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Edited by

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POLISH INSTITUTE OF WORLD ART STUDIES

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"If I forget Thee, Jerusalem." Eastern European synagogue decorations in the Zionist paradigm

In blessed memory of Maryna Stalinska¹

The Land of Israel lies at the very heart of Jewish historical memory, eschatological perspective, and national self-definition.² In the traditional *Galuth* Jewish worldview, the Land of Israel comprised an ideal-utopian centre for the Jewish People, intimately bound up with the messianic notion of Redemption. Illustrations to the oft-recited Psalm 137, *On the Rivers of Babylon*, in synagogue wall paintings were a way to express mourning for the lost homeland and hope for its coming restoration.³ The social-political upheavals of the 19th century, the *Haskalah*, and modernisation began to alter the heretofore homogeneous makeup of the Jewish community. National-political movements of the 19th–20th centuries, including *Hovevei Zion* (*Lovers*

of Zion), the *Chalutzim*,⁴ and Zionism, affected the changing traditional messianic paradigm of the return to the Land of Israel. An alternative emerged: the creation of a Jewish national centre in Palestine. This left a significant mark on the union of the religious worldview with the Zionists' romantic visionary dreams and social ideals.

The latter half of the 19th century saw new social-political movements penetrate the closed world of Jewish Orthodoxy. Rabbis Judah Chai Alkalai (1798–1878), Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), Shmuel Mohilever (1824–1898), and others attempted to go beyond the passive expectation of Redemption, and to unite Divine action with active human involvement in history. In their view, the Land of Israel stood in need of liberation and preparation for the approaching days of Redemption.⁵ Only there would Jewry be completely able to realise its purpose. In practice, this meant organising the purchase of lands, and preparations for settling and appropriating the Land of Israel. Mohilever stressed this in his epistle to the First Zionist Congress, seeing it as one of the greatest commandments

¹ Maryna Stalinska (1954–2012), my mother-in-law, the researcher and teacher of Jewish history, tradition and culture, the head of the "Jewish Identity" program of the Jewish Agency for Israel (Kharkiv), coordinator of education project "Jews on the map of Ukraine."

² The basis of the material is the research of the 'Bezalel' school decorative and applied works on the buildings in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, carried out by the author in the autumn of 2012. I am grateful to Elen Miriam Rochlin from Jerusalem for her translation of the article into English.

³ Khaimovich (2008: 60–71), Kotlyar (2010: 516, 534–541).

⁴ From Hebrew – *halutz* / plural *halutzim* – pioneers in the building of the State of Israel.

⁵ Avineri (1990: 73–85, 267–268).

in the Torah.⁶ Soon, in the steps undertaken by R. Avraham Yitzhak Kook (1865–1935), leader of the religious Zionists and first Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Palestine under the British Mandate, the notion of messianic Redemption fused completely with national-cultural construct.⁷

These processes found their expression in art. They also affected the field of synagogue wall painting, an intrinsic part of religious culture which reflected the changes unfolding in the inner life of the community.⁸ The great majority of artists supporting Zionist ideals were natives of Eastern Europe who had imbibed the culture of the *shtetl*.⁹ The school of arts and crafts called 'Bezalel' provides an especially vivid example: the school forged models of new Israeli art, using the creative and artistic tradition with which it was well-acquainted as a starting point.¹⁰

The Municipal School located on Ahad Ha-Am St.¹¹ in the heart of Tel Aviv provides a vivid instantiation of just such a bond between Eastern European synagogue decoration and the new 'paradigm' of Zionist art with the Land of Israel at its core (ill. 1). In 1924, Zeev Raban (1890–1970),¹² one of the ideologues of Zionist aesthetics associated with 'Bezalel,' came up with a cycle of ceramic panel paintings to decorate the school building's façade.¹³ It is evident that the model inspiring his work was synagogue decoration accentuating the eastern wall and the *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark where the Torah Scrolls are kept) and complemented by some new motifs, as well (ill. 2).

⁶ Avineri (1990: 268). In particular, Mohilever write that "colonize the Country (Israel) – to buy land and build houses, to plant plantations and sow it – is one of the greatest commandments of our Torah, and some of our ancient ancestors say that it is worth the entire Torah." Zionism (1993: 184–191).

⁷ Avineri (1990: 267–281).

⁸ Kotlyar (2013: 268–278).

⁹ Shatz (1905: 17–18), Finkelstein (1998: 201).

¹⁰ Kotlyar (2010: 305–306, 310–311). This was the case, in particular, the leading artists of 'Bezalel': Boris Schatz, Ephraim Lilien, Abel Pann, Zeev Raban and others who laid the aesthetics of 'early Bezalel.' A key focus of the school in support of Zionist ideals in art was their aspiration on the "biblical Zionism" – a reflection of the many themes and subjects of Bible stories: (Manor 2001: 55–62).

¹¹ The Municipal School was built by architect Dov Herszkowitz in 1924.

¹² Details about the work of Zeev Raban: Goldman Ida (2001).

¹³ See special research of ceramic panels in the 'Bezalel' style on façades of buildings in Tel Aviv: Carmiel (1996).

In the central avant-corps, Raban situated the motif of the Twelve Tribes, emphasising the ingathering of the Jewish People in the Land of Israel. Directly above this is a romanticised, sun-flooded shadow figure of Jerusalem with the Temple Mount and the verse from Psalm 137, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem*. Further above this are double insert panels with winged lions flanking a Menorah. These images introduce the symbols of the Temple, reiterating Jerusalem's status as a spiritual centre. The composition is crowned by an illustration to the prophecy of Isaiah, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie with the kid, and a calf with a lion's cub and a fatling together, and a small child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like cattle. An infant shall play over the hole of an asp, and the weaned child shall put out his hand over the eyeball of an adder [viper – E.K.]. They will not harm or destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea," (Isaiah 11:6–9) epitomising a messianic idyll. In the triangular panels above the doors, Raban's motif of the vined pomegranate symbolises the Land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8; Deuteronomy 31:20) and one of the Seven Species representing the Land of Israel.¹⁴ The complex in its entirety is a representation of messianic Paradise.

Insert panels with city views of Jaffa, Hebron, Tiberias, and Haifa alternate with the building's story windows. Raban combines the tradition of representing the holy sites of Biblical history with modern buildings and themes.¹⁵ As models he uses photographs taken by Yaakov Ben Dov (1882–1968), a 'Bezalel' colleague and founder of Israeli photography and a pioneer of Jewish Cinematography in Palestine. Thus, in the *Haifa* composition, he includes the buildings of the Haifa Technion, constructed in 1913.¹⁶ The Technion first

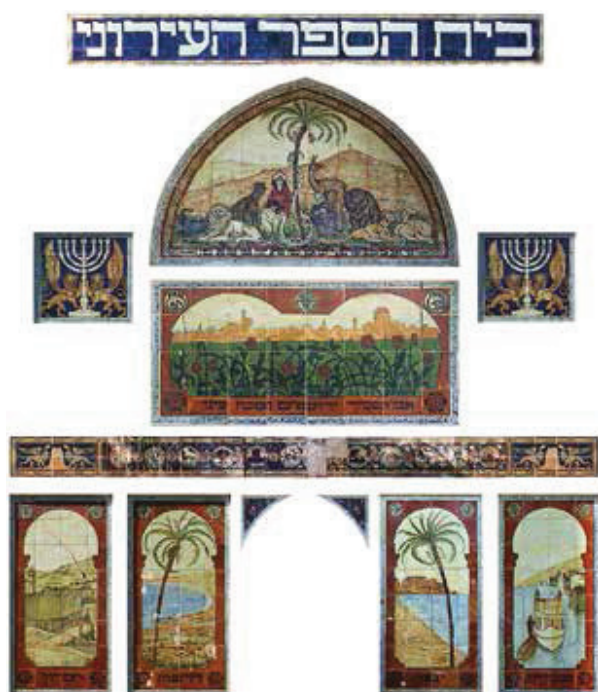
¹⁴ "A land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates; a land of olive-trees and honey" (Deuteronomy 8:8).

¹⁵ Including in the ensemble of the façade four compositions with views of cities of Palestine, Raban update image of the old *yishuv* [Jewish settlement], which is traditionally represented by four cities: Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed and Tiberias. In these cities from the Middle Ages to the beginning of mass *aliyah* in 1882, has concentrated Jewish life. According to Jewish tradition, it was not interrupted there since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁶ The Technion University campus in Haifa was built by German Jewish architect Alexander Baerwald (1877–1930) between 1913 and 1924.



III. 1. Tel Aviv. The Municipal School. The cycle of ceramic panel paintings. Artist Zeev Raban. 1924. Photo- and- computer graphics of the façade by Eugeny Kotlyar, 2012



III. 2. Tel Aviv. The cycle of ceramic panel paintings for the Municipal School. Artist Zeev Raban. 1924. Photo Eugeny Kotlyar, 2012



III. 3. The *Tiberias* composition from the ceramic panel paintings cycle for the Municipal School. Artist Zeev Raban. 1924. Photo Eugeny Kotlyar, 2012

opened its gates in 1924, when Raban was working on the panel paintings cycle. The *Tiberias* composition simply reproduces the photograph taken by Ben Dov of a launch and a boat docked next to it. (ill. 3, 4) Raban even transferred into his work the name of the small vessel, *Nordau*, so named in honour of Max Nordau (1849–1923),¹⁷ the great Zionist leader who died in a year before the panel paintings cycle was made. This suggests the union – if not the opposition – of messianic narrative and new Zionist ideology. Insofar as Nordau as a publicist

¹⁷ It is evident by name of the ship, which dates back to the name of Max Nordau in Yiddish: נורדאָו (Hebrew: נורדאו). I am grateful for consultations on this and other subjects in this article to Dr. Sergey Kravtsov.



Ill. 4.
Tiberias. Photo Yaacov Ben-Dov. Jewish Photo Album. 1920s

and researcher embodied the notion of the secular Jew and someone opposing religion, in art the gesture underlined the different, secular nature of the appropriation of the Land of Israel.¹⁸

This group of paintings as a whole, fitting for a synagogue interior, Raban places on the building of the Municipal School. The institution's name – בית הספר העירוני (*the Municipal School*) appears precisely in the spot where in synagogue façades or interiors inscriptions would mark sacral space.¹⁹ The Municipal School thus becomes a kind of shrine of science and learning, embodying the messianic dream via the new means of cultural Zionism. The leaders of the religious wing also saw this as an element contributing to Israel's spiritual fortification.

¹⁸ Nordau (1990: 764–766). Max Nordau broke with Judaism in his youth, later criticised religion and political institutions, engaged in medicine, psychology and philosophy, stood on the principles of Darwinism and Lombrozian. He was an active participant and co-organiser of the first ten Zionist Congresses, and suggested the active support for Zionism as a realization by the Jews in their own land a “philosophy of human solidarity” (*Die conventionellen Lügen der Kultur-menschheit* (*Conventional Lies of Our Civilization*), Leipzig, 1883). He developed this concept as the social and ethical-based program on the unity of reason and love, relationships between social systems and the freedom of scientific knowledge.

¹⁹ For example, among these inscriptions above the entrance of the synagogues in Eastern Europe (particularly in Galicia, Podolia and Volhyn) was placed: זה השער להי / “This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous will enter through it,” (Psalm 118:20); מה נורא המקום הזה אין / “How terrible is this place! this is no other but the house of God,” (Genesis 28:17); מה טובו אהליך / “How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel,” (Numbers 24:5) etc.

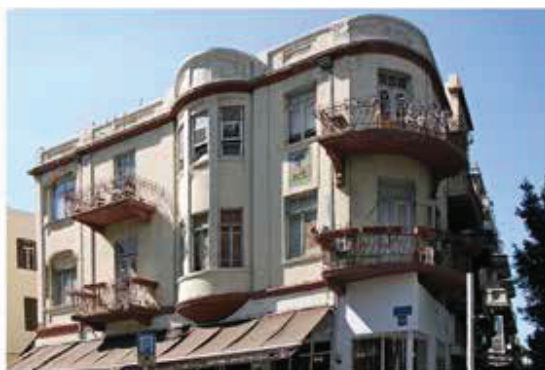
In his speech at the opening of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1925, Rabbi Kook spoke of two directions in Israel's spiritual life. The first is the deepening of Israel's spirit and the intensification of the light of the Torah, while the second is applying the values of Judaism to the public life of society; this includes recognising the sciences as values in Jewish life.²⁰ The epithet he uses with reference to the University, “the house of wisdom and thought,”²¹ can apply to the Municipal School equally well.

The program of the School's decorations combined the messianic paradigm with the Zionist, and the religious one with the secular. In it, three ideas are brought together: the modern development of the Land of Israel, and the ingathering of the Jewish People with the triumph of the messianic Israel. This bespeaks a national program, binding the past and the present of Jewish history into a single whole whose centre is in the Land of Israel.

In the execution of Lederberg's House, another Tel Aviv building, by Jacob Eisenberg (1897–1965), also a member of the ‘Bezalel’ school, from the 1920s, the theme of returning to Zion and the heavenly idyll takes on a different, *Chalutz*-type portent (ill. 5). The vision of a restored Jerusalem, adorned by the passage from Jeremiah *בְּתוֹלַת וְנִבְנִיתָ* / “I will build you firmly again, O Maiden Israel!,” (Jeremiah 31:4) combines with the figures

²⁰ Kook (1925).

²¹ Kook (1925).



Ill. 5.
Tel Aviv. Lederberg's
House. The cycle
of ceramic panel
paintings. Artist
Abraham Eisenberg.
1920s. Photo Eugeny
Kotlyar, 2012

of Jewish settlers ushering in the Holy Land's rebirth. The scene appears as a romantic dream come true in Zionist practice. This can be tellingly contrasted with traditional eschatology as manifested in the mystically inspired motif of a painted window with a patch of sky concealed by curtains.²² In both cases, the viewer is as if peeking into a distant world. The same effect is conveyed by the motif of a theatre curtain being pulled aside to reveal the locus and the Temple of the future (ill. 6). Raban conveys the dream of Zion in a different way. He uses the motif of the "keyhole" through which an unmistakably Zionist idyll can be glimpsed:

figures of reapers, sowers, and shepherds against the backdrop of Palestine landscapes.

Even so, the image of the Jerusalem Temple continues to remain the most important element on the messianic horizon. The 'Bezalel' School's principal and inspirer, Boris Schatz, saw restoring and decorating the future Temple as the culmination of his lifelong project.²³ The same R. Kook,

²² Kotlyar (2010: 526–527).

²³ Schatz (1910: 42). Schatz pointed out the special support of its activities by the orthodox community, who called him 'Rabbi Bezalel,' and anticipated that his school would rebuild the Temple in the days of the Messiah. This inspired Schatz and gave him "confidence in getting the job"; Zalmona (2006: 27–29). Zalmona analyses the utopian novel by Schatz *Jerusalem Rebuilt – A Daydream* (written in 1917, published



Ill. 6.
Synagogue in Bacau
(Romania). Wall Painting.
Artist Mendel Grinberg.
1920s. Photo Elena
Seredina, 2009

whom we have mentioned earlier, in his 1908 epistle to the 'Bezalel' Society sent his greetings to the "connoisseurs of beauty and art," noting that their mission consists in adorning the sacred city of Jerusalem.²⁴ But the Zionist innovation entailed the beginning of the replacement of the image of the yearned for Temple as a sacred edifice with secular buildings – a development we noted earlier in connection with the Municipal School. The tendency can be tellingly demonstrated by comparing two marriage contracts, one prepared in the Orthodox, the other in the Zionist manner. The first reproduces the style widespread in 17th-century Italian *Ketubbot*.²⁵ The second is a pre-printed *Ketubbah* form, issued by the Jewish National Fund²⁶ during the inter-War period.²⁷

in 1925, in Hebrew), where Schatz describes the idyllic Palestine a century later – in 1918, including the Third Temple, decorated with, among other things, Schatz' sculptures.

²⁴ Kook (1908).

²⁵ Sabar (1997–1998: 308–310; 2000: 57). This type spread in the central and northern Italy in the 1670s until the middle of the XIX c. There are several such *Ketubbot* from Verona, Venice, Kassale Monferrato, Livorno, Senigallia and even Amsterdam. Fishof (1989: 26, 27, 30 – ref. no 5).

²⁶ The Jewish National Fund (Hebrew: Keren Kayemet LeYisrael) was founded in 1901 to buy and develop land in Ottoman Palestine (later British Mandate for Palestine, and subsequently Israel and the Palestinian territories) for Jewish settlement.

²⁷ Both types of these *Ketubbot* submitted to the web-site The National Library of Israel: Internet resource 11.07.2014. <<http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/collections/>

The first contract shows an image of Jerusalem and the Temple, motifs of the Garden of Eden, images of prosperity and blessings of the Lord (Psalm 128),²⁸ signs of the Zodiac, and the Tribes of Israel (ill. 7). In the second, the Temple edifice has been replaced by a different archetype: the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, an image to which we will yet return. Rather than an Edenic Baroque idyll with fountains, birds, and a garden in bloom with banner "The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel" (Isaiah 5:7),²⁹ here we see a sun flooded landscape with palm trees and homes of the chief creators of the new "Zionist Eden" – the builder and the gardener. The whole plot combines the banner "The LORD make the woman that is come into thy house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11). This text relating to the history of a Moabite Ruth, connects the Messianic Israel (great-grandson of Ruth is King

jewish-collection/ketubbot/Pages/collections.aspx>. The second type is represented by several examples of which are known only two such artefacts from New York, respectively, in 1931 and 1943.

²⁸ Fishof (1989: 26, 27). The image of Jerusalem with the Temple was the visualisation of the verse "May the Lord bless you from Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life" (Psalm 128:5).

²⁹ Sabar (2000: 46–47, 53). Referring to the Talmudic sources Sabar interpreted these subjects representing a fruitful vineyard as a common metaphor both for eschatological Redemption of Israel (ref. no 13).



Ill. 7. *Ketubbah*. Casale Monferrato, 1671. The Jewish National and University Library of Israel, Jerusalem



Ill. 8. *Ketubbah*. New York, 1943. Yeshiva University Museum, New York

David, of the house of who the Messiah should appear) with the return to the Land of Israel, and with the theme of the harvest, which in an overall sense, can be considered a revival of the Promised Land as the land of "flowing with milk and honey." This *Ketubbah* showed not only the Zionist way, but also the purpose of the Jewish National Fund, which had been created to facilitate the purchase of land in Palestine and the creation of new *yishuvim* (Jewish settlements, ill. 8).

Let us now move on to architectural archetypes. In the old tradition, the most popular way to represent the messianic Temple had been to resort to the image of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount (Mount Moriah) in Jerusalem.³⁰ A vivid example of the way the model of the Temple was adapted for use in a secular institution can be seen in the Herzliyah Gymnasium in Tel Aviv,³¹ whose origin can be traced to the 1892 model of the Tem-

ple by Charles Chipiez. It was also used in the design of many synagogue buildings, a development studied earlier by Sergei Kravtsov.³²

A similar role in the Zionist model of the Temple fell to the lot of the 1919 construction project – destined to remain on paper only – of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem building. In his recent article, "'With Eyes towards Zion.' Visions of the Holy Land in Romanian Synagogues," Ilia Rodov has demonstrated how the construction project drawings of the University became the archetype which inspired the paintings in the Tailors' Synagogue of Piatra Neamț in Romania.³³ This instance was not unique; the same borrowing occurred in the synagogue of the *Beth Hamidrash Hagadol* in New York.³⁴ The ambiguous caption under it,

³² Kravtsov (2008: 25–42).

³³ Rodov (2013: 157–158, 170–171).

³⁴ Wolfe (1978: 51–53). The Beth Hamidrash Hagadol in New York is the oldest Ashkenazi Orthodox synagogue in New York and the first synagogue of Jewish immigrants from Russia in the United States, in Lower East Side, the area of mass Jewish emigration in 1880–1920s. The Congregation was founded in 1852 and in 1885 purchased the building from the Norfolk Street Baptist Church. The wall

³⁰ Sabar (1997–1998: 302–312).

³¹ The Herzliyah Gymnasium (The Herzliyah Hebrew Gymnasium) in Tel Aviv was built by architect Joseph Barsky (died 1943) in 1909.

which reads, בנין בירושלים (*Building in Jerusalem*) underscores the cunning of the design, in which the image of the messianic Temple as a sacral centre is replaced by an edifice symbolising the centre of spirituality and science. The opposite side of the *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark) balances this out with a view of the urban milieu in Tel Aviv. These scenes portray the spiritual and physical rebirth of the Land of Israel. Design along these lines was in itself an innovation (ill. 9).

Earlier, paintings on synagogue walls facing east had typically depicted motifs of the Temple and its vessels,³⁵ along with images of the Garden of Eden. Metaphorical motifs of the Almighty's grace toward the righteous and his wrath upon the wicked also made an occasional appearance.³⁶ Double scenes on themes borrowed from Psalm 137, "On the Rivers of Babylon," were common, but more often situated on walls other than the eastern.³⁷ Later artists also resorted to Zionist symbols – *Magen David* (Star of David) and flags³⁸ – which they incorporated into variations upon the same theme.³⁹ In one instance, in the Bialystoker Shul in Lower East Side in New York, a contemporary view of the Tel Aviv coastline appeared instead of the Temple.⁴⁰

It is once again worth noting that thanks to Zionist influence, the series of holy sites in the Land of Israel began to include new, perfectly secular items. Thus in the poster *Come and See Eretz Israel* (c. 1920) issued as per the order placed by the Jewish National Fund, Zeev Raban included

an image of the Herzliyah Gymnasium and the 'Bezalel' School, both previously referred to. Especially telling is the instance of the 'Bezalel' School commercial-display hall, constructed in 1912 next to Jerusalem's citadel walls. Its image, familiar from postcards in faraway lands, next made it onto the walls of two synagogues (the Leipziger Temple and the neighboring Baal Shem Tov Synagogue) in the Romanian town of Piatra Neamț⁴¹ (ill. 10).

Placing the Land of Israel in the centre of the viewer's attention, Raban also restored one of its most ancient symbols, the date palm, which became a mark of Jewish presence in the Holy Land, also implicitly turning into a symbol of the Zionist movement. The artist used Roman Flavian imperial coins, minted in celebration of the triumph over Judea c. 70 CE. He similarly borrowed the motif of 'Judea Capta' from the Temple Emmanuel stained glass window in Beaumont, Texas. Working on the composition for Jewish National Fund activists' certificates, he adopted a coin with a date palm, turning the image into a symbol of Jewish rebirth. He used the palm as a token symbol of the Land of Israel, whether working on illustrations to the story of the Exodus from Egypt, or in the famous poster *Come to Palestine* (1929)⁴² which became something of a trademark with him. This is the same image we find on the Municipal School façade. Following Raban, the motif was taken up in synagogue wall paintings: it was included in Palestine landscapes, and featured among the symbols of the Tribes of Israel.

Elsewhere, Raban creates an expressive heraldic symbol for Manasseh, one of the Tribes of Israel, as a palm tree and two Stars of David. The image echoes a similar motif used to represent Joseph, Manasseh's father, familiar from late 19th century MIZRACH signs from Germany. This motif also migrated into a number of synagogues, for example, in Bukovina, where the Zionist influence was especially strong.

The *Tribes of Israel* cycle which we have mentioned from the Municipal School façade became a renovated *aliyah* symbol. In the 1920s, Raban replicated this motif, along with other compositional themes again and again: in the ceramic cladding

paintings presumably relate to 1920–1930s and were carried out in the tradition of Eastern European synagogue decorations. The author studied murals of the old synagogues of this area in 2008–2012 and presented them in the paper: *American Traces of Eastern European Synagogue Decoration: The Case of Immigrant Shuls on the Lower East Side in NYC* at the international conference *Traditions and Perspectives in History of Jewish Art*, Sept. 10–12, 2012, Bar-Ilan University.

³⁵ Piechotka 2004 (2004: 115–117), Piechotka (1996: 328–331). Among the most famous examples there are synagogues in Sandomierz, Żółkiew (Zhovkva), Kraków ('Isaac' and 'Kupa' synagogues).

³⁶ Kotlyar (2012: 94–98). The materials of only one synagogue wall paintings with such motives as flower garden and withered, lopped tree (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy, 28) on the both sides of *Aron Kodesh* were preserved in Talne (now Ukraine, Cherkassy region).

³⁷ Khaimovich (2008: 60–71), Kotlyar (2010: 534–541). For example, synagogues of the second half XVIII – the first half XX cc. in Jaryczów (Jarychev), Pieczeniżyn (Peczenezhyn) (Podolia / Galicia), Novoselitza, Czernowitz (Bukovina), Piatra Neamț, Guru Humorului (Romania) and many others.

³⁸ Arbel (1998: 20–22).

³⁹ Khaimovich (2008: 65–68), Kotlyar (2013: 273).

⁴⁰ Kotlyar (2014: 240–242).

⁴¹ Rodov (2013: 158), Kotlyar (2014: 368–370).

⁴² Manor (2001: 58).

Ill. 9.
New York. Beth
Hamedrash
Hagadol (Norfolk
St. Synagogue).
Wall painting on the
Eastern wall.
1920s - 1930s. Photo
Eugeny Kotlyar, 2011



Ill. 10.
Baal Shem Tov
Synagogue in Piatra
Neamț (Romania). Wall
Painting.
1920s - 1930s. Partial
repainting wall and
interior renovation -
2000s. Photo Elena
Seredina, 2009



of the *Moshav Zekenim* Synagogue,⁴³ in the interior of the Chaim Nachman Bialik house museum in Tel Aviv,⁴⁴ and on the metal doors of the *Bikkur Cholim* Hospital in Jerusalem.⁴⁵

⁴³ The *Moshav Zekenim* Synagogue was built by architect Yehuda Maguidovitz in 1928. It is located on 89 Allenby Street in Tel Aviv.

⁴⁴ The house was built by Joseph Minor, an architect who had studied under Alexander Baerwald (author of the Technion University) in 1925. It is located on 22 Bialik Street in Tel Aviv.

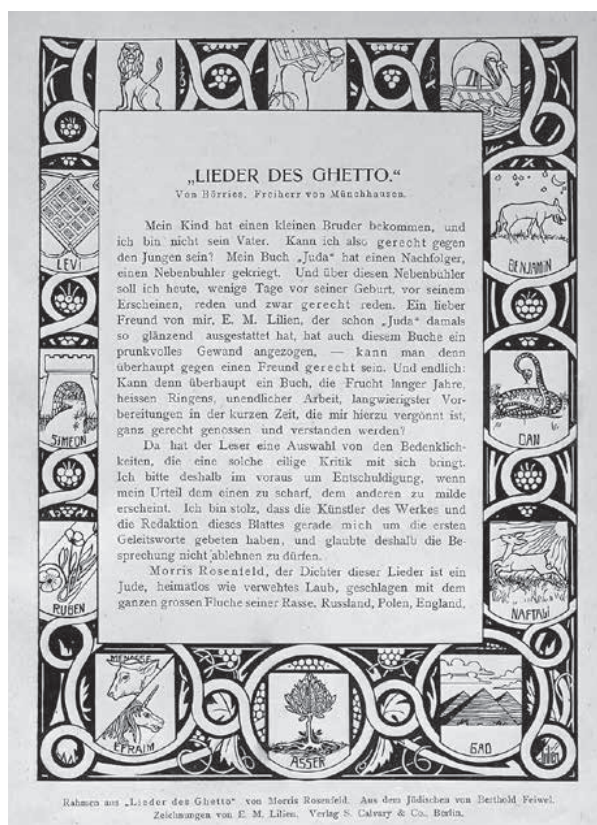
⁴⁵ The Hospital was built by architect Joseph Barsky (opened in 1925), who also built the Herzliyah Gymnasium.

A few times, for example, on the façade of the *Moshav Zekenim* Synagogue building in Tel Aviv, Raban combined this cycle with signs of the Zodiac and the new motif of the "Seven Species of Israel," which also became a Biblical Zionist symbol. Using modernist stylistics, Raban created new Jewish heraldic models, infusing Biblical motifs with Zionist pathos (ill. 11).

It is located on the cross King George St. and Ha-Nevi'im St. in Jerusalem.



Ill. 11.
Tel Aviv. *Moshav Zekenim*
Synagogue. The cycle of
ceramic panel paintings.
Artist Zeev Raban. 1928.
Photo Eugeny Kotlyar, 2012



Ill. 12. Ephraim Moses Lilien. The Tribes of Israel motif.
The illustrations to the collected poems by Morris
Rosenfeld titled *Songs of the Ghetto*. 1902.
(*Ost und West*, Heft 11, November (1902): 757-758)

Raban was obviously no trailblazer in reviving the Tribes of Israel theme, but he breathed new feeling into it. Familiar since ancient times, the Tribes of Israel cycle has made a comeback into Jewish art starting from the last third of the 19th century via numerous printed MIZRACH marker models published in Europe.⁴⁶ The symbols of the Tribes of Israel thence moved on to synagogue walls, now borne along by the new Zionist trends.

The motif was taken up by artists inspired by Zionist ideas. Foremost among these was Raban's older colleague from 'Bezalel,' Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874–1925).⁴⁷ In 1902 Lilien came up with a cycle of illustrations to the collected poems by Morris Rosenfeld entitled *Songs of the Ghetto*; the Tribes

⁴⁶ Shadur (2002: 54–55). In Germany, Breslau, similar colour lithographs of MIZRACH printed by the publishing house of Salo Shotlander (Salo Schottländer, 1844–1920) and distributed throughout Europe.

⁴⁷ Lilien works and above all created by him illustrations for the book by Börries von Münchhausen *Juda* (1900), where he recreated scenes from the Bible in the tradition of *Jugendstil*, and turned back motives such as *Magen David* and *Menorah*, became the aesthetic program of the Zionist movement, the symbols of its ideology and propaganda. Finkelstein (1998: 198–199).

Ill. 13.
Lwow [Lviv]. *Tzori Gilead* Synagogue. Vault paintings. Artist Maksymilian Kugel. 1930s. Repainting wall - 2007. Photo Eugeny Kotlyar, 2010



Ill. 14.
Tribe *Zvulun*. Lwow [Lviv]. *Tzori Gilead* Synagogue. Wall paintings. Artist Maksymilian Kugel. 1930s. Repainting wall - 2007. Photo Eugeny Kotlyar, 2010



of Israel motif was part of the work⁴⁸ (ill. 12). The motif had begun to appear in visual works produced throughout the Jewish world from Europe to America. In the 1920–1930s, Lilien's *Tribes of Israel* appeared on stationary used for financial credit documents by the Jewish cooperative *Geula* in Sofia, and in the relief sculpted images of the Bialystoker Centre & Home for the Aged in New York.⁴⁹ Beginning in 1910, images introduced by him appear as part of the decoration of doors and architectural

relief sculpture in the Alte Synagoge in Essen⁵⁰ and Temple Emmanu-El in New York.⁵¹ In the paintings decorating the *Tzori Gilead* Synagogue in Lwow (1930s), the artist Maksymilian Kugel not only appropriated Lilien's work as the basis for his compositions, but also adopted Lilien's deeper compositional idea. He borrowed the distribution scheme of the Tribes, three on each of the four sides, reiterating the layout of the Israelite camp in the desert

⁴⁸ Rosenfeld (1902: 67, 82, 83, 132, 133).

⁴⁹ The Centre was built by architect Harry Hurwit in 1929–1931 at the 228 East Broadway, New York.

⁵⁰ Alte Synagoge (from Germ. "The Old Synagogue") was built in 1913. It was damaged in the *Kristallnacht* (9–10 November 1938) and reconstructed in 1988.

⁵¹ Temple Emanu-El was the first Reform Jewish congregation in New York City. The building was constructed to designs of Robert D. Kohn in 1929 at 65th St. and Fifth Av.

as this is described in the Pentateuch⁵² (ill. 13). Prior to Lilien's work, this arrangement could only be seen in the 17th–18th century Italian *Ketubbot*, which has already been mentioned and which was indebted to even earlier archetypes.⁵³ Curiously, while preserving the same form, each successive instance was further and further removed from the original order of the Tribes encamped in the desert as described in the text.⁵⁴ But this detail did not interfere with the most important point: the inclusion of Zionist symbols in the Tribes of Israel scheme (ill. 14) brought out the fact that Biblical and messianic motifs had metamorphosed into a manifesto of the Zionist aim to gather the People of Israel in their historical homeland.

Inspired by its leaders, the Zionist movement thus mobilised and in a way also reinterpreted the old Eastern European tradition of synagogue decoration. In Zionist artists' hands, it adapted the tradition for its own purposes, demonstrating a new notion of national rebirth in the Land of Israel instead of the old 'messianic' one. Traditional synagogue decorations with their pathos of Edenic life to come metamorphosed into romantic pictures of Jewish rebirth in the Land of Israel, while Biblical schemes intertwined with *Chalutz*-type motifs. The image of the messianic Temple as a sacred building was transformed into secular centres of science and learning. Zionist ideology and aesthetics, for their part, impacted the modernisation of the Eastern European synagogue decoration repertoire, which was now complemented by new programmatic cycles, Zionist motifs, secular compositions, and views of modern buildings in Palestine. All these innovations began to combine the religious paradigm of synagogue decoration with nationalistic ideas, at times even replacing one with the other. These artistic processes are possible to apply a figurative statement of Rabbi Shlomo Avineri about Abraham Kook, who dedicated himself to rethink religious tradition in the spirit of religious Zionism, "filling

the old vessels with new content."⁵⁵ However, one should always remember, that these trends in synagogue wall paintings were of no radical nature. They only revived a long held system by infusing it with Zionist trends focused on a new, vibrant bond between the Jews and their historical homeland.

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⁵² Numbers 2: 1–32.

⁵³ Sabar (1997–1998: 308–310). The order of placing the tribes of Israel in *Ketubbot* is the same as described in the Torah location of tribes in the camp of Israel in the desert (ill. 7).

⁵⁴ Lilien departs from this principle, more leaning though not exactly the order of Jacob's blessing of his sons on his deathbed (Genesis 49:1–28). In addition, he connects to one emblem the symbols of Ephraim and Menasse, linking their origin from Joseph. Maximilian Kugel also repelled from this interpretation by Lilien in the wall paintings of the synagogue *Tzori Gilead* in Lwow.

⁵⁵ Avineri (1990: 269).

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