

## *Synagogue paintings as indicating a developing conception of national redemption*

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This article compares the interior paintings in the 'Ades and Ohel Moshe synagogues, both of which are non-Ashkenazi, in the Naḥlaot neighborhood in Jerusalem. Although the synagogues were decorated 50 years apart, there are similarities in the painted motifs and drawing schemes, but also some differences. I suggest that these differences reflect the development of a Jewish concept of national redemption during the 50 years that elapsed between the adornment of the two synagogues.

**KEYWORDS:** Synagogue art, wall paintings, interior decoration, national redemption

Upon entering 'Ades and Ohel Moshe, two non-Ashkenazi synagogues in the Naḥlaot neighborhood in Jerusalem, one cannot fail to see some striking similarities between their interior decorations. This is unusual, since the circumstances of the building and decorating of the two were quite different: 'Ades is housed in a purpose-designated edifice, whereas Ohel Moshe is part of a residential building. Moreover, the former was decorated in 1912/13, much earlier than the latter, which was apparently done in the early 1960s. The painter who adorned the Ohel Moshe Synagogue not only borrowed some of the principal painted motifs and inscriptions from the 'Ades Synagogue, but replicated their general dispositions as well. However, although he copied the tribal symbols of Israel, he chose not to include the motif of the signs of the zodiac. I suggest that this omission, as well as several differences in the other motifs and inscriptions, reflect the development of a Jewish concept of national redemption during the 50 years that elapsed between the decoration of the two synagogues.

The 'Ades Synagogue was founded in 1901 in the Naḥalat Zion neighborhood of Jerusalem by the Ḥalebis (Jews from Aleppo, Syria), with financial support from the wealthy 'Ades family, whose origins were in Aleppo.<sup>[1]</sup> It was decorated by students from the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts under the supervision of a Bezalel teacher, the artist

[1] N. Shalev-Kahlifa, *Naḥlaot Belev Ir: Lesayer im Yad Ben Zvi Beyerushalaim* [*Naḥlaot in the Heart of Town: Exploring Jerusalem with Yad Ben Zvi*], Jeru-

salem 2003, p. 282 [Hebrew]; W.P. Zenner, *A Global Community: The Jews from Aleppo, Syria*, Detroit 2000, p. 99.



Fig. 1. 'Ades Synagogue, interior paintings (southern, eastern, and northern walls). Photograph: Zvi Orgad, 2018

of David, and vegetal motifs. On three of the synagogue's walls (the northern, eastern, and southern walls) is a partial and slightly revised version of the verse: "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain [...]" [הביאותים אל הר קדשי [...]] (Isa. 46:7; Fig. 1).

The Ohel Moshe Synagogue is housed on the second floor of a building that was constructed between 1883 and 1886 in the Ohel Moshe neighborhood (today part of Nahlaot),<sup>[5]</sup> and is one of the last synagogues decorated in the East European tradition.<sup>[6]</sup> According to the signature, the interior paintings were done by Gershon Kokhavi.<sup>[7]</sup> Not much is known about this painter. Apparently, he was of Yemenite origin, where there was no tradition of figurative synagogue painting, so he probably acquired his artistic education in the Land of Israel. Kokhavi was already a well-known painter when he decorated Ohel Moshe; in the late 1950s, he adorned another synagogue in Jerusalem, Yeshua Veraḥamim, which served a congregation of Afghan Jews.<sup>[8]</sup>

[2] N. Shalev-Kahlifa, op.cit., p. 285. About Yaakov Stark, see S. Zangelevitz, *Aman Haotiyot Haivriyot [The Artist of Hebrew Letters]*, "Et-Mol" 2001, 26, no. 6 (158), pp. 27–28 [Hebrew]; Y. Zalmona, N. Shilo-Kohen, *Signon Veikonografia Beḥefzey 'Bezalel' [Style and Iconography in 'Bezalel' Objects]*, [in:] "Bezalel" shel Shaḥ, 1906–1929 [Shaḥ's Bezalel, 1906–1929], ed. N. Shilo Kohen, Jerusalem 1992/1993, pp. 201–232 [Hebrew].

[3] On Stark's Art Nouveau letter style see Y. Zalmona, N. Shilo-Kohen, op.cit., pp. 203–205. A combination of Western and Eastern styles was typical of the old Bezalel approach. See, e.g., Y. Zalmona, *Boris Shaḥ: Avi Haamanut Hayisraelit [Boris Shaḥ: The Father of Israeli Art]*, Jerusalem 2006, p. 118 [Hebrew].

[4] As far as we know, situating the tribal symbols in a prominent place in the 'Ades synagogue was a precedent in synagogue interior decoration. See A. Amar, *Habet Hashamaima: Ziyurey HaKir Bayeshiva Hagdola Me'a She'arim [Look at the Sky: The Wall Paintings*

*in the Mea Shearim Great Yeshiva]*, "Eretz Yisrael: Meḥkarim Biydiat Haaretz Va'atikoteha" ["The Land of Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies"] 2009, 28, p. 17 [Hebrew].

[5] N. Shalev-Kahlifa, op.cit., p. 74.

[6] On the phenomenon of the Eastern European synagogue painting tradition in the Land of Israel, see I. Rodov, *Ziyurei Kir Bevatei Knesset: Masoret Mizrah Eirovit Be'erez Yisrael [Wall Paintings in Synagogues: Eastern European Tradition in the Land of Israel]*, Ramat Gan 2011 [Hebrew].

[7] According to Shalev-Kahlifa, the signature formula was "Gershon Kokhavi, Zayar Dekorativi [Gershon Kokhavi, a Decorative Painter]". See N. Shalev-Kahlifa, op.cit., p. 86. The signature, which was on a pillar in the main hall entrance, was painted over.

[8] According to interviews with Rabbi Refael Bezalel (May 3, 2012) and Arie Elias (April 12, 2012), Yeshua Veraḥamim synagogue. The paintings were later erased by the worshippers.

The Ohel Moshe decorative paintings were done in 1963 or 1964.[9] It can also be assumed that Kokhavi held Zionist views, as it is known that in 1973, he was serving in the IDF reserves.[10] The paintings include depictions of the twelve tribes and of holy places in Israel, the seven species, and a starry-sky ceiling. Two verses are inscribed on the eastern wall above the Torah ark: “How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel [מה טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך]” (Num. 24:5); and “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy Temple [ואני ברב חסדך אבוא ביתך אשתחווה אל היכל קדשך ביראתך]” (Ps. 5:7 [8]). A full verse is written along the southern, western, and northern walls: “Even them will I bring to my holy mountain [...] [והביאותים אל הר קדשי]” (Isa. 46:7; Fig. 2).

It is extraordinary that these two non-Ashkenazi synagogues were decorated according to the East European style, particularly as Near Eastern Jewish communities had no tradition of figurative paintings in synagogues. In the ‘Ades Synagogue, the choice of decoration might have been due to an alliance between the Ḥalebi and the Ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi rabbis at the beginning of the twentieth century.[11] The real reason for this alliance was the mutual rejection of secular Zionism,[12] but the relationship with Ashkenazi Jews might have introduced the Ḥalebi community to that kind of synagogue ornamentation. Synagogue and public building interior decoration was a well-known feature of East European Jewish culture in Jerusalem at the time that the ‘Ades Synagogue was being adorned; the Ḥurva Synagogue interior had been decorated in 1912[13], and the Yehudayoff-Ḥefetz Mansion’s (Messiah’s



Fig. 2. Ohel Moshe Synagogue, interior paintings (southern, eastern, and northern walls). Photograph: Zvi Orgad, 2018

[9] According to an interview with Avi Avisar, current manager (*gabai*) of the Ohel Moshe Synagogue (May 15, 2018).

[10] Kokhavi signed his name on an illustrated map he created in 1973 on the walls in a restaurant at the Lido junction, near the Dead Sea, when he was stationed there with the IDF reserves. See N. Shalev-Kahlifa, K. Barnet, *Ziyurei Kir Bezika Lemoreshet Leumit [Wall Paintings in Association with National Heritage]*, p. 21 <<http://www.wallart.org.il/wp-content/uploads/wall-art-as-national-heritage.pdf>>, [accessed: December 19, 2018] [Hebrew].

[11] W.P. Zenner, op.cit., p. 46. Relationships among the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities in Jerusalem might also account for the familiarity of the Ḥalebi community with Ashkenazi culture.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities held negotiations about establishing a mutual leadership. See N. Efrati, *Ha'edah Hasefaradit Biyerushalayim: 600–677 (1840–1917) [The Sephardi Community in Jerusalem During the Years 1840–1917]*, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 46–55 [Hebrew]. Although the negotiations failed, they facilitated deeper cultural ties between the two communities. The Ḥalebi Jews did not belong to the Sephardi community but did take part in the debates. See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 60.

[12] Efrati, op.cit., p. 81.

[13] A detailed model of the Hurva Synagogue made by Meir Rozin in 1912 included interior paintings. See dated photographs of the model in *Souvenirs from The Holy Land: Meir Rosin, 1876–1917* cur. N. Feldman,

Palace) interior was painted by Shmuel Melnik in 1913.[14] There may have been several possible reasons for the Halebi community to have preferred commissioning the Bezalel teacher Yaakov Stark over other synagogue painters to carry out the interior decoration of the 'Ades Synagogue: the synagogue's proximity to the Bezalel School,[15] the Oriental trend apparent in the Bezalel artistic style,[16] and the fact that Stark and his students did the work as volunteers.[17] All of these factors, rather than the ideology of the Halebi communities' religious leadership, might well have encouraged a relationship between the 'Ades congregation and Bezalel's teachers and students.[18]

Some five decades later, the Sephardi congregation of Ohel Moshe might have been inspired by the earlier pictorial scheme of decorations in the non-Ashkenazi 'Ades Synagogue. Perhaps that was the reason that out of the many Ashkenazi-painted synagogues in Jerusalem, Kokhavi chose that synagogue's decoration scheme as his model. For example, Kokhavi was probably familiar with the works of Levi Yizhak Bak, who had decorated the interiors of several Ashkenazi synagogues in Jerusalem, including Tiferet Yisrael, the Hurva, Tiferet Menaḥem, and Beit Yehuda synagogues, and the Mea Shearim Yeshiva and Talmud Torah. It was even said that Bak visited the Yeshua Veraḥamim Synagogue after Kokhavi finished decorating it, and examined the quality of the paintings and discussed them with Kokhavi.[19] Another possible reason for replicating the 'Ades model was the affinity of its congregation with that of Ohel Moshe; most of the worshippers in the 'Ades Synagogue in 1962 were Jews from Kurdistan,[20] and the Ohel Moshe Sephardi congregation was made up of Jews from Kurdistan, Persia, and Iraq.[21] Finally, it is possible that the two synagogues' similar internal architectural design, which included a wide entrance in the western wall, a tripartite Torah ark covering almost the entire eastern wall, and large windows on the southern and northern walls, also led to the decision to base the Ohel Moshe decorations on the 'Ades model.[22]

Jerusalem 2009, pp. 36–41 [manuscript]. The model can be seen in the Old Yishuv Court Museum in Jerusalem.

[14] S. Farkash, *Rabbi Levi Yizhak Bak – Hazayar Mehair Haatika* [*Rabbi Levi Yitzhak Bak – The Painter from the Old City*], Lod 2002 [manuscript].

[15] The distance between the Bezalel building and the 'Ades Synagogue is 400 meters.

[16] On the Bezalel School's oriental style see A. Amar, *op.cit.*, p. 17; Y. Zalmona, N. Shilo-Kohen, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

[17] N. Shalev-Kahlifa, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

[18] Decorating the 'Ades Synagogue in the East European tradition, especially in the Zionist Bezalel style, could hardly have been associated with modern or Zionist ideas among Aleppo rabbis: from the late nineteenth century on they were very conservative

and opposed to new ideas, including Zionism. It was only in 1924 that the pro-Zionist treatise "Torat Yisrael Ve'am Yisrael [Israel's Torah and the People of Israel]" was published by Rabbi Yizhak Dayan. See Z. Zohar, *Heiru Pney Hamizrah: Halakha Vehagut Ezel Hakhmey Yisrael Bamizrah Hatikhon* [*The Luminous Face of the East: Studies in the Legal and Religious Thought of Sephardic Rabbis in the Middle East*], Tel Aviv 2001, pp. 78–82, 99–107 [Hebrew].

[19] According to an interview with Rabbi Refael Bezalel. On Bak's works, see, e.g., A. Amar, *op.cit.*, pp. 6–38.

[20] Z. Zenner, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

[21] According to an interview with Avi Avisar.

[22] The research is supported by German–Israel Foundation for Scientific Research and Development, grant I-1333-112.4/2016.

The influence of the 'Ades Synagogue decoration scheme is clearly apparent in the Ohel Moshe paintings in the use of similar vegetal, national, and religious painted motifs. The vegetal motifs in the two synagogues consist mostly of depictions of the seven species: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates (based on Deuteronomy 8:8), which were painted in similar locations. In the 'Ades Synagogue, they form the decorative patterns of the upper parts of the southern, eastern, and northern walls (Fig. 3), while in the Ohel Moshe Synagogue, each of eight dark blue bays in the southern and northern walls contain a single depiction of one of the species (Fig. 4). The shape and color of the blue bays intentionally copied the architectural structure created above the arched windows in the 'Ades Synagogue. Another similar motif is the pattern of golden stars on a blue background that was painted on both the 'Ades (Fig. 5), and the Ohel Moshe ceilings.[23] It is unknown whether there were other starry-sky ceilings in Jerusalem synagogues when Kokhavi decorated Ohel Moshe,[24] but in any case, the proximity of the two synagogues increases the probability that he copied the 'Ades pattern (Fig. 4).

A very conspicuous motif that appears in both synagogues is the portrayal of the symbols of the Israelite tribes on the upper part of the walls: the southern, eastern, and northern walls in 'Ades, and the southern and northern walls in Ohel Moshe (Figs. 1, 2).[25] The tribal symbols share features with the zodiac signs, mainly the number 12, as por-



Fig. 3. 'Ades Synagogue, interior paintings (northern wall). Photograph: Zvi Orgad, 2018



Fig. 4. Ohel Moshe Synagogue, interior paintings (eastern wall). Photograph: Zvi Orgad, 2018

[23] The actual depictions of the stars and sky cannot be thoroughly compared as the ceiling paintings in the 'Ades synagogue were erased and the ceiling was repainted in blue. Only a small portion of the starry sky was visible until the renovations.

[24] The cupola of a detailed model of the Hurva Synagogue, made by Meir Rozin, was painted blue, but without stars. Apart from Kokhavi's other decorated synagogue in Jerusalem, no other starry-sky pattern was documented in Jerusalem from that period.

[25] The Israelite tribe symbols were painted in the Mea Shearim Great Yeshiva in 1949 by Levi Yizhak Bak. See A. Amar, *op.cit.*, p. 11. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Kokhavi was familiar with these paintings. However, in this synagogue the symbols of the tribes were on the ceiling, not on the walls, and included flags and realistic scenes, rather than flattened images as in the 'Ades and Ohel Moshe synagogues. Therefore, it is doubtful that Kokhavi used the paintings of the tribes in the Mea Shearim Great Yeshiva as his model.



Fig. 5. 'Ades Synagogue, remnants of a starry-sky pattern (before the renovation of the synagogue paintings). Photograph: Zvi Orgad, 2013

elements, forming a circle in the center of the ceiling, a symmetrical rectangle, or a circular peripheral design. In early modern synagogue paintings, the zodiac reflected kabbalistic connotations of the heavenly spheres (*sefirot*), the belief in divine providence, or hopes of redemption.[28] Stark was likely well aware of these implications.

However, the design of the zodiac signs in the 'Ades synagogue is somewhat different than that in early modern East European configurations. Whereas those synagogues displayed figurative illustrations, the 'Ades painter used the Babylonian symbols, which reflected the reliance of the Bezael artists on ancient Oriental models (Fig. 3, bottom). In switching from the traditional Jewish figurative paintings to Babylonian signs, Stark's zodiac lost the associative bond with Jewish tradition, including the messianic ideas and the belief in Divine providence embodied in the structure of the zodiac and in animal figures associated with it.[29] Perhaps Stark felt that these symbols, representing exclusive reliance on Divine providence, were outdated, and sought a similar motif that could also express human participation in the earthly aspect of Redemption. Apparently, he found this perspective in the symbols of the Israelite tribes.

[26] For example, in *Sefer Yeẓira* ("The Book of Creation"), considered one of the earliest extant books on Jewish esotericism, there is a comparison between the zodiac signs and the twelve organs of the human body. See M. Idel, *Hamazalot Bemahshevet Yisrael [The Zodiac Signs in Jewish Thought]*, [in:] *Ĥatum Bakokhavim: Dimuy Vesemel Begalgal Hamazalot [Image and Symbol in the Zodiac Cycle]*, ed. I. Fishof, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 19–21 [Hebrew]. For a combination of the tribal symbols and zodiac signs in *Sefer Yeẓira* printed in the early modern period, see, e.g., *Sefer Yeẓira [Book of Creation]*, Mantova: Yaakov Kohen from Glasgow, 1562, p. 7a; for the two sets of signs in early modern ketubbahs, see S. Sabar, *Ketubbah: The Art of the Jewish Marriage Contract*, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 56–57.

[27] Some well-known painted zodiacs are those on the barrel vault of the Chodorów Synagogue and on the cupolas of the Gwoździec and Mohylew synagogues. See K. Piechotka, M. Piechotka, *Heaven's Gates: Wooden Synagogues in the Territories of the Former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, Warsaw 2004, pp. 123, 125, 131.

[28] I. Huberman, *Living Symbols: Symbols in Jewish Art and Tradition*, [n.p.] 1988, pp. 23–24. Medieval Jewish Kabbalists viewed the zodiac as a reflection of the third *sefira*: "Bina" – wisdom. See M. Idel, *op.cit.*, pp. 19–21.

[29] On the ideas embodied in the traditional zodiac image in synagogues, see I. Huberman, *Tikrot Mezuyarot Bevatei Kneset Me'ez Bedrom-Mizrah Polin [Painted Ceilings in Wooden Synagogues in Southeastern Po-*

In some written Hebrew sources, including *Yalkut Shimoni* and *Midrash Raba*, which were undoubtedly familiar to the 'Ades Synagogue congregation, there is a parallel between the symbols of the Israelite tribes and the signs of the zodiac.<sup>[30]</sup> This parallelism might have provided the basis for seeing the tribal symbols as having celestial qualities and thus being suitable replacements for the signs of the zodiac.<sup>[31]</sup> However, in contrast to the zodiac, which represents primarily heavenly qualities, the tribal symbols stand for both celestial and physical aspects, as expressed in *Midrash Hagadol* (on the verse "Look up to the sky", Num. 2:1): "When God told Abraham: 'look up to the sky,' he showed him a wagon in the center, and twelve zodiac signs surrounding it. [God] told him: this is a sign for your descendants, four flags will exist, three tribes on each side, and the Ark in the middle [כשאמר הקדוש ב"ה לאברהם הבט נא השמימה הראה לו הקב"ה עגלה באמצע ושנים עשר מזלות טובבים [...]] ואמר לו זה סימן לבניך שעתידין להיות ד' דגלים, שלשה מכל צד [והארון באמצע]". This source, which may also link the starry-sky image on the ceiling with the tribal symbols on the walls, alludes to the way the heavenly order of the zodiac signs influences earthly forms – the configuration of the tribes encamped around the Tabernacle. Thus, the tribal symbols could be considered a Jewish representation of heavenly order descending to earth.

Another notable aspect is the role of the tribes in messianic thought. Particularly intriguing is the fate of the ten lost tribes exiled when the Israelite Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians. The Israelite tribes caught the imagination of Jewish and Christian writers, among them nineteenth and twentieth century rabbis. For example, Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmakher (1796–1874), who founded and supported a study hall in Jerusalem, thought that the Lost Tribes would return to the Land of Israel in the wake of Jewish emancipation and that their coming would be a harbinger of the Redemption.<sup>[32]</sup> This expectation was established as early as in the Mishnah, where we find a controversy between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer: Rabbi Akiva insisted that the ten tribes were lost forever, whereas Rabbi Eliezer argued that they would return in the days of the Messiah (*Mishnah, Sanhedrin, 10:3*).

These various connotations associated with the Israelite tribes turned them into symbols of the Redemption, similar to the zodiac signs that preceded them, but much more in line with the Zionist concept of the Jewish nation's ability to take its destiny into its own hands.

*land*], M.A. diss., Tel Aviv University 1979 [Hebrew]. On the Messianic intent of the double-headed eagle in the center of the zodiac in the Chodorów Synagogue, see I. Huberman, *Living Symbols...*, pp. 55–58.  
 [30] See A. Amar, op.cit., p. 16; note 7. in *Sefer Yezira* there is a comparison between the zodiac signs and the twelve tribal symbols. See M. Idel, op.cit., pp. 19–21.

[31] D. Noy, *Yud Bet Hamazalot Veyud Bet Hashvatum* [*The Twelve Zodiac Signs and the Twelve Tribes*], "Maḥanayim" 1963, 4, no. 90, p. 130.

[32] See M. Hildesheimer, *Galut Vegeula Bemishnato shel Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmakher* [*Exile and Redemption in Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmacher's Doctrine*], [in:] *Mea Shnot Ziyonut Datit: Ishim Veshitot* [100 years of Religious Zionism: Figures and Methods], eds A. Sagi, D. Schwarz, Jerusalem 2002/2003, pp. 82–83 [Hebrew].

This was probably the reason Stark chose the tribal symbols as the principal painted motif in the 'Ades Synagogue. But he did not abandon the zodiac signs, and it is possible that he used them as an ideological enhancement of the tribal motif. However, in order to eliminate any remnants of the old concepts they reflected, he altered their design and reduced their visibility.

By the time Kokhavi worked on the Ohel Moshe Synagogue, interest in zodiac signs had diminished, although the practice of painting them in East European synagogues continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century, they lost their exclusive position as the most important of the peripheral pieces, and in many of the East European synagogues, as in the 'Ades Synagogue in Jerusalem, they were accompanied by the twelve tribal symbols.<sup>[33]</sup> In the first decades of the newly established State of Israel, the zodiac signs were depicted on postage stamps,<sup>[34]</sup> but soon afterward, they virtually disappeared from public spaces and from the national Israeli consciousness. In contrast, in the modern era, the twelve tribes continued to evolve in Jewish thought and acquired new meanings and associations, as did the concept of Jewish Redemption. This development was expressed in the inclusion of the tribal symbols as a leading image in the corpus of national motifs in the works of some Bezalel artists.<sup>[35]</sup> Specifically in the State of Israel, the symbols of the twelve Israelite tribes mark the return from exile and a renewed relationship between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. The identification with the "united tribes of Israel" became a dominant feature in the identity of the state.<sup>[36]</sup> For example, the representation of the twelve tribes plays a prominent role in the annual celebration of Israeli Independence Day: twelve torches are lit to symbolize the twelve tribes' return to their land.

Kokhavi probably omitted the zodiac signs from the Ohel Moshe paintings because he was aware of their waning status and the strengthening of the tribal symbols in Jewish thought. Therefore, excluding them was an outcome of his Zionist worldview and his national Israeli identity. The impact of that identity on his perception of Redemp-

[33] For example, in the Great Synagogue of Częstochowa, decorated in the 1920s, the names of at least eight of the zodiac signs were inscribed around the ceiling edges, while two central compositions included the tribal symbols. This synagogue was adorned by Perez Willenberg. For a partial photograph of this painted zodiac and tribal symbols (tribe of Dan and the sign of Scorpio), see S. Willenberg, *Mered Betreblinka [A Revolt in Treblinka]*, Tel Aviv 1986, pp. 144–145 [unnumbered page, Hebrew]. A combination of the traditional figurative tribal symbols and the zodiac signs is also found in other synagogues in the Land of Israel from the first half of the twentieth century: Yizhak Bak painted the two sets in separate rectangles in the Mea Shearim Yeshiva and Talmud

Torah. See A. Amar, *op.cit.*, pp. 14–15. Bak acquired his artistic skills in Europe between the two world wars. Thus, it is little wonder that he followed the custom of painting the two sets of symbols side by side on the synagogue ceiling, as did Willenberg.

[34] <[http://www.palyam.org/About\\_us/displaySO-Harticle?name=מהמזלות&id=th00056&bl=b00056a](http://www.palyam.org/About_us/displaySO-Harticle?name=מהמזלות&id=th00056&bl=b00056a)> [accessed: May 9, 2018].

[35] For documentation of the tribal symbols in the work of Ze'ev Raban, see, e.g., B. Goldman Ida, *Ze'ev Raban: A Hebrew Symbolist*, Tel Aviv 2001, pp. 139, 158; A. Amar, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

[36] See M. Azari, *Hag Ha'atsmaut Vehitpathuto Beyisrael [Independence Day and Its Development in Israel]*, Tel Aviv 1994, p. 49 [Hebrew].

tion was also manifested in the way he integrated four other motifs into the overall design scheme of the Ohel Moshe Synagogue: the seven species, the shield of David, the Temple menorah, and the verse “Even them will I bring to my holy mountain”.

In Zionist ideology and in early Israeli art, the seven species represent both the virtues of the soil in the Land of Israel, especially in agricultural settlements, and the idea of the ingathering of the exiles.<sup>[37]</sup> Therefore, portraying them on the walls of the ‘Ades and Ohel Moshe synagogues might have expressed the Zionist leanings of both Yaakov Stark and Gershon Kokhavi. However, whereas in ‘Ades the spices were utilized as a decorative border for the tribal signs, in Ohel Moshe they were depicted separately, each with its own border, which emphasized their ideological intent.

In Ohel Moshe, two large illustrations of the shield of David were painted on the western wall, flanking the depictions of a Torah scroll, the menorah, a harp, a shofar, and holy sites in Israel (Fig. 6). In contrast, in the ‘Ades synagogue, small depictions of the shield of David, with flowers in their centers, were integrated with images of the Temple menorah, together forming a decorative pattern (Fig. 7). Hence, the shield of David evolved from a semi-decorative motif in the ‘Ades Synagogue into a declarative one in Ohel Moshe. This difference reflects its conversion into the principal Zionist emblem and a feature of Israel’s national flag.<sup>[38]</sup>

[37] Examples of the biblical seven species have appeared in Jewish art since ancient times. There were such depictions in European, especially Polish, synagogues in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they were not portrayed as a complete motif in Jewish art until the rise of the Zionist movement. See T. Gispán-Grinberg, *Amanut Kir Behadrei Okhel Bekibuzey ‘Hakibuz Haarzi, 1950–1967 [Murals in Dining Halls of Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Artzi, 1950–1967]*, “Ca-thedra: For the History of Erez Israel and Its Yishuv” 2010, no. 135, pp. 175–176 [Hebrew].

[38] On the Zionist context of the shield of David, see G. Shalom, *Magen David: Toldotav shel Semel [The Shield of David: The Evolution of a Symbol]*, Ein Harod 2008, p. 55. The Zionist movement adopted the shield as its symbol in the Basel Congress. See Y. Zalmona, N. Shilo-Kohen, op.cit., p. 203. In 1948 it became the principal element of the Israeli flag. The shield of David was also part of the corpus of painted motifs in East European synagogues at the beginning of the twentieth century. See, for example, in the Niebylec synagogue, painted in 1906: <<http://cja.huji.ac.il/wpc/browser.php?mode=alone&id=10480>> [accessed: May 15, 2018].



Fig. 6. Ohel Moshe Synagogue, the menorah and the shield of David (western wall). Photograph: Zvi Orgad, 2018



Fig. 7. ‘Ades Synagogue, the menorah and the shield of David in a decorative pattern (northern wall). Photograph: Zvi Orgad, 2018

This kind of difference is also evident in the menorah motif. In contrast to its decorative appeal in the 'Ades Synagogue (Fig. 7), its image was painted prominently on Ohel Moshe's western wall (Fig. 6). The menorah's design in both differs from its traditional depiction in synagogues from the early modern period until the nineteenth century. Many painted menorahs in these synagogues were accompanied by verses taken from Psalm 67 and were elaborately designed, with images of flames, ornate bases, and two flanking lions.<sup>[39]</sup> The miniature menorahs in the 'Ades synagogue are schematic and lack any distinctive details, and the single menorah in Ohel Moshe has an amorphous design, both characterizations distinguishing them from the traditional portrayals in early modern synagogues.<sup>[40]</sup> The appearance of the menorah as an emblem in the Ohel Moshe Synagogue reflects its national status in the Zionist movement and in the State of Israel. The Zionist movement embraced the menorah as one of its national symbols, manifested in the early twentieth century works of Bezalel.<sup>[41]</sup> Choosing the menorah as the emblem of the State of Israel in 1949 ratified its status as the leading symbol of modern national redemption.

Development of the conception of the future Temple is manifested in the inscription "Even them will I bring [...]" (Isa. 46:7), written differently in the two synagogues. In 'Ades, a partial and slightly revised version of the verse was inscribed: "Even them will I bring to my holy house and make them joyful in my house of prayer for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people [והביאותים אל בית קדשי ושמחתים] (based on Isa. 46:7; Fig. 8).

Two changes were made: first, the idiom "holy mountain [הר קדשי]" was replaced by the phrase "holy house [בית קדשי]", and second, the whole section referring to ritual sacrifice was omitted. In contrast, in Ohel Moshe, the verse was copied accurately: "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people [והביאותים אל הר קדשי ושמחתים בבית תפלתי עולתיהם וזבחייהם לרצון על מזבחי כי ביתי בית תפלה יקרא לכל העמים]" (Fig. 9).

These differences reveal profound disparities in the two painters' vision of the future Jerusalem Temple. The replacement of the word "mountain" with "house" and the omission of the section that mentions the ritual sacrifices transformed Stark's Temple into a house of prayer –

[39] For a portrayal that includes these elements, which was painted in the Bychawa Synagogue in the late nineteenth century (1876–1897), see: <<http://cja.huji.ac.il/wpc/browser.php?mode=alone&id=186615>> [accessed: May 15, 2018].

[40] In numerous East and Central European synagogues in the early modern period the menorah was imaged on the southern wall (or on the right-hand door of the Torah ark, sometimes opposite

the showbread table on the left-hand door), thus demonstrating the parallelism between the synagogue and the Jerusalem Temple. See I. Fishof, *El Mul Pney Hamenorah: Amanut Yehudit Baet HaHadasha [In Front of the Menorah: Jewish Art in the Modern Period]*, [in:] *Leor Hamenorah: Gilgulo shel Semel [In the Light of the Menorah: a Transformation of a Symbol]*, ed. Y. Israeli, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 113–114 [Hebrew].

[41] See Y. Zalmona, N. Shilo-Kohen, op.cit., p. 203.



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