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## **The Fate of Jewish Community in the Rzeszów District in the Period of the II World War**

The timeframe of the dissertation extends before 1939, in order to present the characteristics of the area, and ends in 1944, the year in which the German occupation ended, on the territory of Rzeszów County. The territorial scope of this dissertation covers the extent of Rzeszów County within the period of the Second World War. The author of the dissertation refers to the fate of Jews both in urban areas, where the largest number of adherents of Judaism lived before the war, and in rural areas.

The dissertation includes a statistical analysis of the structure of the Jewish community of Rzeszów County, in relation to the rest of the population living in the area. The material and living conditions at different stages of the German occupation and the extermination process of the Jewish population were also addressed. The study also analyses the survival strategies of the Jewish population in the Rzeszów County.

The first chapter of the dissertation concerns the characteristics of Rzeszów County in 1939-1944, its location and extent, the towns it covered and their areas, with reference also to data from the inter-war period. It discusses issues related to the number and distribution of the Jewish population in Rzeszów County. This topic was important because of the estimates of the Jewish population. The chapter also outlines the organisational structure of the German civil authorities, police authorities and auxiliary formations of the German administration. It also refers to the population policy of the German authorities and the measures against Poles, Jews and Romanies.

The second chapter addresses the everyday life of Jews in the county of Rzeszów. It depicts the process of the exclusion of the Jewish population from economic life, the plundering of their property until the direct extermination, showing the process of their isolation from the rest of society. Deteriorating material and living conditions contributed to the spread of infectious diseases and famine among the Jewish community. The consequence of this policy was a high mortality rate. The chapter also concentrates on the subject of forced labour of the Jewish population and their use as labour force. The

exploitation of the Jewish population and the poor living conditions in which the Jewish people were housed in the labour camps were part of the German authorities' extermination policy towards the Jewish people, which consisted of the destruction of the Jewish community.

The direct process of extermination is depicted in chapter three. It was preceded by displacements that occurred in an atmosphere of terror. During the march as well as before it began, numerous crimes were committed against Jews who succumbed to panic. The displacements were a preparation for the mass deportations that occurred as part of *Operation Reinhardt*. The course of the operation in the Rzeszów County was dramatic and at the same time largely similar to events in the rest of the General Government. The deportations were extremely brutal. Prior to their commencement, numerous executions of Jews had already occurred in the Rzeszów Ghetto. The most tragic, and demonstrating the bestiality of the Germans, was the first "operation". The scale of the crime that occurred in the Rzeszów County, but also in the entire General Government, became the largest known crime committed against a community living in this area in history.

The final fourth chapter explores the hiding of Jews and their survival strategies. The methods of hiding were constantly changing and adapting to the current situation. They depended on a number of factors, including assimilation, physical appearance and acquaintance among the Polish community. On the territory of Rzeszów County, the help provided by Polish society to Jews was either individual (individuals) or organised (by the resistance movement). The Jewish population's presence on the Aryan side was associated with great danger. Throughout the period of hiding or concealing one's identity, it was important to be wary of collaborators and informers. This is because they could not only contribute to the discovery of the true identity, the place of refuge, but also blackmail and extort ransom or even denounce people in hiding to the Germans.

The analysis conducted and the final conclusions broaden the current state of research on the fate of Jews in the Rzeszów County during the Second World War.

Key words: Rzeszów County, Holocaust, Jews, history, ghettos