

Dr Benjamin Orenstein

Dr Filip Friedman's Contribution to the History of Częstochowa

*"My heart is bereft, heavy with sorrow is my heart.
All are already leaving, their spirits at ease;
Only I remain sitting, alone in my grief,
Wordless and silently trembling."*

Chaim-Nachman Bialik

*(Songs and Poems,
New York, 1935, p. 67¹)*



The late Dr Filip Friedman was the leading researcher of the Holocaust era. He engaged in researching the Jewish issues during the times of our national catastrophe under the rule of the Nazi tyranny. His research was not limited to a single geographic territory, but encompassed all the countries that the Nazi forces occupied, exercising their homicidal policy of extermination and genocide as regards Jews.

Dr Filip Friedman dedicated very particular attention to Polish Jewry, which represented the main foundation of European Jewry from all standpoints - intellectual, national [viz. ethnic], communal, political and social. As a result, Częstochowa, with the eighth largest Jewish community [in Poland], was also appropriately highlighted.

Dr Filip Friedman was a Polish Jew, born on 27th April 1901 in Lemberg [Lwów²]. During the Nazi epoch, Jewish life in Lemberg was identical to that in Częstochowa, [with] Jewish badges, a ghetto, the confiscation of Jewish fixed and non-fixed property, [forced] contributions, hunger, dearth, mortality, forced labour, pogroms, shootings, mass killings, concentration camps and day[-to-day] uncertainty.

Thanks to his many friends, Dr Filip Friedman was concealed in bunker hideouts. Each time, as was usually the case, these hiding places came under threat and he was, therefore, forced to constantly seek new bunkers. This was repeated twenty times. There is absolutely no doubt that spending several years in the bunkers, under the constant threat of mortal peril, in cold, damp cellars and mouldy attics, developed in him an illness, and this brought about his premature death.

¹ [TN: We have searched extensively for this poem, but to no avail.]

² [TN: Although at the time of Dr Friedman's birth Lwów belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the official language there was Polish, as was its predominant culture.]

Along with European Jewry, Dr Filip Friedman lived through the spiritual and physical struggle. This was a struggle of blood, fire, battle and sanctity. His closest family members, his Jewish brothers and sisters, many of his male and female pupils, and also his numerous and valuable works were burned and obliterated in Nazi fire, on the altar of the fight for Jewish freedom. [But,] despite the unhealable wound throbbing in his heart, he did not lose his spiritual balance. As soon as the Provisional Government [of the Republic] of Poland was formed in Lublin, he managed to make his way there, and was immediately appointed to the governmental committee³ to investigate the German crimes in Poland.

As soon as the Germans were driven out of Poland, Dr Filip Friedman arrived in Łódź and became every intensively active in memorialising the Jewish martyrdom in history. He founded the Central [Jewish] Historical Commission [Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna⁴], and became its director and spiritual tone-setter. Concurrently, he occupied the position of Professor of [Jewish] History at the state[-owned] University [of Łódź]. At the Central [Jewish] Historical Commission in Łódź, hundreds of recording clerks worked under his directorship, taking testimonies regarding ghetto life, ghetto fighting, camp life, partisan combat and everything connected with Jewish life, struggle, destruction and sanctity during the Nazi epoch.

Montreal resident Flw. A. Żuchowicki, who came to Canada after the Second World War, has related an important episode regarding Dr Filip Friedman:

When A. Żuchowicki arrived in Łódź, in 1945, he learned of the existence of the Central [Jewish] Historical Commission in the city. He immediately went there and saw hundreds of people sitting and writing, taking testimonies and entire piles of important materials on site. He asked himself, who was in charge of such an extraordinarily vital institution and was giving instructions to the recording clerks. The answer was, that the organiser and spiritual leader of the Central [Jewish] Historical Commission sat at every single little table - and his name was Dr Filip Friedman.

Flw. Żuchowicki turned his gaze towards Dr Filip Friedman, who was sitting engrossed in certain materials, reading them with devout piety. Once he had finished his work, he approached a group that had been saved from death and destruction, who had only just arrived in Łódź, and addressed them, "Jews! Let whoever only has God in his heart, whoever only has a conscience, now sit down and write his experiences, and all that he has seen and heard."

Dr Filip Friedman was emaciated and physically spent from his experiences during the Nazi era - as everybody else. But, at the same time, spirituality shone forth from his countenance. He gave an impression of sanctity. Everyone was occupied with himself, seeking their family and friends, who might have been miraculously saved from death, finding a place to lay down his head, procuring food to still his hunger and trying to acquire a garment with which to clothe their body - and Dr Filip Friedman's primary interest was the history of the Holocaust.

³ [TN: Ref. to the Jewish Historical Committee (*Żydowska Komisja Historyczna*), a Holocaust research body organised in Lublin in August 1944, which in December 1944 became an agency of the government-funded Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP). (From the YIVO Encyclopaedia)]

⁴ [TN: This was later to become the current Jewish Historical Institute (*Żydowski Instytut Historyczny; ŻIH*) in Warsaw.]

With his declaration, Dr Filip Friedman elevated himself to the level of the sacred martyr, Professor Szymon Dubnow. As is known, Professor Szymon Dubnow was killed by the Nazis on 8th December 1941 in [the] Rumbuli [forest] near Riga. On his way to the altar of Jewish martyrdom, he called out, "*Jews! Write and record!*" How did Professor Szymon Dubnow's last will resonate? Regarding this, Dr Mark Dworzecki, in his book *Jerusalem of Lithuania in Revolt and in the Holocaust* [Paris, 1948], writes:

"Each one of us wrote and recorded, according to his ability to see, to give testimony and to gather archival materials."

[
And] how did Dr Filip Friedman's declaration resonate? Tens of thousands of declarations of testimony [were] taken, thousands of articles [were published] in newspapers, journals and collection books and hundreds upon hundreds of books [were written]. With his work, Dr Filip Friedman sanctified (let us hereby permit ourselves to use [the words from] the title of [Icchak-Lejb] Kacenelson's epic poem) the "Murdered Jewish People".

In 1945, when the last surviving *Częstochowers*, who were standing on the brink of death, were liberated, they were all physically spent - half dead - and it was not yet possible to contemplate historical publications. [It was] during this period [that] Dr Filip Friedman published, through the Central [Jewish] Historical Commission, an album in six languages, which shows, in pictures, the national catastrophe of Polish Jewry.

On p. 86 of this album, there are three photographs numbered 213, 214 and 215, showing the HASAG camps in Częstochowa. That same year, while none of the *Częstochower landsleit* were physically capable of thinking and writing yet, Dr Filip Friedman published a booklet, in Polish, entitled *Zagłada Żydów Polskich (The Extermination of Polish Jewry)*, in which he provides, on p. 9, statistical data from the official Częstochowa Town Hall books. On p. 36 of that same booklet, Dr Filip Friedman analyses the question of whom the miraculously saved Jews consisted, and he also includes those from the HASAG concentration camp in Częstochowa.

As is known, Jews from the Częstochowa "Big Ghetto" and "Small Ghetto" were sent to Radomsko, Bliżyn and Skarżysko-Kamienna and, from there, further evacuated to Auschwitz. Dr Filip Friedman's comprehensive and detailed book [*To jest*] *Oświęcim [This is Auschwitz]*, on the Jewish life, struggle and destruction, and the German genocide policies in that death camp of mass murder, must also be viewed as part of the history of Częstochowa Jewry.

At the end of 1947, when the manuscript for the book *Churban Czenstochov* was already ready for printing, the Central Administration of the Częstochower Landsmannschaft in the American Zone in Germany handed the manuscript over to the Federation of Polish Jews in Munich to voice its opinion. The chairman of the commission was Dr Filip Friedman (he was by then already in Germany). After he had thoroughly studied the manuscript, he made efforts, by all possible means, that the book should be published as soon as possible. He wrote a foreword to the book and later published a review in the one-of publication of the *Częstochower Landsmannschaften, Unser Yuhrzeit*, published that same year, in October 1948.

Dr Filip Friedman did not pass by a single opportunity in which to cite an episode from Częstochowa's history. Thus, for instance, in his essay *The Literature of the Surviving Remnant* (*Zukunft [Future]*, March 1949, №3, p.1952), he wrote, with the greatest recognition, about the book *Churban Czenstochov*. From it, he quoted, in his very important essay *Ethical and Social Issues of Our Catastrophe During the Nazi Epoch* (*Yiddisher Kemper [Jewish Fighter]*, №869, 8th September 1950, pp.54-58), on p.102 of the 1958 Yad Vashem publication, which appeared in the Hebrew language, entitled *Early Problems and Methodology of Research During the Holocaust*, and in other [works].

In 1958, the large-format, 340-page book titled *Czenstochov* was published. Dr Filip Friedman is featured in that book with a work entitled *Destruction and Resistance of the Częstochowa Jews During the Nazi Occupation*. This work consists of a biographical overview of 107 biographical items, which appeared up to 1957 in five languages - Hebrew, Yiddish, English, Polish and French. This is the first comprehensive bibliography on the Holocaust literature about Częstochowa to this day. This bibliography contains a clinical index, indicating the specific issues and in which works they may be found. This is a major work for the scholars of comparative research and, in general, a key contribution to historical research into the destruction of Częstochowa.

The significant work *Guide to Jewish History Under Nazi Impact*, by Dr Jacob Robinson and Dr Filip Friedman, deserves special attention. In this gigantic work, they indicate the main works published on Częstochowa, and concurrently, on p.396 of the index are listed the issues dealt with in these works, namely: bibliography, bibliographic lexicon, biographies of Jewish personalities (artists, writers, pedagogues, ghetto fighters, doctors, dentists, communal activists, servicemen in the Allied armies), chronology, documentation regarding the ghetto, maps of the city of Częstochowa and of the ghetto, and the ghetto fighters fallen in battle.

This work is one of the most important and it was published by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and by the [YIVO] Institute for Jewish Research in New York in 1960. This work is of extraordinary significance and importance and, concurrently, the most important contribution to historical research into the Częstochowa Holocaust.

This essay was written at the time of the sixth *yuhrzeit* [death anniversary] of the great historian and leading researcher of the Holocaust era, the late Dr Filip Friedman and, therefore, it must be said here that Dr Filip Friedman, with his contributions to historical research into the Holocaust in Częstochowa, has made himself immortal. He will, forever more, live in the minds and thoughts of Częstochowa Jewry. With his work, he will shine as an eternal candle in the history of the Jewish people.

Let us here paraphrase the strophe from Chaim-Nachman Bialik's poem *Bereavement*, with which this essay begins:

*Our hearts are bereft, heavy with sorrow and regret;
With teary eyes, hearts deeply broken and miserable spirits,
Alone remains the Surviving Remnant in holy tremor and grief;
In wordless silence, deep in thought, on lips a trembling prayer.*