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The Holocaust
in Occupied Poland:
New Findings
and New Interpretations

**Warsaw Studies in Jewish History
and Memory**

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Introduction

I am deeply grateful to Peter Lang publishers, for reprinting as a free standing volume the August 2011 issue of "East European Politics and Societies."

The articles presented in this special edition of *East European Politics and Societies (EEPS)* were delivered at the conference "The Holocaust in Occupied Poland: New Findings and New Interpretations" held at Princeton University on 29–30 October 2010. Prof. Jan Grabowski of Ottawa University and I conceived of and coordinated the meetings.¹ Our intention when organizing the conference was to provide a forum for Polish historians and their American colleagues to discuss their new research on the Holocaust period.²

The Polish scholars published in this issue are primarily affiliated with the Center for Holocaust Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.³ In the late 1940s, a number of important works on the Holocaust appeared in Poland under the imprint of the Jewish Historical Commission, and its work was then continued by the Jewish Historical Institute, ŻIH, in Warsaw. But only over the last several years has a scholarly milieu emerged in Poland that took the Holocaust out of its confinement as a strictly "Jewish" subject, repositioning it into the center of Poland's wartime history. One may even claim that thanks largely to the efforts of our conference participants, after a hiatus of half a century a most important chapter of Polish history has been taken up again by Polish historians.

Drawing on newly identified historical sources—primarily, but not exclusively, court files produced in postwar trials of Polish citizens implicated in the persecution of Jews during the German occupation—historians from the Center are in the process of rewriting the history of Polish–Jewish relations during wartime. In doing so, they labor against the grain of the dominant narrative about the war years, which privileges the theme of patriotic resistance against the Nazi occupation. Especially revealing are their findings, contained in several monographs as well as article-length studies, about the persecution of Jews by peasants in the Polish countryside.⁴

The conference, we thought, proved a rich and rewarding experience to all participants, due, primarily, to the exciting and challenging new evidence brought out by the presenters. But it was also notable for an incidental episode—Benjamin Frommer writes about it in the last contribution to the present volume—as it elicited interest from Polish diplomats. The organizers of the Princeton conference are extremely grateful to *EEPS* editors for their willingness to dedicate a special issue to presenting this new scholarship, which offers insights into a particularly tragic period of East European history.

Notes

- 1 Funding for the conference was provided by various entities at Princeton University: the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS), the Department of History, the Council of the Humanities, the University Center for Human Values, the Program in Russian and Eurasian Studies, the Center for the Study of Religion, and the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies. The conference was staffed and seamlessly organized by the PIIRS and its program manager, Jayne Bialkowski. Articles of the Polish participants were translated into English by Jerzy Giebułtowski and Anna Brzostowska. We are deeply grateful for their support.
- 2 In addition to Natalia Aleksion of Touro College and Jan Grabowski of the University of Ottawa, who maintain active professional lives in Poland as well, other American participants were Omer Bartov of Brown University, Christopher Browning of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, David Engel of New York University, Benjamin Frommer of Northwestern University, Jan Gross of Princeton University, Michael Meng of Clemson University, and Antony Polonsky of Brandeis University. Professor Jean Charles Szurek, of the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques and the University of Paris, also joined our group.
- 3 Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów (centrum@holocaustresearch.pl). The Center has also been publishing an annual journal, *Zagłada Żydów*, since 2005.
- 4 Two most recent book publications on the subject are by Barbara Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień . . . Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2011), and Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd. Polowanie na Żydów 1942–1945. Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2011). A seminal article on the same subject was published earlier in the first issue of the yearly *Zagłada Żydów* in 2005, by Alina Skibińska and Jakub Petelewicz: “Udział Polaków w zbrodniach na Żydach: casus region świętokrzyski.”