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THE TOWN WALLS OF THE OLD CRACOW

The town of Cracow, newly founded in 1257 in German municipal law, below the Royal Castle on Wawel hill north of the outer bailey (*suburbium*) named Okól, was taken and destroyed by Tartars in 1259. It was only in 1285 that duke Leszek the Black (1279-1288) surrounded the town by the earthworks and palisades, a fortification which proved to be a good defence, as it resisted the successive Tartars excursions in 1287.

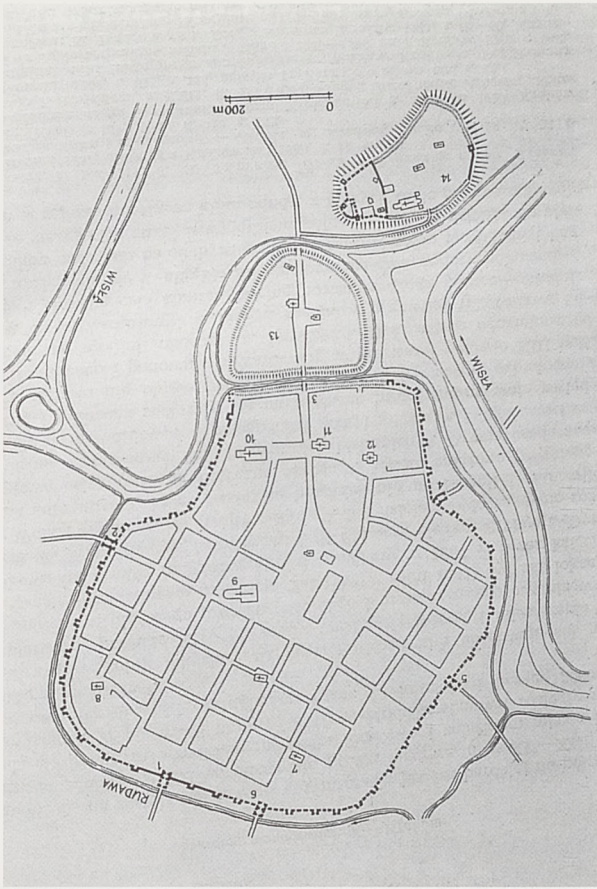
A decade later, in 1298, Wacław the Second, the king of Bohemia and Poland (1291-1305) started to construct the new fortification of Cracow which seems to have been finished in the years 1301-1310 (Fig. 2). It consisted of a stone wall about ten metres high and about three metres thick, crowned by a walk protected by a crenellated parapet, as we can see in the lower part of the wall which escaped destruction in the 19th century (Fig. 5). That curtain wall was reinforced by about forty-two square towers with an open gorge. They were higher than the wall itself and situated at a distance of about 40-60 metres from each other. Originally five defended gateways lead into the town. They consisted of a high tower and a low forgate. One of the forgates, that of St. Nicolas, as well as the tower of St. Florian Gate, are preserved to the present day (Figs. 3 and 4). The others are known thanks to iconographical materials and the recent archaeological excavations.

At the beginning of the 14th century that system of fortification was strengthened by a moat six metres deep, and filled with water brought from the Vistula river and its tributary, the Rudawa. In that period the Royal Castle on Wawel hill and the town were two separate defensive units (Fig. 2). The revolt in 1312 of the German burghers, headed by the Mayor of Cracow, Albert, against the now Polish suzerain Ladislaus the First (called the Elbow, 1296-1333), was the reason of the construction of the new Royal stronghold inside the town (*castrum novum civitatis*), situated near St. Nicolas Gate (Figs. 9). And in next period, between 1321-1347, the monarch subordinated the whole system of fortification of Cracow to that of the Royal Castle on Wawel hill by extending the defensive walls to those on the hill, and incorporating the outer bailey Okól (*civitas in Okól*) to the town itself (Fig. 9). Thus the whole area of Cracow grew from about 50 to about 59 ha., and the length of the walls from 2700 to 3400 metres.

At the same time three new gates were built; two of them on both sides of the newly erected Royal

1. Panorama of Cracow engraving by M. Merian, 1620 (after Muczkowski).





2. The town walls of Cracow at the end of the 13th century (after Widawski).

3. The Old St. Nicolas Gate (photo by the author).

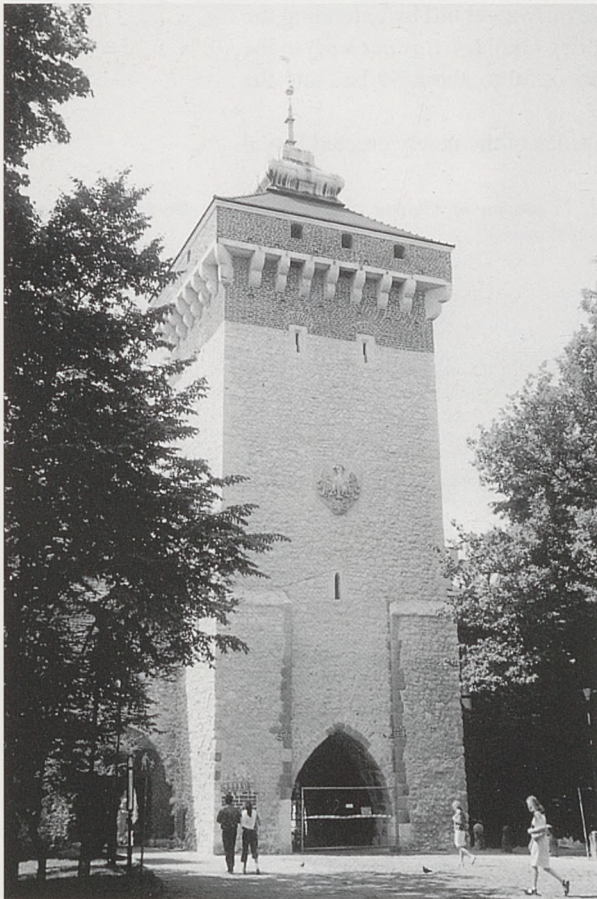
4. The St. Florian Gate (photo by the author).



5. The Strapmakers Tower (photo by the author).

6. The Joiners Tower (photo by the author).

7. The Carpenters Tower (photo by the author).

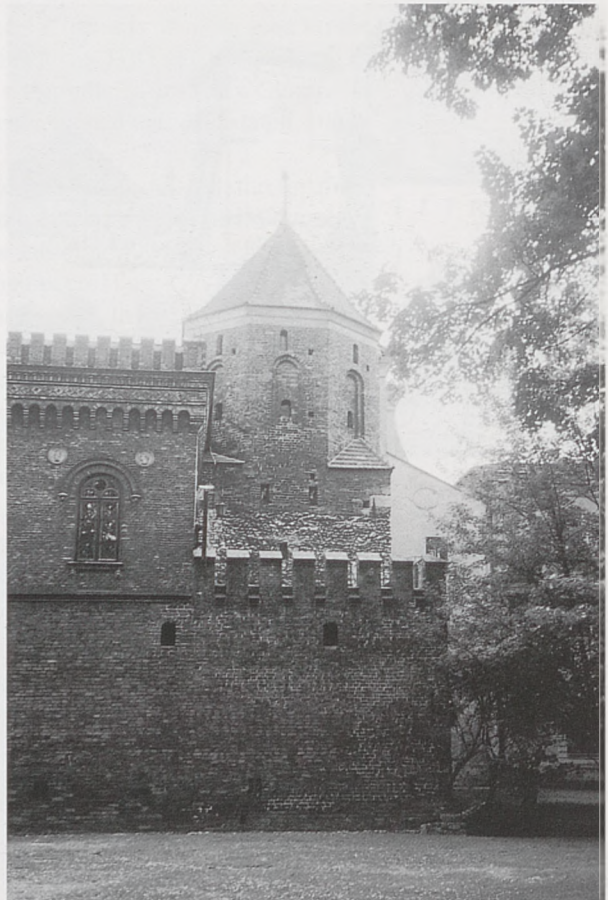
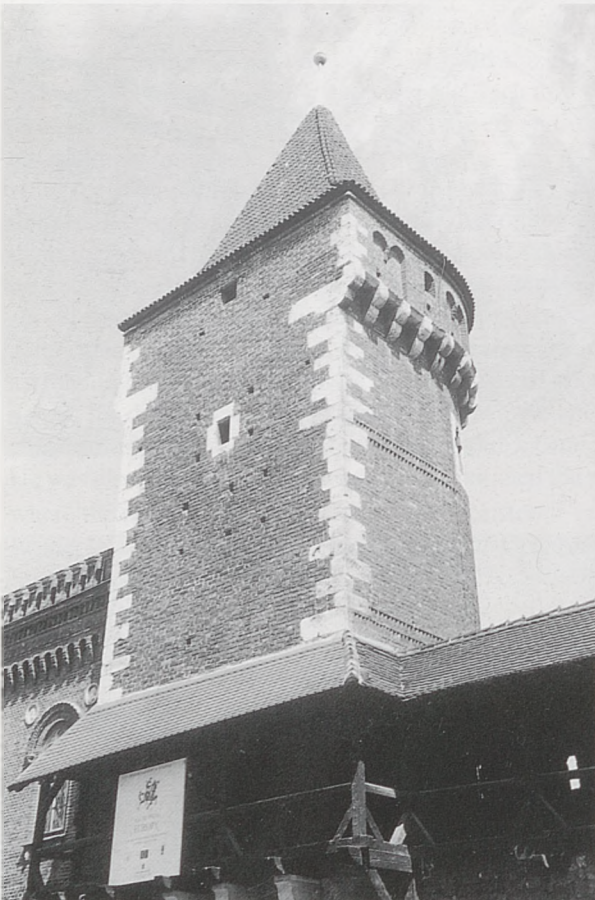


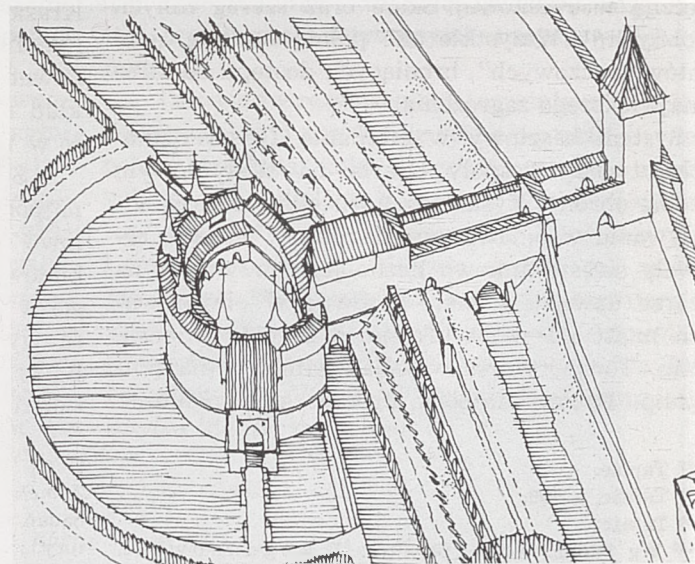
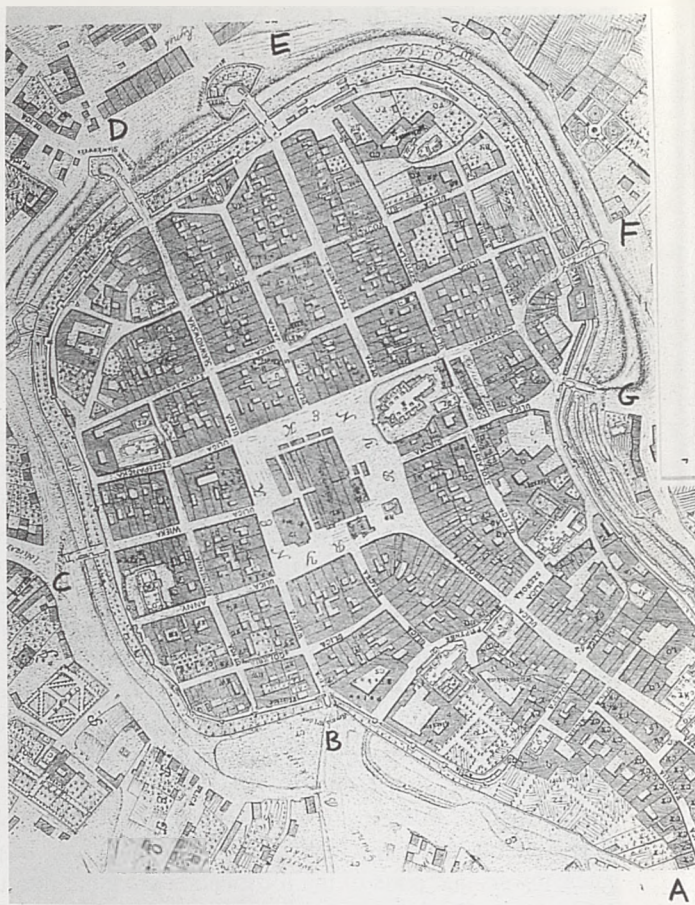
stronghold to which the old St. Nicolas Gate was incorporated (Figs. 9 and 14), and a third one below Wawel hill (Fig. 10). The defensive force of that new system of fortification was good enough to prevent the King of Bohemia, John of Luxemburg (1310-1346) from capturing the Polish capital in the assault of 1345.

At the beginning of the 15th century, as fire-arms came into use, the great process of the modernisation of the fortification of Cracow took place. It was connected also with the development of the Polish capital as an important centre of building activity in general. The main material used was brick. To the old stone walls were added then additional parts in brick, and its galleries for defenders received timber pentice-roofs. Most of the towers, closed now from the side of the town, were heightened. The new superstructures, polygonal or semicircular in plan, in order to be better defended against fire-arms, received new gun-loops, and surfaces were often beautifully decorated by ornamentations in brick. They were usually crowned by machicolations, and covered by high conical roofs (Fgs. 4 and 7).

In the same period an outer curtain wall, lower and about ten metres distant from the main wall, was constructed (Fgs. 9 and 13). The moat on the northern part of city was doubled and received a sophisticated system of water supply. Considerably reinforced was also the defensive system of the gates. Towers were raised in height and its outer gates were extended (Fgs. 5 and 7). The new building activity concerned especially the northern side of the town, more vulnerable to enemy attack (the other sides were well guarded by rivers and morasses). Here to the doubled outer gate of the now-elevated St. Florian's Gate (Fig. 4) a semicircular bastion, a Barbican, surrounded with a separate and very large moat, was added in 1497-1500 (Fgs. 11 and 8). With its three metres thick walls and seven watch turrets, 130 loop-holes on three levels for heavy small arms, it was perfectly suited against the gun-fire of that time. Not by chance therefore did St. Florian's Gate resist a series of attacks: that of 1587 (the Austrians), of 1656 (the Swedes) and, at last, that of 1768 (the Russians).

During time of peace, as a main gate to the town, it was an important place for ceremonial entrances into the Polish capital. From the beginning of the 15th century the defence and care of gates, towers and parts of the fortification were put into the hands of special trade guilds. To the defence system of the city was added also the most elevated tower of St. Mary's parish church. Being in the hands of the burghers it was used as the main watch tower (*turris excubiarum*). So at the beginning of the 16th century, Cracow, with its forty-seven towers, seven gates and a Barbican, such as is visible on the panorama engraved by Matheus Merian of 1620, was one of the best





- 8. The Barbican inside (photo by the author).
- 9. Plan of Cracow in 1785 (after Bakowski).
- 10. The Castle Gate, painting by Z. Wierciak (after Dobrzycki).
- 11. The Barbican in the 16th century. A reconstruction by J. Bogdanowski.
- 12. The Barbican today (photo by the author).

- 13. The Headsman Tower, aquarelle by J. Glogowski, around 1809 (after Muczowski).
- 14. The New St. Nicolas Gate, painting by Z. Wierciak (after Dobrzycki).

- 15. The trace of the old tower in the garden Planty in Cracow (photo by the author).





defended towns in Poland (Fig. 1). Until the middle of the 17th century only a few additions to the existing system of fortification were made.

First there was the construction of the two arsenals: that of the town, situated near St. Florian's Gate (1565-66, and 1625) and the Royal one, near Castle Gate (1626). Some old towers were restored, such as the height tower of the Castle Gate (Fig. 10) and that used by the mayor of the town as his place of residence, with the beautiful Renaissance crowning decorated with Cracow's coat of arms (Fig. 13).

The disasters of the Polish-Swedish war in the middle of the century, with the capture of Cracow in 1655, started the slow decay of the town and its fortifications. Some old gates, such as St. Nicolaus' and Shoemakers Gates, were closed to traffic and used only by pedestrians (Figs. 14 and 16). To reinforce the old system of defence, three polygonal bastions were constructed in the 17th century. Two of them were added to St. Nicolaus' and Slawków Gates, and one to the wall near the Franciscan cloister (Fig. 13).

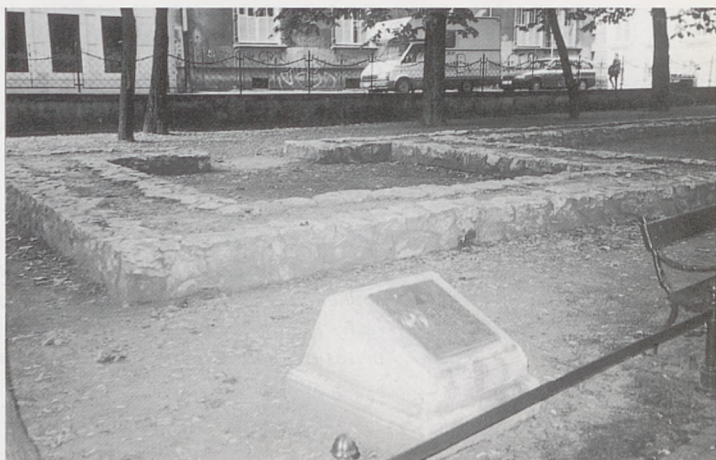
The poor condition of Cracow's fortifications at the end of the 18th century is to be seen on the map of the town made by Maciej Debski and Kazimierz Szarkiewicz in 1785 (Fig. 13), as well as on contemporary iconographical materials, such as a series of water-colours by Jerzy Glogowski (around 1809; Figs. 13, 14 and 17). The towers and walls were abandoned and devastated, sometimes simply brought to ruins.

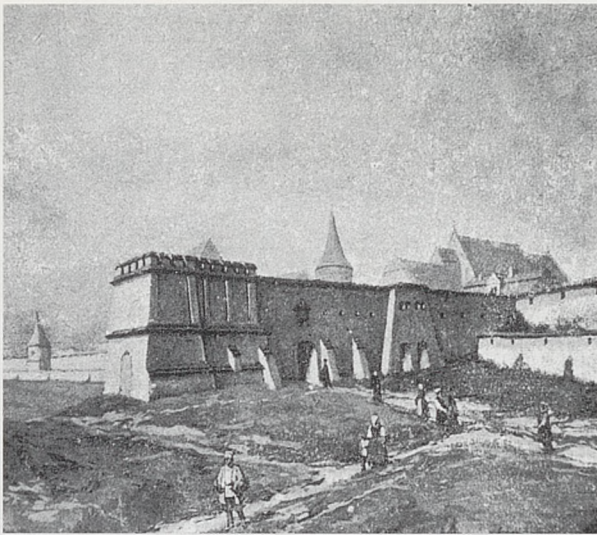
After the third partition of Poland (1796), when Cracow was taken over by Austria, the fortifications of old capital were left to disappear. According to the decree of the Emperor in 1804 most of them (between 1810-1814) were demolished or dismantled for building materials. Only a small part, with St. Florian's Gate, the Barbican and three neighbouring towers (Figs. 4, 7, 12 and 8) were saved, thanks to the famous intervention of senator Feliks Radawski. In 1816 he wrote to the authorities that if St. Florian's Gate disappeared, the area of the main St. Florian's Street and the surroundings of St. Mary's parish church would be open to the cold northern winds extremely dangerous for the health of the inhabitants. Hence the known Cracow proverb was coined - that senator Radawski *saved the unsteady St. Florian's Gate with help of the winds*.

He was also the same person who in 1822 initiated the planting of a garden all around the old town, where the demolished walls and towers once stood.

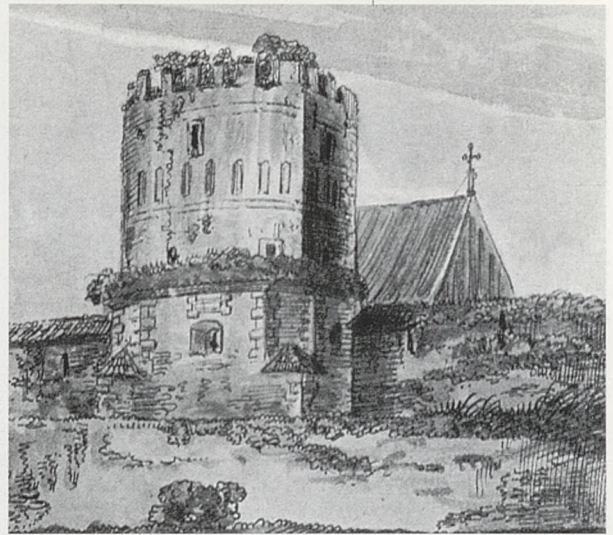
In the 19th and 20th centuries the remains of Cracow's fortifications and especially St. Florian's Gate with its Barbican, were restored several times.

The last renovations were undertaken in 1949-1950, in 1969-1971, and recently from 1999 onwards. It was precisely thanks to the initiative and through the project of our unforgettable colleague the late professor Janusz Bogdanowski, that at the time of the recent revalorisation of the whole garden named *Planty*, the traces of the old walls, towers and gates were marked by low stone walls and fitted with appropriate inscriptions (Fig. 15).





16. *The Shoemakers Gate*, painting by Z. Wierciak (after Dobrzycki).



17. *The Shoemakers Tower*, aquarelle by J. Glogowski, around 1809 (after Muczowski).

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Cracovie, nouvellement fondée en 1257 sur la loi municipale allemande, fut détruite par les Tartares en 1259. En 1285 le duc Leszek le Noir entoura la ville avec des terrassements et des palissades, une bonne défense qui résistât aux successives invasions des Tartares (1287). En 1298, Waclaw II commença à construire la nouvelle fortification de Cracovie: un mur en pierre entouré par une allée protégée par un parapet crénelé; la courtine était renforcée par des tours carrées ouvertes à la gorge et des entrées fortifiées. Au 14^{ème} siècle ce système fortifié fut renforcé par un fossé rempli avec l'eau des fleuves Wistula et Rudawa. Dans cette période, le Château Royal sur la colline de Wawel et la ville étaient deux unités de défense séparées. La révolte en 1312 des bourgeois allemands contre le suzerain polonais Ladislas Ier, entraîna la construction de la nouvelle forteresse royale à l'intérieur de la ville. Entre 1321-47, le monarque subordonna tout le système de fortification de Cracovie à celui du château royal sur la colline Wawel en étendant les murs de défense à ceux qui se trouvaient sur la colline, et en incorporant les murs d'enceinte Okól à la ville même. Le système de fortification était suffisant pour empêcher que le roi de Bohême Jean de Luxemburg conquît la capitale polonaise en 1345. Au 15^{ème} siècle, quand on commença à employer les armes à feu, la fortification de Cracovie fut modernisée: la plupart des tours furent surélevées et la nouvelle superstructure fut pourvue de nouvelles canonnières; dans la même période, fut construite une courtine extérieure. Le fossé dans la partie à nord de la ville fut doublé et reçut un système sophistiqué d'approvisionnement d'eau et le système de défense des portes fut également renforcé. L'activité du nouveau bâtiment concerna en particulier le côté nord de la ville, plus vulnérable à l'ennemi. Ici à la double porte de St. Florian fut ajouté un bastion semi-circulaire, une Barbacane, entourée d'un fossé très large qui devait résister au feu des canons et en effet la Porte de St. Florian résistât à une série d'attaques en 1587, 1656 et 1768. Au 16^{ème} siècle Cracovie, avec ses quarante-sept tours, sept portes et une Barbacane fut une des villes les mieux défendues en Pologne. Jusqu'à la moitié du 17^{ème} siècle peu de choses furent ajoutées au système de fortification existant. Les désastres de la guerre Pologne-Suède avec la prise de Cracovie en 1655, fut le début d'une lente décadence des fortifications des villes qui, à la fin du 18^{ème} siècle, furent abandonnées et ravagées. Après la troisième partition de la Pologne (1796), quand Cracovie fut occupée par l'Autriche, les fortifications de l'ancienne capitale ont disparu. Selon le décret de l'Empereur (1804) la plupart d'entre elles furent démolies et transformées en matériaux de construction. Seulement une petite partie fut sauvée grâce à l'intervention du sénateur Radawski, la même personne qui, en 1822, commença à planter un jardin tout autour de la vieille ville. Au 19^{ème} et 20^{ème} siècles les restes des fortifications de Cracovie furent restaurés plusieurs fois: les dernières rénovations ont été entreprises en 1949-50, en 1969-71 et récemment à partir de 1999.