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Minutes of Village Heads' Conferences as a Source for Research on the Role and Significance of Rural Commune Offices in the German Extermination Policy in the Lublin District (1939–1944) – A Microhistorical Approach

Protokoły konferencji sołtysów jako źródło do badań roli i znaczenia urzędów gmin wiejskich w niemieckiej polityce Zagłady w dystrykcie lubelskim (1939–1944) – ujęcie mikrohistoryczne

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to present the source value of the minutes of the village heads' conferences as a source for research into the role and significance of the offices of rural communes (gminas) in the German Holocaust (extermination) policy in the Lublin District, as well as for research into Polish-Jewish relations in the General Government (GG). The paper discusses the content of minutes from seven communes in the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land, which, considering the state of preservation of this record legacy on the scale of the whole GG, constitute the best-preserved compact group of this type of files on the scale of this quasi-state organism. The work presents the issue of the communes' participation in the German extermination policy, both directly and indirectly, as well as analyzing their activities aimed at building and sealing a village security system,

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which was also targeted, albeit not directly, at Jewish ghetto escapees. The article has a microhistorical character, although it reveals in great detail, from the perspective of the lowest level of the German administration, the mechanisms by which the communes, and thus a certain group of Poles, were implicated in the Holocaust of the Jews. The study provides a springboard for further comparative studies on the minutes, which are an important but underestimated source in research on the Second World War.

Key words: Holocaust, Jews, Lublin District, Lublin region, rural commune, village

STRESZCZENIE

Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie wartości źródłowej protokołów konferencji sołtysów jako źródła do badań roli i znaczenia urzędów gmin wiejskich w niemieckiej polityce Zagłady w dystrykcie lubelskim, jak też w badaniach nad relacjami polsko-żydowskimi w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie. Omówiono zawartość protokołów z siedmiu gmin z obszaru Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land, które, wzajemny pod uwagę stan zachowania rzeczonej protokolarnej spuścizny aktowej w skali całego GG, stanowią najlepiej zachowaną zwartą grupę tego typu akt w skali tego organizmu quasi-państwowego. Zaprezentowano zagadnienie udziału gmin w niemieckiej polityce eksterminacyjnej – tak w wymiarze pośrednim i bezpośrednim, jak też przeanalizowano ich aktywność, której celem była budowa i uszczelnianie systemu bezpieczeństwa wsi, który również, choć nie wprost, był wymierzony w żydowskich uciekinierów z gett. Praca ma charakter mikrohistoryczny, jakkolwiek bardzo szczegółowo, z perspektywy najniższego szczebla niemieckiej administracji, ukazuje mechanizmywikłania gmin, a tym samym pewnej grupy Polaków, w Zagładę Żydów, dając asumpt do dalszych badań porównawczych protokołów, które są istotnym, aczkolwiek niedocenianym źródłem w badaniach nad drugą wojną światową.

Słowa klucze: Zagłada, Żydzi, dystrykt lubelski, Lubelszczyzna, gminy wiejskie, wieś

INTRODUCTION

After 1989, essentially, a small number of scholarly studies were produced whose objective was to analyze the attitudes of officials of commune unions (Gemeindeverbande) towards the Holocaust as representatives of the lowest level of civil administration in the General Government (GG)¹. Examining this issue, individual scholars defined the role of the vil-

¹ During the initial period of German occupation there was no ready-made formula under which the pre-war local government was to operate. For example, it follows from the letter of the GG Government (Department of Internal Affairs) sent to the Kreishauptmannschaft in February 1940 that it was planned 'to restore them (local government) to a moderate degree' for reasons of taxation. Finally, under the ordinance of Governor General Hans Frank of 7 June 1940 the commune unions took over the assets of units of the prewar local government but they did not become its legal successor. Commune

lage head as an official who, through the commune head i.e. the intermediary between the Polish population and German authorities, commissioned the execution of tasks resulting from the orders of the German occupiers². Jan Grabowski emphasized their entanglement into the German occupation, writing that 'as a matter of fact the village heads were deep in a potentially deadly trap. On the one hand, the village head's inactivity could make the authorities look at him in an unfriendly way. On the other hand, village heads had to take account of the feelings prevailing in their own community – some of its members actively persecuted, informed on and robbed Jews'³. We should note, however, that the generally negative attitudes of the rural population towards Jews can be, in simple terms, divided into those that may have certainly resulted totally from their own initiative motivated for example by anti-Semitism or the intention to take over Jewish property, but first of all the role of the German occupation factor should be stressed, i.e. compelling the rural population under threat of severe penalty to take part on a mass scale in the German extermination

heads, village heads and deputy village heads as well as mayors thus became functionaries of the occupation administration, which does not alter the fact that the ethnic composition of these offices was still Polish. For more see e.g.: C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1970, pp. 215–216; W. Kozyra, *Okupacyjna administracja niemiecka na ziemiach Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1939–1945*, "Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie Skłodowska Lublin. Sectio G" 2013, 60, 1, pp. 45–46; A. Wrzyszcz, *Administracja terytorialna w ustawodawstwie okupanta niemieckiego w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie (1939–1944)*, part 1, 1.09.1939–31.07.1940, "Z Dziejów Prawa" 2019, 12 (20), pp. 617–636. Some Holocaust-studies historians, while correctly defining the role and tasks of commune heads and village heads, introduced into scientific circulation the term 'Polish-German administration', which is incorrect because there was no such body. The term is no longer used at present. For more on the negative attitudes of Poles towards the Holocaust see: A. Skibińska, „Dostał 10 lat, ale za co? Analiza motywacji sprawców zbrodni na Żydach na wsi kieleckiej w latach 1942–1944, in: *Zarys krajobrazu. Wieś polska wobec zagłady Żydów 1942–1945*, eds. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2011, p. 349; B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, *Wstęp*, in: *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, vols 1–2, eds. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2018, p. 19; B. Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień. Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945*, Warszawa 2011; J. Grabowski, *Judenjagd. Polowanie na Żydów 1942–1945. Studium z dziejów pewnego powiatu*, Warszawa 2011.

² The role of the commune head (but not of the village head) as an intermediary within the German administration was emphasized already in the earlier literature on the subject (for example C. Madajczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 222). See also: B. Ługowski, *Funkcjonowanie urzędów gmin wiejskich w dystrykcie lubelskim Generalnego Gubernatorstwa w latach 1939–1944*, "Studia z Dziejów Państwa i Prawa Polskiego" 2018, 21, pp. 333–345.

³ J. Grabowski, *Strażacy, wiejska straż nocna i granatowa policja a zagłada Żydów na obszarach wiejskich w dystrykcie krakowskim*, in: *Zagłada Żydów na polskiej prowincji*, eds. A. Sitarek, M. Trębacz, E. Wiatr, Łódź 2013, p. 254.

policy against Jews. The problem of the involvement of the rural administration in the German policy in the sense of the conflict of strategies (protection of the village community versus survival of Jews) is in turn pointed out by Tomasz Frydel, who writes about two approaches to the analyzed subject, i.e. a voluntarist one, which transfers the analysis exclusively onto the individual⁴ level (individual responsibility), also stressing the moral issues, and a functional/structuralist approach which focuses on the structural strength of the Third Reich as the basis of research to understand the socio-political and economic mechanism in the occupied Poland⁵.

The last of the important questions that characterize the literature on the present subject concerns the source corpus on the basis of which almost all the above-cited studies written after 1989 were produced. This is a highly significant issue because it enables us to define at which stage of research we are now with regard to the problems of the functioning of rural communes in the context of the Holocaust. The source-related question was pointed out by Tomasz Domański, who, apart from many original conclusions on the degree of involvement of village heads in the German occupation policy, emphasized that so far the research had been based primarily on the archival materials on criminal proceedings instituted under the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) decree of August 31, 1944 *O wymiarze kary dla faszystowsko-hitlerowskich zbrodniarzy winnych zabójstw i znęcania się nad ludnością cywilną i jeńcami oraz zdrajców Narodu Polskiego* i.e. on so-called 'August measures [sierpniówka]'⁶, whereas we have a vast store of legacies of occupation-time

⁴ We have a limited set of sources at our disposal that represent the opinions of village officials. See for example: J. Chustecki, *Byłem sołtysem w latach okupacji*, Warszawa 1960.

⁵ The cited author, whose paper, although cognitively interesting and containing many valuable conclusions, yet uses terms that may appear incomprehensible especially to a historian. These are the 'mezo level' and 'grey zone'. If we take the functional approach into consideration, did village heads really represent the 'mezzo' level being at the bottom rung of the GG administrative ladder or were they, nevertheless, 'actors' on a micro scale? Similar doubts arise with the second political-science term ('grey zone'), which has not been disambiguated and explained. To elaborate on this issue, a question can be asked whether the political science terminology used by the author has, somewhat contrary to his intentions, explained certain processes or obscured them, however. T. Frydel, *Polska wieś jako szara strefa. Sołtysi na poziomie mezo w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939–1945*, "Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały" 2023, 19, pp. 408–441.

⁶ On the post-war settling of accounts in the context of the co-responsibility of Poles for the Holocaust see: R. Gieroń, *Półmrok. Procesy karne w sprawie przestępstw okupacyjnych popełnionych przez chłopów wobec Żydów w województwie krakowskim*, Kraków 2020; A. Kornblut, *The August Trials. The Holocaust and Postwar Justice in Poland*, Cambridge–London 2021.

communes, which are a multi-perspective source⁷. In view of the large interest in the rural communities in the context of the Holocaust, the lack of exploration of the commune (gmina) records is surprising⁸.

From a regional perspective, i.e. in the case of the Lublin District no work has been produced so far that would present the problem of the tasks and role of commune offices in relation to the German policy of extermination of Jews. The issue was addressed in two significant, albeit temporally distant studies, by Dariusz Libionka and Jakub Chmielewski, although the topics of our interest occur in them only incidentally⁹. What is worth noting in the recapitulation of the most important findings of the two authors is that both of them rather cautiously, by providing a few examples of the attitudes of village heads from the Lublin region, recognized the problem of the incorporation by the occupation authorities of commune administration into the German system of the extermination (Holocaust) of Jews: the former author rightly assessed that this issue required a deeper analysis, while the latter essentially reduced the activities of those commune officials to participation in manhunts for Jews in the so-called third stage of the Holocaust, i.e. from the autumn of 1942, when thousands of escapees from Jewish ghettos sought a possibility of survival on the so-called Aryan side¹⁰. It is worth emphasizing that both historians also focused on the important issue which is the relatively limited sources on the rural population's response to the extermination, including a functional one, i.e. connected with the apparatus of commune offices. Although there are indeed many gaps in this area, thorough preliminary researches in the records held in the archives of the Lublin region will certainly result in the development of further research on the subject. In view of the foregoing, the goal of the present paper is to analyze the source potential of the minutes

⁷ A vast number of archival records (rural commune files) on the scale of the entire General Government is available on *szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl* Therefore the claim that such records do not exist does not correspond to the actual state. See: T. Frydel, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

⁸ T. Domański, *Niemiecka administracja gminna w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie i jej pozostępstwo aktowa do badań nad relacjami polsko-żydowskimi. Przykład dystryktu radomskiego*, "Polish Jewish Studies" 2023, 4, pp. 147–175.

⁹ D. Libionka, *Polska ludność chrześcijańska wobec eksterminacji Żydów – dystrykt lubelski*, in: *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, ed. D. Libionka, Warszawa 2004, pp. 306–333; J. Chmielewski, *Postawy Polaków wobec Żydów w świetle okupacyjnych dokumentów na przykładzie dystryktu lubelskiego w latach 1941–1944*, "Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały" 2024, 20, pp. 591–614. See also A. Puławski, „*Benzyny zużyto 8 litrów*”. *Prozaizacja Zagłady na przykładzie dokumentacji Archiwum Państwowego w Lublinie Oddział w Chełmie*, "Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały" 2018, 14, pp. 311–333.

¹⁰ D. Libionka, *op. cit.*, p. 318; J. Chmielewski, *op. cit.*, p. 605.

of village heads' conferences from the area of the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land¹¹ (Lublin land [rural] county)¹² in the studies on the role and importance of rural commune offices in the German extermination policy in the Lublin District between 1939 and 1944. This is the first presentation of this kind in the context of Holocaust studies. The abovementioned records are the only so well-preserved cohesive occupation-time source for the Lublin District area produced by the lowest tier of German administration. Due to their specificity, the minutes are a kind of 'chronicle' of actions taken in villages on the orders of the German occupiers, and provide an extremely deep access to the occupation realities and the dynamic of changes in the occupation policy at the lowest level possible, which may be discerned by a historian¹³. They are also a source that reflects the extermination policy towards the rural Jews and across the rural areas. However, the problem is that the knowledge of their content with regard to the subject in question (whether every German anti-Jewish regulation was recorded or whether various matters were minuted selectively as the need arose?) is not solidly established. There is no doubt that village heads' conferences were imposed by the model of German administration to the effect that supervision over the activities of communes represented by commune heads was exercised by the Kreishauptmann (county head/commissioner). Since commune heads, as has been said above, became intermediaries between the German occupation authorities and the local population, with whom village heads, as the last entity or link, had the closest contact at the lowest level, the need arose to organize regular conferences i.e. meetings

¹¹ The name Lublin-Land referring to the rural county was in force in the Lublin District from January 1940 by the decision of the Governor General. Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie [hereinafter: APL], Starostwo Powiatowe w Lublinie (Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land) [hereinafter: SPL], ref. no. 1, fol. 1.

¹² The German nomenclature with regard to the commune administration in Lublin-Land area was introduced on 23 August 1940. The following names were used in the official correspondence: rural commune – *Landgemeinde, gromada* (administrative unit) – *Dorfgemeinde* and commune head – *Vogt* and village head – *Schulze*. These names were to be used also in the official language, although the last regulation was not restrictively observed. APL, SPL, ref. no. 5, fol. 15.

¹³ Historiography of the Polish People's Republic, being largely focused, actually not without reason, first of all on the analysis of the martyrdom of civil population, neglected to analyze the commune records. It was only the studies produced after 1989 that referred to the legacies of rural communes as historical sources. See: C. Rajca, *Walka o chleb chleb 1939–1944. Eksplotacja rolnictwa w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, Lublin 1991. In this publication there are numerous references to the German policy towards the rural areas in the Lublin District.

of both commune heads and village heads, especially as the responsibility of a commune head was to announce the occupation authority's directives and to execute them, as was also the village head's responsibility¹⁴. Moreover, these meetings, which were held regularly once a week or two weeks, provided not only an opportunity to coordinate activities aimed at the economic exploitation of the Polish countryside but also to additionally exert direct oral pressure on commune and village heads, which is not without significance for a better understanding of the prevailing atmosphere in the commune office during the German occupation¹⁵. Sometimes the conferences were attended by Polnische Polizei (Polish Police/PP or Blue Police) officers, German military policemen (Gendarmerie) or civil servants¹⁶.

Consequently, the basic research questions asked in the present article are as follows: which records with regard to indirect and direct extermination appeared in the minutes?; were all anti-Jewish regulations recorded?; which German regulations not aimed directly against the Jewish population restricted their mobility and threatened their lives?; what was the role and tasks of village heads and peasants in the indirect and direct extermination of Jews?; do the minutes contain entries that directly evidence the so-called peasants' own initiative in the persecution of Jews?

The presented problems have been divided into four thematic blocks: the introductory one presenting the Jewish population figures in the area in question, and the next ones: the minutes of village heads' meetings in the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land – basic information about the source; compulsory participation of rural communes in the Holocaust (indirect and direct extermination); rural communes in the German security system in the occupied rural areas – countermeasures against 'bands (i.e. partisans)', peasant sentry duties and others.

¹⁴ B. Ługowski, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

¹⁵ It follows from the postwar interviews conducted by some scholars with the families of village heads that before going to a conference the village heads bade farewell to them, just in case, because they did not know whether they would not be detained. This habit gives an idea of the prevailing atmosphere during those meetings. J. Hebda, *Z sołtysem i wójtem przez wieki. Opowieść o dziejach urzędu sołtysa i wójta w Polsce*, Tarnów, 2016, p. 489.

¹⁶ For example, on 3 November 1943 the conference of the village heads in the Zemborzyce rural commune was attended in person by the commander of Gendarmerie (military police) in Lublin, who, presenting the issues of the levy of grain and potatoes, warned that if it was not completely delivered in the coming days, a punitive expedition would come to the commune. APL, *AKta Gminy Zemborzyce* [hereinafter: AGZ], ref. no. 962, fol. 71v.

RESEARCH AND RESULTS

Statistics of Jewish Population in Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land

Unfortunately, the census¹⁷ in the GG was carried out as late as in 1943 when the vast majority of the Jewish population had been exterminated¹⁸. Consequently, the knowledge about the number of the Jewish population should be obtained from the documents of the German district office, in which numerous registration materials from a different period were preserved. One such file was also preserved in the records of the Zemborzyce commune. We know that in January 1940 the Lublin governor ordered the conduct of census in the communes including national minorities – however, the summary of the documentation illustrating its results was not preserved¹⁹. A complete data set comes only from 1942, the period during which Operation Reinhardt was conducted. The census initiative was taken by Odilo Globocnik (SS and Police Commander in the Lublin District). Following his directives, the Lublin county commissioner requested *inter alia* commune heads to carry out the census of all Jews, which had to be carried out within a week because of the time limit required by superiors. The registration was conducted taking four categories into consideration: the total number of Jews, persons fit to work, family members (wives, children but not other relatives), those unfit for work together with family members²⁰.

The census showed that in the Lublin-Land territory there were 25 770 Jews, of whom 17 837 (69.3%) lived in villages and 7933 (30.7%) lived in three towns: Lubartów, Łęczna and Ostrów Lubelski. Out of the total number of Jews, town and village officials classified 10 575 persons (41%) as unfit for work, which automatically condemned them in the first place to extermination during the ongoing Operation Reinhardt. In the 3rd quarter of 1942, the Jewish population constituted somewhat over 6% of the population of the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land²¹. Taking

¹⁷ See: *Amtliches Gemeinde und Dorfverzeichnis für das Generalgouvernement auf Grund der Sommerischen Bevölkerungsbestandsaufnahme am 1 März 1943*, Krakau 1943.

¹⁸ In the records of the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land there is a letter from the GG Government of February 1943 sent to commune heads. It follows therefrom that the census deliberately omitted to record the Jewish population. Determining the number of Jews in 'Jewish living districts and labor camps' fell within the competence of the SS. In the case of rural areas, it was the responsibility of commune offices to communicate with the proper SS authority so that it provided the number of Jews staying in its area. APL, SPL, ref. no. 2, fol. 30.

¹⁹ APL, SPL, ref. no. 4, fol. 12.

²⁰ APL, SPL, ref. no. 81, fol. 146.

²¹ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 943, fol. 31.

Table no. 1: Number of Jews in the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land in the 2nd and 3rd quarter of 1942

Commune	2nd quarter				3rd quarter		
	Commune	Total	Fit for work	Family members (wives and children)	Unfit for work together with families	Number of Jews	Percent of population
Bełżyce		3787	989	1200	1598	4653	26.68
Brzeziny		352	127	120	105	341	3.08
Bychawa		2688	886	1035	767	2791	23.56
Chodel		1388	367	383	638	b.d.	b.d.
Firlej		390	164	165	61	456	4.29
Jastków		431	281	150	—	430	3.61
Jasznów		9	9	—	—	—	—
Kamionka		839	272	216	351	—	—
Konopnica		83	60	6	17	—	—
Krzczonów		93	54	39	—	—	—
Lubartów		2737	489	Figures illegible	Figures illegible	3194	35.90
Ludwin		67	17	30	20	40	0.31
Luszawa		89	34	54	—	130	2.44
Łęczna		2134	188	459	1487	2062	44.62
Łucka		8	2	3	3	8	0.10
Medgiew		194	131	58	5	198	1.69
Niedrzwica		277	213	—	64	199	1.87
Niemce		86	60	26	—	—	—
Ostrów Lubelski		3062	250	500	2312	—	—
Piaski		5166	1436	2200	1530	2750	18.69
Piotrowice		497	289	193	15	493	4.04
Rudno		12	8	4	—	—	—
Samokłeski		27	8	19	—	84	1.60
Spiczyn		72	39	31	2	71	1.27
Tarło		67	19	40	8	61	0.75
Tyśmienica		20	10	10	—	16	0.41
Uścimów		145	101	44	—	115	1.87
Wojciechów		152	58	62	32	233	3.03
Wólka		150	99	38	13	153	1.56
Zemborzyce		749	350	—	399	507	3.55
TOTAL		25 770	7010	8185	10 575	18 990	6.57

Source: APL, SPL, ref. no. 81, fols. 146–147; AGZ, ref. no. 943, fol. 31.

only the rural area into account, the commune heads provided the number of 5776 persons (32%) unfit for work out of the total number of Jews living in villages. The presented figures suggest that about 10% more Jews were qualified as unfit for work in towns than in villages²².

During the Operation Reinhardt, in the summer of 1942, another register of Jews was prepared, which showed their distribution in villages. Furthermore, it noted down in which commune the 'evacuation' ('zahl der Juden die evakuiert sind') of the Jewish population was carried out, which denoted deportation to extermination camps. In some cases, this register shows different figures from the one discussed above concerning the communes in question (cf. Tables no. 1 and 2). It also contains calculation errors, probably because of the haste in which it was prepared²³.

Table no. 2: Distribution of Jews in selected rural communes

Commune	Statistics of population by locality	Total number, including deportees
Jastków	Ghetto in Jastków – 115; Dąbrowica – 49; Jakubowice – 37; Jastków – 41; Józefów – 16; Kolonia Jakubowice – 37; Colony (Settlement) Płouszowice – 94; Colony Tomaszowice – 2; Ługów – 32; Moszenki – 50; Moszna – 14; Natalin – 2; Płouszowice – 11; Sieprawice – 24; Ślugocin – 7; Smugi – 19; Snopków – 13; Tomaszowice – 16	545
Krzczonów	Krzczonów – 59; Krzczonów I – 6; Krzczonów III – 6; Kosarzew Dolny – 8; Olszanka – 10; Policzyzna – 3; Żuków – 3	95
Mełgiew	Mełgiew – 77; Ciechanki Łęczyńskie – 1; Dominów – 3; Janówek – 5; Janowice – 6; Józefów – 9; Krępiec – 4; Krzesimów – 8; Minkowice – 19; Trzeszkowice – 62	194
Niemce	Niemce – 24; Dys – 25; Colony Krasienin – 8; Ludwinów – 5; Majdan Krasieniński – 6; Nasutów – 3; Rudka Kozłowiecka – 8; Stoczek – 7	86
Spiczyn	Spiczyn – 28; Januszówka – 11; Jawidz – 13; Stawek – 8; Zawieprzyce – 13	73
Zemborzyce	Zemborzyce – 205; deported Jews 150, Jews from the Third Reich – 31	375

Please note: The Table does not include the Łucka commune as the seventh one because, although it is present in the German record, no person of Jewish nationality was registered in it.

Source: APL, SPL, ref. no. 81, fols. 355–364.

²² APL, SPL, ref. no. 81, fols. 146–147.

²³ These concern, for example, the Zemborzyce commune, in which it was recorded that there was a total of 375 Jews in it, of which 205 in this locality, 150 people were deported,

According to the data contained in it, taking account of the communes from which minutes were preserved, and which (=communes) were located in the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land, there were only ghettos in Jastków and Piaski at the end of summer 1942²⁴. At that time, the largest number of Jews lived precisely in Jastków and Zemborzyce – 545 and 375 respectively. The register also showed that 170 Jews were deported from the Jastków commune, and 150 from the commune of Zemborzyce²⁵.

The next and last of the presented censuses do not show the number of Jews but their professional structure in the territory in question. It was prepared in early May 1942, also at an extremely fast pace. First, in his letter of May 9, 1942, the governor of the Lublin District issued an order to all county heads to prepare the list registering all Jewish craftsmen and skilled workers (women and men up to 55 years of age), who de facto were forced laborers. The letter on this matter from the county office was sent barely after two days (on May 11) to mayors and commune heads of the Lublin-Land on the order of John Leonhardt²⁶, head of the population and welfare section at the Department of Internal Affairs of the Lublin Land county. He had only six days (until May 16) to execute this task, which is why he demanded that the census results be delivered by a messenger. At the end of the document signed by Leonhardt there is one significant sentence that renders the seriousness of the situation connected with the registration operation, also felt by the German civil servants: *Für die Einhaltung des Termins mache ich Sie persönlich verantwortlich* ('I make you personally responsible for meeting the deadline')²⁷.

The census showed the number of 2923 Jews, who were officially registered in the following localities: Brzeziny, Bychawa, Chodel, Firlej, Jastków, Jaszczów, Kamionka, Konopnica, Krzczonów, Lubartów, Łęczna, Ludwin, Luszawa, Męgiew, Niedrzwica, Niemce, Ostrów Lubelska, Piaski, Piotrowice, Spiczyn, Tarło, Uścimów, Wojciechów, Wólka, and Zemborzyce, i.e. not in all the communes of the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land. It is significant that within this selected group, the GG officials sought to reduce the number of people deemed necessary during the Operation

and 32 came from the Third Reich territory. After adding up those figures, the result is 386 rather than 375. *Ibidem*, fol. 363.

²⁴ The register recorded the total number of Jews staying in Bełżyce (4716 people), but did not specify whether there was a ghetto in this locality or not, confining itself to a short note about incomplete data on this subject. *Ibidem*, fol. 355.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, fols. 356–357.

²⁶ In 1943 this official worked in the 'section of Jewish labor in the Cracow District'. Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, Inwentarze, ref. no. 344, p. 20.

²⁷ APL, SPL, ref. no. 81, fol. 179.

Reinhardt, which is proved by the titles of the census tables: the register is divided into four parts – ‘metalworkers’; ‘Jews systematically performing essential work for the war effort’; ‘Jews who are not utilized for work significant for war purposes (temporarily without being assigned work)’ and ‘unemployed’ (‘arbeitslos’). This division is accompanied by assignments to the following trades: metalworker, textile worker, tanner/leather worker, construction worker, carpenter, steelworker, vehicle mechanic, and hairdresser/barber. The only group distinguished and registered not so much as a strictly professional category but rather as a census category determining life and death—among the four listed – were, from the German perspective, metalworkers – the most useful for wartime purposes. Taking into consideration the categories in question, the greatest number of those registered was textile workers (1176) and tanners (795), metalworkers (272) and carpenters (232). With regard to the division by sex, the only professional groups with the participation of women were textile workers (260), and barbers/hairdressers (24). One female metalworker was also registered but she was classified as unemployed²⁸. The statistics for the communes we are interested in, i.e. those from which minutes were preserved and for which the statistics of Jewish forced laborers were prepared, are as follows: Jastków – 66, Krzczonów – 4, Melgiew – 36, Niemce – 0, Spiczyn – 16, Zemborzyce – 126. Their total number is barely 248 people. The majority of them were textile workers and tanners as was the case in the whole county²⁹. The issue of the number of Jews in the area under discussion requires detailed research in the nearest future.

MINUTES OF VILLAGE HEADS’ CONFERENCES IN KREISHAUPTMANNSCHAFT LUBLIN-LAND – BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE SOURCE

From the territory of the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land, records from seven communes have been preserved to this day, ranging in size from a few hundred pages to several dozen. Although this is a very modest number, in reality, taking into account the state of preservation of this type of sources from the remaining districts, we are clearly dealing with a rare phenomenon, because, despite the relatively small area, a representative group of minutes has survived to the present day, rather than just a single copy. These are, in the alphabetical order, the minutes of village heads’ meetings from the communes of: Jastków, Krzczonów,

²⁸ *Ibidem*, fols. 180–181.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, fols. 182–207.

Łucka, Mełgiew, Niemce, Spiczyn and Zemborzyce³⁰. The choice of exactly this group of minutes was therefore prompted on the one hand by the fragmentary preservation of this type of source material across the entire Lublin District, and on the other hand, by the necessity of examining the aforementioned problem within a specified and at the same time administratively coherent area, which in this case is the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land. In selecting the area of interest not without significance was the German extermination policy. It should be remembered that Lublin's ghetto was the largest in the district (ca. 40 thousand Jews), therefore, it must have generated a greater scale of escapes to rural areas than anywhere else in this region, and moreover, it was the first to be liquidated as part of Operation Reinhardt in the General Government³¹.

The aforementioned minutes inherited from the commune offices in the area in question make up 25% of all such procedural records among the 28 rural communes that once existed in this region. If all the preserved documents of this kind kept in the state archives in the present Lublin region are taken into account, the percentage of those produced in the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land slightly increases to 29%. In the archives covering the area in question, altogether 24 records of minutes have survived: the State Archive of Lublin – 11; in the branches of the Archive: in Chełm – 3, in Kraśnik – 5, in Radzyń Podlaski – 1, and in the State Archive of Zamość – 4³².

Unfortunately, the analyzed documentation is incomplete. In the alphabetical order, it covers the following years: Jastków (September 6, 1939 – April 6, 1940; April 13– August 5, 1943), Krzczonów (June 15, 1940 – March 21, 1941), Łucka (April 2, 1943 – May 5, 1944), Mełgiew (April 4, 1941 – August 5 1943), Niemce (October 26, 1939 – April 6, 1940; April 20, 1940 – December 31, 1942), Spiczyn (November 10, 1943 – February 3, 1944) and Zemborzyce (April 17, 1941 – May 6, 1942; May 13, 1942 – July 12, 1944). Out of all 10 volumes taken into account, six of them refer to the period of the third phase of the Holocaust. However, it is characteristic that in the Łucka records of minutes, although many different

³⁰ APL, Akta Gminy Jastków [hereinafter: AGJ], ref. no. 25–26; Akta Gminy Krzczonów [hereinafter: AGK], ref. no. 13; Akta Gminy Łucka [hereinafter: AGŁ], ref. no. 32; Akta Gminy Mełgiew [hereinafter: AGM], ref. no. 620; Akta Gminy Niemce [hereinafter: AGN], ref. no. 17–18; Akta Gminy Spiczyn [hereinafter: AGS], ref. no. 89; Akta Gminy Zemborzyce [hereinafter: AGZ], ref. no. 961–962.

³¹ On the changing number of Jews in the Lublin Ghetto see: J. Chmielewski, *Granice getta w lubelskim Podzamczu*, "Studia Żydowskie. Almanach" 2016, 6, pp. 96–114.

³² Data based on preliminary research in the aforementioned archives. A detailed study on the subject is under preparation as part of the implementation of the abovementioned grant project.

issues were discussed during the meetings of village heads from this area, the Jewish question never appeared in any form. The prevailing theme was almost exclusively the problem of collecting levies, which was discussed in detail, and the agricultural and breeding issues. Furthermore, even matters related to security, which the German occupiers usually combined with the policy of extermination, are also not reflected in this record of minutes. The absence of Jewish issues in the Łucka record of minutes can be explained by the fact that Jews did not live in this rural commune³³. Nor did the so-called Jewish question appear even once in the Spiczyn minutes, which should also be linked with the negligible Jewish settlement in this commune. The two localities are situated north of Lublin, and Łucka and the nearest town, in which there was a ghetto, i.e. Lubartów³⁴, are barely 3.5 kilometers apart.

The formal analysis of the minutes is less important for the subject in question. Their structure does not show any features that would make them distinct from other sources of this type in the General Government: the minutes were handwritten in Polish, they were numbered or not, the dates of conferences, sometimes called sessions, were always written, and there was certainly a list of names of the attendees (chairman i.e. the commune head, commune secretary, deputy secretary if there was one, or other exceptional persons), the number of present village heads was noted down, and the excused absences of village heads were recorded. The minutes ended with the signatures of all attendees³⁵. Also the style of noting down information in the analyzed minutes is a standard one, i.e. laconic and concise³⁶.

³³ APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 81, fol. 10.

³⁴ On the extermination of the Lubartów Ghetto see: R. Kuwałek, *Z dziejów społeczności żydowskiej w Lubartowie*, in: *Lubartów i Ziemia Lubartowska*, vol. 14, eds. W. Śladkowski, B. Gaśior, Lubartów 2000, pp. 45–91. While memorial books are an excellent source for the study of the fates of Jews who escaped to the countryside, the two Lubartów memorial books do not abound in the information of this kind. Nor do they devote much room to the extermination (Holocaust) itself. According to the survivors, from October 11 to 13, 1942 there was the last of the exterminations of the Ghetto, which put an end to the Jewish community in that town as well as in all the nearby localities. No more than a week later the last Jews who were still in the Ghetto were sent to Piaski and Łęczna. See: J. Honigsblum, *Megilat Lubartow*, in: *Churban Lewertow. A macejwe Lewertow un lewertower kdojszim*, Paryż 1947, pp. 7–8.

³⁵ For example, see the structure and the outline of a minute: APL, AGZ, ref. no. 961, fols. 2–6.

³⁶ The issues related to the style of minuted records are an unexamined subject. A superficial survey of this documentation for the whole GG shows that it is schematic, although there are exceptions to this rule. It would be also interesting to semantically analyze

COMPULSORY PARTICIPATION OF RURAL COMMUNES IN THE HOLOCAUST OF THE JEWS (INDIRECT AND DIRECT EXTERMINATION)

The first months of the German occupation were full of anti-Jewish ordinances. Some of them can be found in the village heads' minutes in the communes of Jastków and Niemce. They concerned the ban on ritual slaughter, affecting not only representatives of the professional groups involved in this practice but also the Jewish religion. On October 21, 1939 a ban on ritual animal slaughter took effect in the Niemce commune, i.e. five days before General Governor Hans Frank issued the corresponding decree (October 26, 1939)³⁷. Earlier, i.e. on October 12 a similar ban was issued in the Jastków commune, yet it concerned all those who committed secret animal slaughter, therefore it did not have the character of an anti-Jewish regulation, although it was also applied to the Jewish minority³⁸. The ban on the ritual slaughter in this commune was announced to the Jewish population on November 10³⁹. In this initial period, the role of village heads was limited to conveying German decrees to the Jewish population in the subordinate area.

The basis for all subsequent persecutions and repressions were the registration activities targeting Jews and their property. When comparing their dynamics in the two aforementioned communes, it should be noted that in the commune of Jastków on December 22, 1939 an order was issued to register the persons of Jewish nationality by December 30⁴⁰, while in the commune of Niemce, at the village heads' conference held almost exactly a month later (January 20, 1940), the deadline for compiling the appropriate list was January 22, which meant that the village heads in the Niemce commune had only two days to undertake actions in this respect⁴¹. As we learn from the minutes, during the census action in the Jastków commune, all adult Jews had to report at the local commune authority on January 28, 1940, for which village heads bore responsibility. They had to execute the German ordinance immediately because they had only one day to deliver the order to the local population to report to the designated location⁴².

the minutes with regard to their changing language as the German occupiers intensified harsh policies towards the Polish rural population.

³⁷ APL, AGN, ref. no. 17, fol. 126.

³⁸ APL, AGJ, ref. no. 25, fol. 78.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, fol. 81v.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, fol. 87.

⁴¹ APL, AGN, ref. no. 17, fols. 138v–139.

⁴² APL, AGJ, ref. no. 25, fol. 91v.

The analysis of the minutes clearly shows that not always all current issues, which were reflected in numerous anti-Jewish German decrees, were discussed at the village heads' conferences but only those which, based on a relatively subjective assessment, the commune heads considered important, requiring discussion, or those that gave rise to various kinds of problems, e.g. when it was believed that the orders were not implemented or that there were delays or obstacles in their execution. Let us consider further examples that reveal the considerable selectivity of the official minuted records regarding the so-called Jewish question. Compare the conference minutes from the communes of Niemce and Jastków of February 17, 1940. In Niemce the order to inform about the Jewish possessions⁴³ was delivered to the village heads, and in Jastków the county commissioner's letter was delivered, requiring the Jews to wear armbands, although in the former place the issue related to the inventory of Jewish property was never discussed at the conference, and in the latter the matter of armbands for the Jewish population was never raised⁴⁴. It should also be noted that the minutes did not record some anti-Jewish regulations even when village heads did not strictly follow the county commissioner's orders and were reprimanded by higher authorities in such matters, as we know from the of rural communes' records other than minutes. This situation occurred in connection with the introduction of armbands for Jews in the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land, an order that had been in effect in this area since December 25, 1939. Although the responsibility for informing the Jews about the stigmatizing marking and ensuring its implementation rested with the village heads, according to a German official, they did not attach due importance to the matter. Therefore, at the beginning of February 1940, the county commissioner expressed dissatisfaction with the insufficient marking of rural Jews, ordering an inspection in this regard and the prosecution of Jews for such 'crimes' by a special court (Sondergericht)⁴⁵.

Among other matters, also selectively reflected in the minutes, were issues concerning the restrictions on the mobility of Jews. Only in Niemce it was deemed important to announce the Lublin county commissioner's

⁴³ APL, AGN, ref. no. 17, fol. 142v.

⁴⁴ APL, AGJ, ref. no. 25, fol. 94v.

⁴⁵ In the files of the county office, a considerable amount of material has been preserved regarding the compulsory armbands for rural Jews, from which it follows that according to the representatives of the commune administration the vast majority of Jews accepted this order without visible opposition, and the few who were checked by village heads were subjected to repressions by PP (the so-called Polish Police) officers. APL, SPL, ref. no. 76, fols. 2–21, 23.

decree of February 22, 1940 prohibiting Jews from travelling by railways, and then, at the beginning of March, entirely prohibiting them from using means of transportation⁴⁶. As for the trading sphere, during this time in the Jastków commune measures were taken to remove Jewish signs from shop windows in the public space⁴⁷.

Considering the material we have at our disposal, it is significant that by the end of 1940, only one case related to the Jewish population had been mentioned in the minutes. The matter concerned Jewish refugees who arrived in the Lublin region as part of the resettlement and displacement conducted by the German occupiers. In Krzczonów, the commune head passed on the Lublin county commissioner's decree of August 6, 1940 concerning the expulsion of Jews from Cracow⁴⁸. This document from the county commissioner's office was issued after more than two months from date of the issuance of the directive by the Cracow city mayor concerning voluntary resettlement from Cracow (May 1, 1940)⁴⁹. Thanks to the preserved records, we know from when the Lublin District communes could prepare for the forced resettlement of Cracow's Jews to the Lublin region. As researchers have determined, from December 1940, 11,000 Jews were forcibly deported from that city to the Lublin District⁵⁰. In turn, in Jastków in May 1940 the matter of refugees from Pomerania was discussed⁵¹.

Apart from a rather high selective character of the records concerning anti-Jewish decrees, what is surprising is also the general absence in these documents of the issue of forced labor of rural Jews when the years 1939–1944 are discussed. In the Jastków commune the records contain only one laconic note on the subject, mentioning that a group of 10 Jews was sent to the local Ługów estate⁵². The passivity manifesting itself in the lack of interest of commune offices in the compulsory labor of the Jewish population was pointed out by the Kreishauptmann of Lublin-Land in April 1941. In his letter of that time, which he based on his experiences from previous control visits in villages, he emphasized that 'the Jews were

⁴⁶ APL, AGN, ref. no. 17, fols. 144v, 145v.

⁴⁷ APL, AGJ, ref. no. 26, fol. 6.

⁴⁸ APL, AGK, ref. no. 13, fol. 161.

⁴⁹ The voluntariness consisted in the fact that the displaced Jewish population of Cracow could freely choose their place of residence in the GG after leaving the city.

⁵⁰ S. Biberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, preface M. Kieta, Kraków 1986, pp. 32–33, 39–40; *Wysiedlenia, wypędzenia i ucieczki 1939–1945. Atlas ziem Polski*, eds. W. Sienkiewicz, G. Hryciuk, Warszawa 2008, pp. 123–125.

⁵¹ APL, AGJ, ref. no. 26, fols. 7–7v, 12v.

⁵² *Ibidem*, fol. 17v.

not assigned to any or only slightly useful work at all'⁵³. That is why the German official made commune heads responsible for monitoring and inspecting the forced labor of Jews in the subordinate area. He also clearly pointed out to the commune heads that although town offices assigned tasks to the Judenrats (Jewish councils) concerning various works⁵⁴, the duty of commune heads was to supervise those bodies using available 'auxiliary measures' such as the Polish Police and to participate in assigning other labors⁵⁵.

The poor condition of both the extant minutes and records of rural communes and the Lublin county does not permit a detailed reconstruction of how German policy towards the Jews was shaped in the area in question, nevertheless it appears that in the first years of occupation (until mid-1941) the rural areas were on the margin of the German occupiers' anti-Jewish policy, which was occasioned by the fact that the Jewish minority lived predominantly in urban centers, hence the rural areas were somewhat pushed into the background.

The reading of the aforementioned documentation confirms that this situation changed in the summer of 1941, when the Jewish issues discussed at village heads' conferences acquired somewhat greater significance because of the hardening German policy towards the Jews, which was aimed towards their strict ghettoization. Coordination in enforcing anti-Jewish regulations also turned to be stricter. It is worth emphasizing that these processes occurred several months after the Lublin District governor Zörner issued on February 15, 1941 a directive on the restriction of residence for Jews in the area of the Lublin District⁵⁶. In this way, the commune administration was not so much included in the ghettoization process as efforts were made to stimulate and dynamize that administration for actions serving that purpose. Let us follow the historical

⁵³ APL, SPL, ref. no. 77, fol. 42.

⁵⁴ The work of Lublin's Jews, the largest cheap workforce reservoir in the region, had not been regulated in the rural areas by the Lublin District authorities for a long time. In order to intensify control over the Jewish forced laborers from the Jewish Ghetto, who were sent to work in the territory of the Lublin-Land, only on March 5, 1942 a formal agreement on this matter was signed between Lublin's Arbeitsamt and the Kreishauptmann of Lublin-Land. Police supervision over Jews was the responsibility of police stations in: Głusk, Łęczna, Niedrzwica Duża, Piaski, and Piotrowice. APL, SPL, ref. no. 81, fols. 119–120.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*. This letter certainly encouraged commune authorities to exploit the free labor of Jews, which is evidenced for example in the application of June, 1941 by the Zemborzyce commune head, who demanded that the number of members of the local Jewish council (Judenrat) be reduced, which would make it possible to send them to forced labor. As members of the council, they were exempted from this duty. *Ibidem*, fol. 53.

⁵⁶ "Amtsblatt des Chefs des Districts Lublin" 1941, no. 2, pp. 30–31.

moment important for our subject. The first identifiable order was issued on June 31, 1941 by the Zemborzyce commune head, who demanded that Jews assigned for farmers be controlled, whereas the documents of 'those loitering' around villages were to be checked, and 'strangers' were to be taken to the commune office at his disposal⁵⁷. The occupiers' greater determination to restrict the movement of Jews is also evidenced by three other similarly worded entries in the minutes on this matter from other communes. In early August 1941, in the Mełgiew commune the Lublin county commissioner's regulation of August 2 was announced concerning the ban on admitting 'loitering Jews'⁵⁸ and in the Niemce commune, in connection with the aforementioned German regulation, the commune head's regulation was issued prohibiting the provision of lodging and overnight accommodation for Jews⁵⁹. It appears that shortly afterwards the county commissioner repeated his decree by issuing a similar to or somewhat different from the previous one. This can be inferred from reading the files of minutes from the Zemborzyce commune of the second half of August, which record that the county commissioner's letter of August 15, 1941 was read out, which prohibited the admission of Jews to communes⁶⁰. This topic emerged again in Zemborzyce occasioned by German orders already in late September, when the commune head again prohibited village heads and inhabitants from offering overnight accommodation to Jews, arguing in his order that they transmit typhus⁶¹.

The fact that the German administration found it somewhat difficult to sever natural relationships between Poles and Jews, which did not, from the German viewpoint, become quickly weakened in the process of ghettoization, and resulted from a series of various factors like natural prewar relations, the desire to help, the financial profit of the majority society and exploitation of Jews, is evidenced by successive regulations with regard to restricting the residence of Jews in the countryside⁶². It turns out that a separate letter to the rural communes was required to combat the practice of Jewish smuggling and transporting Jews in horsewagons.

⁵⁷ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 961, fol. 69.

⁵⁸ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 17.

⁵⁹ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fols. 61–62.

⁶⁰ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 961, fols. 78–79.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, fols. 100–101.

⁶² It is significant that despite many experiences during the war and in the first years of occupation, in August 1941 there were Poles in villages, who sent Jews to agricultural courses. Prohibition of Jewish participation in such courses was introduced by the Kreishauptmann of Lublin-Land on August 19, 1941 in response to the detection of Jewish participants in such courses. APL, SPL, ref. no. 77, fol. 84.

A letter of unknown origin, with German provenance, prohibiting both practices appeared in the Mełgiew commune on October 10, 1941⁶³, which, moreover, shows that such efforts were noted by the occupiers and helped Jews confined in the ghettos.

From the autumn of 1941, with regard to the Jewish issues, the language used in the minutes slowly turned sharper, firmer and blunter, and the pressure and coercion exerted by the German civil administration on village officials also increased, which was not accompanied by any supporting basis i.e. separate county ordinances⁶⁴. This was connected inter alia with Hans Frank's directive of October 15, 1941 (*Trzecie rozporządzenie o ograniczeniu pobytu w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*), under which the act of leaving the ghetto was punishable by death penalty; however, the same sanction applied to anyone who provided shelter ('hideaway') to Jewish population. It entered into force on the day of announcement⁶⁵ and was of crucial importance for Polish-Jewish relations during the German occupation. The goal of this severe penalty for Poles was to discourage them from contacts with Jews, including provision of help⁶⁶. Other examples of the brutalizing language used by the German occupiers, which was motivated by the intention to effectively isolate Jews from the rest of the society, can be traced in the remaining communes. On October 29, a 'stringent regulation' was issued in Zemborzyce, whose goal was the elimination of any Jewish trade. People caught engaging in this practice were to be detained and handed over to the commune head⁶⁷. In Mełgiew, in turn, on November 28, village heads received 'an order to combat all kinds of smuggling – first of all Jews loitering for trading purposes'. It is significant that in this commune the the 'order to combat' did not necessitate catching the trading individuals but only chasing them away, which, however, evidences varied measures taken then by the rural administration against the Jewish population⁶⁸. At that time, village heads had to increase vigilance over Jews performing forced labor

⁶³ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 25v.

⁶⁴ The first such example of language brutalization in the analyzed documents can be found in one of minutes from the Jaszczołw commune. In his letter of October 13, 1941, a certain Ditter, unspecified county representative, ordered the Jaszczołw commune head, without indicating the legal grounds as had been the case so far, 'to immediately evict' several Jewish families from the building of the district cooperative in Trawniki, because the premises they occupied were needed for storage purposes. APL, SPL, ref. no. 77, fol. 85.

⁶⁵ "Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement" 1941, no. 99, p. 595.

⁶⁶ *Represje za pomoc Żydom na okupowanych ziemiach polskich w czasie II wojny światowej*, eds. M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, Warszawa 2019, p. 25.

⁶⁷ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 961, fol. 135.

⁶⁸ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fols. 31v–32.

in the countryside. According to the directive of the Lublin Arbeitsamt, for example, the Zemborzyce village head was obligated to personally take individuals who found employment on farms to neighboring Głusk, within three days by October 25, 1941, in order to register them⁶⁹.

At this point, it is worth examining the regulation issued on October 15, 1941, which, despite introducing the most severe criminal penalties for peasants engaging in contacts with Jews that were undesirable to the Germans, was not specifically discussed at the conferences, which may be surprising because this kind of entries appeared for first time. This document was discussed only at the meeting of village heads in Zemborzyce, which took place on November 6. Here, the village officials were also informed about the regulation concerning former Russian prisoners of war occasionally encountered in the forests, with whom, under penalty of severe imprisonment, it was forbidden to establish contact, provide shelter, or offer assistance⁷⁰. This situation occurred probably because at the end of autumn and in winter 1941, escapes by Jews from the Lublin ghetto did not occur on a large scale, therefore the issue of the illegal stay of single individuals or groups of people in the countryside was not among the top priorities of rural administration at the time. Incidentally, the regulation of October 15, 1941 did not produce expected effects, which is evidenced by the fact that the German occupiers resorted to other solutions in order to isolate Jews more effectively, because in two communes in December 1941 a new theme appeared related to restricting the mobility of Jews in the countryside at that time. It was connected with the typhoid fever that they allegedly spread, therefore the village heads from two communes – Zemborzyce and Mełgiew – were verbally ordered 'under pain of severe penalties' to restrict the presence in the village of undesirable Jews, i.e. those not assigned to a given place. On December 10, the Zemborzyce village head received an instruction not to admit or contact 'Jewish vagrants' and report each such case to the commune authorities or to the police station⁷¹. In turn, the village head of Mełgiew had, as of December 19, – 'in order to curb the typhus epidemic raging with full fury' – to prevent carriers of the plague from entering the commune, in the first place the Jews⁷². Village heads were obligated to take the same measures following the 'order' they received at the conference on February

⁶⁹ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 961, fol. 124.

⁷⁰ The ban of providing assistance to Soviet prisoners of war was also mentioned at the earlier conference of October 9. *Ibidem*, fols. 113, 140.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, fol. 156.

⁷² APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 34v.

20, 1942⁷³. The significance of the matter of restricting the residence of Jews in the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land was reminded by the German county commissioner in his circular of December 15 or 18, 1941⁷⁴. It was announced at the conference of the village heads of the Niemce and Zemborzyce communes: in the former it was announced on December 20, 1941 with an instruction to inform the population about it⁷⁵, and in the latter commune this took place on January 2, 1942⁷⁶.

Apart from the aforementioned ones, the records of minutes from the conferences do not clearly present German initiatives that would prepare the rural administration situated in the closer and more distant surroundings of Lublin for the Operation Reinhardt, i.e. the liquidation of the Lublin Ghetto (March 16/17 – April 15, 1942), and especially in the event of possible escapes of Jews from it. Some activities towards this objective can be observed in Niemce and Zemborzyce. In the former commune on March 23, 1942 the propaganda posters 'Beware of typhoid fever – avoid Jews' were distributed, which the county commissioner had presumably sent to all commune heads with his letter of March 12, 1942, that is, before the start of the aforementioned extermination operation⁷⁷. Over a dozen days later, i.e. on April 4 this commune received other posters on the county commissioner's order of March 30 to be put up, which informed about the death penalty for Jews for crossing the 'residential area' assigned for them. Both types of posters were to remind about the binding restrictions on Jews and at the same time to connect them with the alleged danger of their transmission of typhoid fever⁷⁸.

When the Lublin ghetto was 'resettled' (Jews were deported to extermination camps) by April 15, 1942, the issue of trading with the Jewish people, who were trying to survive through this activity, gained significance in Zemborzyce. By the explicit order of the German authorities, the secretary of the local commune announced on April 29 that 'no goods in the villages are to be purchased from Jews on pain of severe punishment'⁷⁹. The same minutes also included a worn-out argument against allowing peasants to have contact with the Jewish population, related to the alleged spread of typhus outbreaks through gathering rags

⁷³ *Ibidem*, fol. 69v.

⁷⁴ In the records of the two communes two other dates of this circular are given.

⁷⁵ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fol. 105.

⁷⁶ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 961, fols. 164–165.

⁷⁷ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fol. 135.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, fol. 138.

⁷⁹ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 961, fol. 194.

and clothing items from the exterminated Jewish population⁸⁰. The aim was to sever in this way any ties of the rural population with Jewish and post-Jewish movables. Moreover, the German county-level administration also issued decrees concerning Jewish real estates in the rural areas at that time. We know about one of them (of June 18, 1942), which regulated the issue of demolishing former Jewish houses and other premises belonging to them⁸¹. Certainly, there were cases of the Polish population looting both movable and immovable property because at one of the village heads' conferences in Mełgiew on September 23 the issue of protecting post-Jewish property was raised, although the record on this topic is enigmatic and the details of the matter are not known⁸². The term 'protection' should certainly be understood as a euphemism since the Jewish property was to be automatically transferred to the Third Reich rather than fall into Polish hands. It could have been handed over to the Poles provided that the German side expressed such a wish. That is why, when for unspecified reasons the village heads of the Niemce commune were ordered to transport a certain number of Jews to Lubartów, they were also ordered to secure Jewish homes at the same time⁸³.

Another group of issues discussed in the context of the liquidation operation was the matter of employing the remaining Jewish survivors on farms. This issue was raised as many as three times in Zemborzyce between May 13 and August 12, 1942. The local commune head issued a regulation that a person of Jewish nationality who wanted to work on a rural farm had to obtain a certificate from the commune head, which was issued based on the certificate of a person's suitability confirmed by a village head⁸⁴. In July, the commune head next demanded that the registration of Jewish workers be conducted with the obligation to submit the list at the village heads' conference⁸⁵. On the other hand, on August 12, he reminded that Jews who did not have permission from the community office were not allowed to be employed by farmers, adding that 'village heads must obey this'⁸⁶.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, fol. 196.

⁸¹ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fol. 179. For more on the procedures and ways of administering the Jewish property by the Kreishauptmann Lublin-Land see: APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 81, fols. 11, 170.

⁸² APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 69v.

⁸³ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fol. 179.

⁸⁴ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 961, fol. 1v.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, fol. 10.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, fol. 15v.

The last stage of the Operation Reinhardt was the Operation 'Erntefest [Harvest Festival]', as a result of which, on November 3 and 4, 1942, the Germans murdered 42,000 Jewish prisoners held in the camps in the Lublin District⁸⁷. It was probably not accidental that on November 4 at the conference in the Zemborzyce commune the commune head ordered that the village heads strictly comply with the regulation on 'not employing and housing Jews by the farmers.' It was reiterated then once again, not for the first time at such meetings, that village heads had to immediately bring any Jewish escapee found in the village to the police in Głusk, which was the seat of the commune authorities⁸⁸. Soon, i.e. on November 11, the head of this commune read out the *Policyjne rozporządzenie o stworzeniu żydowskiej dzielnicy mieszkaniowej w Okręgu Warschau i Lublin* of October 28, 1942, which was issued by Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger, Higher SS and Police Commander in the General Government⁸⁹. Besides establishing 8 residual ghettos in the Lublin District⁹⁰, it imposed death penalty for helping Jews, with a top-down definition of such assistance. This time, it was not about providing shelter (hide-out), but about supplying food and assisting with transportation when they were leaving the ghettos. Additionally, Krüger introduced the obligation to denounce – 'whoever learns that a Jew is unlawfully staying outside the boundaries of the Jewish residential district and fails to report it to the police will be subject to police security measures'⁹¹. This matter was raised again in Zemborzyce already on November 18, which shows that great importance was attached to it, probably with the awareness of the illegal presence of Jews in the territory of this commune. In accordance with Krüger's ordinance, village leaders, ensuring that farmers did not 'harbor Jews', now had to report to the police 'in case any were discovered'.⁹² Taking account of all the analyzed minutes, it is the first case of the recorded order introducing the obligation to inform on peasants harboring Jews by a village official. In other communes there are no records of the presentation of the regulation of October 28, 1942,

⁸⁷ For more see: C. Browning, *Zwykli ludzie. 101. Policyjny Batalion Rezerwy i „ostateczne rozwiązanie” w Polsce*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 145–153; *Erntefest – zapomniany epizod Zagłady: 3–4 listopada 1943*, eds. W. Lenarczyk, D. Libionka, Lublin 2009.

⁸⁸ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 962, fol. 27v.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, fol. 29.

⁹⁰ On December 17, at one of the village leaders' conferences in Niemce, it was reminded that the only residual ghetto where Jews were allowed to stay in the Lublin county outside of labor camps was Piaski. APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fol. 194.

⁹¹ It entered into force as of November 1, 1942. "Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement" 1942, no. 94, pp. 665–666.

⁹² APL, AGZ, ref. no. 962, fol. 30v.

nevertheless, for example in Melgiew, first on 11 December that year and on February 26, 1943 there appeared regulations highly conducive to the implementation of the Judenjagd (Jew hunt) policy. The first one concerned the declarations received by the village heads, which they were ordered to sign. In the document, they stated that in the areas under their administration, 'no Jews are present, nor are any any given shelter', meaning they were personally responsible for what happened in their jurisdiction with regard to the Jewish question⁹³. The appearance of this declaration in the villages of the Lublin District resulted from the personal involvement of the Chief of Staff (Leiter der Hauptabteilung) of Operation Reinhardt, Hermann Höfle, in incorporating rural administrative structures into the extermination of the Jewish population. On December 3, 1942, through the county heads, and further through mayors and village heads, he sent out a circular to village heads along with a formula of the commitment (Haftungserklärungen), titled *Resettlement of Jews* (Judenumsiedlung) imposing on them the obligation to 'ensure the complete registration of Jews in the Lublin District'. As Chmielewski noted, the signed commitments, which in practice obligated them to hand over Jews to the police, had to be sent to Höfle immediately. Already the first point stated: 'Within the scope of my [the village head's – J.C.] authority, there is not a single Jew'⁹⁴. The second entry in the minutes of this commune was a kind of reminder that any Jew appearing in the village had to be captured and taken to the nearest police station⁹⁵.

RURAL COMMUNES IN THE GERMAN SECURITY SYSTEM IN THE OCCUPIED COUNTRYSIDE: COMBATING 'BANDS' (PARTISAN GROUPS), PEASANT GUARDS, AND OTHERS

The German occupiers not only forced local officials to participate in the extermination of Jews through anti-Jewish regulations, prohibitions, orders, and directives but also established a tight security system in the countryside. This system prevented any unwanted or unfamiliar individuals—including escapees from the ghetto—from moving freely about the rural areas. The operation of this system, in which the majority society had to participate, was of course a deadly threat to the Jews.

In the commune records there are entries showing the process of tightening the system. We could start with the population registers.

⁹³ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 76v.

⁹⁴ J. Chmielewski, *Postawy*, p. 605.

⁹⁵ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 84v.

All newcomers, including, for example, Jews who – due to their ‘good appearance’ – could live ‘on the surface’, had to obtain residence permits not from the village head but from the commune head. Thus, contact with this official of the German administration was necessary and unavoidable⁹⁶. Furthermore, in 1943 village heads were obligated to update population registers kept at the police station by updating them every week⁹⁷. The German occupiers strengthened the registration system of residents in the Lublin District in June 1943 through an ordinance issued by Odilo Globocnik concerning street labeling, house numbering, and the placement of tenant lists in houses in the Lublin District. This allowed the Germans to gain a better topographical knowledge of village buildings and significantly increased direct surveillance over households, creating an impression of total control extending into the privacy of homes, which could have significantly weakened the willingness to help escapees from the ghettos⁹⁸.

Another issue was the obligation imposed on village leaders during the so-called third phase of the Holocaust to report extraordinary incidents⁹⁹, beggars, ‘vagrants’, and loiterers – essentially anyone classi-

⁹⁶ APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 32, fol. 56.

⁹⁷ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fols. 85v, 90v.

⁹⁸ The available minutes do not mention this ordinance, although, since it seldom or almost never appears in the context of studies on Polish-Jewish relationships during the German occupation, it is in order to quote its content: ‘All houses shall be assigned sequential numbers. The numbering must be carried out systematically [...] by commune and village heads. The numbering plans should be kept by the above-mentioned commune officials for inspection. A copy of these plans must be at the relevant police stations. Any changes must be marked on both plans. [...] In every house, a list of tenants must be posted, indicating how many non-German persons aged 14 and above live in the given house. The full surnames of these persons must be listed sequentially according to apartment numbers. Next to each surname, ‘male’ or ‘female’ should be written. The tenant lists of the houses must be examined by [...] the commune or village head, stamped, and signed. [...] Persons staying in the apartment temporarily overnight must be listed on a separate sheet of paper which should then be certified by the aforementioned commune officials and attached below the list of tenants’. Failure to comply with this order was punishable by ‘penal police enforcement measures’ including, it should be emphasized, the application of collective responsibility, extending the penalty to all village residents. Additionally, the penalty could alternatively be imposed in an administrative-criminal procedure. APL, AGM, ref. no. 661, fol. 159.

⁹⁹ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fol. 163; AGZ, ref. no. 962, fols. 19, 50v, 56v, 70v; AGM, ref. no. 620, fols. 80, 83, 92. As we learn from the Zemborzyce minutes, at the beginning of 1943, wronged village residents were also ordered through village heads to personally report any cases of assault or robbery against individuals or private households to the local police station. The village head then submitted a separate report to the commune administration,

fied as 'stranger', which generally meant that any unknown person was deemed 'suspicious'¹⁰⁰. We do not know how systematically, zealously, or with what attitude these orders were carried out en masse. However, for example, in the records of the Mełgiew commune, there are written reprimands directed at village leaders who neglected these duties. These reprimands were issued by the Kreishauptmann to the commune heads¹⁰¹.

Numerous actions taken by the Germans, and implemented at the lowest level of rural administration by village heads, were targeted at various groups of Polish partisans, but in a specific way also at Jewish and Soviet survival groups, which over time also transformed into partisans¹⁰². The German security apparatus actively fought against them with arms, and the population was forcibly engaged in denouncing and detecting them. Such groups were most often called 'bands (Banden)' in the German security system. The activities of some of them also extended to the area in question, noticeably since the end of 1943 in the Mełgiew commune¹⁰³.

The first directives ordering village leaders and the local population to counteract 'Bolshevism', 'Bolsheviks', and 'bands' in the district appeared in May 1942¹⁰⁴. In July and August of that year, the German occupiers insisted that such persons should be immediately reported

allowing the police authorities to cross-check the reports. Since this obligation was not sufficiently observed, in October 1943 the commander of the police station personally attended the village heads' conference in the Zemborzyce commune to discuss the reporting of attacks. APL, AGZ, ref. no. 962, fols. 40–41, 50v, 71.

¹⁰⁰ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fols. 168; AGM, ref. no. 620, fols. 63, 76v.

¹⁰¹ APL, AGM, ref. no. 661, fol. 2.

¹⁰² In the Lublin region various, there were active ethnically mixed partisan groups (often Russians and Jews). In February 1942 the gendarmerie commander in the Lublin District issued a special order (Sonderbefehl) on hunting Soviet prisoners of war, in which he demanded that these matters be treated as a priority 'even if other tasks are postponed'. Unlike Jews, Soviet war prisoners were entitled to burials: their rules were described in detail in March 1942 by officials of the GG Authority to be implemented in the rural communes. The costs of burials were paid by the communes. APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 81, fol. 302; Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde [hereinafter: BArch], Deutsche Polizeidienststellen in Polen (R 70-Polen), ref. no. 311, fol. 9.

¹⁰³ APL, AGM, ref. no. 661, fols. 92, 113, 125, 160, 252.

¹⁰⁴ It should be added that the analyzed minutes never mention the attacks of those groups on village heads, nevertheless two commune offices (Łucka, Mełgiew) were set on fire and vandalized by unknown partisan groups in the summer of 1943. Since this type of incidents continually recurred, from May 1943, Odilo Globocnik, the SS and Police Commander in the Lublin District, issued an oral order requiring 10 Poles to stay overnight in the commune offices. The damage caused by the attacks on communes was, as decided by the German occupiers, to be covered by the local population. APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 32, fol. 14, 18; AGM, ref. no. 620, fols. 95, 97, 99; BArch, R 70-Polen, ref. no. 318, fol. 37.

to the police authorities¹⁰⁵. Some insight into the ways of combating 'members of bands' is provided by the conference minutes from the Niemce commune of December 23, 1942. During the meeting of the commune officials, the German gendarmerie arrived, who announced the relevant operation, and explained it in detail – although no further specifics about it were recorded. The minutes make no mention of village heads taking part in the planned manhunt, although it is highly likely that their forced participation may have been considered as well¹⁰⁶. As an incentive, at the beginning of June 1943, the Kreishauptmann of Lublin-Land introduced a policy of rewarding persons who actively and voluntarily participated in 'combating band members'¹⁰⁷. It is also worth noting that in exceptional cases of observed partisan activity, the German occupiers ordered the clearing of forests in areas they considered too favorable for partisan operations. For example, this occurred in the Łucka commune, where forests located near railway tracks and surfaced roads were to be cut down to a length of 100 meters¹⁰⁸. Such actions also limited the survival opportunities of Jewish escapees, forcing them to exert a greater effort to stay alive.

Another highly significant element aimed at achieving the German objectives of establishing and tightening the security system in rural areas, which appears in the minutes and which reduced the chances of survival

¹⁰⁵ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fols. 150, 167; AGM, ref. no. 620, fols. 51v, 60. At the beginning of July 1942, the chief of staff of the Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS, Ernst Rode, sent a very detailed report (*Erfahrungsbericht*) to the commander of the gendarmerie of the Lublin District. The report described the operations of German assault units against Soviet partisan groups and analyzed the Soviet resistance tactics based on a system of forest bunkers, which were also built by members of Jewish survival groups and Jewish partisans. The report contains plenty of details about bunker construction technology and combat techniques in dugouts and underground fortifications. Its author was Waffen-SS Major General Lothar Debes. The Germans placed a great emphasis on thorough terrain reconnaissance, in which the local population had to participate. Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [hereinafter: IPN], ref. no. GK 104/287, fols. 31–37. For more on the role of the aforementioned formations see M. Cuppers, *Wegbereiter der Shoah. Die Waffen-SS, der Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS und die Judenvernichtung 1939–1945*, Darmstadt 2005.

¹⁰⁶ APL, AGN, ref. no. 18, fol. 195. The issue of the German assessment of the degree of voluntary and forced involvement by the Polish population in gendarmerie operations against partisan groups has not been thoroughly researched. In the February 1942 report of the Lublin District Gendarmerie Commander, i.e. during the period when the development of forest-based partisan activity was not yet at a high level, we encounter the opinion that the response of the Polish population to German actions in this regard was positive. BArch, R-70 Polen, ref. no. 260, fols. 82, 93.

¹⁰⁷ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 962, fol. 58.

¹⁰⁸ APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 32, fol. 78.

for Jewish escapees, was the compulsory organization of guard duties. The functioning of these guards in the Lublin District was regulated by the German occupiers in the summer of 1943. At that time, Odilo Globocnik issued an Ordinance to combat acts of violence in the Lublin District (*Zarządzenie w celu zwalczania czynów gwałtu w Okręgu Lublin*), which came into effect on July 25. It specified the duties of the guards: prevention of 'attempted acts of violence', arresting suspects and delivering them to the nearest police station, as well as immediately notifying the police of any suspicious incidents. Guards were permitted to use force to overcome resistance. In the event of failure to prevent 'acts of violence', severe penalties were to be applied, i.e. police measures against the entire commune or its part, which should be emphasized when analyzing the issue of their functioning. In his directive, Odilo Globocnik also included a monetary fine of 10 thousand zloty¹⁰⁹. The village heads were responsible for administering the guards and sending the appropriate individuals from among their members to designated locations. Unlike single manhunts, this was a much more effective method of controlling rural areas against undesirable outsiders.

The information contained in the minutes shows that the activity of these guards started to become significant from the summer of 1942, when partisan activities in the Lublin region and in other areas of the occupied country gradually increased. The earliest discussions about introducing guard duties concern the Zemborzyce commune. The reason why they were organized in 1942 was not yet the assaults and robberies but the recurring cases of theft. As decided during the village heads' conference, the guard team at that time was to consist of two people. In September already two types of guards functioned in the same commune: day watch and night watch, which were also to provide protection against various assaults¹¹⁰. In Zemborzyce, probably too young persons were chosen as members of the guard and this may have produced negative consequences, which is why in the autumn of 1942, by the decision of the German authorities, every guard member had to be at least 20 year old¹¹¹. For comparison, in Melgiew the guard, called the 'guard of honor', was organized somewhat later, i.e. in September 1942¹¹². It consisted of persons respected in the villages who at once underwent brief training

¹⁰⁹ APL, AGM, ref. no. 661, fol. 172.

¹¹⁰ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 962, fols. 5, 6.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, fol. 29v.

¹¹² In early September, the guard duty was introduced in this commune because of the 'threat of arson'. APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 61v.

on the objectives and tasks of this service¹¹³. The tasks came down to two issues: reporting assaults and robberies as well as detaining strangers, thereby also becoming part of the Judenjagd policy¹¹⁴. We do not know whether in this particular place there was both a day and a night watch, but the minutes are also a source of knowledge about the type of the guards different from the one presented above. Namely, they were also divided into commune and subcommune (gromada) guards. By mid-1943 the former were organized in the Łucka commune in such a way that a guard of two persons, relieved every two hours, patrolled around the commune. The guards had identification cards¹¹⁵. It appears that with time the guards became professionalized ('constant guards') through the appointment of their chiefs, which was meant to improve the rural patrols¹¹⁶. Failures to report for guard duty were eliminated through planning the rotation of guards, which was within the competence of rural officials. For example, in the Łucka commune, their duty rosters were prepared two weeks in advance¹¹⁷. Moreover, the lists of guards were delivered to the police station, which also effectively prevented absenteeism¹¹⁸. Efforts were also made to influence the speed of the danger alert system. In Zemborzyce, alarm gongs were introduced¹¹⁹, and in the Mełgiew commune, from February 1943, there was even a 'special messenger for notifying about extraordinary incidents'¹²⁰.

In addition to the aforementioned types of guards there were also special-purpose patrols. In December 1942, railway guard units began operating in the Mełgiew commune¹²¹. Their members had identification cards and special armbands.¹²² Special (permanent) day-and-night guards were also posted at strategic points as required. For example, in the Mełgiew commune, such guards were deployed in February 1943 on the bridge over the Wieprz River in Ciechanki Łęczyńskie (these were

¹¹³ In the Łucka commune, the commune head gave a talk on the subject. APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 32, fol. 33.

¹¹⁴ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 65v.

¹¹⁵ APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 32, fol. 34; AGZ, ref. no. 962, fol. 80v.

¹¹⁶ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fols. 50, 87.

¹¹⁷ APL, AGŁ, ref. no. 32, fol. 34.

¹¹⁸ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 82.

¹¹⁹ APL, AGZ, ref. no. 962, fols. 6, 15.

¹²⁰ APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 84v.

¹²¹ In January 1943, Odilo Globocnik issued an internal regulation introducing a rule for the German gendarmerie that in the event of sabotage, especially on the railways, the officers of these services were obliged to take 20 hostages from the nearest vicinity and send them to the Trawniki or Poniatowa camp. IPN, ref. no. GK 104/128, fol. 18.

¹²² APL, AGM, ref. no. 620, fol. 75v.

supervised by one responsible person)¹²³, as well as by the commune office building, or near the grain fields in the summer¹²⁴.

During their obligatory patrols the guards must have repeatedly encountered Jewish escapees and caught them, which can be read about in many Jewish postwar accounts. These, however, lack the context of the mechanisms of peasant guards' operations in the German security system. Owing to the lack of sources, we are unable to determine how many members of these formations demonstrated ingenuity, zeal, and spontaneity in apprehending Jews during patrols, and how many undertook these duties reluctantly and with fear of potential health damage or loss of life. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the guard duties were compulsory, and secondly, that the Germans applied not only the principle of individual but also collective responsibility in the case of guard group activities¹²⁵. The mechanism of collective responsibility can be illustrated by the example of the protection of the bridge in Ciechanki Łęczyńskie in the Mełgiew commune. When the guards did not secure this bridge, in September 1943 the residents of the commune were obligated to pay a contribution of 10,000 zloty. Failure to pay this amount risked the involvement of the gendarmerie to enforce the payment and a doubling of the contribution. According to the information held by the Mełgiew mayor, the burning of the bridge was the responsibility of a 'Jewish-communist gang'¹²⁶.

CONCLUSIONS

The minutes of the village heads' meetings from the analyzed communes in the Kreishauptmannschaft Lublin-Land, which (minutes) have luckily been preserved until the present, form a concise, convenient collection of records for microhistorical analyses, and are without doubt an important source for research into the Holocaust of the Jews, and, in particular, on Polish-Jewish relationships in the General Government. In the recorded minutes, information can be found regarding both indirect and direct extermination from 1939 to 1944, covering a wide range of issues: from matters related to the ban on ritual slaughter, through the questions of Jewish property, ghettoization of Jews, and ultimately

¹²³ *Ibidem*, fol. 83v.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, fols. 98–99.

¹²⁵ For more, see: C. Rajca, *Niektóre aspekty stosowania odpowiedzialności zbiorowej w dystrykcie lubelskim, "Zeszyty Majdanka"* 1972, 6, pp. 98–129.

¹²⁶ APL, AGM, ref. no. 661, fols. 92, 113, 125, 160.

their extermination and turning them in to Germans during the period of Judenjagd, when, as escapees from the ghettos, they sought refuge in rural areas. However, these are not extensive items of information but rather laconic, which primarily stems in general from the specificity of the recorded minutes as a source that is schematic and concise in content. Secondly, what is conspicuous is a relatively small number of individual notes regarding the so-called 'Jewish question' compared to other issues concerning the economic life of the communes' inhabitants, and, *de facto*, their extreme economic exploitation.

The crucial issue was the answer to the question not only about what information on the Jewish population was minuted, but also, about what was the practice of treating anti-Jewish regulations at the village heads' conferences with the commune head, i.e. whether each regulation was recorded at the meetings or only some of them were discussed. The answer to this very important question, in a way determining the source value of the minutes in the context of research into the Holocaust, was possible already at the stage of a cursory reading of the minutes, from which it followed that in some communes no issue related to Jews was raised even once during the third phase of the Holocaust. This leads to the conclusion that the minutes contain a selective set of topics dictated by the then current circumstances. It can be assumed that the conferences simply discussed what caused problems and what posed a challenge at the moment.

The minutes also contain a number of items of information about the German measures and regulations which, although not aimed directly against the Jewish population, restricted their freedom of movement, and ultimately could have resulted in the loss of life. Particularly important is the information about the tightening of the security system in rural areas by the German occupiers (e.g. combating partisans, reporting 'extraordinary events', participation in manhunts and in various types of guard duties). The content of the minutes clearly indicates that the tasks of the communes in the extermination of the Jews were a formula imposed from above by the General Government administration, and the methods of their implementation were carried out under coercion and blackmail through the German apparatus of repression. The principle of both personal responsibility (e.g. in the case of village heads) and collective responsibility was applied, as has been repeatedly demonstrated in the literature on the subject. The records reveal a high degree of involvement of rural communes in the Holocaust in the sense that they expose the wide range of methods used by the German occupiers to mobilize rural commune offices to achieve their extermination goals. However, the analyzed material is not a prospective source that

would enable investigation of the so-called independent initiative of local officials or, generally, peasants in persecuting and robbing Jews. This documentation first of all constitutes a record of the terror experienced by the inhabitants of the Polish countryside under German occupation, exposing above all the mechanisms of forced participation in the Holocaust.

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Alicja Gontarek – Phd, historian, researcher of Jewish and Roma history and culture in Polish lands in the 19th and 20th centuries. She is conducting pioneering research on the history of the Gypsy kings of the Kwiek clan in the Second Polish Republic. Her research interests focus, in parallel, on the issue of the aid that Polish society provided to Jews during World War II.

NOTA O AUTORZE

Alicja Gontarek – doktor, historyk, badacz historii oraz kultury żydowskiej i romskiej na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX w. Prowadzi pionierskie badania nad dziejami królów cygańskich z klanu Kwieków w II RP. Równolegle jej zainteresowania badawcze koncentrują się na problematyce pomocy, jakiej udzielało społeczeństwo polskie Żydom w czasie II wojny światowej.

