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# *Polish Help to Jews in the Countryside during the German Occupation. A Sketch Using the Example of the Righteous among the Nations*

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# Polish Help to Jews in the Countryside during the German Occupation. A Sketch Using the Example of the Righteous among the Nations[1]

There is a challenge the researcher dealing with the issue of provision of help to Jews in the Polish countryside during the German occupation has to face – the base of sources is highly diverse and it fails to provide an unambiguous image because it includes almost exclusively personal documents.[2] For unlike in towns and cities, in the countryside help was provided by individuals, who were neither supported, nor financed, nor organized in any institutions. Consequently, the documents of the Polish or Jewish underground include only reports regarding the general situation in the countryside and we will not find any detailed presentation of the issue of help there.

Autobiographic Jewish sources offer the greatest amount of information. There is but a handful of the most precious texts as far as insight in the occupation-period situation is concerned. These are diaries written in hiding in the countryside.[3] Postwar testimonies and memoirs are the most numerous

[1] This article is an abridged version of the text originally published in *Zarys krajobrazu. Wieś polska wobec zagłady Żydów 1942–1945*, ed. Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011), 195–258 (publisher's note).

[2] I use the term "personal document" in its broader meaning. For me a personal document is any document containing a description of a state of mind of a given person.

In accordance with this definition the category of personal documents includes not only autobiographical texts (diaries, memoirs, testimonies, and letters), but also typescripts of testimonies or interviews. The term was introduced into social sciences by Florian Znaniecki, who developed the principle of humanistic coefficient in research. Following this principle "social phenomena should be treated as subjects, whose vital element is the meaning the people who experience these objects give them." After: Jan Szczepański, *Odmiany czasu teraźniejszego* (Warsaw, 1971), 93–113. For more on personal documents in Holocaust research see Jacek Leociak, "Literature of the Personal Document as a Source in Holocaust Research (A Methodoligical Reconaissance)," *Holocaust Studies and Materials* (2008): 31–52.

[3] For instance, Yad Vashem Archive (later: YVA), O33/334, Dziennik Marii Koper [Maria Koper's Diary] (Selection of fragments of the diary: Henryk Grynberg, *Pamiętnik Marii Koper* [Cracow: Znak, 1993]); Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego [Archive of the

though.[4] As for this group of sources, one has to ask the following questions. To what extent do they describe the situation during the occupation? To what extent are they construed under the influence of memories of that period? To what extent are they elements of the post-war narration about the past?[5] The same questions can also be asked with regard to less numerous Polish postwar testimonies about provision of help to Jews in the countryside.[6] If we compare several sources regarding the same case of provision of help, it turns out that its depiction differs depending on the author as well as on the time, circumstances, and purpose of the testimony.

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Jewish Historical Institute] (later: AŻIH), 302/123, Dziennik Brandli Bronki Siekierki [Brandla Bronka Siekierka's Diary]; YVA, O3/3785, Fela Fischbein's Diary; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (later: USHMM), RG-02.054, Acc.1990.329, Dziennik Miny Perlberger [Mina Perlberger's Diary].

[4] The main collections of mostly postwar Jewish testimonies: AŻIH, fonds 301 and 302; AYV, fonds M1, O3, and O33; collections of interviews with survivors: USHMM interviews, RG-50; USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education (later: USC Shoah Foundation Institute) interviews; Centropa's project "Świadek Żydowskiego Stulecia;" Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich (Museum of the History of Polish Jews) interviews; Brama Grodzka Center – NN Theater (*Ośrodek Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN*) interviews.

[5] According to Hayden White, it is the interpretation of the reality (and not the reality or the past) that is the source of historical knowledge. Frank Ankersmit developed White's idea and claimed that a historical narration cannot be regarded as an image of the past as it does not reflect but defines the past. A narration is a system of rules which defines how we are to imagine the past. The past itself has no narrative-like structure. Consequently, a narration is something imposed on the past from the outside. See: Ewa Domańska, *Mikrohistorie. Spotkania w międzyświatach* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2005), 75–76, 88–128; According to Frederic C. Bartlett, "Both an individual and a group never stop creating the past anew, rebuilding it in the interest of the present," after: Frederic C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932); Antoni Sułek, "Postawy Polaków wobec Żydów w świetle badań sondażowych. Próba syntezy," a lecture at the Warsaw University, 15 August 2009, 23; "Particularly momentous events […] (the French Revolution, the October Revolution, WWII) become symbols, and the knowledge about them solidifies in the form of cannons, which are difficult to disturb for they support the construction, to which the general and the political elite (or both of them) attach great importance," after: Jan Tomasz Gross, *Upiorna dekada. Eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców, komunistów i kolaboracji, 1939–1948* (Cracow: Austeria, 2007), 12.

[6] Applications of Poles for financial help in return for provision of help to Jews during the occupation: AŻIH, CKŻP fond, 303; ibidem, Joint fond, 350; testimonies of Poles applying for the Righteous among the Nations medal or those awarded with it: ibidem, Yad Vashem fond, 349; testimonies in the Archive of the Polish Association of the Righteous among the Nations (*Archiwum Polskiego Towarzystwa Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata*); diaries sent in 1948 for the Czytelnik publishing house competition "Opis mojej wsi" (My village) kept in the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (*Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk*, IH PAN); collections of testimonies: USHMM, RG-50; USC Shoah Foundation Institute interviews; interviews of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews; interviews conducted by Brama Grodzka Center – NN Theater.

Court documentation is a separate category of sources for research on provision of help in the countryside. The first group here is the materials of the German special courts (*Sondergerichte*) regarding cases connected with provision of shelter to Jews. Due to the fact that they are being edited, I was unable to use them in this text.[7] Another group is the files of the postwar trials held pursuant to the August decree. They were conducted against, among others, people charged with acting to the detriment of Jews or their wartime helpers.[8]

The subject of provision of help to Jews has a marginal place in the reference literature. It is mentioned in the form of general statements made during discussion on the topic of Polish provision of help to Jews in general[9] or it appears in publications regarding a given geographical region.[10] The issue of provision of help to Jews also appears in the literature regarding the peasant movement and the occupation in the countryside.[11] These studies repeat the thesis promoted for years that help was provided voluntarily and on a mass scale by entire vil-

[7] Notes on the defendants in 67 court cases accompanied with descriptions of the circumstances of the provision of shelter are going to be published within the framework of the INDEX Program for the Remembrance of the Poles Murdered and Repressed by the Nazis for Aiding the Jews.

[8] Alina Skibińska presents a detailed analysis of those documents as a source for Holocaust research in her article "'Dostał 10 lat, ale za co?' Analiza motywacji sprawców zbrodni na Żydach na wsi kieleckiej w latach 1942–1944," in *Zarys krajobrazu, Wieś polska wobec zagłady Żydów 1942–1945*, ed. Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011), 313–444.

[9] Tatiana Berenstein, Adam Rutkowski, "O ratownictwie Żydów przez Polaków w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 35 (1960): 3–46; eidem, *Pomoc Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Polonia, 1963); Szymon Datner, *Las Sprawiedliwych* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968); Wacław Bielawski, Czesław Pilichowski, *Zbrodnie na Polakach dokonane przez hitlerowców za pomoc udzielana Żydom* (Warsaw: GKBZHwP IPN, 1987); Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers Keepers* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957); Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *Kto ratuje jedno życie… Polacy i Żydzi 1939–1945* (London: Orbis, 1968) (new Polish edition published in Warsaw in 2009 by IPN); Mordecai Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1993); Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous. The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003); *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. Andrzej Żbikowski (Warsaw: IPN, 2006).

[10] Elżbieta Rączy, *Pomoc dla ludności żydowskiej na Rzeszowszczyźnie 1939–1945* (Rzeszów: IPN, 2008); Anna Pyżewska, "Pomoc dla ludności żydowskiej w Okręgu Białystok w latach okupacji niemieckiej," in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką*, 941–960.

[11] Jan Nowak, "Wieś w akcji pomocy Żydom w okresie okupacji," *Roczniki Dziejów Ruchu Ludowego* 12 (1970); Kazimierz Przybysz, *Gdy wieś ratowała życie* (Warsaw: Muzeum Historii Ruchu Ludowego, 2001); Kazimierz Przybysz, Andrzej Wojtas, *Bataliony Chłopskie*, vol. 2: *W walce z okupantem* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1985); Janusz Gmitruk, Piotr Matusak, Witold Wojdyło, *Bataliony Chłopskie* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo MON, 1987); Tadeusz Kisielewski, "Wieś i ruch ludowy wobec tragedii Żydów," *Społeczeństwo polskie wobec martyrologii i walki Żydów w II wojnie światowej. Materiały z sesji w IH PAN w dniu 11 III 1993*, ed. Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz (Warsaw: IH PAN, 1996); bibliography after Dariusz Libionka,

lages, and that it stemmed from the generally patriotic stance of peasants during the war.[12] Publications of source materials (both wartime and postwar testimonies), which partly regard the issue of provision of help in the countryside, have an important place in the literature on the subject.[13] A lot of valuable and detailed information can be found in case studies.[14] Devoted to specific people or events, case studies are often based on diverse and highly interesting sources, which allow one to discover the magnitude of details of the described situation and to conduct a detailed analysis. Case studies, however, do not allow one to formulate general conclusions, that is to approach the problem in a global way and present a synthesis.

The existing literature lacks studies showing the issue of provision of help to Jews in the countryside from a broader perspective. The topic of provision of help in the countryside is particularly difficult to approach in a more general way as it seems that each case of provision of help is different and deserves a separate, in-depth analysis. One of the ways to present a broader perspective is to classify the known cases of provision of help in the countryside and to establish a typology of stances, circumstances, and mutual relations between the helpers and helpees.

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"Polish Literature on Organized and Individual Help to the Jews (1945–2008)," *Holocaust. Studies and Materials* (2010): 11–75.

[12] See: Libionka, Polish Literature on Organized and Individual Help to the Jews, 11–75.

[13] *Dzieci oskarżają*, ed. Maria Hochberg-Mariańska and Noe Grüss (Cracow–Łódź–Warsaw: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, 1947); *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, ed. Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna (Cracow: Znak, 1966) (2nd edition in 1969, 3rd edition in 2007); Emanuel Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego. Wrzesień 1939–styczeń 1943*, ed. Artur Eisenbach, trans. Adam Rutkowski (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1983); idem, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*, ed. Artur Einsenbach (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1988); *Dzieci Holocaustu mówią*, ed. Wiktoria Śliwowska (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Dzieci Holocaustu, 1993); Michał Grynberg, *Życie i zagłada Żydów polskich 1939–1945. Relacje świadków* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2003); *Wieś polska 1939–1948. Materiały konkursowe*, ed. Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota, vol. 1–4 (Warsaw: PWN, 1968–1971); *Wspomnienia chłopów z lat 1939–1948*, ed. Wanda Chodorowska, Zdzisław Lubowicz, and Mieczysław Róg-Świostek, vol. 1–4 (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1969–1970).

[14] Mateusz Szpytma, *Sprawiedliwi i ich świat. Markowa w fotografii Józefa Ulmy* (Warsaw–Cracow: IPN, 2007); Jacek Andrzej Młynarczyk, Sebastian Piątkowski, *Cena poświęcenia. Zbrodnie na Polakach za pomoc udzieloną Żydom w rejonie Ciepielowa* (Cracow: Instytut Studiów Strategicznych, 2007); Barbara Engelking, "'…we are entirely at their mercy…' The Everyday Experience of Hiding and Relations with Landlords on the Basis of Fela Fischbein's Diary," *Holocaust Studies and Materials* (2010): 128–155; articles in the collective publication *"Kto w takich czasach Żydów przechowuje?…". Polacy niosący pomoc ludności żydowskiej w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, ed. Aleksandra Namysło (Warsaw: IPN, 2009); Zuzanna Schnepf-Kołacz, "'In the Ciechania Presbytery. The Story of Saving Zofia Trembska. A Case Study," *Holocaust. Studies and Materials* (2010): 363–382.

Typologies of Polish stances toward the Jews doomed to annihilation have been developed by, for instance, Szymon Datner[15] and Antonina Kłoskowska.[16] The latter distinguishes the following stances:

1) *active hostility* of those who participated in persecution and extermination of Jews, without coercion from the occupier;

2) *unfriendly passivity* – a negative attitude toward the victims or even contentment with their fate;

3) *passivity* – involving neither aversion nor compassion toward the persecuted and manifesting itself in lack of interest in or reaction to events not directly in one's interest;

4) *sympathetic passivity* – when Poles indentified to some extent with Jews and had friendly feelings toward them but failed to undertake any concrete action;

5) *active help – provision of shelter to Jews or continuous organization of their rescue*. There were two types of helpers: disinterested helpers and paid helpers.

In this article I focus on the last type from Antonina Kłoskowska's classification. Consequently, I am interested in only one aspect of the occupation-period reality, in one variant of possible responses of Poles to the Holocaust.[17]

A statistical analysis of a given number of cases conducted in accordance with previously defined research categories is a different method, which gives a broad perspective on the analyzed phenomenon and a chance to show its scale. Provision of help and shelter to Jews in the countryside has not been analyzed in this way, that is, taking into consideration the specificity of the topic and using detailed categories. I use the qualitative method to show the scale of certain phenomena and the degree of their co-occurrence. It allows me to approach the issue of provision of help in the countryside comprehensively. I can also verify commonplace opinions on this topic.

At the same time in several selected cases I confront source materials from various collections: Jewish testimonies from the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (*Żydowski Instytut Historyczny*, ŻIH) and from the Yad Vashem Archive; children's autobiographies from the Archive of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum (*Beit Lochamei ha-Getaot*); and interviews conducted for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, USC Shoah Foundation Institute,

[15] Datner, *Las Sprawiedliwych*, 27. The author distinguished 4 models of behavior: 1) following the binding law and denunciation of Jews; 2) failure to help Jews without denunciation; 3) provision of temporary help; 4) provision of long-term help.

[16] Antonina Kłoskowska, "Polacy wobec zagłady Żydów polskich. Próba typologii postaw," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 4 (1988): 111–127.

[17] For more on denunciation and murdering of Jews in the countryside see: Barbara Engelking, "'Po zamordowaniu udaliśmy się do domu.' Wydawanie i mordowanie Żydów na wsi polskiej w latach 1942–1945," in *Zarys krajobrazu*, 259–312, and Skibińska, "'Dostał 10 lat, ale za co?' Analiza."

and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (*Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich*). During the analysis of the said materials I focus on the individual dimension of the history of provision of help. I try to present the significant details and nuances missing from the Righteous' documentation.[18]

## The Stories of the Righteous as a Source for Research on Provision of Help

The material for my statistical research is 5,333 stories of Poles awarded with the Righteous among the Nations medal by 2010. The stories of their provision of help to Jews were told in the form of biographical entries in Yad Vashem's encyclopedia of the Righteous (for the purposes of this article I used its Polish edition).[19] The biographical entries are based on the Righteous' documentation submitted to the Yad Vashem Institute.[20] The number of cases included in the statistics is so large (I conducted a detailed categorization of the total of 479 stories of provision of help) that I limited myself to the biographical entries in *Księga Sprawiedliwych*, which I treated as a source of the most important information, which was a basis for my calculations. In some cases I consulted the more detailed documentation of the Righteous stored in the ŻIH Archive.[21]

The basic unit I use in my statistics is an instance of provision of help. Each instance encompasses an entire history of rescue of one person or a group of people by one Righteous or a group of Righteous as some helpees stayed in many hideouts or localities, hiding in various ways ("on the surface" or "underground"), facing various dangers, etc.

The choice of biographical entries of the Righteous as the material for the statistical analysis allowed me to base the analysis on a selection of documented and verified instances of provision of help. At the same time it means that the scope of research was limited to stories of people acknowledged and honored by Yad Vashem, that is to a segment of the phenomenon of provision of help. These are stories of non-Jews who rescued Jews out of humanitarian motives, disinterestedly, and for a longer time. First and foremost, however, their engagement had

[18] What I mean by Righteous' documentation is all the documents a given person produced to be awarded the Righteous among the Nations medal. These documents are kept in personal files of the people awarded with the title or those who only applied for it. They are available in the YVA (M31) and AŻIH (Yad Vashem, 349).

[19] *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations. Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. Poland*, ed. Israel Gutman, Sara Bender, and Shmuel Krakowski (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), Polish edition is entitled *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holocaustu. Polska*, vol. 1–2, ed. Dariusz Libionka, Robert Kuwałek, and Adam Kopciowski (Cracow: Fundacja Instytut Studiów Strategicznych, 2009).

[20] YVA, M31.

[21] AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349.

to be confirmed by the rescued.[22] Consequently, in most cases we are concerned with effective help that saved the helpee. Nonetheless, the analysis of all cases of the Righteous showed that there were many deviations from those rules in the medal awarding process. According to Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak, the Yad Vashem criteria were treated less and less restrictively during the subsequent decades as "they did not withstand the collision with the occupation-period reality, the passing of time, and the gradual dying out of both the helpers and helpees."[23]

To what extent are those awarded with the Righteous medal representative of all those who helped Jews during the occupation? Can we make general conclusions about provision of help in the countryside on the basis of these calculations? What I mean here is not the quantitative representativeness, as it is impossible to say what percentage of all helpers have been awarded.[24] What I mean is the phenomenological representativeness[25] pertaining to the nature of help and the phenomena connected with it, as well as to the characteristics of helpers and helpees.

The following topics are almost completely missing from the testimonies and statements on the basis of which the medals were awarded: payment for help, farm work as a form of payment for provision of help, the helpers' fear caus-

[22] Israel Gutman, "Polscy Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata," in *Księga Sprawiedliwych*, XLVI, XLVII; Mordecai Paldiel, "To the Righteous among the Nations Who Risked Their Lives to Rescue Jews," *Yad Vashem Studies* 19 (1988): 403–425; for more on the doubts and controversy over the medal awarding procedure see: Marcin Urynowicz, "Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej eksterminowanej przez okupanta niemieckiego w okresie drugiej wojny światowej," in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką*, 254–255; Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 25–26.

[23] Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak, "Wdzięczność i zapomnienie. Polacy i Żydzi wobec Sprawiedliwych 1944–2007," in *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1944–2010*, ed. Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS and ŻIH, 2011), 820. I would like to thank Alina Skibińska for recommending this article and Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak for making its not yet published version available to me.

[24] It is not my intention to estimate the total number of Poles who rescued Jews in the countryside. All such calculations seem highly doubtful and doomed to remain in the sphere of speculation. I agree in this matter with Jacek Leociak, who writes about three "demons" threatening the Polish discourse on provision of help: "1. the demon of rivalry (in terms of martyrology, disinterestedness, nobleness); 2. *the demon of statistics* [my emphasis – Z.S.-K.] (counting those who were helping and those who were killed for it in order to prove the thesis that 'the more, the better'); 3. the demon of trivialization (the large scale of provision of help calls into question its heroism announced to all and sundry)." After: Jacek Leociak, *Ratowanie. Opowieści Polaków i Żydów* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2010), 9.

[25] In this case phenomenological representativeness (also called saturation) would mean that the stories of the Righteous include all of the most important elements of the experience and situation of provision of help to Jews in the countryside. See: Małgorzata Melchior, *Zagłada a tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni "na aryjskich papierach". Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2004), 34.

ing them to terminate the provision of shelter, the difficult and tense relations between the helpees and helpers, including the latter's taking advantage of the former's position. The lack of these situations, which are mentioned in other source materials regarding provision of help, would suggest that the Righteous are not representative for helpers at large. But the key to interpretation of the testimonies for Yad Vashem lies in the reason for their production and not in their content.

The content of the Righteous' documentation is subjected to one aim – obtainment of the medal. Consequently, the testimonies of the Polish helpers and Jewish helpees are adjusted to Yad Vashem requirements. They are laudations in the helpers' honor, with their stances, actions, aspirations, and motives presented in bright colors only. There is no space for any ambivalence of thought or action. But when you read other materials, which were not produced for the needs of the procedure and which are not included in the Righteous' files, you see that the stories of the Righteous have a double bottom, a deeper dimension that distorts the unambiguous black-and-white image.

Let me use the example of the documentation regarding the help provided by the family of Pejzak in the locality of Kulik to Jankiel Kuperblum (after the war Jack Kuper), who survived the occupation as a child in the Lublin region, wandering from one village to another. In his statement submitted to Yad Vashem for the purposes of the medal awarding procedure Kuperblum describes in a totally positive way his hiding at the Pejzaks' and the moment when he had to leave the shelter: "I want to stress that I was treated like a son and brother that whole time, and with kindness, sympathy, and love. […] Helena Pejzak and Gienia Gogułka risked their lives for many months […]. I cannot praise their behavior enough and I will never forget their nobleness and courage. […] pursuant to the new law, Jews employed by gentiles had to be handed over to the authorities. Mrs. Helena Pejzak and her daughter Genia […] refused to hand me over and continued to shelter me as a member of their family. […] after the pressure exerted by their neighbor the Pejzaks had no other option but to ask me to leave."[26]

In his testimony written immediately after the war, when he was still a child, that very same Jankiel Kuperblum described the circumstances of his leaving the Pejzaks' farm in a totally different way. "The Germans issued a ban on sheltering Jews. I had to leave almost naked and hungry. I spent the whole winter wandering from peasant to peasant and that is how I survived that winter."[27]

The recollection of his leaving of the hideout also appears in Jack Kuper's 1960s autobiography (the Polish translation was published in 1995): "Mrs. Pejzak said,

[26] AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349/1913, Oświadczenie notarialne Jacka Kupera [Notarial statement of Jack Kuper], 7 June 1988, pp. 1–2.

[27] Archive of the Ghetto Fighters' Kibbutz, 76-4223, Relacja Jankiela Kuperbluma [Jankiel Kuperblum's Testimony].

> You need to get going, boys. I would sooner die than let you die. But I cannot keep you here either. […] I need to think about my own family and my neighbors. Your presence endangers the whole village. […] Nobody and nothing can help you. You are doomed. You'd better go to Chełm. There is a ghetto so you'll be among your own. […] Sacrifice yourself for our sake.[28]

In the Righteous' documentation there is a testimony of Eugenia Gogułka, née Pejzak, where she states that Jankiel himself had decided to leave their home due to the danger and to go to a different village where he was anonymous.[29] There are also other details missing from the materials that served as a basis for the awarding of the medal: Jankiel's work on the farm and the fact that his mother handed over some modest domestic appliances in return for the Pejzaks' provision of shelter to her child. The person of Eugenia's brother (and Helena's son) is missing, too. According to Jack Kuper's testimony the brother was against sheltering a Jewish boy and he threatened his own mother to denounce her to the Gestapo.

The revealed information does not question the validity of the awarding of the Righteous medal to Helena and Eugenia Pejzak, who undoubtedly greatly contributed to Jankiel Kuperblum's survival. Nonetheless, it shows that the histories of the Righteous, as well as of other instances of provision of help, involve ambivalence of the stances of both helpers and helpees. This is why the histories of the Righteous, disregarding their descriptions addressed to Yad Vashem, seem perfectly representative in phenomenological terms for helpers at large.

But the Righteous' documentation, and consequently their biographical entries in the Yad Vashem encyclopedia, cannot serve as a basis for a qualitative analysis because they show a distorted image of reality. The most appropriate way to include the Righteous' documentation in research is to conduct a quantitative analysis based on clear-cut categories referring to the data unlikely to have been distorted or omitted. Thus obtained statistics offer a concrete framework for a qualitative description of provision of help.

## Relations between the Helpers and Helpees

The ambivalent character of the relations between the helpers and helpees is reflected in the discrepancies between the testimonies of the rescued written for the medal awarding process and those given in other circumstances. In the case of the Yad Vashem materials we often encounter the following model: the detailed description of provision of disinterested help comes from the helper, while his ward only submits a short official statement that he owes his life to that person. "[D]uring my wandering I arrived in the Trzebień village to the Bratos family.

[28] Jack Kuper, *Child of the Holocaust* (New York: Berkley Books, 1993), 76–77.

[29] AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349/1913, Relacja Eugenii Gogułki z domu Pejzak [Testimony of Eugenia Gogułka, née Pejzak], 7 April 1993, p. 7.

They took me in and sheltered me for almost two years, that is from approximately October 1942 until August 1944, even though their lives were in grave danger. I owe my life to that family"[30] testified Hana Distel (Hana Grynberg during the occupation).

Her guardian Józefa Bratos recalled:

> [A]n emaciated girl […] walked to my farm. She was extremely exhausted, physically and spiritually. After she ate something, and washed and warmed herself, she confessed that her name was Hana Grynberg […] and that she was an escapee from the Jewish ghetto in Kozienice. […] we decided that the girl would stay at our place and that we would bring her up with our daughter. We made that decision totally disinterestedly, out of exclusively humanitarian motives.[31]

A more detailed testimony of Hana Grynberg given in 1947 can be found in the ŻIH Archive. The above image of the provision of help by the Bratos differs greatly from the version appearing in the Righteous' documentation:

> [Józefa Bratos s]ensed that I was a Jewess and she told me that if I confessed I would stay at her place anyway, that she would hide me. I confessed. From then on her attitude toward me changed completely. She treated me very badly. She grudged me food and when I was sick she did not give me food. She was mercilessly taking advantage of me. […] Once when I was grazing cows they walked into the beetroots. She beat me up severely and called me a lousy Jew.[32]

Hana Grynberg's testimony is not the only one in which the rescued talks about being harmed and unjustly treated by the future Righteous.

Why were the rescued Jews who had a negative opinion about their guardians willing to support them in their efforts to obtain the Yad Vashem medal and to testify about their disinterested help? This state of affairs could be partly explained through the postwar attitude of the survivors themselves and their attitude toward the fact that they had survived thanks to others, to a lesser or greater extent.

Selma Wijnberg (after the war Engel) and Chaim Engel escaped from the death camp in Sobibór during the uprising in October 1943. After numerous failures to find permanent shelter Adam and Stefania Nowak agreed to shelter them in the attic of their barn. In their interview given for the Holocaust Museum, the rescued describe not only the difficult circumstances of living in the shelter but

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[30] AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349/1722, Oświadczenie Hany Distel dla ŻIH [Hana Distel's statement for the ŻIH], Rehovot, 4 November 1991, p. 1.

[31] Ibidem, Oświadczenie Józefy Bratos i jej córki Marianny Lucyny Żak z d. Bratos [Statement of Józefa Bratos and her daughter Marianna Lucyna Żak, née Bratos], Trzebień, 16 December 1991, p. 6.

[32] AŻIH, 301/2296, Relacja Hany Grynberg [Hana Grynberg's Testimony].

also the situations showing their tense relations with the helpers and their mutual lack of trust. Once every two or three months the landlords allowed Selma and Chaim to descend from the shelter to wash themselves. The Nowaks then went to the attic in search of more valuables even though at the beginning the helpees had given them the valuables they had stolen from the camp.[33] During one of such revisions Stefania Nowak began to suspect that Selma was pregnant and consequently demanded that the Jews leave the shelter. Luckily, it was possible to convince her that the girl's appearance was a result of exhaustion and malnutrition.[34] Despite those unpleasant and humiliating experiences Selma and Chaim regard that provision of shelter as a heroic act. The rescued seem to separate their everyday relations and treatment from the undeniable fact that the landlords did save their lives. "[W]e were very happy that we found people who sheltered us. It does not matter in what conditions. This is the way we have always looked on that, because they did save our lives," Chaim Engel said in an interview.[35]

Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak aptly quoted a fragment of Marek Szapiro's diary written in hiding, in which the author distinguished two tones, a low one and a lofty one, to describe his relations with the landlords. He uses the lofty tone with regards to his landlord's sacrifice as they sheltered the Jews despite the mortal danger and many hardships. "This is the basic tone and everything else will be incommensurate," Szapiro noted. But there is also the low tone, which he uses to talk about the prosaic side of being in hiding and their mutual, everyday relations.

> [T]hey have grown used to our slavish situation all too well. Consequently, our human needs and our ambition are often in jeopardy. […] I cannot write much about the financial aspect. I will in say in brief that there is no exploitation or bribery, unlike elsewhere. On the other hand, the financial side of our requital is "officially" underestimated. Thirdly, whenever we are in financial trouble […] the landlords are unwilling to help us.[36]

These two tones are two dimensions of help, often in discrepancy. It is possible that from the postwar perspective, particularly with the passing of time, the low tone faded away more and more. What was left and what gained more and more significance was the lofty one – the fact that the helpers rescued the Jews regardless of in what circumstances and how.

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[33] USHMM, RG-50.042*0009, tape 1, Wywiad z Chaimem Englem [Interview with Chaim Engel], 12 February 1992.

[34] Ibidem, RG-50.549.02*0014, tape, side A, Wywiad z Selmą i Chaimem Englami [Interview with Selma and Chaim Engel], 30 March 1998.

[35] Ibidem, RG-50.030*0066, tape 1, Wywiad z Chaimem Englem [Interview with Chaim Engel], July 16, 1990.

[36] Marek Szapiro, *Nim słońce wzejdzie… Dziennik pisany w ukryciu 1943–1944*, ed. Feliks Tych (Warsaw: ŻIH, 2007), 641, after: Koźmińska-Frejlak, *Wdzięczność i zapomnienie*, 25.

## Map of Help

I made statistical calculations on the instances of provision of help in the countryside by future Righteous, which allowed me to create a map of that help. I carried out my research on the territory of the General Government[37] (without the Galicia District) as an area with similar conditions.

The sample of 479 cases is too small, especially when it comes to research on characteristic features of a given region, to allow me to define clear tendencies and to arrive at final conclusions regarding the incidence of help in a given district and the factors that influenced it. It should be said that the statistical differences between the districts are so small (the maximum difference is 87 cases for the Kraków and Radom districts) that they are not clear indicators of the character of the whole region. This is why I can only venture to make assumptions and hypotheses regarding the factors which might have affected the provision of help to Jews in a given area.

**Table 1.** Instances of provision of help to Jews in the countryside in a given administrative unit under German occupation.

| Area | Number of cases | Percentage of all cases |
|---|---|---|
| Kraków District | 167 | 34.9 |
| Lublin District | 139 | 29.0 |
| Warsaw District | 93 | 19.4 |
| Radom District | 80 | 16.7 |
| Total | 479 | 100.0 |

It must be stressed at the beginning that the above data illustrate not so much the incidence of help in the countryside in a given district but rather where the largest number of Jews was able to survive (partly thanks to that help). For we are concerned with help provided by people awarded by Yad Vashem, which means that it was mostly effective help that contributed to the Jews' survival.

One of the first factors to consider is what percentage of the prewar population of a given area was Jewish. If we take into consideration the fact that the districts established by the occupier had different borders than the prewar voivodships,[38] then it turns out that the areas with a large prewar percentage

[37] I use the administrative structure from the period of the German occupation throughout the text.

[38] This remark pertains mostly to the Kraków District, which encompassed almost the entire prewar Kraków Voivodship (except for the following counties: Chrzanów, Oświęcim, Biała, Żywiec, Wadowice, and a part of the Maków county) and the western part of the Lwów Voivodship (counties: Tarnobrzeg, Kolbuszowa, Rzeszów, Łańcut, Przeworsk, Dobromil,

of Jews only partly correspond with the geographical incidence of instances of provision of help.

The Kraków District, where statistically Jews were rescued the most often, was an area with a moderate percentage of Jews before the war (7.5% of its total population).[39] At the same time the Lublin region, which holds the second place after the Kraków District in statistics, had the largest percentage of Jews (12%)[40] from all voivodships of the Second Republic of Poland. Moreover, the Jewish inhabitants of the Lublin region lived in the countryside more often than elsewhere.[41] It might have been important in the context of provision of help during the occupation because, as we will see in further statistics, the rescued Jews were mostly inhabitants of nearby small towns and villages. The Kielce District was an area with only a slightly lower prewar percentage of Jews (10.8%), yet the number of instances of provision of help was the lowest there. Consequently, the prewar percentage of Jews in a given area is not a key to interpretation of the map of help, but in the case of the Lublin region it might be of certain importance.

One of the prewar factors is the level of integration of Poles and Jews in the countryside and their mutual relations. The Warsaw, Lublin, and Radom districts had been under Russian rule, while the Kraków District was the only district that had been under Austrian partition. The Austrian authorities wanted to integrate and unify the population, including peasants and Jews, within one Habsburg empire. Absolute and full equality of rights of all inhabitants of the Austrian Empire was introduced in 1876.[42] Thus Jews were incorporated into the citizens' community. By contrast, the Jews in the Russian partition did not receive full rights until the end of its existence.[43]

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Lesko, Sanok, Krosno, Brzozów, Strzyżów, and a part of the Nisko, Jarosław, and Przemyśl counties) as well as to the pre-war Warsaw Voivodship (counties: Garwolin, Grójec, Mińsk Mazowiecki, Ostrów Mazowiecka, Sochaczew, Sokołów, Warszawa), northern borders of the Lublin Voivodship (the Siedlce county and a part of the Łuków county), and the Łowicz and Skierniewice counties from the Łódź Voivodship.

[39] The average for the Kraków District, which encompassed the Kraków Voivodship and a part of the Lwów Voivodship, is based on the map entitled "Odsetek ludności żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej w 1924 r. (według powiatów)," in *Atlas historii Żydów polskich*, ed. Witold Sienkiewicz (Warsaw: Demart, 2010), 256; precise data according to the 1921 census: 6% for the Kraków Voivodship and 9.4% for the Lwów Voivodship.

[40] Data from the 1931 census after: Jerzy Tomaszewski, "Niepodległa Rzeczpospolita," in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), 161.

[41] According to the 1931 census, the percentage of Jews in the rural population of the Lublin Voivodship was the highest (6.4%) in comparison with other Polish territories, after: ibidem, 162.

[42] Artur Eisenbach, *Emancypacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich 1785–1870 na tle europejskim* (Warsaw: PIW, 1988), 541.

[43] Their substitute was the June edict of 1862, pursuant to which they could hold managerial positions in craftsman corporations, be elected trade court judges and counselors of the Bank of Poland, and run pharmacies, see: ibidem, 507.

It seems that in other fields too the conditions conducive to Jews' integration with the rest of the population were more often found in the Austrian partition than in the Russian one. Military service was one of such spheres. Jews were not called up in Congress Poland, while in Galicia their draft began as early as in 1788.[44] Another sphere of integration was the school system, particularly the public one, where children of various ethnic origins and social backgrounds could have contact with one another.

Thanks to the equality of rights the Galician Jews could purchase land. According to the 1921 census, the biggest number of Jewish farms was in the former Austrian partition.[45] The Jews not only continued the model of provincial life traditionally ascribed to them (occupations such as traders, lessors, craftsmen), but they also began to play a new role of grange owners or small farmers. The sedentary lifestyle passed from generation to generation, contacts with neighbors, and cultivation of land made them similar to peasants.[46] Perhaps that increased cultural closeness and the familiarity with the local conditions and inhabitants proved helpful during their wartime search for rescue in the countryside.

As for the degree of integration of Poles and Jews, I should also mention the Polish-Jewish antagonisms during the interwar period. During the last years before the outbreak of war the largest number of pogroms of Jews took place in the eastern and southern part of the future Warsaw District and in the northern part of the future Radom District.[47] Most pogroms were motivated by economic considerations.[48] Economic antagonisms and the occupational competition between Poles and Jews were particularly acute in the areas where pogroms took place.[49] Even though it was mostly the case in small towns, the general aversion to Jews and the conviction that they were exploiting the Polish population economically might have radiated to the neighboring villages. The pogroms were clearly the most frequent in the Warsaw District and in the Radom District (in comparison with the Kraków and Lublin districts), that is where the number of instances of provision of help during the occupation was the lowest.

Another important group of factors was the course of the occupation and of the extermination of Jews in the four districts that are the object of my re-

[44] Ibidem, 270.

[45] Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, Szymon Rudnicki, Janusz Żarnowski, *Społeczeństwo polskie w XX wieku* (Warsaw: IH PAN, 2003), 221.

[46] Tomaszewski, "Niepodległa Rzeczpospolita," 167.

[47] According to the map entitled "Pogromy i większe wystąpienia antyżydowskie w latach 1935–1938," in *Atlas historii Żydów*, 287.

[48] The 1919–1920 pogroms in the eastern Polish territories, for instance in the Lublin region, were motivated by other considerations as Jews were accused of collaboration with the Red Army during the Polish Soviet War. See: Jolanta Żyndul, "II Rzeczpospolita," in *Atlas historii Żydów*, 281, 286, 288.

[49] The pogroms also showed the power of the anti-Semitic propaganda and the local population's susceptibility – conditioned by various factors – to that propaganda.

search. The Jews who were swiftly locked in the ghettos and soon afterwards deported to larger ghettoes far away from the places where they grew up had a smaller chance of finding rescue and establishing contacts with their prewar friends, who could help them. The deported could not take all their possessions and they were deprived of a possibility to earn money. That lack of financial means radically decreased their chance of survival.[50] Besides, many provincial ghettoes were open and there were fewer problems with food provision than in larger towns.[51]

In the Kraków District ghettoes were established relatively late. In Kraków – the capital of the General Government – there was to be no ghetto at all. Consequently, 40,000 Jews were deported from Kraków in the summer of 1940 to the locality of their choice.[52] Perhaps their presence in the provinces during the initial period of the war, when the German terror was still not so severe, allowed them to establish contacts with the locals, which they could use later when they were looking for rescue when faced with immediate extermination. In the end, the ghetto in Kraków was established in March 1941, while the ghettoes in other county towns of the district (Bochnia, Tarnów) were established as late as in the spring of 1942.[53] The ghettoes in the Lublin District were closed late, too. For instance, the ghetto in Lublin was closed in March 1941. Moreover, many of the local ghettoes remained open until early 1942. The situation was entirely different in the Warsaw District, where ghettos began to be established in early 1940. Many of the ghettoes were deported to the Warsaw ghetto very soon, that is during January–March 1941. The total number of deportees was approximately 50,000.[54]

When we wonder about what might have affected the provision of help to Jews in the countryside and its effectiveness, we cannot forget about the natural conditions of a given region and the manner in which the countryside was developed. The extensive forests and swamps typical for the eastern areas (including the Lublin region) as well as the hilly or even mountainous lay of the land of the Kraków District were conducive to hiding and gave a better guarantee that the area was secluded. The Germans rarely or never came to such villages. The farms were relatively sparse, and people had little contact with their neighbors.

Such natural conditions (especially the forests and swamps) were conducive to the activity of partisan forces, be they Jewish, Polish, or Soviet. The Jewish

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[50] Grzegorz Kołacz, *Czasami trudno się bronić. Uwarunkowania postaw Żydów podczas okupacji hitlerowskiej w Polsce* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2008), 96–97.

[51] Teresa Prekerowa, "Wojna i okupacja," in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów*, 283–284, 290.

[52] Prekerowa, "Wojna i okupacja," 279–280; Andrzej Żbikowski, "Zagłada polskich Żydów w latach II wojny światowej," in *Atlas historii Żydów*, 341.

[53] Żbikowski, "Zagłada polskich Żydów," 345.

[54] According to the map entitled "Deportacje Żydów do Warszawy i getta warszawskiego," in *Atlas historii Żydów*, 338; Żbikowski, "Zagłada polskich Żydów," 342– 343, 360.

detachments were active mostly in the Lublin and Radom districts.[55] We can assume that in the areas where the Jewish partisan units were the strongest more Jews were hiding on their own in the forests (without help from the peasants) as members of organized groups or under their protection. It has to be stressed that their situation in the Lublin District was different than in the Radom District.

In the east (including the Lublin region) Jews were supported by the Soviet partisans, who were mostly escapees from POW camps.[56] Consequently, the Jews had better conditions for hiding in forests. The biggest Jewish family camp in the General Government was established in the Lublin region, in the Parczew Forests, and it was protected by Jechiel Grynszpan's detachment.[57] It could be that the generally good relations between Jews and the Soviet detachments had a positive influence on the locals, who were less afraid of persecutions for provision of help from the hands of Polish partisans.

The situation in the Radom District was much less favorable to Jews, as the Polish partisan units (the Home Army [*Armia Krajowa*, AK], Peasants' Battalions [*Bataliony Chłopskie*, BCh], and National Armed Forces [*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*, NSZ]) were the strongest there. The AK reports from that area frequently mention liquidation of Jewish groups in the name of fighting banditry and communism.[58] The Jews who obtained food from the local population in various ways (including theft and extortion by force) were a form of competition for the partisans. The greater the number of Jewish partisans in a given area, the more probable it was that there were "Jewish bands" operating in the area and often attacking the local peasants due to lack of food and money. This was partly the reason why the Jews in hiding were treated with hostility not only by the Polish underground, but also by the locals, who denounced them to the Germans as an act of revenge.[59]

Certain groups connected with Polish partisan units or pretending to be Polish partisan units posed another danger to Jews. They robbed and murdered both Jewish partisans and Jews in hiding unconnected with the underground.[60]

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[55] Prekerowa, "Wojna i okupacja," 368.

[56] Żbikowski, "Zagłada polskich Żydów," 385–386.

[57] Prekerowa, *Zarys dziejów Żydów w Polsce w latach 1939–1945* (Warsaw: WUW, 1992), 189.

[58] The struggle against the "bands" was a broader phenomenon and it did not affect only Jews and it did not have an anti-Semitic character. See: Dariusz Libionka, "ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów polskich," in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką*, 116–117, 120; Marcin Zaremba, "Na dzikim wschodzie," *Polityka* 50 (2010): 60–62; Dariusz Libionka analyzes examples of AK reports from the Radom District in his article "Zagłada na wsi w optyce polskiej konspiracji (1942–1944)," in *Zarys krajobrazu*, 57–138.

[59] Prekerowa, *Zarys dziejów Żydów*, 181–182.

[60] Alina Skibińska and Jakub Petelewicz write that many of the people accused of murder of Jews in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains region were members of the NSZ, BCh, or AK. But it

In that context the purported struggle against banditry was a frequent excuse used by Polish partisans to simply murder and rob the Jews.[61] Groups of partisans often intruded upon the peasants who were helping Jews and gave them an ultimatum: either they handed over the Jews and their property or they would be killed. These attacks might have been an additional reason why peasants in the Radom District were afraid to support Jews. The Germans used more repressions against civilians in the areas with strong partisan units. Frequent revisions on farms and manhunts for partisans conducted by the occupier did not offer good conditions for provision of help to Jews.

It could be that the number of the Righteous in the Radom District was the smallest because there were forced labor camps in that area (in Częstochowa, Radom, Skarżysko-Kamienna, Starachowice). Those camps, unlike their counterparts in the Lublin region (Trawniki, Poniatowa), existed almost until the end of the occupation.[62] Many of their prisoners were Jews from the Radom District and that reduced the number of Jews looking for rescue on the "Aryan" side.

Another possibly important factor was the passing of the frontline in 1944 and 1945. In the entire Lublin District as well as in the eastern part of the Kraków and Warsaw districts the German occupation ended in 1944. But the Red Army appeared in the entire Radom District as late as in January 1945. The second half of 1944 was especially difficult for the civilian population of those territories as the occupier was fighting against the partisan units, and that intensified the danger also to the Jews hiding in the countryside.

Summing up, the conditions which might have affected provision of help and the survival rate of Jews in a given area are very complex, and they appear in various constellations and with varied intensity depending on the region. A question remains: Were the helper's personality and psyche the most significant factors? Was it that those who decided to provide help were simply the ones psychically ready for it, no matter where they lived and whether it was a good place for provision of shelter?

If we analyze the provision of help at the level of counties and municipalities, it turns out that there are no areas with an unusual accumulation of instances of provision of help to Jews. The only clear tendency which could be observed

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remains unknown whether they murdered Jews on behalf of and by order of those organizations. They might have acted on their own initiative, which was all the easier as they had guns. See: eidem, "Udział Polaków w zbrodniach na Żydach na prowincji regionu świętokrzyskiego," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 1 (2005): 128. For more on the instances of murders committed on Jews by the Polish partisan units in the Radom District see: Prekerowa, *Zarys dziejów Żydów*, 183–184; Alina Skibińska, Dariusz Libionka, "'I swear to fight for a free and mighty Poland, carry out the orders of my superiors, so help me God.' Jews in the Home Army. An Episode from Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski," *Holocaust. Studies and Materials* (2008): 235–269.

[61] Alina Skibińska offers a detailed discussion on this topic in "'Dostał 10 lat, ale za co?' Analiza."

[62] Żbikowski, "Zagłada polskich Żydów," 384.

was that there were more instances of provision of help in the vicinity of cities and towns with a large prewar Jewish population. It seems that many of those Jews looked for shelter in the countryside near their place of residence. In some municipalities or on the border between some municipalities there was a certain concentration of acts of rescue,[63] but the obtained data do not allow us to pinpoint an area where provision of help to Jews was particularly frequent. The situation looks similar with regard to specific villages where the number of instances of provision of help was larger (maximum 3 instances in one locality)[64] but not large enough to allow us to talk about a help network.

## The Righteous and Their Milieu

As far as I know, of the total of 5,333 Righteous awarded by 2000 there were 2,155 Righteous who provided help in the countryside in the entire prewar Polish territory (40.4% of helpers at large).[65] If we treat the Righteous as a sample of helpers (considering all reservations regarding the character of help, which I discussed in the first part of this article) it turns out that the provision of help in the countryside constituted a significant contribution to the entire phenomenon of rescuing Jews. We should take two factors into consideration to be able to correctly interpret this outcome. The first factor is the distribution of the entire population of prewar Poland – 72.6% of its population lived in the countryside and only 27.4% in towns.[66] According to the 1931 census, only 23.5% of Polish Jews lived in the countryside, constituting only 3.2% of the total rural population of Poland.

The other factor is the distinction between the number of the Righteous and the number of instances of provision of help. It is of particular significance in the countryside as Yad Vashem often awarded entire families engaged in a single rescue effort. According to my research, in the Warsaw, Kraków, Lublin, and Radom districts 1,264 people participated in 479 acts of help in the countryside, and that gives an average of 2.6 Righteous per instance of help.

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[63] For instance, in the Kraków District municipalities of Jodłowa, Brzostek, Szerzyny (Jasło county) – 6 cases; in the Lublin District: Zemborzyce, Piotrowice, Jastków (Lublin county) – 10 cases; Siedliszcze, Pawłów, Rakołupy, Wojsławice (Chełm county) – 10 cases; Kurów, Końskowola, Wąwolnica, Wierzchoniów (Puławy county) – 7 cases; Wysokie, Żółkiewka (Krasnystaw county) – 6 cases; in the Warsaw District: Jabłonna, Sterdyń, Sabnie (Sokołów Podlaski county) – 6 cases; Radzymin, Klembów, Tłuszcz (Warsaw county) – 4 cases; Górzno, Wilga, Łaskarzew, Podłęż (Garwolin county) – 5 cases.

[64] Three cases of provision of help to Jews in each of the following villages: Markowa (Jarosław county), Borzęcin (Tarnów county), Lubcza (Jasło county), Ostrówek (Sokołów Podlaski county).

[65] Teresa Prekerowa gives a similar figure – 45%, eadem, "Who Helped Jews during the Holocaust in Poland?," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 76 (1997): 159.

[66] Andrzej Żbikowski, *Żydzi* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1997), 186–187.

In the analyzed cases there were 1,571 Jewish helpees, which means that on average 10 Righteous were helping 12 Jews. These calculations may seem absurd but they are important because they question the theories of some researchers and journalists, who claim that it took many Poles to rescue one Jew (some even claimed that it took as many as ten Poles to save one Jew). In fact, it was the other way round – there were much fewer helpers than helpees, as one Pole might have had many wards.[67] The statistics show that at least in the countryside the proportion of helpers to helpees was rather balanced.

The collected data confirm that as far as the occupational structure is concerned the Righteous in rural areas were average inhabitants of the countryside. In over 70% of the examined cases the helpers were farmers (or members of farmer families) or their occupation was connected with the countryside (farmhands, herdsmen, fishermen). It should be stressed that in the general statistics regarding provision of help in urban areas and in the countryside the peasants as a social stratum or an occupational group were the most numerous group among all helpers.[68] The figures correspond with the data regarding the social structure of the Second Republic of Poland: peasants or farmers, as these two categories overlapped to a large extent,[69] were the most numerous inhabitants of the countryside, constituting on average 70% of the population.[70] The peasants were also the most numerous stratum in prewar Poland as they constituted slightly more than a half of its population.[71]

The contribution of the local authorities in the provision of help to Jews (9% of all Righteous) might seem small. Percentagewise, however, their participation is several times larger than the percentage of the rural population they constituted. The number of civil servants, clergymen, school employees, and healthcare system employees is estimated at approximately 300,000 people in 1931[72]

[67] Urynowicz, "Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków," 249; Gutman, "Polscy Sprawiedliwi," XLVI–XLVII.

[68] According to Teresa Prekerowa's research on the social background of the helpers, peasants constituted 50% of the group, the intelligentsia – 32%, workers – 13%, and the lower middle class – 6%, after: eadem, "Who Helped Jews," 161–162. According to Yad Vashem research, the two most common occupations of the helpers were: peasant and forester. See Gutman, "Polscy Sprawiedliwi," XXXIX.

[69] All peasants lived in the countryside. They supported themselves through farming. A small percentage of peasants had other positions or occupations taken into account in my statistics (for example, municipalities clerks, foresters). Consequently, it could be said that the category of peasants as a social stratum most of the time corresponds with the occupational category of farmers. The peasant population of the Second Republic of Poland consisted of: semi-proletariat (10.3% of all peasants), smallholders (42%), medium-sized holders (36.8%), hicks (10.9%), after: Janusz Żarnowski, *Społeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939* (Warsaw: PWN, 1973), table 28.

[70] Mędrzecki, Rudnicki, Żarnowski, *Społeczeństwo polskie w XX wieku*, 125.

[71] Ibidem.

[72] Ibidem,126.

(approximately 1.6% of all inhabitants of the countryside). The question is whether the number of the local authorities engaged in the provision of help in the countryside should not have been larger, considering that they had broader contacts and more possibilities to act and, first and foremost, to exert pressure on other inhabitants of the countryside.

**Table 2.** Social-occupational structure of the Righteous in the countryside in the Kraków, Lublin, Warsaw, and Radom districts.

| **Category: occupation** | **Number of cases**[a] | | **Percentage of all cases** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Agricultural occupations:<br>– farmers;<br>– farmhands, herdsmen, fishermen | 324<br>24 | | 67.6<br>5.0 |
| Intelligentsia, rural authorities<br>– teachers;<br>– foresters;<br>– physicians;<br>– village chairs, municipality heads, village council employees;<br>– other | 17<br>6<br>2<br>6<br>12 | Total:<br>43.0 | Total:<br>9.0 |
| Land estate, estate manor;<br>– land owners;<br>– estate administrators | 11<br>1 | Total:<br>12.0 | Total:<br>2.5 |
| Non-rural occupations:<br>– specialists (chemist, builder, clerk, military man);<br>– physical labor (miner, craftsman, trader, maid) | 8<br>12 | | 1.7<br>2.5 |
| Priests[b] | 4 | | 0.8 |
| No information | 52 | | 10.9 |

[a] One instance of provision of help might involve more than one category.
[b] The statistics do not include the awarded clergymen, who provided help in religious orders.

It was similar in the case of the landed gentry, which played a small role in the provision of help (12 instances)[73] even though the manor had more potential than an ordinary farm to shelter, employ, and feed the persecuted Jews. It

[73] According to Yad Vashem research on the Righteous in towns and in the countryside, there were 23 instances of landowners' provision of help, see Gutman, "Polscy Sprawiedliwi," XXXIX.

should be stressed that before the war the landed gentry were scarce in the countryside.[74]

Rural priests participated in only 4 analyzed instances of provision of help. They organized shelters among churchgoers, provided fake birth certificates, and, less often, sheltered Jews in the rectory. Aside from their direct participation in the help efforts they played a positive role in several cases by encouraging their parishioners to help Jews. There were also instances of a negative influence of priests. A farmer Jan Mirek, who was sheltering Chana and Icchak Windsztrauch at his place, decided to move their shelter to a forest after the Sunday sermon, in which the local priest warned his parishioners against even thinking about hiding Jews.[75]

The sporadic involvement of the clergy in the analyzed histories of the Righteous indicates that the Church was generally absent from the help efforts in the countryside.[76] This conclusion seems to be confirmed in the sources produced during the war, both Jewish and Polish. Emanuel Ringelblum wrote that "the Polish clergy has remained almost entirely indifferent to the unprecedented tragedy of the extermination of the whole Jewish nation."[77] The field reports of the Home Army frequently mentioned priests' passivity and indifference as well as the fact that they had little authority among followers. "The stance of the clergy. It remains in the background, failing to engage in any matters forbidden by the occupation authorities. It also likes to excuse itself by invoking suitable orders from the bishop. Indifferent loyalty – this is how their stance can be called."[78]

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[74] It is difficult to provide unambiguous estimates regarding the number of landowners in the Second Republic of Poland. Both of the prewar censuses conducted in 1921 and 1931 used different census units. According to the 1931 census, the number of large landowners amounted to 57,328. After the war researchers estimated that number at 60,000–178,000 (after: Mędrzecki, Rudnicki, Żarnowski, *Społeczeństwo polskie w XX wieku*, 220–221). We cannot assume that all of those landowners lived in the countryside. If we took the lowest estimate (57,328), it would mean that landowners constituted, highly approximately, 0.3% of the total population of the countryside in 1931.

[75] *Księga Sprawiedliwych*, vol. 1, 470.

[76] Teresa Prekerowa arrived at a similar conclusion while writing about the participation of the Church in the provision of help in both urban and rural areas. See Prekerowa, "Who Helped Jews," 165.

[77] Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, 147.

[78] Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archive of Modern Records] (later: AAN), AK, 203/X/69, Sprawozdanie informacyjne za grudzień 1943 r. (pow. Garwolin) [News report for the month of December 1943 (Garwolin county)], p. 41; other mentions: ibidem, 203/X/68, p. 30; 203/X/66, pp. 13, 71, 78; Dariusz Libionka writes that due to the lack of access to Church documents it is difficult to arrive at unambiguous conclusions regarding the Polish Church hierarchs' stance toward provision of help to Jews. But it seems that there was no general instruction to provide help to Jews. The instances of provision of help by clergymen should be regarded rather as their individual initiative and action. See: Dariusz Libionka, "Polish Church Hierarchy and the Holocaust – an Essay from a Critical Perspective," *Holocaust. Studies and Materials* (2010): 11–75.

Perhaps due to their withdrawal from village life priests might have indeed had little influence on parishioners.

In only 11.1% of the analyzed cases did the Righteous state that their faith and religious beliefs were among the motives of their provision of help to Jews.[79] These data do not support the hypothesis that the countryside dwellers' strong religiosity might have had a significant influence on their decision to provide help.[80] What is more, rural religiosity might have even made them more prone to divide those around them into "their own" and "others" (*orbis interior* and *orbis exterior*).[81] The provision of shelter to Jews was most often regarded a danger to the rural community.

To sum up, most helpers in the countryside were ordinary countryside dwellers – uneducated farmers without power or influence on others. They did not belong to the local elites, either. They were alone in their effort. They enjoyed no support on the part of the local intelligentsia, authorities, Church, or underground organizations. They provided help in isolation from their surroundings. As far as provision of help is concerned, there was no network of contacts, unlike in big cities, particularly in Warsaw.[82] The help was organized only at the level of families or, sometimes, several farms. What is more, provision of help to Jews was generally neither supported nor accepted by other countryside dwellers. Forlorn, the Righteous often had to face hostility from their neighbors.

## Dangers

The category of immediate dangers which the helpers had to deal with says a lot about the conditions in which they lived. By "immediate danger" I mean danger which really befell or could befall the Righteous, for instance, threats made by their neighbors, a German search of their home, etc. In this case I disregard the permanent and general danger on the part of the occupier. In 45.5% of the analyzed cases the Righteous mentioned no immediate dangers. It is difficult to evaluate this figure and to draw conclusions on its basis as in many analyzed cases detailed information about imminent danger might have been omitted. Consequently, only the data regarding specified dangers can be analyzed.

[79] Teresa Prekerowa too did not regard religiosity as a significant motive for provision of help in towns and in the provinces, see eadem, "Who Helped Jews," 165. In Marcin Urynowicz's research religious motives were the basis of only 4% of the analyzed cases from towns and the provinces, see idem, "Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków," 247.

[80] On the other hand, we should bear in mind the fact that many of the Righteous' testimonies were given prior to 1989, when declarations of deep religiosity were still unwelcome.

[81] See: Wojciech Józef Burszta, "Struktury trwania. Kultura chłopska i jej determinanty," in *Zarys krajobrazu*, 31–56.

[82] Paulsson, *Secret City*, 332.

**Table 3.** Immediate dangers mentioned by the Righteous in the countryside in the Kraków, Lublin, Warsaw, and Radom districts.

| Category: Dangers | Number of cases[a] | Percentage of all cases |
|---|---|---|
| Neighbors | 152 | 31.7 |
| Germans | 146 | 30.5 |
| Bands[b] | 35 | 7.3 |
| "Blue" police | 28 | 5.8 |
| Family | 8 | 1.7 |
| Partisans | 3 | 0.6 |
| Municipality head | 2 | 0.4 |
| Priest | 1 | 0.2 |

[a] One instance of provision of help can contain more than one category, for instance, when there was a danger from both the neighbors and the Germans.
[b] Including 3 Ukrainian bands on the eastern border of the Lublin and Kraków districts.

Neighbors were the most frequently mentioned danger (nearly 32% of all cases). In most of the discussed cases the Righteous lived among Poles. In only one case, near Przemyśl, the Righteous had Ukrainian neighbors. Helpers were mostly afraid that their neighbors would denounce them. That fear resulted from their subjective feelings as well as from the fact that their neighbors threatened and blackmailed them, which sometimes resulted in discontinuation or complication of provision of help. In 67 cases the Jews had to leave their hideout as they feared that their neighbors would denounce them. Their fears were not unfounded: in 47 cases the neighbors informed the authorities, with almost half of those cases resulting in death of the Jews (19 cases) or their Polish helpers (10 cases).[83]

According to Teresa Prekerowa, 85% of the Poles who lost their life for aiding Jews died in the countryside.[84] The question is, how many of them died as a result of a denunciation made by their neighbors? In the analyzed materials 40% of all deaths of the Righteous for provision of help to Jews resulted from their being denounced by their neighbors.[85] In most cases, after a denunciation the

[83] In 8 cases the denunciations made by the neighbors resulted in the death of both the Jews and their Polish helpers.

[84] Prekerowa, "Who Helped Jews," 160.

[85] It should be stressed that the collection of the Righteous' stories does not seem representative in this respect. For we need to assume that in most cases the provision of help was successful, that is, that both the helpers and the helpees survived. For instance, the results of Jan Grabowski's research on the Dąbrowa Tarnowska county: of the 239 killed Jews 166 had

authorities executed the entire family engaged in the help effort and the Jews. The denunciations could stem simply from hatred for Jews. Nonetheless, there were other equally significant motifs, such as envy, desire of revenge, and internal conflicts in the village community.

The countryside had certain characteristic features which seem unique in this context. One of them is that there were almost no blackmailers, while the number of informers was high. The whole thing was done in a more indirect and brutal way than in towns. Few people bought themselves out from blackmailers' hands.[86] Extortion of increasing sums of money or number of objects was a domain of the landlords who were sheltering Jews.[87] The neighbors who came to the Righteous' homes and threatened to denounce them and their wards did not do that for financial profit, to be paid to keep the secret. Unlike blackmailers they did not want to play games – they really wanted to get rid of the Jews. At the same time they were driven by financial motives as they hoped to take over the denounced Jews' purported "riches."[88]

Teresa Prekerowa pointed out that the neighbors' demands to get rid of the Jews could stem from fear of collective responsibility – a form of punishment purportedly frequently used in the countryside, as opposed to urban areas.[89] In all of the analyzed cases, however, when an instance of provision of help was discovered, only the helpers and their families were punished, not the entire village. According to a list made on the basis of the materials collected by the Main

been denounced. See idem, "Społeczność wiejska, policja granatowa i ukrywający się Żydzi: powiat Dąbrowa Tarnowska 1942–1945," in *Zarys krajobrazu*, 139–170.

[86] Tadeusz Markiel discusses the blackmail used against the Poles who were storing Jewish property. In his testimony Markiel writes about a group of inhabitants of Gniewczyna and its vicinity who captured their Jewish neighbors, detained, tortured, and raped them only to then denounce them to the Germans. "In the meantime the municipality heads' menials […] walked about the village and, based on confessions obtained by means of torture, took away winter coats which [the Jews] had given for safekeeping to the people they trusted. If somebody refused [to hand over the coats] they threatened to send over the Gestapo." See Tadeusz Markiel, "Zagłada domu Trinczerów," *Znak* 4 (2008): 133. I would like to thank Jan Grabowski for recommending Tadeusz Markiel's testimony in this context. The history of the massacre in Gniewczyna was also described in Cezary Łazarewicz, "Letnisko w domu śmierci," *Polityka* 49 (2010): 32–35. Alina Skibińska writes about the phenomenon of rural blackmailers in "'Dostał 10 lat, ale za co?' Analiza." [We recommend the latest publication: Tadeusz Markiel, Alina Skibińska, *"Jakie to ma znaczenie, czy zrobili to z chciwości?". Zagłada domu Trynczerów* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011) – editor's footnote].

[87] Fela Fischbein writes about such a situation in her diary. See Engelking, "'…we are entirely at their mercy…' The Everyday Experience of Hiding," 251, 253. I would like to thank Barbara Engelking for pointing out this aspect using the example of Fela Fischbein's diary.

[88] AŻIH, 301/3865, Relacja Markusa Halperna [Markus Helpern's Testimony]: "Our neighbors denounced us and they even transported us to Bochnia where a [deportation] operation was going on as they hoped that they would be able to divide my grandmother's farm among them in consequence."

[89] Prekerowa, "Who Helped Jews," 160.

Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (*Główna Komisja Ścigania Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu*), in the analyzed area (Warsaw, Radom, Kraków, and Lublin districts) 8 villages were pacified for provision of help to Jews.[90] The fear of collective responsibility of all inhabitants did not necessarily have to stem from the commonness of its use. It could be that the news of the pacifications spread fast and that the power of the gossip intensified the fear. But it seems that there were more significant factors, that is, the typical belief that members of the rural community are codependent and the feeling that the fate of one family depends to a large extent on the actions of other villagers.

In comparison with the situation in towns, the social control in the countryside was much more developed. Neighbors had much more power and broader informal rights with regard to the other members of the community. They felt entitled to collect information about their neighbors and to intervene in their lives. A typical villager lived observed by other villagers, who for generations had invariably observed and judged one another with regard to morality. Helpers diverted from the accepted cannon of behavior – they broke "the conspiracy of silence."[91] They were exceptional members of their passive communities indifferent to the Holocaust[92] and at times even hostile toward the Jews who were looking for shelter. The Righteous were a like a qualm. "Why aren't we helping when they did? Why were they the only ones who did not turn their backs on those in need?," other villagers asked themselves.[93] In order to silence the inconvenient moral questions during the occupation they accused the Righteous of putting the whole village in danger and of a desire to make a profit on provision of help to the Jews. One of the defense strategies of the neighbors after the war was to belittle the Righteous' heroism and to claim that the Righteous had

[90] Rekówka and Ciepielów (Radom county) – 6 December 1942; Świesielice near Ciepielów (Radom county) – 6 December 1942; Wola Przybysławska near Garbów (Lublin county) – 10 December 1942; Paulinów near Sokołów Podlaski (Siedlce county) – 24 February 1943; Przewrotne near Głogów Małopolski (Rzeszów county) – 13 March 1943; Przewrotne (Rzeszów county) – 9 May 1943; Hucisko and Przewrotne (Rzeszów) – 10 June 1943; Cisie near Cegłów (Siedlce county) – 28 June 1943, after: *Those Who Helped. Polish Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (Warsaw: Mako, 1997).

[91] More on this topic in: Gross, *Upiorna dekada*, 45–46.

[92] One of the manifestations of the indifference toward the fate of Jews was the fact that many Polish testimonies do not mention the Holocaust. Having analyzed the presentation of the Holocaust in Polish memoirs, Feliks Tych stated the following: "Silence is […] the most voluminous category of the categories of attitude of non-Jewish witnesses toward the Holocaust," after: idem, *Długi cień Zagłady. Szkice historyczne* (Warsaw: ŻIH, 1999), 27. This conclusion is confirmed in the memoirs sent in 1948 by countryside inhabitants for the Czytelnik publishing house competition entitled "Opis mojej wsi" [My village]. Of the 600 sent testimonies only 8% mention Jews at all, after: *Wieś polska 1939–1948*.

[93] For more on this issue see Krzysztof Szwajca, "Kłopotliwa 'świętość,'" *Midrasz* 1 (2007): 16–19.

decided to provide shelter simply because they had had favorable conditions for it. This is how Aniela Bober, an inhabitant of the village of Bełżec, commented on the fact that Julia Pępiak had saved a Jewish woman:

> There was an elderly woman [...] and she was sheltering a Jewess. [...] when it was over, she [the Jewess] wrote letters and [...] sent presents to that Pępiak woman. [...] Hardly anybody had visited her, that Pępiak woman, because she was like a hermit, [...]. Consequently, she had little contact with people and she [the Jewess] could easily hide there. [That Pępiak woman] didn't have to worry about her.[94]

Julia Pępiak was awarded with the Righteous medal for the help she provided to Salomea Helman and her daughter Bronia.[95] According to the testimonies given by some inhabitants of Bełżec for the purpose of the medal awarding procedure, many villagers knew about the Jewesses during the war.[96] Julia Pępiak mentioned how scared she was due to the spreading of the news that the Jewesses were staying on her farm. The gossips and the prospect of searches in the village forced Salomea and Bronia to leave Pępiak's barn and hide in a field.[97]

Later during her interview Aniela Bober unwittingly rendered the atmosphere of general indifference toward the extermination of Jews being conducted almost before the very eyes of Bełżec inhabitants. The fact that the death camp was so close to the village makes her testimony even more moving.

Bełżec inhabitants witnessed escapes from death transports. Many of the Jews who jumped out of the freight cars were shot by the train guards. The wounded lying by the tracks attracted a crowd of onlookers but they could not count on their help.

> [O]ne time a Jew [from a transport] jumped into a ditch by the grade crossing and they shot him right away [...]. His legs were a bloody mess [...]. I saw that 'cause we ran there to have a look 'cause people were saying that a Jew had jumped out and that he was lying there, suffering. And a crowd of people gathered, and the train left, and only later did the black [guards from the camp] come and take him.[98]

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[94] USHMM, RG-50.488*0113, Interview with Aniela Bober, 7 October 1999.

[95] *Księga Sprawiedliwych*, vol. 2, 548.

[96] AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349/1097, Uwiarygodnienie zeznań, wspomnień niektórych mieszkańców Bełżca o ukrywaniu przez Julię Pępiakową Żydówki Salomei Helman i jej córeczki Bronisławy podczas II wojny światowej, Bełżec [Corroboration of testimony, recollections of certain Bełżec inhabitants on the hiding of the Jewish woman Salomea Helman and her daughter Bronisława by Julia Pępiak during World War II], Bełżec, 13 Septemebr 1994, pp. 23–26.

[97] Ibidem, p. 5; Antoni Madejski, "Wspomnienie z okupacji. Salomea i Bronia," *Zorza*, 5 September 1976.

[98] USHMM, RG-50.488*0113, Interview with Aniela Bober, 7 October 1999.

A Jewess who managed to escape from a transport went from house to house, asking for a place to sleep, but nobody wanted to let her under their roof. Seeing no chance of rescue, the desperate woman committed suicide.

> [S]he says, "Sir, I'm a Jewess. Let me into your cottage." He says, "I won't let you in, because I'm afraid that they'll kill me, shoot me." "Let me in for the night. I'll sleep here." Well, but it was so strictly forbidden that we didn't let her in 'cause we were afraid. […] We gave her a piece of bread and she left. In the morning, sir… There was a road there and she hanged herself on our neighbor's fence. […] she made a noose of a scarf and there was a high fence and she hanged herself on that fence.[99]

The proximity of the death camp must have had an influence on those situations. But was it so significant that we could say that the Bełżec inhabitants' behavior was unique? It seems that Aniela Bober's story offers an image of an average environment of the Righteous, where instances of provision of help were rare, individual cases instead of a common tendency. Rescued Jews often stressed in their testimonies that the help provided by the Righteous was but a link in a series of failed attempts to find rescue: refusal of shelter, threats of denunciation, robberies, or even danger of death from the hands of the locals. Markus Halpern, aged 15, recalled that before he arrived with his family on the farm of Janina and Władysława Kort (future Righteous) his family had suffered persecution on the part of the local population.

> We were robbed in a forest by peasants, who wanted to denounce us to the police. Several days later […] we went at night to a peasant whom we knew and who had our field, house, and cattle. He refused to give us anything. We barely managed to wheedle out some milk. We slept the whole day in a field. We were hiding in the bushes in our village, but the peasants found us. They had been looking for us. They escorted us to the village reeve, from where we were sent to Bochnia, where the "action" was lasting.[100]

During the occupation the less frequent the German visits in a given village (on occasion of carrying out a concrete task, such as collection of levy or conducting a roundup for forced labor), the greater the role of the neighbors. In the countryside representatives of the occupation authorities were largely absent from the everyday life of its inhabitants. This might be why the Righteous mention fear of their neighbors, who were always close, more often than the danger posed by their indisputable and mortal enemy, that is, the occupier.

"Bands" are another danger for the Righteous. This imprecise term might refer to formations of varied motivation and character. Even though bands are

[99] Ibidem.

[100] AŻIH, 301/1142, Relacja Markusa Halperna z 1945 r. [Markus Halpern's testimony of 1945].

a separate category in the analyzed materials, they were simply partisan detachments or less formal groups, whose members were recruited from among the local population. Bands were often the terror of the entire village, mostly due to robberies they conducted. Moreover, bands captured Jews hiding in the forests and on farms because they thought that they had some possessions, which they could appropriate. Most of the time bands murdered the Jews after the robbery[101] (24 reported cases in the analyzed material).

## The Helpees

The analyzed material provides less information about the Jews than about the Righteous and their milieu. Most of the time the helpees and helpers had been friends (58.7% of cases). Moreover, in 9.8% of cases the Righteous did not know their wards in person but the wards were not totally anonymous as they had been sent by the helpers' acquaintances, friends, or relatives. In 27.8% of all cases the helpees were total strangers to the helpers.

**Table 4.** Prior relations between the helpees and helpers in the countryside in the Kraków, Lublin, Warsaw, and Radom districts.

| Category: relations between the helpers and helpees | Number of cases[a] | Percentage of all cases |
|---|---|---|
| Prior friendship | 281 | 58.7 |
| Mutual friends | 47 | 9.8 |
| No acquaintance or mutual friends | 133 | 27.8 |
| No information | 74 | 15.4 |

[a] One instance of help can involve more than one category.

The category of prior acquaintance seems particularly important with regard to the situation in the countryside where closeness and familiarity on the one hand and strangeness on the other hand defined the relations among the inhabitants and marked the boundaries of those relations. People were more prone to provide help to those whom they knew as it was easier to sympathize with them and to empathize with their fate. At the same time, however, provision of help

[101] The description of the robbery and murder of the Jews in hiding by the AK partisans by order of the Miechów Region leadership in: Jan Grabowski, "'I Wish to Add that I Was not Aware and Carried out the Task as a Soldier of the Home Army.' On the Murder of Jews Hiding near Racławice by a Company of the Miechów Home Army," *Holocaust Studies and Materials* (2010): 337–362.

to a person commonly recognizable in the village might have been more difficult to hide from the neighbors. Jews in the ghettos had many theories about hiding on the "Aryan" side, one of which was that it was better to seek shelter far away from one's place of residence, where you could be anonymous. Nonetheless, in the case of provision of help in the countryside Jews received help mostly close to their place of residence. In 81% of the analyzed cases the rescued had lived near[102] their helpers before the war. What is more, in 74.9% of cases the persecuted Jews were the ones who asked for help. Consequently, we can assume that the Jews looked for rescue in their general neighborhood. Apparently the hope of receiving help thanks to prior acquaintance or professional contacts was stronger than the fear of lack of anonymity.

**Table 5.** Prewar place of residence of Jews rescued in the countryside in the Kraków, Lublin, Warsaw, and Radom districts.

| Category: place of residence | Number of cases[a] | Percentage of all cases |
|---|---|---|
| Near[b] the Righteous | 388 | 81.0 |
| Far away from the Righteous | 46 | 9.6 |
| No information | 49 | 10.2 |
| | | |
| Small town | 144 | 30.1 |
| Village | 103 | 21.5 |
| Town/City | 76 | 15.9 |
| No information | 159 | 33.2 |

[a] One instance of help can involve more than one category.
[b] See footnote 102.

As we can see, helpees were close to the Righteous in geographical terms as in most cases they had lived in the same municipality, county, or region. The question is whether they were close in cultural and social terms, too. Unfortunately, the analyzed material allows only preliminary data regarding the helpees' social background as we lack data pertaining to 33.2% of the cases. According to the available data, most helpers came from small towns (30.1%), from the countryside (21.5%), or from bigger towns and cities (15.9%). Even though most of the Jews who received help in the countryside lived in small towns, whose civiliza-

[102] In this case "near" means not only the same locality, but also the neighboring localities (for instance, cities and small towns in a given region). By "region" I understand the area around a major town or city, a part of a given district, or a geographical region. A given area has to be known both to the helpers and helpees.

tional development and lifestyle differed little from the development and lifestyle of the countryside, they belonged to the lower middle class, which spent its free time and supported itself differently than the rural population. Jewish countryside dwellers constitute the second biggest group of helpees. Some of them might have undergone a process of peasantization, after which they probably differed little from their rural milieu. Aside from the social differences there were also the cultural differences stemming mostly from ethnic origin. On the one hand there were the Righteous, who were mostly Polish peasants. On the other hand there were the small-town Jews, who were religious to a lesser or greater extent and who still functioned in the traditional *shtetl* structures.

## Payment for Provision of Help

Work as a form of payment for provision of shelter was common in the countryside with regard to both children and adult Jews. The analyzed histories of the Righteous, however, offer little information on this topic. The 16 cases of work among children and 58 cases among adults surely do not show the scale of this phenomenon. There could be several reasons why there is so little information regarding the work rendered by the Jews in hiding. Most likely many of the survivors who gave testimony thought that it was obvious that as they were hiding "in the open" they had to help their landlords in some of their duties. But we should consider that most of the Jews hiding in the countryside were hiding "underground," where they had limited possibilities to work for their landlords. There were instances of work rendered at home (tailoring, knitting, making dumplings, weaving baskets), but many of the people might have regarded that form of work as an unimportant detail, and thus fail to mention it in their testimonies given for Yad Vashem.

First and foremost, the helpers feared that they would be accused of having used the situation to employ the persecuted Jews in return for provision of shelter. Such suspicions could result in their not being eligible for the Righteous medal. Consequently, the documentation submitted to Yad Vashem does not mention the work rendered by helpees. On the contrary, it stresses that the provision of help was disinterested. Henryk Prajs testified, "[F]rom the fall of 1942 until the arrival of the Red Army in August 1944 I was sheltered by the Pokorski family in the village of Podwierzbie in the Garwolin county. […] I would like to stress that the provision of help was disinterested."[103]

His wartime guardian Katarzyna Pokorska presented the same version of events in her 1946 letter to the Central Committee of Polish Jews (*Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce*), in which she asked for remuneration for her wartime provision of help. "Even though he really wanted to, Prajs was unable to help me

[103] AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349/233, Oświadczenie Henryka Prajsa [Henryk Prajs' statement], Góra Kalwaria, 20 March 1983, p. 4.

financially as he had neither money nor possibility to earn money to provide for himself. He did not want to put both himself and us at a risk of certain death, which would have been the case if somebody had found out that he was staying at my place."[104]

Nonetheless, in the interview given for the Archive of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Henryk Prajs openly said that he had sewed clothes for his subsequent landlords and helpers.

> "And you sewed clothes for people in return for shelter?"
> "Yes, I sewed clothes for everybody as best I could. […] [while I was hiding at the Pokorskis'] I sewed for the local peasants, too. The Pokorskis brought [the fabric from the peasants], but the peasants were the ones who paid."[105]

In Prajs' opinion provision of sewing services was the best form of payment for shelter.

> I did not want to have money and that saved me. Even when I sewed somewhere I wanted no money for it. I said, "What do I need money for? If you want me to live just give me something to eat, wash my shirts, and that is all I need from you. I want nothing more from you."[106]

The question is why Henryk Prajs wanted to avoid possession of money. Did he sense that it could be dangerous? Payment for each small favor in cash or possessions could make the helpers greedy and occasion a change in their behavior. Even if helpers decided to shelter Jews for humanitarian motives, with the passing of time they could begin to exploit the Jews in various ways. The criteria adopted by Yad Vashem in the medal awarding procedure exclude instances of provision of help for financial motives. The Jews could pay only the cost of living. This is why the topic of payment for shelter is almost absent from the Righteous' materials. But if we compare these sources with other ones we will see that the Jews did pay their landlords, if only for food and other daily needs. In most cases the Righteous made no profit on it, but we can read in some helpees' testimonies that they had received very small rations of food in relation to how much they had paid.[107] Other researchers stress that the border between disinterested

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[104] AŻIH, 301/5220, Podanie Katarzyny Pokorskiej do Warszawskiej Rady Żydowskiej [Katarzyna Pokorska's Application to the Warsaw Jewish Council], Podłęż, Góra Kalwaria, 7 January 1946, p. 1.

[105] USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 29091, tape 3/5, 4/5, Wywiad Joanny Wiszniewicz z Henrykiem Prajsem [Joanna Wiszniewicz's Interview with Henryk Prajs], 1997.

[106] Ibidem.

[107] AŻIH, 301/2266, Relacja Mojszego Kamienia [Mojsze Kamień testimony]: "They paid, but Kamiński always had an excuse and brought no food." Jan Grabowski states that payment for food might have offered conditions for dishonest practices: "[The landlords] could say that they sold the possessions the Jews had consigned to them or they could pretend that the food

help and help involving financial benefits was very fluid.[108] The helpers' stance could evolve. At times their motifs are difficult to precisely classify and unambiguously evaluate. Consequently, it seems that it is more important how the helpers behaved, and whether they were honest and decent, and not whether the Jews bore the expenses. Even if the helper did collect money, it was his reaction to a situation when his wards ran out of sources that was the yardstick of his stance. In such a situation he could help the Jews, throw them out of the shelter, or, in the worst case scenario, denounce them to the Germans.[109]

The Jews regarded payments as something entirely obvious and natural. Many of them thought that no sum of money could reimburse their landlords for the risk they took. Many helpees tried to show their gratitude and win their landlords over with presents and promises of remuneration after the war. This was the case with the Righteous from the Kowalik family (Anna Kowalik and her children: Władysława and Władysław), who sheltered Uszer Weinfeld, his sister Jenta Wulf, her six-year-old son Dawid, and their aunt Sabina Hollander under their home in the village of Rajbrot in the Bochnia county. The statements submitted to Yad Vashem mention no payments.[110] But in his post-war testimony when he was still a child Dawid Wulf stated that "[t]he landlady brought us food into the shelter every day, for which she was paid."[111]

We could suspect that the Jews paid at least for the food they received. The situation became critical after 8 months of hiding. Righteous Władysława Paprota (née Kowalik) writes:

> Our situation was the most tragic in 1944. We had nothing to eat. The Germans were merciless and they were everywhere. We reached the limit of our physical and psychical endurance. The Jewish family understood our fears but they wanted to live and they proposed to financially reimburse us after the war. I still have that document […]. The original "Contract" of prolongation of life, as we could call it, is a reflection of how tragic those times were.[112]

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was more expensive than it really was," after: idem, "Ratowanie Żydów za pieniądze: przemysł pomocy," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 4 (2008): 97.

[108] Grabowski, *Ratowanie Żydów za pieniądze*, 83; Engelking, "'…we are entirely at their mercy…' The Everyday Experience of Hiding," 135.

[109] Grabowski, *Ratowanie Żydów za pieniądze*, 83; Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 95–96. For more on violence and denunciation see: Engelking, "'Po zamordowaniu udaliśmy się do domu.' Wydawanie i mordowanie Żydów," and Skibińska, "'Dostał 10 lat, ale za co?' Analiza."

[110] Uszer Weinfeld stresses the disinterestedness of the help provided by Władysława Paprota, née Kowalik: "Władzia (now Władysława Paprota) helped us free of charge," AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349/750, Oświadczenie Uszera Weinfelda [Uszer Weinfeld's statement], Jerusalem, 22 February 1987, p. 29.

[111] Dawid Wulf's testimony, in *Dzieci oskarżają*, 175–176.

[112] AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349/750, 15 May 1986, p. 6.

The worsening conditions and perhaps also the passing of time made the landlords less and less willing to continue the provision of help. The Jews decided to secure their position by making a financial commitment, which they did not keep after the war though. It was, as Władysława Paprota aptly called it, a "Contract of Prolongation of Life."

> Contract
> We the undersigned undertake to pay 1,000 (say: a thousand) dollars to Mrs. Anna Kowalik from Rajbrot in return for hiding us from the German authorities, which are a threat to our life. The sum shall be paid after the end of the war in cash or in real estate of equivalent value and by mutual consent.
> We guarantee the payment of the above sum without real estate. We lay down the following condition: Mrs. Anna Kowalik is obliged to shelter us until we regain full personal freedom, and only then does the above commitment remain binding.
> Rajbrot August 6, 1944
> Uscher Weinfeld
> Sabina Weinfeld
> Jenta Wulf
> Witnesses present: Władysław Wyrwa, Bronisław Przybyłko
> [on the reverse side of the contract]
> Undertaking
> If I, Anna Kowalik, should be dead at the time of the payment of the said sum, it shall be paid my daughters Maria and Władysława in the amount of 500 (say: five hundred) for each of them.
> Rajbrot August 6, 44
> Anna Kowalik
> Witnesses present: Władysław Wyrwa, Jenta Wulf.[113]

## The Length and Form of Help

The next category in the statistical analysis is the timeframe of the help provided by the Righteous. We can clearly see that the intensification of terror and extermination intensified and broadened the Jewish efforts to find shelter. Most new instances of provision of help occurred in 1942 when the Germans began to close ghettos in the General Government and deport Jews to death camps within the framework of Operation Reinhardt, while at the same time continuing to carry out local mass executions.

[113] Ibidem, Umowa. Załącznik do listu Władysławy Paproty [Contract. Attachment to Władysława Paprota's letter], pp. 11–12.

**Table 6.** Initiation of provision of help by the Righteous in the countryside in the Kraków, Lublin, Warsaw, and Radom districts.

| Category: Year | Number of cases | Percentage of all cases |
|---|---|---|
| 1939 | 2 | 0.4 |
| 1940 | 5 | 1.0 |
| 1941 | 29 | 6.1 |
| 1942 | 285 | 59.5 |
| 1943 | 102 | 21.3 |
| 1944 | 19 | 4.0 |
| No info | 37 | 7.7 |
| Total | 479 | 100.0 |

In 1942 the period of relative prosperity in the countryside connected with the occupier's policy during the initial years of the war came to an end. The countryside suffered from hunger and exploitation due to the increased levies (in the summer of 1942 the authorities introduced capital punishment for failure to deliver a levy). In October 1941 the authorities introduced capital punishment for provision of help to Jews. The pacifications of villages in the Zamość region lasted from the fall of 1942 until the summer of 1943. The increase in the activity of partisan units triggered more frequent searches and retaliation operations on civilians (in mid 1943 the occupation authorities launched anti-partisan operations in the General Government). Due to those unfavorable conditions more and more Jews came to the countryside to look for help.

The Germans continued Operation Reinhardt in 1943 – they closed the last rump ghettos and forced labor camps. The escapes to the countryside continued and more and more Jews came to Polish homes in search of shelter. There were also those who came to the countryside earlier but had been hiding in forests or had worked for peasants who did not want to keep them after the end of the harvest. We could assume that in 1943 the wave of Jewish escapees to the countryside was smaller than in 1942 as most of the Jews had already been exterminated or had managed to escape. This is why the number of instances of initiation of provision of help in 1943 is almost three times smaller than in 1942.

In the vast majority of cases (409 cases, which amounts to 85.4% of all cases) the provision of help lasted until the end of the occupation in a given area, that is until 1944 or 1945, depending on the position and date of arrival of the Red Army. So was it that help was provided consistently and persistently until the moment when the main danger had passed? It seems that such a statement could be true only with regard to the Righteous and that it determines their ex-

ceptionality. For the research based on other materials shows that Jews hiding in the countryside very often changed their place of residence and landlords.[114]

The average length of provision of help by the Righteous in the countryside was 1.5–2.5 years (almost 48% of the analyzed cases). In extreme cases the provision of help lasted 4 years but it was provided in such diverse circumstances that we cannot talk about any pattern. Such help was provided, for instance, by a poor peasant family of Pindor in the village of Bialin near Warsaw, who had not known the Freidenbergs,[115] whom they provided shelter to. Another example is the help provided by Mr. and Mrs. Lipiński, who owned the Ostrówek land estate near Siedlce and who had had close commercial and social contacts with the Jewish family of Kisieliński[116] before the war. In the latter case the prewar acquaintance resulted in mutual help. Thanks to Rafał Kisieliński's intercession, Maria Lipińska, who had been arrested by the Soviet army in September 1939 and imprisoned, avoided deportation to the east and was released.[117] Soon afterwards (in the fall of 1939) the Soviets retreated and that territory came under German occupation. This was when the Lipińskis began to provide shelter and food to the Kisielińskis, which lasted until the end of the occupation.

## Conclusion

The help provided to Jews in the countryside had various character. The histories of the Righteous are just a segment of this phenomenon. They are a sample of the cases when the helpers had mostly noble intentions, and their actions were mostly effective, which means that they managed to survive and save their wards despite the grave risk. The qualitative and quantitative analyses of selected cases suggest that the Righteous did not stand out from their milieu as far as education, social position, occupation, or lifestyle is concerned.[118] They were average countryside dwellers devoid of any characteristic features.[119]

According to Jan Tomasz Gross, the void in the sphere of rules of conduct and moral norms was one of the most painful consequences of the occupation and of the destruction of the Polish state apparatus. For a long time the Poles lacked clear instructions of how to behave, particularly toward the occupier's

[114] See: Barbara Engelking, *"Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień…". Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011), chapter "Wędrowanie i błądzenie."

[115] *Księga Sprawiedliwych*, vol. 2, 560.

[116] AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 349/1414, List Józefa Lipińskiego do ŻIH [Józef Lipiński's Letter to the ŻIH], Gdańsk, 20 June 1989, p. 7.

[117] Ibidem, p. 9.

[118] Unfortunately, the material I analyzed did not allow me to determine the financial status of the Righteous and the influence it might have had on their stances.

[119] Teresa Prekerowa arrives at similar conclusions in her analyses in "Who Helped Jews," 170.

policy.[120] Gross also writes that the behavior of individuals was determined not so much by their character and moral principles as by the influence of the community in which they lived.[121] It seems that this statement is true particularly with regard to the rural community, where the role of the community and the bonds among their members were stronger than in towns. The case of the Righteous seems to be an exception to this mechanism.

What distinguished the Righteous from their neighbors was that they decided to provide shelter to Jews. It should be stressed that they were totally alone in their commitment and actions. Most of them had no support from the local intelligentsia, authorities, or underground organizations. On the contrary, in many cases they had to deal with their hostile neighbors. Nechama Tec was right when she wrote about the helpers' autonomous altruism, that is a behavior which (unlike that normative, required, and rewarded by society) does not command broader respect and can lead to ostracism on the part of the society.[122] For in general the rural community was indifferent, and at times even hostile, toward the fate of Jews.

It should be stressed that even those who decided to provide help usually did so on the spur of the moment, being in a way provoked by the Jews themselves. The statistics based on the Righteous' histories show that in most cases the initiative to begin provision of help came from the Jews. It means that help was provided to those who actively sought it. Those were usually Jews living in the area, known in person or by sight, who came to Poles' doorstep due to the mortal danger they were in and asked for help. "A moral dilemma knocks on the door,"[123] as Szymon Datner aptly described the situation while discussing various reactions of the landlords (from denunciation of the Jew to provision of shelter).[124] Even though Jews sought shelter mostly in 1942, when the occupier's terror intensified and the conditions of the life in the countryside worsened, the Righteous made a heroic decision when faced with that dilemma. In most of the cases the help they provided was long-lasting and resulted in everyday hardships and fear.

The Righteous, however, were not flawless, even though they appear as such in the documentation submitted to Yad Vashem. The search query in other archives allowed me to penetrate at least some of the histories and show the Righteous as ordinary people, who had to deal with temptation to take advantage of the situation, pressure exerted by their community, as well as with fear and other emo-

[120] Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation. The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 137.

[121] Ibidem, 144.

[122] Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 150–152.

[123] Datner, *Las Sprawiedliwych*, 27. I quote this expression after Marta Pietrzykowska from her doctoral dissertation "'Ludzie z kryjówek' i 'papierowi Aryjczycy.' Opis i analiza doświadczenia ukrywania się Żydów po 'aryjskiej stronie,'" defended in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (*Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk*, IFiS PAN) in 2009. I would like to thank the author for making the unpublished text of the thesis available to me.

[124] I present Szymon Datner's typology of Polish stances toward the Holocaust in the introduction to this article.

tions. Not all of them emerged victorious from that struggle. It is difficult to carry out research on the Righteous because in most cases you deal with laudation-like narration produced years later for the purpose of the medal awarding procedure. The image of the Righteous which emerges from these materials is distorted and devoid of human features. Such an image of helpers is unfair to them as it puts them on the pedestal as flawless heroes. It deprives them of humanity, and consequently of their enormous sacrifice and heroism, with which they overcame fear, negative feelings, and temptations. That made them exceptional. It is difficult to expect heroism to be a social norm everybody is ready to implement.

The decision to provide help to Jews and subsequent persistence in that commitment were moments when both parties – the Poles and the Jews – were fighting for their own life. "Can we condemn somebody for following their instinct of survival?" asks the Pherae king Admetus from Greek mythology who accepted his wife Alcestis' offer to die for him in order to save his own life.[125] She was the only one who agreed to die for him. All the other relatives he turned to had refused. "Show me a law that says that the father should die for his son. There is no paragraph which you could refer to. […] I would die for you if I had two lives instead of one," said Adametus' father Pheres. Admetus was unable to carry the burden of Alcestis' sacrifice. He was plagued by qualms that he had survived at her cost, that he had asked her to die. He talked about a universal dilemma when one's fate and somebody else's fate are on the same scale, "Most of us think that they could not accept such a sacrifice. But who loves someone else's life more than one's own? […] I am human like everybody else. I am human like you."

Translated by *Anna Brzostowska*

**Abstract**
The author analyzes help by Poles decorated with the Righteous among the Nations medal to Jews hiding in the countryside during the Nazi occupation. The author demonstrates that stories told many years later differ from immediate post-war recollections. A statistical analysis of the extensive material yields information on the various regularities related to help in rural areas: that the scale of help depends on the integration of the Jews with the Polish society, that they most often sought help close to their places of residence, that help came more frequently form the peasants than from the educated village dwellers, and that the greatest threat to the helpers were their own neighbors.

**Key words**
Holocaust, Jews, Poles, Righteous, Polish-Jewish relations

[125] The myth of Admetus and all lines of its heroes come from the *(A)pollonia* performance directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, which had its premiere on 16 May 2009 in Nowy Teatr in Warsaw.