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The Jewish Criminal Underground in Occupied Cracow – Case Studies¹

Abstract

The article discusses selected crimes committed by Jews during World War II, such as burglary, theft, fencing, usury, and, less frequently, black marketeering and fraud. Most of the criminals knew each other before the war, and their criminal activities were a continuation of these contacts. It also presents statistics on the crimes most often committed by Jews (individually or as part of organized gangs). The article also analyzes the activities of Jewish and Polish-Jewish gangs, as well as cooperation between different groups in the Polish-Jewish criminal underworld. These groups intermingled, as evidenced by the Yiddishisms that appeared in the criminal jargon still used today. Cooperation between organized crime groups began many years before the outbreak of World War II and was sometimes formed on an ad hoc basis to serve common interests. The article attempts to determine whether Jewish criminals continued their activities and whether anything changed with the outbreak of war.

Keywords: crime, Jews, underground, gangs, occupation, Cracow

Józef Duda and J. Wójcik, residents of Bielcza, were walking along Józefa Street in Cracow when they were accosted by a stranger, a Jew, who promised to sell them clothes and leather. They both willingly agreed to this proposal and the three of them went to Dietla Street, where they entrusted the Jew with the sum of 900 zlotys, while they waited for the goods promised to them by a doorway. It turned out that they had fallen victim to a fraudster who made off with their money.

Goniec Krakowski 185 (11.08.1940), 4

¹ Some of the crimes mentioned in the text, i.e., the Glogover case, the theft reported on Krakowska Street, Sara Wortsman, Nehemiah Engelstein and Rumiński's group, were cited for the first time in Jarkowska, "Criminal Cases Involving Jews." In this article, especially in the case of the Rumiński group and the theft reported on Krakowska Street, there is a more detailed analysis, including historical and forensic analysis of these crimes. This work was supported by National Center of Science (Sonata 16), no. 2020/39/D/HS3/00331.

1. Introduction

Despite the outbreak of World War II and the entry of German troops into Cracow, the city's criminal underworld remained active, adapting its illicit dealings to the new war-time conditions. While Polish-Jewish gangs continued to commit acts prohibited by law using their pre-war methods, they also developed new ways of exploiting citizens of both Polish and Jewish origin. Moreover, these gangs often worked closely together. Local fraudsters took advantage of the naivety of outsiders and newcomers unfamiliar with the city's topography. They would agree with the victim on a convenient place where they themselves could make their getaway, as was the case in the news story quoted above. For example, as in the case above, a meeting would be arranged in a doorway on Dietla Street, the courtyard of which was connected to a tenement building on Kordeckiego Street. Other buildings had shared passageways running through basements, which also allowed people to quickly escape from crime scenes. These situations occurred more and more frequently, as the first months of the German occupation gave criminals more opportunities to act. It was a time of social, political and economic disintegration and the establishment of new administrative structures, based on brutally harsh anti-Polish and anti-Jewish policies, as well as the mass migration of people. During this period, there was an increase in the number of reported break-ins, burglaries, fraud and looting, especially in two districts of Cracow: Podgórze and Kazimierz, where many Jewish shops and enterprises were located. The perpetrators of these criminal acts were individuals from both the Polish and Jewish criminal underworlds, often acting in concert. Collaboration between organized criminal gangs began many years before the outbreak of World War II, sometimes being formed ad hoc to serve a common interest. Most criminals were from Cracow, but criminals from other towns and even from other countries were also active on the city's streets. The behavior of people forced to commit crimes out of poverty constitutes a separate issue altogether. Destitution and a survival instinct compelled such individuals to commit crimes that, given the conditions prevailing during the occupation, cannot be considered punishable acts.

2. Sources and methodology

A criminal act is any one of a number of prohibited and punishable acts committed in a certain area. Such acts include, among other things, counterfeiting money, counterfeiting stocks and securities, crimes against the person (e.g., murder), crimes against property and the forging of documents.² On the other hand, some individuals committed certain acts classified as crimes during the war and the occupation with the sole aim of saving their own lives and thus were motivated simply by the wish to survive. These acts were deemed to be committed out of "necessity" by their perpetrators as a result of the inhumane regulations imposed and enforced by the German authorities. In this article,

² Polish Criminal Code of 1932 in: Sobolewski, Laniewski, *Polski kodeks karny*.

I will focus exclusively on petty crimes committed by professional criminals whose motives were baser and not driven solely by the need to avoid death or hunger.

The article is intended as a contribution to current research and its primary source materials are the following: surviving court documents (including files of criminal cases brought before the District Court in Cracow), police and prison records from the World War II (including those of inmates held at St. Michael's prison on Senacka Street), press materials as well as the autopsy reports of the Department of Occupational Medicine of the Jagiellonian University. These documents mainly date from the years 1939–1945, although most of those containing references to criminals of Jewish origin come from a narrower period, 1939–1943. The last mention in the press of the latter dates from the end of the summer of 1942. An interesting, albeit controversial source is the daily newspaper *Goniec Krakowski* published by the German occupiers in Cracow. Apart from serving as a propaganda organ for the Nazi authorities trumpeting the “successes of the Third Reich and its allies on all the fronts,”³ especially on its front pages, it also included reports on burglaries, thefts, and fraud committed by Poles and people of Jewish origin. The basis for these reports were court materials, as was confirmed after checking them against specific entries in criminal case files and court digests. As Sebastian Piątkowski rightly noted, some descriptions of crimes committed by Jews were, however, more malicious in their wording than those involving perpetrators of other nationalities, which was obviously due to the anti-Jewish editorial policy of *Goniec*. However, this did not “prevent” the daily's editors from publishing texts about crimes committed against Jews. One such example involved the case of Poles sentenced to death by a court for robbing a Jewish house in Zawoja at the end of 1939.⁴

I have reconstructed in chronological order selected crimes committed by Jews, divided into specific categories. Most often, these criminals were punished for such offenses as break-ins, theft, burglaries, handling stolen goods, usury, and, less frequently, for black marketeering and fraud. A few murders committed during this period also involved Jews, and I will refer to one particular case in this article. It is worth pointing out here that most of the perpetrators of these crimes knew each other before the war, and their criminal operations were a continuation of these contacts. Criminals adapted to the current situation, taking advantage of anti-Jewish policies to develop new operating methods.

The activities of the Jewish underworld in Cracow during World War II has not yet been the subject of any academic study.⁵ Much more space has been devoted to the criminal operations of Jews in the years 1918–1939, i.e., before the outbreak of the war (Krzysztof Kloc, Tomasz Marszałkowski).⁶ This topic has also been discussed by scholars engaged in research on interwar Warsaw and Lublin (Mateusz Rodak, Adam

³ Piątkowski, „Polityka niemieckich władz okupacyjnych,” 60.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵ A number of other studies have addressed the topic of crime in the General Government and the activities of the justice system in this area; see, for example: Mielnik, *Sądownictwo polskie (nieniemieckie)*; Mielnik, “Prawo sprawdzenia prawomocnych orzeczeń”; Mielnik, “Nazistowski kolonializm prawny”; Mielnik, “«In the Name of the Law»”; Mielnik, “Zabójstwo kryminalne w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie”.

⁶ Kloc, *Wielkowiejska gangrena*; Marszałkowski, *Zamieszki, ekscesy i demonstracje*.

Kopciowski).⁷ In publications dealing with the plight of Jews in occupied Cracow, this issue is addressed only sporadically and usually in connection with crimes committed in the ghetto, e.g., smuggling, theft and black marketeering. One exception is the book by Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking entitled “*Żydów łamiących prawo należy karać śmiercią!*” “*Przestępczość Żydów w Warszawie 1939–1942*.”⁸ Unlike that study, however, the present article, besides dealing with a different geographical area of criminal activity (Cracow versus Warsaw) and different local specifics (such as the fact that Cracow was the capital of the General Government⁹ with an Austro-Hungarian heritage), also analyzes the activities of the pre-war criminal underworld in the first years of the war, and thus its focus of interest is on criminals continuing to engage in illicit and unlawful dealings in the new conditions that preceded the creation of the Cracow ghetto. Due to the above-mentioned specific nature of Cracow¹⁰ and the objectives of this article, i.e., describing how the Jewish criminal underworld operated in that city, this publication will not feature any separate comparative analysis (apart from providing some general information) of Warsaw and Cracow.

Changes introduced in March 1941¹¹ (before Operation Reinhardt) forced those engaged in unlawful activities to further modify their methods and adapt their behavior to the

⁷ Rodak, *Mit a rzeczywistość. Przestępczość osób narodowości żydowskiej*; Rodak, *Pospolitycy, cuwaki, powrotowcy*; Rodak, “Prostytutki żydowskie w województwie lubelskim”; Rodak, “Złodziej w międzywojennym Lublinie”; Kopciowski, “Żydowscy sutenerzy w międzywojennej Polsce”.

⁸ Engelking, Grabowski, “*Żydów łamiących prawo należy karać śmiercią!*”.

⁹ One of Cracow’s unique features was the fact that, besides functioning as the capital of the General Government (GG), it was the administrative center for the Cracow region, where all central state civil and political institutions were located. The authorities of the General Government established their headquarters in Cracow, as did the security services, those services responsible for maintaining public order, district, regional and city authorities, and many different units of the German police, including its political (Gestapo), security (Sipo), and criminal (Kripo) branches as well as the “Order” police (Orpo) and “Protection” police (Schupo). From April 1941, the GG government was headed by a state secretary who oversaw 12 main departments: internal affairs (*Hauptabteilung Innere Verwaltung*), the treasury (*Hauptabteilung Finanzen*), justice (*Hauptabteilung Justiz*), economy (*Hauptabteilung Wirtschaft*), food (*Hauptabteilung Ernährung und Landwirtschaft*), forests (*Hauptabteilung Forsten*), labor (*Hauptabteilung Arbeit*), propaganda (*Hauptabteilung Propaganda*), science and education (*Hauptabteilung Wissenschaft und Unterricht*), construction (*Hauptabteilung Bauwesen*), railways (*Hauptabteilung Eisenbahn*) and post (*Hauptabteilung Post*). See: Administrative Regulation no. 1 of 7 April 1941 to the Regulation no. 3 on the Reconstruction of the Administration of the General Government (Organization of the General Governor’s Government) of March 16, 1941 in: Weh, *Prawo Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, A122a; Chwałba, *Dzieje Krakowa*, 33–7; Chrobaczyński, “Kraków – «stolica» Generalgouvernement”, 237–8; Mączyński, *Organizacyjno-prawne aspekty*.

¹⁰ In 1939, Cracow had a population of 259,000. Two years later, this number had risen to approximately 321,000. According to 1939 statistics, nearly 68,000 Jews lived in Cracow, making up approximately 23% of the population. In 1940, the city’s population comprised 180,000 Poles (approx. 60%), 69,000 Jews (approx. 23%) and 51,000 Germans (17%). The situation changed dramatically when the Cracow ghetto was created in March 1941. According to a census carried out by the Nazi authorities in the GG in May 1943, Cracow’s population was comprised of the following: 251,912 Poles (85.5%), 20,997 Germans (7.4%), 8,753 Jews (3%), 1,947 Ukrainians (0.6%) and 1,184 representatives of other nations, e.g., Austrians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Latvians, Czechs, Slovaks and Italians (0.4%), giving a total of 284,793 persons. Szturm de Sztem, *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1939*, 152; *Małopolska Agencja Prasowa* 7 (8.05.1943), 3. Only 3,000–5,000 Jews survived World War II.

¹¹ The Cracow ghetto was created in March 1941 in an abandoned part of the district of Podgórze. It was devoid of sanitary infrastructure of any kind. In an area no more than 20 hectares in size and covering just 320 houses, lived between 11,000 and 20,000 Jews. At first, 11,000 Jews from Cracow and surrounding towns and villages lived in the ghetto; in June 1942, that number grew to 19,000–20,000 people. Initially, the

confined space of the ghetto and to conditions on the “Aryan” side, where Jews were forbidden upon pain of death. With the establishment of the ghetto, which was surrounded both by a wall and a river, trade in stolen goods, black marketeering, fraud, smuggling, theft, etc., began to flourish. Even people with no previous criminal background became involved in such illicit dealings in an effort to improve their material situation. Some activities that were by their nature normally regarded as criminal behavior ceased to be seen in such a light by society because now they served as a means of fighting the occupier, e.g., forging ID cards for members of the underground or for Jews, stealing from the occupation authorities (e.g., from military hospitals, railways, and railway sidings), carrying out attacks on German soldiers, and committing murder. The desire to fight the Germans also allowed some criminals or groups to commit crimes under the guise of resisting the occupier. In fact, the attempts by some criminal elements to impersonate members of the resistance constitutes a separate topic. A number of criminals, on the other hand, maintained links with the German occupiers, collaborating with them, while the occupiers themselves also acted as criminals (this is a separate subject, with the focus on Kripo members and SS men). I will refer to this shortly.

A separate issue concerns criminal acts committed by people simply in order to survive or to provide their families with basic necessities. The latter were forced to obtain false Aryan identity papers, employment cards or baptism certificates. Quite often, such documents were sought by Jews in hiding on the so-called Aryan side. One individual involved in the production of false documents was the photographer-artist Paweł Bielec, who during the occupation issued false ID cards and employment cards in his photography studio at 50 Karmelicka Street, including for people of Jewish nationality.¹²

The text consists of three main parts: an introduction, the main body of the text in which I will develop my ideas, and a conclusion. In the first part, I will describe the current state of the research, the source base and its specificity, as well as discuss the terminology and classification of different crimes. Next, I will briefly discuss the situation in Cracow after the outbreak of World War II and the resulting increase in crime in the city, in particular in the Jewish community. For this purpose, I will provide statistical data on the crimes most frequently committed by Jews (individually or as part of organized gangs) in the years 1939–1941, i.e., from the outbreak of the war up to the establishment of the Cracow ghetto. I will also refer to the activities of Jewish and Polish-Jewish gangs, as well as to the collaboration between different groups in the Polish-Jewish criminal underworld. These groups interpenetrated each other, as evidenced by the Yiddishisms that appeared in the criminal jargon still used today.

ghetto was fenced in with barbed wire, and later, with a wall with four gates. It was not fully isolated from the rest of the city, but the Vistula River was the only natural border between the two. The final “liquidation” of the ghetto began on March 13, 1943, when the SS, police and the SD troops gathered 6,000–8,000 Jews and transported them to the nearby Plaszow concentration camp. Next day, on March 14, 1943, during the liquidation of the ghetto, Germans murdered between 700 and 2,500 people, approx. 2,000–3,000 people were transported to KL Auschwitz and approx. 8,000 to ZAL Plaszow.

¹² Jarkowska, *Brunatna pajęczyna*.

3. Terminology and categories of crime

According to the Polish Code of Criminal Law of 1932 (known as the Makarewicz Code), which was still in force during World War II, the term “criminal” applied to any person who committed an act prohibited and punishable by the law in force at the time of its commission.¹³ A “criminal offense” included such punishable acts as theft, burglary, robbery, murder, fraud, assault, extortion, etc. The Makarewicz Code consisted of 295 articles contained in 42 chapters (26 of them included a catalogue of specific crimes with definitions) and constituted the basis for the interpretation of the law in German-occupied Poland. The Criminal Code of 1932 only applied to criminal cases heard in Polish courts. Common German courts and special courts in the General Government were governed by the law in force in the Third Reich. Cases involving felonies committed by people of Polish nationality were dealt with by both German and Polish courts. Polish courts were competent to hear specific cases only when the jurisdiction of German courts did not apply.¹⁴ Until 1942, cases involving criminals of Jewish origin were heard by the Polish justice system together with defendants of other nationalities or religions. According to the digest of criminal cases heard by the District Court in Cracow, the crimes most often committed by Jews in the first months of the war (up until December 1939) were forgery, embezzlement, “causing bodily harm or injury to another,” and, less often, fraud. In 1940, most cases concerned theft, fencing, fraud, forgery of documents, and misappropriation. Similar crimes were committed in the following year. In turn, cases concerning black marketeering and attempted bribery were more often brought before the Municipal Court. Criminal cases involving Jews were also heard by the *Sondergericht*,¹⁵ which at the same time adjudicated in cases in which Jews had been accused of failing to comply with anti-Jewish legislation, e.g., for such offenses as failing to wear the mandatory Star of David armband, traveling without appropriate documents, traveling in a section reserved exclusively for Germans or remaining in the city during the curfew. The matter of judicial jurisdiction in the General Government depended not only on the nationality of the accused in a case or its nature, but also on the circumstances. For example, in accordance with the law in force at that time a Jew who

¹³ Polish Criminal Code of 1932 in: Sobolewski, Laniewski, *Polski kodeks karny*.

¹⁴ For a broader description of the justice system in the occupied country, see e.g. Wrzyszczyk, *Okupacyjne sądownictwo niemieckie*; Wrzyszczyk, “Tworzenie okupacyjnego wymiaru sprawiedliwości”; Wrzyszczyk, “Organizacja niemieckiego resortu sprawiedliwości”; Kurkowska, „Procedura karna na ziemiach polskich”; Górski, “Wymiar sprawiedliwości na ziemiach polskich”; Mielnik, “«In the Name of the Law»”; Diemut, “*Non-Germans*” under the Third Reich; Mielnik, „Prawo sprawdzenia prawomocnych orzeczeń”.

¹⁵ “As far as proceedings against Jews are concerned, the collected source material includes 59 cases from the years 1939–1942 (the last surviving judicial decisions date from July 1942) brought against 101 Jews (81 men and 20 women). Of this total, 10 were acquitted, 29 received prison sentences, 59 were sentenced to hard labor, in the case of one person the proceedings were suspended, in another an objection to an order of summary punishment was rejected (which resulted in the order becoming final), while in the case of another there is no information on how the matter was finalized. The statistics regarding the classification of acts committed by Jewish defendants differed from judicial decisions as a whole – 23% were classified as criminal acts, 41% as economic acts and 36% as political acts. As a consequence, although in the rulings of the Cracow court there was a tendency to classify acts as criminal, in the case of Jews it was the rarest category assigned.” Graczyk, „«Stoleczny» Sondergericht”, 49–50.

stole items belonging to another Jew (or a Pole or a Ukrainian) would be tried by a Polish court; on the other hand, if the theft was committed, for example, on the premises of a German production plant, the case would fall within the jurisdiction of a German court (*Deutsche Gericht*). If the perpetrator had been convicted multiple times before and fit the Nazi concept of a habitual criminal, the case would be taken on by a special court (*Sondergericht*). If the subject of the theft was a firearm, the case would probably be heard by a summary court (*Standgericht*). All the above cases were of a “criminal” nature, and hence the ambiguity and vagueness of the system are visible. I do not classify the latter acts as criminal offenses and have excluded them from further analysis.

Crime is an extremely complex phenomenon affecting all social and religious groups. The destabilization of a society strengthens and consolidates criminal groups, and the line between impunity and crime becomes blurred. As I have already mentioned, criminals exhibited a certain continuity in their behavior and demonstrated an ability to adapt to the current situation. Economic, social, political, legal and administrative chaos all contributed to a higher incidence of crime. Crime statistics indicated an increase in unlawful activity (including theft, burglary, robbery, black marketeering, etc.) in Cracow.¹⁶ The police maintained surveillance of both national and religious minorities (Germans, Ukrainians, Jews) and political movements (including communist organizations) to detect if any offenses were being committed. Perpetrators of felonies included both people known to the pre-war justice system and those who had not previously been in trouble with the law. The case was similar with organized criminal gangs, including Polish-Jewish gangs involved in theft or smuggling rings, as well as people of Jewish origin acting independently. These networks were based not only on personal and commercial contacts, but also on family ties. And what they had in common was a desire for profit.

The German occupation radically changed the pre-war social fabric of Cracow, overturning many norms and values. It deprived many people of an opportunity to earn a living, sometimes pushing entire families to the very margins of society, which in turn led to a rise in crime. The outbreak of the war likewise encouraged professional criminals to regroup and revise their skills. Wartime conditions gave rise to new, previously unknown categories of crime, such as blackmail, which will be discussed in more detail later. In 1940, there was a surge in the number of offenses committed by professional criminals operating in Jewish or Polish-Jewish gangs. They specialized in, among other things, fraud, extortion, theft and burglary. The local press warned about the dangers awaiting the inhabitants of Cracow. The following quote, although it comes from the *Goniec Krakowski*, a news and propaganda daily published by the GG occupation authorities, reflects the atmosphere during this period:

In recent days, organized gangs of fraudsters and swindlers have begun to roam around Cracow in large numbers, exploiting the human misery brought on by the war. The victims of these fraudsters are from various social backgrounds, and have been forced to sell the last of their valuable keepsakes. Wedding rings and engagement rings have become the spoils of individuals devoid of

¹⁶ Chwalba, *Dzieje Krakowa*; Czocher, *W okupowanym Krakowie*; Jarkowska, “Criminal Cases Involving Jews”. The problem of crime in Poland during World War II has been tackled by, among others, Strzembosz, “Przestępczość i okupacja”, 7–24; Salmonowicz, “Patologie społeczne okresu okupacji hitlerowskiej”; Piątkowski, “Bandytyzm i inne formy przestępczości kryminalnej”; Piątkowski, “Przestępczość w okupowanej Warszawie”.

any human feelings. In most cases, these tricksters willingly offered to act as supposedly selfless intermediaries in the sale of valuable items. They extorted from their victims gems and jewelry to show to potential buyers, only to make off with the jewels, regardless of the fact that their victims were already in a dire situation. The Directorate of the Criminal Police in Cracow has committed itself to fighting these gangs and has recently eliminated several fraudsters, whose names will be made public. However, punishment of the guilty often comes too late because the fraudsters are no longer in possession of the misappropriated items. We urge you to exercise extreme caution when dealing with suspicious “intermediaries” selling jewelry. If you are forced by circumstances to sell valuable items, you are best advised to hand over the item to the actual buyer, while collecting the payment directly, but in cash. Any mediation in the sale should be remunerated in accordance with a contract, as in a commercial transaction. But you must not be talked into giving the offered item to a person you do not trust. By taking the right steps, you will avoid many unpleasant situations. We also appeal to the public to cooperate with the police in detecting dishonest fraudsters. With this in mind, we advise the community to help its own people as much as it can, as it can protect those with limited knowledge and too much faith in human honesty from any serious losses.¹⁷

The criminal underworld from Cracow and its surrounding towns had already been operating on a large scale many years before the outbreak of World War II, and even before the Great War. It was made up of gangs comprising Poles or Jews exclusively as well as mixed groups, by which I mean Polish-Jewish gangs. These interconnections are evident, for example, in the criminal jargon used, and more precisely, in the existence of lexical Yiddishisms such as: *git* (col.) – “good, great, perfect” (Yidd. *gut טוט* – “good”); *sitwa* (col.) – “a group of people cooperating and supporting each other in order to promote their own interests to the detriment of society,” “clique, coterie” (Yidd. *szutfes שותפות* – “community, participation, partnership”; Heb. שותפות “partnership, community”). Also: *machlojka* (Yidd. “nasty business”); *den* (Yidd. “a hideout where thieves spend the night”); and *gnes* (Yidd. 1. “dirt,” 2. “misdemeanor”). These words entered the local criminal argot and some of them even penetrated everyday language (others have disappeared)¹⁸ and are still in use to this day. Moreover, the Yiddish spoken by Jews was an international language, connecting Jewish criminal groups from various countries in Central and Eastern Europe and making it easier for them to communicate with each other and undertake joint criminal ventures.

Jewish criminals were active throughout Cracow, and their victims were primarily residents of Cracow’s Old Town as well as its Kazimierz, Stradom and Podgórze districts, where many Jewish enterprises, shops, etc., were located.¹⁹ In fact, we may be tempted to say that Kazimierz was the center of the Jewish underworld. Many criminals came from this part of the city where their families had lived for many generations, while others originated from nearby towns or, at the end of the 1930s, from the Third Reich hoping to escape the harsh anti-Jewish laws there. It should be pointed out, however, that criminals born and living in Kazimierz did not limit their interests to the city, but

¹⁷ *Goniec Krakowski* 257 (5.11.1940), 5.

¹⁸ See Małocha, “Żydowskie zapożyczenia leksykalne”; Geller, “Spory o genezę języka jidysz”; Rak, “Kilka uwag o socjolekcie przestępczym”; Pacuła, “O kilku judaikach”.

¹⁹ *Melde- und Fahndungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement, herausgegeben vom Befehlshaber der SP. u. d. SD. (Gruppe IV) Krakau = Dziennik Inwigilacyjny dla Generalnego Gubernatorstwa, wydawany przez Dowódcę Pol. Bezpiecz. i Służby Bezpiecz. (Grupa IV), w Krakowie. Based on an analysis of issues published between 1940 and 1944.*

also operated further afield, throughout occupied Poland, the Third Reich, the former Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary, including Berlin, Vienna, Budapest and Prague.

In pursuit of its criminal objectives the Jewish underworld made use of its pre-war contacts. One example of how these contacts were thus exploited was a case involving a Jew by the name of Jakub Schwarz before the German Special Court in Cracow in December 1940. In the indictment, Schwarz was accused of being a professional currency smuggler. He had already been convicted of perjury and arson, and in 1920 he had stood trial for practicing usury.²⁰ In German court, he admitted to smuggling various goods worth 17,500 zlotys into Slovakia from the General Government. He also smuggled 2,000 German marks purchased on the black market and sold 300 US dollars in an illegal transaction without reporting it to the Bank of Issue in Poland (*Emissionsbank in Polen*) in time. Schwarz operated as part of a larger group of Jews, some of whom had already been tried, while several others involved in the scandal escaped. Unfortunately, we do not know their personal details. During the hearing, the court sentenced the resourceful defendant to a total of 3 years imprisonment with hard labor and ordered him to pay a fine of 50,000 zlotys, which, if not paid, would be converted into a longer period of incarceration, amounting to 100 zlotys for each day of imprisonment. In its verdict, the court declared that, although the accused should also be deprived of his civil rights, this was not possible because he was a Slovak citizen.²¹

Some of the criminal gangs in occupied Cracow comprised thieves and racketeers smuggling stolen goods from the Aryan side into the ghetto, where they offered them for sale to other Jews. They mainly handled basic necessities that were missing in the ghetto, such as food, clothing, and footwear. They also handled valuables entrusted to them by Jews in the ghetto who wanted them smuggled into the Aryan side, where they wished to sell them to their friends. Fraud was a factor in many of these transactions, and the victims were often people who handed over valuable items to the smugglers. One fence who acted as an intermediary in the sale of stolen goods between a gang and buyers was actually a Jewish policeman by the name of Natan Herman.

After the outbreak of World War II, the Jewish underworld continued its illicit dealings unchanged, only adapting to the new conditions brought about by the German occupation, one particular example of which was the “Gestapo man” method of theft whereby criminals would steal from unattended apartments, shops, material warehouses, etc., or commit fraud and theft by impersonating members of the Volksdeutsche and Reichsdeutsche. Moreover, criminals would extort money from people who wanted to get their loved ones out of prison, citing their alleged connections among the Gestapo, Kripo and German officialdom.

Some criminals continued to operate in organized gangs. A number of these were purely Jewish or Polish in composition, but the majority were mixed Polish and Jewish. Jewish criminal networks sometimes comprised family members, including spouses, cousins, and siblings. Among the hundreds of criminal cases heard by the District Court in Cracow in 1940, about 70 concerned Jewish criminals. In 35 of these 70 cases, the crimes were committed by gangs comprising between 2 and 10 members, of which in as many as 30 cases there was mixed ethnicity, i.e., Polish and Jewish. However, only

²⁰ ANK, file no. 2099/19 (digest for 1920); *ibid.*, file no. 29/442/17680.

²¹ *Goniec Krakowski* 285 (7.12.1940), 4.

5 gangs were made up solely of Jewish members. The remaining court cases involved individuals of Jewish origin. In the following year, 1941, the members of 16 criminal gangs were detained and imprisoned, and 11 of these gangs were mixed Polish-Jewish organizations. A significant change in the number of such gangs occurred with the establishment of the ghetto in Cracow and the tightening of anti-Jewish laws. From the beginning of the occupation, the priority for the Germans was fighting crime *per se* and clamping down on the activities of the local underground. It also stemmed from a desire to highlight the superiority of the Germanic race over the Slavs and the Jews, showing how it was only the Germans who knew how to maintain law and order in the territories they conquered. SS-Brigadeführer Bruno Streckenbach, the then acting head of Sipo and SD in the General Government, referred to this fact in an interview published in *Krakauer Zeitung*. Streckenbach, in line with German policy, equated members of the resistance with criminals and boasted of liquidating two criminal gangs during which the German police managed to kill “the king of burglars in Cracow.”²²

The offences most frequently committed by organized criminal gangs were felonies, in particular burglary, robbery, including with the use of a dangerous weapon, handling stolen goods and fraud (involving currency, property, and foreign exchange). Professional criminals specialized in forging documents, including various types of certificates, as well as counterfeiting money, including foreign currency. These actions were dictated purely by a desire to make a profit and not by any feeling of altruism for their “clients” or a wish to help them survive both before and during the establishment of the ghetto. Jewish criminals included in their ranks individuals who collaborated with the Gestapo as agents. They used confidential ID cards issued by the Gestapo to commit acts of extortion, blackmail, fraud and to seize property. One such pre-war criminal was Szymon Spitz, a member of the Diamant network organized by the Gestapo in Cracow, who during the Second Polish Republic had spent several years in prison for fraud.²³ During the war, Spitz extorted money from Jews from Cracow and Bochnia, promising to help them make the journey from the General Government to Hungary, when in actual fact the victims ended up losing their money, being arrested by the Gestapo and deported to concentration camps. One of Spitz’s victims was a young girl, Maryla Schenker, whom Spitz, through a friend, agreed to help travel to the Netherlands. However, Maryla was actually transported to KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, while her parents never recovered the money they had paid to Spitz in the form of a bribe.²⁴ Eventually, however, justice was eventually served as Spitz ended up himself being executed by Polish Home Army counterintelligence.²⁵ Besides Spitz, other Jewish criminals were involved in extortion and fraud, among them Maurycy Diamant and Aleksander Förster, who were also Gestapo agents. However, I was unable to confirm whether they were active in the criminal underworld before 1939. During the war, Diamant and Förster contributed to numerous arrests of people who approached them hoping to acquire foreign documents or who asked them for help in escaping to Hungary

²² *Krakauer Zeitung* (22 and 23.11.1939) – Interview with the Gestapo in Cracow. See: <https://niemieckikrakowblog.wordpress.com/2023/03/20/wywiad-z-gestapo-w-krakowie/> (access: 18.09.2024).

²³ Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów*, 172.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁵ AIPN Kr, file no. 075/1, vol. 17, Sprawa obiektowa kryptonim „RO-1” dot. działalności wywiadu i kontrwywiadu niemieckiego oraz osób współpracujących z wywiadem w czasie okupacji na terenie województwa krakowskiego (1943–1955), p. 58.

from the General Government. I have not found any examples of Jewish criminals forging employment cards, an area in which, among others, Rzymczak's network organized by the Gestapo in Cracow specialized.²⁶

4. Criminal activities of the Jewish underworld in Cracow. Selected examples

According to Anna Czocher's findings, the highest percentage of inmates in Cracow's prisons at the beginning of the war were incarcerated for robbery, burglary, grand theft and hold-ups. The dominant groups of offenders in the penitentiary on Senacka Street, for example, were thieves, receivers of stolen goods, fraudsters and blackmailers. Their loot consisted of items that were scarce during the war, such as underwear, bedding, clothing, food, tobacco, milk, tableware, fuel, and cotton fabrics. Theft most often involved breaking into apartments and attics.²⁷ The perpetrators of these crimes were both Poles and Jews, and one member of the latter group even earned the moniker the "king of burglars" in the local criminal community. Such a conclusion can be drawn from the digest of criminal cases of the District Court in Cracow from September 1939 to mid-1942.

From the very first days of the war, many criminals, sensing opportunities to be made from the mass flight of Jews from the city, began to break into and steal from private apartments, shops and warehouses that had been left unattended. After the occupation, the authorities introduced anti-Jewish regulations and tougher anti-Jewish laws, so criminals blackmailed their co-religionists and robbed them using the "Gestapo man" technique. Like Polish blackmailers, Jews took advantage of the difficult plight their co-religionists found themselves in. The former forced the latter to pay tribute in the form of cash or valuable items in exchange for not informing the German police services of their failure to comply with certain regulations such as, for example, possessing valuable items and foreign currencies, staying in a given area without permission, or failing to wear an armband with the Star of David.

The few surviving sources make it difficult to estimate the scale of crimes committed by people of Jewish origin in Cracow. One reference point we have is the criminal cases heard by the District Court in Cracow and that court's surviving digest. On their basis, we can provide an initial approximation of the number of acts committed by Jews that the court classified as crimes in occupied Cracow. However, it is necessary to separate those criminal cases in which the perpetrators were Jewish individuals from acts committed by Jewish victims of the German policy of extermination, which were classified as crimes. This was not always possible due to the limited documentation available. The majority of cases involving people of Jewish origin heard between the outbreak of the war and the end of 1939 concerned the forgery of documents. The scale of this phenomenon was relatively small compared to the total number of crimes committed. Out of several hundred cases heard during this period, only 43 Jews were charged with falsifying official papers

²⁶ Jarkowska, *Brunatna pajęczyna*.

²⁷ Czocher, "Drobna przestępczość pospolita w okupowanym Krakowie", 125–7.

(including 5 identity cards). However, it is not known how many of the accused were professional criminals. During this period, 11 Jews were charged with theft and wrongful appropriation. The following year, 62 defendants were charged with theft and another 38 with receiving stolen goods. A total of 13 people were tried for fighting in public, causing “medium bodily harm” and fraud, while only 10 were accused of forging documents. In 1941, there were 60 cases pending against defendants of Jewish origin charged with receiving stolen goods, 59 with theft and 25 with forgery.²⁸ In 1941, the number of crimes against property increased, which was probably due to the deteriorating situation of Jewish inhabitants in Cracow, and a significant percentage of the accused were probably people committing crimes out of “necessity.” Pre-war criminals adapted to the new reality, and thanks to their professional know-how, they managed to avoid arrest to a greater extent than inexperienced victims of the war.

Moreover, some Jewish criminals based in Cracow made use of their pre-war international contacts in cities such as Vienna, Prague, Budapest and Berlin, most often in connection with foreign exchange crimes and cross-border smuggling, including into areas incorporated into the Third Reich. One example of a gang that operated in this way was a Polish-Jewish network active in Cracow, Będzin and Sosnowiec. At the time, these cities were located in two administrative zones: the General Government and the Third Reich. Although Będzin and Sosnowiec were only 90 km away from Cracow, they were officially German cities. The above-mentioned gang was comprised of at least 4 Jews and 2 Poles whom we know by name. Its members included Hirsz Puder, Majer Fischbein, Dawid Herzberg, Fajga Puder, a man called Julian and a certain Dorabiała. What was their *modus operandi*? According to the police investigation, H. Puder, Fischbein and Herzberg bought Polish 100- and 500-zloty banknotes withdrawn from circulation in Cracow, which were then smuggled into the Third Reich hidden in bags or thermoses by Dorabiała. They were then exchanged for banknotes “in batches of up to 50 zloty.” Dorabiała sold some of the banknotes for German marks, and then bought Polish currency in denominations of up to 50 zloty.

The Polish banknotes obtained in this way were smuggled by the same individual back into the General Government where, with the help of his Jewish accomplices, they were converted into marks at the Bank of Issue in Poland. H. Puder, Fischbein and Dorabiała also bought gold in Warsaw and Cracow, which they then transported to Sosnowiec, where the accused F. Puder arranged further sales of the smuggled items. With the money obtained in this way, they once again bought 50-zloty Polish banknotes. H. Puder’s role was to buy foreign currency and smuggle the cash into the Reich with the help of Dorabiała. F. Puder was responsible for selling the smuggled foreign currencies on site, and she used the money to buy Polish banknotes. At the same time, German marks were also obtained, probably by Dorabiała, who smuggled them illegally into Cracow, where they were sold to “black market dealers.” The group was also involved in smuggling various goods from the Reich to the General Government, including women’s stockings, lighters, lighter stones, pocketknives, and needles, and these goods were then sold at what were called “profiteering prices,” i.e., inflated prices. These Polish-Jewish

²⁸ Based on the records of criminal cases from 1939–1944. It is important to note that in 1944 no criminal cases involving Jews were recorded. ANK, files no. 29/442/12400, 29/1988/2032, 29/1988/2033, 29/1988/2034.

criminals were probably arrested in 1940 because in 1941 they were already incarcerated in a Cracow prison. This case of foreign currency smuggling and customs violations was heard by the German Special Court in Cracow, which in February 1941 sentenced H. Puder to 3 years of hard labor, F. Puder to 1 year in prison, Fischbein to 3 years of hard labor, Dorabiała to 2 years in prison, and Herzberg to 15 months in prison. Moreover, the court stripped H. Puder and Fischbein of their honorary citizenship rights for a period of 5 years. Fischbein and Dorabiała also received fines of 5,000 zlotys and 7,000 zlotys, respectively, and “the sums of money seized from the two defendants were officially confiscated.”²⁹ It cannot be stated unequivocally whether or not they were professional criminals before the war, but the fact that this group was well organized and engaged in complex activities suggests a certain level of previous experience in this field.

As has already been mentioned, the victims of such crimes were very often Jews who had decided to flee to the eastern territories of the former Second Polish Republic, mainly to Lviv, leaving their shops, houses, apartments, workshops, and enterprises unattended and unsupervised, which encouraged all forms of looting and petty crime. The police often learned about these crimes from Jews returning to Cracow or from their Polish and Jewish neighbors. One Polish-Jewish gang that preyed on such victims from the very beginning of the occupation was a led by a Pole, Henryk Rumiński.³⁰ Different members of the gang were responsible for different tasks. Jews selected and observed victims from among their wealthy co-religionists and then passed on this information to their Christian accomplices. They committed the actual thefts together. The gang adopted a similar approach when it came to blackmail and extortion. Polish criminals often pretended to be German officers or officials, demanding that their prey hand over their valuables or face arrest. As in the case of the burglaries, the victims were singled out by Jewish members of the group who knew which wealthy people of Jewish origin were hiding their assets from the occupier. Often, after committing a crime, it was the Jewish members of the gang who would sell the stolen valuables to fences they knew, including a number of Jews. Some of the items plundered in this way could then be purchased at the local bazaar on Cracow’s Grzegórzecka Street, which local residents called the “Tandeta” (Junk Street). Rumiński’s gang operated primarily in the Kazimierz, Podgórze and Stradom districts, i.e., in places inhabited largely by Jews. The police identified the names of only two Jewish members of this gang, a certain Schonberg and Kos, although there were actually more. Based on the trial records, we can conclude that their roles in the gang involved selecting Jewish victims, transporting stolen items and handling stolen goods.

Rumiński’s gang were responsible for a number of attic thefts in Kazimierz and Stradom. The victims of these lootings were exclusively Jews. Interestingly, court records also reveal that the victims were almost exclusively women, whose losses were estimated in the region of several thousand zlotys. Based on their testimonies and identification of the seized items, the police managed to bring charges against the perpetrators for their involvement in these crimes.

²⁹ *Goniec Krakowski* 30 (6.02.1941), 4.

³⁰ I first described this case in: Jarkowska, “Criminal Cases Involving Jews”. I am currently presenting my latest findings on this topic.

According to the trial records, it was established that Rumiński's gang members included both Poles and Jews, were aged between 18 and 26, and included one woman (a fence). Most of the members of this group lived in Cracow and resided on Dietla, Batorego, and Wrzesińska Streets as well as on Szczepański Square.³¹

The police made their first arrests in August 1940, after the gang's boss, Henryk Rumiński, provided them with details of his accomplices: Stanisław Marc, Ludwik Wilhelm Bałucki, Stefan Turchan, Kazimierz Rumiński, Stanisław Górski, Marian Marzec, Władysław Marzec and the group's suspected accomplices Helena Jeziorska and Jan Galos. Rumiński explained his involvement in the crime as follows:

I stole these goods out of greed, for personal gain, and from my exposure to undesirable elements and the fantasies of reading too many crime novels. [...] I admit to committing all these offenses and I regret having done them. I'm glad I was caught by the police, ending a life of crime that would have led me to God knows where.³²

Rumiński was already known to the police. His name was mentioned in the trial of Ludwik Bałucki, who had been accused of robbing the Hollanders' apartment at 22/2 Wielopole Street in November 1939. After the Hollanders left Cracow, the apartment was placed under the care of their maid, Maria Okoń. The latter, in collaboration with Tadeusz Nowicki, residing at 8/15 Blich Street, as well as Bałucki and Rumiński, stole the Hollanders' possessions. Rumiński was not convicted in this case, but after he was arrested again in December 1940, he admitted to his involvement in the "attic raids" at 7, 9 and 11 Wrzesińska Street as well as to committing blackmail and extortion while posing as a Gestapo officer. Rumiński, aka Herbert Masłowski,³³ did not confess immediately to stealing anything from the attics on Dietla Street. Stanisław Marzec initially admitted to his involvement in the crimes mentioned by Rumiński, but a few months later he withdrew his confession. When interrogated by the police, Stanisław Górski turned out to be a relative of Rumiński, and his task was to store and sell stolen goods in an apartment at 34 Starowiślna Street, and prepare lockpicks for thieves.³⁴ Moreover, during certain illegal transactions he pretended to be a representative of the Tram Directorate in Cracow.

The first hearing of the case before the District Court in Cracow took place on March 10 and 11, 1941. Only three defendants appeared in court: Rumiński, M. Marzec and Galos. W. Marzec was by that time being detained in a prison in Tarnów. According to the testimony of the warden of the prison on Cracow's Montelupich Street, Rumiński, S. Marzec, Bałucki, Turchau and Górski had been "taken away by the German authorities to an unknown place before the start of the criminal trial."³⁵ Rumiński and M. Marzec were sentenced to 8 months in prison, while Galos and Jeziorska were acquitted. The verdict was appealed and subsequent hearings were held in May and October 1941 and February, March and June 1942. The proceedings were concluded in May 1943. Ten

³¹ ANK, file no. 29/1988/2066.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

³³ Rumiński was born in 1919 in Cracow and after graduating from primary school he became a telegraphist.

³⁴ ANK, file no. 29/1988/2066, pp. 71–2, 93.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

witnesses and, at the same time, victims of Rumiński's gang did not attend the trial, probably having been killed during Operation Reinhardt.³⁶ Most criminals avoided punishment due to their whereabouts being unknown.

A number of exclusively Jewish gangs also operated in Cracow. The members of one such gang included Nehemiah Engelstein, Isaac Hacker and Joseph Goldfinger.³⁷ The police arrested them for a crime committed on March 1, 1941, namely, breaking into Lejb Leiserowicz's apartment at 5/5 Rejtana Street using a duplicate key, and making off with goods worth a total of 1,000 zlotys. Based on the type of goods stolen (bed linen, women's and men's clothing) and their total value, it can be assumed that the injured party was not a wealthy person. In his crime report, Leiserowicz testified:

I suspect two people of this theft, Jews, who go around without wearing armbands. As I found out, one of these individuals is called Maks Goldfinger, age 21, who is a friend of Henryk Pechman, residing in Cracow at 15 Augustiańska Street, flat 23. The second individual, N. Natek, wears a black jacket and boots and is a friend of Maks Goldfinger.³⁸

The perpetrators of the offense, having learned that the police were on to them, returned some of the stolen items to the victim, probably counting on the charges being dropped or on the court treating them more leniently.³⁹ The police detained Goldfinger, Engelstein and Hacker after setting a trap in the "Słania" restaurant on Legionów Street in Podgórze district. The perpetrators admitted to committing the theft, and in their statements to the police they tried to downplay their role in the crime. They declared, among other things, that they had no previous convictions and claimed that they had returned the stolen items after learning that the injured party was not a wealthy person. In fact, as the police found out, they were professional criminals with previous convictions for theft, forgery and making false accusations. Ultimately, on April 2, 1942, when the ghetto was already in existence, Goldfinger and Engelstein were sentenced to several months in prison (Engelstein – 8 months, Goldfinger – 6 months). The court of second instance counted the period of detention at 3 Czarneckiego Street as part of their sentence. Only Hacker, at that time probably hiding in the ghetto at 7/17 Krakusa Street, avoided conviction. At a closed session in April 1943, a month after the liquidation of the ghetto, the District Court suspended the proceedings against Hacker due to the impossibility of determining his place of residence.⁴⁰ He probably shared the fate of other Cracow Jews condemned to death in the Holocaust.

Professional counterfeiters and fraudsters continued to remain active, adapting their criminal operations to the newly emerging conditions. Just as some of them had done before the war, they often impersonated peddlers, watchmakers, officials and functionaries of the new wartime administration subordinate to the German occupiers. One example is the story of an unknown Jew who posed as a watchmaker and who, under the guise of repairing watches, stole 3 gold women's watch cases from a one Maria Bryła from

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 447–52.

³⁷ This case was first discussed in Jarkowska, "Criminal Cases Involving Jews", 10.

³⁸ ANK, file no. 29/1988/2139, p. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Krowoderska Street in Cracow under the pretext of taking them away in order to replace their glass.⁴¹

One Polish-Jewish criminal gang tried to take over the ownership of an inn in Cracow by forging notarial documents. The victim in this case was a Jewish woman by the name of Pesla Klein, and the perpetrators of the fraud were Ernst Feingold, a Jew, and Ludwik Włodarczyk, a Pole to whom ownership of the premises was to be transferred. This case is another example where the perpetrator committed a prohibited act to the detriment of another Jew who was a victim of German repression. Due to the impossibility of determining the whereabouts of the accused, in 1940 the Prosecutor's Office of the District Court in Cracow suspended the case against Feingold.⁴²

One swindler who operated on a larger scale was Leib Gutman, who, posing as a Volksdeutsch, accepted fictitious orders from farmers and entrepreneurs for sugar, coal, household machines, hairdressing tools and flour, demanding from his victims advanced payments ranging from 20 zlotys to 150 zlotys. He operated in the Cracow, Radom and Warsaw regions, while also offering assistance to those arrested by intervening with the police. To give the fraud a semblance of authenticity, he had his victims present him with photos and documents of the detainees. When detained by the police, Gutman admitted that he had defrauded victims of around 1,200 zlotys in this way. No court records regarding his case have survived, but warnings against him were made in the press at the time.⁴³

Another individual involved in fraudulent practices was a Jewish woman by the name of Sara Wortsman, accused of forgery and extorting large sums of money from two Polish women, Olga Gałkówka and Zofia Bąk, in the summer of 1940. Wortsman stole several hundred zlotys from the victims' accounts at the Communal Savings Bank (*Komunalna Kasa Oszczędności*) by forging their signatures on their pay slips. On October 1, 1942, a 15-minute court hearing ended with the proceedings being suspended after the court was notified of Wortsman's death.⁴⁴

Jewish criminals in occupied Cracow were not immune themselves to the settling of mutual scores, or to being victims of each other's crimes. In the spring of 1940, the Emergency Medical Service was called out to Świętego Stanisława Street in Kazimierz district to pick up a 31-year-old victim of a stabbing by the name of Moses Flaumenhalf and take him to the Jewish Hospital. The man "had received a stab wound in the chest from another Jew."⁴⁵ Another incident, in September that year, involved robbery and theft. The victim was Karol Sitarz, attacked on the Vistula embankment by Henryk Grossler and Michał Berger who stunned him with a blunt instrument and took his watch and 40 zlotys. Sitarz had been returning home after an evening drinking alcohol in one of Cracow's pubs. The court did not believe Grossler and Berger's claims that there had been a misunderstanding between the men and sentenced Grossler to 1 year and 6 months in prison.⁴⁶

⁴¹ *Goniec Krakowski* 190 (17.08.1940), 5.

⁴² Jarkowska, "Criminal Cases Involving Jews".

⁴³ *Dziennik Inwigilacyjny* 3 (16.01.1940), 17.

⁴⁴ Jarkowska, "Criminal Cases Involving Jews", 17.

⁴⁵ *Goniec Krakowski* 99 (1.05.1940), 5.

⁴⁶ *Goniec Krakowski* 157 (8.07.1941), 2.

Disputes and misunderstandings between criminals sometimes occurred when dividing up and selling the spoils of their crimes. At 9:00 a.m. on February 27, 1942, the body of Ajla Schlama was found on the street in a pool of blood. The man bled to death shortly afterwards. He was a man of “good build, moderately nourished, 171 cm.”⁴⁷ Schlama was killed by his companion, Samuel Glogover, during a fight at 6 Węgieńska Street. A few days before the murder, Glogover and Schlama had burgled an apartment in a building at 25 Zielona Street (today’s Sarego Street), making off with valuable women’s and men’s clothing belonging to the owners of the premises. The two then quarrelled over how to divide up the loot, which ended in Schlama’s death.⁴⁸ The police arrested Glogover, and his trial took place in September 1941. The court issued its verdict in June 1942. Glogover was found guilty of the murder of Schlama as well as burglary and sentenced to 9 years in prison. Additionally, a Jewish woman, Sara Freiman, was sentenced to 6 months in prison for selling some of the items obtained from the theft at a flea market. In April 1942, two months before the deportation of Cracow Jews to the Belzec extermination camp, a higher court rejected Glogover’s appeal of the verdict.⁴⁹

5. Burglary – *modus operandi*

Pre-war thieves and pickpockets, both those acting alone and those in organized gangs, continued to operate in occupied Cracow. Based on the already mentioned court digest of criminal cases, I determined that the highest number of cases of theft involving Jews were handled by the court in 1940, when it heard 62 such cases. In the following year, it considered 60 cases, while in 1942, there were 7 cases on the docket and in 1943 only 3. The situation was different when it came to fencing. In 1940, 37 people of Jewish origin were accused of this crime, but by 1941 this number had risen to 60. This in turn was followed, as in the case of thefts, by a sharp drop in 1942 and 1943, when the number of cases heard was 16 and 1, respectively.⁵⁰ This decline in recorded crime and the subsequent lack of records in later years of the war were probably due to the establishment of the ghetto in March 1941, the decision to deprive Jews of their civil rights, and Operation Reinhardt. In the ghetto, such matters as bringing a suspect into detention or for interrogation in court or searching for thieves in hot pursuit were the responsibility of the Jewish police who had their own detention center, first at 14 Józefińska Street and later at 37 Józefińska Street. It is important to add here that, before the ghetto was established, police cells were located at 6 Estery Street, and later at 41 Krakowska Street, although no records have survived. Nor have I found any documents prepared by the court responsible for hearing cases in the Cracow ghetto.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Archives of the Department of Forensic Medicine, autopsy report, 066s.

⁴⁸ Jarkowska, “Criminal Cases Involving Jews”, 12.

⁴⁹ ANK, file no. 29/1988/2106.

⁵⁰ Based on the records of criminal cases from 1939–1944, with the emphasis that in 1944 no criminal cases involving Jews were recorded. ANK, files no. 29/442/12400, 29/1988/2032, 29/1988/2033, 29/1988/2034.

⁵¹ So far, I have found individual documents drafted by the Arbitration Court.

Thefts committed by Jews made up an insignificant percentage of the several hundred criminal cases examined by the Cracow court in the years 1939–1942. For the reasons described above, it is not possible to reliably determine the number of such crimes committed in later years of the occupation. We can assume, however, that criminal activity persisted, although it is difficult to estimate its scale due to subsequent deportations and the mass extermination of Cracow's Jews.

Jewish professional thieves also committed offenses against their co-religionists, including close family members. Two such examples are the cases of Jachweta Aronsohn and Izrael Artur Backeruoht. On July 22, 1940, Aronsohn reported to the police a break-in in her apartment, from which an unknown burglar had made off with her wardrobe and fur coats. The investigation revealed that the culprit was one Luber Pinkus, from whom the stolen items were recovered.⁵² In the same month, the District Court in Cracow heard a case involving a theft committed by Izrael Artur Backeruoht, a 16-year-old locksmith apprentice who had been stealing from his mother for several months and selling the items he got from her to Józef Bocher and Izrael Bressler, who then sold them on the black market.⁵³

In addition to thieves and fences, pickpockets and burglars were also tried by the Cracow District Court or the Cracow Magistrate's Court. In the summer of 1940, the police arrested Chiel Rosental for pickpocketing a wallet containing 688 zlotys,⁵⁴ and half a year later charged Icek Slupsker with stealing "a packet of tobacco, cigarettes and cigars" at the railway station.⁵⁵ Among the accused were a number of habitual criminals, including a pre-war thief by the name of Moses Rubin (convicted of theft in 1920, and acquitted of fraud in 1933⁵⁶) imprisoned for trading on the black market in 1940 and released after more than 2 weeks, while the fence Jonas Ehrenrich was imprisoned in June 1940 for illegally trading in fur (in 1935 he was sentenced to 5 months in prison for handling stolen goods).⁵⁷ Ehrenrich was released from prison in July 1941.⁵⁸ In 1941, another repeat offender, Kiwi Grunfeld, was sentenced to 4 years in prison. In December of the previous year, he had stolen a woman's fur coat, several pieces of women's underwear and bedding, worth over 2,500 zlotys from the apartment of a one Maria Ligeża. Despite escaping from the apartment, Grunfeld was arrested on the street by the police, who had been alerted by Ligeża, who had caught the thief red-handed.⁵⁹ On the other hand, 19-year-old Abraham Steiman, who had been accused of stealing clothes and underwear belonging to Maria Zuker with a total value of 12,000 zlotys, avoided punishment. The court, taking into account the fact that Steiman had no previous convictions, decided to acquit him.⁶⁰ Steiman did not act alone, but his accomplices could not be identified. Some criminals managed to escape

⁵² *Goniec Krakowski* 170 (25.07.1940), 4.

⁵³ *Goniec Krakowski* 35 (12.02.1941), 5.

⁵⁴ *Goniec Krakowski* 185 (11.08.1940), 4.

⁵⁵ *Goniec Krakowski* 16 (21.01.1941), 4.

⁵⁶ ANK, file no. 29/442/17680.

⁵⁷ ANK, file no. 29/442/12396, 29/442/12391.

⁵⁸ AIPN, GK 903/4: detention of people arrested by the security police in their prison on Montelupich Street in Cracow and the court's own prison on Senacka Street (1941–1944), pp. 84–5.

⁵⁹ *Goniec Krakowski* 79 (4.04.1941), 2; ANK, file no. 29/1988/2032.

⁶⁰ *Goniec Krakowski* 111 (14.05.1941), 3.

responsibility. This was the case with Henryk Immerglück, wanted by the police for a number of pickpocket thefts. He was arrested in Kielce, where he had been using the alias of Józef Karwacki. Immerglück was a professional pickpocket who had escaped from a transport to Cracow and was wanted by the police.⁶¹

At the same time, there were also a number of small gangs who carried out burglaries and looted Jewish property left unattended after the owners had fled to the east or which had previously been seized by a German trusteeship. Among those who took advantage of these circumstances were the Nowak brothers (Stanisław, Aleksander and Stefan) and two Jews by the name of Leon Truchtman and Raabe Rube, acting in concert, who on the night of November 22–23, 1940, broke into Hirsch Sontag's textile shop at 1 Bożego Ciała Street. They made off with cotton and woollen materials with a total value of approximately 20,000 zlotys. They managed to break into the premises by digging a hole in the neighboring tenement house at 3 Bożego Ciała Street, and punching holes in the basement walls to get into Sontag's store. Also located in the building (No. 3) was a confectionery shop, from where the same thieves stole confectionery products worth 200 zlotys. Following an investigation, members of the gang in question were detained. Rube admitted to participating in the burglary and theft, and provided the names of his accomplices, who denied the accusations during their trial, explaining their presence at the place where the crime was committed by their desire to help Jews take goods out of Sontag's store, which had been closed and confiscated by the German authorities. They also put the blame on professional criminals unknown to them by name and surname, who had allegedly entered the building at 1 Bożego Ciała Street. Due to a lack of sufficient evidence in the case and the fact that "this theft was committed for reasons beyond their control" in 1941 Stanisław Nowak, A. Nowak and Truchtman were sentenced to 8 months in prison and Stefan Nowak to 1 year of imprisonment. The proceedings against Rube were suspended.⁶²

One interesting case worth noting is a burglary that took place on Krakowska Street in the Kazimierz district⁶³ where many Jewish shops, enterprises, workshops, etc., operated. Polish-Jewish and Jewish gangs were involved in a variety of felonies in these places. With the outbreak of World War II, these establishments were placed under the management of German administrators. Only some Jewish owners retained control over their pre-war businesses despite being under the direct administration of the occupier. It was in these circumstances that Samuel Stieglitz's store, managed by a Czech administrator, Odo Nepotil, was burgled on the night of February 28–29, 1940, a fact which was also reported in the local press:

On the night of September 29/30, 1940, a burglary took place in a textile shop at 5 Krakowska Street, where unknown perpetrators dug into the basement and made off with textile goods worth 2,000 zlotys. They then tried to make their way over the roof of neighboring buildings to the street, but they were scared off by an approaching police patrol, abandoning their stolen goods and run-

⁶¹ *Goniec Krakowski* 147 (28.06.1940), 4; *Dziennik Inwigilacyjny* 20 (23.11.1940), 4.

⁶² *Goniec Krakowski* 162 (13.06.1941), 2; Court Digest for 1941; ANK, file no. 29/1988/2032.

⁶³ I mentioned this event for the first time in Jarkowska, "Criminal Cases Involving Jews", 10. Here the case is analyzed in detail.

ning away. The police managed to catch one of the perpetrators and the stolen goods were returned to the victim.⁶⁴

The theft in question was committed by a gang of professional criminals of both Polish and Jewish origin led by Józef Tislowitz, who operated under the alias “Ropuszka,” (literally: Baby Toad) a famous pre-war burglar known as the “king of thieves.” The thieves managed to get into the basement of the building before 8 p.m. on September 29, 1940, i.e., before the gate to the tenement was closed. After making a hole in the basement ceiling using tools (1 picklock, a crank, a ball and a drill), they managed to get inside the store, from where they then stole the above-mentioned textile goods. They made off with 36 textile goods (20 short items, 16 long items) worth in total 2,500 zlotys. When moving the looted goods between the courtyard behind 5 Krakowska Street and 3 Meiselsa Street, where they had bags for packing cotton linen ready in the basement, they were noticed by the custodian of the tenement building at 5 Meiselsa Street, who scared them off with her screams. As a consequence, the burglars tried to make their escape across the roofs towards Dietla Street, where, on the corner with Krakowska Street, they ran into a German police patrol, which opened fire on them with guns, resulting in the arrest of one of the suspects while the other three managed to escape.⁶⁵ A Polish police patrol also arrived at the scene and heard shots being fired nearby, on Świętej Katarzyny Street, where one of the thieves was being handed over to the nearby police station. After identifying the suspect at Polish Police Station No. 4 (40 Krakowska Street), it was determined that he was 33-year-old Mejslech Hirschorn, a tailor by profession (single) and a pre-war criminal with two previous convictions for theft (for which he had been sentenced to 6 and 8 months in prison, respectively). Then the policemen in the basement of the tenement at 3 Meiselsa Street secured the stolen goods and 3 bags with burglary tools, which they transported on a trolley to the aforementioned police station.⁶⁶

An inspection of the scene confirmed the gang’s *modus operandi* as well as the circumstances of the burglary and theft. Konarski, a police officer, received a statement from the detainee on the day of his arrest. Hirschorn then admitted his complicity in the burglary, while minimizing his role in the incident. He named as his accomplices a certain Gluckman and two men (Catholics), named Michał and Wojtek, about whom he could say nothing more. Hirschorn claimed that he and Gluckman had met by chance on the morning of September 29, 1940, on Józefa Street in Kazimierz and Hirschorn supposedly informed Gluckman about his difficult financial situation and lack of work, to which Gluckman suggested that he take part in a burglary he was planning. They agreed to meet at the same place at 7:30 p.m. and upon arrival Hirschorn found Gluckman in the company of two Roman Catholic Poles. Hirschorn then provided details regarding their arrest by the police. On the day Hirschorn was detained, i.e., September 30, 1940, the administrator of Stieglitz’s company, Odo Netopil, appeared at the Criminal Police Station No. 4 to collect the goods secured during the inspection. The goods were delivered against receipt by Simcha Goldman, the deputy administrator. At the same time, the police took steps to establish the details of the other perpetrators of the crime named by Hirschorn.

⁶⁴ *Goniec Krakowski* 231 (4.10.1940), 4.

⁶⁵ ANK, file no. 29/1988/2102.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

On the same day, the case was transferred to the Criminal Police Directorate in Cracow for further investigation. The next interrogation took place on March 3, 1941, and was conducted by Jan Tomkow, a detective sergeant from the Criminal Police Directorate in Cracow. Hirschorn changed his previous version of events, admitting only to having transferred the goods obtained from the crime scene, but denied any involvement in the burglary itself. Later in his statement he identified a number of other people as his accomplices, i.e., a certain Tislowitz, alias “Ropuszka,” a pre-war thief, as well as two “blond” individuals unknown to him by name and surname.⁶⁷

During the preparatory proceedings, the details of the accomplices named by Hirschorn were established. They were Józef Hochhejzer false Tislowitz alias “Ropuszka” (born in Cracow), who, according to my findings, in 1935 had been sentenced by the District Court in Cracow together with his partners (Eliakim Schonherz and Zbigniew Brzuszkiewicz), to 1 year in prison for theft. The only woman in this group (Regina Hochheiser) received a lower sentence of 8 months’ imprisonment. Returning once more to the burglary at 5 Krakowska Street, the case files contain information that the named accomplice of the crime, i.e., “Ropuszka”, was shot a week after the night guard’s incriminating statements while in the course of committing another crime. One of the documents reads:

Deceased, “king of burglars,” was killed by a night guard on Miodowa Street in front of the premises at No. 33, on the 10th this year [March 10, 1941]. The body of a man of strong build, well nourished, 163 cm in length. A leather dresser by profession, place of death: Miodowa Street.⁶⁸

It is also important to note that the preparatory proceedings were conducted despite the fact that the Germans were implementing plans to establish the Cracow ghetto at this time.⁶⁹

On May 8, 1941, the case was transferred to the District Court in Cracow. The first trial was scheduled to take place on May 20, 1941, but was suspended after Hirschorn was transferred to KL Auschwitz on April 5, 1941. However, this did not end the proceedings against him because on June 9, 1941, the Prosecutor of the District Court in Cracow sent an indictment dated June 7, 1941, to the Criminal District Court in Cracow against Hirschorn along with a request for a warrant for his arrest “due to ongoing fears of concealment and recidivism.”

The criminal record included in the case files indicates that Hirschorn was a professional criminal, convicted six times of theft and burglary and once for coercing a public official into refraining from performing his duty. At the next closed session on June 14, 1941, the District Court in Cracow, 4th Criminal Division, decided to suspend the proceedings because, according to documentation in the possession of the court, Hirschorn was now in a concentration camp (since April 1941). The last document in the files indicates that at the end of 1943 the case was sent to the archives as it had become impossible to determine the whereabouts of the accused.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Archives of the Department of Forensic Medicine, autopsy report, 079p.

⁶⁹ ANK, file no. 29/1988/2102.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

6. Conclusions

The outbreak of World War II and the anti-Jewish regulations introduced by the German authorities only had limited effect in curtailing the criminal activities of people of Jewish origin. Most criminals continued to operate, adapting to the changing conditions brought about by the war and the occupation. They relied on pre-war networks to pursue common interests. As the occupiers' treatment of Jews became increasingly repressive, the scope for action of criminals became limited and they found it more and more difficult to engage in a variety of prohibited acts. However, this did not mean that they gave up such practices. Polish-Jewish gangs, as well as gangs consisting exclusively of Jews, remained active, even despite the establishment of the Cracow ghetto in March 1941. Jewish criminals were active throughout Cracow and even outside it, in defiance of German regulations and orders, for example, the obligation to wear the Star of David, which I mentioned earlier in this article. This did not mean, however, that all criminals escaped extermination. Some of them were sent to German concentration and extermination camps or were killed when caught red-handed committing a crime.

Both during the Cracow ghetto's existence (1941–1943) and following its liquidation in March 1943 Jewish criminals continued to cooperate with their Polish counterparts. However, criminals of Jewish origin faced a different fate than Roman Catholics. During this period, some of them were held in the ghetto, e.g., in the prisons at 3 Czarneckiego Street and 2 Senacka Street. Others, among them Jakub Selinger, who is not mentioned in detail in this article, began to collaborate with the Gestapo as agents and expanded their existing contacts to include German officials, functionaries, prominent figures, and also Jewish policemen. Both criminals cooperating with the Gestapo, as well as those who refrained from doing so, often impersonated German officers and officials in order to defraud or steal from both Jews and Poles. This sometimes resulted in their arrest by the police and criminal proceedings would be initiated against them. However, Gestapo agents avoided criminal liability for their actions due to the protective umbrella provided by their German contacts. Sometimes those arrested were released from police stations immediately following Gestapo intervention or after only a short stay in custody, a policy followed by the German police from the very beginning of the war. Moreover, they conducted their shady businesses without caring about the fate of other Jews, and their activities often only made the already difficult predicament of the latter even worse. As in the case described above, these criminals would prey on people who had no money or were desperate for help after the arrest of a close family member by the occupier. There were certainly cases of criminals actually performing heroic actions, for example, making forgeries, smuggling goods into the ghetto and smuggling people out of the ghetto and outside the territory of the General Government. However, such incidents usually date from 1942, which lies beyond the scope of this article because Operation Reinhardt had a profound impact on the behavior of certain individuals. However, it is difficult to determine their actual motives, whether it was a desire to help others or simply to enrich themselves. I am currently preparing a publication that will focus on these topics.

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