

Pogroms of Jews in the Polish Lands in the 19th and 20th Centuries Case Studies (until 1939)

Summary

The book is a collective study resulting from work on international research project *Pogromy. Przemoc kolektywna wobec Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX–XX wieku i jej wpływ na relacje polsko-żydowskie. Historia. Pamięć. Tożsamość* [Pogroms. Collective Violence against Jews in the Polish Lands in the 19th and 20th Centuries and its Influence on Polish-Jewish Relations. History, Memory, Identity], coordinated by the University of Warsaw in cooperation with Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department University College London and The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Centre Tel Aviv University.

This volume, one of the four published under the research project, is a collection of case studies containing an analysis of selected pogroms or other collective anti-Jewish actions. Geographically it deals with events which took place in the territory of all parts of partitioned Poland (from the beginning of the 19th century until the First World War) and in the territory of the Second Republic of Poland in the years 1918–1939. All studies are based on a thorough source research and are focused on analysis of unknown cases of collective anti-Jewish violence or new interpretations of particular cases. Texts are lined up in chronologic order, although this arrangement was subject to minor modifications when it was advisable or necessary.

The first study describes anti-Jewish incidents in Warsaw in 1805. Małgorzata Karpińska called them “a forgotten pogrom”, because since the time when information about this act of violence appeared in tsar documentation relating to it, historians have not been interested in it. Michael K. Schulz dealt with perpetrators and instigators of two pogroms in Gdańsk in 1819 and 1821. His conclusions regarding anti-emancipation nature of these tragic events are a new interpretation of the phenomenon of collective violence against Jews in that period. Aleksandra Oniszczyk presented differentiated ways of describing pogrom as a social phenomenon and a kind of politicization of narration about it using the example of Kalisz pogrom in 1878. A new interpretation of the well-known and thoroughly analysed in scientific literature Warsaw pogrom of 1881 was proposed by Artur Markowski. Based on archival documents not used so far, the author questioned Russian inspiration of the pogrom, which was emphasized by historians in the foregoing studies on this problem. A few months later in 1881 dramatic, not really known so far, events took place in Balbieriškis and Prienai in Lithuania, which are described by Darius Staliūnas.

Referring to events in Fryszak Marcin Soboń analyzed certain universal features of authorities’ reaction to acts of anti-Jewish violence, and describing incidents in Nowy Sącz region – a wave of pogroms and anti-Jewish riots of 1898 in Galicia. Daniel Unowsky writes about Wieliczka in 1893, and refers in detail to religious and social conditions of the pogrom. Describing incidents of 1900 in Chojnice Anna Magdzińska puts a question, whether it was a pogrom or just “anti-Semitic incidents”. In her interpretation the context of accusation

of ritual murder is linked with pogrom; she also mentions definition problems faced by historian dealing with this problem.

The first 20th century pogrom described in this book is incident of 1902 in Częstochowa. Artur Markowski is not only the first to describe an event rather obscure in historiography, but he also indicates what role it played in the process of shaping “research paradigm” in scientific discussions about pogroms. The part describing the period before the First World War ends with Szymon Rudnicki’s article about pogrom in Siedlce in 1906. The author uses a new, not known so far, source material and finally, like Anna Magdzińska, mentions problems with definition of this act of violence, since in Rudnicki’s opinion it is similar to certain pogroms which took place during the Great War, particularly in its first years.

The following case studies in this volume relate to the last years of the First World War and first years of the Second Republic of Poland, when effects of war destructions, death, hunger and dislocation of millions of people included, without limitation, growth of extremely nationalist and xenophobic moods, general tolerance of violence, and degradation of Polish-Jewish relations. Resultants of these processes were also pogroms, which took place on a large scale at the beginning of Polish independence.

Article of Konrad Zieliński deals with one of the less-known Jewish pogroms in Galicia (Mielec, November 1918), resulting from the desire to plunder Jewish property, practical impunity of these dealings, administrative chaos and provision problems. Mielec pogrom was like a lens which focused the specifics of events taking place in the whole of Galicia, Eastern and Western, in autumn of 1918 and first months of 1919, even though premises of pogroms in both parts of the region slightly differed (the author suggests that incidents in Western Galicia were more often motivated by economic issues, while “political” issues, such as alleged general support by Jews of the Ukrainians in Eastern Lesser Poland were not so important).

Polish-Ukrainian conflict, accusing Jews of supporting Bolsheviks (phantasm of “żydokomuna” [Judeo communism]), a desire to take revenge for real and alleged cooperation of Jewish merchants and agents with Austrians and Germans exploiting Poland, economic crisis and growth of nationalism – all these premises, although to a different extent, led to pogroms in various parts of reborn Poland. Adam Kopciowski writes about an attempt of pogrom, tragic effects of which were averted thanks to a firm attitude of certain representatives of authorities and *ad hoc* organized, *de facto* informal Jewish self-defence in Lublin in April of 1919. Jewish accounts, mainly the press ones, of pogrom in Częstochowa next month are analysed by Wiesław Paszkowski. In September of the same year a pogrom in Łódź took place and the text by Michał Trębacz is one of the few studies regarding anti-Semitism in “Polish Manchester”. A popularized stereotype of “Judeo communism”, pro-Bolshevik sympathies and the conduct of certain groups of Jewish population during the war of 1920 and a short Bolshevik occupation resulted in pogroms and war crimes committed, without limitation, by Polish Army. One of such incidents is described by Alicja Gontarek, who takes into account the local specifics, reasons and effects of anti-Jewish violence in Łuków on 17–18 August 1920 and on subsequent days.

Case studies relating to the period of the Second Republic of Poland (after cessation of wars at its beginning, establishment of borders and of political system) start with Natalia Aleksun’s study on well-known anti-Jewish riots at Stefan Batory University in Vilnius and outside of it in February 1931. The author conducted a multi-layer analysis of reasons, course and effects of Vilnius incidents, placing them in such contexts as radicalization of student political culture in the thirties or anti-Jewish violence at universities and academic centres as a radical attempt to implement slogans of a homogenous national state. Next position in the book is Andrej Zamoiski’s analysis of pogrom in Grodno on 7 June 1935. Besides a detailed description of incidents occurring during this pogrom, it is worth mentioning that Zamoiski

breaks up – based on source foundation – with a simplified scheme explaining the majority of notorious anti-Jewish incidents and pogroms of mid-thirties. According to this scheme, any individual fight or killing a Christian by a Jew were supposed to automatically lead to charging Jewish community with collective responsibility and using violence against it. The author does not negate the spontaneous nature of described events – accidental by-passers joining the pogrom mob – but he also points out the long activity in the city of agitators using the fact of killing Polish sailor by two young Jews at a dancing party and funeral of the murdered man to initiate a pogrom and escalate its course. The next study is Kamil Kijek's article describing dramatic incidents which took place in Odrzywół between 20 and 29 November 1935. Odrzywół events were a failed attempt to initiate a pogrom; when they got out of control of its organizers, they led to dramatic fights of certain local peasants with the police. As a result of these fights twelve peasants were killed. It is worth mentioning that almost all of them were members of the National Party. Article by Michał Trębacz describes a pogrom which occurred in Częstochowa on 19–21 June 1937. On the one hand he mentions the role of a single incident between representatives of Christian and Jewish community, which was rather typical in the thirties, but on the other he analyses another key factor of the pogrom, namely, the consistent pogrom agitprop conducted among non-Jewish population (party conferences and rallies, but also direct attacks on Jews), which led to collective violence against the whole community. The last text in this volume was written by Zofia Trębacz and it deals with a pogrom in Bielsko and Biała Krakowska in September 1937. The author described in a thorough and detailed way the event triggering off the pogrom, and escalation of tension through rumours, agitation and calls to use violence, which led to beating the Jews and destruction of their property in both cities between 17 and 23 September. The strength of the text is also an impressive diversity of source material used by the author, in spite of extreme dispersion of documents created by administration and now available in archives.

Translated by Elżbieta Petrajtis-O'Neill