

# El Prezente

## Studies in Sephardic Culture

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The National Authority for Ladino  
and its Culture

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## Between Local and Universal: Daniel Kabiljo, a Sephardi artist in Sarajevo on the Eve of the Holocaust\*

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In 1942 Daniel Kabiljo (Sarajevo, March 6, 1894–concentration camp Jasenovac, 1944), today an almost forgotten Sephardi artist from Sarajevo, was among a group of Jewish prisoners including three painters and a sculptor. They were working in a ceramic workshop belonging to the notorious Jasenovac camp system, established in summer of 1941, after the foundation of the Independent State of Croatia, a puppet state of Nazi Germany ruled by the fascist Ustasha movement.<sup>1</sup> The photograph (fig. 1) showing a Jewish sculptor, Slavko Brill, from Zagreb working in the ceramic workshop, is a still from a propaganda film made by the Ustashe, who founded and supervised the camp. The film was made in 1942 as part of the efforts to present Jasenovac to the Croatian public as an educational establishment, teaching the

- \* This article is based on the paper presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Jewish Studies, held at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, August 2-6, 2009. It is a result of the research supported by a grant from the Israel Science Foundation (no. 87/07). I would like to thank my research assistants, Olga Ungar and Mor Presiado, for all their help and devoted work
- 1 See Dolores Ivanuša, *Dimenzije jednog vremena, Židovi–likovni umjetnici u antifašističkoj borbi i žrtve holokausta* [Dimensions of another Time, Jews–Visual Artists in the Anti-fascist Struggle and the Holocaust Victims], exh. cat., The Gallery of Zagreb Jewish Community, May 12-26, 1996, pp. 5, 9. For the establishment and the activity of the Jasenovac camp throughout the war years, see Antun Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac* [The Concentration Camp Jasenovac], vols. 1-2, Narodna Knjiga and Spomen-područje Jasenovac, Belgrade-Jasenovac, 1986; and Nataša Mataušić, *Jasenovac, 1941-1945, logor smrti i radni logor* [Jasenovac, 1941-1945, the Death and Labor Camp], Javna ustanova Spomen-područje Jasenovac, Jasenovac-Zagreb, 2003.



Fig. 1: Slavko Brill sculpting in the Ceramic Workshop, photograph, Jasenovac, 1942, © Jugoslovenska Kinoteka, Belgrade, Serbia



Fig. 1a: Daniel Kabiljo (?), *Landscape*, detail of the photograph showing Slavko Brill sculpting in the Ceramic Workshop, Jasenovac, 1942, © Jugoslovenska Kinoteka, Belgrade, Serbia

“wrongdoers”, through hard work and productiveness, “correct” behavior and thinking.<sup>2</sup>

The truth was however quite the opposite of the picture presented in the film, photographs, and exhibition that accompanied these efforts. The working and living conditions in Jasenovac camps were terrible, and the prisoners—Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and Croat opponents of the regime—were dying daily as the result of exhaustion, cold, hunger, diseases, and torture. They were also killed in regular mass and individual

2 In 1942, to suppress suspicions about atrocities occurring in Jasenovac—expressed among others by the representatives of the Catholic church and German and Italian officials in Croatia—several propaganda actions took place: a two-hour visit by an international committee of some 20 members was arranged after “cleaning up” the camp; the camp was photographed and filmed by a professional photographer showing the positive side of forced labor; and an exhibition was opened in Zagreb that presented to the public the life and products of the inmates in a show entitled “One Year of Ustasha’s Defence Concentration Camps’ Work – Their Previous Work was Politics—Our Present Politics is Work” [Mataušić, *Jasenovac*, pp. 41, 61-62 (Note 1); Ivanuša, *Dimenzije jednog vremena*, p. 5 (Note 1)].

“liquidations”, mostly performed by knife-slaughtering. Among the victims was also Daniel Kabiljo, who died there in 1944.<sup>3</sup>

Until their deaths, the group of artists continued to create art in the camp—officially, working within the framework of the ceramic workshop, as ordered by the Ustashe, and unofficially, expressing their own worlds or serving as an emotional support to other prisoners. In case of Daniel Kabiljo, unfortunately nothing seems to have been preserved from those tragic days, although several testimonies by survivors mention his art works depicting landscapes or portraits of fellow prisoners.<sup>4</sup> However, the still showing Brill sculpting is of great value since it seems to be the only visual evidence of Kabiljo’s work performed in the Jasenovac ceramic workshop. The expressionistic picture hanging on the wall behind the sculptor is most probably one of those Kabiljo’s landscapes mentioned by survivors (fig. 1a). If compared to his pre-war creations in oil and colored-linocut showing houses and corners of his birthplace, Sarajevo, it seems to closely follow those examples (Table I/1-2). Moreover, the landscape created in Jasenovac seems to be done in the linocut technique Kabiljo used in his prewar works created during the 1930s. What is unique about it is that—instead of depicting the images surrounding the artist at the moment of creation—it belongs to those Holocaust art works that re-create from memory images from the past. By turning to such topics, the artist sought comfort and relief from the harsh circumstances surrounding him. Simultaneously such works could be understood as spiritual resistance, affirmation of

- 3 My paper presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Jewish Studies included also Daniel Ozmo (Olovo 1912-Jasenovac 1942), who belonged to the younger generation of Sarajevo’s Sephardic artists and was also a victim of Jasenovac concentration camp. However, his work, mainly due to the fact that he was a prewar communist, was much better published and exhibited after World War II. Albeit, it was mainly interpreted in Socialist Yugoslavia as anti-fascist and needs a re-examination (see my text in “Art in Jasenovac”, *Institute News*, no. 13, The International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, December 2008, Jerusalem, pp. 37-51). I decided to concentrate in this article upon the much less known Daniel Kabiljo. Aside from a few of his works kept in Sarajevo’s Modern Gallery and the City Museum, most of his art is today preserved in private collections and asks for further, in-depth research. I would like to thank here the Elazar, Levi, Gomboš, and Hamović families of Sarajevo and Israel for their kind help and readiness to share with me their knowledge about the artist and his art.
- 4 Avram Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine* [Jews of Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina], Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo, 1987, p. 130.

his individuality and of the artist's former life and identity.<sup>5</sup> To better understand such artistic choice, which helped Kabiljo in the difficult times of his life in the Jasenovac camp, it is now necessary to turn to the life of the Sarajevo Jewish community, explore his contribution to it, and learn about his individual development as an artist.

Sarajevo, Kabiljo's birth town, was founded by the Turks soon after their conquest of Bosnia in the mid-fifteenth century, and it served intermittently as the capital of this territory on the northwestern frontier of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>6</sup> Situated on the east-west overland trade route from Istanbul to the Adriatic coast, it soon became the major economic center of the area and played an important commercial role, especially in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries when the Ottoman Empire was at its height. The population was mainly Muslim, consisting of the local Slavs who converted to Islam at the time of the Turkish conquest; with time, the city came to include growing Croat-Catholic and Serbian-Orthodox minorities as well. The sixteenth century was also the period when the Jewish community started to develop in the city. The first newcomers were Sephardi merchants who came from Salonika. As elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, they were well accepted and quickly became useful city dwellers.

Between 1577 and 1581, following the authorization obtained from the Turkish governor, the pasha Siavush, a special Jewish quarter and the synagogue were built near the city's main market area. The quarter was not a closed ghetto in the European sense, but rather an Ottoman *mahala*, where in time only poor Jews continued to reside, while the wealthier—since there were no restrictions—lived outside its walls, buying or renting houses and shops nearby. Aside from being merchants trading in such merchandise as textiles, fur, glass, dyes, wood, and iron, many Sarajevo Sephardim were artisans, such as tinsmiths, shoemakers, and tailors. In addition, some were well known as early pharmacists and doctors of the region.

5 See Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation, The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 4.

6 For general history of Sarajevo, see Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo: a Biography*, Hurst, London, 2006; for the history of Sarajevo Jewish community, see Samuel Kamhi (ed.), *Spomenica, 400 godina od dolaska Jevreja u Bosnu i Hercegovinu* [Commemorative volume, 400 Years Since the Arrival of the Jews to Bosnia and Herzegovina], Oslobodjenje, Sarajevo, 1966; Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia, A Quest for Community*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1979, pp. 11-25; Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva* (Note 4).

The overall situation of the Jewish community in Sarajevo during the Ottoman era, which extended until the second half of the nineteenth century, is thus usually considered as good, mainly owing to the fact that the general policy was one of a religious tolerance. The independence given in religious and juridical matters, as well as broad autonomy in community affairs, secured the unity and continuity of Sephardi life and tradition. Thus, the Sephardi community of Sarajevo, on the eve of Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia in 1878, comprised a close-knit entity which had maintained its religious, cultural, and social heritage for the past 300 years, mainly due to their rabbis, religious education, traditional communal organization, and patriarchal, extended family circles. Although well adapted to their surroundings and often borrowing from it, the Sarajevo Sephardim remained distinct owing to their names, language and songs, customs, clothes, and food, all of which preserved the memory and deep emotional ties with the Iberian peninsula.

The changes began with the arrival of the new rulers. Austro-Hungarians brought with them full civil rights for the Jews as individuals, but they also posed a threat to the authority and stability of the existing traditional Sephardi community, which was—for the first time—directly confronted with western culture. Moreover, along with the occupiers came a significant number of enterprising Ashkenazi Jews looking for business opportunities; their social and cultural background differed greatly from the local Sephardim, who considered them aliens.

All these innovations forced drastic changes upon the community. As early as 1882, the traditional Ottoman Sephardi community was changed into a Central European *Kultusgemeinde*—modernized, but subject to state control and interference. While the Austrians introduced new industries and made capital investments that created new employment and trade opportunities, now directed towards Vienna, Prague, and Budapest, the introduction of capitalism destroyed the old Ottoman guild economy. As the result, aside from several old, wealthy families who adapted to the new economic order, Sephardi Jews quickly became impoverished, many of them still trying to make their living as old-fashioned artisans, petty traders, or unskilled workers. Finally, the traditional religious school system underwent changes as well: thus in 1894 secular subjects and the Serbo-Croatian language, spoken by the local residents, were introduced into the Jewish school which, until then, had taught only in Ladino and Hebrew. In 1910, the Talmud Torah ceased to exist, becoming a public elementary school run by the state. Moreover, with the turn of the century more and more Sephardi children started to attend state secondary school and some continued their education at the university level abroad, mainly in Vienna. It was this change



in the educational system and the acceptance of the new opportunities afforded by secular education that finally strongly influenced now voluntary changes within the community itself.

From the end of the nineteenth century on, the Sarajevo Sephardi community developed a wide range of cultural and social organizations along with a thriving Jewish press. The first institution, initially established in 1892 by thirteen prominent Sephardi leaders as a welfare society, was La Benevolencija (Ladino for benevolence). It soon added to its activities the promotion of vocational training, education, and enlightenment, all with hope of curbing the poverty and backwardness among the local Sephardi population.<sup>7</sup> Simultaneously, especially among the new generation of university-trained Sarajevo Jewish intellectuals, a Sephardi nationalist movement emerged. In 1898, in Vienna, a group of students from the Balkans decided to form an academic society for Sephardi Jews which they named Esperanza (hope). The organization served social and cultural aims—helping their members to develop an awareness of their Sephardi heritage by studying its language and history and by discussing common problems.<sup>8</sup>

It is not unusual that this happened exactly in the fin-de-siècle Vienna. As noted by Harriett Pass-Freidenreich, it seemed that in order to develop strong Sephardi consciousness, these, now Western-educated youngsters, had to leave their immediate Sephardi milieu.<sup>9</sup> The capital of the multi-national Austro-Hungary was a natural place for a search for the national identity, especially among the Jews, who in the second half of the nineteenth century had been immigrating to the city from other regions of the Empire, such as Galicia, Bukovina, Hungary, or—Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, it was in Vienna, in 1882, that Nathan Birnbaum, writer, philosopher, and one of the originators of pre-Herzlian Zionist ideology, founded Kadima, the first Jewish nationalist student organization. There, influenced by Leo Pinsker, the founder of the Hibbat Zion movement and his pamphlet *Autoemanzipazion* published in 1882, Birnbaum propagated the idea, that the Jews are an ethnic entity, a people, rather than, as commonly accepted then—Austrians (Magyars, Germans, etc.) of Mosaic faith.<sup>10</sup>

7 Avram Pinto, “Jevrejska društva u Sarajevu” [Jewish Societies in Sarajevo], in Kamhi (ed.), *Spomenica* (Note 6), pp. 174-179.

8 Ibid., pp. 185-186; Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva* (Note 4), pp. 149-152.

9 Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia* (Note 6), p. 151.

10 On Nathan Birnbaum, see Joshua A. Fishman, *Ideology, Society and Language: the Odyssey of Nathan Birnbaum*, Karoma Publishers, Ann Arbor, 1987.

Among Sarajevo Sephardim living in the multiethnic city of the Ottoman Empire as a separate ecclesiastical community, ethnicity was now a natural part of their identity, logically advocating a form of Diaspora nationalism. Moreover, Balkan Sephardim cherished a deep attachment to the Land of Israel. Rabbis, scholars, and pious men from Sarajevo went to the Holy Land to die during the centuries when Bosnia was part of the Ottoman Empire. Although this phenomenon reflected a religious rather than a political attitude toward Zion and should be defined as medieval Messianism,<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Jehudah ben Salomon Hai Alkalai, who was born in Sarajevo in 1798 and served as a rabbi in Zemun, across the Danube River from Belgrade, is considered a forerunner of political Zionism. His numerous publications from 1839 on courageously challenged the religious concept of redemption, encouraged the acceptance of modernity, and introduced the idea of an actual, physical return to Palestine.<sup>12</sup> And yet, in contrast to the followers of Theodor Herzl's vision of Zionism, Sephardi nationalists cherished Jewish rebirth both in Eretz Israel *and* in the Sephardi Diaspora.

Among the first generation of these Sarajevo Sephardi intellectuals interested in the researching and preserving of their own heritage, who received their education in Vienna before the World War I, it is important to single out Dr. Moric Levi.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Levi was born in Sarajevo in 1879, a year after the annexation of Bosnia to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1901, he finished the secondary school (the so-called Great Gymnasium) in his birthplace and left for Vienna. In 1906 he received his doctorate from the University of Vienna in Semitic philology, and a year later, he completed his rabbinical studies at the rabbinical seminary of Vienna, which was one of the important European centers for research of Jewish literature and history. Upon returning to Sarajevo, after completion of his studies, Dr. Levi was engaged in teaching religion at the city's high schools and served first as the Sarajevo Sephardi community's rabbi and, later, as the chief rabbi of Bosnia and Herzegovina between

11 See Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought* [in Hebrew], Bar-Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan 1997.

12 Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia* (Note 6), p. 153; see also Israel Bartal, "Messianism and Nationalism: Liberal Optimism vs. Orthodox Anxiety", *Jewish History* 20, no. 1 (2006), pp. 5-17.

13 Kamhi (ed.), *Spomenica* (Note 5), pp. 277-278; Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva* (Note 3), pp. 113-114; Samija Šarić, "Prilog biografiji Morica Levia" [Contribution to the biography of Moric Levi], in Dr. Moritz Levy, *Sefardi u Bosni* [Sephardim in Bosnia], Bosanska Biblioteka, Sarajevo (1996), pp. 124-125.

1917 and 1941. Throughout his life, Dr. Levi fought for Jewish rights, preservation of Sephardi heritage, and support of the Zionist idea. He perished in Jasenovac, leaving behind numerous scientific articles published in Sarajevo's Jewish press and community publications. His major work, however, is a book published in German in 1911, based upon his doctoral thesis and entitled *Die Sephardim in Bosnien*. It is dedicated to the history of Sephardi Jews in Bosnia during the Ottoman rule. In his research he used the original documents, both Turkish and Jewish, and due to the fact that a number of these sources—especially the valuable Jewish *pinkasim*—the community's minute books—do not exist today, mainly as the result of the destruction and plundering during the Holocaust years, Dr. Levi's book is still a valuable source of information. Of special interest for us here is the fact that the book includes numerous photographs, probably taken towards the end of the nineteenth century, that present Sephardi types and sites in Sarajevo.

Such inclusion of old photographs depicting Sarajevo's traditional Sephardi types became a tradition in itself. It was mainly practiced in the so-called *Spomenice*, commemorative volumes occasionally published by the community, which assembled the history, memory, and research of customs and folklore of Sarajevo's Sephardim. Of particular interest is the earliest one of those festive editions, a beautifully produced *Spomenica* published in Belgrade, in 1924, in honor of thirty years of Sarajevo's La Benevolencija work. There are several elements that make this publication important: it was published when Sarajevo Jews already lived as citizens of a new country—the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (which in 1929 became known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia); its editor was Stanislav Vinaver, a Serbian Ashkenazi Jew of Polish-Russian origin; and among the visual material included not only photographs but also reproductions of art works created by two Sarajevo artists—Daniel Kabiljo and Roman Petrović, a Sephardi Jew and a Serb.

The transition from being citizens of Austro-Hungary to becoming Yugoslav Jews did not seem to affect the Sarajevo Jews greatly. They saw themselves as part of a now multi-ethnic Yugoslav society to which they immediately declared loyalty, and from which they in return expected complete freedom as Jews.

This was clearly stressed in the 1918 declaration of the Political Committee of Jews of Bosnia-Herzegovina, mainly consisting of local Sephardim:

We Jews of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who have always lived in brotherly communication with the people in this land and have shared with them all fates in joy and misfortune following with best wishes the political aspirations of the

Yugoslav peoples, feel it our duty to make the following statement:

As conscious and nationalist Jews, who always highly value the great idea of self-determination of nations and democracy, we join the program of the National Council of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes contained in the proclamation of October 19, 1918, and as sons of this land we see guaranteed in this proclamation the free development of the Jews of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>14</sup>

In this spirit, in 1924, the same year that *Spomenica* appeared, a new Esperanza student club was founded. This time it was in Zagreb, the second large city in the newly established Kingdom of Southern Slavs, where now most of the Sephardi students from Sarajevo came to study. The new Esperanza's aims were almost identical to the ones that had been set in Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century: to revive Sephardi cultural heritage; to assemble Sephardi students not only from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkan region but also from the Middle East and Latin America; and to return after completion of studies to the original communities and revive their activities and Sephardi consciousness through publications and press. Study of Sephardi history, literature, and philology of the Ladino language and gathering everything created in this language was one of the main tasks. The society's activities continued until 1941 and the outbreak of the World War II in Yugoslavia.<sup>15</sup>

The 1924 Benevolencija's *Spomenica* seemed at first to be a result of much of these efforts: it included articles dedicated to the history of Balkan and Sarajevo Sephardim, Bosnian Sephardi marital customs, Sephardi music, folk-medicine, Ladino language, and literary pieces written by Bosnian Sephardi authors, such as Isak Samokovlija. However, in addition to those—somewhat unexpectedly—there appeared as well few articles and stories written by Martin Buber, Isaac Leib Peretz and Haim Nahman Bialik, relating to the Zionist movement and Jewish national revival, mysticism, and horrors of the Russian pogroms; there were also several hasidic parables, biblical stories, and finally Vinaver's own and Heinrich Heine's poems. Moreover, aside from the Jewish authors, in the case of Sephardim stemming both from Sarajevo and Belgrade, some of the articles were written by non-Jews—in this case Serbian and

14 "Izjava Židova BiH" [The proclamation of the Jews of Bosnia-Herzegovina], *Židov*, 2, no. 22 (November 17, 1918), p. 6 (translation of the quotation from Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, p. 146).

15 Avram Pinto, "Jevrejska društva u Sarajevu" [Jewish Societies in Sarajevo], in Kamhi (ed.), *Spomenica* (Note 6), pp. 185-186; Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva* (Note 4), pp. 149-152.

Bosnian scholars. *Spomenica's* readers were thus exposed to a rich, cosmopolitan view of Jewish culture, in which Sephardi nationalism, Eastern-European Yiddishism, and Zionism co-existed in a dialogue with their non-Jewish, Yugoslav surroundings.

To better understand the character of this Sephardi yet simultaneously multicultural and truly cosmopolitan publication, paying respect to various trends, ideologies, and worldviews of the modern Jewish era, it is necessary to explore some additional factors. Thus, during the interwar period the Yugoslav Zionist movement, founded as early as the end of the nineteenth century by the South Slavic Jewish students studying in Vienna, became even stronger. Composed mainly of Croatian Ashkenazim and to lesser extent Serbian and Bosnian Sephardim, it hoped to unify all the Jews while simultaneously forging a new Yugoslav Jewish identity. However, while the Zionists promoted a thriving Jewish cultural life in major Yugoslav cities, their main aim was true to the Zionist movement in general, *aliyah* (at least in theory) and the development of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Moreover, owing to the largely Ashkenazi leadership, their struggle for unity did not pay much attention to the efforts of the Sephardim to preserve Sephardi heritage, which was especially pronounced among Sarajevo Jewish intellectuals active in the *Sephardi Circle* who fought to preclude the oblivion of the Judeo-Spanish language and culture.<sup>16</sup> Due to their differing views regarding the Jewish rebirth, a bitter and prolonged dispute erupted between the Zionists and the Sephardi nationalists, whom the former regarded as separatists.<sup>17</sup> Thus, it seems that the editor's multicultural and more universal choice of contributions for the 1924 *Spomenica* reflected an effort to resolve these tensions.

Stanislav Vinaver, *Spomenica's* editor, was a Belgrade modernist writer and poet who symbolized the open, cosmopolitan approach characteristic to his background. He was born in 1891 in Šabac, Serbia, to a respected Jewish family of Polish-Russian

16 About the *Sephardic Circle* see Eliezer Papo, "Serbo-Croatian Influences on Bosnian Spoken Judeo-Spanish", *European Journal of Jewish Studies*, 2 (2007), p. 348 and n. 31.

17 For an excellent discussion of the development of Zionism in Yugoslav lands, see Emil Kerenji, "Serbo-Croatian Zionist Press and the Emergence of Yugoslav Jewry, 1896-1941" in his Ph.D. dissertation *Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish identity in a Socialist State, 1944-1974* (The University of Michigan, 2008), pp. 47-95. For the Ashkenazi-Sephardic conflict, see *ibid.*, pp. 73-80; 90-95. See also Zvi Loker, "Sarajevski spor i sefardski pokret u Jugoslaviji" [The Sarajevo dispute and Sephardic movement in Yugoslavia], *Zbornik 7* (1997), pp. 72-79.

origin.<sup>18</sup> Vinaver studied mathematics and physics in Paris at the Sorbonne University and became a follower of Henri Bergson's philosophy. From 1911 he published extensively and became well-known as an erudite Serbian literati and translator. As a poet and essay writer, he became the leader of Serbian expressionist movement between the two World Wars.<sup>19</sup> During World War I Vinaver was sent by the Serbian government on several diplomatic missions, including one in Petrograd. This experience resulted in a book, *Ruske povorke* [The Russian Processions], which was published by the Jewish publishing house Kajon in Sarajevo, in 1924, the same year as Benevolencija's *Spomenica*.<sup>20</sup> The book is a collection of short essays and stories brilliantly written and offering first-hand insight into the great upheaval caused by the Russian Revolution. While referring to a number of personal destinies and stories, Vinaver often exposes Russian anti-Semitism and the tragedy of Russian Jews. This knowledge and the probable encounter with Russian Jewish culture of that period—which included Jewish renaissance in the field of art, theater, and literature, probably influenced his conception of Sarajevo's *Spomenica* and the inclusion of contemporary visual art depicting the local, Sephardi experience.<sup>21</sup>

The artist chosen for this task was Daniel Kabiljo, the first professionally trained Jewish artist from Sarajevo. Born in 1894, he became in many ways the product of the

18 His father, Dr. Avram Josif Vinaver, born in 1863 in Warsaw to a prominent Jewish family which gave to Poland and Russia famous lawyers, doctors, and chess masters, was a well-known physician in Šabac, Serbia. He settled there after studying medicine in Warsaw, Krakow, and Vienna. Vinaver joined the Serbian army as a doctor during the Balkan War and World War I and died from typhus in 1915. For his biography, see *Spomenica poginulih i umrljih srpskih Jevreja u balkanskom i svetskom ratu 1912-1918* [Commemorative volume dedicated to the Serbian Jews who were killed or died during the Balkan and the First World War 1912-1918], Štamparija M. Karića, Beograd, 1927, pp. 89-92.

19 For Stanislav Vinaver's extensive biography see <http://srcekrajine.net/diskusije/index.php?action=printpage;topic=269.0> (retrieved Jan 31, 2010).

20 Stanislav Vinaver, *Ruske povorke* [Russian Processions], D. i A. Kajon, Sarajevo, 1924.

21 During the era of the Russian Revolution (ca. 1912-1928), the local Jewish artists were actively involved in creating modern, avant-garde Jewish art which combined Yiddish folklore and traditional Jewish art (the art of ceremonial objects, illuminated manuscripts and scrolls, synagogues, gravestones, etc.) with the contemporary artistic style, such as primitivism, expressionism and cubo-futurism. See further Ruth Apter-Gabriel (ed.), *Tradition and Revolution, The Jewish Renaissance in Russian Avant-Garde Art, 1912-1928*, exh. cat., The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, June 1987; Hillel Kazovsky, *The Artists of the Kultur-Lige*, Most Kultury, Moscow, 2003.

new times, marked on one hand by the new opportunities creating a young generation of highly educated Sephardi intellectuals and, on the other, by the Sephardi national revival. Already as a high school student, he showed talent for painting, which was encouraged by his art professor, against the wish of his more conservative father, Elias, who hoped to see his son continue the family trading business. According to the memories of his brother Joseph, Daniel went through numerous confrontations with his father and finally applied for help to the La Benevolencija society, which supported youngsters wishing to study among other things, also painting.<sup>22</sup>

The art world in Sarajevo began to develop with the arrival of the Austrians, during the 1880s and 1890s. At that time, a number of painters searching for an “exotic motif and oriental atmosphere” started to appear in Sarajevo. Some of them stayed, like the Czech Jan Karel Janevski, who opened the first private school in 1906, while others, possibly Kabiljo’s art professor, taught at the local schools. The first generation of Bosnian painters usually continued their art education in one of the Empire’s centers—

22 For Daniel Kabiljo’s biographical data, see Avram Pinto, “Tri jevrejska slikara iz Bosne–zrtve fasizma” [Three Jewish painters from Bosnia–victims of fascism], *Jevrejski pregled*, 12, nos. 11-12, Belgrade (1961), p. 37; Vojo Dimitrijević, “Slikari-Jevreji u Sarajevu izmedju dva rata” [The Painters of Jewish origin in Sarajevo between the two World Wars], in Kamhi (ed.), *Spomenica* (Note 6), pp. 316-317; Smilja Šinik, *Umjetnici Jevreji Bosne i Hercegovine; sudjeluju i umjetnici Bosne i Hercegovine koji su obradivali tematiku jevrejskog života* [The artists of Jewish origin from Bosnia and Hercegovina; with participation of artists from Bosnia and Hercegovina who depicted the scenes from Jewish life], exh. cat., Umjetnička Galerija – Jevrejska Opština, Sarajevo, October 1966, pp. 6-7; Azra Begić, “Umjetnici Jevreji Bosne i Hercegovine u XX stoljeću” [The artists of Jewish origin from Bosnia and Hercegovina in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century], *Stvaralaštvo Jevreja u kulturnoj baštini i razvoju Bosne i Hercegovine, Šveske*, Institut za Proučavanje nacionalnih odnosa, Sarajevo, 7-8, II (1984), pp. 45-46; Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine* (Note 4), pp. 129-130; Ivanuša, *Dimenzije jednog vremena* (Note 1), 7-9; Azra Begić, *Jevrejski umjetnici iz Bosne i Hercegovine* [Jewish Artists from Bosnia and Hercegovina], exh. cat., Galerija Novi Hram, Sarajevo, October 1997, pp. 22-23; idem, “Jevreji u umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine” [Jews in the art of Bosnia and Hercegovina], *Izraz, časopis za književnu i umjetničku kritiku*, 23, Sarajevo, January-March, 2004, pp. 151-152. (While translating the titles into English I tried to follow the original in which sometimes artists were referred to as “artists Jews”, i.e., artists of Jewish origin, sometimes as “Jewish artists”, and sometimes simply as “Jews in art”—thus trying to preserve the complex political, historical, and social attitude the Bosnian authors displayed at different periods towards the identity of the artists in question).

Vienna, Budapest, Krakow, or Prague; but also later in Munich and occasionally Paris. It seems that Kabiljo himself initially befriended a local painter—Vilko Šeferov, who studied at the Budapest Academy and opened in 1913 a studio in Sarajevo. The two shared the premises, and it is at that time that Šeferov painted the portrait of his young Jewish friend (fig. 2), inaugurating what would later become a fruitful dialogue between Jewish and non-Jewish artists in Sarajevo.<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 2: Vilko Šeferov, *Portrait of the Painter Daniel Kabiljo*, oil on canvas, ca. 1914, reproduced in *The Jewish Artists of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, exhibition catalogue, The Art Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina and The Jewish Community, Sarajevo, October 1966.

23 For a good introduction into the early period of artistic development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Azra Begić, “Prilike” [Conditions], in Afran Hoznić et al., *Umjetnost Bosne i Hercegovine, 1894-1923*, exh. cat., Umjetnička Galerija BiH, Sarajevo, July 26-October 15, 1978, n.p.



After the World War I, with La Benevolencija's help, Kabiljo continued his art education, first in Vienna, then in Munich and Zagreb. It is still not entirely clear where and with whom he studied in those art centers,<sup>24</sup> but even before his return to Sarajevo in the mid-1920s, Kabiljo became very active as a Jewish painter: he created, exhibited, wrote, and lectured for the Sephardi community of his hometown as well as at the all-Yugoslav Zionist youth events. It is quite possible that during his studies in Vienna and later in Zagreb, he became a member of the Esperanza students' association and thus, as an artist, followed its goals. Simultaneously, as the result of his studies in the Western, German-speaking centers, the ideas he developed regarding the revival of Jewish art and culture were those promoted by the early Zionists, notably Martin Buber and the journal *Ost und West*.<sup>25</sup> Thus, among the first articles he published in 1924 was one in Sarajevo's Zionist Jewish newspaper, *Narodna Židovska svijest*, discussing the nature of art in general and the ways a Jew participates in it in particular.<sup>26</sup> While quoting Nietzsche and Goethe, Kabiljo searched for a common factor which would define Jewish art and its style and finds it in the Jewish spirit. Just as Buber did in his 1901 speech given at the Fifth Zionist congress in Basel, Kabiljo sees in the renewal of Jewish art—the renewal of the Jewish soul. The following year he published in the same paper an article entitled “The Jewish Spirit in Art”.<sup>27</sup> Again, Kabiljo finds the base for Jewish art to be a “racial” one, looking for Jewish elements in the inner worlds of Jewish artists, rather than in the specifically Jewish subject. Among the modern Jewish artists he mentions are those promoted at the first exhibition of Jewish

24 Kabiljo registered in Vienna with the police each time he changed his address or left the city for a trip back home. These reports were filled out between November 1921 and March 1923 thereby affirming the information that between those dates he indeed lived in Vienna (the copies of those reports were kindly sent to me by the Magistrate of the City of Vienna). However, Kabiljo was not registered at the Viennese Academy of Arts, which would thus leave one of the city's private art schools as a possibility. Details of such a school as well as of Kabiljo's supposed stay and study in Munich still have to be uncovered and researched.

25 About early Zionist art, see Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *The Art and Artists of the Fifth Zionist Congress 1901: the Heralds of a New Age*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, c. 2003.

26 K. Danilus, “O umjetnosti” [About the Art], *Narodna Židovska Svijest*, April 18, 1924, p. 8.

27 K. Danilus, “Jevrejski duh umjetnosti” [Jewish Spirit in Art], *Narodna Židovska Svijest*, September 17, 1925, p.6.

art organized at the time of the Fifth Zionist Congress such as Jehudo Epstein and Moshe Ephraim Lilien. The ones he singles out are—again in Buber’s spirit—Joseph Israels and Max Liebermann. According to Kabiljo, they are the Jewish artists already truly belonging to art history, and he represents each in a separate article praising the spirituality of the former and the social empathy of the latter.<sup>28</sup> But—seemingly hinting towards his knowledge of more contemporary developments and the avant-garde—he adds to the list of his favorites also Marc Chagall and suggests abstraction as the highest form of pure spirituality.

Yet, in his own art Kabiljo remained much more traditional, bound on the one hand to the biblical subjects and, on the other, to local genre, landscapes and portraits, possibly dictated by the taste of his more conservative surroundings: Aside from oil paintings, he created watercolors, drawings in pen and ink, colored linocuts, stylized diplomas for various Sarajevo Jewish societies, book illustrations<sup>29</sup> and stage decorations, such as depiction of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem created for the stage setup in the Sarajevo’s hotel “Evropa”, where the festivities marking the opening of the Hebrew University were held on March 31, 1925.<sup>30</sup> Among his biblical scenes were now lost “On the Waters of Babylon”<sup>31</sup> and the so-called “live pictures”—one-act dance scenes inspired by biblical subjects, such as “Meeting of Jacob and Rachel”, “The Finding of Moses”, “Esther”, “Ruth”, “The Queen of Saba”; or more contemporary ones, such as “A Night in Eretz Israel”. Such performances, created between 1924 and 1930, accompanied various celebrations organized in the main by Zionist-oriented Sarajevo Jewish organizations.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, when signing his works presenting non-Jewish, general subjects Kabiljo often used different pseudonyms—such as K. Danilus, Edić or Martić, sounding thus more Slavic and less Jewish.<sup>33</sup> However, the 1924 Benevolencija publication includes reproductions of his

28 K. Danilus, “Josef Israels – jevrejski slikar” [Joseph Israels – Jewish Painter], *Narodna Židovska Svijest*, March 26, 1926, p. 5; and *ibid.*, “Max Liebermann”, February 11, 1927, str.1-2.; this article was published also as “Max Liebermann – Židov slikar” [Max Liebermann – a Jew Artist], *Hanoar*, no. 6 (1926-27), pp. 157-159.

29 Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine* (Note 4), p. 130.

30 *Narodna Židovska Svijest*, April 8, 1925, pp. 5, 11.

31 Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine* (Note 4), p. 130.

32 *Narodna Židovska Svijest*, June 13, 1924, p. 4; August 15, 1924, p. 3; March 13, 1925, p. 4; July 30, 1926, p. 3; and February 21, 1930, p. 4.

33 Pinto, “Tri jevrejska slikara iz Bosne” (Note 22), p. 38.

now lost lithographs of an entirely local and Sephardi character: the “Interior of the Great Synagogue” and of two works representing Sabbath eve rituals as celebrated in a Sephardi home.

The “Interior of the Great Synagogue” (fig. 3), the Sephardi *Il Kal Grandi* founded in Sarajevo in the sixteenth century, recalls the photograph of the synagogue’s interior included in Moric Levi’s book (fig. 4). Kabiljo’s interpretation of the space is daring and modern, two-dimensional and geometric. However, “The Lighting of the Sabbath



Fig. 3: Daniel Kabiljo, *The Interior of the Great Jewish Synagogue in Sarajevo (Il Kal Grandi)*, lithograph, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in Stanislav Vinaver, ed., *Spomenica*, Belgrade, 1924



Fig. 4: Photograph of the synagogue Il Kal Grandi, published in Dr. Moric Levi, *Die Sephardim in Bosnien*, Sarajevo, 1911

Light” and “The Kiddush” (figs. 5-6) point to another source. While studying in Vienna, Kabiljo probably visited the city’s Jewish Museum and saw there the work of Isidor Kaufmann, the famous Austro-Hungarian Jewish artist whose “Blessing the Sabbath Candles”, created early in the twentieth century (fig. 7), offers an East-European version of the same subject. In Kabiljo’s version the Jews are in Sephardi dress, the *hallah* is replaced with *pitikas*, and the candles with a Sabbath oil lamp. Kabiljo’s style is, however, more modern and expressionistic and points possibly towards art he encountered while in Munich.

Also interesting are the illustrations (figs. 8-9) prepared by Sarajevo’s artist Roman Petrović, a Bosnian Serb born in 1896. Petrović studied art in Petrograd, Krakow,



Fig. 5: Daniel Kabiljo, *The Lighting of Sabbath Light*, lithograph, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in Stanislav Vinaver, ed., *Spomenica*, Belgrade, 1924



Fig. 6: Daniel Kabiljo, *The Kiddush*, lithograph, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in Stanislav Vinaver, ed., *Spomenica*, Belgrade, 1924

and Zagreb, while spending the year 1924 in Vienna and Munich.<sup>34</sup> His *Motives from Sarajevo*, while depicting the old parts of the town, possibly Bjelave, where the poorest Sephardi Jews lived, employ cubo-futurist stylistic elements appearing in such works as Issachar Ryback's *Old Synagogue* (fig. 10), which he could have seen while in Russia. Petrović also produced the portraits of a Sephardi couple in traditional attire shown against the background of an old Jewish quarter street (Table I/3-4), recalling again similar renderings of Jewish *shtetl* street scenes characteristic of Russian-Jewish avant-garde art. Their facial similarity to the painter's own self-portrait is intriguing (Table I/5), pointing possibly towards the artist's identification with his Jewish types. Such interest in the Jewish subject was not rare among the Sarajevo's gentile painters.

34 Šinik, *Umjetnici Jevreji Bosne i Hercegovine* (Note 22), pp. 11-12. For somewhat different information, see Afran Hozić et al., *Umjetnost Bosne i Hercegovine* (Note 20), n. p.



Fig. 7: Isidor Kaufmann, *Blessing the Sabbath Candles*, oil on canvas, ca. 1900-10, private collection, New York

During the 1920s and 1930s Kabiljo himself often painted members of different ethnic groups living in old Sarajevo quarters and in the colorful Baščaršija, the old Turkish marketplace (Table II/1-2). Simultaneously, he continued to paint local Jewish types, as well. Occasionally, he used photographs from Dr. Moric Levi's book in order to re-create the old world's now vanishing atmosphere (Table II/3-4). Much later, in 1953, probably in memory of his Jewish friends who had perished in the Holocaust, Bosnian Croat painter, Petar Tiješić used the same source when painting the famous Sarajevo Jewish pharmacy which had belonged for several centuries to the local Papo family (Table II/5-6). Moreover, the same subject was rendered sometimes by several artists—Jews and gentiles—such as the tinsmith, which was an old Jewish profession (Table III/1-3). It is also interesting to contrast Kabiljo's *Old Sephardi Woman in the Market* with his *Conversation*, both painted in the 1930s (Table III/4-5). While the former, despite its lighter colors and free brushwork, depicts the more traditional



Figs. 8-9: Roman Petrović, *Motifs from Sarajevo*, lithographs, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in Stanislav Vinaver, ed., *Spomenica*, Belgrade, 1924



Fig. 10: Issachar Ber Rybak, *The Old Synagogue*, oil on canvas, 1917, courtesy of The Tel-Aviv Museum of Art

world, the latter's rendering is more contemporary, showing the mixture of old and new customs, such as women still covering their heads with the traditional *tukadu* cap, while dressed in an elegant, western fashion. Finally, in addition to these paintings Kabiljo created during the late 1920s and 1930s numerous landscapes of Sarajevo's surroundings as well as of its picturesque quarters and streets (Table IV/1-3). Some of these works, created in oil, watercolor, colored crayons, pen drawing or colored linocuts, show more daring, modernist style.

Although just before the outbreak of the World War II in Yugoslavia, Kabiljo's artistic activity was described almost as disappointing,<sup>35</sup> his work was exhibited a number of times, mainly in Jewish but also in non-Jewish shows. Thus, his first participation was in the exhibitions organized by the Yugoslav Zionist youth organization and accompanying sport rallies in 1922 in Zagreb, in 1923 in Belgrade, and in 1926 in Sarajevo, where he mainly exhibited landscapes or created biblical "living-pictures" (1926).<sup>36</sup> In Sarajevo's so-called "Jewish Club" he exhibited on three occasions, in December 1928, November 1929, and February 1930,<sup>37</sup> while in 1931 and 1933 he participated in the group shows with various Sarajevo artists exhibited at the gallery "Cvijeta Zuzorić". In this last exhibition he showed paintings depicting local types—"Muslim Girl", "Jewess", and "Peasant Women in the Town", receiving from the author of the article published in the Jewish press comments about his folkloristic and romantic inclinations.<sup>38</sup>

\* \* \*

35 Dr. Juda Levi, in his unpublished manuscript "Jugoslovenski Jevreji u nauci, knjizevnosti i novinarstvu, u muzici, likovnoj umetnosti i glumi" [Yugoslav Jews in science, literature and journalism, in music, visual art and theater], prepared in January 1941 (housed in the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade) claims that "although Danilus promised in his time a lot as a painter of motifs from Jewish life, these promises were, as the result of his [unsupportive] surroundings and other difficulties, not entirely fulfilled" (translated by the author from the Serbian original).

36 *Židovska Svijest*, August 25, 1922, p. 2; August 17, 1923, pp.5-6; *Narodna Židovska Svijest*, July 30, 1926, p. 3.

37 *Jevrejski glas*, December 28, 1928, p. 4; November 15, 1929, p. 3; February 14, 1930, p. 4.

38 "Izložba Cvijeta Zuzorić" [The exhibition at Cvijeta Zuzorić], *Jevrejski glas*, November 10, 1933, p. 4.



In 1941, at the beginning of the World War II, Kabiljo was captured along with other Sarajevo Jews. He was imprisoned, transferred to Stara Gradiška camp, and later to nearby Jasenovac concentration camp, where he perished in 1944. The linocut showing a Bosnian house and cloudy, expressionistic landscape appearing on the wall of the camp's ceramic workshop mentioned at the beginning of this article (fig. 1) continues his artistic opus which, as we saw, expanded during the two decades. In spite of the inhuman conditions that surrounded its creation, this landscape continued Kabiljo's commitment to the local Bosnian and Sarajevo's sites to which he fully belonged and became attached to, both as a Sephardi Jew and as an artist. While reminding him of his past, this landscape probably also soothed him and offered him a sense of universal freedom.