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The Destruction of the New Synagogue

It happened on the night of 25th December 1939, on which Christendom celebrates the birthday of their faith's creator, who preached love, fraternity and tolerance towards others.

On these nights of "The Birth of God" (*Boże Narodzenie*), the Jews - even in pre-war Poland - avoided going out on the street, so as not to "provoke" the religious sentiments of the Polish population, for the Polish antisemites sought every opportunity to incite the masses against the Jews. Much more so during the Nazi occupation, these "spontaneous" outbursts could lead to catastrophic consequences. Due to this and, also, because of the constant fear of the Germans' machinations, the Jewish population deemed it fit to confine themselves to their homes already on 24th December 1939, immediately after sundown, even though the police permitted being on the street in the early evening. Suddenly, on ulica Garibaldiego (formerly ulica Spadek), there was heard the clamour of wild Polish youth and yelling in German, directly followed by a hail of stones hurled at the windows of the Jewish houses. This was a sign of the forthcoming calamity. And, indeed, after the throwing of the stones, a multitude of Germans and Poles could be seen casting incendiary bombs into the synagogue. The flames engulfed the entire building, and quickly spread through the pews, the Holy Ark, the Torah scrolls, the chandeliers and all the other components of the house of worship.

And the synagogue, which had been the greatest pride of Jewish Częstochowa, Częstochowa Jewry's meeting place on holidays, the place which hosted the great Jewish poet Ch.N. Bialik [and] in which the renowned musician and composer Abram Ber Birenbaum operated and created - went up in the flames that had been set by the fiends.

To this day, the screams and cries of despair of Fiszel (he perished during the "transport" in September 1942), the synagogue's cantor, when the flames drove him and his household from his home, still ring in my ears. He wept and lamented for the "Destruction of the Częstochowa Temple".

Not only were the synagogue's religious paraphernalia burnt, but the library also. Just like the Jewish library next to the synagogue on ulica Tłomackie in Warsaw, so too was there a library next to our synagogue, in which both religious and secular literature found a place.



The New Synagogue after its destruction

The Jews of Częstochowa, religious and secular, old and young, used to come to the library every evening to read, study, research and contemplate. There, they found spiritual repose after a gruelling day of labour. The library contained treasures of Jewish literature - books and manuscripts donated by Jews from all corners of the world, melodies written by Abram Ber Birenbaum, which were absolutely unique documents.

There was the hazard of the fire spreading to the adjacent buildings, but the Germans took care to prevent this. Fire-fighters arrived at once with their equipment and tools, but their task was to prevent the fire from spreading to the neighbouring houses. To locate the source of the blaze inside the synagogue itself - was no concern of theirs.

At twelve midnight (a symbolic hour), the synagogue's great tower, with the Star of David at its top, collapsed. At three o'clock after midnight, the fire died down. Partly extinguished cinders continued smouldering here and there, until the remains of the great synagogue were completely burnt down.

On the following morning, the Jews of Częstochowa gathered around the ruined synagogue, contemplating the German murderers' abominable handiwork - their souls also wept for the sacrilege.

In 1941-1942, the author of these lines, together with Messrs Markowicz, Monhajt, Dawidowicz and Mic, attempted to save the remnants of the synagogues in different ways, for the Germans were not satisfied just with the burning. They wanted to completely demolish its partitioning and walls and to tear up the temple of the Jews by the roots. Only by the self-sacrifice of the aforementioned individuals, together with other residents for whom the synagogue was of importance, did they succeed in preventing this sanctified precinct's absolute destruction. Today, its walls are still standing, as a testament to the Częstochowa community's glorious past and as a mark of the hateful actions of the German killers, who are condemned to eternal infamy.