

## Katarzyna Person. *"Warsaw Ghetto Police"*

The Jewish Order Service during the Nazi Occupation. Ithaca en Londen:  
Cornell University Press, 2021

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### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/11160>

DOI: 10.4000/temoigner.11160

ISSN: 2506-6390

### Publisher

Éditions du Centre d'études et de documentation de l'ASBL Mémoire d'Auschwitz

### Printed version

Date of publication: 10 April 2022

Number of pages: 134-139

ISBN: 978-2-930953-16-8

ISSN: 2031-4183

### Electronic reference

Fabian Van Samang, "Katarzyna Person. *"Warsaw Ghetto Police"*", *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire* [Online], 134 | 2022, Online since 27 March 2023, connection on 29 March 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/11160> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/temoigner.11160>

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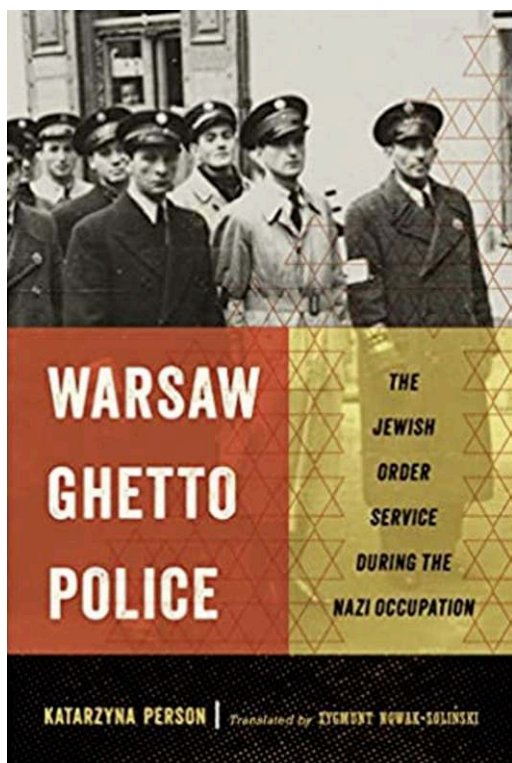
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Katarzyna Person. *Warsaw Ghetto Police. The Jewish Order Service during the Nazi Occupation*. Ithaca en Londen: Cornell University Press, 2021, 232 p.

Katarzyna Person. "Warsaw Ghetto Police"



- 1 In 2021, Cornell University Press, in cooperation with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, published a book called *Warsaw Ghetto Police. The Jewish Order Service during the Nazi Occupation*. Author of the work (the main text amounts to no more than 150 pages) is the young historian Katarzyna Person, a Polish researcher specialising in East European Jewish history. According to her biography, published by the *European Holocaust Research Infrastructure* (EHRI), she previously worked in Jerusalem (Yad Vashem), New York (*Center for Jewish History*), Munich (the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*) and Paris (*Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah*), but is currently affiliated with the Jewish Historical Institute (ZIH) in Warsaw. She is co-editor of the three-volume edition of the famous Ringelblum Archive.
- 2 In ten short chapters, Person deals with the history of the *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst* (JOD), generally known as the Jewish police – an organisation often vilified by survivors, but which has hardly found a place in the historiography of the Eastern European ghettos. Person successively discusses the establishment of the JOD, its organisation and objectives, and the violence it used while performing its daily duties. Chapters 4 and 5 delve deeper into the image of the police force in the eyes of the ghetto dwellers and those of the police force itself. After a brief digression on the attempts to curb police violence by establishing a control committee, the author discusses the radicalisation policy in the spring of 1942 and the participation of the JOD in the first deportation wave (July-September 1942). Chapter 9 deals with the aftermath of the first deportations (the suicide of police chief Jozef Szerynski, the transfer of power and the execution of his successors in the vicinity of the Pawiak prison in April 1943). The last chapter elaborates on the two trials conducted by Polish courts against members of the JOD – Szapszl Rotholc got two years in prison for his part in the

Holocaust, while Abram Wolfowicz got away with an admonition. The fact that he had used his position to help people clearly worked in his favour.

- 3 Person's study is particularly well-founded and (in terms of the source material she made use of) very original. Her assessments are substantiated by 675 footnotes, most of which refer to original, often never-before-quoted documents, originating from 12 archives, located in four different countries. When she does not refer to archival sources, she makes use of reputable published source collections, published ego documents, contemporary sources (such as newspapers and magazines) and (in total 65) scientific studies by renowned historians and researchers.
- 4 It's a pity that the author pays little attention to the January 1943 uprising and the liquidation of the ghetto later that year, in April and May 1943. Did former policemen join the Jewish Resistance Organisation (ZOB), did they fight Jürgen Stroop's infamous units, did they find shelter on the 'Aryan' side of Warsaw? Except for a brief reference, this fascinating episode remains shrouded in mystery. Although her study is well-founded, Person does not tell us much new – many elements are a confirmation of what we in fact already knew. Her book is atypical, especially when it comes to the assessment of the work of the Jewish police force. The extensive quotation from Stanislaw Gombinski's memoirs at the beginning of the second chapter immediately sets the tone – the eyewitness exhorts his readers to get to know the facts, and once they think they can make a judgment, to return to the facts again. "Then try again, for the hundredth time, for the thousandth time, to grasp our reality." Person argues that many rumours circulating in the ghetto about the JOD were largely exaggerated (p. 27); that people were more afraid of the 'Thirteen' (led by Abraham Gancwajch, who collaborated with the Germans) than of the JOD (p. 30) and that the moral decay was mainly due to the weakness and limited control possibilities of its leaders (p. 100). In a moralising conclusion, she argues that the JOD became an instrument in the hands of the Germans, and ultimately a victim itself (p. 158). No doubt some of her readers will not thank her for suggesting that whoever is negatively inclined towards the JOD places himself in the corner of anti-Semites ('In a competition of suffering and in minimizing the Jewish tragedy, the Jewish police play an important role in anti-Semitic publications to this day', p. 154). On the other hand, it may be hard, if not impossible, to work on a topic like this, and remain untouched by its far-reaching moral implications.