

People and works of Oneg Shabbat

Summary

The documents in this volume pertain directly to the activities of Oneg Shabbat, a clandestine organization in the Warsaw Ghetto, a virtual research institute and the only one of its kind on the German-occupied Polish territories. It can be said that almost every manuscript of the Ghetto Archive (ARG) is a statement about Oneg Shabbat, but the materials singled out here are of particular significance. They introduce us to Ringelblum, founder and leader of the organization, and to a group of his closest collaborators, as well as they cast light on the most important working methods of the team.

Of all the preserved materials, those outlining the organization of the group have been selected for this volume. Although Oneg Shabbat was a clandestine formation, documents providing important information about the organization and its members were discovered. These documents contain a number of personal data, including incomplete lists of Oneg Shabbat co-workers. A very important list is the one compiled by Hersh Wasser, containing names and addresses of some people connected with ARG (Doc. No. 1). There are also other lists of names (Docs. Nos. 2, 3, 5). The most important document in this category is a book written by Oneg Shabbat's accountant and kept by Menachem Mendel Kohn from the start of the organization in November 1940 until August 1942. On the one hand, it gives us insight into the finances of ARG, but on the other hand it provides a vast pool of information about people working for Oneg Shabbat: authors, copyists of texts and donors whose support was crucial in that it enabled the organization to continue working (Doc. No. 6).

Another set of materials pertains to archival works of ARG. The documentation amassed by ARG as soon as the fall of 1941 was so extensive that it required to be put in order and recorded. This task was taken on by Hersh Wasser, secretary of the

organization, assisted by Yechiel Górnny, Eliahu Gutkowski and Rachel Auerbach. The recording started at that time and lasted, after a break of a few months, until the deportations to Treblinka in July 1942. Several archival lists were compiled, many of them of materials which were found later in the first cache. These lists are now instrumental in identifying many a document of the Archive and they also provide information about the team's methods of work (Docs. Nos. 8 to 10). No finding aids are preserved for the second cache.

The third group are materials documenting the research program of the Oneg Shabbat team. These are drafts, schemes and questionnaires used to collect data destined to be used in the monograph "Two-and-a-half years", depicting the fate of the Jewish population during the war (Docs. Nos. 11 to 46). The work was planned as a comprehensive one. It was assumed to be not only documentation of facts and phenomena registered as sources, but also a thorough analysis and comments. Ringelblum and his closest collaborators put much effort in the first two phases of the project. They collected substantial source materials and worked out theoretical outlines of the monograph. They started to elaborate on particular chapters, but they did not succeed to complete their work.

The last two groups contain documents of Oneg Shabbat information activities. The fourth group includes Oneg Shabbat bulletins and "Wiadomości ARG" [ARG Information] which were underground press services compiled from April to July 1942 and on the turn of 1942/1943, collecting particular data on the fate of Jewish communities on Polish lands (Docs. Nos. 47 to 63). The Oneg Shabbat bulletin, as an internal periodical of the organization, was originally meant to provide information both for the clandestine ghetto press, and for the so-called Aryan side. The first issue of the bulletin was printed under the title "Wiadomości" [Information]. The following issues, most probably for technical reasons, were typed or handwritten in a few copies, without any title. As a rule, one copy of each issue was destined to go outside the ghetto, to the Polish underground. After a break in the summer of 1942, when most of the ghetto inmates were taken to their death in Treblinka, publication of the bulletins was resumed in the late fall. The first title was then used again, and six issues of the "Wiadomości" were published from November 14, 1942 till January 15, 1943 (Doc. No. 64).

The fifth group contains the most important documents of Oneg Shabbat dealing with the annihilation of Jews on Polish soil. These are reports based on witness testimonies as well as on official files collected in the Ghetto Archive. The reports were put together by the Ringelblum team, then smuggled out of the ghetto and passed on to the Polish underground authorities, to the Polish government-in-exile, and, eventually, to the Allies. This important mission was accomplished and, partly thanks to the Ringelblum's team, information about German crimes reached the leadership of the Western countries. Oneg Shabbat prepared four reports: on the killing center in Chełmno on the Ner (Doc. No. 65), "The second phase"

(Doc. No. 66), “Gehenna of Polish Jews under German occupation” (Doc. No. 67) and “Liquidation of Jewish Warsaw” (Doc. No. 68).

Originals of all the documents in this volume are preserved in the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. For comparison, some documents from the collections of the Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archive of New Documents] in Warsaw and of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York were made use of. So far, some documents on Oneg Shabbat activities were published in their entirety and some other in fragments, but most of them were published here for the first time. It has to be stressed that the older editions have not included the full source material. Documents which are originally in Polish have been transcribed, and those in other languages (Yiddish, German) have been translated into Polish. Scanned copies of all original documents published here can be found on the CD attached to this volume.

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