

## **Poland- WARSAW Ghetto Archives (Emanuel Ringelblum Archives)**

### **- Witness to the Holocaust -**

The Ringelblum Archives consist of a collection of 1680 archival units (approx. 25,000 pages) retrieved from the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The Archives comprise government documents, materials concerning the ghetto resistance, testimonies of the fate of Jewish communities during the Holocaust, literature, works of art and private correspondence collected by victims of the Holocaust in order to pass on information about the Holocaust to future generations. This collection is absolutely unique, both in terms of its origin and its historic value. It mainly concerns the largest ghetto in Nazi-occupied Europe (approximately 500,000 inhabitants), but in fact it covers the whole of occupied Poland, documenting the Shoah, the fate of its Jewish community of 3,500,000 people. Nearly all the creators of the Ringelblum Archives perished, either in the ghetto or in the extermination camps.

### **ESSENTIAL INFORMATION**

#### **1. IDENTITY AND LOCATION**

##### **1.1. NAME OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE**

- Warsaw Ghetto Archives (code name “Oneg Szabat”), also known as the Emanuel Ringelblum Archives (after the young historian who organized the conspiratorial group involved in gathering the information).

##### **1.2. COUNTRY**

- Polish Republic

##### **1.3. STATE, PROVINCE OR REGION**

- Capital Province (Warsaw)

##### **1.4. ADDRESS**

- ul. Tlomackie 3/5, 00-090 Warsaw, Poland

### 1.5. NAME OF INSTITUTION

- Żydowski Instytut Historyczny Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy  
[Jewish Historical Research Institute]

## 2. LEGAL INFORMATION

### 2.1. OWNER

- -The Jewish Historical Institute Association of Poland

### 2.2. CUSTODIAN

- Żydowski Instytut Historyczny Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy  
[Jewish Historical Research Institute]  
(in accordance with the Utilization Agreement dated 25 October 1996)

### 2.3. LEGAL STATUS

- a. Legal entity;
- b. In accordance with the regulations of the Main Administration of the Polish State Archives;
- c. Only copies are available. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. for the purpose of annotated editions of the texts), originals are made available in the presence and under the supervision of Archive staff;
- d. The Jewish Historical Institute Association of Poland.

### 2.4. (...)

## 3. IDENTIFICATION

### 3.1. Description and inventory

The Warsaw Ghetto Archives, recovered from the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto (Part I in September 1946, Part II in December 1950), comprise 1680 archival units (approx. 25,000 pages) which, despite the absence of any visible administrative markings, constitute an integral whole. This is apparent both from the content of the materials and from the internal documentary evidence (e.g. the manner in which copies were made and organized), as well as from author's names which appear in both parts of

the collection. The unitary nature of the collection was further attested to by Hersz Wasser, Emanuel Ringelblum's assistant in the ghetto, who survived, unlike Ringelblum, and was able to indicate where the documents had been hidden and who also drew up the first inventory of the collection.

### 3.2. BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS

- AZIH Record Group Ring I 201 (Part I)
- AZIH Record Group Ring II 202 (Part II)

### 3.3 Visual documentation

- N/A

### 3.4. History

- The documents of the Ghetto Archives are the result of the work of a scientific research group whose goal was to record the overall situation of the Jews in Poland during World War II. The Ghetto Archives team, under the leadership of the historian Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, carried out innovative complex, interdisciplinary studies at the nexus of the historical and sociological disciplines which can justifiably be seen as precursors of methods in use today.

The collection was deliberately designed to be multifaceted and comprises materials from various sources such as government and conspiratorial underground organizations, as well as diaries and chronicles, testimonies of the fate of Jewish communities, literature, works of art and items of private correspondence.

### 3.5. Bibliography (selected):

Hersz Wasser, *The Ghetto Archives - The Enterprise of Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum and his "Oneg Shabbath" Underground Archives*, Jerusalem 1983;

M. Szulkin, *Emanuel Ringelblum - historyk i orGhetto Archivesnizator podziemnego archiwum getta warszawskiego*, "Biuletyn ZIH", Warsaw 1973, nos. 86-87;

Józef Kermisz, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor: Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives "O.S." (Oneg Shabbath)*, Jerusalem 1986;

Ruta Sakowska, *Archiwum Ringelbluma: getto warszawskie, lipiec 1942 - styczen 1943*, Warsaw 1980.

### 3.6. Independent experts.

- Prof. Israel Gutman, Lecturer in History, Hebrew University, Jerusalem;
- Dr. Shmuel Krakowski, Yad Vashem - Holocaust Remembrance Authority, Jerusalem (former director of the Yad Vashem Archives).

## 4. ASSESSMENT OF THE SELECTION CRITERIA

### 4.1. Criteria 1 & 2 - Influence and Period.

The Ghetto Archives cover the period from 1939 to 1943 and offer a better understanding of the course of events during the Holocaust, one of the most tragic events in world history.

#### Criterion 3 - Location.

The Ghetto Archives refer to the Warsaw Ghetto as well as to a significant portion of the other provincial ghettos in Poland and also contain information received from the ghettos about the approaching extermination and the circumstances surrounding it. Among these documents are the very first detailed descriptions of the extermination camps of Chelmno and Treblinka.

#### Criterion 5 - Subject matter.

The documents of the Ghetto Archives represent the history of the resistance of those who were doomed concluding with the extraordinary events of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

#### Criterion 7 - Social significance.

The documents of the Ghetto Archives, particularly those regarding the fate of individuals, such as farewell letters testifying to the feelings of people on the eve of their extermination, possess a universal character, regardless of the ethnic or religious affiliations of their authors. This documentation also contains thousands of items of detailed, first-hand information as to how the Holocaust was carried out.

### 4.2. Authenticity.

The authenticity of this collection is utterly indisputable and has never been refuted. The first verification of its authenticity was undertaken by Hersz Wasser, a member

of the Ringelblum group, who, after the war, indicated where the materials had been hidden just prior to the final liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto.

#### 4.3. Rarity.

The documents of the Ghetto Archives are generally regarded as the most important collection of primary source material on the history of the Holocaust as seen by its victims. These documents are unique and unrivalled in their importance in this field of study. No serious in-depth study regarding the Holocaust can be conducted without reference to this collection.

### 5. MANAGEMENT PLAN

There can be no doubt that the documents of the Ghetto Archives, in the light of their historic importance, require special care and protection, not only on the part of the owners and custodians, but also by anyone who wishes to see this priceless collection survive for future generations.

The current state of the collection is primarily due to the inferior quality of the basic materials used in creating the document. Roughly half the material was prepared on low-grade scrap paper.

The documents bear the marks of biological and mechanical damage, largely as a result of their having been hidden underground.

At the present time, the Ghetto Archives are kept in special safes. Once the current reconstruction of the Institute premises has been completed, they will be housed in a customized facility, for which the Research Institute has applied to potential sponsors to obtain funds for the installation of adequate temperature controls.

Since 1991, thanks to the co-operative efforts of the Jewish Historical Institute Association and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), systematic conservation of the collection has been under way.

For this specific purpose, a Paper Conservation Laboratory has been created and fully equipped on the Institute premises. Three highly qualified paper conservation specialists currently staff the laboratory. In addition to the laboratory's conservation equipment, USHMM has also financed the purchase of all necessary conservation materials. Over the period from 1992 to 1996, USHMM provided over US\$ 110,000 for broadly defined conservation work at the Jewish Historical Institute, with special

priority given to the Ghetto Archives collection. Up to 1996, some 17,450 pages have received conservation treatment and the entire collection has been disinfected in a vacuum chamber.

In addition, the collection is being microfilmed to provide copies of the materials for those who wish access to them and ensure that back-up copies of the entire collection exist.

The Institute's Microfilming Laboratory has also been equipped from the ground up by USHMM in Washington, DC (USA).

## **6. CONSULTATION**

### **6.1. Consultations**

- Historians and experts consulted by the owner (Jewish Historical Institute Association) and by the custodian (Jewish Historical Research Institute) have uniformly agreed to the appropriateness of including this unique collection in the "Memory of the World" registry.

## **7. NOMINATOR**

7.1. Prof. Dr. Jerzy Tomaszewski, Warsaw University

7.2. Renowned academic researcher on modern Polish Jewish history and, hence, a user of the collection.

7.3. Contact: Prof. Dr. Feliks Tych, Director, Jewish Historical Research Institute

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