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DOMINIK FLISIAK, *ANTYŻYDOWSKA ZBRODNIA
W PRZEDBORZU. PYTANIA, ŹRÓDŁA, ODPOWIEDZI*
(INVESTIGATING THE ANTI-JEWISH CRIME IN
PRZEDBÓRZ: QUESTIONS RAISED, SOURCES EXAMINED,
ANSWERS PROPOSED), CHRZAN, 2024, 234 PP.

Polish-Jewish relations in the 20th century have, in recent years, sparked vigorous debate in both academic and public spheres.¹ The book reviewed here

¹ Selected publications on this topic: D. Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland 1944–1946," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998); J.T. Gross, *Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie. Historia moralnej zapaści*, Cracow, 2006; *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, eds. Ł. Kamiński and J. Żaryn, Warsaw, 2006; *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, vol. 2, eds. L. Bukowski, A. Jankowski, and J. Żaryn, Warsaw, 2008; M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Po Zagładzie. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie 1944–1947*, Warsaw, 2008; A. Żbikowski, "Morderstwa popełniane na Żydach w pierwszych latach po wojnie," in *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1944–2010*, eds. F. Tych and M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, Lublin, 2012, pp. 71–94; M. Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944–1947: ludowa reakcja na kryzys*, Cracow, 2012; J. Tokarska-Bakir, "Postwar violence against Jews in Central and Eastern Europe," in *Our Courage – Jews in Europe 1945–48*, eds. K. Bohus, A. Grossmann, W. Hanak, and I. Wenzel, Oldenbourg, 2020, pp. 64–81; J. Korzeniowski, "Bibliografia do tematu: „Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach” (4 VII 1946 r.)," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 4 (1996), pp. 78–80; J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego*, vols. 1–2,

examines Poles' attitudes and behaviour towards Jews in the immediate aftermath of World War II, a period during which some of them – though their number is difficult to determine – held anti-Semitic views and attitudes, resulting in pogroms, assaults, murders, and other acts of anti-Jewish violence.² The most dramatic and widely reported act of violence of the post-war period was the pogrom against Jews in Kielce in early July 1946. The issue of post-war pogroms, anti-Jewish incidents, and demonstrations has been frequently addressed in recent years. As already mentioned, Dominik Flisiak's publication *Antyżydowska zbrodnia w Przedborzu. Pytania, źródła, odpowiedzi* (Anti-Jewish Crime in Przedbórz: Questions Raised, Sources Examined, Answers Proposed) belongs to this trend.³ The author of the book is a trained historian and holds a PhD in humanities. He graduated from the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce. His research has primarily focused on the history of Zionist revisionists, a subject on which he has published numerous academic articles. His books include *Działalność syjonistów-rewizjonistów w Polsce w latach 1944/1945–1950* (The Activity of Zionist Revisionists in Poland in 1944/1945–1950), *Wybrane materiały ideologiczne i propagandowe Syjonistyczno-Socjalistycznej Partii Robotniczej Poalej Syjon-Hitachdut* (Selected Ideological and Propaganda Materials of the Zionist-Socialist Workers' Party Poale Zion-Hitachdut), and a biography titled *Jakob Steinhardt (1887–1968). Życie i działalność* (Jakob Steinhardt [1887–1968]. Life and Work).

This publication integrates a concise monograph on the Jewish community of Przedbórz before and during the war with a detailed analysis of the causes, course, and aftermath of the crime committed there in late May 1945, drawing on a rich selection of source materials. It is worth noting that appendices with documents are included after each chapter. Although the author's intention was likely to link a thematic discussion with selected source material, a clearer presentation of con-

Warsaw, 2018; J. Kwiek, "Wydarzenia antyżydowskie 11 sierpnia 1945 r. w Krakowie: dokumenty," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 1 (2000), pp. 77–89; A. Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie. 11 sierpnia 1945 r.*, Warsaw, 2000; J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Kocia muzyka. Chóralna historia pogromu krakowskiego*, vols. 1–2, Warsaw, 2024; W.W. Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1914–1920*, Cambridge University Press 2018.

² See the latest findings on this issue in: J. Kwiek, *Nie chcemy Żydów u siebie. Przejawy wrogości wobec Żydów w latach 1944–1947*, Warsaw, 2021.

³ D. Flisiak, *Antyżydowska zbrodnia w Przedborzu. Pytania, źródła, odpowiedzi*, Chrzan, 2024.

tent and findings would have been achieved through a comprehensive appendix of sources at the end of the volume. This approach would have been more coherent, especially given the frequent references to archival documents throughout the text. Otherwise, the book has a fairly classic layout. It consists of seven chapters, preceded by a list of abbreviations and an introduction, and culminating in a conclusion, bibliography, and indexes.

In the introduction, the author outlined why he undertook research into the crime committed against Jews in Przedbórz on the night of 27–28 May 1945, as well as when and in which archives he conducted his research. In this section, he also posed the research questions that guided him during his work: “To reconstruct the anti-Jewish crime in Przedbórz as accurately as possible, it was necessary to address several fundamental research questions: What was the history of the Jewish community in Przedbórz up to the outbreak of World War II? What befell the Jews of Przedbórz during the war? Who were Kazimierz Jezierski and Edmund Majchrowski – the key figures in understanding how the anti-Jewish crime unfolded? Are there any eyewitness testimonies of the murder in Przedbórz? Did the perpetrators of the attack face any consequences? Why were the victims accused of pro-communist attitudes? Did representatives of the Jewish community appear in Przedbórz after the crime was committed?”⁴ The introduction contains elements typical of historical publications, including summaries of individual chapters, a presentation of the literature on the subject, and the most important sources used in the research. The author also cites references to the crime in Przedbórz found in earlier publications by other researchers. Surprisingly, the literature cited does not include the very important work of Julian Kwiek, his recently published book entitled *Nie chcemy Żydów u siebie. Przejawy wrogości wobec Żydów w latach 1944–1947* (We Do Not Want Jews Here. Manifestations of Hostility towards Jews in 1944–1947).⁵ In it, Kwiek describes various versions of the events in Przedbórz and indicates numerous sources on this issue. Regardless of whether the tone is affirmative or critical, the author of the reviewed publication should have referred to Kwiek’s work.

⁴ D. Flisiak, *Antyżydowska zbrodnia*, pp. 12–13.

⁵ J. Kwiek, *Nie chcemy Żydów u siebie*, pp. 327–333.

The introduction lacks a summary or a clear outline of the themes explored in the following chapters. The abundance of quotations and references to various individuals gives the impression of chaos. Precise terminology is also lacking, particularly an explanation for the author's choice of the term "anti-Jewish crime" instead of alternatives such as "pogrom" or "anti-Semitic incidents." The introduction would have been an ideal opportunity to clarify the key criteria for selecting the sources included in the volume, as well as to justify the chosen structure of the work. Instead, the author confines himself to outlining only the fundamental principles that guided the editing of the selected materials.

In accordance with the research questions posed in the introduction, in the first chapter entitled "Społeczność żydowska w Przedborzu do pierwszego września 1939 r. Zarys tematyki" (The Jewish Community in Przedbórz until 1 September 1939. An Outline of the Subject Matter), Flisiak briefly discusses the history of Jews in the town from the first traces of their presence until the outbreak of World War II. This outline, spanning almost twenty pages, also includes an introduction to the location and history of the town. A relatively large amount of space is devoted to discussing the fate of the Jewish population until the partitions, including, for example, descriptions of the synagogue, often referred to by the author as a *bożnica* (a Polish equivalent for a synagogue). Incidentally, a photograph of this synagogue appears on the book's cover. The author also attempted to present events from the interwar period. His attempt to reconstruct relations with Poles living in the city is significant, though in this regard he also referred to events in other places in the Second Polish Republic. This chapter appears to have had the potential for expansion to address aspects of social history, including an analysis of the everyday life of Jews in Przedbórz and the factors shaping their relations with the town's non-Jewish residents, particularly in the interwar period. Incorporating such a perspective would have supported a deeper understanding of subsequent events during the German occupation and in the post-war years. Perhaps a memorial book could have provided additional information on this subject.⁶ The appendix of sources accompanying the chapter includes six documents from 1934–1938, among them

⁶ *Przedborz Memorial Book: 33 Years Since the Destruction of the Jewish Community*, published by Przedborz Societies in Israel and America, Tel Aviv, 1977, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Przedborz/Przedborz.html>.

the minutes of a meeting of the Jewish Religious Community Council in Przedbórz, a list of individuals exempted from paying a municipal fee, and selected situation reports. Given this selection, it is not easy to discern the criteria used or the rationale behind including these particular documents.

The second chapter explores the experiences of the Jewish community in Przedbórz during World War II and in the aftermath of the German occupation of Poland. It is important to shed light on the events of May 1945. The narrative opens with the German invasion of Przedbórz and the destruction of the local synagogue. Subsequent pages detail the creation of the ghetto and the daily life of its Jewish inhabitants. The chapter concludes with an account of the ghetto's liquidation and the deportation of its residents to the Treblinka extermination camp in October 1942. However, Flisiak does not offer even approximate estimates of how many people were murdered on the spot and how many were transported. It is also unknown how many Jews escaped during the operation or earlier and hid in Przedbórz and the surrounding area. The author names several people who managed to survive until the end of the German occupation. In this chapter, he does not delve into the issue of Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation, especially in the so-called third phase of the Holocaust. The rest of the chapter deals with the end of World War II. Here, too, there is no brief analysis of Polish-Jewish relations at that time, a regrettable omission, as such an analysis would help the reader better understand the context of the events of May 1945. The chapter is accompanied by an appendix containing three documents related to the post-war period: a list of Jews residing in the Końskie County during the early months of 1945; a letter addressed to the Ministry of Public Security reporting murders and robberies targeting Jews between March and August 1945; and a letter detailing several cases of murders and robberies committed against Polish citizens of Jewish nationality, including incidents that occurred in Przedbórz.

The third chapter, titled „Kim był Kazimierz Jezierski? Świadectwa autorstwa Kazimierza Jezierskiego z lat 1946–1954” (Who Was Kazimierz Jezierski? Testimonies Authored by Kazimierz Jezierski from 1946–1954), centres on a figure whom the author considers crucial to understanding the anti-Jewish incidents in Przedbórz. Jezierski was, among other roles, affiliated with the National Party (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*) and served under Władysław Kołaciński “Żbik” (Wildcat),

the commander of a National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*, NSZ) partisan unit in the Kielce region. The latter's profile is likewise not explored in depth.

In March 1946, Jezierski was arrested by functionaries of the County Public Security Department in connection with his membership in the illegal Underground Polish Army (*Konspiracyjne Wojsko Polskie*). After interrogation, he was recruited to cooperate with the Security Department (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*, UB). Flisiak provides a brief biography of Jezierski and then discusses the content of five documents collected in the appendix. These are transcripts of Jezierski's interrogations from the end of 1945, as well as from February 1954 and June 1954. The other two documents concern, among other things, the findings related to Jezierski's participation in the crime in Przedbórz, made by the head of the Investigation Department of the Voivodeship Public Security Department in Kielce.

Chapter four outlines the profile of another individual linked to the crime in Przedbórz. In this section, the author presents Edmund Majchrowski and his background. His biography is confined to a single paragraph, covering essential details such as his date and place of birth, origin, education, profession, and a brief note about his family. Majchrowski was employed at the County Public Security Department and was accused of murdering four Jews, as presented in the book. The remainder of the chapter focuses on twelve documents included in the appendix, including Teresa Hebińska's complaint against Majchrowski, a summary of the investigation's findings, the minutes of his interrogation, and other materials from the inquiry. Majchrowski was never prosecuted and later appeared as a witness in the court proceedings.

Chapter five, titled "Świadectwa pozostałych sprawców i świadków oraz informacje związane ze śledztwem prowadzonym w związku z antyżydowską zbrodnią" (Testimonies of Other Perpetrators and Witnesses, and Information Related to the Investigation Conducted in Connection with the Anti-Jewish Crime), presents the testimonies of individuals who may have been involved in the crime in Przedbórz. The chapter opens with an overview of the sources' appendix, which contains the most extensive set of documents in the book – 23 items in total – including interrogation reports, fragments of information, statements, excerpts from testimonies, and information derived from investigations. These materials pertain to, among others, Feliks Sokołowski, Józef Sokołowski, Józef Kluska, Jan

Bednarek, Jan Szklarz, Michał Pytlos, and Aleksandra Kularska. In analysing these testimonies, the author seeks to illuminate details that may help reconstruct the causes, the sequence of events, and the individual involvement in the crime committed in Przedbórz.

In chapter six, entitled “W stronę rekonstrukcji” (Towards a Reconstruction), Flisiak presents a discussion and documents concerning, among other things, Kazimierz Jezierski’s contacts with the political police. Ten source documents are attached to this section. However, the reader still does not learn how the author of the publication perceives and reconstructs the post-war anti-Jewish events.

The seventh and final chapter examines Juda Kamiński and his life in Przedbórz after the war. A survivor of the Przedbórz ghetto, Kamiński escaped in the autumn of 1942 and lived in hiding on the so-called Aryan side. During this time, he joined the ranks of the National Armed Forces and remained in hiding until the end of the German occupation. After the war, he converted to the Catholic faith and sought to assimilate into Polish society. He passed away in 1971. As Dominik Flisiak notes, “the picture of Jewish society in Przedbórz would not be complete without presenting his [Kamiński’s] wartime and post-war fate.”⁷ Still, he does not explain Kamiński’s post-war actions and decisions.

The book’s key questions – concerning the causes, chronology, and consequences of the crime against Jews in Przedbórz – are addressed only in the final chapter. There, the author identifies the perpetrators and explores possible motives, while also portraying the victims: the Jewish residents of Przedbórz and its surroundings before the war. The concluding chapter addresses the differing accounts introduced at the beginning of the book and features numerous extensive quotations.

Although the author focuses on a single case – a relatively small town – the issue he raises is highly relevant to understanding the post-war history of Poland’s Jewish community. Dominik Flisiak’s book, however, presents a rather eclectic composition. It resembles a curated collection of sources accompanied by commentary, rather than a conventional monograph. While the structure and content of any scholarly work ultimately rest in the hands of its author, it is the readers who must assess whether this particular approach is the most appropriate for the subject at

⁷ D. Flisiak, *Antyżydowska zbrodnia*, p. 188.

hand. The text and footnotes contain noticeable stylistic and linguistic flaws. Despite drawing on a broad bibliography, it is somewhat surprising to find sources like *Encyklopedia szkolna. Historia* (School Encyclopaedia: History) and general academic textbooks on Polish history – such as those covering the Middle Ages – among the references. As previously noted, the scope and depth of individual topics remain insufficient. Nonetheless, the book has its merits: notably, its engagement with a significant subject matter and its effort to confront complex issues and the intricacies of local history. I am hopeful that this publication will resonate with certain readers and will serve as a catalyst for further scholarly inquiry. The example of crimes against Jews in Przedbórz, taken up and discussed by the author, is an important attempt to fill in another blank spot on the map of post-war anti-Jewish violence in Poland.