

Warsaw Ghetto part 1. and 2.

Summary

The two volumes form a two-part collection of documents on life in the Warsaw ghetto. From a technical point of view they do not differ from the rest of the Archive. Here we find official documents issued by official structures, German and Jewish, as well as documents of the Jewish underground. There are papers written by the Oneg Shabbat collaborators as well as private materials that they assembled. The first part (1.) includes 114, the second (2.) – 111 documents. They are divided into the following chapters: 1. Images of the ghetto; Education; Religious life; Refugees and deportees; Struggle with typhus; Letters; Persecutions and Destruction; 2. Statistics; Economics; Shops; Forced labour; House Committees; Political and civic organisations and the underground; Jewish Order Police; “The Thirteen”. It purposely refers to the earlier volume of the series on the Warsaw ghetto everyday life.

The first part starts with the Images of the ghetto, including texts on social conditions and daily life of the inhabitants, as well as 76 preserved photographs from the ghetto, taken most probably by a Jewish photographer(s). The chapter on education consists of extensive papers on the fate of Jewish children and youth, and schooling under the German occupation. The third chapter contains texts deriving mostly from Jewish orthodox circles and therefore allows us to enlarge our rather scant knowledge about the Holocaust experience in the traditional Jewish environment. The list of over sixty personalities of Jewish religious life, including their place of birth or activity, among them many rabbis, closes the chapter.

Among the documents concerning refugees and deportees, arriving to Warsaw, and then the Warsaw ghetto, of particular importance are those pertaining to German Jews, sent to Warsaw in April 1942. We still lack much information on this community. The next chapter of the volume focuses on the struggle with typhus, one of the biggest problems of ghetto existence. Another chapter includes letters both sent to and received in the ghetto. The volume is closed with a group of documents on the subsequent stages of destruction of the Jews: anti-Semitic attacks that occurred before the closing of the ghetto; persecutions in the ghetto that happened during deportations to death and in the vestigial ghetto. They are complemented by demographic analyses of the deportations and statistics of social phenomena in the vestigial ghetto.

The second part starts with materials on economic life of the Warsaw ghetto. Firstly, the reader will find the statistics. The most valuable is Doc. No. 34/1, an extensive study of various domains of life of the Jewish population, much beyond the economic issues. A separate group of documents concerns particular sectors of the ghetto economy and phenomena like forced labour, new professions, smuggling and (work)shops.

A collection of documents, relatively small in numbers but fairly voluminous, concerns the house committees. They were already spontaneously organized during the siege of the city in September 1939, and later played a very important role as units of ghetto self-government. Preserved protocols of the two committees present us with the methods of work of these civic institutions and reflect the towering problems dealt with by the Jewish population.

Documents included in this volume allow us to for learn about the ghetto political life to only a rather limited extent. Materials on the subject can be found in many files of the Archive. They have been and will be edited in volumes concerning the underground press, the Oneg Shabbat team work, diaries from the ghetto, and others. In this volume, several kinds of records are included, starting with those of a general and programmatic character. Many of them could not be fully identified. We neither know when and why there were written nor where they were to be published, although perhaps in the underground press. Perhaps they were talks prepared for some party meetings. There are also minutes of such meetings, and of gatherings of civic organisations where decisions were taken, e.g. to make those who were relatively wealthier to support the poor (Doc. No. 34/79). Another group of documents concern the armed resistance movement at the turn of 1942/1943, including preparations for the uprising.

In the Archive, many important documents focusing on the Order Police are preserved. Many of them have already been published.¹ In this volume the remaining five are included. The most valuable of them is a monograph by Witelson, a policeman and at the same time Oneg Shabbat collaborator (Doc. No. 34/102). This paper includes extensive and detailed information on the organisation of the Order Police, its staff, methods of work, etc. The overall picture, however, is not objective. The author does not deny his negative attitude to his superiors. He clearly divides the police into two groups; the leaders close to Commander Szeryński, and the rest. Another paper about the Order Police written by an unknown author (Doc. No. 34/101) is more balanced. The volume ends with three testimonies concerning the activities of the so-called “the Thirteen”; a German secret service unit in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Translated by Eleonora Bergman

¹ See volumes: *Getto warszawskie. Życie codzienne* [Warsaw Ghetto. Everyday Life], Docs. Nos. 65-69; *Rada Żydowska w Warszawie* [Jewish Council in Warsaw], Docs. Nos. 79-86.