

Jewish pre-burial houses in Silesian Voivodeship – state of preservation



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For centuries Jewish heritage was an important element of the landscape of the cities located within current borders of the Silesian Voivodeship. Unfortunately not many examples of this heritage have survived to present day. The aim of the article is to present state of preservation of 15 existing Jewish pre-burial houses as an extremely valuable architectural and cultural heritage.

Jewish culture is an important element of the cultural mosaic of the territories within the present-day Silesian Voivodeship. As a result of the tragic events of World War II and the lack of protection and devastation in the post-war years, many architectural monuments of the Jewish community were destroyed. Only a few synagogues, prayer houses and Jewish pre-burial houses have survived to the present day, even though for centuries they were an important element of the architectural landscape of cities of today's Voivodeship. They are an extremely valuable cultural and architectural heritage. The research revealed that at least on 44 out of 64 Jewish cemeteries in the Silesian Voivodeship, were formerly located pre-burial houses, but unfortunately only 15 of them have survived to the present day¹. Among them there are both small, modest in form buildings, as well as buildings distinguished by their grandeur, extensive form and interesting architectural solutions. Unfortunately, as the research shows, the condition of most of the buildings requires urgent conservation intervention.

The research was carried out as part of the project "Jewish necropolises in the Silesian Voivodeship as architectural and cultural heritage" at the Faculty of Architecture of the Silesian University of Technology, under the supervision of Prof. Magdalena Żmudzińska-Nowak, PhD DSc., Eng., Arch. The research was financed from the budget for science in 2017-2021, as a research project under the "Diamond Grant" program.

The aim of the article

The aim of the article is to present the state of preservation of Jewish pre-burial houses in the Silesian Voivodeship as an valuable architectural and cultural heritage. The article presents photos of the buildings taken during in situ research.

Research methodology

The analysis of the buildings state of preservation was made on the basis of in situ surveys and collected materials, e. g. photographic inventory, sketches, and examination forms. Additionally, the research was preceded by a query and study of archival resources, literature on the subject, conservation documentation, as well as interviews with the experts and consultations with cemeteries caretakers.

Research results – state of preservation of Jewish pre-burial houses in the Silesian Voivodeship

The present state of the Jewish heritage is a consequence of destruction that took place during the World War II and following years. Some of the buildings disappeared relatively recently due to poor condition – e. g. the pre-burial house at the cemetery in Czechowice-Dziedzice, which was demolished in 1994 [2]. Nine buildings are protected legally, these are pre-burial homes in Bielsko-Biała, Bytom, Cieszyn (in both Jewish cemeteries), Gliwice (Poniatowskiego Street), Katowice, Pyskowitz, Tarnowskie Góry, Zawiercie Kromotów. Most of the buildings have not been transformed over the years and are of high artistic and historical value, but their technical condition varies greatly.

Pre-burial house at the cemetery in Gliwice at Poniatowskiego Street was designed by the Viennese architect Max Fleischer [3] in neo-Gothic style. The building was built in 1903, using traditional techniques and materials - it is made of brick, on a brick foundation, external walls are made of face brick, the roof truss is wooden, covered with ceramic tiles. It is an magnificent building that houses many functions. In the main, central part there is

a prayer room, and in the symmetrical wings there are: a morgue, rooms for the tahara ceremony, service and technical rooms (in the south wing) and the caretaker's apartment (in the north wing). Such spatial and functional organization of interiors was typical for metropolitan pre-burial houses - among others, funeral houses in Bielsko-Biała and Tarnowskie Góry were designed similarly. Today it presents the best technical condition among the pre-burial houses in Silesia Voivodeship, which is the result of the revitalization carried out between 2013 and 2015 [4]. The building has undergone renovation of the roof, facade, replacement of window and door joinery, replacement of electrical, sanitary and water supply systems, replacement of ventilation, adaptation to the needs of the disabled, recreating the original elements of the decor, on the basis of the few preserved fragments of the original the polychrome, stained glass windows, floor tiles [5].

In good condition, although in need of refreshment, is the pre-burial house in Bielsko-Biała, designed by Carl Korn, local architect, constructor and entrepreneur. The building was erected in 1885, the form consists of a higher central part and slightly lower side wings - both the functional division and the materials used are similar to the above-mentioned pre-burial house in Gliwice. The building stands out from the others discussed in the article with its façade with neo-mauretanian motifs. The building has survived to the present day without any changes in the structure or in the form. In the 90s, building underwent a major renovation, including replacement of the roof, windows and doors, and

¹ The building of the cemetery caretaker, which is part of the former complex of buildings at the Jewish cemetery in Wilamowice was not included in this article – the pre-burial house located next to it has not survived to the present day.



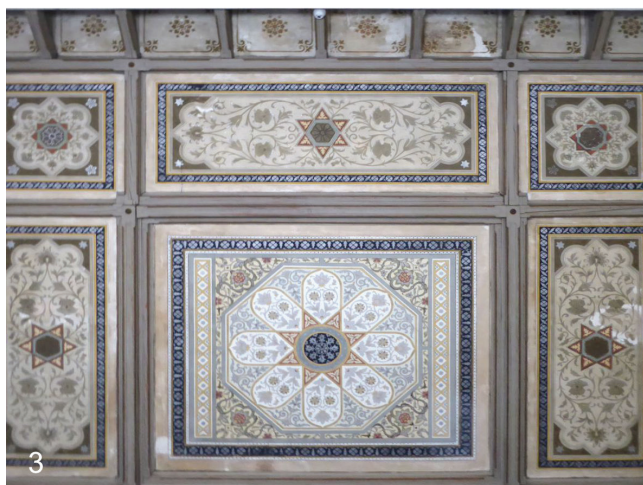


Fig. 1. Jewish pre-burial houses in Gliwice (1), Bielsko-Biala (2,3) and Czeladź (4), photo: author

drying of the walls [6]. Currently, the façades of the building require refreshing, but except the wall on the west side, which is in a worse condition, no damage have been observed. It should be emphasized that extremely valuable historic ceiling polychromes have been preserved in the building.

Some of the Jewish pre-burial houses were adapted to new functions during the World War II, or afterwards, for example to a residential building (Czeladź), a driving school (Lubliniec) or a upholstery workshop (Pyskowice), as a result many of them were significantly transformed. In the opinion of the author pre-burial houses in Czeladź, Lubliniec, Sosnowiec, do not currently have any aesthetic or artistic values, although they present a relatively good technical condition. The building in Czeladź was adapted to residential function, as a result of which the original structure of the building, designed by Bolesław Donat-Szleifstein in 1938, was completely transformed. Originally the building consisted of two parts - the upper, two-story part, which housed the prayer room, and the lower part, which housed the morgue. The form of the building is simple, but the façade is decorated with elements drawn from history - imitation of frieze and cornice and pointed

arch windows. During the adaptation of the building the high gate leading to the former prayer room was bricked up, and the high, pointed arch windows of the building were replaced with smaller ones of different sizes. The high prayer room was divided into two floors. The windows in the lower part, which originally housed the morgue, were partially bricked up and partially replaced. Also the façades of the buildings in the cemeteries in Sosnowiec and Lubliniec were distorted by changes in the composition of window and door openings. Both of the above-mentioned buildings are characterized by a simple form, divided into the central part and lower side wings and use of traditional materials. The architects of the buildings are not known and the lack of archival materials makes it impossible to determine precisely the original functions in the buildings.

The other pre-burial houses are either in a bad condition, requiring a thorough renovation, or critical condition, requiring an urgent conservator intervention.

The pre-burial house in Tarnowskie Góry, designed by Johannes Kindler in 1893, has survived without any changes in the structure of the building - only the roof over the prayer room was pulled down due to poor technical

condition. The symmetrical form of the building consists of a higher, central part, formerly covered with a gable roof, and two lower wings covered with a hipped roof. The facility housed a prayer room, a morgue, a tahara ceremony room and a cemetery caretaker's apartment. The building was erected using brick, the ceilings and the roof truss were wooden and the roofing was made of roofing felt. No defects in the walls, e.g. cracks were observed, but the walls are partially damp. Fragments of stained glass windows in the prayer room and one of the gates have been preserved. Importantly, fragments of polychromes, partially covered with white wall paint, have been preserved in the interiors.

Buildings in Pszczyna and Bytom also require a thorough renovation. Both objects have preserved their original shape. The building in Pszczyna is an example of a small, single-space building with a simple, symmetrical form made of brick and covered with a pyramid hip roof. The construction of the roof was made of wood and covered with roofing felt. The author, Ernst Betz, a local builder, designed it in 1888. Slight defects were observed in the lower part of the brick walls. In the front elevation brickwork intervention is visible. Elements of the original window



Fig. 2. Jewish pre-burial houses in Lubliniec (1), Sosnowiec (2), Tarnowskie Góry (3) and Pszczyna (4), photo: author

and door joinery have not survived to present day. Original wooden gates were replaced with the temporary ones, and the windows were covered with boards from the inside. The building in Bytom is in a similar condition. The form of the building is simple, on a rectangular plan, made of brick, covered with a gable roof with a wooden structure. Defects in the lower part of the brick walls were observed. Original windows and gates (partially glazed) have been preserved from the side of the cemetery. Some of the windows on the northern elevation are bricked up. There are numerous plaster defects and humidity-related damage in the interior.

In Cieszyn, at Hażłaska Street, there are two Jewish cemeteries, pre-burial houses are situated on both of them. The technical condition of younger, once very interesting building designed in 1906 by Jakob Gartner [7], a Viennese architect, located on the new Jewish cemetery requires conservation works. The building served as a prayer room. The form of the building was compact and consisted of a higher central part on an octagonal plan, and lower entrance parts from the side of the road and the cemetery. Originally, the main part of the building was covered with a steel structure dome, which, due to its

poor technical condition, was pulled down in the 1990s. Remained brick external walls of the building were preserved as a permanent ruin. The present condition of the remains of the building is poor - there are defects in the construction material of the walls and in the plaster visible. There are also multiple signs of vandalism. The building in the old cemetery requires more urgent conservation intervention. Its original form and structure has been preserved and it has a great potential for adaptation. The form of the building consists of three segments covered with a gable roofs - the highest of them used to be the prayer hall. During in situ studies, losses of the lower part of stone walls, brick walls and plaster were observed. The original gates have not survived. The high opening leading to the former prayer room has been partially bricked up, and a new metal gate has been set up in the lower part. Similarly, the entrance openings from the side of the cemetery and the tall windows of the main hall were bricked up.

Other buildings requiring urgent conservation intervention are those in Gliwice, Katowice, Pyskowice, Zawiercie and Zawiercie Kromotów.

The pre-burial house in Katowice was built in 1869, originally it was a simple brick build-

ing covered with a gable roof. The present-day appearance of the pre-funeral home in Katowice is the result of transformations carried out in 1890 and 1927-28. The latter, in the neoclassical style, was designed by the Ignatz Grünfeld Baugeschaft office. Currently, the building consists of the main part on a rectangular plan, covered with a gable roof and an entrance area added from the street side, lower than the rest of the building and covered with a shed roof. The building is made of brick, with a wooden roof truss, and the roof covering is made of roofing felt. Both interior walls and elevations were plastered. A characteristic element of the building is the neoclassical portico in the front part. The technical condition of the pre-burial house in Katowice is very bad - the structure of the building is damaged. There are cavities in the walls, the roof of the building is leaky, and above the front part it is completely collapsed, which leads to the degradation of the walls and the dampness and delamination of plasters. The neoclassical portico is destroyed, also there are significant defects in the facade plaster. Additionally, the structure of the building may be threatened by numerous self-seeding trees. The form of the building, despite its current bad technical condition, has not under-





Fig. 3. Jewish pre-burial houses in Bytom (1), Cieszyn (2,3) and Katowice (4), photo: author

gone any major changes. The front elevation has retained its original shape, but the remaining ones have been transformed as the window openings have been bricked up. Unfortunately, the interiors have been heavily transformed and devastated. The ceilings, internal plasters and wall paintings preserved in fragments are damaged. Numerous traces of vandalism are visible.

The complexes of buildings in Zawiercie and Zawiercie Kromotów are examples of a different spatial and functional structure than other pre-burial houses in the voivodeship. The complexes consist of two buildings connected by a gate - in one of them there was a prayer room, in the other there was a caretaker's apartment, a morgue or technical spaces. The objects were made with the use of traditional materials and techniques - the walls were made of brick and the roof construction was wooden. Unfortunately, the archival documentation has not survived and the designers are unknown. The pre-burial house in Zawiercie is a simple form on a rectangular plan, covered with hipped roof. The building in Kromotów was built on a square plan and is covered with a pyramid hip roof. In the case of both buildings, there are visible defects in the wall structure, and the roof

structure is significantly damaged, partially collapsed. The facades of the buildings are badly damaged, the gaps in the plaster reveal brick walls.

The heavily transformed pre-burial house in Pyskowice also requires urgent intervention. The author of the project is unknown. The building was built of brick, on a rectangular plan, covered with a gable roof. In later years, numerous extensions were built on the front side. There are numerous defects in the structure of the walls. The building's elevations have been transformed by bricking up the original windows and inserting new openings of a different shape. The entrances to the building have been widened and steel beams have been inserted. Also the interiors of the building have been rebuilt and devastated.

The pre-burial house in the old cemetery in Gliwice is in the worst technical condition - only the front wall and fragments of side walls have survived, the entrance in the front wall is bricked up. No elements of the roof, windows or doors have remained. The original shape was compact, built on a rectangular plan using brick, covered with a gable roof. Due to the degree of destruction of the building and the lack of archival design documents, the functional partition of the

building is not clear. The author of the project is unknown.

Conclusions – need for protection and adaptation

Jewish pre-burial houses in the Silesian Voivodeship are an extremely valuable architectural and cultural heritage, moreover, most of the buildings have a high adaptation potential. Based on the research on the state of preservation of the buildings, it can be concluded that a significant part of the buildings requires immediate conservation intervention, actions to stop the destruction and comprehensive renovation, which will allow the buildings to be used in the future. The pre-burial houses in Gliwice (old cemetery), Katowice, Zawiercie, Kromotów and Pyskowice are in a particularly bad condition. Buildings in Bytom, Cieszyn, Pszczyna, Tarnowskie Góry, Sosnowiec and Lubliniec also require general renovation. Pre-burial houses can be adapted to many functions — the buildings could house, for example, museums, lecture halls, educational spaces, exhibition halls, concert halls, libraries or reading rooms. An example of positive practice in this field may be the adaptation of the pre-burial house in Gliwice to a museum, which took place in 2013-2015.



Fig. 4. Jewish pre-burial houses in Zawiercie (1), Zawiercie Kromolów (2), Pyskowice (3) and Gliwice (4), photo: author

Currently, the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance (a branch of the Museum in Gliwice located in the former pre-burial house) hosts numerous cultural, scientific and educational events promoting the heritage of the Jewish culture. Due to the poor technical condition of most of the former pre-burial houses and the increasing degradation, the coming years will decide whether they will be preserved for future generations. The protection and adaptation of this heritage should be a priority.

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PRAWIDŁOWY SPOSÓB CYTOWANIA
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Abstract: For centuries synagogues, houses of prayer, Jewish cemeteries with pre-burial houses were an important element of the landscape of the cities located within current borders of the Silesian Voivodeship. Unfortunately not many examples of this heritage have survived to present day - on 64 Jewish cemeteries located within the borders of the Voivodeship only 15 Jewish pre-burial houses

have survived, many of them in a very poor technical condition. The aim of the article is to present state of preservation of this extremely valuable architectural and cultural heritage. Presented research is the result of in situ studies conducted in 2018–2021.

Keywords: architectural heritage, cultural heritage, Jewish pre-burial houses

Streszczenie: ŻYDOWSKIE DOMY PRZEDPOGRZEBOWE W WOJEWÓDZTWIE ŚLĄSKIM – STAN ZACHOWANIA. Synagogi, domy modlitwy, żydowskie domy przedpogrzebowe przez wieki były ważnym elementem pejzażu miast znajdujących się obecnie w granicach województwa śląskiego, niestety niewiele z tych obiektów przetrwało do dzisiaj. Na terenie województwa śląskiego zachowało się zaledwie 15 domów przedpogrzebowych zlokalizowanych na 64 cmentarzach żydowskich, w tym wiele w bardzo złym stanie technicznym. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie stanu zachowania tego niezwykle cennego dziedzictwa architektonicznego i kulturowego. Zaprezentowane wyniki są efektem badań *in situ* przeprowadzonych w latach 2018–2021.

Słowa kluczowe: dziedzictwo architektoniczne, dziedzictwo kulturowe, żydowskie domy przedpogrzebowe