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THE EXTERMINATION OF JEWS IN THE KREIS RAWA RUSKA

Summary

This text explores the systematic extermination of the Jewish population in a provincial region located in the eastern part of the former Lwów (now Lviv) Voivodeship, which, between 1941 and 1944, was elevated to the status of a German occupation-era administrative unit known as the Kreis Rawa Ruska (a county starosty). Drawing on archival records, eyewitness testimonies, and scholarly literature, it traces the unfolding stages of this process – from the initial outbreaks of violence following the German invasion in June 1941, through the establishment and operation of the ghetto, to the deportations to the Bełżec extermination camp and the eventual annihilation of the community. The narrative highlights both the direct role of the German terror apparatus and the responses of the local population in the context of aid provided to the Jews in hiding.

Keywords

Kreis Rawa Ruska • extermination of Jews • Galicia district • ghetto • deportations

Introduction

The subject of the extermination of the Jewish community in the Kreis Rawa Ruska territory has not yet been thoroughly researched or covered comprehensively in the relevant literature. References to this topic appear in various studies, but they are fragmentary. The literature explicitly devoted to this issue in the Polish bibliography is limited to a single two-page popular history article by Jakub Iszchułow entitled “Zagłada Żydów w mieście i powiecie Rawa Ruska” (The Extermination of Jews in the Town and County of Rawa Ruska).¹ The text was based on materials from the commission investigating Hitlerite crimes in Rawa Ruska² and contains very general information, which means that it can only be treated as an introduction to research on the extermination of the Jewish community in the area under study. The subject of the German occupation of the Kreis Rawa Ruska and the extermination of the local Jewish population is also raised in Tatiana Berenstein’s article *Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej w dystrykcie Galicja (1941–1943)* (The Extermination of Jews in the Galicia District, 1941–1943).³ The author presents, in the form of a statistical and chronological summary, estimated data from nine localities in the Rawa Ruska Starosty, the number of Jews living in this area, and the approximate number of victims of *Aktion Reinhardt*.

In addition to the articles by Iszchułow and Berenstein, regional literature should be mentioned, primarily concerning those areas of the Kreis Rawa Ruska

¹ See J. Iszchułow, “Zagłada Żydów w mieście i powiecie Rawa Ruska,” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* 2 (1977), pp. 97–98.

² Presumably, this commission was a local branch of the Extraordinary State Commission for the Investigation and Examination of Crimes Committed by German-Fascist Invaders, i.e. the Regional Commission for the Investigation and Examination of Crimes Committed by German-Fascist Invaders in the Rawa Region (Rayonnaya komissiya po ustanovleniyu i rassledovaniyu zlodzeyaniy nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov v Ravo-Russkom rayonye) headed by Maksim Sidorovich Gavrilenko, which conducted exhumation work in Rawa Ruska and the surrounding area between 24 and 30 September 1944. Its work culminated in the publication of a final report, the descriptive part of which contained information on the German occupation of the Kreis Rawa Ruska. The commission estimated the number of German victims in this area at 41,500. Among them were civilians, including Jews, as well as Soviet prisoners of war held in Stalag 325 in Rawa Ruska. For more, see *Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii* (State Archives of the Russian Federation in Moscow, hereinafter GARF), f. P-7021, op. 67, d. 78, Final Report of the Commission for the Investigation and Examination of Crimes Committed by German-Fascist Invaders in the Rawa Region, 24–30 September 1944, pp. 136–143 (for digital copies of the document, visit http://protecting-memory-ua.org/images/rava_ruska/historical_sources/136-143.pdf [accessed 24 October 2024]).

³ T. Berenstein, “Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej w dystrykcie Galicja (1941–1943),” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* 1 (1967), pp. 3–58.

which are currently within the borders of the Polish state, such as part of the Lubaczów County (the town and municipality of Lubaczów and Oleszyce, and the municipality of Horyniec) and Tomaszów County (the town and municipality of Lubycza Królewska). Particularly noteworthy is the first volume of Zygmunt Kubrak's publication entitled *Dzieje Lubaczowa. Lubaczów od czasów najdawniejszych do lipca 1944 r.* (The History of Lubaczów: From the Earliest Times to July 1944),⁴ in which the author devotes one of the chapters to the German occupation, including the destruction of the local Jewish community. The book also provides information about Rawa Ruska as the capital of the German occupation-era starosty. The author of the present article also addresses the subject of the extermination of the Jews of Lubaczów in two articles. The first concerns the activities of a Jewish survival group led by Edmund Łukawiecki, while the second discusses the fate of the *Volksdeutsche* Władysław Sereżyński and his son Roman, who took part in denouncing Jews and liquidating the ghetto in Lubaczów.⁵

Valuable additions to research on the extermination of Jews in the area which, during the German occupation, was an integral part of the Kreis Rawa Ruska and is now located within the borders of the Polish state, are provided by articles and testimonies published in the *Rocznik Lubaczowski*,⁶ and other periodicals⁷ and

⁴ Z. Kubrak, *Dzieje Lubaczowa. Lubaczów od czasów najdawniejszych do lipca 1944 r.*, vol. 1, Rzeszów, 2016.

⁵ See W. Hanus, "Działalność volksdeutschów Władysława Sereżyńskiego i jego syna Romana w świetle zachowanych akt procesu karnego z dekretu sierpniowego. Przyczynę do dziejów okupacji niemieckiej ziemi lubaczowskiej," *Polish-Jewish Studies* 3 (2022), pp. 133–165; W. Hanus, "Edmunda Łukawieckiego strategia przetrwania w lasach lubaczowskich i Puszczy Solskiej w latach wojny i okupacji," in *Człowiek twórcą historii*, vol. 4: *Spółczesność Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w XX w.*, eds. C. Kukło and W. Walczak, Białystok, 2024, pp. 321–351.

⁶ M. Kopf, "Tamten czas. Część V, Lubaczów. Rok 1942," *Rocznik Lubaczowski* 11–12 (2007), pp. 201–235; M. Kopf, "Tamten czas. Część VI, Lubaczów. Rok 1943," *Rocznik Lubaczowski* 13–14 (2008), pp. 343–365; E. Szajowski, "Tylko ziemia została ta sama. Lubaczów 1942–1943," *Rocznik Lubaczowski* 9–10 (2000), pp. 276–291; Z. Kubrak, "Holokaust w Oleszycach," *Rocznik Lubaczowski* 11–12 (2007), pp. 51–59; J. Bańbor, "Przewodnik po niemieckich źródłach i materiałach do historii ziemi lubaczowskiej podczas niemieckiej okupacji w latach 1939–1944 (wybór źródeł)," *Rocznik Lubaczowski* 13–14 (2008), pp. 205–303; P. Sygowski and A. Trzciński, "Żydzi lubaczowscy i ich cmentarz," *Rocznik Lubaczowski* 8 (1998), pp. 103–159.

⁷ See L. Botner, "Z życia lubaczowskiego podczas okupacji niemieckiej," ed. H. Olicka, in *Kalendarz Żydowski – Almanach 1992–1993*, Warsaw, 1992.

memoiristic literature.⁸ Equally important are works on the town and municipality of Lubycza Królewska.⁹ While these publications primarily examine the German occupation of Lubaczów, its surrounding areas, and Lubycza, comparing them with studies on Rawa Ruska enables a more comprehensive understanding of the Holocaust in the region under analysis.

Regarding foreign literature, it is worth noting encyclopaedias published in English and Russian – two focused on ghettos¹⁰ and one on the Holocaust in the USSR¹¹ – as well as works in German, Ukrainian, and Russian that explore the Holocaust within the territory of the Galicia District. The works of Jakub Honigsman,¹² Markus Roth,¹³ Patrik Desbois,¹⁴ and Dieter Pohl¹⁵ are particularly noteworthy.

The list also includes Ukrainian popular-historical regional publications detailing the history of Rawa Ruska and the extermination of its Jewish population.¹⁶ In comparison to Jakub Iszchułow's previously mentioned work, these publications offer a more detailed testimony of the Holocaust in the region under discussion, covering three deportation operations and the liquidation of the local ghetto. They also revise certain dates, events, and names, or enrich them with new informa-

⁸ E. Olbromski, *Nad Lubaczówką. Eseje – wspomnienia*, Marki, 2009; S. Lavee (Łukawiecki), *Oddział niezwykłych. Drużyna żydowskich partyzantów Armii Krajowej pod dowództwem Edmunda Łukawieckiego w latach 1941–1944*, Rzeszów, 2018; O. Regev, *A rzeka nadal płynie*, Lublin, 2014.

⁹ M. Koper, "Lubycza Królewska. Zagłada i próba upamiętnienia społeczności żydowskiej dawnego miasteczka," *Studia Żydowskie. Almanach* 2 (2) (2012), pp. 209–224; M. Koper, "Zapomniany sztetl – Lubycza Królewska. Śladami nieistniejącego miasteczka," in *Żydzi w Zamościu i na Zamojszczyźnie. Historia – kultura – literatura*, eds. W. Litwin, M. Szablowska-Zaremba, and S.J. Żurek, Lublin, 2012, pp. 233–253.

¹⁰ *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, eds. G.P. Megargee and M. Dean, vol. 2, part A, Bloomington–Indianapolis, 2012, pp. 818–821; *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos During the Holocaust*, vol. 2, eds. G. Miron and S. Shulhani, Jerusalem, 2009, pp. 648–650.

¹¹ *Kholokost na territorii SSSR. Entsiklopediya*, ed. I.A. Al'tman, Moskva, 2009. Page 832 of this volume features a piece on Rawa Ruska written by Aleksander Kruglov.

¹² Ya. Khonigsman, *Katastrofa yevreystva Zapadnoy Ukrainy. Yevrei Vostochnoy Galitsii, Zapadnoy Volyni, Bukoviny i Zakarpat'ya v 1933–1945 gg.*, L'viv, 1998.

¹³ M. Roth, *Herrenmenschen. Die deutschen Kreishauptleute im besetzten Polen – Karrierewege, Herrschaftspraxis und Nachgeschichte*, Göttingen–Wallstein, 2009.

¹⁴ P. Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets. A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, New York, 2008.

¹⁵ D. Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenvernichtung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944*, München, 1997.

¹⁶ See I. Bas and Ch. Lelyk, *Zhyttya ta zahybel' yevreys'koyi hromady (na prykladi mista Ravy-Rus'koyi)*, L'viv, 2013; P. Dolhanov, *Rava-Rus'ka. Zhyttya ta zahybel' yevreys'koyi hromady*, Kyiv, 2023.

tion – such as identifying individuals responsible for the crimes. With regard to Tatiana Berenstein's article and the data she compiled, these publications provide grounds for adjusting the estimated number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust within the Rawa Starosty. The literature on the subject is supplemented by archival sources, both published and unpublished. The first category includes the report *Rozwiązanie kwestii żydowskiej w dystrykcie Galicja* (The Solution of the Jewish Question in the Galicia District) by Fritz Katzmann,¹⁷ co-organiser of the extermination of Polish Jews in this area. This report stands out as one of the most representative German documents in which a high-ranking SS and police officer – directly responsible for the extermination of thousands – provides a detailed account of the crimes committed.¹⁸ The report also includes fragmentary details about the extermination of Jews in the region under study. Notably, it is supplemented with photographs taken at ghetto liquidation sites, several of which pertain to Rawa Ruska.

The second category of sources includes testimonies of Holocaust survivors from the Kreis Rawa Ruska. The testimonies of Abraham Schall and Wolf Sambol, written in German and held in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, are invaluable.¹⁹ The first describes in detail the Holocaust in Niemirów, the second in Rawa Ruska, including the liquidation of the local ghetto and all of the deportations from the town. The same archive contains a several-page diary by Zelda Ginzberg entitled “Jak ja przeżyłam okupację” (How I Survived the Occupation),²⁰ in which

¹⁷ See F. Katzmann, *Rozwiązanie kwestii żydowskiej w dystrykcie Galicja*, ed. A. Żbikowski, Warsaw, 2001.

¹⁸ Fritz Katzmann (1906–1957) served as commander of the SS and police in the Radom District from 1939 to 1941, and subsequently in the Galicia District beginning on 13 October 1941, where he oversaw the mass extermination of Jews. He was promoted on 30 January 1943 to the rank of SS-Gruppenführer and Lieutenant General of Police. From 20 April 1943, he held the position of senior SS and police commander in the Reichsgau Danzig-West Prussia. Following World War II, Katzmann evaded justice by assuming the false identity of Bruno Albrecht and settling in West Germany. He initially lived on the Baltic island of Fehmarn, near Württemberg, and later relocated to Griesheim near Darmstadt, where his family resided. He died in a local hospital in 1957. Two years prior to his death, he had confided his true identity to a nurse, who kept the information secret until after his passing (F. Katzmann, *Rozwiązanie kwestii żydowskiej*, pp. 5–11).

¹⁹ See *Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Warszawie* (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, hereinafter AŻIH), 301/4950, Minutes of the testimonies of Abraham Schall and Wolf Sambol, manuscript, 4 May 1945, pp. 1–11.

²⁰ AŻIH, 302/71, Zelda Ginzberg's Diary “Jak ja przeżyłam okupację 1941–1944,” manuscript, no date, pp. 1–5.

the author describes her struggle for life during the Holocaust in Rawa and the neighbouring Lubaczów, as well as a letter from November 1941 concerning the situation of the local Jewish community, written by the Judenrat in Rawa Ruska. This document is a valuable addition to the testimonies mentioned above.²¹

In turn, the Yad Vashem Institute Archives hold testimonies written in Polish by Franciszek Efraim Włoch,²² which, alongside Wolf Sambol's testimony, are crucial for showing the course of the extermination of the Jewish community in the area under discussion. The author was born in Żółkiew and spent the years of the German occupation in Rawa Ruska. He described in detail the months of the local ghetto's existence and the time after its destruction. The institute's holdings also include equally important testimonies by Lea (Leah, Lusia) Kramer (Rosenzweig),²³ Zelda Hinnenberg Mechlowicz,²⁴ Izaak Redlich,²⁵ and Józef Rygier.²⁶ The latter were written in Yiddish or English.

Worth noting is Kurt Lewin's published memoir, *Przeżyłem. Saga Świętego Jura* (I Survived: The Saga of Saint George), written in 1946 by the son of the Rabbi of Lwów.²⁷ This publication is a moving testimony to the tragedy of the Jewish population during the German occupation. Its author spent 1942 in Rawa Ruska.

The extermination of the Jewish population cannot be described without referring to books of memory dedicated to the Jewish community. We are particularly interested in the *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rawa Ruska ve-ha-seviva*, published in 1973 in Tel Aviv in Hebrew and Yiddish.²⁸ One of the chapters, 146 pages long, is devoted to the extermination of Jews, and includes texts by

²¹ AŻIH, 211/896, Letter from the Judenrat in Rawa Ruska to the Jewish Social Self-Help in Cracow regarding the situation of the Jewish community in Rawa Ruska, 24 November 1941.

²² Yad Vashem Archives (hereinafter YVA), O.3/1132, Testimony of Franciszek Efraim Włoch, 10 December 1958, pp. 1–8.

²³ YVA, O.3/1957, Testimony of Lea (Rosenzweig) Kramer, 1957, pp. 1–8.

²⁴ YVA, O.3/2148, Testimony of Zelda Hinnenberg Machlowicz, 20 April 1946, pp. 1–24.

²⁵ YVA, O.3/8327, Testimony of Icchak Redlich, November 1963, manuscript, pp. 1–16.

²⁶ YVA, O.33/9774, Testimony of Józef Rygier, April 2013, pp. 1–78.

²⁷ K.I. Lewin, *Przeżyłem. Saga Świętego Jura spisana w roku 1946 przez syna rabina Lwowa*, ed. B. To-ruńczyk, Warsaw, 2006.

²⁸ *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rawa Ruska ve-ha-seviva / Rawa Ruska memorial book*, eds. A.M. Ringel and I.Z. Rubin, Tel Aviv, 1973.

Chaim Spetzer,²⁹ Ben Zion Friedman,³⁰ Dan Berger,³¹ Ruth Haskell,³² Eliezer Unger,³³ Joshua Wallfuss,³⁴ and the previously mentioned Wolf Sambol³⁵ and Kurt Lewin,³⁶ rescued from the Holocaust in Rawa Ruska. In 2017, the book was translated into English.³⁷

A valuable supplement to the above book is the *Encyklopedia gmin żydowskich w Polsce* (Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities in Poland),³⁸ the second volume of which is devoted to Eastern Galicia. On pages 498–503, we find information about Rawa Ruska and its Jewish community in the interwar period and during World War II.

The *Encyklopedia*, like the Rawa Ruska memorial book, has been translated into English.

Lubaczów, which during the German occupation was the second largest town in the Kreis Rawa Ruska and had the status of a Landkommissariat, does not have its own “book of memory.” Alongside written testimonies and published memoirs, it is important to highlight the recordings and oral history interviews preserved by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection in Washington and the USC Shoah Foundation – Institute of Visual History and Education. The former houses audiovisual testimonies from Stanisław Młodziński and Ludwik Cencora, who witnessed the extermination of the Jewish community in Lubaczów.³⁹ The latter

²⁹ Ch. Spetzer, “Koniec mojego miasta Rawa Ruska,” in *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rawa Ruska*, pp. 379–395.

³⁰ B.Z. Friedman, “Przez co przeszliśmy,” in *ibid.*, pp. 313–318.

³¹ D. Berger, “Wspomnienia dla przyszłych pokoleń,” in *ibid.*, pp. 395–399.

³² R. Haskell, “Jak zostałam uratowana,” in *ibid.*, pp. 520–522.

³³ E. Unger, “Rawa Ruska i Bełżec na mapie miejsca zniszczenia,” in *ibid.*, pp. 227–230.

³⁴ J. Wallfuss, “Moja próba. Z dziennika 1939–1942,” in *ibid.*, pp. 230–247.

³⁵ W. Sambol, “Fragmenty pamiętnika,” in *ibid.*, pp. 310–312.

³⁶ K.I. Lewin, “Rawa Ruska pod nazistowską okupacją,” in *ibid.*, pp. 359–365.

³⁷ See *Rawa-Ruska*, eds. A.M. Ringel and J.T.H. Rubin, Mahwah, 2017, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Rawa-Ruska1/files/Rawa-Ruska.pdf> (accessed 23 October 2024).

³⁸ *Pinkas hakehillot Polin. Entsiklopedyah shel ha-yishuvim ha-Yehudiyim le-min hivasdam ve-`ad le-ahar Sho'at Milhemet ha-`olam ha-szheniyah*, eds. D. Dąbrowska, A. Wein, and A. Weiss, Jerusalem, 1980, pp. 498–503, https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol2_00498.html (accessed 24 October 2024).

³⁹ Oral history interview with Stanisław Młodziński, 10 March 2009, held in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereinafter USHMM), RG-50.488.0273, transcript: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn45093> (accessed 19 December 2024); Testimony of Ludwik Cencora, 24 August

contains oral history interviews with Jewish survivors from Rawa Ruska, including Hebrew-language⁴⁰ interviews with Leah (Lea) Rosenzweig (Lusia Kramer)⁴¹ and English-language interviews with Berney Berger,⁴² Edith Lewin Schickman,⁴³ Kurt Lewin,⁴⁴ and Leon Hirsch.⁴⁵

In preparing this article, the author consulted printed German documents⁴⁶ as well as archival materials from the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw⁴⁷

2009, USHMM, RG-50.488.0282, transcript: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn45103> (accessed 30 November 2024).

⁴⁰ The transcripts of the interviews have been translated into Ukrainian. See <http://protecting-memory-ua.org/rava-ruska/usnoistorychni-svidchennia> (accessed 24 October 2024).

⁴¹ Oral history interview with Leah Rosenzweig (Lusia Kramer) given to Ronit Gabay, 13 October 1997, Interview code: 34376, USC Shoah Foundation – Institute of Visual History and Education (hereinafter USC Shoah Foundation), <http://protecting-memory-ua.org/rava-ruska/usnoistorychni-svidchennia> (accessed 10 December 2024).

⁴² Oral history interview with Berney Berger given to Suzanne Roberts, 21 March 1996, Interview code: 13485, USC Shoah Foundation, <http://protecting-memory-ua.org/rava-ruska/usnoistorychni-svidchennia> (accessed 10 December 2024).

⁴³ Oral history interview with Edith Lewin Schickman given to Jacqueline Leone, 15 June 1995, Interview code: 03516-4, USC Shoah Foundation, <http://protecting-memory-ua.org/rava-ruska/usnoistorychni-svidchennia> (accessed 10 December 2024).

⁴⁴ Oral history interview with Kurt Lewin given to Naomi Rappaport, 30 January 1997, Interview code: 25423, USC Shoah Foundation, https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/25423?fr_om=search&seg=76 (accessed 24 October 2024).

⁴⁵ Oral history interview with Leon Hirsch given to Elsie Kisber, 13 November 2003, Interview code: 54740, USC Shoah Foundation, <https://refairesavie.museeholocauste.ca/eng/people-personnes/357/bio> (accessed 24 December 2024).

⁴⁶ See, among others, *Amtliches Gemeinde- und Dorfverzeichnis für das Generalgouvernement, Distrikt Galizien*, Krakau, 1943, <https://pbc.gda.pl/dlibra/publication/36451/edition/64122/content> (accessed 24 October 2024); *Amtliches Fernsprechbuch für das Generalgouvernement. Herausgeben von der Deutschen Post Osten, Ausgabe 1942*, Krakau, 1942, <https://bc.radom.pl/dlibra/publication/1269/edition/1230/content> (accessed 24 October 2024); *Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement* 67 (1941), <http://dlibra.umcs.lublin.pl/dlibra/plain-content?id=7863> (accessed 24 October 2024).

⁴⁷ *Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance, hereinafter AIPN), 2448/1481, Surveys conducted by the Chief Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes (hereinafter GKBZH) in Poland and the District Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes (hereinafter OKBZH) in Warsaw 1968–1972, Executions, vol. 2; AIPN, 2448/1483, Surveys conducted by the GKBZH in Poland and the OKBZH in Warsaw 1968–1972, Repression of the Jewish population before the establishment of the ghetto; AIPN, 2448/871, Surveys conducted by the GKBZH in Poland and the OKBZH in Warsaw 1968–1972. Surveys related to the Rzeszów Voivodeship, Lubaczów County – ghettos – Lubaczów County, Information about Hitlerite Crimes in Lubaczów; AIPN *Główna Komisja* (Chief Commission, hereinafter GK), 97/108, List of town and county starosts of the Galicia District; AIPN GK, 296/77, vols. 1–4, Files related to the case of Josef Grzimek.

and in Rzeszów,⁴⁸ State Archives of the Russian Federation,⁴⁹ Russian State Military Archives,⁵⁰ State Archives of the Lwów Region,⁵¹ Diocesan Archives in Zamość and the Archives of the Parish of St. Stanislaus in Lubaczów.⁵²

Drawing on testimonies, memoirs, and archival documentation, this article explores the extermination of the Jewish population in a provincial region that, after 1 August 1941, became part of the newly established administrative unit of Galicia under the designation Kreis Rawa Ruska. Situated near the German extermination camp in Bełżec, this area was among the first to be targeted during *Aktion Reinhardt*. Scholarly literature confirms that three deportation operations occurred in the area of Rawa Ruska in 1942: in March, July, and December. The last one was combined with the liquidation of the local ghetto. Existing publications have generally addressed the implementation of the criminal German *Aktion Reinhardt* in this region, along with references to the formation and activities of the local Judenrat and the conditions faced by the Jewish community under Ger-

⁴⁸ *Oddziałowe Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Rzeszowie* (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance, Branch in Rzeszów, hereinafter AIPN Rz), 191/198, Register of places and facts of Hitlerite crimes (Lubaczów County); AIPN Rz, 191/357, Surveys conducted by the GKBZH in Poland, executions (Lubaczów County); AIPN Rz, 191/358, Surveys conducted by the GKBZH in Poland, ghettos (Lubaczów County); AIPN Rz, 191/364, Surveys conducted by the GKBZH in Poland, repression of the Jewish population before the establishment of the ghetto (Lubaczów County); AIPN Rz, 191/911, Investigation files on crimes committed against Jews in the Lubaczów ghetto by German officers, Report on the proceedings conducted; AIPN Rz, 602/1153, Criminal legal assistance files concerning the GKBZH's appeal requesting the examination of witnesses in the case of criminal activity conducted by Ukrainian police officers during the Hitlerite occupation in Rawa Ruska; AIPN Rz, 353/38, Files related to the criminal case concerning Władysław and Roman Seredyński; AIPN Rz, 358/39, Files related to the criminal case concerning Władysław and Roman Seredyński.

⁴⁹ GARE, f. P-7021, op. 67, d. 78, Final report of the Regional Commission for the Determination and Investigation of Crimes Committed by German-Fascist Invaders in the Rawa Region, 24–30 September 1944, pp. 136–143 (for digital copies of the document, see http://protecting-memory-ua.org/images/rava_ruska/historical_sources/136-143.pdf [accessed 24 October 2024]).

⁵⁰ *Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy voennyi arkhiv* (Russian State Military Archives, hereinafter RGVA), f. 1323, op. 2, d. 292 b, Report of the 24th Police Regiment on operations against partisans, the extermination of Jews and Gypsies, etc., August–December 1942 (for digital copies of the document, see http://protecting-memory-ua.org/images/rava_ruska/historical_sources/1323-2-292b.pdf [accessed 24 October 2024]).

⁵¹ *Derzhavnyi arkhiv Lvivskoi oblasti* (State Archives of the Lwów Region, hereinafter DALO), f. R-35, op. 12, spr. 81, Governorate of the Galicia District. Department of Internal Affairs; DALO, f. R-28, op. 1, Reports on the activity of the Ortskomandantur in Rawa Ruska; DALO, f. R-24, op. 1, spr. 390, Starosty of the Lwów Region.

⁵² Chronicle of the Roman Catholic parish of St. Stanislaus in Lubaczów, manuscript.

man occupation. This article seeks to offer a more detailed and structured account of the extermination process, examining the involvement of German police units in the atrocities, as well as giving estimates of the number of victims and those who survived owing to help provided by both Polish and Ukrainian individuals. It slightly transcends the rigid thematic framework by also addressing broader issues such as the administrative division of the region in question and the condition of the Jewish community before World War II, as well as during the Soviet and German occupations. Without examining these aspects, it becomes difficult to grasp the distinctive character of the area and to accurately reconstruct the process of extermination of the local Jewish population.

General statistical data on Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Rawa Ruska are also relevant to the research topic. It should be emphasised that this information needs to be supplemented and corrected. We know much more about the Jewish community and the Holocaust in the areas within the borders of the present-day Polish state, namely Lubaczów and Lubycza Królewska, which during the German occupation were an integral part of the discussed starosty, than about the Holocaust on the Ukrainian side of the border.

The text was written as part of research on Polish aid to the Jewish community and the Holocaust in the eastern part of the former Lwów Voivodship.

Population and Territory in the Interwar Period

Before the war, the Rawa County comprised a total of eleven rural municipalities (Bełzec, Bruckenthal, Hujcze, Magierów, Lubycza Królewska, Potylicz, Siedliska, Tarnoszyn, Wierzbica, Wróblaczyn, and Kamionka Wołoska) and three urban municipalities (Niemirów, Rawa Ruska, and Uhnów).⁵³ The county covered an area of 1,400.72 sq. km, which made it the fourth-largest in the former Lwów Voivodeship. It had a total population of 90,480.⁵⁴ The majority of the population

⁵³ "Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych z dnia 14 lipca 1934 r. o podziale powiatu rawskiego w województwie lwowskim na gminy wiejskie [Regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs of 14 July 1934 on the division of the Rawa County in the Lwów Voivodeship into rural municipalities]," *Dziennik Ustaw* 1934, no. 64, item 550.

⁵⁴ G. Hryciuk and J. Stoćkyj, *Studia nad demografią historyczną i sytuacją religijną Ukrainy*, Lublin, 2000, p. 67; W. Wierzbieniec, *Żydzi w województwie lwowskim w okresie międzywojennym*, Rzeszów, 2003, p. 25.

was Ukrainian, which, if we take into account the language criterion, accounted for 67.28 per cent of the total population, or 60,880 people. These figures were even higher when religion was considered, with 68.94 per cent and 62,380 people, respectively. The second largest ethnic group were Poles, who, according to religious criteria, accounted for 22.43 per cent (20,290 people), and 18.42 per cent (16,670 people) according to language. The share of the Jewish community in the total population of the Rawa County in the interwar period ranged from 9.00 to 10.96 per cent, that is 8,146–9,918 people. The difference was also due to the criteria used (religion or language). The smallest community in the area in question was the German Evangelicals, which numbered 858 people in total, or 0.95 per cent according to the language criterion and 402 people (0.44 per cent) according to religion.⁵⁵

Although Jews were the third largest nationality in the county, they constituted the majority of the population in Rawa Ruska (56 per cent of the total, or 5,688 people). This was not an isolated case; in other cities of the Second Polish Republic, the Jewish population, due to its professional and social structure, was primarily associated with the urban environment.⁵⁶ Before the outbreak of World War II, Rawa Ruska was an important provincial economic and cultural centre. It owed its character to the railway lines running through the town, which connected it with Jarosław in 1857 and with Sokal a year later. During World War I, the Austro-Hungarian army built the strategically important Rawa Ruska – Zawada – Rejowiec line, which eventually enabled a direct rail connection between Lwów and Warsaw. Rawa was a transfer station on this route. The construction of the railway gave impetus to the creation of prosperous industrial enterprises in the town, the largest of which was a Belgian factory producing railway sleepers and bricks, built in 1929.⁵⁷

The Jewish community, which had inhabited the district since at least the mid-17th century, was mainly engaged in retail and wholesale trade, crafts, and transport. In the 1920s, the main occupations of the local Jews in Rawa Ruska were

⁵⁵ G. Hryciuk and J. Stočkyj, *Studia nad demografią historyczną*, pp. 67–69.

⁵⁶ W. Wierzbieniec, *Żydzi w województwie lwowskim*, p. 70.

⁵⁷ V. Butrym, “Stalag 325 w Rawie Ruskiej obiektem „czarnej” turystyki,” BA thesis, State School of Higher Education in Zamość, Zamość, 2017, p. 5.

itinerant trade and grain trade, as well as running small businesses and enterprises. A few were involved in agriculture. Still others, unable to find their place in the life of a provincial town, decided to emigrate to New York, where the Jewish colony from Rawa established a very prosperous emigrant organisation called *Merchaot Hewrat Bnai Lewi Icchak – Anszej Rawa Ruska*.⁵⁸

Emigration indicated that the financial situation of much of Rawa's Jewish community was less stable than commonly assumed. A significant number of Jewish residents lived in poverty and depended on aid from charitable organisations – most notably the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint), which was dedicated to supporting Jews across Europe in the aftermath of World War I. With assistance from the Joint and backing from Polish authorities, four soup kitchens were established in the town, providing free meals. Many Jewish inhabitants of Rawa, including children, also received supplementary food and clothing through the Joint's efforts.⁵⁹

In Rawa Ruska, there was a Jewish cooperative bank established in 1910, which granted loans to entrepreneurs, merchants, craftsmen, and farmers, as well as a well-developed furriers' cooperative. Other important enterprises included an artistic factory producing stone tableware and selling its products throughout the Russian Empire, founded by Shammaja Baumwal,⁶⁰ and an oil factory known throughout Galicia, owned by Herszel Monk. The percentage of Jews in the liberal professions was high. Twelve doctors were practising in Rawa, half of whom were Jews and the other half were Poles.⁶¹

In the interwar period, Icchak Nachum Twerski, son-in-law of the Bełżec *tzaddik*, was the rabbi in Rawa. There were four synagogues and prayer houses in the town. The political life of local Jews was diverse and included several main currents: ultra-Orthodox, Zionist, and socialist. The first was represented by *Aguda Israel*, led by Josef Mendel, one of the initiators of the establishment of a Jewish cooperative bank. From 1924, Zionist parties centred around *Hitachdut* and *Mizrach* were also active in the town, as well as numerous youth organisations: *Akiwa*,

⁵⁸ *Pinkas hakehillot Polin*, pp. 498–503.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Pinkas hakehillot Polin*, pp. 498–503.

⁶¹ *Rocznik Lekarski Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (1938), pp. 518–519.

Betar, and Gordonia, and later also Ha-Szomer Ha-Cair and Ha-Noar Ha-Cijoni. In the 1930s, they were joined by the left-wing socialist General Jewish Workers' Union in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (Bund). In total, several political groups competed with each other in Rawa Ruska, offering programmes based on tradition, Zionism, and assimilation.

Parties supported various Jewish organisations, including a theatre club and a library of rabbinical works. Other organisations operating in the town included the General Zionist Cultural Association, the Craftsmen's Association, the "Jad Charuzim" Credit Society, the Merchants' and Farmers' Union, the "Hapoel" Sports Association, as well as two Jewish public and supplementary schools – the orthodox Bejs Jakow school for girls and a Hebrew language school, which also operated a kindergarten from 1931.⁶²

In the 1928 elections to the Town Council in Rawa, Jews elected 22 representatives, Poles 20, and Ukrainians 6. In the next elections in 1933, the Jewish community increased its representation to 24 councillors. Although they constituted the majority in the town and on the council, they never managed to elect a Jewish mayor.⁶³

In the interwar period, Rawa Ruska was an example of a town where relations between the Polish and Jewish populations were complex. Both communities lived side by side and cooperated in many areas of everyday life. Relations between them were generally good, with the Jewish community actively participating in economic and cultural life, developing trade, crafts, and other areas. At the same time, there were cultural, religious, and social differences which, combined with the nationwide wave of anti-Semitism that intensified in the 1930s, led to increased tensions and acts of hostility towards Jews.⁶⁴

The Outbreak of World War II and the Soviet Occupation

In September 1939, Rawa Ruska found itself within the defensive perimeter of Lwów. On 14 September, after two weeks of defensive fighting, it was captured by German armoured and motorised units of the XXII Panzer Corps. In the first few

⁶² *Pinkas hakehillot Polin*, pp. 498–503.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

days after the capture of the city, the Germans introduced restrictions on movement and a curfew. A local Jew was shot for failing to comply with the curfew. The occupiers also broke into the local synagogue, where they desecrated Torah scrolls.⁶⁵

The German occupation of Rawa County lasted less than two weeks. Under the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and subsequent border corrections, German troops withdrew from the town and county on 24 September and ceded the area to the Red Army. The local Jews welcomed this with relief, but soon the changes introduced by the new occupiers also affected them. The Soviets dissolved Jewish organisations and social institutions operating in the town. In addition, following their nationalisation policy, they took over many Jewish businesses. The imposition of high taxes led to the closure of some synagogues.⁶⁶ During the two-year Soviet occupation of Rawa Ruska, the town underwent intense Sovietisation, accompanied by widespread repression, arrests, and deportations that targeted both Poles and Jews.

On 22 June 1941, without prior declaration of war, German troops attacked the USSR. Five days later, units of the Wehrmacht, specifically the 71st Infantry Division, entered Rawa. At that time, the town had a population of 11,146, of which over 7,000 (approximately 62 per cent) were Jews. As a result of the war, over 100 buildings were destroyed, and many others were seriously damaged. Around 400 Jewish families lost all their possessions.⁶⁷ Some residents welcomed the arrival of the German troops, and Ukrainians erected triumphal gates in the town.⁶⁸

German Occupation Authorities and the Indirect Extermination of Jews

Territories occupied by the Soviets after 17 September 1939 were taken over by Germany in June 1941.⁶⁹ On 1 August 1941, the areas of the former voivodeships of Lwów, Stanisławów, and Tarnopol were incorporated into the newly created Galicia

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ AŻIH, 211/896, Letter from the Judenrat in Rawa Ruska to the Jewish Social Self-Help in Cracow regarding the situation of the Jewish community in Rawa Ruska, 24 November 1941, p. 1.

⁶⁸ *Als Panzerjäger im Fronteinsatz* (DVD), dir. K. Höffkes, 2008.

⁶⁹ W. Bonusiak, *Polska podczas II wojny światowej*, Rzeszów, 1999, p. 173.

District. On 15 September 1941, a new administrative division was introduced, which remained in force during the General Governorate.⁷⁰ The previous Soviet oblasts (regions) and rayons (districts) were replaced by occupation-era starosties (*Kreishauptmannschaft*), covering the area of several pre-war counties.

The Rawa Ruska rayon, which until recently was an integral part of the USSR, under the new German administrative division, became the seat of a starosty. At the beginning of the occupation, power in the city was taken over by the military 403 Local Command (*Ortskommandantur*), and in the following days, rear units entered Rawa Ruska, including the 56th Reserve Grenadier Regiment and the 87th Communications Company, with the aim of organising support for the front divisions. The newly created Kreis Rawa Ruska covered an area of 2,547 sq. km and had a population of 142,000.⁷¹ The dominant nationality was Ukrainian, who constituted 71 per cent of the total population (100,980 people), followed by Poles – 18.9 per cent (26,853 people), Jews – 8.7 per cent (12,460), and Germans (*Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche*) – 1 per cent (1,352 people).⁷²

The increase in the area and number of inhabitants was due to the fact that the Kreis Rawa Ruska was enlarged by parts of the territory that had previously been under Soviet occupation, specifically a part of the municipalities of Niemirów and Uhnów, as well as a significant portion of the former Lubaczów County, including the town of Lubaczów.⁷³ After the administrative changes, the Kreis Rawa Ruska comprised sixteen municipalities: Bruckenthal, Dobrosin, Horyniec, Krechów, Krowica Hołodowska, Lubaczów, Lubaczów (the town), Lubycza Królewska, Magierów, Niemirów, Oleszyce, Potylicz, Rawa Ruska (the town), Rawa Ruska, Uhnów and Wierzbiany.⁷⁴

Hans-Walter Zinser took on the role of Starost of Rawa, but in February 1942, Gerhard Hager succeeded him and remained in the position until mid-July 1944.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ G. Hryciuk, *Przemiany narodowościowe i ludnościowe w Galicji Wschodniej i na Wołyniu w latach, 1931–1948*, Toruń, 2005, p. 41.

⁷¹ State as of August 1942; DALO, f. R-24, op. 1, spr. 258, Starosty of the Lwów District. Department of Internal Affairs. Division of the population and aid. Elderly population statistics by locality. August 1942 – November 1943, p. 11.

⁷² State as of 15 September 1942; G. Hryciuk and J. Stoćkyj, *Studia nad demografią historyczną*, p. 87.

⁷³ G. Hryciuk, *Przemiany narodowościowe i ludnościowe*, p. 41.

⁷⁴ *Amtliches Gemeinde und Dorfverzeichnis*, pp. 12–13.

⁷⁵ M. Roth, *Herrenmenschen*, pp. 450, 512.

The position of a town commissioner (*Stadtkommissar*) was also created – it was held by N. Laski. The police apparatus within the starosty comprised: a gendarmerie platoon (*Gendarmerie Zug*) based in Rawa Ruska, which had two gendarmerie stations in Rawa Ruska and Lubaczów; a Criminal Police Station (*Kriminalpolizei*, abbreviated Kripo) based in Rawa Ruska, reporting to the Police and Security Service (*Sicherheitspolizei – Aussendienststelle*) in Sokal under the command of Oswald Heyduk,⁷⁶ and the stations of the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police (*Ukrainische Hilfspolizei*) located in Rawa Ruska and all municipalities. During the spring of 1942, a Gestapo station with several personnel was established in the town under the command of Helmut Späth.⁷⁷

Upon entering Rawa, the Germans once again destroyed the synagogue and desecrated the Torah scrolls.⁷⁸ A similar situation occurred in Oleszyce. Beginning on 7 August 1941, anti-Jewish laws previously enforced in the General Governorate were extended to the Galicia District. Among the first actions taken by the German occupation authorities in Rawa Ruska was the imposition of a seven-million-zloty levy on the Jewish population. Jews were prohibited from leaving the city or walking on the sidewalks, required to wear armbands bearing the Star of David on their left forearm, and compelled to work if they were between the ages of 16 and 60. Many, subjected to humiliation, were forced to dismantle the old Jewish cemetery in the city centre. The Germans ordered its destruction, levelled the site, and constructed a road using stones from the shattered matzevot.⁷⁹ Similar activities were undertaken in Lubaczów, the second-largest town in the starosty, where authorities imposed a curfew and prohibited gatherings exceeding three individuals. Acts of terror also took place, including one on 29 June 1941 in Niemirów, where eight people lost their lives. In Rawa itself, assaults and beatings were frequent events.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ D. Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenvernichtung*, p. 415.

⁷⁷ W. Hanus, “Działalność volksdeutschów,” p. 141.

⁷⁸ R.S. Huberband, “Z książki „Kiddush HaShem,” in *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rawa Ruska*, p. 474.

⁷⁹ K.I. Lewin, *Przeżyłem*, p. 98; Oral history interview of Leah Rosenzweig (Lusia Kramer) given to Ronit Gabay, 13 October 1997, Interview code: 34376, USC Shoah Foundation, <http://protecting-memories-ua.org/rava-ruska/usnoistorychni-svidchennia> (accessed 19 November 2024).

⁸⁰ A. Kruglov and M. Dean, “Rawa Ruska,” in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*.

Anti-Jewish and anti-Polish activities in the Kreis Rawa Ruska escalated during July and August 1941. It was during this period that the first mass executions occurred – notably in the Wołkowica forest, south of Rawa. This was where approximately 100 Jews, accused of Soviet collaboration and identified from precompiled lists, were shot by the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police. Further executions were carried out in Niemirów in mid-July, and on 11, 14, and 16 August in the Niwki forest, located 3 km from Lubaczów's center, where around 40 individuals, predominantly Poles, were killed.⁸¹

In July 1941, a fourteen-member Jewish Council (Judenrat) was established in Rawa Ruska, headed by Szymon Brawerman. In April 1942, he was replaced by N. Schweitzer,⁸² who, according to Kurt Isaak Lewin, incited the Germans against the Judenrat and the Jews of Rawa. "The occupiers watched this with malicious satisfaction, deliberately setting the parties involved against each other. They were delighted with Schweitzer and his actions."⁸³ Dr. Josef Mendel, a well-regarded physician in the town, stood in opposition to Schweitzer, consistently challenging both the occupiers and the chairman of the Jewish Council. His resistance led to his arrest, and he eventually died while in custody.⁸⁴

Rawa Ruska had two functioning Judenrats – one at the municipal level and another at the county level. The county council reported to the Jewish Council established in Lubaczów, led by Józef Osterman, and to the one in Niemirów, headed by Izrael Schall.⁸⁵ These councils, instituted by the Germans as administrative instruments to manage the Jewish population, were tasked with overseeing ghetto life, distributing food, and implementing the orders of the occupying authorities. By November 1941, of the more than 12,000 Jews residing in the Kreis Rawa Ruska, approximately 7,400 were concentrated in the county capital. A significant portion of the population lived in severe poverty, facing hunger, cold, and illness. Assistance was provided by the Jewish Social Self-Help (*Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna*, ŻSS), an organisation established with German approval

⁸¹ T. Bereza, "Zapomniane ofiary „Siczy”. Las Niwki koło Lubaczowa, lato 1941 roku," *Gazeta Horyniecka* 47 (2017).

⁸² Y. Walfus, "Moja próba," p. 233.

⁸³ K.I. Lewin, *Przeżyłem*, p. 97.

⁸⁴ *Pinkas hakehillot Polin*, pp. 498–503.

⁸⁵ YVA, O.3/8327, Testimony of Icchak Redlich, November 1963, manuscript, pp. 1–16.

in May 1940. ŻSS operated through local branches, including the Jewish County Welfare Committee (*Żydowski Komitet Opiekuńczy Powiatowy*, ŻKOP) in Rawa Ruska, chaired by Mojżesz Wattenberg, and the ŻSS Delegation in Lubaczów, led by Major Schnitzer.⁸⁶

The organisation sought to provide social care for the Jewish population, organised soup kitchens, provided material support, and offered opportunities to earn a living. Funds came from subsidies from the occupation authorities, aid from foreign Jewish organisations, voluntary collections, and tax revenues paid by Jews. The activities of the ŻKOP and its delegations in the Kreis Rawa Ruska area focused mainly on aiding children and feeding the population in organised soup kitchens. The scope of the measures taken only partially met social needs.⁸⁷

Aktion Reinhardt

In late September and early October 1941, the highest-ranking Nazi German authorities resolved to carry out the physical extermination of Jews residing in the General Governorate. It is possible that, during this period, the order to construct the first extermination facility with permanent gas chambers was also issued.⁸⁸ The location of the camp was not chosen at random. Bełżec was an integral part of the Rawa County in the interwar period, and during the German occupation it first belonged to the Kreis Tomaszów Lubelski and, later from April 1940 to the Kreis Zamość. The village, located at the junction of the Lublin, Cracow, and Galicia districts, was ideally connected to both Lublin and Lwów. Most likely, the first people to be killed by gas in this place were a group of about 150 Jewish forced labourers from Lubycza Królewska working on the construction of the camp.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ "Pismo Wydziału Spraw Ogólnych i Organizacyjnych Prezydium ŻSS w Krakowie do Delegatury ŻSS w Lubaczowie, 17 IV, 1942 r., AŻIH, 211/642," ed. W. Wierzbieniec, in *Wojna i pamięć. Przewodnik po miejscach pamięci narodowej na terenie powiatu lubaczowskiego. Materiały z sympozjum naukowego zorganizowanego w dniu 4 września 2009 r. w 70. rocznicę wybuchu II wojny światowej w Muzeum Kresów w Lubaczowie*, eds. S.P. Makara, B. Woch, and J. Mazur, Lubaczów, 2009 (*Biblioteka Muzeum Kresów w Lubaczowie*, vol. 4), pp. 96–98.

⁸⁷ W. Wierzbieniec, "Formy szukania pomocy i możliwości egzystencji przez Żydów w okresie Holokaustu na terenie obecnego powiatu lubaczowskiego – wybrane aspekty," in *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁸⁸ R. Kuwałek, *Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu*, Lublin, 2010, p. 30.

⁸⁹ M. Koper, "Lubycza Królewska," p. 211; R. Kuwałek, *Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu*, p. 48; R. Kuwałek, "Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu, 1941–1943," in *Bełżec przez dzieje*, ed. A. Urbański, Lublin, 2008, p. 145.

The operation to eliminate the Jewish population in the General Governorate and the Bezirk Białystok was designated by the code name “Reinhardt.”⁹⁰ Its primary objective was the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Jews to ghettos and camps, followed by their physical extermination. The operation also aimed to exploit Jewish labour and confiscate their property for use by the German authorities.⁹¹ The extermination of Jews in the General Governorate began in March 1942. In the first phase, deportations took place in Mielec, Lublin, and Łwów, and then on 19 March also in Rawa Ruska. Units of the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS*, abbreviated SD) from Sokal arrived in the latter town. Approximately 1,000 Jews were arrested, placed in railway wagons and transported to the German extermination camp in Bełżec. According to the testimony of the witness Wolf Sambol, the SD units, supported by the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police, gathered in a square near the Kripo building. “No one tried to escape, everything went smoothly, without shooting or fighting; no one knew what awaited them. About 1,000 Jews were gathered, mainly men and elderly women. On the same day, they were loaded into wagons, a hundred or more at a time, and transported to Bełżec.”⁹²

Crammed into trains, without water or food, Jews lost consciousness, and some died before reaching the destination. With the start of mass murders in the Bełżec extermination camp, Rawa Ruska became an important transport hub. Transports from the Galicia and Cracow districts, as well as from other European countries, including Austria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Hungary, passed through it, carrying Jews to the gas chambers and crematoria. According to eyewitness testimonies, these transports could consist of as many as 50–60 wagons.⁹³ As Franciszek

⁹⁰ The name referred to the surname of the head of the RSHA and protector of Bohemia and Moravia, Reinhard Heydrich, who was killed in an assassination carried out by the Czech resistance in May 1942 as part of Operation “Anthropoid” (for more, see B. Szyrowski, *Czechosłowackie grupy SOE i zamach na Heydricha HHHH*, Warsaw, 2020).

⁹¹ R. Kuwałek, *Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu*, p. 30.

⁹² AŻIH, 301/4950, Minutes of the testimony of Wolf Sambol, a Jewish resident, regarding the persecution and murder of the Jewish population in the town of Rawa Ruska during the German occupation, 4 May 1945, pp. 4–5.

⁹³ YVA, O.3/1132, Testimony of Franciszek Efraim Włoch, 10 December 1958, pp. 2–3. Lea Kramer, in turn, estimates the number of wagons passing through Rawa Ruska at 50–120 (see YVA, O.3/1957, Testimony of Lea [Rosenzweig] Kramer, 1957, p. 6). In his book on the Bełżec extermination camp, Robert Kuwałek included a passage from the testimony of train driver Michał Kuśmierczyk: “At first,

Efraim Włoch recalled, each train arriving in Rawa had at least a half-hour break at the station, waiting for a phone call from Bełżec confirming that the camp was ready to receive the next transport. The information was received by a special German officer stationed at the station who was in direct contact with the camp command.⁹⁴

The transport that left Rawa Ruska for Bełżec on 19 March was therefore one of the first to be sent to this German extermination centre. The choice of location was not accidental. According to the plans for *Aktion Reinhardt*, deportations in the Galicia District were to begin in towns located along the main Lwów–Bełżec route. Rawa Ruska, as a transport hub located close to the extermination camp in Bełżec, played an important role.

During the early stage of *Aktion Reinhardt*, trains passing through Rawa were composed of sealed wagons with windows that were not barred. According to Franciszek Efraim Włoch, communication with those inside the wagons was possible. “Jews working at the station warned them that a death camp was located twenty kilometres away. However, the people in the wagons did not believe it, insisting that the Germans were taking them for forced labour.”⁹⁵

Some people, aware of the imminent danger, made dramatic attempts to escape from the train after it left the Rawa station for Bełżec. These were extremely perilous endeavours, as the last wagon was guarded by soldiers who fired at escapees. Those who jumped from the moving train were often injured. The wounded either returned to the town or hid in the surrounding forests. Realising what was happening, the Germans began placing shooters on the roofs of the wagons as well.⁹⁶

two transports arrived daily, but this later increased to three. Sometimes it happened that four or even five transports arrived. During that period, many wagons were empty. Typically, each wagon carried [...] 100 to 120 people, and a transport consisted of 40 to 60 freight wagons. The initial transports were densely packed with people, and there were no empty wagons. I recall asking the traffic officials at the Bełżec station, out of curiosity, how many Jews were in a transport. I was told 1,500 on one occasion, and 1,800 on another.” According to Kuwałek, the number of wagons mentioned by Kuśmierczyk and the reference to empty wagons pertain to the second phase of Bełżec’s operation, when transports became more frequent and escapes from the trains occurred relatively often. It is likely that in March and April 1942, aside from the notably large transports, the trains sent to Bełżec did not typically consist of such a high number of wagons (see R. Kuwałek, *Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu*, p. 104).

⁹⁴ YVA, O.3/1132, Testimony of Franciszek Efraim Włoch, 10 December 1958, p. 3

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹⁶ K.I. Lewin, *Przeżyłem*, p. 100; E. Unger, “Rawa Ruska i Bełżec,” p. 227; E. Unger, “Rawa-Rus’ka i Belzhets’ na karti mistis’ znyshchennya,” http://protecting-memory-ua.org/images/rava_ruska/memoirs/Rava-Ruska-Yiddish-Parts.pdf (accessed 18 December 2024).

Zelda Ginzberg was one of the few who managed to escape from the train headed to Bełżec. She later recounted: “When the train began moving and had travelled eight kilometres from Rawa, five others and I forced open the wagon door and jumped out. As I hit the ground, blood poured from my head and legs. They were shooting at us. After an hour [...] I reached a certain Gentile. I told her I was Catholic, and she took me in.”⁹⁷

From autumn 1942, transports passing through Rawa were already barred. In the testimony of Franciszek Efraim Włoch, we can read:

[...] the guards were no longer only at the end of the train, but also on the tender⁹⁸ behind the locomotive. Transports in wagons filled with lime also began to arrive. Since winter, the people were naked and looked like skeletons. In the empty carriages returning from Bełżec via Rawa, we found holes gnawed with teeth, through which people had thrown their children or tried to jump out themselves. Every day, several corpses of such desperate people were found on the tracks.⁹⁹

The second extermination action in Rawa Ruska took place on 27 July 1942. It was carried out by two companies from Lwów, specifically the German 133rd Police Battalion and the 60th Company of the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police, supported by a local platoon of German military police. On that day, approximately 2,000 Jews were deported to Bełżec. According to Wolf Sambol’s testimony, when German units arrived in Rawa, the population panicked and began seeking shelter.

The town seemed deserted – no Jews could be found. Early in the morning of 27 July, the Gestapo forced the Judenrat to assist the Jewish police and a group (one Gestapo officer, one Jew, and one Ukrainian policeman) who began rounding up Jews in their homes and shelters. People were rounded up regardless of age or gender, including the sick and helpless. The number of detainees reached

⁹⁷ AŻIH, 302/71, Diary of Zelda Ginzberg titled “Jak ja przeżyłam okupację 1941–1944,” manuscript, no date, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Tender – a specially designed vehicle used to transport coal and water for a steam locomotive.

⁹⁹ YVA, O.3/1132, Testimony of Franciszek Efraim Włoch, 10 December 1958, p. 5.

2,000 [...]. The operation differed from the previous one in that the Ukrainians gathered in the square used physical force mercilessly, even while escorting people to the railway station.¹⁰⁰ The final journey was accompanied by abuse, lamentation, and the cries of children, women, and men.¹⁰¹ After this operation, people in the town began talking about the extermination of the Jewish people, but no one knew the details.¹⁰²

The second deportation in Rawa occurred simultaneously with a similar operation conducted by the German occupiers in the nearby town of Niemirów. Before the war, Niemirów was home to around 2,500 Jews. During the Holocaust, the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police station – led by N. Pelach – played a central role in the town's persecution. Eyewitness Abraham Schall recalled that *Aktion Reinhardt* began there on 15 July, noting that “no one knew or sensed the approaching danger.” At dawn, German military police and SD units, assisted by Ukrainian police forces, entered the town and rounded up approximately 800 Jews, primarily the elderly, women, and children. While some managed to hide or escape into the forest, others – resigned to their fate – reported voluntarily. The sick and those who attempted to flee were executed on the spot.¹⁰³ Those who were captured were transported by trucks to Rawa, from where, on 27 July, they were deported together with others to the extermination camp in Bełżec. The houses and apartments left behind by the Jews of Niemirów were looted by the German military police, the Ukrainian police, and the local population.¹⁰⁴

Abraham Schall, quoted above, and his family were among those who managed to escape. After two days, they returned to the town with others. In his testimony, we read:

¹⁰⁰ AŻIH, 301/4950, Minutes of the testimony of Wolf Sambol, a Jewish resident, regarding the persecution and murder of the Jewish population in the town of Rawa Ruska during the German occupation, 4 May 1945, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ AIPN Rz. 602/1153, Criminal legal assistance files concerning the GKBZH's appeal requesting the examination of witnesses in the case of criminal activity conducted by Ukrainian policemen during the Hitlerite occupation in Rawa Ruska, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Leon Góra, 2 July 1980, fol. 3.

¹⁰² AŻIH, 301/4950, Minutes of the testimony of Wolf Sambol, a Jewish resident, regarding the persecution and murder of the Jewish population in the town of Rawa Ruska during the German occupation, 4 May 1945, p. 5; W. Sambol, “Fragmenty pamiętnika,” in *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rawa Ruska*, pp. 463–464.

¹⁰³ AŻIH, 301/4950, Minutes of the testimony of Abraham Schall, manuscript, 4 May 1945, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

However, we did not live peacefully. The first action was very unexpected, so we expected that another one could come at any moment. [...] We lived in such panic until September 1942. At the end of that month, the local Judenrat received an order to resettle all Jews from Niemirów to Rawa Ruska [...]. We reached our destination in the evening. At the same time, Jews from other towns in the Kreis, including Lubycza Królewska, Magierów, Potylicz and Uhnów, also arrived in Rawa. Upon arrival, everyone had to find accommodation on one of the three streets designated for the ghetto [...]. My family and I were lucky because we found accommodation with friends. However, there were also those who had no place to live and were forced to live on the streets.¹⁰⁵

Following the completion of the second operation, the Germans began establishing a ghetto in Rawa. It lacked electricity, but it remained open. Within its confines, there were only two wells available. The ghetto spanned three streets located in the city's most impoverished area.¹⁰⁶ In late September and early October 1942, Jews from surrounding towns – including Magierów, Niemirów, Potylicz, Lubycza Królewska,¹⁰⁷ and Uhnów – were forcibly crowded into the ghetto. The number of people imprisoned in the ghetto rose to 10,000. There were 20–30 Jews per room.

The population, confined to a severely overcrowded area and deprived of elementary sanitary conditions, food, water, clothing, and medical care, experienced a devastating typhus outbreak that claimed approximately 20 lives daily. Alongside the deportations to extermination camps, German forces conducted systematic pacifications and mass executions. During just October and November of 1942, several hundred individuals were killed in the town and its surrounding areas.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ At present, a part of L'viv'ska, Vasyl Stefanyk, and Mykhaylo Drakhomanov Streets.

¹⁰⁷ J. Peter, "Za trzy konie," in *Tomaszowskie za okupacji*, 2nd edn, Tomaszów Lubelski, 2019, pp. 90–94; R. Kuwałek, *Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu*, p. 63; M. Koper, "Lubycza Królewska," pp. 212–216; Y. Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. The Operation Reinhard Death Camps*, Bloomington–Indianapolis, 1999, p. 383.

¹⁰⁸ These events included several executions and deportations carried out in late 1942: On 3 October, 29 people who had escaped from transports to Bełżec were executed near Rawa Ruska; on 4 October, during a pacification operation in Lubycza Królewska and the village of Kniazie, 48 people were killed – 16 Poles and 32 Ukrainians. Additionally, approximately 300 Jews from Lubycza Królewska were deported to the extermination camp in Bełżec and murdered there; between 15 and 21 November, 56 people were executed in the Rawa Ruska area; from 29 November to 5 December, another 60 individuals were

On 10 October 1942, under the direction of SS Untersturmführer Helmut Späth, head of the Gestapo in Rawa Ruska, a ghetto was established in Lubaczów, located within the Kreis Rawa Ruska. The ghetto was divided into two distinct sections. The first encompassed the central area of the town, stretching from the intersection of the pre-war Mickiewiczza and Piłsudskiego Streets to the junctions of Rynek and Konery, Kościuszki and Świętej Anny, Kościuszki and Piłsudskiego, and Kościuszki and Tartaczna Streets. Until mid-November 1942, this section functioned as a semi-open zone. Barbed wire fencing, mounted on wooden poles, was installed only at select intersections – specifically where Kościuszki, Piłsudskiego, Świętej Anny, Konery, and Mickiewiczza Streets converged.¹⁰⁹ The tenement houses lining the northern edge of the market square, their entrances sealed with boards, effectively served as a ghetto wall. Marian Kopf explained that the absence of a physical fence around the ghetto stemmed from the unique layout of the area – Jewish buildings were dispersed and scattered in many places among Aryan buildings.¹¹⁰

The second section, significantly smaller in size, was located just behind the northern part of Kościuszki Street and included a building constructed during the Soviet occupation.¹¹¹ According to a GKBZH survey, between 6,000 and 7,000 Jews were placed in the Łańcut-Rzeszów ghetto.¹¹² They were brought from across the entire Landkommissariat region,¹¹³ as well as from Niemirów and Potylicz. In October 1942, about 2,000 Jews were deported to the extermination centre in Bełżec, and some were also sent to nearby labour camps in Cieszanów, Dzików Stary, and Płazów. In November, around 2,000 Jews from the rural municipalities of Oleszyce, Potylicz, and Niemirów were brought in to replace them.

killed in the same vicinity. See “Rawa Ruska – akcja „Reinhardt””, <https://teatrnn.pl/ar/rawa-ruska-akcja-reinhardt/> (accessed 30 November 2024); M. Koper, “Lubycza Królewska,” pp. 214–215.

¹⁰⁹ M. Kopf, “Tamten czas. Część V,” p. 226.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ E. Szajowski, “Tylko ziemia została ta sama,” pp. 277–278.

¹¹² AIPN, 2448/871, Surveys conducted by the GKBZH in Poland and the OKBZH in Warsaw, 1968–1972. Surveys related to the Rzeszów Voivodeship, Lubaczów County – ghettos – Lubaczów County, Information about Hitlerite Crimes in Lubaczów, p. 4 (PDF); AIPN GK, 163/58, Questionnaires concerning camps and ghettos in the Rzeszów Voivodeship, Questionnaire concerning the ghetto in Lubaczów, 5 November 1945, p. 115.

¹¹³ Landkommissariats – rural commissariats – were branches of occupation-era starosties, each overseen by a rural commissioner (Landkommissar). They were established in rural counties and typically administered larger territorial areas.

Here, too, the conditions on the streets and in the courtyards were appalling. Filth, poor hygiene, and unsanitary conditions in the buildings were a major problem. All this, combined with widespread hunger and cold, contributed to the outbreak of abdominal typhus. As in Rawa, the disease took a heavy toll and became a pretext for the liquidation of the ghetto. According to Lola Botner, the Jews of Lubaczów already knew the true purpose of the German extermination camp in Bełżec. In her testimony, she wrote: “We are all trembling and afraid that every night may bring the end of our lives.”¹¹⁴ To preserve their lives, Jews constructed underground shelters and various hiding places, hoping to wait out the operation undetected.¹¹⁵

On 10 November 1942, following an order from Friedrich Krüger, SS and Police commander of the General Governorate, the so-called Jewish residential quarters – also referred to as secondary ghettos – were established in the Galicia District and other regions.¹¹⁶ Their creation was intended to facilitate the final extermination of the Jewish population by the Germans.

Within the boundaries of the described starosty, two ghettos were established – one in Rawa Ruska and the other in Lubaczów. From that moment, both were sealed, and any attempt to leave was punishable by death. The Rawa Ruska ghetto was officially closed on 1 December 1942, after which even temporary exits for work were strictly prohibited. As in many other ghettos across the Galicia District, the outbreak of typhus served as a pretext for initiating the liquidation. In Rawa, this operation took place between 7 and 11 December 1942. Fearing death, many Jews hid in shelters and bunkers, both inside and outside the ghetto. Among them were members of the Post, Graf, and Klag families, who found refuge in the home of Fryderyk and Maria Czerwień, who lived on Asnyka Street in Rawa Ruska. They stayed there for about eighteen months, until the Soviets arrived.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ L. Botner, “Z życia lubaczowskiego,” p. 102.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ “Rozporządzenie Wyższego Dowódcy SS i Policji w GG o tworzeniu żydowskich dzielnic mieszkaniowych w Okręgach Radom, Krakau i Galizien z 14 XI 1942 r.,” in „Żegota”. *Rada Pomocy Żydom 1942–1945. Wybór dokumentów poprzedzony wywiadem Andrzeja Friszke z Władysławem Bartoszewskim*, ed. A.K. Kunert, Warsaw, 2002, p. 52.

¹¹⁷ AŻIH, 301/6575, Testimony of Maria Czerwień, given to the GKBZH in Poland, regarding her family’s rescue of 11 Jews in Rawa Ruska during the German occupation, 18 February 1967, p. 2; AIPN, 392/37, Files regarding the aid provided by Fryderyk and Maria Czerwień, Statement of representatives

The liquidation of the Rawa ghetto was carried out by the 14th operational unit of the 5th company of the 24th Police Regiment, Task Force of the Northern Security District (*Sicherungsbezirk Nord, Einsatzkommando*), which arrived from Drohobych,¹¹⁸ supported by the SD from Sokal and the local German military police and Ukrainian police. SS Untersturmführer Josef Grzimek commanded the entire operation.¹¹⁹ Before the operation, the officers were vaccinated against abdominal typhoid. The testimony of Wolf Sambol, already quoted above, shows us the horror of those days:

The ghetto population, having already gone through two similar operations, understood that something terrible was starting again. The Jewish residents of the city shut the windows and doors of their homes – they had learned that even the simplest methods could be used to defend themselves. The sick were hidden in attics, basements, or bunkers prepared for this purpose. The streets of the district were completely silent. Gunfire began. Many had no place to hide. They waited, staying in their rooms. Doors and windows shook, and the shooting continued. Anyone struck by a bullet was lucky to die instantly. But it didn't end there. Day after day, everything started over.¹²⁰

Leon Góra testified before the OKBZH prosecutor that, during the liquidation of the ghetto, he witnessed several crimes committed by the Germans. In the minutes of the witness's interrogation, we read as follows:

of New York-based organisations Congregation Bnai Levy Isaac Anshei Rawa Ruska and Rawa Ruska Relief Committee, Sama Essing and Mosesa Katz, 27 May 1951, p. 64.

¹¹⁸ RGVA, f. 1323, op. 2, spr. 292 b, Report of the 24th Police Regiment on operations against partisans, the extermination of Jews and Gypsies, etc., August–December 1942, p. 6 (for digital copies of the documents, see http://protecting-memory-ua.org/images/rawa_ruska/historical_sources/1323-2-292b.pdf [accessed 24 October 2024]).

¹¹⁹ Josef Grzimek (1905–1950) – SS Hauptscharführer, commander of the German labour camps for Jews in Jaktorów, Racie near Rawa Ruska, Złoczów, and Bolechów between 1942 and 1944. At the end of 1943, he took up the position of commander of a Ukrainian guard company in a German forced labour camp in Szebnie near Jasło. For war crimes committed in German-occupied Polish territory, he was sentenced to death by the District Court in Warsaw on 29 January 1949 and executed by hanging a year later (S. Zabierowski, *Szabnie. Dzieje obozów hitlerowskich*, Rzeszów, 1985, pp. 85–90).

¹²⁰ AŻIH, 301/4950, Minutes of the testimony of Wolf Sambol, a Jewish resident, regarding the persecution and murder of the Jewish population in the town of Rawa Ruska during the German occupation, 4 May 1945, pp. 6–7.

A Ukrainian policeman standing next to the ghetto shot and killed a young Jewish woman and her 2-year-old child, whom she was carrying in her arms, with several shots from his rifle. The same witness also revealed that at around the same time, one of the German officers, accompanied by two Ukrainian policemen, shot and killed several Jews in an alley next to the ghetto, opposite Dickens' grocery store.

Góra also witnessed numerous hunts and roundups of Jews who had managed to flee the confines of the ghetto.¹²¹

During the operation, approximately 3,000 people were murdered on the spot – in the ghetto, in the new Jewish cemetery, as well as in the Kiczera Forest, near the village of Siedliska. The 14th operational unit alone shot 750 Jews in the ghetto. Most of the bodies were collected and buried in one of four mass graves in the cemetery. Another 2,000 Jews were deported on 11 December 1942 to the extermination camp in Bełżec. Among them were Jews from Lubycza and Niemirów.¹²² It was the last transport to this place.¹²³

From the last group of Jews, about 200 young people, both women and men, were selected. Some of them were placed in local forced labour camps in the villages of Rata and Kamionka, supervised by Josef Grzimek,¹²⁴ while others were transported to the Janowska Street camp in Lwów.¹²⁵ A group of 60 Jews, known as the “funeral team,” remained in Rawa. Their task was to remove the bodies of their murdered fellow Jews and bury them in mass graves in the cemetery.¹²⁶

¹²¹ AIPN Rz, 602/ 1153, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Leon Góra, 2 July 1980, p. 3.

¹²² YVA, O.3/8327, Testimony of Icchak Redlich, November 1963, manuscript, pp. 10–11.

¹²³ W. Curilla, *Der Judenmord in Polen und die deutsche Ordnungspolizei 1939–1945*, Paderborn, 2011, p. 803.

¹²⁴ AIPN GK, 296/77, vol. 2, Files related to the case of Josef Grzimek, Testimony of the witness Rudolf Merkel, pp. 323–325 (PDF).

¹²⁵ The Janowska camp – a German labour camp and concentration camp on the outskirts of Lwów on Janowska Street, operating between 1941 and 1944. The prisoners of this place were mainly Jews, although at the beginning there were also Poles and Ukrainians. It was liquidated in November 1943. The number of victims in this and other camps in Lwów is estimated at 200,000. See M.M. Borwicz, *Uniwersytet zbirów. Rzecz o obozie janowskim we Lwowie 1941–1944*, Cracow, 2014; D. Schenk, *Noc morderców. Kaźń polskich profesorów we Lwowie i Holocaust w Galicji Wschodniej*, Cracow, 2011; J. Honigsman, *Zagłada Żydów lwowskich (1941–1944)*, Warsaw, 2007.

¹²⁶ Ch. Spatzer, “Koniec mojego miasta Rawa Ruska,” p. 260.

After the December extermination campaign, Nazi propaganda labelled Rawa Ruska as *Judenfrei*, meaning “free of Jews.” Lusia Kramer, born in Rawa Ruska, documented in her testimony:

[...] there is so much terrible meaning in this word that neither reason nor the human heart can comprehend it [...] *Judenfrei* means that there will no longer be Jewish children going to school in the town, mothers praying by the light of Friday candles, or Jewish men wearing caftans on their way to synagogue [...] There will also be no Jewish cemetery where a rabbi will sing at a grave and a relative will recite the Kaddish; there will be nothing, Rawa Ruska will disappear!¹²⁷

In the nearby town of Lubaczów, the ghetto’s liquidation was scheduled for 7 January 1943. A platoon of German military police from Rawa Ruska participated in the operation. The strategy mirrored that used in Rawa Ruska: small units composed of German military police, along with Ukrainian and Jewish auxiliary police, operated in groups of three or four – typically one Ukrainian and one Jewish policeman accompanied by one or two German officers. At the outset, all street intersections leading to the ghetto were sealed off and guarded by German and Ukrainian police.¹²⁸

The tragedy of those days is also captured in the preserved parish chronicle. Under the entry for 7 January, it reads: “Since early morning, Jews have appeared visibly anxious, and reportedly, younger individuals have been fleeing into the streets. We witness Jewish militiamen escorting people from their homes and lining them up for transport. Much of this is happening right outside our windows. Heavy gunfire is soon met with the sight of corpses lying scattered everywhere.”¹²⁹

The record in the parish chronicle is consistent with the testimonies of Stanisław Młodziński, Adam Bauman, and Marian Kopf.¹³⁰ A transport carrying approxi-

¹²⁷ YVA, O.3/1957, Testimony of Lea (Rosenzweig) Kramer, 1957, p. 7.

¹²⁸ Oral history interview with Stanisław Młodziński, 10 March 2009, USHMM, RG-50.488.0273, transcript: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn45093> (accessed 19 December 2024).

¹²⁹ *Archiwum Parafii pw. św. Stanisława w Lubaczowie* (Archives of the Parish of St. Stanislaus in Lubaczów), The Parish in Lubaczów During World War II (1939–1945), 1943, manuscript, p. 75.

¹³⁰ Oral history interview with Stanisław Młodziński, 10 March 2009, USHMM, RG-50.488.0273, transcript: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn45093> (accessed 19 December 2024); M. Kopf, “Tamten czas. Część VI,” p. 346.

mately 2,000 Jews set off on their final journey from the station in Lubaczów to the German extermination camp in Sobibór.¹³¹ Some of the Jews were shot in the ghetto, the cemetery, and in the so-called Plebańskie Fields between Dachnów and Mokrzyca, 3 km from the town centre. The bodies of the murdered Jews were also transported to the last two locations.¹³²

The next day, the perpetrators searched the ghetto for hiding places where Jews could hide. Those who were found, as on the previous day, were escorted to the Plebańskie Fields, where they were shot and buried. Some Jews managed to escape during the liquidation and find refuge in the forests, including near Oleszyce.¹³³ However, within a week, they were found and shot in the Catholic and Jewish cemeteries in Oleszyce (a total of 174 people). All were buried in seven mass graves (each containing 20–30 bodies).¹³⁴

Returning to the events in Rawa Ruska, immediately after the liquidation of the local ghetto, there were still at least 160 Jews residing legally in the town (specifically the aforementioned “funeral team” and about 100 workers who were cleaning up the former ghetto). In addition, a number of people were hiding in well-camouflaged hiding places in the liquidated ghetto, who owed their existence to, among others, the aforementioned workers. The members of the “funeral team” were the first to be killed after completing their task. The execution took place in March 1943 at the local Jewish cemetery.¹³⁵

Those hiding in the ghetto made a desperate attempt at armed resistance. They managed to obtain weapons with the help of the local population, including a Home Army soldier, Mariusz Koziarczyk.¹³⁶ According to his testimony, in May 1943, he

¹³¹ During the liquidation of the Lubaczów ghetto, local Jews were deported to the German extermination camp in Sobibór, because in mid-December 1942, the Germans began liquidating the centre in Bełżec (W. Hanus, “Działalność volksdeuschów,” p. 144).

¹³² Oral history interview with Ludwik Cencora, 24 August 2009, USHMM, RG-50.488.0282, transcript: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn45103> (accessed 30 November 2024).

¹³³ A. Crisci and A. Kruglov, “Lubaczów,” in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, p. 802.

¹³⁴ Z. Kubrak, “Holokaust w Oleszycach,” p. 52.

¹³⁵ Ch. Spatzer, “Koniec mojego miasta Rawa Ruska,” p. 260.

¹³⁶ Mariusz Julian Koziarczyk, son of Walenty and Waleria Schmidt, born on 23 October 1923 in Łañcut, lived in Rawa Ruska during the occupation and worked as a waiter in a local railway restaurant run by his uncle Jerzy Łoĩński. Together with his brother Ryszard, he belonged to the Home Army in Rawa Ruska County. In December 1943, both were arrested by the German military police for their underground activities. He was held in custody in Rawa and in a prison on Łañckiego Street in Lwów. Ryszard

delivered several weapons to a group led by a Jew named Szame.¹³⁷ The Pole also remembered the name of another Jew who took part in this desperate rising, Kaumen Drucker. According to Franciszek Efraim Włoch, the insurgents “barricaded themselves in the cellars and, when ordered to leave their homes, responded with gunfire and grenades. A regular battle began.” According to the same witness, the pacification of the rising was to be led by Josef Grzmek’s wife, who took command from her husband that day and ordered the use of flamethrowers. According to the witness, she personally fired a machine gun at Jews trying to escape the fire.¹³⁸

The attempt to mount an armed opposition ended in failure.¹³⁹ According to Koziarczyk, the leaders of the fighting Jews, along with several other people, managed to escape from the ghetto and were killed in a skirmish with the German military police on the road leading from Potylicz to Rawa Ruska.¹⁴⁰

From 1 May 1943, there were also around 300 Jews in Rawa, who had been transported from the liquidated forced labour camp in Mosty Wielkie.¹⁴¹ The final end of the Jews in Rawa came on 8–10 June 1943 in the nearby Borowe Forest, those who had been brought from Mosty Wielkie and those who had managed to survive the rising in well-hidden hiding places in the former ghetto were murdered. The

Koziarczyk was murdered in April in prison, while Mariusz was released in March 1944. After the war, he settled in Kielce (AŻIH, 349/24/550, Letter from Mariusz Koziarczyk to the ŻIH in Warsaw, 10 April 1984, fols. 2–11; Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Katowicach (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Katowice), 53/1, Index card from a card-index of persons authorised to perform secret work (MOB work) from the Voivodeship Office of Internal Affairs (*Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych*, WUSW) in Katowice, Bielsko-Biała, and Częstochowa, concerning Mariusz Koziarczyk. [MOB stands for “mobilizacyjno-obronny” (“military and defence”). This abbreviation was used when registering people approved by the “C” division units for admission to work covered by state secrecy. Source: IPN’s glossary (t.n.).]

¹³⁷ AŻIH, 349/24/550, Letter from Mariusz Koziarczyk to ŻIH in Warsaw, 10 April 1984, p. 5.

¹³⁸ YVA, O.3/1132, Testimony of Franciszek Efraim Włoch, 10 December 1958, p. 5.

¹³⁹ AŻIH, 301/4950, Minutes of the testimony of Wolf Sambol, a Jewish resident, regarding the persecution and murder of the Jewish population in the town of Rawa Ruska during the German occupation, 4 May 1945, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ AŻIH, 349/24/550, Letter from Mariusz Koziarczyk to the ŻIH in Warsaw, 10 April 1984, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ Formally, it was a remnant ghetto, transformed in the autumn of 1942 into a forced labour camp for Jews in Mosty Wielkie, segregated into male and female sections, supervised by the SS. The imprisoned Jews worked, among other things, in a sawmill and on the construction of a railway line. The camp commander was SS Obersturmführer Willi Schulze. The camp was liquidated on 1 May 1943. Some of the inmates were murdered on the spot, while the rest were sent to the Janów and Rawa Ruska camps (A. Kruglov and M. Dean, “Mosty Wielkie,” in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, pp. 808–810).

last people in hiding were coaxed out with false assurances of relocation to forced labour camps in Potylicz and Rata – and were subsequently killed.¹⁴²

Table 1. Estimated Number of Victims of *Aktion Reinhardt* in the Kreis Rawa Ruska

Kreis Rawa Ruska	Jewish population before World War II		Number of Jewish victims of the Aktion Reinhardt		Deportations		Mass executions	
	as of 15 September 1942	as of 1 March 1943	1942	1943	to the death camp in Bełżec	to the death camp in Sobibór	1942	1943
	12,460	285	at least 8,000	ca. 4,000	19 March 1942, 27 July 1942, October 1942, 7–11 December 1942	8 January 1943	second half of August, mid-September, beginning of October, mid-November, 7–11 December	8–14 January, 13 February, mid-May, 8–10 June

Source: AŻIH, 301/4950, Minutes of the testimony of Abraham Schall and Wolf Sambol, manuscript, 4 May 1945, pp. 1–11; Table 8. “Powiat Rawa Ruska,” in T. Berenstein, *Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej*; R. Kuwałek, *Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu*, pp. 235–251; G. Hryciuk and J. Stočkyj, *Studia nad demografią historyczną*, pp. 87–88; “Rawa Ruska,” in *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia*, pp. 648–650; C. Crisci and A. Kruglov, “Lubaczów,” in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, pp. 801–802; A. Kruglov and M. Dean, “Rawa Ruska,” in *ibid.*, p. 819.

During *Aktion Reinhardt*, no fewer than 12,000 Jews from the Kreis Rawa Ruska were murdered. The extermination of the Jewish population in this region continued until the end of the German occupation. No fewer than 80 Jews survived the war – a mere fraction of the several thousand who once lived in the starosty. This number refers only to those who – during the war – stayed and went into hiding within the district or starosty. Jews who were deported from the Rawa region to

¹⁴² A.I. Kruglov, “Rava Russkaya,” in *Kholokost na territorii SSSR*, p. 832.

the depths of the USSR in 1940, returned to the country after the war, and then emigrated to Israel, the United States, or other countries were not counted. They endured the ordeal of deportation, many died during transport, and thousands never returned to their homeland. However, deportation to the East saved them from the Holocaust that took place in the occupied Polish territories.¹⁴³

Of the 80 Jews who managed to survive the Holocaust, most were saved in the urban areas of the Kreis Rawa Ruska. A total of 31 Jews were saved in the towns of the starosty, that is in Rawa Ruska, Lubaczów, Niemirów, and Uhnów, and 24 in the countryside. Another 15–20 Jews, born and living in the Rawa Starosty during the war, survived the German occupation by using “Aryan papers” in other parts of the occupied country or through forced labour in the German Reich.

No fewer than 35 Poles, at least six Ukrainians, and one German were involved in rescuing Jews in the Kreis Rawa Ruska area. In the towns, at least 25 Poles saved the lives of no fewer than 52 Jews. The greatest number of people were saved by Fryderyk and Maria Czerwień, Jerzy Łogiński, and Leonard Bartlakowski, also known as Robert Krysiński. The latter was the only German known to us who participated in saving Jews in this area. For a year and a half, the Czerwień family sheltered 12 Jews from the Post, Klag, Graf, and Diller families in their home.¹⁴⁴ Łogiński sheltered five Jews in a concealed attic space within his tenement house located in the city centre. Those sheltered were Berisch Steinfeld and his wife Lola, Dan Berger and his wife Fajga, along with their relative Matylda Kleiner. Additionally, shortly before the ghetto was liquidated, he saved the Steinfelds’ one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Brajndla, in response to a plea from her parents.¹⁴⁵ Leonard Bartlakowski, who was born in Berlin to a Polish family that had acquired German citizenship,¹⁴⁶ served

¹⁴³ See, among others, Oral history interview with Awracham Woltser, 17 February 2004, item ID: 4899284, YVA, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/4899284> (accessed 23 December 2024); Oral history interview with Rosa Shoshana Bly, 7 November 2008, item ID: 7573767, YVA, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/7573767> (accessed 23 December 2024); Oral history interview with Jeszajahu Zimmerman, 2 April 2019, item ID: 13431373, YVA, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/13431373> (accessed 23 December 2024).

¹⁴⁴ W. Hanus, “Sprawiedliwi z Rawy Ruskiej. Fryderyk i Maria Czerwieniowie, Bazyli Chmielewski,” *Biuletyn IPN* 3 (2022), p. 75.

¹⁴⁵ AŻIH 349/24/1079, Documentation of the case concerning Jerzy Łogiński, Statement by Dan Berger, no date, pp. 5–6.

¹⁴⁶ He is listed as a person of German nationality in the Righteous Among the Nations database maintained by the Yad Vashem Institute.

as a translator for the German military police in Rawa Ruska during the German occupation. He hid four Jews in a hiding place beneath the floor of his flat in the city centre. The group included Abraham Weidenfeld and his wife Anna, Romana Kessler, and Stefania Reicher.¹⁴⁷

In the rural areas of the starosty in question, at least 14 Poles rescued no fewer than 20 Jews. The greatest number of individuals were rescued by Anna and Andrzej Antonik, along with their daughter Ludwika, from the village of Lisie Jamy, and by Antoni Dorota and his daughter Aniela from the village of Młodów – both situated near Lubaczów. The Antonik family hid Szmuel and Estera Broch, their son Hersz, and their niece Malka Stupp in the attic of a barn, while the Dorota family sheltered the three-member Remer family in an underground hiding place beneath a barn for nearly three years.¹⁴⁸

Among individuals of Ukrainian heritage who held Polish citizenship prior to the war, at least four families played a role in hiding Jews in the region under discussion. Responding to a plea from the Lapp family, Yekaterina Kleban took in their eight-year-old daughter, Ruzia, offering her refuge under her own roof. The young Jewish girl remained in Kleban's care for over two years and survived to witness the arrival of the Soviet forces. In the village of Rata, located approximately 3 kilometers north of Rawa, Anna and Roman Wywrocki rescued a Jewish infant – the daughter of the Schlettner couple. They hid the child in their home for sixteen months. Also, a resident of Lipina, Maria Ganczar, gave refuge in her buildings to her former neighbours, Moses and Chana Adler. They had previously stayed at Wasyl Nachacz's house in the nearby village of Zalesie. From the summer of 1943 to March 1944, Nachacz sheltered a total of six Jews (in exchange for a regular payment). Three of them – named Cioma, Flajszer and Dekiel – moved to Feliks and Wiktoria Balawender, who lived in the same village, at the end of 1943. The fates of Maria Ganczar, Wasyl Nachacz, and the Balawenders couple were tragic. All of them were arrested for helping Jews and imprisoned in the German military police station in Rawa Ruska, and then transported to a prison in Lwów, where

¹⁴⁷ "Bartlakowski Leonard," <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/righteous/4013818> (accessed 30 December 2024).

¹⁴⁸ *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holokaustu. Polska*, vol. 1, ed. I. Gutman, Cracow, 2009, pp. 8–9, 136.

they were executed.¹⁴⁹ Of the Jews they hid, only Cioma survived the occupation.¹⁵⁰ These are the only known cases from the Kreis Rawa Ruska where people who helped Jews were killed.

All of the individuals listed above – except for the Balawender family – were recognised by the Yad Vashem Institute with the title “Righteous Among the Nations.” This honour was bestowed upon 21 Poles,¹⁵¹ 5 Ukrainians,¹⁵² and one German¹⁵³ from the Rawa Starosty region.

As already mentioned, 15–20 Jews in the Kreis Rawa Ruska survived thanks to the so-called Aryan documents, obtained from both Poles and Ukrainians, either for free or with payment. Among those rescued in this way were Lusia Kramer, Helena Flaum, Ruth Haskell, Zelda Ginzberg, and Ewa Kleiner. Zelda Grinzberg, equipped with a birth certificate issued in the name of Ksenia Wasilewska, left for Volhynia as a Ukrainian and, working on a farm there, survived until the Soviet invasion.¹⁵⁴ The remaining women were sent to forced labour in the Third Reich.

Chaim Spatzer, Hertz Graf, and his brother-in-law N. Graf survived the occupation years in one of the forest bunkers near Rawa. They survived thanks to the help of a Ukrainian friend who supplied them with food.¹⁵⁵ Samuel Sztork from Rawa survived the occupation by hiding in the Horyniec Forest, where he made contact with one of the local Soviet partisan units.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Nathan Zimmer-

¹⁴⁹ See A. Namysło, “Wasył Nachacz, Maria Ganczar,” in *Represje za pomoc Żydom na okupowanych ziemiach polskich w czasie II wojny światowej*, eds. M. Grądzka-Rejak and A. Namysło, Warsaw, 2019, p. 243.

¹⁵⁰ E. Rączy, “Feliks i Wiktoria Balawendrowie,” in *ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

¹⁵¹ Andrzej with Anna Antonik and Ludwika Janczura, née Antonik (Lisie Jamy near Lubaczów); Bazyli Chmielewski (Rawa Ruska); Fryderyk and Maria Czerwień (Rawa Ruska); Antoni Dorota and Aniela Mirkowska née Dorota (Młodów near Lubaczów); Jerzy Łogiński (Rawa Ruska); Walerian with Katarzyna Góra and Katarzyna Baran (Rawa Ruska); Marian Kocielski (Lubaczów); Józef Kulpa (Lubaczów); Jerzy Łogiński (Rawa Ruska); Witold Mączak (Oleszyce near Lubaczów); Helena Piestrak-Fiutowska (Oleszyce); Józef and Zofia Piotrowski (village of Górki near Rawa Ruska); Zofia Pomorska (Lubaczów); Jan Wużyński (Horyniec near Lubaczów).

¹⁵² Maria Ganczar (Lipina near Lubaczów); Jekaterina Kleban (Potylicz); Wasył Nachacz (Zalesie near Lubaczów); Roman and Anna Wywrocki (Rata near Rawa Ruska).

¹⁵³ Romuald Bartłakowski.

¹⁵⁴ AŻIH, 302/71, Zelda Ginzberg’s Diary “Jak ja przeżyłam okupację 1941–1944,” pp. 1–5.

¹⁵⁵ Ch. Spetzer, “Koniec mojego miasta Rawa Ruska,” pp. 393–395. The first and last names of this Ukrainian are unknown.

¹⁵⁶ A.S. Sztork, “Wśród partyzantów,” in *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rawa Ruska*, pp. 450–461.

man and Israel Satz survived by enlisting in the Red Army in May 1941.¹⁵⁷ Ben Zion Friedman hid in the forests near Brody.¹⁵⁸ Some testimonies of Jews rescued from the Kreis Rawa Ruska area lack information about who provided them with support. This is the case, for example, with Simon Huberband, Ada Weichselbaum and Jeszua Wallfuss.

Evidence has also been preserved of Catholic clergy and nuns aiding Jews in the Rawa Starosty during the German occupation. Moni Grauer wrote in his memoirs: "I hid in a monastery in Rawa [Ruska] with the consent of Rev. [Jan] Podczerwieński, who was a friend of our family."¹⁵⁹ According to Leon Hirsza from Rawa Ruska, as a ten-year-old boy, he received help from a priest. In Lubaczów and Oleszyce, two priests, Stanisław Sobczyński and Józef Mroczkowski, issued at least three baptism certificates for Lusja Grünspan, Estera Vogiel, and Pepcia Blaiberger. The priests acted at the request of Polish women Zofia Pomorska and Jadwiga Fusińska.¹⁶⁰

Also, the Albertine Sisters extended their aid to the Jewish community. Sister Waleriana (Prakseda Żukowska) recounted that the sisters sheltered a Jewish child within their convent, ensuring the child's survival throughout the war and the German occupation.¹⁶¹

No formal assistance to Jews within the Kreis Rawa Ruska from the Council for Aid to Jews "Żegota" or the Home Army has been documented. Nonetheless, individual Home Army soldiers undertook efforts to rescue members of the local Jewish community, though these actions were spontaneous and grassroots in nature. Two testimonies have survived – one from a recipient of such aid and the other from a rescuer. The first is the account of Berney Berger, who, beginning in April 1944, was sheltered in the forests near Rawa by his former schoolmate and Home Army soldier, Stanisław Lętowiec.¹⁶² The Pole helped Berger build a small

¹⁵⁷ N. Zimmerman, "Ten, który pozostał przy życiu," in *ibid.*, p. 517.

¹⁵⁸ B.Z. Friedman, "Przez co przeszliśmy," pp. 467–471.

¹⁵⁹ M. Garuer, "Zostałem uratowany," in *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rawa Ruska*, p. 484.

¹⁶⁰ E. Rączy and 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, p. 105; Z. Kubrak, *Dzieje Lubaczowa*, p. 735.

¹⁶¹ K.M. Babraj, „Być dobrym jak chleb”. *Domy zakonne Zgromadzenia Sióstr Albertynek Posługujących Ubogim od 1891 do 2009 roku*, Cracow, 2010, pp. 168–169.

¹⁶² The surname may have been spelled differently.

hiding place and then provided him with food and clothing.¹⁶³ Mariusz Koziarczyk, mentioned earlier, was a soldier of the Rawa Ruska County of the Home Army involved in helping Jews. For some time, he hid five Jews from the Schipermann, Berger, and Kleiner families in his family home in Rawa Ruska, and in May 1943, he delivered weapons to a group of Jews hiding in the former ghetto in Rawa Ruska.¹⁶⁴

The data presented and examples of assistance provided to Jews in the Kreis Rawa Ruska allow us to conclude that it was Poles – despite the higher percentage of Ukrainians in the area – who were more involved in rescuing Jews. This could have been due to both socio-political conditions and mutual Polish-Ukrainian-Jewish relations during the German occupation, as well as conflicts fuelled by social tensions dating back to the Second Polish Republic.

A higher proportion of Jews managed to survive in urban areas, likely due to more accessible hiding places, the possibility of obtaining forged Aryan documents, and the particular characteristics of the social fabric. Prior to the war, towns within the Rawa Starosty had significant Jewish populations,¹⁶⁵ which fostered extensive networks of personal connections. As a result, towns offered a relatively higher sense of security, with individuals sometimes able to rely on assistance from former acquaintances. In contrast, hiding in rural areas posed greater risks, exacerbated by the armed operations of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

* * *

This text seeks to document the extermination of the Jewish population in a provincial region located in the eastern part of the former Lwów Voivodeship, which, between 1941 and 1944, was designated as a German occupation-era starosty (Kreis Rawa Ruska). Drawing on archival records, eyewitness testimonies, and scholarly literature, it outlines the successive phases of this process – from the

¹⁶³ Oral history interview with Berney Berger given to Suzanne Roberts, 21 March 1996, Interview code: 13485, USC Shoah Foundation, <http://protecting-memory-ua.org/rava-ruska/usnoistorychni-svidchennia> (accessed 10 December 2024).

¹⁶⁴ AŻIH, 349/24/550, Letter from Mariusz Koziarczyk to ŻIH in Warsaw, 10 April 1984, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ Jews constituted the majority of the population in Rawa Ruska and Niemirów, while Poles were the majority in Uhnów. The only exception was Lubaczów, where the Ukrainian population was the largest, but if Poles and Jews were taken into account, both groups together constituted almost 60 per cent of the town's population.

initial outbreaks of violence following the German invasion in June 1941, through the establishment and operation of the ghetto, to the deportations to the Bełżec extermination camp and the eventual annihilation. The narrative also highlights both the direct actions of the German terror apparatus and the attitude of the local population in the context of providing aid to Jews in hiding.

This article forms part of a broader study on the Holocaust in the region historically referred to as Eastern Lesser Poland, encompassing the pre-war voivodeships of Stanisławów, Tarnopol, and the eastern portion of the Lwów Voivodeship. Between 1939 and 1944, this area experienced successive occupations – first by the Soviets, then by the Germans. As early as the summer of 1941, prior to the establishment of the extermination camp in Bełżec, the region was already targeted by Einsatzgruppen units, which carried out mass atrocities. The examination of the Holocaust's progression in the Kreis Rawa Ruska adds to our understanding of the localised aspects of the Jewish extermination. A key factor shaping this process and the implementation of *Aktion Reinhardt* – of which this area was among the first to be affected – was Rawa's geographical proximity to Bełżec, making it the nearest town in the Galicia District to the camp.

Accordingly, a possible area for further research could be the study of social relations within provincial, multicultural, and multiethnic communities in the eastern regions of the Second Polish Republic. This inquiry should consider the impact of both the Soviet and German occupations, which significantly influenced intergroup dynamics. Another proposed direction is the detailed reconstruction of the Holocaust's progression at the level of counties and municipalities in the Galicia District, with particular attention to the operations of the German terror apparatus and the involvement of local civil authorities. It is also suggested that the histories of individual localities be integrated into the broader narrative of the Holocaust – not only to complete the overall picture, but also to expose the mechanisms of violence and extermination that shaped its course in the so-called eastern territories.

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