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The Pijade Brothers and the “Serbian Renaissance”

In 1907, David S. Pijade (1881–1942), a young poet, writer, and translator of Sephardic Jewish origin from Belgrade, published a lengthy text entitled “Serbian Renaissance” in the cultural review *Pregled*, founded and edited by him and Velimir Rajić. Pijade composed the text himself in an effort to introduce a Serbian audience to novel ideas, opening a series in what would prove to be an innovative literary and artistic, albeit short-lived, journal.¹ The essay “Serbian Renaissance” can be understood as a wake-up-call which Pijade addressed to his future readers, young Serbian intellectuals, in whom he hoped to awaken an appreciation for the autochthone Serbian folk culture and artistic heritage, and thus arouse their national pride (Fig. 1). Pijade, referring to himself as a native Serb, opened by criticizing the so-called city intelligentsia who, according to him, spoil the natural ingenuity and creativity of the simple folk:

We Serbs are very careless. The best example is a poor taste for beautiful, which reigns in our midst. That we, in spite of our natural intelligence, develop very slowly – is a fact. Our peasant is much better off than the peasants of our neighbors: he is sharper, more cunning and more flexible in comprehending. The foundation is thus good. We should not complain about it. The fault is with our city intelligentsia; with those who the folk listen to – ‘our learned, educated people’. A spiritual elite that we actually do not have... There was never more intellectual superficiality and shallowness than today. We, truth to be told, follow foreign influences; but those are not the high cultural influences, which would produce an epochal meaning, as it was, for example, with the Turkish

¹ *Pregled* was published in merely three issues in September 1907, October 1907, and January 1908, in Belgrade. Velimir Rajić (1879–1915) was a Serbian poet; his book *Pesme i proza* [Poems and Prose] appeared in 1908. I would like to thank to Dr. Raka Levi and Biljana Albahari from Belgrade for their generous help with locating and obtaining the copies of *Pregled* and other relevant material used in preparation of this article.



Fig. 1. David Pijade (center, seated) surrounded by his bohemian friends – Serbian artists, writers and poets.

Photograph, n.d. The Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade. K-Pijade.

influence. In contrast – what reigns is a kind of colorful variety, an astonishing mish-mash. We need to escape from this chaos as soon as possible. Otherwise, we will experience an unprecedented cultural breakdown (David Pijade, 1, 1).

While continuing to mercilessly whip the mediocracy and falseness of contemporary literary critics and a cultural atmosphere poisoning the youth, Pijade first turned to folk poetry as a source for salvation, but soon expanded his admiration to the entirety of Serbian folk heritage, including music, painting and architecture. Pijade concludes that the source of learning and inspiration for the ‘Serbian Renaissance’ was in the Middle Ages, playing a similar role as Antiquity did for the Italian Renaissance. In this grand epoch of Serbian folk creativity, one should search for the roots of national revival, for the ‘Serbian Renaissance.’ “Our folk poems are classical creations,” writes David Pijade. “And as such [they are] of an unmeasurable value for any art that counts with great future.” He continues:

This was recognized by both Vuk [Karadžić] and [Đuro] Daničić. The Serbian Renaissance began with them. Folk poems are our first “excavations.” But it does not end with them. The unexcavated national treasure presently before us is immense: as in the folk poems, so too in the motifs for music, painting and architecture. Ahead of us lies a new world – that merely awaits a creative spirit of one Michelangelo, in order to be revived (David Pijade, 1, 4).²

In this spirit, *Pregled* published sequels in all of the three existing issues entitled “Reflections upon Renaissance and Michelangelo,” penned by Momčilo Živanović, a Serbian painter. They were based upon his lectures held in Munich, May 1907, in the Serbian art students’ club (David Pijade, 1, 20).³ However, what is more intriguing, all three issues also included selection from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, edited and translated from German by David Pijade.⁴ Although the choice of those texts may at first appear random, I suggest that it projects the

² Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864) was a Serbian philologist and linguist, and an important reformer of the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet. He also collected folk literature and published collections of Serbian folk poems, stories, and Serbian proverbs. Đuro Daničić (1825–1882) was a Serbian philologist, translator, linguistic historian, and lexicographer. He supported and extended Karadžić’s work in the field of the linguistics.

³ Momčilo Živanović (1880–1941) was then a student at the Munich’s Academy of Art.

⁴ Pijade’s selection from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* included: “The Drunken Song” (IV, 79) in 1 *Pregled* (Sept 1907): 12–19; “Old and New Tablets” (III, 56); in 2 *Pregled* (Oct 1907): 74–75; “On Child and Marriage” (I, 20); “The Night Song” (II, 31) and “The Return Home” (III, 53) in 3 *Pregled* (Jan 1908): 126–133.

editors of *Pregled*'s higher aim of rejuvenating Serbian intellectual life and of creating a new modernist culture. Moreover, although addressing the Serbian milieu, David Pijade reflected here upon similar trends at the time among young European Jewish intellectuals involved with Jewish renewal – the so-called Jewish Renaissance.

David Pijade was the third child of six, born to a prosperous Sephardic Jewish family in Belgrade. Uziel Pijade (ca. 1795–1875), David's grandfather, was a petty merchant from Vidin, Bulgaria, before coming to Serbia. He probably arrived towards the end of the 1820s, with the influx of Jews to Serbia created by more favorable conditions introduced by Prince Miloš Obrenović, the ruler of the new Serbian state, which had only recently gained independence from the Ottoman Empire (Nešović, 15–30). After passing through several smaller Serbian towns, often not welcoming Jews, viewing them as competitors still loyal to the Turks, the elder Pijade eventually moved to the more tolerant Belgrade. He settled in Dorćol, the Jewish quarter situated at the banks of Danube, in the early 1830s. Uziel's son, David Pijade's father Samuel (1842–1927) became a textile merchant. In 1878 he married Sara Ruso (1854–1903), from a wealthy and cultured Sephardic family from the town of Ruse, in Bulgaria, a port on the Danube. Over the course of the nineteenth century, especially after Bulgaria gained independence from the Ottoman Empire, Ruse, known also by its Turkish name Rustchuk, became one of the major cultural and economic centers of the new state. The bride brought with her a rich dowry which helped the family's move from Jewish Dorćol to a more upscale Belgrade's neighborhood, and her husband's establishment of the successful textile firm which soon gained local and international renown. Aside from her mother tongue Judeo-Spanish, Sara also spoke German and chose a German-speaking nanny for her children. Two girls and four boys thus grew up in a household with three spoken languages: Serbian, Judeo-Spanish, and German. In addition, they also learned French.

In contrast to this multilingual household, the father named his wholesale textile firm, which he founded with his brother David, "Samuilo Pijade and Brother." The use of the Serbian-sounding name Samuilo in the firm's name, rather than Samuel, derived from the Hebrew or Sami in Judeo-Spanish, also reflects the family's striving to acculturate into Serbian society. Moreover, since the Pijade family's social ascent, similar to that of other wealthy Sephardic families in Belgrade, was closely connected to the political birth of independent Serbia, it is not surprising that the façade of their firm's building apparently bore a large colored image of Miloš Obrenović in his princely attire, topped by the Serbian coat of arm (Nešović, 28). This mural, painted as a token of gratitude to a ruler benevolent towards the

Fig. 2. The façade of Samuilo Pijade’s textile firm with the image of Miloš Obrenović in princely attire, topped by the Serbian coat of arms. Drawn by memory by Živorad Nastasijević. Photograph, n. d. The Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade. K-Pijade.



Jews, taught the Pijade children about their father’s loyalty to Serbia. The multilingual and multicultural atmosphere introduced by their mother at home was thus complemented by their father’s public expression of Serbian patriotism (Fig. 2).

Jewish Serbian patriotism resulted from the acculturation processes into Serbian society and the quest for equality. Arriving to Belgrade in larger numbers in 1521, immediately after the Turkish conquest of the city, Jews settled in a separate quarter and preserved Sephardic identity and traditional life for centuries, in what was then part of the Ottoman Empire. Gradually, influenced by the nineteenth-century quest for modernity and equality, they began their own acculturation and integration into the economic, political, and cultural life of the capital. However, Serbian uprisings against the Ottoman Empire, and especially Miloš Obrenović’s benevolent rule towards them, accelerated Jewish integration into the now new, Slavic entity. Thus, during the Serbian-Turkish Wars (1876–1877 and 1877–1878), after being granted the right to serve in the Serbian army, Jews took an active part in fighting the Turks. The final push for acquisition of equal rights was the Berlin Congress in 1878, when Serbian representatives agreed, in exchange for international recognition of Serbia’s independence, to fully recognize the religious, political, and juridical equality of all members of different religions living in its territory. This commitment, which included Jews, was finally implemented ten years later in a constitution passed in 1888 (Koljanin, 157–177).

This newly acquired Serbian patriotism, as that of Samuilo Pijade, fit the definition supplied by David Koen, a Belgrade Jewish lawyer and man of letters, who published a passionate Serbian patriotic pamphlet in 1897 entitled *Sermons*

Dedicated to Serbian Youth of Mosaic Faith. Opening with an enthusiastic essay, Koen included a series of lectures delivered between 1881 and 1887 in provincial Serbian-Jewish communities. Koen preached in favor of Serbian national identity while simultaneously calling for the preservation of ties with the Jewish faith. He believed that the Serbian nation had an important historical mission in Europe and viewed Serbia as a tolerant state characterized by “the spirit of freedom, equality, and brotherhood, without religious or national discrimination” (Koen, n.p.).

The multiculturalism and multilingualism experienced in his childhood home, along with the Serbian patriotism he grew up with, strongly influenced David Pijade’s intellectual development. In addition to publishing *Pregled*, discussed above, he also wrote for several Serbian literary newspapers. In 1900 and in 1912 he published two books of his own poetry and in 1921, a short—for his time unusual—novel dealing with tragic lesbian love. Even more important were his translations, not only of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but also of Wilhelm Jerusalem’s *Introduction into Philosophy*, Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali*, all of which were printed by the publishing house of Geca Kon, a well-known Belgrade Jewish bookstore owner and publisher. In his youth, David closely followed Leon Tolstoy’s ideas, to the point of dressing like a *Narodnik* in a Russian peasant shirt. He practiced vegetarianism and throughout his life remained a staunch supporter of pronounced liberal worldviews that included, among others, women’s liberation. Despite these intellectual interests and literary talents, his family sent David to Karlsruhe, in Germany, to study mechanical engineering, as a more “practical” profession. Although he completed his studies, he never actually worked as an engineer, nor did he settle in the privileged environment of Belgrade, the state capital; rather, upon returning to Serbia he idealistically chose to work as a teacher of the German language in state high schools in the provincial towns of Kruševac and Valjevo, a position he filled between 1909 and 1920. Fortunately for his career, David began his sojourn abroad, before moving to Germany, by studying philosophy from 1900 to 1902 at the University of Vienna (Nešović, 35–36, 856–857; Palavestra, 81–82).

While in Vienna, David Pijade was exposed to Jewish national and cultural renaissance. A number of Sephardic Jewish students there were members of the Balkan Jewish student societies. In 1896, a group originally from Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Rustchuk, decided to form an academic society of Sephardic Jews which they named *Esperanza* (“hope” in Judeo-Spanish). The society served social and cultural aims, helping its members develop awareness of their Sephardic heritage by studying its language, history, literature, and philosophy, as well as by discussing common problems. In addition, it offered an array of academic facilities and

activities: a large, multilingual library and established literary evenings and lectures (Amor and Schmädell, 83–102; Vučina, 341–360). Although it is uncertain whether David Pijade was also a member of Esperanza, he was almost certainly familiar with its Belgrade members and likely took advantage of the cultural activities the society offered.

It is fitting that a student society like Esperanza should appear on the scene precisely in fin-de-siècle Vienna. The capital of the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire was at that time a natural locale for seeking national identity, especially for Jews, who in the second half of the nineteenth century had been arriving to the city from all regions of the Empire. Sephardic Jews from Bulgaria, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina naturally felt an affinity with each other as they not only shared common Sephardic origins and the Judeo-Spanish language, but also historical ties with the Ottoman Empire and familiarity with southern Slavic languages and cultures. *Kadimah*, the first Jewish nationalist student organization, which served as a model for later ones, was already established in Vienna in 1882 by Nathan Birnbaum, a writer, philosopher, and one of the originators of pre-Herzlian Zionist ideology. Birnbaum propagated the perception of Jews as an ethnic entity, a people, rather than—as commonly accepted—Austrians (or Hungarians, Germans, etc.) of Mosaic faith (Olson, 24–66). Some Esperanza members were also ardent supporters of Zionism.⁵

Although David Pijade was probably exposed to Friedrich Nietzsche’s writings while in Vienna studying philosophy, his interest in the radical German philosopher’s ideas was encouraged by their Jewish reception, especially by cultural Zionists. Nietzsche, who at the turn of the century offered a far-reaching intellectual transformation through the creation of new values, and thus profoundly influenced the development of modernism, made a strong impact upon the first Zionist writers and leaders. Early Zionism, primarily a secular and modernizing movement, was acutely aware of, what they viewed as the crisis of the Jewish life experienced at the turn of the century: both in the sphere of the religious tradition, as well as in the bourgeois attempts of assimilation. Nietzsche’s call for renewal enabled the movement’s criticism of those entities and the final rupture with Jewish life in the Diaspora; it encouraged a drive towards the rebirth of a new Jew, a reborn Hebrew

⁵ An unpublished article about Dr. Isaac Alcalay, the future chief rabbi of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, includes a description of a Hanukkah ball organized by him in the winter of 1902 in Vienna, at the Esperanza society, which hosted Theodor Herzl himself (Eventov Archives, Jerusalem, file B-221).

man (Golomb 2004, 1; Aschheim, 102). Martin Buber was especially fascinated by Nietzsche, whom he praised as a heroic figure, and strove to introduce Nietzschean philosophy into Zionism (Mendes-Flohr). Already as a teenager he was enchanted by *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and even started to translate it into Polish, a project never completed. In 1900, he published an essay presenting Nietzsche as a forerunner of a new culture (Mendes-Flohr, 109). The most significant outcome of this influence upon the Jewish national awakening was Buber's essay "Jewish Renaissance," printed in January 1901, in the first issue of *Ost und West*, the illustrated monthly for modern Jewry, published between 1901 and 1923 in Berlin.

One of the main aims of this journal was to bring the rich eastern European Jewish tradition to secular Western Jews, while introducing modern Western scholarship to Jews in the East. With its numerous reproductions of Jewish images and art works created by a growing number of artists of Jewish origin, *Ost und West* also served as a trigger for imagining a new Jewish national identity which—along with history, literature, folklore, and music—also included the visual arts (Rosenfeld). Buber's essay published in the first issue of *Ost und West* was a wake-up call for the Jewish people who had, according to him, lived only a half-life, imprisoned by their inner "ghetto-state" of mind imposed by the exile. They were now called upon to join the reawaking of a universal culture of beauty and to rediscover their national soul. This rebirth should, as the Italian Renaissance, turn for inspiration to ancient sources, but only in order to use them for its own rejuvenation and creation of the new (Buber, 8–10). In December of the same year, Buber and Ephraim Moses Lilien, a Polish Jewish artist living and creating in Germany, curated an exhibition that accompanied the 5th Zionist Congress held in Basel, showing in it a selection of artworks created by a number of Western and Eastern European artists of Jewish origin. Buber viewed here potential for the rebirth of a national "Jewish art" (Schmidt).

In the essay "Serbian Renaissance," David Pijade called on his fellow Serbs to abandon foreign influences and develop their own inherent sense for beauty rooted in national heritage, thus echoing both Nietzsche and Buber. He too, as young Buber, translated excerpts from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and wrote poetry in Zarathustrian style. Pijade's suggestion to turn to its own, Serbian "antiquity" – i.e., the Middle Ages, and to employ national heritage – folk poetry, music, painting and architecture to rejuvenate contemporary culture, once again followed the same path. However, in spite of the fact that he was of Jewish origin, in contrast to the call for a rebirth of a new *Jewish* culture of Buber and the Zionists, Pijade fully integrated his Serbian surroundings and took up the role of a Serbian cultural forbearer. Moreover, as a Sephardic Jew, whose forefathers were welcomed by

the Muslim Ottoman Empire after the 1492 expulsion from Spain, he still felt, as uttered in the opening lines of his essay, that Turkish high cultural influences had an epochal meaning. Nevertheless, Serbian patriotism and a sense of loyalty towards the newly emerging, independent, Christian country he lived in prevailed, and Pijade, using the knowledge he acquired during his sojourn in Vienna, applied it to the Serbian cultural surroundings he identified with.

The loss of homeland, exile and rebirth were motifs accompanying the nation-building process of both the Zionists and the Serbs. In his “Serbian Renaissance” David Pijade reminds the modern generation of Serbs of their glorious and tragic past, calling his contemporaries to view it as a source of inspiration:

Serbian glory and splendor were buried at Kosovo.⁶ The best that there was perished. The knights and lords that remained, in order to save their lives and continue serving their people – spread out over the entire country. Those were folk poets and folk teachers for the period of its slavery. Their mission ended in 1804.⁷ There are a people who became great when enslaved. Let us open the eyes wide. Perhaps this is the case with us. If so, it is sad... Let us show that we are also independent and strong enough for a great culture.

Let us continue the work initiated by Vuk and Daničić. Our entire life asks for a rebirth, not only one branch of it. The Serbian Renaissance must be foremost the Renaissance of Serbian thought and feeling (David Pijade 1, 6).

The parallel between Jewish and Serbian historical destiny was stressed by a Serbian painter Živko Petrović (1806–1868). Between 1844 and 1862 he painted three versions of a painting entitled *Jews on the Waters of the Babylon*, basing himself upon the painting of Eduard Bendemann, a German Jewish artist, who created a work with the same subject in 1832 (Figs. 3–4) (Timotijević, 81–98). The comparison is obvious: exiled and enslaved Jews bemoaning the loss of the Temple and Kingdom of Judah in Bendemann’s work reminded the Serbian painter of the destiny of his own people: Serbs enslaved and dispersed by the Ottomans. Sig-

⁶ Pijade relates here to the fateful Battle of Kosovo held between the Serbian and Ottoman armies in 1389. Although both sides suffered great losses, Serbs gradually lost their autonomy. The Battle of Kosovo became an important part of Serbian tradition and national identity.

⁷ In 1804, the First Serbian Uprising against the Ottoman Empire started. It lasted until 1813. Although the Ottomans reconquered Serbia, the Uprising was the beginning of the rebellion and, being the first attempt of a Christian population to resist the Sultan’s rule, became a symbol of the nation-building process in the Balkans.



Fig. 3. Eduard Bendemann, *On the Rivers of Babylon*, 1832.
Wallraf-Richartz Museum and Foundation Corboud, Cologne,
Gemäldesammlung, Inv. No. WRM 1939.
Photo © Rheinisches Bildarchiv, rba_d000114.



Fig. 4. Živko Petrović, *Jews on the Waters of Babylon*, 1844.
Galerija Matice Srpske, Novi Sad. Inv. no. GMS/U 1494.

nificantly, in Petrović’s painting the cityscape recalling Babylon, on the left, is replaced by a dome-covered building and a column standing next to it, on the right (East?), recalling a mosque and a minaret in what seems to be Istanbul. Moreover, Bendemann’s aged Jew in handcuffs appears in Petrović’s painting as a young enslaved man whose features strongly recall the traditional appearance of Kraljević Marko (Prince Marko). A fourteenth-century Serbian prince whose memory was preserved in Serbian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian oral folk traditions, Kraljević Marko was remembered as a noble protector of the weak and a fearless fighter against the Turks (Timotijević, 87, n. 37). David Pijade’s recollection of perseverance of national identity during an era of exile and national tragedy, continue to build on these parallels.

David Pijade’s call to turn to the Serbian Middle Ages to renew contemporary creativity was put in practice by his younger brother Moša Pijade (1890–1957). Moša, the youngest in the family, was allowed – in contrast to his elder brothers – to follow his talent and his heart’s desire, and to study art. Although already from the mid-1920’s increasingly involved with leftist political movements and later primarily known as a high-ranking member of the Yugoslav Communist Party and Tito’s close aid, Moša Pijade was actually a professional painter. He first studied art in Belgrade, and later, between 1906 and 1909, at the Munich Academy of Arts and in Paris, at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière (Rajner, 15–56).

Once back in Belgrade, lacking financial support due to his father’s bankruptcy and struggling as an artist, in 1913 Moša Pijade decided, like his older brother David, to leave the city in order to teach in Ohrid, Macedonia. Becoming part of the Serbian Kingdom after the confrontation with the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, Macedonia was considered by Serbs as underdeveloped and ‘in need of help’. Thus, from the Serbian point of view, young Pijade’s decision was both idealistic and patriotic. He taught drawing and penmanship, French, and German in the local school. Privately, he hoped that moving to the picturesque old lakeside town of Ohrid would inspire his artistic creativity. Although his stay was cut short by the outbreak of World War I, the encounter with the Ohrid’s eleventh-century Byzantine church St. Sophia inspired Moša to compose an essay. He described it poetically, stressing its neglect and damage during the period of Ottoman rule, especially the “suffering” and mutilated frescoes of Christian saints, “stabbed” and demolished by iconoclastic Turks (Moša Pijade, 115–118). Although acknowledging that it was built from slabs of stone from a pagan temple that had stood on the same site in antiquity and was destroyed by Christian newcomers (as were frescoes by the Islamic conqueror) to build a church, Pijade expressed hope for its rebirth. “This is the soul of our past greatness,” he

wrote in 1915, in the midst of the war, echoing his brother's words written eight years earlier, "our old art that now wants to be resurrected. And it moves towards its resurrection" (Moša Pijade, 118). His sojourn in Ohrid not only inspired him to write about the glory of the town's St. Sophia Church, but it seems that he also visited other Macedonian monasteries to observe their frescoes.

Moša Pijade recalled this encounter in 1920 when turning in his own art to Serbian folk-poetry and medieval art as a source of inspiration. Using the Slavic-sounding pseudonym M. S. Plavšić, he illustrated the Serbian folk poem *Uroš and Mrnjavčevići*, a folk-poem from the collection of Vuk Karadžić belonging to a cycle of

folk poetry dedicated to Kraljević Marko. The poem was published as a single art-book by the Belgrade Jewish publisher Armin Schwarz (Nešović, 154, 201; Rajner, 47). Moša Pijade created black-and-white pen drawings (occasionally accentuated by red) that accompany the Cyrillic text, imitating the Old-Slavic uncial script and also designed by the artist (Fig. 5).

The illustrations recall the graphic Jugendstil art that Pijade encountered during the days of his youth in Munich. Ephraim Moses Lilien, the creator of new, Zionist-inspired art, also used black-and-white ink drawings when illustrating biblical text and scenes rooted in oriental Palestine (Heyd, 1–28). The combination of modern design and national themes was characteristic of fin-de-siècle creations of central and east-European national schools of art, from Prague and Zagreb, to Budapest and Kraków. While searching for a model in the Slavic realm, closer to Serbia's tradition and political affiliation, Pijade may have been also thinking of the Russian art he probably viewed while abroad. During his stay in Paris, Diaghilev's Ballets Russes theater presented its first season (Garafola; Mayer, 15–44). Widely



Fig. 5. M. S. Plavšić (aka Moša Pijade), *Uroš and Mrnjavčevići* (Belgrade: Napredak, 1920), frontispiece.



Fig. 6. M. S. Plavšić (aka Moša Pijade),
Uroš and Mrnjavčevići
(Belgrade: Napredak, 1920), n. p., detail.

popular with Parisian audiences, the colorful, “Oriental” performances staged in the Chatellet Theater may have caught young Pijade’s fancy. In 1912, one of his Munich friends in Paris, the Croatian painter Miroslav Kraljević, produced several drawings based upon performances of the Ballet Russes (Gagro, 37, 88). The dynamism of the movements, rich patterns, and exaggerated gestures of Moša Pijade’s characters in the *Uroš and Mrnjavčevići* illustrations recall creations of Ballet Russes’ legendary costume and scenery creator Léon Bakst (born Leyb-Khaim Rosenberg). They closely resemble the ones Bakst, the fin-de-siècle Russian-Jewish artist, created for the famous performance of Igor Stravinsky’s *Firebird* (1910), for which—befitting a ballet based upon a Russian folktale—he turned to Russian folk and church art (Pruzhan, 222; figs. 65–66). In like manner, while illustrating the Serbian traditional folk poem, Moša Pijade followed his brother’s David’s advice and turned to local medieval art for inspiration.

Pijade’s illustrations for *Uroš and Mrnjavčevići* are thus strikingly akin to frescoes in the twelfth century Nerezi and fourteenth century Psača monasteries (Figs. 6–7). Combining art from the glorious Serbian past with the modernist designs of Lilien and Bakst, Pijade tried to present his version of modern Serbian national art.⁸ For this reason, he may have also chosen to appear in the book under

⁸ Modern Serbian national art inspired by its medieval artistic heritage was developed later by the “Zograf” group, founded in 1927 after the Second International Conference of Byzantine Studies held in Belgrade, which encouraged interest in the Serbian Byzantine artistic legacy (Trifunović, 129–130).

a Serbian-sounding pseudonym— “illustrator M. S. Plavšić.”

However, by 1920 the *Uroš and Mrnjavčevići* project appeared to be a belated attempt to revive Serbian national art by using the autochthone folk heritage. Universal modernism and the art created in Paris were much more attractive and influential for the local artists active in the interwar period, while Serbia itself became part of the new country founded after World War I – the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. By then, David and Moša Pijade had begun to take dissimilar paths: David became increasingly involved with the Sephardic movement, while Moša, engrossed in communist ideology, soon became a victim of his beliefs and, due to his illegal political activities, sentenced to fourteen years in the Yugoslav monarchy’s prisons.



Fig. 7. The fresco of King Vukašin Mrnjavčević. Psača Monastery, Macedonia, 14th century.
©Photo Archive Ivan Djordjević, University of Belgrade.

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The activities of the Pijade brothers, focused on the revival of Serbian folk roots as a basis for the rebirth of Serbian national art and culture, were not unusual for Jews living among the Slavs. The populist movement in Tsarist Russia in the late 1860s and early 1870s, provided an example – like the Russians, other Slavic nations felt the need to “go to the people” (Veidlinger, 1). This call had a clear revolutionary resonance: with the Russians only recently emerged from serfdom, it implied equality of all men; for other Slavic nations living under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, “going to the people” expressed their need for freedom and self-determination, a striving for national redemption and cultural rebirth. Some young Jews living among the Slavs also abandoned their loyalties to Imperial powers and embraced the enthusiasm of the national movements, hoping

to become equal members of them. Maurycy Gottlieb’s *Self-Portrait Dressed as a Polish Nobleman* (1874) or Boris Schatz’s sculptures depicting Bulgarian national themes, created between 1895 and 1902 as part of his all-encompassing efforts to develop a Bulgarian national school of art, are probably the best-known examples (Mendelsohn, 110; Zalmona, 15–17). David and Moša Pijade displayed a similar enthusiasm in the Serbian realm. However, as elsewhere, it was a short-lived experiment, soon to be dominated by other concerns.

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