Löw, Andrea: Juden im Getto Litzmannstadt: Lebensbedingungen, Selbstwahrnehmung, Verhalten.

Wallstein, Göttingen 2006, 584 S., 24 Abb.

On October 16, 1941, the nowadays forgotten Prague station of Bubny witnessed two very different departures. German circus "Krone" drove back to Berlin after an unsuccessful tour in the "Protectorate." At the same time, the first transport of Czech Jews left Prague for the ghetto in Łódź. In the coming two weeks there were four more transports to follow, with altogether 5003 people. Only 282 of them returned.[1]

In her book, Andrea Löw examines the living conditions under which the Prague deportees, together with other Polish, German and Viennese Jews, had to live for more than four years in the Łódź ghetto. Unlike most of the traditional German historiography that focuses on the perpetrators Löw adopts the perspective of the victims. Löw, who works at the "Arbeitsstelle Holocaustliteratur" at Gießen University, provides a sensitive and detailed account of the life of the inmates in the Łódź ghetto. The author presents the inmates of "Litzmannstadt" not as passive victims, but as active individuals with room for manoeuvre within the narrow confines of the ghetto. Moreover she assesses the emergence of complex social and political structures within the Jewish community, such as the self-administration. A central point of her study is to show that ghettos were not just a stop on the way to destruction, but rather places with complex social life and structures.

The book is based on a wealth of primary sources, most of them written by the victims themselves. Voices of seventeen diarists form the core of the study. Further the author uses testimonies, most of them collected shortly after the liberation, several published memoirs, and numerous official documents of the ghetto administration, most notably the so-called "Getto-Chronik" and "Getto-Enzyklopädie,", both produced on the order of the Łódź Judenrat. (Löw's current employment, the "Arbeitsstelle Holocaustliteratur,", is finishing a complete edition of the Getto-Chronik in German.) Löw did not utilise any oral history testimonies.

For a number of reasons Łódź is a special case among the Polish ghettos: for a long time it kept its status as a work ghetto and was thus relatively safe from liquidation. With the exception of Theresienstadt (Terezín), it was the longest existing ghetto, the first erected and last to be liquidated in Poland. Łódź became a part of the Nazi Reich, annexed with the so-called "Warthegau." It was subject to Germanisation policy and renamed to Litzmannstadt. By comparison, the Łódź ghetto district was fairly hermetically closed, smuggling or escapes were nearly impossible. After autumn 1942 almost all remaining Jews had to work for the Nazi industry and the

[1] *Milotová*, Jaroslava: Der Okkupationsapparat und die Vorbereitung der Transporte nach Łódź. In: Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 1998, 40-69.

food situation was appalling. Evidently the worst among the major ghettos: apart from outbreaks of typhoid most of the death toll was due to rampant starvation. Chaim Rumkowski, the Nazi-appointed head of the Jewish self-administration, was subject to tight control and had only minimal leeway for negotiations.

The ghetto existed from April 1940 to August 1944. Just like in all other ghettos, the location chosen was a former slum of the city, without sewage or heating system in the Bałuty district, located quite close to the centre. Altogether 200000 people lived in the ghetto, the majority of them Jews of Łódź, later also Jewish inhabitants of towns in the vicinity. In October 1941, 20000 "Western" Jews deported from Germany, Prague, Vienna and Luxemburg arrived. More than 45000 people died in Łódź, the rest were shipped to annihilation camps. Deportations in 1942 and briefly in summer 1944 were directed to the nearby extermination camp of Chełmno, totalling altogether 77000 victims. Liquidation transports of August 1944 with 72000 deportees were directed to Birkenau. It is estimated that altogether between 5000 and 7000 people from Łódź ghetto have survived, 900 of them hidden in the desolate ghetto district.

In no other ghetto was starvation as appalling as in Łódź, and therefore chapters on food policy and hunger form the backbone of the book and indeed, these are its poignant parts. Löw shows with empathy and discretion what impact starvation had on everyday life. Inmates were permanently preoccupied with food. Starvation was a long process, dragging on over months and years: the inmates observed each other growing thinner, while they still had to continue working. The diarists continued their accounts, recording on daily basis the pains of hunger. Those too weak to work lived under the constant threat of being selected for the next deportation to a death camp. Many historians have so far described the reaction of the ghetto residents to starvation in terms of moral decay, but Löw succeeds in illustrating the monstrous effect of hunger on the individual without becoming judgemental. Hunger damaged fundamental kinship ties: some parents would wait for their children to fall asleep and then eat their rations.

The 1942 transports to Chełmno presented dramatic events of a different sort. As in other ghettos, the Nazi administration ordered how many people were to be deported. Rumkowski and his staff themselves had to fill the count. Löw remarks somewhat surprised that those summoned first were the inmates from the ghetto prison, those supported from welfare. This happened in other places as well, e. g. in Prague and Berlin: Jewish representatives apparently usually put those on welfare or refugees (who mostly lived on social support) to the first transports. Ironically, in the two cases of Prague and Berlin the deportees were sent to Łódź.

The second wave of transports of May 1942 hit individuals labelled as "unproductive eaters," earlier, entire families were deported. Particularly nerve-racking were the deportations of September 1942, when all children under ten years of age, the sick and the elderly were selected to be killed. Since everyone in the ghetto was registered in the labour registry, workers were protected. Whereas mothers usually knowingly joined their selected children on the way to death, however, when one of the parents was selected, the remaining family members were left behind. Löw chooses prudential illustrative quotes to explain what consequences these deportation

conditions had on social life. She skilfully analyses how and when the ghetto residents realised that deportation meant certain death. While the book makes numbers and overviews of transports transparent in practical tables, she hides the fact that the "Western" Jews were exempted from the early transports to extermination camps into a footnote (p. 273, n. 31). However, this was part of a deliberate Nazi policy also applied in Minsk from May 1942 on.

The exemption of the "Western" Jews from the early transports, an order of the German administration, must have intensified conflicts with the "Eastern" Jews. The ghetto society was strongly differentiated in groups, seen on social ladder both vertically (ethnical factors) and horizontally (income and food). Ghetto society was not only set apart by the access to resources, but also by cultural differences. Löw points to the differences between the old inhabitants of Baluty and the newcomers from other districts, which in different patterns recurred between the "Eastern" and "Western" Jews as well. Community life was strongly shaped by conflict and prejudice. At the same time, many of the "Western Jews" were socialised into the Łódź ghetto community. Evidence for this phenomenon was the language used, with identical termini used in Polish, Czech, German and Yiddish.

However, Löw is too quick in claiming that the Czech Jews assimilated quickly and got better jobs by befriending Polish Jews. The overall majority received worse jobs and did not have many social contacts. The author supports this claim mostly with utterances of Oskar Rosenfeld and Oskar Singer, authors of the Getto-Chronik, and thus people with "good positions." These were in no way representative, but they are the only testimonies of Czech Jews that Löw examined. Most of these testimonies are not to be found in the archives where the Polish or German Jews directed theirs (such as the YIVO [Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut], or Leo Baeck Institute), those that Löw has attended. Czech Łódź survivors' testimonies are mostly in the 1990s interview collection of the Prague Jewish Museum: but Löw decided not to examine oral history documents.

In examining the social structure of the ghetto, the author generally largely relies on the study of the journalists from the Ghetto Chronicle. Both Singer and Rosenfeld were experienced and sharp-minded journalists, yet from the study at hand the reader has the right to expect an independent analysis surpassing paraphrasing of primary sources. This is an incomplete analysis and as such somewhat unsatisfying. Furthermore, in examining social position of the ghetto residents, it would have been useful to employ factors beyond origin and economic class, such as social capital, habitus and gender.

In sum, Löw delivers a fine and empathetic description – but a description it remains, even though the author claims this as intentional (p. 29). The book is lacking an overarching theoretical framing that might better illuminate ghetto society in all its dynamics, rules, processes, and changes over time. The groups did not exist as sealed-off, separate entities, but in relation to each other. Löw's flaws are in many respects symptomatic of much of the current social history on the persecuted. The problem is a methodological one: how can we write everyday history of the Holocaust, beyond description on one hand and blind projection of theory on the other? I see this as a major challenge in our field today.

On balance, Andrea Löw has written a carefully researched study, maintaining a high standard of accuracy. She is very successful in rendering a vivid depiction of the life conditions in the Łódź ghetto. It would be desirable to attempt for an abridged Czech translation.

Toronto Anna Hájková