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THE PHENOMENON OF AID GIVEN TO JEWS BY POLES
IN THE OCCUPIED POLISH TERRITORIES:
APPROACHES AND RESEARCH MODELS.
A SURVEY OF POSITIONS TAKEN BY POLISH AND
POLISH-JEWISH HISTORIANS

Introduction

The first accounts on help given to Jews by Poles in the context of Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation began to be published shortly after the end of World War II, mainly in newspapers of that time. Representatives of Polish and Jewish circles spoke out on this issue such as Szymon Datner, Michał Borwicz, Józef Kermisz or Betti Ajzensztajn,¹ taking the lead among the publicists. However, research on a wider scale conducted in Poland as well as in exile did not begin until the 1960s. Thus, two circulations of historical

¹ See D. Libionka, "Antysemityzm i Zagłada na łamach prasy w Polsce w latach 1945–1946," in *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały* 2 (1997), pp. 151–190; *idem*, "Polskie piśmiennictwo na temat zorganizowanej i indywidualnej pomocy Żydom (1945–2008)," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* (herein-after *ZZSM*) 4 (2008), pp. 18–26; K. Kocik, "Obraz Rady Pomocy Żydom w wybranych polskich tekstach naukowych z lat 1945–1989," in *Kościół, Żydzi, jezuici. Wokół pomocy Żydom w czasie II wojny światowej*, ed. M. Wenklar (Cracow, 2021), pp. 75–79.

communication on the subject existed whose respective themes were developed and emphasised. In the first, originating in communist Poland, strictly aid-related research was initiated and in the second originating in the West, where there was no censorship and state control over publications.²

The aid-related research in the Polish People's Republic developed from its inception in the shadow of the anti-Semitic campaign unleashed by the communist authorities in 1968. The subject of aid gained the support of communist (state) propaganda, which used sometimes false testimonies about the rescue of Jews to create an image of massive and selfless help provided by Poles. The narrative constructed during this period was intended to counter the voices emerging outside the country about the hostile attitude of Poles towards Jews under the German occupation. The story of the "merciful Pole" and the "ungrateful Jew" became one of the main theses of the propaganda of the time.³

It is symptomatic that, from the beginning, Polish works produced in the West were also similarly confrontational. As a matter of fact, we are talking about one study by Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, who, as an amateur historian, was concerned with "the matter of bringing out the truth and the matter of good relations between Poles and Jews" in the face of the accusations appearing in the 1960s in the West about the passive attitude and the collaboration of the Polish government with the Third Reich in the extermination of Jews.⁴

Although the output of that period and of the following years should be regarded as very valuable, from today's perspective it cannot be overlooked that the Polish researchers who dealt with the subject of aid until the turn of the 1980s and

² Two fundamental monographs referred to in the article are: *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, second extended edition, ed. W. Bartoszewski, Z. Lewinówna (Cracow, 1969) (first edition 1966, third edition 2007), and K. Iranek-Osmecki, *Kto ratuje jedno życie... Polacy i Żydzi 1939–1945* (Warsaw, 2009) (first edition London, 1968).

³ From the numerous literature in the field, see M. Mazur, *Polityczne kampanie prasowe w okresie rządów Władysława Gomułki* (Lublin, 2004), p. 119; P. Osęka, *Syjniści, inspiratorzy, wichrzyciele. Obraz wroga w propagandzie marca 1968* (Warsaw, 1999), pp. 53–83; *Marzec 1968. Trzydzieści lat później. Materiały konferencji zorganizowanej na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 6 i 7 marca 1998 r.*, vol. 1: *Referaty*, ed. M. Kula, P. Osęka, M. Zaręba (Warsaw, 1998).

⁴ For more on this publication, and other publications dealing with the position of the Polish government-in-exile towards the Holocaust, see A. Gontarek, "Dyplomacja polska a pomoc udzielana Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką w latach 1939–1943 – stan badań," in *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką – przegląd piśmiennictwa*, ed. T. Domański, A. Gontarek (Warsaw–Kielce, 2022), pp. 129–130.

1990s formed a very narrow circle. As a rule, they were concerned with people who during World War II had themselves given aid to the Jews or had been its recipients, e.g. Władysław Bartoszewski, Teresa Prekerowa,⁵ Szymon Datner or Zofia Lewinówna.⁶ Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki is also a witness to history, a “Silent-Unseen” [wartime special operations soldier], and a historian.⁷

Holocaust research began to flourish in Poland after 1989. At that time, researchers began to make up for the backlog from the communist period. Aid studies were relegated to the background, as a side topic, but at the same time part of the then dynamically developing Holocaust studies in the country. A postulate was introduced into the scholarly discussion to take into account the negative attitudes of Poles towards Jews, which occurred alongside the positive ones or were intertwined with them.⁸

At the same time, an attempt was made to integrate research into wartime Jewish history, including aid, which was discussed in the context of the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation. Unfortunately, the presented state of research was basically limited to a literature overview devoid of in-depth analyses, as well as critical assessments of the political inclinations of historians during the communist period.⁹ Dariusz Libionka’s 2008 work, focusing entirely on

⁵ Both Władysław Bartoszewski and Teresa Prekerowa were awarded the Israeli Righteous Among the Nations title.

⁶ See S. Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych. Karta z dziejów ratowania Żydów w okupowanej Polsce* (Warsaw, 1968); *Polacy – Żydzi 1939–1945*, ed. S. Wroński, M. Zwolakowa (Warsaw, 1971); T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945* (Warsaw, 1982) (second edition Warsaw, 2019); *eadem*, “Who Helped Jews During the Holocaust in Poland?,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 76 (1997), pp. 153–170.

⁷ In 1943, Iranek-Osmecki was parachuted into occupied Poland, where he in April took up post of a head of Section IV (logistics) of the Home Army Headquarters, and in January 1944 of Section II (information and intelligence). For more, see J. Majka, G. Ostasz, *Pułkownik Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki. Emisariusz, cichociemny, oficer Komendy Głównej Armii Krajowej* (Rzeszów, 2007).

⁸ Of particular importance was the establishment of the periodical *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* (English: *Holocaust: Studies and Materials*) (around which a then small group of scholars gathered), and the Anielewicz Centre for Holocaust Research. As Joshua Zimmerman noted, these scholars were committed to “a reassessment of all outstanding issues in wartime Polish-Jewish relations,” and showing “the negative anti-Jewish element in the Polish underground’s historical record” (J. Zimmerman, *Polskie Państwo Podziemne i Żydzi w czasie II wojny światowej*, Warsaw, 2018, pp. 22–23.) (translator’s note: the original passages in English were taken from J. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945*, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 7–8.)

⁹ J. Tomaszewski, “Historiografia polska o Zagładzie,” *Biuletyn ŻIH* 2 (2000), pp. 155–170; L. Dobroszycki, “Polska historiografia na temat Zagłady. Przegląd literatury i próba syntezy,” in *Holokaust*

summarising research achievements in the field of aid, stood out positively. The different treatment of the topic is already worth emphasising. The comprehensive study is not so much a survey of the existing literature,¹⁰ as it is a successful attempt to discuss the entire body of research on aid in Poland in the post-war period, the Polish People's Republic and after 1989. The author noted that they were characterised by "manipulation and instrumentalisation," with these processes extending from the end of World War II up to and including his contemporary period (the second half of the first decade of the 21st century). At the same time, he did not deny the existence of professional historians' work unencumbered by such a burden. In addition, Libionka, on the basis of the literature he collected and pointed to, reflected on the number of Jews rescued thanks to Polish aid; the number of Poles involved in the aid; Polish personal losses incurred as a result of helping Jews; the aid provided by the Catholic Church; the "Żegota" Council for Aid to Jews, as well as – in the author's opinion at that time – the negative role of the Institute of National Remembrance in aid-related research.¹¹ The author's conclusions and observations can be summed up in a rather short sentence: the Polish aid delivered to the Jews was extremely modest, whereas historians and researchers have greatly overestimated both the number of Jews saved thanks to Polish aid and the size of Polish personal losses.¹²

The authors of this publication, 16 years after Libionka's study appeared, have a completely different perception of the role of the IPN in aid-related research and

z perspektywy półwiecza. Pięćdziesiąta rocznica powstania w getcie warszawskim. Materiały z konferencji zorganizowanej przez Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w dniach 29–31 marca 1993, ed. D. Grinberg, P. Szapiro (Warsaw, 1994), pp. 177–187; N. Aleksun, "Historiografia na temat Zagłady i stosunków polsko-żydowskich w okresie drugiej wojny światowej," *ŻŻSM* 1 (2005), pp. 33–50; J. Leociak, "Dyskurs o pomocy," *ŻŻSM* 4 (2008), pp. 9–13; E. Rączy, "Historiografia polska przełomu XX/XXI wobec Zagłady Żydów oraz stosunków polsko-żydowskich. Zarys problematyki," *Białostockie Teki Historyczne* 15 (2017), pp. 249–260.

¹⁰ D. Libionka, „Polskie piśmiennictwo,” pp. 17–83. Numerous publications of a regional nature produced before Libionka's work are not discussed.

¹¹ The historian accused the Institute of National Remembrance, and in particular its scholarly and educational divisions, of shaping a "dictate of a properly understood politics of history," i.e. a simplified vision of relations between the two communities that does not reflect actual relations, and of politicising research on aid, which was supposed to be a response to the "hysteria surrounding Jan Tomasz Gross' books *Neighbours and Fear*," depicting dark pages in the attitudes of Poles towards Jews and the Holocaust during World War II. (*ibid.*, pp. 72–76). See also K. Persak, "Co dziś wiemy o niemieckich represjach za pomoc udzielaną Żydom?," *ŻŻSM* 16 (2020), pp. 761–791.

¹² D. Libionka, „Polskie piśmiennictwo,” pp. 17–80.

positively assess its activities in this field.¹³ An era has passed since the publication of the article “Polskie piśmiennictwo na temat zorganizowanej i indywidualnej pomocy Żydom (1945–2008)” and IPN’s aid-related research has developed considerably since then. It should be reminded that the institution was established by the Act of 18 December 1998¹⁴ to replace the former Main Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation (GKBZpNP).¹⁵ Over the years, it became the only research centre to deal with the question of aid in a systematic and long-term means. At first, the activities of the IPN were a continuation of the research started by the GKBZHWP on the human losses of Poles murdered for helping Jews, while in 2006 the Institute became involved in the project “Index of Poles Persecuted for Helping Jews,” which resulted in the preparation of several publications. Research work was also initiated on the several-volume work *Represje za pomoc Żydom*, (Repressions for aid given to Jews) as part of which the cases of deaths for helping the Jewish population in the occupied Polish territories are continuously verified.¹⁶

On the basis of the work carried out under the “Indeks Polaków zamordowanych i represjonowanych za pomoc Żydom” (Index of Poles Persecuted for Helping Jews) project, a Central Research Project named “Dzieje Żydów w Polsce i relacje polsko-żydowskie w latach 1917–1990” (The History of Jews in Poland and Polish-Jewish Relations between 1917 and 1990) was launched by the IPN in 2017.¹⁷ The IPN’s output also includes publications attempting to provide a regional

¹³ Libionka, with all his criticism of the IPN, stipulated: “[...] a full assessment of the activities carried out within the IPN, and above all the research strategies used, will come after the publication of the research results. It is not unlikely that a new quality will emerge.” *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁴ Actually, IPN began operating in 2000.

¹⁵ The GKBZpNP (Main Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation) was established in place of the Main Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Poland (GKBZHWP).

¹⁶ See M. Szytma, *Sprawiedliwi i ich świat. Markowa w fotografii Józefa Ulmy* (Cracow, 2007); *Kto w takich czasach Żydów przechowuje? Polacy niosący pomoc ludności żydowskiej w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, ed. A. Namysło (Warsaw, 2009); K. Madaj, M. Żuławnik, *Proboszcz getta* (Warsaw, 2010); *Represje za pomoc Żydom na okupowanych ziemiach polskich w czasie II wojny światowej*, vol. 1, ed. M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło (Warsaw, 2019) (English version: *Persecution for Providing Help to Jews in Occupied Polish Territories During World War II*, vol. 1, ed. M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, Warsaw, 2022).

¹⁷ It is the current name of the project. An earlier one was “Polish-Jewish Relations between 1918 and 1968.” The output of the IPN in the field of the Holocaust research and Polish-Jewish relations can be found in a special catalogue. See https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/katalog-publicacji/43598_Zagłada-Zydw-i-stosunki-polsko-zydowskie-podczas-II-wojny-swiatowej-katalog-pub.html, accessed 4 March 2024.

perspective on aid-related topics, covering the whole range of aid-related issues in a selected field.¹⁸ In this respect, studies on the Rzeszów region¹⁹ and the Silesian Voivodship²⁰ have been prepared. More recently, historians – IPN employees have also joined the rapidly growing (especially after 2021) current of research on the aid activities of Polish diplomacy.²¹ Many submissions from the aid-related field are also published in the academic journal *Polish-Jewish Studies*, which has been published under the IPN aegis since 2020.²²

Awareness of the fact that more than 80 years have passed since the end of World War II, and more than 50 since the appearance of the first scholarly works on the subject of helping Jews, underpinned the IPN's publishing initiative to bring together all the existing knowledge on the subject. This was a collective study entitled "Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką" (The State of Research on Helping Jews on Polish territories under German occupation), in which 23 authors participated. This publication clearly indicates that aid to Jews in the occupied Polish territory was widespread, but it was not a mass movement. It involved at most several hundred thousand people who provided support to the Jews.²³ Members of various groups and social strata, with the rural population at the forefront, were involved in such activities. The Occupation conditions in Poland, i.e. the German daily terror and criminal

¹⁸ M. Kalisz, E. Rączy, *Dzieje społeczności żydowskiej powiatu gorlickiego podczas okupacji niemieckiej 1939–1945* (Rzeszów, 2015); E. Rączy, I. Witowicz, *Polacy ratujący Żydów na Rzeszowszczyźnie w latach 1939–1945 / Poles Rescuing Jews in the Rzeszów Region in the Years 1939–1945* (Rzeszów, 2011).

¹⁹ E. Rączy, *Pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej na Rzeszowszczyźnie 1939–1945* (Rzeszów, 2008).

²⁰ A. Namysło, *Po tej stronie był również Człowiek. Mieszkańcy przedwojennego województwa śląskiego z pomocą Żydom w okresie II wojny światowej* (Katowice–Warszawa, 2021).

²¹ See A. Gontarek, "Polskie przedstawicielstwo konsularno-dyplomatyczne w Hawanie a sprawa uchodźców żydowskich na Kubie podczas II wojny światowej," *Polish-Jewish Studies* (hereinafter *PJS*) 1 (2020), pp. 41–76; *eadem*, "Działalność Poselstwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Hiszpanii na rzecz pomocy uchodźcom żydowskim w czasie II wojny światowej (w świetle akt Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych przechowywanych w Archiwum Instytutu Hoovera. Zarys problemu," *Almanach Historyczny* 23 (2021), pp. 235–266; *eadem*, "Władysław Günther-Schwarzburg jako poseł Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Atenach i jego działalność na rzecz polskich i żydowskich uchodźców w Grecji w latach 1939–1941," *PJS* 3 (2022), pp. 322–377.

²² See the IPN periodicals webpage: <https://czasopisma.ipn.gov.pl/index.php/pjs>.

²³ T. Domański, A. Gontarek, "Wstęp," in *Stan badań nad pomocą*, p. 26; *eidem*, "Co wiemy o pomocy udzielanej Żydom przez Polaków w czasie II wojny światowej," in *Nie tylko o Ulmach. O pomocy udzielanej Żydom na ziemiach polskich podczas okupacji niemieckiej w latach 1939–1945*, ed. *eidem* (Warsaw, 2023), pp. 56–57.

anti-aid laws on the one hand,²⁴ and the extensive system of economic plunder of the occupied Polish lands, resulting in the rapid impoverishment of the entire population on the other,²⁵ exerted an overriding, though not the only²⁶ impact on the possibilities of giving aid.

An important contribution of the *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką – przegląd piśmiennictwa*, whose authors conducted an extensive analysis of the existing literature on the subject, was above all to expose the glaring discrepancy between the belief, which appears in some research circles, that the aid-related topic is in research terms completed, and the actual state of affairs. The publication has shown how inaccurate this thesis is – which has never been confirmed by any scholarly research²⁷ – as both the state of knowledge

²⁴ One of the most important scholars analysing the anti-aid law and the German mechanisms implicating Poles in the Holocaust is Bogdan Musiał. See B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi...* (Poznań, 2019).

²⁵ The marginalisation and omission of the actual circumstances of the Occupation (the historical context) – apart from the expertise shortcomings demonstrated by the sometimes unreliable analysis of archival materials – was the subject of an academic polemic between Tomasz Domański and the editors and authors of the book *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (Night without End. The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland), vol. 1–2, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski (Warsaw, 2018). T. Domański (following Marcin Urynowicz) believes that omitting the historical context leads to the establishment of an untrue picture of Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation and the picture presented in this work needs to be corrected. See M. Urynowicz, “Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej eksterminowanej przez okupanta niemieckiego w okresie drugiej wojny światowej,” in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. A. Żbikowski (Warsaw, 2006), p. 263; T. Domański, *Korekta obrazu? Refleksje źródłoznawcze wokół książki „Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski”* (Correcting the Picture? Some Reflections on the Use of Sources in the Book “Night without End. The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland”), t. 1–2, red. Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, Warszawa 2018 (Warsaw, 2019); *idem*, *Korekty ciąg dalszy. Odpowiedź redaktorom i współautorom książki „Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski,” red. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2018 na ich polemikę z moją recenzją „Korekta obrazu? Refleksje źródłoznawcze wokół książki „Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski,” t. 1–2, red. Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, Warszawa 2018, Warszawa 2019* (Correcting the Picture, Continued. The Reply to the Editors and Co-Authors of the Book *Night without End* [...]) (Warsaw, 2020). See also B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi*, pp. 12–15. The replies of the authors of the individual chapters of *Dalej jest noc* (Night without End) to *Korekta obrazu* (Correcting the Picture) have been published on the webpage of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research. See <https://www.holocaustresearch.pl/index.php?show=555>, accessed 4 March 2024.

²⁶ What is lacking so far is a problem-based study that would present the issue of the main and circumstantial factors in a structured way, taking into account its hierarchy, which determined aid activities.

²⁷ It is noteworthy that the cutting edge of critical analyses of the IPN's activity was most often directed against the politics of history on which this institution had an influence. Since one of pillars of these politics turned out to be the question of aid, criticism and attacks on the discussion in this field led to the creation of the impression that there was an overabundance of information about Poles rescuing

and the number of studies on aid have proved to be far from satisfactory. It could even be said that the field of research on aid has many blank spaces.

Furthermore, almost all authors agreed that scholarly output is dominated by works on overly individualised and at the same time schematic aid stories. In most cases, they are presented superficially and have many gaps, sometimes containing only mentions of the act of helping. This has resulted in a picture of the aid phenomenon that we can describe as de-fragmented or even extremely fragmented, both on a national scale and within specific regions, such as particular cities. Some exceptions to this are the first analytical works cited above and a few others, including source studies.²⁸ An extensive, scholarly approach is also characteristic of some publications on Polish families providing help and suffering tragic consequences as a result such as the Ulm family²⁹ – or other persons engaged in rescuing Jews.³⁰

Although, from today's perspective, of course, every single case of aid that has come to light and been described is valuable (it is also necessary to continually search for more rescue accounts), the current state of research into the under-

Jews in the media and public space. In contrast, in the strictly research sphere the situation was and still is exactly the opposite. For an example of a critique on the politics of history in Poland, see K. Zieliński, "Kilka uwag o polityce historycznej w Polsce," *Wschód Europy. Studia humanistyczno-społeczne* 8 (2022), pp. 163–187.

²⁸ T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom*, first edition; M. Arczyński, W. Balcerak, *Kryptonim „Żegota”. Z dziejów pomocy Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945* (Warsaw, 1983); M. Urynowicz, "Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc," pp. 217–240; M. Cobel-Tokarska, *Bezludna wyspa, nora, grób. Wojenne kryjówki Żydów w okupowanej Polsce* (Warszawa, 2012); *Rada Pomocy Żydom „Żegota” przy Pełnomocniku Rządu RP na Kraj i Referat Żydowski „Żegota” Departamentu Spraw Wewnętrznych Delegatury Rządu RP na Kraj. Dokumenty z zasobu Archiwum Akt Nowych 1942–1944*, selected and edited by M. Olczak (Warsaw, [2015]); *Relacje o pomocy udzielanej Żydom przez Polaków w latach 1939–1945*, vol. 1: *Dystrykt warszawski Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, selected and edited by S. Piątkowski (Lublin–Warsaw, 2018); vol. 2: *Dystrykt krakowski Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, selected and edited by S. Piątkowski (Lublin–Warsaw, 2020); vol. 3: *Dystrykt lubelski Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, selected and edited by S. Piątkowski (Lublin–Warsaw, 2020); vol. 4: *Dystrykt radomski Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, selected and edited by S. Piątkowski (Warsaw, 2020); vol. 5: *Dystrykt Galicja Generalnego Gubernatorstwa i Wołyń*, selected and edited by S. Piątkowski (Lublin–Warsaw, 2021); vol. 6: *Białostocka, Nowogródzka, Polesie, Wileńszczyzna*, selected and edited by S. Piątkowski (Lublin–Warsaw, 2022); vol. 7: *Trzecia Rzesza i ziemie polskie do niej wcielone* (Lublin–Warsaw, 2023).

²⁹ The widely described history of the Ulma family, about whom a great many works have been written (we refrain from listing them here – most of them have been authored by Mateusz Szpytma), is an example not only of an excellent micro-study, but also a source of knowledge about the mechanisms of the Occupation and its governance. See J.A. Młynarczyk, S. Piątkowski, *Cena poświęcenia. Zbrodnie na Polakach za pomoc udzielaną Żydom w okolicach Ciepłowa* (Cracow, 2007).

³⁰ One could invoke Irena Sendler, whose name appears in countless publications, or Jan Karski.

standing of the phenomenon of aid leads to the reflection that the main task for the coming time should be to introduce a more problem-based approach to the scholarly discourse on aid than has been the case up to now. It also would appear necessary to present a research overview of the history of aid under the German occupation (further omissions in this matter will leave many questions about the nature of aid and its mechanisms unanswered).³¹ Before this happens, however, it is necessary – in our view – to diagnose in which paradigm aid research has been conducted so far. We will focus on three selected issues: the treatment of aid-related topics in research on occupied Polish lands, i.e. the place it occupies among other issues specific to this period, the adopted research model(s) and the meaning of the term “aid” itself.

Polish-Jewish Relations or the Periphery of the Holocaust – the Treatment of Aid-Related Topics in Research on Occupied Polish Territories

It seems that the question of the place of aid-related topics in research on occupied Polish lands, i.e. the ways of comprehension of this issue, has not yet been discussed in the scholarly literature. Probably one may argue there are no disagreements among historians as to the assignment of aid-related research to social history with a high interdisciplinary potential, but the precise outlining of which narrower research context among the broad issues of World War II they fit into may give rise to disputes. Until now, this problem has been resolved in two ways – one group of scholars considered the phenomenon of aid, as one of the reactions to the Holocaust, to be an element of the complex Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation, while another treated it exclusively as part of Holocaust research, and placed it on its peripheries.

The question of the place of the issue of aid in research on the occupied Polish lands is of great significance because, depending on its precise location, we will

³¹ For important clues for the presentation of the collective portrait of The Righteous among the Nations, see Teresa Prekerowa's article “Who helped Jews,” pp. 153–170. On the basis of materials from the Yad Vashem Institute and the former GKBZHWP, this author tried to find out, according to the English title, “who helped Jews?,” She took into account several categories: age, gender, pre-war contacts, and ultimately came to a belief that people who helped Jews were “ordinary people,” with no special distinguishing features.

adopt a different narrative approach, i.e. we will either discuss aid taking into account the intertwining of many conditions and factors, characteristic for the occupied Polish lands (a broad, multidimensional, holistic approach) and concerning both Poles and Jews, or we will limit ourselves to the experience of the Holocaust (a narrowed/particular, one-dimensional approach). How then, have historians presented the above issue? It is now apt to refer to their research.

A survey of Polish and Polish-Jewish research positions should begin with the Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum,³² the author of *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej* (Polish-Jewish Relations During World War II)³³ that he wrote when he was hiding in the “Kryśia” shelter in Warsaw on Grójecka Street during World War II. Although his work was not published in Polish until 1988 (why only then?), there is no doubt that it was known to most post-war historians researching aid matters and was treated by them as an important, and sometimes crucial, point of reference for their research.³⁴ In this sketch we treat this study primarily as a document of the epoch – the time of the Holocaust – appreciating the importance of all the observations.

Ringelblum had no doubt that helping the Jews should be considered as a part of Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation, as the title and structure of his work point out. The problem, however, consists in the fact that he focused on exposing the fate of only one of the parties, leaving the other – the Polish one – on the margins of the analysis, so to speak, and in the distant background. This type

³² It is clear that the question of aid provided by Poles to Jews under the German occupation has been dealt with by many Polish and Polish-Jewish historians or, more broadly, researchers (academics). Here one can name, for example, Lucjan Dobroszycki, Israel Gutman, Stefan Korboński, Jan Marek Chodakiewicz and many others. However, in our opinion, their works, although otherwise valuable, do not address the essence of the problem analysed, i.e. they do not come forward with an original research concept that would handle the question of helping Jews. The indicated authors duplicate the conclusions concerning individual or organised aid proposed by the researchers mentioned in the main body of the article. See M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918–1995. Współistnienie – Zagłada – komunizm* (Warsaw, 2000), pp. 145–299; *idem*, “Refleksje: nowa praca, stare podejście,” in *Złote serca czy złote żniwa? Studia nad wojennymi losami Polaków i Żydów*, ed. *idem*, W. Muszyński (Warsaw, 2011), pp. 51–52; S. Korboński, *Polskie Państwo Podziemne. Przewodnik po podziemiu z lat 1939–1945* (Bydgoszcz, [1990]), pp. 121–144.

³³ E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Uwagi i spostrzeżenia*, edited and with an introduction by A. Eisenbach (Warsaw, 1988).

³⁴ Of the lesser-known authors referring to Ringelblum's conclusions on Polish aid (spontaneous, unorganised, paid aid), mention can be made of Józef Orlicki. See J. Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich 1918–1949* (Szczecin, 1983), pp. 110–112.

of approach can be seen most clearly in the chapters “Po aryjskiej stronie” (On the Aryan Side) or “Dzieci żydowskie po aryjskiej stronie” (Jewish Children on the Aryan Side) that hardly discuss all the problems faced by those who decided to keep Jews at home. With the taking in of a Jew, their world changed in a significant way – henceforth they were in constant danger, as sanctioned under the German law.³⁵ However, this is not simply a diagnosis of the approach Ringelblum chose, nor a discussion of whether it is correct or not, but of the interpretative consequences of this researcher’s willingness to describe such a broad issue as Polish-Jewish relations while refraining from an equivalent analysis of the Occupation conditions affecting Poles as well.

How, then, did Ringelblum view the realities of the Occupation in the context of Polish society? This problem is not discussed at sufficient length in his work but mentioned sparingly. In general terms, we learn that the country was “ruled by a mad terror,” that there were “detentions and manhunts [...] at every step.”³⁶ Ringelblum devoted a separate chapter to the sanctions for helping Jews, presenting his view on the matter very inconsistently.³⁷ First, he sometimes doubted the actual application of the death penalty in Warsaw, something that historians commented on right after the war.³⁸ He seems to have generally downplayed the threat posed by the anti-aid laws. He idealistically asserted that if a Jewish person, upon being discovered by the Germans, assured them that the tenants were unaware of her or his Jewish identity, it could shield Poles from reprisals for hiding Jews. Furthermore, Ringelblum minimized the issue of collective responsibility for aiding those in hiding, as dictated by German orders, to mere rumours “being

³⁵ E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Pisma z bunkra*, ed. T. Epstein, (Warsaw, 2020), pp. 102–131.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

³⁷ The inconsistencies in his manuscript are most likely due to the author’s own tragic situation and the general circumstances (the Holocaust) in which the researcher found himself. For more on the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Ringelblum study, see *ibid.*, pp. 23–31.

³⁸ Ringelblum noted: “I have not been able to establish whether there have been incidents of Poles being executed in Warsaw for hiding Jews.” However, in the conclusion of the chapter in question, he contradicted himself: “[on the outskirts of Warsaw] from time to time Poles are the victims of such executions. It is enough to denounce someone for hiding Jews, and they face severe repressions” (*ibid.*, pp. 143, 147). Artur Eisenbach and Tadeusz Epsztajn mentioned the murders of Poles in Warsaw in their editions of Ringelblum’s book. The former mentioned 17 such victims in Warsaw (*ibid.*, p. 143; E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Pisma*, p. 115).

spread by it is not known who.” In his opinion, those rumours were spread by the Gestapo.³⁹ In another passage, he wrote that during the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942, the reason for the passive attitude of Poles towards the Holocaust “was only one: fear of the German, fear of punishment for hiding Jews.”⁴⁰ In the context of the rescue of Jewish children on the other hand, he explicitly stated that “the population’s fear of an anti-Semitic bashing was greater than its fear of the Germans, and it determined the poor results of the children’s rescue operation.”⁴¹

He interpreted the issue of German punishments for aid outside of big towns differently, noting the Germans’ use of two “methods” there – reward and punishment. The death penalty, in his view, was used there every time the liquidation of the provincial ghettos began, and “the time span of the hiding of the Jew depended on two factors: the German terror and the atmosphere of the environment,” the latter factor determining the chances of survival of the Jewish population.⁴²

The conflicting positions on the enforcement of the death penalty indicate that Ringelblum did not recognise the problem of German anti-aid laws accurately enough.⁴³ He wrote in passing about German orders appearing on the Aryan side that announced hard prison terms or the death penalty for “knowingly hiding Jews.”⁴⁴ He therefore failed to see the process of tightening the anti-aid laws, for posters and placards about the death penalty for helping Jews were not, as Ringelblum’s testimony might suggest, an occasional feature of the landscape accompanying the so-called liquidation operations of individual ghettos, from Warsaw to

³⁹ Ringelblum raised the issue in the context of the collective responsibility that would affect specifically two neighbouring buildings, standing next to the house where the Jew(s) were kept, and the inhabitants of that house (E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*. Pisma, pp. 143–144).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴³ Let us mention the order of the plenipotentiary of the district governor for the city of Warsaw, Ludwig Leist, of 14 January 1941. In it, for the first time during the German occupation, the authorities threatened with punishment those Poles who helped Jews or who knew of the stay of Jews outside the Jewish quarter and failed to report this. The sign of equality was made here – both attitudes were considered a criminal act. The fine was to be up to 1,000 zlotys, and in the case of denial or lack of possibility of payment – the punishment was up to 3 months in jail. The exact wording is provided in B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi*, p. 62. An even stricter order was introduced in November 1942. The denunciation order was linked to the sanction of “police security measures” for failure to comply with it, which in the German occupation practice meant deportation to a concentration camp or the death penalty (*ibid.*, pp. 127–131).

⁴⁴ E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*. Uwagi, p. 115.

small provincial Jewish centres. Last but not least, the above-mentioned founder of Oneg Shabbat, an otherwise astute observer of Polish and Jewish societies under the German occupation – did not point to Hans Frank's order of 15 October 1941, which is a key document for today's research on aid. The order introduced the death penalty for providing shelter to Jews who left a designated district. Perhaps this is why Ringelblum wrote mildly that "the punishments were more severe" for Jews than for Poles hiding the former. However, from a legal point of view, the punishments were not harsher – both Jews and Poles faced the death penalty. However, in the case of Jews the death penalty was carried out with total determination; it was somewhat different in regard to the Poles hiding Jews, who were not in every case executed for the help given. Ringelblum therefore failed to see the process of tightening the anti-aid laws, for posters and placards about the death penalty for helping Jews were not, as his testimony might suggest, an occasional feature of the landscape accompanying the so-called liquidation operations of individual ghettos, from Warsaw to small provincial Jewish centres.

Given the contradictions, ambiguities and general inconsistencies that surface in Ringelblum's work on the circumstances and conditions that shaped Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation, it is necessary to refer to the conclusion of his study, where he clearly indicated two factors significantly limiting Polish aid: "Polish fascism, embodied in exuberant, animal anti-Semitism, [which] created unfavourable conditions for the operation of saving Jews on a mass scale," and also "German terror, mass detentions and manhunts, as well as harsh punishments for hiding Jews."⁴⁵

The first attempts to reflect on Polish-Jewish relations after the war were made as early as 1946. They referred to the actual, rather than the declared approach proposed by Ringelblum, i.e. it was primarily a description of Polish attitudes

⁴⁵ Elsewhere in the conclusion, Ringelblum presented the matter somewhat differently: "[...] Polish fascism, allied with anti-Semitism, has captured most of Polish society. It is this that we accuse of the fact that Poland will not take the place in rescuing Jews that Western European countries will." (E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Pisma*, pp. 212–213). Tadeusz Epsztein referred to the factor of anti-Semitism, raising what appears to be the fundamental question of its real impact on the success of the liquidation of Polish Jews: "It is hard not to agree with the author that anti-Semitic sentiments in the Polish lands had an impact on the number of Holocaust survivors. However, it is impossible to assess unequivocally the extent to which this changed the final balance of the tragedy. (*ibid.*, p. 27).

towards Jews in the face of the Holocaust, rather than an attempt to take into account the testimonies of the two sides. We are mentioning here the works of Betti Ajzensztajn⁴⁶ and Józef Kermisz,⁴⁷ which – even though those were published in communist Poland – do not contain a propaganda message yet. Both dealt with the history of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, and both wanted to assess the attitudes and behaviour of Poles towards the underground struggle of Jews, including the help they were shown. The first author, who dealt with the underground movement in the ghettos and camps, focused in one of the book's subsections on the attitude of the “local population” – she meant the people, i.e. the “average” representatives of Polish society – towards Jews. As she wrote, the “progressive” Polish intelligentsia, involved in the activities of the Council to Aid Jews “Żegota,” and “a certain part of the population” led the way in aid activities. The rest of the population was reluctant and hostile to Jews. Betti Ajzensztajn also emphasised the “positive contribution of the clergy” – “many Jewish children were kept in the monasteries.”⁴⁸ Compared to Ringelblum's opinion, her assessment was more favourable.⁴⁹

Equally important, in addition to the diagnosis made, was the author's explanation of the reasons for this state of affairs. She explained laconically that the German occupier had contributed to it by destroying the Polish intelligentsia. This opened the way for “anti-Semitism rooted for centuries,” i.e. it weakened the promotion of the aid action, led by none other than the intelligentsia, i.e. a group which had a significant impact on the rest of the population.⁵⁰ In this interpretation therefore, the cause of the mass resentment towards Jews was the elimination of the most prominent members of Polish society “in order to deprive the nation of its leadership.” The author indicates a causal mechanism for the formation of Polish attitudes – first, the Germans created certain conditions, which were then compounded by issues of ethnic/racial resentment towards Jews by a section of Polish society. The generator and a kind of trigger of many negative attitudes were thus the Germans themselves

⁴⁶ *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, ed. B. Ajzensztajn (Łódź, 1946).

⁴⁷ J. Kermisz, *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim (19.IV. – 16.V.1943)* (Łódź, 1946).

⁴⁸ *Ruch podziemny w gettach*, p. 17.

⁴⁹ See E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Pisma*, p. 142.

⁵⁰ *Ruch podziemny w gettach*, p. 17.

and their policies. In Ringelblum's work, despite the author's inconsistencies regarding aid, two factors are identified as shaping the Polish potential for providing assistance: anti-Semitism, and fear of the Germans. The former is highlighted as having a decisive impact, not so much on the number of Jewish victims, but on the lack of the possibility for Jews to successfully escape the Holocaust.

In his writings on the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Józef Kermisz uniquely compiled the first comprehensive account of how Varsovians reacted to the Jewish armed resistance. What prevailed – in his opinion – was indifference and passivity. However, the author stated clearly that both the underground homeland authorities (on 19 April 1943) and the Polish government-in-exile (on 5 May 1943) tried to persuade the indifferent masses of the population to act in terms of aid. This did not succeed on a wider scale, although the author noted that “many” Poles provided assistance.⁵¹ So again, as in Betti Ajzensztajn's case, the position of the common people was confronted with that of the elites – to the advantage of the latter.

It is a telling fact that this researcher paid a lot of attention to German propaganda during the 1943 Uprising, the aim of which was to create a conviction among the Polish population not only of the “malignancy of Jewish elements,” but also of the “terrible danger” that the Jews and their alleged “demonic strengths” have supposedly posed. Enumerating these German activities is here of crucial importance, for discussion on this matter addresses the issue of comprehension of the topic, and represents one of the earliest attempts to outline the Occupation context for Polish-Jewish relations during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It then highlights the mechanism by which the German propaganda influenced Poles, entangling them in the extermination process, and weakening their inclination to help.

This propaganda was what Kermisz called “shaping of thought.” He noted that it was used from the very first moments of the Uprising – for example, onlookers were allowed to stand against the wall right next to the machine gun positions, giving the impression that the population supported the crackdown on the fighting Jews in the ghetto. Most significant in the propaganda and disinformation efforts, however, was the issue of the Katyn Forest massacre. Kermisz recalled the large megaphones standing in many squares and at intersections, which gave new

⁵¹ J. Kermisz, *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim*, p. 55.

details of the Katyń crime four times a day, insinuating that the perpetrators of Katyń were Jews. In addition, the Germans displayed photographs of the victims of the “Jewish-Bolshevik crimes” in the shop windows of shops in the Krakowskie Przedmieście and Marszałkowska Streets, in Aleje Jerozolimskie and in Nowy Świat. Underneath those photographs Germans posted unambiguous inscriptions: “This is how Jews murder.” Poster campaigns were undertaken, and red posters depicting the “monstrosity of the Jewish whip of humanity” were pasted on walls and fences.⁵² The Germans also spread rumours designed to arouse hostility towards Jews. Weapons used by insurgents were supposed to have been obtained from the Soviets, which was made plausible by the Soviet air raid on Warsaw on the night of 12–13 May 1943. Jews were also supposed to guide planes so that they could bomb key targets. In addition, fugitives from the ghetto allegedly were to murder Poles. Disinformation extended to territories incorporated into the Third Reich – articles appeared in the Poznań and Pomeranian press stating that Poles, outraged by the Katyń Forest Massacre, had “rushed into the Warsaw Ghetto.”⁵³

The above analysis shows that all three works (we are not comparing the content here, but the way of comprehension of the topic) represent two different research approaches to relational matter. It is paradoxical that Ringelblum’s study, which was intended to present the relations of the two peoples – Poles and Jews – became a description of the attitudes of the former towards the latter, without sufficient concern for presenting the Occupation conditions to which the Polish population was subjected. Meanwhile, the other works on the Holocaust (not immediately concerning the testimonies) cited here, published just after the war by Jewish historians, tried to explain the role of the German occupier in shaping the mutual relations of Poles and Jews much more accurately, taking into account cause and effect relationships.

Full-scale research on aid did not begin in post-war Poland, as already mentioned, until the 1960s, when the subject was taken up by successive Jewish researchers – Tatiana Berenstein, Adam Rutkowski and Szymon Datner. All of these authors understood Polish aid to Jews as part of the wider problem of the relations between the two peoples. In their work *Pomoc Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945* (Helping

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.

Jews in Poland 1939-1945),⁵⁴ Berenstein and Rutkowski underlined the German perfidy of exploiting mutual conflicts for their own benefit.

Berenstein and Rutkowski recognised the impact of the Occupation terror on the ability to support Jews and the essential differences in this respect between occupied Polish lands and the rest of Europe.⁵⁵ For researchers, both Jews and Poles were victims of the occupier's criminal policy, the Jews being the first to be exterminated by the Germans. This view was emphatically expressed by Szymon Datner, who named the chapter of his book *Ratownictwo Żydów w warunkach bezwzględnej terroru wobec Polaków* (Rescue of the Jews under Conditions of Ruthless Terror Against the Poles).⁵⁶

Other Polish scholars, Stanisław Wroński and Maria Zwolakowa, perceived the Polish and Jewish experience of the German occupation differently, although also in the relational discourse. In their opinion, under the Occupation a community of the Polish and Jewish fates existed.⁵⁷ However, this view is not true. The experience of the Holocaust made a drastic distinction between the situation of Jews condemned to total extermination and that of the Polish population.

The difficulty of embedding research on aid in a specific scholarly framework and as it turns out, the labile nature of views on the subject can also be traced back here using the example of Władysław Bartoszewski, the most eminent researcher on the subject of aid. On the occasion of just one of the editions of his flagship work, *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej* (He Is from My Homeland), he formed two fundamentally different conclusions. In the preface to the 2007 edition, Bartoszewski stated: "When I began my systematic research into the issue of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, thousands of witnesses and participants of the events on both sides of the [ghetto] wall were still alive. Today, there are few of them left."⁵⁸ There is no doubt, therefore, that he positioned aid research into the field of Polish-

⁵⁴ T. Berenstein, A. Rutkowski, *Pomoc Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945* (Warsaw, 1963).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–19.

⁵⁶ S. Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych*, p. 8; Datner expressed these research views also in other works. See *idem*, "Udział polskich jeńców wojennych w ratowaniu Żydów w czasie II wojny światowej," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 3–4 (107–108) (1978), pp. 73–87.

⁵⁷ *Polacy – Żydzi 1939–1945*.

⁵⁸ W. Bartoszewski, "Przedmowa" in *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, third updated edition, ed. *idem*, Z. Lewinówna (Warsaw, 2007), p. V.

Jewish relations. Yet, in an interview with Marian Turski added in the appendix, he contradicted himself stating: “We assumed that our book was not a history of Jews under Occupation or a history of Polish-Jewish relations. I limited myself to one element: the help given to Jews and the rescue of Jews.”⁵⁹

This statement implies that his research was not part of Polish-Jewish relations or the history of the Holocaust. If we do indeed accept this point of view, the question arises: what manner of coverage of the subject of aid was Władysław Bartoszewski advocating? It remains rather unanswered, although the rest of the interview shows that Bartoszewski saw the need for social research and for an analysis of “the background, the environment, the conditions, the possibilities and the different trends in different regions of Poland”⁶⁰ – Poland under Occupation, one should add. Thus, consciously or not, he returned to the original idea that aid to the Jews should be considered, studied and explored as part of Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation.

If one takes into account the differences arising from the existing ways of comprehension, which let us simplify by calling them “Poles towards Jews” and “Polish-Jewish relations,” then Bartoszewski’s mutually exclusive opinions on the subject of the place of aid research, and also the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon, we should not be too surprised that there is also a research concept of this subject different from that of the first works on aid. The above treats the issue of aid as a part of Holocaust studies, placing the Holocaust at the centre of events in conjunction with the survival strategies of Jews, a term that is used quite generally and discretionarily.⁶¹ When viewed in this way, the help that

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. XII. Bartoszewski and Lewinówna presented the same conclusions in the preface to the first edition published in 1966 (p. 73).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. XV.

⁶¹ A number of works on the subject suggest that the concept encompasses any action leading to the saving of one’s own life, although the term “strategy” implies rather a stage of planning and preparation for action in the decision-making process, as opposed, for example, to a mere reaction, which may only be ad hoc, taken under the influence of the moment, fear and so on. This raises the question of whether survival strategies differed in any way from spontaneous reactions. For more on the differences between survival strategies and modes of survival in the research literature of the Holocaust studies stream, see T. Domański, *Korekta*. Małgorzata Melchior seems to notice these differences as well: M. Melchior, “Uciekinierzy z gett po ‘aryjskiej’ stronie na prowincji dystryktu warszawskiego – sposoby przetrwania,” in *Prowincja noc. Żydzi i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Leociak, D. Libionka (Warsaw, 2007), p. 321.

Jews received from Poles becomes one of the many phenomena experienced by the Jewish people, but seen only from the Jewish perspective, i.e. of the victims. About the broader experience of the rescuers and their perspective in the light of this research we have learned, so far, very little.⁶² We thus obtain an incomplete picture, i.e. we study only one participant in the aid action or, more broadly, one side of the mutual relations, i.e. the victims of the Holocaust.⁶³ It is, of course, difficult to criticise this research approach; such an approach is even indispensable when analysing the Holocaust, since Holocaust studies by definition deal with the Jewish perspective only, in which “the history of the Holocaust should be seen from the side of the victims, and the side of the victims is not so much represented as [in an objective sense – A.G. and T.D.] monopolised by Jews.”⁶⁴

While the marginalisation of the Polish experience of aid by all means falls within the hitherto outlined theoretical framework for the study of the Holocaust, in recent years many researchers dealing with the fate of the Jews in the General Governorate have become convinced that the theoretical formula for such studies, inspired by the social sciences and the perspective of Jewish sources, is sufficiently broad and capacious to enable them to provide final, definitive, and objectified conclusions about the attitude of Poles towards Jews and even, it would appear, to draw a complete picture of Polish-Jewish relations. This kind of research undoubtedly produced an extremely simplified vision of the German occupation, which has become the subject of a historical dispute. It was formed by removing the general historical context (the background of events) from the historical argumentation, especially that concerning the German policy towards the Polish population.⁶⁵

⁶² Very often in the memoirs of survivors, the terms of the Polish occupation are reduced to a distant background. For example, Janina Bauman noted: “The men and women who gave us shelter, and even their children, had their own daily affairs to attend to, problems to solve, minor troubles and serious worries, some achievements and failures, moments of joy or sadness. Our existence was empty. We simply lasted, measuring time.” (J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, *Strategie przetrwania. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy*, Warsaw, 2004, p. 102).

⁶³ B. Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień... Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945* (Warsaw, 2011), p. 13; see also *eadem*, J. Grabowski, “Wstęp,” in *Dalej jest noc*, p. 17.

⁶⁴ B. Karwowska, “Bystander czy (pasywny) świadek? Kilka uwag nad konsekwencjami wyboru terminologii w badaniach nad Zagładą lub Holocaustem,” *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 64 (1) (2016), p. 94; H. Sinnreich, “Polska i żydowska historiografia stosunków żydowsko-polskich podczas drugiej wojny światowej,” in *Polacy i Żydzi. Kwestia otwarta*, ed. R. Cherry, A. Orla-Bukowska (Warsaw, 2008), p. 123.

⁶⁵ Recently, Anna Bikont has offered a journalistic perspective on the German occupation. A critical analysis of the historical context of the World War II presented in her publication in the aspect of Polish-

Subsequently, the thesis of ‘German absence,’ especially in the countryside, was brought into scholarly circulation, and especially between 1942 and 1945 (the third phase of the Holocaust), when in fact quite the opposite was true.⁶⁶ Even “new” terms that do not correspond to the actual state of affairs were used, such as “German-Polish administration,” supposedly describing the terms of the war in a local perspective, but in practice suggesting the existence of a Polish state administration under German occupation.⁶⁷

When one conflates the aforementioned elements of the “new vision” of the Occupation, a kind of paradox emerges. In these studies, on the one hand, the Polish rescuer, or more broadly Poles and their Occupation experiences, are relegated to the background and are barely noticeable, while on the other hand a very distinctive and controversial thesis is put forward (mainly on the basis of Jewish testimonies), in which the idea persists that it was the attitude of the Polish population towards Jews (the question that comes to mind is: dictated by what?), which greatly determined the chances of survival of Jews in the years 1942–1945.⁶⁸

Without diminishing the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, i.e. the importance of the testimonies of Jews who managed to survive the Occupation, and accepting as a fact that in most of those accounts we will read about Poles’ indifference and lack of mass help from their part, and in many cases about their participation – forced, spontaneous, and voluntary – in the Holocaust, we should ask about the causes of all phenomena occurring in Polish-Jewish relations, both positive and negative. Does the formula of Holocaust studies offer such possibilities? Can the complex matter of Polish-Jewish relations be comprehensively presented solely through it, or do the “Jewish world” and the “Polish world” balance each other out in the research process within its framework, to the extent, of course that this framework was outlined by the Germans? Where is the space in the above for the fundamental point, namely

Jewish relations is presented by P. Kornacki, “Holokaust bez Niemców. Recenzja książki Anny Bikont, ‘Cena. W poszukiwaniu żydowskich dzieci po wojnie,’” *Wołowiec* 2022, 464 p.,” *PJS* 4 (2023), pp. 405–418.

⁶⁶ In extreme cases, the “context-less” analysis leads to historically absurd comparisons of Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation from “the Second World War to the civil (tribal) wars in Africa in the late 20th century.” See Sidi N’Diaye, “Les meurtres de voisins au Rwanda et en Pologne: réflexions sur les imaginaires de haine,” in *Les Polonais et la Shoah. Une nouvelle école historique*, ed. A. Kichelewski, J. Lyon-Cean, J.-Ch. Szurek, A. Wiewiorka (Paris, 2019), pp. 291–305.

⁶⁷ B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, “Wstęp,” p. 19; T. Domański, *Korekta obrazu*, p. 9.

⁶⁸ B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, “Wstęp,” p. 13.

to display the cause-and-effect relationships between the anti-help laws created by the German occupation administration and the attitudes of Poles towards Jews?⁶⁹

Another question is whether it is good practice to unreflectively transplant general observations about the indifference of Western European societies to the Holocaust to the occupied Polish territory. It is important to remember that in the former the death penalty was not applied for helping the Jewish population, nor was it carried out on an ad hoc basis. The scale of German terror and exploitation of the local non-Jewish population was also smaller. There were therefore huge administrative, economic and social differences in the ability to help Jews between Eastern and Western Europe. Attempts to make these differences shallow (or to pretend that they did not exist), to look “by force” for “universal moral choices,” although quite attractive in the narrative layer of the historical account, move us away from understanding the mechanisms used by the Germans in occupied Europe, and all the more do not bring us closer to understanding the phenomenon of aid and the conditions in which it unfolded.⁷⁰

Certainly, only a broader, relational take, and not the one arising directly from Holocaust studies, can lead to an answer to the many nagging questions about the nature of aid as well as Polish attitudes in general. The existence of the two problems as a means of comprehension in respect to the above is, of course, not a problem in research terms per se, but – as it turns out – such different means of comprehension may carry radically different interpretations in analysing the relationship

⁶⁹ Following Zofia Kossak-Szczucka's musings, Michał Grynberg highlighted a shift in the peasants' attitude towards Jews in 1942, from positive to negative. He identified three main causes for this change: German anti-Semitic propaganda, incentives for denunciation, and the erosion of social norms due to the Occupation's brutality. See M. Grynberg, *Księga sprawiedliwych* (Warsaw, 1993), pp. 13–15. Years later, Andrzej Żbikowski, while analysing denunciations in Warsaw from 1940 to 1941, briefly mentioned the existence of anti-help orders in a footnote, following the work of Tatiana Berenstein, Adam Rutkowski, Barbara Engelking, and Jacek Leociak. However, he did not explore the potential impact of the German-imposed duty to denounce on Polish-Jewish relations. See A. Żbikowski, “Antysemityzm, szmalcownictwo, współpraca z Niemcami a stosunki polsko-żydowskie pod okupacją niemiecką,” in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją*, p. 448. In the occupied Polish territories, the Germans implemented a system that effectively (the question is: how effectively?) coerced the rural population into participating in their crimes. Under threats of various forms of punishment and terror, locals were forced to engage in anti-Jewish and extermination policies. This system operated alongside voluntary actions driven by factors such as anti-Semitism.

⁷⁰ “This manner of comprehension was showcased, for instance, at the exhibition ‘Byli sąsiadami’ (They Were Neighbours).” See T. Domański, “W stronę bezkontekstowości. Garść refleksji na temat wystawy: ‘Byli sąsiadami. Ludzkie wybory i zachowania w obliczu Zagłady,’” *PJS* 5 (2024).

between Poles and Jews under the German occupation. Here, in the context of the cited Holocaust studies, we will only draw attention to a study by Bogdan Musiał, who put forward a thesis opposite to that formulated by some Holocaust scholars. In his groundbreaking study *Kto dopomoże Żydowi...* (Whoever Will Help the Jew...), this historian, basing on German archival sources, presented an interesting thesis that the increasing severity of the German “law,” which *de facto* amounted to lawlessness, was a reaction to the broadly understood Polish aid to the Jews and/or perceived by the Germans as aid activities, including maintaining contacts with Jews – against the will of the occupiers – at various stages of the Holocaust, which prevented the implementation of the German anti-Jewish policy.⁷¹

The Basic Conceptual Model in Aid-Related Research

Throughout the entire period of the Polish People’s Republic, only one person has set the tone for discussions on aid, ever since the publication of the fundamental work *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*. That author was Władysław Bartoszewski, who, having dealt with this issue almost single-handedly, whether he wanted to or not, imposed a certain model on the description of Poles rescuing Jews that consisted in presenting the individual stories of the rescuers, and directed his attention above all to aid campaigns in Warsaw and its vicinity, i.e. where he himself was active as part of the Council to Aid Jews. It seems that the researcher, by the power of his authority (by the way, Władysław Bartoszewski had no formal academic education in history, only in Polish Studies), contributed to the spreading of this model also amongst other historians, such as Teresa Prekerowa,⁷² doing so consciously or unconsciously, by making corrections to their works, suggesting changes and providing historical advice.⁷³ We will therefore call Bartoszewski’s proposal the basic

⁷¹ B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi*, *passim*.

⁷² There is no doubt that Władysław Bartoszewski had a significant impact on the final form of Teresa Prekerowa’s publication on the Council for Aid to Jews “Żegota.” Prekerowa concentrated mainly on the aid efforts in Warsaw. It almost seems as though she prepared her work under Bartoszewski’s close supervision, not merely receiving his advice as a mentor and expert in the field, but having him shape the publication’s final form. For more on the relations between Prekerowa and Bartoszewski in the context of their joint work on the book, see A. Namysło, “Wprowadzenie do drugiego wydania,” in T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945* (Warsaw, 2019), pp. 23–24.

⁷³ In the context of aid-related works, we find traces of discussions and reflections on the modelling and conceptualisation of narratives focused on individuals in the review of the historian of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Jan Eugeniusz Zamojski, whose reviews were heavily influenced by

conceptual model in aid research.⁷⁴ It is characteristic that he was, and still is very popular among many researchers and continues to shape the public perception of the rescue of Jews by Poles under the German occupation.⁷⁵

Immediately after the publication of the first edition of *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej* this model was noted by professional historians. Let us recall one of these voices in which it was accurately characterised. Michał Borwicz wrote:

Authors to whom the thing really mattered preferred not to operate with ‘entireties.’ Despite the fact that the actual situation under discussion was characterised also by the activity of underground bodies, and even the dedicated work of an organisation set up specifically for this purpose, they stubbornly stuck to the method of recording isolated incidents, provided they were indisputable: ones in which you could provide the names of specific guardians and specific charges, precise – if possible – dates and addresses, all in the precise context of each of these facts. This was the case for authors of chronicles written in the years of the Occupation itself (even if – for security reasons – they had to hide their names under their pseudonyms), the same was the case immediately after the war and this is also the case in the present published volume.⁷⁶

Bartoszewski and Prekerowa’s works. We do not rule out that this influence proved strong enough to influence the author’s treatment of the subject in a manner characteristic to Bartoszewski. Zamojski stated in “Kwartalnik Historyczny” that Prekerowa’s monograph “is not the work of a professional historian,” and he argued, among other things, as follows: “The narrative method adopted, the use of the name, of an event that accommodates a synthesis of some more general phenomena allows for a more complete perception of the truth about the affairs of the time [...]. The author writes matter-of-factly [...], however, in some places one senses the need for a more analytical approach.” The main objection was the failure to specify the position that aid to the Jewish population took in the overall work of the Government Delegation for Poland (A. Namysło, “Wprowadzenie do drugiego wydania,” pp. 25–26).

⁷⁴ As a model we understand an arrangement of assumptions, concepts and relationships interconnecting those, that allows to approximately describe (model) a selected aspect of reality. It is not an unequivocal concept and can be defined differently depending on the field and academic discipline.

⁷⁵ J. Hera, *Polacy ratujący Żydów. Słownik* (Warsaw, 2014); *Biografie Sprawiedliwych*, ed. A. Krochmal, P. Pietrzyk (Warsaw, 2023). This model has also been applied to the analysis of the aid activities of Polish diplomacy. See e.g. *Lista Ładosia. Spis osób, na których nazwiska w okresie II wojny światowej zostały wystawione paszporty latynoamerykańskie przez Poselstwo RP i organizacje żydowskie w Szwajcarii*, ed. J. Kumoch (Warsaw, 2022).

⁷⁶ M. Borwicz, “Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej,” in *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, ed. W. Bartoszewski, Z. Lewinówna (Warsaw, 2007), p. 783.

Similar criticism about the lack of historical analysis, historical background or insufficient analysis was voiced by Jan Górski, Karol Marian Pospieszalski and Szymon Datner.⁷⁷ These and other reviews meant that, with subsequent editions of the book *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, the authors tried to add the missing elements, which they grouped under specific headings, i.e.: individual aid, organised aid, 'the price of aid.' These eventually resulted in a work that was referred to in reviews as the *Złota Księga* (Golden Book).⁷⁸

It is worth noting that a different model in the communist period was proposed by Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski – authors of the first study on aid of 1963. They tried to place their historical analysis in a strictly scholarly framework.

The application of the aforementioned basic conceptual model to aid research involves collecting and recording aid cases and describing them as unrelated stories. Thus, the main aim of Władysław Bartoszewski was to gather individual stories in one publication and save them from oblivion, rather than to engage in a classical scholarly analysis aimed at investigating the phenomenon of aid, including outlining its mechanisms or a collective portrait of those who rescued Jews.⁷⁹ For

⁷⁷ J. Górski, "Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej," in *ibid.*, pp. 812–816; K.M. Pospieszalski, "[Władysław Bartoszewski – Zofia Lewinówna (oprac.)], Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945," in *ibid.*, pp. 809–811; A. Namysło, "Wprowadzenie do drugiego wydania," pp. 25–26.

⁷⁸ While reviews of this work were generally positive, its meaning to different people varied. Even an opinion was formed that Bartoszewski's and Lewinówna's work gave rise to a discussion on the sources of resentment against Jews in the Polish countryside. These were supposed to be: the attitude of the gentry, the 19th century partition powers playing out national conflicts and "our mostly primitive clergy." See Dedal [Andrzej Kijowski], "Zawsze jest ktoś," in *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, pp. 874–875.

⁷⁹ The testimonies published in 1966 by Bartoszewski and Lewinówna came from a number of sources, such as *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Biuletyn ŻIH*, the collections of Rev. Dr. Jan Zieja, Bartoszewski's own collections, and chiefly responses to a questionnaire published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. The introduction to the first edition (and subsequent editions) does not provide quantitative data regarding the typology of testimonies on which the two researchers relied. It is also not known how many testimonies were submitted to the *Tygodnik Powszechny*'s editorial board and how many were rejected. Above all, however, there was no attempt to discuss analytically the data collected, such as the time and place of the rescue operation, and this is particularly important because in subsequent editions of the book, such as the 1969 edition, the number of testimonies included was increased. The number of rescuers and survivors (from the point of view of the source material collected) is also not given. The editors of the book's first edition focused on systematically presenting forms of individual aid (*Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, first edition, p. 76), and approached the structure of the work quite loosely "because this is the most prominent feature of the aid operation – its diversity from all points of view, from forms and methods to the social position of both parties (especially the helping party) and the degree of danger" (*ibid.*, p. 77). The 2013 edition had a different structure: published material was divided into three sections: organised aid, individual aid (majority of the presented cases), and the price of aid.

this reason, contemporary researchers are confronted with the perplexing question of what do we know about Poles saving Jews in the light of the research that Bartoszewski and Lewinówna undertook, apart from the fact that every person they described rendered considerable services for saving Jews, and saved their lives or tried to do so?

The acceptance and adoption of the model of individualised stories in the process of shaping historical narration by subsequent researchers was also facilitated by the procedure of awarding the Israeli Righteous Among the Nations title or Polish national honours for aid activities, which always focused on particular people or aid stories. The process of honouring then moved onto the historical field, which manifested itself in works dedicated to the Righteous, with the *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata* (The Book of the Righteous Among the Nations) at the forefront, which (apart from an analytical introduction concentrating on a superficial analysis of the honoured) presents a model individualistic approach, presented through an alphabetical arrangement of the names of the Righteous.⁸⁰ Such studies are more akin to commemorative literature than to scholarly analysis.

A third important factor that has influenced the popularity of the narrative model in question after 1989 is the shortage of sources on the subject of aid. Any historian dealing with this problem is aware that there are not sufficient archival records on the subject, and that those that do exist, such as documents of judicial provenance, require extensive and time-consuming archival research and analyses.⁸¹ Regardless of which type of archival source we are dealing with for the history of aid, it should be emphasised that they present above all the individual stories, because aid activities were the result of individual Polish-Jewish relationships. They were undertaken in strict secrecy, under the threat of death, and most often the

⁸⁰ M. Grynberg, *Księga sprawiedliwych; Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holocaustu. Polska*, ed. I. Gutman et al., vol. 1–2 (Cracow, 2009).

⁸¹ A. Krochmal, "Pomoc Żydom w czasie II wojny światowej w świetle polskich i niemieckich źródeł archiwalnych," in *Z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich w XX wieku*, ed. E. Czop, E. Rączy (Rzeszów, 2009); T. Domański, "Postępowania sądowe z dekretu z 31 sierpnia 1944 r. jako źródło do dziejów relacji polsko-żydowskich, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem procesów tzw. sierpniówkowych na przykładzie powiatu kieleckiego," in *Relacje polsko-żydowskie. Badania – kontrowersje – perspektywy*, ed. T. Domański, E. Majcher-Ociesa (Kielce–Warsaw, 2021), pp. 127–151; R. Gieroń, "Zarys problematyki pomocy udzielanej Żydom podczas okupacji niemieckiej w aktach postępowań karnych wszczętych na podstawie dekretu PKWN z 31 sierpnia 1944 r. na obszarze powojennego województwa krakowskiego," *PJS* 2 (2021), pp. 220–250.

act of helping took place in the countryside among peasants, who were not eager after the end of the war to write down the traces of their heroic activity on behalf of Jews, in contrast, for example, to representatives of the intelligentsia. Hence, personal testimonies and memories – Jewish and Polish – play such a large role. Thus, those testimonies also significantly affect the individualised picture of assistance. Moreover, their verification and mutual confrontation is often a tedious research process, which may discourage the undertaking of aid research.⁸²

It is also worth mentioning, while explaining the reasons for the popularity of the basic conceptual model in the research on aid, the general atmosphere unfavourable to this research. It is determined not only by intense interpretative disputes about the place and role of Poles helping Jews under the German occupation in historical memory and contemporary historical policy,⁸³ but also by voices formulated in research circles that deprecate and negate the sense of research on aid. One of the extreme arguments, happily not formulated in the field of history, shall be referred to. Aid is presented here as an attempt to build a “myth of innocent Poland” (“the good name of Poland”) or as a form of a peculiar antidote to the work of Jan Tomasz Gross and other researchers ideologically close to him.⁸⁴ Particularly worrying is the view, characterised by a profound bias formulated a few years ago, situating aid research in the “martyrdom-conservative” current that constitutes a counterbalance to “unmasking-ethical” historiography, capable of reformulating the discourse on Polish-Jewish relations and exploring “black pages from history.” Even the choice of the topic was supposed to be an “ideological manifestation” (sic!).⁸⁵ Paradoxically then, after the communist years the subject of aid-related research has again become very “political” in the eyes of some researchers. This time it even found itself censored. Therefore, in view of the presented politicised

⁸² M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, “Indeks Polaków zamordowanych i represjonowanych za pomoc Żydom w okresie II wojny światowej,” in *Represje za pomoc Żydom*, pp. 64–73; T. Domański, “Stan badań nad pomocą świadczoną Żydom przez ludność polską w okresie II wojny światowej na okupowanych terenach województwa kieleckiego,” in *Stan badań nad pomocą*, pp. 199–266. Antoni Sulek has recently formed similar reflections in his article “Ulmowie na tle. Ten obraz relacji Polaków z Żydami jest bardziej skomplikowany,” <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/2228386,1,ulmowie-na-tle-ten-obraz-relacji-polakow-z-zydami-jest-bardziej-skomplikowany.read>, accessed 23 November 2023.

⁸³ T. Domański, A. Gontarek, “Wstęp,” p. 7.

⁸⁴ P. Forecki, *Po Jedwabnem. Anatomia pamięci funkcjonalnej* (Warsaw, 2018), pp. 262–264.

⁸⁵ B. Krupa, “Historia krytyczna i jej ‘gabinet cieni’,” *Historiografia polska wobec Zagłady 2003–2013*, *ZŻSM* 10 (2014), pp. 722–723. Cf. K. Zieliński, “Kilka uwag o polityce.”

approach to the reality, in which scholarship becomes an immanent part of it, is there room for people whose academic choices are not dictated by the desire to belong to political “camps”? The answer to such a question should be in the affirmative, on the assumption that an antagonising and stigmatising type of thinking leading to simplification should be decisively rejected in the 21st century, and scholars should be left free to choose their research directions. The elimination of such voices will perhaps unblock and unleash the creative powers of historians who, in our view, have not yet fully grasped the possibility of applying the scholarly potential of various research models when analysing the aid phenomenon.

Attempts to Define Aid and its Typologies

Aid, it could be said, was a multidimensional and multifaceted phenomenon. Its complex, heterogeneous nature caused (and continues to cause) research difficulties in capturing its essence. The complications involved have become apparent in the works of all leading historians dealing with aid issues or in studies addressing the subject in passing. How then, have historians defined aid and what terms have they used to capture the meaning of aid-related activity?

The first historian to write about its nature was, of course, Emanuel Ringelblum, although he did not discuss the issue very extensively, attempting to estimate its scale primarily in Warsaw itself.⁸⁶ Characteristically, in analysing the problem of aid, he made Western European countries the point of reference for his argument. He stated that Jews were hidden there en masse, in contrast to occupied Poland.⁸⁷

Ringelblum distinguished between two main types of aid activities, according to the criterion of their typology/kind. The predominant one was providing shelter to hide for money,⁸⁸ understood by him as a paid “job,” within which a kind

⁸⁶ E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Pisma*, p. 213.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 212–213.

⁸⁸ Ringelblum never used the term “paid aid,” although he did discuss rescuing for money in the chapter on aid. He also appreciated this form of aid. There is now an ongoing debate as to how paid support given to Jews that led to the saving of lives should be treated. The most recent findings on the economic aspect of aid were made by Grzegorz Berendt. In his opinion, in view of the progressing pauperisation of Polish society as a result of German predatory policy, at a certain stage the co-financing of aid by Jews became a necessity. (G. Berendt, “Niemiecka polityka gospodarcza w okupowanej Polsce a materialne warunki niesienia pomocy Żydom,” in *Nie tylko o Ulmach*, pp. 61–69; see also A. Czocher, “Okupacyjne uwarunkowania pomocy ukrywającym się Żydom w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie,” in *Kościół, Żydzi, jezuici...*, pp. 45–67). On the other hand, scholars from the circle of the Polish Centre

of a tariff was in force.⁸⁹ The scope of aid stemming from idealistic motives was much smaller.⁹⁰ It should be noted that he treated helping children separately and it can therefore be understood that it was a third type of aid, special because of its uniqueness.⁹¹ At the same time, he often noted the atmosphere of indifference, which he counted among the conditions that were not conducive to the mass rescue of Jews.⁹²

Ringelblum believed that persons who hid Jews for money, if they were not motivated, apart from financial considerations, by “strong moral motives,” “sooner or later” got rid of them.⁹³ He explicitly identified this second group as “idealists,” praising them as “the noblest idealists,”⁹⁴ “Aryan friends,” “Aryan hosts,” “kind-hearted people” or “guardian angels,” and also sometimes referred to as “party people,” i.e. those engaged in underground activities. In doing so, he noted that the care of a single Jew had to be exercised not by a single “Aryan friend,” but by “friends who would create an atmosphere of sympathy around him [the Jew], who

for Holocaust Research have formed the thesis of an alleged wicked desire to enrich oneself on Jews as the main motive for rescuing them for money (J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Okrzyki pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939–1946* [Wołowiec, 2012]; B. Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień*; J. Grabowski, “Ratowanie Żydów za pieniądze: przemysł pomocy,” *ZZSM* 4 (2008), pp. 81–109; *Dalej jest noc*). It is worth recalling that Jan Grabowski translated the English term “paid helpers” into Polish as “biorcy” (i.e. “takers”), which does not necessarily convey the meaning of the original version and denies the nature of aid for this type of activity. For more on this topic, see T. Domański, A. Gontarek, “Wstęp,” pp. 8–9; M. Urynowicz, “O pomocy Żydom w IFiS PAN – kilka uwag,” *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* 3 (2009), pp. 109–112.

⁸⁹ E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Pisma*, p. 211. Ringelblum knew the rates that were paid in Warsaw for hiding. They amounted as much as 2 to 3 thousand zlotys per month. The cost of keeping a child in hiding, on the other hand, was 100 zloty per day. In conclusion, he stated that hideouts were “costly paid” by Jews (*ibid.*, pp. 114, 211).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 189–211.

⁹¹ It is difficult to treat Ringelblum’s chapter on this subject as an analysis of aid and its terms in Polish-Jewish relations. It speaks of the “passage” of children to the Aryan side, as if it happened without the participation of Poles and mainly for money, and of the dilemmas of the children themselves, who found themselves in a difficult situation, without parents (relatives). Ringelblum reduced the role of Polish guardians to a description of their feelings or attitudes towards Jewish children, often mitigated by money. He also mentioned the “liking of the children” by some of the Aryan guardians, while he categorised those who adopted them as wanting in this way to “document their attitude to the tragedy of the Jewish people” (*ibid.*, pp. 132–142).

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁹³ It is worth noting that selfless aid could also be discontinued at any time. On the other hand, we know of cases where paid aid turned into selfless aid – relationships initiated on economic grounds turned into friendships.

⁹⁴ Ringelblum devoted a separate chapter to “idealists.” (*ibid.*, pp. 189–211).

would care for him and solve his endless daily worries with heart.”⁹⁵ He thus drew attention to the importance of the network that was formed when aid was provided. Furthermore, he observed that every Jew, without exception, on the Aryan side had to have this kind of care. He generally qualified the helping attitude as heroism, being the opposite not only of denunciation and other negative behaviour, but also of a passive attitude.⁹⁶ Ringelblum also drew attention to the wide cross-section of society in the context of helping, depicting in his work a gallery of personalities dedicated to the operation of rescuing Jews (a model continued and developed by Bartoszewski after the war). Ringelblum, however, only divided them into two class categories – the wealthy elite and the working people.⁹⁷

The authors of the first post-war monograph on aid, Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, defined aid differently,⁹⁸ namely as “a field of the struggle of Polish society against the German occupier,” thus emphasising that such activities had an anti-German dimension. They also singled out its component parts – “giving aid” to Jews, “hiding” them and “defending” them from the Holocaust.⁹⁹ What they did not express explicitly on that occasion was the view that one of the inherent features of aid was its secret nature. Such a view emerged somewhat later.¹⁰⁰ The treatment of aid as a secret activity in post-war historiography was primarily summarised by Teresa Prekerowa’s position: “The benevolence towards oppressed Jews was thus henceforth sought to be given a secret form.”¹⁰¹

We learn more about what aid was in the understanding of these authors from the structure of their study. The fundamental concept becomes apparent already

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 114, 189–190, 211.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 43, 211, 213.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 210. Epsztein remarked that Ringelblum sometimes applied a social class criterion, and even saw in his writings a “pattern” in interpretations according to which “the poor are always better people than the rich,” although Ringelblum was not always consistent in this. Perhaps this understanding of social divisions was the basis of Ringelblum’s opinion that it was mostly not wealthy people who showed “fortitude of heart” by saving Jews (*ibid.*, pp. 28, 99).

⁹⁸ T. Berenstein, A. Rutkowski, *Pomoc Żydom w Polsce*, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Za to groziła śmierć. Polacy z pomocą Żydom w czasie okupacji*, selected, edited and introduction written by W. Smólski (Warsaw, 1981), p. 9.

¹⁰¹ T. Prekerowa, *Zarys dziejów Żydów w Polsce w latach 1939–1945* (Warsaw, 1992), p. 70. It is significant that the Sejm of the Republic of Poland regarded aid efforts for those racially persecuted as being on par with the active struggle against the occupying forces. (W. Bartoszewski, “Przedmowa,” third edition, p. XIII).

in the table of contents. Aid was divided into individual and organised activities (“the Polish resistance movement,” the Council to Aid Jews “Żegota”), while the aid phenomena was a dynamic process, being a response to the anti-Jewish policy of the Germans – the authors distinguished aid in the “first period of Occupation,” then “intensification of repressions for giving it,” and rescue in the period of deportation to death camps and of extermination (the third phase of the Holocaust). This was a complete novelty in aid-related writing. The authors, following Ringelblum, also highlighted the unique aid activity of saving children, emphasising the role of Polish guardians of the youngest victims of the Holocaust.¹⁰² However, they devised a different interpretation of the issue than Ringelblum did. The founder of Oneg Shabbat painted a gloomy picture of the tragic fate of children on the Aryan side, full of mental and physical suffering, while Berenstein and Rutkowski, referring exclusively to the category of compassion, (which by the way did not appear at all in Ringelblum’s work) presented an idealised version – children outside the ghetto were to meet on their way only “good,” “compassionate,” “faithful,” “caring,” “indefatigable,” “infinitely self-sacrificing,” “unfailing,” guardians and friends.¹⁰³

Another typology presented by them was the introduction of a clear territorial criterion. In Ringelblum’s case, it was barely outlined by indicating two Occupation planes – Warsaw as a kind of epicentre of events, and the distant province. Berenstein and Rutkowski recognised that there were two territorial planes of the rescue and hiding operation, i.e. the city and the countryside, with the latter having a greater potential. They noted that in the countryside, Jews were generally able to hide only “below the surface,” while in the cities they were able to hide both “on the surface” and below, which had consequences for the rescue action.¹⁰⁴ The

¹⁰² T. Berenstein. A. Rutkowski, *Pomoc Żydom w Polsce*, pp. 49–52.

¹⁰³ In comparison, Ringelblum, when writing about “guardians,” used the following (in addition to the aforementioned ‘liking’) words and expressions: “zadokumentowanie” (“documenting,” “getting documents”), “urządzanie dziecka” (“arranging or installing a child”), “męczenie się z dziećmi żydowskimi” (“struggling or being bothered with Jewish children”), “zakrzękanie się” (“getting their head around or busying themselves with”), “otrzymywanie zysków” (“receiving profits”), “wyrzucanie dzieci” (“throwing the children out”), “oddawanie w ręce mundurowej policji” (“handing [children] over to the uniformed police”), “lekcja żydożercza od opiekunów” (“a lesson in hatred for Jews from the guardians”), “anty-semityczne rozmowy” (“anti-Semitic talks”) (E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*. *Pisma*, pp. 132–142).

¹⁰⁴ Ringelblum employs the terms “na powierzchni” (“on the surface”) and “pod powierzchnią” (“below the surface”).

researchers explained why rural regions were characterised by a greater potential – it was determined by the greater number of potential “forms” of assistance, by which Berenstein and Rutkowski meant “pits,” hiding places in the cellars of houses and farm buildings, orchards, gardens, camouflaged hiding places in attics, barns, haystacks, and structures outside homesteads, such as burrows, shelters, dugouts in forests and fields.¹⁰⁵

The aforementioned two scholars also expanded the question of the motivations of those providing support to the Jewish population, pointing to its various types (ideological, political and social reasons, neighbourly, collegial, friendly, professional relations, selfless help, humanitarianism, religious considerations). In doing so, they developed Ringelblum’s rather simplistic yet correct concept of idealism as the basic moral-psychological condition for selfless help.¹⁰⁶

Aid was understood and defined in a completely different way in the work *Las sprawiedliwych* (Forest of the Righteous) by Szymon Datner – as an individual act, i.e. an individual choice, associated with taking a risk and, above all, with a moral choice. In a passage of his book that is almost canonical for aid-related research, he emphasised the moment when the decision to provide support is made:

When a stranger, a Jew, knocked on the window of a peasant’s hut at night, the Jewish problem of those years knocked with him, with all its implications, risks, dangers, with the necessity of making a decision and the spiritual dilemma associated with it. [...] It seems, in general, that there were four possibilities for solving such a dilemma: the first – according to the Occupation “law” imposed by the invader – was to hand the Jew over to the hands of the torturers, which was tantamount to condemning him to death; the second – not to hand him over but not to help him either; the third – to give him *ad hoc* help; the fourth – to take care of him and give him shelter for a longer period of time.¹⁰⁷

According to Datner, who reconstructed in this passage a catalogue of the main attitudes, the field of aid covered its two types hitherto absent from historiogra-

¹⁰⁵ T. Berenstein, A. Rutkowski, *Pomoc Żydom w Polsce*, pp. 35, 45, 47–48.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35 ff.

¹⁰⁷ S. Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych*, p. 27.

phy – ad hoc aid and long-term aid, which both meant engaging in active action, or “active rescuing.”¹⁰⁸

A more specific, more exhaustive and elaborate, albeit chaotic, set of characteristics was presented in the 1960s by Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna. They observed:

We have endeavored to show the aid given to those in danger in its every aspect: aid from individuals, organisations, and institutions, spontaneous and organised aid; political and armed, material and moral, offered to individuals and communities, involving helpers on both ad hoc and permanent bases, and posing varying degrees of risk, yet always carrying some level of threat.¹⁰⁹

In the somewhat unstructured attempt presented above to define what aid is, the extension of its typology, contained in the brief quotation above, is notable. However, its essence is not clarified. It is worth noting that, for example, for Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, helping Jews equated with the Poles’ struggle against the Germans.

The second half of the 1960s saw the publication of Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki’s *Kto ratuje jedno życie* (He Who Saves One Life), published in London in 1968, in addition to domestic publications on aid.¹¹⁰ In his introduction, the author made it clear that books published behind the Iron Curtain did not reach Western societies, and therefore did not have the chance to tell the whole story of the Polish effort to help Jews. What was new in his work was to discuss the assistance provided to the Jewish population outside of occupied Poland, as well as to those deported there, to point out the role of the Polish Underground State, the Polish government-in-exile and Polish diplomacy in aid operations, and to examine more closely the activities of the Social Committee for Aid to the Jewish Population [translator’s note: a pre-

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, first edition, p. 73.

¹¹⁰ Iranek-Osmecki’s book was published in Polish twice, first in London in 1968, and then in Warsaw in 2009 (a reprint was published in 1981). Additionally, the book was published in English in 1971, and again in 1979. K. Iranek-Osmecki, *He Who Saves One Life* (New York, 1971, second edition New York, 1979).

decessor of the Council for Aid to Jews “Żegota”] in Poland. Putting pen to paper, Iranek-Osmecki became an amateur historian who prepared the first analytical and holistic study of Polish aid that covered the full spectrum of aid facets.¹¹¹ The author defined aid by its types, dividing it into: “spontaneous,” “organised civilian,” “military,” “in arming,” “during combat,” “financial,” “from the West,” fighting riots against Jews, and facilitating the establishment of communication of Jews from the occupied country with European countries and the USA.¹¹²

Iranek-Osmecki was also the first author who, having the unfettered opportunity to compare the situation in the occupied Polish lands with the countries of Western Europe during World War II, saw that Polish aid should be considered in terms of a phenomenon – not least because it was punishable by death. He expressed it as follows:

In order to bring aid to Jews, the Polish Secret State, although itself burdened by its struggle against the occupying forces, created an extensive organisation especially for this purpose. This organisation had a structured management and executive authority, field units, provided hiding places for Jews, maintained courier and radio communication with the West, and supplied armaments and funds. Of all the countries occupied by the Germans, as well as of the satellite countries, and countries allied with the Germans, from which the Nazis also deported Jews or exterminated them on the spot, Poland was the only one to establish an aid organisation based on the underground state bodies.¹¹³

He supported this view with a presentation of a typology of the repressions or circumstances of deaths cases for providing help, adding a very important sentence:

¹¹¹ Some scholars have, not unreasonably, formed objections to this publication, especially to the “homeland” part. They point to the author’s incorrect motivation (“defence of the good name of the Poles”), lack of professionalism, adaptation of the argumentation to preconceived theses and “correct highlighting of controversial episodes” (D. Libionka, “Polskie piśmiennictwo,” p. 44). The main shortcoming of this work is that it saturates the narrative with positive manifestations of the activities of the Polish government and society while omitting or eliminating negative phenomena. See A. Gontarek, “Dyplomacja polska a pomoc,” pp. 124–126.

¹¹² K. Iranek-Osmecki, *Kto ratuje jedno życie*, pp. 222–299.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 300–301.

If the accusation of passivity on the part of Poles is made by those in the West – who could have saved Jews without their own sacrifice – who did nothing to help the suffering Jews, let them remember those who provided help at the cost of their own lives.¹¹⁴

Thus, in this thread, Iranek-Osmecki included conclusions contrary to Ringelblum's thesis of alleged mass aid to Jews in Western Europe.

Another position relevant to the definitional issues discussed here is Teresa Prekerowa's study of the Council for Aid to Jews "Żegota." In describing its activity, the researcher did not specify what aid should be understood as such. She referred to German anti-aid orders:

In later periods [of the Occupation], the governors and police authorities of the various GG Distrikts published announcements reminding the public of the death penalty and specifying what the German authorities meant by the term "aid" (giving Jews accommodation, maintaining them, transporting them, buying goods from them, selling them anything, etc.).¹¹⁵

Reaching back to the Occupation orders which directly influenced the possibility of providing aid, and having defined this aid in terms of the war, also forced the researcher to reconsider the issue of trade and smuggling between Poles and Jews, and Jews and Poles in the context of aid. Ringelblum had noted the Polish-Jewish "cooperation" in this regard already during the war (as "one of the most beautiful pages in the history of mutual relations between the two peoples during the present war"),¹¹⁶ thus clearly emphasising that Jews were not only recipients of aid but also its co-creators. The historian therefore did not count this cooperation as a strictly aid-related activity.

The case was viewed differently by Prekerowa, who, adopting the optics of the German anti-aid laws, defined smuggling and trafficking as aid because the Germans' aim was to starve Jews in the ghettos and camps. Undoubtedly, with-

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹¹⁵ T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom*, first edition, p. 43.

¹¹⁶ E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Pisma*, pp. 66–71.

out the illegal acquisition of food, the majority of the Jewish population would have been condemned to death by starvation under the conditions forged by the German authorities. In the light of the above circumstance, food smuggling and trade contacts could indeed be regarded as part of the phenomenon of aid, although it should be emphasised that there is still no clear position on the part of contemporary researchers on this topic.¹¹⁷ However, it is worth pointing out that this aid could only take place under conditions where the mutual contacts were on an equal footing, i.e. where both parties adhered to a contract to which they had mutually agreed.¹¹⁸

Another work by a Polish historian, in our view worth examining from a conceptual angle, came from Marcin Urynowicz. The author, like others before him, did not attempt to form a definition of aid, viewing it through the lens of a typology of aid activities. His work is distinguished from others by its attempt to systematise these activities.¹¹⁹ The researcher introduced a threefold division: 1) organised aid (activities of political parties, social and military organisations before the establishment of the Council for Aid to Jews “Żegota”), 2) activities of the Council for Aid to Jews “Żegota” and 3) aid outside Polish lands provided by Poles and Polish government/social institutions, as well as individual aid. The researcher also stressed the importance of the time factor in considering the typology of aid, distinguishing between permanent, periodic and ad hoc or one-off aid. The publication furthermore contains attempts to name the aid in a different

¹¹⁷ T. Domański, A. Gontarek, “Wstęp,” p. 22. See also D. Siepracka, J. Wróbel, “Stan badań na temat pomocy udzielanej przez Polaków ludności żydowskiej na obszarze województwa łódzkiego w latach okupacji niemieckiej 1919–1945,” in *Stan badań nad pomocą*, pp. 430–469; S. Pietrzykowski, “Stan badań nad pomocą świadczoną przez Polaków społeczności żydowskiej w województwie poznańskim w latach 1939–1945,” in *Stan badań nad pomocą*, pp. 585–613.

¹¹⁸ J. Grabowski, “Ratowanie Żydów za pieniądze,” pp. 82–83; M. Urynowicz, “Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Warszawie w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej,” in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją*, pp. 665–666 (documents No. 19 and No. 20). Some contemporary scholars dismiss food smuggling into the ghettos as a form of aid. Bartłomiej Krupa, for example, noted: “Even smuggling (after all, not selfless) is treated by the author [Jan Przedpeński] as an example of the brave attitude of Poles.” See B. Krupa, *Opowiedzieć Zagładę. Polska proza i historiografia wobec Holocaustu (1987–2003)* (Cracow, 2013), p. 241. By visibly distancing himself from referring to smuggling as a “brave stance,” Krupa did not address the Occupation conditions caused by German alimentary policy or the personal risks faced by smugglers, including the threat of the death penalty.

¹¹⁹ We do not refer in this article to content that the author has taken from the work of other historians, mainly of Nechama Tec.

way than by its type. Urynowicz noted that from the beginning of the Occupation it had a spontaneous, secret and diverse character, and rightly concludes that aid activities were first born in the social sphere and then were transferred to the institutional sphere in the form of organised aid.¹²⁰

Also important for understanding the issue of aid is the aforementioned publication by Bogdan Musiał *Kto dopomoże Żydowi...*, which presents in great detail the understanding of aid to Jews through the lens of the German anti-aid laws. The author not only answered in detail the question of how the German occupier defined the anti-aid laws, but also why Germans decided to introduce those laws, how its evolution took place and what was the mechanism of its implementation and what were the consequences of the contemporary legal situation in force, which as already indicated, was lawless by nature. The Germans, according to Musiał, having learnt about the type of contacts under Occupation between Jews and non-Jews (mainly Poles) and their intensity, introduced into the anti-aid laws the idea of punishing non-Jews more severely for giving help than Jews for accepting it. Musiał asserted bluntly that for Jews it did not matter whether they lost their lives from starvation in the ghettos, by crossing the ghetto boundary in order to obtain food, or already outside the ghetto. From the German perspective, it was necessary to implement strict deterrent measures against the Polish population, who were expected to cease prohibited interactions with Jews for fear of losing their lives.¹²¹ The historian also drew attention to the idea of the feigned legalism of the Germans' actions, i.e. the issuing of special orders by the relevant civil authorities of the GG and the individual district governors and provincial governors (Distrikts' governors).¹²²

Musiał's work shows distinctively that the process of implementing the laws discussed here was gradual. Today, it would be known as "testing social reactions" – the successive tightening of criminal sanctions was intended to disrupt the aid observed by German officials. This touches on a key issue: what exactly

¹²⁰ M. Urynowicz, "Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków," p. 215.

¹²¹ B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi*, pp. 51–53, 89.

¹²² On the governance mechanisms under the German occupation, see W. Wichert, "Niemiecki system okupacyjny na ziemiach polskich w latach 1939–1945. Zarys problematyki," in *Stan badań nad pomocą*, pp. 28–82.

constituted aid in the German occupation optics? German definitions of aid – for we are not talking about a single term here – can be traced quite easily on the basis of the published criminal anti-aid orders. First and foremost, there was the issue of aid given to Jews attempting to leave a designated residential district, and aid provided to them on the Aryan side (order of the district chief’s plenipotentiary for the city of Warsaw Ludwik Leist of 14 January 1941), and the ban on trade between Poles and Jews, including “donating and otherwise passing of goods of all kinds to Jews” (Leist’s order of 13 February 1941), by which smuggling and Poles’ support for begging Jewish children on the so-called Aryan side were to be restricted. The issue of giving shelter was handled again by Governor-General Hans Frank in the well-known regulation of 15 October 1941, which introduced the death penalty for giving shelter to Jews leaving a designated residential district. From then on, the regulations were made more specific. For example, on 10 November 1941, the governor of the Warsaw Distrikt issued an order introducing the death penalty not only for giving shelter but also for giving alms to begging Jewish children, thus in practice for an act of mercy. A year later, on 30 November 1942, the higher SS and police commander in the GG (HSSuPF) Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger issued an order whereby any activity that served to prolong the lives of Jews against the German will would become [prohibited] aid, regardless of whether such activity was of a paid, altruistic or even exploitative nature.¹²³

Musiał, basing on the results of the survey, introduced a new concept in his work – “readiness to help” – estimating that it was “widespread” among Poles (“high readiness”), which turned out to be the main reason for the introduction and subsequent tightening of the laws against persons helping Jews.¹²⁴ The aim of these measures was to reduce or eliminate the phenomenon of aid, as it stood in the way of implementing the policy of exterminating Jews.¹²⁵ Thus, from the German point of view, it did not matter whether the aid provided was selfless or

¹²³ B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi*, pp. 58–61; 127–131. Within this field of the German occupation regulations, particular SS and police commanders (SSuPF), including those in the Radom Distrikt, issued orders that were similar in content. See J.A. Młynarczyk, S. Piątkowski, *Cena poświęcenia*, p. 70.

¹²⁴ It is debatable whether Polish society showed a conscious “readiness to help” or perhaps a readiness for contacts with Jews that existed in the inter-war period, which were suddenly forbidden by the Germans.

¹²⁵ B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi*, pp. 121, 227–228.

motivated by gains – all of the above-mentioned actions on the part of Poles were detailed in German orders and criminalised. The German regulations, according to Musiał, implied that any contact with a Jew was a form of aid because it prolonged their life.¹²⁶

Another novelty in Musiał's narrative, formed on the basis of research on the laws against aid, is the category of the "self-preservation instinct," understood as the avoidance of danger, introduced into the discussion of Polish-Jewish relations in the context of refusal to help Jews. It is a rather separate category from fear and anxiety, which nevertheless undoubtedly blocked help. This theme (developed in historical monographs) appeared in connection with the question of collective responsibility for the help given by Polish families. The matter at stake was mainly the fate of the children of those parents who decided to rescue Jews. The author wrote: "Protecting one's own children, especially little ones, from mortal danger is one of the basic instincts of self-preservation."¹²⁷ Another point is that maternal instinct, which this historian did not mention, may have also played an important role. An exploration of this and similar topics related to the background of refusal of help as seen from an individual perspective is still ahead of us. It is certainly an interdisciplinary topic that goes beyond the scope of historical craft.

Finally, it is worth recalling the definition of aid offered by historians – IPN researchers Martyna Grądzka-Rejak and Aleksandra Namysło:

[The acts of aid were] documented or verbally certified, prohibited by German law, conscious, active and positive activities undertaken for the benefit of the Jews, segregated under German laws. In order for a deed to be considered aid, the condition of its measurable efficiency must be fulfilled, and the activity in question should lead to a specific result, i.e. an improvement of the situation in which the person was, before the aid arrived.¹²⁸

It is worth emphasising that this attempt to create a definition came from the IPN historian community, which, as we have written has made the greatest

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 127–131.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 243.

¹²⁸ *Represje za pomoc Żydom*, vol. 1, p. 72.

contribution to aid research. The direction of the definitional search presented by the researchers is undoubtedly correct and provides an excellent starting point for further proposals in this area. However, as the above definition was formed for a specific publication that sought to qualify or reject cases of aid, it can hardly be considered universal. In our view, there was insufficient attention given to the circumstances surrounding emergency aid. The use of the term “prohibited” in the context of German anti-aid laws is also debatable.¹²⁹

At the same time, it is worth pointing out the emergence of terminological proposals different from those considered so far. These proposals signal rather than resolve certain definitional problems.¹³⁰ Terms such as: “aid” and “rescue,” the “Righteous” and other rescuer, have been distinguished, with the potential for differences between these terms outlined. A discussion of the term “Polish aid strategies” is also of key importance here. As aid research progresses, an increasing number of terms related to the provision of aid would emerge. When considering this, it is crucial to always juxtapose the legal situation imposed by the German occupiers with the very essence of aid.¹³¹

Conclusions

As far as the literature approaches comprehension problems of the above methodological issues is concerned, in declarative terms a considerable number of researchers consider aid as a relational issue. However, in fact they focus on discussing the attitudes of Poles towards Jews, including aid. At the same time, they refrain from explaining in detail the mechanisms shaping Polish-Jewish relations, determined by the conditions of the German occupation. Such works, although noting the existence of a “Polish side,” are essentially descriptive rather than analytical, and their authors do not delve into the essence of the mutual relationship. The other approach is to present the perspective of only one side – that of the Jewish victim, which is now the quintessence of Holocaust studies. In our view, the two most commonly used concepts – “Poles towards Jews” and Holocaust studies – somewhat simplistically attempt to answer first and foremost the question

¹²⁹ The terms like “sanction,” “penalty,” “repression” would be much closer to the Occupation situation.

¹³⁰ T. Domański, A. Gontarek, “Co wiemy o pomocy,” pp. 39–59.

¹³¹ The authors of this text are preparing an article on terminological issues in the field of aid.

of the very nature of the historical context at hand, ignoring the next that comes to mind as to why it was so.

The above-mentioned types of concepts are also characterised by a common research assumption regarding the attitudes of the Polish population. This assumption is based on the conviction that the model of social relations in this national group is static, which in the era of intensive development of social sciences is rather odd. After all, it is not necessary to convince anyone today that conditions under the German occupation created a dynamic, constantly changing situation, and it was this actual context that shaped the attitudes of Poles towards Jews.

Regarding the issue of adopted research models – the basic conceptual model has undoubtedly dominated and continues to dominate in the existing literature (although the patterns are being broken),¹³² consisting in the presentation of individual stories of saving Jews, resulting in the form of individual stories or as collections combined into a single study. This model has significantly influenced the collective consciousness of historians working on the subject, although paradoxically, its scholarly validity can be questioned. Perhaps this is why many scholars have been convinced that the subject of aid is not an issue of a research discipline, as the tried and trusted research question chronological method has rarely been applied to the analysis of the aid phenomenon in the works from this field.

In addition to the model mentioned above, there were of course, works that presented the issue in a structured way, and approached the research question in chronological categories, i.e. according to academic rigour. This model, for example, was used in works on organised aid (the Council for Aid to Jews Żegota), or on hiding places, among others. It would appear that this second model, more broadly applied, enables presenting the entirety of aid issues in a historical overview, which is still missing.

The scholarly literature presented and discussed above clearly demonstrates that the evolution of research on aid to Jews has not led to forming an aid definition that could be universally used today. Nor, it can be argued, has there been any debate

¹³² See T. Gonet, *Pomoc Żydom na terenie przedwojennego województwa stanisławowskiego podczas okupacji niemieckiej 1941–1944* [Aid to Jews in the territory of the pre-war Stanisławów Voivodeship under German occupation 1941–1944], Warsaw, 2023. Manuscript of a PhD thesis written at the Cardinal Stanisław Wyszyński University in Warsaw under the direction of Professor Adam Dziurok.

about the need for it in academic research. In fact, only the historians at the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) have ventured to present it, although their proposal needs to be revised and made more precise. The existing state of affairs is probably due to the dual status of the leading “aid” researchers of the older generation who initiated the research – they were both witnesses of history and historians, in some cases historian-amateurs. The former circumstance in particular meant that they understood aid somewhat intuitively and did not formulate elaborate theoretical frameworks. More attention was paid to the typology and categories of aid, constantly expanding and changing, according to their own concepts, to the scopes of aid activities, which made it possible to vaguely define their nature.

Examining the causes behind the prolonged neglect of the definitional field, it is also worth noting a research gap that surfaced in the early 1990s, coinciding with the democratisation of academic research. At that time, aid-related research began to disappear in favour of an almost exclusive exploration of the so-called dark pages in Polish-Jewish relations during World War II. Subsequently, this current rather quickly dominated the scholarly debate on the subject. Thus, it is unsurprising that only in recent times have the first studies emerged, examining issues like the repression of the Poles for aiding Jews, or the German anti-help laws, which provide a clearer understanding of what aid entailed under the German occupation. Studies of this type – in addition to other scholarly studies – lay the foundations for an indispensable method enabling a research overview for a comprehension of existing knowledge on aid activities.

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SUMMARY

The aid provided to Jews by Poles during World War II was for many post-war decades an issue addressed by a small group of researchers. As a rule, these were people who had themselves given help to the Jews during World War II or had been recipients. At the same time, the topic was subject to political pressure from the communist authorities. In this outline, the authors explore the place of aid-related research within the broader context of issues arising from the terms of the German occupation. The authors examine how the phenomenon of aid has been perceived and documented in historical writings. The authors assert that the cumulative approach of showcasing individual rescuers' stories has been crucial. Nevertheless, they emphasize the necessity for a thorough examination and deeper analysis of aid-related research.

KEYWORDS

helping Jews • research models • Emanuel Ringelblum •
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