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“ISRAEL STANDS TOGETHER”:



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THE MONIES OF THE LODZ GHETTO POST OFFICE by Steve and Ray Feller

THE GREAT CHORAL OF ST. PETERSBURG MEDALS by Dr. Vladimir Bernshtam

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COMMEMORATIVE MEDALS IN HONOR OF THE ANNIVERSARIES OF THE GREAT CHORAL OF ST. PETERSBURG

By Dr. Vladimir Bernshtam

In the mid-19th century, the Jewish community of St. Petersburg numbered around 10,000 people, a figure that did not exceed 20,000 by the beginning of the 20th century. However, these few thousand people in the capital constituted the core of the most educated, cultured, influential, and prosperous segment of Russian Jewry. They paved the way that the entire people, willingly or unwillingly, followed. Their activities were highly visible both on Jewish streets and within Russian society. Their personalities, ideas, and the books, newspapers, and journals they published had a tremendous impact on the youth, especially in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. These individuals significantly shaped not only Russian Jewry but also the global Jewish community, as noted by Michael Beizer in his book "The Jews of St. Petersburg: Excursions Through a Noble Past" [1].

An illustration of these words can be found in the lives and activities of the renowned bankers and patrons, the Ginzburg barons [2], who sought to integrate Jews into the multiethnic society of the Russian Empire while preserving their ethnic identity and Jewish religion. For this purpose,

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Evzel Ginzburg founded the “Society for the Spread of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia” in 1863. Evzel Ginzburg served as the society’s chairman from its inception until his death in 1878, after which his son Horace took the helm from 1878 until 1909. The society provided financial assistance to Jewish periodicals in Russian, translated Jewish religious and secular literature into Russian, aided in the establishment of Jewish libraries, and awarded scholarships to Jewish students.

In 1877, the St. Petersburg Mint issued a silver medal (Figure 1) in honor of Baron Evzel Ginzburg. The renowned medalist Avenir Griliches designed the medal. Encircling the portrait on the medal is the inscription: "Baron Joseph Evzel, son of Rabbi Gavriel Yakov Ginzburg".



Figure 1

Another medal, which can be considered dedicated to the Ginzburg family, is a silver medal (Figure 2) with a diameter

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of 60 millimeters, issued for the fiftieth anniversary of the "Society for the Spread of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia". On the obverse of the medal, alongside the society's name, are the Hebrew words "Yihe Or" (Let there be light). On the reverse, the name of the society in Hebrew, the Latin numeral L (fifty), and the dates 1863–1913 according to both the Julian and Jewish calendars.



Figure 2

The Ginzburgs actively participated in the Jewish religious life of the capital of the Russian Empire and played a pivotal role as primary organizers in the construction of the capital's choral synagogue.

In the mid-nineteenth century, there were several small prayer houses (molels) in the city, which were insufficient for the Jewish population of St. Petersburg. In one of them, the Temporary Mollél for educated Jews, the first choral service in the capital took place in September 1868, where,

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in addition to the cantor, a synagogue choir led by a conductor participated. After some time, a meeting was held at the residence of the Actual State Councillor, first guild merchant Baron Horace Ginzburg, under his chairmanship, to discuss the construction of a permanent St. Petersburg choral synagogue. During this meeting, a preliminary subscription for the necessary donations was initiated. A decision was made to submit a request for the construction of the choral synagogue in the capital. After receiving approval on October 11, 1869, at a meeting in the Temporary Mollel, a committee for the construction of the synagogue was elected under the chairmanship of Horace Ginzburg. The Governor of St. Petersburg approved the elected members of the committee on December 7, 1869, and confirmed the permission received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to collect funds for the construction of the choral synagogue. In February 1880, architects L.I. Bakhman and I.I. Shaposhnikov, winners of the synagogue project competition, presented their design calculated for 1490 worshipers. The project was submitted for consideration to the City Administration, which approved it. The facade sketch of the synagogue required imperial approval. However, the Governor wrote to the Ministry of Internal Affairs expressing his negative opinion: the synagogue's facade was too magnificent compared to Christian churches and exceeded them in height. After this conclusion, Alexander II did not approve the project. The architects created new drawings, significantly reducing the

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size of the synagogue, and on May 16, 1881, Alexander III approved the preliminary design. Construction was led by architect A.V. Malov and was completed in 1893. The total cost of construction amounted to 500,000 gold rubles, the majority of which was contributed by Baron Horace Ginzburg [1].

After the October Revolution of 1917, the synagogue fell into decline. The number of parishioners was small, the main building was not heated, and it opened only sporadically [1]. On June 29, 1929, a resolution of the Lensovet Presidium was issued to close the Jewish religious community, and on January 17, 1930, the Lenoblispolkom Presidium decision led to the closure of the synagogue. However, following a complaint by Jews to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on June 1, 1930, the synagogue was reopened [3]. Currently, the St. Petersburg Choral Synagogue is the second-largest in Europe and the largest in Russia. A restoration was undertaken from 2000 to 2005. The facade was returned to its original terracotta-red color (Figure 3).

The author is aware of medals issued for three anniversaries of the St. Petersburg Choral Synagogue. To commemorate centennial of Synagogue, the St. Petersburg Mint issued a medal designed by medalist Alexey Korolyuk. The medal was crafted from two metals – tombac with a diameter of 62 mm, limited to 50 copies (Figure 4), and German silver

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with a diameter of 30 mm, produced in a run of 300 copies (Figure 5) [4].



Figure 3. St. Petersburg Choral Synagogue (Author: Alex 'Florstein' Fedorov, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=34107175>) [3].

In 2003, the 110th anniversary of the opening of the synagogue coincided with the widely celebrated 300th anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg. To mark this occasion, at the initiative of Sergey Efimovich Shagalov, a member of the Jewish community of the Grand Choral Synagogue of St. Petersburg, medals were issued. On the obverse of the medal, there is an image of the Admiralty,

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the dates 1703-2003, inscriptions "300 years" and "St. Petersburg" in both Russian and English. On the reverse, the Grand Choral Synagogue is depicted, with the dates 1893 and 2003, along with the inscription "Grand Synagogue" in Russian, English, and Hebrew. Table medals in silver and bronze colors with a diameter of 34 mm are known (Figures 6 and 7), as well as medal on a ribbon (Figure 8).



Figure 4



Figure 5

Continued



Figure 6



Figure 7

Continued



Figure 8



Figure 9

Continued

In 2013, the Jewish community of St. Petersburg celebrated the 120th anniversary of the Synagogue. In honor of this event, a commemorative Torah Scroll was commissioned. The Jewish community of St. Petersburg organized a fundraising campaign for the creation of the jubilee Torah Scroll, and hundreds of residents contributed to the cause. Donors were awarded a commemorative medal (see Fig. 9). Depending on the size of their contribution, individuals received medals of three types: silver with gilding, plain silver, or brass. Anastasia Sukhanova created the design of the medals. The diameter of the medal is 35 mm, and its thickness is 2 mm. The silver medals weigh 12 grams and are made of 925-grade silver. On the obverse side of the medal is an image of the Grand Choral Synagogue inside a six-pointed star, along with the inscription: "Grand Choral Synagogue of St. Petersburg 120 years." On the reverse side is the inscription in Hebrew: "Torah Scroll of the Jews of St. Petersburg." These medals were graciously manufactured without charge by the member of the religious community and the CEO of the "Sadko" jewelry factory, Mikhail Katz [5].

In conclusion, the author expresses deep gratitude to the synagogue staff Elena Gurevich, Sara Rabinovich, Anna Brodetskaya, as well as Sergey Efimovich Shagalov, for the kindly provided information. ▣


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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

By Dr. Vladimir Bernshtam

In my article “COMMEMORATIVE MEDALS IN HONOR OF THE ANNIVERSARIES OF THE GREAT CHORAL OF ST. PETERSBURG” (2024 Shekel 2 Spring), I made an error in illustration 1. The medal depicted in it is thoroughly described in the article by Ira Rezak and Zvi Grilishes titled “TWO UNPUBLISHED GUENZBURG PIECES BY FATHER AND SON” (Journal of the Russian Numismatic Society, Number 67 Winter 1998-1999, pp. 63-65). 

This illustration should appear as follows:

