

The Making of a National Art: Boris Schatz in Bulgaria

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A significant step along the road which led Boris Schatz (1866–1932) to a Jewish national art was the period he spent in Bulgaria, where he became one of the founders of a national modern art. Some of the most important phases of his life – the almost decade-long Bulgarian period, followed by the Palestinian years (which were devoted to the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts¹ from the day of its inception in 1906 and until Schatz's death twenty-six years later) were unconnected due to the mutual isolation of these two countries, each concentrating its resources on the development of its own culture. Jewish art historians have been familiar with the Bulgarian period in the sculptor's work in a cursory fashion; only recently was the subject discussed in detail by Yigal Zalmona in a monograph-format catalogue compiled for an exhibition

in 2006 marking the centennial of the founding of Bezalel.² Yet, a number of circumstances of Schatz's life in Bulgaria call for a closer look at the role he played in Bulgarian art at the time, and at the artistic and personal conflicts the sculptor underwent while shaping his "model of national art," and bringing it back to Jewish soil while Schatz himself was still living in Sofia.

Boris Schatz arrived in Bulgaria experienced in the wanderings of an artist Jew; he had emerged from the confines of the ghetto and gone on to seek, in addition to an income, a way to make his search for artistic expression coalesce with Jewish national sentiment. *Gendele*, a sculpture he created in Warsaw ca. 1888, was, in his own words, his "first experiment in propaganda by means of art."³ While still in Warsaw, the young sculptor evolved

The article is dedicated to the memory of my father, Alexander Peisachovich (1934–2007). It is based on "The Making of a National Art: Boris Schatz in Bulgaria – In Honor of the Centennial of the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem (1906) and the 140th Anniversary of the Birth of Boris Schatz (1866–1932)," paper presented at the VIIIth Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies, Moscow, 2006.

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1 Since 1969, the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design.

2 On Boris Schatz in Bulgaria, see Atanas Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo* (Bulgarian Graphic Art) (Sofia, 1988), 396–410 (Bulgarian); *Blgarska skulptura 1878–1974* (Bulgarian Sculpture 1878–1974) [catalogue, National Art Gallery], ed. Lazar Marinski (Sofia, 1975), 11, 29–34, 289 (Bulgarian); Andrey Nikolov, "Boris Schatz," introductory essay in *Posmrtna izlozha na skulptora Boris Schatz, 4–25 fevruari* (A Retrospective Glance at the Sculptor Boris Schatz, February 4–25) [catalogue, "Preslav" Gallery] (Sofia, 1934), 5–9 (Bulgarian); Nicholas Schmiregela, *Skulptura po nashite zemli* (Sculpture in Our Land)

(Sofia, 1961), 86–87 (Bulgarian); Orest Geo-v, "Bolgarskoe iskusstvo" (Bulgarian Art), *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'* 20 (1900): 414–26 (Russian); A.K. Martynenko, *Russko-bolgarskie otnosheniya v 1894–1902 gg.* (Russian–Bulgarian Relations during the Years 1894–1902) (Kiev, 1967) (Russian); Dmitry B. Stepovik, *Bolgars'ke obrazotvorche mistetstvo* (Bulgarian Graphic Art) (Kiev, 1978), 73–75 (Ukrainian); Evgenia P. L'vova, "Iz istorii russko-bolgarskikh khudozhestvennykh svyazey kontsa XIX–nachala XX veka" (From the History of Russian–Bulgarian Art Ties of the Late 19th–Early 20th Centuries), *Sovetskoe slavianovedenie* 3 (1965): 80–87 (Russian); "Bezalel" shel Schatz, 1906–1929 (Schatz's "Bezalel" 1906–1929) [catalogue, Israel Museum], ed. Nurit Shiloh-Cohen (Jerusalem, 1983) (Hebrew); and most recently and completely: Yigal Zalmona, *Boris Schatz: The Father of Israeli Art* [catalogue, Israel Museum] (Jerusalem, 2006), 12–21, which includes works and photographs from Schatz's Bulgarian period.

3 Boris Schatz, *Odin iz mnogikh: Iz vospominaniy odnogo skul'ptora* (One of Many: Memories of a Sculptor) (Sofia, 1905), 95 (Russian). An English version of this text (35 pages) is available at the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), Record Group P-571, Box 1. Schatz's autobiography in Hebrew was published in 1906 in the Jerusalem periodical *Hashkafah*; in 1907 it appeared in Jerusalem as a paperback titled *One of Many: Memories of a Sculptor*, and in 1925 was published in album format with the title *Baruch Schatz: His Life and Work, Part I* (Jerusalem, 1925). Zalmona, *Boris Schatz*, 35, refers to the Hebrew edition of this autobiography.

his own theoretical reformulation of the goals of Jewish art.⁴ Having established a conceptual foundation for his work, in 1889 Schatz headed for Paris, where he perfected his technique at the academy of Fernand Cormon (1845–1924) and at the studio of Mark Antokolsky (1843–1902). Based on his reminiscences of 1905, it becomes clear that while still in France Schatz had first planned the creation of “Bezalel” – his idealistic notion of an artists’ commune in Palestine, which should inspire the new Yishuv with its art.⁵ But fate would have it otherwise, and in 1895 Schatz left Paris for Bulgaria.

There are two alternative views about the motives for this sudden turn in Schatz’s life: the contacts he had forged in Paris with Bulgarian students, who aroused an interest in Bulgaria in the ambitious young sculptor,⁶ and the personal invitation he had received from the Bulgarian prince Ferdinand I Koburgsky (1861–1948) to become his court sculptor. This last came after the Paris exhibition of 1895, where the prince had been delighted by Schatz’s *Matthias the Maccabee*.⁷ Both circumstances may have played a role in Schatz’s decision. The main reason for his departure for almost a decade, until 1903, from the ideas which had been central to his thinking about the Jewish People, seems to have been the prosaic need to earn a living to support his family – his wife Eugenia (Zhenya) Zhirmunsky and his father-in-law, with whom he had first come to Paris, and then to Sofia.⁸

In Bulgaria Boris Schatz was an enthusiastic activist; he immersed himself immediately in the stormy creative and social process of constructing Bulgarian culture, where he quickly found a niche for himself as an outstanding proponent of the ideas of national rebirth (fig. 1). In the course of the Russo–Turkish war of 1877–78 in the Balkans, Bulgaria was liberated from five centuries of Ottoman domination and embarked upon the road to

creating a culture of its own. In this respect the situation in which Bulgaria found itself resembled the cultural predicament of the Jews. Emancipation, Haskalah, and then Zionism, which soon attracted Schatz, opened for the Jews a way out of the ghetto and constructed a path which would lead toward a new and liberated future. Schatz could not fail to see this parallel. He could also appreciate that while for Bulgaria the process was bearing real fruit, in the case of world Jewry it remained enveloped in an idealistic haze.

Bulgarian art had taken its first steps during the last years of Turkish rule, when Bulgarian youth began to study abroad. But the first artists of Bulgarian origin to receive a European education in art, Stanislav Dospevsky (1823–78), Christo Tsokev (1847–83), Georgy Danchov (1846–1908), Dimitry Dobrovich (1816–1905), and the most famous among them, Nicholas Pavlovich (1835–94), were not the ones to lay the foundation for a national art. Yet these masters of the Bulgarian proto-Renaissance managed to overcome medieval concepts, to accept a realistic view of the world, and to introduce a spirit of nationalist patriotism into art.⁹

The next, postwar, generation of artists of the late 1880s–early 1890s opened a new page in Bulgarian art. At the moment that marked the height of cultural development in Bulgaria, renowned scientists, teachers, and artists who had been educated in European cities, such as Munich, Paris, and others flocked there. Among them were Bulgarian artists – Ivan Angelov, Ivan Dimitrov, Anton Mitov, and Petko Klissurov – as well as foreign masters such as the Czech painters Emil Holarek, Ivan Myrkovichka, and Yaroslav Veshin, Polish artists Anton Piotrovsky and Tadeusz Haidukevicz, the Hungarians Laslo and Kopai, and others.¹⁰ Russian political dissidents seeking refuge from the Tsarist authorities

4 Zalman [Boris] Schatz, “Mlekhet mahshevet” (Art), *Hacefira* 216 (16 Dec. 1888): 2–3 and 217 (18 Dec. 1888): 3–4 (Hebrew); quoted in Zalmona, Boris Schatz, 35.

5 Schatz, *Odin iz mnogikh*, 105–6.

6 *Blgarska skulptura*, 29.

7 Alfred Werner, “Boris Schatz; Father of an Israeli Art,” *Herzl Yearbook* 7 (1971): 401; Yona Fischer, “Schatz, Boris,” *EJ*, 14:945; Ran Shechori, *Art in Israel* (Tel Aviv, 1974), 7.

8 “I even made the decision to abandon my beloved Paris, and went to a semi-wild land [Bulgaria – E.K.], so as to feel just my one and only dear friend closer to my soul [...]” So wrote Schatz about his first wife, for whose sake he eventually came to Bulgaria (Schatz, *Odin iz mnogikh*, 137).

9 Evgenia L’vova, *Izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo Bolgarii epokhi natsional’nogo vozrozhdeniya* (Bulgarian Graphic Art of the Period of National Rebirth) (Moscow, 1975), 201 (Russian).

10 Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 381–95.



Fig. 1. Boris Schatz in his atelier in Sofia, in Marcus Ehrenpreis, "Boris Schatz," *Ost und West* 3 (1903): 306

showed up there as well, forming yet another group of agents of culture. One of these was Orest Georgiev (1864–1937), an art critic who had written extensively about Bulgarian art and been one of the first critics to take up the work of Boris Schatz.¹¹ Another activist

was Esther Slepyan (née Iosilevich, 1868–1919), a student at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. A painter and author of critical articles, she had arrived from Paris at the same time as Schatz.¹² Finally, the third name usually associated with

11 His real name is Orest Govoruhin. The following materials were among those bearing on Bulgarian art which were published by O. Geo-v (the abbreviated penname with which he signed all his articles) in the Russian-language Petersburg periodical *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'* in 1900 and 1901: "Komitet 'Tzaria-Osvoboditel'ia' v Sofii" (The 'Liberator Czar' Committee in Sofia), 7 (19) (1900): 370–77; "Bolgarskoe iskusstvo" (Bulgarian Art), 8 (20) (1900): 414–26; "Mezhdunarodniy konkurs na vyrabotku proekta pamiatnika Tsariu-Osvoboditel'iu v Sofii" (International Competition for the Design of the Liberator Czar Memorial in Sofia), 1 (25) (1900): 19–27; "Gosudarstvennoe Risoval'noe Uchilishche v Sofii" (The State School of Art in Sofia), 10 (34) (1901): 283–90. Georgiev later became the

learned secretary of the State School of Art in Sofia. For a more detailed account, see L'vova, "Iz istorii russko-bolgarskikh hudozhestvennykh svyazey": 80–81.

12 Esther Osipovna Iosilevich (Slepyan) came of Jewish stock. Born in Nezhin into a well-to-do assimilated family, she had been brought up in Kishinev and maintained contacts with the Jewish intelligentsia. Even so, during the early years of her career, including its Bulgarian phase, she did not touch upon the Jewish theme, but rather painted portraits and thematized compositions ("Bulgaria Liberated," "Give Me Bread!," and others), working within the traditions of the late-nineteenth-century Russian realistic genre of painting and evidencing the influence of the Moscow school of art. (Slepyan had studied at the Moscow School of

Russian culture in Russo-Bulgarian historiography is that of Boris Schatz.¹³

These artists created the realistic foundation for Bulgarian art, turning as they did to the topic of national culture and the common man. In 1894 the Society for the Support of Art in Bulgaria was founded, its beginnings due to the new generation of artists, some of the most outstanding of whom were the Society's chairman Ivan Shimshanov and its honorary chairman Constantine Velichkov (1855–1907), Bulgarian Minister of Education at the time. The Society published the first Bulgarian art periodical (*Izkustvo*, 1895–1897); beginning in 1894 and with governmental support it also organized a series of exhibitions which were to continue in 1897, 1898, and 1899. The first independent exhibition was to open only in 1903, the year in which the Society for the Support of Art in Bulgaria was renamed the Society of Bulgarian Artists and embarked upon the road to becoming an independent body.¹⁴ These two dates mark a key gestational period

for Bulgarian art, with which the work of Boris Schatz is intimately bound up.

While a number of gifted painters had emerged by this time, freestanding sculpture as a professional genre (except for carving as a decorative art developed over the centuries) was as yet unheard of. In the two decades of independence before 1900, some 300 monumental memorial sculptures had been created, but all these were marked by their low level of artistic achievement, resembling natural or architectural forms (pyramids, obelisks, rock compositions) rather than works of sculpture.¹⁵ Together with Zheko Spiridonov (1867–1945) and Marin Vasilev (1867–1931), two other pioneers of Bulgarian sculpture who also were educated in Western Europe, Boris Schatz opened the eyes of Bulgaria to the possibility of sculpture as an art.¹⁶ Of the three, Schatz was the first to come to Bulgaria, where his work encompassed a number of areas simultaneously.

Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, 1884–89.) See Central State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow, collection no. 680, Documents of the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture of the Moscow Art Society, Record Group 2, file 444 (Iosilevich [Slepyan], Esther Osipovna, personal dossier, August 1884–March 1900), fols. 3, 5, 10, 15). In her views on art, her social activism, and her articles on the national character of Bulgarian art and issues in art education, Slepyan was a close associate of Schatz during his first years in Sofia; see L'vova, "Iz istorii russko-bolgarskikh khudozhestvennykh svyazey": 84–85. However, two years after her private school opened, despite its popularity, shut down and Slepyan left the country in 1898. The reasons are not fully clear. Atanas Bozhkov only hints at certain disappointment on Esther Slepyan's part, possibly connected to her school's social status and her own assessment of her creative and pedagogical efforts in Bulgaria; see Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 396–98. The later stages of the life of Ira Jan (her artistic pseudonym) have much in common with Schatz's biography. The Kishinev pogrom in 1903 (following the years she had spent in Sofia the artist lived in Kishinev) acquainted her with the work and creative personality of Hayyim Nahman Bialik, under whose influence she, like Schatz, became attracted to Zionism. In 1907 she took part in the Eighth Zionist Congress in The Hague (drawing sketches of the participants); in that same year she left her husband and headed for Eretz Israel with her daughter. In Jerusalem Slepyan once again drew close to Boris Schatz and his circle. She soon established an artists' studio in Tel Aviv, where Nahum Gutman, later (beginning in 1912) a student of Schatz at Bezalel (see Nahum Gutman and Ehud Ben-Ezer, *Mezh peskami i nebesnoy sin'iu* [Between the Sands and the Azure of Heaven] [Jerusalem, 1991], 91 [Russian]) became one of her

students. In her art Slepyan once again turned to the theme of the Land of Israel and the diaspora, and wrote a book about Antokolsky; see *Kratkaia evreyskaya entsiklopedia* (Concise Jewish Encyclopedia), ed. Itshak Oren-Nadel (Jerusalem, 2001), 10:953–54, and Nurit Govrin, "A Woman Alone: The Artist Ira Jan as Writer in Eretz Yisrael," in *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Woman in Pre-State Israel*, ed. Deborah S. Bernstein (New York, 1992), 165–82. Works by Esther Slepyan were evaluated in Bulgaria by Irina Mihalcheva in *Izvestiya na Instituta za izobrazitelni izkustva pri Bolgarskoy akademii nauk* (Survey Reports by the Institute for Graphic Art at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) vol. 4 (Sofia, 1958) (Bulgarian).

13 In research dating from the Soviet period Schatz is classified as a Russian artist "who brought to Bulgaria the conceptual-artistic foundations of Russian realistic genre art, as well as the basic ideas of the Russian art school and its teaching methods" (L'vova, "Iz istorii russko-bolgarskikh khudozhestvennykh svyazey": 81). See also Eugenia L'vova, *Iskusstvo Bolgarii* (Bulgarian Art) (Moscow, 1971), 99, 171 (Russian); Stepovik, *Bolgars'ke obrazotvorche mistetstvo*, 73–74. These research texts do not as much as touch upon Schatz's life following his departure from Bulgaria.

14 I. Tsirlin, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Bolgarii XIX—XX vekov: Ocherk* (Bulgarian Graphic Art of the 19–20th Centuries: An Overview) (Moscow, 1953), 40–43. It is noteworthy that, catering to the preferences of his time, throughout this voluminous monograph the author does not even mention Boris Schatz.

15 Stepovik, *Bolgars'ke obrazotvorche mistetstvo*, 72; see also: O. Geo-v, "Komitet 'Tsaria-Osvoboditelia' v Sofii": 372–73.

16 Stepovik, *Bolgars'ke obrazotvorche mistetstvo*, 72; *Blgarska skulptura*, 21, 24.

Schatz's achievements during his first five years in Bulgaria are astonishing. He worked on select commissions from Prince Ferdinand, the Tsar of Bulgaria since 1908, decorating the Ceremonial Hall at the Coronation Palace in Sofia. One of the best known of these works, *The Coronation Album* (fig. 2), presented as a gift to the Russian Tsar Nicholas II upon his coronation,¹⁷ offers an especially faithful reflection of Schatz's work in Bulgaria. At the center of the sculptural composition, measuring more than 2 meters in height, is the album formed as a receptacle containing paintings and drawings by Bulgarian artists.¹⁸ The cover of the album, bearing the dates 1878–1896 (liberation of Bulgaria by Russian troops from Turkish dominion and coronation of Tsar Nicholas II, respectively) represents the history of Bulgarian sovereignty, as well as a political declaration of Bulgaria's allegiance to Russia and of her own aspirations (the side figures of a Bulgarian and a Macedonian convey the idea of the union of Bulgaria with Macedonia). In this work Schatz brought together all his areas of artistic specialization, including freestanding sculpture, relief portraiture, and fine ornamentation, which he reconstructed on the basis of medieval Bulgarian church art. He used bronze, silver, and marble together, a combination which was to appear again in later works, including some of those done at the Bezalel School in Jerusalem. There, a variety of materials were combined to create carved portraits and scene plaques with striking decorative framing. Among his other works done for august persons are a seven-branched silver candelabrum and cylindrical container for parchments, presented by the Jews of Bulgaria in honor of the wedding of Tsar Boris III and Princess Joanna of Savoy.¹⁹ In 1898 Schatz was presented with a silver medal by the Bulgarian sovereign to express public recognition of the sculptor's accomplishments in serving the Bulgarian people.²⁰ The artist was well



Fig. 2. Boris Schatz, *The Coronation Album*, gift of the Tsar of Bulgaria to the Russian Tsar Nicholas II, 1896, bronze, silver, and marble, height ca. 2.2 m, in O. Geo-v, "Bolgarskoe iskusstvo" *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'* 20 (1900): [unpaged]

remunerated thanks to his close relationship with the throne, a condition that enabled him to create a series of impressive indoor sculptural works which combined realistic imagery with an emphasized decorative finish.

Schatz's socio-pedagogic activity had begun immediately upon his arrival in Sofia. Aware of the severe limitations from which art education suffered throughout the country, Boris Schatz and Esther Slepian at almost the same time opened two independent private art schools (1896). Schatz's studio offered two courses: drawing and sculpture, with his wife Zhenya teaching the first²¹ and

she taught a "drawing" class at Schatz's school (Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 396), but Yigal Zalmona writes that she taught painting (Zalmona, *Boris Schatz*, 14).

Translator's note: The apparent discrepancy between the two may be due simply to the old usage, since eclipsed by more modern usage, in which the Russian term "risovanie" could mean art in general, and not only drawing as in the more current sense of the word today. Zhenya Zhirmunsky could thus have been teaching "art" in the general sense of the term, without limiting her subject to either drawing or painting.

17 O. Geo-v, "Bolgarskoe iskusstvo": 421–26.

18 For a more detailed account, see Zalmona, *Boris Schatz*, 15.

19 Nicholas Boshev, "Posmertnaia izlozha na Boris Schatz v Bolgaria" (Boris Schatz: A Retrospective in Bulgaria), a manuscript sent to me by the author in 2005 (Bulgarian).

20 Shiloh-Cohen, "Bezalel" shel Schatz, 128.

21 The biography of Zhenya Zhirmunsky, Boris Schatz's first wife, and the details of her art education remain obscure. Schatz married her in 1889 in Vilna, where she may have studied art. According to A. Bozhkov,

he himself teaching the second.²² Among his first private students were Alexander Bozhinov, Asen Belkovsky, and Michael Kretev.²³ Coming from enlightened, free, bohemian Paris to a cultural hinterland, Schatz considered the art of Bulgaria as being backward and only half heartedly adapting to new forms of realism. In a letter he addressed to Ivan Shimshanov, Chairman of the Society, he elaborated on his ideas of the future of art in Bulgaria: "In my view, the first step in the growth of art in any country must be the gradual education of the artistic sensibility of the masses." He pointed out that an art school must offer evening classes so that clerks, artisans, and students busy during the day would be able to study art. The Society for the Support of Art needs to make a special effort to organize traveling exhibits in Bulgarian towns, similar to what was done in Russia, as well as providing for the participation of Bulgarian artists in exhibitions in Europe. Moreover, in Schatz's view, the Society should collect the works of national artists. "A society which has set such a goal for itself," he wrote, "must nurture an esthetic taste among the public, create the conditions for a union of all art workers, and provide them with all possible moral and material support, so as to enable art and the art industry to advance."²⁴

These ideas of Schatz's were on a par with the view of Jewish art put forth as early as the 1870s by Mark Antokolsky in his letters to the Russian critic Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906).²⁵ Antokolsky had been contemplating "how to introduce the artistic element into the education of the people [...] and to raise the level of art appreciation among Russian Jews,"²⁶ how generally

to develop an esthetic taste among the people and to provide for a stable mechanism for distributing photos and engravings and coordinate their ambulatory exhibits.²⁷ He supported Stasov's idea of organizing a Jewish national school of arts, with a view to including in the definition of "national" not only the experience of the past, but also that of contemporary European art.²⁸ In his own approach to the question, however, Antokolsky opposed insisting that any particular historical style be appropriated as "national," and disapproved of all forms of imitation. In this he differed radically from the artistic method of Boris Schatz.

Israeli scholar Mirjam Rajner writes that ideas for the development of Jewish art through education and introduction of crafts and applied arts were something Antokolsky had borrowed from the Abramtsevo circle created by the patron of the arts Savva Mamontov (1841–1918).²⁹ Later, he expressed support for teaching the Jews trades and artistic crafts in order to integrate them into Russian society and develop their esthetic tastes; later still he passed these ideas on to his students Ilya Ginzburg (1859–1939) and Boris Schatz.³⁰ Thus the socio-esthetic objectives set by Schatz for Bulgarian art were a translation of the ideas of many of his Russian predecessors.

Schatz was one of those whose intensive activity prepared the ground for the transition of art education to state levels. Based on the initiative of the Society for the Support of Art, in 1895 the National Assembly ratified the "Law Concerning the School of Art in Sofia."³¹ A year later Boris Schatz, together with the well-known artists Ivan Myrkovichka (1856–1938) and Anton Mitov

22 Shortly thereafter Schatz went on to teach at the State School of Art, which had opened in 1896. Esther Slepian's studio continued its work for two years, serving for a time as a preparatory school for future applicants to the School of Art, while maintaining an independent status of its own. See also Cyril Krystev, *Asen Belkovsky* (Sofia, 1955), 10 (Bulgarian).

23 Nikolov, "Boris Schatz," 6.

24 Schatz's letters of 1895, Archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia, collection No. II, Record Group 2, file 581.

25 Mirjam Rajner, "The Awakening of Russian Jewish National Art in Russia," *JA* 16/17 (1990/91): 115–16.

26 Letter from Rome to Vladimir V. Stasov, 30 Sept. 1873 in *Mark Matveevich Antokolsky: Ego zhizn', tvoreniya, pis'ma i stat'i* (Mark Matveevich Antokolsky: His Life, Work, Letters, and Essays), ed.

Vladimir V. Stasov (St Petersburg, 1905), 100 (Russian). Quoted in Rajner, "The Awakening": 115–16.

27 Letter from Paris to Vladimir V. Stasov, received 6 Nov. 1879 in *Mark Matveevich Antokolsky*, 388–89.

28 Rajner, "The Awakening": 116.

29 From 1870 to 1890, the estate of the well-known entrepreneur Savva I. Mamontov in Abramtsevo (Moscow Region) became a center of Russian artistic activity, with many Russian artists and musicians living and working there for extended periods of time with Mamontov's support and encouragement. In 1872 Mark Antokolsky became one of the muses of this art society.

30 Rajner, "The Awakening": 118–21.

31 O. Geo-v, "Gosudarstvennoe Risoval'noe Uchilishche": 283–85.



Fig. 3. Aleksandr Bozhinov, "The Holy Trinity" (Caricature of the School of Art Professors I. Myrkovichka, B. Schatz, A. Mitov), in O. Geo-v, "Gosudarstvennoe Risoval'noe Uchilishche v Sofii," *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'* 10 (34) (1901): [unpaged]

(1862–1930), opened the State School of Art in Sofia (renamed in 1908 as a School of Arts and Industry, and in 1921 as the Nicholas Pavlovich Sofia Academy of Arts).³² The widespread support their initiative enjoyed among influential artistic and political circles created favorable conditions for the intensified development of national culture with its new patriotic platform. These three artists – the "Holy Trinity" (fig. 3), as they were known – became the fount of art education: Myrkovichka as principal and teacher of painting, Mitov as teacher of art history, and Schatz as master of sculpture and applied crafts,³³ which included carving, ceramics, jeweler's art, weaving, and more, attracting a large following of students. Teaching methodology at the school was based on students learning to draw from plaster models, then moving on

to nature; three first years of general preparation, then two years of specialization (icon painting, decorative painting, drawing instruction, various fields in sculpture, and others). Modeling was a compulsory subject for all students (fig. 4), as was image casting which, in the view of the teachers, permitted the students to cast their works on their own and thus take charge of their entire work process.

Materials about the School of Art published in 1901 shed light on Schatz's method, indicating the sculptor's aim to direct his students toward specific life subjects. This tallies well with a study assignment he gave the students under the title "Faces on the Streets of Sofia."³⁴ Plaques done in relief and busts of figures of diverse ages and social milieus were intended not only to allow the students to obtain a general academic grounding in art work, but also to direct their attention to the specificity of local types and to instill in them love for the common man and compatriot. These materials were published by Andrey Nikolov (1878–1959) (fig. 5), then an upperclassman and later a leading Bulgarian sculptor who was destined to play a key role in the fate of his teacher. In his catalogue article for the 1934 Boris Schatz retrospective, Nikolov wrote:

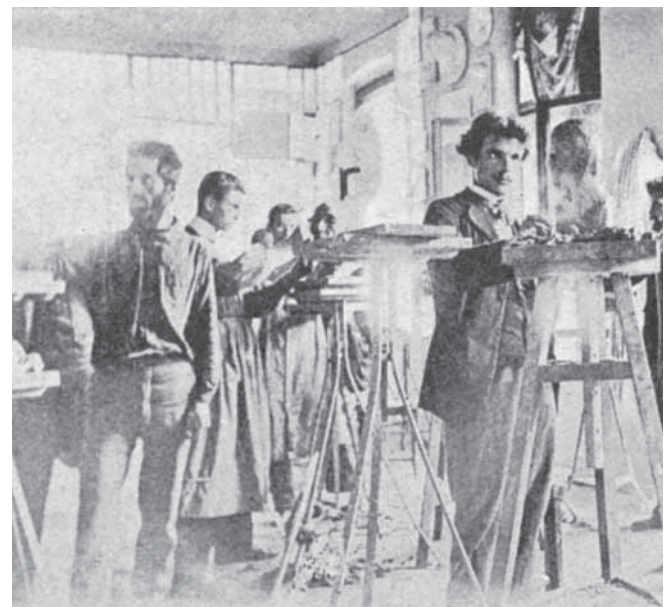


Fig. 4. Sculptor's studio at the State School of Art in Sofia at the time Schatz taught there, in O. Geo-v, "Gosudarstvennoe Risoval'noe Uchilishche v Sofii," *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'* 10 (34) (1901): [unpaged]

³² Tsirlin, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Bolgarii*, 42–43.

³³ Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 399. "The Holy Trinity" (1900), a caricature by Aleksandr Bozhinov portraying the images of Myrkovichka, Mitov, and Schatz, is in the holdings of the Academy of Arts museum in Sofia. Other caricatures on the same theme are also known; see *ibid.*, 436.

³⁴ O. Geo-v, "Gosudarstvennoe Risoval'noe Uchilishche": 286.

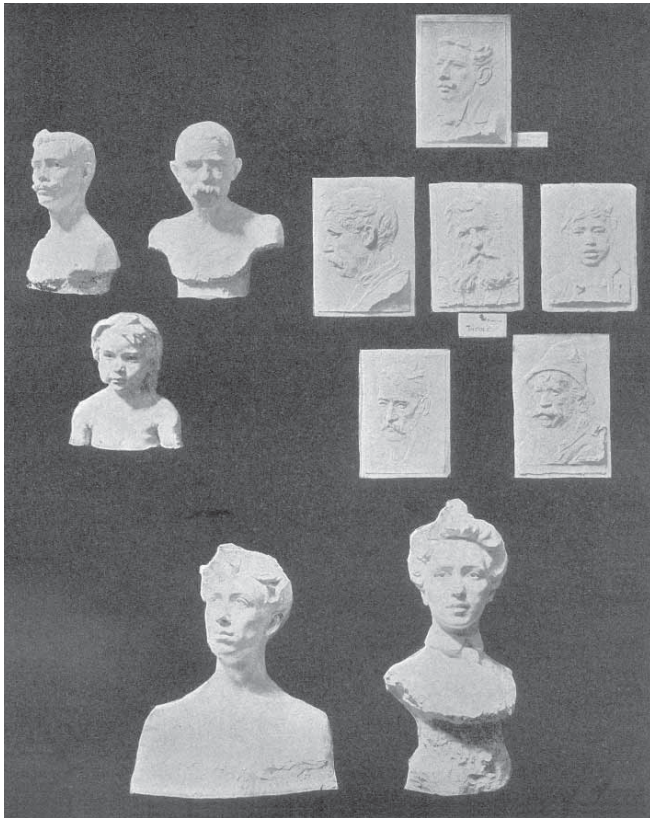


Fig. 5. Works by Andrey Nikolov, student of Boris Schatz. Among the assignments: portrait series "Faces on the Streets of Sofia," in O. Geo-v, "Gosudarstvennoe Risoval'noe Uchilishche v Sofii," *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'* 10 (34) (1901): [unpaged]

For us, the first students of the School of Art, Schatz with his looks, his Russo-Bulgarian, his naiveté, his impractical practicality, his friendly attention, but most of all, with his inspired attitude to art, was the most interesting person. In chance conversations he unrolled before us wide vistas onto art, and we, having begun with the modest intention of becoming art teachers within two or three years, would begin to dream of becoming Raphaels and Michelangelos.³⁵

The first class (48 students) included Andrey Nikolov, Asen Belkovsky, and Aleksandr Bozhinov, as well as Tseno Todorov, Stefan Ivanov, Marin Georgiev, and others. In the first three years of the School's existence its teaching staff grew considerably, and by 1899 Zheko Spiridonov and Marin Vasilev were teaching sculpture together with

Schatz.³⁶ Spiridonov headed the sculpture class at the School after Schatz's departure for Palestine.³⁷

Appreciative of the importance of fostering trades, Boris Schatz suggested to the authorities that carpet production be introduced in Bulgaria, with support for the artistic aspect of this venture to be provided by teachers at the School. His initiative gained support, and a number of years later carpet making was growing as an independent industry, providing an income for entire villages.³⁸ The poignant contrast between the Bulgarian authorities' remarkable sensitivity to the importance of art and their support for artistic endeavor, on the one hand, and the apathy to these issues on the part of the Jewish elite, on the other, inspired a jealous ire in Schatz:

This small people (the Bulgarians) who till the soil set aside enormous sums for the support of an art academy with numerous departments. Why is there no similar school in Eretz Israel! Bulgaria earns some one million francs by weaving and greater sums yet from ceramics and gardening – is it really impossible to do the like in Eretz Israel?³⁹

In his own work Schatz's earlier searching and worldview turned out to be consonant with the new trends in Bulgarian art. His imagery and realism, his devotion to folklore and patriarchal lifestyles, and the social and genre aim of his works are all of a kind with works by Bulgarian painters of the late 1890s and early 1900s. Holiday and ritual scenes and country fairs become a leading subject for Schatz's colleagues at the School of Art – Ivan Myrkovichka (*Ruchenitsa* [Bulgarian Dance], 1894; *Country Girl*, 1900) and Anton Mitov (*Country Fair in Sofia*, 1903). Works by Ivan Angelov (*Reapers*, 1905) and Petko Klissurov (*Spinner*, 1906), all in the National Gallery of Art in Sofia,⁴⁰ show farmers in their everyday life. The farmer's labor, and later works associated with parade scenes

35 Nikolov, "Boris Schatz," 6.

36 Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 401.

37 Stepovik, *Bolgars'ke obrazotvorche mistetstvo*, 75.

38 Jakob Thon, "Bezalel," *Ost und West* 5 (1905): 625.

39 Shiloh-Cohen, "Bezalel" shel Schatz, 33.

40 See Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 395–416.

done for the tsarist court and especially the theme of the Bulgarian struggle for independence, found expression in the military compositions by one of the greatest Bulgarian painters, Yaroslav Veshin (1859–1915), whose life odyssey closely parallels that of Schatz.⁴¹ This array of themes and images shaped the agenda for the new national Bulgarian art, with Boris Schatz as its premier sculptor.

Schatz worked in a variety of sculptural forms. One of his favorites became plaques with relief images of Bulgarian and Turkish (fig. 6) facial types, artisans, or villagers. In his relief *Wretched Devil* Schatz created a profile portrait of a Bulgarian man, his bowed head resting heavily on his hand. The ethnic features of the physiognomy here combine with the image of a laborer, whose life is essentially the sad struggle for daily existence. A similar image of a villager exhausted by his labors is *Woodcutter*, a fronted portrait (fig. 7). Schatz concentrates his attention not only on the person, but also on the tools of his trade: the axe, which he presents with ethnographic exactitude, and Bulgarian folk ornamentation, thus conveying the identity of his subject. Portraiture became Schatz's main concern. In a series of busts which have since become known as the *Schop* (Farmer, fig. 8), *Svircho* (Whistler), *Gaydar* (Bulgarian Pipe Player, fig. 9), *The Macedonian*, and busts of Bulgarian villagers⁴² – Schatz expressed the national spirit by means of external anthropological features, age-related and psycho-emotional elements, and the use of traditional Bulgarian costume and ornamentation.

Schatz's freestanding sculpture and projects for the construction of memorials raise the theme of civil allegiance. These works are completely democratic, without special pathos or expressiveness, generalization or estheticization of the artistic form. Let us cite a number of



Fig. 6. Boris Schatz, *Turk*, 1897, relief medallion, cast plaster, diameter 25 cm, National Art Gallery, Sofia, reproduction from the collection of Dr Nicholas Boshev, Bulgaria

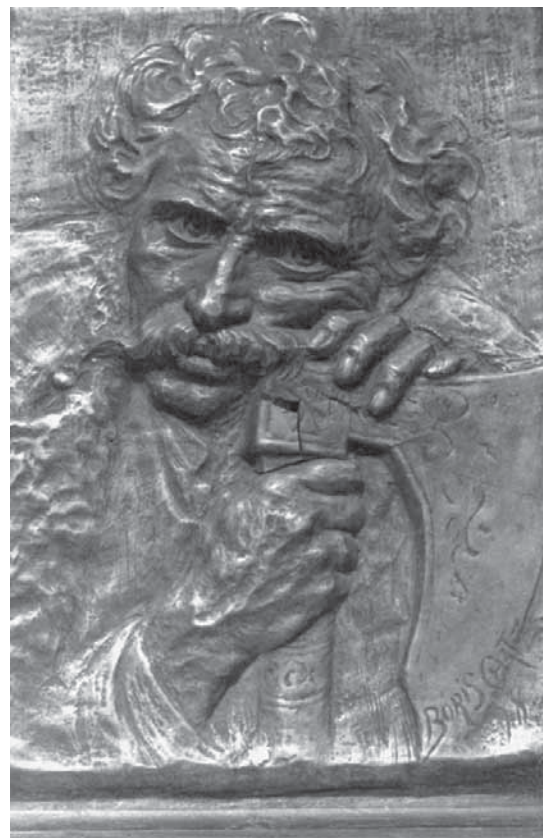


Fig. 7. Boris Schatz, *Woodcutter*, 1898, relief, cast plaster, 35 × 25 × 3 cm, National Art Gallery, Sofia, reproduction from the collection of Dr Nicholas Boshev, Bulgaria

41 Slovak artist Jaroslav Věšín had been invited to Bulgaria as a professor at the School of Art. In 1903 he became court painter to Prince Ferdinand, and after the Balkan War of 1912 devoted himself to the theme of the struggle for liberation. The chief protagonist of his paintings, created under the influence of Russian artist Vasily Vereshchagin, now became the People (*Hajduks*, *Samarian Banner*, *Cart at Odrin*). See Tsirlin, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Bolgarii*, 61–68.

42 “Schop” normally refers to a farmer from Western Bulgaria. This series of reliefs and busts belongs to Schatz's first period in Bulgaria, prior to 1900.



Fig. 8. Boris Schatz, *Schop* (Farmer), 1900, bust, terra-cotta, National Art Gallery, Sofia, in O. Geo-v, "Bolgarskoe iskusstvo," *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'* 20 (1900): [unpaged]



Fig. 9. Boris Schatz, *Gaydar* (Bulgarian Pipe Player), bust, terra-cotta, in Michael Wurmband, "Die Lewaja" (The Funeral), *Ost und West* 3 (1903): 330

comparisons to make this clear. *Bulgarian Freedom Fighter* (fig. 10), a sculpture of Schatz's dating from before 1903, has much in common with the allegorical image of free Bulgaria. This last was fashioned by the earlier artists Georgy Danchev (1846–1908) (*Liberated Bulgaria*, 1879, fig. 11) and Nicholas Pavlovich (*Union of Bulgaria*, 1886) in the Romantic tradition but with a clear influence of the old icon painting technique.⁴³ A sword grasped in a woman's hand, a banner, a roaring lion (transformed in Schatz's work into an image on the banner), and cast-off fetters form a common denominator for all these works, despite entirely different plastic realizations. These painters' theatrical pathos and national-patriotic symbolism made room for genre and compositional rhythmicity in Schatz's work.

The same naturalism and emotional restraint are evident in Schatz's own evolution as an artist when we compare this piece to his earlier *Matthias the Maccabee* (fig. 12), done in Paris in 1894 and influenced by Mark Antokolsky, especially by his project for the lighthouse "Christ Walking upon the Waters" (fig. 13). Clearly, Schatz is moving away from the lofty artistic goals set before him by the art milieu of Paris, which he had criticized for their emptiness. Reminiscing about his stay in Paris, Schatz wrote that in his first years there he was concerned exclusively about technical issues: "I lived enchanted by the great French masters, who deprived me of individuality, required me to admire only themselves, their beauty and masterful genius."⁴⁴ Taken with the new social order in Bulgaria, Schatz is more and more interested

43 Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 384–89.

44 Schatz, *Odin iz mnogikh*, 100.



Fig. 10. Boris Schatz, *Bulgarian Freedom Fighter*, 1900 (?), study, terra-cotta, in "Bezalel" shel Schatz, 1906–1929, ed. Nurit Shiloh-Cohen (Jerusalem, 1983), 130



Fig. 11. Georgy Danchov, *Liberated Bulgaria*, 1879, lithograph, in Atanas Bozhkov, *Blgarsko izobrazitelno izkustvo* (Sofia, September 1988), 389



Fig. 12. Boris Schatz, *Matthias the Maccabee*, 1894, bronze, in Julius Oppert, "Bible und Babel," *Ost und West* 3 (1903): 294



Fig. 13. Mark Antokolsky, "Christ Walking upon the Waters" (unrealized), 1888, project design for the lighthouse, study, painted plaster. Research Museum at the Russian Academy of Arts, in Era V. Kuznetsova, *M.M. Antokolsky. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (M.M. Antokolsky: His Life and Work) (Moscow, 1989), 186

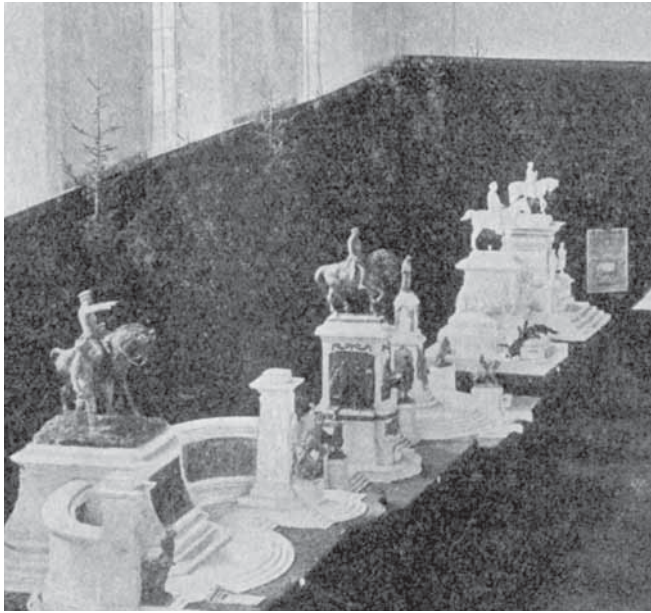


Fig. 14. Boris Schatz's project, third from right, submitted for the competition, 1899, The Princes' Manege, Sofia, in O. Geo-v, "Mezhdunarodniy konkurs na vyrabotku proekta pamiatnika Tsariu-Osvoboditelu v Sofii," *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost'* 1 (25) (1900): [unpaged]

in genre documentation with its social subtext. Always somewhat dependent on the artistic experience of the past, including his own, Schatz did not experiment with form, but used familiar schemata to approach specific new tasks. Such reusing of images, characteristic of commercial art, has a different purpose in Schatz's art: to make certain archetypes and scenes from national history generally accessible by means of art, a goal he had already declared during his pre-Parisian period.

Schatz's monumental sculptures include: Memorial to the Unknown Soldier, Memorial to Count Ignatov in Sofia, Fountain Memorial to Todor Kirkov in Lovech (1902), in addition to memorials in Plovdiv, Plevna, Ruse, and Vratsa. A showcase project of his was a piece submitted to the 1900 all-European contest for the design of a memorial to be constructed in Sofia commemorating the Russian Liberator, Tsar Alexander II. Among more than thirty submissions, all pompous and traditional in critic Orest Georgiev's opinion, Schatz's work stood out because of its meaningful imagery; it was unduly disregarded by

the contest jury. (The submission eventually chosen for construction of the memorial was by Roman sculptor Arnaldo Zocchi.) Schatz had given the portrait images of the tsar's supporters a religious Slavic fervor to underscore the aim of the war: "to liberate our brothers in blood and faith." At the end of his extensive presentation of the project (fig. 14) Schatz wrote: "I gave the memorial's architecture a Christian-Bulgarian spirit. Working it out in detail was something I deemed extraneous [...]." The critics noted that, despite all the advantages of the project, the author had not in fact achieved everything he had raised in his presentation.⁴⁵ Evidently, the estheticization of the sculptural form had not been Schatz's main goal; a great many of his works lacked in plastic completeness, while his lofty and elaborate pronouncements often exceeded the artistic level of the works themselves.

Typified Bulgarian portraits became an expression of national spirit and ethnic antiquity for Schatz; he applied the same portrait techniques to Jewish images. The subject of the physical antiquity of the Bulgarian people inspired the portraits *Old Man* (fig. 15) and *Old Woman*, both done in profile. Portraits of elderly Jews (fig. 16) differ from these only in their identifiable facial features and headgear (hat or kerchief). In portraits of women this difference is indicated in the way the kerchief is tied about the head. Two other works, the Bulgarian old sorceress in *Fortune-teller (Old Bulgarian Woman)* (fig. 17) and the image of the Jewish leader in *Matthias* (fig. 18), express a different kind of national antiquity. The Bulgarian image – the face in an impermeable kerchief, as if emerging from the tree trunk – is an archetype of the organic bond with the "body and spirit" of nature, testimony to the historical rootedness of the Bulgarians. The Jewish image embodies the legendary biblical concept as set off by its renewed Romantic coloring inspired by the teachings of Zionism. This series continues with images of the people's thoughts, personified by national types deep in deliberation. Schatz leads his viewers into thoughts about their own past, appealing to them to become a part of the drama of their history and aspiration for their future. Here again we see a clear parallel between the Bulgarian *Black Thoughts* (fig. 19) and the Jewish *Ba'al Teshuvah* (fig. 20) in their unfolded portrait scheme (head resting on the

⁴⁵ O. Geo-v, "Mezhdunarodniy konkurs": 25–27.



Fig. 15. Boris Schatz, *Old Man*, 1898, relief, cast plaster, 31 × 21 × 3 cm, National Art Gallery, Sofia, in *Blgarska skulptura 1878–1974*, ed. Lazar Marinski (Sofia, 1975), 29



Fig. 16. Boris Schatz, *Rebbe*, before 1903, terracotta, in Marcus Ehrenpreis, "Boris Schatz," *Ost und West* 3 (1903): 310



Fig. 17. Boris Schatz, *Fortuneteller (Old Bulgarian Woman)*, 1897, relief, cast plaster, 34 × 25 cm, in *Boris Schatz 1867–1932, Memorial Exhibition December 1962–January 1963* [catalogue, Bezalel National Museum] (Jerusalem, 1962), no. 5



Fig. 18. Boris Schatz, *Matthias (head)*, 1894, cast plaster, 50 × 40 × 40 cm, in *Boris Schatz 1867–1932, Memorial Exhibition December 1962–January 1963* [catalogue, Bezalel National Museum] (Jerusalem, 1962), no. 17



Fig. 19. Boris Schatz, *Black Thoughts*, 1897, relief, terra-cotta, in "Bezalel" shel Schatz 1906–1929, ed. Nurit Shiloh-Cohen (Jerusalem, 1983), 128

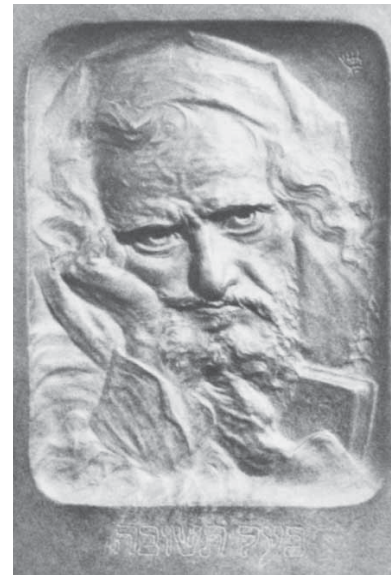


Fig. 20. Boris Schatz, *Ba'al Teshuvah*, 1905–10, relief, bronze, 49 × 29 cm, in *Boris Schatz 1867–1932, Memorial Exhibition December 1962–January 1963* [catalogue, Bezalel National Museum] (Jerusalem, 1962), no. 34



Fig. 21. Boris Schatz, decorative frame for Ivan Myrkvichka's *Bulgarian Princess Marie-Louise*, 1899 (the first on the right), in the "Bulgarian Hall" at an art exhibit in Belgium, 1905; photograph courtesy of Dr Nicholas Boshev, Bulgaria

palm of the hand), each with its typical ethnic differentia. The key difference between turning to Bulgarian and Jewish themes in Schatz's work lay in the fact that when treating Bulgarian themes he merely touched upon the subject of the masses or the lower strata of society, reflecting the interests of the new Bulgarian order and characteristic of European art in general of the second half of the nineteenth century; while in the case of Jewish themes, depicting traditional Jewry was, according to Schatz's friend, the Zionist activist Marcus (Mordechai) Ehrenpreis (1860–1951), the art of the *Galut* (Exile), one of whose most noteworthy practitioners Schatz himself became. Only Schatz's use of images of the heroic biblical past provided the author of the article with the grounds to speak of the new art of Jewish rebirth.⁴⁶

A further direction taken by Schatz was his series of historic figures created in medallions and relief plaques, a genre he discovered while still in Paris. In Bulgaria he

sculpted reliefs of Christo Belchev (1898), the poet Ivan Vazov, Todor Kirkov and Ilarion Makariopolsky, leaders of the Bulgarian renaissance, Prof. Strakosh and other activists (up to 1903). In Bulgaria still, but during his Jewish period, he produced portraits of a series of Zionist leaders: Theodor Herzl, David Wolffsohn (both dated 1904), Otto Warburg, and Ephraim Moses Lilien (1905). His images of great people captured their profound ethos while depicting their specific features and aroused the viewers' sense of identity, requiring them to determine their own place in their national histories.

A curious instance of the way Jewish images followed from Schatz's "Bulgarian" works is the 1899 decorative frame for the portrait of the Bulgarian princess Marie-Louise (painted by Ivan Myrkvichka) (fig. 21). One of the ten reliefs representing the nations of Bulgaria mourning

46 Marcus Ehrenpreis, "Boris Schatz," *Ost und West* 3 (1903): 306–11.



Fig. 22. Boris Schatz, *The Rabbi's Blessing*, 1903, relief, terra-cotta, in Julius Oppert, "Bible und Babel," *Ost und West* 3 (1903): 297

and praying for the soul of the princess is the figure of a Jew in traditional prayer attire. In 1903 Schatz worked on the relief *The Rabbi's Blessing*, a typological reiteration of the image of the Jew from the *Marie-Louise* frame, with the addition of the figure of the boy receiving the blessing and objects symbolic of Jewish observance (fig. 22).

The same frame affords a view of yet another sphere of Schatz's interests and nationalistic quest in art: the tendency to ornamentation, decorative and applied art, which later became a leading theme – if not the most important one – in his work. The portrait frame won a silver medal at an exhibit in Paris; Andrey Nikolov described it as having reached the "highest degree of artistic creation and synthesis of the study of the old

Bulgarian art and Bulgarian facial types." He believed Schatz to be achieving a reincarnation and renewal of the old Bulgarian art style, which after him "degenerated into one vicious routine."⁴⁷ Later Schatz was to set many of his portraits and subject scenes in opulently decorated frames bearing national symbols. He would use Bulgarian wicker ornamentation, which he had himself created anew, in decorative sculpture and platters.

The year 1903 marked the culmination of Schatz's sojourn in Bulgaria. A number of events brought him back to Jewish issues, eventually leading him to emigrate to the Land of Israel. One of these was the break with his family, long in the making (Schatz's wife, together with his young daughter Angelika, left him for his star student, Andrey Nikolov), causing intense emotional upheavals. Other turning points included the bloody 1903 Kishinev pogrom, the growing Zionist movement, and the ideas of Herzl, which Schatz naturally shared with his former dream. He was brought to the same idea by his friendship with Marcus Ehrenpreis, who in 1900 became the Chief Rabbi of Sofia and exerted a considerable influence on Schatz. Ehrenpreis wrote about this phase in the sculptor's life:

It is now seven years since he came to Sofia, and it appears that here the wandering seeker has finally found himself: after years of experimenting with old Bulgarian motifs in art, Boris Schatz has returned to Jewish themes, which had been his initial point of origin. It would be best for him to remain in this field, which provides him with the soil where he can grow.⁴⁸

At the Seventh Zionist Congress in Basel in 1905 Schatz presented a proposal for founding an art school in Eretz Israel. A year later his dream would come true, leading him to begin an entirely new life, but during the years 1903–05 he would be thrown hither and thither about the face

47 Nikolov, "Boris Schatz," 7. Zheko Spiridonov, who headed the State School of Art sculpture class after Schatz's departure, tried to marry academic sculpture to folk carving traditions, and on this basis to create

a national plastic style. However, his experiment was not crowned with success; see Stepovik, *Bolgars'ke obrazotvorche mistetstvo*, 75.

48 Ehrenpreis, "Boris Schatz": 305–6.

of the globe. From March to the end of December 1904 he was in the U.S., where at the request of the Bulgarian authorities he coordinated the creation of the Bulgarian art pavilion for the exhibit in the St Louis State Fair; in 1905 he was living among the Zionists of Berlin.⁴⁹

The subjects for his sculptures and reliefs of the late Bulgarian period focus on traditional Jewish life, biblical history, portraits of Zionist leaders, and personal themes. In a number of works the nationalist theme combines with that of his own personal tragedy – betrayal by the woman he loved, the theme of motherhood and lost parentage. Curious among these works are a number of figures of women directly connected with Schatz's personal life, especially the bust *Ophelia* (1903), which does not bear a direct connection to Jewish themes, and *Judith* (fig. 23). The first of these presents an image of a beautiful but sickly and tormented woman in the throes of an emotional upheaval. This is evidently an inner cast of Schatz's own shattered life. In his sculpture *Judith* (a relief of his on the same theme is also documented) a change in his condition comes through; Schatz by this time had returned from the exposition in St Louis, where he had achieved wide recognition and been granted notable awards. In addition, he had overcome an emotional crisis, found peace, and with renewed energy returned to his work. "Old forgotten dreams came alive again, reminding me of my yearning to address humanity through the universal medium of art in order to speak of the great woe of our people."⁵⁰ In Schatz's work the image of the biblical heroine, one of the favorites in all of world history of art, personifies the renewed faith in his future and in his purpose, which is bound up with Eretz Israel. Finally, in 1905, Schatz created the genre composition *Samson and Delilah* as a gift for his daughter Angelika, also inspired by



Fig. 23. Boris Schatz, *Judith*, 1905, bust, terra-cotta, height 28 cm, in Andrey Nikolov, "Boris Schatz," *Zavety* 4 (1934): 53

the upheavals in his personal life. Here Samson's features are an all too thinly veiled hint at a self-portrait of Schatz himself. Along with these works should be considered the terra-cotta reliefs *Jewish Mother* and *Boy and His Grandmother* (ca. 1904).

On 1 March 1906, Schatz founded the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem. On the eve of his arrival in Palestine, still struggling with an intense emotional crisis, he confessed that he had been "cast by evil fate into semi-wild Bulgaria," while the years of his life in Paris and Sofia he described as "years of intensive labor, hopes and disappointments."⁵¹ Schatz was impressionable and idealistic. His own evaluation of the time he had spent in Sofia notwithstanding, his work in advancing national culture by means of art in Bulgaria had brought him wealth, widespread recognition, and prizes at prestigious art events.⁵²

49 Zalmona, Boris Schatz, 20–21.

50 Schatz, *Odin iz mnogikh*, 142.

51 Ibid., 106.

52 *Woodcutter* and *Fortuneteller* by Schatz were awarded silver medals at exhibitions in Paris. *Jochebed*, *Mother of Moses*, the frame for the portrait *Marie-Louise*, and the sculptural composition *Liberation* (project design for the Alexander II memorial) won silver medals in St Louis. Schatz was made a member of the French Academy of Arts. See Ehrenpreis, "Boris Schatz": 313–15; Schmirgela, *Sculptura po nashite zemli*, 86–87.

It seems reasonable to conclude that his Bulgarian period had enabled Schatz to conduct a brilliant experiment in modeling and introducing a national art infrastructure with its socio-cultural strategy and universalism, but that as an artist he was led away during this time from fine art into the sphere of applied problem solving.

His formula for a “national art” involved educating artists and society based on the materials available through their own folk traditions; it entailed romanticizing national history and providing for mass art production which would serve as a vehicle of expression for collective identity and allow art to develop further. His views on art and his work provoked criticism while he was still in Sofia, as well as after his departure for Jerusalem. Bulgarian critics Aleko Konstantinov, Andrey Protich, and Nicholas Mavrodinov noted the unimportance of his work and his weak influence on Bulgarian art. As early as 1897, Aleko Konstantinov commented ironically on a piece by Schatz, the bust of the Bulgarian poet Ivan Vazov:

The genius of this piece is in that in Bulgaria it can do as a bust of Vazov, in Germany – as a bust of Capriwi, in Italy – as a bust of Umberto, and in the anthropological museums of Montegatz and Lombroso – as a bust of the famous robber Rinaldo Rinaldini. Hard to believe that sculpture has reached such heights of development!⁵³

It was not modernism that Schatz imported from Paris to Bulgaria, but rather academic art and Antokolsky’s nostalgia for the spirit of the Russian *Peredvizhniki*.⁵⁴ “Contemporary, socially underscored realism” had been a progressive feature of Parisian culture in the 1850s, conveyed, for instance, in the works of Gustave Courbet (1819–77), and in Russian art of the 1870s in the works of the *Peredvizhniki*, but

by the 1890s it had become an anachronism. Schatz’s style, both in its Bulgarian and the later Jewish version, combined a foundation in genre realism with the plasticity of the European Secession, the last particularly evidenced by his works’ rich ornamentation. Schatz’s style bore witness to the beginnings of degeneration into decadence and kitsch: sentimentality and unnaturalness, its cloning of accepted compositional and subject schemes, and the way it expresses a certain set of expectations of the tastes and needs of the public which should want to identify with its own people and at the same time stress its own social position.

And yet, in Bulgaria Schatz’s program was appropriate against the backdrop of the general artistic and social scene of the time. In Palestine, by contrast, his artistic notions (as opposed to his political ideas!) did not find fertile ground in which to strike roots. As a result, his mechanistic combination of modern European realism with traditional Near Eastern crafts, including their typical forms, ornamentation, and work techniques (Yemenite silver, Damascus copper, carpet weaving, and other applied arts)⁵⁵ in addition to the overall historical-archaeological direction espoused by Bezalel went against the grain of the search for modernity in Europe during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Its infatuation with traditional and artisan forms of art and emphasis on streamlined production left his school’s work outside the bounds of contemporary art processes, although it also formed the foundation for modern Judaica art.

At the same time, granting the ambiguity of Boris Schatz’s artistic achievements, his real contribution to the development of national art can hardly be overemphasized. To borrow a phrase from Emmanuel Gelman, Schatz was the first to lead Bulgarian and then Jewish art out of the “dissident underground.”⁵⁶

53 Aleksandr Bozhinov, *Minali Dni* (Days Gone By) (Sofia, 1958), 32–34 (Bulgarian); see also Boshev, “Posmertnaia izlozha”; Andrey Protich, *Iskustvo, teatr i literatura: Studii i kritiki* (Art, Theater, and Literature: Studies and Criticism) (Kuestendil, 1907), 16 (Bulgarian).

54 Conventional abbreviation for the Russian “Association of Ambulatory Art Exhibits” formed in 1870. The Association was a union of artists espousing principles of democratic critical realism and Russian populism, who had broken with the art of salons and official art remote

from daily life.

55 Boris Schatz, *Bezalel: Ego Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee* (Bezalel: Past, Present, and Future) (Odessa, 1910), 18–39 (Russian).

56 Emmanuel Gelman, “Rozhdenie skul’ptury v Izraile” (“The Birth of Sculpture in Israel”), in *Kanon i svoboda: Problemy evreyskogo plasticheskogo iskusstva* (Canon vs. Freedom: On Jewish Plastic Art) T. Waksman, Dina Rubina, and Boris Karafelov, eds. (Moscow, 2003), 54 (Russian).

His Bulgarian experience left its mark on Schatz's later work. From Sofia Schatz brought with him to Palestine his students Shmuel Ben-David and Shmuel Levi.⁵⁷ The first studio, created in imitation of the School of Art in Sofia as a casting workshop, was supposed to produce plaster sculpture and reliefs. A month-and-a-half after Bezalel had opened, Schatz organized a carpet-weaving shop, the initiative which had done so well in Bulgaria. In response to an order placed by Schatz, an expert in dyes arrived from the Bulgarian capital to supervise his part of the production process. Finally, Schatz's efforts to advance the organization of museums and collect folk art in Bulgaria came to fruition in Jerusalem with the founding of a national museum and the amassing of a collection of Jewish antique objects and works by contemporary Jewish artists.⁵⁸

In 1934, two years after Boris Schatz's death a grand retrospective devoted to the sculptor's work opened in Sofia with the participation of the sculptor's son Bezalel Schatz (1912–83). More than 80 works by Schatz were exhibited (57 catalogue items), dating from his Bulgarian and Palestinian periods, with the overwhelming majority of the works related to Jewish themes.⁵⁹

Today, works by Boris Schatz in Bulgaria are found in the holdings of museums in Sofia, Plovdiv, Pleven, Russa, and Vratsa. The greatest collection of his works consists of 57 pieces divided into three groups – busts, reliefs, and plaques depicting Jewish traditional holidays in bronze, terra-cotta and cast plaster; it is held by the National Gallery of Art in Sofia.

57 Werner, "Boris Schatz": 395, 408. According to information provided by Schatz's son Bezalel, during the first year of the Bezalel School's existence, Schatz's class numbered eleven students, most of whom had arrived together with their teacher from Bulgaria.

58 "Bezalel v Ierusalime" (Bezalel in Jerusalem), *Almeuland: St. Petersburg Monthly Devoted to the Economic Research of Palestine* 6 (1906): 205–07;

7–8 (1906): 251–53 (Russian).

59 In addition to Bezalel Schatz and Andrey Nikolov, among the exhibit's organizers were Schatz's first private students in Bulgaria Aleksandr Bozhinov, Asen Belkovsky, and Michael Kretev, members of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities, and others. See Nikolov, "Boris Schatz," 11.