



Questionnaire

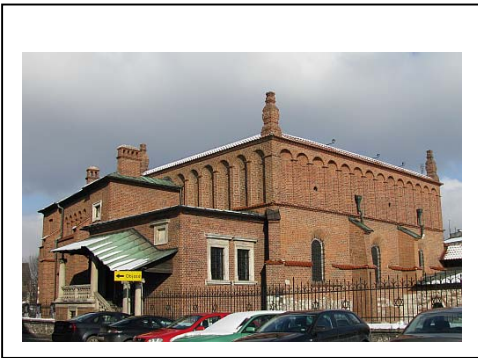
Visited place: Old Synagogue in Krakow, 24 Szeroka Street

Location:	Poland	Gimnazjum nr 7 Kraków	2
	Country	School	Serial number

Photos



Front (north)



Diagonal



West side



East side

Description

The Old Synagogue In Cracow is the oldest surviving synagogue in Poland. Its architecture was formed in the renaissance era, but in the state of medieval town synagogues, comparable with earlier synagogues in Worms, Regensburg, Prague, Eger and Olesinica in Silesia. The original synagogue was built on the site probably in the early 15th c. (1407?) as a detached building, with its eastern wall adjoining the municipal defensive wall. Its earliest depiction dates from 1536/1537. At that time it was exclusively for men: a square, double-aisled hall with cross-ribbed vaulting supported on two pillars and covered with a gable roof. Its floor was at a level much lower than the street level. In 1570 the Gothic synagogue was reconstructed by Mateo Gucci, a representative of a group of Italian architects which was quite numerous in Cracow at that time. Gucci raised the walls of the synagogue to their present height and, rather rare for the time, reconstructed the ceiling of the hall in its original cross-ribbed form, supporting it on two slender Tuscan columns. The external shape of the building was also significantly remodeled. The walls of the main hall with elongated windows with sem-circular tops were made higher and crowned with a high parapet which was used for the first time in the architecture of Polish synagogues.

Position of the object



Size

Area: 500 m² ,
Height: 9 m

Materials

Brick

Date of building/
epoch:

Oldest part probably in the early 15th century

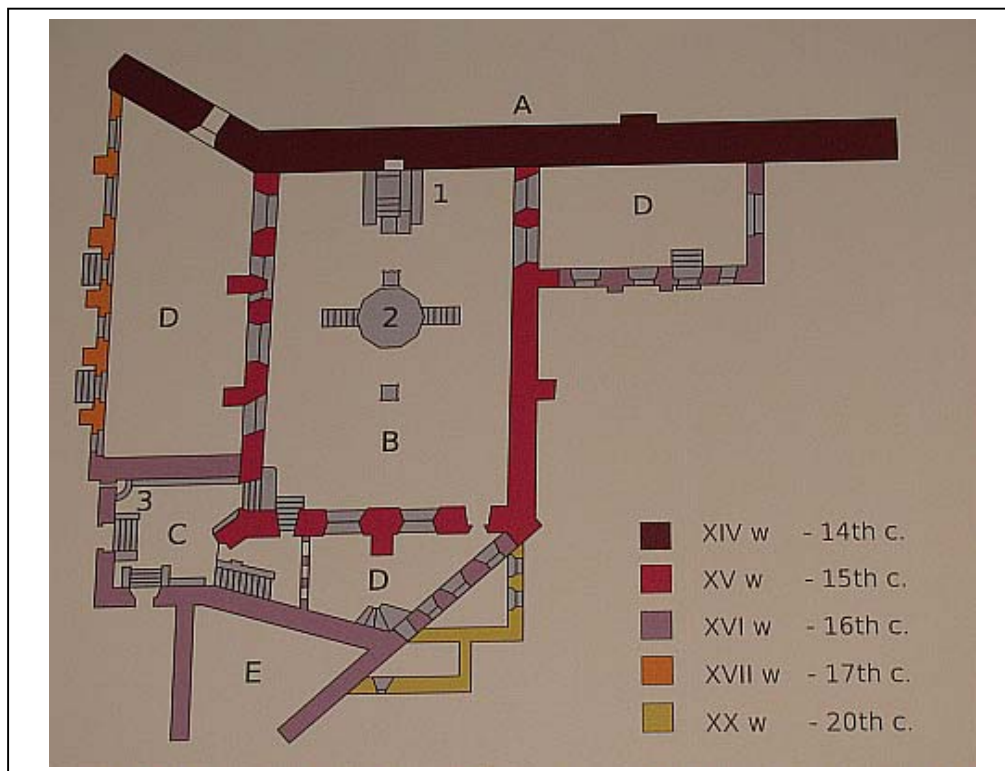
Architect/artist:

Mateo Gucci, Italian architect

Renovation,
restoration
(when, by whom,
who paid, why?):

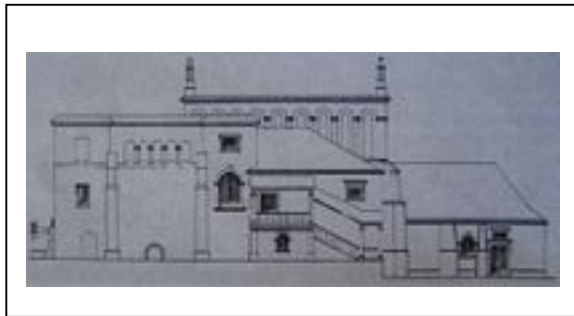
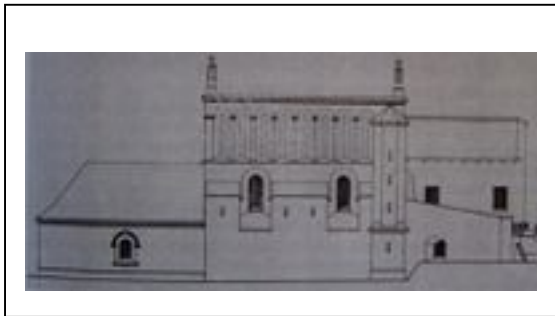
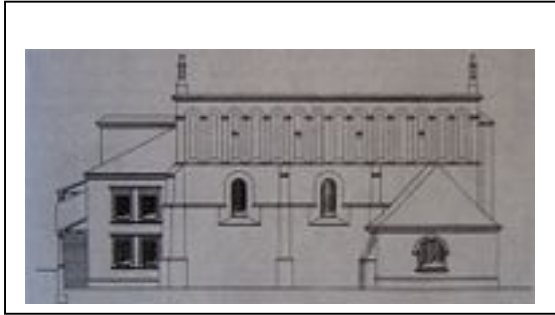
The synagogue was extended and changed a lot until 16th c.:
In the 2nd half of 16th c. one-storey annexes were added, as well as a vestibule at the north-western corner and which was a prayer room for women, situated behind the porch at the western wall of the hall.
In the late 16th and first half of the 17th c. new prayer houses for women were added to the main hall on the southern and northern sides.
Successive remodeling of the synagogue was carried out in the late 19th and the first decades of the 20th c.
Before and after World War I the synagogue was subject to thorough renovation planned in 1904, 1913 and 1923 by Zygmunt Hendel.
The synagogue was completely devastated and ransacked by the Nazi Germans during World War II.
After WWII the synagogue was reconstructed following the design scheme by Józef Jamróz and Józef Ptak, restoring its features to the renaissance style.

Sketch plan:





A – CITY DEFENCE WALL, B – MEN'S SYNAGOGUE, C – VESTIBUL, D – WOMEN'S PRAYER HALL, E – JEWISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL HOUSE DESTROYED IN 19TH C.
1 – TORAH ARK, 2 – TRIBUNE (BIMAH), 3 – WALL FOR RITUAL ABLUTION WATER

Renovation plans
from 1913



Interior

Picture	Name	Function
	<p>Main gate with portal</p>	<p>Traditionally it was the main entrance for men</p>
	<p>Stone casing</p>	<p>In the corner of the vestibule there is stone casing of the well from which water for ablutions was drawn, originally a “living water” from the underground source, later the water being supplied by the municipal piping system.</p>



Vestibule/Portal

People waiting here for court hearings and since the 19th c. the poor who did not have their own seats in the synagogue used sit on oak benches along its walls. Between the vestibule and the synagogue is a door framed with a mannerist style portal from the 1st half of the 17th c., with a semi-circular finial and flanked by pillars supporting the beams, leading to the men's part of the synagogue.



Men's hall

Prayer room for men



Women's hall

In orthodox synagogues women and men are strictly separated. There are special additions or galleries constructed for the latter.



Bath

A bath for ritual
ablution from 19th c.



Pitcher

Pitchers for ritual
ablution water from 18th
c.



**Collection Box
Men's hall**

As with all synagogues,
this was a box used to
accept donations for
religious schools and
charity organizations.
The inscription in the
bottom in an oblong
field contains two dates.
The first date, 1638, is
the date of origin of the
collection box.



**Collection Box
Women's hall**



Menorah

A seven-branched candelabrum (menorah) is the symbol of Judaism, as it was one of the most important sacred objects in the sanctuary in Jerusalem. They are generally used at home. In synagogue worship they do not have a major significance, as Jewish traditionalist avoid too obvious associations of the synagogue with the Temple.



**Bimah
(or: Tribune)**

In main hall between two slender columns is a bimah. In Polish synagogues - situated centrally. An elevated place, serving for the reading of the Torah and delivering sermons in the form of an openwork iron canopy installed on a twelve-sided platform from sandstone ashlars. It's a reconstructed goth-renaissance bimah from ca. 1570.



**Torah Ark
Aron ha-kodesz**

The most important part of the synagogue's architecture is the Ark. Place where the Torah scrolls were kept. In most cases, when possible, the Ark is located on the wall of the synagogue closest to Jerusalem, considered the holiest spot in the world by Judaism. It is framed with a late-Renaissance portal surmounted with a table with an image of the crown.



Ner-tamid

Beside the Ark there is always an ever-burning light, the ner-tamid, symbolizing the light lit by priest in a seven-branched candelabrum in the Temple of Jerusalem.



Beside the steps leading to the platform is a place for a person who leads the prayers.



Torah curtain

They used to decorate and cover the place where the Torah scrolls were kept. They were made from the most expensive materials, depending on funding available.



Hanukkah candelabrum
2nd half of the 17th c.

Nine-branched candelabrum has the most important role in synagogue. They have eight branches in a row, and an additional ninth branch in front. This additional branch is supplementary, as other candles are lit from the one placed in it. For this reason it is called the helper.



Torah

Torah – the name of the Biblical Pentateuch of Moses, including books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Because many texts of legal nature are included in the Torah, its name is also commonly translated as the Law.



**Ritual Torah
“adornments”**

Each scroll of Torah is covered with an embroidered mantle (meil) and adorned with a crown (keter) or a pair of finials (rimonim) and a shield (tas) with a pointer (jad), usually made of silver.



Tallith

Prayers shall



A scroll of the Book of Esther in silver casing, 19th c.

The Book of Esther is a book of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and of the Old Testament. The *Book of Esther* or the Megillah is the basis for the Jewish celebration of Purim. Its full text is read aloud twice during the celebration, in the evening and again the following morning.



Yarmulke

Yarmulke designed for the Day of Atonement



Havdalah candle

The Havdalah service marks the end of the Sabbath, and therefore should be performed only after nightfall on Saturday night. Nightfall is the time when three stars can be seen in the sky. The most pleasant way to perform the ceremony is to have all the participants stand close together in a circle and to dim the lights so candle light becomes the focus.



LOOR TEAM before
visiting the Old
Synagogue
02.02.2009
at 10 a.m.