

Halina Matlak

Tourism and Pilgrimage Movement to the Jewish Heritage Sites in the Cracow Kazimierz District

1. Historical background

Kazimierz, presently a part of the Old Town district in Cracow, was established in 1335 as a separate town. Today it is an important area on Cracow's tourist map. It has special character because of its historic buildings connected with its Jewish heritage which attracts tourists from all over the world. The Jewish Town in Kazimierz used to be one of the greatest and the most important centres of the Jewish population in Europe.

Jews came to Cracow as early as the 12th century. In 1304, the records mention "the Jewish Street" which is today Św. Anny Street. The Jewish Community changed its seat several times but for the longest period it has been associated with Kazimierz. The Jewish community administration existed here as early as the 15th century, with its own synagogue, ritual bath, a market place and a cemetery. In 1495, by King John Olbracht's decree, the entire Jewish community of Cracow was resettled to Kazimierz. A Jewish town was established in the eastern part of Kazimierz as a separate administrative unit. Due to their ethnic and cultural identity and their isolation from the rest of the community, as they lived only in the area where they were permitted to settle, the Jews did not assimilate with the Polish population and constituted a separate, completely closed community until the 19th century. The Jewish town was ruled by its own laws and customs.

In the 1930s, Karol Estreicher described this part of Cracow in his city guide in such a way:

"Kazimierz sometimes resembles a town of the East. (...) There is little vehicle traffic, people live outside their houses. The residents display their Oriental temperament by their noisy conversations, vivid facial expressions and gestures.

At dusk on holidays Kazimierz gets quite and calm. The Jews, dressed in long gabardines and fur-rimmed hats, walk around the streets. Sparkling candle lights shine in the windows. The Old Synagogue, Remu'h, the High Synago-

gue and other places of worship fill with the praying people. The Jewish Town creates an unusual, somewhat charming picture. If only for these reasons, this district is worthy of getting to know, if not for its fine historic buildings.”¹

At the turn of the 15th century, an intensive study of the significance for the entire Jewish cultural life developed in the Jewish Town. The largest and the wealthiest Jewish community in Poland developed here. Due to the high standard of its Talmudic school (*Yeshiva*) and outstanding rabbis, the town became a centre for Judaic religious study and the destination for Jews who travelled here from the neighbouring countries, mainly from Germany, Bohemia and Moravia. The elders found opportunities there for the exchange of philosophical and religious ideas, the grounds for an intellectual ferment, the practice of mysticism and settling of legal disputes. Young people constituted a significant percentage of the visitors. They came here to study in Talmudic schools under such outstanding thinkers as Jakub Polak² or Moses Isserles.

2. Jewish cultural heritage sites

The Jewish district with its synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and all public buildings was devastated during World War II. Its renovation lasted until the 1950s and 1960s. Seven synagogues and more than ten prayer houses (*Bet-ha midrash*) have survived to the present day. The synagogues of the Kazimierz district in Cracow are ranked among the most interesting examples of Jewish architecture in Poland and in all of Europe. The architecture of the Jewish Town is concentrated around Szeroka Street. In the south, the street is closed by the Old Synagogue, the oldest surviving synagogue in Poland, and undoubtedly a jewel among Cracow’s synagogues. The Old Synagogue is a symbol of Jewish culture in Poland and one of the most precious examples of Jewish sacred architecture in Europe, next to Worms and Prague. It was built in the second half of the 15th century and played a special role for the local Jewish community as it was the oldest, central place of worship. Not only was it a centre for religious life but also a centre of the *Kehilla* administration run by the rabbis and elders of the Jewish community. The synagogue is a two-aisle structure covered with ribbed vaulting. It was several times reconstructed after fires, owing its final form to the architect Zygmunt Hendel who gave it neo-Renaissance features in 1904. No single artifact of its interior decorations survived the war. Like all other Cracow synagogues it was plundered by the Nazis in 1939. Currently, the synagogue houses a permanent exhibition of Judaic collection of the Historical Museum of the city of Cracow, entitled “The History and Culture of Cracow Jews.” The first exhibits were purchased by the Judaic Museum in 1958. Since that time the collection was systematically expanded. The exhibits on display are chiefly based on the collection of Stanisław Fischer of Bochnia, donations of the Socio-Cultural Jewish Society in Poland, the Jewish Religious Community in Cracow, the Ministry of Culture and Art or have been purchased by the Historical Museum itself.³



The Old Synagogue, 24 Szeroka Street (Photo by H.Matlak)

One can see here liturgical objects of artistic crafts, vessels and furnishings connected with Jewish festivals and rites, as well as paintings and prints on Jewish themes by Juliusz Kossak, Maurycy Gottlieb, Jacek Malczewski and other artists. In addition, there is a collection of paintings and photographs of the Jewish district in Kazimierz and documents connected with the martyrdom of Cracow Jews during the Nazi occupation. The museum collection also includes a library of about 2,500 prints and manuscripts devoted to Jewish issues. The collection of the Judaic Museum in Cracow is among the largest such collections in Poland (next to the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw and the Jewish History Institute in Warsaw.)⁴

Two other synagogues – Remu'h and Popper's are also situated on Szeroka Street. Remu'h Synagogue is situated in an interior corner of the old Jewish cemetery bearing the same name and was built in 1553. It is a building with thick, buttressed walls. It was founded by Israel ben Joseph, the father of Moses Isserles mentioned above. As far as one can judge from its small size (prayer room 9x12 m), originally it was a private synagogue. Reconstructed after a fire in 1557, it was later remodelled several times. A women's prayer room connected to the main room with rectangular-based arcades was built on the synagogue's western side. More light was then let into the synagogue's interior, as two semi-circular windows were added on the east and west, and the walls in the main hall were made higher.



Gate in front of Remu'h Synagogue,
40 Szeroka Street (Photo by H.Matlak).



Gate in front of Wolf Popper's Synagogue, 16
Szeroka Street (Photo by H.Matlak).

The synagogue underwent a thorough renovation work from 1958-68, and as a result it got its current late-Renaissance interior appearance. On the eastern wall is *Aron-ha Kodesh*, crowned with a stone portal and closed by two-winged door with open-work Art Nouveau ornaments. In the centre of the room is a rectangular bimah, fenced by a wrought-metal grating, a reconstruction of the pre-war original structure. The synagogue is still used for religious service.

Popper's Synagogue founded in 1620, is separated from Szeroka Street by a courtyard hidden behind a wall with three gates of typical design. The synagogue bears its name after its founder Wolf Popper (Stork), a wealthy merchant and banker, who also funded its rich interior furnishings. It is a one-aisle structure with barrel vaulting. The renovation work carried out after the war deprived the synagogue of its sacred character. Since 1965, the building is used by the House of Culture.

The High Synagogue (38 Józefa Street) was built from 1556-1563 as a two-storey, massive building with a prayer room on the upper floor. From its original furnishing only the late-Renaissance Aron ha-Kodesh and fragments of wall paintings with Hebrew texts of psalms have survived. During the conservation and building work which was carried out after the war, the roof of the synagogue was completely rebuilt, from the originally ridged roof into a gable roof. The synagogue interior has been adopted to its function as the Art Conservation Workshop.

The Isaac's Synagogue at 18 Kupa Street which was built from 1638-1644 was founded by Izaak (Isaac) Jakubowicz.

It is an oriented structure on a rectangular plan (16x28 m), one-aisle four-bay and barrel vaulting. On eastern side, over a vestibule is the entrance to the women's gallery. Columns separate this room from the main hall. The early-Baroque Aron ha-Kodesh with two Tucson columns is noteworthy. The interior is adorned by stucco work and remnants of polychromy. After comprehensive renovation which was begun in 1990, the synagogue has been made available to visitors.

The Kupa Synagogue at 8 Warszawera Street was built in 1608 on Kehilla's foundation. It is a small structure built on a rectangular plan, covered with saddle roof. The main room has women's galleries on three sides. Wall paintings depicting sites known from the Bible and the signs of the Zodiac have survived in the main room.

The Tempel Synagogue at 24 Miodowa Street was built from 1860-62 on the initiative of the Association of Progressive Israelites. Its architecture and interior decoration differs from other Cracow's synagogues. It is an extensive, detached structure built on a rectangular plan, with the interior partitioned into three aisles by ranges of pillars supporting the women's gallery. The synagogue has a Neo-Renaissance facade with arcaded friezes and bipartite, arcaded windows. Inside, a stone Aron-ha-Kodesh was preserved, also in the neo-Renaissance style. The synagogue's rich interior alludes to the Moorish style. Fine stained glass windows were



Ritual Bath (*mikveh*), 6 Szeroka Street (Photo by H.Matlak).

funded by the members of the Jewish Community. The Tempel Synagogue still performs its religious function.

In addition to the above-mentioned historic buildings in Kazimierz, there are also former prayer houses (*bet ha-midrash*), a ritual bath house (*mikveh*) and old Jewish cemeteries. The Remu'h cemetery is one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in Europe. The first tombstones date from 1552.

3. Tourism and pilgrimage movement

The typical tourist visits took place at a larger scale no earlier than the period between the two world wars. The first tourist guides to the Jewish heritage sites of Kazimierz were also published at that time. The authors, M. Bałaban, O. Mahler and K. Estreicher, mention the places of interest for tourists – Szeroka Street, historic town walls, Jewish cemeteries and synagogues with a special stress on the Old Synagogue which was the only Jewish historic building mentioned in many tourist guides of Cracow from that time. For its representational function, it was the most frequently visited site within the Jewish town.

In 1923, the Kazimierz Kehilla arranged a museum exhibition in an annex over the vestibule of the Old Synagogue. The exhibits on display included unique Torah curtains (*parokhets*), Jewish artistic goldwork and liturgical objects from the synagogue's treasury and private collections. Wedding ceremonies were held in the courtyard of the Old Synagogues. Government decrees were announced from the *bimah*, as well as prayers which were said during natural disasters and anathema's cast on those citizens who did not abide by the local laws. Tadeusz Kościuszko, the leader of the Insurrection of 1794 also had a speech from the *bimah*, calling for Jews to support of the uprising. Rabbi Beer Meisels (1798-1970) who supported the revolution of 1846 and was actively involved in the Spring of the Nations, gave his patriotic speeches at the *bimah*.⁵

Due to increasing interest in the history and historic monuments of architecture in the 19th century, more and more people from outside the Jewish residents of Kazimierz began to visit the Synagogue. Among them were art historians, such as S. Tomkiewicz and W. Łuszczkiewicz, and outstanding personages of the public life. In 1887, Archduke Rudolph with his wife Stephanie visited the synagogue. In 1927, President of the Republic of Poland Ignacy Mościcki was hosted there by the representatives of the Jewish Community with all the honors due to the head of the State.⁶

Jewish Kazimierz was also visited for religious reasons. During the period between the two world wars, pilgrimages to the Remu'h Cemeteries were especially popular. In Judaism, pilgrimages to graves of holy men were not very popular. This custom appeared with the development of Hasidism and Kabbala. Pilgrims began to travel to the burial places of tzadiks and other persons who enjoyed the recognition of religious Jews, as it was believed that the souls of these deceased persons

will immediately transfer the prayers to God.⁷ The main destination of pilgrimages to the Remu'h Cemetery was the grave of Moses Isserles (Remu'h, 1520-1572.) He was an outstanding personality of his time and for his versatile knowledge and broad area of interest he was believed to be a man of the Renaissance. He knew how to reconcile the religious ritual with in-depth philosophical study. His works served as interpretation of precedence law and a moral code which was binding for every religious Jew. To this day, Remu'h is recognized as a wise man and a spiritual master by Ashkenasic Jews.⁸ The inscription on his grave testifies of a great respect for him by his contemporaries and goes like this *"From Moses [the prophet] to Moses [Isserles] there was no man like Moses."*

The grave of Remu'h became a place of worship from the very beginning. During the period between the two world wars, Majer Bałaban referred to this fact in these words *"the greatest crowds gather in "the town" on the day of the half-holiday Lag b'Omer,⁹ as thousands or perhaps dozens of thousands religious Jews come here from all parts of the Republic of Poland to pray at the grave of the great Remu'h, whose anniversary of death falls on that half-holiday."*¹⁰

Currently, there are various reasons of visits to Kazimierz but some general trends can be observed.

Definitely the greatest attractions of Kazimierz are the remnants of the old town which had been inhabited by Jewish people. Basically, its original urban layout has been preserved, including the synagogues and cemeteries, as well as other community facilities and housing. These historical buildings are of interest for all tourists exploring Kazimierz, sometimes can only be seen from outside and are not available to the visitors.

A periodical event which has been held here since 1988, originally every second year, and since 1994 annually, is the Jewish Culture Festival which draws crowds of tourists from Poland and from abroad. The festival has been initiated and run by Krzysztof Gierat and Janusz Makuch. Through its concerts, theatrical performances, art exhibitions, film showings and art. workshops, the festival is a presentation of various aspects of Jewish



The grave of Moses Isserles on Remu'h Cemetery – the main destination of pilgrimages of Jews from all over the world (Photo by H.Matliak)

culture. Every year, the most outstanding representatives of the Jewish culture and arts from Europe, the USA and Israel are invited to Cracow. The only festival of its kind in Europe attracts crowds of the public, and the Grand Finale outdoor concert gathers a few thousand people in the old center of the Jewish Town. About twenty thousand people participate in the festival events each year. Monuments of the district's heritage architecture offer interesting venues for most of the festival events.

Visits for religious purposes are not so important now as it was during the period between the two world wars but an increasing interest can be observed during the last couple of years. The grave of Moses Isserles is still a site of special respect and it is visited by tourists and pilgrims but only a small group comes here for purely religious purposes with the main goal to visit the grave of Remu'h. This group consists mostly from the Hasidim from whom the anniversary of the death of Moses Isserles is an occasion for a pilgrimage to his grave. As for the forms of the cult, nothing has changed since before the war. Little stones are still placed on the grave and letters with prayers are placed in special boxes there. Religious Hasidim say *Kadish* (a prayer for the dead)¹¹ at the grave. On the anniversary of Isserles's death (April/May) a larger group of people appears in the Remu'h Synagogue. A slight increase in religious pilgrimages is also observed on Jewish holidays. Such visits are usually connected with visiting the graves of family and friends and with the significant events of the life of the community (funerals, Bar Mitzvahs¹² and wedding ceremonies¹³).

Educational tours are usually taken by Jewish youth from Israel as special lessons of the nation's history. It should be added that these tours also contain a religious atmosphere. Kraków is on the itinerary of such tours and as such is visited by the vast majority of the participants. During their stay in Cracow, apart from visiting the city, the young people participate in religious ceremonies, lectures and seminars which are often held at the Tempel Synagogue which is opened especially for this purpose. They also meet the members of the Cracow chapter of the Righteous among Nations.¹⁴

Since 1992, on the anniversary of the outburst of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto (April) and international convention of the Jewish youth from all over the world, called the March of the Living is held in Poland. This event is attended by the participants from the USA, France, Israel, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Uruguay, Guatemala, Greece, Canada and Mexico. The itinerary leads from Warsaw through Kazimierz Dolny, Majdanek, Lublin, Cracow, Oświęcim (Auschwitz), Brzezinka (Birkenau), Łódź and Treblinka, ending back in Warsaw. During their stay in Cracow, young people visit Kazimierz and the sites connected with Jewish history.

The Schindler's List's Trail may also be ranked highly among educational projects. The world premiere of this film was held in Cracow on March 2, 1994. The sites which were shown in the movie provoked enormous interest immediately after the premiere. It was the inspiration for the creation of the "Schindler's List Trail" including these sites. It is worthy to note that the trail is in fact a pretext to show

the sites of the actual events which took place in Cracow during World War II. This initiative, as the organizers say has an educational character – its aim is to present all the sites connected with the annihilation of the Jews in Cracow during the Nazi occupation. The trail begins on Szeroka Street and leads along Ciemna and Józefa Streets to Wolnica Square, continues Trynitaraska and Krakowska Streets. After crossing the Kościuszko Bridge, the next stops on the route are Lasota Hill, Józefińska Street, Zgody Square (The Eagle Pharmacy), Lipowa Street (Oskar Schindler's factory) and the Liban Quarry at the foot of Krakus Mound. The trail ends in the former Płaszów concentration camp. Spielberg's film certainly contributed to the increase of interest in Cracow and Kazimierz. Since March 1994, several dozens of thousands people have participated in the Schindler's List Tour. The largest was the group of tourists from the USA, then Germans, Dutch, Israeli, British and French tourists.

The tourist movement in Kazimierz is difficult to assess for several reasons. The main reason is that no records of visitors are kept at the sites of interest which would permit to evaluate the numbers of tourists. The Old Synagogue is an exception in this respect, as it can assess the numbers of visitors based on the numbers of tickets sold.

The data on the numbers of tourists visiting the Old Synagogue are believed to represent the figures for all of Jewish Kazimierz, as the museum is such a significant tourist attraction that practically no tourist visiting this part of the city can miss it.

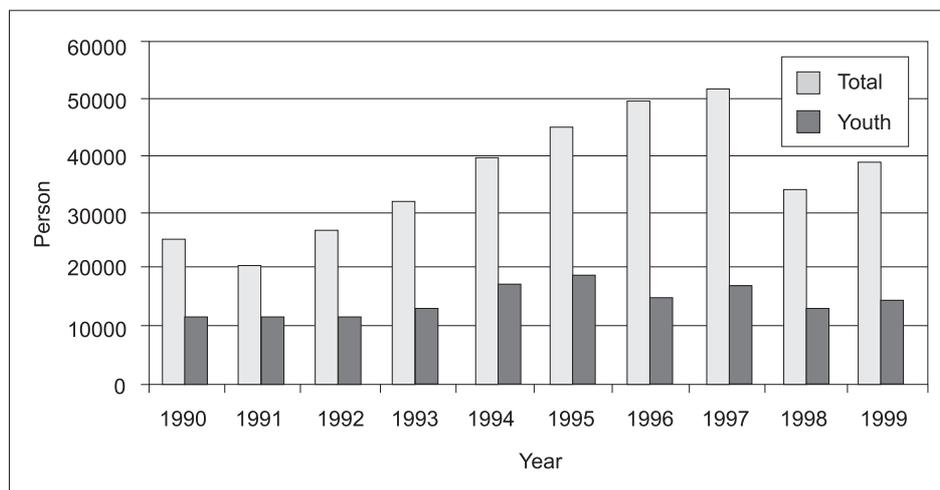


Fig. 1.
The numbers of visitors of the Judaic Museum in Cracow, 1990-1999.

Source: The report from the activities of the Old Synagogue Branch by years (manuscript).

Until 1980, 2,000 the museum was visited by approximately 2,000 people each year (the data from these years are estimations.) The breakthrough was the opening of the permanent exhibition “The History and Culture of the Cracow Jews” in 1980. Since that time, a increase from 4,995 in 1981 to 51,581 in 1997 could be observed. Quarterly trends can also be noticed. The lowest intensity of the tourist movement is observed in the 1st quarter, with a relatively high share of young people. The peak of the tourist movement is noted in the 2nd and 3rd quarter (high season) with a decreasing share of young people. In the 4th quarter, medium intensity of tourist movement is observed with the highest share of young people (off-season discounts.)

4. Conclusions

From 1993-1994, the Kazimierz Revitalization Team developed the “Kazimierz Action Plan”, a comprehensive study devoted to this part of the city. The final report contains a draft plan of the renovation and revitalization of Kazimierz. It envisages the preservation of the traditional character of the district with small shops, offices, craft workshops, antique shops etc. Tourism plays an important role in the Action Plan. Although a significant increase in tourism has been observed in Kazimierz in the recent years, it constitutes a small share with regard to all of the city. About 500,000 tourists from abroad visit Cracow each year, while only 10% of them visit Kazimierz. The Plan proposes a number of actions to increase the district’s tourist attractiveness. The development of a hotel basis is envisaged, compared to the existing small hotel facilities (up to 15 beds.) Two new hotels are planned after the adaptation of old buildings and two new high-standard tourist complexes. The renovation of and the finding of new uses for potentially attractive tourist facilities and residential houses whose sometimes poor condition affects the district’s aesthetics is also very important for tourism. A tourist tram in Kazimierz is also proposed to be put in operation, and the opening of a tourist information center.

The Jewish Town, despite its centuries’ long isolation, is now part of Kazimierz. Its special character enhances the district’s attractiveness for tourists and is a significant element of the diversity of Cracow’s tourism offer. Tourism shows a high growth dynamic. To a large extent it is uncontrolled and requires further studies. Kazimierz, which for centuries remained in the shadow of Cracow faces the opportunity to become the second most popular tourist center of the city.

References:

¹ K. Estreicher, *Kraków, przewodnik dla zwiedzających miasto i jego okolice* [Cracow, a Guide to the City and Environs], Cracow, 1938, p. 262.

² Jakub Polak – the initiator and Rector of the first talmudic school in Poland. In 1503 he was appointed chief rabbi of the Polish Jews.

³ M. Rożek, *Żydowskie zabytki krakowskiego Kazimierza* [Jewish monuments of Cracow's Kazimierz], Cracow, 1990, p. 23.

⁴ The authors of the works devoted to the Judaic Museum in Cracow are: E. Duda, *Judaika w zbiorach Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa. Srebro* [Judaics in the collection of the City of Cracow Historical Museum. Silverwork], Cracow, 1985; *Z dziejów i kultury Żydów w Krakowie. Przewodnik po wystawie stałej w Starej Synagodze* [From the History and Culture of Jews in Cracow. A Guide to the Permanent Exhibition at the Old Synagogue], Cracow, 1985, and L. Ludwikowski, *Stara Bożnica na Kazimierzu w Krakowie* [The Old Synagogue in Cracow's Kazimierz], Cracow, 1981

⁵ T. Ruszkowski, *Miasto Kazimierz, jego dzieje i zabytki*, [The Town of Kazimierz, Its History and Monuments], Cracow, 1973, pp. 69-71

⁶ E. Duda, *Krakowskie judaica* [The Kraków Judaics], Warsaw 1981, p. 75

⁷ A. Unterman, *Encyklopedia tradycji i legend żydowskich* [Encyclopaedia of Jewish Traditions and Legends], Warsaw, 1994, p. 214

⁸ H. Halkowski, *Kraków – „miasto i matka Izraela”* [Cracow – “the City and the Mother of Israel”] [in:] *Kraków – dialog tradycji* [Cracow – the Dialogue of Traditions], The publication prepared on the occasion of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe, May 28-June 7 1991, a collective work under editorial supervision of Z. Baran. Znak Publishing House, Cracow, pp. 39-40

⁹ The holiday falls on the 18th of the month of *Iyar* (April/May)

¹⁰ M. Bałaban, *Przewodnik po żydowskich zabytkach Krakowa* [A guide to Jewish Historical Monuments in Cracow], Cracow, 1935, p. 13

¹¹ To commemorate the passage of the Jews through the desert under the leadership of Moses, when the burial sites were marked with stones

¹² On September 7, 1985 Bar Mitzvah of Eric Strom from the USA took place in the Tempel Synagogue. He came here on the invitation of the Cracow Jewish Religious Community.

¹³ In 1993, a Jewish wedding was celebrated in Kazimierz (one of the few such ceremonies that took place after the war.) The bride (from Austria) and the groom (from the USA) met in Cracow during the Jewish Culture Festival and out of their emotional attachment to Kazimierz decided to marry here.

¹⁴ The association of people who risked their lives during World War II to save Jews.

Halina Matlak, M.Sc.
Institute of Geography of Jagiellonian University
The Department of Geography of Religion
64 Grodzka St., 31-044 Cracow

