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A Jewish Painter between Reform, Judaism, and Zionism: Wachtel's Portrait of Abraham Kohn

Abraham Kohn, the first Reform (Progressive) rabbi of Lemberg/Lviv, died at the age of forty-one in 1848 under unclear circumstances.[1] His death triggered long-lasting speculations among various members of the Lemberg Jewish community. Was his death a murder and, if it was, than who was guilty? Discussions of that question have lasted until present day. Historians have advanced different answers trying to understand the realities of the Galician Jewish community in the 19th century and the religious life of Lemberg, the center of the eastern province of the Habsburg Austrian Empire, in which Abraham Kohn appeared so vibrantly and disappeared so suddenly.

Within the context of the debates around Kohn, so far one aspect has been neglected. In 1902, Wilhelm Wachtel, a young Jewish Galician artist, painted a portrait of Rabbi Kohn – a vivid representation of Kohn that significantly adds to the image of the progressive rabbi in Lemberg collective memory.[2] Wachtel presented Kohn as a religious icon, as a saint, and as a quintessential modern figure. Wachtel's portrait was the only posthumous image of Kohn created fifty-four years after the tragic demise of the rabbi. Taking into account the controversial role of Abraham Kohn as the marginal reformer among the traditionalist majority, why did he reappear in the Lemberg milieu as an iconic figure early in the 20th century? How did it happen that the portrait of a Reform rabbi was painted by an artist who so strongly allied himself with Zionism – the movement with which the late 19th century Reform Judaism was at odds?

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[1] On Kohn's life, ideas and and activities, see: Michael Stanislawski, *A Murder in Lemberg: Politics, Religion and Violence in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Patrick Gleffe, "Rabbiner Abraham Kohn: Ein Reformer und Märtyner," in *Von Salomon Sulzer bis "Bayer & Schwarz,"* ed. Thomas Albrich (Innsbruck: Jüdische Vorreiter der Moderne in Tirol und Vorarlberg, 2009), 41–75.

[2] On Wachtel's artistic itinerary, see: Галина Глембоцька, "Єврейське образотворче мистецтво у Галичині", *Ї* 58 (2008): 236–262; Богдана Пінчевська, *Творчість єврейських художників Східної Галичини 1900–1939 років* (Корсунь-Шевченківський: Всесвіт, 2013).

doi: 10.14653/ju.2015.04

Abraham Kohn: From an Individual to a Narrative

The story of Wachtel's portrait of Kohn had begun long before 1902. Perhaps one should go back to 1833, when Abraham Kohn (1807, Zalužany, Bohemia – 1848, Lemberg, Galicia), a gifted graduate from the Charles University of Prague, was ordained as a Reform (also known as Progressive in East Europe) rabbi in the town of Hohemens, Austria, and started his brilliant albeit abrupted career as a religious preacher and reformer. From the very beginning, Kohn presented himself as an active young leader with a stalwart progressive worldview. He published books of his sermons for the acculturated Habsburg Jews, and Hebrew grammar textbooks for modernized Jewish schools. His strong reformist stance might have influenced his desire to move from a small provincial Austrian town to a bigger city such as Lemberg, where he would have had ample opportunities to teach and preach his gospel of Reform Judaism, a new liberal trend that once and forever split the Jewish community.[3] In 1843, Kohn delivered his first public sermon in Galician Lemberg. Soon after that, the Jewish communal leaders invited him to head the city Jewish community.

For the newly secularized and Germanized Lemberg communal leadership of the 1840s, the progressive and reformist Kohn was the best candidate for the position of town rabbi.[4] His leadership was particularly significant after the 1839 death of Jacub Meshullam Ornstein, the conservative and traditionalist rabbi who vociferously opposed any religious innovations. Once he died and only when he died, the communal leadership endorsed the establishment of the first progressive Temple, the name of which signaled the 19th-century Judaic religious reform.[5] The synagogue was built relatively quickly in 1840–1846. Most likely, the leaders of the progressive Jewish Lemberg community did whatever they could to expedite the finalizing of the Temple edifice to celebrate their Germanized acculturation and their Progressive Judaic orientation in the Lemberg urban environment.[6]

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[3] On Reform Judaism and its impact on Central and East European Jewish congregations, see: Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000); Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: a History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995).

[4] On the modernizing tendencies in the Lemberg (and more broadly, Galician) Jewish community in the "long 19th century," from the times of Joseph II through World War I, see: Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Stanisław Grodziski, "The Jewish Question in Galicia: the Reforms of Maria Teresa and Joseph II, 1772–1790," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 12, *Galicia: Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians, 1772–1918,* ed. Israel Bartal and Antony Polonsky (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999), 61–73; Jerzy Holzer, "Enlightenment, Assimilation, and Modern Identity: the Jewish Elite in Galicia," in ibid., 79–86.

[5] On Rabbi Ornstein, see: Stanislawski, *Murder in Lemberg,* 26–33.

[6] For a detailed discussion of the cultural, religious, and architectural significance of the Lemberg Progressive Temple, see: Julian J. Bussgang, "The Progressive Synagogue in Lwów," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 11, *Aspects and Experiences of Religion,* ed. Antony Polonsky (London: Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization, 1998), 127–153; Sergey Kravtsov, "Progressive Synagogue in Lemberg/

By inviting Kohn, the new communal leadership emphatically marked the beginning of a new chapter in Lemberg Jewish life. Kohn arrived in May, 1844. In addition to his position as a rabbi, he also received a wide variety of other appointments. For example, he served as a "teacher of religion" (known in the traditional Jewish community as *mara de-atra*, the teacher of the town/the head of the Talmudic academy). He controlled the women's voluntary social relief association and the voluntary confraternity to help Jewish orphans. Kohn supervised the establishment of a modern Jewish school and, after becoming the district Rabbi of Lemberg in 1847, took control of the vital records (known as the metrical books) of the Jewish community, confirming his position not only as a religious leader but also as a Jewish member of Austrian imperial bureaucracy. Kohn engaged in all these activities with his tireless enthusiasm and meticulousness.

The young Abraham Kohn embodied the idea of a newly liberal and modernized Judaism, so strongly rejected by the traditional Jewry and widely criticized by the traditional-oriented rabbis across Europe. The main conceptual difference between the opposing camps, the traditional and the Reform, was in the interpretation of what Judaism was in and of itself. For the Reform rabbis Judaism came to be a religion, not a way of life as it was for the traditional Jews. Reform Judaism was a religion among other religions. In the opinion of the leaders of the reformers, Judaism had to be taught through the ethical principles of Judaism in the form of catechism rather than through the daily rituals (*halakhah*).

Emphasizing ethics and religious ideas, the leaders of Reform Judaism claimed liturgy to be of pivotal importance, although they insisted on certain liturgical innovations. The Reform rabbis proposed to eliminate special prayers and hymns for the High Holidays. In the prayer Amidah (Eighteen benedictions), the blessing for the return from exile should be dropped. Reform Jews argued there was no need to return to the Holy Land. From the time they named their praying houses the Temple, the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem lost its importance. That return had nothing to do with the beginning of the messianic era. Building their Temples across Europe, Reform Jews believed that this messianic era had already come and it was the era marked by the emancipation, when European Jewry was allowed to become an equal member of secular society. Introducing the pipe organ into the Temple service, Reform rabbis changed the language of the liturgy from Hebrew to German (as did Lutherans changing Latin to German in their liturgy). The prayer books for the Reform Temples were no more right-left oriented – thy were left-right oriented, as Christian books, and were printed in German, the language of the Enlightenment. No wonder that, rejecting the Judaic Reform movement, the leaders of the rising Judaic Orthodoxy condemned anyone who even dared to enter a Reform Temple.

Lwów/Lviv: Architecture and Community," in *Jews and Slavs,* vol. 23, *Galicia, Bukovina and Other Borderlands in Eastern and Central Europe. Essays on Interethnic Contacts and Multiculturalism,* ed. Wolf Moskovich, Roman Mnich, and Renata Tarasiuk (Jerusalem-Siedlce: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013), 185–214.

Once Kohn established himself in Lemberg, the conflict between the Lemberg traditionalist and progressive factions, the future of Orthodoxy and Reform trends within Judaism acquired new and dangerous overtones. Whatever were its underlying religious, political and economic reasons, that conflict did not end up with the untimely and mysterious death of Kohn in 1848. Several modern historians have argued that the death of the progressive rabbi had been nothing short of a coldblooded murder, and the Orthodox community was implicated in it. For example, Michal Stanislawski carefully reconstructed the four-year activity of Rabbi Kohn in Lemberg and came to a conclusion that Kohn had definitely been murdered.[7] Of course, the major problem was not whether Kohn had or had not been murdered. A present-day historian can only vaguely speculate about this problem.[8] Rather, it was a strenuous relationships between the opposing Jewish congregations coexisting in one and the same city and open clashes between them that shaped the arrival and demise of Kohn – as well as his posthumous fate in urban Jewish culture and popular imagination. Precisely this popular imagination and a complex constituency of the Lemberg Jewish community shaped Wachtel's artistic image of Kohn.

Kohn spent only several years in Lemberg but he left a discernible mark on the city's urban culture. After the rabbi's death, the Benedictine street of Lemberg was renamed into Kohn's street, since Abraham Kohn had lived there with his wife and five children. The same was done to the Jewish school which received the name of its founder. Furthermore, in the first decade after the rabbi's death there appeared at least three Lemberg-published monographs devoted to his activities.

In 1855, the eldest of Kohn's sons, Jacob (1836, Hohenems, Austria – 1899, Sambir, Ukraine) published his book, *Life and Work of Abraham Kohn*.[9] In 1856, an enlightened-minded rabbi Joseph Kobak reprinted that biography of Kohn adding to it a posthumous collection of Kohn's writings.[10] It was the same Joseph Kobak (1828, Lemberg, Galicia – 1913), a German-educated rabbi who was an active supporter of the ideas of Haskalah. In 1883 he also established the Lemberg Mikra Kodesh (Holy Assembly) society, a youth organization considered the first Zionist association in Galicia.[11] In 1856, in Stettin,[12] a man named Friederich Mannheimer issued a book about Kohn in the uplifted, sublime style of a hagiography naming the Lemberg rabbi "a martyr of his times."[13] Another of Kohn's admirers, Emil Roniecki, pushed this genre even fur-

[7] For more detail, see: Stanislawski, *Murder in Lemberg*, 65–78.

[8] Rachel Manekin, "Review on Michael Stanislawski Murder in Lemberg," *AJS Review 32* (2008): 214–217.

[9] Jakob Kohn, *Leben und Wirken von Abraham Kohn* (Lemberg, 1885).

[10] Jozeph Kobak, *Nachgelassene Schiften von Abraham Kohn, mit einer Biographie desselben, verfaßt von Jakob Kohn* (Lemberg, 1856).

[11] Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity*, 53–67.

[12] Presently, Szczecin, Poland.

[13] Veit Friederich Mannheimmer, *Rabbiner A. Kohn, Ein Märtyrer unserer Zeit* (Stettin, 1856).

ther, naming his book *The Great Rabbi Abraham*.[14] In 1897, a progressive Lemberg rabbi Samuel Wolf Guttmann dedicated his monograph on Abraham Kohn to the fiftieth anniversary of Kohn's death.[15] To conclude, the youngest of the Kohn's sons, Gotthilf wrote a book *Abraham Kohn in the Light of a Historical Research*.[16] Thus, the activities and views of Abraham Kohn had been actively discussed, explored, and debated by his disciples and admirers years after the rabbi's death. By the early 20th century there emerged in Lemberg public imagination a heroic myth connected to Rabbi Kohn. The scandal around his murky murder significantly contributed to transforming the allegedly murdered rabbi into a martyr.

Politics in Jewish Lemberg

The Jewish religious milieu in and around Lemberg was different from the central European one, strictly divided between traditional and Reform Judaism. Paradoxically, the relationships between Reformists and Zionists in East Galicia were also more complicated and less radical than elsewhere in Europe, where Reform Jews staunchly opposed Jewish diaspora nationalism.[17]

Several examples illustrate this case of opposing camps and antagonistic ideas interacting with, emerging from, and transforming each other. In the second half of the 19th century Lemberg (and generally Galician) Jewish elites were split along the divide between those that supported German-oriented and those that endorsed Polish-oriented assimilation. Since Austria began reforming its society through the top-down Germanization, Rabbi Kohn was invited to preach in German, to establish German-speaking Jewish schools, and to generally Germanize the Lemberg Jews. Fifty years later, in 1903, Rabbi Guttmann returned to his native Lemberg from Vienna to reorient the community elites from the German to the Polish, emphasize the Polish assimilationist vector, and to preach in Polish. From 1904, sermons at the Lemberg Temple were regularly performed in this language, not in German.

Jewish diaspora nationalists (Zionists) criticized both Polish and German-oriented assimilationists considering them turncoats and traitors of the Jewish national cause. Still, for the secular Lemberg intelligentsia, integration into the Polish culture was tantamount to the struggle for equality and acceptance of the majority culture, although it was a stateless one. Besides, young people, and Wilhelm Wachtel among

[14] Emil Roniecki, *Wielki Rabbi Abraham* (Lemberg, 1878).

[15] Samuel Wolf Guttmann, *Gedenkrede zum 50. Todestage des Rabbiners Abraham Kohn* (Lemberg, 1897).

[16] Gotthilf Kohn, *Abraham Kohn im Lichte der Geschichtsforschung* (Zamarstynow bei Lemberg, 1898).

[17] On Jewish opposition to Zionism, especially on Liberal movements' clashes with the Zionists, see: Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

them received their education at Polish schools; they had almost nothing to do either with traditional Judaism or with German-assimilationist views of their parents.[18]

As a new political movement of the late 1890s, Zionism underwent rapid increase in Galicia. In Lemberg, Zionism mobilized its supporters from the town-fragmented community. Both progressive-oriented and traditional Lemberg Jews seriously engaged in the still forming conceptions of the new movement. Even before Herzl wrote his groundbreaking pamphlet *The Jewish State* (1897), the first proto-Zionist, mostly youth, organizations sprang in Lemberg and surrounding towns as early as the 1880s. Their members who came to Zionism from traditional Jewish families opposed the assimilationists not only because the latter rejected the national-centered political goals of the former, but also because the latter lacked the solid Judaic background of the former. Still, the Lemberg Zionist camp had to engage all other factions in Lemberg from the outset if it sought to achieve political visibility and influence.

For Jewish nationalists a quest for a new liberal Jewish identity within the Progressive Jewish community was a popular theme to laugh at. But for the community in general, along with the Zionist organizations, it came to be a real problem. Mobilizing Jews from different groupings, Zionists had to deal with the language differences among their potential members and supporters and had to come to grips with the fragmented character of the urban Jewish community. Therefore the sharp political opposition between Zionists and Polish assimilationists notwithstanding, the first periodicals of the Zion society were printed in Polish: *Przyszłość* (*Future*) and *Wschód* (*East*). Hebrew Lemberg periodicals sympathetic to Polish-Jewish integration such as *Ha-Mazkir* displayed the emblem of a Polish eagle sporting on its breast a *mogendovid*, the Star of David.[19] Sometimes Zionist festivals were conducted in German, particularly when the audience consisted of the older generation. Zionists had to resort to all available languages and to all groups also because young or old, very few Lemberg Jews, especially progressive ones, knew Hebrew. At the same time, assimilated and enlightened oriented elites, precisely as it happened in the times of Abraham Kohn, did not regard Yiddish as a language at all.[20] Still, the language problem was only one of the manifestations of multiple conflicts within the Lemberg Zionist movement.

Wilhelm Wachtel: The Artist and the City

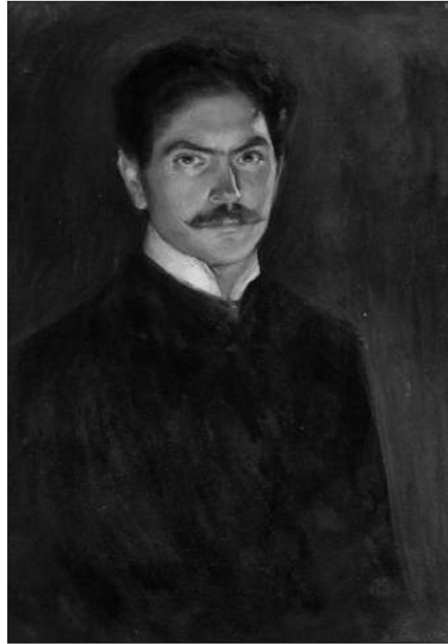
This was the background that to a greater extent shaped distinct features of the cultural and artistic life of Lemberg and East Galicia. Because of its multiple European cultural vectors, young Jewish artists, along with their Polish and Ukrainian colleagues, went

[18] Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity*, 179.

[19] Ibid., 56.

[20] On scornful attitude to Yiddish as a jargon and not even a language among the enlightened scholars and assimilationists in East Europe, see: Dovid Katz, *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish* (New York: Basic Books, 2007); Sarah A. Stein, *Making Jews Modern: Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

for quality education to Art Academies of Krakow, Vienna, Munich or Paris. Some of them continued their career in Europe, while others went back home – and almost all of them, including Wilhelm Wachtel, spent their life moving between different cities, countries, and cultures.



Wilhelm Wachtel
Self-portrait
Woznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery,
Inv. no. Ж-1573

Wilhelm Wachtel (1875 Lemberg/Lviv, Galicia – 1942, New York, USA) appeared in the artistic Lemberg chronicles as the illustrator and cartoonist whose pictures were published by the Zionist Polish-language newspaper *Wschód* and other Lemberg-based Jewish periodicals (il. 1). Wachtel worked as a popular artist together with Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874, Drohobycz, Galicia – 1925, Badenweiler, Germany), perhaps the main figure of the artistic branch of the Zionist movement.[21] Both painters, Wachtel and Lilien, had much in common. Both graduated from the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts. Both honed their skills and formed their style studying under such famous painters as Jan Matejko, Leon Wyczółkowski, and Leopold Loeffler. Both had solid academic background and both returned to Lemberg as representatives of modern pro-European artistic youth. Both shared strong Zionist sympathies. That is to say, the young Wachtel participated in the vibrant political life long before he moved to Palestine in 1936 and emigrated to USA later in the 1930s. As a painter with strong Zionist proclivities, Wachtel moved between the land of Israel and Diaspora not only in his art but also in his life.

Besides his work as an illustrator, Wachtel was inspired by Jewish themes also in his oil-painting. He received commissions from the Jewish community. Perhaps that was the best way for a young artist to demonstrate his deep involvement with the Jewish life of his native town – and to make some money working in the most popular and oft-commissioned genre of painting: portrait.

[21] On Lilien, see: Haim N. Finkelstein, "Lilien and Zionism," *Assaph: Studies in Art History* 3 (1998): 195–216; Elisabeth Keil, "An Artist Looks at Zion: E. M. Lilien and His Changing visions of Palestine," *Studies in Jewish Civilization* 11 (2001): 237–260; Lynne Swarts, "The merging of the cosmopolitan and the national: discovering the beginnings of the national response to art and modernity at the fin de siècle," *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 19 (2005): 188–209.

There is no exact information about the number of the commissioned portraits that Wachtel pained during his Lemberg period. The Woznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery has in its depositories about two dozen Wachtel's works, including portraits of the Lemberg Jewish communal leaders. Some of the portrayed individuals are well-known hence easily recognizable, while most of them are difficult to identify. Of course, Wachtel was not the only artist who took commissions from the community. But he definitely was the most authoritative and talented one. There were several other portraits of communal members, painted by less known or simply unknown Galician artists.[22] Thus Wachtel's portrait of Rabbi Abraham Kohn (il. 2) was one of those many images of the members of Lemberg Jewish leaders, commissioned by the communal elders and most likely put on display in the communal building at Markus Bernschtein street 12,[23] designed by Antoni Rudof Fleischl in 1899.[24] Yet Wachtel's portrait of Kohn was the only one for which nobody sat for Wachtel: Kohn had been dead for more than half-a-century by that time.

The Enigmatic Portrait

Whatever the similarities between other portraits Wachtel prepared for the Jewish community and the portrait of Kohn, there is a major stylistic difference between them. Wachtel portrayed Solomon Buber, a well-known Lemberg philosopher and religious scholar;[25] Doctor Moritz Lazarus,[26] a founder of the Jewish hospital; and other influential and important representatives of Lemberg Jewish elites. But all these Wachtel's portraits were executed in a succinct and generic manner providing the viewer with no more than a mimetic portrayal of a person. This was precisely the opposite of what Wachtel did portraying Kohn.

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[22] Presently, these portraits are also a part of the Woznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery collection.

[23] Presently, Sholom-Aleikhem street.

[24] In 1932–1940 this building also functioned as a Jewish museum, which director was Maximillian Goldstein. After the Jewish museum was shut down, its collection was dismantled and distributed among various museums. That was how the portraits of the Jewish communal leaders, including the one of Abraham Kohn, ended up at the Woznitsky Lviv National Art Gallery (then known as *Lvovskaia kartinnaia galereia*, Lvov Picture Gallery). At present, the building is used by such organizations, as the Lviv Center for Judaic Studies and Jewish Education, the charity organization "The Emil Domberger 'B'naj B'rith Leopolis'" and the Aleksandr Schwartz International Centre of Holocaust Studies.

[25] On Solomon Buber, see: Getzel Kressel, "Buber, Shelomoh," in *Leksikon ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ba-dorot ha-akharonim* (Merhavia, 1965), 1:178–179; Ya'akov Kopel Miklishanski, "Shelomoh Buber," in *Khokhmat Israel be-Maarav Eiropa,* ed. Simon Federbusch (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1965), 3:41–58.

[26] There are at least two portraits of Moritz Lazarus, painted by Wachtel, in the collection of the Woznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery. One of them (inv. no. Ж-3728; 82×62 cm), dated 1920, was transferred to the gallery together with the other commissioned Jewish portraits. This means that the Jewish community kept on making commissions for years. In the inventorial books the portrait is mentioned as "The portrait of the vice-president of the Jewish community."

The analysis of the portrait image could generate interesting insights into the relationship between the real-life author and the historical Kohn. One should always keep in mind that Abraham Kohn's portrait was a posthumous one. Wachtel had never actually seen his model, although he must have had a primary source for the rabbi's image that inspired him. Most likely, this source was a postcard with a graphical (etching) portrait of Kohn.[27] At the first glance it appears as if these two images, the postcard and the portrait very much resemble one another and one of them most likely served a blueprint for the other. But this is only at the first glance.

The sketch on the archival postcard presents Kohn in a mimetic manner. Moderate light and shadows configure his face, head-cover and cloths introduce the image into a three-dimensional space. The main and perhaps the only idea of the anonymous author of that postcard portrait was to depict the rabbi in the most realistic way. One could call the image a visual document rather than consider it an artistic item.

Iconographically, portrait has long been considered one of the most complicated artistic genres. Early modern and modern European portraiture emerged from the medieval icon painting – as its secularized version. Portrait has always balanced between the two, often opposite trends: iconic symbolism stemming from the artist and mimetic realism reflecting the will of the commissioner. On each and every stage of its historical developments, portrait emphasized social and economic status, political and cultural function, external features and character traits of a portrayed individual.[28] But most and for all, portrait artists sought to "catch" the face.

The earliest and the most well-known posthumous portraits in art history are the Fajum portraits. They served as decorations on the coffins, so that the mourners would be able to recognize the dead and to remind themselves of the external look of the deceased. Thus, the first portraits were created to memorize a deceased individual. Painters working on posthumous portraits knew and saw their model – either as a deceased or as an agonizing individual on a death-bed.

Wachtel did not have such an opportunity. He created his portrait of Kohn basing on the only postcard image of the rabbi. Why then did the artist reject the easiest way of painting the portrait by creating an accurate copy of the postcard sketch? Why did he decide to significantly amplify and complicate the image? It would have been logical to create a portrait stylistically much closer to the rest of the commissioned portraits. Yet Wachtel did not follow this path. The comparison between a hypothetic primary source, the postcard, and what most likely was its artistic re-interpretation is crucial for

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[27] We can see the reproduction of this image on the cover of Michael Stanislawski's book *A Murder in Lemberg*. Also same image one can find on the web-site of the Jewish Museum of Hohemens: http://www.hohenemsgenealogie.at/gen/showmedia.php?mediaID=119.

[28] Among most important works on the historical developments of the genre of portrait, see: Михаил Алпатов, "Эпохи развития портрета", в *Проблемы портрета: Материалы научной конференции, 1972* (Москва: Советский художник, 1973), 4–24; Леонид Зингер, *О портрете. Проблемы реализма в искусстве портрета* (Москва: Советский художник, 1969); Andreas Beyer, *Portrait. A History,* trans. Steven Lindberg (New York: H. N. Abrams, 2003).

Wilhelm Wachtel
Portrait of Abraham Kohn, 1902,
Woznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery,
Inv. no. Ж-3706

the understanding of Wachtel's vision of Kohn.

What immediately becomes clear in Wachtel's work is the premeditated and well-crafted two-dimensional representation of the image. Transforming a black-and-white or sepia-type drawing into a polychromic painting, the artist changed the entire principle of representation. Such two-dimensional representation informs the visual space on frescoes, icons, and various religious paintings. This representation helps to emphasize the spiritual rather than the physical aspect of the image. It also emphasizes the expressive facial features of the image and makes the portrayed character more impressive. Furthermore, a two-dimensional depiction points to the underlying symbolism of the image. There is hardly any doubt that Wachtel was well familiar with the Christian iconographical symbolism, particularly since he grew up in one of the most Catholic cities of East Europe the art galleries of which boasted huge collections of medieval and early modern Ukrainian icons.

The two-dimensional representation became also one of the key stylistic features of the visual language of art-noveau and art-deco. For example, Leon Wyczółkowski, one of Wachtel's teachers at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts worked precisely in that manner. Lilien, Wachtel's closest colleague in illustrating, was famous precisely as an art-noveau artist. Wachtel resorted to the same stylistic devices, something one can observe on his women's portraits and on one of his self-portraits.[29] The features of art-noveau linear aesthetics appear also in Wachtel's genre paintings.

Working on commissioned portraits, Wachtel did not use any of the modernistic principles or techniques. But it would be a sheer exaggeration to claim that for the two-dimensional and decorative portrait of Kohn Wachtel utilized exclusively principles of art-noveau or art-deco. Wachtel added such element of medieval art as pictorial flatness

[29] Wilhelm Wachtel, *Self-portrait with a pocket-watch*, inv. no. Г-V-661/171, Woznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery collection.

and shaped the image of the rabbi as if it were a fresco. On top of that, Wachtel Judaized canonical religious art of Christian icon-painting. For example, he placed the figure of Kohn into a nave as if it were a statue or an effigy of a saint placed in a church or cathedral for adoration. Apparently Wachtel knew that for half-a-century the Reform-minded Jews presented Kohn as a martyr, a sacrifice brought on the altar of progress and religious change. So there was no surprise in that Wachtel depicted the uplifted image in a sublime manner.

Like a Christian martyr or saint, Rabbi Kohn appears on the portrait in the moment of prayer. He holds an open prayer book. This detail was not on the postcard sketch; Wachtel introduced this detail by extending the framework of the postcard image. This extension helped Wachtel to make the composition more sober, rigid, and intense. The short *tales* (a prayer shawls) covering the rabbi's shoulders, a German-style rabbinic head-cover and a short beard obliquely referring to a reform trend in Judaism accurately followed the image on the postcard sketch. But the most important difference characterized the background.

Dark blue sky appears behind and above Kohn in the upper part of the canvas. A falling star at the top of the portrait moves above the rabbi's head from right to left, leaving behind a bright long tail. It moves in the same direction the rabbi looks. If the star falls in the same direction the rabbi looks while reciting his prayer, it signifies that the star moves eastward. Unlike the postcard sketch, Wachtel portrait has external orientation. By introducing rabbi's hands and a prayer book, the artist seems to claim that Abraham Kohn is turned to the East, to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem. Wachtel thus constructs the symbolical structure of the image using this right-left composition principle. The falling star becomes a metonymy of Kohn's turbulent life itinerary – but also of Wachtel's political sympathies that require further pondering.

Wachtel ornamented the synagogue column behind the praying rabbi with the *mogendovids* – the "shields" or "stars" of David, a Jewish political symbol associated with the rising Zionist movement. This symbol, a hexagram, a six-pointed star, had been known for centuries in many countries, among many nations, in many cultures and religions. Hexagrams appeared on stamps, flags, house ornaments and especially in mystical and magical texts in the medieval and early modern times, but back then a hexagram had no explicit connection to the Jewish people. Yet late in the 19th century the six-pointed star became the emblem of Zionism. Only late in the 19th century it developed into a national Jewish symbol – and only with the advent of political Zionism.[30] Since the late 1890s, it spread widely and often appeared in book illustrations, on fine arts objects, and also as architectural décor. For example, Lilien

[30] For a brief history of the Star of David, see: Gerbern S. Oegema, "The Uses of the Shield of David – on Heraldic Seals and Flags, on Bible Manuscripts, Printer's Marks and Ex libris," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1998): 241–253; Richard Alan Freund, "The Mystery of the Menorah and the Star," in *Nationalism, Zionism and Ethnic Mobilization of the Jews in 1900 and Beyond,* ed. Michael Berkowitz (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 285–303.

used the Shield of David on his exlibris, among other things. And Martin Buber, one of the most outstanding representatives of the Zionist movement, did the same.

During Abraham's Kohn lifetime the six-pointed star yet had no connection with the Jewish national or individual identity. What Wachtel introduced into his portrait was definitely inaccurate historically. The Zionist symbol could not be placed together with the reform rabbi of the 1840s. Kohn had little chances to emerge in the same context with a hexagram even as an image on the 1902 portrait. This could not happen also because of the staunch opposition of the contemporary European Reform movement toward early Zionism. Yet it did happen. Moreover, Wachtel did not use such symbols as *menorah* (the seven-branch candelabrum) directly identified with Judaic tradition through thousands of years. Instead, he used the main symbol of Zionism. By inserting the Zionist symbol into the realm of his "great rabbi Abraham," Wachtel transferred Kohn fifty years ahead – into the city of Lemberg of the early 1900s. By this modernistic transfer and by his attempt to read history backwards Wachtel made a progressive rabbi into his own contemporary and into a prophet of Zionism. This was the way to transform somebody distant into somebody very dear – into a person who shared the same idealistic vision of the Zionist movement as did Wachtel.

Why did Wachtel let himself such an experiment with history and religious symbols? And why did he place Zionist symbols exclusively on one portrait he prepared and nowhere more? All the rest of the commissioned portraits had no symbolical background whatsoever. Even more, they were made look as little Jewish as possible. To understand the artistic purpose we need once more to peep into the storages of the Woznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery to get a closer look at the rest of the commissioned portraits and to analyze the fact of the commission itself.

In 1902, Emil Byk (1845, Janów, Galicia – 1906), a well-known lawyer, president of the association Shomer Israel ("Guardian of Israel") became the head of the Lemberg Jewish community.[31] He was an ardent supporter of assimilation and an active communal leader.[32] Wachtel received the commission on Kohn's portrait the same year. Although not all of his commissioned portraits are dated and we do not know when the first commissioned portrait was finished, still one can hypothesize that it was Emil Byk who decided to create a portrait gallery of the most significant Lemberg Jews.

Each of these portraits had to have its own place on the wall of the communal center. Unfortunately, there are no extant photographs of the center interior so it is impossible to figure out where and how the portraits were placed. Yet one detail makes it possible to claim that each of these portraits was painted and later hung basing on a certain cultural hierarchy. This detail is the size of canvases. The smallest vary from 70×50 to

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[31] A portrait of Emil Byk was painted by Munz (collection of the Woznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery, inv. no. Ж-3719).

[32] This assimilation-oriented activity and adherence to Polish nationalism transformed Emil Byk into an eternal victim of criticism for the Jewish nationalists. For more details see: Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity*, 60.

74×60 cm.[33] These are the portraits of the members of the community. Then there are same-size bigger canvases such as the portraits of Rabbi Smolkes,[34] Rudolf Gall, Jewish candidate of the Polish club,[35] and Emil Byk himself,[36] all painted by artist Munz. All men on these and other communal portraits appear in white suit shirts and black jackets without any additional detail. All these individuals were enough recognizable and their positions and functions were enough clear for the people in the community.

Portraying Kohn, Wachtel needed to prove the contemporary relevance of the rabbi. Anybody entering the communal building should have seen the forerunners of the new, enlightened, progressive, and acculturated Jewish Lemberg. It was crucial not only to portray Kohn as part of the historical progress, but to show his defining role in it. The icon of Lemberg Reform Judaism, adorned with Zionist symbols, had to make Abraham Kohn historically significant both for Reformists and Zionist and to reconcile all the opposing sides of Lemberg Jewry.

Therefore Wachtel's portrait of Kohn appeared as one of the four largest portraits (100×70 cm) commissioned by the Lemberg Jewish community. Most likely these four portraits were placed altogether on a specially allocated wall. The biggest one was the unsigned portrait of Rabbi Bernhard Löwenstein,[37] who contributed to the establishment of the Progressive Temple more than anybody else. He served his term from 1883 to 1889, and the progressive Lemberg synagogue had never before been such a powerful religious center like in those years. The sermons of Rabbi Löwenstein were so popular that even Jews from other congregations and denominations used to go the Temple and listen to them.[38] Three other portraits of the same size 100×69 cm (± 0,5 cm) also portrayed the Progressive Lemberg rabbis: Samuel Wolf Guttmann,[39] Rabbi S. Wolf,[40] and Abraham Kohn. The Lemberg Jewish elites thus established their top hierarchy: Rabbi Kohn, "the falling star" of Lemberg German assimilation; Rabbi Guttmann, the one to agitate for the Polish assimilation; and Rabbi Löwenstein, blamed by Jewish nationalists for his rapid transformation from a German lover into a Polish nationalist.[41] The Lemberg Jewish community tried to accommodate different parts of its audience and to show that although the key religious leaders were different, all of them were progressively-minded and, each one in his own way proclaimed the need of reforms in Judaic

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33 Keller, Portrait of Dr. Munekh, inv. no. Ж-3722; Mehrer, Portrait of Dr. Schaff, inv. no. Ж-3723; and also a few portraits, painted by unknown artists.

34 Inv. no. Ж-3716, 82×64 cm.

35 Inv. no. Ж-3717, 82×64 cm.

36 Inv. no. Ж-3719, 82×64,5 cm.

37 Inv. no. Ж-3720, 145×95 cm.

38 One of those listeners was Mayer Balaban, who actually was of different congregations but went to hear the sermons of Löwenstein with his father – Bussgang, "Progressive Synagoge," 133.

39 Inv. no. Ж-3712, 100×69 cm.

40 Inv. no. Ж-3725, 100×69,5 cm. The portrait, painted by Mehrer, was declared in the inventory books as "Portrait of S. Wolf" and probably, could have been a one more image of this rabbi. In any case, there is a lack of information about a rabbi with such a surname in the Lemberg Jewish chronicles.

41 Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity*, 60.

tradition. That is how the German-oriented Abraham Kohn became not only a prophet of Polish assimilation, but a determinant figure for Lemberg Jews of different worldviews, both Zionist- and Progressive-oriented.

In the first years of the 20th century, Wilhelm Wachtel, a painter with strong European cultural orientation and political inclinations spent time in Lemberg discovering Judaism and his own place in it. Before he met Lemberg Zionists Adolph Stand[42] and Gershon Zipper,[43] came to admire their ideas and became part of the Jewish Lemberg, Wachtel had felt strong connections with Polish culture and tradition. At that time the young artist was interested in Jewish themes only as a part of Polish history.[44] For this reason Wachtel's portrait of Rabbi Kohn's portrait was a complicated task. Of course, Wachtel was definitely a visionary, when he sought to bring together on rabbi's portrait all important trends among the contemporary Lemberg Jewry – Reform, Zionism, Judaic tradition, rabbinic leadership, and the legendary martyrdom of the Jewish fighters for what he considered a religious progress. On top of that the portrait of Rabbi Kohn turned into a reflection of Wachtel's own transformation and quest for identity. The Jewish communal leader Rabbi Kohn appeared as a saint from a Christian icon; a Reformist became a Zionist, with all these and other cultural references in a flux and a fusion, whereas Wilhelm Wachtel emerged as an artist who balanced between various artistic canons and historical interpretations negotiating them in his artwork.

[42] Adolph Stand (1870, Lemberg – 1919, Vienna) – one of the leaders of the Zionism in East Europe, political activist, follower of the ideas of Herzl. He was the editor and publisher of Jewish Lemberg periodicals *Rocznik żydowski* and *Wschód*, for which Wachtel worked as an illustrator.

[43] Gershon Zipper (1868–1920) – one of the founders of the Lemberg Zionist movement.

[44] Глембоцька, "Єврейське образотворче мистецтво", 241.