

FANATICAL ANTISEMITISM AS EVERYDAY GERMAN
PRACTICE

The Death of Moravian Opera Singer Bertha Pierson (née Bretholz) in Berlin in 1943

Karel Hruža

Based on a source discovered in the municipal archives of Brno, this contribution investigates the background of the death of Moravian opera singer Bertha Pierson, née Bretholz (1860-1943). The sister of Moravian archivist and historian Berthold Bretholz (1862-1936) performed at opera houses in Europe and the USA. She eventually settled in Berlin, where she was able to conceal her Jewish descent after 1933, thereby avoiding antisemitic repressions. Sources kept at the Landesarchiv Berlin reveal that Pierson was denounced to the NSDAP due to her origins in early 1943 and eventually verbally assaulted for being Jewish by the caretaker of her tenement house. This “exposal” presumably led her to commit suicide during the night from 2nd April to 3rd April 1943. The most important source in this context is a report by the Berlin police that assumed a “suicide by soporific poisoning of the Jew Berta Sara Pierson”. Pierson’s property was confiscated after her death, and soon thereafter a potential heir attempted to verify whether she had indeed been of Jewish descent by submitting an enquiry to the Brno City Archives. The case of Bertha Pierson documents how the militant antisemitism of the national socialist regime permeated everyday life in Germany, not least by way of “willing enforcers” (Goldhagen) who voluntarily took action against Jewish citizens. Three key sources on the topic are included in edited form as an appendix.