

Art around 1900 in Central Europe

#6 Jewish painters

Karolina Dzimira-Zarzycka
Jakub Zarzycki

translated by Agata Walny



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
WIRTH INSTITUTE FOR AUSTRIAN
AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN STUDIES



Art around 1900 in Central Europe

In this popular culture series we will examine one of the most inspiring moments in the history of European culture.

The turn of the 19th and 20th century was a **special period for the art of Central Europe**, with various artistic trends occurring in a short time and an intensified cultural exchange between countries politically connected with the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

We will deal with paintings, architecture and sculpture, but also other important cultural phenomena, such as international exhibitions and art collections. We present a panorama of **the Belle Époque** by comparing artists from Central European countries.

Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *Portrait of Blanka Lipschitz Federn*, 1906, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem



Jews in Europe

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Jewish community was **diverse in many respects** – from orthodox circles to fully assimilated groups.

Around 1900, the number of European Jews is estimated at **nearly 9 million**, but their distribution across Europe was very uneven.



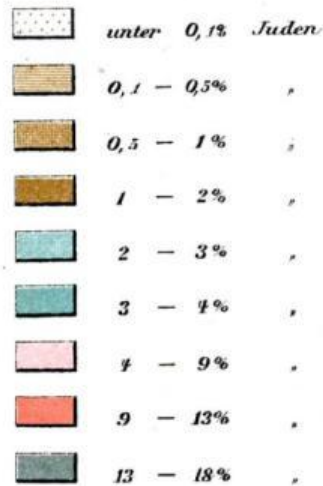
Leopold Horovitz (HU), *At the rabbi's*, circa 1875–1890, East Slovak Gallery, Košice

Almost half of the Jewish population lived in the Russian Empire, of which over 95% – forced by the decree of Catherine the Great from 1791 – lived in the so-called **Pale of Settlement** (currently Lithuania, Belarus, Moldova, and parts of Latvia, Ukraine and Poland).

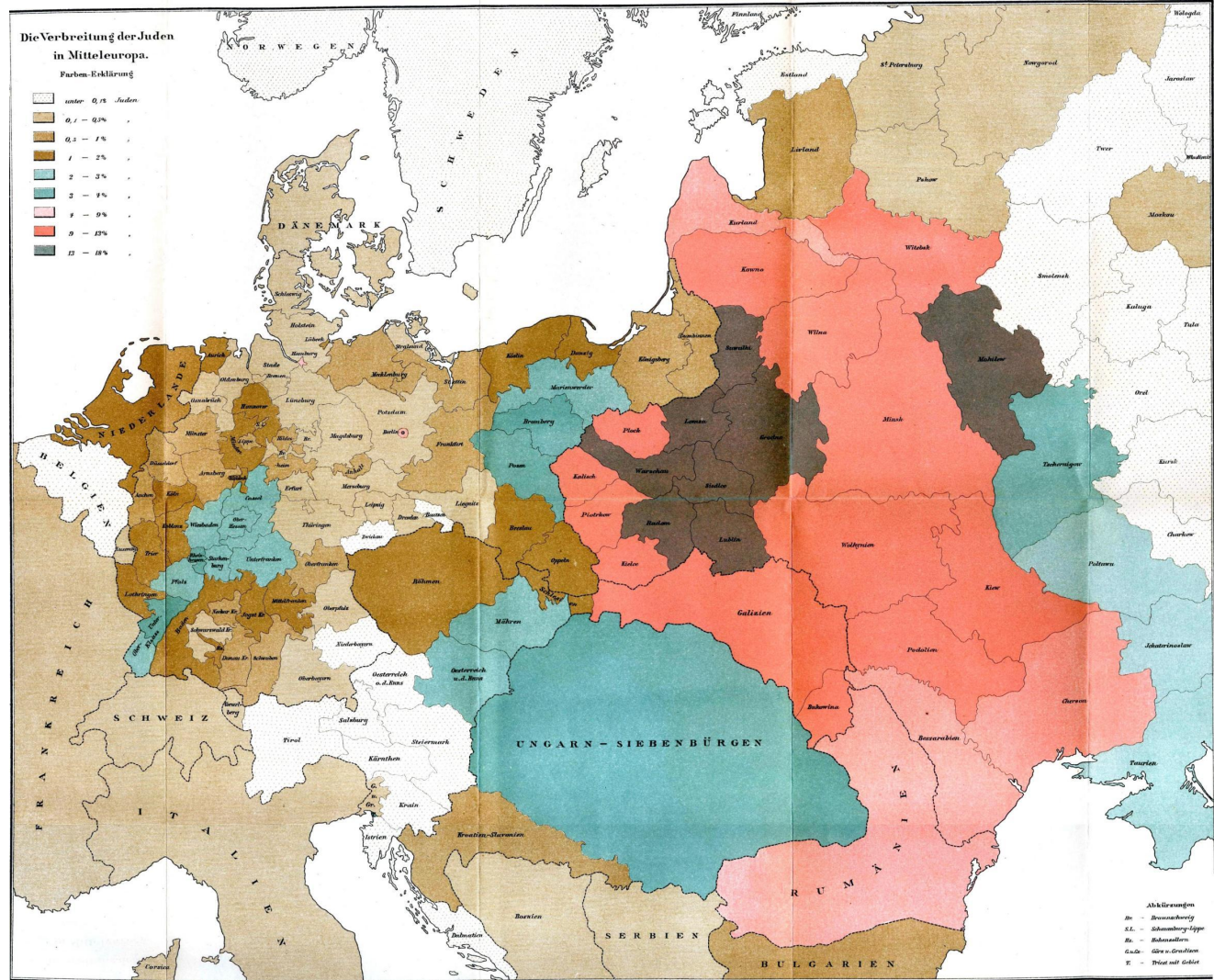
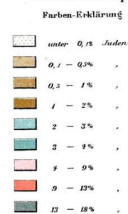
About 1.3 million Jews lived in **Poland** (at the time divided into three partitions). Hungary was in third place with about 850,000. In most major cities like **Warsaw, Budapest, and Vienna**, there were around 150,000 Jews.



Isidor Kaufmann (HU), *Friday evening*, circa 1920, Jewish Museum, New York



Die Verbreitung der Juden in Mitteleuropa.



The distribution of the Jews in Central Europe – Richard Andree, *Ethnography of the Jews*, 1881

Abkürzungen
 Br. = Braunsberg
 S.L. = Schenksberg-Lippe
 B. = Bismarck
 G. = Gießen
 W. = Wiesbaden

Art and the Jewish tradition

The **religious tradition** greatly influenced the development of Jewish art. For centuries – as ascribed by the Old Testament – **depicting the human figure was forbidden**.

Although this guideline was not always respected, it was a long time before Jewish artists dealt with easel painting. Instead, they focused on **artistic craftsmanship** (goldsmithing, medallion art, etc.) and decorative arts related to the **religious function** (polychromes in synagogues).



Ernst Czernoczek (CZ), *Still life with Jewish liturgical objects*, date unknown, Jewish Museum in Prague

This sceptical attitude towards painting slowly shifted in the 19th century. Young Jews, coming from assimilated families, began studying at European academies of fine arts.

Sometimes painters **converted to Catholicism or Protestantism**, like the Hungarian artist Tivadar Alconiere.



Tivadar Alconiere (HU), *Equestrian portrait*, 1831,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Some adhered to **Judaism**, such as Aleksander Lesser from Poland, or Moritz Daniel Oppenheim from Germany – recognized as the first professional Jewish painter.



Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (DE), *Self-portrait*, 1814–1816, Jewish Museum, New York



Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (DE), *Shavuot (Pentecost)*, 1880, Jewish Museum, New York

A universal medium

What is important to note is that painting was a **universal medium**, independent of, for example, language and did not encounter such limitations like literature. The output of Jewish artists was therefore closely **related to the culture of the country** where they resided.

Thus, painting had a parallel impact on both the Jewish and non-Jewish audience. Moreover, painters could function internationally, for example, showing their paintings at exhibitions in Paris.

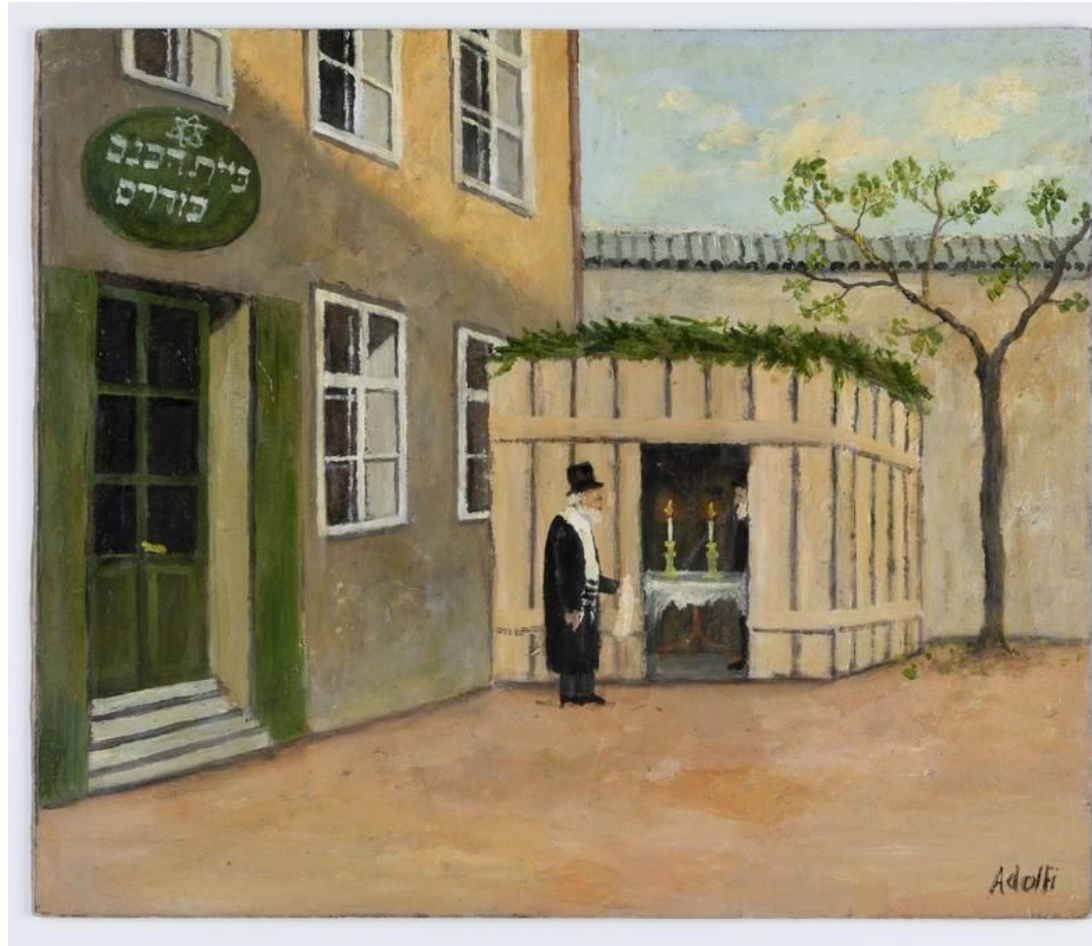
Isidor Kaufmann (HU), *Portrait of a boy*, circa 1895–1915, Jewish Museum, New York



Regardless, the **Yiddish culture** and the **Zionist movement** developed **independently of state borders**, linking Jewish communities from Budapest to New York.

In Austria-Hungary, Judaism was part of a larger mosaic of different nationalities, cultures, and religions. Artists willingly chose to live in Vienna due to its rich cultural life.

Adolf Kohn (CZ), *Inner courtyard (Kauders Synagogue?)*, circa 1890, Jewish Museum in Prague



Warsaw – Budapest – Vienna

Leopold (Lipót) Horovitz is an interesting case study. The painter was born in 1838 near Košice (today's Slovakia) into a rabbinical family. He studied in Vienna and visited Paris many times.

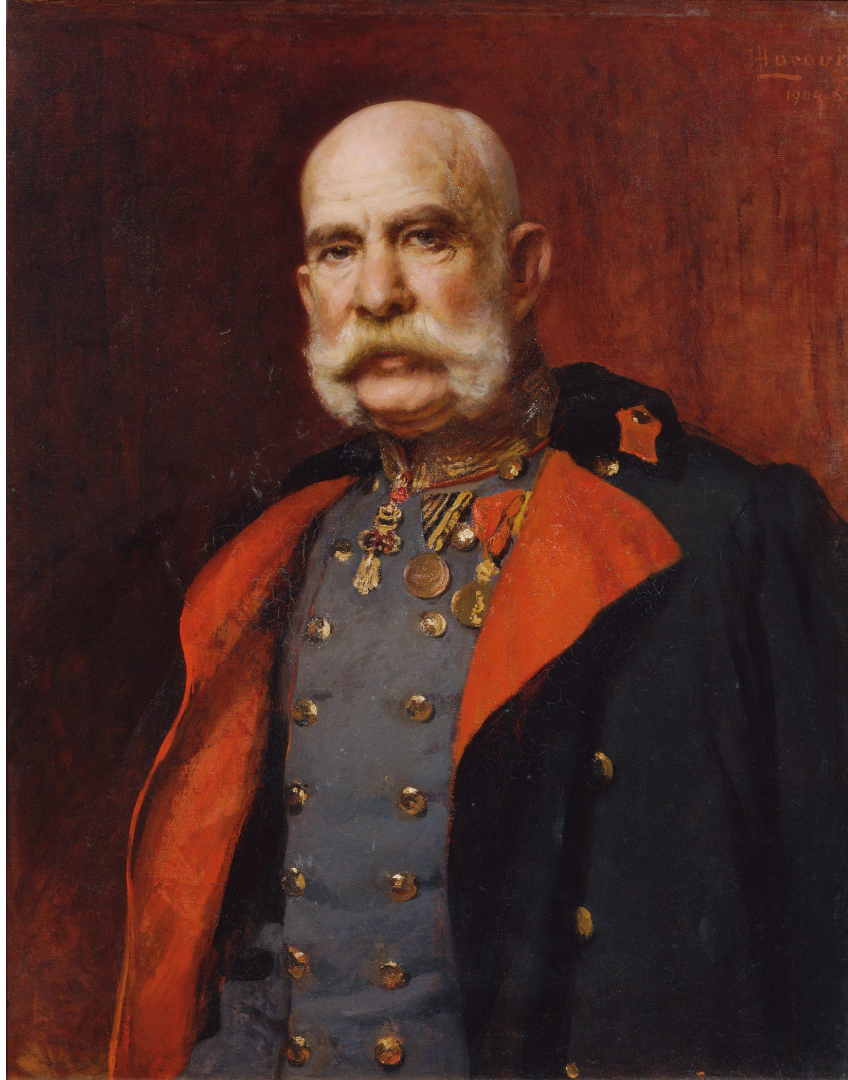
He settled in Warsaw in the 1860's – then part of the Russian partition. There he married the niece of Aleksander Lesser, a Polish painter of Jewish origin. He painted portraits of the aristocracy and rich burghers with great success.

Leopold Horovitz (HU), *Portrait of Anna Branicka*, 1886, National Museum in Warsaw



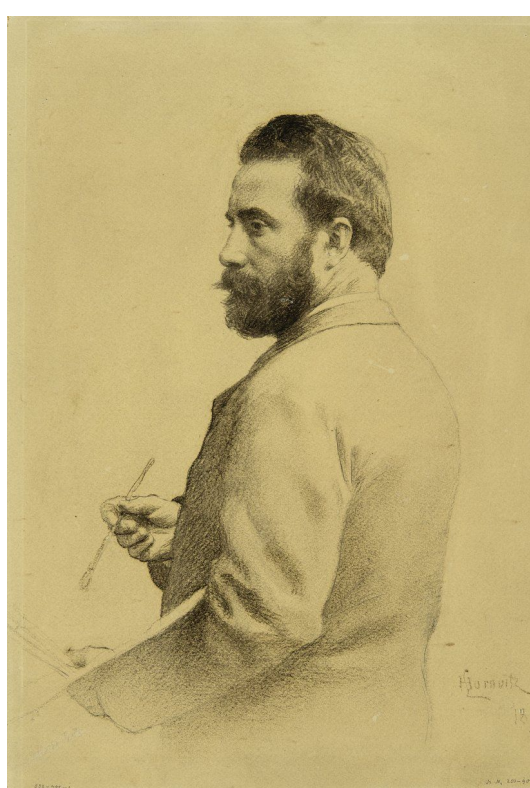
In 1889 he moved to Budapest, and from there to Vienna, where from 1893 he worked as a **portraitist of the court**, frequently visited in his studio by Franz Józef himself. He died in Vienna in 1917.

Leopold Horovitz (HU), *Portrait of Franz Joseph I of Austria*, 1904–1906, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

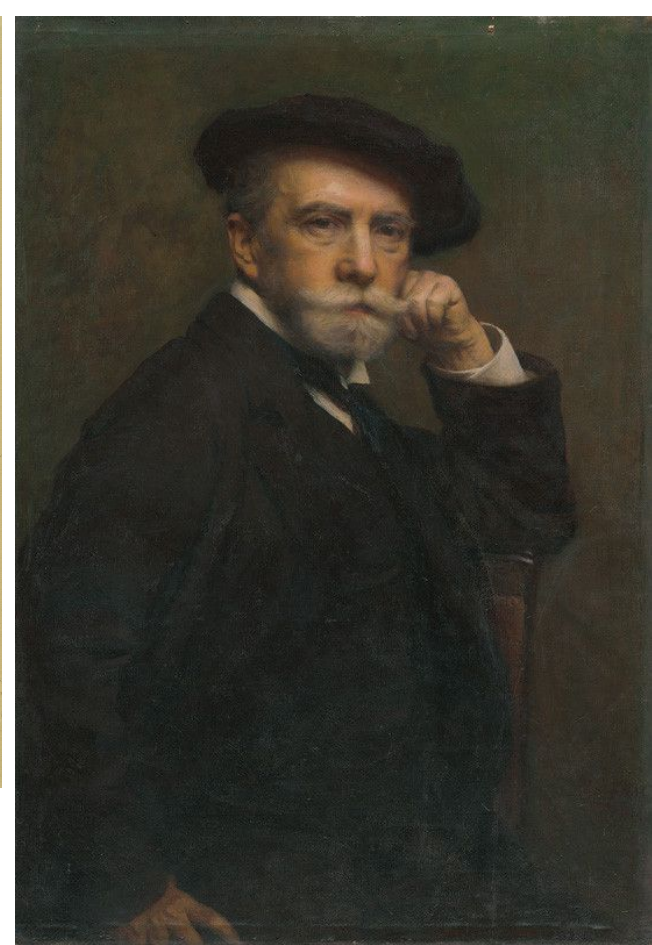




Leopold Horovitz (HU), *Self-portrait at a young age*, circa 1860, National Museum in Warsaw



Leopold Horovitz (HU), *Self-portrait*, 1890, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Leopold Horovitz (HU), *Self-portrait*, 1915, East Slovak Gallery, Košice

From Sanok to Vienna

The painter **Broncia Koller-Pinell** (born 1863 as Bronisława Pineles) had a slightly different story. She was raised in an orthodox Jewish family from Sanok in Galicia (the Polish region of Austria-Hungary).

In 1870, she and her family moved to Vienna where she took her first private drawing lessons. She later studied at the “Damenakademien” (school of painting for women) in Munich.



Broncia Koller-Pinell (AT), *Harvest*, 1908,
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Broncia Koller-Pinell (AT), *Orange grove on the French Riviera*, 1903, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

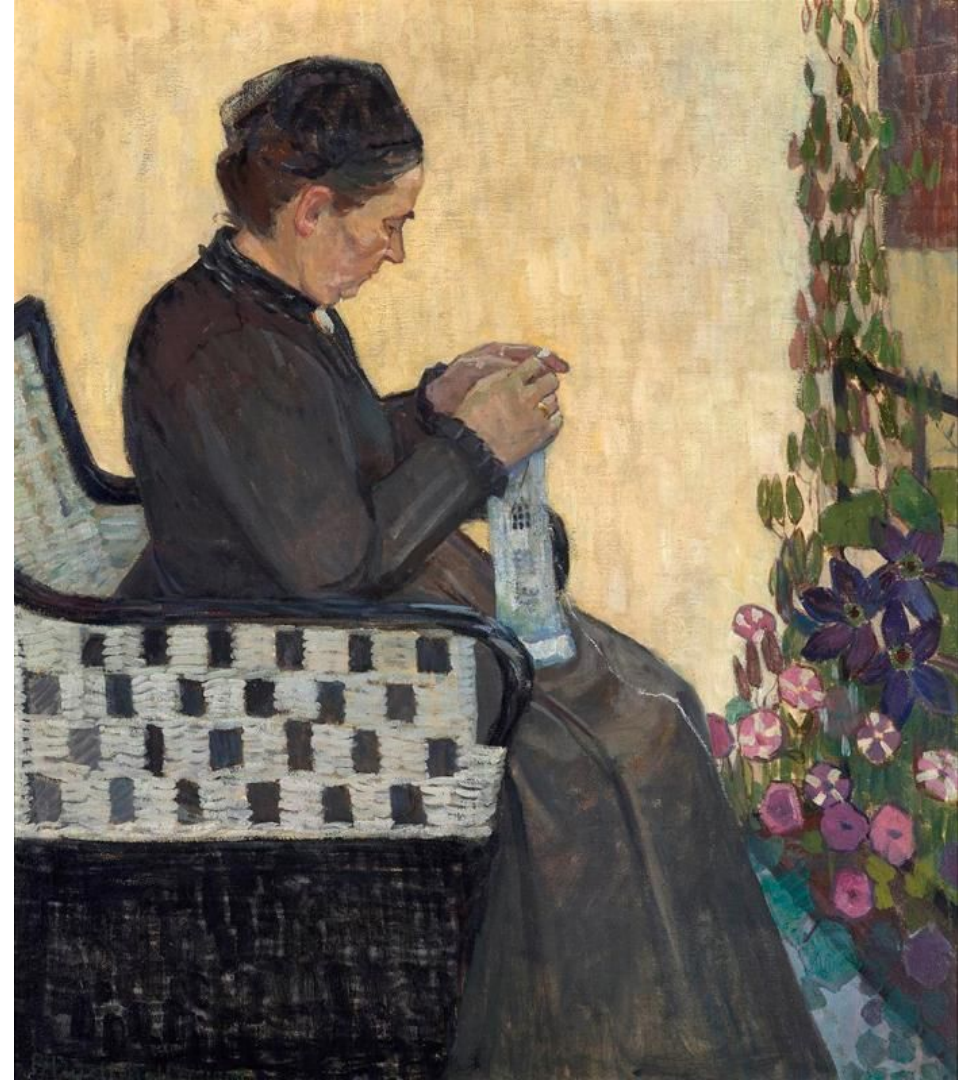


Broncia Koller-Pinell (AT),
circa 1900

At the beginning of the 20th century, she returned Vienna. She was active in the artistic circle of the Vienna Secession, with which she exhibited her paintings.

Her career was greatly supported by her husband Hugo Koller – a Viennese doctor, industrialist and art lover. The couple entertained many leading Viennese artists at their home, like Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele.

Since Hugo Koller was a Catholic, the relationship sparked opposition from Broncia's family. She herself did not convert, but their children were brought up as Catholics.



Broncia Koller-Pinell (AT), *Portrait of artist's mother*, 1907, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

Jewish organizations and initiatives

From the end of the 19th century, more and more organizations linked with Jewish history, culture, and education were established.

1894 marked the date of the establishment of the **Jewish Museum in Vienna** – the first of such in the world.

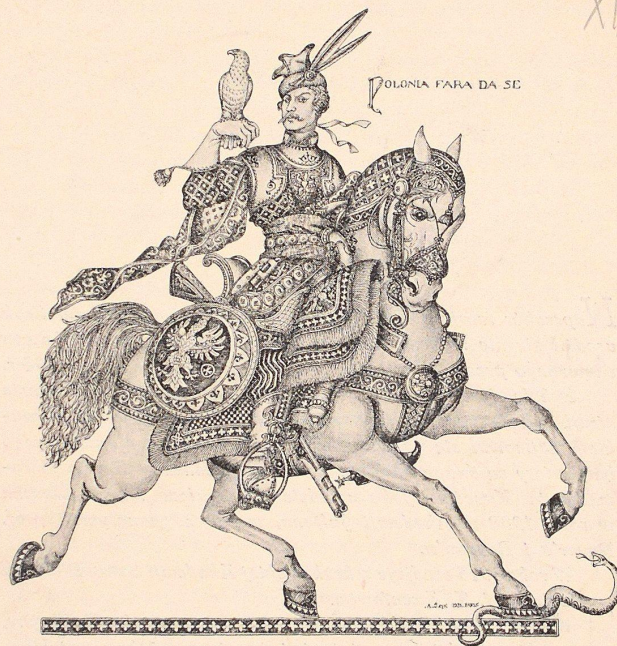
Alef-Beth. Polish-Hebrew primer for Israel children
illustrated by Jakub Weinles (PL), 1902, National
Museum in Cracow



Some initiatives were of **local** importance, others were **international** in scope.

For example, Jakub Kacembogen founded a drawing and painting school in Łódź in 1896. It mostly admitted Jewish students, both boys and girls. A notable student was Artur Szyk.

Cover of catalogue of the
Artur Szyk's exhibition, 1932,
National Library in Warsaw



Pod protektoratem Ekscc. Augusta Zaleskiego, min. spr. zagr.

Okrężna Wystawa Dzieł Artura Szyka

1932

In 1901, the first international exhibition of Jewish art took place, accompanying the 5th Zionist Congress in Basel, and mainly showed works by Jewish artists from Berlin.



E. M. LILIEN.

GEDENKBLATT DES FÜNFTEN ZIONISTEN-CONGRESSES (26. bis 30. Dez.) IN BASEL.

Ephraim Moses Lilien (PL), graphic for the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel, 1901; published later in the magazine "Ost und West", 1902, Frankfurt University Library

Berlin

Berlin became the **main centre of contact for Jewish artists**. It was there at the end of the 18th century that the **Haskalah** – the Jewish Enlightenment movement aimed at modernizing life and dialogue with European culture – was formed.

Important German authors of Jewish origin – such as Max Liebermann and Lesser Ury – attracted artists from Central Europe to Berlin.



Max Liebermann (DE), *Samson and Delilah*, 1902,
Städel Museum, Frankfurt

The Polish-Jewish artist **Ephraim Moses Lilien** was highly active in Germany. He collaborated with the Munich magazine “Die Jugend”, and in 1902 he co-founded the Berlin publishing house “Jüdischer Verlag”.

The Exhibition of Jewish Artists was held in Berlin in 1906. Over 50 artists participated, including those from Poland, Austria and Hungary.

Ephraim Moses Lilien (PL), poster of “Berliner Tageblatt”, 1899, Kunstbibliothek Berlin



Everyday Jewish life

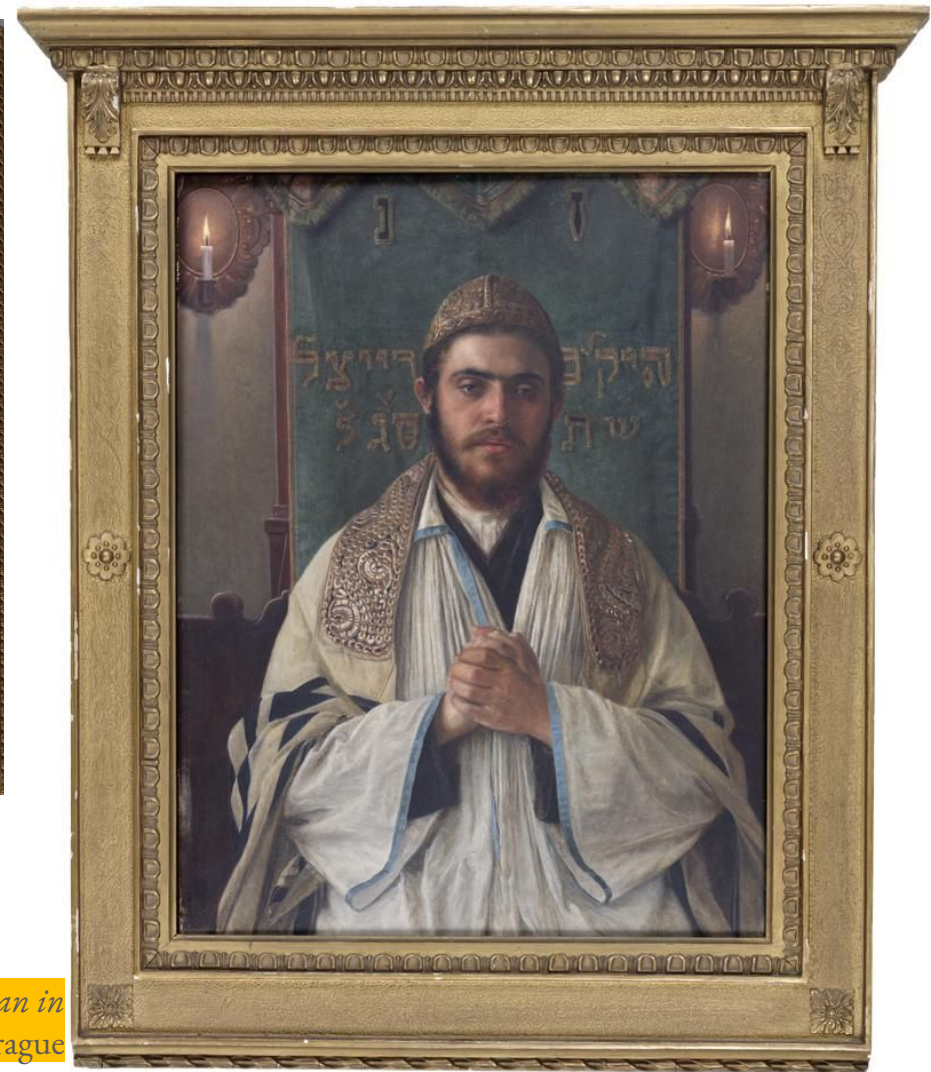
We often find references to native culture and motifs taken from everyday life in the works of Jewish artists: i.e. scenes from **Jewish neighbourhoods, traditional rituals**, and prayers in **synagogues**.



Isidor Kaufmann (HU), *Man with fur hat*,
circa 1910, Jewish Museum, New York



Wilhelm Wachtel (PL), *In the synagogue - Kol nidre*, circa 1900, Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw



Isidor Kaufmann (HU), *Portrait of a young man in a synagogue*, circa 1900, Jewish Museum in Prague

Similar motifs appeared in the works of many Realist painters – not only those of Jewish origin– who were simply looking for picturesque or meaningful subjects (e.g. Polish artist Aleksander Gierymski).



Aleksander Gierymski (PL),
Feast of Trumpets I, 1884,
National Museum in Warsaw



Aleksander Gierymski (PL),
Jewess with oranges, 1884,
National Museum in Warsaw

Jewish artists were more in-depth, treating this as a **record of the world from which they came.**

The paintings could sometimes be dominated by a **personal, intimate dimension** – sometimes a sense of melancholy and passing.



Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *School of talmudists*, 1887,
National Museum in Cracow



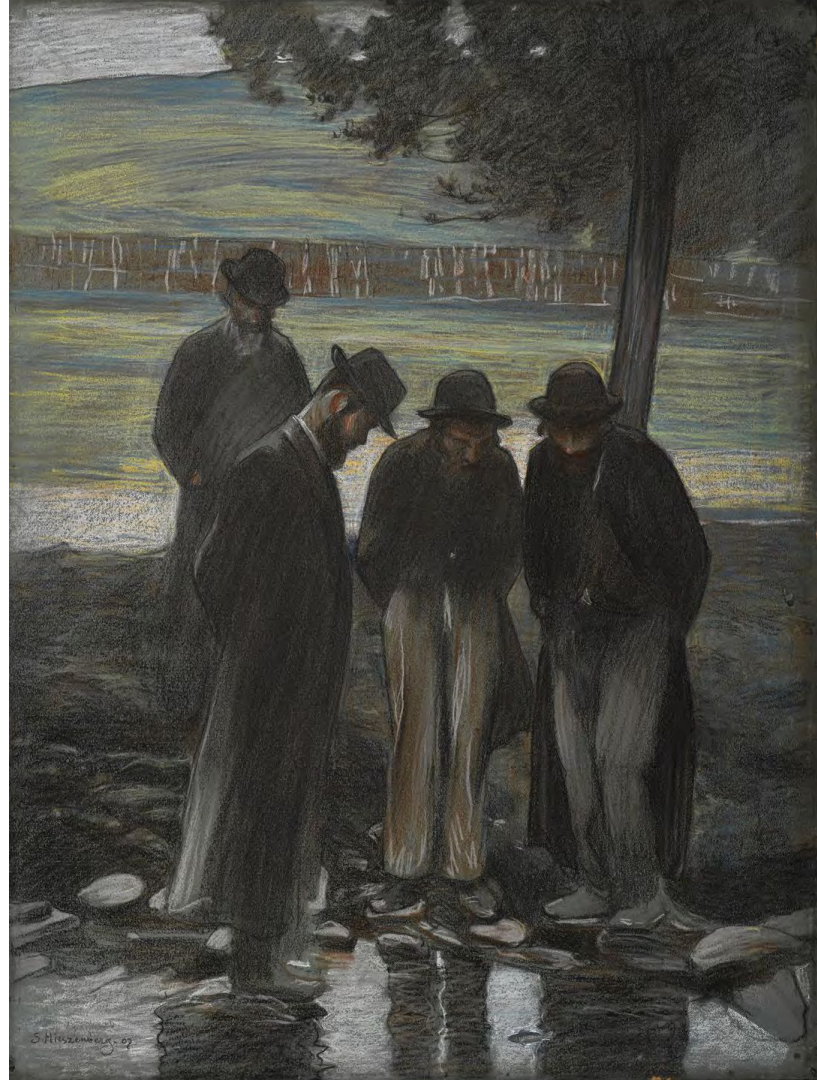
Jakub Weinles (PL), *In the synagogue*,
circa 1900, National Museum in
Warsaw

Unknown artist, *Portrait of a rabbi in front of
the synagogue curtain*, date unknown, Jewish
Museum in Prague

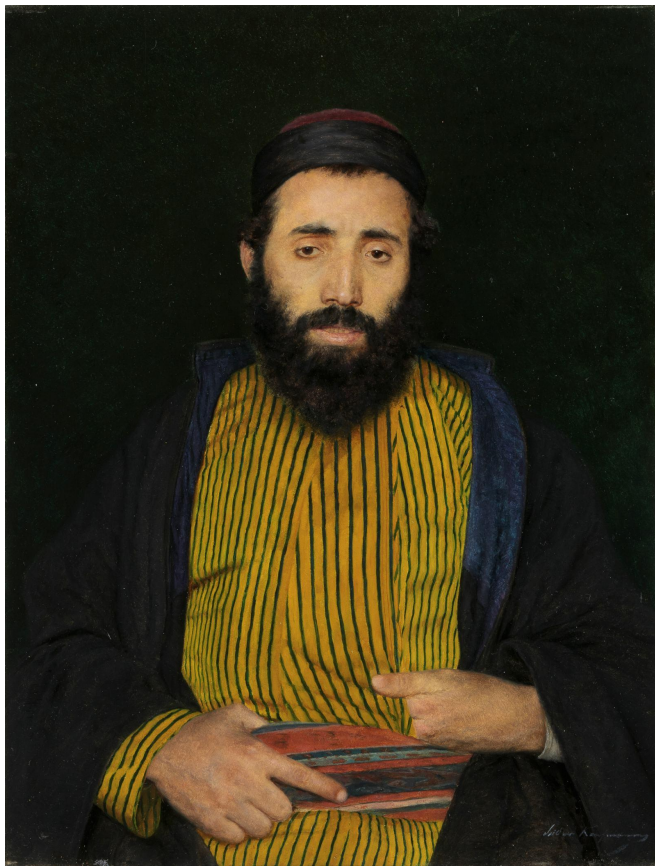




Alois Wierer (CZ), *Part of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague*, date unknown, Jewish Museum in Prague



Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *Tashlich prayer*, 1907, Tel Aviv Museum of Art



Isidor Kaufmann (HU), *Portrait of a Sephardic Jew*, circa 1900, Jewish Museum, New York



Leopold Pilichowski (PL), *Sukkot*, 1894-1895, Jewish Museum, New York



28 / 54 Maurycy Minkowski (PL), *He cast a look and went mad*, 1910, Jewish Museum, New York



Unknown artist, *Portrait of a man in tallit, with prayer straps on his head*, date unknown, Jewish Museum in Prague

In search of identity

The most important iconographic motifs related to Jewish culture were introduced into Polish painting by **Maurycy Gottlieb**, a student of Jan Matejko.

In Gottlieb's painting, you can see the **divide between the Jewish and Christian tradition**, as well as in the identities of Jews and Poles. The artist tried to reconcile these two worlds, looking for a solution by researching old Polish-Jewish relations or presenting Jesus as the “link” between the two religions.

Artist's self-portrait



Maurycy Gottlieb (PL), *Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur*, 1878, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel

Literature

Gottlieb searched for inspiration linked to the Jewish heritage within **history, religion, and literature** (among others in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*).



Maurycy Gottlieb (PL), *Shylock and Jessyka*, etching by Ignacy Łopieński, 1913, National Museum in Warsaw



Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *Spinoza [Excommunicated Spinoza]*, 1907,
The A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of Kursk

Baruch Spinoza, Dutch
philosopher of Jewish origin

Jankiel, a Jew from Adam
Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*

Maurycy Trębacz (PL), *Cymbalom player*,
1890-1900, National Museum in Warsaw



Bible

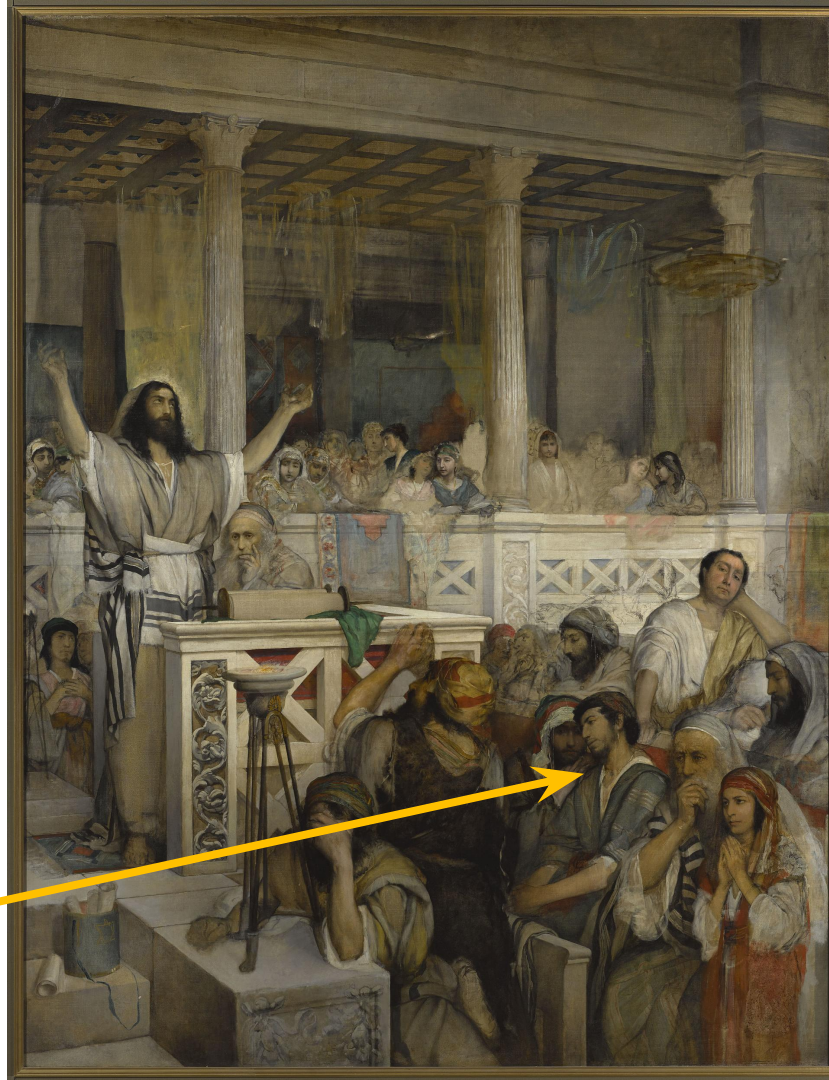
Gottlieb drew from both the **Old and New Testaments**. He emphasized the Jewish origins of Jesus Christ, giving him distinct Semitic features, contrary to traditional iconography. He reached for motifs from the **Jewish-Arab world**, and also painted himself in “oriental” costumes.



Maurycy Gottlieb (PL), *Salome with the head of St. John*, sketch, 1877, National Museum in Warsaw



Maurycy Gottlieb (PL),
*Abasuerus (Self-portrait,
The Wandering Jew)*,
1876, National Museum
in Cracow



Artist's self-portrait

Maurycy Gottlieb (PL), *Christ teaching in Capernaum*,
1878-1879, National Museum in Warsaw

The Wandering Jew

In the works of Maurycy Gottlieb we see the legendary figure of the Wandering Jew as a symbol of the **perpetual drift of the Jewish nation**.

Similar dilemmas appeared in the works of Samuel Hirszenberg, albeit in a symbolist way. The terrifying vision was presented in the painting, *The Wandering Jew* – awarded a bronze medal at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900.

Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *The Wandering Jew*, 1899,
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem





Adolf Hirémy-Hirschl (HU), *Abasuerus at the End of the World*, 1888, private collection

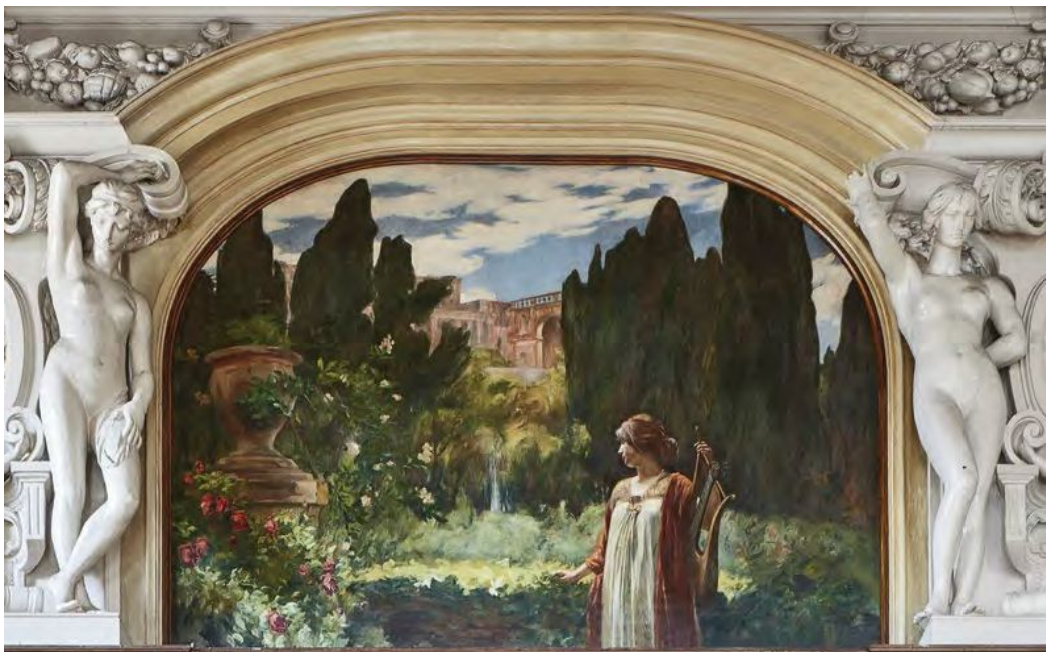
Jewish patrons

Jewish painters were often hired by **industrialists or townspeople of Jewish origin**, who eagerly commissioned portraits of themselves.

Samuel Hirszenberg also created painted decorations in the dazzling palace of Izrael Poznański, a Jewish factory owner from Łódź (today's Poland).



Leopold Horovitz (HU), *Portrait of Leopold Kronenberg*, 1879, National Museum in Warsaw



Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *Muse*, 1903, Palace of Izrael Kalmanowicz Poznański, Museum of the City of Łódź



Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *Portrait of Doctor Anzelm Schudmak (Siodmak)*, 1906, Cracow Historical Museum

Views of Palestine

An important theme in the works of Jewish artists were **journeys to Palestine** – the territory occupied by Israeli tribes in ancient times.

The atmosphere and landscapes of the areas around Jerusalem were an opportunity for artists to **symbolically understand the biblical world**. The Middle East and North Africa were generally treated in a similar way.

Abraham Neuman painted sunny Middle Eastern landscapes. In 1904 he was (most likely) the first Polish artist to visit Palestine.

Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *On the Way to the Western Wall*, 1908, Tel Aviv Museum of Art

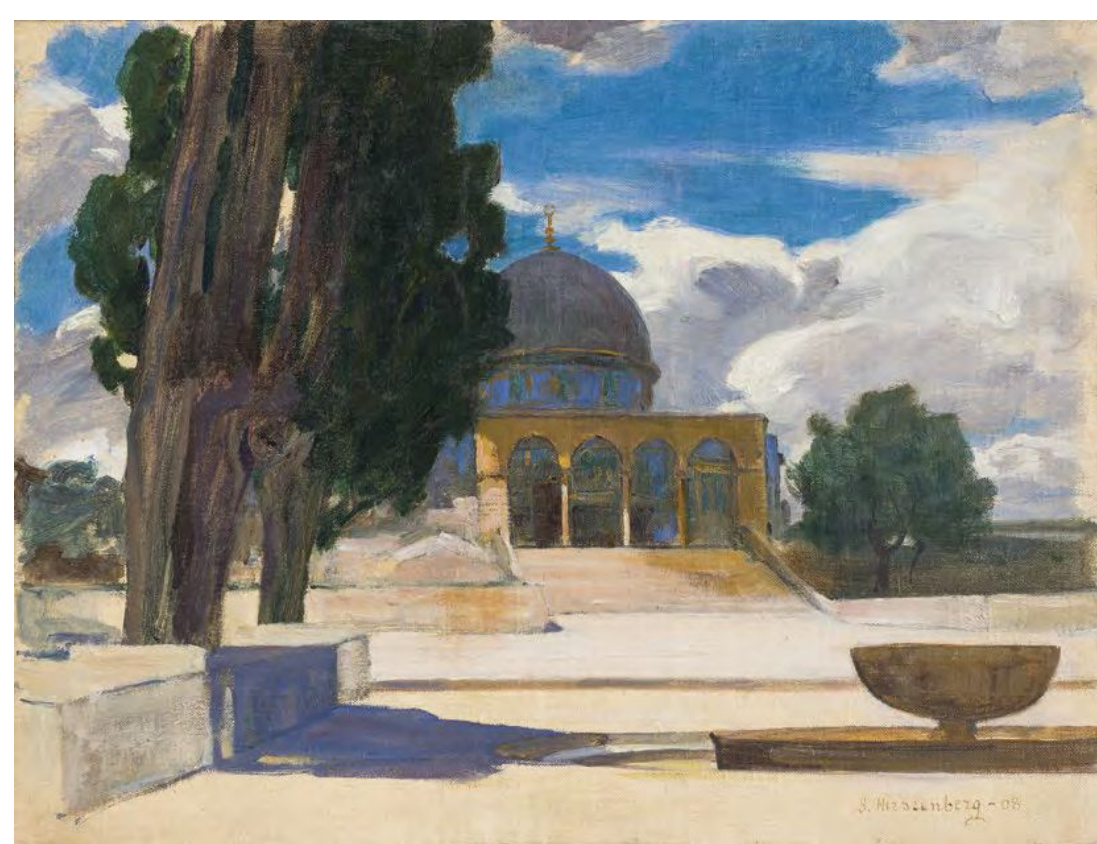




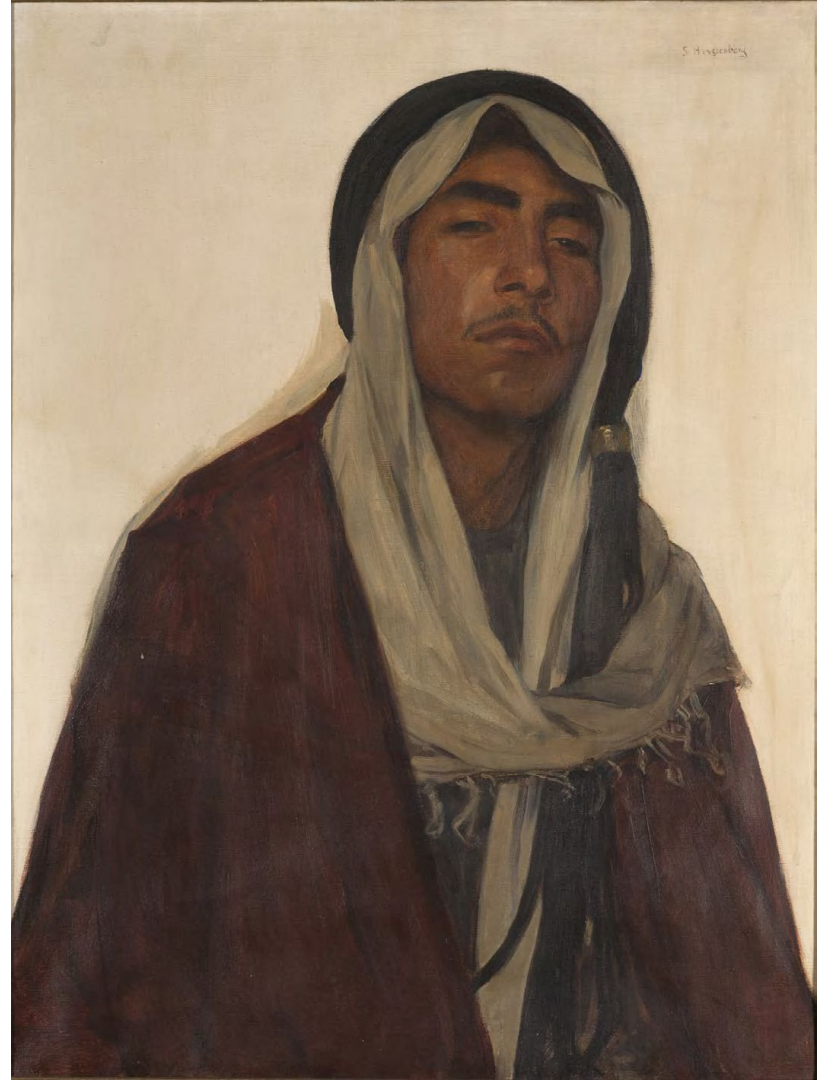
Ludwig Blum (CZ/IL), *View of the Old City of Jerusalem*, 1924, Jewish Museum in Prague



Abraham Neuman (PL), *Arcaded street in Jerusalem*, 1925-1927, National Museum in Warsaw



Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *Dome of the Rock*, 1908, Tel Aviv Museum of Art



Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *Arab*, date unknown, Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw

Ephraim Moses
Lilien (PL), from
the catalogue of
artist's exhibition
in Lviv, 1914,
National Library
in Warsaw



ABRAHAM (z Biblii, rysunek do kwasorytu nr. 15).



ABRAHAM I IZAAK (z Biblii).

Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design

Artists influenced by Zionist ideas also documented the **pioneering Jewish settlement in Palestine**.

The turning point was the establishment of the **Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem** in 1906. It was founded by Boris Schatz, a Jewish artist of Lithuanian origin.



The Bezalel Museum, the drawing department under the direction of painter Abel Pann, 1912, Central Zionist Archives

Students with headmaster Boris
Schatz in Jerusalem, 1910,
Central Zionist Archives



The school attracted both students and professors from Central Europe.

Ephraim Moses Lilien helped coordinate the institution. In 1907, Samuel Hirszenberg started working at the academy, however he died shortly after in Jerusalem (in 1908).



Artur Markowicz (PL), poster of Bezalel Academy exhibition in Cracow, 1912, National Museum in Cracow

Pogroms

Some saw an end to their eternal wandering after returning to Jerusalem – especially in the context of repeated persecution.

Between 1903-1906, Europe was shaken by **anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire** – bloody riots influenced by Russian authorities. The attacks and their tragic consequences (hundreds of victims and forced emigration of thousands) were reflected in the works of Jewish artists.



Ephraim Moses Lilien (PL), graphic for the martyrs of the pogrom of Kishinev (today's Moldova), 1903



Samuel Hirszenberg (PL), *The black banner*, 1905,
The Jewish Museum, New York

Painters and graphic artists most often portrayed the exiled as wounded, exhausted, suffering, but **bearing their fate patiently and with dignity**. Symbolic compositions were also created to pay tribute to the victims.

Wilhelm Wachtel (PL), *Homeless*,
lithographs, 1915, Jewish Historical
Institute, Warsaw



Maurycy Minkowski (PL),
After the pogrom, circa
1910, Jewish Museum,
New York



Two ways

At the beginning of the 20th century, however, a rift emerged in the work of Jewish artists. Some painters began to consider Jewish subjects as an **exhausted source of inspiration** and turned to **new trends** in art and landscape painting.

It is also worth noting that artists of Jewish origin did not necessarily feel connected with their roots, considering themselves, for example, as Austrians or Poles.



Izsák Perlmutter (HU), *Woman in a yellow scarf*, circa 1908, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

École de Paris

Artists from the École de Paris (School of Paris) drew from the avant-garde, like expressionism or cubism. This was a group of Central European painters, mostly of Jewish origin, working **in Paris in the first half of the 20th century**.

The group was associated with, among others, Mela Muter, Moïse Kisling, Eugeniusz Zak, Leopold Gottlieb, and Marc Chagall.



Eugeniusz Zak (PL), *Self-portrait*, 1911, National Museum in Warsaw

Mela Muter (PL), *Still life with
tomatoes*, circa 1905, National
Museum in Warsaw



National style

At the same time, artists associated with the **Zionist movement** attempted to create a **new Jewish style of art**.

There was a sudden clash of different concepts. Some felt that artists should be inspired by the cultures of Egypt and the **Middle East**, while others drew their motifs from **synagogue decorations** and **traditional crafts**.

On the other hand, Ephraim Moses Lilien developed the national style in art, weaving symbols of Jewish culture into his compositions like the star of David, menorah, the Torah, or Hebrew letters.



Ephraim Moses Lilien (PL) at his desk, 1902, The National Library of Israel



Ephraim Mose Lilien (PL), *An Allegorical Wedding: Sketch for a carpet dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. David Wolffsohn*, 1906, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

About the Authors

Jakub Zarzycki, PhD

An art historian and literary scholar.

He received his joint PhD from the University of Wrocław, Poland and Sapienza University of Rome.

Assistant Professor at the Institute of Art History University of Wrocław.

Vice-President & Research Officer for the Wirth Alumni Network.

From September 2015 to August 2016, PhD Research Fellow at the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies.



Karolina Dzimira-Zarzycka

Art historian and Polish philologist.

Author of popular culture texts on art and women's history. In collaboration with online magazines: Historia:poszukaj (National Institute for Museums and Public Collections) and Culture.pl (Adam Mickiewicz Institute).

Recipient of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage scholarship (2020).

Research Associate at Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies (2015/2016).