

4. North to Gdansk.

Late in the fast darkening afternoon of October 17, our tenth day, we boarded the bus for the drive back to Warsaw. It was raining again and darkly overcast as our bus drove through one of the largest of Poland's new cities. Nowa Huta was begun in 1949 in the popular Stalinist style of architecture and planning, but in open country and with much open space about. It is located only about 5 miles from Cracow, and is connected with Cracow by a broad avenue with a trolley line in the center divider. The town center is composed of grey, monolithic blocks six stories high. As we passed through we could get a glimpse into inner courts of lawns and trees. Trees also line the main avenue and the side streets leading off between more housing monoliths. The recent construction is more contemporary in style; many have balconies and are sited with green spaces all around. The overall impression is not as forbidding as that of the area around Constitution Square in Warsaw or Staline Alle in East Berlin, but still the rigid plans of a heavy all powerful bureaucracy give the whole a feeling of inhumanity, with a loss of personal individuality. It is a place for workers; 30,000 of them work in the adjacent immense, sprawling Lenin Steelworks, and from those tall stacks billow forth clouds of smoke to spread across the Vistula and over Cracow.

An unscheduled brief stop happened here in Nowa Huta. A couple of bottles of Slivovitz were aboard the bus, but no cups or glasses. A halt was called. Ella and one member of the group headed for a state store for some form of drinking cup. I took the opportunity to rush into a food store for a bottle of Vodka. The store was immaculate and with all kinds of food stuffs. A counter separates buyer from product; each group of items has its own cash register with a white capped and aproned clerk. There was a queue of customers at each station. I spied the Vodka in among other bottled drinks and boxes of crackers. When my turn came I said "Vodka" and the clerk stared in total incomprehension; I pointed, she bagged two bottles, I paid by handing her a fist full of money from which she smilingly took what I assumed was the correct price. It was inexpensive in any case. I got back to the bus just after the drinking cup team. They had been completely unsuccessful. Necessity became again the mother of invention. Eastman Kodak now has a new use for those little cans in which rolls of 35 mm film are sold; they make a most useful Slivovitz or Vodka cup. Here, I must admit to a personal smugness. In my shoulder bag I was carrying my set of always available and most useful silver cups. A couple of us had Vodka from gold lined silver cups, befitting the long suppressed aristocracy.

A late arrival in Warsaw, a late supper and a weary group went to bed for one night in the Grand

Hotel; a rather new but undistinguished hotel located within a block of the Warsaw Centrum shopping area.

After breakfast the following day, October 18, Friday, we rode out of Warsaw heading northwest, our destination Gdansk on the Baltic Sea. The road was never far from the broad Vistula river, which we crossed some five times in the 400 kilometer drive to Gdansk.

A short distance out of Warsaw we passed through the broad fields of a State farm where mechanical equipment was at work; the fields are large with neat surrounding fences, the new sturdy barns of masonry and concrete construction and efficient machinery attest to State ownership and would suggest high productivity. But as mentioned previously all those little 20 hectare private farms worked by one horse power outproduce these great spreads.

Interspersed in this gently rolling landscape with the State farms are some private farms and stands of well groomed forests of closely planted pine or spruce. Occasionally we passed a small forest of birch trees. As we saw south of Warsaw, the highways are tree lined, and most small towns have tree lined streets with many flowers either in small planters or tiny, neat park or plaza spaces.

As we entered Włocławek, 172 kilometers from Warsaw, the impression of a neat and clean countryside changed to one that is grim and dirty. In this industrial city of 65,000 people, we passed run-down houses and industrial plants belching smoke. In the central city some streets are tree-lined as usual, but the overpowering impression is of a vast, smutty, polluted city in desperate need of urban renewal. The recent housing, the typical vertical and horizontal dominoes, are surrounded by unkempt grounds with little or no landscaping. It is *the* city not to be shown, certainly it is not good for public relations.

Just south of Torun I saw a couple of heavy timber framed houses with mud bricks for fill-in panels; one appeared to have a mud plaster coating. But the sky was dark and the speed of the bus too fast for taking photographs. Ella thought there would be more north of Torun and assured me she would halt or slow the bus so that I might photograph one of these. Alas, I saw no more such structures! However, half-timber structures with fired red brick fill-in are common from Torun north.

Half way to Gdansk, we arrived in Torun in time for lunch. Our hotel, the Kosmos, is a recent structure of undistinguished contemporary design. It is situated across the broad green parkland that typically surrounds the old cities of Poland and where cars, buses and trolleys can circulate freely without destruction to the historic walled city. (Figure 65)

After lunch our bus took us to the center of the city and to City Hall Square. In the old City Hall we were greeted by the City President and a glass of

wine. The Town Hall, originally Gothic, but partially rebuilt during the 17th century in a Dutch Renaissance style is actually a rather grim pile of dark red bricks. The building is now used as a museum and the big room on the second floor where we met is used for concerts and meeting. Its ancient wooden structure has been weakened by age and heavy use, thus the wood beamed ceiling no longer supports the floor above; it is hung from a newly installed concrete beam and slab structural ceiling.

A talk, "Preservation Problems in Torun," was read to us by a local interpreter. Unfortunately, he didn't know the subject matter and obviously had not seen the hand written manuscript before the meeting. His English pronunciation was poor; he was most difficult to follow. Although intended as an introduction to Torun, its history, its architecture, and its preservation problems, the talk put some of our group to sleep and drove the rest to complete boredom; I could understand only small bits and pieces. Torun, luckily suffered no damage during WW II. Here, as we had been told elsewhere, people were moved out of the too crowded old city and into new housing; restoration was then begun. Much of the old housing will be converted to museums—yes, more museums—libraries, artist studios, shops, and for use by "different societies," such as artists co-ops and professional groups. The old city will be separated from the expanding new city by green areas all around the old walled city. Much of this greenbelt is already in place, as we saw in front of our hotel. In explaining why the old Gothic and Renaissance houses could not be converted to living quarters, the speaker said that they would need bathrooms, heat, and kitchens. "This would be destructive to the Gothic details." Further, halls and rooms have ceilings of from 3 to 5 meters (about 10 to 16 feet) high; this does "not conform to today's standards." Worse yet, because of the existence of only one staircase, they would be able to house but one family in each. Of course, this would not do in that land of tiny rooms, low ceilings, and exposed piping, which characterizes the new apartment dominoes—those vast filing cabinets for the masses. However, certain areas of old town will be remodeled into housing, some blocks of old houses are to be adapted to flats, and, as we saw during our walking tour later that afternoon, these blocks are going to be quite pleasant. Many outbuildings of later periods which clutter the inner core of the block are being cleared out and these areas are being turned into parks and playgrounds. To be sure, the inner clutter was 19th century additions and sheds and, as we had seen before, the 19th century in Poland is a no-no.

Our walking tour included a visit to the house in which Nicolaus Copernicus was born. It has been very much restored in order to return its facade, but not the entire house, to the Copernicus era. In a large exposed brick-walled room a large scale model depicts Torun at the time of Copernicus. A well done taped sound and light show lasting some 15 minutes

and prepared in several languages tells of the growth and history of Torun. The sound tape is synchronized with carefully controlled spot lights in the ceiling and small lights in some of the buildings.

Before continuing the walking tour we had a refreshing pause for coffee and delicious pastry in a local and very crowded coffee shop. The coffee shop (or *kawiarnia*) appears to be the daytime Polish rendezvous, always patronized and varying in interior design from simple rustic to very plush. Both large and small, they are everywhere and apparently all government owned. Here in Torun we were proudly taken by the City Conservator to a "restoration," which he said would be better termed an "adaptation of a Gothic house into a *kawiarnia*." It was progressing well, some original Gothic detailing was being exposed and repaired, while the new installations were of contemporary design and generally handsome. But overhead had been installed corny, American type, reproduction wagonwheel lighting fixtures!

After coffee another session in Town Hall, which shed a little more light on the Polish system. As usual interpreters were needed to read the prepared talks and to communicate during the discussion periods. To hear all of these talks is to hear that all is rosy in a rosy land! There is full inter-agency cooperation; differences are settled in an amiable manner. It is only during the un-prescribed discussions, in free conversations over coffee, or on the walking tours that cracks in the facade of inter-agency cooperation begin to become apparent. The Polish bureaucracy is after all made of the homopians, regardless of the rules of governmental ideology. Like the bureaucracy of the democratic world these representatives guard their departmental powers and areas of control; they are jealous and protective of their stations and prospects for advancement.

When questioned about the resolution of a major difference of approach between the office of City Conservator and City Architect or City Planner, we get this stock reply: "It's very hard to explain." However, in such historic cities as Torun the City Conservator appears to have much power; he reviews plans of the City Planner who must abide by his decision.

As in Cracow, Torun's new city plans place all major shopping facilities outside of the old town core. When asked how he feels these plans will affect the present city core as the real center of town life which it still is, the City Conservator was vague, even evasive. We were told that the proportion of shops in both the new and old areas of the city will be controlled to attempt to prevent the commercial death of the old town. Much concern was expressed by members of our group, at each of these town planning sessions, for we feared that the older cores could degenerate into tourist centers devoid of local use or interest. In each city the answer evaded our concern with an attitude of superiority: they are not going to make the mistakes of other countries; they have the problem solved. But how??



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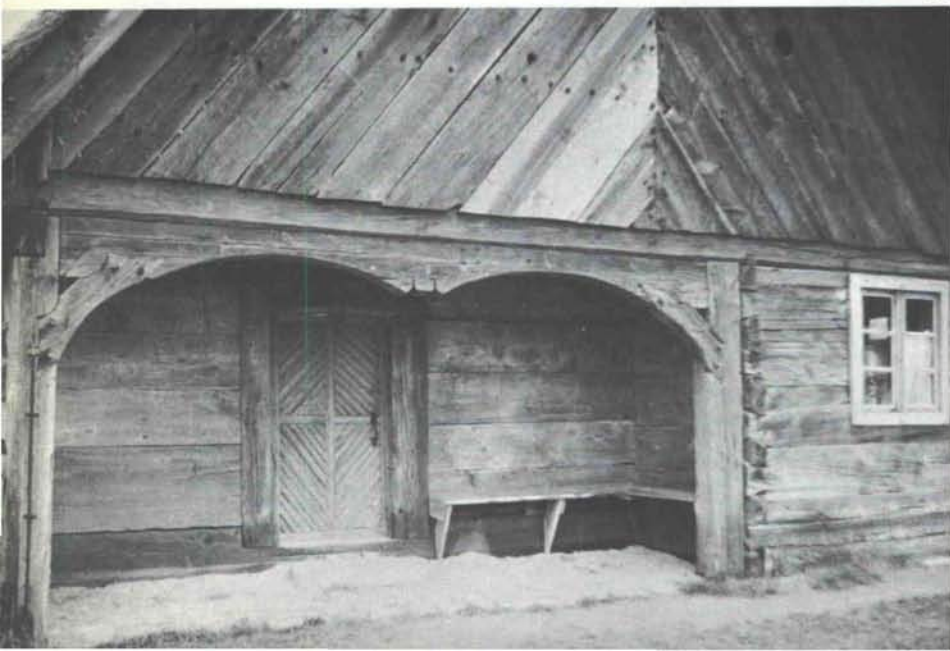


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In Torun the bend in the Vistula river was dominated by a vast Teutonic knight's castle, remnants of which include parts of the wall and one gate structure, figure 58. At shopping hours the main pedestrian street is crowded with people, figure 59, while a nearby automobile display was essentially empty. At 69000 zlotys (\$3,450.00) for a small Fiat, I suspect few can buy. In a country where the annual income is very low \$3,450.00 is a great amount of money. Figure 61 is a detail of one house in the Torun Skansen Museum. Figure 60 was taken in Chelmno; notice the small glass panes set into the ceramic tile roofs to give light to the attic.



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In response to the question about the design for a new building which is to fill in a vacant space in the street facade between historical structures in the old city, we were told that it has to match the existing scale, that they should always "reflect" the old structures but should be of contemporary design, that success "depends on the taste of the architects," and that all new construction must be approved by the City Conservator. Here in Torun, the Conservator has review controls over the entire old city and for a radius of one kilometer beyond the old town boundaries. In this one kilometer area, however, his major concern is for "mass and height" rather than for architectural style or detail.

As elsewhere, the City Conservator has little or no staff other than a secretary. Rather, he "cooperates" with other agencies. In particular, he works closely with the national preservation agency, the PKZ, whose staff does much of the actual preservation planning and execution. He exercises great power and influence; he is sometimes an architect, sometimes a historian.

When preservation activities began after WW II, 23,000 people lived within the old walled city of Torun; this is to be reduced to 7,000 as the plans progress. To be sure, much overcrowding did exist but is this reduction too great for a healthy, viable central core? The planners for the city of Torun expect it to grow from the present population of 110,000 to 150,000.

It is interesting that in the cities which did not suffer severe war damage, Torun and Cracow, the preservationists stress the need for contemporary design in amongst the old historic buildings while in the ravaged cities, Warsaw and Gdansk, the new construction must copy, even mock, the restored old.

According to the City Conservator of Torun, Poland is committed to spend 3 billion zlotys (\$150 million, one zloty equals 5 cents officially) for restoration and conservation during the next five years!

A visit to the Ethnographic and "Skansen" Museums was on the schedule for Saturday morning. Located on the edge of old town Torun facing the greenbelt, the Ethnographic, or Folk Art Museum, is in one large late 19th century barn-like building, once an arsenal. The cut limestone, high pitched roof structure was adapted to museum use after WW I. In addition to collections of early indigenous folk crafts and costumes of the surrounding areas, the building contains also a large, well displayed collection of early fishing implements, including Vistula river sailing boats and wooden dugout canoes. A small auditorium and the administrative offices for the outdoor "Skansen" Museum, occupy space in the museum building. All of the material in the Ethnographic Museum and the ten peasant farm houses and barns of this outdoor museum have been gathered since WW II. (Figures 61, 66) While they continue to search for ancient relics, they also are recording the folklore and collecting the crafts as they are being practiced or produced today. "Research is the basis

for us. The gathering of relics and objects for displays," follows the research. One of their "aims is to have care for all living folk art. . . . Of course, we don't have enough money to do all we want to do." They are trying now in their field work to leave "in situ" as much as possible; it is the only way to really be "authentic." They make photographs and documentation of the "changes as they happen in folk art and customs. . . . There is no living thing that is not important to us (including) dried flowers arranged and placed in churches. . . ." These notes I jotted down as Professor Prufferowa talked—in English—about the museums and the staff's dedication to the work. I would guess that she is in her late fifties or early sixties. The enthusiasm, professionalism, and boundless energy of this lady radiated as she talked, first in the auditorium and later as she escorted us about the exhibits. In collecting the structures, for the outdoor museum the "Army has been a great help; they provided trucks and men to carry the dismantled building to its new home here in Torun."

An unheard of happening: the sun broke through the clouds at 11 a. m. and it stayed out bright and shining all afternoon! Because the afternoon was unscheduled some of our group decided not to return to the hotel for the usual multi-coursed, always lengthy lunch. There was too much to see under a bright sky so we walked about Torun. Three of us paused for a snack of Polish sausage and wine in a small restaurant set on the edge of the crumbled defense walls of the 13th century Teutonic Knight's castle high on a bluff guarding a bend in the Vistula river. Little beyond a few piles of brick and a segment of the one gate remain of this former large, commanding fortress. Happily for Poland and much of Europe only ruins remain to remind us of those arrogant, lordly knights. (Figure 58)

In late afternoon, we were bussed to the University, which is located a couple of miles away from the old city in a new district. A vast campus of sparkling new architecture, the designers could well have been inspired by the past work of American architects like I. M. Pei and S. O. M. All is clean design and sharp edged with much glass and too much open space. An immense reflecting pool stretched out before the multi-story administration building. Incidentally the pool was completely free of litter; I suspect something just short of the death penalty awaits any student seen throwing so much as a gum wrapper into those still waters, or, just perhaps, the students do have pride in their University and its grounds.

On the fifth floor of the administration building we gathered in a conference room of polished light wood paneling of pure undiluted contemporary Scandinavian design. Chairs were set about a U-shaped conference table for us and our hosts, additional chairs lined the walls for faculty and students. Some 30 students were present, all clean shaven and bright faced, but as we were to discover, too quiet. They asked not a single question! It was at this session that our side, so to speak, was to present talks. Edward

Sayre, chemist at the Brookhaven National Laboratory, gave a somewhat technical explanation of the chemical processes of art object and stone deterioration and its conservation, while Lawrence Majewski, Chairman, Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, explained a major preservation-restoration project in which he participated in the Middle East. A local professor of conservation translated for Ed, while Mr. Hendryk Brandys of the Ministry of Culture and Art in Warsaw translated for Lawrence. It appeared to us that the local professor was intending to do all the translating, but that Mr. Brandys usurped her role. Later that evening Ella confessed that while Mr. Brandys did translate highlights of Lawrence's talk, he mostly described a project in which he was involved. A bit of one-upmanship. Following the presentations only the faculty asked questions!

Sunday, October 20, our bus took us north past the large open fields and a well tended apple orchard of a state farm. While no fences surrounded the fields, the orchard was enclosed with heavy, high wire fencing with precast concrete posts and topped with barbed wire. Apples must be very desirable in Poland.

We notice that even for the state farms single family or duplex houses are scattered along the highway, facing side dirt roads or in the fields, rather than in a designed, clustered community as one might expect. There are large concrete block barns, and some other very long structures (I would guess them to be some 200 feet long), older, probably pre-war, large estate barns built of red brick.

Passing through the villages we again see crowds of people flocking to and from Sunday Mass. As we ride along, Ella tells us the speed limits for buses is 70 kilometers per hour and 80 kilometers (or 48 miles) per hour for cars ". . . but nobody cares about these limits."

Half way to a mid-morning coffee break, scheduled for Chełmno, we pass through the small city of Chełmża, an industrial center of 15,000 people. It has the largest sugar refinery in Poland and, according to the guide book, "2 Gothic Churches,"⁵ but apparently nothing else to recommend it to the traveler. A tall, smoking chimney dominates the skyline. It is a grubby, grey town with thick polluted air, old and dirty stuccoed buildings, narrow streets, narrow sidewalks, no trees. On the town edge some new housing is under construction; built of hollow red clay tile, they are two story, two or four family cubes and, probably of private ownership. Scattered amongst the new cubes are older single family houses of red brick with red ceramic tile pitched roofs set on small lots and all have low wire fencing with pipe frame gates.

The land all about is open with only an occasional forested plot. It is gently rolling with a rare high, commanding knoll overlooking the Vistula. On each knoll is what, obviously, was once the local guarding, ruling castle. (Figure 64)

Atop one such knoll, blessed with a larger and

flatter top, is Chełmno, "one of the most interesting towns in Poland picturesquely situated on a high bank in the Vistula valley and surrounded by a ring of 14th-16th century defense walls."⁵

We had time to walk about Chełmno for a half hour. Luckily it was not raining; in fact the sun came out for a few minutes. A large, brick Gothic church was filled with worshippers of all ages, including many teenagers. We gathered back at the Gospoda Pod Kołutkiem coffee house facing the Town Hall Square for a snack before pushing on farther north to Gdansk. (Figure 67)

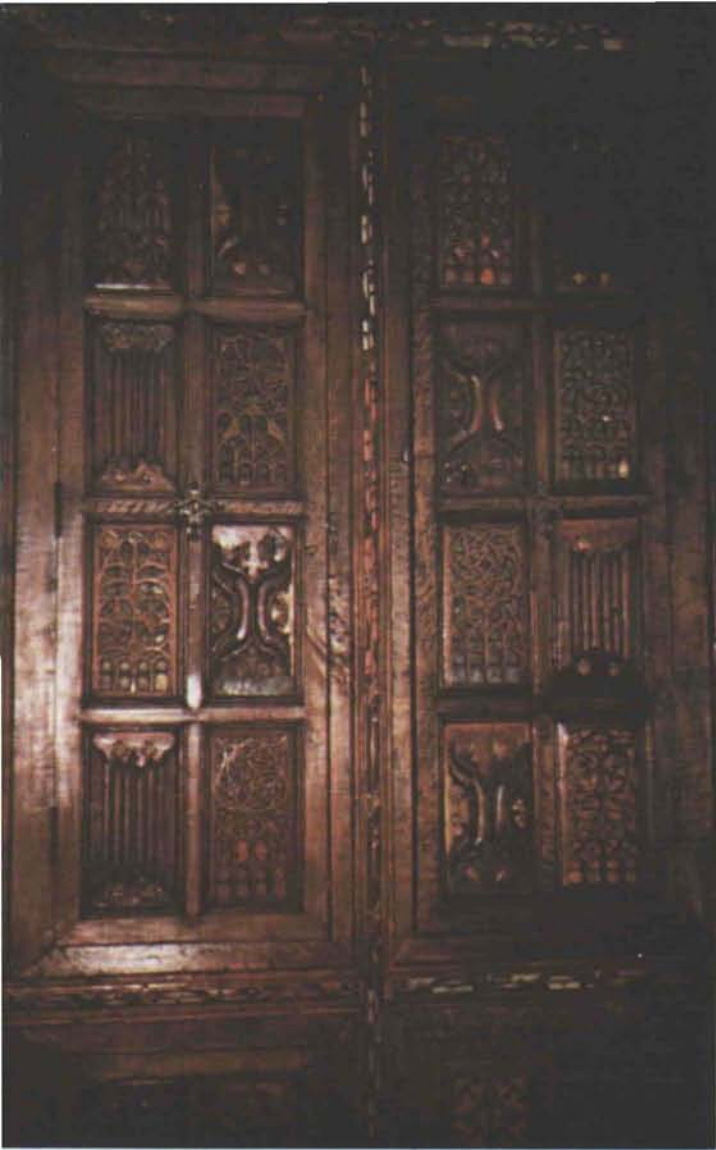
As with most of the hill-top towns, Chełmno is by-passed by the main highway which passes around the base of the hill.

Traveling north from Chełmno we cross again the Vistula and for a short stretch along a section of old highway paved with granite cobble stones of about 3 or 4 inches square. The landscape is more distinctly rolling and with more plots of dense forested areas; almost all are evergreen trees. At Nowa, some 45 kilometers north of Chełmno, we entered the narrow neck of the former Polish corridor which once separated Prussia on the east from Germany proper to the west. The corridor, created by the Treaty of Versailles which ended WW I, gave Poland access to the Baltic Sea at the port city of Gdynia and also encompassed the free city of Danzig. It was at Danzig (now the Polish city of Gdansk) that WW II began.

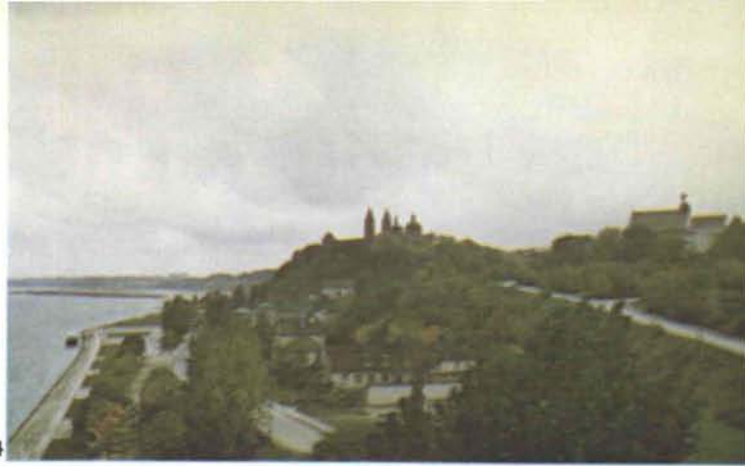
Along the highways signs are all, naturally, painted with Polish names, places and directions, but two words appear frequently and look strangely out of place; along pull-outs off the highway appear the words "parking" and, on many direction signs is the word "camping." As with the salutation "OK," it appears that "parking" and "camping" have become international.

The highway took us past a number of little lakes on the stretch between Nowa and Gdansk, all of which appear to be natural with thick growth of reeds and water lilies around the edges. As we saw while traveling south of Warsaw, chickens, geese, white ducks and a few turkeys are abundant in the front yard of each farm house. □

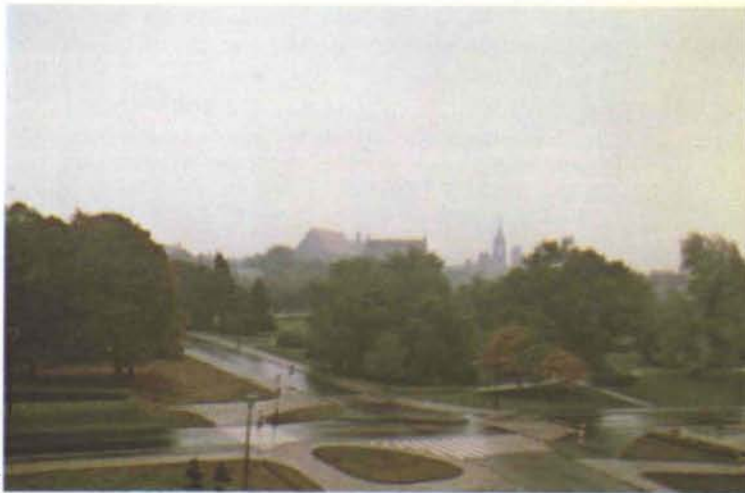
Figure 63, impressive carved doors in the Copernicus house in Torun. Figure 64, the town of Plock is typical of the castle dominated defensive hill towns along the broad Vistula river. Figure 65 was taken from our Orbus hotel looking towards the old city of Torun, and across the park created from the area once occupied by defensive walls and moats. Figure 66 shows the only adobe structure I had the opportunity to photograph. It is in the Torun Skansen Museum and is, we were told, a pig sty—for a well housed family of pigs I would say. Figure 68, also in Torun, shows the half-timber structures which become common from Torun north into Gdansk. Figure 67 is the 16th century Town Hall in Chełmno.



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