

TREBLINKA

WARNS AND REMINDS!

**On the 80th Anniversary
of the Establishment
of the Treblinka I Labour Camp**

Edited by: Edward Kopówka

Treblinka 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Edward Kopówka
Director of the Treblinka Museum. The Nazi German Extermination
and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

Dear Readers,

We present to you the papers from a conference that was the third in a series of meetings dedicated to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Labour Camp. The first conference “Co wiemy o Treblince. Stan Badań” (“What do we know about Treblinka. Review of Research”) took place in 2011. A post-conference volume was published in 2013. Our second conference “Treblinka. Historia i Pamięć” (“Treblinka. History and Memory”) took place in 2014, with the post-conference volume published in 2015.

The third conference “Treblinka – warns and reminds!” was organised on May 31 – June 1, 2021. About 30 lectures were delivered. I hope that the next planned international scientific conference “Treblinka. Przestrzeń Miejsca Pamięci” (“Treblinka. The Space of the Memorial Site”), devoted to the present landscape of the former camps, the Gravel Pit and the Execution Site, will be held in the new museum facility. The planned result of the conference is developing a historical and landscape plan for the area of the Treblinka Museum.

We would like to thank all the speakers who participated in the conference for their time and for sharing their expertise, reflections and comments. I do not agree with all of the views presented in the papers. The purpose of academic conferences is to exchange insights on a given field, bring new perspectives and stimulate further research. The responsibility for the opinions and theses presented in the papers, their justification, and the selection of sources, rests solely with their authors. The meeting was held in hybrid format, with some participants presenting their papers at the Treblinka Museum and others online. The online format enabled contact with participants in distant locations in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Israel and the USA.

For many years, efforts were made for the museum to become an independent unit and to create a facility that would meet the expectations of modern visitors. In 2018, the Treblinka Museum became a local government cultural institution run by the Mazowieckie Voivodeship Self-Government

and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. I would like to sincerely thank everyone who contributed to this.

On November 29, 2021, the results of a single-stage architectural competition for developing an architectural and urban concept for the task titled "Construction of an exhibition and educational facility" on the premises of the Treblinka Museum were announced. The work by Bujnowski Architekci sp. z o.o. architectural firm from Warsaw won the competition.

I would also like to inform you that the Treblinka Museum has prepared "Conservation and research study of the Treblinka Museum" project, which has been approved by the Mazowieckie Voivodeship Conservator of Historical Monuments. Its main purpose is to carry out the conservation of post-camp relics in the Treblinka I Labour Camp and all elements of the commemoration, especially the memorial in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp which was established in 1964 and requires conservation. The Memorial Site is special and artistically appreciated all over the world. We will seek funds for the implementation of these tasks. There is an urgent need to preserve the remains of the camp, otherwise they will be destroyed, which cannot be allowed to happen.

In 2021, we commemorated the Treblinka Train Station. Financial support, in addition to that of the Self-Government of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, was provided by Bildungswerk Stanisław Hantz from Kassel. I would also like to thank for their help.

The Polish publication came out on the 80th anniversary of the murder of Janusz Korczak, together with the children and hundreds of thousands of Jews as part of the so-called Operation Reinhardt.

People in Europe and around the world fear the word "war". Unfortunately, from February 24, 2022, this word has been with us every day. The Russian Federation has carried out an armed aggression against Ukraine, a sovereign state. The horrors of war: murders, suffering, tears, helplessness have returned to Europe! I hope and believe that this war will end soon and that an independent Ukraine will be able to function in peace. Regrettably, on October 7, 2023, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict began, causing further suffering. Both conflicts, as time shows, are difficult to resolve, and the Jewish community faces new challenges.

Very dear Edward

And dear all others, though unknown to me, who are with you.

I wish I could be with you, but I am forced to put on paper what I would like to say. You know what Treblinka means to me and my late husband. In this place are the ashes of my mother, who was gassed here, and of many members of my immediate and extended family. My Husband was tortured here for over 10 months. We swore that we would never forget this place. We have been returning here with groups from Israel for several dozen years. My husband, often in very bad weather, talked about what he had experienced here. I saw how difficult it was for those who listened to him, shivering with cold, to imagine how this camp had functioned. You have to use all your imagination to understand the history of this place. Unlike other camps, such as Oswiecim and Majdanek, there are no crematoria or barracks in Treblinka. Only the stones bear witness to the tragedy that took place here. There are no more living witnesses today. The historians who will continue to guide the groups should be given better conditions. We have been trying for many years to build an appropriate building on this site. Treblinka deserves a museum where you can find all the elements necessary to understand the history of the camp. It will house, among other things, sculptures made by my Husband, which depict the functioning of the camp. What we have been trying to create for years is now being implemented. I would like to thank in advance all those who have contributed to this, with you, Edward, in the lead. I know there are many people to thank. In order not to leave anyone out, I will not mention any more names. I just wish that this Museum would open as soon as possible. As you know, I am not young anymore and I would like to live to see it opening. Although we are separated by thousands of kilometres, all my thoughts and my heart are with you.

Greetings, hugs and good luck,

Ada Willenberg



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Szczecinek, May 25, 2021

Dear Participants,

On my own behalf and on behalf of the Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek, of which I am President, I am delighted to welcome you to the International Scientific Conference organised by the Treblinka Museum on the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Nazi camp in Treblinka. Unfortunately, due to health reasons, I am unable to attend this year's events, which is something I deeply regret, looking at the schedule of this conference, which is packed to the brim with substantial and highly interesting content.

From the available accounts it is known that between two and three thousand Roma and Sinti were murdered in the Treblinka camp. In the absence of camp documentation, the only evidence comes from testimonies of witnesses to the crimes. This tragedy also affected many members of my family, including my grandfather, who was imprisoned in the camp, so this place holds a special sentimental value for me. The period of the Second World War was a tragic time not only for the Polish or Jewish people, but also for the Roma, and this has had a significant impact on the cultural identity of our ethnic minority and continues to influence it to this day.

Already several years ago, the Polish Roma Union, based in Szczecinek, set as its primary goal the commemoration of the places where Roma died in large numbers in the darkness of war, and where their deaths remained silent and forgotten for years. On July 30, 2014, on the initiative of the Polish Roma Union, with the support of the Institute of National Remembrance and the Treblinka Museum, a monument was unveiled in the area known as the Execution Site to commemorate the Roma and Sinti murdered at Treblinka. The monument bears a commemorative plaque in three languages: Polish, Roma and English. I am proud that, thanks to the

efforts of the Roma Union and the Museum Management, we have managed to commemorate the Roma victims of the Nazi camp in Treblinka. I also greatly appreciate the Museum's efforts to educate people about the history of World War II and the Holocaust. I am particularly grateful for raising awareness among the majority population about Samudaripen, the extermination of the Roma during World War II. It is a topic that still does not resonate enough and remains insufficiently known. The Treblinka Museum is committed to ensuring that the memory of the brutally murdered Roma lives on, and that the story of the extermination of this people spreads as a warning to future generations.

I wish you a fruitful discussion and all the best.

Jawen sare Saste Bahtale! Which means may you all be healthy and happy!

Roman Chojnacki

Member of the Joint Commission of Government
and National and Ethnic Minorities

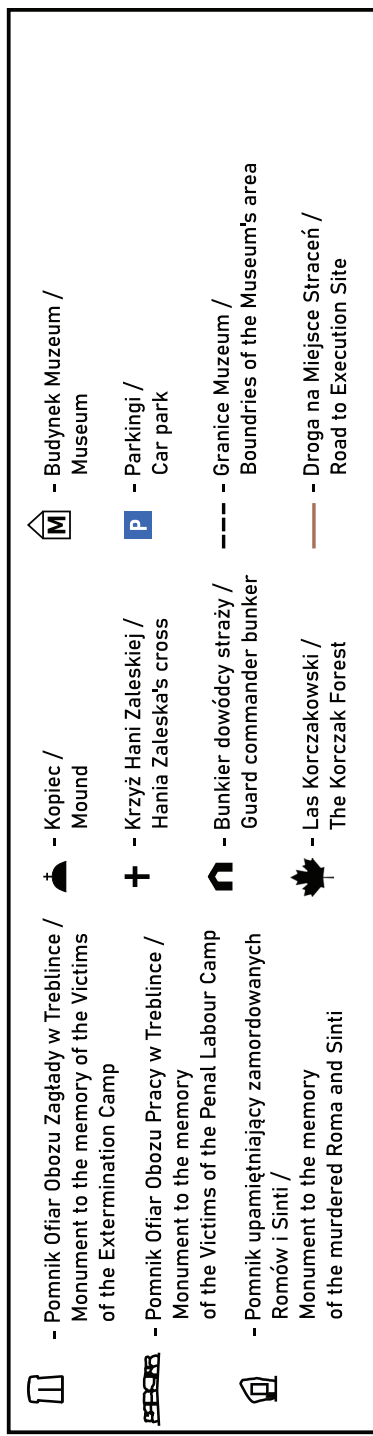
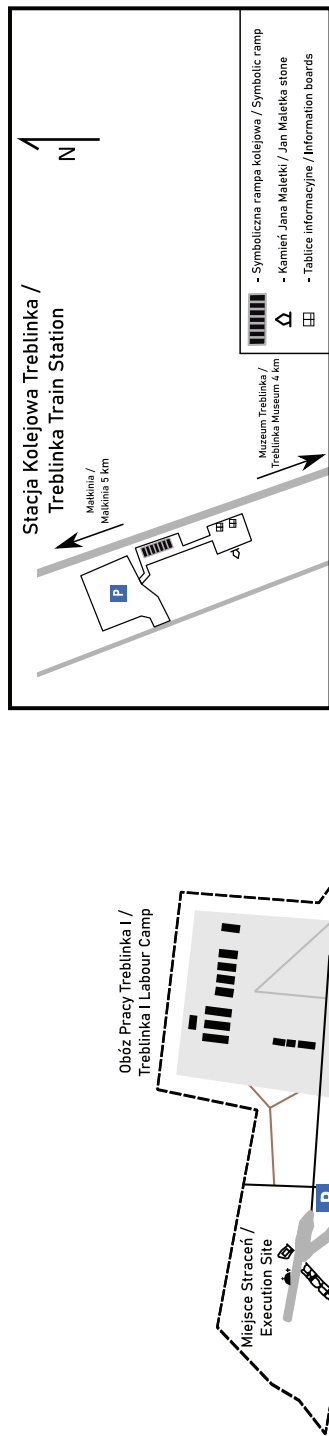
Dear Participants,

I would like to extend a cordial welcome to everyone. Thank you for the invitation to the International Scientific Conference “Treblinka – warns and reminds”. However, due to other official duties, I am not able to take part in this event together with you.

Poland is a country which was painfully experienced by history. The years of war turmoil were a time which tested characters and people’s attitudes. Many of our compatriots showed their heroism, many made the greatest sacrifice – of their life. Remembrance of our country’s history and heroism is our moral obligation, it is of crucial importance for maintaining our national identity and shaping characters of today’s young generation, instilling fundamental values in them, such as patriotism, honor, brotherhood, dedication and service to others. This role is fulfilled by the Treblinka Museum. The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944).

I would like to give my kind regards to all the Participants of the conference. I am certain that this two-day meeting has been a valuable time. It is our common responsibility to make sure that the truth about the extermination camps and labour camps is not falsified. I would like to wish you all the best.

Elżbieta Lanc



HISTORY

Paweł Sawicki, Ewa Teleżyńska-Sawicka
“Memory of Treblinka” Foundation

"MEMORY OF TREBLINKA" FOUNDATION: "BOOK OF NAMES" – A PROJECT TO CREATE A DATABASE OF PEOPLE MURDERED IN TREBLINKA AND COMMEMORATE THEM

ABSTRACT

Of the nearly one million Jews murdered in Treblinka, the vast majority are unknown by name and surname. The “Memory of Treblinka” Foundation compiles a list of Treblinka victims. Close to 60,000¹ records have been collected to date. Nearly 42,500² have been published on memory-of-treblinka.org. It has been possible to find some 5,000³ people whose details are not in Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names, or in other large databases of Holocaust victims. The text discusses the sources that were used. The rules for placing data in the database are also presented. When creating the database, the authors were confronted with many problems and dilemmas. Apart from their discussion, the main challenges arising with expansion of the database and plans for further actions are presented. A list of the most important sources from which the information was obtained is provided at the end of the article.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a name. About 80 years ago, during World War II, millions of people were deprived not only of their lives and everything they possessed,

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1. New data as of 01.03.2024 – current number of records: about 120,000.
 2. New data as of 01.03.2024 – 106,959.
 3. New data as of 01.03.2024 – 8,000.

but even their names and the memory of them. It happened, among many other places, here in Treblinka. German criminals wanted to annihilate the culture, history and heritage of the Jews, the entire Jewish world. Entire communities were murdered – without exceptions. Treblinka is an extraordinary cemetery of almost 900,000 people: without graves, where no surnames or names can be found on the stone slabs (apart from one name: Janusz Korczak – Henryk Goldszmit). Instead of the names of individual people, one can find the names of towns and villages of the Jewish communities that were murdered here. It is easy to find a stone with the name of a town, but finding the names of the murdered is more difficult. We do not know exactly how many people died in Treblinka. Historians' estimates vary by tens of thousands – the number of inhabitants of a medium-sized city.

According to Jewish tradition, a person dies three times. The first time is when people physically die. The second death is at the funeral. The third death occurs when no one of the living says the name of the deceased anymore. When we created the "Names" project in 2010, we did not know this tradition. In our own way we tried to oppose the anonymity of the victims of the Holocaust. We would find the names and read them aloud in many places in Poland, where Jews – Polish citizens – lived and died. On the last Saturday of each month, we read out names in Treblinka. All the names we have read are available at the website www.projekt-imiona.pl.

In 2015, Samuel Willenberg and Professor Paweł Śpiewak founded the "Memory of Treblinka" Foundation and we joined as members. Since then, the collecting of names became more than a project, it has turned into our life's work: to create a "Book of Names" – a database of the names of victims of the Treblinka extermination camp. The bilingual (Polish and English) database is constantly expanded on the Foundation's websites: www.pamiectreblinka.org and www.memoryoftreblinka.org. At the moment (as of 23 March 2021), 45,442⁴ names of people who died in Treblinka or on the way to Treblinka can be found in it. Another 14,500⁵ names are being reviewed for inclusion in the database. About 4,000⁶ people from the Foundation's database, as far as we know, are not listed in any other large Holocaust database, and in particular they are absent from the Yad Vashem's database. Details of another 1,000 such entries are in preparation.

We would like to mention all these people by name and surname in the Educational Centre that is under construction in Treblinka. It is our wish that a Hall of Names be housed in that facility. The specific manner

4. New data as of 01.03.2024 – 106,959.

5. New data as of 01.03.2024 – 13,000.

6. New data as of 01.03.2024 – 8,000.

of commemoration should be developed by artists. It is important for us to gather all available names of the victims in advance. We will continue collecting the names also after the Hall of Names is built – and it must allow some free space for more names to be added as more people are identified.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST DATABASES OF HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

There are many centres in the world that collect data about the victims of the Holocaust. The largest include: the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, the American Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington (USHMM) and the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Arolsen, Germany, now known as Arolsen Archives. Each of these organizations has a multi-million collection, but the number of victims of the Treblinka camp in each of these archives is relatively small. Yad Vashem collected the largest set of data related to about 100,000 victims of Treblinka. A large database of Treblinka victims is also located in the Ghetto Museum in Terezin (called Theresienstadt during the Second World War), where a concentration camp was organized for approximately 140,000 prisoners, mainly Jews. USHMM has only a dozen or so thousand records regarding Treblinka, while ITS has less than half of the USHMM's number. The reasons for this state of affairs are known. The Germans drew up passenger waybills of Jews deported from Western Europe, while Jews living in Eastern Europe (from which 90% of Treblinka victims came) were either murdered on the spot or put into cattle cars and sent to death camps without any passenger list. Numbers were chalked on the wagons – probably referring to the number of the people in each of them. These numbers were reported to Armia Krajowa (Polish Home Army) by Franciszek Żabecki, a railwayman from the Treblinka station and a member of Armia Krajowa. After adding them up, it was estimated that 1,200,000 people died in Treblinka. However, this number is too high according to scholars.

Below, we present the basic principles of creating a database of Treblinka victims, as adopted by the "Memory of Treblinka" Foundation.

ANALYSIS OF SOURCES FOR THE CREATION OF A DATABASE OF TREBLINKA VICTIMS

In the process of creating a database of victims of the Treblinka extermination camp, the "Memory of Treblinka" Foundation collects information about victims from all possible sources.

The largest source for our database is the Central Database of Shoah

Victims' Names at Yad Vashem (yvng.yadvashem.org), from which we have been able to obtain 24,000⁷ names so far. More than half of them have been provided to us courtesy of Dr Alexander Avram, Director of the Hall of Names Department of the Yad Vashem Institute. The data in this database comes mostly from millions of testimonies ("Page of Testimony"), submitted since the 1950s, most often by relatives of the murdered, on the basis of information in their possession. The data is not always accurate, especially regarding the circumstances of the deaths, but that is often the only information we have.

The second largest source of data used by the Foundation is the information received courtesy of Dr. Tomáš Fedorovič of the Památník Terezín Museum. In September and October 1942, 18,004 people from the concentration camp in Terezín were transported to Treblinka. Out of that number, 17,933 names are known. Mainly old people were deported. Nearly half of them were Jews from the former Czechoslovakia, one third came from Germany and one sixth from Austria. Many of them were born outside these countries, for example in Poland. 80% of the deportees were over the age of 65. The younger ones are almost exclusively Czech Jews, including many children. The vast majority were murdered upon arrival, and only a few of those brought in these transports were left alive. Some of them later co-organized the uprising in Treblinka. Two Czech Jews⁸ not only escaped, but also survived the war. Two out of eighteen thousand! This was the chance for Treblinka prisoners to survive. We have very precise data for the 17,931 people brought from Terezín: almost all their dates of birth, we know from where and when they were deported to Terezín, we know when they were sent to Treblinka. Photos of many of them have been collected on the holocaust.cz website.

Another extensive source used by the Foundation is the work edited by prof. Nadia Danova and Roumen Avramov "Deportation of Jews from West Thrace, Macedonia and Pirot in March 1943 – documents from the Bulgarian archives."⁹ It includes, among other documents, lists of Jews living in North Macedonia (over 7,000) and in eastern Greece – Western Thrace (over 4,000), which the Bulgarian occupation authorities handed over to the Germans in March 1943. As far as we know, no passenger waybill was prepared for them, but there are lists of Jewish inhabitants of these regions prepared just a few days before the deportations. The lists were drawn up

7. New data as of 01.03.2024 – 77,500.

8. Karel Unger and Richard Glazar (pen name of Goldschmid).

9. http://www.marginalia.bg/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/T.1_Deportiraneto_na-evreite.pdf and http://www.marginalia.bg/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/T.2_Deportiraneto_na-evreite.pdf.

and divided by family and residential address. Some bear handwritten notes on them, which show that some people were not arrested, while others were added. This does not mean that everyone on these lists died in Treblinka, but it can be assumed with a very high probability. While the majority of Polish Jews realized what Treblinka meant, and many tried to flee, the deportees from Macedonia, Greece or Terezin were convinced that they were going to work in the alleged factory complex in Treblinka. They were transported in good conditions, they even had to buy tickets, and Bulgarian doctors accompanied them part of the way. Unlike Polish Jews, they travelled in ordinary passenger cars from Vienna to Treblinka. We heard from one of the researchers at Yad Vashem that the doctor accompanying the transport testified in a post-war trial that two young people escaped in Budapest from the ship in which the deportees were transported (on the Danube route from Lom to Vienna). These escapes were unique. Not knowing the language was an additional barrier to escaping.

In the second largest database of Holocaust victims (Holocaust Victims and Survivors Database www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_advance_search.php) created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, information about Treblinka is virtually limited to people who were deported from Terezin.

The source that requires more detailed research from our side is the ITS database in Arolsen. There are more than five thousand records in which the word "Treblinka" appears. Among them there is a complete passenger waybill for a transport from Darmstadt. 883 people left Germany on September 30, 1942 and reached Treblinka two days later, on October 2, 1942.

The Foundation also used over 7,000 accounts and 330 diaries submitted to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. They were mainly set down by Holocaust survivors, but there is also a number of documents written during the war and testimonies of those who helped people in hiding. Some of the accounts were written in Yiddish, but almost all of them were translated into Polish at the Institute. They are also a valuable source of information about the family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances of those who made the reports. Sometimes all we know about a person is that they were someone else's brother-in-law, cousin, or kin; we do not know the name, surname or age – nothing but the tragic story they experienced.

The Foundation also uses a collection of approximately 1,500 reports from the Archives of the Yad Vashem Institute, submitted by Jewish survivors in Poland.

An important Polish source of data regarding the victims of Treblinka are court files which declared individuals dead before the Municipal Courts in many Polish cities shortly after the war. It is a source poorly or completely unexploited by researchers. It should be approached critically as the

accounts of witnesses are not always reliable. Nevertheless, more than half of the people in the files reviewed by us who are listed as murdered in Treblinka do not appear in any other database known to us. Advertisements in "Monitor Polski" play a similar role as the files of Municipal Courts, but they do not offer any detailed descriptions of events, only the personal data of the victims. This data was prepared for the Foundation by Roman Weinfeld (member of the Foundation's Management Board).

Town population registers are a source that requires further analysis. A unique example is the register of Kozienice inhabitants kept during the war, containing information on deaths throughout that period. In the register next to the names of about 3,300 inhabitants there is a stamp with the following text: "displaced on September 27, 1942 in an unknown direction". On that day, Germans deported approx. 13,000 Jews from Kozienice to Treblinka. The stamp does not mean that all of them were killed in Treblinka. We established that a dozen or so people from this group survived the war or were on lists of other camps in 1944/45. No more than a quarter of the people marked as deported are included in the Yad Vashem database, but only a few of them had enough information provided to allow for an accurate identification.

There are few living witnesses of the Holocaust, but we also obtained some of our data from them. For example, from Halina Birenbaum we have information about 47 people – her family, her neighbours and friends. 29 of them have already been reported to Yad Vashem by her or other people, but 18 people appear only in our database. Of these 18 people, 13 died in Treblinka. Information about their families was also passed on to the Foundation by the representatives of the "second generation" – children of the survivors.

A valuable source of data for the Foundation are testimonies submitted via the form available on our website (www.memoryoftreblinka.org/the-names-of-the-victims/remembering-the-names-survey-summary/). To this day, we have received testimonies from over 200 people from various countries, which contain data on nearly 500 people considered murdered in Treblinka. About a third of them do not exist in any of the databases we know. In addition to information, we also often receive photos. Some of our submitters decided to come to Poland and visit Treblinka.

Interviews collected in the archives of the USC Shoah Foundation, created by Steven Spielberg (sfi.usc.edu), constitute a unique source of information. They contain a lot of emotions and judgements, often very painful. In order to fully understand some of their fragments, one needs to know the names of Jewish dishes, geographic places in Poland, and have knowledge of the pre-war and wartime relations between Poles and Jews. Thanks to Spielberg's great initiative, over 51,000 interviews around the world were

recorded in a relatively short time, often literally at the last minute (due to the advanced age of Holocaust survivors). It was not possible for historians alone to conduct these interviews, and it is thus not surprising that the interviewers are not always well prepared. They were provided with a fixed set of questions, had a specific time to listen to the accounts, and therefore often cut the story short and did not ask for details. The reports were more focused on documenting the Shoah and on the individual fates of those interviewed rather than on compiling a detailed list of the Holocaust victims.

In Treblinka (also later in Sobibór), prisoners organized an uprising that ended in a mass escape. After the war, many of the escapees submitted detailed reports, and a dozen or so wrote extensive memoirs about their stay in Treblinka. These memoirs usually contain mentions of many people, but often very laconic, reduced only to the name of a victim from the extermination camp and some story related to them.

There are two additional databases used by the Foundation which need to be mentioned: the database on the Warsaw ghetto created by the Centre for Research on the Extermination of Jews (www.getto.pl) and the Stockholm Holocaust Monument (www.thelocal.se). Data from many other databases (e.g. the Austrian Österreichische Opfer des Holocaust database, www.doew.at) coincide with the data in the above-mentioned sources.

We also use telephone directories, pre-war lists of doctors, address books or genealogical websites, which supplement data about a given person, e.g. address of residence or degree of kinship.

Books of Remembrance¹⁰ for individual localities are also an interesting source. When it is known that the entire community of a given town was deported to Treblinka, it could be assumed that all the victims of the Holocaust mentioned in the Book are at the same time victims of Treblinka. However, we have not adopted this assumption so far. Many were taken to labour camps, resettled, many escaped before or during the liquidation of the ghetto, and finally many died in the ghetto. Therefore, we cannot consider all inhabitants of a given town to be victims of Treblinka, instead we continue to search for detailed information about their fate.

We also use sources created by contemporary Holocaust researchers. People like Christian Webb, Michał Chocholaty, Meir Grover and historians from the Centre for Research on the Extermination of Jews should be mentioned here. Moreover, the sources also include numerous historical studies, memoirs, correspondence, and even, which may surprise many, novels (e.g. *Nowolipie* by Józef Hen or *Dom pisarzy w czasach zarazy* [The

10. Books of Memory were written after World War II among the Jews scattered in the Diaspora to commemorate the Jewish communities that had suffered the Holocaust.

House of Writers in the Times of Plague] by Tomasz Jastrun). The list of our sources, successively supplemented, is available on the Foundation's website; the most important ones are provided at the end of this text.

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN THE DATABASE OF TREBLINKA VICTIMS

When creating the database, we decided to include not only those people who were brought to the place of execution, to the camp itself and murdered here. The vast majority of the deported did reach Treblinka, however there were also the few who managed to escape, or died trying to escape from the transport, and the many who died during the journey. There were transports from which almost no one survived (e.g. transport from Międzyrzec on August 25, 1942).¹¹ The deportation itself was extremely brutal. People who refused to strictly follow orders were most often tortured and killed on the spot. Many people died at concentration points, e.g. at the Umschlagplatz in the Warsaw Ghetto. There were cases of suicide during deportation and during the trip to Treblinka. We decided that our database of the victims of Treblinka should include all those who were arrested for deportation to Treblinka and died in various circumstances – during arrest, during deportation, in a wagon on the way to Treblinka, or in Treblinka itself. If we read in a report that a given person was in the Umschlagplatz and there is no information that he/she managed to escape from there, we assume that this person is a victim of Treblinka. People who died immediately before deportation, or who committed suicide at the news of the upcoming action, do not belong to this group.

Despite a fairly clear definition of who is counted as a victim of Treblinka, decisions often have to be made only on the basis of a fragmentary description. Can a Treblinka escapee who did not survive the war be included among the victims of the camp? If the death occurred directly as a result of an escape from the camp, the data about such a person will be found in the Treblinka victims database. If, on the other hand, the escape was successful but they died later under different circumstances, then, according to our approach, they are not Treblinka victims. And what about situations where the trace of a given person is lost, and the only thing we know about them is that they were in a ghetto whose inhabitants were transported to Treblinka? When there are indications that there was

11. Testimony of Jankiel Wiernik, Archiwum Akt Nowych, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj [Archive of New Files, Delegation of the Government of the Republic of Poland at Home], 202-II-29.

contact with a given person until the deportation, and not after the deportation, we consider the person a victim of the extermination camp. The mere fact of being in the ghetto is not enough to enter details of such persons in the Foundation's database.

There are sometimes contradictory reports, e.g. according to a document from Arolsen a person was transported from Darmstadt to Treblinka, and according to that person's child, who gave a testimony at Yad Vashem – to Auschwitz. When there is at least one credible account of a deportation to Treblinka and its possibility is not excluded by another document (e.g. a list of persons from another camp), we enter data about such persons into the database, listing the various places of alleged death (e.g. Treblinka/Auschwitz). When the account is not reliable enough, we disregard it. Family members often rely on hearsay and uncertain information, especially if they themselves were in a completely different place during the war (e.g. in the USSR). Due to the fact that the dates of all 10 transports from Terezin to Treblinka and the names of 99.6% of those deported are known, it is easy to assess the accuracy of the information about former prisoners of Terezin. When the report mentions someone who is not on any list known to us, and who was allegedly deported from Terezin to Treblinka on a completely different date, we believe that this information is unreliable.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE VICTIMS INCLUDED IN THE FOUNDATION'S DATABASE

We care not only about the number of records in the database, but also about the memory of specific people. Therefore, in addition to basic personal data, essential for every database of Holocaust victims, we try to include, whenever possible, additional information. Sometimes these are last words, sometimes the circumstances of death, appearance, behaviour. It is not a formal biographical summary, which in the case of famous people can be easily found in other sources. We want to bring the person closer as a living human being and offer at least one more detail about them.

Occupation is an important piece of information about a victim, an important element of one's identity, so we want to provide it in as precise terms as possible. Most often this does not pose a problem, as professions such as merchant, teacher or pianist existed before the war and still exist today. But many professions have since disappeared. For example, more people were involved in the production of shoes in the past and there were specialists in various types and elements of shoes, e.g. manufacturers of uppers only. Today, even the shoemakers themselves are few in number.

Sometimes it requires consultation and research to determine the profession. For example, *опинчар* (*opinchar*) – a profession appearing in Bulgarian documents – is not known today (we asked Bulgarians about it), but it denoted a shoemaker producing moccasins (a kind of leather loafers).

Information about a single person recorded in the Foundation's database is an original compilation of data collected about them from all available sources. We have at least one source of information for each person who has a record in the database. There are people whose information comes from as many as six sources. The records containing data broken down by source are archived separately (they are not visible on our website), but we are able to check where each individual piece of information about a given person comes from.

Family relationships between the victims are of particular importance to us. The most common information available in databases comes from identity documents – parents' names, maiden name, mother's maiden name. We would like those loving husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, children and their parents and grandparents, sometimes great-grandparents, separated forever by the Holocaust – to be reunited. This is often a very difficult task. The names of the victims were written in various alphabets, including Hebrew without vowels. The transliteration of these surnames into the Latin alphabet can be very different. The relatively short name *Lipszyc* can be written in 90 different ways. When one person makes an account of a given family, the surname of the family members is usually written in the same way. Very often, however, it turns out that accounts come from various sources. It is not easy to find members of the *Silbersztajn* family among people with the surname *Zylbershtein*, for example. We mark dubious decisions with a question mark in the database. Finding family members or connecting a lost child with a mother means a speck of memory is restored.

Address information is also important. Addresses make it easier to realize that during the Holocaust we lost our close neighbours. Several people who are in our database lived in the house where we live today. When I moved in over 50 years ago, one of the daughters of a *Treblinka* victim lived next to me. At the time I had no idea about it.

On every last Saturday of the month, a dozen or so people gather at the monument of the victims of *Treblinka*, near the place where the gas chambers were located, to commemorate the people killed there. We distribute cards about the victims of the Holocaust. In addition to the name and surname, we always try to provide at least a short story about each person. These cards show not only the enormity of the crime, but also the individual dramas. The end of the world – the world of every person murdered here – happened 900,000 times in *Treblinka*.

PRESENTATION OF THE VICTIMS' DATA IN THE FOUNDATION'S DATABASE

The presentation of Treblinka victims in the Foundation's database is split into two stages. The database allows viewers to first search for a person according to many criteria (name, surname, date of birth, parents' names, maiden name, sex, age, country, city, profession, source of information). In addition to the standard search method, the Soundex method, i.e. searching by phonetic convergence, is also available in the database. With this tool, when the surname Lipszyc is entered, for example, other similarly-sounding surnames are also displayed. The database also allows you to sort the results according to several criteria.

After viewing the results in the table, one can get more detailed information about each person by clicking on their data and going to the next screen. The detailed presentation screen shows all the information about a given person in the Foundation's possession, as well as their photo (if any) and a list of their family members. We hope that someday it will be possible to display a family tree showing family relationships. At present, the terms used – e.g. mother, son, daughter-in-law, grandson – must suffice. Among family members there are also people who died in the Holocaust, but not in Treblinka. They cannot be searched for on the main search screen – it only shows details of those who died in Treblinka or on their way to this camp. However, when we know that someone close to a Treblinka victim is also a victim of the Shoah, but died elsewhere, we provide information about such persons among family members.

Pictures of both individuals and families are an important element of the presentation. The photos were most often taken before the war. They show ordinary people, full of life and warmth. These photos do not differ from the pre-war photos of Polish, German, Czech, Greek and other families. They testify to the fact that they were ordinary citizens of European countries – just like us except different by the fact of being Jews.

THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO BUILDING THE TREBLINKA VICTIMS' DATABASE

Building a database of Treblinka victims requires constant discussions, decisions and research. The dilemmas concern, for example, whether a given person can be classified as a victim of Treblinka, whether we have sufficient grounds to determine family relationships, whether the data we have relates to the same or two different people. We mark doubtful situations with a question mark. Some decisions have to be made arbitrarily based on

residual data. The French and the Dutch have almost complete data of the victims of the Holocaust who were citizens of their countries. The dates and places of their birth and the dates and places of death are available. Meanwhile, for Polish Jews – who probably accounted for around 90% of Treblinka victims – the data is scant. When we have two different accounts of people with the same name and surname, from the same locality and of a similar age, can we assume that they are the same person? Is the description “Růžena Kohnová from Prague, aged 60+”, enough to identify a person? Only 2% of Treblinka victims were from Terezin, but within that relatively small group there were six different persons named Růžena Kohnová from Prague aged 60+. And apart from them, there was another Růžena Kohnová from Prague, aged 32, and one Růžena Kohnová from Pilsen, aged 61 or 68.

Is the information that people lived at the same address sufficient to consider them family? Could it be that the age difference between mother and child was 15 years or less? Are Chaja and Hela the same name? Polish Jews, apart from their Jewish names, often used Polish first names. It is easier to identify people when their Polish name is equivalent to a Jewish name, but it doesn't have to be that way.

In many databases, including ours, the information provided about a person is highly fragmented. We try to find more details for each of them in all possible sources. But it is good to have at least rudimentary data about the person. In a few cases, we decided to include a story in the database about a person whose first and last name is unknown at present but may be identified in the future, for example, the moving story of the death of Aron Czechowicz's brother-in-law (AŻIH 301/688, rel. Aron Czechowicz). Our sources often contain stories about people who are mentioned only in passing or described without details which would render their identification possible. Some accounts are not considered to be reliable enough. A very moving story about an attempt by a German admiral to get his maid and her daughter out of the Umschlagplatz is probably untrue – we know nothing about a German admiral living in Warsaw. We believe it is based on the arrest of the maid of Austrian SS-Sturmbannführer Hermann Höfle. When Höfle came to take her and her daughter out from the Umschlagplatz, the cattle cars were already sealed. This is the same Höfle who was the author of the famous telegram sent on January 11, 1943 from Lublin, a very important proof of the scale of the Nazi genocide.

We have a list of approximately 1,500 inhabitants of Konstantynów, dating from April 1940, almost ready to be included in the database. Meir G. Grover (Yizkor to Jewish Konstantynow Podlaski) mentions them as Treblinka victims. However, there is no concrete evidence that these people

died in Treblinka or during the deportation. So far, we have not decided to include this list in the Foundation's database.

On March 30, 1943, according to one of the railway dispatches, a train from the Third Reich was sent to Sobibór. Transports of Jews from Greece and Macedonia were described in this way in railway dispatches at this time. Does this mean that some of those brought from Greece and Macedonia went not to Treblinka but to Sobibór? Does this question the validity of the recognition that people deported by the Bulgarians ended up in Treblinka? When over 11,000 people from this list are added to the database, we will post on our website the information about a possible transport to Sobibór, but we consider all of them victims of the Treblinka camp.

The size of our database is a growing problem. It's not just a matter of tools. For the day-to-day data processing we use Excel, which is not very efficient in dealing with files over 20 MB. It is increasingly more difficult to verify whether the information obtained relates to a new person or a person already entered in the database. A significant challenge is also the speed of presenting search results on the Foundation's website.

Despite the increasingly complex procedures of ensuring data purity and their verification, the database is not free from errors. That is why we continue to create (and apply) new methods of verifying the correctness of data in the database.

The resilience of the database to external attacks is also a problem. All websites that allow the user to enter information are more vulnerable to an external cyber-attack. Last year, one such attack immobilized the Foundation's website for several days.

The need for various translations is also a challenge. We greatly appreciate the people who support us in translating. One such person is Nomi Waksberg, who not only translates, but also adds explanations of the more difficult terms, such as e.g. "vidui"?¹² Translating documents from Bulgarian or German poses a particular problem. Reading extensive files in Polish is also an issue. The Foundation benefits from the competence and commitment of many people, for which they deserve huge thanks.

Last but not least come our efforts to ensure that the database is of value not only for commemoration, but also for Holocaust researchers. That is why it is very important to us to have consultations with the outstanding Holocaust historian Alina Skibińska to confirm that the methods used by us are historically and academically valid.

12. Jewish Jom Kipur prayer, confession of sins.

FURTHER ACTIVITIES CONCERNING THE CREATION OF THE TREBLINKA VICTIMS' DATABASE

By the end of 2022,¹³ the Foundation plans to create a complete list of Treblinka victims based on all the most important and accessible sources. However, the job of sifting through all available sources is a task for at least the next few years. In addition, we are constantly discovering (or someone informs us) about new sources that require review and analysis. We want as many people as possible to know about the “Book of Names” – the database of Treblinka victims created by the Foundation. We are convinced that this is helped by an interesting Facebook profile run by Małgorzata Sołtysik, a member of the Foundation’s Management Board. We are grateful for any information, even if it concerns only one person, even if it is only the name and surname. Each subsequent recorded person means one less person who died in this terrible place is anonymous.

CONCLUSIONS

When information focuses on the scale of a given crime or catastrophe, reported in the hundreds of thousands, the individual dimension of the tragedy may disappear. This individual dimension is brought closer by photographs, as has been discussed above. But not all of them: most of the photos from the times of the Holocaust show people horribly devastated by the war. Images so remote from the reality around us give the impression that what happened during the Holocaust concerned someone else, was part of a different world, a world distant from ours, alien in some way. Such images can even make it difficult to understand what happened during these dark times. Perhaps the Germans, by including such images in wartime propaganda films, hoped that they would arouse not sympathy, but resentment and disgust. It is the words of the war testimonies, diaries, and verbal accounts that allow us to see how little people have changed since then. Reading memoirs, looking at pre-war photos, listening to spoken reports, we become convinced that the people were just like us, except that they were sentenced to death. They had similar dreams, plans, hopes, loves, interests, weaknesses or moments of genius. The things they left behind are their fear, suffering and tears – which we must remember. And there are Names left that we should keep saying so that the victims do not die the for third time.

13. In compiling the list, the Foundation cooperates with other institutions. Sometimes this cooperation requires more time than expected. As of 1.03.2024, the essential work should be completed in 2024.

List of sources used to compile the database.¹⁴ Only sources from which at least 10 persons have been entered are included. More than one source can be associated with one person.

No	Source	Number of persons in the database
1	"Pages of Testimony" deposited at the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem	24,441*
2	Museum Terezín Memorial Site – archival collections gathered in Terezín	17,932
3	Deportation of Jews from West Thrace, Macedonia and Pirot in March 1943 – Documents from Bulgarian Archives, ed. by N. Danova and R. Avramov, Sofia: Obedineni Izdateli, 2013	11,173 (in progress)
4	The database of Holocaust victims on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: www.ushmm.org	7,137
5	Österreichische Opfer des Holocaust, Archives of Austrian Holocaust victims, Dokumentation-sarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes	2,857
6	Szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl – register of inhabitants of the city of Koźienice	about 3,300 (in progress)
7	The State Archives in Warsaw, containing the files of the District Courts in cases concerning presumption of death, inheritance, etc.	1,275
8	Arolsen Archives – digital archive	882**
9	Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw – written reports in this Archive	872
10	Stockholm Holocaust Monument – the monument commemorates 8,000 victims whose relatives survived the war and came to Sweden	762
11	Yad Vashem Archive – written reports submitted to the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem	537

14. The list of major sources has not changed significantly. The total number of sources increased from about 300 to more than 500. Some numbers in the table have been corrected.

No	Source	Number of persons in the database
12	Memory of Treblinka Foundation (deposited accounts)	514
13	USC (University of South California) Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive®	408***
14	Official Journal of the Republic of Poland <i>Monitor Polski</i>	392
15	Telephone directories (published up to 1939) printed and/or available at www.genealogyindexer.org	325
16	Internet database on the Warsaw ghetto: getto.pl	299
17	Federal Archives of Germany, available at www.bundesarchiv.de	267
18	Meir Halevi Grover, <i>Yizkor to Jewish Dlugosiodlo Poland</i> , Second Generation Publication, 2019	244
19	Chris Webb, Michal Chocholatý, <i>The Treblinka Death Camp: History, Biographies, Remembrance</i> , Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2014	218
20	<i>Books of Remembrance of Jewish Communities</i> , ed. by Andrzej Trzciński, Adam Kopciowski, Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2014	153
21	Files of the Institute of National Remembrance from the investigation into the crime of genocide committed by officers of the Third German Reich in the years 1942-1943 in the German Nazi extermination camp in Treblinka	150
22	Stolpersteine_in_Hamburg (www.stolpersteine-hamburg.de)	148
23	Cemeteries database: www.findagrave.com	132
24	Jan Bogdan Gliński, <i>Biographical Dictionary of Doctors and Pharmacists: Victims of the Second World War</i> , vol. 1-6, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Dwa Światy, 1997-2018	122
25	Korczakianum – a centre documenting the life and legacy of Janusz Korczak: www.korczakianum.muzeumwarszawy.pl	113

No	Source	Number of persons in the database
26	Wiesław Paszkowski, <i>Cmentarz żydowski w Częstochowie</i> , Częstochowa: Muzeum Częstochowskie, 2012	88
27	Centropa, a foundation collecting documents on the fate of twentieth-century Jews from Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans: www.centropa.org	87
28	Information from the online encyclopaedia – www.wikipedia.org .	70
29	Foundation for the Documentation of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland – database containing inscriptions from many Jewish cemeteries in Poland: www.cemeteryjewish.org.pl	64
30	Miriam and Saul Kuperhand, <i>Shadows of Treblinka</i> , Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998	62
31	Henryk Makower, <i>Pamiętnik z getta warszawskiego</i> , Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1987	57
32	<i>Dzieci Holocaustu mówią...</i> , vol. 1-5, Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie "Dzieci Holocaustu, 1993-2014 – memories collected by the Association of 'Children of the Holocaust'"	49
33	Halina Birenbaum – a private person	47
34	Emanuel Ringelblum, <i>Kronika getta warszawskiego. Wrzesień 1939 – styczeń 1943</i> , ed. by A. Eisenbach, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1988	43
35	Ghetto Fighters' House Archives – Archives of Holocaust victims located in the Beit Lohamei Haghetat kibbutz	42
36	Yizkor Book Garwolin – the memory book of the Garwolin Jews	42
37	Website of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and their descendants: www.czestochowajews.org	41

No	Source	Number of persons in the database
38	Helena Szereszewska, <i>Krzyż i mezuza</i> , Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1993	41
39	PSJ – Polish Judaic Dictionary, developed by the Jewish Historical Institute	37
40	Meir Garbarz Grover, <i>Yizkor to Jewish Konstantynow Podlaski</i> , Second Generation Publication, 2018	30
41	Bartłomiej Samarski, <i>Zaginieni 1939-1945 w świetle akt Sądu Grodzkiego w Białymstoku</i> , t. 2: Białystok Region, Białystok: Prymat, 2011	27
42	Roman Weinfeld – a private person	24
43	<i>Official list: doctors, dentists, pharmacists, medical assistants, nurses, midwives, authorized and independent dental technicians...</i> , Warszawa 1939	24
44	Source for Jewish genealogy research: www.jewishgen.org	24
45	Richard Glazar, <i>Stacja Treblinka</i> , Warszawa: Ośrodek KARTA, 2011	23
46	<i>The Martyrdom of Jewish Physicians in Poland</i> , ed. by Louis Falstein. New York: Exposition Press, 1963	23
47	<i>Losy żydowskie. Świadećtwo żywych</i> , t. 1-3, ed. by Marian Turski, Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Żydów Kombatantów i Poszkodowanych w I Wojnie Światowej, 1996-2006	22
48	Genealogy information website: www.geni.com	22
49	Samuel Willenberg, <i>Revolt in Treblinka</i> , Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2008	21
50	Maria Ciesielska, <i>Lekarze getta warszawskiego</i> , Warszawa: Dwa Światy, 2017	21
51	Stolpersteine_in_Berlin (www.stolpersteine-berlin.de)	21

No	Source	Number of persons in the database
52	Marek Edelman, <i>Nieznane zapiski o getcie warszawskim</i> , ed. by Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat, Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2017	20
53	Vladka Meed (Feigle Peltel), <i>On Both Sides of the Wall: Memoirs from the Warsaw Ghetto</i> , trans. by Steven Meed, New York: Holocaust Library, 1979	20
54	Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team, available at: www.holocaustresearchproject.org	20
55	Abraham Lewin, <i>A Cup of Tears: a Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto</i> , Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988	19
56	Władysław Dov Kornblum, <i>Ostatnia latorośl: wspomnienia małego chłopca z getta warszawskiego</i> , Warszawa: Ypsylon, 2002	17
57	Simche Poliakewicz, <i>W cieniu Treblinki</i> , Tel Awiw: Ziomkostwo Sokołowa Podlaskiego w Izraelu, 1957 (online access: www.sokolow.jewish.pl/simche-poliakewicz/w-cieniu-treblinki)	17
58	CRARG (Czestochowa-Radomsko Area Research Group) – www.crarg.org	16
59	Anka Grupińska, <i>Ciągle po kole: rozmowy z żołnierzami getta warszawskiego</i> , Warszawa: Twój Styl, 2000	16
60	Shalom Foundation – website www.zydzipolscy.pl , run by this Foundation	15
61	Website constituting the community museum of Jews from Białystok and the region: www.jewishbialystok.pl	15
62	The family website: www.wikitree.com	15
63	<i>Czarny rok, czarne lata</i> , ed. by Wiktoria Śliwowska, Warszawa: Polityka, 1996	14
64	The Book of Częstochowa – translation of Sefer Czenstochow. www.czenstochowajews.org	14

No	Source	Number of persons in the database
65	Tadeusz Obremski, <i>Wśród zatrutych noży. Zapiski z getta i okupowanej Warszawy</i> , Warszawa: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2018	14
66	Passages of Memory Foundation, cultivating the multicultural heritage of Tomaszów Mazowiecki: www.pasazepamieci.pl	14
67	Irena Birnbaum, <i>Non omnis moriar</i> , Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982	14
68	Oral History Archive – a collection of reports created by the Karta Center, available at: www.audiohistoria.pl	14
69	<i>Gazeta Otwocka</i> , special edition on the fate of Otwock Jews, August 2012	13
70	Ita Dimant, <i>Moja część życia</i> , Warszawa: Twój Styl, 2001	13
71	<i>Righteous Among Nations. How Poles Helped the Jews 1939-1945</i> , ed. by Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewin, London: Earls court Publications, 1969	13
72	Virtual Shtetl – the website of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews: www.sztetl.org.pl	13
73	Central Judaica Database, which provides digital images of Judaica from many Polish museums, archives and private collections: judaika.polin.pl	12
74	Suzanna Eibuszyc, <i>Memory Is Our Home</i> , Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2015	12
75	Henryka Urbańska – a private person	11
76	Yankel Wiernik, <i>A Year in Treblinka</i> , New York: American representation of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland, 1945 (available online at: https://www.zchor.org/treblink/wiernik.htm)	11
77	Janina Winawer-Szczuka – a private person	10
<p>* As of 01.03.2024 – approximately 77,500.</p> <p>** As of 01.03.2024 – 4,100.</p> <p>*** As of 01.03.2024 – over 700.</p>		

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COMMEMORATION OF THE MARTYRDOM OF ROMA AND SINTI VICTIMS IN THE NAZI GERMAN PENAL LABOUR CAMP AND THE EXTERMINATION CAMP IN TREBLINKA

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in the efforts of Roma and Sinti activists and organizations to commemorate the Nazi Genocide. Unfortunately, long after World War II, Roma and Sinti were not recognized as victims of Nazism, leading to their persecution being referred to as the 'Forgotten Holocaust'.

The struggle for official recognition of the Roma and Sinti Genocide began in the 1960s, with significant contributions from German Sinti and Roma activists. They dedicated years to commemorating the victims of the Genocide.¹ Notable efforts included a commemorative rally in 1979 at the Bergen-Belsen former concentration camp and a hunger protest in 1980 at the Dachau former concentration camp, organized by Romani Rose, the leader of the Romani community, along with a group of activists, including former prisoners.

In September 1981, 18 German Sinti occupied the basement of the archives at the University of Tübingen, demanding the transfer of Nazi files stored there to the Federal Archives. Some documents were transferred after a few hours, but tragically, around 20,000 German files related to the

1. A. Mirga-Kruszelnicka, E. Acuña C. and P. Trojański, Introduction to *Education for Remembrance of the Roma Genocide. Scholarship, Commemoration, and the Role of Youth*, eds A. Mirga-Kruszelnicka, E. Acuña C. and P. Trojański, Cracow 2015, pp. 12-13.

Nazi genocide against the Roma and Sinti remain lost to this day.² These actions aimed to draw public and media attention to the Nazi Genocide of Europe's Roma and Sinti. As a result of these efforts, on March 17, 1982, the Federal Republic of Germany officially recognized the National Socialist crimes against Roma and Sinti as racially motivated:³

While recognition of the Shoah was a prerequisite for Germany to be re-admitted to the international community, after 1945, the fate of our people has been suppressed and denied. Neither a political reassessment nor a legal or historical reappraisal of this crime has taken place. In the Federal Republic, it took nearly 40 years before the Nazi genocide of the Sinti and Roma was recognized under international law for the first time in 1982 by the then German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt.⁴

After years of struggle to acknowledge and commemorate the Roma and Sinti victims of the Nazi genocide, August 2nd was designated as the International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. This date holds symbolic significance as it marks the tragic event on August 2, 1944, when approximately 4,200-4,300 Roma and Sinti imprisoned in *Zigeunerlager*, including men, women, and children, were murdered, and thus the "Gypsy camp" in Auschwitz-Birkenau was liquidated.⁵ In recognition of this solemn occasion, the Polish Parliament officially established August 2nd as the Roma and Sinti Genocide Memorial Day in 2011.⁶ Additionally, in 2015, the European Parliament also recognized August 2nd as the Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.⁷

2. D. Gress, *Sinti and Roma in the Federal Republic of Germany* <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/sinti-and-roma-federal-republic-germany/> (accessed: 5.05.2021).

3. *The National Socialist Genocide of the Sinti and Roma. Catalogue of the permanent exhibition in the State Museum of Auschwitz*, ed. by R. Rose, Heidelberg: Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti and Roma, 2003, p. 9.

4. R. Rose, "The civil rights movement of German Sinti and Roma and the struggle for recognition" [in:] *Beyond the Roma Holocaust. From resistance to Mobilisation*, ed. by T. M. Buchsbaum and S. Kapralski, Warsaw-Cracow 2017, p. 35.

5. Sinti and Roma (Gypsies) in Auschwitz: <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/categories-of-prisoners/sinti-and-roma-gypsies-in-auschwitz/> (accessed: 5.05.2021)

6. *Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 29 lipca 2011 r. w sprawie ustanowienia Dnia Pamięci o Zagładzie Romów i Sinti* (M.P. 2011 nr 70 poz. 690) <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WMP20110700690> (accessed: 1.05.2021).

7. Press Releases: *MEPs urge end to Roma discrimination and recognition of Roma Genocide Day*; <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/>

STATE OF RESEARCH

The existing literature about Roma and Sinti Persecution in Forced Labor Camp and the Extermination Camp in Treblinka is primarily limited to the positions and monographs published by Treblinka Museum. The most valuable and important works are e.g. chapters: "Holokaust Romów w niemieckich nazistowskich obozach w Treblince (w dokumentach Oddziałowej Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Szczecinie). Zarys problemu" [The Holocaust of the Roma in the German Nazi camps in Treblinka (in the documents of the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Branch in Szczecin). Outline of the problem],⁸ by Krzysztof Bukowski, and "Uroczystość upamiętniająca Romów i Sinti pomordowanych w Treblince (30 lipca 2014 roku)" [A ceremony commemorating the Roma and Sinti murdered in Treblinka (July 30, 2014)]⁹ by Andrzej Sochaj.

Information about Roma and Sinti Persecution in Treblinka also appears in monographs: *Treblinka. Nigdy więcej* [Treblinka. Never again] by Edward Kopówka,¹⁰ *Obóz Pracy Treblinka I. Metodyka Integracji Danych Wieloźródłowych* [Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. Methodology of Multi-Source Data Integration],¹¹ and *Obóz Zagłady Treblinka II. Topografia Zbrodni* [The Extermination Camp Treblinka II. Topography of Crime].¹²

press-room/20150414IPR41851/meps-urge-end-to-roma-discrimination-and-recognition-of-roma-genocide-day (accessed: 1.05.2021).

8. K. Bukowski, "Holokaust Romów w niemieckich nazistowskich obozach w Treblince (w dokumentach Oddziałowej Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Szczecinie). Zarys problemu" [The Holocaust of the Roma in the German Nazi camps in Treblinka (in the documents of the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Branch in Szczecin). Outline of the problem] [in:] *Treblinka – History and memory*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce, Muzeum Regionalne w Siedlcach, 2015, pp. 57-77.

9. A. Sochaj, "Uroczystość upamiętniająca Romów i Sinti pomordowanych w Treblince (30 lipca 2014 roku)" [A ceremony commemorating the Roma and Sinti murdered in Treblinka (July 30, 2014)] [in:] *Treblinka – History and memory*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce, Muzeum Regionalne w Siedlcach, 2015, pp. 135-142.

10. E. Kopówka, *Treblinka. Nigdy więcej*, [Treblinka. Never again], Siedlce, Muzeum Regionalne w Siedlcach, 2002, p. 38.

11. S. Różycki, M. Michalski, and E. Kopówka, *Obóz Pracy Treblinka I. Metodyka Integracji Danych Wieloźródłowych* [Treblinka I. Forced Labor Camp. Methodology of Multi-Source Data Integration], Warszawa-Treblinka 2017, p. 52, 92.

12. S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, and Zalewska N., *Obóz Zagłady Treblinka II. Topografia Zbrodni* [The Extermination Camp Treblinka II. Topography of Crime], Warszawa-Treblinka 2019, pp. 28-29.

A variety of valuable evidence of Roma and Sinti's traumatic experience, which began in transport to Treblinka and ended in Treblinka camp, was provided by Krzysztof Bukowski – a prosecutor of the former Chief Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland. His research was published in 2014 by the Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek in a book titled *Tragedia Romów w Niemieckich Nazistowskich Obozach w Treblince* [The Tragedy of the Roma in the German Nazi Camps in Treblinka].¹³

Another valuable source of knowledge is the memoir of Mieczysław Chodźko – a former prisoner of the Penal Labour Camp, who, in his book¹⁴ (in chapter 7th titled “The Gypsies in Treblinka”), wrote about the fate of Roma and Sinti in Treblinka, including their executions.

However, it should be strongly emphasized that none of the papers mentioned above fully bridges the gap in research on Roma and Sinti martyrdom in the Penal Labour Camp and the Extermination Camp in Treblinka.

Broader research on the commemoration of Roma and Sinti victims can be found in the book by Natalia Gancarz, *Na Bister. Nie zapomnij. Do not forget* in which the author presented in detail the places of remembrance and their geographical location.¹⁵

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

The aim of this chapter is to synthesize current knowledge about the persecution of Roma and Sinti in the Nazi German Penal Labour Camp and the Extermination Camp in Treblinka and to outline the direction of historical memory on this subject. The research is motivated by the significant lack of knowledge about the extent of the Genocide faced by this ethnic group, even years after the events took place. To achieve this goal, the research utilized source analysis, mainly from literature, archival materials, and reports, along with interviews conducted with Roman Chojnacki, the former President of the Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek and a member of the Joint Commission of the Government and National and Ethnic Minorities. Qualitative methods were employed to analyze the findings, providing a basis for the later description of events in the paper.

13. K. Bukowski, *Tragedia Romów w Niemieckich Nazistowskich Obozach w Treblince* [The tragedy of the Roma in the German Nazi Camps in Treblinka], Szczecinek: Związek Romów Polskich z siedzibą w Szczecinku, 2014.

14. M. Chodźko, *Ucieczka z Treblinka* [Escape from Treblinka], Montréal 2004.

15. *Na bister. Nie zapomnij. Do not forget*. ed. by N. Gancarz, trans. by M. Zaród, Tarnów: Komitet Opieki nad Zabytkami Kultury Żydowskiej w Tarnowie, 2020.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, aimed at shedding new light on existing knowledge, the authors did not specify a research hypothesis.

DEFINITION OF ROMA AND SINTI GENOCIDE

To begin the research on the martyrdom of the Roma and Sinti, it is essential to start with a clear definition of the concept of Genocide as it applies to this specific case. The definition of Genocide adopted for this research aligns with Article II of the United Nations *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, dated December 9, 1948. According to this definition, “Genocide” includes

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.¹⁶

The terms “Roma Genocide,” “Samudaripen,” and “Porrajmos” are used to refer to the mass extermination and persecution of the Roma and Sinti during World War II.¹⁷ However, it’s important to note that the term “Porrajmos” has been criticized by some Roma activists due to its connotations (such as absorption, rape, or reaction to something terrible). As a result, this paper will refrain from using the term “Porrajmos” in consideration of these concerns.

THE FATE OF ROMA AND SINTI IN TREBLINKA CAMP

Research on the Roma and Sinti Genocide faces challenges in determining the exact number of victims. It is commonly acknowledged that

16. The definition of the Genocide: *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml> (accessed: 1.05.2021).

17. C. Andrés, A. Martínez-Millán, “Education for Remembrance of the Roma Genocide: Reflections from the Conference” [in:] *Education for Remembrance of the Roma Genocide. Scholarship, Commemoration, and the Role of Youth*, ed. by A. Mirga-Kruszelnicka, E. Acuña C., and P. Trojański, Cracow 2015, p. 26.

approximately half a million Roma and Sinti were murdered by the Nazis,¹⁸ a symbolic figure representing the extent of the tragedy, according to Donald Kenrick.¹⁹

In occupied Poland, Roma and Sinti faced persecution in concentration camps and ghettos, with entire Roma camps and settlements wiped out. The vast number of Roma and Sinti bodies were buried in forests and countryside areas. After World War II, local communities exhumed the graves and sometimes placed the remains in cemeteries or nameless graves, but some sites remain forgotten or not commemorated to this day.

Due to the lack of documentation and prisoner registers from the Treblinka camp, testimonial evidence from witnesses and former prisoners represents the only source of knowledge about Roma and Sinti in Treblinka. Existing sources and evidence indicate that more than two thousand Roma from Poland and Sinti from Germany were killed in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp and the Treblinka II Extermination Camp.²⁰ However, this number is believed to be significantly higher, as testified by Krzysztof Bukowski's investigation. In the Penal Labour Camp (1941-1944), Roma and Sinti were executed by firing squad, while in the Extermination Camp (1942-1943), they were murdered in gas chambers.²¹

The investigation done by Krzysztof Bukowski²² and research by historians of the Treblinka Museum (including Edward Kopówka²³), Roma and Sinti were murdered immediately after arriving at Treblinka. However, there are also known cases of prisoners who worked inside or outside the camp or who managed to escape. Witnesses' testimonies reveal that Roma and Sinti were murdered at the Execution Site of the Labor Camp Treblinka I, with men killed first, followed by women with children.²⁴

18. S. Kapralski, "Roma Holocaust: The End of Silence" [in:] *Education for Remembrance of the Roma Genocide. Scholarship, Commemoration, and the Role of Youth*, eds. A. Mirga-Kruszelnicka, E. Acuña C. and P. Trojański, Cracow 2015, p. 43.

19. D. Kenrick, "The Genocide of the Gypsies: What We Now Know and What We Still Don't Know" [in:] *The Holocaust in History and Memory*, ed. by R. Schulze, vol. 3, 2010, p. 28.

20. K. Bukowski, *Tragedia Romów...*, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

21. K. Bukowski, "Holokaust Romów...", *op.cit.*, p. 63.

22. See: K. Bukowski, *Tragedia Romów...*, *op.cit.*; K. Bukowski, "Holokaust Romów...", *op.cit.*, pp. 57-77.

23. See: E. Kopówka, *Treblinka. Nigdy więcej*, *op.cit.*, pp. 38, 108; S. Różycki, M. Michalski, E. Kopówka, *Obóz Pracy Treblinka I...*, *op.cit.* See also: S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *Obóz Zagłady Treblinka II...*, *op.cit.*

24. K. Bukowski, "Holokaust Romów...", *op.cit.*, pp. 61.

Krzysztof Bukowski collected crucial evidence of Nazi crimes, including the records of interrogation of witnesses and the preliminary investigation findings from 1944 to 1945 regarding the death of thousands of Poles, Jews, as well as Roma and Sinti, shedding new light on the research on Roma and Sinti Persecution in Treblinka. In his papers, Bukowski quoted statements and testimonies of witnesses and former prisoners of Treblinka (such as Edward Sypko, Szymon F. Kazimierz G., Brenner H., Stanisław K., Barbara Z., Jankiel Wiernik, Mieczysław Chodźko, Szymon G., Tadeusz K.,) who tell and describe the tragic fate of Roma and Sinti in the Nazi German Penal Labour Camp and the Extermination Camp in Treblinka.²⁵

Valuable information was also provided by Mieczysław Chodźko, a former prisoner of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, who managed to escape and detailed the tragic fate of Roma and Sinti in the Nazi German camps. His testimony was previously published in the "Rzeczpospolita" a Polish newspaper on September 6, 1944 (Lublin, no 35), then quoted in many publications²⁶ and finally included in his memoir.²⁷ According to Chodźko, Roma, and Sinti, brought by the Nazis to Treblinka, were deliberately misled that they would live in the camp specially organized for them in the forest. The Nazis allowed them even to start the fire and cook the meal. After a few hours, SS officers arrived in the forest and started the execution by separating the men from women and children. Then, the Nazis led 100 Roma men deep into the woods and shot them with machine guns. The remaining Roma who witnessed this massacre were forced to bury the dead bodies and sometimes those who were only wounded. Then, the Nazis murdered another hundred Roma. After SS officers killed the Roma men, they brutally murdered children by grabbing them by their feet and killing them by hitting their heads against a tree and beating and whipping Romani women. In the end, the Nazis fired machine guns at them. The bodies of women and children were buried in the forest by Treblinka prisoners. Chodźko also mentioned that Roma and Sinti were often buried

25. See: K. Bukowski, *Tragedia Romów...*, *op.cit.*, See also: Id., "Holokaust Romów...", *op.cit.*

26. Testimony of Mieczysław Chodźko is quoted among others in: S. Różycki, M. Michalski, E. Kopówka, *Obóz Pracy Treblinka I...*, *op.cit.*, p. 52, and in J. Ficowski, *Cyganie na polskich drogach* [The Gypsies on Polish roads], Warszawa 2013, pp. 166-167. Part of the testimony is also quoted in *The National Socialist Genocide of the Sinti and Roma. Catalogue of the permanent exhibition in the State Museum of Auschwitz*, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

27. M. Chodźko, *Ucieczka z Trebłinki*, *op.cit.*



1. Józef Trojanek with his wife Zofia Chojnacka
[source: private archive of Chojnacki family]

alive, and usually, the ground on the grave was moving up and down for a few hours after the massacre.²⁸

The biography of Zofia Chojnacka,²⁹ Roman Chojnacki's grandmother, reveals the devastating impact on their family during the Holocaust. Family members, including Zofia's husband, Józef Trojanek, were deported to the Treblinka I Labour Camp in 1942. The Nazis were searching for hiding Jews in Grochów, a district of Warsaw, and they found out that Roma were hiding Jewish children. The Nazis killed the Jewish children right away, including a little boy hidden by Trojanek's wife. However, some of the Jewish children survived because they were mistaken as Roma children. Jan Chojnacki, Józef Trojanek's son, recalled how the Nazis gathered Roma in Grochów and killed 30 Roma, including women, men, and children, before taking the rest to Treblinka. Józef Trojanek managed to escape from the camp but tragically died shortly after his return to Warsaw due to exhaustion and lung disease.³⁰

28. M. Chodźko, *Ucieczka z Trebłinki*, op.cit. pp. 50-51.

29. J. Matkowska, "Biography of Zofia Chojnacka" [in:] *Stories of Resistance (World War II heroes of Roma Resistance in Poland)*, Berlin 2021; <https://eriac.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ZOFIA-CHOJNACKA.pdf>

30. J. Matkowska, "Roma Resistance in occupied Poland" [in:] *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout history: recounting stories of strength and bravery*, ed. by J. Dunajeva and A. Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Berlin 2020, p. 162.

COMMEMORATION OF THE MARTYRDOM OF ROMA AND SINTI IN TREBLINKA

The efforts to commemorate the Roma and Sinti victims murdered in Treblinka began in 2013, with Roman Chojnacki (born in 1965), Roma activist and President of the Polish Roma Association based in Szczecinek, playing a pivotal role in advocating for their remembrance. Since 2005 Chojnacki has been a member of the Joint Commission of the Government and National and Ethnic Minorities representing the Roma minority in Poland. In 2015, Roman Chojnacki was awarded the Silver Cross of Merit by the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, for his effort to protect and maintain the identity of the Roma minority. His commitment to commemorating the Romani victims holds deep personal significance, as his own family members were among those murdered in the Treblinka camp. Furthermore, as mentioned above, his grandfather, Józef Trojanek, was a prisoner of the Penal Labour Camp who managed to escape from captivity.

On July 30, 2014, marking 70 years since the liquidation of the Treblinka I Labor Camp, a ceremony to unveil a monument dedicated to the Roma and Sinti victims took place. The Polish Roma Union spearheaded this initiative, and the ceremony was held under the honorary patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland.

The monument, crafted from red sandstone, is located at the so-called Executions Site of the Labor Camp, adjacent to the monument by Professor Strynkiewicz. Its shape and color symbolically evoke a drop of blood, serving as a poignant reminder of the tragic fate suffered by the Roma and Sinti in Treblinka.³¹

The monument features a commemorative red granite plaque adorned with the Romani flag and an inscription. In the upper right corner, above the inscription, a brief poem by Teresa Mirga, a Romani poet and singer from Czarna Góra in Polish Spisz, is prominently displayed. Notably, the inscription and the poem are presented in three languages: Polish, Romani, and English. Prior to its construction, the design of the monument received approval from the Historic Monuments Conservator, ensuring its adherence to preservation standards. Additionally, the Council for the Protection of Memory of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites funded and coordinated the project, further underscoring the significance of this commemorative effort.³²

31. A. Sochaj, "Uroczystość upamiętniająca Romów i Sinti pomordowanych w Treblince (30 lipca 2014 roku)", *op.cit.*, pp. 135-136.

32. *Ibid.*



2. Monument commemorating Roma and Sinti murdered in the German Nazi Labour Camp and the Extermination Camp in Treblinka
[source: Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek]



3. Monument commemorating Roma and Sinti murdered in the German Nazi Labour Camp and the Extermination Camp in Treblinka
[source: Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek]



4. Plaque of the monument commemorating the Roma and Sinti murdered in the German Nazi Labour Camp and the Extermination Camp in Treblinka [source: Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek]

CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to the dedicated efforts and collaboration between the Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek, the Treblinka Museum, the Council for the Protection of Memory of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, and numerous other institutions, the martyrdom of Roma and Sinti victims in Treblinka has now been officially commemorated, 70 years after the liquidation of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp.

Notably, the monument in Treblinka is one of thirty-six locations in Poland that commemorate the Roma and Sinti.³³ Another place of remembrance created thanks to the effort of Roman Chojnacki is a monument commemorating 4,300 Roma and Sinti from Austria murdered in the Nazi extermination camp in Chełmno, unveiled in 2016.³⁴

Additionally, another place of remembrance about the extermination of the Roma is a monument built in 1973 in the area of the former "Romani family camp" in Birkenau, where over 20,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered.³⁵ Another monument stands in Bełżec, the former extermination camp where 2,500 Polish Roma and German Sinti were killed.³⁶

One of the significant challenges in researching the martyrdom of Roma and Sinti during World War II is the lack of precise data on the population of this ethnic group imprisoned and murdered in extermination camps. This lack of accurate data makes it difficult to fully assess the scale of the Genocide. Much of the information available in the literature is estimated and approximated. This problem extends beyond Poland to all of Europe, where there are over 200 memorial sites dedicated to the murdered Roma and Sinti.

Given the deficit of knowledge on this subject and the ethical aspect involved, it is crucial to approach this issue from a scientific perspective.

33. *Na bister. Nie zapomnij. Do not forget...*, *op.cit.*, p. 46. According to the research of Natalia Gancarz, there are 117 places of commemoration of Roma and Sinti in Germany, 27 in France, 17 in Slovakia, 16 in Austria, 13 in Ukraine, 10 in the Netherlands, 8 in Serbia, 7 in the Czech Republic, 4 in Belgium, 4 in Belarus, 3 in Hungary, 2 in Croatia, 2 in Finland, 2 in Latvia, 1 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1 in Montenegro, 1 in Estonia, 1 in Lithuania and 1 in Slovenia.

34. Roma and Sinti Monument Kulmhof am Nehr, former Nazi extermination camp in <http://muzeum.tarnow.pl/na-bister/chelmno-nad-nerem-kulmhof-pomnik/> (accessed: 1.05.2021).

35. Roma and Sinti Monument in Auschwitz-Birkenau: <http://auschwitz.org/muzeum/aktualnosci/odnowiony-pomnik-w-dawnym-obozie-cyganskim,551.html> (accessed: 1.05.2021).

36. Roma and Sinti Monument in Bełżec former extermination camp <http://muzeum.tarnow.pl/na-bister/belzec-pomnik/> (accessed: 1.05.2021).

Conducting research to shed light on the scale of the Genocide and the identities of the victims, even to a limited extent, becomes essential. Additionally, it is vital to raise awareness among other nations about the Genocide, not only of Jews but also of other persecuted groups such as Roma and Sinti, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, the disabled, etc., all of whom fell victim to the Nazi Holocaust. This effort to increase awareness about the scale of harm and murder is crucial for shaping the historical memory of the victims of Nazi crimes and fostering education on this dark chapter in history.

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THE ROMANI GENOCIDE DURING WORLD WAR II, INCLUDING TREBLINKA – THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT TIMES

THE ROLE AND MEANING OF THE GENOCIDE OF THE ROMA IN THE HISTORY OF THE ROMANI PEOPLE

Today, Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority. They are defined differently depending on the country. In some countries as a national minority, in others as an ethnic minority. The latter terminology is used in Poland. According to the Act of 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language¹, the Roma are defined as an ethnic minority. According to the Act, the ethnicity of this group is supported by the fact that they do not have their own state organized on a given territory. However, this feature is constant and unchanged regardless of the dwelling place of this national minority.

It is worth noting that this national group is heterogeneous and in Poland there are 5 main Roma groups:

1. Polish Roma;
2. Carpathian or Bergitka Roma;
3. Lovari;
4. Kalderash;
5. Sinti.

The territory of Poland is also inhabited by other, smaller groups, such as Russian Roma or Servitka Roma.² All these groups differ in their approach to the tradition and modernization processes, language, clothing and in many other areas.

1. The Act of 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language, www.sejm.gov.pl (accessed: 5.2021).

2. J. Ficowski, *Cyganie na polskich drogach*, Warszawa: Nisza, 2014, pp. 34-35.

Due to open borders and uniting Europe, other groups from Romania, Bulgaria and the Balkan countries have also been coming to Poland in recent years.³

The heterogeneity and internal diversity may also explain the terminology used also in commemorating the Romani genocide, that has increased especially in recent years. The most commonly used term is the Roma and Sinti genocide. Sinti are a group of Roma from German-speaking countries, which shows its specific autonomy and independence on the international stage. However, it should be noted, that they constitute one of the Roma groups also living in Poland, though not in large number. They are an integral part of the Romani people.⁴

According to the last census of 2011, the Roma community has a population of about 17,000 people in Poland. Its distribution is uneven throughout the country. The most numerous communities live in the Lesser Poland and Lower Silesian voivodeships. The least numerous are in the Pomeranian and Świętokrzyskie voivodeships.⁵

A common past is one of the components and of identity of each nation that internally binds each national community. This is also the case here. However, it should be noted, that professional research into the past history of the Roma has increased, especially in recent years. Previously, it was limited to a small group of specialists, admirers and enthusiasts.⁶

The presence of this national minority in Europe has been attested since the mid-fourteenth century. It is over 600 years ago. Long enough to permanently blend in with the cultural heritage of respective nations and societies. One of the characteristics of this nation is the difficulty of recreating its history. This is due to the lack of a tradition of preserving history in a permanent written form. Their history functioned in a customary, oral way, told inside Roma families and circles. However, there was no tradition of writing down and recording it in the form of books and literary works. If there are some, they come mostly from the external environment.⁷

Therefore, the history of the Roma is largely a blank unwritten page.

3. P. Krzyżanowski, A. Łuczak, "Polityka państwa wobec mniejszości romskiej w Polsce. Bilans dokonań w Polsce po 1989 roku i współczesne wyzwania" [in:] *Polityczne i społeczne aspekty wielokulturowości. Migracje i mniejszości*, eds. A. Adamczyk, A. Sakson, C. Trosiak, Poznań: UAM, 2015, pp. 380-383.

4. A. Łuczak, *Sytuacja ludności romskiej na ziemi lubuskiej w XX wieku*, Szczecin: ZRP, 2013, pp. 44-45.

5. Results of the 2011 Census. as cited in: www.stat.gov.pl (accessed: 5.2021).

6. A. Łuczak, *Sytuacja ludności romskiej...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 15-16.

7. L. Mróz, A. Mirga, *Cyganie. Odmienność i nietolerancja*, Warszawa: PWN, 1994, pp. 23-24.

That is why this history is insufficiently present in the consciousness of European societies. National Strategies for the Roma, which support and integrate the Romanies, have become an opportunity in historical education in recent years. Many studies of various scale and effectiveness concerning this history have been created due to greater financial possibilities. The program of Social and Civic Integration of Roma in Poland⁸, that has been implemented from 2021 to 2030, is also a chance. One of the priorities set out in it is historical education. The period of World War II and the Romani genocide is considered one of the main historical events.

A certain positive element in promoting the history of the Roma is the development in education on this subject in Polish schools. One of the history textbooks for 8th grade of primary school by the Publishing House for School and Pedagogical Books contains information about the Roma as victims of the German Nazis regime. In this handbook the Roma are mentioned as a group that, together with Jews and Poles, suffered the most in the last world conflict. It is estimated that there were 600,000 victims of this nation. This is a positive change in education. Hopefully, there will be more of these positive changes.⁹

The period of World War II is one of the most tragic in the history of the nomadic nation. It is an indisputable fact. As has already been emphasized, the Romani genocide has not been permanently present in the consciousness of European societies, including Poland.

One of the characteristics of the Roma's presence in the old continent is the fight against their culture. Much has been done to suppress it throughout history, to limit it and destroy it. Governance systems were oriented towards de-nationalization. Therefore, many edicts and regulations were passed to fight the Romanipen.¹⁰ The Roma language was forbidden, the Romani people were ordered to leave their places of residence – it was associated with banishment from many countries, including German-speaking countries, Hungary, Spain. The effects of such a policy are noticeable today. In many countries, most Roma do not know their language.¹¹

World War II was the apogee of such attitude. The Roma-Sinti did not

8. Program Społecznej i Obywatelskiej Integracji w Polsce w latach 2021-2030, www.mac.gov.pl (accessed: 5.2021).

9. W. Kalwat, P. Szlanta, A. Zawistowski, *Historia – podręcznik 8*, Warszawa: WSIP, 2018, pp. 54-55.

10. Romanipen – a moral code defining rules for the conduct of Roma. Diversified among respective Roma groups.

11. A. Łuczak, "Efektywność pomocy Unii Europejskiej oraz krajowych strategii na rzecz społeczności romskiej" [in:] *Świat Cyganów – Problemy Romów*, eds. C. Obracht-Prondzynski, B. Dejna, NCK, Gdańsk 2017, pp. 249-250.

fit into the new understanding of German society. The increase in these moods had been observed since the times of the Weimar Republic in 1920s. The Roma were forbidden to travel or enter holiday resorts. All of these contributed to an exclusion and discrimination of this group of German citizens.¹²

The sense of belonging to the German community had been strongly developed among the German Sinti before the war. This process was also noticeable in other countries, including Poland. This was evident, among others, after 1945 when many Roma families returned to the rebuilt Poland after the changing of the borders.¹³

The first half of the twentieth century is often referred to as the time of turning away from democracy. In many countries, the system of the rule of liberal democracy collapsed (the birth of fascism in Italy, Spain, and finally the coming to power of the NSDAP in Germany under the rule of Adolf Hitler).

The Roma describe what happened during the war in various ways. The entire genocide process has several names. One of them is *Bibachtale Bersa* (The Unhappy Years), another is *Kali Tras* (the Black Fear), another is *Samudarpjen*. However, the most popularized in recent years is *Porajmos*, meaning the Devouring. All these terms constitute a certain counterweight to the concept of the Holocaust, limited mainly to the Jewish community. There are, however, some similarities between those two communities. The Holocaust during the Second World War is an important element of creating modern consciousness for both nations.¹⁴

The scale of the Romani genocide is still unknown. Most likely, it will be difficult to estimate in the light of the passage of time and fewer and fewer witnesses who can tell about this. The source documents are also scarce; documentation concerning this nation – if any was kept at all – was destroyed.

It is stated at a conservative estimate that about nearly 50-70% of the pre-war population was murdered. This means 500,000-700,000 victims. In some countries, the scale of murder was as high as 90% of the entire community.¹⁵

The following figures come from *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust* and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's online encyclopedia of the Holocaust.

12. A. Łuczak, *Sytuacja ludności romskiej...*, op.cit., pp. 23-24.

13. Ibid., pp. 24-25.

14. S. Kaprański, *Naród z popiołów. Pamięć zagłady a tożsamość Romów*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2012, pp. 44-46.

15. Ibid., pp. 52-53.

Country	Romani population, 1939	Victims	Estimates of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Albania	20,000	?	?
Austria	11,200	6,800	8,250
Belgium	600	350	500
Bulgaria	80,000	0	0
The Czech Republic (Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia)	13,000	5,000	6,500
Estonia	1,000	500	1,000
France	40,000	15,150	15,150
Germany	20,000	15,000	15,000
Greece	?	50	50
Hungary	100,000	1,000	28,000
Italy	25,000	1,000	1,000
Latvia	5,000	1,500	2,500
Lithuania	1,000	500	1,000
Luxembourg	200	100	200
the Netherlands	500	215	500
Poland	50,000	8,000	35,000
Romania	300,000	19,000	36,000
Slovakia	80,000	400	10,000
USSR (1939 borders)	200,000	30,000	35,000
Yugoslavia	100,000	26,000	90,000
Total	947,500	130,565	285,650

TREBLINKA – THE SITE OF THE ROMANI GENOCIDE

In addition to the hundreds of sites, both anonymous and verified ones, the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp and the Treblinka II Extermination Camp are also the places where the Romani genocide took place. Here, too, the Roma were executed on a mass scale. Comparing the Nazi camps in Treblinka with other places of this type, such as the death camps in Chełmno nad Nerem, Auschwitz, Bełżec, the ghettos in Łódź and Warsaw, the camp in Siedlce, some similarities can be noticed.

First of all, it is difficult to recreate and reconstruct what happened in the camp. Especially when it comes to the Roma community, which was often not singled out in the camp records or lists. The Roma were often recorded as stateless, people without any permanent registered residence or identification, especially in Central and Eastern Europe countries, including Poland. The camp documentation does not fully reflect the correct proportions of the prisoners and the persecuted.¹⁶ Another important aspect was the lack of professional research in this area for many years. If there were any studies, they were carried out in a marginal and residual form. Most of them have been conducted in recent years. It is important due to the passing time.

Another obstacle is the silence of the victims themselves about what happened in these places, also in Treblinka. Unfortunately, the memory of these painful events was kept within families, passed on orally, and very rarely written down and recorded. Therefore, the knowledge about these events is residual and fragmentary. It did not reach wider social circles in the form of professional studies, monographs and books.¹⁷

The passage of time and the anonymity of the victims and their difficult experiences is an unfavorable factor in the attempt to recreate what happened at the execution sites. It makes it difficult to reach the survivors of those times. There are fewer and fewer living victims of the Holocaust – Porajmos. When dealing with witnesses of those events, one could also notice one very important factor. Victims and former prisoners were often reluctant to recall those times. They wiped the tragic events from their memory. Is it any wonder? This important aspect must also be taken into account.¹⁸

In many places of the genocide, there was no documentation, records, accounts of witnesses, recorded experiences, lists of victims. This anonymity of mass murders is undoubtedly visible and stands out in many articles, studies, symposiums or conferences.

A vivid example of this process is the event that recently took place. The Institute of National Remembrance's delegation initiated an investigation into the murder of about 30 to 50 people of Roma nationality in one of the cities in the Lublin region. For this purpose, they asked for help the Institute of Remembrance and Heritage of the Roma and Victims of the Holocaust at the Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek. Unfortunately, despite the best will to help, the documentation preserved in the Institute's

16. A. Łuczak, *Sytuacja ludności romskiej...*, op.cit., pp. 34-35.

17. Interviews conducted by Andrzej Łuczak in 2009-2021 with the victims of Porajmos from World War II.

18. Ibid.

collections does not allow for unequivocal help in further research. No documents, accounts, memories or records have survived. This is just one of many similar cases. We collected some fragmentary information only through oral conversations and contacts with the Roma community.¹⁹

It is also difficult to establish the exact number of the victims of the Treblinka I and Treblinka II camps. According to the estimates of the director of the Museum, Dr. Edward Kopówka, the number of Roma victims should be estimated at about 2,000. Similar estimates are presented in analyses and studies by the prosecutor of the Institute of National Remembrance in Koszalin, Krzysztof Bukowski, who estimates the number of Roma victims at 1,000-2,000 people.²⁰ We do not know any victims' names or personal details. There are no direct reports from the Roma community. The exception is Józef Trojanek case – a prisoner who managed to escape from the Treblinka camp. He was the grandfather of the president of the Polish Roma Union, Mr. Roman Chojnacki. After escaping from the camp and reaching Warsaw, Trojanek died of exhaustion caused by exhausting work and hunger.²¹

Some residual and fragmentary reports about the presence of Roma in Treblinka come from the outside sources, they are included in an extremely valuable study entitled: *Tragedia Romów w Niemieckich Nazistowskich Obozach w Treblince – w dokumentach Oddziałowej Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Szczecinie* [The tragedy of the Roma in the German Nazi Camps in Treblinka – in the documents of the Branch Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Szczecin] by Krzysztof Bukowski from the Institute of National Remembrance in Koszalin.²²

The Roma in Treblinka were shot next to the Penal Labour Camp. This place is now called the Execution Site. Before they were shot, they were told that they would be able to camp next to the Treblinka I. They were allowed to light a fire, prepare meals, and then men were taken first, then women and children, and shot near large, previously prepared pits.²³

In the testimonies of witnesses there is little information that not only Jews were killed in Treblinka, but also the Roma groups of various size or

19. Query conducted by Andrzej Łuczak in the archives of the Institute of Roma Remembrance and Heritage and the Victims of the Holocaust in 2009-2021.

20. K. Bukowski, *Tragedia Romów w Niemieckich Nazistowskich Obozach w Treblince*, Szczecinek: ZRP, 2014.

21. Interview with Roman Chojnacki entitled "The Roma in Treblinka" conducted by Andrzej Łuczak, Szczecinek 2016.

22. K. Bukowski, *Tragedia Romów...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-2.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-12.

individual transports. Another problem is that the witnesses do not provide detailed information about the murdered people, nor about their number.

Lucjan P. and a witness Szyja W. spoke in their accounts about the fact that the Romani also were brought to Treblinka. The document stated that, in addition to Poles, also Jews, Roma, Czechs and others were imprisoned in the Treblinka camp. It was also indicated that 58 pits were discovered – graves 10 x 5 in size and 2–2.5 meters deep.²⁴

Another document in which the “Roma thread” appears is the report on the results of the investigation into the death camp for Jews in Treblinka, prepared by the investigating judge of the district court in Siedlce, Zdzisław Łukaszewicz in 1945. In the subparagraph entitled “the name and purpose of the camp” we read: “According to the testimonies of all Polish and Jewish witnesses, the camp was intended only for the annihilation of people of Jewish nationality, nevertheless a small number of Gypsies and Poles were also killed in the camp”.²⁵ The witnesses interviewed during the investigation testified that they saw Roma being brought to the Treblinka camp or its vicinity. The Roma, who were sometimes transported in cars, were to be shot in the forest. Some were kept in the camps Treblinka I and Treblinka II.

It is very likely that the Roma who were sent to the Penal Labour Camp (1941-1944) were shot, while the Roma and Sinti who were sent to the Extermination Camp (1942-1943) were murdered in the gas chambers. Stanisław K. was the first to mention it, he testified that: “In March 1943, transports arrived from the vicinity of the city of Grodno and Białystok. There were transports with Gypsies at that time as well”.²⁶ A few days later, a witness Szymon F., testified: “Once I saw a transport of about 80 Gypsies. They were told that they would be led into the forest where they could camp. However, they were taken to the mentioned before pits and shot”.²⁷

Witness Kazimierz G. interviewed in 1965 stated: “I know that transports of Jews, Poles and Gypsies were brought to the camps in Treblinka. There were two camps: a labour camp and an extermination camp. The Nazis sent Jews and Gypsies to the extermination camp and, as I heard, Poles too”. The Roma were transported by train, but according to the witness Brenner H., they were also brought in by cars and then “annihilated”.

24. K. Bukowski, “Holokaust Romów w niemieckich nazistowskich obozach w Treblince” [in:] *Treblinka – Historia i pamięć*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce: Muzeum w Treblince, 2015, pp. 58-59.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

Unfortunately, he did not provide the number of people in these transports; he testified that “a certain number of Gypsies were annihilated.”²⁸ Edward Sytko in his book *Treblinka* writes about the Roma transported in uncovered trucks: “In the summer of 1943, while working at a gravel pit close to the paved road, I saw eight uncovered trucks filled with Gypsies heading towards the camp. During the lunch break, I saw Gypsy families, mostly women and children, with all their belongings, lined up in front of the camp office. When we finished our dinner, the Gypsies were still there, but when I returned from the gravel pit after the work day had ended, they were gone. Prisoners working that day in the camp said that they were all driven to a forest clearing and shot, and that their belongings were burned.”²⁹ The witness, Aleksander P., also mentions the Roma being brought to the camp by trucks: “I also know that trucks filled with Gypsies were brought to the camp several times. Then they were driven into the forest near the camp and shots were heard after a while.” Witness Mieczysław Ch. in his testimony gave the name of one of the alleged perpetrators of the murder of the Roma: “Moreover, I saw how the watchmen under the orders of Lanz led a group of Gypsies, composed of men, women and children. These Gypsies carried Catholic images with them and prayed. The escorting watchmen with Lanz selected the men first and shot them in pits, and then killed the women and the children.”³⁰

A more detailed description of this tragedy can be found in a book written by this witness entitled *Ucieczka z Trebłinki* [Escape from Treblinka]. In the seventh chapter, entitled “Gypsies in Treblinka”, he wrote: “Gypsies, those children of nature, loving above all the freedom of free movement, were locked in the narrow walls of Jewish ghettos in the spring of 1942. The death penalty was imposed for leaving the ghetto and for not wearing an armband with the letter “Z” (Zigeuner – Gypsy) on one’s arm. From autumn 1942, they were transported to the death camps in Majdanek, Treblinka and others. Gypsies, as well as Jews, were either killed in gas chambers, or shot and then burned. Despite the walls and barbed wire of the closed Jewish quarters, some Gypsies managed to get out of the ghetto. The Germans brought the captured Gypsies to the ‘labour camp’ in Treblinka, promising them that they would live in a camp arranged especially for them in the forest. People were laden with bundles and children, carrying holy images and large crosses in front of them. Women held rosaries in their hands, everyone sang religious songs. At the edge of the forest, which was the place of execution and the grave of hundreds of thousands of

28. Ibid., pp. 61-62.

29. Ibid., pp. 63-64.

30. Ibid., pp. 64-65.

people, the procession was stopped. The crowd sat confidently in the clearing. They were allowed to make a fire and cook themselves warm food”.³¹

Jankiel Wiernik mentions that there were three transports of Gypsies. In the book entitled *The Year in Treblinka* he writes: “One day a transport of 80 Gypsies from near Warsaw arrived at the camp. These men, women and children were destitute. All they owned was some soiled underwear and tattered clothes. When they came into the yard, they were very happy. They thought they had entered an enchanted castle. But the executioners were just as happy, because they wiped out all the Gypsies just as they did with the Jews. Within a few hours all was quiet and nothing was left but corpses”. In the next fragment of the same book we read: “No transports had been coming to Treblinka for quite some time. Then, one day, as I was busy working near the gate, I noticed quite a different spirit among the German garrison and the Ukrainian guards. The Stabscharfuhrer, a man of about 50, short, stocky and with a vicious face, left the camp several times by car. Then the gate flew open and about 100 Gypsies were marched in. This was the third transport of Gypsies to arrive at Treblinka. They were followed by several wagons carrying all their possessions: filthy tatters, torn bedclothes and other junk. They arrived almost unescorted except for two Ukrainians wearing German uniforms, who were not fully aware of what it all meant.”³² They were sticklers for formality and even demanded a receipt, but they were not even admitted into the camp and their insistence on a receipt was met with sarcastic smiles. They learned on the sly from our Ukrainians that they had just delivered a batch of new victims to a death camp. They paled visibly and again knocked on the gate demanding admittance, whereupon the Stabsscharfuhrer came out and handed them a sealed envelope which they took and departed. The Gypsies, who had come from Bessarabia, were gassed just like all the others and then cremated”.³³

Szymon G. also mentions the killing of Roma in the gas chambers: “I did not see any Poles murdered in the gas cubicles. 2,000 Gypsies were killed. They were jumping and flinging terribly. They wanted to break the cabins. They scratched the walls up to the windows that were high, they broke such barred windows. The Germans shot them, went to the roof, boarded the windows up and gassed them all”. The bodies of the murdered Roma were burned in the same way as the bodies of the murdered Jews. According to Tadeusz K., the Gypsies were placed in camp number 2. In

31. K. Bukowski, “Holokaust Romów...”, *op.cit.*, pp. 66-67.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

his testimony, he said: "There were also Gypsies in camp number 2. Caught Gypsies were shot right next to the forest."³⁴

The Roma were transported to Treblinka not only by rail or by cars, but they also came in, escorted, in their own carts.

Jan K. recalls the meeting with the Roma group led to the camp: "I cannot accurately determine the date, but I remember an event when I was walking with my mother from Kosów Lacki towards my family home. We were walking along the road near Wólka Okrąglik when we were bypassed by a Gypsy group consisting of six carts. Gypsy families rode on these carts, including children. The group was escorted by German soldiers – Ukrainians. Currently, I cannot say how the uniforms of these Ukrainians looked like, because I do not remember it, but these were the same uniforms that were worn by the German soldiers – Ukrainians who served at the camp in Treblinka. I cannot say where the Ukrainians who escorted these Gypsies came from, because I do not know that, nor can I say where these Gypsies came from and how many people were in the group. The group with the Ukrainian soldiers escorting them overtook us and after some time drove into the forest which was adjacent to the camp in Treblinka. I do not know what happened to them after entering the forest, because I did not enter there. But then I heard very loud crying and screams coming from the forest and the camp. I guessed those sounds came from the Gypsies. After some time, maybe about an hour, or maybe less, when I was still walking with my mother in the aforementioned direction, I saw smoke rising above the camp and the sound of dogs barking coming from the camp, and 'orchestra playing'. After a while, 'everything went quiet'. I don't know what happened to the Gypsies then".³⁵

According to the witness Stanisław B., the Gypsies were also chased away on foot to the extermination camp and then killed. This is how the witness Barbara Z. described the mass execution of the Roma which took place in June 1943: "I remember that maybe in June 1943 about 200 Gypsies – women, men and children – were brought to the camp. They were not given any food or drink, and were kept outdoors for 48 hours under the supervision of the Ukrainians. Then all the Gypsies were led outside the camp into the forest, then we heard shots while sitting in the barracks. It happened in the evening after dinner. From the Polish men, who were staying in Treblinka in a barrack located near our barrack – behind the chain link fence, we learned that the bodies of the Gypsies were buried by them in the forest, in the common pit".

34. Ibid., pp. 69-70.

35. Ibid., pp. 64-65.

Richard Glazar in his account, which was written in 1981, claimed that in June and July 1943, along with the rest of the Jews from the Warsaw ghetto, several hundred Gypsies – women, men and children – were brought to Treblinka, and then killed.³⁶

Witness Janusz Ch. testified about the next two executions of the Roma: “In the second half of June 1943, three Gypsy women, aged 13 to 16, were brought to the camp. By the order of the Haupt they were given a soup from the SS men’s kitchen and then they were shot. I saw it myself. Also in the second half of June 1943, a group of about 40 Gypsies was brought to the camp. Having been served coffee, they were also shot next to me in the same place as three Gypsies before. In July 1943, several thousand people of Jewish origin were brought to the empty camp site. They were given coffee, and then were taken to the death camp. The executions on the Gypsies mentioned above were carried out by Ukrainian SS men under direct German command.” Before reaching Treblinka, the Roma were killed during round-ups. They were murdered at their place of stay. Those who remained alive were taken to Treblinka. Most of the Roma, after arriving at the camp or its vicinity were killed immediately. The rest were sent to work both inside and outside the camp. They worked briefly, for example in the gravel pit or in the kitchen, where they were exploited to the maximum.³⁷

Two Roma women were among the last to be sent to the Treblinka camp in the summer of 1944. According to Ivan Zvezhun’s testimony, it was as follows: “In the summer of 1944, two Gypsy women were brought to the concentration camp. The Germans accepted them seemingly well. They explained that they would be working in the camp in a group of Gypsies who were temporarily absent from the camp because they were employed in the forest. The women were fed and then taken to work in the woods. They were convoyed by Szteben, who, on the order of van Eupen, shot the Gypsies”. According to Aleksandra J. in one case the Roma attacked the Ukrainians who supervised them during the execution: “At an unspecified time I saw the Ukrainians escorting nine cars with Gypsies to the death camp in Treblinka. Later I found out that the Gypsies caused a lot of trouble to the Ukrainians because they attacked and probably killed some of them”.³⁸

The Roma were also sent to the lazaret in the Extermination Camp, where prisoners were killed. One of such events was described by the witness Stanisław K: “I heard about an incident that a Gypsy, who was wounded in the evening and thrown into a pit. He got out of there at night

36. K. Bukowski, “Holokaust Romów...”, *op.cit.*, 64-65.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

with his skin burned and was sitting on the edge of the pit in the morning. The same morning, he was found by the lazaret staff".³⁹

Based on the testimonies of prisoners of Treblinka, who survived it, issued judgments and publications we can roughly determine the tragic fate of the Roma. In 1941, the Germans created the Penal Labour Camp first. The prisoners worked in the gravel pit and performed other physical work. This also applied to a small group of Roma. The Execution Site is located about 500 meters south of the camp. Poles, Jews and Roma were shot there. According to the accounts of witnesses, there may be more places where Roma lost their lives. Lack of detail makes it impossible to determine their exact location. It can only be assumed that in the graves discovered at the beginning of the investigation, in which, apart from human remains, various objects of everyday life were revealed, the Roma were buried, because some of them were shot immediately, without taking their belongings from them. It is similar with the number of victims, which we can only estimate with a large margin of error.⁴⁰

So far, we have two accounts of Roma camp prisoners. Below is the account of one of them:

I cannot say how many members of my family were murdered in Treblinka. There could have been about 200 people. I am not able to provide full details of these people. I mean people from the Paczkowski, Majewski, Głowacki, Sokołowski and other families, whose names I do not remember at the moment. As far as I know, their family members are still alive, but I do not remember their current names, I know that they live in Warsaw, Łódź, Płock, Mława, Pułtusk. I am not in possession of data on their current place of residence. These people were arrested in Warsaw during the so-called "Round-ups" and at their place of stay. At that time, people of other nationalities were detained in addition to Roma. These people were detained by German soldiers and officers, they were physically assaulted by beatings, and if they were not liked, they were killed by shooting or beating them to death. During the arrests, the Roma made attempts to escape, some of them were successful. I do not remember how many people were detained, there were many of them, I do not remember their personal data, and most of them came from Mińsk Mazowiecki, Siedlce. As far as I know, the detainees were placed in the Warsaw Ghetto and in the Pawiak prison. I don't know if all the people ended up in Treblinka, most of them

39. Ibid., pp. 69-70.

40. Ibid., pp. 70-71.

were murdered. I am not sure if there are any children or family members of these people. It seems to me that they may live in Łódź, Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Mława, and Ostróda. I do not know the personal data and addresses of these people. The detainees were transported to Treblinka by trains and cars. These trains were intended for the transport of animals, there were no toilets, kitchens and other amenities important for a human being. The transported people were bestially treated by the guards, they were humiliated, tortured, and some of them did not reach their destination. After the train reached Treblinka, the carriages were opened and people were thrown out. From the very beginning, selection of adults, children, women and men was done. This unloading took place at a railway siding located within the camp. After disembarkation, people of Roma nationality were forced to sing, dance and play musical instruments that they had with them. I am not able to say whether they received money or tokens for the baths. The selection described above took place right after the people left the carriages. Having been selected, people were transported to the camp by trucks and then placed in wooden barracks. Both men and women were searched by guards, valuables were taken from them and they were stripped naked. The clothes were taken from these people and prison shirts and pants were handed out.

I don't know how the process of directing these people to the gas chambers looked like. All I heard was that they were told they were going to the baths and never came back from there. Prisoners were killed in the gas chambers, by hanging or by shooting. I was only a witness of those people being shot. An assembly was made and the guards would choose people to be murdered. Some of them were shot on the spot, and some were taken to an isolated place and killed there. I was brought to Treblinka with my uncle Aleksander and his wife and children. I stayed in the same barrack as my uncle, while his wife and children were placed in a different barrack. I avoided death in the Treblinka camp because I was redeemed by my grandmother, whose last name was Herman. It was done by arranging my release by the commander of the Warsaw ghetto. Grandma was an opera singer, she knew people and had money. Moreover, she had a German-sounding surname, which made it easier to release me from the camp. I don't know the name of the commandant. I was in the camp for a very short time, I was there for a month. I do not remember what month and year it was. During their stay in the camp, my family members were forced to dig pits or collect stones.

Many people from my family were taken to other camps, but I am not able to indicate where these camps were. Perhaps some of them did not end up in other camps and were shot before being imprisoned. In the camp where I was sent, the social conditions were tragic. There was no bathhouse, no drinking water, no food. We were given small portions of cooked beetroot, stale dark bread. The barracks were overcrowded, we slept on wooden bunks. There was hunger, poverty, people were dying of all sorts of diseases. The camp was filled with barracks and fenced with a barbed wire. Guard towers were built into the fence and guards with dogs walked by it. In the camp, we were woken up in the morning every day, there was a roll-call where the prisoners were counted. After this roll call, people were either returned to the barracks or were directed to another part of the camp, but I am not able to say where and why. Members of the German camp staff, Ukrainian watchmen and kapos abused the prisoners, beat and killed them. I do not know the data of these people and their pseudonyms. I do not remember the data of other prisoners from the Treblinka camp, I do not know if their family members are still alive and where they live. I was a child then and I have forgotten about some events. The Roma sent to the camp were massacred, killed, and their reception to the camp looked like any other prisoner reception. I don't remember, I have no information about the revolt that broke out in the camp. I know from the stories that the revolt broke out in the concentration camp in Oświęcim. After my grandmother redeemed me, I learned from her that my whole family was killed in the camp. I have not learned about the details of their deaths or the circumstances in which they died. I know that there is a Romani woman in Tarnów who survived the Treblinka camp and who may have some knowledge about it. I do not remember the name of that woman and where exactly she lives. I do not know which criminals from Treblinka were sentenced after the war, to what punishments and by what courts. As far as I know, one of the commanders of this camp was shot by Soviet soldiers. I cannot say how many people died in Treblinka. They were people from practically all over Europe. I don't know how many Roma were murdered there. Knowledge of this camp is based on my stay there and information obtained from other people. As far as I know, the Roma did not attempt to escape from the Treblinka camp, the camp was so guarded that it was impossible to escape from it. People who have memories who survived the Treblinka camp live in Kraków, Tarnów, Łódź, Mława, Pułtusk, but as I mentioned earlier, I do not remember

their personal details and exact addresses. That's all I have to testify on this.⁴¹

THE COMMEMORATION OF THE ROMA IN TREBLINKA

On July 30, 2014, a very important and memorable ceremony took place in the areas of the former Nazi camps in Treblinka. On that day, a monument commemorating the Roma murdered there was unveiled. Undoubtedly, this ceremony would not have happened without the support of many people and institutions that showed their kindness and sympathy. These include, among others, the then director of the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, and currently the director of the Treblinka Museum, Dr. Edward Kopówka. Thanks to his support and mutual arrangements, it was possible to agree on erecting the memorial on the site of the Execution Site near the Penal Labour Camp.

The ceremony gathered many guests from the world of media, politics, science, and, importantly, also many Roma from Poland and abroad, many of whom represented the young generation, as well as ordinary residents of the surrounding towns. It was happy to see so many people gathered at the ceremony, also from the perspective of educating young generations.

There is an inscription in three languages on the granite monument:

In Polish:

*NA ŚWIECIE BYWAŁEM, KRÓTKO WĘDROWAŁEM
ZOSTAŁEM WEZWANY, NA INNE BYWANIE – TERESA MIRGA*

*PAMIĘCI ROMÓW I SINTI ZAMORDOWANYCH PRZEZ
NIEMIECKICH OKUPANTÓW W KARNYM OBOZIE PRACY
I OBOZIE ZAGŁADY W LATACH II WOJNY ŚWIATOWEJ.*

*BÓL I CIERPIENIE OFIAR ZABRAŁA ZIEMIA, KTÓRA KRYJE
PROCHY TYSIĘCY NIEWINNYCH LUDZI. POCHYLAMY
GŁOWY NAD WASZĄ MĘCZEŃSKĄ ŚMIERCIA.*

*ZWIĄZEK ROMÓW POLSKICH Z SIEDZIBĄ W SZCZECINKU
RADA OCHRONY PAMIĘCI WALK I MĘCZEŃSTWA
2014*

41. K. Bukowski, "Holokaust Romów...", *op.cit.*, pp. 75-76.

In Romani:

*PAŁE PHUV PHIRAVAS
CIUONO ADAJ DZIVAVAS
IMER MAN WICINDE
PRE AWER DZIWIPIEN – TERESA MIRGA*

*RYPYRYBEN PAŁ ROMA I SINTI ZAMARDEN
PEŁDY SASENDYR DRE BUCITKO STARYBEN I DRE
KONCENTRACYJNO LAGRO DRE I BARO MARYBEN*

*ŁENGRY DUKH I RIOBEN ZALIJA PHUV
SAI GARUWEŁ DRE PESTRY BUTE MANUSEN SAŁE CHI NA SYS BANGE
ODDAS BARY PATYV SARE JAMARE
MUŁORENGE SAŁE CHINE ZAMARDE*

*ORGNIZACJA POLSKIE ROMENGRY ZRP DRE SZCZECINKO
RADA PAŁ RAKHIBEN RYPYRYBEN MARYBENA I DUKHA
2014 BERS*

In English:

*I HAVE BEEN IN THE WORLD
I WANDERED BRIEFLY
I HAVE BEEN CALLED TO OTHER BEING – TERESA MIRGA*

*IN MEMORY OF ROMA AND SINTI MURDERED BY THE GERMAN
OCCUPIERS IN THE FORCED LABOUR CAMP AND IN THE
EXTERMINATION CAMP DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR*

*PAIN AND SUFFERING OF THE VICTIMS TOOK THE LAND WHICH
HIDES THE ASHES OF THOUSANDS OF INNOCENT PEOPLE
WE BEND OUR HEADS OVER YOUR MARTYR'S DEATH*

*POLISH ROMA UNION BASED IN SZCZECINEK
COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF STRUGGLE
AND MARTYRDOM SITES
2014⁴²*

The monument is made of red sandstone, and the plaque is made of red granite. Its author is Sławomir Jackowski from the stonemason's company from Kielczewo. The monument contains the previously cited commemorative inscriptions in Polish, Romani and English.

42. A memorial inscription on the monument commemorating the murdered Sinti and Roma in Treblinka.



1. Monument to the Roma and Sinti murdered in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp and the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, unveiled in 2014 [source: www.muzeumtreblinka.pl (accessed: May 2021)]

The role of many institutions in the creation and unveiling of the monument should be briefly emphasized, such as the contribution of management of the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, headed by Dr. Edward Kopówka; the Regional Museum in Siedlce; the Council for the Protection of the Memory of Struggle and Martyrdom in Warsaw; the Mazovian Conservator of Historic Monuments, local government authorities of the Masovian Voivodeship, the embassy of the Republic of Germany in Poland, the embassy of the Republic of France in Poland, the embassy of the United States of America and the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

It is impossible to mention all the people who greatly supported the idea of the monument. Thanks are also due to Mr. Roman Chojnacki, president of the Association of Polish Roma, for his determination and courage in action. This place is particularly important for him due to the aforementioned stay of his grandfather Józef Trojanek in the Treblinka camp, who was one of the few Roma prisoners who managed to escape from the camp.⁴³

The celebrations in July of 2014 were extremely relevant and important both with regard to the past and the present. From then on, the Roma can also pay tribute to their murdered compatriots and honor their memory. In many places of torment there are still no monuments or plaques

43. K. Bukowski, "Holokaust Romów...", *op.cit.*, pp. 76-77.

commemorating the Romani genocide. The arrival of a large number of people at the above-mentioned ceremony was striking and optimistic. The monument is a symbol that enriches the Treblinka Museum area. May there be more and more similar actions, as well as support for initiatives commemorating the murdered Roma during World War II.⁴⁴

THE ROLE OF ROMANI COMMEMORATIONS FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR FOR THE PRESENT DAY

Recent years have brought many positive changes in the area of commemorating victims, including Roma victims. The quoted and preserved estimates regarding the acts of the brutal policy of the Third Reich authorities towards the Roma community reflect only part of the truth and do not show the scale of the actual victims. Time will only scar up the wounds, traumas and deep sadness, that lasted for many years in many of those who managed to survive the turmoil of the war. The Treblinka camp is an example of it. It is very positive that the commemorative monument was unveiled in 2014. Especially for the young generations, education and honest speaking about the past, that is painful and soaked with suffering.

The Roma, as a nation, can pay homage and keep the memory of their ancestors in more and more places, including in Treblinka.

The year 2011 was an extremely important moment in the process of commemorating the Porajmos. On the initiative of the Team for Roma Affairs of the Joint Commission of Government and National and Ethnic Minorities, August 2 was decided to be the day of remembrance of the Roma and Sinti Genocide. This date brings back the memory of the Roma revolt that took place on that day in 1944 in Auschwitz. Since then, ceremonies have been held throughout the country and abroad to emphasize the importance of these Nazi acts on Roma victims. The initiative was extremely needed and has resounded in wider social circles in recent years.⁴⁵

Another important date in commemorating the Roma and Sinti Genocide during World War II was the erection of a monument in Berlin, the capital of Germany, in 2012 at the initiative of the German authorities. This date is symbolic, as the main perpetrators of the Genocide recognized the importance and significance of what happened to thousands of often anonymous Roma victims.⁴⁶

The activity of non-governmental organizations is extremely important

44. A. Łuczak, *Sytuacja ludności romskiej...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 64-65.

45. P. Krzyżanowski, A. Łuczak, *op.cit.*, p. 367.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 368.



2. Monument in memory of the murdered Roma and Sinti during World War II, unveiled in Berlin in 2012 [source: www.wp.pl (accessed: May 2021)]

and necessary in this process. They often organize and stimulate educational activities. The Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek is an example of this. Thanks to its activities, it was possible to organize intergenerational workshops and ceremonies of unveiling the monuments of Roma victims in Treblinka and Chełmno nad Nerem. The celebrations were combined with educational workshops – lectures and practical classes focused on interactions and discussions with participants. During the meetings, participants had the opportunity to meet witnesses to history, including Krystyna Gil, the only person of Roma origin who managed to avoid the massacre in Szczurowa in Lesser Poland, where during the war the German occupiers pacified a Roma settlement of almost 100 people. All these celebrations met with the clear approval of the large public. Roma from all over Poland came to take part in it. Sometimes with whole families. It was possible to spend time outside home in a nice and creative way. The last such meeting took place in September last year in Szczecinek in West Pomerania.⁴⁷

The workshops entitled “Known and unknown Roma” carried out by the Polish Roma Union throughout Poland in 2015-2020 were extremely valuable in commemorating the Roma and Sinti murdered during the Second World War. The project was implemented thanks to the considerable

47. www.romowie.com (accessed: 5.2021).



3. Monument in memory of the murdered Roma and Sinti
in the Chełmno nad Nerem camp, unveiled in 2016
[source: www.muzeum.tarnow.pl (accessed: May 2021)]

help and support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. The meetings were organized in many Polish cities and took place in various educational and cultural institutions, such as community centers, secondary schools, libraries, and universities. The meetings covered, among others, the history and identity of the Roma, their culture and its relation to the school environment, contemporary Roma communities. The main purpose of the meetings was to interact with the gathered audience and listeners. The series of workshops was very popular and successful. Up to 500-600 people participated in individual editions of our meetings. We are glad that the gathered group included many young people – high school students, undergraduates and doctoral students. Our discussions were lively and the questions were often endless. The topics of the Roma history also included the topic of World War II and the Porajmos.⁴⁸

It is worth mentioning the activity of the Association of the Roma in Poland with its seat in Oświęcim, which has been organizing commemoration ceremonies on the grounds of the former Nazi camp in Auschwitz every year for almost 30 years. The celebrations are also an excellent occasion for intergenerational meetings and discussions.⁴⁹

A positive activity in this area is also carried out by the Counseling and Information Center for Roma, based in Pabianice, which organizes picnics for Roma victims of Nazism.

48. www.romowie.com (accessed: 5.2021).

49. www.stowarzyszenie.romowie.net (accessed: 05.2021).

Interesting and extremely valuable initiatives are carried out by the TernYPE International Roma Youth Network, which organizes intergenerational meetings devoted to Porajmos. Meetings called *Dik he na bister* – Look and don't forget, are organized annually in Cracow. They often gather hundreds of young people from all over Europe. Meetings are combined with conferences and talks with witnesses to history. They arouse interest of the world of science and the media.

All these initiatives are extremely valuable. They create a certain knowledge base about the Roma community. They are an excellent opportunity to meet young people, Roma from different parts of Poland, allow you to reach wider social circles and popularize this subject. Besides, it applies not only to the Roma but to the general public and European societies.

Undoubtedly, the subject of the genocide during World War II cannot be appropriated by any nation. It concerned entire societies, larger or smaller national groups. It is necessary and worthwhile to talk about it. The question is why, what is the point of digging through the past and history. An old Latin maxim says "*Historia magistra vitae est* – History is the teacher of life". I think it has a lot of truth to it. It is one of the basic factors determining the sense of these activities. It is important to talk and popularize historical topics in the most accessible way. The history of the Roma communities is inextricably linked with the fate of European societies. They interpenetrated, filled and complemented each other. Let us do everything we can to draw the right conclusions from the past.⁵⁰

50. A. Łuczak, "Międzynarodowa konferencja Treblinka przypomina i ostrzega", *Romano Atmo*, 3 /2021, pp. 21-23.

Andrzej Siwek
Treblinka Museum
The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

TRANSPORT FROM THE BALKANS TO TREBLINKA II

INTRODUCTION

The Treblinka II Extermination Camp is a place where the German Nazis murdered approximately 900,000 people. Most of them were Jewish people of Polish origin, although there were also transports from other European countries. The aim of this study is to present the preparation and the course of deportations to the Treblinka II camp from the countries of the Balkan Peninsula. Both Greece and Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941 were already defeated by the Third Reich and part of their territories came under the Bulgarian administration. Most of the Balkan Jews murdered in Treblinka were deported from these areas (except for the Jewish population of Thessaloniki in the German occupation zone). In order to explain the situation in this part of Europe as clearly as possible, it is necessary to present an outline of the military operations taking place in the discussed area. As indirect responsibility for deportations rests with the then Bulgarian government, it is appropriate to present a brief history of this state. At the end of the 19th century, this country revived after nearly 500 years of captivity and fought from the very beginning for the recognition of its independence on the international arena in the widest possible borders. Bulgaria's attitude during World War II is difficult to assess unequivocally. As an ally of the Third Reich (from March 1, 1941), it succumbed to German pressure and deported the Jewish population to Treblinka II from the so-called "New Territories" (Macedonia and Thrace). At the same time, this country opposed a similar action against Jews with Bulgarian citizenship, thus saving their lives.

HISTORY OF BULGARIA FROM INDEPENDENCE UNTIL THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR II

The peace treaty concluded in San Stefano, ending the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, guaranteed the establishment of the Bulgarian state and changed the balance of power on the Balkan Peninsula. Turkey recognized the independence of countries such as Montenegro, Serbia, Romania. It was then that the concept of "Great Bulgaria" was born, which was to cover the area from the Danube in the north to the Aegean Sea in the south. A few months after the signing of the treaty, the European powers organized a conference in Berlin, at which the provisions of the previously signed treaty were significantly changed. The arrangements made were much less favourable for Bulgaria as Great Britain and Austria-Hungary realized that a strong Bulgaria meant a strong Russian influence in the Balkans. The Principality of Bulgaria (still formally dependent on the Ottoman Empire) was created out of about 1/3 of the area, part of the lands was returned to Turkey, and out of the rest of the area, Eastern Rumelia was created, which, despite having extensive autonomy, was still a Turkish province. Alexander I of Battenberg sat on the throne of the Principality, the administration of Eastern Rumelia was entrusted to the governor, Aleko Bogoridi becoming the first one. At the turn of 1885, unification committees began to form, with the goal of creating "Great Bulgaria" by unifying the Principality with Rumelia and Macedonia.¹ In autonomous Rumelia, military and Liberal Party activists seized power and Alexander I announced the country's reunification. However, he had to step down quickly, because as a result of turmoil and struggle for influence between pro-Russian and Ruthenian parties, he was replaced by Ferdinand I Coburg (father of the later Tsar Boris III).

Only in 1908, favourable circumstances arose (for Bulgaria) to become formally independent from Turkey. The European powers were focused on the German-French dispute over Morocco, Austria-Hungary was preoccupied with the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while in the Ottoman Empire began the so-called Young Turkish Revolution. At that time, also in Bulgaria, hopes for the accession of Macedonia and Thrace² to the country were revived. On October 5, Ferdinand I accepted the title of Tsar³ and Bulgaria gained full independence, later recognized by other European countries. The next decade was a time of numerous wars and frequent changes of borders for the young state (the Two Balkan Wars and World War I).

1. T. Wasilewski, *Historia Bułgarii*, Wrocław 1988, p. 194

2. Ibid., p. 224.

3. Both Ferdinand and his son Boris used the title of king abroad.

The First Balkan War in 1912-1913 was a multinational liberation war fought in order to finally liberate the territories from under the Ottoman Empire's rule. The alliance of Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece defeated Turkey and forced it to make peace on May 30, 1913. The reason for the outbreak of the Second Balkan War was the dissatisfaction of the Bulgarian side as to the division of land obtained in the victorious war. The majority of both Vardar and Aegean Macedonia remained outside the borders of the country, destroying once again the vision of creating the "Great Bulgaria" within the borders similar to the San Stefano treaty. The pre-attack on Serbia and Greece, which took place on June 29-30, 1913, was a big mistake, because Montenegro, Romania and even Turkey took the side of the attacked, hoping to regain at least some of the lost territories. After initial successes, Bulgaria's situation became hopeless and it was forced to make peace on unfavourable terms. Pursuant to the peace treaty signed in Bucharest on August 10, 1913, the rest of Vardar and Aegean Macedonia were separated from Bulgaria. Romania received South Dobruja. Turkey acquired lands in East Thrace.

During World War I, Bulgaria took the side of the Central Powers and, like them, had to accept the peace conditions imposed by the victors. On September 29, 1918, Bulgaria signed an armistice in Thessaloniki, ending its participation in the war. After return, the representatives of the National Assembly passed a resolution to topple Ferdinand I from the throne. The next day, October 3, the tsar abdicated and his 24-year-old son Boris⁴ ascended the throne. Pursuant to the provisions of the treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, Bulgaria lost South Dobruja to Romania (incorporated after the country's capitulation on May 7, 1918). The loss of access to the Aegean Sea was very acute by giving Western Thrace to the Greek state and the scraps of the western border to the kingdom of SHS (Yugoslavia) was painful. War reparations were imposed on the country and the army was significantly reduced. The area of the state decreased by about 9,000 km² and was then 103,146 km². Dreams of "Great Bulgaria" did not come true, but did not fade away either, becoming a source of bitterness and growing nationalism.⁵

In the interwar period, the political, economic and social direction ranged from attempts to establish a democratic and parliamentary order to numerous revolutions and coups leading to dictatorship.⁶ The situation was similar in other countries of the region where autocracy appeared, meaning such a form of government in which the executive power was strengthened and the figures standing at its head became dictators.

4. T. Wasilewski, *op.cit.* p. 236.

5. M. Tanty, *Bałkany w XX wieku. Dzieje polityczne*, Warszawa 2003, p. 143.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

The other Balkan countries isolated Bulgaria, fearing its revisionist aspirations. It was used by the Balkan Entente (Turkey, Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania) established in 1934, whose aim was to preserve the existing borders.⁷ Bulgarian foreign policy had three main goals: removing isolation on the international stage, revising the provisions of the Neuilly-sur-Seine treaty, and obtaining the approval of the superpowers to regain lost territories. On November 23, 1935, Georgi Koseivanov became the head of the government, although the actual power belonged to Tsar (king) Boris III. The following years were characterized by a certain degree of internal stabilization. The monarch restored the constitution, which was repealed in 1934, dissolved right-wing organizations and depoliticized the military. Despite the dictatorship in Bulgaria, there was a parliament (Sobranje) that passed laws. Discussions, debates and protests took place there, and even policy adjustments were made.⁸ The 1930s were a period of increasing dependence on German capital. Trade relations between the two countries became steadily tighter. In 1929, Germany received 30% of Bulgarian exports and almost the same percentage was imported from that country to Bulgaria.⁹ In 1935, Bulgarian exports to the Reich amounted to 48%, while imports from Germany amounted to 53.5% of the total. Four years later, in 1939, Germany was the recipient of 67.8% of goods sold abroad, Bulgaria bought in Germany 65.5% of goods imported from abroad.¹⁰ Such a great deal of economic dependence on one country was dangerous and could become an element of pressure on the government in the future. After the beginning of the German aggression against Poland, on September 15, 1939, Bulgaria declared neutrality towards the fighting parties.

Good relations with the Third Reich began to bring measurable results. Already in 1940, with the support of Germany, Italy and the USSR, Bulgaria managed to regain Southern Dobruja from Romania, lost after World War I. The next territorial acquisitions obtained at the cost of Greece and Yugoslavia were perceived by the public as a national success in the efforts to create "Great Bulgaria". The achievements so far had strengthened the positions of the government and of Tsar Boris III. However, the fact that Hitler did not grant the lands permanently (except South Dobruja), but put them under Bulgarian administration was disregarded. Germany could, if necessary, use this argument as a means of putting pressure on

7. B. Rusin, "Niemiecki eksport broni do Bułgarii w okresie od sierpnia 1938 do lutego 1941 roku", *Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ Nauki Społeczne*, 18 (3/2017), p. 42.

8. R. Hilberg, *Zagłada Żydów Europejskich*, t. 2, Warszawa 2014 p. 927.

9. S.K. Pavlowitch, *Historia Bałkanów (1804-1945)*, Warszawa 2009 p. 342.

10. B. Rusin, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

Sofia.¹¹ The decision on the final ownership of these areas was postponed. Despite this, Bulgaria treated the occupied territories as once belonging to it and sought to tie them permanently with the rest of the country, which was reflected in the imposition of teaching in Bulgarian at local schools.¹² The Jewish population was in the worst situation. Unlike other citizens of defeated Greece and Yugoslavia, they were denied citizenship. The majority of the Jewish population living in Bulgaria and the territories it occupied were Sephardic Jews. They came from the Iberian Peninsula. In 1492, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, who together ruled Spain, announced the so-called Edict of Alhambra which ordered the expulsion of all Jews living under their rule. In 1497, the same fate befell the Jewish diaspora living in Portugal. The exiles settled in Italy, in what is today the Netherlands, in the Middle East and on the Balkan Peninsula. The largest Jewish community was in Thessaloniki. Before the German invasion of Greece in 1941, the community numbered over 50,000 people. Local Jewish communities living in the Balkans since ancient times, after some time, mostly assimilated with the emigrants, adopting their customs and rituals.

Unlike Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews living in Eastern Central and partly Western Europe, Sephardim communicated with each other in Ladino, a dialect of the Spanish language. According to statistics, about 50,000 Jews lived in Bulgaria before the outbreak of World War II.¹³ The so-called "New Territories" (Thrace, Macedonia), occupied by Bulgaria from 1941, were inhabited by approximately 13,000 Jewish people.¹⁴ The relations between the Jewish and Bulgarian people were very good for many years. It can be argued that the Bulgarians were less antisemitic than the contemporary societies of Western Europe. Representatives of the Bulgarian intelligentsia developed the view that tolerance in their country is something to be proud of.¹⁵ According to Hilberg, both Bulgarian Jews and those living in the "New Territories" were not a significant minority. Their percentage in the society was less than 1%. There were no very wealthy people among them, they did not accumulate huge capital. During the war, they became

11. E. Znamierowska-Rakk, *Sprawa Tracji Zachodniej w polityce bułgarskiej (1919-1947)*, Warszawa 1991, p. 207, as cited in: M. Tanty, *op.cit.*, p. 236.

12. M. Tanty, *op.cit.*, p. 236.

13. F.B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944*, Pittsburgh 1972, p. 58.

14. https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%2006633.pdf (accessed: 20.05.2021).

15. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

pawns in the hands of the Bulgarian government, like a “surplus good” that can be exchanged for certain political gains.¹⁶

BALKAN CAMPAIGN OF 1941

Italy, allied with the Third Reich, under Benito Mussolini, sought to gain a position as a superpower, gradually expanding its spheres of influence. Apart from Africa, its subject of interest were the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkan Peninsula. Albania was the first “victim” of the Italian expansion in this region. The country was ruled by Ahmed ben Zog since January 31, 1925, and it became more and more economically dependent on the Kingdom of Italy on the other side of the Adriatic Sea. On April 7, 1939, the army of this country entered Albania, which became an Italian protectorate and an excellent bridgehead for further conquests. On October 28, 1940, Greece became the target of the attack. After initial successes, the better-equipped Italian troops were stopped, while the Greek army went on a counter-offensive and entered Albania. The Greeks were supported by the British, therefore the situation in this part of Europe was closely monitored by Adolf Hitler. When ending the Italian-Greek war as intended by Mussolini became less and less realistic, Hitler decided to support his ally.¹⁷ Stabilization of the situation in the Balkans was a necessity for the Third Reich in view of the preparation already undertaken for the attack on the USSR.¹⁸

On September 27, 1940, Germany, Italy and Japan signed a political and military agreement known as the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis or the Tripartite Pact. Gradually, more countries were “invited” to join the alliance: incl. Hungary, Romania, Slovakia. Advanced talks with Bulgaria and Yugoslavia continued, as the attack on Greece required the consent of one of these countries to allow the German troops to march through their territory. Both countries realized that it would be very difficult for them to remain neutral and they would ultimately have to take one of the fighting sides. However, accepting the German conditions and joining the alliance created an opportunity to achieve certain benefits. While Yugoslavia was mainly concerned with obtaining permission to use the most important port of the Balkan Peninsula – Thessaloniki, Bulgaria’s expectations of Macedonia were much greater. They were presented to Hitler and Ribbentrop on January 3, 1941 by the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Filov. For joining the Tripartite Pact,

16. R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 926.

17. Plan to attack Greece was codenamed “Marita”.

18. Plan to attack USSR was codenamed “Barbarossa”.

the Bulgarians demanded Western Thrace and a large part of Greek Macedonia.¹⁹ After more than three months of negotiations, an agreement was reached. On March 1, 1941, the Bulgarian government, in exchange for new territorial acquisitions, acceded to the Berlin Pact and agreed that German troops could march through its territories. Yugoslavia also received benefits for joining the pact, such as guaranteed inviolability of the borders and the granting of Thessaloniki.²⁰

The decisions made by the government of Yugoslavia led by Prime Minister Dragis Cvetković did not meet with the approval of some politicians, servicemen and society. When on March 25, 1941, the country joined the Tripartite Pact, conspirators became internally active. They had the support of the army, the church hierarchy and the scientific environment. On the night of March 26-27, there was a coup led by General Dusan Simowic. He became the head of the new government. Prince Paweł resigned and the underage Prince Piotr was proclaimed king. In order to avoid a direct reaction from Berlin, the new government assured the German side that it would be faithful to all the commitments previously made. However, Hitler, having received the message of the coup in Belgrade, decided that the country was to share the fate of Greece. On April 6, without delivering any ultimatums or declaring war, the German troops invaded Yugoslavia.²¹ Support was provided by Italian and Hungarian troops. The balance of forces on both sides was fairly even, however there were huge differences in equipment. The Axis powers had nearly 2,233 aircraft and over 2,200 tanks against the obsolete 831 aircraft and 302 tanks at the disposal of the attacked countries.²² The Balkan Campaign was another example of the application of the so-called "Blitzkrieg". On April 14, Yugoslavia asked for a ceasefire, and three days later they signed an unconditional surrender. Both defeated nations were divided among the winners. Bulgaria gained a lot, although its troops did not participate in the fighting. It was a reward for joining the Tripartite Pact and consenting to an attack from its territory. Most of Wardar and Aegean Macedonia as well as Western Thrace were from that moment under the Bulgarian administration. The quick defeat of Greece and Yugoslavia was the last "easy victory" of the Third Reich. After securing the southern flank of the Balkans, nothing stood in the way of starting the implementation of the "Barbarossa" plan. However, it is highly probable that the several-week delay in the attack on the USSR could

19. I. Stawowy-Kawka, *Historia Macedonii*, Wrocław 2000, p. 214.

20. M. Tanty, *op.cit.*, p. 228.

21. S.K. Pavlowitch, *op.cit.*, p. 371.

22. M. Tanty, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

have had a significant impact on the defeat of the German troops in the battle of Moscow in the winter of 1941/42.

ANTI-SEMITIC LAWS IN BULGARIA

At the beginning of October 1940, at the Bulgarian parliament the first reading of the anti-Jewish bill took place, modeled on the so-called "Nuremberg Laws." It happened after the annexation of the lands separated from Romania. The anti-Semitic laws were enacted on January 21, 1941. They had a very wide scope, as they included provisions on the definition, expropriation and concentration of Jews living in the lands administered by Bulgaria. The act provided for the dismissal of Jews employed in the civil service and the army, and introduced limits for companies and liberal professions, proportionally to their percentage share in the entire Bulgarian population. Paragraph 25 specified the number of professions that could be practised by Jews. For example, only 21 Jews could be doctors, 20 lawyers, and only seven people of Jewish origin could become dentists.²³ In paragraph 27 of the "Law on the protection of the nation" we read, *inter alia*, about further restrictions: "People of Jewish origin may not be owners, shareholders or capital investors in educational institutions, theaters, cinemas, publishing houses, [...], hotels, retail outlets, arms manufacturing companies."²⁴

What was to happen to the Jewish enterprises that were forbidden to continue operating? They were to be forcibly sold. "Within six months, all these companies must either be dissolved or transferred to people of Bulgarian origin. Property that is not liquidated or disposed of will be confiscated."²⁵

Paragraph 26 stated what was to happen to the funds that the Jewish owners were to obtain from the forced sale. It was established that they were to be deposited with the Bulgarian Credit Bank in current accounts, although their owners could not use them because they were frozen. Later, this article was expanded, restricting access to all Jewish savings deposited in Bulgaria. With each passing month, procedures for the expropriation of Jewish property grew more brutal. Jews were not allowed to own agricultural land and had to submit special declarations listing their income and all their movable and immovable property. On July 2, 1942, a special tax law was adopted. All Jews with registered assets ranging from Lev 200,000

23. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

24. A. Matkovski, *A history of the Jews in Macedonia*, Skopje 1982, p. 117.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

(\$ 2,430) to Lev 3 million (\$ 36,500) were taxed at 20% of its value, for the estates of over 3 million Levs the amount payable was 25% of its total value.²⁶ Due to the fact that the state charged a fixed percentage of the tax, Bulgarian officials often overestimated the value of the property in order to obtain the greatest possible income. Half of the amount charged had to be paid within 30 days, the rest within 6 months. The penalty for late payment of the tax could be the confiscation of all property.

Moreover, Jewish surnames could not contain the endings "ov", "ev", "ski", "ich".²⁷ The act of January 21, 1941 prohibited mixed marriages with Bulgarians and introduced a ban on movement without a prior consent of the police.²⁸ Jews were also deprived of their voting rights. The decree of June 10, 1942 regulating the issue of obtaining citizenship in the occupied territories had far-reaching effects. Almost all residents of the so-called "new territories" automatically became Bulgarian citizens. Only the Jewish minority was deprived of this possibility.²⁹ They were still citizens of the countries that no longer existed and had to pay a monthly tax to the Bulgarian state for the possibility of staying in the lands under its control.³⁰

The German ambassador to Sofia, Adolf Heinz Beckerle, observed the next stages of limiting the rights of the Jewish population in Bulgaria. At that time, the extermination of the Jewish population in the Soviet Union was already underway.³¹ In June 1942, the extermination camps in Belzec and Sobibor were already operating in the territory of German-occupied Poland, and the Treblinka II camp was under construction. At that time, another law was passed in the Bulgarian parliament. It established authorisations for the Bulgarian government headed by Bogdan Filov. It concerned the issuing of decrees on Jewish matters. On August 26, the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs was created as the main instrument to enforce the government's policy towards Jews. The new institution was led by the staunch anti-Semite Alexander Belev. The Jewish funds blocked in the banks were transferred to the "Jewish community fund", the main goal of which was to finance future deportations that the Germans wanted to implement. All unemployed Jews were to leave Sofia by September 1. A two-person family was entitled to live in one room, a three or four-person family in two,

26. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

27. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

28. R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 932.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 937.

30. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

31. Bulgaria, despite its alliance with the Third Reich, did not declare war or conduct military actions against the USSR.

and a five or six-person family in three rooms.³² At the same time, the entire community was obliged to wear the Star of David. Even before the creation of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, a significant part of the Jewish community was obliged to work in special groups. Their number was constantly increasing. They worked on the construction of roads, railroads, etc. In the summer of 1943, their number reached about 10,000.³³ In the following months, the Jewish community in Bulgaria faced further burdens. The anti-Jewish laws very quickly led to ruin and rapid impoverishment of the population covered by them. On February 22, 1943, the fate of the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia was determined. One of Adolf Eichmann's closest associates, Theodor Dannecker, signed an agreement with Alexander Belev, having all powers of attorney, under which Bulgaria agreed to deport all inhabitants of the mentioned territories to Germany (see Annex I).

DEPORTATIONS

The signing of the deportation agreement was preceded by certain arrangements and preparation. As early as February 2, 1943, an oral agreement was reached between Belev and Dannecker. It was then agreed that the deportations would start at the beginning of March, and that the concentration should be carried out in camps specially created for this purpose. Emphasis was also placed on using the element of surprise to prevent possible escapes.³⁴ The next day, the officials of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs were given instructions on how to conduct detailed censuses in the occupied territories. The lists were to contain such data as: name, surname, age, gender, occupation and permanent residence address. The agreement of February 22, 1943 specified further details of the deportation of 20,000 Jews. Importantly, in the administered areas, from the spring of 1941, before the planned "action", there were less than 12,000 of them. The Bulgarian government intended to deport the missing 8,000 from so-called "Old Bulgaria", that is, the one within the borders from before the invasions of Greece and Yugoslavia. Even before the operation began, on March 2, 1943, the Council of Ministers issued a resolution depriving all Jews who were to be deported, of Bulgarian citizenship.³⁵ Clause 8 of the agreement of February 22, 1943 contained an assurance that the Bulgarian side would never ask about them again. The resolution was signed, in-

32. R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 934.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 931.

34. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

35. The matter concerned the Bulgarian Jews, because those from Thrace and Macedonia never received it.

ter alia, by Prime Minister Bogdan Filov and Minister of the Interior Petar Gabrovski. The Germans also demanded that Bulgaria pay the Reich 250 Reichsmark for each deported person. In this matter, it was much more difficult to reach an agreement, because according to the Bulgarian side, it was too high a price. It was decided that the financial issues would be settled in the future.³⁶

DEPORTATIONS FROM MACEDONIA

Zakhari Velkov was appointed to supervise the deportation action in Macedonia. In Skopje, the operation was to be led by Pejo Draganov and Ivan Zakhariiev. Originally, two collective camps were planned: in Skopje and in Bitola. In the end, only the first one was created. It was decided to place all Macedonian Jews in the buildings of the state Tobacco Monopoly in Skopje. Their adaptation to their new role had started a few days earlier and, according to the accounts of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, it cost 1,254,609 levs. The staff consisted of policemen, soldiers, guards, administration workers and the police station. Pejo Draganov Peev was appointed as the commandant.³⁷

The night of March 10-11, 1943 was the beginning of the end for the Jews who had lived here for centuries. Streets of such cities as Bitola, Štip, Skopje were blocked by the Bulgarian police and army. Earlier, several hundred horse carts were gathered in the designated places, by which luggage and sick people were to be transported. Units taking part in the deportation were divided into groups of several people who checked all addresses from previously prepared lists. Each of them was assigned a number of square-shaped cards corresponding to the number of Jewish families destined for deportation. Moreover, the name and surname of the head of the family and the address were listed there. To reassure the frightened and confused people, they were told that they would be relocated to other parts of Bulgaria, while ensuring them that they would be able to return after the war. According to earlier instructions, the policemen ordered the Jews to take money and valuables.³⁸ After the residents left their houses, they were locked and sealed with wax and seals.

This is how Berta and Miko Noakh remembered the day:

Three detectives and two uniformed policemen came in with rifles in their hands. One of them stepped forward, took a list from his pocket and began reading our names. Then the same man,

36. R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 938.

37. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

apparently the commander, looked at us hostilely and said with hatred in his voice, "You have 10 minutes to prepare things and take food" [...]. Our consternation was intensified by the policemen's comments- '5 minutes left..., 4 minutes..., 3 minutes...' In front of our door there was a trolley into which we put our things and in which my mother was already sitting.³⁹

In Bitola, the operation was led by Kiril Stoimenov, Georgi Dzhambazov, Vasil Vasiliev and General Marinov. Everything was done according to a similar pattern. The city was blocked at night. Between 5 and 6 am., the Jews were informed that they had to leave their homes and were then taken to the assembly point. From there, they were transported to the railway station. Before they departed for the camp in Skopje, they were searched and robbed of their valuables. The resettlement obligations were also imposed on the sick from hospitals. Eight people were brought to the stations, two of whom were recently subjected to serious operations.⁴⁰

The action in Štip was commanded by Stoyan Kristov Bachevandzhiev and the chief of police, Ignat Atanasov Motsev. While waiting at the station for 5 hours, the Jews were searched and robbed by the guards.

The number of people imprisoned in the "Monopol" camp was constantly changing, but according to the data collected by Commandant Draganov on March 11, there were already 7,215 Jews there, including: 551 from Štip, 3,313 from Skopje and 3,351 from Bitola.⁴¹ This group included, among others, 539 children under the age of 3; 602 children between the ages of 3 and 10; 1,172 children between the ages of 10 and 16, and 865 people over the age of 60.⁴² In other Macedonian cities, where the Jewish community did not exceed a dozen or so families, no such activities were carried out as in the above-mentioned cities. These people were arrested separately and sent to a place of concentration.

The conditions in the camp, which existed from March 11 to 29, were very difficult. The prisoners were searched daily. They were not allowed to have money, weapons, cigarettes, matches, etc. They stayed in closed rooms without any heating and it was still the winter period. Prisoners were given insufficient rations, and they could use the few latrines only during group exits to the square, always under guard. Reports about what

39. N. Grinberg, *Dokumenti, Soßija: Centralnata konsistorija na ewreite w Był-garija*, 1945, pp. 152-153, as cited in: A. Matkovski, *A history...*, op.cit., pp. 132-133.

40. N. Grinberg, *Dokumenti, Soßija: Centralnata konsistorija na ewreite w Był-garija*, 1945, pp. 153-155, as cited in: A. Matkovski, *A history...*, op.cit., p. 135.

41. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, op.cit., p. 143.

42. Z. Kolonomos, V. Veskovich-Vangeli, *The Jews in Macedonia during the Second World War (1941-1945)*, Skopje 1986, p. 122.

happened in the camp came from those who escaped or were released. The Bulgarians released 67 doctors and pharmacists with their families from the camp. In addition, 74 citizens of Spain, 19 of Albania and 5 of Italy were released. Three people whose escapes were successful should be added to this number. In total, 168 people regained their freedom.⁴³

Albert Safati, recalled the horrors that awaited the detained prisoners:

People were sleeping on the floor, there were about 250 of them, the air was stuffy. The children cried and the women talked about the tragedy. [...] The worst was the police lieutenant, who turned out to be a terrible sadist. He beat young and old women and children without mercy. If someone talked too loudly during a walk, or did not wear the Star of David, he was beaten to such an extent that he often brushed with death. We used to call him a "Bloody Tartare". [...] Young Jewish women worked in the hospital, policemen mocked them and often took them to their offices, it is not known what they were doing with them. When after some time they came out of there, they were trembling and had tears in their eyes. One young girl named Zhana told me that they raped her and threatened to shoot her if she told someone about it.⁴⁴

A Spanish citizen Leon Bokhor Aladzhem was released after 13 days. He remembered his stay as follows:

For the first three days, we got nothing to eat.... The searches began on the first day and continued for several more. During them, our quilts and winter coats were torn apart and everything was taken: gold, watches, pens, rings, earrings, medicines, clothes, shoes, etc.⁴⁵

The people placed in the camp were to be transported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, which had been operating since the end of July 1942. The first transport, consisting of 40 wagons, left Skopje on March 22, 1943 at 12:45. Initially, it was supposed to accommodate 1,845 people in building VI, for whom food rations were allocated: 1 ¼ kg of bread, ½ kg of cheese, 2 kg of marmalade, 2 kg of biscuit bread, and even a kilogram of smoked meat. Then two more groups of 156 and 337 people were added, bringing

43. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

44. N. Grinberg, *Dokumenti, Sošija: Centralnata konsistorija na ewreite w Byłgarija*, 1945, pp. 160-162, as cited in: A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 141-143.

45. A. Matkovski, *Tragedijata na Evreite od Makedonija*, Skopje 1982, p. 34: According to Leon's testimony, the document FKM #10.448; as cited in: A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 140.

the total number to 2,338.⁴⁶ In each car, there was a small barrel with water and containers for taking care of physiological needs. The train traveled along the route running through Skopje, Nis, Lapovo, Zemun, Piotrków Trybunalski and Małkinia. Initially, the transport was convoyed by the Bulgarian police. At the station in Lapovo, it was taken over by the German unit of 35 Schutzpolizei officers under the command of sergeant Roth. One woman died between Lapovo and Zemun, while three more died in the Piotrków–Małkinia leg.⁴⁷ After nearly 6 days of travel, 2,334 Jews reached their destination on March 28 at 7 a.m. Almost immediately, all of them died in the gas chambers.

On March 25, at 2 p.m., another transport left the camp. All those displaced from Štip and some of the inhabitants of Skopje and Bitola were there. Contrary to the previous one, on the orders of Dannecker, the transport was escorted from the very beginning by a German escort of 35 people led by Corporal Handrik. This time the route was changed due to a track damage and ran, among others, through territories controlled by Italians. During the trip, three people died, so finally, out of the 2,402 deported to Treblinka II, 2,399 people arrived in the afternoon of March 31. About 20 wagons were unloaded immediately, the rest waited at a nearby train station and shared the fate of their countrymen the next morning.⁴⁸

The last transport of 2,404 people left the camp on March 29 and reached its destination in the morning on April 5. In this case, the escorts were, as before, the officers of the Schutzpolizei. The route was also the same. Four elderly people and one infant did not survive the journey. “Belev, who visited the camp for the first time on March 21, visited that place again on the day before the departure of the third transport. In addition to Theodor Dannecker, he was accompanied by his closest associates from the police station, including Y. Kalitsin, P. Lukov, Kv. Toshev and Zakhari Velkov.”⁴⁹ Perhaps it was then that the decision was made to dismiss Draganov from the post of commandant and replace him with Asen Paitashev.

Apart from Matkovski’s statistics, who estimated the total number of deportees at 7,144, there are other sources that provide slightly different data. Grinberg’s letters mention 7,065 people, while Draganov’s reports 7,069, but that seems to be too small a number.⁵⁰ After the deportations,

46. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 148–149.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

49. N. Grinberg, *Dokumenti, Soβija: Centralnata konsistorija na ewreite w Był-garija*, 1945, p. 163, as cited in: A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

50. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

the Commissariat started to liquidate the Jewish property remaining in the places where their owners had lived. Government institutions were allowed to make purchases at minimal prices. Profits from this venture totaled 33,112,714 leva (\$ 402,000), excluding valuables seized upon arrival at the Skopje provisional camp.

DEPORTATIONS FROM THRACE

Just before the deportation began, over 4,000 Jews lived in the territory of Thrace, most of them citizens of Greece, which was defeated in 1941. These people shared the fate of the Macedonian community. Kavala, Seres, Drama, Ksanti, and Gyumurdzhina⁵¹ are the names of some places where temporary camps were established, in which the Jewish population was to be concentrated.⁵² They were often tobacco warehouses, schools, etc. Then, they were to be sent to larger internment camps in Dupnica (commanders: Asen Paitashev, Kerenkov) and Upper Dzhumaya⁵³ (commandant Ivan Taperski) located in the so-called "Old Bulgaria".

On the night of March 4, 1943, following the instructions of A. Belev and Y. Kalitsin from the Jewish Affairs Commissariat, police forces throughout the region began enforcing blockades in the towns. Surprised people were told that they would be temporarily deported to Bulgaria, but that they would return to their homes soon. It was also recommended that they take all money and valuables with them. After one or two days, they were all sent to internment camps in Dupnica and Upper Dzhumaya.

An account of Samuil Sabatov has been preserved, who witnessed the speech of mayor Drama Angel Cherkeзов to the Jews trapped in a tobacco warehouse. The official deceived people with assurances that it was their attitude and cooperation that would determine how quickly they would return to their homes. He also called on them to give back everything they had and reveal other places where they hid the rest of their property.⁵⁴

The first stop on the way to the internal camps was the villages of Simitli and Demir-Hisar. Due to the different track gauge, all the deportees had to change trains. The Bulgarian Red Cross sent several Jewish nurses to this place, the women were treated very badly by the Bulgarians who

51. The current name of the city is Komotini.

52. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 161.

53. The current name of the city is Blagoevgrad.

54. N. Grinberg, *Dokumenti, Soβija: Centralnata konsistorija na ewreite w Był-garija*, 1945, p. 63, as cited in: A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 166.

supervised the actions. They were only allowed to distribute warm water to people.⁵⁵

The first prisoners arrived in the Upper Dzhumaya camp on March 6. It was located in three separate places: in tobacco warehouses, in the buildings of the gymnasium and the economic school. Over 2,500 people were gathered there. The conditions in which they were held did not differ from those in the Skopje camp. The 1,500-capacity building of the economic school had only one water tap, and one toilet was used by an average of 300 to 500 people. Several people died in this place every day.⁵⁶

The second camp in Dupnica started operating on March 7 and was also organized in tobacco warehouses. There were almost 1,500 prisoners guarded by a garrison of Bulgarian soldiers and policemen. About 50,000 levs (\$ 607) were taken during the searches. During this time, five people died.

Almost immediately after the deportations, the employees of the police station began to liquidate the Jewish property left in their places of residence. Benefits for the entire territory of Thrace from this practice amounted to 20,635,884 levs (\$ 257,000).

On March 18, at 7:38 a.m., a transport of 40 wagons with 1,985 Jews left Upper Dzhumaya. It was headed to the Danube port of Lom and was escorted by 4 Germans and 43 Bulgarian policemen led by Veselina Sp. Stambolov. The next day, three more transports set off by rail, which in Sofia merged into two, all headed to the port of Lom. 692 people left Upper Dzhumaya, 1,380 from the Dupnica camp, and 158 from the Pirot district. Among them, there were 368 children under the age of 10.⁵⁷

The district of Pirot belonged to neither Macedonia nor Thrace. Geographically, it was part of Serbia and a small community of less than 200 people lived there. On March 12, they were arrested and placed in the gymnasium building where they spent the next week. Searches and looting took place there too. The Jews gave away about 390,000 levs (\$ 4,500), and during subsequent searches about 20,000 levs and some valuable items (gold coins, etc.) were also obtained.⁵⁸ Police officers treated prisoners extremely brutally. After the war, witnesses accused the police officer George Popov and the head of the local police, Pushkarov, of rape. The men threatened the Jewish woman that if she did not surrender, they would kill

55. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 109.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

57. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 173-174.

58. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

her children.⁵⁹ The Jewish property remaining after the deportees worth 3,571,645 Lev (\$ 43,300) was sold.

The transports arrived in Lom on March 19 and 20. They all had to change to ships going to Vienna. They were also searched for the remains of hidden valuables. A Bulgarian nurse Nadeia Vasileva mentioned that the guards made it difficult to give water to thirsty people.

The abuses of Slavi Puntev, the leader of the operation in Lom, were so great that Svetoslav Nikolaev, the chief auditor of the police station, became interested in him. Puntev, who was Belev's relative, failed to account for more than 140,000 levs (\$ 1,696) confiscated from Jews. Further irregularities concerned the distribution of clothing given to the deportees by the Sofia Jews.⁶⁰

On March 20, around 2 p.m., the first Kara Gjorgje ship left Lom. There were 1,100 people on board. A few hours later, Voyvoda Mishich, carrying 877 Jews, set off for Vienna. The next day Saturnus (1,256 people) and Tsar Dushan (986 people) set off. Each of the ships was escorted by Bulgarian policemen and German gendarmes. There was a Bulgarian doctor on each of them.

Vasil Tsenov recalled:

I left Lom on March 21 at 1.00 pm, heading for Vienna on Saturnus with 1,256 Jews. One 75-year-old man from Drama was very ill with pneumonia and died near Orşova. His body was handed over to the Romanian sanitary services. The ship was guarded by 25 Bulgarian policemen and 2 German gendarmes for safety reasons. We arrived at our destination on March 26 at around 2 pm.⁶¹

Seven people sailing on the Tsar Dushan did not reach Vienna. Then the Jews had to move to trains again to reach the end of their journey. The route led through Katowice, Warsaw-Małkinia. On March 28,⁶² the deported from Thrace and Pirot reached the camp where they were murdered almost immediately. It is estimated that 11,343 Jews were deported from the territories administered by Bulgaria during World War II to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. None of them survived.

As the subject concerns transports from Greece and Yugoslavia, the fate of the Jewish inhabitants of Thessaloniki must be mentioned. This Greek

59. Ibid., p. 116.

60. Ibid., pp. 120-121.

61. N. Grinberg, *Dokumenti, Soßija: Centralnata konsistorija na ewreite w Był-garija*, 1945, p. 121, as cited in: A. Matkovski, *A history...*, op.cit., p. 175.

62. <https://pamiectreblinka.pl/transparty-do-treblinka-dzien-po-dniu/> (accessed: 23.03.2021).

city found itself in the German occupation zone and its Jewish community, which numbered over 50,000 people, was subjected to repression. During the occupation, the persecution increased with each passing month, but its significant intensification began in July 1942. Half a year later, the Germans began preparation for deportation. The hauptsturmführer Dieter Wisliceny played a leading role in it. A number of restrictions were issued, similar to those that Germany had already applied in other countries. Jewish shops and businesses were marked and a ghetto was established. Over 46,000 Jews were deported within two months, most often to Auschwitz Birkenau.⁶³ However, Yitzhak Arad mentions at least one transport that ended up in Treblinka. German railway documents from Vienna, dated March 26, 1943, inform about a train of 48 carriages carrying 2,800 people, which left Thessaloniki and its destination was Treblinka station.⁶⁴

SUSPENSION OF DEPORTATIONS FROM BULGARIA

As already mentioned, the Belev-Dannecker agreement concerned the deportation of 20,000 Jews. Since less than 12,000 were sent to Treblinka from Thrace and Macedonia, the remaining number was intended to be deported from so-called “Old Bulgaria”, that is, the one within the pre-1941 borders, Belev emphasized that this number was to include the most influential and significant representatives of the Jewish community. The commencement date was set for March 9, and the entire operation, as well as the deportations from the “New Territories”, were to be kept secret until the very end.

On March 6, in the city of Kiustendil, a Bulgarian lawyer held a party to which he invited friends. Two Jews were among the guests. The host of the party was the manager of the tobacco monopoly buildings located in the city. A few days earlier, he had been ordered to make them available to the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs for deportation. Knowing the importance of this information, he decided to warn the Jewish friends whom he hosted at his home.⁶⁵ This was not the only case when the Bulgarian government's plans were disclosed. Liliana Panitsa was the secretary and mistress of Alexander Belev. Being aware of the threat, she warned the representatives of the Jewish community about the danger.

63. R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 870.

64. Treblinka – Stangl, Band 13, p. 3703; *War Crimes in Poland*, pp. 281-283, photocopies of these documents, as cited in: Y. Arad, *The Operation Reinhard Death Camps Bezelec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, Bloomington 2018, p. 185.

65. S. Stoilov, Michael Bar-Zohar – *The Saving of Bulgaria's Jews*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2030LUffRQ0&t=3s> (accessed: 23.03.2021).

When the Jews realized what was prepared for them, they decided to act and asked their Bulgarian friends to go to the capital and stand up for them. In the evening of March 8, a delegation of four people left Kyustendil and the very next day they managed to reach Dymitar Peshev. He was the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian parliament (Sobranje). At first, he did not believe the information, but after verifying it, he was shocked and assured that he would do anything to block Belev's plan. Then, accompanied by 10 Sobranje members, he tried to reach Prime Minister Filov, when the latter refused to meet, a group of MPs went to meet Peter Gabrovski, the Minister of the Internal Affairs. During the conversation, they threatened him that if he did not stop the deportation, they would publicize the matter in Sobranje and the scandal would break out.

Almost at the same time, some Jews in Plovdiv were arrested and held at the local school. When this information reached Archbishop Cyril, the priest personally arrived at the concentration site and assured all those imprisoned that he would do whatever he could to save them. Then, he sent a letter to the king regarding their case.⁶⁶ The monarch, after consulting the prime minister, decided to cancel the operation. The order came 2 hours before its scheduled start.

However, Peshev was concerned that this was only a temporary postponement, so on March 17, together with Sobranje's 42 deputies, he sent an official protest letter to the prime minister. It condemned the government's policy towards Jews, which worked to the detriment of Bulgaria's interest and prestige in the international arena. It was also indicated that the "deportation" is a death sentence for everyone it includes.⁶⁷ In the next days, at the request of the vice-chairman, a resolution condemning the alleged acts of atrocities committed by the government during the deportation was put on the agenda. Unfortunately, the required majority was not reached during the vote, and the greatest advocate of the Jewish issue was dismissed from his post.⁶⁸ The protest might appear to have failed as the government retained the majority in the parliament and deportations continued in Thrace and Macedonia.

In early April, Boris III met with Adolf Hitler in Germany. During the visit, the issues of Bulgarian Jews were raised. The king then informed the chancellor that he had stopped the deportation because he needed Jews in the construction of roads and railroads. The consequence of this was the creation of labour camps in Bulgaria.

66. Ibid.

67. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

68. R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 939.

The German side did not give up. In the following weeks, under pressure from the German deputation in Sofia, Belev prepared two new deportation plans. Plan A assumed the deportation of all Jews to Poland. Plan B allowed to deport Jews living in cities to the provinces. Both plans were submitted to the king, who finally accepted the latter.⁶⁹ Church and public opinion interpreted the expulsion of Jews from the cities as the first step to deportation. On May 24, a demonstration by the Jewish community against the new actions carried out by the Commissariat took place in Sofia. The Metropolitan of Sofia, Stefan, gave full support to the demonstrators. Although the protests were quickly pacified, Alexander Belev realized that deportation abroad was no longer possible.

It is worth quoting the words he said shortly after the demonstration to the arrested Rabbi Hananel:

You should be grateful that you have support, powerful support behind you. Otherwise, today I would imprison you and your entire community and send to Germany, not Poland.⁷⁰

By the end of June, most of the Jews had been resettled to the provinces, and Beckerle reported to his superiors:

I wish to assure you that we are doing everything we can to properly bring about the final liquidation of the Jewish question. Unfortunately, direct pressure is not working. Bulgarians have lived in one country with Armenians, Greeks and Gypsies for so long that they simply cannot understand the Jewish problem.⁷¹

The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs pressed several more times to resume operations, but Beckerle got them to understand that any of their request would be rejected anyway.

In mid-1943, the military situation of the Third Reich changed significantly. On the eastern front, after the defeat at Stalingrad and the defeat at Kursk, Wehrmacht irretrievably lost the initiative and went on the defensive. The Western Allies at that time, after driving the Axis forces out from Africa, invaded Sicily. Although the war was to continue for almost two more years, it was almost certain which side would win.

In August 1943, a few days after returning from a meeting with Hitler, King Boris III died. To this day, the causes of the monarch's sudden death are not entirely clear. In Bulgaria, however, the situation of the Jews had stabilized. It is true that they still had to stay in the provinces and work in organized camps, but the threat of death in the gas chambers was

69. R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 940.

70. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

71. NG-2357 Beckerle do MSZ, June 7, 1943, cit.: R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 940.

averted. On August 30, 1944, on the eve of the Soviet invasion of Bulgaria, the headlines of Sofia newspapers reported the cancellation of all anti-Jewish laws.⁷²

TRANSPORTS FROM THE BALKANS IN THE ACCOUNTS OF WITNESSES FROM "TREBLINKA"

All the people deported from the Balkans were almost immediately exterminated. However, the accounts of witnesses describing their arrival at the camp have been preserved. In Treblinka II, not all of them were murdered at once. Few had a chance to extend their lives by working in special commandos performing various jobs ordered by the German crew, e.g. they segregated looted property, cut women's hair before they entered the gas chambers, or buried bodies in mass graves. Due to frequent selections, the personal composition of the groups was subject to a large rotation. They included no more than 1,000 people at a time.⁷³

This is how Yankiel Wiernik⁷⁴ remembers the arrival of foreigners:

The Bulgarian Jews were strong and husky specimens. Looking at them, it was hard to believe that in 20 minutes they would all be dead in the gas chambers. These handsome Jews were not permitted an easy death. Only small quantities of gas were let into the chambers, so that their agony lasted through the night. They also had to endure severe tortures before entering the gas chambers. Envy of their well-fed appearance prompted the executioners to torment them all the more.⁷⁵

Richard Glazar⁷⁶ recalled the transports from the Balkans as follows:

72. R. Hilberg, *op.cit.*, p. 942.

73. E. Kopówka, *Treblinka. Nigdy Więcej*, Treblinka 2002, p. 22.

74. Yankiel Wiernik was a Polish Jew who was sent to the Treblinka Extermination Camp on August 23, 1942. He worked in the work commandos in the camp. During the uprising that broke out on August 2, 1943, he managed to escape and wait in hiding until the end of the war. He is the author of the book, *A Year in Treblinka*, documenting the course of the extermination. After the war, he testified at the trials of German criminals.

75. Y. Wiernik, *A Year in Treblinka*, New York 1944, p. 33.

76. Richard Glazar was a Czech Jew. In October 1942, he was imprisoned in the Treblinka II camp. He worked in the so-called "Lower Camp". During the revolt on August 2, 1943, he managed to escape. Together with his friend Karel Unger, during the escape, they pretended to be Czech workers of the Todt Organization. After the war, he was a witness for the prosecution in the trials of the Treblinka crew in Düsseldorf, incl. commanders Kurt Franz and Franz Stangl.

For four days, full wagons enter the ramp and leave empty. Women with children go and disappear in the square – undressing room. The impressive brown men's shoes go through the empty square-sorting area, next to the flatcar passages, and they run slowly to eternity – Bulgarians, Greeks, Yugoslavs.⁷⁷

Paradoxically, the food brought by the murdered saved the lives of the Jewish workers in the camp. Before their arrival, these people were hungry.

During these six weeks, in which there were no transports, we lost a lot of weight and a lot of energy, many began to fall ill, especially with typhus.⁷⁸

Each train heading to the camp had to go through a small railway station in Treblinka. Its employee was Franciszek Ząbecki. As a member of the Home Army, he secretly collected all information documenting the Holocaust taking place nearby. On August 6, 1944, risking his life, he took some of the documents proving the crimes committed in Treblinka II from the mined station building. On March 6, 1968, he testified at the trial of German criminals. Adolf Beckerle – German ambassador to Bulgaria was one of them. Among the evidence confirming the arrival of transports from the Balkans, there is a telegram concerning the transports to Treblinka from Bulgaria and Greece (see Annex II), and a list of wagons of the train arriving from Skopje (see Annex III).

It turned out, however, that I was to find out if there were any transports of Jews from Greece and Bulgaria. Oh yes! I can confirm that. In the railway documents I saved, there are also lists of trains sent “von Thessaloniki” (from Thessaloniki) and several messages about the commissioning of the trains “aus Bulgarien und Griechenland” (from Bulgaria and Greece).⁷⁹

Samuel Willenberg⁸⁰ escaped from Treblinka II during the revolt on August 2, 1943, and after the war he described his memories. They include

77. R. Glazar, *Stacja Treblinka*, Warszawa 2011, p. 101.

78. G. Sereny, *W stronę ciemności. Rozmowy z komendantem Trebłinki*, Warszawa 2002, p. 185.

79. F. Ząbecki, *Wspomnienia dawne i nowe*, Warszawa 1977, p. 135.

80. Samuel Willenberg was sent to the camp on October 20, 1942. During the selection, following the advice of one of the prisoners, he pretended to be a bricklayer and this saved his life. In the camp he worked in various commandos, he was a member of the conspiracy, which set themselves the goal of organizing a revolt and escaping. On August 2, together with other prisoners, he managed to escape and wait until the end of the war. He fought in the Warsaw Uprising. In 1950, he emigrated to Israel.

an account of the arrival of a transport from Thessaloniki, about which Yitzhak Arad wrote in his book.

A slightly strange crowd spilled out – people with dark faces, curly, raven-black hair, and a foreign tongue on their lips. The suitcases taken out of the cars bore labels reading “Saloniki”. [...] Every last one of them exited the cars in a state of total calm. Grandly dressed women, beautiful children [...] Mitte found three Greeks with a command of German and drafted them as interpreters. None of them understood the place they had reached or the fate that awaited them. The sad, tragic reality dawned on them only when they marched, stark naked, to the “shower” and when they absorbed unexpected beatings as the Germans shouted “Schnell, schnell!”⁸¹

SUMMARY

The Holocaust during World War II claimed the lives of nearly 6 million Jews. It is an unprecedented example of an attempted industrial genocide of an entire nation that had never happened before in the history of the world. After the war, only a few who had survived returned to Macedonia and Thrace. Unfortunately, out of over 11,000 deported to Treblinka II, no one survived.

Looking at other European countries, it can be noticed that in the countries defeated and occupied by the Third Reich, the fate of Jews was harder than in those remaining in alliance with Germany.⁸² When we look at the fate of Bulgarian Jews and those from the “New Territories”, it is hard not to ask a few questions: Why did some people survive and others die despite the fact that they all lived in the lands administered by the same authority? Is Alexandar Matkovski’s thesis right that Bulgaria deported Jews from Thrace and Macedonia because it could not resist German pressure and sacrificed them in exchange for saving its citizens?⁸³ Or maybe the then Bulgarian government was simply pragmatic and corrected its policy depending on the general situation of the Third Reich in the ongoing conflict? Under German influence, they agreed to deportation, but when the internal influence of its opponents became strong enough, it was decided to revise the existing policy and wait for the course of events to unfold. Wi-

81. S. Willenberg, *Revolt in Treblinka*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 104.

82. The exception is Denmark, which despite the occupation had extensive internal autonomy, thanks to which they managed to save almost its entire Jewish community.

83. A. Matkovski, *A history...*, *op.cit.*, p. 181.

thin a few months of 1943, the military situation in Germany was changing dynamically. The Wehrmacht was, of course, able to attack and defeat Bulgaria, although its attention was focused on other theaters of operation. Moreover, the loss of an important ally in this part of Europe might have been too high a price for the extermination of “only” tens of thousands of Jews. According to Frederick B. Chary, only significant German successes in the ongoing war could change the position of the Bulgarian government on the resumption of deportation.⁸⁴

Following the rebirth of Bulgaria since 1878, it can be seen that from the very beginning, it aimed at annexing the Thracian and Macedonian lands (the concept of “Great Bulgaria”). Despite the fact that the land was temporarily taken over, the Bulgarian government granted the citizenship of its country to almost all residents. They only excluded the Jewish minority, appropriating at the very end its modest fortune. The fate of these people will always overshadow the subsequent merits and contribution of some politicians, the king, the church and society as a whole to the salvation of nearly 50,000 Bulgarian Jews.

84. F.B. Chary, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

ANNEX I

Copy of the Bulgarian version of the Belev-Dannecker contract

The Dannecker-Belev Agreement

[Copies of the Bulgarian version of the Dannecker-Belev agreement are located in Natan Grinberg, *Dokumenti* (Documents) (Sofia: Central Consistory of Jews in Bulgaria, 1945), pp. 14-16 (from which this translation is made); and in Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Balkan Studies, Section for Hebrew Studies archives, doc. no. 38. The German version is not found among the captured foreign office documents in Washington or among the public Bulgarian sources.]

AGREEMENT

for the deportation of the first 20,000 Jews from the new Bulgarian lands Thrace and Macedonia into the German eastern regions

attained between

Bulgarian Commissar for Jewish Questions, Mr. Aleksandur *Belev*, on one side, and German plenipotentiary, Captain of the Defense Detachment [SS-Hauptsturmführer] Theodor *Dannecker*, on the other side.

1. After confirmation by the Council of Ministers, in the new Bulgarian lands Thrace and Macedonia* will be prepared 20,000 Jews—without regard to age and sex—for deportation.

The German Reich is ready to accept these Jews in their eastern regions.

2. Departure stations, passengers, and number of trains are established as follows:

- | | | |
|----|-----------|---------------------|
| a) | in Skopje | 5,000 with 5 trains |
| b) | in Bitola | 3,000 with 3 trains |

* Belev crossed out the words “from the new Bulgarian lands Thrace and Macedonia” in the title and “in the new Bulgarian lands Thrace and Macedonia” in the text.

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- c) in Pirot 2,000 with 2 trains
- d) in G. Dzumaia 3,000 with 3 trains
- e) in Dupnitsa 3,000 with 3 trains
- f) in Radomir 4,000 with 4 trains

As complete accommodation of the last 12,000 Jews in the camps is possible only until 15 April 1943, the German plenipotentiary will procure these 12 trains—insofar as this will be possible according to technical conditions—to be prepared to depart in the time from the end of March to 15 April 1943.

The Jews concentrated in the cities Skopje and Bitola will be deported after 15 April 1943.

3. The Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Questions as an organ of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health accepts on behalf of the German Reich the guarantee that the following basic conditions will be fulfilled:

- a) The inclusion of Jews exclusively is permitted in the transports.
- b) Jews in mixed marriages are not to be included.
- c) In case the Jews being deported are not yet deprived of their citizenship, then this must occur at their departure from Bulgarian territory.
- d) Jews with contagious diseases are not to be included.
- e) Jews may not carry with them any arms, poisons, currency, precious metals, etc.

4. For each transport one list of persons included in the transport will be prepared; this list must contain the name, surnames, date and place of birth, last residence, and occupation of the Jews in three copies.

Two copies are to be transferred to the German guard accompanying the transport, and one to the German plenipotentiary in Sofia. The Bulgarian government will give according to arrangement the necessary food supplies for about fifteen days, counting from the day of traveling to the train, as well as the necessary number of water casks.

5. The question of the guard for the transport is still to be decided. Possibly a German guard command will take over the transports even in the departure station.

- 6. a) The amount of monetary compensation payable by Bulgaria, determined according to the number of deportees, will be decided with a special agreement. The carrying out of the transports in opportune time will not be affected by this.
- b) The expenses for the transport from the departure station to the destination are the responsibility of Bulgaria.

7. The Bulgarian State Railway and the German State Railway will agree directly on the schedule of the trains as well as on the disposition of the means of transport.

8. In no case will the Bulgarian government ask for the return of the deported Jews.

9. The present agreement will be prepared in two copies in the Bulgarian and German languages, each of these copies being regarded as an original.

Sofia, 22 February 1943

A. Belev (signed)
T. Dannecker (signed)

Source: F.B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944*, Pittsburgh 1972, pp. 208-210.

ANNEX II

Telegram concerning the launch of trains to Treblinka from Greece and Bulgaria

IFN GK 100/70
NTN 70

Deutsche Reichsbahn

Bahndiensttelegramm

Zahlen: Telephonstelle		Abgegeben				
an	um	an Telephonstelle	Ltg od Pl	Tag	Zeit	Name
38 11	4:5					
von	Ltg					
Name						
Gattung		von (Ursprungsstelle)		(Ursprungs-) Nummer		
B		Gedob Krakau		1609		
<p>BT Krakau betrifft DA. zuge aus Bulgarien und Griechenland durch Tfpa Anordnung für genaue Sonderzüge bestimmte Zahl und der dort anwesenden Personen genaustens durchführung entgegen in beförderungs schein auf Richts. Karte prüfen und abrechnungen auf diesem vermerken. Hier an nicht 500 sonder 490 Personen abrechnungen beförderungschein u. s. u. sofort an V. R. I. Krakau senden.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Gedob Krakau 9 D. M. I. P. S.</p>						

(9)

192 ✓

41001 Bahndiensttelegramm A 4 Bz 100. Schreibmasch-Papier Breslau XI 41 10000 K

56 z 207

Source: Inspection report of documents taken from the Treblinka station by F. Zabecki, IPN GK 196/70. A copy in the resources of the Treblinka Museum.

ANNEX III

List of transport wagons from Skopje

Deutsche Reichsbahn
Eisenbahndirektion: *Wien* **Wagenzettel** *I 44 (6)*

am *22. 12. 1941* von *Skopje* nach *Belgrad*
in *Leoben* von *Skopje* nach *Belgrad*
in *Graz* von *Skopje* nach *Belgrad*
in *Wien* von *Skopje* nach *Belgrad*

Wagen- nummer	Wagen- typ	Wagen- zustand	Wagen- gewicht	Wagen- länge	Wagen- breite	Gesamtgewicht des Wagens		Bedientes Gütergewicht		Verlader- bahnhof	Entladung- bahnhof	Bemerkungen
						I	II	I	II			
30487	63	3	50	14	11					Skopje	Belgrad	
30488	63	3	50	14	11							
30489	63	3	50	14	11							
30490	63	3	50	14	11							
30491	63	3	50	14	11							
30492	63	3	50	14	11							
30493	63	3	50	14	11							
30494	63	3	50	14	11							
30495	63	3	50	14	11							
30496	63	3	50	14	11							
30497	63	3	50	14	11							
30498	63	3	50	14	11							
30499	63	3	50	14	11							
30500	63	3	50	14	11							
30501	63	3	50	14	11							
30502	63	3	50	14	11							
30503	63	3	50	14	11							
30504	63	3	50	14	11							
30505	63	3	50	14	11							
30506	63	3	50	14	11							
30507	63	3	50	14	11							
30508	63	3	50	14	11							
30509	63	3	50	14	11							
30510	63	3	50	14	11							
30511	63	3	50	14	11							
30512	63	3	50	14	11							
30513	63	3	50	14	11							
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30577	63	3	50	14	11							
30578	63	3	50	14	11							
30579	63	3	50	14	11							
30580	63	3	50	14	11							
30581	63	3	50	14	11							
30582	63	3	50	14	11							
30583	63	3	50	14	11							
30584	63	3	50	14	11							
30585	63	3	50	14	11							
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30587	63	3	50	14	11							
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30591	63	3	50	14	11							
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30594	63	3	50	14	11							
30595	63	3	50	14	11							
30596	63	3	50	14	11							
30597	63	3	50	14	11							
30598	63	3	50	14	11							
30599	63	3	50	14	11							
30600	63	3	50	14	11							

18 Wagenzettel A 4 Bk 100 gelocht 6 b. Wien X (1) 25000 Struermühl

67 z 207

IPN GK 196/70
NTN 70

45

Deutsche Reichsbahn
Eisenbahn-Direktion: *Frankfurt*

Wagenzettel

am *12. 12. 43* von *Frankfurt* nach *Radom*
in *Frankfurt* von *Frankfurt* nach *Frankfurt*
in *Frankfurt* von *Frankfurt* nach *Frankfurt*
in *Frankfurt* von *Frankfurt* nach *Frankfurt*

1	2	3	4a	4b	5	6a	6b			7a	7b	8	9	10
							6b	6c	6d					
Wagennummer	Wagenart	Wagenbezeichnung	Wagenbezeichnung	Wagenbezeichnung	Wagenbezeichnung	Wagenbezeichnung	Gesamtgewicht des Wagens			Nebenlast		Wagenbezeichnung	Wagenbezeichnung	Wagenbezeichnung
							I	II	III	IV	V			
							Luft	Luft	Luft	Luft	Luft			
							in Tonnen							
1469	9	2				3	11							
63616	9	2				3	11							
51559	9	2				3	13	10						
61946	9	2				3	11	11						
93591	9	2				3	11	10						
14639	9	2				3	13							
13446	9	2				3	13							
99531	9	2				3	14							
99439	9	2				3	12							
39903	9	2				3	12							
31502	9	2				3	14	10						
13754	9	2				3	12	10						
13709	9	2				3	10							
13710	9	2				3	11	12						
14-	9	2				28	15	13						
3-	9	2				11	146	116						
14-	9	2				23	57	209						

18 Wagenzettel A 4 12x 100 geteilt 6 b. Wien X/41 25.000 Streichenbild

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Source: Inspection report of documents taken from the Treblinka station by F. Żabecki, IPN GK 196/70. A copy in the resources of the Treblinka Museum.

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Edward Kopówka
Treblinka Museum
The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

THE COMMEMORATION OF THE EXTERMINATION CAMP IN TREBLINKA. AN ATTEMPT AT INTERPRETATION

YEARS OF OBLIVION AND DESECRATION

On September 15, 1944, the Polish-Soviet Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes was the first to appear in the post-camp areas. It was represented by: P. Sobolewski, Mieczysław Chodźko and Lieutenant Colonel Lewkow. On the site of the former camp the commission found a “field overgrown with potatoes”, while over the site “a corpse-like scent could still be smelled”. As was concluded: “the only witnesses of these crimes, of this death factory, of the place where a million people were executed, are the scattered, torn, burned parts of ID cards here and there. [...] A large amount of strewn about and damaged objects of everyday use, such as bowls, cups, forks, children’s toys, shreds of documents and books, torn clothes, and a lot of footwear of all sizes and styles.”¹ Then representatives of the Voivodeship Historical Commission from Warsaw visited the post-camp area on September 13, 1945. They were Michał Kalembsiak and Karol Ogrodowczyk. The sight they saw was terrifying. The whole area was dug up and there were human bones in the pits. They also stumbled upon “diggers.”² Such a condition was found by another group of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, which visited the area on November 5-7, 1945.³ The commission was

1. Jewish Historical Institute (JHI), the testimony of Mieczysław Chodźko, ref. 302/321, pp. 103-104.

2. JHI, Katalog obozów (Camps catalogue), no. 301/4867.

3. IPN (Institute of National Remembrance), File OB, no. 66, sheet 2.

composed of: Zdzisław Łukaszkiwicz – investigating judge of the Regional Court in Siedlce; Jerzy Maciejewski – prosecutor; Rachela Auerbach, Capt. Dr. Józef Kermisz – representatives of the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland; Samuel Rajzman, Henryk Reichman, Filip Friedman, R. Mitelberg, Tanchum Grynberg – representatives of the Circle of Former Treblinka Prisoners; K. Trautsolt – sworn land surveyor; R. Ślebzak – chairperson of the Powiat National Council; Kucharek – village head of Wólka Okrąglik; Jakub Byk – photojournalist. The purpose of the meeting was to inspect the crime scene. Its result was to confirm the existence of the extermination camp, interview witnesses, create a photographic documentation of the state of the place, and take bones and objects constituting material evidence from the site.⁴ However, no action was taken for another dozen years or so. The area was penetrated by numerous “diggers” looking for valuable objects. The militia carried out raids with weapons. At least two people were killed during these operations. The phenomenon of “treasure hunting” in the area of the former extermination camp intensified in 1946. Proof that those practices had become widespread is the fact that the Polish Film Chronicle in 1957 focused on this issue making a film with the telling title “Hieny” [Hyenas].⁵ In May 1961, Janusz Gronostajski, a member of the Bureau of Provincial National Council, wrote: “The project intended to tidy up and commemorate the former Treblinka Extermination Camp must be completed as soon as possible, because the area of the Holocaust is dangerous, and the place where the mass graves are located has not been properly commemorated.”⁶

After the publication in 2011 of the book *Golden Harvest* by Prof. Tomasz Gross, media and social discussion broke out concerning the time, which we now call “the time of oblivion and desecration”. The inspiration for writing this book by Prof. Tomasz Gross was the discovery of the photograph of the alleged “diggers” in Treblinka. As a result of this discussion, another book was published, *Wokół “Złotych Żniw”* [Around the “Golden Harvest”]. It contains numerous press publications of various authors based on the discussion about the photo and book by prof. Gross. It includes an article by Marcin Kącki entitled “Powiększenie. Nowe oblicze znanego zdjęcia”

4. JHI, File OB, no. 209/41.

5. Warsaw Documentary Film Studio, P.K.F. 17B/57 Edit decision list, p. 9.

6. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce (AMRS), Wojewódzki Obywatelski Komitet Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa (WOKOPWiM) (Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments). Upamiętnienie terenu byłego obozu kaźni w Treblince 1958-1962 [Commemoration of the former extermination camp area in Treblinka 1958-1962], no. 21/1, sheet 63.

[Enlargement. The new face of a well-known photo], in which he describes, among others, participation of the museum and the author of this paper in the explanation of the circumstances and the place where the photo was taken. Unfortunately, this was not unequivocally established.⁷

It is also significant that from 1950 the state-owned enterprise called "Spółdzielnia Pracy Zbieraczy Materiałów Budowlanych" (Worker Cooperative of Gatherers of Buildings Materials) started mining the gravel in Treblinka again. However, it was only from December 1952, that the enterprise held an official permit from the Commune National Council in Kosów Lacki. In October 1953, the owners of the gravel pit area: Jakub Borkowski, Helena Garbowska and Zofia Woroniecka wrote to the Ministry of Construction in Warsaw claiming compensation for the exploitation of the gravel in Treblinka. The Ministry asked Warszawskie Zakłady Robót Żelbetowych (the Warsaw Reinforced Concrete Works), located at 1 Felińskiego Street to clarify this. Gravel excavation probably stopped by 1955,⁸ but no exact date has been determined.

MEMORIAL COMPLEX

Former prisoners of the Treblinka camps met on July 15, 1945 at Oskar Strawczyński's house. The meeting was attended by 15 prisoners from the extermination camp, they were: Jankiel Wiernik, Szymon Goldberg, Sabina (Sonia) Grabińska, Henryk Rajchman, Aharon Czechowicz, Henoch Brener, Arie Gidlik, Samuel Rajzman, Abe Kohn, Chaim Ciechanowski, Samuel Willenberg, Lejzer Ciechanowski, Henryk Pozwolski, Oskar Strawczyński and Wolf Sznajdman, and three prisoners from the labour camp: Mieczysław Chodźko, Zygmunt Rothendler, Stanisław Kohn. The Central Jewish Historical Commission was represented by Leon Szeftl, Rachela Auerbach and Janina Bucholc. During the meeting, the way in which to commemorate the grounds of the former camps, mainly the extermination camp, was discussed.

Two years later, on June 18, 1947, Komitet Zabezpieczenia Grobów Ofiar w Treblince (the Committee for the Protection of the Victims' Graves in Treblinka) was established. Its goal was to secure the area provisionally, fence it off, put up a guard booth, collect funds for tidying up the post-camp area

7. J.T. Gross, I. Grudzińska-Gross, *Złote żniwa* [Golden Harvest], Kraków 2011. Wokół "Złotych żniw". *Debata oksiężce Jana Tomasza Grossa i Ireny Grudzińskiej-Gross*, selection and layout of texts D. Lis, Kraków 2011.

8. Based on the findings and materials provided to the author by Michał Lebioda.

and develop a form of commemoration for the place. Later it was known as Komitet Uczczenia Ofiar Treblinki – KUOT (Committee for the Remembrance of the Treblinka Victims).⁹ Its first official meeting took place on July 9, 1947 in the building of the Parliament of the Republic of Poland. Ludwik Dura, the voivode of Warsaw, became the chairman of KUOT. The Committee was composed, among others, of the head of the Department of Graves at the Ministry of Reconstruction – Eng. Edmund Dunin, member of the Presidium of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP) – Salo Fiszgrund and representatives of: the Ministry of State Administration, the Ministry of National Defence, the National Council of the Capital City of Warsaw and the Polish Red Cross. The committee was to receive a subsidy from the state budget, and a fundraising was also planned.¹⁰

In 1947, a competition was announced for a project to commemorate the former extermination and the labour camps. Disputes in the committee were caused by the issue of the languages in which information boards were to be made in the future commemoration. They were intended to be made in 10 languages: Polish, Russian, Yiddish, French, German, Czech, Hungarian, Greek, Dutch and Hebrew. KUOT opted for this idea. Another option was to write inscriptions in three languages only: Yiddish, Polish and Hebrew. This concept was favoured by CKŻP.¹¹ The authors who won the competition for the commemoration were the architects Władysław Niemiec (alias Niemirski) and Alfons Zielonko. The competition was launched by the Department of War Graves at the Ministry of Reconstruction and the Committee for the Remembrance of the Treblinka Victims. According to the design, the entire death camp was to be fenced with a stone wall. The “star of Zion” was to be placed inside and surrounded by birches, pine trees and low-growing vegetation. The most important element was supposed to be 25-meter-high Decalogue boards with the inscription “Thou shalt not kill”. Below the Decalogue, a passage to the building where a model of the reconstructed Treblinka based on a drawing by former prisoner Jankiel Wiernik was to be built. Behind the Decalogue, a mausoleum in the shape of a circle covered with a dome was designed. Although the project was intended for implementation at the beginning

9. M. Rusiniak, *Obóz zagłady Treblinka II w pamięci społecznej (1943-1989)*, Warszawa 2008, p. 37.

10. Z. Wóycicka, *Przerwana żałoba. Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady 1944-1950*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 337-338.

11. Ibid., p. 339. The linguistic variance was treated as an attempt to identify the victims. The CKŻP wanted to emphasize that they were Jews and Gypsies, KUOT emphasized their international character.

of 1948, it was never completed. The reasons for withdrawing from the undertaking are unknown.¹² Most likely, the plan was not implemented due to financial reasons. Zofia Wóycicka explains it as follows: "First of all [...] at the end of the 1940s, the Holocaust was almost completely tabooed in Poland. Secondly, with the Stalinisation of the country, religious symbolism began to be abandoned in the commemoration of war victims. Thirdly, the fight against 'the cult of suffering' declared at that time by the Polish communists led to focusing on struggle and heroism instead of martyrdom, which was also reflected in the forms of commemoration. Thus, the project 'did not correspond to the new political directives in any way'."¹³

In 1948, the Committee for the Remembrance of the Treblinka Victims also ceased its activity. It is difficult to say unequivocally why this decision was made. It seems that it was a reaction to a lack of proper interest from the authorities and the public. However, in September and November 1949 the area of the former extermination camp was tidied up. The maintenance work consisted of delineating the camp area by surveying it, fencing it with barbed wire attached to wooden posts stripped of the bark, installing the entrance gate, and marking out alleys.¹⁴

A few years later, in 1955, the Central Board of Museums and Heritage at the Ministry of Culture and Art and the Jewish Social-Cultural Association in Poland announced another competition. It was won by the team: Adam Haupt and Franciszek Duszeńko. The consultation of the project was entrusted to Prof. Ludwika Nitschowa. The Bureau of the Provincial National Council in Warsaw by the resolution no. XVI/69 of 03/06/1958 decided to implement the plan of commemoration. The Regional Directorate for the Construction of Workers' Housing Estates in Warsaw was appointed as the investor.¹⁵ However, the decision to implement the plan was not made until 1961. One of the reasons was the lack of financial resources.

The Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments, when commemorating the former camps in Treblinka, referred to the resolution of July 2, 1947 passed by the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic. In

12. Z. Wóycicka, "Niezrealizowany projekt upamiętnienia terenu byłego obozu zagłady w Treblince z 1947 roku. Próba analizy ikonograficznej" [in:] *Stosowność i forma. Jak opowiadać o zagładzie?*, Kraków 2005, pp. 319-348.

13. Z. Wóycicka, *Przerwana żałoba...*, *op.cit.*, p. 361.

14. Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach, Powiatowa Rada Narodowa w Sokołowie Podlaskim, *Inwestycje na ogrodzenie cmentarza w Treblince 1949*, no. 73. Only the receipts from the works carried out, describing their type and costs, were preserved. We do not know why the area was tidied up, it may be related to "diggers" and searching for valuables.

15. AMRS, WOKOPWiM, Projekt wstępny, no. 21, sheet 7.

its proclamation the council appealed: "We are obliged to erect permanent monuments-museums in the areas of former concentration camps collecting evidence of Nazi crimes, accusing the murderers, perpetrators of World War II and the creators of concentration camps."¹⁶ The fact that the authorities became interested in the Treblinka case in the early 1960s has its roots in the political situation in Europe, at that time divided into capitalist and socialist countries. The Federal Republic of Germany in the local trial of war criminals in 1960, recognized their crime to be time-barred. Socialist countries, including Poland, launched a propaganda campaign against the policy of the Federal Republic of Germany. This country was considered the heir to the policy of the Third Reich and the enemy of peace. The aim was to legally establish no statute of limitation for Nazi crimes and to recognise them as genocide. An important event was also the trial of Adolf Eichmann, which began in April 1961. The Polish authorities wanted to show the world the Nazi crimes in a new light by erecting monuments in the places of the former camps, and to show the fact that those crimes should be remembered, and that the criminals responsible for this should be prosecuted and brought to trial. Building the commemoration in Treblinka was therefore a form of a manifesto against war crimes in general, and particularly against those committed in this location.¹⁷

In the years 1958-1962, the area for the planned commemoration was purchased. 127.15 hectares were expropriated, including: forests – 63.16 hectares, dry meadows – 21.57 hectares, arable land – 26.62 hectares, gravel pit 15.8 hectares. The plots were bought from 192 owners from the villages of Prostyń, Grądy, Wólka Okrąglik, and Maliszewa Nowa.¹⁸ The Artistic and Research Unit of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw was commissioned to build the monument. Then Franciszek Strynkiewicz joined the team. Together, they developed a new spatial and monumental arrangement. And like their predecessors, they did not just confine the arrangement to the monument, but also took into account the entire area. The boundaries of the former extermination camp were marked with huge two-meter-high stones (photo 1).

16. AMRS, WOKOPWiM 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 97, more information can be found in Annex I, which is included in the original publication released in Polish.

17. M. Rusiniak, *Obóz zagłady Treblinka II...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 43-44.

18. AMRS, WOKOPWiM 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 17. Currently, the museum area together with the roads covers approximately 137 hectares. It was enlarged in the 1980s by the area around the penal labour camp transferred to the museum by the State Forests of the Sokołów Podlaski Forest District. In 2018, the museum additionally took possession of a plot of land which is part of the former Treblinka railway station, with an area of 4.72 hectares.



1. Stones symbolizing the boundaries of the camp (photo by B. Domalewska)

On the Kosów Lacki-Małkinia road, approximately 100 meters before the turn leading to the internal road to the parking lot, concrete information monuments were set up on both sides of the road. These monuments bear the side inscription "TREBLINKA. Nazi extermination camp". Opposite the entrance there was another, higher one, with an identical inscription on the front. On both sides of the concrete road, which was built in 1940-1941, low-growing thujas were planted. The author of the greenery design is Danuta Oppenheim, a landscape architect. On her initiative, the western side of the Black Road was afforested, on the opposite side of the ramp, to create the impression of being "closed and surrounded" and to separate the view of the farmland. The existing greenery separating the area of the extermination camp and the labour camp was also strengthened by planting pine trees in order to present to the visitors the difference between those two areas and create a dramatic atmosphere of the gravel pit, and a moment of surprise and astonishment. In the initial phase of the discussion on the memorial complex in Treblinka, the construction of an element connecting the extermination camp with the penal labour camp, the so-called "third additional binding accent", was considered. However, this idea was abandoned, and these two arrangements were finally divided by a dense forest.¹⁹ After several dozen years of no interference with

19. It is difficult to answer unequivocally whether it was an appropriate and correct solution. Perhaps the point was that the scale of the crimes in both camps was incomparable, and that administratively they functioned separately during

the afforestation, the greenery, through self-seeding, uncontrollably encroached on the memorial site and disrupted the original arrangements. Currently, large areas of the Museum are treated in geodesic terms as a typical forest in which only typical forestry operations should be performed, approved in the "Simplified Forest Management Plan". The grounds of the Museum require redevelopment of green areas.

In front of the entrance to the camp, there is a plan of the Museum area, carved in white sandstone and set on a concrete base. Behind it, information boards were made in the same way in Polish, Yiddish, Russian, English, German, French, with the following wording: ON THIS SITE THERE WAS A NAZI EXTERMINATION CAMP, BETWEEN JULY 1942 AND AUGUST 1943, WHERE MORE THAN 800,000 JEWS FROM POLAND, U.S.S.R, YUGOSLAVIA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, BULGARIA, AUSTRIA, FRANCE, BELGIUM, GERMANY AND GREECE WERE MURDERED. ON 2 AUGUST 1943 THE PRISONERS ORGANIZED AN ARMED REVOLT WHICH WAS BLOODILY SUPPRESSED BY THE NAZI OPPRESSORS. IN THE PENAL LABOUR CAMP AT A DISTANCE OF 2 KM FROM HERE THE NAZIS MURDERED AN ESTIMATED NUMBER OF 10,000 POLES BETWEEN 1941 AND 1944 (photo 2).

The entrance gate was commemorated with two concrete blocks (photo 3). Its author is Prof. Adam Haupt. The gate's commemorative function was justified as follows: "from the Black Road to the place where the camp gate once existed, there will be a passage along the siding. This "cobblestone" passage encounters a kind of open "camp gate", designed in the form of concrete blocks with the raw texture of the removed boarding, and with the engraved inscription "Vernichtungs – lager Treblinka". This gate, situated on the border of the extermination camp and framed on both sides by a thicket of pine trees will be a clear sign of crossing the "threshold" of the Death Camp. Beyond it, the view of the siding and its branch will open again, leading towards the unloading ramp."²⁰ Another consultant, T. Kochniarz, justified this element of commemoration in the following way: "The gate' does not mean the place of entry of the murdered into

the German occupation. However, together with the gravel pit, the camp cemetery (now called the Execution Site), and the Black Road, formed the camp complex (centre). There are known cases of sending deportees to the gravel pit and to the labour camp who had previously were on the ramp of the extermination camp, e.g. Mieczysław Chodźko, author of the book *Escape from Treblinka* (Montreal 2005).

20. AMRS, WOKOPWiM 1958-1962, Projekt wstępny, no. 21/1, sheet. 11.



2. Concrete tablets in front of the symbolic entrance gate
(photo by B. Domalewska)



3. Symbolic gate (photo by B. Domalewska)

the camp,²¹ but is a symbol of the gate of death for the living who view the document of the crime. The arrangement of two raw concrete blocks, with the special mutual positioning, is the symbol of the gate of death that has been sought for here.”²² There was some discussion regarding the inscription on the gate for some time. There were proposals to write the name of the camp in other languages next to the German inscription. Eventually the inscription was made only in Polish: “Obóz zagłady” (extermination camp). In retrospect, it seems that the original proposal was more appropriate, especially at a time when claims of “Polish camps” are made.

The idea to keep the motif of the gate in commemoration was accurate. Those who want to communicate with each other pass through the gate. The gate both divides and connects two worlds. Each gate is a border. Walking through it means entering another world, crossing the border between two types of existence. The gate is a universal symbol of the transition from the earthly world to eternal life, a frequent motif in ancient and Christian tombs. In Judaism it is also of great importance: “This is the gate of the Lord; The righteous will enter through it” (Ps 118:20) – this is a verse often found in synagogues, and sometimes on cemetery gates, as in Sopot. Another verse of the Psalm says: “that I may declare your praises in the gates of Daughter Zion, and there rejoice in your salvation” (Ps 9:14). Jewish tombstones often resemble gates. In addition to their appearance, they contain a relief – “a gate closed with a padlock, sometimes even locked with several locks – as if to emphasize the irrevocability of the closure of earthly life. Such reliefs are found quite often in the Warsaw cemetery [...] An interesting analogy is a Sephardic tomb in London, in which the lid of the marble sarcophagus has the form of an open door” – wrote Monika Krajewska, an expert on this subject.²³

A paved road leads through the centre of the gate to the ramp. While walking along it, we put our feet cautiously, because the large gaps between the stones make it difficult to walk. On the right side we can see concrete blocks leading to the ramp (photo 4 and 5), those are symbolic tracks. The original railway tracks leading to the gravel pit were preserved

21. Those deported to the camp arrived in cattle wagons that stopped at the ramp.

22. AMRS, WOKOPWiM 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 46.

23. M. Krajewska, “Symbolika płaskorzeźb na cmentarzach żydowskich w Polsce”, *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, nr 1-2 (1989), pp. 56-57. While guiding visitors, I noticed that the arrangement of the concrete blocks forces them to “squeeze”, creating a compact group in which each person is forced to occupy a small space. This causes fear in those who walk at the beginning, and those who walk at the end instinctively avoid the gate.



4. Symbolic railway track (photo by B. Domalewska)



5. Ramp (photo by B. Domalewska)

until the memorial complex was built, while the branch (siding) leading to the former camp ramp was most probably removed by the Germans themselves when the camp was liquidated. The track that existed at that time was used during the construction of the commemoration to import materials, e.g. granite blocks and cement. After the construction of the main commemoration, the tracks were dismantled and concrete "symbolic railroad sleepers" were built. In retrospect, this should be considered a mistake. These remnants should have been integrated into the commemoration during its construction. The authors of the project probably thought that the entire area should be commemorated only symbolically. For this reason, the then existing remains of the foundations of the new gas chambers, and the foundations of the armoury (they are only documented in archival photos) were not secured.

In 2008, the railway tracks on the Małkinia–Kosów Lacki route were demolished and a road was built there. Because of that, a new form of communication should be found so that to make visitors aware that Jews and Roma were deported to the camp in railway carriages. Currently, a frequent question asked by visitors is: "How did people get to the camp?" However, when planning the commemoration, A. Ciborowski postulated: "One sculptural accent – a monument should be put at a key point in the area. In my opinion, the authenticity of the entire place is the most important, not the authenticity of each fragment and its precise description."²⁴

The "initial design" drawn up in 1960 envisaged: "On the railyard – concrete beams referring to railway sleepers. The beams, simple in form, but significantly scaled up would create a sequence beginning around 150 m before the Camp's border, leading in a steady rhythm to the ramp, located along the middle section of one side of the Camp. Before the ramp it will branch off into a siding entering the grounds of the Camp. This spur track going along the whole ramp would end behind it with a wide concrete beam set across it, like a buffer symbolizing the end of the road."²⁵ The ramp measuring 147 x 15 m is located in a historical place, although it was shortened. It cuts off from the side of the siding, which creates a difference in height between the ramp and the lower ground of the siding, the difference is 60 cm. The purpose of this cut off is to create an association between the design and the railway siding as well as to emphasize the importance of this place and to indicate the approach to the central

24. AMRS, WOKOPWiM 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 35.

25. The Archives of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/3, sheet 12. The last element, the concrete beam, so called buffer, was not implemented.

monument. The surface of the siding is paved with irregularly arranged cobblestones. Ten stones were placed next to the ramp, with names of countries from which Jews were brought to the camp (photo 6). The countries include: Belgium, USSR, Yugoslavia, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria, Greece. The eleventh stone with the inscription Macedonia was placed in 2008.²⁶ A cobbled road²⁷ leads from the ramp to the monument. On both sides of the road, the undressing areas were marked with stones. The official laying of the foundation stone took place on April 21, 1958, after the meeting in Warsaw which was entitled “No more Majdaneks, Auschwitzes and Treblinkas” and it commemorated



6. Stones with the names of countries from which Jews were deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp (photo by B. Domalewska)

26. After the placement of this stone the spokesman of the Greece Embassy in Warsaw requested for an explanation of this initiative. The Embassy of Serbia also showed interest in this work. In 2020 the Embassy of Bulgaria objected to the existing stone with the inscription Bulgaria, which was put up in 1964. They argued that Bulgarians did not send their Jewish citizens to the extermination camp in Treblinka, on the contrary, they saved them. There are also other names of the countries like USSR that need clarification. Museum plans to do so in the new exhibition.

27. According to some interpretations it was supposed to lead to the gas chambers. The newest research did not confirm this thesis.

the 15th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. It is probably then that the idea to write the phrase “Never again” in front of the monument was put forward.

The central monument (photo 7) is built of big granite blocks, whose arrangement resembles the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.²⁸ The front wall gives an impression of being cracked, torn in the middle. It is a symbol of mourning in Judaism. The interpretation made by Justyna Gąsowska while looking at the monument is: “The tear in the monument’s wall makes one remember the world from before the Holocaust and the present one – the world of “the era after the Holocaust”. While looking at the monument one



7. Central monument and the path leading to it (photo by B. Domalewska)

should feel this tear, the crack in history. We should also understand that the tragedy can repeat itself and that we are responsible that it never happens again.”²⁹ The top is crowned with a “cap”, on which from the front, that is the west side, there is an image of torn human remains and two hands (photo 8). The hands symbolize an outcry, a cry for rescuing the

28. So called, Western Wall of the Second Temple. The only remaining part of the Temple in Jerusalem which was destroyed in 70 AD by Romans. The most important place for the believers of Judaism.

29. J. Gąsowska, *Treblinka 1942-1964. Historia pomników na terenie byłego Kar-nego Obozu Pracy i byłego Obozu Zagłady*, master’s thesis written at the faculty of Art History at the Warsaw University in the field “Polish art in the 20th century” under the direction of Profesor Waldemar Baraniewski in 2008, pp. 71-72, (Copy in the Archives of the Treblinka Museum).



8. Central monument, bas-relief depicting human remains and two hands
(photo by B. Domalewska)

Jewish people.³⁰ However one of the hands, through the positioning of fingers clearly refers to the symbol borrowed from the Jewish gravestones: the hands of the priest giving a blessing.³¹ Perhaps it is a combination of both of those interpretations. It can be seen from the considerable distance. On the east side (photo 9), there is an image of menorah, the symbol of Judaism and the covenant between God and the Chosen People.³² On the south

30. This is how prof. F. Duszeńko supposedly interpreted it, when he explained this motif to his students and coworkers. Information given to the author by Zacheusz Pypec during a phone call.

31. It is a symbol of the priest – *kohen*, would give a blessing in the following words: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Numbers – Bamidbar, 6:24-26). Before giving the blessing the priest took off his shoes, and one of the Levites washed his hands. Then he approached the Aron HaKodesh and prayed while facing the praying people having his hands raised in a specific way – his fingers spread in two sets of two fingers each, and thumbs close to each other. During that time he should not look at his fingers. Therefore he covered his head and raised hands with a tallit (prayer shawl).

32. Golden seven-branched candelabrum stood in the First Tabernacle and then in the Temple of Jerusalem. The image of menorah is one of the oldest and most widely known symbols that appear in Jewish religious art. Some say that its shape derives from the Tree of Life with seven branches, others that the inspiration for menorah’s form was a shape of *Salvia palaestina*, which is believed to provide immortality. Another interpretation claims that the seven-branched



9. Central monument, bas-relief depicting a menorah
(photo by B. Domalewska)

(photo 10) and north sides (photo 11) there are reliefs depicting torn human remains. According to Ms. Grzesiuk-Olszewka these reliefs are titled: “Martyrdom” – on the west side, “Women and children” and “Struggle” or “Survival” – on the north and south sides.³³ From the information provided to the author by Zacheusz Pypec, the stonemason who made those parts, they did not have specific names but referred to the events from the camp.³⁴ In front of the monument there is a granite block (photo 12) as if

candelabrum depicts the planetary system. The symbolism of menorah evolved depending on the historical context. Presently, it is an emblem of Israel. The detailed description of menorah can be found in the Book of Exodus (Shemot) 25: 31-40, 37: 17-24. In 70 AD, the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and menorah was taken to Rome as the spoils of war, where it decorated the Temple of Peace. This incident was engraved on the Arch of Titus. The circumstances of its disappearance are unknown until present.

33. Cf. I. Grzesiuk-Olszewska, “Pomniki w latach 1945-1949” [in:] *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa w latach 1945-1995*, Warszawa 1995, p. 116. In the “Initial design” the crack and menorah are mentioned, but not the hands. The Archives of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/3, p. 15.

34. Phone conversation, which took place on January 25, 2021, between the author and Zacheusz Pypec, a graduate of the stone masons school in Jaworzno near Legnica, who formerly worked on conservation of the works of art in Gdańsk.



10. Eastern side of the monument (photo by B. Domalewska)



11. Northern side of the monument (photo by B. Domalewska)



12. Block with the inscription “Never Again” (photo by B. Domalewska)

taken out from it, with the inscription “Never again” in Polish, Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, English, French and German.³⁵ “This message in a visualized version appears as an engraved inscription on a stone located next to the main monument. According to the authors this inscription is supposed to be something that the visitors will keep in their memory after a visit to Treblinka. NEVER AGAIN in Treblinka is a call of the dead to the living of all countries, it is a history lesson and a precept, current in every era” – writes Justyna Gąsowska in her thesis.³⁶ Initially, a fragment of a poem by

35. The inscription in Hebrew was engraved in 2002 at the request of the then ambassador of Israel in Warsaw Szewach Weiss. The lack of Hebrew inscription “Never again” and the sandstone information board at the entrance to the former extermination camp reflected the policy of Polish communist authorities towards Israel. The name “Never again” was adopted by the association created in 20th century initiated by Marcin Kornak. Its program leaflet informs: “The Association ‘NEVER AGAIN’ counteracts racism, xenophobia and intolerance. We think that these are serious threats, which painfully affect many people. Remembrance of the past obliges us to fight against resurgent fascism. The association has existed since 1996 and was established on the initiative of activists from the informal youth Anti-Nazi Group (GAN) which had been active since 1992. Since 1994 we have been publishing the magazine ‘NEVER AGAIN’”. For more information see: www.nigdywiecej.org.

36. J. Gąsowska, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

Władysław Broniewski titled “Żydom polskim” [To the Polish Jews], which was the author’s reaction to the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto and was dedicated to Szmul Zygielbojm, was supposed to be placed in front of the planned monument:

...when we conclude our bloody, years-long effort with victory:
every person will receive freedom, a piece of bread, and rights
and one noble race will arise, the highest: noble people³⁷

It was decided not to use this text after the death of the author. It is difficult to say what was the reason for this decision. Broniewski’s poem was supposed to be replaced by a fragment of the poem “Pogrzeb” [Funeral] by Mieczysław Jastrun engraved on a big boulder. The quote was supposed to be written in Polish and Yiddish:

How shall I honor your death
How to follow your funeral
Homeless handful of ashes
Between the earth and the sky³⁸

In August 1961, a discussion took place between Voivodeship Directorate for the Construction of Workers’ Housing Estates and the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, aimed at delivering the “Swedish stone” for the construction of the central monument. This idea was not implemented.³⁹ In overall recommendations the following need was put forward:

37. K. Radecka, “Upamiętnienie zrealizowane w Treblince” [in:] *Co Wiemy o Treblince? Stan Badań* [What do we know about Treblinka? The current state of research], ed. E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2013, p. 312, (the presentation given during the scientific conference in Treblinka in 2011), here it refers to a drawing made on a tracing paper E-16 dated 10th March 1962, Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, see also *Notatka z konferencji w sprawie przebiegu prac na terenie b. Obozu Zagłady w Treblince, które odbyła się w dniu 7.IX.62r.* [Note from the conference on the progress of work at the site of the former Extermination Camp in Treblinka that took place on September 7, 1962], Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, p. 2. Original poem was written in Polish, for full text see Annex II, which is included in the original publication released in Polish.

38. Original poem was written in Polish. For full text see Annex III, which is included in the original publication released in Polish.

39. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 69. Salo Fiszgrund – a representative of The Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland and Franciszek Duszeńko were supposed to visit Sweden for 8-10 days regarding this matter. As it was explained by Wacław Kruszeński (former head of the Department of Culture and Art of the Presidium of the District’s National Council in Sokołów Podlaski) in his memories “Odpowiadam

“A solution for the artistic and spatial design of the Monument for the Victims of Nazi Crimes including murdered children and to commemorate the uprising on August 2, 1943.”⁴⁰ Those were the essential objectives of the commemoration. The monument was supposed to be placed at the “highest elevation on the camp grounds”. Following an archaeological survey, we know that this does not overlap with the place where the gas chambers were located as it was believed previously.⁴¹ The central monument should be considered as a symbolic tomb for all those who died here.

Behind the monument, in a rectangular hollow, there is a memorial of the crematorium (photo 13). It is a recessed rectangle filled with black basalt, forming irregular clots and icicles. The material for the memorial was provided free of charge by a Basalt Melting Facility in Starachowice. Around the hollow there are several liquid fuel lamps, which, when lit,



13. Symbolic commemoration of the grates on which the Germans burned the bodies of victims of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp
(photo by B. Domalewska)

na paszkwil prof. Grossa” (*Wieści Sokołowskie*, nr 3, 20/01/2011, p. 8): “Swedish Jews will not provide granite, as they declared earlier because they already gave it for a Warsaw Monument to the Ghetto Heroes”.

40. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 8. This was the overall concept of the commemoration.

41. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/3, sheet 15.

remind that a pile of human bodies once burned in this place.⁴² The author of this memorial is Adam Haupt. The commemoration which was for decades exposed to weather conditions suffered from erosion.

22,000 square meters were covered with concrete on which 17,000 stones in various sizes were placed (photo 14). The concrete covers the ashes of people who were murdered here.⁴³ In the "Initial design" there were some interesting ideas considered, which were not implemented probably due to technical reasons: "The concrete cover of the graves can be coloured with right admixtures or become like a clotted lava in texture. (...) It is envisaged that the concrete cover will be covered with a thin layer of soil with some scant vegetation allowed. This layer, when rinsed by rain in some parts, will reveal tops of the bumps of the cover bristled with stones."⁴⁴ This form of commemoration, according to designers, should:



14. Stones commemorating the victims of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp (photo by B. Domalewska)

42. Unfortunately, from spring till autumn due to fire prevention measures it is forbidden to use open fire at the forest complex. Therefore, the artistic vision cannot be always implemented in reality.

43. Already in 1947 Hersz Smolar, the head of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, postulated covering the mass graves with concrete and fencing the grounds of the former camp.

44. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/3, sheet 12.

“Mark in a permanent way the mass graves, protect them from desecration, prevent from being walked on, fundamentally protect places with graves against the encroachment of trees and bushes in the future.”⁴⁵

Franciszek Strynkiewicz said: “We understood that the monument cannot be a conventional figurative sculpture. It should indicate a tragedy, recreate the atmosphere of terror and despair. All three of us agreed that we cannot achieve that with meticulously chiselled blocks. We decided to use broken blocks, as if torn up with bombs. On the graves and ashes of the murdered, the Germans planted a forest. We were supposed to create a mausoleum and a symbolic graveyard in the forest.”⁴⁶ On the east side, in the middle of the biggest grave covered with concrete, two small flowerbeds were placed, in which grass was sown and four willows were planted.⁴⁷ They were planted to show that even nature wept over this place (photo 15). The initiator of this idea was probably Danuta Oppenheim.

The stones symbolize *matzevot*⁴⁸ – gravestones on the Jewish cemetery which the mass graves are. There are 17,000 of them in different sizes and

45. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/3, sheet 15. After thirty years the concrete cover began to crush in many places and the stones without fixing started to tilt. There are areas which are covered with “thin concrete” which contains small amount of cement. First renovation work of the concrete cover was carried out in 1992 funded by a donation from the Voivode of Siedlce, at that time 2,100 square meters were renovated. Other works were carried out in 1996 and 1998, in total 2,886 square meters were renovated. Renovation was financed by the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, headed by Andrzej Przewoźnik. In recent years, other parts have considerably deteriorated, especially around the areas where the willows are located, and in the coming years more renovation work should be carried out.

46. Interview with Franciszek Strynkiewicz, *Sztandar Młodych*, nr 189, 1965. Cf. *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa w latach 1945-1995*.

47. By design, it were supposed to be weeping willows. Interestingly, in other languages its name is translated as “the crying trees”. However, white willows were planted. It may be because of an unnatural ground for this species – dry sand. Even the white willow is difficult to sustain.

48. In Hebrew it literally means a gravestone, *stella*. It was a vertically positioned slab made out of stone, wood or cast iron finished with rectangular, triangular or semicircular top. It was placed at the grave at the head or legs of the deceased. Boulders placed on graves at the Jewish cemeteries on south-east Poland refer to the shape of *matzevot*. See: *Polski słownik judaistyczny. Dzieje – kultura – ludzie*, ed. by Z. Borzymińska, R. Żebrowski, Warszawa 2003, t. 2, pp. 77-78. The first known description of a Jewish grave comes from Book of Genesis (Bereshit 35: 19-20): “So Rachel died, and she was buried on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob erected a monument on her grave; that is the tombstone



15. Willows in the area of the Memorial Site of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp (photo by B. Domalewska)

shapes. The number refers to the biggest number of people that could be gassed during one day (3 transports of 60 rail wagons each, i.e. 17,000-18,000). It would happen only sporadically. Other interpret the stones as human figures.⁴⁹ The cemetery is one of the most important places for every Jewish community. Referred to as the “Eternal Home” or “House of Life”.⁵⁰ On 221 granite stones the names of towns and cities, from where Jews were brought to Treblinka, were written.⁵¹ At the beginning there were

of Rachel until this day”. *Tora. Pardes Lauder. Księga Pierwsza. Bereszit*, Kraków 2001 (translation: https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8230 accessed on 10.04.2021).

49. Information provided by Zacheusz Pypec, who claims that this is how prof. Franciszek Duszeńko interpreted it.

50. *Polski słownik judaistyczny. Dzieje – kultura – ludzie*, ed. by Z. Borzymińska, R. Żebrowski, Warszawa 2003, t. 1, pp. 296-297, gives the following definitions: *Be(j)t moed le-chol chaj* – house of the official gathering of all the living; *be(j)t Chaim* – house of the eternal life; *be(j)t olam* – house of light. There is also a title *bet hakwarot* – house of graves. In colloquial Polish language expressions borrowed from German language: *kirkut* and *kirhof* are also used.

51. The list and instruction on how to find them at the site contains publication created by the museum entitled *Plan of symbolic stones*.

130 stones which came from the current territory of Poland (photo 16). It was probably calculated that at least 5,000 Jews died in each town. Other names were added in 1998 upon the request of Eng. Benjamin Majerczak, Secretary-General of the Association of Polish Jews in Israel, with financial support from the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites in Warsaw. The added towns are mostly from the former part of the Białystok District, from the areas which after the War World II were not incorporated into the borders of Poland, as well as those with smaller numbers of murdered people. This initiative was also supported by Benjamin Anolik from the Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel. The name of the town of Celestynów was engraved in 1999 at the request of its inhabitants, through the Communal Cultural Centre. The official unveiling of this stone took place on May 22, 1999 involving Polish youth from Celestynów and Jewish youth from New York as well as rabbi Michael Schudrich and catholic priest Krzysztof Czyżyk.⁵² In later years there were a few more towns



16. Stones with the names of towns from which Jews were deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp (photo by B. Domalewska)

added, and in 2021 the name Marki was included. Eight towns are doubled, it is due to two reasons: 1 – there was no site plan with the names of the towns which made it difficult to find a particular town and its name was engraved once again; 2 – the representatives of the Jewish commu-

52. Cf. *Celestynka. Miesięcznik Samorządowy*, dated 12.06.1999.

nity from a given town were not satisfied with the placement of the engraved stone, the main factor considered was its position in relation to the central monument, and the name was engraved again in the more “appropriate” place. It was not possible to determine the circumstances of engraving the inscription “Męczennikom getta warszawskiego” (To the Martyrs of the Warsaw Ghetto).

Among the stones there is a commemoration of Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit) and Children (photo 17). It is the only commemoration of



17. Memorial stone of Janusz Korczak and the Children
(photo by B. Domalewska)

a named individual. The official unveiling of the monument took place on May 31, 1978 on the eve of International Children’s Day. This ceremony was also a way to celebrate the 100th anniversary of “the Old Doctor’s” birthday and was part of the celebration of the Year of Janusz Korczak. The unveiling was conducted by Janusz Wiczorek – Chairman of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites. The former Minister – Jerzy Kuberski was also present. The ceremony was accompanied by a staging dedicated to the memory of Janusz Korczak, performed by the Central Artistic Team of the Polish Scouting Association featuring artists from Warsaw.

In the “Initial design” from 1960, it was planned to commemorate more people: “The height of the stones will range between 30 and 60 centimetres, although some of them with a slightly different shape, colour or size,

set in places available for viewing can be engraved with names of outstanding people who died in Treblinka.⁵³ Another idea was “to commemorate the names of famous people murdered in Treblinka, this solution envisaged commemorative tables placed along the ‘black’ road, starting from the ramp, where people who were to be killed were unloaded, to the extermination site, the place where the main accent – the monument – will be located.”⁵⁴ Eng. A. Ciborowski proposed to “scatter the stones engraved with names of murdered people around the small forest.”⁵⁵ This idea was not implemented. The Museum constantly receives questions about why the people who died here are not commemorated individually. There were also cases when people arbitrarily left stone plaques engraved with names at the site of the cemetery. There was also an idea to create a “Memorial Wall”, a place specifically designed for this purpose, where standardized plaques could be placed. After much discussion, this idea was rejected.⁵⁶

The entire spatial and monumental arrangement is kept in the grey colour. Concrete and granite are supposed to resemble the ashes of 800,000-900,000 people resting here. J. Gumkowski came up with the following idea, which was popular in the 1960s: “The Camp in Treblinka is basically one big grave, I propose as well, as an artistic accent, to create a cross-section showing human bones.”⁵⁷ Fortunately, this initiative was not implemented.

53. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/3, sheet 14. It was planned to commemorate Dawid Rubinowicz, the author of the diary.

54. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 24. It refers to the “Road of Death”.

55. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 25.

56. The idea of the “Memorial Wall” was rejected in a study “The Holocaust Memorial Treblinka Museum. Landscape Study” by a landscape architect Anna Dymek, MSc Eng. and a landscape architect Maciej Świątkowski, PhD Eng. from the National Heritage Board of Poland (Warsaw, 10.01.2021, p. 41, in possession of Treblinka Museum). Next to the parking lot, there is a designated place, where the “memorial pebbles” and plaques with the names of people murdered here are placed. This place formed spontaneously and is not part of any artistic concept.

57. Archive of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, Voivodeship Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments (WOKOPWiM) 1958-1962, no. 21/1, sheet 27. This form of commemoration and presentation was used in Majdanek, the first memorial in Sobibor and in Stutthof.

Along the tour route, there are signs indicating the direction of the visit. These are concrete casts 220 cm long, 60 cm wide and 40 cm high, with the following inscriptions: 1) Treblinka – entrance, 2) road of death, 3) penal labour camp – execution site, 4) penal labour camp, 5) execution site. The inscriptions are made of metal embedded in concrete.⁵⁸

Adam Haupt, three years before his death, in an interview summarizing his artistic achievements when asked “You are a painter, scenographer, architect, interior designer, you have designed the interiors of the Książ Castle, you have designed the interiors of ships. You were the rector, the founder of the department of ship architecture and industrial design at the Gdańsk Academy of Fine Arts. When you look back on your life, which of these works do you value the most?”, he replied “What was most dear to me, were the monuments. But of all the works that I have done in my life, I value the project Mausoleum of the Victims of the Death Camp in Treblinka the most [...]”. And when further questioned “Have you been wondering for a long time how to tell the truth to the world?”, he responded “No. I was very impressed with this crime. The Germans obliterated the traces of the camp. They exhumed hundreds of thousands of bodies and turned them to ash in the field crematoria. They threw this ash into three huge pits, several meters deep. In the place where the monument stands, human ashes filled the ground to a depth of 4 meters. When I got there and saw the pits that the “hyena people” – gold diggers – dug, I had no other thought but to commemorate the victims of the crime and to secure their resting place from desecration once and for all. Hence the idea of covering all three burial fields with a thick layer of reinforced concrete, “softly” and directly placed on the ground. It was done without any artificial geometry, and in accordance with the layout of the terrain. This concrete comes straight out of the ground as if the ground had swelled where the ashes had been deposited. I embedded 17,000 grey granite quartzite stones into the reinforced concrete layer. There is also a limited number of small black basalt stones, symbolizing the children who were murdered with their guardian Janusz Korczak. It is strange that I did the work on the Mausoleum of the Victims of the Death Camp in Treblinka extremely quickly, as if I was in a trance. The idea followed the idea. At the same time, somewhere in the middle of my heart, I felt something – like a compass needle guiding me. My goal was not to provide information about the non-existent camp, but

58. Unfortunately, these inscriptions are hardly visible to visitors, so it was decided to place additional information boards set on vertical concrete elements showing the direction of the visit with Polish and English inscriptions. These boards are temporary. The elements are informative, but there are opinions as to their inadequate aesthetic quality in the field.

to get an impression of its ghastly meaning. If it was to be the fence – then not just poles with barbed wire, but large granite blocks placed next to each other. If a railway siding – then not real rails with wooden sleepers, but simple concrete geometric beams marking the course of the tracks. I was stuck with the concept of the field crematorium memorial. I kept sketching and making dozens of models. I felt it must bear a memory of Hell. Melted basalt came to my mind. I went to Starachowice. When I entered the production hall and saw a row of standing furnaces, and the “beards” of molten basalt pouring out of the door set ajar, I felt heat on my back. This is it. I ordered it to be toughened so that it would not be as fragile as glass and to send seven wagons to Treblinka. Then, from this basalt, I manually arranged a 10 x 15 m slab like a mosaic. The individual elements sometimes resemble Greek robes, sometimes burned logs, sometimes strange geysers. During the opening ceremony of Treblinka, the village women were crying. And yet there is no inscription there that this is a commemoration of the field crematorium. This cry was the highest reward for me for what I did for those for whom Treblinka was the terminal station.”⁵⁹

The first ceremonies took place on the site of the former extermination camp as early as April 1963, when construction works were still underway. It was then that the 20th anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was celebrated. Among those gathered was the Israeli Attorney General, Gideon Hausner, the prosecutor of Adolf Eichmann. Interestingly, the construction of the monument coincided with the capture of Adolf Eichmann and his trial in Jerusalem. The official unveiling of the commemoration took place on May 10, 1964 and was named the “Mausoleum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka”. About 30 thousand people gathered at that time.⁶⁰ The celebrations began with the singing of the Polish anthem. The lecturer was Prof. Stanisław Turski – chairman of the monument construction committee. The official act of unveiling was made by the Deputy Marshal of the Sejm of the Polish People’s Republic – Zenon Kliszko. Among the gathered were prisoners of Treblinka II: Jankiel Wiernik from Israel, Richard Glazar from Czechoslovakia, Berl Duszkiwicz from France and Zenon Gołaszewski from Poland. In addition to Janusz

59. W. Staroniewicz, “Od dzieciństwa chciałem zostawić po sobie ślady trwałe, żeby czas nie mógł tego tak łatwo ugryźć”, *Kurier Sopotki*, nr 1/2003 from 24.01.2003, p. 5. Professor Adam Haupt’s comment on women applies to a generation that remembers the war and that was in contact with the witnesses of these events. Due to the fact that this generation is passing away, the museum puts emphasis on providing historical information about the camp and interpreting the commemoration.

60. Official press data from that period.



18. Aerial view of the Memorial Site of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp (photo by R. Lewandowski)

Wieczorek – the chairman of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Monuments, many people spoke, including Salo Fiszgrund – a representative of the Jewish community in Poland. He delivered his speech in Yiddish, the language of the majority of the murdered Jewish population. “An open letter to all writers, scholars and intellectuals of Europe and the whole world” was delivered by Seweryna Szmaglewska, writer and prisoner of Auschwitz. In her letter, she appealed for establishing no statute of limitation for Nazi crimes after May 1965.⁶¹ A commemorative speech was also given by Antoni Mierzwiński – chairman of the Presidium of the Voivodship National Council of Warsaw.⁶² Wreaths were laid by 150 delegations, including Dr Nachum Goldman – chairman of the World Jewish Congress, Charles Jordan – general director of the Joint and representatives of Jewish organizations from Italy, Cuba, Romania, Israel and the USSR.⁶³

61. More information can be found in Annex VI, which is included in the original publication released in Polish.

62. More information can be found in Annex VII, which is included in the original publication released in Polish. It confirms the thesis that Treblinka was commemorated as a reaction of the Polish authorities to the possibility of expiry of the statute of limitations for the crime of genocide in the Federal Republic of Germany and shows the political way of thinking of the authorities about this place in 1964.

63. M. Rusiniak, *op.cit.*, pp. 50-53.

MEMORIES

Rev. Paweł Rytel-Andrianik

THE SHADOW OF TREBLINKA

The space of Treblinka is filled with silence. It is a place of prayer, reflection, reverie, and also caring remembrance of those who died there. It is impossible to cut ties with the camp's shadow. For many prisoners, this station was the final station in their lives.

Treblinka also overshadows the history of my family. My hometown is not far away, and the drama of the camps also affected my relatives. I want to share my experience of confronting this difficult history and how Treblinka influences awareness and choices in my family. This time, it will not be a conference paper, although I also deal with this issue scientifically.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

The shadow of death was constantly floating over the Treblinka II Death Camp. Even the slightest offense could lead to death as a punishment, such as simply possessing a piece of bread or a small keepsake from a loved one. Being shot was the most desired form of parting with life. Escapes would occur, but the escapees rarely avoided rifle bullets. The guards often played with the prisoners and suggested a flight only to shoot the escapee when he attempted it. Treblinka's scenario was unthinkable. It was hard to believe such a camp could be built in the quiet Bug River region. Samuel Rajzman, a Polish Jew and its survivor, describes the summer of 1942 as follows:

During this period, however, nothing indicated that the station would be a place of such terrible ordeal for hundreds of thousands

of people. As usual in the spring, nature was coming to life, the Bug River willows and orchards of Treblinka were becoming freshly green, and in its midst, entire choirs of nightingales were singing.¹

Barbered wires of Treblinka obscured people's freedom and independence. Most of them never returned home. Those who died in Treblinka still live in our hearts, thoughts, and memories. Even though we can no longer hear their voices or see their faces in the rush of everyday life, they still have much to tell us.

The shadow of Treblinka also touched my family. My grandfather, Stanisław Rytel, survived the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, thanks to the help of fellow prisoners. As a descendant of the third generation, I am aware that Grandpa lives in me. He and the victims of the Holocaust crimes are a warning that we should do everything possible so that such events never happen in the future.

A BIBLICAL SHADOW METAPHOR

The shadow image is one of the metaphors found in the Old and New Testaments.

In the Bible, the shadow was a symbol of death. Jesus dying on the cross opened the gates of heaven. Henceforth, the shadow is no longer the embodiment of darkness, the absence of light, but brings radiance and carries a deeper meaning. Light brings healing redemption, purifies, and shows a different perspective. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that, after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostles performed miracles in Jerusalem:

Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. Thus, they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. (Acts 5:12-15).

In the Old Testament, the term "shadow" is used in relation to the surrounding reality, in the literal sense – a shadow of a cloud (Is 25:5) or a shadow of the hills (Judg 9:36). As Andrzej Kalbarczyk explains, the shadow is a biblical image of the caring presence of both man and God

1. S. Rajzman, "Mój pobyt w Treblince" [in:] *Dokumenty i materiały z czasów okupacji niemieckiej w Polsce*, t. 1, Łódź 1946.

which brings and ensures security² It provides protection, but it can also surprise. God provides a shadow of true security.

There is also a metaphor of a shadow that accompanies a person and indicates the transience of both himself and what surrounds him (cf. Ps 39:7). The shadow as a symbol of the fragility and the limitedness of human life on earth appears only in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. "The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light; on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen" (Mt 4:16; cf. Is 9:1). In the true light that enlightens each person who comes into the world, people have been freed from the shadow that brought death with it. Jesus is the shadow of the image of God,³ but he was called by the Father to bring light to people because he is the Son of Light (cf. Eph 5:8; 1Thess 5:5).

Love is the primary criterion for giving up darkness for the sake of light. Love allows us to remain in communion with our brothers and sisters, but also with God: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me." (Ps 23:4).

The hope to defeat the evil and darkness is immortal: "For if to others, indeed, they seem punished, yet is their hope full of immortality" (Wis 3:4). And the memory of the prisoners of Treblinka is immortal.

THE LARGEST CEMETERY OF POLES – TREBLINKA

The scale of the crime in Treblinka was unimaginable; most people had no chance to survive. The memory of them was never supposed to see the light of day. However, it happened otherwise. We know about the appalling daily life of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp thanks to the surviving

2. "[...] Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, While we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed [...] Therefore I will give him his portion among the great, and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty, Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; And he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses." (*Isaiah*, Chapter 53). In the original article, quotations from the Bible are taken from the Millennium Bible, Poznań-Warszawa in 1990. For the purposes of translating this article, the quotations were sourced from the New American Bible, 1970 edition.

3. Cf. A. Kalbarczyk, "Cień jako biblijna metafora znikomości ludzkiego życia", *Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza*, t. 16/2004, Wydzał Teologiczny.

prisoners. Thanks to them, the truth emerges from the shadow intended to obscure the crimes.

Treblinka is the largest cemetery of Polish citizens, mainly Jews. Each individual possessed a unique name, surname, and identity formed since their birth and personal interests. It is estimated that about 900,000 people lost their lives in the camp. The exact number is unknown. Transports arrived there from Warsaw, Białystok, Grodno region, Podlasie, and many other places in Poland and abroad. After the uprising in Treblinka on August 2, 1943, the Germans began dismantling the barracks and gas chambers to hide the traces of the crime. The memory of the people of Treblinka has remained.

TREBLINKA IS IN US

I was born near Treblinka. I grew up knowing that my grandfather, Stanisław Rytel, the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp prisoner, might not have survived. He managed to escape, thanks to the help of a fellow prisoner. I listened to stories about him and his life story. In my family home, the name Treblinka always sounded scary.

As we lived close to the camps, tragic accounts of the Jews and Poles murdered there, the burnt bodies of the victims, and the children killed in front of their parents are still alive in my loved ones and me. I have always had two thoughts: the first is deep compassion for those who innocently died there; the second is gratitude and respect for everyone who saved human life during World War II. "If Grandpa had not survived Treblinka, there would be no us," I once heard from my mother. This sentence carries unspeakable gratitude to those who risked their lives to save the life of another human being.

Grandpa Stanisław was unexpectedly sent to Treblinka arrested in the early morning. He found himself among the prisoners building barracks. The foreman chose him to help, telling the Germans he was related to Grandpa. The foreman's wife used to bring food to the camp. One day, one of the SS men sicced a dog on her. The dog bit the woman to death before her husband and the other prisoners. She was pregnant. I will never forget the shocking account of my grandfather, who witnessed this crime.

In this hell on earth, Grandpa Stasio would often pray. In his pocket, he had a consecrated medal sewn up, which he never parted with for the rest of his life. After eight months of torment in the camp, he fell ill with typhus. One day, a drunk guard opened the camp gate. Utterly exhausted, Grandpa managed to escape. The surrounding villages' inhabitants helped him hide and reach his home. Thanks to this escape, he survived.

Note, however, that the mere escape from the camp gave no chance of survival. The guards usually provoked escapes and then shot a person crossing the gate. A valuable publication recounting the everyday life of the camp is Ryszard Czarkowski's book *Cieniom Treblinki* [To the Shadows of Treblinka].⁴ The author describes the realities of life in the "death factory," terror and bestiality towards adults and children:

The death procession, reciting together the mournful Domsday prayer, was advancing with raised hands, beaten and pushed to the chambers. Lalka ['the doll' – nickname of Kurt Franz – trans.] would torture them with a whip and make the dog attack them. Servile SS men helped him kill his targeted victim. He was no worse than Zenf, the SS beast, who was particularly fond of tormenting children. He would snatch them from their mother's arms and kill them by hitting against a wall.

My Grandpa would not have survived if he had not escaped the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. Having contracted typhus, he would have ended up in camp hospital – Lazaret, which meant certain death. Former camp prisoners, including Piotr Ferenc, describe what happened to the sick and elderly:

When people in the camp began to fall ill with typhus and die en masse, those who didn't have clothes took them from the dead. I was also assigned to the burial team. For days, we carried the dead to graves in the forest. There was no stretcher, so four of us would grab each dead person by the arms and legs and run to bury them. A Ukrainian was riding a bicycle next to us, shouting "bistro, bistro," beating us repeatedly with a stick. The ground was frozen, and there wasn't much time, so we couldn't dig deep graves. We encased the deceased with clods. The next day, when we brought the next ones, those from the previous day had been scavenged by animals. It was a macabre sight – battered human remains scattered throughout the forest. Days passed by on this job, and I thought that one day I would be lying there too.⁵

Grandpa Stanisław spoke very rarely about Treblinka. His silence was significant. The experience of pain and suffering cannot be expressed with words.

4. Cf. R. Czarkowski, *Cieniom Treblinki*, Warszawa 2020.

5. Archive of the Treblinka Museum, Account of Piotr Ferenc, no. 3/62.

HISTORY AND MEMORY

Now, after so many years, my awareness is growing when we tell these stories in our family home; I identify with those in the Treblinka I and Treblinka II camps. Treblinka lives in me and brings specific memories of my grandfather and other prisoners: "The past exists as long as the memory of it."⁶

On the way to my family home, I take the road running through the former railway line that transported prisoners to the Treblinka II Death Camp; I pass the entrance to the "death factory." Then I think about all those who died here. When I look at the preserved foundations of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp barracks, I think about my grandfather forced to build them.

I believe that our task as descendants of those who survived Treblinka is not only to keep the memory of our loved ones alive but also to remind us of these events so that similar crimes will never happen again.

My Grandpa survived because there were people ready to rescue him. I desire to preserve the memory and honour all those who risked their own lives to save their neighbors during World War II.

Together with Edward Kopówka, the head of the then Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, we dedicated the book *I Will Give Them an eternal name* (Is 56:5) to Poles from the vicinity of Treblinka who saved Jews.⁷

NO MORE WAR

In Leviticus, we read: "If any person refuses to give the information which, as a witness of something he has seen or learned, he has been adjured to give, and thus commits a sin and has guilt to bear." (Lev 5:1). We are morally responsible for keeping the memory of the Treblinka camps, the people who fought for survival, and those who died there.

"No more war" is not only a slogan but, above all, an impulse and encouragement to act. Treblinka is a symbol of death, a shadow, an attack on the dignity of another human being. With this in mind, we do not lose faith and hope:

6. A. Morawiec, *Literatura w lagrze. Lager w literaturze. Fakt-temat-metafora*, Łódź 2009.

7. See E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Adrianik, *Dam im imię na wieki* (Iz 56,5), Warsaw-Oxford 2002.

Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:20).

Treblinka living in us is for us to practice mutual love, respect, and peace. Its drama is engraved in the memory of past generations. It obliges us today to take full responsibility for the historical truth and pass it on to future generations.

The biblical Job was in spiritual darkness, and although his fate is hard and marked by suffering, God gives meaning to his life and illuminates the night of his soul and body. His path, leading through many painful life experiences, finds a happy ending, just like in the case of the survivors of the death camps.

Inquire of the former generations, pay attention to the experience of their ancestors. As we are but of yesterday and have no knowledge because our days on earth are but a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you and utter their words of understanding (Job 8:8-10).

Zygmunt Nissenbaum

I WAS IN THE UMSCHLAGPLATZ

I was in the Umschlagplatz. Not just once, three times. Three times they loaded me into cattle wagons sprinkled with chloride, pushed me with rifle butts so that more of us would get in. Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto were usually there for one and the last time. The Nazis cynically called this short cobbled road and the railway platform the Himmelfahrtstraße – “the street to heaven”. To the 500,000 Jews driven there by the Nazis it was really the last road linking the ghetto with the gas chambers of Treblinka.

When the war broke out, I had just turned thirteen. I was attending the Tarbud, a respected Hebrew school in Warsaw. We first lived in Praga and later in Grzybowska Street. I was the youngest of five brothers and sisters. Our father, Lejb Nissenbaum, was a building entrepreneur, we had brick-kilns in Marki, Pustelnik and Radzymin, and we organized carriage of brick and building materials. My eldest brother already had his own building enterprise, he had started building two new houses and had just been conscripted. Also my eldest sister had already left home, was married, and was expecting a baby.

The outbreak of the war came as no surprise to us, we all had feared it for a long time, but literally from day to day our life, not devoid of everyday concerns and problems, but also filled with family warmth, with joy, became a nightmare. A mounting nightmare from a terrible dream, which, however, was a reality. From day to day we were marked by the Star of David on an arm-band, this proud symbol which now began to function as a stigma separating us from others, as a hallmark of horror and a pretext to humiliate us. We felt this at every step. Even when I still was a child, I felt as if I were plague-stricken among those who did not have the star.

After the ghetto had been delimited, our house was in its territory, and so initially we avoided the worst: the necessity to seek a place to live, like those who had come to us from other parts of the city and from outside Warsaw. But now we were much more crowded, hunger appeared, from week to week there was less and less food, people slept wherever they could, begged, and terror constantly increased, especially after the district had been walled in. [...] Later, as the area of the ghetto was curtailed, we were moved to Miła Street, to the so-called special houses, inhabited by the poorest of the poor, where within several months hundreds of people would die of hunger in every building, where in the winter whole families would freeze to death, where all kinds of diseases, including typhoid and tuberculosis, were rampant, where people swelled from hunger or, like skeletons, lay and died on the pavement, in the yards, in the staircases. The dead were carried out into the street for lack of means to bury them. [...] Whatever has been written or said about the conditions that prevailed in the Warsaw Ghetto, about pacifications, about the liquidation operation in 1942, and about the final liquidation and the uprising in the spring of 1943, could tell only a part of the truth, even if the best literary talents were engaged. This sum of suffering, fear, humiliation, and death can neither be grasped mentally nor described in words. He who himself did not go through this hell can neither understand nor even believe it. [...]

After the ghetto had been shut in, only my eldest brother worked outside, in Ursus. The rest of the family had no means of subsistence, and the situation was becoming more and more tragic. However, we had many contacts in Praga, in the Radzymin area, among transport and brick-kiln workers. I was the youngest one, I could get everywhere, push through every hole, so I had to assume responsibility for food provision. As long as the trams ran through the ghetto, I would take a tram. I would jump in and jump off while the tram was moving, I would drop packages at pre-arranged places where others were waiting for them. Later I had to climb a wall three meters high, with barbed wire and broken glass on top of it, or else dig a hole underneath – so small that I could hardly squeeze through it. From such expeditions one usually returned injured, not infrequently beaten unconscious by policemen. One would bring food and everything else, in the most improbable manner. [...]

After I had established the contacts my father had indicated and after I had set up a complicated network of exchange and assistance, I arranged for myself and my friends a hiding place, and at the same time a point of contact, in the Jewish cemetery in Bródno. We felt relatively secure in the vicinity of family graves, even though the cemetery was patrolled by the police, roundups occurred now and then, and executions were carried out. It was there, during the first months of my expeditions, that I watched

from hiding the execution of ten persons led by a rabbi who was carrying the Torah scrolls – a frightening scene for the young boy I was then. I have now designed this shocking scene, a symbol of extermination, in the form of a bas-relief on one of the pylons of the entrance gate in the Bródno cemetery. At that time however, despite such scenes as I have described, in comparison with what was going on in the city, the cemetery seemed a peaceful haven to all of us. We rested there before every return trip to the ghetto, which might have proved the last trip in life. [...]

I was taken to the Umschlagplatz for the first time in the middle of 1942, after I had been caught on my way back without the obligatory armband, luckily already in the ghetto, for if I had been caught outside, I would have been shot on the spot. They included me in a group of Jews to be taken to a concentration camp. While they were loading us into freight cars, although it was not yet generally known that we were doomed to death, there was some commotion, the guards' attention was distracted, and as a result I managed to escape.

I fared much worse the second time. In early 1943, we were carrying from the Bródno cemetery arms and explosives for the planned uprising. Packages with these dangerous goods were deposited in our hiding place by tram-drivers from the Praga depot, activists of the Polish Socialist Party. We took them to the ghetto and deposited them at prearranged places. I was caught again, luckily after depositing such a package, but I thought I would not escape this time. All the streets through which we were driven and the whole Umschlagplatz were closely guarded. I was in the freight car again, but I stayed near the door. The Gestapo men demanded that everyone give up all valuable objects. They checked at random, and if they found anything they shot such a person to scare the others. Many dead bodies were lying near the train. I took advantage of a guard's inattention and hid under them. Later I was taken, together with the dead bodies, to the cemetery. They put me on a cart, even though they could feel I was alive, and dumped me into a pit. I was so smeared with blood that those supervising the operation could not suspect anything. Luckily, the pit had only begun to be filled and was not filled up until night. I managed to get out of it and return to my family, to the ghetto.

The third time I found myself in the Umschlagplatz with all my family. This happened while the uprising was being quelled, during the final liquidation of the ghetto. Shortly before the uprising, carrying the last package with arms, I came to the ghetto. There were no people in the streets, but the pacification had not started yet, only the police were patrolling the streets. Everybody was hiding wherever it was possible. My eldest brother had at first built a hideout in the basement, and so I looked for him there. While I was in Bródno, however, it turned out that the Germans had filled

the cellars with water and those hiding there drowned. Then my brother had built a second hideout in the attic, which I did not know. I walked around the house and whistled an agreed signal, fearful lest I should never see any of my loved ones again. I knew what such absence could mean. But eventually they responded. Under the very roof, in a carefully concealed part of the attic, two families had found shelter – a total of sixty persons.

My happiness did not last long, however. The next day fighting began. Finding nobody in the apartments, the Germans set houses on fire. The opposite side of the street was already burning. Fire reached our house too. We began to suffocate. I rushed to the tap, but there was no water. I wetted a handkerchief with only a few drops and gave it to my mother. We had to flee to the roof and then over the roofs in search of a way down. We had to jump from the sixth to the fifth floor, from one roof to another, a slippery tin roof, we had to sneak with nothing to catch at, not even a foothold. On the side of the yard there was fire, and on the side of the street the roof was so steep that one could not hold on and fell down. In the street there were SS men who shot at anyone who dared to lean out. I cannot imagine how we managed to get through. Simply there was no other possibility.

On one of the roofs I met a young girl with whom I had been in one of the fighting squads. [...] She had fought in Mila Street, had been shot in the leg, and could not walk any farther. We dragged her by the hands. In one of the houses in Mila Street fire had not yet spread to the staircase. I led my mother and sister downstairs. The others followed us. I returned to the roof and dragged the wounded girl down. The house was an annex and the only way out was across the yard and through the gate of the front building, which was ablaze. Each of us put something over our head, and we ran through the gate to find ourselves right in front of SS men's guns.

They lined us, hands up, together with other survivors from nearby houses. My elder brother, who had fought in the uprising, joined us, too, and we all were driven to the Umschlagplatz. We supported the wounded girl all the way. My brother, who had a gun with him, said he had to escape for in any case they would kill him during the search in the Umschlagplatz. He leapt into a burnt house. The Germans shot at him. Later some said he had been hit, others – that he had got out of the ghetto through the sewers and had been seen in Majdanek, where he allegedly died. No one will ever know the truth.

In the Umschlagplatz we were told to give up all valuable objects, and the well-known scene of searches and shooting on the spot was repeated. My mother had sewn some valuable things into my overcoat, I had also concealed a penknife and some photos which I succeeded to smuggle through all the searches and camps and have preserved till this day. For fear of my life, my mother insisted that I give up everything. But I said no and did not

give up anything. The Germans, however, murdered the wounded girl who was standing next to me. Exhausted, she collapsed, and then an SS man came up, put a gun to her head, and fired. The bullet made a hole in the ground, but the girl was still alive, she moved her hand, she moaned. Another SS man came up and killed her off with another bullet. I was then almost seventeen, I had seen many monstrosities, but I still have this scene before my eyes.

They loaded us into the same well-known freight-cars disinfected with chloride, with the windows boarded, they beat us with rifle butts so as to crowd in more people, they fired to scare the people into squeezing together. Then they crammed children over our heads. They kept us in the closed car for over twenty-four hours. It was the last transport, and they still were catching people in the ghetto. In these inconceivable, terrible conditions we travelled to Treblinka three days: it was very hot, we were all suffocating, people died standing up, of thirst and hunger. And it was just our holiday of the Passover.

I did my best to help my loved ones, especially my mother who suffered very much. With the penknife that I had luckily concealed, I made a hole in the door. Halfway to Treblinka, when they opened the door for a moment, I managed to buy a bottle of water. But it did not help much. When we arrived in Treblinka, half of the people in our car were dead. Throughout the journey, my mother tried to convince me that I should escape at the very first opportunity. We all were aware that we would be killed. I did not want to leave my family, just as I had always returned to the ghetto, even though, with my resourcefulness, I could have found some hiding place on the other side. It was because of this resourcefulness that my mother begged me to save myself she demanded that I escape and bear witness to these hideous crimes through the rest of my life. That is why she said: "Nothing will save us, but you must live." She thought I had a chance and perhaps felt that I would manage to save myself.

She repeated this to me even after the selection, when my father and brother, along with eighty other adults, were detached from the transport to be used as labourers, while we walked in the group of women, elderly people and children to the gas chamber. At the last moment I noticed a wheel-barrow into which we had been told to dump eyeglasses and other small objects. I grasped the wheel-barrow and drove it toward the group in which my father was. Nobody took any notice of me. And I hid among them. They immediately loaded us into freight cars. When after two hours the train set off I was told that of my nearest and dearest only ashes had been left in the crematorium. [...]

The second stage of my Gehenna was beginning. Through Majdanek, labour camps in Lublin and the salt mine in Wieliczka, Płaszów, the camp

in Budzyń, again Majdanek, the penal camp in Flossenbürg, inside Germany, forced labour in Hersbruck, again Flossenbürg, later Offenburg near the present French frontier, and from there the last escape and a meeting with French forces developing an offensive against the Germans. [...]

Eventually, I settled in Constance, near the Swiss border, I met my future wife who had been interned there, I raised a family and started winning means of subsistence for the two of us and later also for our children. I told myself I would not serve the Germans. The beginning was more than modest, I repaired old trucks and gathered scrap metal. I assembled a group of several hundred Jews, mostly from Poland, who were in a similar situation after release from camps. I founded a community. I built a private synagogue dedicated to my parents. My business prospered. In time I switched to machine building, I bought a shipyard specializing in tourist craft, I took an interest in building. I never accepted German citizenship even though people often tried to persuade me to do so. I always replied: I have been brought here, I have not come of my own will, therefore, you must tolerate my status of a stateless person.

For forty years nothing attracted me to Poland. On the contrary, the terrible experience that had fallen to my lot on Polish soil kept me away. For a long time various scenes, frightening memories came back to me, despite the lapse of time. Even now I cannot relate them calmly. But deep inside I remembered my mother's last message. And even though I was, and am, very active in the antifascist movement in the FRG, the question returned of whether I had really done all I could, whether I had realized in full the testament of my mother's suffering and the suffering of other murdered members of my family and of millions of Jews. Therefore, I readily accepted invitation to the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the uprising in the ghetto, in Warsaw in 1983. And seeing on this occasion graves of our ancestors in the Bródno cemetery, desecrated and devastated beyond all imagination, showed me what I thought was the most proper way to fulfil this testament. It gave rise to the idea of the Foundation, which since that time has become my second life.

Gideon Nissenbaum

MY FATHER – A MEMOIR

My father, Sigmund “Shimon” Nissenbaum, was also called ‘Szymek’ by his friends and family. He was born on July 25, 1926 in Warsaw. He was the youngest son of Lejb and Henia-Perla and had four siblings: two older brothers Jakob and Józef and two older sisters: Bronia-Szejna and Genia-Gitel. He grew up with his family in Warsaw’s Praga section. The family ran brickyards and a construction company in Warsaw and its vicinity.

After the occupation of the capital by Nazis and the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto the family was ordered to move there. At first they lived at Pawia 3 Street. Later they were forced to move in with others on Grzybowska Street, and then forced again, until the end of the Ghetto Uprising to move to Mila Street.

As it was in the case of thousands of other Jewish families in the Ghetto their everyday life was marked with famine and sickness. It was all about surviving. My father was one of the many children, who smuggled food from the Aryan side for their families through the underground sewers and the holes in the wall surrounding the ghetto. Later supplies for the uprising in the ghetto were added to that need. During those dangerous expeditions my father was caught several times but always managed to avoid deportation.

In one of the buildings on Mila Street the family created a hideout in the attic. By that time my father’s oldest sister Genia, along with her husband and their child had already been sent to Treblinka in summer 1942. During the Ghetto Uprising the Nazis set fire to buildings forcing the occupants, those in hiding, and resisters out. As they surrendered to the SS

they were forced to march to the Umschlagplatz. On the way to Stawki Street, my uncle Jacob escaped from the column. My father, grandfather, grandmother, uncle Józef and his sister, Bronia all went to Umschlagplatz, where they were loaded into the wagons and deported to Treblinka. It was one of the last transports from the Warsaw Ghetto to that extermination camp.

My grandmother Henia-Perla, my aunt Genia-Gitel and many other members of my family were ruthlessly murdered there, in the gas chambers. In the end their naked bodies were burned. Their ashes and remains were buried in mass graves and scattered on the fields. The number of victims of this German Nazi murderous machine operating in Treblinka was nearly one million people.

My grandfather Lejb and my uncle Józef owe their lives to the circumstance that after arriving at the ramp in Treblinka they were taken to the group of around eighty men who were deemed 'able to work', because one of the SS men needed them in a labor camp. When my grandmother found out about it she pushed my father so he could blend in with the group of men among which included my grandfather Lejb and uncle Józef. Before that, she blessed him and told him that he must survive, so he could tell about the fate of us Jews.

From Treblinka, my grandfather, father, and uncle were taken to the following camps: Majdanek, Budzyń, Płaszów, Flossenbürg, Hersbruck, then back to Flossenbürg and in the end to Offenburg near the French border.

How come they managed to survive and stay together for so long? Maybe it was the instinct for survival that kept them alive? During the long hours of roll calls in the cold of winter, thanks to self-discipline and a strong will they managed to withstand it and not fall.

All three volunteered whenever 'specialists' were sought. They understood quickly that SS men needed those kinds of people for various works. Thanks to this they gained the possibility to prolong their lives for one more day.

In the last camp, KZ Offenburg, they worked on disarming explosives on railway tracks. The end of war was near and the Allies were already at the border and conducting regular air strikes. One day my grandfather got sick and he could not go to work with other inmates. After returning from labor my father and uncle started looking for him because he was not in the hospital. My father could not understand that. After his persistent insistence one of the SS men let him into the barrack and dragged him downstairs to the basement. His eyes met a horrific sight of dead bodies: it turned out that the prisoners were brutally murdered with axes. Among them was my grandfather, Lejb. It happened two days before the liberation of the camp.

How traumatized were those who survived after the liberation?

No one took interest in the ones who survived. They themselves could not think about anything else.

Although they were free they were left to struggle alone; without families, without home or homeland, without profession or money but... living among their oppressors.

Many of those who survived tried to emigrate as quickly as possible. To the United States of America, to Canada, to Australia and obviously to Palestine, to build a country that was supposed to be created there – Israel.

My father was one of the few who survived the war and stayed in Germany. Maybe because of the task that his mother entrusted him with and to which he remained faithful until the end. He made a decision to stay in the country of his oppressors as a living warning against the consequences of the fall of men.

In Germany he met my mother, who carried her own burden of experiences on her shoulders. Maybe it is thanks to this that they could not only support each other, but also to encourage one another to continue to live.

It also took a lot of courage for him to come back soon after the liberation to Offenburg where my grandfather and another 41 murdered inmates were buried in a mass grave to commemorate them properly. My father encountered German precision here as well. On a list of prisoners, the names of the murdered ones were crossed out with red ink and next to each name: "Died of heart attack!" was written.

Everyone at the same hour!

My parents settled in Konstanz, at Lake Constance, where they started a trading company. My father, of blessed memory, became a successful businessman. In the first house that he built there he made a small synagogue in memory of his murdered parents and siblings. Thanks to this, Jewish life in the city of Konstanz became possible again and a Jewish community could be established.

My father was socially active in numerous Jewish organizations. He also had the courage to participate in restoration of the democratic Germany and reach out in reconciliation. He believed that the young generation would learn from the mistakes of their parents.

In 1983 my father came to Poland as a representative of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, for the ceremony commemorating the 40th anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It was his first visit to Poland since the end of the war. What he saw there, where once Jewish life flourished, appalled him so much that he felt compelled to stop the destruction of Jewish cemeteries and to save what was left of Jewish culture. He decided to establish a foundation to preserve Jewish culture and cemeteries.

At that time in communist Poland, Martial Law had been declared two years earlier. There were no laws that would allow the creation of a foundation. It was only in 1985 that the Polish Parliament adopted the legal basis that enabled the formation of foundations. Thus, the Nissenbaum Family Foundation became the first foundation established in post-war Poland.

One of the goals of my father was a proper commemoration of Treblinka. Our family kept that in mind through all these years. Therefore, the agreement signed in November 2018 between the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Government of the Masovian Voivodeship, where Treblinka is located, was very special. This laid a foundation for a befitting commemoration of this place of national memory and the museum that we could build there in the future.

My father of blessed memory kept in his heart the will of my grandmother Henia-Perla, till the end. Right before his death in 2001 he asked my mother:

“Do you think that I have really done everything that my mother, Henia-Perla wished for?”

Today the achievements of the Nissenbaum Family Foundation include fenced cemeteries, renovated ohels and synagogues, as well as commemorative plaques located in places related to Jewish martyrdom. The Foundation actively supports the rebirth of Jewish culture in Poland. In 2013 the Foundation financially supported the main exhibition in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN, and created “The Education Fund of the Nissenbaum Family Foundation”. Thanks to these funds during the years 2015-2019 five two week educational projects were organized in Poland for students from Israel, Poland, Ukraine and Germany.

The Foundation is one of 21 Distinguished Benefactors of the POLIN Museum.

Sigmund Nissenbaum died on August 11, 2001 in Konstanz at the age of 75. After his death, the Foundation was taken over by his wife Sonja, who led it until October 2018. I [Gideon Nissenbaum] am the President of the Board of the Foundation from January 2019.

Anna Remiszewska
Treblinka Museum
The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

THE EXECUTION SITE AND BIOGRAPHIES OF COMMEMORATED PEOPLE

The name of the camp cemetery of the Penal Labour Camp – now known as the Execution Site – probably, became widespread only in the 1960s during the works on the commemoration of the camp complex in Treblinka.

Initially, the Execution Site was a cemetery where prisoners of the Penal Labour Camp, who were sentenced to death for camp offences or who died as a result of hunger, exhaustion, diseases and ill treatment, were buried. Section IX of the Circular regarding this place stated that: “Detainees who die during detention should be buried near the camp.”¹ The southern camp gate was located on the border of the Maliszewa Forest and it opened up to a 330-metre-long road, which ended with a place known today as the Execution Site. Postwar witness accounts tell us about what happened there. Among them are the following descriptions:

Antoni Tomczuk,² prisoner of the camp, recalls:

The German instructed me to take a cart and pick up these murdered Jews. After I arrived two Jews began throwing corpses onto a cart. I drove twice with the bodies to the pits located outside the camp area, near the forest towards Maliszewa, it was a few hundred metres away. On the first cart of the corpses sat a Jew, half

1. Institute of National Remembrance, *Okólnik w sprawie Obozu Pracy w Treblince z dn. 1 XII 1941 r.*, File OB, no. 66, p. 57.

2. Antoni Tomczuk – a resident of Sabnie, he stayed in the camp from June to December 1943. He was arrested during a round-up which was organized by the Germans in Sabnie. During his stay in the camp, he worked in the gravel pit at loading gravel, then he was sent to work on the camp farm, where he looked after horses. He was released from the camp in December 1943.

conscious, blood was leaking from behind his ear as result of being hit with a stick. This Jew sat on a cart full of corpses. He had his legs down to the horses, while swaying he was saying, "Mr. Wachman, I still want to live, I still want to work". But I drove the cart to the pits, and everyone was thrown in, including the one still alive, they were laid layer by layer and covered with earth. It was a collective grave. All the corpses were buried there throughout the entire period of the camp's operation.³

Jadwiga Mornel-Figowa,⁴ described what she experienced in the Maliszewa Forest:

When it was my turn, I was led in a group of 20 people. Three large pits were dug in the forest, three meters deep, different lengths, over which five people were shot. When it was my turn, a woman standing next to me and holding my hand, dragged me with her as she fell, and the bullet intended for me whizzed only near my head. Due to the fact that my head got covered with the brain of the dead woman, lying down, I looked visibly dead, and therefore I was not finished off, though I was shot in the leg with a bullet intended for another person. There were four more corpses on me. I was lying in a mass of blood and brain. At night I got out of the pit [...].⁵

In the years 1942-1943, Roma were also shot in the area, called the Execution Site, as evidenced by the recent post-war account of Mieczysław Chodźko:⁶

3. Treblinka Museum Archives (AMT), The account of Antoni Tomczuk, no. 3/50, pp. 20-21.

4. Jadwiga Mornel-Figowa – stayed in the camp from 3.05.1943 to 23.07.1944. She was taken from the Warsaw ghetto with a group of craftsmen and workers. In July 1944, during the liquidation of Jewish prisoners in the camp, she was driven to the forest, where she was to be shot along with the others. She fell into the pit, from which she got out at night. She then hid in the forest and villages until August 12, 1944, until the arrival of the Red Army.

5. Institute of National Remembrance, Branch Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Szczecin, file no. S 9/13/Zn, Witness interrogation protocol of Jadwiga M. from October 6, 1945, vol. XVII, pp. 3314-3319; E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię na wieki (Iz 56,5). Polacy z okolic Trebłinki ratujący Żydów*, Oksford-Treblinka 2011, p. 64.

6. Mieczysław Chodźko was deported from the ghetto in Falenica on August 19, 1942. He was transported to the Death Camp in one of the transports and as a result of selection was placed in the Penal Labour Camp. During his stay in the camp he worked on building barracks, repairing paving and collecting stones in

At the edge of the forest, which was the place of execution and the grave of hundreds of thousands of people, the march was stopped. The crowd trustfully sat down in a clearing. They were allowed to light a bonfire, at which they cooked warm meal for themselves. After a few hours, SS men arrived and separated the men from the women and children. The luggage was arranged in one big pile. The men were led deeper into the forest. They may have thought that they were going to set up a camp there, but to their great dismay they saw a pit with a capacity of 4 m³. One hundred people were driven to a pit and shot at with machine guns. The Gypsies who remained alive were forced to bury the executed, often only wounded, and then they also were pushed into the pit and killed. A thin layer of earth was used to cover the dead to make the most effective use of the pit. And this time, as always when people were shot en masse, the top layer of the earth kept moving for several more hours. It was the half-living buried ones who were giving signs of life. The Gypsy women did not know what had happened to the abducted men, but they heard the continuous rattle of machine guns and raised their screams and lamentations. The Nazis then took off their mask of hypocrisy, stopped talking about Gypsy camps, and initiated the most brutal massacre. In the presence of mothers they grabbed infants by the legs, killing them by hitting their heads against trees. The women who tried to take back their babies went at the soldiers and then were beaten mercilessly with whips and sticks. This scene was ended only by a series of shots fired by SS men and soldiers surrounding the crowd. The corpses of the shot women and children were cleaned up and taken to the previously prepared graves by the prisoners assigned especially for this purpose.⁷

It was also there, where SS men and Ukrainian guards executed people from Gestapo prisons in Sokołów Podlaski and Warsaw. It was a convenient place for executions due to frequent patrols of the guards from the Penal Labour Camp, which guaranteed the absence of possible witnesses. On March 2, 1942, about 100 people from the Pawiak and Aleja Szucha prisons in Warsaw were brought here and shot. Among those shot were activists of the Labour Party (including a Member of Parliament Stanisław Ratajczyk, educational activist Jędrzej Cierniak, Polish Army officers, and other arrested persons).

the fields. Mieczysław Chodźko escaped from the camp on September 2, 1943, and then hid in the forest. He returned to Falenica, where he found his family.

7. M. Chodźko, *Ucieczka z Treblinki*, Montreal 2004, pp. 50-51.

RESEARCH AT THE EXECUTION SITE

After World War II, researchers discovered mass and individual graves in the area of the Execution Site. The first inspection of the area took place in August 1944. Three mass graves in the Maliszewa Forest were examined. In the first grave, measured 10 x 5 x 2 m, 105 corpses were discovered. Medical examination proved that six of the murdered people were between 25 and 50 years old and their death date was set for winter 1942/43. Head injuries caused by a hit with heavy instruments or gunshots were determined as the causes of death. In the second grave there were 97 bodies dressed only in underwear. This grave also contained kitchen utensils and tableware. Medical examination was performed on 4 of these victims. They were found to be men between 30 and 40 years of age, who were buried in spring of 1943. The causes of death could not be determined. The last grave examined contained 103 people – 25 of whom were women, and the time of burial was determined to be 1944. The victims were in their underwear and had their pants lowered to their knees (which may suggest that they were prisoners murdered on July 23, 1944). Medical examination of 4 corpses showed that the cause of death was gunshot wounds to the head.⁸

The next survey of the area took place in August 1946, under the supervision of the investigating judge Zdzisław Łukaszewicz, a sworn surveyor Karol Trautsołt, and a medical expert Hieronim Wakulicz. At that time, 41 mass graves and six individual graves were discovered. Forty graves were completely dug up and one only partially. The exhumation was carried out in the unexcavated part. At that time, 10 bodies were examined, including one female body. 112 skulls were examined. In two cases it was found that the cause of death was gunshot wounds to the head, while in the case of 6 skulls it was indicated that they had been hit with a blunt and hard object. The surveyor's measurements indicated that the graves covered an area of approximately 1,607 m², and their volume (assuming a pit depth of 2 m) was 3,214 m³. Marks were observed on trees near the pits that could have come from firearms bullets. Investigations indicated that the bodies were thrown into the graves without being laid out. Based on the data in Mieczysław Piotrowski's report, it was assumed that 10,000 people could have been buried in these graves.⁹

In 2013, Caroline Sturdy Colls from Staffordshire University conducted research, including on the Execution Site. One of her main objectives was

8. E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię...*, op.cit., p. 65.

9. E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię...*, op.cit., p. 66; E. Kopówka, "Karny Obóz Pracy" [in:] *Rogów. Pamięć o historii zadatkem na dobrą przyszłość*, ed. by Z. Czumań, Rogów 2014, pp. 92-94.

to determine if there were any unremembered mass graves at the site. Based on queries, analysis of LiDAR data and aerial photographs, and due to the visible depressions in the terrain, three areas were selected for investigation. Mass graves containing the remains of the victims were discovered in these areas. The graves measured: 7.2 x 6.5 m, 9.2 x 6 m, 19.2 x 17.6 m. During the initial examination of the remains, traces of the use of sharp tools and force were noted, which indicated that the victims had been brutally treated before being killed. Again, examination confirmed that the bodies were dumped, rather than laid out within the graves. Men's shoes were found in two graves and a rifle cartridge in one grave.¹⁰

In 2016, in the area of the commemoration of the Execution Site (northern edge of the Maliszewa Forest), research was conducted under the direction of Sebastian Różycki, PhD., as part of a project carried out by the Department of Geodesy and Cartography of the Warsaw University of Technology. It was suspected that unmarked mass graves were located in the identified area. The research was initially conducted with non-invasive methods using a geo-radar and gravimeter. Then, the results of the research were compared with the accounts of witnesses and aerial photographs taken in May 1944. The query was followed by archaeological excavations, delineating a trench in which, at a depth of 90 cm, a humerus bone belonging to a person under the age of 14 was found. Another research in the Maliszewa Forest was conducted by specialists from the Department of Geodesy and Cartography of the Warsaw University of Technology in 2017. A grave cavity was then discovered in which at a depth of 1.4 m human bones were found, belonging to a woman aged 20-22 years.¹¹ Several shell casings from ammunition for Mauser-type rifles were also discovered in the area. The entire research work was aimed at locating new, undiscovered mass graves.

The last research in the vicinity of the commemoration of the Execution Site was conducted in November 2019 as part of the investigation conducted by the prosecutor of the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Branch in Szczecin into crimes committed in 1941-1944 against prisoners of the Penal Labour Camp. The main goal was to mark the places where the mass and individual graves of the camp victims were located and where executions were carried out. Experts in

10. C. Sturdy-Colls, *Finding Treblinka. An Exhibition of Forensic Archaeological Research*, exhibition catalogue, Staffordshire University 2015.

11. S. Różycki, M. Michalski, E. Kopówka, *Obóz Pracy Treblinka I. Metodyka integracji danych wieloźródłowych*, Warszawa-Treblinka 2017, pp. 154-155. Data processed by the Warsaw University of Technology, placed on information boards at the premises of the Penal Labour Camp and the Execution Site.

archaeology, criminology, photogrammetry and spatial information systems, as well as anthropology and forensic medicine used specialized equipment to survey the designated area. An international team was assembled, including experts from national and international institutions such as the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin, the Warsaw University of Technology, the University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Staffordshire University. The team was headed by Dr. Andrzej Ossowski from the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin. Representatives of the Chief Rabbi of Poland and the President of the Polish Roma Association also participated in the research. In the area of the current forest parking lot, which during the war was a place where trucks stopped, a grave measuring 4.5 x 3.4 m was found with fragmentary human remains in non-anatomical arrangement, 10-15 cm underground. The found bone fragments probably belonged to the prisoners of the labour camp who were killed by the camp crew. This is indicated by the injuries found: the blows were inflicted with rifle butts or clubs. Experts believe that these are the remains of at least 53 people. During the examinations, seven gravesites of the camp watchmen were also found. The bodies were buried in coffins, laid on their backs, with the hands placed on their chest, pelvis or along the body. Remains of wreaths were found in some of the graves. During the excavations more than 200 various objects were found, including shell casings, everyday objects, elements of clothing, Polish coins from the 1930s, and a fragment of a shoe made by the Warsaw company Rygawar.¹²

During field research in the vicinity of the memorial, shell casings and bullets from the period when the Treblinka I camp was in operation were found, mostly from rifle and pistol ammunition. A total of 127 shells were found, including those from the Soviet Tokariew pistol (52 pcs.), Mauser (25 pcs.), Mosin (10 pcs.), Mannlicher (5 pcs.), and 9 mm caliber pistols. One cartridge from a French Lebel system rifle was found. The excavated shell casings show what kind of weapons were used by the SS men and watchmen in the Penal Labour Camp and at the Execution Site.¹³

12. E. Flieger, "Sprawcy nie powinni leżeć obok ofiar", *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, nr 2 (5155), 3-6.01.2020, pp. A20-A21; B. Szumowski, "Treblinka znów odsłania tajemnice", *Tygodnik Siedlecki*, nr 50, 11-17.12.2019, p. 23.

13. Information about the analysis of ammunition found near the Execution Site provided by Bartosz Kowalski, archeologist at the Treblinka Museum.

THE COMMEMORATION AT THE EXECUTION SITE

The first memorial at the Execution Site was a mound with human remains, now located behind the Roma and Sinti Monument.¹⁴ We did not learn the exact story of its creation until 2010, during a patriotic and religious ceremony at the site. This story was told by Barbara Kadaj.¹⁵ In September 1947, the pupils from the Primary School in Prostyn together with their teacher Feliks Szturo collected bones sticking out of the ground and put them in one mass grave, putting a wooden cross on it. Barbara Kadaj recalls after many years the cleaning of the area:

The mound contains human bones. Today I can name them: hip bones, spine bones, shoulder bones, shin bones, upper and lower limbs, broken ribs, skulls, etc. In 1947 they were collected there by the pupils of 5th grade and put in one place.¹⁶

Currently at the top of the mound there is a concrete cross bearing a plaque with the inscription: UNKNOWN MURDERED 1941-1944.

In the postwar period, the Execution Site was cleaned up and commemorated by erecting a grand monument. Its author was Franciszek Strynkiewicz,¹⁷ a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, the general designer of the entire spatial-architectural complex at the Treblinka Memorial. The design team of the Treblinka memorial included: Adam Haupt and Franciszek Duszeńko. The monument measures 12 x 1,6 x 2,7 m. Its design evokes the so-called wall of death, where executions were carried out. The wall is made of red sandstone, formed in the shape of large drops of blood. The recurring element are four vertical, regularly grooved straight lines. These allude to the motif of the striped uniform. Another interpretation suggests that the grooves refer to the ricochet of bullets. A slab of red sandstone, measuring 2.25 x 12 m, was laid in front of the monument with the inscription: IN TRIBUTE TO THE MURDERED.

14. Sinti – migratory ethnic group from the Indian Peninsula, related to the Roma. Their dialect is significantly influenced both grammatically and lexically by the German language.

15. Barbara Kadaj, née Bronisz was born in 1935 in Prostyn, where she also attended elementary school. Nowadays she is a retired teacher. She is related to the Samsel family, some of whose members were shot on September 8, 1942.

16. AMT, Relacja Barbary Kadaj (Account of Barbara Kadaj), no. 3/17.

17. Franciszek Strynkiewicz (1893-1996) – Polish sculptor, professor of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He took part in the September Campaign of 1939 where he was wounded. He was sent to prisoner of war camps in Stablack and Königsberg. He created monuments, portraits and figural compositions.

The so-called “teardrops”, irregularly shaped, lead to the monument. Laid flush with the ground, they symbolize the stains of blood that have seeped into the soil. The material for the construction of the monument was obtained from the “Kopulak” quarry near Zagnańsk, located between Skarżysko and Suchedniów (Kielce district, Świętokrzyskie voivodeship).¹⁸ It should be mentioned that in the Penal Labour Camp, the prisoners wore their own clothes instead of striped uniforms. There is no evidence that the “wall of death” existed at the Execution Site. The monument is the artistic vision of the author of the commemoration, Professor Franciszek Strynkiewicz, who was a prisoner of German prisoner-of-war camps. The sculptor said:

We understood that this monument could not be a conventional figurative sculpture. It should suggest drama, it should recreate a mood of despair and horror. And all three of us agreed that we would not be able to achieve this by giving the pieces meticulously shaped with chisels. We decided to use torn blocks, torn as if by a bomb explosion.¹⁹

The ceremonial unveiling of the monument took place on May 10, 1964, and was performed by Antoni Mierzwiński, chairman of the Presidium of the Voivodship National Council in Warsaw.²⁰

Symbolic crosses were placed in the area of the post-war commemoration of the Execution Site. Later, plaques were placed with the names of victims who had been identified. The families of the victims turned to the Museum management with such an initiative.

Next to the main monument is a memorial to the Roma and Sinti who were murdered in the German Nazi Penal Labour Camp and the Extermination Camp. It is estimated that more than 2,000 Roma died in the two camps. Before the Roma were executed, they were often told that they would be allowed to set up a camp near the Penal Labour Camp. Then the

18. Archiwum Muzeum Regionalnego w Siedlcach (AMRS), Wojewódzki Obywatelski Komitet Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa, Projekt wstępny, no. 21/16, k. 2, 5; as cited [in:] E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 66-68.

19. I. Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa w latach 1945-1995*, Warszawa 1995, p. 117; as cited in *Pomnik Zagłady Muzeum Treblinka Studium Krajobrazowe*, ed. by A. Dymek, M. Świątkowski, Warszawa 2020, p. 11. Opinion on the number NID – EAKZ/9036/1263/19/MŚ/AD, prepared by the National Heritage Institute in Warsaw (copy in possession of the Treblinka Museum).

20. A. Zawadka, “Upamiętnienie Treblinka” [in:] *Treblinka – Historia i Pamięć*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2015, p. 43.

men, who were driven to previously prepared pits in the forest, were killed first. Then the women and children were shot.²¹

Roman Chojnacki, chairman of the Polish Roma Union with its headquarters in Szczecinek had put considerable effort to commemorate the Roma and Sinti murdered in Treblinka I and Treblinka II camps. It was extremely important to him, because his grandfather Józef Trojanek spent some time in the Penal Labour Camp and was one of the few Roma who managed to escape. The Execution Site was chosen as the location for the monument commemorating the victims of the Roma community. On July 30, 2014, the unveiling of the monument took place. The ceremonies were held under the honorary patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski. The monument was made by Sławomir Jackowski from the stonemason's company in Kielczewo, after the project had been approved by the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites and the Conservator of Monuments. The monument commemorating the extermination of the Roma and Sinti refers to the previously erected memorial with its shape, color, and the image of blood drops it evokes. The monument is made of red sandstone with a plaque made of granite.²² The plaque bears the inscription in three languages: IN MEMORY OF ROMA AND SINTI MURDERED BY THE GERMAN OCCUPIERS IN THE FORCED-LABOUR CAMP AND IN THE EXTERMINATION CAMP DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR PAIN AND SUFFERING OF THE VICTIMS TOOK THE LAND WHICH HIDES THE ASHES OF THOUSANDS OF INNOCENT PEOPLE WE BEND OUR HEADS OVER YOUR MARTYR'S DEATH. In the upper right corner there is a sentence by Teresa Mirga:²³ I HAVE BEEN IN THE WORLD, I WANDERED BRIEFLY, I HAVE BEEN CALLED TO OTHER BEING. At the very bottom – the inscription: POLISH ROMA UNION BASED IN SZCZECINEK COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF STRUGGLE AND MARTYRDOM SITES 2014.²⁴

21. K. Bukowski, "Holokaust Romów w niemieckich nazistowskich obozach w Treblince (w dokumentach Oddziałowej Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi polskiemu w Szczecinie)" [in:] *Treblinka – Historia i Pamięć*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2015, pp. 63-76.

22. A. Sochaj, "Uroczystość upamiętniająca Romów i Sinti pomordowanych w Treblince (30.07.2014)" [in:] *Treblinka – Historia i Pamięć*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2015, pp. 135-140.

23. Teresa Mirga is a Gypsy poet, singer and guitarist. She was born and lives in Polish Spisz, in the Gypsy settlement in Czarna Góra. Since the 1990s she has been writing in Polish and Romani. She is the founder of the band Kałe Bała (Black Hair).

24. A. Sochaj, *op.cit.*, pp. 135-140.

REMEMBRANCE OF THE VICTIMS

Patriotic and religious ceremonies commemorating the victims of the Penal Labour Camp are held annually at the Execution Site. The history of these meetings dates back to the 1980s and is associated with the Light-Life Movement. Currently, people from all over Poland come to the ceremonies. Through prayer and paying homage, participants honour the memory of the victims of World War II. The organizers are the Treblinka Museum and the parish of the Holy Trinity and St Anna in Prostyn. The participants gather at the gravel pit, the place of slave labour of the prisoners of Treblinka I. Then, under the leadership of the clergy, they walk the Way of the Cross to the area of the Execution Site, where the Eucharist is celebrated. Finally, wreaths and flowers are laid at the monument, and candles are lit. Former Treblinka I prisoners and their families attend the ceremony. Numerous school pupils and their teachers take part in the meeting. It is also attended by veterans, soldiers and scouts, who stand guard of honor in front of the monument.

At the ceremony the representatives of state and local authorities, museum and cultural institutions, and local residents are present. In August 2019, just before the patriotic and religious ceremony German youths, who were staying at the Treblinka Museum, performed cleaning work at the Execution Site, cleaning the plaques on the symbolic crosses. In 2020, the September ceremony had a much reduced character due to the epidemiological situation in the country and the world.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES OF COMMEMORATED PEOPLE

There are currently 300 plaques with the names of commemorated people, placed on symbolic crosses. The same number of biographies have also been prepared, but not all of them contain detailed information.

The symbolic crosses are part of the commemoration of the site. During the unveiling of the monument in 1964, the first plaque was placed in memory of Hania Zaleska. In later years, the families of those buried in the area made their own commemorations in various forms. Since 1996, in response to requests from the families of the victims of Treblinka I, the management of the Treblinka Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom decided to standardize the plaques on the crosses.

The camp documentation was destroyed during the liquidation of the camp, which poses a significant difficulty in verifying the persons buried there. In order to prepare biographical notes, queries were conducted in civil registry offices, church and state archives, and museums. The

Treblinka Museum also appealed in the press to all those whose relatives had been imprisoned at Treblinka I. Thanks to these activities, families of those who were commemorated came forward and shared their accounts and mementos of those who perished at Treblinka. Among the materials shared were letters sent from the camp to loved ones (including sisters, wives, and mothers) – secret messages asking for food, medicine, or money to help them survive the hardships of the camp. Another important source of information were death certificates, which were sometimes issued in the camp and sent to the family. Often the cause of death indicated on the certificate was completely different from the actual cause. Pneumonia or a heart attack were causes of death that appeared on the camp document sent to the family. In the case of Waław Stolarski, a prisoner of Treblinka I, in addition to the death certificate, the family archives preserved a postal order with information in German about depositing the deceased's money and sending it back to his family. No less important was a search in the Museum of Pawiak Prison, where it was possible to find in the alphabetical catalog information about persons who were imprisoned in Pawiak and transported from Warsaw to be executed on March 2, 1942. In the museum collection there is a copy of current information, in which there is information about preparing the pits near the camp for the executions a day before.

The biographical notes contain the most important information, such as the circumstances in which people were sent to the camp or directly to the execution. Among the commemorated are the inhabitants of Sokółów and Węgrów districts, people brought from Warsaw and other parts of the country. A large group of people were brought and executed from Pawiak and Aleja Szucha prisons. This group of people included social and political activists, writers and journalists, Polish Army officers, engineers and teachers. Among those commemorated there is one person whose body was brought from another place and thrown into a mass grave.

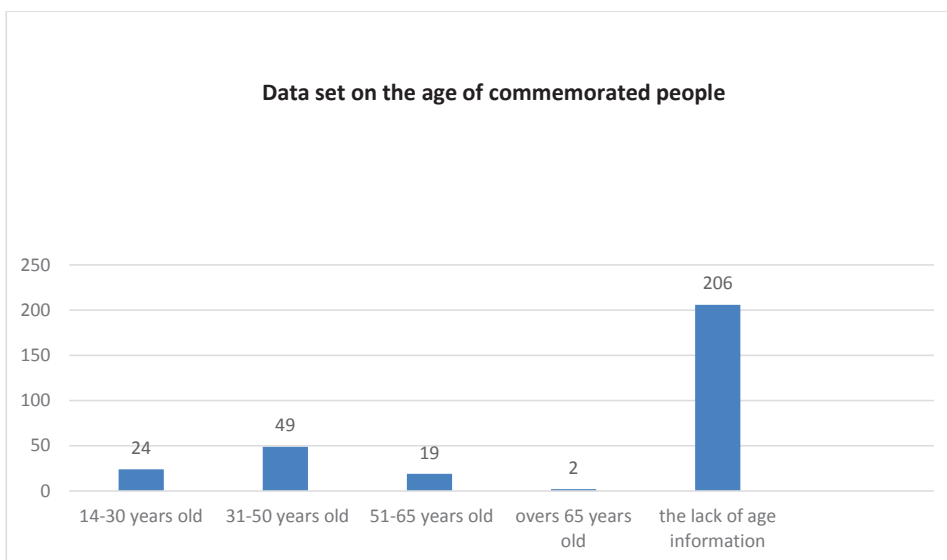
Main sources for preparing the biographical notes were:

- Murdered people families' accounts preserved in family collections; death certificates issued by the camp doctor;
- Oral testimony of prisoners who survived and were eyewitnesses to the deaths of fellow prisoners;
- A list of prisoners who died as a result of the typhus epidemic, which was drawn up by Lucjan Puchała;²⁵

25. Lucjan Puchała was a railwayman at the station in Małkinia. During his work, he handed prisoners' lists to their families and delivered food parcels. For this help, he was sent to the camp for seven months, where he worked in the gravel pit. During the typhus epidemic in the fall of 1943, he volunteered to help with the sick prisoners who were under the care of Dr. Paciorek.

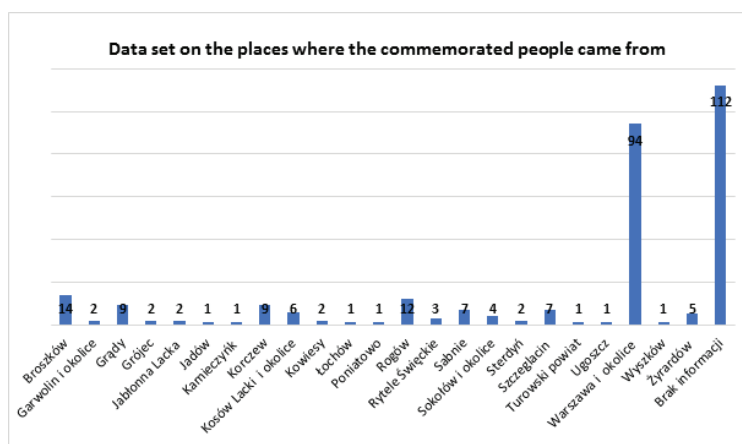
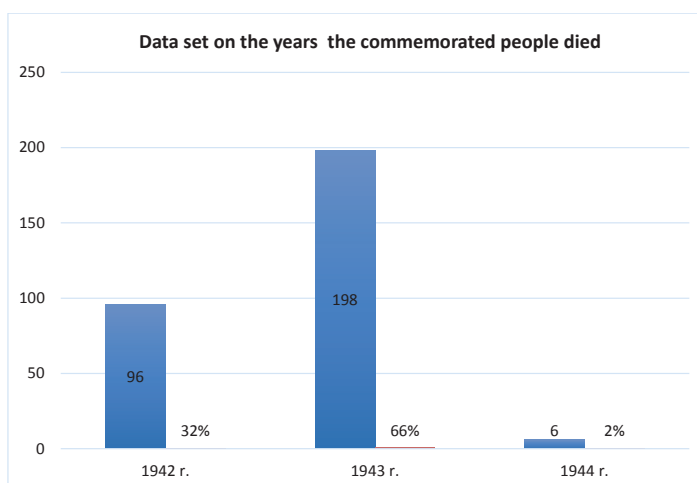
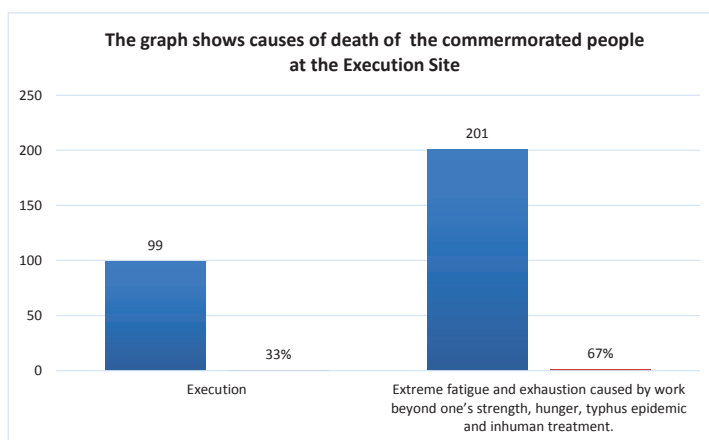
- List of people deported from Warsaw, submitted by Władysław Bartoszewski and Regina Domańska;²⁶
- List of victims of World War II 1939-1945 of the Sokolow district, by Józef Maleszewski.²⁷

On the basis of the above sources, an attempt can be made to compile data including the information on the causes and time of death, and the age of those commemorated. Postwar researchers, on the basis of exhumations and inspections, estimated that 10,000 victims were buried at the Execution Site; today, only 300 people are known by name, representing 3% of the total estimate.



26. W. Bartoszewski, *Warszawski pierścień śmierci 1939-1944*, Warszawa 1967, pp. 80-81, 93-94; R. Domańska, *Pawiak. Więzienie Gestapo. Kronika 1939-1944*, Warszawa 1978, pp. 205-206.

27. Józef Maleszewski – he came from Suchodół. He was the founder of the Volunteer Fire Brigade in his home village. He graduated from the Non-Commissioned Officer Candidate School with a specialization in gas and mining operations. He belonged to the National Military Organization, later to the Home Army, he operated under the pseudonyms “Felek” and “Kret”. After the war he collected information about the victims of World War II in the Sokołów Podlaski district and created a list titled: *Ofiary II Wojny Światowej 1939-1945 r. pow. Sokołów Podlaski* [Victims of World War II 1939-1945 r. Sokołów Podlaski District], Kosów Lacki 1983 (typescript).



One of the first known biographies was that of Hania Zaleska. The inspiration to write it was her sister Barbara Bednarska's speech during the patriotic and religious ceremonies at the Execution Site in 2006. She told her own story and that of her younger sister, who was shot during the liquidation of the camp.



1. Hania Zaleska [source: family archive of B. Bednarska, copy in the Treblinka Museum]

Zaleska came from Bachorza near Sokołów Podlaski. Her family was involved in underground activity. As a 14-year-old girl, she was sent with her sister Basia to the prison in Sokołów Podlaski, and later to the Penal Labour Camp. Fear and anxiety accompanied her throughout her stay in the camp. As a prisoner, she worked in the kitchen, where she was peeling vegetables. On August 1, 1944, Hania was selected to join the group of people supposedly assigned to cleaning the barracks. After completing the task, everyone from the group was shot.²⁸

28. *Słownik uczestniczek walki o niepodległość Polski 1939–1945. Poległe i zmarłe w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, Warszawa 1988, p. 444; AMT, Account of Barbara Bednarska, née Zalewska, sygn. 3/53, pp. 5–26; https://collections.ushmm.org/search/?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=treblinka+bednarska&search_field=all_fields (accessed: 23.03.2021).

Thanks to the family accounts and documents that were made available, it was possible to draft other biographies of former prisoners of the Penal Labour Camp, who rest at the Execution Site. Below are some of them.

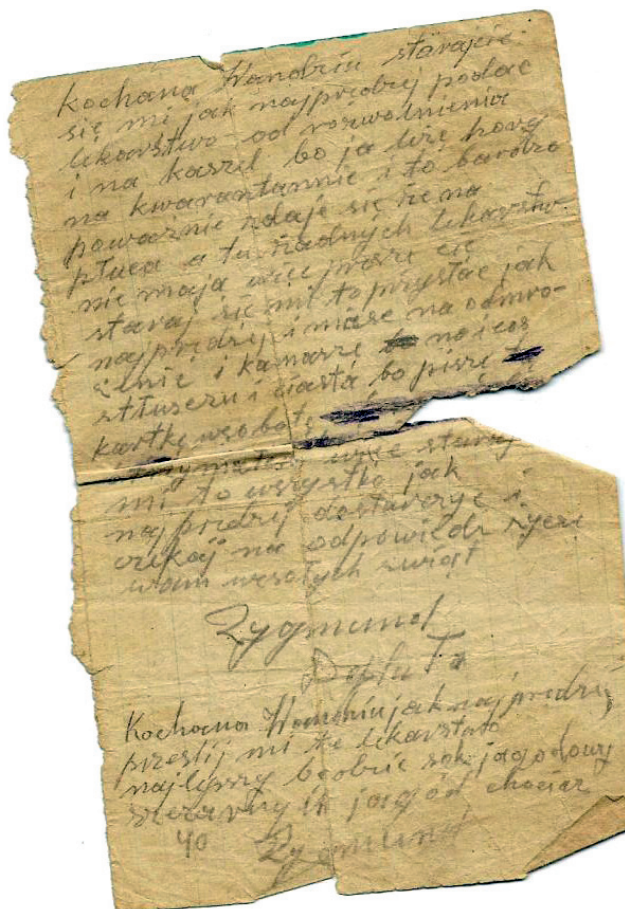


2. Zygmunt Deptuła [source: family archive, provided by: J. Kalisz]

Zygmunt Deptuła came from a village near Wyszków. He was probably sent to the camp at the beginning of 1943. The reason for his arrest has not been unequivocally established. During his stay in the camp he worked in the gravel pit. From the beginning his family made efforts to have him released. One of the camp kapos was in contact with the village leader of Wólka Okrąglik, through whom packages and secret letters were delivered. In one of these letters – secret messages smuggled to his sister Wanda – Zygmunt informed them that he was in quarantine, had stomach problems and needed medication as soon as possible. Zygmunt Deptuła was sick with scurvy.²⁹

29. Information provided by Justyna Kalisz, granddaughter of Wanda Deptuła and Teresa Krawczyk, niece of Zygmunt Deptuła, in 2019 and 2020.

Below are letters – secret messages which Zygmunt wrote to his sister Wanda during his stay in the camp. They were shared with the Treblinka Museum by Wanda's granddaughter, Justyna Kalisz.



3. The letter – a message smuggled out of the camp
[source: family archive, provided by J. Kalisz]

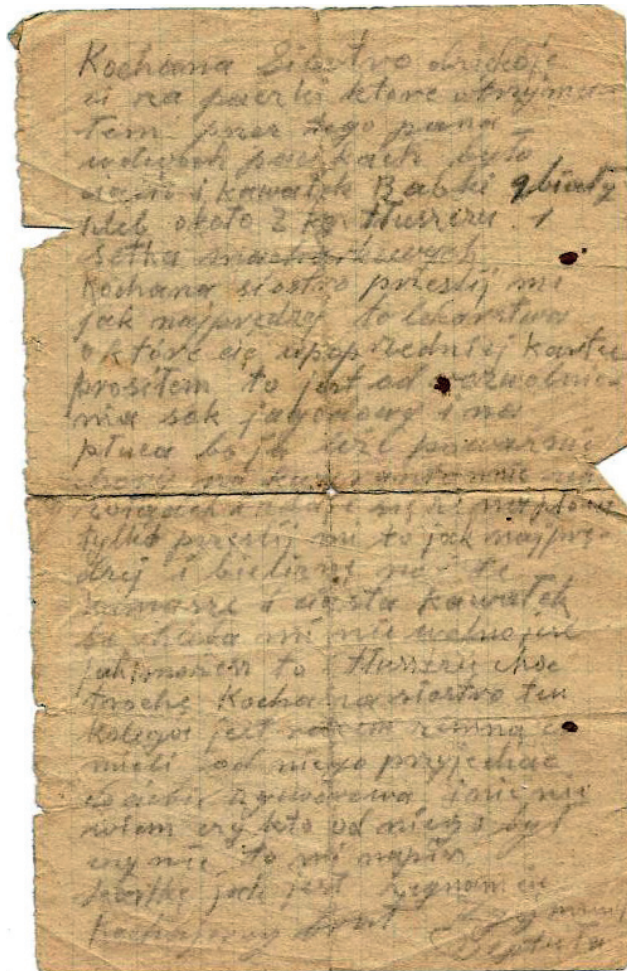
Dear Wanda, please try to give me medicine for diarrhea and cough as soon as possible, because I'm in quarantine and very seriously ill, illness of the lungs it seems, and they don't have any medicines here, so please try to send it to me as soon as possible and some ointment for frostbite and cough and something made with fat and dough to eat because I am writing this card on Saturday [further fragment illegible and partly broken – note AR] I received so try to deliver it to me as soon as possible and I look forward to your response I wish you Merry Christmas

Zygmunt Deptuła

Dear Wanda, please send the medicine as soon as possible, berry juice will be the best, blueberries at least.

Zygmunt

[The original language of the letter was Polish].



4. The letter – a message smuggled out of the camp
[source: family archive, provided by J. Kalisz]

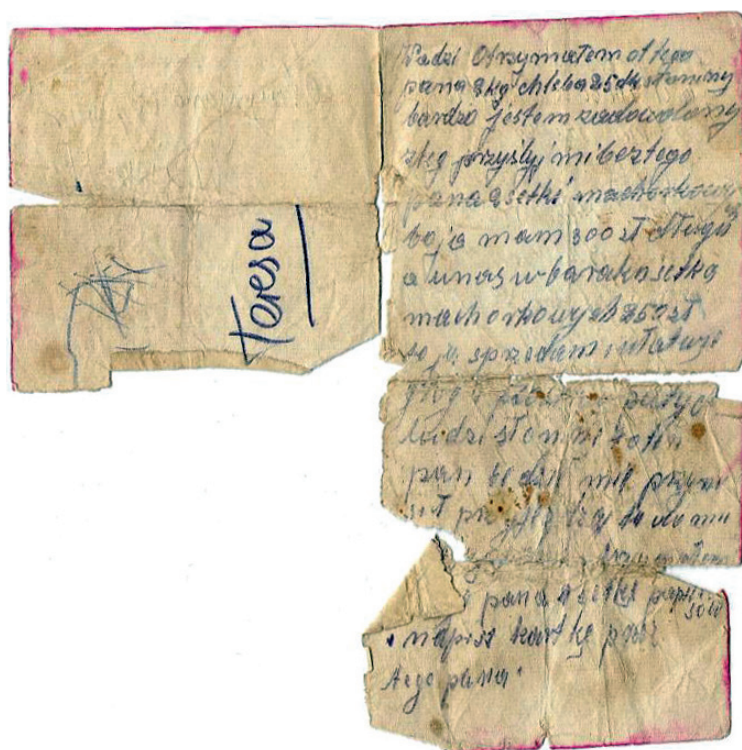
Dear Sister

Thank you for the packages that I received through the man in two packages there was cake a piece of pound cake and white bread about 2kg and a hundred makhorka cigarettes. Dear sister, send me the medications that I asked for in the previous letter, blue berry juice for diarrhea and

something for the lungs, because I am in quarantine, seriously ill with cough and diarrhea, just send it to me as soon as possible and send my underwear and boots and cake because bread is bad for me. If possible send some fat, dear sister, the friend I told about is with me, his people were supposed to come, I don't know if they have come or not, write me a card how it is. Goodbye.

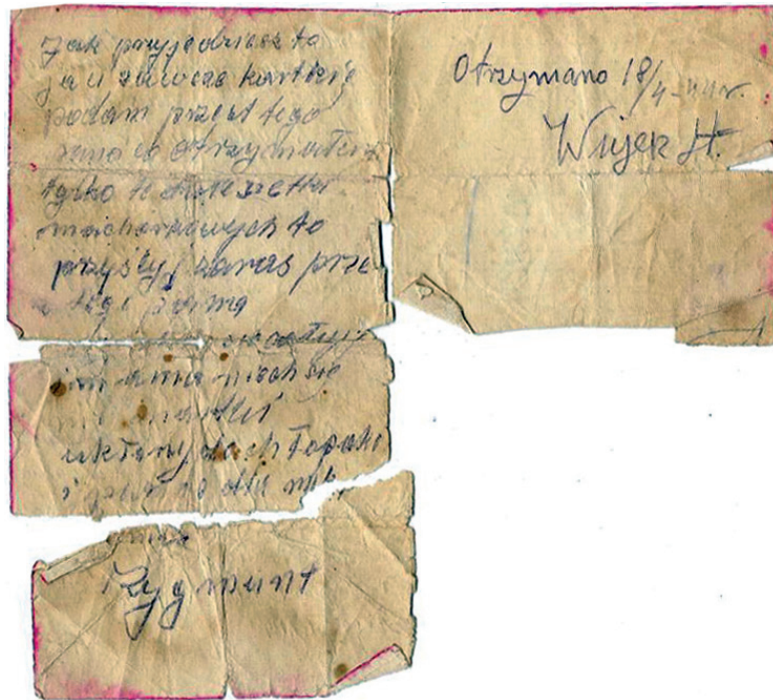
Loving brother Zygmunt Deptuła

[The original language of the letter was Polish].



5. The letter – a message smuggled out of the camp
[Source: family archive, provided by J. Kalisz]

Wanda, I got 2 kilograms of bread from that man, 25 dkg of pork fat, I'm very happy, send me one kg through that same man and a hundred of makhorka cigarettes because I have 300 zloty in debt, and in our barrack one hundred cigs costs 250 zloty, so I'll sell them and settle the debt [...] [illegible fragment – AR] people, the pork fat, which that man... [illegible fragment – AR] brought to me by him [...] [illegible fragment – AR] that man, a hundred cigarettes, write a card through this man.



6. The letter – a message smuggled out of the camp
[Source: family archive, provided by J. Kalisz]

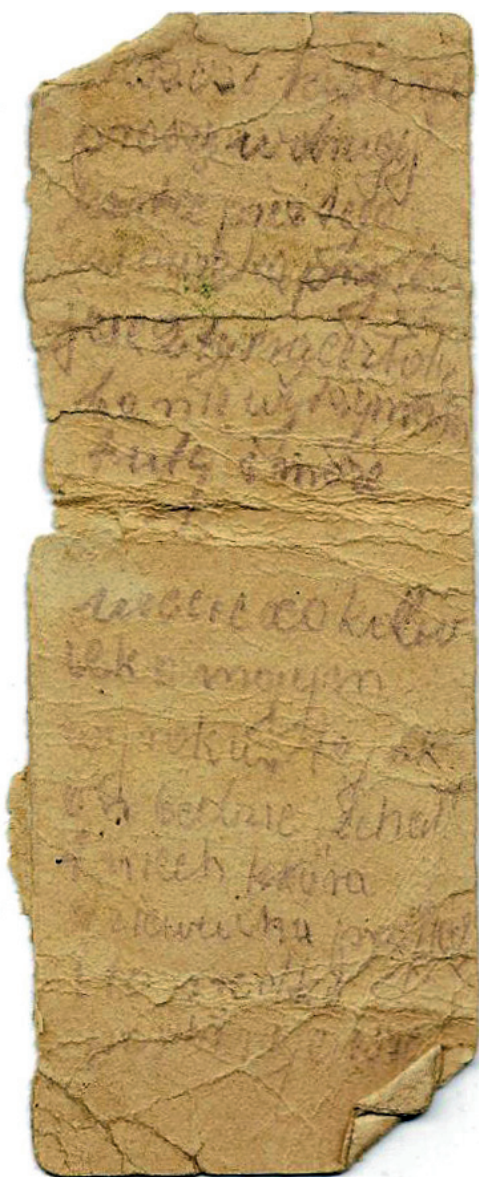
[The original language of the letter was Polish].

When you come, I'll always give you a letter through the same man [from whom] I received it before, just send me soon two hundred of "makhorka" cigarettes through that man [...] [illegible fragment – note by AR].

Zygmunt
Received 18/4/44
Wujek H

Wujek was the name of the village leader of Wólka Okrąglik, according to the family, it was through him that they had contact with Zygmunt.

[The original language of the letter was Polish].



7. The letter – camp secret message [source: family archive, provided by J. Kalisz]

[illegible fragment – note by AR], in the second package, that will be passed by that man please add a hundred more “makhorka” cigarettes, because I can’t stand it here [...] [illegible fragment – note by AR] if he wants, then [further illegible fragment – note by AR].

[The original language of the letter was Polish].

Zygmunt
Pronezynski 15. IV 44
o godzinie 13³⁰ rano.

Tamno Wandruje Zygmunt
brat zmarł w obozie
15-4-44 o godzinie 13³⁰ rano
Wujek Janina

WOLFA - ODE

8. The Information about the death of Z. Deptuła received by the family [source: family archives, provided by J. Kalisz]

T o t e n s c h e i n

Der Pole Zygmunt Deptuła.

geb. am 20. Mai 1925 in _____

wohnhaft in Ochudno

ist heute im Zwangsarbeitslager Treblinka an
Langenentzündung
gestorben.

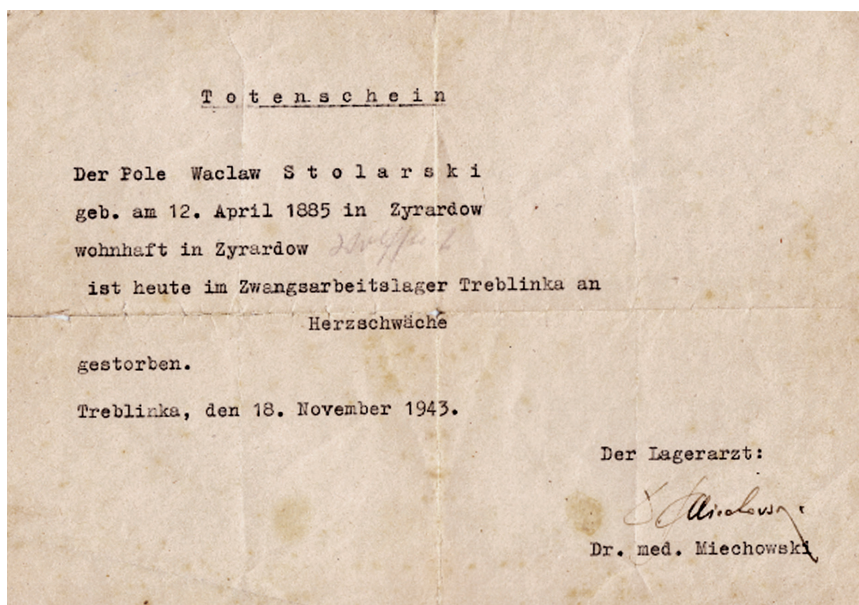
Treblinka, den 15. April.....1944.

Der Lagerarzt :
S. Mielowski
Dr. med. Mielowski.

9. Death certificate [source: family archive, provided by T. Krawczyk]

Zygmunt Deptuła died at 7.30 a.m. on April 15, 1944. The family was informed about this fact by the village leader of Wólka Okrąglik. The death certificate issued by the camp doctor confirms the date of Zygmunt Deptuła's death and states pneumonia as the cause.³⁰

Wacław Stolarski came from Żyrardów. He was a turner by profession. Together with his son Zdzisław, he was involved in the activities of the Home Army (AK). According to the death certificate issued by the camp doctor, Wacław died on November 18, 1943 of "a heart attack", while the list drawn up by Lucjan Puchała shows that he died on November 19, 1943 due to typhus epidemic, exhaustion and hunger. Apart from the death certificate Wacław's family received a postal stub (posted on November 30, 1943) with information about depositing money of the deceased.³¹ On its reverse side there is an inscription in German with the following content: the money of the deceased Wacław Stolarski were deposited – 16,70 zloty. Postage cost – 0.40 zł.³²

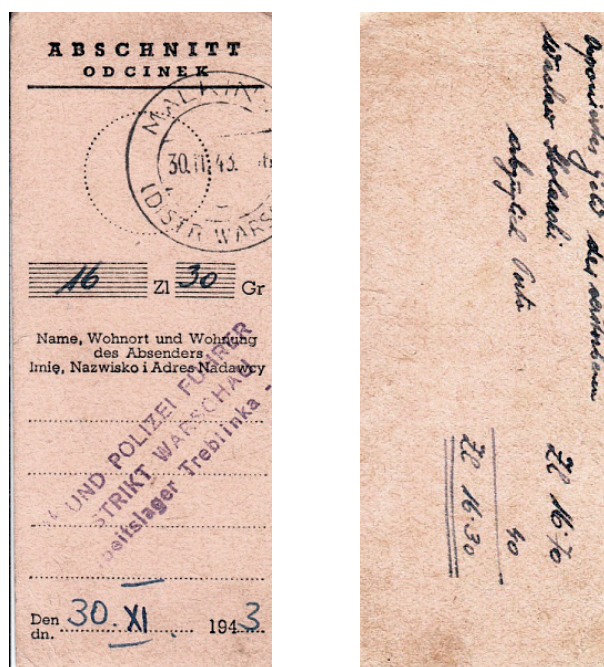


10. Death certificate [source: family archive, provided by M. Nietrzebka]

30. Information and letters provided by Justyna Kalisz, granddaughter of Wanda Deptuła and by Teresa Krawczyk, niece of Zygmunt Deptuła in 2019 and 2020; the death certificate of Zygmunt Deptuła provided by Teresa Krawczyk.

31. AMT, Account Regarding Wacław Stolarski, no. 3/44, pp. 2-17; IPN, OKBZN Siedlce, *Lista ofiar zmarłych w Obozie Treblynka od 12. XI 43 do 20 XII. 43 na tyfus z głodu i wycieńczenia*, (spelling consistent with the original), sygn. 47, p. 43.

32. The postal order was translated and made available to the Museum by Maciej Nietrzebka.



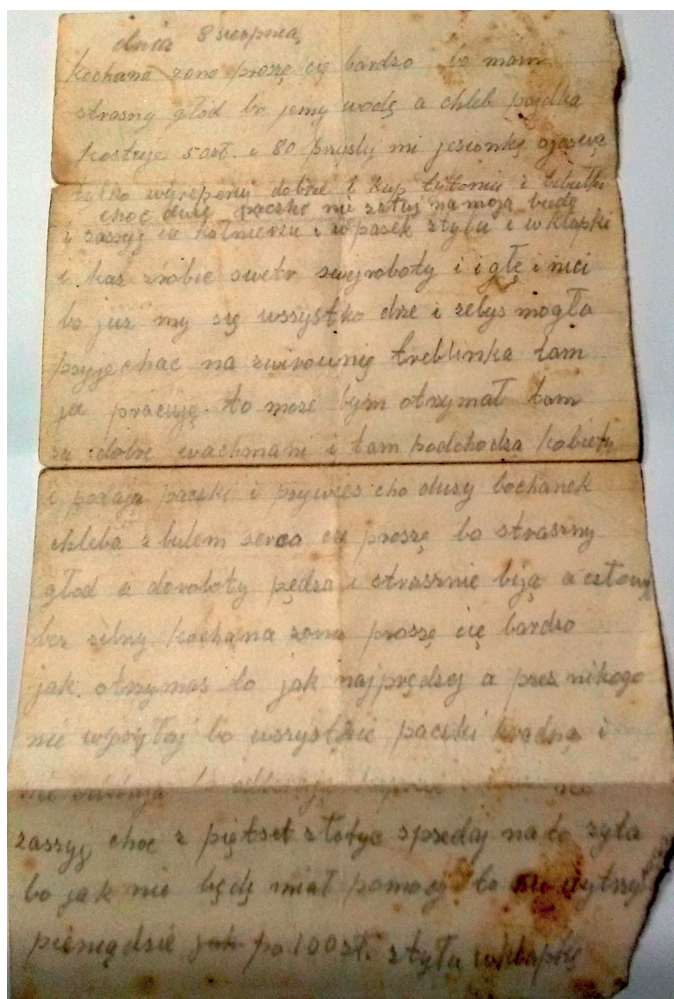
11. Postal information [source: family archive, provided by M. Nietrzebka]

Józef Saks came from the village of Dębe Małe. He was arrested in connection with a sabotage action against an ammunition train. Together with other inhabitants, he was taken hostage to the Penal Labour Camp. As a prisoner, he worked in the gravel pit. Some of the secret messages which he sent from the camp to his wife Janina survived, where he wrote, among other things: "Terrible hunger, and they rush you to work, they beat you terribly [...]"³³ – see below. In the same letter, dated August 8 [probably 1943], he asked for a parcel with a loaf of bread and money. According to the death certificate issued by the camp doctor Miechowski, he died on September 28, 1943. The cause of death was cardiac insufficiency.³⁴

There are preserved secret messages written by Józef Saks from the Treblinka I camp to his wife Janina.

33. The letter – secret message from August 8 sent by Józef Saks to his wife Janina. Correspondence provided by Henryka Żabik (Józef's granddaughter).

34. The death certificate provided by Henryka Żabik. The information provided by the family of Józef Saks.



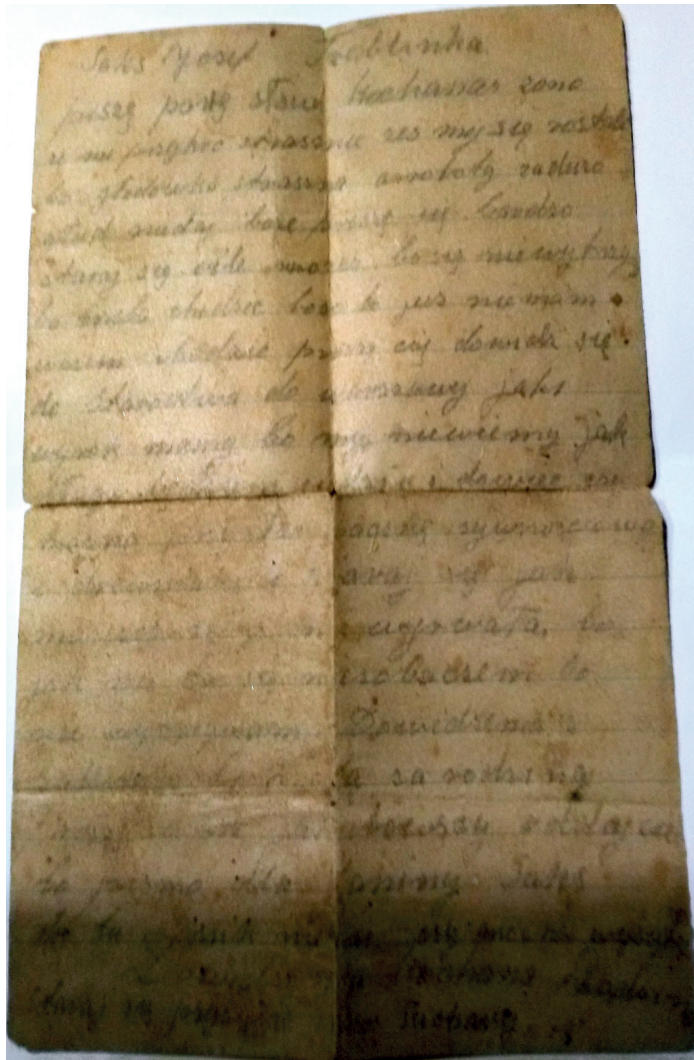
12. The letter – a message smuggled out of the camp
[source: family archive, provided by H. Żabik]

On August 8,

Dear wife, I ask you very much, because I am terribly hungry. We eat water and a slice of bread costs 50-80 zloty, send me the light-coloured overcoat. Fix it well. Buy me tobacco and cigarette papers, at least two packs. Don't begrudge me for the sake of my fate and sew something in the collar for me and in the belt at the back and in the flap, and make self-made sweater for me and bring a needle and thread with you, because everything is tearing and if you could come to the Treblinka gravel pit where I work maybe I would get this there, and there are good wachmans as well and women come up there and give parcels. Take with you a big loaf of bread at least. I beg you with a pain in my heart. I am asking you because there

is a terrible hunger and they rush us to work and beat us terribly. I am powerless. Dear wife, I am asking you very much once you receive this message bring me all this as soon as possible, and don't send it through others because they steal all the parcels and don't [illegible fragment – note AR] sell rye and sew at least five hundred zlotys in. If I don't have any help, I won't stay alive. Sew the money in banknotes of 100 zlotys on the back of the flap. [...]

[The original language of the letter was Polish]

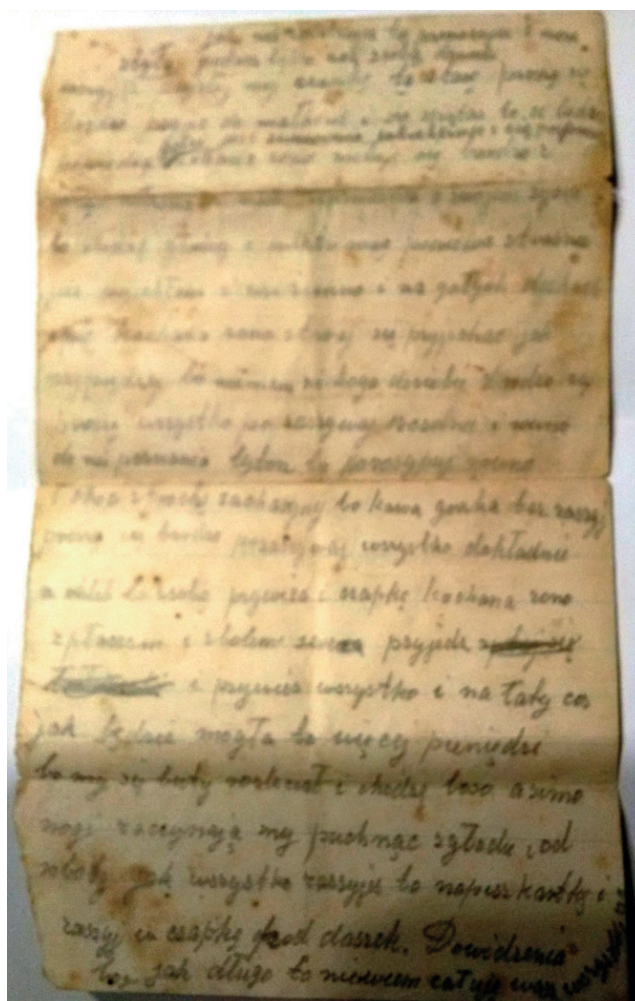


13. The letter – camp secret message [source: family archive, provided by H. Żabik]

Saks Józef Treblinka

Dear wife, I am writing a few words, do not worry that we are separated [illegible fragment – AR] terrible, a lot of work, big hunger in the camp, please try very hard, do the best you can because it is hard to stand it [...] [illegible fragment – note AR] in the camp, please find out [...] [illegible fragment – note AR] in Warsaw some [...] [illegible fragment – note AR] because we don't know how [...] [illegible fragment – note AR] Goodbye ... [illegible fragment – ed. AR] that is a letter for Janina Saks ... [illegible fragment – note AR]

[The original language of the letter was Polish]

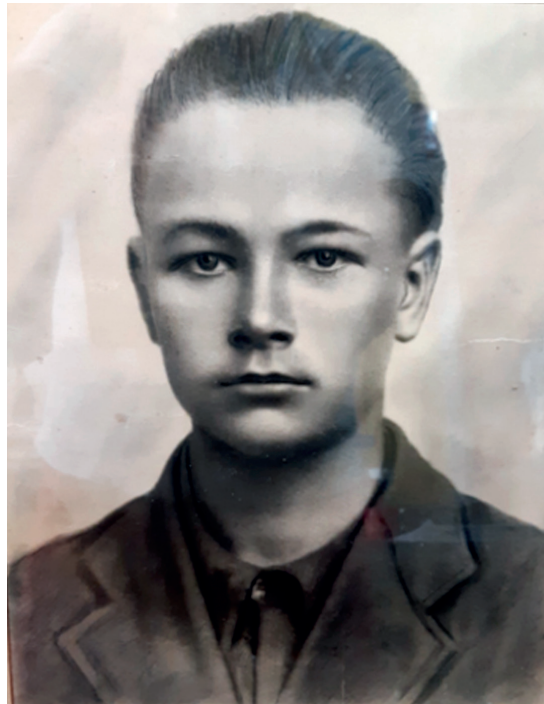


14. The letter – a message smuggled out of the camp [source: family archive, provided by H. Żabik]

[...] [illegible fragment – note AR] Sew the gruda coffee too [...] [illegible fragment – note AR] bring a cap dear wife with fur [...] [illegible fragment – note AR] come yourself [fragment deleted – note AR] and bring everything and something to make patches if you can, more money because my shoes are worn out I walk barefoot and it's cold my legs are starting to swell from hunger, from work, when you sew everything up, write a note and sew it behind the hat under the visor. Goodbye for how long I do not know, kisses all.

[The original language of the letter was Polish]

Jan Jerzy Gregorczyk came from Warsaw. During the occupation he transported grain, which was ground in coffee grinders into flour by family members. Then the flour was used to bake bread for sale. During a trip between Tłuszcz and Małkinia, the train was stopped by the Germans under the pretext of shots coming from it. All the men on the train were arrested, including the twenty-year-old Jerzy. Together with others, he was sent to the Penal Labour Camp. The date of his arrest is unknown. According to his family Jerzy, as a camp prisoner, worked on the railroad track. His sister brought him food several times. Once Jerzy passed on the information that



15. Jerzy Jan Gregorczyk [source: family archive, provided by K H. Lubaszka]

ten other prisoners would be shot if he escaped. He died of typhus or was shot before the camp was liquidated.³⁵

In addition to the biographies of the prisoners of Treblinka I, biographical notes of people brought from Warsaw prisons have also been prepared, including 86 people from the Pawiak prison who died in a mass execution on March 2, 1942. A month after this event, the Information Bulletin of April 2, 1942, no. 13 (117) published the names of the victims.³⁶

In *Current Information* No. 20/45 of June 1, 1942, we read about preparations for executions: "[...] On March 1 the strongest prisoners were assigned to dig 6-8 pits/ length: 10 m, width: 2 m, depth: 1.5 m. On March 2, SS men brought about 80-100 people in cars. They were probably those 100 people from Pawiak. Around 7 p.m. they were robbed of all their belongings and driven out behind the camp [...]. A burst of fire was heard (in the meantime there was a strict alarm and complete isolation)."³⁷ The execution was carried out on the order of Warsaw District Governor Ludwig Fischer in retaliation for killing and wounding German policemen in a criminal shootout.³⁸

One of the detailed biographies of the victims of the March executions is the biography of Andrzej Piotrowski, who came from Domanice near Siedlce. He graduated from the Warsaw University of Technology, and just before the war he defended his doctoral thesis at the Wrocław University of Technology. During the German occupation he collaborated with Stanisław Zelent in conspiratorial resistance. In his Warsaw apartment, together with his brother Jan, they prepared conspiratorial leaflets. He was arrested by the Gestapo and taken to the Pawiak prison, where he underwent heavy interrogations and was tortured. As a prisoner, he served as a scribe of the Sixth Division. During that time he greatly helped the communication network. In his preserved correspondence to his family, he asked for medicines to strengthen him and for warm clothes. During his imprisonment in the Pawiak prison, he made his 2-years-old son's head out of clay and bread. On March 2, 1942, the release of Andrzej Piotrowski was planned for the afternoon hours.³⁹ However, on that day, together with

35. AMT, Account on Jerzy Jan Gregorczyk, no. 3/14, p. 1; Information provided by Krzysztof and Hanna Lubaszka during the years 2019 and 2020.

36. W. Bartoszewski, *op.cit.*, pp. 93-94; R. Domańska, *op.cit.*, p. 206.

37. Muzeum Więzienia Pawiak (MWP), *Informacja Bieżąca*, nr 20/45 from July 1, 1942.

38. W. Bartoszewski, *op.cit.*, pp. 93-94; R. Domańska, *op.cit.*, p. 206.

39. Information and materials provided by the Piotrowski family – son, Rafał Piotrowski (CV, passport, documents from the Wrocław University of Technology, correspondence from the time of his imprisonment in the Pawiak prison – letters from his wife to Andrzej, notes from Andrzej to his wife Krystyna and



16. Andrzej Piotrowski [source: family archives, provided by R. Piotrowski]

other prisoners, he was taken from Warsaw and shot during an execution around 7 p.m. in Treblinka (in the area known as the Execution Site).

Another example of a biography of a person who was executed during the March executions is Grzegorz Drozdowski's biography. He came from Podole, and just before the war he graduated from the Warsaw School of Economics. He was an employee of the "Standard Nobel" company, he was the administrative and financial editor and co-founder of the "Polish-Finnish-Estonian Review". He worked for the economic integration of the Baltic countries. In 1938 he received a diploma of appreciation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs for this activity. He fought in civilian units during the Siege of Warsaw. In July 1941, on the orders of the Home Army (AK), as a director, he organized the "Samopomoc Pracownicza" – a workers' cooperative society which included a canteen that was a camouflaged place for contacts of underground liaison officers. On January 10, 1942, when the Gestapo was searching Drozdowski's apartment he was arrested and taken to the Pawiak prison. As a prisoner, he was repeatedly interrogated and

family); MWP, Prisoners' Registry from 1939-1944, personal card: Piotrowski Andrzej; Z. Śliwicki, *Meldunek z Pawiaka*, Warszawa 1974, p. 271.



17. Grzegorz Drozdowski [source: Pawiak Prison Museum]

tortured, but despite this, he did not turn anybody in. His sister made efforts to have him released, but to no avail.⁴⁰ On March 2, 1942, together with other inmates, he was deported from Warsaw and shot during an execution at around 7 p.m. in Treblinka (in the area known as the Execution Site).

Franciszek Jakubik's biography differs from the others because the man was not a prisoner, nor a person intended for execution. He was killed accidentally, and his body was transported and thrown into a forest pit near the Penal Labour Camp. Franciszek came from Poniatowo. On March 9, 1944, he was walking his fiancée Eugenia Szymańczyk home across the village. On their way they met four Ukrainians. The couple tried to run away, but they were stopped and then the Ukrainian stabbed Franciszek twenty times with a bayonet. The corpse of Franciszek and the wounded girl were taken to the Penal Labour Camp. In front of the camp commandant, the

40. MWP, Kartoteka Więźniów z lat 1939-1944, karta osobowa: Drozdowski Grzegorz; R. Domańska, *op.cit.*, pp. 205-206; W. Bartoszewski, *Warszawski pierścień śmierci* [...], pp. 93-94; Karta tytułowa konspiracyjnego tygodnika z listą ofiar egzekucji z 2 III 1942 [in:] W. Bartoszewski, *op.cit.*; MWP, Włodzimierz Panskiuk's Account.

Ukrainian tried to explain that he had killed a bandit. After a search of Franciszek, it turned out that he had worked in a peat mine. In the morning the corpse of the killed man was thrown into the pits where executed prisoners of the camp were buried. The next day, the mother of the killed man asked the camp commandant to release the body, in response she was told: "We are not releasing any corpses from here, because there is a cemetery here as well, he is already buried there."⁴¹

More information about the Execution Site and about the biographies of those commemorated can be found in the publication *The Plan of Symbolic Crosses at the Execution Site in Treblinka*, published in 2020 by the Treblinka Museum. Especially thanks to recent research, it is possible to learn more about the history of the camp cemetery and the Execution Site. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the camp grounds were subjected only to visual inspections. Therefore, not all places have been commemorated.

The queries carried out in various institutions, the accounts given, and family documents are a valuable source of information about the victims of this place. Often the memory of a loved one was passed on orally from generation to generation. Meetings with the families of the victims were always accompanied by emotions and a deep sense of remembrance about a loved one who did not return home from the camp or about a failed attempt to save them. Each biography is an individual story. With the biographies of the victims we want to preserve the memory of those buried at the Execution Site.

It is worth mentioning the memorial from the 1960s in the area of the Execution Site, which with its form and colours pays beautiful homage to the murdered people. Also, the memory of the place and the people buried in this area is preserved through annual patriotic and religious ceremonies.

We encourage everyone to share memories, accounts of prisoners and people murdered in the Penal Labour Camp. Each testimony collected will help to preserve the memory of the victims.

41. AMT, Marianna Jakbik's Account, no. 3/15, p. 1.

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- Account by Zygmunt Chłopek, no. 3/6.
- Account by Krystyna Grabowska, no. 3/9.
- Account by Marianna Jakubik, no. 3/15.
- Account by Barbara Kadaj, no. 3/17.
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Joanna Oleszczuk

IN THE SHADOW OF TREBLINKA THE MEMORY OF HEROES FROM PAULINÓW

PAULINÓW IN THE PAST AND TODAY

Paulinów is a small village located in the Mazowieckie Province, in the Sokołów County, the Sterdyń commune. Nowadays, it has several houses and is inhabited by only a few dozen people. The origins of Paulinów are related to a grange, which was established here on the initiative of Ludwik Górski in the mid-nineteenth century. A distillery and a brickyard were built here at that time, together with agricultural buildings and houses for the farm workers in the neighborhood. The village was named after Paulina Górka, maiden name Krasieńska, wife of Ludwik Górski, heiress of Sterdyń. Then, farmers settled and established their farms along the road going from the distillery towards the forest. Kolonia Paulinów was created this way, too. Along this road, towards the main road, a long building was built to fit a piggery, stable and barn. Before World War II, the grange with its facilities and neighboring estates created quite a large and well-functioning organism. It was characterized by the low-density of the settlement. The fact that houses were scattered among fields and forests and a constant flow of people arriving in search of work or business allowed to hide or remain unnoticed. The place was always bustling, there was always something going on, new workers arrived, new families settled down. The community of Paulinów managed to create unique social bonds, relations between neighbors were fundamentally correct, people were always

eager to help each other. The tradition of mutual help, the so-called *tłoka*¹ or communal work survived in Paulinów until the 1970s.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF STERDYŃ

Before World War II, the majority of Sterdyń's inhabitants were Jews who were mostly traders and craftsmen. According to the census conducted in 1921, there were 710 Jews in Sterdyń.² "Before World War II, Sterdyń was inhabited by 686 Jews. They constituted 87.5% of the entire village's population [...]."³

In September 1939, the Nazi authorities implemented a policy of discrimination of Jews in Poland, Jewish shops were marked, Jews were ordered to wear white arm bands with a blue Star of David on their forearms, they were harassed and humiliated.

The Germans seized Sterdyń on September 14, 1939, in the evening of the first day of the Jewish New Year (Rosh HaShanah). In the winter of 1939/40, they deported to Sterdyń Jews from Kalisz. "During the war, the voluntary and forced migration of Jews doubled the Jewish community in Sterdyń [...] many families with ties to Sterdyń came here from larger towns, including Warsaw, believing that it will be easier to find food and survive in a small agricultural village."⁴ On June 10, 1940, Ernst Gramss, a mayor of the Sokołów-Węgrów County, established an open ghetto in Sterdyń, in which a total number of about 1,000 to 1,200⁵ people were held.

In October 1941, the German authorities issued an ordinance introducing on the territory of the General Government the death penalty for Jews for leaving the ghetto without proper permits. According to this decree, Poles who helped Jews were also to be punished with death penalty.

Many Jews left the village and hid in the neighborhood upon learning about the German plans to liquidate the Sterdyń ghetto. When the

1. The custom of voluntary neighborly help during harvesting and other field work. The whole village was invited to help, and the work was done free of charge. 'Tłoka' usually ended with an abundant meal and feasting together.

2. Cf. Note no. 11 in: *Szkice z nadbużańskiego Podlasia* [Sketches from the Bug River in Podlasie region], A. Jarosiński; Siedlce 2008 (from the Jewish Institute).

3. *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1939-1945*, published by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2012.

4. *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1939-1945*, *op.cit.*

5. 1,000 people according to "Biuletyn ŻIH" 1952, nr 1 (3), pp. 124-125; *Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej. Zbiór dokumentów*, Warszawa 1957, p. 278; 1,200 people according to *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1939-1945*, *op.cit.*

Germans arrived next morning, on September 23, 1942 to liquidate the ghetto, they found only 500 Jews whom they forced to march to the Treblinka Extermination Camp, located 20km northwest of Sterdyń, to their deaths. "The Germans caught in the villages those who had not been taken to Treblinka and executed them on the spot. The Jews who managed to survive the massacre initially hid in barns, stacks, stables, and forests. 'I saw a concealed trench in the forest in Holendernia, where the Jews were hiding'⁶ – recalled Mr. Witold Abramczuk, an eyewitness of these events". The Germans severely punished those who dared to help Jews. Nevertheless, Poles helped. "During the liquidation of the ghetto in Sterdyń, near Sokołów Podlaski, Pinchas Lerman with his wife, daughter and a cousin managed to escape. They went to the nearby village of Seroczyn, to the house of the Radomski family whom they asked for help [...] in this way, they survived the war [...]"⁷ Not all Jews were as lucky as the Lermans.

GERMAN CRIME IN PAULINÓW

"Since the winter of 1942/1943, the Germans began searching for Jews who were still hiding. In order to establish where they were hidden, the Germans placed at least one agent in the woods surrounding the village. Based on his information, they rounded up and executed those Jews who had survived the liquidation of the ghetto. [...] At the same time, they took punitive measures against Poles who were known to be hiding Jews from Sterdyń."⁸

One of the actions aimed at intimidating Poles who rendered food and shelter to Jews was the pacification of Paulinów. According to the testimonies of witnesses, the County Governor Ernst Gramss participated in this action.

Wacław Piekarski described this event as follows:

On Wednesday, February 24, 1943, Paulinów was blocked. The Germans shot 11 people from Paulinów and nearby towns for rendering assistance to Jews who were hiding here.

The German action which was carried out on a large-scale, had been well prepared and based on provocation. It was provocateurs

6. J. Oleszczuk, "Pacyfikacja Żydów w Sterdyni" [Pacification of Jews in Sterdyń], *Gazeta Powiatowa*, nr 13 (313), June 3, 2002.

7. E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Adrianik, *Dam im imię na wieki, (Iz 56,5). Polacy z okolic Trebłinki ratujący Żydów [I Will Give Them an Everlasting Name]*, Oxford–Trebłinka 2011, p. 241. In 1992, Henryk Radomski and Zofia Radomska were awarded the title of "the Righteous".

8. *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1939-1945*, op.cit.

who made the reconnaissance. They were Jews, one from Warsaw, another from Sterdyń –named Shymel (Szymel) Helman.⁹ The provocateur from Warsaw joined the hiding Jews, pretending to be a French Jew who had escaped from a transport of “the displaced” taken to Treblinka [...].

A large number of troops and police of all sorts were brought in to carry out the operation. It is estimated that there were about 2,000 of them. They came in 60 vehicles from Ostrów Mazowiecka in the morning.

The grange and the village were surrounded. The manhunt line of about 10 km ran from the Sterdyń-Skokółów Podlaski road, through the Zambrow forest to Wymysły then Ratyniec, through Dąbrówka and back to the road. The soldiers were placed densely, a few steps one from another.¹⁰

During the operation, the Germans used a list of people who had helped the Jews hiding in the neighbourhood. Some of them came to the village for food, which most often they received in return for odd jobs or simply out of good heart. The list was drawn up and those providing help were identified by a man who had previously claimed to be a fugitive from a transport to the Treblinka Extermination Camp. He used to come to Paulinów together with Shloyme (Szłojme) and Shymel (Szymel) Roskietenke brothers. Sometimes he was accompanied by the shoemaker Shmulek (Szmulek). There is no reason to claim that these two local Jews collaborated with the provocateur, because the list did not include the names of people helping them at a time when the provocateur was not accompanying them.

In 1987 and 1988, the District Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Lublin interviewed several witnesses of events in Paulinów. The evidence was recorded in witness reports. Today, these sources are valuable evidence of the events that are forever remembered by the inhabitants of Paulinów. Among the interviewed there were:

- Stanisława Witkowska, maiden name Kotowska, whose parents and brother were murdered during the pacification of Paulinów;
- Zofia Piwko, maiden name Kusiak, wife of murdered Stanisław Piwko;
- Regina Augustyniak, wife of murdered Franciszek Augustyniak;

9. Szymel Roskietenke, son of Helman – based on the article, “Zbrodnia, o której nie da się zapomnieć (wywiad z Czesławem Kotowskim)” [The Crime that Cannot Be Forgotten (interview with Czesław Kotowski)], *Gazeta Powiatowa*, nr 28 (328), December 1, 2002.

10. W. Piekarski, *Obwód Armii Krajowej Sokołów Podlaski “Sęp”, “Proso” 1939-1944* [Home Army District Sokołów Podlaski, pseudonyms “Vulture”, “Millet” 1939-1944], Warszawa 1997, pp. 36-38.

- Stanisław Kwiek, neighbor of the murdered Kotowski family.
- Zofia Piwko, maiden name Kusiak, wife of murdered Stanisław Piwko;
- Regina Augustyniak, wife of murdered Franciszek Augustyniak;
- Stanisław Kwiek, neighbor of the murdered Kotowski family.

In the early morning of February 24^t 1943, the Germans murdered a stableman Franciszek Kierylak, who had sometimes allowed Jews to sleep inside farm buildings. Stanisław Kwiek gave a testimony in 1987, during which he said:

[...] I went to work on the grange, and when I got to the barn, I heard sounds of a few shots. Soon, a worker, Tadeusz Lasikowski (now deceased), who lived in the grange's quarters came to the cowshed and said that Franciszek Kierylak who was a warden of the property, was led by the Germans out of the lodging and shot. I saw the body of Kierylak, who was about 60 years old when he died. People said the Germans shot Kierylak for letting Jews, who during the day were hiding in straw heaps, sleep in the cowshed and grange buildings.¹¹

On that day, the spouses Ewa and Józef Kotowski were also killed. Their daughter Stanisława Kotowska,¹² testified in 1987:

Jews started to hide to protect themselves and sought help from Poles who also provided them food. My parents offered them temporary shelter and food. I remember the names of those Jews from Sterdyń and their professions: Shloyme (Szlojme) – was a hairdresser and his brother Shymel (Szymel) – was a young boy. Aron – was a butcher who earned money by killing animals for farmers, and Ankiel was a shoemaker, and he was an elderly Jew. I did not know the family names of these Jews. Most often the siblings Shloyme (Szlojme) and Shymel (Szymel) would come and ask for food. These Jews had a ground shelter in the forest called “Kołpak”, situated about two kilometers away from our farm. My brother Stanisław Kotowski knew about this hiding place, gave them potatoes and straw to insulate the shelter and helped them as much as he could. I also prepared food for them with my mother – soups, hotcakes and bread [...].¹³

11. in: Report of the interrogation of a witness (Stanisław Kwiek) by the District Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Lublin of April 6, 1987.

12. After getting married, she adopted the surname Witkowska (Stanisława Witkowska, maiden name Kotowska).

13. in: Report of the interrogation of a witness Stanisława Witkowska (maiden name Kotowska) by the District Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Lublin of March 23, 1987.



1. The Kotowski family, bottom row from left: Czesław, Ewa, Anna, Krystyna and her children, and Józef; standing are Stanisław and Władysław [source: private archive of the Kotowski family]

The son of the murdered spouses, Czesław Kotowski, for all his life did not want to return to the dramatic moments of the family tragedy, and it was only at the age of 82 that he agreed to talk about these events:

[...] I remember one time when I was doing something at the threshing floor, when suddenly I saw two people leaving our house. I asked my brother, 'Who was that?' He replied that it was Shymel (Szymel) who brought some strange Jew with him, but they were both asked to leave. Then, Shymel came alone and got half a loaf of black bread from our mother. The Jew who was a stranger watched from behind a tree in front of our house's window. It turned out that this man was a German provocateur. Claiming to be a French Jew, he walked around the area and made notes about people helping Jews, and then reported everything to the Germans. [...]

[...] In the morning of the next day, i.e. February 24, my mother probably had a bad feeling, because she woke us up at dawn, sent Kazimierz to school, and told me and Stanisław to leave the house and run away. So, I took my pitchfork and went to the grange. My brother harnessed the horse and followed me [...] I was walking down the road towards the distillery when suddenly I saw a group of Germans walking towards me. They passed me by. Among the

Germans, I noticed this supposedly French Jew who stared at me intently but did not recognize me. Stanisław, who was following me about a hundred meters away, was stopped by the Germans. Unfortunately, the Jew recognized Stanisław. The Germans tied our horse to a pole by the road and ordered my brother to go with them. I took the horse and, not knowing what I was doing, I turned back towards the house. My neighbors, Adam Pawluk and Stanisław Kempa,¹⁴ stopped me, and as it turned out later – saved my life.¹⁵

Czesław Kotowski miraculously escaped death. His sister Stanisława also nearly died on that day. Here is an excerpt from her testimony:

At about 7 o'clock, the aforementioned Jew, who had previously visited us to ask my mother for bread, entered the lodging and asked my mother for bread [...] and he was followed by three German soldiers [...]. Then, one of the Germans led my father Józef to the hall and with a pistol, which he took out of his belt holster, shot my father twice. The father fell dead – his legs were in the hall and the rest of the body was outside [...]. Then, the German came in and told my mother Ewa to go to the hallway. Soon, I heard one more shot. [...] I knelt before the painting of Our Lady and prayed for my life. Two Germans entered the room, one of whom grabbed the sweater around my neck [...] pushed me to the floor, and then let me go. I don't know how long I was lying there [...] my brother Czesław returned before evening. People reported that the Germans shot my brother Stanisław Kotecki in the forest.¹⁶

In the part of the property where there used to be a brickyard and where there was a multi-family residential house, the Germans killed three people: Jan Siwiński, Franciszek Augustyniak and Aleksandra Wiktorzak. Krystyna Pytel, née Kusiak, lived with her parents in this house. Krystyna Pytel, who is now 91 years old, recalls the events preceding the Paulinów tragedy:

It happened in the brickyard. A few days before the manhunt, my father, Franciszek Kusiak, went with a flashlight to the barn to look after a calving cow. He saw a bulge at the top in the straw and

14. Adam Pawluk – my grandfather, Stanisław Kempa – my uncle (Joanna Oleszczuk).

15. J. Oleszczuk, "Zbrodnia, o której nie da się zapomnieć", *Gazeta Powiatowa*, nr 28, December 1, 2002.

16. Report of the interrogation of a witness (Stanisława Witkowska, maiden name Kotowska) by the District Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Lublin of March 23, 1987.

began to poke it with the pitchfork. He heard some people coming down the wall. It was a Jew named Shmulko, accompanied by a man who, as it turned out later, was an agent working for the Germans. This agent pretended to be a French Jew, he knew languages. In addition to French, he spoke Jewish, Polish and German. People gave them food, because Shmulko repaired shoes for them. They asked my father if they could stay overnight, and they even wanted to pay for it, but my father refused to let them stay overnight.¹⁷

Regina Augustyniak, wife of murdered Franciszek Augustyniak, testified in 1988:

[...]The door opened and two armed Germans in uniforms, and a man dressed in civilian clothes, entered the apartment. The man felt much at ease and spoke with those Germans in German. One of these Germans asked my husband, Franciszek, to give him underground newspapers, weapons, and to take them to the forest – to the place where the Russians were hiding... In fact, Russian soldiers were hiding in the nearby forest near Paulinów and they often came for food, too. My husband said that he had no newspapers or weapons and he would not take them into the forest, as he did not know about any Russians hiding in the forest. The Germans searched the house looking for weapons and underground press, but found nothing. [...] After that, all of them went outside with my husband. [...] Then, the Germans also took Jan Siwiński out with them. Soon, I heard four shots. I must say, that at that time, I was three months pregnant [...] When I realized that the Germans had left the house, I went outside and I saw my husband Franciszek and stepfather Jan Siwiński lying in front of the house, showing no signs of life.¹⁸

Later in the testimony, Regina talks about the death of her neighbor Aleksandra Wiktorzak and about other people murdered for helping Jews.

Krystyna Pytel, an inhabitant of the so-called brickyard,¹⁹ remembered the tragedy in Paulinów as follows:

On the day of the tragedy [...] I saw the German troops and cars in the morning. My father entered the house and with an alarm in

17. Based on an interview with Ms Krystyna Pytel (maiden name Kusiak) on January 14, 2021 (interviewed by Joanna Oleszczuk).

18. Report of the interrogation of a witness (Regina Augustyniak, maiden name Borys) by the District Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Lublin of January 7, 1988.

19. Part of the farm located in Paulinów Kolonia, where there was a brickyard and a multi-family house for a farm workers.



2. Franciszek Augustyniak, pictured with his wife Regina
[source: private archive of the Jakubaszek family]

his voice announced that our neighbors Siwiński and Augustyniak had been killed. Then, my father went to look after a cow in the barn, but did not come back for a long time. My mother sent me to get him. I went and saw that the barn was closed. At some distance, I noticed my father standing with the Germans. My father called me over and told me to bring him something to eat and an identity document. [...] I ran home, my mother found the wedding certificate and I gave it to my father. The Germans walked my father with

them all day long and the family thought they would kill him, too. Finally, the Jew who had accompanied Shmulek appeared, he had the list with him, he approached my father and patted him on the shoulder. The Germans started laughing and clapping their hands, saying "good Pole, good Pole". Then, it turned out that this supposed French Jew was in fact a provocateur.²⁰

The Germans led a few men to the forest and shot them there. The victims were: Stanisław Piwko, Stanisław Kotowski and "the displaced from Poznań": Zygmunt Drgas and Marian Nowicki, who temporarily stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Uziębło in Kolonia Stary Ratyniec. Their son, 19-year-old Zygmunt, was also murdered by the Germans that day.

Krystyna Pytel continues:

I saw with my own eyes these killed in Paulinów. I and other children were running around, and we saw what was happening. I was 13 years old at that time. Stanisław Piwko was my uncle (my father's sister's husband), who was killed by the road to Paulinów near the forest, right behind the house of Waław Kusiak, my father's brother.²¹

An eyewitness of this crime was the wife of the murdered Stanisław, Zofia Piwko, who testified in 1988:

[...] I saw Germans standing on the road by the forest – there were many of them, all in uniforms and armed. Next to them stood my husband, Stanisław Kotecki, and two other men unknown to me. The Jew who had been at our house on February 21, 1943 with another Jew was standing with the Germans, too. On that day, that other Jew had asked for bread and my husband had given him some. The Jew who was standing with the Germans, while at our house, had not spoken. Passing by my husband, I asked if he had a Kennkarte – an occupational ID card. My husband just told me, "Go home!", which I did. Having walked 100 meters, I heard shots and immediately turned around and stood still. Then, I saw my husband Stanisław Piwko falling to the ground. I went numb with terror. [...]²²

20. Based on an interview with Ms Krystyna Pytel (maiden name Kusiak) on January 14, 2021 (interviewed by Joanna Oleszczuk).

21. Based on an interview with Ms Krystyna Pytel (maiden name Kusiak) on January 14, 2021 (interviewed by Joanna Oleszczuk).

22. in: Report of the interrogation of a witness (Zofia Piwko, maiden name Kusiak) by the District Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Lublin of January 8, 1988.

In the Paulinów manhunt for Poles who had helped Jews, those whose names were on the list of the German agent were all killed. Many other inhabitants of Paulinów had also helped Jews, but on the exact day when the provocateur was drawing up the list they were not at home or for some reason did not help, as they probably feared a strange Jew. The crime in Paulinów was intended to intimidate Poles. "From March 23 to April 24, the Germans killed 47 other Poles. [...] As a result of these retaliatory actions, combined with similar actions in Sadowne near Łochów and Stoczek Węgrowski, where other ghettos were situated, Poles stopped helping Jews."²³

Victims of the German crime in Paulinów were buried in temporary graves.

Mr. Czesław Kotowski recalled:

I had to take care of the funeral, order coffins, put the bodies of my loved ones in and bury them. The priest did not agree to a funeral mass or a burial in the cemetery. My parents and brother, along with five other people who lost their lives on that day in Paulinów, were buried in the forest nearby the road to Paulinów. We



3. Stanisław, Ewa, and Józef Kotowski, pictured from left to right, before the funeral [source: private archive of the Kotowski family]

23. *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1939-1945, op.cit.*



4. Tombstone photo of Stanisław and Zofia Piwko
(photo by J. Oleszczuk)

exhumed them 1.5 years later, after the liberation. The same priest, who previously had not wanted to bury the dead and excused himself by saying that it was a rather unclear, German matter – was now afraid; now he said a Catholic funeral mass and my relatives were buried in the Sterdyń cemetery.²⁴

Krystyna Pytel when asked about the graves of other victims of the crime in Paulinów said:

These eight people who were buried in the forest, after the war were buried in Sterdyń and three people were initially buried at

24. J. Oleszczuk, "Zbrodnia, o której nie da się zapomnieć", *op.cit.*

the edge of the forest were: Zygmunt Uziębło, Marian Nowicki and Zygmunt Drgas. Their temporary grave was situated in front of the buildings of the Uziębło family farm, by the road leading from Ratyniec to the forest. Today, there is no trace of these buildings anymore. Uziębło was buried in the cemetery in Kosów Lacki [...] and the bodies of the displaced from Poznań, the so called “residents from Poznań” who had lived at the Uziębło family farm, were taken back to Poznań after the war.²⁵

On February 24, 1943, 11 people died for helping Jews in Paulinów. They were people of different age, the youngest victim was 19 and the oldest about 60 years old. They were:

- Franciszek Augustyniak – 29 years old, son of Franciszek and Anna (maiden name Pytel), from Kolonia Paulinów²⁶ (a place commonly known as a “brickyard”);
- Zygmunt Drgas – 23 years old, born in Podgradowice, son of Jan and Julianna (maiden name Górna), from Stary Ratyniec;²⁷
- Franciszek Kierylak – 59 years old, son of Onufry and Małgorzata Kierylak, from Kolonia Paulinów;²⁸
- Ewa Kotowska – 56 years old, daughter of Wawrzyniec and Konstancja, from Kolonia Paulinów;²⁹
- Józef Kotowski – 56 years old, son of Stanisław and Weronika (maiden name Szalach), from Kolonia Paulinów;³⁰
- Stanisław Kotowski – 25 years old, son of Józef and Ewa (maiden name Klimek), from Kolonia Paulinów;³¹
- Marian Nowicki – 29 years old, born in Podgradowice, son of Franciszek and Julianna (maiden name Górna), from Stary Ratyniec;³²
- Stanisław Piwko – 30 years old, son of Jan and Marianna (maiden name Andrzejewska), from Kolonia Paulinów;³³

25. Based on an interview with Mrs. Krystyna Pytel (maiden name Kusiak) on January 14, 2021 (interviewed by Joanna Oleszczuk).

26. Death certificate, Registry Office in Sterdyń.

27. Death certificate, Registry Office in Kosów Lacki.

28. According to a death certificate, Franciszek Kierylak was 59 years old on the day of his death. The tombstone at the cemetery in Sterdyń indicates that he died a tragic death at the age of 66.

29. Death certificate, Registry Office in Sterdyń.

30. Death certificate, Registry Office in Sterdyń.

31. Death certificate, Registry Office in Sterdyń.

32. Death certificate, Registry Office in Kosów Lacki.

33. Death certificate, Registry Office in Sterdyń.

- Jan Siwiński – 46 years old, son of Władysław and Paulina (maiden name Nowak), from Kolonia Paulinów³⁴ (a place commonly known as a “brickyard”);
- Zygmunt Uziębło – 19 years old, son of Ludwik and Józefa (maiden name Flazińska), from Stary Ratyniec;³⁵
- Aleksandra Wiktorzak – about 60 years old, from Kolonia Paulinów³⁶ (a place commonly known as a “brickyard”).

COMMEMORATION

Czesław Kotowski, the son of murdered Ewa and Józef, and the brother of murdered Stanisław, for many years unsuccessfully sought the amends for the loss and harm suffered by his family. A great harm was done to him, his family and other families whose relatives had died for helping other human beings. They did not refuse to help, although they knew that they were risking their lives. They died fulfilling the Christian commandment to love their neighbors. Czesław wanted to live to the moment these victims are recognized at least. He had been working to this end all his life.

In 1990, Czesław Kotowski was admitted to the Association of the Polish Victims of the Third German Reich and recognized by the Provincial Verification Committee as entitled to compensation for damages. He wrote to the Institute of National Remembrance and to the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland. He applied for the “Medal of the Righteous Among the Nations”³⁷ awarded by the Yad Vashem Memorial Martyrs and Heroes in Jerusalem to non-Jews for saving Jews during World War II.

On December 11, 1992, Jerzy Świerkula from the Main Committee for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation, the Institute of National Remembrance, wrote in a letter to Czesław Kotowski:

I hereby inform you that the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem informed the Main Committee that the process of awarding

34. Death certificate, Registry Office in Sterdyń.

35. Death certificate, Registry Office in Kosów Lacki.

36. Based on the testimonies of witnesses, the death certificate have not been found.

37. A medal and a diploma were established in 1963 and were awarded according to the following criteria: 1) the rescued person must be a Jew, and the person who saved their life cannot be of Jewish nationality; 2) there must be no material gain in saving a life; 3) the rescue had to be connected with a risk to the life or freedom of the savior. The key document for the decision to award the title of “The Righteous Among the Nations” is the account of the person saved.

the “Medal of the Righteous Among the Nations” concerning the members of the Kotowski family has been suspended, because of ‘the need to supplement the documentation with an authentic document confirming the passing of the death sentence on the Kotowski family for hiding Jews.’ I would like to mention that as the practice of the Institute in Jerusalem shows, it demands confirmation of the facts of helping the Jews by themselves, i.e. those who received help.³⁸

Another letter from the Institute of National Remembrance of June 23, 1993 indicated that it was possible to apply for information at the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw. The letter to the Embassy was sent at the turn of 2003. These efforts did not bring the expected results.

Czesław Kotowski’s son, Antoni, said that his “Father did not want any money or prizes. He worked just to honor the victims somehow. After all, they died for sharing bread with Jews.”³⁹

THE WAYSIDE SHRINE

The efforts of the Society of Sterdyń Land Friends founded in 1998 finally led to the commemoration of the heroes from Paulinów. On the initiative of the Society, on August 31, 2003, a shrine was unveiled in honor of the inhabitants of Paulinów and Stary Ratyniec murdered by the Germans. The monument was placed by the Paulinów road, exactly in front of the place where there were the farm buildings and the house of murdered Ewa and Józef Kotowski.

The shrine was built on the initiative of the vice-president of the Association, Andrzej Sarna and created by local sculptors, Józef and Franciszek Pytel. The sculpture shows the Sorrowful Christ. A plate with engraved names of people who were murdered on February 24, 1943 for helping Jews was placed under the figure.⁴⁰

38. Based on the article: “Pomordowani w Paulinowie” [Those Murdered in Paulinów], *gazetapodlasia.pl* of August 17, 2010.

39. “Sprawiedliwy bez medalu” [The Righteous without a Medal], *Newsweek*, on January 29, 2011.

40. 12 names are mentioned on the shrine’s plate in Paulinów. On February 24, 1943, Wacław Pogorzelski, who was an accidental victim of the German manhunt in Paulinów, also died in Paulinów. Edward Kopówka and Paweł Rytel-Andrianik in the book: *Dam im imię na wieki... op.cit.* mention 15 names of people who died in Paulinów on February 24, 1943. In addition to Wacław Pogorzelski, they also mentioned Czesław Borowy, Jan Brzozowski, Franciszek Śliwiński and

The ceremony of unveiling the shrine was attended by members of the families of the murdered Poles, representatives of the local authorities, initiators of the event, residents of Paulinów and Grzegorz Ciecierski, the vice-president of the Institute of National Remembrance. He “emphasized that the ceremony in Paulinów shows that the memory of those who had given their lives in the name of faithfulness to universal human ideas and principles coming from the religion professed is most alive among their relatives, who lived with them and remember them because it arises from from the sincerest family ties.”⁴¹

“During the ceremony, Henryk Kozłowski – President of the Commune Circle of the Union of Veterans of the Republic of Poland and former Political Prisoners in Sterdyń also took the floor, and said: ‘In 1939, it was not us who went to capture the territories of the Germans, but they came to us and subjected us to a 5-year Gehenna – they drove people out of their homes, burned towns and villages, and brutally murdered the defenseless. War is a terrible thing [...]’ At the end of his speech, he asked the audience to honor the memory of the murdered with a minute’s silence.

Stanisława Witkowska spoke on behalf of the families affected by the tragedy. Moved, with tears in her eyes, she said: ‘I saw them killing my father and mother [...] My parents raised eight children to adulthood.

Stanisław Hendoszko. During the interrogation of witnesses in 1987, Stanisław Kwiek testified that Borowy was killed in Ostrów by a Soviet artillery shell, when, on the orders of the Germans, he with other people, was digging trenches in 1944. According to Krystyna Pytel’s account, Jan Brzozowski was also killed during this operation: “when the Eastern front was approaching, Czesław Borowy and Jan Brzozowski were captured by the Germans. They both lost their lives in this action, their bodies were brought and buried in the cemetery in Sterdyń.” At the cemetery in Sterdyń, there is also a grave of a resident of Paulinów named Stanisław Chędoska. The inscription on the monument informs that he died a tragic death on August 23, 1944. Based on his mother’s report, his son claims that his father was killed by a bomb while he was digging German trenches. On February 25 Stanisław Kusiak was taken to the Treblinka extermination camp. Krystyna Pytel, maiden name Kusiak, explains: “Stanisław was also my father’s brother. He had a conflict with his wife’s family, but nobody knows who informed the Germans about him, what he was accused of. It was May 5, 1944. On that day, other 2 young men died, Mieczysław Wilk and Gustaw Poślada. The Germans were going to get my uncle, who lived in Dąbrówka... they stopped them and shot them near the forest. It was an accidental innocent death. Stanisław Kusiak was probably taken by the Germans to the Treblinka extermination camp from where he never returned.”

41. A. Wasak, “Śmierć za kromkę chleba” [The Death for a Slice of Bread], *Echo Katolickie*, 11, 2003.



5. A chapel commemorating the victims of a German provocation
(photo by J. Oleszczuk)

Everyone learned at home that no one should be abandoned in need. A Jew or a Gypsy who came by, everyone was given food, because everyone is a human being [...].'⁴²

"Jan Rominkiewicz, president of the Society of the Sterdyń Land Friends said: They died for the love shown to their neighbours. We want to keep them in our memory by offering them this shrine on the 60th anniversary of the tragedy. From now on, it will become a symbol of suffering and love. A symbol of our solidarity with them."⁴³

80-year-old Joanna Lewandowska came to the ceremony of unveiling the shrine from the vicinity of Poznań. During the German occupation, she, her mother and two brothers stayed here as the displaced from the Poznań region with the Uziębło family. Joanna recalled: "I experienced the worst moments of my life here, my mother died of typhus here in such poverty that I had nothing to give her to eat, here in the blockade of Paulinów my two brothers, Marian Nowicki and Zygmunt Drgas died."⁴⁴

The wayside shrine reminds the inhabitants of Paulinów and visitors travelling along the Paulinów road about the shocking events that took place here during World War II.

The memory of the heroes from Paulinów was reflected in the folk poetry of local women poets who paid tribute to the murdered, through their works. On the occasion of the unveiling of the shrine in Paulinów, Lucyna Maksimiak, a resident of Hołowienek in the commune of Sabnie, wrote the following poem:

Rhapsody to the fallen⁴⁵

The bullets were fired by the enemy and your heart stopped beating
 You fell on this land – the beloved Podlasie
 So often by enemies splashed with the blood of our loved ones
 This is what the Lord Jesus taught us how to act
 Give the thirsty one a cup of water, and the hungry one a slice of bread
 Take the chilled travelers home so that they can warm up
 For your goodness and faithfulness to God, they broke you that way

42. S. Maciak, "W hołdzie ofiarom niemieckiej prowokacji" [In Tribute to the Victims of the German Provocation], *Niedziela Podlaska*, October 26, 2003, 43(426).

43. E. Kopówka, "Kapliczka pamięci" [Memory Chapel], *Życie Siedleckie*, September 5, 2003.

44. A. Wasak, "Śmierć za kromkę chleba", *Echo Katolickie*, 11, 2003.

45. The poem was published in the collection of poems by Lucyna Maksimiak entitled: *Kocham moje Podlasie* [I Love My Podlasie], published by the Sokołów Socio-Cultural Society in 2005.

Today, standing in front of this chapel, we pray to God
But enemies always remain enemies – don't forget
There is something else – which we repeat when we pray
“...And forgive us our trespasses as we
forgive those who trespass against us... “.

We will not erase from memory what the enemy has done to you
And we promise to live as God has taught us
In order to bear wrongs patiently, and to be willing to forgive it
To be faithful to God and to our Motherland is what we must do.

When you look at us from the beyond, standing by the throne of God
We want to live as you did – because that is the best way
Nobody goes astray when following this path, and neither you did
but only these who shortened your life lost themselves on the way.

We apologize to you for sixty years of waiting
To commemorate what had been done to you
There are few of us left, who remember those days but
We pass it on to the young and let them remember you.

Marianna Bakońska, a folk poet from Chądzyń in the Sterdyń commune, also wrote a poem for the occasion of the unveiling of the shrine in Paulinów:

The memory of the murdered⁴⁶

The crime we know is written in blood,
here it happened.
Today we are offering a shrine here,
to keep the memory of them still alive in us.

Silence around and suddenly – screams
that woke the inhabitants from their sleep
when the German criminals in the early morning
attacked defenseless people.

The assassin hand squeezed the trigger
and a deadly series he sent.
Many of the victims did not even groan.
Eleven people were murdered.

46. The poem published in the collection of poems by Marianna Bakońska entitled: *Moje Marzenia* [My Dreams], published by the Society of Friends of Sterdyń in 2018.

Some were killed in their homes,
 others were dragged out in front.
 Happy who survived till today
 who fled from the killers.
 Today, many of us will ask: Why?
 After all, they did not expect it.
 For a slice of bread given to their neighbor,
 sacrificed their lives.
 My God please accept into the Kingdom those sacrifices.
 This is what we ask today
 and for their souls, before your throne, Lord,
 we offer our prayers.

A modest wooden wayside shrine in Paulinów commemorates Poles, inhabitants of Paulinów and Stary Ratyniec, who saved Jews during World War II. It is also a meaningful symbol of selfless love of one's neighbor, until the greatest sacrifice, the price of which is one's own life.

THE STONE

The second monument commemorating the German crime in Paulinów is the memorial stone, which was erected in the square in Sterdyń in June 2020. The monument was created as part of a project implemented by the Pilecki Institute. The purpose of this endeavor is to restore the memory of people whose names have been left unspoken for too long. The name of the project "Called by Name" refers to the words of Zbigniew Herbert's poem:

therefore we need to know
 count them exactly
 call by name
 equip for the road⁴⁷

The project was launched in Sadowne on March 24, 2019 on the National Day of Remembrance of Poles saving Jews⁴⁸ and it initiated a series of commemorations. Still in 2019, more monuments were unveiled in the following towns: Poręby-Kocęba, Skłody-Piotrowice, Ostrów Mazowiecka,

47. Z. Herbert, "Pan Cogito o potrzebie ścisłości" [Mr. Cogito about the Need for Accuracy][in:] *Raport z oblężonego miasta i inne wiersze* [Report from the Besieged City and Other Poems], Institute of Literature, Paris 1983.

48. Polish public holiday established by the President of the Republic of Poland in 2017. It is celebrated on March 24 on the anniversary of the death of eight persons of the Ulma Family from Markowa, shot by German gendarmes.



6. Monument honoring the Poles from Paulinów and Stary Ratyniec who were murdered for aiding Jews during the German occupation (photo by J. Oleszczuk)

Stoczek, Nur, Waniewo, Czyżew-Sutki. In 2020, the heroic Poles from Paulinów, Wierchowiska, Tworki, Marki, Pustelnik, Tomaszów Mazowiecki and Stary Lipowiec were commemorated.

The unveiling ceremony of the stone memorial, which took place on June 4, 2020 in Sterdyń, was a significant event, despite the fact that it was held under the sanitary regime due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The event was reported in the media, not only in the local press, but it was also reported in the main edition of TV News – Wiadomości.

The ceremony was attended by: Deputy Minister of Culture and National Heritage – Magdalena Gawin – initiator of “Called by Name” project, representatives of state, provincial and local authorities and residents. “Special guests were members of the families of the murdered residents of Paulinów and Stary Ratyniec. A Holy Mass for the intention of those commemorated in the church of Sterdyń was celebrated by Piotr Sawczuk, bishop of Drohiczyń, assisted by Fr. Paweł Rytel-Andrianik and others. Later, the participants went to the square situated in front of the Sterdyń Commune Office, where a stone with a commemorative plaque was unveiled.”⁴⁹

49. https://zyciesokolowa.pl/pl/639_aktualnosci/6027_zgineli-za-kromke-chleba-upamietiono-11-osob-zamordowani-za-pomoc-ydom.html (accessed: 29.05.2021).

"[...] It was our ancestors who showed by their actions how to find humanity in another person [...]. Years have passed but our hearts have not forgotten. Thanks to your effort and commitment, the memory and history of our family will be engraved even more prominently in the pages of history, and this monument will remind the residents of the noble hearts of our ancestors"⁵⁰ – said Hanna and Antoni Kotowski, representing the families from Paulinów and Stary Ratyniec murdered for helping Jews during the German occupation.

On a stone placed in Tadeusz Kościuszko square in Sterdyń the words of John Paul II: "A man must be measured by the heart" have been written and the inscription "In memory of the inhabitants of Paulinów and Stary Ratyniec murdered by the Germans on February 23-24, 1943 for helping Jews." There is also a list of 11 names of murdered Poles on the monument.

COMMEMORATION

Anniversary commemorations at the Paulinów shrine with the figure of the Sorrowful Christ, laying flowers and lighting candles have already become a tradition reminding about the sad events that took place here during the war. These commemorations are covered in the local press. In 2018, one of the newspapers read: "On Saturday, February 24 on the 75th anniversary of these events, the Society of the Sterdyń Land Friends, the inhabitants of Paulinów and the authorities of the Sterdyń Commune commemorated the victims of the German provocation. Members of the Society, local government officials and residents of Paulinów gathered at the chapel in Paulinów. [...] wreaths of flowers were placed at the chapel and candles were lit. [...] Then the gathered people proceeded to the parish cemetery in Sterdyń, where candles were lit on the graves of seven out of the twelve⁵¹ murdered."⁵²

In 2021, the anniversary commemoration had a wider scope. They were held not only at the chapel in Paulinów, but also by the monument in Sterdyń. On February 24, 2021, the victims of Paulinów tragedy were commemorated in Sterdyń at the stone memorial, flowers were laid by representatives of the commune authorities. In Paulinów before the shrine

50. <https://instytutpileckiego.pl/pl/wydarzenia/instytut-pileckiego-honorowal-ofiary-niemieckiej-oblawy-w-s> (accessed: 29.05.2021).

51. It is currently believed that on February 24, 1943, 11 Poles were killed in Paulinów for helping Jews.

52. S. Maciak, "Zginęli, bo pomogli..." [They Died Because They Helped...], *Życie Sokołowa*, 9.03.2018.

commemorating the 1943 events candles were lit by representatives of the Sterdyń Commune Council, the Society of Friends of the Sterdyń Land and the inhabitants of Paulinów in the memory of the 11 murdered Poles. The families of the victims were represented by Antoni Kotowski – grandson of the murdered Ewa and Józef Kotowski.

The Pilecki Institute took care of the integration of the families. In November 2019, the first “Called by Name” Family Reunion was organized in Brok on the Bug river. The reunion was attended by the families of the victims of the German crime in Paulinów.

On October 2, 2020, in the exhibition space of the Pilecki Institute in Warsaw, in a historic tenement house called “Dom Bez Kantów” (House without Edges), an exhibition about “Called by Name” project was inaugurated. The exhibition presents the realities of life in occupied Poland, tells about the means and methods of functioning of the German terror, and tells about the later life of the “Called by Name” families.

Another form of commemorating the events that took place in Paulinów on February 24, 1943 is a video footage made on the initiative of the Pilecki Institute after the ceremony of unveiling the stone monument in Sterdyń. The video is available on the Internet.⁵³ Also on the initiative of the Pilecki Institute, a podcast entitled “What you cannot see in Paulinów”⁵⁴ was created which talks about contemporary Paulinów and about the events related to the German provocation, as a result of which in 1943 the Germans pacified the village. A documentary was also made with the participation of Ewa and Józef Kotowski’s grandson, Antoni Kotowski and his wife Hanna. This film was broadcast, among others, on TVP Info program on March 24, 2021, i.e. on the National Day of Remembrance of Poles saving Jews.

An important task for all of us, not only at the local level, is to keep the memory of Paulinów and Stary Ratyniec residents who lost their lives helping Jews survive the war. This is a very important part of the heritage of every nation to commemorate those whose heroic attitude has written a page in the history of the motherland.

53. Video report: *Upamiętnienie mieszkańców Paulinowa i Starego Ratynia* [Commemorating the Inhabitants of Paulinów and Stary Ratyniec], Pilecki Institute, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZk11-QUFJ8> (accessed: 29.05.2021).

54. Podcast from the series “Jest historia”, *Czego nie widać w Paulinowie* [This is a Story, Which Can’t Be Seen in Paulinów]; YouTube: <https://instytutpileckiego.pl/pl/badania/mediateka/czy-nie-widac-w-paulinowie-jest-historia-odc-1> (accessed: 29.05.2021).

Monika Samuel
 Treblinka Museum
 The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

RAILWAYMAN FRANCISZEK ZĄBECKI MEMOIRS WORK OF A WITNESS FROM TREBLINKA¹

I want to at least partially give some details of those horrible crimes, so as not to belong to those who keep quiet about the truth, I want to leave at least fragmentary memories about the terror and barbarism which Poles and Jews have suffered from Germans during the occupation in the place where I lived and worked.²

The author of those words is Franciszek Ząbecki who during the German occupation worked as a train dispatcher at the train station in Treblinka. He greatly contributed to documenting the tragic history of this region.

Franciszek Ząbecki (8/10/1907–11/04/1987) was one of the four children of Franciszek and Rozalia. He was born in Łyszkowice village near Łowicz. In 1925 he started working as a radiotelegraph operator apprentice at the train station in Bednary. In 1928 he graduated as an external student from the Public Male Gymnasium named after Prince Józef Poniatowski in Łowicz, that year he also became a graduate of the Course for Communal

1. The title of this article is the result of the query in the National Remembrance Institute. While looking through the archive materials regarding Treblinka the author came across traces of exploration carried out by Franciszek Ząbecki (4/03/1968, 29/07/1976, 30/09/1978), as a purpose of viewing the archival documentation he gave “memoirs work of a witness from Treblinka”. In an attempt to present the figure of Franciszek Ząbecki the author has found it reasonable to use the expression which he himself used.

2. F. Ząbecki, *Wspomnienia dawne i nowe*, Warszawa 1977, p. 7.

Administration Clerks in Warsaw.³ During the years 1929-1931 he completed his military service in the 1st Communication Regiment in Zegrze. He obtained the rank of the reserve platoon leader responsible for communication.⁴ After completing his military service, due to a lack of vacant jobs in the railways, he began to work at the Tax Office in Sokołów Podlaski. His decision to work in Sokołów was not accidental, his older brother Grzegorz had worked in this town for several years in "Sokołów Sugar Factory and Refinery".⁵ On September 12, 1936 Franciszek married Stanisława Oleszkówna and started a family. The couple had six children: five sons and a daughter.⁶ Until Ząbecki was drafted into the army during general mobilization, he worked as a tax collector from November 1932 till September 4, 1939.

During the September campaign he served in the First Communication Battalion. On September 17, 1939 he was taken prisoner by the Soviets. After two months together with other Polish war prisoners he was handed over to the Germans. He was sent to forced labour in the III Reich. As a prisoner number 22264 he stayed in Stalag II-A in Neubrandenburg in the south-east part of Macklenburg. He worked in agriculture in the village Klinken at a farm owned by Otton Mulsof. He fell ill in captivity, in March 1941 he was released and came back to Sokołów Podlaski. Almost immediately after his return, on April 1, 1941, under the pseudonym "Dawny", he joined the resistance within the structures of the Union of Armed Struggle, which on February 4, 1942 was renamed as the Home Army. The Home Army district Sokołów Podlaski "Sęp", "Proso" cooperated with the biggest organization bringing together railwaymen in this region, organized as the 8th company which was part of the 6th Railway Region "Podlasie". The organization was created on January 6, 1940 in Siedlce.⁷ In spring 1940,

3. www.bazakolejarzy.pl (accessed: 13.10.2020).

4. W. Piekarski, *Obwód Armii Krajowej Sokołów Podlaski "Sęp", "Proso" 1939-1944*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 177-179.

5. Grzegorz Ząbecki (1904-1944) alias "Zbroja", was also a soldier in the Home Army. He was arrested in Sokołów Podlaski in July 1943 and transported to Pawiak prison and then to Auschwitz form where he was taken to Mauthausen-Gusen. He died on May 13, 1944 in a the German concentration camp Mauthausen; The Room of Names in KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen <https://raumdernamen.mauthausen-memorial.org/index.php?id=4&p=13740&L=5> (accessed: 21.10.2020).

6. Izydor and Karol were born and died in Treblinka after 7 and 14 days of life. Information received from the Ząbecki Family, e-mail from 9.08.2019.

7. 6 Railway Region was an unprecedented organization in the whole country. Before it became a part of the Home Army in autumn 1942 it belonged to the Secret Polish Army and then to the Armed Confederation; further: A. Gontarek, "Akcja zbrojna Armii Krajowej w czasie buntu w obozie Treblinka II w sierpniu

organizational units on each train station were begun to be created. On every station a commandant was appointed, whose task was to prepare the station for the general uprising and for resuming normal operation after the Germans were removed.

The simplicity of Ząbecki's motivation to join conspiracy, which he explains in his memoirs, is quite engaging:

I found out that there is an underground movement in Poland and that people are needed, so I joined the underground activity with no reservation. How could I not join, God would punish me and God's wrath should not be drawn any more. Although I had been released from captivity, I did not feel released from my soldier's oath to be faithful to the motherland. [...] I still felt a soldier ready to follow every order. I did not ask my colleagues which ideology they represented, I knew only that they were soldiers.⁸

Franciszek Ząbecki was an honest, strict, dutiful and religious man. In his everyday life he was guided by principles deriving from Christian values, to which he remained faithful also during the difficult time of occupation.⁹

TREBLINKA STATION

Franciszek Ząbecki began his work at the train station in Treblinka on May 22, 1941, already being a member of the Polish Underground State. He also moved into staff accommodation there, together with his family. In the association of railwaymen Franciszek Ząbecki's undercover number was 2850, pseudonym "Józuba". His tasks included leading a dedicated intelligence unit in Treblinka. His associates were: Józef Pogorzelski "Kostuś" – no. 2848, Karol Socha "Kubuś" – no. 2880 and Feliks Gałąch "Gwizdek" – no. 2881.

1943 r. – rekonesans badawczy", *Studia nad totalitaryzmami i wiekiem XX*, t. 3/2019, p. 61; R. Dmowski, "Funkcjonowanie kolei na Południowym Podlasiu w drugiej połowie 1944 r. na przykładzie Siedleckiego Węzła Kolejowego. Zarys problematyki", *Szkice Podlaskie*, z. 8, 2000; R. Dmowski, "Zarys dziejów kolei w Sokołowie Podlaskim", *Sokołowski Rocznik Historyczny*, t. 2, 2014.

8. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

9. In the memories of his family and friends he was remembered as a model employee; a quiet, calm man with an interesting past, who wrote beautifully in technical lettering and blackletter, liked gardening, reading and painting; P. Ząbecki, "Był skromnym człowiekiem", *Życie Siedleckie*, 13.12.2013; Wacław Kruszewski, "Ząbecki był bardzo ważnym świadkiem", *Więści Sokołowskie*, 2.06.2011; G. Sereny, *W stronę ciemności. Rozmowy z komendantem Treblinki* [Into the darkness. From mercy killing to mass murder], Warszawa 2002, p. 132.

Ostbahn – Kolej Wschodnia

Personenausweis } Nr. 816.
Dowód tożsamości osoby }

Herr Franciszek Ząbecki
 p. (Vor- und Zuname – Imię i nazwisko)
 steht als Fahrdienstleiter
 pozostaje jako (Dienstbezeichnung)
 (Oznaczenie stopnia służbowego)
 im Dienst der Ostbahn.
 w służbie Kolei Wschodniej.

Das Lichtbild ist von d. em Inhaber
 Fotografia jest przez właściciela (lkę)
 eigenhändig unterschrieben.
 własnoręcznie podpisana.

(Unterschrift des Inhabers)
 (Podpis właściciela)
 den 10 10 1943
 dnia (Dienststelle)
 (Miejsce służbowe)

(Dienststempel)
 (Pieczęć służbowa)

(Unterschrift und Dienstbezeichnung)
 (Podpis i stopień służbowy)

*) Nichtzutreffendes ist durchzustreichen
 Niepotrzebne skreślić

ke 3 16/2 (Ostbahn) Personenausweis A 6 IV 42 100 000 DrFkV Krakau

1. Identity card of Franciszek Ząbecki, issued by the German occupation authorities [source: F. Ząbecki, *Wspomnienia dawne i nowe*, Warszawa 1977]

Treblinka is a small village located in wooded areas at the verge of the lower Bug river valley, away from big agglomerations. In 1887, a railway line was put into operation between the nearby Małkinia and Siedlce.¹⁰ At that time a railway stop was built in Treblinka. In 1914, the railway stop became a train station. It was not a station of significant importance, it would probably become one of many small stations, which we forget about soon after passing the board with its name. That is also how Ząbecki perceived these surroundings:

The surroundings of Treblinka were sad. A sandy wasteland. Crops were destroyed every year by widespread floods from Bug river. There weren't any bigger settlements within a few kilometers.

10. Further information about this region: R. Dmowski, "Funkcjonowanie kolei...", *op.cit.*; id., "Zarys dziejów...", *op.cit.*; M. Pisarski, *Koleje Polskie 1842-1972*, Warszawa 1974; W. Szydlak, "Geneza kolei warszawsko-petersburskiej i jej wpływ na rozwój miejscowości położonych przy tym szlaku komunikacyjnym, na obszarach należących obecnie do woj. warszawskiego i ostrołęckiego: (etap II – lata 1914-1939)", *Zeszyty Naukowe Ostrołęckiego Towarzystwa Naukowego*, z. 13, pp. 107-132.

It was a proverbial end of the world. It seemed that during the occupation this might be a safe place.¹¹

The Treblinka station became more important before the Germans attacked the Soviet Union (it became a junction station), Franciszek Ząbecki's basic tasks included observing the transport route:¹²

[...] no military train passed through Treblinka without being precisely registered, investigated in detail, with information on the quantity and type of carriages and the cargo transported. While the trains were running their carriages were counted, as well as their cargo – tanks, cannons with their caliber noted, armored cars, trucks, carriages with barrels with gasoline, loaded and empty tankers were recognized by leaf springs. In sanitary transports the carriages were counted precisely. From the command of the District ZWZ-AK I received a special instruction on how to recognize chemical weapons transports [...]. Switchman Karol Socha, who was deliberately moved to a different work shift, helped me in those tasks [...]. Later a train dispatcher Józef Pogorzelski helped me with this work with great conscientiousness.¹³

In summer 1941 in the triangle between small villages: Maliszewa, Poniatowo and Wólka Okrąglik, 6 kilometers from the train station in Treblinka, next to the gravel pit which had existed before the Second World War, the Germans created the Penal Labour Camp Treblinka I. Its territory was around 17 ha. In the initial period of the camp's operation, civilians from the Sokołów Podlaski powiat were imprisoned here, later also residents of the eastern poviats of the Warsaw district were put here. A stay in the camp, under starvation, terror and slave labour, often ended in death. The average number of prisoners imprisoned in the camp was from 1,000 to 2,000 people. The prisoners worked in the gravel pit, at the train station in Małkinia and did irrigation work in the valley of the Bug river. Some of them were made to work in the camp's workshops. It is estimated that around 20,000 prisoners were imprisoned in the Penal Labour Camp Treblinka I, of which about 10,000 died or were killed. The Camp was liquidated in the late July and early August 1944, just before the arrival of the Red Army. This is how Franciszek Ząbecki described the creation of the camp:

11. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

12. G. Ryżewski, "II wojna światowa" [in:] *Sokołów Podlaski. Dzieje miasta i okolic*, ed. by G. Ryżewski, Białystok-Sokołów Podlaski 2006, p. 553; F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

13. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

The camp was created on the request of the governor of joined districts: Sokołów Podlaski – Węgrów, a German Pole-hater, Gestapo man Ernst Gramss. The document on the creation of the camp was signed by the governor of Warsaw district Ludwig Fischer. As far as I know from the underground press the official date of the camp creation given by Germans was November 15, 1941. Before that “official” date of the camp’s launch several dozen victims had lost their lives already. [...] The camp’s commandant was SS Hauptsturmführer Theo von Euppen, a sadist who tormented the Poles and even more the Jews who worked there and shot them like partridges.¹⁴

During mid-1942, nearby the Penal Labour Camp Treblinka I, Germans built the Extermination Camp Treblinka II. It was the last camp created as part of the “Action Reinhard”.¹⁵ Its territory was around 17 ha. The camp’s staff consisted of around 30-40 Germans and Austrians. They were assisted by 100-120 guards so called “wachmani” (watchmen) recruited from among the Soviet war prisoners – mostly of Ukrainian origin. It is estimated that around 900,000 Jews from Poland, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Germany were killed here. The camp was liquidated in November 1943. Franciszek Żabecki also vividly describes the circumstances of the creation of the Extermination Camp Treblinka II:

14. F. Żabecki, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

15. “Action Reinhard”, was the codename for the extermination of Jews from General Government and Białystok district carried out by the Germans during the years 1942-1943 at the territories of the occupied Poland, as a part of the final solution to the Jewish question (German: Endlösung der Judenfrage). During several months around 1.85 million Jews were murdered. Most of the murdered were citizens of the Second Polish Republic, however Jewish people from other European countries occupied by the Third Reich were also deported to the death camps. The Action Reinhard headquarters led by the commander of the SS and police in the Lublin district SS-Brigadeführer Odilo Globocnik were located in Lublin. SS-Sturmbannführer Hermann Höfle, former head of the IV Department of the Reich Main Security Office was the chief of staff. The operation of the extermination of the Jewish people was named after SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich – former head of the police and the security service, who died on June 4, 1942 due to the injuries that he sustained during the assassination attack in Prague. SS Commands run this operation in three centres: in Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. The locations chosen for the camps were forest areas, situated in the east part of the General Government, near the railway lines and large clusters of Jewish people. The already existing concentration camps in Majdanek (KL Lublin) and Auschwitz-Birkenau (in the Upper Silesia province) were also used in the action of the planned extermination of Jews.

At the beginning of April or May 1942 a few SS men from Sokołów Podlaski came to the Poniatowo village, in the commune of Prostyn. After a thorough examination they occupied the land and forest [...] located at the border of the villages Poniatowo and Wólka Okrąglik. Right after that visit various building materials were brought to this place by trucks [...] residential barracks and non-residential buildings were built, telephone line was connected. Earthwork was carried out and part of the forest was cleared. The area was fenced with barbed wire [...] Fence was interweaved with pine branches. A convenient path was build which led from the road thought the forest to the occupied land. Works was carried out in great rush by Jewish prisoners from the labour camp Treblinka. [...] During a few special entries to the gravel pit to seemingly record the wagons and bike rides to the forest to gather "spring mushrooms" I determined that probably a new labour camp was being built. I immediately passed this massage to the intelligence unit of the Home Army District. Finally on the June 1, 1942 they began to hurriedly build a sidetrack from the existing siding leading to the gravel pit. The new track led to the developing facility and finished at some distance from it. The track capacity was counted to be 20 wagons without the locomotive.¹⁶

On July 23, 1942 at Treblinka station the first train arrived¹⁷ with victims of the German plan of "the final solution to the Jewish question". These were Jews from the Warsaw ghetto:

The running train made its presence known from a far, not only with pounding of wheels on the bridge but also with shoots from rifles and automatic machines fired by the trains guards. The train rolled into the station like a vicious reptile. It was loaded with Jews from Warsaw ghetto. [...] After the arrival of the transport it was like an evil spirit has entered into the SS men; they would take out their guns, then they hid it and then took it out again, like they wanted to shoot and kill, they would come closer to the wagons to silence the screaming and lamenting people or they would curse and shout. On the wagons there were inscriptions made with chalk with the number of people in a wagon, it was: 120, 150, 170,

16. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.

17. The transport arrived at the Extermination Camp Treblinka II in the morning, with 7,400 people. Among them were residents of the accommodation facilities for refugees in Warsaw and prisoners from the central prison for Jews at 24 Gęsia Street; E. Kopówka, *Treblinka. Nigdy więcej*, 2002, p. 27.

200 people. Later we counted that the overall number of people in the train reached 8-10 thousand.¹⁸

LIFE IN THE SHADOWS OF THE EXTERMINATION CAMP

Ząbecki notes that:

The SS men who were the train escort shot at the escaping people with continuous fire. There were many dead bodies lying at the station. [...] All hell broke loose. People from the village were also escaping, not knowing what is happening. The residents of the station buildings and nearby farms lived under a constant threat and during the shooting they were forced to hide or could not leave their house. The construction workers of the bridge at the Bug river fell to the ground to save themselves from the bullets [...] People who lay down and woke up with God on their lips were seized by despair. There is no way to describe the things that were happening in Treblinka, at the train station alone. No one can understand or retrace this atrocities, this hell on earth.¹⁹

The neighboring German camps were a curse for the nearby inhabitants, they casted a grim shadow on everyday life. It was a sort of incapacitation: people were witnesses of an unimaginable cruelty but an open opposition was often threatened with an immediate death:

It is difficult to find the right words to describe those events and our feelings. I myself, for example, could not do anything, I could not let myself be seen talking to people from the transport or making any kind of gesture towards them. That kind of behavior would threaten all my work that I did for the resistance movement. It is really difficult to describe with words the miserable side of this situation, this compassion that people had towards the victims but being able to do so little for them.²⁰

While going back to the events from that period we should not forget about the orders of the German occupation authorities decreeing the punishment of death for any Pole who would give shelter to Jews or helped them in any other way.²¹ At the station in Treblinka the death threat for

18. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, pp. 39-40.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

20. G. Sereny, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

21. See: the order of the General Governor Hans Frank from 15.10.1941; <https://generalgouvernement.pl/historia-generalnego-gubernatorstwa> (accessed:

helping a person who was considered a Jew by the Germans was not an empty threat. For giving water to the people locked in cattle cars who were going to the Extermination Camp Treblinka II, on August 20, 1942, a railway worker, Jan Maletka was shot by a German guard.²² At that time he was 21 years old.

Ząbecki recalls how Germans were interested in everything in the vicinity of the camps:

The camp's commandant Stangl was interested not only in the extermination camp but also everything that was happening in near and further area of the camp. He particularly watched over the smooth moving of wagons with the "immigrants" to the camp, over the behavior of people in nearby villages [...].²³

The attitudes of the local population varied. Many people stopped thinking constructively about the future – living day by day – often filled with the growing fear and insecurity; and often, at best, they were indifferent to the evil that surrounded them. The staff of both camps organized "outing" to the nearby villages and towns. The watchmen demoralized local inhabitants demanding vodka and female companionship and every objection was suppressed with severe beatings, rapes or imprisonment in the camp. There were also cases of trading and having close contacts with the camp's staff. Sometimes at the train station in Treblinka water was sold (!) to the extremely exhausted Jews and at incredibly high prices, even 100 zlotys for a bottle.²⁴ This trading usually took place with the permission from the Germans responsible for the transports. This type of behavior was condemned and stigmatized in Polish underground press.²⁵

10.03.2020); IPN BU 3053/56: the order of Fisher from 10.11.1941 about the death penalty for Jews and people helping them, the order of the SS and Police Leader in Warsaw District about death penalty for Poles who helped Jews dated 05.09.1942; www.wirtualnysztetl.pl (accessed: 02.03.2021).

22. E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię na wieki (Iz 56,5). Polacy z okolic Trebłinki ratujący Żydów*, Oksford-Treblinka 2011, pp. 186-187.

23. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

24. Jewish people were locked in ghettos and were deprived of the possibility of earning money. Only some of them were being paid for their work. In the chronicle from Warsaw ghetto we can find information from June 1942 about payment for Jewish police: it was 10 zlotys per day and a bigger portions of food products; E. Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego, wrzesień 1939-styczeń 1943*, ed. A. Eisenbach, Warszawa 1983, p. 402.

25. *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, 22 VI 1944, R. VI, nr 25 (232), Nakład A, "Biuletyn Informacyjny", cz. III, Przedruk rocznika 1944 "Konspiracja", Warszawa 2003, p. 207; as cited in: E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię..., op.cit.*, p. 94.



2. Franciszek Ząbecki at the telephone in the Treblinka railway station building, during the German occupation [source: Ząbecki Family Archive]

People who did not give in to this crisis of values are all the more worth remembering. Franciszek Ząbecki continuously provided reports about camps in Treblinka, especially about the Extermination Camp Treblinka II:

To my existing duties of conducting research about military transports going to the eastern front a new responsibility was added to diligently provide any information that could be gathered about what was happening in Treblinka. I had access to those information mainly at the station. Every day I noted each arriving transport, where it came from, how many wagons it had; I even noted the hour of the train arrival. Those information, as I mentioned before, I would bring personally to the underground unit of the Home Army District in Sokołów Podlaski, which was at that time run by Bronisław Plechowski pseudonym "Wojda".²⁶

26. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 45; Bronisław Plechowski, son of Feliks and Kune-gunda nee Kasperska, born in 1913 in Łukówek (Lubelskie voivodship, district of Chełm, Sawin commune); information provided on 02.10.2020 by Ilona Flażyńska, obtained as a result of a carried out query. At Bronisław Plechowski's house there were intelligence headquarters, see: G. Ryżewski, *op.cit.*, p. 552.

Information about the railwaymen's involvement in helping prisoners from Treblinka can also be found in the accounts given by the former prisoners of the Penal Labour Camp Treblinka I. Zdzisław Makowski²⁷ said that:

The locomotive staff and the person who linked train wagons were not prisoners. Those railwaymen risked their lives to bring food packages to the camp.

Another prisoner Edward Sypko²⁸ also mentioned the local railwaymen:

When I worked at the gravel pit I tried to load the first wagon behind the locomotive but I did not always make it. Prisoners who worked close to the locomotive since June 1943, secretly made contact with the drivers, who sometimes hid bread under the wagons

27. Zdzisław Makowski was born in 1925. He was arrested by the Germans on August 24, 1943 during a round-up in Legionowo. He was 18 years old at that time. He was taken to temporary detention at Krochmalna Street in Warsaw. After about three weeks, he was sent to the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. In the camp, he was assigned to work in the gravel pit, he also dug pits where the bodies of the dead or killed in Treblinka I were buried. One day, his mother, Bronisława Makowska, came to the camp to give him food and winter clothing. The woman was arrested and also imprisoned in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. In November 1943, there was an epidemic of typhus and dysentery, during which Zdzisław and Bronisława fell ill with typhus. Zdzisław Makowski was released from the camp on December 21 or 22, 1943. Sick Bronisława remained in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. The family received information about her death in January 1944; Account of Zdzisław Makowski, Archives of the Treblinka Museum, no. 3/30.

28. Edward Sypko was born on December 8, 1919 in Jarosław. In August 1940 together with his father Kazimierz, he joined the Union of the Armed Struggle. On March 3, 1943 he, his father and 18 others were arrested by the Germans in the village of Brzuza. The next morning, the Germans shot 10 people from among those arrested, including his father. On March 5, Edward was imprisoned in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. During his stay in the camp, he worked at rolling out the square in front of the commandant headquarters and in the gravel pit. On September 25, 1943, he escaped from the camp with Wacław Pieś and Franciszek Tomczuk – prisoners arrested in Rogów. After escaping, he fought again as a member of the Home Army. After the Red Army entered in 1944, he was arrested by the NKVD. He managed to escape and, under a false name, he joined the Polish Second Army, with which he reached Prague in May 1945. In 1947 he was arrested again. He was sentenced to 5 years in prison, but was released under the general amnesty. In 1950, he moved to Lublin, where he worked in construction. He graduated in law, then moved to Łódź. In the 1980s he got involved in voluntary work in the Union of Disabled War Veterans; Archives of the Treblinka Museum, no. 3/46; Oral History Archives of the History Meeting House/KARTA Foundation https://audiohistoria.pl/nagranie/49-ISFLDP_o61 (accessed: 26.11.2020).

for the prisoners. Once Germans caught the railwayman who smuggled a loaf of bread for the prisoners. I don't remember his name, I only know that he came from Wólka Okrąglik.²⁹ This railwayman was beaten and imprisoned in the camp. However, the Germans did not let him work in the gravel pit to prevent him from getting in touch with other railwaymen. This incident caused that the railwaymen were afraid to help us.

Antoni Tomczuk³⁰ also spoke about the railwaymen:

Polish railwaymen who worked at the railway also helped prisoners a lot, a railwayman Stanisław Gawkowski used to come to us at the gravel pit, he was marking wagons which were being filled with gravel and he was also bringing money for us. For the money that we got, when someone managed to smuggle it into the barrack, we could buy something to eat from those who came from the "Waser wał".

Franciszek Ząbecki in his memoirs extensively describes the actions taken by railwaymen employed at the Treblinka station to facilitate contact between families and those imprisoned in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp:

29. Edward Sypko probably recalls Stanisław Przyborowski, born in Dębe near Kosów Lacki. He worked at the train station in Małkinia as a train driver. He refused to drive the train with the deported Jews to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. He was hiding in Wólka Okrąglik. He was caught by the Germans and imprisoned in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, where he died a few days before the camp's liquidation; E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię...*, op.cit., p. 146.

30. Antoni Tomczuk, son of Piotr and Marianna, was born on January 1, 1923 in the village of Sabnie. He was arrested on June 10, 1943. In the morning, the village was rounded up by the Germans. A group of about 30 people, mainly bachelors, was arrested at that time. The arrested people were transported by trucks to Sokołów Podlaski, and then to the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. The reason for these arrests was that the produce quotas imposed by the Germans were not delivered on time, the illegal possession of wheat flour and untagged animals. At the beginning, Antoni Tomczuk worked in the camp, then he was assigned to work in the gravel pit, where he loaded gravel onto wagons. After a few weeks, he managed to join a group of prisoners working on a farm run by the camp staff, where he looked after horses. He was released from the camp with a group of a dozen prisoners from Sabnie village before Christmas in 1943; Archives of the Treblinka Museum, no. 3/50, A. Remiszewska, *Plan symbolicznych krzyży na Miejscu Straceń w Treblince* [The plan of symbolic crosses at the Execution Site in Treblinka], Treblinka 2020.

When the trains carrying working prisoners were stopped at Treblinka Station on purpose, the train drivers left their steam engines for the train dispatcher's office under the pretence of some official business. The families in the waiting room handed sheets of paper, letters or smaller parcels to the driver. The railway personnel of the steam engine, moving team and station personnel helped as much as they could, making it easier to pass the parcels. Train driver Władysław Gołębiowski (residing in Zduńska Wola) was sent to the labour camp in Treblinka for passing a parcel. I do not remember how long he stayed in the camp, but he left it supported on a stick. Mover Jan Kikoła from Małkinia was severely beaten a couple of times for passing the sheets of paper to prisoners. [...] however, he kept passing the sheets of paper and parcels.³¹

Although it was extremely dangerous, the railwaymen also tried to help the victims taken to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp:

Despite the prohibition, the railwaymen would give water to the Jews. Even the wives of station workers, including Pronicka, the wife of the station master, Bąkowa, the wife of the road section worker, Wierzbowska, the wife of the road section master and my wife Stanisława, weeping, ran with buckets to the wagons to give even a drop of water to children. It was, as I already mentioned, very dangerous. A road service worker was shot dead at the station in Treblinka for offering water.³²

The resistance put up against the Germans by many railwaymen, including those working at the Treblinka station, took various forms. The railwaymen sabotaged the orders of the German superiors by 'leafing' the freight wagons, which means they would change the consignment notes, which prevented the trains from reaching their destinations. This caused chaos and delays in transports. Delaying the trains not only disorganized transport, but also made it possible for the conspirators to travel and make contacts with those who had already been captured by the Germans.

Employment in the railways protected against deportation to forced labour, while rail passes allowed for movement after the curfew. The railwaymen were under constant supervision, not only had they to be careful during the frequent visits of the crews of both nearby camps, but also beware of the German railwaymen. Two German railwaymen, Willi Klinzmann and Rudolf Emmerich, lived in the station building and were assigned to

31. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-23.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

supervise the 'resettlement' of the Jewish population. From the memoirs of Franciszek Żabecki:

A few days after the death factory started to function, two German railwaymen arrived at Treblinka station: Rudolf Emmerich from Dresden and Willi Klinzmann from Wuppertal. [...] The Germans did not interfere with the basic work related to the general train traffic and office work at the station. Their duties included supervision over the efficient steering of wagons with prisoners to the siding and driving this part of the train to the death camp. They said they only operated the 'way to heaven' – 'Himmelfahrt-Strasse'. Klinzmann and Emmerich occupied a separate room with an entrance from the corridor leading to the office of the train dispatcher; only a wall separated my apartment and Józef Pogorzelski's from the room occupied by the Germans.³³

Having such superiors at the station, I had to be careful and to mask my underground activity by pretending that I did not care about what was happening around me at the station. [...] Despite the greatly changed conditions in which I found myself, I did not stop working in the conspiracy, in which there was more and more work to do.³⁴

Conducting underground activity in such circumstances required extraordinary courage and fortitude. Żabecki lived with his family at the Treblinka station, he was responsible for his wife and children. He described the conditions of living in Treblinka in an interview with British journalist Gitta Sereny:

You must try to imagine life right here, in that place: every day, from the very morning, hours of horror as the transports arrive, and then all the time – except for a few days at the very beginning – that smell, that thick, dark cloud hanging over us, even in the best weather, covering the sky [...]. In the beginning, there was a period when my wife stopped functioning completely. There was nothing she could do around the house, she couldn't cook, play with our son, couldn't eat and slept very little. She was in a deep crisis. She got along when I was in captivity, but now has completely broken down. The acute state lasted about three weeks, and then there was a period of pathological indifference, she moved, ate, slept, talked, but did everything like a robot...³⁵

33. F. Żabecki, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

35. G. Sereny, *op.cit.*, pp. 133-134.

It is clear from his memories that he was aware of the danger and had moments of breakdown. However, he believed in justice and punishment for the criminals after the end of the war. He kept working and collecting evidence of the crime.

Despite the anti-Jewish propaganda proclaimed by the Germans and the control of the vicinity of the Treblinka railway station, many railwaymen did not remain just passive observers. To the extent of their capabilities, being restricted by the strong supervision of the German perpetrators, they tried to help also the deported Jews:

The wagons laden [with the belongings of the murdered ones] were brought from the camp usually in late afternoon. The labels were stuck on the wagons and they were sealed by one of the switchmen on duty, i.e. Stanisława Sówka, Eugeniusz Styś, Jan Spaltabaka, Hipolit Goska, Stanisław Borowy or Karol Socha. Sometimes the switchmen sent to the wagons would return, asking what to do as there were Jews in the wagons. In such cases, I ordered them to wait for the dusk and then one of the switchmen watched for our Nazi supervisors or other dangerous people nearby, and then we would open the wagon door and the Jews fled. We pointed them the direction of escape and places where they could be relatively safe, some Jews asked to be sealed, and they themselves would jump out on the way to be further from the station. The escape from the wagon had a chance of success, as the freight trains were serviced by Polish railwaymen from Siedlce. Such cases were not only on my shift, but also on the shift of Józef Pogorzelski. As it turned out, the Jews employed in the camp, while loading the wagons, often managed to hide unnoticed, even from their fellow prisoners, under the cargo.³⁶

And:

The wife of the station master, Jadwiga Pronicka, wanted to protect a Jewish woman who was caught by Klinzmann on the road next to the station from beating. The furious Klinzmann wanted to put both women in a wagon, one as a Jew, the other for helping Jews. The intercession of Emmerich and the terrified Pronicki saved Pronicka from the fate of the Jewish woman. A few days later, when Pronicka, passing with her husband by the transport, gave the Jews bread, Klinzmann leapt and brutally pushed her away, warning Pronicki that if this happened again, he would take his wife to a wagon and hand her over to the transport commander.

36. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

Although he let Pronicka go, he kept shooting at her when she was walking away.³⁷

DOCUMENTALIST OF GERMAN CRIMES

By liquidating the extermination camps, the Germans covered up the traces of their activities. The Treblinka II Extermination Camp was closed and demolished in November 1943. A farm was built on its area. A Ukrainian guard was left as the farmer.³⁸ He brought his family there and tried to simulate ordinary farming activities. The mass graves, in which the ashes of the murdered rested, were ploughed and sown with lupine. The Germans also destroyed all camp documentation. In August 1944, Franciszek Ząbecki stole from the mined building of the railway station in Treblinka some East Railways consignment notes,³⁹ which were the few origi-

37. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, pp. 75-76.

38. In a report to Himmler on January 5, 1944, Globocnik wrote: "For protection and surveillance, small farms were built on the grounds of each of the [former] camps, manned by specialists who must be paid with a regular income to enable them to maintain their farms."; G. Sereny, *op.cit.*, p. 218; Eugeniusz Goska, a resident of Wólka Okrąglik, who worked on the farm established in the area of the former Treblinka II Extermination Camp, recalls in his account: "It was after the liquidation of this camp that I received an order to help run the farm. I worked from the fall of 1943 to August 1944. In the beginning, there were three Ukrainians. When I started working, there were only two of them. What happened to the third one I do not know. One of them was called Strebel. He was here with his wife, his mother-in-law, and his wife's sister, who had two children. The other one was Sashka, I think he was with his wife, he called her Nadia. The farm consisted of a red brick six-room house, a brick barn, a wooden barn (about 40 meters long), and a wooden cellar. The farm was fenced with a wooden fence. The area of the camp was ploughed and sown, mainly with lupine and potatoes. There was also a small vegetable area. It was my duty to do farm work: 4 cows, 3 horses and a pig. I had to keep the yard clean, which was partially covered with a paving stone. The paths were covered with slag, taken from the furnace. Before the Ukrainians left this place, I was looking after cows, but when I was herding them, they told me to come back at 2 p.m. I brought them at 13.50. I guess those ten minutes saved my life because they couldn't find a gun to kill me". (AMT), Account of Eugeniusz Goska, no. 3/12; In the second half of July 1944, shortly before the Red Army entered these areas, these 'specialists' set fire to the farm buildings and fled, probably towards Warsaw.

39. The protocol of the interrogation of Franciszek Ząbecki and the protocol (December 27, 1945) of the inspection of documents taken from the Treblinka station by F. Ząbecki: 10 timetables, 10 telegrams; wagon lists: 8 military consignment notes, 86 duplicate consignment notes; IPN GK 196/70.

nal documents confirming the German genocide in Treblinka. Franciszek Ząbecki described the circumstances of taking this documentation:

[...] It was somewhere around the August 6, 1944. I learned that all the stations towards Sokółów Podlaski were already destroyed, Treblinka was to be blown up at night or early in the morning as everything had already been prepared by the special units, which arrived soon before. [...] I did not tell anyone about my intention. I left my flat. It was raining heavily. The night was dark, it was late. [...] I entered cautiously [...]. I quickly went to the cash desk room where some evidence was kept; the remaining documents were scattered on the floor. I grasped whatever I could. I had some foreboding and did not go to fetch any other, kept in a different room. I left the building secretly, silently. [...] I heard the explosion from Treblinka. It was the blown station building. [...] Safeguarding the evidence acquired, I did not realize fully how it would be used in the future, for what purpose and by whom. I knew, however, that it had the value of a document. At the same time, I believed the papers will be the best evidence of my work in Treblinka and my proof of fulfilled duty.⁴⁰

These materials were used to calculate the initial number of Jews murdered in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. In *Wspomnienia dawne i nowe* [Memories old and new] and in testimonies given in trials in front of German judges, as well as in testimonies given before Judge Zdzisław Łukaszkiwicz,⁴¹ Ząbecki specifies the number of murdered in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp at a minimum of 700-800 thousand people – this number can be considered probable based on the stolen railway documents. The stolen duplicates of the consignment notes were not complete, so Ząbecki stipulates that the numbers he gives are a cautious and understated estimate, and according to him, the real number of the murdered reaches about 1,200,000 people.⁴² In the interview with Gitta Sereny he said:

40. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, pp. 106-107.

41. Zdzisław Łukaszkiwicz conducted an investigation into the Treblinka Extermination Camp on behalf of the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland. The tasks of the commission included, among others, collecting and publishing materials documenting Nazi crimes. These actions had the power of legal proceedings. Łukaszkiwicz was the author of the first historical research on German Nazi death camps, including Majdanek and Treblinka.

42. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

Others are only guessing but I know. There were no German documents on which the estimation could be made, apart from the ones I saved and hid – and they are incomplete. But I personally stood at this station every day counting up the numbers written in chalk on the wagons. I added them up many times. 1,200,000 people were murdered in Treblinka, and there is no doubt about that.⁴³

The accounts and testimonies of witnesses made after the war, as well as the findings of historians dealing with the Holocaust, are different. The discrepancy in quoting specific numbers is significant.⁴⁴ However, everyone speaks unequivocally about the enormous scale of the genocide committed by the Germans in Treblinka. Given the lack of documentation kept by the perpetrators themselves, the final number of victims of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp will probably remain an estimation forever.

Remembering the Victims, we must not forget about the individual dimension of suffering of each of them. The dispute over their total number cannot focus only on dry numbers. The numbers are important, they give an approximate scale of the genocide committed in Treblinka, but they do not show the enormity of suffering and helplessness of the murdered and the irreversible changes that their deaths made in the lives of their families and the communities from which they were brutally removed. It is a tragedy not only of the murdered, but also of those they left behind. Quoting the survivor Hanna Gumprecht:⁴⁵ “it is still hard to believe that what

43. G. Sereny, *op.cit.*, p. 218.

44. In his 1945 report *Piekło Treblinka* [*The Hell of Treblinka*], Wasilij Grossman gives an exaggerated figure of 3 million victims, Zdzisław Łukaszkiewicz estimates the number of the victims at 780,000. In the trial of Kurt Franz (1965), the Jury Court in Düsseldorf assumed the number of 700,000, while in the trial against Franz Stangl (1970), an expert witness, Berlin historian Dr. Wolfgang Scheffer calculated the number of victims at 900,000. Historians dealing with the issue of the Holocaust also disagree about the number of victims of Treblinka: Joseph Billing gives the number of 700,000, Helmut Krasnik and Albert Rückert estimated the same figure. Raul Hilberg claims 750,000, Martin Gilbert and Yitzhak Arad opt for 850,000; Czesław Madajczyk gives the number of 700,000–800,000 victims, while Manfred Burba – 912,000; Edward Kopówka assumes that 800,000 victims, the number that appears on the information board in front of the entrance to the extermination camp commemoration site, should be taken as the basis; E. Kopówka, “Obóz Zagłady w Treblince” [in:] *Żydzi Kosowa Lackiego*, Kosów Lacki 2016, pp. 269–270.

45. Hanna Gumprecht (October 11, 1927 – April 6, 2016) – prisoner of the Łódź ghetto and the concentration camps Auschwitz–Birkenau, Mittelsteine and Graffenfort (sub-camps of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp), educator,

happened really happened. [...] Although decades have passed, the ashes of the gassed and burned still fall on the heads of the living”.⁴⁶ We should remember this, especially when discussing places like Treblinka.

The documents stolen by Ząbecki, thanks to the stamps preserved on them, also helped to establish the official German name of the Treblinka death camp. Quoting Zdzisław Łukasziewicz:

[...] Ząbecki managed to remove some of the documents relating to the Treblinka camp from the station building before it was blown up and burned. [...] That is why today we can determine the official name of the camp. On the duplicates of consignment notes issued during the liquidation of the camp and signed with the inept handwriting of an SS man, there are official stamps with an eagle and a swastika of several types, most often: Generalgouvernement Der SS-und Polizeiführer im Distrikt Lublin. SS-Sonderkommando Treblinka.⁴⁷

Franciszek Ząbecki is also the author of a unique photo of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. On August 2, 1943, he photographed the smoke over the camp set on fire by prisoners during the revolt.⁴⁸ It is the most famous photograph of this extermination camp.

historian of philosophy. For 17 years she lectured on the history of philosophy at university in Siedlce (now Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities). With her successive classes of students, she conducted discussions on existential, ethical and tolerance topics.

46. J. Świdorska, *Pani Hania*, Warszawa 2019, p. 15.

47. Z. Łukasziewicz, *Obóz straceń w Treblince*, Warszawa 1946, p. 14.

48. At the beginning of 1943, a group called the Organizing Committee was formed, which, despite great difficulties, was preparing the revolt. In July 1943, the burning of the bodies of the murdered was practically completed, transports with deportees came less and less frequently, and the prisoners assumed that due to the lack of work for them, they would soon be murdered. On the afternoon of August 2, 1943, the uprising broke out. Before 4:00 p.m., thanks to a previously duplicated key to the guardhouse, weapons, ammunition and a few grenades were taken out. An unequal fight began, some of the buildings were set on fire and the gasoline tank was blown up. The planned destruction of the gas chambers and the interruption of the telephone line failed. The camp commandant managed to establish contact with the nearby German units, which immediately followed the escapees. The uprising lasted about 20-30 minutes. Not all prisoners took part in it. It is assumed that about 200 people managed to escape out of 840 prisoners in the camp.



3. Photograph by Franciszek Ząbecki depicting the burning Treblinka II Extermination Camp after the prisoners' revolt on August 2, 1943 [source: F. Ząbecki, *Wspomnienia dawne i nowe*, Warszawa 1977]

WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

After the end of World War II, Franciszek Ząbecki continued to work in the railways. Until the end of March 1949, he was the station master in Treblinka, then he worked in the railways in Biała Podlaska, Sochaczew and Piaseczno. In November 1953, he and his family moved to Piastów. Franciszek Ząbecki's last place of work was the Research and Development Centre for Railway Technology in Warsaw. He retired in December 1969. In 1972 he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, and the Home Army Cross in 1975. He described his wartime experiences in the book *Wspomnienia dawne i nowe* [Memories old and new] in 1977, cited extensively in this article. This publication was never reprinted. Ząbecki himself hesitated whether to publish a book that was interfered with by the then censorship, or not to publish it at all. Ultimately, "the book was expurgated – it was published and it is a document of those times."⁴⁹ Ząbecki was also the protagonist of a documentary *A witness for the prosecution*, which was filmed in 1971 by the Film Studio "Czołówka".

49. P. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*



4. Franciszek Ząbecki sitting on a bench in front of his house, Piastów, railway settlement, 1977 [source: Ząbecki Family Archive]

Franciszek Ząbecki took part in the following trials:

- on January 19, 1965 in Düsseldorf, where the accused were: Kurt Franz – deputy commander of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and members of the SS crew of this camp: Willy Grossmann, Otto Horn, Erwin Lambert, Heinrich Arthur Matthes, Willi Mentz, August Wilhelm Miete, Gustav Münzberger, Albert Rum, Otto Stadie, Franz Suchomel and members of the SS Forced Labour Camp crew: Karl Preif, Hans Heibusch and Johann Röge;

- on September 9, 1966, in Bielefeld, he testified regarding the dates and composition of trains carrying Jews from the Białystok ghetto. The accused were: the commander of the Security Police and SD in Białystok, Wilhelm Altenloh, and police officers: Lothar Heimbach, Heinz Errelis and Richard Dibus;

- on August 28, 1970 in Düsseldorf. The accused was Franz Paul Stangl – commander of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp.

The decision to take part in the trials was not easy for Ząbecki:

And if I decide to go, I will have to recollect the terrible pictures, seen a long time ago, of dying unarmed young men, old people, women, girls and children, so that I am able to present all that as exactly as possible in court. And the very thought of those days made me feel dizzy and caused heartache. I also thought about the

death of my brother Grzegorz, murdered in the Mauthausen camp. Despite enormous worry, if I manage to cope with the task, and the sense of jeopardy, I had an irresistible desire to go, to testify to the genocide of the Nazis, to describe what I saw, to look at the criminals myself and to bear witness to the truth. I began to feel great satisfaction that the documents I was collecting then became evidence of guilt and crime.⁵⁰

Franciszek Ząbecki died on April 11, 1987 in Piastów. The parish cemetery in Pruszków-Żbików holds his mortal remains.

ENDING WORD

The purpose of the Treblinka Museum is to cultivate and perpetuate the memory of the history of the Treblinka camps, their victims, but also of people who contributed to documenting and promoting knowledge about this Memorial Site.

The subject of efforts made for many years by the employees of the then Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, as well as by local residents and other people from Poland and abroad who were aware of the importance of this place, was, among others, commemorating the train station in Treblinka. In 2018, in response to the appeals, the Mazowieckie Voivodeship Self-Government transferred plot no. 25/46, which is a part of the former railway station in the village of Treblinka, to the Treblinka Museum. On the basis of research conducted in this area by the Warsaw University of Technology, it was possible to delineate the route of one of the two sidings where transports with deported Jews and Roma were waiting before arriving at the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. This place was commemorated according to the idea of Dr. Edward Kopówka in consultation with the employees of the Treblinka Museum. The form of commemoration was preceded by two years of social discussions. Since December last year, the Museum has also presented an online temporary exhibition entitled "Treblinka station. Between life and death", the main axis of which was Franciszek Ząbecki. The memory of places like Treblinka should last. People such as Franciszek Ząbecki should also be remembered – as a testimony that despite difficult times when people were deprived of humanity, there were people who, despite many difficulties, tried to fight the occupier and did not look away from the wrong done to others. Let the person of Franciszek Ząbecki remain in our memory!

50. F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

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*Historical memory is the factor,
 the rejection of which makes it impossible for a nation to endure.*

Fr. Prof. Mieczysław Krąpiec
 [as cited in: S. Srokowski, "Jak się likwiduje tożsamość narodową",
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INCONSISTENT MEMORY OF THE TRAGEDY OF THE NATIONS

In the discussions about the Holocaust of the Jewish nation during World War II, that have been going on for several decades, the issue of responsibility for the implementation of this genocide plays an important role. It is used not only to establish the truth, but also for the current international political games and the struggle of various interest groups, in which the memory of the victims is sometimes treated instrumentally. While the role of the Germans (also referred to as Nazis) is not in doubt or undermined, the problem of cooperation and help of people of other nationalities in this crime has also been raised. Since many of the Nazi concentration camps, these "death factories" (such as Auschwitz, Birkenau, Stutthof, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec), were located in the central-eastern part of the continent, in the occupied Polish territory, Poles were also blamed for these crimes. The Nazi plan of the Holocaust assumed an earlier gathering of the Jewish population in isolated ghettos, to which they were deported from larger centres of population, many cities and towns. Then they had to travel to concentration camps. Ghettos, with their own Jewish self-governments, became a transitional stage on the road to death, and the selections of people sent to work first, and then to camps, took place inside these enclaves of the Jewish community.

JEWISH COOPERATION IN THE NAZI GENOCIDE

The collaboration of some Jews with Germans in the Judenrats and of the Jewish police in the service of the Gestapo was shocking and shameful due

to the social nature of its participants. This is because, unlike Poles (among whom mainly people from the social margin, the so-called *męty* [scums] agreed to collaborate with the Germans), among Jews a large part of the elite from the so-called Judenrats collaborated, which made it possible to multiply the size of the unprecedented tragedy of the sons of David. Jewish intellectuals strongly condemned this collaboration.

The most famous Jewish thinker of the 20th century, Hannah Arendt, assessed: "For Jews this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter in the whole history."¹ She wrote plainly: "But whereas the members of the Quisling governments usually originated from the opposition parties, the members of the Jewish Councils were as a rule the locally recognized Jewish leaders, to whom the Nazis gave enormous powers – until they, too, were deported."² The author did not hesitate to take up the painful matter of responsibility by writing that without the assistance of the *Judenräte* in registering and concentrating Jews into ghettos and later in actively assisting in the deportations to the camps, far fewer Jews would have perished. The Germans would have had much more trouble to list all the Jews.³ Another Jewish author, Baruch Milk, related the fate of Jews in the former Eastern Borderlands of the Republic of Poland in Lwów and Tarnopol voivodeships: "Anyway, the Judenrat became a tool in the hands of the Gestapo to destroy Jews, and the members themselves later would say that they were the Gestapo on Jewish streets. The Ordnungsdienst (police service) was established as an executive body consisting of the worst elements [...] In fact, the Judenrat began to pursue a robbery policy in order to fill its own pockets and bribe the authorities and the Gestapo with this money, but only to secure the fate of its own and their immediate family. I do not know a single case where the Judenrat selflessly helped any Jew. [...] To carry out their evil deeds, such as collecting huge taxes and imposed contributions, round-ups of Jews for labour camps and raids on Jewish houses, the Judenrats used their Ordnungsdienst, which they gave a percentage of the loot, and these people, ten to fifteen, attacked people, beating in a cruel way whoever they could, and with terrible ruthlessness."⁴

In various countries of occupied Europe, the same tried-and-tested pattern was repeated: Jewish officers drew up name lists with information about Jewish property, and provided the Germans with assistance in

1. H. Arendt, *Eichmann w Jerozolimie: rzecz o banalności zła* [Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil], Kraków 1987, p. 151.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. B. Milch, *Testament*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 106-107.

capturing Jews and loading them onto trains that led them to extermination camps. It also happened in Poland, where a large part of the Jewish elite was horribly compromised by participating in Judenrats and obeying German orders against their compatriots.

Numerous accounts of Holocaust survivors and reliable, objective scientific studies of that time confirm these facts. At this point, however, questions arise that enter the sphere of presumptions that are difficult to answer.

With or without the help of the Jews, the Germans would probably have implemented the “Final Solution”, which means that they would have started murdering the Jews. But it is not so certain that the Germans would have been able to carry out their plan to murder the Jewish people without the help of the Jews. In order to understand this aspect of the extermination of Polish Jews, it is necessary to find answers to at least a few questions.

How many tens of thousands of German soldiers would Germany have had to use in 1939-1941 to relocate three and a half million Jewish people to large cities in Poland and to force them to obey their orders in the ghettos if this part of the plan had not been carried out by the Jews themselves? If the Jews had not carried out the resettlements to large cities, would the Germans have been able to lock up the Jewish population in large ghettos at all? If Polish Jews had refused to cooperate in building the demarcating walls, would the Germans have managed to isolate Polish Jews from Christians? If the Jewish authorities had not lied to the ghetto inhabitants about the real purpose of the resettlement, but had informed them that the trains were taking them to their deaths, how many Jews would have voluntarily gone to the carriages? Would the Germans have been able to control the mass escapes of Jews, would they have been able to find all the hiding places and defeat resistance, even though it might have been primitive? How many tens of thousands of German soldiers would Germany have had to bring from the front in 1942 to capture over three million Polish Jews hiding in forests or in their own houses (wardrobes, bunkers, etc.), and then lead them and load them into wagons, if the dirty work had not been done for them by the Jews themselves? Due to the calendar of the war, from June 1941, waged on two fronts, as well as military tactics, would such an operation have been possible for the Germans at all? However, one does not need to be a specialist in many of the issues raised here to state that without the help of Polish Jews, it would have been extremely difficult for the Germans to implement the plan of extermination of Polish Jews.

In the Łódź ghetto – as proven by reliable Jewish sources⁵ – only a few Germans participated in the extermination of the Jews, who arrived “half an hour before the train left”. In practice, their role was to supervise the departure of a train loaded with Jews by the Jewish police, that transported Jews from Łódź to the extermination camp in Chełmno nad Nerem. Only Jews were involved in preparing lists of people to be killed, catching convicts, taking their luggage and bringing them to the wagons. It was similar in the Warsaw Ghetto, where, according to Emanuel Ringelblum: “50 SS men (others say even less) with the help of a unit of about 200 Ukrainians and as many Latvians were enough to supervise the round-ups carried out by Warsaw Jews and to lead half a million people to death.”⁶

The problem of the cooperation of European Jews with the authorities of Nazi Germany in the murder of the Jewish people is the key to understanding the extermination of Polish Jews. To understand what really happened to the part of the Jewish people living in Europe, one should try to answer the question whether the Germans would have been able to murder six million European Jews if they had not found among the Jews zealous collaborators and executors of their murderous plans. It would not have been possible if there had not been a breakdown of moral values in the ghettos, beastliness, a will to survive at all costs, and even to arrange a comfortable life for oneself in extreme conditions at the cost of murder, crime and handing over of loved ones for certain death. They tried to keep these painful matters to their own circle of those who survived the Holocaust and look elsewhere for the accomplices of the Holocaust.

First of all, soon after the war, one could see the failure of bringing Judenrat functionaries, agents-informers and blackmailers, kapos and other servants from the extermination camps to justice. Jewish writers Henryk Grynberg⁷ and Arnold Mostowicz⁸ wrote about it with bitterness and it would be difficult to accuse them of a lack of objectivity. A researcher of these issues, Jerzy Robert Nowak stated: “... Hundreds of books showing the crimes of the Jewish police have already been published in the United States, Israel, Canada, France, Australia and other countries. These books were written by witnesses of the Holocaust who bluntly show the responsibility of Jewish policemen. It would seem that in this case, on the basis of such rich materials from authentic testimonies, a broader monograph

5. *Kronika getta łódzkiego*, eds. D. Dąbrowska, L. Dobroszycki, t. 1, Łódź 1965, pp. 291, 297, 398, 399, 515, 516.

6. E. Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego*, preface and editing A. Eisenach, Warszawa 1983, pp. 81-82, 108, 116, 128, 142, 150, 407-410, 426-428, 538-539.

7. H. Grynberg, *Drohobycz, Drohobycz*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 58-59.

8. A. Mostowicz, *Żółta gwiazda i czerwony krzyż*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 96-98.

of the Jewish police should have appeared a long time ago [...] Well, the Jews prefer to 'wash dirty linen at home' and not to expose their 'domestic shame' related to the actions of the murderous collaborators from the Jewish police. Jews' behaviour contrasts sharply with that of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs which co-finances a book brazenly slandering Poles (the aforementioned *Inferno of Choices*)."⁹ "Despite the lack of a monograph of the Jewish police available in any of the main languages of the world, it is much easier for readers from Western countries than from Poland to find out about the scale of Jewish collaboration during the war. They have access to thousands of Jewish memoirs and studies that deal with the above subject to a greater or lesser extent. In Poland, however, we have a clear blockade on this matter. Contrary to the Western countries, the vast majority of the most important works about the Holocaust, stigmatizing the crimes of the Jewish police, Judenrat or Jewish kapos, have never been published in Polish translations. We have plenty of translations of books that slander Poland, from the tens of thousands of copies of the books by the sociologist Jan Tomasz Gross,¹⁰ through graphomaniac lampoons in the style of *Miła 18* by Leon Uris¹¹ to *Schindler's List* by Thomas Keneally,¹² or the anti-Polish comic book *Maus* by A. Spiegelman."¹³ [...] "Popularizing various anti-Polish schlocks from the West somehow goes hand in hand with blocking outstanding works of the Jewish Holocaust scholars, even those that deserve special attention in Poland. Why were these books blocked – their content shows that it was unwelcome in Poland to expose the crimes of Jewish traitors of their own nation."¹⁴ – J.R. Nowak.

CONDEMNATION BY COMPATRIOTS

Eyewitnesses of the collaboration of Jews with both invaders of Poland, the Nazis and the Soviets, also encountered resentment or even hostility.

9. J.R. Nowak, *Żydzi przeciw Żydom (Zbrodnie żydowskiej policji. Judenratów i żydowskich kapo)*, cz. 1, Warszawa 2012, p. 58.

10. J.T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* [Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland], Sejny 2001; id., *Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie. Historia moralnej zapaści* [Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation], Kraków 2006; id., *Złote żniwa. Rzecz o tym, co się działo na obrzeżach zagłady Żydów* [Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust], Kraków 2011.

11. L. Uris, *Miła 18*, Warszawa 1999.

12. T. Keneally, *Lista Schindlera*, Warszawa 1994.

13. J.R. Nowak, *Żydzi przeciw Żydom (Zbrodnie żydowskiej policji. Judenratów i żydowskich kapo)*, cz. 2, Warszawa 2012, p. 59.

14. Ibid., p. 61.

A harsh criticism from Jewish circles affected even such an outstanding intellectual as a Columbia University professor, Hannah Arendt, after she wrote a book revealing the backstage of the Holocaust, shameful for her people.¹⁵ The example of a Polish Jew, professor Dora Kacnelson (1921-2003), is also remarkable. She tried to build understanding between the two nations in the spirit of truth, and revived the activity of the Society for the Polish Culture of the Land of Drohobych in Ukraine.¹⁶ Against the Jewish community, she said that the Holocaust affected two nations – Jewish and Polish. She accused American Jews of a lack of help for their brothers murdered in Europe. She agreed with Norman G. Finkelstein,¹⁷ (the son of Warsaw ghetto survivors, a historian from New York) that American Jews used the tragedy of World War II as a profitable enterprise and they earn millions from the Holocaust. It was enough for the Jewish community to reject her completely. She was also rejected by the Polish mainstream, because she strongly protested against the lies of Jan Tomasz Gross. “She spoke briefly about him – ‘he is a scammer hired by American Jews’.”¹⁸ She strongly protested against the escalation of property claims by Jewish communities against the Polish state. Feminists, lesbians and gays did not like her either, because, faithful to her faith, she viewed homosexuality according to the Old Testament: “This is abomination”.¹⁹ She did not manage to return to Poland to meet her end there. The archives, carefully collected over many decades, have been dispersed, and the manuscript of the last book *Ukochalam obydwa narody. Pamiętnik polskiej Żydówki* [I Love Both Nations. The diary of a Polish Jew] was lost in the Arcanum Publishing House in Bydgoszcz. None of the Polish mainstream media has ever been interested in her, although she was undoubtedly an outstanding figure. She spoke too loudly, too boldly and too openly about the shameful aspects of the Holocaust and collaboration with both the Nazis and the communists. The aforementioned historian prof. Norman Finkelstein, who earned his doctorate in Zionism at the Faculty of Political Science at Princeton (USA) and taught at the City University of New York until 2001, after publishing the book *The Holocaust Industry* (2000, Polish translation

15. H. Arendt, *op.cit.*, pp. 386-391.

16. A. Zaorska, “Nie idźcie tą drogą towarzysze z Czerskiej, można być Żydem i również polskim patriotą”, *Warszawska Gazeta*, 2013, nr 28 (317), p. 23.

17. N. Finkelstein, *Przedsiębiorstwo Holocaust* [*The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*], Warszawa 2001, pp. 9, 23, 124-131; id., *O pozorowaniu antysemityzmu i nadużywaniu historii* [*Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*], Warszawa 2005, p. 16.

18. A. Zaorska, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

19. Ibid.

2001) was hailed by the influential opinion-forming circles as Jewish traitor, liar and ignorant.²⁰ This reaction repeated later in a startling manner towards the Polish historian Prof. Krzysztof Jasiewicz.

THE HOLOCAUST BEYOND THE RANGE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Reluctance to undertake research on the tragic pages of history of Jewish collaboration with Nazi torturers has even led to absurd demands, put forward by Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel, to exclude the problems of the extermination of European Jews from historical research. In the 1980s (!) he claimed that the extermination of Jews "...is beyond the reach of history; it evades all explanations and descriptions and will never be comprehensible or possible to tell, it cannot be expressed in words; it cannot even be spoken of."²¹ In his opinion, even conducting historical research on the extermination of the Jews means the annihilation of history, it leads to darkness; and the secret of the truth about the Holocaust is silence.²² The fear of revealing to the world this shameful page of the history of his own nation led him to formulate a ban on undertaking any scientific research on this subject.

Such a postulate of a very serious limitation of historical science is obvious nonsense, which is particularly dangerous for the study of recent history from the point of view of the freedom of scientific research. Elie Wiesel imposes on science an expressis verbis servitude towards ideology, and – in this case – even mystical and catastrophic ideas. Although in the history of many fields of science there have often been distortions, going astray under the influence of the demands of rulers or political decision-makers, the pressure of totalitarian ideologies such as racist dogmas or the famous case of the Soviet academician Lysenko, the striving to establish the objective truth won in the longer or closer perspective. There is no doubt that the extermination of European Jews, as an event of the Second World War, is within the scope of historical science and can be subjected to ordinary methodological historical research like all other historical events, phenomena and processes in the history of mankind. Large-scale genocide or the extinctions of smaller nations or ethnic groups have happened in the past and are happening today. Let us remember the extermination of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the unprecedented slaughter of the

20. E. Kurek, "Problemy z historią", *Warszawska Gazeta*, 2013, nr 41 (330), p. 23.

21. E. Wiesel, *Against silence*, vol. 1, New York 1984, p. 158.

22. E. Wiesel, *Against silence*, vol. 1, pp. 211, 239; vol. 2, pp. 62, 81, 111, 278, 293, 347, 371; vol. 3, pp. 153, 243.

Armenians in the Turkish Empire during World War I, millions of victims of communist crimes, the extermination of a large part of one's own nation by the regime of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the so-called "ethnic cleansing" in the Balkans or mass war crimes against the civilian population of Chechnya committed by the Russian army. In this sequence of tragic events, the Holocaust is no exception, it fits in a series of racist-nationalist, ethnic or social dogmas, although there is also a mystical interpretation of it as God's wrath and punishment on the chosen nation, not the only one in its long history. In this context and from this perspective, it is certain that historical research on the history of the extermination of Jews will not be stopped not only by the resistance of Nobel laureates and opinion-forming groups of intellectuals, but also strict prohibitions, bashing, punishments, court sentences or professional and media ostracism. History as a science field has this attribute that nothing is hidden from it, sooner or later inquisitive researchers will appear, unknown, inaccessible or hidden sources of information will be revealed. One can muzzle one or even several generations of historians, impose limitations on research topics, but nothing else can be achieved. From a closer or more distant historical perspective, sooner or later history will surely show the world the truth about past events, regardless of the geographic and temporal area they concern. This also applies to the scenes behind the extermination of European Jews.

The Jewish Historical Institute of Emanuel Ringelblum, or the employees of this scientific institution, such as professors Paweł Śpiwak, Alina Cała, Barbara Engelking, or the aforementioned Jan Tomasz Gross, or other authors of accusations of Poles for murdering 3 million Jews have not yet shed a light on these problems of Jewish collaboration. Could this restriction have been caused by the opinion of the Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel?

The case of Prof. Barbara Engelking is a significant example of a duality of appraisal. The professor, as the head of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, following the *Painted Bird* (1965, Polish edition 1989) by Jerzy Kosiński, used a historical lie in a research institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences and was not dismissed from office or degraded, in contrast to prof. Krzysztof Jasiewicz.

An equally interesting case is the case of Dr. Edward Kopówka, the director of the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, who attempted to conduct a thorough research on the history of this extermination camp and on the help of local Poles for prisoners, which – perhaps – destroyed the narrative convenient for opinion-forming circles of some Jewish communities. Treblinka in the former Sokołów-Węgrów powiat became a large extermination camp for Jews, where approx. 900,000 Jews

and a certain number of Poles died. Contrary to the claims of Jan T. Gross (*Golden Harvest*), the area around the camp was a place of great help from people who lived in the nearby and further surroundings for the imprisoned. Documented help is presented in the book *Dam im imię na wieki. Polacy z okolic Treblinki ratujący Żydów*, 2011, by Edward Kopówka and Rev. Prof. Paweł Rytel-Adrianik (student of biblical and Jewish studies at Oxford). The high documentary value of this book, which is the result of several years of field research, is evidenced by the use of hundreds of testimonies, reports and memories from 16 poviats of Mazowsze and Podlasie voivodeships. The authors managed to commemorate the names of over 1,000 Poles who saved Jews from Treblinka. They also showed the terrible price that many had to pay for this gesture. The book was well received by Polish circles,²³ it was also attacked by Rev. W. Lemański. The case of restoring the memory of what happened in Treblinka was met with an unexpected attack by people commenting on the Jewish.pl website. In the summer months of 2012, there was a wave of lively discussion caused by an aggressive and harmful statement of Katarzyna Markusz, who attacked Dr. Edward Kopówka in the Korczak Year, accusing him (as the head of the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, which was a branch of the Regional Museum in Siedlce at that time), of a very modest scope of activity of this facility. Many personalities from Polish and Jewish societies from Poland and abroad joined the discussion, expressing their appreciation for the activities of the director of the Museum and his many years of work to shape good Polish-Jewish relations.

ACCUSATIONS AGAINST POLES

The accusations made in recent decades by Jewish communities at home and abroad often mention the complicity of Poles in the Holocaust, the fact of the location of the Nazi labour and extermination camps on Polish territory under German occupation, and the benefits that Poles gained from taking over Jewish property. The accusation of Poles of not helping murdered Jews is also raised. Aleksander Szumański made a selection of anti-Polish texts by Jewish authors (historians, journalists, rabbis, social activists) from the USA, Israel, Belgium, Canada only from the 1980s until the first decade of the 21st century.²⁴ This peculiar anthology includes the

23. M. Bochenek, "Pomoc miała twarz Polaka", *Nasz Dziennik*, 2011, nr 117 (4048), p. 11.

24. A. Szumański, "Żydowski historycy, dziennikarze i rabini o Polsce i Polakach", *Warszawska Gazeta*, 2013, nr 22 (313), pp. 23-25.

names of, among others Abraham H. Foxman, leader of the Anti-Defamation League, Rabbi Reuven P. Bulka from Ottawa, chairman of the Canadian Jewish Congress committee and co-organizer of the March of the Living, Ann Anders, American feminist activist, Meir Lau, Chief Rabbi of Israel, and Menachem Begin, Prime Minister of Israel and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Recent historical research has shown ineffective efforts by representatives of the Polish government in exile to put pressure on the Western allies to prevent the extermination of the Jewish nation.²⁵ At the beginning of 1940, the command of the underground Union of Armed Struggle informed the Polish government in London about the persecution of the Jewish population. The Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief Władysław Sikorski alerted the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden on this matter.

Among the persecuted a painful question was raised about the attitude of their wealthy and influential fellow brothers from countries fighting against Hitler, indifferent to the tragic news reaching them. Ludwik Hirsztfeld, who considered himself a Pole of Jewish origin, spent eighteen months in the Warsaw ghetto and left it with the help of his Polish friends. After the great trauma caused by the experiences there and the death of his daughter, in *The Story of One Life*, written in 1943-1944 as the events unrolled, he was bitterly asking: "Why is no sound of protest heard in the world? What are Jews doing as the remnants of their martyred nation are being murdered? [...] Not those from the occupied countries, as they are also led to the slaughter. But those supposedly powerful from England and America. Do they not know? Or are they pretending not to know? Or do they not believe? And a terrible suspicion arises in me: have they too not lost their conscience and sense of dignity or even pity, and whether they, whose relatives are exterminated completely, do not think in advance and do not calculate how they who have escaped the torment will settle and co-exist with the perpetrator and do everything that one is not even allowed to think about today."²⁶

In 1943, the emissary of the Polish Underground State, Jan Karski (the real name Jan Romuald Koziński, 1914-2000), sought the help overseas

25. A. Szumański, "Amerykanie i Anglicy pozwolili na zagładę Żydów, a Francuzi za pieniądze zawozili ich do niemieckich obozów śmierci", *Warszawska Gazeta*, 2013, nr 38 (327), pp. 20-21.

26. L. Hirsztfeld, *Historia jednego życia*, Warszawa 1957, p. 391.

without success. He reached the Warsaw ghetto and the Belzec (Izbica) extermination camp and, as an eyewitness to genocide, then unsuccessfully tried to organize help for Polish Jews from influential political circles in the USA and Great Britain. His mission was met with disbelief and indifference among the Allies towards the extermination of their fellow believers. On December 6, 2013, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland made 2014 *the Year of Jan Karski*. To commemorate his heroic, and at the same time forgotten and passed by in silence, effort to save the exterminated community, an exhibition devoted to this Pole on the 100th anniversary of his birth was opened at the EU Parliament in Brussels on January 9, 2014. The exhibition was organized on the initiative of an MEP Prof. Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, in cooperation with the historian Prof. Marek M. Drozdowski, in order to remind Europeans of this figure and give a response to the emerging accusations against Poland and Poles of complicity in the Holocaust.

While the Americans and the British simply ignored the Holocaust, the third most important Western ally – the French – even took an active part in it. The collaborative Vichy authorities organized transports of Jews to Auschwitz themselves. The first such transport set off on March 27, 1942, and the last – in July 1944, after the Allied landing in Normandy. A year after the end of the war (1946!), French railways demanded payment from the French government for this “service”. The Vichy government zealously implemented anti-Jewish legislation on its territory and confiscated Jewish property. In the light of these facts, it is very cynical and false to denounce the allegedly Polish anti-Semitism and to propagate the term “Polish death camps” used in Western publications.

An interesting light on the issue of saving Jews by Poles is shed by the account of Jerzy Bander, a newborn rescued from a Gestapo prison in Sambor in 1942. For many years he unsuccessfully tried to have the Yad Vashem Institute award the Righteous Among the Nations medal to the Polish family to whom he owed his salvation. He encountered obstacles that were difficult to explain, or even a lack of willingness to act. “During the occupation, 300,000 Jews were saved in Poland – said J. Bander. – Assuming that (which has already been confirmed) in occupied Poland it was necessary to involve from three to four Poles in order to save one Jew, a million Poles who legally deserve the title “Righteous Among the Nations” come out of this simple mathematical operation. Compare this to the 6,000 who have actually received it. In my opinion, this shows that Yad Vashem is consciously, deliberately pursuing a policy that is to present Poles as the world’s greatest anti-Semites.”²⁷ A survivor from Treblinka, Samuel Willenberg (1923–2016),

27. K. Michalewski, “Nie ma sprawiedliwości dla sprawiedliwych”, *Warszawska Gazeta*, 2013, nr 50 (339), pp. 18, 19.

recalling his ordeal during the occupation, stated that more people (Poles – author's note) lost their lives than Jews were saved.²⁸

THE MATTER OF PROPERTY CLAIMS

The already quoted Ludwik Hirszfeld, writing in the darkness of the Nazi occupation, looked far into the future, predicting: "The times will come when Germany will want to reconcile with the world. These millions of murdered will have to be made up for. German Jews will get the best of it. Perhaps those who stay alive will be pleased that the Jewish issue was liquidated. Germans will feel a little guilty. Such remorse has its value, it can be turned into cash or influence. Maybe a Jew will be appointed for the position of the minister of foreign affairs? It would be the cheapest demonstration of the new course."²⁹ Indeed, as early as the mid-1950s, the Federal Republic of Germany began paying compensation to the families of murdered Jews.

Later came the time of accusing Polish neighbors of complicity in the Holocaust and putting forward property claims. By confronting the fate of Jews in Poland during the Nazi occupation with the narrative blaming Poles for co-responsibility for the Holocaust, it is not difficult to see that it is not about establishing the objective truth and defending Jewish communities, but completely different interest groups that are linked to the implementation of communism in Poland and the issue of compensation brought against Poland. Any refusal to respond to these demands immediately resulted in accusations of anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, if someone protests against paying Jews gigantic compensation for the property lost in Poland, it is not because of anti-Semitism, but because the property was used by the occupiers – the Germans and their helpers (for example, the Ukrainians), or it was largely destroyed during the Nazi occupation. In the post-war years, it was very often that a property did not have an owner as his fate could not be determined. It also happens that the demands made are very often based on forged documents or not based on any grounds, such as claims concerning the so-called heirless property. And yet, influential and opinion-forming circles repeatedly undertake attacks on the non-existent anti-Semitism in Poland presented as a mass phenomenon, consciously harming Polish Jews and consciously ignoring those who fought, suffered and died for Poland. In the fall of 2013, the public in Poland was shocked by prof. Jan Hartman from the Jagiellonian University. He sent a

28. *The last witness*, broadcast: April 22, 2021, TVP Historia.

29. L. Hirszfeld, *op.cit.*, p. 392.

very aggressive letter, full of invective, to Father Rydzyk, the director of Radio Maryja, which was published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. The case concerned the commemoration of the attitudes of Poles towards Jews during the Nazi occupation. We read in it: "We hear that Father Tadeusz Rydzyk is building 'a memory chapel' for those who saved – as the head of Radio Maryja said– 'our Jewish brothers'". Are you provoking brazenly, priest? You called me out, so I speak up: you cynical hypocrite, keep away from the Righteous who saved our parents' lives! Take your dirty hands away from them and go count the cash. The perversity and hypocrisy of the anti-Semite must find limits – and these are the limits of life and death. Therefore do not you dare to spit in the face of the Righteous, their children and grandchildren! [...] Because you dare to call Jews brothers? You?"³⁰ The writer and journalist Mirosław Kokoszkiewicz replied in an adequate tone: "Sorry to say, but your Righteous' are not there. They do not exist, professor, which is a pity, because they could be beautifully recorded in the pages of history. Unfortunately, there are no known cases of Jews saving Poles from Soviet deportations by hiding them in their homes or farmyards. It is known, however, that they joyfully and massively greeted our occupiers with flowers and willingly participated in the denunciation of Polish families who were later transported in cattle cars to the "inhuman land"...³¹

These statements cooled the tone of the dialogue between representatives of both nations and caused a more frequent appearance of articles about anti-Polish activities, during World War II and in the present day, especially in the right-wing, national press, such as *Warszawska Gazeta* and its local mutations. The aforementioned prof. Krzysztof Jasiewicz, a victim of the witch hunt for exposing the historical truth, spoke about a fundamental obstacle on the road to consensus and understanding: "Jews get lost due to the lack of moderation in every aspect and the conviction that they are the chosen people. They feel entitled to interpret everything, even the Catholic doctrine. No matter what we do, it will be criticized by them – that it is too little, wrong or not selfless enough. I firmly believe that engaging in dialogue with Jews is a waste of time, for it does not lead anywhere... People, who use words such as 'anti-Semite', 'anti-Semitism', should be treated as people not worth debating with, who try to destroy others because they lack substantive argumentation. They are the ones who create hate speech."³²

30. Cited in: M. Kokoszkiewicz, "Hartman to ty zabieraj swoje brudne łapy", *Warszawska Gazeta*, 2013, nr 41 (330), p. 2.

31. M. Kokoszkiewicz, "Hartman to ty zabieraj swoje brudne łapy", *Warszawska Gazeta*, 2013, nr 41 (330), p. 3.

32. K. Jasiewicz, statement in *Warszawska Gazeta*, 2013, nr 41 (330), p. 3.

Of course, not all Jews were hostile to Poles, taking advantage of the difficult situation during and after the war. Not all of them were bandits supporting the Bolsheviks, spies of the NKVD or murderers from the UB secret police. We cannot forget about people who share a tragic fate, people of reconciliation such as Prof. Dora Kacnelson, bearing witness to the truth. "Moreover, when their brothers do not want to remember them, the memory should be kept by Poles, because these Jews worked for Poland, fought for Poland and died for Poland," wrote Aldona Zaorska³³ – If anyone wants to restore the Polish-Jewish dialogue, there is no better way to do it than to show that both nations really had a common history and common victims."³⁴ However, as one can see, the struggle for the memory of the tragic years of both nations is not always consistent in its endeavors and is still subject to the pressure of current interests.

The trauma of the camp experiences left an indelible mark on the soul and body of the survivors,³⁵ which they had to struggle with until the end of their days. People of many nations, Poles and Jews, experienced it. They wrote down and published their camp accounts, warned against the repetition of such genocide. Sometimes bearing witness to the truth became the mission of their further life, as in the case of the aforementioned Samuel Willenberg, who was brought to Treblinka from the Opatów ghetto in October 1942, from where he managed to escape during the prisoners' revolt on August 2, 1943, and then, being wounded and with the help of randomly met people, he reached Warsaw to participate in the Warsaw Uprising. Years later, he returned to these memories, places and people, and recorded his camp memories in sculptures resembling the annihilated people.

The trauma of the Holocaust sometimes became a memory – a symbol perpetuated in form of a new surname adopted after the war. This was the case of a communist activist Magdalena Treblińska (formerly Stolińska), associated with the KZMP (Young Communist League of Poland) and KPP (Communist Party of Poland) in the years 1924-1938. She avoided the extermination that had befallen Polish Jews and the repressions of KPP activists in the USSR, because she spent the Second World War in the USSR and returned to Poland in the fall of 1944, where she joined the structures of the PPR (Polish Workers' Party) in the capital city and participated in implementation of the new power. In the years 1948-1952 she was the deputy

33. A. Zaorska, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Sztuka przetrwania. Życie codzienne w ekstremalnych warunkach obozowych w XX-XXI wieku*, eds. Z. Chyra-Rolicz, M. Fałdowska, Siedlce 2019, pp. 30-32.

head of the Personnel Department at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, and then (1953-1954) she headed the Personnel Inspection, demonstrating "class vigilance" towards the enemies of the new "people's homeland".³⁶ The adoption of the surname as a symbol of martyrdom (and a sense of bond with the victims) was not an isolated case. Also her husband, Julian Kole – a pre-war communist activist, after the war the head of the Industrial Department at the Polish Workers' Party, took the surname commemorating the place of deportation to the Kola Peninsula in the USSR, where he managed to survive a crackdown enforced on the members of the KPP.

36. N. Jarska, P. Perkowski, "Droga do władzy? Kobiety w PZPR (1948-1989)", *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość. Pismo narodowe poświęcone historii najnowszej*, 1 (27) 2016, IPN, Warszawa 2016, p. 244 and M. Szumito, "Pierwsi sekretarze Komitetów Wojewódzkich PPR (1944-1948 Portret zbiorowy)", *Dzieje Najnowsze*, R. XLV, z. 4, Instytut Historii PAN, Warszawa 2013, pp. 56-58.

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Paweł Maliszewski
 Treblinka Museum
 The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

**“MEMORY IS NECESSARY
 FOR EVERY OPERATION OF THE REASON”
 ABOUT BLAISE PASCAL’S MESSAGE TO CONTEMPORARY
 MAN WHO REFLECTS ON TREBLINKA**

INTRODUCTION

Blaise Pascal’s philosophy resembles an event to which we go reluctantly. We do not expect joy, harmonious colours or melodious music. We rather expect a bleak atmosphere filling us with confusion and some sense of anxiety. In this setting, ostentatious gestures of generosity or honesty would seem out of place, clashing with the sobering nature of the gathering. The ballroom surprises with a gloomy air, uneaten meals, and sad expressions of the faces of the guests. The only kind gesture is when the host pulls up a chair for us, and gives a warm and compassionate look expressing the joy at our arrival.

Pascal’s philosophy readies the human soul for a harrowing introspection, leaving us in a state of unease and perplexity, and ultimately, facing a crucial decision. His poignant insights lay bare the frailties of human nature, unsettling us with stark musings on our own blindness and misery. In a similar vein, Treblinka presents to future generations a haunting portrayal of humanity, bestowing upon them a legacy even more chilling and immobilizing. The sheer gravity of what transpired at Treblinka, a stark testament to the depths of moral despair, eludes even the most tragic narratives. This confluence of human experiences paints a portrait of reality as a desolate, despondent, and forsaken realm, a place devoid of any desire for habitation.

Throughout his life, Blaise Pascal was intimately acquainted with pain. The untimely loss of his mother, coupled with his own unique temperament, and a life marked by incessant physical and mental anguish

profoundly influenced his philosophical musings. Pascal's deeply moving aphorisms have consistently captivated and intrigued audiences. "What then shall we conclude of all these obscurities, if not our own unworthiness?"¹ he would ponder, probing the depths of human frailty and the vast chasm between humanity and the divine. His reflections poignantly underscore the fleeting nature of our existence and the inevitability of death, compelling each of us to confront these realities and choose our stance in the face of life's relentless march. This text aims to explore Pascal's insights, particularly in the context of the harrowing events at Treblinka. The persistent presence of pain in Pascal's life, his belief in the origination of evil from the original sin, and his personal battles with suffering and malevolence form the crux of this discussion, positioning him as the central figure in our contemplation of these themes.

BLAISE PASCAL'S PHILOSOPHY

Blaise Pascal was born on June 19, 1623 in Clermont-Ferrand, France. His mother died when he was a three-year-old child. It was his father who provided him with education which, due to the poor health of little Blaise, took place at home. At the age of 16, he wrote a short *Essai pour les coniques* that impressed Parisian scientists. Five years later he built a calculating machine. In the following years, he began to experiment with mercury barometers, the weight of air and probability, thanks to which he became recognized in the scientific world. After these triumphs, he renounced that world – and its idyll – by dedicating his life to Christianity.²

The broad spectrum of successes that stemmed from his exceptional mind came at the cost of constant pain. The philosopher did not live a day without suffering. From the age of 24, he was only able to tolerate liquid food.³ In childhood he suffered from abdominal pain with gradual progression to neurological manifestations in middle age, with migraine-type headaches, peripheral neuropathy, epilepsy and neuropsychiatric disorders (depression). He died young, at the age of 39. The autopsy of the body revealed many disorders and damage to the internal organs (possibly caused by celiac disease) in which gangrene had set in. A chronic traumatic subdural haematoma, probably located in the superior temporal region, which

1. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts of Blaise Pascal*, The Online Library of Liberty, trans. by C. Kegan Paul, London 1901, p. 18.

2. Ibid., pp. 5-9; *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Blaise Pascal", 2007, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal/#LifWor> (accessed: 28.01.2021).

3. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy...*, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

was the reason for his left-sided hemianopsia, was also the cause of his death.⁴

It is impossible to discuss Pascal's philosophy without mentioning Jansenism, a religious movement within French Catholicism in the 17th and 18th centuries, which Pascal greatly supported. This movement aimed to address the profound and complex question in Christianity regarding the relationship between God's grace and human freedom. God's grace, as the core of theological disputes was dividing churches, sects, and schools in Europe. It had its origins in the confrontation of St. Augustine with Pelagianism, and spread to the dispute between the Jansenists and the Jesuits in the 17th century. The bone of contention, among other things, was the role of original sin in human nature. Jansenius, the founder of Jansenism, believed that human freedom was not sufficient for salvation. Man, through his corruption, is not able to autonomously choose good, which emphasises the necessity of God's grace in the work of salvation. The Jesuits were at the opposite extreme with the view that the means at man's disposal are sufficient for salvation, and that an act of man's will was necessary to receive grace. In this sense, Jansenism, which Pascal defended, proclaimed the profound corruption of man's nature and the absolute sovereignty of God. This means that – according to the Jansenists – if people go to hell, it is because of the verdict of justice; and if they go to heaven, it is because of the outpouring of mercy. These disputes, while important in the 17th century, at present are only of historical importance. However, this is a context that requires an introduction when presenting Pascal's philosophy.⁵

It is worth mentioning the period of European culture in which Pascal lived. Baroque was an era of contradictions and paradoxes. The era of wars and anxiety in the physical and metaphysical world. The increased mortality caused by the Thirty Years' War and fatal diseases created an atmosphere of anxiety and a resurgence of religiosity. The power of Spain and England ceased to exist, creating a space for other political and cultural forces, especially France. This time was characterized by a sense of confusion, a wave of conversions, mysticism and a fight against paganism. There was a return to the question of what a human being is. How should man behave in tough and important moments? What is the meaning of life?

4. A. Sava, M. Dumitrescu, G. Florenta Dumitrescu, M. Dana Turliud, M. Ciocoiu, V. Scripcariu, "The mysterious 'mental illness' of a philosopher: the case of Blaise Pascal", *Short Historical Review. Romanian Journal of Morphology&Embriology*, 2019, 60 (4): 1383-1389, p. 1.

5. L. Kołakowski, *Bóg nam nic nie jest dłużny. Krótka uwaga o religii Pascala i o duchu Jansenizmu*, Kraków: Znak, 1994.

This atmosphere is close to modern people who, with anxiety and hope, have entered the new millennium after the dramatic events of the previous century.⁶

Pascal, much like Descartes and other luminaries of rationalist thought, placed rigorous demands upon the pursuit of knowledge. Yet, unlike Descartes' cogito, Pascal's contemplations grapple with the inadequacy of reason in addressing profound ethical and spiritual queries – those pertaining to human joy, solitude, the salvation of the soul, and the nature of evil. Pascal posited that humanity's reliance on reason often exceeds its true scope of capability. While reason possesses the capacity for certain knowledge, it falters in the realm of life's most critical inquiries.⁷ "In the order of intelligible things our intelligence holds the same position as our body holds in the vast extent of nature".⁸ Pascal saw it as erroneous to either wholly exclude reason from the quest for knowledge or to rely on it exclusively.⁹

For Blaise, it was a personal tragedy to discover that the rational method does not give understanding of the most important questions.¹⁰ "I know not who has sent me into the world, nor what the world is, nor what I myself am; I am terribly ignorant of every thing [...] I know only that I must shortly die, but what I know the least is this very death which I cannot avoid".¹¹ Thus, the essence of man remains, on the rational level, an everlasting and depressing enigma.

Confronted with the limits of human understanding and recognizing that pure reason inevitably leads to an awareness of profound human fallibility, Pascal chose to place his trust in intuition. It is through this elusive and often irrational faculty that he believed the most significant and profound truths of existence could be apprehended. In Pascal's profound philosophical landscape, intuition finds its residence not in the realm of the mind, but rather in the heart, serving as the core from which true understanding springs forth. "We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart, and it is from this last that we know first principles; and reason, which has nothing to do with it, tries in vain to combat them. The sceptics who desire truth alone labour in vain. We know that we do not dream, although it is impossible to prove it by reason, and this inability shows only

6. J. Pelc, *Barok epoka kontrastów*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004, pp. 7-18.

7. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia Filozofii. Filozofia nowożytna*, t. 2, pp. 44-45.

8. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

10. W. Tatarkiewicz, *op.cit.*, pp. 44-45.

11. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

the weakness of our reason".¹² For Pascal faith will be the foundation of life, the only hope and salvation, which simultaneously offers no certainty as to its ultimate success. However, faith is the only light in the vastness of infinite spaces that surround man and constantly terrify and amaze him.

When I see the blindness and the misery of man, when I survey the whole dumb Universe, and man without light, left to himself, and lost, as it were, in this corner of the Universe, not knowing who has placed him here, what he has come to do, what will become of him when he dies, and incapable of any knowledge whatever, I fall into terror like that of a man who, having been carried in his sleep to an island desert and terrible, should awake ignorant of his whereabouts and with no means of escape; and thereupon I wonder how those in so miserable a state do not fall into despair. I see other persons around me, of like nature, I ask them if they are better informed than I am, and they say they are not; and thereupon these miserable wanderers, having looked around them, and seen some objects pleasing to them, have given and attached themselves to these. As for me, I cannot attach myself to them, and considering how strongly appearances show that there is something else than what is visible to me, I have sought to discover whether this God have not left some impress of himself.¹³

PASCAL'S VISION OF MAN IN THE CONTEXT OF TREBLINKA

HEAVENLY CIVITAS ON EARTH

The Pelagian mentality, which posits that evil can be eradicated from the world through human effort and that human nature itself can be purified from deep-seated corruption, has profoundly influenced the course of thought since perhaps the Middle Ages, and certainly since the 16th century. This line of thinking, underpinning the entirety of millenarian and utopian ideologies, forms the foundation of our modern worldview. This includes the idea of self-redemption of man and the optimism of building an ideal society free from evil – the human realm. We cannot deny the positive role of Pelagianism in creating space for all civilizational achievements by liberating European culture from the burden of Augustinism (which Pascal strongly supported). However, it seems right to be distrustful of all the ideas emerging from it.¹⁴

12. Ibid., p. 26.

13. Ibid., p. 132.

14. L. Kořakowski, *op.cit.*, pp. 226-227.

Kořakowski expresses this distrust as follows, "Our suspiciousness of the Pelagian image of man is undoubtedly justified after all the spectacular catastrophes brought by the dreams of utopians onto European civilization in our century [...]. The conviction that human nature has no built-in obstacles, that block its path to the heavenly civitas on earth, is a dangerous and even fatal fantasy, and our experience confirms it all too well."¹⁵ Certainly, the author has in mind Nazism and Communism which tried to implement the heavenly vision of the world on Earth. The conviction of man's possibility to self-improve and create paradise on earth will always lead to failures of such utopian visions. It is because of the presence of greed, pride and recklessness in human nature.

According to Voegelin,¹⁶ the totalitarianisms of the 20th century arose as a result of the weakening of the spiritual condition of the people of that time. According to the author of the *New Science of Politics*, Nazism and Communism are built on a volitional gnosis which is a belief in the active salvation of society and man. The thousand-year Nazi prophecy, or Marx's view that the transcendent God is the projection of what is best in human being, combines the eschatology of the spiritual kingdom with political programmes. The content designed in this way returns to individuals who begin to consider themselves as God. Gnosticism, by taking ground in human experience, determines the structure of political reality. The civilizational activity formed this way becomes a mystical work of self-salvation – a tangible world order. This order absorbs human eternal destiny and replaces the spiritual life. Totalitarianism, as the existential reign of Gnostic activists, marks the end of progressive civilization. In Pascal's sense, the actions of these activists are a miserable diversion with a fatal effect on the human soul.

Tyrannical politics that was built on the basis of imaginary great ideas, achieved the expected result – a disappointment in humanity. Humankind will always choose evil of their own free will, unless they are directed in the opposite direction by God's grace and will. This is what Pascal's view would look like.

The philosopher's sensitivity, combined with his incredible writing talent, determines his popularity among readers. It is a truism to say that it is not doctrinal theses that account for Pascal's freshness.¹⁷ As one of the main tragic thinkers, he changes our sensitivity, the way we look into our-

15. L. Kořakowski, *op.cit.*, p. 226.

16. E. Voegelin, *Nowa nauka polityki* [The New Science of Politics], trans. by P. řpiewak, Biblioteka "Aletheia", 1992, pp. 103-123.

17. L. Kořakowski, *op.cit.*, p. 224.

selves and at surrounding reality. Taking a closer look at it, one can get a few reflections that may be of importance for contemporary person visiting Treblinka.

THE MYSTERY OF EVIL

In our times, when "the word Treblinka sticks like a knife",¹⁸ reflecting on its horrific events does not diminish Pascal's insights into the corrupt nature of mankind. In the shadow of such atrocities that marked the 20th century, clinging to optimism might seem almost like folly. To truly grasp the essence of what transpired in Treblinka, one must confront the enigma that defies a lifetime's understanding. Pascal, in his wisdom, recognized that human reason falls short in answering the most profound questions of our existence. The reductionist approach of piecing together fragments to form a complete understanding, though commendable, might overlook crucial emergent phenomena. Conversely, holistic methods fail to deliver the truths that require a simultaneous comprehension of all facets of reality, a feat only within the realm of the divine. The human mind, bound in its spatial existence, and the questions it poses about reality, offer little explanation for the existence of certain phenomena, particularly the nature of evil. To navigate these profound dilemmas, one must embark on the arduous journey of trust in God, a path well known to Pascal.

In the history of human thought, the greatest minds have pondered the most important questions, and the fact that no consensus has been reached makes people even more confused. "Philosophers have much more frequently asserted they have attained it, yet in that very point they have all stumbled."¹⁹ It seems, then, that a rational answer to the most important questions, deeply touching the essence of man, should not be expected. The vastness of the world exceeds the capacity of a human being who is unable to grasp anything of an extreme nature. It is a mystery that we must accept. The attitude towards Treblinka is also an attitude of accepting the mystery of the presence of evil in the world, and the resulting from it absurdity of innocent suffering.

Pascal might have contended that the labyrinthine debates of theodicy, along with any attempts to either condemn or absolve God for the atrocities of Treblinka, are merely the barren blossoms of human arrogance, sprouting from a soil rich in overblown pride and yielding only the fruitless sprigs of self-aggrandizement. Paradoxically, it may be that a steadfast

18. A. Krzepicki, *Człowiek uciekł z Treblinek*, Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2017, p. 52.

19. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

faith in God, coupled with a humble approach to the enigma of evil, paves the way to a profounder comprehension of Treblinka and its deepest, most haunting truths.

THE MORE LIGHT WE HAVE, THE MORE WE LEARN

Pascal envisioned the world as a theater of paradoxes and contradictions, a canvas where light and darkness interplay. On this stage, one might discern the legacy of Treblinka either as a beacon of hope and a profound testament to the meaning of suffering, or merely as an inexplicable absurdity. In Pascal's view, God unveils Himself to those earnestly seeking Him, becoming a presence tangible in their quest for truth. Conversely, for those who are indifferent or skeptical, God recedes into an impenetrable obscurity, making belief in His existence an insurmountable challenge.

Not thus willed he to appear in his gentle advent, because since so many men make themselves unworthy of his mercy, he willed to leave them deprived of the good which they refuse. It had not then been just that he should appear in a manner plainly divine, and wholly capable of convincing all men, but neither had it been just that he should come in so hidden a manner as not to be recognized by those who sincerely sought him. He has willed to reveal himself wholly to these, and thus willing to appear openly to those who seek him with their whole heart, and to hide himself from those who fly him with all their heart, he has so tempered the knowledge of himself as to give signs of himself visible to those who seek him, and obscure to those who seek him not.²⁰

According to Pascal's interpretation, the nature of all evil, including events like those that occurred in Treblinka during the Holocaust, and the elusive presence of God can be contextualized within the biblical narrative of the fall of man. Such matters of faith, not being derivable from empirical facts, are addressed not to materialists but rather to those inclined towards belief.²¹ In Pascal's view, God's presence is a paradox – not alternating between presence and absence, but rather simultaneously always present and always absent. He remains hidden from many, yet reveals himself to those whom he has chosen to grace.²² Humanity, once distinguished

20. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

21. L. Kołakowski, *op.cit.*, p. 206.

22. L. Goldmann, *The hidden God, a study of tragic vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the tragedies of Racine*, trans. by Ph. Thody, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, ed. 1. 1955, London, 2013, p. 36.

by God and originally exceeding the natural order and partaking in divine nature, has, according to Pascal, fallen from this elevated state, becoming akin to 'brutes'.²³

The individual choices of the perpetrators in Treblinka had many motives: position, prejudice, ideology, peer group pressure, fear, power. People who were able to show care and love towards their families and relatives at the same time committed unimaginable crimes. Where do two such contradictory attitudes come from? Pascal sees man as an anomaly, a paradoxical being that combines all possible opposites. The dual nature of man contains wretchedness, but also – because of the awareness of this – greatness. Man is marked with radical evil and the ability to act in accordance with ethical principles; two natures divine and temporal, and the suspension between being an angel and a beast – this is what human nature is all about. For this reason the world appears to him as contradictory and paradoxical.²⁴

Pascal instructs individuals to strive ardently in preparing themselves to receive divine grace and to place God at the forefront of their existence. He advocates for becoming deserving of God's tranquility, a state wherein God unveils His light to us. Pascal warns of the peril inherent in revealing to a person their proximity to base animalistic instincts without simultaneously highlighting their inherent greatness. Equally risky is to emphasize this greatness without acknowledging the inherent human flaws. The most detrimental scenario is when an individual remains oblivious to both aspects, whereas the ideal is to comprehend both simultaneously. Pascal urges us to begin this journey of understanding with ourselves, our Creator, and our ultimate purpose.²⁵

The entire duty and true merit of a person lie in their conscious opposition to evil and in evaluating their life and every action against the ultimate objective of the soul's immortality. This reflective process is what constitutes human dignity and rationality. Without such contemplation, one cannot truly be deemed rational. Pascal would propose "to gain light on this subject, whereon our whole conduct depends and to be aware that it is not to be doubted that this life endures but for an instant, that the state of death is eternal, whatever may be its nature, and that thus all our actions and all our thoughts must take such different courses according to the state of that eternity."²⁶

23. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

24. L. Goldmann, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

25. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 37, 39.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 16.

"Let man now estimate his value. Let him love himself, because he has a nature capable of good, but let him not therefore love the vileness which exists in that nature."²⁷ These reflections serve as both the backdrop and the foundational basis for the crucial commemorations, celebrations, and all educational and promotional endeavors of the Treblinka Museum. At the heart of these is the memory of Treblinka and its cautionary message, rooted in continuous self-reflection and the pursuit of moral improvement. To view another person without empathy and understanding is to subtly obscure the memory and lessons of this place.

DECEITFUL PART

Pascal highlights the imagination as a crucial yet potentially misleading aspect of human nature. It wields the power to shape our perception of the world and our value systems, often distorting them. "This proud potentate, who loves to rule and domineer over her enemy, reason, has established in man a second nature."²⁸ As beings prone to inherent fallacies and illusions, we frequently succumb to the whims of our imagination.

Pascal observed that most human actions are motivated by this imaginative force, which holds significant sway over our judgments. "Set the greatest philosopher in the world on a plank really wider than he needs, but hanging over a precipice, and though reason convince him of his security, imagination will prevail. Many will scarce bear the thought without a cold sweat [...]. We cannot even see an advocate in his long robe and with his cap on his head, without an enhanced opinion of his ability. [...] What but this faculty of imagination dispenses reputation, assigns respect and veneration to persons, works, laws, and the great? How valueless are all the treasures of earth without her consent!"²⁹ The same power, which on the basis of the title of a book, a film or a play, makes us think of them as having an interesting content, can also deceive us morally: "My fancy makes me hate a man who breathes hard when he is eating. Fancy has great weight. Will you profit by yielding to this weight because it is natural?"³⁰

The imagination is a dangerous tool in the hands of manipulators and propaganda. It was imagination that motivated the history of anti-Judaism in Europe and the process of growing ethnic prejudices, having its

27. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

poignant ending at the fictional train station in Treblinka and the white coat of the SS man.³¹

Until the last moment, the Nazis took advantage of this power, which also can distort justice. "Why do you kill me – What! Do not you live on the other side of the stream, my friend? If you lived on this side I should be an assassin, and it were unjust to kill you in this fashion, but since you live on the other side, I am a brave soldier, and it is just. [...] Custom creates equity, by the simple reason that this is received. It is the mystical foundation of its authority."³² For Pascal, all world's justice and law is a caprice. The most ridiculous things become rational because of people's madness.

The philosopher did not believe that any political order – unless in a misguided sense – could be just. Nevertheless, he believed that while we cannot obey moral laws without special grace, we can get to know them through revelation in the Holy Scripture and through the natural moral law given by God to man.³³ Man, however, unable to find this law in himself, often replaces it with caprices, the absurdity of which makes power and sophisticated manipulations the only means of its implementation. In this sense, "justice without power is unavailing, power without justice is tyrannical."³⁴ Taking advantage of imagination one can convince people that the law is rightful, and man, unaware and confused by the imagination, will not expose this whim.

Imagination distorts not only justice, but also happiness. Human nature is wretched because people want happiness more than good. Not finding any means in the world to achieve happiness, one usually tries to find it in material possessions. In the pursuit of wealth, man is able to turn into an extremely dangerous creature in order to achieve the goal. To obtain a substitute for happiness, people direct their actions towards diversions which, having only an ephemeral character, hides the truth about happiness that man has not discovered.³⁵

All this took place in Treblinka where the camp staff, blinded by – among others – desire to possess, became an unpredictable being and committed genocide. Looking for happiness in wealth caused inconceivable evil. At the same time, in accordance with Pascal's view on diversions, camp staff indulged in fanciful amusements. Richard Glazar wrote about

31. The fake railway station and the white coats which the SS men wore served to distract the Treblinka victims' vigilance.

32. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 49, 51.

33. L. Kołakowski, *op.cit.*, pp. 217-220.

34. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

35. G.M. Barallobre, *Pascal. Człowiek jest trzecią myślącą*, trans. by A. Paleta, Warszawa: Hachette Polska, 2018.

“the SS men’s craving for entertainment”.³⁶ In the context of Pascal’s philosophy, the existence of the zoo,³⁷ boxing matches, compulsory theatrical performances, concerts, dance recitals³⁸ were to distract the persecutors’ attention away from reflecting on their misery.

In order to live in the world in a good way, a person must be aware of the responsibility for another person. “[...] that is my place in the sunshine. Here is the beginning and the image of the usurpation of the whole earth.”³⁹ Emmanuel Lévinas quotes this fragment from Pascal and uses it as an epigraph for the work *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*.⁴⁰ The existence of man in the world, according to Lévinas, is an usurpation of the right to a place on earth, which is associated with responsibility for another person. Our very existence takes place at the expense of other persons and deprives them of their living space and the possibility of full growth.⁴¹ Man is obliged to take responsibility for that position.

This is another warning for man: constant vigilance by controlling the imagination. Sensitizing to subtle voice of reason is an invaluable tool for being in society. Is my behaviour a caprice or a moral law? Do we not become indifferent to other people when looking for happiness in our own self-interest? These are questions that we are obliged to answer every day in order to remember Treblinka effectively.

THAT MAN WITHOUT FAITH CANNOT KNOW THE TRUE GOOD, NOR JUSTICE

Jesus Christ did nothing but teach men that they were lovers of themselves, that they were slaves, blind, sick, miserable, and sinners, that he would deliver them, enlighten, bless, and heal them, that this would be brought about by hatred of self, and by following him through poverty and the death of the cross. Without Jesus Christ man must be plunged in vice and misery; with Jesus Christ man is free from vice and misery, in him is all our virtue and all our

36. R. Glazar, *Stacja Treblinka*, Warszawa: Ośrodek KARTA Dom Spotkań z Historią, 2011, p. 121.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

38. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], Warszawa 1944, p. 18.

39. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

40. S. Hand, Introduction to *The Levinas Reader*. Emmanuel Levinas, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992, p. 4.

41. M. Pluta, “Śmierć w myśli filozoficznej Emmanuela Levinasa”, *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne*, 1966, 5, p. 166.

happiness. Apart from him is nought but vice and misery, error and darkness, death and despair.⁴²

For Pascal, the authenticity of Christianity lies in its embrace of paradoxes and statements that, at first glance, appear absurd. This faith uniquely dissects and illuminates the enigmatic and paradoxical essence of the human condition. At its core, Christianity's truthfulness stems from its demand for belief in a God of contradictions – a deity whose very nature unravels the complexities of human existence and aspirations: a God incarnate, crucified, and serving as an intercessor. To Pascal, a human being, caught between the realms of the bestial and the divine, finds no fulfillment in doctrines that solely exalt the grandeur of God, prioritize this magnificence, or promise earthly happiness as their ultimate aim. Religions that are wholly ethereal offer no tangible directives for living, just as those promising mere carnal and worldly pleasures fall short of human spiritual needs. For Pascal, Christianity resonates profoundly with the human paradox, imparting teachings that hold genuine significance for a creature as complex and contradictory as man. In his view, only through embracing the paradoxical can mankind truly grasp the conflicting and enigmatic realities of human existence.⁴³

The human inclination to choose virtue is often overpowered by our inherent selfishness. In Pascal's perspective, the chasm between humanity and the divine is so vast it might render the very existence of God elusive to human perception. This perilous freedom and autonomy have given rise to radical ideologies and eroded our capacity to discern right from wrong. It caused a distortion of values, and ultimately led to the tearing down of the wretched curtain adorned with the possessions of the murdered, behind which the boastful and vain nature of man was comfortably and mysteriously embedded in him.

In this sense, Pascal might have viewed the events in Treblinka as a profound distortion of human nature, resulting from the manifestation of original sin and a blatant ignorance of Christ's teachings by the Nazis and their collaborators. Such ignorance was evident in those who exhibited depravity and vileness by harming others. In Pascal's philosophy, faith is the singular shield that protects humanity from the phantasms of its own nature. Relying on a natural moral law inherent in human beings is irresponsibly risky sailing, which – in the context of a human being placed in infinite spaces – becomes surprisingly vulnerable to a change of course in

42. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 161-162.

43. L. Goldmann, *op.cit.*, pp. 303-313.

the direction opposite to our original state, and to sail into a space of even greater confusion.

SUMMARY

What aspects of Pascal's philosophy remain pertinent in the context of Treblinka? There are indeed several key points. The pursuit of utopian schemes for organizing social life on Earth is doomed to fail due to the inherent evil in mankind, an evil that, when combined with power, becomes uncontrollable. True justice is fragile and vulnerable, for it does not rely on force. By idolizing what is not divine, we risk misfortune and suffering, as it leads humanity to lose the ability to discern truth from falsehood.

Reason alone is insufficient when reflecting upon Treblinka. It plays an invaluable role in unraveling the causes and motivations behind the Holocaust, yet it is powerless in explaining its deepest root – evil. Humanity must remain humble, aware of its limitations, and strive to diminish the prevalence of evil in the world.

Additionally, reason, misled by imagination, is prone to irrational and, in extreme cases, insane behaviors – such as ethnic prejudices. The true greatness of man does not lie in his power, possessions, passions, or desires. It lies in thought, the awareness of blind forces and delusional aspirations, and above all, in self-reflection about death. Everyone has an intuition about death, but Pascal delved into its deepest essence. In the face of the certainty of death, and the uncertain nature of the soul's immortality, committing evil and harming others is sheer madness. "The only way of worldly success is to show ourselves honourable, faithful, of sound judgment, and capable of useful service to a friend."⁴⁴ Many perpetrators did not engage in such profound reflections. This serves as a warning to modern man.

According to Pascal, a rational man is one who seeks God, taking at least a few steps in this endeavor.⁴⁵ For man, seemingly placed in the world thoughtlessly, God is the guarantor of true morality and the meaning revealed in Christ. However, mere knowledge of this is not enough. Pascal guides man towards what he believes to be the only cure for the anxiety of the human soul – God. An anxiety that, intensified by the events of the 20th century, has become much more acute.

44. B. Pascal, *The Thoughts...*, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Pascal did not complete his *magnum opus*, '*Pensées*' (Thoughts). He died, leaving his notes partially organized. "Memory is necessary for every operation of the reason"⁴⁶ – this independently written and out-of-context note certainly posed many challenges for the posthumous editors who tried to organize '*Pensées*' into a coherent structure. This open-to-interpretation aphorism encapsulates the truth about Treblinka. Any action or thought related to the realms of social life tied to human existence in the world – be it political decisions, education, culture, social activism, family life, or private conversations – should be preceded by memory, awareness, and mutual control. The prevention of a recurrence of the genocide in Treblinka starts with remembering these events and, based on this, adopting rational attitudes.

46. Ibid., p. 15.

Piotr Jagła

THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE EXTERMINATION AT TREBLINKA AN ATTEMPT AT AN ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE¹

In this article I will present and analyse examples of the references to Judaism made by the Germans in the process of the Extermination at Treblinka and I will also attempt to explain this phenomenon. According to my knowledge, a significant part of this phenomenon has so far been unnoticed and thus not examined. The primary source I used is *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], Jankiel Wiernik's memoirs written after his escape from the Treblinka II extermination camp in 1943 and published while still under occupation in 1944.² Reading this text led me to the conclusion that the information contained therein regarding the subject of interest to me has not received enough attention or scholarly analysis until today. Although the observations were made by Wiernik, he certainly wanted to draw attention to that these references were not accidental but were planned and intentionally implemented by the Germans.

Primarily, I rely on the accounts of eyewitnesses, prisoners of Treblinka II. *A Year in Treblinka* is of fundamental significance to my considerations. In addition, I also refer to the accounts of Avraham Lindwasser, Jerzy

1. I would like to express my gratefulness to the regional historians who deal with the Treblinka I and Treblinka II camps: Edward Kopówka, PhD, Wojciech Jakubik and Monika Samuel, and also to professor Piotr Rapp, PhD Eng., construction specialist, and Piotr Zaremba, pastor and biblical scholar for their substantive support and scholarly discussion. I assume responsibility for the mistakes made.

2. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], Warszawa 2003 (a reprint of the first edition of 1944).

Rajgrodzki, Richard Glazar, Abraham Krzepicki, Jechiel Rajchman, Abraham Bomba, and Samuel Willenberg,³ and also Franz Stangl,⁴ the Commandant of the Treblinka II extermination camp, and Franz Suchomel,⁵ the SS man of Treblinka. Except for Glazar and Willenberg, all of them had

3. A. Lindwasser, *Testimony about Treblinka at the Eichmann Trial 1961 (Selected Extracts)*, from: <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/trials/lindwassertestimony.html> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

J. Rajgrodzki, "Jedenaście miesięcy w obozie zagłady w Treblince. Wspomnienia" [Eleven Months in the Treblinka Extermination Camp. Memories], *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 25 (1958), pp. 101-118.

R. Glazar, *Stacja Treblinka. Żydzi polscy*, trans. by E. Czerwiakowska, Warszawa 2011; R. Glazar, *Die Falle mit dem grünen Zaun: Überleben at Treblinka*, Frankfurt am Main 1992.

A.J. Krzepicki, *Człowiek uciekł z Treblinek... Rozmowy z powracającym*, trans. by K. Środa, Warszawa 2017.

J. Rajchman, *Ocalałem z Trebinki. Wspomnienia z lat 1942-1943*, trans. by B. Szwarcman-Czarnota, Warszawa 2011.

In August 1979 Bomba gave an interview to Lanzmann, full interview is available on the United States Holocaust Memory Museum website (Abraham Bomba – Treblinka – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org), its transcription is also available there: Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection, Contains documentation, including indices, summaries, transcriptions, and translations, compiled by Claude Lanzmann while developing the film Shoah, Interview with Abraham Bomba (Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org); as well as an interview given on August 28, 1990: Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team, from the archive of United States Holocaust Museum Memory (Oral history interview with Avraham Bomba – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org). Its transcription can be found on the Holocaust Education&Archive Research Team website (Avraham Bomba Survivors Stories – www.HolocaustResearchProject.org).

S. Willenberg, *Bunt w Treblince*, Warszawa 2004.

4. Information given by Stangl during his trial was passed by Alfred Spiess in conversation with Lanzmann: United States Holocaust Memory Museum. Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection. Contains documentation, including indices, summaries, transcriptions, and translations, compiled by Claude Lanzmann while developing the film Shoah (Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org); Alfred Spiess (Alfred Spiess – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org).

5. In the Preliminary Investigation of Stangl (<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/trials/suchomelstatement.html>); United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Lanzmann-Suchomel (Franz Suchomel – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org).

the opportunity to stay in the area of the *Totenlager*. I also made use of the book *Piekło Trebłinki* (1944) by Vasili Grossman⁶ who, among others, relied on the accounts of people living in the vicinity of this extermination camp. In addition to making their own observations “from the outside”, these witnesses gathered the news from often drunken Ukrainian guards who served inside the camp.⁷ I also found key details in the testimonies given before Judge, Zdzisław Łukaszewicz in 1945 and 1947 by the prisoners of Treblinka, some of whom were in the *Totenlager* area: Jankiel Wiernik, Szyja Warszawski, Jechiel Rajchman, Aron Czechowicz, Hejnoch Brenner, Jan Sułkowski.⁸

6. V. Grossman, “Piekło Trebłinki” [The Hell of Treblinka], *Muzykalia* VII, *Judaica* 2 (2009), pp. 1-24.

7. R. Czarkowski, *Cieniom Trebłinki*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 55-78.

8. Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 12, 1945, at: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/317/edition/305/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9d2llcm5payZhY3Rpb249U2ltcGxlU2VhcmNoQWN0aW9uJmikaXJpZHM9JnR5cGU9LTYmc3RhcncRzdHI9X2FsbCZwPTA&navref=OHQ7OGggMWikOzFsdiaZdGg7M3NxDRIODsoYWQgODM7N3lgOHI7OGYgMmt6OzJrZw> (accessed: 30.05.2021); Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of January 4, 1947, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/2101/edition/2083/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9d2llcm5payZhY3Rpb249U2ltcGxlU2VhcmNoQWN0aW9uJmikaXJpZHM9JnR5cGU9LTYmc3RhcncRzdHI9X2FsbCZwPTA&navref=OHQ7OGggMWikOzFsdiaZdGg7M3NxDRIODsoYWQgODM7N3lgOHI7OGYgMmt6OzJrZw> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

Szyja Warszawski, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 9, 1945, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/315/edition/303/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9d2llcm5payZhY3Rpb249U2ltcGxlU2VhcmNoQWN0aW9uJmikaXJpZHM9JnR5cGU9LTYmc3RhcncRzdHI9X2FsbCZwPTA&navref=OHQ7OGYgMjhuOzI4NCAoMmQ7NDFrIDZqaTs2aTYgNGh4OzRoMCMBoeitoayByeTtyaiAoN3Y7NDcyIDI4aTsyN3ogcnE7cmIgMzV3OzM1NyAyajsyNyBvNztucyBoYjtnDbtNjtsiBiajt1NCBqcjqtYyBqajtnCAoZTsoMiBMDtkbQ> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

Jechiel Rajchman, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 12, 1945, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/270/edition/258/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9d2llcm5payZhY3Rpb249U2ltcGxlU2VhcmNoQWN0aW9uJmikaXJpZHM9JnR5cGU9LTYmc3RhcncRzdHI9X2FsbCZwPTA&navref=N2k7NzYgZmE7ZXc> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

Aron Czechowicz, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 11, 1945, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/275/edition/263/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9d2llcm5payZhY3Rpb249U2ltcGxlU2VhcmNoQWN0aW9uJmikaXJpZHM9JnR5cGU9LTYmc3RhcncRzdHI9X2FsbCZwPTA&navref=N2k7NzYgZmE7ZXc>

The Bible, which I quoted from, accessible to me, *New Catholic Bible* (NCB)⁹ was indispensable for my research, and also *Mishnah*,¹⁰ and *Talmud*.¹¹ The knowledge about Jewish religious customs in the interwar period was drawn from Regina Lilientalowa's¹² work *Święta żydowskie w przeszłości i teraźniejszości*.

The religious elements discussed in my article are related to the building containing new gas chambers. It was erected in the autumn of 1942 in the part of the camp called the *Totenlager* which was designated for the extermination of the Jews. I will develop my analysis of this issue in six sections:

1. THE COINCIDENCE OF THE CRUCIAL PHASES OF THE EXTERMINATION AT TREBLINKA WITH THE DATES OF THE MOST IMPORTANT JEWISH RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS IN THE YEARS 1942-1943. In this section, I draw attention to the synchronisation of the deportation phases from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka with almost all the major Jewish holidays of that period. The only lacking here are the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) and Hanukkah.
2. THE DATE OF THE COMPLETION AND COMMISSIONING OF THE NEW GAS CHAMBERS. From the accounts of the prisoners: Richard Glazar and

QXJvbitDemVjaG93aWN6JmFjdGlvbj1TaW1wbGVTZWfYy2hBY3Rpb24bWRpcmllkczomdHlwZTotNiZzdGFydHNocjlfYWxsJnA9MA&navref=N247N2I (accessed: 30.05.2021).

Hejnoch Brener, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 9, 1945, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/272/edition/260/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9SGVqbmgjaCtCcmVuZXImYWNoaW9uPVNpbXBsZVNlYXJjaEFjdGlvbiZtZGlyaWRzPSZoeXBIPS02JnNoYXJoc3RyPV9hbGwmcDow&navref=N2s7Nzg> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

Jan Sułkowski, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of December 20, 1945, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/293/edition/281/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9SmFuK1NiJUM1JTgya293c2tpJmFjdGlvbj1TaW1wbGVTZWfYy2hBY3Rpb24mbWRpcmlkczomdHlwZTotNiZzdGFydHNocjlfYWxsJnA9MA&navref=ODU7N3QgM2JpOzNhd> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

9. *New Catholic Bible* (NCB); [<https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Catholic-Bible-NCB-Bible/#booklist>].

10. <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Mishnah> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

11. *The Babylonian Talmud*, trans. by M.L. Rodkinson, vol. 1-10, 1918; *The Jerusalem Talmud. A Translation and Commentary*, edited by Jacob Neusner on CD, trans. by J. Neusner, T. Zahavy.

12. R. Lilientalowa, *Święta żydowskie w przeszłości i teraźniejszości* [Jewish Holidays, in the Past and Present], Kraków 1908.

Abraham Bomba, and also SS man, Franz Suchomel, in the new gas chambers, murderings were taking place as early as the beginning of October 1942. An analysis of Wiernik's memoirs leads to the same conclusion. It was coincided with the final days of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot).

3. THE HOLIDAY OF SUKKOT AND ITS CONNECTIONS TO THE HOLY TEMPLE. The title corresponds to the content here. It prepares the reader to delve into the considerations presented in the following sections.
4. THE DECOR OF THE BUILDING WITH THE NEW GAS CHAMBERS. The terms used to describe the building with the new gas chambers ("it looked like an antiquated temple",¹³ "it had the shape of an ancient temple"¹⁴) as well as the elements of its decor (Star of David,¹⁵ *parochet* with an inscription¹⁶) indicate that the effect the Germans wanted to achieve was not so much an association with a synagogue but exactly with the Holy Temple.
5. THE NUMBER, DIMENSIONS, AND LAYOUT OF THE NEW GAS CHAMBERS. I observe that the numbers with which Wiernik used to describe the structure of the building with the new gas chambers could have had the value of religious symbols. Combining them with other pieces of information about the building leads to the conclusion that the numbers expressed the ideas related to the Holy Temple.
6. THE LOCATION OF THE NEW GAS CHAMBERS ON THE CAMPGROUNDS. In this section I emphasise that the placement of new chambers on the slope of a hill could have been an attempt to refer to the topographic custom of "ascending" to Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.
7. SUMMARY. In the final section I will summarise the earlier observations and propose an explanation for the phenomenon discussed. I will present arguments supporting the idea that its originator or approver must have been Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS, with whom Hitler entrusted the execution of the Extermination.

13. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], pp. 8, 40-41.

14. V. Grossman, *op.cit.*, p. 12

15. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], pp. 8, 40.

16. A. Lindwasser, *Testimony about Treblinka...*, *op.cit.*

1. THE COINCIDENCE OF THE CRUCIAL PHASES OF THE EXTERMINATION AT TREBLINKA WITH THE DATES OF THE MOST IMPORTANT JEWISH RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS IN THE YEARS 1942-1943

The Jewish holidays with which Nazis synchronised the phases of the Extermination at Treblinka were: *Tisha B'Av* (July 22-23, 1942), *Rosh Hashanah* (September 11-12, 1942), Yom Kippur (*Yom HaKippurim*) (September 20-21, 1942), Passover (*Pesach*) (April 19-20, 1943), and most likely Sukkot (September 25 – October 3, 1942).¹⁷

In 1942, excluding Sukkot, these holidays were linked to the phases of deportation from the Warsaw Ghetto as a part of the ongoing *Grossaktion* from July to September.

A synchronisation with the Jewish holiday was articulated by the fact that on that day, a transport would either leave Warsaw or arrive at the Treblinka II extermination camp. It must be remembered here that in the Jewish calendar a new day starts at dusk, the moment sunset.¹⁸ The fastest the transports from Warsaw arrived at their destination was on the same day or the following day, depending on whether they left in the morning or in the evening.¹⁹ Journeys from the most remote ghettos could have taken even a few days.²⁰ What further prolonged the journey with an enormous number of transports was the overnight waiting for their turns at the Treblinka station which was located several kilometres away from the extermination camp.²¹

The first transport arrived at Treblinka on July 23, 1942. On that day fell the Jewish holiday, *Tisha B'Av* (July 22/23)²² during which they mourn the destruction of the First and the Second Temples.²³

17. Jewish Calendar 1942 Diaspora (Jewish Calendar 1942 Diaspora Hebcal).

18. In remembrance of the way the time was measured in *Genesis* (Gen 1,5.8.13.19.23.31).

19. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], pp. 1-2.

20. Heinoch Brener, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 9, 1945, p. 1.

21. F. Ząbecki, *Wspomnienia dawne i nowe*, Warszawa 1977, p. 47.

22. A. Levin, *Dziennik*, trans. by M. Siek, A. Rutkowski, Warszawa 2016, pp. 169-170; F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 42; Minutes of the hearing of an expert, Nachman Blumetal of October 10, 1945, IPN GK (The Institute of National Remembrance, Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes) 196/69.

23. Mishnah Taanit 4,6, from: https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Taanit (accessed: 30.05.2021); *Tract Taanith (Fasting)*, part 4, pp. 85-87 [in:] *New Edition of the Baby-Ionian Talmud, original text, edited, corrected, formulated, and translated into English by M. L. Rodkinson; Section Moed (Festivals)*. Tracts Taanith, Megilla, and Ebel Rabbathi or Semahoth, vol. 8, The Talmud Society, Boston 1918;

The Grossaktion, the first phase of deportation from Warsaw to Treblinka, essentially ended on September 10, 11, or 12. The last “large” transport to Treblinka was sent on one of these days, and most likely it arrived on the same day or the following day.²⁴ In 1942, the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashanah* fell on September 11/12.

According to Szyja Warszawski, a prisoner of Treblinka II who testified on October 9, 1945, the Nazis exterminated an exceptionally large number of people in the camp on the ‘Judgment Day’ in 1942. This term was used by the Jews in reference to *Rosh Hashanah* (September 11/12, 1942) and Yom Kippur (September 21/22, 1942).²⁵ One can wonder whether or not it was done deliberately:

I cannot determine the exact number of victims brought in daily, but I heard that at least 10,000 people were killed each day, while on the Judgement Day 18,000 people were poisoned.²⁶

Essentially, this figure should be considered exaggerated.²⁷ However, there are accounts confirming Warszawski’s statement.²⁸ On September 11

Yerushalmi Taanit 4:5 III:2, VI:2 [in:] *The Jerusalem Talmud. A Translation and Commentary*, edited by J. Neusner on CD, trans. by J. Neusner, T. Zahavy.

24. *Encyclopedia of Holocaust*, Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies, University of Texas at Dallas, D. Patterson, A.L. Berger, S. Cargas Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002, p. 34: “By the time the first wave of deportations came to an end of September 12 (Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, in 1942), 254,000 of Warsaw’s Jews had been murdered at Treblinka’s gas chambers”; Y. Arad, *The Operation Reinhard Death Camps. Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 132-134, 456.

25. “Dzień Sądu” (the Judgement Day), “Rosz ha-Szana” (Rosh Hashanah), see A. Unterman, *Encyklopedia tradycji i legend żydowskich*, trans. by O. Zienkiewicz, Warsaw 2000, p. 79, 235; Abraham Levin the “Judgement Day” called *Yom ha-Kipurim*, A. Lewin, *op.cit.*, p. 226.

26. Szyja Warszawski, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 9, 1945, p. 3.

27. Franz Stangl who became the Commandant of Treblinka in early September 1942 testified during his trial: “Regarding the question of what was the optimum amount of people gassed in one day, I can state: according to my estimation a transport of thirty freight cars with 3,000 people was liquidated in three hours. When the work lasted for about fourteen hours, 12,000 to 15,000 people were annihilated. There were many days that the work lasted from the early morning until the evening,” Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, pp. 128, 131, 157.

28. Camp Commandant, Franz Stangl, in a conversation with the Prosecutor, A. Spiess, suggested the possibility of as many as 18,000 victims per day – Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection, Contains documentation, including indices, summaries, transcriptions, and translations, compiled by Claude Lanzmann while developing the film *Shoah*, Interview with Alfred Spiess, pp. 20-21 (Claude

and 21, the new gas chambers of bigger capacity were not yet in use. We could still assume that Warszawski noticed that almost twice as many human beings were killed on the "Judgement Day" (*Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur*).

Also, on September 21, 1942, that is on Yom Kippur (September 20/21), the last transport from Warsaw was sent. It included the majority of the Jewish Police Service assisting at *The Grossaktion* and also their families.²⁹

The *Grossaktion* itself claimed a quarter of a million of human lives³⁰ at Treblinka and on the way to it, not including the deportations to this extermination center from other Jewish population centers (ghettos).

On the evening of April 19, 1943, which was already the 15th of Nisan, the Pesach holiday, when the Passover Supper (Seder) is consumed, began. On that day, in the early morning hours, the *Grossaktion (in Warchau)*³¹ was started. It aimed at the final liquidation of the remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto.³² Originally, according to Jürgen Stroop quoted by Moczarski,

Lanzmann Shoah Collection – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org). Aron Czechowicz (arrived at Treblinka on the 10th of September 1942, escaped in late November 1942), p. 2: "I remember one day when we worked until three in the morning. On that day, as it was said, 21,000 people were killed in the chambers." (Witold Pilecki Institute for Solidarity and Valour – Czechowicz Aron – zapisyterroru.pl). The Ukrainian guards, usually drunken, were in the habit of 'visiting' their hosts in the surrounding villages: "My wife and I knew and saw 'Ivan the Terrible', formerly called 'Ivan the Machine Operator'. He was at our house. This tall, swarthy, bulky man operated the engines that produced gases with which they poisoned people. Ivan himself told me what he was doing in the camp. On one occasion, already well drunk, he said: 'today I killed twenty thousand Jews'. 'What would your father say to that?' – I asked. 'My father would have cut off my head for that'. – replied 'Ivan the Terrible'." quote from R. Czarkowski, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

29. A. Levin, *op.cit.*, pp. 224-226; F. Ząbecki, *op.cit.*, p. 87; Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, pp. 134, 456.

30. Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, p. 134.

31. By using this name, I am drawing upon the account of Moczarski from his conversations with Jürgen Stroop, K. Moczarski, *Rozmowy z katem*, Warszawa 2002; According to Stroop, it was Himmler himself that invented the name, p. 195. It was often shortened to the 'Grossaktion' (*The Grossaktion in Warschau* – pp. 85, 174, 179, 195-196, 245, 251, 258, 262, 269, 272-274, 282-283, 311, 357, 400; *Grossaktion* – pp. 186, 211, 215, 217, 223, 227, 231, 243, 248, 252, 255, 264-266, 394). The name 'Grossaktion in Warschau' was sometimes used in reference to the operation of liquidation of the remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto, but with time, at least Stroop himself, acknowledged that it was incorrect, pp. 282-283.

32. R. Hilberg, *Zagłada Żydów Europejskich*, t. 2, trans. by J. Giebułtowski, Warszawa 2014, pp. 622-623, 625.

the plans were for the operation of the ghetto's liquidation to last for three days.³³ The uprising prevented the implementation of these plans. According to Stroop's report, out of 56,065 Jews apprehended during the *Grossaktion*, 7,000 were killed during the operation, and 6,929 were deported to the Treblinka II extermination camp. Additionally, it is likely that around 5,000 to 6,000 Jews perished due to explosions and fire.³⁴ If it were not for the resistance of the insurgents, a larger number of the ghetto inhabitants would probably have been deported to Treblinka, and in a significantly shorter period.

According to Rajchman, a prisoner of Treblinka, the Jews in the *Totenlager* were allowed to celebrate Pesach at that time. Already by that time, hundreds of thousands of bodies of those murdered the previous year were extracted from an enormous mass grave to be burnt on huge roasters made of railway tracks.

Pesach is coming. The murderers are put on a show and give us flour for baking matzah and a bottle of wine. We prepare for the Seder, and the SS men come to our barracks as guests for the meal. A cantor from Warsaw, who is among us, bakes matzah and prepares the Seder. The murderers mock this, and after a few minutes, they leave the barracks. We recall the Seder evening: a few comrades participate in the Seder. Outside, a gentle breeze is blowing, the ovens are lit, and the flames crackle. On this evening, ten thousand Jews are being burned, and by morning, there will be no trace of them. And we hold the regular Seder feast. The next day, at the start of work, the oven specialist addresses us (as if someone had asked him to do so) and says that he knows well how difficult and dirty our work is. He asks us, literally, if we want him to assign fifty more people to work with us to make it easier for us. But he sets a condition that we should be content with our current food rations

33. K. Moczarski, *op.cit.*, p. 185: "Leaving von Sammern free to make preparations, I made contact with the commanders of all the Police and SS militia units in Warsaw and some of our Wehrmacht men. I tried to anticipate the situation. Hahn claimed that the action would last far longer than the planned three days. In spite of my Lviv experience, I had never assumed that Hahn's calculations would be so correct that the liquidation of the ghetto would stretch into the summer months. Hahn paid attention to all the complicated elements of the situation. In the ghetto the cleverest Jews remained and had a military-and-political organisation."

34. J. Stroop, *Żydowska dzielnica mieszkaniowa w Warszawie już nie istnieje! / Es gibt keinen jüdischen Wohnbezirk – in Warschau mehr!*, ed. by A. Żbikowski, Warszawa: IPN, ŻIH, 2009, p. 104, 126, 185; R. Hilberg, *Zagłada Żydów Europejskich*, t. 2, p. 629; Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, p. 456.

and share them with the new people. He does not wait for our answer and says that in his opinion, we will be content if our work is a bit harder, but our food rations will not be reduced. He also assures us that soon we will be done with this 'shit' and, then, our life will be easier. Each of us will receive new clothing, and the work will be lighter and more comfortable. The next morning, he found out what we were saying amongst ourselves: that a beautiful and clean life would come when we stop erasing the traces of their crimes and we die. This thug came once again and explained that nothing bad would happen to us. And we should listen and think about our liberation...³⁵

From the statement of the "oven specialist" on relieving the Jews' plight, it can be inferred that before that happens, the process of the Extermination at Treblinka will be accelerated once again through new transports from the Warsaw Ghetto. He was referring to both new victims and new members of the *Sonderkommando*. The announcement of the "specialist" was supposed to take place on April 20, 1943, which was the day after the Seder, but still the 15th of Nisan, which marked the first day of freedom for the Jews after the night of Exodus.³⁶ Rajchman claimed that at that moment, other prisoners working at *The Totenlager* were thinking about liberation from captivity as well. Perhaps some influence on these associations was drawn from the recent holiday during which they reflected on their liberation from Egyptian bondage.

In summarising this stage of reflections, *Tisha B'Av* and Pesach were connected at Treblinka with the commencement, temporary resumption, and acceleration of the process of the Extermination, while the closing stages of murdering Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto were associated with *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and the seven-day Pesach (if the ghetto's liquidation was to last for three days).

I did not find any information in the sources that links the stages of the Extermination carried out at Treblinka with *Sukkot* and *Hanukkah*.

2. THE DATE OF THE CONSTRUCTION AND COMMISSIONING OF THE NEW GAS CHAMBERS

In this part of my reasoning, I will present arguments supporting the idea that during Sukkot, which fell in 1942, from September 25-26 (*Erev Sukkot*)

35. J. Rajchman, *Ocalalem...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-88.

36. Ex 12,14.17; 13,3.14; 20,2; Deut. 16,1,3; 5,6.15.

to October 1-2 (*Hoshana Rabbah*), October 2-3 (*Shemini Atzeret*), or October 3-4 on *Simchat Tora*, a pivotal event occurred in the history of this extermination camp. This was the completion of the new gas chambers and their commissioning.

Before I proceed to Wiernik's text, I will quote and analyse statements from eyewitnesses that indicate the new gas chambers were already operational at the beginning of October.

Szyja Warszawski:

On October 9, 1945, in Łódź, Judge Z. Łukasziewicz interrogated the undersigned as a witness, without an oath, in the presence of Prosecutor, J. Maciejewski. Warned of criminal liability for making false statements, the witness testified the following: [...]: In September or early October 1942, next to the first chambers, another 10 chambers were built in one large building, in the same system as before. However, these were larger chambers, as each could accommodate around 800 people, and usually, over a thousand people were packed in there.³⁷

Aron Czechowicz:

Łódź, October 11, 1945 [Judge Z. Łukasziewicz interviewed the undersigned as a witness, without an oath]: On September 10, 1942, I was brought to the death camp at Treblinka with a transport of about 8,000 men, women, and children from the Warsaw Ghetto [...]. On the first day, I worked sorting clothes. Later, I was transferred to the part of the camp where the chambers were located (the so-called *The Totenlager*). I worked there for two weeks, and one day, when I was assigned to carry planks near a group of workers from the first part of the camp (where there were no chambers, only warehouses and residential barracks), I managed, taking advantage of the Ukrainian's distraction, to blend in with the group of workers from the first part of the camp. I stayed there, working on sorting clothes. [...]. Towards the end of my stay in the *Totenlager*, I was used to carry wood (it was during this work that I managed to escape). This wood was intended for the construction of new chambers, which were already being finished at that time (roofing was being laid).³⁸

37. Szyja Warszawski, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 9, 1945, p. 3.

38. Aron Czechowicz, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 11, 1945, pp. 1-3.

By adding 15 days (“the first day” plus “two weeks”) to the date of September 10, we get September 25. It was around that time that Czechowicz escaped from the *Totenlager*. From his testimony, it can be inferred that 5-6 days before the end of September, the new gas chambers were “being finished (roofing was being laid)”. Note that it was already “roofing”, not just construction. The witness does not mention any unfinished interiors of individual chambers. The descriptions suggest that they were simple, made of concrete, and lacked elaborate interior finishing.³⁹ In the old chambers, which Abraham Krzepicki⁴⁰ described in detail, the walls were covered with tiles: white and red-and-yellow.

Richard Glazar, who arrived at Treblinka on October 10, 1942, began writing his memoirs still during the war. According to the original version published in 1992, written in German, the new gas chambers were to be put into operation at the beginning of October 1942.⁴¹

Abraham Bomba, in the interviews given to Lanzmann in August 1979⁴² and to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August

39. Stanisław Kon, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 7, 1945, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/284/edition/272/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3EgU3RhbmlzJUM1JTGyYXcrS29uJmFjdGlvb3J1TaW1wbGVtZWZyY2hBY3Rpb24mbWRpcmlkc3omdHlwZTotNiZzdGFydHNocjlfYWxsJnAgMA&navref=N3c7N2sgNW04OzVpNyA1ejQ7NXh6IDQ4czsoN3ogMmFnOzI5eCAyM2o7MjMzIDFnNzszZnEgMmIxOzJhaSAoN3E7NDZ4IDN4eTszeDYgMmF4OzJhZSA2MDY7NXowIDZqZjs2aTMgOWVyOzljMSA1N247NTZwIDMoMzszM2cgNXZhOzV1OCA1djU7NXUzI DJ1MDSydGggM2hwOzNneQ> (accessed: 30.05.2021), p. 3: “Inside there were concrete chambers on either side of the corridor, the entrance to each chamber led through tightly closed door.”; H. Brener, *op.cit.*, p. 2: “The chambers were in a long building, they were built of concrete, the entrance to the chambers was from the corridor through a small door.”; J. Rajchman, *Ocalalem...*, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

40. A. Krzepicki, *op.cit.*, p. 100: “The walls were very beautifully and neatly covered with white tiles. The floor was laid with red and yellow terracotta tiles.”; Oskar Strawczyński, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 7, 1945, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/288/edition/276/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3EgT3NrYXIrU3RyYXdxjenklQzUIODRza2kmYWNoaW9uPVNpbXBsZVNlYXJjaEFjdGlvb3J1ZGljaWRzPSZoeXBIPSo2JnNoYXJoc3RyPV9hbGwmcDow&navref=ODA7N28> (accessed: 30.05.2021), p. 4: “These stories show that the high concrete foundation housed concrete chambers with sides of about three metres, square and half tiled.”

41. R. Glazar, *Die Falle...*, *op.cit.*, p. 41: “Anfang Oktober, als unser Transport nach Treblinka kam, müssen sie die neuen Gaskammern in Betrieb gesetzt haben.”

42. Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ushmm.org (accessed: 30.05.2021).

28, 1990,⁴³ claimed that he had arrived at Treblinka on September 26, 1942, the following day he had been deported from Częstochowa on September 25 (*Erev Sukkot*).⁴⁴ He spent the night of September 26 to 27 in a barrack ("At night when they took us into the barrack") and then "on the third day or so" began working as a barber⁴⁵ in the gas chamber. The approximate dimensions he provided for the interior of the chamber, and given in feet ("I would say 18 by 18 by 17"), which can vary in value depending on the country, make it difficult to identify whether it was an old or new gas chamber. The fact that it was entirely made of concrete ("The gas chamber – how it looked? Very simple, it was all concrete, there were no windows. There was nothing in it"⁴⁶) unambiguously indicates a new gas chamber.

Also from the memoirs of Jechiel Rajchman, who arrived at Treblinka on October 10 and, like Bomba, worked as a barber in one of the gas chambers designated for that purpose, it is clear that this must have taken place in the building of the new gas chambers. The high number of several thousand murdered within an hour, as reported by Rajchman, rules out the possibility that this could have occurred in the old gas chambers.⁴⁷

From Bomba's account, it could be inferred that the new gas chambers were operational by September 30 or at the very beginning of October.

SS man from Treblinka, Franz Suchomel, testified in Düsseldorf on September 14, 1967, during the trial of his former superior, the Commandant of the Treblinka II extermination camp, Franz Stangl, that when he returned from leave on October 1, 1943, the new gas chambers were already

43. Abraham Bomba Survivors Stories www.HolocaustResearchProject.org (accessed: 30.05.2021).

44. Transcription of the interview from August 1979, pp. 18-21 (Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org).

45. Transcription of the interview from August 1979, pp. 28-30 (Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – ushmm.org); transcription of the conversation from August 1990 (Abraham Bomba Survivors Stories www.HolocaustResearchProject.org). Before being killed in the gas chambers, women's hair was cut off.

46. Transcription of the conversation from August 1990 (Abraham Bomba Survivors Stories www.HolocaustResearchProject.org).

47. Jechiel Rajchman, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 12, 1945, from: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/270/edition/258/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZXJyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3EgSmVjaGllbCtSYWpjaG1hbiZhY3Rpb249U2ltcGxlU2VhcmNoQWN0aW9uJm1kaXJpZHM9JnR5cGU9LTlYmc3RhcncRzdHI9X2FsbCZwPTA&navref=N2k7N-zYgZmE7ZXc> (accessed: 30.05.2021), p. 2; J. Rajchman, *Ocalałem...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 28-33.

completed, and the Jews were being killed in them.⁴⁸ In his conversation with Claude Lanzmann, who was gathering material for *Shoah*, Suchomel claimed that the new gas chambers were constructed in September.⁴⁹

According to the findings of the Düsseldorf court where the trial against Kurt Franz and nine other criminals from Treblinka was held between 1964 and 1965, the construction of the new gas chambers began around the turn of August and September, and they were put into operation after about a month.⁵⁰

The above information supports the accounts of Jankiel Wiernik.

According to *A Year in Treblinka*, Wiernik was brought from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka on August 24, 1942, which was a month after its operations began, and he escaped almost a year later during the uprising on August 2, 1943.⁵¹ He was already in his fifties when he arrived at the camp. This what saved him were his skills in construction that were exploited by the Germans. Wiernik was a master joiner and had been a member of an examination committee in the Warsaw Chamber of Crafts for many years before the war.⁵² As he spent at the Treblinka camp a signifi-

48. In the Preliminary Investigation of Stangl: "As I remember it Stangl arrived at Treblinka at the beginning of September 1942. I know for certain that he signed my leave pass. [...] On my written application Stangl also granted me some additional days of leave as I needed to take my son to hospital. When I returned to Treblinka on October 1 [...]. At any rate he was not at Treblinka when I returned. I remember that the new gas chambers had been completed and were in use." <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/trials/suchomelstatement.html> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

49. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Lanzmann-Suchomel FILM ID 3754 17:15-17:30: "S: wurden die neuen Gaskammern gebaut. L: Wann? Im welcher Monat? S: Im September" (Franz Suchomel – Collections Search – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ushmm.org (accessed: 30.05.2021).

50. *The Death Camp Treblinka*, ed. by A. Donat, New York: Holocaust, 1979, p. 296 et seq., *Excerpts From Judgments (Urteilsbegründung)* (AZ-LG Düsseldorf: 11931638, p. 49 et seq.): "Schon bald nach der Betriebsaufnahme stellte sich heraus, dass die Kapazität des alten Gashauses nicht ausreichte, um die tägliche anfallen den Judentransporte reibungslos zu liquidieren. Man begann daher Ende August/ Anfang September 1942 mit dem Bau eines neuen grossen Gashauses, das mehr und grossere Gaskammern enthielt und nach etwa einmonatiger Bauzeit in Betrieb genommen werden konnte". = *NS-Vernichtungslager – Im Spiegel deutscher Strafprozesse. Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Chelmno*, ed. by A. Rückerl, München 1977, p. 203, note 62.

51. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], pp. 1, 21.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 16, 17; Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 12, 1945, p. 1; Minutes of the hearing of the witness of January 4, 1947, pp. 2, 7, 8.

cant portion of the time of its murderous activities and participated in the construction of many structures on the camp area, he becomes an invaluable source of information regarding the Treblinka II extermination camp. Just a few days after arriving at the camp, he was included the Work Commando that constructed the new gas chambers.⁵³

In Wiernik's book, the account of the construction of the new gas chambers until their completion and commissioning is composed of four parts.⁵⁴ The final part contains information that the construction works lasted five weeks. Each of these parts contains descriptions of the torture of prisoners by the German and Ukrainian camp personnel. These four fragments are integrated into Wiernik's account of his stay at Treblinka. They provide details of the layout of the camp, its facilities and their operational methods.⁵⁵ Such a narrative style may initially obscure the understanding of Wiernik's text, until one recognises the logic and structure contained in it. The acts of violence mentioned there took place not only during the construction works, but also on the same day during the removal of bodies from the old gas chambers to mass graves. Wiernik and other prisoners had to additionally perform this incredibly burdensome work, which made them utterly exhausted, both physically and mentally. Apart from carrying out both of these tasks, they were also being "punished" after working hours.⁵⁶

The descriptions of the functioning of the old gas chambers may be dated, therefore, with a high degree of certainty, to a time before the launch of these new, more capacious chambers. Later, the old chambers were only used occasionally, when dealing with a very large number of "deportees".⁵⁷ However, it is possible that Wiernik looks forward to the future, at times. For instance, he presents the sadistic cruelty of "Ivan the Terrible", who later also worked with the new gas chambers.

After the completion of the construction works, Wiernik's perspective changed significantly. The Germans recognised his exceptional joinery skills and promoted him to the position of a "Camp Foreman". From then on, he was treated much better than regular prisoners and had to move around the entire camp to complete tasks assigned by the Germans.⁵⁸ It

53. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 4.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5, 6, 7, 8-9.

55. *Ibid.*, e.g.: pp. 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 10; Jechiel Rajchman, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 12, 1945, p. 2; S. Willenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 90; Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, p. 156.

58. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], pp. 7, 9; Szyja Warszawski, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 9, 1945, p. 2; Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 12, 1945, p. 1.

cannot be ruled out that, like other prisoners, he was also being employed later to move bodies from the gas chambers to mass graves.

Wiernik's sources of information are of two types. Firstly, his own observations, reflections, and conclusions. Part of his knowledge might have been acquired through conversations with his fellow inmates, especially those working at the gas chambers, as he spent the nights with them in the barracks in the *Totenlager* area.⁵⁹

Below, I'm providing four excerpts from *A Year in Treblinka* (at length for better understanding). The first one requires a comment.

First excerpt:

On August 29, wake-up as always, but in Polish. We get up immediately and go out to the square. There's no need to get dressed since we sleep in our clothes, so we quickly follow the command. We form rows. The orders are given in Polish. In general, they address us politely. Franc speaks again. He says that from today, everyone will work in their professions. They started selecting professionals. The first were construction workers. I also reported as a master builder. We were separated from the rest. There were 15 of us in total. We were handed over to three Ukrainians. One, a senior private named Kostenko, who was not threatening in appearance. The second, it was Andrejew, an ordinary 'wachman' (guard) of average height, stocky, and a round, red face. He was a good and calm person. The third, Mikoda: short, skinny, malicious, with bandit eyes, a sadist. To them, two more Ukrainians with rifles were added to guard us. They led us into the forest and ordered to dismantle barbed-wire barriers and cut down the trees. Kostenko and Andrejew were quite lenient, they turned a blind eye to work. While, Mikoda urged us on with a whip and shouted orders. Among all those selected, there were no real professionals, they only claimed to be joiners, because they didn't want to work with corpses. These pretenders were mocked and beaten. At noon, we stopped working and returned to the barracks for lunch, which consisted of soup, porridge, and moldy bread. Such dinner was nearly inedible under normal circumstances, but we, hungry and exhausted, ate it all. At 1 p.m., the 'wachman' with the Ukrainians came for us, and we worked until evening. In the evening, as usual, going back home, command etc. On that day, a lot of Germans were all around us, again. There were about 700 of us. Among the Germans, there was

59. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [*A Year in Treblinka*], p. 9.

Franc with his dog. Suddenly, he asked, smiling, who knew the German language. About 50 people stepped forward. He ordered them to step out of line and form a separate group. He did it all with a smile, so as not to arouse suspicion. They were abducted, and they never returned to us. None of them were listed among the survivors. Under what torments and tortures they died, no pen can describe. We spent a few more days in the same conditions, doing the same work. I worked with a colleague all the time, and somehow fate spared us. Maybe because we were both professionals, or maybe because we were meant to witness the agony and deaths of so many of our fellow brothers. They assigned my colleague and me to carry lime crates, and Andrejew watched over us. My colleague was a good craftsman and also listened to my advice. The 'wachman' was pleased with our work. He showed us kindness, even brought us a piece of bread. It was a big deal for us. We were simply dying of hunger. People who escaped another death that I will describe, turned yellow and fell due to hunger. Our workgroup grew larger. New workers arrived. They began digging foundations for a building. None of us knew what the building was for [new gas chambers – note by P.J.]. In the courtyard, there was a wooden building [old gas chambers – note by P.J.], surrounded by a high fence from all sides. It was a mystery for everyone what its purpose was. After a few days, a German foreman arrived with his assistant, and that is when the work began. There was a shortage of bricklayers. Many pretended to be workers to avoid working with corpses, but almost all of them were killed. Once, at bricklaying, I noticed a familiar face from Warsaw, Razanowicz. He was standing with a black eye. I understood that they would shoot him in the evening. A certain Warsaw engineer, Ebert, and his son were also working, but the executioner's hand quickly silenced them. Fate showed them no mercy. After a few days, I found out what the building surrounded by the high fence was for. A shiver of horror ran down my spine. My colleague and me were hewing and edging timber. It was very difficult for us to work in those conditions. I hadn't worked like this for 25 years. My colleague was not a joiner and he struggled with everything. He was a carpenter by trade and not skilled with an axe. However, he managed with my help. I am a joiner by trade. For several years, I had been a member of the examination board in the Warsaw Chamber of Crafts. Eight days passed in a hard vegetation

that's hard to describe. During that time, no new transports arrived. On the eighth day, a new transport from Warsaw was brought in.⁶⁰

Wiernik recounts that between August 28 or, maybe, the start of work on August 29 and the arrival of the next transport after a longer break, three sets of "a few days" had passed.⁶¹ It was only then that he saw with his own eyes the purpose of the building housing the gas chambers. He also mentions that this was not possible earlier due to the eight-day break in transport arrivals. The last transport before the break arrived from Warsaw to Treblinka on August 27 or 28.⁶² It wasn't until September 3 that transports from the Warsaw Ghetto were resumed. The first one arrived at Treblinka on the following morning, September 4.⁶³ Between August 27 or 28 and September 4, depending on the counting method, eight days passed.

Based on these calculations, it can be determined that the day of the "beginning of the work" on the construction of the new gas chambers was a few days before September 4. This would have been either September 1 or 2. The arrival of the German foreman could be associated with Stangl assuming the command of Treblinka at the start of September 1942.⁶⁴

Second excerpt:

When I arrived at the camp, there were already three chambers for gassing. During my stay, another 10 were added. The dimensions of each chamber were: 5 x 5 metres, in total 25 square metres, 1.90 m high [Here follows a detailed description of the building of the old gas chambers and the entire installation used for killing victims with exhaust fumes from a Soviet tank – note by P.J.]. Two Ukrainians worked at the machines [i.e. Ivan 'the Terrible' and Nikolay]. Ivan, tall, with seemingly kind and gentle eyes, yet a sadist. He took pleasure in inflicting torture on the victims. He would sometimes attack us while we were working, nail an ear down to the wall, or order us to lie on the floor and then count harsh lashes. [...] The day when I first saw how children, women, and men were led into the death building nearly drove me mad. I was tearing my

60. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

61. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 5.

62. A. Levin, *op.cit.*, pp. 210-211: "Friday, August 28, (1942) [...]. Yesterday they drove 4,000 men, women and children from Warsaw to their deaths. Today the 'action' is going on. They are encircling and besieging the sheds, but there are – as you can hear – no wagons"; Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, pp. 129-130.

63. Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-131.

64. Ibid., p. 128.

hair out and shedding bitter tears of despair. I suffered the most when I saw children with their mothers or those alone, who didn't realise that their brief strings of life would be cut short in a matter of minutes amid the greatest torment.⁶⁵

Third excerpt:

They crowded 450 to 500 people into a 25 sq. metres chamber. [...] After the gassing was finished, Ivan and Nikolay checked the situation. Then, they moved to the other side where the door is located near the ramp, they opened it and threw the gassed victims out. The task that awaited us was to carry them to the mass graves. We were exhausted, as we had been working on the construction since morning. Nonetheless, there was no one to appeal to. We could resist and be lashed, perish the same death as the others, or a crueler one, so without complaining, we did everything. Above us, there was the 'Hauptmann' (I don't know his name) of average height, wearing glasses. He kept on beating and shouting. I was also being beaten continuously. I raised a questioning look at him, then he paused for a moment and said, 'Wenn du nicht der Zimmermann bist, dan wirst du getötet'. I looked around. Almost everyone working shared my fate. The entire gang of dogs, Germans, and Ukrainians were beating and biting. About 25 percent collapsed while working. Without examining, we threw them into the graves. We returned in a smaller group. I was fortunate that after the 'Hauptmann' left, 'Unterscharführer' released me from that work.

On a daily basis, they gassed 10 to 12 thousand people. We set up a narrow track and people were being transported to the grave, on a platform. But we couldn't keep up, so we pulled them in pairs using straps. That evening I experienced another heavy moment. Well, after a tough day, we were not taken to camp 1 but to camp 2. There, the sight was completely different. I will never forget that sight. Passing by the ramp, I saw thousands of corpses strewn across the camp yard. These were the bodies of fresh victims. Ukrainians and Germans were shouting and giving loud orders. They were savagely shouting and inhumanely beating workers with rifle butts and rods, the workers had bloodied faces, bruised eyes, and clothes torn by dogs. Beside them there were Capos. At the entrance to camp 2, there were single-storey observation towers. The towers could be accessed by ladders. Beside these ladders,

65. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 6.

victims were being tortured. [...] I saw this for the first time in the evening. The moon and spotlights illuminated a horrific massacre of half-dead people and the corpses lying next to them. The moans of the tortured merged with the whistling of the lashes falling on their backs.

When I arrived at camp 2, there was only one barrack, unfinished bunks, and a field kitchen in the yard. I met plenty of acquaintances from Warsaw there, but they had changed beyond recognition. Dark-skinned, swollen, beaten. I didn't enjoy their company for long either. New faces, new acquaintances. Constant novelty and constant death. I learned to look at every living person as at near-future dead bodies. I would assess them with my eyes, thinking about their weight. Who will carry them to the grave and how many lashes they will receive. It is terrible, but true. Would you believe that a person living in such conditions can sometimes smile, joke? You can get used to anything.⁶⁶

Fourth excerpt:

The new construction at which I worked was located between camp 1 and camp 2 and was built very quickly. It turned out that these were 10 new gas chambers. These chambers were larger than the previous ones: approximately 7 x 7 metres, around 50 square metres. Once completed, they packed 1,000 to 1,200 people into one chamber. The chambers were of a corridor layout system. There were five chambers on each side of the corridor. Each chamber had two doors: one through which victims were brought in, it was facing the corridor, and the other on the side of the camp, parallel to the first door, this door was used for removing the corpses. The design of the first and second doors was similar to the doors in the previous chambers. The view from the side of camp 1 was as follows: five wide concrete steps, and on both sides of the steps there were carefully arranged baskets with flowers. A long corridor. Zion Star on the top of the roof on the side facing the camp. The building looked like an antiquated temple. When the building was completed, the 'Hauptsturmführer' said to his subordinates, 'Endlich die Judens tadt fertig'. The work at these chambers lasted for 5 weeks. It felt like ages for us. Work from dawn until night under the pressure of lashes and rifle butts. One of the 'wachmans' (guards), Woronkow, was beating and torturing us mercilessly. He killed several workers every day. Although our physical torment

66. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], pp. 6-8.

was beyond the comprehension of normally living people, at this work we suffered even more morally. Every day, transports kept on arriving. They were ordered to undress immediately, then were led to the three old gas chambers for gassing. The path to these chambers led through our work area [the construction site of the new gas chambers – note: P.J.]. Many among these victims recognised their own children, wives, families. If someone, driven by pain, broke away and ran toward them, they were killed on the spot. It was in such conditions, that we were building the death chambers for ourselves and our brothers. It lasted for five weeks. After completing the work on the chambers, I was taken back to camp I, where I set up a barber shop. Before their death, women's hair was cut off and was carefully collected. These hairs were used for certain purpose, which I know nothing about.⁶⁷

The passage in the fourth excerpt, beginning and ending with the information that the new gas chambers were built for five weeks, is crucial to determine the time of their completion and commissioning. When reading this excerpt, a thought comes to mind that these “5 weeks” should be counted from the “arrival of the German foreman” when the “work began”.

The information about torturing of the workers by Woronkow is understood as also referring to Wiernik (“he kept on beating and torturing us mercilessly”). Thus, if we count the period of “5 weeks” as described, it would significantly stand out in his account due to particularly traumatic memories. Prior to the “arrival of the German foreman”, he and his colleague are supposed to have been treated better (“somehow fate spared us”).

The understanding of Wiernik's narrative is complicated in the fourth excerpt by the way he uses verbs and pronouns in the first-person plural makes, as their meaning extends beyond a literal interpretation. Sometimes, they are used in this manner to recount the experiences of a group one was (or is) a part of and with which a special bond is felt. This bond is formed through shared intense experiences. The style of narration used by Wiernik isn't entirely logical, as it carries an emotional character.

The style of using the first-person plural when describing the experiences of a community, even when those experiences weren't directly lived, can indeed be a way to convey emotions and shared feelings within that group. It can also involve projecting one's own emotions or experiences onto the entire group due to a sense of shared identity or similar experiences.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

In the excerpt involving “Woronkow”, Wiernik may use first-person plural pronouns (“we”, “our”) to express suffering he didn’t personally experience, or experienced to a lesser extent than the rest of the “camp community”⁶⁸ (e.g. because he was treated better for a period). While in turn, the statement “we suffered... morally” could be an expression of projecting his own emotions onto other fellow prisoners.

Moral suffering stems from a sense of helplessness in the face of an overwhelming evil. It appears in vulnerable individuals who are sensitive to the suffering of others.⁶⁹ Wiernik meant those among the builders of the new gas chambers who, desperately and at the cost of their lives, wanted to save their loved ones from going to death in gas chambers. Apart from them, there were most probably others who, like Wiernik himself, “suffered morally”, even though they didn’t see their family members among those heading for death.⁷⁰ The scenes they witnessed at Treblinka would only serve to make them more aware of the fate of their loved ones.

Most of the prisoners only wanted to survive. They were aware that getting emotionally involved in the fate of others, which was already sealed, would only weaken their own will to survive. Some individuals even resorted to collaborating with the enemy.⁷¹

68. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 2: “What are our wives, children and mothers to blame? [...] Blood everywhere. Our innocent blood. The blood of our children, brothers and sisters. The blood of our fathers and mothers. And we, the helpless, feel that we will not escape our fate.”

69. J. Makselon, “Psychologiczne aspekty cierpienia” [Psychological aspects of suffering], *Symposium*, 2 (7) 2000, p. 77: “moral suffering which is the ‘pain of the soul’. It is associated with the danger of one’s own death or that of others, with persecution from those around you with remorse, or with the difficulty of understanding why people who do wrong prosper while those righteous suffer. Suffering can also take on a human or social dimension when a tragedy happens to many people at the same time, as in the case of natural disasters, epidemics or wars.”

70. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 6: “The day I first saw children, women and men being led to the death building drove me almost mad. I pulled hair out of my head and shed bitter tears of despair. I suffered most when I watched children by their mothers or alone, who did not realise that the streak of their short lives would come to an end in a few minutes amidst the greatest torment”. A passage from the introduction to *A Year in Treblinka* (p. 1) sounds puzzling in this context: “I sacrificed all my nearest and dearest. I led them to the execution myself. I myself built death chambers for them”. Wiernik nowhere informs the reader that he saw his “closest ones” going to their death while he was building the new gas chambers. These three sentences imply that they would have died sooner or later in the gas chambers he was constructing.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

The beating of prisoners, in addition to their devastation, aimed to force them to exert maximum effort, whether during the construction of the gas chambers or at the removal of bodies from the gas chambers to mass graves. The builders of the new gas chambers had to perform this extremely physically and mentally taxing work on the same day.⁷² Such an intense exploitation led to a swift death, as the oppressors immediately eliminated those who were less efficient and replaced them with newcomers. However, certain types of construction work required a level of precision that couldn't be achieved in a situation of notorious torture. For instance, in the period between the division into work commando until the arrival of the German foreman, on two occasions, Wiernik performed a safer work. The second time, together with a colleague, he was hewing and edging timber. This brutal and distracting treatment significantly hindered or even prevented them from accomplishing their tasks. The same observation applies to many prisoners performing skilled crafts, such as bricklaying, carpentry, and joinery. Therefore, the beating of skilled workers⁷³ could not have had the same aim as with other prisoners i.e. getting them, as quickly as possible, to a state where they could no longer perform their work. The constant influx of new prisoners was not sufficient, because they needed some time to start performing their tasks properly on the construction site. Among the newcomers there were individuals of varying health conditions and degrees of physical endurance.

The expression "under the pressure of batons and rifle butts" that appeared in the excerpt "with Woronkow" is sufficiently comprehensive to be used to describe both the gentler treatment of skilled craftsmen and also the brutal and ruthless treatment of prisoners working at the old gas chambers. Furthermore, it signifies both the potential "threat of using batons and rifle butts" and the actual "beating with batons and rifle butts".

72. Ibid., p. 7: "The work of carrying them to the graves awaited us. We were overtired, because we had been working on the construction site since morning. Still, there was no one to appeal to. We could have resisted, could have been beaten and received lashings and could have died the same death as others or a more cruel one, so we did everything without a murmur. Above us a 'Hauptmann' (I don't know his name) of medium height, wearing glasses. He was beating and shouting. And I got hit. He was beating me continuously. I raised a questioning glance at him, then he pauses for a moment and says 'Wenn du nicht der Zimmermann bist, dan wirst du getötet' I look back. Almost all working people share my fate. A whole pack of dogs, Germans and Ukrainians keep on beating and biting. 25 per cent fall at work. Without examination, we throw them into the graves. We return in smaller numbers. I was fortunate enough to be released from work by 'Unterscharführer' after the 'Hauptmann' left."

73. Ibid., p. 4.

In Wiernik's account of the first few days in the camp since his arrival on August 24, there are many mentions of prisoners being beaten with the use of instruments intended for that purpose, e.g. batons and rifle butts.⁷⁴ It is clear from these references that systematic beating of prisoners by German and Ukrainian guards was a strictly observed standard at Treblinka. Wiernik himself was always among those being beaten. Therefore, it is difficult to assume that the period of five weeks during which the new gas chambers were erected stood out in this regard in any particular way. Similarly, the "elimination" of several people daily by Woronkow should not be considered as something extraordinary. On August 30, Franz was able to "eliminate" as many as 50 prisoners at a time.⁷⁵

In all likelihood, August 29 was considered by Wiernik to be the beginning of the construction works, as he recounts, at that time: "We were taken to the forest and ordered to dismantle the barbed wire barriers and cut down trees in the forest."⁷⁶ Traditionally, construction works begin with earthworks primarily involving land leveling, surveying, and marking foundations, followed by excavation.⁷⁷ The rest of the prisoners began on that day other preparatory work for the construction of the new gas chambers⁷⁸ on that day. The "forest" where Wiernik worked was not necessarily located outside the camp, but could have been within its premises, on the border between camp 1 and the *Totenlager* (the killing area). This is supported by his account from a later period, after the new gas chambers were put into operation: "I worked in the forest processing wood. This forest was located between the first camp and the second one. This is where the transports of naked children, women, old people, and men passed through. A silent march of death."⁷⁹ The builders of the new gas chambers would have

74. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], pp. 3, 4.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

77. A. Dyżewski, *Technologia i organizacja budowy*, t. 1: *Podstawy technologii i mechanizacji robót budowlanych* (ed. 4, revised and supplemented under the supervision of Professor R. Ciołek DSc. Eng.), Warszawa 1989, pp. 22-23 (pp. 280-288); cf. the Act of July 7, 1994 (Journal of Laws of 1994 no. 89 item 414): Chapter 5. Commencement and conduct of construction works. Article 41 1. The commencement of construction shall take place at the moment of undertaking preparatory works on the construction site. 2. Preparatory works: 1) geodetic delineation of objects in the field; 2) execution of land levelling; 3) development of the construction site including construction of temporary facilities; 4) execution of connections to the technical infrastructure network for the purposes of construction. (<https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/>).

78. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 4.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

had to start not only by dismantling the barbed wire fence that marked the boundaries of the *Schlauch* and each part of the camp, but also by cutting down the trees growing in that area.⁸⁰

Having deducted five weeks, or 35 days, from August 29, 1942, we arrive at October 2 or 3, or *Hoshana Rabbah*, the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, or *Shemini Atzeret* included in the Feast. On one of these two days, the construction of the gas chambers was completed, and on the same or on the following day, the killing of the Jews began in them.

When Wiernik testified before Judge Zdzisław Łukasziewicz on October 12, 1945 and before the Supreme National Tribunal on January 4, 1947, he claimed that he had been deported from Warsaw and arrived at the camp one day earlier than described in *A Year in Treblinka*, i.e. on August 22 and 23, 1942 respectively.⁸¹ Since he provided the same date twice within less than a year and a half, so the possibility that an error crept into his 1944 brochure must be taken seriously.

At one point in his 1947 testimony, Wiernik uttered words that could be understood to imply that the new gas chambers had been under construction for six weeks, which would be a week longer than described in *A Year in Treblinka*.

On a certain day, Untersturmführer Franz called out that people for construction works were needed. I volunteered and was included in the construction work group. From then on, every day, I observed and witnessed how people stood naked and waited to be admitted to the gas chambers. Then I saw them being taken out of the gas chambers into the graves.

This lasted for six weeks, as long as I worked at the construction of the chambers.

Ten of these chambers were built, previously there were only three.⁸²

To properly understand Wiernik's words, the context of what he was saying and his mental state must be taken into consideration.⁸³ From the

80. A. Krzepicki, *op.cit.*, pp. 96-98; S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *Obóz zagłady Treblinka II. Topografia zbrodni*, Warszawa-Treblinka 2021, p. 124 (pic. 29), p. 126 (pic. 31).

81. Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of October 12, 1945, p. 1; Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of January 4, 1947, p. 2.

82. Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of January 4, 1947, p. 4.

83. The testimony to this is found in the opening sentences of *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 1.: "Very often I wake up at night with a terrible groan. Nightmarish visions interrupt my much-desired sleep. I see thousands of

moment of his arrest and entry onto the carriage on August 22, 1942, until the completion of the construction of the new gas chambers, both he and other prisoners continually experienced the cruelty of the Germans. In addition to this, he had to carry the bodies of freshly gassed victims to the mass graves, and bodies, often in a state of decomposition, from other parts of the camp. Recalling all of this caused strong emotions in Wiernik, which were noted in his testimony from 1947.⁸⁴ This may have, therefore, influenced the content of his statement, which might have been less thought-out and structured than his account in *A Year in Treblinka*.

In my opinion, Wiernik counted the "6 weeks" from Saturday, August 22, when his hell began,⁸⁵ until Friday-Saturday, October 2-3, when he was promoted to the position of one of the camp masters after the completion of the gas chambers. Those camp masters lived in significantly better conditions than the rest of the prisoners ("Chairman: you were kept alive thanks to that you were a professional joiner? Witness: Yes.")⁸⁶

In 1942, the sixth day of the Feast of Tabernacles fell on the 1st of October, and the seventh day, known as *Hoshana Rabbah* was on the 2nd of October. In our considerations, also the 3rd of October, when *Shemini Atzeret* was observed might be taken into account as well.

skeletons, stretching out their dead hands to me, asking for life and mercy. And I, drenched in drops of sweat, feel powerless to help. Then I jump up, rub my eyes and I'm glad that it is just a dream. My life is poisoned. The spectres of death pass before me. Children, children and more children. [...] When I look at myself in a stream or a river, fear and wonder twist my face. [...] I carry a hundred centuries on my shoulders. It is hard for me. Oh, how hard. And yet, for the time being, I must carry this burden. I want to and I must. [...] In the wildest imagination no one can create such an image as that which I have seen and experienced. No pen can describe it either. I want to tell everything. Let people know it all."

84. Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of January 4, 1947. During the hearing, Wiernik cried five times (pp. 3-5). He also reportedly said: "I have already described it in my book *A Year in Treblinka*. It was all too painful for me to tell." (p. 2), and: "This is described in detail in the book *A Year in Treblinka*. It is difficult for me to talk about it. [...] I remember everything, but it is difficult for me to talk about it." (p. 8).

85. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [*A Year in Treblinka*], p. 2: "It's getting more and more stuffy in the carriage, I'm short of breath. Hopeless, sad and terrible. [...] Amid endless torment, we reached Małkinia. We stood there all night."

86. Jankiel Wiernik, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of January 4, 1947, p. 2.

3. THE HOLIDAY OF SUKKOT AND ITS CONNECTIONS TO THE HOLY TEMPLE

At the time of the Temple, an Israelite was obliged to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year to participate in the religious ceremonies held there. These were the so-called “three pilgrimage festivals” (*shalosh regalim*): the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread (*Pesach*, *Maccot*), the Feast of Pentecost (*Shavuot*), and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*⁸⁷). Even today, these holidays are among the most solemnly celebrated by the Jews. However, due to the absence of the Temple, they differ from the ancient ones.

The spring *Pesach* commemorated the oldest events in the history of Israel as the chosen people of God. These were the Night of Exodus and the first day of freedom.⁸⁸ Pentecost is celebrated on the fiftieth day, counting from the day of *Pesach*. In later times, it was associated with the giving of the Law on the Mount Sinai, which, due to the Israelites’ practice of the worship of the golden calf, had to be repeated.⁸⁹ During the autumn *Sukkot*, the Jews commemorate the time of wandering through the desert, which began after the Exodus from Egypt.⁹⁰ Israel then dwelled in tents during that time and was under the special care of God, who dwelt among them in the Tent of the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*).⁹¹ This “dwelling”, a form of God’s Presence, was called *Shekhina*.⁹² A pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night were the sign of His Presence.⁹³ When Solomon built the Temple (*Beit HaMikdash*), its central structure (*Hekhal*) took over the role of the Tabernacle. Then on *Sukkot*, during the dedication ceremony of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the Ark of the Covenant was, *inter alia*, transferred to the *Hekhal*. At that time, the *Shekhina* visibly shifted the dwelling place from the Tent of the Tabernacle to the main building of the Temple.⁹⁴

I Kgs 8,1-4, 63-66 [New Catholic Bible (NCB)]: Solomon then assembled all of the elders of Israel, all of the heads of the tribes and the leaders of

87. Ex 23,14-17, 34,18-24; Deut 16, 1-17; R. Lilientalowa, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

88. Ex 12,1-51; R. Lilientalowa, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-44.

89. Ex 19,1-24,18, 32,1-34,35; Lev 23,15-22; Num 28,26-31; Deut 16,9-12; R. Lilientalowa, *op.cit.*, pp. 44-61.

90. Ex 13,20-22; Lev 23,33-44 (42-43); R. Lilientalowa, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-98.

91. Ex 40,1-18,34-38; Lev 23,42-43.

92. Ex 25,8; Ps 132,5; A. Unterman, R. G. Horwitz, J. Dan, *Shekhinah*, Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 18, ed. M. Berenbaum, F. Skolnik, pp. 440-444; M. McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited. Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 147-153.

93. Ex 13,21-22, 40,35-38; Wis 10,15-17; 18,3-4.

94. I Kgs 8,1-12 (10-11); II Chr 5,11-14 (13-14), 7,1-3.

the ancestral clans of the Israelites. They came to King Solomon in Jerusalem in order to bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord out of the City of David, that is, Zion. All of the men of Israel assembled before King Solomon at the festival during the month of Ethanim, the seventh month. When all of the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took the Ark and they brought the Ark of the Lord and the tent of meeting and all of the sacred furnishings that were in the tabernacle [...] Solomon offered up a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord of twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred twenty-two thousand sheep. This is how the king and all of the people of Israel dedicated the temple of the Lord. That day the king consecrated the court in front of the temple for burnt offerings, grain offerings, and for the fat of peace offerings because the bronze altar that was before the Lord was too small for burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the fat of peace offerings. At that time Solomon celebrated before the Lord, our God, with all of Israel, a great assembly, people who came from the entrance of Hamath down to the Wadi of Egypt. It lasted seven days, and then another seven days, fourteen days in all. The next day he sent the people away. They blessed the king and they went home, filled with joy and glad of heart for all of the good things that the Lord had done for David, his servant, and Israel, his people.

4. THE DECOR OF THE NEW GAS CHAMBER BUILDING

According to eyewitnesses, the building of the new gas chambers had the appearance of an “antiquated” or “ancient temple”, or a Jewish “synagogue”. Above the entrance, which was accessed by five-step stairs, there was the Star of David.

Jankiel Wiernik:

On the top of the roof, facing the camp, there was the Star of David. The building looked like an antiquated temple. When the building was completed, the ‘Hauptsturmführer’ said to his subordinates: ‘Endlich die Judens tadt fertig’ [likely should be: *Endlich die Judenstadt fertig*, meaning “Finally, the Jewish city is finished.” – trans.].⁹⁵

Informant(s) of Vasili Grossman:

[...] a beautiful masonry building, finished with wood, constructed in the shape of an ancient temple [Russian: *drewnij chram*].

95. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 8.

Five broad concrete steps led to low but very wide, massive, and beautifully decorated door.⁹⁶

Jechiel Rajchman:

Opposite the train platform where the barracks are located, a road called 'schlauch' leads to the gas chambers. It is lined with trees and looks like an alley in a garden. Along this road paved with white sand, naked people run. No one returns from this road. [...] 'Schlauch' is not long. After a few minutes, you are in a white building with the Star of David on it. A German stands on the stairs, points to the entrance with a smile and says, "Bitte, bitte!" The stairs lead to a flower-adorned corridor, with long towels hanging on the walls.⁹⁷

Jerzy Rajgrodzki:

The entrance to the gas chambers from the 'Himmelstrasse' avenue side was grand. There was a colonnade. The whole thing resembled the entrance to a synagogue. Inside, above the entrance, there was the Star of David against the background of a portico. After a few steps, you entered a corridor.⁹⁸

In no other source will we find information that columns stood in front of the entrance to the new gas chamber building. It is also missing from the model made by Wiernik. The presence of columns would explain, however, why in descriptions of the appearance of the new gas chambers from the entrance side, the terms like "antiquated temple" (Wiernik), or "ancient temple" (Grossman) appear. The front decorated with a colonnade could evoke associations with ancient architecture ("ancient"), which for many centuries served as inspiration for European builders ("antiquated"). Such a colonnade, for example, was present in the Great Synagogue at Tłomackie in Warsaw.

During the Eichmann trial on June 6, 1961, Avraham Lindwasser⁹⁹ testified that one day when he together with SS man, Matthes entered the new

96. V. Grossman, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

97. J. Rajchman, *Ocalałem...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

98. J. Rajgrodzki, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

99. "While we worked at the gas chambers, inside the corridor of the small gas chambers, we could also see the gas chambers at the end. On one occasion I was even taken – again by that Matthias (Matthes) – to the first camp, in order to fetch pairs of forceps for extracting teeth, since extra men had been added to our group. We passed by the large chambers and, on the way back I saw a big curtain at the entrance to the large chambers, a curtain used to cover the Ark containing

gas chamber building from the *Schlauch* side, he saw a synagogue *parochet* hanging at the entrance. On it, there was an image of the Star of David and the Hebrew inscription of the 20th verse of Psalm 118,¹⁰⁰ which he conventionally translated as: "This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous shall enter."¹⁰¹ Arad presented a different translation: "This is the gate to the Lord through which the righteous shall enter."¹⁰² Here, it is legitimate to interpret *lamed* not only as expressing the genitive (of the Lord) but also as the preposition "to" or "towards" (to the Lord, towards the Lord¹⁰³).

The modern *parochet*¹⁰⁴ is a synagogue curtain used to cover the *Aron ha-Kodesh*,¹⁰⁵ the Torah ark, which is a decorative wooden chest containing the Torah scrolls. *Aron ha-Kodesh* symbolically refers to the Ark of the Covenant (*Aron ha-Brit*). The text of the Ten Commandments is inscribed in the Torah, also known as the Five Books of Moses.¹⁰⁶ The synagogue *parochet* symbolically recalls the ancient *parochet* that covered the entrance to the "Holy of Holies" (*Kodesh ha-Kodashim*) where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, both in the *Mishkan*¹⁰⁷ and in the First and in the Second Temple.¹⁰⁸

Symbols often placed on the *parochet* include one or two Stars of David, a pair of lions, menorah(s), a crown representing the Torah, Tablets of the Ten Commandments, architectural structures reminiscent of the

the Torah Scrolls with the Shield of David on it and on the curtain there was the inscription, 'This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous shall enter'. The curtain was of quite large dimensions – it measured three by four metres, something like that.' – quote from <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/trials/lindwassertestimony.html> (accessed: 30.5.2021).

100. In the original text there is a tetragrammaton here "JHVB" ("JHVB gate"), Masoretic text: *זֶה הַשַּׁעַר לַיהוָה צְדִיקִים יָבֹאוּ בּוֹ*, *Stuttgartensia, Hebraica Biblia*, ed. A. Schenker, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997, p. 1548.

101. Septuaginta: αὕτη ἡ πύλη τοῦ κυρίου, δίκαιοι εἰσελεύσονται ἐν αὐτῇ; Ps 118,20 [New Catholic Bible (NCB)].

102. Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, p. 156: „This is the Gateway to God. Righteous men will pass through”.

103. 4389 ל [in:] L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J.J. Stamm, *Wielki słownik hebrajsko-polski i aramejsko-polski Starego Testamentu*, t. 1, Warszawa 2008, p. 478; B. Yaniv, *Parokhet and Kapporet*, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 15, p. 663

104. B. Yaniv, *Parokhet and Kapporet*, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 15, pp. 663-664.

105. R. Wischnitzer, B. Narkiss, *Ark*, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2, pp. 463-464.

106. Ex 20,2-17; Deut 5,6-21.

107. Ex 26,31-33, 27,21, 30,6.

108. II Chr 3,14.

Temple gates, often with *Boaz* and *Jachin* columns flanking the entrance to the *Hekhal* building, as well as just the *Boaz* and *Jachin* columns themselves, which can be symbolically represented by two thin strips of fabric. Many *parochets* feature Hebrew inscriptions, usually quotations from the Bible.¹⁰⁹

The *parochet* that was in the Jerusalem Temple appears in Glazar's memoirs:

They start to burn the bodies – there is nowhere else to bury them. They want to erase the traces. [...] It is not easy at all to burn such quantities of people, and that too in an open fire [...]. Glances from the bunks are constantly directed towards the small, barred windows. Behind them, a fiery purple is spreading and staining the night sky with its glow, turning it into a yellow-red reflection and dissolves into sulphuric vapours. Where the opposite bunk touches the external wall, Salwe appears. Erect, his back turned towards the small window, he gazes into the depths of the barracks. [...] I don't know Hebrew. But, I have read quite a lot of the Bible, the Old and New Testaments. Back then – during those solitary evenings after feeding the cattle, just under three months ago. Now, I am listening here with my eyes wide-open and see that the scene with the man on the cross who about the ninth o'clock cried out: 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Yes, yes, it could have looked like this: '...and behold, the curtain in the temple was torn ... the earth shook... the rocks began to crack' – there, behind Salwe's back, behind the bars.¹¹⁰

In this scene, "Salwe" stands with his back to the "bars", so – as it results from the information contained in Glazar's book – he is standing with his back to the *Totenlager*, where the gas chamber buildings and mass graves were located, and from which they had just started to excavate decomposing bodies to burn them. Glazar associated the *parochet* from the Temple which was supposed to have torn at the moment of the death of the Jew, Jesus.¹¹¹

The quote from the *parochet* at Treblinka was well-known to the Jews. Psalms 113-118, known as *Hallel*,¹¹² are sung (recited) during the majour

109. B. Yaniv, *Parokhet and Kapporet*, Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 15, pp. 663-664; "parochet", see A. Unterman, *op.cit.*, p. 210.

110. R. Glazar, *Stacja Treblinka*, pp. 32-34.

111. Matt 27,51.

112. N.M. Sarna, *Hallel*, Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 8, pp. 279-280.

Jewish holidays: *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, *Sukkot*, *Chanukah*.¹¹³ Psalm 118 seems to be most closely associated with *Sukkot*, as it mentions sukkot (tabernacles),¹¹⁴ describes the course of this holiday on the Temple grounds,¹¹⁵ and its two verses are recited by the Jews when using the *lulav*.¹¹⁶

The “Gate (to) the Lord” in Psalm 118, verse 20, is one of the gates in the Temple. On the one hand, as the name itself suggests, it is intended for God¹¹⁷ who passes through it when returning to His Temple, while on the other hand, it is also accessible to the “righteous” (Psalm 118:19¹¹⁸). In the first sense, the “gate” appears in Psalm 24¹¹⁹ and in Ezekiel.¹²⁰ In the second

113. *Mishnah Sukkah* 3,9-11; 4,1.8, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Sukkah (accessed: 30.05.2021); *Tract Pesachim* (Passover), ch. 5, p. 120, ch. 7, p. 169, ch. 9, p. 198, 200, ch. 10, pp. 243-247, 249-252; *Tract Succah* (Booths), ch. 3, pp. 55-56 [in:] *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, op. cit., vol. 7.

114. Ps 118,15: “Joyful shouts of triumph ring out in the tents of the righteous” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)].

115. Ps 118,27: “Holding leafy branches, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)].

116. Ps 118,1: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good [...]”; Ps 118,25: “O Lord, grant us salvation” (Hebr. *Hoshannah*) [New Catholic Bible (NCB)]; *Mishnah Sukkah* 3,9, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Sukkah (accessed: 30.05.2021); *Tract Succah* (Booths), ch. 3, p. 54 [in:] *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, op.cit.

117. Examples of using *lamed* with a tetragrammaton: Lev 27,9.14.16.21-22.26.28.30.32; Num 6,2.5-6.8.12; Deut 7,6; Judg 17,3; II Sam 8,11; I Kgs 8,63; I Chr 18,11; Neh 8,9; Zech 14,20-21.

118. Ps 118,19: “Open to me the gates of righteousness so that I may enter them and praise the Lord” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)].

119. Ps 24,7-10: “Lift up your arches, O gates; rise up, you ancient portals, so that the King of glory may come in. [...] Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts: he is the King of glory” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)].

120. Ezek 43,1-4: “Then the man brought me to the gate that faces the east, and there I beheld the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east [...]” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)]. The term “Gate of the Lord/JHVH” is most fittingly associated with the one in Ezekiel’s vision. It leads to the interior of the Hekhal and is to remain closed, as through it the Glory of the Lord passed when returning to the rebuilt Temple. Ezek 44,1-2: “Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary that faces east, but it was shut. The Lord said to me: This gate will remain closed. It shall not be opened, and no one may enter through it” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)]. The equivalent of this closed gate was supposed to exist in the Second Temple, *Mishnah Middot* 4,2 – https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Middot (accessed: 30.05.2021).

sense, in Isaiah,¹²¹ where it is mentioned as one of the elements of the times when there will be no more death,¹²² and the dead will be resurrected.¹²³

The Zion will be the center of the eschatological events described by the prophet.¹²⁴ The identification of the “house of God” with the “gateway to heaven” appears in the description of the mystical experience of the patriarch Jacob at Luz-Bethel.¹²⁵ Since the Temple has long ceased to exist, so verse 20 of Psalm 118 could be understood in an eschatological sense.

In the Jewish tradition, the term “righteous” refers to someone who observes the Law given by God to man, namely the Ten Commandments, and in a broader sense, the 613 *mitzvot* included in the Torah. The Ten Commandments and the 613 *mitzvot* primarily refer to man’s relationship to God, and also to other man (other people).¹²⁶

5. THE NUMBER, DIMENSIONS AND LAYOUT OF THE NEW GAS CHAMBERS

Another issue I would like to draw attention to are the numbers that Wiernik used to describe the new gas chambers. He perfectly knew their structure, as he was forced to work on their construction. These data are particularly valuable, because he was a master joiner, that is, an expert in the construction industry. Being an experienced “builder”, he was able to estimate quite precisely the length, width, height, and depth of works of human hands, even without the use of measuring devices. In his memoirs we can find a lot of data regarding the dimensions of objects within the camp.

Wiernik provided accurate dimensions of the old gas chamber, even to the tenths of a metre. The surface area of each of the three gas chambers was: 5 x 5 metres, height 1.9 metres. The heights above the ground of the two elevations at the front and back of the building were respectively

121. Isa 26,2: “Open the gates to allow the upright nation to enter, the nation that keeps faith” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)].

122. Isa 25,7-8: “On this mountain the Lord will destroy the veil that shrouds all the peoples, the path spread over all the nations; he will destroy death forever [...]” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)].

123. Isa 26,19: “But your dead will live and their bodies will rise again. Awake and sing for joy, you who sleep in the dust [...]” [New Catholic Bible (NCB)].

124. Isa 25,6; 26,1 ff.

125. Gen 28,12-13.16-17.

126. “Righteous” and “righteousness” in the Old Testament: Gen 6,9; Isa 26,2, 57,1-2; Hos 14,10; Hab 1,4; 2,4; Mal 3,18; Ps 1,6; 64,11; 68,4; 112,1-6.

0.8 metres and about 0.8 metres. The one from which the gas chambers were entered took the form of a corridor enclosed from the outside by a wall. The area onto which the bodies of the gassed were pulled out was referred to by Wiernik as the “ramp” and was 4 metres wide. The dimensions of the openings, which were closed by special doors through which bodies were removed from the gas chambers, were 2.5 x 1.8 metres.¹²⁷

When providing the dimensions of the new gas chambers, Wiernik appears to be a less precise source of information.¹²⁸ He mentions the number of gas chambers: ten, and that they were distributed in groups of five on each side of the corridor. The dimensions of each gas chamber were 7x7 metres. According to him, this gave a peculiar area of “about 50” instead of 49 square metres. The new gas chamber building was accessed through five-step stairs.¹²⁹

There are no corresponding data here to what Wiernik provided when describing the old gas chambers: the height of the gas chamber ceilings, the height and width of the ramps on both sides of the building, and the height and width of the openings through which the gassed bodies were removed. Wiernik was well aware of these details. During the Eichmann’s trial, he testified that the ceiling in the new chambers was 1.9 metres high, and the length and width of the entire building were 18 x 36 metres.¹³⁰

As opposed to the numbers he used to describe the old gas chambers, the parametres of the new gas chambers are always the natural numbers. 5, 7, 10, and 50 appear in *the Bible* where they are associated with significant events, holidays, and ideas, such as the creation of the world, the week and the Sabbath¹³¹ (7), the Ten Commandments¹³² (10), the Egyptian plagues¹³³ (10), the Sabbath year¹³⁴ (7), the Jubilee year¹³⁵ (7x7), the Menorah¹³⁶ (7),

127. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 6.

128. This is even more striking considering that the new gas chambers, in front of his eyes, consumed incomparably more victims than the old ones. Their surface area was a few times bigger (10 x 7 x 7 = 490 m²; 3 x 5 x 5 = 75 m²; proportions 490: 75 = 6.5333).

129. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 8 (cited above).

130. “The gas chambers of the large building were seven by seven. The entire building was thirty – six metres in length and eighteen metres wide. [...] Into a room of 1.90 metres, they forced many inside.”, quotation from <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/trials/wierniktestimony.html> (accessed: 30.05.2021).

131. Gen 1,1-2,3.

132. Ex 20,1-17; Deut 5,1-22.

133. Ex 7,14nn.

134. Ex 23,10-11; Lev 25,2-7; Deut 15,1-18.

135. Lev 25,8-17.

136. Ex 25,31-40.

Shavuot¹³⁷ (7x7), the duration of Jewish holidays like *Sukkot*¹³⁸ (7) and Passover¹³⁹ (7). Five is especially important to the Jews as it symbolises the Five Books of Moses, the Torah.

The combination of “7” times “7” equals “about 50”, as provided by Wiernik, appears in the Torah only once, in the context of dating the holiday of *Shavuot* in the *Book of Leviticus*.

Lev 23:15-16 [New Catholic Bible (NCB)]:

You shall count off for yourselves seven complete Sabbaths from the day after the Sabbath when you brought your omer as a wave offering. On the day after the seventh Sabbath, having counted fifty days, you shall offer a new cereal offering to the Lord.

In my opinion, for a Jew, Wiernik, the starting point for his associations might have been the completion of the construction of the new gas chambers during *Sukkot*, which became for Solomon an occasion to consecrate the Temple. It is to the Temple that all the numbers he provided in describing the new gas chambers would have to be related.

The arrangement of the ten gas chambers, five on the left and five on the right side, may symbolise the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. In Christian iconography, there is a tradition to place three Commandments on the first tablet and seven on the second. In synagogue iconography, always five Commandments are depicted on the left tablet and five on the right tablet. In the Temple, the original Tablets were deposited in the Ark of the Covenant, which was placed in the Holy of Holies, separated from the rest of the chambers by the *parochet*. In synagogues, their text is written on the Torah scrolls kept in the *Aron ha-Kodesh*, which is covered by a contemporary equivalent of the biblical *parochet*. At Treblinka, the entrance to the building housing the ten new gas chambers, which resembled an “antiquated”/“ancient” temple, was also covered by a *parochet*. The inscription on it indicated that it covered the “gate” leading to the interior of the Temple. The way in which the dimensions of each of the ten chambers were described could have been intended to evoke associations with the Feast of *Shavuot* (7x7=50) during which the Jews commemorate the day when the Ten Commandments were given to Israelites through Moses. The five-stair steps might have brought to Wiernik a recollection of the five books of the Torah in which the Ten Commandments are included.

137. Lev 23,15-16.

138. Lev 23,34.36.39-42; Num 29,12; Deut 16,13.15.

139. Lev 23,6-8; Num 28,17.24-25; Deut 16,3.

In the fourth excerpt analysed earlier, “with Woronkow”, we might be witnessing Wiernik imitating the style of the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch). He mentions twice that the new gas chambers were built over “5 weeks” (8,43: “The work on these chambers lasted 5 weeks”; 9,1: “It lasted 5 weeks”).¹⁴⁰ These twin pieces of information are separated by only nine lines of text. Repetitions are characteristic of the Torah.¹⁴¹

6. THE LOCATION OF THE NEW GAS CHAMBERS ON THE GROUND

Lager II, or *the Totenlager*, was situated on a small hill. This area was to some extent levelled during the dismantling of the camp by the Germans and, above all, after the war, including during preparations for the construction of a memorial.¹⁴² Eyewitnesses referred to *the Totenlager* as the “upper camp”, which accurately reflects its topographical features.¹⁴³ Also, the names used for *Schlauch*, the path by which prisoners were rushed to the old and new gas chambers: “Road to Heaven”, “Last Road”, and “Ascension Road” (*Himmelfahrtstrasse*¹⁴⁴), fitted the rising terrain in that area.¹⁴⁵

According to the account of the Treblinka SS man, Franz Suchomel, the old gas chambers were erected at the highest point of the hill, while the new ones were built at a slightly lower level.¹⁴⁶

Jerusalem is also situated on a plateau, although much more elevated. The innermost courtyard, intended exclusively for the priests, where *Hekhal* stood and the Courtyard of the Israelites were positioned higher than the Courtyard of the Women. During the night festivities of the Festival of Tabernacles, the Levites were supposed to sing the “Songs of Ascents” (gradual Psalms 120-134; from the Latin “gradus” – step) as they were descending the steps connecting the two courtyards.¹⁴⁷ These psalms were

140. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], pp. 8, 9.

141. Lev 23,34-36,39-42; Lev 24,17-18,21; Deut 16,2,5-6; Deut 16,13,15.

142. S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *op.cit.*, pp. 131, 154-157.

143. *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 155-156; Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, pp. 64-65, 157.

144. In German the term *Himmelfahrt* usually refers to “Ascension” of Jesus Christ and Mother of God.

145. S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *op.cit.*, pp. 25-26; Y. Arad, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

146. S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *op.cit.*, pp. 131-132.

147. Mishnah Sukkah 5,2.4, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Sukkah; *Tract Suckah (Booths)*, ch. 5, p. 77 [in:] *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, *op.cit.*, vol. 7.

also supposed to be sung during pilgrimages (“ascensions”) to Jerusalem.¹⁴⁸ That’s why in the Bible, one ascends to the Zion and to the Temple.¹⁴⁹

The emigrations of the Jews from Europe to Palestine were called *aliyahs*, or “ascensions” (first: 1882-1903, second: 1904-1914, third: 1919-1923, fourth: 1924-1928, fifth: 1929-1939, sixth and seventh during the war: 1940-1948).¹⁵⁰ The term *aliyahs*, in the sense of “going to the Land of the Fathers and to Jerusalem”, is derived from the Old Testament.¹⁵¹

If the building housing the new gas chambers was in any way associated by the Nazis with the *Hekhal* of the Jerusalem Temple, it is not necessarily coincidental that it was built on a slope, close to the top of a low hill. Those who were rushed to the gas chamber building through *Schlauch*, they were “ascending”.

We know that the Germans made significant efforts to keep the true purpose of the extermination camps secret. Therefore, the construction of the gas chambers on a hilltop at the Treblinka II extermination camp is all the more surprising. Taking into consideration the precision of the Germans, it is difficult to regard this an unplanned action, a coincidence, or an oversight.

7. CONCLUSION

Some of the references to Judaism, as intended by the Germans, were only becoming apparent to the victims when they were passing through the final section of the *Schlauch* and approached the entrance to the gas chambers. This included the Star of David above the entrance and the *parochet* with an image of the Star of David and a quote from the Bible. Others remained imperceptible to them. Only a few prisoners who had spent more time in the camp might have noticed or heard about them from their companions in misfortune. These references included the completion and commissioning of the new gas chambers during *Sukkot* as well as their layout and dimensions which for Wiernik might have brought to mind the Tablets of Moses, characteristic of Synagogue iconography. It should be noted here that the latter features had absolutely no influence on improving the

148. Each of these Psalms is preceded by the information that it is *שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת* or *שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת*, which means “Song of Ascents” or “Song of Steps”.

149. Isa 2,3; Jer 31,6; Ps 122,4; New Testament: Matt 20,17-18; Mark 10,32-33; Luke 2,42; 18,31; 19,28; John 2,13; 5,1; 7,8.14; 11,55; 12,20; Acts 15,2; 21,12; 25,9.

150. M. Louvish, F. Skolnik, *Aliyah*, Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 1, pp. 660-661.

151. Gen 13,1; 45,25; 50,14; Ex 12,38; Num 32,11; II Chr 36,23; Ezra 1,3; 2,1.59; 7,6-7.28; Neh 7,5-6.61.

efficiency of the extermination process, which could provide some clarification. The organisers of the extermination at Treblinka II, however, ensured that the killings were accompanied with the symbolism characteristic of Judaism, in a context that grossly contradicted the principles of Judaism.

It remains to be assumed that there had been two possible reasons that inspired the Germans, either in combination or separately. The first reason could be rooted in the desire of acrimonious Nazi anti-Semites to further perversely humiliate the Jews being murdered by profaning and ridiculing what they believed in and what had shaped them as a nation. The commencement of the genocidal activities at Treblinka II was connected to a mournful holiday when the demolition of the First and Second Temples is commemorated. This is when the first transport from the Warsaw Ghetto arrived there. In my opinion, it cannot be a coincidence that a little over two months later, during the feast commemorating consecration of the First Temple by Solomon, a building that looked like a "temple" of some kind, "antiquated" or "ancient", i.e., with an architectural décor not reminiscent of the contemporary buildings intended for religious worship was there completed and put into operation. This would draw the observers', namely the prisoners', attention to a vaguely defined past. The notice placed at the entrance to that building, stating "Here is the gate of the Lord", completed the range of associations the perpetrators aimed to evoke in their victims.

In the memoirs of Treblinka, there are several instances of the Germans mocking the Jewish religion. According to Jan Sułkowski, a Pole who worked at the construction of the extermination camp in late June and early July 1942, a group of 11 rabbis were ordered to perform "sukkot" and perform "ritual dances". During that time, the Germans entertained themselves by killing them with firearms. This event was photographed.¹⁵² In the quoted excerpt from Rajchman's memoirs about *Pesach* (Passover), the Germans provided the prisoners with matzah and a bottle of wine for the *Seder*. They participated in the ceremony for a few minutes, all the while mocking it. Rajchman describes it as a "acting out a comedy".¹⁵³ In Wiernik's memoirs, a German, named Karol, is mentioned. He would observe, laughing and making fun, a small group of very religious Jews performing their religious rites. "He even brought them 'tales' and 'twilm' for their prayers". When one of the prisoners died, he allowed a "proper burial and a monument to be erected". After some time, the corpse would be dug out

152. Jan Sułkowski, Minutes of the hearing of the witness of December 20, 1945, p. 4.

153. J. Rajchman, *Ocalałem...*, pp. 87-88.

and burned.¹⁵⁴ In order to “understand” the behaviour of this German, one must always remember that this was happening in one of the largest extermination camps. Wiernik, Glazar, Rajchman, and Willenberg recall the so-called “*szajsmajster*”, who disguised as a cantor or rabbi, among other roles, and supervised prisoners to use the latrine as quickly as possible.¹⁵⁵ It is also worth noting that *Schlauch* was referred to as the “road of ascension” (*Himmelfahrtstrasse*) or “Road to Heaven” (*Himmelweg*), it is not clear whether by the prisoners or the Germans.

Secondly, among the symbols invisible to the victims, there were those shared by Judaism and Christianity. I’m referring to those that would express the Ten Commandments on the Tablets of Moses. It should seem that suggesting their Christian dimension in an extermination camp intended for the Jews might not seem justified. However, Himmler, SS Commander with whom Hitler entrusted the implementation of the Extermination, believed that Christianity, also seen as a Jewish creation, was at least as dangerous to Nazism as the Jews themselves.¹⁵⁶ The goal of the Third Reich was a brutal and merciless conquest. Methods that contradicted the principles of Judeo-Christian ethics and values considered negative by the world of the Western civilisation, took on a positive meaning for the Nazis, gaining a sanction comparable to that of religion.

The ethics of Judeo-Christian origin, based on the Ten Commandments, restrained the mental expansion of Nazism. This was partly due to its proclamation of the equality of all people and the defense of the value of human life. For the Nazis, these principles were of a relative value, because they did not apply to the Jews, for instance, whose lives were deemed “lives not worth living” (German: *lebensunwertes Leben*).¹⁵⁷ An extermination of the People Chosen by God, on an unprecedented scale, perpetrated

154. J. Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince* [A Year in Treblinka], p. 15

155. Ibid., p. 18; R. Glazar, *Stacja Treblinka*, pp. 123-124; J. Rajchman, *Ocalatem...*, pp. 86-87; S. Willenberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-82.

156. P. Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: A Life*, trans. by J. Noakes and L. Sharpe, OUP Oxford, 2012, p. 262: “In public presentations of this idea Himmler identified Freemasons, communists, and Jews as dangerous enemies; within the SS he made it clear that he considered Christianity to be at least as dangerous. [...] Jews were both Freemasons and communists, and somehow or other they were also behind the intrigues of Christianity. Because, however, the Jews were to blame for everything, they remained, even in Himmler’s tirades, curiously insipid. By contrast, his rhetoric took flight when he was speaking against communists, homosexuals, and above all against Christianity.”

157. H. Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*, University of North Carolina 1997, p. 81.

on/in the symbol of the Tablets of Moses with the Ten Commandments was meant to symbolise the rejection of these principles by the *Herrenvolk*.

The prominent Nazis like Rosenberg and Himmler were interested in the pagan past of the Germans. It was emphasised that the adoption of Christianity had suppressed the natural nobility of the Germanic soul, which they believed was most faithfully regained within the ranks of the SS.¹⁵⁸ Mainly, it was about an obedience to the leader, valour in battle, and

158. A. Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century: An evaluation of the Spiritual-Intellectual Confrontations of Our Age*. English Language Translation of German Original: *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* by Alfred Rosenberg, trans. by J. Whisker, Historical Review Press, 2002, p. 4: "Christianity, with its vacuous creed of ecumenicalism and its ideal of HVMANITAS, disregarded the current of red blooded vitality which flows through the veins of all peoples of true worth and genuine culture."; p. 16: "Late Roman, Christian, Egyptian, or Jewish ideas and values have penetrated into the soul of Germanic man and partly destroyed it."; p. 416: "The prerequisite of every German education is the recognition of the fact that it is not Christianity which has brought us civilisation, but that Christianity has to thank Germanic character for its lasting values."; *The political diary of Alfred Rosenberg and the onset of the Holocaust*, ed. by J. Matthäus, F. Bajohr, trans. by K. Luft, J. Lambertz, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, pp. 34-36: "June 28 [1934]: The Führer has always shielded my consistent stance over the years, to the extent he could do so, given his position. Now, with a laugh, he repeatedly emphasized that he has been a pagan all along, and the time has come when the Christian poisoning is approaching its end."; pp. 261-263: "September 7, [19]41 [...] A large empire—and a people that is regressing in terms of mental initiative. And we need intellectual and spiritual strength for the last great conflict of our lives: for prevailing over the Christian denominations."; P. Longerich, *Himmler*, p. 270: "The radical anti-Christian turn in Germanic ideology, like its development into a Germanic faith, had already been relatively widespread in völkisch circles before 1914. Above all in the turbulent years after the defeat of the First World War the mythology of the Germanic hero was revived as a political force, plumped up with racial doctrines and set up as an ideal in contrast to the 'levelling down' practised by the western democracies. [...] Presumably in 1937 Himmler set down on paper the following thoughts: We live in an era of the ultimate conflict with Christianity. It is part of the mission of the SS to give the German people in the next half-century the non-Christian ideological foundations on which to lead and shape their lives. This task does not consist solely in overcoming an ideological opponent but must be accompanied at every step by a positive impetus: in this case that means the reconstruction of the Germanic heritage in the widest and most comprehensive sense."; p. 271: "As Himmler regarded their conversion to Christianity as the Teutons' decisive original sin, preventing Germanic virtues from unfolding to their full extent in the medieval empire, the 'missionary to the heathen', St Boniface was the particular object of the SS leader's anger. [...] But

mercifulness towards enemies, with cruelty being a positive, if not desirable, manifestation of these qualities.”¹⁵⁹

in Himmler's view the Christianization of the Teutons was above all the fault of 'Charles the Frank', that is, Charlemagne, whom he repeatedly accused in public speeches of slaughtering the Saxons; his son, Louis the Pious, was for Himmler simply 'infected with Jewishness'."

159. K. Grünberg, *SS – czarna gwardia Hitlera*, Warszawa 1985, p. 98, from: H. von Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler*, Zürich–New York 1940, p. 11, trans. by K. Grünberg: "In my Ordensburgs, Adolf Hitler stated, a youth will grow up before whom the world will tremble. A youth that is violent, possessive and cruel. This is what I want. It must be resistant to suffering. It must not know weakness or tenderness. I want to see the glitter of a wild animal's gaze in their eyes." (Own translation from Polish).

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Municipal and Communal Cultural Center in Kosów Lacki

“WHERE THE WIND ARRANGES FOR ETERNAL REST” – POETIC EVOCATIONS OF TREBLINKA (Anthology Project)

Literature of the times of war dedicated to the Shoah is shocking both in message as well as the abundance of it. For the first time since 18th century, when the occasional poetry was a natural component of the everyday, turbulent public discourse, the poetry became a mean to express yourself and to document the reality at such scale. Besides, just like then, it was mainly poetry that defined and shaped collective and personal consciousness, being its perfect reflection.¹ It was written by people with different sensibility to language and art, diverse talent, originating from various social backgrounds, representing different views. “What can also be surprising is the fact, that professional poets were a minority among them. The ‘epidemic of writing’, not only poetry, at that time embraced everyone, regardless of the social class. It was a mass phenomenon ‘Everyone was writing, journalists, writers, teachers, social activists, youth, even children’” – Agnieszka Żółkiewska concludes the statements of Nachum Blumental and Emanuel Ringelblum.²

Among the topics, alongside personal experience, there are also spaces of existence: ghettos, villages, regions and finally places representing the end that is the extermination camps. In the case of prose, whether it is a literature of personal document or a fiction inspired by it, when it comes to

1. See: P. Matywiecki, “Poezja [1939-1945]” [in:] *Literatura wobec Zagłady (1939-1968)*, eds. S. Buryła, D. Krawczyńska, J. Leociak, Warszawa 2012, p. 174.

2. A. Żółkiewska, Introduction to *Słowa pośród nocy. Poetyckie dokumenty Holokaustu*, introd., selection and editing by A. Żółkiewska, trans. M. Tuszewicki, A. Żółkiewska, M. Koktyusz, Warszawa 2012, p. 17.

Holocaust, the most encountered is Auschwitz, which became a worldwide symbol of the extermination of Jews. One can get an impression that Operation "Reinhard" marked with Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka in the common consciousness remains in the shadows. And yet, it is precisely these places that represent the most perfectly the essence of Holocaust – killing people on an industrial scale, and later a desire to methodically destroy the memory by liquidating all traces of this activity. In the latter case the Germans failed, residual documents survived, preserving the memory.

This paper is a harbinger of the author's project aiming at creating a Polish anthology of poetic texts relating to the functioning of the penal labour camp and extermination camp in Treblinka³ (that is Treblinka I and Treblinka II).

Firstly, it is a literary image of the place of execution, secondly – it's continuance in social consciousness – intermediate and immediate. Immediate, that is referring to those whose faith was connected with camps (prisoners, survivors, families and friends of those who were murdered), intermediate – functioning among post-war generations, whose representatives were not connected with the victims in any way. Thirdly, it clearly shows that the camp, which was operating for a short time, radiates to this day, and it is impossible to wake up from the "night of the Holocaust".

RECORDS

The Treblinka II Extermination Camp was created in 1942 nearby the pre-existing labour camp. It started operating in July, but its history, marked by death and suffering, began earlier. Already in the autumn of 1941 a ghetto located in the nearby town of Kosów Lacki was raided by Ukrainians and Germans from Treblinka. Their goal was to take all craftsmen from the town. Accompanied by shouts, kicked and pushed they were forced to load their tools, machines and equipment necessary for work on trucks. Then they were told to follow the cars on foot together with their assistants. It all happened very quickly and left the inhabitants who were watching it in fear. A local rumor had it that "Germans plan to build

3. Describing the camps as existing in Treblinka is conventional. This was the name given to them by the Germans who created them. They were built away from the village itself, between the villages of Wólka Okrąglik and Poniatowo. To this day, this raises some misunderstandings, because the village of Treblinka is located in the commune of Małkinia Górna in the Ostrów powiat, while the post-camp areas belong to the commune of Kosów Lacki in the Sokołów powiat.

a labour camp or a factory in Treblinka".⁴ However, it soon turned out that it is a death factory. Builders from Kosów Lacki were among the first to meet their end there.

Except death, everything there was fake: improvised train station with signs showing directions of departure to other locations, field hospital ('lazaret') where the sick were not treated but killed, a hairdresser who cut hair which was collected for processing, and above all the saunas, which turned out to be the gas chambers. Only death was real, the stench of which spread within a radius of several kilometers.

Similarly to other camps, Treblinka had its own 'anthem' too, which was sung after roll calls. It was also the first poem associated with this place:

Let us strengthen our steps and strides
And direct our gaze ahead.
With steadfast spirit ever loyal,
Eyes aiming at the wide world
The brigades march to work.
So we are now in Treblinka
And our fate – tarara...
So we are now in Treblinka,
And our time is short.
We listen to the kommandant's tone of voice
And heed even the look in his eye.
Our every pulse and step is harnessed as one
To the demands of the burden and the duty.
Work here is the meaning of everything
Just like obedience and duty
We shall continue, continue to bear the load
Until the moment a bit of luck winks at us.⁵

Contrary to the text quoted above, poems, or more broadly, poetry was a form of refuge for people who experienced the horrors of the Second World War and Holocaust. The refuge did not grant safety nor came from desire to document but to express what was really difficult to put into words. Prose, artistic and personal document, reflecting, sometimes with absolute meticulousness, the catalogue of evil that happened, types and techniques of murder, the suffering of those killed and those who are left in mourning, excruciating sadness and the desire for revenge, is not able to

4. A. Ziótek, "Żydzi Kosowa Lackiego" [in:] *Żydzi Kosowa Lackiego*, ed. by A. Ziótek, Kosów Lacki 2016, p. 85.

5. S. Willenberg, *Revolt in Treblinka*, Warszawa 2000, p. 133, original German version of the song is rhymed.

live up to reality. Here, where the boundaries of humanity were crossed, no description can grasp actions and the atmosphere which surrounded those who were potentially (and with full awareness of it) next in line for annihilation. The language turns out to be poor and the lexical range – insufficient. Poetry offered a slightly better opportunities for this. Sometimes, when we read these poems, just dividing the statement into lines, tearing it apart, is a perfect reflection of the state of mind. Prose in this respect is somehow referential. The non-literal nature of poetry, based on the assumption that the reader's imagination and experiences also participate in the perceptual process, would seem to be a more adequate form.

AUTHORS AND TEXTS

Among poets, whose poems were included here are both widely recognized authors (Halina Birenbaum, Roman Brandstaetter, Jerzy Ficowski, Władysław Szlengel) as well as authors unknown to the wider public, and also anonymous works. Those who were listed as recognized were not always recognized in this way during their lifetime, and their post-war reception did not always grant them such reputation. The best example is Władysław Szlengel (1914-1943) – a poet, publicist, satirist and stage actor. Emanuel Ringelblum spoke very restrainedly about his work in his *Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto*. He did not see much artistic value in them, however he knew that “they were popular, and moved to tears because they were up-to-date, they spoke about the issues that the ghetto lived and was passionate about.”⁶ His poems were therefore treated in terms of applied (utilitarian)⁷ literature, which was assessed not in terms of aesthetics, but the function it was supposed to fulfill and how it affected the recipient. This category of literature described by Stefania Skwarczyńska, extends to the vast majority of poems written in ghettos, an antechambers of death. Today, Szlengel himself is read in a very different way. His works read “coldly”, without the dramatic context of the creative act, reveal to the reader different values than those recognized at the time of their creation.⁸

6. E. Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego: wrzesień 1939 – styczeń 1943*, trans. by A. Rutkowski, Warszawa 1988, p. 580.

7. S. Skwarczyńska, “O pojęcie literatury stosowanej”, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1931, z. 1, pp. 1-24; see also: *Teoria listu*, editing E. Feliksiak, M. Leś, Białystok 2006, pp. 19-31, see A. Czyż, *Rojny i gwarny blask kultury. Literacka “varietes” i historyczne “multum” tekstów*, Siedlce 2019, p. 522 et seq.

8. See A. Kowalczyk, “Czarny humor w twórczości Władysława Szlengla ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wiersza ‘Mała stacja Treblinka’”, *Annales Universitatis Pedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Historicolitteraria*, z. XV, 2015, pp. 121-129.

The works of the following authors were also referenced: Platiel Cybulski (1903-1967) – a poet and labourer. He survived the war in the USSR, and then came back to Poland, where he graduated and worked in the Ministry of Higher Education. He lost his parents and siblings in the Holocaust; Mojsze Szklar, actually Szklarek (1920-2014) – a poet and a journalist. During the war he worked in Ural glass factory in the USSR, after the war he worked as a journalist in the Yiddish press. He published several collections of poems, and in 1968 emigrated to the USA; Dowid Fogelman (born 1910) – a poet, memoirist, turner. During the war he was in the Warsaw ghetto. During the liquidation action in 1942 he lost his wife and child. He was imprisoned at Gęsiówka and Pawiak, survived the war; Ichcok Kacnelson (1885-1944) – a poet, playwright, renowned pedagogist and teacher, during the war he was in the Warsaw ghetto, his wife and two sons died in Treblinka, whereas he and the third son died in Auschwitz;⁹ Felicja Raszkin-Nowak (1924-2015) – a journalist, filmmaker, poet and the author of memories, spend the war in ghetto in Białystok, later she lived in hiding at Polish family house in the province, after the war she worked in Polish Radio and National Theatre, in 1971 she emigrated to Denmark, her mother probably died in the camp in Treblinka;¹⁰ Franciszek Kobryńczuk (1929-2016) was a veterinarian, professor of veterinary sciences, poet and novelist, he mainly wrote literature for children and teenagers, he published in "Miś", "Świerszczyk" and "Płomyczek" etc., he published around 40 literary books and more than 200 scientific and popular science works, born in Długie Grzymki several kilometres from Treblinka.¹¹ There is also a work by Piotr Jan Nasiołkowski, a lawyer residing in Skarżysko Kamienna, a member of the Lublin Bar Association, a historian-hobbyist, and the author of popular science books. He left his poem "Treblinka", dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust from Skarżysko Kamienna at the Treblinka Museum (cited from the website of the Museum).

As it was mentioned before, some of the poems are anonymous or their

9. Above notes with comments come from anthologies: *Nie nad brzegami Babilonu. Antologia poezji jidysz w powojennej Polsce*, trans., selection and editing by M. Ruta, Kraków 2012 and *Słowa pośród nocy. Poetyckie dokumenty Holokaustu*, selection, introd. and editing by A. Żółkiewska, trans. by M. Tuszewicki, A. Żółkiewska, M. Koktyś, Warszawa 2012.

10. B. Ruben: "Życie i twórczość Felicji Raszkin-Nowak – przykład symbiozy polsko-żydowskiej" [in:] *Żydzi Wschodniej Polski. Serie 6, Żydzi białostoccy: od początków do 1939 roku*, eds. J. Ławski, K.K. Pilichiewicz, A. Wydrycka, Białystok 2018, pp. 31-43.

11. T. Zaniewska, *Hrabiowski biały dom. Gimnazjum w Sterdyni 1942-1950*, Białystok 2004, pp. 195-196.

attribution is uncertain. This is the case with “Treblinka” and “Pieśń Treblinka”, poems important for this selection, written in the summer of 1942, so at the very beginning of the death camp’s operation. Basic information about them were recorded by Agnieszka Żółkiewska:

“Treblinka” – song attributed to different people, including: Nauchowicz, Fajnbojm, Jewish partisans from Treblinka, has been preserved in various variants with different titles. One of them bears the annotation “Międzyrzec June 1943”.

“Pieśń Treblinka” – was created in Warsaw ghetto during the first big liquidation action in summer 1942, this work was also preserved in different versions. We know one of them thanks to Rachela Auerbach, another one thanks to the 14-year-old prisoner of Buchenwald Salek Finkelstein – in his version the chorus is “Milcz, serce, milcz” [Be silent, my heart, be silent].¹²

LAYOUT

The poems quoted below were written from 1942, that is, as it has already been indicated, from the first year of operation of the death factory in Treblinka. They are mostly arranged chronologically. With the exception of the opening work, the poem by Dawid Fogelman “Wysiedlenie”, which was written in Warsaw in 1944 but refers to July 1942, when the first deportation from Warsaw ghetto took place. Author’s blocks were not broken, which is most noticeable in the example of Halina Birenbaum. It seems, however, that this work is so coherent that segmenting it would not be justified.

To the poems referring directly to Treblinka, the poem “Małkinia” by L. Rajzer was added. It speaks about the last stop before the camp, after all, “every train carrying Jews to the camp stopped at the [local] railway station”.¹³ It was performed in the form of a song during the first liquidation action in Warsaw ghetto in 1942 to the melody “W słonym morzu krwawych łez” [In the salty sea of bloody tears] by Szymon An-ski.¹⁴

The following collection of poems is supposed to be a poetic story about Treblinka, a place of extermination of nearly a million human beings and a multiplied number of sufferers. Every death in the extermination camp, even if no documents were left behind, remained in the consciousness and memory of the family, friends and close ones.

12. A. Żółkiewska, “Noty historyczno-bibliograficzne” [in:] *Słowa pośród nocy. Poetyckie dokumenty Holokaustu...*, p. 476.

13. W. Hadała, *Małkinia od czasów najdawniejszych*, Siedlce 2014, pp. 127-128.

14. A. Żółkiewska, “Noty historyczno-bibliograficzne...”, p. 476

In the cited works, the original punctuation given by the authors or editors of the first editions has been preserved. However, it seems that the residual punctuation in older volumes by Halina Birenbaum, who consistently avoids punctuation, should be verified. Also, the notation of individual phrases in capitals and minuscules was not interfered with – this is noticeable in Jerzy Ficowski's poem dedicated to Janusz Korczak, where name Treblinka is written with a lowercase letter. Each poem is accompanied by a footnote indicating the place of the first printing.

ANTOLOGY

In the Polish version of this volume the anthological part contains the poems in full, which resulted in 38 pages, but here we limit ourselves to bibliographic excerpts only, as an artistic translation would have to be a separate editorial undertaking.

1. Dowid Fogelman, "Wysiedlenie", trans. by M. Tuszewicki, as cited in: *Słowa pośród nocy. Poetyckie dokumenty Holokaustu*, introduction, selection and ed. A. Żółkiewska, trans. by M. Tuszewicki, A. Żółkiewska, M. Koktysz, Warszawa 2012, pp. 312-318.
2. "Pieśń Treblinka", trans. by A. Żółkiewska, as cited in: *Słowa pośród nocy...*, pp. 320-322.
3. "Treblinka", trans. by A. Żółkiewska, as cited in: *Słowa pośród nocy...*, pp. 324-326.
4. Władysław Szlengel, "Mała stacja Treblinka", as cited in: *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, t. 26: *Utwory literackie z getta warszawskiego*, ed. A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki, Warszawa 2017, pp. 165-166.
5. Władysław Szlengel, "Już czas", as cited in: *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, pp. 191-192.
6. Icchok Kacnelson, "Dzień mojego wielkiego nieszczęścia. Poemat napisany po stracie żony i dwóch synów wywiezionych do Treblinka", trans. by M. Tuszewicki, as cited in: *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, pp. 180-189.
7. L. Rajzer, "Małkinia", trans. A. Żółkiewska, as cited in: *Słowa pośród nocy...*, p. 328.
8. Roman Brandstaetter, "Stabat Mater", as cited in: id., *Pieśni o moim Chrystusie. Hymny Maryjne*, Warszawa 1963, pp. 135-137.
9. Paltiel Cybulski, "Szkic do portretu mojej matki", trans. M. Ruta, as cited in: *Nie nad brzegami Babilonu. Antologia poezji jidysz w powojennej Polsce*, trans., introd. and editing by M. Ruta, Kraków 2012, pp. 123-125.

10. Mojsze Szklar, "Chcę uciec od smutku", trans. by M. Ruta, as cited in: *Nie nad brzegami Babilonu...*, p. 147.
11. Halina Birenbaum, "Strach", as cited in: id., *nie o kwiatach*, Kraków 1993, pp. 22-23.
12. Halina Birenbaum, "Istnieją fakty...", as cited in: id., *nawet gdy się śmieję*, Rzeszów 1990, p. 27.
13. Halina Birenbaum, "Jedźcie do Treblinki", as cited in: id., *nawet gdy się śmieję...*, pp. 44-45.
14. Halina Birenbaum, "Jesień w Treblince", as cited in: id., *nie o kwiatach...*, p. 21.
15. Halina Birenbaum, "Miałam przyjaciółkę w Warszawskim Getcie", as cited in: id., *nawet gdy się śmieję...*, pp. 11-12.
16. Halina Birenbaum, "Turystka grobów", as cited in: id., *nawet gdy się śmieję...*, p. 48.
17. Halina Birenbaum, "Nie pomoże", as cited in: id., *nawet gdy się śmieję...*, p. 65.
18. Halina Birenbaum, "Pociąg gwizdże", as cited in: id., *nie o kwiatach...*, p. 35.
19. Halina Birenbaum, "Gdybym", as cited in: id., *Jak można w słowach. Wybór wierszy*, Kraków 1995, p. 14.
20. Halina Birenbaum, "Mój ojciec", as cited in website of Ośrodek Postaw Twórczych: <https://opt-art.net/helikopter/10-2017/halina-birenbaum-wiersze/> (accessed: 12.04.2021).
21. Halina Birenbaum, "Podróż w nieskończoność", as cited in: *Treblinka ostrzega i przypomina. W 80. rocznicę utworzenia Karnego Obozu Pracy Treblinka I*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Treblinka 2022, pp. 15-16.
22. Jerzy Ficowski, "List do Marc Chagalla", as cited in: J. Ficowski, *Moje strony świata*, Warszawa 1957.
23. Jerzy Ficowski, "5 VIII 1942, pamięci Janusza Korczaka", as cited in: J. Ficowski, *Lewe strony widoków*, Poznań 2014, pp. 145-146.
24. Felicja Raszkin-Nowak, "Treblinka", as cited in: "Pamiętnikarstwo Polskie" 2000, nr 1/2, p. 137.
25. Franciszek Kobryńczuk, "Treblinka", as cited in: id., *Powroty do gniazda*, Warszawa 2008, p. 58.
26. Piotr Jan Nasiołkowski, "Treblinka. Pamięci zamordowanych w Treblince ofiar Holocaustu, pochodzących z mojego rodzinnego miasta, Skarżyska-Kamiennej", as cited in: <https://muzeumtreblinka.eu/informacje/wiersze-o-treblince/>.

Ilona Flażyńska
 Treblinka Museum
 The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

MICHAL CHOCHOLATÝ, HIS WORK IN DISSEMINATING THE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE TREBLINKA II EXTERMINATION CAMP

Michal Chocholatý was born on August 26, 1981 in Pilsen.¹ During his early childhood he lived in Plasy. Later he moved with his family to the nearby village Rybnice. He holds a doctorate in history from the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. Presently he lives in this city and works as a teacher in secondary school. Students of secondary schools begin their historical education from the time after the First World War till contemporary times. Chocholatý believes that his students show interest in the Holocaust. He explains to them the difference between concentration camps and extermination camps.² Since the age of eighteen he has been interested in the history of the former Nazi camps. He writes books, articles, reviews, collects accounts of witnesses of the Holocaust and is active on social media. He travels to extermination sites. In addition to a visit in the Treblinka Museum, the Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944), he has also visited: the Museum and Memorial in Sobibór,³ Museum

1. Plzeň is a city in the western Bohemia, the capital of the Pilsen region and the West Bohemia region, about 90 kilometres west of Prague.

2. Recording of the conversation between the author and Michal Chocholatý from 22.03.2021.

3. Michal Chocholatý wrote the book regarding Sobibor: *Sobibor Lager III* [Sobibor Camp III], Epika 2019, where he describes the Sobibor Extermination Camp, how it operated, where the gas chambers, mass graves and cremation grids were. He outlined the process of Jews extermination, which was very similar to that in Treblinka and Belzec. No witnesses survived from among those who worked in the extermination zone in Camp II in Sobibor.

and Memorial in Bełżec, State Museum at Majdanek, Stutthof Museum in Sztutowo, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – Former German Nazi Concentration and Extermination camp, Museum of the Former German Kulmhof Death Camp in Chełmno-on-Ner, the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945), the former German Nazi Concentration and Labour Camp Płaszów in Kraków.

In this article, Michal Chocholatý's achievements in disseminating knowledge about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp will be presented in chronological order. Beginning from printed source materials, ending with movies posted on the YouTube website and radio specials.

Before his first visit in Poland Michal wanted to meet with Richard Glazar,⁴ but he found out that three years earlier his compatriot, a former prisoner of Treblinka, had committed suicide. He spoke about the circumstances of this death with Richard's cousin, Irena Ravelovou, who had been a prisoner of the ghetto in Theresienstadt.⁵ Both of them lived in a nursing home in Prague. During their meeting she showed him the window from which Glazar had jumped out. She also told him, that on that day she wanted to prepare breakfast for Glazar. Richard agreed to it and said that he would eat together with her, but first he would go to take a bath. Glazar did not come to breakfast. Irena saw an ambulance next to the building

4. Richard Glazar was born on November 29, 1920, under the name of Goldschmid. In 1942, he was placed in the ghetto in Theresienstadt, and spent a month in there. During that time he worked as a street sweeper. He witnessed how his grandfather slit his own wrists. On October 10, 1942, Richard Glazar was deported from Theresienstadt to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. He managed to survive 10 months in the camp. He was selected to work sorting clothes after the gassed people. He escaped from the camp during the rebellion on August 2, 1943. After the war Richard Glazar came back to Czechoslovakia. In 1969, he was granted asylum in Switzerland. He committed suicide in 1997.

5. Theresienstadt Ghetto in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, was located in the fortress from the turn of 19th century. The decision about the creation of the ghetto was made on October 10, 1941 during the conference in Prague. Those present included: Reinhard Heydrich (deputy Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia), Karl Hermann Frank (SS and Police leader and Secretary of State of the Reich Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia), Adolf Eichman (called the architect of the Holocaust, was responsible for the transports of Jews from ghettos to the extermination camps). Jews who were detained there performed back-breaking work and were fed starvation rations. From the ghetto in Theresienstadt 17,934 Jews were deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. From among these, only two people survived: Richard Glazar and Karel Unger.

and then she was informed about what had happened.⁶ Chocholatý greatly regretted that he was not able to speak personally with this outstanding figure.

Chocholatý visited the Treblinka II Extermination Camp for the first time in 2000. Next time in 2003 he came with his colleague Jiří Strnad. Both men set themselves as their main goal to present to the Czechs information about the Extermination acquired during the visit in Poland. Upon his arrival he did not find any remains of the camp's buildings. This intrigued him and pushed him towards learning more about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. He learnt about the 13 gas chambers, the lazaret,⁷ the revolt of prisoners in August. He found those information interesting. Chocholatý began learning about the history of Treblinka from a book *Treblinka, slovo jak z dětské říkanky*⁸ by Richard Glazar and a Czech translation of a book by Yitzhak Arad: *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. Vyhlašovací tábory Akce Reinhard*.⁹ His desire to learn from other publications about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp prompted Chocholatý to learn foreign languages. The Polish language allowed him to speak with other survivors of the camp, such as Samuel Willenberg.¹⁰ He also learnt German,

6. M. Chocholatý, *Poslední z táborů smrti... přežili Treblinku a Sobibor*, Praha 2019, pp. 25-26. See: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=richard+glazar&ru=%2fvideos%2fsearch%3fq%3d%20richard%2bglazar%26qpvt%3d%20richard%2bglazar%26FROM%3dVDRE%20&view=detail&mid=00B67BD040C372F5DC7900B67BD040C372F5DC79&rvsmid=B91635BC4678191532CBB91635BC4678191532CB&FORM=VDRVRV> (accessed: 26.03.2021).

7. Lazarett (from German: field hospital) in that place prisoners were killed with the shot to the back of their heads. This was supposed to speed up the process of extermination, thus mainly the elderly, the disabled and unaccompanied children were killed there. See: I. Flažýňská, "Porajmos w Obozie Zagłady Treblinka II i Karnym Obozie Pracy Treblinka I", *Dialog-Pheniben*, issue 31/2020, p. 62.

8. *Treblinka, slovo jak z dětské říkanky* [Treblinka, a word like from a children's story]. In 1992 it was published as a book in German: *Die Falle mit dem grünen Zaun – Überleben in Treblinka*. This shortened version of the Czech text was the basis for the English translation: *Trap with a Green Fence: Survival in Treblinka*. The Polish edition, translated based on the German version, was published in 2021, entitled: *Stacja Treblinka*.

9. Y. Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. Vyhlašovací tábory Akce Reinhard* [Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps], Brno 2006.

10. Samuel Willenberg was born in 1923 in Częstochowa. Together with 6,000 Jews from the ghetto in Opatów he was transported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp on October 20, 1942. He worked in a commando that was sorting clothes after gassed people. Willenberg escaped from the camp on August 2, 1943, when the revolt broke out. He was the longest living former prisoner of the

Russian and English, which was essential in Israel, where he traveled in June 2002 and stayed there for a year.

One of the first novels by Michal Chocholatý which referred to the topic of the Holocaust was published in 2005 (from the beginning of 2001, the manuscript was available in the municipal library in Plzeň): *Jiné místo, jiná doba. Der letzte Weg. Poslední cesta* [Different place, different time. The last road]. The title refers to the last road which the victims had to walk before entering the gas chambers. This path was also called a road to heaven, the road of ascension (in German: *Himmelstrasse*).

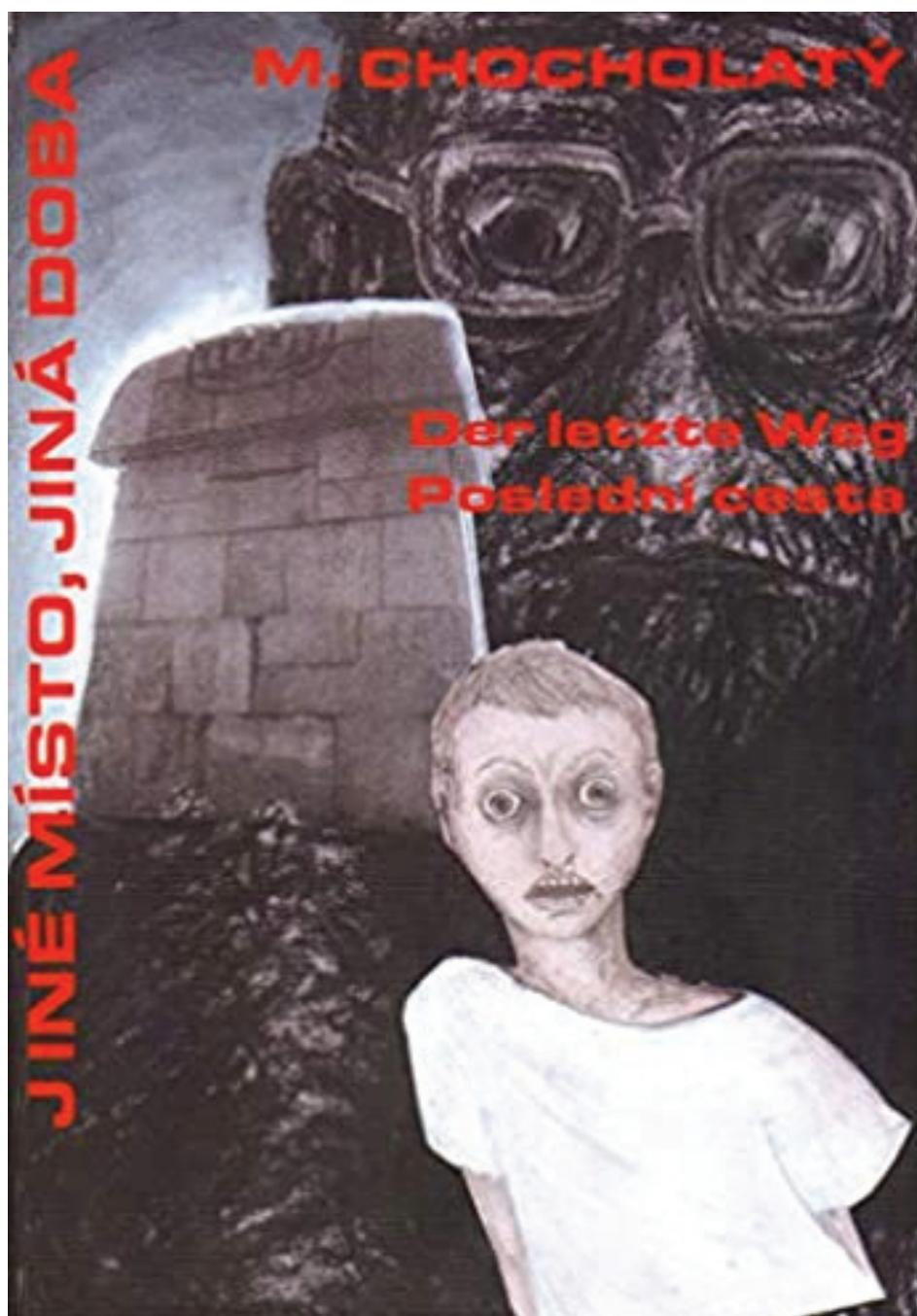
The book, consisting of 116 pages, describes the childhood of nine-year-old Petr Horvát, his seven-year-old sister Běta, and their friends. The novel takes place in 1993 in the town of Plasy near Plzeň, which is the author's hometown. A group of students from the fourth grade of primary school spends their time on carefree fun and studying. Petr has trouble with mathematics and German language at school; at history lessons he learns about Jews, the Star of David, and hears about Auschwitz. By touching on this, the author introduces the reader to the topic of the Holocaust. Petr speaks about incidents of which he has never read or heard before.¹¹ He begins to dream about an unknown place, a fencing, a tall fence interwoven with green branches. A reader who is familiar with the author's interests can guess, that it is the Treblinka II Extermination Camp but it is not said directly.¹² One night, his father hears noises coming from his son's room telling about Warsaw and *Umschlagplatz*, about fear and a need to escape to save oneself from being shot.¹³ Petr explains to his father, that his dreams refer to the war. In one of them he sees the remains of human bodies: hands, heads, legs and he compares the image to the exploding organic volcanos. He describes this place as hell on earth, with mass graves. Throughout the whole time the author builds suspense and does not give the name of this place. Petr's dreams and things happening around him overtake him. One day at school he stands up for his friend, who he calls with a different, unknown name. He does not know why he started to speak mixing German with Polish and Yiddish, which he does not know. He tells his friend to run so she is not shot. After this incident he ends up in a psychiatric hospital.

Treblinka II Extermination Camp. Author of the book: *Revolt in Treblinka*. Died in 2016 in Israel.

11. M. Chocholatý, *Jiné místo, jiná doba, Der letzte Weg, Poslední cesta*, Svoboda Servis 2005, p. 41.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 45.



1. Cover of the book: *Jiné místo, jiná doba. Der letzte Weg. Poslední cesta*
[source: <https://www.megaknihy.cz/historicke/25876-jine-misto-jina-doba.html>]

In the hospital Petr Horvát tries to explain to doctor Lapicki what he has been going through. He tries to tell the therapist that in the past he was someone who experienced suffering which comes back to him in dreams.¹⁴ Petr explains that in the past life he was a prisoner of the extermination camp. The fourth chapter dispels all doubts. Here a transport to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp of August 7, 1942 is described. Petr Horvát appears to be a 19-year old man, who has been deported to the camp with his family. His father saves him from going into the gas chamber, by saying that his son is a dentist, a distinguished specialist. From his inmates he learns that he is in the Death Camp in Treblinka.¹⁵ Among the bodies dragged out from the gas chamber he recognizes his mother and sister. He personally pulls out the body of his father. Chocholatý makes an attempt to show the reader, at least partially, what could go on in prisoners' minds. He also writes about the commandant Irmfried Eberl,¹⁶ the gas chambers and the road leading to them. A prisoner working at burying the bodies, about whom Petr dreamed, and who he was in his previous life, dies. He could not handle the situation in which he found himself; he blended with the crowd of victims led to the gas chambers from another transport from the Warsaw ghetto. After this dream, Petr does not wake up any more, he dies in the hospital. After publishing this book, the author knew that he had to add more details to present the whole story, which prompted him to write another part. Then he understood that his work would be a trilogy.

Action of the second part of the trilogy *Das unser Schicksal ist. To náš osud je* [This is our faith] is set in modern times. The action takes place 10 years after the death of Petr Horvát, who claimed to have been a prisoner of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp in his previous life. The main character is Petr's sister – Běta, who in this part is almost an adult woman facing the suffering after the loss of her brother. She tries to understand the situation she is in. She reads the book of the psychiatrist who was Petr's

14. M. Chocholatý, *Jiné místo, jiná doba, Der letzte Weg...*, op.cit., p. 53.

15. Ibid., p. 85.

16. Irmfried Georg Rolf Eberl was born on September 8, 1910 in Bregenz. He was a doctor by education. He was the commandant of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp from July 1942. The three gas chambers functioning at that time in the camp could not keep up with the great intensity of transports and some victims were shot already at the camp's ramp. The prevailing chaos caused Eberl to be dismissed from his function in August 1942, he left to Bernburg where he was the head of the euthanasia centre. In 1944, he was appointed to Auschwitz, where he conducted experiments on prisoners. In April 1945, he was taken prisoner by the Americans and was released after two months. Only on August 20, 1947 he was arrested on charges of committing a crime against humanity. On February 16, 1948, during the investigation, he hanged himself in the Ulm prison.



2. The cover of the book *Jiné místo, jiná doba II a III, To náš osud je* (*Das unser Schicksal ist*). *Peklovidec* (*Ein Höllseher*)
[source: <https://www.trhknih.cz/kniha/an33wpzn>]

treating doctor to understand, what really caused her brother's death. Doctor Lapický has found out that the boy was not the only person connected to this camp. The previous tenant of the house, in which Petr lived, was Jarka Svobodová, who was writing a novel about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. While searching for inspiration in Poland at the post-camp grounds, she had an accident, after which she never recovered and died at the age of 17. In the novel written by Jarka, she appears herself as a Jewish woman who died in SS-Sonderkommando Treblinka. Before death the girl met commandant Eberl and one of the grave diggers Kaliński. From the description of her short stay in the camp, a reader has an opportunity to learn about the content of the information signs directed to the newcomers: "Attention Warsaw inhabitants! You are in the transit camp, from which the transport will continue to the labour camps. To avoid epidemic, clothes and luggage will be taken for disinfection. Gold, money, foreign currencies and jewelry will be deposited in the cashier booth on receipt. They will be returned after showing the receipt. To maintain cleanliness, everyone arriving must bathe before continuing their journey."¹⁷ On April 5, 2003 Chocholatý finished writing this part of the trilogy.

The third part, subtitled *Ein Höllseher. Peklovidec* [The one who feels hell] takes place in modern times in Poland. Béta Horvátová, Petr's sister and psychiatrist Lapický visit the post-camp grounds of the former Treblinka II Extermination Camp. They decided to pay respects to Petr Horvát this way. In this part the author devotes much space to the description of the work of Irmfried Eberl as the camp's commandant, as well as his earlier career.¹⁸ He presents among others: transport of Roma from the vicinity of Warsaw, the actions of the guard, the description of the tank's T34 engine – used for gasing the victims. He mentions Franciszek Ząbecki – the railwayman from the Treblinka station. He also describes transports of Jews from Kielce, Otwock, Rembertów, Radzymin, Jadów, Wołomin, Mińsk Mazowiecki, Łosice, Siedlce. He also explains the meaning of 'Action Reinhard'.¹⁹ He mentions Janusz Korczak together with 200 children from the Warsaw Ghetto, who died in the gas chamber. Chocholatý writes that during the 37 days when Irmfried Eberl was the commandant, 310,096 Jews lost their

17. M. Chocholatý, *Jiné místo, jiná doba II a III, To náš osud je (Das unser Schicksal ist). Peklovidec (Ein Höllse-her)*, 2006, p. 136.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 323–326, 374–538.

19. 'Action Reinhard', extermination of Jews carried out on the territory of the General Government and robbing of the murdered people properties. In terms of number of murdered people, Treblinka "exceled" among other camps of 'Action Reinhard': Extermination Camp in Belzec and Extermination Camp in Sobibor.

lives.²⁰ In the book except the threads closely linked with the camp's way of operating, Eberl's letters to his wife Ruth also appear. At the end of the trilogy the reader learns that Lapický believes that in his previous life he was the Treblinka's commandant Irmfried Eberl.

The trilogy is written in a simple language, with long dialogues, descriptions of nature and places. The author introduces the difficult subject of Shoah to the reader in a very illustrative manner. It makes this book, which tells about death, an easy read. The facts about the extermination camp are supported by the sources. The author does not emphasize the victim's tragedy for better effect. He faithfully presents the historic truth, intertwining it with the everyday life of an ordinary person, including his experiences regarding Treblinka. He allows the reader to identify with the main characters. He wants to show how young people today perceive Treblinka and Holocaust.²¹

Another work in Michał Chocholatý's bibliography concerning the topic of Holocaust is his BA thesis, which he defended in 2012 at the Charles University in Prague, at the Department of History of the Institute of Economic and Social History. It can be downloaded from the website of Charles University digital repository.²² The title of the thesis is: *Plynové komory v KL Lublin ve světle poválečného bádání*²³ [Gas chambers in KL Lublin in the light of post-war research]. In his dissertation he also mentions the Treblinka II Extermination Camp as one of the three extermination camps which operated as a part of the so called Action Reinhard. He also references to the publication by Martyna Rusianiak-Karwat,²⁴ raising the issue that the description of the extermination camp in Treblinka ends with the liquidation of the camp.²⁵ The later period was often omitted, passed over.

20. M. Chocholatý, *Jiné místo, jiná doba II a III...*, op.cit., p. 531.

21. Recording of the author's conversation with Michał Chocholatý from 22.03.2021.

22. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/43117> (accessed: 25.12.2020).

23. The defense of the BA thesis took place on September 11, 2012. The thesis aimed at the analysis of the post-war research on genocide during the Second World War, in particular with regard to the creation and functioning of the gas chambers in concentration camp KL Lublin (Majdanek). The subject of research were methods of killing the prisoners, estimation of the number of the gas chambers. The sources derive from the conclusions of the Polish-Soviet Investigation Commission of 1944, ending with the latest research on this matter conducted by the State Museum at Majdanek.

24. M. Rusianiak, *Obóz zagłady Treblinka II w pamięci społecznej (1943-1989)*, Warszawa 2008.

25. The grounds were ploughed and planted with lupine. From the former camp bakery and with bricks from the gas chambers a house was built. One of the

It is mentioned as the time of “oblivion” and “desecration”. Only in 1955 the Central Board of Museums and Monuments of the Ministry of Culture and Art announced a competition to commemorate Treblinka as a memorial site.²⁶

Michal Chocholatý continued his research on Treblinka II and the topic of Holocaust in his master's thesis titled: *SS-Sonderkommando Treblinka v první funkční fázi* [SS-Sonderkommando Treblinka in the first phase of operation]. He defended it in 2015 at the Department of History at the University of West Bohemia in Plzeň. The master thesis is available at the website of the digital library of the University of West Bohemia in Plzeň.²⁷ In this dissertation he touched the subjects of: creation of the camp, its operation in July and August. A separate chapter speaks about the transfer of Kurt Franz from Belzec to Treblinka in 1943. Another chapter concerns the situation of the prisoners and transports. A big part of his thesis is dedicated to the command of Eberl. The author also described the reception area, undressing area, gas chambers. In his thesis, Chocholatý, also referred to the accounts of the eye witnesses, for whom the hell of Treblinka began on August 1942: Jankiel Wiernik,²⁸ Abraham Krzepicki,²⁹ Eddie Weinstein,³⁰

Ukrainian guards settled there with his family. He was supposed to testify that a farm was located here.

26. Three artists: Adam Haupt, Franciszek Duszeńko and Franciszek Strynkiewicz developed the spatial and memorial concept. The official unveiling of the monument took place on May 10, 1964.

27. <https://otik.uk.zcu.cz/handle/11025/19412> (accessed: 22.01.2021).

28. Jankiel Wiernik was born on 1889 in Biała Podlaska. On August 23, 1942 he was sent from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. At the camp he worked as a carpenter. He managed to escape during the uprising. The model of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp made by Wiernik is displayed at the museum Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel. Jankiel wrote a book: *A Year in Treblinka*. He died in 1972 in Israel.

29. Abraham Jakub Krzepicki was born in 1915 in Praszka. He was sent to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp from the Warsaw Ghetto on August 25, 1942. He was chosen to work burying the bodies of the deceased. During his stay in the camp he also worked on sorting looted property, cleaning the road leading to the gas chambers. He escaped on September 13, hiding between the goods of the gassed people which were loaded to the empty carriages. He gave an account of what he saw in the extermination camp to Rachela Auerbach from the organization Oneg Shabbat. He took part in the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. Krzepicki probably died on April 22, 1943. His memories can be read in the book: *A man escaped from Treblinka. Conversations with a returnee*, Warszawa 2017. See: <https://muzeumtreblinka.eu/informacje/krzepicki-adam-jakub/> (accessed: 22.01.2021).

30. Eddie Weinstein was born in 1924 in Łosice. He was deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp on August 24, 1942 from ghetto in Łosice. He spent

Pinchas Epstein,³¹ as well as those deported in October 1942: Richard Glazar and Jechiel Rajchman.³² Chocholatý also compared two accounts of Ryszard Czarkowski and Franciszek Ząbecki. The author took into account the dates of the first transport to the camp. The railwayman said that transports of Jews to the camp began on July 23, 1942. Ryszard Czarkowski stated that they were already arriving in May and June. He claimed that he saw it while driving past the camp. Together with the group of other prisoners he worked at the bridge in Małkinia (so called: Siedlce bridge). Czarkowski gave an earlier date because he could have seen the Jews who died during the creation of the camp. Due to the fact that Ząbecki was a railwayman, he gave a date of the first rail transport from Warsaw. Chocholatý considers Ząbecki to be a more reliable source, because he was a train dispatcher at the station, at which the trains to Treblinka made a stop. He was also a member of the Home Army, from which he received an order to gather information about the camps in Treblinka. He also saved some of the original transport documents from the train station in Treblinka before it was blown up by the Germans.

In 2016, Michał Chocholatý published an article titled: “Vzpory v táborech smrti Treblinka a Sobibor. Revolts in the Death Camps of Treblinka and Sobibor”.³³ The author described the goals, preparations and results of the rebellions organized by the prisoners of the Treblinka II Extermina-

around two weeks in the camp. He managed to escape. He was hiding in the vicinity of Łosice, after the liberation by the Red Army he joined the Polish Second Army. He described his story in the book *17 days in Treblinka*. He emigrated to USA, where he died in 2010.

31. Pinchas Epstein was born on March 3, 1925 in Częstochowa. From the ghetto in this city he was deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp in September 1942. He escaped after the prisoner's rebellion. He came back to Częstochowa, later he worked in Germany, in 1948 he emigrated to Israel. He died in 2010.

32. Jechiel Rajchman was born in 1914 in Łódź. After the outbreak of Second World War he moved to Pruszków. After the resettlement to the Warsaw Ghetto, he managed to move to the ghetto in Ostrów Lubelski. He was transported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp on October 10, 1942. At the beginning he was responsible for cutting hair, then he was a dentist and a grave digger. He escaped during the uprising on August 2, 1943. He wrote his memories in the book titled *Ocalałem z Treblinky*. He took part in the Warsaw uprising, as a part of civil units of PPS, he would pull people out of the basements and put out the fire. After the war he emigrated to Uruguay. He died there in 2004.

33. M. Chocholatý, “Vzpory v táborech smrti Treblinka a Sobibor. Revolts in the Death Camps of Treblinka and Sobibor”, *Memo*, 2016/2. See: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/295586903.pdf> (accessed: 30.03.2021).



3. Cover of the book: *Poslední z táborů smrti... přežili Treblinku a Sobibor*
[source: <https://www.megaknihy.cz/army-a-military/395246-posledni-z-taboru-smrti-prezili-treblinku-a-sobibor.html>]

tion Camp and Sobibor Extermination Camp. He pointed out the similarities and differences between those two. He emphasized that in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp during the initial phase of the operation, several individual escapes occurred. As the time passed the situation changed. The camp was guarded more. Additionally Kurt Franz introduced an order to shoot 10 prisoners in place of one escapee.³⁴ The prisoners knew that Germans would not want to leave any witnesses of their crime. They were aware that when the transports stop, they would also die. That is why they began preparations for the revolt so at least some people could be saved thanks to the mass escape. The uprising engulfed the entire area of the camp (the reception area and the extermination area, the so-called *totenlager*).³⁵ The camps' carpenter Jankiel Wiernik, due to the nature of his work could freely move around the camp between those two areas. This way he passed on the information between the prisoners who had no way to contact each other. Another person who informed the grave diggers in the death zone was Żelomir Bloch.³⁶ He was moved from the reception area to the extermination zone.

On February 2018, Chocholatý posted on Facebook website a 5-minute video in Czech language. It refers to the extermination area, so called, *totenlager*. He describes this part of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp next to the model made by Jankiel Wiernik located in the Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel. He talks about the gas chambers, mass graves, and anti-tank obstacles which surrounded the camp. He mentions Hubert Floß, who was the initiator of cremation of victims at the grates constructed from railway tracks.³⁷

In 2019 a book was published under the title *Poslední z táborů smrti... přežili Treblinku a Sobibor* [The last ones from the death camp... they survived Treblinka and Sobibor]. On 295 pages the author describes his efforts of searching the last witnesses from the Treblinka II Extermination Camp.

34. M. Chocholatý, *Vzpouřky v táborech smrti Treblinka a Sobibor...*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

35. *Totellanger* – extermination area – camp 2 (death camp), also called the upper camp, the extermination zone, where the gas chambers, mass graves, grates for burning corpses and a barrack for the prisoners who worked there, were located.

36. Żelomir Bloch – before the outbreak of the Second World War he lived in Slovakia, from where he was deported to ghetto in Dęblin (Poland) in 1942. In the same year he was taken to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. At the beginning he sorted the goods of the gassed people, later on he was moved to the extermination area, where he also could introduce the prisoners who worked there into the conspiracy. He used his experience gained in the army to organize the uprising in the camp. He died during the rebellion on August 2, 1943.

37. <https://www.facebook.com/michal.chocholaty.39> (accessed: 24.03.2021).

He used in it the results of his research, which he conducted over the years. He included many interviews with survivors of the Holocaust. The whole concept of the book is a description of his own experiences. He interviewed some of the survivors, others, he described based on the stories of their relatives and information which he was able to determine. The main part is dedicated to the history of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp; the last fragment of the book refers to the Extermination Camp in Sobibor.

In his book Chocholatý quotes a fragment of the interview with Richard Glazar published in the magazine *Respekt* in 1995. The title of the article is "Jsem dnes jediný na světě" [Today I am the only one in the world]. To the question about how he functioned in Treblinka, Glazar described how he was chosen to work at the camp:

I did not know what was happening, when I was dragged out of the line, completely naked, by one of the SS man and told to get dressed again. Half an hour later, whispering, I asked a man who was working next to me what happened with those who came with me in a transport. He whispered to me, that they are all dead. I could not understand that. But I felt that everything around me was like a big wave, to which I must not give in, or I will be gone right away. I need to lay on the waves, and they will move me. This is how I managed to survive the first, most important moments. Later I already knew everything: the rest was just an attempt to stay alive for another minute, another hour, another day.

When asked: why he survived, he answered:

If you want to kill an anthill with a million of ants, you will never be fully successful. According to the law of statistics and mathematical probability, somewhere under the bottom, a few ants will survive, mutilated in every way, but alive... I was lucky, through my whole life I was lucky.

Another question referred to the subject, that he was the only who wrote down his memories. How is that possible, were other survivors not interested in this subject? Glazar answered:

Me and my friend Karel Unger,³⁸ who survived, were from Western Europe. The others were from the east of Poland. They were simple people, they lived locked in ghettos. Writing down what was

38. Karel Unger was born on April 15, 1921, in Ołomuniec. He was deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp from the Theresienstadt Ghetto on October 10, 1942. Karel sorted the clothes of the gassed people. He escaped from the camp during the rebellion on August 2, 1943. Unger did not want to speak about

happening in Treblinka was beyond them. They even had problem with speaking before the International Tribunal. They did not know German well enough, their native language was Yiddish.³⁹

At that time, Glazar was not the only living witness from Treblinka. Another example of the survivor who wrote down his experiences was Samuel Willenberg. In 1986 he published his memories in Hebrew. Two years later the book was translated to English (*Revolt in Treblinka*) and in 1991 it came out in Polish (*Bunt w Treblince*).

Michal Chocholatý met with Samuel Willenberg for the first time on January 2003 in Tel Aviv. During this meeting Chocholatý saw some of the sculptures portraying scenes from Treblinka, which Samuel had in his studio. Michal emphasizes that it was an incredible experience. They met for the last time in Warsaw in 2011, and they ate dinner at the “U Szwejka” restaurant. The author presented the description of Samuel’s experiences from before the deportation to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, as well as his life after the camp, in one of the chapters of his book.⁴⁰



4. Samuel Willenberg and Michal Chocholatý, 2011 Warsaw
[source: Treblinka Museum]

his experiences from the camp. He emigrated to the United States. He died in 1990 in USA.

39. M. Chocholatý, *Poslední z táborů smrti... přežili Treblinku a Sobibor*, Praha 2019, pp. 35-36.

40. Ibid., pp. 39-86.

As regards Pinchas Epstein, another prisoner who survived Treblinka II, during the initial period, Chocholatý only contacted him by phone. At the beginning, Pinchas did not want to meet with Chocholatý. He excused it with his sickness. Maybe he did not want to open the old wounds. However in 2010, he agreed to speak with him.



5. Michal Chocholatý with Pinchas Epstein and his wife
[source: Treblinka Museum]

Chocholatý received Eddie Weinstein's contact details from the former prisoner of Sobibor. They met in Prague. Chocholatý remembers him as a very interesting person who visited the grounds of the former camps.

Chocholatý met with Kalman Taigman in Israel, at the retirement home where the former prisoner of Treblinka II lived. He received his contact details from the British historian Chris Webb, who also deals with the subject of extermination camps. Later, they made contact by phone. Kalman emphasized that all the witnesses from Treblinka, except him and Samuel Willenberg, had already died.⁴¹

At the social networking site Facebook, Michal Chocholatý posts many information about his achievements and travelling. In today's society, and

41. The movie *Death Camp Treblinka Survivor Stories* with Kalman Taigman and Samuel Willenberg. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hOl5Ef91PY> (accessed: 30.03.2021).

especially at the time of pandemic, this is the easiest and most effective way to reach a wide range of recipients and promote historical knowledge. The subject of his posts is often the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. Among others, Chocholatý posted a link to the article about the first commandant of Treblinka⁴² “Irmfried Eberl – velitel Treblinky s lékařským titulem / Irmfried Eberl – Head of Treblinka With a Medical Degree”. The article presents Eberl’s career and his stay in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, the construction process of the extermination camp, as well as Eberl’s letters to his wife. Notably, the address on the letter, at which his wife could send mail was: “SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Eberl, Treblinka b/Malkinia, SS-Sonderkommando”.⁴³ Chocholatý quoted the account of the SS-Unterscharführer August Hingst, one of the camp’s guards, who presented Eberl as a very aspiring person. The commandant wanted to have as many people as possible killed in his camp. However, the camp’s infrastructure was not sufficiently developed to measure up to his ambitions. According to another SS man from the camp’s staff – Willi Mentz, during the Eberl’s command, carriages had to wait at the camp’s ramp because part of the victims from the earlier transport had not been gassed yet. Due to excessive heat, many victims died in the carriages. The fast pace of the transports arrival made it impossible to systematically clean the camp’s platform from the bodies, thereby the corpses decayed and caused fear and panic among the newly arrived. This caused the increase of escape attempts and shooting. To prove the truthfulness of this story, Chocholatý quotes the account of Eddie Weinstein. After a week, since the transports began arriving at the camp, in his letters to his wife Eberl complained that the pace was extremely fast. He wrote: “Even if I split into four and had 100 hours every day, I would not be able to control it.”⁴⁴ Franz Suchomel⁴⁵ said that during the time when Eberl was the commandant, 100 Jews were assigned to burying the gassed people and every day after finishing their task they were shot. This happened every day. The three gas chambers which operated at the camp at that time were not enough. Despite this, under his command

42. M. Chocholatý, “Irmfried Eberl – velitel Treblinky s lékařským titulem / Irmfried Eberl – Head of Treblinka With a Medical Degree”, *Memo*, 2020/2, pp. 90-124. See: http://www.sohi.maweb.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2021/02/Memo_2020_2final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3wDO9nnvcnvfrHl3rUqxf3GrKTZu73VTBYctD3PBq9c-c9pv9y9yKEmUE (accessed: 3.03.2021)

43. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

45. Franz Suchomel, the SS man supervising the group of around 12 people, called Goldjuden, who worked on sorting and estimating the worth of valuables (gold, diamonds, jewelry) looted from the camp’s victims.

around 300 000 Jews were killed.⁴⁶ This is how Pinchas Epstein described the time of Eberl's command: "The smoke from a diesel engine would go inside the gas chambers. At the beginning there were three gas chambers. Small ones. Each chamber was four meters by four meters. Around hundred to hundred and fifty victims were crammed in them."⁴⁷ After the visitation in the camp by Christian Wirth, the inspector in charge of the three 'Action Reinhard' camps, Eberl was dismissed. In his place Franz Stangl⁴⁸ was appointed.

The book by Michal Chocholatý *Treblinka a Sobibór: Vyhlašovací sektor Treblinky v druhé funkční fázi v porovnání se sektorem smrti v Sobiboru* [Treblinka and Sobibor: Extermination zone of Treblinka in the second phase of functioning compared with the extermination zone in Sobibor], published in 2020, was created on the basis of Chocholatý's research from his doctoral thesis.⁴⁹

In this extensive 400-page publication, the part referring to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp contains a detailed analysis of the conditions in the camp from the point of view of the prisoners and the oppressors. It is a description of the extermination camp during the period from September 1942 to August 1943. The author often compares Treblinka and Sobibór, pointing out similarities and differences. He begins with introducing and explaining the role of the "Action Reinhard". He also briefly describes the earlier period of the camps' functioning, when Irmfried Eberl was the commandant of the Treblinka II. He calls this period "the Danteque phase" referring to the account of Franz Stangl from the book by Gitta Sereny.⁵⁰ It is in the pages of this book that the second commandant SS-Sonderkommando Treblinka II, compared the view which he saw after his arrival to the camp to the scenes from *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri. In individual chapters of the book *Treblinka a Sobibór* Chocholatý included information about: totenlager specification, new gas chambers, working commandos, cremation with the use of grates, the progress of the uprising,

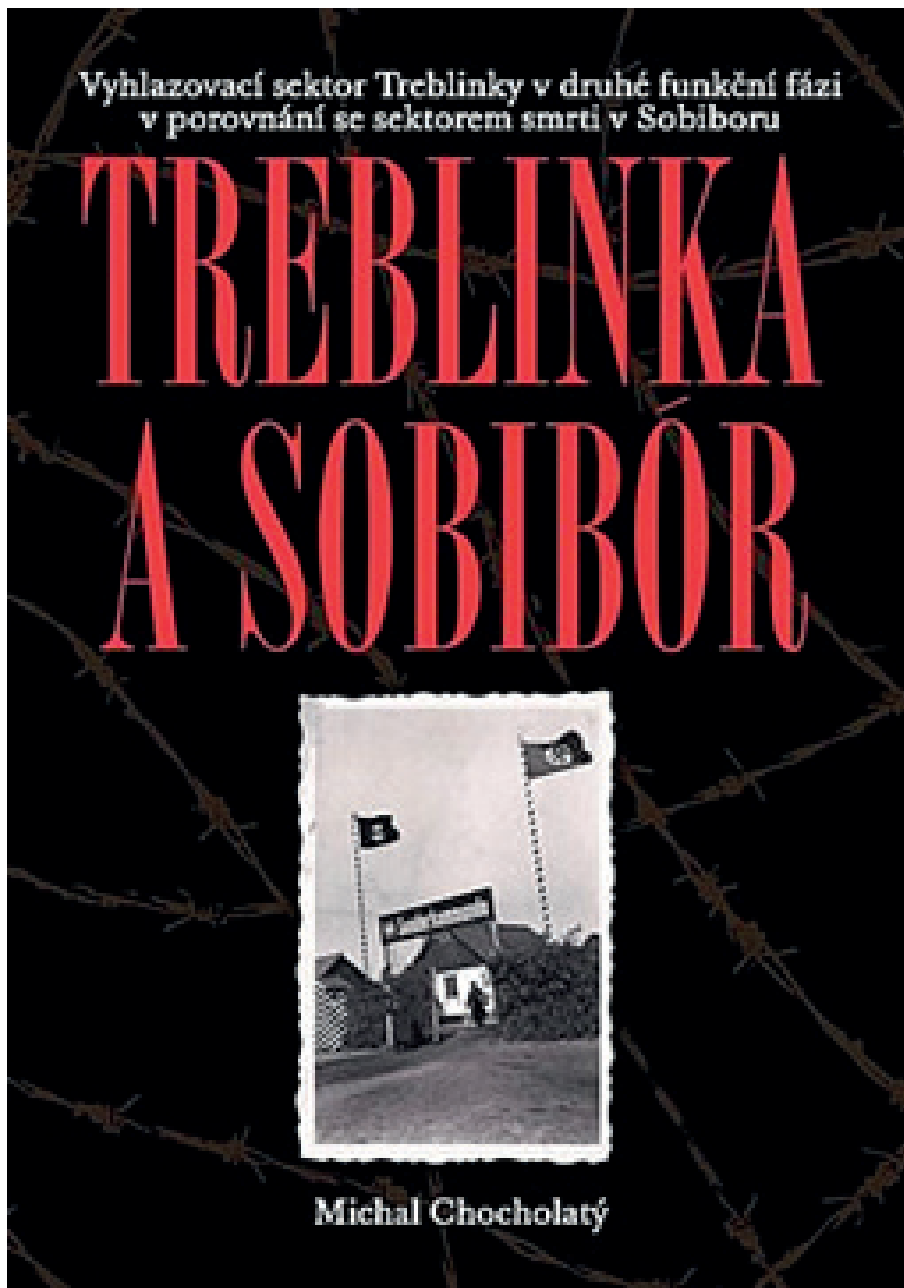
46. M. Chocholatý, *Irmfried Eberl – velitel Treblinky s lékařským titulem*, *op.cit.*, pp. 108, 111.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

48. G. Sereny, *W stronę ciemności. Rozmowy z komendantem Treblinki*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Cyklady, 2002, p. 139; S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *Obóz Zagłady Treblinka II – Topografia zbrodni*, Warszawa-Treblinka 2019, p. 19.

49. Michal Chocholatý's doctoral thesis: *Vyhlašovací sektor Treblinky v druhé funkční fázi v porovnání se sobiborským sektorem smrti* [Treblinka and Sobibor: Extermination zone of Treblinka in the second phase of functioning compared with the extermination zone in Sobibor] was defended in 2019 at the University of West Bohemia in Plzeň.

50. G. Sereny, *op.cit.*, p. 135.



6. Cover of the book *Treblinka a Sobibór: Vyhla zovací sektor Treblinky v druhé funkční fázi v porovnání se sektorem smrti v Sobiboru* [source: <https://www.databazeknih.cz/obalka-knihy/treblinka-a-sobibor-vyhla-zovaci-sektor-treblinky-v-druhe-funkcni-fazi-v-porovnani-se-sektorem-smrti-v-sobiboru-450247>]

typhus epidemic. The book includes accounts of the survivors: Abraham Krzepicki, Samuel Willenberg, Richard Glazar, Samuel Rajzman,⁵¹ Jerzy Rajgrodzki, Jankiel Wiernik, Jechiel Rajchman, Oskar Strawczyński,⁵² Eljahu Rosenberg,⁵³ Pinchas Epstein, Kalman Taigamn,⁵⁴ Eddie Weinstein. Allow me to quote here the account of Kalman Taigman referring to the killing of one of the SS men. The assassination of Max Biala took place on September 11, 1942:

They killed a German there. [...] I saw that, everyone saw. [...] It happened during the roll-call. They counted us and obviously beat us. I do not know how, but one [man] jumped out with a knife, and stabbed him in the back. They killed him right away with a shovel. And he [that injured German] was called Max Biala [...] he was taken to the hospital, but he died on the way. Later they build barracks and they called them: Max Biala Koszary. As a result they killed five percent of people from the camp [...].⁵⁵

Chocholatý described all three commandants of the camp: Irmfried Eberl, Franz Stangl, Kurt Franz. Other SS men mentioned in the book are: Franz Suchomel, the chief of the Goldjuden work commando, who dealt with gathering and estimating the value of jewelry, currencies, and valuables. Fritz Küttner, who was the deputy of Kurt Franz during his time as

51. Samuel Rajzman was born in 1904 in Węgrów. In September 1942 he was deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. He was selected to work at the camp through the intercession of Marcel Galewski, camp's senior. At the camp he sorted the things of the gassed people, he escaped during the revolt in August 1943. After the war he initially lived in France, in 1950 he emigrated to Canada. He died in 1979 in Montreal.

52. Oskar Strawczyński was born in 1906 in Łódź, he was sent to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp on October 5, 1942 from the ghetto in Częstochowa. Together with 50 other men he was selected to work at the camp. He managed to escape during the revolt in August. He died in 1966 in Montreal.

53. Eljahu Rosenberg was born on March 10, 1924 in Warsaw. He was deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp on August 20, 1942 from the Warsaw Ghetto. He was selected to work at the camp as a grave digger. He escaped during the prisoners' revolt. He died in 2010 in Israel as the last grave digger from Treblinka.

54. Kalman Taigman was born on December 24, 1923 in Warsaw. Deported to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp on September 4, 1942 from the Warsaw Ghetto. After the rebellion of the prisoners he came back to Warsaw. He emigrated to Israel, where he died in 2012.

55. M. Chocholatý, *Treblinka a Sobibór: Vyhlašovací sektor Treblinky v druhé funkční fázi v porovnání se sektorem smrti v Sobiboru*, Nakladatelství Aleš Skřivan ml, 2020, p. 67.

the commandant. Arthur Matthes was the chief of totenlager, and Karl Pötzinger was his deputy. Gustaw Münzberger was responsible for gas chambers. Albert Franz Rum and Otto Richard Horn supervised the grave diggers commando. August Miete was the supervisor of the Lazaret, Willi Mentz was his associate. Herbert Floß was the initiator of the cremation of the bodies on the grates.

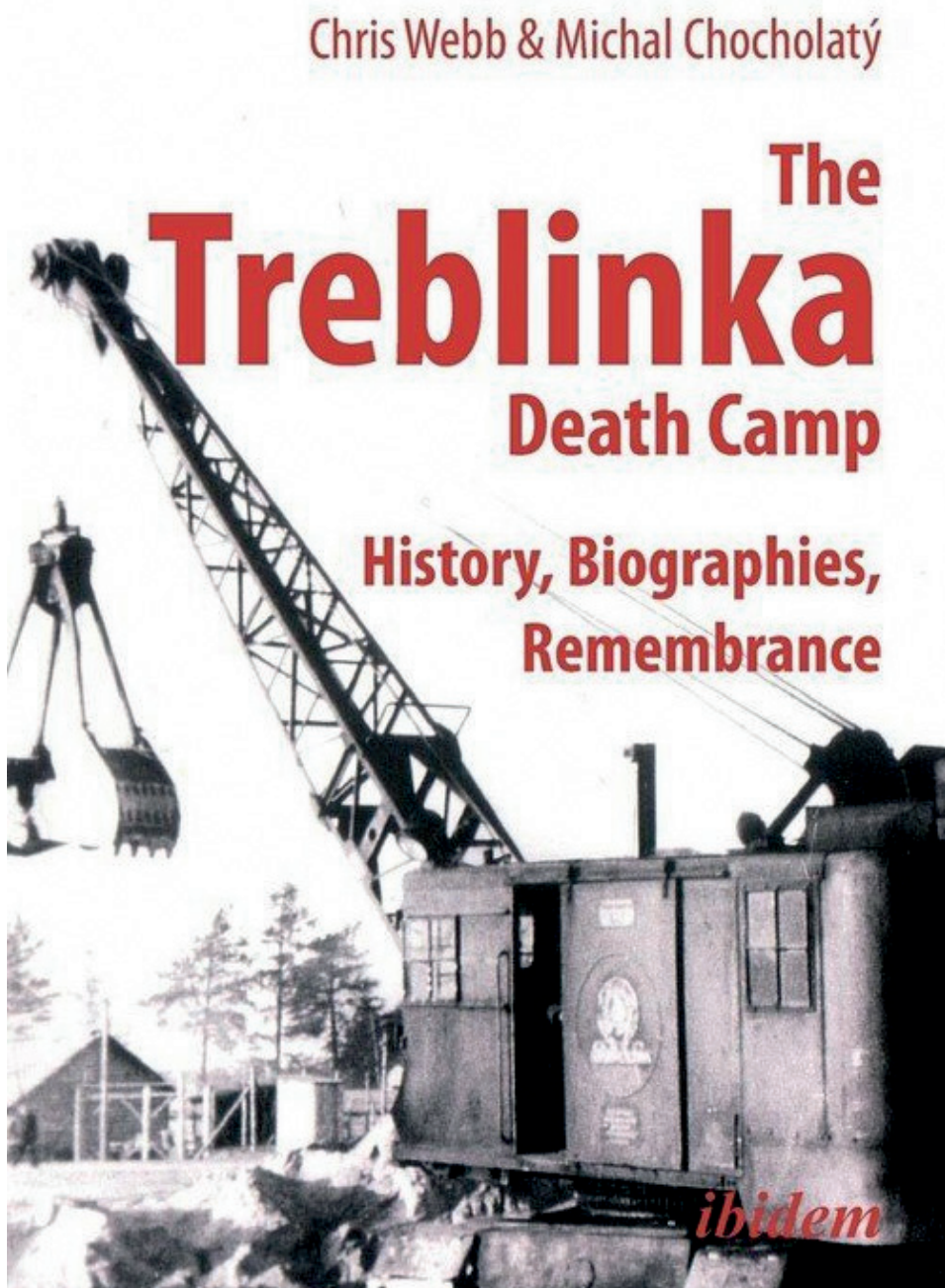
The extensive bibliography indicates that the author has a broad familiarity with the subject of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. He refers to the sources in Czech, Polish, English, German and Russian. Chocholatý regrets that he does not know Hebrew or Yiddish well, because then he would be able to have a more complete picture of Treblinka. In his publication he also used fragments from the survivors' accounts which he collected himself. He put a lot of effort in the preparation of the book. It is undoubtedly a summary of his previous scientific work.

Regarding the book *Treblinka a Sobibor*, an article was also published titled "Michal Chocholatý Treblinka a Sobibor". The first part of the article refers to the death zone in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. It mostly contains the accounts of the witnesses about the behavior of Ukrainians during the extermination. Eliahu Rosenberg recalls the brutality of a watchman called Ivan the Terrible: "I do not know, how such an animal was born on our planet... This murderer would stand in front of the door to the gas chambers, and would cut parts of the flesh with a bayonet. Kalman Taigman reports: "At the end of the road there was a building in modern style, with flowers around it and the Star of David. It was supposed to be a bathhouse. In front of the building's gate there was a group of Ukrainians, among them one was exceptionally sadistic".⁵⁶ The account of Chil Rajchman indicates the division between prisoners in the extermination zone. The dentists pulled out golden teeth, grave diggers would put the bodies on stretchers and transported them to the mass graves.⁵⁷

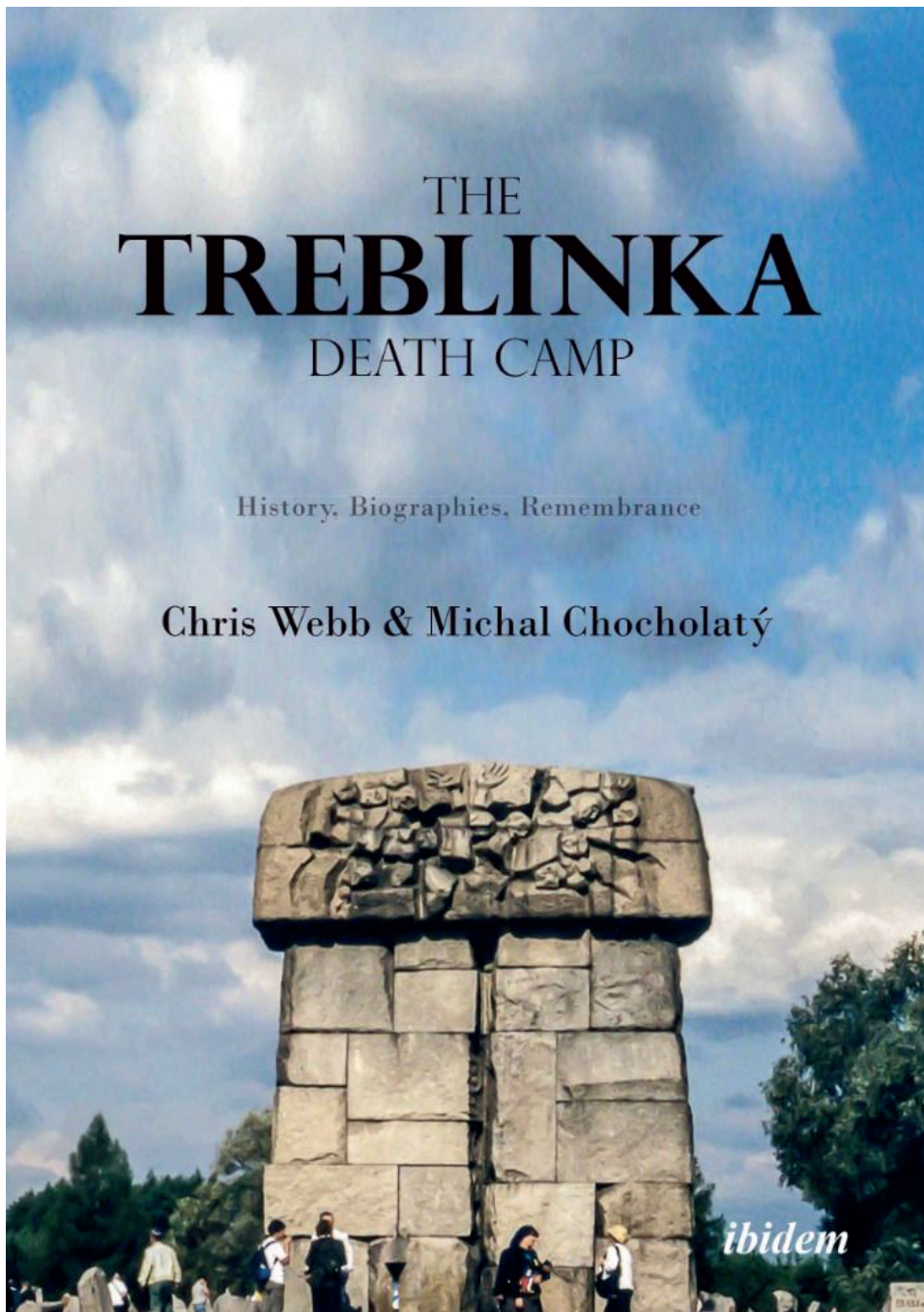
In 2021, the book from 2014, *The Treblinka Death Camp. History, Biographies, Remembrance* by British historian Chris Webb and Michal Chocholatý was republished. The book contains 592 pages and is available in English; the book from 2014 contains 486 pages. The titles of the chapters are: Chapter one: "Penal labor camp: Treblinka I". Chapter two: "Construction of the Death Camp: Treblinka II". The next is: "Initial Phase under Dr.

56. M. Chocholatý, "Treblinka a Sobibór, Vyhlažovací sektor Treblinky v druhé funkční fázi v porovnání se sektorem smrti v Sobiboru", *Internetový magazyn deníku knihy*, 16/10/2020, číslo 10, ročník 31, p. 20. See: https://www.denikknihy.cz/pdf/1020.pdf?fbclid=IwARom9DdrHkDWYkDSXM4zluP3Hgkrur_2R3TGnWvkeO4CV875UCfPjkEmFNM (accessed: 22.03.2021).

57. Ibid., p. 21.



7. Cover of the book *The Treblinka Death Camp. History, Biographies, Remembrance*. First edition from 2014 [source: <https://www.empik.com/the-treblinka-death-camp-chocholaty-michal-webb-chris,p1097242085,ksiazka-p>]



8. Cover of the book *The Treblinka Death Camp. History, Biographies, Remembrance*, Re-edition from 2021 [source: <https://www.ibidem.eu/en/the-treblinka-death-camp-14314.html>]

Eberl: July-August 1942". Chapter four: "Chaos and Reorganization". Chapter five: "Industrialized Mass Murder: September-December 1942". Chapter six: "Deceptions and Diversions: Late 1942-early 1943". Chapter seven: "Visit by the Reichsführer-SS: Orders to Erase Evidence of Crimes (working commandos, camp's orchestra)". Chapter eight: "Jewish Work Brigades". Chapter nine: "The Camp Revolt: August 2, 1943". Chapter ten: "The End of Treblinka and Aktion Reinhardt: August-November 1943". The second part refers to the survivors, victims and perpetrators. Chapter eleven contains: "Interviews with Treblinka survivors". Chapter twelve: "Wartime Reports about the Death Camp". Chapter thirteen: "Transports and Death Toll". Chapter fourteen: "Treblinka War Crimes Trials". Chapter fifteen: "From Trawniki to Treblinka". Chapter sixteen: "The Real 'Ivan the Terrible'". Chapter seventeen: "Roll of Remembrance". Chapter eighteen: "The Perpetrators". The book can be purchased in print version and as an audio-book in bookstores and online shops. Fragments of the book are available at the website Google Books.⁵⁸

Due to the extensiveness of the publication I will only refer to the second chapter "Construction of the death camp Treblinka II". In the chapter the reader learns about the location of the camp. They find out about the railwayman from the Treblinka train station Franciszek Ząbecki's affiliation with the Home Army. A fragment of his account, concerning the construction of the extermination camp, is included. The account of Lucjan Puchała, a prisoner of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp indicates that Jews from Stoczek Węgrowski and Węgrów transported in cars to the construction site of the extermination camp. Even then, the guards who were supervising this group were already committing murders. A hermetically sealed door is mentioned in the account of Jan Sułkowski⁵⁹ who found out from one of the SS men that it was supposed to be a bathhouse. Richard Thomalla from the Construction Office of the Waffen-SS and Police in Lublin was overseeing the construction of the camp. The dimensions of the camp (400 m x 600 m) and the height of the fencing (3 or 4 meters) were given, as well as the information that in 1943 anti-tank obstacles were added as an additional hedge. The guards who were guarding the camp

58. https://books.google.pl/books?id=RVD_BgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=o#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed: 29.03.2021).

59. The account of Jan Sułkowski. See: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra/publication/293/edition/281/content?navq=aHRocDovL3d3dy56YXBpc3loZX-Jyb3J1LnBsL2RsaWJyYS9yZXN1bHRzP3E9SmFuK1NiJUM1JTgya293c2tpJmFjdGlvbj1TaW1wbGVtZWZyY2hBY3Rpb24mbWRpcmlkc2omdHlwZTotNiZzdGFydHNocjlfYWxsJnA9MA&navref=ODU7N3QgM2JpOzNhda> (accessed: 31.03.2021).

day and night were recruited from among the Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, who were called the Trawnikiänner (men from Trawniki). This name was taken from the name of the training camp in Trawniki near Lublin. The inside of the camp was described: the layout of the ramp, the Lazzaret, the path to the gas chambers. The account of Abraham Bomba⁶⁰ about the gas chambers was quoted. About how the victims would enter them with their hands raised and on top of their heads, two- and four-year-old children were thrown in order to fill the space as efficiently as possible. A fragment from Jankiel Wiernik's book about the gas chambers was also included:

When I arrived at the camp, three gas chambers were already in operation. [...] The outlet on the roof had a hermetic cap. Each chamber was equipped with a gas inlet pipe and a baked tile floor slating towards the platform. The brick building which housed the gas chambers was separated from Camp I by a wooden wall. This wooden wall and the brick wall of the building together formed a corridor which was 80 centimeters higher than the building. The chambers were connected with the corridor by a hermetically-fitted wooden door on this side. Each chamber had a door facing Camp II (1,80 meters x 2.50 meters), which could be opened only from the outside by lifting it with iron supports, and was closed by iron hooks set into the sash frames, and by wooden beams. The victims were led into the gas chambers through the doors leading from the corridor, while the remains of the gassed victims were dragged out through the door facing Camp II. The power plant operated alongside these chambers, supplying Camps I and II with electric current. An engine taken from a dismantled Soviet tank stood in the power plant. This engine was used to pump the gas which was let into the chambers by connecting the engine with the inflow pipes.⁶¹

In the chapter there are also fragments of other accounts of the former prisoners of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. Abraham Krzepicki reported that the gas chamber looked like a bathhouse with orange terracotta tiles. Eliahu Rosenberg mentioned red tiles which were supposed to

60. Abraham Bomba was born on June 9, 1913 in Bytom. During the war he stayed in Czestochowa, from where he was sent to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp on September 25, 1942. At the beginning he was assigned to work sorting clothes of the gassed people, later in the commando responsible for cutting hair. He escaped from the camp to Czestochowa in January 1943. He managed to survive until the liberation and emigrate to USA. He died in 2000 in Florida.

61. Ch. Webb, M. Chocholatý, *Treblinka Death Camp: History, Biographies, Remembrance*, Stuttgart 2014, p. 29.

perfectly camouflage traces of blood. The chambers had a small window, which was never opened, its purpose was to watch whether the gassing procedure had finished.⁶²

At the YouTube website, in three short videos, Michał Chocholatý tells about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and themes related to it. The first, around 30-minutes long meeting refers, among others, to the discovery of the tiles from the gas chambers with the emblem of Dziewulski and Lange company. The trademark resembles the star of David, but it was not it. The artefacts are located at the permanent exhibition at the Treblinka Museum. In the meantime, contemporary photos from the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, as well as photos from the period of the archeological work and a drawing of Lazaret by Samuel Willenberg are displayed. Chocholatý explains how the bodies of the gassed people were burned at the grates made of railway tracks. He also shows a photo of the excavator used to dig out previously buried corpses and placed them on grates for burning. The excavator by Menck & Hambrock Ma, which was used for this purpose, can be viewed at the Museum of Work in Hamburg. Chocholatý, referring to the statement of Richard Glazar, emphasizes the fact that Treblinka was not a concentration camp. He explained that the death camp was located within the General Government, as one of the three camps of the so called "Operation Reinhard" (Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka). He spoke about *toten-juden* – prisoners who would pull out the bodies from the gas chambers onto the grates and to the mass graves. He also mentioned the three commandants of Treblinka. He spoke about the revolt in Treblinka, which gave some prisoners an opportunity to escape. During the revolt no German was killed and the gas chambers were not destroyed. He highlighted that transports from the Western Europe, e.g. Netherlands, were different from those coming from the occupied Poland. At the end, he informed that the camp's buildings were destroyed and its grounds were made to resemble a farm. During the video Chocholatý speaks in Czech language.⁶³

Another 7-minute long video in English and Polish revolves around the book: *Poslední z táborů smrti*. During the recording Samuel Willenberg tells that in Treblinka there were two excavators for digging out the corpses. When the excavators broke down, the prisoners had to take out human remains from its claws before it was taken for repair. Another prisoner of Treblinka talks about Kurt Franz and his dog Barry. Toivi Blatt from Sobibor mentions that prisoners heard the screams of the victims and could smell the stench of burning bodies. Chocholatý mentions gassing the victims, the cruelty of Ukrainians who were rushing people to the gas

62. Ch. Webb, M. Chocholatý, *Treblinka Death Camp...*, op.cit., pp. 19-30.

63. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEEve66szos> (accessed: 2.03.2021).

chambers with bayonets and pipes and about the three gas chambers functioning during the initial phase of the camp's operation.⁶⁴

The next 7 minute long video is dedicated to promoting the Chocholatý's book *Treblinka a Sobibor*. During the meeting in the Kosmas bookstore in Prague, the author briefly explained what were the camps of "Operation Reinhard". He tells about how the work of the prisoners looked in the extermination zone, where were the gas chambers and mass graves as well as the grates for burning the corpses. He mentions two Czech prisoners who survived the camp: Richard Glazar and Karel Unger. He points out similarities and differences between the extermination zones in Treblinka and Sobibór. He mentions meeting Caroline Sturdy Colls in Warsaw from whom he had learned that the mass graves are partially covered in concrete. The British archeologist specializes in field research with the use of non-invasive methods combined with confronting it with the accounts of the crime witnesses. The interview was conducted in Czech language, the quality of the recording, especially when it comes to the sound, leaves a lot to be desired. However, it is important to remember, that it is an amateur video, probably made by one of the listeners of Chocholatý's presentation.⁶⁵

Another way of reaching a wide spectrum of recipients was Michal Chocholatý's appearance on Radio Patriot. On July 14, 2020, on the radio show Michal told his listeners how he had always liked writing and that his goal had been to write about one of Holocaust sites. He visited Poland to get a better understanding of the functioning of the camps to teach his students better. He wants to promote the knowledge about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp among Czech people, who in his opinion confuse even the terminology related to concentration camps and extermination camps, which is why Michal often addresses this subject during his appearances. During the radio show he explained that in 1941 the Treblinka Labour Camp had begun operating, later renamed the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, and from 1942 it operated at a distance of 2 km from the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. He emphasized that the two camps had different roles. He also mentioned the transports arriving from Warsaw and other cities located within the General Government. He quoted statements of Richard Glazar and Samuel Willenberg. He spoke about the preparations for the rebellion. Chocholatý also told the listeners how he had reached the witnesses of Treblinka.⁶⁶

64. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS6uAryNNxk> (accessed: 2.03.2021).

65. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS6uAryNNxk> (accessed: 2.03.2021).

66. Radio show from Radio Patriot from 14.07.2020. <https://hearthis.at/radio-patriot-ue/rozhovor-michal-chocholaty-historik-specialista-na-holokaust-a-nacisticke-vyhlašovaci-tabory-14.7.2020/> (accessed: 22.03.2021).

For Michał Chocholatý Treblinka is the place that has been the subject of his reflection for over 20 years. He reflects upon Treblinka every day. He ponders not only on the atrocities that happened there. Treblinka holds his interest also for research reasons. The camp of immediate extermination, a real “death factory”.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

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MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES AT THE SITE OF THE EXTERMINATION CAMP AND THE PENAL LABOUR CAMP IN TREBLINKA IN THE YEARS 2016-2020

INTRODUCTION

The authors published the first results of their studies of the Treblinka camps in 2013.¹ That article contained a preliminary interpretation of the Treblinka I Labour Camp based on an aerial photograph from May 1944. The publication made it possible to establish cooperation with the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka.² Subsequent published studies from 2014³ and 2015⁴ helped to bring new facts about the topography of the Treblinka Forced Labour and the Extermination Camp into the history of studies. The materials collected and the support of the Museum's management permitted the submission of a project application in 2016 within the framework of the programmes of the Ministry of Culture and

1. S. Różycki, M. Michalski, "Karny Obóz Pracy Treblinka I na niemieckim zdjęciu lotniczym. Ukryte piekło", *Odkrywca*, 2013, 12 (179), pp. 26-28.

2. In 2018 the museum became an independent municipal institution of culture under the name Treblinka Museum. The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944) – Resolution of the Mazovian Regional Assembly No. 58/18 of May 22, 2018.

3. M. Michalski, S. Różycki, "Suplement I. Epizody z okresu II wojny światowej" [in:] W. Hadała, *Małkinia od czasów najdawniejszych*, JWK MEDIA Janusz Wojciech Kowalski, 2014, pp. 195-214.

4. S. Różycki, S. Marczak, M. Michalski, E. Kopówka, "Inwentaryzacja śladów działań wojennych z okresu II wojny światowej oraz pomiary geodezyjne na obszarze obozów Treblinka I i II" [in:] *Treblinka – Historia i Pamięć*, ed. E. Kopówka, Siedlce: Muzeum Regionalne w Siedlcach, 2015, pp. 143-159.

National Heritage and the Marshal's Office of the Mazovian Region. This article presents the main results of multidisciplinary studies conducted at the site of the Extermination Camp and the Penal Labour Camp in Treblinka between 2016 and 2020. It also introduces the latest and previously unpublished documents on the history of the Treblinka I and II camps and discusses problems related to the erroneous identification of photographic material published in the literature of the subject.

STUDIES CARRIED OUT IN 2016

One of the main objectives for starting the studies in 2016 was to systematize and describe the source materials, the documentation available in the archives depicting the investigated camps from the point of view of their topography and taking regard of their spatial dimension. Another objective was to carry out as complete archival searches as possible for aerial photographs, cartographic material and textual documents not familiar to the literature of the subject. A novel solution was the development of a methodology for combining descriptive information (derived from testimonies and memories) with spatial data in terms of historical studies. The 2016 studies also included field surveys. Gravimetric⁵ and GPR surveys were carried out in selected spots within the forest situated near the village of Maliszewa (the so-called Maliszewa Forest) to search for the location of mass graves. The results from both methods were used to refine the possible locations where burials might be present. Archaeological prospections were conducted for two areas of suspected mass graves.⁶ One execution trench was located in the course of a search using invasive technique. At a depth of 90 cm, the humerus of a person under the age of 14 was found.⁷

In the area of a dumping ground located near the Sorting Building (Treblinka I Labour Camp), dozens of relics were found, including metal fragments of shoes and clothing, buttons, belt buckles, cartridge cases, coins, as well as glass containers and numerous unidentified fragments of metal

5. T. Olszak, *Raport z pomiarów grawimetrycznych na obszarze obozów w Treblince*, Warszawa 2016 (typescript in the archives of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw University of Technology).

6. R. Zapłata, *Sprawozdanie wstępne z części badań archeologicznych przeprowadzonych w ramach projektu "Metodyka integracji i harmonizacji danych wieloźródłowych dla potrzeb badań nad funkcjonowaniem obozów w Treblince"*, Warszawa 2016.

7. J. Tomczyk, *Analiza antropologiczna*, Warszawa 2016 (typescript in the archives of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw University of Technology).

objects.⁸ These historical artefacts will expand the Museum's collection of exhibits. Skeletal fragments of human remains were also encountered in the described area. The last significant achievement of the 2016 investigation was the discovery and excavation⁹ of a section of a railroad rail located in the area of the gravel pit. The piece of rail, which is over 7 metres long, has been made available to the public and is currently displayed in front of the entrance to the Museum.

STUDIES CARRIED OUT IN 2017

As part of the studies carried out in 2017, two burial pits were located in the area of the Maliszewa Forest – the sites were subsequently marked with crosses and information boards. The location of two gates of the Treblinka I Labour Camp was demarcated. An information board was put up at one of them (most easily accessible to the public). A section of the road leading to the execution sites was also traced and marked out. Along the road, signs were installed with accounts of witnesses who survived the executions.

Four terrain depressions located in the vicinity of the Museum building were also examined. The exploration carried out suggests that those places may have been used for storage purposes. One such topographically depressed site, situated along the road leading to the Extermination Camp memorial monument, was marked with a board.

In order to trace burial pits (in the area of the Maliszewa Forest), aerial photographs from May and September 1944 were analysed. In the field, depressions were observed that were identical to the ground intrusions visible in the photograms. Two of them were selected for verification by means of test trenches. The first test trench cut across one of the depressions. After removing the humus layer, the outline of a 1.6 m wide pit was discovered. Shell casings were found both within and outside the feature. Outside the pit they were only found in the shallow subsurface while inside the pit, they were located throughout its entire thickness.¹⁰ At a depth of 1.4 m below the ground, human bones were encountered: a left femur and the

8. R. Zapłata, *op.cit.*

9. K. Niemczak, *Raport z badań archeologicznych na terenie Obozu Pracy w Treblince*, Warszawa 2016 (typescript in the archives of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw University of Technology).

10. Id., *Raporty z badań archeologicznych na terenie Obozu Pracy w Treblince*, Warszawa 2017 (typescript in the archives of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw University of Technology).

epiphysis of the proximal left tibia.¹¹ Both visible epiphyses were well ingrown, allowing us to conclude that they belonged to an adult individual that was over 20/22 years of age. The femur showed a rather weak development of the linea aspera, which may indirectly indicate the female sex of the individual.¹²

In the test trench 2, after removing the humus layer, the outline of a 90 cm wide pit was discovered in the central part of the trench. During exploration, the neurocranium region of a skull was found at the level of 60 cm below the ground (Figure 1). All the cranial sutures were fully obliterated, indicating the adult age of the individual. The preserved right temporal bone showed a fairly undeveloped mastoid process (*processus mastoideus*), which suggests that this was a female individual. The skull was burnt and showed black staining.¹³



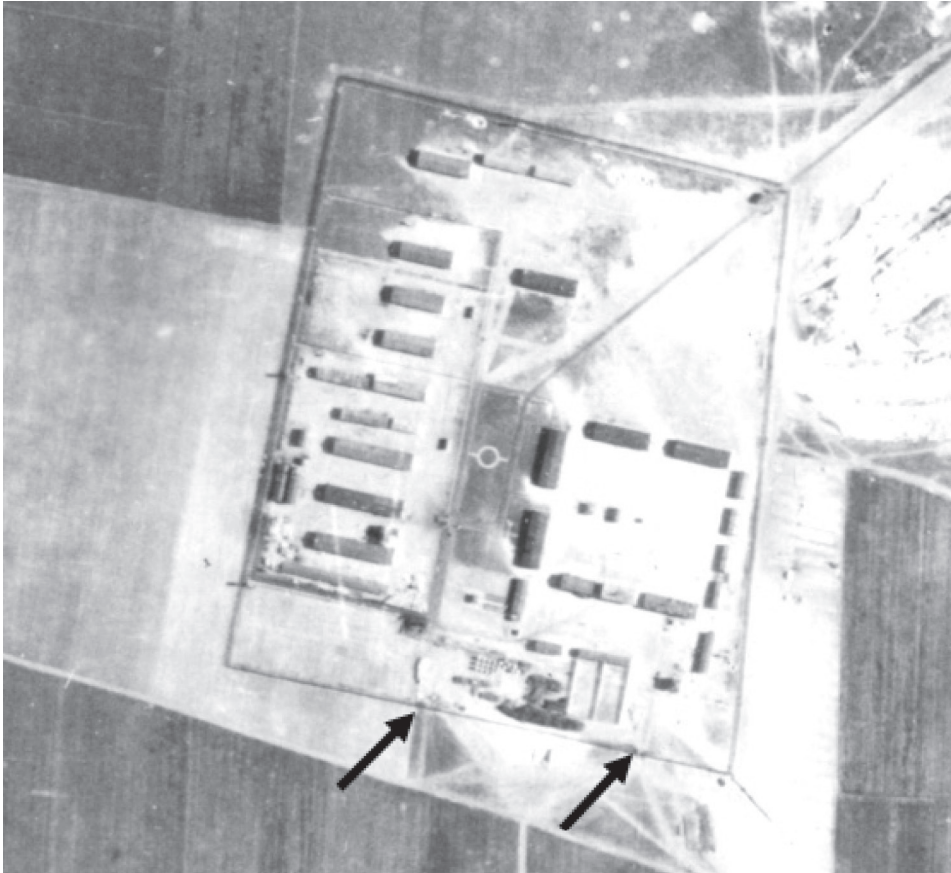
1. The neurocranium region of a skull discovered in the test trench 2
(photo by S. Różycki)

11. K. Niemczak, *Raporty z badań archeologicznych na terenie Obozu Pracy w Treblince*, Warszawa 2017 (typescript in the archives of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw University of Technology).

12. J. Tomczyk, *Analiza antropologiczna*, Warszawa 2017 (typescript in the archives of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw University of Technology).

13. Ibid.

In 2017, based on the interpretation of archival aerial photographs, the southern gates of the Treblinka I Labour Camp were located and demarcated (Figure 2). One of the gates (accessible from the road leading to the memorial) was marked with an information board. Those gates were of great importance in the operation of the Labour Camp. Roads from them led to execution sites located about 500 metres south of the Maliszewa Forest.



2. Aerial photograph from May 1944. The two camp gates of the Treblinka I Labour Camp are marked with arrows [source: National Archives and Records Administration of the United States (NARA)]

The designation of one of them has high informational and educational value. It is proposed that from the very gate (accessible from the current road) a path should be laid to commemorate the last moments of the convicts led to the execution sites in the so-called Maliszewa Forest. This idea has been partially implemented. At a distance of 10 and 20 metres from



3. Selected historical artefacts found in the depressions in the vicinity of the Treblinka Museum's building (photo by S. Różycki)

the camp gate, two boards have been put up featuring accounts of witnesses who escaped death during the shootings in the Maliszewa Forest.

In 2017, a field survey was also carried out covering four depression sites in the area around the Museum building. Currently those depressions are overgrown with low vegetation. Natural and backfill processes are likely to have caused the sites to become shallower than their original depths. The first explanations of the origin and function of those terrain depressions were presented in the article by Różycki and co-authors.¹⁴ In that publication, the authors stated that approximately 110 remnants of earthworks of various types were located in an area measuring approximately 700 x 400 metres. Their position in relation to each other is quite structured and they are often situated on both sides of forest roads. Most of those features are similar in shape and size (squares of approximately 9 x 9 metres or rectangles of approximately 12 x 6 metres). In addition, in many cases the earthen banks around the depressions are open on one side or present discontinuities. Having analysed the available material related to both the technology of construction of the frontline infrastructure elements in question, as well as histographic material and aerial photographs,

14. S. Różycki, S. Marczak, M. Michalski, E. Kopówka, "Inwentaryzacja śladów działań wojennych z okresu II wojny światowej oraz pomiary geodezyjne na obszarze obozów Treblinka I i II" [in:] *Treblinka – Historia i Pamięć*, Siedlce: Muzeum Regionalne w Siedlcach, 2015,

it was concluded that the remains in the form of terrain depressions could be dugouts with storage functions, used by the Soviet Army. The depressions described are fairly often traced back to alleged warfare carried out in the area of camps, bombing or illegal digging of land. Such accounts are quite often reported by local residents, among others.

In order to validate the thesis posed above, an archaeological investigation was carried out on the basis of a field survey conducted with the use of metal detectors. Four dugouts were selected. Amongst other things, metal parts of chest fittings, fragments of cutlery, and soles of military boots were found in them (Figure 3). The elements of chest fittings found in the four investigated sites were especially conducive to confirming the thesis of dugouts.

STUDIES CARRIED OUT IN 2018

In 2018, exploratory works helped delineate – and archaeological prospection allowed to confirm in the field – two previously un-memorialised burial sites, in the form of burial pits (within the Maliszewa Forest).

In addition, in the same year, one of the sidings running from the Treblinka railway station was mapped on the basis of an analysis of documents and archival materials combined with an archaeological survey.

Investigations continued in the area of the so-called Maliszewa Forest, where executions and burials of prisoners from the Treblinka I Labour Camp, among others, took place. The field reconnaissance covered 2 sites near the edge of the Maliszewa Forest. As a first step, metal-detection prospecting was carried out in the vicinity of the selected sites. Approximately 30 shell casings, mainly Mauser and TT, were found. Test trenches were dug in two selected depression sites.

A metal wreath with wrought-iron leaves of oak and other plants was encountered in the test trench I at a depth of 0.8 metres. At a depth of about 1.60 metres below the ground, an outline of a coffin appeared in the form of a thin layer of decayed wood with accompanying human bones.¹⁵ The outline of the coffin contained a human skeleton in the supine position (Figure 4). The left upper limb was bent at the forearm and folded on the abdomen. The right upper limb was slightly bent at the forearm and placed on the pubic symphysis. A (wedding) ring was visible on phalanx bones. Near the right humerus, there were a black-coloured comb,

15. Niemczak K., *Raporty z badań archeologicznych na terenie Obozu Pracy w Treblince*, Warszawa 2018 (typescript in the archives of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw University of Technology).

4 buttons and an elongated orange-coloured object (difficult to identify). Scraps of black fabric were present in the pelvic area. Based on the anthropological analysis, it appeared that we were dealing with an adult individual (epiphyses of long bones were fused). However, it was impossible to determine more precisely the age and sex of that individual. It could be inferred from the deposited artefacts that we encountered a male individual. Based on preliminary analyses, it can be presumed that a grave of a Ukrainian guard was encountered in the 1st trench. From witness accounts, we know that the so-called “Wachmänner” were buried in the area known as the Maliszewa Forest (Figures 4 and 5).



4. The test trench 1. Uncovered burial pit (photo by S. Różycki)

In the test trench 2, a metal shell casing was found at a level of about 50 cm below the ground. Exploration continued to the level of about 1.5 metres below the ground, where human remains were found: a skull, pelvis, rib and the right humerus (Figure 5).¹⁶

The manner in which the remains were arranged was rather unusual (the rib and humerus were positioned too far away from other bones), which does not exclude the possibility that we encountered two individuals. The

16. J. Tomczyk, *Analiza antropologiczna*, Warszawa 2018 (typescript in the archives of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw University of Technology).



5. The test trench 2. Uncovered burial pit (photo by S. Różycki)

characteristics of the burial pit found in the test trench 2 are very similar to the burial pits discovered in 2016 and 2017.

The third task of the studies in 2018 was to map the railway siding of the Treblinka station and to describe its role in the functioning of the Extermination Camp. Prior to undertaking field investigations, a rich set of spatial data in the form of maps, plans and aerial photographs was acquired: a) a German aerial photograph of September 29, 1944; b) a German aerial photograph of December 14, 1944; c) a topographic map on the scale of 1:10,000 from 1980; d) station plans on the scale of 1:1,000 of December 31, 1960. As a result of this phase of work, the coordinates of the points marking the route of the railway siding were obtained, and the siding was dated to September 1944. The coordinates made it possible to determine its course in the field based on GPS measurements. The mapped route of the siding was commemorated at the end of December by the Treblinka Museum.

NON-INTRUSIVE INVESTIGATIONS IN 2017, 2018 AND 2020 IN THE AREA OF THE TREBLINKA II EXTERMINATION CAMP

Between 2017 and 2020, field investigations utilising geophysical prospection were carried out at the site of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. In 2020, archaeological studies were also carried out under the supervision of the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries.

Following the analysis of testimonies and plans of the camp, as well as the interpretation of archival material (mainly aerial photographs), it was decided to pursue magnetometer prospection in the site of the former Treblinka II Extermination Camp. It was the primary method of non-intrusive measurement. The magnetic method is used to detect objects that generate magnetic anomalies. Magnetic anomalies are produced by clusters of ferromagnetics (e.g. iron), but also by objects characterised by thermoremanent magnetisation, e.g. furnaces and burnt brick structures. The magnetometer surveys were carried out in the grounds around the memorial and in the area near the end of the former railway siding, currently overgrown with forest.

Follow-up surveys involving ground penetrating radar (GPR) and electrical resistivity imaging (ERI) were carried out on the selected areas. The GPR survey was conducted using the MALÅ X3M radar with a 500 MHz antenna. GPR prospecting was also performed in the area where remains or traces of the path leading to gas chambers were searched for. The length of the profiles in this area was about 289 metres. The ERI study used a measurement system manufactured by the Abem-Malå company. GPR profiling and ERI results confirmed the presence of anomalies associated with objects that could be remnants of gas chambers.¹⁷

The results of the 2020 magnetometer measurement in the area of the railway sidetrack indicated an anomaly associated with the sidetrack section where wagons rolled into the camp were stationed. This anomaly coincides with and is a continuation of the anomaly recorded during the 2018 measurements. The follow-up measurements in 2020 made it possible to record its boundary which can be considered as the end of the sidetrack.

Independently of the non-intrusive investigations, archaeological test trenching was also undertaken. The test units were excavated in the area which had been surveyed with a magnetometer in 2018. Anomalies were then located that could be linked to the camp lazaret, a dumping ground for useless belongings of transported victims and a waste pit. The studies were carried out after a permission from the Conservator of Historical Monuments was obtained. Members of the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries were also involved in the investigations. Human remains (both small bones and ground bones) were found within three test units. As expected in the area of magnetic anomalies, some metal artefacts were

17. C. Sturdy Colls, K. Colls, "The Heart of Terror: A Forensic and Archaeological Assessment of the Old Gas Chambers at Treblinka" [in:] *Archaeologies of Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, and Repression: Dark Modernities*, eds. J. Symonds, P. Vafeika, Palgrave Studies in Cultural Heritage and Conflict, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

recovered. These included keys, pocket knives, items of cutlery, shaving razors. Splinters of glass, pieces of porcelain and medicine bottles were also found. The nature of those artefacts may indicate that they were personal possessions of camp victims. The bones found during the study were deposited in the ground and buried by a representative of the Rabbinical Commission.

UNPUBLISHED ARCHIVAL MATERIALS – PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

When reviewing the latest publications on the description of the history of the Treblinka camps, it seems that no new archival documents have been discovered in recent past. However, it is not quite so. When preparing for new studies, the authors mainly draw on the already published literature, but they also aspire to access yet unknown sources.

NEW DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

In the course of ongoing archival queries in Polish and foreign archives in 2020, it was possible to trace previously unpublished documents related to both the Treblinka I Labour Camp and the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. Documents¹⁸ found in the State Archive in Lublin are related to deliveries of gravel by the SS Sonderkommando Treblinka to the camp in Trawniki. The document dated June 4, 1943 bears the signature of Willie Mätzig.¹⁹ The document was more fully discussed in the second edition of the monograph²⁰ titled “Topografia zbrodni. Obóz Zagłady Treblinka II” [Topography of Crime. Treblinka II Extermination Camp].

Another document (see Figure 6 with a translation), important for research related to the identification of prisoners of the Treblinka I Labour Camp, is a letter dated October 1943. It contains the names of people who were released from serving their sentences due to severe and incurable diseases.

18. State Archive in Lublin. Collection: Central Construction Board of Military and Police Forces in Lublin.

19. With the rank of SS Unterscharführer. It was the most junior non-commissioned officer rank in the SS.

20. S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *Topografia zbrodni. Obóz Zagłady Treblinka II*, 2nd ed., Warszawa: Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography of the Warsaw University of Technology, 2021.

DER # - UND POLIZEI-FÜHRER
IM DISTRIKT WARSCHAU
- ARBEITSLAGER TREBLINKA -

TREBLINKA, den 18. Oktober 1943.
Post Malkinia

Aktz Iab 19 06 04 Igh.-Nr.: 1512/43

Betr.: Entlassung von 8 kranken polnischen Häftlingen.
Bezug: Dortiges Schreiben - L. 392/43 - vom 15. Oktober 1943.
Anl.: Eine. + Zl. 370,07.

An die
Leitung des
Kreiskrankenhauses,
K l i m o w i z n a .
-Kreishauptmannschaft Sokolow-

Aufgrund Ihres Schreibens vom 15.10.1943, aus dem hervor-
geht, daß die Krankheiten ansteckend und unheilbar sind,
werden nachfolgende polnischen Häftlinge mit dem heutigen
Tage aus dem Zwangsarbeitslager Treblinka entlassen:

- 1.) Mieczkowski, Wiktor, geb.am 5.10.1892, aus Skierniewice
- 2.) Wytryskus, Stanislaw, geb.am 14.11.1924, aus Wolomin,
- 3.) Morawiec, Piotr, geb.am 9.2.1892, aus Warschau,
- 4.) ~~Be~~gnasiewicz, Wacław, geb.am 11.8.1897, aus Otwock,
- 5.) Walczuk, Mieczysław, geb.am 6.2.1926, aus Rogow,
- 6.) Rybarczyk, Piotr, geb.am 13.3.1920, aus Rogow,
- 7.) Mosiejczuk, Jan, geb.am 12.5.1874, aus Sabnie,
- 8.) Jurczak, Wacław, geboren 1911, aus Karakie.

Die Entscheidung über den weiteren Verbleib der Aufgeführ-
ten wird Ihnen anheimgestellt.

Anliegend werden Ihnen
Zl.: 370,07

überreicht. Es handelt sich um deponierte Gelder, die den
Häftlingen gehören, wie aus der anliegenden Aufstellung
hervorgeht.

Es wird um Auszahlung der Gelder und um Rücksendung einer
Empfangsbestätigung an das Zwangsarbeitslager Treblinka ge-
beten.

Der Kommandant des Zwangsarbeitslagers
T r e b l i n k a :

[Signature]
"- Hauptsturmführer.

6. Personal details of prisoners released from the Treblinka I Labour Camp due to ill health [source: Arlosen]

SS and Police of the Warsaw District
Treblinka Labour Camp

Treblinka, October 18, 1943

File ref.: 190604 Entry no. 1512/43

Re.: Release of 8 sick Polish Prisoners.

In ref. to: A letter from there – L 392/43 dated 15 October 1943

Encl.: (illegible word) 370.07 zł

**To the management of
the District Hospital
K l i m o w i z n a
District: Sokołów Podlaski**

Pursuant to your letter of 15.10.1943, which indicates that the diseases are contagious/ infectious and incurable, the following Polish prisoners are released from the Treblinka penal labour camp as of today:

- 1.) Mieczkowski Wiktor, b. 5.10.1892, from Skierniewice,
- 2.) Wytryskus Stanisław, b. 14.11.1924, from Wołomin,
- 3.) Morawiec Piotr, b. 9.02 1892, from Warsaw,
- 4.) Banasiewicz Wacław, b. 11.08. 1897, from Otwock,
- 5.) Walczuk Mieczysław, b. 6.02.1926, from Rogów,
- 6.) Rybarczyk Piotr, b. 13. 03.1920, from Rogów,
- 7.) Mosiejczuk Jan, b. 12.05.1874, from Sabnie,
- 8.) Jurczak Wacław, b. 1911, from Karskie.

The decision as to the further whereabouts of the persons mentioned is up to you. Enclosed I transmit 370.07 Polish zlotys. It is deposited money that belongs to the inmates listed above.

Please pay the money out and send the receipt back to the Treblinka penal labour camp.

Commandant of the penal labour camp
Treblinka
[illegible signature]

PROBLEMS IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

Archival materials in the form of original photographs and documents or their scans are collected and stored in state archives, institutions and museums around the world. It happens in many cases that these historic materials are inaccurately identified and described, and then reproduced in subsequent publications based on the erroneous identification. Therefore, in the course of archival research, it is often necessary to verify the documents found. While the documents from verified sources, such as the Institute of National Remembrance, the Yad Vashem Museum or the Treblinka Museum, raise no doubts, the authenticity and provenance of documents from other sources may sometimes arouse suspicion. It should be mentioned that in most cases erroneous descriptions or misidentification of sources were not a result of deliberate action, but rather a consequence of the inability to verify historical sources in the years immediately after the war, as well as before the so-called "Internet era". The development of the global body of information, the online access to original documents and thus the possibility of verifying the descriptions under photos or the descriptions of documents relatively quickly allows us to eliminate mistakes more and more effectively. It should be noted though that despite the advancement of technical means, the creation of databases and the possibility of accessing original materials, often researchers are still not able to confirm with certainty whether a given document is authentic or contains false information. As an example, let us take a book by Ryszard Czarkowski entitled *Cieniom Trebłinki* [To the Shadows of Treblinka], published by Bellona in 2020.²¹ It is the second revised edition of the book which was first published in 1989. We will refer to two pictures presented in the book. The first is an aerial photograph described as an "American aerial photograph from 1944 showing the site after the extermination camp" – Figure 7.

The second is a photograph described as "Burial of the bodies of the victims of Treblinka under the supervision of Germans" – Figure 8.²² Both pictures can be found between pages 192 and 193 of the book. Unfortunately, the first of these photographs is inaccurately described, it is not an "American photo", nor does it present the site of the former extermination camp. Contrary to the description in the book, the area shown in the photo is the railway station in Małkinia Górna and the surrounding area. The photo itself was originally taken by the German Air Force, and only after the war it was acquired by the American Archives. The purpose of taking

21. R. Czarkowski, *Cieniom Trebłinki*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Bellona, 2020.

22. The National Library of Poland. The current description is "Treblinka – burial of the murdered". Public domain.



7. A fragment of a photo published in the book entitled *Cieniom Treblinki*
[To the Shadows of Treblinka]

note of these facts is both to prevent further use of the misidentified photograph by persons unfamiliar with the subject and to draw the attention of the book's publisher to the fact that while the decision to reprint a book dealing with the difficult subject of the Holocaust is laudable in itself, 31 years after the first edition a verification of the pictures included originally in the book could have been done more thoroughly. The task of verifying the second photo described as "Burial of the bodies of the victims of Treblinka under the supervision of Germans" has turned out to be more difficult and was not completely resolved. It should be added that the photo in question was also described in Polona online library as "Burial of corpses in Treblinka I". Thanks to the commitment of the staff of the National Library of Poland, it was established fairly quickly that the photo had most likely been transferred to the Library in the 1970s, and its provenance is unknown. The description of the photo itself has been changed to mark that there are some doubts as to the accuracy of the legend. A description has been added that the wrong title was given by the archivist cataloguing the photo based on the annotation on the reverse. We would like to mention here that the staff of the National Library of Poland provided a quick and matteroffact response. Unfortunately, the most important issue could not be solved: What does the photo show, who took it and why was it described on the reverse as being taken in Treblinka? The question remains open. Perhaps it will be answered one day. However, difficulties in verifying archival materials related to the



8. A photograph in the collection of the National Library of Poland described as "Burial of the bodies of the victims of Treblinka under the supervision of Germans"

Holocaust will continue to arise in the future. In the opinion of the researchers, verification of any materials should be thorough and exhaustive, and any doubts should be recorded.

SUMMARY

Since 1947, the Treblinka I and Treblinka II camps have been safeguarded by protective measures and efforts have been made to commemorate the remains of the camps. In 2018, the Treblinka Museum – the Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944) was established. In 2007, research on the history of the camps in Treblinka was initiated by the Staffordshire University²³ and in 2016, by the Warsaw University of Technology. In 2018, the Treblinka Museum – the Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944) was established. In order to support the efforts undertaken by this new institution to commemorate the camps, develop the exhibition and organise new activities raising awareness of the crimes, there appears to be a need to continue research at Treblinka, extending its scope and using a wide range of research methods.²⁴ Comprehensive investigations using interdisciplinary approach are yet to be undertaken on the so-called Black Road, a place that, according to the witnesses, was used to dispose of and bury the ashes of the victims of Treblinka II. The authors hope that in the future such investigations will be possible, and specialists from various fields will add a new chapter to the tragic history of the Holocaust based on verified facts.

23. C. Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution*. Doctoral thesis. Staffordshire: Staffordshire University, 2011; id., "Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution", *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, 2012, 7(2), pp. 71-105; id., "O tym, co było, lecz nie zostało zapomniane. Badania archeologiczne na terenie byłego obozu zagłady w Treblince", *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały*, 2012, 8, pp. 83-118.

24. S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *Topografia zbrodni. Obóz Zagłady Treblinka II*, 2nd ed., Warszawa: Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography of the Warsaw University of Technology, 2021.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES IN THE VICINITY OF THE TREBLINKA II EXTERMINATION CAMP (2019-2020)

The archaeological studies in the vicinity of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp had two phases. In 2019, test excavations were conducted in the areas of Excavation units 1-4.¹ The following year, excavations were carried out in the northern part of Excavation unit 1.² The work undertaken was commissioned by the Treblinka Museum – the Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944) for the purposes of the project titled “Construction of the exhibition and educational facility”. Prior to choosing the location of the future facility, it was necessary to research the selected areas, mainly to exclude the presence of “death pits” and other features associated with the Extermination Camp. Archaeological test excavations in the areas of Excavation units 1-4 were conducted between December 9 and 23, 2019. As a result, in the northern part of Excavation unit 1, an area of 5 ares was selected as recommended for a preliminary archaeological survey, which was undertaken in the period from 18 to 28 November 2020. During both phases of work, the study team consisted of two archaeologists and three labourers. 16 members of the Mazovian Association of History Enthusiasts “Ryngraf” participated in the research with metal detectors. The research were led by Andrzej Bryńczak, M.A.

1. A. Bryńczak, *Sprawozdanie z sondażowych badań archeologicznych realizowanych dla zadania “Budowa obiektu wystawienniczo-edukacyjnego” związanego z niemieckim nazistowskim obozem zagłady Treblinka II*, part 1. Wykop 1, part 2. Wykopy 2-4, typescript MWUOZ del. Siedlce 2019.

2. A. Bryńczak, *Sprawozdanie z wyprzedzających badań archeologicznych realizowanych dla zadania “Budowa obiektu wystawienniczo-edukacyjnego”*, typescript MWUOZ del. Siedlce 2020.

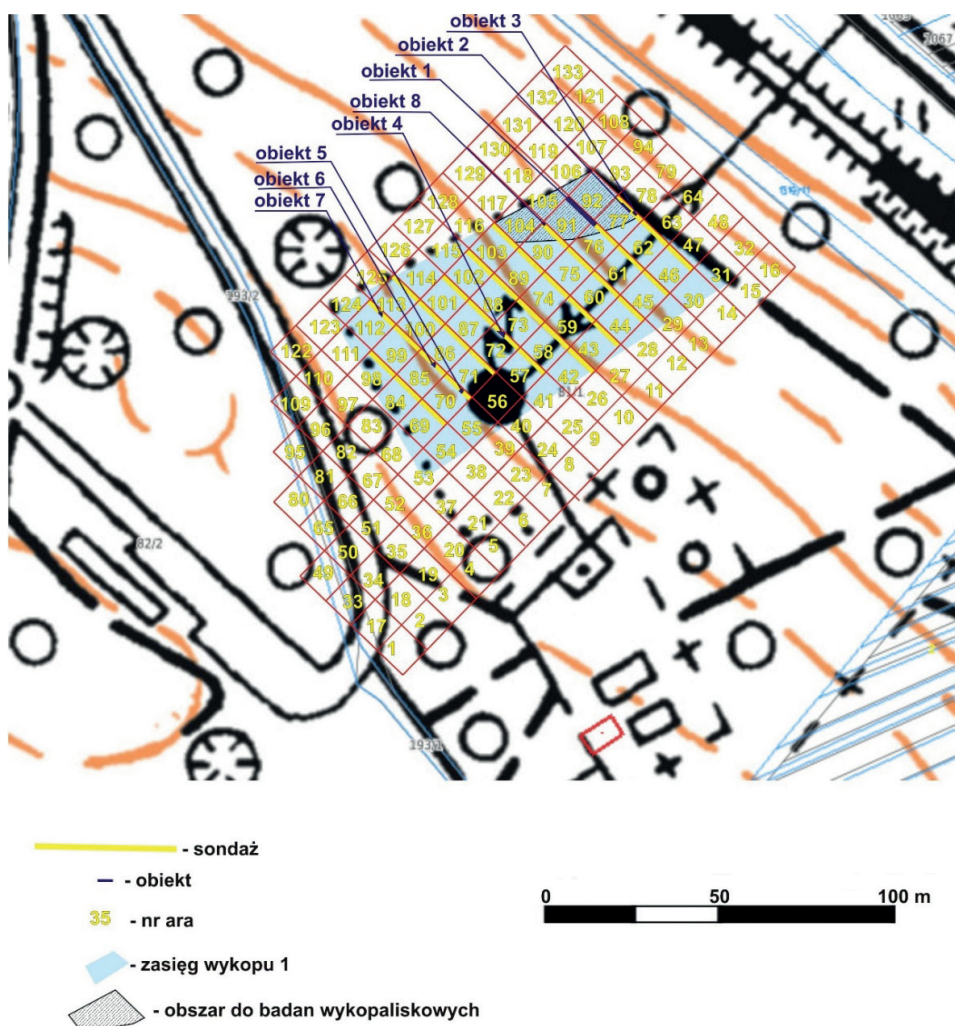


1. Excavation units 1-4 in the vicinity of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp – with backfilled test trenches visible on the orthophoto map [source: <http://geoportal.gov.pl> (accessed: 10.04.2021)]

Map key: Obóz Zagłady Treblinka II – Treblinka II Extermination Camp,
Wykop 1 – Excavation unit 1, Wykop 2 – Excavation unit 2, Wykop 3 –
Excavation unit 3, Wykop 4 – Excavation unit 4

Each of the four study areas had a separate are grid established, along which 1-meter-wide test trenches were demarcated to cover the entire width of the study areas. Appropriate distance was kept from parcel boundaries and wooded land (Fig. 1). In the course of test excavations, the works were performed mechanically – with the use of a mini-excavator – and manually. Layers of 5-10 cm in thickness were mechanically removed until reaching up to 30 cm into the level of undisturbed soil. The depth of test trenches ranged from 0.5 to 1 m. During the preliminary archaeological survey, after the mechanical removal of the humus layer, the remaining exploratory work was done manually. In the course of preliminary archaeological survey, profiles and bottoms of all test trenches were cleaned and documented photographically; marked out features were documented descriptively, photographically, and by means of drawings. The surfaces of all trenches, test pits and spoil heaps were inspected with metal detectors – prior to and during the works – by archaeologists and members of the Mazovian Association of History Enthusiasts “Ryngraf”. All the recovered artifacts were localised within the boundaries of the ares and demarcated features.

The natural stratification within the boundaries of Excavation units 1-4 was diversified. It consisted mainly of clayey gravels with abundant stones,



2. Excavation unit 1, location of test trenches, demarcated features, and the area selected for the preliminary survey [illustration by B. Bryńczak, topographical base: <http://www.geoportal.gov.pl> (accessed: 10.12.2019)]

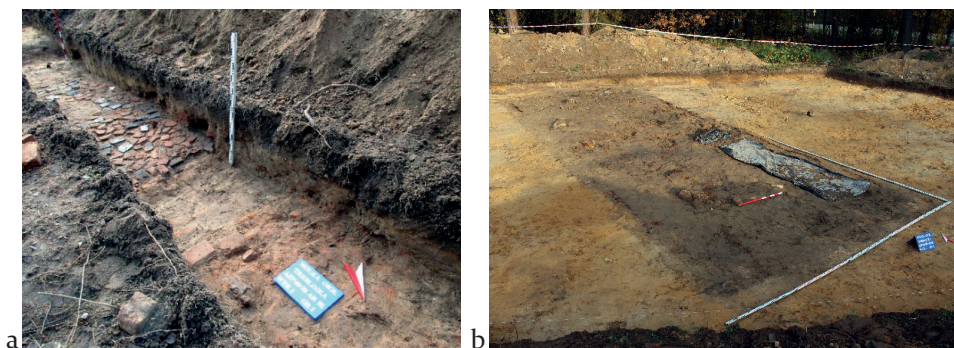
Map key: sondaż – test trench, obiekt – feature, nr ara – are number, zasięg wykopu 1 – extent of Excavation unit 1, obszar do badań wykopaliskowych – excavation area

often of considerable size. Clusters of clays and ferruginous precipitates – hardpans – were also observed in places below the humus layer. Occasionally, the natural substratum consisted of clayey sands. Immediately before test excavations, trees of various sizes – weed trees and tree stumps – were removed from the area of the digs.

EXCAVATION UNIT 1

Excavation unit 1, located to the north of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, had an area of 0.44 ha. Nine 1-m-wide test trenches were dug out within it, spaced every 10 m along the are grid. The total area surveyed by test trenching amounted to 3.5 ares. In the area of Excavation unit 1, the remains of eight spatial features were identified. Four of them (features 1-3, 8), were initially associated with the construction and operation of the Siedlce-Sokołów-Małkinia railway line. The line was constructed in the second half of the 19th century and put into operation in two stages – the first in 1887 and the second in 1893.³

At feature 1, a section of floor paving was exposed during the 2019 excavations (Fig. 3a). The shape and weight of the bricks indicated a late 19th century date. It was initially associated with the operation of the railway line from which the feature is separated by a few dozen metres. Two finds served as dating elements. The first was a Tsarist coin – 1 kopeck from the reign of Alexander II and minted in 1855, found with a metal detector in a spoil heap from the direct fill of feature 1. The other dating element was a fragment of the bottom of a plate with a signature: an embossed, glazed inscription FREUDENREICH.⁴



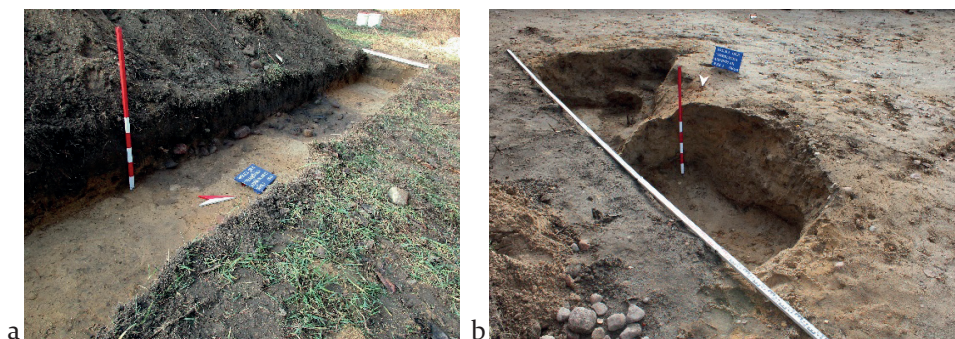
3. Excavation unit 1, feature 1. a) Remains of paving – brick pavement stabilising the habitable surface of the building – uncovered during test trenching in 2019; b) Outline of the entire feature 1 exposed during the 2020 excavations (photo by B. Bryńczak)

3. R. Dmowski: "Siedlecki Węzeł Kolejowy w latach 1866-1939. Zarys problematyki badawczej", *Prace archiwalno-konserwatorskie*, t. 13, Siedlce 2002, pp. 55-77.

4. It is the name of the proprietor of a works in Koło, which was owned by that family between 1842 and 1939. This type of signature, with a slightly cobalt glow, can be dated to the 1840s or early 1850s.

The fills of features 1-3 and 8, uncovered and partially explored during test excavations, yielded numerous ceramic finds falling within the chronological framework between the 19th and early 20th centuries: fragments of flat window panes, glass bottles, stoneware pots, an iron chain, and metal hinges. All of these premises pointed to a residential building of a railway flagman responsible for safety at the level crossing and control of the designated section of the track. At that time, railway line construction parameters provided for erecting and operation of a residential building at every level crossing, even outside of built-up area. More rationale in support of the above assumption was provided by other artifacts recovered with a metal detector: a Tsarist coin – a kopeck from 1855, a steel railroad spike attaching a rail to a sleeper, a steel washer, and an oval, thin, aluminium plate with embossed Cyrillic letters – a railwayman's cap badge.

Following a field inspection carried out by the Mazovian Regional Office for the Protection of Monuments (MWUOZ), Siedlce Delegation, it was determined that, since the nature and dating of the uncovered fragment of flooring were indisputable, there was no need to destroy it at the stage of test excavations. It would be more cognitively valuable to expose the flooring in its entirety if any future earthworks are undertaken in this location. Once documented, the exposed section of the floor was protected with plastic sheeting and backfilled. During the 2019 season, the eastern parts of feature 2 – two waste pits – and small sections of features 3 and 8 were also explored.



4. a) Feature 2 at the top level, 2019 research; b) feature 2 after exploration of the western part in 2020 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

Within the boundaries of Excavation unit 1, fragments of four more spatial features were demarcated in excavated test trenches. Three of them – features 4, 6, and 7 – were concluded to be of natural origin. Feature 5, with a surviving fragment of the lower part of a wooden post, was probably associated with the construction of a transformer station located nearby or

was an element of a fence. The northern part of Excavation unit 1, covering an area of 5 ares and containing the remains of features 1, 2, and 8, was demarcated for a preliminary archaeological survey in case this area would be selected for future development.

Preliminary archaeological excavations were carried out in November 2020 in the demarcated area, which allowed to document the remains of a wooden building (outline – feature 1; structural elements within the outline – features 10-36) and waste pits (features 2A, 2B, 8, 9).

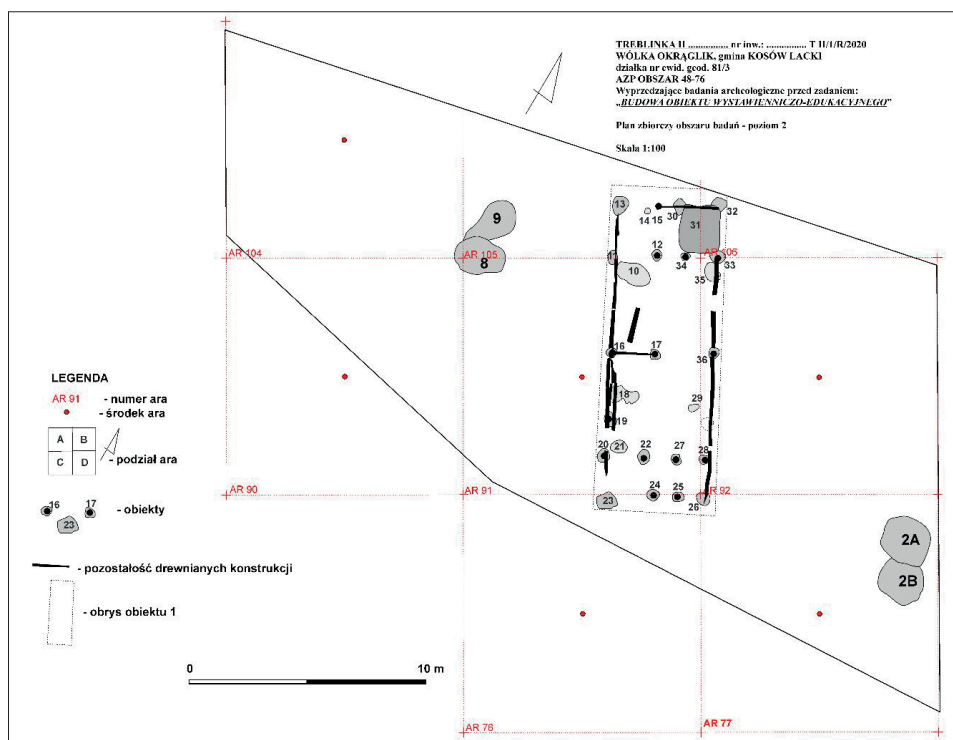
Feature 1 (Figs. 3b, 5), when fully exposed, measured 13 m x 5 m in outline (12.5 m x 4.5 m according to the lines of the timber structures), was oriented with its longer axis approximately in alignment with the N-S direction. The feature was located some 60 metres to the W of the presently non-existent tracks and had its longer walls parallel to them. The remains of the building's permanent foundations have not survived, and it is likely that the base of the building was made of stones, which were removed after the structure itself was demolished. Pits 13, 23, 26, and 32 are remnants of the cornerstones.



5. Feature 1, the base of level 1, drone shot (photo by M. Dębowiak)

The interior of the building was divided into four spaces – two vestibules and two chambers. The southern vestibule, measuring 4.5 m x 1.40 m inside, was narrower than the northern vestibule, measuring 4.5 m x 2.0 m. In the eastern part of the northern vestibule a hollow (feature 31) was documented. It probably represented the remains of a shallow cellar or a type of box for grain or other produces. Between the vestibules, there were two chambers of equal internal dimensions: 4.50 m x 4 m. The total

surface area of all rooms was just under 52 m². In all rooms, the flooring was made up of sandyclayey daub and below this layer, in both vestibules, the ground was paved with field stones. In the southern chamber, part of the floor was paved with brick fragments, while in the northern chamber there was a scattering of bricks and stones, probably from a destroyed masonry heater (Fig. 5). After removing the listed elements, the natural substratum with structural features and pits dug into the undisturbed soil was exposed (Fig. 6).



6. Summary plan of the 2020 study area, showing beams from level 1 of the building and structural elements of level 2 [illustration by B. Bryńczak]
Map key: nr ara – are number, środek ara – middle of an are, podział ara – are division, obiekty – features, pozostałość drewnianych konstrukcji – remnants of wooden structures, obrys obiektu 1 – outline of feature 1

The structure of the wooden external and internal walls was supported on vertical posts of about 25 cm in diameter (Fig. 6, features 12, 15-17, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 33, 34, 36), embedded 30-40 cm into the natural substratum and erected at a distance of 1-1.5 m from each other. On the corners of the building, the logs were probably interlocked with a notch, as suggested by features 13, 23, 26, and 32, being the remains of the

non-surviving corner foundations of the structure. No definite remains of an entrance to the building have been identified – it is possible that it had two entrances in the north and south gables.

During the 2019 and 2020 researches, approximately 1,400 potsherds, over 130 fragments of metal artifacts, and approximately 100 fragments of glass and faience were recovered from features 1-3, 8, and 9, which were identified as the remains of a wooden dwelling and the accompanying waste pits. Worth noting was the high quality of the pottery found in the features – fragments of thin-walled, wheel-thrown vessels decorated with glossy ornaments. From waste pit 2A came fragments of a vessel unique in colour, form and decoration (Fig. 7c). It is a beige-brown, single-ear jug with a sharply contoured body and clearly separated sections of the vessel. The neck is marked off from the body with a moulded convex band. The entire surface of the neck is decorated with vertical glossy ornaments. The upper part of the body is contained between the aforementioned moulded band at the transition of the neck into the body and a similar moulded band accentuating the sharp fold of the body. This part is divided with broad bands of vertical glossy ornaments creating separate quarters. Within them, the maker has “displayed” alternating ears of grain and grass.



7. Selected pottery from the fill of feature 2; a), b) – 2019 research, c) – 2020 research (photo by B. Bryńczak)

In parallel to the test excavations, the entire site of Excavation unit 1 was researched with metal detectors. That task was performed by archaeologists with the support of members of the “Ryngraf” Association. From the area of Excavation unit 1, measuring approximately 0.44 ha, a total of 61 metal artifacts were collected. In the following year, from a surveyed area of 5 ares, further 67 metal artifacts were recovered with the aid of metal detection while exploring the fills of individual features. The following is a brief overview of the various categories of those historical artifacts.

From the fill of feature 1 come two small Tsarist coins: 1 kopeck from 1855 and a “denezhka” from 1859. Apart from them, 5 coins make up a

temporally consistent assemblage: Polish coins from the interwar period, aluminium occupation coins minted on the model of the pre-war ones and aluminium coins of the German Reich – Reichspfennigs. Illegible coins were also included in this assemblage, which may later be subject to a negative verification. The assemblage should be considered jointly as all those coins may have been in circulation at the same time. As such, without any significant doubt, they and their presence should be recognised as being associated with the operation of the Treblinka camp. These are small denomination coins and so had little purchasing or metal value. From feature 1 comes a very well-preserved holy medal (Fig. 8b) with an image of Christ and the Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus and the inscriptions: SERCE JEZUSA ZMIŁUJ SIĘ NAD NAMI (*Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us*), and SERCA JEZUSOWEGO KRÓLOWO MÓDL SIĘ ZA NAMI (*Queen of the Heart of Jesus, pray for us*).



8. a) Tsarist coin dated 1859; b) holy medal. Both items recovered from feature 1 in the 2020 study (photo by B. Bryńczak)

The next category of finds, in terms of quantity, is cutlery: tablespoons, teaspoons, forks, whole knives, or their parts. The material of which they are made is varied: iron, aluminium, heavy metals such as brass, bronze, or plated metal. Many cutlery items stand out by their non-standard shape and ornamentation, usually with a floral or, more rarely, geometric motif. The only find included in the jewellery category is a delicate openwork pendant (Fig. 17b). Within the limits of Excavation unit 1, one shell casing and an unfired rifle round were found. They should be associated with



9. Cutlery handle decorated with a floral motif (photo by B. Bryńczak)

the Second World War period, as should two fragments of aircraft bomb shrapnel that were torn and deformed at the moment of explosion.

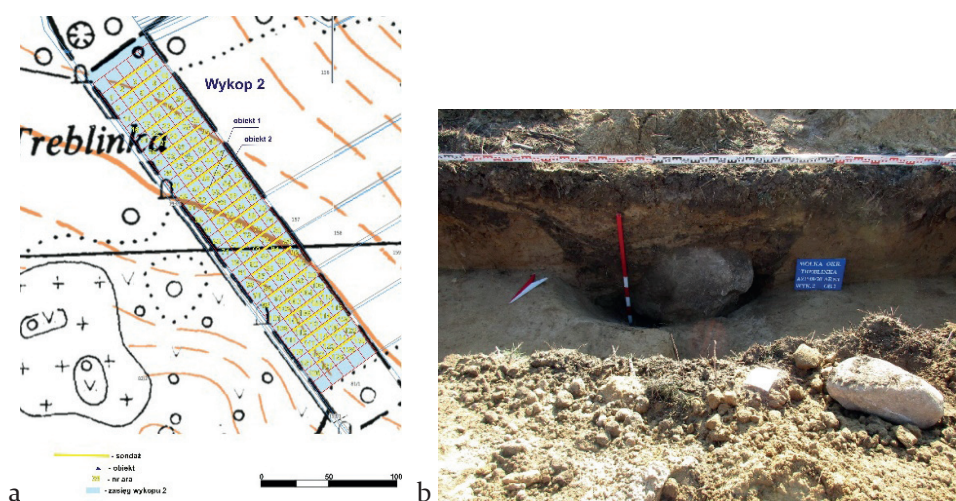
In 2019, an oval, aluminium medallion with an eyelet, badly damaged and practically illegible, an underwear, so-called “dishpan” button, and an oval, thin, aluminium plate, embossed with Cyrillic letters L E B (an applique? a badge from a railwayman’s cap?) (Fig. 10) were also recovered from the surface of Excavation unit 1 with the help of metal detectors. In addition, 2 fragments of a mouth organ and 2 lead seals were found.



10. An applique from the area of Excavation unit 1
(photo by B. Bryńczak)

TRENCH 2

Excavation unit 2, located along the north-eastern border of the Extermination Camp, measured 1.55 ha. There were twenty-six 1-m-wide test trenches dug that cut the excavation area crosswise. A total area of 9.1 ares was researched. Remains of two spatial features were demarcated within Excavation unit 2. An unusual interpretation, perhaps indirectly associated with the construction of the railway, was found for feature 1 whose profile appeared as a deep hollow with a 1-metre-wide stone located at its base (Fig 11b). The most obvious explanation for the origins of the feature is the theory that the stone was an obstacle to cultivation and the only way to get rid of that hindrance was to dig underneath it, roll it into a pit, and cover it up with soil. Another possible interpretation is related to oral transmission: large stones from the immediate vicinity were readily used for the construction of bridges and railway culverts. Since the wooden housing and farm buildings of the time also required stone foundations, peasants hid the stones by burying them in places known only to them. This second interpretation correlates with the findings in Excavation unit 2. Feature 2 isolated within the limits of Excavation unit 2 probably also represents a vestige of a buried stone.



11. Excavation unit 2, a) location of test trenches and features; b) feature 1 in the SE profile of are 53. Shot from NW (photo and illustration by B. Bryńczak)

EXCAVATION UNITS 3 AND 4

Excavation unit 3, located in the immediate vicinity of the eastern corner of the Extermination Camp border, extended over an area of 0.45 ha (Figs. 1 and 12a). Eight 1-m-wide tests trenches, with a total area of 3 ares, were dug within it. In the area of Excavation unit 3, remnants of one spatial feature were identified. The feature had a cross-section in the shape of an inverted



12. a) Excavation units 3 and 4, location of test trenches and features; b) excavation unit 3, feature 1 in the SE profile of are 53. Shot from the NW (photo and illustration by B. Bryńczak)

trapezoid with its base part much wider than the top. It was considered to represent the vestiges of an animal burrow (Fig. 12b).

Excavation unit 4, with a surface area of 1.44 ha, was directly adjacent from the SE to the site of the Extermination Camp (Fig. 1, 12a). Fifteen 1-m-wide test trenches, covering a total area of 6.1 ares, were excavated within it. In the area of Excavation unit 4, remains of two spatial features were identified.

Feature 1 probably represents the vestiges of a small regular hollow, 70 cm deep and 40 cm wide, with a flat base (Fig. 13). Feature 2 is a basin-shaped pit dug about 40 cm into the ground. No dating material was found in the fills of the features. Feature 1 may be related to human activity, feature 2 appears to be of natural origin (a backfilled tree stump hole?).



13. Excavation unit 4. a), c) feature 1 in the NW profile of the are 59; b) feature 1, base surface level within the test trench (photo by B. Bryńczak)

PORTABLE ARTIFACTS RECOVERED WITH METAL DETECTORS

Metal detector explorations covered the entire areas of Excavation units 1-4. They were conducted by archaeologists with the support of members of the Mazovian Association of History Enthusiasts "Ryngraf". From the area of all study sites, which totalled 3.88 hectares, 343 fragments of metal artifacts were collected. The following is a brief overview of the various categories of artifacts.

COINS

The use of metal detectors during test excavations made it possible to collect a total of 73 coins, ranging in time from the 2nd half of the 17th century (1659-1668) – two boratynkas (shillings) – to the 2nd half of the 20th century – 2 kopecks from the USSR dated 1977, as well as 10 groszy and 2 zlotys from the People's Republic of Poland (dated 1980). Coincidentally, it is also the timeframe for all the historical artifacts recovered during the 2019 and 2020 research in the vicinity of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp.



14. Selected coins obtained during test excavations from the site of excavation unit 4 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

The oldest are the copper shillings of John II Casimir minted in Vilnius, bearing the image of the Lithuanian coat of arms Vytis on the reverse, badly worn and hardly legible. Next in chronological order come the Prussian 1/24 thaler of 1782 and the Austrian 1 kreutzer of 1800 (Fig. 14a). Both these coins, and the second one in particular, may be the remnants of the Third Partition of Poland, when this area was briefly in the hands of Austria – from 1795 until the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807. Another group consists of coins from the period between the 19th century and the interwar period – Tsarist kopecks (7 pieces) and a Prussian silver coin from 1876.

The largest group, numbering 59 items, is made up of Polish coins from the interwar period, German occupation coins minted on the model of the pre-war coins, and aluminium coins of the German Reich – Reichspfennigs. That set was treated as a whole because all those coins may have been in circulation at the same time. In all probability, their presence can be linked to the operation of the Treblinka Extermination Camp. The coins are mostly of small denomination. By far the most coins were found within the perimeter of Excavation unit 2 (50 pieces). A few coins were recovered from each of the remaining research areas.

CUTLERY



15. Fork from excavation unit 2 and spoon from excavation unit 4 decorated with the same floral motif (photo by B. Bryńczak).

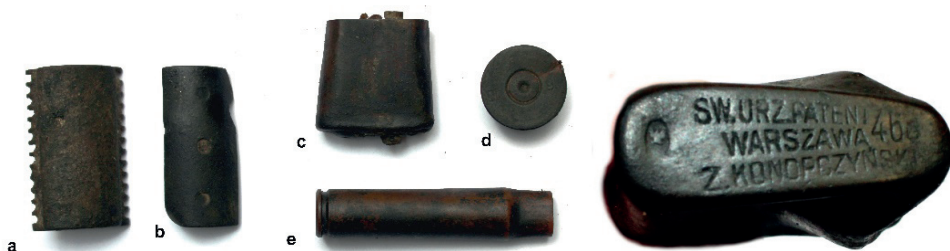
The next category of finds in terms of quantity is cutlery: tablespoons, teaspoons, forks, whole knives, or their parts. The material from which they are made varies: iron, aluminium, heavy metals such as brass, bronze, and plated metal. Many cutlery items are distinguished by above-standard shapes and decorations, usually with floral, less often geometric motifs. Some of the items bear traces of burning. The finds of two severely damaged pocket knives with broken blades and missing liners may be added to this category of artifacts.

MILITARIA

A total of 23 shell casings and unfired rifle and pistol rounds as well as a primer of a smoke bomb or flare were found. Most of the markings on the casings are illegible. The ones that can be read fall within the inter-war period and the times of the Second World War. 28 fragments of aircraft bomb shrapnel that were torn and deformed at the moment of explosion were recovered. All of them should be attributed to the period of the Second World War.

SHAVING RAZORS, LIGHTERS

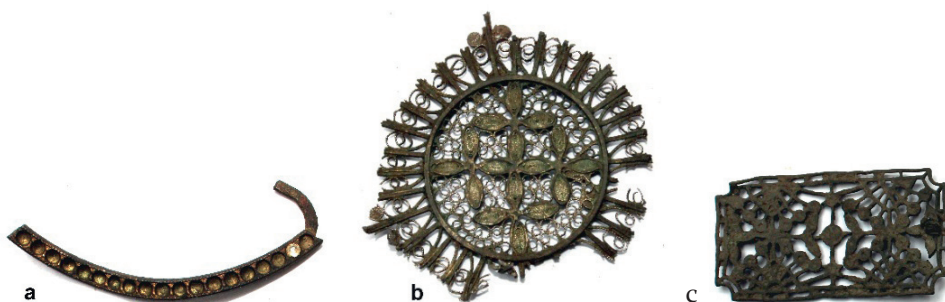
Four unimpeachable fragments of razor heads as well as and two probable ones were found. In addition, 10 fragments of petrol lighter parts were recovered, including one bearing the inscription: *SW. URZ. PATEN. WARSZAWA. Z. KONOPCZYŃSKI* (Fig. 16). All of the above should likely be linked to the operation of the camp.



16. Fragments of shaving razors, shell casings, and lighters from the site of excavation unit 2 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

JEWELLERY

12 historical artifacts were considered to be jewellery. This category of finds included four wedding rings, a cufflink, fragments of two bracelets, and an openwork pendant (Fig. 17b). These were found distributed evenly



17. a), c) fragments of bracelets(?); b) ornament – pendant(?)
(photo by B. Bryńczak)

across all excavation units: Excavation unit 1 contained 1 find, Excavation unit 2 – 5 finds; Excavation unit 3 – 2 finds, and Excavation unit 4 – 4 finds. One decorative element had its gemstones “plucked out”, except for one of them, apparently overlooked in a hurry (Fig. 17a).

WATCHES

More precisely speaking, we should be referring to watch parts, which include: fragments of cases, mechanical movements – calibres, and elements of bracelets. They come from wristwatches, pocket watches, men’s watches, women’s watches, and there is even a “butterfly” shaped winding key from an alarm clock. Of the twenty finds, half are components of the movements of pocket watches, apparently discarded as worthless. The greatest number of artifacts came from Excavation unit 2 (9 items), six elements were discovered in Excavation unit 3, and five in Excavation unit 4.



18. Parts of watches from the areas of excavation units 2 and 3
(photo by B. Bryńczak)

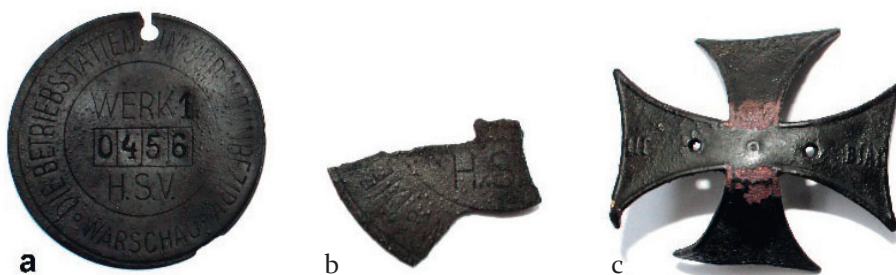
OTHER HISTORICAL ARTIFACTS

These comprise a total of 6 buttons – including men’s underwear so-called “dishpan” buttons, and a more ornate women’s button. 2 fragments of a mouth organ and 2 Yale-type keys: one with the inscription POLO-NIA and the other with the inscription DAMM were also recovered. That assemblage, furthermore, included one aluminium oval holy medal, badly damaged and virtually unreadable, and a reusable metal syringe with a graduation marked on the barrel and a partially preserved glass element.

EXCEPTIONAL FINDS

The following were considered as exceptional finds: an identification badge enabling one to leave the Warsaw Ghetto in order to work outside – one badge virtually complete and a fraction of another (Fig. 19 a, b). The fully preserved badge bears an embossed circular inscription: DIE BETRIEBSSTATTEN IM. JUD. WOHNBEZIRK WARSCHAU; and another inscription in its central part reading: WERK 1, 0456, H.S.V. A similar ID badge was found in Falenty in December 2015.⁵

Another unique artifact is a commemorative badge of the Lithuanian-Belarusian front in the form of an equal-armed cross made of silver plated tombac (Fig. 19c). The arms of the cross bear the inscription: FRONT LIT-BIAŁ and dates 1919-1920. A silver eagle that was originally featured in the central section is missing here, leaving two holes in places where it was attached. The badge was introduced by the order of the Ministry of Military



19. Identification badges (complete one from excavation unit 3, fragment from Excavation unit 2) and a commemorative cross awarded to participants in the 1920 Polish-Bolshevik War from excavation unit 4 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

5. <https://tvn24.pl/tvnwarszawa/najnowsze/znalezisko-z-pierscienia-smierci-ta-plakietka-pozwalala-wyjsc-z-getta-189411> (accessed: 4.04.2021).

Affairs and approved in the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland on December 13, 1921.⁶

SUMMARY

In December 2019, an archaeological team led by Andrzej Bryńczak carried out test excavations in the immediate vicinity of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp commissioned by the Treblinka Museum – the Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944). The works were associated with the implementation of the project titled “Construction of the exhibition and educational facility”. Their purpose was to survey selected areas before deciding on the location of the future facility. Four preselected areas in the vicinity of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, with a total area of 3.88 ha, were intersected with narrow test trenches of 1 metre in width, spaced every 10 metres. The total research area covered 18.1 ares.

The excavations resulted in the documenting of the remains of objects related to the construction and operation of the Siedlce-Małkinia railway line (Excavation unit 1, features 1-3, 8), features of undetermined chronology, containing no dating material (Excavation unit 1 – feature 5, Excavation unit 2 – features 1, 2; Excavation unit 4 – feature 1), and features of natural origin (Excavation unit 1 – features 4,6; Excavation unit 3 – feature 1; Excavation unit 4 – feature 2). No remains of “death pits” or other objects directly related to the functioning of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp were identified within the limits of test trenches.

In parallel with the archaeological test excavations, a metal detection survey of the entire surface of Excavation unit 4 was carried out in 2019 in cooperation with the Association of History Enthusiasts “Ryngraf”. It yielded historical artifacts falling within the chronological framework between the 17th and 20th centuries of which a number was related to the functioning of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. They include coins, shell casings, remnants of personal effects: parts of watches, cutlery, lighters, fragments of jewellery, a few exceptional items, aircraft bombs shrapnel – vestiges of people savagely murdered in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp.

In November 2020, in the northern part of Excavation unit 1 (which was eventually selected for the extension of the Treblinka Museum), at the site where test excavations a year earlier had uncovered the remains of a 19th-century settlement, the same research team undertook preliminary

6. <https://wcn.pl/eauctions/190131/details/111267/Polska-odznaka-pamiatkowa-Frontu-Litewsko-Bialoruskiego-po-1921> (accessed: 4.04.2021).

archaeological excavations, documenting the remains and structural elements of a 19th-century dwelling and related structures.

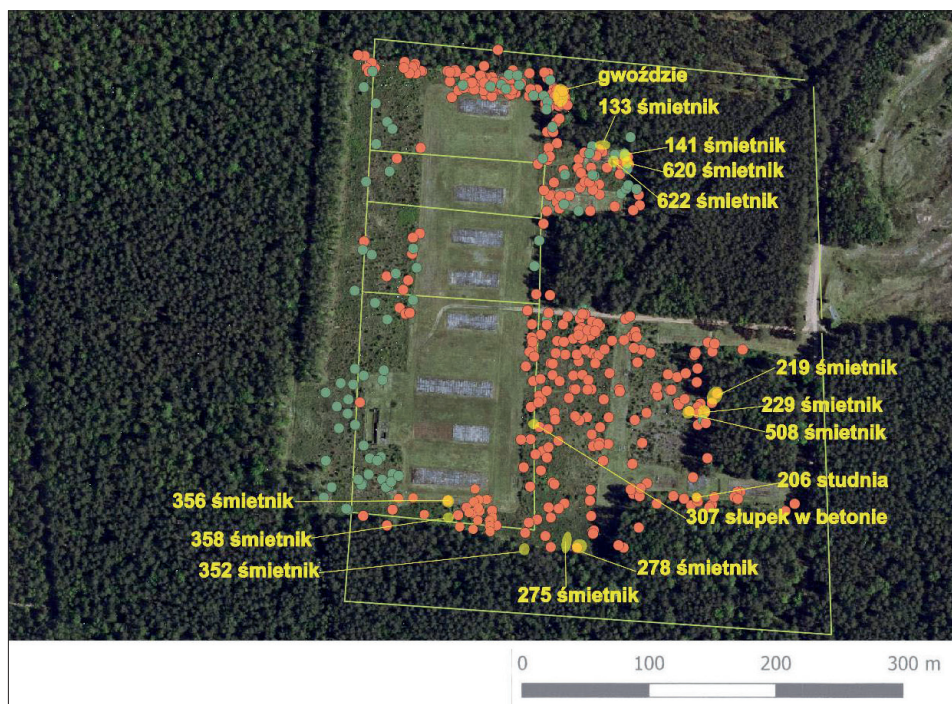
The excavations yielded abundant historical material falling within the chronological framework between the 2nd half of the 19th century and early 20th century. During the 2019 and 2020 seasons, a total of approximately 1,400 potsherds, over 130 fragments of metal finds, approximately 100 fragments of glass and faience, and 67 pieces of metal historical artifacts – found with a metal detector while exploring the fills of individual features – were recovered from features 1-3, 8, and 9, identified as the remains of a wooden dwelling, and from accompanying waste pits. The objects were considered to be remnants of the house of a railway flagman who served on the section of the railway route leading to Treblinka. The building probably ceased to exist in the early 20th century – it is not marked on any surviving maps.

Andrzej Bryńczak

Bożena Bryńczak

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METAL DETECTOR SURVEY ON THE GROUNDS OF THE TREBLINKA I LABOUR CAMP



1. The search area on the grounds of the Treblinka I Labour Camp with colour-marked locations of singular finds and clusters of waste (red dots – the first survey, green dots – the second survey) with the location of waste pits marked with yellow (created by B. Bryńczak, backdrop: orthophotomap (GeoTIFF)) [source: <https://kosowlacki.e-mapa.net/> (accessed on 10.04.2021)]
Map key: śmietnik – waste pit, słupek w betonie – a concrete-embedded post, studnia – well, gwoździe – nails

The search for artifacts of historic origin using electronic metal detectors was carried out on the grounds of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp at the request of the Treblinka Museum – the Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944), before the planned land-clearing works consisting of the removal of weed trees and tree stumps from parts of plot no. 95 in the Wólka Okrąglik 0031 geodesic precinct.

The survey was carried out using metal detectors, with each find positioned with a GPS device and recorded on-site with photo documentation. The survey team led by Andrzej Bryńczak consisted of two archaeologists and 20 members of the Mazovian Association of History Enthusiasts “Ryngraf” who took turns to provide assistance on the site (on average, 12-15 people participated in each search). Between July 15 and September 12, 2020, the survey works were carried out in the area marked in Fig. 1 with a total surface of 5.21 ha.



2. Search team on the job (photo by M. Bryńczak)

After completing the first stage of research, in the autumn of 2020, the removal of tree stumps and the other land-clearing works were performed in the study area. Between January 2 and April 24, 2021, the team completed the second walkover survey, collecting the remaining artifacts that could not be accessed during the 2020 survey.

The team was divided into two groups – a search and a documenting group. The first group located and extracted finds and left them at the place of finding with tags attached. Each find received an inventory number, its position was determined with the use of a GPS device and it was photographed on site by the documenting group. Since GPS positioning had an accuracy of 1 metre, it was decided that finds from an area of about

1 sq. metre would be brought under a single inventory number. During the fieldwork, apart from singular finds, twelve clusters of waste¹ containing significant amounts of objects, as well as one well and one metal post embedded in concrete, were located and explored. Finds from a single waste pit were also given a single collective inventory number. In total, 418 inventory numbers were assigned in 2020 and by the end of the 2nd survey in 2021, the inventory numbered 646 items. The total number of acquired finds is much larger, however, and amounts to over 6,000 fragments.

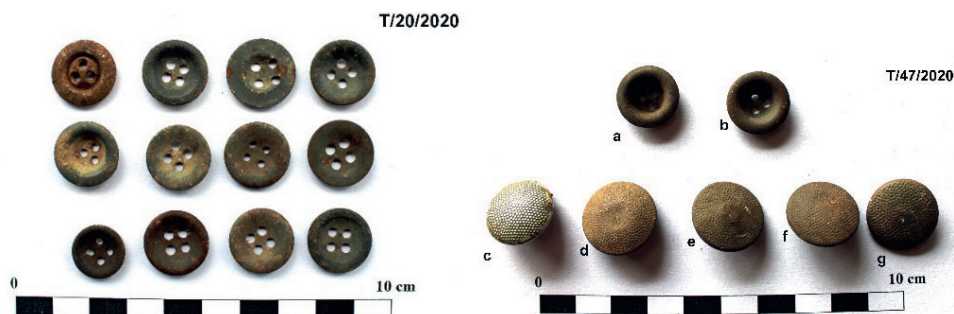
During the surveys, artifacts made of metal, glass, plastic, porcelain, faience, rubber, organic raw materials were unearthed. What is surprising is the fact that most of the finds made of organic materials, such as leather, rubber, or soft plastic, were quite well preserved. The finding of scraps of paper should be noted as truly sensational, all the more so because the scraps are fragments of the camp documentation, which was meticulously destroyed during the liquidation of the camp. The vast majority of the items found were related to the functioning of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. It is possible that some of them could have originated from the Extermination Camp and eventually found their way to the Labour Camp. This applies probably to the following categories of relics: cosmetics, medicines, jewellery, and cutlery.

For the purpose of this paper, the collected objects were divided into categories conventionally related to their function.

1. The term 'waste pit' or 'cluster of waste' should be clarified. What we discovered was a series of shallow pits of irregular shapes, 0.8 – 2.5 m in diameter and 0.5 – 0.70 m in depth, grouped together in several locations. Bearing in mind that the task of the team was to remove any metal artifacts from the area, it must be noted that when we came across the first cluster of waste containing, apart from pieces of metal, also fragments of glass, porcelain, faience, leather objects, as well as those made of plastic, lying so shallow below the ground surface that they were prone to being destroyed during the cleaning works, we asked for additional guidelines from the Office of the Mazovian Regional Conservator of Historic Monuments in Siedlce. We got the permission to explore them. Each pit was positioned by GPS, the pit fills were carefully sifted, the artifacts were documented and described by search teams. The location and shapes of the waste clusters are unusual for regular waste pits, which would indicate that they were created when the camp was being liquidated, as part of the efforts to hide the vestiges of the camp (e.g. pits nos. 133, 141, 620, 622, located directly by the swimming pool – a place of recreation, or pits nos. 219, 229, 508 discovered at the very centre of the courtyard of the camp administration buildings, next to the well). It should probably be ruled out that the regular open waste pits of the Labour Camp were to be located in this quadrangle of buildings which were probably also connected by walking paths.

THE CAMP

Under this category around two thousand finds have been gathered that can be linked with the prisoners' labour and the construction and functioning of the Treblinka I Labour Camp. The most numerous group of artifacts associated with the work of women prisoners in the Sorting Building are buttons. These are both soldiers' underwear buttons commonly known as "dishpan buttons", formed from tin sheet, with three or four holes, as well as "civilian" buttons, made mainly of plastic, mother-of-pearl, with some metal ones. The underwear buttons and the pebbled buttons, commonly used by German soldiers and by guards belonging to auxiliary units, were brought to the camp along with the soldiers' clothing from the front



3. Underwear "dishpan" buttons and pebbled buttons found in massive numbers near the Sorting Building (photo by B. Bryńczak)

line.² The largest number of them was found in the northern part of the surveyed area, in the vicinity of the Sorting Building. More than 150 underwear buttons were obtained. Most of them did not have any manufacturers' markings. A few buttons have inscriptions in French and English, which may indicate their trophy character. Uniform buttons of the Wehrmacht were also represented in large numbers (more than 70 items). Many of them bear more or less legible markings of their manufacturers. One button is especially noticeable as it shows the military division number on its surface. More than 300 "civilian" buttons were also found. Some of them, made of mother-of-pearl, were discovered in clusters nos. 133 and 141, 620, 622 together with women's cosmetic accessories. Some of the more unique finds include: a pre-war Polish Railway uniform button, a navy uniform button with an anchor, and convex-shaped buttons made in France (marked "Paris" or "Lyon"). The latter finds may indirectly confirm

2. S. Różycki, M. Michalski, E. Kopówka *Obóz Pracy Treblinka I. Metodyka integracji danych wieloźródłowych*, Warszawa-Treblinka 2017, p. 19.

the presence of French Jews in the Treblinka camp. There are also two buttons that can be associated with the Red Army – one smooth, green painted soldier's button and another, in a very poor condition, with a barely visible five-pointed star (Inventory No. T/55/2020). A total of about 500 buttons were obtained from the study area.

The second largest group in terms of the number of finds are zinc bowls and plates used by prisoners – there were more than 300 of them. The vast majority of them survived as fragments, only a handful are preserved quite intact. A few bowls have holes in them, and likely served as shooting targets. Bowls and plates were obtained in larger quantities from waste pits located in the eastern and southern parts of the surveyed area. These waste pits also revealed 178 metal caps from bottled beverages drunk by guards.



4. A collection of bowls from waste cluster
no. 352 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

A significant quantity of objects was related to the construction and functioning of the camp barracks. The most numerous finds (over 300 fragments) are nails, varying in lengths and diameters: from the common roofing nails to large, thick, quadrangular ones, perhaps made on the site. A large cluster of nails was located in the north-eastern part of the area in the place of one of the barracks of the Wachmänner. In addition to nails, several dozen fragments of various types of washers, screws, fittings, steel angles, flats, and H-sections used for construction and assembly works were obtained.

The padlocks, door lock elements, and door keys of different types and markings (over 40 items) that were found can be associated with the buildings existing in the camp. Some of the keys may have originally belonged to the prisoners of the Labour Camp. The discovered furnishings of the barracks included window handles, elements related to the heating system



5. Fragments of padlock panels (photo by B. Bryńczak)

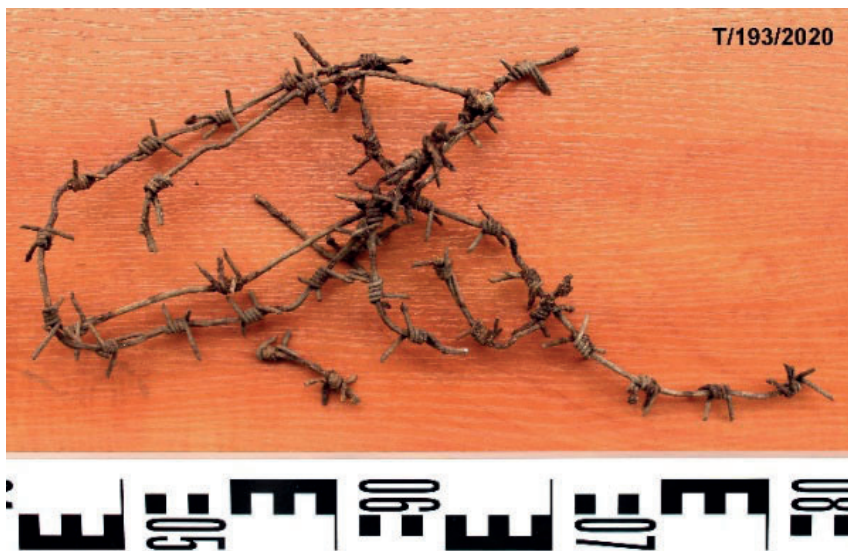


6. Fragment of a furnace door (photo by B. Bryńczak)

(stove rings, poker, stove doors), as well as fragments of pipes and a water tap strainer which should be associated with the water system. Numerous items found – more than 100 pieces – confirm the existence of an electrical grid: bulb holders, cable mountings, electrical cable covers, porcelain and glass insulators.

The finds that should be associated with the works performed at the camp include the fragments of 14 buckets, chisels, axes, spades, shovels, rakes (20 items in total), 4 scythes, 22 pieces of sharpening stones for scythes and knives, 5 horseshoes. Thirty-one fragments of wire springs were also found. Also, several hundred fragments of sheet metal with traces of processing have been classified in this category and are considered to be manufacturing discards from the workshops operating in the camp.

The list of findings should be completed with the artefacts reflecting the camp's horror: 60 barbed wire fragments. It is difficult to determine whether the differences in workmanship between the fragments of barbed wire, such as different densities of the spikes, could be associated with different types of camp fences. We know that in addition to the primary, high-rise camp fencing, there were internal fences in the camp as well. In total, more than 2,000 metal artifacts (complete metals objects and their fragments) were classified in the "Camp" category. This category also includes items made of clay, ceramics, and concrete: fragments of pipes made from concrete or vitrified clay, remnants of ceramic and concrete tiles and fragments of clay bricks with partial markings – a total of 20 finds.



7. Barbed wire from the Labour Camp grounds
(photo by B. Bryńczak)

KITCHEN – METAL ARTIFACTS

This category groups together metal-made items conventionally related to food and kitchen operations. In addition to the plethora of tin bowls and plates mentioned above, which were used by prisoners, dozens of different pots and lids, as well as cutlery, several enamelled plates, 2 barrel bands, and 8 spice receptacles were discovered in the study area. This category also includes: a funnel, a colander, a ladle spoon, a fragment of a vegetable grater. It seems that the latter was produced at the camp site by punching closely spaced nail holes in a sheet metal, which created the grating part.



8. Cutlery from waste pits nos. 133 and 278 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

An interesting item is a ceramic tube on which a heating coil was spirally wound, identified as a part of an electric baking pan. Four objects were initially recognised as fragments of spirit burners. In total, more than 130 finds were classified in the “Camp kitchen – metal artifacts” category.

CAMP KITCHEN – PORCELAIN-FAIENCE-PLASTIC WARE

The clusters of waste nos. 133, 219, 229, 278 contained assemblages of fragmentarily preserved faience and porcelain ceramic vessels as well as glassware. Among them, worth noting are almost perfectly preserved vessels such as a teapot or a sugar bowl with a picture of salt graduation towers and the inscription “Souvenir from Ciechocinek”. The image on one of the mugs showing children in Tyrolean traditional dress suggests its southern German or Austrian origin. A fragment of a mug in a very similar style, with a representation of children’s faces, was found in the Extermination



9. Sugar bowl and cup from waste pit no. 133 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

Camp in Bełżec.³ Twenty-four fragments of bottoms with manufacturers' marks were recognised as originating from potteries of Ćmielow, Nowy Dwór, Włocławek, Wałbrzych, Chodzież, Bogucice, and from Selb and Arzberg. As for the types of dishes, 3 sugar bowls have been discerned, in addition to approximately 25 plates in 118 fragments, 13 mugs in 30 fragments, 7 cups in 30 fragments, 2 bowls in 18 fragments. Out of the total of 448 fragments, one can distinguish approximately 53 vessels. The number, obviously, is an estimate only and may change after careful examination of the artifacts.

Another category of kitchen utensils that can be distinguished on the basis of the material from which they were made are plastic containers and caps, of which 86 fragments were obtained. Fragments of several stone-ware and clay vessels were also collected.

GLASSWARE

The discovered waste pits contained large numbers of objects made of glass. Altogether, 28 whole bottles of various capacities, colours, and purposes were found. It was possible to identify beer producers: Habersbusch and Schiele Brewery in Warsaw and beer bottles made at the Edwardów Glassworks in Radomsko. 144 bases and 154 bottle necks were collected. The vast majority of these are alcohol bottles, mainly from beer and vodka, but also from mineral water that was produced, among other places, in Łódź⁴

3. A. Kola, *Hitlerowski Obóz Zagłady Żydów w Bełżcu w świetle źródeł archeologicznych. Badania 1997-1999*, Warszawa-Waszyngton 2000, p. 75, Fig. 92.

4. Caps with a red triangle – Gustaw Keilich Brewery and Vinegar Factory.



10. Fragments of bottles from cluster 229 and whole bottles from cluster 278 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

and Karlovy Vary.⁵ Next in number come drinking receptacles: 23 bases of drinking glasses, 22 bases of chaser glasses, 9 bases and 2 stems of wine glasses. Also found were 12 pieces of colourless glass – the shape and fine fabrication of which indicate that they came from oil lamp globes – and 32 fragments originating from electric lamp globes. Notable among those were 4 glass decanter stoppers, 6 porcelain bottle stoppers, 10 small glass ampoules, 5 thick-sided tankards in 20 fragments, a four-sided colourless glass bottle in 10 fragments, parts of at least 20 sugar bowls, 9 fragments of glass panes, and a crystal goblet in 7 parts.

Finds of faience and porcelain tableware, cutlery, fragments of luxury glass, and crystal should be associated with the camp administration, as should the numerous broken alcohol bottles.

PHARMACY – HEALTH CARE

The collection in this category consisted mainly of glass medicine containers originating primarily from waste pits 219 and 229, where 29 whole bottles, 27 necks, and 18 bases were recovered. The bottles came in different shapes, colours, and capacities. Many of them feature information on the bases and sides indicating the capacity, the name of the manufacturer, and the place of production.⁶ Apart from the bottles, medicine receptacles took

5. Caps featuring the MATTONI company trademark, the brand which was one of the most well-known in Europe as early as by the end of the 19th century.

6. E.g.: Henryk Żak Soap, Perfume and Chemical Products Factory – Poznań-Warsaw; The Chemical and Pharmaceutical Society, formerly “Mgr Klawe S.A.” in Warsaw.



11. Pharmacy bottles (photo by B. Bryńczak)

also the form of tins and jars – 2 whole and 2 fragments. A distinctive find is an aluminium tube of ichthyol ointment in such a state of preservation that it is possible to read its composition in Latin, the method of application, and the information about the manufacturer in Hamburg, address included (Inventory No. T/413/2020). Also found was one glass thermometer. A total of 104 finds, both whole and in parts, have been included in this category.

ORGANIC MATERIALS

The surveyed waste clusters contained preserved objects made of organic materials such as leather, cork, cloth, and rubber. Most collected items were fragments of leather goods, mainly parts of footwear – very heavily worn heels and soles. Many of the relics can also be characterised as production rejects. The purpose of others is unclear. Rubber was often used to make



12. Leather wallet from waste pit 229 (photo by B. Bryńczak)

and repair footwear – 10 such fragments were collected. A special item is a shoe sole made from a car tyre. The tyre tread, internal grid structure, and nail marks on the edges are visible. 6 bottle corks and 9 fragments of cloth were found. Exceptional finds include a fully preserved leather wallet. In total, this category comprises over 200 finds – mainly fragments of larger objects.

MILITARIA – ARMY SUPPLIES

More than 900 historical artifacts have been conventionally categorised as military-related. Undoubtedly, rifle and pistol shell casings, numbering over 400 finds, fall within the category. The vast majority of rifle casings represent 7.92 mm calibre ammunition for the Mauser rifle. Some of them bear the date of production and manufacturer's markings on the bottom.



13. Shell casings (photo by B. Bryńczak)

Directly related to the armament are 15 stripper clips, rifle butt fittings – 2 finds, an almost complete bayonet, and a scabbard of another. An exceptional find is one half of an oval dog tag belonging to a soldier of I Infanterie Ersatz Batalion 54.⁷ Another unique trove is a skull badge from a cap belonging to a soldier of the SS-Totenkopfverbände⁸ unit. Soldier's

7. <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Gliederungen/InfErsBat/InfErsBat54-R.htm> (accessed: 10.04.2021).

8. J.A. Młynarczyk, "Niemiecki obóz zagłady dla ludności żydowskiej w Treblince" [in:] *Co wiemy o Treblince? Stan badań*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce, p. 68.

T/519/2021



14. Half of a dog tag (photo by B. Bryńczak)

T/321/2020



15. A badge from a cap of an SS Totenkopfverbände soldier (photo by B. Bryńczak)

T/278/2020



16. Belt buckles (photo by B. Bryńczak)

gear in the form of buckles and fasteners is abundant – 62 pieces in total. Three characteristic belt buckles with the inscription “Gott mit Uns” attract particular attention. Not surprising is the large number of horseshoe heel plates – 45 items⁹ and uniform hooks – 6 items.

As many as 48 items represent bowls, lids and handles of soldiers’ mess kits. Some of them are Polish military mess tins bearing the logo and name of the manufacturer: ALUMWAR Warszawa, with engraved letters and numbers. Several of them have individual markings in the form of engraved initials, graphic signs or an entire surname (C. Rososzko – Inventory No. T/413/2020). Electric torches and their components – glass, bulbs, fisheye lenses, with a total number of 23 items – were also attributed to the military personnel. The recovered fragments of batteries and graphite battery cartridges alone numbered about 300 items. Additional finds of this category include: lighters – 3 items, cigarette rolling tubes – 7 items, pocket knives – 3 finds, aluminium caps and thermos fragments – 18 finds, containers with disinfectant – 5 finds. Partly damaged food cans, of which 70 fragments were found, have also been included in this category.

MOTORING INDUSTRY

Dozens of metal and rubber items (more than 80 in total) have been preliminarily linked to the motoring industry. Gaskets and washers were the most numerous, amounting to 21 finds. There were also 12 valve stems for inflating inner tubes. Some of them appear to have come from motorcycles or automobiles. Several fragments of rubber V-belts, inner tubes, cables, steel rollers, and probable parts of bearings were recovered. Isolated finds included tools likely related to motor repairs, and a fragment of a carburetor housing.

OFFICE MATERIALS

Exceptionally interesting are the office-related objects associated with the functioning of the camp administration, found mainly in waste clusters 229, 508, and 622. These included 6 inkwells bearing the markings of their manufacturers: ISKRA, DRACON, PELIKAN, 6 pencils, a stylus box

9. Literature informs us that horseshoe plates had stamped signatures indicating the size of the shoe and the side – left or right (A. Saiz, *Deutsche Soldaten. Mundury, wyposażenie i osobiste przedmioty żołnierza niemieckiego 1939-1945*, Poznań 2009, p. 74).

marked MADE IN CHICAGO. USA, a sharpener, a plastic stencil for technical writing, a gold nib of a fountain pen, an office holder, and a metal ballpoint pen with 4 different coloured refills. Among the extremely important finds were the rubber part of a stamp with the inscription GE-PRÜFT SPR AWDZONO ABT. VI JÜDISCHER PRÜFER N. 3 and another

T/229/2020



17. Camp stamp (photo by B. Bryńczak)

stamp with a handle decorated with mother-of-pearl and the initials D F. In the first case, we are probably dealing with a stamp of the in-camp censorship checking the outgoing correspondence.

Similarly unique are the fragments of paper camp records preserved in waste pit 229. In one case there is a corner of a document with the word (name?) "Rubin" appearing in it. Another, larger piece of paper contains a list of prisoners (craftsmen) with Jewish names. The shreds of

T/229/2020



18. Scrap of a camp document (photo by B. Bryńczak)

a German-language newspaper found and the remains of a paper packet from cigarettes made in Wrocław do not carry such weight.

HYGIENE

This category includes objects used for personal hygiene: toothbrushes, razors, combs, razors, etc., as well as packaging for hygiene products and toiletries. Toothpaste was found in two types of containers: in aluminium tubes – counting 32 fragments and in round boxes labelled “Majde tooth soap” – 3 fragments. Over a dozen toothbrushes were recovered from waste pit 229. Parts of safety-razors were abundant – 31 fragments. Several pieces



19. Toothbrushes (photo by B. Bryńczak)

of straight razors and combs were also obtained. Some of the finds originally belonged to women: 2 hairpins and 3 curling irons, about a dozen lipstick casings, a small round box with a residue of blue eyeshadow. Dozens of flat fragments of mirrors were also obtained from the waste pit glass. In two cases, fragments of what appear to be photographs have been preserved on the reverse sides. One shows a reclining female figure, the other

just a signature – a name and surname BOGUSŁAW SAMBORSKI.¹⁰ Apparently, we are dealing here with actors' stills placed on hand-held, portable mirrors. One fragment represents a mirror doubling as a business card. The surviving fragment features the name of the craftsman's workshop and its address: "...cownia ...bów futrzanych KOPCIA ... Warszawa ...a 30, m.8" [fur products workshop]. A very similar mirror – with a photograph of a child – was found in the Bełżec extermination camp.¹¹

An interesting category of finds consists of perfume or toilet water receptacles. 29 whole bottles of various shapes and colours were found (one holding the contents). In addition, 4 necks of perfume flasks, 2 bottle stoppers and 35 plugs were obtained. Shoe polish was found in glass containers (10 of them were recovered, along with 31 aluminium lids) and in



20. Toiletry bottles (photo by B. Bryńczak)

10. Bogusław Samborski (1897-1971) – actor, since 1913 engaged at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw, soldier of the Voluntary Army in the Polish-Bolshevik war, during the Nazi occupation he played in the anti-Polish propaganda film “Heimkehr”; afterwards, he left for Germany or Austria and under the pseudonym Gottlieb Sambor played in the last film produced by the Third Reich and in another one in 1947. In 1948, after being sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment by a Polish court for collaboration with the occupying forces, he left for Argentina. <https://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?osoba=11109459> (accessed: 12.04.2021).

11. A. Kola, *Hitlerowski Obóz Zagłady Żydów w Bełżcu w świetle źródeł archeologicznych. Badania 1997-1999*, Warszawa–Waszyngton 2000, Fig. 105.

tubes – 2 fragments. The containers mainly represented the Polish brand DOBROLIN.¹² Other finds included several shoe horns, cloth brushes, hair shavers, nail clippers, a rubber airbag from a hairdresser's atomiser. Another notable find is a used condom found in one of the waste pits. An individual find is a packaging from a Japanese ointment featuring a figure wearing a kimono, Japanese letters, and an inscription "BANZAI" in Latin letters on the lid (Inventory No. T/413/2020). A total of more than 300 finds fall into this category.

COINS, JEWELLERY, PERSONAL EFFECTS

Jewellery was not lacking among the items found, neither were objects that, given the place, could only be described as luxurious. The most numerous were coins of which more than 100 were recovered. The vast majority of the coins identified dated from the interwar and the Second World War periods. The geographical spread of the countries whose coins were represented may be surprising. Retrieved were Polish coins from the Second Republic and from the Nazi occupation. Alongside German Reichmarks, the finds included Weimar German marks, Austrian groschen, a small Soviet coin, a Danish coin, a US silver quarter dollar, a coin of the Free City of Danzig. Notable among them is the coin that the British issued for the



21. Selected coins (photo by B. Bryńczak)

12. "Dobrolin" Chemical Products Factory of the Pal Brothers, built between 1928-29 in the Wola district of Warsaw. It manufactured famous polishes for shoes, floors, and the like. Company logo: head of a goat inscribed in a circle, with the name Dobrolin featured on a sash, and an inscription below: "F.A. i G. Pal w Warszawie" (Ferdynand Adolf and Gustaw Pal – co-owners of the factory). <https://www.tubylotustalo.pl/mapa-tbts/144-fabryka-przetworow-chemicznych-dobrolin-braci-palow> (accessed: 10.04.2021).

Palestinian territories, with a face value of 2 mils, bearing inscriptions in three languages: English, Arabic, and Hebrew. The catalogue also includes 3 coins from the period of the People's Republic of Poland.

At least 39 fragments of perforated metal plates were discovered in one of the waste pits. One fragment bore the inscription "Stella" – possibly indicating the presence (in the camp casino?) of a Popper Stella player piano manufactured in the early 20th century.

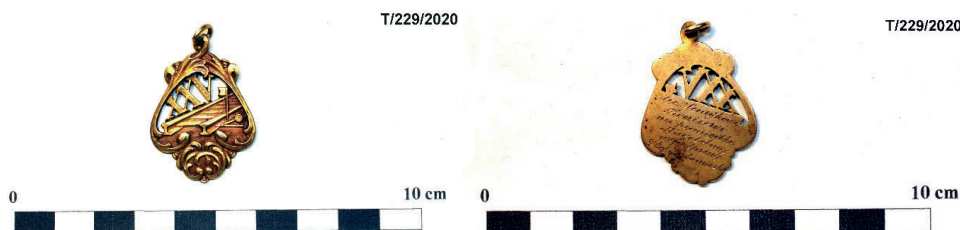
The personal belongings of prisoners include two monthly tickets found in waste pits 229 and 508. One was originally valid on the Warsaw-Świder route, the other featured a surviving fragment of a photograph of the owner – a young man in uniform. Some inscriptions have been preserved: *...ET MIESIĘCZNY; Nr; LISTOPAD 1937; ...amwajowe dzienne i nocne; na linie autobusowe; Dyrektor* [...ET MONTHLY; No.; NOVEMBER 1937; ...amway day and night; for bus lines; Director]; and the ticket number on the side: 3691.



22. One of two recovered monthly tickets (photo by B. Bryńczak)

Owing to the engraved dedication, we know the first holder of the commemorative pendant made on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of co-operation for attorney Henryk Konic.¹³ The inscription on the back of the pendant reads: "To Att. Henryk Konic in memory of the long-standing co-

13. Henryk Konic, an eminent lawyer, publicist, member of the Russian Imperial Duma, professor at the University of Warsaw, born January 15, 1860, died May 10, 1934. He was, among others, a legal adviser to the Vistula River Railroad, and the commemorative pendant is probably linked to this fact. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henryk_Konic (accessed: 10.04.2021).



23. Commemorative complimentary pendant found in waste pit 229
(photo by B. Bryńczak)

operation. Stef. Lubomirski". It is not clear what fate brought this object to the Treblinka Labour Camp – whether the inmate was a family member or whether the object arrived with some other subsequent owner.

Among the 25 pieces of men's cufflinks that were found, 2 pairs were complete and one cufflink stood out by its use of the Star of David motif. 20 watch parts were obtained. These are only fragments: a part of a case, a dial face, a damaged movement. Elements of 4 metal watch straps also fall in this subset of finds. Other objects included: approximately 2,500 beads, 2 wedding rings, 2 signet rings, 4 brooches, 3 jewellery links, 11 earrings, 3 chains, 3 chain clasps, 3 purses and, 2 clasps from women's handbags. Also retrieved were 2 pipe mouthpieces, 6 lenses (probably from sunglasses), and an exquisite silver ladies' cigarette holder decorated with a lily



24. Selected jewellery (photo by B. Bryńczak)

of the valley motif. More than 300 finds were included in this category of historical artifacts.

EXCEPTIONAL FINDS

This category includes 25 special artifacts – Judaica and badges of Polish, Jewish, and German provenance. As for Judaica, in addition to the finds mentioned above – Star of David cufflinks and the coin from Palestine – the Star of David armband should be mentioned in particular. Furthermore, 12 badges of Jewish policemen from the ghetto, a fragment of what likely was a metal pass-badge permitting to go to work outside the ghetto, a screw-on cap from a tube with a Star of David, and a pin/commemorative badge bearing the dates 1897-1937 and a circular inscription in Hebrew should be noted.



25. Fragment of an armband with the Star of David (photo by B. Bryńczak)

Regarding “Polonica”, the following are particularly noteworthy: 2 holy medals and 1 fragment of the central section of a rosary, 2 regimental badges of the 2nd Republic of Poland – from the 1st and 69th Infantry Regiments.¹⁴ The Marshal J. Piłsudski 1st Infantry Regiment was a direct continuation of the 1st Brigade of the Legions. A well-preserved “PCK” (Polish Red Cross) pin is hard to attribute correctly. However, there is no doubt that a Medal for Gallantry and Merit for Members of the Eastern Peoples that

14. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wi/Odznaki_jednostek_piechoty_Wojska_Polskiego (accessed: 10.04.2021).

in many cases those are very distinctive artifacts. Particularly intriguing are the metal filings embedded in a plastic-like substance, in the shape of a truncated cone. Surely the insights of other people, enthusiasts of the history of that period, specialists in mechanics, or motoring might help determine their purpose.¹⁶

SUMMARY

In the course of the searches for artifacts, with the aid of electronic devices, performed in 2020 and 2021 in connection with the planned clean-up work, involving the removal of stumps and old trees from the site of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, a total area of 5.21 hectares was surveyed, which accounts for 30.6% of the camp's total area of 17 hectares. The research was carried out only in the sections of the planned clean-up works: north of the foundations of the sorting facility, on the site of one of the guards' barracks, in the surroundings of the pool and in the space between it and the remains of the camp lazaret, on the roll-call square, and in the vicinity of the foundations of the buildings in the administrative section, near the bunker, the fox farm, the remnants of the farm buildings, and some of the workshops. In the eastern part, the survey covered the area adjacent to the kitchen, cellar, and prisoners' barracks, partly located beyond the boundary of the camp.

The exploration resulted in the recovery and documentation of more than 6,000 historical artifacts made of metal, glass, plastic, porcelain,

16. Only after publishing the Polish version of this article was it possible to determine the function of the finds mentioned above. In all probability, they are so-called organites. Invented by the Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich in the 1920s and developed further by his students after his death, a pseudoscientific theory assumed the existence of orgone – a massless substance permeating the universe that is similar to ether but functions more like a type of living energy. According to Reich, orgone deficits in human bodies led to numerous diseases, including cancer. The device called organite was supposed to act as a kind of battery, accumulating orgone energy and having a beneficial effect on the people around it. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orgone> (accessed: 25.10.2023). Organites are made from a combination of organic materials such as natural resin and wood, metals in the form of wire and/or filings, and crystals. <https://www.crystalsrock.com.au/blogs/crystals-rock-blog/what-is-organite-and-how-is-it-made> (accessed: 25.10.2023). The two artifacts found during the research could have been made in the Labour Camp. The quality of their workmanship and the materials used, which probably were the only ones obtainable in camp conditions, make this theory viable.

faience, rubber, and organic raw materials that were predominantly related to the operation of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp during World War II. Among them are tools, items of barrack equipment, kitchenware and workshop utensils, personal effects seized from male and female prisoners, function badges of the camp guards, and items related to the camp administration. Apart from the scattered finds in the survey area, twelve clusters of waste, one well, and a metal post embedded in concrete were also located.

The presented results of the work constitute a preliminary overview. Selected artifacts were presented freshly after obtaining and prior to subjecting them to conservation and research on the part of the museum. The finds obtained in the Treblinka I Labour Camp will significantly contribute to extending the exhibition part of the Museum.

Bartosz Kowalski
Treblinka Museum
The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT AT THE TREBLINKA MUSEUM

On May 10, 1964 the official unveiling of the spatial-architectural complex built on the site of the former German camps took place: the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, during which time the Mausoleum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka was established, which until 1981 was basically independent from any museum unit.

In 1981, the Mausoleum was legally subordinated to the Armoury Museum at Liw Castle, and as early as 1986, under the name of the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, it became a branch of the Regional Museum in Siedlce.¹

These were small institutions with a regional scope, whose headquarters were located dozens of kilometres from Treblinka, making effective management very difficult. This situation resulted in limited funds and understaffing. This meant that the collections, although numerous and undoubtedly valuable, were only partially developed and many of them needed conservation work. Until the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the majority of the collection consisted of objects found by museum staff during cleaning operations, discovered by visitors or donated by private individuals. The first artefacts from archaeological research did not reach the then Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka (now the Treblinka Museum) until 2013.

1. A. Zawadka, "Upamiętnienie Trebłinki" [in:] *Treblinka – Historia i Pamięć*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2015, p. 32.

As this paper will show, the Museum's collections are growing dynamically and it is impossible to give a figure for the size of the collection that would not fall out of date in the time between the writing of this article and its publication. The figures given are therefore for the end of 2020.

FIELD STUDIES

Since 2010, archaeological research and the search for hidden relics have been regularly carried out on the grounds of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp and their surroundings. Of particular importance for the Treblinka Museum was the research conducted by Dr Caroline Sturdy Colls on the grounds of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp in 2013, during which an international research team acquired more than 300 relics.² In the opinion of the author, this was a kind of "milestone" in the growth of the museum's collection. The research was important not only for its own sake, but it also had a very significant impact on the development of the exhibition. It led to the opening of a new permanent exhibition entitled "Finding Treblinka", which is still on display in the museum's main exhibition hall. Caroline Sturdy Colls' team also carried out excavations on the site of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp in 2017, at which time more than 260 artefacts were recovered as well as significant quantities of bulk material (approximately 400 fragments of brick, glass, concrete, etc.).³

In the years 2016-2020, research at the site of both camps was also conducted by a team from the Warsaw University of Technology led by Dr Sebastian Różycki. As a result, around 100 objects were recovered, including mainly shell casings, but also a fragment of a narrow-gauge railway rail, measuring over 7 metres in length, as described below, which is currently on display in front of the Museum building.⁴

Another very important stage that increased the Treblinka Museum's inventory was the preliminary archaeological survey conducted by Andrzej Bryńczak, M.A., at the end of 2019, prior to the planned investment

2. C. Sturdy Colls, K. Colls, *Finding Treblinka. Archaeological Evaluation 2013*. Research report available at the Treblinka Museum and MWKZ Delegation in Siedlce.

3. C. Sturdy Colls, K. Colls, W. Mitchell, *Finding Treblinka. Archaeological Investigations 2017*. Research report available at the Treblinka Museum and the MWKZ Delegation in Siedlce.

4. Research reports are available at the Treblinka Museum and the MPCM Delegation in Siedlce.

project. During the archaeological work carried out on the plots of land in the vicinity of the Museum building and the areas surrounding the memorial of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, more than 330 artefacts were acquired,⁵ some of which were transferred to the Museum's ownership, while others were deposited in it by decision of the Mazovian Provincial Conservator of Monuments.

The research carried out by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) in November 2019 on the site of the so-called Execution Site is also worth noting. At that time, more than 200 relics related to the functioning of this place were discovered – mainly pistol and rifle casings, but also fragments of clothes, money or personal items.⁶ Today, most of them are still in the care of the IPN – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, branch in Szczecin. Due to the need of rapid conservation intervention, one find was transferred to the Treblinka Museum – fragments of trousers of one of the guards whose graves were discovered at the Execution Site.

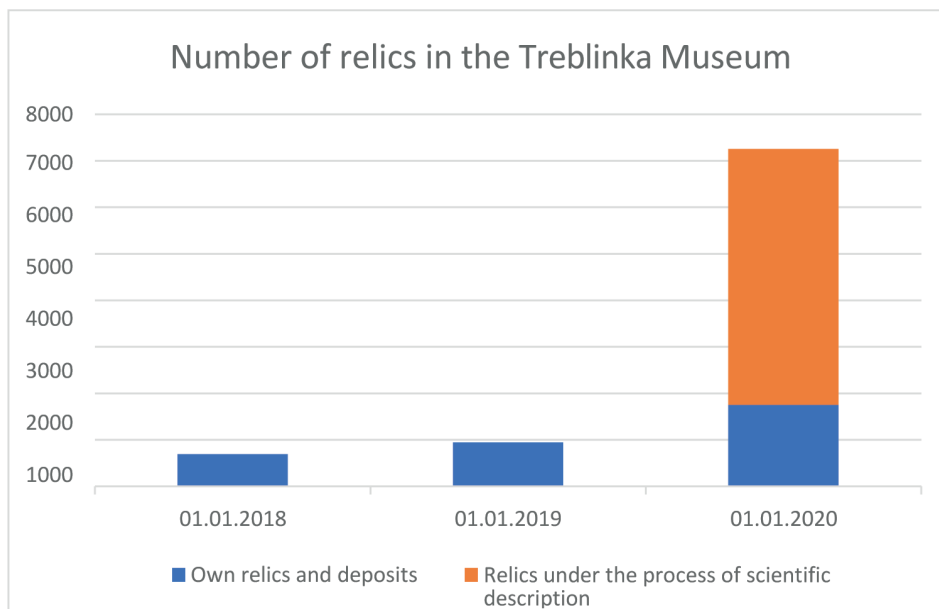


1. Findings found during IPN research in November 2019
(photo by S. Bednarz)

Currently, the biggest challenge for the Treblinka Museum in terms of collections management are the outcomes of the search for relics on the site of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. It was necessary to carry out this

5. The research report is available at the Treblinka Museum and the MPCM Delegation in Siedlce.

6. Research report available at the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Branch in Szczecin, Representation in Koszalin.



2. Number of relics kept by the Treblinka Museum. Relics listed in the main inventory, auxiliary inventory, deposits and objects under study

search due to the planned maintenance of the site with the use of a forestry mulcher. For this reason, metal detectors were used to search an area of over 5.2 hectares in 2020. The work was carried out under the supervision of Andrzej Bryńczak,⁷ M.A. It resulted in the discovery of over 5,500 objects, which are currently being processed by the Museum's staff.

COLLECTIONS RECORDS

Until 2018, the Museum did not employ a person solely responsible for recording and processing the collections. Between 2012 and 2015, the Museum employed an archaeologist who, however, mainly carried out the tasks of a guide. Consequently, although the work was carried out correctly and meticulously, the whole process was lengthy and (from 2013 onwards) slower than the rate of acquisition of historical material. Because of this situation, the management of the independent Treblinka Museum decided to employ an archaeologist who, in addition to supervising the research, would also be responsible for the recording and scientific processing of the collection – this role was assumed by the author of this article.

7. The search report is available at the Treblinka Museum and the MPCM Delegation in Siedlce.

On July 2018 the state of the collection was as follows:

- 111 monuments listed in the main inventory,
- 503 monuments listed in the supporting inventory,
- approx. 1 m³ of bulk material (rubble, infrastructure elements, post-production metal waste), as well as numerous isolated relics, in need of recording and evaluation.

Thanks to the increased number of employees, the quantity of processed archaeological material in the inventory books of the Treblinka Museum began to grow rapidly.

In the second quarter of 2019, the records increased with additional 160 artefacts which were found during clean-up works at the sites of the former camps of Treblinka I and Treblinka II and conserved by the Institute of Archaeology of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.⁸



3. The padlock preserved by specialists from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (photo by B. Kowalski)

In the third quarter of 2019, artefacts from the research conducted by Sebastian Różycki, PhD Eng, in 2017-2018 on the site of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp and the former Treblinka railway station were processed and inventoried. In total, there were more than 60 artefacts (mostly

8. Conservation documentation available at the Treblinka Museum.



4. Mauser rifle shells after conservation (photo by A. Kowalska)

shells casings).⁹ During this period, the remaining artefacts that were recovered during Prof. Sturdy Colls' survey in 2017 were also described and inventoried.

New types of inventory books (including the archaeological relics book) were also implemented in 2018-2019. The design of record sheets was also updated to eliminate the need to keep separate sheets for scientific description, storage etc. – now all this information is placed on one sheet. However, the most important operation was the implementation of an electronic system for the recording of museum items, which made it possible to integrate all inventory books in one place, including images and data that could not be placed in analogue books or record sheets. In view of the exponential increase in the number of monuments, it has also greatly facilitated the harvesting of data related to the collections. In the future, it is also planned to use this platform to digitise the collections and publish them on the Internet, which is particularly important at the time of the pandemic, when it is difficult or impossible to visit museums in person.

9. The research report is available at the Treblinka Museum and the MPCM Delegation in Siedlce.

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION OF COLLECTIONS

Due to the significant increase in the number of artefacts stored at the Treblinka Museum, it was necessary to increase expenditure on their conservation and preventive protection.

As mentioned earlier, by the end of 2018, only a small percentage of the artefacts had been conserved – these were artefacts acquired during the research of Professor Sturdy Colls and conserved with funds raised through the project “Finding Treblinka”. To improve this situation, the Museum has taken steps to secure the collections in their place of storage and has established cooperation with specialists in the field of conservation.

As a first step, an attempt was made to stabilise conditions in the exhibition rooms. The Treblinka Museum currently has two exhibition rooms, one of which, covering 29.5 m², is located in the part of the building that has been in use since the 1960s and was thermally upgraded in 2009-2010, and the other with an area of 130.7 m² is located in the part of the building that was opened in 2010. Between the halls there is a connecting passage of 18.5 m², where fragments of matzevot excavated from the Black Road are exhibited.

The larger of the exhibition halls is equipped with an air-conditioning system, which indirectly allows the stabilisation of microclimatic conditions by lowering the temperature at low values of relative humidity (20-30% RH).

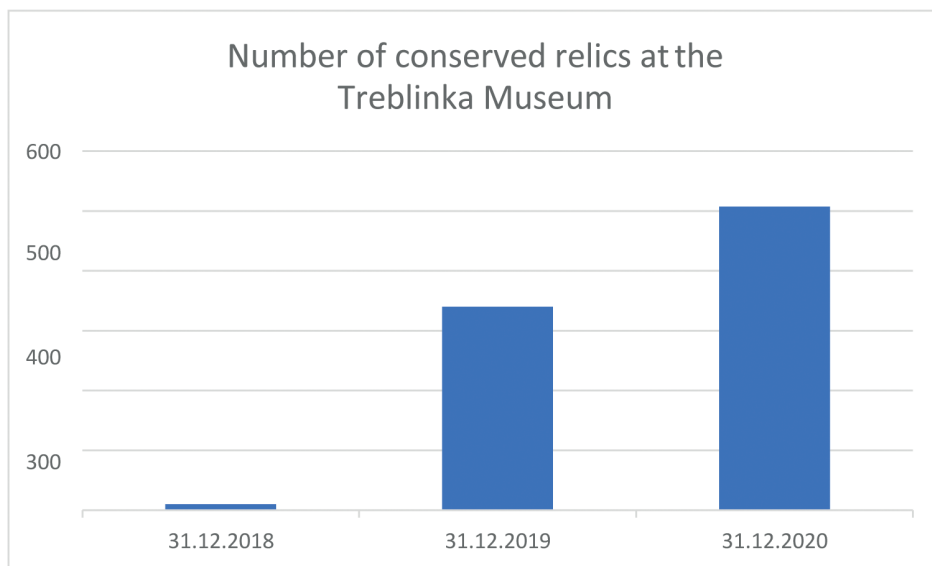
The collection storeroom of about 20 m² is located on the underground floor of the Museum building and protected by a fire door, making it relatively well insulated from changing weather conditions. Air circulation is ensured by gravitational ventilation.

Measurements of relative humidity and temperature in the above-mentioned rooms between March and July 2019 showed that in the exhibition rooms the RH fluctuations exceed the standards allowed by the National Institute for Heritage and the Protection of Collections¹⁰ and range from 22% RH in winter to 75% RH in summer with a maximum temperature amplitude of 7.5°C. Consequently, a decision was taken to install portable humidifiers, which reduced the relative humidity amplitude to approximately 25% (40-65% RH) per year, and increased emphasis was placed on temperature control in both exhibition rooms.

10. J. Czop, “Warunki mikroklimatyczne w muzeach – nowe rekomendacje” [in:] *Ochrona zbiorów. ABC profilaktyki konserwatorskiej w muzeum*, 2013, pp. 35-42. See also: PN-EN 15757:2011 *Zalecenia dotyczące temperatury i wilgotności względnej w celu ograniczenia wywołanych przez niestabilność mikroklimatu, fizycznych uszkodzeń organicznych materiałów higroskopijnych*.

As mentioned earlier, the collection storeroom of the Treblinka Museum is well isolated from external conditions, making the microclimate much more stable – the difference in relative humidity for the entire measurement period did not exceed 30% (26-56% RH) with a temperature amplitude of 4°C, so it was decided that additional adaptation work was not necessary.

However, the most important part of preserving the collections is conservation. The Treblinka Museum will conserve around 500 objects from its main and auxiliary inventory in 2019-2020.



5. Number of conserved relics kept by the Treblinka Museum. Included are the relics entered in the main inventory, deposits and objects under the process of scientific description.

As more than half of the collections at the Treblinka Museum are metal objects, particular emphasis was placed on the conservation of metal objects – especially those made of iron and steel, as they required the most urgent intervention. In addition, the conservation of wooden, paper, leather and textile objects was also carried out.¹¹

It is easy to see that the Museum makes every effort to ensure that the largest possible percentage of its artefacts is conserved, but the increase in the amount of historical material in recent years is much faster than ever before, making this a very difficult task. For this reason, at the pre-design stage of the Museum's new headquarters, the creation of an in-house

11. Conservation documentation available at the Treblinka Museum.

conservation workshop is being discussed, as this would speed up the conservation process and enable the objects in most urgent need of conservation to be protected without delay. In the long term, an in-house workshop would also make it possible to reduce the costs of conservation.

CLASSIFICATION OF COLLECTIONS

The most numerous group of relics in the Treblinka Museum's collection are ammunition fragments – at the end of 2020 the Museum's inventory included approximately 100 objects of this type. These are mainly rifle casings (Mauser, Mosin, Mannlicher, Lebel) and pistol casings (Tokariev, Mauser, Parabellumtype casings and smaller ones of approx. 6 mm calibre) and bullets. They came to Treblinka from all over the world – the signatures indicate factories in Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, the USSR, Yugoslavia or Austria. Individual shell casings also bear British and American signatures. The Museum has in its collection, although in smaller numbers, also other militaria, mainly connected with the personal equipment of soldiers – buckles from rucksacks and military belts, charger clips, magazines, fragments of helmet liners or fragments of gas masks.

Another group of objects, slightly less numerous, are personal and household items which arrived at Treblinka with the victims and prisoners of the camps. This category primarily includes cutlery (spoons, teaspoons, knives, forks) found in both camps, metal and ceramic vessels (bowls, cups, plates, jugs, bottles), hygiene items (toothbrushes, razors), keys and watches. A separate category of personal mementoes of the Treblinka victims is jewellery, which is mainly found on the grounds of the former Treblinka II Extermination Camp. Although this is the smallest group of artefacts, it deserves special treatment because of its sentimental and, in some cases, artistic value, such as the women's brooch mentioned later in this article.

The third most numerous, but probably the most significant and captivating group of relics are the remnants of camp infrastructure. This category includes ceramic tiles from the gas chambers, fragments of the barbed wire that was omnipresent in camp reality, and fragments of brick and concrete from the foundations of buildings. Smaller construction elements are also included: nails, construction reinforcement, hinges, screws, and washers.

From the archaeological point of view, a very valuable group, consisting of several dozen objects, are numismatic items. The most numerous are Polish circulation coins with face values from 1 to 50 grosz from the interwar period. The Museum's collection also includes German Reichsmarks and

Reichspfennigs from the 1930s and 1940s. Particularly interesting numismatic items are the substitute money from the Litzmannstadt Ghetto in denominations of 5, 10 and 20 marks. In the Museum's collection there are also coins not directly connected to the history of the camp, but also bearing witness to its turbulent past – Austrian kreutzers from the 19th century, Russian kopecks from the end of the 19th century and their 20th century Soviet equivalents, but also much older, 17th century Lithuanian boratynkas – copper shillings minted in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the reign of John II Casimir Vasa.¹² Prussian and German coins from the 19th century are also among the interesting objects.

The Treblinka Museum also has in its collection objects connected with art in the broad sense of the term – those dating from the period when the camps were in operation, as well as more modern objects. As far as historical objects are concerned, these are mainly fragments of musical instruments, including above all brass reed plates from mouth harmonicas. The modern objects are mainly paintings painted and donated to the Museum by artists from Poland and abroad.

All the archaeological artefacts in the Museum's possession were found on its grounds primarily through field research. However, almost one million people were imprisoned in the Treblinka camps during the war, so the Museum's grounds are rich in archaeological artefacts lying shallowly in the ground or on its surface. This is why a non-negligible percentage are loose finds, discovered by workers during maintenance work or by visitors who sometimes bring to the Museum objects found in the grass on the grounds of one of the camps.

PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT MUSEUM OBJECTS

Due to the fact that, unlike such places as Majdanek or Auschwitz-Birkenau, the camps at Treblinka were practically liquidated by the retreating Germans, the collections of the Treblinka Museum are much more modest than those of other martyrological institutions. Therefore, every object testifying to the history of this place is extremely valuable. Still, there are particularly significant relics in our collections. On the one hand, these are items which allow even partial identification of the victims and prisoners of both camps, and on the other hand, some of them are exceptional symbols, or even become "icons" of this place. This category undoubtedly includes:

12. D. Marzęta, *Herby i znaki mennicze na szelągach polskich i z Polską związanych*, Lublin 2014, pp. 54-58.

WOMEN'S BROOCH IN THE SHAPE OF A FLOWER



6. Women's brooch in the shape of a flower (photo by A. Kowalska)

It was found by Professor Caroline Sturdy Colls' team near the former gas chambers in 2013.¹³ It is a very modest ornamental object made of bent brass plates, measuring less than 5 cm in diameter and heavily marked by the passage of time. In spite of that, it is probably the most recognisable symbol of Treblinka in the world, carrying a very strong emotional and sentimental charge. The author of *The Third Reich in 100 Objects* considered it a symbol of the Second World War important enough to be described among such objects as Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, the V-2 rocket or the gate to the Birkenau camp.¹⁴ It is currently on display as part of the permanent exhibition "Finding Treblinka".

13. C. Sturdy Colls, K. Colls, *Finding Treblinka. Archaeological Evaluation 2013*. Research report available from the Treblinka Museum and MPCM Delegation in Siedlce.

14. R. Moorhouse, *Trzecia Rzesza w 100 przedmiotach. Materialna historia nazistowskich Niemiec*, Kraków 2018, pp. 244-246.

BADGE FROM THE WARSAW GHETTO



7. Badge from the Warsaw Ghetto (photo by A. Kowalska)

This unique find was discovered by the team of Andrzej Bryńczak, M.A., during the pre-investment archeological survey near the Treblinka II Extermination Camp in 2019. It was made of a thin, round metal plate, less than 5 cm in diameter. It bears the inscription *DIE BETRIEBSSTÄTTEN IM JÜD. WOHNBEZIRK / WARSCHAU / WERK 1 / 0456 / H.S.V.*, which should be translated as “factories in the Jewish residential quarter/Warsaw/ Works no. 1”. The meaning of further numbers and symbols is still being determined. Such identifiers were given to Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto who worked in factories located within its borders. Perhaps it will one day be possible to establish the identity of the person who used this badge. It is not currently on display in any of the exhibitions.

NARROW-GAUGE RAILWAY RAIL

The rail was discovered by the scientific team of the Warsaw University of Technology led by Sebastian Różycki, PhD, during archaeological works near the gravel pit in 2016. The reference OPI 83 IV indicates that it was manufactured at the Putilov Works in St. Petersburg in 1883. Exploitation of the gravel pit belonging to the company “Lublin Granite and Gravel Mines” began¹⁵ in the interwar period. A special railway siding was

15. E. Kopówka, “Karny Obóz Pracy w Treblince” [in:] *Co wiemy o Treblince? Stan badań*, ed. by E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2013, p. 45.



8. Rail of the narrow-gauge railway in front of the Treblinka Museum building (photo by A. Kowalska)

constructed to the gravel pit and the recovered rail was probably part of the system of transporting the excavated material to the siding itself.

During the years of German occupation, the gravel pit continued to be exploited and, due to labour shortages, the district governor of Sokołów-Węgrów, Ernst Gramss, established a labour camp in its vicinity. In effect, mainly prisoners of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp worked in the gravel pit from the summer of 1941 to July 1944. The gravel excavated at this site was transported in so-called “cradles”, i.e. skip cars running on rails. In 2019 and 2020, the rail was conserved and this 7.3-metre-long fragment is currently on display in front of the Treblinka Museum building.

COMMEMORATIVE BADGE OF THE LITHUANIAN-BELARUSSIAN FRONT

It was found during the pre-investment survey conducted in December 2019 by Andrzej Bryńczak M.A. It is a commemorative military badge established by order of the Ministry of Military Affairs in 1921.¹⁶ The arms bear

16. Z. Sawicki, A. Wielechowski, *Odznaki Wojska Polskiego 1918-1945*, Warszawa: Pantera Books, 2007, pp. 630-633.



9. Commemorative badge of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front
(photo by S. Bednarz)

the inscriptions FRONT LIT-BIAŁ and the dates 1919-1920. Unfortunately, it has been preserved fragmentarily – only the cross has survived – so we are not able to determine for sure which of the nine versions we are dealing with in this case. Nevertheless, it is an exceptionally important and valuable memento mainly due to the place where it was found, i.e. a dozen or so metres from the border of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. It is difficult to say how the badge found its way to this place, but the most likely scenario seems to be that it belonged to one of the victims of the camp and was thrown away by the Germans. It is not currently on display in any of the exhibitions.

POCKET WATCHES



10. Pocket watches (photo by S. Bednarz)

The Treblinka Museum has several objects of this type in its collection, with varying degrees of preservation. They are noteworthy, among other reasons, because they constitute less than one percent of the finds recovered in this area – they probably remained in Treblinka only because they were damaged and as such were of little value, which is why they were not transported to Germany with other valuables. However, even though damaged, their aesthetic value and high quality of workmanship is evident. They were found mainly in the area around the extermination camp, so it can be assumed that they ended up there in the same way as the memorial cross described above. They are not currently on display in any of the exhibitions.

LAGER POLIZEI BADGE

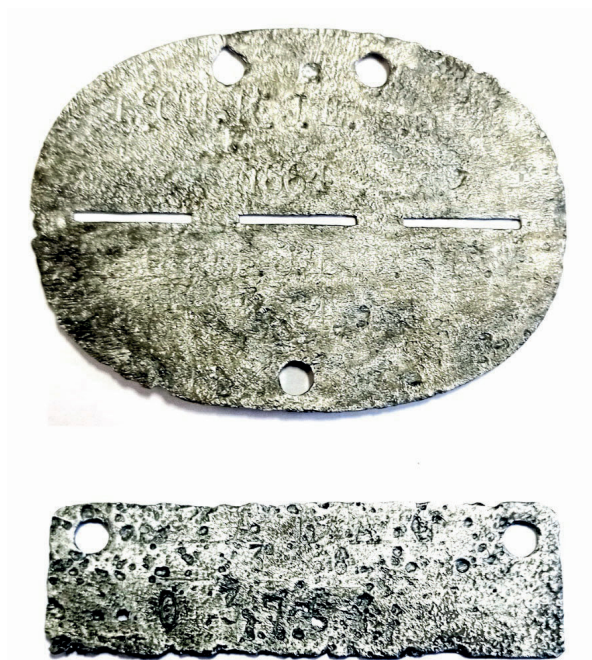


11. Lager Polizei badge (photo by B. Kowalski)

The badge in the form of a gorget, i.e. a crescent hanging around the neck, was found by Prof. Sturdy Colls' team in 2013 in the administrative part of the Death Camp.¹⁷ Its poor state of preservation is due to the fact that it was a surface find, and since the liquidation of the camp it had been lying in the shallowest layers of the soil, exposed to changing weather conditions. The inscription LAGER POLIZEI is visible on its surface with the words separated by a swastika. It was most probably home made by punching the letters with a nail or other sharp tool. Currently the badge is on display at the permanent exhibition "Finding Treblinka".

17. C. Sturdy Colls, K. Colls, *Finding Treblinka. Archaeological Evaluation 2013*. Research report available at the Treblinka Museum and MPCM Delegation in Siedlce.

DOG TAGS



12. Wehrmacht and POW dog tags
(photo by B. Kowalski)

Most of them were found in the 1990s in the administrative area of the Penal Labour Camp, where the SS men were housed. The set comprises both complete and broken in half dog tags. Some of them bear the identification marks of their owners, others are “blank”, waiting to be stamped and allocated to a soldier. Almost all of the found objects are oval German dog tags, made according to the model introduced in 1939, apart from one rectangular, which was also made by Germans, but for prisoners of war.¹⁸ The oval-shaped dog tags bear visible insignia: 1.SCH.K.J.E. (illegible fragment) 1664 – the dog tag belonged to a Wehrmacht soldier (probably 1 Schutzkompanie Infanterie-Ersatz-Bataillon) and 1. J.E.B. 423 (illegible fragment) 6263 (indicating a soldier of the 1st Infanterie-Ersatz-Bataillon). On the other hand, the signature STALAG 378 037 can be seen on the half of the POW’s dog tag. They are not currently on display in any of the exhibitions.

¹⁸ D. Kaszuba, M. Sadzikowski, *Wojskowe znaków tożsamości w fotografii i źródłach z epoki*, Skarżysko-Kamienna 2012.

EMBLEMS OF THE THIRD REICH, THE SO-CALLED "ADLERS"



13. Elblems of the Third Reich, the so-called "Adlers" (photo by B. Kowalski)

Adlers were popularly known as the emblem of the Third Reich which, in the form of a small metal badge, was worn on uniform caps by Wehrmacht and SS soldiers. Photographs from the era show that metal eagles were placed mainly on the caps of non-commissioned officers. Some officers also wore them but usually embroidered on their caps.

The Treblinka Museum holds two such badges in its collection – one with the signature WTW 39, the other without any signature – and one fragment (a broken off wing) with the preserved part of the signature reading 39. At present they are not displayed in any of the exhibitions.

WOUND BADGES

Two Black Wound Badges, preserved in very poor condition, were found on the site of the Penal Labour Camp. The finds represent the lowest rank of such badge and are made of cast iron – hence the poor state of preservation.



14. Wound Badges (photo by B. Kowalski)

On the obverses, the so-called “Stahlhelms” with an image of a swastika on a background of two crossed swords are faintly visible. They are not currently on display in any of the exhibitions.

FRAGMENT OF THE TORAH



15. A Fragment of the Torah (photo by B. Kowalski)

This small fragment, measuring 60x25 cm, contains a fragment of the story of the hard-working Hellea and Jacob, who desired to have offspring of their own. In the upper part of the scroll, the verses are only fragmentarily preserved, while in the lower part they are clearly legible. As it is made of parchment, it underwent conservation treatment in a fumigation chamber in 2019 to stop the growth of mould and other microorganisms. It was found near the Treblinka railway station and is on display in the current permanent exhibition.

WHIP



16. Whip (photo by B. Kowalski)

Found on the grounds of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, it is believed to have belonged to one of the camp crew members and was used to beat victims. Although the massive head with five spikes is attached to the shaft of a thick steel spring by single links rather than by a chain or thong, morphologically this device is most similar to the flail – a weapon used in Europe since the early historic period¹⁹ (11th – 13th centuries). The whip is displayed in the current permanent exhibition.

SILVER MEDALLION



17. Silver medallion (photo by A. Kowalska)

19. M. Gradowski, Z. Żygulski, *Słownik polskiej terminologii uzbrojenia historycznego*, Warszaw 1982, p. 46.

It is an accidental find from the vicinity of the gravel pit. This small silver pendant in the shape of a book resting on a harp and a feather, is a memento of an engagement. The text in the book, written in Hebrew with German influences, means: "In memory of the day of my engagement to my beloved man 22 Elul 5679", that is, according to the Gregorian calendar, October 17, 1919.²⁰ It is not currently on display in any of the exhibitions.

WOLFGANG HERGETH'S SERIES OF PAINTINGS



18. The opening of an exhibition of paintings by Wolfgang Hergeth (photo from the collection of the Treblinka Museum)

It is a series of 11 paintings donated to the Treblinka Museum by the Czechoslovakian-born artist, depicting the last moments of the life of Janusz Korczak and his young charges. It symbolically depicts their journey from the Warsaw Orphans' Home to the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. As the author stated: "My daughter Sonja [...] gave me Monika Pelz's book 'Nie mnie chcę ratować', which tells the story of Janusz Korczak. I was very moved by this text and the feeling has never left me. In order to give shape

20. The translation of the inscription and the calculation of the date were done by Mr Michael Halber.

to this story, I first created many sketches and made many different attempts with colours. I found that depravity could only be conveyed using curd cheese, egg white, linseed oil, siccative and pigment”.²¹ These paintings are kept in the archive and displayed in temporary exhibitions or loaned to other institutions.

As can easily be seen in the above chapter, many museum artefacts are currently deposited in a storeroom or archive and are not on display. This is unfortunately due to the small exhibition space. However, they are also subject to conservation work, as dedicated space is planned for them at the permanent exhibition in the new Museum headquarters.

SUMMARY

Treblinka is undoubtedly one of the most important of martyrdom sites in the world. Despite this, until recently, the site seemed somewhat forgotten and underfunded, and many tasks were carried out only thanks to the commitment of staff and outsiders (donors, volunteers, etc.). Today, more than two years after the unit became independent, these problems have been resolved. Investment in infrastructure, research and conservation work is underway. However, it must be remembered that the care of the historical heritage is an ongoing process that requires constant effort and resources. The Treblinka Museum is confronted with a rapidly growing number of relics that need to be provided with appropriate conditions and protection not only because of their historical value, but also in order to preserve their exhibition value – after all, a large part of them will be on display in the new Museum building. For this reason, conservation and inventory work should be carried out in the coming years at least as intensively as in the past. It is a source of optimism that the authorities at provincial and central level understand the need to develop this institution also in the direction of protecting the collections, which is reflected in the plans for a conservation workshop and a modern storage facility to be created in the Museum's new premises.

21. The artist gave this answer to a question from one of the participants at the opening of the exhibition “Janusz Korczak in the paintings of Wolfgang Hergeth”, which took place on May 8, 2012 in the then Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka. Full coverage of the event is available at <https://muzeumtreblinka.eu/informacje/wolfgang-hergeth/>.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Dominic Borchert
Federal Agency for Civic Education Saxony-Anhalt

COOPERATION BETWEEN SAXONY-ANHALT AND THE MUSEUM TREBLINKA

Dear Sir or Madam, dear Dr. Edward Kopówka,

I have the great pleasure of speaking to you from Magdeburg today. My name is Dominic Borchert and I am representing Mr Maik Reichel, who is unfortunately unable to attend due to other appointments. Mr. Reichel asked me to convey best regards from the State Center for Civic Education Saxony-Anhalt and especially to you, Dr. Kopówka and your team, as our cooperation partner. Thank you very much for hosting this conference. Mr Reichel is looking forward to a personal reunion, which will hopefully be possible soon after the end of the pandemic.

Before I start my lecture, please allow me to say a few words about myself. As advisor for the “Program to strengthen Democracy”, I am responsible, among other things, for the preparation and supervision of trips to memorial sites and also deal with the important topic of culture of commemoration. In this role I had the pleasure to get to know the Treblinka Museum last year. On this occasion, I was not only able to learn a lot about the history of this special place, but also get to know the impressive work of the team – an experience that was both interesting and motivating for me.

In the next 15 minutes, I would first like to introduce you to the state center for civic education in Saxony-Anhalt – the Landeszentrale. I would not only like to go into the history of the institution itself and present the focal points of our work, but above all I would like to explain to you against which historical background political education in Germany is to be seen in general and why it enjoys such a high priority that every federal state

has its own state center for civic education and the Federal Agency for Civic Education exists at the federal level. All of those are state institutions that are financed with public funds but work independently from political influence. Then I would like to talk about the special connections between the State Centre and the Museum in Treblinka. The cooperation agreement that was concluded last year is an important, but at the same time a very young part of a whole network of close links that connect the State of Saxony-Anhalt with the Masovian Voivodeship as well as committed people in Poland and Germany. Of course, I would also like to go into the cooperation agreement itself and briefly present its content and at the same time tell you about further plans and ideas for cooperation. The last part of my lecture will then point out some of the current projects at the State Centre. I hope that I do not exceed my speaking time.

The experience of the first democracy in Germany is crucial for political education in Germany. Between 1919 and 1933 the German Reich was a democracy and a constitutional state – the so-called Weimar Republic. Many elements of the constitution of that time seem very progressive to us today and can also be found in the current German constitution, the Grundgesetz. The fact that this democracy could be converted so quickly by the Nazis into a criminal and inhuman dictatorship is still a very bitter experience in German history. I do not want to explain the various reasons for this development again in this lecture. But it is important to know that one of these reasons was the German population's low appreciation for the concept of democracy. This and the following experience of the Nazi dictatorship, the Shoah and the Second World War have shaped the Federal Republic of Germany since it was founded. Against this historical background, democracy, human rights, peaceful coexistence, the rule of law and the effort to balance different interests are central values of our society. Representing and explaining them and making them understandable in their historical dimension is the goal of the political education work of the State Center for Civic Education today.

In Saxony-Anhalt there is another aspect too. The end of the GDR meant a tremendous change for its citizens. The socialist state, which had up to this point been omnipresent in the economy, society and private life, virtually disappeared overnight. Many people lost work and orientation and had to come to terms with a political system they were not familiar with at all and recognize their own opportunities to participate in it. Political education thus has had a special status and so the Civic Center for Political Education Saxony-Anhalt was founded in 1991. Its Task was and still is to carry out independent and non-partisan political education. In doing so, it always acts on the basis of the goals and values of the Grundgesetz

– which is the constitution – for the Federal Republic of Germany as well as the European Charter of Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN. In the last 30 years, the State Centre has succeeded in creating a broad network of civil society actors with which it fulfills this task. Hundreds of events and educational opportunities for all parts of society and all age groups are realised every year. The spectrum ranges from thematically highly specialized events, such as a podcast on political correctness, to large-scale specialist conferences such as the annual Political Education Teachers Day, up to the participation in major public events such as the Saxony-Anhalt Day. Last but not least, study trips to memorial sites all over Europe – like Treblinka of course – and to the institutions of the Federal Government and the European Union are also part of our portfolio.

Two important focal points of our work, which I would particularly like to emphasize today, are the culture of remembrance and the prevention of anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, it has recently shown again how important this work is in our society. Misanthropic election campaign slogans that seem quite similar to those used in the Nazi-Gemany can be seen more and more often – be it on social media or on the street. And again it is also political parties who want to win votes with such slogans – and are successful. Under the pretext of freedom of expression, more and more radical and misanthropic positions are being articulated, which are ultimately followed by deeds. Most recently, anti-Semitic rallies in front of synagogues have again drawn attention to the fact that Jews in Germany still cannot live undisturbed and freely practice their religion – a right that is guaranteed to everyone in Germany by the Grundgesetz, regardless of their religious beliefs. For us in Saxony-Anhalt, the attempted attack on the synagogue in Halle, in which two innocent people were killed in 2019, was of particular importance. The fact that the perpetrator used the same narratives to justify his crime that the National Socialists used and some of which still appear in the political discourse clearly shows that the fight against anti-Semitism has to be an important aspect of political education. Both – the cultural remembrance work and the fight against anti-Semitism – are combined in educational work in the sites of the Shoah. Nowhere the terrible consequences of inhuman ideology and its state-organized, resolute implementation can be experienced more impressively. Memorial sites and museums, like the one in Treblinka, have therefore had a permanent place in the work of the State Centre for many years. We regularly organize trips to memorial sites ourselves and support schools and other educational institutions in organizing and financing trips to memorial sites in Poland, but also in Ukraine, Belarus and Latvia. In 2018 and

2019, i.e. before the coronavirus pandemic, there were a total of 26 such trips. Six of them led to Treblinka and gave around 150 students from Saxony-Anhalt the opportunity to deal intensively with the Shoah.

The museum in Treblinka is of particular importance for the State Centre. There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, there has been a structured cooperation with the Masovian Voivodeship since 2003, i.e. for almost 20 years. Numerous mutual visits and joint projects in recent years have brought both regions and, above all, the people on both sides closer together. Against this background, the cooperation between the State Centre and the museum in Treblinka was of course obvious and was supported by the highest authorities from the start. We must not forget, however, that there are also much older initiatives that have brought both regions together for a long time. The German-Polish Society Saxony-Anhalt e.V. has initiated and carried out numerous projects here with great commitment and the cooperation with the Treblinka Museum is to a considerable extent the result of this commitment.

But let me now turn to the cooperation between the State Centre and the Treblinka Museum itself. I would now like to introduce you to some of the elements of the agreement and, in doing so, present the joint projects so far and further perspectives for cooperation. A central point is the promotion of youth exchanges. Exchange projects between students from Poland and Saxony-Anhalt are to be promoted and supported. Both partners can use their experiences and contacts in their respective regions to make these exchanges attractive and instructive. There are numerous points of contact on both sides that can be integrated into the programs. I will mention some of them later. In addition to youth exchanges, it is also about a professional exchange between our institutions. Not only will the employees of the State Centre and the Treblinka Museum work together more closely in the future, but the Saxony-Anhalt Memorials Foundation will also be involved in this cooperation. This Foundation is in charge of seven memorial sites in Saxony-Anhalt, including former concentration camps, prisons and extermination sites from the Nazi era, but also memorials that commemorate the injustice of the socialist dictatorship. Another important point is the cooperation in the creation of educational materials and joint publications on the history of Treblinka but also on the culture of remembrance as a whole. These plans were recorded in a cooperation agreement last year, but there was a fruitful exchange in advance, during which the State Centre helped, among other things, in establishing a German section in the library of the Treblinka Museum. I have already spoken of our visit last year and would like to come back to it again. In addition to the visit to the Treblinka Memorial, we had the opportunity to visit other interesting places that are to be integrated into further work. On the one

hand, we visited the new Pilecki house in Ostrów Mazowiecka and made initial contacts for further cooperation. Not only seminars for young people but also for teachers and other multipliers could be organized here. The Jewish cemetery in Brok has been known to us for a long time and will in future be part of the travel program for youth groups. There has already been a conversation with the Mayor of Brok about this. Furthermore, the story of the Lubkiewicz family who were murdered by German forces because they supported Jews with food should be remembered. At their house in Sadowne there is already a memorial that commemorates the brutal murder of the family. As you can see, there are a number of other interesting places in the vicinity of the Treblinka Museum where young people from Germany and Poland can work on the history of Nazi dictatorship. Of course there are such places in Saxony-Anhalt as well. I would particularly like to point out the so-called Totungsanstalt in Bernburg, where several thousand sick and disabled people and prisoners from concentration camps were murdered as part of the T4 campaign. One of the directors of this facility, Irmfried Eberl, was then the first commandant of the Treblinka extermination camp. His successor, Franz Stangl, had also previously worked in Bernburg. With these personal details, connections can be made between the destruction of so-called life unworthy of life and the industrialized mass murder of the Shoah – both ideologically based, inhuman and unprecedented crimes against humanity.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on our work since last year. We had to cancel many events or adapt them to the new circumstances. We had to postpone planned projects or we just could not make progress with some of them. Nevertheless, we made good progress. We were able to win a new partner for the implementation of study trips, who in the future will use state subsidies administered by the IBB to organize trips from Saxony-Anhalt, also and especially to Poland. The first trips are already planned for the second half of the year. We also want to organize a teacher training course in Treblinka, with which the potential of the memorial and the places of learning in the vicinity that I have mentioned will be highlighted. And last but not least, we are continuing our work in the area of remembrance culture. On 16 and 17 of June, we are holding a large conference in Magdeburg under the title “Ask Today”, which focuses on the role of memorials in educational work. We are very glad that we can then welcome Dr. Edward Kopówka as a speaker and I would like to extend a warm invitation to you all to this conference.

I would like to thank you for your attention and I am very happy to answer any questions you may have.

Edward Sułek

GERMAN YOUTH AT THE MEMORIAL SITE IN TREBLINKA – THE CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE

Between October 17 and 21, 2016, I visited the Memorial Site in Treblinka for the first time with German youth. These were 20 students from Burggymnasium (general secondary school) from Wettin, Saalekreis district, Saxony-Anhalt state. They were accompanied by two teachers and Peter Wetzel from the State Center for Civic Education of Saxony-Anhalt. My participation in this project had a dual character because, apart from the role of a translator, I provided information on history, culture and other matters related to my country.



1. Treblinka (photo by K. Mueller)



2. Treblinka (photo by K. Mueller)

I intentionally devote more space to this group of young people because they were exceptional and, moreover, as I have already mentioned, it was my first stay with young people at this Memorial. The uniqueness of this group was that they were very well prepared for this project, with a good knowledge of the Second World War. I was also surprised by their creative insight into the history of this place. It should be noted that some students attended artistic classes. Therefore, they were able to express emotions, their individual view of Treblinka in pictures and photos. With this group, we managed to visit a secondary school in Małkinia and the Korczakianum in Warsaw. After returning to Germany, these students continued to work on the Treblinka project. Some of them visited other classes in their high schools and even other schools, where they were providing information on this Memorial. The youth wondered how to express what they had found out in Treblinka. They decided to collect 17,000 buttons without buying them, as a part of the campaign “Let’s get down to history” (literally: “We fasten the buttons of history”). In this way, they wanted to bring the enormity of the crime to attention, and the fact that such great number of people was murdered in the extermination camp in one day. The suitcases are also symbolic and remind us that thousands of people were forced to take what was the most precious and most important for them before being deported. Organizing an exhibition where one could show pictures and photographs as well as tell about the stay in the former Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944) was a very important idea.

The exhibition entitled “Treblinka – hell on earth” could be visited at their school and at the Willi-Sitte Gallery in Merseburg and at the Treblinka Museum. The name of the exhibition referred to the words of Samuel Wilenberg, who managed to escape from the extermination camp during the revolt in Treblinka. The exhibits were donated to the Treblinka Museum



3. Exhibition in Treblinka, Jadwiga Stankiewicz-Józwik, Dr. Edward Kopówka, and Maik Reichel (photo by P. Wetzel)



4. Exhibition in Treblinka (photo by P. Wetzel)

by young people. High school students from Wettin prepared interesting documentation and informed about the forgotten Treblinka on the website: www.vergessenestreblinka.weebly.com. The exhibition, of which the regional press informed, was seen in Merseburg by many people, especially youth. They are important multipliers of knowledge about what they learned while visiting memorial sites and exhibitions. They get on well not only with their peers but also with their parents and grandparents' generation. Without such knowledge, the culture of memory would be just empty words.

With one group, we were carrying out cleaning work on the site of the former extermination camp, other groups were also ready to do something, in order to testify that they knew where they were. All groups dealt with issues connected to problems related to prisoners of the former labour and extermination camps. The youth understood that it was very easy to lose life in the labour camp and that people were brought to the extermination camp, to this death factory, to take their lives. Moments at the main monument, which took place at the end of the stay, spent in silence or with the words of Halina Birenbaum's poem "Jedźcie do Trebłinki" [Go to Treblinka] and the subsequent need to calm down will remain in my memory forever.

The following list informs about the visits of young people from Saxony-Anhalt to the Memorial Site in Treblinka in the years 2016 to 2019:



5. Treblinka (photo by K. Mueller)

Year	Name of the school	Type of the school	People
2016	Burg – Gymnasium Wettin	(general secondary school Wettin)	22
2017	Burger Roland – Gymnasium	(general secondary school Burg)	24
	GTS “Adolf Holst” Mücheln	(secondary school)	18
	SEK Campus Technicus Bernburg	(secondary school)	19
	Domgymnasium Merseburg	(general secondary school Merseburg)	25
2018	SEK “Quer-Bunt” Querfurt	(general secondary school Querfurt)	22
	Gymnasium Querfurt	(general secondary school Querfurt)	20
	Burger Roland – Gymnasium	(general secondary school Burg)	12
	Gymnasium “J.G. Herder” Merseburg	(general secondary school Merseburg)	21
2019	KinderStärken e.V. aus Region Stendal	(general secondary school and secondary school from Stendal district)	27
	Burg – Gymnasium Wettin	(general secondary school Wettin)	21
	BbS “Dr. Otto Schlein” Magdeburg	(vocational school in Magdeburg)	27
Together			258

An extremely important factor that had a positive impact on visiting the Memorial Site was the fact that we managed to find excellent accommodation in the “Nadrzecze” guesthouse in Brok. We had good conditions there for meetings, discussions and watching films about the problems of World War II. We found supporters in the person of Krzysztof Jóźwik (†2020) and his mother, Jadwiga Stankiewicz-Jóźwik (†2019). Conversations with them helped some groups of young people to gain additional insight into the period of the occupation of Poland. Jadwiga Stankiewicz-Jóźwik was a Righteous Among the Nations. She received this title in 1999. During World War II, as a 15-year-old girl, she saved four Jews. She told the young people that it was something obvious for her, a completely normal

reaction. Naturally, the youth realized that Jadwiga Stankiewicz-Jóźwik risked her life. She worked as a housekeeper for a family in Warsaw, who were sheltering three Jews. When the Gestapo tried to enter the apartment on December 31, 1943, she allowed two people to escape and hid the oldest one in a couch, wrapping him in a duvet. In addition, she saved the life of a boy by providing him with the birth certificate of her deceased brother. The Muszyński family emigrated to the USA and the boy, Janusz Konan, lives in Paris. Together with Krzysztof Jóźwik I had a chance to tell some groups about the fate of this brave woman. We showed the Righteous Medal with the meaningful inscription "Whoever saves one life saves the whole world", a letter from Steven Spielberg with words of appreciation for Jadwiga Stankiewicz-Jóźwik and other documents. Krzysztof Jóźwik informed us about the existence of a Jewish cemetery in Brok. German youth visited this place. Visiting the Polin Museum in Warsaw was also a very important part of the program of stay in Poland. It is a source of information about the history, culture and fate of Jews in Poland and Europe.

In 2019, we contacted Grażyna Olton in Sadowne, a relative of Leon, Marianna and Stefan Lubkiewicz, who were murdered on January 13, 1943 by German gendarmes. The meeting with Grażyna Olton in Sadowne and her account of the fact that for selling bread to two Jewish women, these three people were tortured and shot after ten hours, made a great impression on the young people. The Jewish women were killed immediately. The youth from Magdeburg decided to honor the murdered people by placing a Stolperstein (stumbling block) that will remind of them and the murdered Jewish women. When we talk about Stolpersteine, we mean a project that has existed since 1992 and its author is the artist Gunter Demnig. Brass tablets placed in the ground in the shape of a square remind of the fate of people who were persecuted, murdered, deported or forced to commit suicide by the German Nazis. In Sadowne, they will remind you of a crime that must not be forgotten. The youth is grateful to Grażyna Olton that she agreed to the implementation of this project.

Last year, together with Maik Reichel, director of the State Center for Civic Education Saxony-Anhalt, we managed to make contact with The Pilecki Family House Museum, which is being built in Ostrów Mazowiecka. In the future, we would also like to visit this place with German youth in order to learn about the indomitable soldiers.

It can be said that the young people who visited the Memorial Site in Treblinka correctly understood the words of the former German president, Roman Herzog, on January 3, 1996: "Memory never dare to end, it must also remind future generations to be vigilant. It is important to find a form of memory that will function in the future. It should express grief at the suffering and loss of people, be dedicated to the memory of the victims, and



6. Sadowne (photo by P. Wetzel)



7. Małkinia (photo by P. Wetzel)

resist any danger of repetition.” The young people, whom I accompanied, took this history lesson, which consisted of visiting the Memorial Site, very seriously. These young people are aware of what Max Scheler wrote: “human life is a process of realizing values”. They know that it is up to them to respect human dignity, and to deal with the culture of memory with sensitivity and empathy. During their stay in the former camps in Treblinka, they knew that they should behave in such a way that expresses the memory and respect for the victims. Moreover, they realize how important

it is in the global world to uphold and defend the fundamental rights of democracy.

Another important factor that enriches the stay of German youth in Poland is the opportunity to meet Polish youth. It is meeting people that makes our life more worth living, as Guy de Maupassant wrote. Such contacts make it possible to find out that there are more things that unite us than divide us, and allow us to broaden our knowledge about the country of our neighbors. Perhaps in the future we will manage to organize a meeting of young people from three countries: Israel, Germany and Poland, in Treblinka.

Now I will write a few words about my motivation to cooperate with the Treblinka Museum and to support German youth in this difficult history lesson. Due to the fact that I live in Germany, I would like as many people as possible in this country to get to know my country and my compatriots. I am pleased to see the fact that people employed at the Treblinka Museum and working at the "Nadrzecz" guesthouse in Brok very quickly find an emotional bond with guests from Germany. This wordless communication is first noticed and it facilitates or hinders further joint activities. The second important factor is that we must constantly learn from the past for the present and for the future. As a coordinator for the integration of foreigners in the Saalekreis district, I held this position for five years, I received an invitation to a remembrance ceremony for 10 victims murdered for racist motives by a group of German extremists. The ceremony took place on February 23, 2012 in Berlin. Many words were said that day about making every effort to prevent similar actions from happening in the future. Angela Merkel recalled in her speech the words of Article 1 of the German constitution: "Human dignity is inviolable – and it is the foundation of life in our country." That day I also heard the words of the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, who wrote in the poem "Life" about what characterizes democracy so well: "To live, like a tree alone and free, to live, like a forest in brotherhood. This is our longing".

Finally, we would like to thank the International Centre for Education and Exchange (IBB) and the State Center for Civic Education Saxony-Anhalt for their financial assistance and the Merseburg-Saalekreis Historical Association, headed by its chairman Peter Wetzels, for coordinating these trips. Naturally, without committed teachers who drew the attention of young people to these important projects, it would not be possible to implement them. These educators deserve great praise, because they prove with their attitude that for them a teacher is not only a profession, but also a vocation. On behalf of all young people and teachers with whom I visited the Memorial Site in Treblinka, I would like to express my gratitude to the director of the Treblinka Museum, Dr. Edward Kopówka and Anna

Remiszewska for their help. In the future, we will certainly consider together how to optimally organize visits to this Memorial Site for young people.

This terrible historical truth must never be forgotten, and youth projects are the best method to emphasize the fact that peace is not just a word, but a collective action so that the nightmare of the past does not repeat itself. In other words, it can be said that the culture of remembrance is an indispensable basis for a culture of peace.

Steffan Hänschen, Florian Ross
 Bildungswerk Stanisław Hantz e.V., Germany

HOW DO I UNDERSTAND TREBLINKA? COOPERATION OF BILDUNGSWERK STANISŁAW HANTZ FROM KASSEL WITH THE TREBLINKA MUSEUM

Hello and good morning. I am speaking on behalf of the Stanislaw Hantz Bildungswerk and I would like to thank the Treblinka Memorial and Mr. Edward Kopowka for inviting me to this conference. Bildungswerk Stanislaw Hantz is an independent and voluntary Educational Foundation from Germany. We strive to remember and commemorate the Holocaust. Among different activities, we organize study tours for interested parties to the Holocaust sites in Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania. This includes trips to the former death camps of “Aktion Reinhardt”, that is to Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka.

The number of Jewish men and women who were murdered in Treblinka is still unknown today. Historians estimate that the total number of victims can reach up to 900,000 Jews – plus hundreds of Sinti and Roma.

How can one imagine a number of 900,000 people?

How do “victims”, “murdered” and “dead” become people with a previous history, a fate, with a profession and a family, with good and bad characteristics, as different as people can be. It is often forgotten that there was a disproportionately large number of children among them.

In Treblinka, not 900,000 people were killed all together, but a single person was murdered 900,000 times. The understanding of that fact determines the stops on our way to the Treblinka Memorial. Since 1998 we have been organizing our annual study tours to the former extermination sites of “Aktion Reinhardt”, to Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. We start our visit of the Treblinka Memorial with a visit to the town of Siedlce, about 70 kilometers from Treblinka. We drive downtown and our bus driver drops us off at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed

Virgin Mary. After walking a few hundred meters we reach a parking lot located by a bank. The synagogue of the Jewish community stood here until December 1939.

Around 13,000 Jewish men and women lived in the city. In August 1942, thousands of them were forced by the German occupiers to gather on this square. There were also Jews from the neighboring villages. One of them was Jehuda Jakob Wajnstajn from the small town of Łosice, about 30 km from Siedlce. Wajnstajn was one of the few who managed to escape from the extermination camp. Decades later he described in his book what happened during this deportation. Following his descriptions we inform our participants about Wajnstajn's way to Treblinka. We learn about how he walked from his home town of Łosice to the "assembly point" next to the Synagogue in Siedlce, and how he was mistreated there by the guards. Then we get back on the bus and follow the path that Wajnstajn walked through from the "assembly point" to the cargo station in Siedlce. We keep going straight the Florianska Street. On the railway ramp we let Wajnstajn speak again: about how the Germans violently picked the deportees and pushed them into the wagons. During several August days, over 10,000 Jewish men and women were deported from Siedlce to Treblinka. It happened in public and there are some witnesses who can testify about it. A native German from Reich Fritz Hoeft took photos at the "assembly point" next to the synagogue. The Wehrmacht soldier Hubert Pfoch took photos at the cargo station. We show our participants photos taken by the two of them. We also read the testimony of the Wehrmacht soldier Fritz Lesch, in which he describes what he saw at the "assembly point" and at the train station.

From Siedlce we continue by bus via Sokołów Podlaski to Wólka Okrąglik, a village about 2 kilometers from the Treblinka Memorial. On our way we repeatedly cross train tracks that once led to the extermination camp. In the small settlement of Wólka Okrąglik we get off the bus and walk towards the former train station, which no longer exists today as an expressway has been built there. In 1942 and 1943, the train station served as an alternative location when the train station in the village of Treblinka could no longer accept new trains with Jewish men and women. Jews fled the wagons and were shot on spot. Local inhabitants from Wólka Okrąglik had to bury them.

Not only the trains with the Jewish victims turned the residents of Wólka Okrąglik into witnesses to the murder in Treblinka. Farmers on their horse-drawn carriages were forced to work in the extermination site. Guards from the Trawniki Camp (Trawniki Men) who served at the Treblinka death camp regularly came to the village and bought alcohol and food with the valuables stolen from the Jewish victims. Prostitutes offered

their services. During this stop on our trip to the Treblinka Memorial, we focus on the plunder of the murdered people's belongings. The plunder was on one hand official and done by the German perpetrators, on the other hand the unofficial one was conducted by the security guards of the camp in the vicinity of Treblinka. Another topic here are the so-called "human hyenas". This is the name of the grave robbers who ransacked the area of the former extermination camp for valuables after the retreat of the German occupiers in 1944.

Our journey continues to the former train station in the village of Treblinka. All deportation trains stopped at the Treblinka train station. The trains were split at the station and 20 wagons at once were pushed into the extermination camp one and a half kilometers away. Sometimes the victims waited in the trains for several days before they were transported further. We get off the bus and go to the building where the ticket office was located after the war. Again we let Yehuda Jakob Wajnstajn speak: about how he arrived at the train station tormented by thirst, where the guards murdered the deportees indiscriminately. He also describes the trade between the Polish peasants and the helpless Jews. The descriptions of the situation at the Treblinka train station made by the Jewish survivors on the one hand and the local Polish population on the other could not be more contradictory. If you follow the statements of Polish railwaymen from Treblinka station, despite the constant risk of being shot by the guards, the local residents tried to supply the Jews in the wagons with water. In the memories of Wajnstajn and other Jewish survivors, water and food were only available at exorbitant prices. A bottle for 100 zlotys. One kilo of bread for 500 zlotys. At the same time, the payment did not guarantee that the goods would reach the buyer. Often people paid, but the promised goods were not delivered to the train wagon.

We get back on the bus and leave the Treblinka train station. We follow the route taken by the deportation trains in the direction of the extermination camp. We are approaching the point where a railway siding used to branch off from the main railway line in the direction of the Treblinka camp. The track was dismantled after the war, but a clearing in the forest indicates where they had once stood. We get off the bus and follow the former track of the siding for a few meters. More than 40 trains daily used the main railway line, located just by the siding. At this point we let the Treblinka survivor Samuel Willenberg speak:

As we marched along the tracks, a train passed by us, with a lot of faces in its windows. They watched us with curiosity, they were looking at the forest and at the column of smoke rising from the burning corpses, they were pointing at us and gesturing among

each other. Some of these faces looked scared, others expressed pity. A few grinned with satisfaction. Seeing the bored, smiling Poles on the train reminded us that we couldn't hope for much help from the outside.

We continue and approach the railway siding at the Treblinka Memorial. On the way we let Jehuda Jakob Wajnstajn tell the story again. We listen about how he planned and carried out his escape from Treblinka. He escaped on September 9, 1942 together with Gedalia Rosenzweig and Michael Fischman. The Polish Christians Gabryel and Helena Szczebunski hid him and provided him with food. After the war he changed his name to Edi Weinstein.

When we arrive at the Memorial, we will make our next stop at a cornerstone that the Jewish survivor of Treblinka, Samuel Willenberg and his wife Ada Willenberg, had erected on August 2, 2013 on the 70th anniversary of the uprising in Treblinka. It is a symbolic foundation stone for an educational center to be built, the "Holocaust of Jews in Treblinka Education Center". The extermination of up to 900,000 Jewish women and men in Treblinka took only 13 months. In the first five weeks of the summer of 1942 alone, almost 300,000 people were murdered. A dimension that is singular even in the history of the Holocaust. However, the importance of Treblinka was not reflected in the history of the memorial after 1944. For decades the place was an open area without any form. It was only after more than 15 years that the construction of a memorial began at the end of the 1950s. It was opened in May 1964. To this day, however, there is no museum belonging to the memorial that does justice to the 900,000 victims of this place. We are therefore highly satisfied that a new museum is now being built in Treblinka.

The form of the memorial is limited to the remembrance stones on a concrete surface which protects the area of the mass graves, to a few symbolic landmarks (tracks, ramp, size of the camp). They indicate the topography of the former extermination site. This can be perceived as a weak point or as an opportunity. We use this situation to visualize the topography with our participants, combined with information about the history of Treblinka. The area of the former extermination camp cannot be spotted at first glance today. Over the decades, a forest has grown again on the terrain. Only a part of the former site remains visible to visitors. 2 meters high, free-standing granite stones mark the outline of the area of Treblinka II, the former site of the extermination. Following the stones, we circle the area with our groups and feel more and more the incomprehensibility of the place. It didn't take an extensive area to kill thousands of people every day. On some days, five deportation trains, each carrying up to

6,000 people, drove into the camp one after the other. "The time between the arrival of a transport on the station ramp and the complete extermination of the people who came to the camp usually took no more than about 1.5 hours" according to the statements of the Düsseldorf regional court in the mid-1960s during the second Treblinka trial. Can this factual statement of the judges touch our hearts? Can we really imagine what happened in those 1.5 hours?

We can inform the participants about the facts and testimonies from the few survivors of the extermination site, but do we really understand what they are telling us? Can we realize the depth of the abysses into which the prisoners of Treblinka II were led, after they were determined to work under the command of the German perpetrators?

Only those who have been there can really understand.

The story of the survivors is part of our visit to Treblinka. About 50 Jewish prisoners escaped from the extermination camp during the uprising. But they could not flee from what they had experienced and seen in Treblinka. We tell it to our participants, using the example of Hershl Sperling. He was deported to Treblinka on September 26, 1942. Exactly 47 years later, on September 26, 1989, he committed suicide by jumping from a bridge in Glasgow. Hershl Sperling couldn't live with the burden that his family had been murdered in Treblinka, but he was the only one to survive. During the post-war years, he was unable to talk to his sons about his family who had been murdered in Treblinka.

On the route briefly described here, through which we lead our groups to the memorial, the stay at the former Treblinka train station has always been particularly important. From July 1942 to August 1943, the station was a transition point between life and death. All death trains destined for the Treblinka extermination site had to end their journey at Treblinka station. Here, 20 wagons were disconnected from the train engine and pushed into the extermination camp. The ramp in Treblinka, where people were pushed out of the wagons, could receive a maximum of 20 wagons. When the Soviet army was approaching the location, the Germans during their retreat destroyed the station completely in the summer of 1944. Subsequently the train station was reconstructed and trains stopped again in Treblinka. The terrible scenes that defined the location from July 1942 to August 1943 left no traces – as if the 900,000 Jewish men and women, who waited at the Treblinka train station for their car to be pushed into the extermination camp, had not existed. Probably, in relation with the opening of the new memorial in Treblinka on May 10, 1964, the train station was also included in the official remembrance and commemoration. Two panels made of metal grids were set up on the platform. "Never again Treblinka" and "Never again war" could be read on the bars in Polish. Concrete

flower pots complete the picture. In 1993, transportation of passengers at Treblinka station was stopped. The station was used for cargo traffic until 1998. Then the movement of goods and people was completely stopped. In 2004, the Treblinka train station was closed. Subsequently, the railroad tracks were dismantled and a new road was finally built. It was led over the former railway line. Since 2016, the road 627 has been running right through the former site of the Treblinka train station.

It was very important to us that the place, the memory and the commemoration of the Jews cooped up in the trains, who were exposed to the tormenting thirst, uncertainty, fear and terror of the guards, would not disappear together with the dismantling of the station. In discussions with the Treblinka Museum, we highlighted the need to maintain the former station area accordingly. We also declared our readiness to support the construction of a memorial site. In February 2019, the Treblinka Museum started building a remembrance site on the location of the former Treblinka train station. The Bildungswerk Stanisław Hantz e.V. has so far contributed 40,000 euros to the costs of building the memorial site. We are particularly pleased that there is a quote from the survivor Edi Weinstein on a plaque at the Stacja Treblinka memorial. And we hope that many visitors to the Treblinka Memorial will visit the new location at the former train station and commemorate the Jewish men and women at their last stop between life and death.

Beate Stollberg-Wolschendorf

**TREBLINKA. MEMORIES OF VISITS
AND OF PROJECT WORK WITH GERMAN HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS FROM BIELEFELD**

It was in March 2002 when I visited the Memorial Site of Treblinka for the first time. I was accompanying a group of German high school students on a study tour to the State Museum of Majdanek. On our way back from Lublin (Poland) to Bielefeld (Germany), we had a long stopover in Warsaw. Three students from the group had worked on “Aktion Reinhardt” in our workshops at Majdanek. They had learned about the extermination camps at Belzec, Sobibór and Treblinka and had made an excursion to the Sobibór Memorial. When they became aware of the close location of Treblinka to Warsaw, they kindly asked me, whether I could care to accompany them to Treblinka instead of taking part in the visiting program in Warsaw with the rest of the group. I discussed the request with my colleagues.

We called Dr. Edward Kopówka at his office. He said he would like to welcome us in Treblinka. We found a taxi driver who promised to take us there and to bring us back to Warszawa Centralna train station in time.

I remember that Mr. Kopówka gave us an excellent tour, explaining details about the former extermination camp, the history of the Memorial Site and about the Forced Labour Camp of Treblinka. Furthermore, I remember that we were deeply and profoundly impressed by the atmosphere of the place. Namely the silence at the symbolic graveyard. It leaves room for grief over the victims.

At the same time, following questions arose in my mind. How is it possible that perpetrators are ready to commit such terrible crimes against humanity? The perpetrators were Germans. What does that mean for me as a German? I was born after World War II. The crimes however are part of

German history and shall forever be. How do I deal with it? How can we make sure that something like this will never happen again?

I was a history teacher in Bielefeld at that time, teaching at the high school of the Friedrich-v. Bodelschwingh-Schools. Students of our school, majoring in History in the upper grades customarily depart on a study trip to Lublin in their second year where they take part for about a week in workshops at the Majdanek State Museum. We developed the concept of the project in cooperation between the department of education at Majdanek State Museum and teachers from my school. We started this tradition with the first study trip in March 1996. Of course, there have been many changes to the concept over the years, as the framework conditions changed. The main ideas of the project still exist until today. Much to the regret of students and teachers, it could not take place in March 2020 and 2021 due to the corona pandemic.

The workshops at the State Museum of Majdanek are of course mainly about the German KL Lublin and the Majdanek memorial, but they also deal with questions concerning the occupation policy of Nazi Germany in Poland, the history of Jewish life in Poland and the Shoah. The students determine what the workshops will be about by choosing topics for their individual project work. Before the trip to Lublin, the students study the rise of National Socialism in Germany and aspects of the interior and foreign policy of Nazi-Germany until 1939. They receive an introduction to the history of Poland and get an overview about World War II. Additionally, they also choose and prepare the topics for the workshops at Majdanek.

In the workshops, the students usually work in small groups of 3-4 members. They are supposed to organize their work themselves supported by their teachers and by members of the educational staff at the State Museum. Sometimes they also cooperate with Polish students from a high school in Lublin. Back in Germany, the students had to prepare the results of their studies for a presentation to the public in Bielefeld.

I think it was in 2002 when Dr. Kopówka expressed the wish that a group of our students shall create an exhibition with basic information about the Treblinka extermination camp. This exhibition was supposed to be in German as well as Polish. It had to be an outdoor exhibition because there was no museum building at that time and therefore no interior space for exhibition boards.

I did not believe that Dr. Kopówka's wish would ever come true. However, it did. In 2003, three students in my History class chose this task for their project work. It took them about two years to complete it. Dr. Kopówka then asked them to reformat the boards, so that one could print the information as a brochure in A4 landscape format. The layout for the brochure was ready in summer 2005. The Museum printed the first

edition at the end of 2005. A revised edition from 2015 is still available. It has a reversed language order: Polish-German. It is also available in English/French translation. The Treblinka Memorial Site never presented the original exhibition outside, but rather in the first small Treblinka museum. I think this might have been in 2006, but I am not sure about the year.

When I came to Treblinka in 2002 and 2003, Dr. Kopówka had his office in the attic of a small private house. In 2005/06 (and again in 2009/10), this house was rebuilt and thus became the first museum building in Treblinka. I think this has been an important step in the history of the Treblinka Memorial Site. I am very happy to hear that the next step will even be a bigger additional building for the Museum Treblinka.

It is not easy to get to Treblinka Memorial Site. You have to make sure to have a car, or to take a taxi or utilize a combination of train and taxi or alternatively take the bus as well as a taxi. I remember that in 2002 and 2003 we had problems finding the Memorial Site, even though the bus and taxi drivers said they were familiar with the location of the Site. Treblinka still seemed to be a “hidden place”. I do not know whether it is true that our delays were due to a closed accommodation road, but I do remember that detours were not clearly signposted. In any case, we did not notice any signposts. Nowadays you are able to come upon well-positioned signposts for car and bus drivers. From the new road 627, a junction leads directly to the Treblinka Museum. That makes the drive much easier today.

Meanwhile, I have learned that this road 627 leads through the historic site of the Treblinka train station, a tragic place for the deportees, with close links to their terrible fate in the extermination camp.

I remember that when I first visited Treblinka in 2002, there was no written information available for visitors who wanted to learn more about the forced labour camp (Treblinka I) and the extermination camp (Treblinka II). I do however remember the helpful topographical map of both camps, which was set up at several points on the Memorial site.

At least in the fall of 2003, there were audio cassettes offered to visiting groups. I remember a visit with a group of students from Paderborn University (Germany) in autumn 2003. When we arrived at the parking lot, we received an audio cassette. Then, we got back on the bus and listened to the tape about Treblinka I and II before receiving a guided tour as well as the opportunity to individually approach the Memorial Site. I think the tape lasted at least 30 minutes.

Nowadays, you can download the audio guide “Extermination Camp Treblinka II” on your smartphone in order to listen to it during your visit. According to the current website of the Museum, the audio guide provides information about the history of the camp, stories about survivors and other witnesses. It is a project organized by the Foundation

“Memory of Treblinka” and the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw). The audio guide urges the users to “use headphones in order not to disrupt the silence and disturb other visitors in this special place of memory.” [<https://memoryoftreblinka.org/audio-guide-extermination-camp-treblinka-ii/>].

Let us go back to Dr. Kopówka’s wish to find students who would create an outdoor exhibition for the Treblinka Memorial Site. At the end of March in 2003, my History class, two fellow teachers as well as Paulina and Joachim Langer, a young Polish-German couple, and I started the next study trip to Lublin. Paulina would help us as an interpreter. While we were preparing the study trip, I had mentioned Dr. Kopówka’s wish. To my surprise, three students immediately expressed interest: Eva Budde, Felix Hansen, and Jonathan Sokolowsky. My recommendation entailed them to start studying historical literature that gave them an overview about the *Endlösung* and about the “Aktion Reinhardt”. In the library of the Majdanek State Museum, they also found a book about Treblinka in German. Wiesław Wysok, at that time responsible for the German-speaking section in the education department at Majdanek, told them about Richard Glazar, a Czech survivor of Treblinka, who successfully escaped during the uprising in August 1943. Glazar’s memories (*Die Falle mit dem grünen Zaun – Überleben in Treblinka, The Trap with the Green Fence – Survival in Treblinka*), written shortly after the war, published in Germany only in 1992 (sic!), were not very much known in Germany at that time. The book was an important inspiration for their research work.

On April 4, 2003 the whole History class from Bielefeld made an excursion to Treblinka. Dr. Kopówka gave us a guided tour through the Memorial Sites of Treblinka I and II. He never got tired of answering questions. After the guided tour, the students had the opportunity to withdraw or to walk through the memorial again individually. Dr. Kopówka had a meeting with Eva, Felix, and Jonathan to explain his idea of an exhibition. He wanted basic information about the history and the functioning of the extermination camp and he wanted an exhibition that he could present in Polish schools.

After our visit to Treblinka, we took a lot of time to talk to the students. Many talked to each other, some cried, some had questions to the teachers, many looked for words to express their feelings, a few just wanted to be on their own.

Back in Bielefeld, the students had to review the results of their workshops and prepare their topics for a presentation in a public event. Eva, Felix and Jonathan had already developed ideas about the aspects for which they wanted to develop exhibition boards. They went looking for pictures and other visual material. They selected a graphics software and asked about material and costs for outdoor exhibition boards.

The most difficult task was to write the exhibition paragraphs as briefly and informatively as possible. Half of each exhibition poster was supposed to be in German and the other half in Polish. The work took longer than expected and was of course more complicated than initially intended. Nevertheless, they had the first few exhibition boards printed by autumn 2003. I was able to take these boards to Treblinka in October 2003 during the educational trip with students of the Paderborn University.

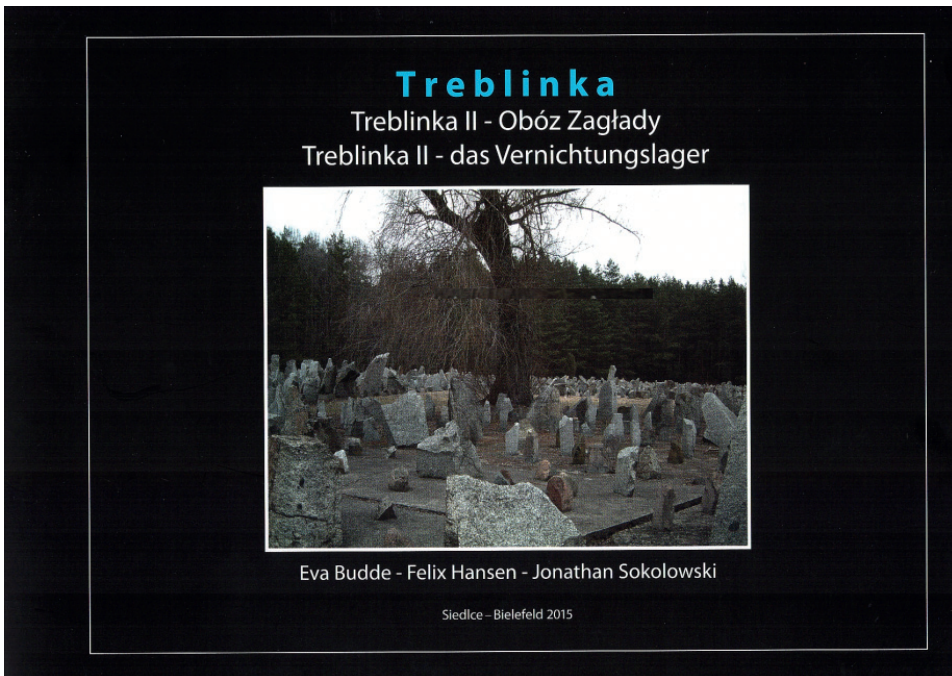
After that, Eva, Felix and Jonathan had to interrupt their work, because they had to prepare for their final high school exams. I was not sure if they would really be able to motivate themselves to continue their work on the exhibition after their exams. They still felt committed. It was still very important to them to finish their plan of an outdoor exhibition, so that especially young visitors had at least an opportunity to find brief information about the historic place of the Treblinka extermination camp and its horrors. I was of course very pleased when it became clear that they would continue. They resumed their work in June 2004 after a break of seven to eight months.

All three of them had decided that they did not want to start their university studies or vocational training straight after leaving school. In August 2004, Eva went to Australia for one year in a “work & travel” program, Felix and Jonathan did a civilian alternative service instead of military service, Felix in the social area, Jonathan in the ecological field.

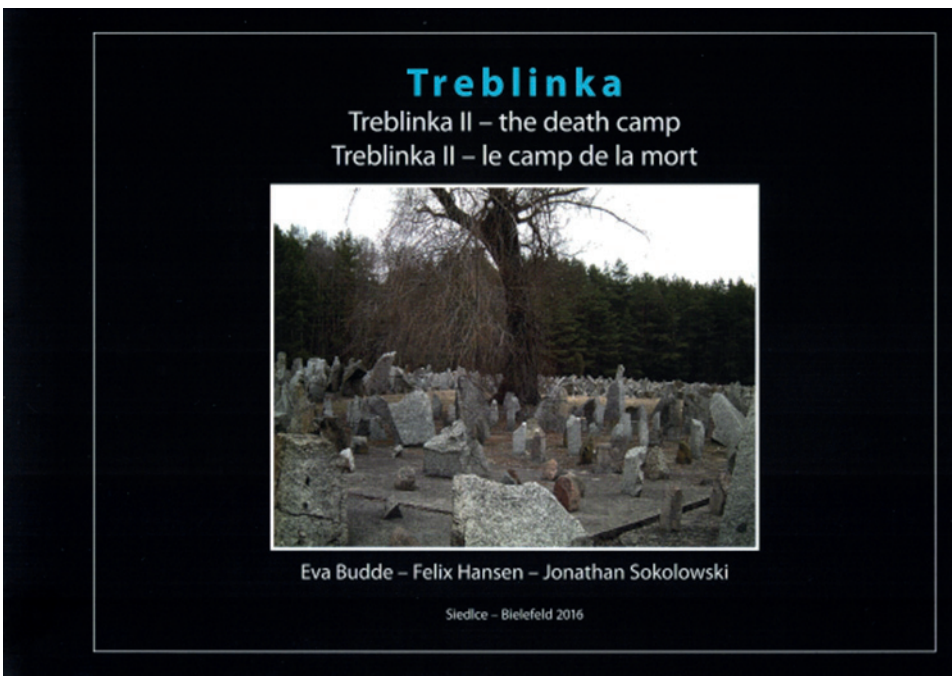
We usually met on Friday afternoons, sometimes on Saturdays as well. Eva made sure that she could complete her tasks before she left for Australia, Jonathan handled the graphics software and the photo material and Felix checked in the specialist literature whether their knowledge of the various sub-topics was correct. They formulated the texts jointly. I accompanied this work supporting it with suggestions and helping to adjust the language, if necessary. Jonathan took care of the printing and financing of the exhibition boards. In March 2005, Felix and Jonathan met with Dr. Kopówka in Warsaw to bring him the exhibition boards.

Dr. Kopówka had another request to the group. He asked if they could downsize the layout for the boards so that one could print the layouts as a brochure. Jonathan, who by now had some experience with the graphics program, promised to try. After a while he finally succeeded in reducing the size of the pages to a DIN A4 landscape format without affecting the layout.

In spring 2005, Jonathan and Felix met Samuel and Ada Willenberg in Bielefeld. The couple was on a tour to several German cities. The “Bildungswerk Stanislaw Hantz” had organized the event tour. As a survivor of Treblinka, Samuel reported on his time in the extermination camp and his escape during the uprising in August 1943. Felix and Jonathan underline



1. The brochure, edition 2015: Polish/German



2. The brochure, edition 2016: English/French



3. Jonathan Sokolowski, Edward Kopówka, Beate Stollberg-Wolschendorf, Lublin, marz 2006 r. (photo by E. Jenz)

in their reflections about the project that to listen to Samuel Willenberg's story and to talk to Samuel and his wife Ada about their lives has been a very impressive, even formative experience for them.

The project work on Treblinka, which I reported on, took place 16 to 18 years ago.¹ When Dr. Kopówka asked me to take part in the conference and to provide information about the project work, I contacted my former students and asked them how they look back on their "Treblinka Project" today. Each of them answered immediately.

Born in 1984, they are in the second half of their thirties by now. Jonathan Gulde (former Sokolowski) lives in Stuttgart. Professionally, he is an attorney in the legal department in the automotive industry. Eva Jenz

1. I have stayed in contact with the Treblinka Memorial since the project. In addition to the multiple visits to Treblinka since the project, the "Schoah Initiative" in Bielefeld is also part of our relationship. In 1999, some Bielefeld citizens founded a local donation initiative for Nazi memorials in Poland that do not receive regular, legally prescribed funding from the Federal Republic of Germany. This initiative was triggered by the reports of high school students from the Friedrich-v.Bodelschwingh-Schulen about their projects at the Majdanek Memorial. The initiative has already supported the Treblinka Memorial Site several times with donations for smaller projects.



4. Treblinka Museum – showroom. The outdoor exhibition shown inside the new museum(photo by E. Jenz)



5. The Treblinka Muzeum 2009 (photo by E. Jenz)

(former Budde) lives in Hannover and works as a biometrician at Hannover Medical School, supporting clinical trials. Eva visited Treblinka again in 2009. She went there together with her mother. She took pictures of the Memorial Site and of the small new Treblinka museum. From this we learned that the exhibition they had created was shown in the museum's showroom. Felix lives in Berlin. He is the founder and owner of a Booking Agency, which represents music acts.

All three of them emphasize that the project work about Treblinka has somehow influenced their lives. It is still in their hearts and minds. They can hardly believe that the brochure still exists. It makes them a little proud of their project. To stick to a project until it is finished, has been an important experience in their lives. They hope that the saying "Treblinka warns and reminds" will be true – everywhere in the world.

Sören Brinkmann, the former high school student, with whom I came to Treblinka for the first time in March 2002, is a radio journalist in Cologne (i.a. "Deutschlandfunk"). He expressed his memories of the visit to Treblinka in the following words:

On cold winter days in March 2002 I visited the former German concentration and extermination camps Majdanek, Sobibór and Treblinka with my History class – and still today I think of those days whenever I read about Nazi crime and when I talk to contemporary witnesses (to Shoah survivors or relatives of Shoah victims) in my professional work as a journalist.

I remember the quietness.

I remember standing at the so-called "Rampe", looking down at the stone blocks on the symbolic railway tracks.

I remember standing in front of the stone memorial for Janusz Korczak and reading so much about his destiny afterwards.

I remember meeting Samuel Willenberg some years later for an interview and listening to his memories of the Treblinka uprising.

I hope many more people would have the opportunity to come to Treblinka – to listen, to see, to feel and to remember.

Jerry Nussbaum
The Korczak Digital Repository

KORCZAK DIGITAL REPOSITORY LAUNCHED

The Korczak Digital Repository was launched in mid-October 2020 – this unique online resource brings together a range of previously scattered collections related to the life and work of Janusz Korczak – both his own personal writings and documents, as well as the writings of others on the subject of his life, activities and creative output. The repository is bilingual – available in both English and Polish.

In the year 2018, thanks to a partnership between the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada, the Korczak Foundation, the Department of History of the University of Warsaw along with the KLIO Foundation, the Digital Competence Center of the University of Warsaw and the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, we were able to establish the Janusz Korczak Repository consortium. At that time, we also began working on the vision of a virtual space dedicated to Janusz Korczak, designed not just to gathering together Korczak's legacy, but also the documents and academic works produced on the subject of his life's work which were scattered all over the world. From the very outset, the Repository was supposed to be a reliable and trustworthy source of verifiable knowledge.

Janusz Korczak is universally renowned as a doctor, activist and author, but above all a tutor and spokesman for children's rights. His innovative educational system and way of raising children in the spirit of mutual respect, partnership and self-governance is to this very day an inspiration for many teachers, pedagogues, civic activists and those involved

in championing children's rights. Korczak's vision of universal children's rights is the foundation for the United Nations Convention on this subject. The convention was universally accepted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and is also known as the global resolution on the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

In spite of all this knowledge about Korczak's influence upon the modern world, materials relating to his legacy are scattered and often difficult to find and access. Works penned by and about Korczak can be found in various online libraries, archives and web pages. These materials do, however, vary in terms of quality – often lacking metadata or including metadata which has not been fully researched. Some of the materials stored in museums, archives, libraries or private collections all over the world have never been digitally scanned and archived – they require professional digitalisation.

This is where the idea of the Korczak Digital Repository comes in – an online space which is universally easy to access and where materials based on reliably verified sources are presented in attractive and modern ways.

The Repository is a long-term undertaking. Thanks to a grant secured from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, as part of the "Public Diplomacy 2020: New Dimension" funding program, the first stage of our project is now being launched.

The Digital Competence Center of the University of Warsaw is responsible for the digital aspect of the project. The solutions used meet the standards of modern academic services. We have utilised the Application Programming Interface (API) and the metadata exchange protocol OAI-PMH (Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting). The technical metadata are created in line with current Dublin Core standards and are based on the descriptive standard MARC21.

The repository was launched on the October 14, 2020 – it contains all the photographs, documents, publications and museum items we have been able to gather thus far. The following institutions have agreed to share their collections: the State Archive in Warsaw, the Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Jagiellonian Library, the National Library, the University Library in Poznan, the Central Military Archive (Army History Bureau), the Stanislaw Konopka Main Medical Library, the Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum, the Itzhak Katzenelson Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum, Documentation and Study Center, the Ethnographic Museum in Torun, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Museum of Children's Books in Warsaw at the Warsaw Public Library – Central Library of the Masovian Voivodship, the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, Korczakianum of the Museum of Warsaw, the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

All this is merely the beginning. The maintenance and development of the Repository, including the expanding of its collections, demands the involvement of various institutions, associations and experts from all around the world. The project can be supported in a range of ways: by sharing knowledge and experience, offering privately owned collections or providing financial resources to cover the cost of maintaining our online resource.

Welcome! You can find us at:

<http://korczakarchive.ca/> and <http://korczak.ckc.uw.edu.pl/>

Fanpage: <https://www.facebook.com/KorczakDigitalRepository>

Public project co-financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland “Public Diplomacy 2020: New Dimension” funding programme.

The grant was received by KLIO – the Academic Foundation of the Friends of the Historical Institute of the University of Warsaw. The responsibility for maintaining and further developing the Korczak Digital Repository rests with KLIO – the Academic Foundation of the Friends of the Historical Institute of the University of Warsaw and the parties belonging to the Janusz Korczak Repository consortium:

- Janusz Korczak Association of Canada;
- The Korczak Foundation;
- The Department of History of the University of Warsaw;
- The Digital Competence Center of the University of Warsaw;
- The Columbia University Department of Education.

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DOMESTIC COLLABORATION AND PROJECTS

Barbara Janina Sochal
Polish Janusz Korczak Association

CHERISHING THE MEMORY – THE KORCZAK FOREST

Janusz Korczak in the last month of his life wrote in his Diary:

I would like to die consciously and awake. I don't know how I would say goodbye to the kids. I would like to say it in a way expressing that they are completely free to choose their path.¹

They were not.

On a hot day, August 5, 1942, the Old Doctor, Stefania Wilczyńska, colleagues and pupils from the Orphans' Home were expelled to the Umschlagplatz. In Andrzej Wajda's film [Korczak] and the accounts of some witnesses, there is a picture of children led by Korczak, who walk in a compact column through the city with the banner of the orphanage. We do not know, whether it was really so. We certainly would like it to be true proudly and with dignity to the end. Cattle wagons were waiting for them at the Umschlagplatz, into each about 100 adults were usually packed. How many children could be there in each car? And finally, the journey itself, how long could it take? On the way, the trains slowed down and let the trains with people and goods through, because they were more useful than Jewish children according to the Germans. What happened to Korczak and his pupils on the spot, in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, we are not able to determine, but the scenario of events was more or less the same each time: in the so-called 'lazaret', all little children were immediately killed.

Hundreds of thousands of children.

1. J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Siedmioróg, 1998, p. 78.

We remember Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit) mainly as the author of books for children: *King Matt the First*, *King Matt and the Desert Island*, *Kajtus the Magician*. Knowledge about him is often limited to the last road he travelled, the road to death. This extremely dramatic picture, moving in its meaning, tends to obscure the huge achievements of the Old Doctor, a rich, multidimensional figure – a researcher of children and childhood, writer, journalist, educator, doctor, social activist, and above all defender of the rights of the youngest. Staying with the children until the end was an inevitable consequence of the choices and decisions made earlier, an internal need to create a friendly and safe place for the pupils. Even when it was so difficult to provide a sense of security for the children.

He demanded not declarative rights for children, but real, causative rights. He implemented his concept of a children's democratic community in two Warsaw homes: together with Stefania Wilczyńska at the Orphans' Home and with Maryna Falska at Our Home. Over the years – by experimenting, analyzing, testing the effectiveness of the educational methods used – he created a participating community for his pupils, in which everyone had their own rights and the possibility of enforcing them (parliament, court, newspaper).

The work of a tutor at summer camps in Michałówka, near the village of Treblinka, near the Małkinia station, inspired Korczak to create a book for children, *Moški, Joški i Srule*. In it, he wrote:

In Michałówka, the bright sun in a purple robe goes out and lights the night. The sun descends lower and lower, dives underground and disappears, piece by piece. 'Already,' some say. – 'Not yet'. Already a star, only a small spark shines. That last evening, at the last sunset, the last camp fairy tale was born – a strange and unfinished tale.

'Or maybe not return to Warsaw? Maybe line up in pairs, pick up the flags, sing a march and hit the road?' – 'Where?' – 'To the Sun'.²

Could Korczak foresee, while writing these words, that in the future, Jewish children doomed to the Holocaust would return to this place, to Treblinka?

How to experience the past time, cherish the memory of people who are important to us, individual stories, often dramatic, and at the same time express concern for the future world, fortunately not yet completely

2. J. Korczak, *Moški, Joški i Srule* [in:] *Korczak. Dzieła*, t. 5, Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Latona, 1997, p. 95.

destroyed? How to present to young people the figure and fate of an extremely modest man who wrote about himself:

I exist not to be loved and admired, but to love and act. It is not the duty of those around me to help me. Rather, it is my duty to look after the world, and people in it.³

And finally, how to talk to young people about the Holocaust, about hundreds of thousands of murdered children – victims of the war caused by adults.

An attempt to answer these questions is included in the KORCZAK FOREST project, prepared since 2020 on the initiative of the Treblinka Museum and the Polish Janusz Korczak Association.

The aim of the project is TO COMMEMORATE JANUSZ KORCZAK, ALL THOSE WHO COOPERATED WITH HIM, AND ABOVE ALL, THE CHILDREN WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE TREBLINKA II EXTERMINATION CAMP.

The employees of the Treblinka Museum – Monika Samuel, Bartosz Kowalski and Aleksandra Kowalska, under the substantive supervision of the director of the institution – Edward Kopówka, took care of the preparation of the initial concept of the FOREST. The FOREST will be created as part of the campaign “We Cherish Korczak’s Ideas”, and the trees planted by young people will become a testimony to the memory of children – victims of the Holocaust – and at the same time, a proof that the humanistic ideas and educational proposals of Janusz Korczak still inspire many educators, guardians and defenders of children’s rights. Planting trees and then caring for them is a form of involving the participants in actively creating their own paths of remembrance of important figures and significant historical events, it is also an incentive to protect the natural environment and care for nature.

The chosen form of commemoration will be cyclical. The Museum Treblinka in cooperation with the Polish Janusz Korczak Association plan to make contact with schools and institutions for which the pedagogical ideas of the “Old Doctor” are close, and invite interested parties to plant trees and participate in annual meetings during which they will be symbolically watered.⁴ Each establishment will have its own plaque with the name and a motto or quote chosen by them, referring to Korczak’s ideas. During their stay in this unique place, young people will have the opportunity to take part in a guided tour and workshops about Janusz Korczak, led by an employee of the Treblinka Museum.

3. J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik*, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

4. By the end of October 2023, 55 trees have been planted in the Korczak Forest.

From among many types of trees, maples were selected for the project "We Cherish Korczak's Ideas" due to their symbolism and the appropriate conditions in which they can grow.

Stanisław Szwarc-Bronikowski in his book *Witnesses of our history* wrote: "Maple was considered a tree that arouses good feelings. Dying people were placed on the boards of this tree to ensure that they would die more easily."⁵

Maple is not a protected or endangered species. It is present in large numbers all over the country under various conditions. It is a magnificent tree with a wide, round or umbrella-shaped treetop and a well-developed, regular trunk. It owes its fame both to the beautiful coloration during the growing season, as well as the colour change in autumn, when it effectively turns gold, orange and red. The requirements of the maple tree are not too high. It does well on most soils in Poland, is rarely attacked by diseases or pests, and is frost-resistant.

Different colours of leaves, kinds, variability depending on a season, age of the tree will symbolize the richness of the children's world, the right of a child to childhood and an individual developmental path.

In line with the humanistic ideas of Janusz Korczak, the possibility of creating the FOREST will be given to various age groups and people with special needs. It will be an excellent opportunity to establish contacts, exchange experiences, and conduct Korczak's dialogue between generations.

The Polish Janusz Korczak Association cooperates with schools, establishments, universities, various institutions, both in Poland and abroad, which are close to the figure of our patron. We think that in the future our foreign friends will be able to symbolically plant trees of memory on a specially created internet platform. The platform with the FOREST would be available to the entire Korczak community currently operating in 26 countries.

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5. S. Szwarc-Bronikowski, *Świadkowie naszych dziejów*, Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2000, p. 143.

Tomasz Nowak
Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities

THE SILENCE OF MEMORY

“Ławeczka” (“The Small Bench”) is an informal group gathering a circle of painters whose productions lead to a living dialogue on the position of painting and its role in contemporary society. The dialogue held by the Ławeczka Group covers issues referring to the history of our region, to the people creating its colour and motifs commenting on the present. The underlying idea unifying the Ławeczka Group is the belief in self-realisation through painting. Study visits and symposia offer conditions for further becoming – refreshing own optics of perception. Awareness is not a constant and continuous phenomenon, each time it takes different forms; often surprising ones even for the artists themselves. While the need to express one’s views, leading to artistic creation, may be a one-off event, consciousness is the result of superimposition, the addition of successive intellectual events. The materials gathered during our symposia allow us to enrich our painterly explorations conducted individually by each of the authors comprising the Group.

It has been 10 years since “The Silence of Memory” project was realised in the Treblinka Museum. The project in its assumptions referred to the memory of the Holocaust of the Jewish nation.

As authors, we faced the challenge of telling or rather manifesting the memory of events that bring disgrace to the history of mankind. The symposium held in 2011 led to posing numerous questions but one issue recurring most often was whether we, as artists, have the right to pronounce on this matter in any form.

The problem which occurred while working on the project consisted in finding a common denominator for an apparently well-known topic. Long



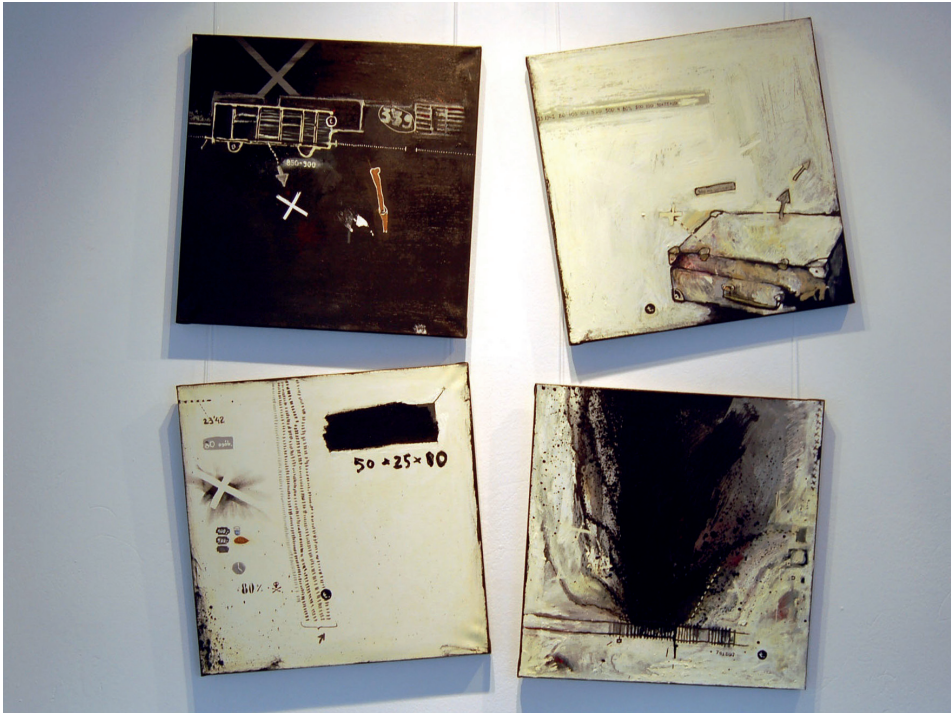
1. Archival photograph of "Ławeczka" Group. Nocturne of the "Ławeczka" Group in Treblinka Museum in 2011

exchanges of opinions in a place with which we had a chance to commune, to which we devoted time of individual considerations and experience, not always easy or obvious – all of this constituted a point of reference for our artistic creations. All these inspirations and events build individual stories which the Artist brings to life on canvas. These creations are original stories locked in iconographically rich compositions.

The publication accompanying the exhibition supplements the overall tone of "The Silence of Memory" project referring to This Place, Those People, and the essence of their significance in the contemporary history of mankind.

Many German artists avoided references to history after 1945.

Ansalem Kiefer, who directly touched on the wartime core of trauma in his paintings, did not shy away from the Nazi past. He tried to find an answer to a question about how to paint a landscape altered by a tank invasion. He then presented it as traumatised, miserable, and scorched. Under the inverted national myths, he hid the tragic experiences of fallen and degenerated Germanness. In a sense, an analogous problem – of creating a painter's narrative of a place bearing the stamp of death – was confronted by four artists from Siedlce who are associated in the "Ławeczka" Group. The concept materialised in an exhibition titled: "The Silence of Memory"



2. Archival photography of “Ławeczka” Group. Paintings by Maciej Tołwiński, Treblinka Museum in 2012

presented at the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka on 18th March 2012. “The memory of the Holocaust of the Jewish nation, ...should be cultivated in various ways. One of them is art...” wrote the manager of the Treblinka Museum. “...We try to bear witness that we remember and to express our protest against what once happened there...” said one of the members on behalf of the “Ławeczka” Group.¹

Maciej Tołwiński in his synthetic representations expressed his personal dissent reflected in a short slogan “God on vacation” placed just above a suitcase shown in one of four his works. In the neighbouring paintings, he pictured a train, a grave, or perhaps a ditch, train tracks, a great explosion. The lack of a title and calculations without their results are symptomatic because, as the artist argued, he cannot understand what happened here and the number of victims was beyond his comprehension.²

1. M. Pałuska, “Bólące miejsca”, *Arche*, 2013, 01(23), p. 66.

2. M. Pałuska, *op.cit.*, p. 66.



3. Archival photograph of "Ławeczka" Group. Painting by Maciej Tołwiński, Treblinka Museum in 2012

The realisation of the "Silence of Memory" project is a thorough introduction to the painting space of the "Ławeczka" Group. The compositions are formed on an internal autopoiesis – which allows for confrontation, and often for a continuation of a motif or a contrasting juxtaposition that stimulates a complex process of memory and contextual references.

The clarity of the message, the layout of individual sections of the exhibition in the Treblinka Museum in 2012 and the content of individual compositions gave the viewer an opportunity to experience a unique record of painters' explorations. It became a testimony to the authors' search for formal solutions that would allow for the discovery of further intellectual values and meanings.

A figure, a landscape, a figure, a landscape. That is the rhythm in which Marcin Sutryk presented his works. Dimmed colours tone in

with the sombre mood of these canvases. This landscape shows Treblinka as we may see it today but it does not include the man presented by the author, who as the author emphasises: “...had friends, family, dreams, and plans for the future”. “The Silence of Memory I” is built with the emptiness of the landscape and with the awareness of the victim’s presence.³



4. Archival photograph of “Ławeczka” Group. Paintings by Marcin Sutryk, Treblinka Museum in 2012



5. Archival photograph of “Ławeczka” Group. Painting by Marcin Sutryk, Treblinka Museum in 2012

3. M. Pałuska, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

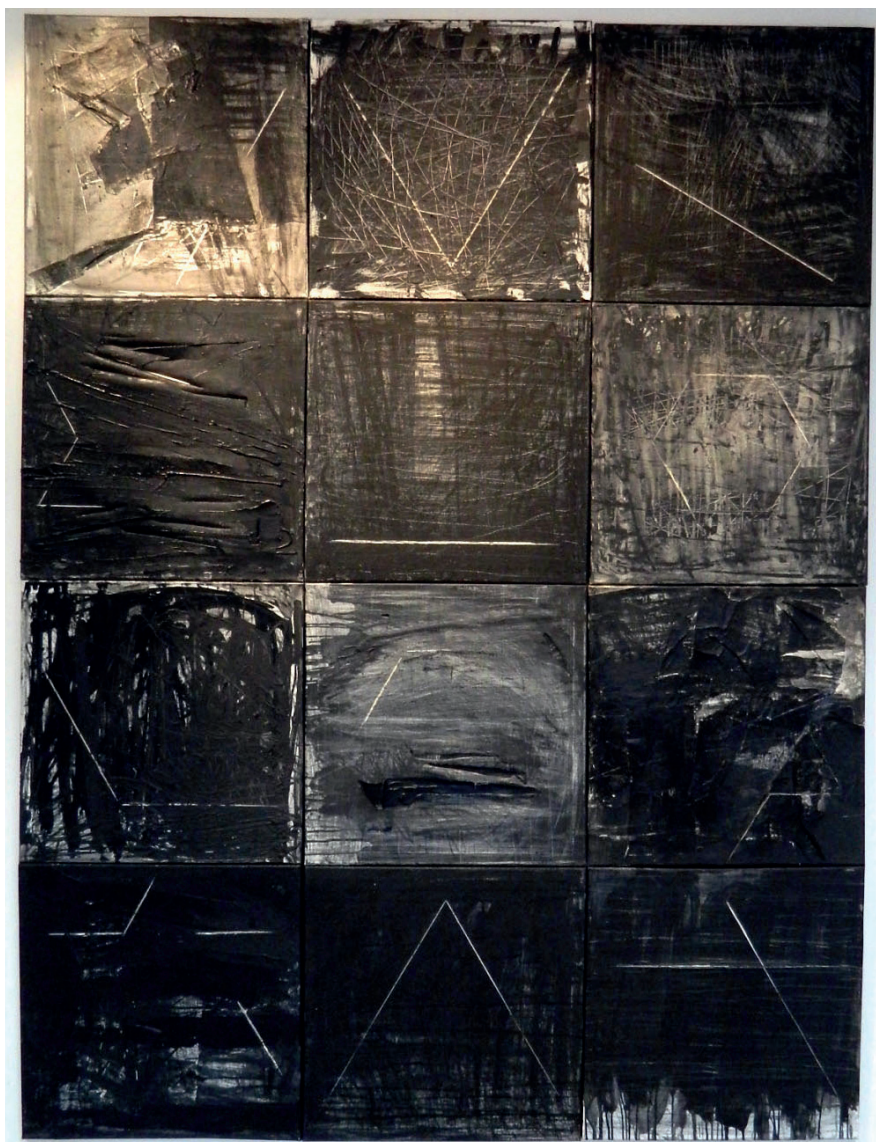
Presented paintings of the Group bear witness to the history and experience of its members. They define the changing harmony between the world of ideas and its nature. The compositions evoke the history of events that provoked us to realise in an emotional way the representation of highly personal content and experiences. Using workshop experience to create a painting matter based on a rich variation of subtleties of colour and value, we have depicted a supernatural atmosphere in the artistic space. Through expression pulsating with refined limitation of the palette, we have built forms highlighting the asceticism of those sensations and the experiencing of the Place.

Aleksandra Rykała has transferred her emotions connected with being in this place onto twelve canvases. They are dramatically scratched, scuffed, torn, and drowned in blackness. The number of paintings symbolises the arms of the shattered Star of David. It has undergone a total deconstruction in which it still retains



6. Archival photography of "Ławeczka" Group. In the foreground, painting by Aleksandra Rykała, Treblinka Museum in 2012

an element of its original structure. The arms symbolising heaven and earth can be found in a reversed order. They are presented as light lines emerging from the omnipresent blackness, flickers in the darkness, or perhaps as a prayer...⁴



7. Archival photograph of "Ławeczka" Group. Painting by Aleksandra Rykała, Treblinka Museum in 2012

4. M. Pałuska, *op.cit.*, p. 66.



8. Archival photography of "Ławeczka" Group. Paintings by Tomasz Nowak, Treblinka Museum in 2012

In the composition of the paintings, each of the authors naturally almost instinctively constructs the form with a sophisticated colour to build the drama of the representation. This is the consequence of creating a relationships between ideas and the reality of life. Reliably built compositions – by overlapping and expressive building of the anatomy, by the visible brushstroke or by rubbing with a sharp tool – give expression to their painterly meditations.

Tomasz Nowak has constructed a kind of a black polyptych. The represented silence brings to mind physical absence, a state zero in the existential dimension. Below, the artist has placed a book



9. Archival photography of "Ławeczka" Group. Paintings by Tomasz Nowak, Treblinka Museum in 2012

whose pages symptomatically may not be opened. Does the closure mean the impossibility to replay the history or does it hide the fear of looking at all its nightmares? Or, perhaps, it refers to the inability to reach individual experiences which form this horrifying whole? It will always remain something not fully discovered as black anonymous matzevot symbolically presented by Nowak in this exhibition.⁵

The Group's paintings are a peculiar kind of code that hides specific information. Based on the readability of the subject, the matter, each of the artists introduces the viewer to a multithreaded journey into a space where the real clashes with the unreal.

Deciphering these works is a state of constant readiness to discover new intellectual values. The authors construct a message. Cognition is an act taking on various forms, often surprising in its nature and not strictly explicable.

"The Silence of Memory" project is an intellectual testimony to the fact that painting as a medium is still alive and it constitutes proof of the strong role iconicity realised through the medium of painting plays in the construction of modern cultural artifacts.*

* Translated by: Katarzyna Mroczyńska

5. M. Pałuska, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

Aleksandra Kowalska
Treblinka Museum
The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

“RUN FOR LIFE” ON THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING

The 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was celebrated in 2003. The ceremony at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes was attended by the then President of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski and his wife, and the President of Israel, Moshe Katsav and his wife.¹

The night before the official commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, a separate ceremony was held on the grounds of what was then the Treblinka Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom (now the Treblinka Museum), the highlight of which was the start of the “Run for Life” from the Treblinka II Death Camp Victims Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes Monument.

The “Run for Life” was a project created on the initiative of Rafał Wochna, then a Polish student at Warsaw University, and Roni Ben-Moha, an Israeli employee of the World Bank in Tel Aviv. The main idea behind the project was to pay tribute to all victims of German crimes during World War II, to reflect on the tragedy that took place over 60 years ago and to show the dialogue between nations and religions, as well as between generations.

The main message of the project is to pay tribute to all those who perished in the Holocaust, as well as to raise awareness of those tragic events by bringing together young people from Poland, Israel and other countries around the world, regardless of their religion,

1. <https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwalne-aktualnosci/rok-2003/art,234,udzial-prezydenta-rp-w-obchodach-60rocznicy-powstania-w-getcie-warszawskim.html> (accessed: 25.02.2021).

culture or background. The project also aims to take a further step in the search for and development of dialogue between religions and different nations, and in particular to symbolise the special relationship between Christians and Jews, the Republic of Poland and the State of Israel. Moreover, through joint effort in planning, organising, implementing and participating in this unique project, as well as making new acquaintances and learning more about each other's cultures, traditions and religions, it could contribute to overcoming stereotypes and prejudices existing between nations² – this is how the organisers themselves described their initiative in the materials promoting the “Run for Life”.

Through my own effort I wanted to pay tribute to the victims of the Holocaust. That is why I chose to run and not, for example, march or ride a bike³ – recalled Rafał Wochna, the originator of the project.

The very idea to personally commemorate and pay tribute to the victims of Nazism came to the author's mind at the turn of 1998, when he started studying at the University of Warsaw and lived in a dormitory on the site of the former ghetto.⁴ For many years the idea had been growing and transforming in Rafał's head until it took a concrete shape and became the “Run for Life”. During these years many concepts and ideas were created, but it was only in 2003 that the whole thing could be realized.

The name of the “Run for Life” took its origin from the very roots of its concept. Rafał Wochna and Roni Ben-Moha through their effort wanted to pay tribute to those who perished at the hands of the German occupant, to show that the history and memory of the people who perished in Treblinka is still alive and also to make another step towards building dialogue between Poles and Jews. Their motto, which guided them during the planning of this project, was the quote “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”⁵ And the “Run for Life” was to be a direct translation of this memory. The name “Run for Life” also has a second,

2. “Run for Life” running project during the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Treblinka Museum Collection.

3. A. Prymaka, *Warszawski student zorganizował Bieg Życia*, *Gazeta.pl* (accessed: 1.03.2021).

4. *Getto Warszawskie. Mapa historyczna na tle współczesnej siatki ulic Warszawy*, Jewish Historical Institute, Warszawa 2017.

5. The author of these words is the American writer and philosopher of Spanish origin George Santayana in: *Myszę, więc jestem. Aforyzmy, maksymy, sentencje*, editing by Cz. Glensk and J. Glensk, Kęty: Antyk, 1993, p. 293.

contrasting meaning. During the war, when Treblinka was an extermination camp, the trains on which Jews from Warsaw and other places arrived were called "death trains", and the name of the "Run for Life" was to be the absolute opposite of that.

Just like the name, the route itself, and in fact the direction of the "Run" had a specific meaning. Covering the route from Treblinka to Warsaw was a reversal of history, a retracing of the route of the "death trains". In planning the route of the Run, the railway tracks were an important element. This was a key point, which symbolically connected the past with the present, therefore, wherever possible, the route of the run ran as close as possible to the tracks. Sometimes the route led through a forest, sometimes on asphalt pavement, but it was not the surface that was important but the proximity to the railway tracks.

The distance from the site of the former Treblinka II Extermination Camp to the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes' Memorial is approx. 95 km. The runners had to prepare themselves properly for such an enormous effort, so that their lives and health would not be endangered.

The first contact between the Polish student and the Israeli employee of the then Export Institute in Tel Aviv took place in 2002, when Wochna was looking for an Israeli partner for his project. Both of them had to prepare hard for the planned run. Roni Ben-Moha ran competitively for 20 years in the USA and Israel. He took part in 12 of the most famous marathons, but being 42 years old at the time, he had to prepare himself anew for such an effort. The author of the idea, Rafał Wochna, was 24 years old in 2003, but as he himself emphasized years later, running was very difficult for him:

[...] I wanted to do something that for me would be difficult. For me, running was difficult. I was at a stage where I was able to run a kilometre and that was the maximum. I just felt terrible running.⁶

The original plan was for the "Run" to take place during the March of the Living⁷ on the route to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. For logistical and technical reasons, this plan was abandoned, but the project itself gained the support of the Chancellery of the then President of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The organisers received a letter

6. Interview by Edward Kopówka with Rafał Wochna, dated 6.10.2009, Treblinka Museum collection.

7. The March of the Living (Heb. *Mits'ad HaKhayim*) is an annual educational programme addressed mainly to Jewish schoolchildren. During two weeks, young people from over 50 countries come to Poland to learn about the Holocaust by visiting places of massacre of the Jewish people, The official website of the International March of the Living: <https://www.motl.org/> (accessed: 17.03.2021).

from the Office of National Security, managed by Marek Siwiec at the time, asking for support from the police, ambulance service and local authorities. All activities related to the Treblinka run were supervised by Minister Andrzej Przewoźnik, Secretary General of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, who was also head of the Organisational Team for the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The success of the “Run” was possible thanks to the involvement of a number of people and institutions who selflessly supported this initiative.

Support for the project was provided by the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw, headed by the Ambassador Shevah Weiss, and by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed by Raphael Schutz, Director of the Central Europe Department.

Support was also provided by the Warsaw University Sports Association (AZS UW). The then vice president of the AZS, Dariusz Piekut, supported the runners’ initiative by assigning them professional coaches – Adrian Mucha, a Polish national long-distance runner, and Roman Stępniewski, an AZS UW coaching legend, who prepared them and worked out the tactics of the race. Support was also provided by the President of the Polish Olympic Committee – Stanisław Paszczyk and the President of the Polish Athletics Association – Irena Szewińska.

Also, Danuta Kędzielawa, the Dean of the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Warsaw, supported this idea, addressing the following words to the organisers of the project “Run for Life”:

[...] We fully support this initiative, which in such a simple and symbolic way expresses the idea of dialogue between people of different nationalities and religions. We are proud that it is a representative of our community who, by implementing his project so persistently and consistently, shows sensitivity to what many seem not to remember.

The history of the headquarters of our Department is closely connected with the dramatic events of 60 years ago. During the occupation of Warsaw, this building was used as the headquarters of the Gestapo, from where the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto was supervised.

Therefore, the idea of keeping the memory of these events alive is particularly close to our hearts.⁸

In addition, the Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Warsaw, in connection with the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto

8. Letter from the Dean of the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Warsaw to the Organizers of the “Run for Life” Project, Treblinka Museum Collection.

Uprising, as part of which the "Run for Life" was planned, announced the cancellation of all classes for that day.

The organisers received help from a medical practice "Prywatna praktyka lekarska w miejscu wezwania – Aleksander Wnuk", which undertook to provide full and free medical care in the form of a fully equipped and crewed resuscitation ambulance for all the participants of the run throughout its duration and during the Warsaw celebrations. Mirosław Osiak's company, PPW Faza, also lent its support by providing, free of charge, a communication system which facilitated the execution of the "Run". Andrzej Koprukowiak made his house in Lipki Stare available free of charge as a base for the runners. Toyota car dealer – Toyota Radość provided its off-road vehicle with driver Andrzej Chojecki and fuel, which was the logistic base on the run route. Roni Ben-Moha's clothes and stay in Poland were sponsored by Yuval Braun, the Israeli distributor of Saucony. Financial support was provided by the Elite Cafe company. A logo was designed especially for the "Run for Life" by Maciej Michalski, a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts and former employee of the Historical Museum of Warsaw. Everyone involved in the "Run for Life" wanted to pay homage to the Holocaust victims in their own way.

Also helping to organise the project were the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society, represented by Joanna Brańska, who supported the activities until the very end, and the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society (Tel Aviv) headed by Miriam Akavia, who put in a lot of effort and commitment to help the organisers realise the project.

In 2003, at Warsaw Zachęta a sculpture of Samuel Willenberg⁹ – one of the last living prisoners of the Treblinka II extermination camp – was unveiled. On the opening day of the exhibition, by a happy coincidence, Rafał Wochna had the opportunity to meet Samuel and present to him and to the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society, with which Willenberg came

9. Samuel Willenberg was born in Częstochowa in 1923. In 1942 he stayed in the ghetto in Opatów, from where he was deported with all the Jews to Treblinka. Pretending to be a bricklayer, he avoided immediate death in the gas chamber. He was a prisoner of the Treblinka II extermination camp for 10 months. On August 2, 1943, he took part in the armed rebellion and managed to escape together with several hundred other prisoners. He also fought in the Warsaw Uprising, and after the capital's capitulation he joined the partisans. He was a soldier of the Polish Army. After the war, in 1950, he emigrated to Israel together with his mother and wife. For 40 years, he worked as a surveyor. After he retired, he took up studies in fine arts and started to sculpt the scenes he had witnessed at Treblinka. Samuel Willenberg wrote down his memories of the Treblinka II extermination camp in his book entitled *Revolt in Treblinka*. He died on February 19, 2016 in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

to Poland at that time, the whole concept of the "Run for Life". Thanks to this meeting and to Joanna Brańska from the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society, who undertook to help with the journey, Samuel Willenberg and his wife Ada found their way to the celebrations in Treblinka on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Another very important person who was very involved in the "Run for Life" project practically from the very beginning was David Efrati. He is a man who as a child escaped from a transport to the Treblinka II extermination camp and returned to Warsaw on foot. After the war he moved to Israel and was associated with Yad Vashem and its chapter of the Righteous Among the Nations.¹⁰ David was also a guide for Israeli groups visiting places such as Treblinka. He was a frequent visitor to Poland and, through his contacts in Israel, he tried to support the initiative of the "Run" organizers. Due to his poor health, David Efrati was unable to come to Poland to participate in the "Run for Life" as an honorary participant, but he was in constant contact with its organisers until the very end and cheered them on. David died in January 2004.

After receiving information from the President's Office about the possibility of adding the "Run for Life" to the main celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the organisers did not have much time left to prepare everything. In less than six weeks they had to plan and organise the entire event. Help came from the then head of the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka (now the Treblinka Museum), Edward Kopówka, and police officers from the District Police Headquarters in Sokołów Podlaski and Ostrów Mazowiecka who helped to design the route of the run and physically secured it, as well as the celebrations on the site of the former Treblinka II Death Camp. Great support was also provided by scouts from: 44th Małkińska Mixed Scout Troop "Ghostbusters", 29th Scout Troop "Pogodni" from Ostrow Mazowiecka and 69th Scout Troop "Australopitekanthropusiki" from Cerańów, who helped with the preparations for the ceremony at the site of the former Death Camp.

The beginning of the ceremony on the grounds of the Treblinka II Death Camp was set for 12 midnight. The procession set off from the symbolic camp gate to the Monument to the Victims of Treblinka II Death Camp, headed by Rafał Wochna, Roni Ben-Moha, the last living witness – former Treblinka II prisoner – Samuel Willenberg and the gathered participants of this event, all together several dozen people. On the way to the

10. Transcript of the soundtrack of the "Misterium Pamięci 'Jedna Ziemia – Dwie Świątynie'" [in:] *Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN, 1990-2010. Artystyczne i animatorskie działania w przestrzeni miasta związane z pamięcią*, t. 2, Lublin 2010, p. 17.



1. Participants of the "Run for Life" with Samuel Willenberg at the Treblinka Extermination Camp Memorial Site (photo by M. Dylewski)

monument, a Jewish song "Eli, Eli"¹¹ was played. There was a minute's silence at the Monument. Then the last witness of the crimes that took place there from July 1942 to November 1943 began his speech. Samuel Willenberg survived 10 months in the extermination camp. After the war, for the rest of his life, Samuel together with his wife Ada bore witness to the German crimes committed during World War II. Since 1983 he had come to Poland many times with groups of Israeli youth to teach about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp.

During the ceremony, Samuel Willenberg spoke about his stay in the camp and his escape during the revolt. During his speech, he also mentioned that the "Run for Life", the possibility of returning from here to Warsaw, is a symbolic reversal of the history of this place. Next, the organizers of the run themselves spoke about their feelings and main intentions, who, with their effort, by traversing the reversal of the route of the last journey

11. The work "Halikha LeKesariya" (Walking in Caesarea) also known as "Eli, Eli" is a poem written in 1942 by Hannah Szenes (1931-1944), a Hungarian poet of Jewish origin. The melody for this song was composed by David Zahavi. The song is considered to be one of the unofficial anthems of Israel and is the most frequently played melody during Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day).

of Warsaw Jews, wanted to pay tribute to all those who perished during World War II. During their speech, the runners stressed that by their endeavor they wanted to deepen historical awareness of those events and to build a dialogue that would transcend divisions based on religion or culture. The Polish-Israeli team stressed that they believe that Poles and Jews are united not only by difficult past but also by common future.

The official part was followed by the laying of flowers and lighting of candles at the monument, and then all those present walked along the symbolic 'Death Road' to the railway platform, where Samuel Willenberg bid farewell to the runners with the words 'See you in Warsaw'.

During the night-time ceremony at the monument to the victims of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp the head of the Treblinka Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom, Edward Kopówka, was present, as was the management of the Regional Museum in Siedlce, to which the Treblinka Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom was subordinate, headed by Ewa Talacha, the then director. Representatives of the local authorities were also present, headed by the mayor of Kosów Lacki,¹² Andrzej Krasnodebski. Also in attendance were representatives of the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society (including Joanna Brańska), Israeli singer Tova Ben Zvi, people securing the ceremony and the entire run with police officers from the District Police Headquarters in Sokołów Podlaski and Ostrów Mazowiecka, firefighters from the Voluntary Fire Brigade in Kosów Lacki, an ambulance crew, people involved in the technical side of the event, as well as local residents.

The solemn atmosphere was enhanced by the presence of numerous scouts from the Ostrów Mazowiecka, Małkinia and Sokołów Podlaski Scout Troops, who stood along the symbolic railway tracks and at the Monument to the Treblinka II Death Camp Victims, holding burning torches which illuminated the unlit camp grounds.¹³

The runners set off from the site of the former German extermination camp Treblinka II at around 1 a.m. Their way was lit by cars which secured the entire route. During the race, the Polish-Israeli team was spontaneously joined at certain points along the route by Yuval Braun, a representative of Saucony in Israel, Caroline Aronis, a journalist from the Israeli newspaper Maariv, and Adrian Mucha, one of the coaches preparing the runners for the "Run for Life".

12. The Treblinka Museum grounds are located in the Kosów Lacki municipality.

13. Information about the course of the ceremony at the Treblinka Museum comes from the archival website of the Małkinia Internet Service available in the collection of the Treblinka Museum.



2. Start of the "Run for Life" (photo by M. Dylewski)

The Warsaw celebrations were scheduled for the next day, 30 April 2003, at 11.30 a.m.

The runners reached the Warsaw border at around 8.30 a.m. Due to the central ceremonies at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and the related passage through Warsaw of numerous government delegations, at the request of the police, the runners stopped their run at the administrative border of the city and resumed it at the junction of Podwale Street and Plac Zamkowy.

At around 11 a.m. Rafał and Roni arrived at the Monument to the Warsaw Uprising on Długa Street, where a relay team of about one hundred people was waiting for them. The relay consisted of students of the Psychology Department at Warsaw University, students of the Secondary General and Economic School Complex no. 1 in Warsaw, members of the Warsaw University Academic Sports Association, scouts from the Warsaw Scouting Organisation and people associated with the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society. After the arrival of the runners, a short ceremony of lighting candles at the Monument took place, attended by all those gathered. In this way, it was planned to symbolically link the Warsaw Uprising with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Then, at 11.20 a.m., a Polish-Israeli team with Polish and Israeli flags and the whole relay set off towards the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. The run proceeded along Świętojerska Street to Mordechaj Anielewicza Street.



3. Participants of the “Run for Life” in front of the Warsaw Uprising Monument (photo by C. Aronis)



4. Participants of the “Run for Life” in front of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes (photo by C. Aronis)

The Warsaw commemorations began with the lighting of candles at the Umschlagplatz by the Presidents of Poland – Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Israel – Moshe Katsav. Then the Presidents walked along the streets of the former Ghetto – Stawki, Lewartowskiego – towards the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. During the march, along with other participants of the ceremony, the Presidents stopped in front of the Anielewicz bunker and at the plaque commemorating the suicide of Szmul Zygielbojm, to pay tribute to the fallen. At noon, the participants in the "Run for Life" relay ran to the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, and the main organisers of the project, running with Polish and Israeli flags, placed them at the monument. This is how the roll call and the laying of wreaths at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began.¹⁴

The "Run for Life" was undoubtedly a unique and one of the first social initiatives in this form. This event shows that sometimes all it takes is good intentions and a lot of strong will to do something good, bringing together generations, people of different nationalities and religions. To pay tribute to the innocent people who died during World War II in a way that was not obvious at the time.

In 2013, the first edition of "Tropem wilczym. Run in memory of the cursed soldiers"¹⁵ took place. It was one of the first events of this type on such a large scale. Currently, a number of such actions are organized. The run, as a form of promoting historical events or social actions, fits in quite well with the current trend of promoting a healthy lifestyle. However, 18 years ago it was not such an obvious event, therefore the author has decided to recall in this article the event that took place on the night from 29 to April 30, 2003.

In 2021, it is hard to imagine not finding information about something, or at least a mention on the Internet. The Internet has become the main source of knowledge about any event or publication. In 2003, the Internet was not as widespread in Poland as it is today. There was no Facebook or Instagram back then, and most websites were just taking their first steps. Information was mainly drawn from newspapers and television, and to

14. *Scenario of a ceremony to mark the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising with the participation of the President of Israel and the President of the Republic of Poland on 30.04.2003 in Warsaw. Draft. As of 15.04.2003.* Treblinka Museum collection.

15. The first edition of the "Tropem wilczym. Bieg pamięci żołnierzy wykłętych" took place in 2013 on the initiative of enthusiasts and social activists. More about this initiative: <https://tropemwilczym.org/#o-projekcie> (accessed: 17.03.20121).

a much lesser extent from the Internet. Nowadays, if you type '2003' into an Internet search engine, you will probably find mostly some entries concerning the referendum on Poland's accession to the European Union and other important events. After so many years it is hard to expect to find information about social initiatives, and the "Run for Life" was just such an initiative.

It has been 18 years since the "Run for Life". And although the project enjoyed strong support from governmental and non-governmental organisations, information about it is not readily available. Searching through the archives of websites, newspapers and television, it is difficult to find any account of the event taking place on the night of April 29-30, 2003. At this point, I would like to thank Rafał Wochna, one of the main organisers of the "Run for Life", who, despite the passage of so many years since these events, was willing to give me his time and share his knowledge about the "Run" itself and the people without whose help it could not have been organised.

If the "Run for Life" took place today, in 2021, the internet would probably be full of pictures of people wanting to join the relay at some stage. There would probably be plenty of photos with location and mood tags, and the whole event would be widely commented online. Maybe there would even be special hashtags, such as #biegżycia #runningforlife... However, in 2003, it was only two people, full of stubbornness and determination, who decided to reverse the route, the end of which for hundreds of innocent lives was the gas chambers of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp.

Ilona Sadowska
Treblinka Museum
The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

TREBLINKA ON THE INTERNET

INTRODUCTION

“Treblinka on the Internet” is a very broad concept, covering many issues, from ordinary amateur recordings to professional articles and publications signed by specialists in various fields and prestigious institutions. Taking into account the vast amount of information posted on the Internet, the author of the paper intends to consider the above topic primarily in terms of the activities of the Treblinka Museum on the Internet, paying particular attention to the pandemic situation¹ that has prevailed for over a year and its impact on cultural institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the imposition of restrictions limiting direct contact with others. The restrictions affected people in many areas of life, as well as cultural institutions for which contact with the audience is the basis for functioning, such as cinemas, operas, theatres and museums. According to a report by UNESCO and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the number of museums increased by around 60%

1. COVID-19 pandemic – SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus infectious disease pandemic. The first case appeared on November 17, 2019 in Wuhan, China. On March 11, 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic was recognized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). The first case of infection with this coronavirus in Poland took place on March 4, 2020 in Zielona Góra. Since March 20, 2020, in accordance with the regulation of the Minister of Health, the state of epidemic was declared in Poland.

in the years 2012-2020.² Adapting to the new reality required solving problems related to, inter alia, restricting the number of visitors, developing new regulations for visitors, organizing workplaces according to the principles of the sanitary regime, organizing safe access to the museum space for visitors and adjusting the educational program to new conditions.³ In order to continue their statutory activities, museums moved into the virtual sphere and the Internet has become an important means of contact with the audience. Educational institutions help teachers in conducting online lessons,⁴ organize workshops for young people, lectures,⁵ cultural events or virtual walks.

On July 1, 2018, the Treblinka Museum became an independent cultural unit named "Treblinka Museum. The Nazi German Extermination and

2. United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 7, *UNESCO Report Museums Around the world In The Face of Covid-19*; 05.2020: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&id=p::usmarcdef_0000373530&file=/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_94a8eedf-4246-4000-aba4-32f33f12ac61%3F_%3D373530eng.pdf&locale=en&multi=true&ark=/ark:/48223/pfo000373530/PDF/373530eng.pdf#%5B%7B%22num%22%3A1%2C%22gen%22%3Ao%7D%2C%7B%22name%22%3A%22XYZ%22%7D%2Co%2C842%2Cnull%5D, p. 18 (accessed: 18.03.2021).

3. M. Pasternak-Zabielska, "Raport z badania Instytucje kultury w okresie Covid-19 Muzealne strategie docierania do widzów", 31.03.2021, https://nimoz.pl/files/articles/252/Raport_z_badiania_Instytucje_kultury_w_okresie_covid.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1BpmPY4tcGgX4RSIQs3i8R_8vJYmk64w7RnrCmVIndjMA1kYPHMPQCWMM, p. 8 (accessed: 31.03.2021).

4. Online lessons are organized by, among others, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. *Ruch oporu w KL Auschwitz, Muzeum Auschwitz*: http://lekcja. Auschwitz.org/pl_16_ruch_oporu/ (accessed: 23.03.2021).

5. *Rola Majdanka w realizacji Aktion Reinhardt*, Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 17.03.2021: [https://www.facebook.com/events/190253352529770/?acontext=%7B%22ref_newsfeed_story_type%22%3A%22regular%22%2C%22source%22%3A%22%22%2C%22feed_story_type%22%3A%22%22%2C%22action_history%22%3A%22\[%7B%5C%22surface%5C%22%3A%5C%22newsfeed%5C%22%2C%5C%22mechanism%5C%22%3A%5C%22feed_story%5C%22%2C%5C%22extra_data%5C%22%3A\[%7D\]%22%7D&privacy_mutation_token=eyJJoeXBlljowLCJjcmVhdGlvbGl9oaW1lIjoxNjE2NTE5ODU1LCJjYWxs c2loZV9pZCI6MzU5MDM2MDAxOTY4NDMyfQ%3D%3D&__xts__\[0\]=68. ARAFPx42tWMP2Sr42gN3fjAv8Ucxq-KnqUvRLvvtK2xrUrgj9tFxd1NqIW5HU zs2oSLAS4lagXDOUejTffBQ6Q2fIFA_g7oPoiU1L4xftsL7qp7O-Z3RIA_ahdSJ1FjkJt2bh-9ioPFnCkcwYJ9InHPJPGoJxNaDHCOR84ueBhYDgq4SoKADar oa_4c2aiMWKjW3j7cuD2hKEASpEDMPvPtUMRxm5Bcjk3rMWHcWV4jujKGw EggqgyVhjjTH5aq-4msPe_bQONIIHvVuoT_uKwKVQPX72HmOoZUYEaY9ma CartAoiwCsw](https://www.facebook.com/events/190253352529770/?acontext=%7B%22ref_newsfeed_story_type%22%3A%22regular%22%2C%22source%22%3A%22%22%2C%22feed_story_type%22%3A%22%22%2C%22action_history%22%3A%22[%7B%5C%22surface%5C%22%3A%5C%22newsfeed%5C%22%2C%5C%22mechanism%5C%22%3A%5C%22feed_story%5C%22%2C%5C%22extra_data%5C%22%3A[%7D]%22%7D&privacy_mutation_token=eyJJoeXBlljowLCJjcmVhdGlvbGl9oaW1lIjoxNjE2NTE5ODU1LCJjYWxs c2loZV9pZCI6MzU5MDM2MDAxOTY4NDMyfQ%3D%3D&__xts__[0]=68. ARAFPx42tWMP2Sr42gN3fjAv8Ucxq-KnqUvRLvvtK2xrUrgj9tFxd1NqIW5HU zs2oSLAS4lagXDOUejTffBQ6Q2fIFA_g7oPoiU1L4xftsL7qp7O-Z3RIA_ahdSJ1FjkJt2bh-9ioPFnCkcwYJ9InHPJPGoJxNaDHCOR84ueBhYDgq4SoKADar oa_4c2aiMWKjW3j7cuD2hKEASpEDMPvPtUMRxm5Bcjk3rMWHcWV4jujKGw EggqgyVhjjTH5aq-4msPe_bQONIIHvVuoT_uKwKVQPX72HmOoZUYEaY9ma CartAoiwCsw) (accessed: 23.03.2021).

Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)". Since that date, the museum has undertaken its own substantive activities, including organizing temporary exhibitions and the Treblinka Memorial knowledge competition. Before the coronavirus pandemic, the activities of the Treblinka Museum focused on maintaining direct contact with visitors. Museum lessons were held, workshops for young people from Poland and abroad were organized. The guides guided individuals and groups around the camps', broadening their knowledge with historical information. Using the example of Treblinka, they explained what antisemitism and hatred towards people of other nations can lead to. The guides sensitized young people to suffering of others by telling the history of the camps. They showed how many evil things people can do to their neighbours in the name of the ideology they believe in. Today, the task of the young generation is to uphold the most important values – life and human dignity, so that what happened in Treblinka will never repeat. The pandemic has changed our reality; the working methods known to us have been transferred into the sphere which until now was only a supplement to the functioning of our institution.

In March 2020, the Treblinka Museum joined the Facebook social platform, where it can continue its activities, but in a completely different way of communicating with people. The fan-page includes, inter alia, virtual exhibitions, announcements. On Facebook, there is a possibility of visiting the permanent exhibition, post-camp grounds and the Treblinka station in the street view mode, in contrast to the official website of the Museum where statements and historical studies are usually posted. The Facebook page and the Museum's website complement each other, creating a coherent whole. Another method of indirect communication with visitors is the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp audio guide,⁶ which was created at the turn of 2020. Together with the existing audio guide for the Treblinka II Extermination Camp,⁷ they present the history of this place.

Today, the Internet is basically one of the main sources of obtaining information. It is characterized by the availability and variety of posted content. We currently live a fast-paced life and never have enough time, so to find information about the topic of interest, instead of looking at a book,

6. The Treblinka I Labour Camp Audio guide is a free application, available in three language versions: Polish, English and German. You can install it on your smartphone by downloading it from Google Play or Appstore. You must turn on the Bluetooth function and location on your device.

7. Information about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp audio guide is available on the Memory of Treblinka Foundation website: <https://pamiectreblinka.pl/audioprzewodnik-oboz-zaglad-y-treblinka-ii/> (accessed: 3.03.2021).

we reach for a smartphone. This is a convenient solution, but it also poses a risk that the information we find can be false. It is also worth taking a closer look at this problem because everyone has the right to post content on the Internet. There are no perfect filters to separate truth from falsehood. This is a task for Internet users who must assess the credibility of the information they obtain.

CHAPTER I

THE WEBSITE OF THE TREBLINKA MUSEUM

The website of the Treblinka Museum was first published on April 12, 2011; the institution was then a branch of the Regional Museum in Siedlce and was named the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka. From 2011 to the end of 2018, the design of the website basically did not change. It featured mainly scientific studies and reports on the current activities of the museum. One of the first initiatives taken by the Treblinka Museum as an independent cultural institution was the visual update of the website and its address.⁸

For many years, the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka faced the problem of the website address. In 2012, all museums protected by law – regarding the evidence of the most terrible crimes committed by Nazi Germany (Act of May 7, 1999 on Protection of the Territory of Former Nazi Extermination Camps) – transferred their websites to .eu or .org domains instead of a .pl domain in order to minimize the risk of mistakenly associating former German camps with Poland. This opened the door to people who wanted to benefit financially from this change. All the simplest and easiest to remember domains were quickly bought by people not related to these institutions, who later offered them for sale for huge amounts of money. Unfortunately, due to such activities, the MWiMT's (Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka) website operated for many years at: www.treblinka-muzeum.eu, which made it difficult to be found on the Internet. In 2018, the visually updated website of the Treblinka Museum was transferred to a simpler domain: www.muzeumtreblinka.eu.

The Treblinka Museum website is made available in accordance with the Act of April 4, 2019 on the digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities and is compliant with this law in 83.64%.

8. Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej, *Uchwała Sejmiku Województwa Mazowieckiego*, 07.02.2019: <https://www.e-bip.org.pl/upload/838.161181.pdf> (accessed: 5.03.2021).

This is due to the fact that the website was created before the entry into force of the above Act.

The graphic design of the Treblinka Museum's website is dominated by subdued colours. Black and grey reflect the seriousness of this institution. From 2020, the website is also available in English. Services for the visually impaired were also added, such as enlarging the font or setting a high contrast. It is also possible to use shortcuts available in traditional Web browsers.

On the website of the Treblinka Museum, apart from information about the institution's activities, there is also substantive content. It was prepared in a way that makes it easy for a visitor to acquire thorough knowledge about the history of the camp. The information was compiled on the basis of various available publications and archival sources. The content is arranged chronologically and accompanied with photos and maps.

The museum building hosts a permanent exhibition. Difficult pandemic times limited the possibility of visiting it live. Following the sanitary regime, the number of people allowed to be present at the exhibition simultaneously was reduced, which restricted the access to the exposition. The Treblinka Museum, against the odds and in addition to the information and photos of the permanent exhibition already existing on the website, introduced the possibility of virtual tours. They were made available with the use of the street view mode. High-resolution photos make it possible to see the information on the history of both camps on exhibition. Also, the exhibits discovered during the archaeological works and, among other things, the model of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, can be viewed in detail. Thanks to the arrows, we can move freely in any direction. From the Museum building, the application smoothly guides the visitor to the former camp grounds. In addition to the sites of the former German camps, the virtual tour also includes the commemoration of the train station in Treblinka.⁹ The service has been available since December 2020. The virtual tour is an opportunity to fill the gap caused by movement restrictions. Although the open-air areas of the Treblinka Museum have been available to visitors continuously since May 2021, not everyone has had the opportunity to visit the Treblinka Memorial Site.

The Internet has also become a sort of "lifeline" for temporary exhibitions. Expositions are one of the ways of disseminating historical knowledge. Creating exhibitions only makes sense if they have a chance to reach

9. Information on the commemoration of the Treblinka railway station is available in the exhibition catalog: "Treblinka Station. Between Life and Death", at: <https://muzeumtreblinka.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Katalog-Stacja-Treblinka.pdf> (accessed: 30.03.2021).

the audience. Under normal circumstances, this is not a problem. In times of the pandemic, this process had to be moved into the virtual sphere.

The first online exhibition created by the employees of the Treblinka Museum is the exhibition entitled "Janusz Korczak – the king of children. From Michałówka to Treblinka". It was the first attempt to transfer the board exhibition to a form available virtually. The exhibition shows Janusz Korczak as a good father of the orphans whom he looked after in the orphanages he created. Their carefree summer life was spent in the pre-war areas located in towns adjacent to where the Treblinka II Extermination Camp was established during World War II, and where Henryk Goldszmit and his pupils lost their lives. The exhibition is an attempt to show the public how unpredictable and perverse human fate can be. The Michałówka summer camp for Jewish children was only a dozen or so kilometers from the place of execution of almost a million people. The exhibition was presented at the beginning of April 2020 on the Museum's website and Facebook.

After the museums were opened, the exhibition was displayed since July 29, 2020 at the Treblinka Museum. Due to the publication of the exhibition on the Internet, a wide audience of people learned about its existence. As a result, it was presented as a loan exhibition at a special School and Education Center in Zuzela during the Korczak Week in March 2021.¹⁰

Another online exhibition entitled "Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp – to see the invisible" has been available on the website and Facebook profile since May 2020. The exhibition was created on the basis of contemporary photos of the post-camp area and accounts of witnesses, former prisoners of the Penal Labour Camp, who share with the audience the traumatic events that took place during their stay in the camp.

Presentation of the temporary exhibition entitled "Treblinka station. Between life and death" on the Museum's main page and Facebook, was preceded by a series of promotional materials encouraging people to see the exhibition, available since December 14, 2020. The main protagonist of the exhibition is the railwayman Franciszek Ząbecki, who during the war witnessed the tragedy that took place in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp located nearby. The story of his life is a lesson for all of us on how to remain human in a world where this term is an abstraction. The attitude and indefatigability of Franciszek Ząbecki show that one person can also contribute to changing of the world at least to a small extent, and in this particular case, bear witness to the truth and make sure that what should

10. Special School and Educational Center in Zuzela, Facebook, 22.03.2021: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=300030791550222&id=103339434552693 (accessed: 30.03.2021).

be remembered is not forgotten. The exhibition, planned as a board exposition, has been transformed into a short film so that it could be viewed on the Internet. In the background, we will hear moving music, the purpose of which is to introduce the viewer to the drama of the presented events.

The pandemic also contributed to the increase in the number of PDF publications on the website. Such activity is now often undertaken by libraries and archives. The closure of schools and universities deprived pupils and students of direct access to the reading rooms, and the functioning of libraries was limited. A barrier has been created in accessing the necessary publications which constitute the basis for learning in schools or universities. The Treblinka Museum publishes on its websites the history of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Labour Camp. These activities were carried out even before the outbreak of the pandemic, and their aim was to spread knowledge about the history of this place. Last year, a knowledge competition about the Treblinka Memorial was also organized. It was attended by students from nearby high schools. To facilitate learning, the Museum increased access to the necessary information that could be used by competition participants. In 2020, the latest publication *The plan of symbolic crosses at the Execution Site in Treblinka* was released, which immediately appeared on the website, and from this year, due to the further limitation of museum activities, it is possible to purchase it by mail order.

The “Biographies” tab is one of the fastest developing tabs on the Museum website. New biographies of people whose fate was related to Treblinka in various ways are systematically added to the tab. All this to make it easier for interested people to access new data without leaving home. We can find here the biographies of the victims of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, whose death was an irretrievable loss for the world. Outstanding musicians such as Artur Gold, sculptors – Abraham Ostrzega, painters – Trachter Symcha died here. An outstanding doctor and educator, Janusz Korczak, lost his life in Treblinka II. The list of names is long and shows how deadly the Extermination Camp Treblinka II was – the last extermination camp built as part of Operation Reinhardt. A handful of people saved their lives by taking part in the armed uprising on August 2, 1943, which they managed to organize with difficulty and commitment. Among them was Samuel Willenberg,¹¹ who until the end of his days gave testimony to the truth and spread knowledge about the place of execution

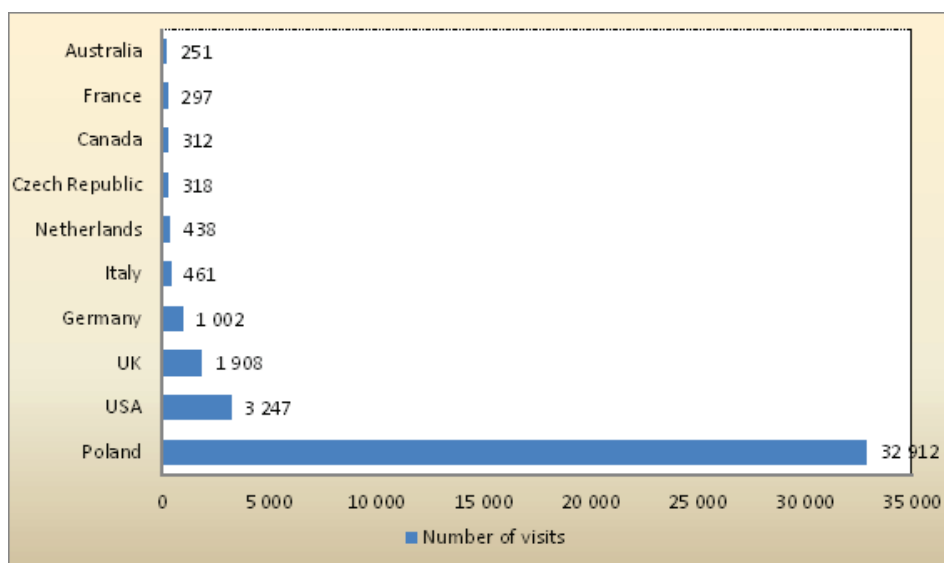
11. Samuel Willenberg was born on February 16, 1923 in Częstochowa. He was sent to Treblinka II in October 1942 along with the transport from the Opatów ghetto. He managed to escape from the camp during the uprising on August 2, 1943. He died on February 19, 2016 in Tel Aviv-Yafo.

of almost a million people. At present, knowledge about the camp comes mainly from the accounts of witnesses of history who survived and decided to talk about their time in this hell on earth. It also contains information about Poles from the vicinity of Treblinka who saved Jews during World War II and met their death for doing so, and about those who were awarded the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. There are also biographies of the victims and testimonies of former prisoners of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp.

People who perceive the Holocaust in an abstract way through painting, poems or sculpture can find content that will be the best form of communication for them on the Treblinka Museum website, in the Holocaust in Art tab. The tab includes, among others, the exhibition entitled "Traces" by Urszula Grabowska, exhibition entitled "Janusz Korczak in the paintings of Wolfgang Hergeth", and the works of Julie Meetal. Poems are also an expression of art. Those about Treblinka have a particular dimension. They take the form of stories, pleas, warnings, sometimes even prayers. They evoke strong emotions and make one reflect on this special place. On the website, visitors can see the works of: Władysław Szlengel, Halina Birenbaum, Piotr Jan Naszółkowski and Roman Brandstaetter.

STATISTICS OF THE TREBLINKA MUSEUM MAIN PAGE

Summary of the number of visits to the website
of the Treblinka Museum in individual countries



The data covers the period of one year: March 23, 2020 – March 23, 2021

The number of visits to the main page of the Treblinka Museum in the last three years amounted to 236,230 of which in the last year the page was visited 107,131 times (data of March 25, 2021).

CHAPTER II

THE TREBLINKA MUSEUM WEBSITE ON THE FACEBOOK SOCIAL PLATFORM

Social networks are used to build relationships between people primarily in the virtual world, but they go vastly outside this scope. They bring together people who share interests, social initiatives, professional or private connections. The basis of their activity is the flow of information. A person becomes an integral part of this system by creating a profile, thanks to which he or she can belong to a selected group. There are two types of profiles – a private profile for members e.g. within a workplace, and a public profile. All Internet users have access to it. The Treblinka Museum has been using such a profile on the Facebook platform since March 17, 2020.

Social platform websites differ in several respects from typical websites. Facebook users have more options when it comes to consuming content, after liking a given page, they are kept informed about new posts. In addition, they can leave comments on a given issue, often initiating a discussion with other users. It happens almost in real time. Observation shows that social networking sites enjoy greater audience interest. They also have a wider reach, thanks to the possibility of sharing and adding reactions, by means of, inter alia, thumbs up icons “I like it”, posts reach a larger group of recipients than typical websites, which can also be noticed in the case of the Treblinka Museum website. The post about Jan Maletka can serve as an example. The museum asked those who may have information about this man to contact the Treblinka Museum. The response was huge, the post has had the largest audience so far – 62,517 (organic views as of March 5, 2021), it was shared 415 times (data of March 5, 2021). Thanks to the publication of the post, a person who had information about Jan Maletka contacted the Museum. This proves that people are interested in the activity of museums and, if necessary, help them in a way that is accessible to them.

The structure of the Facebook page, the so-called “timeline” is like a wall on which content is regularly added. The main task that the Treblinka Museum carries out through its social profile is to disseminate knowledge about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Labour Camp, preserving the memory of people who lost their lives and those who survived. It is a difficult task mainly because the Museum joined this

platform very late. Before the page on Facebook was created, users wanting to add their location to a post, used either automatically generated pages or pages run by private persons. On such websites, the materials posted are not always historically true. This is a problem, but the activities of the Museum on Facebook are aimed precisely at presenting history based on reliable sources and documents. This is done through posts. These short texts are written in such a way so as to convey important content on the selected issue in a way that is easy to understand. They are addressed to recipients of all ages, to those who are passionate about history, but also to people who have little in common with history. The topics of the posts are diverse, some of them refer to daily dates or specific events related to the history of the camps functioning. Apart from historical posts, other materials related to the functioning of the museum are also posted on Facebook.

Facebook is a useful tool for communicating information that reaches a wide audience. When one shares content, the website uses special algorithms. Posts appear not only to people who “liked” the page of the Treblinka Museum, but also to those matched by the portal algorithms. No user has control over who sees the information that they share publicly. Here lies a difference between using Facebook and the Museum’s homepage, where visitors must enter the website address themselves to find the news of interest. This has its pros and cons. A positive aspect is the fact that posts appear to various users, which increases the awareness of the existence of the Treblinka Museum, but the lack of control over who the posts are shared with is problematic. Visiting the grounds of the Treblinka Museum is recommended for young people over 14 years of age, however, there is no age limit on Facebook, therefore, when publishing materials, one must bear in mind that the content posted may reach the youngest recipients. It is a difficult task due to the nature of the Treblinka Museum and the history of this place.

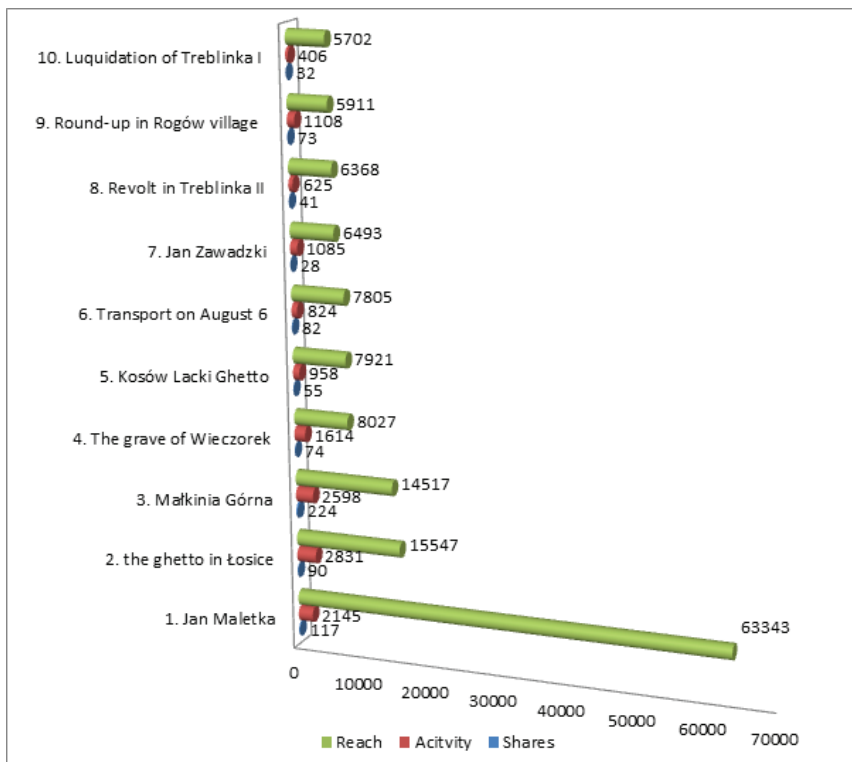
Instagram is quite a specific social platform, based mostly on photos. It is a place where users can express themselves and their emotions through photographs. After typing the word Treblinka on Instagram, the search engine finds a large number of results, among others, the “Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom Treblinka”, under which one can find countless photos taken at the Treblinka Memorial Site by visitors. When taking photos, it is important to remember that it is a special place. It is a place of execution and a cemetery where almost a million people are buried.

People had looked for Treblinka on social media long before the Treblinka Museum joined Facebook. The decision of the museum management to create a profile filled a certain gap in communication with the audience. People not only want to obtain information on the Internet, but also to mark their activity, and it is social media that offer a convenient

and less official form of contact between institutions and Internet users. Other martyrdom museums, including Sobibor and Majdanek, have joined Facebook. The “Memory of Treblinka” Foundation, which also commemorates the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, has also created a page on this portal.

FACEBOOK PAGE STATISTICS

From among the posts shared by the Treblinka Museum on the Facebook page, 10 were selected taking into account their reach, i.e., the total number of recipients they reached. A user did not have to click on the post, it was just visible on their screen. The activity shown is the total number of clicks on the post (number of views, number of clicks on the link, like reactions, post shares). Posts that have reached the largest audience are listed in the order from 1 to 10. Number 1 is the post with the greatest reach so far.¹²



12. Organic data of March 20, 2021.

Post statistics

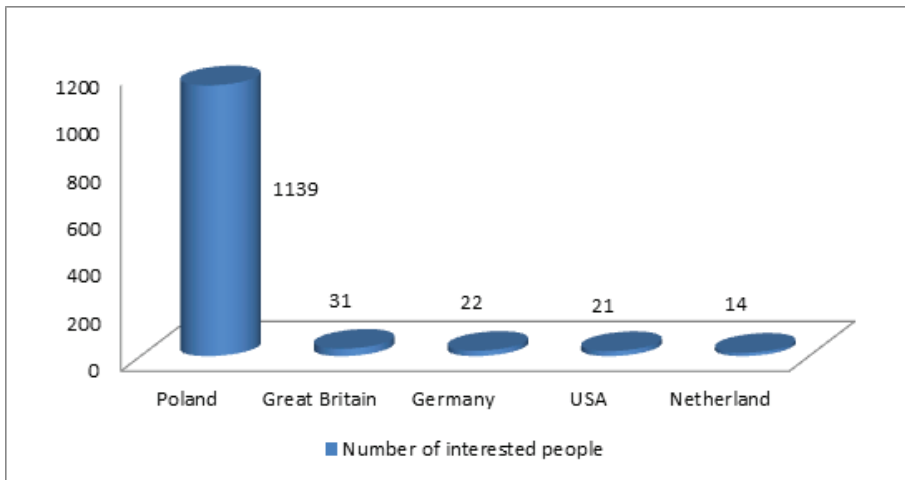
Information on the posts included in the chart:

1. Jan Maletka. Post in which the Treblinka Museum asked for help in searching for information about Jan Maletka.
2. The ghetto in Łosice. Post regarding the liquidation of the Łódź ghetto on August 22, 1942.
3. Małkinia Górna. Historical information on the town located near the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp.
4. The grave of Wieczorek. Post concerning the resting place of a prisoner released from the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, who died of exhaustion and was buried in a forest near the village of Poniatowo.
5. Kosów Lacki ghetto. Information on the liquidation of the ghetto in this town on September 23, 1942.
6. Transport on August 6. The post concerns the arrival of Janusz Korczak, along with the pupils and the entire staff of the Orphans' Home, to the German Nazi Extermination Camp Treblinka II in 1942.
7. Jan Zawadzki. Information about the death of Jan Zawadzki, one of the last surviving prisoners of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp.
8. Revolt in Treblinka II. Post describing the uprising of prisoners at the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, which took place on August 2, 1943.
9. Round-up in Rogów village. On June 9, 1943, the Germans organized a manhunt in the village of Rogów, during which they arrested eighty-eight people and then detained them in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp.
10. Liquidation of Treblinka I. The post describes the last days of the existence of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp.

Historical posts arouse the greatest interest. Half of the posts in this list are local, which is indicative of local residents' engagement and their interest in the surrounding area. This is also confirmed by the statistics of page likes. Taking into account the localities in Poland, the largest number of visitors to the website is located in Małkinia Górna (169), Warsaw (133), Sokołów Podlaski (94), Kosów Lacki (76) and Siedlce (41). Data of 23/03/2021.

Collective statistical data is based on information about people who viewed any post by the Treblinka Museum at least once, based on many factors, including information about age and gender that users provide in their Facebook profiles; the numbers are estimates. About 60% of the Treblinka Museum's Facebook profile's visitors are women and around 40% are men.

List of people interested in the Treblinka Museum
profile on Facebook in individual countries



Data of 23/03/2021

CHAPTER III

TREBLINKA I PENAL LABOUR CAMP AUDIO GUIDE

The Treblinka Museum offers its visitors an application about the Treblinka I Labour Camp. The project was very important, as so far sightseeing with the use of an audio guide was only possible in the case of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. The creator of the audio guide for the area of Treblinka II is the “Memory of Treblinka” Foundation and the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute. The project was carried out with the support of the Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund and the Treblinka Museum. The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944).

The task of the Museum is to spread knowledge about the Treblinka II and Treblinka I camps, which is why it was so important to supplement the information about the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, which was established in this place earlier and existed longer than the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. It is true that the estimated number of victims is much lower than in Treblinka II, yet the camp was a place of backbreaking work and the place of death for about 10,000 people, Poles, Jews and Roma.

The audio guide consists of 19 points. In the area covered by the application, transmitters (beacons) using Bluetooth technology to connect with

smartphones were placed. The points can be found on the map, which is available in the application. The recordings start at the points located along the sightseeing route and include the so-called Black Road, Gravel Pit, remains of the camp buildings and the Execution Site. Thanks to location, visitors can check where they are at any time. The virtual walk starts at the Museum car park next to the first beacon. The recordings automatically turn on when one approaches the transmitter, and can also be listened to independently. The application has been designed in such a way that one can also use it without leaving one's home. Each point's recording has the following structure: information about the current location of the visitor, substantive content (history of the establishment of the Treblinka I Labour Camp, the aim of the gravel pit, the camp layout and its functioning, the fate of prisoners, the composition of the camp staff, description of the Execution Site and monuments commemorating the victims, post-war history) and instructions for navigating to the next point of the educational path. In addition, selected accounts of the following witnesses, former prisoners of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp have also been added: Zygmunt Chłopek, Edward Sypko, Marian Kobylński, Jan Andrzejak, Piotr Grądzki, Genowefa Gawrysińska, Krystyna Grabowska, Zdzisław Makowski, Henryk Brodowski, Franciszek Byszuk, Antoni Byszewski Piotr Ferenc, Irena Jacewicz, Jadwiga Mornel-Figowa, Barbara Bednarska née Zaleska. It also includes the account of Barbara Kadaj (who was not a prisoner of the camp) describing the events that took place after World War II.¹³

The audio guide was created to familiarize visitors with the history of the Treblinka I Labour Camp and the fate of its prisoners, without the need for the museum guide service. In times of pandemic, when contacts between people are limited and the services of traditional guides are suspended, the virtual guide becomes an alternative. The Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Labour Camp were destroyed by the Germans during World War II. These places are visited in a different way than the camps of similar purpose, where the camp infrastructure and evidence of Nazi crimes in the form of personal belongings of the murdered people have been preserved. In Auschwitz, they are shocking: piles of shoes, glasses, huge amounts of hair – beautiful, light strands, young women or little girls' braids. One tries to imagine a guard still standing atop the watchtower. Visitors enter the interiors of the preserved buildings and

13. Barbara Kadaj, born in 1935 in Prostyń. In September 1947, on the initiative of Feliks Szturo, a teacher from the school in Prostyń (which she attended), she took part in excavating the remains at the former Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. The collected bones were placed in one place, creating a mound on which a cross was placed.

barracks. Visiting Treblinka is different, more difficult. Here we will not see barracks, only their remains in the form of concrete-reinforced floors, reflecting only the image of the surface they occupied. The swimming pool built by prisoners of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, concrete remains of the hospital or farm buildings in the part of the camp inhabited by Germans and Ukrainians, inform about the historical location of these facilities. Visitors must use their imagination, use the information presented to them to recreate the appearance of this place in their mind. Visiting Treblinka is like reading a book, words make up pictures, which is why the Treblinka Museum made every effort while selecting substantive content or witness testimonies. The aim was to present a possibly complete picture of the place where many human dramas took place. A person leaving the Treblinka I Labour Camp no longer perceives it in the same way as before. It is no longer a quiet, peaceful place covered with a beautiful, green forest. Looking at this land, one notices the fact of being surrounded by a huge cemetery, hidden under moss, behind a tree trunk, under a stone. People for whom the Treblinka I Labour Camp was the last stop in their lives are buried here.

The audio guide of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp was made available at the end of December 2020. It is very popular among visitors. It has been downloaded more than five hundred times within three months, which indicates that the decision to create it was the right thing to do.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT RELATED TO “TREBLINKA ON THE INTERNET” IN TERMS OF ITS CREDIBILITY ON THE BASIS OF MATERIALS FOUND ONLINE BY THE EMPLOYEES OF THE TREBLINKA MUSEUM

The employees of the Treblinka Museum regularly check the contents of the Treblinka Memorial Site available on the Internet. The information found was divided according to the form in which it was posted online. The following were distinguished: articles, films, books, conferences, scientific symposiums, podcasts, and cultural events. Such a division was possible after careful verification of the selected content. Information from the Internet is very useful nowadays because of easy and quick access. It literally takes a moment to find a selected phrase. Unfortunately, it also poses a risk that the content we search for will turn out to be the so-called fake news or clickbait. When it comes to Treblinka, photos signed with this phrase appear on the Internet, but it does not necessarily mean that the photo was

taken in a this place or has any connection with it. This type of information is created by people, mainly for the purpose of obtaining financial benefits, and is quite common.

The question arises what to pay attention to in order to avoid this situation? What is important when verifying a given material?

Answering the above questions, the author of the paper decided to use selected materials collected by the employees of the Treblinka Museum.

A person looking for information among Internet sources must first of all assess whether the content they found is real and useful. A reliable source has an author who takes responsibility for the content posted. Scientific institutions or book publishers that authorize a given material, also known to us outside the Internet, will play an important role in the assessment of credibility thanks to the prestige they already have, which is due to their previous activity. It is worth paying attention to who the authors of the publications are, whether they cite sources in their work or are specialists in the field they describe.¹⁴ Reliable sources of information include scientific symposia and conferences, where the preparation of the entire event is supervised by a major institution and specialists are responsible for the selection of substantive content.¹⁵

A valuable source of information is also materials whose authors are

14. Among searched content on the Internet by the museum employees, there is an article by Dr. Marcin Urynowicz "German Death Camp Treblinka II (July 1942 – November 1943)", available on the website of the Institute of National Remembrance: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/86805,Niemiecki-Oboz-Zagłady-Treblinka-II-lipiec-1942-November-1943.html> (accessed: 12.03.2021), and material by Tomasz Wiścicki: *The station right next to hell. Treblinka in an account by Franciszek Żabecki* on the website of the Polish History Museum: <http://muzhp.pl/pl/c/1059/stacja-tuz-obok-piekla-treblinka-w-relacji-franciszka-zabeckiego> (accessed: 12/03/2021). In both cases, the reliability of the information provided is guaranteed both by the institutions mentioned here, and also by the authors of the articles.

15. Examples of such content found by the employees of the Treblinka Museum include: the international symposium, which took place on May 23-25, 2013 – *Forced death workers. Sonderkommandos and Arbeitsjuden*, organized by the Auschwitz Foundation and the Auschwitz Memorial Site at the International Press Center – Palace of the Residence and the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jq9OoVrNuIY&list=PLyKMRWYAJTPqLf-iPADoKNoWexAccess> (accessed: 12.03.2021) and the scientific conference in Canada about Treblinka and Janusz Korczak. Led by Karen I Treiger, author of *My Soul is Filled with Joy: Treblinka The Nazi Death Camp* (part 1), YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12MgXBKXgrw&list=PLyKMRWYAJTPqLf-iDoKQFWPAgA9NV2JNh&index=24> (accessed: 12.03.2021).

witnesses of the events described. When analyzing a given source, one needs to pay attention to several important details. Is the given account presented directly by the person who experienced the event, or is it a second hand testimony presented by, for example, a daughter or son of that person. The time of writing or recording of a witness's testimony is also important, the later the report is written, the greater the probability that confabulation may occur (some details are blurred or events are unintentionally distorted), yet this method of obtaining information should not be abandoned. The very contact with a witness to history, whether live or through the media, is an unforgettable experience. In assessing credibility, it is helpful to refer to other sources, compare them, and establish specific dates and facts. It is crucial to maintain objectivity in evaluation.

Materials containing witness accounts can be divided into two types – easy and difficult to read, assuming that a person seeking historical content is not a scientist. The testimonies of witnesses can be found in documentary films created by specialists in scientific fields related to history, such as archeolog.¹⁶ Documentary filmmakers include historical information in the material, which makes it understandable for the potential recipient.¹⁷ The testimonies of witnesses complement the presented content, their purpose being to assure the recipient of the truthfulness of the presented events. After watching the footage, the viewer has a clearly defined historical framework of the presented document. The filmmakers sometimes let witnesses speak throughout a documentary, and it is them who become the main narrator of the document.¹⁸

16. *Treblinka: Hitlerowska machina śmierci*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YXqhl6RNXy> (accessed: 31.03.2021) – the material presents research conducted in 2012 and 2013 by forensic archaeologist Caroline Sturdy Colls of Staffordshire University. The film recalls the memories of witnesses to the history of Samuel Willenberg and Mieczysław Kowalczyk, as well as the memories of Abram Jakub Krzepicki written in the book *Man escaped from Treblinka*.

17. A documentary *Treblinka. Ocaleni z obozu zagłady* – tells the story of two witnesses, Samuel Willenberg and Kalman Taigman, who managed to escape from the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. They talk about their experiences related to World War II and their stay in Treblinka.

18. Irena Jancewicz, born on August 1, 1924 in Skierniewice, activist of the Polish People's Army, PPS, operated under the pseudonym "Stokrotka" (Daisy). She acted as a liaison – distributor in Warsaw-Skierniewice. She distributed newspapers: *Informator* [Informant], *Barykada Wolności* [Barricade of Freedom], *Robotnik* [Worker], as well as reports, orders, weapons and ammunition. She was sent to the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp in January 1943 after she was arrested at the train station in Skierniewice. She was released after 19 months of stay. She talks about the Penal Labour Camp Treblinka I in a three-part

There are also productions the form and understanding of which may be difficult for a potential viewer.¹⁹ Witnesses present their own experiences, sometimes they share other people's stories, often with a large amount of side information. Then, a viewer should have at least a minimum of historical knowledge to objectively evaluate such material.

Scientists have documented a lot of historical information by writing down eyewitness accounts. There is no shortage of content on the web involving witnesses of historical events.^{20, 21, 22, 23}

There are websites where one can publish own content in the form of videos. These include the following platforms: YouTube, Vimeo, blip.tv or Flickr. When choosing such a source of information, it should be verified whether the content is true. It is necessary to pay attention to whether the author of the material refers to the sources used. The lack of quoted sources means that the content provided is unreliable or untrue. Amateur content may be subjective. Of course, an author has a right to this, but information expressed by this person in this way may infringe the personal rights of other people or even entire nations. Controversy may arise from the Deviant Art website, where peculiar works by authors belonging to the group created on this platform are posted. The author, with the nickname "sulf - 98", in her graphics reveals her fondness for the last commander of

film: *Stokrotka z Treblinka* (Daisy in Treblinka), part 1. *The road to Treblinka*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrRvwwk-WdY> (accessed: 16.03.2021).

19. *Treblinka – obóz zagłady Żydów, rozmowy z mieszkańcami okolic Trebinki*, Shoah Claude'a Lanzmanna: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p_J5T9nd5E, (accessed: 16.03.2021), which is a summary of a series of interviews with the inhabitants of the vicinity, where the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and Treblinka I Labour Camp were located during World War II.

20. Instytut Pileckiego, *Codziennie czułam dym palonych ciał w Treblince – J. Józwik. Świadkowie Epoki*: You Tube, 28.01.2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exenerauHdA> (accessed: 12.03.2021).

21. Ośrodek Badań nad Totalitaryzmami im. Witolda Pileckiego, Instytut Solidarności i Męstwa, *Pomagaliśmy Żydom na różne sposoby. Obok była Treblinka – Eugenia Zębrowska*, part 1. *Świadkowie Epoki*, You Tube, 3.01.2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=md_hDjfDa5M (accessed: 12.03.2020).

22. *Treblinka, opowieść więźnia który uciekł*, You Tube, 2.02.2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QekwVjXzVJ8> (accessed: 12.03.2021).

23. On the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum there are 259,280 recordings with the participation of witnesses of history, one of them is the account regarding the Treblinka II Death Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, by Eugeniusz Goska, an inhabitant of Wólka Okrąglik. *Oral history interview with Eugeniusz Goska*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn507912> (accessed: 16.03.2021).

the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, Kurt Franz. The woman on her profile stated in the comments that she did not promote any ideology. The fascination with this man may be of sexual nature, but in it seems that the message by “sulf – 98” may contain deeper content and extend beyond sexuality. In one of the paintings, the woman appears in person next to Franz who touches her shoulder. The work is entitled “Rebirth of Treblinka II”.²⁴

It also happens that subjective content is sought when one wants to know the opinion of other people, e.g., to study social moods that determine a certain type of behavior or the way of approaching a selected topic. In each of these cases, subjectivism is supposed to help in understanding or solving a given problem. However, this does not change the fact that objectivity, diligence and care in the way of providing information, and above all, proven and documented sources, should be a foundation for reliable and useful content both in a historian and ordinary Internet user’s activity.

SUMMARY

Cultural institutions have particular importance in human life. They build social capital by nurturing history and making us aware of who we are and where we come from. They store valuable artifacts and works of art that are willingly made available to visitors. They satisfy our curiosity, pursuit of knowledge, they are a place of contemplation, meetings and discussion forums. The pandemic situation showed us how much we need such places today. Currently, museums are supported by the IT industry by means of Zoom, MS Teams or Google Meet software which can be used during the organization of discussion forums and conferences.

The Treblinka Museum, like other cultural institutions, transferred its activities to the virtual world. It has created a new educational offer adapted to the current needs of the audience. Online exhibitions posted on the website and on Facebook are very popular. During their stay in the post-camp grounds, visitors can use the audio guide created for the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, which gives the possibility of a full tour, enriched with historical information. The application also works independently, the data stored in it can be accessed at any time. For people who want to visit the Treblinka Museum without leaving home, a virtual street view tour of the permanent exhibition, post-camp areas and the commemoration of the Treblinka station has been created. The decision to join the Facebook platform has also turned out to be the right one. Today we live in

24. *Deviation Spotlight*, Dewiant Art.: <https://www.deviantart.com/sulf-98/art/Rebirth-of-Treblinka-II-797825888> (accessed: 18.03.2021).

a time when an infinite amount of information surrounds us. The pace of life is constantly increasing, due to the rush and lack of time, people focus on messages that are concise and contain the most important content. In this case, posts that the museum shares on its Facebook profile play their role well. Statistics show great interest in this form of communication. For the people who learn from the books, the Treblinka Museum recommends the latest publication, *Plan of the Symbolic Crosses at the Execution Site in Treblinka*, which is also available on the website.

All these activities are aimed at maintaining contact with the audience, but also further development of cultural institutions, as the situation of museums around the world is difficult today. Most likely, around 13% of them will not resume their activities after the coronavirus pandemic.²⁵

What the Treblinka Museum and other cultural institutions will look like in the future is difficult to define today. The effects of the pandemic may have a long-term impact on their functioning. In museums, the hybrid form may be maintained, which includes online activities and remote work. Perhaps they will have to adapt to the new requirements of their audiences, who have also changed due to the new situation. The fact is that the pandemic has changed our reality forever, and its end does not necessarily mean that we will go back to what we had known before it began. There is hope that despite all these changes, visitors will be able to visit museums in person, because no online form can replace the emotions and impressions that accompany direct contact with culture.

25. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 7, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

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Marzena Szcześniak

Treblinka Museum

The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944)

“KNOWLEDGE COMPETITION ON THE EXTERMINATION CAMP TREBLINKA II AND THE PENAL LABOUR CAMP TREBLINKA I” INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPETITION

In March 2020, the Treblinka Museum organized a knowledge competition about the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. The competition was addressed to secondary school students (comprehensive, technical, vocational) from the following districts: Sokołów, Ostrów and Węgrów.

The competition consisted of two stages. Stage 1 was held individually in each participating school. Stage 2 was to take place at the Treblinka Museum. It did not take place due to the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, which resulted in the closure of educational institutions.

The aim of the competition was to deepen and disseminate historical knowledge among schoolchildren about the functioning of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, arouse interest in the past, encourage people to search for information and teach about proper use of historical sources and about the history of the Second World War. The competition was also intended to keep alive the memory of the victims of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp, as well as develop sensitivity to injustice and human harm among the younger generation.

A total of 120 students from 7 schools from the Sokołów and Ostrów districts took part in the competition.

The students' task was to answer 30 questions. Some of the questions were test questions, some were “open” questions which required a short, written answer. The contest included questions requiring general knowledge of the Holocaust and the occupation of Poland. There were questions about the victims and perpetrators of the crime in Treblinka as well as

questions about the functioning of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. The level of difficulty of the questions was varied. It was taken into account that secondary school students already had full knowledge of the events of World War II, and they know the history of their neighborhood. The questions were formulated to be easy to understand to students.

The maximum number of points to be obtained in the competition was 50. In accordance with the competition regulations, five people with the best results were qualified for the 2nd stage from a given school. The best results were as follows:

- I. Mikołaj Kopernik General Education Secondary School, Tadeusz Kościuszko Street 36, 07-300 Ostrów Mazowiecka. 45 students took part in the competition. The best results were achieved by:
 1. Sylwia Wiśniewska 47 pts.
 2. Patrycja Kuziak 45,5 pts.
 3. Mateusz Sadłowski 44,5 pts.
 4. Marta Brzostek 44,5 pts.
 5. Oliwia Kulesza 42 pts.
- II. School Complex no. 1, Roman Rubinkowski Street 8, 07-300 Ostrów Mazowiecka. 18 students took part in the competition. The best results were achieved by:
 1. Kamila Pańkowska 37,5 pts.
 2. Dawid Fidura 37,5 pts.
 3. Natalia Szulęcka 35 pts.
 4. Oliwia Zadrożna 32 pts.
 5. Michał Niedobylski 31,5 pts.
- III. St. Staszic School Complex in Małkinia Górna, Nurska Street 15, 07-320 Małkinia Górna. 11 students took part in the competition. The best results were achieved by:
 1. Jakub Wróbel 41 pts.
 2. Aleksandra Mleczko 30 pts.
 3. Bartosz Wasieńko 30 pts.
 4. Patrycja Wujek 30 pts.
 5. Klaudia Wujek 29,5 pts.

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- IV. School Complex, Armii Krajowej Street 6, 08-330 Kosów Lacki. 11 students took part in the competition. The best results were achieved by:
1. Daria Ołtarzewska 35.5 pts.
 2. Weronika Bierdzińska 30,5 pts.
 3. Paulina Spalitańska 26 pts.
 4. Klaudia Zakrzewska 25 pts.
 5. Ewelina Laskowiecka 20.5 pts.
- V. I Maria Skłodowska-Curie General Secondary School, Sadowa Street 11, 08-300 Sokołów Podlaski. 14 students took part in the competition. The best results were achieved by:
1. Oliwia Onisk 47 pts.
 2. Maciej Krystoszyk 46 pts.
 3. Emilia Gałęcka 43 pts.
 4. Weronika Pliszka 38 pts.
 5. Karol Kosieradzki 37 pts.
- VI. K.K Baczyński School Complex No. 1, M. Skłodowska-Curie Street 24, 08-300 Sokołów Podlaski. 15 students took part in the competition. The best results were achieved by:
1. Weronika Czapska 34,5 pts.
 2. Dominika Stańczuk 32,5 pts.
 3. Natalia Modzelewska 32 pts.
 4. Kacper Kułak 31,5 pts.
 5. Mateusz Mostowiec 30,5 pts.
- VII. Salesian School Complex, Ks. Bosko Street 1, 08-300 Sokołów Podlaski. 6 students took part in the competition. The best results were achieved by:
1. Maciej Suchożębski 47 pts.
 2. Piotr Perzyna 36,5 pts.
 3. Wiktoria Jasieńczuk 34 pts.
 4. Nikodem Żochowski 32,5 pts.
 5. Maciej Sobieski 31,5 pts.

The competition ended after the first stage.

CONCLUSION

Students can identify victims and perpetrators of the crime. They know the history of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. They are aware of the prisoners' hard work and the harsh conditions in the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. They are aware of what the gas chambers were and how agonizing the death of the Jewish population was. Competition participants are aware of the gruesome events that took place in their neighborhood. Those events are sometimes intertwined with the fate of their families. The students are aware of how many Jews, Poles and Romani died in the Camps in Treblinka and how evil the crime was. However, most of it is general knowledge that requires continued education in this field, reminding about how great a tragedy took place in the area close to the students' place of residence, reminding about the tragedy of Jews, Poles and Roma. We must remember and preserve the memory of the victims and sensitize young people. Preserving the memory is like paying tribute to all the millions of Jews, Poles and Romani murdered in these camps.

The museum as a "guardian" of the memory should educate young people about the history of places such as Treblinka, therefore similar competitions as well as educational lessons, exhibitions are needed in museums. As many of them as possible should be created for schoolchildren in order to encourage them to deepen their knowledge. We cannot allow the youth to know history only from a dozen or so minutes of a school lesson. The museum must preserve and expand this memory in order to include it in the identity of future generations. We cannot remain silent about this terrible story that took place in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp. It must be taught so that there will never be such a truth again.

BIOGRAPHIES

MAREK BODZIANY (born 1973) is a colonel of the Polish Army, Habilitated Doctor of security sciences – Professor at the General Tadeusz Kościuszko Military University of Land Forces in Wrocław. Deputy Dean for Scientific Discipline at the Faculty of Security Studies. Editor-in-chief of the Publishing House of the Military University of Land Forces. Member of the University Senate and Chairman of the Safety Science Scientific Discipline Council of the Military University of Land Forces. He focuses on qualitative research in the field of social changes and population processes, cultural security and multiculturalism, conflicts and social crises. Since 2020, he has collaborated with Dr. Justyna Matkowska. He is the author of two monographs and co-author of three monographs. He is the editor of eleven monographs and about ninety articles and chapters in monographs. His most recent monographs are: *Internal determinants of Poland's cultural security* and *Social crises of the 21st century. Between disintegration, "fencing policy" and the collapse of statehood*; and articles: "Motivating in theory and practice of command – case study of the Polish armed forces, the police and the fire service"; "Military Implications of the Russian Federation's Politics of Expansion"; "Pro-Social and Altruistic Behaviors of Military Students in Random Events"; "Feminization of Terror: Psychological Analysis of the Role of Women in Terrorist Structures"; "Catholic Church Towards Sovietization of Culture and Polish Society in Communications of the Polish Embassy at the Vatican in the Years 1956-1968".

DOMINIC BORCHERT studied contemporary history at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena during the years 2005-2011 and graduated with a title of Magister Artium. His interests include the history of national socialism and its consequences, among others, in collective memory and media. Since 2014, he has worked for the Mitteldeutsche Zeitung. He is the referent of the program "Demokratie stärken" at the Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Sachsen-Anhalt. He is responsible for organizing trips for the German youth to memorial sites and for promoting historical knowledge among them. He visited Treblinka in 2020.

BOŻENA BRYŃCZAK and ANDRZEJ BRYŃCZAK are archeologist, graduated from the University of Warsaw, who have been professionally active for many years, mainly in the region of southern Podlasie voivodeship and eastern Mazowieckie voivodeship. They conduct archaeological research independently and they also cooperate with various research centers, institutions and associations in the field of archaeology. They are both members of the Liw Region Cultural Association "Zamek Liw" [Liw Castle]. Bożena is also a graduate of postgraduate studies in "Air and Ground Scanning" at the AGH University of Science and Technology in Kraków. Currently she is studying for her PhD at the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in the field of history. They "attract" treasures – two were given to the Museum in Liw, one (Jewish treasure) is in the Museum in Mińsk Mazowiecki. This year there was a fourth one found – in Sokółów Podlaski.

ROMAN CHOJNACKI is a President of the Polish Roma Union based in Szczecinek. Member of the Treblinka Museum's Council.

ZOFIA KRYSZYNA CHYRA-ROLICZ (born 1948) graduated in history from the University of Warsaw in 1970. She received her doctorate in 1975 at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She obtained her habilitation in 1993 at the Institute of History of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She received the academic title of professor of humanities in 2005. She specializes in the social history of Poland in the 18th and 20th centuries, history of cooperatives, and the history of culture. Member of the Women's History Committee of the Historical Sciences Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 2003-2018. Member of the Historical Sciences Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 2007-2015. She collaborates with the Research Committee of the International Co-operative Alliance. From 1970, she has been a member, among others, of the Polish Historical Society. From 1996, she has been a member of the Association of Journalists of the Republic of Poland. She works as an academic teacher at the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. Vice-chairman of the Museum Council at the Treblinka Museum. The author of many scientific publications, including: *Wspólnymi siłami. Związki ruchu emancypacji kobiet ze spółdzielczością na ziemiach polskich przed rokiem 1939* (2013), *Stanisław Staszic prekursor spółdzielczości rolniczej* (2004), *Żydzi na Podlasiu* (2010), *Maria Konopnicka. Opowieść o niezwykłej kobiecie* (2012), *Sztuka przetrwania. Życie codzienne w ekstremalnych warunkach obozowych. Biogramy 693 w XX-XXI wieku* (2019), *Między prywatą a wspólnym dobrem. Stosunek sił politycznych do spółdzielczości w II i III Rzeczypospolitej* (2019), *Sukcesy*

i porażki. Historyczny kontekst kobiecych dążeń do samorealizacji (od XII do XXI wieku) (2020).

ILONA FLAŻYŃSKA, born on March 11, 1989 in Ryki, is a graduate of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. From 2017, she was a guide at the Treblinka Museum. Since 2019, she has been an assistant in the Scientific and Publishing Department of the Treblinka Museum. Her work focuses on the development of documentation related to the Victims of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, mainly transported there from the ghetto in Terezin (the Czech Republic). She also researches the history of Roma victims murdered in the Treblinka camps. She is the author of the paper: "Extermination of the Jewish, Polish and Roma population at the Treblinka II Extermination Camp in the testimony of witnesses", delivered at the Pilecki Institute conference, and the article: "Porajmos in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp and Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp", published in the Romani quarterly *Dialog-Pheniben* (no. 31/2020).

STEFFAN HÄNSCHEN, doctor of philosophy, he studied Polish literary studies at the University of Bremen. Author of such publications as: *Das Transit ghetto Izbica im System des Holocaust* [The Izbica transit ghetto in the Holocaust system], *Die Reise in die ehemaligen deutschen Kulturlandschaften. Wandlungen der Erzählerhaltung in der polnischen Prosa nach 1990* [Journey into old German cultural landscapes. Changes in narrative attitudes in Polish prose after 1990]. His articles include: "Doppelrezension: Der Aufstand der jüdischen Gefangenen in Sobibór" [Double review: Uprising of Jewish prisoners in Sobibór], "Studiereizen van het Bildungswerk Stanislaw Hantz naar de kampen van de 'Aktion Reinhardt'" [Study visits of the Bildungswerk Stanisław Hildungzswerk to the "Aktion Reinhardt" camps], "Ethnic groups, perpetrators and victims, Transforming remembrance in the former death camp Belzec – a short history, 'Sicher glaubt ihr mir nicht'. Auf Erkundungsreise nach Lemberg" ['You don't believe me for sure'. On an exploration trip to Lviv], "Zwischen Verdrängung und Aufarbeitung Das Verhältnis zum Holocaust in Polen" [Between repressions and coming to terms with the Holocaust in Poland], "Mitteleuropa redivivus? Stasiuk, Andruchovyč und der Geist der Zeit" [Redivivus of Central Europe? Stasiuk, Andruchovyč and the spirit of the times]. He is active in the Bildungswerk Stanisław Hantz Association. He collaborates with the Treblinka Museum by organizing study visits with German youth to the Treblinka Memorial Site.

PIOTR JAGŁA (born in 1972), is a historian of antiquity. His master's thesis was titled *Wielka Kolumna Jowisza w Moguncji – rozważania wokół*

możliwości interpretacji [Great Column of Jupiter in Mainz – reflections around the possibility of interpretation] and his doctoral thesis was *Religia w polityce Filipa II Macedońskiego* [Religion in the politics of Philip II of Macedon]. Both theses were defended at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He became interested in Judaism during his research on ancient religions, exploring the ancient roots of modern universalist religions (Judaism, Buddhism), including the beginnings of Christianity, mainly through an unorthodox approach (symbolism of Sukkot and gnosism in the Gospel of John, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey during Sukkot, Adoptionism, Docetism). He is a teacher at the Knight of the Order of the Smile Primary School in Dąbrówka, in Greater Poland.

EDWARD KOPÓWKA, born in 1963, has lived in Siedlce since 1970. In 2009, he obtained a doctorate in humanities at the University of Podlasie in Siedlce (now known as the University of Natural Sciences and Humanities), where he defended his dissertation on Jews in Siedlce in the 19th-20th centuries. He enriched his knowledge through courses at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the Goethe Institut in Berlin. From 1996, he worked as the manager of the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka. In July 2018 he became the director of the Treblinka Museum. The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944). He is the author and co-author of many books, the most important of which, according to him, are: *Bojownikom o Niepodległość Hi!* (Siedlce 2001, co-written with his wife Katarzyna), *Treblinka. Nigdy więcej!* (Treblinka 2002), *Stalag 366* (Siedlce 2004), *Żydzi w Siedlcach 1850-1945* (Siedlce 2009), *Dam im imię na wieki (Iz 56,5). Polacy z okolic Treblinki ratujący Żydów*, Oxford-Treblinka 2011, co-authored with Rev. Paweł Rytel-Andrianik; *Jews in Siedlce 1850-1945* (New York 2014), *Obóz Pracy Treblinka I. Metodyka integracji danych wieloźródłowych*, (Warsaw-Treblinka 2017, co-written with Sebastian Różycki and Marek Michalski).

ALEKSANDRA KOWALSKA, born in 1991, is a graduate of archaeology at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. She has been employed at the Treblinka Museum since 2018. She works as the promotion and publishing specialist. Her main tasks include managing the Museum's website and Facebook page as well as developing various types of graphic and promotional materials. She is the co-author of the exhibition "Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp – to see the invisible" and the continuation of this exhibition "Prisoners of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp".

BARTOSZ KOWALSKI, born in 1991, is a graduate of the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Łódź. He has worked as an archaeologist at the

Collections and Exhibitions Department of the Treblinka Museum since 2018. Since then, he has been taking care of monuments and supervising archaeological research at the Museum. He has also been conducting his own research related to the functioning of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp since 2020. Co-founder of the Polish branch of the Sustainability in Conservation (SiC) organization, which is dedicated to sustainable development of monuments conservation.

ANDRZEJ ŁUCZAK (born in 1981) is a PhD student in history at the University of Zielona Góra. His doctoral thesis focuses on the history of the Roma in Poland in the 20th century. He is a trainer, publicist, organizer and participant of many educational events. He has participated in projects: “Dolne Łużyce i południowa część województwa lubuskiego – krajo-braz kulturowy w centrum Europy” (Lower Lusatia and the southern part of the Lubuskie Voivodeship – cultural landscape in the center of Europe), “Innowacyjni Romowie na rynku pracy I, II” (Innovative Roma on the job market I, II). He collaborates with the Roma magazine *Romano Atmo*. Currently, he is the director in the Board of the Institute of Remembrance and Heritage of the Roma and Victims of the Holocaust at the Polish Roma Association based in Szczecinek. He is the author of *Romowie na Warmii i Mazurach*; *Sytuacja ludności romskiej na ziemi lubuskiej w XX wieku*, as well as many others articles about the Roma.

PAWEŁ MALISZEWSKI, born in 1995, is an employee of the Treblinka Museum. A graduate of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences and a student of theology at the Catholic Academy in Warsaw. He works as a Polish-English speaking guide at the Treblinka Museum. He collaborates with other museum's departments in the field of translations, making an inventory of archaeological artifacts and in other areas. He has interests in history, philosophy and nature.

JUSTYNA MATKOWSKA, born 1991, is a Romologist and literary scholar. A graduate of BA (2013) and MA (2015) studies at the University of Wrocław and of postgraduate studies in Romology (2017) at the Pedagogical University of Krakow. In 2020, she obtained a PhD degree in humanities at the University of Wrocław. She was the plenipotentiary of the Lower Silesian Voivode for national and ethnic minorities in 2016-2018. She has lectured at the University of Wrocław and Hawaii Pacific University in the United States. She is the author of numerous scientific publications about the Roma, including the chapter: “Roma Resistance in occupied Poland” (2020) and articles: “Matka Natura w poezji romskiej” (2020), “Romowie górcy jako społeczność wielokulturowa karpackiego pogranicza”

(2018), "Wizerunek kobiety romskiej w twórczości literackiej Karola Parno Gierlińskiego" (2017). She is also the holder of numerous scientific scholarships, e.g. research scholarship at the Romani Studies Program at the Central European University. She also conducted research as part of the "Re-Thinking Roma Resistance" project implemented by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. Dr. Matkowska co-hosted (together with her sister Magdalena) official ceremonies commemorating the Roma and Sinti victims during World War II held at the former Nazi extermination camps: in Treblinka (2014 and 2015) and in Kulmhof (2016).

MAREK MICHALSKI, an engineer by education, he studied at the Silesian University of Technology, a graduate of the Military University of Technology. His work focuses on, among others, photogrammetry and photo interpretation of aerial photos. In the years 2016-2020, he carried out topographic research at the Treblinka II Extermination Camp, the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp and the Treblinka railway station on behalf of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography of the Warsaw University of Technology. He collaborates with the Treblinka Museum, the Central Museum of Prisoners of War in Łambinowice/Opole and the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica. In his scientific work, he focuses on camp's related issues.

GIDEON JAKOB NISSENBAUM is the son of Holocaust survivor Sigmund Nissenbaum. Since January 2019, he has been the President of the Management Board of the Nissenbaum Family Foundation, continuing the work of his father. The main aims of the Foundation are: rescuing the Jewish heritage in Poland, commemorating places related to the Holocaust and Jewish resistance during World War II, disseminating knowledge about the best traditions of the common history of Poles and Jews in Poland and abroad, reviving interest in the Jewish spiritual and material heritage both among the diaspora and the Polish society. Gideon Nissenbaum also focuses on maintaining relationships between Polish, German and Israeli youth. The Nissenbaum Family Foundation is one of the 21 Distinguished Benefactors of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. In 2019, Albert Stankowski, the director of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum, and Gideon Nissenbaum, who represents the Nissenbaum Family Foundation, signed a co-operation agreement. It consists i.a. of the joint implementation of projects aimed at commemorating the fate of Jews, with particular emphasis on their history during World War II, as well as the implementation of educational projects. Gideon Nissenbaum is a member of the Treblinka Museum Council, The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944) and the Council of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum.

SIGMUND SZIMON (ZYGMUNT) NISSENBAUM was born on July 25, 1926 in Warsaw. As a fourteen-year-old boy he was imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto, together with his family. He was obliged to sneak into the so-called Aryan side to get food there. Later, together with his colleagues, he carried weapons and ammunition necessary to organize the uprising in the ghetto. In April 1943, during the suppression of the uprising in the ghetto by the Germans, he and his family were brought to the Umschlagplatz, from where they were transported in a cattle wagon to the Treblinka Extermination Camp. The transport took three days. Together with his father and elder brother Józef, he was selected by one of the SS men during the selection and sent to another camp. He was a prisoner of the Majdanek concentration camp, the Budzyń labour camp and the labour camp in Wieliczka salt mine, the Flossenbürg camp in Germany, the labour camp in Hersbruck and KZ Offenburg. After the war, he settled in Konstanz on Lake Constance, where he started a family. He was a Jewish entrepreneur and philanthropist. In 1983, he established the Nissenbaum Family Foundation and became its president. The main aim of the Foundation is to rescue the Jewish heritage in Poland and to commemorate places associated with the martyrdom of Jews. Sigmund Nissenbaum was awarded the Order of Saint Bridget, the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, the Auschwitz Cross, the Medal for Warsaw 1939-1945 and the Gold Medal of the Guardian of National Remembrance Sites. He died on August 11, 2001 in Konstanz.

TOMASZ NOWAK is a painter and a professor at the University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce. Since 1989, he has been an employee of this university. Currently, he serves as the head of the Art Studio at the Faculty of Humanities. He has held over 90 individual and collective painting exhibitions. In 2007, he was honored with a Distinction from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage for his special achievements in the dissemination of culture. In 2008, he initiated the formation of the informal "Ławeczka" Group (Bench group), which focuses on promoting the concept of art and its impact through painting. He is also a participant, co-organizer, and author of interdisciplinary programs, as well as a curator of painting exhibitions both in Poland and abroad.

JERRY NUSSBAUM is the chairman of the Janusz Korczak Association in Canada based in Vancouver. It was established in February 2002. The main aim of the association is to promote knowledge about the life and work of Janusz Korczak all over the English-speaking world, especially concerning Korczak's defense of children's rights. Another important task is

to disseminate Korczak's pedagogical ideas and their impact on children's education. The Association is one of the founding members of the "Korczak Repository Consortium". The repository is an archival collection of Janusz Korczak's legacy scattered all over the world. They contain Korczak's works, publications about him and his achievements, as well as iconography, documents and museum objects. This facilitates easier for a wider audience to access these important works. In addition, the technological solutions used there meet the standards of modern scientific services.

JOANNA OLESZCZUK. A historian by education. She completed her master's studies at the Faculty of History of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. She also graduated postgraduate studies in Quality Management. She worked with modeling and optimizing business processes in Warsaw corporations. However, history and monuments of the past remained her passion. She holds a license of a tourist guide in Warsaw. She is also a tour leader with a license to guide tourists around Warsaw museums, including the Royal Castle, the Wilanów Palace, the Fryderyk Chopin Museum, the park and buildings located in the Royal Baths Park. She recently became a guide to the Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN. In her spare time, she writes articles, mainly about the local history of Sterdyń and Paulinów, where she comes from. She is the granddaughter of Franciszek Oleszczuk, a prisoner of the Treblinka I Penal Labour Camp.

ANNA REMISZEWSKA, born 1981, is a graduate of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. She graduated in history with a teaching specialization (master's studies); English philology (bachelor's studies) and completed postgraduate studies in Polish philology. From 2006-2011, she was a history teacher at the Primary School in Bujaków. Since 2006, she has worked at the Treblinka Museum, where she works as an assistant professor in the Education Department. During her work at the Museum, she took care of young people from "Akcja Znaku Pokuty" [Action Sign of Penance]. She works on biographies of people commemorated at the Execution Site and biographies of prisoners of the Treblinka I and Treblinka II camps. She is the author of the publication entitled: *Plan symbolicznych krzyży na Miejscu Straceń w Treblince* (2020). She is interested in regional history, history of World War II, travel and ethnography.

FLORIAN ROSS works at Bildungswerk Stanislaw Hantz e.V. Association, an independent organization, operating in Germany on voluntary basis. The initiatives undertaken by this institution include: honoring the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, organizing educational trips to places connected with Holocaust in Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania. Among others,

the Association funded a trip to Poland of a 21-person group of young people from Ukraine, as part of historical workshops which were carried out at the Memorial Site in Belzec. On the 60th anniversary of the revolt in Sobibor (October 14, 2003) the Association created the Lane of Remembrance. It contains stones which commemorate the people murdered in the camp. On every stone a plaque was placed with a name, the date and place of birth and the date of death. The Association cooperates with the Treblinka Museum in organizing educational trips for youth to learn about the former extermination camps of "Operation Reinhard". The Association financially supported construction of the Memorial Site of the "Treblinka Station". This monument was erected in winter 2019 at the area of the former train station. Florian Ross is one of the authors of texts in the publication *Photographs from Sobibor*. It contains the reproductions of the photographs provided by the family of Johann Niemann, the deputy commandant of the extermination camp in Sobibor.

SEBASTIAN RÓŻYCKI is a graduate of the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography of the Warsaw University of Technology. In 2015, he obtained the degree of Doctor of Technical Sciences with distinction. In his scientific work, he focuses on research issues in the field of remote sensing (in particular, geometric aspects of developing high-resolution satellite images) and Spatial Information Systems (in the field of using SIP in crisis management, the use of free software in teaching SIP). Since 2013, he utilized archival and current aerial photos, laser scanning data, cartographic materials and geophysical methods in the study of death camps, concentration camps and labour camps of World War II. In 2016-2020, he led multidisciplinary research conducted in the areas of the extermination and labour camps in Treblinka as well as Chełmno nad Nerem.

PAWEŁ RYTEL-ANDRIANIK, Rev., born in 1976, is a publicist, polyglot – in his scientific work he uses 16 languages. He obtained a PhD in biblical sciences and archeology at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem and another PhD in Oriental Studies in the field of Hebrew and Judaic studies at the University of Oxford. From 2015-2020, he served as the spokesman of the Polish Episcopal Conference. Since 2014, he has been a lecturer at the Major Seminary in Drohiczyn, the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Warsaw, the section of St. John the Baptist. He is also a Professor at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. From 2020, he was the director of the Office for Foreign Communication of the Polish Bishops' Conference. He has been awarded with the Papal Cross of the Drohiczyn Diocese, and the Medal of the "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising". He serves as the Supernumerary Canon of the Drohiczyn Cathedral Chapter.

He analyzes the stories of Poles and Jew who experienced by World War II. He is the grandson of Stanisław Rytel, a survivor of the Treblinka Penal Labour Camp. He has collaborated with the Treblinka Museum for many years. He is a co-author of the book: *Dam im imię na wieki (Iz 56,5). Polacy z okolic Trebłinki ratujący Żydów*.

ILONA SADOWSKA, born in 1985, is a graduate of the Faculty of History and Sociology at the University of Białystok. She has worked as a guide at the Treblinka Museum since 2019. In addition to guiding visitors, she collaborates with other departments of the Museum by making an inventory of archaeological artifacts and disseminating knowledge about the Treblinka Memorial site on the museum's website and on Facebook.

MONIKA SAMUEL born in 1978, is a graduate of history at the University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce. She was a guide at the Treblinka Museum in 2018. She has served as an assistant in the Scientific and Publishing Department of the Treblinka Museum from 2019. She is the author of articles in regional publications: "Kosów Lacki. Studia i materiały z dziejów miejscowości", t. I (2011) and „Wojna obronna 1939 roku na Mazowszu i Podlasiu. Ludzie – Postawy – Konsekwencje” (2020). At the Treblinka Museum, she is involved in the acquisition and development of archival materials about the Treblinka camps. She is the curator of the "Treblinka Station. Between life and death" exhibition, co-author of the exhibition "Treblinka I. To see the invisible". She is also the author of the historical path – the audio guide application for the Treblinka of Penal Labour Camp.

ANDRZEJ SIWEK born in 1985, is a graduate of history at the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. Since 2018, he has worked as a guide at the Treblinka Museum. In addition to guiding visitors, he collaborates with other departments of the Museum by making an inventory of archaeological artifacts and disseminating knowledge about the Treblinka Memorial site on the museum's website and on Facebook.

BARBARA JANINA SOCHAL is an educator, methodologist of art education, author and implementer of many projects for children, youth and teachers regarding cultural and intercultural education as well as education through art. She was a long-time employee of the Ministry of National Education (1998-2007), where she focused on, among others, cultural education and out-of-school education, human-children's rights and prevention. She worked on projects related to international cooperation programs for children and youth, including the arrivals of young people from Israel to

Poland. From 2002-2005, she coordinated the preparations and the course of the "March of the Living". Since 2011, she has been the president of the Polish Janusz Korczak Association. She is also the vice-president of the International Janusz Korczak Association (IKA). She is a member of the Treblinka Museum Council. She also specializes in artistic ceramics, experimenting with combining weaving and painting techniques.

BEATE STOLLBERG-WOLSCHELDORF, while working as a history teacher at Gymnasium Bethel in Bielefeld (Germany), she supported students for two years on the project which culminated with the publication of the album in 2005: *Treblinka II – The Extermination Camp*. The album is available for sale at the Treblinka Museum and is very popular among the visitors, having been released in the following languages: Polish, German, French and English. In 2015 the brochure was republished and improved. The aim of creating it, as well as the exhibition, which is an expanded version of the publication, was to present basic information to the visitors of the Memorial Site in Treblinka and encourage further cooperation between Polish and German youth during various types of workshops and meetings. Currently, Beate is retired and resides in Berlin.

EDWARD SUŁEK, born on April 18, 1954 in Puławy. He graduated from the A.J. Czartoryski Secondary School in Puławy. From 1973 to 1978 he studied agriculture at the Higher School of Agriculture in Nitra (present-day Slovakia). Then he worked at the Department of Detailed Plant Cultivation at the Higher School of Agriculture and Pedagogy in Siedlce until 1981. He began doctoral studies in Halle at the Martin Luther University and completed his degree in 1985. After graduation he worked at the Agricultural Production Cooperative in Nauendorf for about 5 years. From 1990, he was employed at the Saalkreis District Office (renamed Saalekreis in 1997), where he was responsible for contacts with partner regions of the Starosty (including Lithuania, Wales, Poland and Germany), served as a social worker with knowledge of foreign languages, and was a coordinator for the integration of foreigners. He has been retired since 2019, but continues to actively support Polish-German relationships. He is the chairman of the German-Polish Association in Saxony-Anhalt and a member of the Merseburg-Saalekreis Historical Association. He has been a member of the Maltese Cross Association in Halle for many years. Since 2018, he has been recognized as one of the people of merit for the Saalekreis District. Together with Konrad Szumiński, he co-authored a book in German in 2016 entitled: *Erinnerungen eines polnischen Zwangsarbeiters: Nr. 10.433 – AEL Zöschchen – 1944-1945*.

EWA TELEŻYŃSKA-SAWICKA (born in 1962), a Polish philologist by education, and PAWEŁ SAWICKI (born in 1956) an IT specialist. They have co-operated with the “Memory of Treblinka” Foundation, which was established on the initiative of Paweł Śpiewak and Samuel Willenberg in 2014, for six years. They are both members of its board and are the main authors of the “Book of Name” – a database of people murdered in the Treblinka II Extermination Camp. As of March 2021, 45,000 names have been collected. The “Book of Names” is available on the Foundation’s website. Many more names are currently being verified. In their research on people murdered in Treblinka, the Foundation has utilized over 200 different sources. The most important among these are the Yad Vashem Central Base, the State Archives, reports submitted to the JHI, as well as certificates sent to the Foundation, censuses, court files, testimonials and memoirs. Ewa and Paweł Sawicki visit Treblinka every last Saturday of the month to read the names of people murdered there. They read the names at the stone with the inscription “Never Again”. In doing so, they honour the memory – the only thing that can still be given to them.

ADA KRYSZYNA WILLENBERG, born in 1928 in Warsaw, survived the Warsaw ghetto. Until the uprising, she hid using Aryan documents in Helena Majewska’s family home. As a Polish citizen, she was deported by the Germans to forced labour. She is a former prisoner of German camps and the author of the memoir book *Skok do życia* [A Jump to Life]. She is the widow of Samuel Willenberg, a former prisoner of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp – one of the few participants of the revolt in Treblinka who survived the war. After the war, together with her husband, she traveled from Israel to Poland many times. They often accompanied Israeli youth visiting Treblinka. She was a co-initiator of the construction of the future exhibition and educational facility of the Treblinka Museum.

ARTUR ZIONTEK is a literature historian, editor, regionalist and author of nearly 300 scientific and popular science publications on Polish literature and culture as well as the history of Podlasie region. In 2021, he published the novel *Latawcy* (Kraków, Ostrogi Publishing House), which is set near Treblinka. He is a member of the Siedlce Scientific Society (member of the Board during the years of 2008-2012) and a member of the Polish Society for Research on the Eighteenth Century. He is also a member of the Museum Council at the Treblinka Museum.

