

HISTORY AS SEEN THROUGH POSTCARDS: A STORY OF THE LODZ GHETTO — TOTAL ISOLATION

NITZA DAVIDOVITCH

Education Studies, Ariel University
POB 3, Kiryat Hamada, Ariel, Israel
E-mail address: d.nitza@ariel.ac.il
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7273-903X>

SHLOMIT BEN ISHAY

Education Studies, Ariel University
POB 3, Kiryat Hamada, Ariel, Israel
E-mail address: ShlomitB@ariel.ort.org.il
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/000-0002-2015-9356>

RUTH DOROT

The School of Architecture, Ariel University
POB 3, Kiryat Hamada, Ariel, Israel
E-mail address: sf_moshed@bezeqint.net
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1884-1743>

ABSTRACT

Thesis. This study explores the role of postcards as a historical, documentary, and artistic source depicting the events of the Holocaust, focusing on postcards written or received by inhabitants of the Lodz Ghetto. 78 postcards were translated into Hebrew and on exhibition at the Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Museum in Israel. Research indicates that the postcards served as an authentic and rare source of information as well as understanding the emotions of Jews whose lives were overshadowed by the threat of annihilation.

Methods. The study is a qualitative one, based on the grounded theory approach. Analysis is established on identifying and characterising recurrences in the raw material of findings, with a clear definition of the unit of analysis, to build a hierarchy of the recurrences and themes, and to construct a theoretical model that explains the reality under investigation. Researchers in this method gather information about the life patterns of their subjects as well as the organizational and social structures. Grounded theory assumes that all people who have shared life circumstances also have shared social and psychological patterns, which even if not consciously formulated or expressed grow from the shared experiences.



Results. The prohibition of all postal ties was a strenuous burden on the ghetto's inhabitants and increased their anxiety for the fate of their relatives and acquaintances outside the ghetto, also leading to its absolute separation from the outer world. Only in 1944 did the Germans once again allow postal connections with the ghetto.

Conclusion. In-depth analysis reveals the historical events from the perspective of the postcard writers, as they experienced them in the ghetto. The postcards sent to the ghetto by relatives and acquaintances reveal their writers' hopes of reuniting with their family or their extreme despair as they cope with the loss of their family.

Keywords: documents, postcards, communication, chronicle, Lodz Ghetto, Holocaust, educational system

INTRODUCTION

In Hebrew, the word for postcard is *gluya*, which also means "open, visible to all." A postcard has no envelope, and it may therefore reveal feelings and thoughts, as well as express the current state of affairs (Sabar Ben Yehoshua, 2011). But does it indeed? During the Holocaust, when the Nazis censored all information—may postcards be considered an authentic, valuable, and trustworthy source of information? Perhaps postcards conceal and hide more than they reveal? Do they reflect an "objective" or "subjective" reality?

The current study focuses on postcards from the Lodz Ghetto postcard collection¹, which consists of 78 postcards sent during 1940-1944 from and to the ghetto, which have not been previously explored or investigated. The postcards served as a means of communication for the ghetto inhabitants with family members and acquaintances who remained outside the ghetto.

These postcards can also be considered literary works, and like art, create the events of the Holocaust which are hard to grasp. In order to teach the younger generation to remember and to remain committed to commemorating the values that arise from the event that is continuing to reverberate to this day, there is a constant endeavour to search for creative and persuasive techniques (Dorot et al., 2021). The intimacy of Postcards is capable of crossing generations and enabling a revitalised discussion on such an earth-shaking topic as the Holocaust (Appelfeld, 1997).

Postcards convey an "experience," information related to the writer, as well as personal information, which demonstrates a general-uni-

1 The Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Museum in Ariel was founded by Holocaust survivors Irena and the late Yaakov Wodislavsky to commemorate the Holocaust for future generations. The museum contains many collections that relate the story of the communities and particularly the story of the Jewish people in unbearable times of destruction. The museum is visited by soldiers, tourists, students, and school children, and it is said that "in Irena and Kuba's house you can 'touch' the Holocaust." The museum also contains a unique collection of postcards on display for visitors. This is a collection of postcards sent from ghettos and work camps, most of which were written by Jews who lived in the ghettos and camps. The postcards were sent from all over war-torn Europe and depicted a somber and painful picture of people whose world was overturned in a moment. For this paper, postcards from the Jewish community in the Lodz Ghetto were selected.

versal experience. The postcards sent from the ghetto after restrictions imposed by the German authorities were emotionally detached and content-focused, describing the search for relatives, delivery of packages of food and clothing, funds, etc. However, some of them contained expressions of concern, love, longing, memory fragments, and a strong desire to return to the past existence, to that which remained behind. A review of the postcards presented in this study reveals the daily conduct and behaviour of people in completely impossible situations upholding values of faith and survival.

The study focuses on the postcards dated from the final period of the ghetto, up to 1942, when large-scale deportations to the death camps began, reaching their apex in September 1942, when the large deportation of the sick, the elderly, and young children took place. In this year, postal ties with the outer world were completely forbidden in order to prevent news of the events from getting out.

THE LODZ GHETTO

A universal, industrial city – Lodz, one of Europe’s largest textile industry centres - was a magnet for Poles, Germans, and Jews in 1942. The Jews of Lodz were known as a vibrant and diverse social, political, cultural, and religious community (Unger, 2005). On September 8, 1939, the city was occupied by the Germans, who encountered no resistance. At that time, there were about 233 000 Jews in Lodz, comprising about 34% of the city’s residents (Unger, 2010). Immediately upon occupying the city, the Germans initiated a campaign of persecution and decrees against Jews, assisted by the large German minority in the city (about 60 000 people). Many Jews were seized on the streets and taken to perform various types of forced labour, usually accompanied by extreme humiliation and physical abuse. Public prayers were forbidden, and Jews were forced to open their businesses on Sabbaths and holidays. The Germans published a list of orders that led to Jews’ exclusion from economic life. The situation of Jews deteriorated even further once the city was annexed to the Third Reich about one month after the invasion, on October 8, 1939 (Unger, 1995).

On November 14, 1939, the governor of the Kalisch district, which included Lodz, published a decree to mark Jews. They were obligated to wear a yellow armband that was replaced in December 1939 with a yellow Star of David. By May 1, 1940, when the ghetto was officially closed to the world, about one-third of the city’s Jewish residents had been deported to death camps (Poznanski, 2010).

The Lodz Ghetto was one of the largest ghettos in occupied Poland, and the last to be liquidated in 1944. The area of the ghetto was only four square kilometres, of which only 2.5 were built up. More than 16 500 Jewish residents of Lodz and the vicinity were settled in an area of four sqkm, as well

as an additional 47 000 Jews and gipsies deported from Germany, Austria, and other areas. When the Russians liberated the area, only 877 people remained in the ghetto, and about 10 000 Lodz ghetto residents survived the war in other places.

The Lodz Ghetto was apparently the only one that did not utilise smuggling and its Jews did not engage in illegal manufacture of products that found their way to other areas. Workers did not leave the ghetto for day jobs outside the enclosed area. Jews were allowed to use money issued by the Germans only, which was valueless outside the ghetto (Gutman, 1995). These diverse edicts led to the absolute. In April 1940, the Lodz Ghetto was officially closed hermetically, depriving its inhabitants of most human rights, and totally isolating the ghetto from the Jewish population, the city, and the outside world. Its inhabitants became totally dependent on the ghetto's internal institutions, including the postal department, which became the only life channel with the world outside.

The ghetto was administered by the local Judenrat, which was headed by Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski (1877-1944), who was considered one of the most controversial figures in the history of the Holocaust. Rumkowski was convinced that Jewish productivity would ensure the survival of the ghetto ("labour for rescue"), and he embraced an autocratic leadership style in order to transform the ghetto into a huge industrial complex for manufacturing products for Germany. He forced the population to work 12 hours a day despite unbearable conditions, to produce clothes, wood and metal products, and electrical equipment for the German army. This productivity may have been the reason that the Lodz Ghetto managed to survive a long time after all other ghettos in occupied Poland had been liquidated.

In contrast to other ghettos throughout Poland, where a black market based on the smuggling of food and products between the ghettos and the outside world flourished, the strict German control and German minority that resided in the city made this impossible in the Lodz Ghetto. Jews were completely dependent on the German authorities and the Judenrat for food, medicine, and other essential equipment. By September 1942, Rumkowski and the Jews of Lodz understood that deportation meant death.

In 1944, the Lodz Ghetto with its 70 000 inhabitants, was the largest concentration of Jews in Eastern Europe, functioning as a labour camp, where survival depended only on the ability to work. As Soviet forces advanced rapidly, the Germans decided to begin the gradual liquidation of the remaining population, deporting them to the Chelmno death camp or Auschwitz.

Rumkowski's strong rule, which forcefully prevented any kind of resistance, the failed attempts to smuggle food and people into the ghetto in a hostile environment, and particularly the belief that productivity would ensure survival (even if partial) ruled out an armed revolt. Although some form of armed resistance was debated in the ghetto's final days, it was not carried out for these reasons. Nonetheless, symbolic, and defensive resistance in the ghetto existed.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON THE LODZ GHETTO

Sources of information on events in the Lodz Ghetto during the Holocaust are the studies, personal testimonies of the survivors, documentation, typically kept in institutions for the study, and commemoration of the Holocaust, often found on various websites.

The Lodz Ghetto left behind one of the richest and most extensive documented archives of all Polish ghettos. The heads of the Jewish council in Lodz arranged for the employment of a team of workers who endeavoured to gather information and document it daily in writing, photographs, and drawings. The team was comprised mainly of those with knowledge and understanding in the gathering of archival material, its sorting, and recording. The archive employed locals and residents of outlying towns who had been deported to the Lodz Ghetto, as well as Jews from western Europe who had been brought to the ghetto in the fall of 1941. The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto was the major component of the ghetto archives. For three and a half years, the chroniclers recorded details of current events, the mood of the population, their tribulations, stories of survival versus the destruction and ruin of the community. The Chronicle contains statistical and demographic information, details of the weather, police records, information on the provision of food, the ghetto's production plants, and information on the various departments of the ghetto administration (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989).

The current study centres on an important and significant source regarding events in the Lodz Ghetto – the postcards. On January 5, 1942, all postal services in the ghetto were terminated, due the Germans' concern about rumours of the impending deportations, and postal ties with the ghetto were resumed only in May 1944. Most of the postcards in the collection dated in 1942 were sent to the ghetto from Prague by family members and acquaintances, and the majority were desperate attempts to search for relatives. In March 1942, the post received approval to send only printed postcards from local residents with short notice concerning the writer's health. Every day, 1000 of such postcards could be sent. The postcards discussed in the study are, as stated, not a testimony analysed by a researcher, but rather a personal experiential testimony of the writers from their hellish moments. Reading the postcards is like hearing a testimony of the events in its writer's voice. Receiving a postcard from outside the ghetto was a significant event, noted by the local chronicler in the daily record (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989).

As a source of information, postcards are an inseparable part of the chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto, which produced one of the richest archives of all ghettos on Polish soil, which was almost completely preserved. No similar documentation is known from any other ghetto. The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto is shocking in its simplicity, and it is a document with great historical value. The rich information it contains, the precise records kept, and the

systematic way it was composed made the chronicle a unique source regarding the destruction of European Jewry in World War II. The chronicle was written on a nearly daily basis, and the facts and events are based on primary information sources comprised of documents that were themselves composed in those very days.

The role of postcards in the ghetto evolved over time. Initially, postcards served as a means of communication between the sealed ghetto inhabitants and people living outside. As the ghetto's isolation lengthened, postcard writers were increasingly motivated to write in order to maintain contact with their relatives and acquaintances. People optimistically wrote about everyday life in the ghetto, even though they knew that postcards might not reach their destination, and that they were all closely examined by the German censor. The postcards thus became more than a means of communication – they became a sign of life from people forced to survive impossible life circumstances. Postcard recipients at least knew that the writer was alive.

METHODS

This study is a qualitative study, based on the grounded theory approach. Analysis is based on identifying and characterising recurrences in the raw material of the findings, with a clear definition of the unit of analysis, to build a hierarchy of the themes and a theoretical model that explains the reality studied. Researchers in this method gather information about the life patterns of their subjects as well as about the organizational and social structures. Grounded theory assumes that all people who have shared life circumstances also have shared social and psychological patterns, which even if unconsciously expressed grow from the common experiences (Gibton, 2002).

First, postcards were defined as the Lodz Ghetto postcards collection selected from among 78 postcards from the Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Museum in Ariel, Israel founded by Holocaust survivors Irena and the late Yaakov Wodislavsky, and a search for common themes was conducted. In this study, two different original catalogues were developed: a catalogue of events and a catalogue of postcard themes, which together offer fascinating insights into the chronology of events documented in *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto* (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989). The catalogue of postcard themes was qualitatively analysed as authentic written documents, using multiple research tools, based on the diverse sources of information, such as the research subjects themselves, pictures, certificates, and documents.

We specifically explored the following questions:

- What types of messages concerning events in the ghetto in the years under consideration are contained in the postcards: cognitive-historical, emotional, ethical?

- To what degree, if indeed, does the message in the postcard reflect personal, group, objective, or subjective experiences and thoughts?
- To what degree, if indeed, does the content of postcards indicate future processes that occurred in the Lodz Ghetto—and in other ghettos?

RESULTS

The prohibition of all postal ties was a strenuous burden on the ghetto's inhabitants and increased their anxiety for the fate of their relatives and acquaintances outside the ghetto, also leading to its absolute separation from the outer world. Only in 1944 did the Germans once again allow postal connections with the ghetto. On May 9, 1944 a chronicler wrote:

Daily news—the prohibition against sending post was cancelled. The event of the day is the news of cancelling the prohibition against sending post. The contact person of the post for regional station 6 brought this news to the ghetto before noon and it promptly became known to all. The ghetto can once again send and receive post. It has been almost two and a half years since the ghetto was completely severed from the world and now the inhabitants of this besieged city are supposed to once again be in contact with their families. At first it was said that it would be permitted to write anything in letters and on postcards. It would be possible to ask for packages and search for relatives. The ghetto is incredibly happy... The only ones who had a more or less constant connection with their relatives outside the ghetto are in fact the 250 to 300 former residents of Prague... Where only Jews with Arian family relations appear to have remained, who had the good luck to have remained in their homeland... But to whom will the others write? To their family members who fled Lodz? (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, p.15).

The Chronicle also recorded the arrival of postcards, which illuminated the actual existence in those terrible times from a new angle. Postcards accurately describe the needs, requests, and emotions of a writer, and validate the dissolution and loss of a family. Families were torn apart, and their members sent to the unknown – ghettos, camps, their death. From the postcards, one can learn about the extent of the mental anguish that accompanied the family dissolution process. The very act of writing a postcard is an attempt to reconnect the pieces.

The trauma is an event of a total nature, wherein the subject feels “strong fear, helplessness, loss of control, and a danger of eradication” (Goldberg, 2012, p. 79). Amos Goldberg (2012) claims:

Something strange assaults you and intrudes upon you, shattering the defensive barriers posed by the soul. A stranger invades you, takes control of you, takes hold of you, becomes a dominant component in your inner scene and consequently threatens to empty you and leave you hollow (Goldberg, 2012, p. 79).

Hence, this is an event that fundamentally undermines one's mental economy. The defence mechanisms cannot prevent or regulate the many stimuli that flood the soul and therefore the soul cannot respond to them adequately and it remains helpless. This is despair on several levels: the external occurrences, their mental processing, and later in face of the symptoms that recur in a compulsive and uncontrolled frequency (Goldberg, 2012).

A postcard (C21) sent on August 23, 1942, from Baustelle D.S.C. Oreetz Neustadt-Wosse (a construction site) by the two brothers G. M. Fuchs, stated:

For the past 20 months my brother and I have been at the camp and in the last four months we have written a large number of postcards to our parents but did not receive any regards and we do not know what to think...We ask the Jewish Elder to tell us the reason, why are we receiving no reply from other parents...

This is one manifestation of the trauma mentioned by Goldberg in his reference to the diaries, which can also be attributed to the state of trauma revealed in the postcards. In this postcard, the helplessness in face of the lack of information is conspicuous. The reality broke this family apart, but one's soul is unwilling to accept the loss, and although all traumas are the occurrence of a terrible event, the extreme terror it arouses cannot be represented by language or by other symbolic systems. Any attempt to represent this event is doomed to fail. Even when it is completely accurate factually, the description of the traumatic event cannot fully contain or signify the shocking dimension of the experience (Goldberg, 2012).

The trauma represents the void and absence that follows the harsh events with which people were forced to deal. The new circumstances they had to contend with led at once to the collapse of all familiar systems. Beginning with the loss of that which is "human" to loss of the family and social systems. The terrible calamity produced writing. Writing connects you to what used to be, thanks to it one holds on to fragments of the previous life from which one was expelled. Writing creates and allows life in a verbal and real sense.

The text in each postcard is read doubly: the written text in its simple form, from which arises the subtext—those social, personal messages that describe the real situation, a situation that may not be mentioned in the text. The text lets us understand the writer, his or her mood while writing, and the expressions beyond the written message. Was he or she feeling longing? Was he or she angry? Was his or her writing aimed at a single goal—the transfer of money to his or her family, or does the mere request have a hidden level, a message that the writer wishes to convey? The text offers readers the "existence" of a person writing it. The postcard's writer longs to preserve the "existence" that remains and represents normalisation that is beyond the impossible life that has been forced on him or her. The writing

connects one to normalisation, and gives control, albeit minimal, of one's life. Writing confirms and reaffirms the human spirit.

A postcard (B31) sent on December 10, 1941, from the ghetto to Prague by Margarita Kloman, who came from Prague on the fourth transport, Transport 145, states the following:

(...) My dears, I am writing to you, dear Liza, because your address seems to me the safest. I received your letter with the notice that the money had been sent. Write to us more often and more and send in your letter also pictures (photographs) from you, mother, and the children. Lots of things can be enclosed in a letter. In every letter we search for some small memory (memento) of you. Aside from that, there is nothing new to tell. Perhaps you do not know that together with us also Aunt Ruzena, mother's cousin, is with us. I think of you often and now before Christmas I miss you. Kisses, yours, Grete.

Further on in the postcard (in a different handwriting):

My dears - I too send you lots of good wishes. We are all healthy. Please write to us quickly. Send newspapers too. Father asks to send his regards to the relatives". In the postcard, it is possible to read "between the lines" about the fear that the postcard will not reach its destination, as well as the request for help and support. The strong desire to keep in contact and to prevent the terrible catastrophe of the family's dissolution may be noticed as well. The writer states that memories can be sent in the letter. Everything can be enclosed in a letter. There are other relatives with her, and it is possible to sense the relief at not being alone.

Reading the postcard, the message that is beyond words enhances the very function of the postcard as a sign of life. The postcard's existence reinforces one's existence or nonexistence. However, even writing is no guarantee against catastrophe and certainly not in a time of such severe trauma. The murderer might intrude at any moment on the victim's writing and take control of it as well. Then again, the terror of the trauma, that pain- and terror-filled vacuum on which the writing centres, can suddenly burst out and carry away the writing to destruction, together with the writer. In this case, the writing is no victory, at the most it allows the writer to establish an area in which he or she can symbolically battle awesome forces without disappearing completely (Goldberg, 2012).

Postcards can be read concurrently with other sources such as diaries (despite the distinct differences between the two genres), understanding through them that a person in times of trauma does not write or record. This is evident in gravely traumatic times in the ghetto when there were no postcards. Then again, the "routine" too creates a "vacuum" situation in writing. Routine within trauma generates a strange reality of absence in writing.

May 28, 1942, a postcard (C16) sent from Prague to the Litzmanstadt ghetto management by Emil and Elsa Slesner, residents of Prague. They were seeking information about their relatives, including their children, who arrived on transport no. 266-E from Prague to the ghetto:

(...) On March 25, 1942, I sent 20 German marks to the municipal savings fund, account no. 700. Also on April 24, 1942, I sent 10 marks. But sadly, since December 1941 I have not heard from my wife's brothers and I have received no confirmation that the money was received, and thus I repeat this request...

And another postcard sent from the Netherlands to the Jewish Elder in the ghetto on March 8, 1942:

(...) Very beloved parents. I am sending you here 5 golden or 6 Deutschmarks. Confirm their receipt on the attached postcard. Why aren't you writing to me? You know how worried I am, so please write and reply to the postcards that I have sent you up to now. Thank God, I am healthy and strong, and I hope you are too... I wish you a good Passover and hope that we will be together in the future. Regards from your loving son and I hope to see you soon...

Oskar Singer described the evacuation on September 7, 1942, and wrote:

(...) No one dared utter a sound. The mothers did not even dare move a hand. Yes, this was something completely different! No bawling policeman of the chairman, who has lost his senses and is bargaining with a Jewish mother. The shots rang out and the orders were sounded - and everything was deathly quiet... How can you watch your infant thrown in the wagon without throwing yourself under the wheels, under the horses' hooves? The soul is so shattered and vague, and the heart is so worn, it hardly beats at all. The hunger has worn you down completely. Mothers of the ghetto, what a shocked and miserable mass you are that you cannot even give your life for your own flesh and blood! Men of the ghetto! You are the support for the mothers, where is your fist, you are a poor cowardly shadow... Where is your sharp head, wise and resourceful Jew?

TO WHAT DEGREE, IF INDEED, DOES THE CONTENT OF THE POSTCARDS INDICATE FUTURE PROCESSES THAT OCCURRED IN THE LODZ GHETTO—AND IN OTHER GHETTOS?

Yosef Zelkovich, born 1897, was a Jewish intellectual, a member of the "Bund" and a resident of Lodz, and one of the conspicuous writers in the literary and journalistic landscape of pre-war Polish Jewry. In May 1940, he was imprisoned in the ghetto together with the other Jews from the town, until he was deported to Auschwitz in the summer of 1944 and murdered there. During the war, he writes about the life in the ghetto: about the breaking of a man, the breaking of a man versus his beliefs, versus the loss of his inner essence, the breaking of a man versus the loss of his human image, versus the dissolution and loss of his family, the breaking of a human being versus the disintegration of social systems. The postcards symbolise the source of a human-cultural connection with the past world, which was gradually disappearing at once, in the mist of the terrible reality. In the new, chaotic, limitless world, where all the familiar rules were being grossly vio-

lated, the postcard served, among other things, as a connection to one's emotional communication skills that include compassion, unconditional love, concern, and appreciation for one's dear ones.

From a postcard (B32) dated December 17, 1941, from the Lodz Ghetto to Mrs. Ira Polosinski: "Dear brothers and sisters... The abovementioned sold his possessions for 850 marks. Was he asked? It's as though you are eating his flesh and drinking his blood... Do you have no conscience...?" (The postcard bears the stamp: forbidden content).

The historiography of Jewish history during the Holocaust has managed to reconstruct Jewish life in the Holocaust unprecedentedly, but it clearly found it hard to deal with the full depth of despair. History knows how to describe that which exists—events, reactions, survival, struggle, community, personal and family activity - but not how to describe that which does not exist, the absence. History is occupied with existence and not with absence, with establishing and maintaining identity rather than with its acute refutation, with building and creating settings and institutions and not with their dissolution, with the development of ideas and meaning producing processes rather than with their erasure. So how can history contend with a period that has at its heart the non-existing—the helplessness—without missing this essential feature of the era? "How is it possible to write a history of that which is not? Of that which was refuted? Of that which dissolved?" (Goldberg, 2012, p. 11).

From a postcard (B22) sent to the ghetto on November 16, 1941, by C. H. Goldberg, who was sent to a labour camp in Western Prussia, and wrote to the Jewish Elder Chaim Romkowski:

To the Jewish Elder...I asked for a package...I sent the approval on November 5, 1941, and since then I have received no response. The package is very important for me. I am approaching a time of illness and I have nothing to wear...

Both the concrete man and the concept of humankind underwent a radical transition during the Holocaust. In the events to which the victims of the Holocaust were subjected, people went through such an extreme transformation that it seems that the human condition to which they were subjected against their will, exceeds the customary conceptual world concerning human character and nature. The Holocaust fundamentally undermined the concept of humankind as shaped and developed in our historical, religious, and philosophical traditions. Humankind after the Holocaust is not the same as before it (in Goldenberg, 2012).

From a postcard (C8) sent to the Jewish Elder in the ghetto on March 8, 1942, from the Netherlands: the writer, Hermann Zuiszajn, asked:

Why aren't you writing to me? You know how worried I am, so please write and answer all the postcards I have sent you to date... I'm awaiting post from you like a thirsty man... I wish you a good Passover and hope to be together in the future...

The postcards, as a primary source of information, illuminate the actual existence in those terrible times from a new angle. The postcard accurately describes the occurrence, need, request, wish, and feeling of the person who wrote the postcard, addressing it to someone else or to organisations in the ghetto such as the Judenrat. The content of the postcards validates the dissolution of the family and its loss, a traumatic event that accompanied Jews in the Holocaust. Families were torn apart, and their members sent to the unknown – ghettos, camps, even death. From the postcards, one can learn about the extent of the mental trauma that accompanied the dissolution process of the families and the very writing of the postcard is an attempt to reconnect the pieces.

The following postcard contains a testimony of the fate of those deported from the ghetto:

(...) My dears. I did not reply to your letter from November 8 because there were only various rumours about the fate of Jews from the towns, however to our calamity everything is now known. Today there was a witness here who had been there on site, in hell. It is in the village of Chelmno, near Dąbie, and everyone is being buried in a forest called Rzuchów. That is what happened to the Jews of Kolo, Dąbie, Wlodawa, Izbica Kujawska. Thousands of gypsies were brought there from Lodz and the same thing befell them. Since last week also thousands of Jews from Lodz are being brought. They are all being murdered with gas and also the shooting. The heart has turned to stone, the eyes are dry. Don't think that this is being written by a madman, it is the cruel truth. Rend your clothes man, roll in the dirt, run in the streets and cry... Write whether this is known to you. Yaakov.

EVENTS IN THE GHETTO REFLECTED OR NOT REFLECTED IN THE POSTCARDS

This study presents postcards not previously explored that were sent from the ghetto to locations throughout war-torn Europe (and several to the United States), as well as postcards sent by relatives, acquaintances, friends, organs and institutions, such as the postcard (C13) sent by teacher's staff of the Jewish school in Frankfurt to the ghetto. Most of the postcards that survived are from the years 1941-1942.

In-depth analysis of the postcards reveals to readers the involvement of historical events from the perspective of the postcard writers, as they experienced them in the ghetto. Then again, the postcards sent to the ghetto by relatives and acquaintances show great helplessness of the individuals writing when encountering the loss of their family and in the hope of finding it anew.

The Lodz Ghetto left behind one of the richest archives of all Polish ghettos, which was almost completely preserved. The heads of the Jewish system in Lodz arranged for a team of workers who endeavoured to gather

information and document it daily in writing, photographs, and drawings. The team was comprised mainly of those with knowledge and understanding in the gathering of archival material, its sorting, and recording. The archive employed locals and residents of outlying towns who had been deported from their places of residence to the Lodz Ghetto, as well as Jews from western Europe who had been brought to the ghetto in the fall of 1941. Due to the special conditions of the Lodz Ghetto, in contrast to the complete destruction normally characteristic for the other ghettos, the archival material was not destroyed and was almost not damaged. During the final liquidation of the Lodz Ghetto, the Germans left a group of 800 Jews to gather the possessions and machines left by those deported from the ghetto. Among these was Nachman Zonabend, who risked his life to save the material, which contained testimonies of what had happened in the ghetto. A conspicuous and unique place in the ghetto archives was occupied by "The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto." No similar documentation is known from any other ghettos. There are many private diaries of Jews, written in the ghettos at the time the events occurred, including diaries from the Lodz Ghetto (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989).

In this study, it is possible to read about the events as they occurred, both in the chronicle and in the postcards concurrently, as experienced by the writers. The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto is shocking in its simplicity, and it is a document with great historical value. The rich information it contains, the precise records kept, and the systematic way it was composed made the chronicle the only one of this kind of sources regarding the destruction of European Jewry in World War II. The chronicle was written on a daily basis, the facts and events are based on primary information sources or documents that were themselves composed in those very days. This was mainly since it was composed of an institution that had access to almost all the ghetto's internal records. This institution was the archive of the Jewish Head of Council at the Lodz Ghetto. The chronicle, similar to almost all the other projects carried out in the archives, is a group effort in which all the workers participated. Moreover, this group of people worked well and harmoniously, despite the differences in age, education, previous occupation, country of origin and language, not to mention differences in worldview. They were united by their shared fate and devotion to the cause.

On January 12, 1941, less than two months after the archive was established, the first entry was written in the chronicle, and from then on, the chronicle was recorded regularly and included lists written almost every day until mid-1944 (the ghetto was liquidated in August 1944). Initially, the chronicle was written by hand; in the next stage, five or six copies were typed on a typewriter on longer sheets of paper than customary. In total, the chronicle includes about 1000 entries. Not all entries of the chronicle were preserved. The continuous dates of the issues and their content show that most were preserved. The physical copies were found in various places throughout the ghetto, well concealed and hidden. Some were removed

from the ghetto, another part was concealed on 13 Lutomierska St., the location of the fire brigade, and another part was known to have been concealed in the cemetery but was not found. In the first year of the chronicle and until September 1942, it was written in Polish, and from then until the last issue, it was written in two languages concurrently – Polish and German.

LODZ 1942 – YEAR OF THE GREAT DESTRUCTION

A postcard (C5) from Margarita Armstein, sent from Prague on March 9, 1942, to the municipal savings fund Konto 700, where she asked:

(...) I would like to give the sum (of 10 marks) to my son-in-law (came to Prague on transport no. 257-N) after deducting your commission. At the same time, I would like my son-in-law to confirm receipt of the sum on the attached postcard and return it to me, because I would like to continue sending money to my son-in-law through your kind mediation. I hope that this will be promptly arranged, and I express my thanks.

Postcards from other places were sent to the ghetto and, like the others, they too sound concerned and helpless. A postcard (C6) dated March 1942 was sent from Hungary to the ghetto. The name of the sender is unclear. It begins with the words:

(...) My loves. I have received no news from you for weeks. You did not confirm receipt of the money – 30 marks, and we are not quiet. Please write to us. There is nothing new here. We are all well. From Berta I hear often, she has written that she has not heard from you in a long time... Here everything is fine. I hope that you are all healthy...

The month of May was summarised in the Chronicle as a very difficult month food-wise, together with the hardships formed in the ghetto following the entrance of those deported from western Europe, together with the arrival of Jews deported from the field towns of Pabianice, Brzeziny, and Stryków. Israel Tabaksblat wrote in his book “that one of the refugees who came from Brzeziny brought with him a postcard written on January 19, 1942, which reached the ghetto together with those deported-on May 19, 1942” (Unger, 2005, p. 314).

An official printed postcard (C17) from the management of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, sent to a family in Prague, is particularly conspicuous. The signatory is “Litzmannstadt – the largest textile industry in the east”:

Re: Transfers. Private notices to residents of the ghetto are not allowed on principle. It is not possible to receive personal signed confirmation of money transferred and paid to the ghetto inhabitants. When money reaches the account in the municipal savings fund (Konto 700), any sum, and when the address of the recipient appears on the back-left side of the postal slip, the sender will receive a confirmation from the office of the ghetto management only. The money will be transferred as previously by the bank of the Jewish Elder to those entitled to payment.

The meaning of the order described in the postcard was in fact the absolute and final severing of all contact that was still maintained in some way between the ghetto inhabitants and their relatives and acquaintances outside the ghetto. Sending money to the ghetto and requesting the personal signature of the recipient was like a notice – “I am alive!” This order cancelled at once the personal signature of the recipient and prevented him or her from contacting the family. Even though the contact was “only” a signature and confirmation, the message was very personal and meaningful, like a sign of life saying: “I’m alive! I’m still here!”. In addition, the order meant even stricter control of Jewish life in the ghetto, deepening the separation and isolation from the world outside. Not allowing people to sign for money transferred to them and intended for them was another step in curtailing their liberty and their basic right to contact with their family. From that month on, there was a significant drop in the number of postcards in the collection, aside from two postcards sent in August, until after the Sperre – the big deportation (Sperre is an abbreviated form of the German word *Gehsperre*, meaning curfew).

June was characterised in the chronicle by several important items that include a visit by the committee on behalf of the German authorities. The chroniclers write:

The population understands and knows that this is not a regular inspection tour, that the matter is more serious and important... an existential matter. The results of today’s inspection are not yet known; however, it was clear from the face of the requesters that they will be positive. What does an inhabitant of the ghetto long for, what does he wish for himself and what does he expect of the committee? All he wishes is to be left alone, not be separated from his family, to be allowed to remain in the same tough conditions and that his work be appreciated. If his work is appreciated, he will be granted the right to remain in the ghetto, and further – he will be allocated a modest ration (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, p. 22).

Many other significant items deal with rumours of the big deportations expected for inhabitants of the ghetto. A horrifying item deals with the rumour of the expected deportation of children under 10. The chronicler’s stress: “We emphasize once again that the authorized elements have not confirmed this rumor” (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, p. 42). During the month of July, a major item was published in the chronicle, whereby the information bureau had recently been receiving many postcards from ghetto inhabitants sent to work at the various labour camps.

(...) The postcards from labor camps are richer in content. From a general perspective they are mostly uninteresting as they are almost completely limited to family matters. However, within the flood of these letters one postcard from two days ago was sent from a labor camp near Inovrazlav, where the writer says, aside from personal matters, the following sentence translated word by word from German – “I am receiving so much food here that I would have

been glad if you, my dears, could have received at least some of it" (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, p. 145).

The notice is interesting and the question it arouses is why did the postcards arrive at the information bureau rather than at the post office and why did the chroniclers stress that the postcards are mostly uninteresting as they are almost completely limited to family matters? This is a sign of concern regarding the German authorities, who followed the chroniclers and the contents of the chronicle. An "uninteresting" postcard indicates a routine, proof that nothing new is happening. Accentuating the quantity of food proves that "the state of those deported to the labour camps is good" as they are receiving so much food. This item is linked directly to the rumour that spread through the ghetto on July 26, 1942. The rumour had to do with the state of Jews sent to the various camps around Poznan. Notably, the name of the camp mentioned in the item is not from this area.

July ended with a laconic item, horrifying in its simplicity, which summarises the death level in the ghetto from the beginning of the year until this month. The sentence that concluded the item was: "In the last months the number of deaths is terrifying" (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, p. 145).

As stated, there is a significant drop in the number of postcards in the collection from May to August 1942. Only two postcards in the collection were sent in August, and the events appearing in the chronicle in this month concern the liquidation of the ghettos in the outlying towns and deportation of their inhabitants to the Lodz Ghetto, following the policy of turning the ghetto into a labour centre. The flow of refugees continued until the end of August 1942. The description of the cruel *aktzias*, where children under ten were separated from their parents and sent with the old and sick to an unknown place, increased the concern of the ghetto's Jews that they too were destined for such a fate (Unger, 2005).

The chronicler noted on August 28:

(...) Once again there is an unexplained sense of insecurity in the ghetto. People are tormented by the stories of those arriving and by the big unknown that is worse than the worst reality... The constant movement of people in the ghetto creates a major sense of insecurity, undermines normal life... The ghetto's streets are traversed by wan shadows with swollen faces and feet, human figures with a distorted shape whose only wish is to hold on and remain alive... to see a better tomorrow with no new hardships, even at the price of poorer and worse food rations... (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, p. 208).

Two seemingly contradictory facts continued to throw the ghetto's inhabitants from hope to despair: they heard about the cruel *aktzias* in ghettos in the area and were concerned about them, but saw that all the Jews from ghettos in the area who were capable of working were being transferred to them. They concluded that the ghetto in Lodz would persevere (Unger, 2005).

The fear for the fate of family members remaining in the ghetto appears openly in two postcards. The first postcard (20), dated August 17, was sent from a labour camp in Poznan to the Jewish Elder in the ghetto:

To the Jewish Elder. I would like to sincerely ask the Jewish Council in LitzmanStadt to tell me, if possibly as soon as possible, how and where my two sisters are employed – Adel and Gweleyna, who live on Plefferstadt 13/5. Signed with thanks. Jarol Friede.

The request to know how and where the sisters were employed means a confirmation of life. The Lodz Ghetto was a large and main centre of employment, where any person who was employed was ensured a few more days of life, keeping away the fate of deportation.

In the second postcard (C21), dated August 23, two brothers from the Baustelle D.S.c Oreetz Neustadt Wosse camp (construction site) ask for information about the fate of their parents. Reading the postcard clarifies the extent of the tragedy generated by the separation of the family members, their dispersal, and the absence of any knowledge concerning their fate, which is tearing the family apart:

To the Jewish Elder at the Litzmannstadt Ghetto. For twenty months my brother and I have been at the camp and in the last four months we wrote our parents a large number of postcards but received no word and do not know what to think. We strongly request that the Jewish Elder replies with the reason, why we are not receiving any answer from our parents who live on Patrycja Karpinska. We hope to receive a quick reply from the Jewish Elder and are grateful. J.M. Fuchs.

THE BIG DEPORTATION – THE POSTCARDS IN THE CORPUS

For the period from the end of August 1942 to November of that year, there are no postcards in the research corpus. This vacuum can be explained as no postcards were sent due to the big deportation, the Sperre. The deportation began with the evacuation of the sick from the hospitals. The chroniclers began the report on September 1 with the following sentence:

Today, on the third anniversary since the war began, the ghetto awakened to a terrifying nightmare... the tragedy of the sick and their families is indescribable. One has a brother, the other a sister, this a father and that a mother, cousin, aunt! Every person left someone. Such terrible sights were not seen even at the height of the deportations, so much crying and screaming. Here and there a small group of bawling women could be seen, children and men at their wits' ends, torn from their dear ones in such a horrible manner... (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, pp. 220-221).

The chroniclers also wrote about the condition of Jews, the inhabitants of the ghetto, who were not deported in the big deportation and remained to continue their glum routine. On September 4, Chaim Romkowski gave

a speech in the fire brigade square at the ghetto, in what was recorded in history as the "Children's speech." In this speech, he confirmed what the pained audience had feared: "That he is bloodless, because he is tired and his strength was spent in the struggle with his stomach, a cruel enemy that vanquished him..." (Singer, 1959, p. 75).

The sights were unbearable; almost no family was spared. The parents whose children had been taken remained broken and depressed, some even went out of their minds from sorrow. Many blamed themselves for not having done enough to save their children and for looking on with no objection while their offspring were torn from them. The sources contain many testimonies, mainly of mothers who lost their minds.

Jacob Poznanski (2010) writes in his diary about the sorrow and derangement of the mothers:

In the office Attorney Defner was employed. He had two girls, aged 4 and 6. During the operation in September 1942, he hid them in a trash can and closed the lid on them. A moment later, when the Germans were still in the yard, the younger one started to yell desperately: Mommy!! The German police heard the shout, opened the trash can, and pulled the girl out. The desperate mother fell at their feet, but to no avail. The traumatic event broke the brave woman completely and she started to show signs of a confused mind... (Poznanski, 2010, pp. 219-220).

The shocked and beaten inhabitants of the ghetto were forced to return to work and to maintain a "routine." How can one resume functioning after such a trauma? The survivors' struggle to exist continued and all their mental energy was directed at holding on. The effort to obtain means of subsistence may have diverted their attention from the horror of the deportation and the consequent trauma. The apathy that overtook them was a type of mental mechanism that served to preserve their physical and mental existence. But many did not manage to cope and died shortly after (Unger, 2005). The year 1942 was the most difficult one for the inhabitants of the ghetto. Parents and children were cruelly torn from each other, and the remaining vacuum was unbearable. Parents remained alone. The postcard collection includes no postcards from the months of September-November. It may be assumed that the terror of the events was the cause of this silence.

LODZ 1943-1944 – THE LAST POSTCARDS

Jacob Poznanski wrote in his diary at the beginning of the year 1943 as follows: "We have entered the fifth year of the war. We heard that Hitler took this opportunity to give a pompous speech in which he once again settled accounts with the Jews. What can we do? This is our fate" (Poznanski, 2010, p. 74).

After the Sperre in September 1942, the appearance of the ghetto changed. Less than 90 000 Jews remained; mostly young people capable of work.

The children, elderly, and sick had been deported from the ghetto, which became one big labour camp. Unlike other labour camps, the Jews who lived in the ghetto remained in their homes with remaining family members. In this period, a certain improvement was evident in the supply of food and the deportations ceased, resulting in a sense of calm, renewal of unofficial activities, but mainly an increasing feeling that the ghetto's inhabitants who are employed still have a chance of survival (Unger, 2005).

The postcard collection includes only six postcards from these years. They reflect, albeit slightly, the attempt to renew contact after the big tragedy upon the deportations of 1942. Those writings ask for a sign of life from their relatives and also wish to say that, despite everything, they are still alive.

In June 1943, Chaim Romkowski, the Jewish Elder in the Lodz Ghetto, wrote a postcard (D2) to Mrs. Camilla Sarah Groft from Cologne, Germany: "The Gniadelaper family lives here. 15/10 Altmark St. Litzmannstadt. They are well."

Alran Rubin from the forest camp of Britz near Oelerswalde, Angermunde district, wrote a postcard (D3) on July 19, 1943, to the Jewish Elder in the ghetto: "I would like to notify my parents that I am at the Britz forest camp. I am working and healthy. Their names are Majsio und Basia Rubin. They live at Ziegfriedstr 51 N2. Alran Rubin."

A final postcard (D5) in the collection from this year, from December 25, 1943, deals with the receipt of money. The postcard was sent to Prague, signed by the Jewish Elder: "Mrs. Rada Asherman from Spacerowastr, 20 received the money, 50 marks."

The chroniclers chose to mention the important work of the ghetto's postal department in a special item published on July 12, 1943:

The postal department of the head of the Jewish Council, or as called in short – the "Jude post" – is one of those departments whose activity is not particularly conspicuous. It performs a relatively anonymous job, because its functions cannot be compared to those of a regular postal office. The prohibition against sending letters and packages, namely, the inability to be in contact with the surroundings, of course restricts the activities of the postal office and allows it to perform only a small part of its customary duties. The link between the ghetto post and the outer world is the German post. And here it is necessary to consider what the ghetto post receives and what it sends. The ghetto receives, first and foremost, money orders from outside, mostly from Prague, a small number from the old Reich and from Jewish labour camps. It also receives a very limited number of orders from the Netherlands, Hungary, Switzerland, and Italy, and finally also from what is called the camp post, originating from Jews who were deported, which arrive as an act of generosity, despite the prohibition against all correspondence. Of all the moneys that arrive, ninety percent are from Prague. The amounts and the number of deliveries is indeed diminishing by the month. The fullest month was December 1941, namely right after the arrival of the transports from the west. In that month there were days

when 15,000 money orders arrived... gradually, the quantities and amounts of the money orders decreased... In June 1943 they reached 113 000 marks. This development shows that the number of free Jews in the Czech protectorate and in the old Reich is gradually dropping... The ghetto post gives the German post postcards that contain regards to send to the area of the general government and the labour camps, confirmation of money sent from the old Reich, from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and from the labour camps, packages for the labour camps with objects for daily use, aside from food products and written supplements. These movements are not considerable... For all this work 70 clerks are employed, including a team of 40 postmen. It can be determined that every day about 5 000 postal items are distributed (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, pp. 381-382).

The Lodz Ghetto was liquidated by the Germans in August 1944. The chroniclers continued their recording during this year as well. There is a significant reference in the chronicle in 1944 to the change in German policy with regard to the Jewish postal authority. In that year, various restrictions on sending and receiving postal items were removed. In most of the postcards, the writers note that packages were sent to the inhabitants of the ghetto. Packages of food, clothing, and other products they needed, asking for confirmation that these had been received. A moving item written in the chronicle on February 27 deals with this issue:

For several weeks there are a dozen happy people in the ghetto. This does not mean that they are exempt from all the hardships of the ghetto or that they have reached the recognition that it will all pass. Not at all. Their happiness is of a simpler kind: they received food packages from outside, from somewhere in the wide world. This can be seen as a miracle, as from December 1941 there have been no postal ties between the ghetto and the outside world... only when one of those who came from the west receives a sum of several marks is he allowed to confirm this on a printed form. That's all. That is the contact with people and things outside the ghetto. And suddenly now – gift packages. These deliveries cannot be called anything else... And what did they contain? Of course, food products. Mostly bread and also oil, jam, sugar, and similar delicacies, rare and highly desired. Who is the sender? asks the happy recipient of the package. However, this question has no answer. The name of the sender is not given to the recipient of the package. He can guess, think, surmise. And eventually he makes do with the fact that there is someone who remembers him out there... He dreams of the past and hopes to be happy once again (Ben Menachem & Rab, 1989, p. 186).

The Lodz Ghetto was liquidated in August 1944. The extent of the tragedy that befell the people of the ghetto and the refugees who arrived there can be demonstrated through the following statistics: The ghetto housed 204 800 people in total. Of these, 43 743 died of hunger and disease. About 15 000 were deported to labour camps; most perished. About 80 000 men, women, and children were deported to the death camp at Chelmno or were murdered during the aktzias. When the ghetto was liqu-

idated in 1944, 67 000 people were deported to Auschwitz. It is estimated that about 7000-10 000 people survived, less than five per cent of all residents of Lodz (Unger, 2005).

In a time of horror and terror, in total isolation, absolutely dependent on the German authorities; in a state of extreme hunger, dealing with the tearing apart of families, and in the attempt to survive nonetheless – the inhabitants of the ghetto sent postcards. Their purpose was one – to give a sign of life. I, the writer, am still alive despite the horrors visited upon me, and from my place of incarceration, I am sending a sign of life to the world that I left behind, so that someone there will remember me.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study deals with a view of history as seen through postcards, in a case study of the Lodz Ghetto, where the post was the exclusive means of communication in the years 1940-1944. The authors of this article examined the types of messages concerning events in the ghetto in the years under consideration, contained in the postcards: cognitive-historical, emotional, and ethical messages. The authors studied the messages arising from the postcards as a reflection of personal, group, objective, and subjective experiences and thoughts. Finally, the extent to which the contents of the postcards indicate future developments that occurred in the Lodz Ghetto and in other ghettos was taken into consideration.

The study presents postcards that were sent from the ghetto to locations throughout Europe (and several postcards were sent to the United States), as well as postcards sent by relatives, acquaintances, friends, organs, and institutions. Most of the postcards that survived are from 1941-1942.

In-depth analysis reveals to readers the evolvment of historical events from the perspective of the postcard writers, as they experienced them in the ghetto. Then again, the postcards sent to the ghetto by relatives and acquaintances expose readers to the great despair of the individual writers coping with the loss of their family and the hope of finding it.

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