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## EVERYDAY LIFE AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF JEWS IN THE NOWY SĄCZ GHETTO 1940–1942

The theme of the extermination of the Jews in the Nowy Sącz district (Kreishauptmannschaft Neu Sandez) has already been dealt with in several scholarly and popular interest articles.<sup>1</sup> They focused on the activities of the Judenrat in Nowy Sącz, the attitude of the Jewish elite of that city towards the Holocaust and the direct extermination of the Jews. None of the authors described the everyday life and living conditions in the Nowy Sącz ghetto (*Der jüdische Wohnbezirk in Neu Sandez*) in greater detail.<sup>2</sup> “The Jewish Quarter” in Nowy Sącz was established by an order of town commissioner Ernst Hein on 12 August 1940 and ceased to exist on 23–28 August 1942, when German functionaries deported its inhabitants and then murdered them in the Bełżec extermination camp.

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<sup>1</sup> See i.a., T. Duda, “Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej Nowego Sącza w okresie II wojny światowej,” *Rocznik Sądecki* 19 (1988–1990), pp. 209–250; Ł. Połomski, “Elity nowosądeckich Żydów wobec Zagłady,” in *Elity i przedstawiciele społeczności żydowskiej podczas II wojny światowej*, ed. M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło (Cracow–Katowice–Warsaw, 2017), pp. 69–82; *Pamiętając dla przyszłości. Historia Żydów na Sądecczyźnie. Konteksty – nawiązania – refleksje* (Nowy Sącz, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> References to the living conditions can be found in T. Duda’s study, „Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej.”

The aim of this article is to fill the above-mentioned research gap. Information on daily life and conditions in the Nowy Sącz ghetto can be found mainly in post-war survivor testimonies held in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and in other archives and academic institutions in Poland and abroad involved in the study of the Holocaust, and in collected Holocaust testimonies. In addition, there are several memoirs of the Jews of Nowy Sącz published.<sup>3</sup> Elements of everyday life appear in the records concerning the activities of the Judenrat and other institutions providing assistance to those in need. This whole set of sources – supplemented by records concerning the relationship between the ghetto and the so-called “Aryan side” – shows the living conditions that the German authorities created for the Jews in Nowy Sącz.<sup>4</sup>

### The First Months of the German Occupation

Before World War II, Nowy Sącz was an important regional centre of political, economic, social and cultural, and religious life of the Jewish community. About eleven thousand Jews lived in the town (about sixteen thousand in the Nowy Sącz District). According to the 1931 census, the percentage of the Jews residing in Nowy Sącz was 30%.<sup>5</sup> The census considered only religion and language, not nationality. Followers of Judaism declared speaking Yiddish and Hebrew, while assimilated Jews spoke Polish.

As a result of the German Reich's aggression against the Second Polish Republic at the beginning of September 1939, the Nowy Sącz District was captured by the German troops. As a consequence of administrative divisions imposed by the occupation authorities, the structure of the local administration changed. The town of Nowy Sącz became part of the Nowy Sącz District (Kreishauptmannschaft Neu-

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch. Wspomnienia ocalonego z Zagłady Markusa Lustiga*, trans. E. Świderska (Nowy Sącz, 2016); Jakub Müller's memories captured on film: “Nowy Sącz to jest moje życie – Wspomnienia Jakuba Müllera,” pt. 1, YouTube channel of the Museum of Nowy Sącz land <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIclaxcBvM0>, accessed 10 January 2024.

<sup>4</sup> For information on the Jesuits' aid to the ghetto, see A. Franczak, “Śasiędzkie relacje w godzinie próby. Pomoc jezuitów udzielana Żydom w czasie Zagłady na terenie Nowego Sącza,” in *Kościół, Żydzi, jezuici. Wokół pomocy Żydom w czasie II wojny światowej*, ed. M. Wenklar (Cracow, 2021), pp. 199–215.

<sup>5</sup> K. Samsonowska, *Wyznaniowe gminy żydowskie i ich społeczności w województwie krakowskim (1918–1939)* (Cracow, 2005), p. 104.

Sandez).<sup>6</sup> The function of the District governor from December 1939 until the end of the German occupation was held by Reinhard Busch, and before him, for only a few months, by Walter Hübschmann (initially as the district commissioner). In Nowy Sącz, the office of the town commissioner (Stadtkommissar) was held by Ernst Hein (until October 1940), Friedrich Schmidt (October 1940–January 1942) and Herbert Hüller (until the end of the German occupation). In October 1941, the German occupation authorities formally changed the name of town Nowy Sącz to the Germanised Neu-Sandez.<sup>7</sup>

After the Wehrmacht troops entered the town on 6 September 1939, looting and harassment of the Jews began. Markus Lustig, born in Nowy Sącz in 1925, wrote several decades after the end of the German occupation that for Jews the beginning of the war was associated with increasing persecution and their isolation from the rest of the population.<sup>8</sup> Already in September 1939, the Germans plundered synagogues and Jewish houses of prayer.<sup>9</sup> In the weeks and months that followed, German actions against Jews in Nowy Sącz were similar to those in many other towns and cities in occupied Poland. Samuel Kaufer recalled:

It began with incidents which, compared to the crimes of the following years, seem like innocent jokes, pranks. Men were seized and sent to work, from which they often returned bruised and bleeding. We were mistreated in a bestial way, but there were no casualties, and for us this was always a fundamental issue.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Nowy Sącz District (Kreishauptmannschaft Neu-Sandez) was part of the Distrikt Krakau (Cracow Province) of the General Governorate. In 1942, it had an area of 2,510 square kilometres and a population of about 315 thousand, and included seven towns: Nowy Sącz (Neu Sandez), Krynica (Bad Krynica), Stary Sącz (Alt Sandez), Piwniczna, Muszyna, Grybów and Limanowa – and 26 rural municipalities: Chelmiec, Dobra, Grybów (village), Jodłownik, Kamienica, Kobyle-Gródek, Korzenna, Krynica (village), Limanowa (village), Łabowa, Łącko, Łososina Dolna, Łukowica, Mszana Dolna, Mszana Górna, Muszyna (village), Nawojowa, Nowy Sącz (village), Niedzwiedź, Piwniczna (village), Skrzydlina, Stadło, Stary Sącz (village), Tylicz, Tymbark and Ujanowice.

<sup>7</sup> D. Golik, „Powiat nowosądecki pod władzą Niemców. Starostwo powiatowe i cywilne instytucje okupacyjne,” [www.wojennysacz.pl/powiat-nowosadecki-pod-wladza-niemcow/#\\_ftn6](http://www.wojennysacz.pl/powiat-nowosadecki-pod-wladza-niemcow/#_ftn6), accessed 18 January 2024.

<sup>8</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> S. Lehrer, L. Strassman, *The Vanished City of Tsanz* (Southfield, MI, Nanuet, NY, 1997), pp. 260–261. For an outline of the religious life in Nowy Sącz ghetto, see below in this paper.

<sup>10</sup> Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (hereinafter AŻIH), collection Zbiór relacji Żydów Ocalałych z Zagłady [Collection of the Holocaust Survivors Testimonies], 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 1.

Religious Jews, easily recognisable by their challahs, hats, and sidelocks, were particularly targeted for public harassment.<sup>11</sup> The Germans ordered them to perform in the Nowy Sącz Market Square in strange poses: jumping, dancing or walking on all fours. Germans also took photographs. In addition, they forced the Jews to do the humiliating work of cleaning up the streets and toilets.<sup>12</sup>

Round-ups of Jews for forced labour soon began.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the first anti-Jewish decrees were promulgated, which covered the entire General Governorate. The legal acts excluded the Jews from the social and economic life of the region.<sup>14</sup> The process of stripping people of their livelihoods and property, which frequently fell into the hands of the German terror apparatus, commenced.<sup>15</sup> These measures led to the far-reaching pauperisation of a large part of the Jewish community. As a result of the German-occupation policy, money was losing its value and, as Markus Lustig recalled, people tried to cope by trading in kind. As time passed, the people of Nowy Sącz began to feel the shortage of provisions.<sup>16</sup>

In the autumn of 1939, a Judenrat (Jewish Council) was established in the city, which in accordance with the instructions of the Germans, arranged life in the so-called Jewish residential quarter in Nowy Sącz, which had been under organisation since 1940; among other things, it was in charge of drawing up lists of workers, organising money collections and paying contributions to the occupier. It had its seat initially at 44 Kraszewskiego Street, then in the centre of the Piekło quarter, on Lwowska Street. The Council consisted mainly of middle-class merchants, craftsmen and the intellectual elite: lawyers, clerks and educated citizens.<sup>17</sup> Markus Lustig noted that the Council initially focused on helping Jews and was seen in

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<sup>11</sup> E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim w latach 1939–1945* (Rzeszów, 2014), p. 259.

<sup>12</sup> S. Lehrer, L. Strassman, *The Vanished City*, pp. 258–259.

<sup>13</sup> See B. Engelking, “Życie codzienne Żydów w miasteczkach dystryktu warszawskiego,” in *Prowinia noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Leociak, D. Libionka (Warsaw, 2007), p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> For more, see M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, “Relacje polsko-żydowskie w okresie II wojny światowej. Kontekst i uwarunkowania,” in *Represje za pomoc Żydom na okupowanych ziemiach polskich w czasie II wojny światowej*, vol. 1, ed. M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło (Warsaw, 2019), pp. 12–23.

<sup>15</sup> “Wrzesień 1939 roku i kilka dalszych wspomnień Władysława Wajdy,” ed. I. Zacięwska, *Almanach Sądecki* 1/2 (66/67) (18) (2009), p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> To use the phrase used by a survivor from Łowicz, D. Fligelman, it could be said that its members constituted the “aristocracy of war” (cited after: B. Engelking, “Życie codzienne Żydów,” p. 163).

a positive light. However, in the following months, it was taken over by individuals who were clearly viewed negatively.<sup>18</sup> The change in the perception of the Judenrat may have been linked to the establishment of the ghetto and the new duties that were imposed on the Jews.

## Establishment of the Ghetto

The Germans organised the first ghetto in the occupied Polish lands as early as in October 1939 and it was in Piotrków. In April 1940, a large ghetto was established in Łódź, located in the Polish territories incorporated directly into the Third Reich. In the same year, ghettos were established in the Distrikt Warschau (Warsaw Province) (Góra Kalwaria, Parysów, Łowicz).<sup>19</sup> In the Distrikt Krakau (Cracow Province), most of the ca. 70 “Jewish residential quarters” were set up between 1941 and 1942.<sup>20</sup>

According to these data, it can be concluded that the ghetto in Nowy Sącz was established relatively early, as it was created on 12 August 1940.<sup>21</sup> According to German regulations, “Christians” living in the residential district designated as the Jewish quarter had to leave their flats and find new accommodation. As a result, there were frequent exchanges of accommodation with Jewish families who were compelled to move into the ghetto.<sup>22</sup> The order establishing the Jewish quarter stipulated that the dwellings must not only be vacated, but also emptied of possessions. In addition, the owners of houses in the ghetto were placed under an immediate obligation to make repairs, including repairing damage caused by warfare. The Jewish Council was burdened with the leasing of flats and the maintenance of order. Any change of accommodation within the Jewish quarter had to be reported to the town hall and to the power plant.<sup>23</sup> It’s worth noting that most of the elegant and modern Jewish houses outside the ghetto, similar to those in Cracow

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<sup>18</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> B. Engelking, “Życie codzienne Żydów,” p. 168.

<sup>20</sup> R. Hilberg, *Zagłada Żydów europejskich*, vol. 1, trans. J. Giebułtowski (Warsaw, 2014), p. 248.

<sup>21</sup> National Archives in Cracow, Branch in Nowy Sącz, files of the town of Nowy Sącz (hereinafter ANKrNS), 31/15/316, order of the town commissioner and the Town Directorate in Nowy Sącz, p. 49. Residents of Nowy Sącz were able to get acquainted with the city plan with the demarcated boundaries of the new district for a fee of one zloty.

<sup>22</sup> Archives of Sądecki Sztetl (hereinafter ASS), Testimony of Tadeusz Rychlak, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> ANKrNS, 31/15/316, order of the town commissioner and the Town Directorate in Nowy Sącz, p. 97.

and many other cities, were taken over by the Germans.<sup>24</sup> The process of resettling the Jews in Nowy Sącz to a designated quarter probably ended in August 1941.<sup>25</sup>

From the beginning, the ghetto was divided into two parts: for the working and the non-working. Nowy Sącz was not an exception. The Germans applied a similar solution also in other towns of the Distrikt Krakau (Cracow Province) such as Sanok.<sup>26</sup> An “inferior ghetto,” as it was called, was located in the centre of Nowy Sącz, because those who were unable to work were placed there, including mainly the elderly, children, the sick and unskilled individuals. Initially, this ghetto was open. Most probably at the end of June or the beginning of July 1941, construction work was started to separate it from the so-called “Aryan side.”<sup>27</sup> In the following months, it was largely surrounded by a wall and in some parts by barbed wire.<sup>28</sup> According to Jakub Müller’s testimony, the construction of the wall caused a kind of panic. Some people attempted to escape, feeling they were locked in a death trap.<sup>29</sup>

Eventually, this part of the ghetto overlapped with the pre-war Jewish quarter: it was enclosed to the north by the castle, to the south by the northern frontage of the Market Square, to the east by Piotra Skargi Street, which was, however, excluded from the ghetto. Therefore, from the eastern side, the Jewish quarter was separated from the “Aryan city” by the wall enclosing Franciszkańska Street, Trzeciego Maja Square, and the entrance to Kazimierza Wielkiego Street. The quarter had two entrances. At the corner of Bóżnicza and Piotra Skargi Streets was the main gate of the ghetto (right next to the station of the Jewish Order Service, or the *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*, popularly known as the Jewish Police). The other, unofficial one,<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A. Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie* (Cracow, 1985), p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> A. Wiśniewski, “Losy ludności żydowskiej na terenie Sądeckich w okresie okupacji niemieckiej,” in *Okupacja w Sądeckim* (Warsaw, 1979), p. 171; A. Franczak, M. Grądzka-Rejak, “Tylko mur nas dzieli, tylko kilkadziesiąt kroków, a tu życie, tam śmierć. Mury wokół gett w Warszawie, Krakowie i Nowym Sączu,” in *Ciemności kryją ziemię. Wybrane aspekty badań i nauczania o Holokauście*, ed. M. Grądzka-Rejak, P. Trojański (Cracow – Nowy Sącz, 2019), p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> In the autumn of 1942 the ghettos in Bochnia, Przemyśl, Rzeszów and Tarnów were reduced in size and divided into two parts. In Cracow, it was not until the end of 1942 that the ghetto was split into parts for working and non-working residents (E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, pp. 112, 115; A. Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, p. 80).

<sup>27</sup> A. Franczak, M. Grądzka-Rejak, “Tylko mur nas dzieli,” p. 123.

<sup>28</sup> It is likely that the wall was built between July and September or October 1941 (*ibid.*, p. 124).

<sup>29</sup> ASS, testimony of Jakub Müller, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> It was through this gate that the Germans led the ghetto residents to the headquarters of the German border guard, popularly known in Nowy Sącz as the Gestapo.

was opposite the Lutheran church at the Pijarska Street. Pijarska Street up to the Lutheran church did not belong to the ghetto, because the Germans who considered themselves Lutherans went to the church here. At the western borders of the ghetto, there were no walls, but barbed wire fences.<sup>31</sup> Because of the fence, escape from this part of the ghetto was difficult, but it did happen.<sup>32</sup> Trade between the Polish and Jewish populations and any aid provided by Poles was also very limited.

The second part of the ghetto was established in an area of the city called Piekło<sup>33</sup> and was intended for the working residents. Jews could only move between one ghetto and the other (for the working and the non-working) via Pijarska, Szwedzka and Wałowa Streets and the bridge over the Kamienica River. The boundaries of the ghetto for the working residents were: the Kamienica River to the south and west, Paderewskiego Street to the east, and Zdrojowa and Głowackiego Streets to the north. As there were a lot of orchards and farmland here, it was called the “rural ghetto.” Living conditions were better than in the city centre. Residents could grow vegetables and fruit. In addition, there were no walls, only formal boundaries. Contact with the Polish population was therefore more frequent, and there were greater opportunities for escape than in the ghetto for the non-working.

## Resettlements

The majority of the pre-war eleven thousand strong community of Nowy Sącz Jews ended up in the ghetto in the very first year of its existence. In addition, there were refugees from Germany and Austria who had made it to Nowy Sącz before the outbreak of war. On 23 August 1942, when the ghetto was liquidated, there were approximately seventeen thousand people in it. This was the result of the resettlements and migration of the Jewish population carried out on the initiative of the German authorities. As early as in 1940, the German authorities resettled Jews from Cracow, Lwów, Łódź and even the German Reich to Nowy Sącz. Poles

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<sup>31</sup> ASS, Records provided by Władysław Żaroffe.

<sup>32</sup> Among others, Jakub Müller escaped from the ghetto. He crossed the boundary of the sealed quarter near the Evangelical church (ASS, Testimony of Jakub Müller, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> The etymology of the quarter's name (“Piekło,” i.e. Inferno, Hell) is not entirely clear. One of the versions suggests that the name is linked to the fact that non-Catholics (Arians, i.e. Unitarians, and later Jews) lived there, the first brothels were established there, and it was the scene of many crimes. Another tradition refers to the “Piekło” inn, which was located on the main street in this part of Nowy Sącz.

watched the arriving railway wagons full of people. They were particularly struck by the state of Jews brought from Łódź, who were sent to the barracks in Nowy Sącz: “Their fate was sad,” noted Maria Zielińska, who came from an intelligentsia family. “The transports travelled slowly because of the frost and snow (early March 1940) [...] Jews in a terribly deplorable condition. Their wounds were dressed until dark.”<sup>34</sup> Almost every month, the Judenrat turned to organisations such as Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, JDC) in Cracow for help. A letter sent in mid-1940 stated that the situation “is deplorable.”<sup>35</sup>

In 1940, the Germans also started the operation of resettlement of Jews from the surrounding villages. This resulted in the deterioration of living conditions in the Nowy Sącz ghetto. The resettled and refugees, however, were in a particularly bad situation. There was no housing for them, so they were housed in synagogues, smaller Jewish houses of prayer called *bóznica*<sup>36</sup> and schools. Some came to Nowy Sącz voluntarily, but their number is difficult to estimate.

“The quarters inhabited by Jews are shrinking steadily,”<sup>37</sup> wrote Samuel Kaufer, one of the Holocaust survivors who gave an extensive post-war testimony of his experiences. Jews residing in Nowy Sącz before the war thought that there were actually a lot of newcomers.<sup>38</sup> The Judenrat stated in its reports to the JDC in Cracow that 75 per cent of the displaced were people deprived of their livelihoods.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, and it is worth emphasising, in the testimonies none of the survivors formed complaints or accusations against the newcomers claiming e.g. that they deprived them of space or food. Arguably, the Jews who had resided in Nowy Sącz for generations saw the newcomers as people who suffered as much as they did themselves.

Initially, when the first transports arrived in the town, the local Jews tried to take care of those arriving. They were allocated flats with furnishings, bedding

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<sup>34</sup> *Z pamiętników Marii Matyldy Zielińskiej*, ed. B. Celewicz (Nowy Sącz, 2021), p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> American Joint Distribution Committee Archives (hereinafter JDC), Letter of the Judenrat to the JDC in Cracow, 6 June 1940, [http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W\\_3941/W\\_3941\\_017/W\\_3941\\_017\\_0872.pdf#search=](http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W_3941/W_3941_017/W_3941_017_0872.pdf#search=), accessed 16 April 2021.

<sup>36</sup> There were two major synagogues in Nowy Sącz before the war and ca. 20 smaller Jewish houses of prayer called *bóznica*.

<sup>37</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> AŻIH, 301/4694, testimony of Kiplowa, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> JDC, letter of the Judenrat in Nowy Sącz to the JDC in Cracow, 21 November 1940, [http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W\\_3941/W\\_3941\\_017/W\\_3941\\_017\\_0925.pdf](http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W_3941/W_3941_017/W_3941_017_0925.pdf), accessed 16 April 2021.



and necessary items. If someone lacked clothing, they could count on the others' kindness. The public kitchens served food, often even two-course dinners.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, as time passed, the ghetto became poorer and the Judenrat could not afford to run the kitchen. Funds for food were dwindling. According to witness testimonies, the ghetto residents looked at those arriving and wondered how many more people could be accommodated in Nowy Sącz.

On 12 November 1941, the town commissioner Friedrich Schmidt introduced an order on the duties of the ghetto residents. It concerned, among other things, the routes by which Jews could move between the two parts of the "Jewish residential quarter." Under the Third GG Residence Restriction Regulation of 15 October 1941, the death penalty was introduced for leaving the area designated for Jews without permission.

### Terror in the Ghetto

Anxiety and fear of German repressive actions had a huge impact on the living conditions of the Jews of Nowy Sącz. The participant and inspirer of many anti-Jewish actions was Heinrich Hamann,<sup>41</sup> the commander of the town's German Border Police (Grenzpolizeikommissariat Neu Sandez).

In his testimony, Samuel Kaufer distinguishes between two types of German operations in the ghetto. The first type were "wild" operations, when literally anyone who stood in the way of the Germans could be killed – for example, when Hamann at the ghetto gate shot at Jews passing by it.<sup>42</sup> The second type are "or-

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<sup>40</sup> "Pamiętnik Poli Mordkiewicz (Mordkiewicz), 1940 r.," in *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, vol. 24: *Obozy pracy przymusowej*, ed. M. Janczewska (Warsaw, 2015), p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> Heinrich Hamann (1908–1993) was a native of Brodesholm (Schleswig-Holstein). He attended a primary school in Neumünster, then a secondary schools in Lütjenburg, Petersdorf, and Kiel. He became a tradesman and ran a shop owned by his mother. In 1931, he enrolled in the NSDAP, then in the SS. He worked in Munich, serving as adjutant in Reinhard Heydrich's office from 1936. Subsequently, he was the commander of the Regina Hotel in Vienna, which was the headquarters of SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler. Between 1939 and 1943, he was the commander of the Border Police in Nowy Sącz, later working in Jasło and Cracow. In 1945, he fled to Germany, where he was captured only in 1960. In 1966, he was sentenced to life imprisonment (D. Golik, "Struktury niemieckiej policji bezpieczeństwa i służby bezpieczeństwa w Nowym Sączu," [www.wojennysacz.pl/struktury-niemieckiej-policji-bezpieczenstwa-i-sluzby-bezpieczenstwa/](http://www.wojennysacz.pl/struktury-niemieckiej-policji-bezpieczenstwa-i-sluzby-bezpieczenstwa/), accessed 16 April 2021; K.-M. Mallman, "Heinrich Hamann, Leiter des Granzpolizeikommissariats Neu-Sandez," in *Karrieren der Gewalt. Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien*, ed. G. Paul, K.-M. Mallman (Darmstadt, 2011), pp. 104–112).

<sup>42</sup> A. Franczak, M. Grądzka-Rejak, "Tylko mur nas dzieli," p. 128.

ganised” operations, usually carried out on the basis of lists, very often with the zealous participation of the Jewish Order Service officers.<sup>43</sup> In the first case, the operation resulted in death on the spot; in the second, it also resulted in being sent to a concentration camp, usually KL Auschwitz, or to labour camps in Pustków or the Police School in Rabka.<sup>44</sup>

The pattern of most organised operations was similar: Commander Hamann’s decision, then the victims were brought by the Jewish police and sent to a German camp or executed in the local cemetery.<sup>45</sup> This was the course of the bloodiest April operation that took place in 1942,<sup>46</sup> when four hundred people were killed in one day. An extension of this was the May operation.<sup>47</sup> A year earlier, on Hamann’s orders, forty Jews from Russia were shot.<sup>48</sup> It should be mentioned that the Jewish police were also the cause of terror of the Nowy Sącz ghetto residents. This was not an isolated case, the situation was similar also in other ghettos.<sup>49</sup>

Crimes also occurred on a daily basis. Mojżesz Bergman – a Nowy Sącz resident and a Holocaust witness – described how, before his very eyes, around thirty young Jews were thrown out of the trucks in front of Ameisen’s house (located at 30 Jagiellońska Street) in 1940. Several of them, perhaps five, were dead: “They looked horrible. It is simply difficult to describe it. Faces massacred, clothes in shreds or [people] dressed only in trousers and without shoes.”<sup>50</sup>

The spreading news of the crimes instilled horror and raised the atmosphere of terror in the ghetto. It seems that at first those crimes shocked, but over time

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<sup>43</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, Testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> The School of Commanders of the Security Police and Security Service, located in Rabka, was a place of execution for many Jews – officers were shown here how to act towards the “subhumans.” More in G. Moskal, M. Rapta, W. Tupta, *Mroczne sekrety willi „Tereska”* (Rabka-Zdrój, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> The April action began on 28 April 1942. It was targeted at ghetto residents belonging to Zionist and left-wing organisations. Heinrich Hamann compiled a list of victims on the basis of lists of members of the M. Rosenfeld Library. Those arrested were often random people and not connected with the library, but the number of detainees added up. They were all shot in the Jewish cemetery, then Hamann and the Germans entered the ghetto and killed about a hundred people in a street shooting.

<sup>47</sup> Throughout May 1942, people were also murdered under the pretext of belonging to left-wing organisations (ASS, Copy of the minutes of the testimony of Kalman Holzer, p. 42).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> J.A. Młynarczyk, *W cieniu Zagłady. Losy kieleckich Żydów w czasie drugiej wojny światowej* (Toruń, 2020), pp. 131–137; A. Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, p. 165.

<sup>50</sup> Yad Vashem Archives (hereinafter AYV), 88-0192F, Michał Bergman-Winter, *Memorandum. Nowy Sącz – Sambor 1939–1945*, manuscript, n.d., n.p., p. 18.

became commonplace. Jews in Nowy Sącz talked about who and where the Germans had killed, how many people had been taken away to camps. “Gestapo men – as various representatives of the German occupation authorities were commonly referred to – would walk the streets, shoot, drag people out of their homes and shoot them,” testified Steinlauf.<sup>51</sup> Historian Tadeusz Duda wrote that death could befall Jews for virtually anything that the Germans interpreted as transgressing the law.<sup>52</sup>

### Housing and Sanitary Conditions

The Jewish quarter in Nowy Sącz was unimaginably overcrowded due to the constant influx of deported persons.<sup>53</sup> Some of the houses were poorly maintained: they lacked floors, were old and wooden, and ridden with mould, which enhanced the spread of many diseases.<sup>54</sup> Similar conditions existed also in other ghettos. The inhabitants were economic with furnishings, and some furniture was sold to obtain money for essential needs. The lack of running water and sanitary facilities worsened the already disastrous hygienic conditions.<sup>55</sup>

The richer and relatively privileged Jews were better off than the majority of the ghetto’s residents. This is shown by the case of Esther Elenberg, who came to Nowy Sącz from Cracow in 1941, and was able to rent a flat. She was a fairly wealthy person, coming from a merchant family with a high financial status:

“We lived at my sister’s for a short time, then we rented a flat [...]” – she recalled. – “I was engaged at the time, my fiancé lived in Warsaw. His name was Roshar. Then the ghetto thing started in Warsaw, he ran away and came to us in Nowy Sącz. Since my father would not allow us to live in one flat without getting married, we took a silent wedding and rented a room for ourselves.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> AŻIH, 301/1338, Testimony of Emil Steinlauf, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> T. Duda, “Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej,” p. 217.

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that the last groups of Jews arrived in Nowy Sącz in August 1942, a few days before their deportation to the death camp in Bełżec.

<sup>54</sup> T. Duda, “Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej,” p. 215.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. A. Kopciowski, *Zagłada Żydów w Zamościu* (Lublin, 2005), p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> AYV, O.3/2136, testimony of Estera Elenberg, p. 5.

However, as time went by, also their situation deteriorated. In a short time, it became apparent that paying for housing was pointless, because new people were constantly arriving in the ghetto and the Germans were quartering them in the already inhabited flats.<sup>57</sup>

Those with some connections were able to obtain better accommodation. Emil Steinlauf, who moved to the ghetto in accordance with the German orders in 1941, thus relatively late, described how he got a flat for himself: thanks to a relative in the Judenrat, he chose a flat and paid the property owner. As he recalled, he placed “his two daughters there at once, a 16-year-old and a 12-year-old, so that no one would take the flat away from me.”<sup>58</sup>

The situations outlined here concerned a small group of people. As already mentioned, some Jews got in touch with Poles, who had to leave the area of the “Jewish quarter,” about exchanging their dwellings. Samuel Kaufer reported: “More often than not, Jews have to pay fat sums of money in order to exchange their beautifully furnished flat with an “Aryan” for a stinking cubbyhole, located, however, in a district where we were allowed to continue to vegetate.”<sup>59</sup> The rental of a flat on Kochanowskiego Street was mentioned by Abe Holcer, who moved with his family to Nowy Sącz from the village of Białawoda in 1941.<sup>60</sup>

After each resettlement of the next group of Jews to the ghetto in Nowy Sącz, the situation of its residents worsened. In the testimony of Mrs. Kiplowa (first name unknown) from Nowy Sącz, we read that in 1941 there were on average 4–5 families per room with a kitchen.<sup>61</sup> The total was about twenty people per flat, making the population density similar to that in the Warsaw ghetto. In the “sealed quarter” in Łódź, six to seven people had to share a room. Similarly, in Miechów, it was about five people per room, and in Radom, around five people. In Lwów, a dozen or so people shared one room.<sup>62</sup> In the Cracow ghetto, there were five people per room

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> AŻIH, 301/1338, testimony of Emil Steinlauf, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> AYV, 033c/6433, testimony of Abe Holzer, n.p.

<sup>61</sup> AŻIH, 301/4694, testimony of Kiplowa, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> M. Grądzka-Rejak, “‘Zdobyczyńcze życia.’ Wybrane aspekty codzienności dziewcząt i kobiet żydowskich podczas okupacji niemieckiej,” in *Ciemności kryją ziemię*, pp. 56–57.

and up to even ten per flat.<sup>63</sup> Similar figures for the final period of the operation of the Nowy Sącz ghetto were given by Salomon Lehrer.<sup>64</sup> “People slept in gate passages, on the ground, with bundles that rats and mice would pick at,” Kiplowa recalled.<sup>65</sup> Holcer estimated that in the sealed ghetto, where his parents stayed, between ten and fifteen people could live in a single flat; it should be added that the average dwelling consisted of a kitchen and a room.<sup>66</sup>

The flats of the deceased – sometimes the rooms of people who died in them from the bullets of Germans – were occupied by new tenants. The allocation of the flats was handled by Judenrat officials. Lustig recalled that when their neighbour died, they got her room, broke through a wall and thus enlarged their flat.<sup>67</sup> After Markus Lustig’s family was murdered on 29 April 1942, the Germans quartered a family from Łabowa in his home, whom he did not know at all.<sup>68</sup> The living conditions in the Nowy Sącz ghetto contributed to the breakdown of previous family ties and intimacy. Social roles were also reversed, and it was not uncommon for children to try to provide food for the family or to maintain it.<sup>69</sup>

### Food and Ways of Obtaining Food

The Jewish inhabitants of Nowy Sącz first experienced famine in the winter of late 1939 and early 1940, following the mass arrival of refugees.<sup>70</sup> Hunger soon became an integral part of their daily lives. In the spring of 1940, the weekly food ration per person was seven hundred grams of bread, fifty grams of meat and twenty grams of sugar. In Przemyśl, it was two hundred grams of bread, in Nowy Targ one hundred and sixty grams. One year later, there was five hundred grams per person in Dębica and one hundred grams in the Cracow ghetto. Despite that, as the list shows, in the initial period of the German occupation, the food rations

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<sup>63</sup> E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 142.

<sup>64</sup> S. Lehrer, L. Strassman, *The Vanished City*, p. 286.

<sup>65</sup> AŻIH, 301/4694, testimony of Kiplowa, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> AYD, 033c/6433, testimony of Abe Holcer, n.p.

<sup>67</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 61.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>69</sup> B. Engelking, „Życie codzienne Żydów,” p. 186.

<sup>70</sup> S. Lehrer, L. Strassman, *The Vanished City*, p. 279.

for Jews in Nowy Sącz were higher than in other localities, they still did not meet human needs.<sup>71</sup>

Food shortages led to the development of many diseases. As early as August 1940, the Nowy Sącz Judenrat reported to the JDC: "Their families are formally starving, there is an increasing number of illnesses in Jewish homes."<sup>72</sup> Epidemic typhus was prevalent in Nowy Sącz and in ghettos in other towns.<sup>73</sup> For example, in the "sealed quarter" in Żółkiew, the disease was claiming dozens of lives a day, including young people.<sup>74</sup> In 1940, fearing diseases, the Germans opened a small hospital, consisting of just three rooms, in the Nowy Sącz ghetto. Only three doctors worked there at the time. In the Krakau Distrikt (Cracow Province), hospitals also operated in ghettos in Bochnia, Dębica, Jasło, Rzeszów and Przemyśl. All of them struggled with similar financial and supply problems.<sup>75</sup>

Until the ghetto walls were erected, contacts with the "Aryan side" were easier and there were more opportunities to get food. Among those looking for it outside the ghetto was Markus Lustig, for example, who in 1941, together with his neighbour Reinhold, travelled around the surrounding villages in a horse-drawn cart:

We had a permission from the authorities to collect debts from the peasants for the flour, which had already been bought before the outbreak of war. I agreed. We started the journey on a Sunday, going to the villages of Trzetrzewina, Wysokie and others. Each evening we stayed overnight with a different farmer. The farmers had no money to pay, but they gave us food. For example, we were given flour, grain, potatoes, vegetables and fruit.<sup>76</sup>

Lustig recalled that the expeditions lasted from Sunday to Thursday. Through such journeys they obtained food for their families. If they had more food, they shared it with their neighbours and closest relatives.

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<sup>71</sup> E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 140.

<sup>72</sup> JDC, Letter of the Judenrat in Nowy Sącz to the JDC in Cracow, 13 August 1940, [http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W\\_3941/W\\_3941\\_017/W\\_3941\\_017\\_0891.pdf](http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W_3941/W_3941_017/W_3941_017_0891.pdf), accessed 16 April 2021.

<sup>73</sup> E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 153.

<sup>74</sup> G. Taffet, *Zagłada Żydów żółkiewskich*, ed. N. Aleksy, S. Eckert (Warsaw, 2019), p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 148.

<sup>76</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 61.

Emil Steinlauf, anticipating the deportation from Krasne Potockie, had already arranged for a flat in the “better ghetto” at Piekło in May 1941. He took a cow there, with which he could feed his family: “I stole one cow from my own farm and smuggled it into the ghetto in Nowy Sącz,” he wrote.<sup>77</sup> Raising animals in the ghetto was illegal, and it is most likely that Steinlauf was able to do so because someone close to him belonged to the Judenrat.

According to witness testimonies, hunger was among the dominant experiences in the Nowy Sącz ghetto. As a result of the German economic policy, the value of money was declining and funds were running out over time. Samuel Kaufer recalled how Jews tried to survive the difficult conditions: “Many surrendered their last garment, their last shirt, just to get some potatoes, a loaf of black bread.”<sup>78</sup> Food prices rose rapidly<sup>79</sup> so when money was running out, groceries were bought with valuables or clothes.<sup>80</sup>

In 1942, very low food rations were established in the occupied Polish territories; among other things, meat ration cards were taken away from Jews and extra rations for children and working people were abolished. According to Raul Hilberg, this was part of the preparation for “The Final Solution” (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*).<sup>81</sup> By the end of the operation of the ghetto in Nowy Sącz (1942), food rations were catastrophically small; seven hundred grams of bread, fifty grams of meat, twenty grams of sugar “is a regional weekly ration per person,” Kaufer reported.<sup>82</sup> The result of this policy was deaths due to starvation or “physical exhaustion.” In January 1942, for example, nine such cases were recorded in the ghetto.<sup>83</sup> Whole families and individuals died of famine. In 1941, the Goldfinger family, who lived on Czarna Street, died of starvation, and in 1942, Pessla Dagan from Czysa Street.<sup>84</sup> The young Mina Gotlieb starved to death on Bandurskiego

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<sup>77</sup> AŻIH, 301/1338, testimony of Emil Steinlauf, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* For more, see G. Berendt, “Cena życia – ekonomiczne uwarunkowania egzystencji Żydów po ‘aryjskiej stronie,” *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 4 (2008), pp. 110–143; I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski XIX i XX wieku* (Warsaw, 1984).

<sup>80</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> R. Hilberg, *Zagłada Żydów europejskich*, pp. 172–173.

<sup>82</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, Testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 145.

<sup>84</sup> ASS, A. Kac, *Żydzi – prześladowanie i Zagłada*, manuscript, p. 99.

Street despite family care.<sup>85</sup> The same deaths befell 78-year-old Chaskiel Fisch from Lipie and Golda Goldfinger from Barska Street.<sup>86</sup> They all died in the ghetto at Piekło. It was unfenced, with more green space, but even this did not protect many of the people placed there from starvation.

Probably the number of famine victims in the Nowy Sącz ghetto would have been higher had it not been for Polish-Jewish smuggling.<sup>87</sup> “So smuggling flourishes, practised within the ghetto itself by Jews who are in contact with Poles, lured by the possibility of great profits,” Kaufer recounted.<sup>88</sup> Berta Korennman recalled that inside the ghetto the food trade was practically non-existent. Food only arrived from outside, shopping could be arranged through Poles.<sup>89</sup> According to Izak Goldfinger, food was delivered to the ghetto at Piekło, where his parents lived, by Stanisław Pawlik, his father’s pre-war employee. The Goldfinger family came from the village of Tropie. Help from others, Izak claims, depended on selling what his parents had taken from home.<sup>90</sup>

The commodity that the ghetto offered in barter was saccharine. Janina Maćkowiak, then a school-age girl, recalled that she once bought bread and went with it to the Nowy Sącz ghetto. As soon as she crossed the threshold of a Jewish house, the senior of the family shouted that there was bread. It was a great sensation:

Persons in the room crowded around – three pairs of little dirty hands reached out to me. One pair, probably the largest, started to tinker near the lock of the briefcase, but my mother chased the attackers into a corner with a flutter of a cloth, and asked me to sit on a chair wiped down with a cloth.<sup>91</sup>

After about 15 minutes, the man returned with saccharine and exchanged it for bread. Maćkowiak remembered:

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>87</sup> For more in this matter see B. Musiał, *Kto допоможе Żydowi...* (Poznań, 2019), pp. 35–55.

<sup>88</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> B. Korennman, “Relacja z okresu okupacji,” *Almanach Sądecki* 1/2 (66/67) (18) (2009), p. 148.

<sup>90</sup> A. Gieniec, *Młodość za drutem kolczastym. Dzieje Izaka Goldfingera w czasie II wojny światowej*, M.A. thesis written under the direction of Dr A.K. Link-Lenczewski, Jagiellonian University, Cracow 2003, p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> J. Gołosińska-Maćkowiak, “Najważniejszy dzień życia – Nowy Sącz 1941,” *Almanach Sądecki* 1/2 (86/87) (23) (2014), p. 47.



On my way out, I looked back. Squatting on the floor, three curly-haired children were busily tugging at slices of bread with their teeth. The bread was sprinkled with a little sugar. The smallest one in the cradle also got a piece of crust, which it turned in its toothless mouth.<sup>92</sup>

It is worth noting that in 1940 in Nowy Sącz on the “Aryan side,” a kilogram of the cheapest meat cost four zloty (veal) or ten zloty (pork). The price of pork fat reached as much as twenty zloty, and butter thirty-four zloty per kilogram.<sup>93</sup> In Warsaw at the same time, a kilogram of meat cost thirteen zloty, butter thirty zloty and in 1941 pork fat cost eight zloty.<sup>94</sup> The prices of groceries for the Jews who were concentrated in the Nowy Sącz ghetto were higher than on the “Aryan side” due to the risk borne by the seller.

The lack of food was debilitating people. Due to the lack of vitamins, people grew weaker, shuffling through the streets like shadows or carelessly dressed skeletons. Clothing became a secondary or even a tertiary importance issue, the Jews concentrated only on having in possession the obligatory item, the armband with the Star of David. Clothing was taken from them all the time anyway. A collection of clothes was conducted in December and November 1940, and the negligible number [of clothing items] that was obtained showed the scale of the shortage. In a report to Joint, the Judenrat recorded: “in this regard the situation was desperate.”<sup>95</sup> There was particularly a shortage of shoes, especially children’s shoes. At the beginning of January 1942, the winter campaign was underway, the Germans were taking warm clothes from the Jews, and many people were murdered in the process.<sup>96</sup> The Germans began such requisitions in the General Governorate at the end of 1941 (in Cracow, for example, Jews had to surrender fur coats and ski equipment).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Z pamiętników Marii Matyldy Zielińskiej...*, p. 92. It is worth noting that prices in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941 were even higher. Horsemeat cost 9 zloty per kg, lard nearly 35 zloty, and bread 8 zloty (R. Hilberg, *Zagłada Żydów europejskich*, p. 313).

<sup>94</sup> B. Engelking, J. Leociak, *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście* (Warsaw, 2001), pp. 486–487.

<sup>95</sup> JDC, Letter of the Jewish Social Self-Help in Nowy Sącz to the JDC in Cracow, 12 January 1941, [http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W\\_3941/W\\_3941\\_017/W\\_3941\\_017\\_0966.pdf](http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W_3941/W_3941_017/W_3941_017_0966.pdf), accessed 16 April 2021.

<sup>96</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 62.

<sup>97</sup> A. Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, p. 54.

Due to the famine, some Jews decided to escape from the ghetto. Unfortunately, there is no information how many people attempted this. Neither the fate of most of the escapees is known. For instance, the escape of the Breindl family of three, a father with two daughters, ended tragically. In April 1942, fully determined, they left the ghetto, heading for the countryside. Otherwise, they would have shared the fate of people who died on the street, begging for a slice of bread. The Germans apprehended them in Przetakówka town district<sup>98</sup> with six other Jews. The Breindls were killed in the street, while the others were murdered in houses nearby, after which their bodies were thrown onto the roadway.<sup>99</sup>

## Forced Labour

On 26 October 1939, Governor-General Hans Frank issued a regulation introducing forced labour for the Jews residing in the General Governorate. Soon, subsequent occupation legislation was issued normalising other questions and imposing new obligations. Jews were forced to work beyond their strength, for unimaginably low wages or completely for free.<sup>100</sup> This applied throughout the German-occupied area, and the German Labour Office (Arbeitsamt) played an infamous role in many towns in compiling lists of forced labourers and registering the population. Everyone, including their occupations and professions, was meticulously recorded. This applied also to minors, because forced labour was to be provided from the age of fourteen onwards.<sup>101</sup>

The Judenrat handled the organisation of Jewish labour. Many Jews were anxious to get into the part of the ghetto designated for the working people, its residents performing various work for the Germans. Getting a suitable job, however, was not easy; it required contacts or bribes. In Nowy Sącz, as in Zamość, for example, the wealthier ghetto inhabitants bought their way out of hard work, while others hoped for a better assignment.<sup>102</sup> Some gained a new social position through

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<sup>98</sup> Przetakówka – the name of a part of Nowy Sącz which is located between the Kamienica and Lubinka rivers, in the area of the Jewish cemetery at Rybacka Street.

<sup>99</sup> ASS, A. Kac, *Żydzi – prześladowanie i Zagłada*, manuscript, p. 99.

<sup>100</sup> The German Ministry of Labour issued the applicable documents on 31 October 1941 (R. Hilberg, *Zagłada Żydów europejskich*, p. 166).

<sup>101</sup> E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 161.

<sup>102</sup> A. Kopciowski, *Zagłada Żydów w Zamościu*, p. 257.

employment. Mosze Kanengeiser was a “handyman” (he took on the tasks of a mechanic, plumber, locksmith, carpenter, etc.). The Jews, the Germans and the Judenrat needed him. Lustig recalled that Kanengeiser did not complain about a shortage of work and always brought something home – sometimes food, sometimes a little money.<sup>103</sup>

A considerable problem for the Judenrat was the organisation of groups sent to do physical labour.<sup>104</sup> Already in the first months of the Nowy Sącz ghetto’s operation, Jews were used for labour in nearby quarries (Kłęzany, Dąbrowa, Kamionka), river regulation in Marcinkowice and Chełmiec, and road construction.<sup>105</sup> Such workers had more contact with the “Aryan side.”

In 1941, the district *Polski Komitet Opiekuńczy* (Polish Welfare Committee) in Nowy Sącz calculated that, working for ten hours a day, fifteen-year-old Jews should earn 26 grosz per hour, and the wages of Jews who were older should increase by 5 grosz for each year of age. A 40-year-old worker would therefore earn more than 1.20 zloty per hour, and about 256 zloty per month (on average). The actual situation, however, was different. Workers at the labour camp in Lipie were paid around 88 zloty per month, and 24 zloty net after various fees had been deducted. In other towns, the rates were similar: in Miechów 1.76 zloty for ten hours of work, in Tarnów even 5 zloty, in Pychowice 2 zloty.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned places, the Jews of the Nowy Sącz ghetto also worked in factories and workshops and in cleaning. The Association of Jewish Craftsmen (*Verband der Judischen Handwerken Neu Sandez*) was established at 25 Poprzeczna Street. In 1942, it had eight hundred members. Just as before the war, the craftsmen found employment in a wide range of businesses from carpentry to textiles.<sup>107</sup>

In some testimonies, we find descriptions of the conditions under which Jews worked:

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<sup>103</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 60.

<sup>104</sup> See B. Engelking, “Życie codzienne Żydów,” p. 138.

<sup>105</sup> JDC, letter of the Judenrat in Nowy Sącz to the JDC in Cracow, 13 August 1940, [http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W\\_3941/W\\_3941\\_017/W\\_3941\\_017\\_0891.pdf](http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W_3941/W_3941_017/W_3941_017_0891.pdf), accessed 16 April 2021.

<sup>106</sup> E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 165.

<sup>107</sup> T. Duda, “Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej,” p. 219.

The winter of 1940 was harsh and snowy at our place. As usual, we were rushed to work on the railway in very modest, torn summer clothes, without any underwear. We felt the merciless cold and were emaciated from the excess of hard work and malnutrition. All of this made us unfit for work, Bergman wrote.<sup>108</sup>

The temperature sank to as low as minus thirty degrees. Bergman worked on the railway together with Poles who helped the Jews – they gave them warmer underwear and clothes. In Bergman's opinion, without these things the Jews would have frozen to death.

In addition, the work was an opportunity for persecution by the Germans. Bergman recalled that starting in 1941, he, along with two hundred other Jews, had to tear up the asphalt on Pierackiego Street (now known as Grodzka Street). They did this at night so that, as the Germans claimed, the traffic would not be obstructed. They worked hard even until three o'clock in the morning. Bergman described how people were intimidated: "they would sift us like through a sieve and every tenth of us would be sent to the "himmelkomando"<sup>109</sup> [...] six Jews were bumped off, many were injured."<sup>110</sup> The people who worked, even in the camps in Rożnów or Lipie, even though they were exposed to harassment and persecution, nevertheless felt that they were valuable because they had a job.<sup>111</sup>

Philip Friedman indicated the social revolution that took place in the ghettos. The hierarchy of the pre-war world was shattered. Work was an important part of this transformation, as it offered a chance for survival. Friedman wrote metaphorically: "in the jungle, money and education don't mean much – only strong teeth and claws."<sup>112</sup> There was a kind of a transformation in the perception of forced labour by the inhabitants of the Nowy Sącz ghetto. At first, people did not want it; they rejected the jobs, seeing them as an instrument of terror and escaping the dire conditions. Then they asked for it themselves; they reported to the Arbeitsamt,

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<sup>108</sup> AYV, 88-0192F, M. Bergman-Winter, *Memorandum. Nowy Sącz – Sambor 1939–1945*, manuscript, n.d., n.p., p. 17.

<sup>109</sup> "The heavenly commando," i.e. deployment ending in death.

<sup>110</sup> AYV, 88-0192F, M. Bergman-Winter, *Memorandum. Nowy Sącz – Sambor 1939–1945*, manuscript, n.d., n.p., p. 37.

<sup>111</sup> T. Duda, "Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej," p. 214.

<sup>112</sup> Cited after B. Engelking, "Życie codzienne Żydów," p. 175.

where everything was decided by corrupt Jewish officials – Mozes Grun and Izak Ropper.<sup>113</sup> Kaufer testified that the closer 1942 was, “there was no payment for the work, on the contrary, one often had to chip in towards the work.”<sup>114</sup> There was a belief that productive people would be needed by the Germans. After the war, Samuel Kaufer testified that the Germans at first murdered those Jews who were not useful: “as a rule, the first to go to the front line are those who are unable to show a “Zuweisung,” i.e. a card stating that the individual works under an employment contract.”<sup>115</sup>

In order to “legally” work outside the ghetto area, one had to have a pass:

I could only go to work with a pass, Emil Steinlauf recalled, but the Germans didn't want to issue passes, so I went every day in secret, every day I risked my life. However, we had to live on something, because there were a lot of us [...] This is how I sneaked off to work for six months, until in February 1942 I finally got a pass for six months.<sup>116</sup>

## Religious Life under the Occupation

The first acts of repression against the Jews concerned their religion. The persecution began during the autumn holidays of 1939 (New Year, Sukkot and Yom Kippur). At that time, the devastation of synagogues and persecution spread to many towns in occupied Poland.<sup>117</sup> Orthodox Jews were harassed in the streets: “The Germans were setting fire to their beards and sidelocks for fun, terrible things were happening.”<sup>118</sup>

The publication *The Vanished City of Tszanz* contains the testimonies of Jews in Nowy Sącz regarding Purim celebrations in 1940. It was difficult under occupation conditions to celebrate this most joyous festival, known as the “Jewish

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<sup>113</sup> The fate of these officials remains unknown.

<sup>114</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 7.

<sup>115</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> AŻIH, 301/1338, testimony of Emil Steinlauf, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> D. Silberklang, *Bramy łez. Zagłada w dystryktie lubelskim*, trans. M. Metlerska-Colerick (Lublin, 2022), p. 249.

<sup>118</sup> AYV, 88-0192F, M. Bergman-Winter, *Memorandum. Nowy Sącz – Sambor 1939–1945*, manuscript, n.d., n.p., p. 10.

carnival.” Instead of dressing up in colourful costumes, the Jews started to ridicule the Germans in the ghetto, and for a few hours they forgot about the problems of everyday life and all the evil that was happening behind the walls of their houses.<sup>119</sup> The only element of Jewish tradition that the Germans allowed to be cultivated in the ghettos of occupied Poland was the baking of matzah for Passover and its distribution to the needy.<sup>120</sup> The Judenrat in Nowy Sącz always tried to provide the right amount of it.<sup>121</sup>

Kaufer noted the changes in the religious life of the Jews living in the Nowy Sącz ghetto: “The houses of prayer stand empty, it is forbidden to gather for communal prayers.”<sup>122</sup> Due to the prohibitions imposed, religious rites began to be practiced in secret.<sup>123</sup> Lustig noted: “The Minyan<sup>124</sup> for a prayer at Rabbi Shmuel Prawer’s son’s attic was convened easily from among the residents who lived in the same building.”<sup>125</sup> Gatherings took place, therefore, mostly in private homes, as in other ghettos.<sup>126</sup>

According to Samuel Lehrer, religious Jews observed their religious duties, including the readiness to help others, despite difficult conditions, poverty and pauperisation. In 1940, the Bochner family of ten was resettled to Nowy Sącz from Krynica.<sup>127</sup> They had nothing to eat, so the Hasidim decided to collect bread for them in the ghetto on the Thursday before Shabbat. This was not easy given the prevailing famine. Thanks to the generosity of society, they managed to collect a basket of bread. “When we entered the ruined room, we were greeted by shouts of joy from the hungry children, their faces pale and fastened with hunger,” Lehrer recalled.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> S. Lehrer, L. Strassman, *The Vanished City*, p. 261.

<sup>120</sup> D. Silberklang, *Bramy łez*, p. 250.

<sup>121</sup> JDC, letter of Ing. Reinberg to the Judenrat in Nowy Sącz, 17 April 1940, [http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W\\_3941/W\\_3941\\_017/W\\_3941\\_017\\_0859.pdf](http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/W_3941/W_3941_017/W_3941_017_0859.pdf), accessed 16 April 2021.

<sup>122</sup> AŻIH, 301/1703, testimony of Samuel Kaufer, p. 10.

<sup>123</sup> D. Silberklang, *Bramy łez*, p. 250; A. Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, p. 224.

<sup>124</sup> A Minyan is a quorum of ten Jews over thirteen years old, required for a common religious service.

<sup>125</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 58.

<sup>126</sup> G. Taffet, *Zagłada Żydów żółkiewskich*, p. 49.

<sup>127</sup> The Bochners arrived in the Nowy Sącz ghetto like many other residents of this resort town, as the Germans had no plans to create a sealed Jewish quarter there.

<sup>128</sup> S. Lehrer, L. Strassman, *The Vanished City*, p. 266. The bread was meant for the Sabbath, but the children ate a piece each when they saw the gifts. The rest was set aside for the feast day. Bochner thanked the donors with tears in his eyes.

Due to anti-Jewish orders issued by the German occupation authorities, the observation of religious commandments was made very difficult.<sup>129</sup> A Mohel worked illegally,<sup>130</sup> Religious Jews cared about keeping kosher.<sup>131</sup> The function of the unofficial head of the Hasidim was performed by the previous rabbi of Stary Sącz, Awigdor Halberstam. It was he who circumcised the last child before the ghetto was liquidated. When he was on his way to attend the rite, he was caught by the Germans, who cut off his beard and moustache.<sup>132</sup>

For the Hasidim, it was a tragedy to give up their traditional vestments and to cut off their sidelocks. This happened, among other things, when they were taken to work. Lehrer, who was humiliated by the Germans in this way, was deeply affected by this. When he returned home, he was told by his pious father that now he had to survive the war, the hair would grow back by itself later.<sup>133</sup> Despite all the persecution, ghetto residents needed faith. Some persevered in it till the end, even in the face of death. Estera Elenberg reported that Klein, sitting in confinement after the liquidation of the ghetto at Piekło, asked his daughter to deliver him a tallit.<sup>134</sup> He knew that staying in the sealed ghetto augured the worst for his future. All that was left for him to do was to have faith in God and resign himself to his fate.<sup>135</sup>

## Social Life

In the available testimonies we do not find much information about the cultural life or the use of leisure time by the residents of the Nowy Sącz ghetto. At the beginning of the German occupation, even after the regulation on wearing an armband with a Star of David was issued, Jews spent time at the beach on the Dunajec River and tried to entertain like in the pre-war period. It seems that despite the atrocities that occurred in the subsequent years, they tried to adapt to the new situation. Meetings with other people, music, games, pleasures could distract

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<sup>129</sup> For more on anti-Jewish regulations, see E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, pp. 118–136.

<sup>130</sup> S. Lehrer, L. Strassman, *The Vanished City*, p. 279. A mohel is a person who is trained to perform the Jewish circumcision rite.

<sup>131</sup> ASS, A. Kac, *Żydzi – prześladowanie i Zagłada*, manuscript, p. 99.

<sup>132</sup> S. Lehrer, L. Strassman, *The Vanished City*, p. 117.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>134</sup> A tallit is a shawl worn during Jewish prayers and religious ceremonies.

<sup>135</sup> AYW, O.3/2136, testimony of Estera Elenberg, p. 14.

them for a while from the thoughts about their tragic situation. We know that there were restaurants in the ghetto (which was not uncommon),<sup>136</sup> traditional weddings took place (albeit in secret), people loved each other, entered into relationships of all kinds. In Lustig's house a certain Dorenter married Beck's daughter, and they had a child.<sup>137</sup>

Fragmentary information about the social life of Jewish youth in the ghetto is provided by a small number of witness testimonies:

On one opportunity we plunged into activities that occupied us beyond curfew and we couldn't go home, Markus Lustig recalled. We stayed up all night at one of the friends' house until the morning. At home they didn't know what had happened to me because there was no phone. In the morning, when I came home, I got a due telling-off from my parents.<sup>138</sup>

The same Holocaust survivor recalled the interest of some ghetto residents in spiritualism:

In one of the rooms in the building, we used to meet in the evenings, whether to pray or to talk about the current situation. In this room, there was a wooden table that was made without nails. A couple of religious Hasidim knew something about spiritualism and arranged a séance using this table. Once or twice I participated in this ceremony. We sat around the table with both hands on the table and asked the table questions. Somehow the table would rise and fall to one side according to the questions.<sup>139</sup>

People made new friends in the ghetto, started intimate relationships and had a sex life. Szalom Weinberger recalled that a young, "physically developed" girl worked in a shop in the ghetto at Piekło. He himself was 16–17 years old at the time. Once, after shopping, the girl dragged him to the back room, where

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<sup>136</sup> D. Silberklang, *Bramy łez*, p. 249.

<sup>137</sup> ASS, testimony of Markus Lustig, 2012 (marked with an F).

<sup>138</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 58.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.



they had sexual intercourse. He did not resist, even though he was afraid of the consequences, for the girl's uncle was an officer of the Jewish Police in Mielec or Rzeszów.<sup>140</sup> Another survivor, Markus Lustig, recalled an acquaintance with Ela Szejnfeld, who was his neighbour (she lived with his mother and brother Bole): "we used to sit with [...] Ela by the tiled oven, we kissed and hugged, it was lovely."<sup>141</sup> Also prostitutes worked in the ghetto. Thanks to their services, they acquired food and expected protection.<sup>142</sup>

There were changes in customs in the Jewish quarter. After the April German action, due to the large number of the dead, traditional mourning (shiva) continued in many Jewish families. The survivor testimonies show that it was not, however, practised by everyone:

The situation in the ghetto was a bit strange. The youth lived with the feeling that they were heading towards perdition. Anyone who had even a little money was partying day and night. Imagine that after the great massacre, members of the Wint family opened the Holland family hall and converted it into a hall for dancing, drinking and partying. Young people did not think about the future,

– noted Lustig, who took part in the parties himself, even though he had lost his parents and all his siblings in the aforementioned action;<sup>143</sup> "People wanted to dance, they knew that tomorrow could be the end,"<sup>144</sup> he noted years later, when he was already able to see not only the tragedy of his family, but also the attempt to live a normal life and to de-escalate war situations.

### Closing Remarks

The so-called Jewish residential quarter in Nowy Sącz was not very different from the other ghettos of the Distrikt Krakau (Cracow Province). The available testimonies confirm that this ghetto was affected by similar processes that led to

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<sup>140</sup> ASS, testimony of Jacek Weinberger, 2016.

<sup>141</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 61.

<sup>142</sup> ASS, testimony of Jacek Weinberger, 2016.

<sup>143</sup> M. Lustig, *Skrwawiony puch*, p. 69.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

impoverishment and the slow extermination of its inhabitants. Jews were abused by the Germans with various orders and acts of terror. The Nowy Sącz ghetto, however, had its own peculiarities that made it somewhat different from the other ghettos in the area. It had already been established in the summer of 1940, so it was one of the first ghettos created in the Distrikt Krakau (Cracow Province). It was divided into two parts: for the working and the non-working residents. Although it was not completely unique among the ghettos in German-occupied Poland, it was a rare type of a ghetto in this Distrikt, especially in the first stage of the setting up of the ghetto. The Nowy Sącz ghetto differed from others of a similar size the most in that it was enclosed by a wall. In the south of German-occupied Poland such ghettos did exist (Cracow), but on the scale of the occupied country, they were not common. Most of the ghettos in the Distrikt Krakau were enclosed by a wooden fence, barbed wire fences or had only marked boundaries. The wall surrounding a part of the ghetto in Nowy Sącz must have had an effect on the mental state of those imprisoned. However, due to the lack of sources, we are not able to fully outline this issue.

Heinrich Hamann had a significant impact on the daily lives of the Jews in Nowy Sącz during the war. As a zealous Nazi, he followed his superiors' orders without hesitation, particularly those targeting Jews. While every town under occupation had its executioner, Hamann stood out for his ruthlessness. He committed murders himself, executed orders, and even issued his own on his own initiative. He was one of the most sinister figures of World War II and the Holocaust in the Sącz region.

Those imprisoned in the "Jewish quarter" faced many hardships on a daily basis. There was terror, hunger and discrimination. Historical knowledge on the subject has so far mainly focused on the sanitary conditions, especially the activity of the Jewish hospital. Researchers have also mentioned forced labour and actions conducted by the Germans against the ghetto residents. However, the issues of food, religious life and housing conditions were not addressed before. The information and accounts cited in this article outline a more detailed picture of living conditions in the ghetto.

The Nowy Sącz Ghetto, which existed between 1940 and 1942, was a place of fear and terror. The numerous accounts, descriptions and memories of the crimes

committed there are available today. The crimes committed there, in the memory of the Holocaust survivors, marked the stages of the ghetto's existence. Alongside all these dramatic events, however, life went on as usual, as much as it could under wartime conditions. People were born, loved and died, tried to mourn their dead or rejoice at weddings and the birth of children. From today's perspective, the word "normality" does not correspond to the Holocaust, yet a kind of hope is visible in the survivors' testimonies. People quickly adapted to their living conditions and sought this normality. This could be seen in the everyday life of the Nowy Sącz ghetto.

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## SUMMARY

The article focuses on the daily life and living conditions of the Jews in the Nowy Sącz ghetto from 1940 to 1942. The establishment of the so-called Jewish quarter is outlined here, as well as the matters of housing and sanitary conditions in the ghetto, food and way of obtaining it, the terms of Jewish labour, and religious and social life. A crucial aspect of the daily existence of Jews imprisoned in the ghetto was the omnipresent German terror, whether organised or spontaneous.

## KEYWORDS

Nowy Sącz • living conditions • Jews • ghetto • Holocaust