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JEWS IN THE MIŃSK MAZOWIECKI POWIAT DURING  
THE GERMAN OCCUPATION, 1939–44\*. THE STATE  
OF RESEARCH, RESEARCH POSTULATES, SOURCE BASE

The state of research

Issues concerning the Jewish minority during the German occupation in the Mińsk Mazowiecki powiat have so far rarely been discussed. However, both researchers of the Second World War and regional historians have been involved in this discussion. A dozen or so brochures and articles of a scientific, popular or educational nature have been published. Memoirs and journals about the life of Jews in Mińsk Mazowiecki and the Mińsk powiat constitute a separate category of publications.

Generally speaking, the research works have revolved around two basic issues: the Holocaust, and the help Poles gave to Jews who were at risk of death at the hands of the Germans.

The first type is represented by an article by Emil Noiński, 'Likwidacja getta żydowskiego w Mińsku Mazowieckim w świetle relacji i wspomnień naocznych świadków' [The liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Mińsk Mazowiecki in eyewitness

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\* In 1939–1944, the Mińsk Mazowiecki powiat was located in the eastern part of the Warsaw district of the General Government. This article concerns the Mińsk Mazowiecki powiat in the boundaries of the German occupation period, i.e. of *Kreis Radzyn*. All references to 'Mińsk' in this text refer to this town, and not the Belarusian city.

accounts and memoirs].<sup>1</sup> He initiated a number of research publications on the subject of the Holocaust in relation to Mińsk and the surrounding area. The article was based primarily on accounts collected in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute and published memoirs, as well as notes in encyclopaedias. It discusses the basic facts related to the extermination of the Mińsk Jews, i.e. the liquidation of the ghetto on 21 August 1942, and the murder by the Germans at the beginning of 1943 of several hundred people from the labour camp located at the Kopernik school on Siennicka Street in Mińsk.

In another text by Noiński, which speaks in a cross-sectional way about the Jews of Kałuszyn over the centuries, the issue of the final years of the existence of the Jewish community in this city also appears. However, the author limits this part to a minimum, focusing on creating a general picture of the life of this community before 1939. Nevertheless, this article represents the first attempt to discuss the extermination of Jews in Kałuszyn, although it should be noted that Noiński cites no sources and only draws upon previously published publications. He treats Holocaust issues in a very brief manner, devoting only two pages of the work to it.<sup>2</sup>

In the collective work *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim* [Province Night. Life and destruction of the Polish Jews in the Warsaw District], wherein researchers intended to create a general picture of the Holocaust in this region, we will search in vain for a separate study devoted to the Jewish community of the Mińsk district. Nevertheless, in many places, albeit perfunctorily and randomly, the book does touch upon issues concerning the area of interest to us. Particularly noteworthy is the article by Jacek Andrzej Młynarczyk entitled “Akcja Reinhardt” w gettach prowincjonalnych dystryktu warszawskiego 1942–1943’ [Operation Reinhardt in the provincial ghettos of the Warsaw district 1942–43]. The liquidation of each powiat ghetto, including Mińsk, receives several pages. Młynarczyk extensively cites documents from the criminal proceedings that were conducted after the Second World War against Nazi criminals in the courts

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<sup>1</sup> E. Noiński, ‘Likwidacja getta żydowskiego w Mińsku Mazowieckim w świetle relacji i wspomnień naocznych świadków’, *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2006, no. 14, pp. 75–83.

<sup>2</sup> E. Noiński, ‘Ludność żydowska Kałuszyna od XVII do XX wieku’, *Rocznik Kałuszyński* 2005, no. 5, pp. 80–82.

of the Federal Republic of Germany. These are currently stored at the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes [*Unterlagen der Zentralen Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*] in Ludwigsburg. Another positive aspect of Młynarczyk's work is the attempt to investigate the problem of the extermination of Jews in small ghettos scattered throughout the powiat. We learn from the article that people were forced to go to the Jewish districts of Dobre and Mrozy at the hands of the German torturers. These people died on the spot, or were transported to the extermination camp in Treblinka.<sup>3</sup>

In the rest of the studies in this book, however, we find little mention of Jews from the Mińsk powiat. For example, in the work of Jan Grabowski, *Żydzi przed obliczem niemieckich i polskich sądów w dystrykcie warszawskim Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939–1942* [Jews before German and Polish courts in the Warsaw District of the General Government, 1939–42], the abuses of Karl Bittrich, the district governor (*Kreishauptmann*) of Mińsk, are mentioned in the context of the displacement of the Jewish population from their homes in 1940.<sup>4</sup>

The fate of the Jews of Mińsk is also referred to in the pages of Barbara Engelking's article, 'Życie codzienne Żydów w miasteczkach dystryktu warszawskiego' [The everyday life of Jews in the towns of the Warsaw district]. However, this work includes only individual pieces of information illustrating the brutality of the German terror against Jews, the background to the formation of the *Judenrat* in Mińsk, the issue of sending the inhabitants to labour camps and the provision of food supplies, among others. The excerpts on Mińsk were based on reports from the Jewish Historical Institute and Yad Vashem.<sup>5</sup>

In turn, Jacek Leociak's study *Wizerunek Polaków w zapisach Żydów z dystryktu warszawskiego* [The image of Poles in the writings of Jews from the Warsaw district],<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J.A. Młynarczyk, "Akcja Reinhardt" w gettach prowincjonalnych dystryktu warszawskiego 1942–1943', in *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Leociak, D. Libionka, Warszawa 2007, pp. 64–66.

<sup>4</sup> J. Grabowski, 'Żydzi przed obliczem niemieckich i polskich sądów w dystrykcie warszawskim Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939–1942', in *Prowincja noc*, pp. 105–06.

<sup>5</sup> B. Engelking, 'Życie codzienne Żydów w miasteczkach dystryktu warszawskiego', in *Prowincja noc*, pp. 126, 133, 138, 182.

<sup>6</sup> J. Leociak, 'Wizerunek Polaków w zapisach Żydów z dystryktu warszawskiego', in *Prowincja noc*, pp. 373–441.

included in the above-mentioned collection, presents a one-sided view of the Polish population. Its sources are accounts by Jewish witnesses to the Holocaust who left their own testimonies after the end of the German occupation, which are often filled with suffering and bitterness caused by the deaths of their loved ones and the entire Jewish community. Without the help of Poles, the survival of the Jews would have been very difficult. Despite this, many of these testimonies are characterised by a great aversion towards the Polish community. Not only does Leociak fail to take these factors into account, but also selects only those extracts of accounts in which Jews attribute negative attitudes towards Poles or pursue statements and behaviours filled with dislike. He cites *inter alia* the opinion of Lejb Guz, who wrote in his post-war memoirs about the indifference of Poles to the tragedy of the Jews murdered in the Mińsk ghetto.<sup>7</sup> An extract from the article which quotes the diary of Lejb Rochman, a Holocaust survivor, emphasises the indifference of the Polish population to the tragedy of the Jewish nation in a similar vein:

Leib Rochman, who was hiding after the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk Mazowiecki, tried to join a group of Jewish survivors who had worked in the local factory and were barracked in the building of the Copernicus school. Pushing through the fields, he met an old farmer grazing a cow. He had the courage to approach him. "The peasant listened to me indifferently. I tried to read his gaze, but his face was expressionless. He was grazing the cow in the stubble as usual. For a moment I imagined I was waking up from a bad dream, and now everything was back to normal. There were noises in the distance. I shivered. The peasant who was looking at the grass said slowly: 'It's nothing, these are the Jews who the Germans are taking off to a labour camp.'"<sup>8</sup>

The article is structured in such a way as to move away from the problem of the Polish population's indifference and towards (as Leociak sees it) their anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Following this line of thinking, in order to confirm his thesis about the Poles' anti-Semitic attitudes, Leociak quotes another extract from Rochman's memoirs, in which he quoted a peasant woman in February 1943

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 397–98.

as saying, “I realise that if the Jews were still alive, today bread would cost as much as a house, and we would all have starved to death”<sup>9</sup>

According to Leociak, the memoirs of the above-mentioned Lejb Guz should also serve as a hard argument for the fact that the Poles were anti-Semites:

We marched through streets that we had seldom travelled before. After the liquidation of the Jewish population in Mińsk Mazowiecki, the appearance of Jews was a kind of sensation. This could be clearly observed in the way passers-by reacted. This time the ‘madman’ who escorted us decided to show his power over us, and at the same time to ridicule us in front of the Poles. [...] In a word, a recruiting exercise. [...] These exercises lasted quite a long time, to the delight of the watching passers-by. [...] Many of us, after a day of hard work, felt great hunger – and then we had to undergo additional physical and spiritual suffering, to be exposed to mockery.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from the excerpts quoted, the article also contains many more in a similar vein. These are supposed to testify to the Poles’ rising antipathy, which implicitly led to the murders and robberies committed against the Jews. Leociak tries to lead the reader along with the use of subheadings, and tries to insist that the Poles’ indifferent attitude and aversion towards the Jews led in a straight line to extreme behaviour such as helping with the robbery, denunciation and finally the murder of the Jews: ‘Those who helped’, ‘Those who betrayed’, ‘Those who robbed’, ‘Those who murdered’.<sup>11</sup>

In his work on the image of the Poles, Leociak did not attempt to construct any positive image of the Polish community. It seems that he did not find any such excerpts in the diaries of the Jews, as never once did they positively testify to the attitude of the Polish people. This is all the stranger as every person rescued from the Holocaust often received help from the Polish community in order to survive. Hence the conclusion that Leociak’s article treats Polish-Jewish relations in a one-sided manner, and only ‘illuminates’ that aspect of reality which

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 393.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 402–04, 407–08, 414, 420, 423, 432, 434–35, 438.

testifies to the anti-Semitism of the Poles and their participation in the Holocaust. After reading this article, the reader will get the impression that no Poles helped the Jews in the Mińsk powiat, and all were against them; they only waited for the Jews' end, or worked towards it themselves. This is of course demonstrably untrue.

Recent years have brought a certain increase in the number of regional publications which are characterised by academic value. One such is an article by Ewa Maria Borkowska, published in 2015 in the *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* [Mińsk Mazowiecki Yearbook], entitled 'Obozy pracy przymusowej dla Żydów w powiecie mińskim w latach 1939–1943' [Forced labour camps for Jews in Mińsk powiat in 1939–43].<sup>12</sup> This study was based not only on the relatively sparse literature on the subject dealing with labour camps, but above all on documentation, which the researcher cites quite richly. The documents listed include questionnaires from municipal courts from the Mińsk powiat in the IPN Archive, Jewish accounts deposited in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, and documents of the Mińsk powiat communes from the period of the German occupation, now stored in the Otwock branch of the State Archives in Warsaw.

The author deals with an issue that has been poorly researched, and still remains virtually unknown. The issue of forced labour by the Jews, excluding the larger or more famous camps, has not so far been of interest to historians. Excavating this important issue from the darkness of oblivion becomes something important in itself. The forced labour camps for the Jewish population were located in Chyżyny near Latowicz (a water management camp), Kołbiel (a water management camp), Kuflewo-Jeziorek (an agricultural and water management camp), Mińsk Mazowiecki (the Copernicus school on Siennicka Street), Mienia and Kałuszyn (labour camps) and in Zimnowod in the Chróścice commune (a water purification camp).<sup>13</sup> Borkowska has introduced new facts into academic circulation. Not only does her work reveal many unknown events in the history of the Jews in the Mińsk district, but it also indicates an important direction for future research on Jewish issues in the countryside and smaller towns.

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<sup>12</sup> E.M. Borkowska, 'Obozy pracy przymusowej dla Żydów w powiecie mińskim w latach 1939–1943', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2015, no. 23, pp. 79–106.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

Borkowska presents further considerations in her article 'Przymusowa praca Żydów powiatu mińskiego – placówki i kolumny robocze przed akcją Reinhard (1939–1942)' [Forced labour by the Jews from the Mińsk powiat: Workplaces and work columns before Operation Reinhard (1939–42)].<sup>14</sup> In fact, it continues the research work undertaken earlier. This time it focuses on depicting the places where Jews were employed before the Holocaust. The Germans forced them to work at the railway station and factory in Mińsk, at the airfield in Janów near Mińsk, in the former Fogelnest factory in Stojadła and on one of the neighbouring estates, among other places. In the opinion of those working in the camps, their situation was much better than that of those who remained in the ghettos. This was because the camp was guarded by Poles, who did not harass or 'harry' the Jews, were sluggish in performing their duties, and did not force them to perform hard, inhuman work.<sup>15</sup> In addition, as Borkowska points out, in Mrozy, where there was a work column, Poles passed parcels to employees through the fence.<sup>16</sup>

Borkowska highlights an important, previously unknown problem concerning forced labour in small towns, villages and farms. Her articles set the direction of research for other authors who intend to deal with the problems of camps in other poviats of the General Government. Despite the scanty source base, there is a need for more in-depth research in this field. It would be worth trying to answer questions about the scale of the phenomenon. How many Jews participated in such work? Who did the Germans try to recruit to it? It should also be considered to what extent help from the Poles was possible. Did the Jews have any opportunity to escape from the labour camps? These questions should be answered through further research and academic publications.

The brochure published in 2007 by Beata Gładys entitled *Mińsk Mazowiecki. Z dziejów społeczności żydowskiej* [Mińsk Mazowiecki, From the history of the Jewish community],<sup>17</sup> should be considered the first popular academic publication in which some space has been dedicated to the life of the Jewish community during the Second World War. It is strictly educational in nature.

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<sup>14</sup> E.M. Borkowska, 'Przymusowa praca Żydów powiatu mińskiego – placówki i kolumny robocze przed akcją Reinhard (1939–1942)', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2016, no. 24, pp. 165–80.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>17</sup> B. Gładys, *Mińsk Mazowiecki. Z dziejów społeczności żydowskiej*, Warszawa 2007.

The author discusses the history of the Jews in the town within a specific framework: she begins with the first mentions of their arrival, and discusses many issues such as education and Hasidism. It also deals with the issues of the Holocaust, discusses the profiles of the Righteous Among the Nations, including Julian Grobelny, Emilia Dyna, and Aleksander & Jadwiga Gawrych. She also mentions the liquidation of the Copernicus camp on Siennicka Street in Mińsk.<sup>18</sup>

The book by Alicja Gontarek entitled *Judenrein. Bez Żydów. Żydzi mińscy w czasie wojny i po jej zakończeniu* [*Judenrein. No Jews. The Jews of Mińsk during and after the war*],<sup>19</sup> published in 2011 by *Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Mińska Mazowieckiego* [The Society of Friends of Mińsk Mazowiecki], is also a popular academic work. Here we find an interpretation of many facts and events that have not yet been written about. The author begins the narrative by discussing the brutal German invasion of Mińsk in mid-September 1939; she then turns to the story of the creation of the Mińsk ghetto, and describes the extermination of its inhabitants. Gontarek also discusses the problem of tracking down and murdering Jewish escapees after the liquidation of the ghetto. As many of them were hidden on the 'Aryan side', the German police services and the gendarmes waited for denunciations as they were combing through the buildings. Finally, the author shows what the city became without the Jews, and what the fates of those who survived the Holocaust were. In her work she draws upon testimonies from the Mińsk memorial book [*yizkor*], as well as other source materials obtained from Yad Vashem, the YIVO Institute, the State Archives in Siedlce and Warsaw, and the Institute of National Remembrance among others. An additional value of the book is its rich illustrative material.

In a sense, Gontarek's other article, 'Obóz pracy "Kopernik"' [The Copernicus labour camp], can serve as a complement to the publication discussed above,<sup>20</sup> as it presents many aspects of the camp's operation, especially the everyday life of this place, interpersonal relations within it, and its brutal liquidation in January 1943.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 21–25.

<sup>19</sup> A. Gontarek, *Judenrein. Bez Żydów. Żydzi mińscy w czasie wojny i po jej zakończeniu*, Mińsk Mazowiecki 2012.

<sup>20</sup> A. Gontarek, 'Obóz pracy "Kopernik"', *Biuletyn Gminy Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej w Warszawie* 2012, no. 3, pp. 14–16.



So far, little attention has been devoted to the problem of Poles helping Jews in the Mińsk powiat. The first article in which this subject was discussed a little more broadly was a small text by Tomasz Roguski entitled 'Julian Grobelny "Trojan" – cegłowlanin, który kierował "Żegotą"' [Julian Grobelny, 'the Trojan': The Cegłów native who headed *Żegota*], published in *Zeszyty Ziemi Mińskiej* in 2012.<sup>21</sup> The author focuses on illustrating the activities of Grobelny as the president of the *Żegota* Council to Aid Jews, mainly drawing upon the well-known studies by Anna Mieszkowska<sup>22</sup> and Teresa Prekerowa.<sup>23</sup>

The local context of Julian Grobelny's activity is primarily related to his home town of Cegłów, as well as the fact that during the German occupation he served as chairman of the Polish Socialist Party in the Mińsk powiat and as the *starosta* of Mińsk in 1944. The author of the article did not try to go any deeper into Grobelny's biography, preferring to repeat (with a few exceptions) what was already known from previous publications.

The brochure about the life of Grobelny published by Roguski in 2013 does not bring any fresh perspectives either.<sup>24</sup> The narrative about saving Jews is largely based on the aforementioned publications, and Roguski does not add to the knowledge that was included in them. Nevertheless, the reader will find many important, hitherto unknown biographical elements in it, especially concerning the pre-war period.

Damian Sitkiewicz's article 'Działalność Juliana Grobelnego w latach 1939–1944 (poza "Żegotą")' [The activity of Julian Grobelny in 1939–44 (apart from '*Żegota*')] portrays this individual in a different light.<sup>25</sup> The author demonstrates Grobelny's connections with the Communist underground, especially with the so-called radical peasants and Communist socialists, and with activists of the Polish Workers' Party

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<sup>21</sup> T. Roguski, 'Julian Grobelny "Trojan" – cegłowlanin, który kierował "Żegotą"', *Mińskie Zeszyty Muzealne* 2012, no. 1, pp. 89–100.

<sup>22</sup> A. Mieszkowska, *Dzieci Ireny Sandlerowej*, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>23</sup> T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945*, Warszawa 1981.

<sup>24</sup> T. Roguski, *Pierwszy w "Żegocie". Julian Grobelny "Trojan" (1893–1944)*, Mińsk Mazowiecki 2013.

<sup>25</sup> D. Sitkiewicz, 'Działalność Juliana Grobelnego w latach 1939–1944 (poza "Żegotą")', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2013, no. 21, pp. 101–26 (This is an extended and supplemented version of the text, 'Mechanizmy instalowania władzy i administracji komunistycznej na przykładzie działalności Juliana Grobelnego jako starosty mińskiego (10 października – 5 grudnia 1944 r.)', *Historia i Świat* 2013, no. 2, pp. 161–84).

during the German occupation. The environment in which Grobelny operated also influenced his appointment by the Polish Committee of National Liberation [*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, PKWN] authorities to the position of the Mińsk *starosta* in October 1944. He then issued several important decisions, including the confiscation of equipment from manor houses being subjected to land reform: paintings, furniture and other valuable items owned by landowners, whom the Communist authorities had expelled from their own homes. The article does not deal with the issue of saving the Jewish population, but does open up a previously unknown chapter in the life of the president of *Żegota*. Information from the article has been published in a slightly more accessible form in the journal *Do Rzeczy Historia*.<sup>26</sup>

The topic of saving Jews in the local context was also examined by Lilla Małgorzata Kłos in her article 'Apolonia Chmielewska – sprawiedliwa mińszczanka' [Apolonia Chmielewska: a righteous native of Mińsk].<sup>27</sup> On the basis of the sources which the author draws upon – the accounts of the heroine's family members, the rich literature on the subject, as well as documents from the Archives of the Parish Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Mińsk Mazowiecki and the State Archives' Warsaw Branch in Otwock – she describes how Chmielewska saved two Jewish women, Cypra (later Danuta) Dina and Barbara Berger. The author speaks in an accessible way about the complexity of the problem of hiding Jews in a provincial town.

The journalistic article by Alicja Gontarek entitled 'Emilia Dyna – zapomniana Sprawiedliwa wśród Narodów Świata i jej działalność w Mińsku' [Emilia Dyna: One of the forgotten Righteous Among the Nations, and her activity in Mińsk] concerns one of the most distinguished saviours of the Jewish population in the Mińsk powiat. This *Kripo* officer in Mińsk Mazowiecki, together with her friend Elżbieta Gajewska, saved Elżbieta Kowner and Henia Nuss, who hid from the Germans in this town until the end of the war.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> A. Gontarek, D. Sitkiewicz, 'Tajemnice Juliana Grobelnego. Z "Żegoty" do komuny', *Historia. Do Rzeczy* 2013, no. 6, pp. 51–53.

<sup>27</sup> L.M. Kłos, 'Apolonia Chmielewska – sprawiedliwa mińszczanka', *Mińskie Zeszyty Muzealne* 2013, no. 2, pp. 65–73.

<sup>28</sup> A. Gontarek, 'Emilia Maria Dyna – zapomniana Sprawiedliwa wśród Narodów Świata i jej działalność w Mińsku', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2016, no. 24, pp. 233–36.

Further interesting material for research into the issues of aiding the Jews in the Mińsk powiat is provided by the works of Urszula Grabowska: 'Mariawici i Żydzi – rzecz o pomocy' [The Mariavites and the Jews: on the nature of the assistance]<sup>29</sup> and 'Stosunki mariawicko-żydowskie czasu Zagłady. Kilka przykładów z Mazowsza i Podlasia' [Mariavite-Jewish relations during the Holocaust. Some examples from Mazowsze and Podlasie].<sup>30</sup>

While undertaking such research, it would also be worth taking advantage of the knowledge gathered in the work of Edward Kopówka and Fr. Paweł Rytel-Andrianik *Dam im imię na wieki (Księga Izajasza 56,5). Polacy z okolic Treblinki ratujący Żydów* [I will give them an everlasting name (Isaiah 56:5). Poles from the Treblinka area saving Jews], in which a number of examples of help from Poles were cited.<sup>31</sup> One should also mention the two-volume *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holocaustu* [The Book of the Righteous Among the Nations. Saving Jews during the Holocaust], which was published in Cracow in 2009.<sup>32</sup>

One very specific study is the list of residents of the Mińsk powiat who were awarded the medal 'Righteous Among the Nations', included in the second issue of *Mińskie Zeszyty Muzealnych*.<sup>33</sup> It contains the names of 36 people along with a short note on the history of hiding the endangered Jews. It is a compilation of information taken from several books devoted to the above-mentioned subject.

## Research postulates

Few studies on the history of the Jews in the Mińsk powiat during the Second World War have been published so far. For this reason, there is a need to articulate the problems in conducting research in this field. Over time, the publication of research in the form of articles and books will fill this gap.

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<sup>29</sup> U. Grabowska, 'Mariawici i Żydzi – rzecz o pomocy', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2008, vol. 4, pp. 442–65.

<sup>30</sup> U. Grabowska, 'Stosunki mariawicko-żydowskie czasu Zagłady. Kilka przykładów z Mazowsza i Podlasia', in *Żydzi w Podlasie*, ed. Z. Chyra-Rolicz, R. Tarasiuk, E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2010, pp. 341–55.

<sup>31</sup> E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię na wieki (Księga Izajasza 56,5). Polacy z okolic Treblinki ratujący Żydów*, Oxford–Treblińska 2011.

<sup>32</sup> *Book of the Righteous Among the Nations. Saving Jews during the Holocaust. Poland*, vol. 1–2, ed. D. Libionka et al., Kraków 2009.

<sup>33</sup> 'Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata w powiecie mińskim', *Muzeum Ziemi Mińskiej* 2013, no. 2, pp. 51–64.

The most important thing seems to be to investigate the issue of the ghettos located in smaller towns such as Kałuszyn, Kuflew, Mrozy and Stanisławów. In addition, there is a lack of academic work devoted to the social relations between the inhabitants of ghettos, as well as the survival strategies adopted both inside the Jewish districts and – in the case of people trying to save themselves – after leaving them.

Research is also needed into the issue of relations between Poles and Jews before the ghettos were organised, during the period when the ghettos were functioning, and after their liquidation. Nor have Jewish-German relations been characterised either. Not only is it worth considering exactly how the German policy of exterminating the Jewish population proceeded, but one should also answer the question of whether the contacts between some Jews and Germans affected the social and economic conditions in the ghettos. It is also worth considering the existence of German agents in the ghettos, and the possible participation of Poles and Jews among such individuals.

Authors of future research papers should also raise the issue of the assistance to Jews coming from underground organisations such as ZWZ-AK, NOW, NSZ, BCh GL-AL<sup>34</sup> and others. We do not know at present whether such assistance was provided. We do not know whether the above-mentioned organisations had intelligence networks in Jewish quarters, or what the work of these networks looked like. Historians should also consider investigating the question of Jews who belonged to armed underground organisations in the Mińsk district.

Further research should also consider the problem of aid to the Jewish population and its scale in the Mińsk powiat. As of now, only the names of those who were awarded the Medal of the Righteous Among the Nations are known. Apart from them, other cases of helping Jews, unknown in the literature, should also be investigated; this can be found out by querying the sources.

Through postulated research, we should also learn more about the forcible involvement of Poles – both peasants and city inhabitants – in hunting Jews

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<sup>34</sup> ZWZ-AK: Związek Walki Zbrojnej-Armia Krajowa – Union of Armed Struggle-Home Army; NOW: Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa – National Military Organisation; NSZ: Narodowe Siły Zbrojne – National Armed Forces; BCh: Bataliony Chłopskie – Polish Peasants' Battalions; GL-AL: Gwardia Ludowa-Armia Ludowa – People's Guard, People's Army (Communist-led Polish armed formations).

and handing them over to the German services. Similar research should also be conducted into the German uniformed services in which Poles served, such as the 'Polish Police' (*Polnische Polizei*), colloquially called the 'Navy-blue police' or the Fire Department. It should be taken into account that the Germans tried to find concealed Jews after the liquidation of the ghettos, and they could have forced Poles – both civilians and uniformed officers – to search for them.

There is also a need to enumerate all the crimes committed by the Germans in the Mińsk powiat, along with information on the numbers of people murdered in specific places, as no research in this area has been conducted so far.

Further detailed analysis should also consider the structure and activity of the German terror apparatus, in particular the composition and activity of the *Kriminalpolizei* field office as it existed in Mińsk in 1939–43 (to be replaced by the Gestapo in autumn 1943). Similar research should be carried out on the German military police, the *Sonderdienst* and other auxiliary formations, as well as the Wehrmacht. A complete picture of how these services operated in the Mińsk powiat will contribute to expanding our knowledge about the extermination of the Jews in the region.

### The source base

Let us begin with an overview of the memoirs published in print. At present, we have four publications which testify to the extermination of the Jews in the Mińsk area. These are: *The pit and the trap. A chronicle of survival* by Lejb Rochman; *Targowa 64. Dziennik 27 I 1943 – 11 IX 1944* [Targowa 64. Journal 27 January 1943 – 11 September 1944] by Leon Guz; *Moje notatki z piekła* [My Notes from Hell] by Chil Kirszenbaum; and *Sny chociaż mamy wspaniałe... Okupacyjne dzienniki Żydów z okolic Mińska Mazowieckiego* [Yet our dreams are so wonderful: Jewish diaries under occupation from Mińsk Mazowiecki and surroundings] edited and introduced by Barbara Engelking.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> L. Rochman, *The Pit and the Trap. A Chronicle of Survival*, New York 1983 (Holocaust Library); L. Guz, *Targowa 64. Dziennik 27 I 1943 – 11 IX 1944*, Warszawa 1990; C. Kirszenbaum, *Moje notatki z piekła*, Mińsk Mazowiecki 2016; *Sny chociaż mamy wspaniałe... Okupacyjne dzienniki Żydów z okolic Mińska Mazowieckiego*, ed. B. Engelking, Warszawa 2016.

In each of these publications, the dominant topics are the liquidation of the ghetto and the Holocaust. The witnesses discuss a wide range of matters, as well as the problems resulting from hiding with Polish families. In Leon Guz's memoirs, the theme of the Copernicus camp on Siennicka Street in Mińsk appears.<sup>36</sup> The liquidation of this facility also appears in the memoirs of Chil Kirszenbaum, who describes the issue of the Holocaust quite extensively.<sup>37</sup> The extermination of Jews at Copernicus, the relations between the ghetto inhabitants, as well as the problem of hiding among Poles appear in the collection *Sny chociaż mamy wspaniałe*.<sup>38</sup> The reality of the occupation, as well as the conditions and emotional state of the person in hiding, are perfectly reflected in the diary of Lejb Rochman.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to those mentioned above, another important memoir is the book *Szumcie wierzby* [Murmur, ye willows] by Franciszek Mówiński,<sup>40</sup> an underground activist of the Polish Workers' Party (later PZPR, the Communist party) in the Mińsk poviat. In his diary, which was written from a position of distrust towards the other underground movements (especially the Home Army and the NSZ), Mówiński discussed the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk, exaggerating the help provided to the Jews by members of Communist organisations. Therefore, any information he gives must be verified and juxtaposed against other historical sources. In addition to the ideological tinge, the book is characterised by a fictional style in some parts, which reduces the credibility of the facts which the diarist gives.

The memorial books (*yizkors*) of the Jewish community of Kałuszyn and Mińsk Mazowiecki may shed new light on the history of Jews during the German occupation. The first such book to be published in 1961 was the Kałuszyn book, while that of Mińsk was published in 1977.<sup>41</sup> So far, they have not been well researched by historians, the direct reason for which is probably the language

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<sup>36</sup> Guz, *Targowa 64*, pp. 100–09.

<sup>37</sup> Kirszenbaum, *Moje notatki z piekła*, pp. 136–75.

<sup>38</sup> In the collection *Sny chociaż mamy wspaniałe*, the journals of Adam Kamienny (pp. 25–134), Brandla Siekierki ('Ja, Fiszbajn Branka, opisała', pp. 171–202), Chajcia Goldsztejn (pp. 289–352), and Eli Goldsztejn ('Strasliwy wyrok śmierci na Żydów i na wszystko, co żydowskie', pp. 353–448).

<sup>39</sup> Rochman, *The Pit and the Trap*, pp. 11–86.

<sup>40</sup> Franciszek Mówiński, *Szumcie wierzby*, Warszawa 1972.

<sup>41</sup> *Seifer Kalushin: gehaylikt der khorev gevorener kehile*, ed. A. Shamri, S. Soroka, Tel Aviv 1961; *Seifer Mińsk-Mazowiecki: izker bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener kehile Mińsk-Mazowiecki*, ed. E. Szedlecki, Jerusalem 1977.

barrier, as they were written in Yiddish; only excerpts translated into English or other languages can be read. They are certainly valuable sources, especially since a large part of the texts contained therein concern the period of the Second World War.

A great deal of new information could also be provided by the publication of Jewish sources, the Ringelblum Archive, which were issued from 1997 to 2018.<sup>42</sup> These sources have not yet been analysed from the viewpoint of regional research into the Mińsk powiat. Such an inquiry might yield new information about the Holocaust, the strategies employed to survive, and the help provided to the Jewish community by the Polish population.

It is worth considering the possibilities offered by the testimonies which Jews themselves left behind. Thanks to these, we can reflect on the methods which the Poles used to try and help the Jews. In addition, these memoirs give the opportunity to depict the surrounding, 'Polish' world in the way it was perceived by the rescued themselves. Finally, they make it possible to learn many facts about the occupation in a slightly broader context – social relations, the behaviour of the occupiers – especially since not many testimonies on Jewish issues in the Mińsk powiat have been published.

In addition to the published memoirs, sources for further research include Polish and German documents, as well as previously unprinted memoirs and reports. First, the German documentation prepared during the occupation should be presented, and then the Polish documentation, produced both by the underground and by the administrative and self-government bodies of cities and communes. Then, the archives produced after the war by common courts and offices should be discussed, and then the accounts of witnesses to the Holocaust kept at the Jewish Historical Institute.

Of the original documents created during the German occupation and prepared by representatives of the Jews themselves, as the later victims of the German occupier, we only have two collections of correspondence: the Jewish Council in Mińsk Mazowiecki from the American Joint Distribution Committee in Warsaw for the period from

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<sup>42</sup> *The Ringelblum Archive. Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto*, vol. 1–35, Warszawa 1997–2018.



5 October 1940 to 23 June 1941;<sup>43</sup> and the Presidium of the Jewish Social Self-Help with the Delegation of the Jewish Social Self-Help in Kałuszyn for the period from 1 September 1941 to 31 October 1941.<sup>44</sup> These materials concern the assistance to the Jews confined in the ghettos in Kałuszyn and Mińsk, and also include financial reports. These – albeit to only a small extent – allow researchers to learn more about the conditions in which the Jews of Mińsk and Kałuszyn found themselves.

Reading the German documents from the *Amt des Gouverneurs des Distrikts Warschau 1939–1945* collection, deposited at the State Archives in Warsaw, may be troublesome for several reasons. Information about the Mińsk powiat, and especially about the Jews living in it, can only be found in more general documents concerning the district's affairs, in which references to the powiat only appear in various collective reports. There are no files in this collection whose titles would directly indicate that the data contained therein concerns the Mińsk powiat. Hence it is quite difficult to make archival queries in this collection. However, documents devoted to the problems of Mińsk Jews are present in the files. For example, we can find detailed statistical data in file 1025, in which the information is divided into localities and nationalities.<sup>45</sup> The Holocaust researcher will also find important data in file 939, which contains statistics on the displacement of Jews in the Mińsk district by the Germans during autumn 1941.<sup>46</sup> The group also includes many files containing circulars and other regulations concerning the Jewish population, especially forced labour or the organisation of the ghettos. In one of them, for example, we find listed the legal provisions on the basis of which Jews were employed as forced labourers.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; hereinafter: AŻIH), American Joint Distribution Committee, 210/493, Correspondence of the Jewish Council in Mińsk Mazowiecki with the AJDC in Warsaw, 5 October 1940 – 23 June 1941.

<sup>44</sup> AŻIH, Jewish Social Self-Help, 211/508, Correspondence of the Presidium of the Jewish Social Self-Help with the Delegation of Jewish Social Self-Help in Kałuszyn, 1 September 1941 – 31 October 1941.

<sup>45</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie (State Archives in Warsaw; hereinafter: APW), Amt des Gouverneurs des Distrikts Warschau 1939–1945, 1025, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> In November 1941, 150 people were resettled from Jakubów to Kołbiela, 7 from Wielgolas to Kołbiela, 120 from Jeruzal to Łatowicz, 138 from Ceglów to Mróz, 32 from Glinianka to Stanisławów, and 33 from Dębie Wielki to Stanisławów (APW, Amt des Gouverneurs des Distrikts Warschau 1939–1945, 939, p. 1).

<sup>47</sup> APW, Amt des Gouverneurs des Distrikts Warschau 1939–1945, 1159.



In addition to German-language documents, the materials produced by municipal and communal authorities are of great academic value. We have two well-preserved sets for the Mińsk powiat: the files of the city of Mińsk Mazowiecki and the files of the commune of Kuflew. Both are stored in the Otwock branch of the State Archives in Warsaw. Jewish topics, although not widely represented, appear in many archival files, in particular issues related to the creation and functioning of ghettos in cities and larger villages. One file entirely devoted to the Mińsk ghetto has been preserved in the Otwock archives.<sup>48</sup> In the remaining collections, among the matters undertaken by the local government, we can find, for example, a discussion of how to combat the spread of typhus in the Mińsk ghetto, as well as the issue of the city authorities' takeover of a Jewish bath house located in the Jewish district.<sup>49</sup>

German wall posters preserved in several file collections represent further excellent material reflecting the occupation policy. These contain detailed orders by the *Kreishauptmann* and other German officials covering both Poles and Jews from 1939 to 1943.<sup>50</sup>

The available documentation also covers details of the forced labour camps. In one of the file units from the Kuflew commune we can find a German order to Jewish councils to start work and note the data they obtain.<sup>51</sup> In the documents from Kuflew, a great deal of space is devoted to the situation of the population in the local labour camps in 1942.<sup>52</sup> The documentation also reflects the problem of Jewish crime in Mińsk.<sup>53</sup>

Little archival material produced by the underground has been preserved. Indeed, we only have some reports from the Home Army's Warsaw Area Command concerning national minorities; moreover, these were mainly drawn up in 1943 or later, i.e. after Germans had exterminated Jews in the ghettos, and those who had managed to escape from the ghettos were hiding with Poles, mostly

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<sup>48</sup> APW, Otwock Branch (hereinafter: APW, OB), Files of the city of Mińsk Mazowiecki, 533.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 492, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 466, 467, 468, 469.

<sup>51</sup> APW, OB, Files of the Kuflew commune, 347, p. 82.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 386, pp. 9–10.

<sup>53</sup> Jews were punished for various offences, including for starting fights in Mińsk (APW, OB, Files of the town of Mińsk Mazowiecki, 515, p. 90).

in the countryside. Facts about life in the ghettos, and from the time before their creation, are almost absent from this class of documentation. Nevertheless, it does provide some data or clues about the hunting of Jews by the gendarmerie, as well as their concealment and betrayal in 1943 and 1944.

A little more information about the situation in the Mińsk ghetto can be found in an excerpt from a report of the Warsaw Area Command for August 1941.<sup>54</sup> The dispatches drawn up in 1943 regularly repeat reports about searches for Jews by the German military police, the *Sonderdienst* and the *Polnische Polizei*, as well as about their immediate execution when discovered.<sup>55</sup> According to the Home Army informants, in 1943 the German security services rounded up about two hundred Jews in the Warsaw district each month and shot them on the spot.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the Germans repressed or killed Poles who sheltered Jews or provided them with help in any other way;<sup>57</sup> for example, in June 1943, the military police burned down the farm of a Polish farmer in Kędzierak.<sup>58</sup>

The documents of the Polish Home Army report quite broadly about how Jews joined bands of thieves or Communist groups in order to protect themselves from death at the hands of the German security services. This phenomenon occurred in the Home Army's Warsaw Area,<sup>59</sup> whose informants also wrote about this happening in the Mińsk powiat.<sup>60</sup> Some reports contain much more detailed data. In one of them, for example, we read that on 10 June 1943 Jews in hiding took part

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<sup>54</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records; hereinafter: AAN), Home Army (hereinafter: AK), 203/X-70, Report on the state of subversive organisations and national minorities for August 1941, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Situational report on the organisational status & activities of subversive organisations, national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 30 June 1943, p. 18; *ibid.*, Report on the organisational status & activities of subversive organisations and national minorities for the period from 1 to 31 August 1943, p. 56; AAN, AK, X/35, Situation report on the organisational status & activity of subversive organisations, national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 30 September 1943, p. 10; AAN, AK, X/73, Monthly report for the period from 1 to 25 November 1943, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> These data concern the Home Army's entire Warsaw Area.

<sup>57</sup> AAN, AK, II/13, Reports from field offices of September 1943, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> AAN, AK, 203/X-70, Situational report on the organisational status & activities of subversive organisations, national minorities and the occupant for the period from 1 to 30 June 1943, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> AAN, AK, II/13, Reports from field offices of September 1943, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> AAN, AK, X/22, Situational report on the organisational condition, activities of subversive organisations and national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 31 May 1943, p. 67; AAN, AK, X/35, Report on the state of subversive organisations, national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 30 September 1943, p. 10; AAN, AK, 203/X-69, Information report no. 1, 4 October 1943, p. 95.

in an attack on civilians from the village of Trojanów in the Kuflew commune.<sup>61</sup> In a report from the end of 1943, we find more precise data: it lists 20 Jews who took part in the attacks in the Mińsk powiat.<sup>62</sup>

Home Army informants also reported other problems related to the presence of the Jewish population in this powiat. They warned against infectious diseases, especially fever, which might have been spread by Jews in hiding.<sup>63</sup> From the documents collected in the file devoted to the history of the Home Army's Warsaw Area, we learn about the campaign to bring aid to Polish children from the Hrubieszów and Zamość poviats in 1943, in which disinfected clothes taken from Jews murdered by the Germans were used.<sup>64</sup>

We will begin the review of the post-war documentation with the significant source materials produced as a result of the activities of common courts (especially criminal departments) and prosecutor's offices, especially in the years 1944–51. The cases and investigations undertaken at that time mainly concerned cooperation with the German occupier. The court proceedings were mainly conducted at the District Court in Warsaw in 1944–49, and at the Provincial Court for the Warsaw voivodeship in Warsaw after 1950. The relevant documents are deposited in the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw, and the Warsaw State Archives' division at Milanówek.

The vast majority of investigations into matters regarding Jews concern German criminals or officers of the German police forces such as the *Kripo*, the *Sonderdienst* and the *Polnische Polizei*. Nevertheless, these include criminal proceedings against Poles, including Kazimierz Sowiński, who was deputy chief of the Mińsk *Kripo* in 1942–4, and later the Gestapo; the charges against him included the shooting of six Jews on Siennicka Street in Mińsk.<sup>65</sup> The case of Zbigniew Barbachen also attracts the attention; he was a *Sonderdienst* officer in 1940–43, and was

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<sup>61</sup> AAN, AK, 203/X-70, Situational report on the organisational status, activities of subversive organisations and national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 30 June 1943, p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> AAN, AK, X/73, Monthly report for the period from 1 to 31 December 1943, p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> AAN, AK, X/22, Report on the political, social and national status for the period from 1 January to 15 April 1943, p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> AAN, AK, 203/X-68, Quarterly report of the Public Information Bulletin of the Warsaw Area for the period from 15 July to 25 October 1943, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup> APW, District Court in Warszawa 1944–1950, V (Criminal) Department (hereinafter: APW, SOW), 260, pp. 3–4.

accused of murders committed during the liquidation of the Copernicus camp; in the indictment, he was accused of shooting Brandla Grynberg, Ita Grynberg, Chaja Frajman and two people from the family of Moszek Siekierka.<sup>66</sup>

Charges were also brought against Poles who were functionaries of the German-created *Polnische Polizei*. They were repeatedly accused of murdering Jews as a result of their own activity, or as a result of denunciations.<sup>67</sup>

Considering the complexity of the trials records and historical occurrences of their production (Stalinist era), it seems obvious, that each case should be dealt with separately; the case files should be examined in detail and, if possible, one should try to compare them with other sources.

Court proceedings were also initiated against officers of other Nazi terror groups. Stanisław Konicki, an officer of the *Kriminalpolizei*, was accused of murdering Jews in the Copernicus camp together with the Polish police.<sup>68</sup> Another member of the *Kripo*, Stanisław Szeweluk, heard the same charge.<sup>69</sup> The prosecutor's office of the District Court in Warsaw brought charges against Emilia Dyna, a *Kripo* officer;<sup>70</sup> however, this trial was halted because Dyna did not harm any Jews; on the contrary, she hid them.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> APW, SOW, 1366, pp. 4 and 4v.

<sup>67</sup> In the indictment against Jan Smolak and Władysław Bakula, we read that in autumn 1943 they brought an unknown Jew to policemen in the town of Kędzierak: Czesław Czajkowski and Władysław Czerniawski (Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance; hereinafter: AIPN], 1023/26, p. 66). The accusation of police officers from the Kałuszyn station murdering Jews is contained in the proceedings against Konstanty Muszalik, pending before the Supreme Court in Warsaw. The indictment states that in spring 1943, he ordered the Jews to be locked up in a pigsty in the village of Aleksandrów Muszalik for the night, and then he ordered Józef Bieliński and Stanisław Nowakowski to take them to the police station in Kałuszyn. There certain officers, who were not named in the file, shot the Jews (AIPN Branch in Lublin, 314/1, pp. 208–11). According to the indictment against several inhabitants of Cyganka, Władysław Gniado was guilty of the capture of a Jewish woman, Cecylia Kałucka, while Stanisław Krusiewicz, Józef Jackiewicz and Piotr Rek were accused of denouncing Kałucka to police officers in Mińsk (APW, SOW, 3850, p. 7). The 'blue' policemen Józef Szaflik and Feliks Woźniak were accused of taking part in the murder of a Jewish family of four in Jędrzejów in the Jakubów commune (AIPN, 318/81, p. 138). In turn, the policeman Wiktor Bernas was tried for the murder of two men who were hiding Jews (AIPN, GK 227/53, p. 7; AIPN, 227/54). A similar-sounding indictment was laid against one Piotr Moro: he was accused of taking part in a raid on Jews organised by the Germans near the village of Wielgolas as a 'blue' policeman in the summer of 1943 (AIPN, GK 318/54, p. 82).

<sup>68</sup> APW, SOW, 2614, pp. 4–5.

<sup>69</sup> APW, SOW, 252, p. 180.

<sup>70</sup> AIPN, GK 453/63, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> For more on the help provided to Jews by Emilia Dyna, see AIPN Kr, 00100/49/Diazo, passim; Gontarek, 'Emilia Maria Dyna', pp. 233–36.

Charges of murdering Jews were also brought against members of underground organisations. In the indictment against Stanisław Makoś, who came up before the Provincial Court for the Warsaw Province, there is no information about the name of the underground organisation to which he belonged. However, it was stated that Makoś took part in the murder of three Jews, two men and a woman.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, in the case against Stanisław Kania, his affiliation with the Home Army was precisely defined. In 1942, the accused handed over a Jewish woman named Nejman and her five-year-old daughter to the Germans.<sup>73</sup>

Civilians, including Józef Wojciechowski, were also accused of killing Jews or handing them over to the Germans;<sup>74</sup> these included Ignacy Grajda,<sup>75</sup> Jan Kamiński,<sup>76</sup> Polikarp Kalkowski, Stanisław Duda, Bartłomiej Witkowski, Daniel Aniszewski,<sup>77</sup> and Kazimierz Herdt.<sup>78</sup> The latter did indeed sign a *Volkslist*, but he helped many Jews in hiding.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to the documentation described above, the resources of the Institute of National Remembrance include a large batch of documents from the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland [*Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce*]. Among them, the files concerning the investigation into the liquidation of the ghetto in Mrozy in summer 1942 deserve special attention,<sup>80</sup> as do the questionnaires from the Municipal Court in Mińsk Mazowiecki. The court employees strove to record German repressions and crimes in individual towns of the Mińsk powiat as widely as possible. Information from witnesses to the events was grouped into questionnaires according to issues

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<sup>72</sup> AIPN, GK 317/150, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> AIPN, GK 209/11, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Józef Wojciechowski was accused of handing over a concealed Jew to the gendarmes in 1943, as well as indicating places where Jews were hiding (APW, SOW, 3809, pp. 6–7).

<sup>75</sup> In the light of the indictment, in 1943 Ignacy Grajda indicated the whereabouts of the hidden children of Jewish nationality to the German military police (APW, SOW, 3314, pp. 4–5).

<sup>76</sup> Jan Kamiński was accused of murdering three Jews hidden by Zofia Kur in the village of Gamratka in June 1943 (APW, SOW, 3165, p. 22).

<sup>77</sup> The Provincial Court for the Warsaw Province tried Polikarp Kalkowski, Stanisław Duda, Bartłomiej Witkowski and Daniel Aniszewski for handing over two people of Jewish nationality to the gendarmes (AIPN, GK 318/34, p. 4).

<sup>78</sup> AIPN, GK 453/1283, Prosecutor files against Kazimierz Herdt.

<sup>79</sup> A. Gontarek, *Judenrein. Bez Żydów. Żydzi mińscy w czasie wojny i po jej zakończeniu*, Mińsk Mazowiecki 2012, pp. 37–38.

<sup>80</sup> AIPN, 2205/6, vol. 1–4.

such as ghettos, the aid provided to Jews, the repression of the Jewish population and others.<sup>81</sup> The employees of communal offices, who in 1945–46 searched for information in this regard among the inhabitants of the powiat, also tried to find witnesses to the German crimes and repression. The work was carried out at the request of higher authorities. In the documentation, population losses in the powiat were estimated, among other facts.<sup>82</sup> The collections of the Main Commission also include a list of people murdered in the Mińsk powiat.<sup>83</sup>

We can obtain additional information about the Jews thanks to the documents preserved from the civilian state security authorities at the powiat level, and from other source materials, such as the Security Offices of all levels functioning after the war. For example, from a file on the activities of ‘Zionist elements’ in the Mińsk powiat, we can learn that Leokadia Bartniczka, born on 20 October 1902, in Siennica, hid Jews during the occupation.<sup>84</sup> The file also contains much other information, obtained mostly through denunciations, concerning the Jewish problem both during and after the Second World War.<sup>85</sup> One of the tasks of the officers of the District State Security Office (PUBP) in Mińsk was to investigate people who had cooperated with the German occupier. Documentation of such activities undertaken in the Mińsk powiat has been preserved. People who were officers of the *Gestapo*, *Kripo*, *Orpo*, gendarmes and other formations included in the German terror apparatus, as well as people cooperating with the Germans or who had been entered onto the German national list were dealt with.<sup>86</sup>

It is also worth paying attention to the file collection created during the work of the District Office of Information and Propaganda in Mińsk Mazowiecki operating from 1944 to 1947. The reader will find a great deal of information therein about the German occupation and statistical data concerning the Holocaust.<sup>87</sup> Material devoted to personal losses can be found in one of the files of the War

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<sup>81</sup> The questionnaires also registered individual cases of crimes or repression against the Polish population. See AIPN, 2448/90; 2448/91.

<sup>82</sup> AIPN, 166/488, vol. 4.

<sup>83</sup> AIPN, GK 162/393.

<sup>84</sup> AIPN, 0201/247, Summary of materials from subtask no. 5916 of codename ‘S-14’, p. 283.

<sup>85</sup> AIPN, 0201/247, Secret file concerning the activity of ‘Zionist elements’ in the Mińsk Mazowiecki powiat.

<sup>86</sup> The file also includes the investigation into people cooperating with the German security authorities in the district of Węgrów. This subject was also investigated in the Mińsk powiat (AIPN, 0255/337, pp. 40–194).

<sup>87</sup> APW, Office of Information and Propaganda of the Warsaw Province 1944–47, 375.

Compensation Department of the Warsaw Voivodship Office from 1944 to 1950.<sup>88</sup> Much valuable material can also be obtained from an archival query in the files of the Municipal Court from 1940 to 1950, which contain files devoted to persons considered dead or missing. This documentation concerns *inter alia* the deaths of Chaia Estera Berger,<sup>89</sup> Sura Rozenblum,<sup>90</sup> and Laia Felner.<sup>91</sup>

When conducting research into the Jews of the Mińsk powiat, it is sometimes worth making the effort to search in files created many years after the war, because they may contain important documentation which can serve not only as supplements to facts already known, but can also contribute much new information. One example may be the archives of the Provincial Office in Siedlce from 1975 to 1999, especially archival unit 1330, from which we learn that 650 Jews from the labour camp located in the Kopernik school and the Rudzki & Co. factory were buried in the cemetery in Mińsk Mazowiecki.<sup>92</sup>

The extensive collection of Jewish and Polish Holocaust testimonies includes narratives recounted by persons residing in the Mińsk powiat during the German occupation. This collection contains several accounts of the help Poles provided to Jews convicted by the Germans. Halina Grobelna, the wife of Julian Grobelny, spoke in two accounts about her and her husband's activities; living in Cegłów near Mińsk, they saved Jews together.<sup>93</sup> Natalia Siuta also talks about the help she offered, thanks to whom Frajda Gewisówna from Jędrzejów avoided the German manhunt coming from Kałuszyn.<sup>94</sup> Krystyna Wasiak, aka Henia Niewiadomska, a Jewish woman who found herself with her mother in Kałuszyn during the German occupation, mentioned the help she had received from Polish people. By August 1942 the mother had gone on to Mińsk, from where she never came back, but thanks to the help of a Polish family, the orphaned girl survived the war.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> APW, Warsaw Voivodship Office 1944–50, War Compensation Department, 25.

<sup>89</sup> State Archives in Siedlce (hereinafter: APS), the Town Court in Mińsk Mazowiecki 1945–51, 626, Documentation on Chaja Estera Berger.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 1682, Documentation on Sura Rozenblum.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 1361, Documentation on Lai Felner.

<sup>92</sup> APS, Provincial Office in Siedlce 1975–1999, 1330, Study 'The Jewish Cemetery in Mińsk Mazowiecki', p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/5863 and 301/6412, Halina Grobelna's accounts.

<sup>94</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/6129, Testimony of Natalia Siut.

<sup>95</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/5874, Testimony of Krystyna Wasiak, aka Henia Niewiadomska.



Another group of accounts kept in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute consist, first of all, of testimonies of survival in the ghettos and descriptions of their liquidation. Róża Berek gave an account of the expulsion of Jews from the ghetto in Stanisławów.<sup>96</sup> The fate of her family, who lived in Dobre and Stanisławów among other locations during the German occupation, was described by Stanisław Słomkowski, aka Dawid Słoń.<sup>97</sup> Apolonia Przybyjewska related her experiences from the Mińsk ghetto,<sup>98</sup> as did Łopacki (first name unknown),<sup>99</sup> Mojsze and Brajndla Siekierka,<sup>100</sup> Boruch Gartenkranc, Aleksander Walewski, Ludwik Michalski and Icek Lipczyński.<sup>101</sup>

Two accounts kept at the Jewish Historical Institute concern the struggle of the Jews: they present one of the strategies of survival which Jews resorted to: either armed resistance or joining partisan units. The latter method was chosen by people who were the heroes of the account given by Szczepan Janicki, who wrote about a partisan group composed of a dozen or so Soviet prisoners of war who escaped from the POW camps, as well as two Poles and three Jews. According to Janicki, this group operated in the forests around Mińsk and Stoczek. He described the Jews taking part in partisan actions.<sup>102</sup> The armed rebellion by the Jews imprisoned in the camp located in the Kopernik school on Siennicka Street in Mińsk is mentioned by Efraim Siedlecki.<sup>103</sup>

The Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute also contain an account by Stanisław Jurkowski, appointed by the Communist authorities as mayor of Mińsk Mazowiecki after the end of the war. There are many threads in his memoirs: the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk, the transports to Treblinka, the labour camps at the Rudzki factory and the Kopernik school, and the execution of Jews by the gendarmerie in the town of Chochół.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/5108, Account of Róża Berek.

<sup>97</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/3358, Testimony of Stanisław Słomkowski aka Dawid Słoń.

<sup>98</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/5890, Apolonia Przybyjewska's testimony.

<sup>99</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/6044, Account by Łopacki [no first name given].

<sup>100</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/4098, Testimony of Mojsze and Brajndla Siekierka (the authors describe their experiences in Mińsk Mazowiecki and Żwirówka). See also AŻIH, ZR, 301/4158, Brajndla Siekierka's testimony.

<sup>101</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/5088, Accounts by Boruch Gartenkranc, Aleksander Walewski, Ludwik Michalski and Icek Lipczyński about the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk.

<sup>102</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/5805, Testimony of Szczepan Janicki.

<sup>103</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/1680, Efraim Siedlecki, 'The fight and death of the last 400 Jews in Mińsk Mazowiecki'.

<sup>104</sup> AŻIH, ZR, 301/1010, Testimony of Stanisław Jurkowski.



Sizeable collections, especially of personal accounts, can be found in the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem. Relatively many testimonies of this type have been preserved. These materials are numerous, and contain information not only about the experiences of specific Jews, but also about the living conditions in individual towns, such as Chyżyny (the labour camp),<sup>105</sup> Dobre,<sup>106</sup> Kaluszyn,<sup>107</sup> Kołbiel,<sup>108</sup> Mińsk Mazowiecki,<sup>109</sup> and Mrozy.<sup>110</sup> In addition, the Yad Vashem Archive contains a list of Jews from Kalisz who survived the Holocaust, prepared in 1945.<sup>111</sup>

Another group of important materials, albeit little used in academic research so far, includes the investigative files concerning German crimes kept in the Bundesarchiv Branch in Ludwigsburg, the former Centre for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes. The files from the investigations carried out in the 1960s are particularly valuable, as they were created as a result of interrogations of war criminals, as well as their victims and witnesses from the Second World War period. Extensive evidence has been collected for the Mińsk powiat in ten volumes of files.<sup>112</sup> The other files therein should not be overlooked either, although their titles do not directly indicate that they contain any information about the Jews from the Mińsk powiat. Nevertheless, it is worth examining them due to their high research value. One could at least, for example, consider the documentation in which we can find data on the criminal activities of Herman Botz, the clerk for Jewish affairs in the Mińsk starostwo.<sup>113</sup> Other archival materials related to the Holocaust in the General Government are also characterised by their high value as sources,<sup>114</sup> as are the files

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<sup>105</sup> Yad Vashem Archive (hereinafter: AJW), O.3., Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives (hereinafter: Testimonies), 2074, 2078.

<sup>106</sup> AJW, O.3, Testimonies, C/5994.

<sup>107</sup> AJW, O.3, Testimonies, 501, 3438, 504, 506, 507, 4457, O.33.C5598, VT/6513; AJW, O.12 Perlman Collection-Refugees from Poland, 51.

<sup>108</sup> AJW, O.3, Testimonies, V/T.3474.

<sup>109</sup> AJW, M.1, Central Historical Commission (CHC) of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the US Zone, Munich, 1062; AVY, O.3, Testimonies, 2777, 3469, 3471, 6321, 7491, 9844, 11472, 13133, 14170, VT/1152, VT/1734, VT/2260, VT/2455; AJW, O.39 Collection of Memoirs Written for the Yad Vashem Competition, 184; AJW, O.62, Borwicz Collection, 455. AYU, O.62, Borwicz Collection, 455.

<sup>110</sup> AJW, O/3, Testimonies, 2824, 3139.

<sup>111</sup> AJW, M.54, National and Provincial Archives in Poland, JM/10005.

<sup>112</sup> Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg (hereinafter: BAL), 6833-42.

<sup>113</sup> BAL, 162/3518.

<sup>114</sup> BAL, 162/30530.

on the participation of gendarmerie members in the Warsaw district,<sup>115</sup> the archives depicting the forced labour of Jews in this district<sup>116</sup> or the lists of Germans who murdered Jews there on behalf of the civil apparatus, gendarmerie, etc.<sup>117</sup>

The diverse archival collections, especially those kept abroad, should be subjected to research. When looking for documents relating to the history of the Holocaust in the Mińsk powiat, we should also reach for the archival materials collected at the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust [*Studium Polski Podziemnej*], and at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London.

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<sup>115</sup> BAL, 162/26469.

<sup>116</sup> BAL, 162/7443.

<sup>117</sup> BAL, 162/5545.

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## SUMMARY

The article discusses the state of research, research postulates and sources which could be used for research into Jewish issues in the Mińsk powiat (Warsaw district) during the German occupation in this area in 1939–44.

The author presents this article in the form of a review. It cites the results of research conducted in this area, referring to the academic literature that has been published as of the time when this article was submitted for further editorial work. In submitting a critical analysis of the known academic items, the author turns to as yet unarticulated issues in relation to the study of Polish-Jewish relations in the area under discussion, i.e. the Mińsk powiat.

The issue of the source base is discussed in the last part of the text. The author focuses on presenting the available sources, both printed and archival, including central archives (such as the Archives of New Records and the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance), local ones (e.g. the State Archives in Warsaw and its branch in Otwock), as well as foreign ones (the Yad Vashem and the Bundesarchiv Branch in Ludwigsburg).

## KEYWORDS

State of research • Jews • Mińsk powiat • research postulates  
• German occupation