THE LAST DAYS
OF THE JERUSALEM
OF LITHUANIA
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Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto
and the Camps, 1939–1944

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YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW HAVEN AND LONDON
[In September 1943, the Vilna Ghetto was liquidated and several thousand remaining Jews, including Herman Kruk, were transported to camps in Estonia, notably to Klooga, near Tallinn. Kruk continued writing his chronicle—in the form of diaries, narratives, and poems—up to the last day. He was killed and burned with most of the surviving Jews just hours before the Red Army liberated the area on September 19, 1944. The following poem, written in Yiddish in precise amphibrachic meter, was found among his writings from this last period and is presented here in a literal translation.]

FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Neighbors in Camp Klooga often ask me
Why do you write in such hard times?—
Why and for whom? . . .
. . . For we won’t live to see it anyway.

I know I am condemned and awaiting my turn,
Although deep inside me burrows a hope for a miracle.
Drunk on the pen trembling in my hand,
I record everything for future generations:
A day will come when someone will find
The leaves of horror I write and record.
People will tear their hair in anguish,
Eyes will plunge into the sky
Unwilling to believe the horror of our times.
And then these lines will be a consolation
For future generations, which I, a prisoner,
Kept in my sight, things
I recorded, fixed faithfully. . . .
For me it is superfluous,
For future generations I leave it as a trace.
And let it remain though I must die here
And let it show what I could not live to tell.
And I answer my neighbors:
Maybe a miracle will liberate me.
But if I must die, it must not die with me—
The time of horrors I leave for future worlds.

I write because I must write—a consolation in my time of horror.

For future generations I leave it as a trace.

—March 24, 1944
The following note was found with Kruk’s papers, hidden in the ruins of the Vilna Ghetto.

TO THOSE WHO MAY FIND THIS MATERIAL!!

The materials gathered here—the chronicle along with all the documents, manuscripts, and other texts—were collected, written, and preserved in the most difficult days of my life, from 1941 to April 1943.

I beg the honest discoverer to respect my wish, preserve the materials, and carefully ship them to my friends or relatives.