

Warsaw Ghetto Police: The Jewish Order Service During Nazi Occupation. Katarzyna Person. Translated by Zygmunt Nowak-Soliński. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. 248 pp. \$33. Hardcover ISBN-13: 9781501754074.

Katarzyna Person's *Warsaw Ghetto Police* offers a fascinating in-depth study of the *Ordnungsdienst* (Jewish Order Service), one of the most notorious organizations in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. In ten short chapters that move chronologically from the Order Service's formation by the Judenrat in November 1940 to its significant role in ghetto deportations known as the "Great Action" in 1942, Person describes the conduct of Jewish policemen and their significant role in the everyday lives of inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto. Along the way, Person grapples with questions of belonging within the Jewish community, the perpetuation of violence, and the extent of the Order Service's role in carrying out German orders.

Person begins with a detailed explanation of the formation of the Order Service by Judenrat Chairman Adam Czerniaków. While the initial instructions for the formation of the Order Police are not entirely clear from surviving documentation, the organization was an auxiliary service that performed tasks imposed on it by the German Order Police (Orpo), the Polish State Police (known as the Blue Police), and the Judenrat. After the Warsaw Ghetto was sealed on November 16, 1940, Order Service policemen were charged with regulating pedestrian and vehicular traffic and sanitation of apartment blocks. In time, they would be responsible for carrying out the deportations of ghetto inhabitants to the *Umschlagplatz* and on to Treblinka.

The commander of the Order Service was Józef Szeryński, a former Polish army officer, Polish State Police commissioner, and Catholic convert. Thanks to his pre-war experience and his strong personality, the Judenrat gave Szeryński a free hand in selecting his officers. Most of his deputies had little policing experience (many were lawyers and medical professionals by trade) but had been part of the previous Labor Battalion that facilitated delivery of Jewish workers to German forced labor camps. Szeryński and his men also enjoyed significant independence when it came to the recruitment of nearly two thousand policemen. While Order Service records indicate that strict guidelines were in place to select the best candidates, those from well-connected families had little trouble gaining jobs. Moreover, the Order Service was staffed with primarily young, educated men that were strongly acculturated within Polish society and very few spoke Yiddish.

The demographic makeup of the Order Service would become a significant issue as it contributed to the perception that the police "stood on the border between the Jewish world and the Aryan side" (79). In two chapters, Person skillfully uses a variety of sources including memoirs, the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto (known as the Ringelblum Archive), and newspapers such as *Gazeta Żydowska* to explain their "outsider" status in the eyes of ghetto inhabitants. Two issues—materialism and violence—led to this negative perception. As thousands of Jews struggled to survive each day in the Warsaw Ghetto, members of the Order Service enjoyed substantial meals and alcohol, occasionally associated with prostitutes, and often extorted bribes from the poorest residents to line their pockets. Connected to corruption was the use of widescale violence against ghetto inhabitants. Members of the Order Service were advised to use physical

punishment as a last resort, but violence became the norm as officers collected Jewish Council fees, rounded up men for compulsory labor in German work camps, and guarded convicts in the ghetto's Central Lockup prison. Policemen were especially harsh toward child smugglers and refugees into the Warsaw Ghetto. The behavior of Order Service officers, Person notes, "symbolized moral decline, the dissolution of social ties, and the loss of sensitivity to suffering of other Jews" (82). Person spends time in the fifth chapter, "Policemen's Voices," demonstrating how officers tried to explain away their actions as carrying out German-imposed orders or providing for their families, and there were even attempts made by ghetto authorities to regulate behavior within the ranks of the Order Service. Nevertheless, neither the Judenrat or Szeryński could contain the violence and corruption.

The intense hatred for the Jewish police among ghetto inhabitants perpetuated by the corruption and violence ultimately led members of the Order Service to "close their ranks" and become insular. Officers built a sense of belonging through ceremonies, daily roll call, and the establishment of mutual assistance funds. Still, their actions fueled the myth that policemen and their families lived better lives than all others in the ghetto. Person assembles testimony that clearly demonstrates that, while many did live well from bribes and extortion, especially the elite of the Order Service, the rank-and-file officers struggled to make ends meet. In one striking example, an officer laments the lack of pay and recounts his family dying from a vitamin deficiency and exhaustion. In highlighting the social differences between officers, Person adds an important, if overlooked, element to historical studies on daily life in the Warsaw Ghetto.

A final question that Person considers is the extent of the involvement in the Order Service to carry out the demands of the German government in Warsaw. Were they functionaries forced into their roles by the Germans or were they also victims? In the spring of 1942, as the Germans prepared for Operation Reinhard, Order Service members assisted German police and the Gestapo in arresting Jews living on the Aryan side of Warsaw. Later, Jewish police were tasked with rounding up Jews whose names were compiled on German lists to be deported to labor camps. The crescendo of their involvement came in July 1942 during the deportations to the *Umschlagplatz*, the holding site before boarding cattle cars to the newly constructed Treblinka extermination camp. Policemen were ordered to bring six thousand Jews for deportation each day using whatever means necessary. Such "intimate violence," Person argues, led many to see Jewish police as a "greater threat than even the most brutal Germans" (127). After the war, former members of the Order Service defended their actions in several ways, the most common of which was to explain they carried out their duties as "cogs in a machine" (150). In other words, they acted solely in defense of family and friends who otherwise would have suffered. Interestingly, in the twenty-three cases involving Order Service officers referred to the Jewish Honor Court, created to "cleanse Jewish society of people who in one way or another cooperated with Nazi authorities," only two went to trial and both men were eventually acquitted for lack of evidence (147).

Warsaw Ghetto Police ends with a brief discussion of how the Order Service has been portrayed in historical accounts and testimonies since World War II. Most of these sources, Person notes, describe officers as foreigners and oppressors. Additionally, such accounts served as fuel

for antisemitic campaigns that portrayed a “Jewish Gestapo” helping to eliminate “passive Jews” (154). Person should be commended for providing Holocaust scholars with the fullest account of the Order Service to date and revising our understanding of the diversity of individual attitudes and motivations among policemen. Additionally, the book should serve as a model for historical scholarship of Jewish police activities in smaller ghettos in years to come.

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