

Renata Lesiakowska

(Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3972-022X>









e-mail: renata.lesiakowska@mail.umcs.pl

The Picture of German-Polish Relations in 1938–1939 in German Historiography. Status and Prospects for Research

Obraz relacji niemiecko-polskich w latach 1938–1939 w historiografii niemieckiej. Stan badań i perspektywy badawcze

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the German historiography concerning German-Polish relations in 1938–1939. It is written from the perspective of a Polish historian who wonders why the events of the last year of peace are not only perceived differently in Polish and German historiographies, but also why historical issues so important in one society are of minor importance in the neighboring one. The text presents the development of German literature on this subject from the times of the Third Reich, through the years of division of Germany into two hostile states and the period of German unification until the recent decades. Mutual relations between the two neighboring societies during the interwar

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THE AUTHOR'S ADDRESS: Renata Lesiakowska, the Institute of History of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, 4A Maria Curie-Skłodowska Square, Lublin 20-031, Poland			
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period and World War II are one of the most emotive topics in Polish historiography, and the legacy of National Socialism – in German historiography. This makes the issue discussed even more interesting.

Key words: German historiography, Polish historiography, historiography of the Federal Republic of Germany, historiography of the German Democratic Republic, Polish foreign policy 1938–1939, September 1939, German crimes on Polish lands, Wehrmacht crimes, ‘Bloody Sunday’ in Bydgoszcz, Polenaktion, bombing of Wieluń, Gdansk Corridor, outbreak of World War II, Munich Agreement, Hitler-Stalin Pact

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł poświęcony jest historiografii niemieckiej dotyczącej relacji niemiecko-polskich w latach 1938–1939. Jest napisany z perspektywy historyka polskiego, któremu towarzyszy pytanie, dlaczego wydarzenia ostatniego roku pokoju są nie tylko inaczej postrzegane w historiografii polskiej i niemieckiej, ale także, dlaczego w tak różnym stopniu zajmowały i zajmują uwagę sąsiednich społeczeństw. W tekście przedstawiono rozwój niemieckiego piśmiennictwa na ten temat od czasów III Rzeszy, poprzez lata podziału Niemiec na dwa wrogie państwa i okres zjednoczenia Niemiec do ostatnich dziesięcioleci. Wzajemne relacje między sąsiednimi społeczeństwami w okresie dwudziestolecia wojennego i drugiej wojny światowej to jeden ze wzbudzających najwyższe emocje tematów w historiografii polskiej, a spuścizna narodowego socjalizmu – w historiografii niemieckiej. Czyni to poruszane zagadnienie tym ciekawszym.

Słowa kluczowe: historiografia niemiecka, historiografia polska, historiografia RFN, historiografia NRD, polska polityka zagraniczna 1938–1939, wrzesień 1939, zbrodnie niemieckie na ziemiach polskich, zbrodnie Wehrmachtu, ‘Krwawa Niedziela’ w Bydgoszczy, Polenaktion, bombardowanie Wielunia, korytarz gdański, wybuch II wojny światowej, układ monachijski, pakt Hitler–Stalin

The German historiography concerning German-Polish relations in 1938–1939 has so far been a subject of interest of such Polish historians as: in the oldest and older generations – inter alia, Henryk Batowski, Czesław Madajczyk, Franciszek Ryszka, Karol Marian Pospieszalski, Antoni Czubiński, Jerzy Krasuski, Gerard Labuda, Antoni W. Walczak, Marek Andrzejewski, Bogusław Drewniak, and Wiesław Mincer; in the younger (and youngest) generation – Eugeniusz Cezary Król, Robert Traba, Stanisława Żerko, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, and Wojciech Wichert. The aforementioned authors were interested in the state of the specialist literature concerning the years directly preceding the outbreak of World War Two as one of many detailed problems within broader research on German historiography or they treated the period in question marginally, sharing their observations or providing advice on the German literature on the subject in the publications devoted to the events of the period under discussion¹. For obvious reasons, when using the studies published

¹ For example: F. Ryszka, *Kilka uwag na tematy niemieckie: (prace niemieckie i polskie na temat hitleryzmu i III Rzeszy)*, “Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1959, 66, 3, pp. 829–850; H. Batowski,

before 1989, it is necessary to adopt a generally more critical approach with regard to assessments formulated by East Germany's historiography at that time.

The most significant publications that discuss the state of the German historiography describing the period in question are *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie w historiografii* [Polish-German Relations in Historiography], part 3, edited by J. Krasuski, G. Labuda and A.W. Walczak, published by the Institute for Western Affairs in Poznań in the early 1990s and *Narodowy socjalizm w historiografii Republiki Federalnej Niemiec w latach 1986–2016* [National Socialism in the Historiography of the Federal Republic of Germany] by W. Wichert, published several years ago by the Institute of National Remembrance.

The most important figure among German scholars who studied the historiography of German-Polish relations was Klaus Zernack regarded as the originator of the new trend or scientific school of Polish studies in Germany². One of his disciples, Andreas Lawaty, in cooperation

Z najnowszej (1959–1967) literatury o Konferencji Monachijskiej 1938 roku, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1968, 75, 3, pp. 679–682; M. Andrzejewski, *Zagadnienie drugiego Wolnego Miasta Gdańska w historiografii obcej i polskiej*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1979, 11, 1, pp. 183–189; C. Madajczyk, *Osiągnięcia historiografii polskiej w badaniach II wojny światowej i Polski Ludowej*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1987, 94, 1, pp. 225–242; *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1933–1945: XVIII Konferencja Wspólnej Komisji Podrecznikowej PRL – RFN Historyków 28 V–2 VI 1985 r.*, Nowogard, eds. A. Czubiński, Z. Kulak, Poznań 1988; *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie w historiografii*, part 3, *Studia z dziejów historiografii polskiej i niemieckiej*, eds. J. Krasuski, G. Labuda, A.W. Walczak, Poznań 1991; K. Ruchniewicz, *Rozmowy w Tybindze w październiku 1956 r. Pierwsze spotkanie historyków polskich i niemieckich po II wojnie światowej*, "Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka" 1991, 54, 1, pp. 79–99; *Tematy polsko-niemieckie: historia, literatura, edukacja*, eds. E. Traba, R. Traba, Olsztyn 1997; *Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Bibliographie*, ed. A. Lawaty, Wiesbaden 2000; S. Żerko, *Niemiecka polityka zagraniczna 1933–1939*, Poznań 2005, pp. 418–445; *Jak patrzeć na Polskę, Niemcy i świat? Księga jubileuszowa profesora Eugeniusza Cezarego Króla*, ed. J. Szymoniczek, Warszawa 2017; W. Wichert, *Narodowy socjalizm w historiografii Republiki Federalnej Niemiec w latach 1986–2016*, Szczecin–Warszawa 2018. Because of the popularity of the subject before 1989, as well as because of the long-standing activity of the Polish-German Textbook Commission it is impossible to name here all Polish historians formulating comments on the German historiography dealing with the subject.

² K. Zernack, *Völkerbeziehungen als Problem der Geschichtswissenschaft: methodologische Grundfragen der deutsch-polnischen Schulbucharbeit*, in: *Miedzy historia a teoria: refleksje nad problematyka dziejów i wiedzy historycznej*, ed. M. Drozdowski, Warszawa 1988, pp. 508–515; idem, *Das Jahrtausend deutsch-polnischer Beziehungsgeschichte als geschichtswissenschaftliches Problemfeld und Forschungsaufgabe*, in: *Grundfragen der geschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Deutschen, Polaben und Polen: Referate und Diskussionsbeiträge aus zwei wissenschaftlichen Tagungen*, eds. W.H. Fritze, K. Zernack. Berlin 1976; idem, *Preußen – Deutschland – Polen:*

with the abovementioned W. Mincer, edited a monumental bibliography of Polish-German relations for 1900–1998, titled *Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Bibliographie* published by the Herder Institute in Marburg in 2000³. Over four thousand publications listed in this register deal with the whole interwar period and the beginning of World War Two; however, most of them are Polish publications, and as regards some subjects, for example German-Polish diplomatic relations or the operations of the German intelligence service on Polish territory before the outbreak of the war, the Polish publications prevail.

The description of Polish-German relations on the brink and at the beginning of World War Two has obviously become part of the broader issue of chronicling the history of the Third Reich. The community of German historians interested in this subject matter is very wide and highly diversified as regards the assessment of the achievements of German historiography. The most important bibliographic guide to the extremely broad subject of the German historiography concerning the history of Germany in the period under discussion is *Bibliographie zum Nationalsozialismus* by Michael Ruck, which contained information about ca. 37 000 publications in its 2000 edition⁴.

The authors of the studies to date sum them up fairly unanimously with the following conclusions:

Polish-German relations in 1938–1939 arouse far greater interest of Polish historians than German ones; what prevails in German historiography are collections of articles, minor contributory articles, and source editions whereas there are very few syntheses; the subject in question as well as other issues connected with the history of the Third Reich III have aroused and still arouse intense emotions in society; over the successive decades the research on World War Two was not free from very strong political influence. A feature typical of the German scholarly community is also to transfer discussion on significant subjects from the academic onto popularizing level⁵.

Aufsätze zur Geschichte der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen, eds. W. Fischer, M.G. Müller, Berlin 1991.

³ *Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen*.

⁴ M. Ruck, *Bibliographie zum Nationalsozialismus*, Darmstadt 2000. Vide also: *Neue Forschungen zum Zweiten Weltkrieg: Literaturberichte und Bibliographien aus 67 Ländern*, eds. J. Rohwer, H. Müller, Koblenz 1990.

⁵ See: annotation no. 1.

* * *

Mutual German-Polish relations in the period directly preceding the outbreak of World War Two and during its beginnings very soon aroused interest from German historians. Obviously, the first publications on the subject, written before the fall of the German Reich, were strictly subordinated to propaganda purposes⁶; nevertheless, the theses promoted at that time were repeated after 1945.

Studies published in the Third Reich were meant to prove that the Polish state was unable to exist independently, and it was the Polish side, which escalated the conflict over Gdansk, that was to blame for the outbreak of the war. The subject of the German minority was exploited particularly eagerly: they were presented as oppressed and forcibly Polonized. The starting of the war was allegedly meant to serve their liberation. A suggestive example of this kind of narrative can be found in Kurt Lück's 1940 publication addressed to the Volksdeutschers, in which the photos of the graves of German soldiers fallen during the attack on Poland were signed *They also died for the liberation and restoration of settlers to Fatherland*. Interestingly, a thesis was also promoted that the occupation of the Polish territory in September 1939 was also beneficial to the Polish population liberated from the inept authorities and thus being able to take part in German *reconstruction*⁷.

One of the most important themes of the propaganda concerned the events that took place in Bydgoszcz on 3–4 September 1939. Information was spread that the number of German victims of the so-called *Bloody Sunday in Bydgoszcz/Bromberger Blutsonntag*, which is now estimated at ca. 300 in joint German-Polish projects, was 1000 persons, while during the whole Polish campaign 5 437 Volksdeutschers were allegedly injured as a result of mob or police action. This figure was announced in November 1939. From February 1940 on, however, following the directives of the Propaganda Ministry, those figures began to be presented as 58 000 victims⁸.

German descriptions of the course of military operations conducted in the autumn of 1939 focused attention on – first of all – the behavior

⁶ Which, of course, has already been said in the literature on the subject, see: J. Sobczak, *Kampania wrześniowa w historiografii NRD i RFN*, "Sobótka" 1981, 3, pp. 429–444. The possibility of using German specialist literature of 1939–1945 has recently been pointed out by Waldemar Rezmer, *Kampania polska 1939 r. w historiografii III Rzeszy. Wprowadzenie bibliograficzne do tematyki*, "Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy" 2022, 3, pp. 119–147.

⁷ K. Lück, *Die Cholmer und Lubliner Deutschen kehren Heim ins Vatterland*, Posen 1940, p. 101; "Das Generalgouvernement" 1944, f. 3, passim.

⁸ M. Krzoska, *Der "Bromberger Blutsonntag" 1939*, "Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte" 2012, 2, pp. 237–248.

(presented as irresponsible) of Polish leaders, who, on the one hand, themselves left the territory of the country, whereas on the other they issued orders to resist the Germans, which increased losses in the population and damage to infrastructure. Incidentally, it should be noted that the periodical "Das General Gouvernement" of November 1944 presented the devastation of Warsaw – carried out by Germans during and after the Warsaw Uprising – as the result of the September campaign and as repaired by the German administration with full commitment (!)⁹. Furthermore, the military weakness of the Polish side was emphasized.

This is the legacy with which German historiography entered the period of the division of Germany into two states situated on the two sides of the Iron Curtain. Before 1989 Polish historians treated kindly the studies written in East Germany concerning the events of 1938–1939, and stressed that their authors admitted that it was NSDAP-dominated Germany that tried to provoke an armed conflict, they did not belittle the importance of the Polish defensive war, and, owing to the fact that they used Polish publications they had greater knowledge about the weaponry and the course of the campaign than historians from West Germany. In contrast, Polish studies written after 1989 point out, naturally, to a very strong politicization of that research and also emphasize that the critical appraisal of the 1933–1945 period presented in the Russian Occupation Zone and then in East Germany was first of all a propaganda slogan, not necessarily involving the conduct of in-depth historical studies – even in the Marxist-Leninist conception, which was used far more restrictively than in Poland¹⁰. A similar idea was expressed by German historian Martin

⁹ Examples of publications of that period prepared by the Auswärtiges Amt – *Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges*, Berlin 1939, *Urkunden zur letzten Phase der deutsch-polnischen Krise*, Berlin 1939 and *Polnische Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges. Erste Folge*, Berlin 1940; *Deutschland und Polen 1919–1939: eine historisch-politische Studie*, "Völkerbund" 1939, 8, 16/17, pp. 205–282; *Deutschland und der Korridor. In Zusammenarbeit von Günter Lohse und Waldemar Wucher*, ed. F. Heiss, Berlin 1939; *Trotz polnischer Willkür: aus Arbeit und Kampf der volksdeutschen Jugend im ehemaligen Polen*, Berlin 1940; G.H., *Der Schicksalsweg der Wolhyniendeutschen*, Posen 1939, *Unsere Heimat*, vol. 8; R. Haider, *Warum mußte Polen zerfallen?*, Berlin 1940; *Die Berichte des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht vom 1. September 1939 bis zum Waffenstillstand in Frankreich: nach amtlichem Material zusammengestellt*, ed. K. Schaub, Berlin 1940; "Das General Gouvernement" 1944.

¹⁰ A. Fischer, *Der Weg Zur Gleichschaltung Der Geschichtswissenschaft in der SBZ 1945–1949*, in: *Geschichtswissenschaft in Der DDR*, vol. 1, *Historische Entwicklung. Theoriediskussion Und Geschichtsdidaktik*, eds. A. Fischer, G. Heydemann, Berlin 1988, pp. 45–76; U. Neuhäusser-Wespy, *Aspekte Und Probleme Der Um Orientierung in Der Geschichtswissenschaft der DDR von 1971/72*, in: *Geschichtswissenschaft*, pp. 77–102; A. Sywotiek, "Marxistische Historik": *Probleme und Scheinprobleme*, in: *Geschichtswissenschaft*, pp. 255–268; G. Heydemann, *Der Theorieboom in Der*

Sabrow noting that East German historiography was strictly subordinated to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), and the description of the history of the Third Reich was to be some kind of background for the description of the history of the workers movement and its activists, created according to top-down guidelines¹¹. Obviously, the permanent presence of the subject of Nazi war crimes in public discourse was meant to divert attention from Soviet crimes.

The Polish-German relations in the period in question were first of all studied by Johannes Kalisch (1928–2002), who worked at the University of Rostock. From the 1950s, he maintained professional relations with a Polish historian with significant achievements and a substantial influence on the historians' community, Marian Małowist, as well as with many other Polish historians. From 1976 to 1989, J. Kalisch headed a research team studying Poland's history and German-Polish relations. His work was concerned with the Free City of Gdansk, Polish foreign policy in 1938–1939 and its impact on the September 1939 events, the invasion of Poland as an element of the plan aimed at the realization of German imperial ambitions, and with the course of military operations in September 1939¹². He also held the function of Secretary of the Commission of Polish and East German Historians, and after the unification of Germany he

Marxistisch-Leninistischen Geschichtswissenschaft Der DDR Seit 1967. Ursachen – Entwicklung – Perspektiven, in: *Geschichtswissenschaft*, pp. 289–306.

¹¹ M. Sabrow also said that a very strict subordination of historiography to the party resulted in the historians being considerably distanced to their work and in their lack of the sense of professional community. Idem, *Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft und Ihre Zeithistorie*, "Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft" 2004, 20, pp. 257–282; idem, *Beherrschte Normalwissenschaft. Überlegungen zum Charakter der DDR-Historiographie*, "Geschichte und Gesellschaft" 1998, 24, 3, pp. 412–445; idem, *Die deutsch-deutschen Historikerbeziehungen zwischen Anschliesung und Öffnung*, in: *Die Rückkehr der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft in die "Ökumene der Historiker"*. Ein wissenschaftsgeschichtlicher Ansatz, ed. U. Pfeil, Oldenburg 2008, pp. 287–304; K. Wóycicki, *Niemiecki rachunek sumienia. Niemcy wobec przeszłości 1933–1945*, Wrocław 2004, p. 16.

¹² J. Kalisch, *Das Vorspiel*, in: *September 1939*, ed. F.H. Gentzen, Berlin 1959, pp. 27–40; see also other articles: idem, *Die Freie Stadt Danzig 1919/20–1939 im Spiegel wissenschaftlicher also Literatur und politischer Publizistik*, "Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft" 1977, 25, pp. 57–74; idem, *Polens Septemberkatastrophe 1939 und ihre Lehren: (Bemerkungen zur polnischen Außenpolitik Herbst 1938 bis Sommer 1939)*, in: *Polen an der Schwelle zweier Epochen: (1939–1944)*, Rostock 1982, pp. 5–16; *Von der "Globallösung" zum "Fall Weiß"*: die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1938/39, in: *Der Weg in den Krieg. Der Weg in den Krieg: Studien zur Geschichte der Vorkriegsjahre (1935/36 bis 1939)*, eds. K. Pätzold, E. Dietrich, Berlin 1989, pp. 381–402; *Nachruf auf Prof. Dr. sc. phil. Johannes Kalisch*. Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Ralph Schattkowsky, Rostock/Thorn, <http://www.polen-news.de/puw/puw66-24.html> [access: 05.01.2024].

took part in the work of the Textbook Commission. The same academic center also produced studies on the Polish minority in Germany before the outbreak of the war and the importance of the Bund Deutscher Osten (League for the German East) as well as the Hitlerjugend in Germany's foreign policy. The theme of Polish-German relations in the last year of peace and first weeks of the war was also investigated as one of many in synthetic publications. In accordance with the requirements of the time, they elaborated on the theses about Western imperialism and class struggle while little attention was devoted to Polish policy of 1938–1939, the course of military operations in September 1939 being presented instead¹³.

With regard to the historiography of the Federal Republic of Germany, it should be first of all pointed out that while the (officially) main motto of East German historians investigating the history of the Third Reich was *Irrweg der Nation* or *The Wrong Track of the Nation*, West German scholars focused on Friedrich Meinecke's (1862–1954) thesis about *Die deutsche Katastrophe* or *German Disaster*. This meant focusing on the losses suffered by German society as a result of the outbreak of the war¹⁴. The facing of the problem of responsibility towards other nations for the WW2 events was postponed for several reasons. German society was neither eager nor ready to remove functionaries of the previous regime from public life (in the 1980s, when describing this attitude, columnist Ralph Giordano introduced the term of German *Second Guilt/Zweite Schuld* into public discourse). This applied also to the circles of historians; moreover, there was simply an insufficient number of people not involved with the previous system. Those who were against Hitler's policy during the war were still 'tacitly' condemned as traitors of the nation, and moreover, the Germans considered themselves draconianly punished in the last months of the war. Social resistance was aroused by the disclosure of the realities of concentration camps, about which an ordinary German simply did not want to know anything. The recognition of German responsibility for the outbreak and events of World War Two by Soviet-controlled East Germany was an additional factor for doubting the German guilt.

¹³ M. Rothbarth, *Der »Bund Deutscher Osten«: (1933–1942). Instrument aggressiver Ostpolitik des faschistischen deutschen Imperialismus*, vols 1–2, Rostock 1971; *Polen im Bannkreis des Imperialismus 1918 bis 1944*, ed. B. Schrage, Rostock 1980; *Der deutsche Imperialismus und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Materialien der wissenschaftlichen Konferenz der Kommission der Historiker der DDR und der UdSSR zum Thema »Der deutsche Imperialismus und der Zweite Weltkrieg« vom 14. bis 19. Dezember 1959 in Berlin*, vols 1–3, Berlin 1960–1962; *Deutsche Geschichte*, eds. H.J. Bartmuss et al., vol. 3, Berlin 1968, pp. 247–261.

¹⁴ W. Wichert, *op. cit.*, p. 28; K. Wóycicki, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–33.

Another problem was the lack of access to documents during the period of their legal protection¹⁵.

It should be said that the bilateral Polish-German relations before the outbreak of World War Two and in the autumn of 1939 were not a particularly important subject for West German historians during that period – on the contrary, they were an inconvenient topic. The current German literature on the subject notes that the fact that most testimonies concerning German crimes committed in the first years of the war came from behind the Iron Curtain became a sufficient reason (or rather a pretext) why many scholars at once recognized those testimonies as false. At the same time, when German historians were already able to compare them with the German sources (reports, requests to confirm controversial orders), they hardly used this opportunity¹⁶.

In 1957 appeared the publication by Hans Roos (1919–1984), devoted to Polish foreign policy in the 1930s. It met with a very positive assessment by the Polish-American historian Piotr S. Wandycz as a study based on wide sources and using rich literature. Nevertheless, P.S. Wandycz showed as a weakness the fact that the final dividing line in the study was January 1939, and also that H. Roos describes Polish-Czechoslovak and Polish-Lithuanian relations in great detail but at the same time in a biased manner, explaining conflicts as resulting from Józef Beck's totally erroneous policy, and – in the case of Czechia – from the Polish anti-Czech attitude, as apparently evidenced by one of Władysław Studnicki's books. At the same time Roos mentions only in passing the Czech anti-Polish publications¹⁷. In recent years a suggestion appeared in German historiography that the Polish-Czech conflict had been inspired by Germany (as shown below)¹⁸.

¹⁵ D. Schenk, *Strukturen der systematischen Nichtverfolgung von Nazitälern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, "Zeitschrift des Verbandes Polnischer Germanisten" 2014, 3, pp. 57–73; B. Kosmala, *Hilfe und Rettung für Juden in Osteuropa mit dem Schwerpunkt Polen/ Pomoc i ratunek dla Żydów w Europie Wschodniej ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Polski*, referat wygłoszony na konferencji 3. *Internationale Konferenz zur Holocaust-Forschung – Helfer, Retter und Netzwerker des Widerstands*, Berlin 27–28.01.2011, main organizer: Die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. The whole report is accessible on the website: Die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: <https://www.bpb.de/medien/191213/Vortrag-Kosmala1.pdf> [access: 21.10.2022]; W. Wichert, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–48.

¹⁶ M. Krzoska, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

¹⁷ P.S. Wandycz, *Polen und Europa: Studien zur polnischen Aussenpolitik, 1931–1939* by Hans Roos, "The Journal of Modern History" 1957, 29, 5, p. 404.

¹⁸ See: annotation 22 and for example oraz: W. Michalka, *Das Dritte Reich (1933–1945)*, in: *Deutsche Geschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Wiedervereinigung*, [ed.] M. Vogt, 2nd edition, Stuttgart 1991, pp. 646–727.

The Polish theme is found of course in synthetic publications. In *Dzieje Niemiec* [History of Germany] published at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, Hellmuth Rössler (1910–1968) says, repeating the ideas from the studies published in the Third Reich, that Poland, along with Great Britain, is one of the main states responsible for the outbreak of World War Two. He substantiated his thesis by the fact that in the last months of peace the Polish side rejected attempts at an agreement, which Germany reputedly sought to achieve¹⁹. At the same time a synthetic presentation of German history was prepared and published by Johannes Bühler (1884–1967). This author believed, in turn, that both Poland and Germany were Hitler's victims. In the subchapter summing up the history of the last months preceding the outbreak of the war he stated: 'Hitler is obviously to blame. Conscious of his goals, he first achieved control over the German nation by means of the Nazi party and Gestapo, and then, through intense armaments, in which the main emphasis was laid on modern weapons [...] he created a base to capture German Lebensraum in the East. Poland was the next target. [...] These were not calculations of a mad psychopath, as many thought: Hitler acted as a political gambler and fanatic, permeated with the idea that because of their racial uniqueness the Germans had the right to rule others'²⁰.

With regard to the papers directly concerning Polish-German relations, the 1950s saw the publication of inter alia documents and a study about international relations in the summer of 1939, documents and monographs concerning German foreign policy, monographs devoted to Polish foreign policy in the 1930s, taking special account of the so-called Beck system²¹.

In the early 1960s appeared a book *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik 1939–1945* by Martin Broszat (1926–1989), who with time became one of the world's most recognized scholars studying National Socialism (from 1972, he was Director of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich). The book appears to be a testimony to the turning point that took place

¹⁹ W. Wichert, *op. cit.*, p. 59; the original title of H. Rössler's publication: *Deutsche Geschichte. Schicksale des Volkes in Europas Mitte*, Gütersloh 1961.

²⁰ The thesis about the personal responsibility of Hitler and his closest associates juxtaposed with the argument about the joint responsibility of the whole German society gained very high popularity and turned out to be long-lived. See: K. Wóycicki, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

²¹ W. Hofer, *Die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkrieges: eine Studie über die internationalen Beziehungen im Sommer 1939. Mit Dokumenten*, Stuttgart 1954; H. Roos, *Polen und Europa: Studien zur polnischen Außenpolitik; 1931–1939*, Tübingen 1957; *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik: 1918–1945, Serie A–E*, Baden-Baden–Göttingen 1950–1995; H. Spanaus, A. Hans, *Die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen von 1933 bis zum Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Erlangen 1950.

in some part of the community of West German historians with regard to the problem of German-Polish relations in the then not so distant past. In the preface the author says: 'The outcome of German policy towards Poland during World War Two is terrifying. The point is to take it into consideration rather than 'compensate' for Germany's post-war fate'²².

According to M. Broszat, the first goal of Germany's policy in 1938–1939 was to make Poland a satellite state. The creation of the situation in which Poland benefited from the capture of Czechoslovakia was meant to be a payment for fulfilling this role. The matter of Gdansk was presented by the author as being of little importance in itself but significant as a touchstone of Poland's readiness to acknowledge its dependence. In addition, in Germany's plans, its closest eastern neighbor was also expected to play a certain role in capturing the infamous *Lebensraum* in the territory of the Soviet Union. The refusal of the Polish government to agree and its acquisition of British guarantees was allegedly the reason why Germany began to seek to achieve a different goal, that is, an agreement with Stalin (whom, according to the cited author, Hitler expected to understand the plans to change demographic relations on a large scale). In early September 1939, Germany allegedly still considered preserving the Polish statehood in some form – the task of that puppet state would be to recognize the annexation, which might have postponed the conflict with Great Britain and France. The correction of the frontiers in comparison with the stipulations of the Ribbentrop – Molotov Pact (called in this publication 'the German-Soviet Pact of 23 August'; later the name Hitler-Stalin-Pakt²³ was adopted in Germany) was explained by M. Broszat both by ethnic reasons and by the fact of leaving the matter of possible Polish statehood to Germany. The plan to create a puppet state was no longer relevant in October 1939. The author did not describe the course of operations on the front, stating only that in its propaganda comments the German side treated the Polish adversary irreverently when presenting the eighteen-day campaign. On the other hand, Broszat showed the course of Alfred Rosenberg's talks with Hitler concerning population policies. Summing up this theme, he

²² M. Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik 1939–1945*, Stuttgart 1961, p. 7. When pondering over the German desire for compensation for Germany's postwar fate addressed exactly to the Polish society, one cannot help reflecting that, apart from what happened during the war itself and without diverting towards the appealing but false lead to try to explain this attitude by psychological theories of transferring aggression and denial, the "Polish postwar fate" was not after all particularly enviable.

²³ C. Curcuruto, *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt (23. August 1939). Die Wahrnehmung und Reaktion Italiens (German Edition)*, München 2013; C. Weber, *Der Pakt: Stalin, Hitler und die Geschichte einer mörderischen Allianz*, München 2019.

wrote that the quick liquidation of the military administration and its replacement by a civil one and the competence chaos were purposeful actions meant to create conditions for criminal activities directed against the Polish and Jewish populations (from which it indirectly follows that the author was then convinced that such actions would not have taken place under Wehrmacht rule; as is known, this belief persisted very long in German society)²⁴. However, in the 1960s publications also appeared concerning the period on the brink of the outbreak of the war, in which the Polish topic was treated marginally but, in the way, showing that thinking about Poland as ‘the bastard of the Versailles Treaty’ still lingered on in the circles of German historians. According to W. Wichert, these publications showed a ‘small number’ of NSDAP and SS rogues and noble Wehrmacht soldiers on the one hand, and on the other – a self-assured Poland, whose policy led to an armed conflict²⁵. At the same time a book by Andreas Hillgruber (1925–1989) was published devoted to the role of Germany before the two World Wars. Its author presented the Polish foreign policy from the mid-1930s only as the result of the actions by the actual actors (Germany, France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union). That publication contains a comment unpleasant to the Polish reader, albeit not necessarily groundless, that Great Britain took care to maintain in the international arena the appearances of Polish independence and *quasi-world power status* in order that it was Poland that would appear as an obstacle to German expansion to the east and thereby receive the first armed attack²⁶. In the 1960s, German historiography presented a still recurrent thesis (also found in the historiography of other countries) that the attack on Poland was not the correct moment of the outbreak of World War Two but one of a series of events preceding this outbreak (like earlier the Anschluss of Austria and the annexation of Czechoslovakia)²⁷.

In the 1970s and 1980s, more detailed studies began to be published concerning the operations directly preceding the invasion of Poland, such as, for example, frontier incidents in the summer of 1939, preparations

²⁴ M. Broszat, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–18.

²⁵ W. Wichert formulates these remarks by referring to some extent to Jerzy Krasuski’s earlier assessments regarding the works by Golo Mann, Ernst Nolte, Peter Kleist, and Hellmuth G. Dahms. W. Wichert, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–58.

²⁶ *Entscheidend war nur im Sinne der britischen Konzeption, daß als wichtigstes Hindernis für einen “Ausbruch” Deutschlands nach Osten als quasi-Großmacht und eigenständige machtpolitische Größe unbedingt erhalten bleiben mußte.* A. Hillgruber, *Deutschlands Rolle in der Vorgeschichte der beiden Weltkriege*, Göttingen 1967. I have used the 1986 edition. Quotation p. 81.

²⁷ *Kriegsbeginn 1939: Entfesselung oder Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkriegs?*, ed. G. Niedhart, Darmstadt 1976; the publication contains articles by British and German authors of the 1960s and 1970s.

for the Tannenberg operation or exercises as part of *Aktion Zug* (whose main objective was to capture the Tczew bridges). Publication also began of the orders issued by the German Armed Forces High Command (OKW) during World War Two, and a much wider interest was taken in the course of Poland's defensive war (*Polenfeldzug*), when comparing the Polish and German research on the subject²⁸. In 1979 appeared the first of a series of publications published under the research program concerning the course of military operations, implemented by the research institute: *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt* (within the Bundeswehr). As Waldemar Rezmer observed, comparatively little attention was devoted to the Polish defensive war in those publications²⁹.

The well-known *dispute among historians/Historiker Streit* taking place in the 1980s (observed attentively by Polish humanists) did not directly touch upon the issue of Polish-German relations at the moment of the outbreak of the war³⁰. However, the question itself about the responsibility for the war events and about whether the regime ruling in Germany in 1933–1945 was something exceptional or comparable with other European systems was certainly also asked by scholars studying German-Polish relations. One of the (then) younger generation of historians, Götz Aly (b. 1947), taking an active stance on the dispute conducted by the older generation, carried out very interested research on the economic aspect of the functioning of the Third Reich. He focused mainly on the material dimension of anti-Semitism, but in the later period his many years of work also resulted in the description of the financial mechanisms prepared at least from May 1939 that enabled offloading inflation and shortages unavoidable during the war from Germany to Poland and other occupied countries³¹.

²⁸ *Die Berichte des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht: 1939–1945*, vols 1–3, München 1983–1985; H.R. Bachmann, *Der Kampf um Hela: 1. September – 1. Oktober 1939*, "Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau" 1970, 20, 5, pp. 275–296; H.D. Krannhals, *Massenhysterie beim Ausbruch des deutsch-polnischen Krieges*, "Deutsche Studien" 1970, 8, 30, pp. 131–137; R. Elble, *Die Schlacht an der Bzura im September 1939 aus deutscher und polnischer Sicht*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1975; *September 1939: Krieg, Besatzung, Widerstand in Polen; acht Beiträge*, ed. C. Kleßmann. Göttingen 1989; *Wach auf, es ist Krieg! Wie Polen und Deutsche den 1. September 1939 erlebten*, ed. W. Schade, Bielefeld 1989.

²⁹ *Idem*, *op. cit.*, pp. 120–121. This author notes that few German historians are interested in the purely military side of World War Two.

³⁰ U. Herbert, *Der „Historikerstreit“ – Politische, wissenschaftliche, biographische Aspekte*, in: *Zeitgeschichte, Wissenschaft und Politik*, ed. V. Kronenberg, [no place of publication] 2008.

³¹ G. Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat*, Frankfurt am Main, 2005. I used the Polish edition: *idem*, *Państwo Hitlera*, transl. W. Łygaś, Gdańsk 2022, pp. 103–127.

The object of constant interest in the next decades was the situation of the German minority in Poland on the eve of the war and the role of the Free City of Gdansk in German foreign policy³². Historians exploring these subjects used the publications written in the period of the Third Reich, sometimes also repeating the conclusions expressed in them³³. In the 1950s in his book *Das Deutschtum in Polen 1918–1939* Otto Heike (1901–1990) exploited the subject of the ‘September crime’. In his successive publications, a historian of the Lutheran Church in Poland, Eduard Kneifel (1896–1993), in turn reverted to the charge of compulsory Polonization, which was allegedly conducted using the Church structures. Furthermore, this author objected to the opinion of German Lutheran pastors who stated during the postwar period that German Protestants should apologize to Polish coreligionists for the World War Two events. In his book *Die Pastoren der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Polen* he expressed his conviction that Poland was equally an aggressor. To substantiate his claim, he compared the list of a dozen or so victims among the German pastors of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church with the list of a dozen or so Polish Lutheran priests, who were murdered in the autumn of 1939 or were detained and sent to concentration camps (where they died). Without denying that at the beginning of the war there were cases of aggression towards the politically uncommitted German population and could have also affected pastors, it is necessary to critically examine the list of names presented by E. Kneifel. Out of fourteen cases, in light of the data provided by this author in the same publication, there is no doubt about two – the names of the pastors executed by a firing squad in September 1939. Apart from these, he presented as victims of the

³² E. Hasbach, *Die Lage der deutschen Volksgruppe in Polen vor dem Zweiten Weltkriege*, “Zeitschrift für Ostforschung” 1952, 1, pp. 262–264; T. Bierschenk, *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Polen: 1934–1939*, Kitzingen 1954; O. Heike, *Das Deutschtum in Polen 1918–1939*, Bonn 1955; P. Nasarski, *Deutsche Jugend im Zerrbild: polnische Legenden ohne Ende*, “Der Europäische Osten” 1965, 11, pp. 577–585.

³³ W. Wrzesiński, *Wokół dziejów Prus Wschodnich w okresie międzywojennym w historiografii polskiej i niemieckiej*, in: *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie w historiografii*, part 3, *Studia z dziejów historiografii polskiej i niemieckiej*, [eds.] J. Krasuski, G. Labuda. A.W. Walczak, Poznań 1991, pp. 175–227, 220–223; B. Drewniak, *Pomorze Gdańskie i problem tzw. korytarza*, in: *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie*, pp. 88–173. Already after 1989 that author observed that: ‘Polish scholars observe with closest attention everything that is connected with the West German Ostforschung because in many research initiatives pursued in the FRG one can observe the trend intended toward territorial revisionism. The assessment of this trend, along with the existence of many other matters of contention, where substantive discussions are still going on, is a clearly emerging problem with its dynamics of conducted re-evaluations’, *ibidem*, p. 172.

Polish side the pastors who were executed by shooting in 1945 after the entry of the Red Army, the pastors who in 1940 and even in 1949 allegedly died as *a result*, as he put it, *of ill-treatment by the Poles in September 1939*, and even a pastor, who was executed by shooting for trying to escape from the prison in Płock in 1940 (?)³⁴.

As regards the Free City of Gdansk, the earlier literature on the subject contained a claim that in light of the Versailles Treaty decisions, Gdansk was supposed to be an independent state, and the decision to incorporate it into the German Reich should have supposedly belonged to the Reich and the Free City of Gdansk³⁵. H.V. Böttcher, who presented such conclusions, admitted, however, that the incorporation of Gdansk into the Third Reich on 1 September 1939 had legal defects. The later publications, as has already been mentioned above, presented the German demands for the so-called corridor as an expression of Germany's drive towards war. At the same time, it was pointed out that the German public expected a solution to this matter because of the German inhabitants of the Free City³⁶.

The historiography after the unification of Germany is a continuation of West German historiography. As has been said above, East Germany's historiography has not aroused greater interest so far, and the work of still active historians from the former Eastern Bloc has been evaluated according to West German norms³⁷.

In the 1990s, another volume was published from the aforementioned series prepared by the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt der Bundeswehr³⁸. From the Polish viewpoint, an interesting but at the same

³⁴ E. Kneifel, *Die Pastoren der Evangelisch-Augsburgischen Kirche in Polen. Ein biographisches Pfarrerbuch mit einem Anhang*, Eging 1967, pp. 201–205; O. Heike, *op. cit.*

³⁵ H.V. Böttcher, *Die völkerrechtliche Lage der Freien Stadt Danzig seit 1945*, Göttingen 1958 p. 114; vide also H.W. Bracht, *Die völkerrechtliche Lage der Freien Stadt Danzig*, "Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa Forschung" 1961, 3 (13), pp. 523–527.

³⁶ Cf. H. Rohde, *Kriegsbeginn 1939 in Danzig – Planungen und Wirklichkeit*, in: *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Analysen, Grundzüge, Forschungsbilanz*, ed. W. Michalka, München–Zürich 1990, pp. 462–481.

³⁷ R. Eckert, *Ein gescheiterter Neuanfang?*, "Geschichte und Gesellschaft" 1994, 20, pp. 609–615; the author writes somewhat mockingly that in East Germany the Marxist paradigm was superficially replaced by references to Max Weber or to the so-called Annales School.

³⁸ H. Boog, *Luftkriegführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg: ein internationaler Vergleich*, Bonn 1993. In the second half of the 1990s, Stefan Kley's PhD dissertation was also published: *Hitler, Ribbentrop und die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, Paderborn–München–Wien–Zürich 1996. The author focuses on diplomatic tactics, presenting the attack on Poland as necessary for Germany for one reason – namely, to secure peace on the eastern frontier during the war in the West. This is a complement to the idea expressed at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s by W. Michalka that the Anti-Comintern Pact was aimed in fact primarily at

time controversial thesis is the statement by Horst Boog (1928–2016), a historian working in the aforementioned project, according to whom the bombing of Wieluń, which began World War Two, was a result of a mistake, and the actual target was a cavalry brigade stationed near the town³⁹. This thesis was criticized inter alia by Hans-Erich Volkmann (b. 1938) and a representative of the next generation, Jochen Böehler (b.1969). The two historians are specialists both in military science and in the history of East-Central Europe. In the early 2000s, J. Böehler published studies devoted to Poland's defensive war and German crimes on the occupied territories, thereby filling in the gap in German historiography while at the same time bringing up a subject difficult for the German reader. These books were translated into Polish within several years and provoked a vivid discussion⁴⁰.

At the same the attention of German public opinion was riveted by the book: *1939 – der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte: der Lange Anlauf zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* by Gerd Schultze-Rhonhof (b. 1939). Even though this publication was prepared outside the academic circles and is labeled as extremist

Great Britain: 'Diese von Ribbentrop befürwortete Bündniskonstellation war zwar dem Tenor nach antikommunistisch, der Sache nach aber antibritisch, zumal alle drei Mächte in ihrer angestrebten Expansionsrichtung – wie sie Ribbentrop sah – nicht von der Sowjetunion, sondern primär von England behindert und beeinträchtigt wurden'. Idem, *op. cit.*, pp. 646–727, citation: p. 687.

³⁹ H. Boog, *Bombenkriegslegenden*, "Militärgeschichtliche Beiträge" 1995, 9, pp. 22–29; idem, *Völkerrecht und Menschlichkeit im Luftkrieg*, in: *Die Soldaten der Wehrmacht*, ed. H. Poppel, München 1998, pp. 256–323; idem, *Bombardierung der polnischen Grenzstadt Wielun am 1.9.1939*, in: *Kriegsverbrechen in Europa und im Nahen Osten im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. F.W. Seidler, A.M. de Zayas, Hamburg 2002, pp. 60–66.

⁴⁰ H.E. Volkmann, *Wolfram von Richthofen, die Zerstörung Wieluńs und das Kriegsvölkerrecht*, "Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift", 2011, 70, pp. 287–328; an important study by the same author is also: *Polen im politisch-wirtschaftlichem Kalkül des Dritten Reiches 1933–1939*, in: *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 237–248; J. Böehler, *Der Überfall: Deutschlands Krieg gegen Polen*, Frankfurt am Main, 2009; *Einsatzgruppen in Polen: Darstellung und Dokumentation*, eds. K.M. Mallmann, J. Böehler, J. Matthäus, Darmstadt 2008; vide also: *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Polen 1939–1945: Eine Leerstelle deutscher Erinnerung?*, eds. D. Bingen, S. Lengemann, Bonn 2019. J. Böehler together with Stephan Lehnstaedt also edited a collection of essays based on speeches from the 2009 conference of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw devoted to the realities of everyday life in occupied Poland, titled: *Review: "Gewalt und Alltag im besetzten Polen"*, Osnabrück 2012; J. Böehler, *Der Überfall: Deutschlands Krieg gegen Polen*, Frankfurt am Main, 2009; *Einsatzgruppen in Polen: Darstellung und Dokumentation*, eds. K.M. Mallmann, J. Böehler, J. Matthäus, Darmstadt 2008; J. Böehler, *Der Überfall: Deutschlands Krieg gegen Polen*, Frankfurt am Main, 2009; vide also: *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Polen 1939–1945: Eine Leerstelle deutscher Erinnerung?*, eds. D. Bingen, S. Lengemann; <https://nto.pl/dr-jochen-boehler-wrog-napad-na-polske/ar/4451295> [access: 08.01.2024].

by the mainstream opinion-forming circles, it should nevertheless be discussed because it enjoyed tremendous popularity – in 2019, its 11th edition was published (the first appeared at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s). The author presents in it the arguments once present in the German discourse and scientific articles, which said that until the moment of the attack on the Soviet Union, German policy was not more aggressive than the policies of Poland (and other states), and war crimes were the result of brutalization after encountering the Soviet reality in 1941. Interestingly, G. Schultze-Rhonhof insists that these are his original conclusions that he reached after long-lasting studies of foreign literature, in which, unlike in German literature as he tries to convince the readers, Germany is not ascribed the role of the state persistently striving for war⁴¹.

Since the 2000s more attention began to be also paid to the issues seldom raised earlier. Such as *Polenaktion*, i.e. the expulsion from Germany in October 1938 of robbed Jews having Polish citizenship, which involved a long-lasting diplomatic dispute. The majority of current scholarly or popularizing publications concern precisely this event⁴². The subject of the so-called Bloody Sunday in Bydgoszcz has also returned. In 2012, an article about this event by Markus Krzoska (b. 1967) appeared in one of Germany's most popular historical scholarly journals "Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte". The author followed the German and Polish studies conducted for several decades together with the accompanying scholarly and journalistic narratives, including the works of *Historisch Landeskundliche Kommission für die Deutschen in Polen* founded in 1950 and of Poland's Institute of National Remembrance. He points out that both German and Polish historians seldom refer to the findings of the other side, which makes it difficult to explain events. In addition to the information concerning the so-called Bloody Sunday itself and the ways of describing it, the text also contains ideas with wider application. M. Krzoska believes that German scholars studying the beginning of World War Two tend to focus on isolated events whereas the realities of German-occupied Poland remain little known. He points out that the research context in which

⁴¹ G. Szultze-Rhonhof, *1939 – der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte: der lange Anlauf zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 2nd edition, München 2003. Promotion meetings gathered a several-thousand strong audience. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WteEcsIVr4> [access: 07.01.2024].

⁴² "Ich war ein seltener Fall": die deutsch-jüdisch-polnische Geschichte der Leni Zytznicka, eds. H. Behrens, N. Reichling, Essen 2018; J. Hoschek, *Abgeschoben aus Erfurt: Dokumente zur "Polenaktion" 1938*, Jena 2017; K. Krabbe, "Polenaktion" 1938: Die erste Ausweiseaktion der nationalsozialistischen Regierung an polnischen Juden, München 2009; A. Berg, *Polenaktion 1938*, München 2004.

German losses are shown should be: the German aggression, victims on the Polish and Jewish side, purposeful bombardment of civil population, murders carried out by the SS, "Volksschutz" (Selbstschutz), German police and by the Wehrmacht. He also states that the explanation of individual incidents in which the German minority could have been aggrieved and the estimate of the number of victims is an important objective in itself but not a priority in view of the whole research perspective concerning the September of 1939⁴³.

As has been mentioned above, both German and Polish historians observe that in the German historiography of German-Polish relations in 1938–1939 there are many missing pages. It was a period rich in events and the number of diverse sources is simply overwhelming; consequently, interesting research prospects are emerging. A preliminary grasp of this broad source material can be facilitated by the following directions. Diplomatic records showing accumulation of the conflict before the outbreak of the war are stored in the German Foreign Ministry's Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amt in Berlin⁴⁴. Separate records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, e.g. documents of the March-August 1939 period, concerning the planned cooperation with Slovakia during the invasion of Poland are kept in the Federal Archive⁴⁵. Bilateral diplomatic relations are explored to a negligible extent in German literature: scholars interested in the subject should also use the aforementioned source publications and the collections of the Archives of Modern Records in Poland and the Archives of the Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London.

The materials concerning Poland's defensive war and the first months of German occupation are part of the records of the Federal Archives stored in the Military Division/ Bundesarchiv Abteilung Militärarchiv

⁴³ Citing: 'Und so wichtig es ist, die Klärung der Opferzahlen voranzutreiben, so sekundär ist es doch in Bezug auf die Ereignisse im gesamten Polen im Herbst 1939'. M. Krzoska, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁴⁴ Documents concerning relations with Poland are stored first of all in the following fonds: Polen (containing documentation on international treaties, primary series – Verträge); Politische Abteilung (the fonds containing documents on relations with other countries, including the League of Nations; primary series – Deutsches Reich-Zentrale); R I – R II Völkerrecht, Konsularrecht, R III Staatsrecht, Strafrecht (the fonds containing documents concerning international and criminal law and extradition; primary series – Deutsches Reich-Zentrale), Deutschtum im Ausland (the fond containing documents on the German minority in Poland; primary series Kultur), and Botschaft Warschau (the fonds containing the records of the German Embassy in Warsaw).

⁴⁵ Fonds: BArch R 901 Auswärtiges Amt.

in Freiburg⁴⁶. The records contain military diaries and operation reports on the Wehrmacht's actions in 1939, documents of the General Staffs of Air Force and Infantry, documents and studies about the actions of the Navy; orders of the Command of the 4th Armored Division; reports of strike forces; the diary of operations involving the securing of the border between 24 August and 18 November 1939, photos and films documenting the attack on Poland (and in the same fonds – on Belgium and France); documents of training units; materials of propaganda units; documents on awarding the Iron Cross; commanders' notes; documents about inspections; documents concerning logistics and transport; memoirs; postwar analyses of events; documents related to carrying away the spoils of war and the takeover of railways; reports concerning chemical weapons and armaments plants; and fonds concerning individual commanders and soldiers. In the files scattered in the archives of individual Länder there are mainly photographic collections and propaganda publications. In the abovementioned article, W. Rezmer pointed to the possibility of using German publications of the World War Two period in the research on Poland's defensive war. Also the press of the German minority is still a little-utilized source. The use of both types of publications certainly requires great caution; however, in addition to the fact that analyzing them will enrich the knowledge on the propaganda mechanisms, critical reading may also provide information about facts themselves⁴⁷. Very rich is also memoir-based literature. Polish specialists in German studies have in any case already observed that what we perceive as deficiencies in the German historiography concerning our mutual relations is now the result of lack of interest rather than lack of sources.

⁴⁶ For example: Bundesarchiv, BArch RH 2 OKH / Generalstab des Heeres; Bundesarchiv, BArch RH 3 OKH / Generalquartiermeister und nachgeordneter Bereich; Bundesarchiv, BArch RH 87 Verbände und Einheiten der Gebirgsjäger, Jäger und Skijäger des Heeres; Bundesarchiv, BArch RL 2-IV Generalstab der Luftwaffe / Kriegswissenschaftliche Abteilung; Bundesarchiv, BArch N 22 Bock, Fedor von (Generalfeldmarschall); BArch RH 24-8 VIII. Armeekorps; BArch RH 21-3 Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 3; Bundesarchiv, BArch RH 28-1 1. Gebirgs-Division; BArch RW 5/ OKW / Amt Ausland/Abwehr; BArch FILMSG 1 (the film collections are the fonds not divided into periods; catalog number concerning the invasion of Poland – 1/4199). A guide to the collections concerning Poland is: J. Gaul, *Polonika w Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv we Freiburg*, "Archeion" 2004, 107, pp. 391–397. In the Archives of the German: Länder: photographic collections e.g. Landesarchiv Berlin, F Rep. 290 (09) Allgemeine Fotosammlung der Landesbildstelle Berlin; propaganda publications e.g. Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Abt. Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Flugschriftensammlung bis 1945 >> Polnischer Feldzug, J 150 /311 No. 8.

⁴⁷ W. Rezmer, *op. cit.*, passim.

To sum up, the years 1938–1939 in the Polish-German relations are a very interesting period and rich in events that influenced the future of both societies. Writing down the history of those events also took place in interesting times, in which both sides eventually experienced the occupation, changes in the form of state and political-system transformation. The significant politicization of the subject causes that in many studies it is difficult to distinguish between the factual and interpretive level.

The perception of the history of the year preceding World War Two and the first weeks of the occupation of the Polish territory differs on either side of the Oder River, and this is understandable to a considerable extent: both because it is difficult to find any events, especially conflict ones, that could be perceived in the same way by the participating parties, and also because the Second Polish Republic and the German Reich were not the states of equal importance in the international arena. However, even taking this into account, the Polish historian finds it difficult to resist the impression that the proportions in the German research are disturbed, which is illustrated by the fact that in the abovementioned ample bibliography of studies concerning the Third Reich, the publications on the relations with Poland occupy one page whereas the issue of German resistance against the Nazi regime, the subject of exclusion of its opponents from public life and emigration occupy about 150 pages⁴⁸. It appears that this impression is not – despite everything – the effect of excessive Polonocentrism, of which Polish scholars are accused by K. Zarnack, but a person not involved on either side could also have it. The gaps in the historiography concerning German-Polish relations in that difficult period are also increasingly often noticed by German historians. The upsetting of proportions not so much raises doubts in the truth of the saying that history is written by the victors as it provokes reflection that victory and defeat are relational terms, and the beginning, end and assessment of World War Two are still open subjects.

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⁴⁸ M. Ruck, *op. cit.*, pp. 598–742; 1008.

Bundesarchiv:

BArch R 901 Auswärtiges Amt; BArch RH 2 OKH / Generalstab des Heeres; Bundesarchiv; BArch RH 3 OKH / Generalquartiermeister und nachgeordneter Bereich; BArch RH 87 Verbände und Einheiten der Gebirgsjäger, Jäger und Skijäger des Heeres; BArch RL 2-IV Generalstab der Luftwaffe / Kriegswissenschaftliche Abteilung; BArch N 22 Bock, Fedor von (Generalfeldmarschall); BArch RH 24-8 VIII. Armeekorps; BArch RH 21-3 Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 3; Bundesarchiv, BArch RH 28-1 1. Gebirgs-Division; BArch RW 5/OKW / Amt Ausland/Abwehr; BArch FILMSG 1.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Renata Lesiakowska – PhD of Humanities in the discipline of history, assistant professor at the Institute of History of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University. Research interests: nation-building processes, national identity, Polish-German relations in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Evangelical Church in Poland. Author of the monograph *Polonisation of Germans in the Kingdom of Poland in the second half of the 19th century on the basis of press publications* (Lublin 2024).

NOTA O AUTORZE

Renata Lesiakowska – dr nauk humanistycznych w dyscyplinie historia, adiunkt Instytutu Historii Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej. Zainteresowania badawcze: procesy narodotwórcze, tożsamość narodowa, stosunki polsko-niemieckie w XIX i XX w., Kościół ewangelicko-augsburski na ziemiach polskich. Autorka monografii pt. *Polonisation of Germans in the Kingdom of Poland in the second half of the 19th century on the basis of press publications* (Lublin 2024).