

URGENT NOTICE

If you can quickly translate this document into *German, French, or modern Hebrew*, please contact Andrew Hingston at +48.502.349.753, or email him at: ahingston1492@gmail.com

***James C. March**, former officer and director, and also principal benefactor, of Poznań Synagogue Project, will be in Poznań from 10 July 2007 to 15 July 2007. If you would like to meet him during his visit, please contact him by email at: ahingston1492@gmail.com**

Apparently, censorship and cronyism are alive and well at *Gazeta Wyborcza - Poznań*.

Rather than risk a true debate, they have decided to remove all recent mention of the Poznań synagogue from their website. This includes their articles about the synagogue, written by Sylwia Wilczak, which appeared in the paper on 3 and 4 July, and the accompanying public comments. How unsurprising! How sad!

Nevertheless, I promised a more detailed commentary on the architectural issues inherent in the Poznań synagogue matter. I do my best to keep my promises.

So here is a simple commentary, preceded by 26 very important facts:

FACTS:

1. The former synagogue on ul. Wroniecka in Poznań (formerly Wronkerplatz, Posen) was built at a time (1906-07) when the city of Poznań was an important provincial capital within the fast developing German Empire. In the early 1900s, 47% of Posen's inhabitants spoke German as their native language. Nearly all the German speakers were members of the educated middle classes, and quite a few were among Posen's élites. The German Kaiser had an important palace in Posen. The University, the Great Theatre, the New Theatre, the Medical Academy, the Postal System, the Railway System, the Tramway System, the Banking System, and most of the good architecture, along with most of the other then recent evidence of development and civilization, were designed, built, and paid for by the German government or German entrepreneurs (many of them Jewish). Poznań has been irrevocably blessed by its German history and associations; the attempt to deny that history is Philistinism of the worst sort.

* American philanthropist from California. Since 2001, Mr. March donated at total of approximately \$5,000,000 to causes such as Amnesty International, The Tolerance Project (US), Poznań Synagogue Project (Poland), Reed College of the Arts and Humanities (US), and numerous other causes and projects (including in Nepal and Laos) dedicated to education, public action, and democratic participation.

2. The ‘Neue Synagoge,’ as it is known around the world, was also German. Designed by German architects, paid for by a German foundation, decorated by German decorators, and supervised by a German rabbi. Religious services were conducted in German (with Hebrew, of course) and its congregation consisted of what are generally called German Jews. Substantial numbers of Polish Jews (what the Germans, including German Jews, referred to as *Ostjuden*) arrived only after 1919.
3. Germany’s defeat in the First World War led to a massive, often brutal displacement of the historic German inhabitants of Posen. The German Jews of Poznań were seen as Germans, and were therefore deeply affected by this displacement. Following the Wielkopolska Uprising at the end of the First World War, a very large proportion of the Jews of Poznań, including the most successful and accomplished of them, were forced to leave. Most went to Germany.
4. This left the Jewish community of Poznań with probably the smallest number of members it had at any time in the hundred years prior to the Holocaust. It also greatly impoverished the Jewish community of Poznań – impoverished it financially, intellectually, and culturally. The newly emergent Polish state worked hard to fill the vacuum – encouraging Poles to occupy former German homes and businesses, and permitting Polish Jews to take over the homes and businesses of former German Jews. Not everyone accepted the Jews willingly; Roman Dmowski, who lived in Poznań during and immediately after the Poznań Uprising, was strongly anti-Jewish.
5. For various reasons, including Poznań’s association with and proximity to an increasingly threatening and anti-Semitic Germany (which came under Nazi control in January 1933), the upturn in Jewish numbers that occurred in the early- and mid-1920s soon went back into rapid decline. By the mid-1930s the Jewish community of Poznań is estimated to have included only between 1,500 and 2,000 members – very few of whom were German Jews.
6. On 11 September 1939, the German Army succeeded in taking Poznań after an heroic defense by the Polish Army. Hitler installed a particularly brutal ideologue – Arthur Greiser – as Gauleiter (Regional Nazi Party Leader) of Wielkopolska, which was renamed *Warteland* and annexed into the Third Reich. Greiser was a strict racist. Ethnic Poles were persecuted to a degree seen nowhere else in the western territories. Poznań’s Jews, down to a number of about 1200 at the time of the invasion, were rounded up and deported east to the Lublin District of the Generalgouvernement. Mass extermination of Jews had not yet begun at this time (late 1939, early 1940); the first death camp (Chełmno) did not begin operation until December 1941. Nevertheless, most of the Jews that had been in Poznań in September 1939 died in the Holocaust, many of them in Majdanek, the death camp associated with the Lublin District.
7. One survivor – Baruch “Bronek” Bergman, now living in the USA – estimates that 99% percent of Poznań’s Jews died in the Holocaust. This compares to about 90% of Poland’s Jews in general. (Both these figures refer only to Jews living in Poland at the time of the German invasion. They do not include those who managed in the final months before September 1939 to escape Poland to other

European countries, to the USSR and points east, to the New World, or to Mandate Palestine.

8. Under Arthur Greiser Poznań was immediately renamed Posen and ruthlessly Germanized. The city quickly became an important administrative and ideological center of Nazism. The former Kaiser's palace (known in Poznań as the Zamek, Polish for castle or stronghold), became an important provincial headquarters of the SS, who redecorated much of the interior to reflect SS "hard man" tastes. Parts of the upper floors, for example, were decorated with the same blood-red marble that decorated Hitler's Chancellery in Berlin. An office was built for Hitler's use, though he never used it. Heinrich Himmler visited the city several times during the war.
9. It was in Poznań that Himmler gave a speech that includes the only recorded admission of the Holocaust by a very senior Nazi (the speech, usually called either the *Poznań Speech* or the '*We Shall Never Speak of This*' *Speech* was given on 4 October 1943. It appears from references in the speech itself to have been given in the ballroom of the Hotel du Rome (Hotel Rzymiski), rather than in the Zamek. Himmler's audience consisted of SS generals and senior colonels. The doors were locked. The speech was meant to be "secret." But in his vanity and obsession with keeping records, Himmler had it recorded. The speech lasted more than three hours. The recordings survived the war and can be heard on the internet.
10. The synagogue on ul. Wroniecka was promptly closed for religious services. It was first used by the Nazis – as were many synagogues in garrison towns – as a warehouse for military supplies and as stables for army horses. Sometime in the early 1940s (again stories conflict on exactly when), a decision was taken to convert the synagogue into a building more suitable to a powerful Nazi city dominated by one of the most brutal of the Nazi Gauleiters. Two stories have emerged. One says the synagogue was converted to a sports hall that was used in conjunction with the military hospital on pl. Bernardyński. The swimming pool in the sports hall was specifically used to rehabilitate soldiers wounded and traumatized in Operation Barbarosa, the disastrous Nazi invasion of the USSR that began in 1941. The other story says that the conversion of the synagogue was ordered and controlled by the SS, and that the sports club was used exclusively by officers of the SS. (I have never found any documentary evidence to support either story.)
11. Following the Second World War, the badly damaged city had almost no amenities. The sports club, which miraculously survived the Red Army's artillery barrage in February 1945, was one of the few. The communists who eventually took over the government of Poland saw no reason to remove the swimming pool. Since the war, the pool in the former synagogue has been used by several generations of Poznań's school children to learn to swim. After the war there were no longer any active Jews in Poznań, and very few Jews of any description. At the time, no one thought the use of the former synagogue for the teaching of swimming was inappropriate. The reasoning was: at least the poor building is being put to a good use.
12. This set of facts, and this type of reasoning, lasted until the emancipation of Poland from Soviet-dominated Communism at the end of the 1980s. As Poles, including the Jews still in Poland, became more aware of the Jewish history of Poznań, and

more confident of their right to express their opinions, the swimming pool became a public embarrassment to many people in Poznań. They often suggested that the pool should go, but rarely had any ideas for how to put the building to better use. Ideas proposed were generally vague and often poorly thought through. The idea that the building should be restored to use as a synagogue was frequently mentioned. But a synagogue for whom? By 1969 there were almost no Jews in Poznan. There are only about 150 today, and only 12 belong to the group that now owns the synagogue. Different Jewish groups – as many as four or five have existed in Poznań since the war – began in the early 1990s to make unofficial efforts to reclaim the former synagogue.

13. In February 1997, under pressure from Israel and the USA, the Polish government passed a law saying that all formerly Jewish communal properties in Poland could only be reclaimed by the Jewish community of Poland acting through the agency of an organization known as the ZGWŻ, which was meant to be an umbrella organization representing all the Jews of Poland. The Polish government – like many before and since – completely overlooked the fact that there were several competing Jewish communities in Poland, as there had always been (even during the Holocaust).
14. Very quickly the ZGWŻ began to be dominated by the Orthodox faction of Judaism. The Orthodox have always claimed to be the only true Jews of Poland, insisting that the definition of Orthodox and the definition of Jew are the same. Other Jews – Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, even Chasidic, etc. – were actively and sometimes cruelly discriminated against. Despite these efforts to quash dissenting voices, the Conservative Jewish congregation of Wrocław grew and thrived in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the active support of the World Conservative Union, and with the guidance of an American Conservative Rabbi, Rabbi Ivan Caine. However, today, the rabbi in Wrocław is Orthodox, a protégé of Rabbi Michael **Schudrich**. According to one of the Wrocław Jewish Community's prominent members, the Conservative community has been driven underground, denied the use of the famous White Stork synagogue (originally a Reform synagogue, built during Breslau's days as a major center of the Reform movement), and forced to conduct services in their homes.
15. In 2000, Rabbi Michael Schudrich, a native New Yorker originally employed by the **Lauder Foundation** in New York, whose early days in Poland are universally admired, converted from Conservative Judaism to Orthodox Judaism. His precise reasons for doing so have been disputed – some say he did it for true religious reasons, while others, equally sure of themselves, say he did it for reasons of ambition and money. Sometimes described as “more Orthodox than the Orthodox,” Schudrich endorsed and then came to lead the Orthodox takeover of Jewish Poland. Those Polish Jews who disagreed with Schudrich were marginalized and ultimately silenced. The current president of the ZGWŻ, Piotr **Kadlick**, is a man described by the **Lauder Foundation** in New York as “a creation of Rabbi Schudrich, a man whose only job is to do whatever Schudrich tells him to do.”
16. Sometime in 2001 or early 2002, the Lauder Foundation very quietly stopped supporting the ZGWŻ and Rabbi Schudrich, finding the American Rabbi in particular “a potentially serious embarrassment to the causes of Jewish renewal in Central Europe. He has frequently supported practices and results that the Lauder

Foundation could not and would not support.” (This statement was made by a senior Lauder Foundation official to PSP on condition that his identity not be revealed.) One of the few exceptions to the enforced silence imposed by the ZGWŻ has been Bolesław **Szenicer** of Warsaw, the former caretaker of the Jewish Cemetery of Warsaw. Mr. Szenicer, like Jakub **Szadaj** in Gdansk, and Andrzej **Beryt** in Poznań, founded rival organizations; but those organizations have never had the access to money or the media attention that Rabbi Schudrich commands.

17. Mr. Szenicer, Mr. Szadaj, and Mr. Beryt, were prominently featured in an article that appeared in *Polityka* in October 2002 that strongly criticized the ZGWŻ, specifically attacking its policies on Jewish heritage in Poland. That article is still the most complete and by far the most responsible and objective article to have appeared in a respected mass circulation journal in Poland. It can be read on the internet. Poznań Synagogue Project (PSP), an American-based foundation founded earlier in 2002, against the advice of Rabbi Schudrich, commissioned a translation of the article into English. Both the original Polish version and an English translation with commentary can be read on the Poznań Synagogue Project website.
18. Original Polish version:
http://www.pozsynpro.org/press_pdf/polityka/p_article10_02%5Bpl%5D.pdf/
19. English version, with commentary:
http://www.pozsynpro.org/press_pdf/polityka/p_article10_02%5Bus%5D.pdf/
20. PSP was so disturbed by the allegations made in the *Polityka* article that it began to investigate the matter independently, contacting many of the people mentioned in the article, as well as the Lauder Foundation in New York, and other experts and interested parties. By October 2003, PSP was convinced that all the allegations in the article were substantially true (and, in fact, that some situations described in the article were worse than they had been described), and that the behavior of the ZGWŻ was at least ethically reprehensible and probably illegal.
21. PSP immediately took steps to sever all its previous ties with the ZGWŻ and to expose the ZGWŻ’s activities to Jews around the world. The ZGWŻ retaliated – boycotting (and eventually forcing the cancellation of) a conference that PSP had organized, attempting through fraud to take control of PSP’s bank account, and getting unscrupulous journalists to publish defamatory, misleading, and deeply biased articles against PSP. The first of these, Romana Brzeżyńska (**Gazeta Poznańska**), has since died of cancer, and the other, Daina Kolbuszewska (**Gazeta Wyborcza**), has since left the newspaper.
22. In spite of the ZGWŻ’s efforts, the public response to PSP’s exposure of the situation has been phenomenal. There have been more than 21,000 hits on the PSP website (www.pozsynpro.org); more than 16,000 of them in the last six months. But the ZGWŻ continues to ignore all attempts to make it more transparent and accountable.
23. PSP has repeatedly called for competitive, transparent, and open processes to be used in deciding the future of the Poznań synagogue. PSP has also repeatedly called for whatever eventually is done with the Poznań synagogue to be a world-

class project using the best people and the best ideas gathered from around the world.

24. In contrast, the ZGWŻ have long refused to discuss the matter. Most recently, they – in the person of their paid representative in Poznań, Mrs. Alicja **Kobus** – have submitted a mediocre proposal, after consultations with none of the world's recognized authorities, with designs by decidedly second-rate designers. PSP confidently predicts that the ZGWŻ project, if built, will ultimately embarrass the people of Poznań and Poland.
25. Several international experts, encouraged by Poznań Synagogue Project, have repeatedly offered to help with the Poznań synagogue. So far, Mrs. Kobus and the ZGWŻ have ignored or refused all these offers of help. Among those who have offered to help are:
- a. Prof. Feliks **Tych**, former director of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.
 - b. Dr. Eleonora **Bergman**, current director of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.
 - c. Prof. Antony **Polonsky**, international authority on Polish Jews, Brandeis University, Boston, and US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington.
 - d. Prof. Jonathan **Webber**, co-founder of the Kraków Museum of Galician Jews, University of Birmingham.
 - e. Prof. Carol Herselle **Krinsky**, author of *The Synagogues of Europe*.
 - f. Prof. Michael C. **Steinlauf**, author of *Bondage to the Dead: Poland the Memory of the Holocaust*, Gratz College of Jewish Studies, Philadelphia.
 - g. Prof. Harold **Hammer-Schenk**, widely acknowledged to be the world's authority on the history of German synagogues, Free University of Berlin.
 - h. Prof. Manfred **Koob**, acknowledged to be the world's authority on the design and construction of German synagogues, Technical University of Darmstadt.
 - i. Prof. Julius **Schoeps**, Director of the Moses Mendelssohn Center for the Study of European Jewry, Potsdam.
 - j. Architect Moshe **Safdie**, Boston, architect of the redesigned Yad Vashem Center, Jerusalem, winner of numerous international awards for design excellence.
 - k. Architect Peter **Eisenman**, New York, architect of the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, winner of numerous international awards for design excellence.
 - l. Architect Stefan **Kurylowicz**, Warsaw, often regarded as the best architect living in Poland today.
 - m. Architect Adam **Wapniak**, president of the Jewish Architectural Heritage Foundation (New York), and founder of the first Holocaust museum in Roumania.
26. The ZGWŻ's experts are unknown, none has ever been disclosed. The names mentioned by Mrs. Kobus – Archbishop **Gądecki**, Father Jerzy **Stranz**, Prezydent Ryszard **Grobelny**, Wojewoda Tomasz **Dzuiba**, etc – are not experts at all. Mrs. Kobus's architects are Stefan **Bajer** and Krzysztof **Kwiatkowski**, local Poznań architects who have never won an international award and never distinguished themselves in any way as designers.

CONCLUSIONS:

Mrs. Kobus and the ZGWŻ are not interested in achieving a world-class project for Poznań. They have consistently chosen instead to further their own interests, and possibly their own bank accounts, and to maintain complete and ruthless control over the project.

They are in the process of embarrassing and insulting the Jews of Poland, the city of Poznań, and the entire Polish nation, by their activities. Simultaneously, they have insulted and continue to insult the Jews of Germany, whose ancestors designed, built, and paid for the former synagogue on ul. Wroniecka.

**The ZGWŻ's plans should not be accepted.
Better minds and better plans are available.**

✧ **Poznań Synagogue Project** ✧
www.pozsynpro.org