

# KRAKÓW

Kraków, a former capital of Poland, has had a Jewish presence since at least the early fourteenth century. Jews settled here probably because of the city's location on the Vistula River, central to European trade routes. A Jewish street is mentioned in documents from 1304, and the first of Kraków's famous synagogues dates from 1407.

The origins of Jewish settlement in Kraków are associated with the legend of a Jewish queen named Esterke, said to be the wife of King Casimir (Kazimierz) the Great, who admitted Jews into Poland in the fourteenth century and granted them a favorable charter of privileges. A similar legend exists among Poles, but in the Polish story, Esterke was Casimir's concubine. No historical evidence has been found to substantiate either story, but guides in Kraków continue to lead tourists to "Esterke's house."

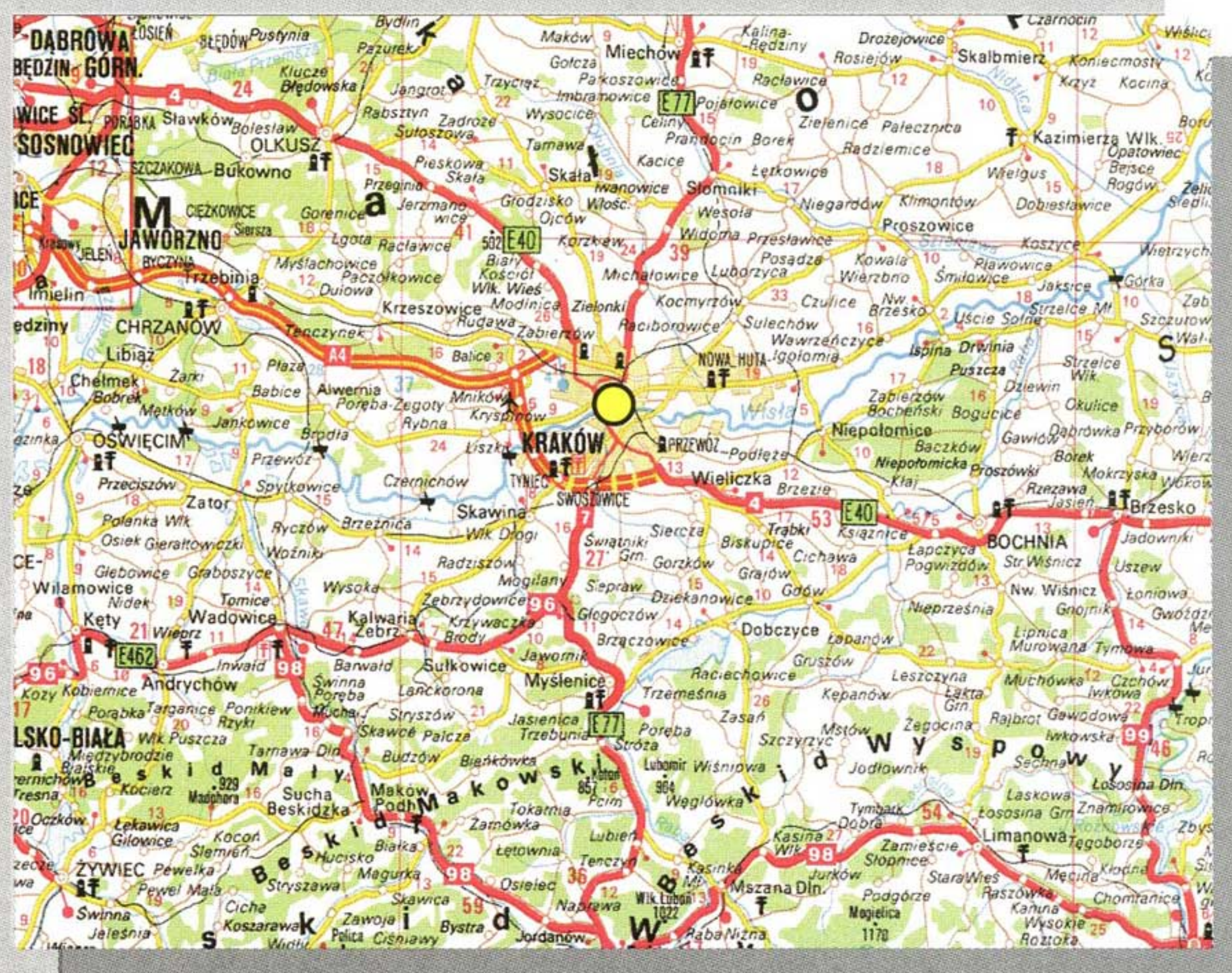
In 1494, Jews were expelled from Kraków proper and required to live in the suburb of Kazimierz (Kuzmir). In later centuries, as Kraków grew, Kazimierz was incorporated into the city and became its Jewish quarter. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Kraków Jews were both merchants and artisans such as tailors, goldsmiths and butchers. One of the first Hebrew printers in Poland set up shop in the city in 1530. Kraków was the home of Rabbi Moses Isserles (c. 1530–1572), known as the Remu, whose annotated version of the Shulkhan Aruk, the handbook of religious law, defined Jewish life for centuries. In the mid-seventeenth century, along with other Polish cities, Kraków began to decline as a result of wars and political turmoil in the Polish Commonwealth.

For most of the nineteenth century, after the disintegration of the Commonwealth, Kraków was incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Kraków's reputation as a center of Polish culture grew during this time, when, under the rule of the comparatively liberal Austrians, Polish literature and theater flourished.

By the twentieth century, Jews made up more than a quarter of the city's population and lived not only in the Kazimierz neighborhood, but throughout the city. Many Kraków Jews found the lure of Polish culture irresistible. Moreover, it was not only the assimilating middle-class Jews who spoke Polish in Kraków; by the interwar period, visitors to Kraków were often surprised to hear the children of Hasidim speaking Polish to each other in the street. By this time, Kraków boasted a strong Jewish culture in both Polish and Yiddish; of particular importance were the Polish-language Jewish press and a modern Yiddish theater.

The Germans occupied Kraków on September 6, 1939. The city became the capital of the so-called General-gouvernement, embracing the region of central and southern Poland not directly annexed to the Reich. Deportations began in 1940; a ghetto, established in March 1941, held

## CRACOW, KRAKAU, KRAKO, KRAKUV, KROKE



from 15,000 to 18,000 people. Deportations resumed in June and October 1942, and the ghetto was liquidated on March 13–14, 1943. Beginning in 1940, two underground organizations commenced resistance activities. Kraków was the site of the famous factory of Oskar Schindler, whose enterprise enabled more than 1,000 Jews to survive the Holocaust.

Immediately after the war, returning Holocaust survivors brought the Jewish population of the city to 10,000, but amidst the turmoil of the postwar years, during which hostility to Jews was punctuated by physical attacks, most left, primarily for Palestine/Israel and the United States. Today, only about 200 Jews, mostly elderly, remain in Kraków. Beginning in the 1980s, Kraków became the center of a Polish revival of interest in Jews and Judaism. Today, there is a Research Center on Jewish History and Culture at Jagiellonian University, a Jewish cultural center in Kazimierz, and an annual festival of Jewish music in the streets of Kazimierz.

### Location

295 km SW of Warsaw  
50°03' / 19°57'  
Voivodship: Kraków

### General Population, 1939

260,000 (25% Jewish)

### General Population, 1994

745,799





■ The Temple (Reform Synagogue), ul. Miodowa 24, today

1

## SYNAGOGUES

ul. Miodowa 24

The Temple (Reform Synagogue), erected between 1860–1862 by Progressive Israelites Society.

Current use: Synagogue.

ul. Szeroka 40

Remu Synagogue, founded in 1553 by Israel Isserles, father of the famous Rabbi Moses Isserles for whom the synagogue was named.

Current use: Synagogue.



■ Remu Synagogue, ul. Szeroka 40, today

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## SITES OF SOME FORMER SYNAGOGUES

ul. Szeroka 16

Bocian (Popper) Synagogue, founded in 1620 by Wolf Bocian and reconstructed in 1965 after Nazi devastation. Current use: District Culture Club Studio.

ul. Szeroka 24

Old Synagogue, built in second half of fifteenth century, reconstructed in 1570 and again in 1904 and 1913. Destroyed during Nazi occupation and reconstructed by State Office for Preservation of Cultural Property in 1956–1958.

Current use: Jewish Historical Museum with permanent exhibition.



■ The Old Synagogue in Kazimierz, ul. Szeroka 24, today

3

ul. Kupa 16

Isaac Synagogue, constructed in 1638 by one of the most affluent Kraków Jews of the time, Isaak Jakubowicz; it was devastated during World War II. In the 1950s, the building was reconstructed by the Fine Arts Association in Kraków and underwent additional reconstruction in 1983. The stucco decorations on the ceiling and wall paintings in the gallery for women are the only preserved elements from the original building. Nearby is the reconstructed Mizrahi prayer house.

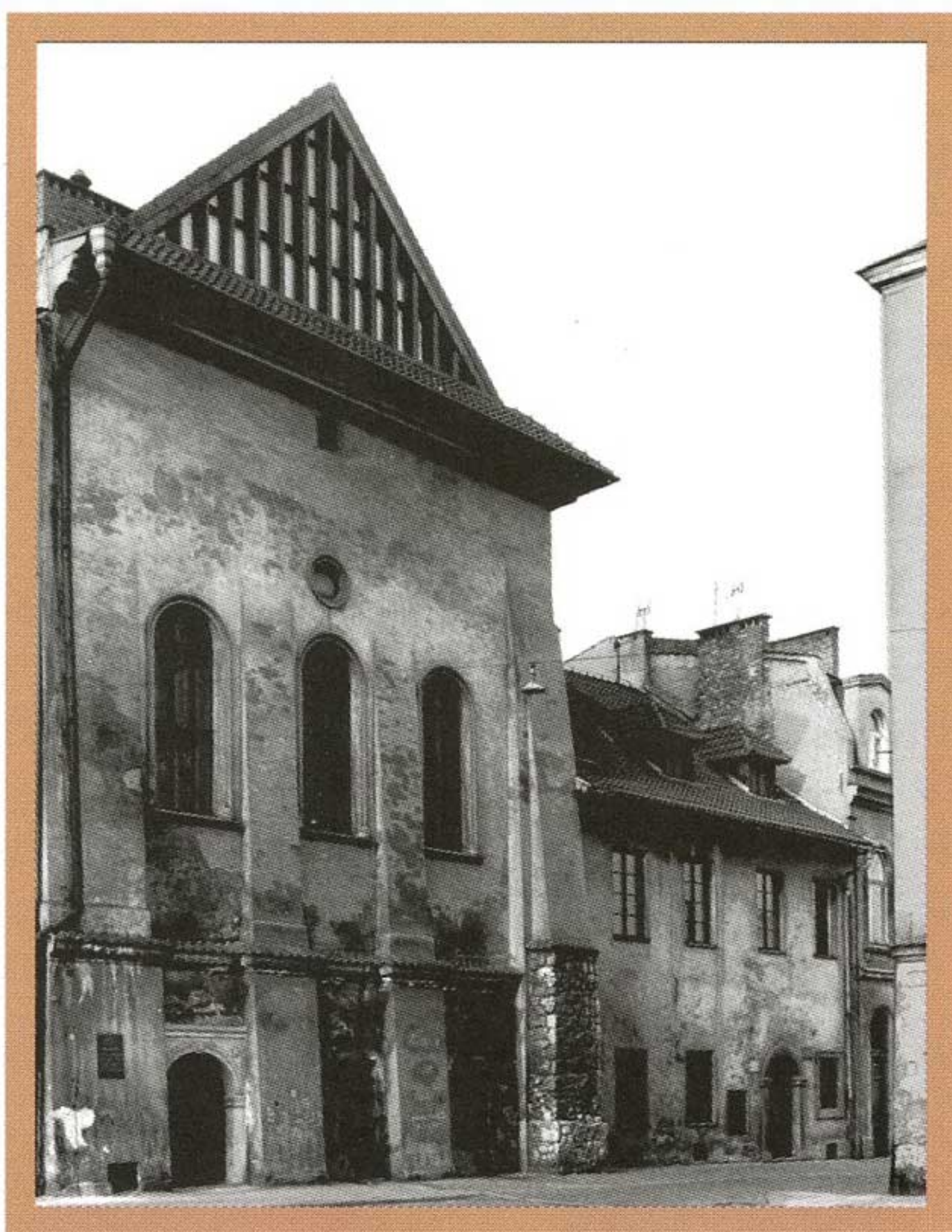
ul. Jonatana Warschauera 8

Kupa Synagogue, built in the first half of the seventeenth century by contributions from the Jewish goldsmith's guild. It was devastated during World War II. Current use: under restoration.

ul. Józefa 38

Wysoka (High) Synagogue, erected from 1556 to 1563. Current use: Historical Monuments Preservation Workshop.





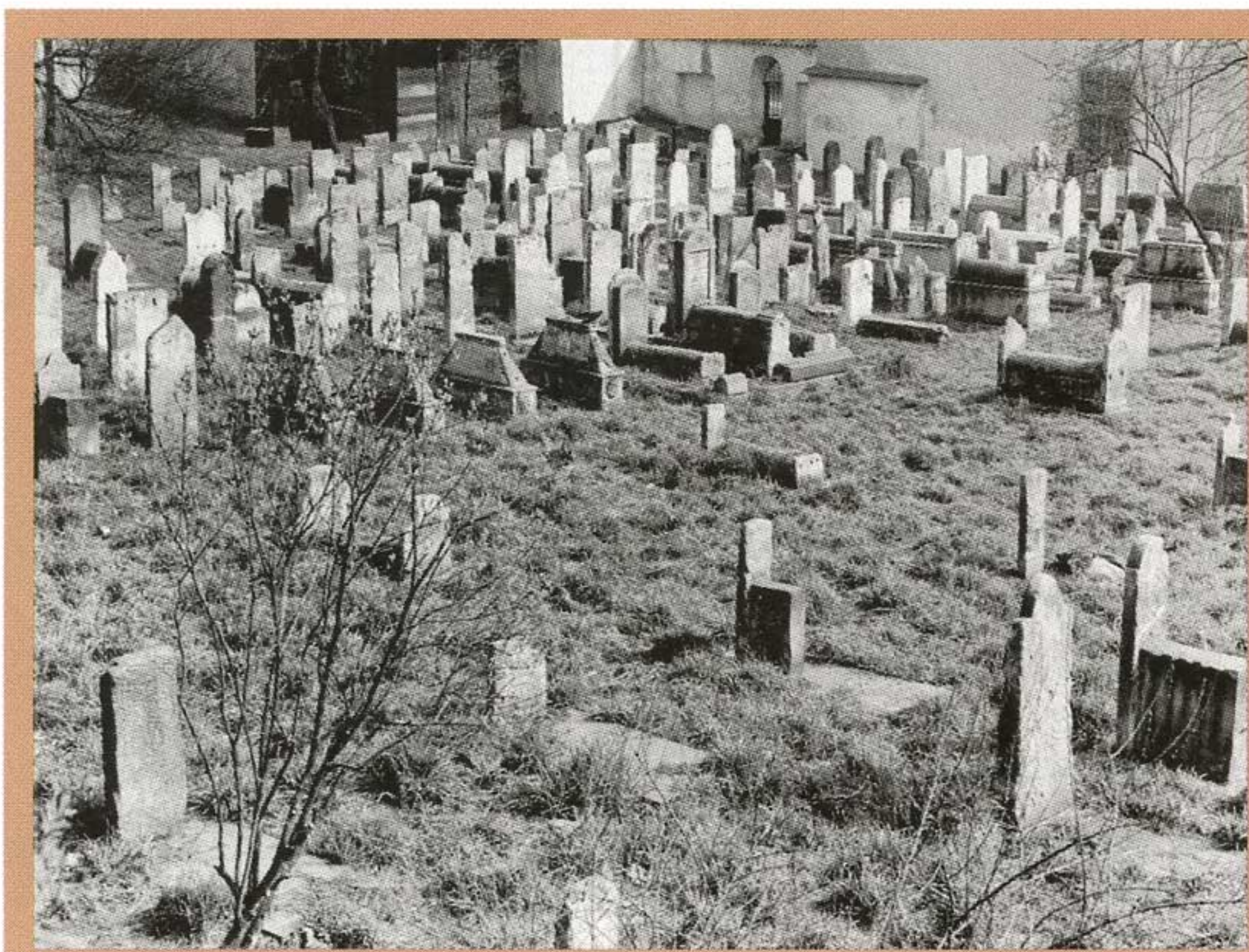
■ Wysoka (High) Synagogue, ul. Józefa 38, today

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## JEWISH CEMETERIES

ul. Szeroka 40

The Remu Cemetery adjoins the synagogue on the north and west sides and is one of the oldest cemeteries in Europe. The Kraków *kehilla* purchased the land in 1533, and the cemetery was founded in 1551. The cemetery was almost totally devastated by the Nazis; however, in 1959, during archaeological excavations, about 700 ancient tombstones and fragments were found buried and later re-erected in the sites where they now stand. The graves of Rabbi Moses Isserles and his family members are in a fenced plot. Other prominent Kraków rabbis buried there include Rabbis Moses Isserles, Natan Nata Spira, Joel Sirkes, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Yomtov Lipman Heller.



■ Remu Cemetery, ul. Szeroka 40, 1978

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ul. Miodowa 55

New Cemetery, founded in 1800 and damaged during the Nazi occupation. It was reconstructed in 1957 and is still active. The oldest preserved tombstones date back to the 1840s, with about 10,000 tombstones remaining.



■ New Cemetery, ul. Miodowa 55  
Memorial to Jews from Slomniki, 1993

6

ul. Abrahama and Jerozolimska

The two cemeteries located between the above streets were founded in 1932. One tombstone remains. The rest were completely destroyed or used as foundations for barracks or for other construction purposes at the Płaszów concentration camp, built on this site.



■ Remu Synagogue, interior, 1977

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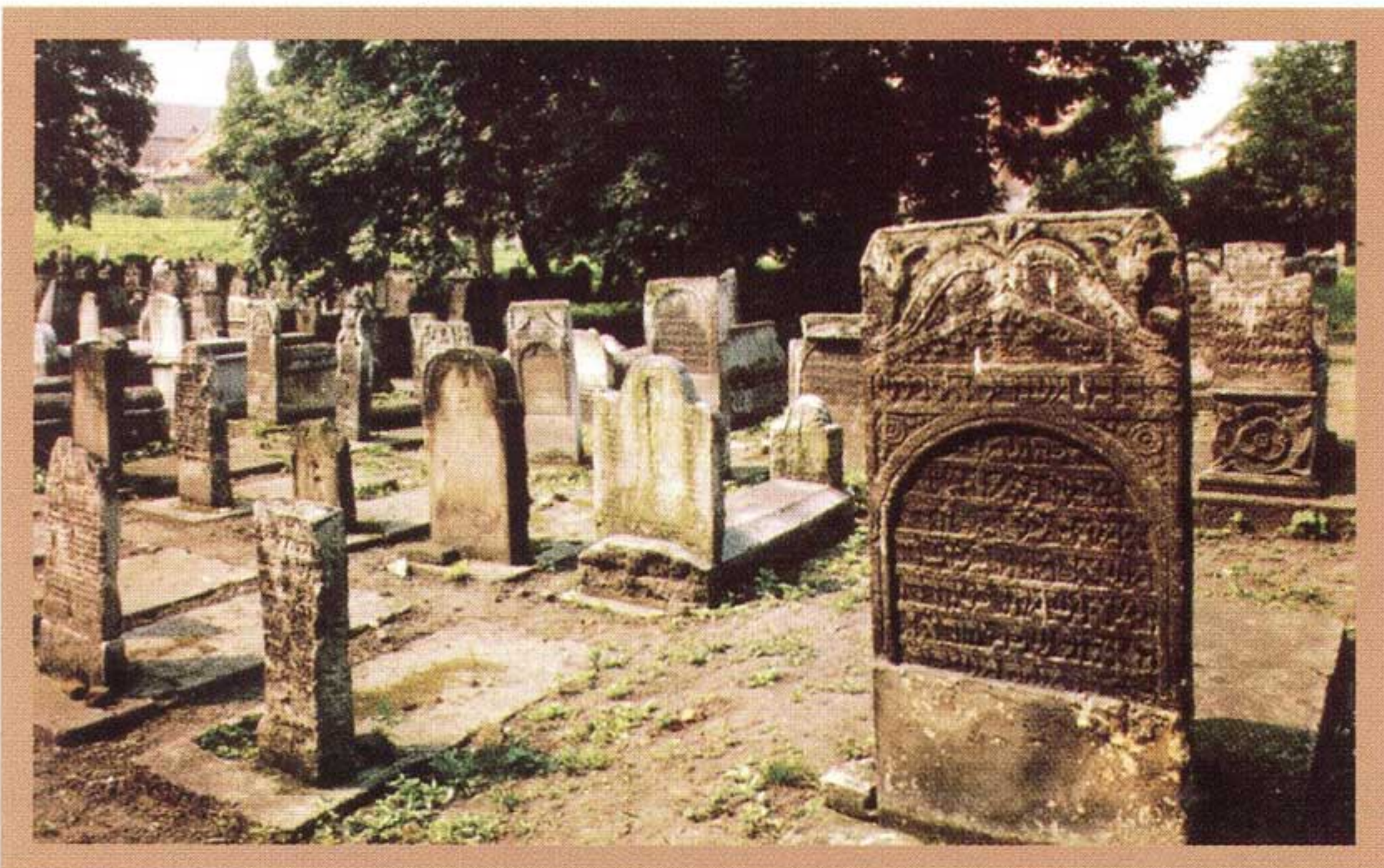
■ New Cemetery, ul. Miodowa 55, 1983

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## HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS

Plac Bohaterów Getta (pre-war: Plac Zgody)

From here, Jews from the ghetto were deported to concentration and extermination camps in Bełżec and Auschwitz-Birkenau.



■ Remu Cemetery, ul. Szeroka 40, today

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Plac Bohaterów Getta 6 (Ghetto Heroes' Square)

Former headquarters of the Jewish Fighters Organization (ŻOB) marked with a commemorative plaque.

Plac Bohaterów Getta 18

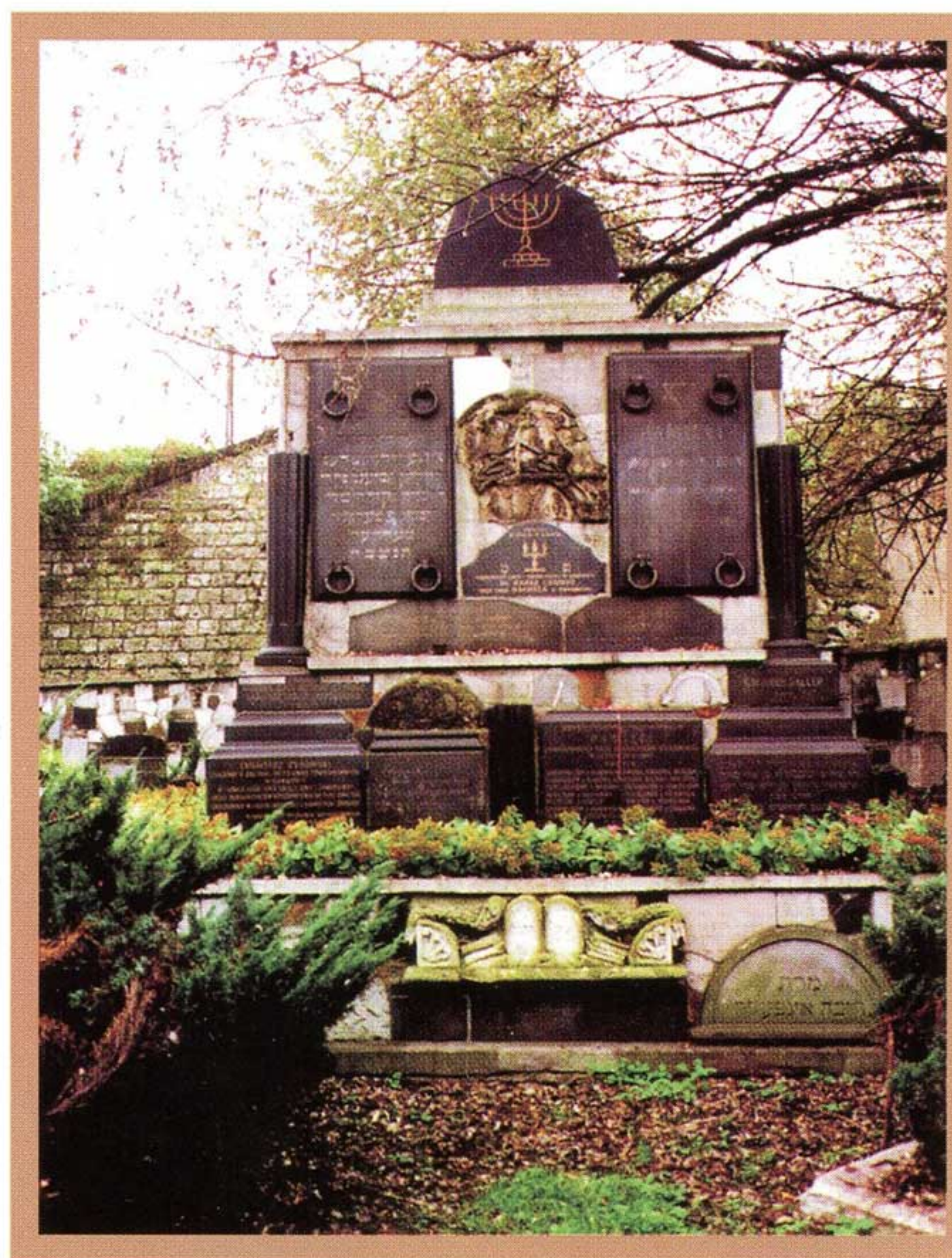
Museum of National Remembrance on the grounds of the former Kraków ghetto. The Pod Orłem pharmacy, run by Tadeusz Pankiewicz, served as a place of refuge and exchange of information within the ghetto. A museum on this site houses a permanent exhibition commemorating life in the ghetto and the life of Pankiewicz.

ul. Lwowska 25

Fragments of the ghetto walls remain, with a commemorative plaque erected on the fortieth anniversary of the ghetto's liquidation.

ul. Miodowa 55 (New Jewish Cemetery)

Memorial "in commemoration of murdered Jews, victims of Nazi genocide in the years 1939–1945," from Kraków. Among the tablets is one dedicated to Dr. Rafał Landau, the last chairman of the Kraków kehilla before the outbreak of World War II. There are also monuments to murdered Jews from Skawina and Limanowa.



■ New Cemetery, ul. Miodowa 55  
Holocaust memorial to Jews of Kraków, 1993

10

ul. Kamieńskiego

Small monument commemorating Jewish victims of Płaszów concentration camp, located near the larger general monument.



■ Monument at site of Płaszów concentration camp, today

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## OTHER SITES

ul. Józefa 42

Former Bet Midrash Kovea Itim L'Torah, erected in 1810 and renovated in 1912.

Current use: private apartments.

ul. Szeroka 6

Former mikvah, constructed in the sixteenth century and rebuilt in 1974.

Current use: small hotel.

ul. Bocheńska 7

Former Jewish Theatre (1927–1939).

Current use: Railroad Workers' Theatre.

ul. Skawińska 8

Israelite Hospital constructed in 1861.

Following World War II, it was remodeled again.

Current use: Kraków health service.

ul. Bocheńska 4

Former Bet Midrash Sheeirit B'nei Emunah.

Current use: House of Culture.

ul. Brzozowa 6

Former Bet Midrash of Salomon Deiches, constructed in the early twentieth century.

Current use: office of a Kraków cooperative.

ul. Miodowa 24

Mikvah, attached to The Temple (Reform Synagogue).

ul. Lipowa

Former site of Oskar Schindler's factory, whose 1,100 Jewish workers survived the Holocaust. A monument was erected in the factory courtyard.

Current use: electronics factory.

ul. Meiselsa 17

Former B'nei Emunah prayer house.

Current use: Center for Jewish Culture (see Chapter 1).

ul. Batorego 12 (part of Jagiellonian University)

Research Center on Jewish History and Culture in Poland (see Chapter 1).

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Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bełżec, Płaszów.

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■ Cloth Hall, 1918

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■ Wawel Castle, c. 1917

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Market square and town hall, 1918

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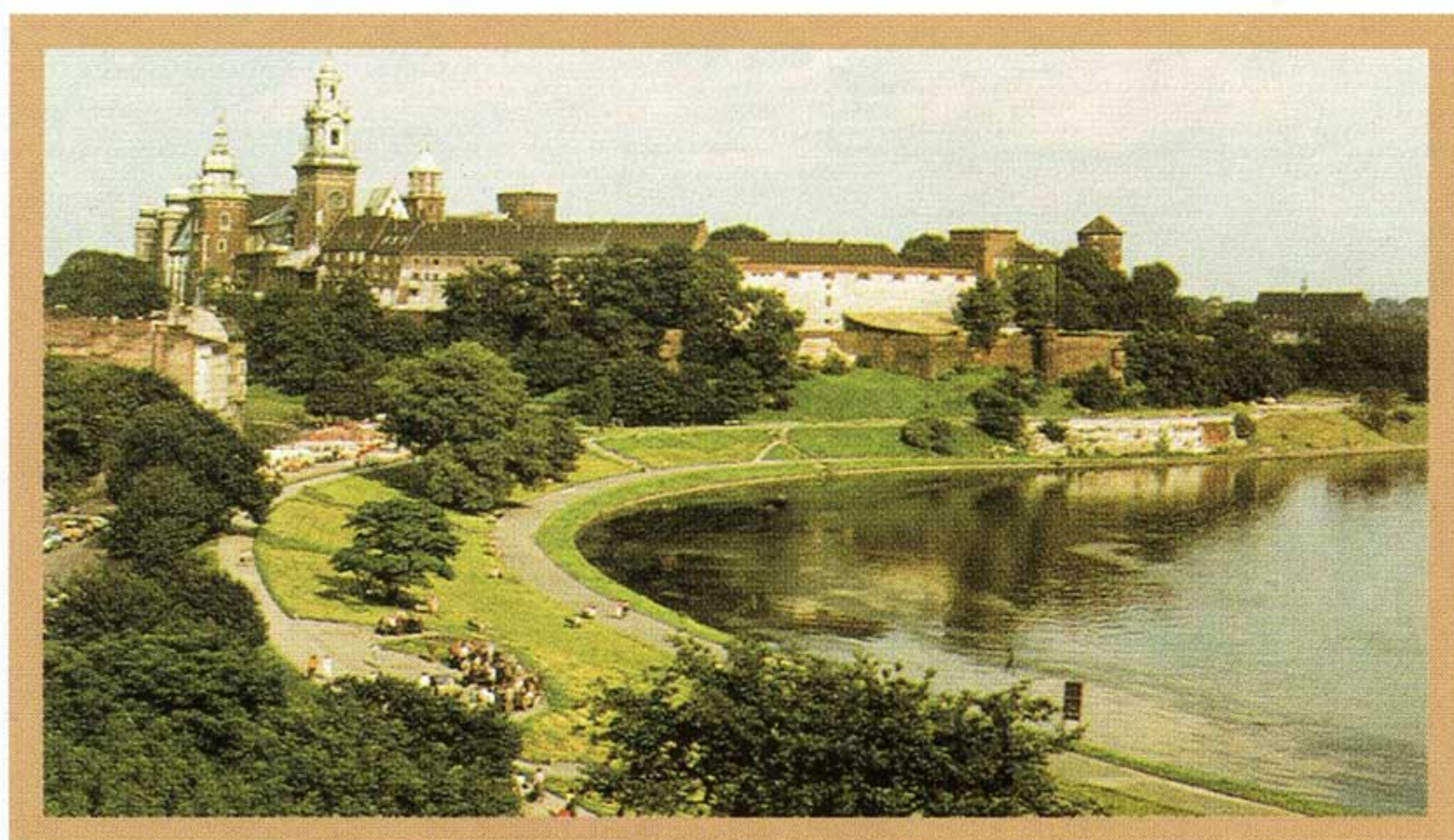
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Wawel Castle, today

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Former Bet Midrash Kovea Itim La Torah, ul. Józefa 42, now private apartments, c. 1989

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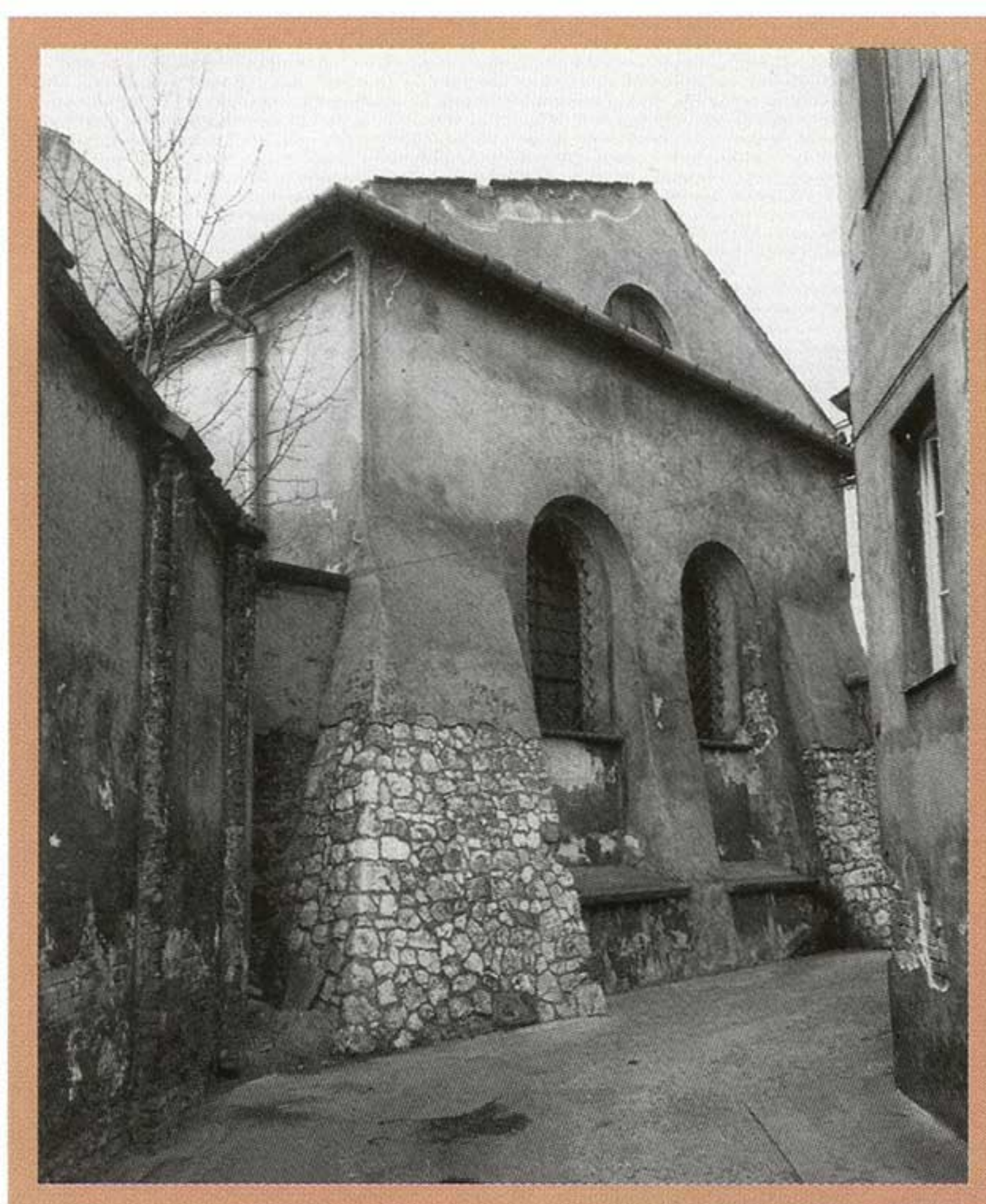


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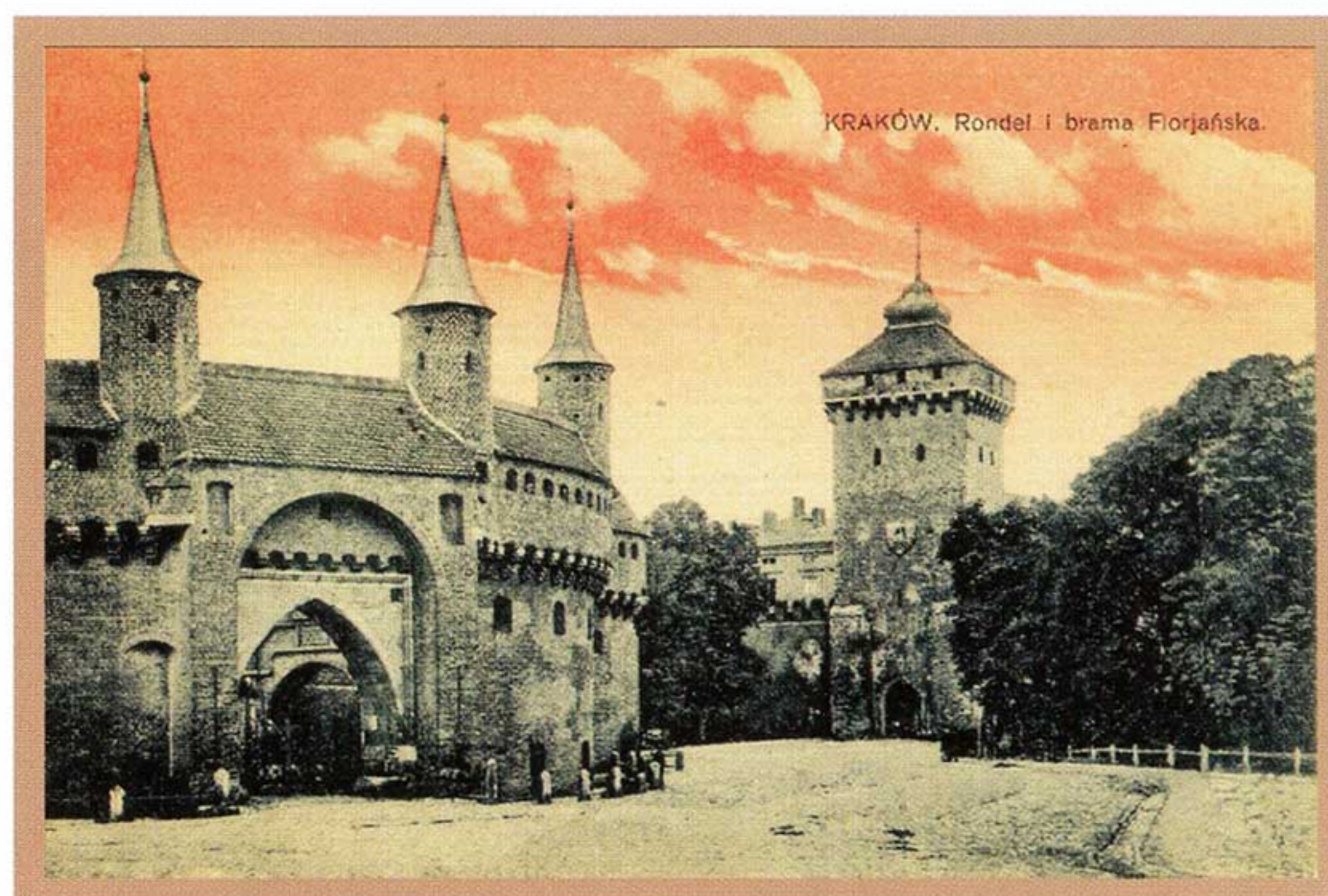
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■ Bocian Synagogue, ul. Szeroka 16, c.1989

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■ Fortress and Florianska Gate, c. 1917

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■ Panoramic view, c. 1918

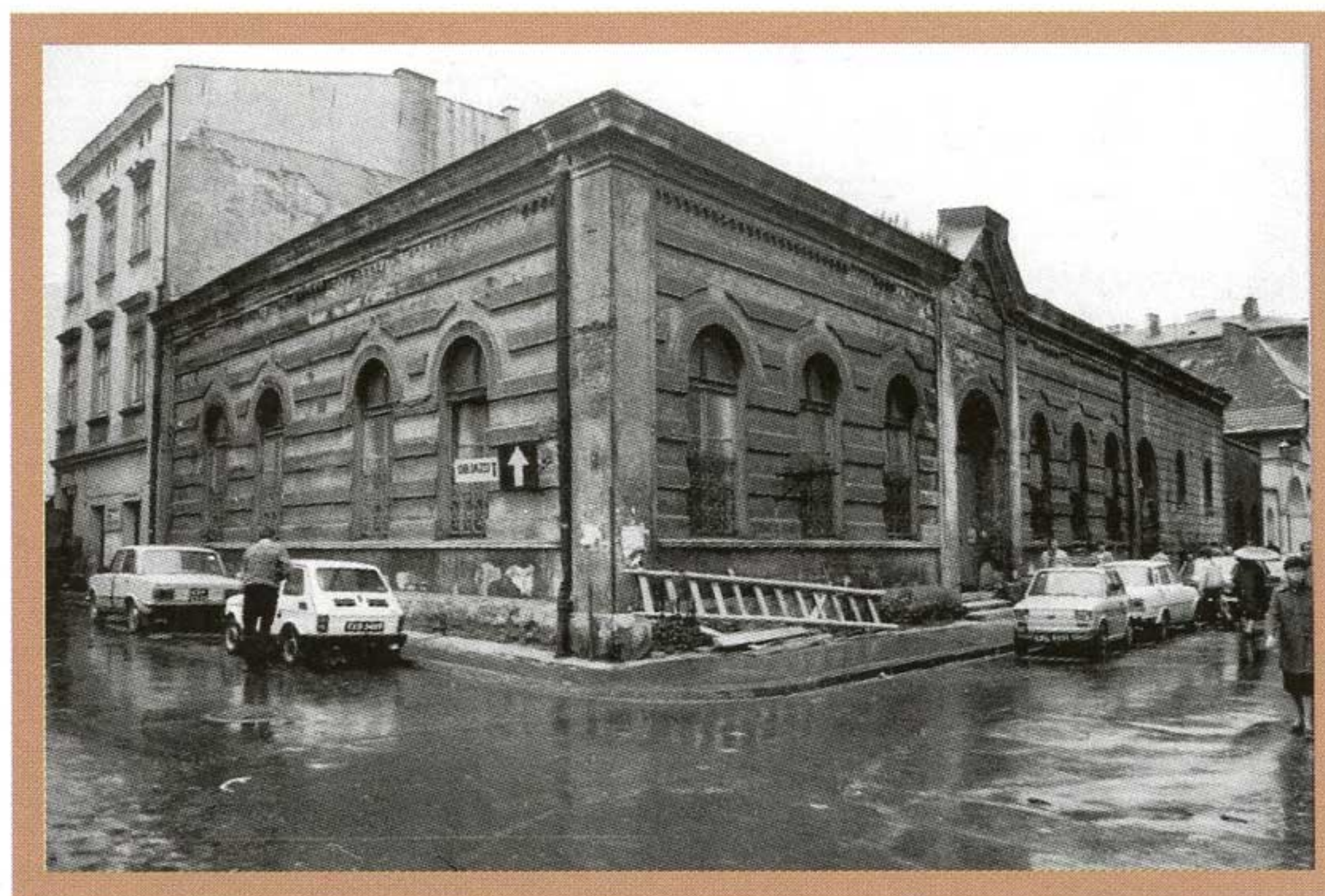
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■ Former mikvah, ul. Szeroka 6, c. 1989

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■ Former prayer house, ul. Meiselsa 17, c. 1990 (see photo #21 below)

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■ Center for Jewish Culture (renovated B'nai Emunah prayer house), ul. Meiselsa 17, 1994

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■ Old synagogue, ul. Szeroka 24, 1977

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■ Rynek Kleparski, 1905

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