



The destruction of the material heritage of Jews in post-war Poland in the light of documents concerning the liquidation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów¹

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Abstract: The main purpose of the article is to present the mechanisms involved in the removal of traces of Jewish material heritage in postwar Poland, based on a case study—the liquidation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów. This was made possible thanks to preserved archival documents—a file titled *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza żydowskiego (ul. Krzywa 18). Dotyczą okresu 1958-87* [Matters of the Liquidated Jewish Cemetery (18 Krzywa Street), covering the years 1958–1987] and stored at the Chorzów City Hall. In addition, the article will present little-known facts concerning the history of the cemetery, its urban layout and architecture, as well as largely unpublished iconographic material. The source analysis employs the traditional scholarly method of historical-interpretative research. Documents—mainly archival—and factual information about the site were collected and then subjected to analysis and interpretation. Iconographic sources—plans, designs, and photographs—were examined and confronted with surviving descriptions and the results of empirical research. Thanks to the preserved archival materials, the legal and administrative mechanisms for removing traces of Jewish material heritage in postwar Poland were reconstructed on the basis of this case study—the liquidation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów. The article analyzes and cites legal acts and circulars that enabled the expropriation and liquidation of the necropolis, as well as the sale of tombstones and tombstone stone. Based on archival documents, preserved plans, and photographs, the article reconstructs (as far as possible) the appearance of the cemetery and the funeral home prior to their destruction, and then presents the history of their devastation along with photographs taken just before the liquidation. The Jewish cemetery in Chorzów was established around 1864 on Ziegeleistrasse (now Krzywa Street) in Königshütte (now Chorzów). At the end of the 19th century, an impressive funeral house designed by Edmund Trossin (design dated 1898) was erected at the main entrance. Around 1906, the cemetery was expanded to the southwest according to a design by Franz Jaunich. It covered an area of 0.8 hectares and, according to postwar records, contained 1,700 graves with 900 tombstones. In 1959 it was closed, and between 1972 and 1973 it was liquidated. For years it had been systematically destroyed, and only in 2006 was it commemorated by the erection of a monument.

Keywords: cemetery architecture, Jewish cemetery, Jewish heritage in Poland

1. Introduction

The main objective of this article is to present the mechanisms involved in the removal of traces of Jewish material heritage in post-war Poland, based on a case study – the liquidation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów. This research was made possible by the discovery in 2023 of a set of archival documents contained in a file entitled *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza żydowskiego (ul. Krzywa 18). Dotyczą okresu 1958-87* [Files concerning the defunct Jewish cemetery (18 Krzywa Street). They cover the

period 1958–1987.]. The file is preserved at the Chorzów City Hall (*Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958–1987). In addition, the article presents little-known facts concerning the history of the cemetery, its urban layout and architecture, as well as largely unpublished iconographic material. The state of research on the Chorzów necropolis is very limited. Sławomir Pastuszka published a brief history of the site on the *Wirtualny Sztetl*² website, dedicated to the history and traditions of Polish Jews

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/64P_boro.pdf

² <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/c/420-chorzow/114-cmentarze/9503-cmentarz-zydowski-w-chorzowie-ul-krzywa>. Accessed 6.10.2025

and their material culture and run by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw (Pastuszka, 2006).

In 2012, an article entitled “Cmentarz żydowski w Chorzowie. Okoliczności związane z jego likwidacją” [The Jewish Cemetery in Chorzów: Circumstances of Its Liquidation] was published (Skoczek, 2012). The author of the article presented an extensive chronology of events, but did not address the legal and practical mechanisms that enabled the devastation and sale of tombstones and, ultimately, the liquidation of the cemetery.

The Chorzów necropolis is not mentioned in articles devoted to Jewish cemeteries in the Katowice Province, either by Krzysztof Domański in his 1993 study “O destrukcji cmentarzy żydowskich w Górnośląskim Okręgu Przemysłowym” [On the Destruction of Jewish Cemeteries in the Upper Silesian Industrial Region] (Domański, 1993), or by Dariusz Waleriański in his 1998 article “Cmentarze żydowskie w województwie katowickim: historia, stan zachowania, problemy ochrony” [Jewish Cemeteries in the Katowice Province: History, State of Preservation, and Protection Issues] (Waleriański, 1998). It is, however, mentioned by Krzysztof Bielawski in his book *Zagłada cmentarzy żydowskich* [The Destruction of Jewish Cemeteries] (Bielawski, 2020, pp. 90, 99, 189).

Legal aspects and source materials concerning the liquidation of material traces of Jewish culture in post-war Poland are discussed in the above-mentioned publication, as well as in the following works: Małgorzata Bednarek’s *Sytuacja prawna cmentarzy żydowskich w Polsce 1944–2019* [The Legal Situation of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland, 1944–2019] (Bednarek, 2020), and Kazimierz Urban’s *Cmentarze żydowskie, synagogi i domy modlitwy w Polsce w latach 1944–1966 (wybór materiałów)* [Jewish Cemeteries, Synagogues, and Houses of Prayer in Poland, 1944–1966 (Selected Materials)] (Urban, 2006).

This article employs the traditional scholarly method of historical and interpretative research. Documents – primarily archival materials – and information concerning the site were collected and subsequently analysed and interpreted. Iconographic sources, including plans, designs, and photographs,

were also analysed and compared with preserved descriptions and the results of empirical research conducted in situ.

2. The history of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów

Thanks to preserved archival materials, the legal and administrative mechanisms of the process of removing traces of Jewish material heritage in post-war Poland have been reconstructed on the basis of a case study – the liquidation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów. Legal acts and circulars that enabled the transfer of Jewish property, the liquidation of the necropolis, and the sale of tombstones and gravestones were analysed and cited. Based on archival documents, preserved plans and photographs, the image of the cemetery and funeral home before its destruction was reconstructed (as far as possible), and then the history of its devastation and photographs taken just before its liquidation were presented.

2.1. The urban layout of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów and the architecture of the pre-funeral home

The Jewish religious community was established in Królewska Huta in 1860. The Jewish cemetery was founded on Ziegeleistrasse in Königshütte, today’s Krzywa Street in Chorzów, on the site where Park pod Kasztanami is currently located. Renata Skoczek indicates 1862 as the date of its establishment (Skoczek, 2012, p. 395), but Sławomir Pastuszka states that permission to establish it was not obtained until 1864, and the first burial took place three years later (Pastuszka, 2006). The cemetery was established on an elongated, rectangular plot measuring 81.35x57.40 m, located south-west of Krzywa Street. It had a regular spatial layout – one main avenue and two side avenues were separated, all perpendicular to the street. This created two almost identical sections. Directly on the street, around 1898, an impressive funeral home was built, designed by Edmund Trosin, an architect and builder from Katowice [fig. 1], which replaced an older building. Its characteristics

are presented in the appraisal report prepared on 4 July 1963 by Longin Ziembiński (Ziembiński, 1963). It was a single-storey building with a partial basement, brick walls and wooden ceilings. It had an elongated rectangular floor plan, measuring 27.40 x 11.30 m, with an area of 350 m² and a volume of approx. 2,100 m³ [fig. 2]. The central part was occupied by a high mortuary hall with an area of 225 m², topped with a dome, while the lower side parts housed a mortuary washroom, a hearse carriage house and a guard's apartment [fig. 3]. The façades were given a historicist style with a predominance of Neo-Romanesque elements (full arches of windows and doors and a rosette) and Moorish elements (onion-shaped domes above the pilasters). Around 1906, it was decided to enlarge the cemetery to the south-west by another section measuring approx. 75x58 m. At that time, Franz Jaunich from Królewska Huta designed the extension of the cemetery [fig. 4] – stairs and passages from the old to the new part [fig. 5] and a brick fence [fig. 6]. The existing alleys were extended and four new plots were separated. After the expansion, the cemetery had an area of 8,000 m² and was surrounded by a wall approximately 40 cm thick, made of broken stone and partially reinforced concrete elements (Skoczek, 2012, p. 396). The new section was put into use in 1915 (Pastuszka, 2006). A book of the deceased from the early 20th century, supplemented in later years, has been preserved, in which 948 people buried in the old part and 421 in the new part were recorded (ibid.).

During World War II, the cemetery was not destroyed, and its condition in 1945 could be described as good, although neglected (Pastuszka, 2006). After the war, it remained in use – probably after 1945, twenty-four people were buried there, with the last funeral taking place in 1954 (Drenda, 1972). In 1952, there were 1,700 graves with 900 tombstones, 460 of which required repair. There were 128 trees growing on its grounds. Until 1949, the funeral home was occupied by a Jewish family (Skoczek, 2012, p. 396), but after they moved out, it was estimated in 1952 that it was about 30 per cent destroyed (*Cmentarz żydowski...* [The Jewish cemetery...], 1952). At that time, renovation and cleaning works were carried out

at the necropolis, financed largely by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Bielawski, 2020, 189-190), a Jewish organisation from New York working to provide aid to Jews (Beizer, 2025).

In 1958, the Ministry of Municipal Economy carried out a spring renovation and clean-up campaign of religious cemeteries (Bielawski, 2019, p. 548), but in order to proceed with it, the necropolis had to be closed first (Wojewódzki Zarząd Gospodarki Komunalnej i Mieszkaniowej, 1958). Therefore, on 3 April 1959, the Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Chorzów [hereinafter referred to as PMNC] adopted Resolution No. 13/59 on the closure of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów and its takeover by the State Treasury (Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Chorzowie, 1959). Under this act, the Municipal Board of Municipal and Housing Management was obliged to maintain it properly, carry out the necessary cleaning work, arrange green areas in places without burials and demolish damaged buildings. At that time, maintenance work was carried out on the greenery, the graves were cleared of bushes and the tree crowns were thinned out. Before the cemetery was taken over by the State Treasury, the burial register was maintained by Mojżesz Fiber (or Fider), who lived at 21/6 Powstańców Street in Chorzów, who handed it over to the Jewish Religious Congregation in Katowice. Another burial register was maintained by a man known only as Dudek (*Protokół z przeprowadzonej narady...* [The protocol from the meeting...], 1971).

The takeover was made possible by the regulations in force at the time: cemeteries belonging to Jewish religious communities became the property of the state on 1 January 1956 as “abandoned property” pursuant to Article 34, letter a of the Decree of 8 March 1946 on abandoned and former German property as a result of the expiry of the 10-year period for submitting an application for the restoration of ownership (Dekret z dnia 8 marca 1946 r... [The Decree of 8 March 1946...], 1946; Wytyczne w sprawie przeprowadzenia prac porządkowych... [The guidelines for carrying out cleaning works...], n.d.). The entry in the land and mortgage register of the State Treasury as the new owner of the Jewish

cemetery in Chorzów was made pursuant to the decision of the District Court in Chorzów of 10 September 1959.

2.2. Legal regulations enabling the takeover and liquidation of cemeteries.

The post-war fate of Jewish cemeteries was greatly influenced by legal regulations and circulars issued by various authorities. It is therefore worth mentioning at least the most important ones.

Zarządzenie Ministra Administracji Publicznej Nr 3 z 26 lutego 1945 r [Decree No. 3 of the Minister of Public Administration of 26 February 1945] recommended that the then starosts immediately hand over the properties to the former Jewish Religious Associations (after: Bednarek, 2020, p. 581). Pursuant to the *Okólnik nr 3 Ministra Administracji Publicznej z 6 lutego 1945 r. o tymczasowym uregulowaniu spraw wyznaniowych ludności żydowskiej* [Circular No. 3 of the Minister of Public Administration of 6 February 1945 on the temporary regulation of religious matters of the Jewish population], they were placed under temporary state administration (ibid., pp. 525-527).

Pursuant to the *Ustawa z dnia 6 maja 1945 r. o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych...* [Act of 6 May 1945 on abandoned and deserted property...] (1945), Jewish Religious Associations and Jewish Congregations could only apply for the administration of the above-mentioned properties, but they were not their actual owners. Pursuant to the *Dekret z dnia 8 marca 1946 r. o majątkach opuszczonych i poniemieckich* [Decree of 8 March 1946 on abandoned and former German property] (1946), they were nationalised and became the property of the state on 1 January 1956. The introduction of the *Ustawa z dnia 14 lipca 1961 r. o gospodarce terenami w miastach i osiedlach* [Act of 14 July 1961 on the management of land in cities and housing estates] (1961) enabled the state to register the ownership of real estate in its name in the land and mortgage registers. *Ustawa z dnia 31 stycznia 1959 r. o cmentarzach i chowaniu zmarłych* [The Act of 31 January 1959 on cemeteries and the burial of the deceased] (1959) played an important role, as it outlined the legal framework for the closure and liquidation of

cemeteries. After closure, they became “cemetery land”, which allowed for the exhumation of remains and the development of the land for other purposes, such as recreation or housing. This was conditional on at least 40 years having passed since the last burial, but there were exceptions to this rule, e.g. when there were exceptional circumstances related to public utility. According to *Pismo okólne nr 3 w sprawie przedkładania wniosków o zamykanie i likwidację cmentarzy Ministra Gospodarki Komunalnej i Usług Komunalnych...* [Circular No. 3 on the submission of applications for the closure and liquidation of cemeteries by the Minister of Municipal Economy and Municipal Services...] (1962), the Presidium of the Municipal National Council submitted a request to close a cemetery, after consultation with the provincial authorities, and the decision was made by the Minister of Municipal Economy in consultation with the Minister of Health and the Office for Religious Affairs.

On 3 August 1964, the Minister of Municipal Economy issued *Okólnik nr 11* [Circular No. 11] on disused cemeteries, which stated that Jewish cemeteries that constituted abandoned property became the property of the State by prescription (as cited in: Urban, 2006, pp. 645, 649-652).

In 1948, an important *Okólnik Nr 44 Ministra Administracji Publicznej...* [Circular No. 44 of the Minister of Public Administration...] (1948) on gravestones from Jewish cemeteries, ordering the return of gravestones and tombstones to the “appropriate representatives of the Jewish population” at the expense of the municipality. This is the most important of the normative acts and circulars that directly or indirectly concerned Jewish cemeteries in post-war Poland.

2.3. Liquidation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów – a case study

In 1960, the authorities of the city of Chorzów commissioned construction, assembly and maintenance works in accordance with *the Wytyczne w sprawie przeprowadzenia prac porządkowych na nieczynnych cmentarzach pozostających w zarządzie resortu gospodarki komunalnej* [Guidelines for clean-

ing up disused cemeteries managed by the municipal services department] (n.d.). These guidelines had a direct impact on the condition of many cemeteries in post-war Poland. According to them:

Gravestones lying next to graves or leaning should be placed on the appropriate graves. Gravestones or parts thereof lying on roads, whose ownership cannot be determined, should be removed from the cemetery to a place indicated by the competent municipal authority, sorted, piled up and the volume of stone calculated, or, in the case of a large amount of stone and appropriate security measures, stacked in a designated area within the cemetery.

After drawing up a handover report, the stone material could be used for the purposes specified in *Okólnik Ministra Gospodarki Komunalnej nr 30 z dnia 13.09.1956 r.* [Circular No. 30 of the Minister of Municipal Services of 13 September 1956] (1956), which reads: "Grave scrap (completely broken gravestones) should be used for matters related to the tidying up of cemeteries", as stated in the Guidelines (*Wytyczne...*, n.d.). Also, in accordance with these guidelines, unnecessary gates were to be renovated and used in cemeteries in the city that did not have them.

On 13 February 1960, a cost estimate for the renovation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów was drawn up for the amount of 74,116 zlotys (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987), approved by the Ministry of Municipal Economy in Warsaw. In accordance with the aforementioned Guidelines (*Wytyczne...*, n.d.), in 1960, work was carried out to place gravestones on the appropriate graves and to cover fragments or those whose location could not be determined. The fence was also repaired.

2.3.1. Devastation of the cemetery.

Unfortunately, even then the cemetery was already in poor condition. A handwritten note dated 24 September 1960 (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987) indicates that most of the gravestones had

been knocked over and it was not known to which graves they belonged. Theft also contributed to this state of affairs. Leopold Chwastek, director of the Municipal Greenery Management Board [hereinafter MGMB] of the Presidium of the Municipal National Council [hereinafter PMNC], repeatedly reported damage to the fence and looting to the Citizens' Militia, asking for their assistance. On 18 June 1959, during one of the inspections by the Municipal and Housing Department [hereinafter MHD] of the PMNC in Chorzów, it was found that "a whole pile of gravestones was prepared for transport", and on 18 January 1960, the same department reported to the Citizens' Militia Headquarters in Chorzów that "some of the precious monuments had been taken by unknown perpetrators" (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987).

In 1960, an idea emerged to liquidate the oldest part of the cemetery and use it, together with the funeral home building, for the purposes of the Municipal Greenery Management Board. At that time, Director L. Chwastek approached the PMNC in Chorzów with the idea of placing the offices of his unit and the Municipal Housing Authority there (*Notatka służbowa z konferencji...* [Official memo from the conference...], 1960). On 6 August 1960, the PMNC in Chorzów officially requested permission from the Jewish Housing Congregation in Katowice. The matter was revisited two years later, but during an inspection on 23 October 1962, the building was found to be in poor technical condition and the idea was abandoned (*Protokół z wizji lokalnej...* [Minutes from the site inspection...], 1962).

In 1962, an inspection of the cemetery was carried out with the participation of a representative of the Ministry of Municipal Economy, which revealed the poor condition of the building. At that time, the Municipal Greenery Management Board treated the cemetery area as a utility facility – stone cubes, paving slabs and pipes were stored there, composters were set up, and a temporary storage area for trees and shrubs was created. The gravestones were deposited in the third, undeveloped part of the cemetery. The Ministry of Municipal Economy recommended securing the small architectural elements and remaining gravestones against further damage. The clean-up

work was carried out, but not completely, and at the end of 1963, the supervisory authority ordered its completion, including the removal of stored debris and wooden beams. At that time, an information board was ordered to be placed with the following text: “The Jewish cemetery is closed by Order of the Minister of Municipal Economy No. ... of ... pursuant to Article 1(2) of the Act of 31 January 1959 on cemeteries and the burial of the deceased (Journal of Laws No. 11, item 62). The use of the cemetery grounds is prohibited under penalty of law. It is also forbidden to destroy cemetery facilities” (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987).

Despite this, acts of vandalism, desecration and theft continued to occur. The director of MGMB was responsible for maintaining order, but he did not perform this task properly, as evidenced, among other things, by a letter dated 6 June 1966 from the head of the Municipal Housing Department in Chorzów concerning the failure to carry out the order “to investigate the desecration and theft of gravestones” (Nowak, 1966). It was described as follows: “In this densely wooded area, groups of hooligans use the facility for various antics. Numerous interventions by the militia are ineffective” (Kasperek, 1970) and “In later years, due to the lack of proper control by the Ministry of Defence, which was asked for help several times in writing, the cemetery suffered greater devastation, hooliganism and even robberies of the graves” (*Informacja dotycząca cmentarza...* [Information concerning the cemetery...], 1970).

In 1963, the city authorities decided to liquidate part of the cemetery, most likely the oldest part, located next to the funeral home. On 12 July 1963, a request was made to the MHD Presidium of the Provincial National Council in Katowice, but the deputy head of Department Z. Białoskórski took a negative stance due to the lack of necessary documents: a resolution of the Provincial National Council in Chorzów and the opinion of the Provincial Conservator of Monuments required under the Act on Cemeteries and Burial of the Deceased of 1959. These documents were apparently supplemented because in July 1963, the liquidation of the old burial area with an area of 0.12 ha, dating from 1848 (sic!), was announced, and at the same time,

a decision was made by a commission to demolish the pre-burial building, which was in poor technical condition [fig. 7] (Kucharski, 1963; Ziemiński, 1963). On 10 January 1963, a few months earlier, city architect J. Karmański issued an order for its demolition, setting the deadline for completion between 25 March and 30 May 1963. In fact, the demolition of the building began in June 1963 ([Odrębna adnotacja...] [Handwritten annotation...], 1963). In its place, a MGMB barracks was to be built from the recovered bricks. At that time, an iron gate was also made, the fence was completed, and the area of the demolished part of the cemetery was planted with shrubs ([Notatka służbowa...] [Official note...], 1963). MGMB then piled up the stones. It is not known whether this was done in accordance with the order of MHD PMNC in Chorzów to pile up only gravestones “lying loose, not next to the grave”, not to remove stones from the graves and not to level the ground (F. Nowak, 1965).

The security measures did not prevent further thefts. In May 1964, F. Nowak informed MGMB in writing that the cemetery was not closed and the gate was wide open, and again instructed them to secure the stone. Unfortunately, no one made an inventory of the gravestones at that time. Despite the fact that in 1963 the Ministry of Municipal Economy imposed such an obligation on MGMB, it was not carried out, and the Company responded to written reminders that inventorying during the summer was not possible “due to a heavy workload” and promised to do so during the winter (Zarząd Zieleni Miejskiej [Municipal Greenery Management Board], 1965). No documents confirming the preparation of such documentation have survived.

F. Nowak (1966) described the dramatic condition of the cemetery:

The inspection revealed a complete lack of care and maintenance of the graves – to date, the gravestones have not been inventoried, the graves are being vandalised – dismantled, and no one has reported the desecration of graves and theft of gravestones to the Municipal Citizens’ Militia Headquarters. Despite numerous interven-

tions by the Provincial National Council and the local Department, the graves are becoming increasingly devastated. Only in three cases this year has permission been granted to collect piled up sandstone. Meanwhile, during the collection of granite stones, sandstone stones disappeared from graves that were in good condition.

In 1967, the gate was broken and lay overturned, the area was untidy, and the gravestone was piled up. An inspection in October of that year showed that the stones had been placed in three locations, or rather on three piles, referred to as “old” (located to the right of the exit), “new” (to the left of the exit) and “at the bottom” (consisting of small and large fragments of gravestones). The deputy head of MHD PMNC, Franciszek Nowak, decided to combine and fence off these piles, but an anonymous author of a note dated 21 October 1967 wrote that there was nothing left to fence off ([Odręczna notatka...] [Handwritten note...], 1967). Ultimately, the head of the Department, J. Polednia, ordered the removal of the remains of stone from the cemetery grounds.

In May 1969, another municipal commission was held, and its minutes described the condition of the gravestones:

After examining the condition of the stones, those present conclude that they are only unsuitable remnants of monuments sold in previous years. They are mostly granite, side stones, cracked and otherwise damaged, of minimal material value (*Protokół z wizji lokalnej...* [Minutes of the site inspection...], 1969).

It was decided at that time that they would be removed by the Specialised Cooperative for Drilling and Construction and Assembly Works in Chorzów, which would tidy up the area in return. In July 1969, representatives of the city met with the president of the cooperative, but he was interested in only a few good stones, and the rest, in his opinion, were only suitable for road foundations ([Odręczna notatka...] [Handwritten note...], 1969).

2.3.2. Sale of gravestones.

In addition to theft, the official sale of gravestones by local authorities, which was carried out on the basis of the regulations and circulars in force at the time, contributed to their liquidation. Before 1963, this was done on the basis of point 9 of *Okólnik nr 30 Ministerstwa Gospodarki Komunalnej z dnia 13.09.1956 r. w sprawie właściwej gospodarki na cmentarzach podległych resortowi gospodarki komunalnej* [Circular No. 30 of the Ministry of Municipal Economy of 13 September 1956 on the proper management of cemeteries subordinate to the municipal economy department] (1956), which clearly specified the purposes for which gravestone stone could be used:

Filled burial plots in active municipal cemeteries, which are designated in accordance with Article 1 of the Act of 17 March 1952 on the burial of the deceased and the determination of the cause of death for the reburial of corpses, shall be liquidated after a public announcement of the intended change. Graves for which objections to liquidation have been submitted by interested parties and for which a fee has been paid to preserve the grave for a further 20 years, as well as graves of historical and artistic value, shall remain in the liquidated plots.

After the public announcement of the liquidation of the plot, if the owners did not come forward, the stone could be sorted and deposited in a place indicated by the presidium of the municipal council.

The use of ownerless gravestones from liquidated cemeteries or plots is carried out by way of sale by the presidium of the national councils at fixed prices, for the purposes of building war cemeteries, mausoleums in municipal cemeteries and carrying out planned works related to cemeteries or tombs. It is unacceptable to sell stones to private individuals. At the same time, the local Department explains that when closing burial plots and inactive cemeteries,

the opinion of the Provincial Conservator of Monuments should be sought in each case in order to avoid the destruction and damage of monuments of historical and artistic value (Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej [Presidium of the Provincial National Council], 1963).

As can be seen from the above excerpts, *Okólnik nr 30* [Circular No. 30] did not allow the sale of gravestones or parts thereof to private individuals without consulting the monument protection authorities, but despite this, such practices took place in the case of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów.

When issuing permits for the sale of gravestone stone, reference was also made to other circulars of the Minister of Municipal Economy: *Okólnik nr 8 z 25.06.1964 r. w sprawie wykorzystania kamienia nagrobkowego pochodzącego z likwidowanych kwater grzebalnych cmentarzy, pozostających w zarządzaniu i użytkowaniu organów do spraw gospodarki komunalnej* [Circular No. 8 of 25 June 1964 on the use of gravestone stone from liquidated burial plots of cemeteries managed and used by municipal authorities] (1964), replaced in 1968 by *Okólnik nr 2 z dnia 20.05.1968 r. w sprawie wykorzystania kamienia nagrobkowego pochodzącego z likwidowanych kwater grzebalnych i cmentarzy* [Circular No. 2 of 20 May 1968 on the use of gravestones from liquidated burial plots and cemeteries] (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987).

It is worth taking a closer look at selected regulations. In the latter document, square metres and slab thickness were introduced instead of pieces when calculating the price, and sales could only take place on the basis of a permit issued by the municipal and housing authorities of the presidia of national councils. A register of permits was also introduced, and priority in the purchase of stone was given to local economic entities carrying out tasks related to war graves and municipal cemeteries. The prices of gravestones and stone sold were also regulated. The Minister of Municipal Economy specified them in *Pismo okólne Nr 37 z dnia 30.11.1963 r. w sprawie cen za kamień nagrobkowy pochodzący z likwidowanych cmentarzy i kwater grzebalnych...* [Circular No. 37 of

30 November 1963 on the prices of gravestone stone from liquidated cemeteries and burial plots...] (1963), and from 1 April 1968, prices were set on the basis of *Zarządzenie nr 81/68 Państwowej Komisji Cen z dnia 6.03.1968 r. w sprawie zmiany cen kamienia pochodzącego z likwidowanych kwater grzebalnych i cmentarzy* [Order No. 81/68 of the State Price Commission of 6 March 1968 on changes in the prices of stone from liquidated burial plots and cemeteries], (1968).

Based on preserved documents, it is possible to reconstruct how, between 1962 and 1970, the municipal authorities of Chorzów sold gravestones and tombstones from the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów. Usually, private individuals submitted applications to the MHD PMNC in Chorzów. After obtaining written permission, the MGMB issued the applicant with gravestone stone (Zarząd Zieleni Miejskiej [Municipal Greenery Management Board], 1966). These were whole gravestones or parts of them, including marble and Strzegom granite slabs. Usually, their use was declared for the construction of gravestones in nearby cemeteries: in Chorzów, Świętochłowice, Siemianowice Śląskie, Sosnowiec, Katowice and Bytom-Łagiewniki. Private individuals justified the need for purchase in various ways. For example, B. W., employed at the Department of Internal Affairs of the PMNC in Chorzów in 1966, applied to purchase “waste stone from the Jewish cemetery” for the construction of a monument for her parents (B. W., 1966). Similarly, J. S. paid 300 zlotys for three pieces (J. S., 1966). In the same year, stone was sold to G. M., a cleaner employed at the office. In 1967, purchases were made by: I. P. for her grandfather’s grave in Katowice-Wielowiec, in 1968 J. S. for the border of her husband’s grave, M. M. for the monument of her mother B. S. and sister in the cemetery on Cmentarna Street in Świętochłowice. In a 1964 application by director A. P., there is a mention of the purchase of “black marble, which remained after the liquidation of the Jewish cemetery” (A. P., 1964). Complete gravestones were also sold, as evidenced by the permit issued by the deputy director of MGMB in Chorzów, engineer F. Sojka, on 20 August 1964 (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987) stating that “The Municipal Greenery Management

Board permits the removal of one gravestone, two pyramids and a border with granite cubes, made of black granite, and four border slabs made of grey granite from the cemetery at 1 Krzywa Street.” The record holder was G. P. from Katowice-Załęże, who in 1966 applied for permission to purchase 12 pieces of marble, and J. B. from Chorzów, who purchased 18 pieces in 1970.

The documents show that some buyers were able to choose the stone (Wydział Gospodarki Komunalnej [Department of Municipal Services], 1964). A handwritten note from 16 September 1970 has been preserved: “At the Jewish cemetery, there is still something to choose from sandstone, white marble, with chipped edges” (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987).

The appearance of the gravestones sold is unknown, although in one case a slightly more detailed description was provided. A. P. wrote in her application of 5 September 1965: “The above stones do not currently belong to any of the existing graves and are stored loosely on the cemetery grounds. Each stone is a truncated pyramid 112 cm high, with a smaller base measuring 45/20 cm and a larger base measuring 50/20 cm” (A. P., 1964).

2.3.3. Official liquidation of the cemetery and exhumation of bodies

In 1968, another attempt was made to liquidate part of the cemetery. The Automotive Services Plant applied to the Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Chorzów for the transfer of a section of the necropolis for the purposes of a planned car service station expansion (Drenda, 1968). This involved a 15-metre-wide strip of land parallel to Krzywa Street, long enough to build portable shelters. The existing law allowed for this possibility after obtaining the relevant permits and exhuming the remains (Polednia, 1967).

In 1970, it was decided that further measures to secure the gravestones were pointless due to their extensive damage. The report from the cemetery inspection stated: “almost all of the monuments are illegible and scattered around the graves” (*Protokół z odbytej wizji...* [Report from the inspection...],

1970), and in the description of the Jewish cemetery from July 1972... (Drenda, 1972), it was characterised as follows:

The current condition is extremely poor. The tombs no longer exist, the facing stones are broken and scattered, and the graves have collapsed to such an extent that it is impossible to identify individual graves. The fences surrounding the cemetery have been completely destroyed. Currently, the cemetery is a meeting place for various types of hooligans and criminals, where the Citizens’ Militia constantly has to intervene [...]. A modern housing estate called “Różanka” has been built around the cemetery and is still under development. The cemetery and its immediate surroundings do not contribute to the beautification of the area and constitute an obstacle to the functional design of the site [fig. 8-10].

In 1970, the Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Chorzów, chaired by engineer Jerzy Świrada, decided that a school for the new “Różanka” housing estate would be built on the site of the cemetery (*Protokół z przeprowadzonej narady...* [Minutes of the meeting...], 1971). With regard to the above, MHD PMNC asked the Presidium of the Provincial National Council in Katowice for permission to close the cemetery, but the request was refused because the 40-year period required by law from the date of the last burial had not yet expired. According to *Pismo okólnie nr 3 Ministerstwa Gospodarki Komunalnej (...)* w sprawie przedkładania wniosków o zamykaniu, likwidacji cmentarzy [Circular No. 3 of the Ministry of Municipal Economy (...) on the submission of applications for the closure and liquidation of cemeteries], (1962), in such a case, the decision to liquidate the cemetery was issued by the Minister of Municipal Economy in consultation with the Ministers of Health, Culture and Art, and the Office for Religious Affairs. On 11 February 1971, the PMNC in Chorzów submitted a letter on this matter to the Minister of Municipal Economy in Warsaw (Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej... [Presidium of

the Municipal National Council...], 1971), arguing that: “[...] the cemetery around which a modern housing estate has been built does not contribute in any way to the beautification of the area and, moreover, constitutes an obstacle to the functional design of the area.” In 1971, the Chorzów Housing Cooperative wanted to use part of the cemetery as a temporary storage site for building materials in relation with the construction of a pavilion, but the city did not give its consent until the ministry granted permission for its liquidation. On 11 March 1971, the Municipal Sanitary and Epidemiological Station agreed to the liquidation of the cemetery before the expiry of 40 years from the last burial. On 25 May 1972, the PMNC in Chorzów adopted Resolution No. 94/599/72 on the liquidation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów, with a deadline of 31 January 1973. The legal basis for this was Article 1(4) of the *Ustawa z dnia 31.01.1959 r. o cmentarzach i chowaniu zmarłych* [Act of 31 January 1959 on cemeteries and the burial of the deceased], and *Pismo ogólne nr 3 Ministerstwa Gospodarki Komunalnej z 27.01.1962 r. w sprawie przedkładania wniosków o zamykaniu, likwidacji cmentarzy* [Circular No. 3 of the Ministry of Municipal Economy of 27 January 1962 on the submission of applications for the closure and liquidation of cemeteries]. The resolution states: “This facility has been closed for many years, and the graves of the deceased show a complete lack of maintenance and care on the part of the families of the deceased – the gravestones have been partially dismantled.”

On 3 August 1972, Jerzy Józwiak, deputy chairman of the Municipal National Council in Chorzów, engineer Andrzej Piątek, applied to the Department of Municipal and Housing Economy of the Presidium of the Provincial National Council in Katowice for permission to liquidate the cemetery (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987). On 10 March 1973, acting head of the Department E. Paszka issued a decision to close it and develop the area for construction in accordance with the spatial development plan of the city of Chorzów (in *Sprawy zlikwidowanego cmentarza...*, 1958-1987). The area was designated for the construction of a primary school, but this did not happen.

The next step towards the liquidation of the cemetery was the exhumation of the remains, carried out between 15 February and 3 March 1973, the history of which was described in an article by Renata Skoczek (Skoczek, 2012, pp. 399-402). The municipal authorities did not obtain the cemetery register, and the list of people who died between 1934 and 1945 was compiled on the basis of the civil registry in Chorzów (29 people) and information from a private individual (3 people). In parallel with obtaining the relevant approvals from higher authorities, on 25 January 1972, the city authorities applied to the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, Katowice Branch, for permission to liquidate the cemetery due to the need to expand the “Różanka” housing estate. It was proposed that the exhumed bodies be transferred to a location designated by the Society. On 2 May 1972, the Jewish Religious Community, after consulting with the Katowice branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, agreed to the exhumation.

The remains of 32 deceased persons buried between 1933 and 1945 were exhumed. Plaques with the names of the deceased were made and, after being placed on the graves, photographed [fig. 11-12]. The documentation has been preserved in the files of the Chorzów City Archives. The remains were transferred to the Jewish cemetery at 56 Piekarska Street in Bytom and placed in a mass grave (W. Nowak, 1987). Earlier graves were not subject to exhumation in accordance with *the Act (...) on cemeteries and the burial of the deceased* (1959).

Due to the economic crisis in Poland, the school and kindergarten were not built. A park was established on the cemetery grounds – Park pod Kasztanami (Chestnut Park), and the old gate [fig. 13], the remains of a stone fence [fig. 14] and a monument [fig. 15] remind us of the existence of the necropolis. It was created in 2006 on the initiative of the Juliusz Ligoń Association of Chorzów Enthusiasts and the Katowice Branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, and its author is Gerard Grzywaczyk. It takes the form of two matzevah-like slabs with an engraved fragment of a menorah and

the words “God bless”. Below is the inscription: “In memory of the Jewish community of Chorzów, the residents of the city, 2006” (Skoczek, 2012, p. 403).

3. Conclusions

The article presents the mechanisms that led to the loss of traces of the material heritage of Jews in post-war Poland, based on a case study – the liquidation of the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów. They were reconstructed on the basis of extensive archival documentation stored in the Archives of the Chorzów City Council. In addition, little-known facts about the history of the cemetery, its urban planning and architecture, as well as mostly unpublished iconographic material, were presented.

After 1945, the Polish authorities created a legal system enabling the state to take over religious cemeteries. From 1946 to 1956, Jewish religious associations were allowed to manage cemeteries, but for economic and logistical reasons, they did not do so very often. After nationalisation, the maintenance of these areas became problematic for the state. For ideological and financial reasons, no one cared for them. Regulations were introduced to guarantee the protection of historic cemeteries and tombstones, but they were not respected. Part of society, people without knowledge, sensitivity, cultural and religious background, devastated and desecrated cemeteries. Officials and the militia in the service of the then state authorities did not intervene or intervened ineffectively. The post-war economy of scarcity contributed to the unrestrained illegal acquisition of stone or entire gravestones, their sale and use for various, not always religious, purposes. A legal system based on circulars was also created, which allowed for the official acquisition of stone and gravestones. Thus, the state not only cleared the area, but also generated income. The regulations were circumvented to suit the needs of the moment; for example, there was a ban on the resale of gravestones to private individuals, yet this was done. It was not possible to sell historical monuments, but the lack of an inventory and, consequently, an understanding of their value made this practically possible.

The long-term process of devastation usually led to the area becoming an image-related problem for local and national authorities, which they wanted to solve as quickly as possible. In the case of large cities such as Chorzów, the areas of former cemeteries were extremely attractive due to their urban development potential resulting from the extensive growth of these centres. However, regulations stood in the way of their rapid development – 40 years had to pass since the last burial. However, even in this case, the authorities left themselves a loophole in the regulations – investments of significant public utility were exempt, and these could include anything from housing estates to the expansion of the transport base adjacent to the cemetery. The regulations allowed for the non-exhumation of remains older than 40 years, which led to the desecration of most of them during construction work.

The case of Chorzów shows that even when determining which graves to exhume, the authorities did not always exercise due diligence – despite the existence of a cemetery register, they did not consult it, and what is more, after obtaining information about the location of the mass graves of prisoners of war, no search or exhumation was carried out (*Notatka służbowa spisana na okoliczność zgłoszenia się świadka...* [Official memo written on the occasion of a witness coming forward...], 1973).

It is worth highlighting another aspect of this story related to the demolition of a historically and architecturally valuable monument – the funeral home designed by Edmund Trossin in 1898. The authorities, including the conservation authorities, did not identify the value of the building and did not place it under protection, which allowed it to be demolished in 1963. This was not an isolated case – such buildings disappeared not only for economic reasons, but also for ideological reasons, as traces of an “unwanted” heritage.

Over the course of several decades, the authorities of the time led to the destruction of the material heritage of the Jews of Chorzów. Many were responsible, both among those who created the legal and administrative system that enabled this process, but also among ordinary people: officials, stone buyers and hooligans who did not intervene, committed

acts of vandalism, and finally bought gravestones or parts of them. This is a very sad and still somewhat

forgotten fragment of post-war Polish history, which, thanks to preserved documents, has been presented in a case study – the Jewish cemetery in Chorzów.

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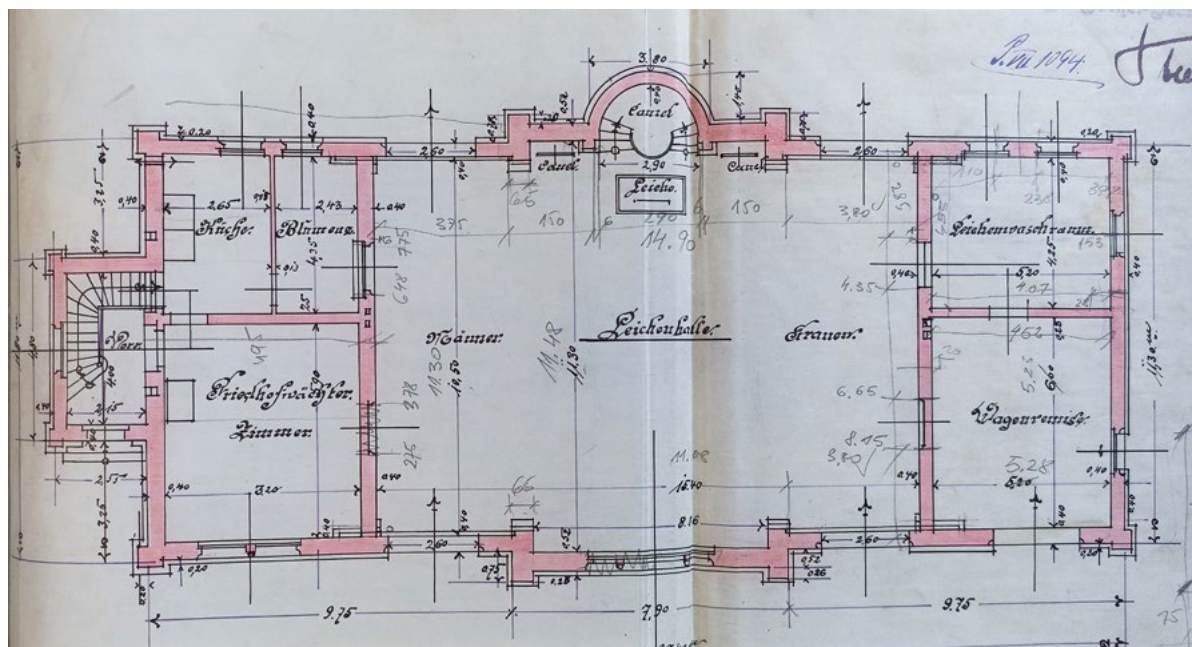


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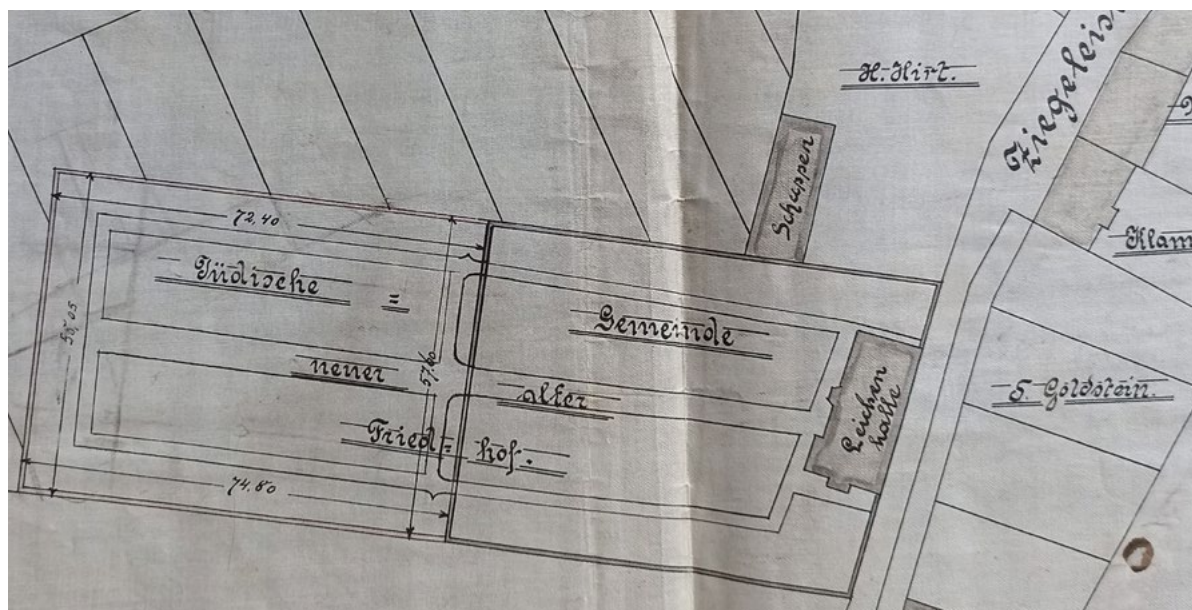


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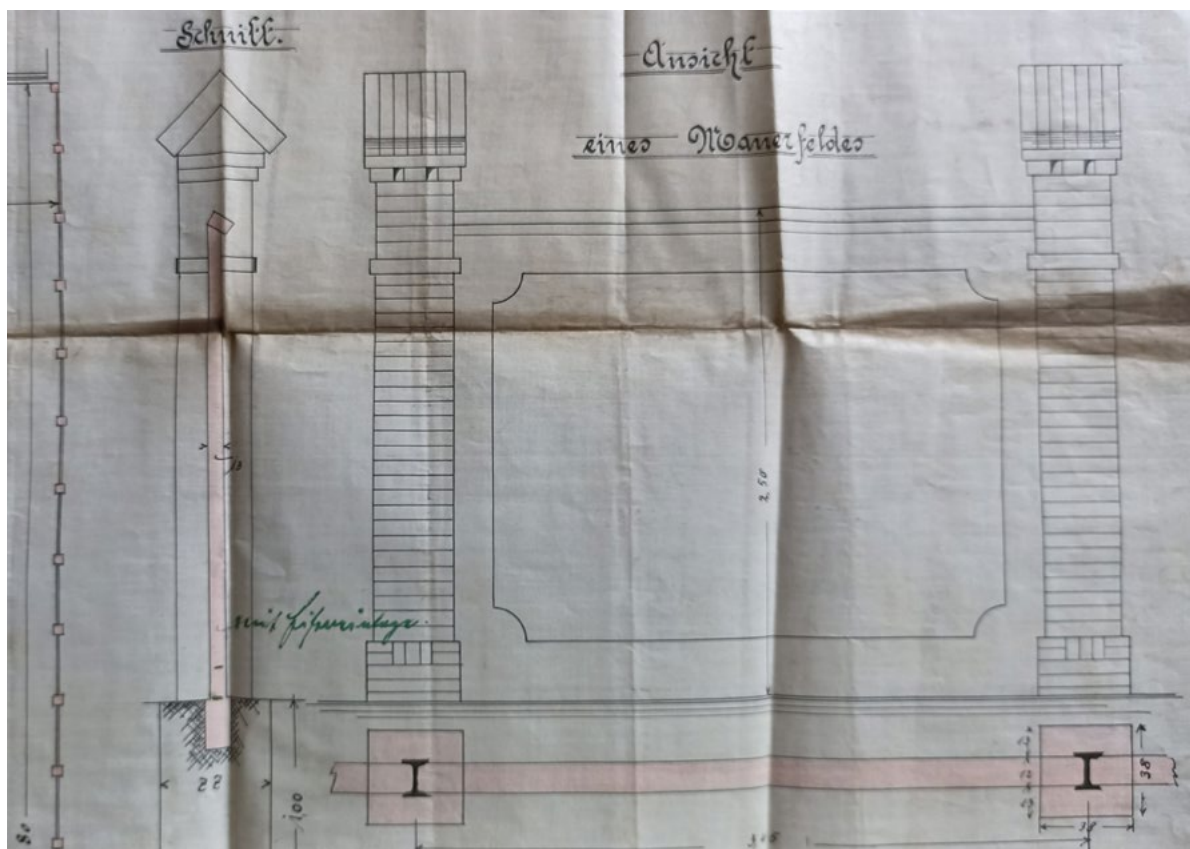


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