezer Yehoshua Epstein; and there was also talk about the imminent arrival of "the doctor"—presumably, Dr. Natan Balanowski.³³³

The deportation of the Jewish refugees from Germany would, in a matter of days, on November 9-10, 1938, snowball into yet another tragic anti-Jewish episode that would take place mainly in Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland—the part of Czechoslovakia that Germany had recently annexed. That singular event would subsequently come to be known as *Kristallnacht*, or the November Pogrom, during which more than 1,000 synagogues were set aflame and

³³² L[eon] Rodal, "What Is Happening in Kielce?," 3-4.

³³³ Ibid., 4.

destroyed, some 30,000 Jewish males were rounded up and sent to concentration camps, and as many as 236 Jews perished.³³⁴ Taken as a whole, these devastating back-to-back anti-Jewish, government-sanctioned actions on the part of the Third Reich, were all a prelude to World War II and the Holocaust.

Yechaskel (“Charles”) Fastag (1915-2013), in his Shoah Foundation testimony, attested to the trouble that was brewing for Jews in Poland of the 1930s. He also noted that although he was not greatly aware at the time of the rise of Nazism in Germany, he recalls that in general, Poles throughout Poland became more antisemitic during that period, boycotting Jewish establishments with signs saying something to the effect, “Don’t buy by Jews! Buy by your own!”³³⁵ He further added that “you could hear about a pogrom here and there” on a small scale.³³⁶ As further proof of this antisemitism, Faye Goldlist (née Skrobicka) (1922-2017) conveyed how her family’s kosher dairy business floundered, because the Poles took away all the Jewish business in Chmielnik. According to Goldlist, this began just as soon as Hitler took power [c. 1933].³³⁷

³³⁴ Although the official Jewish death toll taken by Germany in the aftermath of the November Pogrom was 91, more recent scholarship demonstrates that the total count was most likely several hundred. Among those who perished were individuals defending their homes or businesses, those who died as the direct result of wounds incurred, and those who committed suicide as a result of this terror. See for instance: James Deem, *Kristallnacht: The Nazi Terror That Began the Holocaust* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Pub., 2012), 15-16; Martin Gilbert, *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 13, 36.

³³⁵ Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Faye Goldlist, interview by Faye Blum, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Downsview, Canada, June 19, 1995.

Cesia Ullman (née Diament), born in Chmielnik in 1928, described her dislike of going to public school because of the antisemitic atmosphere already at that time.³³⁸ As she put it, “You went out for break and Polish kids would call you names.” She also recalls how Poles would frequently go about drunk in the streets, and how in such cases, Jews would try to cross to the other side of the street. Under such circumstances, Jewish women were frequently called “Żydówka” —“dirty Jew”—and other such derogatory names.³³⁹

Similar to Ullman’s negative recollections of the antisemitic atmosphere in her public school, Mordechai Goldstein (1924-2022) recalls there being daily clashes between Polish and Jewish students in his own public school and that the Polish children would call the Jewish children “dirty Jews” and insult them with the oft-used phrase: “Jews to Palestine.” Furthermore, some of the teachers were likewise influenced by the growing anti-Jewish sentiment of the times and used assorted opportunities to employ different negative terms that were specifically aimed at their Jewish pupils.³⁴⁰ For Goldlist (née Skrobacka), the antisemitic atmosphere in the town motivated members of her fiercely Zionist youth group, Beitar, to envision “*aliyah*” to Palestine, even if it meant getting there by foot.

On the other hand, one gets the sense that antisemitism, for the most part, was kept in check in Chmielnik, by the sheer fact that the Jews outnumbered the Gentiles there. Indeed, some former residents of the town insisted that pre-World War II Chmielnik was comparably decent

³³⁸ Ullman does not provide an exact date or date range for such incidents, but the events she describes evidently took place in the 1930s, since she was born during the late 1920s.

³³⁹ Cesia Ullman, interview by Stephen Grynberg, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, August 7, 1995.

³⁴⁰ Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 8.

insofar as the treatment of Jews by Poles. This was in sharp contrast, according to them, to the neighboring city of Kielce, which was noted for violent antisemitic eruptions dating back to 1918, at which time Jews were subjected to beatings at the hands of Poles; and other nearby cities, in which pogroms were fairly routine occurrences.³⁴¹

Usher Tarek was a good example. He was under the impression that antisemitism in his native town appeared likely “less strident in Chmielnik because the Jews outnumbered the Poles.” In his words, “Let me put it to you this way: if Poles were antisemitic, they didn’t show.”³⁴² Former resident of Chmielnik, Ester Moncznik (née Lewkowicz), likewise stated that she did not witness much outward antisemitism on the streets of prewar Chmielnik, since Jews entirely dominated the town’s main thoroughfares. The Gentiles, on the other hand, were according to her, only to be found on the outskirts of Chmielnik.³⁴³ Similarly, Jakob Sylman remarked that although Chmielnik’s Poles strongly admonished farmers from the outlying areas not to buy from Jews, according to Sylman, “We weren’t afraid because we were the majority.”

³⁴¹ Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 22. In actuality, the 1918 event to which the Garfinkels refer, was a pogrom that took place on November 11, 1918, and resulted in the maiming and killing of several Jews. For further information, see: Waclaw Wierzbieniec, *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, s.v. “Kielce” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kielce> (accessed 7-28-12). Yet another relatively nearby city to witness a pogrom during this same time frame, on May 27, 1919, which resulted in several Jewish deaths and many more injuries, was Częstochowa. See: William M. Glicksman, *A Kehillah in Poland During the Inter-war Years: Studies in Jewish Community Organization* (Philadelphia, PA: M. E. Kalish Folkshul, 1969), 21, 24; Rafael Mahler, ed., *Tshenstokhover Yidn [The Jews of Czenstochowa]* (New York: United Czenstochover Relief Committee and Ladies Auxiliary, 1947), 165-167, 170-177.

³⁴² Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 23.

³⁴³ Moncznik contrasted the lack of street violence against Jews in prewar Chmielnik to the overt antisemitism she witnessed in Warsaw (c. 1932), where she saw Poles physically beating up on Jews. Ester Moncznik, interview by Jennifer Epstein, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Southfield, MI, March 21, 1996.

He further maintained that although the Jewish youth of his generation spoke to Poles in school, they were not truly friends with them.³⁴⁴

Avraham Goldlist (b. 1927) recalled one particular occasion when far right-wing, pro-Nazi Gentile students stood outside of Jewish shops shouting: “Don’t buy from the Jews!” Yet, Goldlist noted that these antisemitic youths “didn’t beat us up because they were afraid, since by us in town it was 70 percent Jewish.”³⁴⁵ He further added that there were also those Jews in Chmielnik who knew how to fight. On another occasion these same students did initiate a fight with Jews. However, one of the local Jewish butchers who witnessed this instigation of violence then began to beat up the instigators. In the end, the antisemitic youths fled, knowing they were no match for the combined Jewish majority and the fact that there actually were Jews in Chmielnik who were prepared to physically retaliate against them.³⁴⁶

Mordechai Goldstein stated that when his youth group, Hashomer Hatzair, would go on outings, Poles would harass and attempt to bother them. Sometimes this led to outright physical scuffles. But according to Goldstein, the Jewish youths would always win, due to their sheer greatness in numbers. Yet, the actions of the Jewish youths were always tempered, for there was

³⁴⁴ Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 25. Further bolstering Jakob Sylman’s statement that the Jews of Chmielnik were not truly afraid of antisemitic Poles because the Jews were in the majority, Malka Owsiany remarks that in general, Chmielnik Jewry was not overly frightened by “hooliganistic antisemitism.” Aside from the fact that the antisemites were in the minority there, much of the local Jewish youth participated in sport clubs and would be more than prepared—if necessary—to stage a physical opposition against the antisemites. Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseyt*, 45.

³⁴⁵ Testimony of Avraham Goldlist, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/12820, 5.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

the constant underlying awareness on their part that angering the Poles too much could potentially lead to a pogrom meted out against the entire Chmielnik Jewish community.³⁴⁷

Thus, according to both written and oral recollections, the two populations—the Jewish majority and the Gentile minority—interacted with one another, but generally, only superficially and on a need-only basis, such as in school and in the marketplace.³⁴⁸ To quote former resident of Chmielnik, Ira Kaminsky, “Our social life was separate to [*sic*] the Polish life ... separate social life ... We had Polish neighbors, and we were friendly with them. But socialize we did, only with our own.”³⁴⁹ In a similar vein, while overlooking tensions and power relations, Morris Kwasniewski summarized Chmielnik’s pre-World War II Polish-Jewish relations as follows: “We didn’t love each other, but nobody did anything actively against the other. We tolerated one another, as one might say.”³⁵⁰

Otherwise, according to these testimonies, Jews and Poles in Chmielnik before World War II appear to have coexisted, side-by-side, conducting two relatively distinct, but parallel

³⁴⁷ Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim* [*In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews*], 12.

³⁴⁸ These two spheres of school and business are precisely those indicated by Gitla Fastag (née Shulsinger) as having overlapped between Jews and Gentiles prior to World War II. According to her, Jews and Poles conducted business with one another in the marketplace. She also recalled how a Polish (Gentile) girlfriend named Zosia Kaczyńska would bring her the homework assignments from school whenever she was unable to attend class. Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012.

³⁴⁹ Ira Kaminsky, interview by Daniel Sedlis, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bayside, NY, December 21, 1995.

³⁵⁰ Morris Kwasniewski, interview by Richard Bassett, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995. Although Kwasniewski’s sentiments seem contradictory in light of the previously referenced attack on Rabbi Sylman, it appears that the Rabbi was specifically targeted for violence, as he was a well-known religious leader of the local Jewish community.

lives.³⁵¹ As to what might have developed over time between the two populations, had World War II not broken out in the fall of 1939, one can, in retrospect, only surmise and postulate.

What Comes Next?

After immersing ourselves in the study of World War I and post-World War I Chmielnik, there are two major questions that arise. The first is: Was a major anti-Jewish event in the form of the Holocaust inevitable? So many factors seemed to be in place even without the introduction of a man like Hitler: a “rolling boil” of antisemitism, the Great Depression, demographic asymmetries that made places like Chmielnik at least 80 percent Jewish, and the already precarious Polish-Jewish relations. The Poles had been “tolerating” Jewish majorities in their towns for generations now, but how long could that last? If Chmielnik is truly a microcosm, then it seems like a bubble about to burst all across Poland. Not simply in the form of another pogrom, but in a total and final way. Hitler’s addition to the percolating aggression and violence of the 1930s was a new form of slaughter, due to the introduction of technology and industrial-scale murder. But if not Hitler, would somebody else have ridden the wave of this movement instead?

The second question that our study of the interwar period introduces is simply this: Was the “shtetl,” as a concept, on its way out anyway? Scholars such as Bernard Wasserstein argue

³⁵¹ There is a large body of literature that discusses the interactions of Poles and Jews in Poland’s pre-World War II era and across history. The following is but a brief survey of some of these works: Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Magdalena Opalski and Yisrael Bartal, *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992); Yisrael Gutman, ed., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1989); Robert Blobaum, ed., *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

that although the process of Jewish population decline in the shtetls of Poland may not have occurred as rapidly as in certain other parts of east-central Europe, by the 1930s, it survived in a “diminished form” and was “no longer the model Ashkenazi Jewish settlement. Instead it came to seem a static, outmoded relic of a bygone age.”³⁵² A huge theme of this chapter seems to be the generation gap: religious, intellectual, economic, and political. The youth of the shtetl were feeling disenfranchised with the way things had been. They were leaving. They wanted something new, and modernity allowed them to find it—or at least seek it. Thus, we have to ask ourselves: Did the Holocaust only hasten the final chapter of a book that was already essentially over?

Before we dive into Chmielnik’s fate during World War II, we must take a brief detour to look at a religious event—a scandal, really—that was *not* typical of towns like Chmielnik (although it was not totally isolated, either), and in fact made it quite infamous. It began with the death of the town’s chief rabbi and the question of who his successor would be. Unfortunately, the answer was not simple. Eventually, the Jews of Chmielnik divided themselves into “tribes” of warring followers, with collateral damage along the way: violence, police involvement, other communities contacted. Even the American newspapers picked it up. But to understand all this, we must begin a new chapter.

³⁵² Wasserstein, *On the Eve*, 81.

Chapter Three: The Great Rabbinic Dispute of 1929

Chmielnik's chief rabbi, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman, died in 1928. In response, the community appointed his son, Rabbi Toivye Sylman (b. 1888),³⁵³ his successor. That decision was not a harmonious one. Some believed the son was better suited to his current *dayan* (judgeship) position, not one that required such leadership skills as his father had possessed. This dispute metastasized from a small disagreement to a full-on rabbinic war, with zealous followers on both sides, raging for at least a decade and only ending because of the impending war. At its height, this dispute not only tore the Jewish community of Chmielnik apart; it also gained notoriety in greater Poland and even America, ultimately pulling in the Gentile community as well. It is difficult, after immersing ourselves in the conflict, to see the decade leading up to the war as having been characterized by anything so much as it was consumed by this dispute-turned-scandal.

Before we begin, let us remind ourselves of our point here: to accurately document the life of small-town Jews in pre-war Poland, through the microhistory of one such town, Chmielnik. To be sure, this dispute took place only in Chmielnik. But it is not *unique* to Chmielnik. Successorship debates, and the tribal warring between religious—specifically Jewish—followers—is something we see throughout Jewish history, including today.³⁵⁴ A close

³⁵³ Piotr Krawczyk, “Dzieje Gminy Żydowskiej w Chmielniku” [The History of the Jewish Community in Chmielnik], 9.

³⁵⁴ For example, the dispute over rabbinic succession that broke out between the two sons of the late Rabbi Moshe (Moses) Teitelbaum (1914-2006), who was the world leader of the Satmar Hasidim. For further insight into this dispute, see: Susan Edelman, “Rabbi-Rousing Row: Holy Hell as Synagogue Feud Comes to Fisticuffs,” *New York Post* [New York], March 10, 2002, <https://nypost.com/2002/03/10/rabbi-rousing-row-holy-hell-as-synagogue-feud-comes-to-fisticuffs/> (accessed 10-24-22).

reading of the dispute allows us to “digress” into the intensely felt passions of mundane life in a town like Chmielnik, which rarely receives the attention of metropolises like Warsaw or Krakow, but which far more accurately represents the lives of millions of Jews in pre-Holocaust Europe. To dismiss these disputes as petty from the mile-high perspective that comes with nearly 100 years of distance, would undermine the very purpose of this dissertation: to shed light on and breathe oxygen into the mundane but authentic stories from pre-Holocaust eastern Europe. One of the great tragedies of the Holocaust is that it renders everything that came before it as insignificant, when in fact nothing could be more inaccurate. It is worth studying “mundane” events like this rabbinic scandal precisely because it illustrates the kind of social factors that animated Jewish life in Chmielnik, and other towns like it, before World War II. This is part of the mosaic of life we are trying to recreate, and all we have are the shards of colored glass. This is one of those shards.

First: some background knowledge about (the former) Chief Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman. The man was the grandson of Rabbi Yochanan Sylman, who served as a community leader and activist and who represented Chmielnik during an assembly of communal activists in Warsaw, which took place after the major wave of pogroms in Russia in the 1880s. According to Rabbi Avraham Aharon Price (1900-1994), a former resident of Chmielnik who was a protégé of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman, Rabbi Yochanan Sylman was selected as an emissary to Paris and London, where he represented the interests of Jews before the Russian ruling monarchy.³⁵⁵

As for Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman, the son of Rabbi Yisrael Leib, he was known from his

³⁵⁵ I have neither been able to substantiate nor negate the emissary position that Rabbi Yochanan Sylman supposedly held. I would conjecture that Rabbi Aharon Price heard this account as part of an oral tradition that was handed down within the Sylman family from his teacher, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman.

earliest years as a Talmudic genius and was often referred to as the “Chmielnik Gaon” [i.e., Hebrew for the “Genius of Chmielnik”]. His marriage at the age of 18 enabled him to forge a close relationship with Rabbi Yehudah Leib Eiger of Lublin (1816-1888), the grandson of the perhaps more famous, Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1761-1837); as well as with Rabbi Tzadok ha-Kohen of Lublin (1823-1900), himself a follower of Rabbi “Leibele” Eiger.³⁵⁶

Indeed, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman was such a well-respected figure even in Lublin, that when Rabbi Tzadok ha-Kohen of Lublin died in 1900, his followers requested from Rabbi Sylman that he take over the position of their deceased leader. However, Rabbi Sylman modestly turned down this offer and remained in Chmielnik. Nevertheless, due to Rabbi Sylman’s ties to Lublin, the Lublin variety of Hasidism is said to have spread in Chmielnik during the 1870s. When all was said and done, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman ended up serving as chief rabbi of Chmielnik for over 45 years.³⁵⁷ What is more, he was said to be so

³⁵⁶ Avraham Aharon Price, “Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman, May the Memory of the Righteous be a Blessing,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 28 (1989): 40; Avraham Aharon Price, “Our Rabbi: The Chmielnik Rabbi, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman, May the Memory of the Righteous be a Blessing,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 157; Gelber, “History of the Jews in Chmielnik,” 67.

³⁵⁷ According to Avraham Aharon Price, a former student of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman, the rabbi served in this position for approximately 60 years, whereas other sources state that he served in this role for 45 years, if not more. See: Price, “Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman,” 40; Price, “Our Rabbi: The Chmielnik Rabbi,” 158; “Reverberations in the Press Regarding the Rabbinic Dispute,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 551; A Resident of Chmielnik, “The Dispute Surrounding the Chmielnik Rabbinate Is Becoming Sharp (A Letter from a Resident of Chmielnik),” *Kieltser tsaytung* [Kielce, Poland], May 1, 1936, 4. Other sources, yet, state that Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman was only rabbi for 40 years total. See: “Across Cities and Towns: The Opponents of ‘Moses’ Faith’ [i.e., the Mosaic Faith] in Chmielnik,” *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], May 20, 1931, 4. Aside from possible lapses in memory and/or total ignorance as to when Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak was appointed the leading rabbi of Chmielnik, I am unable to properly account for these discrepancies.

unassuming and without means, that for most of his residence in Chmielnik, he lived in a rented apartment without furniture.

Nevertheless, he was a major collector of religious texts, many of them one-of-a-kind. Some of these works he inherited from his father and grandfather. He was so knowledgeable about Torah and so well-versed in the rabbinic literature that he was even said to have impressed the great historian and “military rabbi” of the Austrian Army during World War I, Dr. Majer Bałaban.³⁵⁸ Upon meeting Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman, Bałaban was said to have been surprised to find such a scholar in a small and seemingly insignificant town like Chmielnik.³⁵⁹

Rabbi Avraham Aharon Price remembered Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman as being “loved by all strata of the Jewish population; he was shown much esteem and respect.”³⁶⁰ Twice a year he prayed in the town’s main synagogue, when he delivered his famous Torah sermons on “Shabbat ha-Gadol” [i.e., the Sabbath immediately prior to Passover] and “Shabbat Shuva” [i.e., the “Sabbath [of] Return,” which occurs during the Ten Days of Repentance]. On those occasions, the synagogue would be packed.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ According to Israel M. Biderman, Bałaban was not a chaplain in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, he was “an intermediary between the Jewish population in the occupied territory and the military administration.” Israel M. Biderman, *Mayer Balaban: Historian of Polish Jewry* (New York, NY: Dr. I. M. Biderman Book Committee, 1976), 71.

³⁵⁹ Price, “Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman,” 40; Price, “Our Rabbi: The Chmielnik Rabbi,” 160.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.; *ibid.*

³⁶¹ Ibid.; *ibid.*

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman died on September 23, 1928, the eve of Yom Kippur.³⁶² According to former Chmielnik resident, Mordechai Fridnzon, the dispute regarding succession began even before the deceased rabbi had been buried. It was at that time—in the increasingly frantic hours before Yom Kippur—that his son, Rabbi Toivye Sylman, the town’s designated rabbinic judge, demanded that an official statement be signed declaring him his father’s successor. No doubt he did not want to postpone such a decision until after the holiday. However, there were community members who opposed such a move—namely, the community’s chairman, Dovid-Yosef Zilberberg.³⁶³

Lengthy debates ensued—all still before Yom Kippur—during which it was proposed that Rabbi Toivye Sylman’s older brother, Rabbi Leyzerl Sylman, rabbi of the nearby town of Działoszyce, be appointed the new chief rabbi of Chmielnik, with Rabbi Toivye retaining his position as rabbinic judge. Rabbi Toivye Sylman, though, rejected this offer. In order to avoid a desecration of the late Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman—which is what postponing his burial until after the holiday would mean—the decision was made to accede to Rabbi Toivye Sylman’s terms and allow him to be the town’s rabbi for the time being.³⁶⁴

³⁶² *The American Jewish Yearbook* of 1929-1930 states that Rabbi Abraham Isaac Silman [*sic*] of Chmielnik died in September 1928 at the age of 72. See: “Review of the Year: Appendices,” *The American Jewish Yearbook*, Vol. 31 (1929-1930) (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1929), 97.

³⁶³ Fridnzon, “Rabbinic Dispute,” 545.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Presumably, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman could have been buried prior to Yom Kippur and the appointment of the late rabbi’s replacement could have waited until after Yom Kippur. However, one gets the sense that the local Jewish community of Chmielnik was attempting to avoid making too much of a scene—at least in the immediate aftermath of their rabbinic leader’s death—and possibly besmirching the recently deceased chief rabbi’s well-respected name and reputation.

But, all was not resolved. When Rabbi Toivye Sylman received his weekly pay following his appointment as chief rabbi, he found that it was precisely the same amount he had previously received in the position of judge.³⁶⁵ This led to an argument, with several Hasidim, including the aforementioned community chairman, taking the stance that Chmielnik required a rabbinic leader of greater stature than Rabbi Toivye Sylman. A proposal was made to offer the position to the chief rabbi of the nearby village of Raków, whose name was Rabbi Eliezer Yehoshua Epstein (b. 1898).³⁶⁶ He was first cousin to Rabbi Toivye Sylman—as both rabbis were grandsons of the “Chentchiner Rebbetzin”³⁶⁷—and his own grandfather, Rabbi Aryeh Yehudah Leib Epstein, had been the Chmielnik chief rabbi prior to Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman.³⁶⁸ Thus, Rabbi Eliezer

³⁶⁵ A Resident of Chmielnik, “The Dispute Surrounding the Chmielnik Rabbinate,” 4; Fridnzon, “Rabbinic Dispute,” 546.

³⁶⁶ According to Penina Meizlish, Rabbi Eliezer Yehoshua Epstein was born in 1898 and perished in Treblinka. He was appointed the chief rabbi of Raków in 1920. See: Penina Meizlish, *Rabanim she-nispu ba-sho'ah: Biografyot shel rabanim ye-admorim mi-Polin u-mi-shear artsot mizrah Eropah she-nispu ba-shoa'ah* (Jerusalem: [Lashon limudim], 2006), 21. See also: Piotr Krawczyk, “Dzieje Gminy Żydowskiej w Chmielniku” [The History of the Jewish Community in Chmielnik], 9. Malka Owsiany, a native of Raków who was also incarcerated in the Chmielnik ghetto, recalled that Rabbi Epstein took over the rabbinic seat in Raków following his predecessor, the so-called “Modzhitzer Rebbe,” Rabbi Shaul Yedidiah Eliezer Taub (1886-1947). Mark Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt: khronik fun undzer tsayt* (Buenos-Aires: Tsentral-farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1946), 15.

³⁶⁷ Rabbis Eliezer Yehoshua Epstein and Toivye Sylman, respectively, are both indicated as being “grandchildren of the just deceased Chentchiner Rebbetzin,” in a *der Moment* article from 1937. Although her name is not explicitly mentioned in this article, the common grandmother of these two rabbis was Sara Horowitz Sternfeld (1838-1937). “The Chmielnik Rabbi Arrested in the Middle of Praying on the Sabbath,” *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], March 1, 1937, 1. For biographical details about Horowitz Sternfeld, see: Shuly Rubin Schwartz, *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 8; Tzvi Rabinowicz, *The World of Hasidism* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1970), 205.

³⁶⁸ Proof of Rabbi Aryeh Yehudah Leib Epstein’s former position as rabbi of Chmielnik may be seen in a rabbinic notice printed in *ha-Magid*, the first Hebrew language weekly, in 1875. The notice, which pertained to the use of large citrons that hailed from Corfu, Greece, during the holiday of Sukkot, referenced the many esteemed rabbis who gave their rabbinic ruling on this matter of Jewish law. Included among the listed is Rabbi Aryeh Yehudah Leib Epstein of the Jewish community of Chmielnik. See: “Notice,” *ha-Magid* [Lyck, East Prussia], September 29, 1875, 8. A family tree outlining the rabbinic lineage of Rabbi Eliezer Yehoshua Epstein and his familial relationship to Rabbi Aryeh Yehudah Leib Epstein, his grandfather, may be seen in the following religious text: Eliezer Yehoshua Levi Epstein, *Sefer Mishnat Rabi Eliezer* (Bnei Brak, Israel: Esh Dat Rabbinical Seminary, [2013]), 320.

Yehoshua Epstein was viewed as having as much right to the rabbinic seat as did his cousin, Rabbi Toivye Sylman.³⁶⁹

Not surprisingly, Rabbi Toivye Sylman did not remain silent in light of this new proposal, and in time, the town splintered into two camps: those supporting Rabbi Toivye Sylman, and those supporting Rabbi Epstein. According to the recently mentioned Chmielnik resident Mordechai Fridnzon, most of the local “artisans took Rabbi Sylman’s side, whereas most of the Hasidim took his opponent’s side.”³⁷⁰ It is not totally clear who had the ultimate authority in the town during these tumultuous years, but both rabbis seemed to “set up shop” in the town as though they had won the battle.³⁷¹

The complete details of how matters proceeded in the town during this era of disputed leadership, which lasted until the outbreak of the war, are not perfectly clear. In a 1936 issue of the Kielce newspaper, *Kieltser tsaytung*, a contributor who referred to himself only as “A Resident of Chmielnik,” explained that the entire local Jewish community was divided and greatly suffered as a result. He stated that the majority of the local community sided with Rabbi

³⁶⁹ An alternate version of this account states that after Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sylman’s death, nobody applied for his position after offers for it were dispatched from Chmielnik, since it was already known that the position’s rightful successor was Rabbi Toivye Sylman. The only person said to have actually applied for the rabbinic post was Rabbi Eliezer Yehoshua Epstein, otherwise known as the “Rabbi of Raków.” See: “Reverberations in the Press,” 551; “Sharpened Rabbinic Fight in Chmielnik,” *Kieltser tsaytung* [Kielce, Poland], December 9, 1932, 4.

³⁷⁰ Fridnzon, “Rabbinic Dispute,” 546; Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, eds., *From A Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 156.

³⁷¹ Apparently, Rabbi Eliezer Yehoshua Epstein came to serve both the Jewish communities of Chmielnik and Raków, commuting between the two. For further details on this point, see: http://swietokrzyskisztetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=242&sub=173 (accessed 10-26-22).

Toivye Sylman,³⁷² and noted that the religious court in Kielce, which held a trial concerning this matter, ruled in favor of Rabbi Toivye Sylman.³⁷³

Which, of course, did not sit well with Rabbi Epstein. Apparently he would not accept the court's verdict and took over Chmielnik's rabbinate and relocated with his family to an apartment in the very center of the town, in the marketplace square. All this, in spite of the popular protests from many residents, and in spite of the distinct prohibition issued by the Agudas ha-Rabonim [i.e., "The Union of Rabbis"] in Poland.³⁷⁴ The votes for Rabbi Epstein in the local *kehillah* elections were done away with by the authorities, but in opposition to them, two appeals were brought to the highest administrative tribunal. As of the publication of this article, the author believed that these votes would ultimately be annulled.³⁷⁵

The matter reached secular authorities, too. According to the Warsaw-based Yiddish daily, *Haynt* [Today], in 1934 the Starosta (chief administrator of the province) and the Wojewoda (governor of the province) approved Rabbi Epstein's appointment as rabbi of Chmielnik, after which Rabbi Sylman appealed to the highest tribunal. The Agudas ha-Rabonim then simultaneously appealed to Poland's Ministry of Education in opposition to Rabbi Epstein's

³⁷² A Resident of Chmielnik, "The Dispute Surrounding the Chmielnik Rabbinate," 4.

³⁷³ The rabbis, who are not explicitly mentioned by name, are referred to in the Chmielnik memorial book as hailing from Radzyń [officially Radzyń Podlaski, in Polish], Ozorków, Otwock, and Novaminsk [i.e., Mińsk Mazowiecki, in Polish]. Perhaps noteworthy is the fact that most of these towns had sizable Hasidic communities. See: "Reverberations in the Press," 551.

³⁷⁴ Fridnzon, "Rabbinic Dispute," 548; Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From A Ruined Garden*, 157; "A Dispute in Chmielnik Surrounding the Rabbinic Seat Lasts 8 Years," *Hayntige naves* [Warsaw, Poland], May 12, 1936, 3. Supposedly, even relatives of both Rabbis Sylman and Epstein, in addition to the Agudas ha-Rabonim, entirely forbade Rabbi Epstein from becoming rabbi of Chmielnik. See also: Ibid.

³⁷⁵ A Resident of Chmielnik, "The Dispute Surrounding the Chmielnik Rabbinate," 4.

rabbinic appointment.³⁷⁶ By 1936, *Hayntige naves* [Today's News; Warsaw, Poland] stated that “sanctions” were taken out against Rabbi Sylman by his opponents, until he told his followers to stop contesting Rabbi Epstein’s selection in the *kehillah* elections.³⁷⁷

“A Desecration of God’s Name and Demoralization”

Chmielnik’s “dirty laundry” began to reach nearby towns. A few years into the dispute, an effort was made by a non-Jewish actor—the mayor of the nearby town of Busko-Zdrój, Kazimierz Gałdziński (1885-1947)³⁷⁸—to reign in the internecine battle. It is unclear precisely why this mayor and not the mayor of Chmielnik at the time, decided to get involved at this point. However, it is likely that Gałdziński was a man of some clout, given that he was mayor of this popular spa town for a period of 20 years, up until the outbreak of the Second World War. He demanded that the Chmielnik Jewish community take Rabbi Toivye Sylman to a religious court of law to settle the matter of the rabbinic seat. According to an article published in the *Kieltser tsaytung*, a religious trial was supposed to have taken place in December 1932 in Kielce. That was intended to settle the dispute (at least at that stage). The participating rabbis were the famous so-called “peacemaker,” Rabbi Levinzon of Nayshtot [Nowy Korczyn, in Polish]; Rabbi Bromberg from Lentshits [Łęczyca, in Polish]; and Rabbi Horberg, the “Zwoliner Rabbi” and

³⁷⁶ “According to the Intervention of the Agudas ha-Rabonim, the Ministry of Education Has Not Approved the Chmielnik Rabbi,” *Haynt* [Warsaw, Poland], Oct. 21, 1934, 7.

³⁷⁷ “A Dispute in Chmielnik Surrounding the Rabbinic Seat,” 3.

³⁷⁸ According to a monument dedicated in memory of Gałdziński in the Parish Cemetery in Busko-Zdrój, he was mayor of the town from 1918 to 1939. For images of this monument, visit: “Busko is Getting Ready for the Next All Souls’ Day Collection.” *Echo Dnia Świętokrzyskie*. November 8, 2012. <https://echodnia.eu/swietokrzyskie/busko-szykuje-sie-do-kolejnej-kwesty-zaduszkowej/ar/8525992>; “Gałdziński, Kazimierz.” *Mogily.pl* Polish Cemetery in Busko-Zdrój. http://mogily.pl/buskozdroj/Ga%C5%82dzi%C5%84skiKazimierz_981500 (accessed 4-18-22).

head of the religious court of law, from Kielce. However, the religious court of law was torn asunder in the middle by Rabbi Sylman, who refused to hear testimony in favor of Rabbi Epstein.³⁷⁹ Thus, the matter was not resolved, and continued to drag on—seemingly indefinitely.

In time, even basic functions were impeded in Chmielnik. Both sets of followers hired their own ritual slaughterers, stating that the opposing rabbi's ritual slaughterer's "*shechita*" was unkosher and thereby unfit for consumption by Chmielnik's Jews. As a result, "for a pious Jew, there was no choice but to give up eating meat."³⁸⁰ The Agudas ha-Rabonim, though, continued to side with Rabbi Toivye Sylman as the rightful rabbinic successor and thereby forbade the "*shechita*" of Rabbi Epstein's ritual slaughterer.³⁸¹ One of the prohibitions issued by the "Union of Rabbis" may be seen in the following emphatic notice, published in an issue of one of Poland's leading interwar Yiddish dailies, *der Moment*, in 1935: "Agudas ha-Rabonim once again warns that the rabbinic interpretation of ... Epstein is forbidden and every man shall be warned and should watch that his dishes not be mixed even with the mourners' dishes from the '*shechita*' of the ritual slaughterers and inspectors who are subordinate to Epstein."³⁸² Incidentally, this notice was signed by three of the Agudas ha-Rabonim's leading rabbinic figures of the day: (President) Rabbi Menachem Mendel Alter (b. 1877), Chief of the Religious

³⁷⁹ "Sharpened Rabbinic Fight in Chmielnik," 4.

³⁸⁰ Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From A Ruined Garden*, 157. See also: Fridnzon, "Rabbinic Dispute," 549.

³⁸¹ Ibid.; *ibid.*; A Resident of Chmielnik, "The Dispute Surrounding the Chmielnik Rabbinate," 4.

³⁸² "Strong Prohibition of the Agudas ha-Rabonim Against the Rabbinic Interpretation of Mr. Epstein from Rakow and Chmielnik—Not to Mix with the Dishes from Those Who Eat from Epstein's Ritual Slaughterers," *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], June 17, 1935, 2. Note that Rabbi Epstein is not credited in the title of this article with being a rabbi, but rather, is referred to as "Mr."

Court of Pabianice; (Vice President) Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Kanal (b. 1862); and (Secretary) Rabbi Reuven Yehudah Neifeld (b. 1869), Chief of the Religious Court of Nowy Dwór.³⁸³

Other major halachic quarrels and controversies developed between the two rabbis and their respective followers. In one instance it had to do with the status of the Chmielnik *eruv*.³⁸⁴ In that case, it reached the point where the *eruv* was destroyed and thereby unfit for use by any of Chmielnik's Sabbath-observant Jews—the vast majority of Chmielnik Jewry—resulting in virtually nobody being able to carry any longer on the Sabbath.³⁸⁵ In other instances, these differences in opinion meant that certain couples who had been married by “Rabbi A” versus “Rabbi B” were considered to be living together illegally and “in sin,” according to the ruling of “Rabbi B”—and vice versa. And finally, on yet another occasion, during Passover, no less, one of the two rabbis declared that an oven that the other rabbi had deemed kosher for Passover, contained leaven.³⁸⁶

In the meantime, all of this anger, hostility, and division is said to have spilled out into the streets of small-town Chmielnik, such that whenever one of the two rabbis appeared on the street at any given time, he would be shouted at and publicly berated by his opponents. On some

³⁸³ Ibid. For further details regarding these rabbis, see: Meizlish, *Rabanim she-nispu ba-sho'ah*, 17, 184, 222.

³⁸⁴ An *eruv* is a ritual halachic enclosure created for the purpose of allowing a Jew to carry objects from a private domain to a semi-public domain on the Sabbath, something that would otherwise be forbidden on the Sabbath. The *eruv* also allows a Jew to transport objects four cubits or more within a semi-public domain. Since the *eruv* directly affects the ability of religiously observant Jews to carry such things as house keys, medication, food, and even infants, its absence in a highly traditional *kehillah* such as Chmielnik would certainly have imposed major limitations on what local Jews could effectively do on the whole, during the Sabbath. For a basic definition of the term, “*eruv*” and its halachic implications, see for example: Adele Berlin and Maxine Grossman, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 247.

³⁸⁵ “Urbanistics and ... Dispute of the Decisors,” *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], September 20, 1938, 4.

³⁸⁶ Fridnzon, “Rabbinic Dispute,” 549; Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden*, 157-158.

occasions, this ongoing strife even led to outright physical violence. For example, once, when Rabbi Epstein was leaving the house of study after giving a sermon, together with his supporter, the aforementioned Dovid-Yosef Zilberberg, a group of Rabbi Sylman's supporters were outside waiting for them. One of these overly zealous artisans actually went so far as to strike Zilberberg on the head with a bottle, wounding him.³⁸⁷ All of this enmity frequently led to "denunciations, provocations, legal processes, and the like."³⁸⁸ In the words of the formerly mentioned anonymous "Resident of Chmielnik": "Chmielnik is an old Jewish community, but in her history there was never such an internal Jewish dispute recorded, which brings nothing more than a desecration of God's name and demoralization."³⁸⁹

The Culminating Ripple Effects of the Dispute

By 1937, the long-winded dispute between Rabbis Epstein and Sylman had reached such heights that Rabbi Epstein was actually picked up by the police on a Sabbath day in late February of that same year, during the morning prayers, and whisked away in a car, after which he was thrown in jail. From the Yiddish press of the day, it remains unclear precisely what the charge against Rabbi Epstein was at this time.³⁹⁰ According to Mordechai Fridnzon, Rabbi Epstein was accused of being a Communist, a rather absurd charge against an Orthodox rabbi. As the Communist Party (KPP) had been illegal in Poland since 1919, such a charge could land

³⁸⁷ Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden*, 158.

³⁸⁸ "Sharpened Rabbinic Fight in Chmielnik," 4.

³⁸⁹ A Resident of Chmielnik, "The Dispute Surrounding the Chmielnik Rabbinate," 4.

³⁹⁰ "The Chmielnik Rabbi Arrested in the Middle of Praying," 1. A second and somewhat later newspaper article states that Rabbi Epstein was taken by taxi to Busko-Zdrój, where he was handcuffed and then transported to Pińczów, where he was presumably jailed. See: "Surrounding the Arrest of the Chmielnik Rabbi," *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], March 3, 1937, 1.

one in prison.³⁹¹ Apparently, though, according to one article in *der Moment*, this was not Rabbi Epstein's first arrest. Indeed, he had previously been arrested on account of the rabbinic seat and the dispute surrounding it.³⁹² Nevertheless, Mordechai Fridnzon states that "following long efforts, they [Rabbi Epstein's supporters] succeeded in freeing the rabbi from the prison with bail [money]."³⁹³

Articles published from two respective newspapers on March 3, 1937, only days after Rabbi Epstein's arrest and imprisonment, both state that a delegation from Chmielnik came to Kielce that very day to appeal to the local authorities there to release their rabbi.³⁹⁴ The article from *Haynt* further adds that Rabbi Epstein's delegates even offered to increase the amount of bail money to have the rabbi released, but that the local mayor refused to accept their offer.³⁹⁵ Only a day earlier, according to an article in *der Moment*, local authority figures—possibly even the mayor of Chmielnik and Rabbi Sylman himself—came to Rabbi Epstein's residence and appropriated his record books, which were subsequently handed over to Rabbi Sylman.³⁹⁶

What is clear from the reportage of the aforementioned Yiddish press is that this rabbinic dispute, which began as a rather internal matter among Jews in a small Polish town, within a

³⁹¹ Fridnzon, "Rabbinic Dispute," 550; Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden*, 158.

³⁹² "The Chmielnik Rabbi Arrested in the Middle of Praying," 1.

³⁹³ Fridnzon, "Rabbinic Dispute," 550. See also: Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden*, 158.

³⁹⁴ "Surrounding the Arrest of the Chmielnik Rabbi," 1; "Following the Arrest of Rabbi Epstein," *Haynt* [Warsaw, Poland], March 3, 1937, 2.

³⁹⁵ "Following the Arrest of Rabbi Epstein," 2.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; "Surrounding the Arrest of the Chmielnik Rabbi," 1.

matter of time, had an increasing ripple effect.³⁹⁷ Ultimately, the dispute grew to involve non-Jews of various bureaucratic strata, and they, too, took sides in this seemingly only Jewish matter. As Mordechai Fridnzon recalls in his essay, even among the Chmielnik police, there was a police officer, Balczykowski, who sided with Rabbi Epstein, whereas there was another police officer, Majda, who also collaborated with the secret police and threw in his support for Rabbi Sylman. Naturally, both police officers took their own respective “cuts” from local shopkeepers and tavern keepers in exchange for their support. According to Fridnzon, Officer Majda, who could frequently be seen getting drunk at the tavern owned by Leibl Sylman, Rabbi Sylman’s cousin—as a form of gratitude for liquor—was supposedly behind having Rabbi Epstein arrested as a political criminal (as previously discussed).³⁹⁸

It is unclear just how much this relentless dispute cost Rabbi Epstein financially, as it appears that his followers took the brunt of the costs involved, for example, in relocating him and his family to Chmielnik and bailing him out of prison (at least on one occasion). However, it is rather evident that Rabbi Sylman was left in a financially impaired state, which was either brought on by, or simply compounded by, the costs involved in his defending himself against Rabbi Epstein. Indeed, Rabbi Sylman’s shaky financial status is the main subject of discussion in two appeal letters that he wrote, respectively, in 1938 and 1939, only a matter of days before the outbreak of World War II, to his fellow *landsmen* [kinsmen] in the New York City area. In the

³⁹⁷ I would speculate that since Chmielnik was so heavily Jewish, and because the town’s Polish Gentile minority was so economically dependent on whatever affected the local Jewish population, this rabbinic dispute invariably affected everybody—both in its immediate and nearby spheres. Hence, the dispute’s ripple effect, which even led to non-Jews taking sides, either with Rabbi Sylman or Rabbi Epstein.

³⁹⁸ Fridnzon, “Rabbinic Dispute,” 550; Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden*, 158.

letter from 1938, Rabbi Sylman bemoaned the spiteful proceedings and troubles he had to contend with from his opponents, who in his words, endeavored to kill off his entire family, since “If one takes away the livelihood of another person, it’s as good as killing him.”³⁹⁹ He further added that this 10-year-long “action” cost him a great deal of money defending his good name, yielded “victims,” and destroyed his rabbinic household. Rabbi Sylman threw himself upon the mercy of his fellow Chmielnik Jews in New York with the following plea: “The only salvation is [that] I depend on you, to whom I turn with tears in my eyes” ... “to provide me with this urgent help, for I am in need of several thousand Polish złoty.”⁴⁰⁰

Again, on August 14, 1939—only two weeks before Germany invaded Poland, beginning World War II—Rabbi Sylman turned to his fellow *landsmen* in the New York City area in a tone of desperation. This time, he did not attribute his financial problems to the so-called “dispute” per se, but rather, to the antisemitic “*shechita*” restrictions and laws that were enacted against locally pasturing geese—an economic mainstay of many Chmielnik Jewish families.⁴⁰¹ For this reason, the rabbi requested that he be sent a regular sum of 10 dollars per month to help him and his family remain financially afloat. In addition to this, he asked that his kinsmen assist him with the paperwork necessary so that he might come to America for a period of six months, during

³⁹⁹ “Two Letters from the Chmielnik Rabbi, Rabbi Toivye Sylman,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 1028.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 1029.

⁴⁰¹ For additional information regarding the edict that forced goose breeders to relocate their pastures from Chmielnik, proper, to the town’s outskirts—due to sanitary reasons—and the monetary impact this had vis-à-vis Chmielnik’s newly established “Reconstruction Fund” and “Free Loan Society,” see for instance: “About Our Reconstruction Work: Looking into the Matters of the Reconstruction Fund,” *Folks hilf* [People’s Aid; Warsaw, Poland], December 1, 1937, 20.

which he would lecture on Jewish subject matter, and in this way, be able to earn some much-needed income.⁴⁰²

As far as the request for several thousand zloty is concerned, it is unclear whether this was ever fulfilled either in full or in part by the New York-based Chmielnik *landsmen*.⁴⁰³ Given the late date of the request, it is abundantly clear that this could never be actualized—definitely not in any manner that Rabbi Sylman envisioned it. The sad irony is that had he been able to come to the United States at around the time he hoped to do so, Rabbi Sylman would quite likely have avoided the fate that he and so many of his fellow Chmielnik Jews—and Polish Jewry as a whole—invariably suffered during World War II.

For the residents of the otherwise peaceful shtetl of Chmielnik, the social and religious tumult caused by this scandal was not only a novelty, but a cause célèbre and source of shame.⁴⁰⁴ But, the sad truth is that rabbinic disputes were nothing new, as attested to by no less than the

⁴⁰² “Two Letters from the Chmielnik Rabbi, Rabbi Toivye Sylman,” 1029.

⁴⁰³ Although it remains unclear to me just how sizable the Jewish Chmielnik diaspora was prior to World War II, the Chmielniker Sick and Benevolent Society of New York was established in 1929 with 12 members. There were 140 individuals present during the society’s first official election of administrative positions, also in 1929. By 1938, the society had 135 members. Its composition by the late 1930s was five percent American-born and meetings were held on the first through the third Saturday on New York City’s Lower East Side. The society’s aims at that stage in its existence included: receiving death benefits, purchasing cemetery plots, helping needy members, and supporting institutions both in Chmielnik and locally. See: Federal Writers’ Project (New York, N.Y.), *Di Idishe landsmanshaften fun Nyu York* [The Jewish Landsmanshaften of New York] (New York, NY: The Yiddish Writers’ Union, 1938), 302; Moyshe Leyzer Mintz, “With Chmielnikers in America,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 1000. In 1931, the society established the Chmielniker Young Ladies Auxiliary to aid needy *landsmen* and charitable agencies. See also: Fruma Mohrer and Marek Web, eds., *Guide to the YIVO Archives* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 54.

⁴⁰⁴ According to an article in *der Moment* from 1938, which argues the novelty of the Chmielnik rabbinic dispute, such a matter between two rabbis “is as old as the rabbinic seat itself.” “Urbanistics and ... Dispute of the Decisors,” 4.

esteemed Yiddish and Hebrew writer and journalist, Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1942)⁴⁰⁵—even when they pertained to matters of rabbinic succession, opposing ritual slaughterers, and religious judges. Among the other disputes concerning rabbinic succession that occurred around the same time as Chmielnik’s rabbinic dispute in east-central Europe were the following three: 1) one that involved the appointment of a “Rabbi Shmulevizner” to take the place of the deceased “Peltsovizner Rebbe,” Rabbi Lotstein (c. 1925); 2) the more well-known dispute that pertained to the appointment of Rabbi Yosef Zusmanovitsh (1894-1941) in place of Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein (1866-1934), the former “Slobodker Rebbe” and director of the noted Slobodka Yeshiva, in the greater vicinity of Kaunas, Lithuania (c. 1928); and 3) the highly publicized and long-winded dispute in nearby Radom, which revolved around the appointment of Rabbi Yechiel Kestenberg (1888-1942) as the city’s local chief rabbi.⁴⁰⁶ Even today, in the 21st century, we see similar social dynamics, where perfectly insular communities that most of the world has never heard of suddenly make the front pages of major New York daily newspapers. Unfortunately, there is a long-standing precedent for such in-fighting, especially among Hasidic rabbis and community leaders. Chmielnik was not an anomaly.

⁴⁰⁵ See for example Hillel Zeitlin’s insightful article in *der Moment*, in which he addresses what he calls, the “Rabbis’ Question.” In this piece, Zeitlin provides an outline of how to better avoid in the future these age-old rabbinic conflicts that have long-since plagued Polish Jewry. He also remarks that in the past, the disputes that developed between rabbis—particularly Hasidic ones, such as the Radzyńer and Gerer, respectively—at least had some sound and clear-cut basis. In recent years, though, according to Zeitlin, it is less evident what these disputes even pertain to, and that they are often simply “a fight for influence in various Jewish communities, namely, a fight for rabbis.” Such was the case in Chmielnik, as well. Hillel Zeitlin, “The First and the Most Necessary in the Government of the Rabbis’ Question,” *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], January 5, 1932, 3.

⁴⁰⁶ See: “The Question Regarding the Peltsovizner Rabbinic Seat,” *Haynt* [Warsaw, Poland], October 29, 1925, 7; “The Dispute Surrounding the ‘Rabbinic Seat’ in Slobodka,” *der Moment* [Warsaw, Poland], August 3, 1928, 3; Ben-Tsion Klibansky, *The Golden Age of the Lithuanian Yeshivas* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022), 342; Gershon Bacon, “Warsaw-Radom-Vilna: Three Disputes over Rabbinical Posts in Interwar Poland and Their Implications for the Change in Jewish Public Discourse,” *Jewish History* 13, no. 1 (1999): 108-109, 111; Alfred Döblin, *Journey to Poland*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London; New York: : I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1991), 60-62.

World War II Brings an End to the Dispute

In hindsight, of course, it is difficult to watch this saga unfold without wringing our hands in panic. Did the rabbis not understand that much bigger troubles awaited them on the horizon? Could they not see that the question of who was to lead the town of Chmielnik was perfectly irrelevant, since there would be no community to lead? Did they not see the signs that Europe was against them, and that any nuances they saw between themselves were quite invisible to the outside world?

No. Of course not. And to expect them to, honestly, would be unreasonable. What rational human being could possibly have anticipated the horrors of the Holocaust and what it would mean for Poland's Jews? Is it possible that, had the community not been consumed by such in-fighting, they might have been more aware of the oncoming war? Possibly. But, as we have seen, antisemitism was nothing new in Poland, and there was no reason to pause one's life to navigate it. In fact, it was just another part *of* life.

The rabbinic dispute continued to drag on even into the outbreak of World War II. When the Germans occupied Chmielnik in early September 1939, each of the two cousins, Rabbis Sylman and Epstein, hid in separate cities. After they had both returned to Chmielnik, they are said to have finally reconciled in some way, in the shadow of death. Neither one of the rabbis is believed to have survived the war.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ Fridnzon, "Rabbinic Dispute," 550; Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden*, 158.

Chapter Four: Chmielnik's Jews During the Second World War

The Initial Days of Warfare

In the last chapter, we immersed ourselves in a rabbinic dispute that consumed much of Chmielnik's psyche in the years leading up to World War II. Some might say it even distracted them from what should have been a sense of impending doom, by causing the townspeople to focus on minutiae rather than on the more important signs of war. But whether Chmielnik's Jews were ready for it or not, the war did come, and this chapter will focus on Chmielnik's experience of it. Specifically, we will look at the German invasion, the creation of anti-Jewish laws and the ghetto, ghetto life, forced labor from the ghetto, mass deportations, and the final liquidation of the town's Jewish population. In most measures, Chmielnik mirrored many other Polish towns and reflected the larger timeline and methods the Third Reich used globally, as part of its Final Solution. In other ways, certain elements of the German takeover in Chmielnik differed from more metropolitan areas. For example, Chmielnik's ghetto was unwalled, unlike Warsaw's or Łódź's, which were sealed. However, this was actually typical for towns of Chmielnik's size and vicinity. Still, a deep immersion into the specific stories of Chmielnik survivors allows us an intimate and close-up view of the larger trends we read about in secondary sources. This is what microhistory is about—using a small case study to extrapolate greater conclusions and contribute to a more nuanced and colorful mosaic—and this chapter is a good example of that. So, let us begin at the beginning: late summer of 1939.

In Chmielnik, mobilization for war against the Third Reich was announced by the Polish Government on August 31, 1939, and was initially “met with peace and understanding” among

the general population.⁴⁰⁸ Military reservists were called up and told to join their particular regiments and units. The mobilization process was conducted in an orderly fashion. The public was assured that the allied forces were prepared to help defend Poland against the enemy. According to Maciągowski and Krawczyk, despite the imminence of war, this news was generally met—at least, at the onset—with calmness. To some degree, this behavioral pattern on the part of Polish society may have taken its cue from the Polish authorities, who asked citizens to remain quiet and “to commence hard work for the country’s defenses.”⁴⁰⁹

On Friday, September 1, 1939, at around 6:00 a.m., the announcement was made on Polish radio that Germany had declared war on Poland.⁴¹⁰ This signified, in the words of Chmielnik native, Joseph Kiman, “the beginning of the end for the Jewish population of Chmielnik.”⁴¹¹ By the 3rd of September, all of the local Polish police and elected officials in Chmielnik fled eastward, leaving the town unprotected,⁴¹² and all males who were of draft-age

⁴⁰⁸ Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 154.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 154-155.

⁴¹⁰ Yisrael Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 703.

⁴¹¹ Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 3.

⁴¹² Joseph Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], ed. Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 656; Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 3; Yankev Rozenblum, “The Destruction of Chmielnik,” *Unzer shtime* (Paris), October 11, 1947, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55. This situation was evidently not unique to Chmielnik. Menashe Montsazsh, who, in 1939, was a military reservist living in Sosnowiec (a city located a distance of more than 130 km from Chmielnik), further relates how when local military reservists in the area were asked to report for duty at the nearest military headquarters, relatively few reservists actually showed up. Menashe Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 725.

were encouraged to escape, so as to avoid falling prey to the Germans. Already by the evening of Saturday, September 2, Chmielnik was flooded by refugees who had come by foot, by car, or in carts, from Silesia and Poland's western territories. This included Jews from Sosnowiec and Będzin who were attempting to flee the quickly encroaching German forces. It was they who revealed to the Jews of Chmielnik that a number of Polish cities in their vicinity had, even then, already been taken over by German troopers.⁴¹³

Partially in response to the plight of these refugees, as well as the reports of bullets and machine guns, and the noise of German planes in the air, a number of Chmielnik's residents—particularly the youth—decided to flee east. In the words of Yisrael Feingold, a Chmielnik native: “During the course of the day on Sunday, there was a great frenzy in Chmielnik. Events unrolled at such a frantic pace, to the point where the youth planned on fleeing, some on foot, some by vehicle.”⁴¹⁴ By the evening of September 3, as much as 50 to 75 percent of Chmielnik's population evacuated the town.⁴¹⁵ However, when those fleeing were overtaken the following day by German tanks, most of them decided to return to Chmielnik. Nonetheless, about 1,000 Chmielnik residents—most of them Jews—continued eastward, and in this way, ultimately

⁴¹³ Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 703; Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa'am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 17-18.

⁴¹⁴ Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 703.

⁴¹⁵ Feingold recalls that by Sunday, September 3, more than 50 percent of Chmielnik fled in various directions at the onset of World War II, whereas Maciągowski and Krawczyk state that the count was as high as three-fourths—if not more—of the town. See: Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 703; Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 155.

managed to survive the war.⁴¹⁶ The wartime journeys of these individuals, as well as their stories of survival, will be addressed, specifically in the next chapter.

According to Maciągowski and Krawczyk's *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, by 3:00 p.m. on September 5, German tanks had entered the town from Pińczów Street and Busko Street.⁴¹⁷ In little time, the town had grown empty, with residents hiding out in cellars, attics, and various other clandestine places.⁴¹⁸ As Cesia Ullman (née Diamant) recalled the events surrounding the takeover of Chmielnik in September 1939, the Germans marched with huge tanks into their small town with its narrow streets. She and her family were at home at the time and were terrified by this sight. According to Ullman, the Germans shot at Jews they saw on the streets. Therefore, her parents told her and her siblings to hide and crouch down low in a back room. When she dared to peek out, she saw that the entire sky was ablaze in red. This was because—as she would later learn—the Germans had set fire to a nearby synagogue in which people prayed, with people inside.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 155; Zimmerman, "Jewish Cultural Festivals," 172. On accounts of Jewish flight eastward early on in World War II and the positive impact this decision frequently had on Jewish survival, see also: Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 127, 141, 204, 228, 281. Anna Prager (née Frydman) (b. 1936) and her immediate family, as well as members of her extended family, were among those Jews who fled Chmielnik to the eastern zone, following the outbreak of World War II. In spite of their subsequent deportation by the Soviets to Siberia, in June 1940, Prager and her relatives managed to survive the war in this manner. Anna Prager, telephone interview with author, written transcript, August 26, 2012.

⁴¹⁷ Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 155; Sabor, *Shtetl*, 93; Kalman Zelażnik, "The Destruction of Chmielnik," *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 3 (1964): 5.

⁴¹⁸ Zelażnik, "The Destruction of Chmielnik," 5; Batya Rodzhinski-Ensel, "In the Ghetto and on the Aryan Side," *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 11 (1972): 5.

⁴¹⁹ Cesia Ullman, interview by Stephen Grynberg, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, August 7, 1995. Similarly, Chmielnik native, Bernie Sayone (1922-2017) noted that his first encounter with the Germans at the age of 17 was within the context of them purposely setting fire to a Chmielnik synagogue with praying Jews inside. See: Beverly A. Evans, 1995, Ts., *In the Streets Lying, Crying, and Dying: The Bernie*

Due to the fact that the Polish police had already fled the city, a civilian militia that included Jews was created and took over in their stead, for the purpose of protecting and defending local residents.⁴²⁰ This was composed of Moyshe Yosef Szperling, Wolf Moszkowicz, Kalman Kosak, and others.⁴²¹ One of the first casualties of war in Chmielnik was the aforementioned Moszkowicz, who had been standing guard on Pińczów Street with a rifle strapped across his back. A German tank approached Moszkowicz and the soldier inside called him over to him. But the Jewish militiaman did not understand these orders, and so the tank drew nearer, firing at Moszkowicz, and afterward, severing his body.

Following the murder of Moszkowicz, according to Gitla Fastag (née Shulsinger, 1920-2018), the German officer began to sing in German, “We will free Poland of the Jews!”⁴²² Rivka Mali recalled that in the immediate aftermath of Moszkowicz’s murder, everyone was terrified and remained at home with closed windows and heard only the sound of passing German boots. But otherwise, nobody dared to stick his face outside.⁴²³ This singular event clearly made a

Sayone Story, University of Colorado at Denver. Likewise, Renia Kukielka [also: Renya Kulkielko], a native of Jędrzejów who found herself living with family in nearby Chmielnik after the war’s outbreak, stated that Jewish townsmen were herded into Chmielnik’s great synagogue, which was then “locked and barred, sprayed with gasoline, and put to the torch.” Kulkielko, *Escape from the Pit*, 5. See also: Batalion, *The Light of Days*, 34. The fire to which Ullman, Sayone, and Kukielka all referred will be discussed in greater detail in the forthcoming body of this text. The structure that had been set ablaze was actually a religious house of study, which was also used for prayer.

⁴²⁰ Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 19; Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995; V. Herskop, “On the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Destruction of the Polish Town, Chmielnik,” *der Tog*, November 17, 1952, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55.

⁴²¹ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 656; Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 727; Bender, “Die Juden von Chmielnik,” 76.

⁴²² Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012.

⁴²³ Testimony of Rivka Mali, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/10530, 3.

strong impression on Chmielnik's Jews as a foreshadowing of what was yet to come, since it was mentioned in several testimonies.⁴²⁴

That same evening, additional German military reinforcements entered Chmielnik at around 7:00 or 8:00 p.m., dispersing throughout the town, and burning down at least one house and the lime kilns belonging to Shimen Koyfman [Kaufman] and Shloyme Ptasznik.⁴²⁵ Local hooligans assisted the invaders in ferreting out members of the prewar Jewish community (or *kehillah*) council. This was followed by yet another singular tragic event to mark the beginning of the war: over thirty Jews and Poles were taken captive and forced into the local house of study (or *beit midrash*) that was situated near Chmielnik's main synagogue.⁴²⁶ Among this group were the Rakower rabbi, Rabbi Eliezer Yehoshua Epstein; the rabbi of Chęciny and his son-in-law; Shabtiel Bialogórski, the prewar president of the *kehillah*; the town priest, Władysław Kwieciński, and others.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ See, for example: Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa'am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 23-24; Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992; Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995; Nathan Garfinkel, interview by Charles Silow, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Southfield, MI, November 26, 1995; V. Hershkop, "On the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Destruction of the Polish Town, Chmielnik," *der Tog*, November 17, 1952, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55; Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 4; Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 727; Irving Buchbinder, interview by Simon Zelcovitch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Willowdale, Canada, April 3, 1995; Yehoshua Steinfeld, "The First Victims," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile [Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community]*, edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 741.

⁴²⁵ Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 156; Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 727; Sabor, *Shtetl*, 94.

⁴²⁶ This was the so-called 'common house of study' mentioned earlier in this work.

⁴²⁷ Bender, "Die Juden von Chmielnik," 77; Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 156; Sabor, *Shtetl*, 94; Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 727.

On September 15, 1939, the Germans set fire to the *beit midrash* and stood watch outside with a machine gun. Anyone who attempted to jump through the windows was shot on the spot. Several individuals attempted to escape, but were killed, and the building was completely destroyed.⁴²⁸ According to Chmielnik native, Kalman Mapa (b. 1926), who witnessed the aftermath of the fire, some 200 people perished in this intentionally set blaze.⁴²⁹ The only known exceptions to survive this arson were the priest, Władysław Kwieciński,⁴³⁰ who apparently jumped out of a window under a volley of bullets, Shabtiel Bialogórski, who survived with a grazed ear, Rabbi Epstein, who incurred an injury to the leg, Yehoshua Steinfeld, and Hershl Ratse.⁴³¹ At around the same time, the Germans threw a hand grenade into the building that

⁴²⁸ According to historian Philip Friedman, similar such cases in which the German occupiers set fire to enclosed structures with Jews inside took place in Mielec, on September 13, 1939, the eve of the Jewish New Year; in Białystok, on June 27, 1941; in Końskie, Kutno, Łask, Łowicz, Łuków, and Sieradz. See: Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 222.

⁴²⁹ Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992.

⁴³⁰ The Germans forced Priest Władysław Kwieciński (1912-1998) from his home, along with a group of Jews, into the *beit midrash*, which they proceeded to set ablaze. See: Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 156.

⁴³¹ Various versions of this event are likewise mentioned in several eyewitness accounts. See, for example: Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995; Charlotte Goldlist, interview by Rona Arato, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, October 25, 1995; Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 5; Mary Kleinhandler, interview by Sidney Burke, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, July 18, 1995; Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa, "Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile [Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community]*, edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 713; Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 727; Rodzhinski-Ensel, "In the Ghetto and on the Aryan Side," 5; Yankev Rozenblum, "The Destruction of Chmielnik," *Unzer shtime* (Paris), October 11, 1947, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55; Yankev Rozenblum, "In Memory of Jewish Chmielnik," *der Keltser* (Paris), May 1950, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55; Irwin Wygodny, interview by Elana Daniel, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Wilmette, IL, June 11, 1995; "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile [Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community]*, edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 697. In many accounts of this event, Rabbi Epstein perished, as did all of the captives aside from Shabtiel Bialogórski and the priest. However, Yehoshua Steinfeld, who

served the town's new Jewish cemetery on ul. Mrucza. The wife of the undertaker and two children were killed on the spot.⁴³² The following morning, as Joseph Kiman recalls, "the chapel with the Torah scrolls were still burning, and yet we couldn't do anything."⁴³³ The Germans ordered randomly selected Jews to clean up the ashes of those who had been murdered in the blaze the night before.⁴³⁴

Anti-Jewish Laws Begin

By the start of 1940, the Germans had enforced a host of anti-Jewish laws. These took several extreme and sometimes bizarre forms. They lasted into the period of the ghetto, which was formally established in April 1941.⁴³⁵ For example, one of the first decrees involved the wearing of the Jewish badge, which had to be visible both from the front and from the back and worn by all Jews ages six and older. According to Joseph Kiman, this edict took effect as early as January 1940, and required Jews to wear "yellow armbands with the Jewish star."⁴³⁶ Jews with

personally jumped from the *beit midrash* and survived the war to later tell about it, may ultimately have been one of the only surviving witnesses to dispel some of these other mistaken claims. See: Yehoshua Steinfeld, "The First Victims," 741-742.

⁴³² Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 657; Rodzhinski-Ensel, "In the Ghetto and on the Aryan Side," 5.

⁴³³ Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 5.

⁴³⁴ Yankev Rozenblum, "The Destruction of Chmielnik," *Unzer shtime* (Paris), October 11, 1947, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55.

⁴³⁵ Bender, "Die Juden von Chmielnik," 82; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 665; Krakowski, "Chmielnik," 657. Robert Seidel states that the district of Busko, which included Chmielnik and other "open ghettos," witnessed the establishment of ghettos slightly later than stated above, in May 1941. See: Robert Seidel, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik Politik in Polen: der Distrikt Radom 1939-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 240-241.

⁴³⁶ Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 5. Ezjel Lederman recalled the armbands as being white with a blue Star of David. According to his recollection, every Jew—including children and infants—"had to wear one on every outergarment at all times." Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 147.

beards would be routinely attacked by German S.S. officials on the streets; their beards and flesh would literally be torn from their faces.⁴³⁷ In addition, Jews were only permitted to walk outside until 6:00 p.m.⁴³⁸ Signs were put up declaring that Jews and dogs had their own walking lane, while Poles had a separate lane in which to ambulate.⁴³⁹ Jews were no longer permitted to move freely along the town's two main streets, which included Shidlever gas (ul. Szydłowska). Instead, their main street became Bednarska, which was a small and narrow thoroughfare.⁴⁴⁰

According to former Chmielnik resident, Yechaskel Fastag, if a Jew were spotted walking in a street that was off-limits to Jews, the German authorities would simply shoot him dead.⁴⁴¹ Faye Goldlist (née Skrobacka) recalls how Jews were no longer allowed to frequent the main marketplace and were forced to live in the town's side streets. At night, they were not permitted to keep their lights on, and synagogues were no longer officially permitted to conduct

⁴³⁷ Yankev Rozenblum, "The Destruction of Chmielnik," *Unzer shtime* (Paris), October 11, 1947, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55.

⁴³⁸ Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 731; Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992. Similarly, Miriam Bronkesh stated that her family was afraid to go out after eight o'clock p.m., because they had heard rumors about the German's German shepherds—that they shred people to pieces. Miriam Bronkesh, interview by Helen Schneeberg, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bridgeton, NJ, May 13, 1998.

⁴³⁹ Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 658-659.

⁴⁴⁰ According to Irwin Wygodny, who could no longer recall the names of the streets in Chmielnik during the time of his 1995 interview, Jews were not permitted to walk on the walkways at all; rather, they were literally forced to walk in certain designated streets. Irwin Wygodny, interview by Elana Daniel, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Wilmette, IL, June 11, 1995; Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 731.

⁴⁴¹ Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995.

services (especially on the Sabbath), although people—such as Goldlist’s father—would pray at home.⁴⁴²

Jews were forced to enter their homes from the back entrance.⁴⁴³ Furthermore, all Jews whose homes faced out onto the main marketplace had to smear their windows with white dye. This was so as to block their view of the marketplace, thereby no longer enabling them to see what was taking place there.⁴⁴⁴ Jews were not permitted on the streets during the hours of 8:00 to 10:00 a.m., at which time the commandant of the German police would visit the chief of the Polish police.⁴⁴⁵ Were this commandant to see a Jew in the distance, he would order his German shepherd, “Man, bite that dog!” It was in this manner that a number of Jews were torn to shreds by this mighty dog.⁴⁴⁶ Finally, Jews were not permitted to consume onions and eggs. Were egg

⁴⁴² Faye Goldlist, interview by Faye Blum, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Downsvlew, Canada, June 19, 1995.

⁴⁴³ Mary Kleinhandler’s (née Scheiber) family had lived on a main street in Chmielnik prior to the German takeover. However, when this area became off-limits to Jews, they were forced to abandon their house through the back door. See: Mary Kleinhandler, interview by Sidney Burke, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, July 18, 1995. See also: Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 707; Miriam Bronkesh, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 29, 2022.

⁴⁴⁴ Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995; Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012; Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 659. In a similar vein, Leah Mapa-Shapiro recalls the windows of her home, which faced out onto the marketplace, being dyed black (not white), so as to obscure her family’s view of the outside world. See also: Leah Mapa-Shapiro, “Saved from the Nazi Angel of Death,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 21 (1982): 4.

⁴⁴⁵ Yankev Rozenblum, “In Memory of Jewish Chmielnik,” *der Keltser* (Paris), May 1950, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55; Yankev Rozenblum, “The Destruction of Chmielnik,” *Unzer shtime* (Paris), October 11, 1947, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55.

⁴⁴⁶ Yankev Rozenblum, “The Destruction of Chmielnik,” *Unzer shtime* (Paris), October 11, 1947, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55.

shells to be found in the rubbish bin of a Jewish-owned yard, the owner of the property would be arrested and taken away for good.⁴⁴⁷

The Germans took special pains to torment the Jews whenever they passed them on the street, which in turn, led Jews to remain outside as seldom as necessary—particularly, when a German had been sighted in the vicinity. Among the most tormented of the victims were the Hasidim, who were highly visible in Chmielnik. If spotted on the street, they were ordered to do various forms of work without even the slightest remuneration in return,⁴⁴⁸ and were often mocked and photographed. In one case, a Jew was ordered to ride a pig stationed inside of a vehicle, the entire way from Chmielnik to Kielce, a distance of approximately 30 kilometers (or roughly 19 miles).⁴⁴⁹

Anti-Jewish laws also came in the form of economic pressure. Following the German takeover of Chmielnik, Jews were forced out of their jobs, especially when they held influential positions. Such was the case with Dr. Natan Balanowski (b. 1896),⁴⁵⁰ a local Jewish physician who, according to Mordechai Goldstein, was the official town doctor of Chmielnik prior to the war.⁴⁵¹ Balanowski opposed the new regime and was arrested and imprisoned as a result.⁴⁵² His

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.; Yankev Rozenblum, “In Memory of Jewish Chmielnik,” *der Keltser* (Paris), May 1950, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55 .

⁴⁴⁸ Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 706.

⁴⁴⁹ Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 713.

⁴⁵⁰ Dr. Balanowski’s date of birth and profile are provided in Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names, based on two respective lists: one pertaining to Jews rescued by righteous Gentiles, the other one to persecuted Jews. For further details see: *The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names*, Balanowski, Chmielnik: https://yvng.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&s_id=&s_lastName=balanowski&s_firstName=&s_place=chmielnik&s_dateOfBirth=&cluster=true (accessed 5-29-21).

⁴⁵¹ Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 47.

apartment and medical office, located just across the road from the Mapa family, were both taken over by a doctor from Poznan who was a *Volksdeutscher* (Pole of German extraction).⁴⁵³

According to Kalman Mapa, in his oral testimony, one afternoon a young man on a motorcycle appeared and accosted Dr. Balanowski, ordering him: “You have to leave everything what [*sic*] is in this office. You just take your clothes and your shoes.”⁴⁵⁴ When Dr. Balanowski asked why this was being done to him, given all the good he did for people in Chmielnik, a jeep came by with two men who proceeded to place the doctor in chains and inside of the jeep. Mapa states that Dr. Balanowski was taken to another nearby city where he was imprisoned for close to one year, until the local Judenrat was finally able to have him freed and returned to Chmielnik.⁴⁵⁵

Thus far in our discussion of Chmielnik’s fate under Nazi rule, we have encountered a series of actions implemented by the Germans against the Jews of Chmielnik that for the most

⁴⁵² As referenced later in this text, Dr. Balanowski would survive World War II and was appointed chief physician of the security forces or secret police, the UB, in Kielce. He tended to both the living and the dead in the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom, as attested to by former Chmielnik residents and survivors of the Kielce pogrom of 1946, Max Glait (née Melech Glajt), M. Kwasniewski, and Gitel Garfinkel-Bresco. Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989; Kwasniewski, “Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom,” 44; Garfinkel-Bresco, “Memories of My 80 Year Lifespan.” Balanowski’s name also appears in the “Relatives Sought” column of the *Forverts* newspaper as somebody seeking a friend named “Dr. Horn” who formerly resided in Warsaw. The newspaper notice clearly states that Balanowski was then residing in Poland. See: “Relatives Sought,” *Forverts* [New York], October 20, 1946, 10. Finally, Balanowski is also mentioned as still residing in Poland as recently as 1965. See: Charles Deitelbaum, “A Greeting from Chmielnikers in Poland,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 4 (1965): 16.

⁴⁵³ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 658; Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 729; Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 47; Bender, “Die Juden von Chmielnik,” 80.

⁴⁵⁴ Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992.

⁴⁵⁵ Unfortunately, he never returned to his practice, since, as previously mentioned, it had already been forcibly appropriated by a *Volksdeutscher* (Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992). What is more, Jews were afraid of this new physician and could not afford to go to him (Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 152).

part follow Raul Hilberg's six stages, which ultimately led to the near total destruction of European Jewry.⁴⁵⁶ These stages were: (1) Definition—Jews (and other minorities) were defined as the dangerous “other” via legalized discrimination; (2) Isolation—anti-Jewish laws, social practices, residential living restrictions, job displacements, and property expropriation marginalized Jews from mainstream society; (3) Concentration—Jews who were unable to emigrate—as was the case for most of Polish Jewry—were concentrated into ghettos; (4) Deportation—Jews were then deported from smaller to larger ghettos, and from ghettos to concentration and death camps; (5) Mobile killing units (or *Einsatzgruppen*)—the systematic killing of Jews began through this channel with the support of “local gendarmerie, police units, native antisemitic elements of the populations and the German army murdered Jews in towns, villages, and cities throughout the German-occupied Soviet Union”;⁴⁵⁷ (6) Death camps—industrialized killing centers that played a central role in the “Final Solution” by eliminating massive numbers of “undesirables”—particularly Jews. As we will soon see in the rest of this chapter, these stages will unfold in precisely this order within the context of Chmielnik—as was also occurring simultaneously in other towns and cities throughout Poland.

The Establishment of the Chmielnik Ghetto

The establishment of the Chmielnik ghetto, which was previously mentioned, took place in April 1941. This was consistent with what was happening to other Jewish communities in the

⁴⁵⁶ For a broader discussion of Hilberg's six stages of mass murder, see: Michael Berenbaum, “The Holocaust,” in *Teaching About Genocide: Issues, Approaches, and Resources*, edited by Samuel Totten (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Pub., 2000), 119-122.

⁴⁵⁷ Berenbaum, “The Holocaust,” 121. The mobile killing units, or *Einsatzgruppen*, is the one stage in Hilberg's delineation of the “Final Solution” system that was not implemented in the vicinity of Chmielnik, as the town was never part of the German-occupied Soviet Union.

greater vicinity around that time. According to Christopher R. Browning, the Jewish communities of southern Poland were generally spared ghettoization until “the spring of 1941, when a wave of ghettoization decrees in March and April engulfed the Jewish communities in the Cracow, Radom, and Lublin districts.”⁴⁵⁸ During that period, the Jews of Chmielnik were concentrated in an unfenced and unwallled area, thus making Chmielnik one of many sites to have a so-called “open ghetto.” Nonetheless, as previously alluded to, Jews were forbidden from going beyond the specified boundaries of more than one kilometer outside of this designated area.⁴⁵⁹ The Chmielnik ghetto was not surrounded by barbed wire, “but you had a curfew, and you weren’t supposed to go out on the street. If they caught you, you were shot.”⁴⁶⁰ Demarcating the designated Jewish ghetto area was a sign to this effect, aimed at keeping away Gentiles, which also indicated that this district was a “‘Seuchengebiet’ or area of infectious diseases.”⁴⁶¹

A number of former Chmielnik residents noted that their ghetto had a different status than some of the other towns and cities in Poland (e.g., Warsaw and Łódź, to name a few). For example, Chil Gorlicki commented that Chmielnik did not have a ghetto like those found in big cities, but that at the same time, the town had a centralized area into which Jews were concentrated.⁴⁶² Echoing Gorlicki, Isadore Goldlist (b. 1929) stated: “By us it was not a ghetto

⁴⁵⁸ Browning, *Remembering Survival*, 55.

⁴⁵⁹ The singular exception to the one-kilometer decree applied to members of the ghetto’s Jewish law enforcement, the so-called Jewish police. Miron and Berenbaum, eds., “Chmielnik,” 111; “Thus Our Town Was Destroyed,” 697.

⁴⁶⁰ Miriam Bronkesh, interview by Helen Schneeberg, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bridgeton, NJ, May 13, 1998.

⁴⁶¹ Lederman, *Outlasting Hitler’s Armies*, 27.

⁴⁶² Chil Gorlicki, interview by Diana Ritch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Maroubra, Australia, June 26, 1995.

like the big ghettos, like the Warsaw ghetto. There were sections where Jews could not live ... you were cut off from the whole world.”⁴⁶³ Lily Smietana (née Lewkowicz) also stressed the difference between the ghetto in Chmielnik and those found in the big cities, emphasizing that they, as Jews, “couldn’t walk outside of the city limits.”⁴⁶⁴

Yechaskel Fastag aptly remarked that Chmielnik was not a ghetto with a fence or a wall, comparable to what existed in Warsaw. Nonetheless, Jews had designated streets on which they were permitted, and outside of those few areas, they could incur a death sentence, were they spotted by a German official. In Fastag’s estimation, although the ghetto was not a caged-in space, per se, “the fear of death was the worst.”⁴⁶⁵ Rivka Mali, like Fastag, stated that Chmielnik’s ghetto was not enclosed with walls, but rather, that Jews were not permitted to walk along the town’s main thoroughfares. According to Mali, if a Jew were found walking along one of those streets, he would be summarily shot.⁴⁶⁶ Izhak Dobia (also known as “Frank,” b. 1926), who had already been incarcerated in the larger, but also unfenced Płock ghetto, prior to his arrival in the Chmielnik ghetto in early 1941, stated that the Chmielnik ghetto “was not barbed

⁴⁶³ Isadore Goldlist, interview by Lisa Newman, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, March 18, 1998.

⁴⁶⁴ Lily Smietana, interview by Rona Arato, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, October 12, 1995.

⁴⁶⁵ Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995.

⁴⁶⁶ Testimony of Rivka Mali, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/10530, 5.

wired [*sic*]. It was none of that.”⁴⁶⁷ Yet, there was no work there to be had; and so, the “Germans used to come in and grab people for work.”⁴⁶⁸

The first decree that provided precedents for ghettoization was issued in the form of Reinhard Heydrich’s *Schnellbrief* (“express letter”) of September 21, 1939. This stipulated that Jews should immediately be concentrated “in ghettos,” so as to allow for better control and to enable them to later conduct their deportations with greater ease. However, as to the question of how exactly this process would be implemented, Heydrich only addressed the matter of establishing *Judenräte* (or Jewish councils). Other arrangements, though, he left to local authorities.⁴⁶⁹

It is due to this lack of detailed organization in Heydrich’s *Schnellbrief*, that Christopher R. Browning remarks, the process of ghettoization itself stretched for many months and was not uniform from one place to the next. In Browning’s mind, ghettoization was not part of the Nazi Reich’s central plan, or a “calculated, preparatory step for the Final Solution.”⁴⁷⁰ Rather, he argues that the ghetto was exploited by local authorities who made conditions so untenable for the Jews, “in order to press the central government to approve or sanction ever more radical measures, including ultimately mass murder.”⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁷ Testimony of Izhak Dobia, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/5840, 24.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Christopher R. Browning, “Before the ‘Final Solution’: Nazi Ghettoization Policy in Poland (1940-1941),” in *Ghettos 1939-1945: New Research and Perspectives on Definition, Daily Life, and Survival* (Washington, DC: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005), 4.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 4.

Holocaust scholar and survivor, Philip Friedman, who undertook the discussion of ghettoization, argues similarly, that instructional meetings and preparations among high-ranking members of the Third Reich were not always a precursor to the establishment of ghettos.⁴⁷² For this reason, he posits, a different course of action was followed among various local authorities, since there was evidently no general directive in place for such an endeavor. It is for this reason, Friedman avers, that all distinct types of ghettos were established, namely: open, closed, and half-closed. Furthermore, in many of the smaller towns in Poland in which Jews comprised the vast majority of residents, there were no ghettos established, as it was often viewed as “technically impossible” to segregate the local Jewish population from that of the local Gentile one.⁴⁷³ Although Friedman does not specifically refer to the case of Chmielnik, he does bring several examples to illustrate the various ghetto prototypes. One of the examples he brings of an “open ghetto” is that of Częstochowa, which was considered relatively “liberal.” As with Chmielnik, Częstochowa’s ghetto was not fenced off.⁴⁷⁴

According to Christopher R. Browning, in his work, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp*, the ghettos of the Lublin district were predominantly “open.” Another example of the “open” ghetto model that he cites is that of Wierzbnik, a town in the Radom-Kielce vicinity. Wierzbnik’s ghetto was demarcated by signs, but as in the case of the Chmielnik

⁴⁷² On the one hand, higher ranking members of the Third Reich generally met in advance to discuss the establishment of significant ghettos such as those constructed in Łódź (referred to by the Third Reich as Litzmannstadt) and Warsaw. On the other hand, the details surrounding the establishment of less-significantly-sized ghettos were often not as explicit—frequently resulting in confusion and decisions being made only on the local level. See: Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 70-72.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 73.

ghetto, it was not “physically sealed off by a wall or fence.”⁴⁷⁵ Other examples of ghettos in the same general vicinity as Chmielnik that were “open,” at least initially, include those of Ostrowiec and Działoszyce. In the case of Ostrowiec, the ghetto was officially established in April 1941 and the Germans apparently did not enclose the ghetto until the end of 1942/beginning of 1943.⁴⁷⁶ Likewise, in Działoszyce, a sealed ghetto was not created. However, in June 1941, Jews were forbidden from leaving the actual town and its surrounding villages.⁴⁷⁷

Although one tends to think of the German-instituted ghettos of World War II in terms of the “closed ghetto” model, as seen in the largest two ghettos of Warsaw and Łódź, the reality is that closed ghettos—typically, surrounded by high walls or fences and guarded by the police⁴⁷⁸—were actually in the minority. More common was actually the “open ghetto” model. This was certainly true of the Distrikt Radom (Radom Region), in which the Chmielnik ghetto was situated. Even though open ghettos were not sealed-off by high walls, the residents of these

⁴⁷⁵ Browning, *Remembering Survival*, 55.

⁴⁷⁶ Leibush Milstein, “The Annihilation of a Jewish Community,” in *Ostrowiec: A Monument on the Ruins of an Annihilated Jewish Community*, edited by Meir Shimon Geshuri, et al. (Tel-Aviv: Society of Ostrovtser Jews in Israel with the cooperation of the Ostrovtser Societies in New York and Toronto, 1971), 53; Theo Richmond, *Konin: A Quest* (London: Vintage Books, 1996), 350-351. The blatant distinction of the Ostrowiec’s subsequent “sealed” status is related by Holocaust survivor, Nachemia Wurman, in the following: “At about that time the barbed wire went up. It enclosed the ghetto. Gates were installed at regular intervals, and each was manned by police: Polish and German on the outside, Jewish police on the inside. No one could leave without a special permit.” Nachemia Wurman, *Nachemia: German and Jew in the Holocaust* (Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon Press, 1988), 42.

⁴⁷⁷ Holocaust survivor, Heniek Pomocnik (b. 1923), in his unpublished autobiographical account, relates the ghettoization scenario that transpired in Działoszyce: “At last, we arrived in the town of Działoszyce ... That was the summer of 1941 ... An order was issued that Jews were not allowed to leave the town and villages.” Heniek Pomocnik, “My Memories: A Survivor of the Shoah of Polish Jews” (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), typescript. See also: Shimshon Leib Kirshenboim and Stefan Krakowski, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition (Vol. 6), s.v. “Działoszyce” (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 80.

⁴⁷⁸ In the case of the Warsaw ghetto, there was a high wall in place to separate the ghetto population from the rest of the local population. In the instance of the Łódź ghetto—what the Germans referred to as the Ghetto Litzmannstadt—a fence was utilized to isolate the ghetto’s inhabitants from the rest of the city’s inhabitants. See: Andrea Löw, “Ghettos,” in *A Companion to Nazi Germany*, edited by Shelley Baranowski, et al. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 552.

designated areas were also subject to strict limitations on their daily movements and functions. Likewise, they were not permitted to leave the confines of the demarcated ghetto area without receiving explicit authorization from German functionaries or their representatives, to do so. This is all evidenced by the accounts retold by Jewish survivors of the Chmielnik ghetto who are cited here.

In general, open ghettos offered better living conditions—if one might make such a bold statement—compared to closed ghettos, where physical congestion and rates of disease and starvation were typically higher. Also, the sheer fact that open ghettos were, by their very nature, not hermetically sealed-off—and, in the case of Chmielnik and many other smaller-sized ghettos in the Distrikt Radom—located within close proximity to farms and villages, also meant greater access to food, as compared to large urban-based closed ghettos. Nevertheless, according to historian Martin Dean, the closed ghetto model predominated in the Distrikt Radom from the spring of 1941 onward. This move only further devastated Jewish communities in the region, as it meant that Jews had to now risk their lives sneaking into and out of ghettos in order to barter for or purchase food from nearby farmers and villagers.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁹ Martin Dean, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945* (Vol. 2, Part A), s.v. “Radom Region (Distrikt Radom)” (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 189, 191.

Creation of the Judenrat

Within the first 10 days of September,⁴⁸⁰ the Germans stationed in Chmielnik called a small meeting to order, which took place in the local main synagogue. At that gathering, a German S.S. official demanded that a Judenrat, or “Jewish Council,” be established. At that same time, Avraham Langwald, the son of the well-known merchant and community activist, Yankl Langwald, was appointed the “*Juden Elster*” (or leader of the Judenrat).⁴⁸¹ Langwald attempted to convince other prewar *kehillah* members to join him, but most of these individuals refused to get involved.⁴⁸² Another brief meeting later followed at Langwald’s home, at which there was also a German S.S. presence. It was there that the Judenrat was officially assembled. It consisted of: Avraham Langwald (leader), Yosef (or Josek) Kleinert, David Zalcman, Efraim Zalcberg, Moyshe Levenstein, Yechiel Staszewski, Simcha Jedwabny, Mordechai Markowiecki, Leibús Shulsinger, Yosl Feffer, Moyshe Wajsgold (from Łódź), Anshl Scyzorek, and Yechiel Domb (secretary).⁴⁸³

⁴⁸⁰ Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 22, 26.

⁴⁸¹ Langwald, who previously had no experience as a community leader, remained in this position for a year before resigning. He apparently left his post because he did not believe he was able to properly live up to this role. See: “Avraham Langwald,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 19 (1980): 37; Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 657. A somewhat different explanation for Langwald’s resignation is that the opposition against him within the Judenrat and one of its committees pressured him to leave his position. See: Isaiah Trunk, “Indirect Rule,” in *How Was It Possible?: A Holocaust Reader*, edited by Peter Hayes (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 340, 347.

⁴⁸² Trunk, *Judenrat*, 26.

⁴⁸³ Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 728; Bender, “Die Juden von Chmielnik,” 79.

Immediately following the establishment of the Judenrat, the Germans demanded “contributions” of some huge amount of money.⁴⁸⁴ Jews also had to turn over valuable household goods, such as silverware, gold, jewelry, clothing, and furs, and everything had to be delivered by a certain time and day. As Charlotte Goldlist (née Lewkowicz) recalls, members of the Judenrat came around to confiscate Jewish possessions on behalf of the German S.S., “not because they wanted to do it, but because they had to do it.”⁴⁸⁵

After the first sum had been handed over, demands were made for additional “contributions,” and all Jews were forced to participate—wealthy and poor alike.⁴⁸⁶ The Judenrat was in charge of overseeing these collections and making sure that everything was turned over in a timely manner.⁴⁸⁷ As Yechaskel Fastag conveyed, the Judenrat would have to collect money from the community and then turn it over to the Germans. This order for money might be something in the range of hundreds of thousands of zloty, and it would be due shortly after the order had been administered.⁴⁸⁸

As for the controversial question about the local Judenrat and its behavior toward the Jews of Chmielnik, the general picture that emerges from the primary literature is that these were

⁴⁸⁴ Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 713.

⁴⁸⁵ Charlotte Goldlist, interview by Rona Arato, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, October 25, 1995.

⁴⁸⁶ According to Montsazsh, the “contribution” demands rose from day to day, as the sources for these funds continued to dwindle from day to day. Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 729.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 728-729; Mary Kleinhandler, interview by Sidney Burke, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, July 18, 1995.

⁴⁸⁸ Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995.

well-known and well-liked people.⁴⁸⁹ What is more, they were put into the difficult and thankless position—one of “choiceless choices,” to quote scholar of Holocaust literature, Lawrence L. Langer⁴⁹⁰—of acting as mediators between the German S.S. and the Jews. For example, according to Fastag, the perception was that Jews had no say in becoming Judenrat members; the Germans simply designated who they would be. Furthermore, as he put it, there were “no Kapos” among them; they were “nice Jewish people.”⁴⁹¹ Separately from her husband, Gitla Fastag (née Shulsinger) conveyed a similar perspective: that people did not want to be put into this position, but they had no choice in the matter, because the Germans forced them into doing this.⁴⁹²

In a similar light, the view of the Judenrat painted in *Sara’s Children* is that of exploited individuals whom the German S.S. malevolently manipulated into being used as accomplices in the Germans’ crimes.⁴⁹³ This view of the Jews being naïve apparatuses in their own destruction is one that is also mentioned by Holocaust survivor-scholar, Aharon Weiss (b. 1928), who has written widely on the subject of the *Judenräte*. According to Weiss, certain historians, such as Raul Hilberg (1926-2007), viewed the Jews as little more than tools in the hands of their oppressors, the Germans. In Weiss’s words, quoting Hilberg: “‘The Jewish councils became a

⁴⁸⁹ Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 706.

⁴⁹⁰ Langer employed this phrase in multiple publications to convey the untenable position in which Jews; namely, members of the Jewish leadership, were frequently placed, while under German occupation during World War II. See for instance: Lawrence L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 46-47.

⁴⁹¹ When Fastag refers to Judenrat members as not being Kapos, he may be connoting the Jewish police, which was an institution implemented in the ghettos. Kapos, on the other hand, were designated functionaries in the concentration camps—not in the ghettos. Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995.

⁴⁹² Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012.

⁴⁹³ Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 88.

German tool as a consequence of their origin, condition and strategy ... From the beginning, virtually all of the Councils were placed into an irreversible position, regardless of the thoughts or perceptions of their leaders.”⁴⁹⁴ Finally, Yechiel and Kalman Mapa formulated their view of the newly instated Jewish leadership and law-enforcement body as follows: “The Judenrat and the *Ordnungsdienst* [i.e., Jewish Police] were in general, not bad.”⁴⁹⁵

Some of the *Judenräte* (Jewish Councils) adopted positive attitudes toward resistance and rescue efforts, even while knowing full-well the repercussions, were they or other parties to be discovered by the German authorities. That being said, Chmielnik had a Judenrat elder in the person of Shmuel Zalzman, who had been one of the most prominent local activists prior to World War II, especially with regard to Jewish welfare aid and support services.⁴⁹⁶ Perhaps due to such a background, Zalzman was favorably disposed toward resistance activities in the ghetto. Moreover, he was not only aware of, but also involved in underground efforts against the German Nazi regime. He ended up being arrested, on account of an informer, and met a grisly

⁴⁹⁴ Aharon Weiss, “The Historiographical Controversy Concerning the Character and Function of the Judenrats,” in *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period: Proceedings of the Fifth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, March 1983*, edited by Yisrael Gutman and Gideon Greif (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988), 682.

⁴⁹⁵ Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 713. The *Ordnungsdienst* or Jewish Police were likewise appointed for the purpose of aiding the Judenrat in “carrying out the Germans’ orders, demanding taxes, sending people to do work,” and other such tasks. See: Zelažnik, “The Destruction of Chmielnik,” 5. The question of the institution of the Judenrat and the Jewish Police is taken up in far greater detail in the previously footnoted, definitive work on the subject, entitled *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* by Isaiah Trunk. Therein, lay several specific references to Chmielnik, many of which stem from the Chmielnik memorial book. See: Trunk, *Judenrat*, esp. 22, 26, 106, 320, 339, 397, 458, 467, 483, 486, 518, 524.

⁴⁹⁶ Blatman, s.v. “Chmielnik,” 17.

death. According to a witness, he was “fastened to a horse-drawn cart” and “dragged all over town” before ultimately expiring. However, other reports state that Zalcman was shot to death.⁴⁹⁷

Shortly after the Judenrat had been established in Avraham Langwald’s home, Jews were being hauled off to forced labor, initially, by the Germans, who would appear unannounced and kidnap them for the reconstruction of houses demolished during the German occupation, and so as to conduct various tasks in the town. But by the second half of 1940, the matter of Jewish forced labor became more regulated with the Judenrat being forced to provide a fixed quota of workers.⁴⁹⁸ Furthermore, these work demands, which included meliorations—breaking up rocks along roads for highway repairs, and in stone quarries, and paving snow in the winter⁴⁹⁹—increased in difficulty from one day to the next. According to Mary Kleinhandler (née Scheiber), whose 15-year-old brother, Karol, was sent to one of these quarries, the Germans were preparing the surrounding infrastructure for war against the Russians, since Chmielnik lay in the path

⁴⁹⁷ Trunk, *Judenrat*, 467. A somewhat different version of Zalcman’s murder, which involves him being chased and then shot in the head, is presented by former Chmielnik resident, Moshe Ben-Shlomo. See: Moshe Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 8 (1969): 4. Similarly, Chmielnik native, Samuel Kalisz (b. 1923), heard other Jews state that S.S. official, [Hauptmann Gerulf] Mayer, was responsible for shooting Zalcman dead. See: Testimony of Samuel Kalisz, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.38/544, 8. References to Zalcman’s murder may also be found in a number of the oral testimonies given by former residents of Chmielnik, including those of Ester Moncznik (née Lewkowicz) and Lily Smietana (née Frydman). See: Ester Moncznik, interview by Jennifer Epstein, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Southfield, MI, March 21, 1996; Lily Smietana, interview by Rona Arato, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, October 12, 1995.

⁴⁹⁸ It is unclear precisely how many Jews were kidnapped or sent off to do forced labor at this time; or, for that matter, what the Judenrat’s fixed quota of workers was. Most likely, the count totaled several hundred, if not more than 1,000 Jews. On this subject, see for instance: Blatman, s.v. “Chmielnik,” 17.

⁴⁹⁹ Irving Buchbinder, interview by Simon Zelcovitch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Willowdale, Canada, April 3, 1995. Frank Dobia, a native of Dobrzyn, Poland, who was deported to Chmielnik via Płock, recalled being forced to break up rocks along the road between Chmielnik and nearby Jędrzejów. He, his father, and other groups of people performed this job, which stood out among other jobs, because it was unlike anything they had ever before done. Frank Dobia, interview by Christian Froeliche, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toorak, Australia, October 4, 1996.

between the two political forces. Women were also taken to work digging potatoes, according to Kleinhandler, as well as turf.⁵⁰⁰

In order to avoid or ameliorate this situation, the Judenrat decided to create a daily listing of who would be selected for work. Wealthier members of Chmielnik's Jewish community could pay money to have the poorer segments of society substituted for them.⁵⁰¹ Mordechai Goldstein, one of those individuals who was ordered to do forced labor, recalls that wealthy Jews and those with means would regularly pay off the Judenrat with a designated sum of money to cover all the Judenrat's expenses, including bribes for the Germans. These monthly payments came with the demand that the wealthy Jews and their sons not be sent to do forced labor in dangerous places. According to Goldstein, the Judenrat willingly acceded to this demand.⁵⁰²

Irving Buchbinder described this work selection process, and the actual ensuing labor as follows: prior to 1942, a foreman would distribute work assignments to Jews on a piece of paper that were signed off on by that same foreman. Jews would not get paid for their labors, and those who could afford to pay off somebody else to work in their stead, would do so. Buchbinder was paid off to work in place of somebody else, even though he was only 12 or 13 at the time. He did

⁵⁰⁰ Mary Kleinhandler, interview by Sidney Burke, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, July 18, 1995; Mapa and Mapa, "Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa," 713.

⁵⁰¹ Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 729; Irving Buchbinder, interview by Simon Zelcovitch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Willowdale, Canada, April 3, 1995. Miriam Bronkesh, (née Kotlan) (b. 1930), a native of Łódź who came with her family to Chmielnik around the time that the Łódź ghetto was erected, in winter 1940, recounted how her family initially paid to have somebody else take her father's place in breaking up stones—performing acts of forced labor. But after a while, he, too, had to go report for "Zwangsarbeit" (German for forced labor). Miriam Bronkesh, interview by Helen Schneeberg, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bridgeton, NJ, May 13, 1998.

⁵⁰² Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa'am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 62-63.

this work—repairing highways in the summer and helping clear the roads of snow for the Germans in the winter—almost daily, in an effort to help financially support his family.⁵⁰³

Jewish Police Created

At around this same time, according to former Chmielnik resident, Menashe Montsazsh, the Jewish police was created under the direction of the Judenrat. At its head stood a Łódź Jew named Moniek Pasternak who spoke German and functioned as a liaison between the Jews and the German authorities.⁵⁰⁴ His assistant was Levi Gonczarski. Other members of the Jewish police included: Natan Szwer, Yechaskel Melman, Eliezer Bugajski, Matis Drukarz, Naftali Tuchman, Sholem Itche Levenstein, Leibus Unger, Alter Steinfeld, Shimen Feingold, Avraham Ferleger, and several others.⁵⁰⁵ According to the description of a Chmielnik newcomer, Henry Golde (1929-2019), who was deported with his family from Płock to Chmielnik in the early years of World War II, the Jewish policemen could be distinguished from other Jews and from

⁵⁰³ Irving Buchbinder, interview by Simon Zelcovitch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Willowdale, Canada, April 3, 1995.

⁵⁰⁴ Guy Miron and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust* (Vol. 3), s.v. “Chmielnik.” (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010), 110.

⁵⁰⁵ Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 730.

the Polish policemen⁵⁰⁶ in that they “wore hats and armbands of white with the star of David in the middle. They also carried billy clubs.”⁵⁰⁷

In theory, the Jewish police (officially called the *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*, or “Jewish Order Service”) was an extension of the Judenrat, and existed for the purpose of helping to enforce the orders set down by Jewish Council members, as commanded by the German authorities.⁵⁰⁸ Indeed, Aharon Weiss argues that unlike the Judenrat, which was in a sense the externally enforced continuation of a prewar Jewish institution (i.e., the Jewish community council), “the Jewish Police was a totally new phenomenon, previously unknown in Jewish communal life.”⁵⁰⁹

Weiss further posits that in all communities, the Jewish police were established by specific orders of the Germans, and that “one cannot point to a single community in which Jewish internal initiative led to the establishment of a Jewish Police.”⁵¹⁰ Indeed, for this precise

⁵⁰⁶ Although it is not entirely clear from Golde’s description who these Polish police were, it is quite possible that he is alluding to the “Blue” police (Pol. *Granatowa policja*), so-called, because of the navy-blue uniforms that they wore. According to Emanuel Ringelblum, one of the chief chroniclers of the Warsaw ghetto, the Blue police functioned only in the territories of Central Poland—otherwise known under the German Nazi regime as the *Generalgouvernement* (General Government). This domain included the regions of Warsaw, Lublin, Kielce, Kraków, and Eastern Galicia. Thus, Chmielnik was also one of many such places subjected to the actions of the Blue police. See: Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War*, ed. Joseph Kermish (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 133; “Thus Our Town Was Destroyed,” 698.

⁵⁰⁷ Henry Golde, *Ragdolls* (Appleton, WI: Golde Publishing, 2002), 39.

⁵⁰⁸ Aharon Weiss provides a list of categorized functions that the Jewish police conducted. See: Aharon Weiss, “The Relations Between the Judenrat and the Jewish Police,” in *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe, 1933-1945: Proceedings of the Third Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, April 4-7, 1977*, edited by Yisrael Gutman, et al. (Jerusalem, Israel: Yad Vashem, 1979), 201, 211.

⁵⁰⁹ Weiss, “The Relations Between the Judenrat and the Jewish Police,” 202. On the subject of *Judenräte* members viewing at least some of their functions as a continuation of their prewar communal activities, see for instance: Weiss, “The Historiographical Controversy Concerning the Character and Function of the Judenrats,” 686.

⁵¹⁰ Weiss, “The Relations Between the Judenrat and the Jewish Police,” 202.

reason, the institution was frequently viewed by Jews “from its very inception, to be a foreign body” imposed upon them by the enemy, and thereby “antagonistic to the community.”⁵¹¹ In light of this background, the record and reputation of the Jewish police in the Chmielnik ghetto appears more mottled than that of the Judenrat.⁵¹²

On the one hand, we have contradictory accounts such as that of Yaakov Lemberg, who relates how two Jewish policemen rescued him and other Jews from being turned over by Polish peasants to the German gendarmes. In this instance, the policemen just in time informed the peasants about their alleged German order to capture any Jews they should find. They then proceeded to tell the peasants that they need not concern themselves any longer with these Jews, and that they would be sent the liquor due them as a reward for handing over Jews. Instead of turning Lemberg and the other Jews over to the Germans, the Jewish policemen placed them in a Jewish prison, in order to rescue them from a certain death.⁵¹³

Ira Kaminsky, similarly, had generally benign interactions with the Jewish police. According to his assessment, “The Jewish police, nobody feared. They were all our friends before that. Most of them were fine boys. They behaved nice.” Kaminsky further added that although some people may have held a grudge against “Pasternak,” the head of the Jewish

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 209.

⁵¹² As with the establishment of the Jewish Councils, the order for the establishment of the Jewish police was initiated by the German authorities. However, in contrast to the Judenrat, “a general order by a central authority regarding the establishment of the Jewish police has not yet been discovered for any occupation area.” Trunk, *Judenrat*, 475.

⁵¹³ Yaakov Lemberg, “From Roundup to Roundup,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 753; Trunk, *Judenrat*, 518.

police, he, personally, had no problems with him.⁵¹⁴ On the other hand, we have testimonies that in Chmielnik and in other ghettos, including those of Radom, Będzin, and Częstochowa, “the ghetto police also arrested people or sealed off their homes for not paying taxes in time, for being late in paying their shares of enforced cash contributions or in delivering fur coats, furniture, and other goods.”⁵¹⁵ Such individuals were then jailed until they paid up or delivered the items requested.

Ironically, although—as previously mentioned—Kalman and Yechiel Mapa indicated that the Jewish police were generally “not bad,” they were also among those to be jailed by two members of the Jewish police. This was even after begging the policemen to let them be and allow them to flee to the nearby town of Działoszyce. But the Jewish policemen refused, and placed the Mapa brothers in a windowless factory, where there was already another imprisoned Jew. A family friend who must have seen what had taken place, shouted to the Mapas to do whatever they could to escape, because in the morning they would be shot. Thanks to the help of this man, Leibl Sylman, the two brothers managed to flee from the prison through a chimney and via the roof, and both ultimately survived World War II to recall the experience.⁵¹⁶

Joseph Kiman was one of those Chmielnik residents to have decidedly negative encounters with the Jewish policemen to the point that he writes, in conjunction with his experiences in Chmielnik following the first and second deportations of autumn 1942, “I could

⁵¹⁴ Ira Kaminsky, interview by Daniel Sedlis, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bayside, NY, December 21, 1995.

⁵¹⁵ Trunk, *Judenrat*, 483.

⁵¹⁶ Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992.

not understand why I was so harassed by the Jewish police and not the Polish police.”⁵¹⁷ For example, following the first deportation, when the Germans were in the process of auctioning off Jewish possessions, Kiman persuaded a German official not to confiscate a coat that had belonged to his father. Ironically though, a Jewish policeman by the name of Abraham Ferleger then approached Kiman and asked him to give him one half of the coat’s value. When Kiman told Ferleger that he did not have any money with him at the time, the Jewish policeman assured Kiman that he would come to see him about the money later.⁵¹⁸ Sometime thereafter, the Jewish police caught Kiman and another Jew and imprisoned them both, because according to them [the police] they were considered illegal and had no right to live.⁵¹⁹

Gitla Fastag (née Shulsinger) also experienced abuse at the hands of some Jewish policemen who took advantage of an already horrendous situation. Unlike some members of the Jewish police, who, according to Fastag, tried to help minimize the hardships of life then prevalent in Chmielnik, there were also “some ... very bad boys, and they used the occasion, and they were beating up people, too.” Fastag further recalls how one such “bad policeman” was

⁵¹⁷ Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 15.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 11. Ezjel Lederman, likewise, had negative recollections of the Jewish policeman, [Abraham] Ferleger, whom he referred to as “God’s Horse.” Lederman blamed Ferleger for having arrested and imprisoned him, due to his having allowed another Jew who was then under Ferleger’s watch, to escape. See: Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 155.

⁵¹⁹ Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 14. Kiman and the other Jew were now considered “illegal” and “had no right to live,” according to the German Nazi regime, presumably because their capture took place after the first and second deportations of Chmielnik Jewry. Kiman, specifically, had fled and hidden in a village during the second deportation, only to return to Chmielnik, after which he was picked up and imprisoned by a Jewish policeman.

later killed by fellow prisoners in Buchenwald, once word got out about how he had treated fellow Jews in his hometown of Chmielnik.⁵²⁰

Ezjel Lederman, who, like Kiman, had overall hostile feelings toward the Jewish police—as well as the Judenrat, for that matter—had initially considered the possibility of becoming a policeman. As Lederman remembered, “many young people were trying very hard to become members of the Jewish Police and were using all kinds of protekcja (influence / connections) to get nominated,”⁵²¹ since jobs that were “essential” to the German war effort were believed to help insure one’s survival. Yet, his father refused to have any connection with the Judenrat or their agents; and henceforth, he was not permitted to become a policeman. Although Lederman conceded that some of the policemen were decent fellows who did the best that they could and tried to aid people, “others became drunk with power they thought they had and behaved miserably, taking bribes and extorting money and goods from people. Some of them acted with unnecessary force while carrying out orders.”⁵²²

Malka Owsiany, like Lederman and Kiman, had absolutely nothing positive to say about the Jewish police in Chmielnik. Because she was not a native of Chmielnik, but rather, somebody who had fled there from a nearby village, she was deemed undesirable by the local Jewish police. In their estimation, these “foreign Jews” who were constantly slipping into Chmielnik were the bane of their existence—literally, the source of all their problems—and an

⁵²⁰ Gitla Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995.

⁵²¹ Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 154.

⁵²² Ibid.

endangerment to their very lives. Yet, in Owsiany's apt and observant words: "The Jewish police did not consist of any righteous people."⁵²³ As she expressed it, "the Germans specially sought out the worst elements, knowing that with corrupt elements, it would be easier for them to manage and carry out their operations."⁵²⁴

Forced Labor in the Ghetto: Methods and Conditions

German demands for forced labor continued to climb from day to day. They finally rose to the point where the Judenrat, in accordance with the orders given them by the Germans, sent men ages 14 and older to do hard labor in Podłęże and Wiśniówka.⁵²⁵ There, they performed melioration work, such as breaking up rocks, and were paid a sum total of 20 złoty per week. According to Ira Kaminsky, who was sent to Wiśniówka, it was a terrible place overseen by Ukrainians who constantly beat the prisoners. Furthermore, conditions there were bad enough, such that some of the prisoners died of hunger.⁵²⁶ In Podłęże, 400 young men labored under horrible conditions, with their bodies partially submerged in water.⁵²⁷

⁵²³ Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 62.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Former resident, Mordechai Goldstein, was one of those adolescent males ordered to report for forced labor in Wiśniówka. According to him, this order, which he recalls coming by mail in March 1942, was sent to some 50 young men in town—all of whom were among the poorer and less well-connected sector. See: Mordechai Goldstein, "The Third Visit of Mordechai Anielewicz in the Chmielnik Ghetto," in *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 18 (1979), 6.

⁵²⁶ Ira Kaminsky, interview by Daniel Sedlis, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bayside, NY, December 21, 1995.

⁵²⁷ Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 660; Mapa and Mapa, "Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa," 713.

Adam Neuman-Nowicki (b. 1925), a native of Płock, Poland, who was deported with his family to Chmielnik in March 1941, was subsequently sent to the camp at Podłęże. According to Neuman-Nowicki, the jobs given to him and the other forced laborers at Podłęże were simply impossible. They had to dig up enormous quantities of dirt to make ditches, and the usual work day was 12 hours. This consisted of standing in water up to one's knees. Moreover, there were always Polish overseers present who would continuously prod the laborers with their sticks.⁵²⁸ In addition, 300 people were selected to do hard labor in Słupia, a village in the western part of Poland. However, at some point later on, a number of these individuals trickled back into Chmielnik, exhausted, hungry, and in a beaten down state, whereas others managed to escape. In the end, nobody remained in Słupia.⁵²⁹ Not long thereafter, in December 1939, another order was given by the Judenrat and enforced by the Jewish police, demanding that even more laborers—500, according to Nathan Garfinkel—be sent to Biała Podlaska,⁵³⁰ in the general vicinity of Lublin, to dry up swamps.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ Adam Neuman-Nowicki, *Struggle for Life During the Nazi Occupation of Poland* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 41. Ezjel Lederman was also sent to Podłęże, where he remained for three or four weeks. However, instead of laboring at drying swamps and digging ditches, he was assigned the task of being the first-aid man. Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 156-157.

⁵²⁹ Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 729; Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa'am Yehudim [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews]*, 55.

⁵³⁰ Nathan Garfinkel, interview by Charles Silow, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Southfield, MI, November 26, 1995. Although Garfinkel reports having been sent to Biała Podlaska at the end of 1939, in the spring of 1941, it became one of several labor camps to which the German authorities recruited labor battalions of men between the ages of twelve and fourteen. See: *The Black Book: The Crime Against the Jewish People* (New York: The Jewish Black Book Committee, 1946), 194-195.

⁵³¹ Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 661. Charles Goldlist (b. 1919), who recalls being sent to Biała Podlaska in 1940 for a period of three to four months, stated somewhat differently; that he worked with other Jews under the supervision of Germans and Poles at laying train tracks—eight men to a half-a-mile stretch of train tracks. Charles Goldlist, interview by Rona Arato, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, October 25, 1995.

According to Joseph Kiman, who was sent to work in Biała Podlaska, “The working conditions were extremely difficult because you had to work in water up to your chest.”⁵³² Furthermore, he witnessed a growing number of executions of Jewish soldiers in the Polish Army who had been captured by the Germans.⁵³³ These conditions ultimately led him to escape from the camp in November 1941 and to return to Chmielnik.⁵³⁴ Like Kiman, Garfinkel, who remained there from December 1939 until early 1941, recalls the Biała Podlaska camp as a dehumanizing place. Nonetheless, he concedes that they at least received food there, thanks to the local Jewish community.⁵³⁵

Ultimately, representatives of the Chmielnik Judenrat were sent to check up on the conditions of Jews who had been sent to Biała Podlaska. Shortly thereafter, the Judenrat saw to it that the demanded high monetary funds were raised in order to free most of the Jewish prisoners at the forced labor camp.⁵³⁶ When these prisoners returned to Chmielnik, however, many of them

⁵³² Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 6.

⁵³³ Kiman’s recollection about the Jewish war prisoners from the Polish Army in Biała Podlaska is consistent with information provided in the Biała Podlaska memorial book, *Sefer Biala-Podlaska*. The memorial book states that in the beginning of 1940, Jewish war prisoners from the former Polish Army who hailed from what had formerly been Poland’s eastern Kresy region, were brought from Lublin to Biała Podlaska, and that the road leading to Biała was marked by the bloodied corpses of Jews shot dead along the way by German machine guns. See: M. J. Feigenbaum, ed., *Sefer Biala-Podlaska* (Tel Aviv: Kupat Gmilut Hesed of the Community of Biala Podlaska, 1961), 402.

⁵³⁴ Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 6.

⁵³⁵ Nathan Garfinkel, interview by Charles Silow, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Southfield, MI, November 26, 1995.

⁵³⁶ Trunk, *Judenrat*, 397.

had contracted typhus, which is highly contagious. They, in turn, infected other Jews in Chmielnik with the disease, which invariably led to a large number of deaths.⁵³⁷

Food Scarcity in the Ghetto

The economic situation in Chmielnik deteriorated. Although the Judenrat attempted to ameliorate matters by helping subsidize local Jewish residents, several months would pass, during which Jews did not receive any of these subsidies. Many Jewish professionals were ruined, and families began to literally starve from hunger. Jews received ration cards for bread, but the amounts received were generally insufficient to feed whole families.⁵³⁸ According to Ezjel Lederman, the allotted ration cards were only “enough for 600 calories per day per person,” and “totally inadequate to maintain one’s health.”⁵³⁹ Esther Lederman (née Gutman), Ezjel’s wife, further noted that, “People who had to depend on the rations allotted to the Jews by the authorities were starving to death. If they didn’t starve, diseases got them. The people, and especially children, were undernourished, underclothed, homeless, and abandoned.”⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 661; Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 730.

⁵³⁸ Regarding the state of hunger in Chmielnik at this time, former resident, Hershl Kaminsky, recalls having to stand in line with bread ration cards. Each card was only good for a pound of bread, yet one needed to stand in line as early as 5:00 a.m. if one had any hopes of obtaining bread. That is how desperate the situation had grown, according to Kaminsky. See: Hershl Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 913.

⁵³⁹ Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 151.

⁵⁴⁰ Esther Lederman and Ezjel Lederman, *Outlasting Hitler’s Armies: The Story of Esther Gutman Lederman: Followed by the Same Events as Remembered by Ezjel Lederman, Her Husband*, ed. Leslie Virostek (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2005), 23.

A plea drafted by Judenrat head, Avraham Langwald, and his secretary, Yechiel Domb, to the Joint Distribution Committee in Warsaw, illustrates just how alarmingly difficult the state of Jewish survival in Chmielnik was, already by February 26, 1940. In this letter, Langwald reports that the Jewish population presently stands at about 7,000 residents, and that most of these individuals do not even have the bare necessities with which to feed their families. The following statistics (as well as additional statistics not included here), provided by Langwald, were intended to jolt the “Joint” into eliciting further aid from the United States—especially, from those families who were known to have relatives still living in Chmielnik:

- “1) Over 400 families do not have any means of survival;
- 2) Over 100 refugee families from other cities;
- 3) Approximately 350 Jewish businesses are closed;
- 4) Approximately 250 workshops are not active.”⁵⁴¹

As a result of the food shortages reaching the point of starvation, many Jews turned to smuggling food items, including potatoes, bread, flour, and corn, from the neighboring villages. The corn would then be ground into cornmeal and baked in a rather primitive manner.⁵⁴² For example, Miriam Bronkesh (née Kotlan) relates how various family members, including her

⁵⁴¹ The above referenced letter was found by a former Chmielnik resident while visiting Poland in 1978. Because of its significance, it was translated from the original Polish into Yiddish and included within the Israeli and Diaspora-based Chmielnik society’s annual bulletin. See: Yehoshua Steinfeld, “Appeal of the Judenrat in Chmielnik to the ‘Joint’ in Warsaw Concerning Help for Jews,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 18 (1979): 4-5. A copy of the original Polish letter may also be found in the “Joint’s” (JDC) archival holdings: JDC Archives, 1939-1941 Warsaw Collection, Folder #295, “Letter from A. Langwald to Amerykansko-Zydowskiego Towarzystwa ‘Joint Distribution,’” February 26, 1940.

⁵⁴² Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 661.

aunts, uncles, grandmother, and Gentile-looking mother would go on a weekly basis to the Polish villagers and return to Chmielnik with chicken, cheese, and flour, which they received in exchange for materials or dry goods. All the while, they recognized that if intercepted by the Germans, it would mean an almost certain death, as they would frequently “hear about this one and that one getting caught.” But in this manner, according to Bronkesh, her family did not suffer hunger, and always “had plenty to eat.”⁵⁴³ Chil Gorlicki described the phenomenon of smuggling in similar terms. According to him, once Chmielnik fell under German occupation, food came mostly from farmers outside of town. Food became extremely expensive, so Jews would trade clothes with farmers in exchange for it.⁵⁴⁴

Children, who were somewhat less constricted than adults, were often in the position of conducting these smuggling efforts. For example, Henry Golde, who was 11 years old when he was deported to Chmielnik, relates how conditions were so bad there that many children—himself included—would sneak out of town to nearby villages, where they would work on farms, often milking and tending to cows. Doing this would also enable them to eat relatively normal meals and to bring back food to their starving families in Chmielnik.⁵⁴⁵ Similarly, Adam Neuman-Nowicki, just a few years Golde’s senior, became a skilled farmhand and cowherd, thanks to the work he did at this time on farms in the Chmielnik vicinity. In addition to providing

⁵⁴³ Miriam Bronkesh, interview by Helen Schneeberg, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bridgeton, NJ, May 13, 1998.

⁵⁴⁴ Chil Gorlicki, interview by Diana Ritch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Maroubra, Australia, June 26, 1995.

⁵⁴⁵ Henry Golde, interview by Sara Akerlund, USC Shoah Foundation Institute testimony, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Appleton, WI, March 3, 1997; Irwin Wygodny, interview by Elana Daniel, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Wilmette, IL, June 11, 1995.

him with food, this experience enabled Neuman-Nowicki to temporarily “forget about the Nazi Occupation, the War, the wanton killing, and the constant fear of death.”⁵⁴⁶

In spite of the seemingly idyllic escapes or respites from reality, in time, even the children were subject to being shot, if discovered with food parcels on their persons. Indeed, smuggling and movement outside of Chmielnik were punishable by death, but many Jews viewed such acts as necessary for survival. In the words of Mordechai Goldstein, who, as a 15-year-old boy, used to smuggle in food with his younger sister from outside of Chmielnik, “It was clear to everyone that if a person did not leave the ghetto for the non-Jewish side; that is, for the Polish side—in order to obtain food there, in spite of all the dangers—he would not survive, and would expire from starvation, he and all of his family.”⁵⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the official warrant banning Jews from leaving the town did not take effect until December 11, 1941.⁵⁴⁸

Chmielnik as a Haven for Non-native Jews

Adding to the hardships in Chmielnik was the influx of Jews from the western parts of Poland, closer to the German border. Among the major sites represented here were Płock, Radom, Główna, and Łódź, with the largest contingency coming from Płock, in March 1941.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁶ Neuman-Nowicki, *Struggle for Life*, 35, 37.

⁵⁴⁷ Goldstein, “The Third Visit of Mordechai Anielewicz in the Chmielnik Ghetto,” 6.

⁵⁴⁸ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 661.

⁵⁴⁹ According to Christopher R. Browning, the Jews of Płock were deported in two roundups in early 1941. One of these took place on February 21, while the other one occurred on March 1. See: Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 53. We also learn that 2,000 Jews were expelled from Radom by Nazi authorities on March 12, 1941, and resettled in Chmielnik and neighboring villages, “where the already-impooverished local Jews have been forced to provide aid for them.” “Expelled Radom and Cracow Jews Resettled in Provinces,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York], March 13, 1941, 1. See also: “Nazis Intensify Anti-Semitism: Berlin Hints Reprisals for Passage of Lease-Lend Bill

Chmielnik became a “safety zone” for these refugees, who had been evacuated or deported from these other towns and cities. Many Jews also returned to their hometown of Chmielnik, from larger cities, to be with family during the growing crisis. In the words of Chmielnik native, Kalman Mapa, “they knew that in the small places, in the small cities, they had better chances of getting food, and they had more chances, maybe, to survive.”⁵⁵⁰ In a telephone interview with her, Miriam Bronkesh, herself a native of Łódź, voiced the same sentiments to me as Mapa vocalized above: “There were people from Plock and Krakow there [i.e., in the Chmielnik ghetto]. They thought it would be safer or better there, which it was. As a child I would never have survived there [i.e., in the Lodz ghetto].”⁵⁵¹

According to the Judenrat, which aimed at reducing the Jewish numbers in Chmielnik—at least, on paper, since this was to be viewed by the German authorities—the total Jewish population in Chmielnik in September 1941 reached a count of 8,292 residents.⁵⁵² Speaking about the Jews of Plock, approximately 800 of whom were shipped to Chmielnik, by the time they reached the town, they had no baggage or means of existence. According to former Plock

Aiding Britain,” *The Sentinel* [Chicago, IL], March 20, 1941, 32; “Nazis Increase Persecution as ‘Reprisal’ for Measure,” *The Reform Advocate* [Chicago, IL], March 21, 1941, 6.

⁵⁵⁰ Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992.

⁵⁵¹ Miriam Bronkesh, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 29, 2022.

⁵⁵² Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 662. Although it is unclear what the exact total count of Jews in Chmielnik was at this time, Henry Golde, who arrived from Plock, stated that originally, Chmielnik had begun with “a population of three thousand.” Now, according to him, “so many Jews had been shipped in from all over Poland, that its population had grown to ten thousand.” Golde, *Ragdolls*, 39-40.

resident, Henry Golde, among his contingent, “no one had money for anything. Everything valuable had been turned over to the Germans.”⁵⁵³

Due to the overcrowding of Jews in such a concentrated area, there were not enough places for the newcomers to reside. Initially, they were put up in Chmielnik’s main synagogue, but this was only until the Judenrat designated where and with whom these refugees would be lodging.⁵⁵⁴ Every household now had its own share of refugees, such that even the formerly wealthy no longer lived in spacious living quarters.⁵⁵⁵ According to Faye Goldlist (née Skrobacka), living space became even tighter following the influx of Jews, first from Radom, and then from Płock. Chmielnik’s Jewish community had to house these newcomers, despite its limited resources.

For example, one family had to accommodate six refugees in their home for a period of six weeks, until other lodgings could be found for them.⁵⁵⁶ In a similar vein, Gitla Fastag (née

⁵⁵³ Golde, *Ragdolls*, 40. See also: Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 662; Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 7; Lederman, *Outlasting Hitler’s Armies*, 30.

⁵⁵⁴ According to Gitla Fastag (née Shulsinger), the Judenrat kept a list of which households had so-called “vacancies” and were available to take in refugee families. Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012.

⁵⁵⁵ Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 730. Similarly, the 1967 Płock memorial book states that the Płock deportees were mainly quartered in the homes of Chmielnik’s wealthy Jews. See: Eliyahu Eisenberg, *Plotsk: toldot kehilah ‘atikat-yomin be-Polin [Plock: History of a Very Old Jewish Community in Poland]* (Tel-Aviv, Israel: ha-Menorah, 1967), 488-489.

⁵⁵⁶ Faye Goldlist, interview by Faye Blum, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Downsview, Canada, June 19, 1995. Alter Steinfeld similarly recalls that living quarters had become so crowded that three families would be forced to reside in a single small house with a kitchen. Furthermore, it was not unusual for Chmielnik residents to generously give up their own beds to the refugees, while they, in turn, slept on the floor. See: Alter Steinfeld, “The First Deportation,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile [Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community]*, edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 745.

Shulsinger) recalls how her widowed grandmother had to relinquish one of her two rooms to another family.⁵⁵⁷ Kalman Mapa also mentions that his own sizable family, which included seven children, took in three newcomers from outside of Chmielnik. In his words: “They were sharing with us, and they were sleeping on the floor. We try [*sic*] our best.”⁵⁵⁸

Indeed, the local community did do its best, collectively, to help the newcomers in terms of housing, clothing, and medicine.⁵⁵⁹ In Miriam Bronkesh’s estimation, Chmielnik Jewry “did the best that they could. Not one [Jewish] person was sleeping on the street [there].”⁵⁶⁰ She and her mother were given a room in which to live in the home of Motl Rozenblum, who also took in a mother and daughter, both of whom slept in a bed in Rozenblum’s kitchen.⁵⁶¹ In another example of the community’s open-heartedness, Adam Neuman-Nowicki recalls being greeted warmly upon his arrival in Chmielnik by members of the Judenrat and the Jewish police, who gave the refugees hot food, bread, and coffee—none of which they had had since being deported from Płock.⁵⁶²

On the other hand, in *Plotsk: toldot kehilah ‘atikhat-yomin be-Polin* [*Płock: History of a Very Old Jewish Community in Poland*], there is some clear criticism of the Chmielnik Jews in

⁵⁵⁷ Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012. Henry Golde and Adam Neuman-Nowicki, both of whom, along with their respective families, had to be put up in the homes of local Jewish families, further corroborated this scenario. See: Neuman-Nowicki, *Struggle for Life*, 34; Golde, *Ragdolls*, 40-41.

⁵⁵⁸ Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992.

⁵⁵⁹ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 662; Sol Greenspan, *Yidn in Plotsk* [*Jews in Płock*] ([New York]: A. & H. Print. & Pub., 1960), 283.

⁵⁶⁰ Miriam Bronkesh, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 29, 2022.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Neuman-Nowicki, *Struggle for Life*, 34; Bender, “Die Juden von Chmielnik,” 83.

that most of them, apparently, could not fathom that the Płock Jews—who had come with no goods or means—had actually formerly been people of means. According to this same source, only Chmielnik’s intelligentsia had any true understanding of the deportees’ position and predicament.⁵⁶³

As a further measure of coping with the refugee situation, a Jewish self-help organization was established, known in Polish as the *Z.S.S. (Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna)*, or in Yiddish, as the *Yidisher hilfs-komitet*.⁵⁶⁴ This was initiated by the Zionist activist, Shmuel Zalcman, who succeeded Avraham Langwald in his position as head of the Judenrat.⁵⁶⁵ In general, Judenrat members were quite transient, and Chmielnik was no exception in this regard. This is because, according to Philip Friedman, many of these individuals were killed “under some pretext or for some petty or trumped-up ‘transgression.’”⁵⁶⁶ Judenrat members tended to change hands, be dismissed, and were frequently killed and replaced, many times over.

Under the auspices of the self-help committee, the Chmielnik ghetto absorbed an orphanage of Jewish children who were included among the 800 refugees from Płock.⁵⁶⁷ According to documentation from the aforementioned Jewish self-help organization, the

⁵⁶³ Eisenberg, *Plotsk*, 488.

⁵⁶⁴ Miron and Berenbaum, eds., “Chmielnik,” 111; Greenspan, *Yidn in Plotsk [Jews in Plock]*, 283.

⁵⁶⁵ As previously mentioned, Zalcman was killed by S.S. agents, possibly by Hauptmann Gerulf Mayer, when somebody informed on him for underground activities. After Zalcman’s death, Leon Koralnik from Katowice was appointed Judenrat head in his stead. Koralnik, too, was killed, following deportation from Chmielnik. See: “Thus Our Town Was Destroyed,” 698.

⁵⁶⁶ Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 546.

⁵⁶⁷ These 800 deportees also included 20 children from Płock’s Jewish orphanage. See: Greenspan, *Yidn in Plotsk [Jews in Plock]*, 283; Eisenberg, *Plotsk*, 488.

orphanage, which contained 25 children and staff members, was fully dependent on the Chmielnik ghetto's Z.S.S. (*Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna*). In the words of the said document from May 20, 1941,

Every day we provide them with eight kilograms of bread, kitchen lunches, bread marmalade, sugar, coffee, salt, etc. products. The efforts of the Supreme Council of Elders in Radom to place children in orphanages in other larger cities were negative. So far, only five children have been sent to Radom, and according to the information obtained from this Council, we were to send the rest of the children to Kielce, Częstochowa and Piotrków. This issue, however, so urgent for us, has completely stalled.⁵⁶⁸

Although the total number of individuals connected to the orphanage may appear relatively small, the Chmielnik ghetto as a whole was already suffering from overcrowding, growing food shortages, and the problems that stem from these combined hardships. Thus, having these additional mouths to feed and house clearly posed additional challenges for the overburdened Z.S.S. and Chmielnik ghetto. Furthermore, in time, the orphanage grew in size, taking in a total of approximately 300 children from both Płock and Chmielnik alike.⁵⁶⁹

The Z.S.S. also established a public kitchen to feed the hungry, which again, catered especially to the Jewish refugees from Płock and elsewhere.⁵⁷⁰ The kitchen distributed daily between 1,200-1,300 lunches for the hungry at a cost of 10 groszy per lunch. One hundred lunches were also distributed daily that were entirely free-of-charge for the poor and refugee

⁵⁶⁸ J. Klajnert, "To the Jewish Self-Help Organization," May 20, 1941, ŻIH Archives, Jewish Social Self-Help Organization [Z.S.S.], 1940-1942 [1944], RG 211, File 301, 30-31.

⁵⁶⁹ Montsazsh, "During the Years of Hitler's Occupation," 731.

⁵⁷⁰ Eisenberg, *Plotsk*, 489. Former Chmielnik resident, Nathan Mendrowski (b. 1907) recalls this "soup kitchen" as having been established for the sake of helping refugee Jews who had come to Chmielnik. He was one of many to help out there. See: Nathan Mendrowski, interview by Sandy Wise, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, May 25, 1995.

Jews.⁵⁷¹ What is more, according to the document from May 20, 1941, the number of hungry and starving people who were already then in need of dinners, totaled about 3,000.⁵⁷²

Disease in the Ghetto

Another outcome of the overcrowding and filth to which the Jews of Chmielnik were subjected—especially, in light of the town’s ballooning numbers—was a typhus and dysentery epidemic, which broke out in May 1941.⁵⁷³ As a result, the communal bathhouse was converted into a makeshift hospital, and a sanitation agency was likewise established. Dr. Wajsgold from Łódź became the director of this combined agency. But, due to the escalating number of outbreaks of these diseases, the hospital was unable to keep up with all of its sick patients, with the end result being that four to five people died daily.⁵⁷⁴ Included among the dead were Dr. Wajsgold, who himself contracted typhus and died.⁵⁷⁵

The dire situation, especially concerning the typhus epidemic in the Chmielnik ghetto, is reflected in the same previously mentioned correspondence from May 20, 1941, between the Chmielnik ghetto’s Z.S.S. and the Z.S.S.’s Presidium in Krakow. In an appeal letter drafted by the

⁵⁷¹ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 662; Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 713; Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 730-731; Steinfeld, “The First Deportation,” 745; Eisenberg, *Plotsk*, 489.

⁵⁷² J. Klajnert, “To the Jewish Self-Help Organization,” May 20, 1941, ŻIH Archives, Jewish Social Self-Help Committee [Z.S.S.], 1940-1942 [1944], RG 211, File 301, 30.

⁵⁷³ Although he does not explicitly mention typhus or dysentery, Bernie Sayone relates how the Chmielnik ghetto was like a “stockyard for cattle except worse,” and that its conditions were so “deplorable, dirty, unsanitary and humiliating” that “everyone had lice and fleas and disease ran rampant.” Beverly A. Evans, 1995, Ts., *In the Streets Lying, Crying, and Dying: The Bernie Sayone Story*, University of Colorado at Denver.

⁵⁷⁴ Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 7.

⁵⁷⁵ Kermish, 665; Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 713; Montsazsh, 731.

president of Chmielnik's Z.S.S. delegation, Josek Kleinert (or Klajnert, in this piece of correspondence), he urgently requested that Chmielnik's Z.S.S. be granted "an additional, immediate, subsidy for the month of May intended specifically for the treatment and fight against the typhus epidemic."⁵⁷⁶ Among the points that Kleinert outlined in his correspondence as the basis for this subsidy were the following:

4. Typhus epidemic:

Incidents of typhus have so far been sporadic. Currently, for several weeks, this disease has taken on an epidemic character and the number of patients is increasing every day. The lion's share of the sick are recruited from the midst of the population and the poorest population of the city.

5. Epidemic hospital and bathing and disinfestation plant:

In order to combat the epidemic and in accordance with the management of the Authorities, the Council of Elders in Chmielnik has launched an epidemic hospital for patients with typhus, and earlier a bathing and disinfestation plant. The number of patients currently in the hospital is 27 people. Almost all the sick come from the poorest masses of the Jewish population.⁵⁷⁷

Indeed, the occurrence of epidemic outbreaks, coupled with the establishment of hospitals in several towns throughout Poland at this time, was fairly commonplace. *The Black Book of Polish Jewry*, which was published already in 1943, includes an extensive discussion of "biological destruction" and how deadly epidemics, such as typhus, were for those who were directly subjugated by then, under the German Nazi regime.

According to this work, the rise in epidemics in the first half of 1941 "caused the opening of new hospitals in a number of provincial towns (Ostrowiec, Nowy-Sacz, Chmielnik, Otwock

⁵⁷⁶ J. Klajnert, "To the Jewish Self-Help Organization," May 20, 1941, ŻIH Archives, Jewish Social Self-Help Committee [Z.S.S.], 1940-1942 [1944], RG 211, File 301, 33.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 31.

and others).”⁵⁷⁸ The conditions found in Chmielnik had been deluged by a steady stream of refugees from other localities. Therefore, “the majority of the stricken were refugees from various regions,” and “the causes for all this lie in the conditions to which the Jewish population has been subjected by the Nazis.”⁵⁷⁹ Finally, as far as the mortality statistics for Chmielnik were concerned, “out of a population of 6,000 there were 104 deaths in the first five months of 1941.”⁵⁸⁰

Education and Culture in the Ghetto

In spite of the numerous restrictions placed upon the Jews of Chmielnik, as well as the sheer fact of their having to live within a ghetto, certain aspects of cultural, religious, political, and educational life continued, albeit surreptitiously, and with the constant awareness that if discovered, the punishment in most cases would be death. In Miriam Bronkesh’s assessment, the Jews of Chmielnik were naïve, but they continued to move forward with their lives and to hope. In her words, “they had dignity until the very end.”⁵⁸¹ She, for example, as a child living in the

⁵⁷⁸ *The Black Book of Polish Jewry: An Account of the Martyrdom of Polish Jewry Under the Nazi Occupation*, ed. Jacob Apenszlak, et al. (New York: Roy Publishers, 1943), 193. Stefan Dąbski (b. 1919), the then-mayor of Chmielnik, was interviewed by Chmielnik’s municipal court on October 29, 1945, about what had taken place in his town during World War II. Among the information that Dąbski provided, which further confirms the *Black Book of Polish Jewry*’s statements about Chmielnik, was the fact that there had been an epidemic of typhoid fever in the Chmielnik ghetto and that a hospital had existed in the ghetto. See: “*Chronicles of Terror*” testimony database, Dąbski, Stefan: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/3420/edition/3401/content?navq=aHR0cDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3l0ZlXJyb3JlLnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9ZGFic2tpJTJDK3N0ZWZhbiZhY3Rpb249U2ltcGxlU2VhcmNoQWN0aW9uJm1kaXJpZHM9JnR5cGU9LTYmc3RhcncRzdHI9X2FsbCZwPTA&navref=Mm4xOzJtaSAybjI7Mm1qIDJuMDsybWggZ2o7ZzQ> (accessed 5-4-22).

⁵⁷⁹ *The Black Book of Polish Jewry*, 193.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 199. Interestingly, Malka Owsiany also notes the 104 deaths of Jews of all ages in Chmielnik, due to typhus, as documented in *The Black Book of Polish Jewry*. See: Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 51.

⁵⁸¹ Miriam Bronkesh, interview by Helen Schneeberg, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bridgeton, NJ, May 13, 1998.

ghetto, recalls attending school and having friends with whom she gathered for dances and sing-alongs. In spite of the fact that Jewish children were no longer permitted to attend school, a woman educated her daily, “until the very last day,” as she put it, along with a group of four or five girls. However, they would constantly have to be prepared to scatter and hide their books, should a German official enter the room.⁵⁸²

Ezjel Lederman also recalled taking academic courses such as math, physics, chemistry, and biology in the Chmielnik ghetto. His teachers were university students who found themselves stranded in Chmielnik. Echoing Bronkesh’s sentiments, he remarked, that in spite of all the difficulties that he and other Jews faced, “we never lost hope and we were actually preparing ourselves for the day when we would be free.”⁵⁸³ In addition, Lederman participated in a book club, which was attended by younger people. These gatherings, which generally took place in somebody’s home, were sometimes followed by a dance. It was at one of these dances that Lederman befriended his future wife, Esther.⁵⁸⁴

Yechaskel Fastag married Gitla Shulsinger in the Chmielnik ghetto on April 17, 1942, even though, as he noted, the first deportation of Jews occurred only six months later, in early October 1942.⁵⁸⁵ According to his recollection, his wedding was like something normal from

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 153.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 154.

⁵⁸⁵ The exact date of the Fastags’ wedding and its close proximity to the first deportation from Chmielnik was confirmed for me a second time by Fastag’s wife, Gitla “Jean” Fastag in a personal interview. In Mrs. Fastag’s estimate, it was not totally out of the ordinary for a wedding to take place—even at that time—since nobody could yet imagine the later horrors that would befall them. For example, her parents, who had lived through World War I, assumed—like many Jews—that this terrible situation would also pass. Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012.

prewar times. Under regular wartime circumstances, there was a curfew until early evening, but in this instance, the Jews were permitted on the street all night, and there was even klezmer music present. The only reason this special exception was made, according to Fastag, was because his wife and her family—textile dealers—provided unique goods for one particular German lieutenant. In exchange for these favors, the lieutenant canceled the usual restrictive ghetto laws for that single night of the Fastags' wedding.⁵⁸⁶

Both Chil Gorlicki and Irving Buchbinder recounted their Bar-Mitzvahs, which took place in the ghetto under rather Spartan conditions. For example, Gorlicki remembers that his Bar-Mitzvah was held illegally, and not in the synagogue—but at home. Only a few people and family members were invited. There was little food there and the celebration was generally sparse, because there was already growing hunger by that time.⁵⁸⁷ Buchbinder, similarly, recalls his Bar-Mitzvah being a rather minimalistic affair, consisting of the rabbi, his mother, and his grandmother (his father had already died by that time). The rabbi simply showed him how to put on tefillin.⁵⁸⁸

News of Death Camps Reaches Chmielnik

One of the most frequently recounted socio-political events to occur in the Chmielnik ghetto is that of the three visits made there by Mordechai Anielewicz (1919-1943), who was

⁵⁸⁶ Yechaskel Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995.

⁵⁸⁷ Chil Gorlicki, interview by Diana Ritch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Maroubra, Australia, June 26, 1995.

⁵⁸⁸ Irving Buchbinder, interview by Simon Zelcovitch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Willowdale, Canada, April 3, 1995. Willowdale, Canada.

affiliated with the Zionist “Hashomer Hatzair” organization and would later lead the *Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa* (*ŻOB*), or Jewish Combat Organization, in staging the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943.⁵⁸⁹ According to Mordechai Goldstein, who met Anielewicz during his last visit to Chmielnik, in early 1942, it was Anielewicz who informed members of Chmielnik’s Jewish community of the dire situation in the Warsaw ghetto, as well as of the reality of the death camp known as Bełżec. However, as he put it, it was virtually impossible for those present—members of the “Hashomer Hatzair”—to truly fathom the implications of what Anielewicz was relating at the time.⁵⁹⁰

Tovah Mali (née Płóciennik), a former resident of Chmielnik, recalled Anielewicz’s visits to her hometown during the Second World War. According to Mali’s recollection, it was in March 1942 that Anielewicz revealed to her and her fellow townsmen that there was a camp called Chełmno, and that Jews were being stuffed into vans there, in which they were gassed to death.⁵⁹¹ In Mali’s words, “This was the first time that we had ever heard of such a thing.” It was likewise then, Mali attested, that Anielewicz hinted at the deportations—although, she also

⁵⁸⁹ Mordechai Goldstein, “The Third Visit of Mordechai Anielewicz in the Chmielnik Ghetto,” 6; Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 714; Mapa-Shapiro, “Saved from the Nazi Angel of Death,” 4.

⁵⁹⁰ Goldstein, “The Third Visit of Mordechai Anielewicz in the Chmielnik Ghetto,” 6; Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim* [*In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews*], 73-74.

⁵⁹¹ Tovah Mali also recalled how Anielewicz had revealed to her and other Chmielnik youths the truth about the extermination camp known as Chełmno, although according to her, this took place in the fall of 1941. However, since the camp only began operation in December 1941, it is quite likely that Tovah Mali misspoke about the timing of Anielewicz’s revelation. Tovah Mali, interview by Mira Schacham Golan, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Kibbutz Yakum, Israel, May 15, 1996.

added, that at the time, the Jews of Chmielnik did not yet know about Auschwitz or the extermination camps.⁵⁹²

According to the Mapa brothers, Anielewicz made them more politically aware of the world situation at that time. He also distributed illegal literature to those present at his gathering and insisted that the only way for the Jews to approach their present situation was to stage a resistance against the enemy.⁵⁹³ Through this Anielewicz connection, the Jews of Chmielnik continued to have contact with the Jews of Warsaw, following Anielewicz's departure, and they received letters and an illegal newspaper thanks to a Jew with Aryan papers known as "Wiga."⁵⁹⁴ However, as Kalman Mapa conceded, there was ultimately no resistance movement in Chmielnik—certainly not among members of Hashomer Hatzair—Anielewicz's own ideological camp, as well as that of Kalman's brother, Yechiel. For when the Jewish police caught wind of these meetings and resistance efforts, they warned individuals such as Yechiel Mapa not to do anything, as it would result in everyone in the ghetto being murdered.⁵⁹⁵

Avraham Goldlist, who joined Hashomer Hatzair at the age of 14, recalled Anielewicz visiting Chmielnik somewhat earlier than what was previously reported by Mordechai Goldstein and Tovah Mali (née Płóciennik). According to Goldlist, Anielewicz visited Chmielnik between 1940 and 1941 and informed the Jews there that they had to stage a revolt. Chmielnik Jewry, in

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Bender, "Die Juden von Chmielnik," 85; Mapa and Mapa, "Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa," 715.

⁵⁹⁴ Mapa and Mapa, "Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa," 714.

⁵⁹⁵ Kalman Mapa, interview by Agi Hecht, Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, August 11, 1992.

Goldlist's recollection, already knew about the mass murders of Jews at this time. Yet, echoing what Kalman Mapa said, there was no support at the time for this type of revolt among most Chmielnik Jews. The rabbis, according to Goldlist, particularly opposed this idea, which would invariably mean having to purchase weapons.⁵⁹⁶

Already in July 1942, prior to the first roundup and deportation of Chmielnik Jewry, which occurred in early October 1942, rumors regarding the ultimate destination point of deported Jews began to circulate among Chmielnik's Jewish population. By the end of August, by which time deportations to Treblinka had begun in the Warsaw ghetto, and most of the Kielce ghetto had been liquidated,⁵⁹⁷ it became increasingly evident that Jews were not simply being sent east for forced labor. Rather, some Jews in Chmielnik began to suspect that deportations invariably meant a death-sentence.⁵⁹⁸ In preparation for what was still too unimaginable for many, those Jews who had both foresight and good relations with nearby Gentile farmers, readied themselves by finding hiding places in the outlying villages. They also turned over all of their possessions to these same Gentiles.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ Testimony of Avraham Goldlist, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/12820, 19.

⁵⁹⁷ The deportations in the Warsaw ghetto commenced on July 22, 1942, and lasted until September 21, 1942. More than 250,000 Jews were deported to Treblinka during this period. See: Martin Dean, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945* (Vol. 2, Part A), s.v. "Warsaw Region (Distrikt Warschau)" (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 361. The deportations in Kielce occurred between the 20th through the 24th of August 1942. At that time, approximately 21,000 Jews were deported to Treblinka and exterminated, and the Kielce ghetto was virtually liquidated. See: Yitzhak Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 393.

⁵⁹⁸ Bender, *Ba-erets oye*, 199; Yaakov Lemberg, "From Roundup to Roundup," 751; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 666; Miron and Berenbaum, eds., "Chmielnik," 111; Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 7.

⁵⁹⁹ Lemberg, "From Roundup to Roundup," 751.

Many Jews, however, continued to live with the illusion that what had happened elsewhere would not repeat itself in Chmielnik. According to Joseph Kiman, two weeks before the deportations began in Chmielnik, the Germans approached the Jewish leadership and demanded handing over all gold and silver in exchange for the promise of communal safety. Many of the Jews believed this falsehood and proceeded to do as they had been told.⁶⁰⁰

The Jews of Chmielnik were further encouraged to believe this ruse by the Busko *Landrat* (or county commissioner), who reassured them that no harm would come to them, provided they continued to prove themselves useful by being productive workers. To this end, the Judenrat attempted to organize shops and even established a special committee for this very purpose. For example, at this time, Yisrael Feingold, along with Isachar Kanercukier, opened up a small shop that carried sewing goods.⁶⁰¹ Nonetheless, these efforts did not prove viable, since shortly thereafter the first mass roundup and deportation were well underway.⁶⁰²

Also, around this time, as part of their charade to ensure the Jews of their safety and that no harm was intended them, the Germans began to circulate a rumor that all Jews who were interested in immigrating to Palestine, simply needed to register with the local leadership. Due to a great deal of naïveté and delusion, a number of Jews began to sign up for this opportunity. Yisrael Feingold was among those who registered. In his postwar testimony he admitted that “all

⁶⁰⁰ Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 7.

⁶⁰¹ Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 708.

⁶⁰² Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 200; Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 666.

of these rumors came [to us] for the purpose of obfuscating the horrible deeds of the Germans.”⁶⁰³

Deportations to Skarżysko-Kamienna Slave Labor Camp

On October 1, 1942, during Chol Hamoed Sukkot, the Germans ordered the Judenrat to convey that all young men and young, unmarried women⁶⁰⁴ were to gather the following morning at 6:00 a.m. in the town square. There, they would be assessed by a German committee to see which among them were fit for work.⁶⁰⁵ The fact that Jews of a certain age were ordered to assemble the next day, was yet another rationale used by those who refused to believe that they would be deported. Their logic was that if an actual deportation were intended, then Jews of all ages would have been ordered to appear the next morning in the marketplace. Yet, in

⁶⁰³ Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 708.

⁶⁰⁴ The exact stipulations placed on the Jewish population in terms of age vary from one account to the next. For example, Yaakov Lemberg recalls that the Germans’ orders included men and women ages 18 to 30, whereas Kalman Zelażnik and Ira Kaminsky state that this order included all Jews ages 16 to 40. Menashe Montsazsh’s testimony states that all young people ages 12 to 25 had to report to the marketplace, while Joseph Kiman’s autobiographical account reveals that all Jewish males and females between the ages of 16 to 45 were to heed this order. Henry Golde, in his autobiography, relates that the decree was for all Jews between 12 and 40 years of age, whereas Mayer Rubinstein, Chaim Borenstein, and Wolf Zelinger recall that it applied to every Jew from 17 to 60 years of age. Finally, Freyda Mapa-Zonshein recalls the order being for women up to the age of 30, and men up to the age of 50, while Hershl Kaminsky states that the order applied to all Jews ages 12 to 60. What this discrepancy reveals is that details such as an age range must have eluded the minds and memories of many of those who were unfortunate enough to be present at the Chmielnik marketplace on that particular day and at that specific time. See: Lemberg, “From Roundup to Roundup,” 751; Zelażnik, “The Destruction of Chmielnik,” 5; Ira Kaminsky, interview by Daniel Sedlis, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bayside, NY, December 21, 1995; Montsazsh, “During the Years of Hitler’s Occupation,” 732; Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 8; Golde, *Ragdolls*, 50; Mayer Rubinstein, et al., “Twenty Thousand Jews in Chmielnik Murdered by the Ukrainian Nazis,” *der Morgen zshurnal* [The Morning Journal], February 18, 1946, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55; Freyda Mapa-Zonshein, “Chmielnik Jews in the Skarżysko Camp,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 843; Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” 913.

⁶⁰⁵ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 666.

Kaminsky's words, "in their hearts, though, everyone already felt that something was going to happen here."⁶⁰⁶ The following morning the designated Jews assembled themselves as ordered. A count was then taken of approximately 1,200 young Jews who were selected for forced labor at HASAG (or *Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft*) in Skarżysko-Kamienna,⁶⁰⁷ a distance of about 55 kilometers (or 34 miles) from Chmielnik.

To provide some perspective on the total number of Jews who were sent to and frequently perished at this labor camp, it is worth considering the work of Felicja Karay (1927-2014), entitled *Death Comes in Yellow: Skarżysko-Kamienna Slave Labor Camp*. The book is so titled, due to the notorious Werk C section of the labor camp, in which slave laborers worked with the dangerous yellow chemicals, Trotyl (TNT) and picric acid, typically without any sort of protective gear. As a result, their eyes and skin quickly turned yellow. Many also suffered kidney failure as a result of these toxins and died. In general, it was known that those who were sent to do slave labor in Werk C, as opposed to in Werk A or B, stood a far greater mortality rate.

In this monumental work, Karay, who was herself an inmate of the camp, estimates the number of Jewish inmates at Skarżysko at about 25,000. Speaking specifically about Chmielnik, Karay estimates that in October 1942, there was a single transport of Chmielnik Jews totaling

⁶⁰⁶ Kaminsky, "Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik," 913.

⁶⁰⁷ Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 200; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 666; Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 8.

approximately 500.⁶⁰⁸ The vast majority of these inmates, collectively, never lived to see the camp's liberation.⁶⁰⁹

Among the presumably few Chmielnik Jews to survive Werk C (and Werk A) of Skarżysko⁶¹⁰ were Avraham Goldlist and Jankiel Zajac (b. 1922). Goldlist was only incarcerated in Skarżysko—in Werk C—for approximately a month, from which he fled on November 1, 1942. But even based on that brief incarceration period, Goldlist recalled in his 2006 Yad Vashem testimony that the Jews who labored in Werk C were “truly yellow.” Furthermore, conditions there were horrible: he and other Jewish laborers in Werk C were only permitted to wash themselves once every two weeks in Werk A.⁶¹¹ Fellow Chmielnik native, Zajac, was incarcerated during World War II in several ghettos and labor camps, which also included Buchenwald and Mauthausen. In 1945, Zajac provided a testimony regarding his wartime experiences in which he related the following, primarily about his time in Werk C:

They took us to the bathhouse, and then to the barracks in Werk A. We were two days without food and drink. Then there was a selection, and we were assigned Werk C. There we lived in open barracks, without beds and blankets, 50 people per barrack. The next day I was sent to *Granatenabteilung* [i.e., the shell and grenade department]. We were getting 18 dekagrams of bread and 1 liter of soup ... and 1/2 liter of soup was brought to

⁶⁰⁸ Felicja Karay, *Death Comes in Yellow: Skarżysko-Kamienna Slave Labor Camp* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), 35.

⁶⁰⁹ Skarżysko-Kamienna (often referred to simply as Skarżysko) was occupied by the German forces from 1939-1945. In 1940, the munitions factory that already existed there prior to World War II was re-appropriated for the German war effort by the “HASAG” company, which contracted with the German Wehrmacht. See: Evelyn Zegenhagen, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945* (Vol. 2, Part A), s.v. “Skarżysko-Kamienna” (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 308-311. See also: Karay, *Death Comes in Yellow*, xviii; Newman, *Hope's Reprise*, xix.

⁶¹⁰ To the best of my knowledge, there is no specific tabulation of Jewish survivors from Chmielnik who were incarcerated in Skarżysko-Kamienna's Werk C forced labor camp division.

⁶¹¹ Testimony of Avraham Goldlist, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/12820, 10.

the factory, and in the camp we were given bread, and every third day we received 1 dekagram of marmalade. We got up at 4:00 in the morning. After the roll call, we set off to work for which we spent 12 hours, and sometimes we were taken to unload the wagons and worked 8-10 hours overtime. The conditions were terrible, the work was extremely hard.⁶¹²

Zajac did not convey any details about the particularly dangerous workload and conditions in Skarżysko's Werk C division. However, the conditions there must have been horrible enough to prompt him to "constantly [be] thinking about running away."⁶¹³ Ultimately, he did flee from this camp, approximately six months upon arriving there.

Aside from those Jews who had been selected for the Skarżysko labor camp, a smaller group of approximately 40 Jews was selected for forced labor at the Granat or HASAG camp in Kielce. HASAG-Kielce was originally called Granat, and like its previously mentioned branch in Skarżysko-Kamienna, it served as a Polish munitions factory prior to being taken over in January 1940 by the HASAG, or *Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft* factory. Henceforth, the factory was known as the Hugo Schneider A.G. Werke in Kielce. The factory became the property of the Generalgouvernement, and German S.S. official, Axel Schlicht, was appointed its director. In February 1942, the camp was listed as having 1,379 Polish workers. From October 1942 on, Jews arrived at the camp from Kielce, Chmielnik, Stopnica, Staszów, and other towns in the vicinity of Kielce.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² Testimony of Jankiel Zajac, ŻIH Archives, RG 301, File 291, 1.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Sara Bender, "Jewish Slaves in Forced Labour Camps in Kielce," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 23 (2011): 454-455; Bender, "Die Juden von Chmielnik," 86; Felicja Karay, "Heaven or Hell?: The Two Faces of the HASAG-Kielce Camp," *Yad Vashem Studies* 32 (2004): 220; Kalman Mapa, "Chmielnik Jews in Kielce 'HASAG,'" in *Pinkas Chmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in*

The First Roundup and Deportation of Chmielnik Jewry to Death Camps

On October 3, 1942, the neighboring towns of Piotrkowice and Pierzchnica were liquidated of their Jews, who were transported to Chmielnik.⁶¹⁵ Although the Jewish police had previously been granted the right to move about beyond the one-kilometer area within which the rest of Chmielnik's Jewish community was restricted, that right was rescinded from them, as well, only a few days prior to the major deportation of October 6.⁶¹⁶

On October 5, 1942, just following the holiday of Simchat Torah, small S.S. detachment units comprised of German gendarmes, as well as Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Latvians, reached Chmielnik. They came from Radom, Kielce, and Busko-Zdrój, and during the night, surrounded Chmielnik's Jewish area and prepared for the roundup and mass deportation that was to take place the very next day. Hans Gaier (1902-1945), "the *Schupo* commander in Kielce and the dominant figure during the [Kielce] ghetto's existence,"⁶¹⁷ who had overseen the great

Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 839; Newman, *Hope's Reprise*, xix.

⁶¹⁵ The displacement of the Jews of Piotrkowice and Pierzchnica, as well as the subsequent deportation from Chmielnik, was consistent with what was taking place in the general Kielce-Radom vicinity at this time. Indeed, it was during the month of October 1942, according to Christopher R. Browning, that "large ghettos, such as Piotrków, Chmielnik, Opatów and Ostrowiec, as well as many smaller ones" were struck by what Browning refers to as "itinerant ghetto-clearing units." Browning, *Remembering Survival*, 68.

⁶¹⁶ "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 698.

⁶¹⁷ Hauptmann Gaier was the head of the Protective Police, otherwise known as the *Schutzpolizei* or *Schupo*. This institution was a division of the *Ordnungspolizei*, which was in turn, an organ of the Nazi state. See: Sara Bender, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945* (Vol. 2, Part A), s.v. "Kielce" (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 238; Seidel, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik Politik in Polen*, 301, 372; Steinfeld, "The First Deportation," 745; Testimony of A. Sztajnfeld [Steinfeld], Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/524, 3. For information about Gaier's ultimate murder by Yanush Peltz, the son of one of Gaier's victims in Graz, Austria, in 1945, see: Isabel De Bertodano, "I Found Dad's Nazi Killer—and Shot Him Dead," *The Jewish Chronicle* [London, UK], October 2, 2014, <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/i-found-dad-s-nazi-killer-and-shot-him-dead-1.58365> (accessed 7-25-21).

deportation there, arrived in Chmielnik. He was accompanied by Hauptmann Gerulf Mayer (b. 1910), the military captain of the German gendarmes stationed in Kielce.⁶¹⁸ Together, they conducted the deportation campaign from Chmielnik.⁶¹⁹

The following morning on October 6, 1942, horrible, animal-like screams were heard, accompanied by shootings, and the barking of dogs.⁶²⁰ Before eight o'clock in the morning, the Jews of Chmielnik were rushed out of their homes by the Germans' dogs, sticks, and rifle butts—before they had scarcely had enough time to dress. They were harassed and hurried into “the *Meritse*,” the marketplace where animals were sold, which was situated near the small woods, on Shidlever veg, two kilometers from the town proper.⁶²¹ The Germans threatened the Jews that anyone who did not reach the designated place at the designated time would be shot on the spot—regardless of whether they were elderly, sick, or lying in bed.⁶²² As Kaminsky relates, by the time the Jews had reached the designated place, blood was already gushing from their bodies.⁶²³

⁶¹⁸ Thomas Albrich, et al., *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht: der Fall Österreich* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2006), 108; Heimo Halbrainer and Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider, *Kriegsverbrechen, NS-Gewaltverbrechen und europäische Strafjustiz von Nürnberg bis Den Haag* (Graz: Clio, 2007), 285.

⁶¹⁹ Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 201-202; Mary Kleinhandler, interview by Sidney Burke, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, July 18, 1995.

⁶²⁰ Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” 914; Lemberg, “From Roundup to Roundup,” 751; Steinfeld, “The First Deportation,” 745.

⁶²¹ Lemberg, “From Roundup to Roundup,” 751; Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, “The 72 Following the Deportation,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 747; “Thus Our Town Was Destroyed,” 698.

⁶²² Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” 914; Steinfeld, “The First Deportation,” 745-746.

⁶²³ Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” 914.

People began running in every direction, and a general state of chaos ensued. Children were caught and bitten by the Germans' dogs. "Men lost sight of their wives; women lost sight of their children. Some Jews ran to the Jewish cemetery, wearing their *kitlen* and *taleysim*, [and] waiting to be shot there, so as, to at least, be brought to burial in the traditional Jewish manner."⁶²⁴ The S.S. agents encountered along the way to the "Targowice"—the market square—were heavily armed, "as if prepared for some great battle, with helmets, hand grenades, and short automatic rifles."⁶²⁵ The entire path leading from the town to the market area was strewn with the corpses of shot Jews.⁶²⁶ Indeed, some elderly and sick Jews intentionally remained in their homes at this time, so that they could at least die with dignity there, and avoid other unimaginable forms of torment. Such was the case with Dawid Dolus and his wife, who were both shot to death in their home.⁶²⁷

The German committee was already awaiting the Jews at the designated assembly place, with tables and lists of names. According to Freyda Mapa-Zonshein, the assembled Jews did not

⁶²⁴ Those Jews who readied themselves for death in this fashion took comfort in the fact that they at least knew where they would be buried and that it would be at a Jewish cemetery. Whether they anticipated the fact that they would be buried in a mass grave is impossible in retrospect to determine. Lemberg, "From Roundup to Roundup," 751-752; Rivka Sametband-Mali, a former resident of Chmielnik, echoes this recollection by remarking that during this time, families remained together, for fear of getting separated in the general chaos. See: Rivka Sametband-Mali, "During the Struggle for One's Life," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 761.

⁶²⁵ Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, "The 72 Following the Deportation," 747.

⁶²⁶ "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 699.

⁶²⁷ Steinfeld, "The First Deportation," 746; Testimony of A. Sztajnfeld [Steinfeld], Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/524, 3; Ben-Shlomo, "The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law," 5. A Polish eyewitness account made by a Zofia Stradomska mentions that a Dawid Dolz was murdered in 1943 by a policeman (although it is unclear from the context whether this was a member of the German S.S., or a Polish collaborator) named Orłowski. Stradomska also adds that Dolz was himself a German collaborator. See: Marek Maciągowski and Piotr Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 171.

know what to expect.⁶²⁸ German gendarmes surrounded the entire area together with the officers of the Polish “Blue” police, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Latvian auxiliary forces, whom the Jews referred to in Yiddish as “di Shvartse” (The Black Ones), on account of their black uniforms.⁶²⁹ There were also trucks guarded by the Ukrainians, which stood by, ready to transport the selected Jews to their next destination site.⁶³⁰ There were likely no more than 30 German commandants and S.S. agents and approximately 30 *Schupo* (or *Schutzpolizei*) present during this roundup and deportation campaign.⁶³¹

Alter Steinfeld recalls the segregation of Jews beginning at around 9:30 a.m. At that time, one could hear the heart-wrenching cries of despair as men were torn away from their wives and parents from their children. A number of individuals fainted from sheer fright. In some instances, the overwhelming state of terror broke down family solidarity as “mothers tossed aside their children; people turned into animals.”⁶³² Rivka Sametband-Mali further corroborates this statement with the following: “There were those who left behind children, so as to save themselves.”⁶³³

The committee of Germans commanded the Jews to stand in a long row and proceeded to march back and forth while selecting Jews. Those who appeared healthy and fit for work were

⁶²⁸ Mapa-Zonshein, “Chmielnik Jews in the Skarżysko Camp,” 843.

⁶²⁹ Steinfeld, “The First Deportation,” 746.

⁶³⁰ Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” 914.

⁶³¹ “Thus Our Town Was Destroyed,” 699.

⁶³² Steinfeld, “The First Deportation,” 746.

⁶³³ Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 761.

sent to the right, while those who did not, were sent to the left.⁶³⁴ Ultimately, the Germans sent home those who were selected for the left, while the rest had to stand in special rows. Subsequently, they were sent away on military trucks. According to Mapa-Zonshein, approximately 500 men and women were thus transported to the previously mentioned labor camp, Skarżysko-Kamienna.⁶³⁵ Among those transported to Skarżysko was the Płock native, 13-year-old Henry Golde. As he recalled, “the order came through whereby all of the young men and women were to be sent to work camps ... I was one of them.”⁶³⁶ However, Golde’s kin did not fare as well as he; presumably, they were among those sent to the left on that tragic day. In his words: “That was the last time I saw my family.”⁶³⁷

During the assembly and selection process, which involved practically the entire town—approximately 11,000 Jews⁶³⁸—the Germans set aside giant baskets in which they ordered the Jews to place all of their possessions, including gold, diamonds, jewelry, silver, and suitcases.⁶³⁹ Mary (née Scheiber) Kleinhandler recalls how the S.S. agents literally tore engagement rings from the fingers and earrings from the ears of the women. In addition, the Jewish police were forced to conduct thorough body searches on both men and women who were suspected of

⁶³⁴ Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” 914; Chil Gorlicki, interview by Diana Ritch, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Maroubra, Australia, June 26, 1995.

⁶³⁵ Mapa-Zonshein, “Chmielnik Jews in the Skarżysko Camp,” 843.

⁶³⁶ Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: The Story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1997), 116.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Lemberg, “From Roundup to Roundup,” 752; Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 761; “Thus Our Town Was Destroyed,” 698.

⁶³⁹ Mary Kleinhandler, interview by Sidney Burke, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, July 18, 1995; Lemberg, “From Roundup to Roundup,” 752; Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 761.

possibly harboring any gold or money on their persons. Women were forced to strip naked, as they were inspected for valuables that might have been sewn into the linings of their undergarments.⁶⁴⁰ During the search, men and women received beatings, and several women and children were shot.⁶⁴¹

According to some estimates, close to 200 Jews were shot dead during this general roundup and deportation campaign, which was the first of three such deportations in Chmielnik.⁶⁴² A few individuals who had readied poison for themselves prior to the deportation ended their lives, while the selection process was still underway.⁶⁴³ In a desperate effort to comfort Chmielnik's despairing Jews, the Zionist activist, Isachar Kanercukier cried out: "Jews! Don't cry! Jews! Don't Despair!" and proceeded with, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one," as the Jews were marched out of Chmielnik—and eventually, deported to Treblinka.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁰ Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, "The 72 Following the Deportation," 747; Lemberg, "From Roundup to Roundup," 752.

⁶⁴¹ "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 699.

⁶⁴² Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 202.

⁶⁴³ Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, "The 72 Following the Deportation," 748; Steinfeld, "The First Deportation," 746; Ben-Shlomo, "The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law," 5. According to the unidentified author of "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," the suicide victims were all female. Included among these women was the medical student by the surname, "Adler." "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 699.

⁶⁴⁴ Steinfeld, "The First Deportation," 746. See also: A. Steinfeld, "The 16-Year-Old Hero During the Jewish Deportation in Chmielnik," *Yidishe tsaytung* (Landsberg, Germany), December 6, 1946, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55; Testimony of A. Sztajnfeld [Steinfeld], Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/524, 4. In a somewhat different vein, Malka Owsiany relates that it was said that Kanercukier, his family, and others marching with them at the time sang "Hatikvah" as they were being led to their execution, and that they were shot dead while pronouncing these Zionist lyrics. See: Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 50.

In this manner, the first groups of Jews were led out of the town, in rows that were heavily guarded by S.S. agents from both sides. Because they were so downtrodden and full of despair, the Jews selected for deportation threw away whatever possessions they still carried with them.⁶⁴⁵ The deportation and selection finally ended around two o'clock that afternoon. Those too sick or elderly to walk were placed on wagons and transported to the nearest train station and transported to Treblinka.⁶⁴⁶

The selected Jews, who numbered between 1,500 to 2,000, were marched toward Chęciny, a town situated some 45 kilometers away from Chmielnik.⁶⁴⁷ Those who were unable to keep up with the pace were shot along the way, causing the entire path to be red with blood.⁶⁴⁸ Along the way, the group of deportees, which was heavily guarded at all times, stopped to sleep beneath the open sky in a village called Morwica Wola. This was not far from Kielce, near a train station.⁶⁴⁹ At this juncture, two more Jews—the well-known medical doctors Globus and Oygnfish from Płock—committed suicide by hanging themselves on a tree.⁶⁵⁰ Płock sources

⁶⁴⁵ Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, "The 72 Following the Deportation," 748; Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 699.

⁶⁴⁶ Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, "The 72 Following the Deportation," 748; Yankev Rozenblum, "The Destruction of Chmielnik," *Unzer shtime* (Paris), October 11, 1947, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55; Yankev Rozenblum, "In Memory of Jewish Chmielnik," *der Keltser* (Paris), May 1950, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55.

⁶⁴⁷ Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 204. Yet, Martin Gilbert places the total number of the Chmielnik Jewish deportees who were subsequently sent to Treblinka on this day, at the much higher number of 6,000. See: Gilbert, *The Boys*, 116.

⁶⁴⁸ Lemberg, "From Roundup to Roundup," 752.

⁶⁴⁹ Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 700; Mapa and Mapa, "Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa," 716; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 671.

⁶⁵⁰ "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 701; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 671.

differ somewhat from Chmielnik sources on Globus' death, stating that while being forcibly marched, he bent over to tie a shoelace and was summarily shot to death from behind.⁶⁵¹

From Morwica, those Jews who were still alive marched to the train station in Daleszyce,⁶⁵² approximately 30 kilometers away from Chmielnik. Once there, they had to wait four days without food or water, until a train that carried cattle cars finally arrived. Into a cattle car that would normally be large enough to hold 50 to 60 men, 120 to 130 deathly exhausted people were shoved. The cattle car was then promptly sealed. From there, the Jews were transported to Treblinka and gassed.⁶⁵³

During the selection process, the Germans chose 72 Jews as useful. This group of survivors included various tradesmen (e.g., tailors and shoemakers),⁶⁵⁴ and younger people who were physically fit and able, as well as members of the Jewish police. They were allowed to remain in Chmielnik. These individuals were heavily guarded, as they marched in rows back to town. All along the way from the "Targowice" to the market square, the path was strewn with

⁶⁵¹ Greenspan, *Yidn in Plotsk* [*Jews in Plock*], 283; Eisenberg, *Plotsk*, 489.

⁶⁵² Some sources mention Daleszyce, whereas others only reference Chęciny. In either case, both towns are located within a relatively short distance of one another. See for example: "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 700-701.

⁶⁵³ Lemberg, "From Roundup to Roundup," 752; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 671-672; "Thus Our Town Was Destroyed," 701; Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 204.

⁶⁵⁴ Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 671. Due to their having been chosen to perform various tasks for the Germans, the group of 72 Jews was referred to as the "Arbeitskommando" (work crew) or the "Aufräumungskommando" (clean-up crew). See for example: Ibid., 672; Ben-Shlomo, "The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law," 4. Malka Owsiany remarks that her cousin was a hairdresser who cut the hair and shaved the faces of the German gendarmerie in Chmielnik. Thus, he was deemed "useful" and was one of the 72 Jews permitted to survive and remain in Chmielnik at this time. See: Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani* [*Owsiany*] *dertseyt*, 51.

the dead. Shidlever veg was filled with the corpses of those who had been shot—the so-called “first victims of the transport.”⁶⁵⁵

When the Jews reached the marketplace, the Germans sadistically commanded them to sing the Jewish song, “Hatikvah.”⁶⁵⁶ From the marketplace, the Jews were concentrated in the former Judenrat building—now, the magistrate building—where they were again heavily guarded by gendarmerie and confined in utter darkness. All those present, in their state of utter despair, began to sob in unison. As a backdrop to their sobs, one could hear the shots of gunfire, which did not let up the entire night.⁶⁵⁷

On the following day, October 7, 1942, the German forces left the town, and the local gendarmerie sent the young Jewish women to clean up the offices of the gendarmerie.⁶⁵⁸ The Jewish men, in turn, were sent to the former ghetto area, as well as to “the *Meritse*” (where the selection and deportation had taken place the previous day). There, they were forced to collect the bodies of dead Jews and bury them in a mass grave at the Jewish cemetery. Among the dead lay elderly, women, and children. According to some sources, the total number of dead may have reached as high as 300.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁵ Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, “The 72 Following the Deportation,” 750.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.; Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 761-762; Bender, *Ba-erets oyevev*, 205.

⁶⁵⁷ Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, “The 72 Following the Deportation,” 750.

⁶⁵⁸ Bender, *Ba-erets oyevev*, 205; Mary Kleinhandler, interview by Sidney Burke, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, July 18, 1995.

⁶⁵⁹ See for example: Yisrael Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 709; Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, “The 72 Following the Deportation,” 750. Moshe Ben-Shlomo, who was also among those forced to dig this mass grave, recalls a somewhat lower number of approximately 130 dead. See: Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” 4.

Mary Kleinhandler (née Scheiber), who happened to witness the scene of this mass burial the following morning, recalls how the Jewish males were forced to dig a huge pit, within which they alternated layers of dead bodies and lime.⁶⁶⁰ Moshe Ben-Shlomo recollects how they, those burying the dead, were not permitted to perform any of the rituals associated with a traditional Jewish burial. Instead, Hauptmann Mayer, one of the chief figures to carry out the aforementioned deportation, forced them to bury the dead within a single grave, rather than in clearly demarcated individual graves.⁶⁶¹ A number of the dead were still recognizable, and so a list of names was compiled by the surviving Jews during the burial proceedings.⁶⁶² All the while, those who were present could not help but wonder whether they themselves “would at least merit a Jewish burial.” For in the words of Mary and Arthur Kleinhandler, “Many of those who dug the graves with us, lie today in unknown places.”⁶⁶³

A new, smaller ghetto was established on ul. Furmańska,⁶⁶⁴ and the 72 Jews were subsequently joined by hundreds of Jews who came out of hiding either from Chmielnik proper, or from villages in the surrounding vicinity.⁶⁶⁵ According to Yaakov Lemberg, the Germans

⁶⁶⁰ Mary Kleinhandler, interview by Sidney Burke, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Los Angeles, CA, July 18, 1995.

⁶⁶¹ Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” 4.

⁶⁶² One may infer that the act of recording the names of the dead was in itself a form of resistance. Had the surviving Jews been caught doing this, they may very well have been put to death on the spot.

⁶⁶³ Arthur and Mary Kleinhandler, “The 72 Following the Deportation,” 750.

⁶⁶⁴ Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 709.

⁶⁶⁵ The exact total number of Jews—including the returnees—found living in Chmielnik in the wake of the first deportation remains unclear. For example, Rivka Sametband-Mali and Malka Owsiany simply refer to “hundreds of Jews” who were returning to (or trickling into) Chmielnik at this time. Yechiel and Kalman Mapa report there being 500 Jews, while Yaakov Lemberg estimates there having been around 600 Jews. The unidentified author of “Thus Our Town Was Destroyed” provides an estimate of 700 Jews, whereas Yisrael Feingold and Moshe Ben-Shlomo recall there being as many as 1,000 Jews present at that time. See: Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s

allowed the Jews to return to Chmielnik without any (immediate) negative repercussions, so as to lay a trap for them—to ensnare them for the next deportation.⁶⁶⁶

Many of those who had hidden outside of Chmielnik feared that they would be murdered by right-wing Polish antisemitic factions or by local Polish partisans who were engaged in the capture and/or murder of Jews. In addition, these hidden Jews could not live with the constant fear of being discovered and turned over to the Germans, who would, unquestionably, kill them. The Germans concentrated all of the returning Jews in the home of Moshe (or Moniek) Pasternak, which had previously housed the Jewish police.⁶⁶⁷ At that locale, a joint kitchen was established and run by Leibl Sylman.⁶⁶⁸

According to Rivka Sametband-Mali, all of the last possessions and items of value belonging to Jews were now auctioned and sold off daily by the gendarmes with the help of remaining Jews. Malka Owsiany, who arrived in Chmielnik following the first deportation from a neighboring town, recounts how the Jewish police were forced to search all the cabinets,

Life,” 762; Malka Owsiany, “The Last Jews in Chmielnik,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 20 (1981): 10; Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 721; Lemberg, “From Roundup to Roundup,” 754; “Thus Our Town Was Destroyed,” 702; Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 710; Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” 4.

⁶⁶⁶ Lemberg, “From Roundup to Roundup,” 754.

⁶⁶⁷ Bender, *Ba-erets oyevev*, 206; Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 710; Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 762; Alte Shore, “During the Fight for My Family’s Survival,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 827; Mapa, “Chmielnik Jews in Kielce ‘HASAG,’” 838. Moshe Ben-Shlomo states that most of the remaining Jews now resided in the courtyard of Moshe Pasternak’s house, but that Jews also found residence among some of the surrounding smaller streets, including ul. Bednarska and part of ul. Pińczowska. See: Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” 4.

⁶⁶⁸ Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 762; Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” 5.

drawers, and hiding places of formerly Jewish domiciles. In addition, they were made to drag all of the furniture out onto the street. The good furniture was then loaded onto trucks and sent to Germany, whereas the old and poor-looking furniture was sold in the marketplace at dirt-cheap prices, practically for free.⁶⁶⁹ Polish peasants from the surrounding area and from Chmielnik proper “bought whatever they could lay their hands on.” In Sametband-Mali’s words: “The town was filled with them.”⁶⁷⁰ In addition, a number of Jewish possessions were looted and stolen at this time, during the night, by local peasants. This was in spite of the death sentence imposed by the Germans on anyone caught conducting such acts.⁶⁷¹

The remaining Jews in Chmielnik were now forced to conduct various daily tasks for the Germans, under the constantly watchful eyes of the gendarmes. Many of these tasks involved digging ditches and physically transporting heavy loads. Over the course of six weeks, the Jews would have to leave at around five o’clock in the morning in order to reach these work sites, which were located some distance from Chmielnik. In the evenings they would return to Chmielnik, shattered and broken from exhaustion.⁶⁷²

In the meantime, the overseer of the HASAG-Kielce munitions factory arrived on the scene in Chmielnik and proceeded to grab young people to do compulsory labor in the HASAG forced labor camp in Kielce. A number of Jews also volunteered for work, including Yekutiel

⁶⁶⁹ Owsiany, “The Last Jews in Chmielnik,” 10; Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” 5.

⁶⁷⁰ Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 762.

⁶⁷¹ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 672.

⁶⁷² Bender, *Ba-erets oyeu*, 206; Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 710.

Sametband, the brother of Rivka Sametband-Mali, as well as Kalman, Yechiel, Leah, and Chava Mapa, as they all hoped that this might provide them with a means of survival.⁶⁷³

The timeline for the first round of deportations from the Chmielnik ghetto to the Treblinka death camp was consistent with that of the deportations of many of the small ghettos in the nearby vicinity. For example, Chmielnik's initial deportation began on October 6, 1942. The neighboring town of Busko-Zdrój witnessed its own major deportation on October 1, 1942, and the city of Ostrowiec on October 11, 1942. However, Kielce, which is closer to Chmielnik than Ostrowiec, witnessed its first series of deportations—consisting mainly of women and children—beginning on August 20, 1942. The Warsaw ghetto, which is not situated in the same region of Poland, saw the beginning of its Grossaktion ("Great Action") earlier yet, on July 22, 1942. The Łódź ghetto, located in Germany's annexed Warthegau administrative area, saw its major deportations begin on September 23, 1942. Yet, in this instance, the deportees were sent to nearby Chełmno, a distance of about 31 miles from Łódź, where they were gassed to death in mobile gas chambers.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷³ Sametband-Mali, "During the Struggle for One's Life," 762. Prior to their volunteering for forced labor in Kielce-HASAG, the Mapa siblings had been hidden for several days in the home of fellow Chmielnik Jew, Yankl Moszkowicz. The Mapas were warned, though, that it was dangerous for them to remain hidden in this place and were reassured that they would be safer to volunteer for forced labor. They ended up being at HASAG-Kielce for close to two years. See also: Mapa, "Chmielnik Jews in Kielce 'HASAG,'" 838; Mapa-Shapiro, "Saved from the Nazi Angel of Death," 5; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 673.

⁶⁷⁴ For the deportation dates of Chmielnik, Busko-Zdrój, Ostrowiec, and Łódź, see: Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the Holocaust: The Complete History* (London: Routledge, 2009), 126, 128. For the beginning date of the Kielce ghetto's major deportations, see: Rivka Schiller, "The History of Anti-Semitism in Kielce During the Holocaust Era," *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal* 6, no. 3 (2002): 30. For the beginning date of the Warsaw ghetto's "Great Action," see: Joshua D. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939-1945* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 151.

The Second Roundup and Deportation of Chmielnik Jewry

Approximately a month after the first deportation, on November 5, one of the German S.S. commandants from Kielce arrived in Chmielnik with a unit of armed gendarmes.⁶⁷⁵ They surrounded the house of Moshe Pasternak, where most of the remaining Jews were then to be found and assembled all of them in the clearing behind the house, to the side of ul. Kolejowa.⁶⁷⁶

Although Chmielnik's Jewish community had already faced a major roundup and deportation, for many—if not most—of the local Jews, the second roundup and deportation also took them by surprise, possibly because its timing came only a few weeks after the first such onslaught.⁶⁷⁷ According to the eyewitness account of Alte Shore, she and her family already learned of where the Germans would be sending the Jews, shortly before this next roundup and deportation campaign was underway. One of Shore's sons came running into the house and revealed that the deportation of the neighboring community of Stopnica was to take place that very day. Chmielnik's Jews were also to be included in this deportation.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁵ According to the first-hand account of Moshe Ben-Shlomo, the S.S. figure charged with conducting this second deportation was again Hauptmann [Gerulf] Mayer. He was said to have been accompanied by other Gestapo agents, gendarmerie from Kielce, the surrounding area, as well as from Chmielnik proper. See: Ben-Shlomo, "The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law," 5. See also: Owsiany, "The Last Jews in Chmielnik," 10.

⁶⁷⁶ Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 206; Zelażnik, "The Destruction of Chmielnik," 5; Lemberg, "From Roundup to Roundup," 754; Sametband-Mali, "During the Struggle for One's Life," 763; Feingold, "During the Years of the Holocaust," 710.

⁶⁷⁷ According to Kermish, the second roundup and deportation in Chmielnik "began suddenly." Nonetheless, there were evidently some Jews who suspected what was going to happen, because during the night preceding the event, individuals escaped by fleeing to the forest. Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 673.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.; Pearl Shore Greenblat, et al., eds., *The Story of the Shore Family: A Testimony of Survival* (Hamilton, Ontario: McMaster University, 2004), 1. See also: Wolfgang Curilla, *Der Judenmord in Polen und die deutsche Ordnungspolizei 1939-1945* (Paderborn; München; Wien: Ferdinand Schöningh, c2011), 511.

As in the case of the previous roundup, this one was also accompanied by shootings in the streets, causing a major panic outbreak, as people cried and screamed from every which direction. Jews were once again hurried out of their dwellings, toward the designated area where they were ordered to gather. Various local collaborators participated in conducting the German orders, including Ukrainians and Poles, who carried with them hand weapons.⁶⁷⁹ Local Poles stood by, watching, laughing, and making fun of the Jews' great misfortune.⁶⁸⁰ As in the case of the first deportation, Malka Owsiany recalls how the assembled Jews were forced to place all of their gold, silver, diamonds, and suitcases into a large basket. If a gendarme suspected that somebody was withholding something, he would immediately order that man or woman to strip naked and proceed to search that person's clothing. In certain instances, this also involved thorough body searches. Furthermore, in Owsiany's words, "it could have been cold, or raining—it was of little concern to the gendarmes."⁶⁸¹ The Jews were forced to stand in that clearing for what seemed like forever. Around six o'clock it began to rain lightly, when a convoy of wagons being drawn by horses suddenly drove up. The Jews were made to line up in rows, after which each row was forced into the wagons that were destined for Stopnica, a distance of approximately 25 kilometers (or roughly 16 miles).⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁹ Shore, "During the Fight for My Family's Survival," 823.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 824; Greenblat, et al., eds., *The Story of the Shore Family*, 2; Sametband-Mali, "During the Struggle for One's Life," 763.

⁶⁸¹ Owsiany, "The Last Jews in Chmielnik," 10.

⁶⁸² Shore, "During the Fight for My Family's Survival," 824; Greenblat, et al., eds., *The Story of the Shore Family*, 2; Feingold, "During the Years of the Holocaust," 711; Sametband-Mali, "During the Struggle for One's Life," 763; Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 206-207.

Among those left standing in the space where the selection had just taken place was Yeshayahu Shmuel Margolis, who was covered in his tallit and tefillin. He boldly declared to the German commandant, Hauptmann Mayer, that he refused to be taken on any transport, and that he would rather die on the spot. Mayer threatened to shoot him right there, to which Margolis reportedly retorted: “Please, kill me. I am not afraid of death.”⁶⁸³ Mayer ordered him to turn around and then proceeded to shoot into the air, purposely not aiming for Margolis. He then “laughed a murderous laugh” and ordered that Margolis be taken with the other Jews for deportation.⁶⁸⁴

Malka Owsiany, who was one of those destined for Stopnica, recalls that on each fifth wagon car German gendarmes were planted with huge lanterns, which were used to observe the cars directly in front, so as to make certain that nobody was jumping off and escaping. If a person attempted jumping, he or she would be shot on the spot. Nonetheless, several Jews—possibly as many as 200—managed to jump from the wagons during this eight-hour journey, and of these, a number managed to return to Chmielnik.⁶⁸⁵ Of those who reached Stopnica, the majority were deported, along with the Jews of Stopnica, to Treblinka, either on that same day, November 5, 1942, or on the following day, November 6, 1942.⁶⁸⁶ It remains unclear just how

⁶⁸³ Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” 5.

⁶⁸⁴ According to Moshe Ben-Shlomo, Margolis would ultimately meet his untimely fate in the third and final deportation, which involved the nearby Jewish community of Sandomierz. Ibid.; see also: Feingold, “During the Years of the Holocaust,” 711; “This Is How the Jews of Chmielnik Were Killed,” *Pirsume muze’on ha-lohamim ve’ha-partizanim* 9 (1970): 24.

⁶⁸⁵ Owsiany, “The Last Jews in Chmielnik,” 10; Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 54; Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 763; Shore, “During the Fight for My Family’s Survival,” 824-825; Greenblat, et al., eds., *The Story of the Shore Family*, 2; Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 207.

⁶⁸⁶ Owsiany, “The Last Jews in Chmielnik,” 11; Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, 394. Frank Dobias was hiding in Stopnica during the time when the town’s Jewish population was being deported to Treblinka. Once he learned from

many of Chmielnik's Jews were deported at this time. However, it is known that an estimated total of 5,000 Jews, which included Jews from Chmielnik, were deported from Stopnica during this two-day period.⁶⁸⁷

Following the second deportation from Chmielnik, only between 50 and 110 Jews were allowed to remain in the town.⁶⁸⁸ These were mainly tradesmen, as well as members of the Jewish police.⁶⁸⁹ As came to pass prior to the second deportation, a representative from the HASAG-Kielce labor camp arrived in Chmielnik by automobile and ordered the Jewish police to assemble both Jews who were living openly in the ghetto, as well as Jews who had hidden in Chmielnik proper, or in the neighboring vicinity, for forced labor in the munitions factory in Kielce.⁶⁹⁰ At the same time, a lorry with 20 Jewish workers and their accompanying supervisors arrived in Chmielnik with the purpose of dismantling several shanties and delivering their

a local Pole what was taking place there, he fled to Chmielnik, where he found only a few remaining Jews (in the wake of the town's second deportation), mostly tradesman who were of personal value to the Germans. See: Frank Dobia, interview by Christian Froeliche, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toorak, Australia, October 4, 1996.

⁶⁸⁷ Curilla, *Der Judenmord in Polen*, 511. According to the testimony of Rivka Sametband-Mali, several hundred Jews were deported at this time. Moshe Ben-Shlomo places the count at over 900 deportees, whereas Joseph Kermish estimates that over 400 Jews were selected for deportation at this time. See: Sametband-Mali, "During the Struggle for One's Life," 763; Ben-Shlomo, "The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law," 5; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 673. For Stopnica's and other sites' Jewish deportation statistics, see: Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, 394.

⁶⁸⁸ There is some disparity between the first-hand accounts of those recounting the number of Jews allowed to remain in Chmielnik at this time. According to Malka Owsiany, there were only 50 remaining Jews present, whereas Rivka Sametband-Mali recalls there being 75 remaining Jews. Moshe Ben-Shlomo, on the other hand, remembers there being as many as 110 Jews whom the Germans permitted to remain in Chmielnik at this time. See: Owsiany, "The Last Jews in Chmielnik," 10; Sametband-Mali, "During the Struggle for One's Life," 763; Ben-Shlomo, "The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law," 5.

⁶⁸⁹ Mapa and Mapa, "Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa," 716; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 674.

⁶⁹⁰ Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012; Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 674; Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 207.

contents to HASAG-Kielce. The Jewish workers hinted to the remaining Jews of Chmielnik that those who volunteered for work at the HASAG-Kielce factory stood a better chance of survival than those who simply remained in Chmielnik. Acting on this advice, several Jewish men and women, including the Mapa brothers and their sisters, Leah and Chava, volunteered to return with the lorry of Jewish workers to HASAG-Kielce.⁶⁹¹

The Final Roundup and Deportation of Chmielnik Jewry

The third and final roundup and deportation of Chmielnik's remaining Jews took place on December 20, 1942. Members of the German S.S. and local gendarmes oversaw this murder campaign. They ordered most of the remaining Jews onto horse-drawn wagons. In order to persuade the Jews to calmly follow orders and join this last transport, which they subsequently did, the Germans presented them with the lie that in Sandomierz Jews could live freely.⁶⁹² According to David Newman, as of December 1, 1942, news had spread that a Jewish quarter was being established in Sandomierz, east of Kielce, and that Jews who applied to relocate there by a certain date need not fear deportation. Newman recalls that pictures of the so-called new *Judenstaat*, or Jewish "state," were published in the press for propaganda purposes. Hans Frank (1900-1946), the governor-general of German-occupied Poland, even verified this statement with his own signature. As a result, many Jewish families from Chmielnik responded positively to this falsehood.⁶⁹³ Upon their arrival in Sandomierz, a young man of perhaps 16 named Chaim Wolf

⁶⁹¹ Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 207; Mapa and Mapa, "Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa," 716-717; Mapa-Shapiro, "Saved from the Nazi Angel of Death," 5.

⁶⁹² Sametband-Mali, "During the Struggle for One's Life," 763; Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 207.

⁶⁹³ Newman, *Hope's Reprise*, 40.

Kaufman jumped on a member of the S.S. and attempted to strangle him with his bare hands. The two struggled for some time, until other S.S. men grabbed and bound Kaufman, and then shot him.⁶⁹⁴

In Sandomierz, by early January 1943, there were approximately 6,000 Jews concentrated into a small ghetto area. This included roughly 1,100 Jews from Staszów, and an undetermined number of Jews from Chmielnik. The healthy men and women were sent to do forced labor in the Skarżysko-Kamienna concentration camp. However, all the other Jews from Chmielnik, along with the rest of the ghetto inhabitants, were deported to Treblinka in sealed wagons, on January 10, 1943. At that point in time, the Sandomierz ghetto was liquidated.⁶⁹⁵

The very last Jews left in Chmielnik after the deportation to Sandomierz were kept alive for the sole purpose of performing assorted services in the station of the local gendarmerie.⁶⁹⁶ An exception to this pattern may be seen in the instances of Jews who were hidden on the outskirts or in the vicinity of Chmielnik. This included Ann Nudelman (née Frydman), her father, and two younger siblings, who were hiding in the domicile of a Polish acquaintance since the time of the

⁶⁹⁴ Dr. Z. Lederman, "Attempts at Opposition," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 744; Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 207; Ben-Shlomo, "The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law," 5; A. Steinfeld, "The 16-Year-Old Hero During the Jewish Deportation in Chmielnik," *Yidische tsaytung* (Landsberg, Germany), December 6, 1946, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55; Testimony of A. Sztajnfeld [Steinfeld], Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/524, 5.

⁶⁹⁵ Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 675; Cesia Diamant, "Eyewitness Testimony of Cesia Diamant," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 721; Newman, *Hope's Reprise*, 40; Testimony of Cesia Diamant, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/950, 4; Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, 395.

⁶⁹⁶ Bender, *Ba-erets oyev*, 208; Sara Bender, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945* (Vol. 2, Part A), s.v. "Chmielnik" (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 210.

final deportation, in late December 1942. The Frydmans were ultimately discovered in April 1943, and marched into Chmielnik's town center, at which time, according to Nudelman, "they were the last Jews there."⁶⁹⁷ Nudelman's father and the Polish acquaintance were then taken away for questioning, while she and her younger siblings were put in jail by the German gendarmerie. They were not released until August 1943, at which time they were deported to HASAG-Kielce, along with the other few remaining Jews, still barely subsisting in Chmielnik. These last survivors, according to Nudelman, were mostly shoemakers, tailors, cleaning servants, and the like, and were considered of personal use to the Germans.⁶⁹⁸

Kuba Zaifman, a tailor who was spared deportation earlier on—due to his remarkable skills and ability to tailor suits for the Germans—was also among the last Jews residing in Chmielnik, until July 1943. According to his testimony, "the S.S. hand-picked him [Zaifman], a shoemaker, a carpenter, a few housekeepers, and some other personal servants"⁶⁹⁹ to remain in Chmielnik until this late date. Regarding the general state-of-affairs at that time in Chmielnik, Zaifman further recounted: "We remained 10 people only—from a city of (more than) 10,000. It was worse than a ghost town."⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁷ Ann Nudelman, telephone interview with author, written transcript, September 1, 2012.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Hagstrom, *Sara's Children*, 144.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid. The number 10,000 as a total count for Chmielnik's pre-World War II Jewish population (versus the much-depleted numbers of Jews, postwar) was further substantiated by several interviewees, all of whom are natives of Chmielnik. See: Gitla Fastag, personal interview with author, written transcript, August 22, 2012; Helen Greenspun, telephone interview with author, written transcript, August 20, 2012; Cesia Zaifman, telephone interview with author, written transcript, August 21, 2012.

Synopsis

As demonstrated by the accounts presented here about the progression of ghetto life in Chmielnik, which culminated in a series of deportations concluding in December 1942, it is evident that ghettoization was merely one stage in the Germans' "Final Solution" system. Ultimately, the ghetto was only intended to be a temporary holding cell in which Jews would die by overcrowding, filth, disease, starvation, or physical violence. In certain cases, for example, perhaps most notably in the Łódź and Warsaw ghettos, the ghetto was also utilized by the Germans as a venue by which to obtain forced labor from inmates via onsite workshops and factories. Indeed, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, the Judenrat leader in the Łódź ghetto, famously employed the motto: "Unser Weg ist Arbeit" ("Our way is work"), the notion being that so long as the Jewish ghetto residents proved productive for the Germans, they stood a reasonable chance of survival.⁷⁰¹

Over time, ghetto residents experienced transfers to other, often larger ghettos, prior to their deportation to concentration camps and death camps.⁷⁰² This was especially true of many of the ghettos in the vicinity of Chmielnik in the Distrikt Radom. But ultimately, these ghettos also witnessed final deportations and liquidations, which in Chmielnik's vicinity frequently had one major endpoint as far as the Germans were concerned: the Treblinka death camp. This was certainly true of Chmielnik and Kielce, as previously mentioned. But it was also true of numerous other smaller sites near Chmielnik, including: Chęciny, Opoczno, Ozarów, and

⁷⁰¹ Van Pelt, *Lodz and Getto Litzmannstadt*, 60.

⁷⁰² Dean, *The USHMM Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, s.v. "Radom Region (Distrikt Radom)," 196.

Kozienice, to name a few. All of these four former ghettos were liquidated either in September or October 1942,⁷⁰³ overlapping with Chmielnik's first two deportations and predating Chmielnik's final deportation, in December 1942. On the other hand, some of the larger ghettos located in other regions of Poland, such as those in Białystok, Kraków, and Warsaw, witnessed later liquidation dates. In Białystok, this occurred in mid-late August 1943, in Kraków, beginning on March 13, 1943, and in Warsaw, not until early/mid-May 1943, following the Warsaw ghetto uprising.⁷⁰⁴

As we saw with Chmielnik, the general pattern of the Germans was to leave behind a surviving group of able-bodied individuals, which sometimes included members of the Jewish ghetto police and/or Judenrat, to clear out the former homes of ghetto residents who had already been deported elsewhere—in many cases, to their death. These individuals were taxed with burying the Jewish dead and tending to the various functions that the Germans required of them, such as chopping wood, providing haircuts, tailoring clothes, and the like. Again, this is why the last Jews of the Chmielnik ghetto were permitted by the local gendarmerie to remain behind, even after the final deportation from there had taken place. This pattern may be seen in the previously mentioned ghettos in the Chmielnik vicinity and in ghettos throughout Poland.

As for the subject of flight eastward into the Soviet Union on the part of Polish Jewry during World War II, this was a widespread phenomenon among Jews residing throughout the country. However, given issues of proximity, Jews who resided or found themselves in towns or cities that were further east, tended to have higher success rates insofar as actually reaching

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 208, 250, 267, 273.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 459, 530, 869.

Poland's Soviet-controlled zone and further into Soviet Russia. Nevertheless, as we shall soon see in accounts retold here, even Chmielnik, which—depending on the date—was at best close to 200 miles away from Soviet Russia (think Boston to New York City) and at worst, 300 miles away (think Boston to Philadelphia) witnessed cases of individuals, groups, and even families, who made this dangerous trek in flight from the German forces. This is the topic of our next chapter.

Chapter Five: Those Who Fled East

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the announcement of the German invasion into Poland triggered many Chmielnik men of military age to decide to flee eastward, to Russia. (Overall, an estimated 1,000 Chmielnik residents—most of them Jewish—fled, and the estimated total population of Chmielnik in 1939 was 12,500. Thus, an estimated eight percent of the general town fled in the earliest days of the war.) Prior to Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, the distance between Chmielnik and Soviet Russia was somewhat less than 300 miles. However, by late September, once Soviet Russia had consolidated its control over Poland's eastern sector—beyond the Bug River—this same distance had been reduced to roughly 170 miles. It made sense, especially for fleeing Jews, to move in a trajectory that took them away from the Germans, as reports were already arriving in Chmielnik during the first days of the war, regarding the terror visited by the invading Germans upon other nearby communities. This is one of the chief reasons why such a sizable percentage of Chmielnik's Jewish population decided to flee in an eastward direction, toward the Soviet Union and the Soviet interior.

Rivka Mali (née Sametband, b. 1919), who did not flee eastward, recalled that once the youth in town saw at the outbreak of the war that they had few options in situ, "many of them fled to Russia. There was a possibility of going eastward to Russia, so many fled ... Those who fled to Russia remained in Russia already, they did not return until the end of the war. Several died there, but from Russia most of them returned; that literally saved them."⁷⁰⁵ This chapter will focus only on the fates of those who escaped to Russia. Generally, the journey can be divided

⁷⁰⁵ Testimony of Rivka Mali, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/10530, 4.

into three stages: the flight to Lemberg/Lwów, the stay in central Asia, and the period after the 1941 Soviet-Polish pact that allowed Jews to move freely in Soviet-controlled areas. These stories of survival can be told in a number of ways—namely, in chronological order, in spatial order (West to East), or one survivor at a time. I have chosen to employ the third method, even though it does not always correspond to chronology and geography, in the interest of keeping each survivor’s biography intact. This is both for clarity’s sake and in service of treating the survivors, themselves, with dignity—as real people with real stories, rather than merely as examples of larger trends.

As previously mentioned, a sizable number of Chmielnik Jews—especially those who were unmarried and/or did not have children—made the decision to flee eastward, along with a sizable portion of Polish Jewry during the early days of World War II. There was also the initial belief among many Polish Jews that as with past wars, it was the men who were in danger and most needed to flee eastward to escape the Germans; the women and children were not perceived to be in the same degree of danger. Hence, there were countless cases of men—husbands and fathers of households—who left their wives and children behind in Poland to greet the invaders, while they themselves ultimately found safety beyond the Soviet border. This may be seen in Mordechai Goldstein’s account of how his mother encouraged his father to flee in the early days of the war, while leaving her and their four children behind in Chmielnik: “Many decided to flee to the east, with the hope of reaching a safe haven, whatever it may be, before the Germans arrived ... Those who left the city were primarily young men ... My mother tried to explain to my father that he need not worry about us, as the Germans would not do anything to the women

and children; rather, only to the men.”⁷⁰⁶ In retrospect, of course, Goldstein’s mother’s naïveté is difficult to read on the page, but it reveals how little the Jews understood about what was yet to come.

According to historians Yisrael Gutman and Joanna Michlic, as much as 70 percent of Poland’s surviving Jewish community—a 10 percent survival rate overall—survived the Second World War in the Soviet Union, often deep within the country’s interior.⁷⁰⁷ Ironically, by being subject to Joseph Stalin’s Communist whims, the majority of these Polish refugee Jews managed to survive the war. Those Jews who remained on Polish soil, however, fared statistically far worse; only 30 percent of Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors managed to survive in Poland proper or in the Nazi concentration camps in Germany and Austria.⁷⁰⁸ Given the fact that Chmielnik was no exception with regard to its mass Jewish refugee flight toward the Soviet

⁷⁰⁶ Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim* [*In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews*], 20. The phenomenon of men fleeing east may also be seen in the autobiographical details surrounding Renia Kukielka [also: Renya Kulkielko] (b. 1924). Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, Kukielka, an adolescent, fled from her town of Jędrzejów to nearby Chmielnik, where other family members lived. Kukielka’s own father, Moshe, was one of many Jewish men who fled eastward toward the Bug River at this time. He and other adult Jewish males wanted to “keep as far as possible from the Germans” on the other side of the Bug River, which the Soviets had already reached. Kukielka recalled this period in the present tense as being marked by great fear, for “the weeping and wailing of women is unbearable. It is difficult to part from husband or father.” Renya Kulkielko, *Escape from the Pit* (New York: Sharon Books, 1947), 3. See also: Judy Batalion, *The Light of Days: The Untold Story of Women Resistance Fighters in Hitler’s Ghettos* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020), 33.

⁷⁰⁷ Gutman, more specifically, says that 70 percent of Polish Jewry’s overall 10 percent survival rate survived in the Soviet Union or in other countries outside of Poland. Some sources, such as the documentary film, *Saved by Deportation*, place this survival rate at the even higher percentage of 80 percent of the total 10 percent survival rate of Polish Jewry. See: Yisrael Gutman, *ha-Yehudim be-Polin ahare Milhemet ha-olam ha-sheniyah* [The Jews of Poland After the Second World War] (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1985), 12; *Saved by Deportation: An Unknown Odyssey of Polish Jews* (LOGTV, Ltd, 2007), <https://logtv.com/deportation/>.

⁷⁰⁸ Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 198. Yisrael Gutman breaks down this 30 percent Jewish survival rate even further by the 10 percent of those who survived in hiding with Poles or in the woods of Poland; and the remaining 20 percent of those who survived in German labor and concentration camps. See: Gutman, *ha-Yehudim be-Polin ahare Milhemet ha-olam ha-sheniyah*, 12.

Union, it is worth relating here some of these wartime experiences, both from a general and individual perspective.

Among the most current literature written on the subject of Polish Jewish refugees who survived World War II in the Soviet Union is that of Eliyana R. Adler's 2020 publication, *Survival on the Margins: Polish Jewish Refugees in the Wartime Soviet Union*. Adler states that there were well over 100,000 Polish Jews who chose to flee from areas that were conquered by the Nazis as of September 1, 1939, to those newly under Soviet control as of September 17, 1939, as outlined in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.⁷⁰⁹ Nevertheless, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on precisely how many Jews actually survived in the USSR. By the end of 1946, a full two-thirds of the Jewish Holocaust survivor community—the *She'erit Hapletah* (Hebrew for “Surviving Remnant”)—was composed of repatriated Jews from the Soviet Union, the majority of whom hailed from Poland.⁷¹⁰

Holocaust survivors and scholars suggest that aside from geographical reasons, Polish Jews who fled east were often Communists or left leaning, politically.⁷¹¹ Others have suggested,

⁷⁰⁹ In a somewhat similar vein, Yisrael Gutman produces an approximate total number of Jews who fled to the Soviet Union from Poland on the eve of World War II or were deported there between 1939-1941 of 350,000. See: Gutman, *ha-Yehudim be-Polin ahare Milhemet ha-olam ha-sheniyah*, 12. Dorit Bader Whiteman echoes Gutman in her assertion that of the 1.5 million Poles who found themselves under Soviet control during World War II, about 400,000 of them were Jewish. This included “those who had fled to Russian-occupied territory on their own accord, as well as prisoners-of-war and vast numbers who had been arbitrarily deported by the Russians.” Dorit Bader Whiteman, *Escape via Siberia: A Jewish Child's Odyssey of Survival* (New York; London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1999), 62.

⁷¹⁰ Eliyana R. Adler, *Survival on the Margins: Polish Jewish Refugees in the Wartime Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 2-3.

⁷¹¹ In the estimation of former Chmielnik resident, Max Glait: “The most left Jews fled to Russia and survived World War II.” Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989.

similarly, that those who were already somewhat secular or less religiously bound, were able to more readily submit to the antireligious policies by which the Soviet Union was then governed.⁷¹² Although this theory is quite logical, it has not been proven, and tends to be discussed on an anecdotal level. However, of the individual Chmielnik and non-Chmielnik cases with which I am familiar, geographical location and/or political and religious views frequently factored into the decision to flee east. Age and marital status frequently also played a role in this weighty decision. Generally, those who chose in the affirmative about fleeing eastward were less attached and had fewer responsibilities to other individuals—particularly, family members. But of course, there were also couples, groups, and even family units that chose to make this risky trek, as we shall soon see.

For example, in the case of Max Glait (b. 1912), who was originally from Chmielnik but resided in Łódź since approximately 1928, he frequently states in his Shoah Foundation testimony that he was leftist in his orientation. According to Glait, he belonged to a trade union related to his profession as a tailor and became “less religious” than how he had been raised. He also joined Jewish political parties, beginning with Hashomer Hatzair, and progressing toward Poalei Zion-Left and the Bund. As a result of his leftist affiliations and union membership in the needle trades, Glait did not feel safe remaining in Łódź once the Germans invaded Poland—he was afraid that he would be an easy target for Poland’s occupiers, were they to somehow learn of his personal politics and activities. According to Glait’s nephew, Yosl Glajt, his uncle had good reason to be concerned, as he was among members of his union’s board who had been arrested

⁷¹² Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 33.

and sent to the notorious Bereza Kartuska internment camp in the 1930s, where he was incarcerated for close to one year for his leftist activities.⁷¹³ Consequently, already on September 1, 1939, Glait fled home to his family in Chmielnik.

The Journey Eastward: Stage 1 for Those Who Fled

From Chmielnik, Glait and some other single Jewish youths like himself—a group of perhaps five men and women—decided to flee eastward with horses and carriages, because in their minds, the Russians seemed far safer than the Germans. Of course, Glait had no idea just what was in store for him in the “East.” Indeed, he knew other Jews who fled eastward and ended up returning home, mainly because they could not find any food. But once he managed to cross the Bug River and into the Soviet-controlled sector of Poland near Lemberg/Lwów (today, Lviv, Ukraine) by bribing an “honest Pole” to smuggle him across, Glait felt a certain sense of relief, now that he was subject to the Russians—as opposed to the Germans.⁷¹⁴

Chmielnik-born, Roma Tcharnabroda (also known as Ruchama née Zalcman) (1916-1951),⁷¹⁵ whose tragic first-hand account was recorded in Munich by Dr. David P. Boder (1886-

⁷¹³ Yosl Glajt, “This is How I Spent My 80 Years—An Account,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 28 (1989): 9. It is worth noting that many of the more than 10,000 prisoners incarcerated in Bereza Kartuska during the years of the camp’s existence, 1934-1939, were political activists—like Max Glait—who belonged to leftist groups, especially the Communist party. See: Vitali Silitski and Jan Zaprudnik, *The A to Z of Belarus* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2010), 60-61.

⁷¹⁴ Glait’s intended meaning behind the words “honest Pole” in this context is that this particular Pole honored Glait’s bribe, rather than accepting the bribe and then turning him over to the authorities. Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989.

⁷¹⁵ For factual details regarding Roma Tcharnabroda’s—or Ruchama Zalcman’s—correct place of birth and earliest years, see: Sara Kerbel, “The Tragic Death of Ruchama Zalcman,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 933.

1961) in 1946, shortly after the Kielce pogrom, ended up fleeing east—at least at the outbreak of the war—because of her husband’s military position. At the time of the war’s outbreak, Tcharnabroda and her husband were based in Kielce. Because her husband was of age and a physician, he was called up for military service and sent to the east. Tcharnabroda served as his nurse cadet. As Tcharnabroda conveys to Boder, she and her husband migrated toward Lemberg and Równe/Rovno (today, Rivne, Ukraine) to what was now the Soviet zone of occupation. They ultimately sojourned temporarily from 1939-1941 in Lemberg/Lwów, where many other Chmielnik Jews and Polish Jews, in general, who were fleeing the Germans, decided to sojourn in the early part of World War II.

While there, Tcharnabroda and her husband survived devastating pogroms perpetrated by both Polish and Ukrainian antisemites, who believed the Nazi story they were fed regarding so-called “Jewish Bolsheviks” who had murdered prisoners of the local NKVD (the Soviet secret police) jail. The couple also remained in Lemberg/Lwów when the Germans overtook the formerly Soviet-occupied eastern part of Poland in June 1941. According to Tcharnabroda, it was around this same time when the first efforts were made toward deporting Jews to Bełżec and when the first extermination camps were established.⁷¹⁶ In her words: “Nobody had any idea [about this] yet.”⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁶ In actuality, the construction of Bełżec did not begin until November 1941, and the first mass deportations and murders of Jews did not take place there until March 1942. See: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Bełżec: Key Dates” <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/belezec-key-dates> (accessed 5-3-21).

⁷¹⁷ *Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), Paul V. Galvin Library, University Archives and Special Collections*, David Pablo Boder Papers, 1930-1957, Roma Tcharnabroda, September 24, 1946, <https://voices.library.iit.edu> (accessed 5-7-21).

Under the Third Reich, Tcharnabroda and her husband were both imprisoned in a labor camp in the vicinity of Lemberg/Lwów on Janowska Street.⁷¹⁸ The two somehow managed to escape from the camp, fleeing toward the area in which they both originated, near Kielce. In this regard, Tcharnabroda's wartime saga, which included incarceration in the Warsaw ghetto, Skarzysko-Kamienna, Ravensbrück, Majdanek, and a host of other labor and concentration camps, ultimately differs widely from that of her fellow kinsmen who made their way into the Soviet interior. Sadly, Tcharnabroda's husband did not survive the war. Furthermore, the Americans had to amputate both of her legs below the knees, immediately postwar, due to her feet having frozen just prior to her evacuation of the Ravensbrück concentration camp at the war's near-end.⁷¹⁹

In the case of Chmielnik-born child Holocaust survivor, Anna F. Prager, the reason for her being taken as a young child to the Soviet Union shortly following the outbreak of World War II, was, like that of Roma Tcharnabroda, mainly geographic in nature. For her father, Icek Frydman (later known as Jack Friedman), was in the Polish army and stationed near the Russian

⁷¹⁸ Presumably, Tcharnabroda means the camp known as Janowska, located in the northwestern suburbs of Lemberg/Lwów. This is the same camp in which Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal (1908-2005), was incarcerated and about which Holocaust survivor, Leon Weliczker Wells (1925-2009), wrote in his aptly titled autobiography, *The Janowska Road*, published initially in 1963. For the complete publication details of this book, refer to this work's bibliography.

⁷¹⁹ *Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), Paul V. Galvin Library, University Archives and Special Collections*, David Pablo Boder Papers, 1930-1957, Roma Tcharnabroda, September 24, 1946, <https://voices.library.iit.edu> (accessed 5-7-21); Donald L. Niewyk, *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 237. As a sorrowful postscript to Roma Tcharnabroda's 1946 testimony, a few years later, in December 1951, she committed suicide while still residing in Munich, Germany, where she was a student of pharmacology. Tcharnabroda was buried in the local Jewish cemetery, where, according to her friend, Sara Kerbel, there was still no official headstone for the deceased as of 1953, due to a shortage of funds among her surviving friends and acquaintances. See: Kerbel, "The Tragic Death of Ruchama Zalcmán," 935-936. For a postwar group photograph of surviving Jews from Chmielnik in the Landsberg DP camp that includes Tcharnabroda, see also: Abraham Goldlist, interview by Dave Harris, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, September 11, 1995.

border when the war began. Frydman was taken prisoner by the Soviets and shipped as a laborer to a Siberian labor camp. Prager does not explain the type of labor camp in which her father was incarcerated. But based on the timing and circumstances of his capture by the Soviets, it is possible that it was something akin to one of Eliyana R. Adler's following descriptions:

Polish officers, captured mainly in September 1939, were held primarily in separate Polish POW camps.⁷²⁰ A small number spent time in Soviet prisons as well. Those arrested for crossing the border or as political prisoners typically spent most of their period of incarceration in Soviet prisons. Some describe cells filled primarily with other Polish citizens at the outset, while a few joined the population of Soviet prisoners immediately and all did so after sentencing to labor camps.⁷²¹

Prager's mother, Tema (also known as Tamara) Frydman (later, Friedman; b. 1916), decided to travel east to locate her husband, or at least, to obtain some word of his whereabouts. Also traveling with Prager and her mother was Prager's uncle, Jakob Sylman (1924-2014), her mother's teenage brother, who was sent along to help her mother.⁷²²

Similar to Glait's account, Prager's account involves her family unit crossing the Russian border illegally during the night and reaching Lemberg/Lwów (today, Lviv, Ukraine). Adler's findings bolster the fact that both Prager's and Glait's firsthand experiences involved crossing the Russian border near Lemberg/Lwów. Yisrael Vayman, another Chmielnik native who survived World War II under the Soviets,⁷²³ likewise supports the accounts of Glait and Prager

⁷²⁰ When Adler refers to Polish officers who were kept in separate POW camps, she means that they were incarcerated separately from other imprisoned Polish citizens who were not Polish military figures. See: Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 111.

⁷²¹ Ibid.

⁷²² Anna F. Prager, *I Remember* (Middletown, DE: Bowker, 2018), 17, 19.

⁷²³ Abraham Wein highlights Vayman's account among other memorial book entries that provide first-hand information on the experiences of refugee Jews who were in Soviet work camps, Siberian exile, the Urals, and Central Asia during the Second World War. See: Abraham Wein, "'Memorial Books' as a Source for Research into

and Adler's findings. According to him, "most of the Chmielnik Jews who, with the outbreak of the war fled to the Soviet side, were concentrated in Lemberg."⁷²⁴ This was mainly, according to Vayman, because they had the sense that the city was close to home, and they hoped that in time they would all be able to return to their place of origin and be reunited with their loved ones.

With the outbreak of World War II, Gitel Garfinkel-Bresco, then residing in Łódź, initially fled to Białystok, which became part of the Soviet zone of occupation in 1939. But sometime thereafter, in 1940, she relocated to Lemberg. Her recollection, like other previous accounts, attests to the strong presence of Chmielnik Jews in this newly Soviet-controlled metropolis: "I went to Lemberg because I found out that in Lemberg there were a lot of Chmielnikers, as well as my brother, Melech. I wanted to be together with him."⁷²⁵

In Lemberg/Lwów, many of the Chmielnikers remained together in a tight-knit group, where they advised one another about what actions to take next.⁷²⁶ There were two main communal dwellings in which the Chmielnik refugees resided, according to Bentsiyon Vaytsman. One was a shop with a room, which was extremely crowded with people sleeping on the floor; the other one was a less crowded apartment owned by Chmielnik refugees, Fishl Glajt and his wife. Based on Vaytsman's experience, the Chmielnik refugees' food during this period

the History of Jewish Communities in Europe," in *Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry: Essays on the History and Meanings of Yizker Volumes*, edited by Rosemary Horowitz (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, c2011), 101-102.

⁷²⁴ Yisrael Vayman, "In the Soviet Camps," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 873.

⁷²⁵ Garfinkel-Bresco, "Memories of My 80 Year Lifespan."

⁷²⁶ Vayman, "In the Soviet Camps," 873.

consisted of soup and bread that they received twice daily.⁷²⁷ Apparently, though, Chmielnik's Jewish refugees were far from unique in their thinking and choice of temporary sojourn in Lemberg/Lwów. In Adler's words, "most refugees went first to the larger cities within formerly Polish areas. Bialystok and Lvov were inundated with refugees."⁷²⁸ This statement is further bolstered by John Goldlust, who states in *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union*, that partially because both Bialystok and Lwów already had sizable Jewish populations before the war, these two cities became "the most popular destinations for the Jewish 'refugees' from German-occupied Poland."⁷²⁹

Survival in Russia/Central Asia: Stage 2

The two accounts of Glait and Prager diverge somewhat, at least initially, in that Prager ended up living in a Siberian Gulag,⁷³⁰ whereas Glait makes no mention of residing in any Arctic surroundings while in wartime Soviet Russia. Prager even titles one of her more descriptive

⁷²⁷ Bentsiyon Vaytsman, "My Wartime Migrations Across the Soviet Union," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 885.

⁷²⁸ Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 54. Adam Broner, an adolescent Polish Jew from Łódź who fled with his older brother to Białystok in November 1939, likewise states in his autobiography that the cities of Białystok and Lwów were among the major destination sites for refugees in Soviet-occupied Poland. He also recalls that these sites were reached via trains, which ran effectively in German-occupied Poland and were infrequent and overloaded with passengers in Soviet-occupied Poland. See: Adam Broner, *My War Against the Nazis: A Jewish Soldier with the Red Army* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 11.

⁷²⁹ John Goldlust, "A Different Silence: The Survival of More Than 200,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union During World War II," in *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union*, eds. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 36-37.

⁷³⁰ According to Anne Applebaum's Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Gulag: A History*, GULAG is the acronym for the Soviet bureaucratic institution, *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, the Main Camp Administration, which operated the Soviet system of camps (including forced labor camps, punishment camps, transit camps, et al.) in the Stalin era and came to be synonymous with the "Soviet repressive system itself." Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2004), xv-xvi.

chapters on the subject of Siberia: “Always Cold,” in which she conveys how constant, deep, and blinding the snow combined with wind was, in her words: in “that God-forsaken place.”⁷³¹ Due to these harsh conditions, the building in which Prager and her relatives slept and the one in which they ate, were connected by cables. People would hold onto these cables when walking from one building to the other. Otherwise, one could easily get lost—or worse—from the oncoming snow and wind activity. Since Prager was a young child at the time and could not reach the cables, which were designed for adults in mind, she had to promise her mother that she would never let go of her. Her mother would hold her hand as the two made their way from one building to the next.⁷³²

Prager’s autobiography is short on dates and detailed explanations of precisely how her family traveled from one part of the Soviet Union to another. After all, she was not quite three years old at the outbreak of World War II. Nevertheless, she recalls that after a period of time in Bodaybo, located in Irkutsk Oblast, where the family was reunited with another maternal brother, Yochanan (or Jochne; later known as “Johnny”) Sylman (b. 1922), they ultimately came to Samarkand, Uzbekistan’s second largest city. Prager illustrates the state of poverty in which people, including her family and other Polish refugees, lived in Bodaybo and Samarkand. In Bodaybo, she remarks, for example, that “everything was scarce including food,” and that “a person could get killed for the shoes on his feet.”⁷³³

⁷³¹ Prager, *I Remember*, 29, 32.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 35.

Poverty clearly also existed in Samarkand, where Prager and her family lived in what had originally been intended as a storage shed. At this point, the family network consisted of Prager, her parents, her mother's two younger brothers, as well as her mother's cousin, Fela, whom Prager's father had discovered to be living for a long time already in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.⁷³⁴ The hut in which the family resided had a dirt floor that had to be washed and swept daily. Yet, notwithstanding the less-than-luxurious accommodations, Prager remarks that her family felt relatively safe and unthreatened by the locals there—perhaps due to their lowly status as Polish Jewish refugees. Interestingly, Prager states that the Uzbek Gentiles recognized that they were Jewish and were antisemitic as far as Uzbek Jews were concerned. However, because her family and other Polish Jewish refugees like them were in such a crisis, their Jewish status did not seem to matter much to the local Uzbek Gentiles.⁷³⁵

Of all the positive features of Prager's family's temporary sojourn in Samarkand, the most captivating one is likely that of the marketplace, which fascinated Prager in all its shapes and colors—so much so, that its sights caused Prager to come late repeatedly to her Russian-speaking first grade class. That was, until her mother caught wind of her dalliances. Prager echoes the colorful descriptions of the Samarkand marketplaces coupled with the poverty of refugees provided by fellow Polish Jewish refugee, Fani Brener. Brener, who grew up in Bereza Kartuska (today, Byaroza, Belarus), in what was then the northeastern sector of Poland, was in a

⁷³⁴ Anna Prager, telephone interview no. 2 with author, written transcript, April 28, 2021.

⁷³⁵ Prager, *I Remember*, 41-43. Asher Scharf, one of the heroes of the documentary film, *Saved by Deportation*, expresses this same sentiment regarding the Uzbek Gentiles not being antisemitic toward the Polish Jewish refugees in their midst and recognizing their lowly position. See: *Saved by Deportation: An Unknown Odyssey of Polish Jews* (LOGTV, Ltd, 2007), <https://logtv.com/deportation/>.

geographically well-positioned place from which to flee further eastward into Soviet Russia during World War II.

In her Yiddish-language autobiographical account, *Di ershte helft lebn* [The First Part of My Life], Brener describes Samarkand as having several marketplaces. At the large marketplace in the Old Town—quite possibly the marketplace that Prager herself depicted—Brener remembers how “refugees, mostly Jews, would walk around and sell something—a watch, a pair of trousers, shoes, and other desirables. With the money they earned, they would purchase food. A countless number of fruits and vegetables were at the marketplace.”⁷³⁶ Brener continues, almost nostalgically: “Once, I bought some cherries, and a boy ran over to me and hit my hand. The cherries spilled out, and he hastily, hastily picked them up from the ground, wiped off a bit of the sand, and consumed one cherry after the next.”⁷³⁷

The exotic portrayal of Samarkand, in particular, is also echoed by Max Glait, who regaled his interviewer, Marc Hillel, with references to melons that grew rampant in the warm climate and the ancient structures standing there for hundreds of years, built with tile mosaics as small as “sugar cubes.”⁷³⁸ Glait’s description is likewise reminiscent of the description provided by Brener, when she writes that in Samarkand’s “Old Town there were two old buildings—

⁷³⁶ Fani Brener, *Di ershte helft lebn* [The First Part of My Life] (Tel-Aviv, Israel: Y. L. Peretz Publishing, 1989), 91.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989.

noteworthy, hundreds of years old: Tamerlan's tomb and the Registry, with the stunning glass adornment, mosaics in several colors."⁷³⁹

According to Glait, in Samarkand, where he was the manager of a government-operated factory, there were some 15,000 Polish Jewish refugees while he was there. It was a virtual haven for Polish Jews like himself who had fled to the Soviet interior in order to escape Nazism. Similarly, Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital city, became a major center for Polish Jewish refugees.⁷⁴⁰ Adler states that many were motivated to come to the Uzbek metropolis, at least in part, "by the image of the city presented in Alexander Neverov's popular Soviet children's book, *Tashkent, City of Bread*," published in 1923 and translated into both Polish and Yiddish.⁷⁴¹ Indeed, Glait also resided for a period in Tashkent, where he said that Polish refugees—the vast majority of them Jewish—would often congregate and have meetings as Polish patriots. The Soviet government permitted them to conduct these organizational gatherings, since "officially" the members were all "Communists." Yet in reality, according to Glait, many of the members were Communists only on paper.⁷⁴²

⁷³⁹ Brener, *Di ershte helft lebn*, 90-91.

⁷⁴⁰ Uri Diamant, who was also in Tashkent for some period of time during World War II, together with his wife, Chaya, further substantiates this statement. According to him, unlike other places during the war, one could buy as much bread there as one wanted, but to do so, one had to wait in a line to purchase it. See: Uri Diamant, interview by Naomi Oron, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Rehovot, Israel, February 9, 1998.

⁷⁴¹ Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 1.

⁷⁴² Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989.

Sikorski-Maisky Pact Allows Jews to Move Freely: Stage 3

Although not spelled out explicitly in all of the Chmielnik-related testimonies or autobiographies I have encountered, Jews were ultimately able to travel freely to parts of the Soviet interior such as Uzbekistan, only after being liberated from military duty and/or from forced labor in Siberian Gulags, the coal mines of Donbas, and elsewhere. This release of Polish citizens who had been detained in the USSR during World War II was set in motion by the Polish-Soviet Agreement of July 30, 1941—also known as the Sikorski-Maisky Pact. Władysław Sikorski (1881-1943) was the Premier of the Polish Government-in-Exile, then based in London. Ivan Mikhailovich Maisky (1884-1975) was the Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain at the time. The two leaders met to pledge that both of their respective countries would aid each other in battling their common Hitlerite enemy. Also outlined in this pact of diplomatic relations was the creation of a Polish army in the USSR, as well as the aforementioned release of Polish citizens in Soviet Russia.⁷⁴³

Glait's sojourns in the Soviet Union took him to many scattered sites that Prager never mentions, including Cherkessk, in the Caucasus, where he was reunited with his older sister, Gitel, who separately from him, initially crossed the Russian border illegally into Białystok at the beginning of the war. In Cherkessk, Glait worked as a tailor for a government-run shop⁷⁴⁴ and in

⁷⁴³ Anna M. Cienciala, "General Sikorski and the Conclusion of the Polish-Soviet Agreement of July 30, 1941: A Reassessment," *The Polish Review* 41, no. 4 (1996): 401; Antony Polonsky, "Foreword," in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939-1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, eds. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), xiii; Whiteman, *Escape via Siberia*, 62-63.

⁷⁴⁴ According to Melech's sister, Gitel, he received work right away in Cherkessk as part of a tailor artel (Soviet workers' cooperative). See: Gitel Glait-Garfinkel, "Memories of Chmielnik and Cherkessk," *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 31 (1992): 20.

his spare time did tailoring work for private clients in their homes, which was considered illegal. Apparently, black market work was widespread among refugees like Glait, who frequently relied on this in order to make ends meet.⁷⁴⁵ As Glait conveyed, since he was already receiving a salary from his official job and lived in state-sponsored free housing, the main thing of importance to him then was food: “At this time I didn’t even want money. They paid me food.”⁷⁴⁶

Glait also traveled to Baku, Azerbaijan, crossing the Caspian Sea in a cargo freight boat to Tajikistan, near Iran.⁷⁴⁷ Accompanying him were his sister and other Polish refugees, most of whom were Jewish. Next, Glait ended up in the Urals, where ostensibly he registered with the Soviet government to work in forestry. But in reality, he sought out private clients for his illegal tailoring work. Once again, he requested payment in the form of food. By the war’s end, Glait

⁷⁴⁵ Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 167. According to Adler, the testimonies given by Polish Jewish refugee children who found themselves in the Soviet Union during World War II frequently mention black market trading. Unlike adult testimonies of this same population, which tend to justify and downplay black market activities, the children are generally less guarded or embarrassed in their statements. Rather, they speak of this illegal wartime enterprise as a normal mainstay of Soviet life—essentially, what everyone had to do in order to survive. See: Eliyana R. Adler, “Children in Exile: Wartime Journeys of Polish Jewish Youth,” in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939-1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, eds. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 43-44, 55.

⁷⁴⁶ Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989.

⁷⁴⁷ Indeed, we have evidence that some Jews from Chmielnik who reached the Soviet interior did, in fact, travel all the way to Iran, particularly, to its capital of Tehran. This may be seen in a 1942 column of *Davar*, a Hebrew newspaper then based in British Mandate Palestine, pertaining to all the Polish refugees then in Tehran, Iran. In this listing are two individuals from Chmielnik named Chone and Efraim Goldstein. Although the newspaper column itself does not provide any information about these individuals’ ultimate fate, based on an essay in the Chmielnik memorial book authored by Efraim Goldstein, we learn that he finally arrived in Palestine on Rosh Hashanah, 1943. Furthermore, he came to Tehran together with the Polish Anders’ Army in which he was a member. However, Goldstein makes no reference to other Jews from Chmielnik who were with him in Tehran or in Anders’ Army, for that matter. Thus, it is also unclear what the prior and subsequent experience of Chone Goldstein was before and following his time in Tehran. See: “List of the Refugees from Poland Who Reached Tehran from Russia,” *Davar* [Tel-Aviv, British Mandate Palestine], July 10, 1942, 6; Efraim Goldstein, “From Anders’ Army to the Lines of the National Military Organization [i.e., the ‘Irgun’],” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 899-902.

was living not badly-off in Samarkand, where he met and married his wife, a fellow Polish Jewish refugee who worked for him in his factory. Prager and her extended family were likewise living in Samarkand by the war's end and socialized with members of the Glait family there.⁷⁴⁸

Another Uzbek site that witnessed large numbers of refugees, including Polish Jews, was the city of Bukhara, where Uri Diamant and his wife, Chaya, traveled to by train after being released by the Polish-Soviet Agreement of 1941. Indeed, there were so many Polish Jewish refugees there that Diamant encountered a Yiddish theater acting troop from Lemberg/Lwów. According to Diamant, Bukhara, which looked like an “Arab village,” witnessed several diseases—many of which were common under unsanitary living conditions, including typhus.⁷⁴⁹ Diamant himself contracted the highly contagious illness in the fall (presumably of 1941) and was treated by a doctor who would not accept any monetary payment. Rather, as in the case of Max Glait, food was considered an even more important commodity in certain parts of the Soviet Union during the war years.⁷⁵⁰

Anna Prager's mother, Tamara Friedman, provided a Shoah Foundation testimony that echoes the written account of her daughter. However, perhaps not surprisingly, Friedman provides many details about which Prager likely never even knew or did not remember, given

⁷⁴⁸ Prager, *I Remember*, 47; Anna Prager, telephone interview no. 2 with author, written transcript, April 28, 2021.

⁷⁴⁹ Among the diseases frequently mentioned within the context of Uzbekistan during the Second World War are dysentery, pneumonia, malaria, and typhus. Recovery from these epidemics—assuming one survived—could take weeks or even months. This often led to children being orphaned. Hence, “the sight of scattered bodies of young and old was so common that even children became inured to the sight.” Whiteman, *Escape via Siberia*, 72. See also: *Saved by Deportation: An Unknown Odyssey of Polish Jews* (LOGTV, Ltd, 2007), <https://logtv.com/deportation/>.

⁷⁵⁰ Uri Diamant, interview by Naomi Oron, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Rehovot, Israel, February 9, 1998.

her tender age at the time when most of these wartime events took place. For example, Friedman conveys how treacherous were the itinerant journeys she and her group made in their movement eastward into the Soviet interior. Several times along the way—even before reaching Lemberg/Lwów—members of her unit were arrested both by German and Soviet officers. Yet, Friedman, with her quick wit, was able to get herself and other members of her group out of harm's way on multiple occasions, by using her daughter's early age as a bartering tool. In one case, after finally reaching the Soviet side, Friedman even used her Jewish background and knowledge of Yiddish as a form of protection, *proteksye*, to get herself and her group released from prison, thanks to the aid of a high-ranking Soviet Jewish official.

Friedman's description of the time she and her co-travelers spent in Lemberg/Lwów is overall, rather pejorative. Unlike the more familial and cozy-sounding descriptions of Chmielnik kinsmen residing together that Vayman and Vaytsman presented, Friedman states that they were not welcome guests in the refugee-laden city, where even the local Jews perceived them as foreigners and burdens.⁷⁵¹ She also revealingly remarks that some of the refugee Jews residing there were Communists and therefore believed that they could do whatever they pleased now, because they were in Communist Russia. Along these lines, Friedman provides the example of a fellow named Finkelstein—another Jew from Chmielnik—who appropriated two rooms for himself in a church rectory, while all the other Jews, including her daughter and her, slept

⁷⁵¹ There were distinct reasons that the Polish Jewish refugees were perceived as burdens, even by their coreligionists. Namely, this was due to the fact that poverty in Lemberg/Lwów became increasingly widespread thanks, in part, to the Russian authorities who emptied out the city and its surroundings of everything that could be transported. In some cases, this even meant that houses were dismantled, with entire parts of the structure being shipped off to Russia. At the same time, unemployment in Lemberg/Lwów, which had always been high, soared because of the increase in the population—chiefly due to the local refugee crisis. See: Whiteman, *Escape via Siberia*, 32.

crammed in. According to Friedman, they were “like herring” on the floor of a large room:
“Whenever somebody rolled over, everyone had to roll over.”⁷⁵²

Friedman also mentions that it was in Lemberg/Lwów that she learned by word-of-mouth from fellow Chmielnik refugees that her husband, Icek, had been sent to Donbas (southeastern Ukraine) to toil in the region’s coal mines.⁷⁵³ Dov Levin (1925-2016), the late professor of Jewish history, stated that the Soviet administration established registration bureaus in western Ukraine and Belarus in late 1939, where refugees—individuals like Icek Friedman (Frydman)—could sign up to voluntarily work in factories and quarries in eastern Ukraine. In return, workers were assured of good pay and that all their needs would be fulfilled. One particular area of labor was, indeed, that of Donbas, for which volunteer workers set out beginning in November and December 1939.⁷⁵⁴ In Levin’s estimation, “although many refugees ... found work in this fashion, others returned by various routes, alienated, homesick, and disillusioned by the absence of suitable conditions.”⁷⁵⁵

Dorit Bader Whiteman, author of *Escape via Siberia*, further bolsters Levin’s statement. According to her, those individuals who went to Donbas during this period were “reduced to such poverty that they succumbed to the Russian lure and sought employment in the Donbas

⁷⁵² Tamara Friedman, interview by Lillian Gordon, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Monmouth Beach, New Jersey, July 25, 1996.

⁷⁵³ Ibid. Donbas, apparently, did not have a good reputation among the Chmielnik Jewish refugees as a relatively “desirable” place in which to sojourn. This was mainly due to the fact that the correspondence received from Jews who went to Donbas by their kinsmen who were yet in Lemberg/Lwów, was not positive. See also: Bentsiyon Vaytsman, “My Wartime Migrations Across the Soviet Union,” 885.

⁷⁵⁴ Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, 7, 189.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., 7.

Mines located inside Russia” and soon became so “disenchanted with the grueling working conditions, backbreaking labor, utter poverty, and freezing cold,” that they returned to Lemberg/Lwów if they were allowed to do so.⁷⁵⁶ This is precisely what ended up happening with the Friedmans.

Prager never mentions Donbas in her own account, although from the manner in which Friedman describes the “very cold and windy” surroundings there, one might easily conflate it with Siberia. As Friedman recalls, in Donbas, to which she traveled from Lemberg/Lwów, there was nowhere for her large familial unit to live, food was difficult to come by—especially for her young child—and she knew of few Jews in the area. Furthermore, according to Friedman, local Gentiles were antisemitic, as seen in the following remark she often heard snidely uttered: “Jews don’t work in the coal mines.”⁷⁵⁷

Because Friedman and her husband were so unhappy with the living and working conditions in the Donbas area, they ultimately made the decision to return to Lemberg/Lwów, with the hope that they might be able to return to the part of Poland that was now under German control.⁷⁵⁸ Along the way, their train stopped in Kiev, which Friedman describes as a horrible sight, since people there were literally starving. When they returned to Lemberg/Lwów, Friedman and her family members were subjected to the same conditions that had previously

⁷⁵⁶ Whiteman, *Escape via Siberia*, 32-33.

⁷⁵⁷ Tamara Friedman, interview by Lillian Gordon, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Monmouth Beach, New Jersey, July 25, 1996.

⁷⁵⁸ See my previous comments in the main body of this text as quoted by Dorit Bader Whiteman on pages 32 and 33 of her book, *Escape via Siberia*.

existed there of overcrowding and numerous people dwelling in a makeshift manner in a single room.

The Soviets then used the ruse of informing the Polish refugees that if they wished to return to German-controlled Poland, all they had to do was register. And so, the Friedman family registered, like so many other Polish refugees—a sizable percentage of them Jewish. In the meantime, the Friedman family unit sold various goods on the black market in order to have enough food on which to subsist. But then, one-night, Russian officers came to their domicile and took away a whole group of people, including Friedman and her family members. It was 1941, according to Friedman, when they were sent on cattle wagons headed for Siberia, where they ended up doing forced labor and living in barracks until 1943.⁷⁵⁹

The War's End, the Return Home

As Atina Grossmann correctly states in *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union*, in July 1945, shortly following the war's end in May, an agreement was forged between the Soviet Union and the new Polish regime.⁷⁶⁰ This enabled Polish citizens in the Soviet interior such as Glait, Prager, Friedman, and other Chmielnik Jewish refugees mentioned here, as well as their respective accompanying relatives, to be legally repatriated back

⁷⁵⁹ Tamara Friedman, interview by Lillian Gordon, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Monmouth Beach, New Jersey, July 25, 1996.

⁷⁶⁰ Wojciech Marciniak discusses the drawn-out process that led to the ultimate signing of a Soviet repatriation agreement with the nascent Republic of Poland on July 6, 1945. For further details on how this agreement evolved and what its implications were for Polish citizens in the Soviet Union who wanted to return to Poland after World War II, see: Wojciech Marciniak, "Repatriation of Polish Catholics and Jews from Distant Parts of the Soviet Union in Polish-Soviet Relations (1944-1947)," in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939-1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, eds. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 110-129.

to Poland. Grossmann estimates that refugees returning to Poland probably numbered “somewhere between approximately 200,000 and 230,000,” and that “earlier estimates speak of a total of 230,700 repatriates until 1949.”⁷⁶¹ Furthermore, while some Jews trickled into Poland later on, after being freed from Soviet camps and prisons, most of them returned between February and July 1946. These return journeys were frequently long, circuitous, and fraught with their own set of challenges.⁷⁶²

When World War II ended, Friedman and her family were living in Samarkand, as previously indicated by Prager. Friedman first learned about this significant turn of events from local loud speakers that generated the public announcement. According to Friedman, she and her relatives all planned to return to Poland—like most other Polish Jewish refugees in the Soviet interior—because they thought that they still had a home to which to return. Although Grossmann mentions the repatriation agreement forged between the Soviet Union and Poland of July 1945, Friedman states that already within a few weeks of the war’s end in early May, she and her relatives left town for Poland.

At that time, though, it was not yet legal for Polish refugees to cross back into Poland. Therefore, the Friedman clan needed to acquire not only train tickets—obtained by bribery—but they also needed to have all sorts of false documents made, as it was not yet permissible for them to enter large urban centers in Russia, according to Friedman. Just to reach Moscow from

⁷⁶¹ Atina Grossmann, “Jewish Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India: Lost Memories of Displacement, Trauma, and Rescue,” in *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union*, eds. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 201-202. In a similar vein, Marciniak estimates that by July 1946, “more than 250,000 wartime exiles returned to Poland” and that roughly 65 percent of these exiles were Jews. Marciniak, “Repatriation of Polish Catholics and Jews,” 127.

⁷⁶² Edele, et al., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 202.

Samarkand, Friedman recalls, it took an entire three days by train. Since the train went to Kielce, and Friedman's cousin Fela had heard that her husband, Mietek Kwaśniewski (also known by other given names, including "Morris" and "Moyshe"), was living there, members of the Friedman unit disembarked in the city.⁷⁶³

In keeping with the timeframe mentioned by Grossmann, Glait recalls that in the beginning of 1946 the Soviet government began permitting Polish Jewish refugees who registered to return by train to Poland.⁷⁶⁴ Glait's sister, Gitel Garfinkel-Bresco, who was also in Samarkand during the war, states that "finally the Soviet Forces provided an order that the Polish citizens who had fled from occupied Poland, from the Nazis, could return to their homes."⁷⁶⁵ In her words, which do not convey an exact time of departure: "My family and I were among the first from Samarkand to legally leave the Soviet Union."⁷⁶⁶

Yet, according to Garfinkel-Bresco, she did not truly feel relieved until the train actually began to move. Nevertheless, her joy of returning home was short-lived. As the train drew closer to the Polish border, the passengers could hear bands of Poles shouting: "Żydokomuna" ("Jewish Communists") and "Nazad do Rosji" ("Return to Russia")! This was followed by stones being

⁷⁶³ Tamara Friedman, interview by Lillian Gordon, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Monmouth Beach, New Jersey, July 25, 1996.

⁷⁶⁴ Marciniak acknowledges Glait's personal recollection in his statement that the first repatriation transports to return Polish refugees from far-flung Soviet regions to Poland began in February 1946. See: Marciniak, "Repatriation of Polish Catholics and Jews," 127.

⁷⁶⁵ Garfinkel-Bresco, "Memories of My 80 Year Lifespan."

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

pummeled at the locomotive's windows, which resulted in several Jews being wounded and one even being killed.⁷⁶⁷

Glait's journey back to Poland was around the same time he heard the fate of his hometown; news had not been available previously. According to Glait, in the beginning of 1946, he heard from a Jewish soldier who had been in Kielce, not far from his hometown of Chmielnik, that there were no Jews left there. This is consistent with what Adler states; that Polish Jews serving in the Soviet Forces were among the first to learn about the devastation in neighboring Poland. They, in turn, conveyed what they had witnessed to friends, relatives, and acquaintances—including other Polish Jews—in the Soviet interior.⁷⁶⁸

According to Glait, it was exceedingly difficult throughout the war to learn what was actually taking place with family members and friends in Poland, since radios were illegal, and the only news that was transmitted on loudspeakers was, as Glait puts it: "Propaganda news—just what they [i.e., Communist Soviet Russia] wanted you to hear."⁷⁶⁹ Friedman remarks that most of the time while she was in the Soviet interior during the war, she had no indication of what was taking place in Poland, since she could not read the Russian newspapers well. Not to mention that whatever news she *did* hear (presumably by word-of-mouth) regarding Poland, was

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁸ Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 216.

⁷⁶⁹ Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989.

not good. Furthermore, nobody actually trusted the two Soviet propaganda newspapers that were available at the time, one of which was the ironically titled, *Pravda* [Truth].⁷⁷⁰

The unavailability of news regarding Poland's Jewish communities is echoed by Diamant, who did not leave Bukhara with his wife until May 1946 to return to Poland. According to him, he had no idea what was happening in Europe during the war until 1944. For it was July 23, 1944, when Soviet forces liberated Lublin-Majdanek, the first major concentration camp to be liberated.⁷⁷¹ Around that time, Russian newspapers began to feature pictures of Majdanek. But echoing Glait's and Friedman's words about the Soviet media, Diamant remarked that initially, people just assumed that this was all Soviet propaganda.⁷⁷² As a result of the scarce and questionable local media sources, the accounts presented by Jewish military figures, as previously mentioned, were perceived as far more believable than anything printed in the local newspapers.

This so-called absence of knowledge regarding what would later come to be known as the "Holocaust" in Poland among Polish Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union was apparently common, according to Adler. This is in spite of the fact that:

⁷⁷⁰ Tamara Friedman, interview by Lillian Gordon, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Monmouth Beach, New Jersey, July 25, 1996.

⁷⁷¹ David M. Crowe, *The Holocaust: Roots, History, and Aftermath* (New York; London: Routledge, 2018), 385. More specifically, it was the troops of the First Belarusian Front that initially entered the Majdanek concentration camp. The fighting over Lublin, though, was technically still ongoing at the time. See: Katharina Friedla, "I'm Rushing with Millions of Others to the Battlefield—Jewish Soldiers in the Polish Army in the Soviet Union, 1943-1946," in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939-1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, eds. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 98.

⁷⁷² Uri Diamant, interview by Naomi Oron, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Rehovot, Israel, February 9, 1998.

Scholars have shown that previous assumptions about the lack of coverage of the Holocaust in the Soviet press were greatly exaggerated. In fact, not only the Yiddish newspaper *Eynikayt* (Unity), but also Russian-language organs covered both German atrocities and Jewish heroism during the war ... The Soviet Polish press also included articles about the Holocaust and the heroic ghetto fighters. Nonetheless, Polish Jews who spent the war in the USSR do not report having learned about the Holocaust from Soviet media.⁷⁷³

Adler argues that these Polish Jewish refugees were so busy with the day-to-day struggles of survival that they were often unable to access sources of information. To some degree this was due to the fact that they were often not permitted to reside in the larger cities in which newspapers were more readily obtainable.⁷⁷⁴

Glait, his wife, her daughter from a previous union, and his wife's father, returned to Poland at the end of June 1946, quite a bit later than Friedman and her relatives. Since Glait knew that there were no Jews left in Chmielnik, and because Kielce had a Jewish committee with a presence of some 20-30 Jews, according to him,⁷⁷⁵ he decided to remain there. Ironically, Kielce would turn out to be far less safe than Chmielnik, as Glait would soon learn, only a few days following his return to Poland.

⁷⁷³ Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 214.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁵ Glait's estimate of the number of Jews present in Kielce at this time is far lower than the actual total number. For example, Glait's friend, M. Kwasniewski, who already resided in Kielce prior to Glait's arrival and had a position of authority there, states that at the time of the Kielce pogrom, on July 4, 1946 (essentially, when Glait arrived in Kielce), there were about 250 Jews in Kielce and that 95 percent of them resided at the same building address [i.e., Planty 7]. See: M. Kwasniewski, "Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom," *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 28 (1989): 45. Similarly, Jan T. Gross cites a report issued by the Central Committee of Polish Jews on July 18, 1946, which states that at the time of the pogrom, "180 Jews were living in the Jewish building [Planty 7] in Kielce." Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006), 124.

Chapter Six: Rescuers, Collaborators, and the Space Between

In the previous chapters, we explored the fates of the Jews of Chmielnik: those who fled East, and those who stayed in Poland—most of whom perished. And, while there is no way to understand the psyche of the Germans who carried out the Final Solution in Chmielnik, there is at least some comfort in the ability to label them as perpetrators and find moral black and white categories. But there were many individuals during the war who did not fit into either category—perpetrator or victim—and it is the work of this chapter to identify these people and try, as best we can, to understand their motivations. We will start with the treatment of Poles toward the Jews during Nazi occupation.

Polish-Jewish Relations in Chmielnik During World War II

There has been much research published, especially during the past few years, on the subject of the Polish treatment of Jews, or, more broadly, Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War.⁷⁷⁶ Indeed, this latter subject was the basis for historian Emanuel Ringelblum's significant work, *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War*, which

⁷⁷⁶ A few yet unmentioned recent English-language publications that pertain entirely or in part to this subject are: *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001) by Jan T. Gross; *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940-1945* by Gunnar S. Paulsson (2003); *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre* by Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic (2004); *Rescue for Money: Paid Helpers in Poland, 1939-1945* by Jan Grabowski (2008); *Polish-Jewish Relations 1939-1945: Beyond the Limits of Solidarity* by Ewa Kurek (2012); *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* by Jan Grabowski (2013); *Poles Saving Jews During World War II* by Katarzyna Cegielska, et al. (2016). The aforementioned titles are not intended to be an exhaustive list of recent publications on the subject of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, but rather, a small sampling of a far more extensive body of literature. The full citations for these works are included in the bibliography.

was in fact drafted while Ringelblum was in hiding in a bunker with his family during the war.⁷⁷⁷ Furthermore, since Emanuel Ringelblum, this subject continues to be one of much preoccupation among historians, who still strive to comprehend the factors that led to such a massive societal betrayal of a deeply-rooted resident minority group, namely the Jews.

How did the Poles of Chmielnik treat their Jewish neighbors during World War II? And, did this treatment fit in with the picture of other urban centers in Nazi occupied Poland? Let us begin with the first question, to which testimonies of witnesses and survivors do not provide a clear-cut answer other than that it was complicated. For in nearly every first-hand account that I encountered, the author or speaker relates a combination of events that he or she witnessed— involving both positive and nefarious treatment of Jews at the hands of the Poles. Indeed, even those former residents of Chmielnik who do not have fond memories of how the Poles treated them during the war, must frequently admit that they owe their lives to (a) singular Pole(s), who for whatever reason, decided to aid them at some given point, thereby enabling them to hold out for yet another day, week, month, or beyond.

For example, Rivka Sametband-Mali relates how the night before the third deportation in Chmielnik, she was to be smuggled out by a Pole—a so-called prewar “Judeophile”⁷⁷⁸ named Staszek Szczukiewicz (Tunia)—and driven to Warsaw. This “Judeophile” handed her over to another Pole, who was to continue the next leg of the journey. That second Pole proceeded to rob

⁷⁷⁷ Tragically, Ringelblum, his wife, son, and all the other Jews with whom they were together in hiding, were betrayed to the German authorities and uncovered on March 7, 1944, and executed a few days later. See: Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War*, xxvi.

⁷⁷⁸ “Judeophile” is the expression that Sametband-Mali applies to this Polish Gentile who was the gatekeeper of the local Jewish sport club, “Gwiazda,” prior to the Second World War. See: Sametband-Mali, “During the Struggle for One’s Life,” 763.

her of every possession she owned and refused to take her any further. Yet, Sametband-Mali also describes how she was later aided by several Poles who warned her of the impending third deportation from Sandomierz, hid her, provided her with false identity papers, and helped her find residence in Warsaw, where she was ultimately able to survive by passing as a Polish Gentile.⁷⁷⁹

Miriam Bronkesh, likewise, presents an area of “grey” insofar as the treatment that she and her family members received from Poles in the Chmielnik vicinity during the war. On the one hand, she relates how she, her mother, her uncle, and cousin all managed to survive for a duration of two years—thanks in part to a variety of Gentiles who hid them for periods of time, in exchange for monetary compensation. Yet, on the other hand, Bronkesh and her mother were constantly forced to run from one hide-out to the next—with the omnipresent fear of discovery. Moreover, they needed to pay for this temporary protection. Therefore, she insists that these Poles were by no means, “Righteous Gentiles,” but rather, individuals who took advantage of the Jews’ dire circumstances by finding themselves an opportune business transaction. Further buttressing this negative sentiment is the fact that Bronkesh’s grandmother and young cousin were murdered by Poles, while hiding at the home directly next door to where Bronkesh and her mother sought shelter.⁷⁸⁰

Frank Dobia (formerly Izak Dobraszkanka, b. 1926) is another such individual with a variegated account of helpful and harmful behavior on the part of Poles during the Second World

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., esp. 763-766.

⁷⁸⁰ Miriam Bronkesh, interview by Helen Schneeberg, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bridgeton, NJ, May 13, 1998.

War. He was hidden for a period of time in a village called Kargów, approximately 15 kilometers from Chmielnik, where he had been a cow herder. However, he was discovered by Poles, who took him to the local municipality. There, he was arrested and placed in a holding cell—most likely, for the purpose of turning him over to the Germans. Yet, that night, the secretary of the municipality, whose cow Dobia had coincidentally watched, set him free and told him to run.⁷⁸¹

Similar to Sametband-Mali, Bronkesh, and Dobia, Avraham Goldlist acknowledged the presence of both antisemitic and philosemitic Poles during World War II. Nevertheless, in his overall estimation, he averred that “there were many who were antisemites, but most of them were not, and they helped us.”⁷⁸² Indeed, Goldlist’s personal experience during the ghettoization period included illegal visits to kind Gentile farmers who lived on the outskirts of Chmielnik, for the purpose of bartering clothing and household items in exchange for life-sustaining food. In Goldlist’s estimation, the farmers would make a concerted effort to provide him with extra food and warned him of the potential danger of being caught.⁷⁸³ At the same time, though, Goldlist, who is closely related to other Goldlists mentioned in this text, also remarked that he had cousins who were murdered while being hidden by Gentiles. Though not stated explicitly, Goldlist implies that it was Poles who perpetrated these murders.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸¹ Frank Dobia, interview by Christian Froeliche, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toorak, Australia, October 4, 1996. See also: Testimony of Izhak Dobia, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/5840, 26-27.

⁷⁸² Testimony of Avraham Goldlist, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/12820, 9.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., 24.

Accounts of Righteous Gentiles Who Rescued Chmielnik Jews During World War II

There is an abundance of published literature today that pertains in some form or another to the subject of Gentile rescuers—often referred to as “Righteous Gentiles” or “Righteous Among the Nations.”⁷⁸⁵ The former are individuals who, for varying reasons—either acting alone or as part of a larger entity—chose to aid, protect, and possibly even hide a Jew or multiple Jews during the Second World War. The repercussions for aiding Jews during this period, were the Gentile rescuer/s caught, could range from physical assault to incarceration to outright execution, depending on the given country. However, since this work focuses on a town in Poland, the statements made here in conjunction with “Righteous Gentiles” will likewise focus on what it meant to aid Jews specifically in wartime Poland.

The aforementioned Holocaust survivor-scholar, Philip Friedman, provides several categories of motivations insofar as Gentiles who risked taking a Jew or multiple Jews under their care during the war. These are, chiefly: (1) friendship or love, something that was perhaps most prevalent among members of the intelligentsia and the working class, as well as in cases of inter-religious romantic and familial alliances; (2) party affiliation, whereby individuals and underground organizations helped Jewish party members; (3) purely humanitarian—or, what is

⁷⁸⁵ The manifold publications on this topic include, but are not limited to the following: Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, *Assistance to the Jews in Poland (1939-1945)* (Warsaw: Polonia Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963); Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995); Philip Friedman, *Their Brother's Keepers: The Christian Heroes and Heroines Who Helped the Oppressed Escape the Nazi Terror* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957); Milton Meltzer, *Rescue: The Story of How Gentiles Saved Jews in the Holocaust* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1988); Mordecai Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1993); Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

often referred to as “pure altruism.”⁷⁸⁶ In the last category, Friedman states that such individuals did not belong to the aforementioned categories and aided Jews facing danger on a wholly indiscriminate basis.⁷⁸⁷ There is, however, yet another—perhaps more obvious—category of Jewish rescue motivation that both Friedman and Yad Vashem have negated with regard to “Righteous Gentiles.” That is: those non-Jews who were initially persuaded to help persecuted Jews in return for monetary payment (or some other form of remuneration).⁷⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Friedman still acknowledges that one must recognize that, “even in such cases the risk of death, the constant fear, the strain and tension, were of far greater magnitude than the amount of money received.”⁷⁸⁹

In Chmielnik and its vicinity, there were several known and officially recognized cases of Jews who were rescued by “Righteous Gentiles.” In these cases, which will be illustrated in the following, it is quite evident that of the previously outlined motivations, those of friendship and pure humanitarianism (or altruism) definitely played a role. As to whether there were any cases here in which party affiliation may have played a role, of that I am uncertain.

Among the accounts that chronicle incidents of Chmielnik Jews being hidden and rescued by Polish Gentiles is that of Esther (née Gutman) and Ezjel Lederman. They attributed their survival to the decency of the Zal family: Jan and Maria; their sons, Jan, Bogdan or “Antoni,”

⁷⁸⁶ In more than one publication, the husband-and-wife team of Samuel P. and Pearl M. Oliner addresses the notion of the uncommon “altruistic personality” and the role this played in motivating some ordinary people to risk their lives and the lives of their families to help others—even complete strangers—in the face of imminent danger. See for instance: Oliner and Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*, passim.

⁷⁸⁷ Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 409-410.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 411; Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage*, 13.

⁷⁸⁹ Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 411.

and Józef; and their granddaughter, Wiesława Wąsowicz, who lived in a village called Grzymala, approximately 20 kilometers from Chmielnik.⁷⁹⁰ The Zals hid four members of the Lederman family, which included two sons: Ezjel and Samuel, as well as Esther Gutman (later, Esther Lederman), for a period of 22 months, in spite of the imminent dangers surrounding them at the time.⁷⁹¹

The Ledermans' connection to the Zal family was initially forged because Antoni and Samuel had been schoolmates prior to the outbreak of World War II. This contact led to the Zals providing the Ledermans with food throughout Chmielnik's ghettoization period. It also resulted in Jan (the son) and Antoni rescuing the Ledermans from the Chmielnik ghetto, shortly before its liquidation. In order to avoid their neighbors and the Germans, the Zals relocated the Ledermans from one building to another. The Ledermans provided the Zals with jewelry and gold coins, which were used to purchase food. Otherwise, the Zals took no monetary compensation for

⁷⁹⁰ Żal Jan & Maria; Son: Jan; Son: Antoni; Son: Józef; Granddaughter: Wąsowicz Wiesława, 2 October 1984, M.31.2/2987, Righteous Among the Nations, Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. [Żal Jan & Maria ; Son: Jan ; Son: Antoni ; Son: Józef ; Granddaughter: Wąsowicz Wiesława \(yadvashem.org\)](http://yadvashem.org) (accessed 5-22-21); Israel Gutman, Sara Bender, and Shmuel Krakowski, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust: Poland* (Vol. 2) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), 921.

⁷⁹¹ The autobiographical account of the Ledermans' wartime survival is captured in the appropriately titled and previously cited work, *Hiding for Our Lives*. Indeed, several pages of this book are devoted to the period the Lederman-Gutman family unit spent hidden in the care of Bogdan—also known as Antoni—Zal and his family. The Ledermans arrived at the Zals' home on Sunday, October 4, 1942, while Esther Gutman arrived there only a few days later. The first deportation of Chmielnik's Jews took place during this same period, on October 6, 1942. See for example: Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 158-162. According to Esther Lederman (née Gutman), the Zals were wonderful people, who, in recognition of their heroic actions during World War II, were honored by the governments of Israel and Poland. Esther Lederman, telephone interview with author, written transcript, September 23, 2012.

aiding and hiding the Ledermans, and subsequently, Esther Gutman, who arrived at the Zals' farm after the Ledermans' arrival there.⁷⁹²

According to the testimony provided by the Ledermans to Yad Vashem, so as to gain recognition for the Zals as "Righteous Among the Nations," they emphasized that "the entire Żal family took care of them and they highlighted the efforts of the sons and niece who helped to keep their spirits up and provided them with 'mental nourishment' by supplying them with books."⁷⁹³

Like the Lederman-Gutman story of survival, the previously mentioned Dr. Natan Balanowski survived World War II and attributed his survival to the aid of righteous Gentile, Waław Ścisław, of Chmielnik. According to Yad Vashem's "Righteous Among the Nations" collection, in March 1940 the Gestapo released Dr. Balanowski from Kielce prison, where he had been incarcerated for half a year for his prewar public activities. At that point, he returned to Chmielnik, where he had lived and worked prior to his imprisonment. There, he was taken in and materially supported by Waław Ścisław, who had been elected vice mayor of Chmielnik in 1920,⁷⁹⁴ until October 1942. Sometime thereafter, Ścisław transported Balanowski to Warsaw,

⁷⁹² Although there was the exchange of monetary goods between the rescuees and rescuers in this case—as in other cases—the sole impetus for the Zals' rescue efforts were clearly not predicated on receiving any particular form of remuneration from their Jewish charges. It is also important to bear in mind that had the Zals been caught for harboring Jews, the entire family would quite likely have been executed. It is for the above reasons that Yad Vashem would subsequently deem the Zals worthy of being honored as "Righteous Among the Nations."

⁷⁹³ "Żal Jan & Maria; Son: Jan; Son: Antoni; Son: Józef; Granddaughter: Wąsowicz Wiesława," 2 October 1984, M.31.2/2987, Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. [Żal Jan & Maria ; Son: Jan ; Son: Antoni ; Son: Józef ; Granddaughter: Wąsowicz Wiesława \(yadvashem.org\)](#) (accessed 5-22-21); Gutman, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous* (Vol. 2), 921.

⁷⁹⁴ "Chmielnik," Virtual Shtetl [Local history | Virtual Shtetl \(sztetl.org.pl\)](#) (accessed 5-29-21).

where he hid on the Aryan side until the city's liberation. Yad Vashem publicly honored Waław Ścisław as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations" on September 15, 1990.⁷⁹⁵

During the second roundup and deportation of Jews in the Chmielnik ghetto in November 1942, Maria Rolicka and her parents fled to the town's Aryan side. Rolicka's father was subsequently captured and incarcerated in the Buchenwald concentration camp, which he managed to survive. Her mother obtained "Aryan" papers for herself and her daughter, with which Rolicka reached Kraków. A schoolmate of Rolicka recommended that she seek out the aid of a Polish Gentile named Aleksander Lau, who secured a dwelling place for her and replaced her papers with more authentic-looking ones.

Rolicka's neighbors denounced her to the police, even though she had been presented as a Polish Gentile. Fortunately, her paperwork was found credible, and she was released. But given the obvious danger to which Rolicka was now subjected at the hands of her suspecting neighbors, Lau moved her from Kraków to Warsaw. There, he rented a room for her at his own expense. He continued to care for her from afar by sending her money and food parcels until the time of liberation, in January 1945. Lau never received any sort of compensation for his virtuous deeds, which were motivated purely by humanitarian goals. Following the war, Aleksander Lau

⁷⁹⁵ "Ścisław Waław," 15 September 1990, M.31.2/4563, Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. [Ścisław Waław \(yadvashem.org\)](https://yadvashem.org) (accessed 5-29-21); Gutman, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous* (Vol. 2), 701.

immigrated to Australia and Maria Rolicka to the United States. Yad Vashem honored Mr. Lau for his exceptional acts as one of the “Righteous of the Nations” on March 28, 1995.⁷⁹⁶

Yet another account of a Jew from Chmielnik who survived World War II due to the aid of Righteous Gentiles may be seen in the case of Róża Langwald (1900-1983).⁷⁹⁷ Presumably, she was a relative of the first Judenrat leader, Avraham Langwald, although their exact relationship remains thus far unclear. When the first of the major deportations of Jews from the Chmielnik ghetto began in early October 1942, Langwald turned to a Polish Gentile family named Partyka that she knew from before the war in the nearby village of Drugnia. The Partykas agreed to shelter Langwald, and Władysław Partyka created a hiding place for her in his barn. A second hiding place also existed, according to Marianna Partyka, the wife of Władysław, in their attic. The couple’s 13-year-old daughter, Józefa, would regularly bring Langwald food and hot milk twice a day. The Partykas also permitted Langwald to enter their home after dark, in order for her to bathe and stretch her legs. In this manner, the Partyka family provided Langwald with shelter and asylum for a total of two years, continuing to hide her in spite of having been denounced to the Germans.

But even after the war had ended, according to Jadwiga, Langwald’s daughter, Marianna Partyka was generous enough to sell off part of her own farm fields, giving Langwald the earnings from this sale, so that she could have something by which to establish herself anew.

⁷⁹⁶ “Aleksander Lau,” 28 March 1995, M.31.2/6534, Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. [Lau Aleksander \(yadvashem.org\)](http://yadvashem.org/en/Righteous/Aleksander_Lau) (accessed 6-29-21); Gutman, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous* (Vol. 1), 445-446.

⁷⁹⁷ “Róża Maria Langwald Laskowska,” Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/nameDetails.html?language=en&itemId=10662242&ind=1> (accessed 5-29-21).

After the war, Langwald, who legally changed her name to Maria Laskowska, returned to Chmielnik, where she lived for several years near the town's marketplace square. Sometime thereafter, she remarried and relocated to Kraków, where she later died. The Partyka family's members were recognized by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations" on June 19, 1998.⁷⁹⁸

Another remarkable story of survival involved four members of the extended Goldlist family, two respective sets of brothers and first cousins named Abram (also known as "Al," 1921-2015); Chaskiel (also known as "Charles," 1919-2005); Herszel (also known as "Harry," 1926-2020); and Icek (also known as "Isadore," 1929-2000). After managing to avoid the series of roundups and deportations by fleeing periodically from and hiding outside of Chmielnik, in 1943, the four close relatives each ultimately found their way to the home of a Polish family whom they knew from before the war, named Boberek, who resided in a village outside of Chmielnik named Żydówek.⁷⁹⁹ In total, the Goldlists hid in the Boberek's granary for approximately one-and-a-half years, until the region's liberation by the Russian army in January

⁷⁹⁸ Sara Bender, *In Enemy Land: The Jews of Kielce and the Region, 1939-1946* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2018), 265-266; Edyta Sokółowska, "Questions Without Answers," *Świętokrzyski Shtetl* http://swietokrzyskisztetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=600&sub=169&subsub=528&schemat=2 (accessed 5-29-21); "Partyka Władysław & Maria (Borek); Daughter: Józefa," 19 June 1989, M.31.2/4303, Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4039765&ind=0 (accessed 5-29-21); Gutman, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous* (Vol. 2), 583.

⁷⁹⁹ Somewhat ironically, the name of the village, "Żydówek," is a cognate of the word Żyd, which means "Jew" in Polish.

1945. The Boberek family consisted of the heads of the household, Grzegorz and Katarzyna, and their six children.⁸⁰⁰

Toward the close of the war, a German officer was likewise quartered at the Boberek's home, for a period of six months. In spite of great risks and the fact that rumors circulated at the time about the Bobereks sheltering Jews, the Catholic Polish family continued to harbor the Goldlists. Of these four surviving Goldlists, three: Abram, Chaskiel, and Icek provided testimonies about their experiences of hiding to the Shoah Foundation. Icek or "Isadore," who appeared the most reflective about his wartime experiences, noted that Mr. Boberek received money from the Goldlist family for hiding them. What is more, in "Isadore's" opinion, Mr. Boberek always had it in mind that the Goldlists' survival would allow him the opportunity to reap the material goods—such things as textiles—that the Goldlists had hidden away elsewhere (not on the Bobereks' property). Similarly, Abram or "Al" remarked that his family paid the Bobereks 1,000 złoty weekly in exchange for being permitted to hide on their property.⁸⁰¹

"Isadore" also recalled how on some occasion, Mr. Boberek, instead of feeling proud about saving four lives, openly stated the following in reference to his Goldlist charges: "You know, if you're going to live through [the war], I'm going to have you on my conscience."⁸⁰²

⁸⁰⁰ "Boberek Grzegorz & Katarzyna (Chicońska)," 9 February 1993, M.31.2/5247, Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel.
https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=goldlist&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4034338&ind=0 (accessed 7-12-21); Gutman, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous* (Vol. 1), 97-98.

⁸⁰¹ Abraham Goldlist, interview by Dave Harris, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, September 11, 1995.

⁸⁰² Isadore Goldlist, interview by Lisa Newman, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, March 18, 1998.

According to “Isadore,” this statement alluded to Boberek’s fear that if the Russians should ultimately win the war, the Jews would enact their revenge on the Poles for the evils they had themselves perpetrated against the Jews. It is also worth mentioning here that although “Isadore” and several close family members were rescued by Poles, his brother-in-law and sister, Rachel, and their infant child, who was born while in hiding, as well as a cousin, were all murdered directly by Poles or due to Poles turning them over to Germans, who in turn, shot them.

Hence, “Isadore” was quite circumspect and even emotionally divided about his survival at the hands of Poles, in light of the fact that other relatives and acquaintances were also murdered on account of Poles. In his apt words, when commenting on the actions of Mr. Boberek, his wife, and children:

This Polak⁸⁰³ did save us. He didn’t want us ... that we should be saved. But somehow it [he] did. He *did* save us. No question about his wife, who was very good to us and the children, that probably did not know ... or care that they are Jews or not Jews. So personally, I am torn. I was not in concentration camps. I was not in any camps. And yet, I think the biggest blame is the Poles, because they didn’t have to kill Jews. They didn’t have any order to kill Jews.⁸⁰⁴

In the final estimation, the Goldists and Yad Vashem all saw fit to honor the Bobereks for their humanitarian actions in hiding, sheltering, and providing regular sustenance to the Goldlists

⁸⁰³ Although the word in Polish for a male Pole is “Polak,” given the interviewee’s tone and the context of his words, I suspect that “Isadore” used the term here derogatorily, in the manner that it is still often employed—even today—in North America.

⁸⁰⁴ Isadore Goldlist, interview by Lisa Newman, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, March 18, 1998.

during World War II. As a result, the Bobereks were honored as “Righteous Among the Nations” for their commendable actions by Yad Vashem on February 9, 1993.⁸⁰⁵

Perhaps the most telling and unequivocally positive account, though, of Polish-Jewish relations is that of Alte Shore and her family. This was a rare instance in which eight members of a single extended family managed to survive the war in hiding for a span of 27 months and 10 days, thanks to the war invalid, Stanisław Kaszuba and his family, who resided in the village of Żydówek, approximately eight kilometers outside of Chmielnik and only some 200 feet from the Boberek homestead, where the Goldlists were likewise hiding.⁸⁰⁶ On numerous occasions, this religious Christian family risked their own lives to insure the safety of the Shores and the Shores’ in-laws through marriage, the Kozłowskis.⁸⁰⁷

Even when rumors began to circulate about the Kaszuba family hiding Jews, and their neighbors began to threaten them, the Kaszubas continued to hide the considerable number of Shore family members. So too, even after their house was attacked, vandalized, damaged, and members of their family were physically assaulted—presumably, in retaliation for hiding Jews—

⁸⁰⁵ “Boberek Grzegorz & Katarzyna (Chicońska),” 9 February 1993, M.31.2/5247, Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel.
https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=goldlist&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4034338&ind=0 (accessed 7-12-21); Gutman, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous* (Vol. 1), 97-98.

⁸⁰⁶ Sara Goldlist, interview by Sheila Frohlich, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995. Although David Newman, the nephew of Alte Shore, does not mention the Kozłowskis, the Shores’ in-laws through marriage, he otherwise correctly echoes the story of rescue recounted here. See: Newman, *Hope’s Reprise*, 93. For the reference to the close proximity between the Kaszuba and the Boberek homesteads, which were both in Żydówek, and the Shore family, see also: Isadore Goldlist, interview by Lisa Newman, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, March 18, 1998.

⁸⁰⁷ In recognition of the selfless and heroic acts of the Kaszuba family, Yad Vashem honored them as “Righteous among the Nations” on August 22, 1993. See: Shore, “During the Fight for My Family’s Survival,” 824-827; Greenblat, et al., eds., *The Story of the Shore Family*, 4-10; Bender, “Chmielnik,” 210-211; Natalia Aleksion, “The Polish Righteous: The Kaszuba Family,” Polin, Oct.-Nov. 2010, [Story of Rescue - The Kaszuba Family | Polscy Sprawiedliwi](#) (accessed 5-7-21).

the Kaszubas would not reveal the hiding places of the Shores. In this manner, the Kaszubas continued to hide and care for their Jewish charges until the Soviet army liberated the area in January 1945.⁸⁰⁸ For their extremely kind-hearted and selfless deeds, Stanisław Kaszuba and his wife; their sons, Stefan Kaszuba and Ryszard Kaszuba; and their daughter, Daniela Krupa née Kaszuba, were all recognized as “Righteous Among the Nations” on August 22, 1993.⁸⁰⁹

According to Yad Vashem’s “Names of Righteous by Country” webpage, as of January 1, 2022, Poland accounted for a total of 7,232 “Righteous Among the Nations.”⁸¹⁰ That number appears relatively high when one takes into consideration the fact that by 1941, the Third Reich had issued an official decree threatening with death any Pole who aided Jews, for example, in relocating to the forbidden “Aryan side.” In more general terms, as conveyed by Holocaust survivor-scholar Nechama Tec, “... the Nazi law specified that those who aided Jews in any way and for any length of time were committing a crime punishable by death.”⁸¹¹ Nevertheless, the

⁸⁰⁸ Duncan Hooper, “Vistula Defences Breached,” *The Palestine Post* [Jerusalem, British Mandate Palestine], January 14, 1945, 1.

⁸⁰⁹ Kaszuba Stanisław & First name unknown; Son: Stefan; Son: Ryszard; Daughter: Krupa Daniela (Kaszuba), 22 August 1993, M.31.2/5826, Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. [\(Kaszuba Stanisław & First name unknown ; Son: Stefan ; Son: Ryszard ; Daughter: Krupa Daniela \(Kaszuba\) \(yadvashem.org\)](https://www.yadvashem.org/en/Righteous/Righteous%20Among%20the%20Nations/Righteous%20Among%20the%20Nations%20List/Righteous%20Among%20the%20Nations%20List%20-%20Kaszuba%20Stanislaw%20%26%20First%20name%20unknown%20%3B%20Son%3A%20Stefan%20%3B%20Son%3A%20Ryszard%20%3B%20Daughter%3A%20Krupa%20Daniela%20(Kaszuba)) (accessed 5-29-21); Israel Gutman, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous* (Vol. 1), 341.

⁸¹⁰ See: Names of Righteous by Country, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/statistics.html> (accessed 1-2-23).

⁸¹¹ Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 22-23, 93. See also: Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939-1945*, 153; Martin Dean, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945* (Vol. 2, Part A), s.v. “Radom Region (Distrikt Radom)” (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 190.

late Polish historian, Teresa Prekerowa (1921-1998), stated that among the adult Polish population, only about 1-2.5 percent aided Jews during World War II.⁸¹²

Based on the aforementioned case studies of recognized wartime rescue efforts, there were an estimated 24 Poles who risked their lives to actively aid, protect, and rescue Jews either initially or entirely within the vicinity of Chmielnik during the Second World War. In 1939, Chmielnik had a total of approximately 2,225 Gentiles.⁸¹³ Those Gentiles who were engaged in Jewish rescue and aid efforts during the war comprised slightly more than one percent (1%) of the total Gentile population of the Chmielnik vicinity. In light of Prekerowa's assessment of the overall degree of aid provided by (adult) Gentile Poles to Jews during the war years, the estimated rate of aid provided to Jews in the Chmielnik vicinity is entirely consistent with the overall estimated rate of aid provided to Jews at this time throughout Poland.

It is difficult to draw too many conclusions, though, on a more local scale as to how Chmielnik compared in terms of its numbers of Gentile rescuers with regard to other nearby towns. For although one might deduce estimated percentages of rescuers on a town-by-town basis, there are several variables that must factor into a comparative analysis of this nature. This includes—but is not limited to—the given town's respective general and Jewish population estimates and the degree of positive versus negative interactions between the respective populations prior to the outbreak of World War II. And just because a town was or was not over 80 percent Jewish on the eve of the war, this does not necessarily appear to have any obvious

⁸¹² Teresa Prekerowa, "The 'Just' and the 'Passive,'" in *My Brother's Keeper: Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, edited by Antony Polonsky (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

⁸¹³ The breakdown of total versus Jewish populations in Chmielnik in 1939 may be viewed in the bar chart on page 48.

relationship with the degree of aid that was extended by Gentiles to the local Jewish population during the war. For example, Przytyk, a previously mentioned town that was 90 percent Jewish, has zero recognized “Righteous Among the Nations,” according to Yad Vashem.⁸¹⁴

Jewish Collaborators in Chmielnik During World War II

Based on the series of events presented here that befell the Jews of Chmielnik during World War II, it is self-evident that they were victimized and subjected to various forms of persecution and torture at the hands of the German S.S. and their various Gentile collaborators. However, the question of Jewish collaboration in Chmielnik—a highly-sensitive subject, even more than 75 years after the Holocaust—still remains to be addressed, at least in part. As I learned first-hand while conducting my research on Chmielnik, part of the reason for the taboo nature of Jewish collaborators during World War II is due to the fact that some of them still have surviving relatives, including close family members. These individuals, many of whom experienced the hardships of World War II themselves, are understandably embarrassed by this negative association, and protective of their own offspring’s feelings and reputations.⁸¹⁵ Having read through numerous first-hand accounts, listened to several interviews of former Chmielnik residents, and conducted interviews with former Chmielnik residents, two names come up in the context of Jewish collaboration in Chmielnik.

⁸¹⁴ See: The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=Przytyk&searchType=righteous_only&language=en (accessed 1-3-23).

⁸¹⁵ This latter point, in particular, was delineated for me by former Chmielnik resident, Helen Greenspun (née Garfinkel). Helen Greenspun, telephone interview with author, written transcript, August 20, 2012.

In the profiles previously presented of the Judenrat and the Jewish police, former residents of Chmielnik placed these individuals within a “grey-zone”—to borrow the phrase coined by Italian Jewish Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi (1919-1987)⁸¹⁶—insofar as their moral and ethical behavior and treatment of fellow Jews. At the same time, though, many of these individuals are also remembered as having taken positive measures toward ameliorating the horrible and generally hopeless situation into which Chmielnik’s Jews were plunged. Nonetheless, there were a few singularly notorious individuals who entirely crossed the line insofar as aiding and abetting the Third Reich, and whom former Chmielnik residents placed entirely within the “black zone” as outright “collaborators.”

A great deal of literature has been written on the subject of the perpetrators, victims, rescuers, collaborators, and bystanders by scholars and writers including Raul Hilberg, Hannah Arendt, Czesław Miłosz, Jan Błoński, and Jan Grabowski. Hilberg, for example, addressed the three entities of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders as mostly distinct entities. However, even he acknowledged that in some cases, depending on circumstances, bystanders—individuals who were neither perpetrators, nor victims—could cross the line into becoming outright perpetrators. Interestingly, Hilberg practically never uses the term “collaborator/s,” in his seminal work:

⁸¹⁶ The ‘grey zone’ is a term employed by Levi in his essay collection, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989); originally published in Italian as *I sommersi e i salvati* in 1986. In this swan song, the last book Levi completed before his death, he tried to analyze what made people behave the way that they did in Auschwitz, often leading certain individuals to survive while others perished. In his essay, “The Grey Zone,” he focuses on those Jews in the camp system deemed “privileged”—those who curried favors with the Germans while exploiting their fellow inmates. One such example is that of a former concert violinist who behaved as a callous taskmaster. Aside from actually referring to Levi’s essay, for additional insight into how Levi employed this term and its later implications, see for instance: Adam Brown, *Judging ‘Privileged Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the ‘Grey Zone’* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013).

Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945,⁸¹⁷ although “collaborator/s” could readily fill in here as an extension of the “perpetrator/s” category.

It was Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), a German Jewish refugee who did not personally experience the horrors of the Holocaust, who was noted for her black-and-white stance on collaborators—namely Jewish collaborators—particularly in the form of the Jewish Councils (or *Judenräte*) in the ghettos. In Arendt’s controversial view, the latter stood between “saintly victims” and “diabolical perpetrators” by actively “cooperating”—or collaborating—with the perpetrators in helping to bring about the victims’ destruction. Thus, they bore some degree of responsibility for the demise of European Jewry.⁸¹⁸ This outlook may be seen in Arendt’s own following words: “This leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.”⁸¹⁹

Hilberg is of a similar mindset as Arendt when it comes to the subject of “cooperation” on the part of the incarcerated Jewish populace under Nazi control. According to his line of reasoning, Jews had historically taken the stance of acquiescing and “cooperating” with their aggressors during periods of persecution, in order to save both face and lives. Thus, because this

⁸¹⁷ Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

⁸¹⁸ See: Dan Porat, *Bitter Reckonings: Israel Tries Holocaust Survivors as Nazi Collaborators* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 183.

⁸¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963/1973), 125.

was a long-established behavioral pattern for Jews, they likewise resorted to this same approach vis-à-vis the German occupiers and their collaborators in the ghettos and camps during World War II. Hence, Hilberg also argues, there were relatively few attempts on the part of the Jews at outright physical resistance. However, little did the Jews realize, but that this time around, the results of this “cooperative” reaction pattern would prove catastrophic for them.⁸²⁰

At the same time, Hilberg employs the use of the term “cooperation” as others might use “collaboration” in reference to the local citizens who actively aided the Germans in perpetrating pogroms against the Jews; and with regard to the auxiliary police who actively participated in the seizures and shootings of Jews.⁸²¹ One salient example, according to Hilberg, of this type of “cooperation” on the local level, may be seen in light of the Einsatzgruppen.⁸²² These were S.S. death squads that were responsible for the mass murder of civilians, mostly by shooting, in German-occupied territories that had been controlled by the Soviet Union.⁸²³ Yet, notwithstanding all of these cooperating agents of Nazi Germany, Hilberg asserts—like Arendt—that: “More important than the cooperation of the army and the attitude of the civilian population, however, was the role of the Jews in their own destruction. For when all was said and done, the members of the Einsatzgruppen were thousands. The Jews were millions.”⁸²⁴

⁸²⁰ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 24.

⁸²¹ Ibid., 120.

⁸²² Ibid., 121.

⁸²³ For a detailed discussion of the Einsatzgruppen, see for instance: *ibid.*, chapter 4, “Mobile Killing Operations,” pages 99-153.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 123.

In view of the aforementioned shared perspective of both Arendt and Hilberg, particularly with regard to the Jewish leadership during World War II, it leads one to wonder how this thinking applies specifically to Chmielnik. Did Chmielnik's Judenrat essentially help aid and abet the Germans in their goal to annihilate all of Chmielnik Jewry? On a certain level, one might respond in the affirmative; however, we also know from the testimonies of Chmielnik ghetto survivors that in general, the members of the local Judenrat were not malevolent individuals with evil intent. Rather, they were people who hoped that by "cooperating" with the German authorities, they would ultimately be saving Jewish lives. It goes without saying that Jewish "cooperation" on the part of Judenrat members in Chmielnik—and elsewhere, for that matter—was, in the words of Holocaust historian Isaiah Trunk (1905-1981), "forced upon the Jews and was maintained in an atmosphere of ever-present merciless terror," unlike non-Jewish collaboration, which was done on a purely voluntary basis.⁸²⁵

Furthermore, I have not encountered serious condemnation among Chmielnik survivor testimonies regarding the town's Judenrat leaders.⁸²⁶ Within this context, there do not appear to have been any Chmielnik ghetto elders who took the so-called power of their position to their heads and went to the extreme in cooperating with the Nazis, as in the case of certain notorious and controversial Judenrat elders, including Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski (1877-1944) of the Łódź ghetto and Moses Merin (1905-1943) of the Ghetto in Eastern Upper Silesia.⁸²⁷ Rather, the

⁸²⁵ Trunk, *Judenrat*, xvi, 572-573.

⁸²⁶ There were multiple Judenrat elders in the Chmielnik ghetto, beginning with Avraham Langwald, followed by Shmuel Zalcman, and concluding with Leon Koralnik. All three men were murdered during World War II.

⁸²⁷ Rumkowski and Merin were among the most "powerful" ghetto leaders during World War II. Trunk, *Judenrat*, passim; Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 333-364.

elders of the Chmielnik ghetto appear to have been more akin to Adam Czerniakow (1880-1942), another oft-mentioned Judenrat leader who oversaw the largest ghetto in Europe: the Warsaw ghetto, and tragically committed suicide when he realized that he was helpless in halting the inevitable mass murder of Warsaw Jewry. Presumably, Czerniakow perceived himself as becoming more of a Nazi “collaborator” than a “cooperator,” and he could no longer face this sense of guilt.⁸²⁸

Nevertheless, it is important, when considering the weightiness of the Jewish “cooperators,” not to lose sight of the fact that they were still victims, put in untenable situations. Moral clarity is easy when nothing goes awry, but such was not the case in World War II Poland. And, neither Hilberg nor Arendt were themselves from eastern Europe—certainly not from Poland, where much of the actual killing took place.⁸²⁹ In contrast to Hilberg and Arendt, Miłosz (1911-2004) and Błoński (1931-2009) both hailed from Poland, as does the contemporary-day historian, Jan Grabowski (b. 1962). All of them addressed our next topic: Poles playing the role of bystanders—the ultimate witnesses or onlookers—as Jews suffered persecution, atrocities, and were directly targeted for murder. Miłosz and Błoński focused in their respective works, “Campo dei Fiori” (Warsaw, 1943) and “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto” (“The Poor Poles Look at the

⁸²⁸ Trunk, *Judenrat*, passim. Aside from the diary that Czerniakow kept while in the Warsaw ghetto, perhaps the most definitive work about him to-date is that of the following: Marcin Urynowicz, *Adam Czerniaków 1880-1942: prezes getta warszawskiego* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej—Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2009).

⁸²⁹ Jan Grabowski, “The Role of ‘Bystanders’ in the Implementation of the ‘Final Solution’ in Occupied Poland,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 43 (2015): 114, 118.

Ghetto,” 1987)⁸³⁰ on the collective guilt and responsibility that Poles bear for standing by and doing little—if anything—to aid their fellow Jewish countrymen during the Second World War.

Grabowski further underscores the notion of Poles having been witnesses or onlookers. However, at the same time, he argues that it was virtually impossible to be a true “bystander” in Poland’s Generalgouvernement, in which the extermination of the Jews was frequently conducted in public spaces and there were, at the time, many onsite spectators. In keeping with Miłosz’s and Błoński’s sentiments, Grabowski notes that relatively few Poles expressed much interest or willingness to aid Jews who were literally fleeing for their lives. Yet, he also avers that there was a segment of the greater Polish population that directly profited from hiding Jews by demanding payment in return—and in certain instances, even resorted to murdering or betraying Jews to Poland’s German occupiers. In such cases, Poles went from being so-called “bystanders” to being active participants, outright “collaborators.”⁸³¹ As to how Grabowski would view Jewish “collaborators” such as the ones that will be discussed here shortly, that remains a matter of interest, but speculation.

Who were these collaborators? Both Jews and Poles from Chmielnik mention one person by name: Szaje Fastag, “an agent of the gendarmerie.”⁸³² The specifics of Fastag’s actions will be explored shortly, but all of the survivors who remember him paint the image of a young

⁸³⁰ Both of these works may be viewed in English translation in the following: Jan Blonski, “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto,” in *My Brother’s Keeper: Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, edited by Antony Polonsky (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 34-50.

⁸³¹ Grabowski, “The Role of ‘Bystanders,’” 117.

⁸³² In the testimonies of former Jewish residents of Chmielnik, there is no indication that Fastag was affiliated with the Judenrat, or even with the Jewish police, for that matter. Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 714.

man—16 or 18, depending on the testimony—who hailed from a Hasidic, well-respected, wealthy family. According to one testimony, Fastag was a former member of the Zionist youth organization, Hashomer Hatzair, but he eventually went “astray.” At some point, he fathered a child with a Gentile girlfriend with whom he lived. This brought much shame to his parents.⁸³³

One of the most scathing accounts of his activities during the various roundups and deportations in Chmielnik may be seen in the eyewitness account presented by Cesia Diamant (later Ullman), yet in Germany, in 1947. According to her, Fastag, along with his comrade, Szyja Sobkowski, as well as other unnamed individuals, would drive out Jewish families onto the street and beat them up terribly. They would then plunder and requisition their belongings, for which, as Diamant notes, “they worked a whole life long.”⁸³⁴

She further added that Fastag would go around with a scent dog that he used to ferret out hidden Jews. Upon uncovering such an individual, Fastag would order the dog to bite that person, and then proceeded to include his victim in a forthcoming deportation. Yet, worst of all, according to Diamant, was the way that Fastag turned on his own immediate family during one of the roundup and deportation campaigns. In one of these instances, Fastag’s parents and siblings were hidden in an attic. Fastag was aware of their whereabouts and went to fetch several gendarmes. His sisters begged him to have mercy on them, but he refused; and “his entire family,

⁸³³ Testimony of Cesia Diamant, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/950, 3. The point about Fastag having a Polish girlfriend (though not about the child he was said to have fathered) is also mentioned by Esther Pasternak Tarek. Ironically, Tarek is one of the few former residents of Chmielnik who harbored no ill-feelings toward Fastag, “because he did nothing to hurt her or her family.” Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 98.

⁸³⁴ Diamant, “Eyewitness Testimony of Cesia Diamant,” 720; Testimony of Cesia Diamant, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/950, 2.

with his own hands, he turned over into the hands of the murderers, by whom they were brutally beaten.”⁸³⁵

During yet another roundup and deportation, Diamant recalls how Fastag and Sobkowski were once again “quite active.” However, she clearly distinguishes between these two individuals by stating that “[Fastag], though, was the head of the informants.”⁸³⁶ It was also due to Fastag and his scent dog that Diamant and her family were discovered hiding in an attic, violently forced out of hiding, and turned over to the German gendarmes.⁸³⁷

Another revealing account attesting to the degree of Fastag’s cruelty toward fellow Jews and the sycophantic maneuvers he employed in ingratiating himself to the Germans, may be seen in the testimony of Lily Smietana (née Lewkowicz). According to Smietana, in early August 1942, her father went out for a walk one day, when he was suddenly intercepted by two German gendarmes and their attack dog. Accompanying the German officers was the Jewish informant, Szaje Fastag, who, according to Smietana, was then 18 years old.⁸³⁸ Fastag proceeded to command the dog, whom he referred to as “Mensch,” (German for human-being) to sic the “Hund,” (German for dog) the Jew. Smietana’s father then fell down in the street, as Fastag jumped on top of him, chopping off his beard with the knife that he was brandishing. Following this incident, Smietana recalls how her father came home to lie down. He died only a few days

⁸³⁵ Diamant, “Eyewitness Testimony of Cesia Diamant,” 720; Testimony of Cesia Diamant, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/950, 4.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 721; *ibid.*, 7.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., 721-722; *ibid.*

⁸³⁸ Lily Smietana, interview by Rona Arato, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, October 12, 1995.

later in his bed. According to Smietana, her father's death—most likely, in the form of a heart attack—which occurred on August 10, 1942, was the direct result of Fastag having physically assaulted him.⁸³⁹

Josef Lapa (b. 1924), who like Cesia Diamant, provided an eyewitness testimony in Germany, albeit in 1946, recalls this same collaborator, whom he leaves unnamed. According to Lapa, this Jewish informer was later shot dead by the very Germans with whom he collaborated. Furthermore, he was responsible for stealing a great deal of money from Lapa's family, which was relatively well-off. Like the previous accounts here, Lapa could not forget this collaborator's large dog, whom he described as being "literally like a lion. It was enough for them to tell the dog: Take the Jew! Then there no longer remained anything of the Jew."⁸⁴⁰ Upon being asked by his interviewer who this Jewish collaborator was, Lapa replied that he was a former member of the Zionist youth organization, Hashomer Hatzair, who had gone astray, and that he hailed from an extremely Hasidic home.

Lapa further elaborated on this collaborator's escapades and how he, himself, just barely survived a terrifying encounter with this man and his ferocious beast. In Lapa's words, this collaborator frequently chased him and his friends, forcing them to flee through yards and rooftops to escape. But one instance in particular, Lapa would understandably never forget. On that occasion, Lapa and his friends were busy hiding out in an attic, when all of a sudden this Jewish informer appeared with his dog and a German. The informer proceeded to set the dog on

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ Testimony of Josef Lapa, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/11307, 5.

Lapa and his friends. But then, out of nowhere, an S.S. officer showed up and shouted at the informer, asking him what he was doing there, and chased him away. In Lapa's words, he was convinced that this was a miracle, and that the S.S. officer was none other than Elijah the Prophet who had arrived just in time to save him and his friends.⁸⁴¹

Although Chmielnik native, Mordechai Goldstein, does not indicate being personally affected by the detestable deeds and actions of Fastag, he echoes some of the negative attributes mentioned here by other kinsmen. According to Goldstein, 16-year-old Yeshayahu Fastak [*sic*] was the rare Jewish individual from Chmielnik who actively offered his services to the German occupiers. "He caused shame to his parents, and they were also afraid of him. He related to his family as though to strangers. In many instances he did things to Jews that the Germans did not do themselves."⁸⁴² Goldstein also distinguished between Fastag's actions and the actions of Jewish extortionists who threatened their fellow Jews out of their sheer sense of desperation and need for survival. Unlike these few extortionists who conducted their actions in secrecy—due, presumably, to shame—Fastag was utterly blatant and unapologetic in his despicable actions.⁸⁴³ This would also explain why so many different first-hand accounts from Chmielnik natives attest to this collaborator's various offenses.

In addition to ferreting out and turning over Jews to the Germans, Fastag is personally credited with gunning down Jews. For example, following the first roundup and deportation of Jews in early October 1942, a period in which Jews were frequently being attacked and shot at,

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁴² Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa'am Yehudim* [*In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews*], 45.

⁸⁴³ Ibid.

Fastag is himself said to have shot dead Blume Gorlicki Kaufman, the wife of Yankl Kaufman.⁸⁴⁴

Jewish survivors strove to understand how an individual who hailed from such a “very good family”⁸⁴⁵ could sink to such base levels. Esther Lederman (née Gutman), a native of Łódź who fled with her family to Chmielnik after the outbreak of World War II, rationalized that Fastag believed he was invincible. In her estimation, he “ran with the Germans” because he was a young man—“maybe 16” ... “a handsome, well-dressed boy”—who thought he would impress everybody by wielding power with the enemy. Only, he took this power to his head. With his leather jacket, good looks, and clout, he came to think that he was somebody important. Nevertheless, as Lederman confirmed, he was ultimately killed, like so many others.⁸⁴⁶

According to Jewish sources, Fastag was gunned down by the Germans⁸⁴⁷ with the very revolver with which he supposedly murdered many Jews, following the last and final deportation, in May 1943.⁸⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Fastag’s last victim is said to have been Avraham Chmielnicki, who was gunned down in the fields behind Chmielnik while fleeing from

⁸⁴⁴ Kermish, “Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime,” 672.

⁸⁴⁵ These are the words that Esther Lederman used to convey the dichotomy between this Jewish collaborator and his fine and upstanding family. Esther Lederman, telephone interview with author, written transcript, September 23, 2012.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁷ Mapa and Mapa, “Testimony of Yechiel Mapa and Kalman Mapa,” 713; Testimony of Yechiel and Kalman Mapa, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/621, 2.

⁸⁴⁸ The previously mentioned Cesia Diamant, in her own testimony, does not signify when precisely Fastag was gunned down by the Germans. However, she does state that a German gendarme “put an end to him [i.e., to Fastag]” once there was no longer “a single Jew to be found in Chmielnik.” This would seem to be consistent with the notion that Fastag was murdered once the last and final deportation of Jews had taken place, and Fastag most likely no longer served any useful function to the Germans. See: Diamant, “Eyewitness Testimony of Cesia Diamant,” 724.

Skarżysko.⁸⁴⁹ Polish testimonies included in *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik* further attest to the behavior of this singularly cruel personality. However, unlike the Jewish sources, these sources also credit Fastag with killing Poles—in addition to Jews—and likewise indicate that he, himself, was killed by the Polish underground or partisans, and then buried in a pit at the side of a road.⁸⁵⁰

The following are excerpts from one of these testimonies, as presented by a Helena Karyś, who lived in Chmielnik during the period of German occupation:

My sister told me that she saw Szaje Fastak [*sic*], a Jew, killing a man. After the displacement of Jews from Chmielnik, Szaje moved to live at the police station and he was responsible for searching for Jews who were hiding in Chmielnik and the vicinity. He also spied on the Poles who used to help Jews ... We couldn't understand how a Jew could behave like a German ...

He also killed a woman from the village of Młyny, who was walking close to the ghetto, where Poles were not allowed to walk ... everybody in the town was talking about it. My sister, Natalia Brodowska, saw how the Jew killed an elderly man in the cemetery situated by the police station.⁸⁵¹

As a result of his cruelties, Szaja was sentenced to death by the Polish underground court.

He was caught by Polish partisans and shot in the field that belonged to the woman he had killed

⁸⁴⁹ Kermish, "Chmielnik Jews under the Nazi Regime," 675. It is worth mentioning that there are some apparent discrepancies in the murder of Avraham Chmielnicki. According to the Editorial Board of the Chmielnik *yisker bukh*, the murdered Jew described in the above episode was actually named "Yechiel Yankl," a name that also appears in its cognate form as "Yechiel Yekl" in a lengthy necrology included in the *yisker bukh*. Furthermore, Szaje Fastag, the individual credited with murdering Chmielnicki, was apparently himself murdered—according to the memorial book's Editorial Board—already in 1942. Yet, Chmielnicki was not murdered until the end of 1944. Thus, there may indeed be an error insofar as Chmielnicki's murderer, and/or possibly insofar as when he was murdered. See: Editorial Board, "Finished and Not Completed: Postscript from the Editorial Board," in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*, edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 29, 1302.

⁸⁵⁰ Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 168, 170. See also: Zimmerman, "Jewish Cultural Festivals," 172.

⁸⁵¹ Maciągowski and Krawczyk, *The Story of Jewish Chmielnik*, 170.

in Chmielnik. He was also buried there, in a pit by a road...⁸⁵² It is worth noting that the Polish sources credit the Poles for eliminating Fastag. This is in direct contradiction to the previously mentioned Jewish sources that credit the Germans with having gunned down Fastag.

Presumably, the chaos of war led to this and other inconsistent statements that were handed down initially by word-of-mouth, but subsequently recorded.

Malka Owsiany, when she mentions Jewish collaborators in the Chmielnik ghetto, singles out a specific individual, whom she remarks was “one of the most devoted servants of the Nazi gendarmerie in Chmielnik.”⁸⁵³ This was a man she refers to as “the notorious informer Sobkowski,” who according to her, “even before the war had a reputation for being a vile person.”⁸⁵⁴ What is more, Owsiany unequivocally states that “the Jews of Chmielnik never had a good opinion of this person. In order to win the favor of the Nazi bandits, he would show them the wealthy Jews, from whom it was still possible to steal something.”⁸⁵⁵

Although Szaje Fastag did not survive World War II, meeting the same ultimate fate of many of his fellow kinsmen, his aforementioned sidekick, Szyja Sobkowski (b. 1914?),⁸⁵⁶ apparently did. Indeed, he was spotted by other former Chmielnik residents in the Landsberg DP (displaced persons) camp in postwar Germany. For example, the aforementioned Cesia Diamant,

⁸⁵² Ibid.

⁸⁵³ Turkow, *Malka Ovshiani [Owsiany] dertseylt*, 62.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁶ Sobkowski’s inexact date of birth is based on records from the Joint Distribution Committee’s Archives, which has his name spelled incorrectly as “Szya Szopkowski” and notes his birth as being May 3, 1914. See: JDC Archives, 1943-1959 Jewish Displaced Persons and Refugee Cards, “Szopkowski, Szya,” April 19, 1949.

whose testimony was presented in Munich, close to Landsberg am Lech, comments regarding Sobkowski, that “he is living today in Landsberg [Germany].”⁸⁵⁷

Ezjel Lederman also referenced a former Nazi collaborator from Chmielnik whom he witnessed on the very same day he arrived in the Landsberg DP camp with the slightly different name of Szyja Biedra, whom he characterized as being “particularly vicious.”⁸⁵⁸ Upon encountering “Biedra,” Lederman advised the DP camp authorities about him, only to be informed that there were “no applicable laws” in place that would allow punishment to be meted-out against this former collaborator. In Lederman’s words, “this was very shocking and upsetting to me, as were many other things, including influence peddling in order to get anything accomplished.”⁸⁵⁹

It is unclear whether Lederman was implying in his words that “Biedra” exerted some sort of special influence or *proteksye* to insure that nothing happened to himself while in the Landsberg DP camp. However, even if there were “no applicable laws” at that time and place to legally, or officially, try this man in a military court of law for having committed some form of “war crimes,” there was something known as a Jewish “honor court.”⁸⁶⁰ In Laura Jockusch’s words, this was “an unofficial or semi-official nongovernmental tribunal set up by a professional, social, cultural, or communal organization to arbitrate conflicts between two or more of its

⁸⁵⁷ Diamant, “Eyewitness Testimony of Cesia Diamant,” 721; Testimony of Cesia Diamant, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.1.E/950, 7.

⁸⁵⁸ Lederman, *Hiding for Our Lives*, 189.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁰ Also known by several other names in different languages, including *ern-gerikht* in Yiddish and *Ehrengericht* in German. See: Laura Jockusch and Gabriel N. Finder, eds., *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution, and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel after the Holocaust* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 3.

members.”⁸⁶¹ Although these courts aimed, in part, to repair various types of breaches, or “the abuse of rights and privileges,” they were also known to have limited punitive power, given that “the court’s decisions were not binding on nonmembers and had no legal relevance outside the respective body.”⁸⁶²

Ultimately, the documentation does not appear to support there ever having been any sort of postwar trial involving “Szyja Sobkowski” under any of his given aliases. All these decades later, one can merely speculate why none of his fellow Chmielnik survivors in the Landsberg DP camp pressed the matter of Sobkowski’s past actions enough to try him in a Jewish “honor court.” This is all the more curious, given that by the fall of 1945, there were local camp courts (*lager-gerikhtn* or *ern-gerikhtn*) in existence in American zone DP camps, which included that of Landsberg. What is more, these courts prosecuted all sorts of cases, including those pertaining to survivors who were suspected of Nazi collaboration during World War II.⁸⁶³

In addition, Sobkowski is mentioned in conjunction with Buchenwald, where he was incarcerated during the war, along with many other Jewish men from Chmielnik. While there, he had a reputation for having previously been a “*kapo*” in “a camp near Kielce.” Fellow inmates accused him of “brutality against weaker prisoners and collaboration with the Germans,” and in retaliation, gave him a severe beating that left him with bruises to the face that literally marked

⁸⁶¹ Ibid.

⁸⁶² Ibid.

⁸⁶³ Jockusch and Finder, eds., *Jewish Honor Courts*, 55; Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 136.

him as a “wanted man.”⁸⁶⁴ According to former resident of Chmielnik, Sam Friedman (née Frydman), who was incarcerated in Buchenwald and remembered Szyja Brudny, “Brudny” was simply a nickname for this individual’s official surname, “Sobkowski.” Accordingly, Szyja Brudny and Szyja Sobkowski were, in fact, the same person.⁸⁶⁵

Charles Kotkowsky, a native of Piotrków Trybunalski, writes that while incarcerated in the HASAG-Częstochowianka concentration camp in Częstochowa, he encountered the personage of Szyja Sobkowski/Szyja Biedra/Szyja Brudny. Kotkowsky refers to him, though, as “Szie Biodra.” In describing his relatively short, forced labor stint at Częstochowianka, Kotkowsky vividly recalls the following about the camp:

The worst part was going to work and coming back. In the yard, there were always *Kapos* (*Katzet-Polizei* or Head foremen) or just “hitters”, who walked around beating up everybody in sight. The worst offender of them all was a tall giant whom we called “Bulldog”. His real name was Szie Biodra from Chmielnik. He would walk around with a whip, without feeling or conscience, like a robot, and hit everyone in sight. Fortunately, we only spent about seven weeks here and I felt very uneasy and helpless.⁸⁶⁶

Kotkowsky, who was also incarcerated in Buchenwald, likewise recalls this “Bulldog” being beaten horribly in Buchenwald by fellow inmates—possibly during the very same attack mentioned above by Naphtali Lau-Lavie:

The next morning, the same group of men came into our barracks and beat up the big “Bulldog” from Czestochowa. Later, when I saw him lying there on his bunk, which was

⁸⁶⁴ Naphtali Lau-Lavie, *Balaam’s Prophecy: Eyewitness to History, 1939-1989* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1998), 117.

⁸⁶⁵ Sam Friedman, telephone interview with author, written transcript, September 23, 2012.

⁸⁶⁶ Charles Kotkowsky, *Remnants: Memoirs of a Survivor* (Montreal, Canada: Concordia University Chair in Canadian Jewish Studies, 2000), <http://migs.concordia.ca/memoirs/kotkowsky/kotkowsky.html> (accessed 8-18-21). Although this online publication is unpaginated, see section entitled: “Piotrkow *Judenrein* (Free of Jews),” for Kotkowsky’s above quote.

situated close to the door, his face looked even larger than in Czestochowa. It was badly swollen and all bloody and his eyes were puffy and closed, and he was breathing heavily. He could not get up anymore for the evening roll call and was counted sick. This job was done by a special "hit-squad" under the leadership of an inmate called Gustaw, allegedly from Lemberg . . . He was the Block leader of No. 66. The hit-squad watched every new transport of prisoners that arrived in Buchenwald and inquired as to who had been the "bad apples" in former camps. They then sentenced the culprits.⁸⁶⁷

Indeed, one of Sobkowski's/Biedra's/Brudny's/Biodra's records from the International Tracing Services (ITS), incorporated today into the Arolsen Archives in Bad Arolsen, Germany, states that he was incarcerated in both the formerly mentioned, Buchenwald, as well as in HASAG-Częstochowianka. Furthermore, he is noted as having been born in Chmielnik, Poland.⁸⁶⁸

Given the combination of information indicated here and the relatively uncommonness of this individual's name, there is no question that all the various aforementioned monikers actually describe a single individual who ultimately immigrated to the United States.⁸⁶⁹ In a word, Sobkowski's negative record insofar as collaborating with the Germans was never duly noted by

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., section: "*Konzentrationslager Buchenwald: Arbeit Macht Frei.*"

⁸⁶⁸ See for example the following International Tracing Services (ITS) "Incarceration Documents, 1.1.5 Buchenwald Concentration Camp," accessible via the Arolsen Archives in conjunction with the name variants: "Sobkowski, Szyka" and "Sobkowski, Szyja": Prisoner card of Szyka Sobkowski, Buchenwald, 1.1.5.3/ 7147348/ ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives, https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/archive/7147347/?p=1&s=sobkowski&doc_id=7147348; Prisoner card of Szyja Sobkowski, Buchenwald, 1.1.5.3/ 7147353/ ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives, https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/archive/7147347/?p=1&s=sobkowski&doc_id=7147353; Prisoner card of Szyja Sobkowski, Buchenwald, 1.1.5.3/ 87383113/ ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives, https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/archive/7147347/?p=1&s=sobkowski&doc_id=87383113 (accessed 12-19-21).

⁸⁶⁹ See also the following document from the collection: "Registrations and Files of Displaced Persons, Children and Missing Persons," accessible via the Arolsen Archives, and attesting to Sobkowski's [aka "Szopkowski, Szyja"] emigration from Europe and intended destination site in the United States: Correspondence and nominal roles, done at Bremen-Grohn: transport by ship (USS GENERAL STURGIS); transit countries and final destinations: Australia, USA, 3.1.3.2/ 81672975/ ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives, https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/archive/81672975/?p=1&s=szopkowski&doc_id=81672975 (accessed 12-19-21).

any higher authorities. Yet if it was, it clearly did not stand in the way of his immigrating to the United States.⁸⁷⁰

Lingering Questions

We began this chapter noting that there are many grey spaces when it comes to discussions of who did what during the Holocaust. Victims, we understand. Perpetrators, we understand as well, though only abstractly. But the spaces in between—rescuers, for instance—or, what some might call “upstanders”—defy our basic instincts of self-survival. Why did they do what they did? Poles who hid Jews for money, but not quite enough money: what motivated *their* actions? Other Poles, who were not under orders to kill Jews, but who did so gratuitously anyway—what motivated these acts of violence? And finally, Jewish collaborators: did they see themselves as acting in self-preservation, and thereby justify their behaviors, or were they simply given an opportunity, in the chaos of moral ambiguity, to show their true colors? We can only surmise at the answers to these questions. But, if the case of the collaborator Szyja Sobkowski is any indication, we do know one thing: neither side—neither the rescuers nor the collaborators,

⁸⁷⁰ I was unable to determine precisely what Sobkowski did professionally, socially, or otherwise during the years that he lived in the United States in the aftermath of World War II. What I *was* able to determine is that he died in 1981 and was buried in a Jewish cemetery. Based on a phone interview I conducted with Sobkowski’s niece, whom I will simply refer to here as “Sobkowski’s niece” or “the niece”—due to the notoriety of Sobkowski’s reputation—he did not marry her aunt until he was well into middle age. This was his first marriage and her second. Sobkowski’s wife was likewise a Polish Jewish Holocaust survivor, but according to Sobkowski’s niece, Sobkowski did not have any known relatives. The niece knew nothing of Sobkowski’s life prior to the United States, including the fact that he originally hailed from Chmielnik, Poland. Sobkowski’s niece also added that Sobkowski was “not one of my favorite uncles” because “he was not very nice to my aunt.” The niece quickly qualified her statement; that Sobkowski had not been abusive toward her aunt. However, he also did not appear to take his wife out or go places with her. Sobkowski’s niece further remarked that her aunt had married Sobkowski in haste shortly after her first husband—also a Holocaust survivor—died, as she did not want to remain alone. In other words, according to Sobkowski’s niece, it was not a marriage of love, but of convenience—if one might call it that. Sobkowski’s niece, telephone interview with author, written transcript, January 3, 2023.

nor anyone in between—has been served justice here on earth for their actions. Most of the crimes and acts of heroism during the Holocaust were neither seen nor recognized after it was over. For that, we can only hope there is a Court on High.

Chapter Seven: In the Aftermath of World War II

Chmielnik's Jewish Survivors Briefly Return to Their Town

There has been much literature and numerous testimonies recorded on the subject of the return trips made by Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors in the months following World War II and the violence that frequently befell returning Jews during that period.⁸⁷¹ For example, Jan T. Gross devotes an entire chapter to “The Unwelcoming of Jewish Survivors” in his book, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz*. In Lukasz Krzyzanowski’s more recent publication, *Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City*,⁸⁷² which is entirely devoted to the subject of a community of Jews who return to the city of Radom—not far from Chmielnik—a full chapter focuses on the violence perpetrated against Jews in the postwar context.⁸⁷³

As Gross illustrates in his book, one of the main underlying reasons for this anti-Jewish sentiment among Poles following the war stemmed from conflict surrounding the “illicit transfer of material property from Jewish ownership during the war.”⁸⁷⁴ In other cases, Polish observers readily noted the helpless and precarious state in which most returning Jewish survivors found

⁸⁷¹ In addition to the accounts of Chmielnik survivor returnees related in this chapter, see for example: Hillel, *Le massacre des survivants: En Pologne après l'holocauste, 1945-1947* (Paris: Plon, c1985), 131-132, 195-196; Jonas Turkow, *Nokh der bafrayung: zikhroynes* [Following the Liberation: Memoirs] (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1959); David Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 51.

⁸⁷² See: Lukasz Krzyzanowski, *Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁸⁷³ For further insight into the postwar violence perpetrated against Jews in Radom, see: Ibid., chapter 2, “Violence,” 122-234. One such article that Krzyzanowski cites within the context of postwar events in Radom is that of Dr. Samuel Margoshes, “A Night in Radom: Fear of Death,” *der Tog*, March 21, 1946, 7. In the article, Margoshes (1887-1968), a native of Poland and an American-based Yiddish journalist who visited Poland following World War II, conveys the fear he has of spending a mere night in Radom in light of all the warnings he received about recent anti-Jewish violence there—and the potential for more.

⁸⁷⁴ Gross, *Fear*, 39. See also: Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence”: 47.

themselves, and some chose to take advantage of this situation by threatening or even outright murdering Jews, purely for the sake of obtaining whatever property they still owned. Actor, producer, and writer, Jonas Turkow (1898-1988), who spent World War II on Polish soil, echoes Gross's emphasis on Jewish property as a major impetus for postwar violence targeting Jews. In his words, "Nearly everywhere hooligans demanded that the Jews leave their homes, and otherwise they were threatened with exerting 'appropriate measures.' And what the appropriate measures meant, everyone knew well..."⁸⁷⁵

The fact that Jews were pariahs and "an endangered species" in Poland following the war, particularly in the country's small towns, was so well-recognized that even Polish political officials took note of this phenomenon. This may be seen, for example, in the following correspondence by Jan Kowalczyk, the voivodeship of Kraków, "commissar for productivization of the Jewish population" to the "Presidium of the District Commission of the Labor Unions": "It is an undeniable fact that the living conditions of the Jewish population in county towns are extremely difficult. Because of the terror of reactionary elements the Jewish population runs away from those locations in order to save their lives and concentrates in larger towns."⁸⁷⁶

In addition, as early as August 13, 1944—while the war was still raging in most of Poland—the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP), an aid organization established by surviving Polish Jews in Lublin only a few days prior, held its second meeting. That gathering

⁸⁷⁵ Turkow, *Nokh der bafrayung*, 83.

⁸⁷⁶ Gross, *Fear*, 34.

was devoted to discussing the question of security or the lack thereof, for returning Jewish survivors.⁸⁷⁷ Clearly, safety, self-protection, and the omnipresent fear of anti-Jewish violence was foremost in the minds of this already significantly reduced community. Chmielnik, thus, represented only one of many former Jewish communities whose surviving population had to contend with the possibility of physical assault—if not worse—should its former residents return to their small hometown.

Following the end of World War II, relatively few surviving Jews returned to Chmielnik. This was due, in part, to the fact that the vast majority had been murdered during the war. Although the number of Jews from Chmielnik who ultimately lost their lives during World War II remains unknown, some of the first-hand accounts and Holocaust literature provide estimates in the range of 8,000.⁸⁷⁸ This is out of an estimated 10,275 Jews on the eve of the war. Among some 1,000 survivors were Jews who had fled to the Soviet occupation zone, had gone into hiding, and others who had been deported to concentration camps and slave labor camps including Skarżysko-Kamienna, Buchenwald, Bergen Belsen, Ravensbrück, HASAG-Kielce, and HASAG-Częstochowianka.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁷⁸ For example, Yitzhak Arad notes that between the dates October 1-5, 1942, which presumably overlap with the first and main deportation from Chmielnik, 8,000 Jews were deported. Robert Seidel likewise states that 8,000 Jews were deported to Treblinka during the first days of October 1942. Further, A. Steinfeld states in a newspaper article written one year after World War II, that “we ... remember the number of 8,500 holy victims of Chmielnik.” See: Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, 394; Seidel, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik Politik in Polen*, 322; A. Steinfeld, “The 16-Year-Old Hero During the Jewish Deportation in Chmielnik,” *Yidishe tsaytung* (Landsberg, Germany), December 6, 1946, YIVO Archives, Territorial Collection, Poland, 1939-1945 (Poland 2), RG 116, Folder 55.

As previously mentioned, following liberation, it was particularly dangerous for Jews to remain in the small towns of Poland in the wake of the Holocaust.⁸⁷⁹ To quote former Chmielnik resident, Anna Prager (née Frydman), whose family was threatened by the Polish family living in their former home following World War II: “If you don’t leave right away, we will shoot you.”⁸⁸⁰ She recalls that “The mood in Poland after the war was very anti-Semitic.”⁸⁸¹ Joseph Kiman relates how he and fellow townsman, Irwin Wygodny, began heading back toward Chmielnik following their liberation in Annaberg, Germany, in early May 1945. Along the way, they met a Jewish woman who warned them “that although the war was over, the Polish people continued to murder Jews in small towns.”⁸⁸² For this reason, the woman recommended that the two men not proceed to Chmielnik, but rather, go to Częstochowa, a city where there was a Jewish committee and lists of survivors. The two men took the woman’s advice and proceeded to go to the Jewish committee in Częstochowa.⁸⁸³

⁸⁷⁹ Due to the dangers in postwar Poland associated with Jews returning to their small hometowns, Ira Kaminsky attests that he never returned to Chmielnik, following World War II. Ira Kaminsky, interview by Daniel Sedlis, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Bayside, NY, December 21, 1995. Among the two most well-known cases of post-World War II violence perpetrated against Jews in Poland are the pogrom that took place in Kraków on August 11, 1945, in which at least one individual was murdered, and several others injured, and the larger-scale pogrom that took place the following year in Kielce, on July 4, 1946. In the latter pogrom, 42 Jews were murdered and over 40 suffered injuries. For further information about these events, both of which were instigated by blood libel accusations, see for example: Anna Cichopek, “The Cracow Pogrom of August 1945: A Narrative Reconstruction,” in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and in Its Aftermath*, edited by Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 221-238; Samuel Loeb Shneiderman, *Between Fear and Hope* (New York: Arco Publishing Co., 1947), 85-108; Gross, *Fear*, 37, 74.

⁸⁸⁰ Anna Prager, telephone interview no. 2 with author, written transcript, April 28, 2021.

⁸⁸¹ Prager further related how this Polish family refused to return a single item belonging to her family. This included a portrait of her, which had little more than sentimental value. Anna Prager, telephone interview with author, written transcript, August 26, 2012.

⁸⁸² Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 22.

⁸⁸³ Ibid.

Hershl Kaminsky, who *did* return to Chmielnik following the war, did so for two reasons: because he was searching for his sister Rachela, based on testimony that she was still alive, and so as to see with his very own eyes what had become of his hometown.⁸⁸⁴ Kaminsky appears to regret having ever returned to Chmielnik, where he encountered a Pole who had been his friend prior to the war and who threatened Kaminsky with his life, in order to avoid any potential claim for former Jewish property. In addition, Kaminsky went to visit the Jewish cemetery, which he found in an utterly ruined and vandalized state. He likewise found that many of the headstones of Jewish graves had been used to pave the streets in town.⁸⁸⁵ Nonetheless, he also encountered 17 Jews there, in three separate places; although, as he remarks, some of these individuals “were later murdered in the infamous Kielce pogrom.”⁸⁸⁶

Concerning the devastated state of Chmielnik’s Jewish cemetery in the fall of 1946, Dr. Natan Balanowski informed the Central Committee of Jews in Poland that “Local peasants are removing stones that form the wall around the Jewish cemetery in Chmielnik without any interference from anyone. They are destroying monuments etc. [...] The old cemetery [...] had

⁸⁸⁴ Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” 914.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 917-920. Regarding the lack of headstones in the Jewish cemetery and the use of these headstones to pave the streets, see also: Melech Glait, “The Kielce Pogrom,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 10 (1971): 5; Lily Smietana, interview by Rona Arato, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, October 12, 1995.

⁸⁸⁶ The 17 Jews who returned to Chmielnik were likely living together in three separate locations in the town, quite possibly, for reasons of safety. Kaminsky, “Three Times I Said Goodbye to My Chmielnik,” 915. According to Gitla Fastag (née Shulsinger), she was (only) the seventh Jew to return to Chmielnik following World War II. (Kaminsky arrived on the scene there somewhat later, by which time, a few more Jews had also returned to Chmielnik.) Nonetheless, she recalls how one Pole greeted her with the remark, “Somehow, all of the Jews are returning.” See: Gitla Fastag, interview by Benjamin Weiner, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Brooklyn, NY, November 21, 1995.

been turned into a market place.’”⁸⁸⁷ Not only were the headstones in the Chmielnik Jewish cemetery appropriated to pave streets in town, but it was a common practice for locals there and elsewhere throughout Poland to use the headstones for whetstones or grinding discs and as “small sharpening stones for scythes and knives.”⁸⁸⁸ Such grinding wheels could be readily acquired in the 1940s and 1950s at local fairs. By 2015, the Chmielnik Jewish cemetery was so barren of fully intact headstones that when Marianna Opalka, a native of the town was interviewed at that time, she stated that the Jews “‘didn’t have any monuments, they only had ‘discs’ with inscriptions.’”⁸⁸⁹

Mordechai Goldstein, who was liberated by the Soviets in January 1945, returned shortly thereafter to his hometown to search for other surviving family members—or at least, for information about their fate. He found no relatives, nor did any of the Poles whom he encountered indicate knowing anything about their fate or whereabouts. Goldstein encountered a familiar Pole named Janczak who informed him that there was a Jewish family residing at a particular address, and so Goldstein promptly located it. The family there was that of the previously discussed Shores—the mother, daughter, and three sons—who had only just come out of hiding after two-and-a-half years and returned to Chmielnik only two days prior. Nor did they have any information about other fellow Jews.⁸⁹⁰

⁸⁸⁷ Krzysztof Bielawski, *Zagłada cmentarzy żydowskich* [Destruction of Jewish Cemeteries] (Warsaw, Poland: Biblioteka "Więzi," 2020), 123. See also: “Correspondence re: the cemetery in Chmielnik,” Oct. 20, 1946, ŻIH Archives, Central Committee of Jews in Poland. Legal Department, 1945-1950, RG 303/16/130, 1-2.

⁸⁸⁸ Bielawski, *Zagłada cmentarzy żydowskich*, 130.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁰ Goldstein, *Be-Chmielnik hayu pa’am Yehudim* [In Chmielnik There Once Lived Jews], 149-150.

Goldstein would subsequently encounter another Jewish acquaintance, Feygl Skrobacka (later, Faye Goldlist), who likewise found her way to the Shore family. Goldstein and Skrobacka had lived only a few houses apart on the same street prior to the war and decided to accompany each other in revisiting their former domiciles. For the two former neighbors, this was clearly a journey filled with both hope and trepidation for what they would now find.⁸⁹¹ Following is the somber image that Goldstein paints of his reunion with his former childhood home:

We reached the house in which I had lived ... And here I was standing on the step beside the house in which I dwelled with my family, and it was burnt to the foundation. I was standing and looking at the rubble. I do not know how long I stood like that, but I could not approach and search for anything among the ruins. I felt as if I were being held by force and I was unable to move from that spot. I stood and looked and did not say a single word. Feygele, who was beside me, only said: "This is what remains."⁸⁹²

After this heartbreaking encounter, the two returnees made their way to Skrobacka's former home, which was fully intact. However, the house was now inhabited by Poles who had known Skrobacka's family. Practically everything inside the house remained the same as before, except that the Skrobacka family photographs on the walls had been exchanged for different photographs of the Polish family, along with a large cross upon which an icon of Jesus Christ stood affixed. The sight of these changes and their juxtaposition with the otherwise familiar household surroundings prompted Skrobacka to fall down on the floor and break into bitter sobs. All her bottled-up emotional pain hit Skrobacka in those tearful minutes.⁸⁹³

⁸⁹¹ Ibid., 155.

⁸⁹² Ibid., 155-156.

⁸⁹³ Ibid., 156.

After Goldstein and Skrobacka left her former home, the two vowed never to set foot upon their former street or to look at it again. Shortly thereafter, Goldstein spotted some familiar Polish fellows on the street who made a point of looking away from him, as though to say that they had no interest in speaking with or knowing him. This unpleasant reception, coupled with Goldstein's former experiences that day, only confirmed for him, as he put it: "that there is no place for me here and at the first opportunity I have to leave here."⁸⁹⁴ In light of these sentiments, it should perhaps come as no surprise that Goldstein remarks that he remained in Chmielnik for less than a week total.⁸⁹⁵

Marta Cherston (née Poper), who returned to Chmielnik only one week prior to the Kielce pogrom, in June 1946, states in her Shoah Foundation testimony that during her brief visit, "I found nothing ... a town without Jews."⁸⁹⁶ According to Cherston, in the town's marketplace there was a group of Poles, one of whom recognized her because they had attended public school together prior to the war. He proceeded to question Cherston—then Poper—in a hostile manner: "Popper, tell me, how come you survived the war?"⁸⁹⁷ Cherston remarks that these words, along with the fact that her former home was no longer standing, only overgrown with grass, propelled her and her accompanying friend to leave Chmielnik within only a matter of a few hours. As soon as she and her friend were able, they got on a bus and left Chmielnik—

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁶ Marta Cherston, interview by Leo Rechter, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Flushing, NY, May 23, 1995.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

for good. In Cherston's concluding assessment of her brief return postwar visit to Chmielnik:
“And that's it what [*sic*] I saw from Chmielnik. Nothing, just bad memories.”⁸⁹⁸

Uri Diamant's return to Chmielnik shortly following his return to Poland from the Soviet Union, where he had spent most of the war years, was somewhat more varied. Diamant mentions arriving in Chmielnik and finding the stores dark and inactive. He finally arrived at his own prewar home, which was now inhabited by Poles who knew him and allowed him to walk around freely inside his former house. When he next came to the house in which he was born, the Gentile Polish neighbors, who still remembered him from his earliest years, responded: “You are not Urysz ... What a ghost has returned!”⁸⁹⁹ These same individuals seemed genuinely glad that Diamant had survived the war, and even brought him before their entire family. Yet, in contrast to this warm welcome, Diamant also mentions encountering two Poles on the street whom he knew who responded with: “Are you returning to collect your father's debts [i.e., money owed to his father]?”⁹⁰⁰

In other cases where Jews returned to Chmielnik, such as that of Dorothy Riseman (née Dora Lukawitz, b. 1921), the encounters with prewar Poles were likewise emotionally laden. At the same time, the town's changed landscape was of a generally anxiety-provoking and negative nature. According to Riseman, she returned to Chmielnik shortly after the war's end, remaining there for two weeks, at most. While there, she sought out a local and rather religious Polish

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁹ Uri Diamant, interview by Naomi Oron, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Rehovot, Israel, February 9, 1998.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Catholic woman named “Andzia” who had worked for her family and knew her well. Andzia informed Dorothy that her 14-year-old sister, Bracha, had been murdered by Poles and now lay buried in the local Jewish cemetery. Andzia also warned Dorothy that she should get out of town because Jews were not wanted there. In Andzia’s words, “‘You’re not secure here. You leave. I’m praying for you. But leave. Don’t stay here.’”⁹⁰¹ After learning about the fate of her younger sister, Dorothy was able to assemble 10 Jewish men to say Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, at the local Jewish cemetery. But after that, she had no reason to remain in Chmielnik. Instead, she moved on to nearby Kielce, where many other Chmielnik Jews had also decided to congregate.⁹⁰² Little did she know what she would soon encounter in the nearby city.

Chmielnik Jews in the Kielce Pogrom of July 4, 1946

By early July 1946, at the time of the Kielce pogrom, there were 14 Jews remaining in Chmielnik.⁹⁰³ However, they, too, gave up the idea of resettling there, because of “the hostility shown by the local Polish population.”⁹⁰⁴ Moreover, as many as four Jews from Chmielnik may have been murdered in the pogrom in Kielce: Shmuel Weinberg, Mendl Mikolowski (b. 1912), Moyshe-Yudl Eisenberg (b. 1920), and Sholem Plotno (b. 1917).⁹⁰⁵ At least three additional

⁹⁰¹ Dorothy Riseman, interview by Linda Davidson, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, June 19, 1996.

⁹⁰² See: Ibid.

⁹⁰³ Some sources, though, say there were only 10 Jews residing in Chmielnik at that time. See for instance: Yisrael Turkeltaub, “Chmielnik Victims in the Kielce Pogrom,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 928.

⁹⁰⁴ Krakowski, “Chmielnik,” 657.

⁹⁰⁵ Yisrael Turkeltaub, “The Chmielnik Victims of the Kielce Pogrom,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 10 (1971): 6; Turkeltaub, “Chmielnik Victims in the Kielce Pogrom,” 928; Yosef Kantor,

individuals from Chmielnik were seriously wounded. This included a woman who was seven or eight months pregnant at the time. She managed to survive, but her unborn child died and was buried along with the other Jewish victims, in Kielce's Jewish cemetery.⁹⁰⁶ The other two injured Jews were Melech Glajt (subsequently known also as Max Glait) and Yisrael Turkeltaub, both of whom later recounted their experiences in articles written for *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora*.⁹⁰⁷ Following the Kielce pogrom, the last known remnants of pre-World War II Chmielnik Jewry left Chmielnik for good, immigrating primarily to such countries as Israel, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

"Chmielnik Without Jews," *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 28 (1989): 16. An incomplete list of 18 murdered pogrom victims issued in late July 1946 mentions both Mendl Mikolowski and Sholem Plotno, but only specifically indicates that Mikolowski was a native of Chmielnik. The other murdered Chmielnik victims of the pogrom are not mentioned in this list. See: Y. Shmulevitsh, "Temporary List of the Murdered Jews in Kielce," *Forverts* [New York], July 24, 1946, 3. There is some discrepancy between different Kielce pogrom victims lists when it comes to Sholem Plotno and his wife, who was severely injured in the pogrom. Yet, most sources indicate that Golda Plotno actually survived. What is more, Yosef Kantor (mentioned above), relates that his relative, "Sholem Plotno," who had been a sergeant in the Red Army during World War II, was among those murdered in the Kielce pogrom. Hence, I have to assume that it was indeed Sholem Plotno who perished in the pogrom. The dates of birth of all, but one of the four victims mentioned above, is noted by Jarosław Dulewicz and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, in the following article: Dulewicz, Jarosław, and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "'An Unfinished Story': Genealogy of the Kielce Pogrom Victims (Selected Problems and New Research Possibilities)," *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 18 (2020): 163-188. According to Dulewicz and Tokarska-Bakir, Sholem Plotno may actually have been a native of Chęciny—not of Chmielnik. Also, the aforementioned authors do not account for Shmuel Weinberg at all in their article. For a chart bearing names of supposed pogrom victims and their corresponding dates of birth and places of origin, see also pages 179-180 of the previously mentioned article.

⁹⁰⁶ Turkeltaub, "The Chmielnik Victims of the Kielce Pogrom," 6; Kiman, "A Witness to History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 26. For a list of the Kielce pogrom victims, which includes names of Jews from Chmielnik, see: Schiller, "The History of Anti-Semitism in Kielce," 35.

⁹⁰⁷ Glait, "The Kielce Pogrom," 5; Turkeltaub, "The Chmielnik Victims of the Kielce Pogrom," 5-6. Glait's frightening post-pogrom physical state is also commented on by relatives and other Chmielnikers who visited him as he recovered from his serious injuries in the hospital. See for example: Gitel Garfinkel-Bresco, "July 4, 1946—Black Day for Survivors as Pogrom Breaks out in Kielce," *The Canadian Jewish News* [Montreal; Toronto, Canada], July 2, 1981, 5; Etki Ajzenman, "In Memory of the Kielce Pogrom," *Lebns-fragn* [Tel-Aviv, Israel], July 1, 1984, 12; Ruth Zeitlin, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 5, 2021; Rosalie Halstuch, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 2, 2021; Heather Solomon, "Daughters of Survivors Reveal Secrets in New Play," *The Canadian Jewish News* [Toronto, Canada], March 21, 2019, [Daughters of survivors reveal secrets in new play \(cjnews.com\)](https://www.cjnews.com/daughters-of-survivors-reveal-secrets-in-new-play) (accessed 4-24-21).

In order to better grasp the tragic events surrounding the Kielce pogrom from the context of Chmielnik, it is necessary to introduce some of the individual figures and their stories as they factored into that bloody day: July 4, 1946, and its aftermath. One of the leading figures was the aforementioned Melech Glajt. Other figures, although more tangentially, were those of the previously mentioned Tema Friedman (then Frydman), her husband, Icek, and daughter, Anna Prager (then Frydman), who was approximately 10 years old at the time. According to her written account, Prager's parents were supposed to meet friends in a nearby home for a social gathering. Yet, because she was not feeling well, they remained at home to care for her, rather than attend the gathering. As a result, they serendipitously avoided quite possibly being massacred, along with over 40 Jews on that day.⁹⁰⁸

Also present in Kielce that day was the aforementioned Morris Kwasniewski, then more commonly known as “Mietek” Kwaśniewski, who was Director of Personnel for the Kielce voivodeship's Office of Security—the Urząd Bezpieczeństwa or “UB.”⁹⁰⁹ The UB, which was deployed throughout Poland, served as the secret police force in the country's Communist-controlled regime, beginning in 1944.⁹¹⁰ Kwaśniewski himself was employed by the UB from

⁹⁰⁸ Prager, *I Remember*, 51.

⁹⁰⁹ Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą: społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2018) (Vol. 1), 325-328; Uri Diamant, interview by Naomi Oron, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Rehovot, Israel, February 9, 1998; Moyshe (“Mietek”) Kwaśniewski, “With the Partisans in the Chmielnik Area,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 860; “Alter (Albert) Grinboym [Grinbaum]—A Postwar Victim,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 931-932. For a basic and literal definition of the “UB,” see for instance: Łukasz Kamiński and Jan Żaryn, eds., *Reflections on the Kielce Pogrom* (Warsaw: Institute of National Remembrance, 2006), 141.

⁹¹⁰ Gross, *Fear*, 14.

January 30, 1945 until December 31, 1946.⁹¹¹ The force, which was in plainclothes and received extensive support from the NKVD—the Soviet secret police, was charged with “detecting and countering activities that might damage, threaten, or undermine the country covertly, either from within or from outside its borders.”⁹¹² From 1944 until 1947, the NKVD together with the Red Army, introduced a Communist reign of terror throughout Poland. From the perspective of Soviet Russia, Poland was simply viewed as an extension of the Soviet state. During this period, many leading politicians and soldiers affiliated with the Polish Underground State—the Home Army—which actively resisted both Poland’s German and Soviet occupiers during World War II, were imprisoned. Some died in prison under unexplained circumstances. In certain cases, these were Soviet-established prisons in Poland that functioned in former Nazi camps. For all these reasons, Polish society resented and feared the presence of the NKVD, which remained stationed in Poland until March 1947.⁹¹³

Dorothy Riseman, who at the time was married to her first husband, another Chmielniker named Albert (or Alter) Grinbaum (1918-1946), was likewise present in Kielce on the day of the pogrom.⁹¹⁴ Like Kwaśniewski, Grinbaum was an important figure in Kielce’s local Office of

⁹¹¹ “Kwaśniewski, Mieczysław (Moszek),” Bulletin of Public Information, Personal Data from the Directory of Security Apparatus Officers <https://katalog.bip.ipn.gov.pl/informacje/655034> (accessed 3-28-22).

⁹¹² Harold D. Nelson, *Poland, a Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Dept. of the Army: For sale by the Dept. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1983), 328-329.

⁹¹³ Karol Wołek, “A Post-War War. The Years of 1944-1963 in Poland,” *The Warsaw Institute Review* 7 (2018): 107-109; Jean Carpentier, et al. *The Emergence of Human Rights in Europe: An Anthology* (Strasbourg: Council of European Publishing, 2001), 140.

⁹¹⁴ Margie Levitt, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 11, 2021. Polish anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir’s in-depth work on the Kielce pogrom includes an entire profile as well as documentation pertaining to Grinbaum (or Grynbaum). See: Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą* (Vol. 1), 328-330, 468; (Vol. 2), 378-379.

Security: the deputy head of the County Office of the UB.⁹¹⁵ Following the war, Grinbaum was instrumental in helping bring to justice Poles who had collaborated with the Germans in murdering Jews. Hence, he was a “wanted man” among some of the nationalist Polish underground factions, including members of the Armia Krajowa, or “Home Army.”⁹¹⁶

On July 4, 1946, Melech Glajt’s birthday,⁹¹⁷ Glajt resided temporarily at the home of his friend, Mietek Kwaśniewski. As mentioned in several accounts, Kwaśniewski was a war hero who had served in the Tadeusz Kościuszko Division, part of the Polish Army that formed in the USSR in 1943 and participated in the fighting alongside the Red Army.⁹¹⁸ In the words of Klemens Nussbaum, the Soviet Union created the army “to enable the Poles to participate in the war against the Germans” and armed and equipped the army, “which was to safeguard politically and militarily the operation of imposing a communist government on Poland.”⁹¹⁹ By May 1944, the Kościuszko Army (as he refers to it) was more than 100,000 strong—the size of a

⁹¹⁵ Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Conflict in the Wake of World War II* (Boulder: East European Monographs; New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2003), 74.

⁹¹⁶ Dorothy Riseman, interview by Linda Davidson, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, June 19, 1996. Originally, Grinbaum was appointed director of the UB in Skarżysko following World War II, but due to his dangerous line of work, he was subsequently transferred to the UB in Kielce. See also: “Alter (Albert) Grinboym [Grinbaum]—A Postwar Victim,” 931-932.

⁹¹⁷ Supposedly, Glajt’s actual date of birth was November 12, 1912. See: Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą* (Vol. 1), 467.

⁹¹⁸ See for example: “Moyshe Kwaśniewski (Toronto),” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnik in Israel and Diaspora* 20 (1981): 28.

⁹¹⁹ Klemens Nussbaum, “Jews in the Kościuszko Division and First Polish Army,” in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-46*, edited by Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991), 183. See also: Moyshe (“Mietek”) Kwaśniewski, “With the Partisans in the Chmielnik Area,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile [Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community]*, edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 855.

full army—and renamed the First Polish Army (*1 Armia Wojska Polskiego*).⁹²⁰ According to Adam Broner, a Polish Jew from Łódź who served in the rank of a corporal in the Kościuszko Division, it welcomed Jews into its ranks and as a result, had a sizable Jewish volunteer constituency.⁹²¹

As a reward for his stellar wartime service,⁹²² Kwaśniewski was not only decorated with several military medals,⁹²³ but was also granted a large home in which to reside when he was appointed to the UB in Kielce. A number of his kinsmen from Chmielnik who arrived in Kielce following the war, resided temporarily at his home. In the words of Anna Prager, who recalls residing in “Cousin Mietek’s” ample surroundings: “Mietek [sic] was a war hero. He had joined the resistance when he lost track of Fela [i.e., his wife; a cousin of Anna Prager and her parents].

⁹²⁰ Officially, this military entity was known as the Polish 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division and was under the command of General Zygmunt Berling. See for instance: *Poland: A Handbook* (Warsaw, Poland: Interpress, 1977), 95.

⁹²¹ Broner, *My War Against the Nazis*, 64, 67, 70. Antony Polonsky bolsters Broner’s statistical claim about the size of the First Polish Army and asserts that many of the Jews who joined these military ranks viewed it as the only means by which they would be able to return to Poland. See: Polonsky, “Foreword,” xv.

⁹²² In his military position, Kwaśniewski served as a parachutist assigned to seek out and aid Polish partisans who were aligned with the pro-Soviet underground entity known as the “Armia Ludowa” [i.e., the “Polish People’s Army”]. While in this capacity, Kwaśniewski detonated several German trains carrying weapons and military equipment for the Third Reich. He also blew up seven trains that altogether carried hundreds of German S.S. officers.

⁹²³ “Moyshe Kwaśniewski (Toronto)”: 28; Moyshe (“Mietek”) Kwaśniewski, “With the Partisans in the Chmielnik Area,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 860. Bernard Kwasniewski, the son of Mietek Kwaśniewski (later, Morris Kwasniewski) informed me that he still has in his possession the several military medals that his father received in postwar Poland for his wartime feats. See: Bernard Kwasniewski, telephone interview with author, written transcript, May 8, 2021.

He lived in a large house with many rooms; I had never seen anything so spacious. The living room was large enough to accommodate a grand piano!”⁹²⁴

According to Kwaśniewski’s [Kwasniewski’s] recollection of July 4, 1946, he was awakened at 6:00 o’clock that morning by a soldier who informed him that “there was trouble brewing in town.”⁹²⁵ This, apparently, was no great shock to Kwaśniewski, who suspected that the unrest was political in nature. For not only did Kielce have a long history of antisemitism, it (and the surrounding province) also had the largest documented number of Jewish deaths by violence in comparison to other Polish provinces in the aftermath of the war.⁹²⁶ Kwaśniewski appears to have attributed these murders of Jews to nationalistic Poles who opposed the new Polish government and had collaborated with the German occupiers during the recent war.⁹²⁷ Moreover, there had just been a political referendum on the 30th of June to determine the future direction of the Polish government. The pro-Communist faction had won in an election that was

⁹²⁴ Prager, *I Remember*, 48. According to Bernard Kwasniewski, who was not yet born at the time his parents lived in postwar Poland, when his parents finally left Poland for Israel in 1957, shortly following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, they debated whether to bring this piano with them. Bernard also mentioned that the large apartment in which his father and mother, Fela, resided in Kielce, had previously been a mansion and that because it had indoor plumbing and hot running water, various relatives who passed through Kielce following the war, went there to take hot showers. Clearly, even in post-World War II Poland, these were not everyday household features to be taken merely for granted. See: Bernard Kwasniewski, telephone interview with author, written transcript, May 8, 2021.

⁹²⁵ Kwasniewski, “Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom,” 45.

⁹²⁶ Historian David Engel cites figures demonstrating that between September 1944 and September 1946, there were a total of 327 Jews killed through violent means in 102 Polish locations. Out of this total number, 104 of these violent deaths occurred in Kielce Province—far more than in any of the other accounted for provinces in Poland. See: Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence”: 49-50. See also: Adam Kopciowski, “Anti-Jewish Incidents in the Lublin Region in the Early Years After World War II,” *Zagłada Żydów Studia i Materiały* 4 (2008): 177-178; Marta Marzańska-Mishani, “An Ordinary Town: The Kielce Pogrom Reexamined,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 49 (2021): 197.

⁹²⁷ Kwasniewski, “Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom,” 45.

widely recognized as having been rigged. Hence, there was a great deal of anti-government sentiment in the region.⁹²⁸

On the other hand, Polish anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, who has written the most definitive work to-date on the Kielce pogrom in the form of *Pod klątwą: społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego* [Under the Curse: A Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom], presents a more nuanced picture of the various underlying factors leading up to the tragic events of July 4, 1946. She demonstrates that the Kielce pogrom was not merely politically motivated or that it was mainly about an anti-Communist/pro-nationalist versus pro-Communist social divide in which all Jews were purported to be Communists or Communist supporters. In short, what she evinces is that the commonly held assertion “that postwar pogroms and murders were politically motivated is false. She documents and demonstrates that such an assumption was a coverup of an inability to admit to and deal with the prevalent institutionalized antisemitism.”⁹²⁹

Before he left for his post, Kwaśniewski met with a Chmielnik kinsman, Shmuel Weinberg, at his home. Weinberg had spent the war years in the Soviet Union under harsh conditions and had just returned from Chmielnik,⁹³⁰ where he had sold off his father’s house for 22,000 złoty in hand. He was planning on returning there again to receive the remainder owed to him. As a result, Weinberg was in good spirits, and apparently said that he would now be going

⁹²⁸ Regarding the rigged election of June 1946 and its direct correlation to the Kielce pogrom, only a few days later, see for example: Gross, *Fear*, 22-26; Max Glait, interview by Marc Hillel, Living Testimonies, McGill University, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Montreal, Canada, 1989.

⁹²⁹ See: Marzańska-Mishani, “An Ordinary Town”: 198.

⁹³⁰ Shmerke Kacerginski, “What I Saw and Heard in Kielce,” in *Shmerke Katsherginski: ondenk-bukh* [Szmerke Kacerginski: Memorial Book], by Szmerke Kacerginski (Buenos Aires: Published by a Committee, 1955), 388.

down a new path in life.⁹³¹ Weinberg mentioned that he was headed over to the Jewish Committee building, at Planty Street, no. 7. But Kwaśniewski warned Weinberg to avoid the Jewish Committee building. In his words: “Don’t go over there, there is a pogrom mood.”⁹³² Weinberg did not heed this warning and was subsequently murdered in the pogrom.

The building at Planty 7, which still stands today, is where the vast majority of the Jewish returnees from the Soviet Union, the concentration camps, partisans, and elsewhere resided in Kielce, as they received temporary aid from the “Joint.”⁹³³ Among them were several Zionist kibbutz members planning to immigrate to Palestine as soon as possible. The returnees figured there was safety in numbers, one of the reasons why so many Chmielnik natives had congregated in Kielce rather than in their hometown.

At about 8:00 a.m., a Polish boy named Henryk Błaszczyk who had been well coached, began telling passers-by that he had been kidnapped, imprisoned in a cellar, and maltreated by the Jews of 7 Planty Street, the site “where about a dozen other Christian children were still trapped and about to be murdered.”⁹³⁴ In the minds of many local Poles, this charge was perhaps

⁹³¹ Chaya Rozenblum-Frucht, “Shmuel Weinberg—The Victim of the Kielce Pogrom,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*], edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 930.

⁹³² Ibid.

⁹³³ Prior to World War II, several Jewish families had resided at Planty 7 in Kielce. During the war, the local Gestapo’s headquarters were housed there. Following the war, once the building stood empty, the local magistrate permitted returning Jewish refugees to live there. The Jews who resided in the building at the time of the Kielce pogrom, overwhelmingly, did not intend to remain in Poland long-term, or in most cases, in Europe, for that matter. In the interim, as these war-beaten Jews attempted to locate missing relatives and re-establish themselves, the “Joint” provided brotherly aid to these and other Jews living in postwar Poland. See: Y. Shmulevitsh, “The Jewish Victim and Witness,” *Forverts* [New York], June 29, 1946, 3.

⁹³⁴ Michael Checinski, “The Kielce Pogrom: Some Unanswered Questions,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 5 (1), 1975: 59.

all the more believable, considering that there had been multiple incitements only a month earlier, in which Jews had been accused of killing Christian children and using their blood for dietary consumption.⁹³⁵

At 10:00 a.m., militiamen searched the house and found the whole story false. At the same time, they confiscated the few weapons with which some of the kibbutz members were armed.⁹³⁶ Apparently, the head militiaman who requested that the Jews of Planty 7 hand over their weapons so that they not shoot at the gathering crowd, was none other than a previously mentioned Chmielniker, Albert Grinbaum. Consequently, “the Jews gave away the weapons; they received a guarantee from the [security] agents that the police would protect them.”⁹³⁷

Shortly before he was shot dead, Dr. Seweryn Kahane, Chairman of the Kielce Jewish Committee,⁹³⁸ attempted to appeal to various officials: the president of the city, the militia, the

⁹³⁵ In the early postwar years rumors of ritual murder were frequently used as highly effective tools to incite ordinary citizens to commit overt antisemitic acts—of which the Kielce pogrom of 1946 was the most infamous example. There were several versions to this blood libel charge, one of which had the Jews keeping the blood of the murdered Polish victims and giving their bodies to the Soviets and Ukrainians. See: Joanna Michlic-Coren, “Polish Jews During and After the Kielce Pogrom: Reports from the Communist Archives,” *Polin* 13 (2000): 256.

⁹³⁶ Yitzhak “Antek” Zuckerman (1915-1981) was a Zionist youth leader who fought in the Warsaw ghetto uprising and was based in the country’s capital at the time of the Kielce pogrom. Upon learning that a pogrom had taken place in Kielce, he made a point of traveling to the beleaguered city several hours following the tragedy. According to him, members of the UB and the militia demanded that Kielce’s Jewish community turn over their few rifles and guns the day prior to the pogrom. Furthermore, Zuckerman contended that the security forces’ lack of response to the pogrom victims was an obvious indicator that the UB had collaborated with the rioters to perpetrate the pogrom. See: Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 660-661.

⁹³⁷ Jews who returned to Poland after the war received weapons with which to defend themselves against hostile and violent antisemites. However, in the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom, Jews in Poland with the help of the Jewish self-defense network succeeded in acquiring a far larger number of weapons than prior to the pogrom—as many as 2,000. See: Shimon Redlich, *Life in Transit: Jews in Postwar Lodz, 1945-1950* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 62. Regarding Grinbaum’s role in the confiscation of weapons, see: Y. Shmulevitch, “The Jewish Victim and Witness,” *Forverts* [New York], June 29, 1946, 3.

⁹³⁸ S. L. Shneiderman was a Polish-born American journalist who happened to be visiting Poland at the time that the Kielce pogrom broke out and came to Kielce as the pogrom was drawing to a close. He provided the following biographical information and observations regarding Dr. Kahane: “Dr. Kahane was born in Lwow. Throughout the

army, the security authorities, the command of the Soviet troops, and Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek (1895-1963)—the bishop of Kielce at the time (who was then out of town)—but it was all to no avail.⁹³⁹

As the first shots rang out on the second floor of Planty 7, Dr. Kahane immediately telephoned Mietek Kwaśniewski from the UB, asking him to appeal in Kahane's name to Provincial Governor Eugeniusz Wiślicz-Iwańczyk (then away on sick leave) to have him ask Bishop Kaczmarek to placate the incited masses. The bishop, however, declined. Regarding Bishop Kaczmarek, M. Kwasniewski ironically added that "this was the same Catholic bishop who came forward with bread and salt to greet the Nazis when they marched into Kielce in 1939."⁹⁴⁰ Dr. Kahane was even offered safe passage from the building by the governor, but categorically refused the offer, stating that so long as even one Jew remained in the building, he would not leave. While still on the telephone with Kwaśniewski, Dr. Kahane was shot dead by an unknown Polish Army lieutenant. In M. Kwasniewski's words: "Just then, over the phone I heard a loud shot followed by a dull thud. Dr. Kahane went down, shot by a military officer."⁹⁴¹

At about 11 o'clock three lieutenants of the Polish Army entered the room in which Kahane was located at that moment. When the officers came into the room, Dr. Kahane held the telephone receiver in his hand ... They told him they had come to remove weapons ... One of

Nazi occupation he fought in the ranks of the Polish guerillas. At the end of the war he settled in Kielce, where he assumed leadership of the remaining Jews, who numbered one hundred fifty ... Dr. Kahane died a martyr, appealing with his last breath to the conscience of his murderers." Shneiderman, *Between Fear and Hope*, 91.

⁹³⁹ Dorothy Riseman, interview by Linda Davidson, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, June 19, 1996.

⁹⁴⁰ Kwasniewski, "Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom," 45.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., 44.

them walked up to Dr. Kahane, told him to keep calm because soon everything would be over, and then approached him from behind and shot him straight in the head.⁹⁴²

Indeed, the Polish Roman Catholic Church—the predominant religious umbrella for all of Poland—responded that it would not intercede, for the Jews had brought Communism into Poland and thus, were themselves culpable for the Kielce pogrom.⁹⁴³ In the aftermath of the pogrom, only Bishop Teodor Kubina of Częstochowa (1880-1951) would issue a statement condemning the Kielce pogrom and the blood libel that instigated it, and he was promptly rebuked for doing so.⁹⁴⁴

⁹⁴² Bożena Szaynok, "The Pogrom of Jews in Kielce, July 4, 1946," *Yad Vashem Studies* 22 (1992): 216. See also: Kwasniewski, "Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom," 45; Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Pogrom Cries: Essays on Polish-Jewish History, 1939-1946* (Frankfurt am Main; New York, NY: Peter Lang Edition, 2017), 257-258, 263. It is unknown to this day precisely who murdered Dr. Kahane. According to Yisrael Turkeltaub, a Chmielniker who scarcely survived the pogrom and witnessed the shooting of Dr. Kahane, he was never called as a witness to testify in the case of Dr. Kahane's death. Nor was he ever asked to identify the doctor's murderer. Furthermore, at the public trial following the pogrom, the question of who had disarmed the Jews and shot dead the Jewish leader was never even raised. See: Michael Checinski, *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Antisemitism* (Princeton, NJ: Karz-Cohl Publishers, 1982), 27-28.

⁹⁴³ For further elaboration on the subject of the Polish Roman Catholic Church's response to violence targeting Jews in Poland following World War II, see for example the first-person accounts related by Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum (1887-1961), then President of the American and World Federation for Polish Jews. Tenenbaum conveys the fruitlessness of his meeting with Cardinal Hłond in early June 1946 (approximately one month before the Kielce pogrom); and his subsequent written appeal to Pope Pius XII, shortly following the Kielce pogrom. Joseph Tenenbaum, *In Search of a Lost People: The Old and New Poland* (New York: Beechhurst Press, 1948), 235-243. See also: Natalia Aleksium, "The Polish Catholic Church and the Jewish Question in Poland, 1944-1948," *Yad Vashem Studies* 33 (2005): 151, 157-158.

⁹⁴⁴ Gross, *Fear*, 135; Aleksium, "The Polish Catholic Church": 160-161. Aside from Bishop Kubina, other Polish Catholic representatives did not openly condemn this vicious act. Rather, they attributed the outbreak of the pogrom to political—as opposed to—racial animosities and "'blamed Jews in the government for creating animosities' leading to such events." Last, according to the Bishop of Lublin in the wake of the pogrom, "the question as to whether or not Jews use blood for their rituals has not yet been clarified." Peter Meyer, *Jews in the Soviet Satellites* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1953), 253. Despite the majority opinion of the Polish Roman Catholic Church, the aforementioned Jewish journalist, S. L. Shneiderman, took hope in the fact that there were some liberal Catholic intellectuals such as Bishop Kubina, who had the backbone to denounce the antisemitism surrounding the Kielce pogrom. See: Robert L. Cohn, "Early Postwar Travelers on the Future of Jewish Life in Poland," *The Polish Review* 53, no. 3 (2008), 330.

By 11:00 a.m. a vicious mob had gathered around, and militiamen began throwing Jews out of the windows and the door. Dorothy Riseman, whose husband, Albert Grinbaum, was on the scene at Planty 7 before the actual pogrom broke out, stated that “a young girl—maybe sixteen years old—was thrown out of the window and shot.”⁹⁴⁵ A number of Jews were murdered by the local lynch party. Still others, such as Dr. Kahane, met their ends by shooting. Roman Wach, a Pole who resided at Planty 13 and witnessed the vicious onslaught, presented the following image in the pogrom's aftermath:

At about 11:30, some eight young people coming from the direction of the railroad station on Sienkiewicza St. drove some men down the middle of the road ... He was hit with fists on the face and head ... from his face I could tell he was a Semite ... I would like to mention that as a former prisoner of concentration camps I had not gone through an experience like this ... I have seen very little of sadism and bestiality on this scale.⁹⁴⁶

Finally, at 4:00 p.m. an army unit from Warsaw arrived. It did not halt the looting, but rather, took an active part in the process. However, it did put an end to the massacre. In the wake of this brutal attack, many Jews were murdered, and even more were injured, most of them seriously. Due to the chaos at the time and the relatively small number of Jewish survivors, the numbers of injured and dead vary from source to source. The number of injured ranges from 70-100+, while the number of dead ranges from 36-70.⁹⁴⁷

⁹⁴⁵ Dorothy Riseman, interview by Linda Davidson, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, June 19, 1996. Although Riseman never names this young pogrom victim, it is quite possible that she was referring to either Belka Gertner (a native of nearby Ostrowiec), age 16, or Rachel Sonberg, age 14, at the time of their respective murders. The photographs of the two victims may be seen in the following work: Marc Hillel, *Le massacre des survivants: En Pologne après l'holocauste, 1945-1947* (Paris: Plon, c1985), between 172 and 173.

⁹⁴⁶ Szaynok, "The Pogrom of Jews in Kielce, July 4, 1946," 220.

⁹⁴⁷ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 662; Checinski, "The Kielce Pogrom: Some Unanswered Questions," 59.

Among the seriously injured victims of the pogrom were multiple Chmielnik natives, including the aforementioned Melech Glajt (later, Max Glait)⁹⁴⁸ and Yisrael Turteltaub (b. 1911).⁹⁴⁹ Genia Samborska (also known as Golda Płotno, b. 1923⁹⁵⁰) was not from Chmielnik proper, although she appears to have had close relatives there.⁹⁵¹ The case of Samborska was indeed so heartbreaking, that it is frequently singled out in the retelling of the pogrom's events. For she was seven or eight months pregnant at the time of the pogrom and was intentionally stabbed through the belly. According to Dorothy Riseman, this crime was committed by a mere Polish lad who was all of 10 years old. The woman survived the attack, but her unborn child died as a result of the trauma.⁹⁵²

Glajt was left for dead—as was Turkeltaub—together with the corpses, but Dr. Balanowski, another Chmielnik native who worked in a medical capacity for the local UB,⁹⁵³

⁹⁴⁸ Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą* (Vol. 1), 467.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., (Vol. 1), 481; (Vol. 2), 143-144.

⁹⁵⁰ In most references, this surviving pogrom victim is referred to as “Samborska,” however in some sources, she is alternately referred to as “Płotno.” Płotno appears to have been the woman's maiden name, while Samborska was her married name. See: Ajzenman, “In Memory of the Kielce Pogrom,” 12; Hillel, *Le massacre des survivants*, between 172 and 173; Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą* (Vol. 1), 478.

⁹⁵¹ According to Tokarska-Bakir, Samborska was born in Sandomierz, Poland. Nevertheless, there are several references to members of the Samborski [masculine for Samborska] family in the Chmielnik memorial book. That, coupled with the fact that Chmielnik survivor, Joseph Kiman, stated in his autobiographical account regarding Samborska, that: “She's a member of my Chmielnick [*sic*] society in New York,” would seem to indicate that Samborska did indeed have close familial ties to the town. See: Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą* (Vol. 1), 478; 1. Shedletski, ed., *Pinkes Khmielnik*, passim; Kiman, “A Witness to History,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 26.

⁹⁵² Sh. L. Shnayderman, *Tsvishn shrek un hofenung: (a rayze iber dem nayem Poyln)* [Between Fear and Hope: (A Journey Across the New Poland)] (Buenos-Aires, Argentina: Tsentral-farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1947), 101; Kaczerginski, “What I Saw and Heard in Kielce,” 386, 388; Dorothy Riseman, interview by Linda Davidson, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, June 19, 1996.

⁹⁵³ Chodakiewicz, *After the Holocaust*, 74. According to the previously mentioned, Stefan Dąbski, mayor of Chmielnik, who was questioned about wartime incidences in his town in October 1945, Dr. Balanowski was already

noted that both Glajt and Turkeltaub were still alive and subsequently had them transported to a hospital in Łódź.⁹⁵⁴ The move of the injured pogrom victims and other Jews to Łódź was orchestrated by Yitzhak “Antek” Zuckerman (1915-1981), a member of the Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ŻOB), who arrived in Kielce from Warsaw on the 5th of July. Zuckerman determined that it was not safe for Jews to remain in Kielce and saw to it that a special medical train that was heavily guarded by troops took the bulk of Kielce’s surviving Jews to Łódź. Indeed, Zuckerman, in his autobiographical account, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, states that during the transport of injured pogrom victims from Kielce to Łódź, he did not inform anyone of the train for which he was waiting, because he was afraid that even while en route to Łódź, the train could quite likely be attacked.⁹⁵⁵ In the words of M. Kwasniewski, who recalled the pogrom and its aftermath: “The authorities in Kielce were very much in fear that the antisemitic hoodlums would strike once more, that they would try to break into the hospital and finish up their bloodshed. The decision was, therefore, made to remove the wounded from Kielce as soon as possible.”⁹⁵⁶

residing in Kielce at the time of his interview. See: “*Chronicles of Terror*” testimony database, Dąbski, Stefan: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/3420/edition/3401/content?navq=aHR0cDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3l0ZXJyb3JlLnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9ZGFic2tpJTJDK3N0ZWZhbiZhY3Rpb249U2ltcGxIU2VhcmNoQWN0aW9uJm1kaXJpZHM9JnR5cGU9LTYmc3RhcnRzdHI9X2FsbcZwPTA&navref=Mm4xOzJtaSAybjI7Mm1qIkJuMDsybWggZ2o7ZzQ> (accessed 5-4-22).

⁹⁵⁴ Checinski, “The Kielce Pogrom: Some Unanswered Questions,” 65; Turkeltaub, “Chmielnik Victims in the Kielce Pogrom,” 928. Glajt’s sister, Gitel Garfinkel-Bresco, attributed her brother’s survival after being injured in the pogrom to the help of Dr. Balanowski, their friend, Moyshe Kwaśniewski, and the care of the Red Cross. Together, they saw to it that Glajt and other wounded individuals were transported on a special train to a hospital in Łódź. See: Garfinkel-Bresco, “Memories of My 80 Year Lifespan.”

⁹⁵⁵ Gross, *Fear*, 102; Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 663.

⁹⁵⁶ M. Kwasniewski, “Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom,” 44.

Glajt incurred such severe injuries to the head and wore so many bandages, that those who visited him in the hospital reported that he was practically unrecognizable. It would take him several months in the hospital until he finally recovered enough to be discharged. According to Glajt's sister, Gitel, who came to the hospital to care for her brother and the other wounded Jews, Glajt was so severely wounded that "not only could he not eat on his own; it was simply difficult to place a small spoon smoothly into his mouth."⁹⁵⁷ In the words of Chmielnik native, Etkajzenman: "I did not recognize it, the small body in bed ... Had he not told me that it was he, Melech Glajt, I would not have believed that it was he."⁹⁵⁸

On the same day, yet, as the Kielce pogrom, thousands of peasants began to assemble in Chmielnik. Evidently, news of the violence in Kielce had made its way to nearby Chmielnik, where there were under 20 Jews total at the time. Four Jews hid in the town magistrate building and managed to survive. Suddenly, around 5:30 pm, several vehicles bearing 10 heavily fortified soldiers arrived in Chmielnik. At the helm of the military was Etkajzenman, the chief secretary of the Kielce UB and a native of Chmielnik. She arrived in a military truck just in time to disperse a crowd of some 250 people who had gathered in the village square. The military opened fire on the mob, with Etkajzenman herself shooting a machine gun to the right and to the left. In this manner, Lewkowicz-Ajzenman and the accompanying military were able to avert another likely pogrom, this time in Chmielnik. Unfortunately, as Lewkowicz-Ajzenman learned

⁹⁵⁷ Garfinkel-Bresco, "Memories of My 80 Year Lifespan."

⁹⁵⁸ Ajzenman, "In Memory of the Kielce Pogrom," 12. Glajt's own niece, Ruth Zeitlin, who was approximately two years old at the time when she was taken along to visit her uncle in the hospital, recalled to me how she had nightmares for many years following this hospital visit of a "monster" with a swollen head lying in a bed inside of a white room. Only years after the fact, once Ruth was old enough to understand, did her mother, Gitel, explain to her the significance of this nightmare. Ruth Zeitlin, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 2, 2021.

while still in Chmielnik, other sites in the greater Kielce vicinity were not as lucky. “Small” pogroms had already broken out in Ostrowiec, Częstochowa, and Lublin, although Lewkowicz-Ajzenman was unaware of the number of victims.⁹⁵⁹ For example, in Ostrowiec, on March 19, 1945, four Jews were shot dead and six injured at the Krongold apartment; and in Lublin, 40 Jews were murdered between the months of April and June 1946. Furthermore, a pogrom was attempted in Ostrowiec at the same time as the Kielce pogrom. There were also physical assaults and murders of Jews perpetrated on the day of the Kielce pogrom on trains in the Kielce vicinity en route to Częstochowa; and at the same time as the Kielce pogrom, a pogrom was apparently averted in Częstochowa, where an individual who turned out not to be a Jew, was accused of having killed a Christian child.⁹⁶⁰

On July 8, 1946, the funeral for the mass burial of the pogrom victims took place at the Kielce Jewish cemetery. It was well-attended by as many as 25,000 people, according to M. Kwasniewski.⁹⁶¹ Yet, the underground press published in Kielce Province stated that many of these numbers were represented by clerks, factory workers, and even scouts who were explicitly

⁹⁵⁹ Turkeltaub, “Chmielnik Victims in the Kielce Pogrom,” 928; Hillel, *Le massacre des survivants*, 257, 280.

⁹⁶⁰ Regarding Ostrowiec, see: “Murders at the Krongold Apartment,” Jews of Ostrowiec <https://jewsofostrowiec.com/murders-at-the-krongold-apartment/>; Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “The Girl and the Painter. Ostrowiec, 19 March 1945,” Jews of Ostrowiec https://jewsofostrowiec.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Girl-and-the-Painter-revised-version_Feb14-2021-compr.pdf (accessed 2-8-23). Regarding Lublin, see: Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence”: 50; Kopciowski, “Anti-Jewish Incidents”: 177-178. Regarding Częstochowa, see for instance: Gross, *Fear*, 114. Regarding the averted pogroms in Ostrowiec and Częstochowa, see: Meyer, *Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, 253.

⁹⁶¹ Kwasniewski, “Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom,” 44.

ordered to attend by Edward Osóbka-Morawski (1909-1997), Poland's Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of National Unity, at the time.⁹⁶²

The mass funeral itself was presided over by Rabbi David Kahane (1903-1998),⁹⁶³ the chief military rabbi of the Polish Army. Speaking in the name of the entire Jewish community, the rabbi plainly attacked the Polish Roman Catholic Church, accusing it of fomenting the pogrom. In Kahane's words aimed at the general Polish public, but primarily at Church leaders: "It is up to the Polish clergy to put an end to the anti-Semitic agitation in this country."⁹⁶⁴ According to Jewish attendees of the funeral, the funeral concluded with the famous Cantor Moshe Koussevitzky (1899-1966) singing the "El Malei Rachamim" prayer for the deceased.⁹⁶⁵

Following the Kielce pogrom, on the 10th of July, there was a Supreme Court Martial trial, during which 12 individuals were tried and nine were found guilty and executed⁹⁶⁶ the following day. Albert Grinbaum, who had attempted to put down the pogrom, was said to have collected materials that incriminated the pogromists on trial, supposedly comforting himself with

⁹⁶² Kamiński and Żaryn, eds., *Reflections on the Kielce Pogrom*, 107.

⁹⁶³ Kahane immigrated to Israel after the Polish Army liquidated the Polish Army field rabbinate in 1949. In Israel he would go on to become Chief Rabbi of the Air Force. He also served as Chief Rabbi of Argentina between the years 1967-1975. For additional biographical details about Kahane's life, see: David Kahane, *Ahare ha-mabul: Nisayon lehehayot et ha-kehilot ha-datiyot be-Folin she leahar milhemet 'olam ha-shniyah (1944-1949)* (Jerusalem: Hotsa'ah Mosad Ha-rav Kuk, 1981); David Kahane, *Lvov Ghetto Diary* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990); David Patterson, Alan L. Berger, and Sarita Cargas, eds., *Encyclopedia of Holocaust Literature* (Westport, Conn.; London: Oryx Press, 2002), 76-77.

⁹⁶⁴ Hillel, *Le massacre des survivants*, between 172 and 173. See also: Aleksion, "The Polish Catholic Church": 144, 155.

⁹⁶⁵ Ajzenman, "In Memory of the Kielce Pogrom," 12.

⁹⁶⁶ Cohn, "Constructions of the Kielce Pogrom," 16.

the thought that the murderers would pay dearly for their crimes.⁹⁶⁷ During the trial, which Jan T. Gross aptly calls a “kangaroo court,” none of the pogrom victims were allowed into the courtroom or permitted to testify as witnesses.⁹⁶⁸ In the words of seriously injured pogrom victim, Yisrael Turkeltaub, who attested to witnessing the fatal shooting of Dr. Seweryn Kahane during the Kielce pogrom, “I was never summoned to the Procurator’s Office or the court to testify on the murder of Dr. Kahane or to identify his murderer.”⁹⁶⁹ In spite of the post-pogrom trials and hasty executions, antisemitism in Poland continued to flourish. “Only in 1947, when the government consolidated its power and used strong measures against the underground, was order restored. Attacks on Jews became rare. The superficial calm was a result of strong police measures rather than of a genuine change of mind on the part of broad segments of the population.”⁹⁷⁰

Only weeks after the pogrom, Albert Grinbaum, one of the senior UB members⁹⁷¹ who had been on the scene at Planty 7, died under suspicious circumstances. In the words of Margie Levitt, the daughter of Dorothy Riseman, who had formerly been married to Grinbaum, “He was

⁹⁶⁷ “Alter (Albert) Grinboym [Grinbaum]—A Postwar Victim,” 932.

⁹⁶⁸ Tokarska-Bakir, *Pogrom Cries*, 264; Gross, *Fear*, 157-158; Shmulevitsh, “The Jewish Victim and Witness,” 3. According to Dorothy Riseman, many participants in the pogrom were arrested, but the vast majority of them were set free. Ultimately, only nine individuals were executed. In her estimation, there were some 300 individuals who were specifically “invited” to attend the trial in Kielce. Only invited individuals, according to her, were permitted to attend the trial. See: Dorothy Riseman, interview by Linda Davidson, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, June 19, 1996.

⁹⁶⁹ Checinski, “The Kielce Pogrom: Some Unanswered Questions,” 65.

⁹⁷⁰ Meyer, *Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, 253.

⁹⁷¹ More specifically, Albert Grinbaum served in the position of Deputy Manager for the UB’s District Public Service Office in Kielce from January 1, 1946, until August 7, 1946. See: “Grinbaum, Albert,” Bulletin of Public Information, Personal Data from the Directory of Security Apparatus Officers <https://katalog.bip.ipn.gov.pl/informacje/652601> (accessed 3-28-22).

assassinated by people involved in the pogrom.”⁹⁷² According to Riseman, in the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom, she informed her husband that she no longer wanted to remain in Poland. In her words to Grinbaum, as she recalled them years later: “This [i.e., the pogrom] finished me ... Poland for me is closed.”⁹⁷³ In the last weeks prior to his death, Grinbaum, who was fluent in French, was appointed to work for the Polish Embassy in France. Therefore, he and his wife were in the process of packing their belongings and readying themselves for their new lives outside of Poland.

As Riseman recalls, Grinbaum and a Jewish friend, his assistant, were suddenly called away shortly before she and her husband were due to leave Poland for France, to Warsaw, to take care of some so-called last-minute paperwork.⁹⁷⁴ While in transit in a taxi and coincidentally, without any bodyguards, their car was stopped by partisans on August 10, 1946, near Białobrzegi. Grinbaum, together with Henryk Ochin, from the Kielce voivodeship's Polska Partia Robotnicza (Polish Workers' Party), were then kidnapped and most likely shot the following day. More specifically, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir states that Grinbaum (and presumably his assistant) was murdered by members of the Polish underground.⁹⁷⁵ Grinbaum's premature death significantly limited the possibility of reconstructing the anti-Jewish events that had taken place only a few weeks earlier in Kielce. Moreover, with Grinbaum out of the way, this effectively meant that he was no longer available to testify against anyone in any trials as a direct

⁹⁷² Margie Levitt, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 11, 2021.

⁹⁷³ Dorothy Riseman, interview by Linda Davidson, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, June 19, 1996.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid.; Margie Levitt, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 11, 2021.

⁹⁷⁵ Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod kłótwą* (Vol. 1), 468. See also: Marzańska-Mishani, “An Ordinary Town”: 203.

witness to what had transpired during the actual pogrom.⁹⁷⁶ Following the killing of Grinbaum and his assistant, the remains of the two men were given to Riseman and a funeral was held for them in the Kielce Jewish cemetery. Apparently, the assassins were found and subsequently brought to trial. Soon thereafter, Dorothy Riseman left Kielce to live temporarily in Wrocław, until she ultimately immigrated to Toronto, Canada in June 1949.⁹⁷⁷

The outbreak of this major pogrom so soon after the Holocaust served as only the most blatant example of the hostility encountered by returning Jews. It convinced a large number of them that a Jewish community could not resume existence in Poland. Jews were seized with panic, and hundreds and thousands began to flee daily. According to Arthur Bliss Lane (1894-1956), American Ambassador to Poland during the years 1944-1947, following the pogrom, the Jewish exodus from Poland increased dramatically to a rate of 700 people daily.⁹⁷⁸ Within only a month of the pogrom, approximately 33,000 Jews fled Poland, and "in 1946, about 150,000 left

⁹⁷⁶ Kamiński and Żaryn, eds., *Reflections on the Kielce Pogrom*, 74-75; Tokarska-Bakir, *Pogrom Cries*, 263; Shmulevitsh, "The Jewish Victim and Witness," 3.

⁹⁷⁷ Dorothy Riseman, interview by Linda Davidson, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, June 19, 1996; Margie Levitt, telephone interview with author, written transcript, April 11, 2021.

⁹⁷⁸ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed: An American Ambassador Reports to the American People* (Indianapolis; New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1948), 253.

Poland."⁹⁷⁹ In the words of the Polish-born, American journalist, S. L. Shneiderman (1906-1996), and the first Western reporter on the scene following the Kielce pogrom:⁹⁸⁰

The Kielce massacre overshadows all other pogroms which stain the history of this bloody century. The pogroms of Kishinev, Proskurov, Pinsk, Brest and Przytyk hardly equal Kielce in sheer brutality, for the latter occurred in liberated Poland, after the Nazis had already slaughtered three million Polish Jews and almost as many Jews from other European countries ... It was on this anniversary of American liberty that the self-styled Polish patriots ... perpetrated the Kielce massacre. They slaughtered forty-two men, women and children, and gravely injured forty others. S. L. Shneiderman, *Between Fear and Hope*, pp. 85-86.

Postwar Justice for an S.S. Official Who Operated in Chmielnik During the War⁹⁸¹

One of the leading postwar trials of former S.S. officials that involved the testimonies of surviving Jews from Chmielnik is the following one to be discussed, which pertained to the previously mentioned, Hauptmann Gerulf Mayer. Indeed, the coverage of this trial was quite widespread and thorough in the contemporaneous Austrian press, as evidenced by author and Holocaust researcher Sabine Loitfellner, in her work, *Die Rezeption von*

Geschworenengerichtsprozessen wegen NS-Verbrechen in ausgewählten österreichischen

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid., 256. See also: Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 217. Holocaust scholar, Natalia Aleksion, further bolsters these numbers. According to her, due to the postwar violence perpetrated against Jews in Poland, between 1945 and 1947, close to 200,000 Jews left the country. See: Natalia Aleksion, "Jewish Responses to Antisemitism in Poland, 1944-1947," in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and in Its Aftermath*, edited by Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 256.

⁹⁸⁰ Hailing from the historic town of Kazimierz Dolny, Shneiderman immigrated to the United States in 1940 and trained as a journalist at Warsaw University. In addition to his English publications, Shneiderman wrote non-fiction works, poetry, and edited literary journals in Yiddish. Prior to his emigration from Poland, he was the Paris correspondent for several Jewish newspapers in Poland. In his journalistic capacity, he covered a number of the 20th century's most noteworthy events, including the Spanish Civil War and Poland before, during, and after the Second World War. See: Cohn, "Early Postwar Travelers," 326.

⁹⁸¹ I thank Annette Gendler for all the assistance she provided me by reviewing German language documents pertaining to the trial of Nazi official, Gerulf Mayer (and his co-collaborators), which is discussed in this section.

Zeitungen 1956-1975 [The Reception of Jury Trials for Nazi Crimes in Selected Austrian Newspapers 1956-1975]. According to Loitfellner, among the newspapers that frequently discussed this said trial were the *Salzburger Nachrichten* [Salzburg News], *Kleines Volksblatt* [Small Newspaper], and the *Neuer Kurier* [New Courier].⁹⁸²

In 1964, Chmielnik natives, Samuel Kalisz, Kalman Zelażnik [Zelaznik], and Rivka Mali testified in writing against Hauptmann Gerulf Mayer, whom they all clearly remembered from the period of German occupation. Kalisz recalled how Mayer had shot dead Shmuel Zalcman, the Chmielnik ghetto's second Judenrat elder, and had overseen the ghetto's roundups and deportations in 1942.⁹⁸³ Zelażnik [Zelaznik] specifically recalled Mayer shooting dead a child with the surname Igielnik, in October 1942.⁹⁸⁴ According to Mali, who had worked for the German gendarmerie in Chmielnik during the war, Mayer was stationed in Kielce and frequently came to nearby Chmielnik. During the roundup and deportation of Jews from the town square, Mali was an eyewitness to Mayer's direct shooting at Jewish townspeople.⁹⁸⁵

In her own postwar description of this horrific scene: "There were many dead. He held a revolver in his hand, ran without let up and shot left and right. I saw Mayer at the [town] square and without any reason, he shot children whom he caught, with his revolver."⁹⁸⁶ Mali proceeded

⁹⁸² For a broader discussion of these and other Austrian newspapers that covered the trial pertaining to Gerulf Mayer, see: Sabine Loitfellner (Jubiläumsfonds der Oesterreichischen Nationalbank), <http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/prozesse/geschworeneng/rezeption.pdf> (accessed 2-15-23).

⁹⁸³ Testimony of Samuel Kalisz, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.38/544, 8.

⁹⁸⁴ Testimony of Kalman Zelaznik, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.38/544, 1 [20].

⁹⁸⁵ Testimony of Riwka [sic] Mali, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.38/544, 7-8.

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid., 8.

to recall a particularly gruesome and senseless killing that Mayer perpetrated at this same time, which directly affected a woman named Tyzom who held an infant in her arms: “He tore the infant out of her arms, threw it onto the pavement, and then shot it. I witnessed this incident at a distance of 2 meters. Mayer was the terror of the Jewish population in Chmielnik, and he had many Jews [i.e., Jewish lives] on his conscience. During the resettlement operation he was always extremely active in its implementation and in giving orders to his subordinates.”⁹⁸⁷

In the 1998 testimony that Mali gave to Yad Vashem, she likewise recalled “Hauptmann Mayer,” who oversaw the deportation of Chmielnik Jewry on October 6, 1942. She also added that Mayer was ultimately put on trial in Austria for his wartime crimes, but that “he got nothing”—i.e., presumably, no conviction or jail time—“in spite of the fact that he was such a horrible killer.”⁹⁸⁸

On January 20, 1969, the Trial of Austrian Gendarmes for Murders in Central Poland (Kielce) 1941-1944 opened at the Regional Court of Graz, Austria that charged four Austrians with “murder or complicity in the murder of Jews in Poland while serving in the Nazi occupation police during World War II.”⁹⁸⁹ Included among these four was 59-year-old Gerulf Mayer, deemed a former police major, who was charged specifically with having committed murder. Among the witnesses who testified against Mayer at his trial were four former Jewish residents

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁸ Testimony of Rivka Mali, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/10530, 9.

⁹⁸⁹ “Trial Opens for 5 Austrians Charged with Murder, Complicity in Death of Poles,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York], January 21, 1969. The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* appears to have been incorrect in the number of individuals tried, as there were only four total: Gerulf Mayer, Alfred Lusser, Karl Popp, and Georg Unterberger. The trial would last until March 28, 1969. See: Sabine Loitfellner (Jubiläumsfonds der Oesterreichischen Nationalbank), <http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/prozesse/geschworeneng/rezeption.pdf> (accessed 2-15-23).

of Chmielnik who now resided in Israel: Yisrael-Yitzchak Rydelnik, Kalman Zelażnik [Zelaznik], Aryeh Wloch, and his brother, Yaakov [Jakob] Wloch.⁹⁹⁰

According to the *Salzburger Nachrichten* [Salzburg News], Zelażnik [Zelaznik], a 46-year-old witness who had been incarcerated in the Chmielnik ghetto until March 1943, declared that he had seen how Mayer had “shot a child in the ghetto”; Rydelnik (56 years old) declared that Mayer had fatally shot a woman in the ghetto in November 1942; and Yaakov [Jakob] Wloch (47 years old) confirmed that Mayer had shot a one-year-old child, also in the Chmielnik ghetto.⁹⁹¹ Based on their testimonies, in March, 1969, Mayer was only found guilty in conjunction with Chmielnik of having shot dead a few Jews in the year 1942.⁹⁹² Nevertheless, he initially received an 11-year prison sentence after being found guilty of “having murdered an adult and two children and of having participated in the liquidation of the Polish village of Polska-Skala,”⁹⁹³ in which “92 people were murdered,”⁹⁹⁴ including “23 women and 31 children.”⁹⁹⁵ In 1970, the Austrian Supreme Court reduced Mayer’s prison sentence to a 10-year-

⁹⁹⁰ Ben-Shlomo, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry in the Eyes of the Austrian Court of Law,” 4. See also: Yitzchak Rydelnik, “The Murderer of Chmielnik Jewry,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 8 (1969): 7; “This Is How the Jews of Chmielnik Were Killed”: 23.

⁹⁹¹ “Main Individual Accused is Charged,” *Salzburger Nachrichten* [Salzburg News], January 29, 1969, 3. See also: “This Is How the Jews of Chmielnik Were Killed”: 23.

⁹⁹² Albrich, *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht*, 109.

⁹⁹³ “2 Austrian Police Officials Sentenced in Gratz for Participating in Murders of Jews,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York], March 31, 1969. The Polish village in which this liquidation occurred is actually called Skałka Polska and is located within relative proximity to Kielce. See also: Tomasz Domański, “Michniów’s Pacification Before the Administration of Justice,” *Kuryer Kielecki* [Kielce Courier], July 11, 2013, 9.

⁹⁹⁴ Albrich, *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht*, 109. See also: “Guilty Verdicts and Acquittals in the Murder of Jews Trial: Graz Jury Sentenced Gerulf Mayer to Eleven ... Years in Prison,” *Salzburger Nachrichten* [Salzburg News], March 29, 1969, 11.

⁹⁹⁵ Albrich, *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht*, 108.

period, due to his advanced age of 60.⁹⁹⁶ Another documented reason for the reduced prison sentence passed in the aftermath of the 1969 trial, was that the credentials of the presiding judge, Dr. Kofler, were in serious question. Supposedly, he was in fact neither a lawyer, nor did he have a high school diploma. As a result, the Supreme Court of Austria ultimately declared the verdict legal yet decided to reduce Mayer's 11-year prison sentence by one year.⁹⁹⁷

Putting It Together

In the aftermath of World War II, return visits of Holocaust survivors in Poland to their hometowns were rather common. Indeed, this is reflected by the fact that many memorial books representing Polish Jewish communities include first-person accounts of such visits and their impact, typically in their final pages. Several such accounts may be seen, for example, in *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* in the section entitled, "Return."⁹⁹⁸ In attempting to determine how typical or atypical the postwar situation vis-à-vis Jews in Chmielnik was, I have examined the status and fate of Jews who found themselves in some of the towns and cities located in the general vicinity of Chmielnik.

⁹⁹⁶ Tomasz Domański, "Hauptmann Gerulf Mayer and the Pacification of Skalka Polska," *Historical Supplement of the Institute of National Remembrance* [Kielce, Poland], July 20, 2018, [4]. See also: listing number 20 on the following webpage, which pertains to war-crime trials that took place in Austria following World War II: Winfried R. Garscha, "Die 35 österreichischen Prozesse wegen NS-Verbrechen seit der Abschaffung der Volksgerichte," *Nachkriegsjustiz*, n.d., http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/prozesse/geschworeneng/35prozesse56_04.php (accessed 9-12-21). Based on personal correspondence with Siegfried Sanwald, an archivist at the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) in Vienna, I learned that Mayer apparently never served more than four years of his 10-year prison sentence. According to Sanwald, this was due to the pre-trial detention time Mayer served and on account of his good behavior during that period. Siegfried Sanwald, Re: Gerulf Mayer, December 19, 2012.

⁹⁹⁷ See: "Supreme Court of Austria Validated Kofler Verdict," *Salzburger Nachrichten* [Salzburg News], July 10, 1970, 6.

⁹⁹⁸ Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From A Ruined Garden*, 243-266

In Chmielnik, in the wake of the war, there was never a noteworthy number of Jews present at any given time. Again, as attested to in this chapter, this was likely because returning Jews had already been informed by fellow Jews or even by sympathetic Poles that it was not safe for them to remain in—or even to briefly visit—Poland’s small towns, due to widespread antisemitic sentiment. Chmielnik certainly qualified in this regard. Nonetheless, based on my research, I know that Chmielnik did not witness any outright postwar pogroms. Nor did it apparently have any documented cases of anti-Jewish physical assaults at the time. The situation, though, as we already know—in light of the Kielce pogrom—was not as benign in all the nearby towns or cities. Yet, in addition to Kielce, which, according to local Jewish resident, Mietek Kwaśniewski, may have had as many as 250 Jews residing there at the time of the pogrom,⁹⁹⁹ there were also other sites in the area that were marked by anti-Jewish violence. Four of these sites are Działoszyce, Ostrowiec, Skarżysko-Kamienna, and Radom.

In the case of Działoszyce, we learn from the town’s memorial book via the first-person account of a Jewish returnee, Avraham Langer, that he was nearly killed when members of the Polish Home Army attacked his home and demanded that all valuables be handed over to them immediately. However, other Jews who were present at the time were not as fortunate as Langer; two were severely injured (and it is unclear whether they ultimately survived or not), and two were gunned down.¹⁰⁰⁰ As in the case of the few Jews who did return briefly to Chmielnik following the war, Langer did not remain in his hometown for long. In fact, the following day or

⁹⁹⁹ M. Kwasniewski, “Forty Years Since the Kielce Pogrom,” *Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora* 28 (1989): 45.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Avraham Langer, “During and After the War,” in *Sefer yizkor shel kehilat Dzialoszyce ve-ha-seviva* (Tel Aviv, Hamenora, 1973), 386.

so, he left Działoszyce for good, and by 1949, he had left Europe altogether for the newly formed State of Israel.¹⁰⁰¹ Like Chmielnik, Działoszyce was a predominantly Jewish town prior to World War II; its prewar Jewish population was roughly 83 percent of the total population. But after the war, the previously mentioned *Surviving Jews in Kielce District* publication of 1945-1946?, listed only a total of 156 registered survivors from Działoszyce.¹⁰⁰²

In the case of Ostrowiec, a larger site that was already mentioned in conjunction with postwar violence visited upon Jewish returnees, there is likewise a first-person postwar *yisker bukh* account. In this instance, Dr. Chaim Shoshkes describes his own journey to the city not long after the war, in the article, “Ostrowiec Without Jews.”¹⁰⁰³ Herein Shoshkes relates that he believes that the city had more than 15,000 Jews before World War II and that only 80 Jews returned afterward. Furthermore, of those returnees, he states that six Jews were murdered by local Poles and that all of them were young.¹⁰⁰⁴ Presumably, Shoshkes had in mind here the aforementioned assault on the Krongold apartment.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid., 387.

¹⁰⁰² See: "Surviving Jews in Kielce District" (JewishGen.org, August 1, 2003), https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Holocaust/0070_SurvivorsKielce.html (accessed 2-13-23).

¹⁰⁰³ Dr. Chaim [Henry] Shoshkes (1891-1964), an American-based journalist originally from Poland, authored a book entitled, *Poyln—1946: (ayndrukn fun a rayze)* [Poland—1946: (Impressions from a Trip)], in which he details his experiences traveling to various sites in Poland in the wake of World War II. It is quite possible that Ostrowiec was one of the sites that he visited during that time, although he does not explicitly mention it in this work. See: Dr. Ch. Shoshkes, *Poyln—1946: (ayndrukn fun a rayze)* [Poland—1946: (Impressions from a Trip)] (Buenos-Aires: Tsentral-farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1946).

¹⁰⁰⁴ See: Dr. Chaim Shoshkes, “Ostrowiec Without Jews,” in *Ostrowiec: A Monument on the Ruins of an Annihilated Jewish Community*, edited by Meir Shimon Geshuri, et al. (Tel-Aviv: Society of Ostrovtser Jews in Israel with the cooperation of the Ostrovtser Societies in New York and Toronto, 1971), 457.

Skarżysko-Kamienna, which had a much less sizable Jewish community than Chmielnik both in number and percentage before World War II,¹⁰⁰⁵ was the site of one of the largest Nazi-operated concentration camps. However, after the war, only a small pool of Jews returned there.¹⁰⁰⁶ During the winter of 1945-1946, liberated Jews who returned to the city to retrieve their property were met with blatant hostility. Then, in February 1946, five Jews were murdered there and three of the murderers were subsequently sentenced to death. The entire ordeal is retold by Eliezer Levin, one of the Jewish returnees to Skarżysko, in the *Skarżysko-Kamienna sefer zikaron* memorial book.¹⁰⁰⁷ Levin further relates how right after the murder of these Jews, practically all the other Jewish returnees with the exception of himself and six other individuals, left the city for other, hopefully safer, destinations.¹⁰⁰⁸ In this regard, the Jewish situation in postwar Skarżysko was similar to that of Chmielnik, since returning Jews did not remain there much beyond the horrific events of early 1946.

In the case of Radom, which was the largest of the four aforementioned sites that witnessed postwar anti-Jewish violence, the prewar general population numbered 100,000, whereas the Jewish population—30 percent of the population—came to 30,000 just prior to

¹⁰⁰⁵ In 1921, Skarżysko had a population of 1,590 Jews, who constituted 20 percent of the total population. See: Stefan Krakowski, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Vol. 14), s.v. “Skarżysko-Kamienna” (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 1644.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Jewish returnee Eliezer Levin, who does not provide an exact total count of the Jews whom he encountered in Skarżysko following the war—yet makes it clear that they were scarce—states that all of the Jewish returnees were concentrated in three houses. See: Eliezer Levin, “The Frightful Massacre,” in *Skarżysko-Kamienna sefer zikaron* (Tel Aviv: Skarżysko Society, 1973), 156.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., 156-159.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ibid., 158.

World War II.¹⁰⁰⁹ In this regard, the city's Gentile and Jewish prewar populations were both significantly greater than those of prewar Chmielnik, although the Jewish percentage was far lower as compared to Chmielnik. In the wake of the war, a few hundred Jews settled there.¹⁰¹⁰ However, as Lukasz Krzyzanowski thoroughly outlines in his previously mentioned book, there were several robberies of apartments and institutions belonging to Jewish returnees, as well as physical assaults on Jews in Radom. Finally, there was the outright murder of seven Jews there over a period of a few months in 1945.¹⁰¹¹ Although the vast majority of the local Jewish community left Radom in light of these acts of violence for which Krzyzanowski suspects there was little—if any, follow-up investigative work conducted—there were still seven Jews residing in Radom as recently as 1965.¹⁰¹²

Yet, although anti-Jewish threats and acts of violence were not exceptional in the few years following the close of World War II as illustrated by the above cases, by the same token, outright pogroms, such as the one that took place in Kielce—or even the one that occurred a year earlier in Kraków, in August 1945¹⁰¹³—were not the norm. Many—if not most—of the smaller towns in the vicinity of Chmielnik may have fared similarly to it in the sense that they did not

¹⁰⁰⁹ “Radom,” Świątokrzyski Sztetl http://swietokrzyskisztetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=240&sub=173#strona; “The Jewish Community of Radom,” Museum of the Jewish People” <https://dbs.anumuseum.org.il/skn/en/c6/e232057/Place/Radom> (accessed 2-18-23).

¹⁰¹⁰ “The Jewish Community of Radom,” Museum of the Jewish People” <https://dbs.anumuseum.org.il/skn/en/c6/e232057/Place/Radom> (accessed 2-18-23).

¹⁰¹¹ See: Krzyzanowski, *Ghost Citizens*, chap. 2, esp. 122-124, 126, 131-132, 136, 139, 141, 155, 174, 176-182.

¹⁰¹² “The Jewish Community of Radom,” Museum of the Jewish People” <https://dbs.anumuseum.org.il/skn/en/c6/e232057/Place/Radom> (accessed 2-18-23).

¹⁰¹³ Cichopek, “The Cracow Pogrom of August 1945,” 221-238.

witness pogroms or even other acts of anti-Jewish violence. Of course, this may be because many towns were not visited by Jews after the war, or if they were, the Jews were not readily detected.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to document the microhistory of a place called Chmielnik from its earliest Jewish settlers to its ultimate demise under the Third Reich. Having done this, we now have an intimate understanding of the life and death of a Polish shtetl: how it began, how it flourished, and how it collapsed.

In many ways, this town was typical of others in its vicinity of central Poland. Its population size was under 13,000, its ratio of Jews to Gentiles was 5:1, and it became a privately-owned town bearing municipal rights in the 16th century, overlapping with the waves of Ashkenazi Jewish migration from the German lands. The town thrived particularly during the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century and her Jews played a large role in that success, serving as factory owners, tanners, purveyors of agricultural and building materials, and geese herders. As in many Polish towns, the Jews of Chmielnik received the brunt of disappointment when all was not well, for example, during the Polish-Swedish War. Still, Jews lived their lives publicly and prominently; they had a large and ornate house of worship, built infrastructures like Chmielnik's main synagogue and religious houses of study (or *batei midrash*), and were generally so swept up in mass movements like Hasidism that several famous figures of the movement hailed from Chmielnik. World War I brought hardship and death to many, but likewise it brought Polish independence. For the Jews of Chmielnik, as in other small Polish towns, there was hope on the horizon that national identity would mean a new era. In other words, less antisemitism. But, like many Jews in Polish shtetls, cut off from modern technology and information, Chmielnik's Jews were naïve and unprepared for the antisemitism that had been building for generations. Like her counterparts, Chmielnik was unapologetically divided between

Jews and Gentiles; Jews held jobs as independent businessmen and industrial workers, and Gentiles worked more in farming and agriculture. Because the population ratio was so unbalanced, the Gentile population generally had to bow to the Jewish rhythms of the Sabbath and other Jewish holidays. Resentment was building and, through the help of Hitler's propaganda, would come to a blow. But the Jews, who were used to an ever-present "low simmer" of antisemitism and isolation, had no idea how deep that resentment went. This naïveté was in part to blame, some might say, on the rabbinic battle that raged in Chmielnik for almost the entire decade leading up to World War II. And in this regard, as well, Chmielnik was similar to other Jewish communities in east-central Europe.

Demographic numbers tell us that the percentage of Polish Jews living in cities reached 80.9 percent and 19.1 percent in villages in Poland's central region, according to the 1931 census.¹⁰¹⁴ This certainly reflects the larger migration to big cities sweeping the continent at that time. However, this still does not take into consideration the towns—the likes of Chmielnik—which neither qualified as cities, nor as villages. We know that in the years leading up to World War II, many youths were leaving towns like Chmielnik in search of both economic opportunities and idealistic and political fulfillment, and the snapshot of Chmielnik makes us wonder if, in fact, the lifespan of the "shtetl" was coming to a close—with or without the rise of the man named Hitler.

When the war finally came, Chmielnik's fate was fairly typical for towns of its size and in its region. Ghettos were established—usually open—and *Judenräte* (or Jewish Councils) were appointed. These were typically men who were already fairly prominent in Jewish life. Unlike

¹⁰¹⁴ See: Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, 24.

some of the more infamous *Judenräte* like those of the Łódź ghetto and the Ghetto in Eastern Upper Silesia, Chmielnik's Judenrat was not, in general, despised by its community. Rather, the members of the Jewish Council were seen as having been put in an untenable situation, and doing with it what they could. The process of alienating, targeting, and killing Chmielnik's Jews generally followed the pattern established by scholars like Hilberg. Like many Jews in the vicinity, Chmielnik's Jews were farmed out from the ghetto to do work at distant sites like Podłęże, Słupia, and Biała Podlaska. But, ultimately, the vast majority of her Jews perished in the major death camp, Treblinka. Even her deportation dates and ghetto liquidation months are pretty consistent with towns in the vicinity, and line up with the general timeline of the Germans' move eastward.

One area in which Chmielnik stands out from its neighbors is in the number of people who survived, specifically, those who fled to Russia. It was exceedingly rare for members of the same family to survive, but in the case of Chmielnik, there are several families in which at least two siblings survived; and in a few known instances, there were even four or more family members who survived. The following are just a few of these known cases:

The Garfinkels—five siblings (four sisters and one brother) who survived, in spite of their having been incarcerated in a number of labor camps, including Skarżysko and HASAG-Kielce;¹⁰¹⁵

¹⁰¹⁵ Although all but one of the five Garfinkel siblings—Helen Garfinkel Greenspun—are now deceased, following World War II, four out of five of them rebuilt their lives close to one another in the Detroit, Michigan area.

The Mapas—four siblings (two brothers and two sisters) who likewise survived, in spite of their incarceration in several camps, combined, including HASAG-Kielce, another branch of HASAG in Częstochowa, Ravensbrück, and Buchenwald;

The Shulsingers—four siblings (two brothers and two sisters) who survived through a combination of different channels (being hidden by Polish Gentiles, incarcerated in HASAG-Kielce, and fleeing eastward);

The Wygodnys—four siblings (one brother and three sisters) who survived, having been hidden by Polish Gentiles and later incarcerated in several of the aforementioned camps;

The Lederman-Gutman Family—four immediate family members and the girlfriend (later, the wife) of one of the family members, who survived, thanks to their having been hidden for a lengthy period of time, by a Polish Gentile family;

The Frydman-Sylman Family—six immediate and extended family members who survived, due to their having fled eastward and been incarcerated in Siberia under the Soviets;

The Goldlist Family—four family members, two sets of brothers, which included one set of first cousins who survived thanks to their having been hidden for an extended period of time by a Polish family. Aside from the Goldlists who survived in hiding, at least one additional family member—another first cousin named Avraham Goldlist—also survived, in spite of incarceration in labor and concentration camps, including: HASAG-Kielce, HASAG-Częstochowianka, Skarżysko-Kamienna, Buchenwald, Dachau, and Bisingen.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰¹⁶ For information on the labor and concentration camps in which Avraham Goldlist was incarcerated during World War II, see for example: Testimony of Avraham Goldlist, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.3/12820, 1-2.

The Shore-Kozłowski Family—eight immediate and extended family members who survived, thanks to their having been hidden for an extended period of time, by a Polish Gentile and his family.

It is worth considering the acute observation of one former Chmielnik resident vis-à-vis Chmielnik's seemingly higher survival rate. According to Nathan Garfinkel, Chmielnik had more survivors than any of the other neighboring towns, such as Pińczów, Stopnica, Busko-Zdrój, and Staszów. In Garfinkel's words, in other towns the size of Chmielnik in this same region of Poland, "You couldn't find a Jewish survivor."¹⁰¹⁷ Garfinkel does not provide an explicit rationale for this phenomenon, nor did most of the former residents of Chmielnik with whom I spoke. (Indeed, I wonder if any of them had even considered this question prior to my asking it.) Speaking about Chmielnik—and not about the condition of other nearby towns—the combination of factors that may have provided the opportunity for a relatively "greater survival rate than average"¹⁰¹⁸ in Chmielnik are as follows:

First, the "open" (versus "closed") ghetto allowed a certain percentage of Chmielnik's Jewish population to flee and hide—thereby avoiding the several rounds of deportations that took place in the town. During the deportations, there were often conditions such as darkness and

¹⁰¹⁷ Nathan Garfinkel, interview by Charles Silow, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Southfield, MI, November 26, 1995.

¹⁰¹⁸ The overall survival rate of Polish Jewry following World War II is estimated at approximately 10 percent, since the Jewish death rate of this community is estimated at over 90 percent. If we assume that 8,000 to 8,500 of Chmielnik's Jews were murdered, out of the 1939 estimated total of 10,275 Jews, that yields a range of 1,775 to 2,275 surviving Jews. In terms of percent, this yields an estimated survival rate of 11.44 to 22.14 Chmielnik Jews following World War II, which is clearly higher than the general estimated survival rate of Polish Jewry. In light of these calculations, it would appear that Chmielnik Jewry stood a relatively "greater survival rate than average" when compared to what befell Polish Jewry collectively. For further information regarding Polish Jewry's postwar statistics, see for instance: Walter Laqueur and Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 488.

poor weather that enabled some Jews to jump, undetected, from moving vehicles—thereby surviving, if only temporarily. This, for example, is what enabled the survival, during the second deportation, of members of the Shore and Mapa families.

Another factor that may have contributed to higher than usual survival rates was that a number of Chmielnik's Jews—including members of the Shore-Kozłowski, Goldlist, Lederman-Gutman, Wygodny, Shulsinger, Kotlan,¹⁰¹⁹ and Frydman¹⁰²⁰ families—were able to find Polish Gentiles in the vicinity who agreed to hide them, for varying lengths of time, and for varying prices. In the cases of the Shore-Kozłowski and Lederman-Gutman families, the acts of rescue appear to have been those of true altruism. Conversely, in the case of Miriam Bronkesh (née Kotlan) and her mother, their capacity to find shelter with Poles was entirely dependent on their ability to pay demanded fees in a timely manner.

A third—and arguably the most significant—factor in the survival rates of Chmielnik Jews was that, in the beginning of World War II, a sizable number of Chmielnik's residents—approximately 1,000 people—which included many, primarily young, Jews—fled eastward, beyond the Bug River, into areas that came under Soviet occupation.¹⁰²¹ A large percent of these escapees subsequently found themselves in regions such as Siberia and Uzbekistan, where they were subjected to extremely challenging, if not harsh, conditions. Yet, by this same token, they were able to avoid deportation—which usually resulted in death—under the Third Reich. This is

¹⁰¹⁹ Kotlan was the maiden name of Miriam Bronkesh, who, together with her mother, survived the war in hiding in the vicinity of Chmielnik.

¹⁰²⁰ The Frydmans mentioned here are those of Ann Nudelman's (née Frydman/Friedman) immediate family.

¹⁰²¹ Morris Kwasniewski, who found himself in the Soviet zone during World War II, attested to the fact that many Jews from Chmielnik, like himself, survived the war and subsequently returned to Poland, by fleeing to Soviet-controlled areas. Morris Kwasniewski, interview by Richard Bassett, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Toronto, Canada, April 5, 1995.

how Jews such as the Frydman-Sylman family managed to evade death. To quote Anna Prager (née Frydman): “The ones who survived were in Russia.”¹⁰²²

There is no reason to think that the Chmielnik Jews who were incarcerated in concentration camps had a higher-than-normal survival rate. For those in camps such as Skarżysko-Kamienna, one of the leading labor camps to which Chmielnik Jews were deported, survival could depend greatly on the whims of camp overseers. In the case of Skarżysko, members of the Garfinkel family attribute their survival and that of other Jews from Chmielnik, to a *Volksdeutscher* named Laskowski.¹⁰²³ Nathan Garfinkel, for instance, referred to Laskowski as “The Angel from Heaven,” and attested that without his aid and that of his sisters, he would never have survived the war. Garfinkel further added that the figure of Laskowski continued to remain a mystery to him, since learning, after the war, that unlike other workers, many of Laskowski’s workers had been left unabused.¹⁰²⁴ Helen Greenspun (née Garfinkel) further

¹⁰²² Prager further distinguished between this type of survival experience (her own) and that of other former residents of Chmielnik (including some of her own relatives), who were incarcerated: “The ones who survived in the camps were young and were strong.” Anna Prager, telephone interview with author, written transcript, August 26, 2012. Chmielnik survivor, Sonia Nothman (née Garfinkel), stated nearly the same words about the correlation between Polish Jews who were in Soviet Russia during World War II and survival: “People who were—left Poland, Russia, they’re alive.” Sonia Nothman, interview by Donna Miller, Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, USHMM Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive, Farmington Hills, Michigan, January 4, 1983.

¹⁰²³ For a lengthier discussion about Laskowski and his treatment of former residents of Chmielnik in Skarżysko, see for instance: Hagstrom, *Sara’s Children*, 121-122, 184-185. See also: Felicja Karay, “Women Slave Laborers,” in *How Was It Possible?: A Holocaust Reader*, edited by Peter Hayes (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 403.

¹⁰²⁴ Nathan Garfinkel, interview by Charles Silow, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Southfield, MI, November 26, 1995.

bolstered her brother's statement with the claim that, had it not been for the decency of Laskowski, "My family and I wouldn't have survived."¹⁰²⁵

A final way in which Chmielnik seems atypical of her surrounding towns is in what transpired—or did not transpire—in the postwar era. Most shtetls experienced some level of antisemitic behavior when Jewish survivors returned after the war to find their relatives and see what was left. Chmielnik did not see any serious antisemitic acts—certainly no real violence—and perhaps this is a small victory. Then again, most of her survivors avoided returning because they were warned to go to larger cities where they would be safe. Ironically, one of those larger cities was Kielce.

¹⁰²⁵ Helen Greenspun, telephone interview with author, written transcript, August 20, 2012. During my second telephone conversation with Greenspun, she remarked that "not all Germans were bad," and that Jan Laskowski helped her and many other Jews. At least on one occasion when she received beatings for something or other, Laskowski comforted her, told her about his own children, and that she should not cry. In a word, there was nothing bad that Greenspun could say about this man—even more than 75 years after the fact. Helen Greenspun, telephone interview no. 2 with author, written transcript, May 26, 2021. Sonia Nothman, another surviving Garfinkel sibling, likewise referenced this same *Volksdeutscher* whom she encountered, although she did not mention him by name. According to Nothman, he shared details about his own immediate family with her and encouraged her by telling her that she was young and would survive. Sonia Nothman, interview by Donna Miller, Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, USHMM Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive, Farmington Hills, Michigan, January 4, 1983.

Revisiting Several Questions and Final Impressions

When I began my exploration of Chmielnik, I had several questions, all previously mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. I would like to revisit them each here, providing as best answers as my research can offer.

First: Did the demographic breakdown between the general versus Jewish population influence either the degree of antisemitic activities or positive interactions between the two populations? One might theorize, for example, that towns in which the ratio of Jews to Gentiles was higher, had higher amounts of antisemitism. This would be manifested, perhaps, in higher-than-average numbers of postwar acts of violence against Jews, and fewer instances of Righteous Gentiles. So, is this the case? As far as I can tell, the answer is no. In fact, I can see almost no correlative patterns here at all, when it comes to these two barometers. As mentioned before, Chmielnik had fewer acts of postwar violence against Jews, even though she had an 80 percent prewar Jewish population. (This is far higher than Kielce, for example, which was only 35 percent Jewish, and which saw both the 1918 and 1946 pogroms—the latter of which was quite possibly the worst documented postwar mass murder of Jews anywhere in the world, and this is in an already depraved climate.)

This brings us to my second question: Did the town's Jewish versus Polish demographics impact the number of Righteous Gentiles in the town? If it did, this might help us answer question one. So, did Chmielnik produce fewer Righteous Gentiles than the next town over? Not in the least. In fact, it produced the highest percentage in Kielce Province when considering the

following eight sites¹⁰²⁶ in the vicinity: Chmielnik, Działoszyce, Przytyk, Staszów, Ostrowiec, Chęciny, Kielce, and Pińczów. If we compare both their Jewish versus Gentile population ratios, and then look at their instances of Righteous Gentiles as a percentage of the Gentile populations—using Yad Vashem’s statistics¹⁰²⁷ throughout—there is no discernible pattern. Of Działoszyce’s Gentile population, only .08 percent were Righteous Gentiles.¹⁰²⁸ Nonetheless, 83 percent of the town was Jewish¹⁰²⁹—even higher than Chmielnik, which was 80 percent Jewish. Yet, as previously mentioned, Chmielnik’s Gentile population produced a rate of 1 percent Righteous Gentiles. Przytyk, at 90 percent, was even more proportionately Jewish, but it produced no Righteous Gentiles at all.¹⁰³⁰ Staszów was 68 percent Jewish, and .5 percent of its non-Jews were Righteous Gentiles.¹⁰³¹ Ostrowiec was only 37 percent Jewish, and its non-Jewish

¹⁰²⁶ I specifically chose these eight sites because they were all located in Kielce Province during the interwar period and on the eve of World War II. These were also sites for which I could readily obtain population statistics and the statistics of Righteous Gentiles. Finally, I wanted a mixture of sites that were smaller than, similar in size to, and larger in size than Chmielnik both in terms of their respective general populations and Jewish populations. Basically, I wanted towns and cities that represented a cross array of compositions with which to compare to Chmielnik.

¹⁰²⁷ By “using Yad Vashem’s statistics” I mean utilizing Yad Vashem’s “The Righteous Among the Nations Database,” accessible at the following URL: <https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?/search.html?language=en>.

¹⁰²⁸ The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=dzialoszyce&searchType=righteous_only&language=en (accessed 2-18-23).

¹⁰²⁹ “Działoszyce,” Świętokrzyski Sztetl http://swietokrzyskisztetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=192&sub=173 (accessed 10-28-22).

¹⁰³⁰ “Przytyk: Świętokrzyskie,” International Jewish Cemetery Project <http://iajgscemetery.org/eastern-europe/poland/przytyk> (accessed 10-28-22); The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=Przytyk&searchType=righteous_only&language=en (accessed 1-3-23).

¹⁰³¹ “The Staszów Book (Poland): History of Staszów,” JewishGen <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/staszow/sta025.html> (accessed 10-28-22); The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel. https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=staszow&searchType=righteous_only&language=en (accessed 2-18-23).

population produced .1 percent Righteous Gentiles.¹⁰³² Chęciny was 60 percent Jewish, and only produced .04 Righteous Gentiles.¹⁰³³ Kielce, 35 percent Jewish, produced the highest number of Righteous Gentiles—404—but this was only .9 percent of its Gentile population.¹⁰³⁴ And, it also produced the aforementioned pogroms. Finally, Pińczów was 56 percent Jewish, and produced .08 percent Righteous Gentiles.¹⁰³⁵ So, there does not appear to be any obvious correlation between ratios of Jews to Gentiles and levels of either antisemitism or rescues of Jews.

Finally, my last question—and one of the reasons I chose Chmielnik as my case study in the first place—was: What contributed to the “relatively” higher number of Chmielnik Jews who survived the war, compared to larger population centers? The answer, as discussed above, comes down to three factors: an open ghetto, higher-than-average numbers of Poles willing to hide Jews, and primarily, the ability to flee eastward to Soviet Russia.

Researching the various chapters of history as they unfolded in the Polish town of Chmielnik, a small and seemingly average—some might even say, relatively insignificant—

¹⁰³² “Ostrowiec,” Świątokrzyski Sztetl http://swietokrzyskiszetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=229&sub=173#strona; The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel.
https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=ostrowiec&searchType=righteous_only&language=en (accessed 2-18-23).

¹⁰³³ “The Jewish Community of Checiny,” Museum of the Jewish People <https://db.anumuseum.org.il/skn/en/c6/e170004/Place/Checiny>; The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel.
https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=checiny&searchType=righteous_only&language=en (accessed 2-18-23).

¹⁰³⁴ “Kielce: Demography,” Virtual Shtetl <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/towns/k/399-kielce/100-demography/20980-demography>; The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel.
https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=kielce&searchType=righteous_only&language=en (accessed 2-18-23).

¹⁰³⁵ “Pińczów,” Świątokrzyski Sztetl http://swietokrzyskiszetl.pl/asp/en_start.asp?typ=14&menu=233&sub=173; The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, Israel.
https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=pinczow&searchType=righteous_only&language=en (accessed 2-18-23).

Jewish community, I was struck by the sheer amount of primary literature that is available today. Likewise, there are still remnants of that community; for example, several of the individuals with whom I spoke about Chmielnik, reside in the greater New York City area and in Toronto.¹⁰³⁶ There are still additional former residents of Chmielnik who reside in Israel and are scattered throughout the United States. Indeed, a long time has now passed since the Jewish community of Chmielnik was destroyed in the Holocaust. For it is already more than 75 years since World War II ended, and many of those who lived to tell about pre-World War II Polish Jewry, have since died.

Yet, to respond to the question posed to me by more than one “Chmielniker” regarding my rationale for researching Chmielnik in the ever-so-late year of 2021, sometimes the distance of time and space can be beneficial in providing new perspectives on, and insights into historical events. Furthermore, interest in historical events often ebbs and flows, frequently skipping a generation. In my own case, I had no choice but to come to this study late, because of the simple fact that I am two generations removed from all of the individuals who grew up and lived their lives in prewar and wartime Chmielnik.

Today, Chmielnik, which once boasted over 10,000 Jews, has no living Jews. One of the few surviving remnants of that life is a synagogue building, which is now a museum. Unfortunately, Chmielnik serves as a microcosm of Jewish life in Poland: it flourished for close to 400 years, producing religious, social, and political movements, and then came to a screeching

¹⁰³⁶ At one time, there was a sizable enough community of former residents of Chmielnik in Toronto to warrant them having their own synagogue, which was aptly named, the “Anshei Chmielnik Synagogue.” For references to this synagogue, see for example: “Social Notes—Toronto,” *Canadian Jewish Review* [Toronto, Canada], April 15, 1960, 6; *Ibid.*, April 22, 1960, 8. See also: Roberto Perin, *The Many Rooms of This House: Diversity and Toronto’s Places of Worship Since 1840* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 137.

halt in 1939. And then, in an eyeblink, it was gone. The life and death of Chmielnik is the life and death of Polish Jewry.

The next major step in gaining a perspective on the history of Chmielnik's Jewish community—and the history of Polish Jewry, by extension—would involve comparing it to other towns of similar size and Jewish/Gentile ratios, in other regions of Poland. Do these towns mimic Chmielnik with regard to her statistics, demographics, Polish-Jewish relations, Jewish collaboration with the Nazis, and Jewish survival tactics or strategies?

And yet, on some level, it does not really matter whether Chmielnik was a microcosm or not. For the study of this town and its people does not need a “permission slip”; it should be justified whether or not it can serve some greater function. Most of Chmielnik's Jewish residents lived lives that were never lifted up or seen by anyone outside of their close neighbors, and that was when they were alive. When they were killed, mercilessly and swiftly, their lives were made even more invisible, because the only people who witnessed their contributions were killed, too.

My efforts to document this town are, of course, pragmatic. I am a historian, and this is not just a sentimental endeavor. The “purpose” of studying microhistory is well-established; this is how a fuller historical picture is assembled and built: shard by shard, on the backs of countless seemingly insignificant interviews and newspaper clippings. And yet, this *is* a sentimental history. For how could it be otherwise? In reconstructing and retelling the tragic stories I have spent the past dozen years collecting, I cannot help but be moved. The history of Jews in Poland was nearly 1,000 years old, yet it was destroyed in a matter of months. I tell Chmielnik's story because she cannot tell it herself. I can only hope that someone else will pick up the charge of

telling another town's story, and that little by little, we will have an accurate picture of the way Jewish life was in Poland before it was eradicated.

Appendix



Fig. 1. Stanisław Sanecki, *Postcard of Chmielnik, Poland, c. 1908-1920, Polona* (Biblioteka Narodowa/National Library of Poland, 2020), <https://polona.pl/item/chmielnik-ogolny-widok,Njg4NTgxMDE/0/#info:metadata>.

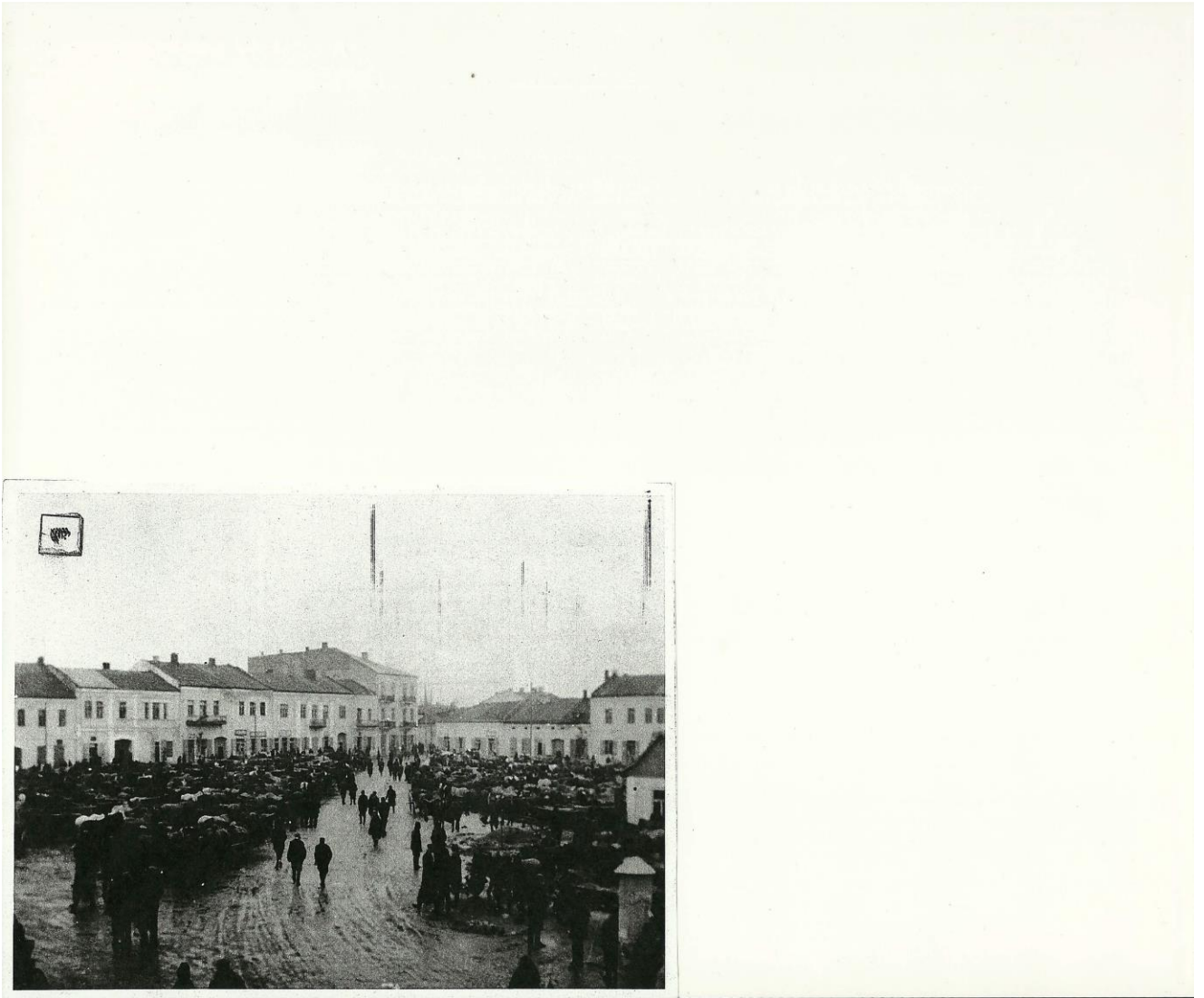


Fig. 2. Marketplace in Chmielnik, Poland, Pre-World War II. YIVO Archives, Territorial Photographic Collection, 1860s-1970s, RG 120, #0433.

המיעלניקער איראלטע שוהל אין איר בעלעמער

וויסל זכרונות, ווארעמער ציטער רופט ארויס דאס בילד ביי אלע חמיעלניקער, אן אונטערשייד פון אנטוואנגען עלטער און שטאנד.

די יידישע קונסט־געשיכטע אין אייראפע — פון דעם גלאנץ פעריאד פון סינאגאגאלער קונסט אין פארטוגאל ביזן 17^{טן} יארהונדערט — האט נישט געוויסט פון קיין שענערער און ערנסטער באציונג צו פלאסטישע רעליגיע־קונסט, ווי א עס האבן ארויסגעוויזן די פוילישע יידן.

גאנץ באוונדערס איז קענטיק געווען דער טיפער אינטערעס פון פוילישע יידן צו רעליגיעזע קונסט אין 17^{טן} און 18^{טן} יארהונדערט — אין דער ווונדערליכער ענטוויקלונגס־עפאכע פון ארכיטעקטור און איבערליכער באציונג פון גאסן הויז.

אלס זעלטענער אריגינאל פון קונסטלערישן שוהל־בוי קען באצייכנט ווערן די שוהל־געביידע פון קהילת חמיעלניק. איר סער איר רונדן קאפול, וואס דערמאנט דעם אינוועניג פון די באקאנטע קראקאווער שוהלן: די רמ"א'ס שוהל, די הויכע שוהל, ר' יצחק בן יעקב'ס שוהל — האט זי זיך אויסגעצייכנט מיט איר אייגענאָטיקן בעלעמער (וועלכע'ס בילד מיר זעהען אויבן) וואס האט נישט געהאט זיינס גלייכן אין גאנץ פוילן. דער בעלעמער איז געווען געבויט פון שטיין און געהאט 8 ווינקלען, פון וועלכע עס האבן זיך אויפגעהויבן 8 ייילן, שא' פנדיק צוזאמען דעם איינציקן כוון א אלט־גריכישן „אודעאון“, די זיילן און די בויגנס־געביידע האבן זיך אויסגעצייכנט מיט דינע איירעלע רענעסאנס מאטיוון אין גייסט פון „סטיוקו“ סטיל.

במשך הונדערטער יארן האבן חמיעלניקער יידן אין שוהל געלעבט און געפירט אירע פילות צום רבונ'שלי עולם. צענדליקע דורות האט דער בעלעמער איינגעזאפט אין זיך יידישע כרייד און לייז, תשעה־באב טרויער אויף חורבן בית־המקדש, סליחות טעג, ימים־נוראים, שמחות־ה' ביי הקפות און אין געבעט צו דעם אין הימל, שלעכטע גזירות קעגן יידן מבטל גע.אכט.

אבער, דער ביטערער גלות האט געברענגט דעם חורבן פון אונזער מקדש־מעט, דעם אכס פון אונזער טייערן חמיעלניק מיט אירע שוהל'ן, בתי־מדרשים, חסידים שטיבלעך און אירע גאטס־פאכטיקע דארציקע יידן, צעשמערט דאס אונ' פארגעסליך צאטלדיקע יידישע לעבן.

איביק, אייביק, וועל' מיר דיך הייס־שטעטל געדענקען!



THE CHMIELNIK SYNAGOGUE AND ITS ALTAR

Jewish art in Europe — from the days of glory of Synagogal architecture in Portugal up to the 17th century — never surpassed the achievements of Polish Jewry in religious art.

The Synagogue of Chmielnik was one outstanding example. Crowned by large cupola — in the style of the famous Synagogues of R'mo, the Izha' Ben Ya'cov and the "Hoche Shul" in Cracow — the Chmielnik Synagogue had a unique Altar (as pictured here). This octagonal stone structure was framed by eight columns, not unlike a Greek Odeon. The co-

Throughout the centuries, the Synagogue at Chmielnik was a center where devote Jews worshipped. Many generations gathered around its Altar to invoke the Almighty. In days of mourning or of joy, on the Ninth of Ab when the destruction of the Temple is commemorated, at the reciting of Sli'hot and the High Holidays, at the rejoicing of Simhat Torah, or when the mercy of the Lord was implored to mitigate the edicts of harsh rulers, this is where our fathers and brethren gathered.

Fig. 3. "Interior of the Chmielnik Synagogue, pre-World War II," in *Sefer ha-zikaron: a ner-tomid unzer shtetl Chmielnik* (Tel Aviv?, 1955), 5-6.



Fig. 4. “The Chmielnik Synagogue, 1930s.” The religious house of study may be seen in the distance. Courtesy of Dr. Lynne W. Zimmerman.



Fig. 5. “The Chmielnik Synagogue prior to renovation,” c. 2011.
http://www.znak.org.pl/graph/news/mainphoto/large/chmielnik_synagoga.jpg (accessed 5-7-21).



Fig. 6. Małgorzata Płoszaj, “Another view of the Chmielnik Synagogue,” October 2008.
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chmielnik_synagoga_\(6\).JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chmielnik_synagoga_(6).JPG) (accessed 5-10-21).



Fig. 7. Paul Pinkus, “Monument Erected by the Culture Association of Chmielnik and the Kalish Family on the Grounds of the Chmielnik Jewish Cemetery in 2008,” August 2012. Courtesy of Paul and Kreindel Pinkus.



Fig. 8. “Map of Different Types of Synagogues in Poland,” in *Bate kenestet be-Polin ye-hurbanam* [Synagogues in Poland and Their Destruction] (Jerusalem, Israel: Mosad Harav Kook and Yad Vashem, 1960), between 7 and 96.

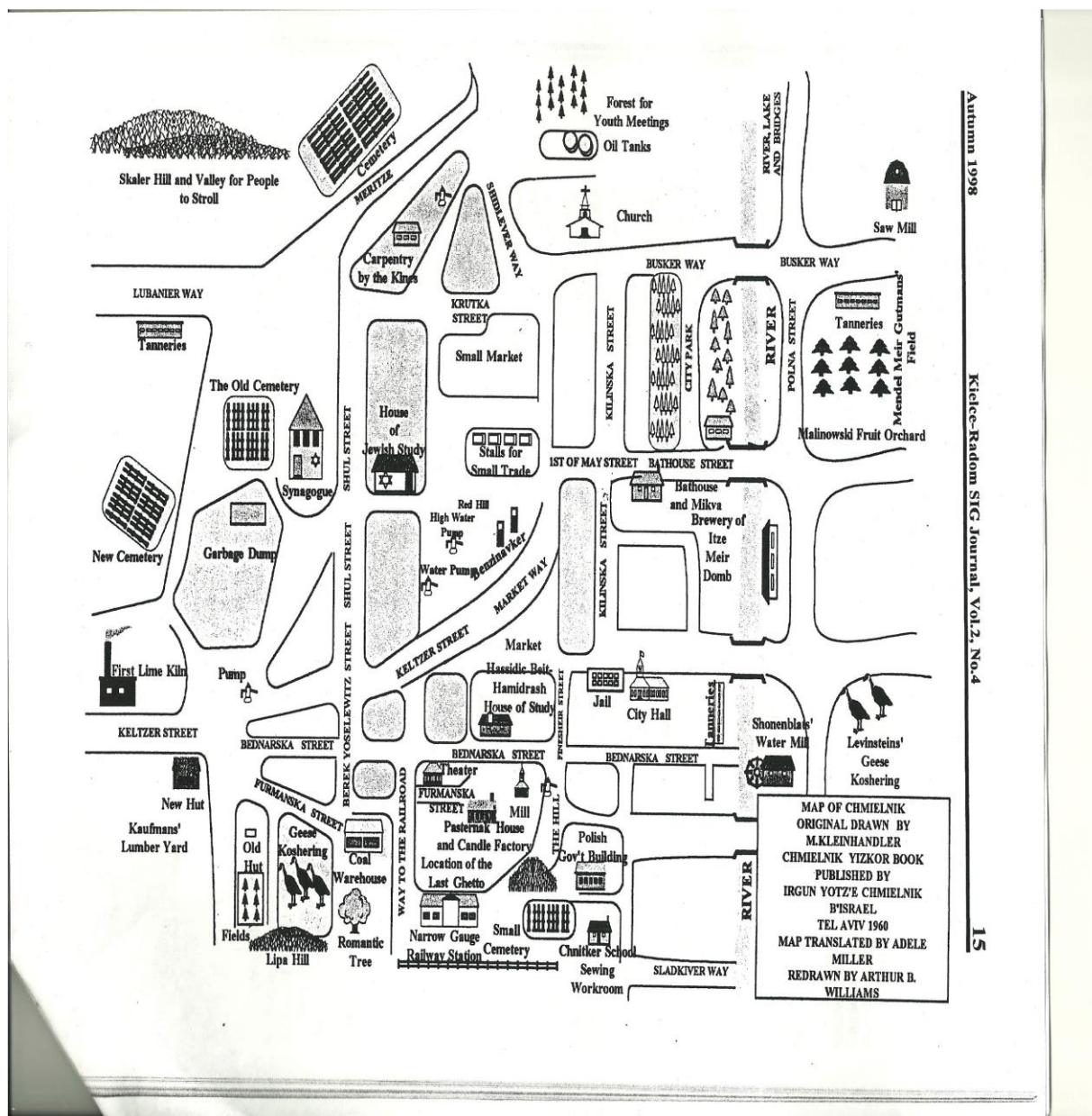


Fig. 9. “Illustrated map of pre-World War II Chmielnik, as based on memory of former resident, Mary Kleinhandler (née Scheiber) (English-language version of original Yiddish-language map taken from *Pinkes Khmielnik*),” in *The Kielce-Radom SIG Journal* 2, no. 4 (1998): 15.

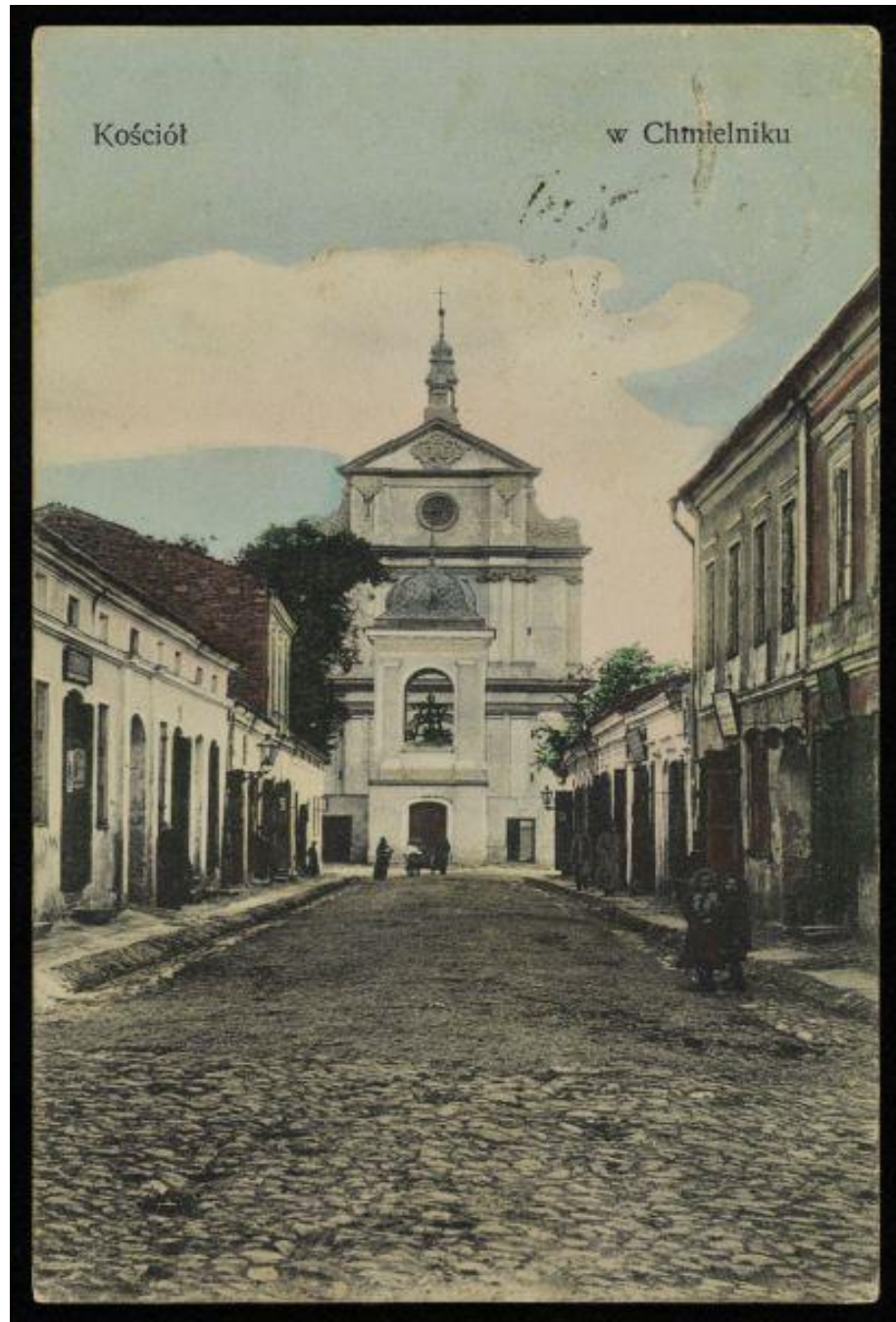


Fig. 10. Stanisław Sanecki, *Depiction of the Catholic Holy Trinity Church That Took up a Full Block Between Busker Gas and Shidlever Gas. The Structure Continues to Stand in Chmielnik until the Present Day, Polona* (Biblioteka Narodowa/National Library of Poland, 2020), <https://polona.pl/item/kosciol-w-chmielniku,Njg4NTgxMDI/0/#info:metadata>.

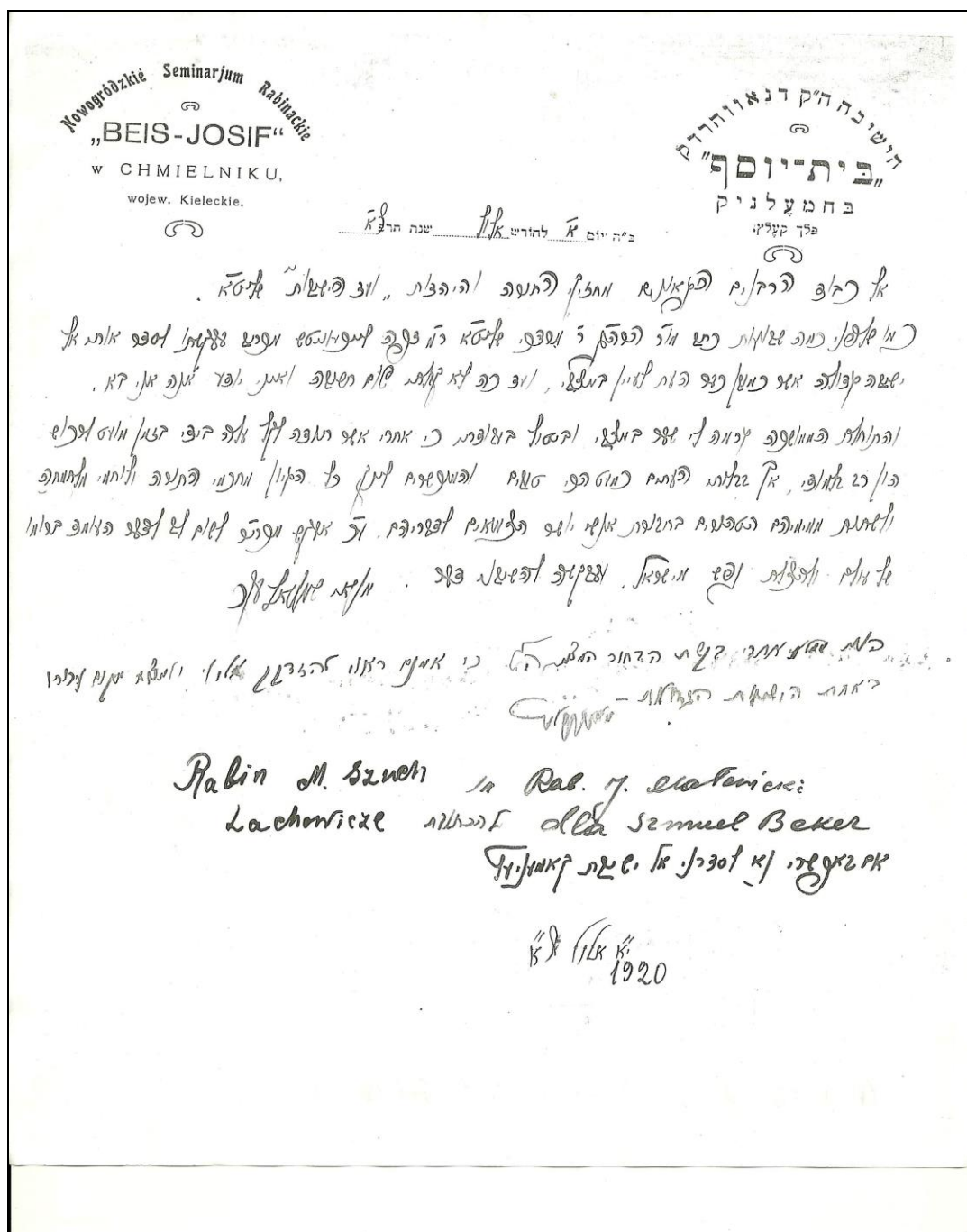


Fig. 11. Stationery from the “Beis-Josif” w Chmielniku” [Beis Yosef in Chmielnik], 1920. YIVO Archives, Records of the Vaad Hayeshivot [Council of Yeshivot], 1924-1940, RG 25, Box 4, Folder 61.

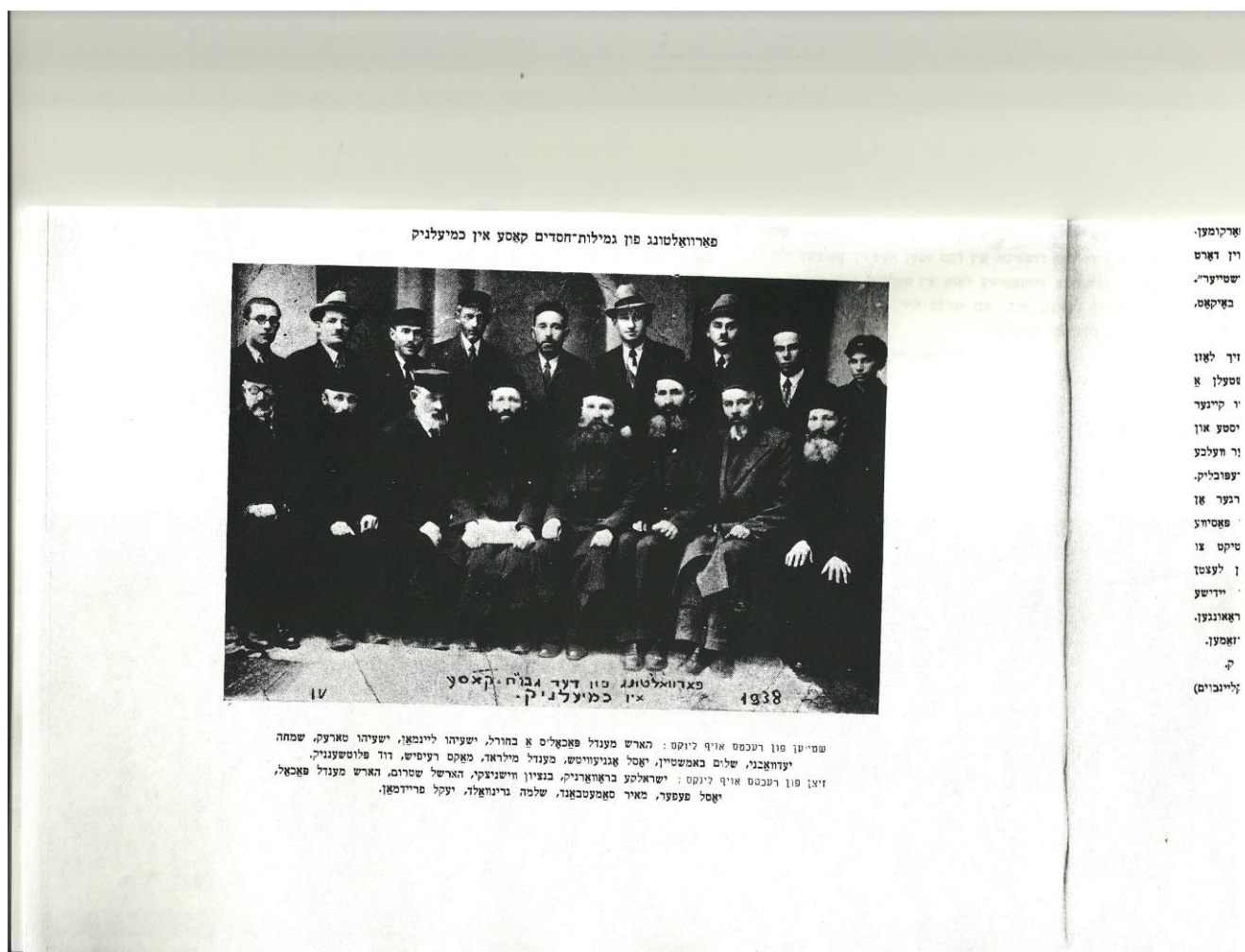


Fig. 13. “Meeting of the `Gmifus-Chesed w Chmielniku’ [the Free Loan Society in Chmielnik], 1938,” in *Pinkes Khmielnik: yisker-bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener Yidisher kehile* [*Pinkas Chmielnik: Yisker Book in Memory of the Annihilated Jewish Community*, edited by Efraim Shedletski (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotsei Chmielnik be-Yisrael, 1960), 517-518.



Fig. 14. “Jews at forced labor in Chmielnik, clearing the rubble of the synagogue's study house, destroyed and burned by the Nazis. Several of them are wearing armbands,” September 1939. Beit Lohamei Hagetaot – Ghetto Fighters’ House Photo Archive #6753. Courtesy of Beit Lohamei Hagetaot – Ghetto Fighters’ House.



Fig. 15. Image of four members of the Jewish Committee in Chmielnik, Poland during the Holocaust. From left to right, Scyzorek, Bluma Kleinhandler, A. Langwald [president] and "Dab" [secretary, dated 1941-1942]. Visible in the image are white armbands, bearing wording, including "Judenrat." Reverse in Hebrew and English. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives. Courtesy of Varda Kleinhandler Cohen. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Fig. 16. Members of the Kleinhandler family in the Chmielnik ghetto wearing armbands, June 28, 1941. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #96906. Courtesy of Varda Kleinhandler Cohen. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Throughout October 1942 the deportations continued. From Holland (*above*) and Belgium (*opposite, above*), Jews were brought to Auschwitz (*see also page 117*). From central Poland and Theresienstadt they were deported to Treblinka; with as many as 30 deportations during the last two weeks of October (*opposite, below*); and from eastern Galicia to Belzec (*opposite, above*). East of Greater Germany, the Jews were killed in the streets, or in nearby woods and quarries, including 10,000 in the Volhynian town of Luboml.

Fig. 17. “Map depicting major deportation route of an estimated 8,000 Jews from Chmielnik to Treblinka on October 6, 1942,” in *The Routledge Atlas of the Holocaust: The Complete History* (London: Routledge, 2009), 115.



Fig. 18. “The deportation of Chmielnik Jewry. A column of deportees is standing in the street. Photographed in 1942.” Beit Lohamei Hagetaot – Ghetto Fighters’ House Photo Archive #6754. Courtesy of Beit Lohamei Hagetaot – Ghetto Fighters’ House.



Fig. 19. Melech Glajt (later Max Glait) with a group of Polish Jewish refugees in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 1943. Glajt is standing in the middle of the back row, wearing eyeglasses. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #42659. Courtesy of Anne Miransky. Thanks to Rachelle Glait, daughter of Melech Glajt, for bringing this photograph to my attention.



Fig. 20. Members of the Glajt family: Melech Glajt; Gitel Glajt Garfinkel (later “Garfinkel-Bresco”) and infant daughter, Ruth; niece Helen Baron (later “Kupfer”); and other unknown individuals, including an Uzbek couple in Samarkand, 1944. Courtesy of Rosalie Halstuch, daughter of Helen Kupfer.

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¹⁰³⁹ Established by a dozen survivors in Munich, Germany, in the US zone, on November 28, 1945, the Central Historical Commission (or the Tsentrale Historishe Komisy, TsHK, in Yiddish) gathered approximately 2,550 testimonies from Holocaust survivors hailing from various European countries between December 1945 and December 1948. The testimonies pertain to the fate of Holocaust survivors during the years of Nazi occupation. Upon the Commission's dissolution in 1948, the testimonies were transferred to Israel to be incorporated within Yad Vashem's archival collections. For extensive information on the establishment and activities of the Central Historical Commission in Munich (and its associated historical commissions), see: Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. 6-7, 128, 144.

¹⁰⁴⁰ According to political scientist, Claudia Leeb, The Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance is the "only existing institution in Austria that exposes Austria's involvement in Nazi atrocities." Claudia Leeb, *The Politics of Repressed Guilt: The Tragedy of Austrian Silence* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 12. Established in 1963, the DÖW houses documentation pertaining to Nazi war crimes and the prosecution of Nazi criminals from the postwar era, among other materials. Yad Vashem owns copies of documentation from the DÖW, which it has made readily accessible to researchers via its website in the form of Record Group M.38.

¹⁰⁴¹ The documentation that I have utilized in my research on Chmielnik pertains to the following three legal testimonies presented during the war crimes trial of former S.S. Gendarmerie Major Gerulf Mayer. All of these testimonies are included within the same transcribed courtroom documentation and are cited in my text: Testimony of Riwka [sic] Mali, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.38/544; Testimony of Samuel Kalisz, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.38/544; Testimony of Kalman Zelaznik, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.38/544, 1 [20].

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Sanwald, Siegfried. Re: Gerulf Mayer. December 19, 2012. Email.

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American Jewish Yearbook [New York]

The Canadian Jewish News [Montreal, Toronto; Canada]

Canadian Jewish Review [Toronto, Canada]

¹⁰⁴³ The following list of periodicals consulted for this work represents publications—many now defunct—in multiple languages: English, Hebrew, Polish, and Yiddish. Thus, this is an integrated list, linguistically speaking. In alphabetizing these periodical titles, I have ignored definite articles such as “The,” “Ha-,” “Der,” and “Di,” when they come at the beginning of a title and considered the respective spelling systems of these different languages. Hence, *Der moment* precedes *Ha-magid*, and *Di kinder-velt* precedes *Kieltser tsaytung*.

Davar [Tel-Aviv, British Mandate Palestine]

Echo Dnia Świętokrzyskie [Kielce, Poland]

Hed Hairgun: Annual of Chmielnikers in Israel and Diaspora [Tel-Aviv, Israel]

Haynt [Warsaw, Poland]

Hayntige naves [Warsaw, Poland]

Historical Supplement of the Institute of National Remembrance [Kielce, Poland]

The Jewish Chronicle [London, UK]

Jewish Telegraphic Agency [New York]

Kurier Kielecki [Kielce, Poland]

Lebns-fragn [Tel-Aviv, Israel]

Midstream [New York]

Der moment [Warsaw, Poland]

Ha-magid [Lyck, East Prussia]

Moriah [Vienna, Austria]

New York Post [New York]

Nowy Kurier Chmielnicki [Chmielnik, Poland]

The Palestine Post [Jerusalem, British Mandate Palestine]

Polish Review [New York]

Folks hilf [Warsaw, Poland]

Forverts [New York]

Forward [New York]

Ha-tsofe [Tel-Aviv, Israel]

Ha-tsefira [Warsaw, Poland]

Di kinder-velt [Warsaw, Poland]

Kieltser tsaytung [Kielce, Poland]

The Reform Advocate [Chicago, IL]

Salzburger Nachrichten [Salzburg, Austria]

The Times of Israel [Jerusalem]

Der tog [New York]

Unzer fraynd [Wilno, Poland]

YIVO bleter [New York]