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

The crime in Przedbórz has already received considerable attention, though it has not been sufficiently examined in depth.¹ Its impact is not determined by the number and quality of published materials, but rather by public perception. In May 1945, in a small town in the Końskie County, a cruel crime was committed

¹ Polemics surrounding the murder in Przedbórz were conducted in the local press: <https://radomszczanska.pl/artukul/o-mordzie-zydow-w-przedborzu-odpowiadam-lukaszowi-czuryllo-i-przypominam-to-oddzial-zbika-n706340> (accessed 7 May 2025); <https://radomsko.naszemiasto.pl/przedborz-list-mieszkanca-w-sprawie-mordu-na-zydach-w/ar/c1-8002921> (accessed 8 May 2025). Reports from meetings with Leszek Żebrowski, historian specialising in the National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*, NSZ), also offer insight into his interpretive perspective: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBK7cmlvMwY>; <https://radomszczanska.pl/artukul/leszek-zebrowski-w-przedborzu-kto-jest-winnym-morderstw-na-zydach-n710602> (accessed 7 May 2025).

against at least six people of Jewish nationality (the authors disagree on the number of victims – the most commonly cited figure is eight victims).² The perpetrators of this crime were linked, in a manner that has not been fully explained, both to the new authorities that were in the process of establishing themselves, in this case the County Public Security Department (*Powiatowy Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, PUBP), and to soldiers of the anti-communist underground stationed nearby (a group of the National Armed Forces under the command of Władysław Kołaciński “Żbik” [Wild Cat]). The subject matter of Dominik Flisiak’s book thus fits into the historical and ideological debates concerning Polish anti-Semitism and the controversy surrounding the activities of the organisation mentioned above. The media-driven intensity and emotional undertones surrounding the judgments appear to play a significant role in shaping the discourse on this subject. On the one hand, these judgments serve to debunk the history of the anti-communist underground soldiers, and to emphasise and document the thesis of their anti-Semitism. On the other hand, apologists for the cursed soldiers, especially those from the nationalist movement, are fighting, in their opinion, to defend the good name of the heroes who have been unjustly accused. It is not the reviewer’s task to enter into this dispute, let alone make categorical assertions. The question is whether the author of a new comprehensive publication on this subject brings more knowledge to this dispute.

Dominik Flisiak is a researcher focusing on the political life of the Jewish minority in Poland and on Polish-Jewish relations in the 20th century. This time, he decided to examine these relations from the vantage point of one specific and extremely dramatic event.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each accompanied by an appendix featuring a curated selection of documents, introduced and contextualised through detailed commentary. Of these chapters, four engage directly with the central theme reflected in the book’s title.

Firstly, it should be noted that the scope of issues discussed in the book exceeds the subject matter suggested in the title. This raises the first question. A significant

² A list of the names of the murdered Jews was published by regional historian Wojciech Zawadzki. He reports nine victims of the crime (W. Zawadzki, *Imienna lista ofiar m. Przedborza w II wojnie światowej*, Przedbórz–Bydgoszcz, 2012, pp. 30–31).

part of the publication is devoted to documents from the period chronologically preceding the events described. They concern the fate of the Jews of Przedbórz before and during World War II. Are they really that necessary? If the author wanted to provide background information on the events, he could have done so descriptively by referring to existing literature. Meanwhile, in a publication that is supposed to concern a single event from 1945, we find sources that are completely unrelated to the matter and even precede it by over a dozen years.³ The title and overarching concept of the book might have benefited from a different formulation, as they, in their current form, fall short of supporting the content effectively.

The structure of the entire publication also raises certain objections. In chronologically divided chapters, the author first provides a brief description and then, at the end, a collection of selected documents. In part, this seems justified. However, this would be the case if the author justified his choice each time and provided comprehensive commentary on the published sources. Unfortunately, in the descriptive part, Dominik Flisiak limits himself to summarising the selected material and does not justify his selection. I also find it quite perplexing that the descriptive sections include lengthy excerpts from documents whose full texts appear just a few pages later.

However, the most significant shortcoming of the work lies in its failure to provide a thorough assessment of the documents' reliability, as well as a critical comparison of their content that would allow for a conclusive, synthesizing commentary. In other words, the interpretative layer is insufficient and of a low standard. As previously noted, the events in Przedbórz remain emotionally charged and are interpreted in markedly different ways. The author of the recent publication on the topic, while citing (albeit rather selectively)⁴ arguments from both sides of the debate and reproducing documents already familiar to other scholars, offers no substantive new insights. Nor does the work advance our understanding of the crime's circumstances – aside, perhaps, from implicitly aligning with those who attribute the crime to anti-Semitism rather than opportunistic looting. Where such

³ D. Flisiak, *Antyżydowska zbrodnia w Przedborzu. Pytania, źródła, odpowiedzi*, Chrzan, 2024, pp. 47–58.

⁴ The author does not, for example, engage in polemics with Leszek Żebrowski's opinions contained in the introduction to Władysław Kołaciński's memoirs or with Żebrowski's statements defending "Żbik's" position, which are available on the Internet.

an analysis should be found, the phrase “it should be emphasised...” appears time and again, followed by information about various judgments and interpretations of the facts described. This can, of course, be seen as an expression of a certain objectivity and a resignation from pushing one’s own version of events. However, it is a serious flaw in the publication in question. The author’s assessment therefore boils down to the recognition that the crime was “anti-Jewish” in nature, with the justification not being based on the content of the documents cited and their analysis, but on, for example, the opinions of other authors or – which is a bizarre move – quotations from the nationalist press from the period of the German occupation illustrating the nationalist camp’s anti-Semitism. The second fairly clear opinion, which can be considered the author’s conclusion, is that Kazimierz Jezierski bears the greatest responsibility for the crime. In both cases, the assessments appear to be justified – supported by the attached documents – but it remains unclear whether the author substantiates them adequately.⁵ In the latter case, the author does not explain how the conclusion is derived from the content of the documents cited.

In my opinion, a rather perfunctory analysis of the materials presented also leads to errors and uncritical acceptance of the information contained in the documents. Jezierski was most likely never a member of the Polish Underground Army (*Konspiracyjne Wojsko Polskie*, KWP), as Flisiak claims, citing ministerial sources. After his arrest, as a man devoid of any principles, he disclosed the identities of KWP members from Przedbórz to the Security Department (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*, UB) functionaries. This evokes the compelling issue of the post-war impunity of the perpetrators of the Przedbórz crime – an aspect the author leaves undeveloped and, consequently, misses the opportunity to explore a deeply disturbing and significant phenomenon. Paradoxically, all Jezierski had to do to avoid responsibility was to reveal his (questionable, as I have already mentioned) activity in the anti-communist underground to the amnesty commission. He needed his membership in the KWP to disclose it during the amnesty and take

⁵ Other researchers also draw attention to the responsibility of these two persons. R. Wnuk and S. Poleszak, *Niezlomni czy realiści? Polskie podziemie antykomunistyczne bez patosu*, Cracow, 2024, p. 762.

advantage of it, which in turn protected him from punishment for the crimes he had committed, which he had totally concealed. Not only was the court not very inquisitive in explaining them, but it even argued that Jezierski was not obliged to disclose them. Needless to add, Jezierski – quite naturally – could not and did not commit any criminal acts in the KWP mentioned above. These circumstances and his connections with the then authorities in Przedbórz contributed to the fact that he was able to completely evade the consequences, especially since he was immediately recruited as an informant for the Public Security Department (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, UBP). The underground activity for which others paid the highest price became, for Jezierski (albeit this activity was fictitious in his case), a gateway to taking advantage of the amnesty and avoiding responsibility for the crimes he had committed! Unfortunately, “several years of work” on the book (as the author claims) did not suffice for the formulation of what I consider to be fairly obvious judgments.

The second theme, also unjustly omitted by the author (at least in his commentary), concerns the passivity of the Security Service and Citizens’ Militia functionaries during the events described, which is linked to the impunity of the Przedbórz criminals. The accounts and court testimonies reveal the perpetrators’ certainty that no one would interfere with them while they were committing the murders. Such signals appear in the statements of Edmund Majchrowski, who was affiliated with the District Public Security Department (*Powiatowy Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, PUBP) and ranked second in terms of involvement in the crime, after Kędziński. It would have been a strange paradox if the PUBP officers had participated in a crime committed by representatives of the national underground, who were most hated by the authorities. This raises another issue and leaves unanswered the question of the extent to which the perpetrators were associated with or inspired by the NSZ. The book even raises the question of Władysław Kołaciński “Żbik’s” responsibility for the crime described. In fact, however, the only answer is a quote from the latter’s memoirs, in which he provides false information about the number of Jews in Przedbórz in May 1945. Kołaciński, without denying the murder itself, says that there were as many as 300 of them, and that three of them were killed as part of a sentence for their cooperation with

the communist apparatus of terror.⁶ In this case, Flisiak narrows his assessment of Kołaciński's attitude to questioning the latter's credibility in connection with the described lie. This is clearly not enough to conclude that someone is guilty. If the author wanted to undermine Kołaciński's version, he could have asked a fairly simple and obvious question: how can we talk about the execution of a "civilised" sentence if, as the published documents show, it was accompanied by common looting and violence?

Contrary to appearances, the number and consistency of the preserved accounts leave little to be explained regarding the course of the Przedbórz tragedy. Nonetheless, the motivations and intentions of the killers, as well as an analysis of the circumstances that allowed such a cruel crime to occur and go unpunished, may be the subject of consideration and discussion. For example, why was there no intervention by the functionaries of the then-ruling apparatus?

The book fails to substantiate the claim that anti-Semitic sentiments influenced the crime in question. Moreover, such an assessment is inherently flawed when the author bases their account of the partisan group's activities not on preserved archival documents, but rather on press publications from nationalist sources – materials that may well have been unknown to the participants of the events described. The author's task should not be to speculate on the alleged anti-Semitic views of the "Żbik" group, but to engage with them strictly through the lens of the available evidence. The question of whether the murder was committed for robbery or anti-Semitic reasons is, in my opinion, misguided, as the motives for the crime undoubtedly had both aspects. It seems more important to explain why it was possible in the first place. I would expect an insightful author to answer this question. Instead, we are presented with a technically competent (though strangely structured) edition of documents, whose greatest asset is that it brings together in one place most of the accounts of the events in question, which is supposed to enable the reader to form their own opinion about the crime described.

The author appears to have started with more ambitious intentions yet ultimately fell short – abandoning the effort midway and failing to fully harness the potential of the gathered material. Nevertheless, the documents and testimonies included

⁶ W. Kołaciński, „Żbik”. *Między młotem a swastyką*, ed. L. Żebrowski, Warsaw, 2018, p. 281.

offer a compelling glimpse into the unique realities of a small town at the close of the war, and the lives of those who played a pivotal role in shaping them. For people like Jezierski and Majchrowski, who were unscrupulous and hungry for influence and tangible benefits, there were two ways to achieve this goal. One was through the repressive apparatus of the time and cooperation with the communist authorities. The other was through the underground soldiers stationed nearby, with their determination and strength. In Przedbórz, it turned out that it was possible to be in both places at the same time, or at least to manoeuvre in such a way as to gain certain influence from both sources. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir⁷ characterised the phenomenon as a “mafia-like system of exchange of services, linking individuals across political divides”⁸ – and it is hard to disagree with her.

Returning to the structure of the work and the range of topics covered, one more surprising move should be pointed out. The last chapter of the book is devoted to Dr. Juliusz Kamiński. He was a doctor of Jewish origin who, after escaping from the Przedbórz ghetto, found himself in the “Żbik” unit, where he remained until the end of the war. After the war, he converted to Catholicism and was a well-known and respected citizen of the town.

The description of his fate within the unit is the subject of controversy and divergent interpretations. On the one hand, the presence of a Jewish doctor within the National Armed Forces is cited as evidence of the absence of prejudice among Kołaciński’s subordinates. On the other hand, surviving testimonies reveal the deep fear that gripped Kamiński, who reportedly never left Żbik’s side out of concern for his own safety. Commenting on his post-war trajectory, Tokarska-Bakir observed that “his loyalty to his comrades-in-arms implicated in the pogrom proved stronger than his solidarity with the victims.”⁹ Such a radical assessment is debatable, to say the least, and Wojciech Zawadzki has published an interesting polemic on this point of view.¹⁰ Without going into the details of the dispute, it is worth noting that the author of *Antyżydowska zbrodnia* refrains from commenting on Tokarska-

⁷ J. Tokarska-Bakir, “Terror w Przedborzu, noc z 26 na 27 V 1945 r.,” in *Bracia miesiące. Studia z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939–1945*, Warsaw, 2021, pp. 339–379.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 370–371.

¹⁰ <https://psbprzedborz.pl/pogrom-terror-czyli-mord/> (accessed 5 December 2024).

-Bakir's assessment and completely ignores Zawadzki's polemic. The same applies to the discussion that appeared a few years ago in *Gazeta Radomszczańska* on the subject of the Przedbórz massacre.¹¹ It is strange, given that Dominik Flisiak was also invited to comment on the subject and was interviewed by the periodical mentioned above.¹² Flisiak once more offers only a cursory reference to the events in question, without addressing the substantive debates related to the massacre.

The publication of a new book on a subject that has not been sufficiently covered so far would suggest that its author has something essential to add and is attempting to reinterpret the sources cited. Is this really the case? In my opinion, unfortunately, not. The author includes selected documents, but in his opinions and assessments, he uses the findings and opinions of other researchers.¹³ It is also unfortunate that he opts to engage with this material in such a selective way. While the book presents itself as honest and methodologically sound, it ultimately leaves the reader with a sense of dissatisfaction and ambivalence. In terms of interpretation, it adds little to the existing body of knowledge. Referring to the subtitle – *Questions Raised, Sources Examined, Answers Proposed* – one might say that Flisiak's work does indeed pose questions and present sources, but the answers, when proposed, feel superficial, often disconnected from the evidence and not clearly grounded in the material provided.

¹¹ <https://radomszczanska.pl/arttykul/mord-w-przedborzu-do-rachunku-sumienia-brygady-swietokrzyskiej-przypominamy-n711646> (accessed 5 December 2024).

¹² <https://radomszczanska.pl/arttykul/okreslam-to-mianem-antyzydowskiej-n896760> (accessed 5 December 2024).

¹³ Cf. M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Po Zagładzie. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie 1944–1947*, trans. A. Madej, Warsaw, 2006.