

# The Taste of Life in Ghetto #10. Adam Boj- mowicz's Confectioner's – 54 Leszno Street

**We invite you to read another article by Agnieszka Witkowska-Krych in a series entitled “Life in the Ghetto”, in which the authoress writes about such issues as problems with feeding the residents of the ghetto, the activity of meal points that were organized on an ad hoc basis for its starving residents, as well as kitchens dedicated to children and infants, Transferstelle.**

The author talks about the buildings of Courts that served as trafficking points for food smugglers, Janusz Korczak's efforts to obtain help for the Main House of Shelter, the so-called house committees, about people and institutions which had to face a nearly impossible task: feeding and saving people from starving to death. The articles are published on our website every week. We invite you to read these uneasy accounts, based on diverse and solid sources.

Bogdan (Dawid) Wojdowski, born in Warsaw, was placed in the Warsaw ghetto as a teenager. He portrays the hunger that accompanied the life of the residents of the closed district in a dramatic novel entitled “Bread for the Departed”, based on facts and his own experiences: “The first days of hunger are the worst, then it becomes bearable. First comes the weariness, your arms and legs feel heavy, each word becomes a painful noise ringing in the ears. The colours do not bring joy to the eyes, the light hurts them. (...) You feel constant thirst; chapped lips dry out. The jaws clench of their own accord and you feel pain behind the ears at the sight of a tin spoon abandoned on a table. Then, thoughts about food start; terrible, exhausting daydreams. The stomach works like a syphon. A simple thought about a piece of swede is enough – suddenly your teeth tear the stringy pulp apart with a crunch, and the juice resembling black turnip, milder and sweetish in taste, flows down your throat and wets the swollen tongue, leaving a tart residue in the mouth. (...) The thought separates itself from swede and floats high above. – When will they bring the bread?” (1971, pp. 24-25).

Bread – the object of desire of dozens, hundreds of thousands of people crammed in a small,

designated area of the so-called North District. People, the vast majority of whom died of hunger, illness, exhaustion, during displacement actions, and in the Treblinka death camp. Food: in the ghetto, next to people who were craving bread and dreamed about swede, there were those who ate at the L'Ourse café, and "Gazeta Żydowska" ["The Jewish Newspaper"] informed on August 1, 1941, that the kitchen at 11 Leszno Street „will distribute 50 grams of candy for adults and additionally for children.” This does not change the general picture of the place in which acquiring food was a matter of great importance – necessary for, but not a guarantee of survival.

Prof. Konrad Zieliński, Head of the Scientific and Research Department at the Warsaw Ghetto Museum

#### Adam Bojmowicz's Confectioner's – 54 Leszno Street

Apart from the most well-known cafés and restaurants, Adam Bojmowicz's Café also operated in Leszno Street. Before the war, its headquarters was located at 3 Żelazna Brama Square, and its branch at 50 Długa Street, in Simons' mall. In the ghetto, it opened its headquarters at 54 Leszno Street, which was even publicly announced in February 1941 within the pages of the „Gazeta Żydowska” newspaper licensed by the Germans. Bojmowicz's products, which had been known for their quality, probably quickly found their buyers. Unfortunately, this fame that had been going on since the times before the war was sometimes pernicious. Stanisław Różycki wrote about this, recalling the more or less successful attempts to counterfeit food that existed in the Warsaw ghetto: “They forge bread using talc, to make it white, the rolls with saccharine, to make them sweet. <<Bomowicz>>cakes >> take advantage of the popularity of the << Bojmowicz >> company. Tobacco is cut leaves of a home-made product, often mixed with hay. Recently, yellow cheese has been marketed in a yellow, triangular package. Quite tasty. After a week, fakes of the same cheese appeared, imitating in the external aspect, and coarse in taste and harmful to health.” (Stanisław Różycki, Zbiór relacji pt. "Obrazki uliczne getta", in: "The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto", vol. 5, Warsaw 2011, p. 26)

Perhaps this was the confectionery where Różycki's friend, Frania went to, who, having received

money from her mother, decided to spend it on some sweet little thing. Różycki writes about her: "She has already been wandering in Leszno Street for two hours, touching every grocery store's window with her nose, she is unable to decide what to buy for herself [...] Finally, with a bold step she decides, enters the store and buys a sweet butter roll. This resolute decision was influenced by the argumentation that such a bun is both sweet and large. Frania is hungry and tired, she walks out of the store and already on the doorstep she voraciously puts the bun in her mouth. Suddenly, a hungry ragamuffin, a teenage beggar, shadow of a human being runs up to her, hungrily and viciously knocks the barely bitten roll out of her hand and immediately devours it. He does not care about the fact that a crowd is already being formed around him, that projectiles of fists and sticks are already falling on him, he only covers his mouth, as if he was afraid that someone would be able to pull the roll from his mouth or from the greedy, eternally hungry stomach. He falls to the ground, the strikes and lashes fall on him from all sides, the boy's face is already covered in blood, but he does not complain, he does not scream in pain, in silence, without a fight, without defending himself, he succumbs to the revengeful blows of the street, instinctively and spontaneously lynching the ragged, cadaverous, homeless and starving boy. And Frania, in tears, is looking in fear at this everyday and universal street picture. She is not crying because of losing the bun, she has already forgotten her dreams, though the saccharine roll's sweet taste is mixed with the bitterness of her tears. No, she does not regret this bun at all. But her wrongdoer – she did not recognise him immediately – is a former pre-war acquaintance and a neighbour from Nowolipki Street. She remembers well his beautiful and big eyes, the gentle smile and the melodious voice that has always fascinated her. He was beautiful, he did well at school, he always impressed her with everything. Yes, it is Jozek Kapusta, her greatest sweetheart, whom she has never forgotten, and now the poor one is lying on the ground trampled, kicked, spat on, manhandled, called names and insulted" (Stanisław Różycki, Zbiór relacji pt. "Obrazki uliczne z getta warszawskiego", in: "The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto], vol. 5, Warsaw 2011, p. 35).

The presence of the so-called chaper, also called łapacz, or chapacz, namely street thieves specialising in snatching parcels with food from the passersby, was commonplace in the ghetto. Déclassé, hungry people looked for all sorts of ways to get anything that was suitable for eating. Their desperation affected both the individual passersby, who carried some parcels with them, as

well as street sellers or even shop owners, at whose shop windows a range of groceries was displayed. In order to protect oneself against the attack of the chapter, the purchased goods were pressed against the body, while the street stalls were protected, for instance, with a metal mesh.

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