

A Croatian Zionist: Adolf Weiller between the East European *Shtetl* and the Lure of Nature

Two striking images are included in a sketchbook belonging to Adolf Weiller (1895–1969), a Croatian artist of Jewish origin (figs. 3.1–3.2), in which he sketched during the WWII years. One image depicts a partisan viewed from behind with a rifle on his back; the other is an image of an exhausted civilian, a man dressed in a long coat and a cap with a visor, sitting low with his hands folded in a gesture of passivity and helplessness.

Until the early 1990s, Weiller's sketchbooks, along with two hundred of his additional drawings, were treated as “documents” of an era celebrating the victory of Tito's partisans and the anti-fascists, and were occasionally exhibited as such.¹ It was only with the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia and the formation of new states on its territories, each in need of defining themselves nationally through re-examining and often rewriting their past, that Weiller's works began to be reassessed and viewed in a new light.² They are not only symbols of the anti-fascist struggle but also of the Holocaust, revealing at times their clearly Jewish character.

If seen in such context, Weiller's drawing of a desolate man (fig. 3.1) can, somewhat surprisingly, as did the sculpture of Moša Pijade discussed in the Introduction, recall an image of a traditional, particularly east European Jew. Not only the characteristic clothes worn by Weiller's man, but even more so his body language—despite the fact that he is younger—remind one of the old, bearded, and forlorn Jew painted in 1891 by the Russian-Jewish artist Leonid Pasternak (fig. 3.3). Pasternak's oil study, entitled *He Will Wait*, and numerous

1 For the exhibition of Weiller's works see for example *Likovna umjetnost NOB-e Hrvatske*, [catalogue], Umjetnički paviljon u Zagrebu i Muzej revolucije naroda Hrvatske, June 21–September 29, 1974, ed. Lea Ukrajinić (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 1974), cat. nos. 226–37.

2 See Ivanuša, *Dimenzije jednog vremena*, 9–11. Although presented on the Jewish community premises, the exhibition bore a more public character as it followed the curator's lecture at the symposium conducted in 1995 with which the Zagreb Jewish Community joined the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the victory over Nazism. The exhibition was paralleled by her article published in the proceedings of this academic gathering: Dolores Ivanuša, “Židovi—likovni umjetnici u antifašističkoj borbi i žrtve holokausta,” in *Antisemitizam, Holokaust, Antifašizam*, eds. Ivo Goldstein and Narcisa Lengel Krizman (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 1996), 156–83. Ivanuša was at the time of these events the senior curator of the Croatian History Museum.



FIGURE 3.1 Adolf Weiller, untitled, page from a sketchbook, 1941–1945, pencil on paper, 20.4 × 14 cm, Inv. No. HPM/MRHH-C-2319/8. Croatian History Museum, Zagreb



FIGURE 3.2 Adolf Weiller, untitled, page from a sketchbook, 1941–1945, pencil on paper, 20.4 × 14 cm, Inv. No. HPM/MRHH-C-2319/56. Croatian History Museum, Zagreb

postcards printed after it, referred to the hardships of Jewish life in Tsarist Russia and were created at the time of Jewish mass emigration to the West due to poverty and anti-Semitism.³

Moreover, the contrast of Weiller's two images—a partisan fighter and a passively sitting civilian—could be understood as not only stemming from the artist's own wartime encounters, but also as echoing images depicting the modern Jewish experience and referring to both: old and new, segregation and inclusion, passive suffering and active resistance. For example, the readiness of Jews to take up arms and participate in an armed struggle (in Weiller's case by joining the partisans) was already shown earlier in paintings such as Lazar Krestin's *Self-defense* painted in 1906.⁴ Krestin depicted an armed Jewish secular youth protecting the elderly religious members of the Jewish community

3 For Pasternak's painting, see Mirjam Rajner, "Chagall's 'Jew in Bright Red,'" *Ars Judaica* 4 (2008): 68–71.

4 The painting is presently at Mishkan LeOmanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod.

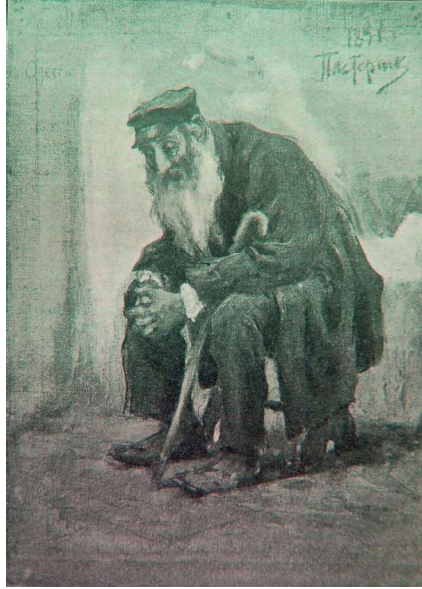


FIGURE 3.3
Leonid Pasternak, *He Will Wait*, 1891,
whereabouts unknown, reproduced in
Ost und West 6 (June 1902): cols. 413–14

from pogroms that followed the 1905 unrest in Tsarist Russia. Weiller's Jew again appears to resemble the images of the east European traditional Jews shown in the background of Krestin's painting, while his armed partisan parallels Krestin's young members of the self-defense organization carrying clubs, a rifle, and a gun.

This unexpected connection with the art created by east European Jewish artists at the turn of the century was repeated by Weiller in several additional drawings created in the same sketchbook or in later drawings based upon them. For example, a few of his drawings of refugees carrying their belongings and children are based upon such works as the painting by Max Fabian, who in 1902 depicted a family of east European Jewish exiles in his work known as *Emigrants*.⁵ Similarly, Weiller's drawing of a refugee child clearly follows Abel Pann's image of a child in his "Jug of Tears" series (1916) dedicated to the suffering of Russian Jews during WWI (figs. 3.4–3.5).⁶

In addition to such images, another drawing created by Weiller during the war years shows a group of traditional Jews, their heads covered by hats and skullcaps, holding a discussion around a table, while in a sketch—crossed out later (?) by a large X—an elderly Jew is blessing a child near a table on which

⁵ Presently at Mishkan LeOmanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod.

⁶ For Fabian's work and a reproduction, see Rajner, "Chagall's 'Jew in Bright Red,'" 72; for that of Abel Pann, see Yigal Zalmona, *The Art of Abel Pann: from Montparnasse to the Land of the Bible*, [catalogue] (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2003), 33–35.



FIGURE 3.4
Adolf Weiller, *A Refugee Child*, 1944–1945,
black and brown crayon on paper, 32.5 × 23 cm,
Inv. No. HPM/MRNI-C-2281. Croatian History
Museum, Zagreb



FIGURE 3.5 Abel Pann, *Gone Mad*, 1916, gouache on cardboard, 39.5 × 37.5, Inv. No. B04017. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Marcus Feichheimer, Cincinnati, in memory of his son
PHOTO © THE ISRAEL MUSEUM, JERUSALEM BY OFRIT ROSENBERG. COURTESY OF © TALIA PANN WANG



FIGURE 3.6 Adolf Weiller, untitled, 1944, pencil on paper, 30 × 21.5 cm, Inv. No. HPM/MRNH-C-2252, verso. Croatian History Museum, Zagreb



FIGURE 3.7 Adolf Weiller, untitled, 1944, pencil on paper, 30 × 21.5 cm, Inv. No. HPM/MRNH-C-2256/1, verso. Croatian History Museum, Zagreb



FIGURE 3.8 Samuel Hirszenberg, *A Bit of Politics*, 1893, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in *Ost und West* 10 (October 1902); cols. 677–78

stand lit candles (figs. 3.6–3.7). These two drawings again bring to mind the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century paintings created by artists such as Samuel Hirszenberg, Leopold Pilichowski, and Lazar Krestin, showing east European Jews while discussing, studying, and praying (fig. 3.8).⁷

⁷ For concise biographies of Hirszenberg and Pilichowski, see my entries in *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Gershon David Hundert (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1:720–21; 2:1358. For Krestin, see *Lazar Krestin, Sechzehn Heliogravüren nach seinen Werken* (Vienna: Haruach, 1924).

Such drawings, depicting east European Jewish suffering and religious behavior, are more than atypical for the years 1943–45 in which they were created, and especially for the culture to which Weiller belonged as a secular, acculturated Croatian Jew who, at the time he drew those works, supported the partisans' communist ideology. The question which arises here is, then, why did Weiller, in the midst of the war and the Holocaust, borrow these images that belonged to an entirely different era and culture? To fully apprehend these choices and their results, to which I will return at the end of the book, it is vital to learn about Weiller's early, pre-WWII development and his artistic career.

1 **Becoming a "Jewish Artist"**

In comparison to the artistic careers of Moša Pijade and Daniel Kabiljo, which from their onset were more or less connected to the local Serbian or Bosnian artistic scenes in Belgrade and Sarajevo, Weiller's early development stands out as primarily associated with his Jewish milieu. This, even more than in Kabiljo's case, resulted in the prolonged lack of scholarly research and acknowledgment of his art and general interest in it. Aside from the cited works dealing with Weiller's war experience, preserved at the Croatian History Museum, the majority of his opus is in a private collection.⁸ Some of his later works, mainly genre scenes and landscapes created in the last phase of his life during the 1950s and early 1960s in the surroundings of Samobor, a provincial Croatian town where he lived at the time, are kept in this town's local museum. His published biographical data are scarce as well.⁹

Weiller was born as the youngest of seven children in the small town of Bosanski Novi in Bosnia, where his father Ljudevit, a merchant originally from Zagreb, most probably settled in search of a livelihood. After the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia in 1878 a number of Ashkenazic Jews arrived there from other parts of the Dual Monarchy hoping to develop businesses in this new and underdeveloped area.¹⁰ Adolf had five older brothers

8 I would like to thank Vedran and Savinka Vajler for generously sharing with me their knowledge about the artist, their father's uncle, allowing me to study their collection, and for providing the images of his works.

9 Aside from Ivanuša, *Dimenzije jednog vremena*, 9–11, see Levi, "Jugoslovenski Jevreji u nauci," 56; Nikola Neidhardt, "Ing. Adolf Vajler" (in memoriam), *Šumarski list* 1–2 (1969): 81–83. Weiller's solo-exhibition, held at the City Museum in Samobor in 1959, was accompanied by a brochure containing short biographical data (*Adolf Weiller*, Gradski muzej Samobor, 30 May–22 June, 1959). See also Mirjam Rajner "Adolf Vajler: pokušaj rekonstrukcije biografije jednog jevrejskog umetnika," *Zbornik* (Belgrade: Jewish Historical Museum) 9 (2009): 525–61.

10 See above Ch. 2, n. 13.

and a sister, who was closest to him in age. In 1899, when he was four, his father died suddenly and the mother moved the children back to Zagreb, where Weiller grew up. Although his mother came from a prominent Zagreb family that in previous generations included a rabbi and community activists, the Weillers experienced hardships, and the future artist was primarily guided and financially supported by his brothers. The mother sent all the elder boys to learn various trading professions, while she earned money by renting rooms in their apartment and caring for her tenants. Only the sister Mirjam and Adolf, the youngest son, received an academic education. While attending the Forest Engineering Faculty, promising a more “practical” profession, Weiller was also able to follow his heart’s desire and study art in the private school of Tomislav Krizman (1882–1955), a well-known Croatian fin-de-siècle graphic artist, painter, stage and applied art designer. As Krizman’s artistic choices significantly influenced Weiller, they should be briefly examined.

Krizman studied in Zagreb with Bela Čikoš Sesija, one of the first Croatian representatives of symbolist and art nouveau painting, and Menci Clement Crnčić, an expert in graphic art, primarily in etching and engraving. This made an impact on his development and, following in the footsteps of his teachers, Krizman continued his artistic education in Vienna, where he studied between 1902 and 1907 at the School of Arts and Crafts and the Art Academy. Strongly influenced by the Vienna Secession movement, he remained there for ten years, absorbing the influences of the leading Viennese fin-de-siècle artists such as the early Gustav Klimt and Koloman Moser, and participated in exhibitions of art associations such as Jungbund, Künstlerhaus, and Secession. Upon returning to Zagreb he taught from 1912 at the Arts and Crafts School and from 1922 in the Art Academy’s graphic department. Krizman created portraits, posters for various cultural and artistic events in Zagreb, and some applied art objects, all in the Vienna Secession style. In addition, in his numerous landscapes he especially developed the art of etching.

As an ardent traveler, Krizman was primarily attracted to the “Oriental” regions of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. And as a true “Western Orientalist,” like the Austrian and Czech artists discussed in the previous chapter, he was attracted to Sarajevo’s picturesque sites, producing during the 1920s an array of works depicting old Turkish shops and markets, bridges, traditional houses and courtyards, minarets and mosques.¹¹ Standing out among such works are his depictions of the old quarters of the Macedonian towns in *Tetovo* and *Ohrid*

¹¹ See Smiljka Domac Ceraj, *Tomislav Krizman: retrospektivna izložba*, [catalogue], March 23–May 7, 1995 (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 1995).

(both from 1918), which preserved the Ottoman atmosphere, or the old stone bridge built by the Turks in the Herzegovinian town *Mostar* (1916).¹²

Presently, Weiller's earliest known works preserved only in photographs are such "Oriental" motifs influenced by Krizman and depicting scenes from Bosnia. During WWI, in February 1917, he sent one of them as a postcard to his older brother Daniel, then serving in the Austro-Hungarian army; the other, dated 1916–17, shows the young artist as he paints a canvas with an old Bosnian man standing in front of the local houses and a minaret in the background. A "large painting showing a blind man" exhibited in November 1918 in the window of the furniture shop owned by the Bothe and Ehrmann Firm on Ilica St. in Zagreb, was mentioned in the local Jewish and non-Jewish press.¹³ As no illustration or more detailed description of this painting appear in print, we do not know what it looked like. Still, the short review in *Židov* proudly presents Weiller as a talented and ambitious young painter, stressing that his painting aroused interest among the members of the Jewish community.

Krizman probably also imparted to his Jewish pupil the wish to continue his art studies in Vienna. Thus, in 1921, upon acquiring a degree as a forest engineer, Weiller continued his art education in Vienna in a private art school.¹⁴ From there he traveled to Munich, where he studied in Heinrich Knirr's studio, the art establishment that, as noted, was popular among the Croatian artists (and also attracted young Moša Pijade) at the beginning of the century.¹⁵

Judging from his signed and dated student exercises and numerous sketches preserved in sketchbooks and on separate sheets, the period of 1921–23 was spent traveling between Vienna, Munich, and Berlin, with a brief summer

¹² For Tomislav Krizman's works see the digital collection of the National and University Library in Zagreb, <http://db.nsk.hr/HeritageDetails.aspx?id=593> (last accessed 9 January 2018).

¹³ *Židov*, no. 7 (1918): 22; *Obzor*, no. 260 (1918). I would like to thank Andreja Der-Hazarijan Vukić of The Archives of the Visual Arts of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb, for this information. "Bothe and Ehrmann" was the name of the largest furniture factory in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (est. 1895) owned by Alexander Ehrmann, a well-known Zagreb Jewish entrepreneur, philanthropist, and art lover; see Marko Fak, "Aleksandar Ehrmann (1879–1965), veleindustrijalac i mecena (skica za portret)," *Interdisciplinarni znanstveni časopis "Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest"* 41, no. 1 (Nov. 2009): 325–35.

¹⁴ Several of Weiller's short biographies (see n. 9 above) mention the name of Prof. Russl, possibly wrongly spelled Russel. If the misspelling is the case, one possibility is that this was the private art school in Vienna known as Münchner Malschule Russel-Löwenfeld. I thank Maria-Theresia Lichtschauer for consulting the Archiv der Berufsvereinigung der Bildenden Künstler Österreichs [Archives of the Association of Austria's Visual Artists] in Vienna and providing me with this information. So far I was unable to find more details about this art establishment.

¹⁵ See Ch. 1, n. 31.

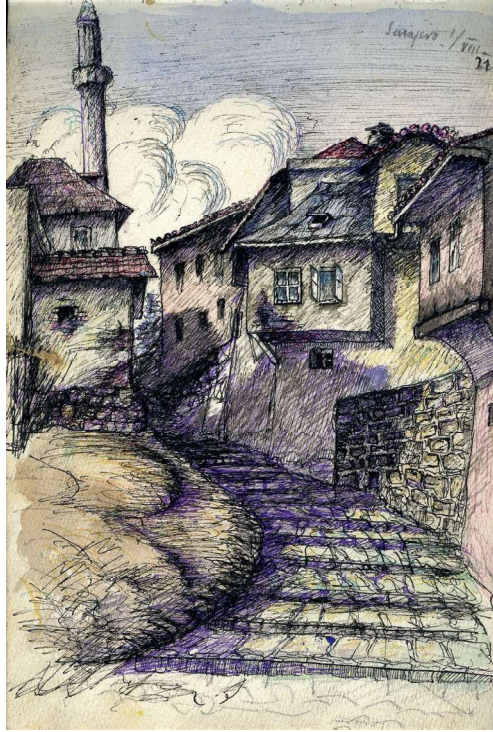


FIGURE 3.9
Adolf Weiller, *Sarajevo*, August 1921,
ink, ink wash, and colored crayons on
paper, 20.4 × 14 cm. Private collection

visit to Bosnia. Several landscapes in watercolor or pencil sketches record his trips and travels to Starnberger Lake, near Munich, to the metropolis of Berlin, where he admired open vistas next to the river Speer, and to the old Sarajevo alleys which he drew still influenced by Krizman's "Orientalism" (fig. 3.9).

Of special value are densely written lists of artists' names whose works he may have wanted to see or actually saw in Leipzig, Munich, and especially in Berlin. They include names of numerous well-known contemporary, modern, and avant-garde artists of the Berlin Secession such as Wolf Röhricht, Leo von König, or Ernst Oppler; German expressionists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Karl Schmitt-Rothluff, Max Pechstein, August Macke, Emil Nolde, Franz Marc, and Erich Heckel; the fauvist Hans Purrmann, or the Bauhaus' Lyonel Feininger, but also artists of Jewish origin such as Rudolf Levy, Lesser Ury, and Eugen Spiro. Such lists indeed point to Weiller's broad interest in and knowledge of the current artistic scene he encountered in Germany. Some of the drawings he created at that time show good character studies which he later transformed into oil portraits. His only preserved self-portrait also dates from that period. It is painted in heavy impasto, using thick black outlines and

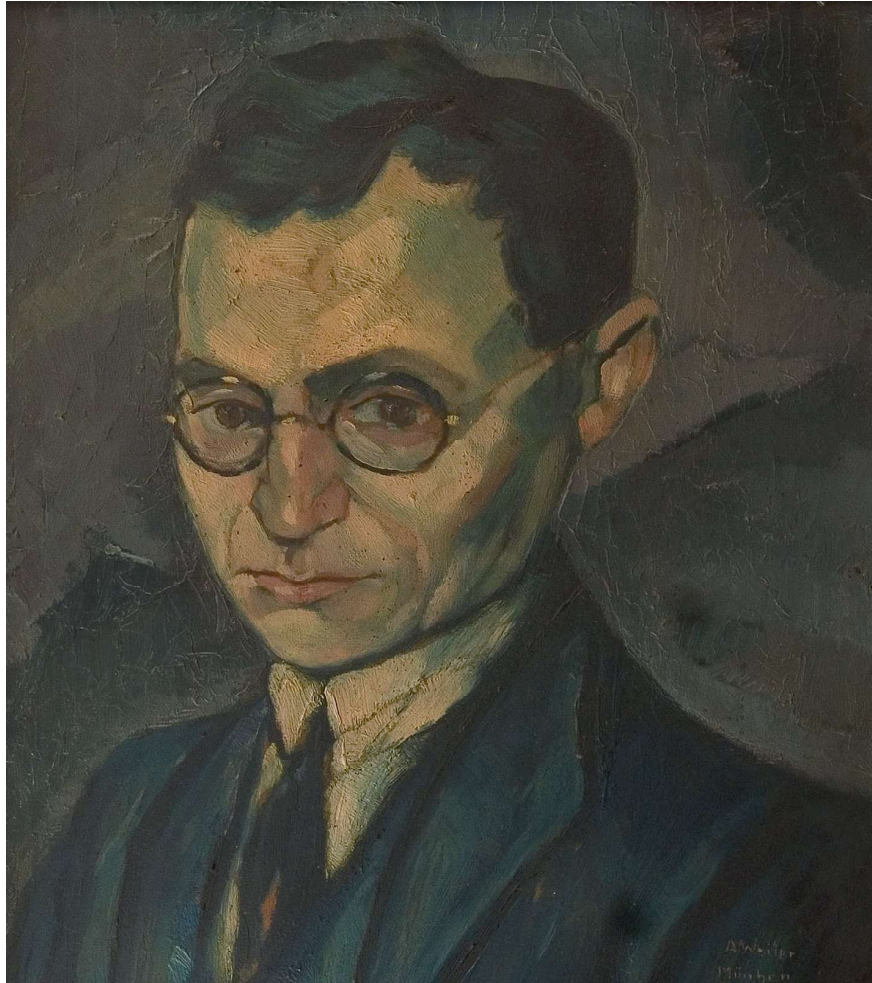


FIGURE 3.10 Adolf Weiller, *Self-portrait*, 1923, oil on canvas, 39.4 × 34.3 cm. Private collection

expressive brushstrokes, recalling portraits of his contemporaries, the second generation German expressionist artists. (fig. 3.10).

It is also possible to reconstruct the beginnings of Weiller's artistic development with the help of two articles about him published in the Yugoslav Jewish press in the early 1920s. He was first noticed as a promising young artist already in 1922, when his name appeared among the participants of the art exhibition held during the second Yugoslav Zionist Youth sport rally conducted in Zagreb in August of that year. This review, written by Vera Stein and published

in the Zionist youth magazine *Gideon*, was already encountered when exploring Daniel Kabiljo's early development.¹⁶ Two years later an additional article about Weiller appeared, again in *Gideon*, written by Eric Artur. It is much more detailed and is helpful for further reconstruction of Weiller's artistic persona, his identities, and how they were understood and explained to the young Croatian Zionist readers.¹⁷

Thanks to Artur's article it is possible to reconstruct several phases of Weiller's early opus. Thus, we learn that the first works he created prior to his departure for Vienna, at the time he was studying with Krizman, were indeed dedicated to the theme of Bosnia. *Two Turks* and *Bosnian Street in Moonlight*, mentioned by Vera Stein in her 1922 article as beautifully painted, belong to that group of works, along with the earlier discussed sketches created during his 1921 summer trip to Bosnia (see fig. 3.9). However, in contrast to Krizman, Weiller must have felt much more at home in this former Ottoman province. During his childhood and youth, Weiller, who, as we saw, was born in Bosnia, often went back there for vacations, especially to the town of Prijedor to visit his aunt, his mother's sister. Born Najfeld [Neufeld], an Ashkenazic Jewess, she had married into the old, local Sephardic family named Mevorah. Thus the fact that Weiller was born in Bosnia, often traveled there, and that he had this Sephardic side in his family seemed to encourage Artur to see the artist as "instinctively connected to the Orient" which "permeated his portraits of the local types and landscapes."¹⁸

When we look at the black-and-white image of Weiller's now lost watercolor study *A Sephardic Jew* (fig. 3.11), reproduced in *Gideon*, the picture indeed recalls different sources. A comparison with one of Kabiljo's works is helpful, allowing us to better understand Weiller's intentions (fig. 3.12). While Kabiljo invites us to participate in the daily life of his characters dressed in typical local work clothes, talking animatedly on one of Sarajevo's market streets, Weiller's character appears to be old and venerated, withdrawn, thoughtful, and melancholic. The old wisdom and sadness reflected in his face and eyes indeed recall an image of a "true" Oriental Jew rather than a local Bosnian "Oriental." It actually brings to mind earlier images of aged Yemenite Jews leaning against the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem as depicted by the Polish-Jewish artist Samuel Hirszenberg in 1907–8, the work reproduced in the German Jewish

16 *Gideon*, no. 2 (Nov. 1922): 46–48; also published in *Židov*, no. 36–37 (1922): 12–13. For quotations from this article relating to Kabiljo's art, see Ch. 2, 67.

17 Eric Artur, "Slikar Adolf Weiller," *Gideon*, no. 6 (1924–25): 115–17, plates 1–111.

18 *Ibid.*, 115. The cases of such "intermarriage" between an Ashkenazic and Sephardic family were still rare at this time.



FIGURE 3.11 Adolf Weiller, *A Sephardic Jew*, 1922–1924, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in *Gideon* 6 (1924–1925): n.p.



FIGURE 3.12 Daniel Kabiljo, *At the Market in Sarajevo*, 1920s–1930s, ink and watercolor on paper, 30 × 42 cm. Private collection



FIGURE 3.13 Samuel Hirszenberg, *Near the Wailing Wall*, 1907–1908, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in *Ost und West* 2 (February 1912): cols. 131–32

Ost und West in 1912 (fig. 3.13).¹⁹ At the time he created this work Hirszenberg was teaching at Jerusalem's Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts. With works such as *Near the Wailing Wall* he, albeit reluctantly, joined in the school's ef-

¹⁹ *Ost und West* 12, no. 2 (Feb. 1912): cols. 131–32.

forts to create a new “Hebrew art” and identity by seeking models among the Oriental Jews who were considered to be more authentic and closer to biblical ancestors than European Ashkenazim.²⁰ Deriving from such a source as *Ost und West*, Weiller’s *Sephardic Jew* thus indicates his intentions, very different from a mere depiction of Bosnia’s local types and landscapes.

When writing about Weiller, Stein mentions him also as the creator of a number of, now lost, small oil paintings showing east European Jewish types. Stein calls them images of the “*Ostjuden*”—using the German term—whom Weiller apparently depicted with their “typical hand gestures and facial expressions.” Weiller’s Jewish characters appear in couples or groups and their expressions, we are told, show their spiritual depth and their “soul.” Stein specifically mentions a painting, *At the Game*, most probably referring to the painting later entitled *Chess Players* that was reproduced in 1925 in the Zionist children’s magazine *Ha-aviv—Proljeće*.²¹ This work was clearly based upon Isidor Kaufmann’s *Chess Players*, the well-known mundane Jewish genre scene that received a gold medal at the Viennese 1873 World Exhibition.²² As shown, Kaufmann, played an important role for Kabiljo as well, and now also served as an inspiration for Weiller. Both Kabiljo and Weiller were introduced to his art while in Vienna.²³ Still, Weiller’s chess players are his contemporaries; he renders them in a realistic manner and they clearly lack Kaufmann’s more detailed depiction of the Jewish traditional world and an aura of nostalgia for bygone days.

Among the drawings in Weiller’s student sketchbook one finds such contemporary images of elderly men: portraits or studies of them sitting and holding a bowl of soup (fig. 3.14). Artur informs us that it was precisely in Vienna that Weiller became fascinated with east European Jews. Many of them, arriving to the city during WWI as refugees from the eastern provinces of the Empire and settling in the poverty stricken, predominantly Jewish, Leopoldstadt district, added an “exotic” touch to it with their outer appearance, clothes, speech, and behavior.²⁴ A vivid description of Weiller’s “fascination” enables us to imagine

20 On Hirszenberg’s dilemma and ambivalence towards the new Bezalel art, see Richard I. Cohen and Mirjam Rajner, “The Return of the Wandering Jew(s) in Samuel Hirszenberg’s Art,” *Ars Judaica* 7 (2011): 47–56.

21 *Ha-aviv—Proljeće*, no. 6 (1925–26): 103.

22 On Kaufmann’s *Chess Players* (1873), see Tobias Natter, “Glorification and Positions in the Works of Isidor Kaufmann,” in *ibid.*, ed., *Rabbiner, Bocher, Talmudschüler*, 21, 178–79.

23 See Ch. 2, 81.

24 See David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 74–78.



FIGURE 3.14
Adolf Weiller, *A Man with a Soup Bowl*,
1922, charcoal on paper, 20.3 × 14 cm.
Private collection

the process of his work and the now mostly lost paintings from this phase of his artistic development:

Every day one could see him [i.e. Weiller] as he goes to the *Judengasse*, a sketchbook in his hand. Here, among petty merchants, old things, and clothes dealers, he finds models for his little pictures. Sometimes he enters a *shul* [synagogue] and studies *Ostjuden* at prayer, study, and in conversation.

Afterwards he received permission from Vienna's Jewish community to visit the community's Old Age Home. Here he would spend entire days watching the old people, listening to their talking, conversing with them, and studying their movements and facial expressions.²⁵

By using the German word *Ostjuden* for the traditional east European Jews and by stressing their "typical" hand gestures and facial expressions that Weiller found artistically inspiring, Artur clearly projected his (and Weiller's)

²⁵ Artur, "Slikar Adolf Weiller," 115–16.

identity as an acculturated and secular Croatian Ashkenazic Jew. As former German-speaking Westernized subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they saw their “Eastern brethren” as the “other” in both a patronizing and romantic manner.²⁶ Moreover, such interest in east European Jews who, in their quarter in the midst of modern Vienna, managed to preserve an Orthodox religious way of life and an atmosphere of a *shtetl*—as suggested by Artur—was contradictory.²⁷ The “old” Jewish traditional world was for them at once attractive, due to its authenticity, and repulsive, as it symbolized backwardness and exclusion.

Still, as noted by Artur, Weiller was also able to converse with the old Jews. As a foreign student in Vienna and away from home, he may even have felt a certain homesickness and nostalgia for the world to which they belonged. They most probably reminded him of the childhood stories his mother told him about his great-grandfather, Aharon Palota (1809–49), an Orthodox rabbi who came from Hungary to Zagreb in order to serve the community. Zagreb’s Jewish community was established only in 1806, following a long period during which Jews were banned from the city. Joseph II’s Edict of Toleration and the subsequent legislation of Leopold I eased their condition, as elsewhere in Austro-Hungary, and Jews were first permitted to reside in the city in the 1780s. However, only in 1873 did they receive full civil rights.²⁸

Until 1840 the Zagreb Jewish community was Orthodox, but when the supporters of the new Neolog movement prevailed the Orthodox members gathered around Rabbi Palota and founded their own congregation.²⁹ The artist’s maternal grandfather, Abraham Zvi-Hirsch Segal Najfeld, followed the same Orthodox path and—what was probably especially interesting for the young

26 See Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jews in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcomed Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and a web-exhibit “East European Jews in the German Jewish Imagination” at the Ludwig Rosenberg Library of Judaica, University of Chicago [https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/exeej/ (last accessed 9 January 2018)]

27 Artur, “Slikar Adolf Weiller,” 115–16.

28 For a brief history of Zagreb’s Jewish community before 1918, see Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 41–54; see also Gavro Schwarz, *Povijest zagrebačke židovske općine od osnutka do 50-tih godina 19. Vjeka* (Zagreb: Štamparija Gaj, 1939); Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 14–21.

29 Weiller’s unpublished manuscript containing his memoirs of the family, dated 19 August 1959, is kept at the Eventov Archives, file no. A-106. For Rabbi Palota, see Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 46; *Židovi na tlu Jugoslavije*, eds. Ante Sorić and Slavko Goldstein [catalogue] (Zagreb: Muzejski prostor, 1988), 137 [the English translation of this catalogue, *Jews in Yugoslavia*, eds. Ante Sorić and Slavko Goldstein (Zagreb: Muzejski prostor, 1989) is an abbreviated version of the 1988 publication. I will further refer to the original version].

artist—aside from being the beadle of Zagreb’s Hevrah Kadisha (burial society), he was also a traditional Jewish artisan creating papercut *mizrahim*, decorated with Jewish motifs and religious verses.³⁰ Grandfather Najfeld also richly decorated the cover of the community’s Hevrah Kadisha register of 1854, which is still preserved in Zagreb’s Jewish community and occasionally exhibited.³¹

From the reviews of Weiller’s early opus by Stein and Artur, we can thus learn that his early artistic interests developed in two directions: exploration of the picturesque “Oriental” Bosnia which he depicted as “Western Orientalist,” but also as a Jew “instinctively connected to the Orient”; and the preservation of the east European Jewish “types” whom he observed from the viewpoint of an acculturated Western Jewish artist, but also as an understanding insider. Such an approach, adopted by Weiller in both these directions, corresponded to the one promoted by the young, Western educated, largely Ashkenazic Yugoslav Zionists, whose ideal was a new, liberated and secular Jew, and from that standpoint observed and judged the other Jews. Among Weiller’s siblings, his sister Mirjam Weiller (1892–1942), one of the main leaders of Zagreb’s Zionist movement, was especially influential in creating such worldviews.

Mirjam, who due to an early illness was hunchbacked, was exceptionally talented and her mother paid special attention to her education. In 1913, upon graduating from the Jewish school and the lyceum in Zagreb, she was sent to Switzerland to master French in addition to German, and study education. Already as a teenager, while visiting relatives in Prijedor, Bosnia, Mirjam took special interest in the Zionist movement. Before WWI Prijedor was the center of the Zionist movement in Bosnia and one of the local leaders was Salomon Mevorah, a cousin of Adolf and Mirjam who in 1913 attended the eleventh Zionist congress in Vienna and was among the founders of the local branch of the Po’alei Zion movement. His friend, Gustav Seidemann, an Austrian Jew and a Zionist who settled in Prjedor at the beginning of the century, owned a Jewish bookstore where Mirjam read many books with Jewish and Zionist content, while they all learned Hebrew from an Ashkenazic rabbi in the nearby town of Banja Luka.³² Thus, inspired by her relative, during the war years Mirjam brought together young Jewish women in Zagreb, spread the Zionist

30 Such papercuts were usually placed on the eastern (*mizrah*) wall in houses and synagogues to mark the direction of Jerusalem, towards which the worshipers are supposed to turn during prayer.

31 For the Hevrah Kadisha register with Najfeld’s decorative cover, see *Židovi na tlu Jugoslavije*, 263, cat. no. 11/1.

32 See Gustav Seidemann, “Die Juden in Bosnien und der Zionismus,” *Die Welt* 25 (19 May 1903): 3–4; id., “Židovi i cionizam u Bosni,” *Židovska smotra* 6 (31 March 1909): 84–86.

idea among them, and initiated the foundation of the Bnot Zion (Daughters of Zion) organization. During the Jewish holidays this organization offered hospitality to Jewish soldiers from Galicia and Bukovina, mobilized into the Austro-Hungarian army, and to the Russian Jewish prisoners of war who occasionally appeared in Zagreb. Those soldiers, coming from much larger, older, and better established central and east European Jewish communities, often spread Zionist and Jewish nationalist ideas and further encouraged the young women's work.³³ Mirjam soon became extremely active and involved in numerous enterprises: the Jewish National Fund, publication of the weekly *Židov* (1917), organization of the first Yugoslav Zionist Congress in Zagreb (1919), foundation of the Federation of Jewish Yugoslav Youth (1919), and publication of the children's magazine *Ha-aviv-Proljeće* (1922) which she edited in the spirit of early Zionist settlers' ideology. In that same year, after completing her studies at the Montessori educational system in Vienna, Mirjam also opened a Jewish kindergarten, "Gan Hajeladim," where in addition to employing contemporary educational methods she taught the children Hebrew and raised them in the spirit of Zionism and national Jewish self-consciousness. The kindergarten proved to be a great success and even the city's non-Jewish parents apparently tried to register their children at "Doda Mirjam's Gan" (Aunt Mirjam's Kindergarten). In 1927, together with a group of local Zionist-oriented women, Mirjam established a branch of the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO). Finally, during the 1930s, following the deteriorating situation in Germany and Austria, she became increasingly involved in helping Jewish refugees arriving from those countries to Zagreb.³⁴

Mirjam's energetic enthusiasm and numerous activities were part of the general national and cultural renaissance inspired by Zionist ideology around which gathered a larger group of young, secular, educated, middle-class Ashkenazic Jews in Zagreb in the interwar years, to which the Weiller siblings belonged. During the 1920s Zionism attracted an especially strong following

33 A photograph taken in a Zagreb photo studio and preserved by the Vajler family shows young Adolf together with a group of four such Russian Jewish soldiers. It was used as a postcard and sent by him on September 19, 1915 to his sister Mirjam (Mici) who was at the time visiting their relatives in Prijedor. The soldiers were originally from Odessa, Petrograd, Kovno, and Krim, as Weiller reported, stating their names and professions, and were all, as he wrote, "great Zionists."

34 J[akir] E[ventov], "Doda Mirjam," *Bilten* (Tel Aviv), 15 Sept. 1967, 17–21; Adolf Weiller, "Autentični podaci o životu i radu Mirjam Weiller," typewritten manuscript, Eventov Archives, A-105, pp. 1–3.

in Croatia, and Zagreb was chosen as the location of the headquarters of the Yugoslav Zionist Federation. As a result, the Zagreb community maintained a number of Zionist-affiliated associations: a Maccabi sport club, a choir, women's and youth organizations, and a union of Jewish employees. The leading Jewish periodicals in Yugoslavia, such as the Zionist weekly *Židov* and youth and children magazines with a pronounced Zionist ideology like *Gideon*, *Hanoar*, and *Ha-aviv*, were published in the city. However, as noted, although supporting the idea of the revival of Jewish life in Palestine, most of the young Zionists saw their mission primarily as renewing Jewish life in their own surroundings, mainly by adopting the image of a new and secular Yugoslav Jew simultaneously belonging to this new, multi-ethnic country *and* developing a strong and proud Jewish national identity. As conditions worsened in Europe and Yugoslavia during the 1930s, only a small number of Yugoslav Zionists immigrated to Palestine, while some of those who stayed left the fold of Jewish activism and became politically affiliated with the Yugoslav radical left.³⁵ The majority, however, did not change their way of life.

By choosing to depict the east European religious Jews he encountered in Vienna, Weiller was thus, on the one hand, preserving the memory of the traditional religious lifestyle of his ancestors. On the other hand, as a secular Jew close to Zionist ideology, like Kabiljo during the mid-1920s, Weiller set out to create a modern Jewish national art as an integral part of the Yugoslav Jewish cultural renaissance. As shown, in the early twentieth century such art was intensely discussed and regularly reproduced in the pages of the German Jewish periodical *Ost und West* which was certainly well known to German-speaking Weiller, then studying in Vienna and Munich.³⁶ The ideological creators of the new Jewish national art were using exactly the same images of the old *shtetl* Jews painted by artists such as Pasternak, Krestin, Pilichowski, or Hirszenberg noted above. Such paintings became symbols of the life of suffering which the Jewish nationalists presented as being common to all Jewish people in the Diaspora—a unifying element typical of the Jewish *Volkseele* (national soul). This painful soulfulness was seen as especially characteristic of east European Jews whose religious way of life and spirituality preserved, in the eyes of the

35 On Zionism in Yugoslavia in general and Zagreb in particular, see Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 154–69; Emil Kerenji, “Serbo-Croatian Zionist Press and the Emergence of Yugoslav Jewry, 1896–1941,” in id., “Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia,” 47–95; Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 42–46, 95–130.

36 As noted, both Pijade and Kabiljo were well acquainted with it as well; see Ch. 1, 25, and Ch. 2, 70, 83.

assimilated secular Western Jews now seeking national unity, the true spirit of Judaism.³⁷

It is thus possible that the black-and-white reproduction of Weiller's now lost painting *Rabbi* (fig. 3.15), which accompanies Artur's article, is an example of such works. Weiller's image of an old bearded rabbi wearing a skullcap and gesticulating with his hands in the midst of what seems to be a religious dispute, is thus both Weiller's personal memory of the world of his ancestors and his effort to create a work of new Jewish art similar to those painted by artists such as Lazar Krestin or Leopold Pilichowski, whose paintings depicting the old east European world of Talmud study and prayer he saw reproduced in *Ost und West*. They also appeared on numerous Jewish postcards printed in Berlin and Vienna, like in the case of Pilichowski's painting, thus making these images easily obtainable and recognizable throughout the European Jewish world (fig. 3.16).³⁸ Weiller's extant painting *A Beggar*, which was also reproduced in Artur's article, belongs to such works as well. While displaying empathy with misery and suffering, it recalls the images of impoverished, migrating Jews depicted by artists such as Pilichowski and published in *Ost und West* (figs. 3.17–3.18).

While in Munich, Weiller also “discovered” Rembrandt's paintings, which, as we learn from Artur, attracted and influenced him.³⁹ In addition, he took an interest in the art of Honoré Daumier whose expressiveness, Artur explains, helped him “translate” the “exaggerated movement and the grotesque” he saw in his Viennese east European models.⁴⁰

While studying and traveling abroad, Weiller continued to exhibit his work at home. At the exhibition accompanying the fourth sport rally of the Yugoslav Zionist youth conducted in Belgrade between 5 and 8 August 1923, he showed

37 This topic was discussed by Kabiljo in his 1924–26 articles published in *Narodna židovska svjest*; see Ch. 2, 71.

38 On Jewish postcards, see Shalom Sabar, “Between Poland and Germany: Jewish Religious Practices in Illustrated Postcards of the Early Twentieth Century,” *Polin* 16 (2003): 137–66; Galit Hasan-Rokem, “Jews as Postcards, or Postcards as Jews: Mobility in a Modern Genre,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009): 505–46.

39 For the modern “discovery” of Rembrandt by German and German-Jewish scholars, see Michael Zell, “Eduard Kolloff and the Historiographic Romance of Rembrandt and the Jews,” *Simiolus* 28 (2000–2001): 181–97. Rembrandt's art was often reproduced in *Ost und West*, stressing what was believed to be the artist's positive attitude towards the Jews. Jozef Israels, the Dutch Jewish artist admired by Daniel Kabiljo, published *Rembrandt: eine Studie* (Berlin: Concordia, 1906), while Leonid Pasternak wrote a book about Rembrandt and the Jews (*Rembrandt: His Work and Its Importance for Judaism*), which was published in Berlin and Jerusalem in 1923.

40 Artur, “Slikar Adolf Weiller,” 116.

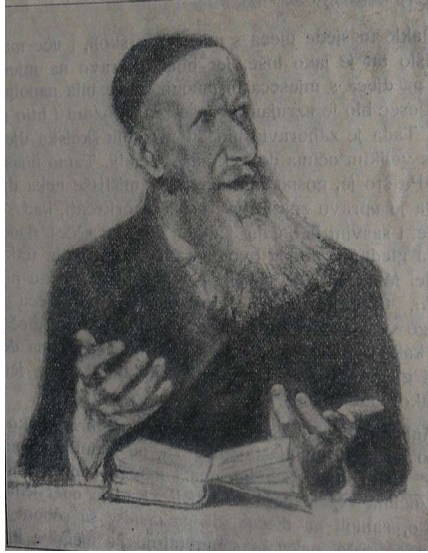


FIGURE 3.15 Adolf Weiller, *Rabbi*, 1922–1923, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in *Gideon* 6 (1924–1925): n.p.

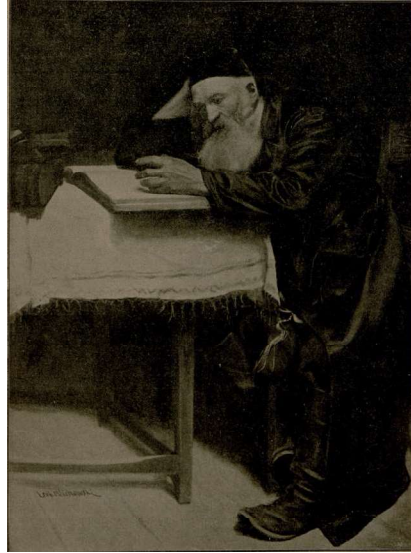


FIGURE 3.16 Leopold Pilichowski, *Studying the Talmud*, before 1903, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in *Ost und West* 1 (January 1903): cols. 5–6

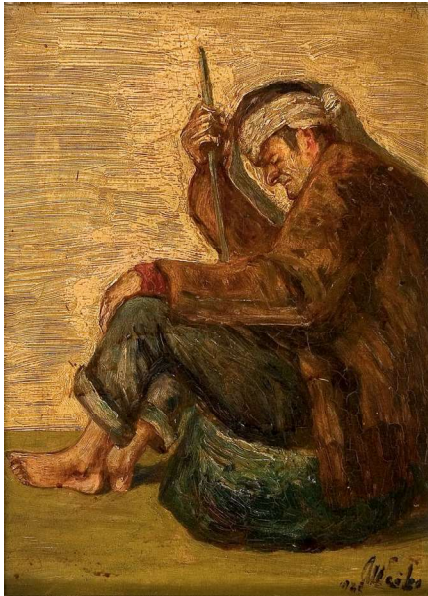


FIGURE 3.17 Adolf Weiller, *A Beggar*, 1923–1924, oil on canvas, 33 × 24 cm. Private collection



FIGURE 3.18 Leopold Pilichowski, *Tired Ones*, before 1903, whereabouts unknown. Reproduced in *Ost und West* 1 (January 1903): cols. 48–49

oil canvases, charcoal and crayon drawings, and watercolors that included landscapes from the environs of Munich, copies of Honoré Daumier's *Don Quixote*, the earlier discussed *Sephardic Jew*, and works known today only by their titles, such as *The Son of a Ghetto* and *The Blind Man*, the latter possibly being his early 1918 work noted earlier. In 1925 Weiller exhibited again, this time only with Slavko Bril, Zagreb's Jewish sculptor who, like Kabiljo and Weiller, showed his work at the sports rally exhibitions.⁴¹ The two now exhibited in the small Croatian town of Bjelovar, where Adolf's older brother Daniel lived with his family and possibly helped organize this event. The local Croatian newspapers announced their show as an important cultural event, which was to take place on Easter Sunday at the town's County Hall. Weiller, introduced as Krizman's student who had acquired artistic training in Vienna, Munich, and Berlin, was planning to exhibit forty smaller and larger works depicting genre scenes from Jewish life.⁴² Although Artur also mentioned this exhibition in his article, unfortunately no more details about it are available.⁴³

2 The Lure of Nature

Thus it comes quite as a surprise that in that same year of 1925 Weiller decided to move away from the urban centers with their comfortable middle-class life and Jewish activism into the remote Croatian areas of Lika and Kordun, where he lived among simple folk. This move seems to have been inspired mainly by Weiller's wish to advance his career as a forest engineer, for he conducted there an elaborate study that examined the influences of climate, the types of settlements, forests, and soil as well as the local *krast* terrain. The Master thesis based on his research was submitted to the University of Zagreb in 1926. However, he did not entirely neglect his artistic talents: they were now employed to prepare an album containing photographs, drawings, and watercolors which accompanied the thesis and illustrated his research (figs. 3.19–3.20).⁴⁴ It is quite possible that a large canvas showing a portrait

41 Bril's work will be discussed in Chapter 8.

42 *Nezavisnost* (Bjelovar), 11 April 1925, p. 4 and *Demokratski glas* (Bjelovar), 11 April 1925, p. 6. My thanks to Olga Nikolić Litwin for retrieving these articles.

43 Artur, "Slikar Adolf Weiller," 115.

44 "Prilog slobodno obradjenjoi tezi: Velika Kapela, s osobitim obzirom na područje kr. šum. uprave: Novi Jasenak," izradio ing. Adolf Weiller, u Zagrebu, 4. decembra 1926 [Addition to the freely elaborated thesis: Velika Kapela, with special attention paid to the area of the kingdom's forest administration: Novi Jasenak, prepared by Eng. Adolf Weiller, in Zagreb,



FIGURE 3.19
Adolf Weiller, *Mountain Houses*,
1925–1926, photograph. Samobor
Museum, Samobor



FIGURE 3.20
Adolf Weiller, *Mountain Houses*, 1926, ink
on paper, 20.5 × 27 cm. Samobor Museum,
Samobor

of a man in work clothes, with a dog and a donkey, on an open road against the background of a broad landscape with fields and mountains on the horizon (fig. 3.21), also originates from this period of his life. Similarly, several caricatures humorously depicting hunters, bears, and hunting dogs on the mountain of Kormesač, created in 1926, offer a glimpse into Weiller's way of life at this time, as do the preserved photographs showing him with a hunting rifle in the company of other foresters, hunters, and their dogs (fig. 3.22).

Nevertheless, from the artist's surviving sketches and drawings created before WWII it is possible to detect his continuous belonging to two different worlds. While some of them depict services in a synagogue and praying Jews donning a prayer shawl (fig. 3.23), others show peasant women kneeling and praying. They can be juxtaposed with drawings showing men and women pulling cattle, chopping wood, carrying baskets during a grape harvest—sometimes

December 4, 1926]. In 1958 Weiller gave the album as a present to the Mountain Museum of Croatia in Samobor (today the City Museum of Samobor), a small town near Zagreb in which he lived after WWII.



FIGURE 3.21 Adolf Weiller, *A Man with a Donkey and a Dog*, ca. 1925–1926, oil on canvas, 86 × 116 cm. Private collection



FIGURE 3.22 Adolf Weiller, (on the left) in a hunt with forest engineers, Moslavina Region, photograph, 1932–1933. Private collection



FIGURE 3.23 Adolf Weiller, untitled and undated, ink on paper, 20.4 × 14 cm. Private collection

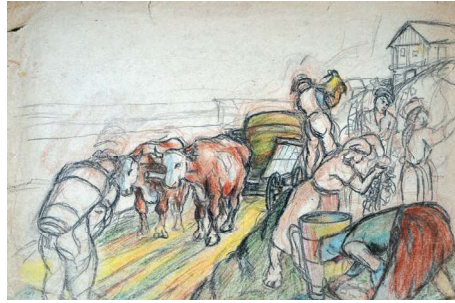


FIGURE 3.24 Adolf Weiller, *Grape Harvest*, 1930s?, colored pencils on paper, 14 × 20.4 cm. Private collection

in colorful folk-costume (fig. 3.24). Only occasionally, and usually with humor and irony, did Weiller depict bourgeois city dwellers dancing or celebrating with a bottle of champagne.

Weiller's vocation as a forest engineer gave him a unique connection to Croatian nature and to "simple folk." The art born from these new circumstances stands in stark contrast to his earlier, urban Zionist activism, yet simultaneously it fulfills the dream of the rebirth of a "new Jew" through unification with the (in this case, Croatian) land and hard physical labor. But, although depicting this new life lovingly and with understanding, Weiller still observed it as an outsider, an academically educated city Jew. Similarly, he captured images of traditional Jewish life to which he, as an acculturated and secular Jew, did not belong. This twofold "otherness" became especially pronounced during the war years and the Holocaust, and in Weiller's later attempts, which will be discussed at the end of the book, when as a survivor he used his art in an attempt to bridge the rupture that the 1941–45 period had created in his life and in that of European Jews.

The three artists presented in the first part of the book created art that expresses Serbian, Yugoslav, and—ultimately—politically left identities (Pijade),

shaping of Sephardic national distinctiveness (Kabiljo), or identification with Zionist ideology (Weiller). The different paths they chose to follow and the worldviews they adopted caused them to address very different audiences. While Pijade strove to become a member of Belgrade's Serbian and Yugoslav artistic scene, neglecting his ties with the Jewish community, Kabiljo and Weiller turned mainly towards the Jewish community, initially to the newly forged Yugoslav Zionist audiences present at all-Yugoslav Jewish youth events. Subsequently Kabiljo turned towards the Sephardic community as part of the multi-confessional Sarajevo, while Weiller addressed the Ashkenazic Jews and the Croatsians.

The second part of this book is dedicated to the subsequent generation of Yugoslav Jewish artists who emerged during the 1930s. This period, which continued until 1941, the year WWII broke out in Yugoslavia, was marked by extreme political and economic upheaval. In contrast with members of the earlier generation, who had pursued an introspective search for national and individual identity, the younger artists, caught between the rise of fascism and anti-Semitism in Europe and in Yugoslavia, chose more radical solutions: they struck back in a modernist, avant-garde, and universalist direction and with political activism.