

## From the editor

This volume contains texts published during 2011–2013 in the *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* yearly published by the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research, Warsaw. The previous volumes of the English edition were published in 2008 and 2010. The purpose of *Holocaust. Studies and Materials* is to present the most recent research undertaken in Poland, primarily that based on source materials kept in local archives, in the hope of introducing them to academic circulation. The intention is also to familiarise the foreign reader with the current discussions and disputes in Poland regarding the subject matter of the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations.

Four of the texts published in this volume deal with the perception and treatment of the Jews, escapees from the ghettos and camps, by the partisan detachments of the Home Army and other underground organizations. This subject matter continues to be highly controversial. For instance, after a German TV channel had transmitted the miniseries *Generation War* [*Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*], which shows anti-Semitism spread in the ranks of the Home Army, there was a wave of criticism in Poland.

The studies presented in this volume do not offer a comprehensive analysis of the complex issue of the attitude of the Polish underground resistance to the extermination of the Jews they witnessed. Instead, the studies are multi-faceted analyses of murders committed on the Jews during 1942–1944. The first text, written by historian Alina Skibińska and ethnographer Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, discusses the murders committed on the Jews by members of the famous partisan detachment of the Home Army operating in the Kielce area. The victims included a Jewish family, its Polish helper, who years later received the Righteous among the Nations medal, and a member of a Home Army detachment, who was murdered after his anti-Semitic companions had discovered his Jewish origin. One of the effects of the publication of that text was that the AK officer who cooperated with the authors was excluded from a combatant organization. Dariusz Libionka's text is the most recent voice in the discussion, which has been proceeding in historical literature, regarding the case of the murder of a group of escapees from the forced labour camp on Lipowa Street in Lublin, who were Polish soldiers of Jewish origin taken prisoner in September 1939. Libionka's careful reading of the source materials enabled him not only to reconstruct the facts, but also to reveal the manipulations perpetrated in the 1990s by some Polish historians. There is no doubt that the massacre was committed by a nationalist group, which was soon incorporated into the National Armed forces

(a right-wing organization, not affiliated with the mainstream Home Army). The “Materials” section presents studies regarding the murder committed by members of the local Home Army network on a few Jews hiding in a small village in the Opatów county and the execution of a few dozen escapees from the forced labor camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna conducted by a Kielce detachment of the Home Army shortly before the liberation in August 1944. The article by Anna Bikont, who inspected the scene of the said crime in 2011, is a postscript to the latter text. All authors of the texts reconstruct the course and mechanism of the events as well as their wider context. They also wonder to what extent those anti-Jewish actions resulted from the orders and to what extent they were a consequence of the demoralization of some members of the underground. They also try to discover how common such incidents were.

Firstly, the above-mentioned bloc of articles belongs to the most recent (and very promising) trend in the historiography of the Holocaust: namely case studies, and other forms of inquiry based upon the methods of micro-research or, as it is known in France, the *prosopographie*. This particular attention given to detail, to the local scenery and to the local context was well summarized by Daniel Mendelsohn, who wrote in *The Lost*: “Everything that happened, happened because someone, an individual, made a decision. [...] Holocaust is so big, the scale of it is so gigantic, so enormous, that it becomes easy to think of it as something mechanical. Anonymous. But everything that happened, happened because someone made a decision. To pull a trigger, to flip a switch, to close a cattle car door, to hide, to betray.” This, as Mendelsohn observed, is what adds the invisible dimension of morality to the record of historical facts. On the academic, scholarly level, the study of the Holocaust initially developed along different lines, devoting considerable attention to the history of the institutions. Top-down studies, which focus on something that may be called “the elegance of the decision-making processes” a part of the *Täterforschung*, or the study of perpetrators. And it is in precisely this context that Saul Friedländer commented in *The Years of Extermination*: “The Germans were bent on exterminating the Jews as individuals [...]. The ‘history of the Holocaust’ cannot be limited only to recounting of German policies, decisions, and measures that led to this most systematic and sustained of genocides, it must include the reactions (and at times the initiatives) of the surrounding world and the attitudes of the victims, for the fundamental reason that the events we call the Holocaust represent a totality defined by this convergence of distinct elements.” The texts presented in this volume try to render justice to individual, often forgotten, victims of the often-overlooked part of the Holocaust. Victims who, quite often, did not die at the hands of the Germans but at the hands of their Gentile fellow-citizens.

Secondly, the common feature of the presented texts is that they draw upon a new and plentiful historical source; a source, which only recently entered the historical mainstream: the proceedings conducted by the Polish courts in the post-war period into the deeds of Polish citizens accused of collaboration with

the Germans. These trials (known in Poland as the “August Trials”) were conducted on the basis of the 31 August 1944 decree “concerning the punishment of Fascist-Nazi criminals, guilty of murders and mistreatment of civilians and prisoners of war and traitors of the Polish Nation.” Similar proceedings have been conducted in other countries of Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. The authors of the studies included in this volume pay particular attention to these “traitors of the Polish Nation” because it is among them that they find individuals who denounced, mistreated or simply murdered their Jewish fellow citizens. According to the contemporary interpretation of the law, all activities undertaken by Poles, which helped the Germans to exterminate Jews, constituted a form of collaboration with the enemy.

The next two articles concern the subject matter of helping and rescuing Jews in occupied Poland. Originally published in *Zarys krajobrazu. Wieś polska wobec Żydów 1942–1945* (2011), the first text (by Zuzanna Schnepf-Kołaczkiewicz) offers a multi-faceted analysis of the deeds of rural inhabitants awarded the Righteous among the Nations medal. The other text (by Justyna Kowalska-Leder) discusses an individual instance of rescue and its psychological consequences. Jacek Leociak presents an upsetting image of the Poles emerging from the wartime and post-war Jewish texts. His text was originally published by the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research in the book *Prowincja Noc* (2007). Barbara Engelking’s study on dreams as a historical source touches upon completely different questions. We also decided to include one highly important English text among the other texts by Polish authors. Written by the British archaeologist Caroline Sturdy Colls, it discusses her work on the territory of the former Nazi killing centre in Treblinka.

The studies devoted to Franz Konrad and Jürgen Stroop (both tried before the Provincial Court in Warsaw in July 1951 for their involvement in the crushing of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto) are also of particular importance. The latter text comments on the only, and so far unpublished, testimony given by Stroop in court. This is also the first publication of a memoir of a young girl from the ghetto in Radomsko (Radom District), who was murdered in autumn 1942. The memoir was edited by Feliks Tych. Another unique source are the letters written in 1941 to the Nazi ruler of occupied Poland Governor General Hans Frank by people of Jewish origin, in which they included various requests and propositions.

Finally, the “Controversies” section contains a discussion on a 2011 collection of studies, which constitutes a useful guide to the mentality of radically right-wing authors dealing with Polish-Jewish relations during WWII as well as a sketch regarding the educational activity of the Institute of National Remembrance addressed to the foreign reader.

*Jan Grabowski, Dariusz Libionka*

