Lilien and Zionism

Haim Finkelstein
Department of Foreign Literatures & Linguistics,
Ben Gurion University of the Negev

Ephraim Mose Lilien has often been described as the first artist of the Zionist Movement, or even labeled at times the "first Zionist artist."[1] There is undoubtedly ample justification for referring to Lilien in such terms; he was, after all, the foremost contributor to the early visual vocabulary of the Zionist Movement, and some of his images have persistently kept a firm hold on the imagination of later generations. He was, furthermore, actively involved over a period of years with the Zionist Movement, and served as representative to the Sixth Zionist Congress. He was one of the founders of the *Jüdischer Verlag*, the Jewish publishing company in Berlin whose publications propagated the artistic and literary output of the Jewish Renaissance. He also took part in establishing the Bezalel School of Art in Jerusalem. However, a marked lessening of his commitment to Zionism may be discerned in the years following his first trip to Jerusalem, at the time he started working on his Bible illustrations and developing his skills as an etching artist. The roots of this development lie further back in time, close to when he was still actively involved in Zionist affairs. A certain ambivalence in his Zionist attitudes could be discerned even then, and it is the peripeties of his Zionist stance that are brought under scrutiny in the following pages.

There seems to have been, in retrospect, much to commend the conjoining of Lilien and the burgeoning Zionist movement. Art Nouveau, or *Jugendstil*, to apply in Lilien's case the German term for the Munich-based Art Nouveau center, embodied to a large extent the striving for a new art, a new aesthetic direction free of any allegiance or subservience to the styles of the past. Thus, words like "renascence" and "liberation" figured often in writings associated with the movement.[2] The names by which the style was known in its various

centers — Art Nouveau, *Jugendstil*, or "style of youth," *Modernista*, Modern Style — also convey a sense of a new beginning.

It is hardly surprising that, quite early on, at the time Lilien's association with the Zionist Movement was already well-established, the awakening of the Jewish national spirit would be associated with this stance of artistic liberation. In 1906, in a small book entitled *The New Art of an Ancient People*, M. S. Levussove, an art professor in New York, argued that the renascence of the Jewish spirit could be compared to what he termed the 'art rebellion, the war of the Secession,'[3] which he defined as an 'onslaught on the academic and classic art' resulting in the creation of a new style.[4] Levussove was careful enough, however, not to define a "Jewish style", and his stylistic observations regarding Lilien's work could have fitted a great many of the artistic trends associated with the Secession movement in general.

The question of Jewish art was heatedly debated in the Fifth Zionist Congress. Martin Buber argued that the diaspora Jew, his existence wholly lacking the aesthetic dimension, is a barren human being, blind to beauty and nature. Jewish art, Buber said, would help regain this dimension and complement the efforts of the Zionist movement to lead the Jewish people toward a realization of its potential. While a truly national art would flourish only on Jewish soil, there is much that can also be accomplished, Buber asserted, by Jewish art, if it becomes fully conscious of the cultural tradition of the Jewish people. Buber's reference to a 'truly national art' flourishing on Jewish soil appears to be the closest he came to evoking the notion of style. Indeed, Martin Buber, Ahad Ha'am and others saw Jewish art mostly in terms of Jewish content or Jewish iconography, and there was very little effort to define a Jewish style.[5] This is where Art Nouveau, especially in Lilien's *Jugendstil* version, could indeed have suggested the means of circumventing the question of style by potentially enabling the incorporation of the symbols and iconography of the Jewish cultural tradition within a stylistic framework, which, in placing itself under the banner of the new and in its somewhat eclectic stylistic orientation, presumed to free itself from subservience to any hallowed style of the recent or more remote past. Its floral ornament suggesting life and energy would have formed a strong stylistic correlative to the promise of dynamic awakening inherent in Zionism. Furthermore, perceived as essentially a non-Jewish artistic mode, *Jugendstil* also suggested to Jewish intellectuals of the time the benefits of incorporating, under the aegis of Zionism, a vital non-Jewish cultural force into Jewish secular self-identification.[6]

The coming together of *Jugendstil* and Zionism had its beginning in Lilien's career during the last years of the century. Lilien's artistic activities in Munich

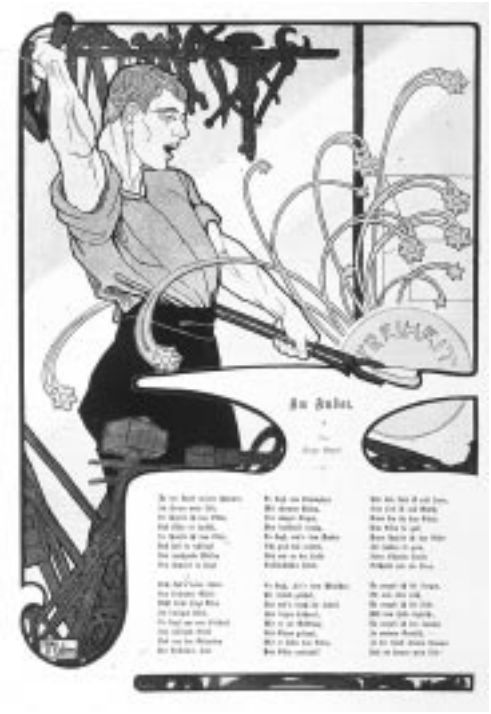

Fig. 1: E. M. Lilien, "At the Anvil" ("Am Amboß"), *Süddeutscher Postillon,* September 1897.

during that time might, indeed, be seen as nurturing those developments that eventually led to the later conceptions underlying his work for the Zionist movement. In 1897, a short while after he had begun publishing drawings in the literary and artistic journal *Die Jugend*, Lilien began his activities as illustrator for various socialist publications, primarily the illustrated magazine *Süddeutscher Postillon*, whose editor, Eduard Fuchs became a close friend of his.[7] Beginning with his first drawing to appear in the *Süddeutscher Postillon*, an illustration for a poem entitled "Der Amboß" (The Anvil) (September 1897), (Fig. 1), Lilien's illustrations for this magazine, in their relative sobriety and solemnity, exhibit marked differences from his work for *Die Jugend*, with its Arcadian subjects of nymphs and satyrs and its erotic, almost decadent frivolity — characteristics that also exemplify some of the ex-libris he designed around that time. Some of the elements that formally characterize the works for *Jugend* — undulating curves and uninterrupted flowing lines, usually applied to bacgrounds or to the depiction of serpentine hair — found their way to the *Süddeutscher Postillon* illustrations. Such are, for instance, the undulating hair of the female figure in the cover of the Christmas issue of 1897, or the ornamental sparks arising from the grinding machine in "Das Rad der Zeit" (The Wheel of Time), the centerfold illustration of the August 1898 issue. However, contrary

to the light and sketchy character of the Jugend illustrations, the latter exhibit stronger lines and simpler decorative schemes. These works for the *Süddeutscher Postillon* and, similarly, the title page and double-page spread for the *Mai-Zeitung* of 1899, already reveal much of what would characterize, a few years later, his work for the Zionist movement, both conceptually and stylistically. They were mostly conceived as allegorical schemes involving personifications of, for instance, labor, art and Social Democracy. These allegorical figures are engaged in symbolical actions (for example, the winged Social Democracy handing a wreath to the worker who has just broken off his chains; labor and art shaking or holding hands). In a manner which would become even more pronounced a few years later, Lilien retained the primacy of the human figure, setting an opposition between the academic naturalism of the figure drawing and the flatness of setting and ornament. The decorative schemes were mostly relegated to the borders, often involving ornamental elements that functioned as emblematic signs communicating meaning (for instance, stylized and schematized workers' tools).

These characteristics point away from normative Art Nouveau or *Jugendstil*, and it is, indeed, in such deviations that one may locate the promise for his contemporaries of concepts such as Socialist art or, later, Jewish national art. To this might be added considerations of the thematic implications of Lilien's stylistic choices, especially in view of what might be considered the failure of Art Nouveau's program of regeneration of art and life. While preparing the way for important future experiments in art, architecture and design, Art Nouveau was also bogged down by an undertow of Romantic and mystical yearning, as well as by its inability to face the harsh realities of modern society. Weary and decadent *fin-de-siècle* mood, and ornament of great preciosity approaching the morbid, took precedence over its more robust representations of the vital forces of plants and flowers. Zionism, on the contrary, required a more robust approach; not pure aesthetics but a forceful expression of ideology; not a suppression of narrative content but harnessing such a content to its overall political and social purpose. Academic naturalism, combined with decorative forms which also stood for Jewish or Zionist emblems and symbols, served this purpose better than Art Nouveau morbidity or abstraction[8] on the one hand, or any of the more progressive Post-Impressionist trends on the other.

All these considerations notwithstanding, that Zionism seemed for a while to have found a potent vehicle in *Jugendstil* was largely due to the publication in 1900 of *Juda*, a book of poems by Börries von Münchhausen, designed and illustrated by Lilien. There is, however, no reason to assume that Lilien's work

on this book had been prompted by any direct association with Zionist circles, or that he had in this publication consciously proposed a program or a model for a Zionist or Jewish national art. That is not to say that Lilien was wholly oblivious to Zionism at the time. It has been argued that it was in his hometown Drohobycz (1892-1894) that the foundations had been laid for his strong national Jewish sentiments as well as his identification with Zionist ideology,[9] and that some of his associates in Munich belonged to Zionist circles.[10] It might be added that some of the symbols introduced in *Juda*, such as the Magen David and the eight-branch Menorah, were, as noted by Yigal Zalmona, at that time already well-established as new Zionist emblems.[11] However, within the overall thematic and decorative scheme of the book, these seem to be grafted on to what is generally a Jewish cultural context and thus appear more in their capacity of traditional Jewish religious symbols. Admittedly, there were no clear demarcation lines at the time between sentiments related to a renascence of Jewish national identity, in its religious-cultural sense, and those associated with Zionism as a national liberation movement that aimed to provide an answer to questions raised by modern anti-Semitism. However, steeped on the whole in Jewish and Biblical themes, the book is certainly quite removed from anything referring to Zionism's "political" aim of creating for the Jewish people a home in Palestine, as it was proclaimed in the "Basle Declaration" in 1897. As a collaborative effort by von Münchhausen and Lilien, the book is an expression of late-century romantic-national ideas. In what concerns the book's literary context, the name "Juda" indicates its "Judaizing" tendency; that is, the casting of its Biblical material in a specifically Jewish framework (rather than Christian exegesis).[12] Even the ballad "Passah" (Passover), with its call for the Jews to return to their homeland and celebrate Passover in the future in Jerusalem, is not necessarily an expression of modern Zionist political rhetoric. In this respect, the material is no more "Zionist" in essence than, say, Byron's "Hebrew Melodies." This could also be said of Lilien's illustration for "Passah", which represents an old Jew, his figure encircled in thorns, viewed against monumental Egyptian architecture and the distant sun of "Zion" sending forth its rays. The Jew, standing on a high precipice, irrevocably separating him from "Zion", does not even turn directly toward it; the thematic roots of the illustration are thus embedded in the Diaspora rather than in anything associated with a contemporary Zionist sentiment. If we can still see *Juda* as a Zionist creation, it is because it was so enthusiastically adopted by the Zionist movement. It was indeed the book Zionism yearned for, one whose conception, overall design, and stylistic deviations from typical *Jugendstil* norms, suggested a promising direction for the art to be, a Jewish national art that would fulfil its ideological

Fig. 2: E. M. Lilien, "The Jewish May" ("Der Jüdische Mai"), *Lieder des Ghetto*, 1902.

and propagandist needs. Furthermore, it would appear that it was the enthusiastic reception accorded to the book by Jewish and Zionist circles that helped recruit Lilien and his art to the cause of Zionism.

Once Lilien harnessed himself to this task, he began pursuing successfully an artistic idiom that would answer the expectations of his generation, as is well apparent in the persistence of some of the images he created in the common consciousness of the Jews in the following decades. Such is, for instance, the illustration for the poem "Der Jüdische Mai" ("The Jewish May," *Lieder des Ghetto*, 1902) (Fig. 2), with its unabashedly emotional depiction of an old Jew who, bound with thorns and guarded by snakes, stretches his arms with a tearful and yearning look toward the sun which rises over an enchanted dream-vision of a Zion underneath which flows a meandering river bedecked with lush vegetation and palm trees. For the Diaspora Jew yearning for a Zion he had never seen, few images can equal this one in its direct emotional appeal (in this respect, it is far superior to the "Passah" illustration). A similar image was used around that time for a souvenir card for the Fifth Zionist Congress (1901), in which a similarly bound Jew is ordered by an angel to look toward a distant Zion where a Jew is seen ploughing the land within the orb of a huge and blinding sun. Lilien's art succeeded indeed in synthesizing readymade ingredients with a proven appeal to the Jewish popular imagination — mostly

those in which the religious and folkloristic motifs remained dominant. When Issachar Ryback and Boris Aronson, in an 1919 article, criticized Lilien, from the perspective of Jewish modernism of the Russian Revolution era, for embracing the 'Biblical, Zionist sentiment with all its superficialities and pseudo-romanticism — the palm tree from Goldfaden's theatre and the *Menorah* from the poems of Frug,'[13] they pointed precisely, though unsympathetically, to those elements that made his art so popular.

As noted before with regard to *Juda*, the Zionism inherent in Lilien's work was romantic-national in essence. As an expression of Utopian longing for Zion, tinged with "Biblical" romanticism — paralleling, in a sense, the Utopian socialist themes, with their somewhat romanticizing attitude regarding labor and the proletariat, that dominated his work during the Munich years — it remained an insubstantial vision, quite lacking in what referred to activist Zionism. It was also well removed, as we shall see, from the reality of Palestine, to which he was exposed during his first trip in 1906. Ryback and Aronson's criticism notwithstanding, Lilien's illustrations were less heavily tinged with romanticism and more topical in their implications when he came to express Jewish, or even Jewish-national, themes that were not necessarily related to Zionism. His illustrations for Morris Rosenfeld's *Lieder des Ghetto* are, in this respect, more persuasive as authentic expressions of Lilien's frame of mind vis-à-vis their subjects than those for *Juda*, for instance. The son of a poor wood turner in Drohobicz, Lilien witnessed in his childhood the plight of the small craftsman who could hardly provide for his family. This childhood experience is given memorable expression in the portrait of his father at the lathe, a haunted and despairing look on his face, framed by his working tools and by the highly stylized shapes of the shavings coming off the wooden block. In other illustrations for the "Lieder der Arbeit" section, the sinister shapes of a blood-sucking vampire or a spider weaving its web are grafted on to the more realistic depictions of Jewish tailor and sweatshop worker. Most of Rosenfeld's poems deal with the fate of Jews in the Diaspora. Appropriately, they are accompanied with images — in illustrations and border decorations alike — that revert in their form, mood and iconography to an idiom that might be considered closer to normative *Jugendstil*. Such are the bare drooping branches of a tree and a broken harp (cover illustration), roses with extremely long thorny stems, drooping flowers, curling snakes, and cobwebs. These images appear to be more indicative of the general mood of the book than the depiction of an archangel bearing Herzl's physiognomy in the illustration for "The Creation of Men" (Fig. 3). Indeed, the book as a whole is quite removed from the spirit of Zionism as a movement of political renascence and liberation. The illustration

Fig. 3: E. M. Lilien, "The Creation of Men" ("Die Erschaffung des Menschen"), *Lieder des Ghetto,* 1902.

for "Storm" (Fig. 4), with its two Jews forlornly sitting on the deck of a ship tossing in the storm, is, in its expression of the experience of Jewish immigrants, far more concrete and immediate than the illustration for "Der Jüdische Mai" — the only direct "Zionist" work in the book — in which the yearning for Zion is offered from the timeless perspective of the traditional viewpoint of the Diaspora Jew.

Some of the illustrations of *Lieder des Ghetto* convey a hidden sense of uneasiness. It is not just a matter of sinister bats and vampires, or snakes rearing their heads in the border decoration. In a less obtrusive manner, it is introduced even in the illustration for the poem "Mein Kind," which follows a long Romantic tradition of portraits of children, whose innocence and purity find their counterparts in flowers and other creations of unspoiled nature. Here, though, this innocence seems to be threatened, since the heartshaped frame surrounding the child's head is made of thorns. Such an almost undefined quality of bizarreness, even perverseness, can also be discerned in the illustration for the poem "The Creation of Men." It is not so much that the image of Herzl, as one of the angels present at the creation of man, is shown practically naked, although this does have a somewhat bizarre effect. Rather, this quality is derived from the contrast perceived between Herzl's strong and masculine figure, which dominates the left-hand page in this double-page

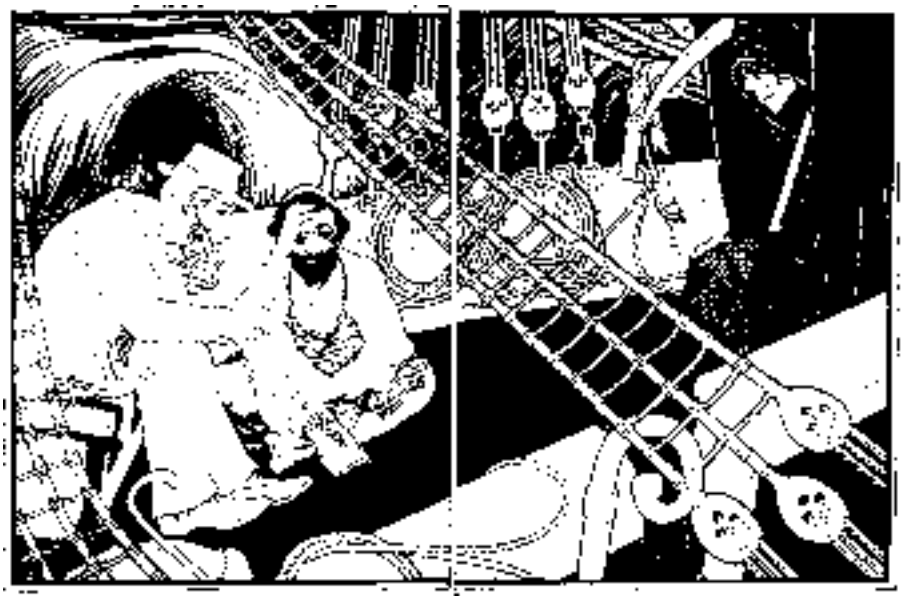

Fig. 4: E. M. Lilien, "Storm" ("Sturm"), *Lieder des Ghetto,* 1902.

illustration, and the boyish, vulnerable and somewhat feminized figure of the newly-created man seen on the left.[14] As suggested in the poem, the newly-created man also represents the poet or artist, and one might be tempted to see this vulnerable poet as Lilien's oblique reference to himself as an artist dominated by the larger-than-life figure of Herzl. A certain ambivalence regarding Herzl, that may have been only hinted at in 1902, became much more pronounced later on in 1908, when a Herzl figure appeared again in Lilien's art in several of the illustrations for the first volume of the Westermann edition of *Die Bücher der Bibel*. The juxtaposition one may perceive in the illustration for "The Creation of Men" comes up again in the depiction of Jacob's struggle with the angel, where, in a strange reversal of roles, Jacob, a strong black-bearded figure (indeed, with pronounced Herzlian features) struggles with a young vulnerable angel whose own twisted thigh is more prominently displayed than Jacob's. I suspect there is some homoerotic quality in this pair; or, it may refer to some hidden current of a love-hate relationship with Herzl. I won't go into the psychological implications of such illustrations (a subject that still awaits a serious study), but rather consider the implications insofar as Lilien's commitment to the cause of Zionism is considered. These are brought into high relief in the representation of "The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden," where an angel holding the "flaming sword which turned every way"

bears Herzl's features, while Adam's appearance somewhat resembles that of the vulnerable angel struggling with Jacob. The angel, whose sword, held upright along his body, hides his nakedness, refers back to two very significant precedents: Lilien's earlier "Rahab" illustration in *Juda*, in which the naked Rahab is lying prostrate below the figure of an angel with huge dark wings and holding a long phallic sword that seems plunged into her body. The posture of this figure appears directly related to that of the angel represented in Franz von Stuck's *The Guardian of Paradise* (1889), whose sword also seems to have been a model for the sword in the Bible illustration. I suspect that both Von Stuck's painting and its permutation as an erotic-sadistic scene in the "Rahab" illustration were on Lilien's mind, perhaps quite unconsciously, when he came to represent his version of the "Guardian of Paradise." The question is why has Herzl been assigned such a role in Lilien's work. It has been suggested that the desert-like seashore, with its desert vegetation, is a reflection of the Land of Israel, as Lilien saw it during his first trip to Palestine.[15] The border of the Garden of Eden, on the other hand, seems to consist of papyri or bulrushes, and these are associated with Egypt. Thus, the illustration also has as a subtext the Exodus from Egypt, with Herzl-Moses ordering the Jews to leave the fleshpots of Egypt-Europe in order to settle in the desert-land of Israel.[16] Does Lilien's picture imply a perception on his part, however unconscious it might be, of his own inability or unwillingness to leave Europe for the desert land of Zion? The drooping heads of the lilies (*Lilien* in German) seen at the feet of the angel, next to Lilien's signature, seem to offer a further substantiation for this interpretation.

Can we discern in these pictures hints concerning a disenchantment with his role as a Zionist artist or a lessening of his Zionist commitment? In the most extensive biographical source, Lilien's collected letters to his wife, *Briefe an seine Frau: 1905-1925* (1985), there is no specific indication warranting such a conclusion. However, whereas the early letters are full of enthusiastic pronouncements concerning Zionism, letters written during or after his first trip to Palestine appear to be quite low key in this respect. Alongside enthusiastic responses to sites holding remnants of the Biblical past, the letters also seem to express some disappointment with the present-day reality he found there, which was quite removed from the Utopian vision of Zionism presented by him in his earlier work. This disenchantment may have been enhanced by a weakening of his ties, following Herzl's death, with the new leadership of the Zionist Movement. To this might be added Lilien's falling-out with Boris Schatz, after he had accompanied him to Jerusalem as a member of the executive committee of Bezalel, in order to help establish there the Bezalel art school. It

Fig. 5: E. M. Lilien, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*
Die Bücher der Bibel, 1, 1908.

may also be argued that, whereas his Jewish national feelings and his Zionism were nurtured by his Eastern-European background, and grew as a response to the hardships and pogroms experienced by the Jews there,[17] his marriage in 1906 to Helena Magnus, daughter of a respectable and fully assimilated Jewish family in Brunswick, may have brought about a lessening of his Jewish and Zionist commitment.

Such issues, however, might be explored by a future biographer. My concern is with the evidence provided by Lilien's two central activities in the years following his first trip to Jerusalem — the Bible illustrations and the etchings — this mostly in relation to the development of his conception of landscape. In most of his early illustrations, figures, symbols and emblematic forms act in a non-realistically determined space. The flatness and stylization of setting in his early work often resulted in the placement of figure and landscape in two distinct and separate spatial configurations as, for instance, in "Passah" or in "Der Jüdische Mai." Although the landscapes almost always contain important emblematic elements, these spatial tensions necessitated at times that landscape elements be relegated to a somewhat subsidiary position. We can view, indeed, the gradual change in his art following his first visit to the Middle East in 1906 as one in which the landscape loses its emblematic character and becomes more realistic. This development is easily discernible in the illustrations for the three volumes of the Westermann edition of *Die Bücher der Bibel* which came out in 1908, 1909 and 1912. In the first Bible volume Lilien tended to choose the kind

of motif that required a non-realistic, symbolic or allegorical treatment. Such is, for instance, his treatment of Moses with the Tablets of the Law, referred to above, with its stylized clouds seen against a fantastic landscape. Some of the illustrations in the sixth volume (the second to be published), especially those for "Psalms," offer views of a more authentic nature, still placed within a decorative border (palm trees in Psalms 42 and 43). In the 1912 volume, the presence of human figures is often quite inconsequential. Lilien introduces some identifiable locations, either as settings for a Biblical theme (for example, the Damascus Gate as an illustration for Ruth) or with no narrative pretext whatsoever (a view of Jerusalem with palm tree, to accompany Proverbs, chapter 29). Landscapes of this type appear in great preponderance in the single-volume Bible editions published in 1912 and 1915, which make use of all the illustrations included in the three volumes of the uncompleted early edition.

No great discernment is needed to perceive the direct relationship existing between those illustrations and Lilien's etchings. Lilien started making etchings around 1908, and after 1912 etching became his exclusive mode of artistic creation. His move to graphics may have been prompted partially by personal or even material factors. One may conjecture that at that time Lilien had to accept the painful truth that, as an "Artist of the Zionist Movement," he had few commissions coming his way. There was no question that the print medium offered potentially a better income than drawings or illustrations. In one of his letters to his wife Lilien reveals his enthusiasm over sales of etchings and enumerates all those sold; in another he says that more etchings were sold than drawings.[18] It is also conceivable that Lilien felt a growing urge to engage in an art form that can be acquired by collectors, hung on walls or displayed in exhibitions, rather than remain hidden within the covers of a book or put away in a newspaper bin.[19] Lilien would have been aware, to a greater or lesser extent, of the momentous implications of such a decision for the Zionist orientation of his art. Rather than harness his art to the general dissemination of the Zionist idea in the form of a book or any other form of publication, a Jewish publication, Lilien would create in the exclusive domain of the individual collector or the art connoisseur. Whether or not these implications were fully on Lilien's mind when he turned to etchings, such developments certainly add another dimension to the lessening of his ties with the Zionist Movement to which I have referred before.

A parallel development might be discerned in his etchings. Among the first etchings in 1908 and 1909 there are some, like *Ploughing Jew* and *The Wall of Lamentation in Jerusalem*, which reveal, in their fantastic quality and linear or decorative character, some persistence of older forms and motifs. But there

are also quite a few portraits, and even some depictions of "ethnic" types: a Moroccan Jew, a Yemenite Jew, a Turk. In 1910 and later, most of the prints depict authentic locations and "types." It appears that Lilien began looking for a means of conveying more effectively his newly awakened perceptions of the reality of the Land of the Bible, and he found in etching a medium most suitable to this end. The adoption of etching may in itself also have progressively enhanced his awareness of that reality and led to a growing dependence on the possibilities offered by this medium. Lilien's ever growing reliance on the etching medium is, indeed, most apparent in the illustrations for the third Bible volume and for the later New Testament section (included in the Bible editions published in 1912 and 1915), in which the character of the landscape and, at times, the textural quality follow those of the etchings. Lilien's growing adherence to this medium may have affected his work on the Bible illustrations. One may account for the unfinished state of the Westermann edition of *Die Bücher der Bibel* by citing the publisher's diminished enthusiasm for the project. It would be no less accurate, however, to see the abandonment of this project as being primarily due to Lilien's own waning interest, as evinced by the smaller number of illustrations in the last two volumes to be published.

The subjects of Lilien's etchings are not exclusively Middle Eastern; over the years he made some very fine works depicting European subjects, views of Brunswick and of Lemberg, landscapes in Galicia or portraits of Polish peasants. The Middle Eastern works, however, far outweigh the others. The question is whether this fact suffices to vindicate the viewpoint that argues for a Zionist continuity in Lilien's work. We can consider this question in the light of the importance assigned by Lilien to topographic and ethnographic accuracy. Lilien follows here a tradition whose roots lie in the 18th or early 19th-century penchant for accurate representation of subjects of interest for the historian or scientist. The Middle East was one of the preferred areas to be explored by scientists and pilgrims alike, and the publications documenting such expeditions offered scope enough for topographical artists, as did guidebooks for tourists or other pictorial surveys. I should mention, in this respect, David Roberts' volumes of lithographs published in the 1850s; Finden's *Landscape Illustrations of the Bible*, some of which were drawn by Turner, published in 1836; Bartlett's and Alom's illustrations for John Carne's *Syria, the Holy Land, etc.* published in 1836; or Charles Wilson's famous *Picturesque Palestine*, with illustrations by anonymous artists, published in the 1880s.

The 19th century saw some significant developments in the methods for attaining this truthful representation of the oriental setting. In this, the work of the artist was greatly enhanced by photography, which simply offered an easier,

faster, and more accurate way of sketching a landscape or, even better, a street scene, in preparation for a painting. Artists such as Horace Vernet and Jean-Léon Gérôme, for instance, are known to have painted with the help of photographs.[20] At times, the reliance of the artist on specific photographs done by others may border on slavish imitation. This accurate rendition of a photograph was, of course, precisely what was demanded from an engraving artist converting a photograph into an engraving. This was the only viable way for publishing photographs before the introduction of photo-mechanical printing later in the century. Indeed, it was a far more efficient method of reproduction than the pasting of separately developed photographs into a book.

However, especially in the case of landscapes, the engravings were often modified slightly; an imaginary reality was introduced to accommodate some pictorial convention that was not necessarily commensurable with the original photograph. In the far more independent context of painting, such modifications, either of the photograph or the actual scene as experienced by the artist, are certainly the rule. Topographical artists were influenced, in this respect, by a tradition of landscape painting that was based on patterns derived from the ideal landscapes of Poussin or Claude and from the somewhat later schemes of the picturesque, a term, as has been aptly pointed out, which 'counts among its many connotations the literal one of seeing nature in terms of other pictures.'[21] The Claudian structure usually suggested a closed scene, framed by trees, buildings or hills—an artful "framing" of nature—in which the foreground was occupied by figures or ruins, for instance, and the background suggested some misty distant vista, often a mountain, while the main subject lay in between the two. The Claudian scheme retained its strength in European art well into the 19th century, and it persevered even later in topographical art.[22]

The deviations from strict topographical accuracy we find in 19th century paintings or engravings of Holy Land landscapes were often intended to bring the bare, at times featureless, and desolate landscape closer to this convention.[23] Photographers too often chose their point of view to accommodate such a scheme. We may place alongside one another, for instance, the views of Jerusalem from Mount Scopus or from the Mount of Olives found in Charles Wilson's *Picturesque Palestine* (1880-84) (Fig. 6), in which trees or a small ruin frame the subject (although here the city itself occupies a very distant middle ground), and a 1900 photograph (by an American Colony photographer)[24] of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives in which trees even more obviously serve as a framing device (in a manner quite similar, in fact, to Lilien's depiction of the same motif in a New Testament illustration). It should be added that,

Fig. 6: Charles W. Wilson, "Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives", *Picturesque Palestine*, 1880-84.

alongside such or similar efforts to bend the photograph to obey the conventions of the picturesque, there were other photographers who remained on the whole quite faithful to the special character of the landscapes of the Holy Land. Indeed, some of their photographs may appear to us today quite monotonous in their dull and somber textures.

Photography, as has been amply documented in recent years, was indeed a dominant aesthetic factor in Lilien's work, serving as aide-mémoire and helping him when he was back home to recapture accurately the detail and flavor of types and places.[25] His etchings also largely reflect the two diverging attitudes noted above. Some offer artistic embellishments of the landscape that would satisfy the demands of the conventions of the picturesque, while others appear closer to the more objective approach. Lilien's famous 1911 etching of the view of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, for example, with its olive trees and Arab tent (Fig. 7), appears quite close to Francis Frith's 1862 photograph,[26] with its olive trees jutting into the city, its figures and small oriental edifice; as opposed to the stark view offered by a 1855 photograph by James Graham.[27] Lilien's etching *The Shore of the Sea of Galilee* (1919), on the other hand, represents quite a bare landscape, and is similar, in this respect, also to some of his New Testament views (Fig. 8).

Fig. 7: E. M. Lilien, *Jerusalem, from the Mount of Olives,* etching, 1911.

My concern, however, is not with Lilien's dependence on photography for his illustrations and etchings, but with the manner in which the conceptions underlying his etchings evince a basic ambivalence on his part regarding his commitment to the Zionist cause. His vision of the Holy Land, it seems, had no place in it for modern Zionism, for the actual manifestations of the Zionist effort. Nowhere in his work do we find any perception of the new. His vision was quite selective in this respect. His many portraits of Arabs, Yemenite Jews, Samaritans, and other ethnic groups are authentic representations of "types", but these were chosen precisely because they were types; the streets of Jerusalem in his graphic work are faithful representations of Jerusalem of his day, but he does not venture his look beyond them. In fact, no implements of the modern world ever encroach on his vision of the Holy Land. This is quite in contrast to what the European subjects offer. In his *Wool Market in Brunswick* (1922), for instance, we find a bicycle rider. Furthermore, all his "agricultural" subjects—*The Milker* (1914) or *The Reapers* (1914), for instance—are strictly European, while the Palestine landscapes are populated by pastoral shepherds. There are no images of the new Jewish settlements, not even of the Jews living outside the Walls of Jerusalem. He does mention, in a letter dated the 20th of April, 1906,

Fig. 8: E. M. Lilien, *The Shore of the Sea of Galilee*, etching, 1919.

the fact of his coming back from the 'Jewish colonies',[28] but he does not elaborate. This indifference seems quite odd in view of his ecstatic reference a few months earlier (significantly enough, before his trip to Palestine), to '64 flourishing colonies' and the way Jewish labor transformed swamps and deserts into 'splendid plantations and fertile fields'. He also wrote then — and this is quite telling in view of his later attitudes — about 'wretched' Arab villages that have been transformed into 'vivacious' colonies.[29] Indeed, nothing of this is present in his graphic work, and this at a time when — even before the 1920s — one could already find in various publications, postcards and newspapers attempts to present more objectively and realistically the Jewish settlement efforts, and to evoke a vision of a newly built land consisting of images of the modern *Chalutzim* (pioneers) or even of a new town such as Tel-Aviv.[30]

This consistent obliviousness to the concrete manifestations of Zionism can be considered in terms of landscape conventions employed in his etchings. Lilien, it would appear, had been emotionally bound by the picturesque sensibility, with its ruins and the sense of timeless antiquity that obviously has no place in it for the new. The introduction of figures of Arabs, with their pronounced Biblical aura, into many of these landscapes evinces a kind of

Zionist vision which, while not admitting of any mark of active Zionism, entails a perception of Jewish continuity in the Holy Land as part of an ever present reality. The other landscape scheme adopted by Lilien, based on a more faithful, topographically accurate rendering of the special character of the land, represents the religious thought underlying the tradition of scientific pilgrimages to the Holy Land— expeditions intent upon developing the scope of Biblical archeology and finding or, rather, reconstructing a Christian truth based on the observable reality of Biblical sites. In other words, the sites and the people of the Middle East were thought to offer a concrete link with the Biblical past, providing an accurate idea of how Biblical figures and places really looked. Michael Bartram, in *The Pre-Raphaelite Camera*, offers an apt remark with respect to the English context, which might be equally applicable in other instances as well. He points out that 'traditional British susceptibility to landscape was combining with Protestant devotion to the Bible to view the topography of Palestine as synonymous with the Word of God: to tamper with it was sacrilege.' He cites as an example a writer in the 1860s attesting that topographical investigations corroborate 'the minute accuracy of the inspired Record.'[31] Sites associated with episodes in the life of Christ, be they the most barren and unimposing, also confirmed the prophecy about the fate allotted the Jews who had not recognized Christ's divinity. Commenting on American photography in the Holy Land, John Davis points to the absence or suppression of the human figure in 19th-century photographs as 'laying open a rift' between the Palestinian land and the people who inhabited it:

> Up to a point, the locals were embraced by visiting Westerners, for they could also be considered as "evidence" . . . of a continuing "scriptural" way of life. Such an approach required that 19th-century Arabs and Jews remain safely within the religious past, on the other side of a distancing buffer zone of time. This temporal *cordon sanitaire* effectively filtered out the disconcerting implications of contemporaneous inhabitants, whose very presence asserted an implicit challenge to Western attempts of possession and control.[32]

Michael Bartram similarly proposes that British photographers and artists in the Pre-Raphaelite context, 'in laying a visually all-encompassing hold on the terrain and reducing or banishing the native inhabitants . . . seemed, more than the more tasteful Roberts before them, to be claiming it as theirs, feeling deep down that it belonged to them.' Bartram argues that this feeling arose

from a sense of racial superiority. To quote him again: 'The decay of the town and the villages, which illustrated the unfitness of the inhabitants, strengthened the British Protestant proprietariness.'[33]

One may ask whether a similar reasoning could be applied to Lilien, in whose works — those that are not strictly figure compositions — human figures are generally very small or are omitted altogether; whose Palestine, while retaining traces of Jewish continuity, is largely abandoned by its other inhabitants; and whose landscapes are often suffused with a sense of abandonment and dilapidation. Could we, then, view Lilien's Zionism as constituting such or similar attitudes? Perhaps it would not be proper to imply that Lilien consciously adopted such an outlook, although, by the same token, one might note the quite explicit presence of a sense of Western superiority in a 1913 etching ironically entitled *Masters of the Holy Land*, which depicts two Arabs lazily smoking a Nargileh.[34] We should remember, however, that Lilien, on the whole, was a commercial artist who geared his work to the needs and requirements of his potential clients. The voluminous listings of the sale of etchings found in his letters point to his awareness of what constituted a successful etching as far as his European collectors were concerned. His Bible illustrations, especially those used for the New Testament, evince an acquiescence on his part with the German-Protestant attitude. In all fairness, it should be added that the absence of figures in these illustrations might be explained by Lilien's reluctance to depict New Testament scenes, or by the publisher's Lutheran bias against such depictions. These or other observations, however, do not suffice to answer all the questions raised here; at best, they serve to color somewhat our perception of the basic ambivalence informing Lilien's Zionist stance, and thus they shed light not only on his later work but also on what concerns his early association with the Zionist movement.

Notes

1 This appellation was used in the introductory essay by Orna and Micha Bar-Am for the Tel-Aviv Museum catalogue, *Painting with Light: The Photographic Aspect in the Work of E. M. Lilien* (1990). The latest Lilien catalogue, published by the Open Museum, Tefen (1997), is entitled *E. M. Lilien: the First Zionist Artist*.

2 See, for instance, Henry Van de Velde, "Memoirs: 1891-1901," in Chipp 1968: 120-123.

3 Levussove 1906: 49.

4 *Ibid.:* 10.

5 See Zalmona 1983: 25-28; also Ofrat 1982: 35-36.

6 Gelber, 1986: 109-110.
7 I am indebted to Inka Bertz for much of the information regarding Lilien's work for the Labor Movement in Munich. Her article, "Lilien's Lehrjahre : Imagery and Ideology in his Work for the Labor Movement (1894-1900)," is to appear in a forthcoming collection of essays, *E. M. Lilien, Jugendstil, and Cultural Zionism*, Mark H. Gelber and Haim Finkelstein (eds.), together with several papers read at the Lilien conference held at Ben-Gurion University in 1988.
8 The later abstract phase of Art Nouveau is represented, for example, by Van de Velde's non-objective ornament.
9 See Maria Klanska, "E. M. Lilien and Drohobycz," to appear in a forthcoming collection of essays (Cf. Note 7).
10 Cf. Note 7.
11 Zalmona's text appears in Hasenclever 1987: n.p.
12 This was argued by Mark H. Gelber in a paper given at the Lilien conference held at Ben-Gurion University in 1988 (Cf. Note 7).
13 Cited in Kampf 1984: 29.
14 Milly Heyd (Heyd 1980: 66) distinguishes between the hermaphroditic nature of a young boy in an illustration by Beardsley which served Lilien as a model, and the "unquestionable" masculinity of the young boy in "The Creation of Men." It seems to me, however, that, notwithstanding his obvious male attributes, the boy still strikes a feminized figure.
15 This interpretation, to which I have been greatly indebted in my own reading of this illustration, was offered by the late Claude Gandelman in a paper given at a Lilien conference (Cf. Note 7).
16 The equation of Herzl and Moses might be conjectured in view of another Bible illustration, in which the awesome figure of Moses with the Tablets of the Law, looking both like Herzl and an Assyrian god, is seen rising like some colossus against a fantastic landscape.
17 In 1907, Lilien prepared a dedicatory page for *Sbornik*, an anthology of poems by Jewish poets in Russia planned by Maxim Gorki, that bears the Hebrew inscription "To the Martyrs of Kishinev."
18 Lilien 1985: 162; see also 178-179.
19 In a letter dated 13th of July, 1905, Lilien expresses dissatisfaction with his work and a longing for color, but adds that he cannot permit himself the luxury of painting in oil (Lilien 1985: 41).
20 Scharf 1979: 79-83; also Perez 1988: 64-74.
21 Novak 1980: 228.
22 One may consider, to cite a few examples almost at random, Bartlett's depiction of Absalom's Tomb (*Jerusalem Revisited*, 1855), with its framing trees, horsemen, and steep ridge in the foreground, and the distant promontory of the Mount of Olives, or the same subject in Charles Wilson's *Jerusalem the Holy City* (1880), again with trees serving to frame the edifice and the figures of Arab shepherds in the foreground.
23 See MaryAnne Stevens, "Western Art and its Encounter with the Islamic World 1798-1914," in Stevens 1984: 19-20.
24 See Schiller 1980: 18-19.

25 I have dealt with this in detail in my paper "Lilien's Etchings: From *Jugendstil* to 'Photo'-Realism, " read at the Lilien conference held at Ben-Gurion University in 1988. The subject has since been fully documented in the 1990 exhibition at the Tel-Aviv Museum (Cf. Note 1).
26 Schiller 1980: 17
27 Peretz 1988: 70-71
28 Lilien 1985: 80.
29 *Ibid.:* 38.
30 Many of these publications are illustrated in the catalogue for the exhibition *Visual Images of Zionism 1897-1947*. Beit Ha'tfuzot, Tel-Aviv, 1996-7.
31 Bartram 1985: 103.
32 Davis 1992: 251
33 Bartram 1985: 105
34 This is Lilien's title or, at least, one which he made use of in referring to this etching. See Lilien 1985: 175.

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