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SYMPOSIA PROCEEDINGS

*STAN BADAŃ NAD POMOCĄ ŻYDOM NA ZIEMIACH POLSKICH  
POD OKUPACJĄ NIEMIECKĄ – PRZEGLĄD PIŚMIENICTWA,*  
ED. BY TOMASZ DOMAŃSKI AND ALICJA GONTAREK

After several years of work, researchers in 2022 at the Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, IPN) published the study: *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką – przegląd piśmiennictwa*.<sup>1</sup> This publication arose in the context of the main IPN research project “Dzieje Żydów w Polsce i stosunki polsko-żydowskie w latach 1917–1990” (History of Jews in Poland and Polish-Jewish relations between 1917 and 1990), edited by Tomasz Domański and Alicja Gontarek, and is divided into three parts. In the first, the German occupation and its political system in Polish territories is analysed as well as its lawmaking in respect to Poles and Jews in the General Government,<sup>2</sup> and territories incorporated into the Third

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<sup>1</sup> *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką – przegląd piśmiennictwa* (State of Research on Assistance Offered in Polish Territories to Jewish People During the German Occupation – A Review of the Literature), ed. by T. Domański and A. Gontarek (Kielce–Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2022), 998 pp.

<sup>2</sup> General Governorate for the Occupied Polish Territories (German: Generalgouvernement für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete, Polish: Generalne Gubernatorstwo dla Okupowanych Ziem Polskich, abbreviated to GG hereinafter).

Reich. The second part discusses the extent of assistance given to Jews by the Polish diplomatic service and the third, main part, examines studies on such assistance in particular voivodeships of the Second Polish Republic. These cover both an analysis of the particular nature of a given region, Polish Jewish relations in the inter-bellum as well as a presentation of the literature up to now and its research devoted to assistance given to Jews. Moreover, the studies examine this assistance and its consequences during the German occupation relating to individual and organised support on the part of the Polish Catholic Church and that of “Żegota.”<sup>3</sup> In this context, according to the researchers’ aims, this was to be a point of departure for further, particular studies on these very research questions. In 2022 therefore, for the purposes of familiarising the public at large with the latter, the respective IPN research divisions organised their local book launch, where historians contributing to this publication took part.

The first book launch saw respective contributions from Tomasz Domański, Alicja Gontarek, and Mateusz Szpytma, Deputy President of the Institute of National Remembrance, initiating numerous discussions promoting the above-mentioned study on 7 September at the IPN Centre for Education, History Stopover (*Centrum Edukacyjne IPN Przystanek Historia*), ul. Marszałkowska 21/25, Warsaw, with Rafał Dudkiewicz from Polish Radio 24 as moderator. In his speech, Mateusz Szpytma underscored that the Institute, which has been functioning already for over twenty years, was established with the aim of researching communist crimes, security service documentation and the broadly understood apparatus of repression and its functions. This activity, however, coincided at the time with a controversial debate (of international dimensions) related to the crimes committed in Jedwabne, against which IPN could not refrain from taking a stand. The Deputy President of the IPN viewed this as a motivating opportunity towards a more comprehensive undertaking of the Second World War research by this Institute than envisaged by its founders, in particular relating to such questions as Polish-Jewish relations. As a consequence, over the past two decades, research on the so-called Jewish question, among others, has taken pride of place in the scholarship conducted by researchers at IPN.

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<sup>3</sup> Rada Pomocy Żydom (Council for the Aid to Jews) “Żegota.”

In relation to the main aspect of the discussion, Tomasz Domański, when asked about the justification of conducting research in respect to Polish-Jewish relations as far as the notion of Polish assistance was concerned, replied:

One might be under the impression that the literature and its research relating to studies on the assistance given to Jews is so large, so comprehensive that in fact the final conclusions that should accompany our publications should be definitive and yes, many claim so much has already been done that there is nothing to research and there's nothing else to be written. The conclusions, however, are totally the opposite. Contrary to current opinion, first and foremost that of the media as well as those that are well-known to academic circles, there is in fact material to research. There are many research fields that are lying fallow, ones that in a sense are as if they were blanks and it is these that constitute the major conclusion of our study.

Next, Tomasz Domański outlined the respective contents of the publication and the underlying idea behind it – showing the relevant literature and its research in relation to the assistance given to Jewish people in occupied Poland at that time in particular voivodeships. He went on to state that the comprehensive nature of the literature devoted to this subject notwithstanding, it is highly fragmentary, secondary and multi-lingual. So far two studies on this research question have been published in relation to the regions of Rzeszów and Upper Silesia, while others in respect to specific voivodeships or counties are still waiting their turn. Therefore, the research being undertaken is so important, he stated and also noted that apart from the Archive of The Righteous Among the Nations, there is, in principle, no other such work that has recorded the vast numbers of the Polish Righteous. Moreover, to date no research has been undertaken that allows one to state what percentage amongst them were men and what percentage were women, which age group was most engaged in giving assistance and which the least and why. In discussing the literature and its research, he pointed out that the present breadth of literature on the subject of assistance given to Jews differs in relation to particular voivodeships. For example, the Eastern Borderlands and Wielkopolska were, for this reason, not the subject of study.

In the case of central Poland, the situation is different – starting from the 1960s through to the 1970s and 1980s when the research was conducted by, among others, Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewinówna, Stanisław Wroński, Maria Zwolakowa, Tatiana Bernstein, Adam Rutkowski or Szymon Datner, though by no means was this research question conclusively covered. In this respect, the study *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom* has this clearly documented, organising the publications available. Alas, nearly 80 years after the war's end, it is still not possible to give the numbers of those rescued Jews as well as those who, as a result of giving this assistance, were murdered.

It is to this very point that Mateusz Szpytma shared his reflections, adding that to this very day it is not possible to conclusively answer the question of how many Jews, thanks to this assistance, managed to survive the war:

Such fundamental questions, and there are no answers. [...] We took the decision that this should be simply the subject of research. How might one ask? To research thoroughly – that is, region by region. If not in terms of counties, then at least in terms of voivodeships. [...] When we undertook this initiative, there appeared at that time replies such as why research this particular problem since so many studies have already been published on the subject – since the literature is so comprehensive, so huge? It is at that time that I decided we should establish the state of the literature at the beginning. That we should establish whether a given researcher observes that in their area, everything has been comprehensively studied, then a brief outline of one or two pages that informs: *in the area of this region, everything already is known on the subject of rescuing Jews and this can be found in the literature I am attaching* and the given researcher signs this, taking personal responsibility. As it turned out, no one completed such an outline. On the contrary; many, as well as those who had doubts, came to contribute to this publication [...], commenting among others that this very subject is poorly researched and there is still much to be explored.

Mateusz Szpytma also pointed out the most important research directions in respect to Polish-Jewish relations: “This publication represents our first stage. The second will be a collection of monographs on assistance given to Jews during the

German occupation that outline the above in particular voivodeships and finally, research devoted to the above-mentioned nature of relations and the Holocaust,” stated the Deputy President of IPN. He then appealed to all researchers, those focused on Polish regions and aficionados of history to prepare such monographs devoted to their towns, villages and communes. Taking his own example, he encouraged others by recounting his own journey:

When I decided to research my own village, at that time, in the relevant literature, one could find information that six Jews managed to survive. After further comprehensive examination, it transpired that, in fact, twenty-one Jews were rescued. Naturally, in this context, negative attitudes on the part of the local population can also be found, and this is also worth noting. It is for this reason that history is an enormously interesting venture and why it is worth entering into the so-called microcosms of history that IPN is not able to engage in. This, ladies and gentlemen, is an invitation extended to you.

Continuing the discussion, Alicja Gontarek informed that research relating to the work of Polish embassies and consulates that were engaged in providing assistance to Jews has been undertaken by scholars abroad and that the materials are highly comprehensive:

There has been much that has been written on the work of the Polish diplomatic service, but there remains a principle question, namely our research relates to the assistance given, whereas many studies are concerned with their work *per se*. These are, it can be seen, two separate research questions. The work of the diplomatic service during the Holocaust is a wider matter, whereas such assistance decidedly a more narrow research question. Having conducted a review of the literature at hand, I realised that in respect to the issue of providing assistance, there exist only three studies, and all three relate to the Embassy of Poland in Bern. Naturally, research questions relating to assistance provided to Jews also occur in other publications and one should make use of this knowledge. The subject itself of assistance, the subject of our research, is not broadly represented and is only just, as it were, learning to walk.

Further on, Alicja Gontarek outlined the functioning of the Embassy of Poland in Bern, describing it as a “great centre of rescue and information with respect to the Holocaust.” She also went on to outline the phenomenon of other centres in their work, among others in Cuba, Spain and Greece, though in her view, “we are far from completing an overall picture in this regard, and this is needed. The tasks of diplomacy are among others, to provide protection and help to its citizens, though such work as for example producing false documents belongs to deeds of an extraordinary nature,” said the researcher.

In this context Mateusz Szpytma noted that both fulfilling one’s tasks in the service of one’s country as well as all types of sabotage deserve recognition – for the Second World War was in its essence an unprecedented experience – and it is about this very determination that one should speak loudly.

At the end of the discussion, Tomasz Domański once again took to the floor in respect to his chapter of the publication, *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom*, dealing with the Kielce Voivodeship. The speaker noted that studies on his research area began to appear in the late 1960s, though they were not written by regional researchers but from the perspective of Warsaw (Warsaw-centric), which in a fundamental way influenced the calibre of these discussions. Further, there still remains somewhat of a hiatus in relation to reviews of literature, studies on the Righteous from the region and literature reviews. Moreover, not all the research relating to archives has been exhausted, he emphasised. Tomasz Domański went on to note that the subject of providing assistance to Jews has been undertaken in a great deal many publications of various nature, which, alas, does not change the fact that a monograph on this subject pertaining to the Kielce Voivodeship is still awaiting its researcher. In closing, he turned to the problems that all the authors of their respective chapters had encountered:

It is often that we speak of neglecting research on the subject of providing assistance to Jews and that there are so many things that remain a *tabula rasa*. I do hope nonetheless that the remaining panelists agree that this is a difficult subject. It is one demanding a huge amount of effort researching the archives that at times may appear to be of little effect compared to the time actually spent there itself. It is one that demands from the researcher a highly experienced hand at

moving in and about many various collections and resources. We therefore have to “conduct excavations” for example, in the collections of the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland [*Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce*], records from the Yad Vashem collections or the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute [*Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma*]. [...] We also have to deal with the enormous audiovisual collection in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, documents of the Polish Underground State [*Polskie Państwo Podziemne*], documentation from German courts, personal recollections, diaries and memorial books. All this demands an incredibly huge amount of work in order to prepare for such a publication.

The Deputy President of the Institute of National Remembrance Mateusz Szpytma subsequently went on to recapitulate the discussion, stating that everyone, regardless of their views, who does research on the Holocaust will need to read the publication *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom* – this being one of the most important IPN publications, he concluded.

The abovementioned book launch was the first meeting of discussions that opened the cycle of local promotions for this collective body of research (in particular divisions and delegations) that took their course in a similar vein. Thus each of these meetings discussed the aims of the publication, the relevant literature and challenges that researchers face in preparing publications relating to the main research question of assistance provided to Jews in the territories of Poland during the German Occupation.

The second book launch took place on 26 September 2022 and was organised by the Gdańsk Branch of the IPN and the Museum of the Second World War (*Muzeum II Wojny Światowej*) for the discussion cycle “Encounters with History”. Taking part were Grzegorz Berendt, Director of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk; Mateusz Szpytma, Deputy President of the Institute of National Remembrance; Tomasz Domański, IPN Kielce; Alicja Gontarek, IPN Office for Historical Research (*Biuro Badań Historycznych*) in Lublin and Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin with Jan Hlebowicz from the Office for Historical Research (*Biuro Badań Historycznych*), IPN Gdańsk as moderator. During the

discussion, it was emphasised that research on the assistance given to Jews in what is present-day Poland requires assiduous and precise work, and thus, conclusions cannot be simply drawn without taking into account the relevant historical context of particular areas under research. The so-called picture that presented itself of occupied Poland was therefore not uniform, and as a consequence, the “conditions, opportunities and circumstances of providing assistance” varied in nature.

The third book launch was organised by IPN in Cracow on 5 October 2022. Taking part were Maciej Korcuć, Director of the Office for Commemorating Polish Struggle and Martyrdom (*Biuro Upamiętniania Walk i Męczeństwa*), and Roman Gieroń, the IPN Office for Historical Research (*Biuro Badań Historycznych*) in Cracow, author of the chapter on the state of research on assistance provided to Jews in the Cracow Voivodeship. During the discussion, he commented on the large difference between the above and the numbers given in the literature and maintained that this is a consequence of the so-called research gap on this subject and the lack of verification with respect to sources. Further, he reminded the audience that after the Second World War it was not possible to conduct historical research freely.

In turn, Maciej Korcuć pointed out that the title of the publication itself is perhaps not that pleasant to the ear, but this does not change the fact that in condensed fashion it discusses the German Occupation in Poland and indubitably constitutes a valuable source of historical knowledge – not simply a review of the available literature.

Moreover, in relation to the previous speaker Roman Gieroń, he noted that when the free world discussed the Second World War, Polish historians were locked as it were behind the Iron Curtain. In his view therefore, it may be argued that the level of awareness and overall picture of the Holocaust among some researchers in the West can be said to be selective. Therefore in examining the issue of assistance provided to Jews one should know that in essence this was conspiratorial in nature. Further, it is necessary to know how to put to one side cases of factual such assistance of an altruistic nature from that of situations where profit was made at the expense of a Jewish person's safety – though it was often the case that Jews paid for such assistance, otherwise the family hiding them would not have been able to afford the necessary food. Korcuć went on to finish the discussion with this final



thought: “Let a family today, in the context of a free Poland, take as guests another family of five and look after them for two years. It is obvious that in so far as they are able, they would participate in expenses. One should, therefore, carefully differentiate such situations from ones where money is extorted.”

The next book launch took place on 6 October 2022 in Rzeszów with Wojciech Hanus and Michał Kalisz from IPN Rzeszów. The latter wrote the chapter devoted to assistance given to Jewish people by Poles in the eastern part of the Lvov Voivodeship, while the former from The Office for Historical Research (*Biu-ro Badań Historycznych*) is continuing the research on this area. The question of the administrative division of the Lwów Voivodeship was discussed, whereby according to the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact the eastern part of the voivodeship belonged to the Soviet zone. There was general agreement that assistance given to Jews in the main took place in larger towns where there was a majority of Polish people. In addition, in these very places there were large concentrations of Jewish communities organised by the Germans into ghettos. In the countryside, however, Jews constituted a very small percentage of the population and therefore acts of assistance were far and few between. In this context, the ethnic composition of this region was an important issue that analysts drew attention to. Therefore, in an inimical community where nationalist propaganda prevailed (this in particular related to villages with a developed network of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (Організація українських націоналістів), the chances of survival proved to be significantly less than in towns, irrespective of German terror. Further, another part of the discussion was devoted to the course of Operation Reinhardt (*Aktion Reinhardt*).

The fifth book launch took place in Bydgoszcz on 11 October 2022. Taking part were Tomasz Kawski, prof. Monika Tomkiewicz from Kazimierz Wielki University (IPN Warsaw), Tomasz Ceran (IPN Bydgoszcz) and Kinga Czechowska (IPN Bydgoszcz). The discussion was centred on the assistance provided to Jews in Pomerania and Kujawy during the Second World War, being focused on the local context. Contributors pointed out that in the pre-war voivodeship of Pomerania the percentage of Jewish people was rather small. From the end of the First World War it gradually decreased in respect to their emigration to Germany. When the Germans invaded in 1939, some Jews were deported, while others were murdered

there. At the time, Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler issued a decree that all Jews must be removed from Pomerania by the end of 1940. Therefore in the view of scholars the prospects for research on assistance given to Jews is limited in the case of this region. Nonetheless, in the opinion of prof. Kawski, the publication *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom* is the first such attempt at a comprehensive approach to this research question, whereby every case should be thoroughly documented.

The next book launch took place on 7 November 2022 in Łódź, Voivodeship Public Library with Tomasz Domański, IPN Kielce, Martyna Grądzka-Rejak, IPN Warsaw and Aleksandra Namysło, IPN Katowice. The co-editor of the publication outlined the aims and explained why the above question remains one of the main ones for IPN. He went on to note that the estimation of the scale of such assistance provided is the cause of the greatest controversy and therefore the main task that scholars engaged in this project took upon themselves is an attempt at establishing – with the greatest possible precision – the specific numbers of people concerned.

The sixth book launch was organised in Kielce on 17 November 2022. Taking part were Tomasz Domański, Alicja Gontarek, Jan Kochanowski (University in Kielce), prof. Jerzy Gapys, who chaired the discussion, and Edyta Majcher-Ociesa. Tomasz Domański brought to listeners' attention that many myths and controversies have grown around the subject of assistance provided to the Jewish people and that after all, this is a research question like any other that should be approached without prejudice or emotion as well as preserving scholarly objectivity and professionalism. He went on to emphasise that for the Kielce Voivodeship to date there have not been any statistical studies in respect to the numbers of rescued Jews. Moreover, during the discussion it was pointed out that in many cases it is already too late to conduct research in the field

The seventh book launch was organised by Wrocław Branch of IPN on 28 November 2022. Taking part were Wojciech Hanus and Michał Kalisz (IPN Rzeszów), Tomasz Gonet (IPN Katowice) and Michał Siekierka (IPN Wrocław). All of the speakers were working on the so-called Eastern Borderlands voivodeships that once created the pre-war territory of Eastern Małopolska, Poland: Lvov, Stanisławów and Tarnopol voivodeships. All during discussion were agreed that the point of difference in respect to these voivodeships from other such studied areas was the ethnic composition of the region's population. Thus in the countryside the Ukrainians

dominated, which had an effect on the environment for the provision of possible assistance, especially in the period where it came to a pacification of Polish towns. In many cases therefore, Ukrainians represented an additional danger for Jews hiding on the so-called Aryan side. Here, speakers underscored that the literature devoted to the Eastern Borderlands voivodeships is very meagre, while studies on the rescued Jews have not been conducted so far. In this context the main source of information remains the accounts of witnesses, testimonies and diaries. As an illustration, Tomasz Gonet recounted how his search of the archives in Ukraine fared, one that he just managed to conduct a day before the Russian invasion. Every one of the speakers gave an interesting example by way of outlining their field of research, where a dozen or more people were given shelter. The meeting finished with a series of questions from the audience that were in the main focused on the challenges that scholars faced in preparing monographs on the research question of assistance given to Jews.

Book launch number eight took place in Białystok on 29 November 2022 in Książnica Podlaska with two authors from the publication: Marta Kupczewska, *Polacy ratujący Żydów na terenie przedwojennego województwa wileńskiego* (Poles Rescuing Jews in pre-war Vilno Voivodeship) and Anna Pyżewska, *Pomoc ludności żydowskiej w latach okupacji niemieckiej na terenie województwa Białostockiego – stan badań* (Assistance Given to Jewish People During the German Occupation in Białystok Voivodeship – State of Research), IPN Białystok. The meeting saw a detailed discussion of issues that are tied to the literature of the above subject, on which Anna Pyżewska has been conducting research for the past several years. The scholar went on to state that such research represents very much a long-distance grind requiring Benedictine precision and moreover, one should note the number of those rescued is significantly greater than those awarded a medal as the Righteous Among the Nations. In outlining the main features of the Vilno Voivodeship in this regard, the scholar pointed out the complicated ethnic structure with numerous minorities including Lithuanians and Belarusians. Here, it should be noted that the policy of the Third Reich during the German Occupation aimed at exploiting these differences for the benefit of its own aims.

The last book launch discussion of *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom* took place on 5 December 2022 in Lublin. The presentation coincided with the eightieth an-

niversary of the establishment of “Żegota”. Taking part were Tomasz Domański and Alicja Gontarek from IPN, as well as Janusz Kłapeć, who outlined the state of research and research aims associated with the rescue of Jews in the Lublin District. The former, co-editors of the publication, gave an outline of the study’s contents. Further, Paweł Skrok presented information on the shelter given by the Servant Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate (*Zgromadzenie Sióstr Służebniczek Najświętszej Maryi Panny Niepokalanie Poczętej*) to orphans in Turkowice. Finally, Małgorzata Orłowska, TVP Lublin gave an introduction to the pre-Premier of the film *Gniazdo sierot* (Nest for Orphans), on the shelter for children orphaned during the war in Turkowice, which was then screened to close this book launch.

All the discussions on the publication *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom* demonstrated that this particular subject is one of considerable interest that often evokes many emotions. This was an opportunity for the authors of the publication’s respective chapters to share the research of their studies and, in turn, for those taking part, a means of becoming familiar with the latest studies devoted to the assistance provided to Jewish people on the territories of Poland during the German Occupation.