

## From the editor

Writing about the history of the Holocaust in Poland, and in Polish, carries with it a very peculiar set of duties, obligations and challenges. There are few issues in Polish history that reverberate through the nation with such force and whose ongoing discussion is able to have an immediate and profound impact on the national self-perception. The recent discussions surrounding the publication of Jan T. Gross's books are convincing proof of that. On the other hand, the issues related to the destruction of the Polish Jewry have been among the most forgotten, falsified and manipulated events of the recent past. As discussed in recent decades, the Holocaust became an addition to, rather than an essential and defining part of, Polish historical writing. And these were the reasons why the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research was created in the first place. The members of the Centre set out to return the history of the Holocaust to the centre of the historical focus while, at the same time, trying to make it an integral and inalienable part of mainstream Polish history.

The publication of this volume marks an important chapter in the history of the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research. Since its creation in 2003, the Centre has published a number of books written by its members. It has also published translations of crucial foreign publications previously unavailable in Polish. In addition to the published books, the Centre has also published three volumes of its annual review *Holocaust Studies and Materials*. The fourth volume is soon going to press, and will be available in bookstores in the near future. Each volume has a thematic leitmotiv: an area of study which has previously been neglected by researchers. The first volume focused on methodological issues related to the history of the Holocaust. The authors analyzed the historical and epistemological potential of the available sources, while pointing to the pitfalls and challenges in the existing literature. The second volume shed light on various aspects of the phenomenon of collaboration under the occupation, both on the "Aryan" and on the Jewish side. The third volume turned its attention to the fate of the smaller ghettos, places often overlooked in academic writings. The fourth, current, volume sets out to explore one of the most hotly debated and most contentious questions in the area of Polish-Jewish studies: the problem of Polish-Jewish interaction and, more specifically, the issue of helping and rescuing the Jews during the Holocaust in Poland. This English-language volume represents a selection of articles published in the first three issues of the Polish version of *Holocaust Studies*.

The texts included in the present volume can be divided into two major groups. The first group, entitled "Studies", offers a selection of academic articles. Michał Głowiński reflects on the fundamental text written twenty years earlier by Jan

Błoński. Błoński's text opened, for the first time, the painful discussion about Poles and Jews at the time of the Shoah. Jacek Leociak in his essay delivers a thorough and exhaustive "topography" of various personal narratives left by the victims, survivors, participants and witnesses to the Holocaust. The much underrated narratives of the witnesses and survivors offer an aspect which is missing from other sources: the palpable feeling of horror. Andrzej Żbikowski examines this premise in one of the most terrifying examples: he discusses two accounts of women who dug themselves out from a mass grave in Poniatowa. One of the most important conclusions of his analysis points to the fact that even though the narratives of survivors should be given full credibility, the accounts of experienced horrors often tend to – with time – blur and hide the most traumatic experiences. This belief, in turn, confirms the historiographical diagnosis offered by Jan T. Gross in his seminal book *Neighbors*. Dariusz Libionka in his essay tracks the complex and shifting story of several alleged Polish "helpers" who, after the war, working hand in hand with the Polish communist secret service, invented their own war-time histories. Based on lies and deceit, the activities of these people underscore the importance of rigorous scrutiny of historical evidence – especially when using the archives of the secret police. In his text *Libionka* convincingly argues that at least a part of the legend of the Zionist underground in the Warsaw ghetto (ŻZW) was invented after the war, and in more than shadowy circumstances. Agnieszka Haska sets out to examine one of the more troubling aspects of the history of the Holocaust – the story of Jewish collaboration and collusion with the Germans. In her quest she takes aim at the person of Adam Żurawin – one of the movers and shakers in the Warsaw ghetto. The ambiguity of Żurawin's actions, the dearth of historical evidence, lack of witnesses and, last but not least, the fluidity of moral criteria of these desperate times – all these factors make the historian's task extremely difficult. But not impossible – as can be seen in Haska's diligent and persuasive analysis of the preserved evidence. Adam Kopciowski investigates the question of murders committed by Poles on Jewish survivors returning after the war to the Lublin area. Kopciowski was able to track down one hundred and eighteen such murders and he presents troubling and dramatic evidence which sheds light on the reasons and circumstances surrounding the tragic fate of the returning survivors.

The second group of presented materials consists of "research in progress" and other materials, taken straight from researchers' desks. The excerpts drawn from the extraordinary diary of Hinda and Chanina Malachi allow us to observe and to live through the desperate struggle for survival of a Jewish couple from Ostrowiec. Their misery and terror on the "Aryan side" is punctuated by frequent encounters with the feared Polish "szmalcownicy" (blackmailers), who preyed on the helpless Jews. In one of the paragraphs in their diary the Malachis mention a massacre of their Jewish friends from Ostrowiec at the hands of the local Poles. The Jews, having paid a handsome price, were promised a place among the Polish freedom fighters, in the resistance. Instead, they were led to a nearby forest and killed. Alina Skibińska and Dariusz Libionka followed the lead of this single sentence from the Malachi diary and discovered a body of archival evidence which confirmed the horrifying allegations of the Jewish couple. Basing their account on the post-war investigation into

the murder of the Ostrowiec Jews, Skibińska and Libionka demonstrate how greed, fear and hatred of Jews made some of the members of the underground willing to take part in mass murder of innocent victims. Other “Materials” include a text by Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, who present a case study of two Jewish families who, in the spring of 1940, fled Warsaw, crossed German territory and finally managed to enter neutral Switzerland. Basing their findings on previously unknown German archival records and Jewish narratives from the ghetto, they demonstrate the extent of Swiss complicity in the Holocaust. In the same “foreign” vein, Darek Libionka presents archival materials related to Kazimierz Papée’s (Polish ambassador at the Holy See) repeated and rather unsuccessful attempts to bring news about the Holocaust to the attention of Pius XII.

The selected articles and materials are but a small part of the Polish-language edition of the yearly publication of the Centre. It is our hope that, with time, we will be able to publish an English version of “Holocaust Studies and Materials” on a biennial or even annual basis.

*Jan Grabowski*