

Foreword

This work by B. Orenstein depicts the Destruction of Częstochowa in the dark years of our greatest national catastrophe in exile.

The author set himself the task of encompassing the tragedy of the Częstochowa Jews as comprehensively as possible. He described it in the tone of the pulsating Jewish life in Częstochowa prior to the War. In his work, he analysed every aspect of Jewish life, struggle and annihilation during the Hitler era. He presents us with a systematic image of the Judenrat and its activity, as well as of other institutions under the supposed "self-government". We learn very interesting details regarding Jewish labour and the Jewish Workers Council - a rare institution during the period of the Nazi tyranny. The barracks and the various workplaces, the characteristic distraction of the "dangerous" Jewish working elements by the Germans - all this is described in detail. The information regarding the Jewish underground movement and the personalities of the individual combatants is very important.

The depictions of the "akcja" [operations] and selections are horrifying. The author also dwells on the subsequent fate of the transports deported from Częstochowa - which he follows on their sorrowful path with his quill and with his feelings - to Treblinka, Buchenwald, Gross-Rosen, Dora, Ravensbrück, Bergen-Belsen, and so on.

He ends his detailed images with the depiction of Częstochowa's [Surviving] Remnant following the Liberation - from the first sprouting of an organised Jewish community in Częstochowa after the Liberation, and also of the surviving Częstochower landsleit left in Germany.

The author is a Jew from Warsaw who, during the unhappy years 1940-1942, ended up in Częstochowa, where he worked until he was sent away by the Germans with a work transport to the Karczew labour camp near Otwock. He escaped from the camp and returned to Częstochowa (in March 1943) where, to the bitter end, he suffered and hurt together with the Częstochowa Jews. He also made the land journey of the Częstochowa-Buchenwald-Dora-Bergen-Belsen transport.

B. Orenstein built his work, in addition to his own experiences and the events he lived through, on a great abundance of diligently collected material from testimonies and official documents. True, all these sources mentioned are not always an absolute guarantee of irreproachable historical objectivity. Testimonies and personal memories are, by their own nature, subjectively tinted and official German documents are also filled with tendentious falsehoods and interpretations. Particularly in describing the "akcja" and selections, a dispassionate objectivity is practically impossible. However, when handling such moments, the psychological truth is often more important than the historical one. Those same descriptions will often be the best and most faithful, conveying the atmosphere and the emotional tensions of those moments hallowed by the blood and pain of Kedoishim [martyrs] - and not merely a chronical, impersonal and disinterested enumeration of dry facts and numbers.

The author's work is not the first one on the Destruction of Częstochowa. As is to be seen from the bibliography, which he presents at the end of his book, several articles were published on this same theme in Poland and Germany. Besides these, two large monographs were published (in New York and Buenos Aires, in 1947¹). Although I was unable to compare B. Orenstein's work with the two aforementioned monographs, I am sure that Orenstein's work introduces much new information with the abundance of materials that he has gathered, with his comprehensiveness and descriptions and his systematic and transparent composition of the historical material.

¹ [TN: The former is a ref. to the book "Czenstochover Yidn", while the second could only be Szlomo Waga's book, also titled "Churban Czenstochow", which is indeed mentioned in the bibliography, but did not appear in print until 1949.]

It is a work which constitutes an important contribution to the historical research of the era of destruction, and is concurrently a worthy and earnest memorial to the Jewish community of Częstochowa – to the “City and Mother in Israel” [2 Samuel 20:19] that was destroyed in sanctification of God’s name².

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² [TN: Term traditionally used in Judaism in ref. to those who perished as martyrs as a result of upholding the Jewish faith or simply because they were born Jewish.]