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In many ways Ka-tzetnik’s and Spiegelman’s books are relations of witnesses, similarly to the books of Chajka Klinger and Liwer. Here we are faced with authentic texts, which faithfully relay facts in a way only eyewitnesses could remember. Most importantly however, the same desperate search for means of expression of experiences which are outside normal human comprehension can be found in them. Did mum not meet the limits of expression of a historical event every time she was trying to describe it in her journals? When she began her journals towards the end of August 1943, she contemplated:

*And is human language not too limited to describe all of this. For every word seems to me too pale, inadequate, unable to express accurately our emotions, not communicating what we’ve truly* [survived]. *For words adequate* [for] *communicating our era and place, and death of the Jewish nation in this era have not been born yet. I don’t want to embellish, I do not want a speck of exaggeration in my story - I want to paint the naked truth - but I lack words. - Lack of words to describe these terrible days - the anguish we survived. As I’ve already said, human language was not created for today’s times. Language, literature grew from the grounds of sound reality and conditions.*

*This reality and these conditions have never existed before - or maybe it just seems that way to me?11*.

Occupation and annexation

Directly after World War II broke out the Jewish community of Zagłęb had 95 thousand people. The two biggest cities in the region, Sosnowiec and Będzin had 27 thousand inhabitants each. In Będzin, Jews constituted around half of the entire community13, and in Sosnowiec, just above a quarter. As the war broke out, similarly to Chajka and Dawid, many Jews decide to flee their cities. Most relations from that period talk of undertaking an attempt to run east14. Zagłębie Jews living in regions next to the German border hoped that they would overtake the triumphant march of the German war machine, but similarly to Chajka and Dawid, others could also find out about its strength for themselves. The main points of Polish resistance surrendered at the end of September 1939, and on 5 October, Germans were already defiling in Warsaw. When German troops caught up with the Jews, many returned to their cities, but not all. Towards the end of 1939 the Germans carried out a population census and it turned out that in Będzin there are 22 167 Jews.

The Germans entered Będzin on 5 September 1939. Jews hid in their homes. Looking through closed curtains was Johanan Ranz, a member of the Dror supporters. For the past three days he has been wondering with his friends if he should pack his things and join the refugees going east. He decided to wait until the situation clarifies. Now however, Ranz was watching a column of armoured vehicles on their way to the city centre.

With loud engine revs the column circled the city several times, demonstrating strength, which was supposed ignite fear in the hearts of the inhabitants. Leather coats covered in dust suggested the soldiers have been on the battlefield for several days, and their silent faces didn’t promise anything good. Upon circling yet another time the army drove further, leaving behind the commanding officer and the military staff that were supposed to monitor the city.

The commanding officer belonged to Einsatzgruppe “Z/BV”, one of the units designated to take care of the Polish Jews. For a few days he held the city with an iron fist.