

## A Band of Comrades

The Oyneg Shabes was not just a clandestine archive; it was also a tightly knit collective, a secret but vital component of the larger alternate community that had developed out of the house committees and the Aleynhilf. Using the Aleynhilf as a base, Ringelblum slowly and methodically assembled a group of collaborators that ranged from the most prominent leaders of prewar Polish Jewry to impoverished refugees. Of all the Jewish historians in prewar Poland, it was Ringelblum who most regarded history as a collective enterprise. Now, in the middle of a national disaster, it was this collective effort that shaped the archive and imbued it with a sense of purpose. As Ringelblum wrote, probably in late 1942:

The members of the Oyneg Shabes constituted, and continue to constitute, a united body, imbued with a common spirit. The Oyneg Shabes is not a group of researchers who compete with one another but a united group, a brotherhood where all help one another . . . Each member of the Oyneg Shabes knew that his effort and pain, his hard work and toil, his taking constant risks with the dangerous work of moving material from one place to another—that this was done in the name of a high ideal. . . . The Oyneg Shabes was a brotherhood, an order of brothers who wrote on their flag: readiness to sacrifice, mutual loyalty, and service to [Jewish society].<sup>1</sup>

Over time, the Oyneg Shabes brought together men and women from a wide spectrum of prewar Polish Jewry: wealthy businessmen and poor artisans, rabbis and Communists, Yiddishists and Polish-speaking intellectuals, teach-

ers and journalists, economists and leaders of youth groups. Some were part of a small executive committee, an inner circle that raised money, made policy, and decided what to study and what to collect. A larger group contributed essays and reports commissioned by the archive. This group ranged from frequent contributors to those who only submitted one or two essays or testimonies. Some members only copied, typing or writing out duplicate and triplicate copies of incoming material; isolated from everyone else except Ringelblum and his closest secretaries, were Israel Lichtenstein and his two teen-aged helpers, David Graber and Nahum Grzywacz. They concealed the documents in the Borochov School on Nowolipki 68 and waited for the order to bury them under the school basement. Although exact numbers are difficult to establish, approximately fifty to sixty people (including copiers and transcribers) were involved in some way with the archive, from its beginning in 1940 until the ghetto uprising in 1943.

The Oyneg Shabes had more luck in saving documents than in saving people. Although thousands of pages survived in the tin boxes and in the milk cans (a significant part of the archive was most certainly lost), little more than random traces remain of the men and women who wrote the documents, gathered them, copied them, and hid them. As most of the Oyneg Shabes collaborators died with their entire families, few survivors could provide more than the barest biographical details of those who perished. The fate of the Oyneg Shabes collective reflected the fate of interwar Polish Jewry: the destruction was so complete and so calamitous that all too often only disconnected scraps of information remained. The few biographies of those who contributed to the archive, published largely in Yiddish books and journals, are short and sketchy, some little more than a paragraph, and often they are little more than hagiographies.

Some members of the Oyneg Shabes did not even have the luck to find some small memorial in an article or biographical dictionary. Those who wrote in Polish fell between the cracks: they did not merit entries in the standard Yiddish literary lexicons, nor were they famous enough for inclusion in the biographical dictionaries of Polish literature. There are scant details on the young student Salomea Ostrowska, a productive worker in the archive. Stanisław Różycki, an important essayist has left no traces beyond his penetrating essays on the ghetto streets and on his experiences in Soviet-occupied Lwów. Many members of the archive left little more than a name. Hardly any had a grave. Only three survived: Hersh Wasser, his wife Bluma, and Rachel Auerbach.

Only a small inner circle—the so-called executive committee—knew the entire scope of the archive's agendas and membership. Most Oyneg Shabes

work proceeded on a need-to-know basis. Once contributors received an assignment, they were not supposed to discuss it with anyone, even if they suspected that their interlocutor was also working for the archive. They did know, however, that a secret organization with a national mission had asked them for help.

The Oyneg Shabes, although a diverse group, had particular characteristics. Although several contributors, such as Daniel Fligelman, were totally unknown figures before the war and were “discovered” by the Oyneg Shabes through the Aleynhilf or the refugee committees in the Warsaw Ghetto, Ringelblum had managed to assemble an executive committee of stature and achievement. It included prominent prewar communal leaders and well-to-do businessmen. Virtually all members of the executive committee of the Oyneg Shabes had been active in prewar Jewish cultural life. In the ghetto, the entire executive committee also served in the leadership of the Aleynhilf. Apart from the executive committee, most Oyneg Shabes collaborators were teachers, economists, and journalists, all recruited from the Jewish intelligentsia.

If any one prewar institution shaped the ethos of the Oyneg Shabes it was clearly the YIVO Institute, for prior to the war several members had worked in some way for the YIVO, in its Warsaw branch, in Lodz, or in Vilna. These included Ringelblum, Hersh Wasser, Eliyahu Gutkowski, Yitzhak Giterman, Abraham Lewin, Shie Rabinowitz, Shmuel Winter, Aaron Koninski, Shimon Huberband, Menakhem Linder, Rachel Auerbach, Cecylia Słapakowa, Jerzy Winkler, Yitzhak Bernstein, Yehezkiel Wilczynski, and others. Many were scholars in their own right who had already published work on history, literature, folklore, or economics. In the YIVO they had by now seen that political differences need not preclude collaboration to advance Yiddish culture. The Oyneg Shabes merely extended a path that they had already chosen.

But Ringelblum understood that the archive could work only by reaching out and recruiting new members. Hersh Wasser, one of the two secretaries of the Oyneg Shabes, recalled that Ringelblum had told him that the archive had to become “the property of the entire Jewish people [der kinyn fun gantsn yidishn folk].” There could be no room for ideological and political quarrels. Anyone whom the staff considered a valuable worker and able to keep secrets was eligible for membership. According to Wasser, Ringelblum never wanted the archive to be known as a Left Poalei Tsiyon archive, or even an archive with any ideological slant or bias.<sup>2</sup> If YIVO activists were over-represented in the leadership of the Oyneg Shabes, they still made room for fervent champions of Hebrew (Eliezer Lipe Bloch) and for Jewish poets and writers who wrote in Polish (Henryka Lazowert, Gustawa Jarecka).

Wasser recalled that the executive committee, as part of this effort to make the Oyneg Shabes as inclusive as possible, reached out to the strongest and best-organized political party in the ghetto—the Bund. The Bund refused the Oyneg Shabes request to work together and set up its own archive.<sup>3</sup> As usual the Bund preferred to work alone, especially when the potential partners were Zionists or, worse, members of the LPZ, with whom the Bund had long had chilly relations.<sup>4</sup> But even though the Bund as a party decided to go its own way, several Bundists worked in the Oyneg Shabes Archive on their own, for example, Shie Rabinowitz, who was on the executive committee; David Cholodenko, who was a judge in literary contests; Leyb Goldin, who contributed a valuable fictionalized essay on hunger; and Yehezkiel Wilczynski, who conducted interviews, transcribed documents, and left many of his own studies on the history of Polish Jewry. Furthermore, it is entirely probable—as is discussed in the next chapter—that, when news first reached the ghetto of the Nazis’ extermination program, the Bund and the Oyneg Shabes worked together to inform Jews abroad and the Polish Government-in-Exile in London.<sup>5</sup>

Communists also joined the Oyneg Shabes. One of the most important editors of the underground Communist press in the ghetto, Yehuda Feld (whose real name was Yehuda Feldworm) played a significant role in the archive. Feld worked in the CENTOS, had extensive contact with children and refugees, and filed important and informative reports on them for the Oyneg Shabes. He also compiled a collection of short stories of ghetto life, *In di tsaytn fun Homen dem tsveytn* (In the days of Haman the Second).<sup>6</sup>

Ringelblum had been preparing for the archive as soon as the war began. Shortly before the Germans invaded Poland, he began a diary. This diary revealed very little about his personal emotions and practically nothing about his family. Especially in the first year of the war, it resembled the random notes and jottings of a historian who was planning a major book after the war. By day Ringelblum heard countless stories from the hundreds of people who passed through the offices of the Aleynhilf; at night he recorded them in his diary.<sup>7</sup>

German soldiers, in the year prior to the ghetto’s establishment, frequently raided Jewish apartments to requisition them or in search of valuables. In those circumstances, Ringelblum believed, most Jews were too scared to write. Instead of keeping diaries and journals, prominent journalists and writers burned incriminating papers and books.<sup>8</sup> Therefore Ringelblum began keeping records in his diary fully aware that he bore a special responsibility to document events that would otherwise be forgotten.



He quickly realized, however, that these fears were exaggerated. Although the Germans did all they could in the first months of the occupation to destroy the Polish political underground, they cared little about what the Jews wrote or said. When they raided Jewish homes, they were interested in valuables, not manuscripts.<sup>9</sup>

That being the case, Ringelblum believed that it was feasible to organize an underground archive to study Jewish life under the Nazi occupation and to collect documentation. He knew from the beginning that it had to be a collective enterprise. No one individual could even begin to think about interviewing sources, gathering documents, and ensuring that the material would remain hidden and secure. On November 22, 1940, he convened a meeting that formally organized the archive.<sup>10</sup>

Over time Ringelblum and his associates built this “band of comrades” by a process of trial and error. Several people disappointed him and were quietly dropped. Others, totally unknown before the war, became indispensable. Today it is clear that the Oyneg Shabes succeeded in part because alongside an executive committee that provided direction and focus, many of the members of the archive wrote on topics they chose themselves. This interplay of central direction, focused research, and individual initiative produced an enormous variety of material. Thanks to the Oyneg Shabes, a large number of very different people, with diverse points of view and interests, ensured breadth of coverage and a variety of opinions and approaches. In the middle of a war, Ringelblum believed, it was best to cast as wide a net as possible. How could one know, after all, what information future historians would find “important”? In the archive Ringelblum came closest to realizing his prewar dream of a history “of the people and by the people.”

## THE SECRETARIES

The two most important members of the Oyneg Shabes, apart from Ringelblum, were both refugees from Lodz: Eliyahu Gutkowski and Hersh Wasser. Gutkowski and Wasser were the co-secretaries who ran the daily affairs of the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>11</sup> Once the executive committee decided to send someone on an interview, or to solicit a particular essay, usually Wasser or Gutkowski followed through, routinely working with Ringelblum to draw up the research agendas and questionnaires that became so important when the archive decided to complement *zamling* with focused studies of Jewish life under the Nazi occupation. Evidence suggests that it was Wasser who took the actual archival materials to Israel Lichtenstein at the Borochov school on Nowolipki

68.<sup>12</sup> Wasser's wife, Bluma, not only interviewed but also joined a pool of typists who made duplicate and triplicate copies of the testimonies and accounts streaming into the archive. When the staff at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw opened the first tin boxes of documents in September 1946, Rachel Auerbach recognized the telltale notebooks that Gutkowski would distribute to writers who received assignments from the Oyneg Shabes. Gutkowski, she recalled, would also come around to prod writers to stay on task and meet their deadlines.

Wasser had been a member of Ringelblum's party, the LPZ, and an important leader of its Lodz organization. An economist by training, he had also directed the party's Borocho library in Lodz. In December 1939 he and his wife decided to flee Lodz for Warsaw. After a harrowing train ride, where German soldiers beat and robbed passengers, the Wassers arrived in Warsaw. Hersh Wasser went immediately to Ringelblum, who recruited him for the *Aleynhilf*.<sup>13</sup> Wasser ran the *landsmanshaft* department, which directed the refugee organizations based on town of origin. This very important job gave him valuable contacts with the hordes of refugees pouring into Warsaw. Thanks to Wasser the Oyneg Shabes could now collect a wealth of data about what had been happening to Jews in the provinces.

Wasser kept lists of Oyneg Shabes collaborators and distributed small stipends to them.<sup>14</sup> He also maintained a running inventory of material flowing into the archive.<sup>15</sup> Later on, after news arrived of the "Final Solution," Wasser, along with Ringelblum and Gutkowski, compiled Oyneg Shabes bulletins on the mass murders and put together reports to be sent abroad.

Alongside his work in the Oyneg Shabes, Wasser remained active in the LPZ. According to his daughter, Leah, he was passionately devoted to his movement—before, during, and even after the war.<sup>16</sup> He helped edit its underground press and sat on its Central Committee. In the second half of 1942, as a representative of the LPZ, he attended key meetings that concerned the *ŻOB*, the Jewish Fighting Organization.<sup>17</sup> Thus Wasser constituted one of several links that would develop between the Jewish resistance movement and the Oyneg Shabes.

During the ghetto uprising, Wasser fell into the hands of the Germans who put him on a train to Treblinka. He jumped from the train and made his way back to Warsaw.<sup>18</sup> He and his wife eventually found a hideout in the northern part of Warsaw. They shared it with Hersh Berlinski, the former commander of the LPZ fighting groups in the ghetto uprising; Pola Elster, a charismatic party leader who had escaped from the Poniatowa labor camp in 1943; and Eliyahu Erlich, a party member. On September 1944 the Germans discovered their hideout. In the shootout that followed, Berlinski, Elster, and

Erlich were killed, but Wasser and his wife survived.<sup>19</sup> It was thanks to Wasser, who owed his life to a series of miracles, that the Oyneg Shabes Archive was eventually discovered.

The other secretary of the archive, Eliyahu Gutkowski, had been a leading member of the Right Poalei Tsiyon.<sup>20</sup> Gutkowski's prominence in the Oyneg Shabes reflected Ringelblum's determination to put aside political differences for a common cause. Like Wasser, Gutkowski had lived in Lodz, where he acquired a solid reputation as a teacher and as an expert in Hebrew culture. He received much of his Hebrew erudition from his father, Rabbi Jacob Gutkowski, and had lived in Palestine for many years.

Gutkowski was a gifted writer who had worked in his party's press. It was probably thanks to Gutkowski that the Oyneg Shabes managed to recruit one of its best writers, Peretz Opoczynski, who had worked alongside Gutkowski in the Right Poalei Tsiyon's major newspaper, *Dos vort*.

Like Wasser, Gutkowski did not let his ties to the Oyneg Shabes interfere with his political activities. In the ghetto he helped edit the major underground newspaper of the Right Poalei Tsiyon. He also drew closer to one of the most important youth organizations in the ghetto, Dror-Frayhayt.<sup>21</sup> While political and perhaps personal considerations prevented some of Dror's leaders from entirely trusting Ringelblum, they did feel quite close to Gutkowski.<sup>22</sup> In time, as the idea of resistance crystallized, these connections to the youth movements would become very important to the Oyneg Shabes.

Especially warm relations developed between Gutkowski and Dror's Yitzhak Zuckerman, who would later serve as deputy commander of the ŻOB.<sup>23</sup> Zuckerman recruited Gutkowski to help teach seminars that Dror organized in the ghetto. Together they compiled an anthology of Jewish history and martyrdom, *Payn un gvure* (Pain and heroism), that was avidly studied in Dror's seminars.<sup>24</sup>

The ninety-eight-page anthology was a rich collection of historical and literary writings on the Crusades, the expulsion from Spain, the Khmel'nitsky massacres, the pogroms of 1903–21, World War I, and Jewish fighters in mandatory Palestine. It certainly attested to Gutkowski's deep knowledge of Jewish literature and history—and perhaps underscored why he would see the Oyneg Shabes as a national mission of critical importance. Precisely at the time the Germans were trying to crush the spirit of the Jews, the study of Jewish history could remind them that the Jews belonged to a great nation. Issued in the summer of 1940, just following the fall of France, *Payn un gvure* admitted that there seemed to be little hope for the Jewish People in this most difficult period of their history. The Nazis seemed to be winning everywhere. However,

we Jews, an ancient nation rich in culture, with a great spiritual tradition from which we draw enormous strength—we Jews cannot and do not want to perish. During our three-thousand-year history we have gone through many difficult times—sometimes even harder than now. But we have survived, much to the dismay and outrage of our oppressors. The history of our nation shows that we are a great people. . . . One can oppress such a people only for a short time, but it is impossible to wipe it off the face of the earth. . . . This [collection] will instill in us a will to live and a determination to hang on in this difficult time. Our forefathers died as martyrs and withstood terrible tortures because they believed in a higher idea. With all our successes and failures, we are like the mythic phoenix that rises again from the dust.<sup>25</sup>

After the war Zuckerman recalled that the anthology made an enormous impact on the members of the youth movements. But, as time went on, it was also a reminder that what they were experiencing was entirely unprecedented. Whatever the lessons were of Jewish history and literature, Zuckerman believed that they were of limited value in the Warsaw Ghetto, with one exception: the lesson that Jews had to fight for their honor.<sup>26</sup>

Gutkowski constantly pumped Zuckerman for material for the Oyneg Shabes, and after the war Zuckerman found many of his seminar notes in the archive.<sup>27</sup> Thanks to Gutkowski, the Oyneg Shabes was probably able to procure several important ghetto writings of the Hebrew-Yiddish poet Yitzhak Katzenelson. In the Warsaw Ghetto, Katzenelson was like a member of the Dror family.<sup>28</sup> Gutkowski's links to this dynamic youth movement would complement Ringelblum's growing ties to Dror's main rival, the radical-left Hashomer Hatzair.

Gutkowski himself wrote extensively for the archive. He composed a long memoir of Lodz Jewry during the early days of the German occupation, and in 1941 and 1942 he compiled important essays on economic trends in the ghetto and on currency trading. When the Oyneg Shabes began its systematic study of Jewish life under the occupation ("Two and a Half Years"), Gutkowski wrote many of the detailed questionnaires that guided interviewers. In the spring of 1942 he wrote reports that summarized the development of the German extermination program.

During the Great Deportation, Gutkowski, like many other members of the Oyneg Shabes, found temporary shelter in the woodworking shop run by Alexander Landau on Gęsia 30. Deeply concerned about his own survival and about hiding his only son, Gutkowski still continued to work for the Oyneg Shabes. In early September the Germans sent him to the Umschlagplatz. On the train to Treblinka, he found himself in the same boxcar

as Michael Mazor, who had worked with Ringelblum in the house committees, and Nathan Asz, a functionary in the Aleynhilf.<sup>29</sup> They noticed that the barbed wire that sealed the opening of the boxcar was loose and jumped from the train. Gutkowski made his way back to Warsaw and rejoined the archive. He was probably killed in the ghetto uprising in April 1943 at the age of thirty-nine, together with his wife, Luba, and their four-year-old son, Gabriel-Ze'ev. According to Zuckerman, they died trying to escape the burning ghetto through the sewers.

## THE PROTECTORS

The Oyneg Shabes executive committee charted policy and raised money. The membership of this committee shifted over time, but it included Ringelblum, Wasser, Gutkowski, Yitzhak Giterman, Menakhem Mendel Kon, Shie Rabinowitz, Shmuel Winter, Alexander Landau, Lipe Bloch, Daniel Guzik, Abraham Lewin, and others. The Oyneg Shabes badly needed people who were well connected, relatively wealthy, and powerful enough to protect it from outside interference. All the members of the executive committee were in a position to provide this help, and they were all committed to Ringelblum's project. The account book of the Oyneg Shabes showed that, in particular, Landau, Winter, and Rabinowitz contributed sizable amounts regularly to the archive's treasury (more on this in the next chapter).

### Menakhem Mendel Kon

Ringelblum and Wasser agreed that when it came to keeping the Oyneg Shabes in business, few people were more important than Menakhem Mendel Kon (1881–1943). The archive's treasurer and one of its chief fund-raisers, Kon also had to keep key members of the Oyneg Shabes alive. When Peretz Opoczynski and Rabbi Shimon Huberband contracted typhus in the course of their work, Kon procured expensive medicines and arranged for extra food rations to enable them to recover.

In a diary entry of May 27, 1942, Hersh Wasser wrote:

I am very upset that our dear Menakhem Kon is still here in the rotten ghetto. He needs, according to his doctor's advice, a sanatorium and fresh air. I'm going mad looking for a way to get him to Otwock. All his reservations, all prompted by legitimate worries about his obligations and responsibilities, must be waived because his health is the guarantee of Oyneg Shabes work. Without him it vanishes like a soap bubble. A person of such heart and character as Kon must be guarded like a precious

gem. Together with me, Rabbi Huberband is also looking for a solution. I hope we will persuade him in the end.<sup>30</sup>

Kon, like many others, emerged from obscurity to leadership in the ghetto. A native of Ostrołęka, he had been a wealthy merchant who arrived in Warsaw as a refugee. Ringelblum got to know him in the Aleynhilf, where he acted as a gadfly who called on his colleagues to spend less time on meetings and more on actually helping the poor.<sup>31</sup> Kon seems to have had good contacts with religious circles in the ghetto.<sup>32</sup> Rabbi Huberband, he wrote in his diary, was “his best friend.”<sup>33</sup>

Kon saw the Oyneg Shabes as a vital national mission:

I consider it a sacred duty for everyone, whether proficient or not, to write down everything he has seen or heard from others about what the Germans have done. . . . It must all be recorded without a single fact left out. And when the time comes—as it surely will—let the world read and know what the murderers have done. When the mourners write about this time, this will be their most important material. When those who will avenge us will come to settle accounts, they will be able to rely on [our writings].<sup>34</sup>

Among the many documents that Kon deposited with the Oyneg Shabes was a fragmentary diary that he kept of his experiences during the Great Deportation. This diary contained some negative, even damning judgments about Jewish behavior, but a basic rule of the archive was to record everything—good and bad. In the middle of panic and despair, fighting to stay alive and avoid German manhunts, Kon wrote down what he saw and felt—constant fear and often bitter disappointment in his fellow Jews.

The roundups and blockades produced such panic that even Kon, a respected and well-known figure in the ghetto, was refused help by close friends. On August 6, 1942, he found himself in the middle of a German roundup. Desperately seeking a hiding place, he found a cellar but decided to leave it to make room for children. (“The children should be saved before anyone else.”) He then ran to the carpentry shop of Alexander Landau on Geşia 30, where he had many friends and which would soon shelter the remnants of the Oyneg Shabes and the leaders of key Zionist youth movements. But on that day friendship counted for less than terror. (This may have been just after the German raid on the shop described by Natan Eck; see below.) In an unemotional tone Kon recounted how his friends turned him away, probably afraid that hiding an elderly man without documents might compromise their own illusory security in the shop. (“I see that there is no place for me;

my friends of yesterday are casting such eyes on me, strange, unrecognizing pricking looks . . . as if I had intruded by force into their territory where they have the exclusive right to be. One has to run somewhere else.”<sup>35</sup> Back on the street, Kon soon encountered Ringelblum and Lipe Bloch, both distraught and afraid that their families had been captured. Finally, Kon found a hiding place: at Nowolipki 68, the “safe house” of the Oyneg Shabes, where Israel Lichtenstein, David Graber, and Nahum Grzywacz took him in and gladly gave him food and shelter. Just a couple of days before, Lichtenstein and the two boys had buried the first cache of the Oyneg Shabes Archive.

Kon found a job in Emil Weitz’s brush factory, where he worked alongside Rabbi Huberband. But illusions of safety quickly vanished. Kon witnessed the SS select Huberband for death, and on September 7 he fell into the German net. Driven under a hail of blows to the Umschlagplatz, Kon told the people around him to escape. (“We should rather be killed on the spot than go to the death camp.”) Kon dropped his bags, dashed off, dodged German bullets, and returned to the brush factory, hoping to hide there. In his last diary entry, on October 1, 1942, Kon wrote that the remnants of Polish Jewry were going to their deaths with one hope—that after the war the Jewish people would exact retribution and justice. That, he wrote, was the main reason why Jews had to keep writing down what they were seeing. Kon continued to work for the archive until his death in April 1943.

### **Shmuel Winter**

Like Kon, Shmuel Winter (1891–1943), another important member of the executive committee, arrived in the Warsaw Ghetto from the provinces early in the war. Born in Włocławek in 1891, Winter grew up in a rabbinic family and received a traditional religious education before he left for Frankfurt to study commerce. Winter made his fortune exporting grain and seeds, and headed one of Poland’s largest import-export firms, Nasiona. He occupied major positions in both Polish and Jewish business organizations and served as one of the leaders of the Jewish Merchants Union (Yidisher Soykhrim Fareyn).

Shmuel Winter defied established stereotypes.<sup>36</sup> He was a wealthy businessman who contributed to the socialist Bund. According to Rachel Auerbach, Winter helped the Bund because of its stance on Yiddish culture rather than its politics.

Winter probably had his political sympathies . . . but just like a faithful husband is [true to only one woman], Winter devoted his entire passion and his heart to one idea—secular Jewish culture. He carried on his

shoulders the burden of responsibility for its very existence, for its every need. And because he left no heirs, no political party to bask in his achievements and in his memory, his name has been forgotten.<sup>37</sup>

The Jewish business elite of central Poland was largely Polish-speaking, but Winter's stubborn insistence on using Yiddish in his business dealings and on his letter heads earned him the sobriquet "Don Quixote." Winter was one of the founders of the YIVO and served on its executive board. It was the YIVO that brought Winter, Giterman, and Ringelblum together long before the war began. Even as his business prospered, Winter found the time to *zaml* for the YIVO and to publish many articles in the *YIVO bleter* and the Yiddish press on Jewish folklore and Yiddish literature. Max Weinreich recalled that he had a particular interest in Yiddish dialects, especially his own Kujawy patois. Winter became a regular contributor to the *Vilner tog*, a newspaper known for its high standards and interest in Yiddish culture.<sup>38</sup> He also amassed an enormous private library of thousands of volumes. In addition to folklore, he loved Jewish history. When the war began, he had still not completed a project he had been working on for many years—a history of the Jews of the Kujawy region.

Winter arrived in the Warsaw Ghetto with his wife and three children early in the war and became part of the Oyneg Shabes inner circle as well as a mainstay of the IKOR, the Yiddish cultural organization. With Winter, the Oyneg Shabes made a glaring exception to its ironclad rule barring collaboration with people who had ties to the Judenrat. The Judenrat, probably impressed with his prewar standing in the business community, recruited him to a key post in the semi-autonomous and critical Department of Provisioning and Supply (Zakład Zaopatrywania [ZZ]), which became an independent agency in September 1941.<sup>39</sup> There he worked closely with the respected Abraham Gepner, who headed the ZZ and was also one of the most important Judenrat members. Winter thus served as an indispensable unofficial link between the "official community" and the Aleynhilf, since he was able to help procure food allotments for the soup kitchens—and, one can assume, to funnel information to Ringelblum about Judenrat intentions.<sup>40</sup>

The Israeli historian Israel Gutman, whom Winter adopted in the ghetto after he lost his family, recalled that,

[Winter] was a special kind of character in the Ghetto, even in his external appearance. He was very tall, with a wide back that was curved like a round bow. He was always looking toward the ground. A huge nose jutted out of his yellowish face and perched on it were a pair of spectacles.<sup>41</sup>



Two of Winter's sons were in the Hashomer Hatzair, despite their father's opposition to Zionism.<sup>42</sup> In time this would create an important personal link between Winter and the resistance movement.

Available evidence suggests that Winter's role in the Oyneg Shabes became especially vital after the Great Deportation of 1942. In the shrunken and devastated ghetto, Winter continued to work for the ZZ. After September 1942 normal movement in the ghetto was no longer possible. The ghetto had been split up into isolated blocks of "shops"; one needed special passes to go from one to the other. Right after the Great Deportation Ringelblum and Lichtenstein were in Bernhard Hallman's carpentry shop on Nowolipki 59, close to the site where Lichtenstein had buried the first part of the archive. Wasser and Gutkowski were at Alexander Landau's shop, the OBW (Ostdeutsche Bautischlerei-Werkstätte), on Gęsia 30. On the pretext of arranging supply matters for their shop kitchens, the leaders of the Oyneg Shabes could come to Winter's Office on Franciszkańska 30, where they could also discuss and exchange archival material. Winter provided money and food for Ringelblum and his staff—and a priceless telephone to communicate with the Aryan side.<sup>43</sup> He could also procure jobs for people whom the Oyneg Shabes wanted to save—such as Rachel Auerbach and Shie Perle. It was through Winter's telephone, with its link to Adolf Berman (who had left for the other side in September) that Ringelblum, Auerbach, and others were able to prepare their eventual escape from the ghetto.

In the fall of 1942 Winter arranged a job for Auerbach to provide cover for her new Oyneg Shabes assignment—to collect and write down the stories of various Jews who had escaped from Treblinka. Now Auerbach saw him more often. He was now living in a small apartment with his surviving son Julek, his daughter Marysia and her beau, and Gutman, whom he had "adopted."

The charred, fragmentary pages of Winter's diary reveal the terrible pain of his last months. During the Great Deportation the Germans had sent his wife, Tobke, and his youngest son, Heniek, to Treblinka, and he felt guilty that he had failed to save them.<sup>44</sup> He wrote that he could not sleep and was in such great emotional pain that he was ready for the end. But then he revealed: "I don't want to leave the world when we can see from afar . . . a possibility to live to see . . . revenge against the killers." According to Ber Mark, Winter expressed a deep faith in the Soviet Union and was angry at the Western allies for allegedly dragging their feet in fighting the Germans.<sup>45</sup>

When the first armed resistance electrified the ghetto on January 18, 1943, Winter was still unsure whether it was more important to fight or to preserve the Oyneg Shabes—which an all-out battle might endanger.<sup>46</sup> But within a couple of days he expressed full support for the young fighters. He only re-

gretted that, during the Great Deportation, hundreds of thousands of Warsaw Jews had let themselves be taken like sheep to the slaughter and had failed to put up any resistance. But now, in January, the young fighters were helping to save Jews. Thanks to them, the Germans were afraid to go into the cellars and hideouts to look for hidden victims. Firmly committed to resistance, Winter joined a committee that included Ringelblum and that collected money to buy weapons for the Jewish Fighting Organization. He handled large sums, and even complained in his diary that he was not used to taking and handing over so much money without a paper record.<sup>47</sup> He also sent consignments of bread to the ŻOB.

Although other Jewish leaders were now beginning to look for hideouts on the Aryan side, Winter adamantly refused to leave the doomed ghetto. Auerbach urged him to try to get out:

“What do you mean leave? Not everyone has the right to just pick up and go. What will happen to those who have no way of getting out?”

“But isn’t there some fund to help people get out?”

When I mentioned this fund, which was supposedly set up to help the intellectual and political elite to escape, Winter became even angrier and his face grew red.

“Who should take it upon themselves the right to decide who goes and who stays?”<sup>48</sup>

Unquestionably tension was developing in those final weeks between Winter, who was ready to die in the ghetto, and Ringelblum, who was torn between his desire to save his wife and child and his sense of duty. Ringelblum wanted to collect money to save “the intellectual and political elite.” Winter preferred to collect money for arms.<sup>49</sup> And in another fragment of his diary, Winter complained that, in the general rush to leave the ghetto, some leaders of the Oyneg Shabes were forgetting their higher responsibilities to the archive.<sup>50</sup> Ringelblum had already sent his wife and son out of the ghetto. He joined them in a hideout on the Aryan side sometime in February 1943, but he made frequent forays back into the ghetto and was trapped there when the uprising began on April 19, 1943.

When the uprising broke out on April 19 Winter joined his surviving children in a well-equipped bunker under Franciszkańska 30. After some persuasion, a proud Abraham Gepner also joined them. Israel Gutman recalled that, in the first few days of the battle of the ghetto, as the buildings aboveground went up in smoke and the air inside the bunker turned acrid and it was difficult to breathe, Winter sat in a corner and wrote in his diary. After Gutman was wounded in the eye, Winter came to visit him, and it would be their last

meeting. For the first time Winter spoke to the young Gutman as an equal. His life was finished, the older man told him, and besides, after the loss of his wife and son, he was a broken man. But one question bothered him and gave him no rest: Where was the outside world as the Jews went to their deaths?

They, the Jews abroad and the world in general know what [is happening here]. We hear the radio station Świt boast about the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. So if they know, what are they doing, how are they reacting? Do they just get out of bed, read the newspapers, drink their morning coffee, and complain about the bad weather? Does nothing bother them? Does not one bit of our pain reach them? . . . [Winter] wanted to ask Jews after the war, what did they do?<sup>51</sup>

After the war Rachel Auerbach heard from the Bundist fighter Marek Edelman how Winter had died. On May 3, 1943, Edelman and his fighters saw from their perch on Franciszkańska 30 how the Germans discovered the bunker where Winter, Gepner, and other Jews were hiding. They threw tear gas into the opening, and the Jews began to crawl out. Edelman saw Winter and Gepner marched away, along with the others.<sup>52</sup>

### **Alexander Landau**

Another major protector of the Oyneg Shabes, also a member of its executive committee, was Alexander Landau. An engineer by training, Landau had established a successful lumber factory before the war. In his youth he had been a member of the Poalei Tsiyon, and in the years before the war he had drawn closer to the pioneer youth organization He-haluts.<sup>53</sup> Landau became an important member of the Aleynhilf in the ghetto and also continued to run his woodworking establishment. According to Natan Eck, since the factory was formally owned by a brother who lived in the United States, the Germans did not confiscate it until the U.S. entered the war. After December 1941, although it now assumed a new German name, Ostdeutsche Bautischerei Werkstätte, the Landau brothers continued to run it.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike many Jewish entrepreneurs in the ghetto, Landau used his energy, money, and contacts to encourage civic and later armed resistance. After the beginning of the Great Deportation, many activists of the Oyneg Shabes and the youth movements found a refuge in Landau's shop on 30 Gęsia Street. Landau gave them papers that offered at least temporary exemption from deportation. Although he could have earned enormous sums of money by selling these precious places in his shop, he apparently helped activists without taking any compensation. Natan Eck arrived at Landau's shop in early Au-

gust with his wife and child. He begged Landau to let him in. The shop was crammed with people. Landau reproached him for not coming earlier, when it might have been easier to find him a place. Nevertheless, he agreed to take him in.

Many of Landau's "real" workers—carpenters and woodworkers—deeply resented what their boss was doing. They believed that he was endangering their lives to save intellectuals and activists. In early August 1942 Germans and Ukrainians entered the shop and seized a large number of men, women, and children who had found refuge in an inner courtyard and thought they were safe. After they left, the Jewish craftsmen blamed Landau for the tragedy and started a riot. Unless Landau convinced the Germans to release their wives and children, the workers threatened, they would tell the SS that he was using the shop to shelter outsiders. Landau tried to use his contacts with the Germans, but it was too late to save the women and children. In the end the workers did not carry out their threat.<sup>55</sup>

In fact, any safety Landau could provide was only temporary. When SS barged into shops and snatched Jews for deportation, they rarely bothered with such details as actual work skills or documents. On January 18, 1943, during the so-called Second Action, when the Germans met with armed resistance, Landau himself was hustled off to the Umschlagplatz. He was released a short time later.

Landau's own daughter, Margalit (Emilka), was a member of the Hashomer Hatzair, and her father spared no effort to help the youth movements and, later on, the ŻOB. On January 18 Margalit joined Mordecai Anielewicz and other Jewish fighters who were marching in a column to the Umschlagplatz. When Anielewicz gave the signal Margalit threw a grenade, and the fighters attacked the Germans. Margalit died on the spot. After her death Landau, his wife, and surviving son went over to the Aryan Side. Along with other Jews who had procured foreign passports, including the well-known poet Yitzhak Katzenelson, the Landaus were sent to the internment camp of Vittel, in France. In April 1944 the Nazis shipped them to Drancy and from there to Auschwitz, where they were gassed.<sup>56</sup> People who remembered him from Vittel recalled that he constantly spoke of his daughter.<sup>57</sup>

### **Shie Rabinowitz (1888–1943)**

Like many other members of the Oyneg Shabes executive committee, Shie Rabinowitz had been active in the prewar YIVO. Like Yitzhak Giterman, Rabinowitz was also a scion of the leading Hasidic families of Eastern Europe.<sup>58</sup> To the utter horror of his family, Rabinowitz refused to become a Hasi-

dic rebbe. Instead, he joined the Bund! Arrested during the Revolution of 1905, he was released only thanks to a hefty bribe paid to the Russian police by the Bialer Hasidim.<sup>59</sup>

Although Rabinowitz remained a lifelong Bundist, his real interest was Yiddish culture. Like Winter, Rabinowitz used his successful business—in this case roofing tiles—to finance his support of the YIVO. It was in the Warsaw branch of the YIVO that he likely came to know Ringelblum. One can assume that he was able to keep some of his money in the ghetto, and he gave generously to the Oyneg Shabes.

In the ghetto Rabinowitz also joined the Aleynhilf and IKOR.<sup>60</sup> According to Michael Mazor, Rabinowitz worked closely with him in the Central Commission of House Committees.<sup>61</sup> Just as Winter served as a *de facto* link between the Judenrat and the Aleynhilf, Rabinowitz possibly played a similar role between the Oyneg Shabes and the Bund.

In January 1943 Rabinowitz and his family tried to hide on the Aryan side. Disaster soon overtook them. The Gestapo caught his wife and younger daughter and shot them. Rabinowitz returned to the ghetto with his son-in-law and tried to save himself by buying a false South American passport. In 1943 the Germans sent him, along with a group of other Jews who had foreign passports, to Bergen Belsen. Survivors recalled that in the camp Rabinowitz gave lectures on Yiddish culture and Jewish history. On October 11, 1943, the Germans deported him and his son-in-law to Auschwitz—probably in the same transport that included the Yiddish writer Shie Perle and the leader of the LPZ Natan Buchsbaum. The entire transport was gassed.

### **Lipe Bloch**

Ringelblum scored a major coup when he recruited Eliezer Lipe Bloch to serve on the executive committee of the Oyneg Shabes. Bloch had long been a major figure in his own right, an important leader of the General Zionist Party in Poland and the director of its major fund-raising arm, the Keren Kayemet (the Jewish National Fund). Unlike the Yiddishist Ringelblum, Bloch had long been a fervent supporter of Hebrew. Before the war he had helped run the Tarbut, the highly regarded network of Zionist schools in Hebrew.

After the war started he and Ringelblum worked closely in the Aleynhilf, where they shared a common interest in the house committees. They became close friends.<sup>62</sup> Bloch was an excellent speaker, a respected leader, and an amateur scholar who had a deep interest in Jewish history and who appreciated the importance of clandestine documentation. When the Oyneg Shabes planned its major study project, “Two and a Half Years,” Bloch was slated

to be its coeditor along with Ringelblum (more on this in the next chapter). Needless to say, as the former director of the Keren Kayemet, he was also an experienced fund-raiser. Like many others in the Oyneg Shabes, he enjoyed close relations with a Zionist youth movement—in this case, Dror.<sup>63</sup>

In the weeks before the outbreak of the ghetto uprising Bloch worked on a committee to raise money for the ŻOB. The Germans caught him during the uprising and sent him, along with eight hundred other Jews to the Budzyn labor camp near Lublin, where the German firm Heinkel had an airplane factory.<sup>64</sup> Besides Bloch, this group also included Kolonymous Shapiro, “the Piaseczno rebbe,” who was well known for his writings and talks during the war. Adolf Berman tried to rescue Bloch the same way that he had rescued Ringelblum from the Trawniki labor camp—by sending the Polish railway worker Tadeusz Pajewski and his Jewish friend, Emilka Kossower, to smuggle him out. But Bloch and fifteen other Jews—including Rabbi Shapiro—had taken a solemn vow that they would all stay together, come what may. Pajewski could take out no more than two Jews, and certainly not fifteen. In August 1944 the Germans sent Bloch to the feared Mauthausen camp in Austria. He died sometime before the end of the war.

#### **The Young Activists: Joseph Kaplan and Shmuel Breslav**

In 1942 the Oyneg Shabes added Joseph Kaplan and Shmuel Breslav, two leaders of the leftist Zionist youth group Hashomer Hatzair, to its executive committee. At first glance this decision is hard to explain. Unlike Bloch or Winter, they were not established businessmen or well-known prewar leaders. But the inclusion of Kaplan and Breslav on the Oyneg Shabes reflected the growing importance of the youth movements in the ghetto. Moreover, by that time Ringelblum had become personally close to the leaders of Hashomer.

Before the war adult leaders and the youth movements usually had little to do with each other. By 1942 the distance had lessened considerably.<sup>65</sup> The youth movements and their couriers became critical sources of information for the Oyneg Shabes after the first reports arrived of German massacres in the eastern territories in the fall of 1941. In time, these youth movements would provide an all-important link between the Oyneg Shabes and the ŻOB.

As Israel Gutman and others have pointed out, the youth movements stood out for their inner cohesion and their ability to maintain intellectual and moral standards in the chaotic and demoralizing conditions of the ghetto. The members, having known one another long before the war began,

trusted and relied on one another. They established closely knit communes and for a time even wangled German permission to live and work together on farms outside the ghetto. Until the spring of 1942 the youth groups focused their energies on their clandestine press, underground seminars, and classes.<sup>66</sup> They did not challenge the hegemony of the political parties and showed little interest in competing with them for political leadership. But when news of the mass murders began to penetrate the Warsaw Ghetto, things began to change. The leadership of Dror and Hashomer Hatzair turned away from cultural work and began to prepare for armed resistance. In the process the youth movements acted with growing independence and self-confidence.

In the Warsaw Ghetto the LPZ and Hashomer Hatzair drew closer together, but before the war serious differences had divided these movements. The Hashomer disdained Yiddish, emphasized Hebrew, and infused its young members with a determination to immigrate to Palestine at the earliest possible opportunity. Unlike the LPZ, which reached out to Yiddish-speaking youth from poor families, the Hashomer Hatzair attracted Polish-speaking Jewish youth, many from middle-class backgrounds. It was an elitist movement that had little interest in the *do* (here), the daily life, and the concerns of Polish Jewry. Ringelblum, like many of his party comrades, had believed that the prewar Hashomer prepared *tlushim* (uprooted misfits).<sup>67</sup> Hashomer, its critics in the LPZ charged, imbued its young members with enthusiasm and giddy self-confidence—and then left them uprooted and disappointed. One could not stay young forever, and one could not wait indefinitely for the chance to go to Palestine. Eventually all too many *shomrim* (members of Hashomer) found themselves psychologically unprepared for the hard life of a Jewish young adult in Poland. Once they left the intense experiences of the *ken* (the local Shomer organization) they had nothing to fall back on.

Hashomer and the LPZ started to bury the hatchet with the coming of the war in 1939. Both groups realized that, apart from the Communists, they were the most pro-Soviet organizations in the ghetto. Neither group idealized the Soviet Union, but when the war began both agreed that, whatever its faults, the Soviet Union was the Jews' best hope. True, Britain was fighting Hitler but that did not make London an ally of the Jews. After all, in 1939 Britain had betrayed Zionism with the White Paper. Zionism's best chance depended on the collapse of British rule in the Middle East; only world revolution and the Soviet Union could make that happen.<sup>68</sup>

So while Dror and the Bund supported Britain as she fought alone against Hitler, the LPZ and Hashomer wrote in their underground press about an "imperialist war" between Germany and Britain. Difficult as it may be to believe that these Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto saw no difference between Hit-

ler and Churchill, the fact remains that under the conditions they faced they desperately needed ideological certainties and dogmas that afforded hope and a shred of optimism. Ringelblum did not discuss these views much in his diary, but his party preached these notions in its underground press, which was co-edited by Hersh Wasser.

Once Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, all Jews naturally hoped for a Red Army victory. Hashomer and the LPZ could now dispense with the unnatural cant about the imperialist war and cheer on a USSR that was allied with Britain and the United States. In March 1942 the LPZ, Hashomer, Dror, and the Right Poalei Tsiyon joined the Communists in the formation of an “Anti-Fascist Bloc.” As Raya Cohen has pointed out, the new situation forced Hashomer to become less focused on Palestine and more concerned with the “here”: the ghetto, the war, and the situation in Europe.<sup>69</sup> Although the movement’s hostility to Yiddish never disappeared, it began to issue a Yiddish publication (*Oyfbroyz*), a sign that for all its elitism and isolation it was at last reaching out to those outside its narrow circle. Thus the ideological gap between Hashomer and the LPZ continued to narrow.

As Ringelblum became personally close to some of the key leaders of Hashomer in the Warsaw Ghetto, they began to invite him to their meetings. In his diary he recorded his growing admiration for the movement’s spirit and idealism.<sup>70</sup> Despite the risks, he allowed the Hashomer to use the second floor of the Aleynhilf headquarters on Tłomackie 5 for its meetings, which attracted more than five hundred members. In a diary entry of November 23, 1941, Ringelblum noted “the incredible courage of the members of Hashomer. They are organizing conferences . . . are carrying out a wonderful educational program, and are publishing a journal that is on a very high level.”<sup>71</sup>

Ringelblum became especially close to Mordecai Anielewicz and, one can assume, to Breslav and Kaplan as well. In his memoirs Adolf Berman recalls the personal bonds that developed between him and Ringelblum and these young leaders of Hashomer. All three—Anielewicz, Breslav, and Kaplan—would become major proponents of armed resistance, and Anielewicz would lead the Jewish Fighting Organization, the ŻOB. Ringelblum recalled that one time Kaplan and Anielewicz asked him to come to Hashomer’s headquarters on Nalewki 23. There they showed him two revolvers which they were using to train young people in the use of weapons.<sup>72</sup>

The impulsive and romantic Breslav, the main editor of Hashomer’s clandestine press, was a gifted writer and a born journalist.<sup>73</sup> Zuckerman recalled that he acted “like a young Pole.” When the war began, Breslav took the Hashomer flag with him when he fled Warsaw and carried it three hundred miles to Vilna! (The flag eventually made it to Palestine.) On orders from



the movement Breslav returned to Warsaw and became one of the most fervent advocates of armed resistance. When the Great Deportation began, he wanted Jews to resist with every means at their disposal, including their bare hands. According to Zuckerman, when the Jewish Fighting Organization was founded six days later, on July 28, 1942, its command staff consisted of himself, Zivia Lubetkin, Breslav, and Joseph Kaplan.<sup>74</sup>

Joseph Kaplan, born in 1913, was older than Anielewicz and Breslav and was one of the most beloved and respected leaders of the Hashomer. Unlike most of his comrades, Kaplan actually liked Yiddish culture and seemed closer to the ordinary Jewish masses.<sup>75</sup> Despite his markedly Jewish appearance, Kaplan fearlessly traveled through occupied Poland, where he visited various branches of Hashomer and relayed information.

The known contributions of these two activists to the archive include an important interview conducted by Breslav of a Polish woman regarding Polish-Jewish relations; a study by Breslav of a young Jewish woman active in the house committees; a large amount of Hashomer Hatzair correspondence and materials; and the bulk of the Hashomer Hatzair illegal press in the ghetto.

The Germans killed Breslav and Joseph Kaplan on the same day, September 3, 1942. According to Zuckerman, a Jewish informer had revealed Kaplan's whereabouts. After the Germans took Kaplan away in a car, Yitzhak Zuckerman rushed to inform Giterman, hoping that Giterman might be able to raise ransom money. That same day Breslav was walking along Geşia Street with a switchblade in his pocket and spotted a car full of Germans. He and his companion ran, but the Germans caught him. Breslav attacked them with his knife. They beat him to death on the street.

Ten days earlier, in his diary entry of August 24, 1942, Abraham Lewin wrote:

A meeting of the Oyneg Shabes at the Hashomer Hatzair with the participation of R-m, G-n, G-k, B-ch, L-n, G-ski, W-r, Josef, B-au. Rabbi H. was missing; he had been seized at the broom factory. The place, the time, and the appearance of the participants underline the special tragedy of the meeting.<sup>76</sup> [Josef was Kaplan, B-au was Breslav.]

### **The Rabbi: Shimon Huberband**

In his essay on the Oyneg Shabes Ringelblum recalled that when he first organized the archive, finding good collaborators had been a process of trial and error. Therefore the arrival of Rabbi Shimon Huberband (1909–1942) was especially welcome. Before the war the rabbi had lived in Piotrków but

had come to know Ringelblum at the Warsaw branch of the YIVO.<sup>77</sup> Just a few days after the war began German bombs killed Rabbi Huberband's wife and children near Piotrków, but his deep religious faith helped him to bear his loss. In 1940 he moved to Warsaw. Ringelblum found Huberband a job in the Aleynhilf, where the rabbi headed the Department of Religious Affairs. He also remarried.

In the Aleynhilf, more than any other ghetto institution, Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews worked closely and effectively. Certainly Huberband deserves some of the credit for this. In a moving eulogy for Huberband, delivered shortly after his deportation to Treblinka in August 1942, Menakhem Mendel Kon said:

Considering his devout piety one could only marvel at his tolerance of [atheists and leftists]. He always looked at the whole man, this is what determined his attitude. He respected his opponent if the latter was sincere in his beliefs. He despised falsehood. A great scholar, highly erudite in the Torah, Mishna, and Talmud, a man of noble virtue, a fervent Hassid with a flaming heart, he nevertheless always tried to use common sense. . . . Every day I would spend a few hours with him on Oyneg Shabes matters—and I can say that Rabbi Huberband was one of the finest personalities of our times. Committed heart and soul to the archive, nothing was too difficult for him. . . . It was Dr. Ringelblum who influenced and guided him in his writing. Woe to you, teacher and master!<sup>78</sup>

Before the war many Orthodox journalists and rabbis in prewar Poland had already begun to take their first, halting steps toward modern literature and even secular culture.<sup>79</sup> Without in any way compromising their devotion to the Torah, they began to express an interest in secular Yiddish writing, world literature, and the YIVO.

The YIVO and a shared dedication to the history of Polish Jewry had brought Ringelblum and Huberband together before the war. Both Ringelblum and Isaac Schiper were convinced that the young rabbi had the makings of a superb historian. They were especially excited by Huberband's mastery of rabbinic "Responsa Literature,"<sup>80</sup> which contained a treasure trove of material on the social history of Polish Jewry and had been under-utilized by historians with little yeshiva training. In 1939 Rabbi Huberband published an important study in *Sotsiale meditsin*, titled "Jewish Physicians in Piotrkow from the Seventeenth Century to the Present," where he used both Jewish and non-Jewish sources. But the young rabbi's interests were not confined to history. He showed a deep interest in the problems of reconciling traditional Judaism with modern science and had published an article on the subject. He had also written stories, in Hebrew, about Hasidic life and Talmudic luminaries.<sup>81</sup>

A serious historian who understood the importance of the archive, Huberband was a methodical collaborator and interviewer who carefully adhered to the guidelines worked out by the Oyneg Shabes staff. Discreet and careful, he was afraid at first to write in notebooks; he would scribble his essays in the margins of holy books in case the Germans made a search. (Gradually Ringelblum convinced him that there was little risk.) No one in the Oyneg Shabes worked on as wide a range of topics as Huberband: religious life, labor camps, ghetto folklore, Jewish women, and Jewish life under the Soviet occupation.

Huberband shared with Ringelblum the conviction that the Oyneg Shabes bore a special responsibility to record the German destruction of Jewish synagogues, cemeteries, artwork, and markers of material culture. In a diary entry of February 27–28, 1941, Ringelblum remarked that when the Germans forced Jews to destroy a historical Torah ark in the synagogue in Plonsk, they were also trying to erase the physical evidence of the centuries of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, “in order to show that the Jews were an alien element that had no claims [to live in Poland]”.<sup>82</sup> For his part Huberband wrote a special report for the Oyneg Shabes listing what had been destroyed up to then and the steps Jews might take to hide valuable books, documents, and artifacts.<sup>83</sup>

Huberband was most indispensable to the Oyneg Shabes as a conduit to the religious community. He conveyed material on many aspects of religious life under the Nazis. He was especially close to one of the most important religious thinkers in the Warsaw ghetto, Rabbi Kalonymous Shapiro, the Piaseczner Rebbe. It was possibly because of Huberband that the archive procured many of Shapiro’s wartime sermons and writings.<sup>84</sup>

Although Ringelblum and Kon remembered Huberband as a self-effacing rabbi and scholar, his writings were often hard-hitting and controversial. Like Ringelblum, Huberband saw himself as a historian, not as a hagiographer, and he pulled no punches. He could describe young Gerer Hasidim as self-centered drunks, and atheistic Bundists as courageous martyrs. Like many other writers in the Oyneg Shabes, Huberband did not believe that German persecution excused Jewish corruption. Some titles of his essays speak for themselves: “Moral Lapses of Jewish Women during the War” and “The Extortion of Money from Jews by Jews.” In the latter, Huberband wrote:

The Talmud permits the killing of informers, and that is also the opinion of the Shulkhan Arukh. In the Responsa of Reb Asher b. Jehiel, it is mentioned that Reb Asher ordered an informer’s tongue cut off to prevent him from continuing his murderous activity. In the response of Reb

Meir of Lublin the fact is noted that, in the days of R. Shachna of Lublin, Jewish informers were drowned in the *mikveh* [ritual bath]. But today there aren't enough *mikvehs* to suffice for all the Jewish informers.<sup>85</sup>

Huberband's work in the Oyneg Shabes became even more important in light of the widespread agreement among many observers that the war had seen a major decline in religious observance. In a survey of Jewish intellectuals and cultural leaders, discussed further in the next chapter, Hillel Tseitlin had dwelt on the failures of Orthodox Jews. Ringelblum repeatedly noted that during this war, compared to past trials, Orthodox Jews showed much less willingness to become martyrs, that is, to die for Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of the holy name. Huberband did not explicitly defend religious Jewry against these charges. Indeed, he added his own accusations—as seen by his indictment of the young Gerer Hasidim. His work rested on the conviction that ultimately the facts would make a more lasting impression than hagiography or apologetics.

Alongside accounts of corruption and moral decline, Huberband compiled stories of Kiddush Hashem, which, he explained, could be performed in three ways:

A. a Jew sacrifices his life when others attempt to make him abandon the Jewish faith. B. a Jew gives his life to save a fellow Jew, and even more so—to save a group of Jews. C. a Jew dies while fighting to defend other Jews. Maimonides rules that if a Jew is killed, even without any overt attempt to make him abandon the Jewish faith, but because he is a Jew, he is considered a martyr.<sup>86</sup>

Huberband described the rabbi of Włodawa, Reb Avrom Mordkhe Maroco.

On the second day of September 1940 a group of officers entered the rabbi's home and carried out a search. During the search they found a Torah scroll. They ordered the rabbi to tear apart the scroll, or else they would burn him alive. The rabbi refused. They poured gasoline on his body and set fire to him alive. When the rabbi was transformed into a blazing torch, they threw the Torah scroll on top of him. The rabbi and the Torah were burned together.<sup>87</sup>

In his essay *Kiddush Hashem* Huberband included secular Jews such as Dr. Josef Parnas, the chairman of the Lwów Judenrat, who refused a Gestapo demand for a list of Jewish professionals and intellectuals. He was hanged. Huberband also mentioned the Bundist leader in Piotrków, Avrom Vayskof, who risked his life to save Torah scrolls.

Thanks to his many contacts in the ghetto, especially in the religious community, Huberband gathered testimonies and accounts that humanized and individualized the tale of collective suffering. In the process he also uncovered important examples of how ordinary Jews faced death with dignity and quiet courage. One such person was Yosef Peykus, who had a wife and a small child and who had borrowed 180 zlotys to sneak out to the Aryan side to buy food for his family. Peykus was caught and was among the first group of Jews sentenced to death by the Germans in November 1941 for leaving the ghetto illegally. From his death cell he wrote a final letter to his wife, which he gave to a rabbi who visited him. The rabbi passed the letter on to Huberband.

Peykus told his wife where he had hidden their nest egg—a sack of jewelry—and reminded her that she had to repay the 180 zlotys that he had borrowed.

We must pray to God that our son will grow up to be a mensch and that he will know the prayers. . . . If I am shot, may my father arrange a burial plot for me. A separate grave with new shrouds, everything as it should be. Things haven't worked out well; for young blood to go to earth so early. I could still have lived a bit, and instead to be buried in the ground. To be a young widow so early, with a sweet son whose father lies in the ground. . . . This letter is made of blood, not words. If I have done any wrong to my parents, may they forgive me. May Khayele and her daughter forgive me. Shloyme, take care of my wife. Dovid Volfshstayg, I thank you very much for your kind heart, and the deeds you have done for me.<sup>88</sup>

The Oyneg Shabes spared no effort to keep Huberband safe. When the Great Deportation began, the rabbi procured a job in Emil Weitz's brush makers shop. But the SS raided the shop in August 1942, carried out a selection, and sent Huberband directly to the death trains at the Umschlagplatz. There was no time to send someone to try to bribe guards and get him released.<sup>89</sup>

## THE TEACHERS

It was only natural that Ringelblum would recruit many teachers to work in the archive: Bernard Kampelmacher, Israel Lichtenstein, Aaron Koninski, and Abraham Lewin. For many years this had been his own milieu; he knew these people and could trust them. Israel Lichtenstein—as the physical guardian of the archives—had perhaps the most sensitive job in the entire Oyneg Shabes; Koninski provided the archive with some of its most valuable material on Jewish children in the ghetto; Lewin served not just as a contributor but as a trusted member of Ringelblum's inner circle; and Kampel-

macher had been a respected school principal in Grodzisk before the war, and became an indefatigable collaborator of the Oyneg Shabes after his arrival in the Warsaw Ghetto.

### Abraham Lewin

Lewin and Ringelblum were old friends. Both had been teachers at the Yehudiah high school for girls in Warsaw; the students deeply respected Lewin, a master teacher who was able to establish a unique rapport with his pupils.<sup>90</sup> Lewin headed the youth division of the Aleynhilf in the ghetto and was one of the archive's most important members. Not only did he do a great deal of interviewing but he also kept a diary that Ringelblum considered one of the most important holdings of the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>91</sup>

Lewin was a firm believer in the importance of cultural resistance, and knew Jewish history and Hebrew well.<sup>92</sup> Both he and his wife, Luba, were children of the Polish Orthodox Jewish elite who had found their way to Zionism and to modern secular culture. Luba, the daughter of a famous rabbi, even went to Palestine to settle on a kibbutz, but poor health forced her to return. The couple had one daughter, Ora, who would later join Hashomer Hatzair. All three would perish.

Lewin and Ringelblum differed politically—Lewin was a General Zionist, a party detested by the Left Poalei Tsiyon—but both men shared a passion for Jewish history and they had worked together in the Warsaw branch of the YIVO. Like Ringelblum, Lewin “lived” Jewish history. He was especially moved by its pathos and by the suffering of the “forgotten Jews,” the Jewish poor.

In 1934 he published *Kantonistn*, which he called a history book “of the folk for the folk.”<sup>93</sup> This was a survey of the dreaded *rekrutchina*, the impressment of Jewish boys into the Russian army during the reign of Nicholas I (1825–1855). What had prompted Lewin to write the book was a passage in the memoirs of the famous Russian revolutionary Alexander Herzen. Herzen had described a convoy of young Jewish boys, who would probably never see their homes again, and the image of those children gave Lewin no rest.<sup>94</sup>

*Kantonistn*, less a historical monograph than a large anthology of contemporary memoirs and folk songs, documented the trauma suffered by the poorest sectors of the Jewish population. Like much of Ringelblum's own work, Lewin's *Kantonistn* had a marked populist tilt, with the Jewish masses cast as heroes and the Jewish elite as villains. Rich Jews, Lewin charged, protected their own children at the expense of the poor. They hired kidnapers (*khapers* in Yiddish) to track down their prey and wrest them from the arms of their

desperate and helpless parents. For Lewin, the *rekrutchina* represented one of the greatest national calamities in modern Jewish history precisely because of the breakdown of national solidarity and the moral failure of the Jewish elite. Indeed, Lewin wondered why Jewish historians had not written more about this disaster, which he compared to the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the Khmel'nitsky massacres of the seventeenth century.

We should gather all the tears of the Jewish children of that time in one cup and put it alongside all the other cups overflowing with our blood and tears from previous persecutions. Our people should never forget its young martyrs.<sup>95</sup>

In the ghetto both Ringelblum and Lewin would draw parallels between the *khapers* and the behavior of the Judenrat and the Jewish police.<sup>96</sup> If Lewin could be moved so deeply by a nineteenth-century Russian's depiction of Jewish suffering, then one can well imagine how he reacted to the Warsaw Ghetto—and later to the deportation of his beloved wife in the summer of 1942. His moral sensitivity and willingness to commit his innermost feelings to paper made him an especially valuable member of the Oyneg Shabes and lent his Warsaw Ghetto diary extraordinary power.

Lewin recorded honestly a subject that surfaced only rarely in the ghetto diaries: his own personal fear.<sup>97</sup> As the German vise tightened, his terror grew. On May 16, 1942, with reports flooding into the Oyneg Shabes about German massacres in the provinces, Lewin wrote:

An unremitting insecurity, a never-ending fear, is the most terrible aspect of all our tragic and bitter experiences. If we ever live to see the end of this cruel war and are able as free people and citizens to look back on the war years that we have lived through, then we will surely conclude that the most terrible and unholy, the most destructive aspect for our nervous system and our health was to live night and day in an atmosphere of unending fear and terror for our physical survival, in a continual wavering between life and death—a state where every passing minute brought with it the danger that our hearts would literally burst with fear and dread.

(p. 73)

Whereas Ringelblum rarely abandoned the tone and voice of the objective historian, Lewin gave the Oyneg Shabes a diary that recorded what it felt like to see Jews dragged off to the cattle cars, to lose one's own family, and to face the prospect of a terrible death. On August 12 Lewin returned to find that a German blockade of Landau's shop had swept up his wife:

Eclipse of the sun, universal blackness. My Luba was taken away during a blockade on 30 Gęsia Street. There is still a glimmer of hope in front of me. Perhaps she will be saved. And, if God forbid she is not? My journey to the Umschlagplatz—the appearance of the streets—fills me with dread. To my anguish there was no prospect of rescuing her. It looks like she was taken directly to the train . . . I have no words to describe my desolation. I ought to go after her, to die. But I have no strength to take such a step. Ora—her calamity. A child who was so tied to her mother, and how she loved her. (pp. 153–154)

Lewin struggled to find the right words, the right tone, to convey the double blow of a national catastrophe and personal disaster. With the Great Deportation, Lewin switched from Yiddish to Hebrew, the language of the *pinkesim*, the traditional chronicles of Jewish suffering and woe.<sup>98</sup> On November 11, 1942, he railed yet again against his probable fate: to be remembered as a “martyr.”

How terrible it is that a whole generation—millions of Jews—has suddenly become a community of “martyrs,” who have had to die in such a cruel, degrading and painful manner and go through the torments of hell before going to the gallows. Earth, earth do not cover our blood and do not keep silent, so that our blood will cry out until the ends of time and demand revenge for this crime that has no parallel in our history and in the whole of human history. (pp. 206–207)

Lewin held on. He still had his daughter. But he was acutely aware that his own milieu, that of the Warsaw Jewish intelligentsia, was already largely gone. And he realized with growing dread that the catastrophe might have irrevocable consequences for the nation. If Polish Jewry went under, what would happen to the Jewish people? What would be left? Dread of approaching death mingled with despair about the destruction of his entire people. On December 29, 1942, Lewin wrote:

Warsaw was in fact the backbone of Polish Jewry, its heart, one could say. The destruction of Warsaw would have meant the destruction of the whole of Polish Jewry, even if the provinces had been spared this evil. Now that the enemy’s sword of destruction has run amok through the small towns and villages and is cutting them down with murderous blows—with the death agony of the metropolis, the entire body is dying and plunging into hell. One can say that with the setting of the sun of Polish Jewry the splendor and the glory of world Jewry has vanished. We, the Polish Jews, were after all the most vibrant nerve of our people. (p. 232)



As Lewin continued to work for the Oyneg Shabes, interviewing escapees from Treblinka, he struggled to cope with his fear. On January 9, 1943, he wrote:

When I hear these accounts of Treblinka, something begins to twist and turn in my heart. The fear of “that” which must come is, perhaps, stronger than the torment a person feels when he gives up his soul. Will these terrible agonies of the spirit call up a literary response? Will there emerge a new Bialik able to write a new Book of Lamentations, a new “In the Town of Slaughter?” (p. 237)

His final diary entry is dated January 16, 1943. He probably died in Treblinka later that same week. His daughter, Ora, also perished.

### **Aaron Koninski**

Another teacher who made an important contribution to the archive was Ringelblum’s brother-in-law Aaron Koninski.<sup>99</sup> Koninski had gained a reputation before the war as a fine teacher who took a lively interest in the problems of Jewish education. A member of the Right Poalei Tsiyon and an active member of its school movement, the Shul Kult, Koninski showed a flair for social service and administration. He took over the running of the deficit-plagued Jewish Emigration Society (JEAS) on Mylna 18 and turned its finances around. In 1939 Koninski opened up Mylna 18 to many of the refugees from Zbąszyń and gave them help and support. Many of these refugees died from a direct hit on the building during the siege of Warsaw in 1939.

When the war began the Aleynhilf turned Mylna 18 into a children’s center under Koninski’s supervision. He developed a good rapport with the children and with the teachers. Often the Aleynhilf and the CENTOS could not provide all the children’s institutions with enough food, but Koninski always found some way to keep the children from going hungry.

Koninski wrote a major essay on the Jewish child in the Warsaw Ghetto for the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>100</sup> Based on comprehensive research, this essay analyzed the situation of Jewish children in the ghetto and concluded that “of the hundred thousand children in the ghetto, 80 percent require help” (more on this in chapter 6). But only half the needy Jewish children were receiving any kind of assistance. Koninski concluded with a sudden shift from objective, dispassionate analysis to moral pleading: unless the Jewish community acted fast, Koninski warned, the children of the ghetto would become physical, mental, and moral cripples. Jewish society was responsible for its children. Would history record that Warsaw Jewry failed to do all it could?

As a member of the Oyneg Shabes and as Ringelblum's brother-in-law, Koninski had an inside account of the massacres that had started in 1941. He certainly would have known the real meaning of the words "deportation to the East." Nevertheless, when the Germans collected his "children" for deportation, Koninski decided to accompany them on their final journey. Together with his wife, the teachers, and the rest of the staff, Koninski marched with the children to the Umschlagplatz. He was forty years old.

### **Bernard Kampelmacher**

Before the war Kampelmacher had been a respected school principal in Grodzisk. After he arrived in the ghetto as a refugee, the archive gave him his bearings and a sense of purpose.<sup>101</sup> His many contributions to the archive—an essay on education in the ghetto, interviews with refugees, a detailed study of his hometown in the early days of the war—show a careful, methodical, and thorough man. Thrown into the chaos of the Warsaw Ghetto, Kampelmacher coped by developing an orderly routine. He helped run the association of Grodzisk refugees in the ghetto. He worked hard on a detailed plan to improve schooling for ghetto children. Unlike some other members of the Oyneg Shabes, he stuck closely to the guidelines and questionnaires prepared by the Oyneg Shabes when he interviewed refugees about their hometowns. The raging typhus epidemic made this dangerous work. In early 1942 Kampelmacher came down with the disease and died.

### **THE ECONOMISTS: MENAKHEM LINDER (1911-1942) AND JERZY WINKLER (D. 1942)**

When he wrote Menakhem Linder's obituary, Max Weinreich, the director of the YIVO, stressed that "we loved Linder in a special way because Linder was one of us."<sup>102</sup> One of the first products of the YIVO graduate program in Vilna, Linder quickly became the institution's rising young star. With his gift for languages and his law degree from Lwów University, Weinreich noted, Linder might have become a successful lawyer. But he came to the YIVO not because he had no other options but because he wanted to serve his own people. Like Ringelblum and Rachel Auerbach, Linder was a native of Galicia who defied the prejudices of Polish-speaking Jewish intelligentsia and embraced modern Yiddish culture.<sup>103</sup> (Linder's turn to Yiddish was all the more startling because earlier he had been a member of the Hashomer Hatzair.) In the new YIVO graduate program, Linder won an award for his study of the

economics and social profile of his native town, Śniatyń. He fell in love with Vilna, found a wife there, and even began to speak Yiddish with a Vilna accent. His deep interest in the economic problems of Polish Jewry led him to take a position with the CEKABE in Warsaw, where he worked under Giterman's supervision and came into close contact with Ringelblum. Linder soon became the editor of the YIVO's major economic journal (*Yidische ekonomik*), and published several important studies on the economic problems of Polish Jewry in the late 1930s. He also became secretary of the Warsaw branch of the YIVO.

After the start of the war Linder headed the Aleynhilf's statistical section. In the Oyneg Shabes he chiefly coordinated and organized the gathering of economic materials. In early 1942 Ringelblum gave him a key assignment—to write the economic section of “Two and Half Years,” the large-scale study of Jewish society in wartime which the Oyneg Shabes planned but never completed.

Linder's first love in the Warsaw Ghetto was the Yiddish cultural organization, the IKOR; he found encouragement in the new interest in Yiddish culture that he had observed in the Warsaw Ghetto.

He had the vision of Jewish cultural autonomy in the lands of the Diaspora. He believed that out of the curse of the ghetto would come a blessing in the form of a general shift of the Jewish intelligentsia to the living language of the masses . . . that a new energy would invigorate a Jewish creative spirit forged and tempered by the ordeals [of the war].<sup>104</sup>

In the large hall of the Aleynhilf building on Tłomackie 5 (now the site of Warsaw's Jewish Historical Institute), large crowds came to hear Yiddish lectures organized by the IKOR. The indefatigable Linder was fascinated by how Yiddish responded to the new wartime conditions. He even coined new words to describe unfortunate ghetto realities.<sup>105</sup> Along with Ringelblum, Linder worked tirelessly to ensure that Yiddish became the standard language of the house committees, and he also found time to lecture for the underground seminars of the youth movements. Zuckerman recalled that Linder was one of the most popular lecturers.<sup>106</sup>

On the night of April 17, 1942, Gestapo agents knocked on Linder's door and politely asked him to come with them, reminding him to take a toothbrush and a change of clothing. He entered their car and, when they arrived at the building of the former Evangelical hospital, the agents told Linder to get out. There they shot him. He did not die quickly. Witnesses reported that he struggled for a long time. But it was after curfew, and no one dared go out

to help him. They could only watch helplessly from the windows as he struggled and suffered. His terrified widow burned his diary before Ringelblum could acquire it for the archive.<sup>107</sup>

With Linder gone, the economist Jerzy Winkler assumed major responsibility for the economic research of the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>108</sup> Before the war Winkler had studied economics at Vienna University and had also been active in the YIVO's economics section. Thanks to his YIVO ties, he got to know Joseph Jaszunski, who became a member of the Warsaw Judenrat and who procured a job for Winkler in the Judenrat's statistical bureau. This post gave Winkler access to many Judenrat documents as well as to Judenrat correspondence with the German authorities. The first part of the Oyneg Shabes Archive contains several such documents and letters that Winkler copied by hand.

Winkler's most important contribution to the Oyneg Shabes was his splendid essay, in Polish, on the ghetto economy, "The Ghetto Struggles against Economic Enslavement."<sup>109</sup> Here Winkler painstakingly documented how Jews doggedly worked to acquire raw materials, set up workshops, and export goods to the Aryan side. The money earned from these exports, based on a myriad of business relationships with Poles and Germans, helped keep tens of thousands of Jews alive.

Winkler also completed valuable statistical studies for the archive. In 1941 he wrote a study in Yiddish on the health of the ghetto population and on the reasons for declining physical resistance to epidemics.<sup>110</sup> That same year he compiled a statistical survey of those who were sent off to the labor camps.<sup>111</sup>

Obviously impressed, Ringelblum (and probably Linder) asked Winkler to coauthor the economic section of "Two and a Half Years."<sup>112</sup> After Linder's murder, Winkler took over the project, but when the Great Deportation began in July he had an emotional breakdown. Disabled with a crippled arm, he knew that he had little chance of surviving a "selection." At the very beginning of the Great Deportation he was sent to the Umschlagplatz but his co-workers in the Judenrat were able to obtain his release. His reprieve was short-lived, however. He and his wife perished a short time later.<sup>113</sup> Winkler was in his mid-thirties.

#### **THE REFUGEE: DANIEL FLIGELMAN**

In 1941 the Oyneg Shabes recruited a young refugee, Daniel Fligelman, who became one of the archive's most productive contributors. His many essays and reports in the first part of the archive suggest an interesting and erudite man in his twenties who knew foreign languages, read widely, and had a mor-

dant sense of humor. His essays, written in Polish, were sprinkled with Latin phrases.<sup>114</sup> He had strong opinions and did not hide them; for example, on the cover sheet of an interview he had conducted with a refugee in the Warsaw Ghetto who had been the chief of the Jewish police in his hometown, Fligelman wrote that the interview had been a waste of time, as the man was probably a liar. Usually Fligelman used the code name Fligar, but his style was unmistakable. In a report on the small town of Nieszawa, in western Poland, Fligelman described the public flogging of several Jews:

After they whipped him the Jew Jagoda asked the officer a question straight out of Tolstoy: "Why?" Instead of an answer Jagoda got a blow in the face from a baton. . . . The officer then ordered another 60 lashes for Jagoda, whipped another Jew, and then beat Jagoda again. When it all ended, all the Jews were allowed to go home except Jagoda, who was taken to jail. A few days later, despite repeated efforts by the local Jews, he was shot along with two Polish thieves. So Jagoda died the death of Christ.<sup>115</sup>

As Ruta Sakowska speculates, Hersh Wasser probably noticed Fligelman in the course of his work with the refugees and recruited him for the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>116</sup> For all his intellectual acuity, Fligelman impressed Ringelblum as someone who was quite helpless in everyday life: "The quiet dove Daniel Fligelman would have perished [long before he did] had it not been for the constant help and concern he received from our dear comrade Menakhem [Kon]."<sup>117</sup> Kon's account book recorded many disbursements that helped keep Fligelman alive: 90 zlotys on November 20, 1941; 150 zlotys in January 1942; and 140 zlotys . . . on February 25, 1942.<sup>118</sup> Kon also procured medicine to treat Fligelman when he became infected with typhus, probably as a result of his extensive interviewing in the refugee centers.

Although Fligelman only arrived in Warsaw around the middle of 1941, he quickly became one of the archive's most important workers. Ringelblum called Fligelman's essay on Jewish prisoners of war from the September 1939 campaign the best study of the subject in the archive.<sup>119</sup> Fligelman's contribution to the archive was immense when it came to interviewing refugees and producing accounts of events in the provincial towns. He conducted two crucial interviews that provided the archive with its first detailed accounts of German massacres in the East. One interview, with Hashomer member Aryeh Vilner, contained ominous news of the mass killings in Vilna. Another interview described the massacre of the Jews in Slonim. Both accounts found their way into the material that the Oyneg Shabes sent abroad in early 1942. Fligelman died in Treblinka in the summer of 1942.

## THE TRANSLATOR: CECYLIA SŁAPAKOWA

To write a study of Jewish women in the ghetto, the archive approached Cecylia Słapak.<sup>120</sup> Married to a successful engineer, Cecylia Słapakowa was someone who easily crossed many of the cultural boundaries that marked prewar Jewish Warsaw. A native of the Vilna region, she was part of the old Russian-speaking Jewish intelligentsia that had been dispersed by the 1917 Russian Revolution. She was also involved with the Yiddish literary elite. According to Auerbach, she maintained close ties with the prominent Yiddish critic Shmuel Niger and his brother, Daniel Charny, as well as with Marc and Bella Chagall. Usually “Litvaks” like these had little involvement with Polish culture. But Słapakowa was different. She attracted attention with her translation into Polish of Simon Dubnow’s monumental *World History of the Jewish People*. She was also a frequent contributor to the Polish-language Jewish daily *Nasz przegląd*. Like many other members of the Oyneg Shabes, she was linked to the Warsaw branch of the YIVO and publicized its activities for the Polish-speaking circles of Warsaw Jewry.

Rachel Auerbach remembered how, in the first winter of the German occupation, Słapakowa decided to arrange Sunday afternoon “coffee hours” that brought together Jewish intellectuals, actors, and writers, a decidedly dangerous activity when German patrols were routinely barging into private apartments in their search for valuables and forced laborers. But Słapakowa was determined to fight the prevailing mood of fear and depression. Her “five o’clocks” resembled a prewar salon where good conversation and modest food enabled the fifteen or so guests to forget the war for a few hours. Sometimes guests performed chamber music.<sup>121</sup>

After the Germans forced the Słapaks to move from their spacious apartment on Elektoralna 1 in the spring of 1940, the salon ended. Auerbach often met Słapakowa in the Aleynhilf offices on Tłomackie 5, and during one visit to her apartment, Słapakowa asked Auerbach about her work in the soup kitchen. The tone of the questions led Auerbach to guess, correctly, that Słapakowa was researching an assignment for the Oyneg Shabes. After the war, in the tin boxes that housed the part 1 of the archive, Auerbach and others found the records of the interviews that Słapakowa was conducting for her unfinished study of Jewish women during the war.

The Słapaks had one young child of school age, a daughter who resembled her mother. Both perished in Treblinka during the Great Deportation of 1942. According to Auerbach, her husband survived.

## THE PARTY COMRADES

Several members of the Oyneg Shabes had known Ringelblum and Wasser from the Left Poalei Tsiyon. In addition to the teachers Israel Lichtenstein and Natan Smolar, this group of LPZ members included Nehemia Tytelman, Mordecai Schwartzbard, and Yekhiel Gorny.

Before the war Tytelman had been one of the leaders of the Warsaw Shtern, the sports organization of the LPZ. Although he suffered a breakdown at the onset of the war, he recovered and remained an active member of the underground party in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>122</sup> He was also courageous. Angered by the abuses in the labor camps and by Judenrat venality, he sent an open letter to the head of the Judenrat's labor department in which he demanded fairer treatment of the poor.<sup>123</sup>

Tytelman made many important contributions to the archive, including essays on smuggling, interviews with refugees, and street sketches. His specialty, however, was ghetto folklore: courtyard songs, jokes, and the milieu of the all-important smugglers. Tytelman wandered the ghetto with pen and paper, always ready to write down the songs of a child singer or of a wandering "comedian," along with vivid descriptions of the singers themselves.

In a typical reportage, Tytelman described an encounter with an eighteen-year-old street singer, Shayne Eisenberg. In Rypin, her father had been a tanner and the family had enough to live on. But as soon as the Germans took the town, they arrested her mother and the family never saw her again. The family finally arrived in Warsaw, at the notorious refugee center on Stawki 9. Shayne's father soon died of starvation and her brother wandered off. Now she had only her ten-year-old sister left, whom she supported by street singing.

When Shayne mentions her mother she breaks out in prolonged crying. "If they had not dragged mother away things would not be so bad." She is awfully lean, looks like a corpse, is already dulled, does not . . . understand what people say to her. . . . The shoes, obviously her father's, are thrice her size. . . . All the time, whether singing or talking, she keeps begging [for food]—one notes that her song is garbled, she does not know all of it.

To the tune of "Mame libe, mame getraye," she sings:

Oh oh oh oh / oh oh oh dear father  
Why, why, why must we Jews so suffer  
Suffer so much suffering, suffer, suffer  
Why, you promised us, long ago didn't you  
To elect us for your beloved nation.<sup>124</sup>

Tytelman, who also used the pseudonym NR (Natan Rocheles, Natan the son of Rachel) was killed sometime in 1943.

Little is known of Yekhiel Gorny except that he was a member of the archive who could be trusted to carry out many different assignments: interviews, short reports, and copying. He kept a diary that he continued even during the chaotic and terrible days of the Great Deportation. He also wrote one of the first descriptions of the January 1943 action. It was thanks to Oyneg Shabes members like Gorny that historians have a day-by-day account of what happened in the Warsaw Ghetto after July 1942, at a time when fear and terror paralyzed many surviving writers and chroniclers. Gorny continued to write even after the Germans took away his wife and child on August 7, 1942.

Gorny tersely recorded the things he witnessed. On November 25, 1942, eight Jews were shot. On November 26 a German gendarme warned Jews to avoid the next street: “Don’t go, there’s an SS man over there and he’ll shoot you.” Later that same day Gorny noted that thirty people had been shot the day before and that “at 5:00 PM a Jew was shot near Miła 55.”<sup>125</sup> On November 29 Gorny noted that “an unknown hand” had killed Israel Furst, a notorious Jewish collaborator for the Gestapo.<sup>126</sup> In these last weeks of his life Gorny described, day by day, how the remaining Warsaw Jews wavered between hope and despair. When news came of the Allied landings in North Africa, Gorny wrote that “the mood of the Jews is getting happier, that hope is rising that the handful of survivors . . . might see Hitler’s downfall.” But two days later the mood was “very depressed.”

Gorny expressed hardly any emotion, except when he wrote about the Jewish police. “Their conduct,” he wrote in October 1942, “can be answered by one word only, ‘J’accuse.’” How should the Jews punish them after the war? This would be a problem, because Gorny believed that Jews “were not capable of taking revenge through murder, burning, or extermination . . . not even against our mortal enemies, the Germans. We would not be able to do it.” No, after the war “the Jews of Warsaw” should lead the surviving Jewish police to Treblinka and make them stand there—on the site of the gas chambers—with a placard attesting their complicity in the “greatest disgrace of the twentieth century.”

During the ghetto uprising, Gorny fought in the combat group of the LPZ commanded by Hersh Berlinski. He was killed on May 10, 1943, with a group of fighters who were trying to leave the burning ghetto through the sewers.

In memoirs published after the war one LPZ veteran called Mordecai Schwartzbard “one of the most intelligent leaders of the Jewish labor move-



ment in Poland.<sup>127</sup> Before 1939 Schwartzbard served on the central committee of the Lodz Poalei Tsiyon, a party stronghold. Arrested several times by the Polish authorities, Schwartzbard gained a reputation as an excellent speaker and a tough fighter.<sup>128</sup> In November 1939 Schwartzbard left Lodz for Warsaw. He continued to work for the party and directed a soup kitchen for Lodz refugees.

In the Oyneg Shabes Schwartzbard conducted interviews with refugees; wrote many reports, especially on conditions in various labor camps in 1940 and 1941; recopied Ringelblum's diaries and notes; and made copies of many other documents. His most important contribution to the archive, however, was his own diaries and chronicles. Schwartzbard wrote a detailed chronicle of the early days of the German occupation in Lodz, where the Germans seized him twenty-two times for forced labor. His chronicles continued after he arrived in Warsaw and then stopped in 1942.

Schwartzbard probably died in Treblinka in 1942, along with his wife, Miriam, and his son, Daniel. All his writings were contained in part 1 of the archive, which stopped in August 1942.

#### **THE POLISH LANGUAGE WRITERS: HENRYKA LAZOWERT AND GUSTAWA JARECKA**

Although Ringelblum as a fervent Yiddishist frequently criticized the growing use of Polish among Jews, he nonetheless readily recruited trusted members of the Polish-speaking Jewish intelligentsia to work in the archive. Two important collaborators were the young poet Henryka Lazowert and the leftist writer Gustawa Jarecka. The Oyneg Shabes also collected many of the writings of the most popular Polish-language poet in the ghetto, Władysław Szlengel. But although Ringelblum thought Szlengel important enough to write a short essay about him (more on this in chapter 8), Szlengel did not appear to be an actual collaborator of the Oyneg Shabes, probably because of his membership in the Jewish police which he quit at the beginning of the Great Deportation.

#### **Henryka Lazowert (Łazowertówna)**

Before the war Henryka Lazowert had been a promising young poet who had won an academic fellowship to study in Italy. When the war started Ringelblum brought her into the Aleynhilf, where she wrote "propaganda": leaflets, appeals, and so on. He then recruited her for the Oyneg Shabes. At a time of so much suffering in the refugee centers, when tens of thousands of fami-

lies were slowly starving to death in shocking conditions, Ringelblum praised Lazowert for her ability to bring to life the individual family tragedies that lurked behind the dry statistics of mass suffering contained in the Aleynhilf reports. Ringelblum singled out Lazowert's essay on a single Jewish family's struggle for survival in the ghetto. This essay won a first prize in a secret contest sponsored by the archive.<sup>129</sup>

Lazowert continued to write poetry in the ghetto. Her most popular poem was "To the Child Smuggler," which was translated into Yiddish and sung by the well-known performer Diana Blumenfeld.

Through walls, through holes, over ruins, through barbed wire I'll still  
find a way. Hungry, thirsty and barefoot I slither through like a snake: by  
day, at night, at dawn. No matter how hot. No matter how much rain.  
You can begrudge me my profit. I am risking my little neck.<sup>130</sup>

During the Great Deportation Ringelblum wrote that Lazowert voluntarily went with her mother to the Umschlagplatz. The Aleynhilf tried to rescue her, but when she discovered that she would have to leave her mother, she chose to accompany her to "the East."<sup>131</sup>

### **Gustawa Jarecka**

It is not clear how well Ringelblum knew Gustawa Jarecka (1908–1943) before the war. She had not taken part in any Jewish cultural activities; her reputation rested on leftist novels about working-class life and political struggle. Forced into the ghetto with her two children, she found a position as a typist with the Judenrat. There she worked closely with Marcel Reich-Ranicki, who after the war became a popular television personality and literary critic in Germany. Ringelblum asked both of them to furnish copies of Judenrat documents for the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>132</sup>

As they worked together in the Judenrat offices Reich-Ranicki and Jarecka developed a deep friendship. They loved to talk about French and Russian literature. Reich-Ranicki admired the older woman's poise and self-possession, and began to develop strong feelings for her.

Did I love her, this Polish writer Gustawa Jarecka? Yes, but this was an entirely different relationship from the one I had with Tosia. I knew very little about Gustawa's past. Before the war, little tied her to the Jewish world. She was one of those Polish Jews, for whom religious matters were totally foreign. She arrived in the ghetto with her two children: an eleven or twelve year old from a short-lived marriage and a two year old about

whom she never told the father. Czerniakow (and we have to credit him for this) selflessly supported many intellectuals who were in the ghetto without work and found them employment in many offices of the Judenrat. Since Gustawa knew German and knew how to type, she wound up in my office. I can still see her before me: a chestnut haired, blue-eyed woman, a bit over thirty, composed and quiet.<sup>133</sup>

On July 22 Reich-Ranicki and Jarecka were both at work in the Judenrat offices when SS officer Hermann Höfle barged into Adam Czerniakow's office with an order to begin the deportation of Warsaw Jewry. Reich-Ranicki and Jarecka were ordered to type transcripts of the meeting—and of the fateful deportation order—in German and in Polish. Höfle told Czerniakow that if the Judenrat did not carry out the order, he would hang all its members: “right there,” he said, pointing out the window at a recently opened children's playground.<sup>134</sup>

Thanks to her job in the Judenrat, Jarecka managed to avoid the first wave of selections in the summer of 1942. Ringelblum then asked her to write about what she had seen. She entitled this essay, “The Last Stage of Deportation Is Death.” Living through the hellish fear of the daily blockades, Jarecka recalled at the start of her essay, was easier than writing about what happened. Then the senses were numbed. Now she could look back on the horror and know that even as she sat and wrote her reprieve was only temporary. Writing just brought back memories:

memories of mothers crazed with pain over losing their children; the memory of the cries of little children carried away without overcoats, in summer clothes and barefooted, going on the road to death and crying with innocent tears, not grasping the horror of what was happening to them, the memory of the despair of old fathers and mothers, abandoned to their fate by their adult children, and the memory of that stony silence hanging over the dead city after the sentence, passed upon 300,000 persons, had been carried out.<sup>135</sup>

But Jarecka believed that the written word was a link to a “before” and an “after.” After the war the details of mass murder might shock the world and keep such a crime from recurring. What had happened to the Jews, she implied, could well happen to others. In order to grab the attention of future readers whom she knew she would never see, Jarecka did her best to tell the truth and conceal nothing, even if it caused her pain.

Why, she asked, did the Jewish masses not resist? She admitted that the Germans found it easy to fool the Jews and that Jewish solidarity quickly collapsed as individuals looked for ways to save themselves through “exemp-

tions.” But she implied that no one could afford to ignore another factor, and that was the Jews’ misplaced optimism in mankind. They simply refused to believe that mass extermination was possible. They continued to accept the assumption that “organized communities had a right to life. . . . Wearily and slowly most of us, who had been brought up on illusions, learned to consider facts from the viewpoint of subordinating justice to politics. Too long we had believed in the importance of life.”

Jarecka’s essay remained half-finished. Either she ran out of time or found the effort unbearable. According to Hillel Seidman, who writes that he talked to her in December 1942, Jarecka expressed regret that she did not know Yiddish or Hebrew. She told Seidman that if she survived the war, she would learn these languages and write in them.<sup>136</sup>

Reich-Ranicki clearly remembered the last time he saw Jarecka. It was on January 18, 1943, the first day of the January action, when the Germans first encountered armed resistance in the ghetto. Jarecka, her two children, and Reich-Ranicki and his new wife were all in a crowd that was marching to the death trains. Reich-Ranicki and his wife decided to run. He told Jarecka to run with them, and she said that she and her children were ready. But when Reich-Ranicki and his wife made their mad dash, Jarecka remained in the column. Perhaps her youngest child, then a boy of four, was unable to run.<sup>137</sup>

## THE YIDDISH WRITERS AND JOURNALISTS

In his essay on the Oyneg Shabes Ringelblum declared that he preferred amateur writers to professional journalists:

The majority of our permanent collaborators, which totaled a few dozen [*etleke tsendlik*] were mostly recruited from the folk intelligentsia [*folk-sintelligentn*], mainly from the proletarian parties. We purposely avoided inviting professional journalists because we didn’t want our work to become cheapened and distorted. We wanted the simplest most unadorned account possible of what happened in each shtetl and what happened to each Jew (and in this war, each Jew is like a world in itself). Any superfluous word, any literary exaggeration grated and repelled. Jewish life during the war is so packed with events that it is unnecessary to add an extra sentence. And then again, there was the problem of secrecy. As is well known, journalists have a hard time with that.<sup>138</sup>

In fact, however, Ringelblum did involve several Yiddish writers and journalists in the archive, both as interviewers and authors, including Peretz Opocz-

ynski, Shie Perle, Rachel Auerbach, Leyb Goldin, Yehuda Feld, and Moshe Skalov. Generally all were leftists or at least shared a populist identification with “the Jewish masses.” Except for Perle, none had belonged to the literary elite before the war. Many other Yiddish and Hebrew writers did not work for the archive, but their works were preserved by the Oyneg Shabes: Yitzhak Katzenelson, Joseph Kirman, Kalman Lis, Shlomo Gilbert, and others.

While testimonies and eyewitness accounts remained the foundation of the archive, Ringelblum and his associates understood the importance of other genres: reportage, poetry, essays, and synoptic stories. The Oyneg Shabes encouraged literary life in the ghetto by sponsoring competitions and awarding prizes.

Although the reality of the war exceeded the worst of horror fiction, writers in the ghettos understood that the catastrophe had not made fiction and poetry superfluous. Well-crafted language and synoptic stories could bring out the truth in new and compelling ways. And though factual testimonies constituted the bedrock of the archive, reportages also proved effective in conveying information, making a point, and gripping the conscience of a hypothetical reader. In the entire Oyneg Shabes there was little question that the master of ghetto reportage was Peretz Opoczynski.

### **Peretz Opoczynski: The Ghetto Mailman**

In Peretz Opoczynski the Oyneg Shabes found a brilliant reporter and one of its best writers. Opoczynski was born near Lodz in 1892. His father died when Opoczynski was only five, and he grew up in terrible poverty. He spent his youth in various yeshivas, sleeping on benches in synagogues, and living on meager meals in strangers’ homes. Drafted into the Russian army during World War I, Opoczynski spent most of the war years as a POW in Hungary.

His mother had hoped that he would be a rabbi, but Opoczynski decided to become a writer. After the war he supported himself as a shoemaker and, on the side, began to write short stories, poems, and reportage. These attracted some notice, and Opoczynski became part of the Lodz literary scene.

Just when it seemed that he had a secure career as a journalist, Opoczynski lost his two children to polio and suffered serious bouts of depression. In 1935, citing an old Jewish saying that a change of place means a change of luck, he left his comfortable apartment in Lodz and moved, with his wife, Miriam, to Warsaw where he took a job with *Dos vort*, the newspaper of the Right Poalei Tsiyon. In 1938 his sister came to visit him from the United States. She recalled that he lived in an attic apartment on Wołyńska 21 in

shocking poverty. The walls were covered with mold and damp. His stubborn pride caused him to refuse any financial help from his sister. But Opoczynski and his wife had one consolation: they had a new son, Daniel, who was intelligent and healthy. Opoczynski's sister recounted that "Danchik," born in 1935, was an adorable child who filled both parents' lives.<sup>139</sup>

The war deprived Opoczynski of his meager livelihood as a journalist. Natan Eck and Hersh Wasser both remembered Opoczynski in the ghetto as very poor and frail. He could not earn enough from his job as a ghetto mailman to feed his family. His feet were swollen from hunger. Still, he found the strength to play an active role in his party, the Right Poalei Tsiyon, and to write, in both Hebrew and Yiddish, for the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>140</sup> Opoczynski also was active in his house committee on Wołyńska 21.

Long before the war Opoczynski had tended to see writing as a mission and a calling rather than as a career. Although he had been widely published, he apparently did not frequent writers' circles such as Tłomackie 13. Conveying the impression of being an ordinary artisan rather than the gifted journalist that he was, Opoczynski was exactly the kind of writer that the archive could use.

Hersh Wasser recalled that, in the Warsaw Ghetto, the Oyneg Shabes helped Opoczynski survive with small stipends. When he contracted typhus, Menakhem Kon provided medicine. (In appreciation, Opoczynski dedicated a Hebrew story to Kon.) Perhaps it was the Oyneg Shabes that helped Opoczynski acquire his job as a mailman.<sup>141</sup> In any case, the "investment" was well placed, as Opoczynski helped the archive in several important ways.

Once the extermination process began in the provinces, Opoczynski may have been one of those who gave the archive a priceless source of documentation: final postcards and letters that Jews awaiting "resettlement" sent to loved ones in Warsaw.<sup>142</sup> He also wrote important reports on the ghetto post office and kept a diary that covered the period from May 1942 to January 1943.

Opoczynski's greatest contribution to the archive, however, was his skill with reportage.<sup>143</sup> As he walked the streets and knocked on people's doors to deliver mail, he encountered, and later described, the ghetto's concerns and tensions, the array of characters and social types that had made Jewish Warsaw so diverse: Hasidim, Polish-speaking doctors, Jewish workers, smugglers, housewives, neighbors, and friends. Underpaid and starving, Opoczynski crafted a masterpiece, "The Ghetto Mailman," written in October 1941. Here he skillfully dissected the deeper social and cultural ramifications of a seemingly straightforward relationship between a mailman and the people on his route.<sup>144</sup> He was the object of envy and jealousy at first. Before the war there

had been no mailmen or Jewish police; now the ghetto had both—surely a sign of Jewish autonomy! And what a job! Of course the uniform might have been better. A sword would have looked nice, but a mailman's cap would do. This was a good job, people thought enviously, secure, with plenty of opportunities for bribes.

The truth, Opoczynski bitterly remarked, was quite the opposite. In the post office, as in so much else in the ghetto, corruption reigned. A small clique of Polish-speaking Jews ran the post office and grabbed all the lucrative jobs for themselves. A martinet who was in charge took care of his friends and terrorized his underlings. As for Opoczynski, on a good day he might deliver as many as 100 to 150 letters but earn only 6 to 9 zlotys, little more than the price of a loaf of bread.

Many desperate Jews regarded this simple mailman as a messenger of hope, a direct link to better places, better times. Opoczynski reported how the letters and packages he delivered created both a physical and emotional lifeline between starving Jews in the ghetto and children or husbands who had fled to the Soviet zone or who had emigrated. How Jews dealt with their mailman exposed the wide cultural and social gaps that marked the ghetto. Polish-speaking Jewish professionals treated him with condescension and arrogance, which, he commented acerbically, only reflected their own pathetic inferiority complexes. As undelivered mail piled up in the central ghetto post office, these acculturated Jews made cutting remarks about Jewish incompetence. For different reasons, Opoczynski had equally few good words to say about the Hasidim. They were hypocrites and skinflints who refused him the tips he needed to get by. He empathized with the *amcho*—ordinary Jews like himself who spoke Yiddish, who did not put on airs, who understood how hard it was to live, and who gave him decent tips—at least in the beginning.

Like his other reports on the house committees, children, and the *parówki*, his story of the ghetto postal service described a tough struggle for survival that the Jews were slowly losing. Inexorably and ominously, conditions worsened. Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union and Pearl Harbor put an end to the vital food packages from the Soviet zone and remittances from the U.S.<sup>145</sup> As the mail service deteriorated and the Judenrat raised its fees for each letter and package, many people blamed Opoczynski and began to treat him with hatred and contempt.

Because he was not part of the privileged inner circle, Opoczynski's route included some of the poorest streets of the ghetto as well as the refugee centers where hundreds of people lived in a few large rooms; the sick often lay all day in their excrement. Locating a person in these conditions was far from easy. Hallways were dark, stairs were polluted with filth, and often there was

no list of tenants' names. All too often Opoczynski would bring a precious letter only to learn that the person lacked the thirty groszy to pay the delivery fee. They would ask him to lend them the money, which he could not afford to do. In these circumstances the mailman might have to spend precious time going to neighbors for small contributions to "redeem" the letter.

These reports were unlike anything Opoczynski had written before the war. Then he knew who his audience was and when they would read his piece. Now there was no newspaper, no guaranteed audience, and no certainty of personal survival. Yiddish, the very language that had bound writer and reader in a circle of mutual understanding, was itself being destroyed. But Opoczynski wrote as if there would be a tomorrow, as if he and his readers would meet again in the morning newspaper. He presented the ghetto experience by dividing it into understandable, discrete themes and incidents to be shared with trusted readers who in turn recognized the reporter's authority. In the midst of a collective and an individual disaster, Opoczynski confronted rupture by seeking continuities with the known past: language, shared experiences, social spaces, and social conventions.

Without glorifying the ghetto inhabitants, Opoczynski described their rough humor and grim struggle to survive—and to maintain some modicum of social solidarity. Along with his keen powers of observation, he had a wonderful sense of language. He remembered and recorded conversations between Jewish mothers and their children; the slang of the Jewish smugglers; the pleas of young beggars on the street; housewives' petty quarrels; grim humor in a long line waiting to enter the *parówka*. Without in any way disguising their foibles or embellishing their virtues, Opoczynski made it clear that these were the people he was comfortable with: *folksmenshn*, ordinary Jews. He understood the importance of the social microcosms of the ghetto: the courtyards, the house committees that had become the arena of a desperate struggle that Jews were fighting not only for physical survival but also for dignity and to gain a foothold in conditions of growing chaos. Writing with no firm knowledge of a final outcome, Opoczynski conveyed how Jews saw and reacted to events as they unfolded. Quiet and unthreatening, he could win people's trust without monopolizing their attention; so they let him observe their lives and report what they did to survive in the ghetto.

Overall, his reportage reveals an inexorable deterioration of ghetto life, a grim realization that day by day, the battle to survive was becoming harder and harder. A new note crept into his writings. In most of his reporting Opoczynski had maintained the voice of a detached observer. When he wrote about particular individuals—ordinary people he knew—he could describe them with admiration and sympathy. But when he wrote about War-



saw Jewry as a collective, he became increasingly angry, and in “Children on the Pavement,” written in November 1941, he became an accuser. Since Opoczynski had lost two of his own children, he was especially sensitive to this subject. In normal circumstances, he wrote, people approached children with an instinctive love and protectiveness. For any normal community, preserving children ranked as the most important priority. Now, in the Warsaw Ghetto, it was the Jewish child that was bearing the brunt of the suffering. Future generations, he implied, would not only blame the Germans. They would also blame the Jews.

In “Children on the Pavement” Opoczynski poured out his outrage at his fellow Jews for allowing Jewish children to sleep in the streets, starve to death, and degenerate into wizened and decrepit beggars. Like Ringelblum, he was especially bitter at the Judenrat and the Jewish police for sending only poor Jews to labor camps, a policy that exposed the children of the poor to particular hardship. But not just the Judenrat and the Jewish police were to blame. The plight of the Jewish child exposed the moral bankruptcy of much of Jewish society. Yes, the Germans bore ultimate responsibility. But that did not excuse Jews who had lost their sense of community and their feelings of mutual responsibility. The war had made Warsaw Jews—selfish to begin with—even more egotistical and self-absorbed.

All sense of community began and ended with the four walls of one’s own apartment. It is the tragedy of the Polish Jews that the war found them so unprepared, so unorganized, so unable to rise to the needs of the times. Polish Jewry—divided into thousands of separate tribes [*eydes*—and each person a tribe unto himself.<sup>146</sup>

Had Polish Jewry been better organized, Opoczynski wrote, it could have accomplished so much in the early months of the war. Jewish possessions and wealth could have been used to stockpile large reserves of food and clothing to help the poor and to protect Jewish children. Polish Jews should have learned from the experiences of their brethren in Germany and Czechoslovakia that there was no point in hanging onto one’s wealth. Sooner or later—“guided by gentile or Jewish informers”<sup>147</sup>—the Nazis would find it anyway. Jews were supposed to be a people with intelligence and common sense. What happened? And now, why weren’t Jews doing more to help the children? There were still plenty of people in the ghetto who could do something: the smugglers, the bakers who were earning so much.

His reportage included both dry statistics and heartrending incidents that he witnessed or heard about. One such incident concerned a child whose accent marked him as a refugee from the provinces. An older woman noticed

that he was wearing a decent coat. Taking advantage of the child, she told him that she could find him a place in a children's shelter—and she would also get him a bicycle. But it was raining, and she needed to cover the bicycle with something. If the child would only lend her his coat, she would come right back. The child never saw his coat again.

[The suffering of the Jewish child] should have shaken us to our core, yanked us out of our passive paralysis and blindness and moved us all to protect our children. But so far that has not happened. As I write these lines [November 1941] we are going through the most critical time of the ghetto: new expulsions, more streets being taken away, less room, a tighter noose around our necks, walls, new walls. There is no room to move. Winter, damp, cold, poverty and death—will we be able to save the Jewish child?<sup>148</sup>

Opoczynski discussed Poles and Germans as well as Jews, conveying his belief that no one people had a monopoly on righteousness, just as no one people had a monopoly on evil. In his description of the *parówki*, Opoczynski wrote that the Nazis accused the Jews of spreading typhus in order to isolate them from Poles and Germans. The Nazis were afraid to let German soldiers wander through the ghetto. Opoczynski knew that many came to steal and rob, but he also knew there were exceptions:

Many German soldiers came to visit the ghetto because they were decent ordinary folk [*erlebbe folks menshn*], workers and peasants, who had no interest in Hitler's ideology. . . . [T]hey would come to the Jewish street markets and talk to the Jewish traders in Yiddish-German. Like common people everywhere they [found a common language], began to feel comfortable with one another and even began to say what they thought of Hitler and his gang.<sup>149</sup>

In the same reportage, corrupt Jews eagerly joined Germans and Poles in extorting money from their unfortunate brothers.

In “Smuggling in the Warsaw Ghetto” and “Gentiles in the Ghetto,” Opoczynski described how smuggling and illegal trade drew Poles and Jews together. Of course, smugglers and traders were not saints. The Poles who entered the ghetto knew the Jews were hungry, and they used their buying power to get the best deal they could. They wanted to make a profit. No matter. Not only did they foil the German plans to isolate the Jews behind ghetto walls and separate the two peoples, they actually kept the ghetto alive.

The bridge that linked Jew and gentile was made of bad material—speculation—but it served a good purpose—to save many Jews from starva-

tion . . . these Polish smugglers [worried about their own pockets] but still played a national role . . . by maintaining the ties between loyal citizens of Poland and by stretching out a brotherly hand to the persecuted. Thereby they sow the seeds of morality in a time of major moral degeneration.<sup>150</sup>

Their actions, Opoczynski believed, also served as an implicit repudiation of the widespread economic boycott that had figured so prominently in pre-war Poland. The war proved once again that the two peoples needed each other (“The Poles cannot live without the ghetto”). Painful as it was for Jewish women to part with wedding dresses, candlesticks, and family heirlooms, they had already lost their homes; now they had to keep their families alive. Smuggling and trading created personal bonds, a form of community that somehow gave the Jews in the ghetto a sense of comfort, a reminder that they were not completely alone. After all, the Poles themselves took risks to enter the ghetto. Often, after the Polish peasant women made a deal for merchandise they wanted, to ward off bad luck they tried to do a good deed such as giving bread to starving Jewish children.

The “kind lady” would reach into her bosom, take out her purse and would give the poor Jewish child a zloty or even two zlotys or even some bread. At the same time she would whisper in his ear and ask him to say a prayer to the “Jewish God” to help her get back on the Aryan side.<sup>151</sup>

After the Great Deportation, Opoczynski continued to keep his diary and traced the destruction of Warsaw Jewry in short, laconic comments. On September 3 he recorded the death of Shmuel Breslav: “Shmueli, a leader of the Hashomer Ha-tzair, a talented fellow, a great idealist and a man of action was shot in the street yesterday.” The next day he noted the rumors that the Germans intended to wipe out all the Jews of Europe: “Our end had come. This is the thought that is on everyone’s mind. We’re facing annihilation and no one has the courage to lead a resistance, so that we would at least die with honor.”<sup>152</sup>

On September 8 he described the bedlam of the “cauldron,” where all the remaining Jews of the ghetto had to wait in a small area for a final registration and selection:

The impression left by this registration was terrible and was symbolized by one- and two-year-old children sitting on a sofa in the middle of the road and crying “mama” while Jews, their hearts bleeding, were passing by, watching the horrible scene and crying. The Germans had probably done it deliberately. They could have taken the children away, but they did not. On the contrary—they let the Jews see and grieve.

And on September 30:

We are now seeing beautiful days. The sunshine is unusual for September. The heart is full of feelings. Scenes and memories of the past fill up the soul on this eve of Hoshana Raba [the seventh day of the fall Sukkot festival]. This gold in the sky, the colors, the beauty of the sunset—the heart is so strong—will we live to see redemption?

On October 9 Opoczynski reported rumors of a “giant electric chair” in Treblinka, designed to kill ten thousand Jews and Poles a day. “The Germans like to brag about their industrial prowess, and so they also want to run their killing industry with American efficiency.”

In the last months of his life, Opoczynski continually returned to the theme of resistance. Apparently unaware of the ŻOB and its preparations for armed resistance, he gave vent to his anger in his diary. On December 4, 1942, he discounted a rumor sweeping the ghetto about Jewish workers in a labor camp near Lublin who had supposedly killed their German guards; 180 Jews were said to have escaped.

We are more than certain that this rumor is not true. It had been produced by our deep sense of shame that in Warsaw, this mother city of Israel, in this city with its great masses of tough working Jews, and its traditions of political struggle—the Jews should have let themselves be led like sheep to the slaughter.

Even as Opoczynski wrote of his growing despair, he retained his faith in the basic decency of ordinary Germans. For him, faith in “the German masses” represented a last shred of hope and a lingering trace of prewar humanism that assuaged the growing sense of terror and isolation. On December 22, 1942, he reported widespread rumors that fifty thousand Warsaw Jews had turned up as workers in Bobruisk in White Russia, a sign that Jews still wanted to believe that the Germans really were deporting Jews to “the East” and not to Treblinka. The Gestapo spread these rumors, Opoczynski believed, not to comfort the Jews but to deceive ordinary German soldiers.

[The Gestapo is afraid] . . . that ordinary German soldiers, who are finding out the truth about the “resettlements” from their conversations with Jews, might revolt. . . . The German soldier really did believe the SS when it said that Jews were being sent to the East [to work]. But when he hears [from us] about the death factory at Treblinka, he starts to tremble and denies it all. But now that the British and the American radio is broadcasting the news, the SS has to work harder to cover up the terrible truth.

His last diary entry is dated on January 5, 1943. He was probably seized during the roundups in mid-January. Nothing is known about the fate of his wife, Miriam, and of his son, Danchik. Much of his prewar literary archive was found in the second part of the Oyneg Shabes.

### Shie (Yehoshua) Perle: The Accuser

Before the war Shie (Yehoshua) Perle had been one of the most talented writers in Yiddish literature. Overcoming the personal tragedy of his wife's suicide in 1926, he went on to write *Yidn fun a gants yor*, a superb novel of Jewish life in a provincial city seen through the eyes of an adolescent boy.<sup>153</sup> The novel won the Bund's top literary prize in 1937 as well as the first prize of the Yiddish Pen Club. (Critics like Dan Miron and David Roskies have compared it to Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*.) While many Yiddish novels had a historical or a political focus, Perle's narrative examined interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, and psychological tensions. Instead of national pathos the novel described the everyday, with its problems and small victories. If there was any implicit political message in this autobiographical novel, it was subtly embedded in Perle's depiction of Polish Jews as being totally at home in their surroundings. The characters in the novel, struggling to make ends meet, do not see themselves as a people in exile. Poland is their home, its streets, villages, and landscapes are their own. They differ from their Polish neighbors, but they are neighbors all the same. Perhaps this sense of *doikayt* ["hereness"] explained Perle's growing closeness to the Bund, which he formally joined just before the war.<sup>154</sup>

But as one of his close friends noted, Perle paid little attention to politics. His constant flirtations with the Left never overshadowed his deep interest in Jewish tradition and his respect for religion. When Dovid Nomberg, a prominent Yiddish writer, died in Warsaw, many leftist writers attended his funeral bareheaded. Perle wore a skullcap. (This is the way we Jews honor the dead, he said.) While vacationing in a Polish resort in August 1939, he would go to hear the sermons of nearby Hasidic rebbes.<sup>155</sup>

Perle was as controversial as he was talented. Long before the publication of *Yidn fun a gants yor*, Perle had gained a certain notoriety for his serialized stories in the Yiddish press, which contained sexual motifs that shocked straight-laced critics and self-appointed guardians of the moral purity of Yiddish literature. (Some of the most memorable passages of *Yidn fun a gants yor* involved adolescent sexual awakening and fantasies.) In 1935, when Perle appeared to speak at the Second International Conference of the YIVO in Vil-

na, he was booed off the stage. Writers of *shund* [trash], the crowd yelled, were not welcome at the YIVO.<sup>156</sup>

When the war began Perle fled to Soviet-occupied Lwów. The Soviets treated him well, and, according to Melekh Ravitch, Perle became the chairman of the Yiddish section of the writers' union.<sup>157</sup> But he also realized that Soviet Jews had little interest in Yiddish culture, and their future as a distinct nationality seemed bleak. After the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, he returned to Warsaw in late 1941 and shared his impressions and concerns with Ringelblum.<sup>158</sup> In the ghetto Perle lived next door to Shakhne Zagan, the leader of the LPZ. Perhaps this also brought him into closer contact with Ringelblum. Ringelblum mentioned that Perle wrote a long report on Soviet-occupied Lwów for the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>159</sup>

The war changed Perle. In the spring of 1942 the Oyneg Shabes asked Perle to participate in a survey of Jewish intellectuals and writers about the future of Polish Jewry after the war. Of all the participants, Perle was among the most pessimistic—and angry. Perle, deeply committed to Polish Jewry, to its folk culture and its language, understood that the war was irreparably destroying it all. He greatly resented the “Jewish bourgeoisie” and its lack of self-respect and sense of national honor. The ghetto experience, as shown by the plague of informants and deep demoralization, mercilessly exposed the rot that had infected large sections of Polish Jewry long before the outbreak of the war.

Among Poles you certainly would not see the pestilence of informers that we have in the ghetto. I find it hard to believe that any nation endowed with national pride would sink to such shameful depths. . . . [The Germans] shut the Jews up in the ghetto with the hope that they would kill one another. And they have been proven right; we bury each other alive.<sup>160</sup>

This abject lack of national honor extended to their own language, which Jews “hated,” even in the Soviet Union, where Yiddish received state support. Only the Jewish working class, Perle believed, the “only group which was not rotten,” offered a ray of hope. As for the postwar world, he believed in some kind of Jewish state, “but a Communist one.” “Only the Soviet Union,” he stressed, “could give the Jews a country.”

In early August 1942 the Germans entered Perle's courtyard and shouted for everyone in the building to come down. Trusting in their documents, Shakhne Zagan and his family obeyed the command, only to find themselves hauled directly to a Treblinka-bound train. Perle ignored the order and stayed put in his room; he evaded that particular roundup.<sup>161</sup>

In August 1942 the Oyneg Shabes asked Perle to write about the Great

Deportation. He started writing on August 31 and completed it on October 2. The essay, “Khurbm Varshe” (The Destruction of Warsaw) hurled bitter accusations at the Judenrat, the Jewish police—and all of Warsaw Jewry itself.<sup>162</sup>

We must ask: my God, who raised these [policemen], how can the sons of Jewish fathers turn into such killers? Which Jewish mothers nursed them? The only answer is that the fathers were murderers and the mothers were whores.

Perle cited the case of a Jewish policeman who had already caught four Jews. One short of his quota, he spied a small child whimpering in an abandoned apartment. He raced to hand the child over to the SS—and to take his well-deserved rest for the day. But the SS man looked at the child with disgust and then quickly shot him with his revolver.

No, the German executioner said. This “head” does not count. I shot the little dog. Anyone I shoot does not count as a “head.” So you owe me one “head.” Go catch someone or you’ll pay.

The Jewish bastard left without a word and brought in a fifth “head.”

Why had there been no leadership? Why hadn’t the people fought back? Czerniakow’s suicide had been an act of cowardice. Why had he not issued a public call for resistance before he decided to kill himself? The Judenrat had played such a shameful role that its members, Perle believed, deserved to be hanged from lamp posts.

We could have defended ourselves, not let ourselves get slaughtered like stupid oxen. Had all Jews just run into the streets, had we all just climbed over the ghetto walls, had we all flooded the Warsaw streets carrying knives, axes, even stones—then maybe they would have killed 10,000, 20,000, but they would never have killed 300,000! We would have died with honor.

His conclusion was bleak:

If a community of 300,000 Jews did not try to resist, if it exposed its own throat to the slaughterer’s knife, if it did not kill one German or one Jewish collaborator—then maybe this was a generation that deserved its bitter fate!

In September 1942, as Perle was writing “Khurbm Varshe,” Shmuel Winter secured him a job in the artificial honey factory on Franciszkańska 30—the same factory that would also employ Rachel Auerbach.<sup>163</sup> Now only Jews with numbers—hung about their necks like dog tags—had a right to live, working up to fourteen hours a day for meager rations. The Germans handed out

30,000 numbers in all, and Perle wrote another essay about his new name, “4580.” The Bible had admonished Jews to blot out the name of Amalek, the treacherous tribe that had attacked the Israelites in the desert. Now the Germans, with the consent and connivance of the Judenrat, were turning the tables on the Jews.<sup>164</sup> They had already killed 300,000. And now they were blotting out the names of the few they allowed to linger on in the ghetto shops.

Once his name, Perle wrote, had served as his conscience and his moral guide. Before the war his name had provoked anger and derision—and then honor and recognition. In the worst moments of his life—following the death of his young wife—it was fear of bringing dishonor on his name that had prevented him from committing suicide.<sup>165</sup> A name meant autonomy, it symbolized a small measure of dignity, and it linked its bearer with past and future generations. One could mourn a name; could one mourn a number?

In this essay, written in a tone of ironic self-mockery mixed with self-deprecating humor, Perle discussed the new status that gave him a temporary right to life—the tin tag that hung around his neck with the number 4580.<sup>166</sup>

And just as Sholom Aleikhem’s Motl, the son of Peyse the Cantor, runs around barefoot and happily proclaims, “I’m alright, I’m an orphan,” so I walk around in the tenement courtyard on Franciszkanska Street, which had become the great wide world, and proclaim: “I’m alright, I’m a number.”

In “Khurbm Varshe,” Perle had bitterly noted that it was the worst who had gone into the shops and survived—the hustlers and *makhers* who paid big money for their dog tags and preferred self-preservation to resistance. But in the end, Perle implicitly admitted, he himself had acted no differently. He, too, had survived thanks to pull. Instead of rushing into the streets and attacking a German, as he urged in “Khurbm Varshe,” he had become one of the “lucky ones.” And what now? For the few weeks of extra life, one paid a heavy price in guilt. His neighbor (“as clever, as learned, as polite as I—maybe even more polite”) did not get a number. He kept his name: “but a beautiful human name has the same value today as a beautiful human heart or a beautiful human virtue.”

In order to become a number, my fifty-three years had to be jabbed at until they bled. Jabbed at, mocked, raped. In order for me to become a number, they had to destroy my house first. Destroy it, tear it up by the roots. Under my number lies three times a hundred thousand Jewish martyrs. Three times a hundred thousand Jewish lives that Amalek slaughtered with the consent of the head of the kehilla and his servants.



From under my unfortunate number leaps out the cry of tens of thousands of poisoned, strangled Jewish children.

Traditional Jewish texts of lamentations and mourning could not describe what was happening now.

In the dark nights I hear the great weeping of the mother of all our mothers, our Mother Rachel. She walks across the desolate fields and wraps her children in burial sheets. With her beautiful delicate hands she washes the blood off her sons and daughters. But can she wrap ALL of them in burial sheets. Can she wash them ALL? Blood cries out; and the earth, in all its length and breadth, is dissolved in lamentation.

They lay, the slaughtered creatures, naked and shamed, scattered and spread, impurified for burial, without a kaddish, without a gravestone, violated by the murderous hands of Amalek, with the consent of the holy congregation of Warsaw. I'm alright. I'm a number.

In 1943 Perle and his son, Lolek, a member of the Polish Communist Party and an engineer by training, left the ghetto to hide on Aryan papers provided by a friend of Lolek's.<sup>167</sup> Like many other Jews in their position, Perle and his son clutched at a chance to buy Latin and Central American passports and thus possibly save their lives. Those who bought the passports assembled in Warsaw's Hotel Polski, from where the Germans sent many to camps in Germany and France while deciding whether these newly minted "Latin Americans" could be of value, either for exchanges or money.<sup>168</sup>

The Germans first sent Perle and his son to Bergen-Belsen.<sup>169</sup> There months passed as Perle nursed the hope that the Germans would let him leave Europe. A fellow inmate recalled that Perle loved to attend lectures on the Bible and other Jewish texts given by an Orthodox Jew. After one lecture Perle loudly complimented the Jew on his insights and on his excellent Yiddish. Another religious Jew mordantly repeated the well-known saying: "God, the Torah, and the Jewish People are one" (*Kudsha borukh hu, araysa v'yisroel khad hu*). Perle immediately understood the meaning and began to cry.<sup>170</sup> If the Jewish people were being destroyed, the Jew seemed to be saying, then what was the point of the Torah? And if a religious Jew could make such a statement, then who was left to show moral steadfastness? Perle despaired. Caught between his nostalgia for Jewish tradition and his vague left-wing sympathies, what he most believed in were the Jewish masses of Poland. And whatever happened to him, they, he knew, were gone forever. His essays had been filled with allusions to the Bible and the Prophets, to Sholom Aleikhem and to Peretz. His Polish Jews would have understood them. Would anyone else?

In October 1943 the Germans told Perle, his son, and a group of other Jews

to pack their bags. They were being transferred to a transit camp and then to freedom in Switzerland. Perle seemed hopeful and promised those left behind that he would do all he could to publicize the German crimes. The train actually took the group to Auschwitz, where Perle and his son were gassed.<sup>171</sup>

After the war, when the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute published “*Khurbm Varshe*” in its journal without naming the author, the Yiddish literary critic H. Leyvik questioned its authenticity and charged that Ber Mark, the director of the Institute, had falsified the document. Why did the “anonymous author” reserve his bitterness and anger at his fellow Jews and hardly mention the Germans? And despite all his calls for resistance, where was the evidence that he himself had done any fighting? Surely, Leyvik argued, this was an example of scurrilous Communist subversion of the truth.<sup>172</sup>

Indeed, Ber Mark was not averse to tampering with and censoring published documents. But, on this occasion, Mark easily rebutted Leyvik’s accusations. For Leyvik, still reeling at the destruction of East European Jewry, the murdered Jews were *kedoyshim*, martyrs. He had trouble grasping the anger and bitterness that engulfed Warsaw Jewry as it surged to its death. But the Oyneg Shabes preferred a record that told the entire truth—thus ensuring that the Jews would be remembered as they were and not as elegists preferred to see them.

### Rachel Auerbach: The Survivor

As one of only three survivors of the Oyneg Shabes Archive, Rachel Auerbach had the rare opportunity not only to retrieve her wartime reportage but to rewrite and publish her reports in such books as *B’hutsot varshe*, *Varshever tsvoes*, and *Baym letstn veg*. The differences, some subtle, some great, between her wartime writings and their postwar versions reflected a personal journey of survival and an evolving search for the meaning of Holocaust memory. As she handed over her first cache of writings to the Oyneg Shabes on July 26, 1942, in the chaos of the deportation to Treblinka, she attached a note that exposed her feelings: raw fear, violent anger, despair. “I am handing over this unfinished essay to the archive. The fifth day of the ‘Aktion’. Perhaps such horrors have already occurred before in Jewish history. But such shame, never. Jews as tools [of the killers]. I want to stay alive. I am ready to kiss the boots of the worst scoundrel [*dem gemaynstn kham*] just to be able to see the moment of revenge. REVENGE REVENGE remember.”<sup>173</sup>

In that same note she also wondered whether her writings would share the same fate as the scriblings of a coal miner trapped in an accident with

no survivors, whose body would never be found. Would anyone read them, would anyone care? And besides, she complained, she had lost her ability to write coherently. Her style, she felt, was confused, disjointed. Had it not been for Ringelblum, she would have written nothing. And yet, maybe it was best if she died. As a survivor, what good would she be to anybody?

By early 1944, living under false papers on the Aryan side, she was writing her memories of the Warsaw Ghetto at the request of the Jewish National Committee. This time there were no questions, no doubts about why she was writing. She owed it to the dead to tell what had happened. But her writing had to be exact:

The mass murder, the murder of millions of Jews by the Germans, is a fact that speaks for itself. It is very dangerous to add to this subject interpretations or analyses. Anything that is said can quickly turn into hopeless hysteria or endless sobs. So one must approach this subject with the greatest caution, in a restrained and factual manner . . . this had been my intention: not to express but to transmit, to note only facts but not to interpret.<sup>174</sup>

She quickly added that she realized immediately that this mandate was impossible—even for her.

After the war, in Poland and in Israel, after she had recovered her wartime manuscripts, her writing would take on yet another purpose: to ensure that the Jewish people remembered not only to keep faith with the dead but to use the lessons of the Holocaust to strengthen the nation and tighten the bonds between Israel and the Diaspora.

For Auerbach, memory and mourning demanded a painful return to the intense, vibrant world of prewar Warsaw Jewry which one of her mentors, the Yiddish poet Melekh Ravitch, had called a sprawling mosaic of different Jewish tribes and subcultures.<sup>175</sup> Auerbach took its shattered bits and shards and reconstructed a mosaic of memory based on a poignant evocation of dozens of individual vignettes. And thus she spoke for those who had no one to remember them: the ordinary Jews she came to know in the ghetto as she ran the soup kitchen on Leszno 40 and the Jewish writers, artists, and actors whose milieu she shared in the 1930s and in the ghetto. The more one knew about what and whom the Germans had murdered, the more one could grasp the enormity of the national *khurbm* [holocaust].

Before the war she had been active in Warsaw Yiddishist circles and had written articles on literary criticism and psychology for the Yiddish- and the Polish-language Jewish press. Like Ringelblum, she was a native of Galicia.

Before moving with her family to Lwów, she had spent her childhood in a remote shtetl in Podolia, Lanowitz, where she acquired a love of Jewish folklore and the Yiddish language. The great Jewish folklorist and ethnographer, Shmuel Lehman, had interviewed her many times about the folksongs and customs of the rural Jews of Podolia.<sup>176</sup> Auerbach, like Opoczynski, was a superb observer of the Jewish everyday. She had a fine sense of the nuances of the behavior and speech of the diverse panorama of Polish Jewry. Auerbach conveyed what she saw and observed in evocative, powerful language that made her writings an indispensable source for any cultural or social history of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Like many other Galician Jews, Auerbach combined a deep Jewish identity with a first-class Polish education and cultural sensibility. At Lwów University in the early 1920s she studied psychology and befriended the young poetess Dvora Fogel and her friend, Bruno Schulz. Indeed, it was Auerbach who was instrumental in launching Schulz's literary career as one of the most promising writers of the Polish avant-garde.<sup>177</sup> In Lwów in the 1920s she served on the editorial board of *Tsushhtayer*, a literary journal that tried to encourage Yiddish culture in a region where most of the Jewish intelligentsia spoke Polish.

Auerbach moved to Warsaw in 1933. She began to publish literary and theater criticism in the Polish-language Jewish daily *Nasz przegląd* as well as in Yiddish journals such as *Literarische bleter*. She also published articles on psychology and supported herself with part time copy editing. In Warsaw Auerbach became the companion of the brilliant and tempestuous Yiddish poet Itzik Manger. After Manger was forced to leave Poland in 1938, Auerbach preserved many of his manuscripts and hid them in the Ringelblum Archive.

Thus much of the power of Auerbach's reportage stemmed from her ability to navigate cultural boundaries, derived from a life that straddled different worlds: village, shtetl, and city; Yiddish and Polish; Poles and Jews; Galicia and Warsaw; the milieu of the Jewish literary elite and the world of the Jewish masses; religious and secular; diaspora nationalists and Zionists. (This negotiation and mediation would continue after the war, as Auerbach began speaking up for the murdered victims in her controversies and arguments with Ben Zion Dinur about the agendas of Yad Vashem and Jacques Steiner over his book *Treblinka*.)

Auerbach and Ringelblum had known each other before the war but had not been especially close. Therefore Auerbach was quite surprised when Ringelblum mobilized her for the Aleynhilf and then for the Oyneg Shabes. In addition to her essay on the soup kitchen Auerbach kept a diary of her life

in the ghetto and, at Ringelblum's request, began to write a report of the literary life of the ghetto.<sup>178</sup>

In her diary Auerbach gave free rein to her growing fear of death, as reports of mass executions in the provinces streamed into the Oyneg Shabes. In the past, she wrote on March 6, 1942, Jews had gone to their deaths knowing that they could have saved themselves had they only chosen to renounce their faith. Now Polish Jewry did not have the comfort of Kiddush Hashem, of dying to sanctify God's name. Like a convict on an American death row, they were waiting for their date with the executioner. In her diary Auerbach betrayed her uncertainty and her dread as her thoughts flitted back and forth between despair and hope.

How will our ordinary Jew get the strength to meet such a death, what will hold up his spirit as he waits week after week for his execution? . . . I am sure that our age-old spiritual capital, this golden pillar of our community, has not been totally shattered<sup>179</sup>

During the summer of 1942 Auerbach had several close calls but managed to survive.<sup>180</sup> In the fall of 1942, during the lull in the killing, Shmuel Winter summoned Auerbach to his office on Franciszkańska 30. Winter told Auerbach that he had found a new job for her in an artificial honey factory in the same building. What he really wanted her to do, however, was to fulfill a new assignment for the Oyneg Shabes—to interview and write down accounts of escapees from Treblinka for the archive. Several of them had already made their way back into the ghetto. Using her job as cover, Auerbach began to interview one of these escapees, Abraham Krzepicki. When Krzepicki's detailed account surfaced in the second part of the Ringelblum archive, it came to almost one hundred typed pages. Winter and Ringelblum closely followed Auerbach's work. The Oyneg Shabes had hoped to issue it as an underground publication (more on this in chapter 8).

In February 1943 Auerbach escaped to the Aryan side. Helped by Polish friends, she procured Aryan documents and became a courier for the Jewish underground. Carrying a basket with hidden money and manuscripts, covered by vegetables, Auerbach crisscrossed the city on various missions.<sup>181</sup>

After the ghetto uprising, Auerbach continued the legacy of the Oyneg Shabes.<sup>182</sup> She not only wrote a constant stream of essays but also became part of an underground Jewish archive on the Aryan side. At the request of the Jewish National Committee she wrote essays on the Great Deportation and on the murdered Jewish intelligentsia. With the help of Polish friends, Auerbach buried her writings in two different locations in Warsaw, on the grounds

of the Zoo and in a field in the southern district of Mokotow. Both caches survived the war.<sup>183</sup>

Auerbach had been close to the circles of the prewar YIVO, and her wartime writings stressed the close links of the Jewish intelligentsia and the masses. The first title of her essays on the murdered writers, musicians, and artists was “Tsuzamen mitn folk” (Together with the people). Her work followed in the footsteps not only of Emanuel Ringelblum but also of YIVO director Max Weinreich who made special efforts to incorporate the insights of Sigmund Freud and social psychology into the study of Polish Jewry. In a world hitherto dominated by traditions and ideologies that stressed the primacy of the collective over the individual, Auerbach, like Weinreich, believed that one could not understand *klal yisroel* (the collective) without grasping the needs of *reb yisroel* (the individual): the aspirations, drives, obsessions, and hopes of the many individuals who made up the Jewish masses in Poland. (In her masterly 1935 review of Shie Perle’s wonderful novel of adolescent awakening—*yidn fun a gants yor*—she lambasted a prudish Bundist critic who panned the book because it suggested that adolescent boys thought about sex.)<sup>184</sup>

And so, too, in her Holocaust writings she highlighted the complex interplay of psychological factors in individuals, families, and entire social groups. She told a complicated story: resilience, vitality, and self-sacrifice on the one hand, and corruption and moral collapse on the other.

Auerbach stressed the Germans’ brilliant use of psychological factors to effect the destruction of Warsaw Jewry and to use the Jews’ strengths against them. The Germans played with the Jews and with their natural human instincts of self-preservation and hope. In her cogent observations of the mass hysteria that gripped the Warsaw Ghetto in the summer of 1942, she described how the very qualities that had served Jews so well in the past—practicality, pragmatism, hard-headedness, “seykhel,” and natural optimism—now accelerated their journey into the abyss.

And still other Jews. Broad-shouldered, deep-voiced, with powerful hands and hearts. Artisans, workers, wagon drivers, porters, Jews who, with a blow of their fists, could floor any hooligan who dared enter their neighborhoods.

Where were you when your wives and children, your old fathers and mothers, were taken away? What happened to make you run off like cattle stampeded by fire? Was there no one to give you some purpose in the confusion? You were swept away by the flood, together with those who were weak.

And you sly cunning merchants, philanthropists in your short fur

coats and caps. How was it that you didn't catch on to the murderous swindle?<sup>185</sup>

Would other peoples, confronted with a similar massive assault, have acted better? She did not think so. Did Warsaw Jewry eventually recover from the shock and fight back? Yes. Should one blame the Jewish masses for not having fought back earlier? Only those who had not been there, Auerbach implied, would do so. Was armed resistance the only way the Jews stood up to the Germans? Absolutely not.

In November 1943 Auerbach was sitting in a Warsaw trolley car and saw a woman, her head thrown back, talking to herself. Like the biblical Hannah in her silent prayer, she at first conveyed the impression of being drunk. It turned out that she had just learned that the Germans had shot her son.

"My child," she stammered, paying no attention to the other people in the streetcar, "my son. My beautiful beloved son."

I too would like to talk to myself like someone mad or drunk, the way that woman did in the Book of Judges [*sic*] who poured out her heart unto the Lord and whom Eli drove from the Temple.

I may neither groan nor weep. I may not draw attention to myself in the street. And I need to groan; I need to weep. Not four times a year. I feel the need to say Yizkor four times a day.<sup>186</sup>

Unlike the Polish woman, she could only mourn in secret. She returned to her room, locked the door, and began to write "Yizkor" (Remember).<sup>187</sup> Most of the time Auerbach wrote in Polish; this she wrote in Yiddish.

She poured out her soul as she tried to describe the murder of Warsaw Jewry: the toddlers, the children whom she remembered from the ghetto schools, the tough Jewish workers, the hardened women shopkeepers, young scouts, courting couples, intellectuals, all gone, gone. Even if a few individuals survived, the vibrant, raucous, and diverse mosaic of Warsaw Jewry had been destroyed. "Yizkor" humanized the victims by recalling not only their individuality but also their city, the specific urban milieu that had shaped them and that had made them "Varshever."

As she groped for images in "Yizkor" to explain the sheer magnitude of the catastrophe, she used the example of a flood and evoked the oath "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem" of Psalm 137:

I saw a flood once in the mountains. Wooden huts, torn from their foundations were carried above the raging waters. One could see lighted lamps in them, men, women, and children in cradles tied to ceiling beams. Other huts were empty inside but one could see a tangle of arms

waving from the roof, like branches blowing in the wind waving desperately toward heaven, toward the riverbanks for help. At a distance one could see mouths gaping, but one could not hear the cries because the roar of the waters drowned out everything.

And that's how the Jewish masses flowed to their destruction at the time of the deportations. Sinking as helplessly into the deluge of destruction.

And if for even one of the days of my life I should forget how I saw you then, my people, desperate and confused, delivered over to extinction, may all knowledge of me be forgotten and my name be cursed like that of those traitors who are unworthy to share your pain.<sup>188</sup>

Auerbach offered no explanations for the catastrophe. This secular writer could only end her essay by repeating the Hebrew words of the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead. As David Roskies has pointed out:

Only someone who was flesh of the people's flesh yet thoroughly trained in analytic observation could have produced—fourteen months after the events described—a chronicle of destruction that combined reportage and liturgy, the documentary sweep of Lamentations and the individual pathos of Psalms. Only someone standing on the other side of the ghetto wall could possess such total recall.<sup>189</sup>

In other essays written in 1943–44, Auerbach regretted the lack of resistance. But “Yizkor” was different. Unlike the works of some other writers of the Oyneg Shabes, such as Perle, Lichtenstein, or Opoczynski—Auerbach's “Yizkor” was suffused with empathy and stunned bewilderment rather than anger. By using the imagery of a flood, a natural disaster, she anticipated future questions that those who were not there would pose.

No, the mass murder was not a metahistorical event. But its enormity was too horrible and too unprecedented to allow for glib theories and facile questions that might compromise the memory of the Jewish masses that she cherished so deeply. How does one resist a flood or an earthquake? What befell the Jewish masses was so unthinkable and so calamitous that they were psychologically unprepared. Implicitly Auerbach was anticipating the invidious distinctions that many would make after the war between the few who fought back with weapons and the masses that had allegedly died without a fight. It was the people she wrote about in “Yizkor,” not the fighters who had risen up just months before.

Now all she could do was defend their memory and take her place, once more, among those who could no longer speak for themselves. As a child in the synagogue her grandfather had built in Lanovitz, she recalled how on



major holidays the Torah reader, Meyer Itsik, would loudly bang the podium and cry out “We recite yizkor.” And then even the less devout would return to pray. For Auerbach, “Yizkor” was a return not to religion but to the place of her birth, to a world that did not have to invent new words to describe pain and loss. They were already there, in the prayers.

After the war Auerbach desperately told everyone she could about the archive hidden under the ruins. Well aware that she, Wasser, and his wife were the only survivors, she implored people to start the search. At first people did not take her seriously. There was so little money, the dimensions of the disaster were just beginning to sink in, and traumatized survivors had other priorities.

In April 1946 Auerbach spoke at a meeting in Warsaw to commemorate the third anniversary of the ghetto uprising. The Yiddish writer Mendel Mann recalled a tiresome and disappointing evening, full of phrase mongering and political sloganeering. Then Auerbach, the only woman on the rostrum, got up to speak:

She did not make any speeches, she did not “explain the meaning” of the uprising. She implored! With a stubbornness that deeply affected me, she demanded, she called: Remember, she cried out, there is a national treasure under the ruins. The Ringelblum Archive is there. We cannot rest until we dig up the archive. . . . Even if there are five stories of ruins, we have to find the archive. I’m not making this up. I know what I’m talking about! This isn’t just talk! This is coming from my heart. I will not rest, and I will not let you rest. We must rescue the Ringelblum Archive!<sup>190</sup>

Mann remembered that Auerbach met with a cool reception. People had their own troubles, and many did not understand why the archive was so important. Everybody knew what happened, and survivors reckoned that they did not need any historians to tell them about the disaster.

But Auerbach disagreed. Now more than ever, survivors had to organize a systematic and collective effort to record the past and continue the work of the Oyneg Shabes. The traditions of the Ringelblum Archive could counteract disturbing trends she had already noticed in early postwar memoirs. The memoirs of the eminent biologist Ludwik Hirszfeld, a convert to Catholicism, or the pianist Władysław Szpilman, she felt, presented a skewed and distorted picture of the ghetto.<sup>191</sup> But what could one expect, she asked, from individuals who had been so distant from Jewish society before the war? On the other hand, Auerbach also attacked the memoirs and writings of many nationally conscious survivors for their tendency to settle political scores and

nurture ideological jealousies. Auerbach held up the model of the Oyneg Shabes, where, she felt, a shared sense of national mission trumped narrow agendas. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, a wounded nation had to look at its record, the good as well as the bad. To tell the whole truth, to add and subtract nothing, was a debt owed not just to the victims who had died but to the nation that had to recover and rebuild.

Auerbach and Wasser persisted, and with money from the Jewish Labor Committee in New York the search finally began in earnest in the summer of 1946.

For the rest of her life Auerbach guarded Ringelblum's legacy. Immediately after the war she threw herself into the work of the Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, which later became the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH). Even before the war ended, the Commission, which besides Auerbach included such scholars as Philip Friedman, Joseph Kermish, and Nachman Blumenthal, collected survivor diaries, memoirs, and testimonies. It published several important books of documents and testimonies. Auerbach helped publish Leon Wieliczker's memoirs of the Janowska concentration camp near Lwów and a book on Treblinka, based on survivor testimony.<sup>192</sup>

After her immigration to Israel in 1950, she helped organize the collection of survivor testimony and support for Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Archive and Museum. There, too, people remembered her as a tough, uncompromising, and single-minded woman who was determined to protect the memory of the victims—and Ringelblum's legacy.<sup>193</sup> She was convinced that the study of the Holocaust should not be limited to professional scholars. Researchers had to reach out to survivors, mobilize them, and harness their need to recount what they saw. Unlike some scholars who regarded survivor testimony with suspicion, Auerbach believed that for many aspects of the Holocaust their testimony was a critical resource. Ringelblum had shown the way, she argued, with his call for history to be a collective and popular enterprise, and Philip Friedman had continued this approach after the end of the war. Furthermore, Ringelblum had reminded the Jewish people that the writing of their history should not depend on gentile documents and hostile sources. After the war this charge had become even more important. Auerbach was not only worried about Holocaust denial, although that too concerned her greatly. She fretted that Jews, Israelis in particular, were forgetting just how powerful a force Holocaust awareness could become in strengthening national identity and cohesion.<sup>194</sup> The Six Day War was just one example. Because of the Holocaust, the Jewish soldier knew that he had no choice but to win.

In 1958 Auerbach became involved in a nasty, public battle with the dean

of Israeli historians, Ben Tziyon Dinur, who also served as the director of Yad Vashem. Dinur had attacked Auerbach for her allegedly poor performance in her job and fired her. Auerbach hit back with a public rebuttal that questioned Dinur's priorities and the entire direction of Yad Vashem. Instead of focusing on research and study of the Holocaust, she charged, Yad Vashem was neglecting its basic mandate in favor of projects that had little to do directly with the Holocaust.<sup>195</sup> The very fact that it allocated far more money to German-language rather than Yiddish-language testimony, Auerbach pointed out, spoke for itself.<sup>196</sup> Research on the internal life of the ghettos, on social conflicts within Jewish society, whether or not Jews outside Europe had done all they could to rescue their brethren—all these vital questions were not getting the attention they deserved. Indeed, in a draft of a memorial article for Philip Friedman, she wrote that right after the war she and her comrades who were working in the postwar Historical Commission in Warsaw had regretted that they had been able to publish only a fraction of what they should have. But however inadequate, she now realized that, in retrospect, their efforts in postwar Poland constituted a “golden age” of Holocaust research.<sup>197</sup>

Auerbach also condemned what she feared was premature normalization of German-Jewish relations and refused to allow her biography to appear in the *Leksikon fun der nayer Yidisher literatur* because the project was partly financed with German reparations money.<sup>198</sup> In 1966 she became involved in a bitter dispute with Jean Steiner about his fictionalized account of Treblinka. Steiner, she charged, had distorted the truth and had defamed the memory of the victims and the honor of the camp survivors.<sup>199</sup>

Before she died in 1976, Auerbach published three books of memoirs on the Warsaw Ghetto. In the tension between her wartime writings and postwar emendations, one can discern a marked shift not in subject matter but in emphasis and attitude.

In her wartime writings and reportage for the archive, Auerbach judged herself harshly. The soup kitchen had been a failure, the Aleynhilf largely an exercise in futility.

After the war, when she retrieved these wartime writings, she took a more positive view of what she had done. She admitted that no one who depended *only* on the soup kitchen could have survived. But the kitchens had provided a critical margin for those who had some other source of food and had helped many people to survive; the Aleynhilf had done yeoman work in keeping up the struggle for human dignity.

By the same token she changed her views on the state of Polish Jewry and its cultural future. In the 1930s she shared the doubts of many of her friends

about the future of Yiddish culture in Poland. But as she redacted her war-time writings, she realized that here, too, she had been overly pessimistic. During the war she had written about the last days of such Yiddish cultural figures as the librarian Lev Shor, the poets Hershele, Kalman Lis, and Joseph Kirman, the actors Miriam Orleska, singers like Marysia Eizenshtat, composers like Yankel Glatshetyn. After the war, as she reread her essays on the Warsaw Jewish cultural elite, she asserted that this new generation of writers, poets, artists, and singers would have taken the place of those who had gone before—if only the Germans had not killed them all. Furthermore, she wrote, her work in the Aleynhilf was an epiphany. The Jewish masses had more strength than she had believed, and they would have provided a deep reserve of people and spirit to counteract assimilation and cultural decay.

This was her way of keeping faith with a band of comrades who had almost all perished.

Between the outbreak of the war and the summer of 1942 Ringelblum had managed to assemble a group of teachers, rabbis, scholars, writers, businessmen, and idealistic young people. This group, for all its differences, represented the finest traditions of Polish Jewry. It reflected the extraordinary cultural ferment that had transformed so much of East European Jewry in the first decades of the twentieth century.

One of the strengths of the Oyneg Shabes derived from its collective character. Ringelblum conceived the archive, probably wrote most of the questionnaires, and his views certainly carried great weight. But a sense of shared purpose clearly animated the Oyneg Shabes. This was not a group of disciples but, as Ringelblum himself wrote, a collective imbued with a common ideal. Over time as the archive evolved it was able to capitalize not only on its ability to organize and define topics but also on its success in drawing on the diverse talents of its members and in encouraging their individual creativity.

Based in the Aleynhilf, the archive had conduits to all sectors of the Jewish community and sources that brought in information from all over occupied Poland. The members of the Oyneg Shabes, whatever their political differences, worked under the most difficult circumstances to leave a record for future generations. True to the legacy of Peretz, Dubnow, and Ansky, these *zamlers* worked to the very end to ensure that future generations would view Polish Jewry through the prism of history rather than hagiography and elegy. In good times and bad, Polish Jewry spoke in many different voices; the men and women of the Oyneg Shabes did all they could to record those voices and ensure their survival until someday someone would listen.