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The Adventures of a Stamp Collector in the Warsaw Ghetto: Franz Konrad's Story

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From research workshops

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The Adventures of a Stamp Collector in the Warsaw Ghetto: Franz Konrad's Story

At 10.30 a.m. on Friday 23 April 1943 about 3,500 workers of the *Werterfassung* (the economic branch of Operation Reinhardt,¹ which seized and secured the property the Jews deported to Treblinka had left behind in the Warsaw ghetto) marched from Niska Street to the *Umschlagplatz* to be deported to the camps in the Lublin District. It is not known if there had been an intensive campaign similar to that in Schultz's and Többens' shops to convince the *Werterfassung* workers to leave for the camps.² According to eyewitnesses of those events, unlike the workers of a handful of other enterprises operating in the rump ghetto the *Werterfassung* workers did not try to defend or hide themselves. Allegedly they went to the *Umschlagplatz* confident that their safety was guaranteed by SS-Obersturmführer Franz Konrad (property takeover specialist), who was leading the march. This text is an attempt to establish who that Nazi was. His SS colleagues called him "the King of the Warsaw Ghetto." But on the fourth day after the Warsaw ghetto uprising, after the nightmare of deportation and initial military operations, he still enjoyed (as the memoirist Ber Warm put it) the "unlimited trust" of the Warsaw Jews.³

The official information found in the personnel files of the SS is just a handful of basic facts on Konrad's pre-war life. Franz was born on 1 March 1906 in Liesing near Vienna as the son of Florian and Maria Konrad. He was a Catholic and merchant by profession. He got married in 1931 and had three children: a boy born in 1931 and two girls born in 1936 and 1939. He joined the NSDAP (party number 1 085 499) and the SS in 1933 (ID no. 46 204) and then the Waffen-SS on

¹ More on Operation Reinhardt see *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, ed. Dariusz Libionka (Warsaw: IPN, 2004). More on the economic dimension of Operation Reinhardt see Stanisław Piotrowski, *Misja Odyła Globocnika. Sprawozdanie o wynikach finansowych zagłady Żydów w Polsce* (Warsaw: PIW, 1949).

² See e.g. Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego [Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute] (later: AŻIH), 301/474, Relacja Eugenii Truskier [Eugenia Truskier's Testimony], pp. 14–15.

³ AŻIH, 302/188, Relacja Bera Warma [Ber Warm's Testimony], p. 2.

6 December 1939. He was a *Stabszahlmeister* with the Waffen-SS rank of Captain and was awarded the War Merit Cross (*Kriegsverdienstkreuz*) First and Second Class and the Iron Cross Second Class. It is also recorded that Konrad was promoted only by two ranks during the entire World War II: he was *Untersturmführer* SS (second lieutenant) in 1939 and by 1944 he had become *Hauptsturmführer* (captain).⁴ This information suggests (at the very most) an average officer. Nothing explains how this very man became “the King of the Warsaw ghetto,” subsequently tried together with Jürgen Stroop in 1951.

But there is one more highly informative yet peculiar source of information on Konrad’s biography. He described his life in great detail on two occasions: soon after the end of the war in 1946 after he had been captured by the American Army and in July 1951 during the hearing at the Warsaw Provincial Court. These two statements are very exhaustive and vivid. One learns from them not only of Konrad’s biography but also of his post-war auto-creation.

Consequently, one can begin the story of “the King of the Warsaw ghetto” from his adolescence. This is how Franz Konrad described his early years in 1946:

I wanted to be a musician as a child. But due to the material situation the dream could not come true. After I left my six-grade elementary school one day my father took me to a nearby market town where I was to become an apprentice to a certain merchant [...]. During the last year of my apprenticeship I learned how to play chess and I joined a club to learn Esperanto – the international auxiliary language. I have forgotten it altogether for I had no opportunity to practice speaking it. But at that time I was so proficient that I proudly wore an Esperanto badge with a green star on white background, and I promoted it through propaganda materials.⁵

After the apprenticeship Konrad found employment at the Distributive Association. In the autumn of 1931, already as a director of one of the Association’s branches, he was accused of theft. In his testimonies he claimed that the accusation was completely groundless. He spent three months in prison though. As is already known he joined the NSDAP and the SS in 1933. Allegedly he was recruited by the barrister who defended him during the trial for theft. Konrad also hoped that the membership would help him find a steady job. He worked for some time at road construction. In the summer of 1935, unemployed again, he escaped to Germany where he joined the SS training camp in Weissenfeld. His

⁴ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance] (later: AIPN), GK, 317/874, Proces Jürgena Stroopa, Franza Konrada i Hermana Höflego, Sąd Wojewódzki dla m.st. Warszawy, t. 10, Raport osobowy, SS-Untersturmführer Franz Konrad [Jürgen Stroop, Franz Konrad and Herman Höfle’s Trial, Provincial Court for the Capital City of Warsaw, file 10, Personal Report, Untersturmführer Franz Konrad], p. 53.

⁵ AIPN, GK, 317/874, file 8, Oświadczenie Franza Konrada [Franz Konrad’s Statement], 8 January 1946, pp. 19–20.

career accelerated in that formation though not spectacularly. In the autumn of 1938, after he had become an SS administrative officer, he was transferred to Austria. In December 1939 Konrad completed a crash course for administrative directors in Berlin. But the two crucial factors in his career were: personal contacts and, as it seems, also the great ease with which he made new acquaintances. During his stay in Berlin he made friends with, among others, Hermann Fegelein – close colleague of Heinrich Himmler, member of Adolf Hitler's closest circle and organiser of the SS cavalry in Poland. From then until the end of the war Fegelein "steered" Konrad's career. In January 1940 the two men went to Warsaw, where Konrad became a clerk in charge of building requisition in the Requisition and Provision Division (*Beschlagnahme und Beschaffungswesen*), which requisitioned (rooms in) buildings and premises for the German administrative authorities and German officials. His duties consisted of furnishing and refurbishing offices and apartments for high-ranking SS officials. According to Konrad's personal file, due to his "firm ideological stance, his calm and simultaneously determined action and his tireless diligence he was able to perform his tasks and duties in an exemplary fashion."⁶ Numerous testimonies of victims of the requisitions (performed within the scope of the duties of the civil and military authorities or performed by SS members on their own initiative) suggest that Konrad derived substantial profits from that activity. But no testimony of a victim of his direct activity has been found. Konrad's testimonies are the only source of information on this stage of his carrier. Similarly to those that concern his youth, they are also very vivid and they probably significantly divert from the truth. A fragment of Franz Konrad's testimony of 1946:

Born in the mountains, unprepared and unfamiliar with big city life, I could not accept the thought of taking anything from anybody, even if that person was of the Jewish race. I was outraged and everything in me rebelled against it. I explained this to Franz Freidrich and asked him to give the task to somebody else. I was told that unless I obeyed the order I would be accused of insubordination. Moreover, I was derided and condemned as a coward and my colleagues laughed that even though I was an SS member I lacked the courage to take anything away from the Jews. Earlier, as an SS member I had not dealt with the Jewish race issue. I had not known the Jews as a mass apart from one of them whom I met during my apprenticeship and whom I came to know as a hard-working and diligent man. While worrying about the order I had received I came to the conclusion that injustice inflicted upon a fellow human being always returns to one. It was my main thought while performing my future duties and I obeyed all orders from the point of view of a human and of my own conscience.⁷

⁶ Ibidem, file 10, Raport osobowy [Personal Report], SS-Untersturmführer Franz Konrad, p. 53.

⁷ Ibidem, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], p. 27.

During the hearing before the Warsaw court he also claimed that he removed furniture from Jewish apartments only during the transitory three-week period and that later he tried to obtain them from the warehouses on Senatorska Street through the office of the Governor of the District of Warsaw.⁸ According to Konrad's own version, he confiscated furniture only from abandoned apartments, which he allegedly found due to his Jewish helpers. He claimed that consequently Jewish families invited him over "not because they feared that I would take something away from them but because they sought contact with me only because of personal understanding."⁹

In summer 1941 Fegelein took command of the "Florian Geyer" 8th SS Cavalry Division and was sent to the East. His protégé Franz Konrad left Warsaw with him. The SS cavalry went down in the history of the Eastern Front as the formation that participated in massacres of civilians and Jews. But nothing suggests that Konrad was involved in those murders. As an administrative clerk, he was not at the front line. After the war he admitted that he was well informed about the unit's activity. He claimed, however, that he only organized the transport of provisions for the soldiers at the front line.¹⁰ In the summer of 1942 Konrad was delegated to organize SS weapon repair offices in the Caucasus Mountains. But the plan was dropped after the situation on the eastern front line had changed and he was called to Warsaw instead.

Konrad's return to the capital was probably at the end of June 1942 or in July 1942. It has not been ascertained what he was doing there initially. He claimed that Fegelein ordered him to investigate the possibilities of making a profit in the Warsaw ghetto and of using the credits extended by the Third Reich to weapons manufacturers, who used a Jewish workforce.¹¹ Of course, Konrad was not the only one who sought profit in the ghetto during that period. As is known, large German enterprises associated into the Deutsche Firmengemeinschaft Warschau GmbH had been already operating and developing in the ghetto since mid-1941. Moreover, when Konrad arrived in Warsaw in mid 1942 numerous new companies were being established in the Jewish district. Tatiana Brustin-Berenstein enumerates other entrepreneurs other than Konrad, e.g. Karol Heinz Miller, Gustav Siegmund and Zimmermann (A-Ha-Ge Zimmermann paper company).¹²

Konrad's initial objective was to take over the Kohn and Heller Company, which comprised about a dozen smaller manufacturing companies primarily

⁸ Ibidem, file 1, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], p. 12.

⁹ Ibidem, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], p. 30.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 35.

¹¹ AIPN, GK, 317/874, file 1, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], p. 13.

¹² Tatiana Brustin-Berenstein, "Rola przedsiębiorców niemieckich w eksterminacji ludności żydowskiej w getcie warszawskim," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* [later: *BŻIH*] 1-2 (13-14) (1955): 191.

working for the army. As Karolina Marek (Kohn and Heller's office employee) recalled during the post-war investigation, Konrad had already started the negotiations to take over the company before the deportation at the end of July 1942.¹³ According to Konrad, the first attempt did not succeed due to the firm objection on the part of Ferdinand von Sammern-Frankenegg (SS and Warsaw District police commander).¹⁴ Konrad only managed to take over the firm later (perhaps at the end of August or in September 1942) after the death of its owners on 7 August 1942. Konrad's next and this time successful undertaking was with the entrepreneur and shop owner Walther Többens.¹⁵ Using agents-solicitors they found owners of Jewish companies, who then gave them handsome bribes in return for incorporation into the so-called *Exportabteilung* of Többens' company. The owners were also told that they would be safe during deportations. The 1951 trial's indictment says, however, that despite Konrad's promises the incorporation did not guarantee safety. Many of those who paid for it were deported the very next day.¹⁶ Konrad and Többens cooperated until September 1942 when most entrepreneurs and their families were deported to Treblinka. Konrad himself claimed during the trial that the company had never been established.¹⁷

During that period Konrad not only conducted his own business but he also began cooperation with Walter Geipl, director of the *Werterfassung* – the newly created office for property takeover. Brigades to collect material goods left behind by the deportees (*Aufräumungskommando*) similar to the Warsaw *Werterfassung* were organized in all major ghettos eliminated within the framework of Operation Reinhardt. The Warsaw *Werterfassung* was officially amalgamated with Operation Reinhardt staff in January 1943, when it was incorporated into Osti (Ostindustrie GmbH) – a company subordinated to the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office (*SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*). Osti was to establish prisoner workforce manufacturing companies in Jewish labor camps in the Lublin District. Consequently, the Warsaw plants with about twelve thousand Jewish workers had to be moved to the camps in the Lublin District. But the 1943 January operation halted the preparations to liquidate the ghetto. Hence, the transports from Warsaw reached the Lublin District camps only in the second half of March.¹⁸ Konrad, who replaced the

¹³ AIPN, GK, 317/874, file 8, Zeznanie świadka Karoliny Marek [Witness Karolina Marek's Testimony], p. 133.

¹⁴ Ibidem, file 1, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], p. 13.

¹⁵ See Brustin-Berenstein, "Rola przedsiębiorców niemieckich," 189.

¹⁶ AIPN, GK, 317/874, file 1, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], p. 18.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 13.

¹⁸ Detailed information on the transports of Jews from Warsaw to the concentration camp at Majdanek and to the labor camps in the Lublin District see Alina Skibińska "1943: z warszawskiego getta do obozów na Lubelszczyźnie w relacjach żydowskich," in *Erntefest*, 3–4

dismissed Geipl as the *Werterfassung* director in September 1942, used that delay to the full.

The *Werterfassung* was primarily to collect the most valuable objects and resources from the buildings abandoned due to the deportations or changed of ghetto boundaries' shifting. The goods were then stored in empty buildings in the ghetto. In his 1946 testimonies Konrad enumerated 15 warehouses in the ghetto. The excerpt is quoted to show the full scale of the *Werterfassung*'s activity:

Warehouse 1. My office with Jewish clerks was there, [and] 1 big carpenter's shop, which made mostly radio boxes and radios (single type). Moreover, the furniture for the offices was stored, repaired, French-polished, etc. there. 1 warehouse with ca. 200 grand pianos and upright pianos, musical instruments and adequate parts.

Warehouse of furs and hides handed to the Leipzig Central Office worth 1.2 million Reichsmarks.

Carpets and rugs worth thousands of Reichsmarks.

Rare Jewish publications.

Oil paintings and their repair.

Watches and repair shops with big warehouses of spare parts.

Stamps.

Warehouse 2. Warehouse of textiles, clothes, silver, porcelain, products sold by the cubit, haberdashery, buttons (a certain company offered 100,000 Reichsmarks for them).

Warehouse 3. Chemicals, paints, drugstore products, drugs, hides, hemp.

Warehouse 4. Furniture, valuable goblets and works of art (van Delft).

Warehouse 5. Underwear – selected underwear was washed and taken to warehouse 2.

Warehouse 6. Paper, office equipment and toys.

Warehouse 7. Cosmetics, toothpaste, shoe polish, flypaper, parachute caps, phloem shoes.

Warehouse 8. Warehouse of furniture, horsehair and seagrass.

Warehouse 9. Furniture and books.

Warehouse 10. Furniture and books.

Warehouse 11. Pillows and cushions.

Warehouse 12. Bakelite objects.

Warehouse 13. Foundry.

Warehouse 14. Metal workshops.

Warehouse 15. Bookbinding and printing shops, book warehouses, machinery warehouses.¹⁹

In his testimony Konrad did not give the addresses of individual warehouses. But it is known that many of them were in the complex of buildings on Niska

listopada 1943. *Zapomniany epizod Zagłady*, ed. Wojciech Lenarczyk and Dariusz Libionka (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2009), 153–182.

¹⁹ AIPN, GK, 317/874, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], pp. 55–56.

Street, where he also organized accommodation for the office employees. Each warehouse had its own sign with the number and function.²⁰ All bigger buildings in the ghetto such as the Catholic St Augustine church on Nowolipki Street and the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street were adapted as warehouses, with the latter being the biggest one in the ghetto. The furniture collected in the synagogue was advertised in the press and then sold to the Polish Warsaw inhabitants. *Werterfassung* warehouses watchman Samuel Puterman wrote that the furniture from the synagogue was sold by piece, by whole sets and even by the whole content of a building at once, in which case the value of the collected furniture was only roughly estimated.²¹ Even though the furniture was delivered to Tłomackie Street by the *Werterfassung*, the sale itself was organized by the Receivership of Secured Properties. This is how Franz Konrad described the operation of the *Werterfassung* using the example of that warehouse.

Wagons (ca. 100 horses) transported everything usable, including paper and rags, to the designated warehouses. Then I mobilized horse-drawn wagons from the Civil Office for Roads and Communication Ltd. (*Urząd Cywilny Dróg i Komunikacji sp. z o.o.*), where every day I hired 50 wagons pulled by one or two horses. Escorted by the Jewish Police, the wagons transported the furniture and other objects left behind in the apartments to the synagogue, which at that time was not in the Warsaw ghetto [...]. To settle the accounts a sum of money was paid to the SS and Police of the Warsaw District, the Valuable Objects Takeover Office, to the Bank of Issue, Warsaw branch, Poland. [...] After the closure of the account the profit was ca. 5,000 Reichsmarks. Other valuable objects were stored in the designated and already mentioned factory buildings and apartment buildings.²²

In the rump ghetto the synagogue on Tłomackie Street partly assumed the function performed by the court on Leszno Street before the deportation. It was a place where Polish and Jewish workers of the *Werterfassung* met to discuss business and personal matters.²³

The *Werterfassung* had more and more work. At the beginning of December 1942 the company employed 3,200 persons, while a month later the number reached 3,700.²⁴ They not only removed objects from the apartments but also worked in sorting shops, laundries, sewing rooms and warehouses. Shop watchmen (the so-called *Werkschutz*) and Jewish Police functionaries were also brought to assist the *Werterfassung*. The engagement of the latter group caused a fierce conflict between Konrad and his director Józef Szeryński at the

²⁰ AŻIH, 302/27, Samuel Puterman, "Getto warszawskie" ["Warsaw ghetto"], p. 254.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 256.

²² AIPN, GK, 317/874, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], p. 54.

²³ Rachela Auerbach, "Werterfassung," *Nasze Słowo* 3–4 (1949): 11.

²⁴ Brustin-Berenstein, "Rola przedsiębiorców niemieckich," 198.

end of 1942. Szeryński opposed the employment of 150 Jewish Police functionaries as porters claiming that they were already working 15 hours a day. Jewish Police functionary Samuel Puterman wrote in his memoir that “[a]fter a few days of negotiations [Szeryński’s] the only success was the cancellation of the night guard, which protected buildings against the Aryans creeping in over the wall.”²⁵ Konrad himself also talked during the trial about “the wild looting committed by the Poles, who stormed into the abandoned building so rapidly that there were casualties.”²⁶ Puterman says that with the increase of the office’s workload not only steady workers but also the Jewish Police functionaries’ and Judenrat clerks’ wives had to help the *Werterfassung*.²⁷ Those who were in the ghetto illegally and had no work assignment were also recruited.²⁸

Konrad was so spectacularly successful that at the beginning of 1943 Odilo Globocnik – commander of the SS and the police in the Lublin District and Operation Reinhardt commander – invited Heinrich Himmler to inspect his workshops. The visit was to prove the value of the Warsaw Jews, who could be used as workforce in the Third Reich arms industry. The highly profitable operation of the workshops was to aid the plans to increase the Jews’ productivity and the plans to maintain the forced labor camps. Konrad himself stressed Himmler’s visit in all of his testimonies as he thought it the culmination of his career. Both the ghetto inhabitants and the German administration were of the same opinion. The report on the visit to *Wiadomości* – the Oneg Shabbat milieu underground bulletin – read: “Himmler visited the *Werterfassung* warehouses in the ghetto on Dzielna Street No. 35 and 69 (not the only warehouses with looted Jewish property). He was not interested in the shops, factories or Jews’ workshops. He took interest only in his creation – the *Werterfassung*.”²⁹ Content with Konrad’s activity, Himmler described him in the report as a “very nice [man, who] makes an excellent impression.”³⁰ Consequently, the very same evening von Sammern-Frankenegg invited Konrad and other employees of the office for vodka.³¹

²⁵ AŻIH, 302/27, Samuel Puterman, “Getto warszawskie” [“Warsaw ghetto”], p. 256.

²⁶ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad’s Statement], p. 48.

²⁷ AŻIH, 302/27, Samuel Puterman, “Getto warszawskie” [“Warsaw ghetto”], p. 254.

²⁸ In Ringelblum’s Archive there is e.g. the announcement of the Labor Department and the Labor Commission of the Warsaw Judenrat of 20 September 1942 calling all unemployed persons to register for work in the *Werterfassung* (AŻIH, Ring. II 73).

²⁹ Szymon Datner, “‘Wiadomości’ – podziemny organ prasowy w getcie warszawskim z okresu po ‘wielkim wysiedleniu,’” *BŻIH* 76 (1970): 79.

³⁰ *Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej. Zbiór dokumentów*, collected and edited by Tatiana Berenstein, Artur Eisenbach, Adam Rutkowski (Warsaw: ŻIH, 1957), 182.

³¹ AIPN, GK, 317/874, file 1, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], p. 39.

In October 1942 Emanuel Ringelblum wrote: “[l]ooting, i.e. selling the things left behind by the deportees, [is] the only rescue.”³² It is not an exaggeration to say that the rump ghetto lived off the *Werterfassung*. The deportees’ possessions were sold to other Jews, Poles who came to the ghetto especially to obtain them or to the wagon drivers who transported them.³³ It seems that most of its workers engaged in trading the requisitioned property and that to some extent the *Werterfassung* authorities accepted that situation, which helped keep the workers alive. Most workers took some objects, sometimes sharing them with their German supervisors.³⁴ Memoirist Karol Rotgeber wrote that the Germans sometimes sold an entire building’s content to the Jews for a lump sum of 10,000–13,000 zlotys.³⁵ Rachela Auerbach, who described how the workers used to cook together in the abandoned apartments’ kitchens, went as far as to call the atmosphere in the *Werterfassung* a “cemetery idyll.”³⁶ It seems that in comparison with the murderous regime in many other shops the work in the *Werterfassung* could indeed seem relatively attractive.

At the same time, however, one cannot forget that the *Werterfassung* workers’ main duty was to collect the objects left behind by their murdered neighbors, friends and family members. A comment of *Werterfassung* worker Natan Żelechower: “The apartments were still alive, we came to kill them, we came to smash that illusion of life created in the warm atmosphere of family happiness. I could not bring myself to do it when for the first time I had to tear some Jew’s painting from its frames and destroy it, I felt [as if] I was committing murder.”³⁷ Others engaged in the property takeover also recall similar sentiment.

The ghetto inhabitants employed in the *Werterfassung* usually coped with their moral dilemmas by means of sabotage – a phenomenon mentioned by most of its workers and by those who had some contact with the organization. It consisted mostly in destruction of valuable objects such as paintings or porcelain, often without any reaction on the part of the German supervisors.³⁸ Such a form of sabotage sometimes took place even before the *Werterfassung* workers entered the buildings. Rachela Auerbach said that “[t]o chop up ones’ furniture or ownerless furniture so that the *Werterfassung* would not get it was a perfectly proper thing to do.”³⁹

There is no doubt that the *Werterfassung* was commonly regarded as the safest workplace in the rump ghetto and as such it was the most coveted one. Rachela Auerbach recalls:

³² Emanuel Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego*, ed. Adam Rutkowski (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1983), 411.

³³ AŻIH, 302/139, Natan Żelechower, *Pamiętnik* [Memoir], p. 21.

³⁴ Auerbach, “*Werterfassung*,” 11.

³⁵ AŻIH, 302/48, Karol Rotgeber, *Pamiętnik* [Memoir], p. 134.

³⁶ Auerbach, “*Werterfassung*,” 11.

³⁷ AŻIH, 302/139, Natan Żelechower, *Pamiętnik* [Memoir], p. 21.

³⁸ Auerbach, “*Werterfassung*,” 11.

³⁹ Rachela Auerbach, “Po ‘Akcji,’” *Nasze Słowo* 5–6 (1949): 10.

In no other branch of the German manufacturing industry did the Jews feel as safe and needed and as longevous as in the *Werterfassung*. "Life numbers" of no other shop – not even of Schultz's or Többens' – reached a price as high as those of the *Werterfassung*. And nowhere else did one feel an atmosphere of such safety as in that work detail's office on Niska Street, under the "protective wing" of its chief – shady cunning businessman [*geszefciarz*] SS Sturmführer Konrad. [...] Even after the January operation the people on Niska Street still kept their apartments in relative order and undressed before going to bed. They thought that they would outlive everybody. They and Pinkiert's funeral parlor workers – the collectors of corpses and the collectors of dead objects – felt the most "life-durable" people in the Warsaw ghetto.⁴⁰

Konrad himself certainly contributed to that feeling of security. In the ghetto he was regarded as both a briber and a bribable person. But unlike other Nazis he was thought to be basically harmless. He was known mostly for his stamp-collecting hobby. Almost all of the witnesses who testified during his 1951 trial mentioned it. This is what one of them said: "I know nothing about Konrad aside from the fact that he collected stamps. I heard from the people who had contact with him that he liked collecting stamps to such an extent that if he had been shown a beautiful collection of stamps he would go after it to Berlin; he would totally concentrate on it."⁴¹ Another witness claimed that Konrad had a Jewish assistant whose only duty was to look for stamp collections.⁴²

Despite that opinion Konrad's testimonies clearly show him as a very down-to-earth person perfectly aware of what was happening in the ghetto. During the hearing he described incidents such as the robbing of the Judenrat safe by the underground or Alfred Nossig's murder as well as the smuggling methods.⁴³ Allegedly he obtained the information about it from a network of his Jewish friends and informers. He claimed that he had had close relations with the Jews but during the trial he was able to name just a few Jews whom he had saved: "the child of Mrs. Brotheim. A certain Jew, his name was Unger. And one more, it seems that his name was Fogel."⁴⁴ Undoubtedly Konrad's relations with the Jews who worked for him were incomparably better than those of other employees of the German administration of the ghetto. More importantly, during his post-war trial it was determined that at least until January 1943 Konrad was commonly known in the ghetto as the one who did not kill Jews. Only in mid-January that

⁴⁰ Auerbach, "Werterfassung," 11.

⁴¹ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 1, Drugi dzień rozprawy [Second Day of the main hearing], 19 July 1951, Zeznanie świadka Gołąbka [Witness Gołąbek's Testimony], p. 100.

⁴² Ibidem, Trzeci dzień rozprawy [Third Day of the main hearing], 20 July 1951, Zeznanie świadka Karoliny Marek [Witness Karolina Marek's Testimony], p. 60.

⁴³ Ibidem, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], pp. 15–17.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 31.

year it began to be rumored that he ordered the execution of seven *Werterfassung* workers during the liquidation of the Lejzorowicz brothers' tannery, which was thought a "safe" workplace. Intrigued by the hearsay that some valuables were hidden there, Konrad himself participated in the search, which he normally did not do. After the search, the *Werterfassung* workers on whom something was found were executed. Aside from that infamous incident no evidence during the post-war trial suggested that Konrad had committed murder or had ordered any liquidations in the rump ghetto or during the April uprising.

In the ghetto Konrad was mostly widely known as the hero of many stories about the fortune he had earned. It was commonly believed that the *Werterfassung* workers were too valuable for him to allow their deportation and that it was his personal desire that the institution should function as long as possible. Clearly proud of his entrepreneurship, Konrad openly admitted after the war that he had ordered his Jewish helpers to look for old liturgical texts and prints, which he intended to sell after the war.⁴⁵ Allegedly Konrad derived large profits from the companies, which he ran. They operated outside the *Werterfassung* but obtained a significant percentage of their materials from requisitions. Konrad himself described them as "numerous efficient companies and workshops."⁴⁶ The bakelite goods workshop in Többens' shop's building was one of them. Consequently, the profits he derived from his position were thought in the ghetto to have been incomparably bigger than those of all other German functionaries.⁴⁷ That activity was the reason why in his closest German circle (which he referred to as "a circle of friends from the SS") he was commonly referred to as "the King of the ghetto."⁴⁸

And so one comes directly to the events of 23 April 1943 and to the manner in which the *Werterfassung* employees were convinced to go to the *Umschlagplatz*. It needs to be said here that Konrad, who promised his employees that they would survive, had once kept his word. According to Ber Warm, on Tuesday 20 April, just as other entrepreneurs did, Konrad called the *Werterfassung* workers to come to the square outside the Judenrat building. He also promised that they would not be deported. Warm claims that 1,500 of the 4,500 workers did come and that the rest hid themselves.⁴⁹ Nothing happened to the *Werterfassung* workers on that day and all of them safely returned home just as Konrad had promised. During his stay at the square outside the Judenrat building Konrad allegedly told Többens (made by Globocnik the plenipotentiary for the moving of production [*Bevollmächtigter für die Verlegung der Betrieb im jüdischen Wohnbezirk Warschau*] in March 1943) that he would not let his workers be sent to

⁴⁵ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], p. 66.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 53.

⁴⁷ AŻIH, 302/188, Relacja Bera Warma [Ber Warm's Testimony], p. 2.

⁴⁸ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], p. 101.

⁴⁹ AŻIH, 302/188, Relacja Bera Warma [Ber Warm's Testimony], p. 8.

a labor camp. That strengthened the opinion of the *Westerfassung* as a workplace that was not subject to deportation. According to Ber Warm's estimates, the number of people in Niska Street immediately increased from 4,000 to 6,000 as the workforce was expanded by both workers of other shops and those who had been hiding. Bribes given for employment in the office allegedly increased from 500 to 5,000 zlotys.⁵⁰

Konrad appealed to his workers again on Friday 23 April. About 3,000 people came voluntarily. According to Warm, they marched hopefully to the *Umschlagplatz*.⁵¹ Only about 500 of them (mostly printers and book binders) managed to survive.⁵² Justifying his actions after the war Franz Konrad said that he could not disobey the order to bring the *Werterfassung* workers ("many of whom were his friends"⁵³) to the *Umschlagplatz* because the order came directly from Jürgen Stroop – the new commander of the Warsaw ghetto liquidation operation. Konrad's and Stroop's post-war testimonies undoubtedly prove that after the latter's arrival to Warsaw on 19 April 1943 the two men were in open conflict which seems to have been a natural consequence of the conflict of competence between Globocnik and Stroop. Konrad remained in the ghetto in the capacity of Globocnik's representative. Consequently, he remained in Stroop's closest circle during the entire period of the uprising. Even though no evidence suggests that Konrad had participated directly in the massacres during the uprising, many witnesses claimed that he had been present, particularly during the frisking of the ghetto inhabitants removed from the bunkers.⁵⁴ At the same time Konrad was extensively photographing of the uprising's pacification and Stroop attached the photographs to his report as illustration. According to Konrad's testimonies, the photos were to serve as evidence for the atrocities committed during the pacification.⁵⁵

After the war Konrad said that the reason for the conflict was the difference in the two men's attitude toward the property accumulated through the hard work of the *Werterfassung*. Allegedly, Stroop did not intend to use it. He burnt a significant amount of the property even though Konrad allegedly suggested

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 3.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 16.

⁵² AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 1, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], p. 25.

⁵³ Ibidem, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], p. 73.

⁵⁴ Leon Najberg, "Fragment z pamiętnika gruzowca," in *Dokumenty i materiały do dziejów Żydów w Polsce*, file 2: *Akcje i wysiedlenia*, ed. Józef Kermisz (Łódź: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, 1946), 336.

⁵⁵ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 1, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], p. 44. On 2 and 4 October 1948 Konrad was interrogated by Józef Skorzyński – member of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland. In his testimony he claimed that he wanted the photos he took during the uprising to serve as evidence against Stroop (ibidem, file 8, p. 180).

sending the goods to Germans in need (or at least he claimed so after the war). After the war Konrad reported "in Warsaw at least 1,000 wagons of eiderdowns had burnt." Stroop gave the rest of the property to high-rank officials. According to Konrad, four or five wagons removed objects from the warehouses in the burning ghetto non-stop for an entire week. Konrad testified that consequently "the only thing left out of all the collected and accumulated Jewish property was perhaps just some books."⁵⁶

In turn Stroop testified that in his opinion Konrad's shady dealings were unbecoming to the conduct of a German soldier's. He made the following comment. "Both Oberführer Frankenegg and the accused Konrad moved in those circles in which I, as a soldier, shunned."⁵⁷ Then he added that in his opinion "those people would have performed their functions better if they had been where they should have been, for there was a war."⁵⁸ Consequently, he allegedly personally intervened with Himmler demanding Konrad's transfer to the Eastern Front.⁵⁹ To prevent further conflicts the Osti leadership removed Konrad from the ghetto and sent him to inspect the conditions in the Włodawa POW camp, which was to be transformed into an SS labor camp. Then he was sent to evaluate the possibility of collection of valuable objects during the Białystok ghetto liquidation in August 1943. In October that year Konrad went to Łódź by order of Globocnik to estimate the number of trains needed to resettle the Łódź ghetto in Lublin. Konrad himself claimed that he sabotaged that order by reporting that such a transport was impossible. At the same time after the fall of the Warsaw ghetto uprising Konrad continued his activity in the capital removing machines for Osti from the ghetto ruins. He also co-organized workshops in KL Warschau, which was being built then.⁶⁰ The operation of Osti and consequently Konrad's duties in occupied Poland ceased in November 1943, i.e. after Operation Erntefest – the mass execution of all Jewish laborers in the labor camps in Trawniki, Poniatowa, at Majdanek and in other camps in the Lublin District.

On 13 December 1943 Franz Konrad was called to Berlin, where he was given a very attractive post of an administrative director at the SS castle in Fischhorn near Salzburg. He worked there until his arrest on 21 August 1945. According to the documents the American Army provided to the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, at the time of Konrad's arrest it was the fortune he still had (both that removed from Warsaw and that accumulated already during his stay in Fischhorn) and not the war crimes he committed that

⁵⁶ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], p. 99.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, file 1, Drugi dzień rozprawy [Second Day of the main hearing], 19 July 1951, p. 35.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, Protokół rozprawy głównej w dniu 18 VII 1951 r. [Typescript of the main hearing on 18 July 1951], p. 67.

⁶⁰ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 8, Oświadczenie Konrada [Konrad's Statement], pp. 104–105.

was in the centre of interest. Immediately after the arrest Konrad allegedly gave the American authorities Hitler's and Ewa Braun's letters, the suit Hitler was wearing on 20 July 1944 (the day of the assassination attempt) and numerous photographs.⁶¹ At first, Konrad was imprisoned in Zell Am See and on 13 September 1945 he was transferred to Glaserbach near Salzburg and then on 5 June to a prison in Regensburg. There he was once again interrogated about the money, letters and Hitler's personal possessions, which he claimed to have burnt. According to the American documents, he was kept in a cell for 11 days on bread and water but to no avail.⁶² But the American authorities suspected that he knew where more valuable objects were hidden. Consequently, they put an agent in the neighboring cell, who was to befriend the accused and obtain the appropriate information.⁶³ The Americans' activity was interrupted by a Polish extradition request. On 11 May 1946 the Polish government requested for the extradition of Franz Konrad known as "Ghetto Konrad" as the one "responsible for the mass murder of 60,000 Jews in the Warsaw ghetto."⁶⁴ On 4 September 1946 Konrad was sent to Poland. But on the same day he managed to escape from the transport. According to a secret report of the American Army counterintelligence, Konrad and four other prisoners escaped through a hole in the train's floor. As he himself claimed, "freedom waiting outside the hole in the floor turned out to be too great a temptation."⁶⁵ He was captured on 26 September while looking for shelter under the address given to him by the agent planted in the prison. After that arrest the American authorities turned down his cooperation proposition and he was immediately and without incident deported to Poland,⁶⁶ where he was put on trial with his opponent from the ghetto – Jürgen Stroop. Stroop's trial was to be the last in the series of trials of major Nazi war criminals after the trials of the employees of the Majdanek camp staff, Arthur Greiser the Gauleiter of Warthenland, Amon Göth the Płaszów camp commandant, Ludwig Fischer Governor of the Warsaw District, Rudolf Höss the Auschwitz KL commandant, Albert Forster Gauleiter of Danzig-West Prussia and Josef Bühler State Secretary of the General Government. After the capture of Stroop the Polish authorities planned a series of trials like the Nuremberg Trials. The others to face trial aside from the Warsaw ghetto executioner were e.g. Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski (Warsaw Uprising pacification commander) and Johannes Blaskowitz (commander of the 8th Army during the September 1939 campaign).⁶⁷ In fact, however, Franz Konrad (perhaps due to the lack of better candidates) was the only one put on trial

⁶¹ Ibidem, file 3, Counter Intelligence Corps, Detachment V, Nota do dowódcy oddziału. Temat: Conrad, Franz [Memo to the Detachment Commander, Topic: Conrad, Franz], p. 83.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 3, Wniosek ekstradycyjny [Extradition Motion], p. 73.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, Nota do dowódcy Oddziału V [Memo to Detachment V Commander], p. 84.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 84.

⁶⁷ Hirsch Wasser, "Proces Stroopa powinien się odbyć jak najszybciej," *Nasze Słowo* 4 (1949): 2.

apart from Stoop. Unfortunately, the Operation Reinhardt chief of staff Hermann Höfle, who the Polish authorities wished to try during the same hearing, was not captured and his case was excluded. The fact that as late as at the beginning of 1948 Franz Konrad appears in the internal correspondence concerning the preparations for the trial, as Hans Conrad seems to suggest that he had never been of primary interest to the Polish authorities.⁶⁸ The stenographic records of the hearing held during 18–24 July 1951 before the Provincial Court in Warsaw kept in the IPN archive clearly show that all the attention was focused on Stroop. The indictment states that “being a German administrative clerk for post Jewish property requisition and then the *Werterfassung* office director in the Warsaw ghetto [Konrad] participated in mass murders and persecution of the Jewish population in the Warsaw ghetto and in the robbery of their property for the benefit of the German Reich and his own benefit.”⁶⁹ But in comparison with the crushing of the uprising in the ghetto Konrad’s activity seemed to have been of marginal importance both for the witnesses and the prosecutors. As stated above, the public prosecutor’s office did not succeed in proving Konrad’s participation in the murders of the Jews conclusively, while the witnesses devoted more attention to his stamp-collecting hobby than to his crimes. This is how Konrad’s defense counsel summed it up in the final defense:

The very fact that during that trial dripping with blood and tears, there was talk of stamps made an extraordinary, macabre impression. The enormity of crimes, thousands of victims, burning buildings, women jumping off buildings with children in their arms and... the stamps [...]. He was collecting stamps while his colleagues from the SS were collecting children’s heads smashed for fun against the wall.⁷⁰

Hence, Konrad’s line of defense focused on the fact that his role was meager in comparison with the enormous responsibility of Stroop and other Nazis, who were acquitted or given lenient sentences in the Nuremberg Trials. In turn, the prosecutor’s office limited itself only to general political statements, which were to prove, as prosecutor Jan Rusek put it in his speech, “the responsibility of big German capital and the Western capital connected with that German capital for the policy of looting Jewish property and for the direct executions of Jews and other nations in the occupied countries.”⁷¹ On 24 July *Życie Warszawy* reported: “Konrad’s prosecutor, prosecuting attorney J[an] Rusek, reminded the court that the destruction of a part of Warsaw and the massacre of thousands of Polish citizens of Jewish nationality had been planned by the SS and Wehrmacht

⁶⁸ AIPN, GK, 317/874, file 3, Dokument z 28 II 1948 r. [Document of 28 February 1948], p. 8.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, file 1, Akt oskarżenia [Indictment], 5 July 1951, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, file 2, Przemówienie obrońcy oskarżonego Konrada adwokata Jana Palatyńskiego [Defense Speech of Konrad’s Defense Attorney Jan Palatyński], p. 8.

⁷¹ Ibidem, Mowa prokuratora Jana Ruska [Prosecuting Attorney Jan Rusek’s Speech], p. 1.

– organizations closely connected with German and Anglo-American monopolistic capital.”⁷² The accused Konrad claimed that he performed purely administrative duties and he stressed his connections with the ghetto inhabitants and the fact that he helped many of them survive.⁷³

The court sentenced both Konrad and Stroop to death. The substantiation said that Konrad was guilty of “planned, conscious and premeditated participation in genocide, which resulted equally from his political views and his insatiable thirst for profit, which accompanied those views.”⁷⁴ Konrad’s defense attorneys unsuccessfully appealed against the sentence. After the court had upheld the sentence on 14 December 1951 his attorney barrister Jan Palatyński asked President Bolesław Bierut for a pardon. Palatyński claimed that the court “had not provided evidence for cruelties or atrocities, for murder or murder orders, which the accused was directly guilty of.” He also referred to the principle of individualization of guilt and punishment.⁷⁵ Konrad too asked Bierut for pardon. He stressed his service to Poland after the war. A fragment of his letter reads: “During my five-year stay as a prisoner in Poland I did all I could to contribute through my work to the reconstruction of this country. I have worked diligently from 1 April 1948 in the Mokotów Printing House until the day of the hearing on 18 July 1951, where I was promoted to the position of a machine operator.”⁷⁶ Konrad’s wife Agnes also asked Bierut for pardon. This is a fragment of her dramatic letter, which was clearly translated by somebody who did not use the Polish language on an everyday basis:

I have learned now from radio and newspapers that my husband was sentenced to death on 23 July 1951 in Warsaw together with SS General Stroop. As far as I know my husband did nothing wrong during his stay in Warsaw and separately during his command in the Ghetto in Warsaw did no injustice. But if my husband was charged and sentenced due to a formal offence, that is due to his membership in the SS, as an administrative officer, I ask your honor mister president to mercifully consider that my husband has atoned through all too long period of imprisonment and that the sentence imposed on him is too harsh. My husband is a father of three children, two of whom are not provided for. I know that the concern for the lot of a totally innocent family, especially the children, makes his own fate the most severe misery for he has always been a exemplary head of the family, to whom his family [was] more important than anything else. I exclude the possibility that Franciszek Konrad occasioned any punishable act, perhaps aside from the mentioned formal offence. On the con-

⁷² *Życie Warszawy*, 24 July 1951, 2.

⁷³ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 2, Czwarty dzień rozprawy [Fourth Day of the Hearing], 23 July 1951, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁷⁵ AIPN, GK, 371/874, file 2, p. 193.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

trary, I could conclude on the basis of what he has told me that the voice of his heart told him in the numerous instances he had contact with, to alleviate or reverse apparent injustice neglecting his own safety and contrary to orders telling him to do otherwise. This character reveals his deep human heart. 29 February 1952⁷⁷

The Provincial Court in Warsaw was informed that the Polish President did not exercise his power of pardon toward Franz Konrad, son of Florian, who was hanged on 6 March 1952.

The strong politicization of the trial and the marginalization of his case and the focus on Jürgen Stroop render evaluation of Konrad's activities impossible today. It is difficult to say to what extent he was just a greedy clerk, who ended up in Warsaw almost by accident and to what extent a conscious player and an important component in Operation Reinhardt. As always the truth lies somewhere in the middle. But the presentation of his person is extremely important for the research on the practice of the implementation of the extermination of the Jews policy in the General Government and to the history of the Warsaw ghetto after the "Great Action," which still has not been fully researched.

Translated by Anna Brzostowska

Abstract

Franz Konrad, the head of the *Werterfassung* – and institution, which seized and secured the property the deported Jews left behind in the Warsaw ghetto – was one of the key figures in the ghetto after the Great Deportation Operation. Up to 4,000 ghetto inhabitants worked in the *Werterfassung* collecting, sorting and transporting looted property. Even though the institution was believed to be a workplace that offered relative security, almost all of its employees were deported in April 1943. The article, based on the ghetto inhabitants' memoirs, stenographic records of Konrad's trial and his testimonies given right after the war, records the role that he and the property confiscation played both in the everyday life of the ghetto as in the implementation of Operation Reinhardt.

Key words

Franz Konrad, Warsaw ghetto, Operation Reinhardt, Nazi war criminals' trials

⁷⁷ Attempt has been made to preserve the style of the original (translator's footnote).