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to the Jews was the inside of the hall, which had to conform to their religious demands – the outside, frequently circumscribed by external factors, was of less consequence.

The earliest records of synagogues existing on Polish lands date from the fourteenth century and refer to several larger towns. This is understandable, since Jewish communities in smaller towns were presumably still limited in number, and prayed in appropriately adapted rooms in residential buildings. Only a substantial and integrated community was able to erect a building specifically for the purpose. Just as with the overwhelming majority of houses and churches, most synagogues were likewise wooden in construction. This is confirmed by records from the sixteenth, and particularly from the seventeenth centuries, which refer to the replacement of wooden synagogues with masonry ones.

We have no records of the architecture of medieval wooden synagogues. Those of masonry synagogues erected in Polish lands in this period are likewise sparse. Two edifices have survived in Silesia, which were once synagogues, but, with the secession of Silesia from Poland and the expulsion of the Jews were transformed into churches. These are the church of St. Barbara in Strzegom from the fourteenth century, a small, single-nave hall covered with a pitched roof, similar to many such buildings dating from this period in Germany and Hungary, to which a multi-angled presbytery was subsequently added; and the church of St. Salvador in Oleśnica from the fifteenth century, originally a two-nave hall with two columns supporting

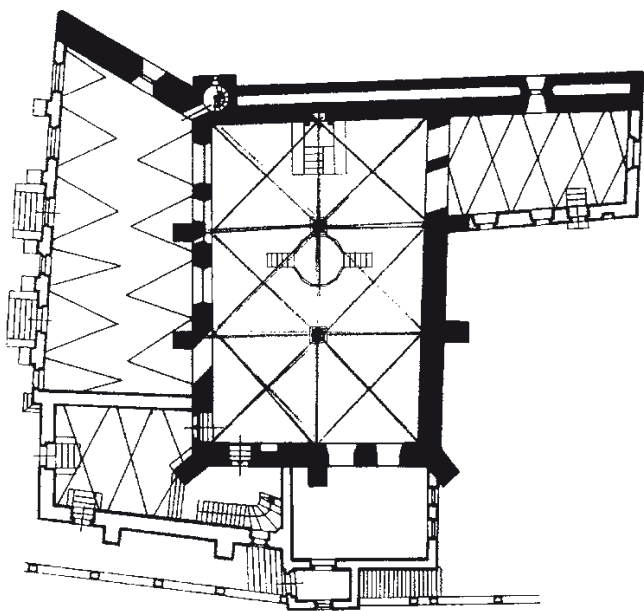


19 Kraków-Kazimierz, the Old Synagogue, interior of the main hall in the early 20th century

six fields of vaulting, which was entirely rebuilt following a fire in the eighteenth century. Both synagogues had massive walls, supported by buttresses and steep, pitched tile-covered roofs. In Oleśnica the slope of the eastern wall concealed the niche for the holy ark.

At the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the so-called Old Synagogue (Stara Synagoga) was built in Kazimierz by Kraków. Like the Old-New Synagogue in Prague and the original synagogue in Oleśnica, this is a two-nave hall with six fields of vaulting. The Old Synagogue burned down in 1557. The rebuilt synagogue was completed in 1570 on the plan of its predecessor, but the walls were raised higher, the shapes of the windows altered, and Renaissance forms were given to the columns and brackets supporting the vaulting, which had ribs that still retained a gothic profile. The original steep, pitched roof was replaced, following an ordinance by the civic council of Kraków from 1554 applicable to all newly-erected buildings other than churches, as an attempt to reduce fires, with a multi-surfaced sunken roof, concealed behind a high parapet wall.¹⁷

The single-nave hall in Strzegom, as well as the two-nave six-bay synagogues in Oleśnica and in Kazimierz by Kraków, belong to the type of hall-synagogues, as built



18 Kraków-Kazimierz, the Old Synagogue, ground-plan as in 1924



21 Kraków-Kazimierz, view from the east, 1880, with the Old Synagogue in the north and the Church of Corpus Christi in the south

the remaining territories of Royal Prussia and the ancient fief of Mazovia. These *privilegia* prevented them from settling within towns – but direct servants of the Crown, as well as the great bankers, doctors, etc., who were granted individual privileges, were exceptions to this decree. In Warsaw Jewish merchants had the right to reside and pursue their commercial activities only during the sessions of the Diet (*Sejm*) and the election of a new king, in Gdańsk during the Dominican Fair, and in Lublin during the sessions of the Diet and of the Crown Tribunal. In many towns with *privilegia de non tolerandis Judaeis*, Jews nevertheless possessed numerous money-changers' booths and shops rented from townspeople and the gentry. At the same time prohibitions against residence were frequently ignored by the Jews themselves, and were enforced ineffectually by the civic authorities. While the leading opponents of the Jewish presence were the middle-ranking and smaller traders and craftsmen who were threatened by their competition, the attitude to them of the patriciate was significantly less restrictive. Its members, associated with the Jews through business and using as they did their banking services, entered into agreements with them as representatives of the civic

authority, permitting them to reside in the town for a specified period at a high level of payment. Hence the frequent renewal of *privilegia* formed the basis for drawing up new agreements and receiving new fees.

Restrictions upon residence and economic activity, the opposition of the towns themselves, royal prohibitions and decrees, all failed to prevent the already-mentioned concentration of Jews in the greatest cities of the Crown – in Kraków and Kazimierz, Poznań and Lwów, and, somewhat later, Lublin, Vilnius and Warsaw. Particularly in these cities the opportunity to reside and possess storehouses of goods within the boundaries of protective city-walls, close to the centre of trade, the marketplace, was of paramount importance to Jewish bankers and traders. Hence the desire to reside close to the marketplace or in the Jewish quarter of the inner city, despite increasingly deteriorating conditions there, and opposition to attempts by the civic authorities to relocate their residents to the suburbs. A result was extreme overcrowding in Jewish districts in the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries. The desire to utilise every scrap of available land led to an increase in the number of storeys of buildings, the erection of structures in courtyards and passageways, and even in attaching houses to the city-walls and towers themselves. This concentration of housing that was still largely wooden resulted in frequent fires breaking out in Jewish districts, often destroying entire towns, or substantial parts of them. Consequent rebuilding of Jewish districts generally took place in an uncontrolled manner, which meant a loss of the original land-plots, or their subdivision, or even a change in the lines of streets and a reduction of their width. Augmentation of the Jewish district through the purchase of adjoining plots, and the leasing of houses beyond its designated boundaries, resulted in protests on the part of townspeople, and their recourse to the king and to the courts.

In Kraków the conflicts which were evident as early as the 14th century resulted in the already-mentioned agreement of 1485, radically limiting Jewish trade and craftsmanship, and in attempts to remove Jews from the city. At the same time a Jewish community arose in Kraków's satellite-town of Kazimierz, which, following an influx of refugees from the Czech lands, but also from Germany, Italy and Spain, as well as Jews transferred from Kraków following the fire of 1495, came to dominate over the Jewish community in Kraków itself. Although small, the latter persisted, and its members resided and owned shops and exchange-booths in the city. The Jews of both communities were known as Kraków Jews.⁸ Whereas the territory occupied by the Jewish district around Żydowska (Jewish) Street, currently św. Tomasza (St. Thomas's) Street, remained small, in Kazimierz, whose development was undoubtedly hampered by its proximity to Kraków, the Jewish district developed more rapidly than the remaining part of the town. The original *vicus Judaeorum*, dating from the end of the fifteenth century, grew into a large and wealthy *Oppidum Judaeorum*, Jewish Town, with fifty two rich Renaissance masonry houses, thirty two wooden houses⁹, and three



22 *Kraków-Kazimierz, the Jewish Town at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries*
 Streets: 1 – Szeroka, the Jewish marketplace. 2 – Żydowska, now Józefa 3 – Kierków, now Jakuba
 Synagogues: 4 – Stara (Old). 5 – Remu (Rema). 6 – Wysoka (Tall). 7 – Popper's-Bocian. 8 – Izaak's (Isaac's).
 9 – Kupa (Kuppoh). 10 – Remu (Rema) cemetery
 Boundaries of the Jewish Town:
 — before 1553 - - - in 1553 - · - in 1583 · · · · in 1607/1608

synagogues – the already-mentioned Old Synagogue, rebuilt after the fire, the small Remu (Rema) Synagogue founded by the father of the celebrated Talmudic scholar Moses Isserles as the place for the education and studies of his son, and the Tall Synagogue (Wysoka), erected in about 1560. The Jewish Town was a centre for trade and banking, as well as for religious and intellectual life, attracting Jews from all over



23 *Kraków-Kazimierz, the Old Synagogue before its reconstruction by Zygmunt Hendel in the 1920s; view from Szeroka Street*



24 *Kraków-Kazimierz, the Old Synagogue, as rebuilt after the war; view from Szeroka Street*



25 Kraków-Kazimierz, Józefa Street, drawing from Kłosy, 1884

Europe. At the end of the sixteenth century its population was about 2,000, and this continued to increase. The area of the district was increased several times by means of agreements with the civic council of Kazimierz, the last occasion being in 1608; the boundaries established at this time continued to apply right to the nineteenth century. In contrast to the compact housing on the main streets, Szeroka and Józefa, where wealthy merchant and banking families had their mansions, adjacent areas were occupied by wooden houses, in which the poorer people lived.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, in parallel to the stagnation which overwhelmed Kraków and other Polish cities, Kazimierz started to decline and this also applied to its Jewish Town. It was plagued by fires, which on several

occasions destroyed much of the district. The largest, but not the last of these, in 1623, devoured two-thirds of the houses. Rebuilding proceeded rapidly, and in 1633 there were already ninety seven masonry and one hundred and thirty six wooden houses standing.¹⁰ Building was haphazard, the lines of most streets, apart from a few main ones, were lost. Every scrap of land was used, even the defensive-walls were utilised, by opening window-holes in them. Between 1620 and 1644 four more masonry synagogues were erected – the small synagogue of Wolf Popper-Bocian, built against the town-walls; Na Górcie (On the Hill) Synagogue, above a bathhouse, erected by Moses Jakubowicz for his son-in-law, the famous Kabbalist Nathan Spiro; the Kupa (Kuppoh) Synagogue, beside the hospital, built from the funds of the *kahal*, also adjacent to the walls; and the largest and last of the synagogues of Kazimierz to be built, that of Izaak, founded by Izaak Jakubowicz Jেকেles. In spite of this, the majority of people became increasingly impoverished, and the condition of the district declined.

In Poznań the Jews lived in the oldest part of the town from as early as the 14th century. Their numbers, initially small, increased considerably after 1510 following the arrival of refugees from Brandenburg, and then Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal. In 1517 the Poznań Jews received from the King the right to trade, putting them on an equal footing with local traders, and four years later they were declared free of customs-duties throughout the whole country. At this time they probably occupied twenty eight houses on Żydowska Street, stretching from the marketplace to the exit of Dominikańska Street. By about 1540 they owned forty nine houses.¹¹ In the second half of the sixteenth century the Poznań Jewish community numbered, according to various researchers, 1,500–2,000 people. At the same time Poznań became an important centre for banking and foreign trade in a large range of goods, in which Jewish merchants and financiers played a significant role. In 1558 Jews were the owners of at least eighty three houses,¹² in which one hundred and thirteen families resided, and the extent of the district had increased considerably – taking in Woroniecka Street, Mała Żydowska (Little Jewish) Street and Przed Dominikanami (In front of the Dominicans) as well as Żydowska – now Szewska, Street itself.

The rapid rise in the Jewish population and the size of the district it occupied, as well as its increasingly significant role in the economy occasioned protests and opposition on the part of the townspeople. These were particularly strong in the wake of several great fires, the largest being in 1536 and 1509, which had their origins in the Jewish district, and thoroughly destroyed not only the district itself (according to Tollet, the fire of 1590 consumed one hundred and thirty four Jewish houses as well as the synagogue), but substantial areas of the rest of the city. The Jews were accused of causing these disasters, and there were demands for their permanent removal, or at any rate enforcing a limit on the number of houses they could occupy once the area had already been rebuilt. There was also an attempt to



32 Tarnów, Zakątna Street, in 1954

removal of ninety seven Jewish families residing within their jurisdiction, governor Grudziński resettled these Jews in the nearby weavers' town of Swarzędz, which he had founded.²¹

At the end of the sixteenth and in the early years of the seventeenth century a number of towns in Lesser Poland, including Pilzno, Bochnia and Ujście Solne, obtained *privilegia de non tolerandis Judaeis*. The Jews expelled from these towns resettled in the nearest large private town of Tarnów, where a grouping of Jews had previously resided in a suburb. In 1581 the Jews of Tarnów received from its owner, Prince Konstanty Ostrogski, a privilege permitting them to own twelve masonry houses *intra muros* in the town, beside Żydowska Street, and to build a synagogue.²²

In the second half of the sixteenth century in Vilnius, which together with other larger Lithuanian royal towns had in 1527 obtained a *privilegium de non tolerandis Judaeis*, the Jews resided in houses belonging to the nobility which were outside civic jurisdiction, and formed a substantial community with its own wooden synagogue. Żydowska Street existed from the end of the sixteenth century. In 1593 Lithuanian Jews, including those of Vilnius, obtained from the King trading powers equal to those of the townspeople, as well as the right to rent and purchase houses from the nobility, and to reside in houses belonging to the nobility without restrictions or



33 Tarnów, Żydowska Street, in 1954

the obligation to pay civic taxes by virtue of this residence. The resultant increase in the Jewish population and its occupation of districts led to increasing opposition on the part of the townspeople. This resulted in the establishment in 1629 of the boundaries of the Jewish district. Some years later the largest and most magnificent synagogue in the whole *Rzeczpospolita*, known as the Great Synagogue, was built on land belonging to the Słuck Princes. Thus a substantial Jewish Town developed in the very centre of a city possessing the *privilegium de non tolerandis Judaeis*. In 1645 this was occupied by two hundred and sixty two families, consisting of 1310 individuals. A similar number lived outside this district, residing in houses belonging to the nobility and clergy distributed throughout the city.²³

Warsaw and the province of Mazovia were incorporated into the Crown in 1527, the same year in which King Zygmunt I granted them the *privilegium de non tolerandis Judaeis*, which remained in force until the end of the eighteenth century. Following the Union of Lublin in 1569 the importance of Warsaw increased enormously. During this century it became the actual, if not yet the official, capital of the *Rzeczpospolita* of Both Nations, as well as an important centre for national and international trade, and strenuous attempts were made to impose the prohibition on residence in the city by the Jews. Apart from a few royal servants, who had individual permission for permanent residence, Jews were only allowed to live and trade in the city during the



37 Szydłów, the hall interior, before 1939

particularly following the arrival of the Sephardic Jews. They successively occupied Szewska (Cobblers') Street and virtually the whole of Rynek Solny (the Salt Market). The synagogue, as was the case of the religious buildings of other denominations, was situated on the periphery of the city.

In 1642 Jędrzej z Potoka Potocki granted a similar privilege to the Jews, encouraging them to settle in the town of Stanisławów, which he had founded:

I grant [...] all the citizens who come to settle here their liberty, to the Polish as well as to foreign nations and people of religion, permitting Talmudic Hebraic Jews to settle; and allow them to build their school in the Jewish street in the designated location. Beside this same school and open space I permit the building of three houses, that is for the physician and the school-teacher close by, which same houses are in now and in the future to be free of taxes.²⁵

Towns in the eastern territories were thus multi-national and multi-denominational. Alongside Poles and Ruthenians, the larger ones saw settlements of Armenians, Italians, Greeks, Germans and Scots. In all these towns the Jews were particularly numerous. According to Topolski, "The dynamic development of towns in Volhynia, Podolia and the provinces of Kiev and Braclaw was a feature of the general influx of surplus populations from Central Poland and Jewish settlements."²⁶

Jews generally became the dominant ethnic-religious minority soon after their settlement. The districts settled by them were not specifically delineated, and

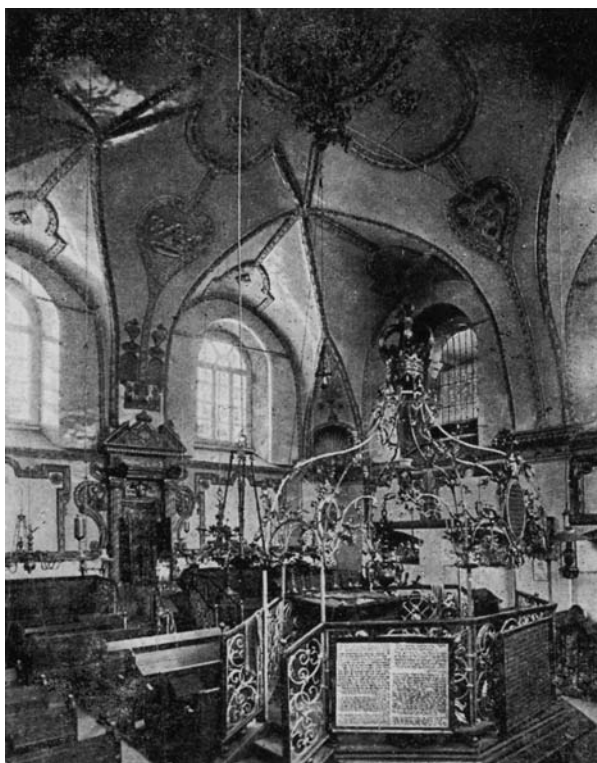


38 Pińczów, the hall interior, before 1939

probably were no different in their building from those in other parts of towns. The Jews were generally permitted to acquire real estate outside their designated districts. The demographic and economic vitality of the Jews favoured an increase in their level of ownership in towns. Jewish districts grew rapidly.

Alongside the territorial development and increase in the number of Jewish settlements, there arose a need for new synagogues. The advantageous economic status of the Jews, as well as the favourable attitude to them of the governors of royal towns and the owners of private towns, encouraged the fulfilment of this need. Synagogues were built right across the country. In the largest settlements – in Kazimierz by Kraków, Lublin and Lwów – privately-funded synagogues were erected alongside those built from community funds, and these former were an expression of the affluence and piety of wealthy bankers and merchants.

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in the densely-populated Jewish districts of larger towns, where overcrowding placed a premium on available space, longitudinal halls roofed with barrel-vaults with lunettes were still built, continuing the medieval arrangement – the Remu, Wysoka (High) and Popper's synagogues in Kazimierz, the Old School (Stara Szkoła) in Poznań. In those places where there was not such a shortage of space, as early as the mid-sixteenth century synagogues on a square or near-square ground-plan, with a centrally-located *bimah*, began to be built.



39 Zamość, the hall interior, 1926

Jews who settled in Poland were Ashkenazim. They followed the principle established by Maimonides (1135–1204) of erecting the *bimah* as a free-standing structure in the centre of the hall. This principle was endorsed by the most celebrated contemporary authority, Moses Isserles Remu (1510 or 1520–1572), the Rector of the Kraków *Yeshiva*, in his 1578 commentary *Mappa (Tablecloth)* to the codification of religious principles *Shulchan Aruch (A Covered Table)* by Yosef Caro (1488–1575), and this had a fundamental influence upon the architecture of Polish synagogues between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

The mid-sixteenth century synagogue in Szydłów still retains a longitudinal plan in the form of an east-west rectangle, but its barrel-vaulting with lunettes skirting all four sides was constructed in a shape emphasising the special significance of the centrally-placed stone-built *bimah*-bower. Single-space synagogue halls, constructed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Lwów (Golden Rose), Pińczów, Zamość, Szczepieszyn and Chęciny, already have a square, or a roughly square plan. In their interiors covered with vaulting (cloister-vaulting in Golden Rose, “sail” vaulting in Zamość, Szczepieszyn and Chęciny), the connection with contemporary secular architecture – town hall and castle chambers – is evident.



40 Zamość, the hall interior, 2103

At the same time synagogues whose interiors present an original structural solution, found in no other kind of building, were being constructed. Synagogue halls whose *bimah* was surrounded by four pillars were probably built in the second half of the sixteenth century (in Lublin, Brześć Litewski) and became more widespread at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Lesser Poland (in Przemyśl, Tarnów and Rzeszów), as well as in the neighbouring territories of the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (somewhat later in Łuck, Pińsk, Słonim, Tykocin and Nowogródek). Placed upon a podium, connected above by arcading in one powerful pier, the pillars constituted the *bimah*-tower supporting the vault, consisting of four barrels with lunettes intersecting at the corners. The bases of the vault-ribs rested directly on the podium, or were transmitted through a powerful balustrade, solid or pierced. A small cupola covered the field above the *bimah*. In the mid-seventeenth century these cupolas were occasionally significantly lowered in comparison with the remaining fields of vaulting, and were crowned with inverted lanterns, as in Pińsk, Słonim and Nowogródek. Thus a kind of inner chapel, built into the *bimah*-tower, was created as described in the inscription of 1642 on the *bimah* in Tykocin.



45 *Nowogródek, the hall interior, before 1939*

the hall. In the synagogues described above the *bimah* was a free-standing podium or a bower situated within the central field surrounded by pillars.

Sergey Kravtsov draws attention to the remarkable similarity between the synagogues in Lwów and Ostróg, and the plan of the Temple of Jerusalem as recreated on the basis of the Vision of Ezekiel by the Spanish Jesuit, architect, writer and theoretician Juan Battista Villalpando (1552–1608). Villalpando's work, published in 1604, was known in Poland, and in the opinion of many Polish scholars had a great impact on Polish sacral architecture, as well as that of the Netherlands and England in the seventeenth century. It is thus probable that it could also have been the inspiration for the building of these synagogues.²⁹

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in accordance with the spirit of the age, as well as the increase in the significance of the *bimah*, decoration of the frame of the Holy Ark also became richer and more elaborate. From plain



46 *Tykocin, the hall interior, 1998*



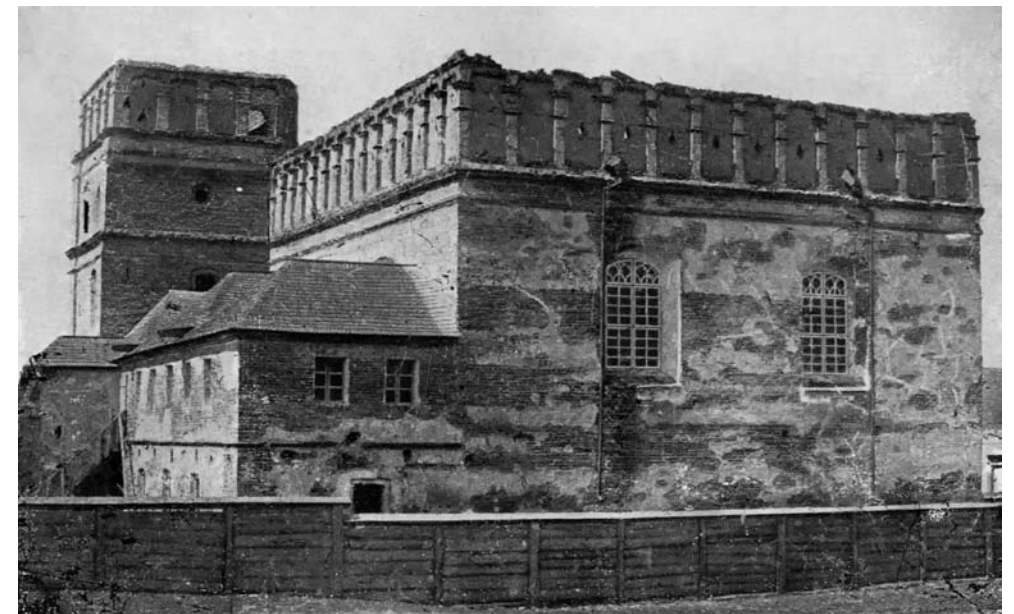
51 *Szydłów, view from the south-east, 2014*



52 *Pińczów, view from the north-east, before 1939*

(Pińczów) or crenellated (Szydłów), occasionally with blind arcading (the Old Synagogue in Kazimierz after rebuilding, Łuck and Satanów).

Around the middle of the sixteenth century new spaces came to be added to the main hall – a vestibule, and, somewhat later, a *babiniec*, or women's prayer-room. The vestibule was almost always located on the west side, and protected the entrance; it was the place in which the community elders and the *kahal* court met. The *babiniec* was located on the ground floor along one of the other sides, or else on the first floor, above the vestibule. Women had access to services only through small, densely-grated windows in the wall separating the *babiniec* from the men's hall. The oldest known synagogue in which the vestibule and the women's room placed above it were built at the same time as the main hall and were part of a unified structure was that in Pińczów, dating from the end of the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. The Isaac's Synagogue in Kazimierz by Kraków, built in the years 1638–1644 and modelled on ecclesiastical architecture of the period, also has a longitudinal form, in which the women's room located above the vestibule constitutes an open gallery separated from the hall only by arcading; the hall and the gallery are covered by the same barrel-vaulting with lunettes.



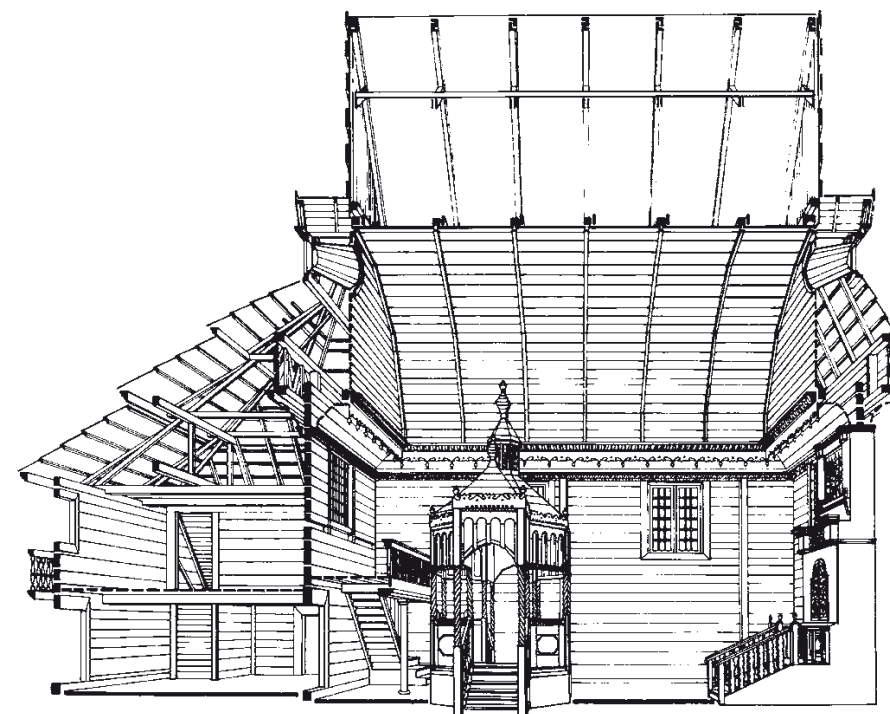
53 *Łuck, the synagogue, view in the inter-war period*



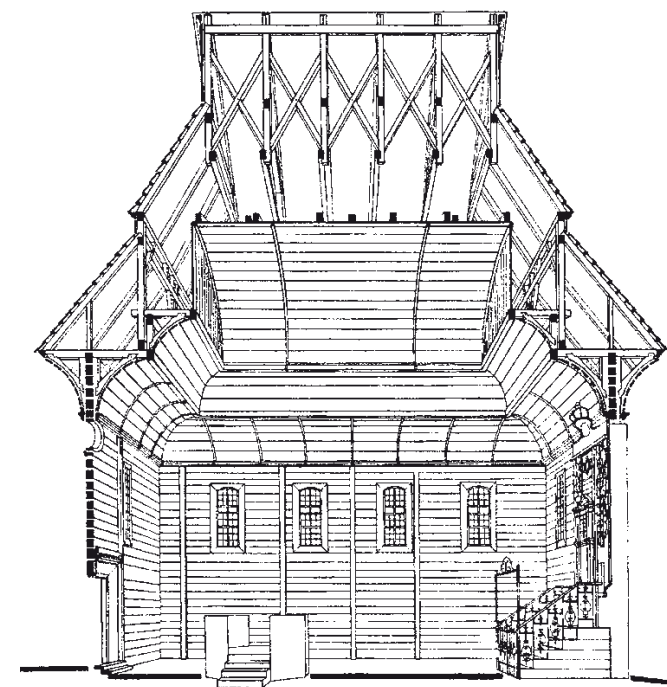
55 Zabłudów, the hall interior, before 1939

and architectural solutions is evidence of an earlier development of such roofs and the prevalence of their local varieties by as early as the mid-seventeenth century. They presumably came into being in the first half of the seventeenth century, at a time that was recognised as featuring a significant development in wooden architecture in the lands of the *Rzeczpospolita* of Poland-Lithuania, and were being applied in the construction of synagogues, particularly those of a traditional character, right up to the 19th century.

The hundred years dating from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries is frequently described as the Golden Age of the Polish Jews. The Commonwealth of Both Nations was then home to the largest concentration of Jews in the world, including about 80 per cent of all European Jews. Polish Jews participated in all fields of the national economy. Their generally favourable economic position, religious freedom and multi-tiered self-government encouraged the development of Jewish culture. Jewish Towns in Kazimierz by Kraków, Lublin, Poznań and Lwów became great religious, cultural and economic centres – “Jewish metropolies”, whose activities stretched nationwide and also had an international impact. The Jews of the Commonwealth assumed the leading role among Ashkenazi Jews. Even Jewish communities abroad appealed to the Diet of the Four Lands and the tribunal



56 Zabłudów, the reconstruction of hall interior



57 Chodorów, the reconstruction of hall interior



62 Żółkiew, view from the south-east, before 1939



64 Lubomla, view of the synagogue before 1939



63 Leszniów, view from the north-east, 1920

that of a square, and only subsequently were lower lean-to structures of varying height, construction and manner of roofing added. The earliest-known synagogue in which the main hall, vestibule and women's room located above the latter, were all realised at the same time and covered with a common roof, was that built in Kamionka Strumiłowa, probably before 1730.

The halls were covered by large, broken roofs with mock vaulting built into them. These roofs were carried by horizontal grillage, whose boarding constituted great external and internal coving, so characteristic of synagogues. In the synagogue in Janów Trembowelski, built in the second half of the seventeenth or the early eighteenth centuries, as in the somewhat later one in Chyrów, the hall was covered by a barrel supported on a bed-moulding. In time, alongside barrel-roofs and their derivatives, cloister-vaulting appears, and, around the mid-eighteenth century, in the synagogues in Jaryszew, Michałpol, Żydaczów and in Mohylew on the Dnieper, domes of various shapes. In Kitajgród, Lanckorun, Minkowce, Snitków, Ostropol and Rozdół, on the evidence of photographs of their exterior, which are all that remains of them, the halls were likewise covered by barrels built into the roof or with barrel-vaults supported by bed-mouldings. Only in Jabłonów did a flat ceiling probably replace an original vault.



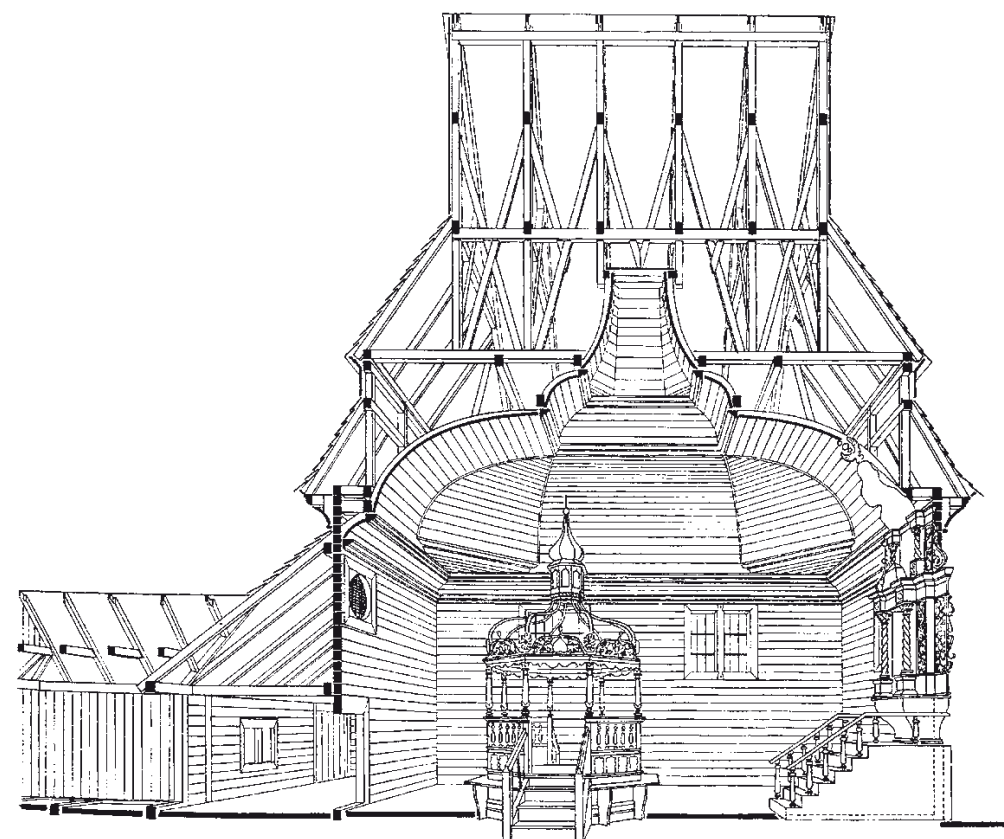
65 Janów Trembowelski, view of the synagogue from the south-west, ca. 1910

The external appearance of the synagogues built in these territories was modest. However, Jewish mysticism was given full expression in the interior of their main halls. The biblical text "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."⁷ came to be applied to the synagogue. The "gates of heaven" were painted above the entrance to the synagogue in Jabłonów, together with a text proclaiming, "All gates are locked, only the gate of tears remains open, and hence every person ought to pray with tears in his eyes, for King David said: *the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.*" The architectural shape of the hall, the number (twelve) and spacing of the windows, and the small window above the entrance, "through which the Lord looks", were in many of these synagogues all in accordance with the indications of the Kabbalistic *Sefer ha-Zohar* (*The Book of Splendour*).

There was a desire that the place in which God was addressed should be magnificent. The interior was to recall the Tent of the Tabernacle of the Lord and the Temple of Jerusalem. In Gwoździec the original barrel-roof was replaced in the middle of the eighteenth century by a multi-storey vault, which mirrored in wood

the forms of a tent. The forms of octagonal cupolas covering the halls in Mohylew, Jaryszew and Michałpol also referred to those of the tent.

The walls and vaults of synagogue halls were covered with polychrome decorations, which imitated the interiors of ceremonial Oriental tents that became popular among the nobility of the *Rzeczpospolita* after the victory over the Turks at the Battle of Vienna in 1685. The walls were divided into vertical fields, reminiscent of the sheets of a tent. In these fields, boards with the texts of psalms and prayers were placed within frames similar to those around the *mihrab*. Images of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, of menorahs, of tables covered with sacrificial loaves of bread were placed just as they had been, according to biblical descriptions, in the Tent of the Tabernacle and the Temple. The vault, decorated with winding festoons of vegetation with rosette-stars, imitated the roof of the tent, and also the Garden of Eden, with heavenly skies. The flat style of painting



66 Gwoździec, reconstruction of the synagogue interior after rebuilding of the vault at the beginning of the 18th century



67 Gwoździec, detail of polychrome decoration of the vaulting of the synagogue hall. Reconstruction in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. POLIN, Warsaw 2014

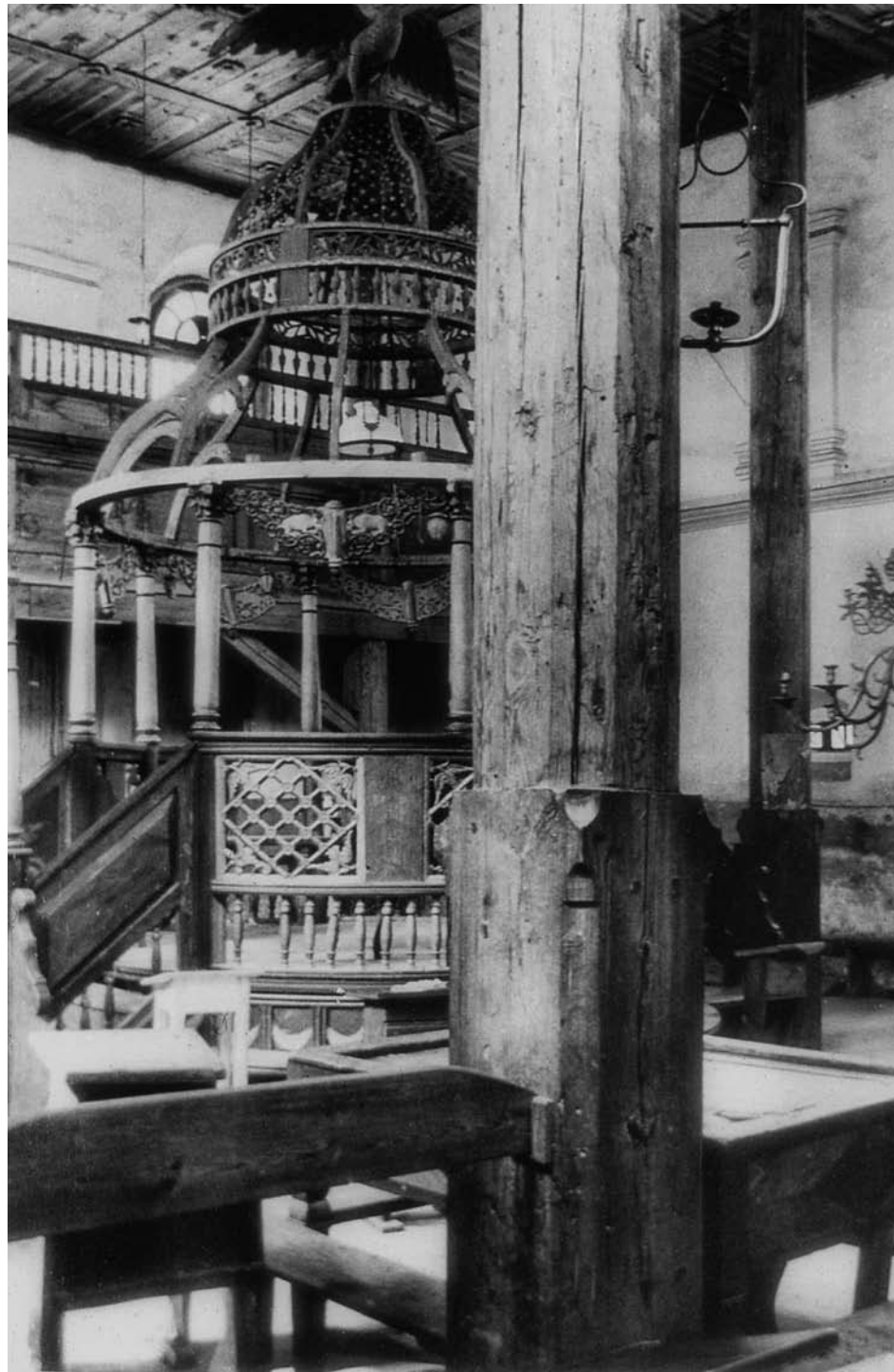
was reminiscent of applique and tent embroideries. The overall impression of textile was heightened by carved decorations – suspended denticles, pelmets and fringes, all cut from boards.

The vault-paintings in Chodorów are like a complex lecture on the cosmological conception enshrined in the Kabbalah, linking the earthly sphere with the heavenly, surmounted by the two-headed eagle, the symbol of the protection of the Highest over the people of Israel, surrounded by the spheres of Heaven and the Zodiac, together with animals and plants which symbolised the forces operating in the Universe. Similar conceptions also appeared in the polychrome decorations of the synagogues in Gwoździec, Michałpol and Jaryszew, on the walls in Kamionka Strumiłowa and Jabłonów, and in the interior of the somewhat later (ca. 1740) synagogue in Mohylew on the Dnieper.

The polychrome decorations of the wooden synagogues built in the territories of the *Rzeczpospolita* were a remarkable phenomenon, found nowhere else in the entire Diaspora. Only here was the prohibition against the representation or “likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” contained in the Second Commandment not rigorously adhered to. The code of visual and symbolic imagery developed at the turn of the



68 Gwoździec, view of the bimah in the synagogue hall. Reconstruction in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. POLIN, Warsaw 2014



83 Izabelin, the hall interior, before 1939



84 Brody, the exterior view of the synagogue from the north-west, 1998



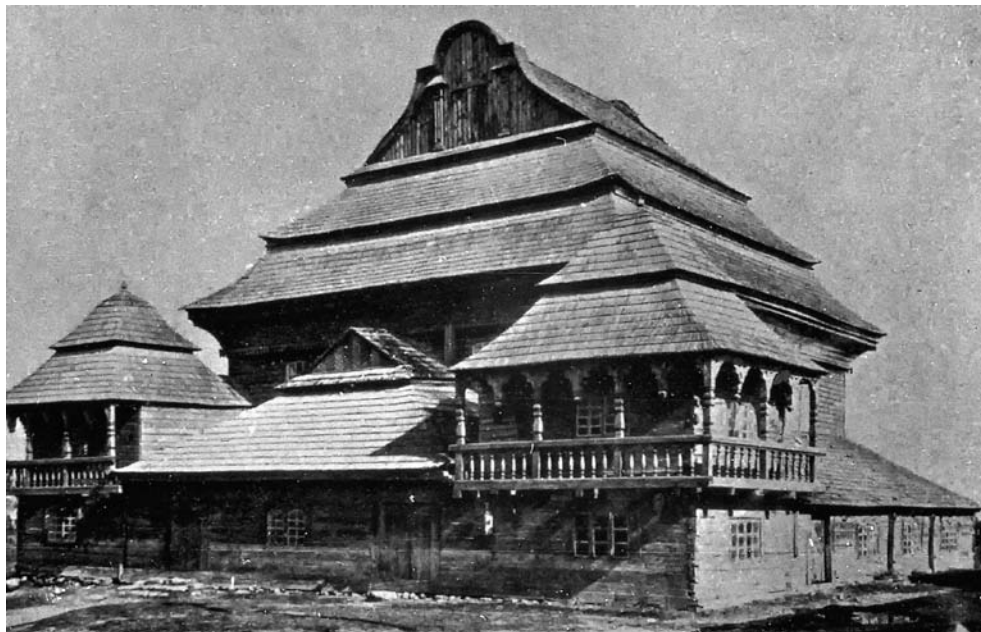
85 Tykocin, view of the synagogue from the north-west, 2014



89 Zabłudów, view of the synagogue from the west, before 1939



91 Pilica, view of the synagogue from the north-west, before 1939



90 Wołpa, view of the synagogue from the south-west, before 1939



92 Rzochów, view of the synagogue from the south-west, before 1939



126 Kraków-Kazimierz, Orthodox Jews in the Remu Cemetery, 2005



127 Kraków-Kazimierz, Festival of Jewish Culture

Sejny and Tykocin are venues for exhibitions, meetings and conferences devoted to the culture of Polish Jews, as well as of other ethnic-religious groups in the former Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania.

Jewish communities in large cities, regaining the ownership-rights of which they were deprived by the Communist authorities, are able with the financial help of overseas Jewish foundations to restore to the former splendour these synagogues, whose reconstruction and proper maintenance had not hitherto been possible. The Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw, the *Tempel* in Kraków, the Synagogue Under the White Stork (Pod Białym Bocianem) in Wrocław, and others, while fulfilling the religious requirements of Judaism, are at the same time living centres not only of Jewish culture. In Kraków-Kazimierz, apart from the Museum of the History and Culture of Polish Jews (Muzeum Historii i Kultury Żydów Polskich) located in the rebuilt Old (Stara) Synagogue, a Centre for Jewish Culture (Centrum Kultury Żydowskiej) has been established with the financial support of the Judaica Foundation; several synagogues have in recent years been rebuilt and revived – Isaac's Synagogue, The Kuppoh (Kupa) Synagogue, The High (Wysoka) Synagogue, Popper's Synagogue and the *Tempel*, and the Jewish Town has become the venue for an annual world Festival of Jewish Culture. Meanwhile in Warsaw the Jewish Theatre (Teatr Żydowski) is active, and there is an annual Festival of Jewish Culture "Singer's Warsaw".

Further significant developments took place in the early 2000s, when Jewish organisations and private individuals, from abroad as well as in Poland, became involved in the rebuilding and revaluation of synagogues to a greater extent than hitherto. The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego), established in 2002 by the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland (Związek Gmin Wyznaniowych Żydowskich) and the World Jewish Restitution Organisation (Światowa Organizacja Żydowska ds. Restytucji), oversaw the reassignment for cultural purposes of the synagogue in Zamość, and is undertaking restoration work in Kraśnik, Przysucha and Rymanów. Cooperation between Polish local and national authorities with Jewish organisations has resulted in a reassignment for cultural purposes of synagogues in, among others, Tarnogród, Szczepleszyn, Dąbrowa Tarnowska, Bobowa, and Chmielnik.

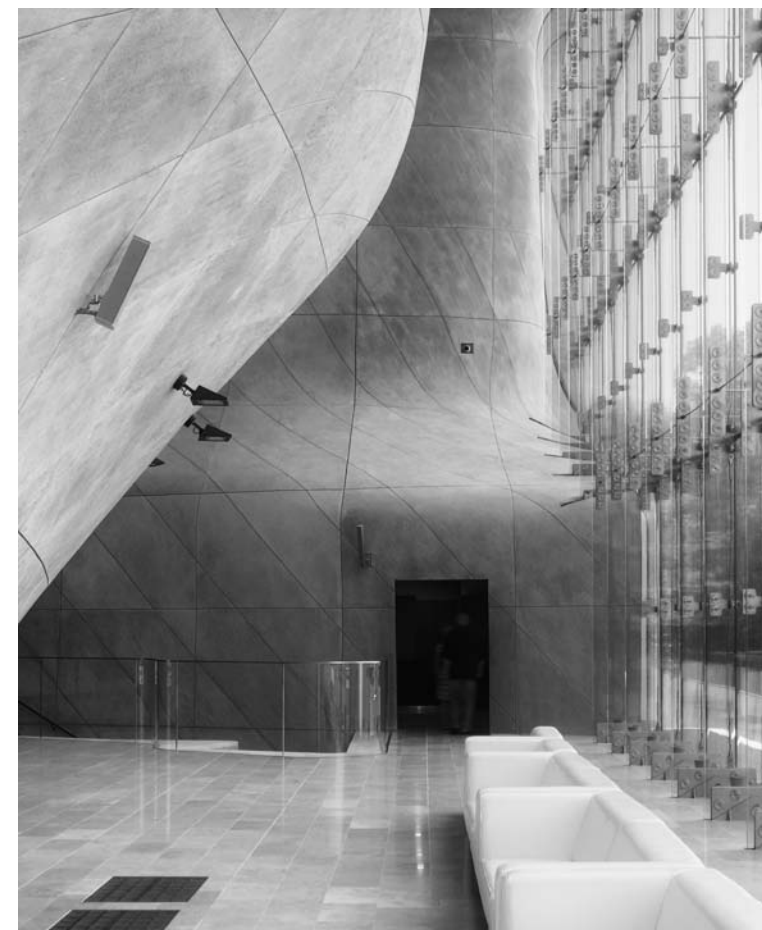
There remain, however, numerous small towns off the beaten track, which do not have the resources to rebuild or even to maintain large-scale buildings which were formerly synagogues, however valuable and significant these may be from a historical or architectural point of view. The restoration and reassignment of the great synagogue in Orla, a tiny location, was begun, but interrupted on account of a lack of resources and also of a perceived social requirement for so large a structure. Synagogues in Nowy Korczyn, Wodzisław, Książ Wielki, Konin, Włoszczowa, Krzepice, Medyka and Wielkie Oczy, deprived of protection and abandoned, undergo increasing destruction and fall into ruin. But even here there



128 Warsaw, POLIN. Museum of the History of Polish Jews, exterior view in 2015

have occasionally been activities whose purpose was to prevent further destruction. Examples of these can be found in Tarnów, where a *bimah* surviving from the seventeenth century has been given a new framework to give it greater emphasis, and in tiny Działoszyce, where the walls of the synagogue have been strengthened and declared a “protected ruin”.

A major occurrence of global significance has been the construction in the years 2012–2014 of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich) POLIN in Warsaw, whose monumental building was financed by the Polish



129 Warsaw, POLIN. Museum of the History of Polish Jews, view of the interior, 2015

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the City of Warsaw. It is thanks to the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland in Warsaw (Stowarzyszenie Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Warszawie), and of countless benefactors, chiefly Jewish, from across the whole world, that the Museum has become the venue for multimedia permanent displays and temporary exhibitions, as well as scholarly and cultural events.