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Sascha Feuchert, Erwin Leibfried, and Jörg Riecke, ed., *Die Chronik des Gettos Lodz/Litzmannstadt*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007. 5 vols. Pp. 3053. ISBN 978-3-89244-834-1.

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It took the editors, along with an interdisciplinary team of German and Polish scholars, ten years to bring this momentous and comprehensive work to fruition.¹ The Łódź Ghetto Chronicle constitutes a unique written and photographic record of immense historical, testimonial, literary, and cultural importance, which Feuchert and his colleagues have now made accessible *in toto* for the first time to readers and scholars of many disciplines.

Die Chronik des Gettos Lodz/Litzmannstadt [hereafter, *CGL*]² is divided into five volumes. The first four correspond to the calendar year in which documents were originally written: 1941-4. Selected photographs and other additional documents from the ghetto's Archive are included in each volume. A fifth volume (*Supplemente*) contains a selection of writings not originally included, such as diary entries by other ghetto inhabitants and various other texts or fragments of texts by *CGL* authors themselves. Volume 5 also contains informed commentary and analysis regarding the history of the Łódź Ghetto, its inhabitants, the history of *CGL* itself, and existing scholarship on the topic. A glance at the scholarly sources listed in the volume shows that this work is not unique in addressing the persecution and murder of Jews in the Łódź Ghetto. Rather, what distinguishes it is that it is an *unabridged* version of *CGL*. The full scholarly apparatus makes these volumes an unprecedented and unequalled tool for study. In volume 1, for example, which contains the texts written in 1941, approximately 100 of the 463 pages consist of annotations by the editors.³

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The persecution of the Jews of Łódź began as soon as the German army reached the city on 8 September 1939. One-third of the city's 233,000 inhabitants were Jewish. Initially, thousands fled the city, but for those who remained life became an unthinkable hell. The German authorities' ultimate goal was to make the city *judenrein* (free of Jews). Since Łódź

¹ A parallel, unabridged edition in Polish is also in progress, the first volume of which has appeared simultaneously with this German-language edition. The present review addresses only the latter.

² Łódź (pron. "Wooch") is a large city in central Poland. After its annexation to the Reich in November 1939, German authorities renamed it Litzmannstadt, after Gen. Karl Litzmann, who had won the Battle of Łódź in 1914.

³ For non-specialists in World War II and, more specifically, Holocaust studies, *The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto 1941-1944* (New Haven, CT: Yale U Pr, 1984), ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki, trans. Richard Lourie and Joachim Neugroschel, containing roughly one-fourth of the original documents, is the most complete English-language edition to date. Another useful reference is the YIVO Institute's *Guide to the Records of the Nachman Zonabend Collection 1939-1944, RG 241*, processed by Marek Web <www.miwsr.com/rd/0815.htm>. The YIVO Institute in New York houses many original *CGL* documents in German and Polish; the website offers English summaries of their individual contents.

now belonged to the German Reich, Jews in the city were stripped of their property and citizenship, and forced to perform demeaning tasks and to use German rather than their native Polish or Yiddish; they were beaten, murdered and resettled in the ghetto, where starvation and fear became their greatest enemies. On 1 May 1940, the Łódź Ghetto was officially sealed from the rest of civilization. Also sealed were the fates of the remaining Jews, as well as those of the many thousands of Jewish prisoners later funneled through the ghetto on their way to extermination. Of the 204,800 Jews who passed through its gates, perhaps only 7,000–10,000 survived.⁴ What most distinguishes this ghetto from others of the time was that it was completely cut off from civilization. Living in an area lacking an underground system of sewage canals, ghetto residents had no chance to smuggle from, communicate with, or escape to the outside world.

From Department of Statistics to *CGL*

CGL is essentially a record of various aspects of daily life, secretly written by seven ghetto inmates. The history of how it came to be is somewhat confusing, as there was overlap in various departments of the ghetto administration.

In volume 5, Feuchert's article, "Die Getto-Chronik: Entstehung und Überlieferung—Eine Projektskizze" [The Ghetto Chronicle: Origin and Tradition—A Project Outline], notes that the initial proposal to found an archive in the ghetto a few months after it had been sealed off was not well received. One Dr. Szykier, who was standing in for Mordechai Rumkowski (Elder of the Jews in the ghetto), at a meeting on 8 August 1940, stated that: "Whoever made this suggestion needs to be sent to a psychiatrist in order to determine whether he is sane" (5.168).⁵ Nonetheless, several weeks later Rumkowski himself embraced the idea.

The Archives—or the Department of Archives, to use its official name—was founded on the strength of a decision by Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, the Eldest of the Jews, on November 17, 1940, as the fifth in a series of sections of the so-called departments of population records of the Lodz Ghetto. Aside from the Archives, these interconnected institutions included the Registration Bureau, the Department of Statistics, the Department of Vital Statistics, the Rabbinical Bureau, and the photography workshop, which was set up somewhat later. All of these sections were headed by Henryk Neftalin, an attorney who helped organize many of the ghetto's other administrative branches and who was a confidant of M.C. Rumkowski.⁶

Neftalin's guiding principle from the very beginning was that the Archives should serve as source material "for future scholars studying the life of a Jewish society in one of its most difficult periods."⁷ Feuchert quotes Nachman Zonabend to much the same effect: "Lawyers and historians should have access to what is likely the most extensive collection of documents stemming from a Jewish administration during the Holocaust" (5.167-8).

⁴ See Josef Zelkowitz, *In Those Terrible Days: Writings from the Lodz Ghetto*, ed. Michael Unger, trans. Naftali Greenwood (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002) 29.

⁵ English translations herein from the book under review are my own.

⁶ Dobroszyski (note 3 supra) ix-x.

⁷ *Ibid.*, x.

Technically, the Department of Archives developed as an off-shoot of the already-established Department of Statistics. Though separate entities, they were closely interconnected; as survivor Lucille Eichengreen, former secretary in the Department of Archives, put it: “Archive and Statistical Department were essentially one and the same” (5.172).

The Department of Statistics deals now also with public health statistics and with workers and worker production in the ghetto workshops. At the beginning of 1941 its agenda had grown so extensively that a division into various departments became necessary: demography, employment and workshop production, public health, educational system, social welfare, provisions for the ghetto population, justice, security, and later, the department of control for incoming goods and materials, the department of testing and the department of secondary processing of tabulated materials (5.168–9).

The principal purpose of *CGL*, beginning with its first entry on Sunday, 12 January 1941, was to portray the most important daily events in the ghetto. Its main authors over the four years of its existence were a team of seven inmates: Józef Klementynowski, editor of the first phase in Polish; Oskar Singer, editor of the German-language phase beginning in January 1943; Oskar Rosenfeld, Peter Wertheimer, Bernhard Heilig, Bernard Ostrowski, and Alice de Buton. As members of the above-named institutions, under the umbrella of the Department of Statistics and/or Department of Archives, the chroniclers’ access to various aspects of ghetto statistics enabled them to compile records so far as the reliability of the available data allowed. They reported, for example, on the weather, the number of suicides, deaths from infectious diseases, the type and amount of food that arrived in the ghetto, etc. Various factors made the authors’ task overwhelmingly difficult. The first—which only adds to their amazing accomplishment—is that they were writing for *an audience of the future*. This was not a publication that contemporary ghetto inhabitants had the privilege to read, but rather a dangerously-guarded secret from the Nazi Ghetto Administration. Lucille Eichengreen characterized the project as: “a daily newspaper without readers Everyone contributed, i.e. if you heard a rumor or had any kind of info you told Dr. Singer, Rosenfeld Sometimes they used the material, or reworded it, or thought it best to ignore it” (5.173). The frequently-appearing column heading—“Man hört, man spricht” [people hear, people say]—suggests the type of reports the chroniclers often had to rely on. In addition, they were also writing under extreme, in part self-imposed censorship. Though, according to Feuchert, it is not clear whether the Nazi Ghetto Administration had any knowledge of *CGL*, Rumkowski, of course, did to some extent; the very existence of the authors, as well as of the project itself, depended on their remaining in his favor. Although the writers were subjected to the same extreme conditions as all other ghetto inmates, that is, hunger, sickness, cold, fear of deportation, they did receive a regular additional soup ration.

Up through January 1943, *CGL* had been written in the language of the native ghetto inhabitants—Polish and some Yiddish. But thereafter, when the *Westjude* (western European Jew) Oskar Singer took over as editor, the language became German. Due to Singer’s

experience as a professional journalist, the texts took on a more journalistic format, nature, and style.⁸

This development was certainly not only determined by the journalistic (research) techniques of the authors, but apparently arose out of a certain routine of dealing with the daily horror. The longer the ghetto existed, the more routine it became for the chroniclers, the more they strived to make a historical illustration of the Ghetto Litzmannstadt comprehensible to future generations. Ever more frequently the authors tried to imagine themselves in a future situation in which the existence of such a ghetto would be as unimaginable as it once was for them. Their portrayals become noticeably more empathetic and more exemplary, clearer and—to a certain degree—also more conceivable.... The fear on the part of the chroniclers to be unable to make a future reader understand what they went through due to the limited means available to them, is always present (5.178).

The Final *CGL* Entry (4.454):

Daily Report for Sunday, July 30, 1944 _____ Daily Chronicle Nr. 211

Weather: midday 22–38 degrees [Celsius], sunny, hot.

Deaths: 1

Births: none

Arrests: various for various reasons: 2

Admitted: 1 / Man from outside the Ghetto

Population: 68,561

Daily News

Today was also very quiet.

[Rumkowski] held various discussions. But all in all peace and order prevails in the ghetto. Hohensteiner street has a new appearance. The traffic is unusually lively. One notices that the war is also advancing towards Litzmannstadt. The Gettomensch [ghetto neologism for ghetto inmate] curiously watches the hastening motored vehicles loaded with various types of weapons. But the most important thing for him is still: “What is there to eat?”

Food Provisions

On this Sunday only 7,160 kg of potatoes, 46,210 kg of white cabbage, and 13,790 kg of kohlrabi arrived. No other foodstuffs arrived.

If tomorrow, Monday, no flour arrives, the situation could become extremely critical.

It is said that the flour provisions for the ghetto are barely sufficient for 2–3 more days.

Potato Ration

⁸ See Jörg Riecke, 5.191–2.

Beginning today 1 kg of new potatoes will be given out at the food distribution centers.

Medical Service

Today's reported infectious diseases: none

Cause of today's deaths: 1 suicide.

Volume 5—Editors' Contributions

Andrea Löw, "Das Getto Litzmannstadt—Eine historische Einführung" [The Ghetto Litzmannstadt—An Historical Introduction], concisely documents the historical events that led to the official founding of the ghetto (1 May 1940), and follows through to its ultimate liberation by the Red Army (19 January 1945).

Sascha Feuchert, "Die Getto-Chronik: Entstehung und Überlieferung—Eine Projektskizze" [The Ghetto Chronicle: Origin and Tradition—A Project Outline], comprises accounts of Nachman Zonabend's miraculous preservation of the Jewish Archive documents, the founding of the Archives and the history of its various departments, and postwar efforts to publish it. Feuchert pays tribute, for example, to efforts by the Polish team of Lucjan Dobroszycki und Danuta Dabrowska, who tried to publish a complete edition of *CGL* in Polish in the early 1960s, but whose efforts were stifled ("plötzlich und geradezu brutal abgebrochen"—suddenly and quite brutally terminated) after the first two volumes appeared (1965/1966). The other two volumes, ready for print at the time, were destroyed due to the then current political environment in Poland. Feuchert also praises Dobroszycki's abridged English-language publication (see note 3 *supra*) for making the *CGL* available for the first time to an international audience and thereby prompting numerous research projects (5.187). On the other hand, he criticizes the 1984 publication for including only one-fourth of the original texts and, in some instances, shortening them without notice, thus obscuring a truly complete picture of ghetto life. Overall the article takes into account the research history on the topic of the Łódź Ghetto Archives and, more specifically, *CGL*, adding commentary based on Feuchert's own research.

In "Zur Sprache der Chronik" [On the Language of the Chronicle], Jörg Riecke, a linguist as well as Germanist, concerns himself with the "Wie des Textes" [*How* of the Text]. He analyzes linguistic devices, taking into consideration, for example, the circumstances that dictated the language of composition—initially Polish and Yiddish, ultimately German. In addition to various language-dependent stylistic traits, the *Chronik* eventually took on the style of its main contributors, Oskar Singer and Oskar Rosenfeld, two west European Jews journalists. Riecke also focuses on the problems of translation of the early volumes from Polish and Yiddish into German. He emphasizes that the editors attempted to remain true to the original text as much as possible, but points out particular problems where there is no high German equivalent, as in the case of neologisms derived from ghetto life itself (5.192).

The final scholarly contribution in volume 5 by the editors is Erwin Leibfried and Elisabeth Turvold's "Zur Edition" [About the Edition]. They sketch the guiding principles of the edition, the history of the Archive documents after they were first rescued by Nachman Zonabend, and their re-collection from archives in the United States, Germany, Poland,

and Israel. An extensive chart comparing names and dates of original documents and their current archival locations demonstrates how the editors reconstructed the order of *CGL*. Rounding out the section and completing volume 5 are: archival photographs; a complete bibliography of primary sources; a list of historic Łódź street names in both Polish and German; a registry of names; a registry of names of artists and historical figures who appear in *CGL*; a registry of scholars cited.

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The fact that we, a small fraction of the targeted *future generations* of readers, now have access to these texts through Feuchert, Leibfried, and Riecke's German-language edition, adds a sense of eeriness to the reading process. Not only does this publication help to accomplish the original mission of *CGL*, namely, to offer firsthand insights into the very daily life of a Jewish ghetto during the Holocaust, it goes well beyond this, as we, the contemplated future readers, feel called to *act* upon this knowledge.

These five volumes are a major contribution to the scholarship of World War II and the Holocaust. Wallstein Verlag is to be congratulated for publishing such an important and complete account of the horrors of the Łódź Ghetto. The seven main writers of *CGL* were scholars, journalists, and trained professionals with a fine sense of history and literary style. This at times lends their work the qualities of a *feuilleton*—the cultural section of major German-language newspapers.

Literary historians, social and political theorists, and scholars of World War II and the Holocaust alike will find this publication of immense interest. Present and future generations of scholars are provided with a description of daily life in the Łódź Ghetto in all its minutiae, a small but precious glimpse of the miseries of that existence. These volumes should be made available in the research collections of all major institutions.