



Elżbieta Rączy¹
Mirosław Surdej²
Piotr Szopa³

Polemics on the survival strategies applied by Jews on the Aryan side of Dębica county

Abstract

For years historians have discussed the attitude of Poles towards Jews during the Holocaust. Tomasz Frydel's article on the survival strategies applied by Jews during the German occupation in Dębica county is one of the contributions to this discussion. The authors of the present article wanted to draw the reader's attention to Frydel's somewhat simplified approach toward the issue of Polish-Jewish relationships. The first part of this article is a critical analysis of accounts and testimonies given by persons who survived the Holocaust around the current Subcarpathian Province. This part also illustrates the reality of Polish residents of Dębica county during the German occupation, which was one of the main causes for their attitude towards ghetto runaways.

The second part describes the attitude of the Home Army towards Jews hiding on the Aryan side in Dębica county during the German occupation. It analyses Frydel's findings concerning the numbers of murdered Jews and circumstances of their death.

Key words: survival strategies, anti-Semitism, Polish-Jewish relationships, Aryan side, non-gratuitous help, spontaneous help

¹ Elżbieta Rączy, PhD, DSc, Professor of the University of Rzeszów, Institute of History of the University of Rzeszów, al. Rejtana 16c, 35-959 Rzeszów, e-mail: kira.raczy@wp.pl, nr ORCID: 0000-0001-5910-1832.

² Mirosław Surdej, PhD, Institute of National Remembrance, Rzeszów Branch, ul. Słowackiego 18, 35-060 Rzeszów, e-mail: miroslaw.surdej@ipn.gov.pl, nr ORCID: 0000-0003-4001-2156.

³ Piotr Szopa, PhD, Institute of National Remembrance, Rzeszów Branch, ul. Słowackiego 18, 35-060 Rzeszów, e-mail: piotr.szopa@ipn.gov.pl, nr ORCID: 0009-0000-2367-7223.

Elżbieta Rączy

Part 1. Some remarks on methodology

The observations made by the authors of the polemic refer primarily to the interpretation of historical facts. The authors divided the text into two parts according to the areas of their academic interest. The first of the authors focuses on various aspects of Polish-Jewish relations. The other two concentrate on the independence conspiracy, in particular the Home Army and relations of Home Army members with national minorities.

The book titled *“Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski [“Night without end. The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland]*, co-edited by Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski (the authors used the Polish edition of 2018), is a contribution to the academic discussion about Polish-Jewish relationships in German-occupied Poland. This two-volume work, which contains nine parts, covers different counties of Poland and was written by different authors. All the chapters (...) describe (...) the fate of Jews living in each county in the years 1939–1945 (...) (Engelking, Grabowski 2018: 14).

This article focuses on the 160-page section, written by Tomasz Frydel, concerning Dębica county (Frydel 2018: 367–521), a region that is now part of the Subcarpathia Province. Research on the extermination of Jews and the broadly understood Polish-Jewish relationships in this area have chiefly been carried out for many years by two scientific centres, the Institute of History of the University of Rzeszów and the Rzeszów Branch of the Institute of National Remembrance. Frydel’s rhetoric seems to be very much in line with the academic assumptions of the book’s co-editors.

Frydel’s work consists of several chapters. In the introductory part, the author describes the nature of Polish-Jewish relationships before World War II in Dębica county. The next part covers the period of World War II. Among other things, it describes the German administration, police forces and demographic and nationality changes that took place in this region. The subsequent parts describe the survival strategies applied by Jews before July 1942, the implementation of *Aktion Reinhardt* and the survival strategies of Jews running away from ghettos and camps. The ultimate part is the summary and conclusions. Of course, it is not possible to address all issues tackled by Frydel, therefore, the authors of this article focused on the main

issue, that is, the strategies applied by runaway Jews to survive among Dębica county villagers.

The reason why the authors decided to polemicize with Frydel was certain, imposed assumptions upon which his publication is based. In the authors' opinion, these assumptions might lead to superficial conclusions. Frydel's work describes the survival strategies of runaway Jews in German-occupied Poland only from the victims' perspective. The truth is the chances of survival on the so-called Aryan side to a great extent hung on the attitude of Poles towards the Jewish community. Therefore, the present article tackles the issue of Polish-Jewish relationships. What seems to be of importance is a critical analysis of the sources cited in Frydel's publication.

Some Jews in the German-occupied Poland saw the world around them as hostile. Therefore, the authors of this article focused on the credibility of post-war accounts of witnesses. What seems to matter considerably is the time when these accounts were given. As time passed by, the perception of the events by those who had survived the Second World War changed. The accounts given shortly after the events were usually very emotional and detailed. Those given many years after the war were more neutral, with not so many interesting nuances. Instead, they contained more "collective memory" facts. What matters, too, is the place where the accounts were given or where the witnesses' memories were written down. The environment where this took place also had a great impact on this process. For instance, there was one Pole whose father spontaneously helped a Jewish family survive the tough times of the Nazi occupation. He remembered that after the war the family left for the United States. In the letters sent to his father after the war the Jewish family expressed more and more reprimands towards Poles for not having rescued as many Jews as they could have and for having informed on many of them to the Germans (Jan Świętoń: 2018). Most Jews were for the rest of their lives grateful to those who helped them survive the horrendous war times. Although there were some Jews who started to label Poles as anti-Semites.

Also, after the end of World War II, some Jews, and some Poles, too, fabricated evidence, giving their versions of events and their causes – not only in accounts but also in testimonies given before courts in criminal proceedings. However, except for one case (Berta Lichtig), not much reflection on these accounts and testimonies can be found in Frydel's article. The Lichtig family from Mielec and Jakub Einhorn from Markowa, who are mentioned by Frydel, lied in matters concerning the role individual Poles had played in crimes against Jews. This was proven

before common courts after the war. The issue of Lichtigs' and Einhorn's false testimonies has been tackled in the literature, although some historians still consider Einhorn's version incontestable (Grabowski, Libionka 2016: 629, 631–639). So, let us shed some light on it.

In December 1942, in the village of Markowa (Łańcut county), with the participation of the village's residents, Jews who had been hiding there were rounded up and killed (Szpytma: 2014). The Germans caught and shot 25 persons, including Jakub Einhorn's family members. Jakub Einhorn, who was hiding at the house of one of Markowa's villagers, claimed he was a witness to those events. After the war, he accused one of the villagers of taking part in the murder. Einhorn claimed he had not only heard but also seen persons torturing his closed relatives: *I noticed that one of my brothers had a cut on his head and blood was running down his face, and it was at that time that I heard those who took part in the roundup saying that it was Orzechowski and Krauz that cut my brother's head when they were beating him in the barn. Then, as I observed the yard, I saw Wojciech Krauz still beating my brother on the head. Watching further what was happening from the place where I was hiding, I mean, from a hall near the chicken coop, I could see what was happening in the house and in my eyeshot through the open backyard door* (AIPN, IPN Rz 358/80: 15–16). The story told by this man is over imaginative, with many other details, which in fact never happened (AIPN, IPN-Rz 383/5: 41; AIPN, IPN Rz 358/80: 106,108). What he said was at variance with the accounts given by the residents of Markowa, including the accounts of Poles at whose place Einhorn was hiding (AIPN, IPN Rz 358/80: 19, 185, 186). According to what the Poles said, Einhorn could not have seen what he described in such minute detail. The accounts given by the Poles proved right during a local inspection carried out during court proceedings (AIPN, IPN Rz 358/80: 186–187). This was not the only such situation. On at least two more occasions Einhorn accused various persons of taking part in rounding up and murdering Jews, extortions or stealing of Jewish property (AIPN, IPN Rz 358/142: 19, 30–32, 35–36). Hoping for the conviction of those who in his opinion were guilty of informing on Jews hiding at their neighbours, Jakub Einhorn made up stories full of fanciful details that were never acknowledged by any of the witnesses heard. For the court Einhorn was not a credible witness. And it was due to his incredibility that the accused were eventually acquitted. This does not mean that crimes against Jews hiding among Poles never happened, or that the local community never took part in roundups. What is evident is that the examples provided above prove that the fact that an account of events is given by

a Jew does not mean that it should be considered incontestable (Raczy 2014: 264–265).⁴ Just like an account given by a representative of any other nation, an assumption that is obvious although not always considered. Therefore, the accounts of those who survived the Extermination as well as testimonies concerning the relationships between Jews and Poles given before courts should be analysed with a fair dose of scepticism, something that Frydel's article lacks.

Methodology issues and various difficulties encountered during the analysis of *the great Jewish catastrophe* during World War II have been addressed by Doctor Samuel Gringauz, a Holocaust survivor, a former resident of the Kaunas ghetto and a prisoner of the Dachau camp. He coined the term *hyperhistorical complex of the survivors*, which causes that “most of the memoirs and reports are full of preposterous verbosity, graphomaniac exaggeration, dramatic effects, overestimated self-inflation, dilettante philosophizing, would-be lyricism, unchecked rumours, bias, partisan attacks and apologies” (Gringauz 1950).⁵ The existence of the *hyperhistorical complex of the survivors* should be borne in mind especially by all those Holocaust historians who centre their research around the “victims' perspective”, and, for various reasons, ignore non-Jewish sources.

Frydel's narration is mainly based on the accounts of four persons (three men and one woman), who survived the Nazi occupation and wanted to share with the world what they had been through during this period. He also refers to accounts and testimonies of other Jewish witnesses given before criminal courts after the war. Frydel selected persons who spoke perfect Polish, had Polish friends, and decided to use these “assets” when they looked for help among members of the Polish community. This selection is obvious since only those who had acquaintances on the other side of the ghettos could count on help. Without help on the Aryan side, chances of surviving outside of the Jewish quarters were scarce. The author mentions a group of more than 500 persons who searched for help on the Aryan side. This number represents approxi-

⁴ Einhorn and Lichtig are not the only confabulating Jewish witnesses. Compare, for instance, the account of Isaac Kalfus concerning the participation of Poles in the Nazi murders of Jews in Mielec in September 1939.

⁵ “The hyperhistorical complex may be described as *judeocentric, lococentric and egocentric*. It concentrates historical relevance on Jewish problems of local events under the aspect of personal experience. This is the reason why most of the memoirs and reports are full of preposterous verbosity, graphomaniac exaggeration, dramatic effects, overestimated self-inflation, dilettante philosophizing, would-be lyricism, unchecked rumours, bias, partisan attacks and apologies”.

mately 4% of all Jews resettled from Dębica county (the total number of Jews resettled from this area oscillated round 12,000).

Taking the above-mentioned figures as a basis for the calculations, it can be stated that the majority of the Jewish population, for various reasons, did not take any action to save their lives. When the German authorities introduced anti-Jewish ordinances and then resettled the population to ghettos, few people could have guessed where events would lead. The strategy of survival for many Jews at that time was to submit to German orders so as not to expose themselves to further repressions from the invader and to live among their own people. Only the development of the situation in the ghettos forced a verification of views and a change of attitude. The later the decision to go into hiding was made, the more difficult it was to get outside the ghetto walls to the so-called Aryan side and find a suitable hiding place. When the deportations began, life outside the walls of the ghettos was no less feared than staying on the spot, and this was influenced by the spreading news about the problems of living on the Aryan side and the attitude of the local population towards refugees. Only determining how many people seeking help from the so-called Aryans managed to survive on the Aryan side could give at least some idea of the scale of this problem.

The attitude of Poles towards ghetto runaways was influenced by numerous factors, among other things, the nature of previous relationships. This is perfectly illustrated by Franciszek Kotula, who described *two totally different worlds* of Głogów Małopolski (Kotula 1981: 170). What mattered significantly was the level of acculturation of the Jewish community. In Dębica county it seemed to be low (just like in the rest of what is currently the Subcarpathia Province). Of course, this level was slightly higher in cities than in small towns or villages. In the area in question there were mainly small towns with a population smaller than 20,000 residents (Wierzbieniec 2003: 54–55). One of them was Dębica, whose population before the war was around 14,000. Only Jarosław, Przemyśl and Rzeszów had populations of more than 20,000 (Rączy 2014: 74–77).⁶

At the beginning of his narration, Frydel gives an outline of the history of the Jewish community in Dębica county, focusing on the period of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria and the interwar period. What catches the eye is a one-sided presentation of Polish-Jewish relationships, *de facto* narrowed down to various peasants' rebellions of the 19th

⁶ The Jews accounted for these populations respectively: Jarosław 25%, Przemyśl 34%, Rzeszów 35%.

century and anti-Jewish riots of 1918–1919. The author also mentions tensions between Poles and Jews in the 1930s. He refers to these riots and rebellions within the context of the Extermination and brands them “anti-Semitic”, which suggests that their background was race-based. In fact, the causes of these riots and rebellions were far more complex. The author mentions only in passing the otherwise crucial economy-based conflict, which by both parties was often handled in the way that can hardly be called ideal or exemplary. The author portrays Poles as those who were always first to attack Jews or at least Jewish property. He claims that in the interwar period, the committees of the Polish Communist Party and Jews sitting on city boards made every effort to stop Poles from doing so. Attaching importance to the otherwise marginal role of the Polish Communist Party as those who prevented anti-Jewish pogroms shows that, regrettably, the author has little understanding of the political situation of interwar Poland. Frydel builds a narrative based on only one account (Rafael Ebelholtz). Ultimately, he concedes that during the interwar period in Dębica county there was not a single anti-Jewish rebellion substantiating his thesis, that is, a rebellion where people were killed. Frydel’s narrative suggests that only Poles were unfriendly towards Jews. This is a generalization since not all Poles were hostile towards Jews. The author does not refer to any Poles’ recollections of mutual relations or at least the literature where these relationships are described. This is understandable considering the assumptions on which his publication is based. What matters is the Jewish point of view. Such an approach seems somewhat strange for a researcher, who should always tend to be objective and reliable.

It should be emphasized that aid on the Aryan side could only be counted on by those Jews who had friends, or at least good acquaintances, among Poles ready to put their lives, freedom or at least property at risk. Frydel says little about the situation of Poles under the Nazi occupation, an issue that had a great impact on the attitude of Poles towards Jews in Dębica county. If we consider the author’s perception only, this will seem logical. Frydel focused mainly on the survival of Jews among Poles. Unfortunately, readers far and wide will not have a full picture of the situation. Those English-speaking readers who have absolutely no knowledge about the reality of German-occupied Poland will have no idea of the impact it had on the lives of those who experienced it. The German occupation of Poland is considered one of the most brutal in Europe. In the first two years of the war, repressions were mainly aimed at Poles. Attempts were made to subdue Poles, make them slaves of the Third Reich, and seize their property. This was done by way of imposing

laws regulating almost all spheres of Poles' lives. Any attempts to object to or circumvent these laws resulted in severe sentencing, including the death penalty. Terror, killing, sending to extermination camps and, especially, starting from 1943, pacifications of villages and the application of collective responsibility were commonplace. The system imposed by the Germans demoralized those who were a part of it (from top management officials to the victims) and was conducive to corruption and a growing number of informers. Given the nature of their functions, members of the Judenrat and Jewish policemen, too, were forced to collaborate with the German authorities. The fact that there had been informers among Jews was confirmed by witness testimonies (Rączy 2014: 217–228). In the hearing record of Kriminalpolizei officer Jakub Patalong, there is information on the network of agents collaborating with the Chief of Kriminalpolizei in Dębica county. These included two priests, a property owner, the head of a commune near Dębica and the president of the Jewish commune of Dębica (AIPN, IPN Rz, 061/1482). The fact that Jews collaborated with the Germans is also mentioned in Frydel's article. One of the examples of such collaboration is the activity of the so-called Kapłan's Group (Krempa 2012: 149–151) who hunted for the Jews hiding near Mielec and handed them over to the Germans. Frydel is right in saying that such behaviour could be justified by an extreme situation in which Jews found themselves in forced labour camps. Their lives depended on the existence of labour camps and, if these had been liquidated, their chances of survival would have decreased considerably. Frydel is trying to justify the motives of Jewish informers who collaborated with the Germans and says "(...) *it was the effect of a complex evolution encompassing various conditions that were typical of the situation prevailing in Dębica county (...). The activity of this group is only a small part of the history of Judenjagd where the main characters are gendarmes, blue policemen and Polish peasants* (Frydel 2018: 511). It is worthy of note that Frydel also mentions cases where Poles were informed on by the Jews hiding at their homes. Such collaboration with the authorities was probably commonplace throughout German-occupied Poland. There is no question about it. Though, no academic research into this issue has so far been carried out. There is no information on the number of informers, Poles who faced repressions or the informers' motives (mental collapse during tortures, a sense of self-preservation). Tolerance of pain has its limits, and the desire to save one's own life is indisputable. What needs to be addressed, however, is the author's attempt at justifying deeds committed by Jews. According to Frydel, this was a form of survival strategy, which was ultimately fruitless.

In this context, however, all negative behavior of Poles towards Jews, which was caused by terror or blackmail by the German authorities, should also be considered a survival strategy (e.g., taking of hostages from amongst villagers and threatening to kill them unless they were obedient, participation in roundups of hiding Jews or watching those captured). Given the situation that existed in German-occupied Poland, the odds were that these threats could easily be carried out.

A great asset of those seeking help on the Aryan side was money. But money was oftentimes also the cause of personal misfortune. Jews seeking help from Poles were never sure whether those to whom they turned for help would not be lured by the prospects of an easy gain or willingness to take advantage of their dire situation. And this would have been easy since Jews were not protected by the law. They were treated as prey by the Germans. This issue, too, is tackled by Frydel in his article. Offering financial gratification was one of the chances for staying alive. The author draws the reader's attention to non-gratuitous help and says little about cases where Poles helped Jews spontaneously. The author quite rightly argues that those who had certain property (preferably movables) would find hiding places much easier, although not in every single case, a fact that is confirmed also by accounts given by the Jews (AYV, 03, 1281). It is also true that Jews were robbed, deceived, and taken advantage of by those who valued highly material goods. And there were many such people in German-occupied Poland. Nonetheless, the standpoint of one of the main witnesses, cited by Frydel without any comment, seems to be a far-reaching generalization. The witness says he was not so sure "*a Jew or a Jewish family could survive long at a Polish home*" (Frydel 2018: 417). He claims that Jews hiding at a peasant's home who had jewellery or money were at the mercy of those who hid them. The truth is that all Jews found themselves in such a situation regardless of how much they had. The author's suggestions lead the reader to the conclusion that greed for material things was the entrenched mindset of Polish peasants. All they allegedly wanted was to deprive Jews who sought help of their assets and, sooner or later, make them their victims. Again, the truth is that not all Jews could pay for their rescue. Frydel provides some rough data according to which, out of 141 persons who survived in the villages of Dębica county, 20% said they had paid or promised to pay their rescuers after the war (Frydel 2018: 429). This means that, as regards most rescued Jews, no information on financial gratification is available. Nonetheless, Frydel recapitulates: "*it is very probable that the majority of those who were hiding supported their rescuers financially*" (Frydel 2018: 430). What was the basis of this

presumption is difficult to say since the information provided in Frydel's article is not sufficient to make such a generalization.

Frydel does not say much about the economic situation of villagers in Dębica county. He mentions quotas imposed on peasants but nothing more on their financial situation in general. And without this information there is no background against which the issue of non-gratuitous help could be addressed. A typical village in the Rzeszów region derived its characteristics from Galicia's past (major farmland fragmentation and, consequently, poverty). According to data gathered by Rada Główna Opiekuńcza (RGO) [*Central Welfare Council*], in Dębica county, in the first quarter of 1942, only 16,222 persons were provided care, while at least 11,267 persons were not (AAN, RGO, 424: 144). In the fourth quarter of 1942, in Dębica county, 35,190 persons lived in such poverty that they qualified for care from the RGO. And only 51% of them could receive it because the RGO was not capable of providing aid to all who needed it (Rączy 2008: 106). Hunger before harvest was commonplace in this area. There are still witnesses to those times. Poles did not enjoy any tax relief, and taxes, just like various other dues, were growing as the Nazi occupation continued. Prices of goods in the free market were growing but wages were frozen. The fact that Jews participated in the costs of living was nothing out of ordinary since few Polish peasants could afford to maintain additional persons beyond their immediate household. Of course, there is little information in the testimonies of witnesses, both Poles and Jews, on the financial gratification for the help provided to hiding Jews.

Poles, on the other hand, say nothing, because, for many of them, providing non-gratuitous help to Jews was something blameworthy or shameful after the war. It happened that those who helped Jews during the war were assaulted or robbed because of the prevailing stereotype: *you hid Jews, so you made money out of it*.

What might also seem to stir up controversies is the allegation that Poles murdered the Jews they hid at their homes after the latter ran out money. There is no denying that this happened in German-occupied Poland. No data illustrating the size of this problem are available. Nothing is said on the scale of these murders in Dębica county in Frydel's article, either. The author consulted sources in Poland and abroad, so he could have at least provided estimates or made references to the sources where these estimates can be found. What he did was confine himself to saying that this information was widespread in the county and sometimes reached the Germans: "*It was him who allegedly murdered them because they did not want to*

pay any more” (Frydel 2018: 432, przyp. 202). The author provides not one documented example.

So, his assertion that there were many such examples in Dębica county must be considered an over-interpretation.

Another issue tackled in Frydel’s article that requires commentary is the pacification of Podborze in April 1943 and the consequences it brought to the Jews who were hiding there. This issue is linked with the case of informing on the Adlers, a Jewish family of four, who were provided with shelter by Tomasz Stachurski. After the pacification, Stachurski forced them to leave his home but kept providing them with food. It was at the time of Podborze pacification that village meetings started to be called to remind the local community about the consequences of helping Jews.⁷ Frydel says that, according to the testimony of Jan Kulig, “the Adlers were caught after a village meeting”. As Frydel describes this “*a few days later, the Kawęczyn hostages caught the Adlers and brought them to the police station*” (Frydel 2018: 470). The situation in which the hostages found themselves is described above. Consequently, it should be concluded that informing on and handing over the Jews to the Germans by those who were forced to do so was a survival strategy. Frydel seems not to recognize the hostages’ right to save their own lives. Instead, he suggests that it was thanks to the German system based of terror and fear that “... *villages were now given a “tool” to fight against aliens*” (Frydel 2018: 446). One might be given the impression that what Polish peasants from Dębica county needed was only the “right stimulus” to start murdering Jews. In the opinion of Frydel, this stimulus was the pacification of Podborze.

Information on the burning down of the village spread and caused terror among its residents. And Frydel draws rather far-reaching conclusions from this fact. In his opinion “*violence against Poles and application of collective responsibility for hiding Jews caused that the thin line between a bystander and a participant was blurred (...), profound changes of social relationships prompted by extreme forms of violence could only deepen (or activate) the anti-Semitism that had existed before the war*” (Frydel 2018: 476). He writes further: “(...) *Jews mattered for*

⁷ Introduced in October 1941 by the Ordinance of Governor-General Hans Frank; starting from the Autumn of 1942, under the Ordinance of Fridrich Krüger, SS and Police Leader in the General Government, the Ordinance covered third parties who had information on aid provided to Jews and did not inform the competent authorities about it. Collective responsibility was applied at that time. Also, the local authorities reiterated that providing any help to Jews was forbidden (Announcement of Dębica county Kreishauptmann dr. Ernst Schlüter of 19 November 1942).

their Polish neighbours only insofar as they could be the source of money and valuables” and recapitulates: “Jews also became a threat to the existence of village communities. A common readiness to hand over runaway Jews to the Germans to save a community shows how far Jews were excluded from the universal moral responsibility of the Polish nation as a whole.” (Frydel 2018: 477) According to what is suggested by Frydel, the reason why so few Jews survived the Extermination, was the anti-Semitism of Polish peasants.

It can be inferred that if there were any who were not hostile towards Jews, they became hostile because of terror and collective liability for hiding Jews applied by the Germans.

In his narration of what happened after Podborze pacification, Frydel refers to the dossier of the case against Tomasz Stachurski, mainly to the record of his testimony, the records of the trial and the testimonies of the witnesses including, among others, Isaac Sommer. It is a pity the author makes no references to the court’s findings, which are recorded in the dossier as well. And these data are vital for the critical assessment of the source. Isaac Sommer testified that he learned from third parties that, even before the displacement, Adler had handed over his property to Stachurski, so that the latter could take care of it. In 1943, when Adler returned to reclaim it, Stachurski, with the help of some other persons, allegedly tied him up and handed over to the blue police in Wadowice Górne. He purportedly did the same to Adler’s wife who, concerned about her husband’s absence, went to look for him (AIPN, IPN Rz 353/151: 38–39). The Regional Court in Tarnów, on 17 June 1949, entered a judgement acquitting Tomasz Stachurski of the charges, that is catching and handing over the Adlers to the blue police. Stachurski never pleaded guilty, and his version was confirmed by Polish witnesses. The court took a critical stance towards Sommer’s testimony. It said: *“even without questioning the statement of witness Isaak Sommer, it has to be asserted that, in the first place, the testimony does not contain or substantiate facts proving that the accused committed the act described in the statement of charges. The information provided by the witness in his statement is hearsay evidence only, and the witness is not able to say exactly who had told him that the accused had allegedly caught Adler and his wife and then handed them over to the police”*(AIPN, IPN Rz 353/151:97). This, however, does not change the underlying fact that these persons were killed. Though, one can get the impression that the author selected information fitting a stance he had taken beforehand.

Piotr Szopa
Mirosław Surdej

Part II. Attitude of the Home Army (AK) towards ghetto runaways

Another issue tackled by Frydel that ought to be addressed is the attitude of the Polish Underground towards Jews. In his article, Frydel draws profound conclusions. He says: “*the Extermination meant destruction of an integrated community for which Poles were never obliged to bear moral responsibility.*” To substantiate his thesis, Frydel refers to some reports of the Home Army Inspectorate for Rzeszów, which contained negative opinions on the attitude of Jews towards Poles or confirmed that Jews were denied recruitment to the Home Army (along with Germans, Ukrainians and those who were not capable of keeping a secret). He says that the decision to deny recruitment was one that, arguably, brought the most catastrophic consequences for Polish Jewry. This opinion should, then, be construed to mean that the Home Army was morally responsible for, and capable of, rescuing Jews, as Polish citizens, from the Extermination. The fact that it did not happen became a basis of accusations. Unfortunately, the author does not say precisely how the Home Army could have done it or prove that Jews were really treated differently. In some respects, indeed, Jews and Poles were treated differently by the Home Army. There is no question about it (Frydel 2018: 443–444). The organization did not trust minorities. Minorities were those who gave no guarantee that they would fight and sacrifice their lives to pursue Polish national aims. This lack of trust was present in Polish Armed Forces even before the war, as early as during the Polish-Soviet War. It was further enhanced by the minority revolt in the Kresy [Eastern Borderlands] in 1939.

For example, in 1942, Inspector Ciepliński, whose command included the structures of Home Army’s Dębica Region, issued the following instruction: “because of the Gestapo and communists who want to introduce provocateurs to us, I order you to be careful. Conduct an interview beforehand about the person, his contacts, the environment in which he lives, family relations and attitudes towards the National Cause. Find information on the ways in which he sought contact with us.

Introduce a new member with the surety of two witnesses, active members of ours. Should the new members come from elsewhere, check beforehand whether they were not disciplinary transferred to the reserve or even dismissed from active service” (AIPN, IPN Kr, 595/141: 24).

The Home Army intelligence services operating in the Home Army Inspectorate in Rzeszów also repeatedly informed about the involvement of Jews in the communist conspiracy, which posed a threat to the independence conspiracy (Szopa 2009: 56–72).

So, Jews were denied service at the Home Army also because the organization considered them as a potential threat. Jews were severely persecuted by the Germans. Thus, they were much more exposed to the risk of being detained and brutally interrogated, which might possibly lead to the identification of those who had helped them. What mattered, too, was simply pragmatism related to all newly recruited Home Army soldiers. A Home Army soldier was not only an asset but also an investment – he had to be trained and equipped. Funds were limited, so only those who could give a 100% guarantee were selected. This was the institutional “survival strategy”.

However, the fact that Jews and Poles were treated differently within the Home Army should not be interpreted to mean that the Polish conspiracy could ensure safety for the Jewish collective. Just like it could not protect Poles from being deported to Siberia in 1940, rescue children in Zamojszczyzna from German hands, protect the population of Volhynia and Eastern Galicia against the crimes of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, rescue the residents of Polish villages pacified by the Germans or even tear down prisons to rescue its own soldiers and Polish civilians.

Frydel is aware that after the liquidation of ghettos the attitude of the Home Army towards Jews was a complex and multi-faceted issue. To prove this complexity, Frydel refers to notifications. He found two documents drafted by the Underground authorities in an area falling within the jurisdiction of the Home Army's Rzeszów Sub-Region. These describe the persecution of Jews hidden by the local community (Frydel 2018: 445). The first one is dated 5 July 1943 and, according to Frydel, was published in the local Rzeszów paper “Na Posterunku” (Frydel 2018: 445). It is an announcement made by the commander of armed forces informing about the setting up of special courts. It says “*It seems that, as compared to the Home Army, the Peasants' Battalions in the Podkarpacie Province were far more interested in providing aid to runaway Jews or finding ways to discourage the locals from hunting for people. And, based on fragmentary reports, the attitude of the Home Army towards Jews could at the very best be defined as indifferent and at the very worst as hostile; what can be noticed, too, is that the organization was only interested in the Jewish community insofar as it directly affected the fate of Poles.*” (Frydel 2018: 444) So much for an extensive

citation. This harsh opinion is interesting for a few reasons. Two pages earlier Frydel says that the archives of Dębica Home Army structures were destroyed. So, on what basis were these conclusions drawn? From 1943, the Peasants' Battalions had been a part of the Home Army. Jews served and even held commanding positions in the Home Army (e.g., Piotr Jarosz, that is, most likely Naftali Spaglet, pseudonym "Paproć" – commanded the 4th Company of Peasants' Battalions of the Rzeszów District). Even in the publicly available (posted on YouTube for many years) memoirs of Marek Verstandg – one of the victims of the Home Army attack in Chrzastów – Verstandg states that when he was detained by the Home Army from Tuszów Narodowy, he told the soldiers he himself was a cadet [podchorąży] of the Home Army. As evidence of this fact he presented a document signed by the then deceased Władysław Jasiński, the famous "Jędrus". On a side note, Verstandg's account contains many other details of this tragic crime that are worth noting. They shed a slightly different light on this matter.

Although the organization looked at the Jewish population with caution, it does not mean that it was not interested in their fate at all.

The local Rzeszów paper "Na Posterunku" to which the author is referring was a publishing organ of the Home Army Inspectorate for Rzeszów ZWZ-AK. In total, 119 issues were released, and the circulation ranged from a few hundreds to 5,000 copies, which made "Na Posterunku" one of top conspiracy papers in the area (Brzęk 1975: 14, 2–3). Let us see, then, what kind of content was published. The first page of "Na Posterunku" no. 37 of September 1st, 1942 says: "(...) *Before the eyes of the Polish Nation, millions of Jews living next to us are being exterminated; and this extermination is a warning for us (...)*". A month later, the following content was published in issue no. 39: "(...) *Alongside the tragedy suffered by the Polish society decimated by the enemy, again, for almost a year now, in our land, a horrifying, planned slaughter of Jews is happening. This mass murdering is unprecedented in the world's history. It is unparalleled to any known atrocity. Infants, children, the disabled, the sick, the healthy, men, women – Catholics, Jews – mercilessly murdered, poisoned with gases, buried alive, thrown off from great heights (...). Incapable of resisting actively, on behalf of the entire Polish society, the Directorate of Civil Resistance is protesting the genocide of Jews. All Polish political and social groups have joined this protest. Just like crimes against Poles, these crimes will be accounted for by their perpetrators and accomplices*" (Na posterunku: 1 X 1942, nr 39: 5).

In Dębica county, an Information Bulletin was also distributed. On 18 March 1943, a special warning to the perpetrators was published:

"Warning. The Polish society, despite that it is itself a victim of the horrible terror, with horror and deep sympathy observes the murdering of the remaining Jewish community in Poland. Polish society protested these murders; their protest was communicated to the entire free world, and Jews who fled from ghettos or extermination camps were provided with such a substantial aid that the German invader published an ordinance threatening all Poles who helped hiding Jews that they would be killed. Nonetheless, there were some with no honour and conscience, criminals, who made blackmailing Jews and Poles who hid them a new source of their shameful income. The Directorate of Civil Resistance is warning that, where possible, each such blackmail is being recorded and severely punished, or will be recorded and punished in the future" (Szopa 2014: 176). This warning was often copied by the local Underground press. Numerous death sentences given by underground courts prove that this was not groundless. Out of approximately 500 people who were executed or attempted to be executed in the Rzeszów sub-district, death sentences were also given to people who committed crimes against Jews. Also in the Rzeszów Home Army Inspectorate, within which the structures of Home Army's Dębica Region operated. One of them was Franciszek Groch, against whom the commander of the structures of Home Army's Dębica Region, Capt. Adam Lazarowicz ps. "Gwóźdź" drew up an indictment in which, among other counts, he pointed out: "He tracked down and shot a whole number of hiding Jews." He was executed by the Home Army soldiers on August 24th, 1943. In another case from this inspectorate, the commanding officer, Capt. Ciepliński personally submitted a criminal report to the Special Military Court and the Special Civil Courts requesting the death penalty for those who had committed the murder of Jews.

About 500 executions carried out during the occupation by underground structures were largely the implementation of sentences handed down by underground courts operating in the Rzeszów Subdistrict of the Home Army. Several dozen such cases concerned crimes committed against Polish citizens of Jewish nationality. Such cases, which are described in the literature, also took place in Dębica county (Szopa 2014: 158, 264, 347, 354; Wojnarowski 1996: 7).

Interesting information can also be found in the existing literature concerning the area in question. Local researcher of the Mielec region, Mirosław Maciąga, Ph.D., says that on 9 July 1944, a group of Home Army soldiers operating under the command of captain Władysław Kwarciany, confiscated from the German settlers in Golezów former Jewish property that had been seized by the Nazis. A Jew by the name

Mendel from Książnice participated in this operation (Maciąga: 1994, 334). *And on 28 July 1944, "a group of Jews from Radomyśl forests liaised with the local Home Army outpost; "Ciechan" participated in the talks. As a result of the negotiations, the Jews were joined by "Gawlik" with 20 people* (Maciąga: 1994, 334). This means that there were contacts between hiding Jews and Home Army structures. Frydel's assertion that the Home Army was not interested at all in the situation of the Jewish population in Dębica county must be considered groundless.

The author ignores entirely the Home Army's contribution to rescuing Jews in Dębica county. There are known cases of help being provided in various forms by Home Army soldiers, e.g. by providing Aryan documents enabling, for example, trips to work in the Reich, organizing such trips or hiding in occupied Poland (AIPN, IPN Rz 107/1272: 1, 117).

Frydel writes about, for example, the existence of grassroots social networks helping the Jewish population (Frydel 2018: 424–425). Though, a question should be asked whether those who operated within these networks were not engaged in conspiracy? Accordingly, it should be asked whether these networks did not act with the knowledge and aid of the Underground structures? Frydel describes how Kazimierz Zaczek relocated Elżbieta Reibscheid and her family. He says that Zaczek had a German uniform. How did he get it? Did he have any documents that would be necessary in the case of a random check point and, if so, where did he get them? Why does Frydel not ask these questions? This is what happens when the accounts of those who were hiding are the only source of information. Elżbieta Reibscheid and her family did not only need to but was not supposed to know that those who were hiding her and her family were in the Home Army. This was a general principle applied to protect both those who were being hidden and those who hid. Another example of the activity of the "social network" is Jews hidden in the buildings of the manor house of count Tarnowski in Chorzelów. Interestingly, in 1944, this very mansion house was the headquarters of the Home Army's Mielec Region during Operation "Tempest", which suggests that the Home Army might have known about the Jews that were being hidden there. Whereas this information can be questioned, about Aleksander and Leokadia Mikołajkow [Mikolaykov], the rescuers of the Reich family, Frydel straightforwardly says that they acted in conspiracy and "could count" on the support of the structures of Home Army's Dębica Region. Nonetheless, he still sees it as "social network" aid rather than aid provided by the Polish resistance movement. However, Frydel concedes that the Mikołajkows were in the Home Army, the

Home Army provided false kennkartes for the hiding Jews and that these Jews were relocated to Warsaw where they fought in the Warsaw Uprising, most probably, as Home Army soldiers. So, perhaps an obvious conclusion should be made that it was the Home Army rather than some “social network” that helped them. Let us now look at another case, namely a (single) crime that the Home Army committed on Jews, that is, the *Verständing* family, who were killed in Chrzastów in 1944 r. Frydel has no doubt that the crime was committed by the “local conspiracy” (Home Army). The soldiers of the group that killed the *Verständings* in Chrzastów were later afraid of the reaction of the command and Military Special Courts. Even they understood that what they did was an act of banditism and not a Home Army operation. Of course, they tried to justify their deeds by saying that they had committed this crime for the sake of safety. Nonetheless, they acted on their own initiative. Therefore, charging the Home Army with this crime is unjust. The Home Army never gave an order to kill the family from Chrzastów. Looking from Frydel’s perspective, according to which the Home Army should be considered responsible for the death of the *Verständings*, it should be consequently concluded that it was the very same Home Army and not the “social network” that was engaged in saving the *Reichs* in Dębica. In both cases, those involved in these operations acted on their own initiative. Frydel concedes that *Verständing* was hiding at Marcin Walas’s – a Home Army soldier. Despite that, he claims that, to rescue the *Verständing* family, Walas used a “network of friends”. The author did not give details of the murder and of what happened later, for example that after his escape *Verständing* returned to his place of hiding and that Walas soon provided him with a list of names of Home Army soldiers who had committed the crime.

What seems to be worth commenting on are the statistics referred to by Frydel in his publication. He says there were 952 deaths among hiding Jews. Out of these 952 persons, four (the *Verständings*) were killed by Home Army soldiers. So, on what basis did the author conclude that the Polish Underground had been a threat to Jews? Perhaps, such was the subjective feeling of the Jewish community. However, a historian’s judgement should always tend to be objective. Based on what Frydel writes about the *Kaplan’s* Group, it is questionable who should be considered a greater threat to Jews hiding in Dębica county – the Home Army or, perhaps, the *Kaplan’s* Group?

It is worthy of note as well that, on a few occasions, the Home Army attempted to kill those whom Frydel brands as “leaders in violence” towards Jews – for example Hans Urban or “Rudi” Zimmermann. During

these operations, a few Home Army soldiers were killed. Also, the attack on the labour camp in Biesiadka, which was carried out by a partisan group, according to the attackers was aimed at setting free and rescuing those confined. Some Jews, however, decided to stay or return to the camp. Not only does this show how difficult life was outside of the camp but also proves that some Jews made such a choice because they hoped to the very end that the worst case scenario would not come true and they would survive in the reality created by the Germans.

Frydel says that the way Poles in Dębica behaved was sometimes determined by a fear of being informed on by the Jews. Perhaps a question should be asked whether Jews who decided to stay at the German camp did not act in a similar fashion?

Frydel attempts to systematize information obtained from the consulted sources, which is a good thing. However, he seems to have had serious problems with it. For instance, table no. 4, titled "Population migration before Aktion »Reinhardt« in the years 1939–1942", consists of the following: Resettlements/deportation; population, locality, period, number of persons and comments. Item 4 contains the following information: "Resettlement of village population residing around future proving grounds", Population – "Polish, Jewish", locality – "area of proving grounds "Południe" and SS Heidelager", period – "Spring 1940–1944, number of persons – "15000–20000". Putting aside the fact that the information he provides goes beyond the adopted timeframe (1939–1942), a reader analyzing the table will not see that most of the resettled population included Poles from the neighbouring villages.

What should be commented on as well is table no. 9 titled "Perpetrators and circumstances of death of runaway Jews". Underneath the table, Frydel writes that "for all the three categories of murders committed by police forces, the victims that had been "informed on by the locals" were the majority of those killed. Catching and handing over Jews to the Germans was the initiative of the local villagers, mainly those who were members of village self-defence committees". Frydel says that there were altogether 952 deaths among runaway Jews. Let us have a closer look at the table, then. In "*Perpetrator – the German police*", "*own action*" – killed – 10"; "*Informed on by the locals*" – 52. "*No data*" – 160. Further, in "*Perpetrator – German police + blue police*", "*own action*" (as a marginal note it should be added that no information is given on whose "*own action*" it was), 12 killed persons are provided; "*Informed on by the locals*" – 37 persons; "*No data*" – 52. Further, in "*Perpetrator – blue police*", "*own action*", 8 victims are provided. "*Informed on by the locals*" – 7 victims. "*No data*" – 74 victims. What is more, the table con-

tains serious errors. For instance, according to what the table says, $8+7+74$ equals 153 victims! In fact, there were 89 of them. This is not all. According to Frydel, unidentified police forces were responsible for the death of 258 persons. During manhunt actions carried out by combined police and military forces in forests, 162 persons were killed. The local conspiracy (Home Army) was made responsible for the death of 4 persons, local civilians for 10. Others causes (bandits, passing of the war front, Wehrmacht, typhus etc.) were responsible for the death of 4 persons. What seems to be particularly astounding is the last of these figures. It is unrealistic considering the causes Frydel provides. To sum up, 952 Jewish runaways were killed. In three instances the table provides information on the type of action and says that there were 412 victims. Out of this number, for 286 persons Frydel provides no data on the circumstances surrounding death. So, bluntly speaking for 70% of the persons at hand there is simply no data. A question arises, then, how did Frydel draw his conclusions? Also, two pages later he writes: "*It is difficult not to conclude that the lion part of the victims in the county were killed by the German police.*" What does he mean by "*it is difficult not to conclude*" since such were the facts? Classifying under the same category and adding up together the victims of the Home Army (4), local civilians (10) and the so-called "other causes" (42) ("other causes" including also "typhus" passing of the front", Wehrmacht [sic!], bandits") seems strange to say the least.

To recapitulate, the article of Frydel is definitely a very important contribution to the long-lasting discussion about the attitude of Poles towards Jews in German-occupied Poland. Frydel's article is the first scholarly work discussing the issue of survival "on the Aryan side" in a county that is currently part of the Podkarpace Province. Beyond all doubt, the author did immense work collecting materials for his publication. Nonetheless, he relied on the accounts of Jews only, which seems to be too little to describe the complex nature of Polish-Jewish relationships existing in the county. What can be inferred from Frydel's article is one simple conclusion. Anything Jews did to stay alive on the Aryan side was their survival strategy. They had all the right to do what they did and must be understood. But why does Frydel not give this right to Poles? Did they not have the right to save their lives or be scared? The reasons why Poles showed a negative attitude towards ghetto runaways are far more complex than these described by Frydel. There was much more to it than just Polish anti-Semitism or greed.

Frydel's article implies that, in the recollections of Jews, Poles predominantly have a negative image. This, however, is not entirely true.

The pre-war Jewish community were not only made of those who survived the war. Perhaps we should look at this issue from a different perspective. Perhaps most of these recollections exist because those rescued met only Poles along the way. A great majority of those who met only Germans in the period from Aktion Reinhardt to the entry of the Red Army had no chance of leaving any accounts of what happened to them.

Literature

Sources

- AIPN Rz, case ref. 061/482, Operation record concerning Leopold Krawczyk.
 AIPN Rz, 107/1272, Dossier of the case of Antoni Chorąży and others, Record of testimony of Władysław Łabaj, Rzeszów, 28 XII 1951.
 AIPN Rz, 353/151, Records of the case of Tomasz Stachurski.
 AIPN Rz, 358/80, Records of the case of Andrzej Rewer.
 AIPN Rz, 358/142, Records of the case of Bonifacy Słota.
 AIPN Kr, 595/141, Archives "Ruch", Instruction by Captain Łukasz Ciepłiński ps."Pług", Rzeszów, 29 IX 1942.
 AAN, Rada Główna Opiekuńcza, case ref. 424, Report of the Central Welfare Council in Dębica county for 1942.
 AYV, accounts, case ref. 1281.
 Jan Świętoń, 2018 (author's collection).

Press

- "Na Posterunku" no. 39, 1 X 1942.

References

- Brzęk G., 1975, „Na Posterunku” i „Wedeta”: *relacja z dziejów konspiracyjnej prasy na Rzeszowszczyźnie*, „Rocznik Historii Czasopiśmiennictwa Polskiego”, 14/2–3.
 Engelking B., Grabowski J., 2018, *Wstęp* [in:] *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Garabowski, Warsaw.
 Frydel T., 2018, *Powiat dębicki* [in:] *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Garabowski, vol. II, Warsaw.
 Grabowski J., Libionka D., 2016, *Rozdroża polityki historycznej. Wokół Markowej, czyli o czym nie mówi Muzeum Polaków Ratujących Żydów podczas II Wojny Światowej im. Rodziny Ulmów*, "Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały". Pismo Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów IFiS PAN, Warsaw.
 Gringauz S., 1950, *Some methodological problems in the study of the ghetto*, "Jewish Social Studies", vol. 12, no. 1.
 Kotula F., 1981, *Miasteczko na przykładzie Głogowa Małopolskiego i jego sąsiadów. Próba biografii*, Rzeszów.
 Kowalski T., 1985, *Eksterminacja mniejszości narodowych i jeńców koalicji antyhitlerowskiej we wschodniej części Dystryktu Krakowskiego (1939–1945)* [in:] *Studia nad okupacją hitlerowską południowo-wschodniej części Polski*, vol. IV, Rzeszów.
 Krempa A., 2012, *Zagłada Żydów mieleckich*, Mielec.

- Maciąga M., 1994, *Kalendarium wydarzeń 1939–1944* [in:] *Mielec. Studia i materiały z dziejów miasta i regionu*, ed. F. Kiryk, Mielec.
- Maj J., 1973, *Na drogach do piekieł*, Kraków.
- Mroccka L., 1995, *Dębica w latach drugiej niepodległości* [in:] *Dębica. Zarys miasta i regionu*, ed. J. Brzuszek, Dębica.
- Rączy E., 2008, *Pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej na Rzeszowszczyźnie 1939–1945*, Rzeszów.
- Rączy E., 2009–2010, *Negatywne postawy Polaków wobec Żydów w powiecie mieleckim w latach okupacji niemieckiej*, „Rocznik Mielecki”, t. 12–13.
- Rączy E., 2014, *Zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim w latach 1939–1945*, Rzeszów.
- Szopa P., 2009, *Stosunek żołnierzy konspiracji niepodległościowej do Żydów w świetle wspomnień i dokumentów organizacyjnych na terenie Rzeszowszczyzny* [in:] *Z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich w XX wieku*, ed. E. Czop, E. Rączy, Rzeszów.
- Szopa P., 2014, *W imieniu Rzeczypospolitej... Wymiar sprawiedliwości Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego na terenie Podokręgu AK Rzeszów*, Rzeszów.
- Szpytma M., 2014, *Zbrodnie na ludności żydowskiej w Markowej w 1942 r. w kontekście postępowań karnych z lat 1949–1954*, „Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u”, no. 40.
- Wierzbieniec W., 2003, *Żydzi w województwie łwowskim w okresie międzywojennym. Zagadnienia demograficzne i społeczne*, Rzeszów.
- Wojnarowski F., 1996, *Moje przeżycia wojenne i powojenne*, „Okruchy wspomnień lat walki i martyrologii AK”, Kraków, R. 5, no. 17–21.

Studium polemiczne na temat strategii przetrwania Żydów po aryjskiej stronie na terenie starostwa dębickiego

Streszczenie

Od wielu lat wśród historyków trwa dyskusja dotycząca postaw Polaków wobec Żydów w czasie Holocaustu. Artykuł Tomasz Frydla o strategiach przetrwania Żydów w czasie niemieckiej okupacji na terenie powiatu dębickiego wpisuje się w tę debatę. Celem autorów prezentowanego tekstu było zwrócenie uwagi na schematyczne podejście T. Frydla do problematyki stosunków polsko-żydowskich. W pierwszej części skupiono się przede wszystkim na krytycznej analizie przykładowych relacji i zeznań osób, które przeżyły Holocaust na terenie obecnego województwa podkarpackiego. Ukazano także realia życia polskich mieszkańców starostwa dębickiego pod niemiecką okupacją, które były jedną z ważnych przyczyn ich stosunku do uciekinierów z gett.

W drugiej części omówiono stosunek Armii Krajowej do Żydów ukrywających się po aryjskiej stronie na terenie okupacyjnego powiatu dębickiego. Omówiono także zaprezentowane w tekście T. Frydla wyniki jego ustaleń dotyczące liczby zamordowanych Żydów oraz okoliczności ich śmierci.

Słowa kluczowe: Polacy, Żydzi, strategia przetrwania, strona aryjska, Armia Krajowa, sieć społeczna