

## FREDERICK WEINSTEIN

*Aufzeichnungen aus dem Versteck. Erlebnisse eines polnischen Juden 1939-1946*

[Sketches from Hiding. Experiences of a Polish Jew 1939-1946] Trans. from Polish by Jolanta Woźniak-Kreutzer. Ed. and with a commentary by Barbara Schieb and Martina Voigt, Berlin: Lukas-Verlag 2006, 578 pp., b/w illus., paperback. ISBN 3936872708

Fryderyk Winnykamień was a resourceful, energetic and active young man who did not easily let people discourage him. Endowed with those qualities alone, he was well equipped for the Jewish struggle for survival during the National Socialist occupation of Poland. In addition, he often found that luck was on his side when he needed it, and in many instances family members gave him vital assistance. In 1943/44, he spent a number of months in hiding together with his father Leopold Winnykamień under the protection of the assumed 'Aryan' identity of his mother over on the 'Aryan side' in Warsaw. It was there that he wrote his report and remembrances -- unusually rich, detailed and in an engaging style -- on his experiences of the war and occupation from the summer of 1939 until 21 July 1942, the day before the beginning of the deportations to Treblinka. That segment of time comprises the major part of the present testimonial (pp. 43-269). It is followed by shorter texts and fragments of daily notes and sketches from the Warsaw Ghetto from June 1942 to February 1943, and from the Wola neighborhood in Warsaw down to the beginning of the national Polish Uprising in August 1944. After that, the author was for a time active, disguised as an ethnic Pole, as an interpreter for the German troops. In 1945, he was able to salvage his notes and sketches intact from the ruins of ravaged Warsaw, and their survival is thus likewise a great stroke of luck. Winnykamień, who later changed his name to Frederick Weinstein, took these writings along with him when he emigrated to the United States.

Born 1922 and raised in Łódź, Fryderyk together with his parents and two sisters attempted to escape the enormous pressure of persecution under the German administration in Lodz by fleeing to Warsaw at the end of 1939. There he initially found a modicum of relative freedom, and took on various jobs in the framework of the forced labor system. He maintained contact with his parents, who had moved to Otwock, a spa near Warsaw, in the hope of better chances for a livelihood for his father, who was a dentist. Later the author himself fled from the organs of persecution once more, relocating in October 1940 to Gniewoszczów, where his parents in the meantime had moved. Located some 60 km from Radom at the edge of the Radom District, not far from the Vistula River, the tranquil town seemed at first glance to the harried young man a veritable oasis of peace. Here the world still appeared to be a sane and orderly place.<sup>1</sup> The family welcomed New Year 1942 'without a care, in affluence [...] yes, we did not even sense the approaching doom' (204). But a half year later even the most remote province was reeling in the grips of 'Operation Reinhard.' Like many others, Winnykamień returned to Warsaw, because now he felt safer inside the Jewish Ghetto. And it was here that his decision crystallized to attempt to survive on the other side of the ghetto walls.

Winnykamień, who was fired by a desire for social justice and pinned his high hopes on the Soviet Union, was a committed communist (p. 193). He often referred to the Germans - - whom he sincerely hated, and whose crimes he described, one after the next -- by using the customary derogatory epithets (Teutons, Swabians, barbarians, Huns). He regarded the Poles, aside from a very few exceptions, as reactionary anti-Semites, ready and eager to collaborate with the Germans; in his eyes, they were pleased with the persecution of the Jews and eager to profit from its ravage. After his emigration, he never returned to Poland.

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<sup>1</sup> Today too a popular resort area; see the current web site on the town in Polish <http://www.gniewoszczow.pl/index.htm> .

The author also describes the conflicts within the Jewish population. These were in part the product of heterogeneity within Polish Jewry, where assimilated Jews in the Western sense lived together with a large mass of Jews still adherent to custom and tradition. Particularly striking is his description of the disputes that raged between the representative of Jewish Social Self-Assistance in Gniewosów (his father) and the Jews' Council (*Judenrat*) on this internal periphery (pp. 199-204). As here manifested, the social welfare services for the endless stream of indigent and starving refugees were always threatened by the bane of local corruption.

After his emigration to New York, for decades the author gave little or no further thought to sketches from the war, until Barbara Schieb convinced him to allow them to be translated into German and published. Winnykamień's text, written in 1943/44 as a manuscript in Polish, has here been translated into a facile and flowing German. With the help of facsimile pages of the original interspersed in the text, the reader can also gain some impression of the appearance and language of the original. The editors have provided an introduction and a very detailed commentary, which attempts to place these notes and sketches within the context of the contemporary state of research. Another fortunate circumstance was the fact that the writer was available for questions and thus able to help clarify various ambiguities and inconsistencies in the text. The notes for these remembrances themselves are voluminous, comprising 105 densely printed pages (pp. 380-484). Since there is to date no comprehensive monographic study on the National Socialist murder of the Jews in Poland, annotation here necessitated substantial research in the relevant literature and in archives.

But a number of details require correction in this regard. Thus, the reference on p. 12 should be to the 'Second' Polish Republic, not the 'First.' The 'epidemic quarantine area' in Warsaw was closed off earlier, in November 1939, not March 1940 as stated (p. 431). The assertion (p. 445) that Hitler's war of annihilation was directed with equal intensity against Jews, communists and 'Slavs' is without foundation, because in that case National Socialist Germany would not have cooperated for so many years so closely with Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia -- and from 1939 to mid-1941, even with communist Russia. There was no 'National Democratic Party Poland' (p. 426) in the inter-war period, even if this term repeatedly crops up in the literature.<sup>2</sup> The parties oriented to National Democracy, Polish nationalism and anti-Semitism had other, often changing names. Surprising is the statement that the to date generally exaggerated role of the Nazi occupation authorities in the pogroms against the Jews in Warsaw in March 1940 has 'not been sufficiently investigated' (p. 427).<sup>3</sup>

But this criticism should not detract from the merit of the editors in having established here new editorial standards for excellence. One can only wish that a comparable degree of exacting scholarship might lead to a more consistent effort in future to make available other exceptional Jewish testimonies on the Nazi Judeocide.<sup>4</sup> The series 'Library of Holocaust Testimonies' could serve as a paradigm here.

Klaus-Peter Friedrich

Translated from the German by Bill Templer

<sup>2</sup> See now Saul Friedländer, *Die Jahre der Vernichtung. Das Dritte Reich und die Juden. Band 2 1939-1945*, Munich 2006, p. 52; English original: *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Vol. 2, 1939-1945. The Years of Extermination*, New York: HarperCollins 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The authors are apparently unaware of the relevant study on this by Tomasz Szarota: *U progu zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie*, Warsaw 2000.

<sup>4</sup> I am thinking here, for example, of the reports in Polish by Leon Najberg, *Ostatni powstańcy getta*, Warsaw 1993, Marian Berland, *Dni długie jak wieki*, Warsaw 1992 or Edward Reicher, *W ostrym świetle dnia. Dziennik żydowskiego lekarza 1939-1945*, ed. Renata Jabłońska, London 1989, the latter to date only available in a French translation.