## On Old Wooden Synagogues in Poland<sup>1</sup>

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As widely known, several wooden synagogues, frequently unique in their shape and style, have survived in a number of little Polish towns which were inhabited largely by Jews. Although the synagogues cannot be characterized precisely, they are nevertheless worthy of closer inspection for research purposes and of a detailed description. In the small towns, the innate conservatism and perhaps even more the poverty of the Jewish congregations have led to the survival to this day of several of these vestiges of times past, virtually in their original state. It is regrettable that structures of this type are often hidden by a variety of earth huts and farm buildings, and are not especially noticeable to interested travellers.

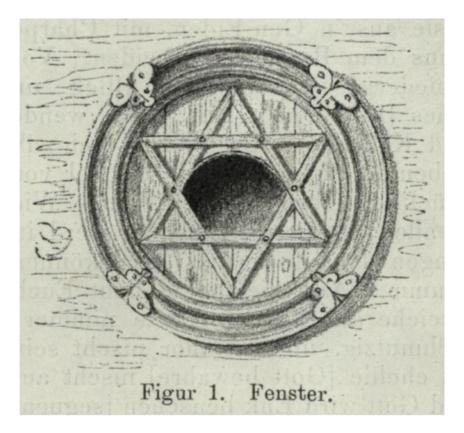


Fig. 1. Window

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries wooden synagogues were generally erected in Poland because, as in other forested countries, a wealth of natural building material was available to the Jews living there which was cheap and easy to work and which they readily used. Given the hospitable reception, as well as the rights and privileges they were granted, which ensured peace and wealth, they became fond of the country and erected permanent synagogues of which several still exist today, despite the passage of time. The maagazine "Klosy" (Ears of Corn) included short reports on the latter, largely by Siegmund Gloger, with good illustrations. Bearing the importance of the subject in mind, we consider it necessary to round off the various references to them by including the following details.

Among the most unique synagogues is that in Upper Mazovia, although it has to be admitted that, from an architectural point of view, it does not catch the visitor's eye. The central nave is almost square with a roof in three tiers rising up to a pointed top. It is surrounded on all sides by simple extensions with small, low roofs such that, from every side, three individual small roofs are to be seen. The entrance, the windows, and the entablature which runs around the

whole building, are not special in any way; they are completely simple, devoid of any trace of decoration, and are more or less in the style found in certain farmhouses, as described by Ladislaus Matlakowski.<sup>2</sup> A picture of the above mentioned synagogue with a description by Siegmund Gloger can be found in "Klosy," issue 471 from 1874. To avoid the danger of it collapsing, this synagogue was closed in 1880.

The wooden synagogue in Ostropol is mentioned briefly by Eduard Chlopicki in a few columns with illustrations in the article "Vom Bug bis zum Boltu" ("Klosy," issue 540 from 1875). This beautiful building from the 17<sup>th</sup> century is even more interesting that the one mentioned previously. The large central nave is covered by a roof of three tiers, crowned at the top by a long, pointed, decorated hook. The low buildings at the corners of the central nave are different and of varying heights, making the character of the whole building unique.

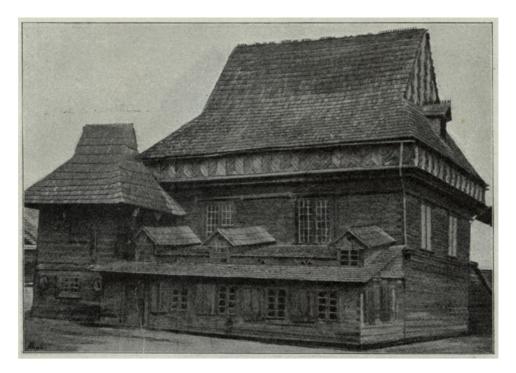


Fig. 3. Synagogue in Zabłudów

The most beautiful is an extension at the entrance to the house of prayer with a low roof with two tiers, the top of which reaches the main roof. When the whole building is viewed from the side, one has the impression that it has a pyramid-shaped roof of five tiers. A gallery with crude, simple but nevertheless unique carvings runs around the single-storied extension. The broad stairs inside which lead up the gallery has a not poorly carved and relatively richly decorated banister.

Siegmund Gloger mentions another beautiful wooden synagogue, namely that in Nasielsk, in "Kiosy" of 1879, page 52.

Abutting the central nave of this house of prayer, which has a roof with three tiers, are two squat towers on two corners at the entrance which are lower than those of the central nave, in turn decorated here and there with crude, albeit beautiful carvings. The peaked roofs of these towers rest on a tastefully executed entablature. The whole building has a beautiful and dignified appearance and is doubtlessly the work of a capable carpenter whose name is unknown.

The old wooden synagogue in Zabłudów deserves to be mentioned in more depth due to its unique architecture.<sup>3</sup> The illustrations included here, based on photographs taken from three different sides (figs 2,<sup>4</sup> 3, 4), show that this house of prayer, like those already described, comprised a spacious central nave surrounded by various additional extensions of different shapes and sizes with—as we shall see later—a variety of functions. The whole building was constructed of larch; in some parts oak and spruce was used for later renovations and is still to be found in some parts of the building.

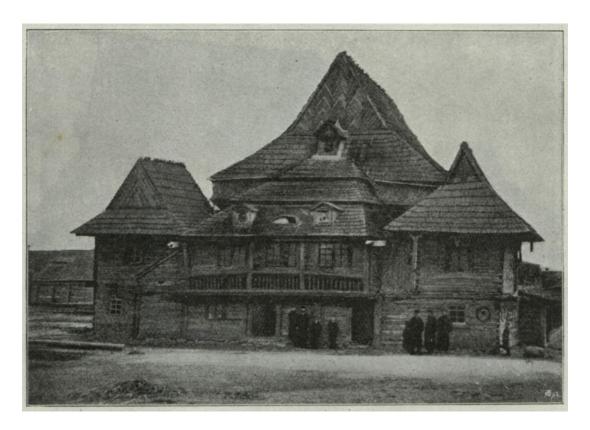


Fig. 4. Synagogue in Zabłudów

Of the ornamentation inside, a frieze around the central nave below the roof and the pinnacle of the main roof itself are worthy of mention. The artistically fitted, multicolored slats form a simple design which we noticed not infrequently in later wooden buildings. In this same extension the top of the square, adjacent building to the side can be seen (fig. 3, right), shown in greater detail (fig. 5), as is one of the four round windows in the same adjacent building (fig. 1). In the middle of the said window is the so-called "Shield [Star] of David." The synagogue in Zabłudów no longer has any other ornamentations inside. Only the galleries which were decorated with heavily carved backrests that ran round virtually the whole building, still have some vestiges of these.

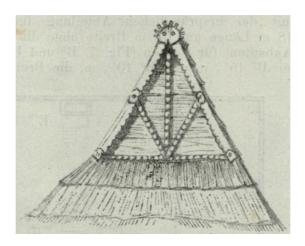


Fig. 5. The roof gable

There are entrances to the house of prayer on different sides; namely a main entrance for men and two for women in the low buildings at the side (figs 2, 4); in addition, a special entrance leads up a roofed-over staircase to the upper floor of the front addition with a balcony (fig. 4), which is also set aside for women. It appears that this section of the story was built at the same time as the central nave since these abut each another directly. The former is separated from the synagogue by a wooden balustrade such that the women sitting in the gallery can take part in the service without being seen from below. The balustrade mentioned stretches from the beginning of the arch and still retains its original shape. The beams are heavily carved with the heads of fantasy animals (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Balustrade

Following the growth of the Jewish population in Zabhidowo, the women's gallery described above became too small and, most probably, the congregation was forced to add the aforementioned elongated, single story extensions on both sides of the central nave for their exclusive use.

Bearing the safety and comfort of the prayer-goers in mind, the rooms in the synagogue required several entries and exits on the various different sides.

The plan illustrated here (fig. 7) show that the synagogue in such an insignificant town as Zabłudów was nevertheless very impressive. The central nave, together with the original section for women (sections A and B) is 18m long and 11m wide, excluding the buildings on the side. The side extensions for women (fig. 7, B2 and B3) were of different lengths: B2 15½m and B3 10¼m; the width of the former was 4¼m, of the other greater than 4½m. The

third extension adjoining section B3 (C) was slightly narrower and intended for use for meetings of the *kahal*—the congregation's council; it was only 5m long and just over 3 1/3m wide.

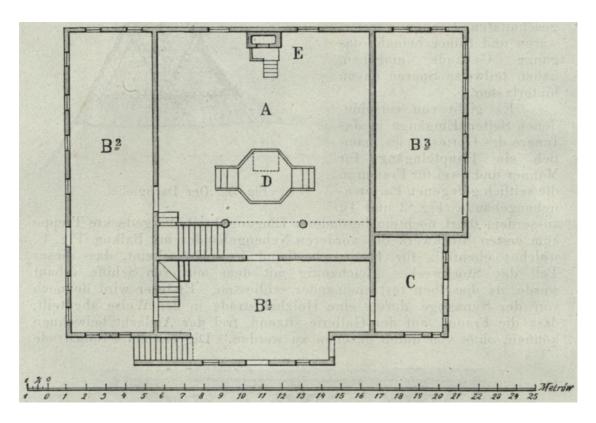


Fig. 7. Ground plan of wooden synagogue in Zabłudów (A central nave. - B women's section. - C council chamber. - D Area for reading from the Toral scroll. - E Aron Hakodesh, cupboard in which the Torah scrolls are kept)

The central nave, where the service is held, has plain walls without any carved or painted ornamentation. Traces of a Hebrew inscription, that have been completely obliterated over time, can be found near the main entrance. A raised area in the middle of the synagogue forms a kind of tent, reached by two small flights of steps opposite each other (fig. 7, D). This elegantly shaped structure is made completely of oak and measures—including the steps—5m long and almost 2¾m wide. A table is in the middle on which the scroll is placed for reading from the Torah. The many renovations to the building carried out in the course of the past century contributed to the loss of its original character. As a consequence we have added a drawing (fig. 9) and point out that this structure is called a *bimah* and that some protrusions bear traces of gilding, primarily on the three domes which rest on turned supports.

The most beautiful work inside the synagogue in Zabłudów is doubtlessly the Aron Hakodesh—the cupcoard in which the Torah scrolls are stored, fitted on the wall opposite the main entrance. Made of oak and spruce it is 1½m wide, 9½m high and 1m deep, not including the base or the steps. Attention is drawn to three tastefully exucuted and richly gilded ornamental items carved in oak, namely the main door, the central panel, and the seven-branched lamp in the upper section between the columns, which is surrounded by vine-like ornamentation (fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Wooden cupboard in which the Torah scrolls are kept

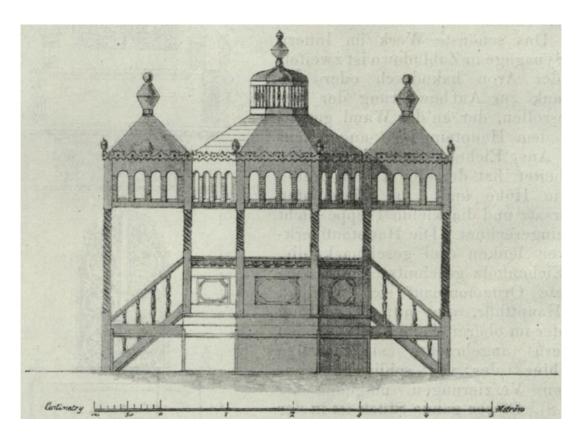


fig. 9. The so-called bimah

The whole is indeed the elegant work of a competent artist, executed in the Italian Renaissance style. The rich and exclusively vegetal ornamentation is in a classical style and elegantly carved. It is only regrettable that the gilding has worn away in many places. The council chamber, which in some respects does not lack certain unique features, is in a separate, square extension and also noteworthy (fig. 7, C). The walls of this room are painted in wax paint from top to bottom with fanciful intertwined flowers, most of which are in a pale brown and pale green. The frieze around the top is reminiscent of the Romanesque style. The artist added circles between the plant-like ornamentation supported by various fantasy animals, which although of no artistic merit, met the tastes of the time. A variety of biblical quotations is engraved within the circles. The whole of the room's ceiling is also covered in vegetal ornamentation with a Hebrew inscription on the outer-most pinnacle which reads that the so-called room was renovated in 5472 (1712). The last renovation of the whole synagogue in Zabłudów was carried out in 5525 (1765), as revealed by the Hebrew inscription in the main entrance hall. When exactly the synagogue was built is not known. A terrible fire which destroyed the majority of the little town at the end of the previous century, did not spare the archive of the Jewish congregation there either. As a result, all their records as well as privileges and documents were lost. Only one book (a *pinkas*) was saved in which the elders in the congregation used to record the most important matters with which they were involved. In this book, the beginning of which is missing and that very much shows its age, the decision made by the congregation in 5406 (1646) to add another women's section on the first (ground) floor—probably the section that is maked B1 in fig. 7— can be found. From this it can be seen that the central nave of the synagogue in Zabłudów existed much earlier than 1646. A beautifully worked piece of silverwork in the Renaissance style, which was donated to the synagogue by a pious lady and which bears the date 1652, has been kept there to this day. Judging by the height and the internal shape of several parts of the above mentioned building, it must be considered very old. However, the exact time of its construction cannot even be ascertained scientifically; one cannot speak of any one particular style either.

Generally speaking, the early wooden synagogues in our country had an utterly unique yet characteristic shape.

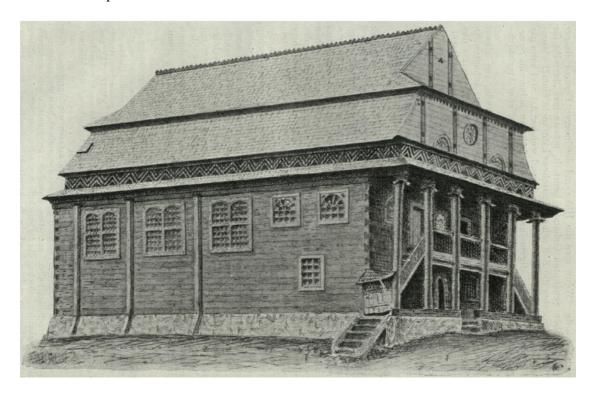


Fig. 10 Synagogue in Lutomiersk

As mentioned above, these buildings comprise a large central nave surrounded by various small extensions of various shapes and sizes, erected in the course of time according to the needs of the respective congregation and the population growth, as well as the materials available. The diverse extensions, together with the main building, as well as the ridges of the roofs of various heights and shapes that tower over them, certainly have a picturesque authenticity which divert the eye from the neighboring low, dirty mud-walled buildings to their advantage.<sup>5</sup>

And as already said, it would be difficult to attribute the early wooden buildings described here, that still exist, to any one architectural style. The different shapes of these structures do not line up with any known construction system although their uniqueness is astonishing. If we take a closer look at the design, the exterior shape and the simple ornamentation of the buildings mentioned, we automatically come to the perhaps too broad assumption that the Jews, who had settled in Poland having escaped persecution in Germany, adopted the system used for houses of prayer which they had known in neighboring Silesia, and more importantly in those cities which already had wooden Christian churches from earlier times. It is probable that wooden churches both in Germany as well as in Sweden and Norway originally consisted of a main nave only. Later, guilds and individual devout prayer-goers, built on specific chapels, added balonies, arcades and other extensions to all sides of the churches which ultimately gave these the appearance of a large building made up of various different parts which frequently did not match the main nave.

Today, more than 100 wooden churches in this style—if one can refer to one as such—still exist in Silesia (see *Geschichte der Holzbaukunst in Deutschland* (The History of Wooden Architecture in Germany) by Carl Lachner).

The most beautiful and unique of such buildings are to be found in the district of Lubomia, in Syrynia from 1305, in Brzezie from 1331, as well as in Jedlownik, Pniewy, Boguszyce, and a number of other little towns. More dignified, however, than those mentioned above is the wooden church that graces the Silesian village of Poniszowice (built in 1499). It has all the characteristic features discussed previously, i.e. extensions of various heights as well as roofs made up of different parts and external balconies.

The notion that Jews, who arrived in Poland from countries under German rule, drew on houses of prayer from their former homeland for the design of their wooden synagogues, is not improbable. If, after much and exact research, the assumption just expressed seems justified, the question arises as to whether the old wooden synagogues built on Polish soil were erected by Jewish architects. In spite of our most careful research in this respect and numerous written inquiries to the oldest congregations, we have not yet found any trace of the existence of even one single Jewish architect from the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century [see by contrast: Conclusion]. In any case, it cannot be denied that the synagogues of which we have spoken in this work were built with skill and a certain taste—by implication, therefore, by experts. Did Jews at that time employ Christian builders and carpenters to construct their beautiful and substantial synagogues, or at least give them the plans? The probability of this assumption is further supported by the credible evidence we have collected that many noble Polish magnates donated funds for the construction of synagogues and other buildings for Jews in the little towns that they owned. Radziwiłł, Lubomirsky and others, for example, were known for such acts of religious tolerance. Christian builders could therefore have been given building plans or advice for the construction of these buildings.

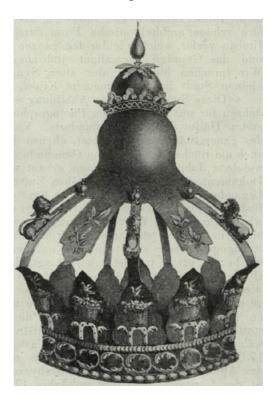


Fig. 11. Silver crown with ornamental elements in gold in the synagogue in Pohrebyshche (shown  $\frac{1}{2}$  its real size).

Now we would like to take a look at a synagogue which is definitely in keeping with the distinct style of earlier Jewish architecture. The description of this synagogue deserves all the more attention and interest as the synagogue lost its beautiful architectural form two years ago

due to an appallingly bad reconstruction which, unfortunately, has completely obliterated its original character and the features of former Jewish wooden architecture. We are talking here about the old synagogue in Pohrebyshche, a small town in the Kijow administrative district in the Berdychiv region.

This synagogue, shown here (fig. 12), based on a photograph taken for us two years ago, dates from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Many years ago a fire destroyed the whole town, including the *kahal* building in which the records of the Jewish community were also kept. It is difficult to say exactly when this synagogue was built because of the lack of documents. There are a number of legends about its origin; however, since these stories are not based on historical evidence but are more fable-like in nature, no scholarly claim can be made. The only clue is a small stone monument, almost touching the outer wall of the synagogue, on which there is an old Hebrew inscription. Although somewhat obliterated, it states that Chmielnicki's hordes suddenly attacked Pohrebyshche in 1648 and murdered both the Polish magnates as well as all Jews, old men, young men, women, and children who were in our ancient House of God. This happened just as the wedding of a young couple was being held.

Since this synagogue was already referred to as ancient in 1648, it must date at least from the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Something else that can help us a little to date the synagogue in Pohrebyshche is that a Greek church had been erected there in 1730. The deed of donation mentions that, in that same year (1730), the old synagogue—which was badly showing its age —had been restored. It is not certain why this is mentioned here specifically. Among other early artworks in this synagogue that have survived is a parchment prayer book in folio, which is richly written and decorated with arabesques and initials. As the inscription of this book says, it took several years to write the prayer book. It was finished in 1735 by Arye Jehuda Lejb, son of Baruch, who dedicated his work, as he says, "to the ancient and holy synagogue in Pohrebyshche." Based on the years mentioned here, one can assume that the building dates from the first half of the 17th century. As already mentioned, the whole of the exterior was remodeled two years ago while, however, retaining the old interior. In this respect, our illustration is of even greater value, as it shows the building in its original form, which although not so very different in design from that of other wooden synagogues of that era, nevertheless has a unique and pleasing appearance thanks to the four roofs that tower above the building.



Fig. 12. The synagogue in Pohrebyshche

It must be said that the interlinking of this unique roof is in no way conventional and that it was well thought through; it is convincing evidence that we have the work of an exceptional master builder in front of us. There is no external ornamentation as, in general, it was not customary for Jews to decorate their houses of prayer. Simplicity and unpretentiousness could be observed in the construction of such buildings, with greater value being placed on the relative height of the structure. The whole house of prayer is made of oak and, according to tradition, the congregation was given most of the building material by the noble owners of Pohrebyshche at that time.

The plan of the ground floor and first upper story (figs 13, 14) show that, in relation to the not very large congregation, the building is not so small and that the interior, bearing the small population in mind, is extremely well and comfortably furnished. One has to admit that the overall dimenions are well balanced, the building being 16.7m long and 20.4 m wide. The section reserved for women, however, seems to be too narrow (3.5m wide) in relation to its disproportionate length (12.4m). The proportions of the mens' section are better, covering an area 12m wide and 12.4m long. Subtract from this the simple wooden altar that stands in the middle and measures 5.6m by 4m, as well as a wooden platform on the right-hand side measuring 2.7m by 1.5m. Although not particularly large it nevertheless effects the synagogue's overall proportions. The other sections of the building are intended as anterooms and cloakrooms and Room C which is 3.5m wide and 5.6m long, to the right of the entrance on the ground floor, is generally where the congregation's council members sit.

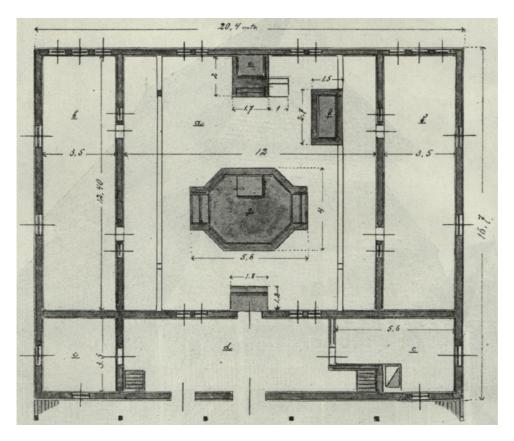


Fig. 13. Ground floor plan of the synagogue in Pohrebyshche

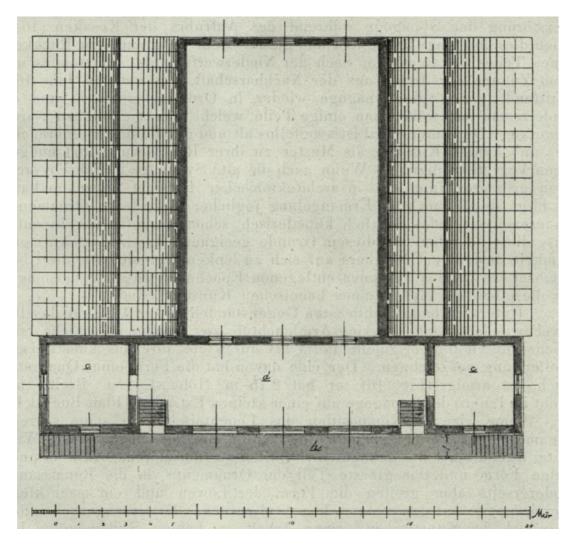


fig. 14. First floor plan of the synagogue in Pohrebyshche (Key to plan figs 13, 14. a. Men's section, b. Women's section, c. Anteroom, d. Hall (Polish), e. Ark (Aron Hakodesh). f. Candelabra (Menorah). g. Altar (*almemor*). h. Stairs with balacony leading to women's section)

The interior of the synagogue is simply furnished. There are traces of old painted murals on the wall against which the ark has been placed, which depict a variety of birds, plants, and domestic animals in gracious arabesques. These link up, on both sides, with the carvings decorating the ark itself which also have various birds and animals in rich vegetal arabesques as motifs too. The ark (Aron Hakodesh), in which the Torah scrolls are kept (fig. 17), is made completely of oak and is 4.5m high and 1.7m wide. ((im Original steht 81,7m! Kann nicht stimmen!)) It is more richly decorated than the altar in a style reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance. All the carvings which decorate the ark and which we have mentioned above, are light and artistically executed. Some evidence exists which suggests the carvings were originally much wider and larger and that these most probably covered the whole of the wall on both sides of the ark. The gilding on the carving which is polished in several places and matte in others, is still in relatively good condition. This must once have embellished the whole of this part of the house of prayer. The ark, as far as we could ascertain, was among the oldest objects in the synagogue. After the destruction of the synagogue during the Cossack riot of 1648, it remained empty and unused for many years. Only following the return of some of the residents after the riots had subdued, and after Jews had moved there from other places nearby around 1690, was the synagogue repaired and the ark restored, whereby several sections that were still intact were reused. The lower part is doubtlessly old and it was this

that the unknown artist used as a model for its renovation and ultimately its completion. Even if the old synagogue in Pohrebyshche is not particularly interesting from an architectural point of view, and in spite of the lack of any form of ornamentation, it does however house a number of really beautiful artistic objects. For this reason alone it well deserves attracting those researchers who are interested in the country's relicts from a time long passed, all the more as these objects are the work of a local artist.

Among the most significant objects are two exquisite brass candelabras which are characterized both by their original shape and by their thoroughly artistic execution. One of these is square, planar, 14-branched (fig. 16); it is 2.75m high, 1.44m wide and has been placed inside the synagogue on a small platform (marked F on the plan). It we take a close look at the composition of the candelabra and its richly ornamental shape it is difficult to catagorize it to any known style. Its form and the majority of the decorative elements may be reminiscent of the Renaissance, on the other hand however the shape of the lions and a few of the small ornamental devices draw on the Romanesque. It is obvious that the artist did not adhere to any one style in his work, following instead any momentary inspiration, borrowing only from the carved ornamentation embellishing the wooden ark. Irrespective of this, one has to admit that the candelabra has a special character of its own; it is pleasing to the eye and a similar candelabra in such a form and of such perfection is seldom to be found. The same goes for the second candelabra, also made of brass (fig. 15), which is indisputably the work of the same artist. This candelabra, 2.63m high and 1.5m wide at the base, is has eight or more branches. Although eight arms branch off the central shaft, four on each side, the ninth arm, fitted to the shaft with a hook, can be moved at will from one side to the other. The form and beautiful ornamentation of this candelabra is more sublime than the one previously described; its design and detailing outshine it in several respects. The artist drew on the same motifs and ornamentation in both cases; the composition of the second one however is much more unusual.



Fig. 15. Brass candelabra in the synagogue in Pohrebyshche



Fig. 16. Brass candelabra in the synagogue in Pohrebyshche

The ninth arm which reaches out from the shaft is decorated with a large ram, certainly a reminder of the sacrificial ram, and is beautifully and artistically chased. The four lions which stand on the pedestal are also well and effectively modeled. From this, one can assume that the artist was able to draw on good models. The pedestal did not appear to be sufficiently decorative to the artist nor did is correspond to the upper part. For these reasons he added several lights which emerge from the mouths of the two lions on the side, thus embellishing the work as a whole.

Having acknowledged the work of the artist in words, we should now take a look at him as a person based on the information we have gained from our research.

The person who made the candelabra was Jewish and known to others in his congregations by the name of "Boruch." He was a poor craftsperson and it is not known where he came from. He arrived in Pohrebyshche after the reconstruction of the synagogue; i.e. in the 1690s. He preoccupied himself with mending old, time-worn metal vessels in the little town and in the surrounding area, and he was able to make a simple living from this work. Where he learned his craft is unknown. One can imagine him talking to the good priest of the wooden church erected by Radziwiłł, and his being given various jobs in the church and sacristy. He may have seen various drawings and models at this priest's house, which as locally believed were

later useful for him in his work. The hard-working Boruch eked out a wretched living. He used to collect bits of brass of various shapes and sizes from houses he visited and elsewhere and bought broken vessels no longer of any use for the few coins he had saved. When someone he knew once asked why he was collecting bits of brass so diligently, he said that he wanted to make candelabras for the old synagogue which had once been so admired, as soon as he had gathered enough material. He collected metal in this way for eight years. Boruch then set about turning his intention into reality, and as he himself related worked for six years to complete the candelabras. Having neither the necessary tools nor the money he could not work any faster. He did not want any help from others either. That Boruch's candelabras were to be found in the synagogue by 1735 is a fact, as it is mentioned in Arje Jehuda Lejb's book that they were a gift from Boruch. Consequently we can be certain that the candelabras illustrated here date from the end of the 17th century or, at the latest, from the beginning of the 18th century and are the work of the Jew Boruch.

To conclude, we would like to mention two other small relicts found in the synagogue described by us and which date from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: these are a silver crown, an ornamental decoration for the Torah scrolls, and a silver pointer, used when reading from the Torah in the synaogue. The silver crown (fig. 11) is a very tasteful and unique work; its decorative elements, primarily lions, flower baskets, birds, and a few arabesques are artistically worked and heavily gilded. The small lions are especially beautifully chased. The pointer with the hand is of silver but also has a few gilded parts.



Fig. 17. The wooden altar in the synagogue zu Pohrebyshche

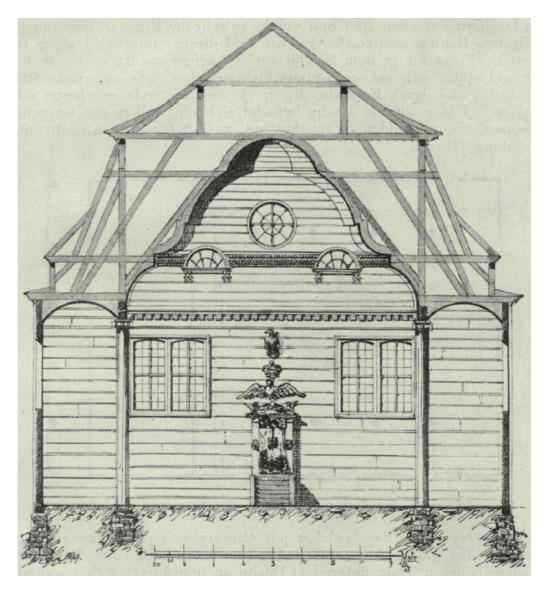


Fig. 18. Cross-section of the synagogue in Lutomiersk

These two objects, as shown by the engraved inscriptions on them, were the gift of Isaak ben Abraham, the congregation elder in 1752. There are also several richly embroidered items which however are so badly worn that neither the embroidered motifs not the ornamentation are recognisable. With this we conclude our description of the old wooden synagogue in Pohrebyshche and its artistic treasures.

Also of interest, although of an earlier date, is the wooden synagogue in Lutomiersk in the Piotrków administrative division, Łask County, an image of which is reproduced here (fig. 10).

When building this synagogue the architect kept to the new style, if we can call it that, which differs considerably from the old one. Here, there are neither tiered roofs nor those peculiar little towers, frequently with slightly rounded roofs, so characteristic of earlier Jewish buildings. Part of this simple roof juts out over the façade beyond the nave by 2.2m, supported by six round spruce columns, each made from one single piece of wood with decorative capitals carved in the Ionic style. Under this roof is a balcony, reached by gently rising staircases from both side leading to the women's section.

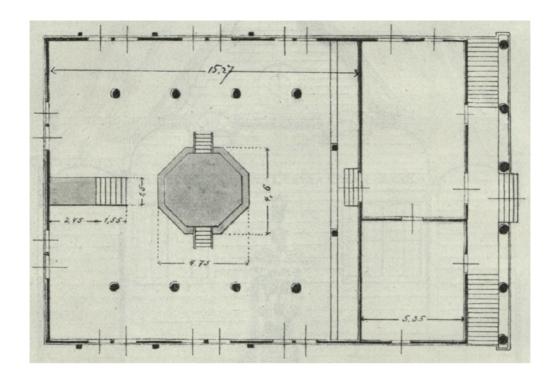


Fig. 19. Ground plan of the synagogue in Lutomiersk

Apart from the frieze executed in black and white coloured wood which extends around the whole building, the master builder only added very simple and very small ornamental elements to the higher sections below the roof on the external side walls. The whole building, together with the balcony, is 24.2m long and 16m wide; the height to the top of the roof is 20.7m. The interior of the synagogue has slightly more decoration (figs 18, 19, 20). The whole is made of spruce with a semi-oval ceiling, gently traced in gracefully curved lines, and supported on eight wooded columns, four on each side, of which each has a diameter of 1.8m. The capitals of these columns are carved from one piece in the Ionic style. Whilst the architect wanted to give the interior of the synagogue a dignified, albeit simple appearance, he added a carved frieze above the large windows and a similar one above the small semicircular windows higher up, which is not particularly easy to discern from below as all the inner walls are painted a pale blue (fig. 18). No wall painting were executed here. The internal height of the synagogue from the floor to the highest arch in the ceiling is 14.5m. The men's prayer room is 15.27m long and 15.6m wide; the women's section is 15.6m long and 6.55m wide (fig. 19).

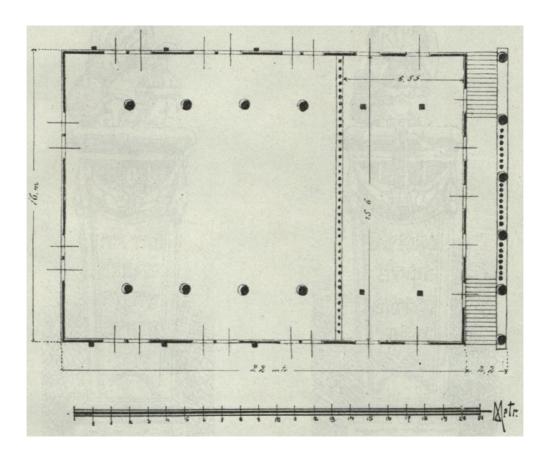


Fig. 20. Plan of the first upper floor in the synagogue in Lutomiersk

In the middle of the men's section, a small wooden altar was placed in a slightly raised position surrounded by a simple balustrade, covered with a dome accessible from both sides. Beyond the wall, opposite the main entrance, is a small platform 2.45m long and 5m high, on which the ark for the Torah scrolls is located, crowned with a simple but quite prettily carved dome. Above the dome, also against this wall, is a large eagle which is gilded in part, with outstretched wings and its head lowered. Above this crown is another slightly larger and more heavily gilded eagle with its head and wings stretching upward (figs 18, 23).

Apart from this relatively insignificant ornamentation, the synagogue in Lutomiersk has an old collection box (figs 21, 22), situated at the main entrance and carved from a single piece of oak. It measures 1.4m high and 26cm wide. This old, artistically executed box depicts a lion on a column through whose open mouth money for the synagogue could be inserted. This old and unique carving came from another old synagogue and only found its way to Lutomiersk thirty years ago.





Figs 21 (front view) and 22 (side view). Collection box in the synagogue in Lutomiersk



Fig. 23. The upper part of the ark in the synagogue in Lutomiersk

The synagogue in Lutomiersk was built during the reign of King Stanisław August who is worth mentioning as the name of the local, Jewish master builder was recorded in connection with him. It was Hillel Benjamin of Łask near Lodz. It is very probable that he completed his training in Germany and enjoyed a certain reputation in his home country with the title "architect" being added to his name. It appears that he designed a number of different buildings in a variety of places. After completing the synagogue in Lutomiersk he began work on the construction of a large wooden synagogue commissioned by the Jewish congregation in Zloczow. However, he did not complete it as he fell from the scaffolding while examining the roof ties and died on the spot. His body was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Zloczow.

- <sup>2</sup> Ladislaus Matlakowski, *Die ländliche Bauart in Po dh al. Krakau*, 1892 (in Polish).
- <sup>3</sup> Zabłudów in Lithuania, a little town in the Grodno District, founded in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Gregor Chodkiewicz, marshal of the Duchy of Lithuania, who had a Roman and Greek church as well as a hospital built there in 1568. The Radziwiłłs attracted the Calvinists to Zabłudów. The little town was destroyed in 1659 by Chowanski.
- <sup>4</sup> Omitted here.
- <sup>5</sup> Apart from the synagogues mentioned here, the wooden synagogue in Jabłonowo on the Prut in well known. Louis Wierzbicki made drawings of it and its interesting and multicolored ornamentation and published them in our report by the "Commission zur Erforschung der Polnische Kunstgeschichte" in 1891 (incl. plates XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, and XX). A report on the wooden synagogue in Nowy Sącz of 1746 was written by Prof. Luszczkiewicz (from the Imperial Academy of Science in Cracow, ed.) for our report.

  <sup>6</sup> Without expanding further on this hypothesis, we would like to mention that Norwegian wooden churches are based on stone Anglo-Saxon basilicas and that these largely comprise several naves, although the side naves enclose the central area on all four sides, this in turn resulting from the wooden construction. Cf. Dietrichson, Munthe, *Die Holzbaukunst Norwegens*, Berlin 1893.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> From reports by art-history commissioners of the Imperial Academy of Science in Cracow, 1895/1900. Our thanks go to the present commissioner for his kindness in letting us use the logo to illustrate this work.