



Roman Mykhalchuk

Department of World History
Rivne State University of Humanities, Rivne
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9313-4830>
r.mykhalchuk@ukr.net

Holocaust Oral History Sources in the Yahad-In Unum Archive Collection (Based on Volhynia-Podolia General District Materials)

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to analyze the oral history collection of the Holocaust sources at the Yahad-In Unum scientific institution (Paris, France) on the example of the Nazi-occupied territories of the Volhynia-Podolia General District of Reichskommissariat Ukraine. The research methodology is based on the principles of historicism and scientific objectivity. Analysis of oral history sources is the main method of the research. Scientific novelty: For the first time in historiography, the oral history Holocaust sources of the Yahad-In Unum scientific institution were analyzed based on the example of the Volhynia-Podolia General District. The conclusions prove that the oral history sources of Yahad-In Unum have powerful potential for Holocaust studies. They have exclusive information that is not found in other sources. German and Soviet documents cannot fully shed light on Holocaust history. Instead, the stories of witnesses provide an opportunity to examine this topic in a multifaceted way.

Key words: Yahad-In Unum, Holocaust, oral history, eyewitness testimony, Patrick Desbois, Volhynia-Podolia General District, “small death jobs”.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en>), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s) 2023.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

Editor-in-chief: Jolanta Sujecka

Conception and academic editing: Wojciech Sajkowski

Introduction: Research problem

Oral history is gaining an increasingly prominent place in historical research. Using oral sources, scholars have the opportunity to consider the events they study from the perspective of a specific person and to move away from the grand narrative of events. The use of oral history narratives is extremely relevant for the study of traumatic events of the 20th century, in particular World War II, the Holocaust, the totalitarian practices of National Socialism, etc.

The advantages of oral history sources include the availability of information that other sources do not contain. They provide an opportunity to understand the background of the period in question. The stories of eyewitnesses and direct participants in the events make it possible to deepen the traditional research base, to expand the historical ideas presented in official documents, and to make history “more human.” The lived and reconsidered stories of individuals provide an opportunity to learn about details that are missing in the grand narrative. Sometimes memories are the only sources describing the events in a particular town or village. In this way, oral history helps to balance official history with collective and individual experience. The relevance of collecting oral testimonies is obvious because with time, witnesses become older and die, and valuable information can be lost forever.

Among large-scale oral history projects, the *Yahad-In Unum* scientific institution (Paris, France) stands out with its rich collection. The sources gathered at this organization provide an opportunity to analyze the events of the Holocaust from different perspectives, including the viewpoint of non-Jewish narrators in small towns and villages. The relevance of using such sources is reinforced by the fact that in modern studies of the Holocaust, non-Jewish oral historical testimonies are used extremely rarely. Moreover, their use in Ukrainian historiography is only beginning to attract the attention of researchers.

The historiography of the problem consists of works by *Yahad-In Unum* founder Patrick Desbois and scholars who participated directly in the institution’s projects and have published scientific works based on the *Yahad-In Unum* sources.

Collecting and analyzing the testimonies of Holocaust bystanders in post-Soviet countries, Desbois notes in his writings the close relationship between the narrators and the Jews, because they were often neighbors (Debua, 2011; Desbois, 2013, pp. 91–99, 2018). Desbois is the person

who coined the term “Holocaust by bullets,” which refers to the killing of Jews in Eastern Europe by shooting. Desbois’s conclusions include the observation that the Nazi occupiers extensively involved local residents in the Holocaust. In particular, he argues his position with facts and specific examples in the Volhynia and Podolia regions of Ukraine (Desbois, 2018). His oral history project made it possible to identify a special category of civilians who were forced to perform “dirty work” (digging graves, burying victims, searching corpses, sorting the belongings and clothes of those killed, etc.) – “small death jobs.” This group of people was analyzed in an article by Roman Mykhalchuk based on the example of the Volhynia-Podolia General District (Mykhalchuk, 2020).

The available achievements of historiography based on the Yahad-In Unum sources allow certain features of the Holocaust in various occupied territories of Ukraine to be singled out. Those achievements include the latest studies published within the last three years by Volodymyr Zilinskyi (2019), Roman Shliakhtych (2019), Andrii Khoptiar (2020), and Yurii Kaparulin (2020). These works are broadly based on the oral testimonies stored at Yahad-In Unum and analyze Holocaust events in various regions of Ukraine: the Lviv, Dnipropetrovska, and Kamianets-Podilska regions, the Kalinindorf district (the territories of the modern-day Kherson and Mykolaiv regions) in the south of Ukraine, etc. Analyzing the Holocaust in the rural areas of the Dnipropetrovska region, Shliakhtych notes that there are more than 100 such testimonies from this region. Almost 90% of them are related to the region’s rural areas (Shliakhtych, 2019, p. 193). In Zilinskyi’s study of the mass executions of the Jewish population in the territory of the modern-day Lviv region, thanks to the oral sources at Yahad-In Unum it was possible to clarify the reaction and actions of the killers, witnesses and victims during the execution (Zilinskyi, 2019, p. 360). According to Khoptiar’s calculations, 82 killing operations of the Jewish population took place in the Kamianets-Podilska region during 1941–1943, in which about 115,000 people died. The most common method of killing was shooting (“Holocaust by bullets”), but the victims were also killed by burying alive in basements and mines, poisoning with gas, drowning in rivers (Khoptiar, 2020, p. 101). With the help of Yahad-In Unum oral testimonies, Kaparulin not only analyzed the Holocaust in the Kalinindorf district, but also followed the commemorative practices of the Jewish community at the sites of mass shootings (Kaparulin, 2020).

Studies on the methodology of conducting and processing oral history interviews (Bodnar, 2021; Hrinchenko, 2007; Hrinchenko et al., 2012; Usach, 2021) were also important for this research.

Another important direction of this research is the analysis of the behavior of witnesses/bystanders in relation to the victims of the Holocaust. The classic triad of Raul Hilberg – “perpetrator-victim-bystander” – needs rethinking. Modern researchers convincingly argue that bystanders are not a neutral category, but that in different situations a bystander might turn into a perpetrator, rescuer or accomplice. Works by Timothy Williams (2019), Mary Fulbrook (2019) and Froukje Demant (2019) helped to analyze the behavior of this category of persons during the Holocaust.

The sources for this research comprised the Yahad-In Unum archive’s video evidence from the Volhynia-Podolia General District. During the research, we analyzed 250 eyewitness testimonies; the average age of the witnesses at the time of the events was 15. The interviews were conducted from 2007 to 2013. The age range of the witnesses whose memories were analyzed was from nine to 31 years old. We also separately analyzed 50 interviews from the Yahad-In Unum collection from other regions of occupied Ukraine in order to compare common and distinctive features in the testimonies about the Nazi occupation.

Thus, the Yahad-In Unum oral history sources have great potential in Holocaust studies. These sources contain information about victims, witnesses and perpetrators of crimes, which makes it possible to examine the topic of the Holocaust from various angles. The aim of the present work has been to analyze these sources in order to study the conditions of the Jews during the Nazi occupation and trace the reaction of locals to the Holocaust in the Volhynia-Podolia General District of Reichskommissariat Ukraine. The research methods for executing the formulated tasks and achieving the goals are divided into general scientific and historical. The oral history method is important. A combination of different methods and interdisciplinary connections will facilitate the integration of research themes and the detection of patterns and features of the situation of the Jews in the region under consideration.

Yahad-In Unum Oral History Sources

Yahad-In Unum (Paris, France) is an organization that searches for sites of mass graves with the help of eyewitness accounts of mass murders of the Jewish and Roma populations during World War II. Created in 2004 by the Catholic priest Patrick Desbois in France, Yahad-In Unum (meaning “together”) has already identified about 2,500 sites of mass shootings. In the process of collecting the evidence base of Nazi

crimes, Yahad-In Unum records the video testimonies of eyewitnesses to the murders in those settlements where the crimes were committed, with further archiving of the video data for analysis and research. In many cases these recordings are almost the last opportunity to keep and preserve first-person accounts of these traumatic events.

As of May 5, 2022, the Yahad-In Unum video collection contained 7,558 video testimonies of eyewitnesses to mass murders of the Jewish and Roma populations during World War II in 12 countries, where 3,134 sites of mass executions of civilians were located.

It should be noted that the organization carries out the most active research work in the territory of Ukraine, where 1,298 sites of mass executions have been identified and 3,065 video testimonies have been recorded. After the start of the full-fledged Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022, an expedition led by Desbois has also been conducting an oral history project in Ukraine documenting the crimes of the Russian occupiers.

Thus, the Yahad-In Unum research institution is carrying out an important mission, expanding the scientific discourse of the study of the Holocaust and mass killings of civilians during World War II by the National Socialist regime in Eastern Europe, as well as modern crimes and violence during the Russian-Ukrainian war. The institution's activity is extremely relevant. Recording 80-year-old memories is a tremendously important process today, because witnesses to crimes become older and pass away. In this regard, the research activity of the organization has never stopped and was even continued during the quarantine caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (in compliance with all quarantine requirements).

Yahad-In Unum is not the first organization to collect oral history sources of the Holocaust. In the mid-1990s, testimonies were recorded in the context of a project of the Shoah Foundation in the United States ("People Who Survived the Shoah"), founded by American film director Steven Spielberg. This collection contains more than 52,000 testimonies of those who survived the Holocaust, as well as those who saved victims of Nazism, homosexuals, Roma, Jehovah's witnesses. Of these, 3,446 video testimonies were recorded in Ukrainian. These sources are stored at the Institute for Visual History and Education of the Shoah Foundation of the University of Southern California in the United States (Mykhalchuk, 2021, p. 44). The difference between these two collections of oral history sources is that, to a great extent, the Shoah Foundation focused on Jews (victims of the Nazis), while Yahad-In Unum's interviews were conducted with non-Jewish residents (witnesses). Thus, both oral history collections complement each other and emphasize

the general background of the Holocaust; they share the urgent importance of preserving the “human voice” in genocide studies.

The creation of the collection of video evidence is preceded by painstaking preparatory work. First, the Yahad-In Unum research team studies the history of crime in a specific region (area) where an expedition trip is planned. For this, documentary sources are analyzed in detail. They can contain not only the facts of crimes, but also the names of direct participants/victims or witnesses of the events. First and foremost, these are data from the archives of Germany, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in the United States, regional archives and criminal cases from the archives of the Security Service. After the necessary information has been gathered, a search team is formed; it visits the planned locations and meets with local residents who witnessed the mass killings. The choice of respondents is dictated by the presence of direct witnesses of the Holocaust, which is not an easy task because there are very few of them still alive.

Witnesses interviewed by Yahad-In Unum teams are citizens who witnessed the murders. Most of them were children at the time of the genocide. Therefore, sometimes in their reminiscences they recount not only their individual experience of the observed events, but also the stories of other witnesses (parents, other close relatives, neighbors, etc.). Thus, it should be taken into account that these stories might not only be the result of their own observations, but also of the stereotypes that exist in their environment (Usach, 2021, p. 161).

Testimonies also differ in the extent of the information they contain. As Shliakhtych points out (on the example of the Dnipropetrovska region), the memories of people who were between five–seven and 15–17 years old at the time of the genocide are the most informative. For the witnesses, it was a psychological trauma that became etched in their memory. Testimonies of people who were 18 years old or older at the time turned out to be less informative. They usually do not recount everything and try not to voice unpleasant moments, or they talk about them in general terms, without details (Shliakhtych, 2019, p. 193). Most of the facts are revealed in testimonies about the implementation of the “Holocaust mechanism,” namely arrests, the escorting of Jews to the place of execution and, finally, the execution itself. Some witnesses were at the site of execution, so the acts of murder were not a secret. Therefore, such stories are often found in testimonies (Shliakhtych, 2019, p. 194).

Researcher Helinada Hrinchenko notes that the modern understanding of oral history involves three main components: the process of transmitting

information and recording memories (with the help of audio or video technology), newly created historical sources obtained as a result of this process, and their further analysis (primarily reconstructive, narrative) (Hrinchenko, 2007, p. 7). The methodology of collecting information by researchers is primarily focused on the minimal (as far as possible) influence of the interviewer on the information from the respondent. Notably, there is a characteristic feature of sources of oral origin that distinguishes them from others. This is the respondent's subjective view of the problem they are talking about. Therefore, the question of historical truth is relevant, and all factors that can affect the content of the testimony should be taken into account. The narratives provide information not so much about the events themselves, but about the meaning of these events for the respondent and their own place in them. Consciously or unconsciously, the respondent chooses their own position regarding the events described, presenting themselves in a positive context, giving an exclusively positive assessment or hiding a negative role. We found an example of such unreliability in the testimony of a woman from Domachev. At first, she said that after the liquidation of the local ghetto, the Germans allowed the locals to take clothes from the ghetto, but people did not take them because they were afraid. However, in another episode of the interview, she mentioned how she went to the ghetto with her mother and took something from there (YIU, Testimony 135B). In another testimony, a woman from Sernyky said that there were few people from their village who bought the clothes of the murdered Jews, and if some people did, they were from neighboring villages. However, in another part of the interview, she claimed that Jewish items were sold to "our people" (YIU, Testimony 544U). Therefore, specific examples show that, for various reasons, some respondents tried to hide their true role in the events described.

Thus, the problem of the reliability of a testimony is one of the most urgent for the researcher. Taking into account that oral testimonies are subjective sources requiring a critical approach, the correct methodology should be used for their analysis. Their reliability is determined by comparative and cross-analysis. This method means that the information contained in an interview is subject to comparison with information from other sources, which is the essence of cross-analysis (Hrinchenko et al., 2012, p. 180).

The age and psychological characteristics of witnesses should also be taken into account when analyzing oral testimonies. After all, some respondents might have been six years old at the time of the events, others – 15 or 50 years old, which influenced their perception of the events, their

evaluative judgments and reflections, and could affect the level of reliability of the information. Considering the complexity of the topic of violence, the historical truth can be distorted by the psychological trauma suffered. Thus, during the interviews, some of the narrators showed a kind of desire to distance themselves from the terrible events. In some cases, they denied unpleasant facts and seemed to want to say, “it wasn’t us,” “we didn’t do this,” “we were not involved,” “maybe somebody did this but not we” (Mykhalchuk, 2021, p. 46). A thorough analysis of such testimonies can be the basis for formulating other conclusions than the information voiced by the witnesses. In this context, we agree with researcher Halyna Bodnar (2021, p. 38), who noted that “for an oral history researcher, it is important to go beyond the text and to catch what the text does not convey.”

Although the video testimonies in the *Yahad-In Unum* collection differ in the extent of the information contained, they have a common structure. This includes the personal data of the respondent, date of birth, origin, a story about the coexistence of the Jewish and non-Jewish populations in the interwar period, Holocaust events during the war, information about places of forced detention of Jews in the ghettos and their mass executions, the role of military and civilian persons. In many video interviews, respondents showed the places they were talking about (the territory of former ghettos, sites of the executions of Jews, memorial signs) and reflected on the events, expressing their own evaluative judgments.

Holocaust Oral History Sources from the Volhynia-Podolia General District

The analysis of the oral history sources of *Yahad-In Unum* is based on evidence from the territory of the Volhynia-Podolia General District of Reichskommissariat Ukraine, which was established on September 1, 1941. It included the territories of the former Rivne, Volyn, Kamianets-Podilska, partially Vinnytsia and Ternopil regions of the Ukrainian SSR, and the southern part of the former Brest and Pinsk regions of the Belarusian SSR.

The choice of this administrative entity for the analysis of the stated topic is relevant because during the years of German occupation, the main institutions of Reichskommissariat Ukraine were located here. The city of Rivne was the center of Reichskommissariat Ukraine. It housed the headquarters of the Chief Quartermaster and the economic administration of Army Group South, the Central Issuance Bank of Ukraine,

the German Supreme Court, the headquarters of the head of the Wehrmacht's rear units in Ukraine, etc. (Makovskaia, 2008, pp. 461–462). With an area of 80,507.99 sq. km, the district was the biggest in Reichskommissariat Ukraine (as of 1943), and second-largest in terms of population. The ethnic composition was dominated by Ukrainians: 3.5 million (75%). There were 460,000 Poles (10.9%), 330,000 Jews (7.8%), 280,000 Belarusians (6.6%), 330,000 Russians (7.8%), and 3,000 Germans (0.07%). The General District was headed by SA Obergruppenführer Heinrich Schoene from Königsberg, and later by General Commissar of Zhytomyr Kurt Klemm. The place of residence of the Commissioner General was Brest-Litovsk, later – Lutsk. The district existed until February 5, 1944 (Mykhalchuk, 2021, p. 40).

It is likely that more than 400,000 Jews were under German occupation in this territory (Dean, 2012, p. 1316). According to researcher Oleksandr Kruhlov, in mid-1941 there were about 350,000 Jews here along with refugees (Kruglov, 2002, p. 386). As for the losses during the Holocaust, compared to the total losses among other residents of Ukraine, the Jews in these areas were the absolute majority. In particular, this number was 65% in the Rivne region, 70% in the Volyn region, 94% in the Khmelnytskyi region, etc. (Kruglov, 2008, p. 287).

This study involved the analysis of 250 eyewitness testimonies. In addition, 50 interviews from other regions of occupied Ukraine were analyzed for comparison.

The analyzed Yahad-In Unum interviews are semi-structured; they include not only the answers to the questionnaire, but also contain a phase of free narration. In general, these are one-on-one interviews; however, as an exception, there are group interviews when two or more people appear and testify in the video at the same time. For example, in the village of Mizoch, Rivne region, the testimony of eyewitness Volodymyr Bidiuk was supplemented by his daughter's story (YIU, Testimony 574U).

According to Desbois, the founder of the organization, the witnesses in the Yahad-In Unum collection can be divided into three groups: 1. Indirect witnesses who did not see the murder itself, but heard about it from the stories of others; 2. Direct witnesses who were present during the killing of Jews. 3. People who were forced to perform forced labor at the place of the murder of Jews – “small death jobs” (Debus, 2011, pp. 101–102). He calls this category of “small death jobs” an “invisible group,” which was one of the main discoveries of the Yahad-In Unum project (Desbois, 2013, p. 96). This category not only saw, but also participated in the process itself. After all, the process of mass killing required the involvement of civilians who were

forcibly recruited to perform auxiliary functions in the implementation of the Holocaust. Desbois discovered more than 20 types of “small death jobs” (Desbois, 2013, pp. 96–97). Within the territory under consideration, gravediggers before and after an execution, transporters of people to the site of execution, sorters and sellers of clothes, etc., were the most in demand. Sometimes the functions of such persons were quite specific. For example, in Stara Syniava a witness mentioned that her 16-year-old neighbor Ivan brought ammunition and wine on a sleigh, while a German on site drank wine from a bottle and fired shots (YIU, Testimony 861U). In addition, after the victims were killed, their property and clothes had to be sorted and, if necessary, cleaned of blood and dirt. Later, clothes had to be collected in a certain place and sold. This type of work was also sometimes performed by this category of persons (Mykhalchuk, 2020, p. 160).

However, as evidenced by available sources, these functions were often combined and a wide range of them was performed by the same people. For example, in the village of Sernyky, a man who was first forced to dig graves before an execution by shooting, was then forced to bury the dead bodies. After that, he loaded the things of those killed and transported them to a specified place on horses. Together with him, other persons were forced to perform the same work (YIU, Testimony 544U).

Although the interviews focused on the violence during World War II, particularly the Holocaust, the testimonies reveal a variety of themes in the lives of the victims and their relationships with non-Jews. This is explained by the fact that the interviewers are interested not only in the facts of the murders, but also ask questions about prewar and postwar life. Due to this, we can obtain information that complements the picture of the coexistence of Jews with the surrounding society. Thus, the analyzed testimonies from the territory of the Volhynia-Podolia General District also covered relations between Jews and local non-Jewish residents (Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs, Russians) in the interwar period; the evacuation of Jews to the east; the establishment of German power in the region and pogroms; the reaction of Jews to the obligation to wear special marks; the situation of Jews in the ghettos; looting of Holocaust victims by the local occupation administration and civilians; Jewish assessments of their situation during the Holocaust and the change in the attitude of non-Jewish residents towards them; evaluations of the activities of the Jewish police and Judenrats; the rescue of Jews and ways of their survival; the functioning of the police; shooting procedures during mass killing operations and during forced labor; facts of resistance at the site of execution; involvement of civilians

in the Holocaust (voluntarily or under pressure); the condition of Jewish graves after the war; stories about the earth moving for several days after the shooting of the victims, etc.

Facts related to pogroms at the beginning of the occupation, religious and sexual violence, and the complicity of fellow villagers in the violence against Jews turned out to be less covered topics in the testimonies. For example, witnesses very rarely gave the names of perpetrators and people involved in crimes, and often refused to name them because their neighbors and acquaintances could be among them. There is little information about “good Germans” who helped the Jews. Cases of the description of gender aspects of the crimes are even rarer, including when Jews were killed by women, though such cases existed (YIU, Testimony 1782U).

It is also worth noting the diverse range of the witnesses’ evaluation judgments regarding their participation in the events they were talking about. Some mentioned their participation in helping the victims of the Holocaust and their empathy for them. Others openly talked about unequal exchanges, which were similar to looting Jewish property. For example, in the village of Ozeriany, in exchange for some bread the witness demanded a watch and cigarettes from Jews (Desbois, 2018, p. 34; YIU, Testimony 1463U). The witness noted that he went to the ghetto several times to exchange food with Jews, and each time he asked for a watch. He personally knew those Jews, but considered this behavior of his to be quite acceptable. In another testimony, a man in the Tomashivka ghetto exchanged 10 kg of flour for a watch, claiming that in this way he was helping the Jews (YIU, Testimony 127B). However, giving food for a reward can hardly be called help; rather, it is an attempt to get richer or a form of barter. In many other analyzed cases, such actions resembled robbery.

A common feature in the testimonies from different occupied territories of Ukraine was that the material component of the Holocaust (Jewish property) was of interest to all strata of the population, regardless of age, gender, social status, ideological and political preferences. This process of acquisition of Jewish property includes various aspects in different areas: theft at the site of execution of Jews (Zhytomyr region, YIU, Testimony 1719U), intention to rob the ghetto (Dnipropetrovska region, YIU, Testimony 948U), looting of the ghetto after liquidation (Chernivtsi, YIU, Testimony 2326U; Chernivtsi region, YIU, Testimony 2217U; Zaporizhzhia region, YIU, Testimony 396U).

There are similar stories from the Volhynia-Podolia General District and other regions of occupied Ukraine, when witnesses claimed they did not

take Jewish property but other people did (Zhytomyr region, YIU, Testimony 1719U; Chernivtsi region, YIU, Testimony 2217U), or they refused to loot the ghetto for various reasons while others looted (Dnipropetrovska region, YIU, Testimony 948U).

Our analysis of the sources correlates with the research results of modern scholars regarding the role of witnesses who can no longer be considered ordinary bystanders. Depending on the situation, bystanders resorted to various forms of behavioral reactions. As pointed out by German sociologist Timothy Williams, the boundaries of Hilberg's traditional "perpetrator-victim-bystander" model are becoming blurred (Williams, 2019, p. 73). In this context, Ensel and Gans point out that the observer could turn into a perpetrator, a rescuer or an accomplice, and over time these roles could change depending on the context of the events (Ensel & Gans, 2019, p. 113).

The analysis of testimonies in this research supports Fulbrook's findings that in a system of collective violence, bystanders should be seen as individual actors who play an important role. As far as bystanders are not a neutral category, their non-interference reinforces the behavior of a perpetrator and can be a connivance in increasing the violence against the victim. Vice versa, a bystander could help the victim if such an intervention occurred (Fulbrook, 2019, p. 17). In this context, a number of researchers exploring this problem propose to expand the terminology and more clearly outline the entire range of behavioral reactions of outside observers, and not just bystanders. Thus, bystanders could have different positions performing different roles: "beneficiaries," "observers," "accomplices," "assistants" (Demant, 2019, p. 91). Such diverse characteristics are present in the testimonies analyzed in this research.

Witnesses' Psychological Trauma

In addition to reflections regarding the events, the narrators often talk about their own experiences. Such reflections are mostly related to the terrible events that they had to witness – merciless shooting in the pits, the killing of children, sexual violence, mocking of the victims. What was seen/experienced often became the cause of traumatic experiences and the psychological trauma of the witnesses. The testimonies include cases of emotional upheaval, in particular among "small death jobs" participants. Psychological changes often occurred immediately after the performed work (burying the killed victims, moving the dead bodies to the pits,

watching the process of killing, etc.). The events they experienced haunted them throughout their lives.

Thus, in the village of Sernyky, a witness saw that during the execution of Jews, about 10% of the victims were not shot to death in the graves that he had dug and then filled in himself. This had a depressing effect on his psyche when he was forced to watch the suffering of the victims (YIU, Testimony 544U). A witness from Olyca recounted how he went to the local ghetto a week after its destruction and saw a Jew hiding there. A German shot him in the head with a dum dum bullet. It happened in front of the witness, who was so frightened that he started stuttering and could not talk about what had happened for a long time at home (YIU, Testimony 1773U). In the village of Leznevo, local residents were recruited to bury Jews in a mass grave. According to the narrator, his father “was crying and could not eat after that” (Usach, 2021, p. 147).

If one analyzes the behavior of women, their emotional experiences were obviously even more powerful, and the effects of psychological stress were stronger. Thus, an eyewitness from Kozhan-Horodok testified about a woman who was forced to bury Jews. After such work, she returned physically and psychologically exhausted, lay down and lay for a long time, unable to eat or drink (YIU, Testimony 189B). Jewish women were deeply traumatized by sexual assault. Such cases were recorded in Brest (YIU, Testimony 161B), Stolín (YIU, Testimony 195B), Strokostyantynov (YIU, Testimony 865U), Kupel (YIU, Testimony 857U), Mezhyrich (YIU, Testimony 1420U) and other towns. A witness from Leletyntsi mentioned another case of severe psychological distress. Her brother transported Jews to the place of shooting, and afterwards he took their belongings to Felshtyn. When the brother returned, he was so exhausted from seeing the deaths and murders that the family had no hope he would survive. She said, “He could do nothing... He was so exhausted, he was so weak that he couldn’t see the world around him... We thought he would die, he was so exhausted” (YIU, Testimony 647U). Often during such testimonies, the witnesses cried and could not continue their story, like one woman from Orynyn, “I can’t continue, I’m sorry” (YIU, Testimony 639U).

The analysis of oral history sources from the Volhynia-Podolia General District revealed many similar memories, which the witnesses voiced in different ways: “It was scary to watch. Everything was in blood, mixed. Yes, oh God. I could not eat for three days after. That’s it. I saw everything with my eyes. Wherever you go, they [the shot Jews] are in your sight” (Nevirkiv) (YIU, Testimony 1420U); “It was judgement day, I couldn’t bear

to look at it anymore... To endure such a thing, to experience it – it was just a horror... – we all got ill after watching all this, everyone got ill. One had a headache, another – pain in the heart” (Lokachi) (YIU, Testimony 1481U); “What I saw was very scary for me. It remains in my memory, in my eyes until death” (Radyvyliv) (YIU, Testimony 1783U); “And then terrible, unspeakable things happened. I can’t talk about it, honestly. All the time. I have lived a long period of time since that, but I will never forget it” (Shumsk) (YIU, Testimony 1792U).

Thus, non-Jewish residents who witnessed crimes against the victims of the Holocaust and survived what they saw often became victims of psychological trauma themselves, which sometimes led to ailments and illnesses. The Nazi occupation was not only a catastrophe for the Jews, because the non-Jewish population suffered physically and morally from it as well.

Conclusions

The Yahad-In Unum organization was created in 2004 by French priest Patrick Desbois to document the crimes of the Nazis through oral interviews with witnesses. The activity of the organization is extremely relevant and today is almost the last opportunity to preserve stories about the events of World War II, in particular the Holocaust. It is also important to emphasize that an expedition led by Debois is carrying out an oral history project documenting the crimes of the Russian occupiers in Ukraine after the beginning of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022. Thus, Yahad-In Unum is carrying out the important mission of researching not only the Holocaust, but also contemporary crimes of the 21st century.

The organization’s oral history collections, which contain exclusive information that is not found in official sources, have powerful potential for the study of the Holocaust. German and Soviet documents are not always able to fully show and reveal Holocaust practices. Instead, the stories of witnesses and perpetrators about the events are sources that make it possible to examine this topic in various aspects.

This research analyzed more than 250 testimonies from the territory of the Volhynia-Podolia General District of Reichskommissariat Ukraine. The research results show that the theme of “small death jobs” in the implementation of the Holocaust is the most mentioned topic in the interviews, which was one of the main discoveries of the Yahad-In Unum project. This category of interviewees not only saw, but also

participated in the events. Less covered topics are explained by reluctance to talk about the troubling moments of the persecution of Jews by persons whom the witnesses may have known personally.

The analyzed testimonies are diverse. Some narrators talked about their help to the victims of the Holocaust, others believed that they had the right to rob them. In this context, modern researchers point out that, depending on different circumstances, bystanders could change their roles and turn into perpetrators or rescuers, become friends or enemies of Jews. Therefore, bystanders are not a neutral category, and their (non)intervention could influence the perpetrator's behavior.

The experience they lived through often became the cause of psychological trauma for witnesses. Cases of emotional upheaval were not rare after watching the killing of victims and after digging and filling in the graves. Sometimes such memories haunted witnesses for the rest of their lives. The Nazi occupation was a great disaster for all inhabitants of the occupied territories – for the Jews, who were subject to genocide, and for the local residents of other ethnic origin, who suffered from physical and moral violence. For 18 years, the Yahad-In Unum research institution has been playing an extremely important role in studying this process.

References

Archive Sources

YIU – Yahad-In Unum archives.

YIU, Testimony 127B.

YIU, Testimony 135B.

YIU, Testimony 161B.

YIU, Testimony 189B.

YIU, Testimony 195B.

YIU, Testimony 396U.

YIU, Testimony 544U.

YIU, Testimony 574U.

YIU, Testimony 639U.

YIU, Testimony 647U.

YIU, Testimony 857U.

YIU, Testimony 861U.

YIU, Testimony 865U.

YIU, Testimony 948U.

YIU, Testimony 1420U.

YIU, Testimony 1463U.



YIU, Testimony 1481U.
YIU, Testimony 1719U.
YIU, Testimony 1773U.
YIU, Testimony 1782U.
YIU, Testimony 1783U.
YIU, Testimony 1792U.
YIU, Testimony 2217U.
YIU, Testimony 2326U.

Other References

- Bodnar, H. (2021). "Sohodni istoriia tvoryt'sia v Ukraïni": Usna istoriia i dosvidy nezavershenykh revoliutsii ta viiny: Mirkuvannia pro dyskusiïne i (ne) ochevydne. In H. Hrinchenko (Ed.), *Slukhaty, chuty, rozumity: Usna istoriia Ukraïny XX–XXI stolit'* (pp. 31–57). TOV "Art-knyha".
- Dean, M. (Ed.). (2012). *Encyclopedia of camps and ghettos, 1933–1945: Vol. 2. Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*. Indiana University Press.
- Demant, F. (2019). The many shades of bystanding on social dilemmas and passive participation. In C. Morina & K. Thijs (Eds.), *Probing the limits of categorization: The bystander in Holocaust history* (pp. 90–106). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw04hm8.9>
- Debua, P. (2011). *Khranytel' spohadiv: Kryvavymy slidamy Holokostu* (V. Kadenko, Trans.). Dukh i Litera.
- Desbois, P. (2013). The witnesses of Ukraine or evidence from the ground: The research of Yahad- In Unum. In *The Holocaust in Ukraine: New sources and perspectives: Conference presentation* (pp. 91–99). Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- Desbois, P. (2018). *In broad daylight: The secret procedures behind the Holocaust by bullets*. Arcade Publishing.
- Ensel, R., & Gans, E. (2019). The Dutch bystander as non-Jew and implicated subject. In C. Morina & K. Thijs (Eds.), *Probing the limits of categorization: The bystander in Holocaust history* (pp. 107–127). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw04hm8.10>
- Fulbrook, M. (2019). Bystanders: Catchall concept, alluring alibi, or crucial clue? In C. Morina & K. Thijs (Eds.), *Probing the limits of categorization: The bystander in Holocaust history* (pp. 15–35). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw04hm8.5>
- Hrinchenko, H. (2007). *Usna istoriia: Metodychni rekomendatsii z orhanizatsii doslidzhennia: Dlia studentiv i aspirantiv*. Kharkivs'kyi natsional'nyi universytet imeni V. N. Karazina.
- Hrinchenko, H., Rebrova, I., & Romanova, I. (2012). Usna istoriia v postradians'kykh doslidnyts'kykh praktykakh (na prykladi suchasnykh Bilorusii, Rosii ta Ukraïny). *Ukraïns'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 2012(4), 172–187.

- Kaparulin, Y. (2020). The Holocaust in Southern Ukraine: The response of survived Jews of Kalinindorf district after the German occupation. *Colloquia Humanistica*, 9, 153–180. <https://doi.org/10.11649/ch.2020.011>
- Khoptiar, A. (2020). Holokost u Kamianets'-Podil'skiï oblasti: Khronolohiia, mekhanizmy, metody vynyshchennia ievreïskoho naseleunia (lypen' 1941 – sichen' 1943 rr.). *Ukraïns'kyï istorychnyi zhurnal*, 2020(3), 90–102. <https://doi.org/10.15407/uhj2020.03.090>
- Kruglov, A. (2008). Jewish losses in Ukraine, 1941–1944. In R. Brandon & W. Lower (Eds.), *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, testimony, memorialization* (pp. 272–290). Indiana University Press.
- Kruglov, A. (Ed.). (2002). *Sbornik dokumentov i materialov ob unichtozhenii natsistami evreev Ukrainy v 1941–1944 godakh*. Institut iudaiki.
- Makovskaia, N. (2008). *Arkhivy okupatsii 1941–1944* (2nd ed.). Kyievo-Mohylians'ka akademiia.
- Mykhalchuk, R. (2020). “Small death jobs”: The role of forced civilian persons in the Nazi plans of the Holocaust in the general district of Volyn-Podillia (on the materials of Yahad-In Unum). *East European Historical Bulletin*, 15, 157–165. <https://doi.org/10.24919/2519-058x.15.205144>
- Mykhalchuk, R. (2021). Rol' ievreïskoï vlasnosti v dynamitsi Holokostu v heneral'niï okruzi “Volyn'-Podillia”: Fokus mistsevoho neievreïskoho naseleunia. *Problemy istorii Holokostu: Ukraïns'kyï vymir*, 13, 38–85. <https://doi.org/10.33124/hsuf.2021.13.02>
- Shliakhtych, R. (2019). Holokost u sil'skiï mistsevosti Dnipropetrovs'koï oblasti (za materialamy svidchen' ochevydtsiv z arkhivu *Yahad-In Unum*). *Roxolania Historica*, 2(17), 188–198. <https://doi.org/10.15421/30190212>
- Usach, A. (2021). “To ne nimtsi...”: Mistsevi vynuvalttsi Holokostu v neievreïsk'kykh usnoistorychnykh svidchenniakh. In H. Hrinchenko (Ed.), *Slukhaty, chuty, rozumity: Usna istoriia Ukraïny XX–XXI stolit'* (pp. 143–161). TOV “Art-knyha”.
- Williams, T. (2019). “I am not, what I am”: A typological approach to individual (in)action in the Holocaust. In C. Morina & K. Thijs (Eds.), *Probing the limits of categorization: The bystander in Holocaust history* (pp. 72–89). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw04hm8.8>
- Zilinskyi, V. (2019). They were killed on the spot: The destruction of Jews during the nazi occupation in the territory of the Lviv region [Special issue]. *Visnyk Lvivs'koho universytetu*, 340–360.

Усноісторичні Джерела про Голокост в Архівній Колекції «Яхад-ІН Унум» (На прикладі Генеральної Округи «Волинь-Поділля»)

Мета статті – проаналізувати усно-історичну колекцію джерел Голокосту наукової інституції Яхад-Ін Унум (Париж, Франція) на прикладі окупованих нацистами теренів генеральної округи «Волинь-Поділля» Рейхскомісаріату «Україна». Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на принципах історизму та наукової об'єктивності. Провідним методом в дослідженні став усно-історичний. Наукова новизна. Вперше в історіографії проаналізовано джерела усної історії Голокосту наукової інституції «Яхад-Ін Унум» на прикладі теренів генеральної округи «Волинь-Поділля». У висновках з'ясовано, що усні джерела «Яхад-Ін Унум» мають потужний потенціал в дослідженні Голокосту. В них наявна ексклюзивна інформація, яка не зустрічається в інших джерелах. Німецькі та радянські документи не можуть у повній мірі можуть висвітлити процес здійснення Голокосту. Натомість розповіді свідків дають можливість різносторонньо розкрити дану тему.

Ключові слова: Яхад-Ін Унум, Голокост, усна історія, свідчення очевидців, Патрік Дебуа, генеральна округа «Волинь-Поділля», «small death jobs».

Źródła historii mówionej o Holokauście w kolekcji Archiwum „YAHAD-IN UNUM” (na przykładzie Okręgu Generalnego „Wołyń-Podole”)

Celem artykułu jest analiza zbioru źródeł historii mówionej o Holokauście z terenów okupowanych przez hitlerowców Okręgu Generalnego „Wołyń-Podole”, Komisariatu Rzeszy Ukraina, opublikowanych przez „Yahad-In Unum”, Instytucję Naukową znajdującą się w Paryżu, we Francji. Metodologia badań opiera się na zasadach historyzmu. Po raz pierwszy w historiografii przeanalizowano źródła historii mówionej o Holokauście, znajdujące się w „Yahad-In Unum”, zebrane z terytorium Okręgu Generalnego „Wołyń-Podole”. We Wnioskach wyjaśniono, że źródła historii

mówionej „Yahad-In Unum” mają ogromny potencjał do badań nad Holocaustem. Posiadają wyjątkowe informacje, których nie można znaleźć w innych źródłach. Dokumenty niemieckie oraz sowieckie nie mogą w pełni określić procesu Holocaustu. Natomiast relacje świadków dają możliwości wszechstronnego wyjaśnienia tego tematu.

Słowa kluczowe: Yahad-In Unum, Holocaust, historia mówiona, relacje świadków, Patrick Desbois, Okręg Generalny „Wołyń-Podole”, „small death jobs”.

Przekład z języka ukraińskiego
Witali Lesniak

Note

Roman Mykhalchuk, Rivne State University of Humanities, Department of World History, Rivne, Ukraine. r.mykhalchuk@ukr.net
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9313-4830>

The preparation of this article was self-funded by the author.
No competing interests have been declared.

Publication History

Received: 2023-12-03, Accepted: 2023-12-05, Published: 2023-12-23