

**BIRENCWAJG** Machel Michał (1907-1943), craftsman, communist, leader of the Jewish underground. He was born of 10<sup>th</sup> July 1907 in Częstochowa, the son of Icek Majer and Bajla née Kurnendz, the brother of → Szymon Biro.

He received a traditional Jewish education in a *cheder*, after which he studied at the Jewish *Gimnazjum*. There, he joined the Zionist circle and was also a member of the Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair scouting movement. Very soon, he came to doubt the Zionist ideal and joined the illegal Communist Party.

He worked as an upholsterer, as well as during the German occupation when he was employed in the *Möbellager* (furniture warehouse and workshops, organised in the Wajnberg factory building at ul. Wilsona 20/22). There, he performed the function of a Jewish manager.

During the deportation of the Jewish population from the ghetto (in September and October 1942), Birencwajg and his companions saved hundreds of Jews and hid them in the *Möbellager*. Following the opening of the "Small Ghetto", they were smuggled there, despite the presence of Germans and two Jewish spies ("Kulibajki" and Gnata), who were specifically sent by the Gestapo. These activities were made possible due to Birencwajg's determination and mental resilience. (Mothers, with their children, were transported inside wardrobes, sofas, and chests, and were hidden in shelters prepared by the underground.)

In the *Möbellager*, on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1943, the Germans attempted to arrest the Birencwajg family. He, alone, escaped and hid. His mother was shot on the spot and his wife was imprisoned in Zawodzie. Birencwajg had "a good appearance", so that he could pass for a Pole. He also had Aryan papers. However, he did not want to leave Częstochowa until he had saved his wife. He hid with friends on the "Aryan side", who blackmailed him and, finally, handed him over to the Germans. Tortured and broken, he was sent to the Zawodzie prison in Częstochowa. On 28<sup>th</sup> July 1943, he was shot, along with sixty Jews, at the Jewish cemetery. His burial place is not known. His name is included on a memorial plaque (1220 I).

Brener, *Widersztand*, pp. 53, 105-106; *Czenstochower Jidn*, p. CXL (140; photograph here), *Czenstochow*, p. 25.

**Wiesław Paszkowski**