

## Reading the History of Jewish Policemen in the Kovno Ghetto: Threads, Traces, and New Interpretations

Simon Goldberg

In 1964, a rare archive was accidentally uncovered in the area where the Kovno ghetto once stood. Amid the bureaucratic trove was a history written by anonymous Jewish policemen in the ghetto—men who were caught in the grey zone between collaboration with the Germans and passive cooperation. Their account describes the nascence of the police force; explores the intricate mosaic of wartime Jewish institutions; and traces the history of the German occupation. Yet while the policemen's document has captivated scholarly and public attention, its evidentiary value has remained uncontested; it rests on assumptions, contentions, and contradictions that demand investigation.

This paper will explore the methodological and epistemological challenges that the policemen's *Geshikhte* presents. I will first use close readings of the text to illustrate the fraught stakes that guided its composition. How did the policemen endeavor to represent the calamities that befell the Kovno Jewish community? What connections might we draw between the policemen's reportage and their desire to explain the unenviable predicaments they faced? These questions draw attention to the ways in which the chronicle shapes, and does not merely report on, reality in the ghetto.

At the same time, we can better assess the chronicle by juxtaposing it with other archival records. The historiography of the Kovno ghetto has long been dominated by the writings of ghetto elites, relegating the testimonies of Jews who did not occupy positions of authority during the war to the margins. My paper will introduce survivor accounts collected by historical commissions in Germany and Poland in the immediate postwar period. I will argue that these records offer an intriguing opportunity to analyze the policemen's *Geshikhte*, accentuate its insights, and ponder its evidentiary limits. I will conclude by reflecting on the questions this document raises about the way we read Jewish sources and produce knowledge about the Holocaust.