



Piotr Litka, Bogdan Michalec, Mariusz Nowak, *Polskie Archiwum X [The Polish X-Files]*, WAM Publishing House, Kraków 2016, pp. 277

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“We acted in this matter outside the box” (after: Litka, Michalec, Nowak, 2016, p. 256) – says Bogdan Michalec, a police officer working in this investigation group, talking about one of the investigations of Krakow’s “the X-Files”. I think that these words are a great illustration of the actions taken when solving each case. “The X-Files” (official name: Operational and Investigative Police Group KWP in Krakow for undetected murders, called “the X-Files”) is a police unit that deals with the detection and solving cases related to the so-called dark figures of crime¹. Officially the group was founded on January 23rd, 2004, but its activity dates back many years before.

The reviewed publication is a collection of 10 stories in which – sometimes for years

– it was impossible to determine the perpetrators of the crime, and the main characters are two police officers – Bogdan Michalec, the current head of the “X-Files”, and Mariusz Nowak, one of the founders of this unit. Readers have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with their work, with particular phases of each action and specifics of investigations. Each chapter tells a story of one of the victims; however, the reader can indicate many common elements between these stories. One of them is the fact that the perpetrators very often “misrepresent reality” and “enjoy illusion” which aims to confuse the investigators. Another common feature linking many of the crimes is the fact that the missing person is usually reported by someone from their immediate surroundings.

A huge plus of this publication is the terminology used, which sometimes gives the impression that the reader is acquainted with the case files and immediately is able to get to know the fate of the victim

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¹ This term is used to describe deaths considered to be caused by going missing without a trace, drowning, suicide or accidents, in which the perpetrator could not be determined.

before their death. The modern methods of investigation, already mentioned unconventional working methods and knowledge of the recesses of human psyche cause that the Krakow unit has a lot of success in this field. Certainly, the book is also a kind of a work that fights stereotypes and unfair judgments about the helplessness of police officers and their ineffectual actions.

The stories described absorb the reader. They are presented in a clear way without excessive, unnecessary digressions. Interesting additions are the photographs of, e.g., press articles relating to the described crime, or photographs showing where corpse was hidden or where the evidence was discovered. At this point, however, the reader can point to a flaw – some photographs are small in size, giving the impression that they are quite blurry and it is difficult to read from them anything (especially since they are black and white). However, their use has also some advantages, as it helps to further delve into the psyche of the perpetrator and into the presented situation.

The reader can also learn that the actual work on a specific case and theoretical knowledge that a policeman acquired at school, are two completely different notions, and in everyday life facts are not always arranged according to the rules described in course books. This principle is certainly very valuable not only in the work of police investigators. One of the characters comments on this phenomenon: “Every case is different. No scheme can be ap-

plied to the specific case; you cannot take pieces of evidence, transfer them to a computer, apply some patterns and get a result. Such things only happen in movies” (Litka, Michalec, Nowak, p. 16).

Furthermore, extremely important is a fact, which the authors draw attention to – namely, comparing the crimes that happened many years ago with the current ones. It can be said that the only thing that has changed is the technique of committing a crime, while the motivations of the perpetrators still remain the same, e.g., “greed, fear, lust for domination and impunity” (Litka, Michalec, Nowak, p. 18). These phenomena are called “bad emotions” by investigators and in most cases they are the main cause of tragic events.

At this point I would like to draw attention to one of the chapters – *Specyfika Podhala* [*The Specifics of the Highlands*]. It refers directly to the previous chapter – *Bez śladu* [*Without a Trace*], which presents the history of Zakopane. In that part, the police pointed out to the characteristics of the region, i.e., the residents who are clinging to traditional values, such as family and the Catholic faith. Furthermore, the police also present the difficulties arising from the mentality of the people and how to conduct investigations in this area. The entire chapter gives the impression of a “theoretical introduction” into consideration, which – in my opinion – should be included, e.g., at the beginning of the book, preceded by a report of crime in Zakopane. Placing this

chapter in the middle of the publication gives the impression of a chaotic and poorly thought out structure.

Polskie Archiwum X [*The Polish X-Files*] is a book which may not appeal to everyone. The crimes' descriptions are sometimes very literal, and outlining the socio-moral situation and perpetrator's psyche infiltration can be a daunting experience, especially for more sensitive readers. How-

ever, I am convinced that this book will appeal to anyone interested in forensics, conducting investigations, and searching for killers, as well as among those who are interested in police work. I recommend it also for students of criminology, forensics, homeland security, as well as psychology or sociology. Certainly, time spent reading will not be lost!