

1

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Jewish monuments in Bardejov

Learning about history is wonderful because it is the best teacher of life. Knowing the history of one's own family is an even more wonderful feeling. This feeling is often experienced by the descendants of Bardejov's Jewish community because, in addition to the renovation and collection of historical information, many precious artifacts have been found.

Discovering the secret of one's lineage is certainly a wonderful phenomenon. In my opinion, in all towns where the past existence of Jewish communities was known, there should be a collective effort to search for ancestors; followed by active work for the preservation of this heritage.

Every person, and every group of hard-working, selfless people with kind and generous hearts, can be part of something bigger. Every willing hand is welcome in the restoration of a monument. Many volunteers are already part of exploring the traces of Jewish Bardejov. They have become entangled in the knot of the fates of Bardejov's Jewish families and have become so intertwined that there is no turning back until the knot is untangled. In many cases, people do not want to escape this cycle. Their goal is to spread awareness and not to allow the fate of the Jews to be forgotten. Even in Bardejov, there are individuals who, with the support of various Jewish and non-Jewish institutions, began to restore historical monuments. I have noticed the positive approach of schools to the matter of local Jewish heritage. This is how students learn about the culture, history, customs, and way of life of this large community. Such steps can lead to a better Slovakia or even a better world. If a child cultivates racial or religious tolerance and multiculturalism in society, there is a chance that history, or rather human's lack of common sense, will not repeat itself.

If our hearts turn towards history, we will begin to understand, and through understanding, something will inevitably become clear within us. We will start to understand the connections, and this is the most important thing for the intellectual development of a young student – to dust off the past and learn from it. Knowledge of history leads to change and change leads to belonging. More and more people desire to be part of something bigger.

Bardejov is extremely rich in Jewish cultural monuments, and it is a success that they are gaining recognition not only among the town's residents but also nationwide and even globally. I believe that the past treatment of such important heritage of Jewish ancestry was not right on the part of the town and its residents. I doubt that the town would permit the installation of a hardware store in a Catholic shrine. Though there are indeed no Jewish residents in Bardejov today, I believe we should not forget the valuable heritage that our town's history provides. Synagogue buildings

have the right to stand and be used. We do not demolish churches just because they are no longer in use. We register them as monuments with the Monuments Board and actively promote tourist visits. This may be exactly the case with Jewish monuments since they allow Jews to wander in the footsteps of their ancestors. The truth is that their interest in Bardejov is much greater than a common person might think. Bardejov therefore has a real potential to become a tourist destination for many foreign Jews. While we can assert that Bardejov is already a favoured destination for many Sons of Israel, I would argue that its potential could be even greater! It is also important to attract and educate the local population, who do not have the necessary insight into the history of the local Jewish community. Preservationists and volunteer work played a crucial role in closing the aforementioned hardware store and initiating the restoration of the Old Synagogue. With the project completed, it stands as a potential new source of pride for Bardejov. Now, we eagerly await the public opening ceremony, allowing everyone to access these valuable spaces.

In my opinion, the Old Synagogue restoration project has been sufficiently promoted in the town. I find the development of these significant projects that have received financial support from various grants truly remarkable. The participation of the Central Association of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia is also worth noting.

Many praise it, but some don't grasp the true significance of the restoration; nonetheless, they're pleased that a small town like Bardejov can boast a globally unique preserved structure. They may be proud of the monument, but so far, they seem to have failed to uncover its true purpose. I would like to emphasize that the renovated spaces do not need to function solely as a museum exhibit. They can also be used by ordinary people for various cultural events. If residents were aware of the treasures concealed within Bardejov, not only in the Jewish Suburbia, they would feel even prouder to call such a wonderful historical town their home!

Day by day, they walk past the unnoticed buildings. The Mikveh, the ritual bath building, also served commercial purposes as it was transformed into a functioning shop. Morally, it did not bother anyone to buy hardware in such a historically important and valuable building.

In addition to the set of Jewish buildings between Mlynská Street and Dlhý Rad (The Jewish Suburbia), Bardejov's Jewish heritage also includes two other sites. One of them is Bikur Cholim Synagogue on Kláštorská Street. The other preserved and already renovated monument is undoubtedly the Jewish cemetery on Tehelná Street.

The streets of Bardejov continue to highlight the presence of the Jews. All we need to do is open our eyes and take a little interest in the town we have lived in for years. I am glad that my high school studies opened my eyes, and my heart began to resonate with the fate of the followers of the Moses religion. The buildings in which they regularly gathered and prayed are, of course, an inseparable part of that. Despite being situated in "forgotten" eastern Slovakia, Bardejov acts as an imaginary magnet that increasingly attracts the attention of not only Jews but also followers of various religions from around the world. Behind these remarkable efforts are organizations such as Vita in Suburbium and the Bardejov Jewish Preservation Committee. They exemplify that the

essence of art does not lie in escaping to the western part of the country or integrating into developed societies. Instead, it lies in enhancing and cultivating culture and the environment in Eastern Slovakia. This is because even the seemingly forgotten region of Bardejov has a diverse range of interesting aspects to offer.

As mentioned earlier, the use of Jewish monuments can be extensive. If I were to list them all, the list would stretch back to Jerusalem, Israel. From national orchestra concerts to exhibitions and conferences. We should not perceive spaces as "Jewish" and feel afraid. The building won't hurt you. The important thing is to look up and enjoy the breathtaking view of the colourful ornaments decorating the ceiling. For the epicureans, I offer a challenge: Uncover all the hidden meanings behind the depicted symbols. Let me give you a hint: There are more than you think! The beautifully decorated space, comparable to the Moscow Metro, enhances the artistic experience of a ballet performance or any other cultural event. The historically rich spaces will not leave any viewer disappointed.

Certainly, we can view the Jewish Suburbia as a living museum and an integral part of Bardejov's heritage. However, let's also consider these buildings as a potential hub for cultural development, where a hopeful theatre ensemble can perform rehearsed dramatic works. Visiting theatre plays have long been missing from the list of Bardejov's leisure activities, along with a dedicated space for such events. The reconstruction and opening of the Old Synagogue could be the first step towards becoming the cultural Mecca of Eastern Slovakia, especially for such a beautiful town as Bardejov. It certainly has the conditions and material for a similar future acquisition.

The spaces are also well-suited for establishing an organized youth group interested in delving deeper into Jewish history, customs, and traditions, or for generating fresh ideas for utilizing the space. There are certainly experts in town on this subject, and they would be more than happy to share all the information about the Jewish community of Bardejov with curious students. This would expand horizons and lead to a greater concentration of intellectuals and knowledge in the town. Of course, I am not restricting seminar participation to students alone, because I am sure that older residents of the town and the public are also interested in the topic.

Another idea could be a seminar connected with the presentation of important artists of Jewish origin who worked in Bardejov. I must confess, even I could not name a single Jewish composer, musician, or artist from Bardejov. Surely many talented generations of Jews have passed through this small town and are at least worth mentioning. The public should be aware of their talents, and the Jews mentioned don't necessarily have to be from Bardejov; it would suffice to limit their geographical origins to Eastern Slovakia.

Preserving heritage is a no-brainer. This is how each of us should approach monuments. They refer to the past and warn of the future. I am glad to be part of a school that is not afraid to talk about Jewish history and regularly commemorate the fate of the less fortunate. The fates of

the hands that built these many buildings which are now visited with wonder and awe by curious tourists from all corners of the world.

Keep it up, Bardejov!