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GRZEGORZ ROSSOLIŃSKI-LIEBE, *POLNISCHE BÜRGERMEISTER UND DER HOLOCAUST. BESATZUNG, VERWALTUNG UND KOLLABORATION* (POLISH MAYORS AND THE HOLOCAUST. OCCUPATION, ADMINISTRATION AND COLLABORATION), BERLIN: DE GRUYTER, 2024, 1124 PP.

Introduction

The book by Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe entitled *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust. Besatzung, Verwaltung und Kollaboration* (Polish Mayors and the Holocaust. Occupation, Administration and Collaboration) was published by De Gruyter in Berlin in 2024.¹

Born in 1979, the author of the book describes himself as a Polish-German historian. From 1999 until 2005 he studied the history of culture and Eastern Europe at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). From 2002 to 2005, he

¹ The monograph was published only in German, so the translation of the excerpts included in Polish version of this review were the author's work.

was a scholarship holder of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Between 2007 and 2012, he collaborated with the University of Hamburg, concluding these activities in 2012 with the defence of his doctoral thesis focusing on Stepan Bandera and the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). His research has received funding from, among others, the Gerda Henkel Stiftung and the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. Between 2012 and 2014, he was involved in a research project on the Holocaust in the memory of the Ukrainian diaspora during the Cold War. Moreover, he conducted research as an employee of the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies. Between 2014 and 2018, he studied the attitudes of Poles towards the German occupation during World War II. He has also received scholarships from many institutions, including the Claims Conference, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the Foundation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah, the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, and the International Institute for Holocaust Research, which is part of Yad Vashem. The issues he addresses concern anti-Semitism, fascism, and nationalism. He is currently employed as a *Privatdozent* (PD) at the Friedrich Meinecke Institute of History, one of the institutes within the structure of the Freie Universität Berlin (Free University of Berlin).

Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe earned the title of habilitated doctor at the Freie Universität in Berlin in 2023 on the basis of his dissertation *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust. Besatzung, Verwaltung und Kollaboration* (Polish Mayors and the Holocaust: Occupation, Administration, and Collaboration). There are no published online academic reviews of his monograph, which contributed to him obtaining the aforementioned degree, and therefore it is unclear which body is responsible for awarding this monograph the status of a scholarly work.

The 1,124-page publication is divided into ten chapters, preceded by an introduction of over fifty pages. Its structure is as follows, in chapter order: I. "Politics, Administration, and Legislation of the Second Polish Republic," II. "Cities as Places of Coexistence and Violence," III. "Pre-war Lives of the Occupation-era Mayors," IV. "War, Occupation, and Administration," V. "Mayors in the Administrative Network," VI. "The Holocaust," VII. "Mayors and the Polish Population," VIII. "Resistance, Everyday Life, and Repression," IX. "The Postwar Period," X. "Concluding Part."

Although I have read the entire monograph, only some of the issues raised in it are the subject of this review. In the introduction, Rossoliński-Liebe points out that his book is the first comprehensive study of the issue of Polish mayors in the General Governorate (German: *Generalgouvernement*, hereinafter GG).² Certainly, no broader research results on this subject have been presented so far. This does not mean that no one else has described them. Probably due to the subordinate role that mayors played in the German administrative structure, they did not attract much interest from scholars.

In his research, the author analysed the activity of 50 officials working in 22 towns and cities within the GG. He also noted that he examined 35 of them in detail, 31 of whom were Poles and four were ethnic Germans. Due to the ongoing armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, he did not analyse the activities of Ukrainian mayors, although he announced that a study on mayors who declared themselves to be Ukrainian would also be published in the future.³ The main objective of the research, as indicated from the very first pages of the monograph, was to show the activities of Polish mayors who, according to the author, allegedly supported the Germans in their policy of exterminating Jews, and would be therefore their ‘partners.’ Being certain of their involvement in this process, Rossoliński-Liebe states with full conviction already in the introduction that Polish mayors participated in the Holocaust, that is, they were the accomplices, and his research goal is merely to explore this issue.⁴ The starting point for the author’s further deliberations is not the question of whether Polish mayors participated in the extermination of Jews, but how they did it. One of the author’s goals was to create a collective biography of Polish mayors, which he believed aligned – at least in part – with a broader study of this professional group. He argued that examining issues such as cooperation with Jewish councils and German authorities, the establishment of ghettos, and land exploitation could shed some light on the attitudes and actions of individual mayors in rela-

² G. Rossoliński-Liebe, *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust. Besetzung, Verwaltung und Kollaboration*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

tion to these matters.⁵ The natural question that comes to mind is were then the members of the Judenrats also responsible for the Holocaust?

The author blames the German research conducted to date for its “selective national (nationalist) narrative about the Holocaust,” noting that such research began in the 1990s. He points out that the role of “local authorities,” mayors, and “other actors” has been completely omitted from this research, or that historical analysis in this area has been only marginal. He also criticises both Polish and other “national” historiographies that focus on the German occupation, arguing that they attribute, or rather, as the author writes, reduce responsibility for the Holocaust solely to decisions made by the German authorities.⁶ The review focuses on issues related to the extermination of Jews and the author’s hypotheses and arguments. To verify the footnoted sources, I conducted archival research on mayors’ activities in the Distrikt Warschau (Warsaw Province).⁷

Part I. The Created World of Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe

In the book’s introduction, the author criticises the terminology used to date, which he considers incorrect and imprecise. He explains that he avoids terms like “German authorities” and “German administration” because they are “imprecise” and “require clarification.”⁸ This approach must surprise any researcher who takes facts seriously. Terms such as “German authorities” and “German administration” are general and elementary, as well as established in scholarly literature, descriptions of the realities of the GG, the territories incorporated into the Reich, and the remaining Polish territories occupied by the German Reich in 1939–1945, especially the Eastern Borderlands from 1941. These terms refer to both civil and police or military authorities. Remaining within his own paradigm, which is incon-

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷ The archival research was conducted at the State Archives in Siedlce (*Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach*), the State Archives in Warsaw (*Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie*), the State Archives in Warsaw, Branch in Grodzisk Mazowiecki (*Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie Oddział w Grodzisku Mazowieckim*), and the State Archives in Warsaw, Branch in Otwock (*Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie Oddział w Otwocku*).

⁸ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 10.

sistent with historical truth, the author points out that the terms “German Reich” (*Deutsches Reich*), “General Governorate” (*Generalgouvernement*) and “ethnic Germans” (*Volksdeutsche*) are not placed in quotation marks, even though, as he claims, “they were invented or significantly inspired by the National Socialists.”⁹ It is difficult to explain the logic behind this idea – does the author intend to place all terms coined by the National Socialists in quotation marks? His deliberations on these terms are completely unnecessary and, at the same time, utterly unclear. Furthermore, the GG or even *Volksdeutsche* are not invented terms, but entities functioning under German law.¹⁰ Only the term “Third Reich” could be treated with caution as a colloquialism used to refer to the German Reich. In addition, the author points out that the Germans held positions in the GG only at the top of the administration.¹¹ Obviously, this is not true, as evidenced by the employment of Germans not only in the GG government at the aforementioned top level, but also in *Distrikt*-level (provincial) offices and in the *Kreises* (districts) [both terms will be used here for the German entities to avoid confusion – editor’s remark]. It is worth noting that the offices of *Kreishauptmanns* in rural *Kreises* and *Stadthauptmanns* in urban *Kreises* were branches of the German authorities – the GG government. These offices were held exclusively by the Germans. They had full administrative power in the *Kreises*, and Polish officials, including mayors, had to obey their orders without question. Moreover, German supervisors and administrators carried out various functions, typically at the managerial or directorial level within specialised administrative agencies such as forestry, agriculture, or cooperatives. Others oversaw estates and businesses looted from Poles and Jews. Collectively, they formed a substantial group with full authority over the occupied population. The author uses the term “local administration” to refer to mayors and municipal administrations, though he does not note that the administration – including the local level – was German in the state established by the Germans as an auxiliary to the Reich, the GG, and that ethnic Poles were employed only as officials required to obey unconditionally. In this context, it is worth asking the author: were the Jewish Councils, *Judenrats*, a Jewish-German administration?

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The author notes that during the Second Polish Republic, particularly in the latter half of the 1930s, the self-governing functions of urban and rural municipalities were partially curtailed. Building on this observation, Rossoliński-Liebe contends that this trend persisted within the GG.¹² Combining these two periods is completely ludicrous. Firstly, the author ignores the essential distinction between the sovereign state of the Second Polish Republic and the colonial construct of the General Government. Secondly, the role of mayors was indeed limited and some of their powers were transferred to district governors [Polish: *starosta*, head of *powiat* (district administration) – editor’s remark], but in pre-war Poland, Polish officials worked for their own country, not for the invaders, who were the Germans. Thirdly, the legal and state system of the GG had nothing in common with the Second Polish Republic. The Germans did not preserve the state structures of pre-war Poland, and the GG, as a German creation, completely broke with the Polish state and broadly understood Polishness.

It is useful to consider the concepts introduced by the author in the introduction, particularly in relation to the role of mayors. Primo Levi’s notion of the “grey zone” is significant; he acknowledged the complexity of interactions between occupiers and the occupied, highlighting the space between routine activities and collaboration. Rossoliński-Liebe not only engages with this concept but also emphasises that these interactions were asymmetrical, with the occupiers holding a dominant position. The author also cites Yehuda Bauer’s idea that collaboration can be identified when individuals align themselves with the occupiers’ ideological objectives.¹³ These circumstances did not pertain to Polish mayors, a point the author does not contest. It is important to note that although he references these concepts in the introduction, they are not applied in the main body of the monograph, including the conclusion.

Rossoliński-Liebe approached the subsequent theories underpinning the main content of his book in a totally different manner. Particularly significant is the concept of governing developed by Alf Lüdtke, which German historian Frank Bajohr paraphrased as follows:

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

The definition of governing as a social practice does not assume a clear, sharp division between the governing and the governed, between those who give orders and those who receive them but rather defines the process of governing as a quite amorphous field of forces in which actors relate to each other in various ways. Instead of inquiring about the passive, abstract stance of society towards those in authority, one takes into account the diverse forms of activities and behaviours within society.¹⁴

Applying this theory to the functioning of municipal officials in the GG and the German administration, the author assumed that the division between mayors and German authorities was not clear-cut, and that both groups influenced each other, and therefore the responsibility for the new tasks imposed on towns during the occupation, namely the Holocaust and economic exploitation, lies with both German officials and Polish mayors.¹⁵ The author argues that “the occupiers would not have been able to carry out the two aforementioned tasks in municipalities and towns without the participation of mayors and local administrations.”¹⁶ In relation to the above statement, it is necessary to address the ahistorical mode of thinking adopted by the author in his consideration of “what if...” scenarios. The issue of the Holocaust, as it relates to the monograph, will be addressed in a later section of the review.

Continuing his discussion of the actions carried out by the occupiers and mayors, Rossoliński-Liebe presented the following concept: “modern bureaucracies did not hinder the perpetrators’ actions, but rather facilitated them, as they minimised the specific responsibility of the actors involved through the ‘division of labour.’” According to this concept, responsibility for the persecution and murder of Jews, as well as for other forms of cooperation, “was divided between various offices, and within them, various organisational units and dozens, if not hundreds, of officials and other employees.”¹⁷ The author then argues that mayors, although they “headed the municipal administration and had an overview of all events, took on

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

only part of the overall task,” and also: “were not directly involved in the murder of Jews, unlike German or Polish policemen, firemen or village leaders, but acted mainly as ‘desk perpetrators.’”¹⁸ The author of the monograph adds that, in principle, mayors participated in the murder of Jews in two ways: firstly, by carrying out the orders of their superiors, and secondly, by exploiting the framework of the occupation to – on their own initiative – rob and harm Jews, as Rossoliński-Liebe calls these activities. He also adds: “because these two types of participation in the murder of Jews were intertwined, it is not always possible to clearly separate them.” For this reason, in his research, the mayors were considered perpetrators who, depending on the circumstances, were either victims of the German occupiers or of the Polish resistance movement.¹⁹ By describing Polish mayors as perpetrators and accomplices, the author also points to cooperation between the Germans and the “local administration,” even though these relations were based solely on the subordination of the Poles to the Germans. According to Rossoliński-Liebe, it was a dynamic process involving an exchange of ideas, plans and intentions, which ultimately led to joint action. The author attempts to look at their contacts from a broader perspective and argues that “objects” previously considered opposites in research, such as the occupiers and the occupied, or resistance and collaboration, are interconnected. The author even ceases to see any differences between them, thereby limiting the responsibility of the Germans for their actions, including the Holocaust, and shifting it onto Polish mayors. He is convinced that by using a “transnational approach” and rejecting “methodological nationalism in research on the Holocaust, occupation and collaboration,” he is expanding the existing research perspectives and shedding new light on long-known facts.²⁰ The analysed fragment of the introduction can be compared more to journalistic musings than to serious scholarly analysis. In his attempt to prove that Polish mayors participated in the extermination of Jews and were jointly responsible for it, Rossoliński-Liebe employed at least several methods that are certainly far from scholarly rigour.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* This term usually concerns the persons who issued orders or organised the repressions or mass murders, while not engaging in direct criminal acts; as such describing the Polish officials, who were not decision-makers in the process of the mass murder of the Jews as “desk perpetrators” or “Schreibtischtäter” is utterly misleading.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

While reading the monograph, one cannot help but reflect on the legal framework of the GG administration. On the one hand, the author is reluctant to use the term *Generalgouvernement*, General Governorate – the German-ruled administrative entity – and on the other, he introduces a non-existent and non-historical term into academic discourse: “Cracovian government” (*Krakauer Regierung*), which he uses to describe the form of government of the supreme authority operating in the GG. The term “Cracovian government,” coined by the author, appears 81 times throughout the book, including once as a subchapter title. Notably, it does not appear elsewhere in established academic literature.²¹ Meanwhile, the correct and proper name, which Rossoliński-Liebe is reluctant to use – the government of the GG (*Regierung des GG*) – not only existed and was an entity under German law, but also, which the author may not know, was recognised by the Supreme National Tribunal as a criminal organisation.²² It is worth noting that the GG was established under German law by a decree issued on 26 October 1939 by Adolf Hitler, commonly referred to as the Proclamation of the GG. Its content was officially entered into the official Reich’s journal of laws – the *Reichsgesetzblatt*.²³

By using the false term “Cracovian government,” the author attempts to create the impression that the GG, or rather its supreme authorities, were not German. Let us ask a rhetorical question: what does it mean that the government was “Cracovian,” who appointed it, and so on? From here, it is only a short step to using an equally erroneous term – one the author does not shy away from – according to which the administration in the GG was German-Polish in nature. To support the historically inaccurate thesis about the functioning of such an administration, the author cites the publication of regulations in the GG’s journal of laws (*Dziennik Rozporządzeń GG*) and other journals issued within the GG in Polish and German.²⁴ It should be emphasised that the journal was published by the Germans “for the occupied Polish territories”; even its title underscored their dominance

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 194, 381, 383, 652.

²² *Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej Główna Komisja* (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance, Main Commission, hereinafter AIPN GK), 196/239, Indictment issued by the Prosecutor’s Office of the Supreme National Tribunal, Cracow, 31 May 1942, p. 51.

²³ *Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers* über die Verwaltung der besetzten polnische Gebiete vom 12 Oktober 1939, *Reichsgesetzblatt*, Part 1, 24 October 1939, no. 210, pp. 2077–2078.

²⁴ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 198.

over Polish lands.²⁵ Given that one country dominated another – in this case, Germany dominated Poland – it is inaccurate to speak of a “Polish-German daily.” The German occupiers made practical use of the Polish language, employing it in documents, including legal texts, to ensure that Poles could understand and comply with orders, and to disseminate German propaganda among the Polish population. Ethnic Polish officials had no influence over legal provisions within the GG. Nevertheless, the author frequently uses terms such as “Polish-German administration” and even “Polish-German legislation.”²⁶ The book offers a telling quote on this matter: “municipal administrations and other offices were Polish-German in nature, even if some of these buildings flew flags with swastikas.”²⁷ It is worth reminding the author that throughout the GG, only the symbols of the German Reich were allowed to be used, while the Polish emblem and national symbols were legally banned. It seems that the author is unaware of the actions taken to denationalise Polish offices, including the municipal authorities. Let us also recall that German was the official language of the GG, while beginning in 1941 Polish held the status of an “acceptable” language – after Ukrainian.²⁸ It is also worth noting that the large number of ethnic Polish employees at the lower levels of administration in the GG stemmed from the fact that the Polish population constituted the ethnic majority within this ‘state.’ It should be recognised that their performance of tasks in individual offices was solely the result of the occupier’s practical approach. The administrators of the GG, who failed to create an administration based exclusively on Germans, had to reach out to Poles in some way to implement their programme of economic exploitation and social control. This was achieved through orders given to them to carry out, instructions to impose and collect taxes, and minor forms of administration, such as applications and requests. Unfortunately, Rossoliński-Liebe overlooks the fact that, in November 1939, all civil servants employed in the municipal government prior to 1 September 1939 were compelled to return to work. Noncompliance was met

²⁵ *Verordnung über das Verlagswesen im Generalgouvernement*, *Verordnungsblatt des Generalgouverneurs für die besetzten polnische Gebiete* 1939, no. 3, 2 November, p. 19.

²⁶ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, pp. 51, 196–197, 199, 201, 228–229, 248, 578–579.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²⁸ A. Wrzyszczyk, “Hierarchia aktów prawnych wprowadzonych przez okupanta niemieckiego w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w latach 1939–1945,” *Studia Iuridica Lublinensia* 22 (2014), p. 700.

with repression, meaning that officials typically resumed their duties not voluntarily, but under duress.

The notion of a so-called “Polish-German administration,” in light of the arguments already presented – especially those regarding the destruction of Polish statehood, the removal of national symbols by the Germans, the imposition of German as the official language, the enforcement of German law, and the compulsory appointment of officials – is entirely baseless. The Germans pursued an aggressive occupation policy, and Polish officials – including mayors – were entirely subordinate to them; they were obliged to carry out their occupiers’ orders and instructions. In this context, the author’s thesis regarding the existence of a “Polish-German administration” in the GG is both absurd and inconsistent with fundamental historical facts.

Rossoliński-Liebe went much further in his narrative, claiming that there was a legal continuity between the Second Polish Republic and the GG. It should be noted that his concept is absurd and demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of the era. This is shown, among other things, by a quotation from a German order: “the existing Polish law remains in force insofar as it does not conflict with the takeover of administration by German law and the exercise of sovereign military rights.”²⁹ The reference to existing Polish legal provisions did not stem from any intention to apply them in practice. Rather, the Germans selectively appropriated elements that served their interests, without seeking the consent of the Polish population. The application of Polish law by the Germans against the will of the Poles does not make it German-Polish law. These decisions were driven by pragmatic concerns, not by any effort to preserve even the vestiges of Polish statehood. The claim of legal continuity between pre-war Poland and the GG is based on flawed scholarly reasoning. One supposed piece of evidence is the decision of Kreishauptmann Kurt Driessen, who, in establishing the ghetto in Końskie, cited the Polish law of 21 February 1935 on combating infectious diseases.³⁰ This constitutes a *de facto* propaganda manoeuvre by the German occupying authorities, intended to create the illusion of concern for the population. The truth is that the

²⁹ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 199.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

GG, as part of the Greater German Reich, did not constitute a legal successor to the Second Polish Republic. In relation to the work's central topic, it should be noted that in the Second Polish Republic, mayors were initially elected by the local population, and, from 1933 onwards, by municipal councils. In contrast, under the GG, mayors in towns with populations of up to 20,000 were appointed by the Distrikt Governor upon the recommendation of the German *Kreishauptmann*, while in larger municipalities, those exceeding 20,000 inhabitants, appointments were made directly by the Governor-General.³¹

By constructing a specific notion of “legal continuity” between the Second Polish Republic and the GG, the author appears to pursue a broader objective: to suggest not only institutional continuity – particularly regarding mayors and magistrates – but also to imply the responsibility of pre-war Poland and its institutions, including administrative and local government bodies, in allegedly implementing measures akin to those enacted in the 1930s German Reich, namely the reality of systemic violence against Jews. While anti-Semitism did exist in pre-war Poland, comparing it with the German crimes of genocide against the Jews is an absurd proposition.

Since, according to the author, ‘Polish-German law’ was in force in the GG, laws passed by the Sejm in interwar Poland were invoked, and the ‘Cracovian government’ was functioning, it seems obvious that there was a kind of cooperation between the Germans and the Poles that could be described as collaboration. This word was, in fact, used in the subtitle of the monograph.

The narrative created by the author also includes another important, albeit unconfirmed, thesis, according to which the actions of Polish officials, specifically their alleged collaboration with the occupiers, were sanctioned by the Polish government-in-exile in London.³² Rossoliński-Liebe states:

The Polish resistance, operating primarily in the General Governorate, was one of the strongest in Europe. The Home Army (AK) and its predecessor, the Union of Armed Struggle (ZWZ), cooperated with the Polish government-in-exile in London, with which some mayors also maintained contact. The Polish

³¹ *Verordnung über die Verwaltung der polnischen Gemeinden*, *Verordnungsblatt des Generalgouverneurs für die besetzten polnische Gebiete* 1939, no. 9, 6 December, p. 71.

³² *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 8.

government-in-exile formally legitimised the cooperation of mayors and all other municipal employees with the German occupiers, as it assumed that without municipal administration, normal life in occupied Poland would be impossible. However, the government-in-exile and underground organisations condemned political collaboration or cooperation with the occupiers that harmed the Polish and Jewish populations.³³

The author's statement is an obvious misrepresentation, indicating a complete misunderstanding of the conditions of coercion and terror in which both mayors and residents of occupied towns found themselves. Rossoliński-Liebe does not attempt to prove this thesis in any way, nor does he support it with any documents or point to other arguments that might speak in its favour. It is therefore worth asking: is the author aware of what he is writing about? Is his monograph really serving scholarly purposes, including, above all, the pursuit of truth?

Regarding the issue of collaboration, it is worth noting that in examining this question, the author was unable to distinguish between the activities undertaken by the mayors on their own initiative and those imposed upon them by the German occupiers. This approach to the problem will certainly not lead to identifying who was responsible for what exactly. It is worth adding that those who were assigned specific duties also bear responsibility, albeit of a different kind. However, unlike the Germans, refusal to carry out these tasks could cost Polish mayors their jobs or even their lives. Responsibility for the actions of the occupiers can easily be attributed to Polish officials. In this context, a passage from the monograph in which the author speculates that the Poles perceived the Germans as a "master race" seems understandable but completely irrational. Accepting this – which the author concludes, contrary to logic – one could assume that the relations between German Kreishauptmanns and Polish mayors were collegial or even friendly.³⁴ Let us clarify that it was the Germans who referred to themselves as the "master race," not the Poles who perceived them as such. To claim that Poles entered into friendly and collegial relations with the Germans

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

because they regarded the occupiers as a 'master race' is a gross distortion of the violent and racist reality imposed on Polish lands by the invaders from the West beginning in 1939 and thereafter. It should be recalled that in the GG, the occupying authorities implemented a racial policy in which the Poles were explicitly regarded as inferior within the imposed hierarchy.

From the unreliable narrative of friendly relations between German and Polish officials, the author infers the existence of conditions conducive to cooperation, allegedly encouraging interaction between representatives of both nationalities. According to the author, this mutual engagement led to a process of learning from one another, which was particularly evident, in their view, during the establishment of ghettos and the exploitation of Jews. The author even claims that "mayors [Poles – author's remark] were often more responsible for the Holocaust than their 'German counterparts.'"³⁵

Rossoliński-Liebe apparently believes that, due to their constant interaction with German officials, Polish mayors played an important role in German local politics, and by shaping it, they also influenced state politics. Referring to the realities of the occupied towns, he states: "local politics is not only the implementation of state policy at lower levels, but it also offers scope for one's own political projects."³⁶ The author's conclusion is fundamentally false, given that the mayors did not pursue any policy of their own, but rather, as officials working within the German administration, implemented the German plan of action. The author's claim that Polish mayors pursued an independent policy serves to distort the historical narrative by attributing agency to Polish officials and equating their role with that of the German authorities. It must be stressed that such an equivalence is fundamentally untenable, as under German racial doctrine, the Poles had a status subordinate to the Germans.³⁷

The fundamental issues discussed in the monograph, as well as its structure, give rise to many critical reflections. In addition, the book has many poorly placed emphases and omissions – gaps concerning essential topics that should definitely have been included. Let us now proceed to discuss the structural

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

flaws of the publication. The first three chapters: I. "Politics, Administration, and Legislation of the Second Polish Republic," II. "Cities as Places of Coexistence and Violence," III. "Pre-war Lives of the Occupation-era Mayors," are of an introductory nature and concern the Second Polish Republic. Their main premise is to create an image of interwar Poland, and especially of the towns where Jews lived, as places full of violence towards the Jewish population or, at best, hostile to them. Such an image, especially of the second half of the 1930s, is not entirely without merit, but Rossoliński-Liebe's presentation of the matter, with its failure to distinguish between the brutal, downright murderous anti-Semitism of the Third Reich and the situation of Jews in pre-war Poland, aims to create a breeding ground for demonstrating the extensive involvement of Polish mayors in the Holocaust during World War II and to clearly show that this was merely a continuation of violent actions that allegedly began during the Second Polish Republic.

Unfortunately, the book does not have a chapter or subchapter devoted to the racist policies of the German state towards Jews in the 1930s. An ideal historical background for the author's reflections in subsequent chapters would be an analysis of the racial anti-Semitic German law (the Nuremberg Laws), gradually implemented and introduced by the Germans, and even an emphasis on the brutal actions of the National Socialists in Germany towards the Jewish minority, including Polish citizens living in the Reich. This unmentioned background could serve as a perfect introduction to the discussion of the extermination of Jews in cities in German-occupied Polish territories during World War II. The profile of the occupiers' actions should be one of the fundamental elements of the monograph, yet it is completely absent. Instead, a direct introduction to the occupation and the issues outlined in the title and subtitle of the monograph, at least in intention, is provided in Chapter IV, entitled "War, Occupation, and Administration." In Chapter V, "Mayors in the Administrative Network," little attention is paid to the destruction of cities and towns as a result of the actions of German artillery, armoured weapons, air force and infantry, as well as police formations, during the Polish campaign of 1939.³⁸ This gives the striking impression that the German

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

army and repressive apparatus did not conduct operations against the Polish and Jewish populations in September and October 1939.³⁹ It seems that the author does not assign sufficient importance to key historical context, addressing it only in a limited way. It is worth recalling that the first murders of Jews on Polish soil, carried out by Wehrmacht soldiers and German police units, occurred during the military campaign of 1939 – more than two years before Operation “Reinhardt.” Unfortunately, the author did not include even a mention of these significant events. In his monograph, the author marginalised an issue that was a crucial element of the German Reich’s policy, namely the displacement of Poles and Jews from the territories incorporated into the Reich to the GG. While Jews were mainly sent to cities, Poles were usually sent to the countryside. As a result of this, as well as the destruction caused by the aforementioned military actions, numerous cities in the GG were overpopulated.⁴⁰ These important, even key events, whose scholarly analysis is essential, should provide historical background and open the way for further consideration of the position of mayors and their actions. They are not of any interest to the researcher. Their omission is not only a huge factual error but also imposes the belief of “limited German agency” in the scholarly discourse on the Holocaust.

A characteristic feature of much of the work, especially the aforementioned chapters II,⁴¹ III,⁴² as well as VI⁴³, entitled “The Holocaust,” is the simplification of the narrative by reducing it to a “listing” of individual towns and mayors and a brief discussion of them. The author’s historical analysis of the “heads of the town administration” has been reduced to their laconically presented biographies and references to their activity before World War II, with particular emphasis, of course, on their participation in anti-Semitic actions. In Chapter VI, the author uses a case-by-case approach to discuss individual towns, attempting to prove the involvement of individual mayors in the Holocaust. Unfortunately, his approach

³⁹ See the subchapter in Chapter V, titled “Destruction of Cities, Military Administration and Recruitment of Mayors,” in *ibid.*, pp. 246–261.

⁴⁰ Jewish settlement in Polish towns dates back to the Middle Ages. In the 19th and 20th centuries, urban centres became the primary areas of Jewish life in Poland.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 98–133.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 134–180.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 357–578.

has little in common with an analytical, scholarly, or problem-based approach to the issues raised. The author should point out certain problems characteristic of most mayors and the majority of towns, rather than listing municipal bodies and their leaders one by one and then characterising each case individually, as if he were a student. The proposed structure of the monograph is surprising for a habilitation thesis.

The author should also attempt to provide a brief overview – at least in the form of a subchapter – of the anti-Jewish policies pursued by the German repressive apparatus and administrative structures in the GG. These include methods of persecution, ghettoisation, the establishment of Judenrats, as well as the introduction of anti-Semitic legislation aimed at plundering, persecuting, and murdering Jews. Without even a minimal analysis of these issues, which undoubtedly form the historical context surrounding the actions of the German perpetrators, it becomes impossible to understand the role of Polish mayors and the nature of the German occupation in the GG.

Repeating hypotheses and theses in both the introduction and conclusion is a cardinal error that disqualifies any scholarly dissertation. Of course, there should be a correlation between the opening and closing sections of a scholarly study. In Rossoliński-Liebe's monograph, the introduction and conclusion are 'fluid' – the author mixes theses with hypotheses, while the proof of the latter, especially with regard to the Holocaust, is already indicated in the introductory part of the book. In fact, reading the introduction is enough to understand what the monograph is about and what hypotheses have been 'proven,' including the most important one, according to which Polish mayors were co-responsible for the Holocaust and benefited from it. What is more, the author does not actually pose any research questions in the book, and the involvement of mayors in the Holocaust is obvious to him and constitutes a starting point for further deliberations.⁴⁴

A serious shortcoming of the work – stemming from the author's methodological choices – is the absence of any analysis of German law, particularly the regulations issued by the Governor-General (in the official journal of laws for GG, *Verordnungsblatt*) and the official gazettes of Distrikt heads concerning the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

functioning of the “town administration.” It was Governor-General Hans Frank, along with Distrikt governors and Kreishauptmanns, who issued the legal acts under which, among others, mayors and members of the Judenrats were required to operate.⁴⁵

The book is marred by fundamental flaws in the historian’s craft – errors that have no place in any serious scholarly work, let alone a habilitation thesis. The footnotes, to be precise, are not merely inaccurate; they actively obstruct comprehension. Instead of clarifying the text, they muddle the narrative and open the door to misreadings, including outright false interpretations. In short, they are ineptly executed. It is Rossoliński-Liebe’s practice to cite only the addressees of letters in the footnotes, while omitting the authors. Several footnotes were selected from among many, along with their numbering and the exact wording:

- 1) footnote 685: An den Herrn Kreishauptmann, 9.10.1940, APGM, AMGr, Bd. 542, Bl. 266;⁴⁶
- 2) footnote 691: An den Herrn Bürgermeister, 22.11.1940, APGM, AMGr, Bd. 542, Bl. 422;⁴⁷
- 3) footnote 720: Do Rady Żydowskiej (To the Jewish Council), 26.1.1942, APSi, AMSi, Bd. 365, Bl. 54;⁴⁸
- 4) footnote 739: An den Herrn Bürgermeister, 20.2.1940, APGM, AGKor, Bd. 248, Bl. 3;⁴⁹
- 5) footnote 762: Do Zarządu Miejskiego (To the Municipal Administration), 30.10.1940, APO, AMMM, Bd. 533, Bl. 22;⁵⁰
- 6) footnote 789: APGM, AMSk, Bd. 183, Bl. 67–167;⁵¹
- 7) footnote 1144: Do Pana Burmistrza (To the Mayor), 25.3.1940, APGM, AMGr, Bd. 519, Bl. 240;⁵²

⁴⁵ A. Wrzyszczyk, “Administracja terytorialna w ustawodawstwie okupanta niemieckiego w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie (1939–1944). Część I (1.09.1939 – 31.07.1940),” *Z Dziejów Prawa* 20 (2019), pp. 621, 627–628.

⁴⁶ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 497.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 502.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 506.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 580.

- 8) footnote 1617: Do Komisarycznego Zarządu Zabezpieczonych Nieruchomości (To the Provisional Administration of Seized Properties), 10.12.1942, APO, AMO, Bd. 871, Bl. 1,⁵³
- 9) footnote 1750: An den Herrn Stadthauptmann, 15.1.1942, APW, KBMW, Bd. 70, Bl.⁵⁴

The omission of the document's creator in the brief footnote descriptions demonstrates the author's unprofessional handling of historical method and forms part of a deliberate effort to inject disinformation into the account. In the main text, the author typically employs an impersonal style when referring to German actions, obscuring who was responsible, while the footnotes cite only the document's recipient. As a result, both the narrative and the footnotes prevent the reader from connecting German decision-makers with the actions carried out or decisions taken. Other errors made by the author in the footnotes concern incorrect information about the location of archival materials. In the footnotes on page 645 of the monograph – footnote 1565 (Do Pana Pełki Łukasza [To Mr. Łukasz Pełka], 17 December 1942, APSi, AMKo, Bd. 423, Bl. 11) and footnote 1566 (Do Pana Krauze Mieczysława [To Mr. Mieczysław Krauze], 17 December 1942, APSi, AMKo, Bd. 423, Bl. 14) – the author committed a formal error by stating that the archival collection Akta miasta Końskie (Files of the Town of Końskie, hereinafter AMKo) is held at the State Archives in Siedlce (*Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach*, hereinafter APSi). Meanwhile, the files of the town of Końskie are kept in the State Archives in Kielce (*Archiwum Państwowe w Kielcach*).⁵⁵

In addition to misquoting archival collections, the author also makes another serious mistake – he alters the content of documents. He assigns archival reference numbers to documents other than those he quotes. Here is an example. On the basis of the documents registered under the reference number 1290 from the Akta miasta Siedlce (Files of the Town of Siedlce) archival collection held at the State Archives in Siedlce (*Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach*), Rossoliński-Liebe states that the Kreishauptmann of the Kreis Siedlce, Friedrich Seeman, reported: “ambitious and hard-working craftsmen now had the opportunity to earn a living in towns such as Łosice, Mordy and Siedlce. Those who wished to take advantage of this opportunity

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 652.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 659.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 645.

were asked to contact the relevant mayor, who would inform them whether the transfer was possible and which flat had been allocated.”⁵⁶ The document referred to by the author is probably factual, but the State Archives in Siedlce do not keep it in the “Files of the Town of Siedlce” archival collection under reference number 1290. Under this reference number, there is the “Książka meldunkowa ul. Piaski Zamiejskie 42, wł. Bareja Józef” (Registration Book for 42 Piaski Zamiejskie Street, owner Józef Bareja).⁵⁷ It is therefore difficult to determine in which fond and under which reference number the document used by the author is located.

The reference number “1290” from the Files of the Town of Siedlce reoccurs as an incorrect citation. Rossoliński-Liebe cites an announcement dated 16 May 1942, issued by Kreishauptmann Ernest Gramß of the Kreis Sokolow-Wengrow and addressed to the Polish population, which stated that “village leaders and bailiffs are obliged to report any foreigner lacking residence in the GG.” The Kreishauptmann ordered that every non-resident foreigner staying in the municipality temporarily must be reported to the relevant German Gendarmerie station. Villagers were obliged to immediately inform bailiffs and village leaders of the whereabouts of any “strangers.” Gramß threatened to send the village leader or bailiff to the labour camp in Treblinka for failure to comply with this order.⁵⁸ It is worth recalling once again that under the aforementioned reference number “1290” there is the “Registration Book for 42 Piaski Zamiejskie Street, owner Józef Bareja,” and not the announcement referred to by the author.⁵⁹

Part 2. The Holocaust and Jews

For the purposes of this review, and especially in connection with Chapter VI, archival research was carried out in the records produced by municipal offices in the Distrikt Warschau (Warsaw Province). The records cited by the author were

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 644.

⁵⁷ *Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach* (State Archives in Siedlce, hereinafter APS), collection Akta miasta Siedlce (Files of the Town of Siedlce, hereinafter AMSi), 1290, Książka meldunkowa ul. Piaski Zamiejskie 42, wł. Bareja Józef (Registration Book for 42 Piaski Zamiejskie Street, owner Józef Bareja); *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 644.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 725.

⁵⁹ Incorrect reference number provided by the author: Obwieszczenie nr 190 (Announcement no. 190), 16.5.1942, APS, AMSi, vol. 1290, p. 4

examined, their content verified and then compared with the chapter's treatment of the Holocaust.

Chapter VI, entitled "The Holocaust," examines the role of Polish mayors in the extermination of Jews. As the most significant chapter, its title partially overlaps with that of the book *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*. Were Rossoliński-Liebe's approach guided by a strict pursuit of objective truth, a more appropriate title might have been, for instance, "Polish-Jewish Relations." Essentially, the issues raised there relate to the broadly understood relations between Poles and Jews under the German occupation. It should further be emphasised that the chapter entitled "The Holocaust" constitutes a misrepresentation in the context of Polish mayors' participation, and particularly their alleged co-responsibility in the expulsion of Jews from town councils, the establishment of *Judenräte*, ghettoisation (i.e. forcible resettlement of Jews from their previous dwellings into ghettos), the imposition of forced labour, and the 'appropriation' (i.e. plundering) of Jewish property. Regarding all the problems and events mentioned, we can talk about the use of repression and persecution, but it was not yet a time of systematic genocide. The title of the chapter is even more misleading given that the issues in question occupy over 300 pages in the book (from page 357 to 688), whereas the description of the genocide within the Holocaust in the entire chapter devoted to it is limited to only 30 pages (from 689 to 729). These pages do, in fact, examine the extermination of the Jews – namely the liquidation of the ghettos and the final stage of the Holocaust. Considering the arguments presented, however, the chapter's title amounts to a scholarly misrepresentation.

To further the analysis of Rossoliński-Liebe's monograph, excerpts from the chapter "The Holocaust" concerning towns in the Distrikt Warschau were juxtaposed with the archival records cited by the author. Accordingly, both the main text and the source base employed in the book will be examined.

Rossoliński-Liebe points out that Polish mayors were beneficiaries of the forced labour of Jewish workers and profited from it. The book contains a sentence stating that "they learned to profit from their [the Jews' – author's remark] labour," but it does not specify who taught them this. Even if readers assume that it was the Germans, the author does not state this. In search of an argument to support this thesis, he refers to a document which is an employment

contract, according to which the mayor of Sochaczew employed 15 Jews, who, as Rossoliński-Liebe notes, were “examined and cleared of charges.”⁶⁰ Rossoliński-Liebe refers to the content of the document in a very inaccurate manner, citing only information that confirms his claim that Jews were not paid and that they were exploited. However, the actual content of the document completely contradicts this. The agreement notes the payment of the salaries, and although its amount was limited to only 80% of the Polish worker’s wages, however it was paid. The document also states that the costs of food and accommodation in this case were paid by the Jewish workers. The content of the narrative in the main text is completely inconsistent with the information contained in the document. Thus, the author is not so much mistaken in his interpretation as he is distorting the facts.⁶¹

Another example of presenting completely unreliable data to reach the desired conclusions concerns Warsaw. Referring to the content of an archival document produced during the tenure of the Commissioner Mayor of the City of Warsaw, Rossoliński-Liebe states:

The complexity of tax policy and the involvement of city councillors can be seen in Warsaw. The received administrative records show that Mayor Kulski and his administration participated in all areas of tax policy. Essentially, they protected Polish interests while disadvantaging Jewish residents, exploiting the anti-Semitic circumstances created by the occupiers to profit from Jewish helplessness.⁶²

To confirm this comment, the author refers to information passed by Ludwig Leist, the Stadthauptmann of Warsaw, to Mayor Kulski, according to which he would allow street music “only in very exceptional cases and only in the area of the

⁶⁰ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 593.

⁶¹ *Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie, Oddział w Grodzisku Mazowieckim* (State Archives in Warsaw, Branch in Grodzisk Mazowiecki, hereinafter APW OGM), collection Akta miasta Sochaczewa (Files of the Town of Sochaczew), 342, Employment contract concluded between the Kreishauptmann of Sochaczew-Błonie and the Mayor of Sochaczew, Prause, Warsaw, 24 May 1941, p. 12.

⁶² *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 668.

epidemic control zone.”⁶³ It is not necessary to refer to the content of the archival document, as Rossoliński-Liebe simply contradicts himself. Both the document and the monograph state that Stadthauptmann Leist, a German, forbade Jews from performing street music. For unknown reasons, the author manipulates the text, suggesting that also in this case Poles benefited from the tragedy of Jews. It is hard to guess what benefits he is referring to, and the person who prohibited the performance of music was a German official. It is unclear from where Rossoliński-Liebe draws the basis for his conclusions.

When discussing the enforcement of taxes on Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, he also proposed a similar interpretation, specifically one not based on facts. Let us quote an excerpt from the monograph:

The manner in which Kulski demanded payment of the “unpaid” bills was also morally questionable. Although gas bills had to be paid by individuals in the ghetto, he decided that the [municipal – author’s remark] gasworks should receive the amount owed to them for the entire ghetto from the Jewish Council. In doing so, he referred to a decision made by the Stadthauptmann on 29 June 1942. The same was to apply to electricity, water and sewerage charges. To collect these debts, the city administration wanted to collect the amount of 96,955 zlotys owed by “Jewish consumers” to the municipal gasworks from the Jewish Council in the next settlement, which was scheduled for July 1942. With this administrative step, the mayor ultimately succeeded in forcing the Jewish Council to pay the bills of impoverished or already murdered Jews.”⁶⁴

The actions described, which were certainly morally questionable, were not, as the author interprets them, implemented on the mayor’s initiative. He exercised executive power in the city as a subordinate of the Stadthauptmann and referred to the decision issued by him on 29 June 1942 regarding the enforcement of fees.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie* (State Archives in Warsaw, hereinafter APW), collection Komisaryczny Burmistrz Miasta Warszawy (Commissioner Mayor of the City of Warsaw, hereinafter KBMW), 70, Commissioner Mayor of the City of Warsaw to the Management of the Municipal Gasworks, Warsaw, July 1942, p. 45; *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, pp. 674–675.

Rossoliński-Liebe completely “ignores the person” of the Stadthauptmann, even though the content of the source clearly indicates Leist’s decision-making power and responsibility. The mayor did not decide on taxes, and besides, their main beneficiary was the “German administration,” so often overlooked by the author. Furthermore, it is unclear what the author intends when he speaks of collecting taxes from murdered Jews, particularly since the July 1942 document in question was likely drafted before the major deportation operation, even though mass killings by the Germans had already taken place. He may be alluding to Jews who died in other circumstances, yet he provides no clarification, thereby creating a false picture.⁶⁵

Rossoliński-Liebe’s interpretation of the actions of Otwock Mayor Gadomski led him to conclude that the mayor was campaigning for the collection of a tourist tax, known as the “spa tax” (German: *Kurtaxe*), in the Jewish quarter. According to the author’s narrative, Gadomski was to punish or expel from the city those who did not pay it on time.⁶⁶ The content of the document, typical of a German occupation-era poster written in German and Polish, does not indicate that the mayor himself sought to punish Jews who did not pay their contributions, but that he acted on the orders of the Germans. What is more, a Judenrat official was responsible for collecting the “spa tax,” and the mayor merely encouraged Jews to pay it. He did indeed warn that those who did not pay it on time could expect “appropriate sanctions, up to and including the removal of those who evade payment.” Significantly, his decision was based on unspecified bylaws. This suggests that both the mayor and those compelled by the Germans to collect the tax were aware of the contractual provisions arising from these bylaws. The author, however, does not acknowledge this, presenting the matter as though the mayor acted independently. Nor does he consider whether the tax applied to the entire city or solely to the Jewish quarter. Rossoliński-Liebe’s conclusions aim to portray tax collection as a form of repression against Jews, despite the absence of supporting evidence in his account.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, pp. 674–675.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 682.

⁶⁷ *Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie, Oddział w Otwocku* (State Archives in Warsaw, Branch in Otwock, hereinafter APW OO), collection Akta miasta Otwocka (Files of the Town of Otwock, hereinafter APW OO).

Elsewhere, he states:

Two documents sent to Kulski by Leist also shed light on the practice of tax collection and enforcement procedures in the ghetto. In the first letter, dated 29 November 1941, the mayor asked the Stadthauptmann to release the city administration from the task of collecting debts in the ghetto and to entrust this task to the Jewish Council. Presumably, a decisive motive behind this request was that at that time most Jews were already so impoverished that the “city administration” [German: *Stadtverwaltung*] could hardly collect any more taxes and it was no longer worthwhile for them to operate in the ghetto. A third possibility [it is hard to find out why the third – author’s remark] is that the scandalous behaviour of the tax officials had become excessive and had to be stopped. Kulski wrote: “The experience of the municipal authorities from its law execution activities in the Jewish quarter leads to the conviction that collections from the Jewish population are becoming increasingly difficult and are mostly pointless. [...] In view of their [the Jews’ – editor’s remark] constant movement within their residential quarter [...] the percentage of the so-called untraceable addresses is growing. This makes enforcement increasingly difficult and overloads the office with paperwork, address investigations and similar administrative tasks.”⁶⁸

The document clearly indicates that the main reasons why the mayor attempted to stop collecting taxes in the ghetto were problems with locating Jews at their correct addresses and the associated administrative and investigative work, as well as the potential high risk of Polish officials becoming infected with typhus⁶⁹.

Rossoliński-Liebe added to the above quotation that “Medical reasons were also significant for Kulski. Some tax officials became infected with typhus” and that “the mayor wanted to retain control over the collection of taxes by the Jewish

after AmO), 2278, p. 11, Municipal Board, Otwock. Announcement signed by Mayor Jan Gadomski, Otwock, 5 March 1941, p. 11.

⁶⁸ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 678.

⁶⁹ Typhus was also an obvious reference to a common at the time anxiety of the German authorities of spreading an infectious disease.

Council.”⁷⁰ Referring in the above-quoted passages to the document sent by Mayor Kulski to Stadthauptmann Leist, the author assesses that the actions of the officials subordinate to the mayor were scandalous, but does not specify what this “scandalousness” was supposed to be all about. Such a statement – which, let us add, is unfounded – is baffling when used in a scholarly work. Such a judgment does not speak well of the historian’s preparation for analytical work. The unfounded nature of this statement is compounded by the fact that it is not supported by any substantive argument. The author even spots some kind of “profit-seeking” on the part of the Polish city administrator in a letter sent by the mayor to Stadthauptmann Leist, in which he sought to relieve his officials of the obligation to collect debts from Jews. Hence, in his commentary, the author speculates, without rational evidence, that the mayor, as a representative of the municipal authorities, had previously profited from collecting taxes, but at the time the document was issued, it was no longer profitable for him and for this reason he asked the Kreishauptmann to relieve his officials of the obligation to carry out these activities. Again, the author does not examine the real content of the archival document but interprets the data in a way that supports his arguments without relying on genuine information. Rossoliński-Liebe therefore fails to take into account that the main beneficiary of the taxes levied on Jews and Poles was the German authorities. His comment that the mayor wanted to retain control over tax collection by the Judenrat, while he was applying for complete exemption from this duty for himself and his officials, is nonsensical and proves that the author is unable to draw obvious conclusions from the facts. Does he really believe that control over the collection of taxes from Jews can be achieved by exempting tax officials from this obligation? The mayor hoped that the request submitted to Leist would resolve the outlined problems – the city administrator himself did not make decisions on matters that fell within the competence of the Stadthauptmann. However, Rossoliński-Liebe seems to overlook this fact and finds it much easier to draw conclusions pointing to the official’s profit-seeking and anti-Jewish attitude, even though the documents he cites do not confirm his interpretation.⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ APW, KBMW, 70, Den Kommissarische Bürgermeister der Stadt Warschau and den Herrn Stadthauptmann, 24 November 1941, p. 27.

The actions of a butcher named Malczyk (whose first name remains unknown), who on 3 May 1940 applied to Mayor Kulski for assignment to stall no. 39 in the market hall on Koszykowa Street in Warsaw, previously owned by the Jewish merchant Laks, became the basis for Rossoliński-Liebe's depiction of the change "for the worse" in the attitude of Poles towards Jews "just a few months after the outbreak of war."⁷² The author resorts in this case to simple reasoning – a Pole wanted to take over a stall from a Jew in the hall on Koszykowa Street in Warsaw, so his actions prove that he was a bad person. It is implied that other Poles behaved in a similar manner. Such a generalisation by the author amounts to a misrepresentation, resting on only one example. It should be added that the author did not take into account the fact that Malczyk was not granted this stall because his application was rejected by other Poles – officials of the Commissioner's Administration of the City of Warsaw, who reported to Mayor Kulski. Are these activities supposed to indicate a deterioration in the attitude of Polish society towards Jews six months after September 1939, given that one Pole applied for a "position left vacant by a Jew" and others blocked it? The author's commentary on this matter essentially departs from historical discourse, once again showing the hallmarks of a journalistic interjection.⁷³

The next, equally bizarre conclusions proposed by Rossoliński-Liebe concern events in Otwock. Gadomski, who held the office of mayor there, was obliged by the Germans to draw up a list of all shops, divided into the so-called Aryan and Jewish ones. The mayor did indeed present such a list. The author points out that Gadomski was responsible for the takeover of the shops but did not provide any circumstances illustrating this process.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, Rossoliński-Liebe's critical reflection fails to consider the realities and distinctive character of Otwock as a town. The decline and subsequent confiscation of many shops resulted largely from German occupation policies, which caused Otwock to lose its significance as a spa and holiday resort. It is worth noting, with reference to the same document cited by the author – though unfortunately without adequate source criti-

⁷² *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 610.

⁷³ APW, KBWM, 1, Representative of the Distrikt Head for the City of Warsaw to the Commissioner Mayor. Industrial Department, Warsaw, 3 May 1940, p. 18.

⁷⁴ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 621.

cism – that out of more than 180 shops, 68 did not make it through the first years of the German occupation, largely because of the decline in patients visiting the health resort. This also applied to restaurants and small craft workshops, shoemakers, tailors, cobblers, among others. The takeover of most companies stemmed chiefly from the German-induced economic collapse of the town, not from the mayor's policies.⁷⁵

The attitude of Karol Roschilt, the mayor of Piaseczno, towards the transport of items from the local ghetto, taking into account the documentation, has not been interpreted according to the truth. In the opinion of the author, who refers to the content of a document sent by the mayor to Untersturmführer Erlinger, the “town administrator” protested loudly against the removal of items from the ghetto, implying that the mayor wanted to keep these possessions for himself. Unfortunately, the author seems to misunderstand the basic meaning of the document. The mayor wrote that items from the ghetto were being stolen and that a receipt should be issued for each item taken away. He did not dare to condemn the practice itself, but demanded that a document be issued stating that each of these items was taken from the Jewish quarter by the SS.⁷⁶

Referring to the limitation of Kulski's powers, Rossoliński-Liebe stated:

On 20 November 1939, his scope for action with regard to Jewish commercial activity was significantly restricted. He was no longer allowed to grant Jews licences to trade, nor was he allowed to permit them to work as self-employed craftsmen, open new commercial premises or register their bicycles, carriages and other vehicles for traffic. Jews were also only allowed to work as employees in their own businesses. The resolutions of the conference [held on 20 November 1939 – editor's remark] further obliged Kulski to permit all commercial activities by the Poles and Volksdeutsche (namely, ethnic Germans) and to make no distinction between them. With these regulations, the city authorities initiated

⁷⁵ APW OO, AmO, 710, Otwock Municipality. List of shops and workshops, n.d., n.p., p. 25 (original, German version), p. 27 (translation into Polish).

⁷⁶ APW OGM, collection Akta miasta Piaseczna (Files of the Town of Piaseczno, hereinafter AmP), 3213, Mayor of Piaseczno Karol Roschilt to Unterscharführer Erlinger, Piaseczno, 28 January 1941, p. 13.

the takeover of Jewish property, which was implemented by Kulski and the city administration and from which the Poles in particular benefited.⁷⁷

This passage touches upon several themes, each of which requires explanation. Firstly, it uses passive and impersonal phrases: “his scope for action [...] was significantly restricted,” “he was no longer allowed” and “the resolutions [...] obliged Kulski,” through which the author once again deflects responsibility for their decisions away from the Germans. Let us note that between 1935 and 1939, Kulski had powers arising from his position as Vice-President of Warsaw, which applied to both Poles and Jews living in the Polish capital. Let us add that pre-war Polish law did not prohibit Jews from running businesses, but the German occupiers did. It was they who decided that Kulski’s “scope for action was restricted,” “he was no longer allowed” and “the resolutions [...] obliged Kulski,” whereas literally all of the “rules” indicated were dictated, in accordance with German law, by Reich Commissioner Dr. Sauberzweig, who appears in the document cited by Rossoliński-Liebe as the President of the City of Warsaw, that is the superior of the city mayor. It was he who, on 22 November 1939, gave Kulski the above-mentioned set of instructions in writing, referring to the results of discussions that took place during a purported conference on 20 November 1939, the details of which remain unclear.⁷⁸ Thus, it was the Germans who introduced the laws from the initial stage of the occupation, not Kulski. It is undisputed that reference must be made to the comment quoted in the above passage, according to which “the resolutions [...] further obliged Kulski to permit all commercial activities by the Poles and ethnic Germans and to make no distinction between them.” Unfortunately, this passage misleadingly implies that the Germans and the Poles could conduct business on equal terms. In reality, economic life was subordinated to German racial policy, which placed the Poles at a disadvantage. When one considers the conditions in the GG – confiscation by Germans of Polish businesses, roundups, and deployment to the forced labour in the Reich through the (German-organised) *Arbeitsamts* – it becomes evident that the Germans and the Poles were not on equal

⁷⁷ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 611.

⁷⁸ APW, KBMW, 55, On Behalf of the President of Warsaw to the Commissioner Mayor. Industry Department. Translation into Polish, Warsaw, 22 November 1939, p. 2.

footing, especially in terms of running businesses. The author also overlooks the historical context, including numerous reprisals by the Germans against the Poles – especially torture, arrests, deportations to concentration and labour camps, and compulsory quotas.

In Rossoliński-Liebe's narrative, the mayor of Grójec, Antoni Wojdak, was held responsible for the displacement of the Jews from their homes in June 1940, which were designated for the needs of the Wehrmacht. Furthermore, in terms of authority and decision-making power, the author equated the Polish mayor with the German Kreishauptmann Werner Zimmerman, as if they both had similar powers in managing Jewish homes.⁷⁹ The content of the document on which the discussed fragment of the monograph is based clearly indicates that the request to occupy flats for the Wehrmacht was submitted by the Local Command (*Ortskommendantur*), obliging the mayor to prepare a list of vacant – so-called Jewish – premises.⁸⁰ The actions of Mayor Antoni Wojdak were presented as if he had taken apartments away from Jews on his own initiative. The document does not justify such a conclusion, since it was Wehrmacht soldiers who needed the premises.

Based on a document from the Otwock commune, the author attempts to demonstrate that Mayor Gadomski was responsible for selecting the site where the ghetto was established but fails to take into account that he did not act on his own initiative, but was ordered to do so on 2 July 1940 by Hermann Ruprecht, the Kreishauptmann of the Warsaw-Land District [*Kreis Warschau-Land* – editor's remark]. The mayor received an order to carry out an analysis of the town's inhabitants, indicating their national origin, and to provide information on a potential site for the ghetto.⁸¹ Rossoliński-Liebe does not cite the document indicating that the decision to establish the ghetto was taken by the Kreishauptmann himself, who, on 20 September 1940, sent a letter to Gadomski informing the mayor that it would be located in the so-called commercial quarter, inhabited mainly by Jews. The same document, which unfortunately did not interest the author, further

⁷⁹ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 494.

⁸⁰ APW OGM, collection Akta miasta Grójca (Files of the Town of Grójec), 542, Ortskommandantur to the Mayor of Grójec, Grójec, 4 June 1940, p. 43. It is worth noting that the author fails to provide information about the issuing entity, the Ortskommandantur.

⁸¹ APW OO, AmO, 2279, p. 4; *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 473.

records that Ruprecht ordered the resettlement of Jews from other quarters of the town into the ghetto within eight days. Furthermore, the document makes clear that it was the Kreishauptmann, not the mayor, who forbade Jews from purchasing land, engaging in business, and renting commercial or utility premises outside quarter no. 1 – the Jewish quarter. These prohibitions extended to Poles as well. Ruprecht explicitly stated that if he were to issue permits for the resettlement of Jews in the future, they would be confined to quarter no. 1. Although Rossoliński-Liebe cites these documents, he reduces their content to a passing mention, deliberately suppressing the fact that a German official was the one responsible for establishing the ghetto.⁸² In another case, he attempts to prove, referring to the instruction of 26 September 1940 issued by the Kreishauptmann of the Kreis Warschau-Land, that Gadomski allegedly modified it in favour of the Polish population. Although he quotes its content, he does not indicate at what point the mayor of Otwock altered the content of the document. This interpretation seems to be a misrepresentation and, at the same time, another journalistic interjection.⁸³ When discussing the establishment of the Otwock ghetto, let us refer to another excerpt from the book: “The mayor conscientiously complied with the Kreishauptmann Rupprecht’s demand of 2 July 1940 to draw up a plan for the ghetto in his town by 1 August 1940.”⁸⁴ The document referred to by the author in this passage concerns a completely different matter, and moreover, it is addressed not only to the mayor of Otwock. Let us cite the letter sent by Ruprecht, Kreishauptmann of Kreis WarschauLand, to the mayors and commune heads – a document also referenced by RossolińskiLiebe:

I intend to establish a ghetto for Jews in every municipality. After possible prior consultation with the chairman of the local Jewish council, I request that you submit appropriate proposals to me. A local plan marking the planned boundaries of the ghetto should be submitted to me. Deadline: 1 August [19]40.⁸⁵

⁸² APW OO, AmO, 2279, Kreishauptmann des Kreises Warschau-Land an den Herrn Bürgermeister in Otwock, Warschau, 20 September 1940, p. 36.

⁸³ APW OO, AmO, 2277, Announcement published by Mayor Jan Gadomski, signed by Kreishauptmann Dr. Ruprecht, Otwock, 26 September 1940, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 473.

⁸⁵ APW, OO, AmO, 2279, p. 4.

On the basis of this archival material, it cannot be concluded that the mayor of Otwock diligently followed the Kreishauptmann's order; it only shows that the latter expressed his intention to establish ghettos in the Kreis Warschau-Land. In accordance with the order issued by Kreishauptmann Ruprecht on 13 January 1941, the ghetto in Piaseczno was fenced off. Five days later, the local mayor informed the chairman of the Jewish Council of this measure. Rossoliński-Liebe maintains that the mayor was also responsible for carrying out the task.⁸⁶ Once again, the narrative in the monograph completely contradicts the content of the document cited by the author in the footnote. According to the document, the chairman of the Jewish Council was responsible for all activities related to the sealing off of the ghetto in Piaseczno. It was he who, on the basis of the Kreishauptmann's decision, was obliged to erect a wire fence, raise the fences on individual properties, move the entrance gates, and install appropriate information boards. Furthermore, as indicated in the archival document, the Jewish Council was obliged to post guards at the entrance to the Jewish quarter.⁸⁷ The mayor was not obliged to perform any of the activities mentioned above; he only passed on the Kreishauptmann's orders to the chairman of the Jewish Council.

Another example of the author finding content that does not appear in the document concerns Otwock. According to Rossoliński-Liebe, Mayor Gadomski instructed the chairman of the Judenrat, Icek (Isaac) Lesman, to contact the head of the Polish Police station, Bronisław Marchlewicz, "as soon as possible" during the resettlement of Jews within the city as part of the ghettoisation process.⁸⁸ The phrase "as soon as possible" does not appear in the document, but there is an indication that the mayor suggests to Lesman that, "if necessary, he should consult the Head of the Polish Police station, Mr Marchlewicz, about the matter in advance."⁸⁹ The document was cited by the author with the suggestion that the mayor of Otwock was responsible for the resettlement of Jews in the town. In addition, the author's use of the phrase "as soon as possible" is intended to reinforce

⁸⁶ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 474.

⁸⁷ APW, OGM, AmP, 3213, Mayor of Piaseczno to the Chairman of the Jewish Council, Piaseczno, 18 January 1941, pp. 11–11v.

⁸⁸ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 478.

⁸⁹ APW OO, AmO, 2279, Mayor Jan Gadomski to the Chairman of the Jewish Council in Otwock, Otwock, September 1940, p. 44.

the narrative of the mayor's responsibility for the resettlements and his cooperation in this matter with the head of the Polish Police station. Meanwhile, the decision on resettlement was made by Kreishauptmann Ruprecht, while the mayor, as mentioned in the quoted document, passed on the order dictated by him to the Judenrat – in other words, the mayor only delivered to Lesman the orders issued by the representative of the German administration. It should be emphasised that the Germans did not allow any mayor or other head of the town administration to shape population policy without their knowledge and consent.

The following excerpt demonstrates another misinterpretation of the documents: “The Skierniewice municipal treasury benefited from the fact that in 1940, a total of 35 Jewish shops were sold and the owners had to settle their debts.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, the document referred to by the author – namely, the list of Jewish shops – is actually an appendix to another archival source. This is significant, yet Rossoliński-Liebe fails to mention it. The document as a whole indicates that a ghetto was established in Skierniewice on the orders of the German Kreishauptmann. As a result, Jews were forced to leave their shops, which were their source of livelihood, and move to the Jewish quarter. Their property, especially their shops, remained in the area not covered by the ghettoisation, that is outside of the ghetto. The liquidation of the shops was therefore a consequence of the creation of the ghetto, and not the result of the mayor's decision.⁹¹ The documents do not indicate whether the town treasury benefited from the sale of the shops and whether it was in fact the beneficiary of this process.

When writing about Węgrów, the author of the monograph states that at the beginning of the war, the number of Jews in the town increased due to resettlements from large Polish cities, such as Łódź, and from nearby towns. This passage clearly fails to indicate those giving the orders for these resettlements, namely the Germans.⁹² This is also evidenced by the author's statement regarding the Kreis Sokolow-Wengrow at the end of 1941: “their relocation from small to larger towns

⁹⁰ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 612.

⁹¹ APW OGM, collection Akta miasta Skierniewic (Files of the Town of Skierniewice, hereinafter AmSk), 659, Certificate concerning the appointment by the Municipal Council of Mr. Janusz Moczulski as technical manager of works related to the fencing of the Jewish quarter, n.p., 21 November 1940, p. 6; APW, OGM, AmSk, 659, List of sold Jewish shops, n.d., p. 7.

⁹² *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, pp. 500–501.

had to be organised.”⁹³ The author mentions the existence of seven ghettos in the Kreis Sokolow-Wengrow, but fails to add that they were established by an order of the Sokolow-Wengrow Kreishauptmann, as is clearly indicated in the document in which the German Deputy Kreishauptmann Dr. Hermann wrote that he “ordered the creation of seven residential quarters in the Kreis Sokolow-Wengrow.”⁹⁴ Unfortunately, the author does not quote this information – and a declaration at the same time – that it was the Kreishauptmann himself, and not the mayor who was behind establishment of ghettos. Rossoliński-Liebe goes even further and, referring to a document produced by the Sokolow-Wengrow Kreishauptmann, states that the mayor of Węgrów, Władysław Okulus, “together with other mayors in the Kreis and the Kreishauptmann” organised horse-drawn carts to transport the Jews to Węgrów and other towns. The proposed interpretation is not true, as the mayor and other Polish officials did not show any independent initiative in the matter of providing horse-drawn carts, but acted on the orders of the Kreishauptmann. Moreover, the author states that cart owners were paid for their services and some profited from this, while Kreishauptmann Ernst Gramß announced the most severe penalties would be imposed on those who charged usurious prices.⁹⁵ The author thus presents an interpretation according to which the bad mayor ordered the establishment of a ghetto, while the good Kreishauptmann prohibited usurious profits. According to Rossoliński-Liebe’s line of reasoning, it was the Kreishauptmann who ordered the horse-drawn carts to be provided, and the people obliged to do so did not perform this work on a voluntary basis. The information about the penalties does not indicate, as the author suggests, that the workers profited from this, but rather that the Kreishauptmann used reprimands to maintain discipline and enforce his orders. Nota bene, it should be noted that Ernst Gramß signed the document concerning the provision of horse-drawn carts, while the actual author was his deputy, Dr. Hermann. Therefore, the

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 502.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; APS, collection Akta Miasta Węgrowa (Files of the Town of Węgrów, hereinafter AmW), 46, Kreishauptmann’s Office Internal Affairs Sub-section in Sokolów to all mayors and commune heads. Letter signed by Dr. Hermann, Sokolów, 9 December 1941, p. 45.

⁹⁵ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 502; APS, AmW, 46, Kreishauptmann’s Office Internal Affairs Sub-section in Sokolów to all mayors and commune heads. Letter signed by Dr. Hermann, Sokolów, 9 December 1941, p. 45.

German authorities were responsible for this. Rossoliński-Liebe also wrote that the resettlement of Jews to larger towns in the Kreis facilitated their subsequent deportation to extermination camps – this is true, but overlooking the role of the Germans can lead to false conclusions.

The author addresses the issue of mayors' attitudes towards the deportation of Jews to extermination camps – the “liquidation of ghettos” – which were extremely brutal operations during which the Germans killed thousands of Jews on the streets of towns and cities. Rossoliński-Liebe writes:

Polish mayors showed varied behaviour during the deportations and shootings. While some of them withdrew during those days so as not to have to witness the horrific scenes, others actively participated. In principle, the mayors could not shirk their responsibility because they had to carry out the orders they received from the occupiers and were therefore fully aware of what was happening in their towns. Unlike some Kreishauptmanns and ethnic German mayors, there is no record of Polish mayors murdering Jews with their own hands on the day of deportation. Why this did not happen – because they were not allowed to carry weapons, because the murder of a Jew was not within their jurisdiction, because such behaviour would have discredited them in the eyes of the local population – remains an open question. Many mayors were indifferent to the deportations and did nothing to prevent them because they had become accustomed to the persecution of Jews. This is evident, among other things, in Kulski's behaviour. When an Easter pogrom took place in Warsaw in April 1940, he was still outraged and therefore intervened with Leist. In contrast, he merely observed the deportations in the summer of 1942 passively and did not intervene. The motto of every working day was: “business as usual.”⁹⁶

The author's speculations go far beyond historical discourse and once again bear the hallmarks of journalism rather than a thoroughly researched scholarly work. Speculations such as “what if...” are completely inappropriate in this type of dissertation. Rossoliński-Liebe, however, engages in such deliberations and,

⁹⁶ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 693.

moreover, leaves room for a reflection of dubious value. He emphasises that, if the mayors had been armed, if killing Jews had been considered their duty, and if they had not realised that their anti-Jewish actions would discredit them in the eyes of the population, they could certainly have acted with brutality – and, by implication, kill Jews. This is not the end of the unfounded, untrue, hurtful, unfair, and completely unscholarly remarks in the above-quoted passage. Rossoliński-Liebe emphasises the indifferent attitude of the mayors, including Kulski, and at the same time embellishes it with a completely irrelevant and ahistorical comment: “business as usual.” This raises the following questions: on what basis does the author claim that Kulski’s attitude was indifferent? What was he supposed to do, how was he supposed to react? Was he supposed to forbid the Germans from carrying out executions in Warsaw? The author is even reversing the concepts. What “business” is he referring to, considering that it was the Germans who set up trusteeship offices and other administrative structures to seize property belonging to both Poles and Jews? The author probably intended to emphasise the mayor’s “profit-seeking” in his alleged anti-Jewish “policy.” The German occupiers do not appear in the quoted passage. Furthermore, the author did not attempt to conduct even a simple historical analysis, replacing it with vague journalistic language, full of understatements, bordering on alternative history.

The author’s manipulations can be seen also elsewhere. Let us quote another excerpt from the book:

After the Jews of Węgrów had been gathered in the market square on 22 September 1942 and many of them had already been shot, they were forced to march about 17 kilometres to the railway station in Sokołów Podlaski, from where they were transported by freight train to the Treblinka extermination camp. Due to the number of people gathered there – probably around 6,000 – transporting them was a complicated process that required the cooperation of the city administration. Since some of the Jews were unable to make the journey on foot, they were transported by horse-drawn carts organised by Mayor Okulus.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 695.

The text acknowledges the SS marching column, but the author does not elaborate on the goals of its operation.⁹⁸ The fundamental problem with this passage is the detached way in which the liquidation of the Węgrów ghetto is described. The author speaks of “some” unidentified perpetrators and “someone” who shot the Jews yet fails to mention that these crimes were carried out by units of the German police, SS, and German Gendarmerie. Such omissions concern basic historical facts. As a result of eliminating the perpetrators, the narrative loses its meaning, and those responsible for the crimes, although known, are deprived of their identity and become absent. By omitting reference to the Germans as perpetrators, the author more readily places blame on the mayor of Węgrów, Okulus, who provided carts under German instruction. In the author’s view, the coercive nature of these orders is of no real significance. Yet it must be emphasised that such activities were also undertaken in hundreds, if not thousands, of other localities where residents were compelled to provide such services. This demonstrates that such practices were routine under occupation and nullifies not only responsibility but, more importantly, guilt for these actions.

The above excerpt needs consideration from another perspective. On the one hand, the narrative depicts the perpetrators of the murder in an impersonal way – the Germans are not mentioned – while on the other hand, the mayor, a Pole identified by name, is presented with striking clarity, his actions described in detail, namely obliging residents to provide carts. On the one hand, we have a constructed character, on the other, the perpetrators. This technique makes the reader’s perception focus on the more distinct, memorable, tangible and familiar person. It should be noted that the author demonstrates inconsistency in discussing the actions of Mayor Okulus, as illustrated in the following excerpt from the monograph. “As mayor, Okulus could not avoid administrative tasks related to deportations and had to coordinate the town’s administration, although the details of his actions are unknown.”⁹⁹ As mayor, he had to obey the orders of the German Kreishauptmann and the commanders of the German units murdering Jews. However, since the author does not know what actions the mayor took at that time, what is the pur-

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 695.

pose of including such a sentence? Does the undeniable fact that Okulus was the mayor of Węgrów at the time mean that he is responsible for the crimes committed during the Holocaust? Once again, the author's analysis lacks scholarly rigour. He chooses speculation at the expense of source basis.

Similarly, the author pointed to Mayor Kulski's participation in the deportations of Jews. Here is an excerpt from the text concerning this issue:

During the deportations, which lasted two months in Warsaw, he [Kulski – author's remark] carried out his usual administrative duties. It is not known whether or how he or the city administration supported the liquidation squad. As in other cities, the city administration was most likely involved. However, since most of the city administration documents were destroyed, it is not possible to reconstruct these activities.¹⁰⁰

Without any archival evidence, the author once again speculates about the assistance given to liquidation squads, which, as in the case of Węgrów, remain anonymous – as if they were not German squads known to us.¹⁰¹ Let us quote another fragment, which was placed directly after the passage concerning deportations in Warsaw:

On 14 September 1942, ten days before the end of the deportations, he [Kulski – author's remark] informed his employees in a circular letter that a recreation centre had been opened for them in Dąbrowa Leśna near Warsaw, where they could spend holidays with their families at favourable prices from 20 September onwards.¹⁰²

Initially, this fragment appears insignificant and irrelevant. However, its placement immediately after the information about deportations is meant to indicate that Kulski not only failed to oppose the murder of Jews but also opened a holiday

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 710.

¹⁰¹ The author merely stated that the records from the time when the Germans were deporting Jews to the Treblinka extermination camp shows that Kulski was busy with collecting outstanding taxes from the Christian and Jewish population, securing housing for his subordinates, and repairing buildings destroyed by Soviet bombing on 20 August and 1 September (*ibid.*, pp. 710–711).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

facility at that time and was focused solely on his own employees. To illustrate the work of the town hall, almost any record of Kulski's official operations on various matters handled by the municipal administration could be cited. Why this should serve as evidence of collaboration in the Holocaust remains unclear.

In the subchapter entitled "The Great Redistribution II. After the Deportations," the author begins with the outline of the situation following the deportation of Jews from ghettos to extermination camps and later emphasises that, "in some cases, entire neighbourhoods became vacant, which largely resolved housing shortages in many areas."¹⁰³ As Rossoliński-Liebe underlines, the extermination of Jews even resulted in a housing surplus in some areas. At the same time, the main text states that many houses and flats left behind by murdered Jews were in poor condition due to the fact that ghettos were often located in poor neighbourhoods without sewage systems or modern infrastructure, and also because they had been inhabited for many months by people living in difficult hygienic and material conditions.¹⁰⁴

Referring to archival records, the author nevertheless attempts to prove that Poles benefited from the deportations. Let us quote an excerpt from the monograph:

On 19 August 1942, the day before the deportation of Jews from Otwock to Treblinka, the Otwock chairman of the Provisional Administration of Seized Properties, Dymitro Nesterenko, announced that the former "Aryan owners" of the houses in the ghetto should obtain a permit from the police to enter this quarter so that they could take possession of their houses again immediately after the deportation of the Jews. At the same time, Nesterenko warned all citizens of the town not to loot the ghetto after the deportations.¹⁰⁵

Let us note that the above passage refers to Poles taking possession of houses that belonged to them before the creation of the ghettos and not houses owned by Jews at the time of the creation of the Jewish quarter. Let us analyse the documents

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 640.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 701.

read by the author and check whether the archival materials confirm his narrative. Referring to a document issued by the Otwock chairman of the Provisional Administration of Seized Properties,¹⁰⁶ the author forgot to add that Jewish properties, pursuant to the order of the governor of the Distrikt Warschau, Dr. Ludwig Fischer, were transferred to the Provisional Administration of Seized Properties. Therefore, they did not fall into the hands of Poles – the town's residents. Dymitr Nesterenko only warned that Poles should not vandalise these properties. Once again, the author's interpretation diverges completely from the content of the document quoted.¹⁰⁷

The author also refers to Warsaw, where, after the deportation, some of the houses were to be occupied by Polish townspeople and peasants who, according to Rossoliński-Liebe, plundered and demolished them, which was, he adds, “a practice that developed into a problem, even a veritable plague, in almost all of the communities” examined in his study. As a result of this plundering and devastation, the houses appeared to be demolished and robbed.¹⁰⁸ In citing these arguments, the author referred to a manuscript of Kazimierz Reczyński's diary entitled “Okupacyjni nadzorcy Wydziału Kwaterunkowego Zarządu Miejskiego w Warszawie 1939–1944” (Warsaw Municipal Administration Housing Department Supervisors during the Occupation, 1939–1944), held in the State Archives in Warsaw. During the German occupation, Reczyński worked in the Housing Department of the Warsaw Municipal Administration. Let us quote an excerpt from his diary:

The houses and flats handed over to us were in dreadful condition. Roofs were partly damaged, leaving water stains on the ceilings of the upper floors. Doors had been kicked in, most windows were shattered, and water marks spread across floors and ceilings. The furniture lay broken, drawers ripped out, with holes in the walls and stoves. In many flats even the floorboards had been removed – evi-

¹⁰⁶ Which was a German institution.

¹⁰⁷ APW OO, AmO, 2279, Plenipotentiary of the Provisional Administration of Seized Properties in Otwock, D. Nesterenko to all Aryan property owners in the Jewish quarter of Otwock, Otwock, 12 August 1942, p. 162.

¹⁰⁸ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 640.

dence of treasure hunters at work. We wondered who it might have been. The entrances to the area were still heavily guarded by the German Gendarmerie and the Blue Police, so it was likely that members of these organisations vandalised the flats. Or perhaps it was the Jews themselves? Slashed pillows and duvets completed the scene of destruction [...]. On the ground lay heaps of broken porcelain – some of it very old and beautiful – together with shards of glass and crystal. Amidst this rubbish were paintings and photographs torn from the walls, piles of partly valuable books, and sheets and scrolls of parchment inscribed in ornate Hebrew script.¹⁰⁹

The manuscript's author, describing houses that the Warsaw ghetto "handed over" to the Warsaw Municipal Administration during its downsizing, stated that those who might have caused damage were German Gendarmerie, Polnische Polizei officers, or Jews unwilling to surrender their property to strangers, but not peasants or townspeople – contrary to Rossoliński-Liebe's false claim based on Reczyński. Once more, the actual content of the archival source was distorted to build a narrative at odds with the truth. The author fails to draw factual evidence from this or other sources, relying instead on baseless insinuations.

The author may well recognise that it was the Germans who stripped Jews of their property rights, dignity, and ultimately their lives, yet he assigns the blame to Poles – particularly Polish mayors. His account serves a single purpose: to shift the narrative of responsibility for actions against Jews as far as possible from German perpetration. Writing in this spirit, he uses phrases that do not directly point to the perpetrators, for example: "Jews had to live in ghettos, dying from disease and malnutrition." Although the author does not explicitly assign responsibility, his claim elsewhere that Poles were behind the establishment of the ghettos makes the implication clear: in his view, Polish mayors were responsible for the diseases and malnutrition suffered by Jews in the ghettos. They also laid the foundations of the Holocaust.

¹⁰⁹ APW, collection Zbiór rękopisów (Manuscript collection), 748, K. Reczyński, *Okupacyjni nadzorcy Wydziału Kwaterunkowego Zarządu Miejskiego w Warszawie 1939–1944*, Olsztyn, June 1980, pp. 6–7.

Conclusions

Chapter X of the monograph, entitled “Concluding Part,” includes a subchapter entitled “Mayors and the Holocaust,” in which the author sets out his conclusions regarding his alleged research on the attitude of Polish mayors towards the extermination of Jews. Let us quote the author’s words:

On the one hand, mayors and municipal administrations functioned as tools of the German occupation in carrying out the Holocaust. On the other, they pursued the persecution of Jews on their own initiative. The boundary between these two forms of persecution was blurred, as mayors exploited the framework of antiSemitic regulations to advance their own antiSemitic policies.¹¹⁰

The sources cited by the author, and especially their creative and manipulated interpretation, which in many places is riddled with lies, definitely do not confirm that Polish mayors persecuted Jews on their own initiative. Moreover, the author argues that the mayors not only applied antiSemitic legal provisions but also refined them to fit the needs of the urban centres they governed.¹¹¹ Rossoliński-Liebe mistakenly assumes that mayors had the right to choose whether to apply German regulations. The thesis that mayors created their own legislation, even though they were not authorised by the Germans to issue any legal regulations for residents (but only to create internal instructions and regulations for the needs of municipal administrations), demonstrates a complete lack of knowledge of the realities of the German occupation. His analysis of legal matters goes further: he contends that Hans Frank’s antiSemitic laws could be enforced only within municipalities, in other words, with the “help of legal authorities.” In the author’s view, it was mayors and officials who had to oversee whether Jews wore the Star of David, whether their shops were properly marked, and whether they left the ghettos.¹¹² The lack of context, including the lack of an objective description of German terror against Jews, causes the text to turn into elaborate journalism that is far removed from scholarly rules. Pointing to the monitoring of the activities of Jews by Polish may-

¹¹⁰ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 1019.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1020.

ors, while omitting German pressure and brutally enforced regulations, as well as SS and Gestapo units entering the ghettos to beat, rob and spread brutal terror is a misrepresentation and an attempt to conceal the actions of the Germans and, at the same time, to divert our attention to the actions of “Polish town administrators.” The author’s omission of the German context leaves the reader with only Polish mayors and Jews in mind – as if there were no Germans in the ghettos.

Manipulations also take on a different character, for example in the “Concluding Part.” Quoting Hans Frank’s regulation of 15 October 1941, Rossoliński-Liebe wrote that the law “forbade Jews to leave the ghetto.”¹¹³ The legal act is genuine, but the author omitted to mention that the issuer indicated the possibility of applying the death penalty to Jews who left the ghetto, as well as to Poles who helped them by providing a hiding place.¹¹⁴ According to the author, Polish mayors undoubtedly participated in the Holocaust, and their most important contribution was the establishment of ghettos, in which they allegedly played a key role. Rossoliński-Liebe argues that not only were they obliged by the German authorities to establish ghettos, but they were also “able to suggest which city quarter they preferred and how large the ghetto should be.” He also points out that the Kreishauptmanns agreed to their proposals, which proved that they made independent decisions on matters concerning the Jewish quarter.¹¹⁵ The author’s reasoning is completely nonsensical. Namely, the mayors did not make decisions on their own, but rather the Kreishauptmanns commissioned them to prepare analyses concerning the city. The statement that the mayors made decisions independently is untrue. The Germans did not grant them any powers in this regard.

The final conclusions contain an opinion purporting to prove that Polish mayors were responsible for the spread of typhus due to the very fact of creating Jewish

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ A fragment of Article 1, §4b of the regulation read as follows: “(1) Jews who leave their designated quarter without authorisation are liable to the death penalty. Anyone who knowingly hides Jews shall be subject to the same penalty. (2) Inciters and helpers shall be punished in the same way as the perpetrator; an attempted act shall be punished as an accomplished act. In milder cases, heavy imprisonment or prison may be adjudicated.” (*Dritte Verordnung über Aufenthaltsbeschränkungen in Generalgouvernement – Trzecie Rozporządzenie o ograniczeniach pobytu w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie z dnia 15 października 1941 r.*, *Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement*, 1941, no. 99, 25 October, p. 595).

¹¹⁵ *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, p. 1022.

quarters in parts of towns with poor infrastructure and no sewage system. According to the author, this was to lead to the “mass extermination of Jews” prior to their deportation.¹¹⁶ The lack of context regarding the German occupiers once again deliberately leads to the omission of the fact that the decisions to establish ghettos were made by the Germans. Rossoliński-Liebe suggests that mayors tried to reduce the size of the ghettos so that the Christian population would benefit from this.¹¹⁷ In this case, too, the decision was made by the Germans, as evidenced by numerous documents concerning, for example, the creation of the so-called residual ghettos by the German administration.

Another example from the “Concluding Part,” where the conclusions do not correspond to the facts, is the following excerpt:

Germans and Poles often competed for Jewish property. [...] The occupiers were usually only able to acquire some of the most valuable items. Objects that Jews left behind in their homes before deportation were transported to halls or warehouses and stored there, if they had not already been stolen by Poles who looted the ghettos. [...] Items that were not stolen by Poles but ended up in warehouses were partly sent to Germany and partly sold [...] to the local population.¹¹⁸

The author distorts the reality of the German occupation by portraying it as a rivalry between Germans and Poles over Jewish property, thereby placing the occupiers on the same level as the occupied. In doing so, he not only omits the harsh realities of Polish suffering under brutal German rule – including widespread robbery – but also suggests that both nations engaged in some kind of rivalry as if they were equals. It is absolutely key to note that the author, perhaps unconsciously, emphasises a completely different attitude towards the Germans and the Poles, which is reflected in the language. When he writes about Poles who took property belonging to Jews, he uses the words “stole” or “looted.” When he refers to the same actions by Germans, he writes about “transporting” to warehouses and “storing.” The above passage suggests that the Germans took

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1026.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1023.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1025.

what the Poles did not loot, as if the Poles were the first to seize Jewish property, followed by the Germans, whereas in fact the Germans were front and centre as both the first and principal beneficiaries. Once more, the historical context is ignored, and the facts are reversed and manipulated. On the one hand, the author outlined the operations of the German terror apparatus, while on the other hand, he omitted the activities of specialised German agencies and organisational units responsible for the plundering of Polish and Jewish property and its transport to the Reich.

The book's most serious and central claim is that, during Operation "Reinhardt," Polish mayors participated in the persecution and isolation of Jews within the ghettos. While Rossoliński-Liebe rightly stresses – an undeniable truth – that they did not play a decisive role in the deportations, he nonetheless encapsulates their involvement in the liquidation of the ghettos with the following words:

They undertook a range of organisational tasks, including hiring horsedrawn carts, preparing meals for the liquidation squads, coordinating with firefighters and Polish police officers, and supplying workers to dig mass graves.¹¹⁹

Certainly, all these secondary and tertiary actions did indeed depend on the mayors, but they did not "undertake" these activities on their own initiative; rather, they carried out orders imposed on them by the German occupiers and implemented their directives. I would like to emphasise that the word "undertook" used by the author misrepresents the actions that the Germans obliged the mayors to perform. In the next part of the argument, the author emphasises that "the most important contribution of the mayors in Operation "Reinhardt" was the long-term preparation of this mass crime."¹²⁰ The author seeks to persuade the reader that Polish mayors bore responsibility for concentrating Jews in smaller ghettos, implying that their actions paved the way for the subsequent transfer of the Jewish population to larger urban centres and, ultimately, for the execution of Operation "Reinhardt" – the systematic murder of these people. Concluding the

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1027–1028.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

topic of the extermination of Jews, Rossoliński-Liebe absurdly states that without their participation, Operation “Reinhardt,” namely the extermination, shootings and deportations, could not have been conducted.¹²¹

One of the author’s conclusions concerns national historiographies. As he points out, since the 1990s, this trend has been popular in Germany, among other places, where its representatives “have developed a selective, national narrative of the Holocaust in which mayors, local authorities, local offenders and many other actors in occupied countries have been either completely ignored or only marginally examined.” The author criticised also the narrative of Polish and other “national” historians, pointing out that the narrative of the Holocaust had been “reduced” to attributing the decision to perpetrate it to the actions of the Germans.¹²² Let us note that the author has already presented the same conclusion – specifically concerning the departure from German national historiography – in the introduction,¹²³ so the purpose of its repetition in the final section is hard to understand.

Rossoliński-Liebe states that by departing from what he describes as “nationalist historical narratives,” he has moved closer to those that are much closer to the truth, and that his work is therefore more objective. Nothing could be further from the truth. The author fits perfectly into the political manipulations, seeking to “spill” part of the responsibility from the Germans to the Polish mayors and, what is more, to Polish society of the World War II era. In this way, he creates a false image of the Holocaust.

The “Schlussteil” (Concluding Part) of Rossoliński-Liebe’s work brings together numerous arguments aimed at persuading readers that Polish mayors in towns of the GG under German occupation shared responsibility for the extermination of Jews. In his book, the author does not shy away from misrepresentations, such as distorting the content of documents and falsifying facts, contrary to what archival sources confirm. The method used in the book – citing authentic documents while contradicting their actual content – is clear academic malpractice. The deliberate mixing of genuine data with falsehoods is difficult for readers to detect and requires a confrontation of the author’s narrative with archival materials.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 1017.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Importantly, the author depicts the German occupation in a way that relegates the Germans as occupiers to the background, as shown by the absence of context and description of their actions – from September 1939, through the resettlement of Poles and Jews from territories annexed to the Reich, the terror against Jews including the creation of Judenrats and ghettos, and the role of the administration and German security forces in the liquidation of ghettos and the deportation of Jews. Furthermore, Polish mayors are entangled in the world artificially constructed by the author – the supposed reality of the German occupation in which the Germans are given only a limited role – where, in Rossoliński-Liebe’s narrative, they are falsely elevated to equal partners of the Germans, likewise depicted as participants in the Holocaust. The author writes: “the involvement of Polish mayors in the Shoah constitutes a major contribution to this enormous crime.”¹²⁴

In summary, Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe’s book, while creating the appearances of scholarly rigour, does not adhere to the principles of historical research. One gets the impression that it aims to convince the scholarly world that local officials in the GG, especially Polish mayors, were jointly responsible for the Holocaust – from as early as 1939 – while the role of the Germans, according to the author, was marginal.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1017.