

In the Middle Ages, Warsaw was only a regional center; it grew to greater importance after it replaced Kraków in 1611 as the capital of the vast Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Warsaw experienced strong growth in the eighteenth century, precisely at a time when other Polish cities were declining. After the partitions of the Commonwealth, Warsaw was given to Prussia; then briefly occupied by Napoleon; and finally, along with the surrounding provinces, incorporated into the Russian Empire. Warsaw became a cradle of Polish nationalism, as two doomed uprisings against the Russians were centered here. Beginning in the 1860s, Warsaw began a rapid rise to prominence, with booming commerce and industry, along with a soaring population—from 230,000 in 1861 to 844,000 in 1914. During the interwar period, as capital of the new Polish nation, its population was more than 1 million.

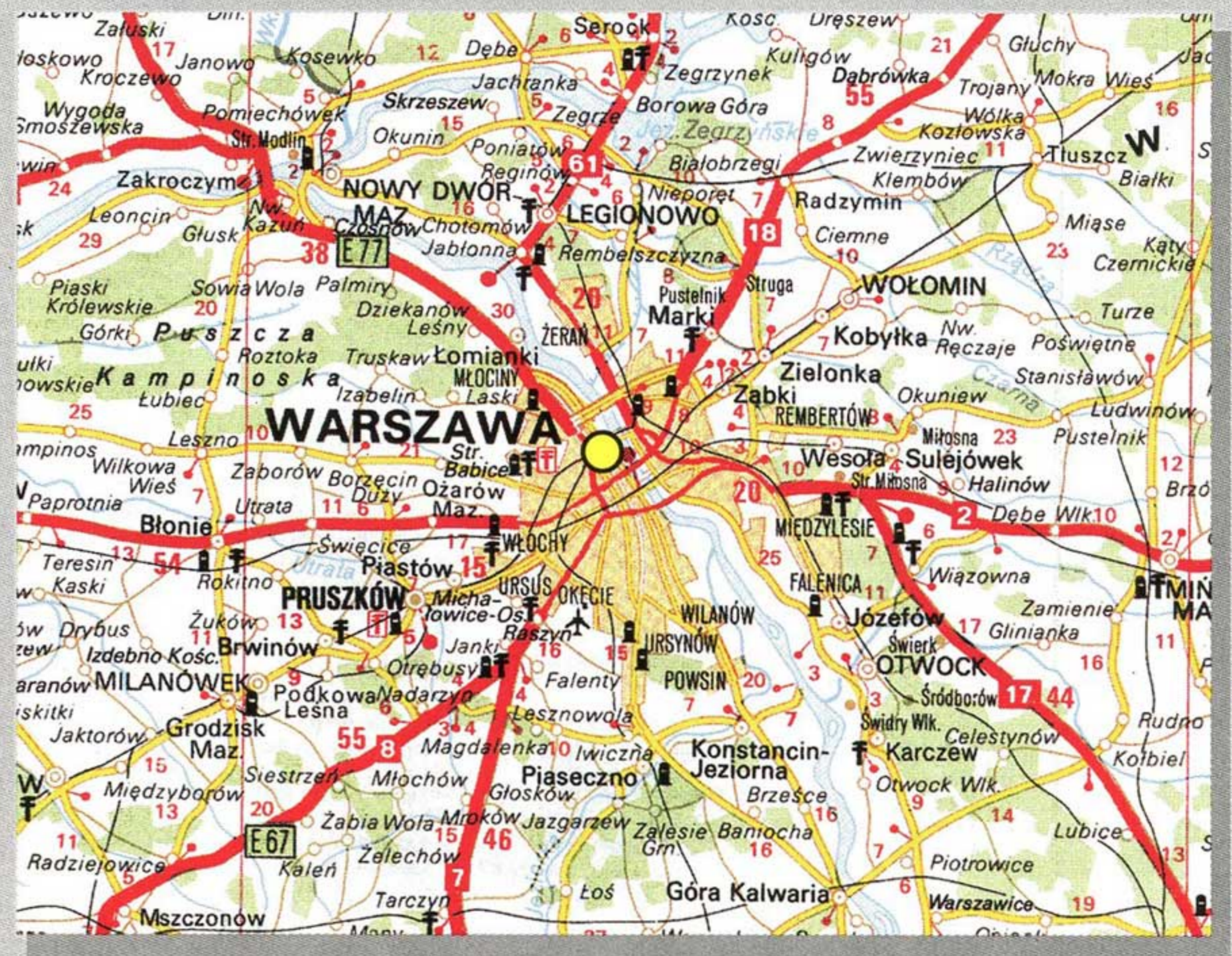
For centuries, Warsaw was a multiethnic city. Jews, whose presence is documented in the city as early as 1414, became the second-largest group, after Poles. By 1861, Jews comprised one-third of the population, a proportion they maintained until the Holocaust. In 1939, there were about 350,000 Jews in Warsaw, making it the largest Jewish community in Europe, and second only to New York in the world.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Warsaw Jews were still encumbered by numerous residential and employment restrictions as well as special taxes. But in the 1860s, in an effort to win the support of Jews against the Poles, the czar lifted many of the restrictions against the Jews in Warsaw and the surrounding provinces. Economic activity surged as Warsaw was flooded with new residents—small-town Jews and peasants fleeing the overpopulated countryside. By the end of the nineteenth century, Warsaw had become the economic, political and cultural capital of the Jews of Poland.

Hasidism sank deep roots in Warsaw in the nineteenth century. At the same time, a group of upper-class, Polish-speaking Jews began to advocate the integration of Jews into Polish society. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Warsaw became the headquarters for a large number of Jewish political parties that advanced a variety of ideologies based on different combinations of socialism and nationalism. By the interwar period, even Orthodox Jews had organized themselves into a powerful political party.

Under the influence of I. L. Peretz, who lived in Warsaw from 1890 to 1915, Warsaw became the center of a rapidly growing modern culture based in the Yiddish language; the city was a magnet for Yiddish novelists, poets,

## WARSAW, VARSHAU, VARSHE, WARSCHAU, VARSHA



journalists and theater people. At the same time, some Jews began to use the Polish language as a way of meeting Jewish needs, and in some circles, modern Hebrew began to develop as well. Nor did traditional life languish. In Warsaw in the 1920s, according to incomplete statistics, there were 442 synagogues and prayer houses for a population of 350,000 Jews. Jewish cooperatives, credit unions, orphanages, hospitals, newspapers, publishing houses, theater companies, orchestras, choirs, sports clubs and cultural societies were the links in a far-flung network whose center was Jewish Warsaw.

The Germans occupied Warsaw in September 1939. In October 1940, a ghetto was established; it was sealed the following month. Half a million Jews were packed into the ghetto, making it the largest in German-occupied Europe. Over the next two years, the death rate in the ghetto from starvation and disease was 10 percent annually. Nevertheless, a multitude of organizations, from soup kitchens to schools to theaters, continued to function, and a resistance movement began to form.

From July to September 1942, the Nazis shipped 250,000 Jews from the infamous Umschlagplatz (transfer point) in Warsaw to the death camp at Treblinka. During the following months, the Jewish resistance movement came into its own. It repelled an attempt to deport more Jews in January 1943, then organized the final defense of the ghetto. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began on April 19, 1943, pitted about 750 barely armed youngsters and some 40,000 unarmed Jews who had dug into underground bunkers against 2,000 superbly armed German troops. The uprising

lasted nearly a month; its defeat required the incineration of nearly every building in the ghetto. The old Jewish quarter of Warsaw was completely destroyed. Mordechai Anielewicz, the leader of the uprising, and his general staff committed suicide in their bunker at Miła 18 to avoid capture. To celebrate his victory, General Jurgen Stroop, the German commander, ordered the dynamiting of Warsaw's Great Synagogue.

Several thousand Jews returned to Warsaw after the war. Most of those who remained after the first postwar years assimilated into Polish society. Most of these Jews, however, were driven from Poland in the years 1968 to 1970 during an official "anti-Zionist" campaign; nevertheless, a small organized Jewish community has managed to survive until the present. Today, with substantial aid from Jewish groups abroad such as the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, and some Polish government support, this community supports a Jewish elementary school, a pre-school, summer camp Yiddish theater, a newspaper, and two rabbis. Other groups, such as a society of child survivors of the Holocaust, function as well. Warsaw is also the site of the Jewish Historical Institute, which houses invaluable Jewish archival documents and objects.

#### Location

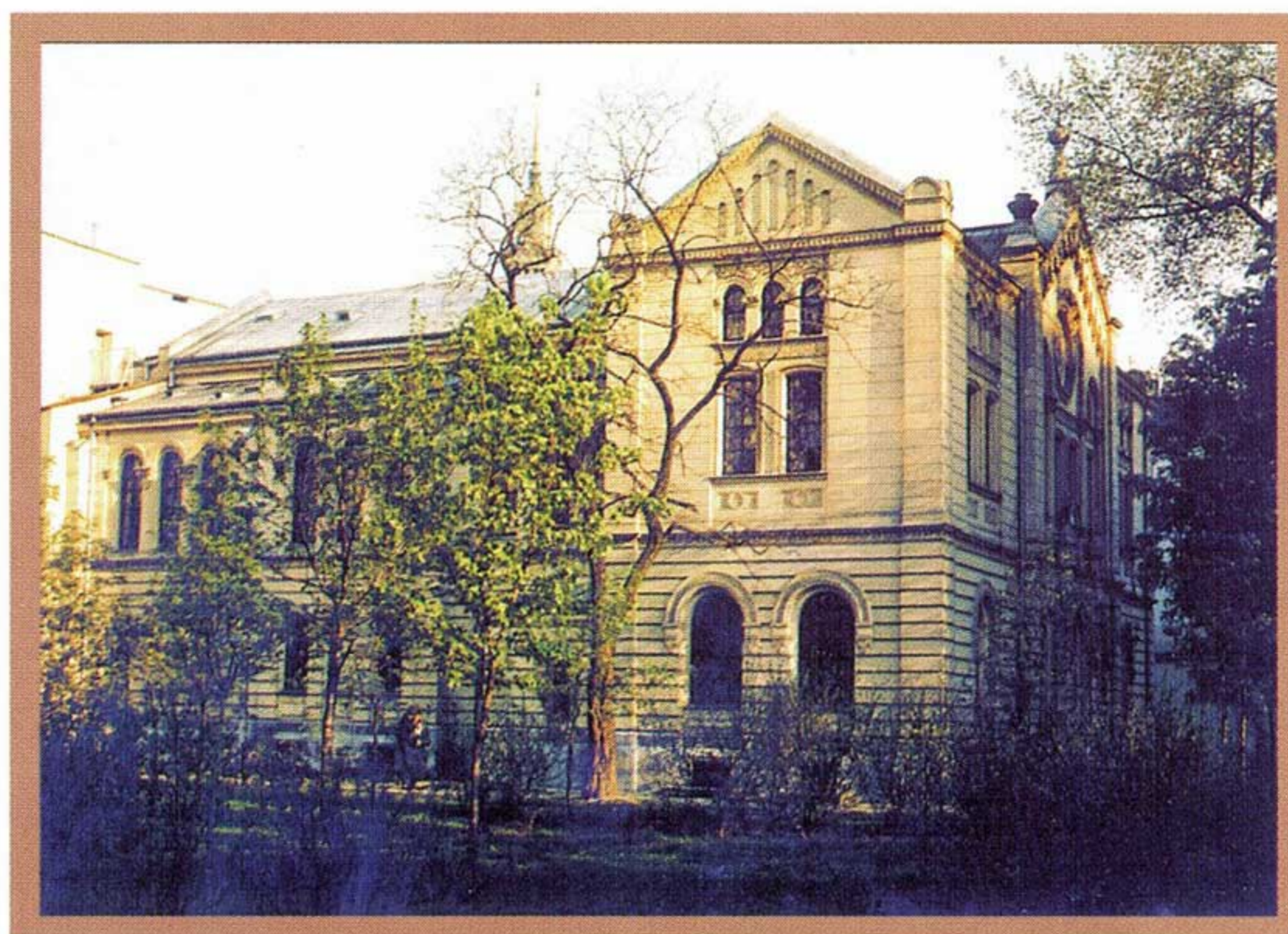
134 km NE of Łódź  
52°12' / 21°02'  
Voivodship: Warsaw

#### General Population, 1939

1,181,850 (33% Jewish)

#### General Population, 1994

1,641,941



■ Nożyk Synagogue, ul. Twarda 6, today

1

#### SYNAGOGUE

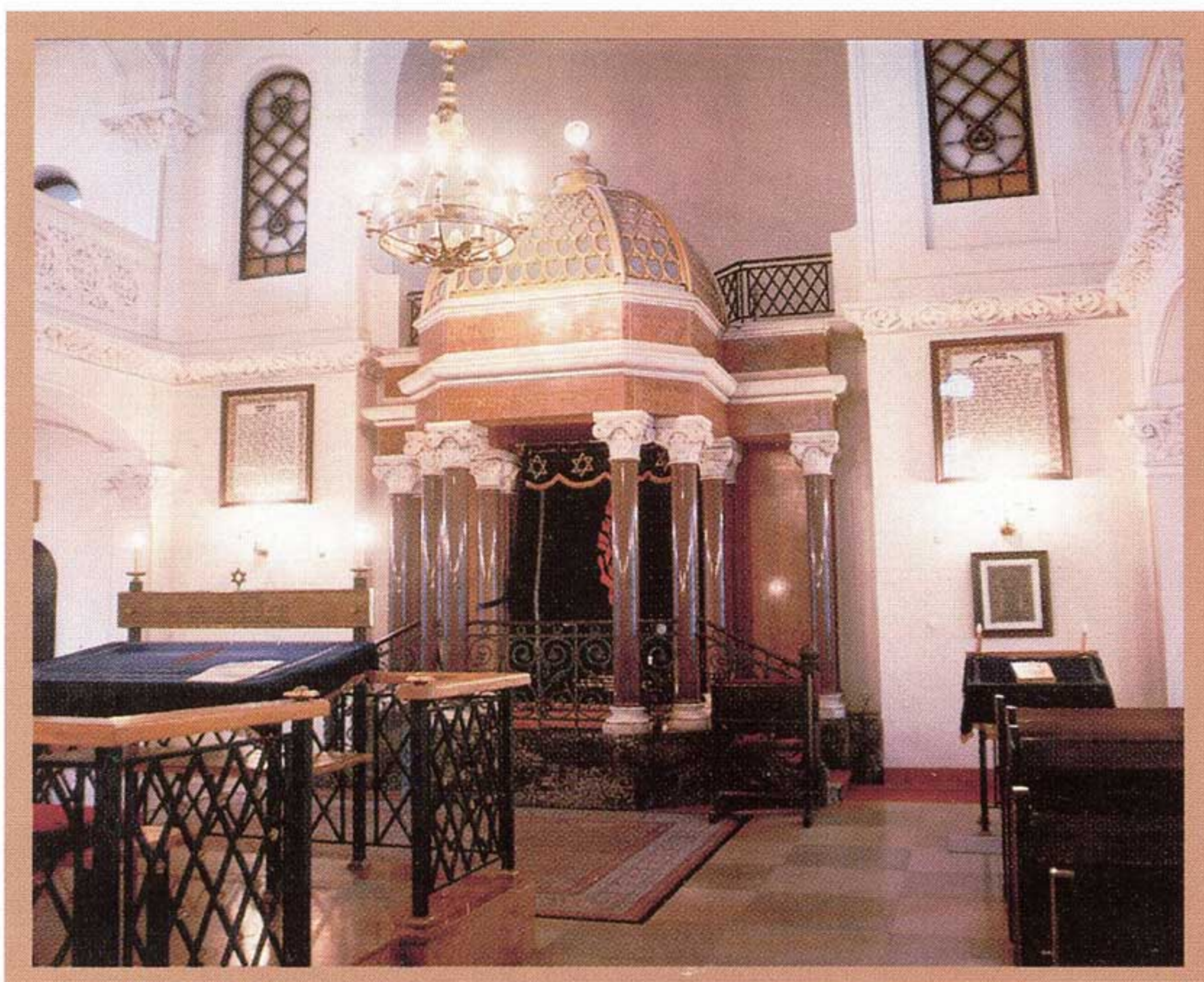
ul. Twarda 6

Nożyk Synagogue, the only synagogue not destroyed by the Nazis and today Warsaw's only Jewish place of worship, was founded in 1902 by Zalman Nożyk, a Warsaw merchant. Services are held daily and led by Rabbi Menachem Joskowicz, who has served as chief rabbi of Warsaw since 1989. During the war, the Germans used the synagogue as a stable and barn. It was rebuilt after the war and renovated in 1983.



■ Nożyk Synagogue, ul. Twarda 6, today

2



■ Nożyk Synagogue interior, ul. Twarda 6, today

3

### SITES OF SOME FORMER SYNAGOGUES

ul. Tłomackie

(directly opposite the Jewish Historical Institute)

Great Synagogue, completed in 1878 and blown up by Nazis on May 16, 1943, after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The modern blue glass skyscraper now occupying this site encountered extensive delays (30 years) and problems during construction. Local legend interprets the long delay as a form of retribution for rebuilding on the site of the destroyed synagogue.

ul. Szeroka and Petersburska

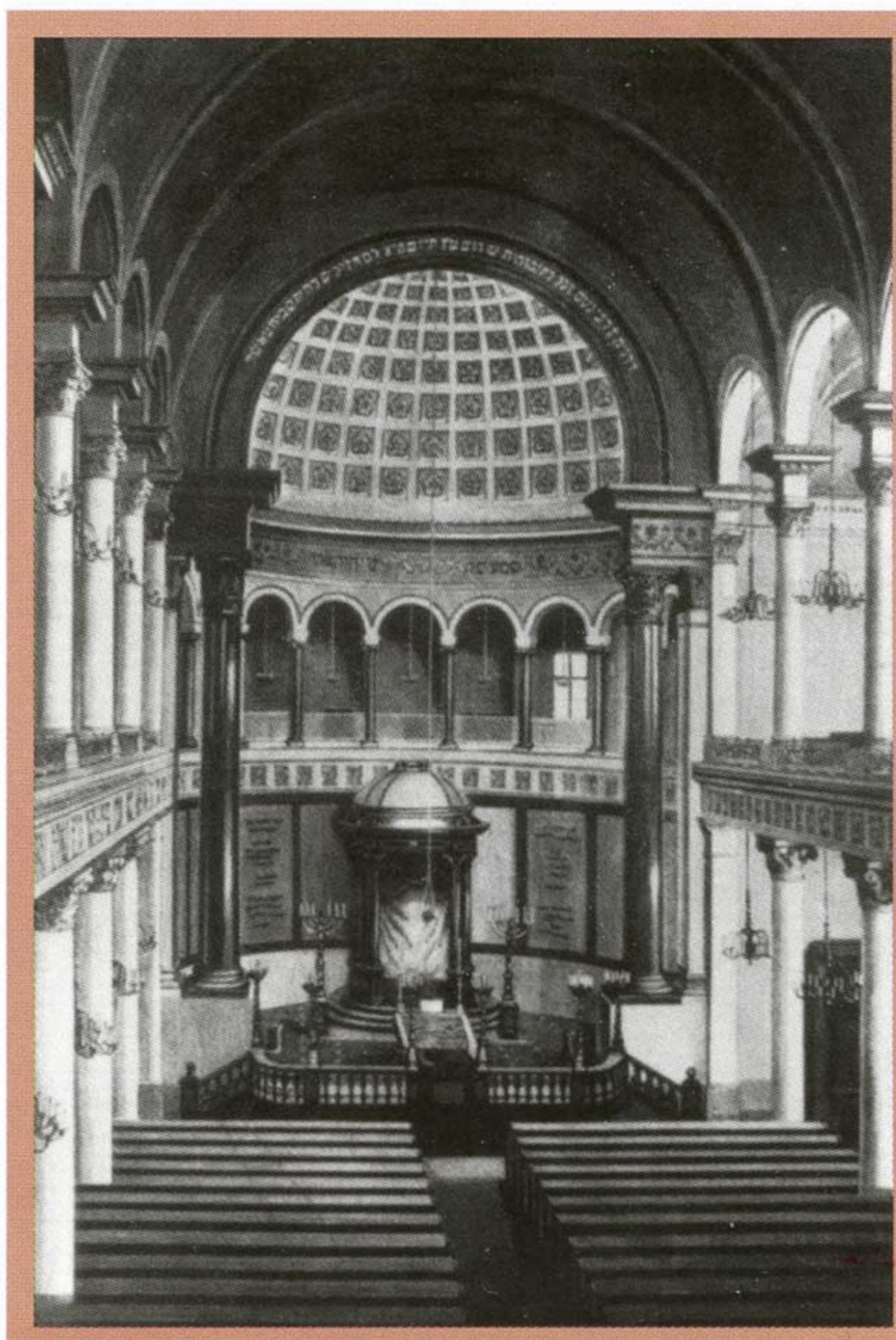
(now Wójcicka and Jagiellońska)

Synagogue built in 1840, devastated during the Holocaust and destroyed in the 1950s.



■ Great Synagogue, ul. Tłomackie, built in 1878, destroyed by Nazis in 1943

4



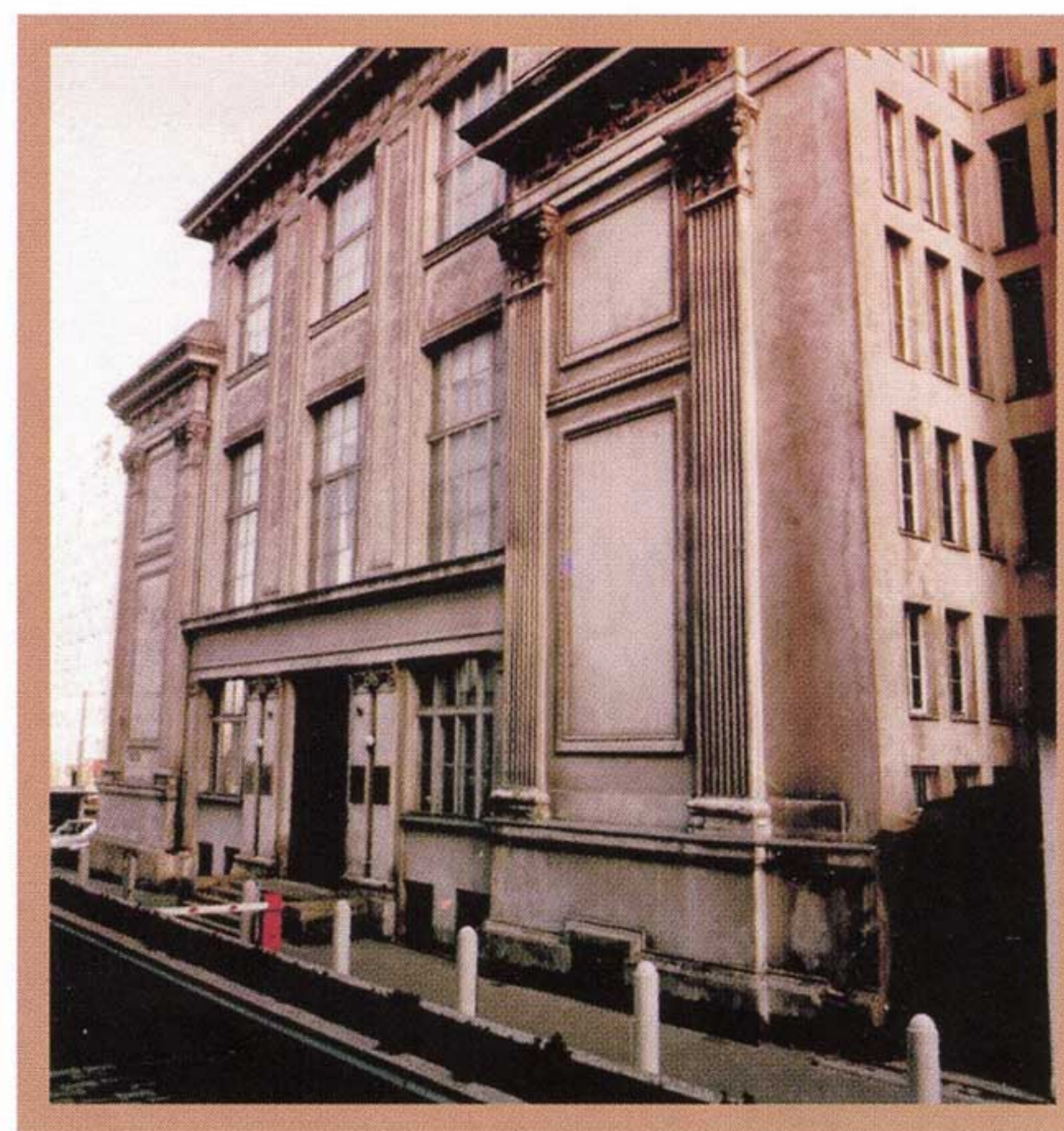
■ Great Synagogue interior, ul. Tłomackie, pre-Holocaust

5

### FORMER PRAYER HOUSES

ul. Twarda 4; ul. Bródnowska 8; ul. Gęsia 5; ul. Wspólna 20;  
ul. Nalewki 27

Pre-1939, Warsaw had more than 450 Jewish houses of prayer, ranging from great synagogues to hundreds of Shtiblekh.



■ Jewish Historical Institute (former Library of Great Synagogue and Institute for Judaic Studies), 1994

6

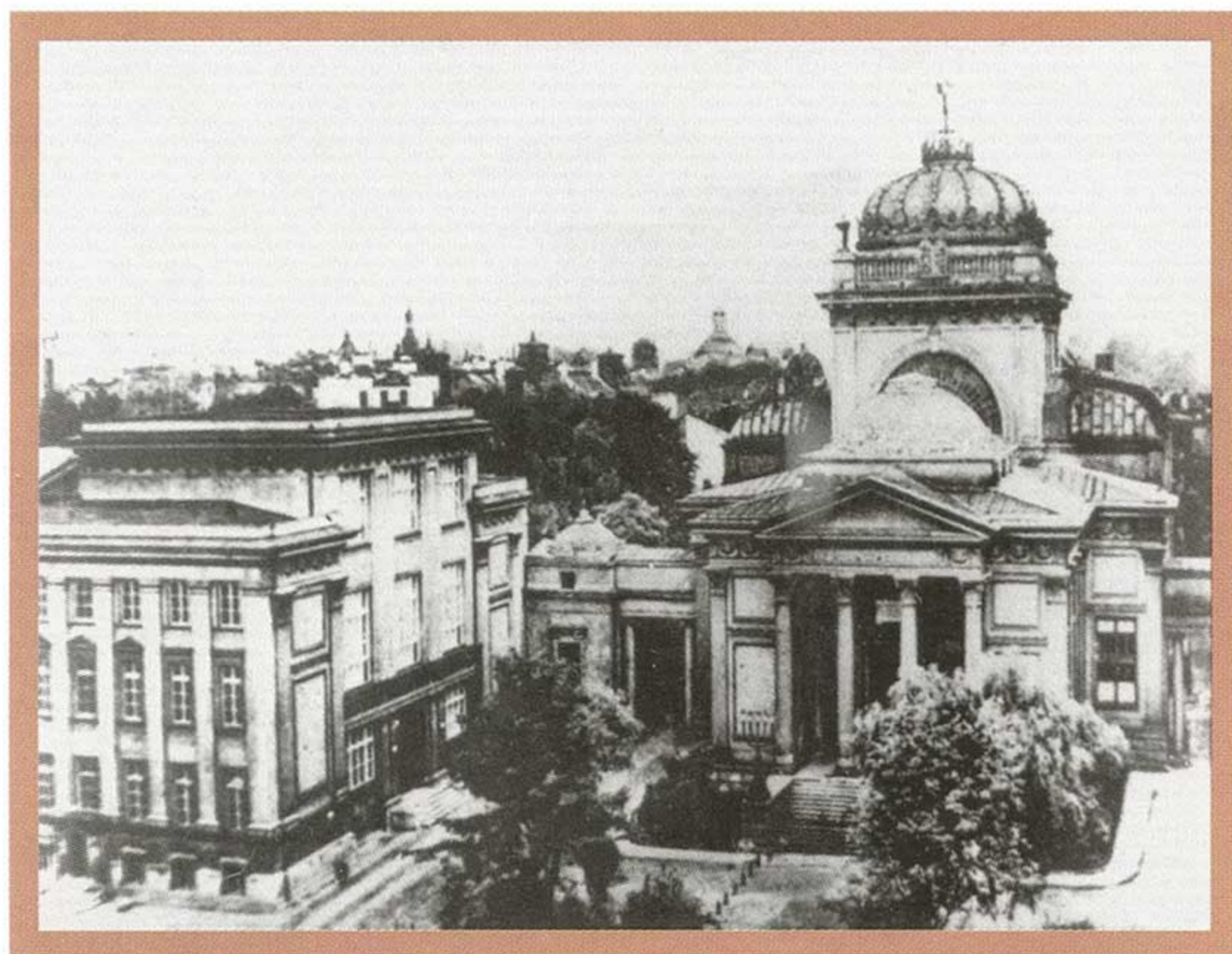
## JEWISH CEMETERIES

ul. Okopowa (entrance on Gęsia Street)

The old cemetery, established in 1806, functions to this day and is surrounded by a brick wall. There are approximately 250,000 tombstones, including those of many well-known figures in Polish-Jewish culture. Among them are Szymon Anski (1863–1920), ethnographer and author of the celebrated Yiddish play *The Dybbuk*; historian and diplomat Szymon Askenazy (1866–1935); Jewish historian Majer Bałaban (1877–1942); banker and art collector Mathias Bersohn (1824–1908); Adam Czerniaków (1880–1942), head of the Warsaw Judenrat (Jewish Council) under the Germans; Ester Rachel Kamińska (1870–1925), known as the mother of Yiddish theater; Ludwik Natanson (1822–1896), physician and communal leader; Samuel Orgelbrand (1810–1868), publisher; I. L. Peretz (1852–1915), known as the father of modern Yiddish literature; Ber Sonnenberg (1764–1822), merchant; and Ludwik Zamenhof (1859–1917), creator of the “international language” Esperanto. Much of the cemetery is overgrown with shrubs, weeds and trees, which often makes it impossible to search for individual tombstones. The cemetery caretaker, Bolesław Szenicer, has numerous handwritten notebooks documenting thousands of tombstones. Within the last few years, he has entered about 42,000 names and tombstone locations into a computer database, and he can be very helpful in locating individual tombstones. There is a small bookshop in the cemetery office.

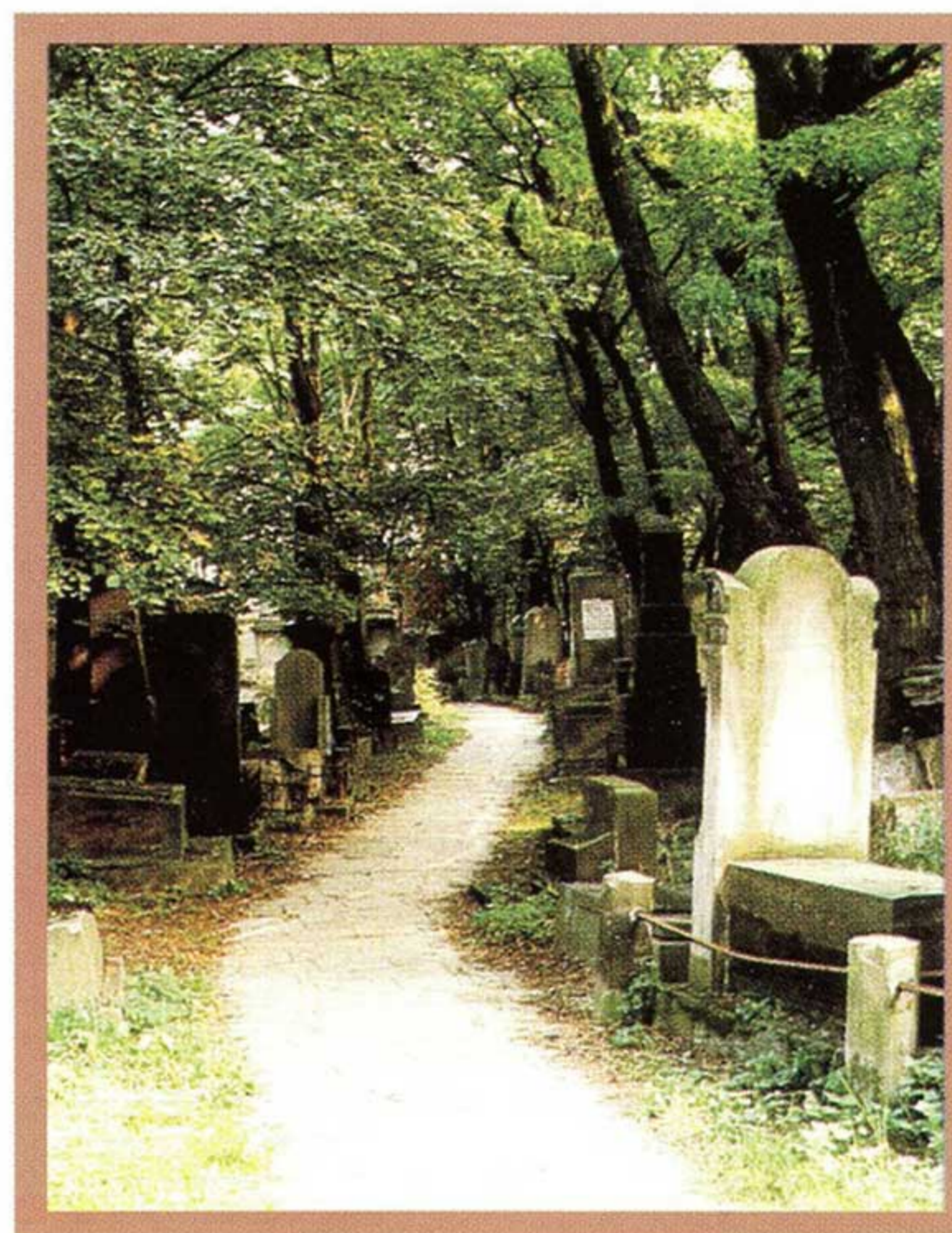
ul. Św. Wincentego and ul. Odrowąza  
(Bródno quarter of Warsaw)

Cemetery established in 1780 and devastated by Nazis in 1941. About 1,000 tombstones are preserved.



■ Institute for Judaic Studies and the Great Synagogue, pre-Holocaust

7



■ Jewish cemetery, ul. Okopowa, today

8

## HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS AND MONUMENTS

Monuments and markers are part of the “Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle,” designed by architects Z. Gašior and S. Jankowski.

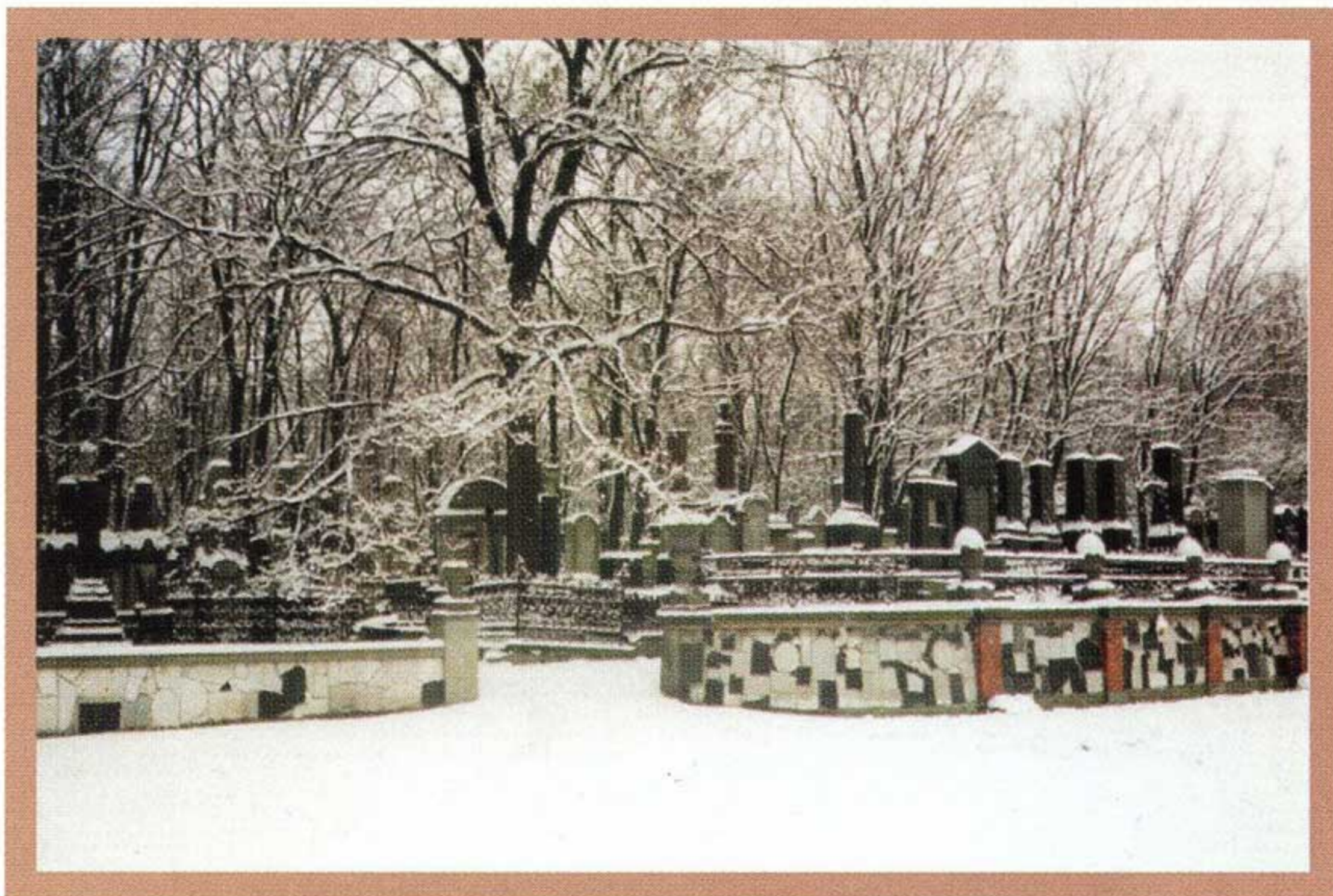
ul. Anielewicza

Named for Mordechai Anielewicz, commander of the Jewish Fighters Organization (ŻOB) during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943.



■ Monument to Janusz Korczak at Jewish cemetery, ul. Okopowa, c. 1990

9



■ Jewish cemetery, ul. Okopowa, 1989

10



■ Monument to Janusz Korczak and Jewish orphanage,  
ul. Jaktorowska 8, 1988

12

ul. Miła 18

Site of Jewish resistance bunker where Mordechai Anielewicz and others committed suicide.

ul. Długa 29

Former site of Hotel Polski, from which hundreds of Jews with Latin American passports were deported on July 15, 1943, to death camps after being promised a safe exit to neutral countries.

ul. Dzielna 24/26

Former Nazi Pawiak Prison, now a museum.

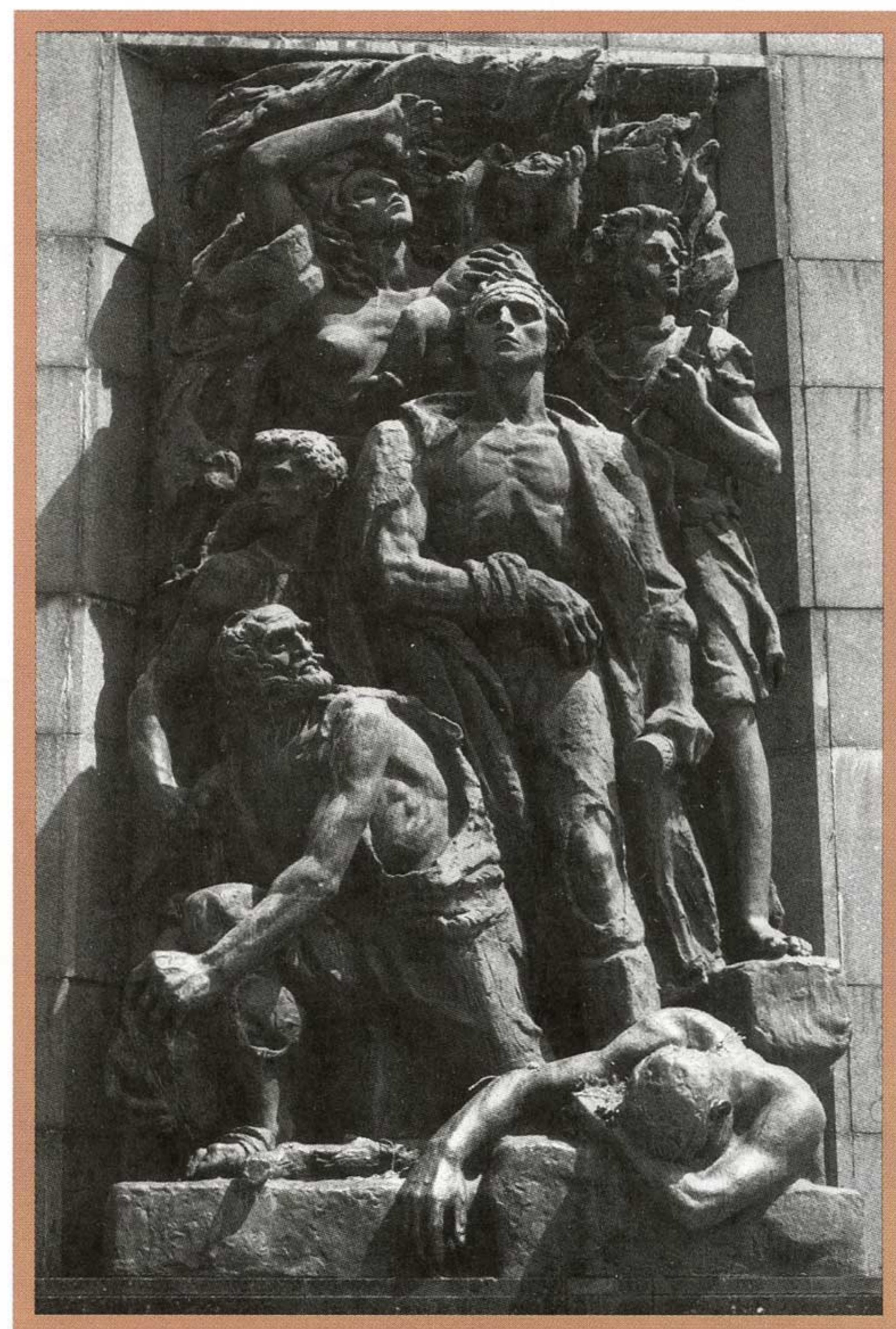
ul. Jaktorowska 8 (formerly ul. Krochmalna 92)

Monument to Dr. Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit), director of a Jewish orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto. Korczak went to his death at Treblinka along with the children he refused to abandon.



■ Ghetto Heroes Monument, ul. Zamenhofska, c. 1988

11



■ Detail of Ghetto Heroes Monument (see Fig. 11, left), 1977

13

ul. Zamenhofska

The 36-foot bronze sculpture by Natan Rapaport, built in 1948, is inscribed in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish: "From the Jewish People to Its Fighters and Martyrs."



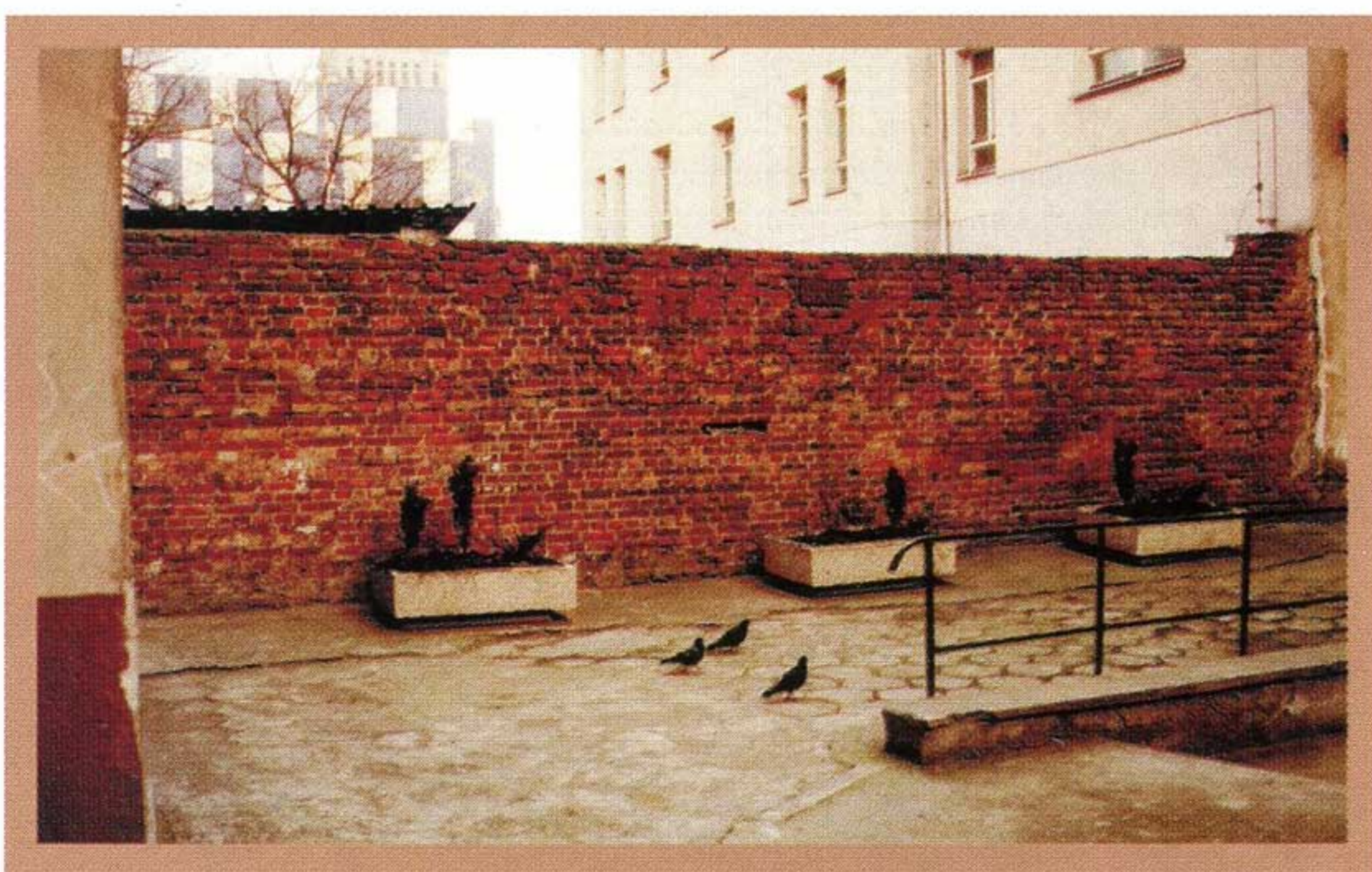
■ The Umschlagplatz Monument, ul. Stawki, c. 1988 14

ul. Stawki (Umschlagplatz)  
Monument at site of transfer point (Umschlagplatz) from which 300,000 Jews from the Warsaw ghetto were deported to Treblinka in 1942–1943.

ul. Stawki 5/7  
Former SS building where deportations from the Umschlagplatz were ordered.  
Current use: University faculty building.

ul. Stawki 6/8  
Building where Jews were held prior to deportation to Treblinka.

ul. Złota 60 and Sienna 55  
Fragments of the Warsaw ghetto walls.



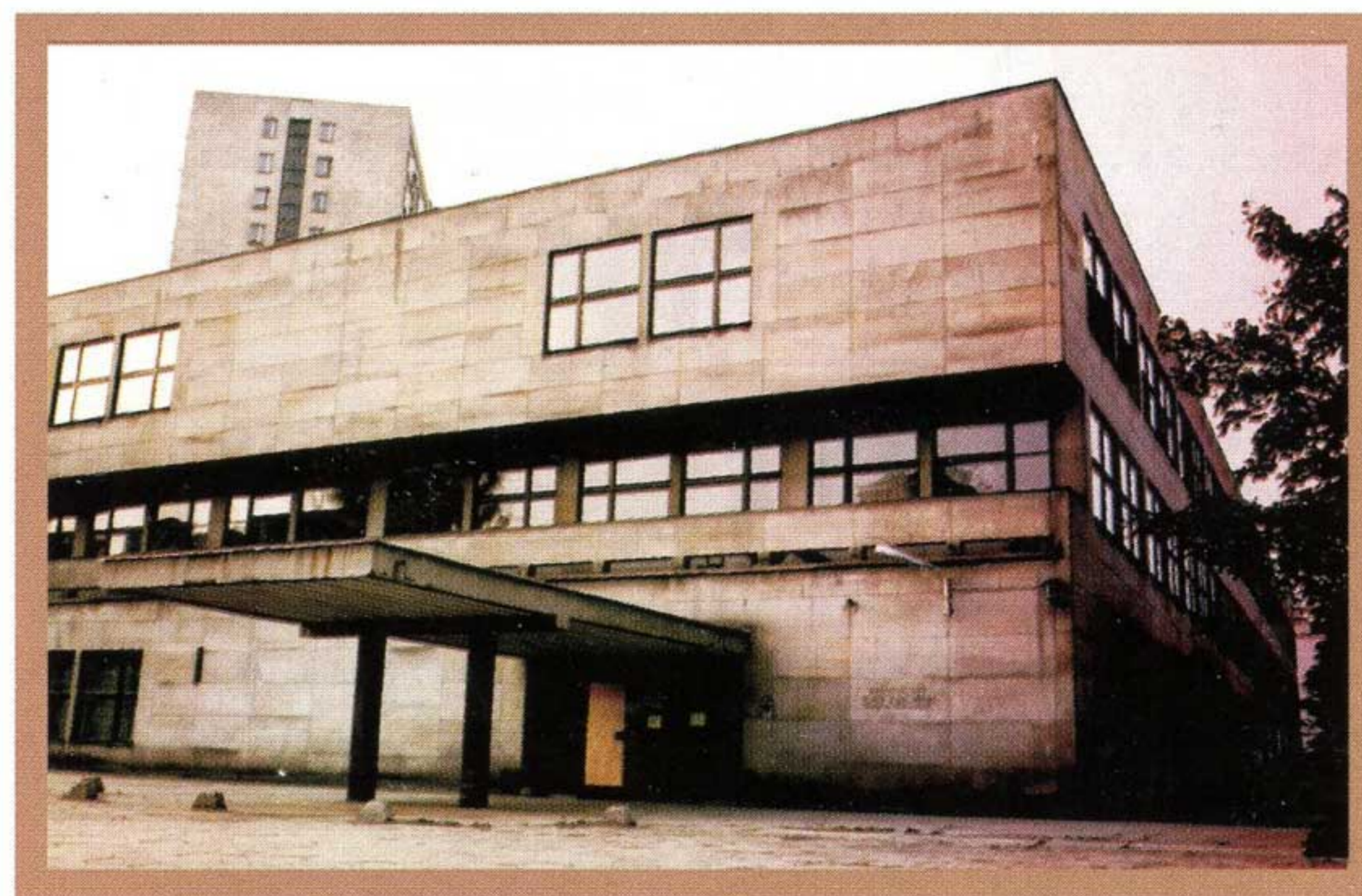
■ Fragment of Warsaw ghetto wall, ul. Sienna 55, today 15

## DEPORTATIONS

Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück, Gross-Rosen, Majdanek, Sachsenhausen; concentration camps, prisons or slave labor sites in Germany.

ul. Twarda 6  
Jewish community complex, including:  
Building 1: Synagogue, kosher kitchen, mikvah, Jewish community office.  
Building 2: The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, Association of Child Survivors of the Holocaust, Polish Union of Jewish Students, Association of Jewish War Veterans, Jewish kindergarten, Kosher kitchen, "Our Roots," Joint Distribution Committee, periodicals Midrash and Jidele.

Plac Grzybowski 12/16 (near synagogue)  
Jewish Cultural House, consisting of Yiddish State Theater and Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland. The theater presents regular performances of Yiddish plays. Until 1968, the theater's director and star performer was Ida Kamińska, daughter of the legendary Yiddish actress Ester Rachel Kamińska, for whom the theater was named. In the same building are editorial offices of *Słowo Żydowskie*, the only Jewish newspaper in Poland published in both Yiddish and Polish.



■ The Yiddish State Theater, Plac Grzybowski 12/16, today 16

ul. Sienna 60  
Bersohn's and Bauman's Children's Hospital.  
Current use: hospital.

ul. Jagiellońska 88 (Praga section of Warsaw)  
Building of Michał Bersohn Jewish Educational Center (1911–1914).  
Current use: Baj Theater for children.

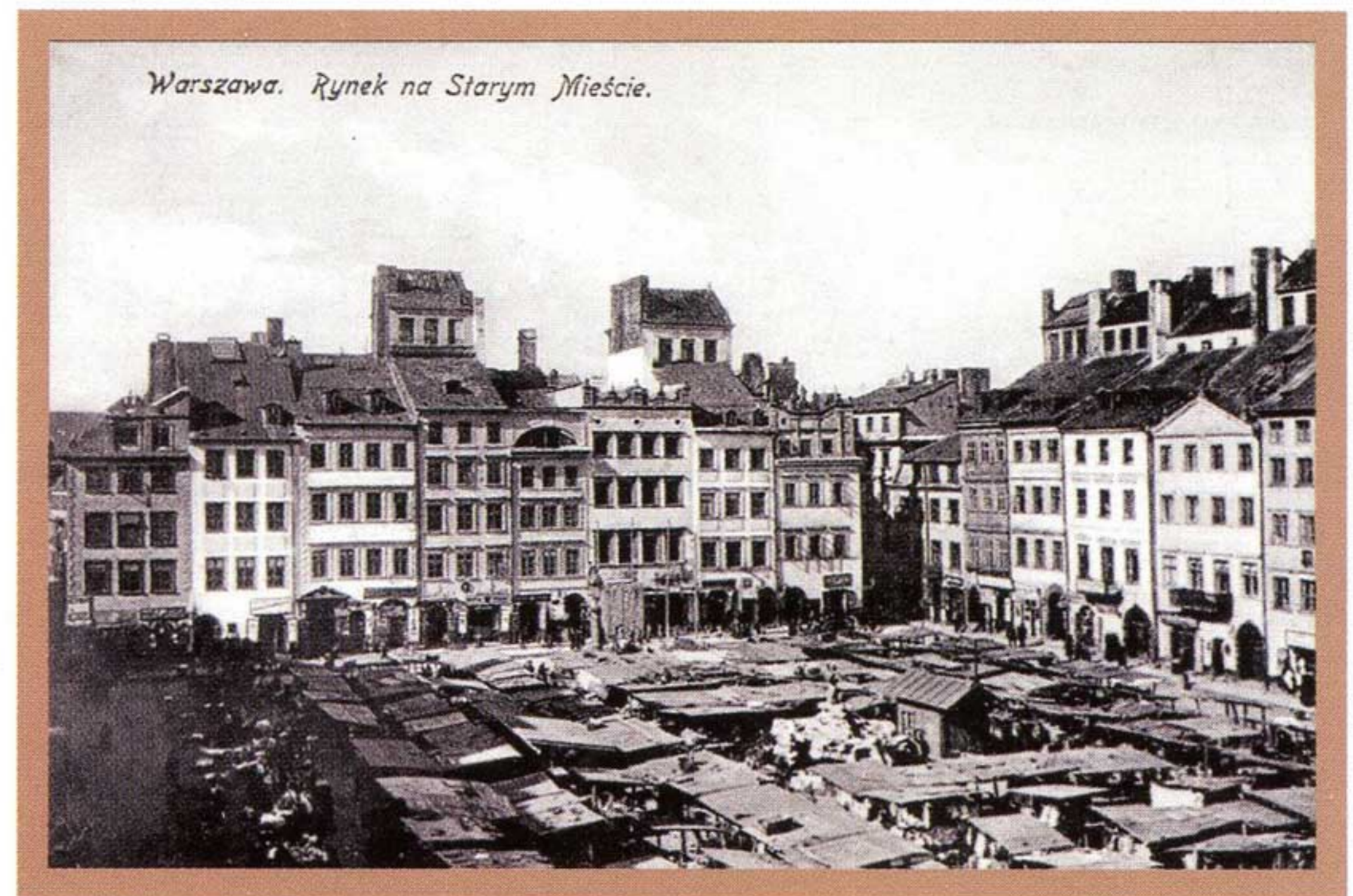
ul. Zamenhofa 5  
Plaque on building in honor of Dr. Ludwik Zamenhof, the Białystok physician who invented the international language, Esperanto, in 1887.

ul. Sierakowskiego 7 (Praga Section of Warsaw)  
Building of Jewish Academic House.  
Current use: police department.



Old Town square, View 1, c. 1917

17



Old Town square, View 2, c. 1917

19

## INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

### The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation (RSLF)

ul. Twarda 6  
00-104 Warszawa  
Tel: 620-3496; 652-2150

Since 1988, the RSLF has organized summer (three two-week sessions) and winter (two one-week sessions) programs for young and old alike. In 1989, the RSLF opened the first Jewish kindergarten (with 34 children today) and, in 1994, a Jewish primary school (with 67 children today). In 1993, the RSLF opened the first Jewish Educational Center/Young Club in Warsaw. Today, there are also clubs in Kraków, Wrocław, Łódź and Gdańsk. The main weekly event is a Friday night Shabbat dinner, open to both local residents and visitors. The RSLF also supports the Makabi Sports Club; Bejtejnu (the Holocaust Survivor Center); the Polish Union for Jewish Students; the Association of Children of the Holocaust; Jewish War Veterans; and two Jewish periodicals in Polish: *Jidele*, a student magazine, and *Midrash*, a monthly.

### American-Polish-Israeli Shalom Foundation

Pl. Grzybowski 12/16  
00-104 Warszawa  
Tel: 620-0559

Established in 1988 in Warsaw by Golda Tencer, director general, the foundation promotes Polish and Jewish culture and supports Jewish artistic culture in Poland.

### Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland

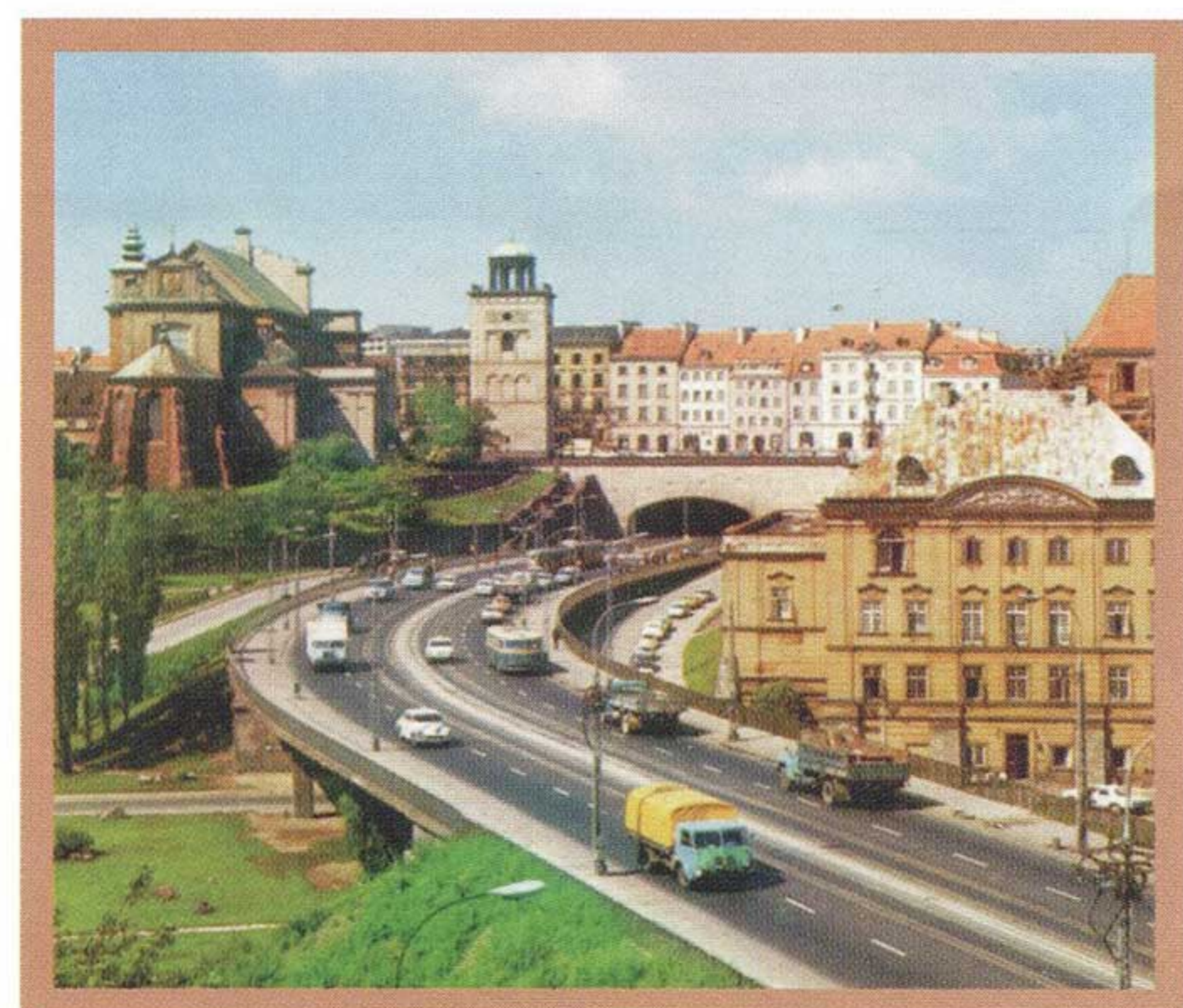
Pl. Grzybowski 12/16  
00-104 Warszawa  
Tel: 620-0554

The Society has branches throughout Poland and is a lay organization engaged in the promotion of Jewish culture through lectures and meetings. The Society cooperates with the Jewish Historical Institute, the Yiddish Theatre and the Jewish Religious Union in Poland.



Town hall, c. 1917

18



Old Town in distance, today

20



Old Town square, View 3, c. 1917

21



Old Town square (rebuilt), today

23

### Jewish Information and Tourist Bureau (Our Roots)

ul. Twarda 6  
00-105 Warszawa  
Tel/fax: 620-0556

Travel agency specializing in Jewish sites. Local guidebooks to Jewish sites are available in this office for Warsaw, Kraków, Lublin and Łódź. Arrangements can also be made for out-of-town excursions with car, driver and translator. The staff is very knowledgeable and helpful.

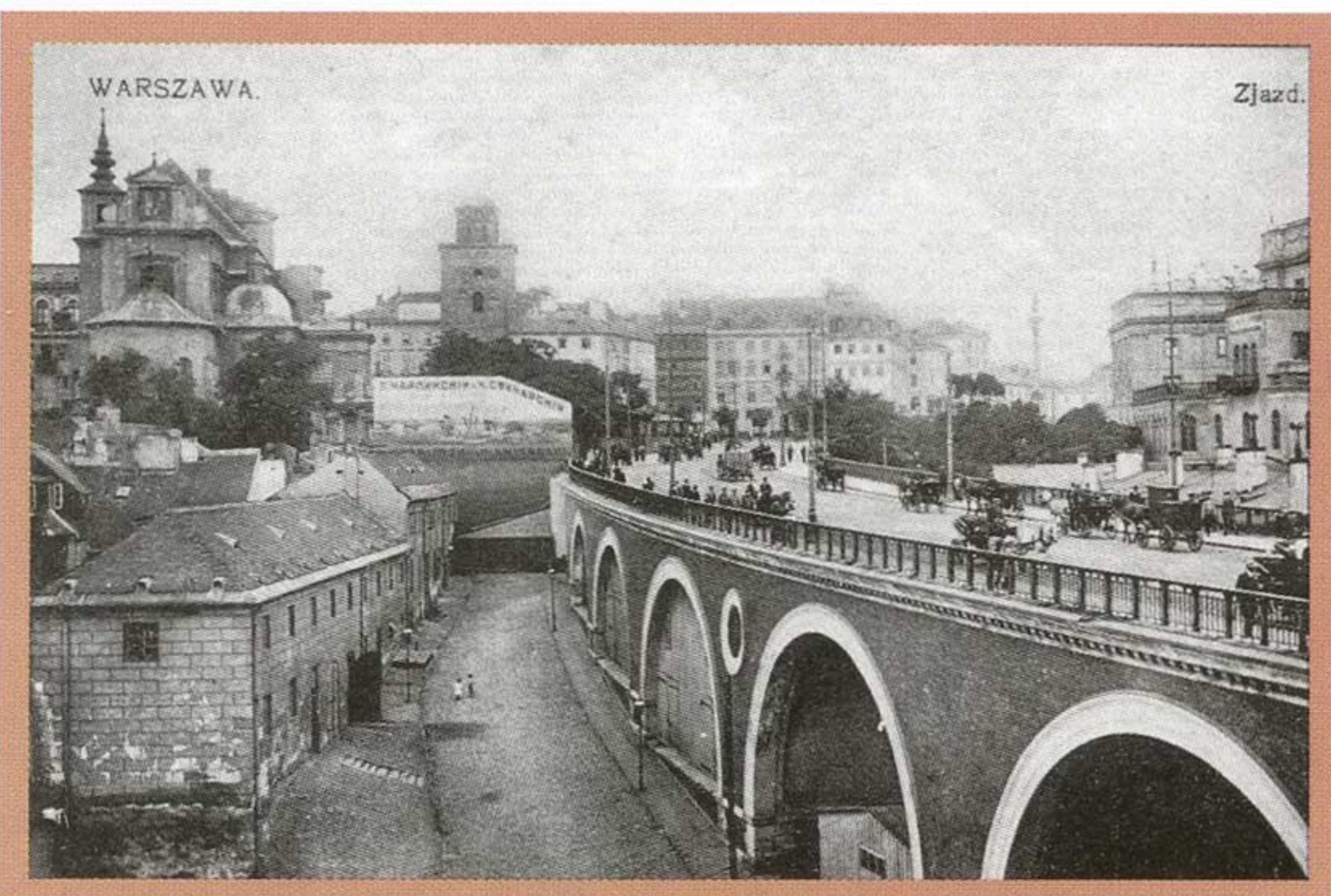
### Remembrance Foundation

Aleje Ujazdowskie 9  
00-583 Warszawa  
Tel: 625-5339; fax: 694-7345

Upkeep and repair of Jewish cemeteries; renovation and commemoration of synagogues and other Jewish monuments; cultural and educational activities concerning Polish-Jewish relations.

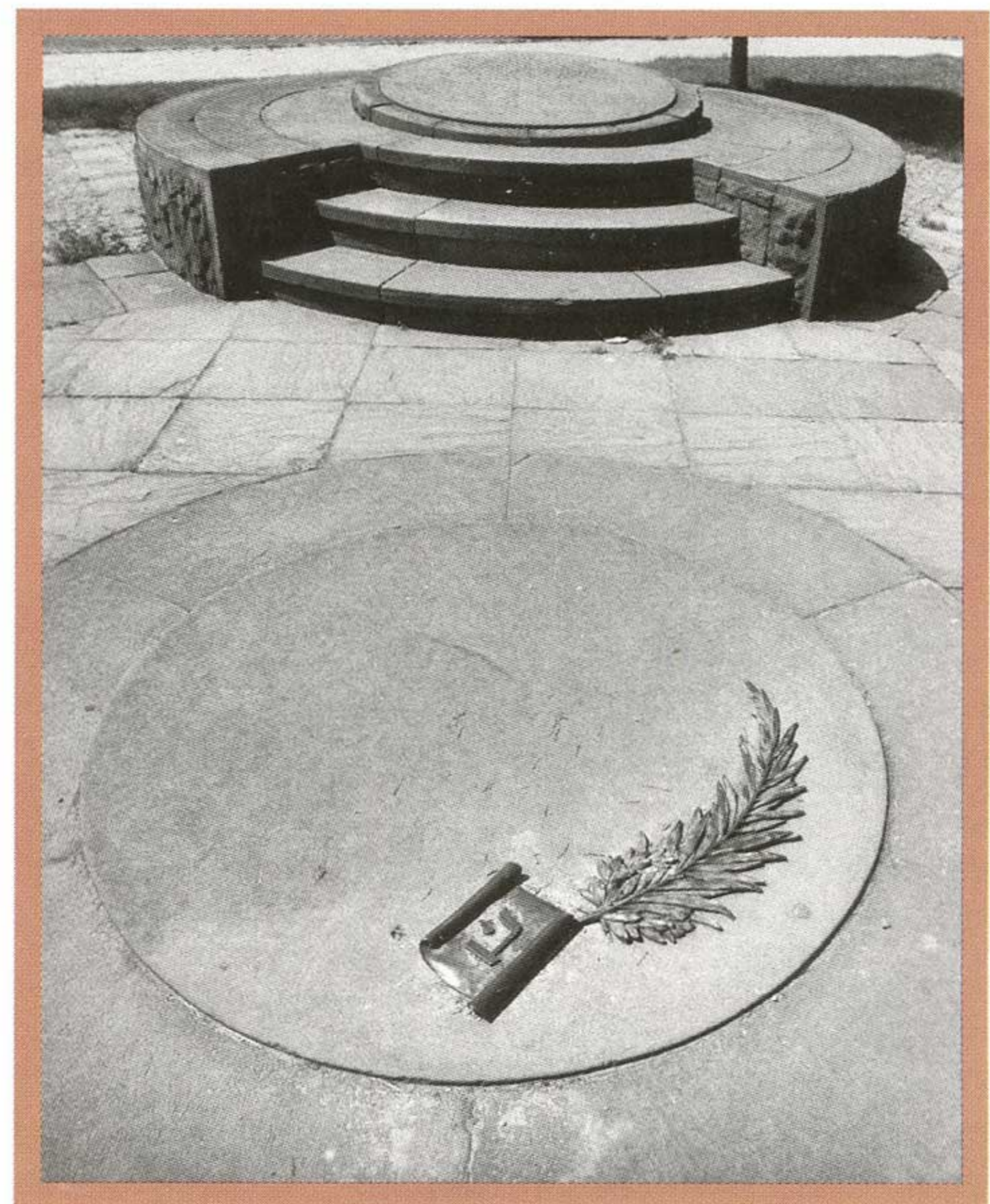
### JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE (ŻYDOWSKI INSTYTUT HISTORYCZNY)

Before the war, this building housed the Main Judaic Library and Institute for Judaic Studies. Now, the Jewish Historical Institute occupies the building and includes a museum, library and archives (see Chapter 5).



Local view, c. 1917

22



Monument to Warsaw Jews, raised on April 19, 1946, on the ghetto ruins, ul. Anielewicza, 1977

24



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ul. Marszałkowska, c. 1918

25

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ul. Aleje Jerozolimskie, c. 1918

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Aleje Jerozolimskie and ul. Marszałkowska, today

27



■ Palace in Wilanów, today

28

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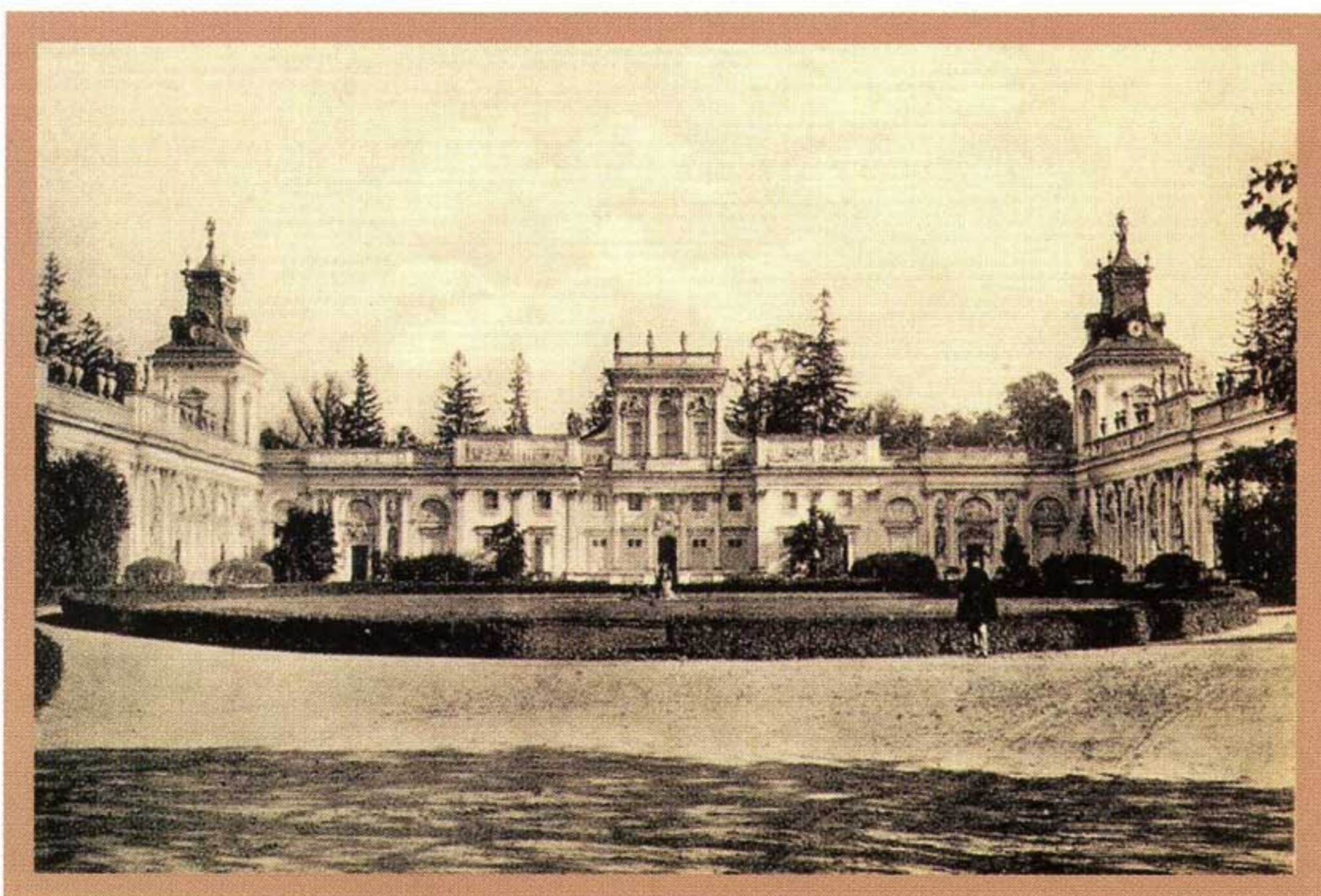
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■ Palace in Wilanów, c. 1918

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■ Hotel Bristol, 1909

30

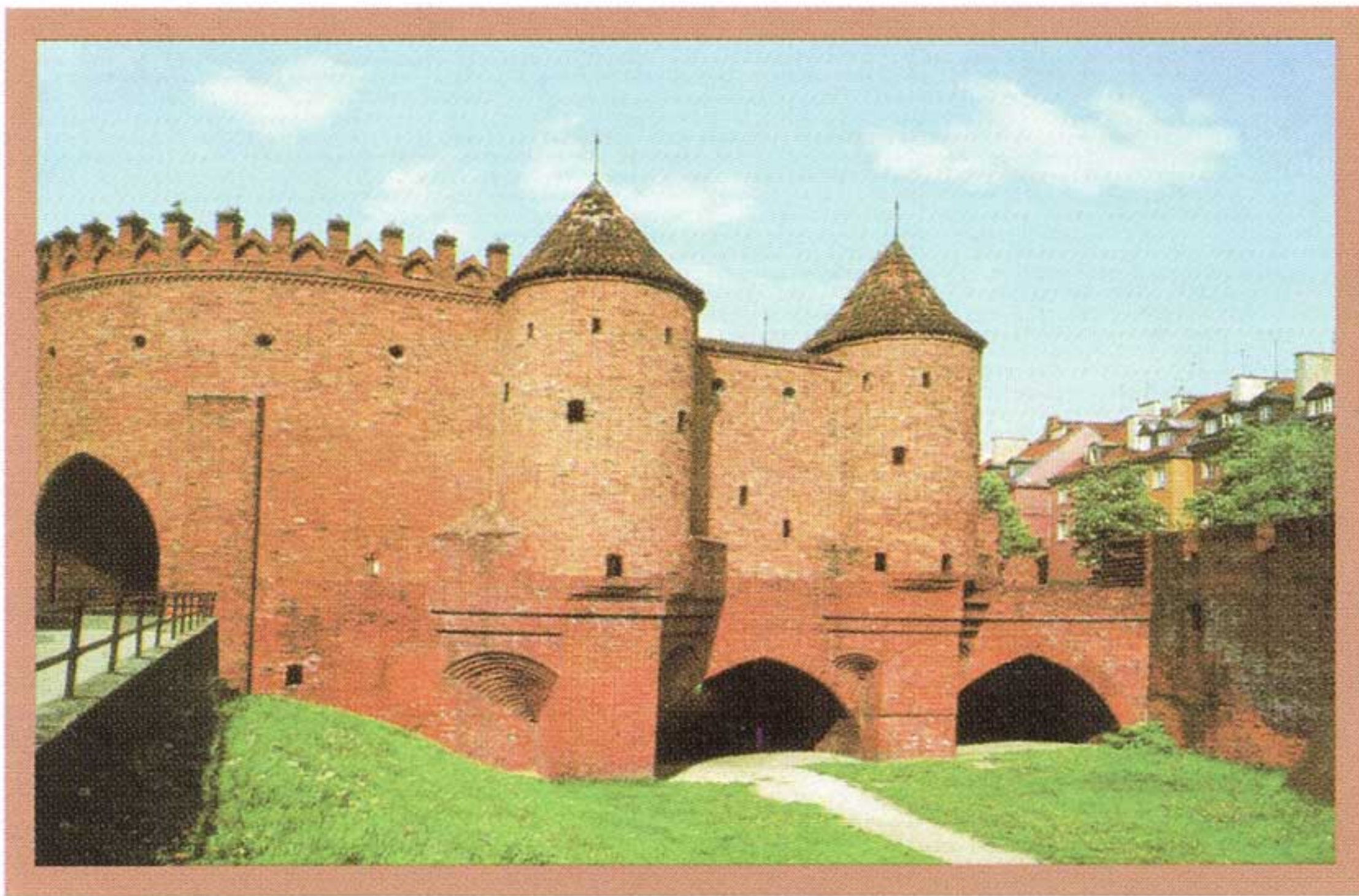


■ Hotel Bristol, today

31

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View of the Barbican, c. 1991

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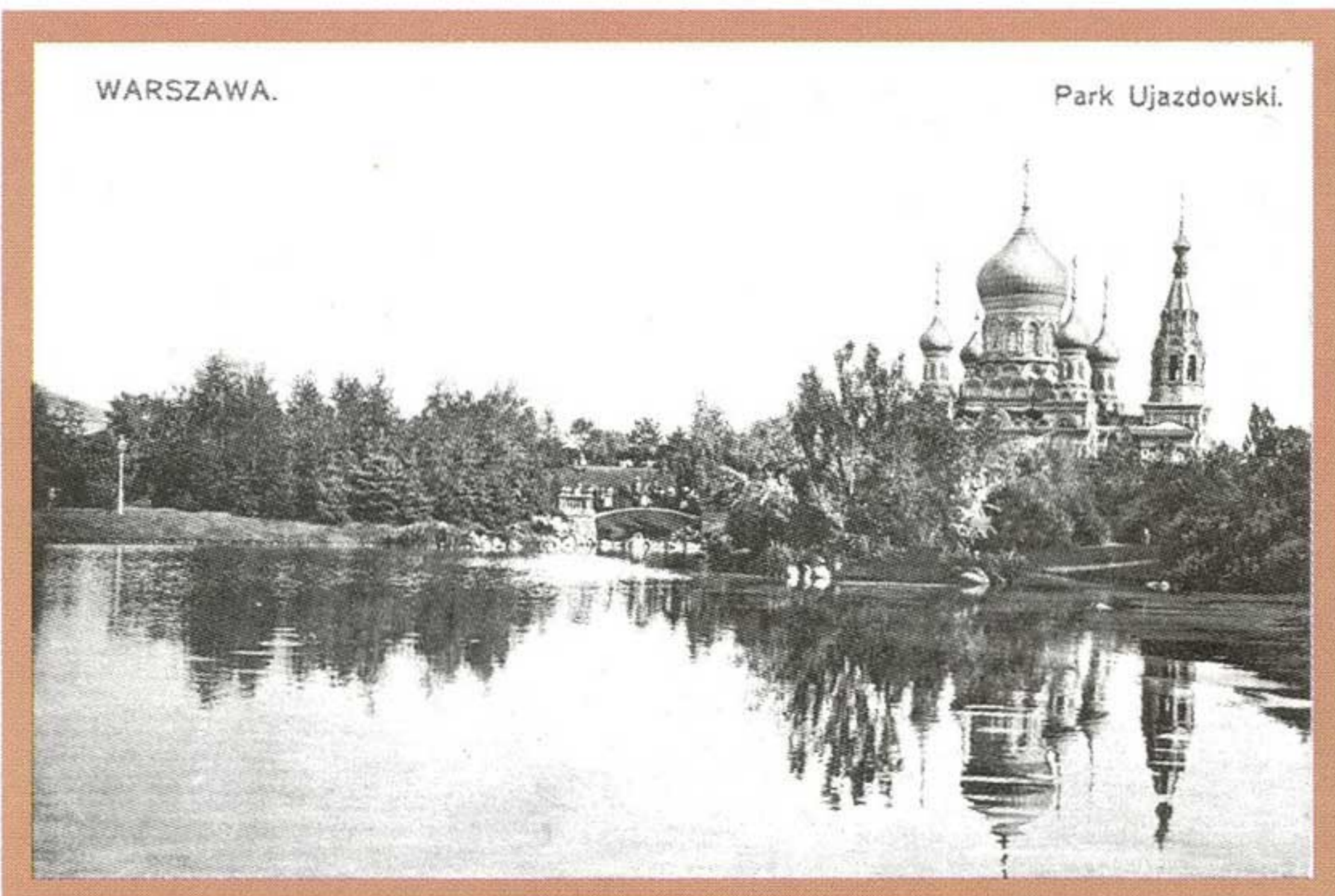
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Park Ujazdowski, pre-1918

33

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ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście, c. 1917

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1982

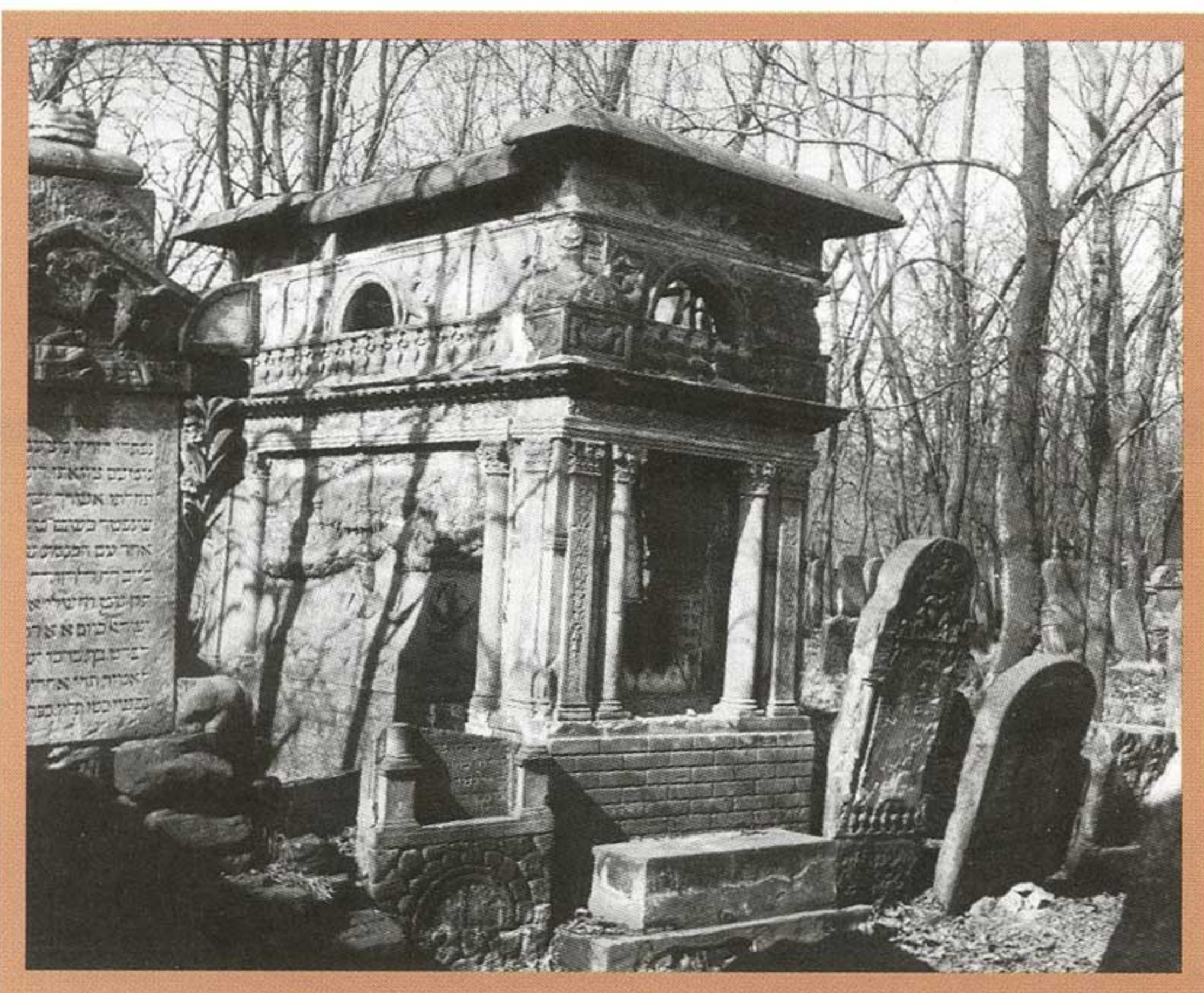
35

Jewish Cemetery, ul. Okopowa  
(figs. 35 and 37 are details of fig. 36)

**Upper left (fig. 35):** Bas-relief illustrating Psalm 137: “By the rivers of Babylon we sat down, there we wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows nearby, we hung up our harps.”

**Center left (fig. 36):** Monument of banker Berek Sonnenberg (1764–1822), son of wealthy merchant, Samuel Zbytkower. The two elaborate sculptured panels on the monument are described in figs. 35 and 37. Sculpture is attributed to David Friedlander.

**Lower left (fig. 37):** Bas-relief depicts view of Praga, a Warsaw suburb across the Vistula River, including the Jewish cemetery, at ul. Wincentego.



1982

36



Monument to Bund members who perished during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (sculpture by Natan Rapaport), 1982

38



1990

37

### BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES

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