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REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE 'THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NAZI OCCUPATION. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN POLISH AND JEWISH LIFE 1939–41', WARSAW, 18–19 NOVEMBER 2019

At dawn on 1 September 1939, troops of the Third Reich crossed the borders of Poland without a formal declaration of war, thus starting the first campaign of World War II. This aggression, and the subsequent German occupation, led to the deaths of millions of Polish citizens. In connection with the 80th anniversary of this event in 2019, Polish research communities prepared a number of various initiatives aimed at commemorating the tragedy of that period, summarising the present state of knowledge in this field, and indicating the perspectives for further research.

The international conference held on 18–19 November 2019 in Warsaw, entitled 'The Beginnings of the Nazi Occupation. Continuity and Change in Polish and Jewish life 1939–41', was part of the calendar of celebrations related to these celebrations. The event was prepared by the Warsaw Ghetto Museum in cooperation with the Polish Society for Jewish Studies, the Jewish Historical Institute, the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity and Touro College

in Berlin. The meeting was attended by 25 speakers representing both academic centres and other research institutions, from Poland, Israel, Germany, Great Britain and Australia among others. They included renowned and experienced researchers, as well as representatives of the younger generation. The conference aimed not only to present the results of the latest academic research on German policy towards Poles and Jews in the first years of the occupation, but also to present the contrasts that appear in the common memory of these events in Polish and Jewish cultural circles. The session was also attended by many listeners who actively participated in the discussions on the issues presented.

The proceedings began on Monday 18 November in the conference room of the Jewish Historical Institute. The opening ceremony was hosted by Albert Stankowski, the director of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum; Prof. Paweł Śpiewak, the director of the Jewish Historical Institute; and Prof. Jan Rydel, a member of the Steering Committee of the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity. As Mr. Stankowski emphasised in his speech, the conference on the beginnings of the German occupation represented the inauguration of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum's research activity; it could not have been organised without the support of both the Polish and the foreign institutions that study the fate of the Jewish community in Poland. In turn, Prof. Śpiewak emphasised the symbolism of the place where the individual panels on the first day of the conference were to take place: "Until May 1943, the Great Synagogue was located here. Its demolition was a sign of the end of the Jewish community in Warsaw and Poland". In a way, Prof. Rydel's preamble served as an introduction to the issues raised during the session. From the outset, he highlighted the clear disproportion in the amount of research conducted into individual years of the German occupation, stating unequivocally that the period after 1941, when the process of extermination reached its apogee, was examined much more frequently by researchers. The clear gaps in research into the initial phase of the occupation necessitate a closer look at the phenomena that took place in the first months after the outbreak of the war. "Poles and Jews saw that the German occupation was a phenomenon of a previously unknown scale of barbarism. However, they could not have foreseen later events", said Prof. Rydel, also adding that public awareness at the time was based on the belief that the war would soon end. Another important element of his speech drew attention to the way in which research in this

area should be conducted. According to Prof. Rydel, researchers dealing with the history of Polish Jews between 1939 and 1941 face an enormous challenge because they have to avoid perceiving this period through the prism of the events that dominated the following years.

The conference's inaugural lecture was given by Prof. Stephan Lehnstaedt from Touro College in Berlin, who has been researching the Holocaust and the history of the Jews for many years. In his speech entitled 'Through the occupier's eyes. Ordinary Germans look at Poland, 1939–40', Prof. Lehnstaedt analysed photos taken by Wehrmacht soldiers during the invasion of Poland and the beginning of the occupation. The photographs show the representatives of the Jewish community who were of interest to the German military mainly because of their 'distinctiveness'. Prof. Lehnstaedt mentioned the notes made on the backs of the photos, which included phrases about 'Jewish filth' and 'laziness'; these (as he emphasised) were supposed to justify the crimes of the German soldiers and strengthen their conviction that it was necessary to isolate the Jews. The captions to these photographs also included anti-Polish and anti-Slavic statements. As he noted, the Wehrmacht's soldiers perceived their actions in terms of 'restoring order and justice'; this was expressed, for example, by forcing the Jewish population to work, or by supporting the *Volksdeutsche*. In his conclusions, Prof. Lehnstaedt stated that the evidence presented testified to the effectiveness of National Socialist propaganda, and the photographs taken by the soldiers prove that the prevalent stereotypes about Jews were consolidated and deeply entrenched.

The plenary session of the conference was divided into seven thematic sessions. In the first panel, 'Persecution of Jews 1939–41: a regional perspective', specialists from Poland and Israel presented the tragic fate of the Jewish population during the initial phase of the war in selected areas of occupied Poland. The session opened with a speech by Szymon Pietrzykowski, representing the Departmental Historical Research Bureau (*Oddziałowe Biuro Badań Historycznych*) of the Institute of National Remembrance in Poznań; in his lecture, entitled 'Battlefield, internment, return and persecution: the odyssey of Jewish soldiers from the Poznań region (1939–41)', he outlined the wartime journey of the Polish Jews mobilised before 1 September who were residents of those parts of the region incorporated into the Reich in October 1939. The speaker focused on the fate of these soldiers after

their participation in the so-called September Campaign; they were wounded and/or interned in various POW camps, located mainly in Germany, where they experienced worse and more discriminatory treatment in comparison to the non-Jewish prisoners. As Mr. Pietrzykowski demonstrated, they could not return home before the end of 1940, and their fate was marked by other types of persecution, characterised by their conscription into forced labour projects, 'ghettoisation', or deportation onto the territory of the General Government.

The speech by Jakub Chmielewski from the State Museum at Majdanek focused on the situation of Lublin's Jews under the German occupation in 1939–41. The Jewish community in Lublin made up nearly a third of the city's population before the outbreak of the war. The arrival of the German army in mid-September 1939 marked the beginning of a brutal occupation that quickly affected the Jewish population as well. The fact that Lublin was made the district capital meant that the city played an important role in the Germans' demographic plans. The paper discusses the activities of the occupation authorities during the first months of the war; these consisted of the introduction of a number of discriminatory provisions on the territory of the General Government, aimed at excluding and pauperising the Jewish population. Mr. Chmielewski then focused on a detailed presentation of the situation of Lublin's Jews, mentioning the imposition of high taxes on them, the obligation to collect scrap metal, and their forced displacement from their apartments in the better parts of the city. At the initiative of the local civil administration, the Jews were also ordered to wear the stigmatising yellow Star of David, which was soon replaced with a white band with a similar blue symbol. The speaker also mentioned that the Lublin Jews were forced to work in camps run by Odilo Globocnik (the camp on Lipowa Street in Lublin, and the camps on the border with the Soviet Union), as well as in other German institutions and enterprises. The speech also touched upon topics related to the migrations of the Jewish population, the plunder of their property, the occupation authorities' systematic repressions, and the role of the *Judenrat* which, due to the modest financial resources available to it, was unable to improve the situation of the local Jews. The speech's coverage ended at the moment when the ghetto was established, a move which preceded the next stage of anti-Jewish policy, namely the mass extermination as part of Operation Reinhard.

Next, Dr. Lea Prais from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem focused on the issues of small towns in occupied Poland in the context of the testimonies collected by the *Oneg Shabbat* organisation. Analysing the testimonies from the Ringelblum Archive given by Jewish refugees who fled or were expelled from various cities throughout occupied Poland and reached Warsaw, and then went into the ghetto, Dr. Prais was looking for answers to the questions of "how were the first days of occupation in other, smaller towns described, and whether the outbreak of the war came as a surprise to the Jewish communities living there; and what the first signs of damage in those areas were, both at the level of the commune and the Jewish community specifically". The topics discussed also included issues related to the Jewish leadership's reactions to the outbreak of the war and the strategies which the Jews adopted to deal with the new reality. The Israeli researcher noted that although the testimonies she analysed were given immediately after the events described (1940–42), it should be remembered that the witnesses were living in the shadow of the fugitives' trauma and expulsion, becoming refugees in their own country. This reality greatly influenced the nature of their testimony.

The panel closed with a speech by Dr. Tomasz Domański from the Institute of National Remembrance in Kielce, which concerned the scope and form of the anti-Jewish activities carried out by the German occupation authorities in rural areas and in small ghettos in the Kielce poviat (Bodzentyn, Chęciny, Daleszyce). The speaker also mentioned the German occupation structures operating in the area discussed which were directly responsible for the repression and persecution of Jews. Issues related to specific crimes and topics related to everyday life in small ghettos and villages were raised, with particular emphasis on the relations between Poles and Jews during the first years of the German occupation.

In the second panel of the session, papers on selected aspects of the lives of Poles and Jews under the German occupation were presented. In the first, prepared by Alicja Bartnicka from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, issues related to the organisation of forced Jewish labour in the General Government (until 1941) were discussed. The paper focused on recreating and describing the German occupying authorities' legislative process in this regard. The most important guidelines were briefly presented, such as the decree by Hans Frank of 26 October 1939 on compulsory labour for the Jewish population, which was

the first official directive in this area, issued immediately after the establishment of civil administrative authorities, and the implementing provisions of Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger of 11 and 12 December of the same year, which specified both the age range of the Jews sent to forced labour, the time of their work, and the need to exploit the workforce in accordance with the professions they had been trained in. The paper also referred to further regulations by the German occupation authorities, and raised topics related to the types of labour camps in the GG, the living conditions there, and the role and involvement of the *Judenrat* in the situation of the Jewish forced labourers.

Martin Borkowski-Saruhan from the Georg-August-Universität in Göttingen focused on issues related to the intertwined experiences of Jews and non-Jews during the first two years of German occupation in east Upper Silesia, with a particular emphasis on sports. The author suggested that both groups displayed similar coping patterns in this early period. The case of German-occupied east Upper Silesia showed some peculiarities compared to other occupied Polish territories, primarily the General Government. These differences greatly influenced the chances of survival for both Jews and non-Jews. From a comparative perspective, the speaker claimed, the beginning of the occupation seemed relatively peaceful, apart from local outbreaks of mass violence, such as the executions in Katowice of people considered to be Polish nationalists, or the beating and burning alive of around forty Jewish residents of Będzin in the local synagogue (both events took place in September 1939). The key factor to understanding the events analysed in the paper is the National Socialist concept of east Upper Silesia, which they saw as a truly German territory that needed to be 'liberated'. This belief led the territory to be annexed to the Reich, along with the Dąbrowa Basin and the Żywiec region. In this situation, a significant part of the Jews, who had often already fled from German occupation elsewhere, found themselves in Germany once again, where they did not know how to deal with the situation (proof of which, as the author showed, was the 'Nisko-Aktion'). When reconstructing the eastern border of the former Prussian and Habsburg lands in Upper Silesia, the occupying authorities designated most of the people living in the west of the region as Germans, or those who could be 'Germanised', whereas the Poles and Jews were displaced to the region's eastern part.

This process of 'ghettoisation', as the speaker noted, was by no means comparable to those that took place in places such as Warsaw or Łódź. Many Jews chose to live with relatives and acquaintances in Zagłębie before they were eventually expelled. Isolated ghettos did not exist until 1943 (with a few exceptions). The areas assigned to the Jews were relatively spacious and not densely populated, with much better living conditions and supplies than elsewhere. In these circumstances, which according to Borkowski-Saruhan did not contradict the violence of the occupier, recreational activities such as sports were of key importance for coping with the occupation experience, as we learn from the few sources on this subject. Among many other functions, sport contributed to the building of social ties, linking the Jews with the other inhabitants of German-occupied eastern Upper Silesia. A closer look at the sporting practices of the Jews, Poles and Upper Silesians (based on selected case studies) revealed very similar patterns of socialisation. Moreover, according to the paper's author, the perspective from the history of sport shows that in the early period, the non-Jewish inhabitants of Upper Silesia were more at risk of death due to the conditions of occupation than the Jews living in this area.

The penultimate panel on the first day of the conference focused on issues related to ethnic groups in Poland and the policy of the German occupier towards them. Michał Turski from the Osteuropäische Geschichte/Historisches Institut in Giessen prepared a paper on the German nationality list (*Volksliste*) and the techniques used for classifying and separating Germans and Poles in the Wartheland. The paper focused on the presentation of the National Socialists' ethnic policy in the Warthegau in 1939–41, with particular emphasis on the Łódź region (Łódź itself and the neighbouring towns). It was in the area of the Warthegau that the first *DVL* (*Deutsche Volksliste*) projects were created, which in March 1941 were extended to all the occupied Polish territories. Mr. Turski not only introduced the audience to the regulations related to the adoption of the German nationality list, but he strongly emphasised the impact of the *DVL* Act on the lives of the Germans and Poles in the Warthegau, as well as the resulting clear division between these groups which were visible in various aspects of everyday life. The speaker highlighted the privileges of the Germans, who were the only people permitted to own land, factories, shops and houses in the Wartheland. In addition, he discussed the policy of discrimination towards the Poles and Jews, whose property was subject to requisition.

Issues concerning the persecution of the Roma in Poland in the first period of the occupation were presented by Dr. Alicja Gontarek of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. The topic discussed here represents a kind of a blank spot in the historical research on the fate of the Gypsies in Poland, mainly due to the small amount of archival materials in this area and their dispersion over a very wide area. The presentation focused on identifying the typology of persecution, with a description of the source materials on this subject. The question of the strategies employed to deal with German acts of violence and the consequences of the persecution for this minority's internal social structure was also discussed. According to Dr. Gontarek, the first two years of the occupation were much more important for the Gypsies than for the other persecuted groups, because it led to their internal disintegration and the collapse of their traditional social structures. The final part of her paper focused on characterising the general state in which the Polish Gypsies entered the next stage of German policy, i.e. 'ghettoisation' and subsequent extermination.

The first day of the session closed with a special session attended by researchers from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, devoted to the new encyclopaedia of the Warsaw ghetto which they have been preparing. Maria Ferenc-Piotrowska, Katarzyna Person and Justyna Majewska, with the support of Prof. Andrzej Żbikowski who was moderating the panel, spoke about the long-term interdisciplinary research project implemented by the Jewish Historical Institute, the aim of which is to develop a virtual encyclopaedia of the Warsaw ghetto. The encyclopaedia's comprehensively prepared entries are intended to be a synthesis of all the work on a complete edition of the Ringelblum Archive, and to encompass the Jewish Historical Institute's other archival collections and the published sources and testimonials about the Warsaw ghetto and the Holocaust. As a result, the final index should include nearly 2000 entries, which can be divided into specific personal, historical, geographical, organisational (political, cultural or youth organisations operating in the ghetto) or characteristic elements of everyday ghetto life, in different subject areas. The project is being carried out by a specialised interdisciplinary research team, and after its completion the encyclopaedia will be made available on the DELET website. The historians involved in its compilation emphasise that the entries will be illustrated by unique and little-seen photographs from the ghetto taken from the collections of the Jewish

Historical Institute. In addition, individual items will also be assigned charts, graphs, references to documents and publications from the collections of the Jewish Historical Institute, as well as tags linking to entries on similar topics. The encyclopaedia is supposed to fulfil both educational and popularising functions. It is also worth emphasising that this work will be targeted not only to the group of researchers dealing with this issue, but (in the intention of its creators) to a wider audience: teachers, lecturers, students or pupils in upper secondary schools. The project is scheduled to be completed in 2023.

The second day of the conference had three sections, devoted in turn to a comparison of Polish and Jewish memories about the events at the beginning of the occupation, the history of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union until 1941, and research into the history of the Warsaw ghetto. This time, the sessions were held at the Zielna Conference Centre, located near the headquarters of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum.

The speakers on the first panel, entitled 'Jewish memory/Polish memory: similarities and differences' mainly based their papers on analyses of selected testimonies and accounts. Andrzej Kirmiel from the Międzyrzecz Regional Museum focused on the history of the Jews who ended up in Zbąszyń after their expulsion from the Third Reich. The transports of Jews which started as part of the *Polenaktion* on 28 October 1939 were mainly directed to railway crossings on the borders. The speaker said that the largest group was sent to Zbąszyń, a large railway junction on Poland's western border. It is estimated that over 6000 people were deported there on 28–29 October alone. This paper, apart from discussing the course of the action itself, the conditions available to those resident in the town and the help they received from private individuals, also referred to the perceptions of these events from the viewpoints of people resident in Zbąszyń today.

The next two presentations focused on analyses of selected Jewish accounts and the presentation of the events outlined in them from the viewpoint of their authors. Prof. Sara Bender from the University of Haifa (whose paper was read by the organisers in her absence) recalled the notes of Simcha Korngold, a member of the Jewish Military Union who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which today constitute an extremely interesting source on wartime events. The first chapter, on which the speaker focuses, is actually a diary describing the life and everyday reality in the besieged city of Warsaw until its fall on 27 September

1939. The paper recalled Korngold's remarkable descriptions of the efforts of tens of thousands of residents as they took all possible steps to prevent the city from falling. Anna Ciałowicz of the Pilecki Institute, on the other hand, discussed Polish--Jewish relations at the beginning of the German occupation (September–December 1939) in the light of the recollections of Reuwen Feldszuh, a writer, journalist and revisionist activist who lived in the Warsaw ghetto during the German occupation. The topic discussed was important, first of all because Feldszuh's book, *Poyln brent* (Buenos Aires, 1960), has not hitherto been used in historical research. It includes notes from the period of the siege of Warsaw (September–October 1939), a description of the first persecution of Jews in the capital and in the countryside (Łaskarzew), a description of the everyday life of Jews and Poles, a description of the changing moods of the people living under German occupation, as well as information concerning the establishment of the *Judenrat* in Warsaw. In the context of the events described by Feldszuh, Ms Ciałowicz discussed the changes in the communities living in the occupied territory, as well as the evolution of the author's own perceptions of the events taking place around him.

In the session entitled 'Polish Jews and the Soviet Union, 1939–41', Daniela Ozacky-Stern from Bar-Ilan University in Israel talked about the activities of the Kibbutz in Vilnius, which was established there just after some members of the *ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* youth movement escaped eastwards from Warsaw and other Polish cities in early September 1939, along with other Jewish refugees trying to avoid Nazi occupation. After much wandering, they reached Vilnius and Rivne, which were still under Soviet rule. Over time, a large cluster, the Kibbutz, was created in Vilnius consisting of 610 members of *ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* from Kalisz, Częstochowa, Zbąszyń, Radom, Lublin, Kraków, Sosnowiec and other places. The documents they left behind constitute invaluable historical material that allows researchers to recreate their everyday life, their ideological, cultural and educational views, and to describe the relationships between the members of the Kibbutz in Vilnius and the Jews remaining in the German-occupied areas.

Dr. Andrei Zamoiski, representing the Freie Universität Berlin, presented an extremely interesting paper on how aware the inhabitants of the Soviet Union were of the persecution of the Jewish population in occupied Poland. As he demonstrated, in the period from autumn 1939 to June 1941 Soviet newspapers were silent

on the acts of violence perpetrated against the Jewish population in German--occupied Polish territories. For political reasons, the Soviet authorities and Soviet propaganda did not inform the Jews living in that area about those atrocities. As the speaker showed, in Soviet society, which itself had experienced several waves of terror in the interwar period, the state and secret services monitored all the inhabitants' activities and the circulation of news, so that the Soviet Jews, especially those in Belarus and Ukraine, were not prepared for the events ahead, and did not undertake any activities to evacuate themselves or their families to the eastern regions of the Soviet Union in the early weeks of the German invasion. The Soviet leaders did not take advantage of the reports flowing into the country to protect their people, or even to inform the Jews in the USSR about the National Socialist system's murderous policy towards the Jewish population.

The last panel of the conference's second day was devoted to the integrated perspectives of research into the history of the Warsaw ghetto. Dr. Anna Hirsh of the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne analysed postcards and letters in the Australian archives sent by Warsaw Jews to relatives who had fled to Australia, Japan, and North & South America. The correspondence comes from the period beginning at the outbreak of the war until the Jewish correspondents had been settled in the ghetto. Today, this material – which is completely unknown in Poland – is a legacy that provides information on the occupiers' policy towards the Jews, the regulations imposed on Jewish residents, their living conditions, and the situation of their family and friends. The speaker tried to show how fear and censorship could affect the inclusion or exclusion of key details about suffering within the content of a short letter or postcard.

Daniel Reiser from the Zefat Academic College in Safed discussed the religious leadership of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Szapiro in Warsaw in the first months of the war. An examination of his sermons has shown that he made no direct reference to political or historical events. Szapiro never mentioned the Germans, or later, important ghetto figures, by name; nor did he refer to specific events directly. However, his sermons do contain mention of 'evil-doers', descriptions of physical and mental torments and suffering due to the loss of loved ones, and of crises related to religion and faith. These materials do also contain many indirect references to outside events, especially from the first year of the war, even before the construction of the ghetto. Szapiro mentions the forcible

shaving of his beard, the closing of the synagogues and Jewish shops, the setting up of aid organisations, the persecution and contempt expressed towards the Jews in the street, and the plunder of Jewish property. As Reiser pointed out, the personal tragedy of Szapiro, who lost his entire family in the bombing, influenced his perception of himself as a religious leader who nevertheless served as an example of someone who still believed in God's justice, despite having experienced more suffering than others.

In the last lecture of the panel, Dorota Siepracka from the Institute of National Remembrance in Łódź talked about the scouts' aid for the ghetto, known under the codename 'Akcja Żet', which is today a forgotten chapter in the history of the Warsaw ghetto. Ms Siepracka demonstrated that the scouts provided help in various forms practically from the very beginning of the ghetto's existence. The strictly secret cells ('Żetka', 'Żet') created within the structures of the Grey Ranks [*Szare Szeregi*] were delegated to perform special tasks in this district. There were at least three 'Żet' units, whose members, thanks to passes issued by the City Council, had legal, regular access to the ghetto as employees of various municipal institutions, performing their routine duties as collectors, disinfectors and garbage collectors. While undertaking this 'legal' work they also conducted underground activities, which initially consisted in identifying the topography of the closed district, observing the moods of its inhabitants, and collecting information on the general living situation. The next stage of the clandestine tasks involved making contacts with the elite and intelligentsia in the ghetto, in cooperation with whom the members of 'Żet' were able to led Jews threatened by the Gestapo out of the ghetto. They also saved many doctors, pharmacists, poets, musicians and actors who were well-known in the ghetto. The audience also learned that two of the three 'Żet' cells were quickly detected and liquidated by the Germans, while the third, which had only two members, continued to operate in the Warsaw Ghetto until its complete liquidation.

Aside from the substantive discussions, one should mention the visit organised during the second day of the conference to the Bersohn & Bauman Children's Hospital in Warsaw, where the Warsaw Ghetto Museum will be housed. The speakers had the opportunity not only to see this historic building, but also to learn more about the place's interesting history. The hospital was built in the years 1876–78, and initially functioned as a small institution treating Jewish children. In the years

1905–12 a pediatrician, Henryk Goldszmit (aka Janusz Korczak), who later founded the Orphans' Home for Jewish children in Warsaw, worked there. At the outbreak of the war, the hospital was already a thriving facility, although in November 1940 it found itself within the boundaries of the Warsaw Ghetto, and from February 1942, the doctors who worked there took part in research on diseases linked to starvation. After the liquidation of the small ghetto, on 10 August 1942 the entire hospital on Sienna Street was moved to its headquarters at the intersection of Leszno and Żelazna Streets. Three days later, its location was changed to the school buildings on Stawki Street. On 11 September 1942, the employees of the hospital and their patients were deported to Treblinka. The abandoned hospital buildings between Sienna and Śliska Streets became the seat of the Children's Clinic, which operated until the Warsaw Uprising. This facility was the only professional medical point in the centre of Warsaw during the rebellion. After the end of the war, the headquarters of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland were located in the hospital buildings, and later, when the building had come into the hands of the state and been reconstructed, it housed the 'Children of Warsaw' Provincial Hospital for Infections in Children. In 2015, the hospital building was abandoned. On 7 March 2018, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture Piotr Gliński announced that the building would be designated as the seat of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum. The participants of the November conference had the opportunity to look at the buildings, where renovation work will soon begin in connection with the ongoing permanent exhibition, which is scheduled to open in 2023.

The conference 'The beginnings of the Nazi occupation. Continuity and change in Polish and Jewish life 1939–41' was an opportunity to present research, exchange experiences and make new scientific contacts. The speakers' papers not only demonstrated their familiarity with the areas discussed, but also presented new research challenges, as was widely discussed in the summary by Prof. Daniel Blatman from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The discussions showed a wide range of specialisations related to the history of the Poles and Jews in the first years of German occupation, and also indicated the need to make ever closer ties of cooperation between the people and institutions who deal with these issues.