# IN THE LAND OF HAGAR

## The Jews of Hungary: History, Society and Culture



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The Jews of Hungary: History, Society and Culture

A series of Books
on Jewish Communities
around the World

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# IN THE LAND OF HAGAR

## The Jews of Hungary: History, Society and Culture

Editor: Anna Szalai

Beth Hatefutsoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora

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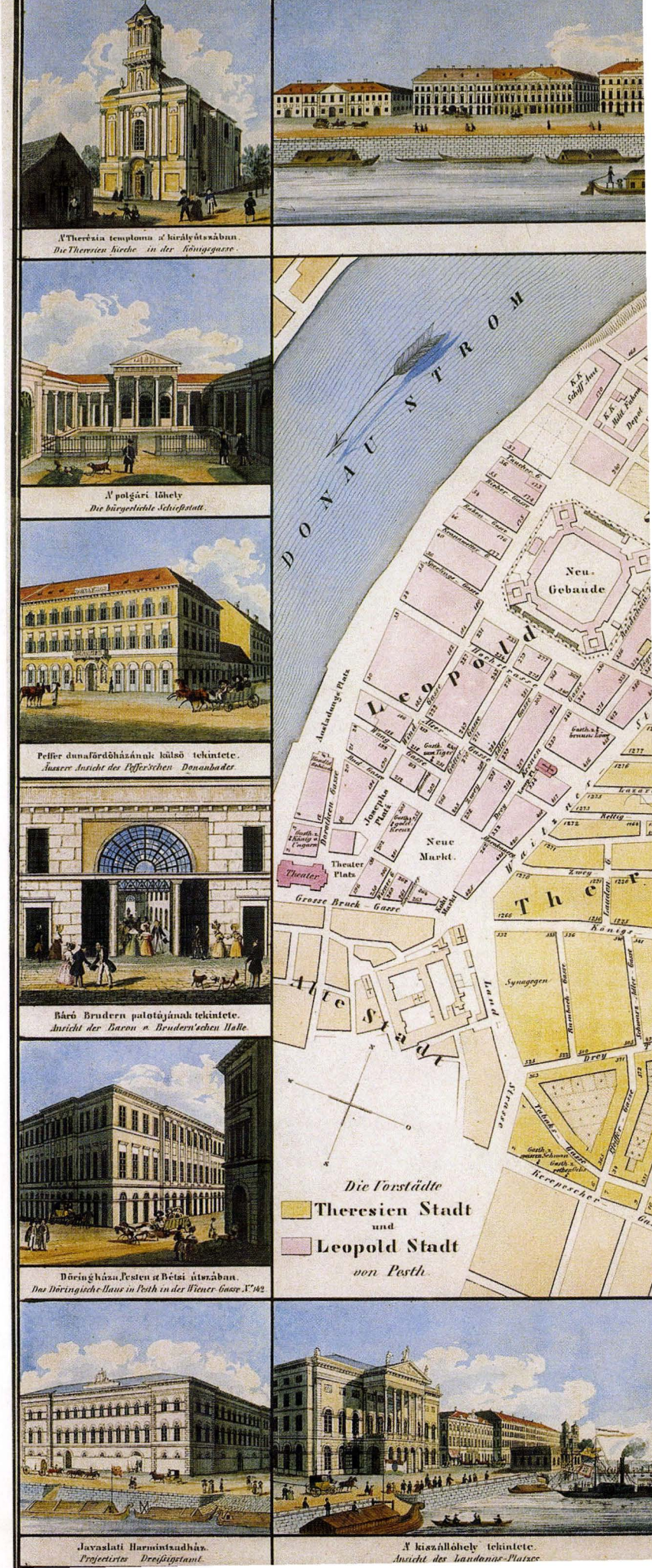
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*We also wish to thank all our friends who helped us.*




Terézváros, the Jewish quarter of Pest
(Series of maps drawn by Vasquez, 1837)

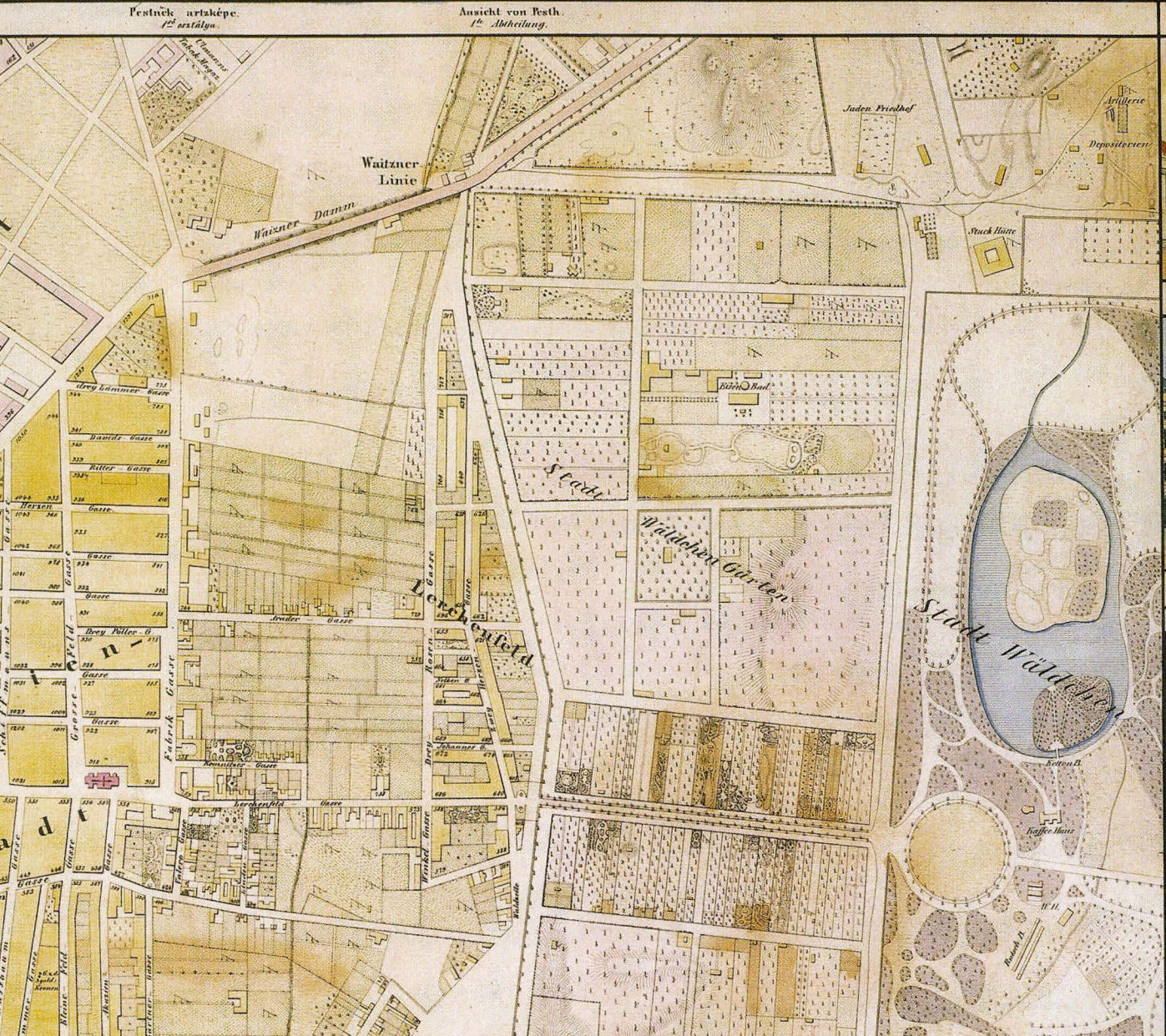


Pestnek artzképe.
1ső osztálya.

Ansicht von Pesth.
1te Abtheilung.



Az Evangélikusok temploma.
Die Evangelische Kirche.






Peffertől állitott dunafördö
Das Peffer'sche Donaubad.



Nagy vendégfogadó a' Magyar-Királyhoz
Hotel zum König von Ungarn.



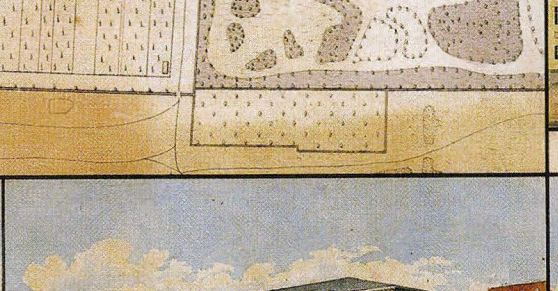
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Das Marzibani'sche Palais in der Götzergasse.



Wudianer Rudolf háza a' duna mellett.
Das Rudolph Wudianer'sche Haus an der Donau.



Buda és Pest tekintete alólról vizellenében.



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Theater Platz.



A' Vármegyeháza tekintete hátulról.
Rückwärtige Front des Comitathauses.

# Contents


6 A Message from ELIE WIESEL

9 Preface – DAVID ALEXANDER

10 Introduction – ANNA SZALAI

**History – From the Beginning Until 1849**

13 A Brief History of the Jews of Hungary Until the Fall of the Medieval Hungarian State – GYÖRGY HARASZTI

19 The Annals of the Jews of the Seven Communities: A Model of Jewish Ghetto Life – SHLOMO SPITZER

29 A Short History of the Jews in Hungary: The Turkish Occupation and Resettlement (1541–1790) – GYÖRGY HARASZTI

39 The Effect of the Enlightenment on Hungarian Jewry – ANIKÓ PREPUK

**Economy**

47 Jewish Integration into the Hungarian Economy – YEHUDA DON

55 Family Life and Family Strategy among the Jewish Elite of Pest in the Reform Era – VERA BÁCSKAI

**Education and Community Life**

59 The Development of Jewish Schools in Hungary – LÁSZLÓ FELKAI

61 Textbooks for Hebrew-Language Study in Jewish Schools in Hungary – ARIEH LEWY

67 The Yeshivot in Hungary in the 19th and the 20th Centuries – YEHIEL ZVI MOSKOVITS

75 A Promise Fulfilled: A Brief History of Hassidism in Hungary – KINGA FROJIMOVICS

81 Rabbinical Training in Hungary and the Rabbinical Seminary of Hungary – JÓZSEF SCHWEITZER

88 Musicians of Traditional Religious Jewish Life – JUDIT FRIGYESI

93 Synagogues in Hungary: A Short Survey from the Middle Ages to Modern Times – RUDOLF KLEIN

102 The Threefold Path: From the Split to the Forced Unification – KINGA FROJIMOVICS

**History – From 1849 until 1920**

113 The Development of Anti-Semitism Up to the Collapse of the Monarchy – RAPHAEL VAGO

**Zionism**

121 Herzl and His Hungarian Friends in Paris 1891–1895 – HAYA HAREL

128 The Jews of Hungary and Eretz Israel – DAVID GILADI

133 Zionism in Hungary Between the Two World Wars – ATTILA NOVÁK

141 Jewish Self-Defense at the End of World War I – RAPHAEL VAGO

**Budapest**

145 The Jewish Bourgeoisie of Budapest – VICTOR KARADY

155 Several Truths About the Orthodox Community in Budapest – DOV LANDAU

165 The Hungarian Jews and Architectural Style – RUDOLF KLEIN

**Provinces**

173 Jews of the Hungarian Provinces Until 1918 – RAPHAEL VAGO

185 Provincial Jewry in Hungary – VICTOR KARADY

197 Jewish Wedding Customs in the Sub-Carpathian Region – MIKLÓS RÉKAI

204 Yiddish in Hungary – VERA SZABÓ

**History – The Inter-War Period**

207 Anti-Semitism in the Inter-War Period – RAPHAEL VAGO

**Culture**

215 A Brief Survey of Jewish Scholars in Hungary – ISTVÁN GAZDA

218 Jewish Sportsmen in Hungary – ÁGNES KELETI

221 Jewish Presence in Hungarian Journalism – GÉZA BUZINKAY

227 Jewish Authors and Jewish Themes in Hungarian Literature from the 1840s to the Holocaust – ANNA SZALAI

235 In the Service of Thalia – TAMÁS GAJDÓ

243 Jewish Photographers in Hungary – MICHAEL SIMON

249 In the Maze of Movie – ISTVÁN NEMESKÜRTY

252 Secular Jewish Musicians in Hungary – JUDIT FRIGYESI

257 Jewish Fine Arts in Hungary – FRIGYES PORSCHT

**History – The Holocaust**

265 The Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry – RAPHAEL VAGO

**Post-war Period**

278 Jews in Post-war Hungary – ANDRÁS KOVÁCS – ESZTER ANDOR

284 A Generation Discovers its Identity – NOMI GUR

291 About the Authors
293 Selected Bibliography
295 Index – Persons
301 Index – Places
303 Sources of Pictures





# A Message from Elie Wiesel

At home, we spoke Yiddish and Hungarian. But between the two world wars we were Romanian citizens. For reasons which escaped me as a child, doubtless dating back to events under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, we felt Hungarian. My mother, an exceptionally cultivated woman equally at home in a number of languages and cultures, adored Hungarian literature. Did she ever read a Romanian book? I have my doubts. Poetry, novels, theater: none of these were of interest to her unless they were in Hungarian. Did this apply to all the Jews in my home town, and in other towns too? I have no idea.

All I know is that many of them far and wide, particularly in "historical" Hungary, remained deeply attached to all things Magyar. And naturally they were proud of their Hungarian Jewish brethren who had managed to make a name for themselves in so many Jewish domains.

They had every reason to be proud. The pages of Jewish history books abound with examples. Religious thinkers, social critics, scholars, journalists and physicians, visionaries and exponents of the powerful Jewish message, interpreters of Halacha, political militants, defenders of our people, artistic figures, composers and musicians: in this short preface, I will refer to none of these. They have been given their rightful place in this work which happily, albeit somewhat late in the day, brings them all together and pays tribute to them.

What would the State of Israel have been – indeed, what would the Jewish history of recent centuries have been – without the hope and glory that distinguished the far-reaching and momentous contributions made on all levels by Hungarian Jewry?

True, some Jews, driven by excessive patriotism, adopted all of the Hungarian people's causes and took part in all their struggles, opting for assimilation, often through conversion. How many were they? Where were they from? What were their motives? What explanation can be given for their desire to sever their ties with our people? Is this chapter also part of "the history of Hungarian Jewry"? If it is, it is fairly marginal – in other words, not necessarily typical.

On the other hand, what is typical is the naive confidence, the utter faith that most Jews placed in the friendship towards them of the Hungarian people and government, particularly in the last but one phase of their coexistence. Despite Hungary's classical more or less anti-Jewish legislation (Jewish quotas at the country's leading universities, restrictions on employment of Jews in teaching and commerce), we were convinced that the country's supreme authorities would never sacrifice us to Nazi Germany's insane ambitions.

◁ Memorial Tree, Budapest
In memory of
the victims of the Holocaust.
(Photo by Doron Ritter)

My own parents, although Jewish to their very core, with Jewish roots reaching back into the mists of time, would have sworn that although Hungary might go up to a certain point because of pressure from Berlin and the Nyilas with their predilection for anti-Semitic violence, there was a line that it would never cross. What the German Jews thought of Germany, we in turn said about Hungary: such a cultivated, enlightened people, so emancipated, would not disgrace itself to the extent of committing, say, a nationwide pogrom. Which was our big mistake.

Just as we must never forget that Hungary allowed so many Jewish talents to flourish for decades, we must never forget the evil and misery which it inflicted on its Jews during the cruelest and bloodiest of our national calamities.

It was, after all, from Hungarian policemen and gendarmes that we received our first blows. The closure of stores and bank accounts, the confiscation of jewelry and radio sets, bans on movement, arbitrary arrests, the ghetto, the transports – all bore the stamp of official Hungary.

Burned into my memory is an image that will remain with me to the end of my days. In the courtyard of Sziget Great Synagogue, we are lining up to present our ID cards to a Hungarian officer. It would be an understatement to say that we were proud. The day I received mine, I was happy – really happy. Like everybody else, I felt protected by this document, for which my father must have paid a considerable number of pengő. After all, the reason why the "foreign Jews" had been deported in August 1941 to Kamenets-Podolsk (where they were massacred by the SS Einsatzgruppen) was because they were unable to prove their Hungarian nationality. We could. Budapest would therefore certainly protect our vital interests.

The elegant Hungarian lieutenant, sitting at a table at the entrance to the Great Synagogue, did not even bother to look at my ID to check whether the photograph corresponded to my face and my age, if the stamp was genuine, if I had a profession and a place of residence; he didn't really care about any of this. He took the document, tore it up, and dropped it into the trash can, as if it were a dirty piece of paper which dirtied his hands.

This I will never forget.

The tragedy of Hungarian Jews could have been avoided, or certainly reduced. This is something on which all historians agree. But it happened. It was not, however, the final chapter in its history. The chapter of the survivors, in Israel and in the Diaspora too, will remain as an affirmation of their faith in the creative and noble dimensions of the Jewish tradition, as well as their supreme right to remembrance.

**Elie Wiesel**

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate (1986)



# Preface

This volume, the fourth in the series of books on "Jewish Communities around the World", a joint venture of the Diaspora Museum and the Ministry of Defence Publishing House, records the history of the Jewish community in Hungary from its beginnings to the present day. The book is not limited to historical survey; it also describes the rich cultural and intellectual diversity of this outstanding and unique community. The life of the community is recorded both at its flourishing peak and in times of calamity.

The book provides a panoramic and impressive portrait of the life of the Jews of Hungary and gives expression to the various aspects of this community in modern times: on the one hand, remarkable adherence to tradition, in the spirit of Orthodox and Hassidic Jewish culture in Eastern Europe, and on the other hand, lively integration into the surrounding society, sometimes to the point of total assimilation.

This polarity was characteristic of Hungarian Jewry – a community which left its mark on its environs – and accompanied it until its destruction in the years of terror and annihilation.

The publication of this volume was preceded by protracted research efforts based on the compilation of precious and rare documentary and photographic material.

Jews from Hungary have made valuable contributions to the advancement of the State of Israel in all branches of the economy and society, in medicine, in engineering and education, in artistic endeavor, in poetry and in music. They have left their special stamp on the world of satire and humor.

It seems to me that this is a manifestation of one of the unique features of the Hungarian Jewry: criticism voiced in a spirit of concern and faith, ironic and humoristic tongue-lashing inspired by love. Avigdor Hameiri – who lived in Budapest, Odessa and Tel Aviv, writer, poet, author and father of the satirical theater in Eretz Israel – wrote in his notebook, under the heading, ***Reflections on Satire*** "Whenever we laugh at someone or something, we do so out of love of that which we mock; that which we do not love, we do not caricature."

The publication of this book is an act worthy of Beth Hatefutsoth, the Jewish Diaspora Museum's mission: to reinforce the affinity – particularly of the young generation – towards community and nation and to bestow historical depth on the identity of the individual and the community.

Exhibitions come and go, words, photographs and loving memories remain with us for ever.

**Dr. David Alexander**

Director General, Museum of the Jewish Diaspora

◁1

1 Imre Ámos, *Sukkot*
(Oil Painting, 1933)

# Introduction

Due to its geographical location and its relatively large size, the Jewish community in Hungary was for centuries one of the most important Jewish communities of east-central Europe. As a result of historical conditions, Hungary was often a safer place for Jews than its neighbors, and sometimes also served as a haven for Jews who were forced to flee other countries in the region. Thanks to the beneficial conditions, Orthodox communities flourished in certain areas of Hungary and, concomitantly, there was a process of assimilation and integration into the Hungarian nation – a process which, on the one hand, reflected gratitude to the host nation and, on the other, was an instrument in the struggle for equal rights. Between these two main trends, one can find countless examples of a particularly rich spectrum of allegiances: from membership in Hassidic communities to ardent support for the Zionist movement; from hesitant and ambivalent attachment to Judaism to total detachment from it. After Emancipation and as a consequence of this complex process, the Jewish community in Hungary split into three different trends.

In the past two centuries, the Jews constituted a prominent presence in Hungary and they had a strong impact on all spheres of Hungarian life. They participated in historic events, were active in politics, the economy, science and culture, and in the private domain they appeared to be totally integrated into the host society. At the same time, however, their growing importance in the economy and the liberal professions helped to generate an anti-Jewish atmosphere. This found expression in anti-Semitic movements and in the promulgation of anti-Jewish laws on the eve of World War II. As a consequence, the Jews forfeited their rights, were discriminated against and were evicted from the social and professional circles to which they had belonged. This soon led to deportation, which was carried out with unparalleled swiftness and led to the almost total extermination of the community.

This volume is titled *In the Land of Hagar* because Hagar was the commonly used name for Hungary in Jewish medieval literature and onward. It is not possible, within the framework of a single volume, to make mention of all the historic, social and cultural events pertaining to the Jews of Hungary, nor could we provide a comprehensive list of the men and women who were active in the various spheres of endeavour. However, an attempt has been made to give expression to the major events relating to the life and annals of Hungarian Jewry. The bibliography at the end of the volume includes books whose contents and detailed bibliographical references are sources of further information. The "running titles" which appear throughout the book will help the readers find their way through some 40 articles which have been arranged both chronologically and by subject. The reader can also peruse the indices of personal and geographical names at the end of the book.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who helped and gave me encouragement in the course of my work on this volume. Special thanks to Judit Kafri who assisted me in the task of editing. She was of valuable help throughout in creating and maintaining contact with authors and institutions in Hungary, in locating and gathering visual material, and in administrative and logistic efforts. Sincere thanks to Raphael Vago of Tel Aviv University, the book's historical consultant, who also contributed articles on important issues.

I am very grateful to the staff of the following museums and libraries in Hungary: Budapest Történeti Múzeum, Hadtörténeti Múzeum, Kiscelli Múzeum, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Magyar Zsidó Múzeum és Levéltár, Néprajzi Múzeum, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet (Budapest); Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum (Kecskemét), Zempléni Múzeum (Szerencs). All these institutions made every effort to help me.

Special thanks to all those who helped to locate pictures in public and private collections and spared no effort to place the material at our disposal: Hanan Akavia, Eszter Anna Balázs, Mária Ember ז"ל, Fazekasné Judit Majoros, Kinga Frojimovics, András Fürst, Tamás Gajdó, János Gerle, Egon Gottl, Katalin Jalsovszky, Marianne Kiss, Rudolf Klein, Géza Komoróczy, Frigyes Porscht, Miklós Rékai, Székelyné Ilona Kőrösi, Ágnes Takách, Zsuzsa Toronyi, Törökné Margit Gruber.

I am particularly grateful to the directors and staff of the Memorial Museum of Hungarian Speaking Jewry in Safed (Israel), and to the Israeli families who permitted us to use material in their possession.

My heartfelt thanks to Chaya Galai, Vera Szabó, and Magdaléna Seleanu who translated a large part of the articles into English. Chaya Galai also served as English editor. With her help, and the assistance of the copy editor Joan Hooper and Trudy Deutsch, who proofread, we have endeavored to present the reader with clear and readable texts.

Throughout my work I enjoyed the support and active assistance of the staff of Beth Hatefutsoth, the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora. The Chief Curator, Joel Cahen, and the Deputy Director for Finance and Administration, Yehuda Blecher, accompanied the project from the outset. The Director of Publications, Yossi Avner, spared neither time nor energy at all stages of the editing and made a valuable contribution to the book. The photographer Ya'akov Brill was of great help in preparing the pictures for print and ensuring their high quality. The Director of the Visual Documentation Center, Zippi Rosen, helped us find our way in the rich archival collection. Finally, I would like to thank the designer, Hayim Shtayer, who gave the volume its attractive artistic form, which is a harmonious blend of text and illustrations.

**Anna Szalai**

Editor



# A Brief History of the Jews of Hungary Until the Fall of the Medieval Hungarian State

György Haraszti



3



4

According to archeological evidence, Jews settled in the territory of historical (Greater) Hungary in the wake of the Roman legions, as early as the 2nd century C.E. The area was then part of the Roman Empire's provinces of Pannónia and Dacia. At first the Jews were slaves of the Roman conquerors, but later they became merchants and middlemen, promoting the lively trade between the Roman Empire and the German tribes north of the Danube. Several inscriptions and finds from the sites of Roman military camps and settlements attest to a Jewish presence; one of these is a memorial stone in the Roman town of Intercisa (now Dunaújváros) erected by "Cosimus, the leader of the custom station, the prefect of the Jewish synagogue." The Jewish inhabitants of Pannonia were swept away in the course of the great migrations after the fall of the Roman Empire, when the region was settled successively and briefly by different races.

A few centuries later, the Jewish presence in Hungary was recorded again. Around 985 C.E., the Jewish geographer and voyager Abraham ben Jakov (Ibrahim ibn Jakub) passed through the territory of the future Greater Hungary, and fragments of his observations and adventures have survived. Among other things, he described encounters with his clansmen in this territory and mentioned explicitly that they were Jews. In 955, another Spanish Jew, the diplomat Hasdai ibn Shaprut, in his long and disputed Khazar letter, described Jewish settlements in a region inhabited by "Slavonians." This suggests that Jews were living there before the conquest of Hungary (869–900). Hungary was conquered by seven Magyar tribes and three Kabar (Khazar) tribes, and some of these Khazars had apparently converted to Judaism. The Jewish element is indicated by a rare find: a Khazar ring with Hebrew letters, unearthed at Ellend near the Hungarian town of Pécs. It is possible that the nomadic pagan Magyars also encountered Karaite Jews, since there were Jewish settlements along the shores of the Black Sea and the Crimean Peninsula, where the Magyars used to bring their prisoners of war for sale.

The nomadic forays ended at the time of the last prince, Géza (who ruled between 972–997), and his son and successor, St. István (997–1038), founded the Christian Hungarian kingdom. He thereby became involved in European international politics and initiated contacts between Hungary and the West. Hungary began to engage in international trade, and peaceful immigration from the West commenced, bringing with it Jews as well. However, references in

2
The Old Synagogue in Sopron was built between 1300–1325 (Photo by Ágnes Takách)

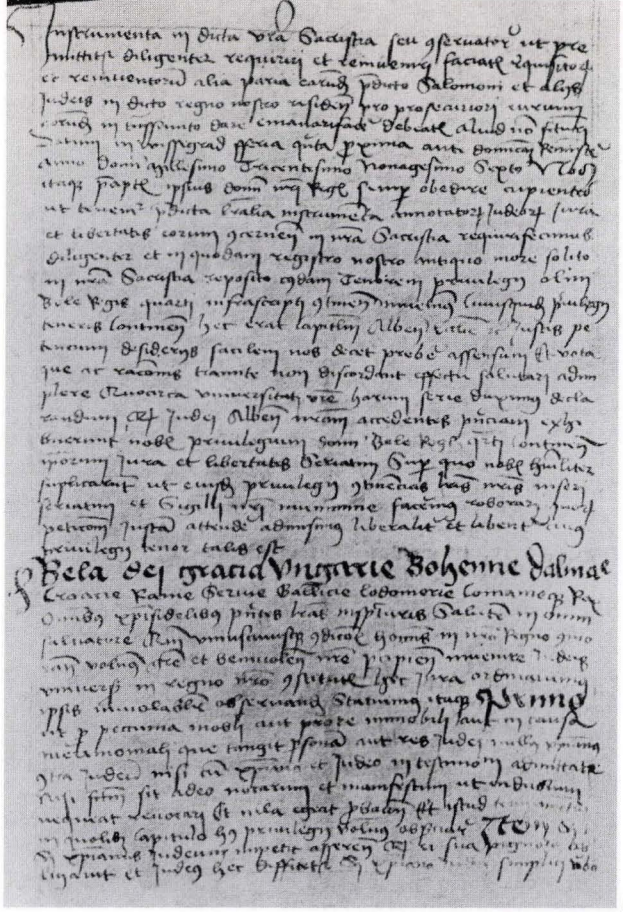
3
The earliest gravestone from Buda (1278) (Photo by Aliona Frankl and László Lugosi Lugo)

4
Gravestone of a Jewish family from Aquincum (early 4th century C.E.)

Jewish (and non-Jewish) historical tradition to Jews as permanent residents in Hungary can be found only from the second half of the 11th century, when Jews from Germany, Austria, Bohemia and Moravia began to settle there. At first, they resided only in towns ruled by the bishops, where important communities developed.

In the 11th century, the main trading site associated with Hungary (Land of Hagar in contemporary Jewish sources) was Regensburg in Germany. A rabbinic decision dating from the end of that century mentions two brothers from Regensburg who returned from Russia with heavily-laden wagons. One of the wagon wheels broke on the left bank of the Danube late on a Friday afternoon. By the time the brothers had crossed the river and arrived in the nearest community – apparently Esztergom – the Jews were already leaving the synagogue, and neither greeted them nor permitted them to enter the synagogue the following morning. On the next day, judgement was pronounced on the Sabbath desecrators by two foreign scholars, Kalonymus and Shabbethai the Chazzan (of whom nothing more is known). The severe sentence was doubtless intended to serve as an example.

While the Hungarian kings were engaged in eradicating paganism, the Jews lived undisturbed lives. Only in the time of St. László (1077–1095) did the anti-Jewish edicts of synods and popes first gain currency in Hungary. The growing power of the Church was indicated by the fact that, in 1092, at the Council of Szabolcs, the Church prohibited marriages between Jews and Gentiles, work on Christian festivals, and the purchase of slaves. (The basic principle of these edicts was that no Christian should be subservient to a Jew.) Yet, at the end of the 11th century, King Kálmán (Könyves) protected Hungarian Jews when the remnants of the Crusader armies attempted to attack them. (Despite this protection, a memorial book from the Jewish congregation in Mainz mentions Jewish martyrs from Pozsony, who apparently perished during the First Crusade.) Jews increasingly settled in the towns, and established communities there: Esztergom (in the mid-11th century), Buda and Óbuda (12th century), Pozsony (first mentioned in chronicles of 1092), Nagyszombat (12th century), Komárom, Pest, Tapolcsány (13th century), Sopron, Kőszeg, Trencsén (around 1300), Selmecbánya (1367), Dévény (1342), Holics (1400), Cseklész, Szered (1410), Szakolca (1439), Galgóc, Zagreb, Nyitra, Bazin, Vasvár, Eisenstadt, Mattersdort, Szalónak, Szentgyörgy, Tata , Eger, Szeged, Nagyvárad, etc. Relics of synagogues and cemeteries attest to continuous Jewish presence in western and northwestern Hungary. (We know today that there were 36 Jewish settlements altogether in medieval Hungary, naturally not at one and the same time.)


Bela dei gracia Vngarie Bohemie Dalmacie

5
The first page of King Béla IV's Charter of Privileges (1251)

6
The letter *aleph* on István V's denarius

7
The letter *pe* on Béla IV's denarius

8
The letter *mem* on Béla IV's denarius


5

Under the Árpádian Dynasty (until 1300), the Jews of Hungary, albeit restricted by certain edicts, lived a considerably more secure life than their coreligionists elsewhere in Western and Central Europe. The basis of the Árpádian monarchy's wealth was its huge estates, since monetary wealth did not yet play a major role. It was only with the emergence of the money economy at the beginning of the 13th century that the status of Hungarian Jewry began to rise. During the 13th century, Jews occupied important positions in commerce and finance, and the royal court often turned to them for money, as well as for advice on international affairs. The nobles felt it necessary to curb this development, and the famous Golden Bull of 1222 contained a clause prohibiting Jews from holding certain offices and from achieving noble rank. The legal status of the Jews was settled in the Charter of Privileges, issued by King Béla IV in 1251, which resembled similar documents in neighboring countries. (This charter was repeatedly ratified by subsequent rulers.) According to this document, which introduced the medieval institution of Chamber service into Hungary, the Jews were "servants of the Royal Chamber," paying their taxes directly to the treasury in return for protection. Archival records from 1250 note the existence of a large Jewish congregation in Pozsony, led by the renowned rabbi, Jehuda Liebermann. The 1279 Church Council of Buda prohibited Jews from leasing land, and compelled them to wear the Jewish badge. In practice, these decrees were not applied strictly because of the king's objections.


6


7


8

During the reign of Louis the Great of the House of Anjou (1342–1382), the Church's hostile attitude predominated again in policy towards the Jews. The Black Death led to the first expulsion

"Thus did the Jews first greet the king and queen as they arrived outside the walls of the city: first came an ancient Jewish leader mounted on a horse, carrying a sword and a pitcher filled with money, ten *font* [pound] in weight. Beside him rode his son with a similar sword of silver and a pitcher. Behind them came 24 horsemen in red garments, their headgear decorated with three ostrich feathers, and behind them 200 Jews on foot under a red banner on which were emblazoned five thorns and two gold stars with a golden Jewish crown above them. All wore the Jewish headgear *ephod* [tallit] on their heads. The elders stood in the center under the tent and around them were gathered the young men. When the king arrived, they sang and brought the ten commandments and held a great celebration and did so mostly because they had hopes that it would bring them considerable benefit."

Schwandtner, 1476

9





10

9
Gothic windows in the eastern wall of the Old Synagogue in Sopron (Photo by Ágnes Takách)

10
Jakob Mendel, "Jewish Prefect" (*Praefectus Judaeorum*)

11
The delegation of Buda Jews greets King Matthias and Beatrix, 1476 (Painting by Béla Vízkelety, 1864)



11

of Jews from Hungary around 1349. General expulsion was decreed in 1360, but this decree was revoked circa 1364 and the Jews were permitted to return, though subject to restrictions. In 1365, the king instituted the office of *Judex Judaeorum totius regni*, "Judge of the Jews of the entire kingdom." This office-holder was chosen from among the magnates, and was in charge of all matters relating to Jewish property, the imposition and collection of taxes, representation of the Jews before the government and the protection of their rights.

In the middle of the 14th century, the most important Jewish community in Hungary was that of Székesfehérvár, whose *parnasim* (congregation leaders) also directed the general affairs of the Jews of the country. During the 15th century, the community of Buda gained in importance as Jews who had been expelled from other countries (e.g., France) settled there. The standing of the Jews improved during the reign of Matthias (1458–1490), despite his support for the towns, the overwhelming majority of whose inhabitants were Germans who were hostile to the Jews and considered them dangerous commercial rivals. Around 1477, Matthias created a new high office, that of the Jewish Prefect (*Praefectus Judaeorum*). In all probability, he took this step at the request of the Jews themselves, who had been placed under the jurisdiction of the cities after the abolition of the office of *Judex Judaeorum* (about 1440), and had great difficulties in obtaining fair judicial treatment. The new position – which became hereditary in the famous Mendel family – was exploited by the treasury to exercise control over the vital Jewish taxes. The powers of the Jewish prefect were greater than had been those of the Jewish judge, since it was the prefect's responsibility to divide the burden of payment of royal taxes among the Jewish communities.

In 1494, there was a case of blood libel in Nagyszombat (the first ever in Hungary) and 14 Jews were burned at the stake. In its wake, anti-Jewish riots broke out in the town; these were repeated at the beginning of the 16th century in Pozsony, Buda and other towns. The economic situation of the Jews also deteriorated: King Ulászló II (1490–1516) cancelled all debts owed to the Jews. During this period a degrading form of Jewish oath before the tribunals was introduced (and remained in force until the middle of the 19th century).

During the reign of Lajos II (1516–1526), hatred of the Jews intensified as a result of the activities of Izsák of Kassa, the director of the royal mint, and of the apostate Imre Szerencsés (Fortunatus – whose original name was Shlomo Seneor), the royal treasurer.

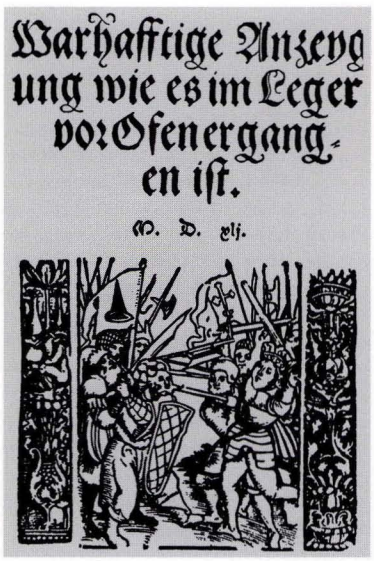
Little information is available on the spiritual life of Hungarian Jewry during the Middle Ages, but it was apparently undistinguished in comparison with the neighboring countries, because of the wide geographical dispersion of the communities and their small size. (At the end of the 15th

"In these same months, August 1494, severe punishment was imposed on several Jews from the town of Nagyszombat, who tenaciously adhered to their terrible sin. Twelve men and two women secretly captured a Christian child born into a free family, conveyed him to a nearby house, strangled the poor child, and then sliced up his muscles – while his soul was slowly departing – some of his blood they drank themselves, and the rest they preserved for others. They carved up his body into parts and buried it separately. For some time the parents sought their child and could not find him, but it was proved that a day before the incident, he had been seen in the Street of the Jews, and hence it was decided to launch a legal investigation against them. Militia men were sent to their homes, discovered the fresh blood, and seized the owner and his family. During the interrogation the women, for fear of torture, revealed the course of the horrific deed. On the basis of their confession, the minister of the palace – who was also mayor of the city – gave orders that several of those found guilty be burned at the stake in the market place and on others who seemed less guilty, the imposed heavy fines. After the reason for the terrible crime had been extracted from the elders, through torture, it was discovered that there were four reasons which obliged the Jews to commit these despicable deeds in Nagyszombat and in other districts as well. One reason is that they were instructed by their forefather that, the blood of a Christian is an excellent cure for excessive bleeding during circumcision; another reason is their belief that Christian blood, when mixed with food, is very effective in arousing love; third, among the Jews, both men and women have the monthly flux, and, according to their experience, if one drinks the blood of Christians, it cures this disease; and the fourth reason is that they have an ancient and secret law, according to which, during their daily prayers, they must sacrifice Christian blood to God, but this must be done each time in a different place, and, so they claim, this year it was the turn of the Jews of Nagyszombat.
All these terrible deeds occurred in the year one thousand four hundred and ninety three of the redemption."

Antonio Bonfini, 16th century

"Shortly after that, an armed mob captured the very rich home of Emericus Fortunatus (who converted from Judaism to Christianity and was placed in charge of the treasury after Joannes Bornemisza), claiming that Belgrade had been lost because of him, and they plundered it in ugly fashion: in addition to many other objects of great value, they stole from him more than sixty thousand ancient gold coins of high quality: he himself magnified this through weeping and bleeding from his wounds after he fled his home. After that his fate was sealed, because this miserly man, for whom gold was more important than life, was vanquished by the pain caused him by the great loss, and passed away."

Miklós Istvánffy, 17th century




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12
"Fortunatus", identified with Imre Szerencsés, sitting under the *chuppah*
(Woodcut from the 16th century)

13
Mint workshop, from the *Weisskunig*, the pictorial biography of the Emperor Miksa I.
(Hans Burgmair's wood engraving, about 1515)

14
Jews and Turks defending Buda together (1541)
One of the banners held by the Jews bears the *Judenhut*

century, there were 3,500–4,000 Jews in Hungary out of a total population of over two million.) It was common knowledge among the Jews of the West that the Hungarian Jewish communities were poor and, due to their misfortunes, had not produced any rabbinical scholars of note. The first rabbi whose reputation spread beyond Hungary was Izsák of Nagyszombat (late 14th-early 15th century). In the introduction to his *Sefer ha-Minhagim*, he describes the sorry state of religious study in Hungary.

After the Mohács Disaster, when Ottoman forces conquered Buda in 1526 and then retreated, many of the Jewish inhabitants joined the retreating force. Consequently congregations of Hungarian Jews developed within the main Jewish communities of the Balkans. In the next two decades, there were anti-Jewish riots in the towns ruled by Germans and Hungarians due to the lack of a strong central power there (e.g., in Bazin in 1529, Jews were charged with ritual murder and burned at the stake). Jewish residents were forced to abandon their homes (Pozsony and Sopron in 1526, Nagyszombat in 1539, etc.), and old, established Jewish communities were deserted as the Jews fled from war atrocities and took refuge in more peaceful regions. The overwhelming majority of the Jewish population of the country were expelled by the rival urban Christian merchants and craftsmen. These events, as well as the final conquest of Buda by the Turks in 1541 and the incorporation of central Hungary into the Ottoman Empire, marked the beginning of a new era in the long history of the Jews in Hungary.

# The Annals of the Jews of the Seven Communities: A Model of Jewish Ghetto Life

Shlomo Spitzer

In western Hungary (which is now part of Austria, Burgenland) a handful of Jewish communities existed for centuries. These communities, which succeeded in preserving their own unique character throughout the period, may be perceived as a model of Jewish ghetto life.

First, let us examine the political and historical factors which facilitated Jewish settlement in that region and created the conditions for the establishment and functioning of the communities in their traditional form, which is familiar to us from the Middle Ages.

According to legend, Jews first settled in this region in the 8th century, but in fact it can be established with a high degree of certainty that Jewish settlement in northern Burgenland began at the end of the 14th century. Documents dated 1373 from Eisenstadt record the presence of Jews in the population, and in 1388 the town bishop demanded the right to determine where they could reside in the town. In 1491, in the wake of the Pressburg Peace, the most important estates in western Hungary were taken over by the Habsburgs. Subsequently, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the local feudal lords regained dominion through leasing, sale and purchases of land. The northern part of the district was granted to the Counts Esterházy and the southern section to the Counts Batthyány.

These estates had been opened to Jews from the end of the 15th century, when they were expelled from Austrian territories, and again in 1526 when they were expelled from Sopron after the Turkish occupation. The most striking feature of Jewish settlement in Burgenland was the stability, which prevailed there for centuries, with the exception of brief periods of war. The charters which the feudal lords granted them served as the basis for Jewish life. Thus the Esterházys granted charters to the Jews in 1690 and 1694, and the Batthyánys in 1673. The number of Jews increased steadily for some two hundred years, until feudal rule ended in 1867 and the Jews were emancipated.

There is statistical evidence of this population growth: in Eisenstadt, for example, in 1744 – there were 352 Jews, in 1785 – 767, and in 1848 – 1,554; in Deutschkreutz there were 268 Jews in 1768, 535 in 1785, and more than 1,000 in 1848. After the granting of emancipation, the number of Jews in the region dwindled considerably as they began to migrate to towns. On the eve of World War

I, there were 4,854 Jews in Burgenland, and by the eve of World War II, their number had dropped to 3,854.

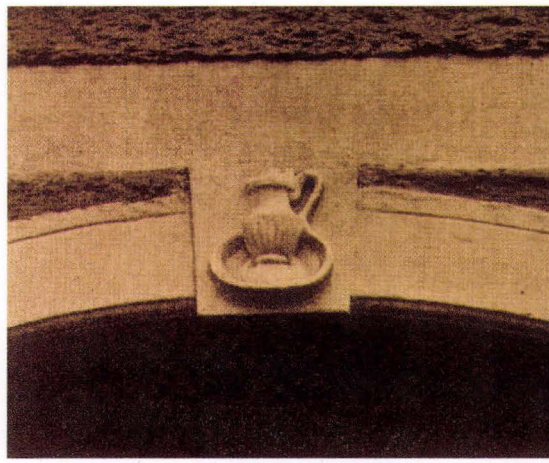
The Seven Communities (*sheva kehilot*) referred to in the title were all located in the districts ruled by the Esterházys: Eisenstadt, Mattersdorf, Deutschkreutz, Frauenkirchen, Kittsee, Lackenbach and Kobersdorf. They amalgamated at the beginning of the 18th century so that, in times of trouble, they could present a united front to the count. They initiated joint activities and ensured that the tax burden was apportioned evenly. Among the outstanding achievements of their representative body, which met periodically in Eisenstadt, was its solution of the existential resettlement crisis at the beginning of the 18th century and the way it handled numerous problems during the cholera epidemic of 1830. Thus, it is evident that the same vital interests which bound together individuals of similar views also created intercommunity cohesion. What was the social fabric of these communities? Where did these Jews come from, what were their occupations, and how did they relate to their surroundings, to their rulers and to their neighbors? We will endeavor to answer these questions in brief.

The Jews of Burgenland represented a conservative element within the general population. This was due to the fact that the authorities delegated the power to grant right of residence, or *hazaka* in the *kehilot*. The *hazaka* was the sole guarantee of their safety and security. As a rule, the right to migrate to these communities was not easily granted and was subject to stringent conditions. It was bestowed, in principle, only on those who married into the *kehila* or as a gesture of esteem to scholars. The main reason for denying *hazaka* was economic because of the limited opportunities to earn a living.

The censuses held every few years, in addition to specifying place of birth as a record of the type of migration, also noted occupations. In this sphere as well, stability was maintained; about 45% of the Jews engaged in retail trade, 25% were artisans, 20% in service occupations and 10% in professions. Prosperity was never a feature of the communities or their individual members, and this situation did not alter greatly in the 20th century.

Among the major achievements of the *kehilot* were the regulations (*takanot*) they enacted for themselves, in other words, the way in which they administered the autonomy granted them by the authorities. The *takanot* did not originate in the seven *kehilot*, but had existed since the Talmudic era and received their basic form in the Middle Ages, under the influence of the non-Jewish surroundings and for internal community reasons, stemming from the Halakha and from tradition. However, certain of their features were unique to this region.

The *kehilot* were headed by two *tovei hakahal* (community worthies), representatives of the religious *kahal*, and two *tovei ha'ir* (town worthies), representing the political *kahal*. Above these four was the *rosh kahal*. These five together were known as *alufei hakahal*, or AKROT. Extensive powers were also vested in the general assembly, in accordance with the subject under discussion and its importance. Additional office-holders in the community were the charity *gabbaim* (treasurers), the Talmud Torah *gabbaim*, the Eretz Israel *gabbaim*, etc. It should be noted that all these positions were honorary, and those who held them received no remuneration. Elections to these posts were held annually, in the intermediate days of Passover, on a democratic basis. First, the members of the *kehila* elected seven selectors, who, in their turn, selected the various office-holders. All sectors of the *kehila* – prosperous, middle class and lower class (poor) – took part in the process. The criteria for class categorization were updated from time to time. The upper class naturally filled the senior positions, such as *rosh kahal*, but the middle class were also elected to positions of *tovei kahal*. In addition, the *rosh kahal* employed a number of salaried clerks, such as the *ne'eman* (trustee, a kind of secretary) and tax collectors. Other salaried employees were the *hazzan* (cantor), and the *shamash* (beadle, who fulfilled other functions such as execution of court orders). As the most respected, the rabbi fulfilled the major religious, educational and judicial functions, and ensured that the traditional religious infrastructures were not undermined.



15
Eisenstadt, Levite sign above a doorway

The *vaad kehila* (community council) fulfilled numerous functions and wielded judicial powers. Non-Jewish records rightly refer to the *rosh kahal* and his four deputies as "judge and citizens," whose task was to investigate every quarrel or dispute in accordance with Jewish law and to punish the guilty. Whereas criminal offences were tried before official courts, the *kahal* wielded judicial authority in cases of insubordination against community officials, non-observance of regulations, and violations of religious law. In offences of the latter kind, the *rosh kahal* and his deputies consulted the rabbi as to whether the case was within the jurisdiction of the rabbinical court. Among the means of punishment we find: fines, excommunication, revoking of the right to vote and be elected to public posts, and most severe – revoking of the *hazaka*.

The administrative powers stemmed from the nature of the administration of the autonomous *kehila*: granting *hazaka* with the sanction of the feudal rulers; employing paid staff; representing the *kahal* and community associations and institutions before the authorities and the district administration; providing documents and certificates of all kinds; maintaining monopolistic control of purchase and sale of various goods, such as wine, meat, brandy, olive oil or salt; imposing consumer taxes and leasing this privilege by tender; managing and maintaining




16
The Old Synagogue in the ghetto in Eisenstadt
(Postcard about 1900)

community real estate, such as synagogues, the *kahal* offices, the rabbi's residence, the *mikveh* and the slaughterhouse; maintaining public order and security through promulgation of regulations; maintaining traditional institutions of learning, such as *Talmudei Torah* and yeshivot, and from the end of the 18th century schools as well. And finally, the community also concerned itself with the welfare of the poor, the orphans, the widows, the sick and needy visitors. The financial powers of the *kahal* were of particular importance, since, on the one hand, it was necessary to allocate the tax burden fairly and, on the other hand, it was essential to provide a stable financial infrastructure for the administration.

What were these taxes? First and foremost, the protection dues, together with the "gifts" to the count and individual members of his staff in honor of the New Year, and other Christian festivals;

payments to the district administration; ad hoc surcharges, particularly in wartime, and finally, from 1749 onward, the tolerance tax, which Empress Maria Theresia imposed on the Jews of Hungary. The question of the apportioning of the tax burden, whether as a poll tax (number of householders) or by "sum" (economic status) was decided by the council of the Seven Communities through fair compromise. It should be noted that where internal taxation was concerned, greater consideration was shown for the needs of the individual.

There were numerous societies and funds in the communities whose aim was to provide services not provided by the community itself. Among these was the *Hevra Kadisha* (burial society) or, to give it its full title, *Hevra Kadisha deGemilut Hasadim*, which not only dealt with burial rituals and procedures, but also supported the poor and the needy. Additional social functions were carried out by other societies, such as *Hevrot Nashim, Hevrat Ner Tamid, Hevrot Hakhnasat Kala*, etc. The division of administrative powers was extremely impressive, and attests to the high level of autonomy in this area.

At the same time, the prosaic problems of everyday life, which preoccupied the Jews, did not deflect their attention from the essence: unswerving and uncompromising observance of *halakha* and tradition. This was true not only of the characteristic institutions of the traditional Orthodox community, but also of the individual members who were totally committed to the Torah, which was the focus of their lives and their actions. Hence, the greatest pride for a community was the appointment of a rabbi renowned for his erudition and saintliness, as attested to by rabbinical letters of appointment.

Each of the Seven Communities was presided over by renowned rabbis. The present volume includes an article devoted to Rabbi Samson Wertheimer's role as Court Jew, but he was also the chief rabbi of the entire country and an esteemed and respected scholar in his day. It was he who initiated the establishment of these communities after the expulsion from Vienna in 1670, and when he considered it necessary to appoint a rabbi for the region he summoned his friend Rabbi Meir ben Isak to take up the post. The latter resided in Eisenstadt, and was known, after this town, as MAHRAM AS. He was renowned throughout the Jewish world for his Torah commentaries, *Panim Meirot*. The MAHRAM AS founded a yeshiva in the town, and his gravesite still attracts pilgrims.

At the end of the 18th century, Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Frankfurt, the Chatam Sofer, was the rabbi of Mattersdorf. Thanks to him, the local yeshiva gained an international reputation, which it

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17
Torah ornaments, wine cups, *etrog* container, spicebox from the synagogue in Eisenstadt

18
Entrance to the Wolf Library in Eisenstadt (Drawing by Mrs. Hitschmann)

maintained until just before the Holocaust. Even after he moved to the capital, Pressburg, the Chatam Sofer continued to speak of the "sages of Mattersdorf."

In the second half of the 19th century, Rabbi Meir Hildesheimer who later gained fame as the founder of the Berlin rabbinical seminary, served as rabbi of Eisenstadt. The rabbi of Deutschkreutz, Rabbi Menahem Katz, was the leader of the Orthodox rabbis of Hungary during the split in the Hungarian Jewish community in 1869.

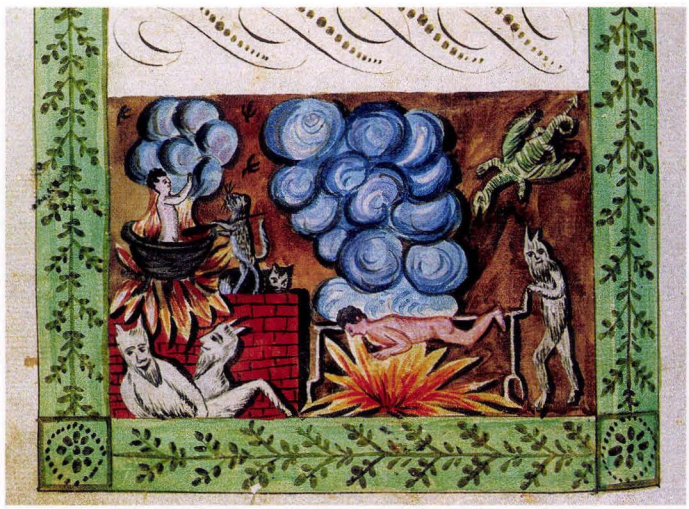
In the first half of the 20th century, various rabbinical dynasties like the Ulman family in Lackenbach, the Ehrenfeld family in Mattersdorf and the Grünwalds in Deutschkreutz, left their mark on the lives of the Jews of the seven *kehilot*. In 1938 the incumbent rabbis witnessed the destruction of the achievements of their forefathers.

In conclusion, I would like to describe briefly the oscillations in 19th century Hungarian legislation regarding the status of the Jews of the region. There is extensive literature on this subject, and it has been dealt with at length by my own mentor, Professor Nathaniel Katzburg. I will confine myself, therefore, to noting that the wider political events – the abolition of feudal rule in 1848 and the granting of civil and political equality – had few practical implications for the internal administration of the western Hungarian communities, which continued to maintain close ties with their feudal patrons. The traditional religious outlook, which advocated examining new elements and comparing them to the old and familiar, led the communities to move towards the future at a cautious and measured pace. Religious reform bypassed the seven *kehilot*, and they demonstrated their solid loyalty to religion and tradition by establishing a national bureau of Orthodox Jewry in 1871.

This situation endured in the two decades following World War I, when all the communities in the region were included in Burgenland, the eastern federal district of the new Austrian Republic. In 1920, they founded the successor of that bureau – the Orthodox National Bureau of Burgenland – thereby reviving the idea of an association of communities based on similar principles. The most striking achievement of the association is considered to be the school law passed in 1936, under which Jewish schools in Burgenland were granted equal status to Catholic and Protestant schools.

In 1938, annexation by the Nazis spelled the end of the Jewish communities. The Jews of Burgenland, 3,854 in number, were forced to flee, and those who failed to escape perished in the death camps. Only the cemeteries and archival documents remain today to tell the story of these people, who, for centuries, lived arduous and simple lives, inspired by faith, in this region.





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Anna Hajnal

**PURE, PURE, PURE**
A Jewish Lament
(Part of the poem)

They know they'll be buried in earth,
in four planks, horribly white,
without nails, the sides dovetailed
tightly, like fingers entwined,
roofless, the house still stands open,
unadorned it is, and bare,
windowless, without a door,
the guest must lie on the floor –

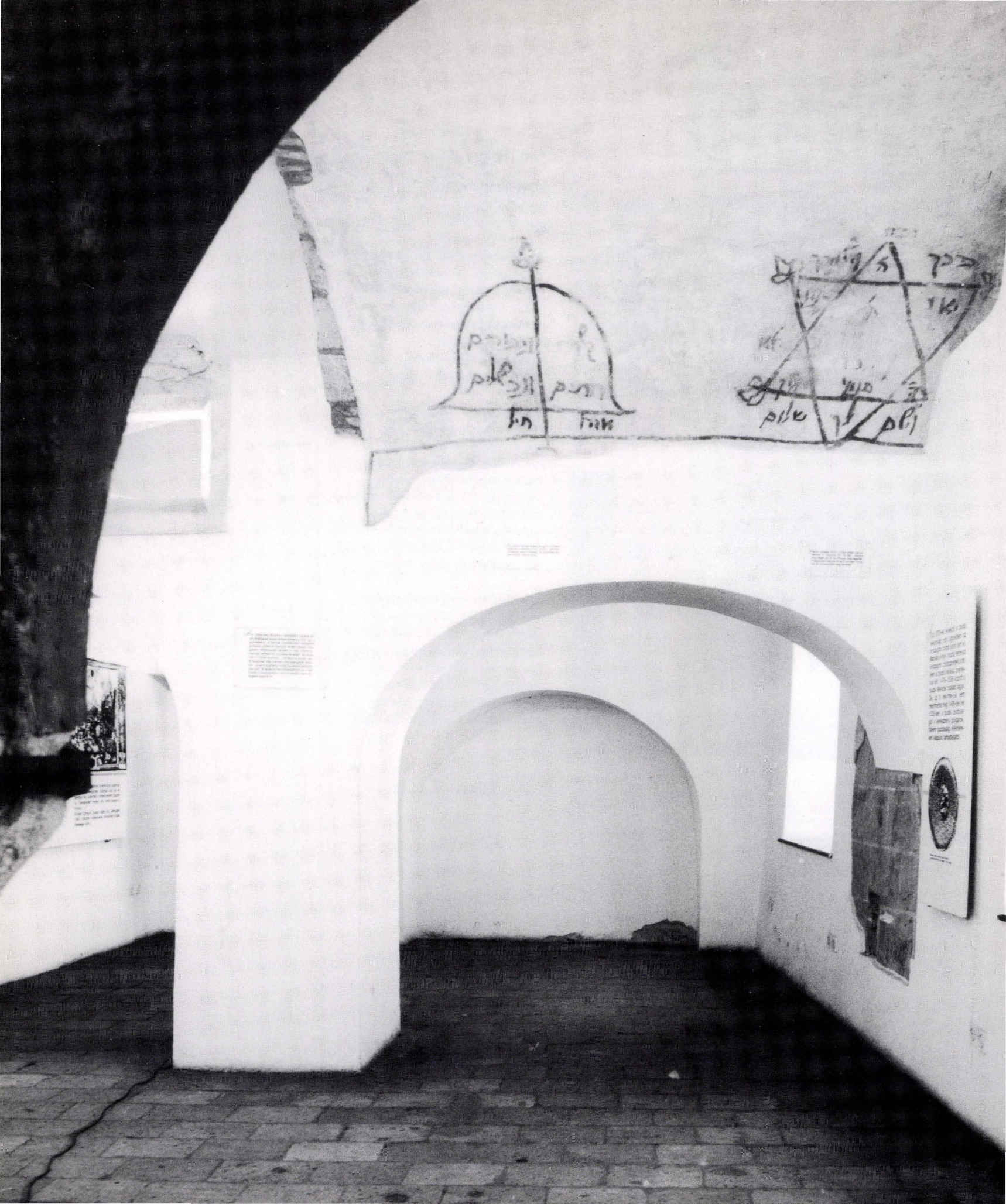
and even that will be removed,
aye, let's start our song of woe,
aye, she will be prepared soon,
aye, in lace-white she will be tied up,
aye, the cambric sheets are sewn,
and the threads in them are unknotted,
so that her dress falls off the body,
when she is laid out as earth-fare,
so that the earth can kiss her,
this bride so cool and so blissful –

now the tubs and pails are awaiting,
wooden buckets tall and straight,
sacred waters will swell and wash
the planks and hoops made of wood,
aye, the pails that never dry out,
gleaming always and shining,
blessed water magically flowing,
let us start the weeping and wailing

*1970*

Translated by
George Gömöri and Mari Markus Gömöri

19–27
Color illustrations from the
*Hevra Kadisha Gold Book*
in Nagykanizsa (1792–1793)
(Photo by Aliona Frankl and László Lugosi Lugo)



# A Short History of the Jews in Hungary: The Turkish Occupation and Resettlement (1541–1790)

György Haraszti

After central Hungary was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in 1541, the status of the Jews was relatively satisfactory. Jewish settlement in Buda was renewed and Sephardic Jews of Balkan and Asia Minor origin also settled there. In the 17th century, the mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardi *kehila* of Buda, which was large even by European standards, was one of the most important communities in the Ottoman Empire.

Most of the Jews were traders and played an important role in the commerce between various regions of the Ottoman Empire, on the one hand, and the West, on the other. Some of the Jews in Ottoman Hungary were artisans: contemporary sources mention lace-makers, glassworkers, and purse makers. In addition they leased taverns and were rent- and tax-collectors.

In 1686, half of the approximately one thousand Jewish residents of Buda were killed by the mercenaries of the Saint League (their hardships are vividly described in Izsák Schulhof's famous *Megillath Ofen*), while the rest were taken captive, and were later ransomed by Western European Jewry and dispersed in Western countries. Other Jewish inhabitants of the province left the country together with the Turks and scattered through the Balkans.

In the Habsburg dominions of western Hungary, the number of Jews was very small. The Hungarian magnates accorded protection to the Jews expelled from the towns. Those Jews who were banished from Vienna in 1670 found refuge on the estate of Prince Esterházy in Eisenstadt and six small neighboring towns. They constituted the oldest of the Seven Communities of modern Burgenland, granted autonomy in a privilege issued in 1690. In northwestern Hungary, the first documentary references to Jewish immigration date from the years 1649 and 1650. These Jews came from eastern Moravia and settled down in Galgóc, Tapolcsány and Nyitra, the vanguard of a mass migration by Moravian Jews into Hungary in the 18th century.

In independent Transylvania, there was no permanent Jewish settlement. Only under the rule of Prince Gábor Bethlen (1613–1629) was the status of the Jews stabilized in 1623 by a privilege. The favorable attitude toward the Jews there stemmed from Reformation influences. The Jewish merchants (the majority of whom were Sephardic) settled down in Gyulafehérvár, but they fled Transylvania too when the armies of the Habsburg Emperor appeared around 1687.

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Remains of the Sephardic synagogue in Buda (16–17th centuries) (Photo by Ágnes Takách)

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29
"A Jew merchant" in Transylvania
(17th century)

30
"A Jew's Wife" in Transylvania
(17th century)

After the expulsion of the Turks from Hungary, Ashkenazi Jews resided only near the western border. There were a few Sephardic Jews in Temesvár, which was occupied by the Turks until 1718.

Until 1840, it was the privilege of the nobility to "keep Jews," in other words, Jews received or were refused permission to settle entirely at the whim of the upper and middle nobility.

In the first half of the 18th century, and not only in western Hungary, the well-to-do landowners began to settle the Jews or to permit them to settle on their lands, in order to augment their own income. In return for legal and physical protection, the Jews paid several types of taxes, rented lands, worked in crafts and greatly stimulated trade.

A similar process to the emergence of the Seven Communities took place in the same period in Vas and Zala counties, on the estates of the Counts Batthyány (Rohonc, Szalónak, Nagykanizsa), and somewhat later (1680–1700) in the immediate vicinity of the Hungarian capital Pozsony on the lands of the Counts Pálffy. This center became the spiritual and economic headquarters of Hungarian Jewry, and maintained this role for a century and a half. Between 1660 and 1670, the first families from Galícia settled on the vast estates of the Rákóczi family in northern Hungary and leased land there. Count Sándor Károlyi settled Jews on his estate in eastern Hungary, and even had a rabbi brought there.

The Jews started to migrate to the interior of the country as well from these territories and from abroad, beginning mainly from the west. As in western Hungary, the majority were received into the towns and villages on the estates of the big landowners.

Many of the decrees of protection granted to the Jewish communities in western Hungary by the landowners are still extant. The typical decree lists the names of the heads of family or the number of houses given to the settler and determines the sum to be paid annually in return for the protection (*Schutzgeld*). The documents reveal that the Jews constituted an autonomous political community. Every year, they selected their own judge and jury, who settled legal suits within the community. The Jews were permitted to establish their own synagogues and schools, as well as to build their own cemetery and public bath. They were allowed to employ rabbis, cantors, teachers, synagogue servants and grave diggers, and to trade throughout the estate. Foreign Jewish merchants could do the same only on market days. In return for a certain sum, the landowner permitted the Jews to slaughter animals and sell wine for their own needs. They could accept a new member into their community only with the consent of the landowner.

On the other hand, the growing counter-reformation trends from the second half of the 17th century were disadvantageous to the Jews. After the expulsion of the Turks, a plan known for its Germanizing intentions, the so-called *Einrichtungs Werkh...*, was prepared in 1689 at the order of Cardinal Lipót Kollonich, bishop of Győr, in order to reorganize a united Hungary. This plan contained certain proposals aimed at preventing the settlement of Jews in Hungary.

It was probably as the result of this plan that Emperor Leopold I expelled the Jews on pain of death from the mining towns and a seven-mile area around them in 1693. Moreover, both the Jews who remained and those who immigrated to Hungary were prohibited from settling in royal towns for about a hundred years, as a result of Leopold I's policy of supporting the anti-Jewish measures of the free royal towns.

Despite the anti-Jewish sentiment in leading government circles, Jewish bankers, army contractors and especially the so-called Court Jews, who coordinated financial activities at the highest level, played an increasingly important role in Baroque Europe. As a result of their activity, the slowly evolving and growing Jewish communities were awarded several privileges.

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31
Samson Wertheimer

32
Samuel Oppenheimer

The two most famous court agents in Hungary were Samuel Oppenheimer and Samson Wertheimer. Wertheimer, in addition to his successful economic activity, was well-versed in Jewish studies as well. He founded a Talmud school and helped to found and finance 40 Jewish communities in Hungary.

Not only the central court in Vienna, but government organizations and local authorities as well required the services of the Jews. Government organizations such as the Court Chamber (*Hofkammer*) or the Council of War (*Kriegsrat*), sometimes even the big landowners, usually supported the economic activities of the Jews, both as army contractors and in trade and fiscal affairs. They championed the Jews when the city or county authorities infringed on or restricted their rights.

Around 1700, there were only 4,000 Jews in Hungary. In the first decade of the 18th century, the majority of Hungarian Jews, together with their protectors – the landowners of western Hungary who fought on the Habsburg side – fled the *Kuruts* freedom fighters to imperial territories on a temporary basis. The Jews in eastern Hungary supplied *Kuruts* soldiers with cloth and boots, obtained steel for gun barrels and pistols and supplied saltpeter for gunpowder.

When peace was restored, the *Helytartótanács* (*Statthalterrat* or Regent Council) ordered a census in 1725 in order to restrict further immigration. According to the (extremely fragmentary) lists, there were about 1,700 heads of households, and more than 40 settlements. In most places, organized Jewish communities already existed or were under formation. According to our data, the Jews still lived mainly in the towns of the western Hungarian estates in groups of varying sizes.

There were a few Jews scattered in other parts of the country, with no more than one or two families per town or village, especially in the northern and northeastern counties. These Jews had contracts with the landowner, usually for brandy distillation or innkeeping. Their number grew continuously, especially when King Karl III, in his 1726 decree, forbade more than one young Jewish man per family from establishing a separate household in the hereditary Austrian provinces. Consequently, many young men, especially from Bohemia and Moravia, who wished to marry, immigrated to Hungary. They augmented the Jewish communities of Nyitra, Pozsony and Trencsén counties.

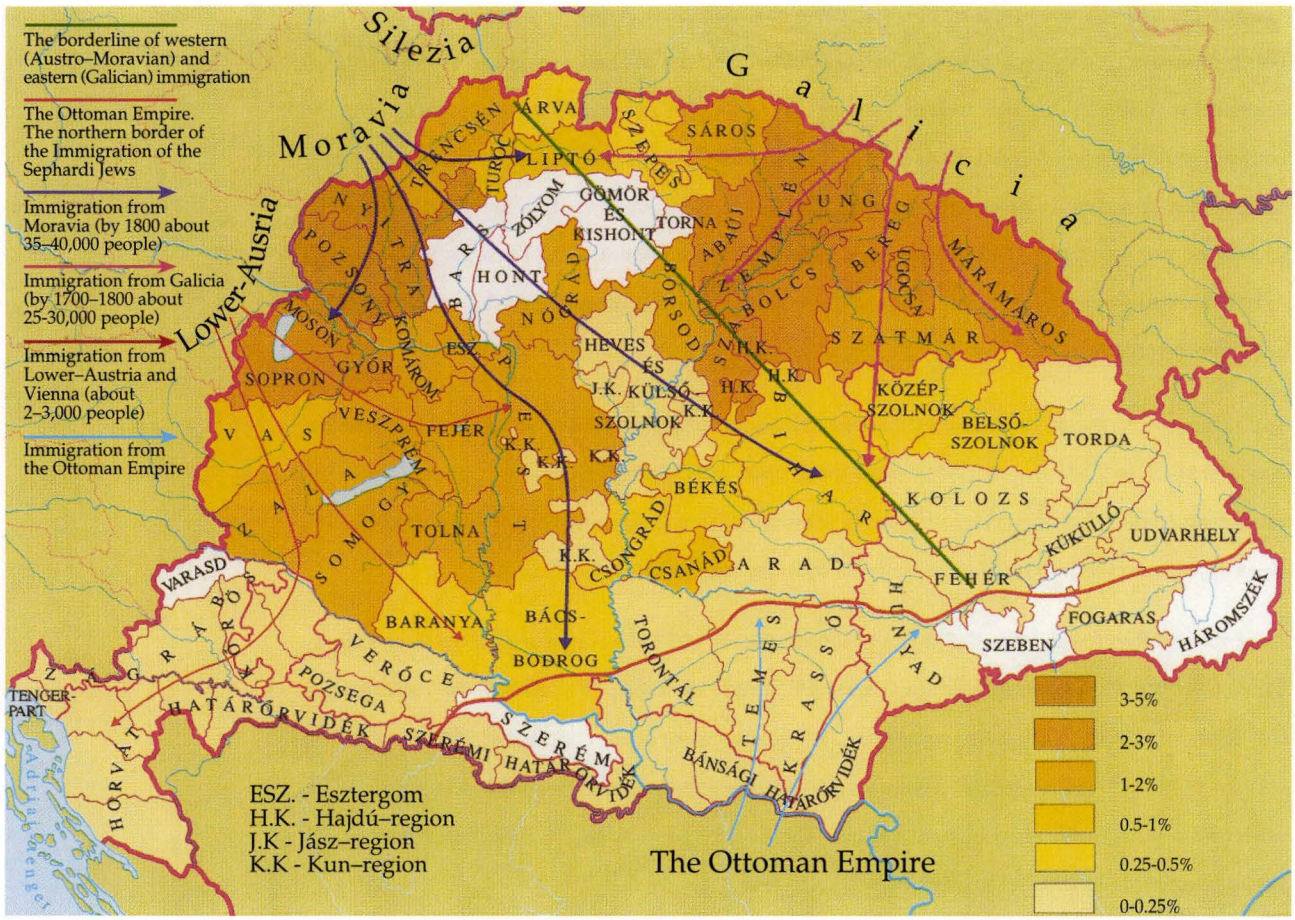
According to a new census conducted between 1735 and 1738, the number of heads of households had increased to 2,531 in one decade and there were now almost 60 Jewish communities with more than 10 families. The actual number of Jews must have been more than the reported 12,219, since apart from the free royal cities, only 32 counties carried out the census.

According to the census, of the 2,531 heads of households, 883 were craftsmen, 143 of them tailors. There were quite a few butchers and glaziers, 230 brandy distillers, 150 innkeepers. About half of the heads of family, 1,139, were merchants, while nine were army contractors. There were 272 shopkeepers and 814 peddlers. There were also day laborers and beggars. Among the 536 settlements with Jews, only 12 had a rabbi. There were 14 cantors, 26 ritual slaughterers, 25 synagogue servants and 143 teachers.

By the middle of the eighth decade of the 18th century, according to the census of Joseph II, the number of Jews totalled over 80,000. Up until the end of the 18th century, the Jews came mainly from the German states, the Austrian Alpine provinces, and especially from Moravia, Bohemia and Silesia, and from the east.

The western Jews settled in the northern and central parts of the country, while the eastern Jews preferred the northeastern and eastern parts. The Transylvanian Jewish community started forming only in the second half of the 18th century, but the numbers remained insignificant until the end of the century. For a long time, the Jewish population of the country was divided into two parts, the division corresponding to the dual waves of immigration. The Jews, using the terminology of the western immigrants of that time, called themselves *Oberlanders* (western Hungary, the northwest and Transdanubia) and *Unterlanders* (eastern Hungary and Transylvania).

There was a broad sociocultural difference between the western and eastern immigrants. The




33
The return of the Jews in the 18th century and their proportion within the population under Joseph II

Galician immigrants were typical Eastern European Jews, not only Orthodox, but Hassidic to a considerable degree as well. The western Jewish communities had been open to the Emancipation and to assimilation processes for a long time and tended towards Neology.

Comparison of data from the 18th century censuses reveals the migration of the Jewish population from the border areas towards the central territories. Like the migration of the Jews from the villages to the cities, this process also reached its full dimensions only in the 19th century. In 1735, 84% of the Jews listed lived in the 16 counties on the border or in counties not far from the border.

From the second third of the century, there were certain changes in the distribution of the Jewish population. In addition to the Jewish communities in western Hungary that remained populous, the communities of Bazin and Modor became important due to the Counts Pálffy, and those of Tata and Pápa due to the Counts Esterházy. The Jewish communities in the central parts of the country, especially that on the Zichy estate in Óbuda, gained importance. The Jewish population

of Óbuda, situated close to Pest-Buda – a city barred to Jews, that was becoming the cultural-economic center of the country – began to grow rapidly in the middle of the century. In the middle of the 18th century, Óbuda became the second spiritual center of the country's Jews.

In this era, the differences within Hungarian Jewry could already be clearly distinguished. Karl III rewarded a few Jewish families, such as the Schlesingers, the Keppish brothers and the family of Izsák Hirschel, for their services by granting them privileges. These privileged families were more or less the aristocrats of Jewish society. Thanks to the royal protection, they could live anywhere and go anywhere in the country, excepting areas banned to Jews. They could also sell any kinds of goods in open shops. The privileged Jews did not have to wear distinctive Jewish badges, and they paid the same amount of taxes as the Christians. They could practice their religion freely and their legal cases were settled not by the local authorities but by the Hungarian Royal Chamber that represented the king himself.



34
Ritual bath, miniature (18th century)

The second group of Hungarian Jewry consisted of the members of the communities. A Jew could obtain the right to become a member of a community (*cheskat hakahal*) only with the permission of the landowner and the local Jewish community itself, and by paying a certain sum. The third group of Jews consisted of homeless vagabonds who were temporarily cared for by the communities, but they did not enjoy the advantages and the security of membership and were in constant danger of being expelled from the country.

Most Jewish merchants were peddlers who went from village to village selling ribbons, scarves, stockings and so on to the peasants and buying rabbit and sheepskins, old clothes and scrap iron. One rung higher on the scale were the shopkeepers, who sold all kinds of goods, such as silk and cloth. Some of them, the so-called Jewish stallholders, offered all kinds of goods, from local crops to local and foreign goods in the markets. The highest and richest class engaged in wholesale trade. They were the "household Jews" of the nobles, who sold the goods produced on the estates, bought foreign luxury goods for the estate, especially for the landowner and his family, and, if necessary, provided the big landowners or even the counties with credits and loans.

A smaller proportion of the Jewish population pursued crafts. Tailoring was the most prevalent occupation, but there were many glaziers, goldsmiths, bookbinders and pipemakers. These occupations were characteristic mainly of the more advanced western and central territories. The

majority of Jews in the northern and eastern counties leased the landowner's inn or distilled brandy. The treasury struggled with financial difficulties and welcomed the possibility of an extra Jewish tax. In 1698, Leopold I had attempted to impose a tax on the Jews in return for tolerating them, the *tolerantialis taxa* (imposed by the so-called Olbern committee), but his attempt failed as a result of the opposition of the counties.

The idea of the tolerance tax was revived by Maria Theresia in 1743. This tax was introduced and its sum was determined without the consent of the Estates and the Diet. Maria Theresia already regarded the special tax originally collected from time to time to support the Austrian War of Succession as an obligatory tax on the Jews. From 1743 on, it was paid by all Jewish families, and from 1746 by every individual Jew. In 1749, the annual payment was fixed at 20,000 florins, and the Jewish community as a whole was made responsible for its delivery.

The allocation of the new tax generated a great deal of dispute between the counties, the communities and even members of the same community. Finally, since in Hungary, unlike Bohemia and Moravia, the Jews had no nationwide organization, the tolerance tax was imposed on each county separately on the basis of the number of the Jews living there, and the local communities had to collect the money. Usually – this varied according to time and to place – the Jews paid this tax in a combined form. One-third of the tax was to be paid per capita and the rest was divided by the leaders of the community according to the financial standing of the members.



35
Honey-cake with Hebrew letters

The government conducted a contradictory policy. On the one hand, for financial reasons, it supported the settlement of the Jews. On the other hand, however, the monarchs periodically restricted the movement of the Jews, both for religious reasons and on the demand of the citizens of the free royal cities, generally the guilds. The non-Jewish merchants and craftsmen who comprised the guilds did everything possible to prevent the settlement of the Jews or at least to restrict their activities.

In 1746, Maria Theresia, who resented the Jews, banned them from Buda. Some of them settled in neighboring Óbuda, but several families immigrated to Poland. Only 40 years later, during the reign of Joseph II, did a few Jewish families again move to Buda, and there were only 40 Jews in Pest in 1785–1787.

From the middle of the century, simultaneously with the introduction and increase of the tolerance tax, central policy towards the Jews became more moderate. In 1762, Maria Theresia issued a decree prohibiting the forced conversion of Jewish children. In 1763, she called on

Catholic priests to stop collecting surplice fees from the non-Catholic population. In 1764, the government ordered the release of those Jews from Orkuta who had been cruelly tortured in 1764 in Sáros county, in an effort to make them confess in the first case of ritual in the modern history of Hungary.

During the ten years of Joseph II's reign (1780–1790), several important changes occurred in the relations between the government, society and Hungarian Jewry that were to prove decisive in the long run. The famous *Systematica Gentis Judaicae Regulatio* was proclaimed by the Regent Council on the 31st of March, 1783. This decree permitted the Jews to settle freely wherever they chose, except for the mining towns. In order to promote the usage of the German language, it ordered the Jews to stop using Hebrew and Yiddish and, to further this objective, it decreed that Jewish schools under state supervision were to be opened, and permitted Jewish children to attend Christian schools. Within a few years, more than 20 such so-called *Normalschules* were opened. Likewise, the decree permitted the Jews to attend some faculties of the universities. All the crafts until then persistently barred to the Jews by the guilds were now opened up to them by the monarch. They were even permitted to lease land, provided they cultivated it themselves. He abolished the distinctive badges worn by the Jews on their clothing, and in some cases even allowed Jews to wear a sword. His well-intentioned, characteristically anti-clerical decree, forbidding Jews to wear beards provoked such anger andoutrage that it had to be withdrawn after three months.

Though, for financial reasons, Joseph II could not afford to give up the tolerance tax, in 1785 he replaced its insulting name with a neutral one. In the same year, at the request of the Jews, he revoked the so-called personal tax (*Leibzoll, Leibmaut*), that was paid only by the Jews when crossing the border of the internal provinces or of the country. In 1787, he ordered that every Jew choose a German family name by the 1st of January of the following year.

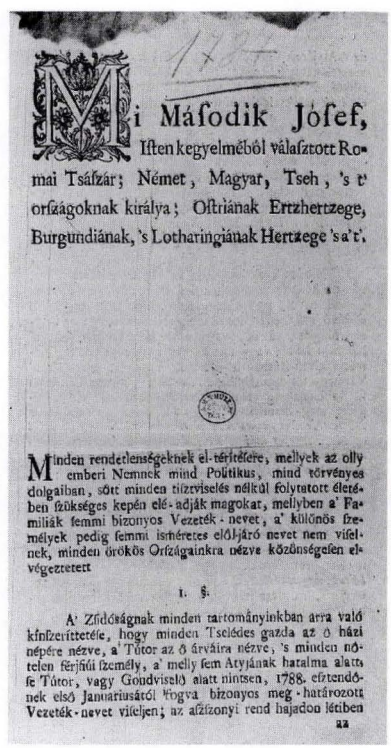
The death of Joseph II in 1790 endangered the positive changes in the status of the Jews, since, on his deathbed, he rescinded the decrees that concerned the Jews as well as his other orders. The cities demanded renewed banishment of the Jews and the restoration of the economic restrictions. The 1790 law, called *De Judaeis*, obliged the cities to maintain or restore the status of the Jews that had prevailed on the 1st of January, 1790. This law, extremely important and modern at that time, remained valid for half a century, but in time it became an obstacle to the social-economic mobility of the Jews, an instrument restricting the efforts to achieve emancipation and assimilation.

36
Title page of an Italian book on the customs and ceremonies of the Jews, translated from Latin into Hungarian by an anonymous priest from the Episcopal See of Pécs (1783)

37
Joseph II's decree of January 1, 1788, ordering the Jews to take German surnames


A'
ZSIDÓKNAK SZOKASI,
ÉS
SZER-TARTÁSI,
MELLYEKÉT
UGYAN A' ZSIDÓSÁGBÓL MEG-TÉRTT
DOKTOR
MEDICEI PÁL
OLASZ NYELVEN
KI-ADOTT;
ÉS AZON NYELVRŐL DEÁKRA FORDÍTOT
[ELSŐ REMETE SZ. PÁL SZERZETESÉBŐL]
T. P. ROSTHY MIKLÓS.
MOSTAN PEDIG
MAGYAR NYELVRE ÁLTAL-TETTE, ÉS
A' ZSIDÓ TALMUDBÓL, S' EGYÉBÖNNEN KI-
SZEDEGETETT NÁMELLY SZÉP TOLDALÉ-
KOKKAL MEG-BŐVÍTETTE
EGY
PÉTSI PÜSPÖKI MEGYÉBŐL.
PÉTSETT Angyal János
1783

36


Mi Második Jósef,
Isten kegyelméből választott Romai Tsászár; Német, Magyar, Tseh, 's t' országoknak királya; Ostriának Ertzhertzege, Burgundiának, 's Lotharingiának Hertzege 's a't'.
Minden rendetlenségeknek el-téritésére, mellyek az olly emberi Nemnek mind Politikus, mind törvényes dolgaiban, sött minden tízrviselés nélkül folytatott életében szükséges képén elé-adják magokat, mellyben a' Familiák semmi bizonyos Vezeték-nevet, a' különös személyek pedig semmi ismeretes előljáró nevet nem viselnek, minden örökös Országainkra nézve közönségesen elvégeztetett
1. §.
A' Zsidóságnak minden tartományinkban arra való kinszerittetése, hogy minden Tselédes gazda az ő házi népére nézve, a' Tútor az ő árváira nézve, 's minden nőtelen férjfiú személy, a' melly sem Atyjának hatalma alatt se Tútor, vagy Gondviselő alatt nintsen, 1788. esztendőnek első Januariusától fogva bizonyos meg-határozott Vezeték-nevet viseljen; az aszszonyi rend hajadon létiben
aa

37


T. Clarot del.

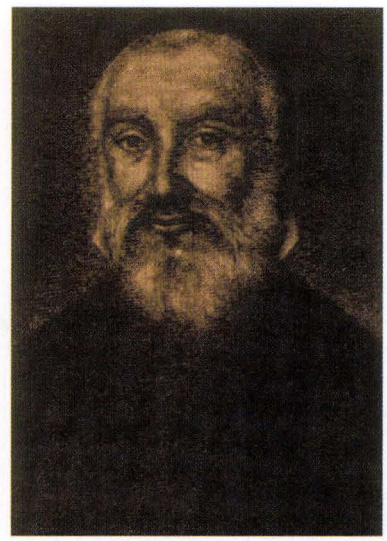
# The Effect of the Enlightenment on Hungarian Jewry

Anikó Prepuk

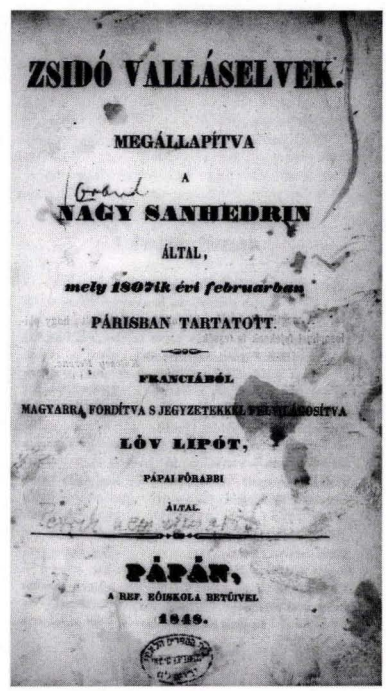
38
At the Pest bridgehead of the floating bridge. A Jewish vendor can be seen among the people on the bank (Lithograph by Johann Clarot, 1843)

39
Áron Chorin, chief rabbi of Arad

40
Hungarian edition of the Jewish articles of faith set down by the Great Sanhedrin of Paris in 1807, translated into Hungarian by Lipót Lőw (1848)



39




40

Fter centuries dominated by the Christian conception of Jews, the intellectual atmosphere of the Enlightenment created a totally new attitude towards them. The omnipotence of closed religious systems based on natural law was questioned, too, and in view of the mood of religious tolerance, it was not hard to imagine that the walls between Jewish and Christian society could be broken down. Of the various new intellectual movements, it was the Enlightenment which first penetrated the rabbinical world. The goal of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah)* which was born in the last third of the 18th century in Berlin, was to lead Jewry out of the spiritual and the material ghetto by embracing some elements of European culture. The sway of the Berlin movement could be felt in Hungary towards the beginning of the 19th century, predominantly in the activities of Áron Chorin, the rabbi of the Arad community. In his writings, he attempted to prove that the Talmud and rationalism could be reconciled, criticizing such authoritative commentators as Maimonides and questioning the validity of the mystical interpretation of the Bible, the Zohar. He was the first in Hungary to accept the ceremonial reforms introduced by the Berlin *maskilim*, including German-language sermons. Other representatives of the modern spirit were Nissan Márkus Weiss, Eliezer ben Farkas Liebermann and David Friesenhausen. They all demanded a change in religious life, confronting the necessity of reforms within the rigid rabbinical law. Weiss demanded change predominantly in the dietary laws and in traditional dress. Liebermann suggested following the practical customs of other persuasions. Friesenhausen was mostly concerned about rabbinical training: he wanted to replace the traditional yeshiva with modern rabbinical training institutions.

The Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) made an impression only on a small intellectual elite in Hungary. The majority of Jewish leaders of the time rejected any ideas that wanted to tamper with tradition. The conflict between the traditionalists and the innovators, which began at the beginning of the 19th century, came to full bloom during the fight for civic emancipation during the Reform Age.

In Hungary it was the liberal nobility which embraced the cause of civic reform and, along with it, Jewish emancipation. The first representatives of the reform generation viewed the activities and integration of Jews into general society in relation to their effect on the birth of the homogenous Hungarian nation and civic society. In his early works, István Széchenyi presented the activities

"Behold the dark, pale face, with its features betraying its oriental ancestry, behold the smoldering glare, inflamed by suppressed revenge and unfulfilled cravings, behold the sufferings, and thou shall recognize him. Children point at him mockingly and the traveler casts a pitying glance at him, whom not the lowliest among us would call his equal [...] – the Jew, or the one whom we call by this name, the heartless stranger, who feels kinship with no-one, the unfortunate miser who, having been stripped of all ambition, covets only profit, the insolent usurer, who had no honor to lose and who for this reason indulged the flaming desires of his heart rather than the precepts of moral in his deeds – in other words, the eternal Jew, the rightless, the outcast, whom our ancestors had robbed of all human rights, whom we have deemed unfit for any civil rights. [...] The Jew's character has an aspect which is oft-times disagreeable, repulsive and even ridiculous; yet there is another one which, no matter with how much prejudice and bias we look upon this nation, unwillingly evokes a feeling of awe – his piety. The self-same Jew whom, when seen only in his dealings with Christians, we might despise; here a heartless miser, there a good father and husband and true friend of his co-religionists; the needy Jew will not knock on his door in vain, there can be none so lowly among Moses' followers with whom he feels not one spark of kinship. The self-same Jew who timidly flatters his oppressors and wears his chains with a calm equanimity cleaves to his religion with irresistible faith and would rather endure all manners of suffering, would rather choose death than to abandon his forefathers' altar. The self-same Jew who clings with irrational childish stubbornness to his prejudices learnt from his Talmud, has preserved from among all of Canaan's nations the faith of the *One God*, and with it, the sublime moral on which our own higher Christianity is built. The Jewish nation, like one side of the coin, is worn, but the other has kept its engraved legend, and no metal which has withstood so much through the millennia can be base."

József Eötvös, 1840

of Jewish merchants as an example to be followed by the Hungarian nobility, since he believed that they combined economic rationality with civic virtues, e.g., diligence, enterprise and profit orientation. Ferenc Kölcsey and Miklós Wesselényi, both of whom sought means of harmonizing interests, thought that it was necessary to unite all socially useful elements in the framework of a civic constitution. What they had in mind was the masses of taxpayers from various ethnic minorities that lived in Hungary, including the Jews.

Attempts to change the legal status of Jewry were first clearly discernible at the Diet of 1839–1840. Article 1840:XXIX, passed after a long debate, allowed Jews who were born in Hungary or who had legally received permission to dwell in Hungary to live freely in any part of the country. Jews were allowed to trade freely, to establish factories and to practice any profession "with the help of apprentices of their faith." In accordance with the nascent civic law, Jews were also required to use a permanent first and last name. Certificates and contracts had to be written in one of the "living languages fashionable in our country." The greatest achievement of the law was granting freedom of residence. As a consequence, Jews could settle even in royal free cities, which they were previously not allowed to enter. Only mine towns remained closed to them. This greatly contributed to the dissolution of the masses of Jewish communities near the border and to the migration of Jews to territories previously inhabited by Hungarians only. This posed a good chance for the Magyarization of the Jews, which was the heartfelt desire of the liberals.

The Jewish question remained on the agenda of the (Reform Age) Diet for quite some time, and during the 1840s two opposite attitudes crystallized. The liberals, represented primarily by József Eötvös, wanted to grant Jews immediate and unconditional emancipation. Radicals like Lajos Kossuth demanded assimilation and Magyarization from the Jews in return for emancipation, and viewed religious reform as a token of this process.

As a reaction to the demand for Magyarization, traditional Jews rejected the idea of emancipation, while others held legal equality to be more important and started to look for ways towards Magyarization. The ultimate stronghold of conservatism was the Jewish community of Pozsony and the illustrious yeshiva headed by Chatam Sofer, who tried to guard against modern thought. The progressive forces were centered in Pest. The first reform synagogue was founded in 1827. Here services followed the pattern of the Vienna reformers.

The reformers supported the use of Hungarian, and from the 1830s, the language of instruction in the Jewish schools was Hungarian. From 1830 on, the Hungarian language teacher in Buda was

Móric Rosenthal. In Pest Hungarian was taught by Lőw Schwab in the newly organized school from 1834 on, in Pápa from 1839 on. In Arad it was Áron Chorin who introduced Hungarian, and in Nagykanizsa Lipót Lőw (1841). The Pest Association, Discussed and Popularized the Use of the Hungarian Language among Hungarian Jewry, was founded in 1844 in Pest. The Society maintained a Hungarian kindergarten, a language school and had a library of Hungarian papers and books.

The first works of Jewish literature in Hungarian were translations of the Bible and of various Hebrew texts. The Pentateuch was translated by Móric Bloch in 1840, Móric Rosenthal translated the Psalms of King David and the Passover Haggadah, and the two of them together published a Hungarian prayer book. In 1841 Hermann Bauer translated the Book of Proverbs. Salamon Neumann wrote biblical stories in German and in Hungarian. The first Hungarian Jewish reader was published in 1848 by Ignác Blayer, a teacher in Pápa.

Hungarian language sermons were first given in some progressive Jewish communities in the 1840s. Lipót Lőw in Nagykanizsa, Jakab Steinhardt in Arad, Meir Zipser in Székesfehérvár and Lipót Rokonstein in Nagyvárad introduced the use of Hungarian in the synagogue. The first attempt to publish a journal in Hungarian was the *Magyar Zsinagóga* published by Lipót Lőw in Pápa in 1847.

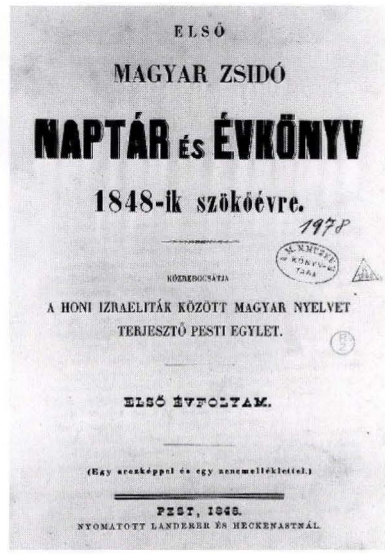
The commitment to adjust to the environment was also indicated by the efforts to reform the one-sided occupation pattern of Jews. The goal of the Hungarian Israelite Handicraft and Agricultural Society, founded in Pest (1842), was not only to spread the Hungarian language but also to popularize handicraft and agricultural work among Jews.

The 1848 Revolution mobilized primarily the more progressive and more Magyarized sector of Hungarian Jewry. There were Jews among the members of the Public Peace Committee, and the National Guard did not create obstacles for Jews who wanted to join, either. Nevertheless, anti-Semitic sentiments that evolved in various cities in the country soon stopped Jews from joining the Revolution. It was mostly German guild members in Pest, Pozsony, Sopron and Nagyszombat who utilized the revolutionary upheaval and demanded the expulsion of Jews and the banning of small trade and protested against Jews being admitted to the National Guard.

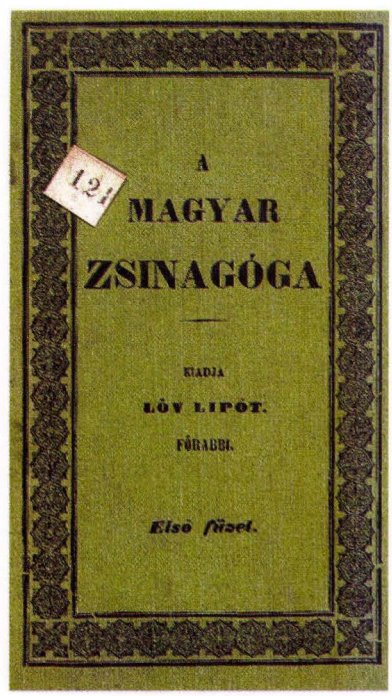
The effect of urban anti-Jewish conduct was felt at the sessions of the Diet in Pozsony, too. Fearing that by passing the law of emancipation they would lose the support of the anti-Jewish urban bourgeoisie, revolution leaders postponed the discussion of the Jewish question. As a result the

41
Title page of *Első magyar zsidó naptár és évkönyv* [First Hungarian Jewish calendar and yearbook]

42
*A magyar zsinagóga* [The Hungarian Synagogue], periodical published by Lipót Lőw


ELSŐ
MAGYAR ZSIDÓ
NAPTÁR és ÉVKÖNYV
1848-ik szökőévre.
1978
A HONI IZRAELITÁK KÖZÖTT MAGYAR NYELVET TERJESZTŐ PESTI EGYLET.
ELSŐ ÉVFOLYAM.
PEST, 1848.
NYOMATOTT LANDERER ÉS HECKENASTNÁL.

41


121
A
MAGYAR
ZSINAGÓGA
KIADJA
LŐW LIPÓT.
FŐRABBI.
Első füzet.

42

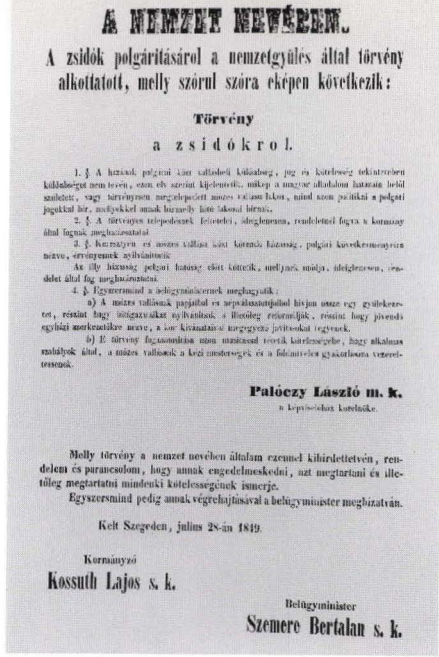


43
Captain Dr. Zsigmond Kunewalder,
chief physician
of the Fifth Army Corps
(Watercolor)

April laws, which were so important for the civic development of Hungary, did not take a stand on the Jewish question. The law on religion granted equal rights only to representatives of officially acknowledged religions, and Jews were not listed among those entitled to vote.

Though the anti-Jewish measures ended by May 1848 and Jews joined the revolutionary forces in large numbers, the Hungarian legislation decided to bestow legal equality on the Jews only on July 28, 1849. However, due to the fall of the Hungarian cause, this law of Szeged had no practical consequences.

After the surrender of the Hungarians, many Jewish soldiers were imprisoned or conscripted into the Austrian army. Two distinguished rabbis, Lőw Schwab of Pest and Lipót Lőw of Pápa, were both imprisoned in Pest on account of their sermons, welcoming the Declaration of Independence. The payment of reparations imposed on the Jews was also a heavy burden. In the spring of 1849, the Jewish communities of Pest, Óbuda, Szeged, Győr and Arad – which had collaborated with the Hungarian government – were forced to pay reparations to Haynau's army. Since these communities were unable to pay, the monarch declared in October 1849 that the entire Hungarian Jewish community was collectively responsible for paying the two hundred and thirty thousand forints of reparations. On September 20, 1850, he reduced the amount of these taxes to one hundred thousand forints, and ordered that this sum be utilized to set up a Jewish Educational and School Fund.



A NEMZET NEVÉBEN.

A zsidók polgáritásáról a nemzetgyülés által törvény alkottatott, melly szórul szóra képen következik:

**Törvény**

a zsidókról.

1. §. A hazának polgárai ezen vallásbeli különbség, jog és kötelesség tekintetében különbséget nem tevén, ezen ok szerint kijelentetik, miképp a magyar államlakon határain belül születtek, vagy törvényesen megtelepedett összes vallásu lakos, mind azon politikai s polgári jogokkal bír, melyekkel annak bármely hitvallásu birtok.

2. §. A törvényes telepedésnek feltételei, elrendezésem, rendeltetni fogva a kormány által fognak megállapittatni.

3. §. Kormányon és összes vallási ügyi körnek hatóság, polgári következményeiben nézve, érvényesnek nyilvánittatik.

Az illy hatóság polgári hatóság előtt történik, melynek módja, illetőleg, rendelet által fog meghatároztatni.

4. §. Egyszersmind a belügyminiszternek megbizatik:

a) A mózes vallásnak papjaitól és népelöljáróitól hivjon össze egy gyülekezetet, részint hogy ittgazságokat nyilvánitsak a illetőleg reformáljak, részint hogy jövendő egyházi szerkezetökre nézve, a kor kivánatainak megfelelő javitásokat tegyenek.

b) E törvény foganatositása mint iránt részint tovább körülményekbe, hogy alkalmas szabályok által, a mózes vallásnak a keresztyén mesterségek és a földmivelés gyakorlásra vezettessenek.

**Palóczy László m. k.**
a képviselőház elnöke.

Melly törvény a nemzet nevében általam ezennel kibirdettetvén, rendelem és parancsolom, hogy annak engedelmeskedni, azt megtartani és illetőleg megtartatni mindenki kötelességének ismerje.

Egyszersmind pedig annak végrehajtásával a belügyminister megbizatván.

Kelt Szegeden, julius 28-án 1849.

Kormányzó
**Kossuth Lajos s. k.**

Belügyminister
**Szemere Bertalan s. k.**

44

44
The bill on the Emancipation of the Jews,
passed by the National Assembly (Szeged, July 28, 1849)

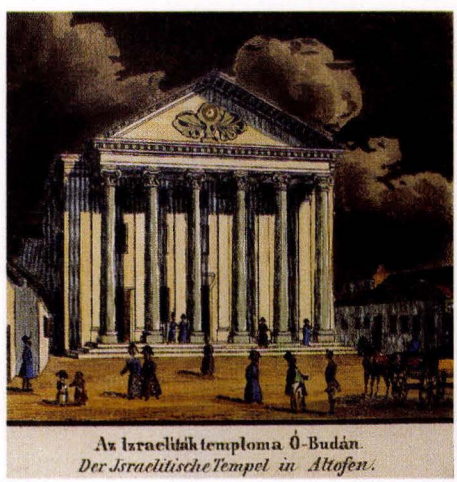
45
The pogrom in Pozsony (1848)



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46
Moshe Minc, Chief Rabbi of Óbuda
from 1790 (Copper engraving by Sámuel Lehnhardt)

47
The synagogue of Óbuda (Drawing by Franz Weiss in
series of Vasquez's maps, 1837)

48
Niche for the *ner tamid*, the Eternal Light, Pécs
(Photo by Ágnes Takách)

49
Painting commemorating the 29th wedding
anniversary of Lipót Streliszky, former court
photographer, and his wife, Róza Tetinger, done in
February, 1870
(Watercolor by unknown painter, 19th century)



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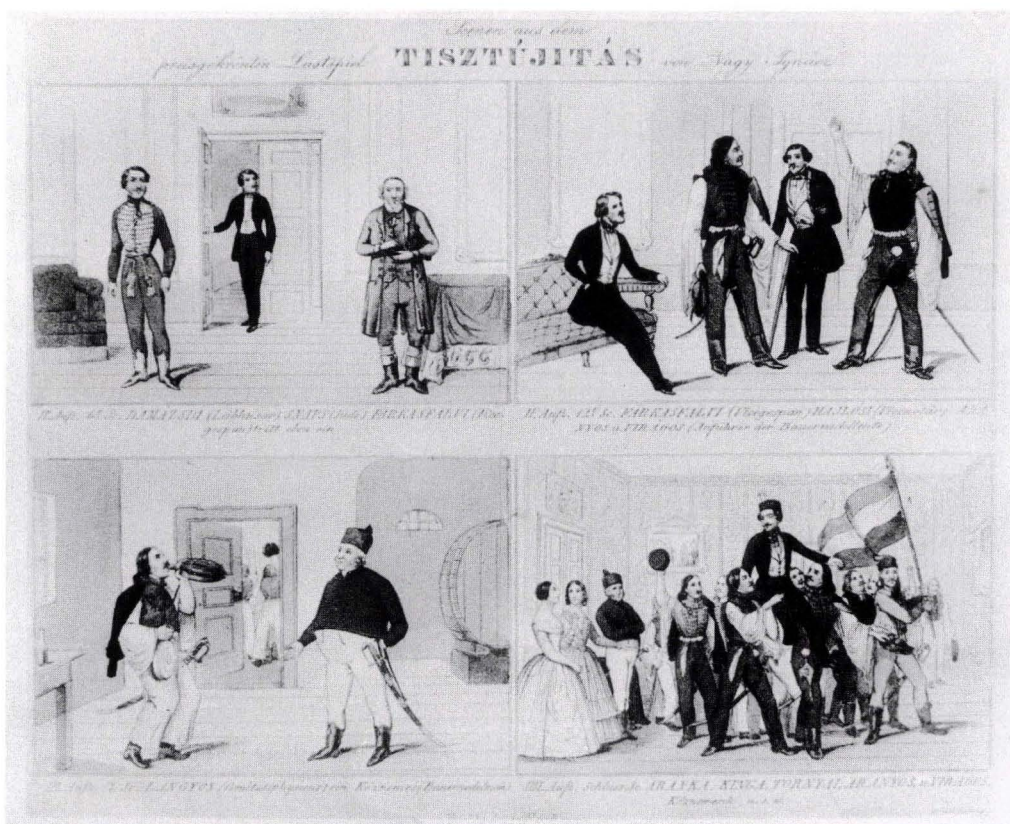
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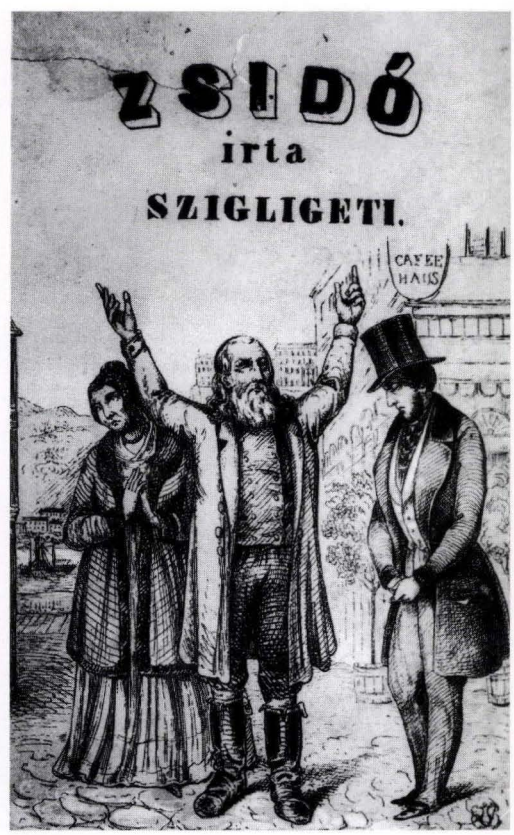
50
Flood-board from Óbuda, inscribed in Hebrew. The tablet, showing the water level of the great flood of Pest-Buda in March, 1838, was affixed to one of the inner walls of the Óbuda synagogue and was inscribed with the following text: "Let this be a sign among you, that when your children ask in time to come, saying: What mean ye by these stones (Joshua 4, 6): Let the very last generation know that the waters of the Danube swelled up to this point."

51
Scenes from Ignác Nagy's *Tisztújítás* [Election of the Officials]. Illustration made for the publication of the play by Vidéky, a copper engraver in Pest (1843). The upper left-hand picture shows the innkeeper, Mózes Schnapps, the Jewish character in the play.

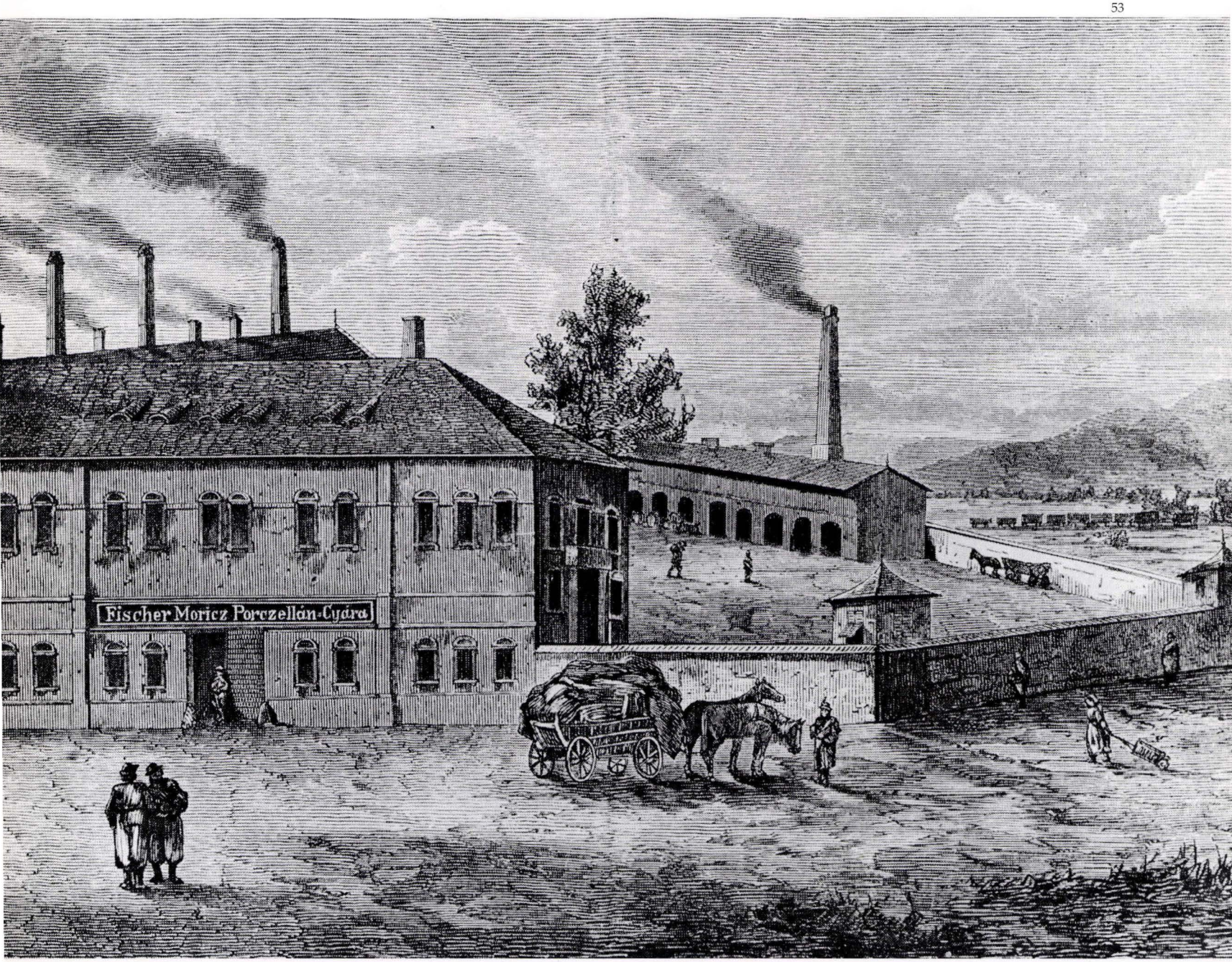
52
Title page of Ede Szigligeti's play, *Zsidó* [The Jew] (1844)




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52


Fischer Moricz Porczellán-Gyára

# Jewish Integration into the Hungarian Economy

Yehuda Don

Historians of Hungarian Jewry maintain that Jews lived in Hungary before Hungarians lived there. In the city of Esztergom, for instance, we know of Jewish settlement before the Hungarian occupation. When the Hungarian tribes penetrated into the Danube Basin, in the 11th century, they were joined (apparently) by Jewish Khazar tribes who, together with the ancient Jewish settlers, founded fully-fledged communities, with synagogues, rabbinical courts as well as charitable institutions for the sick and the poor. In that early period uniquely harmonious relationships evolved between the Hungarians and the Jews. Jewish settlers were allowed to pursue all occupations, including agriculture with slave labor. Economic discrimination against the Jews, inspired by Western Christianity, was first practiced in Hungary in the early 12th century. Jews were compelled to transfer to cities and were barred from keeping Christian slaves, a ban which effectively excluded them from agriculture. This was but the beginning of a long period of occupational exclusion, which drove them into trade and commerce, and notably money-lending.

However, limitations notwithstanding, the Jewish population in Hungary did not share the bitter destiny of their brethren in the West, even during the early Crusades. Certain documents even suggest that some Jews belonged to the upper nobility, and served the Court in important financial roles. The king even quarreled with the Papal Court over the Jewish issue.

This relatively moderate era, during which Jews made considerable contributions to the economic stability of the state, ended in 1360, with the first comprehensive expulsion of Jews from the cities (where most of them now lived). They were readmitted some years later, having been found economically irreplaceable. However, the era of benevolent tolerance of the past was over. This was especially true in those cities where the economic competition of Jewish merchants and artisans provoked anti-Jewish atrocities, particularly on the part of the urban guilds, many of them of German origin. This state of affairs continued, by and large, until the 16th century. The kings endeavored to maintain a balance between permitting Jews to function in the economy while taxing them heavily, on the one hand, and responding to the demands of the urban guilds to exert pressure on the infidel Jews with whom they were in competition. Although the Jewish

54



53
Mór Fischer's porcelain factory in Herend

54
Hand-painted portrait of Vilmos Farkasházy, Fischer's father, on a porcelain goblet (Kolozsvár, 1879)

Policy varied considerably in different periods and places, economic interests remained a central consideration. When the benefits from utilizing the Jews economically seemed smaller than the cost of their efficiency through which they competed with the Christian artisan or merchant, religious arguments were employed to discriminate against them.

The Turkish occupation ushered in a new epoch. Following the Mohács Disaster in 1526, the eastern and central provinces of the country were occupied by the Ottoman Empire. After some chaotic post-occupational years, the attitude of the conquerors to the Jews, and indeed to all "infidel" ethnic minorities, was reasonably tolerant as far as religious worship and economic activity were concerned. The "infidels" paid very high taxes to the state, but beyond that there was little state intervention in the business affairs of the Jews, since they did not compete economically with the Muslim elite. Consequently, numerous Jews migrated to the occupied provinces from the Christian north and northwest of Hungary. Jewish merchants of Ottoman Hungary traded with the northwestern parts of the country, as well as with the great urban centers in the Balkans, such as Sarajevo and Thessaloniki, usually through Sephardi Jews.

When the north and the northwest came under Habsburg control, the life of the Jewish communities deteriorated sharply. Anti-Jewish prejudices, stemming from religious bigotry, and urban economic rivalry were supplemented by charges that the Jews were to be blamed for the Turkish defeat. Expulsions from the major cities (such as Pozsony and Sopron) became the rule, and many Jews settled on the large estates of the nobility, who were well aware of the economic advantages of the Jews as merchants and tax farmers. When King Ferdinand III formally deprived the Jews of their legal rights in 1647, exposing them to the arbitrary whims of local rulers, many shrewd noblemen continued to protect "their Jews" on their estates.

With the re-conquest of the country from the Turks (1686–1700), most Jewish settlements in the recaptured territories were liquidated. Many Jews were massacred, while others escaped to the Ottoman Balkans or migrated to the northwestern Jewish communities. The old commercial ties with the Balkans were all but eliminated. In the northwestern parts of the country, the pattern of small, rural communities, mainly located on noble estates, remained the typical model of Jewish settlements until the second half of the 18th century.

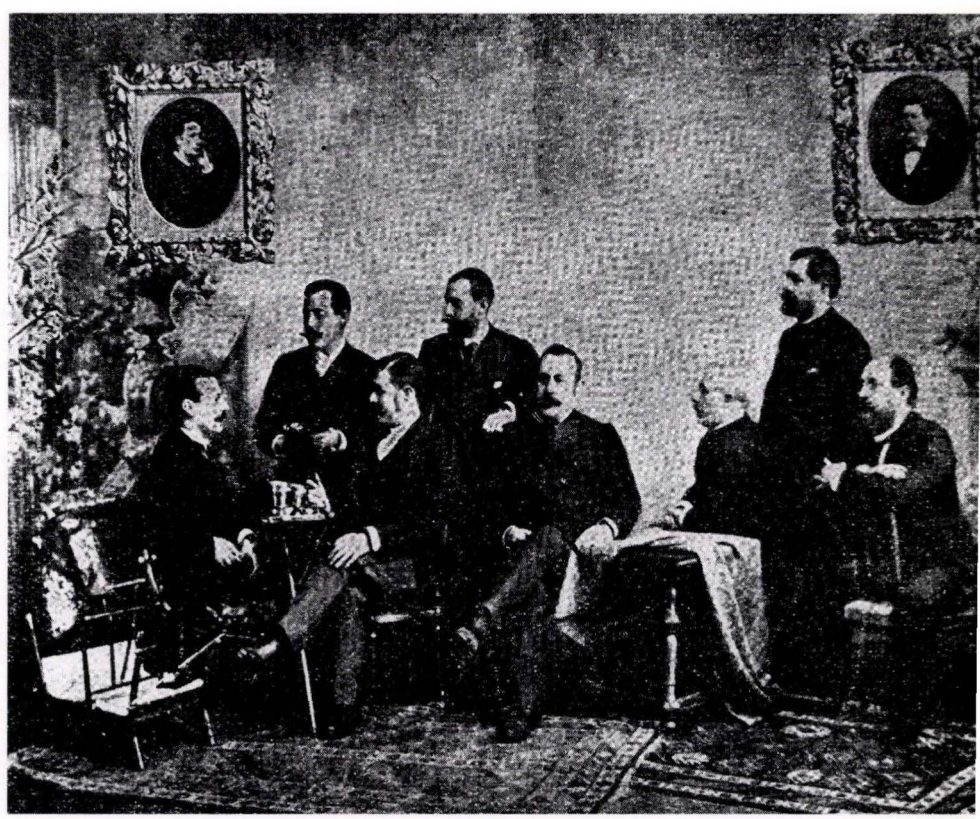
The majority of the Jews were poor and eked out a living as petty traders, artisans or in jobs serving the community itself. There was a narrow stratum of well to do merchants and tax farmers, who became quite widespread due to the extremely inefficient state bureaucracy. Above

them were a small number of wealthy financiers and military suppliers to the Habsburg Court. These rich Jews, such as Samuel Oppenheimer, who were permitted to reside even in the capital city, gradually evolved into Court Jews. In the 18th century, they provided essential provisions and financial services to the Court in its frequent wars. In the early stages of industrialization, the accumulated capital of such Court Jews became important sources of entrepreneurial capital.

The Industrial Revolution reached Hungary late, more than half a century after its appearance in England. The powerful guilds resisted, for obvious reasons, new methods and new technologies. Their endeavor to maintain a strong monopolistic influence continued until the late 19th century. Consequently, innovations were not likely to come from the urban burghers, but rather from those social groups which had been excluded from the medieval guilds, and prominent among them were the Jews.

However, since their freedom to choose places to settle and occupations to pursue was constrained until the late 18th century, it was not feasible for them until then to become innovators. King Joseph II passed the *Systematica Gentis Judaicae Regulatio* in 1781–1783, which, besides opening up most cities of the realm for Jewish settlement, allowed the Jews to enter many crafts and industries. However, since the power of the guilds was not curbed and Jewish artisans were excluded from the guilds, many Jewish artisans were barred from producing for the general urban public. They were only allowed to work for other Jews. Modern technologies were, however, permitted and were often introduced. This state of affairs changed in the course of the 1840s, when the struggle for national freedom was associated with liberal attitudes towards minorities, notable among them the Jews.

55
The members of the Goldberger family at the end of the 19th century: Arnold, Gusztáv, Albert, Gyula, Bertold, Ferenc, Samu and Ödön



The first industrial enterprises emerged in Hungary around the same period. Many of them were initiated by Jewish entrepreneurs. The most prominent examples were Sámuel Goldberger's textile dyeing plants, Mór Fischer's fine china manufacturing plant

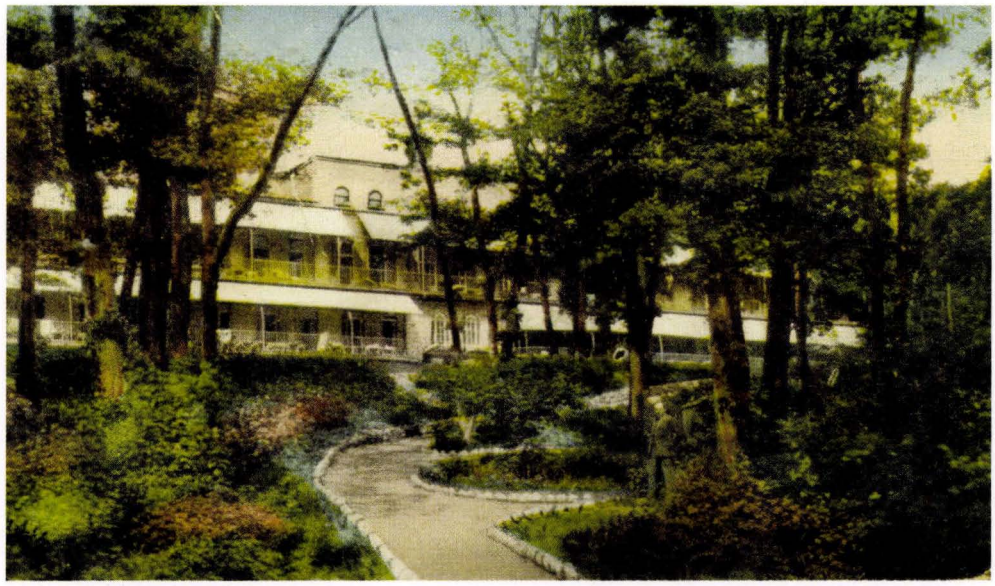


56
The foundation of the First Hungarian Insurance Company (1857), Mór Jellinek, Baron Frigyes Harkányi, Miklós Gottesmann, Károly Ullmann, Izidor Szitányi (Oil painting by Gyula Benczúr)

in Herend, and the first steam mill, established by Mandel Bernát, which heralded the stunning industrial success of Hungarian milling in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The role of the Jews in the economic development of 19th century Hungary is unprecedented in modern European economic history. It can safely be asserted that the most prominent entrepreneurs responsible for Hungary's industrialization up to World War I were Jewish. The reason for this seems quite evident. The country's modernization was heralded and led by the middle classes, who, unlike the landed nobility, had no social and political interest in the perpetuation of the ancient regime. In contradiction to the urban burghers of old, who had benefited from the repressive opposition of the guilds to any innovative ideas, the new middle classes thrived on change and innovation. However, the medieval guilds were not abolished in Hungary until late in the 19th century, and until then, urban burghers displayed little zeal for modernization. On the other hand, land reform, which should have led to the modernization of agriculture and to the socio-economic restructuring of the landed nobility, had to wait until the end of World War II. Consequently, the recently emancipated Jews evolved into the vital component of the newly emerging middle class, which responded to the new economic challenges of the Industrial Revolution. There were additional factors that helped Jewish capitalists to assume leadership in the industrial as well as financial entrepreneurship in Hungary.

1. Due to their pre-industrial occupations, numerous Jews had accumulated some initial capital. During the 1850s and 1860s, in the course of the commercialization of Hungarian agriculture,



57

those Jews who traded in agricultural produce also amassed considerable capital, which was utilized as venture capital in the early stages of industrialization.

2. The Jews, as ardent Hungarian patriots, enjoyed a stable political position within the sensitive ethnic composition of the country, with its very large and unruly ethnic minorities. The coalition between the Jewish capitalists and the ruling landed nobility proved advantageous to both. It lasted, with minor modifications, up to 1944.

3. The international ties of the Jewish entrepreneurs were of great help in a world of increasing cooperation between financial and industrial enterprises and increasing export orientation.

4. After emancipation, in 1867, the Jewish upper middle classes were eager to integrate into the Hungarian economic elite, and were ready to pay the price in terms of loosening ties with their past. The abandonment of all the constraints imposed by their Jewish past, and even conversion to Christianity, became widespread among the second generation of successful pioneers of the Industrial Revolution.

Jewish entrepreneurs developed the Hungarian milling industry, the most internationally competitive in the country, as well as the heavily export-oriented sugar industry. Likewise, the flagships of Hungarian heavy industry – coal and iron mines – in Salgótarján and Rimamurány, as well as iron and machinery concerns in Csepel, were started, financed and managed by Jewish capital and entrepreneurship. Many of the late 19th century's electrical and chemical establishments were also founded by Jews.

58



57
Manfréd Weiss' private sanatorium in Budakeszi (Postcard)

58
Manfréd Weiss' coat-of-arms

TUTTLEMAN LIBRARY OF GRATZ COLLEGE
Melrose Park, PA

Commercial banking also expanded rapidly, as financial capital played a much more important role in the actual management of industry than in Western Europe. Jews were heavily involved in the establishment and management of the great Hungarian banks, such as the Hungarian Commercial Bank (*Magyar Kereskedelmi Bank*), the Hungarian General Credit Bank (*Magyar Általános Hitel Bank*), the Hungarian-English Bank (*Magyar Angol Bank*) and others. Jewish entrepreneurs were also very active in the establishment of the Union of Industrialists (*Gyáriparosok Országos Szövetsége*).

Obviously, the Jewish magnates constituted only a very small segment of the over 900,000 Jews living in Hungary on the eve of World War I. Most of these Jews were small, rather poor artisans, shopkeepers and wage-earners. More than half of them (51.8%) lived in villages and small towns, and one quarter of them resided in the capital, Budapest. The occupational structure of the Jews and the non-Jews, by percent, in the census of 1910 was:

| | Agr. | Publ. Sector | Lib. Prof. | Commerce | Industry | Misc. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jews | 8.1 | 2.2 | 4.5 | 46.4 | 36.1 | 2.7 |
| Non-Jews | 69.6 | 2.0 | 0.7 | 2.5 | 22.0 | 3.2 |

The two structures differed greatly. The three most marked differences were

1. the very high percentage of the Gentile population which worked in agriculture,
2. the almost equally high percentage of commerce among the Jews,
3. the relatively high proportion of liberal professions, i.e., medicine, law, journalism and the arts, among Jews.

Abandonment of agriculture, the high propensity for commerce and the liberal professions were not the sole characteristics of Jewish occupational preference in the early 20th century. The following were other typical features of Jewish priorities:

1. Jews preferred to be independent and self-employed rather than employees and hence channeled their economic endeavors into fields in which independence seemed economically feasible. Commerce and the free professions were fine examples of this tendency.

2. Jews preferred employment in the private sector and endeavored to avoid both employment in and business dealings with the public sector. Exposure to the open, competitive market place was advantageous to the Hungarian Jew, who had won his position through his own initiative rather than his connections.

3. The Jews were, on the average, better educated and more literate than the Hungarian labor



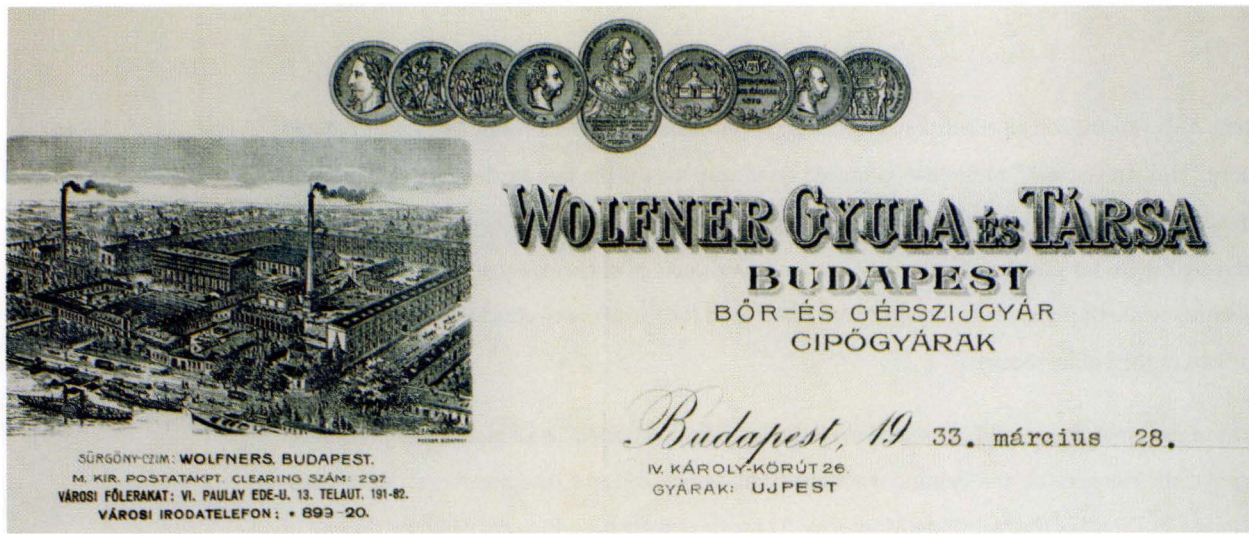
59
Baron Zsigmond Kornfeld, director of the Hungarian General Credit Bank and member of the Upper House of Parliament, wearing the *díszmagyar*, a ceremonial outfit (1905)

force. This was true on all educational levels, up to the universities. As a result, Jews accumulated more "Human Capital," more Jews acquired qualifications for the free professions, which were physically easier and paid better. In the universities, Jews preferred to study subjects which prepared them for positions in the modern economy, such as sciences, economics and business training, while the sons of the nobility very often used their university education as preparation for jobs in the public sector.

Educational preferences and job-selection strategies of Jews reflected also a measure of precaution against the dangers of anti-Semitic discrimination, which did not disappear even during the "Good Old Days" of the Habsburg Monarchy. Those days were brutally terminated by the end of World War I, which launched a dramatically new epoch in the economic history of the Jews in Hungary.

For Hungary, World War I ended in catastrophe. The country was cruelly dismembered and vast numbers of frustrated pre-war Hungarian bureaucrats who had been employed in the old provinces, and now became redundant, swarmed into "mutilated Hungary," only to discover that they were redundant there too. In search of a scapegoat, they found the Jews, who occupied positions which they themselves had created in the process of modernizing the country. The short-lived and unpopular Hungarian Soviet Republic (1919), perceived as a machination of Jewish Communism, fuelled the flames of racial anti-Semitism, which was basically economic in its final goals. Its first success was the ignominious Numerus Clausus of 1920, which, in its clumsy attempts to replace Jewish students with Hungarian Gentiles, led to the technological regression of the whole university system and the country for an entire generation.

The calamity caused by a narrow minded, protectionist economic policy during the 1920s was aggravated in 1929 by the sharp global economic crisis, followed by the economic depression in the first half of the 1930s. The country was impoverished, unemployment was high and, although the Jews were exposed to the same economic conditions, popular frustration turned against them. Right wing propaganda created the Jewish Question which was given immense prominence in public opinion and was considered equal in importance to the issue of land reform. From 1932, with the accession of Gyula Gömbös, the anti-Semitic politician, to the premiership, the policy objective of "Changing of the Guard," i.e., the replacement of the Jews in positions of economic significance by "the masters of this land," became an explicit policy goal. Such a policy had long been the desire of those who could not compete with the qualifications of the Jews. They tried to accomplish this discriminatory employment policy first by political propaganda, then through legislation, the so-called Jewish Laws.




60
Writing paper with company letter-head (1933)

The First Jewish Law, passed in May 1938, aimed to reduce Jewish influence in the Hungarian economy, particularly in the liberal professions. It targeted those liberal occupations where the proportion of Jews was substantial, explicitly to alleviate unemployment among the Christian intelligentsia.

The legal device was the establishment of chambers for each liberal profession in each locality with compulsory membership, and the exclusion of new Jewish members from those chambers. Implementation would have meant the loss of livelihood for about 16,000 Jewish professionals. The law was, however, never implemented, as it was considered too mild and moderate. Hungarian right-wingers demanded more radical and more racist, Nazi-like measures. They obtained it in the Second Jewish Law, in 1939. The major difference of the Second Jewish Law from its predecessor, besides the radicalism of the actual discriminatory instructions, was that race was substituted for religion. The law required all "ex-Jews" or their descendants to conduct complex racial calculations in order to compute the percentage of their "Jewish blood." This was a totally ridiculous requirement. Among other things, it led to the downfall of one of the most vicious pro-Nazi premiers, Béla Imrédy, on the basis of racial impurity.

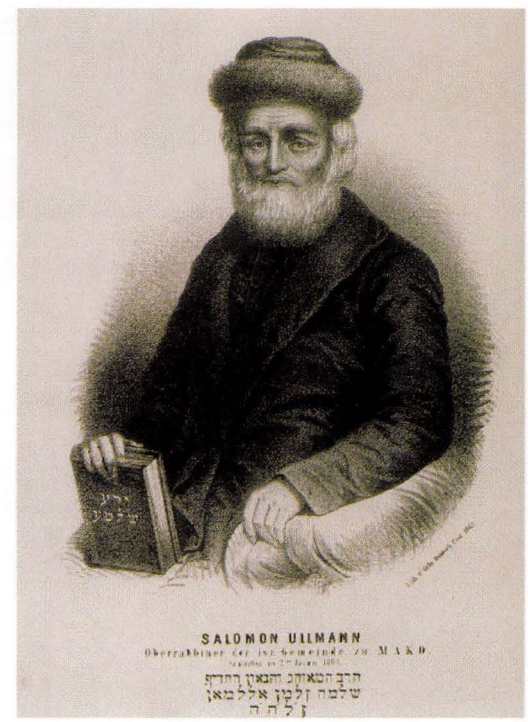
The law was ruinous to a vast number of Jews, who were deprived of any source of livelihood except charity, which was also in short supply, due to the huge number of totally destitute people. However, as before, the Second Jewish Law was not implemented consistently. Exemptions were given to Jews whose contribution was essential to the Hungarian society and economy or to the war effort. Thus, the law led not only to the acute deprivation of the great majority of Hungarian Jews but it also widened the already great social cleavage between the moneyed elite and the rest of the Jewish public.

The German occupation threw the community into total chaos.

# Family Life and Family Strategy among the Jewish Elite of Pest in the Reform Era

Vera Bácskai

Literature, tradition and memory bear witness to the importance and cohesion of family contacts in Jewish life. The explanation for this phenomenon should be sought, not in religious precepts – after all, other religions also maintain the importance of close family links – but in issues relating to social status. Family contacts gain excessive importance within all socially outcast, marginal groups, and notably among Jews. To achieve success and social acceptance, minorities always needed to display outstanding accomplishments, and for this they needed the support and cooperation of the broader family. In the 18th century, the business success of Greek (i.e., Greek Orthodox) merchants was firmly anchored in their family contacts throughout the Balkans and in Vienna. Similar collaboration existed between the Jewish merchants of Pest, who had migrated there from other parts of the Austrian Empire, mainly from Moravia, and their wealthy and successful relatives who had stayed at home. This help manifested itself mainly in facilitating business contacts, granting credit and forming new family contacts by marriage.




61
Salamon Ullmann

The everyday life of nuclear Jewish families, however, was no more harmonious and loving than that of other families of similar social position, but different religious affiliation. As in non-Jewish merchant families, choice of marriage partner was not determined by the emotional bond between the couple, but by the socio-economic interests of the parents. In her will, dated 1841, Mrs. Rosenfeld M. Liebman cautioned her son not to select a wife according to her financial status but by her good qualities and noble character. "She should be virtuous, cheerful, a good and prudent housewife." This admonition depicts the ideal bourgeois housewife – but no mention is made of love among the criteria for choice. It should be pointed out, however, that Mrs. Rosenberg gave her advice to her son after he had been widowed. His first wife was the daughter of a distinguished and wealthy family, in accordance with the marriage customs of the merchants of the period. The goal of marriage was to increase wealth, broaden business contacts and enhance social advancement. Of course, the carefully considered decision of the parents, based on these principles, did not always ensure marital harmony and happiness, as attested by the high number of divorces. For instance, despite Mrs. Rosenfeld's excellent advice, her own daughter

62




63




62
Rudolf Wodianer's house beside the Danube (Drawing by Fanz Weiss in series of Vasquez's maps, 1837)

63
Ullmann Mór's new house by the Danubian unloading square (Drawing by Franz Weiss in a series of Vasquez's maps, 1837)

had divorced and returned to her parents' house with her two children. In other families, such as that of the influential and wealthy Rudolf Wodianer, the choice of marriage partner on the basis of economic considerations ruined the life of the couple as well as of their children.

Family tension was often generated by sibling conflict. Because of the large number of children and the early mortality of parents, older children often had to raise the younger ones, and provide a dowry or capital for them to start a business. The older boys thereby gained some patriarchal power over the younger ones and this was often a source of conflict. This is why we so often encounter parental instructions to older sons to take care of their younger siblings and to younger children to respect and obey their elder brothers. The high frequency of these exhortations about brotherly love and camaraderie also implies that the relationship between siblings was not free of tension. The fairly precarious family harmony was often threatened by suspicions directed against a new son-in-law, who was very often only permitted to receive his share of the family wealth on the basis of certain conditions, most often only through the children. In short, it would be hard to talk about specific traits of family harmony: there were good and bad marriages, just as there were among the rest of the bourgeoisie.

In most cases, however, the foundation for happy family life was, if not love, at least the common will to raise the children decently, to launch them on their career, to amass some wealth as a basis of their social advancement. The role of women in Jewish merchant families, just like in other merchant families, was not restricted to raising children or running the household; they participated actively in business dealings, too.

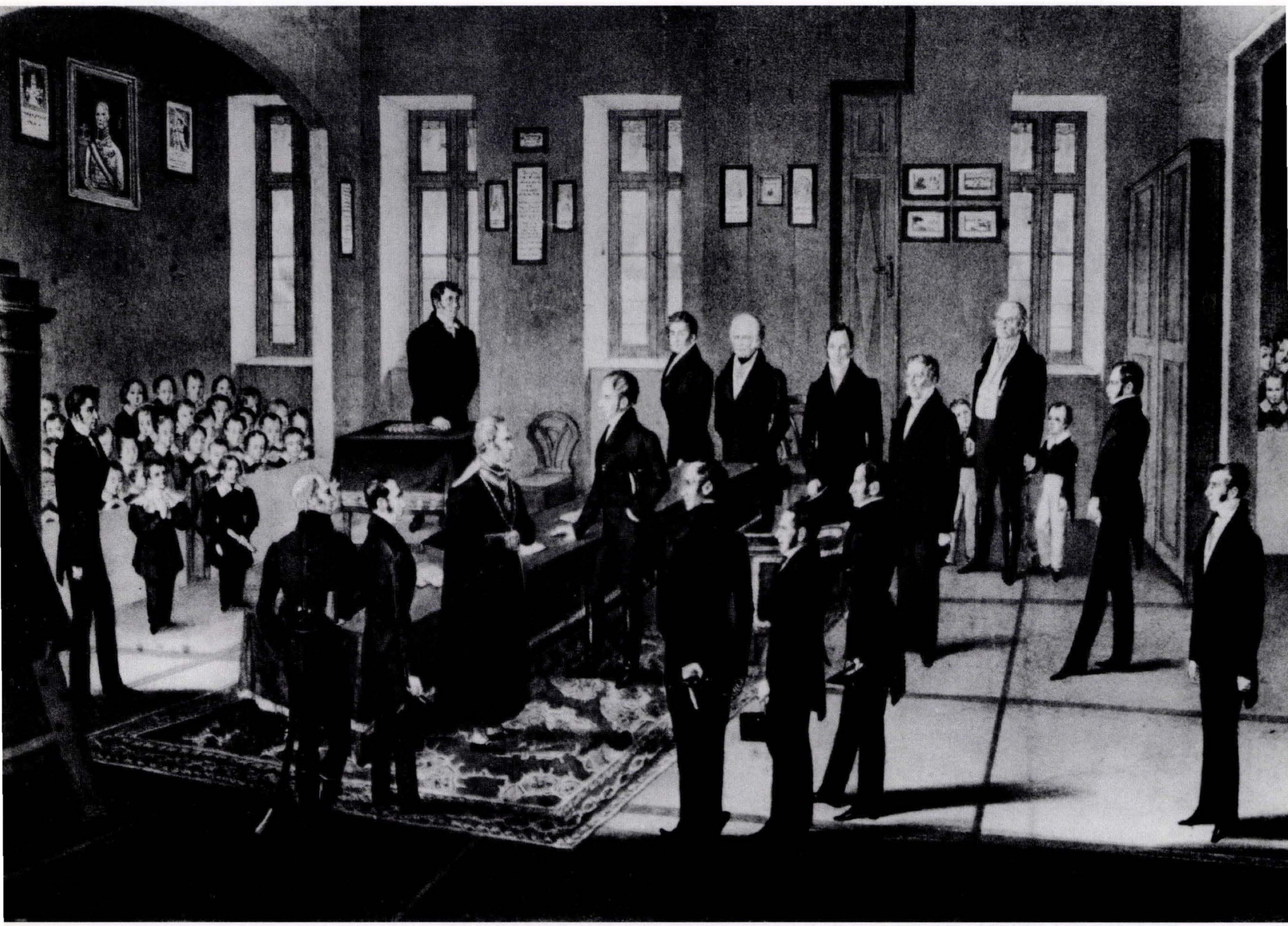
Education played an important part in laying the foundations for children's future. Placing extraordinary emphasis on schooling was, indeed, one of the major specific traits of the cultural strategies of Jewish families. The sons of Jewish merchant families were sent to study in the Piarist High School in ever-growing numbers. At first they studied in the lower classes, and then in the upper two classes, as well, which served as a launching pad to institutions of higher education.



64
Mór Wodianer (Drawing by Joseph Kriehuber)

During this period the proportion of Jewish pupils exceeded 10%. They started their professional career in the firms of their fathers or relatives, but the sons of the most important merchant families often had the opportunity to perfect their skills and broaden their business knowledge in concerns belonging to partners or relatives in foreign countries. Due to their social position, Jewish merchant families employed a different strategy than their Christian counterparts in laying the foundations of their sons' careers. The latter generally planned to ensure the future of their children by raising them either to inherit and continue the family store, or to become office clerks or military officers. This path was not available to Jews. The residential rights and commercial activity of urban Jews were restricted, and only one son or son-in-law of a tolerated Jewish merchant could inherit the rights granted to his father. Though there were cases of inheritance of family businesses, Jews generally had to seek other, economically more productive strategies. Since only one son could inherit the father's business, the others, usually the older sons, earned their rights to independent commercial activity through some remarkable business deal, generally by supporting government offices. Thus the goal of Jewish merchants was not only to raise the future heir of the company, but also to establish several companies with different profiles. This strategy is characteristic mostly of the first few decades of the century. The best could achieve extraordinary success, but the less commercially gifted did not have to worry about their daily bread either.

As was the case with exploitation of family contacts in business, the family strategy of Jewish merchants with regard to securing the future of their offspring also differed from the practices of their Christian counterparts. The greater importance they attributed to knowledge, learning and education can be partially explained by the influence of religious tradition but also by their acceptance of bourgeois values. Incidentally, commercial success, outstanding achievement and social mobility often constituted a challenge to religious observance. Even though those who abandoned their faith were supposed to be mourned as if they had died, there is proof that Mór Ullmann and Mór Wodianer, both of whom converted and received titles of nobility, remained in contact with members of their respective families, who remained Jews.



65
The crown prince, Ferdinand, visited the Jewish
Primär School in Pozsony (1830)

# The Development of Jewish Schools in Hungary

László Felkai

The Hungarian Jewish community, like most other Jewish communities throughout the world, established its own schools. The first mention of such institutions, *Scholae Judaeorum*, is found in the Codes of King Béla IV in the 13th century. Various historical documents, such as a land register from Pozsony, dating from 1439, contain references to the existence of Jewish schools in Hungary in later centuries as well. The few available contemporary sources and later accounts by non-Jewish authors indicate that, thanks to these schools, the educational-cultural level of the Jewish population was much higher than their relatively poor social, legal and financial standing warranted.

Most Jewish boys aged 6–7, but sometimes as young as 3–4, attended *heder*, where they learned the prayers and studied basic *Tanach* (Pentateuch). After bar mitzva, some of them continued their schooling at yeshivot (religious study academies), where they studied the Talmud under rabbinical tutelage. From the beginning of the 19th century on, the largest and most important Hungarian yeshiva was in Pozsony. The last Hungarian yeshiva, in Paks, was closed down in 1956.

The first secular German-language Jewish school, whose curriculum included secular subjects as well as religious, was opened in Mattersdorf (Sopron county) in 1783, in the reign of the enlightened Emperor Joseph II, an advocate of Jewish emancipation. Similar three- or four-grade schools were established very soon after in several other towns as well, so that by the end of the decade there were close to twenty Jewish schools, with some two thousand students. From the early 19th century on, the number of these schools grew rapidly. The main subject on the curriculum was still religion, but German language, orthography, composition, writing, arithmetic and singing were also taught, and in some schools, the Hungarian language as well. From the 1860s, Hungarian replaced German as the language of instruction.

The number of Jewish schools reached its peak after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. By 1896, there were 528 Jewish elementary schools, most of them consisting of four grades, and the remainder of six grades. In that liberal period up until World War I, there were also ten higher elementary schools (roughly equivalent to junior high school) where students studied for four years. These schools followed the curriculum drawn up by the Ministry of Education and

Religious Affairs, but the law permitted the local Jewish communities, which maintained them, to modify that curriculum according to their particular requirements. Hence, the Jewish schools taught the same subjects as state schools or schools of other religious denominations, but differed in the proportion of hours allotted to each subject and in the topics taught. Naturally, religious education was different, too.

The Israelite Teachers' Training College was established in Budapest in 1857, and for many decades was the only institution where Jewish elementary school teachers were trained. The Rabbinical Seminary of Hungary was founded in 1877, and has operated without interruption ever since. Furthermore, several Jewish commercial schools and two schools for the deaf and for the blind were also established. Some of the Orthodox Jewish communities set up Talmud Torah schools, which served mainly to provide religious education and occasionally to reiterate what had been taught in elementary school.

The greatest deficiency of the Jewish school system was at the secondary school level. There was only one secondary school, located in Vágújhely.

In the inter-war period, the number of Jewish educational institutions dwindled radically. This was due to two reasons: Hungary's loss of territory under the Trianon Peace Treaty, as well as the restrictive measures adopted by the government against the Jews. In 1920, the Jewish community owned only 186 elementary schools, three higher elementary schools, the teacher training college, two Jewish high schools which were established in Budapest in 1919, the Rabbinical Seminary and the schools for the deaf and for the blind. In 1929, a second teacher training college for girls was opened in Miskolc, which operated until 1944. The number of high schools increased temporarily in 1940, because five of the cities that were re-attached to Hungary after the Vienna Decision had Jewish secondary schools.

In this period, the curriculum of the Jewish schools followed the state standards in almost every respect, yet the content and method of education were outstanding. They adapted to the Hungarian school system, but also won a high reputation for their excellent educational results and sports achievements.

As a consequence of the tragic events of the Holocaust, almost all of the Jewish schools in Hungary were closed in 1944. Only a few of them were re-opened after the war and operated between 1945–1948, when the schools were nationalized by the government.

# Textbooks for Hebrew-Language Study in Jewish Schools in Hungary

Arieh Lewy

The first textbooks for study of Hebrew used in Jewish schools were printed around the middle of the 19th century. From then until 1948, when almost all religion-affiliated schools in Hungary were nationalized, more than 30 Jewish authors published Hebrew textbooks for use in Jewish schools, or in religious classes for Jewish students in non-Jewish schools.

Language textbooks reflected not only pedagogical approaches to teaching foreign languages, but also the social and cultural milieu of their target readers. In other words, they revealed something of the prevalent discourse among those studying the particular foreign language. Experts in school curriculum refer to this phenomenon as "the hidden message of the curriculum," or, briefly, "the hidden curriculum." Even though this term refers to learning outcomes that are unintended by the teacher, it nonetheless relates to important and influential aspects of school life.

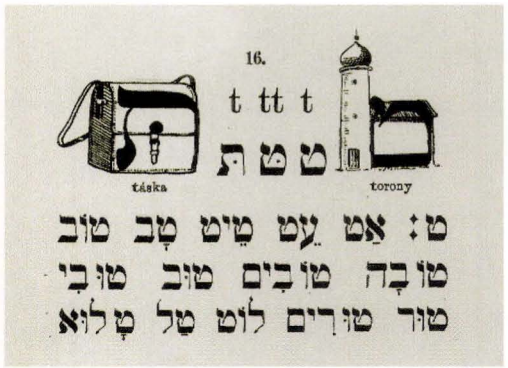
On reviewing the Hebrew textbooks published over a period of 150 years in Hungary, one may identify four types of "hidden messages" transmitted to the learner, which offered different goals and motives for the study of Hebrew, as follows:

* *promotion of religious values*, i.e., participation in liturgy and the study of the Holy Scriptures;
* *enlightenment*, which entailed secular use of a language associated with religious values and with a body of classical texts;
* promotion of *Zionist ideals*, such as renaissance of the Hebrew language,
* mastery of the language for *daily communication*.

This article takes a closer look at these implicit goals of the textbooks.

**The Religious Motive**

The first Hebrew textbooks used in Jewish schools in Hungary focused on decoding skills, i.e., on the ability to produce the appropriate sound as a response to a given graphic stimulus. The purpose of acquisition of this skill was to enable students to recite Hebrew prayers. Comprehending the text was considered a learning task to be achieved only after gaining mastery in the act of decoding the graphic symbols.




66




67

To facilitate the process of matching graphemes with sounds, it was common practice to use pictures. Thus, for example, in his textbook for Hebrew beginners, Ignác Kondor (1907) attached a picture to each letter, which depicted an object whose initial letter equaled that of the target letter (see Figure 66). The Hebrew letters ט and ת, for instance, were disguised in the form of a tower (*"torony"* in Hungarian, which also begins with t). Thus, the learner could also use the shape of the written symbol as a mnemonic aid for uttering its vocal equivalent.

Textbooks of this type were published already in the 1860s. Kohányi (1861) entitled his textbook for Hebrew reading *Hangoztató Olvasó* (The Vocalizing Reader).

A later vocalized reader, written by Widder (1921), was entitled הקריאה העברית (Hebrew Reading). In the introduction to his book, the author declared:

> "We are Hungarians who follow the Jewish religion. Our ancestors prayed in Hebrew and we, too, wish to pray in Hebrew."

His textbook was designed to teach children to participate in public prayers and to know the text. According to the author, *knowing* implied *comprehending*.

**Enlightenment and Secular Humanism**

Another type of Hebrew textbook, which carried the flavor of secular humanism, represented the influence of the Jewish Enlightenment movement. It relied on a body of culturally valued ideas contained in the classical Jewish literature. This motif was well represented in the Hebrew textbook by Goldberger (1869) (see Figure 67). This textbook, called לשון מדברת (Spoken Language), was printed in Pozsony one year after the publication of an anthology of Hungarian poems translated into Hebrew by the scholar Simon Bacher (1868). The anthology was entitled זמירות הארץ (Songs of the Land). The subtitle of the book informed the reader that it contained translations of selected poems by the most famous Hungarian poets. The opening poem of the volume was the translation into Hebrew of the Hungarian national anthem, the Hymnus. Its first two lines were:

ברך אלוהים בן ארץ הונגריה

ברוחך סמכהו, בתעצומות עוז

Bacher viewed this volume of translations as homage paid by Hungarian Jewry to their homeland, Hungary. He believed that the volume would strengthen the link between Hungarian culture and Jewish readers of his anthology. Additionally, it would generate interest in Hungarian culture in all countries where people were capable of understanding the original language of the Holy Scriptures.

In the introduction to his Hebrew textbook, Goldberger also emphasized the cultural value of learning Hebrew. In a later German version of the textbook, he wrote that his aim was:

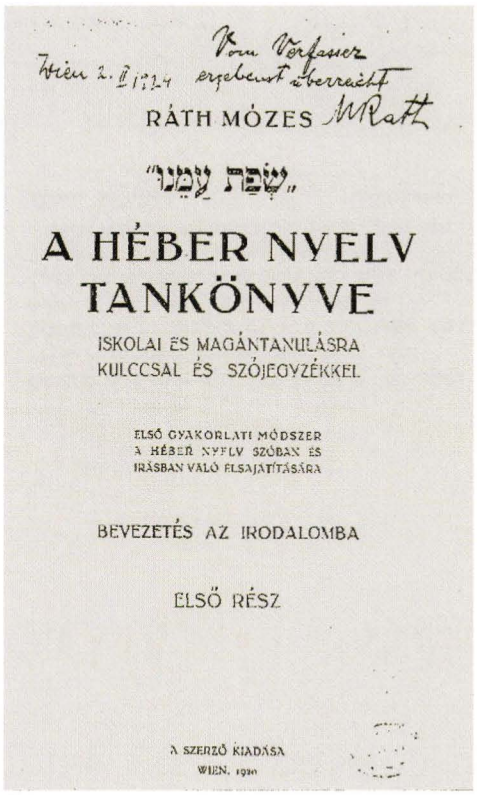
"... to remove obstacles to understanding the text of the Bible, to stir up a desire, to arouse a longing for learning about the beauty and charm of the Hebrew language, which is one of the most beautiful languages in the world. We may convince people of the world, that even now, our ancient language has kept its vitality, and even today we are able to use it for communication in all areas of our life."

Goldberger's book was Hungary-centered. It dealt with Hungarian geography and history, and taught the readers to memorize the Hebrew translation of sentences:

> "the Alps are higher than the Carpathians;
>
> the Danube is greater than the River Tisza;
>
> in the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-eight Franz Joseph was crowned King of Hungary."

It contained Hebrew texts describing the daily routine of school life, such as (originally in Hebrew):

> "in the morning I had a Hebrew class and at noon I had a Hungarian class. My sister learns German, and my brother studies Latin."




68

**The Zionist Motive**

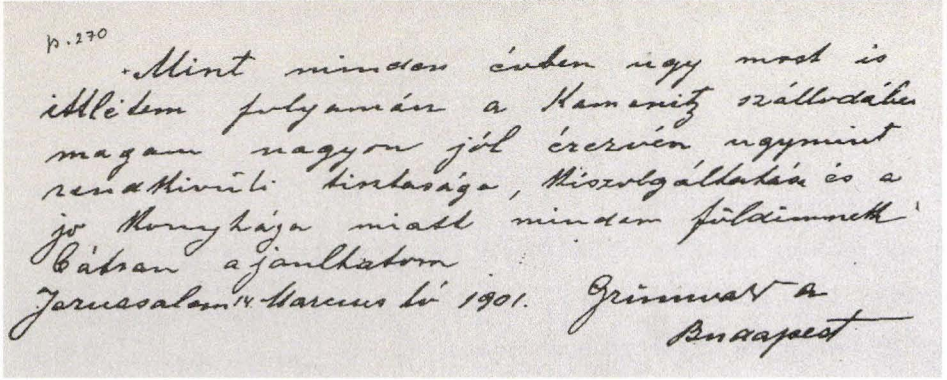
The third motive, which characterized another series of books, was promotion of Zionist ideals. This was a central topic in the book שפת עמנו (The Language of Our People), written by Ráth (1914), in Polish, and subsequently translated into several languages, among them Hungarian (see Figure 68). Despite its Zionist orientation, the book did not center on "Eretz Israel," i.e., Palestine, but rather on the European Diaspora, with sentences like "In winter, the ground is covered in snow, and the waters of the rivers freeze."

Devotion to the Jewish religion and pride in Jewish achievement were expressed in the following sentence:

> "Our Torah, the Torah of Moses, is holy not only for the Children of Israel, but also for other people in the world."

The book contained poems by Bialik and Tchernichovsky and short stories by Mendele Mocher Sfarim and Zalman Shneur, describing Palestine-centered experiences. Its Zionist spirit was represented in paragraphs like the following:

> "In the spring, I will travel to Eretz Israel together with my dear parents. My grandfather will

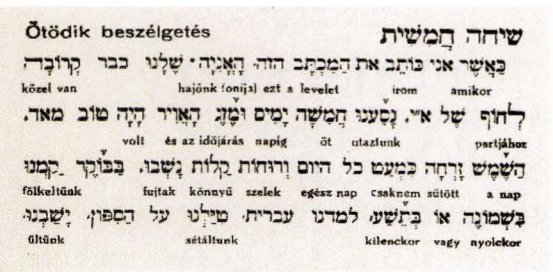


p. 270

Mint minden évben úgy most is itt lévém folyamán a Kamenitz szállodában magam nagyon jól érezvén ugyanott rendkívüli tisztasága, kiszolgálkodása és a jó konyhája miatt mindenkinek Bátran ajánlhatom

Jerusalem 14 Marcus hó 1901. Grünwald a Budapest

69



Ötödik beszélgetés שִׂיחָה חֲמִשִׁית

בַּאֲשֶׁר אֲנִי כּוֹתֵב אֶת הַמִּכְתָּב הַזֶּה, הָאֳנִיָּה · שֶׁלָּנוּ כְּבָר קְרוֹבָה ·

közel van hajónk (onija) ezt a levelet írom amikor

לַחוֹף שֶׁל א״י, וְנִסְעֲנוּ חֲמִשָּׁה יָמִים וּשְׁנֵי הָאֲוִיר הָיָה טוֹב מְאֹד.

volt és az időjárás napig öt utaztunk partjához

הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ זָרְחָה כְּמַעַט כָּל הַיּוֹם וְרוּחוֹת קַלּוֹת נָשְׁבוּ. בַּבּוֹקֶר הַקְּמָנוּ

fölkeltünk fujtak könnyű szelek egész nap csaknem sütött a nap

בְּשָׁמוֹנָה אוֹ בְּתֵשַׁע, לָמַדְנוּ עִבְרִית, וּמַיָּלְנוּ עַל הַסִּפּוֹן, יָשַׁבְנוּ

ültünk sétáltunk kilenckor vagy nyolckor

70

also join us on our way to Eretz Israel, the country where the great heroes of our history once lived and where our prophets and our famous poets have spoken."

It should be noted that many tourists from Hungary visited Palestine and stayed in Jerusalem as early as the first decade of the 20th century. The guest book of the Kamenitz Hotel in Jerusalem from 1890 until 1910, which is in the manuscript collection of the Jewish National and University Library, contains entries from guests from various cities in Hungary, like Szentes, Kassa, Kisvárda and of course Budapest. One of them wrote in 1901:

"As is the case every year during our visit in Jerusalem, we are enjoying the clean rooms and good service of the hotel" (see Figure 69).

Thus, a sentence in Ráth's book announcing a family visit to Jerusalem gave a realistic picture of actual events.

**Language of Everyday Communication**

Several textbooks teaching everyday communication were printed in Hungary in the 1930s and 1940s. Extensive use was made of the book written by Groszman (1938), a teacher at the Jewish Higher Elementary School (*Burgerschule*) in the city Miskolc, whose texts resemble those of Hungarian books for study of German, French and other modern foreign languages. Its first lesson contained the following text in Hebrew:

"I am sitting / I am standing up / I am standing / I am going / I am going to the blackboard / I am sitting on the chair."

In contrast to Groszman's book, Szabó's textbook (1939) served the needs of prospective immigrants to Eretz Israel. It used interline translation (i.e., under each Hebrew word appeared its Hungarian translation) (see Figure 70). Lesson 1 contains the following sentences (in Hebrew):

"What do Jewish youth want to do in their Homeland [*moledeth*]?

Jewish youth want to work in agriculture.

I will quit my studies at the university and I will make aliyah to Eretz Israel. I have no future and goal in continuing to study at the University (in Hungary)."

As this passage illustrates, Szabó's book had a strong Zionist flavor, and addressed the needs of would-be immigrants to Eretz Israel.

**Concluding Remarks**

This article has presented the characteristic features of four types of Hebrew textbooks published in Hungary.

Many Jews in Hungary opted for assimilation into Hungarian culture and rejected Zionist ideology. Nevertheless, in all epochs of Jewish life in Hungary, there were many Jews, of diverse ideological orientation, even opponents of Zionism, who took an interest in studying Hebrew.

This dedication recalls the Midrash which states that the children of Israel were redeemed from slavery in Egypt due to their devotion to the Hebrew language. The textbooks described above testify to the fact that Hungarian Jewry, too, remained faithful to Hebrew. While the motives for studying the language changed from one era to another, the Jews of Hungary never ceased to invest efforts in the acquisition of the language.

71
Mihály Biró, "Jews, get out of the schools!" from his *Horthy* series (Vienna, 1920)





# The Yeshivot in Hungary in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Yehiel Zvi Moskovits

The yeshiva occupied a central place in the Jewish educational system in Hungary. Young boys received their schooling in the *heder* (literally "room," the term used for yeshiva on the elementary school level), in Yiddish. Here they learned the Pentateuch with the Rashi commentary, Talmud, basic laws pertaining to their daily life, arithmetic, and reading and writing (in Latin characters). In western and central Hungary there were Jewish schools where boys and girls were taught according to the official general curriculum, plus some Jewish subjects. Except in the big cities, Jewish higher elementary schools were rare. Some boys of this age attended yeshivot, while others learned trades or went into commerce. Very few went to university, especially after the Numerus Clausus was instituted in 1920.

Boys attended yeshivot from age 13 on into their middle or late teens where they studied only Jewish religious subjects. Experienced rabbis renowned for their scholarship established yeshivot in their communities and usually headed them. They not only directed the studies, but also managed their schools' administrative and fiscal affairs, and served as their students' spiritual and psychological counselors, especially for those – and there were many – who left home at an early age.

Most yeshivot were part and parcel of the Orthodox communities in which they were situated. The sole exception was the yeshiva in Nagykároly, which was affiliated to the Status quo ante stream.

The Hungarian yeshiva differed from the Lithvanian yeshiva in goal, in curriculum, and in teaching method. There were two types of learning session (*shiur*) in the Hungarian yeshiva. One was the *pashut* (simple) *shiur*, conducted three times a week, in which the students covered approximately three pages of Talmud together with the main commentaries and elaborators. The second type was the *iyun* (probing) or *sugya* (topical) *shiur*. Here the teacher covered three topics in each *zeman* (literally "time period," the yeshiva counterpart of semester or trimester). Each *sugya* was thoroughly examined from every angle, through all the references to it in all the talmudic tractates, on to the *halakhic* (applied law) conclusions. During an *iyun*, students did not hesitate to make textual corrections. In addition to the basic commentaries studied in the simple *shiur*, more advanced and more complicated *halakhic* elaborators were also studied.

72
Chatam Sofer (Oil painting based on Ber Frank Halevy's drawing, mid-19th century)

It should be noted that the Hungarian yeshiva did not pursue abstract learning for the mere sake of sharpening the student's mind. Many yeshivot conducted special *shiurim* in the Responsa literature, which is especially important for those wishing to become community rabbis. Generally speaking, however, these yeshivot aimed at producing educated laymen who would transmit the legacy of Jewish learning and living to their progeny. The rabbi would confer on students who devoted many years to studying and mastering the material the title of *haver* (colleague), which dated back to the talmudic period, or *morenu* (our master). A student who wished to be ordained as a rabbi was tested by three rabbis acknowledged as *halakhic poskim* (arbiters). If they were satisfied with his grasp of the material and with his piety and bearing, they granted him ordination.

There were three categories of students. The first was the *mat'hil* (beginner), who could learn only with the help of the second category, the older, experienced student known as *hazar-bocher*, who worked with the neophytes, usually in the *kvatir* – a room that four or five students rented together when no dormitory space was available. The third type, the *shiur*-goer, was slightly more advanced than the *mat'hil*, and did not need help. The teacher tested the *mat'hil* and *shiur*-goer once a week. The older students were expected to be active participants in the *sugya* discussions led by the teacher.

Some yeshivot also organized classes in various vocations. For example, from 1912 the yeshiva in Ónod, near Miskolc, divided its students into two groups – one of which devoted the mornings to religious studies and the afternoons to vocational classes, while the other did exactly the reverse. In Máramarossziget, a weaving school operated under the yeshiva's auspices. Students who made good progress in their yeshiva studies for two successive years were allowed, in addition, to spend six hours daily mastering the weaving craft.

In the Lithvanian yeshiva the institution of *hazar-bocher* did not exist. There the beginners were taught in groups of approximately twenty by a *maggid shiur*. They also had no *kvatirs*, and the classes were conducted in a yeshiva *ketana* (small yeshiva), housed in a synagogue or some other communal institution. The head of the yeshiva himself conducted the *shiur* for the outstanding students. They did not use the *sugya* method, and they did not make a point of analyzing the language of the text. They considered it more important to grasp what they called the "principles" or "definitions" deriving from the text. They also did not delve as deeply into the literature of the *poskim*, so that graduates of the Lithvanian yeshiva were not at home in the *halakhic* rulings pertaining to everyday life.



73
Izidor Kaufmann, "The Rabbi's Visit"
(Oil painting about 1866)

Abraham Fuchs, in his book *The Hungarian Yeshivot in Their Prime and Their Destruction* (Jerusalem, 1979) counted some seventy yeshivot in Greater Hungary. I myself located sixty-six yeshivot within the country's 1938–1944 borders. It is difficult to state which were the most important yeshivot; at best, we can point to some whose reputation is undisputed.

## SLOVAKIA

### Pozsony (Pressburg)

The most famous yeshiva in central Europe was in Pressburg. Its fame was due primarily to the fact that for thirty-five years (1806–1839) it was headed by the Chatam Sofer, a leading *halakhic*

*posek*. Three of his descendants in succession headed the yeshiva until the Holocaust. Boys wishing to study in yeshiva dreamed of studying at Pressburg for at least one *zeman*. The Chatam Sofer is credited with organizing the system of the *pashut shiur* and the *iyun shiur*, and was known for his opposition to *pilpul*, the method of extensive subtle argument and reasoning concerning points of law. He also opposed general studies, because they might require resorting to books not written in the spirit of Judaism. He saw no future for the Jews in the Diaspora, and under his influence many Jews settled in Eretz Israel.

The split between Orthodox Jewry and the Neology did not bypass the Pressburg yeshiva. Moreover, in 1871 one of the Chatam Sofer's students, Dr. Ignatz Wilhelm Beck, became the Neolog community's first rabbi. This trend for Neolog communities to be established under the leadership of former yeshiva students intensified the Orthodox community's isolationist tendency and its stringent *halakhic* approach.

**Dunaszerdahely**

The famous Dunaszerdahely yeshiva had one hundred and fifty students between 1852 and 1866, when it was headed by Rabbi Jehuda Aszóder, one of the great Torah scholars of his time. He headed a delegation of rabbis who went to ask the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph to intervene in the dispute between the Orthodox and the Neologs.

A second yeshiva functioned in the town until the Holocaust, headed by Rabbi Asher Anshel Katz, leader of the Kehal Adat Israel synagogue.

**Nyitra**

The Nyitra yeshiva was headed by Rabbi S. D. Unger. It had some three hundred students, for whom it also operated a refectory. Rabbi Unger was also president of the Central Organization of Haredi Communities and a leader of the Agudat Israel organization. He emphasized the importance of prayer as well as study, and he was himself an outstanding *ba'al tefilla* (prayer leader). The yeshiva continued to function during the Holocaust.

**Galánta**

Galánta had two Orthodox communities. The yeshiva was headed by Rabbi Josef Zvi Dushinsky, who later moved to Huszt and finally settled in Jerusalem. He was succeeded by Rabbi Joshua Buxbaum, who agreed that Jewish children should also receive a basic general education, but only by means of private lessons.

## WITHIN THE BORDERS ESTABLISHED BY THE TRIANON PEACE TREATY

### Balassagyarmat

The yeshiva was headed by Rabbi Aron David Deutsch, followed by his son and then his grandson. It had about one hundred students and it operated a dormitory and a refectory. During the Holocaust many Jewish refugees came here from Slovakia and were provided with the necessary documents.

### Bonyhád

This town was an important center of learning. The yeshiva was headed by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Heller. One of its famous graduates was Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, author of the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* (Abridged Code of Jewish Law).

### Bűdszentmihály

The yeshiva was founded by Rabbi Jehuda Grünfeld. Among its graduates was Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, later famous as the Szatmár Rav. Rabbi Grünfeld's son, Shimon, who succeeded him as head of the yeshiva, was considered one of the three leading *poskim* of Hungary, along with Rabbis Jesaja Silberstein of Vác and Mordechai Leib Winkler of Hegyalja–Mád. In Rabbi Winkler's time the yeshiva had one hundred and forty students.

### Paks

Like nearby Bonyhád, Paks was one of Hungary's important Torah centers. The yeshiva's first head, from 1840 to 1865, was Rabbi Joel Ungár, a disciple of the Chatam Sofer. Like other Hungarian yeshivot, it was hard hit by the White Terror that raged in Hungary at the beginning of the Horthy regime, and the number of students dwindled sharply. Rabbi Shimon Altmann, Paks's last rabbi (1931–1944), liked to give tangible illustrations of the material studied wherever possible. Thus, when the students were learning the laws of *shehita* (ritual slaughter of beasts) and the related *kashrut* laws, he would take them to the abattoir so they could familiarize themselves with the animals' organs. Or he would show them a proper *get* (bill of divorcement) or a *halitza* shoe (used in the ceremony freeing a man from his levirate obligation) when they were learning the relevant talmudic tractates.

### Pápa

Rabbi Jakob Jehezkija Grünwald, son of the author of *Arugat Habosem*, was named rabbi of the Pápa community in 1929. He ran the yeshiva, which had three hundred students, in the hassidic spirit. He was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Josef Grünwald, who brought with him many students from Szatmár, raising the number to four hundred and enhancing the yeshiva's hassidic spirit.



74
Izidor Kaufmann, "Business Secret"
(Oil painting)

This yeshiva and the one at Ópályi near Mátészalka functioned until the final deportation to the death camps.

**TRANSYLVANIA**

**Székelyhíd**

This yeshiva was founded in about 1869. Its best years were during the leadership of Rabbi Jehuda Segal Rosner, 1905 to 1944, and in the 1930s it had about three hundred students. His wife personally cooked for the students and for the community's sick people. Here the *hazar-bochers* were also tested every week. The veteran students were tested in groups, by lottery. Once in a great while the rabbi ordained a student for the rabbinate. He opposed general education and, like most Hungarian rabbis, was anti-Zionist.

**Szatmár**

Rabbi Jehuda Grünwald, who had been rabbi in Bonyhád, founded the leading Szatmár yeshiva in 1898 and headed it until his death in 1920. He was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Eliezer David

Grünwald, who headed the yeshiva till 1934, and in his time the number of students grew to five hundred. The yeshiva reached its acme after Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum was named rabbi of Szatmár in 1934 (he served until 1944).

The town had three more yeshivot with several dozen students each.

## MÁRAMAROS AND THE SUB-CARPATHIAN RUTHENIA

### Felsővisó

The Felsővisó yeshiva was headed by Rabbi Menahem Mendel Hager of the Vishnitz hassidic dynasty. Under his leadership the yeshiva reached its acme in 1921, when it had some four hundred students, some of whom came from the far reaches of Romania and Hungary. The number of students fluctuated. Eventually they erected a large building to house the yeshiva as well as a dormitory and refectory. Teaching was not conducted according to the *sugya* method, but only the *shiur pashut*, and the students were divided into four levels. They covered six to eight folios of Talmud a week, because the head of the yeshiva operated on the principle that "quantity leads to quality."

### Huszt

Some outstanding rabbis headed this yeshiva: Rabbi Samuel Shmelke Klein; followed by Maharam Schick; Rabbi Moshe Grünwald, author of *Arugat Habosem*; and the above-mentioned Rabbi Josef Zvi Dushinsky, who made a point of insisting that the students maintain a neat outer appearance. In the time of the last rabbi of Huszt, Rabbi Joshua Grünwald, the yeshiva had some one hundred students. His lectures were so clear and thorough that the beginning students did not need a *hazar-bocher*. He survived the Holocaust, and afterwards served as a member of the Budapest Rabbinical Court that dealt with the problem of *agunot* – women whose husbands were missing but who could not remarry because their husbands' death could not be certified.

### Munkács

This city had two yeshivot, one headed by the hassidic Rebbe of Spinka and the other by the community's rabbi, Rabbi Haim Elazar Shapira. He was famous for his bitter opposition to the local Hebrew high school and to all the Zionist organizations as well as to the non-Zionist, ultra-Orthodox Agudat Israel. His yeshiva had two hundred and fifty students.

After the Holocaust, efforts were made to reopen some of the yeshivot. but life became increasingly difficult under the Communist regime and the students left – some for Israel, others for various Western countries.

75
Moses Teitelbaum,
rabbi of Sátoraljaújhely from 1808

76
Music sheet of Jichak Eizik Taub's song,
*Szól a kakas már*
[ The rooster is already crowing]

77
Rabbi Jichak Eizik Taub
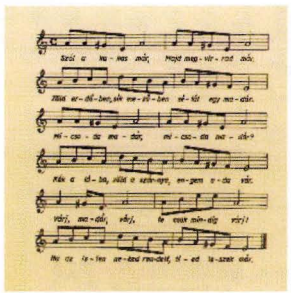



"He was visited not only by rabbis and by Hassidim, but also by Gentiles. He was called the Baal Shem of Újhely. His wonderful eyes barely alighted on someone and he immediately knew what there was to know, past, present and future. His counsel was more precious than gold. [...] It so happened that a young man from Monok, who was studying in the gymnasium, visited the rabbi. Knocking on the door, he took off his hat. The rabbi hurried to him and placed his hand on the boy's head. He was a handsome Gentile boy with black curly hair. Rabbi Moses blessed him. [...] And he said to him: 'You shall be as one who has seen the burning bush. Your words will ring far and wide, and your name shall be disseminated by money, much, much money. The monies will wither, but your words will remain. The Lord of Hosts will make you great and grant you long life by the rivers of Babylon.' What wonderful words! Who was this young man? His family was not particularly well known. They are not even rich. His father is a lawyer in Zemplén. Kossuth something or other."

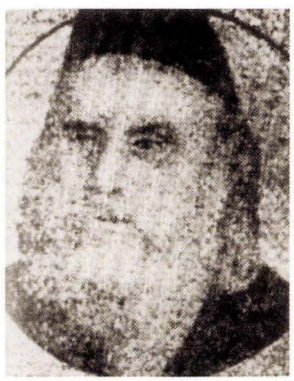
Illés Kaczér, 1953

# A Promise Fulfilled: A Brief History of Hassidism in Hungary

Kinga Frojimovics



76



77

"The renowned rabbi, Reb Eizik Taub of blessed memory, walked among the hills of Szabolcs, on green fields. A shepherd was playing his flute. He was playing the song about the gilt-green winged, blue-clawed bird, walking, walking – walking through time and timeless time. The *tzaddik* listened more attentively. He had heard this tune before. Not under the rule of the just Joseph and not in the time of the aloof Maria Theresia, but much earlier. Two thousand years ago, or even earlier. On Mount Moria, sung by the choir of the Levites in the Temple courtyard, while Asaph's sons, Jeduthun's sons and Korah's chief musicians played the psalteries, strummed the harps, blew their silvery trumpets and the resonant *gittih*... He gave a penny to the shepherd boy and asked him to sing the song. And another penny, for the shepherd boy to play it on his flute. And another penny, and another one. 'Again, my son! Play! Sing!' He had already given a hundred and one pennies, the shepherd boy had played and sung the song a hundred and one times. And then he stopped. He could not for the life of him play it one more time. No matter how he strained his voice and his flute, he could not remember a single note. He had given it forever to the rabbi. Since then, the song belonged to the *tzaddik* of Kálló."

Illés Kaczér, 1953

The first encounter of the Jews of Hungary with Hassidism is shrouded in legends. According to a well-known Hassidic story, the founder of the movement, Jisrael Baal Shem Tov, already visited Hungary in the second half of the 18th century, stopping in Nagykálló, Mádzombor and Szerencs. Many stories have also survived of his journeys in the Carpathian Mountains. According to one of these, the Baal Shem Tov is believed to have said to his disciple, Reb Jacob Koppel, about Máramaros county in Transylvania: "Máramaros is a beautiful garden. Take care of this garden." The Hassidim later interpreted these words to mean that Máramaros would belong to Rabbi Koppel's descendants. The promise came true, and the first Hassidic communities of Máramaros became followers of the Kosov-Vishnitz court, the descendants of Reb Koppel.

Before the Hassidic courts of Galicia extended their influence over Hungary, there were two attempts to create independent Hassidic centers in Hungary. The first Hungarian *tzaddik*, Reb Jichak Eizik Taub, was a shepherd boy, who, after a study trip to Galicia, became the rabbi of Nagykálló in 1781. The renowned song, *Szól a kakas már...* is usually attributed to him. His grave is still an important place of pilgrimage. After his death a new Hassidic center emerged under the leadership of Moses Teitelbaum. Rabbi Teitelbaum came to Sátoraljaújhely from Galicia in 1808. There he founded a renowned yeshiva and organized his congregation in a strict Orthodox spirit. However, he soon came under the influence of the Lublin *tzaddik* (Jakob Isak HaHoze) and was converted from an implacable opponent to a devoted follower of Hassidism, so much so, that he became responsible for spreading it in Hungary. His well-organized court, numbering many thousands of followers, disintegrated after his death. In other words, Hassidism did not gain a strong foothold in Hungary in the narrow sense (that is, in the territory which was to become Hungary after World War I). The emerging centers were organized around charismatic individuals, but their followers dispersed after the death of their master. The congregations formerly led by Taub and Teitelbaum chose strictly Orthodox leaders after their death, who had no sympathy for Hassidism and Hassidic ideals.

Hassidism was unable to gain strength in Hungary, even though it did not encounter serious opposition, as it had in Lithvania or Poland in the beginning of the movement. The two founders

of Hungarian Hassidism were contemporaries of Rabbi Moses Sofer of Pozsony, the renowned Talmudic scholar and *halakhic* authority. Sofer, who fought a bitter war against the emerging Reform movement, and who is known for his famous saying, "That which is new is prohibited by the Torah," did not turn against Hassidism. On the contrary, as shown by his responsa, he acknowledged Taub's and Teitelbaum's erudition and was generally favorably disposed towards them. In one of his letters, he addressed Taub as "Esteemed *tzaddik*, pure and just, a great luminary." The reason for this is probably that the Chatam Sofer and the Orthodox Jewry he led regarded the Reform movement as the greatest threat to Jewry and considered Hassidism to be a mass movement that would strengthen Jewry, since it advocated the primacy of a traditional way of life. (Hassidism at the time of its emergence, was persecuted with such vehemence east of Hungary because its opponents, led by the Gaon of Vilna, believed that eastern Jewry had still not recovered from the shock brought on by Shabbatai Zvi and the Frankists and they feared any new mass movement.)

**Hassidic Trends in Hungary**

According to Israel Rubin, who studied the Szatmár Hassidim of New York in the 1960s, the history of a Hassidic trend (court) can be described best by following closely the life and activity of its leader, the Rebbe. Applying the model Rubin suggested, we offer here a very brief overview of the three major Hassidic courts of Hungary. One was based in Vishnitz (Galicia) and directed the life of its Hungarian followers from there, while the other two – the Sziget-Szatmár and Munkács courts – were based in Hungary.

Owing to the unique composition of Hungarian Jewry, Hassidism gained a foothold only in the eastern and northeastern parts of the country, mostly in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. The Hassidic movement in this area (the Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa and Máramaros counties in northern Transylvania), bordering on Galicia, received a continuous inflow of Hassidim from the "motherland" both as regards its leaders and followers. The history of Hassidism in the Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia has been reviewed in detail by Jehuda Spiegel in his book, *The History of the Development of Jewry and Hassidism in the Sub-Carpathian Region* (in Hebrew). Incidentally, this is the single study that offers a monographic overview of at least one part of Hassidism in Hungary. In spite of the vast number of studies concerning Hassidism, the history of the movement in Hungary is still uncharted territory.

78
Menahem Mendel Hager



As has already been mentioned above, Máramaros first came under the control of the Kosov-Vishnitz rabbinical dynasty. Reb Jacob Koppel's son, Menahem Mendel Hager, rabbi of

Kosov, became the rabbi of the entire county in the second half of the 18th century. He can be credited with organizing the Jews of Máramaros and with strengthening religious life. From his yeshiva, he sent disciples knowledgeable in various aspects of religious life to work in the Jewish communities, he opened *mikvehs*, and he organized charity institutions to aid the poor, etc. His son Haim continued this work and he introduced the traditional Hassidic clothing among the Jews of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia.

The Kosov-Vishnitz court ruled over Hassidic Jewry in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia for some one hundred and fifty years. Their sway was eventually broken by the Teitelbaum dynasty – known from Sátoraljaújhely – in the early 20th century. Moses Teitelbaum had tried to secure the rabbinical post of Máramarossziget for his son, Elazar. The son, however, lacked his father's fighting spirit and perseverance, and within a few years he fled the town from which the followers of the Vishnitz court had tried to drive him away from the outset. The Teitelbaum dynasty got hold of the Sziget rabbinical post again in 1858, when Elazar's son, Jekutiel Jehuda occupied it. Then, for eighty-six years, until the Holocaust, the Sziget rabbi always came from the Teitelbaum dynasty. The Teitelbaums created a new, strong and militant Hassidic center in the Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia.

79
Jekutiel Jehuda Teitelbaum

80
Joel Teitelbaum



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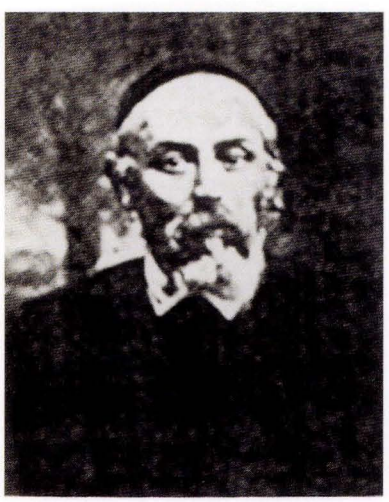
In the early 20th century the Teitelbaum dynasty of Sziget split into two branches. Reb Hananja Jom Tov Lipa Teitelbaum, son of Reb Jekutiel Jehuda, died in 1904. He had two married sons, Joel, who was seventeen at the time, and his brother Haim Hers, his elder by seven years. The community elected the older son, Haim Hers, as its rabbi, and the younger son went to Szatmár, a town not far from Sziget. There Reb Joel, an energetic, militantly Orthodox man with a vast erudition, soon built a strong and loyal community. After a few years, he moved to Orsova in Ugocsa county, where he founded a yeshiva, and thereby swelled the ranks of his followers with disciples from faraway regions. In Orsova, he launched his first attacks against Zionism, since the first Mizrachi clubs in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia were founded at that time.

The year 1926 was a turning point in the life of Reb Joel Teitelbaum and his followers since his brother, the rabbi of Sziget, died unexpectedly. Reb Haim Hers' oldest son, Zalmen Leb, was only fourteen at the time, and although the Sziget community appointed him rabbi, the Hassidim did not accept him and began to turn to Reb Joel, rabbi of Orsova, for counsel. From 1926, Reb Joel Teitelbaum – who had until then always been overshadowed by the great centers of Sziget and Munkács – broke out of his isolation and became perhaps the most influential and powerful

Hassidic leader in Hungary. In the autumn of 1926, he moved from Orsova to Nagykároly, then returned to Szatmár in 1934. In 1944, his entire community was deported, while the militantly anti-Zionist Reb Joel was, ironically, saved by the Hungarian Zionists. As a passenger on the Kasztner train, he arrived in Switzerland, from where he soon went on to Jerusalem. His anti-Zionism grew even stronger after the Holocaust, and in 1946 he settled in Williamsburg (Brooklyn, New York), where he again organized his court. His cousin, Reb Moses Teitelbaum, inherited an extremely well organized, dynamic community in 1979, when Reb Joel died. Beside the Williamsburg center, there are important Szatmár Hassidic communities in Israel (Jerusalem and Bnei Brak), London, Antwerp and the metropolises of South America. The Szatmár Hassidim play an important role among ultra-Orthodox Jewry throughout the world.

The third Hassidic movement in Hungary before the Holocaust was made up of the followers of the Shapira dynasty in Munkács which, until the 1920s, was much larger and much more influential than the Sziget-Szatmár Hassidic court. The first Hassidic rabbi of Munkács was Zvi Elimelech Shapira from Galicia, who was elected rabbi in 1824. However, the section of Munkács Jewry which did not sympathize with Hassidism soon drove him away, and he returned to Galicia (he died in Dinov in 1841). Until 1879, the town of Munkács had always had strictly Orthodox and anti-Hassidic rabbis, the last of whom was Haim Sofer, who in 1879 was invited to become rabbi of the Orthodox community in Budapest. The Jews of Munkács again asked a rabbi from Galicia, this time Salamon Shapira, grandson of the banished Elimelech Shapira, to become their rabbi. Salamon Shapira strengthened Hassidism in Munkács and became the founder of the Shapira dynasty there. After his death, the post was inherited by his son, the militantly conservative Zvi Hers. After the latter's death in 1913, he was followed by his son, Lazar Shapira, who was an adamant opponent of Zionism and any reform. He perished in the Holocaust together with most of his followers.

81
Zvi Hers Shapira



Beside these major Hassidic dynasties, there were a few smaller courts in pre-Holocaust Hungary, such as that in Liszka, presided over by Reb Zvi Hers, the Bodrogkeresztúr court concentrated around Reb Shajele Keresztirer and the Dés court, ruled by Menahem Panet. The major Hassidic courts of Galicia also had their followers in Hungary: Hassidim of the Sanz-Shinev court lived in Ung county, while Hassidim from Belz could be found in the Munkács area.

Hassidic life in Hungary was disrupted by the Holocaust and the few surviving Hassidim left the country to start life anew elsewhere. Hassidic communities of Hungarian origin can today mostly be found in the United States and in Israel.




82
*Shammas*, holding the gavel used for summoning the congregation to prayer, wearing the Jewish costume of western Hungary (Tint drawing, 1808)

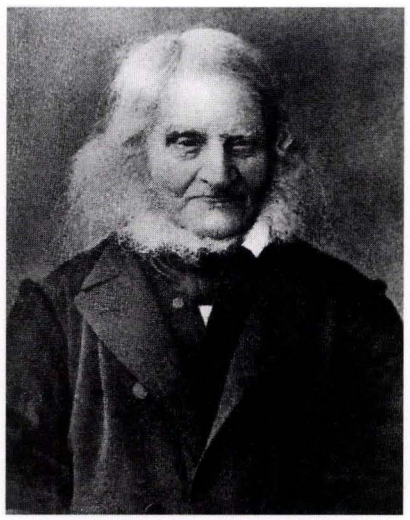
83
Rabbinical Seminary, 1902



# Rabbinical Training in Hungary and the Rabbinical Seminary of Hungary

József Schweitzer

The training of rabbis traditionally took place in the yeshiva, an advanced school for the study of Talmud. These institutions of Jewish learning, promoting a knowledge of religion and Jewish thought, were founded in antiquity, originally for the study of the Talmud and other religious, legal and liturgical texts. Later, the primary goal was to train gifted and talented young men to become well versed in Judaism. They began to undertake rabbinical training only later on. The outstanding students became rabbis – the spiritual and religious leaders of their communities.



84
Leopold Zunz

Besides having a thorough knowledge of biblical scholarship, they were also learned in secular matters, often becoming leading scholars in the fields of medicine, geometry, philosophy and astronomy. In the 18th–19th centuries, the rabbis who remained true to tradition were wary of succumbing to outside influences and shunned secular scholarship. The European Enlightenment and the Jewish *Haskalah* turned against Jewish tradition, and argued for the need to integrate into secular society and to acquire a general education. At the same time, the *Haskalah* also stressed the need to familiarize non-Jews with specifically Jewish values, and took great care to bolster Jewish self-respect among the Jews themselves. A Jewish cultural association was founded in Germany with the aim of studying all aspects of Jewish literature and culture. The outstanding advocate of this movement was Leopold Zunz, the founder of *Hokhmat Jisrael*, modern Jewish scholarship.

Jews with a secular education sought spiritual and religious leaders capable of combining rabbinical tradition with modern secular education, who would be able to lead those of their brethren who had strayed far from religion back to Jewish sources. These leaders, they hoped, would be trained in new intellectual workshops and new types of rabbinical academic institutions, which would teach Jewish tradition and thought by the traditional methods, combined with a modern philological, historical and critical approach.

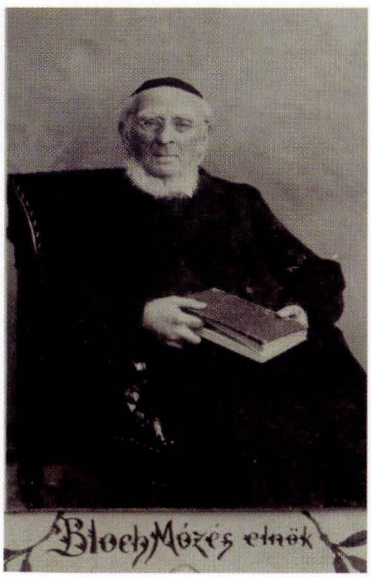
In the course of the 19th century, rabbinical seminaries were set up in Padova and, later, in Metz, Breslau, London, Budapest, Vienna and Berlin. Beside traditional knowledge, they taught the Bible and its commentaries, the Talmud and *Halakhic* literature. The curriculum also included

subjects that were not studied in the yeshivot, such as Jewish history, literary history and medieval Jewish philosophy.

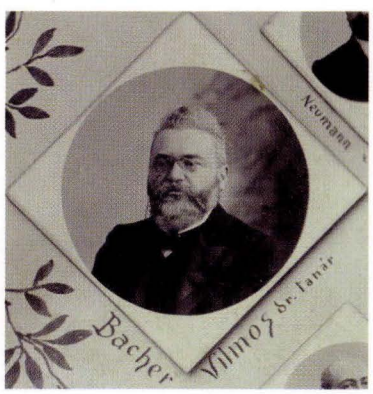
The idea of establishing a rabbinical training institute in the Austrian Empire was first conceived in 1806 by David Meir Friesenhausen, who was born in Bavaria and later moved to Hungary. Lipót Lőw, the most prominent representative of the *Haskalah* in Hungary, enthusiastically supported this idea, as shown by an article he published in *Pesti Napló* in 1844, in which he called for the foundation of a modern rabbinical seminary. The state, without whose support it would have been impossible to set up such a seminary, only began to consider this idea in earnest in 1864. They invited three rabbis, all of them well versed in secular knowledge, as well as religious matters, to devise the curriculum of the planned institution.

85
Mózes Bloch, first rector of the Rabbinical Seminary (1876–1907)

86
Vilmos Bacher, second rector of the Rabbinical Seminary (1907–1913)



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86

Traditional Orthodox rabbis vigorously opposed the plan, fearing that the new institution would be conceived in the spirit of the German Reform movement, similarly to the short-lived Reform congregations which had been banned by the Austrian government for political reasons following the crushing of the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848–1849. The apprehension of the Orthodox rabbis proved to be unfounded since the new rabbinical seminary modeled itself on the Breslau seminary, directed by Zeharia Frankel. It was well known that the Breslau seminary had opposed the German Reform movement, and it was famed for granting both a traditional Jewish and a thorough secular education. The goal of the rabbinical seminary of Pest was not the abolition of religion, but rather dissemination of Jewish knowledge among those for whom a traditional, observant life was no longer an attractive option.

The Orthodox rabbis failed to understand that the government was not favorably inclined towards either extreme religious reform or extreme conservatism which opposed any form of secular learning, since both were obstacles to even moderate social integration. The government supported the advocates of a middle path, who called for traditional, but not extreme religious practice, modern education and excellent scholarship, the very ideals of the new rabbinical school. Although Emperor Franz Joseph I consented to meet a delegation sent by the protesting Orthodox rabbis, he supported the plan to establish the new rabbinical school.

The Rabbinical Seminary of Hungary was the only institution of its kind in the world which was established and maintained by the state, while enjoying total freedom of education and belief. Its financial source was the Jewish Educational and School Fund. After the crushing of the 1848–1849 Revolution, indemnity that had been levied on the community (as punishment for the high Jewish

87




88


בעזרת השם
אנחנו חתומי מטה מורי הורת ה' תורה שבכתב ושבעל פה בבית מדרש הרבנים לארצנו ארץ הגר בעיר הבירה בודאפעשט יע"א באנו בזה להעיד ולפרסם על האיש היקר מורנו הרב
רבי יהונתן בנימין בן מו"ה יהודה צבי הנקרא דוקטור פרענקעל
יליד טאשנאד במחוז סילאדי שלמד ושקד בבית מדרשנו זה עשר שנים והקשיב לקח בכל ענפי חכמת ישראל במשך הזמן הזה עלה מעלה מעלה והראה חריצותו וכשרונותיו הוא השכיל להעמיק חקר בדברי המקרא ומפרשיו ולמד כמה מסכתות התלמוד והגה ודייק בדברי חכמינו ז"ל ומפרשיהם וידיו משגרת לברר הדין ולבירר ההלכה לאמתה על פי המקורים הראשונים ונדולי הפוסקים ונשאי כליהם גם ראינו דרכי חיים וידעינו בו כי איש ישר וטהר לב הוא במעקליו זך וישר במדות נפשו יראת שמים נמוזה בלבו וראוי והגון הוא לשרת בקדש ולשמור משמרת רב ומורה בישראל והיום ארחי אשר בא באחרונה בכור הבחינה ועמד בנסיון בכל למודיו הנני ממלאים את ידיו ומכתירים אותו בשם רב ומורה
יורה יורה ידין ידין
באיסור והיתר ובשאר עניני הדת ושאלות ישראל יפיצו מעינותיו חוצה הורת ה' ברבים וידרך בעדתו את בני ישראל בשביל האמונה והמוסר וחפץ ה' בידו יצלח:
לראיה באנו על החתום פה בודאפעשט יום כא לחדש אדר ראשון ה'תרפ"ז:

participation in the revolution), enabled the community to set up a Jewish Educational and School Fund, which was to be used for creating a new rabbinical training institute.

The first institute financed by the Jewish Educational and School Fund was the Israelite Teachers' Training College, established in 1856, where future elementary school teachers were trained; its curriculum was essentially identical to that of the state teachers' training institute, but also included various Jewish subjects.

The Rabbinical Seminary of Hungary was opened on October 4, 1877. According to its statutes, students studied there for nine years: four years of secondary school studies, followed by final examinations in secular and in Hebrew subjects, and then five years of college studies in theology. In the secondary school, the main emphasis was on the study of Bible, Talmud, Hebrew grammar and Jewish history, as well as the classical languages, Greek and Latin. The college studies focused on the Bible, various rabbinical and Jewish historical subjects, as well as the *Shulhan Arukh* and Jewish philosophy. At the same time, students were also required to study at a university and to obtain a doctorate in the humanities before receiving their rabbinical diploma.

The research interests and educational goals of the three leaders of the Seminary, Mózes (Moshe Arieh) Bloch, Vilmos Bacher and David Kaufmann, fostered a religious and scholarly atmosphere in the institution, creating a spirit that remained true to tradition and permeated all aspects of rabbinical training and the Seminary's religious practice. The rector, Mózes Bloch, scion of a

87
Students of the Rabbinical Seminary in the 1887/88 school year

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Jenő Frenkel's rabbinical diploma



89



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David Kaufmann bequeathed his collection to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

90
Ignác Goldziher, world-famous scholar of Islamic studies, with his sons

renowned Orthodox family, taught the Talmud and Shulhan Aruch. He preferred the traditional method of Talmud study. His scholarly oeuvre concentrated on various fields of Talmudic law and rabbinical decisions. Vilmos Bacher, son of Simon Bacher, the renowned Talmudic scholar and Hebrew poet, and himself a graduate of the Breslau rabbinical seminary and professor of Bible studies, taught Hebrew linguistics and Jewish history and literature. His main field of research was biblical commentary; his best-known works include studies on the literary history of the Aggadah of the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmud, and Persian Jewish poetry. He also compiled a comprehensive list of the scholars with whom the Chatam Sofer had corresponded, and the diverse subjects they had covered in their correspondence. Together with József Bánóczi, he launched *Magyar Zsidó Szemle*. David Kaufmann, another graduate of the Breslau rabbinical seminary, taught Jewish history, family history, and philosophy of religion and homiletics. As a scholar, his research concentrated on these fields, as well as on Jewish art history. He purchased a considerable part of the Cairo Genizah, which his widow donated to the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, where it is housed today as the Kaufmann Collection. The first keeper of the collection was Miksa Weisz, professor at the Rabbinical Seminary of Hungary. He published various items from this collection, and his work was continued later by Salamon Widder, Sámuel Löwinger, Sándor Scheiber, Ernő Róth and István Hahn.

A world-famous scholar and professor at the University of Budapest, Ignác Goldziher, taught philosophy of religion at the Seminary. His scholarly research focused on the theological debates in Islamic theology, and his scholarly interest extended to all fields of Islamic culture.

Subsequent generations of the staff of the Seminary followed the example of their masters, enriching the field of Jewish scholarship and raising future generations of scholars. Bernát Heller became renowned for his studies in Islamic tales and legends, and for his erudition in the Bible and Aggadah. Lajos Blau and Mihály Guttmann were active in modern Talmud research; Ármin Hoffer taught traditional Talmud and codex literature, and wrote a number of studies on the history of *halakha*; Sámuel Kohn excelled in the field of Jewish history; Simon Hevesi's field was the history of philosophy and homiletics. Shulhan Arukh was always taught by an Orthodox rabbi: first Mihály Guttmann, later professor of Talmud at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, then Mózes Feldmann, director of the rabbinical seminary in Breslau, who was the Orthodox rabbi in Galánta and, later, of the Rumbach Street Synagogue.

The next rector was the renowned Bible scholar, Sámuel Löwinger, who later became a member of the institute studying the Hebrew manuscripts of the National Library in Jerusalem. His

colleagues included Ernő Róth, an expert on the Talmud and Shulhan Arukh, Simon Hevesi and his son, Ferenc Hevesi, as well as István Hahn, the latter two both professors of philosophy.

Some of the students of the Rabbinical Seminary came from Orthodox families and had earlier studied at various yeshivot, while others came from observant Neologist families. In the inter-war years, their religious education was entrusted to Sámuel Löwinger, who taught them Talmud and Bible. Gifted students were allowed to assist him in his library work, and those who were privileged enough to converse with him on long evenings caught a glimpse of his wry humor, his openness to the world and his awareness of the many problems threatening Hungarian Jewry.

Many of the first students of the Rabbinical Seminary came from assimilated families, and their ranks included members of the Zionist movement – for example, Jichak Pfeiffer, Chief Rabbi of Monor (who perished in the Holocaust), and Mózes Richtmann, who published regularly in *Zsidó Szemle*, a Zionist periodical, and who also taught at the Israelite Teachers' Training College and, later, at the Seminary. From the early 1930s, young rabbis often fostered a Zionist spirit in their communities. Suffice it here to mention Pál Weisz, Chief Rabbi of Debrecen and later professor of Biblical Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Róth, Chief Rabbi of Győr and Pál Hirschler, Chief Rabbi of Székesfehérvár. In the 1940s, there was an enthusiastic group of young rabbis in Pest, whose activities were permeated by the Zionist spirit.

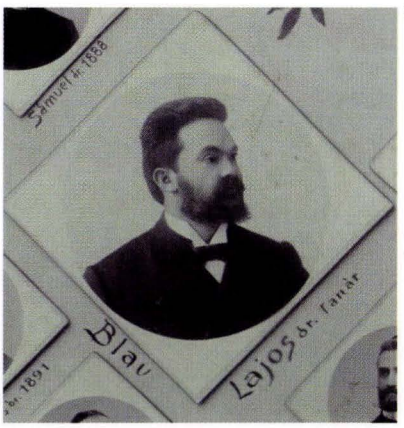
The arrival of students from the Hebrew high school of Ungvár and Munkács in the 1940s changed the intellectual life of the students. The new arrivals spoke Hebrew, were intimately familiar with modern Hebrew literature, and were enthusiastic Zionists. The teaching staff of the Rabbinical Seminary was careful not to become directly involved in the Zionist movement. Their students, in contrast, staged Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man* using Avigdor Hameiri's Hebrew translation.

Most students came from poor families and worked regularly as private tutors to earn their livelihood. The students also included the sons of rabbis, cantors and teachers.

On March 20, 1944, the Hungarian police and the Gestapo seized the building of the Seminary and transformed it into a detention camp. Later it was occupied by the Arrow Cross Party. The invaluable library of the Seminary was looted on Eichmann's orders, and some two to three thousand volumes were earmarked for despatch to a research institute on Jews in Germany. Luckily these books never reached these destination, but were left in Prague. It later turned out that only duplicates and less valuable books had been selected for shipment to Germany.




91




92

91
Sámuel Kohn
historian and professor of sermons – homiletics – at the Rabbinical Seminary (1899–1905)

92
Lajos Blau, rector of the Rabbinical Seminary (1914–1932)

Twenty-four students of the secondary school, thirty-seven students of the theological college and three students on the verge of rabbinical ordination fell victim to the war and the deportations.

On January 19, 1945, teachers and students of the Seminary began to restore the building under the supervision of Rector Sámuel Löwinger. Educational work was also resumed, but only in the college, since most of the high school students had perished in the war. Since the Jewish education of most students left much to be desired, preparatory courses were organized for them. Due to the tragic losses among the teachers of religious studies, the Pedagógium, a Teachers' Training College, was opened. Assistant rabbis were trained to fulfill the functions of rabbis and cantors in smaller communities. However, both were soon closed down. Sámuel Löwinger left for Israel in 1950, followed by Rector Ernő Róth and several students in 1956. Sándor Scheiber became the rector of the Seminary.

Following the political détente in Hungary, Professor Scheiber continued the publication of the *Monumenta Hungariae Judaica*, and launched a new series entitled *Monographs of Hungarian Jewish Communities*, as well as the Yearbook – published by the National Representative Organization of the Hungarian Israelites – which offered opportunities for both Jewish and non-Jewish scholars to publish their works in various fields of Jewish studies. Professor Scheiber also continued his research on Jewish history and elements of Jewish folklore in Hungarian literature and folklore.

93
Sándor Scheiber's *ex libris*

94
Lipót Lőw, chief rabbi of Szeged (1850–1875), with his family

93




After the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, the books stolen during World War II were finally returned to the library, where they are kept today as the Prague Collection. In 1990, the Pedagógium, supported by Midreshet Yerushalayim, once again started training teachers of Judaism for the Jewish high schools.

Several former students of the Rabbinical Seminary are professors at various universities all over the world: Professor Pinhas Artzi (Landler) and Professor Zvi Moskovits lecture at Bar-Ilan University, Professor Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger at the Yeshiva University in New York, Ernő Róth at the University of Mainz, Márton Schreiner at the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin, Pál Weisz at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The synagogue of the Rabbinical Seminary of Hungary is one of the major centers for Jewish youth in Budapest. At the Friday night services, students of the Institute give sermons, while students of the Pedagógium give their *Dvar Torah* at the kiddush following the services. The reception hall is always filled on Seder nights.


L. LETZTER

# Musicians of Traditional Religious Jewish Life

Judit Frigyesi

In the Hungarian Jewish communities, as in other eastern European Jewish communities, the roots of musicality can be found in religious practice. In traditional communities, music is primarily not art but a way of life. While there is limited opportunity to enjoy music for its own sake, spiritual life is carried out entirely in music.

The basis of Jewish life is the reading of sacred texts – prayers, the Tanakh, the Gemara – which are always chanted (recited). Traditional linguistic usage differentiates between reading of the Torah *(leinen)*, of prayers *(davenen)* and learning, but not between chanting and reading, because all these texts are chanted. Since all members within traditional Jewish environments encounter religious texts in one way or another, the community as a whole deeply internalizes this attitude.

It is this basic relation to text-music that lies at the heart of Jewish musicality, and explains why Jews became prominent in the art music of many countries.

What do people learn from this tradition? First, they learn that speech and music are inseparable. In this practice, it is impossible to think of music as an abstract system of sounds. For the Greeks, music was the auditory realization of cosmic relations, of mathematical proportions; music was a science that could be grouped with mathematics. The Jews have a very different attitude. For them, music always "speaks": it is an inherent part of an expressive text. Music is declamation, argument, rhetoric, emotional expression. By constantly practicing to express meaning and emotions in music, a traditional Jew learns to be musical without even knowing that he has ever dealt with music. Musicality is not a qualification for a profession, but an inherent part of being Jewish.

Second, since it is inseparable from the sacred texts, music is intimately linked with the spiritual and the transcendental. Through the practice of prayer and learning, a traditional Jew became accustomed to relate to spiritual issues through music. Finally, this musical practice trains people to use music as a means for individual expression. Since, traditionally, the texts are recited by each individual, the religious service must be heterophonic (i.e., many voices must be heard together without coordination). With the exception of the reading of the Torah, reading of sacred texts is a markedly individual and spontaneous act. Community members are allowed, indeed

encouraged, to find their own voice, rhythm, style of phrasing and melodic elaboration, within a general musical framework.

Because of the emphasis on individual chanting, the dividing line between "amateur" and "professional" is blurred. Nevertheless, there is a complex and subtle pattern of professional and semi-professional functions. Normally, each member of the community (including women) knows the art of *davenen* and every male, after his bar mitzva, knows the musical rules of *leinen*, and usually also the learning tunes for the Gemara.

However, since people master these melodic styles on different levels, most communities assign the performance of certain functions to the more musically-talented in their midst. Typically, communities rely on a few members for the public cantillation of the Torah, and it is often the case that the majority of the community would not be able to perform this role in the service. In a traditional community, any male participant can be asked to be the prayer leader (*báal tefilla* or *sheliach tzibbur*), but it is customary to ask certain persons on a regular basis to perform this task. Essentially, these *báalei tefilla* have the same background as the others, except that they have a more profound knowledge of the *nusah* (the traditional prayer melodies), remember melodic variants and can invent new ones, have better voice and performing capacities and, finally, a deeper spiritual orientation.

The *hazzan* differs from the *báal tefilla* not merely in having a better voice and greater performing power but, more important, because he has a unique, personal view of the text and its *nusah*. Although the basis of *hazzanuth* is the commonly-known patterns of the *nusah*, the *hazzan* gives a new meaning to the text of the prayer: through melodic elaboration, he endows the text with new emphasis and emotion. It should be noted that *hazzanuth* occupies only a small part of the service: the performance of the *hazzan* is the rare moment when the members of the congregation listen to someone else's voice instead of praying for themselves. The meaning of *hazzanuth* lies precisely in its exceptional status: it is the artistic-emotional climax of the service.

Similar to the expressive art of *hazzanuth*, the traditional service includes songs which are strongly metric. They constitute an intentional contrast to the spiritual and individual bent of the recitation; they emphasize communal singing, and many of them are based on popular or folk songs of the surrounding non-Jewish culture.

The Reform movement that reached Hungary in the first half of the 19th century brought a fundamentally new attitude towards religious expression and music in those communities that



95
*Hazzan* in Mose Leb Wolf Trebitsch's handwritten prayerbook

embraced it. The difference is so crucial that even when the melodies and the essential structure of the liturgy are preserved, they no longer mean the same thing. The difference lies in the change from individual expression to communal reception, and from "noise" to "silence" as the context of spirituality. Whereas in the traditional form, the most important part of the service was what individuals did on their own (everyone chanting the prayers), in the new form the congregation essentially listens to a performance. Religious experience now consists of listening to a text and of silent meditation, and the congregation no longer chants heterophonically. Clearly, this new concept of spirituality is modelled on the religious and artistic tradition of Europe.

Music has a completely new meaning: it is now framed as art, with distinction between performers and audience, even though the same person may be performer in one part of the service and audience in another. This service requires a musically-trained cantor. Whereas music and text were inseparable in the traditional context, here text is perceived as verbal material to be set to music by a composer in the form of four-part choruses, duets, etc. The organ assumes central position, providing accompaniment for the cantor and background music for the silent prayers. Hundreds of new pieces were composed (or improvised) for this purpose.

The elements of Reform practice are not new; there is ample documentation of the fact that, centuries earlier, Jews had already introduced aspects of art music of the surrounding cultures into the synagogue. Moreover, in practice, the dividing line between the traditional and Reform services is not necessarily as sharp as it may seem. Many congregations use elements of both practices. However, the conceptual distinction is crucial, and the fact of whether a community tends towards one or the other form of the service, determines its basic attitude towards music.

To what extent was the musical life of the traditional Jewish communities in Hungary unique within this general central-eastern European pattern?

The key to answering this question lies in the specifically Hungarian phenomenon of the Status quo ante. In 1868–1869, the Jewish community split, formally, into three factions: the Neolog and the Orthodox, representing the extreme trends, while Status quo ante was the designation of those communities that wished to continue as before. But Status quo ante was not only a bureaucratic label, it was also a way of thinking.

It was typical of Hungary that, whereas Jews modernized their lifestyles and/or integrated into a Hungarian environment, they saw no reason to change the music of the liturgy. The congregation of a Status quo ante synagogue might have been involved in the social and cultural

aspects of modern life while it preserved the service intact with its traditional music. The Rumbach Street Synagogue is an excellent example of such a community.

In general, the musical taste of Hungarian Jews with regard to the service was more traditional than the rapid modernization of their lives might suggest. It took a long time for the innovations of Sulzer and Lewandowski to take hold in Hungary. Operatic style cantorial music with organ accompaniment flourished only in the large synagogues, although choruses existed in many communities, their function ranging from sustained-voice support for the *hazzan* to the performance of individual pieces. However, the extreme Reform movement of German synagogues, with nearly total elimination of Hebrew, the use of symphonic orchestras and the introduction of music modelled entirely on German art music, was out of the question even in the most Neolog congregations in Hungary.
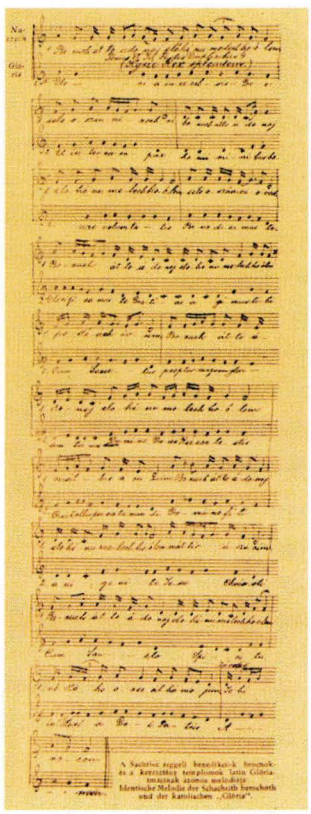
In my estimation, up to World War II, a high proportion of Jews (including the assimilated) were performers of traditional Jewish music or, at least, familiar with it. It is more difficult to know how widespread this knowledge was among women. In some parts of the country it was customary to educate girls, and in larger synagogues, women had their own prayer leaders. In Orthodox communities, women knew at least the simple melodies for prayer recitation.

We can thus speak of widespread musical practice within the Jewish religious sphere with countless musicians, many thousands of performers and a large repertoire of compositions. In discussing Jewish secular music, we can cite dozens of names. Where liturgical music is concerned, however, we know few actual names of performers and compositions. The names of even the best *báalei tefilla* are unfamiliar to us, and we know the identity of only a handful of choral directors, organists and composers of synagogal music, such as Hugó Kelen, Mór Rafael, Jakab Krausz, László Káldi, Mór Friedmann, Emil Ádám. Most of the composed music has never been published and is still in personal collections in basements and attics.
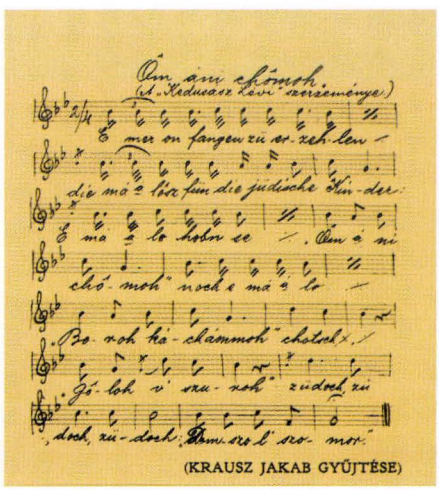
*Hazzanuth*, the most artistic sphere of the traditional liturgical music, was of major importance for the Hungarian Jewish communities, including the assimilated Jews. People in Budapest still remember the greatest among them: Izrael Tkatsch, Emil Bornstein, Moshe Preiss. At the beginning of the century, several cantors were recorded on 78 long playing records which attest to their extremely high standard. The recordings of Samuel Grünwald, Fülöp Weiser, Leopold Holzer, Salamon Stern, József Fisch reveal that they were on a par with the best known *hazzanim* of the era. Yet, besides a few accidentally preserved records, we have almost no information about these people.

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Mór Rafael's sheet music, comparing the tune of the morning prayer and the Christian liturgical hymn *Gloria in Excelsis*

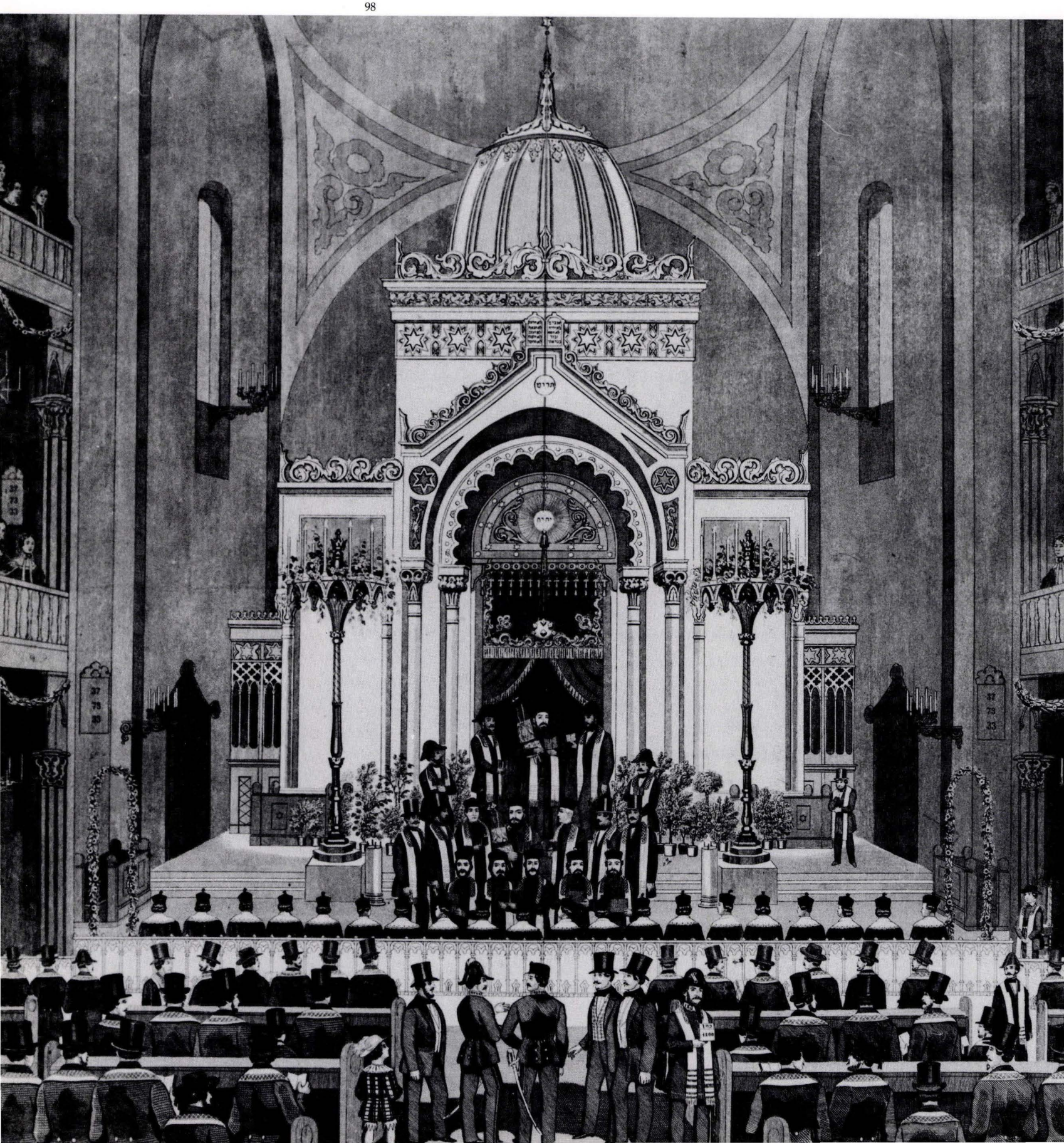
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Jakab Krausz's collection



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# Synagogues in Hungary: A Short Survey from the Middle Ages to Modern Times

Rudolf Klein

The oldest medieval synagogues discovered so far in Hungary are in Sopron. They date back to the 14th century and are both located in the Új (New) Street. The older one, built between 1300 and 1325, and used until 1526 by the Jewish community, is a three-bay vaulted Gothic structure, 6.05m. wide and 8.70m. long, with a centrally located hexagonal *bimah* and an ark in a niche elevated four steps above floor level. The women's section was attached to this prayer room, connected to it by narrow windows, as well as a separate ritual bath, and a room for the sick. The other medieval synagogue in Sopron was a two-bay structure, erected around 1350, and used by one prominent family until 1500. The undivided interior, measuring 9.5 by 6.25m., was also covered by a quadripartite Gothic ribbed vault. Both synagogues serve today as museums.

The Jews of Buda were granted permission to erect a synagogue in 1251. The *Chronicle of Buda* records the existence of a synagogue in 1307, but the remains of this building have not been found. The two historic synagogues known today are located in Táncsics Mihály Street. The smaller one, positioned in the house Nr. 26, accessible from the courtyard, dates back to the 16th century. It served the Syrian Jews, also during Turkish times. The slightly irregular floor plan is divided by two walls and two columns into five irregular bays.

The larger, unexcavated synagogue, almost unknown to international scholarship, is one of the most prominent buildings of its kind in central Europe. Erected in 1461 by the Mendel family, a favorite of the great King Matthias, it highlighted the advantageous position of the Jews in early Renaissance Hungary. The 26.26m. long, 10.73m. wide and 8.5-9m. high eight-bay synagogue is 28% larger than Stara Bożnica in Cracow. In terms of proportions of the bays, the two buildings are rather similar. The prayer room surpassed even the magnificence of the Hall of Knights in the southern part of the Castle of Buda, probably the work of the same Italian master builders. The synagogue was part of the city wall, like its counterpart in Cracow and the slightly earlier synagogue in Maribor. In terms of floor plan, the great medieval synagogue in Buda is similar to the destroyed synagogue in Regensburg, with three central columns that supported the slightly

98
The consecration of the Dohány Street Synagogue (Engraving by Alajos Fuchstaller, 1859)

pointed Gothic vaults. The original vaulting was destroyed in the 16th century and the edifice was covered with a flat timber ceiling. Later, during the siege, it was further damaged, but today there is enough material left for its reconstruction.

The next generation of synagogues stems from the late Baroque/neo-Classicist period. The most prominent of these synagogues – Bonyhád, Mád and Apostag – followed the usual nine-bay structure with a strictly central *bimah*, eastern ark and women's gallery on the western side with the men's entrance and a *heder* underneath, an arrangement known from the Polish-Ukrainian region. The exterior of these buildings is also similar: on the longer façades, to the east, there are two or three larger vertical windows illuminating the prayer room, and on the western side, two smaller windows on the upper floor (women's gallery) and one or two smaller windows combined with a door on the ground floor. The eastern façade has two large windows in the axes of side-bays and usually one small window in the center, facing Jerusalem. These synagogues are covered with simple pitched roofs, sometimes with a gable on the western side. Due to their location and size they occupy a dominant position in the Jewish quarter (street) and sometimes in the context of the whole town.

In the first decades of the 19th century, a new type of neo-Classicist synagogue emerged. The four central columns of the nine-bay structure vanished, and the columns were now either arranged along the longitudinal walls (Baja, Pápa) or disappeared altogether (Óbuda). Step by step, the central *bimah* lost its spatial significance in favor of the ark, leading to a church-like axiality of the interior. In the more conservative communities the *bimah* still remained in the center, while in the more Reform-oriented it was shifted to the eastern wall. These synagogues had solemn four-column porticoes, based on forms of classical antiquity – a common element in some period secular buildings and Protestant churches – symbolizing the egalitarian ideas of the French Revolution.

As the situation of the Jews improved further after the 1848 Revolution, the synagogue interior became explicitly longitudinal, focused towards the pretentious *mizrah*, an altar-like ensemble comprising the ark and the *bimah*. Jewish buildings required some distinctive character, however, and the neo-Moresque language fulfilled this function by harking back to the great Iberian past of Diaspora Jewish culture. This was the only available form of expression, since major Western historic styles – Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque – were already "taken." (Neo-Moresque was used by Gentiles for military barracks or arsenal buildings.) Nevertheless, the Jews admired the neo-Moresque, because it integrated them into the system.

99



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In the years of post-revolutionary consolidation, the Jewish population of Pest exceeded 12,000, but still lacked a major synagogue. In 1852 the decision was taken to erect a *Temple* and a *Synagogue*. Although the majority of the Jewish population adhered to tradition, the community leadership pressed forward with plans for the construction of a large *Judentempel* seating 3,000 (!) people, promising the assembly that, after the construction of the Temple, a more conservative place of worship would be erected. Due to overspending, however, this second building was only erected much later.

Following fierce discussions about the space-conception of the Temple, the commission was given to the Viennese architect, Ludwig Förster. The interior was designed partly by Frigyes Feszl.

The 26.8 x 74.95 m. large Dohány Temple resembles Catholic churches with its long nave, and two towers topped by clocks and spires. (The building was extended in the 1930s to include the premises that house the Jewish Museum. As the new wing took on the architectural language of the main building, the original composition lost its integrity without giving appropriate treatment to the corner.)

The description of the Dohány Temple in *Pester Lloyd* emphasizes the important references to architectural history – Byzantine and Moorish – omitting entirely the Jewish symbols, the Tablets of the Law, and speaks in Christian terms (tracery, longitudinal plan, spires). The *Magyar Sajtó* emphasizes the advanced technique.

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The synagogue in Mád (Photo by Ágnes Takách)

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Section of the Dohány Street Synagogue

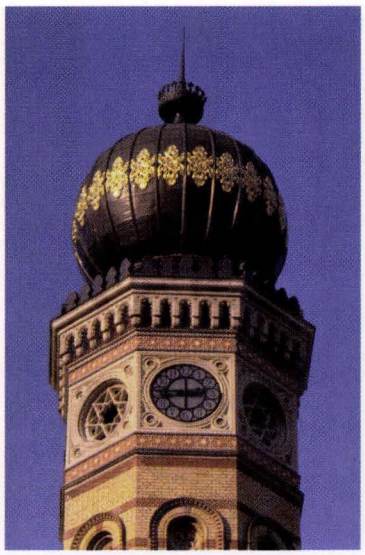
"The temple is a magnificent building (*Prachtwerk der Architektur*) due to the purity of execution, richness of fixture and bicolor brick ornamentation. [...] Important is the tasteful mixing of Byzantine and Moorish style. The floor plan is an elongated rectangle, 168 feet long and 84 feet wide. The main entrance is Moorish with rich stone carving topped by a tracery covered with a star motive. (Note: This star motive, however, is not based on a six-point star, which would have been too much for the Christian brethren. R.K.) Two towers topped by richly guilded spires flank the entrance, accessible from a courtyard closed by a wrought iron fence with a base of pink marble. Unfortunately, due to the urban setting, this courtyard is of irregular shape. The interior of the temple is divided into a nave and two aisles by a pair of cast iron columns."

*Pester Lloyd*, September 7, 1859

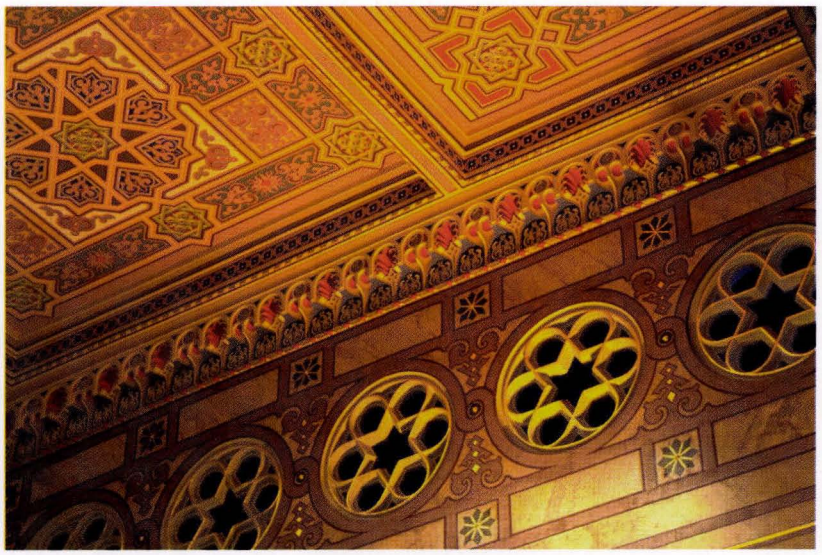
"The slender, pretty [*csinos*] iron columns impress the viewer deeply with their apparent weakness, forming a double gallery. The white marble sanctuary [*szentély*] equipped with luxurious curtain and other ornamentation amazes all visitors."

*Magyar Sajtó*, September 7, 1859

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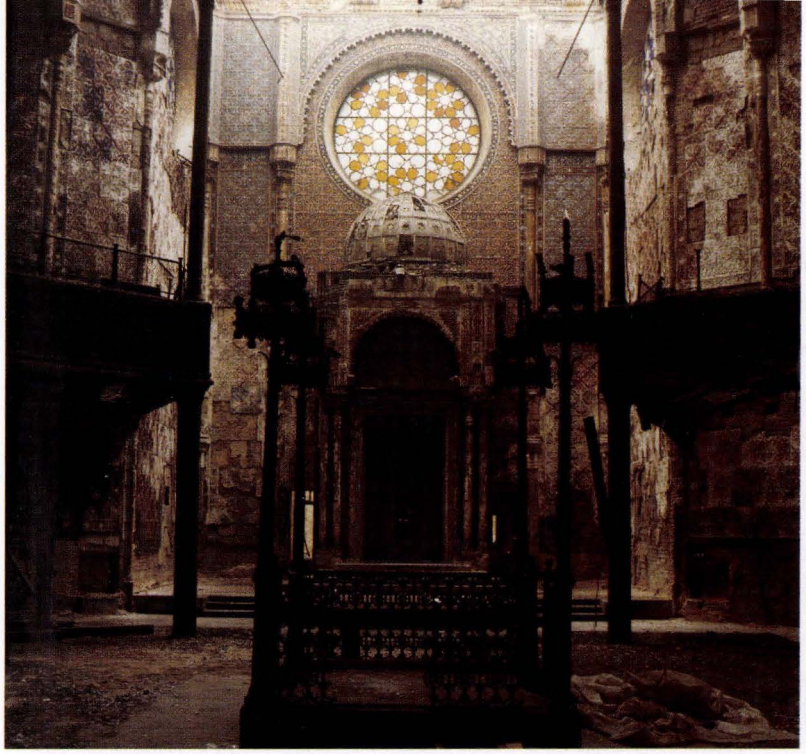


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The Dohány Street Synagogue, detail of the tower
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)

102
The Dohány Street Synagogue, detail of the wall
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)

Curiously, only one article focuses on the real issues of assimilation, hinting at ideological dilemmas that accompanied the construction: "It is written of the beautiful Israelite Prayer Room (original: *izraelita imaház*, a formulation that avoids the expression *temple* or *synagogue*. R.K.) in a recently published monograph, that it is more luxurious than the one that glittered in Jerusalem millennia ago. This is an exaggeration, but, nonetheless, the new edifice is magnificent, becoming a jewel of our city, that is poor in public buildings." This last article condemns the hasty assimilation, and emphasizes the significance of the building, that though Jewish, boosts the otherwise rather provincial town. Ironically, in time, due to the rapid development of Pest, the Dohány Temple was overshadowed by the rising urban fabric around, and today only its turrets are visible on the skyline of the city.

The promised synagogue of Pest had to wait until 1872. The competition was announced in 1867 and won by Otto Wagner, who later became the father of Viennese Modernism. His synagogue in Rumbach Street is the opposite of the Dohány Temple, modestly concealing its actual body behind a typical street building. This Romanticist-Moresque multi-storey building serves community purposes, having a slightly emphasized central projection topped by the Tablets of the Law, containing the main entrance, flanked by two octagonal corner-pillars ending in "minarets," visible only from a greater distance. The octagonal synagogue is organized around a rectangular *bimah*, with the ark in an apse-like recess, that, together with the entrance portion, lent a certain axiality to the interior. This arrangement expressed the middle-path of Status quo ante standpoints between strict Orthodoxy and Neology. The two timber-structure galleries and the dome are supported by eight slender cast-iron columns. The very thin outside and inner walls



103



104

103
The Rumbach Street Synagogue, detail of the interior before the restoration (Photo by Ágnes Takách)

104
The Rumbach Street Synagogue, the door of the ark, before the restoration (Photo by Ágnes Takách)

mark the building as the first light-structure place of worship in Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The interior is covered with very rich surface decoration, rendered vivid by the changing and filtered light. The synagogue is deserted today, after being sold to a construction company that partly repaired it but failed to find a proper buyer who would use it.

Although there was a general movement from the provincial towns towards the capital in the second half of the 19th century, the Jews of the provinces continued to display initiative, and parallel to the Dohány Temple and the Rumbach Street Synagogue, numerous synagogues were erected in the provincial towns.

The synagogue in Kőszeg (1858–1859) is an atypical building, resembling the early Christian round churches, like the San Stefano Rotondo (470 C.E.). The floor plan is central with four exedras, one of them being the entrance portion. The entrance is flanked by two towers that recall some neo-Classical Hungarian church towers and also the bastions of Romantic castles. Entering the interior, one does not see the ark that is on the right-hand side, as in synagogues of the late 18th and early 19th century. The slightly curved edges of the women's gallery loosely follow the perimeter walls. The decoration is a mixture of *Rundbogenstil* and neo-Gothic.

In terms of mass-formation, the synagogue of Győr (1868–1869) also recalls early periods of Christian architecture. The octagonal tambour relates to German Romanesque cathedrals, like that in Mainz, for instance. This and the double gallery mark it as a precursor of the Rumbach Street Synagogue in Budapest. The reference to Romanesque architecture is enhanced by the revivalist *Rundbogenstil* decoration. A school and community building is attached to the synagogue. The synagogue is not in use and in poor condition.

The great synagogue of Kecskemét, built in Romantic-Moresque style (1864–1871), is unique in terms of location, being on the main square, due to a town reconstruction (1892–1905) that cleaned up the very center, bringing together places of worship of diverse denominations. The building follows 19th century temple reproductions, having a slightly elongated floor plan with two rows of columns supporting two galleries for women on each side of the nave and four staircases in the corners. The synagogue has an octagonal tower above the entrance, topped by an onion shaped spire, somewhat reminiscent of churches with one tower – a composition that later became common in Hungary as well. Its interior, measuring 21.6 x 25.20m., has been converted to a museum of technology and lost its original shape.

In Nagyvárad, "little Budapest," with the largest percentage of Jewish population in Hungary around the turn-of-the-century, housed nine synagogues. The great Neolog synagogue (1878) occupies an outstanding position on the riverside, dominating the townscape. Inspired by the great synagogue of Nürnberg (1874), it has a slightly longitudinal floor plan with a prominent central dome, and stressed central projections on the southern and northern façades, in the spirit of *Rundbogenstil*. The prayer room is divided into a nave and two aisles by two rows of columns, which support the women's gallery and the tambour of the central cupola via pendetives. The *bimah* is in front of the ark, and above the ark is a gallery for choir and organ. The synagogue is owned by the Jewish community.

Around 1900, a series of synagogues emerged in Hungary with a large, central spherical dome on tambour resting on pendetives, four protruding central projections and usually four or two turrets on the corners, housing the staircases for the women's gallery. (Curiously, around the turn-of-the-century when Neolog synagogues became central, the Orthodox synagogues preserved the longitudinal arrangement, previously an indication of assimilation.) From the outside they suggest Greek cross floor plan, but in the interior they are nearly in the middle, having a grand ark-*bimah* composition on the eastern wall, and one women's gallery running along the southern, western and northern perimeter walls. A great number of these synagogues were designed by Lipót Baumhorn, who specialized in synagogue buildings, like the one in Szeged (1899–1903). Immanuel Löw, the famous rabbi, created the iconographic program for the stylisticly eclectic building: the mass formation is close to Byzantine architecture, but the details are neo-Gothic and in the interior sometimes oriental. The synagogue belongs to the depopulated Jewish community.

A contemporary of the Szeged synagogue, in Szabadka, was designed by Dezső Jakab and Marcell Komor after their unsuccessful entry for the design competition in Szeged. This building

is the first synagogue built in the avant-garde Hungarian Secession style, characterized by the use of folklorist decoration, representing a rejection of traditional plastic ornamentation based on the rules of Western architectural history. The paraphrased Hungarian honeycake motifs, tulips, were arranged freely, "floating" over the bearing structure, that was considered to be Jewish by the opponents of the style. The women's gallery and the large dome rest on eight iron pillars, the ceiling reflects its suspended nature. The synagogue, damaged and desecrated by its former user, a quasi avant-garde theater, is municipally owned.

Around the turn of the century in Budapest, a final attempt was made to give expression to the power of Judaism, at a time when its unity was beginning to disintegrate, by erecting a large *fin-de-siècle* central type synagogue. The competition for the design of a great synagogue in Lipótváros was announced in 1899, and highly diverse entries were submitted, lacking any basic underlying conception. The most interesting entry was Béla Lajta's project, a neo-Gothic, neo-Moresque structure with a large spherical central dome growing out of a forest of flying buttresses, pierced gables and pinnacles. The floor plan based on the six point star broke away from the conventional period arrangement. The first prize was awarded to Ernő Förk's project, a



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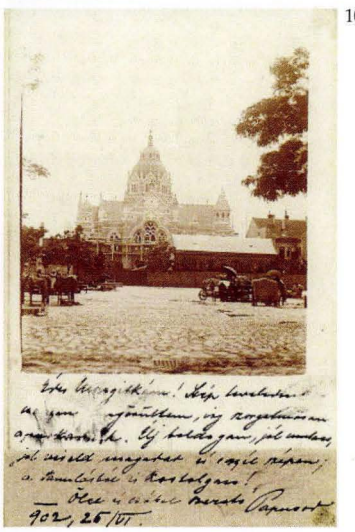
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Interior of the synagogue in Szeged
(Photo by Ágnes Takách)

106
Lipót Baumhorn

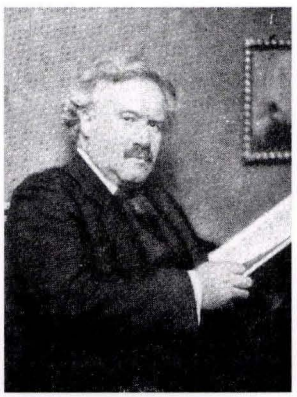
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The synagogue in Szeged (1902)



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Dezső Jakab

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Marcell Komor

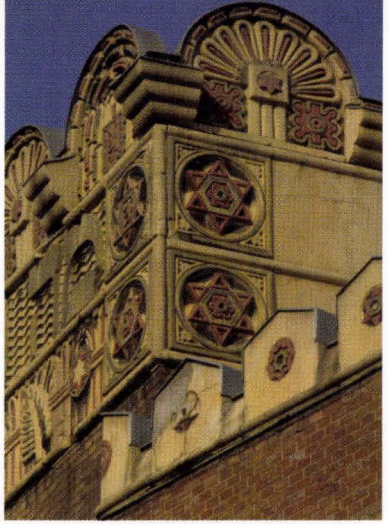
pompous blend of an Italian Romanesque church with an enlarged transept and a large Florentine central dome uniting two statements: the cross plan with the prominent central projections referred to Christianity, and the dome hinted at the Renaissance with which the Jews identified after Emancipation.

The other attempt to erect a representative synagogue in the Hungarian capital, some ten years later, the so-called Temple of Buda, was also abortive. Nonetheless, a new language of architecture was evident among the entries, reflecting a different Moorish style, a combination of completely plain surfaces and slightly decorated ones.

Although numerous difficulties hampered the two aforementioned attempts, the real reason for their failure was spiritual: the Jewish community, that had practically taken over the intellectual life of the city, did not really invest effort in expressing itself through a representative temple. Paradoxically, the success of assimilation in its late stage frustrated the expression of assimilation in architecture.

Curiously, the most significant synagogue in the years before World War I was erected in Kazinczy Street by the Orthodox community (competition 1909, construction 1912–1913). It was designed by architects Sándor and Béla Löffler, followers of Béla Lajta and the *Wiener Werkstätte*. Located on the bend of Kazinczy Street, the façade is slightly recessed from the street line, with an asymmetrical composition creating an L-shaped widening of the narrow street. The synagogue interior is 21 x 23 meters large, seating 479 men and 522 women, the latter in two galleries placed behind an elegant timber grid. The interior is dominated by the visible reinforced concrete structure – pillars and ribbed galleries with sculpturally formed railing. The central *bimah* and the large ark, with their warm timber color and rich decoration as well as the unique chandeliers, counteract the pure bearing structure, making the building one of the most beautiful 20th century synagogues in central Europe. The synagogue is part of a wider complex which houses community facilities and a school. Today it is the main synagogue of the Orthodox Jewish community.

After World War I the intellectual climate changed in Hungary, and Jews started to lose their confidence in the benevolence of the host nation. Only a few synagogues were erected, among them the large synagogue in Gyöngyös, Budapest Páva Street Synagogue and the modest Heros' Temple (1929–1931, architects László Vágó, Lajos Deli, Ferenc Faragó) besides the Dohány Temple. This latter was marked by a new philosophy, modernism and a slight touch of Moorish flavor, akin to the period Jewish architectural style in Palestine (Bezalel School).



110

110
The Orthodox Synagogue in Kazinczy Street, detail of the building (Photo by Rudolf Klein)

111
The first prize for the design competition of the Lipótváros Synagogue was awarded to Ernő Förk and Ferenc Schömer (1899)

111

# The Threefold Path: From the Split to the Forced Unification

Kinga Frojimovics

"There were two Jewish families in the house: a 'Neolog,' 'progressive,' patriotic and a bourgeois, rich Jewish family, who rented the entire street section of the second floor, and who lived a rather secluded life, rarely bothering to seek the friendship of the other tenants; and another one in the back of the courtyard, an 'Orthodox,' rather large family, who were poor and multiplied most fruitfully, with new relatives and new babies arriving all the time, and they all lived together at the back, in three dark rooms which, sometimes, on holidays, overflowed with the noise and bustling of the family as if the participants of a meeting were about to make a most important decision. These 'poor Jews' were clothed in Galician garbs and strictly observed the religious precepts – although, to tell the truth, I am not quite sure that they were as poor as they were said to be – in any case, the Gentile tenants of the house liked them much better than the rich and aloof 'Neologs.' It sometimes happened that some members of 'poor' Jewish family on the ground floor cut off their peculiar hair locks, donning civilian clothes as it were, cast away the caftan, the fur-lined hat, shaved and put on stylish clothes – this change came about rather swiftly in most cases. The children attended secular schools and some of them even enrolled in gymnasium. Within a span of ten to fifteen years there were no more caftanned Jews in the house and very few remained in the town itself."

Sándor Márai, 1934

## The Antecedents of the Congress

In the 1830s and 1840s the gap became even wider between the Reformers, who supported Jewish emancipation and were also eager to create the conditions considered necessary by the political leadership, and the Traditionalists, who opposed emancipation and were gathered around the Chatam Sofer and his school. In order to bridge the gap, Pinkas Horovitz, a traditionalist rabbi, initiated a rabbinical meeting in 1844 at Paks. We can find the antecedents of this plan in one of Lajos Kossuth's articles, which was published in *Magyar Hírlap* on May 5, 1844. Kossuth wrote that in order to carry out homogeneous religious reforms it would be necessary to call together a general Jewish religious board (synod). While preparing the meeting, the basically traditionalist-minded Horovitz sent a circular letter to his like-minded colleagues, asking them to pool their efforts in order to check the Reformists' endeavors. Horovitz made a double mistake by sending out this letter. He discouraged the Reformist rabbis from taking part in the meeting while, at the same time, he incurred the anger of Benjamin Wolf Schreiber, the Ktav Sofer, leader of the Traditionalists and head of the Pressburg yeshiva. According to the Traditionalists gathered around the Ktav Sofer, Horovitz had undermined the authority of the Pressburg Rabbinate. On August 20, 1844, only 25 rabbis attended the rabbinical meeting and it was dissolved the next day for lack of a quorum. Although unsuccessful, the meeting was still a remarkable event in that, for the first time, an open debate took place between the future proponents of Neology and Orthodoxy about the role of rabbis in the life of the communities, and the establishment of a religious hierarchy, which was the government's basic condition for emancipation.

The gap between the Reformers and the Traditionalists widened. These estranged trends were temporarily kept together by the 1848–1849 revolution and war of independence, since the Jews of Hungary unanimously supported the Hungarian freedom fight. However, during the reprisals following the fall of the revolution and war of independence, the inner conflicts among the Jews became more prominent than ever.

The strengthening of the Reformist camp and the impending emancipation divided the Traditionalist camp in the 1860s. It had to face four interdependent difficulties: the compulsory

secular education initiated by the government, the rapid linguistic acculturation of the Jews of Hungary, the growing pressure resulting from the adoption of Hungarian national identity, and the widespread synagogue reforms. By the mid-1860s there were three distinct groups within Orthodoxy, which reacted differently to these challenges. Azriel Hildesheimer, the rabbi of Eisenstadt, was the leader of the Hungarian neo-Orthodoxy. The centrist group gathered around Moshe Schick, the rabbi of Huszt. The extremist ultra-Orthodoxy, which refused any compromise, was led by Hillel Lichtenstein, Haim Sofer and Akiva Joseph Schlesinger. Some Hassidic communities and their rabbis also belonged to the third group.




112
The memorial leaf of the General Assembly of Hungarian and Transylvanian Israelites (1868–1869)

**Ultra-Orthodox Attempts at Separation**

The activity of the ultra-Orthodox had had a decisive effect on the split at the Congress in 1868–1869 as it was this group that adhered strictly to the traditionalist and self-excluding ideology of the Chatam Sofer and wanted to put it into practice. According to the Chatam Sofer, the integrity of the Jewish community is based upon its members' traditional way of life. This definition implied that any deviation from the traditional Jewish way of life by a member could lead to banishment from the community of the Jews.

The split in the Jewish community of Székesfehérvár in 1862 and the rabbinical meeting at Nagymihály in 1865 are two events in which the separatist tendencies of the ultra-Orthodoxy clearly manifested itself.

The story of the split in the Székesfehérvár community goes back to 1844, when Meir Zipser, the rabbi of the newly re-organized Jewish community, who was born in Moravia, formulated the statutes of the community. Zipser, who inclined towards the reforms, left the ceremonial rules unchanged but shortened the prayers and changed the language of prayers for the emperor and political leaders to Hungarian. The community agreed to the new rules and introduced the changes in the synagogue. Some years later Traditionalist Jews, including Fischer Gottlieb, a highly educated follower of the Chatam Sofer, moved to the town. After experiencing the new synagogue service, Gottlieb organized a *minyan* of his own in his house. Since the statutes of the

community forbade the organization of private *minyans*, Gottlieb and his followers were openly defying the community statutes.

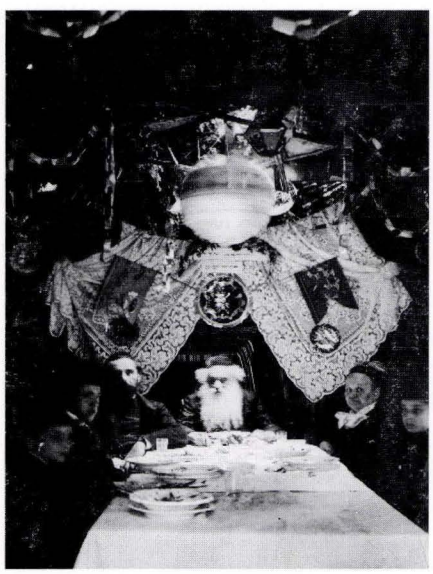
Gottlieb's Traditionalist supporters dealt the final blow to Zipser, when the rabbi issued a *get* in which he did not violate any basic Talmudic tenets, but did not follow the strictest traditions of the highly respected rabbis of the 18th century. As a result of the constant attacks, Zipser left Székesfehérvár in 1858 and moved to Rohonc.

113
Mór Wahrmann, one of the vice-presidents of the Congress

114
Midday meal on Sukkot at an Orthodox rabbi's home (1906)



113



114

On the question of inviting a new rabbi, the community – the majority, who favored introducing reforms, and the Traditionalist minority, led by Gottlieb – came to an agreement. They decided to invite a strictly Traditionalist rabbi, who was also highly educated. Joseph Guggenheimer, the rabbi of Aussee in Moravia, the son-in-law of the father of German Neo-Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch (the rabbi of Frankfurt a. M.), answered these criteria. After his election in 1859 Guggenheimer disappointed the Reformist majority by openly supporting the Traditionalists. He abolished Zipser's reforms. Because of this the Reformists, 150 people, appealed to the authorities to restore Zipser's rules, which the new rabbi had abolished. At the same time, the 88 Traditionalists also appealed to the authorities to obtain permission to secede from the community and found a new one of their own. In 1862 they were granted the license and founded their independent community whose members were exempted from paying taxes to the mother-community; only the registration of births, deaths, and marriages remained common.

The split in the Székesfehérvár community was a significant event. For the ultra-Orthodox, who feared for the survival of Judaism in Hungary, and, consequently, refused to arrive at a compromise with the Reformists, the Székesfehérvár episode proved that they could defend their interests successfully if they fought persistently and resolutely. Drawing strength from the success of the Székesfehérvár community, the leaders of the ultra-Orthodoxy began to clarify their relationship to the Reformists and the other groupings within the Orthodoxy on the initiative of Hillel Lichtenstein, the rabbi of Szikszó. On 28th November, 1865, 24 rabbis from 15 communities in Northern-Hungary met in Nagymihály (Zemplén county). The participants passed a nine-point resolution, which was printed in Ungvár in 1866, and became the manifesto of the ultra-Orthodoxy. The document, signed by 71 rabbis, prohibited any interior or exterior architectural changes to synagogues (i.e., it was not permitted to build a tower or to put the *bimah* elsewhere but the center) and any deviations from the traditional rituals (i.e., to use a choir during the service, to celebrate marriage in the synagogue, etc.). It proclaimed any synagogue which introduced the slightest changes to be a house of heresy.

By the mid-1860s, therefore, there were two large camps, the Reformists, and the Traditionalists, within the Jews of Hungary. The dividing line between the camps, which were of almost equal size, was quite rigid. The internal war was exacerbated by the full emancipation of the Jews of Hungary in 1867.

**The Congress of 1868/1869**

By 1868, it had become essential both for the state and for the Jews to convene a General Assembly of Hungarian and Transylvanian Israelites (the Congress). As a result of the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, Hungary had become an independent civil state, at least in terms of internal affairs. The administrations of such a state required centralized, hierarchical religious organizations for state institutions to deal with. The Jews lacked such an organization: each and every community was an autonomous body, totally independent of all the others. The Jews needed to form a united stand in order to use the Jewish Educational and School Fund. The direct impetus for both sides to convene the Congress was provided by the Emancipation Act, which granted citizens of the country following the Jewish faith equal civil and political rights to those of their Christian compatriots. The emancipation of individuals, however, did not mean acceptance of their religion. The creation of an autonomous religious organization was necessary for the latter.

Representatives to the Congress were elected on November 18, 1868, following the pattern of parliamentary elections. As a result of the elections, the Congress opened with 132 progressive and 88 traditionalist representatives on December 11, 1868, in the assembly room of the Pest county hall. Dr. Ignác Hirschler, the president of the Pest Community, became the Congress' president and its two vice-presidents were Lipót Popper, Traditionalist representative from Beszterce, Trencsén county, and Progressive representative Mór Wahrmann, from the Pest community. Thus, the composition of the managing body of the Congress mirrored the majority status of the Progressive camp.

The extreme discord between the two camps was apparent already during discussion of the first topic, the structure of community organization. The conflict stemmed basically from the fact that, in order to establish an organizational structure for the autonomous Israelite denomination, it was necessary to define the term "Jewish religion." This was a question which the representatives of the Progressive camp wanted to keep out of the Congress. They were right to be concerned since, in the end, this very issue led to the final split. The Progressives defined the Jewish community as an organization with the task of serving the religious needs of believers in the rabbinic Mosaic

faith. The Traditionalists, however, claimed that the Jewry of Hungary was made up of those who were faithful to the principles and teachings of the Mosaic faith and of the Talmud as formulated in the Shulhan Arukh. The difference between the two definitions is striking. According to the Progressives, Judaism was a religion, one among several others, while the Traditionalists considered it a way of life. By placing the emphasis on the Shulhan Arukh, the latter were demonstrating that for them the only legitimate foundation of Judaism was the *halakha*, the religious law which encompasses all aspects of Jewish life.

While discussing the very first topic, representatives of the two camps were already faced with the fact that each defined the essence of Judaism in a completely different way. The Progressive majority of the Congress dismissed the Traditionalists' definition, arguing that religious questions could not be on the agenda of the Congress. As a result, 48 out of the 88 Traditionalist representatives saw no alternative but to leave the room. After this the Congress continued its activities without them.

In the end, because of the claim that the Congress could not deal with religious questions, even the statement that the community was based on rabbinic Mosaic faith was omitted from the final version of the constitution of the communities. According to the accepted final version, the sole task of the communities was to maintain and operate the basic Jewish religious institutions, to perform ceremonial, ritual, educational and charity functions. The communities constituted the lower level of the Jewish denominational hierarchy. The constitution declared that in each settlement there could be only one Jewish community and that all the local Jews must join it. The National Office (*Országos Iroda*) constituted the top level of the hierarchy. The task of the National Office was to maintain relations and mediate between the denomination and the government.

In accordance with prior plans, the Congress also discussed the issue of the constitution of the schools. The foundation of a modern rabbinical seminary, which would teach secular subjects alongside the traditional religious curriculum, was a crucial element of this discussion. Despite the disputes, the overwhelming progressive majority of the Congress voted for setting up a modern rabbinical seminary, which, as a result, was opened in 1877.

Here is how the Neologs evaluated the Congress in 1908, almost forty years later: "The first Israelite general assembly determined rules and regulations which made it possible for the denomination to conduct its own affairs under the legal protection of the state, which the denomination needed for its objectives, and for its relationship with the state." In spite of the positive evaluation by the Neologs, one should not forget that the intention of the Congress was




to create a homogeneous Israelite hierarchy, yet it achieved precisely the opposite, an organizational split.

### The Struggle of the Opposing Trends After the Schism

As the first step towards the official break, on June 14, 1869, Emperor Franz Joseph I codified the constitution created by the Congress. At this point *Shomrei Hadat* (*Hitőr Egylet*), the association which led the struggle of the Traditionalists, submitted a petition to Parliament, based on freedom of conscience, asking for exemption from the resolutions of the Congress, since they reflected the opinion of the Progressive majority. The timing was exceptionally good as the Parliament was just about to begin discussing the issue of freedom of religion and conscience, one of the cornerstones of a liberal state. The resolution of March 18, 1870, by the House of Representatives, constituted de facto legitimization of the separate organization of Orthodoxy, since it declared that no denomination should compel its minority members to observe rules that contravened religious laws as viewed by the minority. Encouraged by the resolution, *Shomrei Hadat* convened a "counter-Congress" at Hotel Tigris in Pest (August 9, 1870). The Orthodox created their own constitution and their own autonomous hierarchical denominational organization. The top organ of Orthodoxy was modeled on the Neolog National Office and was called the Orthodox Mediating Committee (*Ortodox Közvetítő Bizottság*).

115
Following the General Assembly of Hungarian and Transylvanian Israelites (the Congress) held from December 11, 1868, to February 23, 1869, the Jewry of Hungary split up into three separate trends – Neolog (Congressional), Orthodox, and Status quo ante – each with its own nationwide organization and its own communities. Because of the bitter conflict between the Neolog and Orthodox trends after the Congress, many Jewish communities split up. By the turn of the century, however, the period of instability was largely over: almost every Jewish community became affiliated quite securely with a trend. Therefore, we used data from the first census taken after the turn of the century, in 1910. Another reason to base the map on the data of this census is that this was the last census which covered the whole of the "historical Hungary."
We have indicated on the map only Jewish communities which had a population of over 500 in the given period. (For the sake of clarity, we have noted by name only settlements with a total Jewish population of more than 1,500.) Moreover, for reasons of space, we cannot indicate to which trend the majority of the Jewish communities in the country were affiliated. (For example, in Háromszék county, there was no Jewish community with a population of more than 500, and hence, no communities are marked. However, the color indicates that the majority of the little Jewish communities in the county belonged to the Status quo ante trend.)

The constitutions of Orthodoxy and Neology differ basically in three points: 1) In contrast to the above-mentioned Neolog definition, the Orthodox defined a community on the basis of *halakha*: "The organization of the autonomous Jewish community is formed by voluntary association of each of its members for the task of creating and maintaining the institutions, and employing the officials that are necessitated by religious law as laid down in the Shulhan Arukh." 2) The Neologs permitted only one community per settlement. They wanted to solve the problem of religious differences by creating prayerhouse associations. This meant that if some members of the community wanted to hold different services from the existing ones, they had the right to form a prayerhouse association with their own prayerhouse and ritual personnel. The Orthodox constitution, however, permitted individuals or a group of members to leave a community and form a new one irrespective of their place of residence. Practically speaking, this meant two things: residents of different settlements could belong to the same community and residents of the same settlement could belong to different communities. 3) The crucially different approach to the role of the rabbi is a consequence of the fact that, for the Orthodox, a community provides the infrastructure for a way of life determined by religion under the guidance of the rabbi, who has the right of decision on every question. By contrast, in the Neolog community, the rabbi is one of the paid officials, whose role is limited to religious matters and rituals. And the community, the role of which is to satisfy the religious needs of its members, is directed by secular leadership. This concept strengthened secularization within the community as well.

The Orthodox constitution created by the "counter-Congress" was ratified by the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, Tivadar Pauler, on October 22, 1871. From that day on, the Jewry of Hungary officially constituted one denomination and three trends, each with its own organization. The communities that accepted the constitution of the Congress joined the Neolog, viz. the Congressional trend. Communities accepting the constitution of the "counter-Congress," organized by *Shomrei Hadat*, constituted the Orthodox camp. A small fraction of the communities, however, which did not want to acknowledge the break and did not join either trends, were forced to constitute a separate group, the group of Status quo ante communities. In terms of their religious customs and rituals, these communities resembled the Orthodox, while in terms of their life-style, demographic characteristics and professional structure, they were closer to the Neologs.

This group of communities formed their independent organization very late, only in 1928, in order to have independent representation in the Parliament. The following table shows the proportions of the three trends:

*Distribution of the population of communities by trend*

| Period* | Neolog Communities | | Orthodox Communities | | Status que ante Communities | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. of members | %** | No. of members | % | No. of members | % |
| Dualism: 1880 | 238,947 | 38.2 | 350,456 | 56.1 | 35,334 | 5.7 |
| Dualism: 1910 | 392,063 | 43.1 | 472,373 | 51.9 | 45,155 | 5.0 |
| Post-Trianon Hungary: 1920 | 300,026 | 63.4 | 146,192 | 30.9 | 27,092 | 5.7 |
| Post-Trianon Hungary: 1930 | 292,155 | 65.7 | 134,972 | 30.4 | 17,440 | 3.9 |
| 1944 (April) | 269,034 | 62.1 | 156,418 | 36.1 | 7,653 | 1.8 |
| 1948 | 106,130 | 79.3 | 23,451 | 17.5 | 4,281 | 3.2 |

* Apart from 1944 the table contains data collected during population censuses. The first year is 1880, for which we have reliable data with respect to the number of members of each trend. (The official organization of Orthodoxy dates back to 1871.) In the era of Dualism, the last population census was held in 1910. The table contain figures from two population censuses in post-Trianon Hungary. The data of 1944 are taken from a list compiled by the Jewish Council in April concerning the whole country. The 1949 population census was the last one in which religious affiliation was asked in Hungary .

** The percent distribution in each period indicates the proportion of the number of Jews belonging to a given trend within the total number of Jews in Hungary.

After the official separation of Orthodoxy in 1871, the ratio between the trends was far from being as clearly evident to contemporaries as the table above indicates. Since the Orthodox constitution made it possible to secede from communities, many new communities began to be formed. In most cases, Orthodox groups broke away from communities which went through a process of modernization in the cities. Here is how Márton Schweiger, the president of the National Office, remembered the events at the turn of the century, in 1901: "There was such terrible chaos that nobody could tell how many communities there were in the country and who belonged to them as regular, tax-paying members."

The Orthodox launched a general offensive in 1877 after the opening of the Rabbinical Seminary. They wanted to enforce the 1870 resolution of the House of Representatives which they considered to constitute recognition of two denominations. As a first step the Orthodox Mediating Committee argued that the Jewish Educational and School Fund should be divided fairly. Since they did not recognize the Rabbinical Seminary, they thought it was unjust that this institution received money from the School Fund while the yeshivot did not. In 1880, the House of Representatives refuted the Orthodox claim. They stated that Hungarian laws recognized only one kind of Jewry, and hence there was no reason to divide it into two denominations.

From the struggle of the two camps the Neologs emerged as the winners. In 1888, the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, Ágoston Trefort, regulated the question of forming communities by a decree. In the preface he reiterated that "Congressional, Orthodox and Status quo ante communities are all considered as belonging to the very same denomination, both from the point of view of state politics and from the point of view of Jewry." The decree regulated successfully the issue of forming communities, since after 1888 there were no more splits in the communities.

Denominational autonomy, however, remained truncated since a new congress was not convened. As a result, the victory of the Neologs can be considered only partial.

When Ágoston Trefort died in 1889 and Albin Csáky became the new Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, the Orthodox renewed the question of denominational segregation. They submitted a petition to the Ministry, signed by 239 rabbis from Hungary and abroad, in which they stated, citing the religious authority of the rabbis, that Orthodoxy and Neology in Hungary constituted two denominations and their believers could not live together in the same community. The Minister of Education and Religious Affairs sent the petition to the National Office in order to get an opinion. It is worth dwelling on the answer of the Neologs, since they formulated three essential proofs of the unity of the Jewish religion supported by clear examples: 1) Differences in ritual do not imply the existence of different denominations. Such differences in the ritual are: the location of the *bimah* in the synagogue, the use of organ and choir during services in Neolog communities, likewise the language of sermons (Yiddish versus Hungarian or German), the number of occasions that the rabbi delivers a sermon, the sermon's content, whether it is a traditional *drashah* or a sermon with moral message. The National Office pointed out that differences in ritual could exist within the same community, for example, in the Pest community the Dohány Temple's ritual differed from that of the Rumbach Street Synagogue. In addition to that, sometimes communities belonging to different trends used the same ritual, for instance, the Pozsony Orthodox community and the Óbuda Neolog community. 2) It was never a problem for rabbis to conduct rituals for Jews from communities belonging to different trends, for example, they married "mixed" Neolog-Orthodox couples. Moreover, in certain cases, the rabbi himself fulfilled functions in communities which belonged to different trends. Rabbi Joel Ungár, the famous Orthodox rabbi of Paks until his death in 1885, was at the same time the rabbi of the Szekszárd Neolog community, which belonged to his district. 3) The artificiality of denominational segregation was illustrated beautifully by the composition of the student body of the Rabbinical Seminary and the Israelite Teachers' Training College, since both institutions, from the moment they were opened, were attended by more students with Orthodox family background than Neolog. Orthodox communities did not employ rabbis who graduated from the Rabbinical Seminary, but they often hired teachers who graduated from the Israelite Teachers' Training College.

On the basis of these details, the National Office reached the following conclusion: "... it cannot be said that the Israelite citizens of our country cannot remain members of the same community, both from religious and the domestic points of view. Neither can it be said that there exist

phenomena which indicate that the inclination to split our denomination into two is necessitated by the religious requirements of Jewry." The Minister of Education and Religious Affairs accepted the Neolog opinion, and in 1890, for the last time, he reaffirmed that there was only one Jewish denomination in Hungary. The Law of Reception, codified in 1895, expressed the same view.

Although officially, on the level of denominational politics, the Orthodox appeared unyielding as regards segregation, several signs indicate that Jewry of Hungary was able to preserve a certain kind of unity, a homogeneous identity, even in the period of the break. Jakob Katz, in *The Identity of Post Emancipatory Hungarian Jewry*, proved convincingly that economic and social relations and even family contacts were maintained between the two opposing camps all along. Responsa literature demonstrates that, in many cases, Orthodox merchants and artisans had Neolog partners. The fact that this issue appears in responsa literature also proves that the partnership created special religious problems for the Orthodox. However, in the rabbinic literature, there has never been a decision in favor of breaking up a partnership between partners belonging to different trends. The rabbis always aimed at solving the practical problems arising from the cooperation, which is a clear proof for their efforts to maintain relations between Jews belonging to different trends.

From the late 1930s, the outside world treated the Jews of Hungary as a homogeneous group. Anti-Jewish legislation and decrees, ghettos and deportation afflicted all. As a result of the Holocaust, the organizational segregation of the trends came to an end. The Jews of the countryside were wiped out almost completely, and in the Budapest ghetto, it was mostly the Neologs of the capital who survived. And thus the proportion between the trends changed drastically.

In 1950, Orthodoxy, which by then had shrunk to only a tiny fragment of its former size, united with Neology in a manner defined in detail by the Unified National Constitution, yet continued to maintain a certain internal autonomy. Following the Holocaust, in 1949, Status quo ante communities ceased to exist. In 1949, as the last step of the cessation of the Status quo ante communities, the Debrecen community, with its 2,500 members, united with the Orthodox community of the city.

Although the era of organizational segregation of the Jewry of Hungary ended in 1950, the compulsory union did not create ideological unity. In the second half of the 20th century, we are witnessing the ever deepening ideological conflict between Reform Judaism and the ultra-Orthodox (*haredim*) worldwide.


170%

# The Development of Anti-Semitism Up to the Collapse of the Monarchy

Raphael Vago

The optimistic conviction which prevailed during the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849 that Jews would be granted full emancipation was followed by a period of gloom and setbacks as Hungary suffered under the heavy hand of the Habsburgs. Yet, less than twenty years after the failure of the Hungarian War of Independence, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 ushered in a new era for Hungary and its Jewish population.

The anti–Semitism which developed in Hungary from 1849, and particularly from 1867, displayed, along with the traditional elements, the same characteristics as the anti–Semitic movements in Germany and Austria: reaction against the granting of civil rights to the Jews, the process of emancipation and assimilation and their penetration into new areas, and against their success in various fields of the economy, in trades and liberal professions. Their rapid ascent of the economic and social ladder was opposed by those Hungarians who felt that it threatened their status, and perceived the Jews as a barrier to their own advancement up the social scale. In Hungary, as in Germany and Austria, the smallholder peasants as well as the petit bourgeoise felt that they were being held back by the rapid advancement of the Jews in an era when modernization, in which the Jews had a leading role, was transforming traditional society and ways of life.

In the period immediately following 1867, the Jews benefited from and exploited the new opportunities. A complex relationship evolved between Hungarians and Jews who had become citizens, and, at least on paper, enjoyed the same rights and obligations as their fellow Hungarians. The Jewish contribution to the economy, society and culture was well above their proportion of the population. They were deeply involved and successfully integrated into national life, and completely loyal to Hungary and everything it stood for. Many Jews regarded themselves first and foremost as "Hungarians" and were grateful to the nation that had opened the doors of opportunity to them, even though, on some levels, integration was not yet complete.

116

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely when and how the trend to reject the Jew as "the other" became

116
Caricature of a Jewish noble (1881)

evident. Hungarian, as well as Jewish society, were now treading the narrow and dangerous path between integration and total rejection. The warning signs of this development became manifest just prior to emancipation, especially after the Revolution in 1848–1849.

The legacy of the Springtime of Nations in Hungary was double-edged. On the one hand, there was no doubt in the mind of the Hungarians that Jews supported the Revolution, a fact that promoted the granting of emancipation. On the other hand, the events of the revolutionary period created the dynamics of popular rage against Jews; as was the case in Germany and Austria, the Jews were accused of treachery.

During the era of repression that followed the failure of the 1848–1849 Revolution, until the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the Hungarian political elite continually voiced its uncertainty as to the place and role of the Jews in Hungarian society and the readiness of the Jews themselves to accept civil rights and obligations. A parallel debate took place within Jewish society on the meaning and impact of ties with the Hungarians, and the repercussions of the gradual process of emancipation for Jewish society and its traditional institutions.

The granting of emancipation in 1867 opened a new page in the history of the Jews in Hungary and in relations between the two nations. In marked contrast to the stillborn legislation of 1849, which was limited in its scope, and was never implemented due to the collapse of the revolutionary regime in Hungary, the new 1867 legislation opened up Hungarian society to those who wished to integrate into it. Emancipation, for all its importance, was not as comprehensive as claimed by its advocates. The legislation granted equal rights to Jews as individuals, but did not elevate the Jewish religious establishments and institutions to the same level as Christian institutions. This limiting factor was of significance in the legal approach of the state towards the Jewish religion and institutions, although it did not affect the internal autonomy enjoyed by the three denominations that emerged within Hungarian Jewry – the Orthodox, Neolog and Status quo ante communities.

The entry of the Jews into the economic and cultural life of the country was resented from the outset, and greeted with rising anti-Semitic activity. Political anti-Semitism in Hungary was more active and better organized than elsewhere in central Europe and eastern Europe, and was dominated by one major figure for more than a generation. Győző Istóczy was elected to Parliament after having failed to be appointed as a judge. He blamed a Jew for his failure, and this personal experience apparently transformed him into a bitter anti-Semite. He led the Hungarian anti-Semitic movement with fierce determination, even though his ideas were never as original

as those voiced elsewhere in Europe. Nonetheless, it was clear that the rise of anti–Semitism in Hungary was influenced by developments in Germany and Austria.

In the two decades after 1849, Hungarian anti–Semitism did not develop into a political movement with a clear platform and aims. Its rise paralleled the emergence of modern Hungarian political culture. Up to the 1870s, the Hungarian national ideological discourse was gradually infiltrated by theories that rejected the entry of the Jews into Hungarian society. Such theories reflected the anxieties of the Hungarian elite, who resented the rapid rise of the Jews and their swift achievements, which often overshadowed those of other strata.

In two instances, Istóczy's activities were of particular significance: the first was his "Zionist" speech in the Hungarian Parliament in June 1878 in which he advocated the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as a means of solving the "Jewish question." He proposed an appeal to the Ottoman authorities for the eventual deportation of Hungary's Jewry in the framework of such a solution. He thereby contributed to that particular 19th century phenomenon, "Zionist-anti–Semitism." The need for a Jewish state, as professed by Istóczy, came to the attention of Hungarian Jews, and some researchers tried to prove a possible link between Istóczy's "Zionism" and the ideas of the Budapest-born Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism.

The second instance was Istóczy's role in creating the public atmosphere which generated the Tiszaeszlár blood libel in 1882. When a fourteen-year-old girl committed suicide, three Jews were accused of murdering girls for ritual purposes. Istóczy called on Hungary to expel the Jews, amidst a frenzy of anti–Semitic rumors about Jewish ritual murders. The case lasted more than a year and a half and ended in the acquittal of the three Jews. Károly Eötvös, a noted liberal and member of Parliament, came to their defense, courageously opposing the anti–Semitic stereotypes and propaganda, while Hungarian politicians adopted an antisemitic line.

Following the verdict in August 1883, antisemitic riots broke out in Budapest and other parts of the country, lasting several days until troops were called in to quell the unrest.

Istóczy's role in the Tiszaeszlár trial and its aftermath was decisive in heating up the campaign against the Jews, and unprecedentedly vitriolic language was used by the Hungarian press of the time. Thus, he paved the way for the emergence of anti–Semitic literature and publications in Hungary. He was sued for one of his articles, published in 1882, and although he was acquitted, he felt that he had enough public support to form the Anti–Semitic National Party which received fourteen mandates in the 1884 elections.

The Tiszaeszlár blood libel case and Istóczy's political activities symbolize the two faces of Hungarian society's attitude to the Jews. During the trial, there was a collision between the forces of the past, ready to use medieval accusations of ritual murder by Jews, and the growing liberal attitudes, as manifested by Eötvös' defense and the liberal press. In spite of the legal outcome of the case, the attempts by Hungarian liberals to integrate Jews into their society were only partially successful. The electoral success of Istóczy's party, the rise of popular anti–Semitism and of anti–Semitic publications in the period leading up to World War I indicated the vehemence of the elements that rejected Jews.

Following Tiszaeszlár, the emphasis shifted towards economic anti–Semitism. The Jews were identified with the negative impact of Western capitalism and industrialization which had damaged the delicate structure of traditional Hungarian society and poisoned the soul of the nation. Late 19th century anti–Semitism targeted not only the large-scale Jewish immigration and its impact on Hungary, but also the role of the Jews in a period of rapid modernization. The process of urbanization, which influenced the economic, social and cultural life of the country, was accompanied by rising manifestations of anti–Semitism. One of the more prominent and popular trends was headed by Ignác Zimády, a priest who combined traditional religious motifs with attacks on the alleged impact of the Jews on the economy and the society.

Other anti–Semitic views, expressed by such well known public figures as Károly Nendtvich, a professor at the Higher Technical School in Budapest, who wrote about the damaging character of the Jews and the moral decay caused by the material greed of Jewish doctors and lawyers, enjoyed wide popularity and were upheld as respectable theories. These voices penetrated Hungarian society and had a growing impact on the rise of anti–Semitism. Because of the rise of the cheap mass-circulation press, anti–Semitic propaganda was accessible to wide segments of Hungarian society, from the poor peasant and smallholder, through the middle classes to the landed aristocracy. In an era of the decline of the monarchy and intensified political struggles in Hungary, all the groups that were vulnerable in the face of the rapid changes wrought by modernization were easy targets for anti–Semitic propaganda.

**Jews and the Jewish Question during World War I**

The loyalty of the Jews of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to the crown was never in doubt. The Jewish population participated in the war effort like the rest of the population, and Jewish soldiers of all ranks played their part in the war on an equal basis to other nationalities.

117


Hetedik évfolyam. — 1883. 17. szám. Péntek, junius 22.

BUDAPEST

KÉPES POLITIKAI NAPILAP.

A tisza-eszlári bünpör fővádlottjai

és a holttest csempészek.

BRAUN LIPÓT.

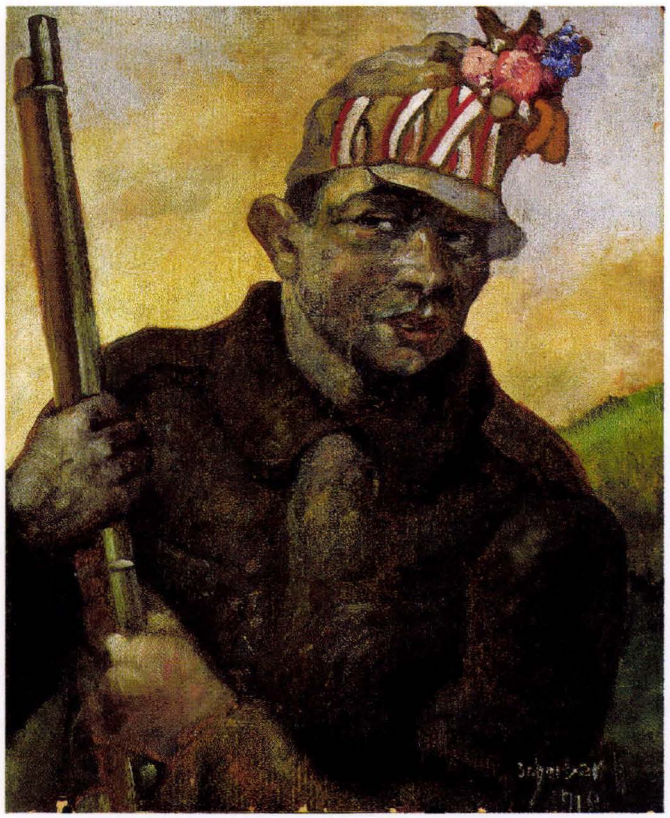
SCHARF JÓZSEF.

VOGEL ÁMSÉL.

SMILOVITS JÁNKEL.

HERSKO DÁVID

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Furthermore, the Jews were proven to be more loyal than other nationalities as they had no national aspirations and did not wish to challenge the existing structure of the monarchy.

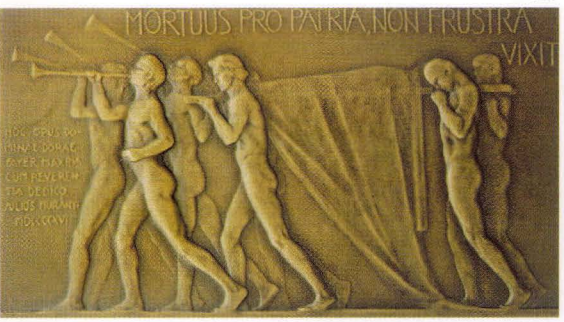
By the end of World War I, at least seven Jewish officers, most of them from Austria, had attained the rank of general. One of them, Alexander von Eiss, was active, after his retirement from the military, in the Zionist movement alongside Theodor Herzl. Another Jew, Samu Hazai, born in 1852 as Sámuel Kohn, converted and served as Minister of War for most of the war period. Some 300,000 Jews were drafted during the war, roughly their proportion among the population, although the number of those who refused to serve, due to religious reasons, was higher than among other national groups. There were seventy-six military rabbis, some of them from Hungary.

Despite their full share in the war effort, the Jews were under social pressure to prove themselves. Anti-Semitic incidents, which were not rare, focused on such charges as "we see the Jews everywhere, but not in the trenches," and alleged stories that the Jews shirked combat, while simple conscripts faced hardships. The participation of the Jews in various ranks, their prominent role in medical professions and as interpreters and translators, positions they reached thanks to

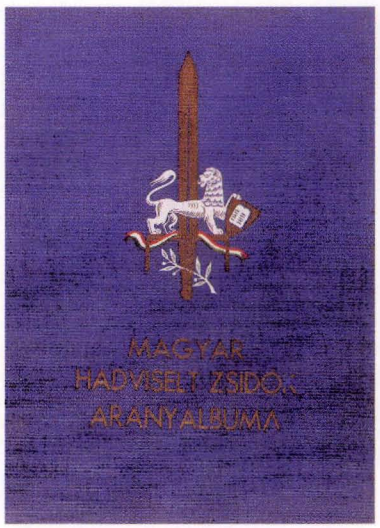
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Drawing in the contemporary press of the Tiszaeszlár case (1883)

118
Hugó Schreiber, "Soldier with a Michaelmas daisy", symbol of the 1918 bourgeois revolution (Oil painting)

119



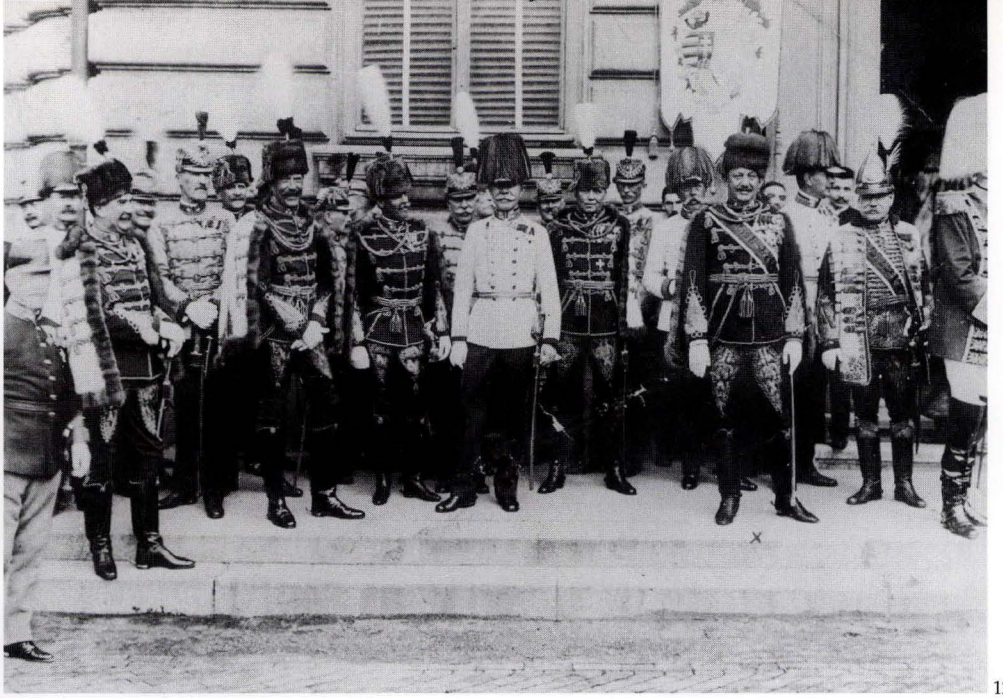

120




119
Gyula Murányi, "Carrying the dead" (Plaque, 1916)

120
*A magyar hadviselt zsidók aranyalbuma* [The Gold Album of the Hungarian Jewish War Veterans] (1940) Title page of the album published in memory of the Jewish soldiers who fought in World War 1

121
The General Staff with Samu Hazai, Minister of Defense, at the St. Stephen's day procession in the Buda Castle, 1913 (Photo by Oszkár Kallós)



121

their education and personal traits, were indicative of their efforts, on an individual, and not necessarily group basis, to prove themselves as citizens with equal rights and duties.

The Hungarian attitude towards Jewish loyalty in the war was ambivalent. Together with expressions of gratitude for personal heroism and acts of valor, for which a high number of Jews were decorated, there was a clear attempt by Hungarian anti–Semites in the inter-war period to downplay the Jewish role, and to propagate the myth of the treacherous Jew. They cited the case of Hungarian POWs in Russia, such as Béla Kun and many others of Jewish origin, who became communist activists. Initially, the 1938 anti–Semitic legislation, the so-called First Jewish Law, took Jewish war veterans into consideration, yet these veterans, some of whom had been awarded high honors and medals, ultimately suffered the same fate during the Holocaust as the rest of Hungary's Jewry. This is how the nation repaid those who had demonstrated their complete devotion to the monarchy.

The consequences of World War were devastating for Hungary. The 1920 Trianon Peace Treaty cut off significant parts of the country, essential for the national economy, and left a third of the Hungarians, including the Jewish population, in the neighboring states created on the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The moral, economic, social and political crisis of 1918–1920 had a long-range impact on Hungary in the inter-war period. Hungarian nationalism raised its head, and, by demanding the revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty, and "Justice for Hungary," turned increasingly towards a narrow and exclusivist nationalism and ethnocentrism, which fed on the "trauma of Trianon." The Jews were soon caught in the crossfire as the waves of revolutionary and anti-revolutionary unrest swept across Hungary, and became the first, almost natural targets of Hungarian nationalistic

rage, which sought and found in the Jews the scapegoats for Hungary's post-World War I misfortunes.

The political events of the first two post-war years added a new dimension to the anti–Semitic tendencies of Hungarian society and placed the Jewish question high on the national agenda in the period following the Trianon Peace Treaty. After 1920, Hungarian leaders made cynical and manipulative use of the Jewish origin of many leaders of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic (March 21, 1919 – August 1, 1919). The Béla Kun regime lashed out at the middle and higher classes and attempted to create a Marxist regime, like the Bolshevik regime in neighboring Russia. While Béla Kun and some of his top lieutenants were of Jewish origin, and the regime launched Red Terror against the "class enemies," their ethnic origin had no connection whatsoever with their policies. They were revolutionaries of Jewish origin, from assimilated families which had broken with Judaism, and their economic policies in nationalizing and confiscating private property were directed against Jewish property just as much as against Hungarian assets. Following the collapse of the short-lived Soviet Republic, the backlash of the nationalist right-wing was fierce. The White Terror of Admiral Miklós Horthy, Hungary's new ruler, was directed against Jewish lives and property, and Jews became the primary targets of Hungary's first steps in the post-Trianon era. The anti-Bolshevik aspect became the main feature of anti–Semitism as Jews were identified by the new counter-revolutionary regime as the bearers of Marxist ideology.

However, it soon became clear that the aims of the anti–Semitism which had reared its ugly head were not purely ideological. Hungary remained largely a homogeneous state, with only two major nationalities, Jews and Germans. The results of the peace treaty tore apart the fabric of relationship between Hungarians and Jews which had existed until World War I, relations which had been based on the Jewish contribution and role in the modernization of Hungary, and created a new relationship grounded on a more utilitarian basis. Following 1919–1920 the Hungarian establishment had no further need, or at least was less dependent on Jewish capital and on the Jewish contribution to the country's ravaged economy and society. The ideological platform of the new Horthy regime, the "Szeged idea" – named after the town where Horthy's power base was formed – was nationalist and anti–Semitic. It was claimed that the Jews were not only the carriers of the communist ideology, but were a foreign body within the Hungarian nation, and that they must be removed from the high positions they held. Following the collapse of the Béla Kun regime, anti–Semitism and racism became the main driving spirit of the armed gangs that applied the White Terror in savage fashion and brought panic and fear to the Jewish population.




122




123

122
The Károlyi government of the 1918 bourgeois revolution

123
The revolutioary governing council of the Hungarian Soviet Republic



# Herzl and His Hungarian Friends in Paris 1891–1895

Haya Harel

Benjamin Zeev Herzl, jurist, playwright, writer and journalist, was one of the greatest leaders of the Jewish people in modern times.

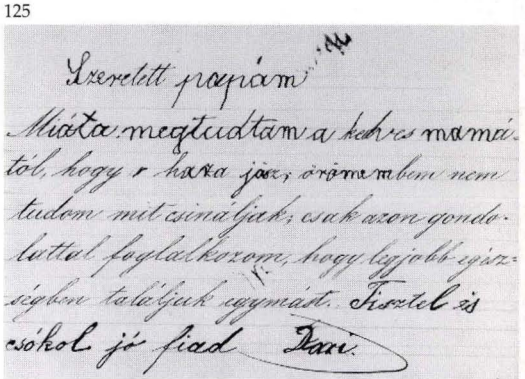
Herzl was born in 1860 in Pest, and was raised and educated there until the age of 18. In 1878, his family moved to Vienna, capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. From October 1891 until July 1895, he served as Paris correspondent of the important Viennese paper, *Neue Freie Presse*. During this period Herzl crystallized his Zionist idea, after an intense process of inner struggle and conflict regarding the Jewish question, which had already begun in 1882. In Paris he wrote the first drafts of his book, *Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State)*, and took his first practical steps towards bringing his ideas to fruition; here too he tested his theories on various target audiences, and in particular on his friends – most of them Hungarian Jews.

Who were Herzl's Hungarian friends in Paris and to what extent did they influence the consolidation process of the Zionist idea or even the methods for its implementation?

The demanding schedule of a foreign correspondent in Paris left Herzl scant time for social activity. His few friends in this period included the wellknown philosopher, Max Nordau, the brothers Emil and Friedrich Schiff and the sculptor Friedrich Beer. Nordau and the Schiff brothers were Hungarian-born Jewish journalists, who then were the Paris correspondents of German newspapers.

Whenever they met, Herzl and his friends discussed political, literary and philosophical questions. Initially, the Jewish question was not on their agenda, Emil Schiff later testified: "We almost never discussed Jews and Judaism, although we used to discuss all the contemporary questions [...] Only once did I realize that we differed in our attitude towards the Jews [...] I told him that I would no longer be travelling in summer to the spa resort of Ischl [...] since in the season it was filled with Jews of all sorts and I found their company and milieu most unpleasant. Then Herzl fixed his beautiful eyes on me, and asked me in surprise: 'How is that possible, you yourself are a Jew, and how can you abhor Jewish surroundings?' and we said no more about the matter."
Notwithstanding, those discussions of contemporary issues precipitated Herzl's interest in the Jewish problem and his search for solutions.

125

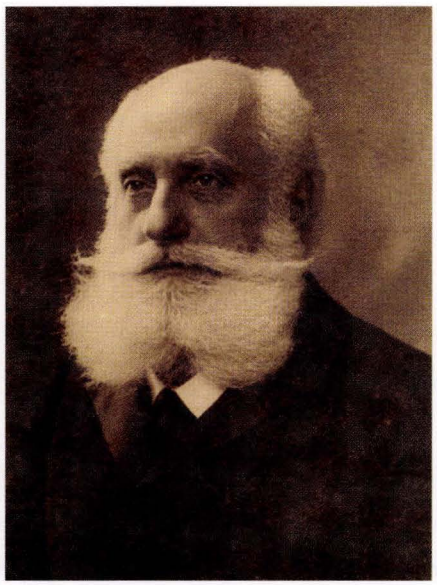

Szeretett papám!
Miáta megtudtam a kedves mamától, hogy a haza jaz, óráimban nem tudom mit csinálják, csak azon gondolattal foglalkozom, hogy legjobb egészségben találjak egymást. Írnál is sokat jó fiad Dani.

124
Herzl with his parents and sister (1873)

125
Herzl's Hungarian letter to his father (1866)



126



127

126
Herzl's memorial tablet in the staircase
of the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives
(Photo by Egon Gottl)

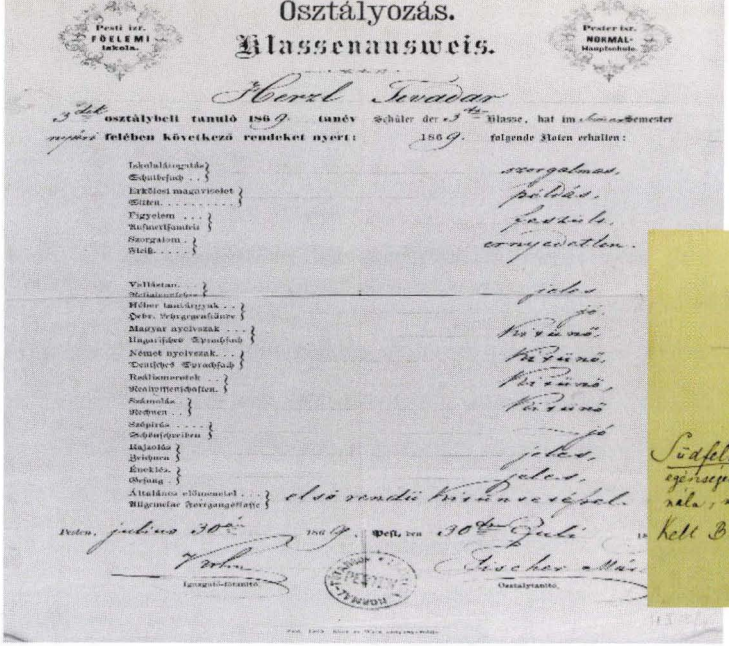
127
Max Nordau

In 1891, when Herzl arrived in Paris, Max Nordau had been living there already for eleven years, and was engaged in writing one of his fiercest works of criticism, *Entartung*. The two met at a press conference in early 1892, and developed a close friendship, based on their common Hungarian background, German cultural world and similar spheres of interest and occupation. Nordau, eleven years senior to Herzl, also served as physician to Herzl's family.

Paris of the 1890s was considered to be the focal point of cultural and political experimentation. This was the era of the *fin-de-siècle* Third Republic; the period from the decline of Boulangism to the start of the Dreyfus affair, was characterized by social and political ferment, violent anarchism, financial scandals and anti–Semitism.

Herzl arrived in Paris fired with belief in the French people and in France as the cradle of the revolution and of Emancipation and the standard bearer of liberties and civil rights. Unlike Nordau, who made Paris his home, Herzl regarded his stay in Paris as a transition period – a time of study and a launching pad for a brilliant journalistic or literary career. He viewed events in Paris through his Viennese prism, and perceived it as a socio-political laboratory for the entire world. Herzl studied the feasibility of applying the French model of the *État Nation* to the multi-national Austro-Hungarian political world. He gradually awakened from his idealization of French society, as he observed the rise of modern anti–Semitism in France and in Vienna. After a fierce inner struggle, he then arrived at the conclusion that anti–Semitism was a universal phenomenon and began to consider the idea of Jewish nationalism.

During his four years in Paris, Herzl`s search for a solution to the Jewish question underwent several stages. At first he defined it as a religious matter; then he regarded it as a social issue, and finally, as a national problem, which called for a political solution. He proposed different



Osztályozás.

Klassenausweis.

Herzl Tivadar

3-dik osztálybeli tanuló 1869. tanév Schüler der 3. Klasse, hat im Semester

1869. felében következő rendeket nyert: folgende Noten erhalten:

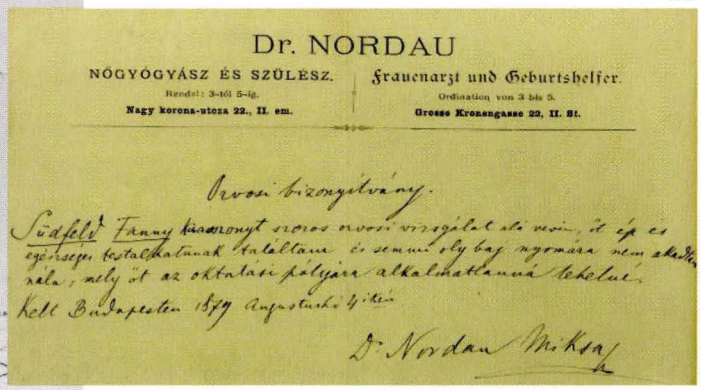
szorgalmas
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erényedatlan.

első rendü bizonyitvánnyal.

Pesten, julius 30án 1869. Pest, den 30. Juli

Tescher Mór

128



Dr. NORDAU

NŐGYÓGYÁSZ ÉS SZÜLÉSZ. Frauenarzt und Geburtshelfer.

Rendel: 3-tól 5-ig. Ordination von 3 bis 5.

Nagy korona-utcza 22., II. em. Grosse Kronengasse 22, II. St.

Orvosi bizonyitvány.

Südfeld Fanny kiemonyt noros orvosi vizsgálat alá vevén, őt épp es egészségos testalkatunak találtam és semmi olyan bajnak nyomára nem akadtam vala, mely őt az oktatási pályára alkalmatlanná tehetné.

Kelt Budapesten 1879 Augusztus 4-ikén

Dr. Nordau Miksa

129

128
Herzl's school report from the Pest Jewish Primary School (1869)

129
Hungarian doctor's certificate written by Nordau (1879)

solutions at each stage, as his perception gradually changed, until he arrived at the national solution.

By 1893–1894, he had formulated all the practical basic suppositions necessary for the solution of the Jewish question. At that time, however, he still believed that the Jews were capable of integrating into the surrounding society, and in 1894 he still rejected any scheme for migration and the establishment of a Jewish sovereign entity as a solution of the Jewish problem.

In October 1894, Herzl wrote his play, *The Ghetto* (a later version of which, entitled *Das Neue Ghetto*, he dedicated to Nordau), in which he dwells upon the inability of Jews, even assimilated Jews, to integrate into non-Jewish society. Several months earlier Nordau too had completed a play, *Die Kugel*, which was similar in message and content. Was the similarity between the two plays an outcome of exchanged ideas between Herzl and Nordau, or did the both arrive, each on his own course, at a similar conclusion? In any event, both plays reflect a strong identity search, as they cast a new light on Emancipation against the background of their growing criticism of European society.

For Herzl, who was trying to tackle the Jewish problem in various ways, *The Ghetto* marked the beginning of his Jewish "political" activity. He was resolved to stage the play without delay as a means of launching a public debate on the Jewish question in "a nation of anti–Semites." He took vigorous clandestine action, but told his friends in Paris nothing about the play. Nordau, on the other hand, read *Die Kugel* to Herzl.

In October 1894, while Herzl was still occupied in writing *The Ghetto*, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was arrested. Herzl, Nordau and Schiff covered the Dreyfus trial and were present at the degradation ceremony at which he was stripped of his rank (January 1895). The trial, and in particular the

anti–Semitic outbursts which accompanied it in France, left their impact on the three "Hungarians". Nordau, who until then had regarded anti–Semitism as a marginal side effect of the ailments of *fin-de-siècle* society, began to grasp the existential threat inherent in it. In the wake of the trial, he intensified his search for self-identity. Friedrich Schiff came to the conclusion that socialism was the solution to the Jewish problem. The Dreyfus case notwithstanding, Schiff was convinced that anti–Semitism was a fleeting phenomenon. For Herzl, however, the trial became a catalyst, a dramatic substantiation of his basic assumptions. If up to that point he viewed the Jewish question as a social or religious matter, he now recognized it as a pressing national issue, because Jews everywhere were surrounded by a hostile environment. However, by the time that the Dreyfus trial occurred, most of his theoretical and practical concepts had already been formulated, and in a course of a few months, he was able to muster the forces for implementation and to crystallize his national and political credo.

Herzl's scheme was based on the view that it was possible to achieve a political, economic and social solution to the predicament of the Jewish people by gathering them together in a territory of their own within a framework of a sovereign state, acknowledged by the enlightened nations. Herzl believed that in order to achieve this aim, it was vitally important to create a cohesive leadership for the Jewish people, able to formulate, conduct and implement policy. In this context, he thought that the Jewish intelligentsia should play a major role, and hence invested considerable effort attempting to mobilize them.

During his Paris period, Herzl revealed his scheme to three individuals only, whom he regarded as representatives of the target populations he wanted to reach: Baron Maurice de Hirsch, representing the Jewish magnates; Friedrich Schiff, representing the middle class and free professions, and Max Nordau, representing the elite Jewish intelligentsia, who had won prestige among non-Jewish society as well.

On June 17, 1895, some two weeks after his abortive meeting with Baron Hirsch, and after having recorded in his Zionist diary: "For me my own life has ceased and history has commenced," Herzl decided to sound out his scheme by revealing it to his friend, Freidrich Schiff. He had assigned to Schiff and his brother, Emile, major roles in its implementation. Schiff, however, totally rejected the scheme, expressed doubts as to Herzl's soundness of mind, and tried to persuade him to abandon the idea. Beyond his emotional response and his warning that Herzl would be exposing himself and his family to ridicule and would be perceived as a false Messiah, Schiff also cited rational arguments: the Jews were not a nation; they were not capable of establishing a state;

anti–Semitism was a transient phenomenon, as demonstrated in Hungary; the sole solution was socialism.

Herzl examined Schiff's arguments one by one. He had already confronted most of them on his road to consolidation of his national program. He now examined all the existing phenomena on the contemporary political map. Herzl had already rejected the notion of socialism being a counter-movement to antisemitism, and regarded Schiff's suggestion for solution of the Jewish question through socialism as "total nonsense, like socialism itself." But Schiff's arguments required him to devote serious attention to the situation of Hungarian Jewry, as a test case for his ideas.

Although Herzl left Budapest in 1878, gave up his Hungarian nationality in 1885, and even defined himself as a "German Jew from Hungary," he did not cut himself off completely from the city or the language or even from Hungarian culture. He visited Budapest frequently, flavored his writing in German with Hungarian expressions. He spent a great deal of time with Hungarian emigrants, apparently because of their common background, as he wrote to Ernő Mezei: "My heart is drawn to you, apparently because you too are a Jew from Pest." During his Paris period as well, when he was searching for characteristic features and criteria for Jewish national definition, and was investigating the role of the Jewish religion in his own experience and seeking models in the Jewish past, he found them in his childhood and Jewish upbringing in Budapest. Thus, in March 1895, when he attended synagogue in Paris for the first time, he recalled his childhood: "And again, in my eyes, the prayer was solemn and moving. Many things reminded me of my youth and of the synagogue in Tabakgasse in Pest."

Thus, too, a childhood memory from the Jewish school in Budapest provided him with his identification model in the image of Moses and the tale of Exodus: "My earliest memory of that school is still of the beating I received because I could not recall all the details of the Exodus. Today many teachers would like to beat me because I recall the Exodus too well."

In his Zionist program, Herzl initially assigned the Hungarian Jews the role of "the Hussars of Judea, who can be excellent, champion horsemen." However, during his visits to Budapest, Herzl noticed a strengthening trend towards Magyarization and Hungarian nationalism, to which he was opposed: "Hungary has become even more Hungarian. It is a pity! Several of my friends... have become total Hungarian fools. They do not in fact know Hungarian, but they obstinately insist on speaking it, and have changed their names to Hungarian names. But I myself did not utter even one syllable of Hungarian."

Herzl did not have faith in the effectiveness of the "liberal" policy regulated towards the Jews in Hungary. He concluded that "the concentration of land in the hands of the Jews of Hungary *makkhetes zsidó* (in the original Hungarian: the base Jews) will inevitably arouse fierce anti–Semitism. The minor nobility, who are being crowded off their land, are ready to lead the people in attacks against the Jews. The liberal government is artificially sustaining itself solely through the election funds of Jews. The conservative national party, with Vienna and the army to back it, is capable of turning the situation upside down from overnight [...] and then from one day to the next we will witness in Hungary the most acute forms of anti–Semitism."

The thorough reappraisal of his own basic theories, in light of Schiff's strong reaction, led Herzl, to search for alternative methods of realizing his schemes. He rejected Schiff's proposal to ask for Nordau's professional opinion of whether the scheme was "the idea of a sober, responsible man," and decided to submit it for the consideration of the former German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Only some three weeks later, on July 6, 1895, when Bismarck had failed to reply, did Herzl bring up in a conversation with Nordau the Jewish question: "We spoke out of one another's mouths. I have never before sensed so strongly how compatible we are." Herzl and Nordau were "harmonious" with regard to the national features of the Jewish question. However, despite their identical basis, Nordau was not yet persuaded that the Jews should establish a homeland of their own, but thought rather that, "because of anti–Semitism, the Jews everywhere will be forced to shatter the idea of a homeland." But even at this stage, Herzl did neither reveal to him his scheme nor his plan of action.

Why did Herzl hold back his views, his activities or his strong emotions from Nordau in Paris? Why did he not read his play *The Ghetto* to Nordau, nor disclose his national program to him? Was he afraid of being disheartened by biting criticism on the part of Nordau who "in his true love for the truth, would have told me of every mistake he discerned?"

In fact, Herzl indeed feared both Nordau's savage criticism as literary critic and thinker, as well as his expert medical professional opinion. As he noted in his diary: "Lombrozo [the psychiatrist] may yet consider me to be insane, while my friend Nordau will conceal from me the concern I am causing him. But they are wrong. I am well aware that twice two is four." This explains why Herzl did not present his scheme to Nordau until it was fully crystallized – at which time he was already convinced that nothing could deflect him from his purpose. Consequently, Herzl first revealed his ideas and activities to Nordau in November 1895, as part of his efforts to establish a Jewish leadership among the elites of Paris and London. This time Nordau grasped the idea "instantly.

He was the easiest of my conquests, the most precious acquisition. He could be a good president for our academy or minister of education." By now, Nordau had arrived at the conclusion that anti–Semitism was not a fleeting phenomenon, and he had begun to understand the threat to the survival of the Jews of the West posed by the political conflagration in France after the Dreyfus trial.

That was why he was ready to accept Herzl's scheme, as he himself wrote: "It was only the growth of anti–Semitism that aroused in me awareness of my obligation towards my people, and the initiative for this can be attributed in part to Herzl, my dear friend, with whom I was on very close terms in Paris. It was he who showed me the way to fulfilling my duty towards my people."

**In Conclusion**

*Fin-de-siècle* Paris served as the background for the consolidation of the national and political theories of Herzl, of Nordau and eventually also of Schiff. The events in Paris accentuated and exacerbated the sense of alienation felt by German Jews of Hungarian origin, and spurred their search for identity. Their discussions exposed varied attitudes and alternatives, and influenced their ideological consolidation. Herzl was the first to arrive at a national viewpoint.

Schiff, nonetheless, was skeptical as to Herzl's conclusions. Although he tried to discourage Herzl at the action stage, paradoxically his efforts only fortified Herzl's resolve and confidence in his scheme and urged him to seek other alternatives. Schiff himself also adopted Zionist views in 1898 under the impact of the Dreyfus affair. As Herzl attested in his diary: "Schiff [...] visited me [...] I reminded him of what he said about my ideas when I read him three years ago the manuscript of *Der Judenstaat*. He was ashamed, felt uncomfortable and said: 'I have repented. You are right, you are indeed right.' He changed his mind as a result of the incitement around the Dreyfus affair, and like him, who thought me mad, all those who proclaimed me mad will come to me. But what would have happened if I had hesitated because of such people? The world would have been deprived of an idea and Judaism would have been deprived of a great movement."

Unlike Schiff, however, Nordau's conversion to the Zionist program, in 1895, was more significant. Nordau was one of the outstanding intellectuals of his time, a man with wide contacts, and involvement in both the non-Jewish and the Jewish world. Nordau contributed greatly to the world publicity of the Zionist movement and became its chief ideologist and polemicist. Thus, the two Hungarian-born Jews became the leaders of the Zionist movement as Herzl wrote to Nordau: "If I am the arm of the Congress, you are its voice, speaking to Europe."

# The Jews of Hungary and Eretz Israel

David Giladi



130
Károly Miksa Reissmann, "David's tomb in Jerusalem" (Aquarelle, 1889)

There is clear evidence of links between the Jews of Hungary and Eretz Israel from the 17th century onward. For more than 150 years, from 1525 to 1686, Hungary was part of the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish sultan ruled supreme both in Jerusalem and in Buda fortress, and Jews, like all his subjects, were able to travel throughout the Empire. Under the Turks, Hungary, and Buda in particular, was a stop on the route of immigrants from Europe – Moravia and Germany – to Eretz Israel.

At the end of the 17th century two well-known figures immigrated from Hungary to Eretz Israel: Rabbi Jehuda, or to give him his full name, Rabbi Arieh Jehuda Leib, son of Rabbi Ephraim Hacohen, author of the book of responsa *Sha'ar Ephraim*, and his brother-in-law, Rabbi Jakob Zak. Rabbi Ephraim ben Jakob Hacohen was one of the greatest rabbinical authorities of his day. After an odyssey which included Vilna, Mezeritsch, Prague and Vienna, he reached Buda in 1666, founded a great yeshiva there, corresponded with the greatest rabbis of his time and served as rabbi and head of the rabbinical court until his death in 1678. In his later years he was summoned to serve as rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem and intended to immigrate, but died in an epidemic before he could do so.

His son, Rabbi Jehuda of Buda, visited Eretz Israel twice, the first time in 1685, with the intention of publishing his father's writings. When he learned of the fate of his family in Hungary, he returned to Europe. Several years later, in about 1692/3, he immigrated for the second time, apparently together with his brother-in-law, Rabbi Jakob Zak. Rabbi Jehuda died about 1730. Sources dispute whether he was buried in Safed or Jerusalem.
Rabbi Jakob Zak was also born in Buda, and while still living in Vilna, he married the daughter of Rabbi Ephraim Hacohen. His son Zvi, who came to be known as *Hakham Zvi* (Zvi the wise), was born in 1660. The name of this illustrious family – Rabbi Jakob Zak, his son Zvi and grandson, Rabbi Jakob Emden – was linked to the city of Buda.

In 1686 the Austrians succeeded in capturing Buda from the Turks. Rabbi Zvi's wife and daughter were killed in the Turkish bombardment of the city. At the time he was in Sarajevo and thus was spared. After the city of Buda fell to the Austrians, Jakob Zak

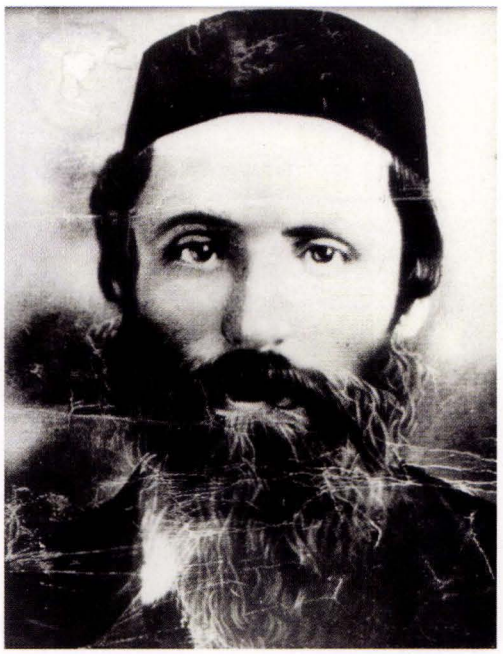
and his wife were taken captive by the Austrians, taken to Berlin and there redeemed by the Jewish community. Only three years later, in 1689, did Rabbi Zvi discover that his parents had survived and had been redeemed. After being freed and after meeting his son in Altona, Rabbi Jakob Zak decided to emigrate to Jerusalem. It is assumed that he made his way there with his brother-in-law, Rabbi Jehuda, in 1692/3 and lived in Jerusalem until his death about 1697/8.

In the 19th century, the desire to emigrate to Eretz Israel burgeoned again for two seemingly conflicting though connected reasons. Some historians link this revival to the 1848 uprising of the Hungarians, who rebelled against the absolutist regime of the Austrian Emperor. Many Jews fought in the ranks of the Hungarian freedom fighters and some of them served as officers. Evidence of the impact of the revolutionary spirit on the Jews has been found by the writer Ehud Ben-Ezer in the diaries of his grandfather, Jehuda Raab, one of the founders of Petah Tikva. Raab is quoted as having asked himself while still in Hungary why he should not follow in the footsteps of the Hungarian rebels and initiate a Jewish revolution in Eretz Israel. And it is indeed possible that the 1848 revolution influenced Jehuda Raab and his comrades, Joshua Stampfer, David Gutman and others.

The impetus for immigration came from another direction as well, and is linked to the name of the Chatam Sofer. His advocacy of emigration stemmed from his fear that the granting of equal rights to Diaspora Jews would lead to their assimilation and total integration into the surrounding society. The only path of defense against this threat was to return to Eretz Israel, the Holy Land. And, indeed, the first and foremost supporter of the founders of Petah Tikva was the Chatam Sofer's loyal disciple, Rabbi Hillel Lichtenstein, who was known for his religious zeal.

Even more renowned was his son-in-law, Rabbi Akiva Joseph Schlesinger, who immigrated in 1870 after he too came to the conclusion that the sole way of preserving the Orthodox way of life was to establish an Orthodox community in Eretz Israel. In 1873 he published a booklet in which he detailed his scheme for establishing a worldwide association for the consolidation of Orthodox Jewry, to be centered in Jerusalem. He believed that the Jews living on *halukah* (charity) should move out of the walled city of Jerusalem and establish agricultural settlements.

Another scion of the Lichtenstein family was Rabbi Pinhas Lichtenstein. He too supported the renewal of Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel. Rabbi Lichtenstein established his



131
Joshua Stampfer

"Joshua Stampfer, son of the Szombathely *dayan*, made his way on foot from Budapest to Jerusalem through the Balkans, Turkey, Anatolia and Syria, wandering for months in the desert without food or drink until he reached his destination. [...] He was an extremely pious man and governed the colony in a religious spirit. Still, he was the one who had once given orders to violate the Shabbat in the synagogue. Once, during the Shabbat prayers, he received news that Bedouins had attacked the colony. Stampfer stopped his recital of the *Shmone Esre*, threw off his *tallit* and ordered the men to interrupt their prayers and grab their guns."

József Patai, 1926

movement in Transylvania and initiated the immigration of one hundred families of farmers from there. A large group immigrated in 1923 and were among the founders of Kfar Gideon in the Jizreel Valley. Other members settled in Balfouria, Tel Adashim and Givat Ada.

Another ardent advocate of settlement in Eretz Israel was yet another member of the Lichtenstein family, Rabbi Joseph Lichtenstein, in whose court the Jews of the town of Máramarossziget, both old and young, used to assemble every year on the Feast of Pentecost *(Shavuot)* and eagerly drink in his words, which were devoted to one sole theme: the injunction to emigrate to Eretz Israel and to rebuild its ruins.

Towards the end of the 19th century, a scheme for the construction of the Ungarin and Ziebenberg housing complexes was launched in the Old Yishuv in Eretz Israel. Emissaries were sent from Jerusalem to the Diaspora to recruit funds by selling shares. The Ungarin buildings, constructed in the Mea Shearim quarter, constituted an urban development with typically Hungarian features: densely-built structures, an inner courtyard, a complex of staircases, etc. The ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) community was also established in this quarter by disciples of the Chatam Sofer and of his son the Ktav Sofer, Rabbi Abraham Shmuel Benjamin Wolf, who immigrated at the end of the 19th century. These disciples included Rabbi Joseph Haim Sonnenfeld, Rabbi Israel Zeev Horovitz and Rabbi Abraham Shaag (formerly one of the rabbis of Burgenland).

At the end of the 19th century, the Hungarian Jewish communities followed the development of settlement in Eretz Israel with close attention. The teacher Elazar Greenhut, who lived in Jerusalem, published in the Hungarian Jewish press reports on events in Eretz Israel, in Petah Tikva and the other colonies, and stories about farmers and Jewish agricultural laborers in the orange groves. These reports aroused interest, and the Jewish weekly *Egyenlőség* organized a group which visited Eretz Israel in order to gain an impression of the achievements there.

The pilgrims leased a ship which sailed from Trieste in the summer of 1905. After their return to Hungary, Miksa Szabolcsi, the editor of *Egyenlőség*, published enthusiastic reports for several weeks. These reports were written in a spirit wholly in contrast to the usual anti-Zionist tone of the central organ of the Neolog communities. In 1911 a second group set out for Eretz Israel, again aboard a ship leased at Trieste. The group was headed by

two rabbis – one of them, Rabbi Gershon Stern, published a special anthology containing enthusiastic reports of what he and his fellow travelers had witnessed. World War I cut short the trend represented by these group visits, and delayed immigration initiatives centered in Budapest until after the war.

A scheme for Zionist immigration was launched in Budapest as early as 1903, and was given new life by Zionist student associations and, in particular by students of the Law Faculty and of the Technological University. In the early post-war years, dozens of engineers and architects immigrated to Eretz Israel and made a significant contribution to establishing the infrastructure of a modern and progressive country.

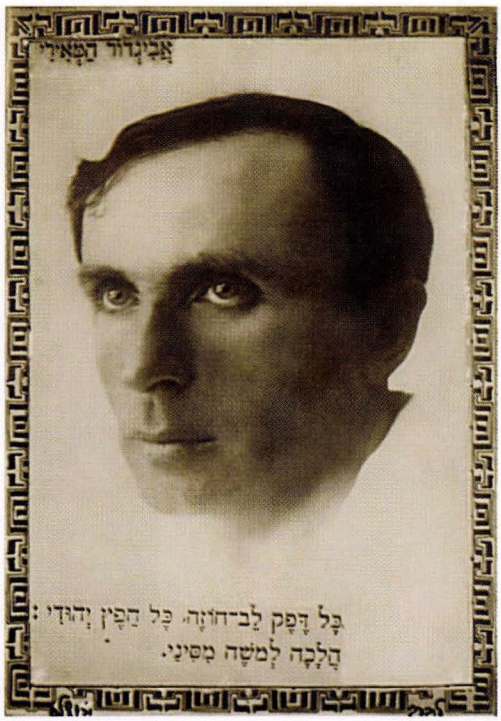
In 1903, Theodor Herzl visited Eretz Israel and his vision of the transformation of the country encompassed the spheres of building and construction as well, calling for the use of modern building materials. In response to Herzl's appeal, Ármin Beregi immigrated to Eretz Israel from Budapest in 1921 and established a factory in Tel Aviv for the manufacture of silicate bricks which supplied the building trade for many years. His friends Árpád Gut, Leó Vámos and others introduced modern building methods into the country. They brought cement and iron, paved roads and built large buildings such as the flour mills in Haifa and the Nesher cement factory. They constructed the King David Hotel and the Generali building in Jerusalem, the Assuta Hospital in Tel Aviv, the infrastructure of The Hebrew University on Mount Scopus as well as handsome apartment houses.

Hungarian Jews laid the foundations for the water supply system in Jerusalem, introduced modern construction methods to Tiberias and made a considerable contribution to the draining of the Jizreel Valley swamps (the name of Professor József Breuer of the Technion is associated with this project) and the malaria-stricken swamps of Hadera.

However, it was not only in construction and engineering that the Jews of Hungary made their contribution. Among them were poets and writers, cartoonists, physicians and teachers, historians and educators, bibliographers and librarians, politicians and economists, industrialists and scientists, fighters and members of pioneering movements as well as the founders of communal settlements.

132
Avigdor Hameiri

133
Poster of the Palestinian Pen Club and the Union of Hebrew Writers, annoucing the reception to be given in honor of Marc Chagall, Józef Patai and Edmond Fleg (April 5, 1931)




132




133


Tiszteletpeldany
KADIMAK
CSERKÉSZ
Kiadja
a Phönix örs.
I évf. 6 szám.
Ára 500 Kor.
1923 szept.

# Zionism in Hungary Between the Two World Wars

Attila Novák

"Hungarian Zionism cannot be anything but red, white and green, the colors of the Hungarian Flag," wrote Budapest-born Theodor Herzl in 1903 in a letter to Ernő Mezei, a Jewish member of Parliament. He was alluding to the fact that Hungarian Jewry, both assimilated and Orthodox (the latter accounting for over 50% of the community), was fully loyal to the Hungarian state. The great majority of Jews in Hungary defined themselves as Hungarian by nationality. Notwithstanding, as early as the fall of 1897, the first Zionist society, the Zion League (*Cion Egylet*), was founded in Nagyszeben by János Rónai, who attended the Basel Congress. The proclaimed aim of the League was to provide a home in Palestine for Jews "without a homeland." Herzl visited Hungary on several occasions, and held talks with several Hungarian Jewish politicians to win them over to Zionism, but his attempts failed.



135



136

The First Congress of Hungarian Zionist societies convened in 1903 in Pozsony, and founded a roof organization known as the Hungarian Zionist Alliance (*Magyarországi Cionista Szervezet*), with Rónai as its president. In accordance with the views held by the majority of Hungarian Jews, the Congress resolutions proclaimed that Hungarian Zionists were not demanding political rights on an ethnic basis and would not conduct activities which would conflict with Jewish "religious tradition."

The organization of Zionist college and university students, known as *Makkabea*, was also formed in the first years of the century. In 1913, a similar youth organization, *Bar Kohba*, was formed.

In 1909, the Hungarian Zionist Alliance submitted a memorandum to the Hungarian government and members of Parliament, explaining that the objectives of the movement in Hungary were primarily economic, social and moral. However, the Alliance's statutes did not receive official approval, and it continued to operate in a semi-legal fashion.

As a result of Hungary's loss of territories following World War I, Zionist activity was

134
Title page of *Kadimah cserkész* (September, 1923)

135
The participants at the Congress of the Mizrachi (Pozsony, 1903)

136
Participants in the Fourth Congress of the Hungarian Zionist Alliance (Budapest, 1906)

concentrated mostly in Budapest and in several provincial towns with a relatively large Jewish population like Miskolc, Debrecen, Nyíregyháza, Szeged, Székesfehérvár. This urban Zionism, later mocked as "salon Zionism," characterized the Zionist movement in Hungary. The Alliance received legal standing in 1927.

The Pro-Palestine Alliance of Hungarian Jews (*Magyar Zsidók Pro Palesztina Szövetsége*) was founded at the end of 1926. Modelled on the Jewish Agency, its aim was to serve as a bridge between Zionists and non-Zionists. The Alliance had Jewish National Fund and Keren Hayesod departments as well.

The relationship between the official community leadership and the Zionists was relatively poor until the outbreak of World War II. The Zionists, who demanded a share of political power in view of their struggle for all sectors of the Jewish people, rejected the official religious leadership whose authority was based on the influence of moneyed community members. The community leaders, for their part, considered the Zionists, because of their nationalist stand, to be an encouragement to assimilation processes and a threat to the survival of the Jewish community as a religious group. *Egyenlőség*, a major Jewish weekly, took every opportunity to attack the Zionists in order to demonstrate that the Jews were good Hungarians. At the same time, in the 1930s, several Jewish communities were headed by people with Zionist views, e.g., Samu Biedl of Szeged.

Through the Jewish Agency, the Palestine Office despatched British immigration permits (certificates) for Hungarian Jews as well. The number of certificates had always depended on two factors: the strength of the Zionist movement in the specific country and the degree of danger in various countries. Hungary received few certificates and the various Zionist parties fought over their allocation. It should be noted that many Jews found their way to Palestine without such permits. From the end of World War I until 1938, approximately two to three hundred Jews immigrated to Palestine each year, most of them legally. The era of *Aliyah Bet*, the illegal emigration from Hungary to Palestine, started in 1935.

The leaders of the World Zionist Organization did not neglect the Hungarian Zionist movement. Nahum Sokolov and Menahem Ussishkin, for example, visited Hungary in 1925.

The character and marginal role of the Hungarian Zionist movement were largely determined by the fact that, both in relation to the size of the country and to the size of the Jewish community, it was small. In 1930, there were some 440,000 Jews in Hungary, but until 1938 the Zionist

movement never had more than two to four thousand members. Therefore their enemies did not take them seriously, and the wider public took note of them only in the late 1930s as a result of the police harassment they suffered.

**The Zionist Left**

The year 1927, when the Hungarian Zionist Alliance receive legal status, signified a turning point for the Zionist movement in Hungary, for several reasons. A small group of activists proclaimed their affiliation to *Hashomer Hatzair* and began to establish *kenim* (clubs) in several provincial towns. The writings of Jean Jaurès and other socialist authors were read in *Hashomer Hatzair* camps. By the end of the year there were two hundred and fifty members, and in the following years this number rose to six hundred. In the early 1930s a clubhouse was built in Budapest (Hollán Ernő Street 14) and two agricultural and two industrial *hakhsharot* (pre-immigration training frameworks) were founded. Participation in *hakhsharah*-training was one of the conditions for approval of immigration for movement members.

In 1929, the organization of *Hapoel Hatzair* and of the *Poalei Zion* movement began. The latter operated for some time under the name *Hanoar Haoved* and then as *Dror*. These organizations were all marked by a strong left-wing orientation, but not all of them were Marxist.

In light of the strong right-wing and anti-Communist sentiment of the era, these organizations could not hope for legal status. Consequently, the Hungarian Zionist Alliance enabled them to function under its auspices as departments. *Dror* was known as the Youth and Library Department of the Alliance and *Hashomer Hatzair* as the Youth and Culture Department.

Left-wing Zionist groups soon found themselves in confrontation with the official Hungarian Jewish leadership, the community leaders and later with the Hungarian authorities as well. In certain places, their activity was banned by the rabbis, not so much because of their anti-religious stand but because Zionism, as a movement of national renaissance, seemed to them to be at odds with their self-proclaimed loyalty to the Hungarian state. *Mizrahi* activity was condemned for the same reasons.

In the early 1930s, the left-wing groups established a roof organization under the name of *Eretz Israel Haovedet*. A coalition of this kind was needed in order to improve the prospects of the Left in the elections to the 17th Zionist Congress (Basel, 1931), and it was also decided which of the parties would receive the votes won by the coalition and would represent it at the Congress.




137
Symbol of *Hashomer Hatzair*

*Hashomer Hatzair* received the 1931 votes, and Dr. Lajos Fodor, a radical lawyer from Hatvan, represented the Zionist Left at congresses from 1933 on.

The activity of the left-wing groups suffered as a result of police harassment. *Hashomer Hatzair*, that is the Youth and Culture Department, was officially closed down in 1933, but the Zionist Alliance permitted *Hashomer Hatzair* activists to continue conducting local activity on their own responsibility.

In addition to hard-line Marxist ideology, *Hashomer Hatzair* circles were also characterized by sectarian tendencies, which precluded collaboration even with other leftist organizations. They established their own educational system, and *kenim* with their own leadership. The country was divided into *gelilim* or districts, each headed by an organizing body. National administration strictly observed the principle of collectivity. The activists were divided into three age groups (*shikhva*): *bnei midbar* (11–14), *tzofim* (14–16), and *bogrim* (17 and above).

The police collected accurate information on the organizational frameworks, the *hakhsharot* and the functionaries. The majority of participants in leftist movements were minors, and the core of the movement consisted of young people under the age of 25. They included a large number of women and unskilled workers. The majority of the Budapest members lived in the city center, in the VI, VII, VIII districts. Jews from the affluent districts of Budapest did not join the leftist Zionist movements.

There was continuous correspondence between the London center of the World Zionist Organization and Zionist leaders in Budapest. Nahum Goldmann, the representative of the Jewish Agency to the League of Nations, held talks with ministerial officials in Hungary on several occasions with the aim of winning concessions for Zionist activity in the country. The *Histadrut* department of the Jewish Agency warned *Hehalutz* in Hungary not to engage in activities that would endanger the legal status of the Zionist movement in that country.

*Hashomer Hatzair* began to publish a paper called *A Zsidó* in 1934, but the general hostile atmosphere made it impossible to give free expression to the views of the Zionist Left.

Police pressure on the Hungarian Zionist movement reached its height at the end of 1937, with the arrest of four members of *hakhsharot* (General Zionist, *Poalei Tzion* and *Dror*). This aroused public furor and the right-wing press discussed the affair for days.

*Hashomer Hatzair* was now forced to conduct its activity in private apartments, while *Eretz Israel*

*Haovedet* received legal status as the Library department of the Zionist Association. In this way the Zionist Left carried on its illegal activities.

Between the two World Wars, *Hashomer Hatzair* in Hungary was in constant contact with the Palestinian center of the World Zionist movement and also with other eastern European sister-organizations. It took part in 1930 and 1935 in the traditional *Hashomer Hatzair* gatherings in Czechoslovakia.

**Religious Zionists**

The First World Conference of Religious Zionists, at which the *Mizrahi* movement was founded, was held in 1904 in Pozsony. Shortly afterwards, several of the most prominent rabbis in the country issued a caution, which constituted a ban on Zionist activity. In spite of this, personalities such as Rabbi Moshe Arieh Roth, rabbi of Pápa, and Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Glasner, later Orthodox rabbi of Kolozsvár, openly declared their support for Zionism. Religious Zionists tried to provide an Orthodox interpretation of the modern challenge of the Jewish national idea. According to their reasoning, the religious and national elements of Judaism could not be separated, and they emphasized the significance of those *mitzvot* (religious injunctions) which could be observed only in Eretz Israel.

The core support for the *Mizrahi* movement came from yeshiva students in several large towns. In 1919, the *Bahurei Mizrahi* league was founded, with groups in Makó, Vác and naturally in Budapest, too. The members were under constant pressure from the Orthodox, who attacked them for being Zionists, and from the Zionist Left for being religious.

In November 1922 the league changed its name to *Tzeirei Hamizrahi*, while a parallel organization for girls was founded under the name of *Miriam*. In June 1925 the *Hehalutz Hamizrahi* organization was founded to organize *hakhsharot*.

The *Hanoar Hamizrahi* Association, founded in May 1932, encompassed *Tzeirot Hamizrahi*, *Hashomer Hadati* and *Hashomeret Hadatit*. In 1933, the adult group of the Budapest *Mizrahi* renewed its activity, and *Brit Hamizrahi Behungaria* was founded. In *Mizrahi* groups and *hakhsharot*, girls and boys lived in separate quarters and the dietary laws were strictly observed. In January 1934, *kashrut* was prescribed for all *hakhsharot* at the initiative of the *Mizrahi*.

The outstanding personalities in the *Mizrahi* movement included Henrik Mauthner, a landowner who visited Palestine in 1927, and engineer Lipót Lindenbaum. In the 1930s, the movement published two Hungarian-language papers: *Torá Váárec – Tóra és ország* (1932), and *Ösvény*




138
Members of *Bnei Akiva* in Ungvár (1934)

*Hanetiva* (1935–1939). The movement also organized summer camps and many of its members immigrated to Palestine.

The *Mizrahi* movement also suffered from police harassment and, in the fall of 1937, was forced to dissolve its *hakhsharot* temporarily because of frequent house searches.

The *Bnei Akiva* movement, which operated initially under the name of *Tzeirei Mizrahi* and other names, gained strength towards the end of the 1930s. There were groups in Munkács, Kassa and Ungvár. The first national gathering was held in August 1939. Meir Kahani and Dávid Friedman were elected leaders, among others. After World War II, *Bnei Akiva* became the youth organization of *Hapoel Hamizrahi*, divided into four age groups: *hevraya alef* (9–12 year olds), *hevraya bet* (12–15), *hevraya gimel* (15–17) and *hug magshimim* (17 and above). The activities included religious studies.

**The General Zionist Movement**

Those who joined the General Zionist movement in Hungary were people who were dissatisfied with the left-wing or right-wing ideological trends of the various organizations operating within the Zionist movement. It sought to promote the general objectives and interests of Zionism. The

General Zionist organization grew out of the *Aviva-Barissia* groups for boys and girls, and the *Makkabea* youth organization.

In the summer of 1936, the organization changed its name to *Hitahdut Hatzionit Behungaria*, and was joined by *Aviva-Barissia*, *Makkabea*, *Hanoar Hatzioni* and *Hehalutz Haklal Hatzioni* which had been formed in the meanwhile by people who did not want to remain in *Hehalutz* under *Hashomer Hatzair* influence.

In June 1930, *Hitahdut Hanoar Behungaria* organized an eastern and central European conference in Budapest for those movements which were reluctant to align themselves with the left or the right. The first conference of *Hanoar Hatzioni* World Organization took place in 1931 in Cracow, with the aim of establishing a separate youth department within the World Zionist Organization.



139
Members of *Aviva-Barissia* in Marosvásárhely (1922)

In September 1931, the leadership of *Hitahdut Hanoar Behungaria* decided to join the *Hanoar Hatzioni* World Organization.

In the mid-1930s, the Hungarian General Zionists were forced to take a stand and declare their support for one of the factions of the World Organization after the split. At the conference of Central European General Zionists in January 1935 in Budapest, the Hungarian movement decided in favor of *Sia alef* whose political activities were conducted within the framework of the *Histadrut* in Palestine.

Since only personalities who were not politically suspect were permitted to participate in the leadership of the Hungarian Zionist Alliance, the two chairmen of the Alliance were General Zionists: Ede Izsák and Dr. Gyula Miklós.

*Cheruth*, the organ of the Youth Department of the Zionist Alliance, published between 1928–1931, generally expressed General Zionist views. *Zsidó Szemle* (1907–1938) was the important periodical of General Zionism, as was *Cionizmus*, published in 1935. All these publications appeared in Hungarian.

**The Zionist Right**

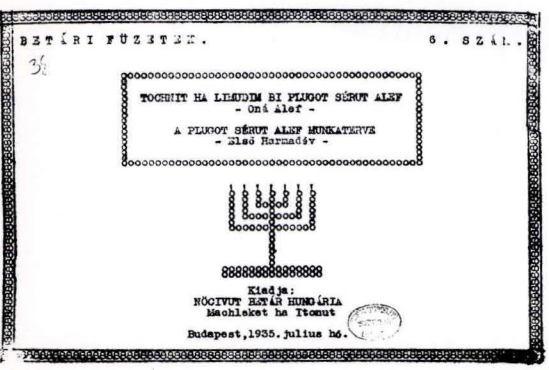
Even though it had fewer supporters than the Zionist Left, the Revisionist movement, which became active in 1928 in Hungary, was of no less ideological importance. József Schönfeld, the editor-in-chief of *Zsidó Szemle*, was its prominent representative.

The Zionist Right was supported by several dozen activists who were not inclined towards the Left, and were dissatisfied with the policy of the Hungarian Zionist Alliance and the World Zionist Organization.

*Betar* operated initially as the Sports Department of the Hungarian Zionist Alliance; the separate organization was founded in the mid-1930s and after the split in the World Zionist Organization, the New Zionist Alliance was formed in Hungary as well.

140
Title page of the *Betar* booklets

141
Title page of *Bné Betár*


BETÁRI FÜZETEK. 6. SZÁM.

TOCHNIT HA LIMUDIM BI PLUGOT SÉRUT ALEF
- Oná Álef -

A PLUGOT SÉRUT ALEF MUNKATERVE
- Első Harmadév -

Kiadja:
NÖCIVUT BETÁR HUNGÁRIA
Machleket ha Itomut

Budapest, 1935. julius hó.

140


גליון א׳. שנה ג׳. שבט תרצ״ח.

בני ביתר

עתונה המרכזי של ברית תרומלדור בשפה ההונגרית
מופיע עשר פעמים בשנה בהוצאת נציבות ביתר הונגריה

BNÉ BETÁR

a Brit Trumpeldor magyarnyelvű folyóirata
a zsidó nemzeti öntudat harcos lapja

TÁJÉKOZTAT
a mai Palesztina igazi arculatáról
a Betár aktuális kérdéseiről
a zsidó nemzetnevelésről

ISMERTETI
a zsidóság galuti helyzetét
a zsidó ifjuság mozgalmait
az uj zsidó irodalmat

KÜZD
a palesztinai zsidó nemzeti államért
a 'hivatalos, és a vörös asszimiláció ellen
a jövő zsidó nemzedékért

TERET AD
a galut szociográfiájának
a termékeny vitának
az olvasók beküldött irásainak

Egyes szám ára — — — 20 fillér
Csehszlovákiában — — — 1 korona
Jugoszláviában — — — 3 dinár
Romániában — — — — 10 lei

141

The most basic organizational unit of the *Betar* was the *tzror*, which consisted of twelve members plus a leader. Two to four *tzrorot* made up a *pluga*, two to four *plugot* made up a *gdud*. A larger group was called a *ken*. The national unit of *Betar* was the *snif*, its leader the *natziv*. There were *Betar kenim* in almost every town.

One of the most prominent personalities in the Hungarian *Betar* was Dénes Szilágyi, who played a very important role both as a journalist and as an organizer. In 1936–1937 there were several acrimonious debates in the press between left- and right-wing Zionists, which sometimes even ended in physical scuffles. The fact that their members received regular military training from 1936 boosted their self-awareness.

Among the important publications reflecting right-wing stands were: *Betári Füzetek* (1935–1936), *Kék Fehér* (1935–1936), *Bné Betár* (1936–1938) and *Ha-Koah* (1936) – all in Hungarian. After the outbreak of World War II, the Revisionists produced numerous publications, mainly to convince "the decent anti-Semites" of the justness of their cause.

From 1937 on, *Betar* members organized numerous illegal immigration projects, helping many people to reach Palestine. The Zionist Left accused the Right of indiscriminately helping people without proper Zionist training to immigrate.

Although the Zionist movement in Hungary between the two World Wars was undoubtedly limited in size, it represented the entire Zionist ideological spectrum – left and right, religious and secular, extremist and moderate, young and old. The number of members increased significantly only after the Jewish legislation was enacted, and after the modification of Hungary's borders, which considerably increased the number of Jews within its territories. Thus it seems, paradoxically (or perhaps according to the original Zionist conception), that a threat to Jews is an indispensable condition for the formation of a true Jewish national movement.

# Jewish Self-Defense at the End of World War I

Raphael Vago

At the end of World War I the small Zionist movement in Hungary was embroiled in internal strife between various viewpoints, and in debate with the Jewish community regarding its own role and positions. At that time, however, unforeseen circumstances created the need for practical action by the Zionists, even if immigration to Palestine was not the immediate aim. The brief existence of a Jewish defense unit in Hungary, led and manned mostly by Zionists, was a interesting chapter in the history of the small Zionist movement.

By the end of the war, there was a rising sense of danger among Hungarian Jews. Against the background of the imminent collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the disintegration of its armed forces, there was a marked increase in anti-Semitic incidents. The Jews faced accusations of profiteering, black marketeering and making easy profits from the suffering of the others.

The anxiety among the Jews intensified with the return of many of the POWs who had been held in Russia, and who were freed after the 1917 Revolution after having witnessed the civil war and the pogroms, especially in the Ukraine. The Autumn Rose Revolution, the bourgeois revolution which took power in Hungary immediately after the war, and the collapse of the Monarchy only intensified the fears of the Jews. Like the rest of the population, they faced a state of near anarchy, as the liberal forces of the newly emerging regime were unable to ensure law and order, in a country and society that had undergone rapid military, political, social and moral collapse.

In early November 1918, several pogroms were conducted, which claimed Jewish lives and property. Although the reports of anti-Jewish activities was often based on rumors, rather than actual details, the idea of organizing Jewish self-defense units was broached among Jewish organizations. The Jewish press, especially the non-Zionist organ of the assimilationists, *Egyenlőség*, published information on the damage inflicted on the Jewish community and called for the organization of a Jewish force which would participate alongside Hungarian security forces in the enforcement of law and order in the war-ravaged state. At a time when the Hungarian authorities were trying to downplay



142
Flag consecration ceremony of Scouts Team No. 252, named after József Kiss (June 12, 1927)

the extent of anti-Jewish violence, *Egyenlőség* called for material compensation for the victims of violence and for the establishment of a self-defense organization. While some of the details of the establishment of such units remain unclear, it is evident that the Zionists adopted a concept based on the experiences of the young POWs who had returned from Russia. The Zionist organ, *Zsidó Szemle*, soon emerged as the main promoter of efforts to set up Jewish self-defense units. In early November 1918 the Secretary of State for Military Affairs, István Friedrich, called for volunteers to help restore public order. His call was welcomed by numerous Jews who had served in the military. Representatives of the Zionist movement, including Adolf Strausz, the President of the Zionist Federation, representatives of the Maccabi organization and other Jewish activists, met with the Secretary of State, and expressed their readiness to form volunteer units with the aim of helping the Jews in the provinces. The Hungarian official was delighted by the offer, and promised weapons and ammunition to the Zionist self-defense units, whose exact formation and tasks were only vaguely outlined. According to some contemporary sources, the Zionists requested permission to establish a unit numbering 1,500 men for the defense of Jews as well as non-Jews.

On November 4, 1918, the Volunteer Guard Battalion was formed. The unit was allotted a temporary site in a military barrack, and the first volunteers reported there after a ceremony held at the main offices of the Zionist movement in Budapest, at Károlyi Street no. 36. The unit consisted of 1,319 men under the command of Lieut. Ármin Beregi, a member of the Zionist Committee in Budapest, aided by several more officers of junior rank. Material support was provided by the Zionist movement, the Jewish community, different Jewish organizations, and individual donors who were not associated with the Zionist movement. The Orthodox community, for example, contributed some 60,000 crowns, a considerable sum at the time, for the expenses of the unit. The Zionist Guard, as some newspapers called the unit, launched its activities without proper definition of its tasks and its authority, except the general aim of providing support for the authorities in maintaining law and order, and the safeguarding of property, especially that of the Jewish population.

At several public meetings held in Budapest in late 1918 with the participation of senior representatives of the Hungarian authorities, differences of opinion emerged between the Zionists and active members of the Jewish community on matters related to the latter's security. Representatives from the provinces in particular attempted to minimize the Zionist character of the emerging Jewish defense organization, although there was no doubt that the Zionists were playing a leading role in organizing self-defense and promoting awareness of such activities. They appealed to Jewish officers in the following words: "Zionist officers! Join in the defense of the Revolution, serve the honor of our people, come to the headquarters of the Guard Battalion at Király Street 36, the house of the Zionist movement. We need you!" The atmosphere was conducive to Zionist participation in this major undertaking, as the Hungarian administration took a positive view of the initiative. It was also viewed with favor by the newly-appointed Minister of Minorities, the well-known sociologist, Oszkár Jászi, although his attitude to Zionism was cautious and reserved.

According to some sources, several of them controversial, small sub-units of the Jewish battalion operated in places where Jewish property was being looted or was in danger, such as Érsekújvár and Szered. In reporting anti-Jewish activities, *Egyenlőség* kept a low profile in explaining that the initiative came almost entirely from the Zionist camp, which was a marginal and small section of the Jewish community. The paper even branded Zionist members of the unit as "mercenaries" and wrote, probably with much exaggeration, that the Zionists had been disarmed in some localities by the very people they wished to defend. On the other hand, *Múlt és Jövő* was much more forthcoming, provided more accurate reports and described some of the activities of the unit branded in the paper as the "Zionist Guard."

On February 19, 1919, the Hungarian government formed the National Guard, and the Secretary of State for Military Affairs, who had initially authorized the formation of the Jewish defense unit, called upon it to merge with the Hungarian National Guard. The end of the affair was swift; the commander of the unit, Beregi, who wished to preserve the unique Jewish character of the force, resigned in early March 1919 and disbanded the unit, which by then was operating in small sub-units. Some three weeks later, Hungary underwent a revolutionary upheaval with the ascent to power of the Communist-Socialist coalition led by Béla Kun and the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.


ÚJLAK
Szemlőhegy
Rézmál
ORSZÁGÚT
II
VIZIVÁROS
LIPÓTVÁROS
V
VI
TEREZVÁROS
ERZSÉBETVÁROS
VII
VÁR
KRISZTINAVÁROS
I
TABÁN
BELVÁROS
IV
JÓZSEFVÁROS
VIII
IX
FERENCZVÁROS
DUNA FOLYAM
Gellérthegy
KIS GELLÉRTHEGY
Kelenföld
Lóportár dülő
VÁROSLIGET
ORCZY-KERT
KÖZ TEMETŐ
Szín- és jelmagyarázat.
MÉRTÉK

# The Jewish Bourgeoisie of Budapest

Victor Karady

The capital city of modern Hungary was formed in 1872 out of Buda (the royal residence), Pest (a free royal city), and Óbuda (an erstwhile manorial township, belonging from 1767 to the crown). There was continuous Jewish settlement in all three from the late 18th century until the Holocaust, although the history of the three Jewish communities differed. From the early 19th century, Pest attracted a growing stream of Jewish immigrants from inside and outside Hungary, especially after the 1840 law granted Jews the right of residence and freedom of enterprise in cities. This immigration consisted mainly of Jews with capital, skills and/or a propensity for professional mobility, which was easier to achieve in the central economic market of the country. The economy was almost completely open to Jews after the liberal Emancipation Act of 1867 (except for public employment). From then on, the Jewish bourgeoisie in Budapest, thanks to its sheer size and, even more, its economic, professional, and intellectual assets, prevailed in many ways over both the local middle classes and the provincial Hungarian-Jewish elites. It also constituted the major model for modern, educated middle class existence in Hungary.

The group can be summarily characterized by its relative economic power, its socio-professional stratification, its concentration in urban space, its typical choices of options from the mainstream of Jewish identity patterns, as well as its schooling strategies, social habits and cultural roles.

144



143
Map of Budapest (1896)

144
Jewish peddlers at the flea market in Teleki Square, 1912 (Photo by János Müllner)

**Economic Strength and Living Standards**

In 1869, Jews made up 14.8% of the city's population, in 1910 – 23.1% and in 1930 – 20.3% (this figure dropping to 16% by 1941 – converts being discounted). Up to 1918, they constituted more than one fourth, and later (for most of the period) close to one half of Hungarian Jewry. In many professional and economic fields, the Jews of Budapest ascended from the bourgeois sector to eminent positions, and played a major role both in the city's social set-up, and as regards the Jews of the provinces. They were over-represented in the middle class of the time. Even conservative estimates (which disregard converted Jews) suggest that nearly half of the Jews residing in the

143



145
Crowd in Síp Street, waiting for the distribution of Baron Rothschild's 100,000 crowns for the poor Jews of Pest, 1911 (Photo by János Müllner)

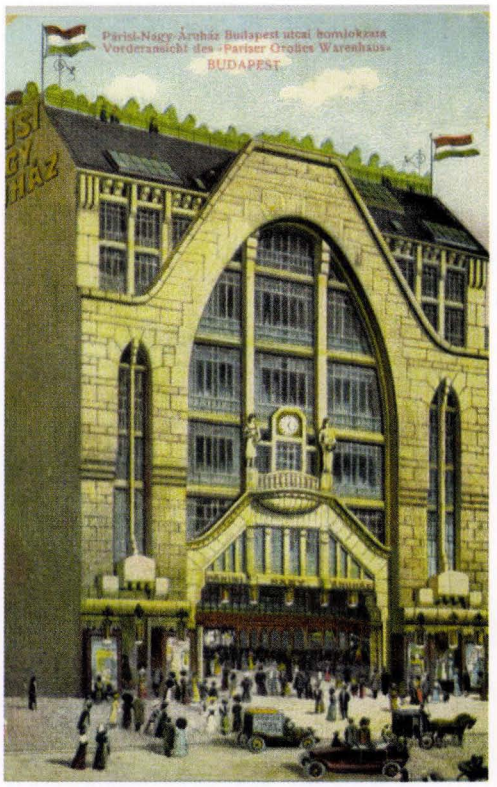
city before the Holocaust belonged to the bourgeoisie. This proportion is much higher than corresponding figures for the local Gentile population, as well as provincial Jewry.

Jews were among the highest taxpayers of the city, entitled to special representation in the municipal government (*virilists*). Jewish presence was strongly felt between 1873–1917, as was implicitly demonstrated in a classical study of this privileged group. In a later period, in 1937 for example, at least 44% of those paying income tax and 43% of those paying capital tax were Jewish. Some 42% of Jewish inhabitants of the capital – as against only 15% of non-Jews – lived in apartments with three or more rooms, the minimal criterion for bourgeois accommodation. Similarly, 44% and 45% respectively of occupants of apartments with a bathroom or with a servant's room were Jewish. The proportion of Jews among property owners was 41% in 1930, while 44% of the owners of buildings of two or more storys were Jews. Even more significant was the statistical fact that in each and every socio-professional category of the active population of the city, the proportion of Jews living in "bourgeois" flats (three rooms and more), owning houses or paying income or capital tax was much higher than among their Gentile counterparts. In 1930, for example, among Jewish commercial employees, 23% lived in apartments with three or more rooms, as against a mere 7% among Gentiles of the same category. This was even true of the Jewish proletariate, where the figure was 5% as against less than 1% for working-class Gentiles. On the whole, Jews tended to hold more senior positions in each specific socio-professional hierarchy, so that even in the lowest brackets, some of them enjoyed "bourgeois" living conditions.

The internal and social stratification of the group can be analyzed empirically by sub-category,

such as capitalist entrepreneurs, private executives, members of the liberal professions and intellectuals, and a small fringe group of civil servants (mostly municipal employees).

Jews were particularly dominant in capitalist entrepreneurship. Jewish traders played a leading role more or less throughout the late feudal, post-feudal and pre-socialist periods. From the early 19th century, some 70% of those involved in wholesale trading were Jews. With certain fluctuations, the proportion remained at around this level until the Holocaust. In 1937, 68% of all Budapest traders liable to income tax were Jewish, with a proportion as high as 73% in the book trade. Jews attained even higher positions in banking, constituting some 90% of directors and 56% of clerks in financial businesses in 1910. But during and after the *Gründerzeit* in the 1860–1880s, Jewish entrepreneurs preferred to invest their mobile capital in new industries. The far-reaching consequence was that, in 1936, Jews owned no less than 59% of large concerns (with a workforce of more than 20) in the city, and some 63% of corresponding Jewish businesses throughout the country. On the eve of World War II, and despite the anti-Semitic drive for "economic aryanization" then in full swing, the number of Jewish-owned factories in Budapest rose from 783 in 1936 to 853 in 1939. At that time, Jews controlled as much as 77% of the clothing industry, 71% of the textile industry, 63% of the printing concerns, 62% of the leather concerns and 60% of the paper industry in Budapest, and more than 50% of all but a few other branches. Some 55% of the Jewish-Hungarian industrial bourgeoisie was active in the capital city.




146
The Párizsi department store
(Postcard about 1910)

Privately-employed executives and managers constituted an important addition to the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie. In Budapest in 1910, at least 67% of salaried managers in trade and banking, 56% in industry and even 23% in (mostly public) transportation were Jewish. These very high proportions were not maintained until the Holocaust, but Jews remained considerably over-represented in these white-collar categories until the introduction of the socialist regime. The bulk of the cluster (50.5%) was located in Budapest already in 1910, and their number rose subsequently.

Jews maintained a steady proportion from the end of the 19th century in the academic profession, from which they had been excluded before emancipation (with the exception of medicine). By 1910, 62% of lawyers, 59% of physicians, 52% of veterinary surgeons, 44% of self-employed engineers and 33% of pharmacists in Budapest were Jewish. These proportions declined somewhat, but not radically, in the anti-Semitic period, primarily because of the infamous anti-Jewish Numerus Clausus enforced in Hungarian higher education from 1920. Whereas before 1918, they constituted a minority (36%) among Hungarian professionals (however

147




148




147
The Orczy coffee house in Orczy House

148
Liquor store in Dob Street (about 1900)

disproportionate this minority may have been), in the inter-war years a large majority of all Hungarian-Jewish professionals (55%) resided in the capital.

A large number of free-lance or self-employed intellectuals also played an important role in the sector under scrutiny, whether as entrepreneurs in the fast-developing modern "cultural industry" of the Hungarian capital (as publishers, founders of journals, theater managers, film producers, etc.), as staff members or as journalists, writers, independent scholars, actors, musicians and other artists. According to the 1910 census, in Budapest some 48% of journalists, 30% of actors, 32% of those active in literature and the arts as well as 36% of scientists, independent scholars and those in non-academic occupations of public or humanitarian interest were Jews.

**Residential Dispersion**

By the end of the 19th century, the vast majority of Budapest Jewry had left Óbuda and Buda and moved to the central districts of Pest (over 80% in 1900). Hence, the above-defined "bourgeois"

sector was now even more heavily concentrated in Pest. The proportion of these Jews, owners of apartments of three rooms and more, was just over 50% in 1906 in the first three districts (Buda and Óbuda), and as high as 78%, 82% and 66% in the central IVth, Vth and VIth districts of Pest, and again only 50% in the VIIth and as low as 41% in the VIIIth and the rest of the capital. Clearly enough, the Jewish bourgeoisie preferred to reside in the very center of the city. This was in contrast to the Jewish poor, most of whom dwelt in separate districts. Among the Gentiles, the upper crust lived in Buda (considered the most ancient and aristocratic section), while the lower classes lived in the peripheral proletarian or petit-bourgeois suburbs.

Jewish bourgeois residence in Budapest can be broadly divided into three main sectors. The highest echelons of the sector monopolized the relatively new and modern housing facilities in the so-called Lipótváros and its extension (Újlipótváros), developed in Pest near the Danube, mainly in the inter-war period. Lipótváros came to epitomize the very essence of Jewish bourgeois life in modern Budapest. The more middle-class, professional and medium bourgeois groups were centered in Terézváros, an area bordering on the circular boulevard (Nagykörút) of Pest. Part of Terézváros and of Józsefváros, to its northeast, were typical provided residential areas for lower-class Jews.

149
"Strangers in Budapest" (Caricature, 1892)




### Religious Affiliation and Identity

The above-mentioned three-tiered residential distribution can be identified also in terms of religious trends. Józsefváros and part of Terézváros were the residential center of the Orthodox, who mostly belonged to the lower-middle class. The remainder were inhabited mostly by Neologs or secular Jews, the bulk of whom belonged either to the skilled working class (printers, etc.) or to the middle and higher bourgeoisie, as defined above.

The absolute majority of Budapest Jewry, over 90% in the 20th century, were associated with Neolog Judaism. As witnessed by the proportion of births, marriages and deaths registered in the records of the Orthodox and the Neolog communities, the former accounted for not more than 5 to 8% of the Jewish community from the late 19th century onwards. The Orthodox share of the educated middle and higher bourgeois brackets was obviously far more limited. In 1926 among those in Budapest who defined themselves as Sabbath observers, there were only 12 doctors and 14 lawyers, less than 1% of the Jewish professionals. Not unexpectedly, from very early on (since the 1848 Revolution, and more significantly, after the 1868–1869 Jewish Congress), the middle and higher echelons of the local Jewish bourgeoisie were strongly inclined toward the Neolog ideology and way of life.

However, Neolog affiliation served often as a cover for indifference and secularism and even led, in many cases, to a complete break with religious Judaism. Four-fifths of the growing number of converted Jews in Budapest between 1931 and 1937 came from the bourgeoisie. In 1941, the proportion of Christians assumed to be of Jewish background (including Christian children born of mixed marriages) was close to 30%. A similar proportion (28%) was found within a representative sample of converted lawyers regarded as Jewish in 1941. Even before anti-Semitic pressure began to grow in 1938, religious commitment was weakening, a process which was reflected in the increase in administrative concealment of Jewish origins. Between 1930 and 1937, some 42% of Jewish births were not recorded in the rabbinical offices of the city. Recent (yet unpublished) research confirms that an increasing proportion of candidates for intermarriage (one-fifth of Jewish bridegrooms in 1936–1937) were members of the educated bourgeoisie.

The same was largely true of supporters of the movement to Magyarize foreign surnames. Before 1918, some 61% of such Magyarizers nationwide were Jewish. This declaration of an attempt at formal adoption of assimilated national identity was attractive to the educated middle class above all. By 1940, 63% of Jewish lawyers in Budapest (and 85% of their converted counterparts) bore Hungarian surnames. This was true of 52% of Jewish doctors (1939), 31% of students graduating from the Jewish High School (1928–1943), 34% of Jewish students graduating from the Lutheran High School (1872–1944) and 32% of the survivors recorded in the highly "bourgeois" IVth and Vth districts in 1945. This was in contrast to a figure of 18% of survivors in the VI-VIIth districts and a mere 7% of those observing Sabbath (1926). Deliberately-adopted, cherished Magyar identity was especially important to members of the group under scrutiny who aspired to high social standing.

Consequently, this strategic "Magyarism" was regularly accompanied by militant anti-Zionism, refusal to acknowledge any kind of Jewish political separatism, and support for Magyar nationalist governmental policies in the Liberal Era (before 1918). Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, it was also characterized – in many cases, especially among Jews of the higher entrepreneurial class – by qualified "understanding" or even acceptance of legal anti-Semitism (which was regarded as a lesser evil than Nazism). It is also true, however, that, from the beginning of the 20th century, younger elements in the same bourgeoisie, even some members of the second or third generation of economic tycoons, fell increasingly under the spell of universalist social ideologies, like radicalism, social democracy, socialism and communism. They often exchanged the "nationalist" commitments of their parents for Leftist utopian theories. A good case in point is the career of György Lukács, who shifted from idealist esthetics to Marxist philosophy and participated, as

military leader and commissar for public instruction, in the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic. His father was a banker in Budapest, a friend of Béla Bartók and a generous sponsor of Hungarian artists and writers.

**Social Reproduction and Schooling**

In the social reproduction of the Jewish bourgeoisie of Budapest in the pre-Holocaust era, demographic and educational strategies played an increasingly important historical role – in addition to the bequeathing of wealth, social networking and managerial positions in family firms – in the entrepreneurial class.

Demographic strategies were focused from the end of the 19th century on the reduction of the number of offspring and the maximization of their life expectancy, as well as on the minimization of births out of wedlock. This was, of course, the general drive in all middle class groups undergoing demographic transition, but the relevant Jewish clusters in Budapest succeeded demonstrably earlier and better at this than did their Gentile counterparts, as suggested by recent research. In the years 1926 and 1931, for instance, the Jewish birthrate declined both in absolute numbers (by nearly 10%) and in its proportion of all births (from 30.1% to 26.9%) within the Budapest population which was statistically defined as "bourgeois," though in a somewhat broader sense than above (including all employers, self-employed and liberal professions). The same population accounted for over 33% of married couples. This can serve to indicate more "rational" control of fertility, reflected both in smaller family size and in rapid reaction to the economic crisis.

As for life expectancy in the same "bourgeois" population, it was significantly higher among Jews in the same period. Infant mortality, which is the best indicator of general conditions of hygiene and medical care, amounted to only 47 per thousand births for Jews as against 71 among non-Jews. A similar disparity – 2.8% against 3.2% – can be observed in the proportion of stillbirths, and illegitimate births – 1% against 3%. On the whole, the Jewish middle classes of Budapest maintained an increasing degree of demographic discipline more efficiently than did their Gentile counterparts.

Education has always been of paramount importance in all Jewish circles, reflecting closely the choices as regards denominational and social identity. The educational strategies of urban middle class Jewry in Budapest were aimed above all at the maximization of the prospects for social integration and upward mobility of their offspring, as well as the legitimization of the socio-economic status achieved by the families.



150
The inauguration of the Jewish Secondary School, (June 8, 1932)

Though it is very difficult to ascertain trends to quantitative or qualitative over-schooling of sons of the local Jewish bourgeoisie due to the dearth of relevant data or its inaccuracy, recent research has provided some evidence on this issue. In a large sample of pupils attending grammar schools (*Gymnasium* and *Realschulen*) in Budapest between the 1870s and 1930s, 56% of the offspring of entrepreneurs and people with private means were Jewish, a proportion most probably exceeding their proportion in the corresponding socio-economic bracket. Moreover, the performance of these Jewish students, mostly from the capitalist bourgeoisie, was comparable with the best performances of all social categories (together with children of professionals and intellectuals), and was far better than that of Gentiles from the same "leisure classes." To their probable quantitative over-schooling should be added significant academic excellence. On a scale of 1-4 points (1 being the best) the difference, for instance, between Jewish and Catholic students of these social strata was more than half a point (0.52) in German, almost half a point (0.46) in Hungarian literature and grammar, 0.33 in Latin and 0.25 in maths. The particularly high standard of children of the Jewish higher bourgeoisie in the "national subjects" (Hungarian and Latin), as compared even with maths, indicates the function of elite schooling in the drive for symbolic assimilation.

The preference of this group for state or – whenever accessible – Christian institutions is indicative of the same trend. Jewish students constituted the majority of those enrolled in the Liberal Lutheran High School of Pest (some 55% of the student body was Jewish between 1873 and 1918, according to the school's annual reports). On the other hand, before the introduction of the Numerus Clausus in secondary schools (1939), the Jewish High School (opened in 1919) attracted only a small proportion (between 8 and 15%) of the students concerned, and an insignificant proportion of the higher echelons of the bourgeoisie.

**Cultural Functions and Social Life**

The Budapest Jewish bourgeoisie was marked by its involvement in the political, social and

intellectual life of the Hungarian metropolis, and its distinctive efforts to foster modern Hungarian literature, arts and sciences.

Only a small proportion, albeit significant, of these activities were limited to Jewish circles or to exclusively Jewish occupations. Among them should be mentioned the *Lipótvárosi Kaszinó*, founded in 1883 as a reaction against the aristocratic *Nemzeti Kaszinó* from which Jews were excluded in practice if not formally, and the philanthropic, educational or cultural services and organizations of the Jewish community.

Most of the social and intellectual commitments of the Budapest Jewish bourgeoisie were marked by an assimilationist approach. Thanks to their prominent economic involvement in the political press, publishing, printing and other branches of culture, and to the advanced education received by the second and third generations of Jewish capitalist dynasties, it is not surprising that Lipótváros (or *Lipócia* to the initiated) became synonymous in Hungarian urban life with cultural modernity, provocative experimentation, avant-garde snobbery and, more generally, high brow intellectual pursuits. These activities were pursued, often almost ritually, in literary cafes, managed mostly by Jews (like the Cafes Emke, Astoria, Japán, New York, Belvárosi and others). Jewish bourgeois patrons performed similarly indispensable functions in Budapest on behalf of modern Hungarian music, theater, painting and architecture. There too, Jews from Lipótváros supported creative endeavors, not only as donors and contributors, but also as responsive readers or audiences or in many other capacities.

The atmosphere generated in Lipótváros illustrates perhaps better than anything else the long-standing Jewish-Hungarian cultural symbiosis. It also gave rise – precisely in the last decade of the old regime, which was characterized by the anti-Semitic turn in government policies – to the polarization of the conflicting intellectual trends among the regime's opposition. This confrontation was waged between "urbanists" (i.e., those advocating Jewish-Gentile cooperation, openness to Western influence, liberal democracy and basic social reforms) and "populists" (who pressed for reform based on "national" needs and values linked to peasant civilization, and were not free of *völkisch*-type xenophobia). Though battered by institutionalized anti-Semitism, though shaken by the blows inflicted on it by institutionalized anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and communism, the legacy of the "urbanist" outlook, which was fundamentally liberal-bourgeois in character, has survived to some extent in the political culture of post-communist Hungary (as have its anti-Semitic counterparts). The recollection of past glories infuses Jewish life in that country (now almost exclusively centered in the capital) with a nostalgic flavor of its own.


NEUMANN ANTAL
VÉSNÖKI MŰTERME
FODRÁSZ
HAJVAGAS 60
NOI HAJVAGAS 60
CÍMFESTŐK
UDVARBAN
ÁRUHÁZA
AZELOTTAZUDVARBAN
TUCHTEN FIVEREK
EKSZERESZEK
SZÖVEG A TÁRSA
SCHULEK

# Several Truths About the Orthodox Community in Budapest

Dov Landau

Anyone familiar with Hungarian Orthodox Jewry knows that its heart lies in the capital city of Budapest. Before the Holocaust, there were some three hundred thousand Jews among the million inhabitants of Budapest, only the minority of whom were affiliated with one of the three main religious communities: Neolog, Orthodox and Status quo ante. The bulk of the Jews maintained very tenuous ties, if at all, with the various communities. Notwithstanding, there were some thirty to forty thousand Orthodox Jews in Budapest, some of whom practiced Western customs – wearing European garments (tailored suits, waistcoats and breeches and European felt hats or caps). In most cases they did not grow beards although they tended to grow long sidelocks. A few of them had small chin beards. These Jews usually prayed in the Ashkenazi style, spoke Hungarian in their everyday dealings and were acquainted to some degree with the classic culture of their country. Many of them spoke German, which was the prevalent language in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, or spoke Yiddish spiced with German. Known for their pious observance of religious precepts on the basis



152

151
Signboards in Hebrew along Király Street, 1929
(Photo by Imre Kinszky)

152
The *huppah* in the courtyard of the Orthodox Synagogue in Kazinczy Street
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)

of the Shulkhan Arukh, they lived in Slovakia, in Pannonia beyond the Danube, in Pozsony, in the Seven Communities, in Pápa, in Győr, in Szekszárd, in Bonyhád, in Paks and elsewhere. Naturally enough, the Jewish population of the large Hungarian towns was mixed – there were Western Jews from the *Oberland* and Hassidic Jews, whose communities were known as "Sephardic congregations," because they prayed in the Sephardic style. However, even in the specifically Hassidic communities, where the Neologs did not succeed in gaining a foothold, there were groups of Jews who prayed in the Ashkenazi style and conducted themselves like Western Jews.

An interesting characteristic of the Jews of western Hungary (*Oberland*) was the strict daily routine they maintained as regards their religious life. I can bear witness to this from my own experience in the community of Kiskőrös, where I attended a small yeshiva in 1943–1944. Winter and summer, all yeshiva students were obliged to rise and go to the *bet midrash* at five a.m. so as to attend the local rabbi's lesson. At least a hundred of the local householders were already present when the yeshiva students arrived. (At five fifteen the rabbi entered and those seated in his path rose in his honor and only when he took his seat did they sit down again.) The lesson lasted until six fifteen, and we studied *gemara* with Rashi's commentary and *tosafot*. Sometimes the discussion became more profound and ancient commentators, such as the Ramban and the Rosh, were studied, and later commentators such as Jehezkel Landau (Noda biJehuda), the Chatam Sofer and others. Everyone was fully attentive, and trenchant arguments often developed. It should not be forgotten that the participants, now engaged in commercial, clerical and manufacturing occupations, had attended yeshivot for many years in their youth and were often as erudite as the rabbi. At the same time, the fierce tone of the debates did not mar the deep respect displayed towards the rabbi as the holder of religious office. We young students sat in our places and absorbed the atmosphere of respect for learning.

After the lesson, the participants prayed as a *minyan*. People who arrived late attended additional *minyans*, at intervals of some fifteen minutes. By seven thirty the event was over, since at eight o'clock the entire community went off to work, some in factories, some in workshops, some in shops.

At eight thirty, the *bet midrash* was taken over by the yeshiva students, who returned from breakfast to begin their studies; this scene was repeated in all the Ashkenazi communities, and the same was true of most of the Jews of Budapest. However,

although they were the dominant group, they did not dictate the unique Jewish character of the communities, and certainly not that of the communities in the vicinity of Király, Dob, Wesselényi and Kazinczy Streets in Budapest.

As was the case in all the communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, dozens of prayerhouses, known by their Yiddish name of *stiebelech*, were opened in Budapest as well by the various Hassidic communities – Zanz, Vishnitz, Kálló, Spinka and others. Most of them were concentrated around Dob Street. Each of the *stiebelech* consisted of a small entry hall for hand washing and a larger room with several long tables, a *bimah*, an Ark and a prayer lectern for the *hazzan*, and around the walls – bookcases. The Hassidim studied and prayed in these prayerhouses, but also spent many hours of their free time there – some poring over books, alone or in groups, some sitting in the corridor and "solving" all the problems of the world, while their children ran about and played as if they were in their own courtyards. The prayerhouse or *bet midrash* was a second home for these children.

In the mornings, after the prayers, particularly on memorial days for the parents of one of the participants, all those present were offered poppyseed cookies or nuts and drank a glass of brandy in memory of the deceased. The hospitable instincts of these Jews found expression mainly on Friday nights. On Friday afternoons, the entire Orthodox community prepared to greet the Sabbath Queen. Towards evening, the prayerhouses were filled with Jews in festive garments praying devoutly. They sang *Lekha Dodi* by Rabbi Shlomo Elkabetz of the court of the Holy ARI, the kabbalist Rabbi Jitzhak Luria of Safed. After the evening prayer, the *gabbai* allotted the "guests" – Jews from distant places, most of them beggars – to members of the community. Even when these "guests" were numerous, none of them remained hungry, and a warm bed awaited each of them in the home of a local family. At the Friday night meals, between courses and between the *zemirot*, the diners devoted their time to discussion of the communities from which the guests came, discovered mutual acquaintances, discussed Jewish issues, and also devoted time to debating Torah problems, particularly during the long winter nights. This was the Sabbath day of rest in Jewish communities in the Hungarian Diaspora, also known as the Land of Hagar.

On Sabbath afternoons or early evenings, just before the end of the Sabbath, the Sabbath *seuda shlishit* (Third Feast) was held in the prayerhouses: it consisted of two rolls with



153
Interior of the Orthodox Synagogue
in Kazinczy Street
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)

sardines or pickled fish. The early evening light lent the event a slightly mysterious atmosphere, as the Jews seated around the table sang Sabbath *zemirot* with melancholy melodies, imbued with longing for another, better world, purer and more Jewish. We children also received portions and took part in the singing of *Bevoo Mi Edom* and of kabbalistic-Hassidic songs such as *Beney Heyckala* and *Keyl Mistater*. The profoundly mysterious content of these songs, and in particular the melancholy elegiac tunes, expressed the pain of a nation scattered among other nations, bearing the sorrow of the world on its shoulders. Everyone present, old and young, was moved by this emotional singing. Sometimes a particular householder was honored with a certain song and sang it each Sabbath. If one of the guests had a melodious voice, he was asked to sing, and the singing continued until it was time for the evening prayer. People prayed, recited the *havdalah* prayer, folded the prayer shawls, a task which was not performed during the Sabbath, and went home to begin a new week of labor.

As a boy of eleven, I often had occasion to travel from Szeged to Budapest on the morning train. At the Western Station we boarded the No. 6 tram and travelled to the corner of Dob Street. We entered the Kazinczy Synagogue to pray and then walked down almost the entire length of the street to Rumbach Street and from there to Király Street on our way to Josef Schlesinger's bookstore. This was the Jewish cultural kingdom in Hungary and a sister store to the large branch in Vienna. Prayerbooks of all types, volumes of the *humash*, *humash* with Rashi's commentary or with the other commentaries, *mishnayot*, *midrashim*, Rabba and Tanhuma, all types of *gemara* and even the Vilna *shas*,

books of responsa and works of philosophy, the entire Jewish bookshelf in one giant store. What I loved above all in the bookstore were the shelves of *meyse bichelach* (books of Hassidic stories). They included works in Yiddish, Hebrew and even Hungarian. While my father was looking for what he needed, I used to pore over those volumes. Included among them were the stories of J. L. Peretz and even Mendele Mocher Sfarim. How happy I was when I discovered that I could understand, at least in part, stories in Hebrew and even in Yiddish. Years later, this instilled considerable confidence in me when I was required to demonstrate my knowledge of those languages. I drank in the Jewish atmosphere of those stories no less than the sharp odor of leather and glue which filled the store and the bookbinding workshop behind it.

I believe that contemporary readers have something to gain from a glimpse of the spiritual content of this Jewish community. The outlook of Hungarian Jewry is most clearly reflected in the books of responsa about everyday issues written by the great Hungarian rabbis. One of the greatest Orthodox rabbis in Budapest was Rabbi Haim Sofer. He was not a member of the family of the Chatam Sofer, whose original name was Schreiber (or Sofer in Hebrew); his original family name was Szofer. One of the questions he dealt with in his great multi-volumed work, *Mahaneh Haim*, was the Tisha be-Av laws. The Temple was burnt down on the tenth of Av and not on the ninth, Tisha be-Av. The question was, therefore, why the fast was observed on the ninth and not the tenth. In a well-reasoned reply, Rabbi Haim Sofer explains that the Romans, Titus' troops, broke into the Temple on the ninth, and that their presence there and their conduct defiled the sacred place, into which nobody was granted access except the High Priest. Thus, the holiness was defiled on the ninth, and on the following day only the building, ceiling and walls, referred to in Jewish tradition as "trees and stones," were destroyed. Rabbi Haim Sofer concludes his explanation by writing: "We mourn the holiness, which was defiled, but we do not mourn the trees and stones."

Not far from the shop of Josef Schlesinger were other Hebrew bookstores. No. 1 Király Street once housed the store of M. Levi and Sons, and No. 6, opposite Schlesinger's store, was once the site of Steiner Ármin's store. These bookstores and others like them were symbols of the "People of the Book." After several hours of browsing among the shelves, we used to take the parcel of books we had bought and go over to the strictly kosher restaurant of Uncle Nissel, which naturally enough strictly observed the Sabbath.




154
Holiday resort of the Jewish Boys' Orphanage in Tahitótfalu (Postcard, 1918)

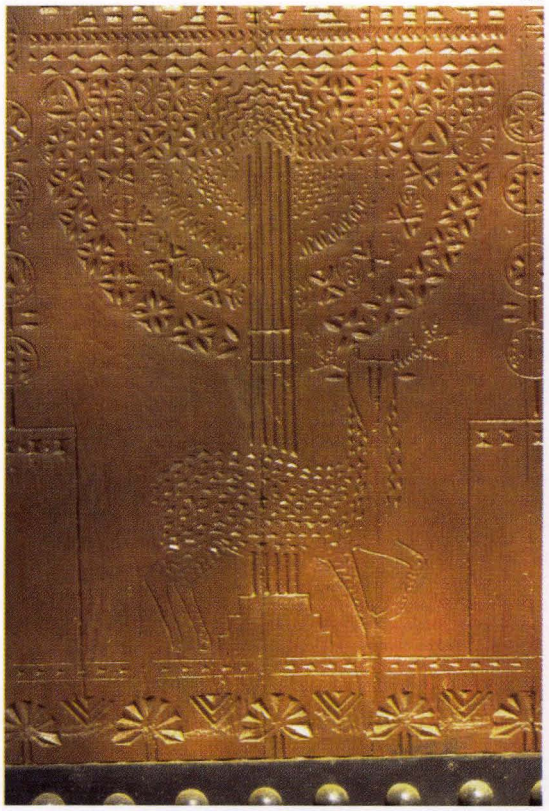
It was particularly rewarding to visit it on Sundays, since everything left over from Shabbat was sold at half price: a pie of eggs mixed with goose liver and onion, beef soup which we were not accustomed to, since at home only poultry was slaughtered, and most important of all – *tsholent*, with the *Nissel kugel* and the snow-white braided hallas, as crisp and tasty as nectar.

In the early morning hours, the visitor to these streets, where thirty thousand Orthodox Jews lived, was amazed at the hubbub and bustle. There were dozens of *stiebelech* along the street. At their doors stood young and old men, wrapped in prayer shawls and phylacteries and holding prayerbooks. Their prayer service was awaiting the tenth man to complete the *minyan*. Outside the *stiebel* stood a man shouting in Yiddish "A tzenter," namely, a tenth (for the *minyan*).

Right beside the *stiebel* was a bakery emitting enticing odors, and beside it a cobbler's workshop, next to it a tailor, carpenter, hatmaker, a grocery store and a haberdasher's. Wherever one turned, there were Jews working by the sweat of their brow. There could be no more vivid evidence to refute the claims that the Jews of the Diaspora were parasites who did not work for a living. The truth is that sociologists and historians such as Tartakover and Kaufman have proved that forty percent of them were engaged in productive occupations.

Like most of the large communities in Hungary, the Orthodox community of Budapest

155



156




was also organized as a miniature state. It boasted hospitals, schools, old age homes, orphanages, soup kitchens and of course synagogues, *heders*, yeshivot and a *Hevra Kadisha*, which administered the cemetery. It was a wonderfully-organized state: within a state, on the one hand, participating in the life of the nation within which it resided, and, on the other, preserving the centuries-old Jewish culture. Hungarian Orthodoxy did not differ in this respect from other communities.

155
Detail of the woodcarving on the main entrance to the Institute for the Blind (Photo by Rudolf Klein)

156
Charter of the *Hevra Kadisha* (1871)

This focus on the Orthodox community is not intended to imply that the Neolog and Status quo ante communities did not maintain their own forms of Jewish life, which in certain respects resembled that of their opponents. It is also important to shatter the myth of mutual hatred and envy which supposedly prevailed between the Orthodox and Neolog communities. There were conflicts, there was opposition; the Orthodox would not eat meat from a Neolog butcher, nor would they enter Neolog synagogues, because the organ was played there on the Sabbath and holidays. The differences were great, but their fate was similar, and hence there was considerable fraternal feeling between them, and even a large degree of mutual aid. Balaam's blessing was realized in these communities: "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwelling places, O Israel."

How regrettable and sad it is that this beautiful and vivid lifestyle vanished because of the Holocaust and the communist era, and exists no longer. May the souls of all the martyrs be blessed.



ORTHODOX ZSIDÓ UJSÁG

Főszerkesztő: Dr. Reiner Imre

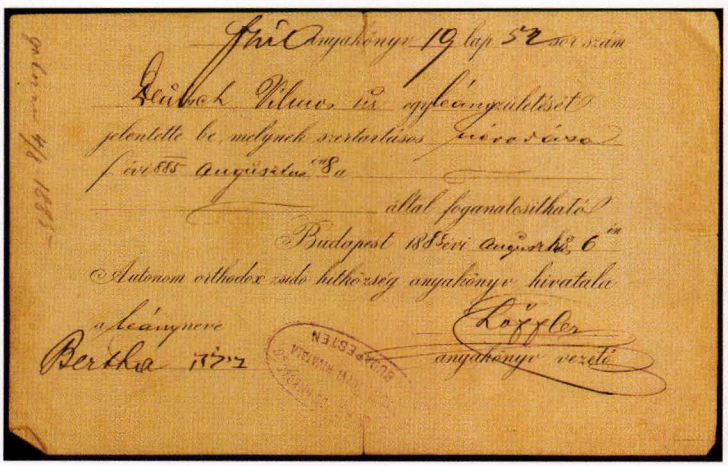
Felelős szerkesztő: Grozsberg Jenő

**A Központi Bizottság ülése**

– Tudósítás a 4. oldalon –

**UJ FELADATOK ELŐTT**

157



158



159



160



161



162

157
Title page of *Orthodox Zsidó Újság* (January 20, 1939)

158
Birth certificate issued by the Budapest Autonomous Orthodox Community (1885)

159
*Ketubah*

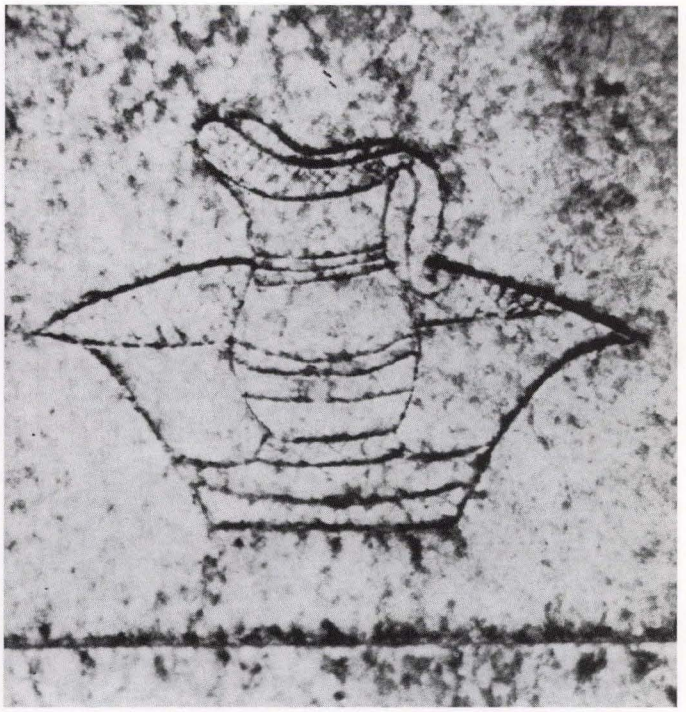
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Silver articles

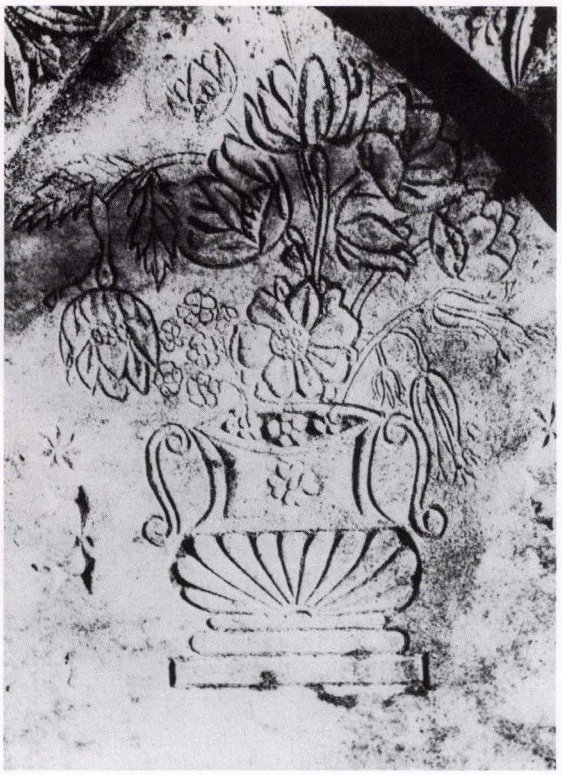
162
Seder plate, Herend (mid-19th century)

163



164





165

163
Sepulchral vault of Sándor Schmidl's family in the Kozma Street cemetery, designed by Béla Lajta and Ödön Lechner 1902-1903 (Photo by Egon Gottl)

164
Levite symbols on a gravestone in the Tolcsva cemetery

165
Gravestone in the Abaújszántó cemetery





166, 167
Moses and Pericles, detail from the Schoßberger Palais
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)

# The Hungarian Jews and Architectural Style

Rudolf Klein

Architecture has always been a manifesto of values, cultural identity, sometimes even a political statement, particularly so in periods of intellectual ferment, like the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Since upwardly-mobile groups are generally willing to spend lavishly on architecture, the newly-emerging Jewish middle classes played a major role in the development of the so-called "Hungarian Style" at that time.

For most of the 19th century, Jews were barred from studying architecture at the Technical College, and hence, the Jewish influence on Hungarian architecture stemmed from their role as entrepreneurs and clients rather than designers. After obtaining equal rights (1867), Jewish urban developers started to participate in the construction of the most beautiful avenue in Budapest, the Andrássy Road, with its lavish palaces and splendid Opera House, ending in the City Park (*Városliget*). The amply-decorated neo-Renaissance style expressed the ideology of the Jewish entrepreneural class, in contrast to the neo-Baroque and neo-Gothic favored by the conservative establishment and the Catholic church, respectively. The neo-Renaissance style, inspired by the Italian Renaissance, highlighted the ideas of individual initiative, enlightenment and liberalism.

From time to time, Jews were not satisfied with style alone, and introduced Jewish symbols as well. At the Schoßberger Palais (1876) at the beginning of Andrássy Road, above the entrance and beneath the beletage balcony two dust-covered Atlases greet the visitors: Vulcan and Moses, epitomizing the Greek and Jewish constituents of Western culture. While Vulcan is holding a hammer in his hand, Moses, in addition to the tablets of the law, carries a torch emphasizing that Jews are torchbearers.

Jews began to exert direct influence on architectural style towards the end of the 19th century, when Jewish students gained entry to the School of Architecture at the Technical University in Budapest in greater numbers and subsequently found employment in large architectural firms. (By 1900 the proportion of Jewish architectural students had reached 44.46%!) Later, they started to open their own offices. In the 1890s, the most prominent Jewish architects, such as Dezső Jakab and Marcell Komor, joined Ödön Lechner's movement, using Hungarian folklore ornamentation to cover up façades. This style was more than simple decoration, and was aimed at establishing a new identity for Hungarian cities, particularly those with a large national minority population.

168, 169
Dezső Jakab and Marcell Komor, Black Eagle (Nagyvárad, 1906–1908). The building incorporates a hotel and a shopping mall, including a passageway with expensive shops, a cinema and rental offices. The Hungarian style was blended with modernity in the remote eastern part of the Hungarian Kingdom (Photo by Rudolf Klein)

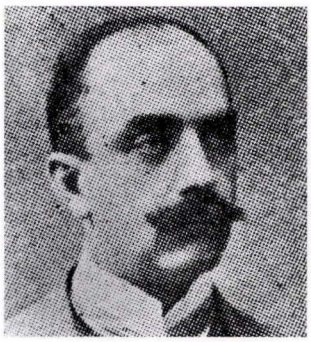




The so-called "Hungarian architectural style" was part of the Magyarization project. As they emphasized in their writings, Dezső Jakab and Marcell Komor wanted to convince the Croats, Slovaks, Romanians and other national minorities through architecture of the superiority of Hungarian culture. They sometimes even forced their clients to accept this style, if they felt it necessary, as Dezső Jakab reports in his article about the synagogue of Szabadka. A series of important edifices in the so-called "Hungarian Style" were erected in Hungary, particularly in border areas (in the counties of Bács-Bodrog, Hajdú-Bihar, Maros-Torda, etc.). The City Hall and Reform Synagogue in Szabadka, Black Eagle in Nagyvárad, Women's Baths, Redoute in Palics, City Hall and Cultural Palace in Marosvásárhely are the best examples of this movement. Curiously, the Hungarian Parliament passed a regulation in 1902, which prohibited spending public money on edifices in the so-called "Hungarian Style." However, as demonstrated by numerous examples in Marosvásárhely, Szabadka and elswhere, this regulation was disregarded in the remote counties of the country. There the architects often resorted to a trick: they submitted a neo-Baroque version to the authorities for approval, and changed the façades and interior decoration to Hungarian style during construction work.

Although Jewish architects were anxious to emphasize that they were good Hungarians, they did not always succeed in this. In fact, they cultivated a particular language of architecture, that had nothing to do with the Hungarian national heritage, and applied the elements of Hungarian folklore free-handedly without its original structural principle and syntax. They paraphrased the Hungarian heritage, and their liberal attitude in doing so outraged real nationalists. Thus, as time went on, the Hungarian language of architecture became counterproductive for the Jews. It no longer reflected the "sound Hungarian identity," at which they aimed, but rather betrayed the intellectual condition of assimilated Hungarian Jewry. They had largely abandoned their *Jiddischkeit*, but had not become properly

170



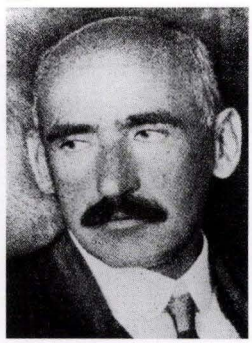
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172



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170, 171
Dávid Jónás and his brother Zsigmond Jónás opened a joint office in 1903 (Caricature by Béla Riedl, 1937)

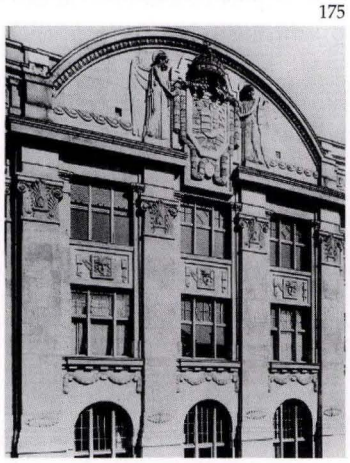
172
Zsigmond Quittner, designer of public buildings and apartment houses in the Eclectic style in Budapest and regional towns

173
Artúr Sebestyén, designer of hotels and public spas

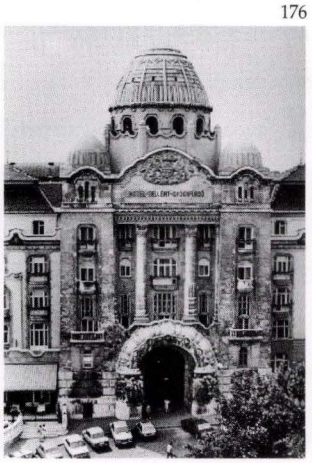
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The Gellért Hotel and Spa designed by Artúr Sebestyén, Ármin Hegedüs and Izidor Sterk

175
Zsigmond Quittner, façade of the Hungarian Commercial Bank

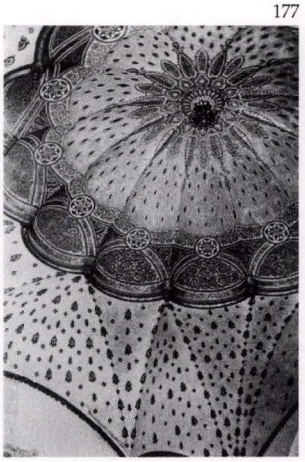
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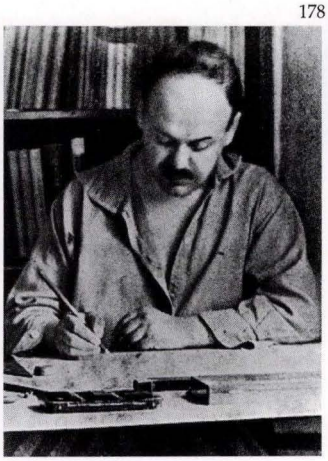
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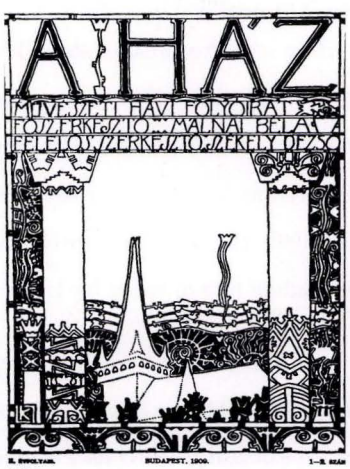


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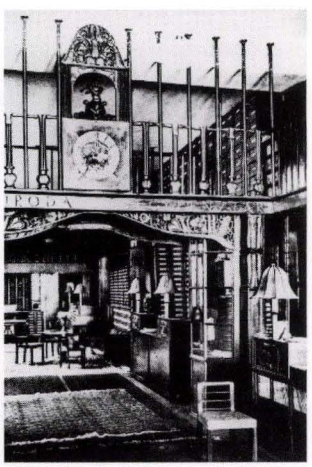


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Entrance of the Gellért Hotel and Spa: the statues on the gateway were by Ede Telcs and Borsányi

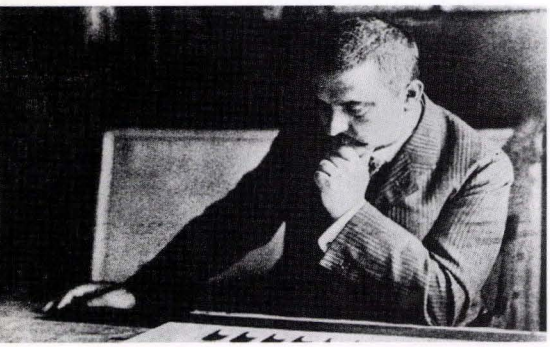
177
Detail of the ceiling of the entrance hall of the Gellért Hotel and Spa

178
Lajos Kozma, interior designer and graphic artist, one of the outstanding representatives of the modernist architectural movement in the 1930s

179
Title page of the periodical *A Ház*, by Lajos Kozma

180
Interior of the Rózsavölgyi music shop, designed by Lajos Kozma

181



182




181
Béla Lajta

182
Henrik and Rezső Lajta's shop, designed by Béla Lajta

Hungarian. The new architectural language, the so-called "Hungarian Style" reflects this intellectual condition. The façade is highly decorated with Hungarian honeycake shapes, flowers, peacocks, etc. The decoration, however, does not communicate with the inner structure of the building (space conception, partition walls, load-bearing elements), and is just cladding. The "Hungarian Style" was utilized as a form of overcompensation for the foreign origin of the Jews, but unwittingly reflected some Jewish traits.

The "Hungarian façade" differs from the façades of late Eclecticism mainly in its rejection of plastic decoration, the "carved image," acquiring a textile-like independent layer, an assumed outer stratum of identity. The dissolving of the traditional unity of building body and cover was also modern, expressed in Gottfried Semper's theory of cladding (*Bekleidungstheorie*), which was put into practice around 1900 by Otto Wagner, the "King of Viennese Modernism," who indirectly influenced architecture in Hungary. The "Hungarian Style" was, thus, really an element of Modernism, as often emphasised by Dezső Jakab and Marcell Komor.

The "Hungarian façade" is not only "detached" from the body of the building, but uses elements alienated from each other and from their original context. Elements of Hungarian decoration float on the surface, without being anchored into the structural principle of their previous folklore context. Anti-Semitic critics often related the decoration of Hungarian Secession to the wall-paintings in Polish wooden synagogues. It is true that Ödön Lechner's Jewish followers placed Hungarian decoration in a new context that reflects the "Jewish structural principle": free association, intentionally unstructured constitution, paraphrasing of original themes, combinations resembling language-play.

Thus, around 1900, the "Hungarian Style" became Jewish without using motifs from the Bible. The prominent Hungarian Jewish architect, Lajta, who came from a semi-conservative Jewish family, started to apply Jewish motifs to the façade in conjunction with the already established Hungarian decoration. Lajta started his career in Ödön Lechner's office, but unlike many of his colleagues, who spent their leisure time – and often office time as well – in cafés, he made an effort and toured the countryside in order to study vernacular architecture, i.e., the originals of the elements he incorporated into his projects between 1903 and 1907. His trips to Transylvania apparently impressed on him the importance of authenticity, leading him to blend Jewish and Hungarian motifs, expressing this dual identity.

On the gate of his Institute for Blind Children he created menorot and Magen David based on Hungarian wood-carving motifs. The auxiliary entrance to the same building resembles a *huppah*,

having a thin metal column with a capital in the form of a menorah. On the Home for the Elderly of the Budapest *Hevra Kadisha* he combines the wheel motif with a Magen David.

With time, Lajta's buildings became increasingly modern, based on simple orthogonal forms, deploying plain, unadorned surfaces. Nevertheless, he did not stop using Jewish motifs for decoration. The apparently cool cubist forms of his proto-Modernist municipal school building in Vas Street convey an important political statement. Near the main entrance, on the street façade, among floral decoration, we find a row of shofars carved in stone. Underneath is a steam locomotive, resembling a wooden toy, and symbolizing technological and general progress. (Jews played a crucial role in building up the railway network in Hungary. Both leading families in this enterprise, the Rothschilds and the Perriers, were Jewish.) The pivotal element on this locomotive is a little screw on the main wheel in the form of a Magen David. This is reminiscent of the statement implied in the Moses figure on the Schoßberger Palais, some forty years earlier: Jews constituted a relatively small share of the population, but they were a decisive element of Hungarian society.

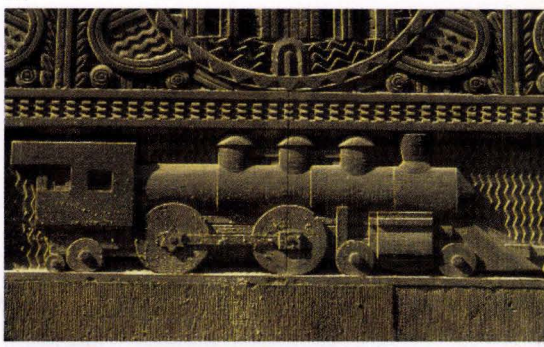
The evolution of the Jewish motifs signifies the progress Jews had made in three generations. In terms of art, the narrative sculptural representation of Moses with the torch, characteristic of 19th century Gentile society, yielded to a more abstract, symbolic and comic representation on Lajta's buildings. In social terms, Jews were now not just lighting the way, but playing a pivotal role. This role, however, became so obvious, that there was no need to demonstrate it, nor to prove loyalty to the host nation. Hungary's assimilation of the Jews and the Jewish spirit is illustrated, inter alia, by the fact that the Hungarian language absorbed a set of key notions from Yiddish. Decoration of Lajta's early modernism illustrates this idea.

Thus, the "Hungarian Style" of Jewish architects became redundant in the later phase its of history, and disappeared altogether after the first harsh anti-Semitic legislation in Hungary. After World War I, the Jews turned swiftly to Modernism, which became their new style in the 1920s and 1930s. It represented universal humanity, the abolition of national differences and discrimination, and more importantly, the rejection of historic styles based on the "graven image." The official standpoint of the state was explicitly anti-modern, condemning Modernism for cosmopolitanism – the loss of Hungarian national character – Bolshevism, etc. Only a relatively small proportion of Hungarian architecture was Modernist. Some Jewish architects built also for clients who opposed Modernism altogether, but the Jewish avant-garde adopted Modernism unanimously.

183



184



183
The Institute for the Blind, designed by Béla Lajta. The building blends Transylvanian folk architecture with Jewish elements. The side-entrance recalls a *huppah*, the columns are topped by a menorah
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)

184
The Municipal Commercial School in Vas Street, designed by Béla Lajta.The austere proto-modernist building has a steam locomotive, its axle decorated with a Magen David, among the foliate ornamentation
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)

Modernism became the hallmark of assimilated middle class Jewish values. Due to state repression, however, the most prominent Modernist Hungarian Jewish architects left the country. József Vágó, a committed socialist, was forced to emigrate. In the 1918 revolution, he had headed the housing office, and in 1919 he was placed in charge of building management. In France, he and his son, Pierre (born Péter Vágó in Budapest), in particular, became leading figures in international Modernism. While still a student, Pierre Vago became the editor-in-chief of *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, the leading architectural journal of the period. In 1948, he founded the UIA (*Union Internationale des architects*), the leading international body of the profession. As a practising architect, he created a set of remarkable buildings in Europe and elsewhere.

185, 186
József Vágó and his brother László Vágó designed apartment houses and public buildings, interiors and furniture, in their joint office

187
Exhibition hall of the National Salon, designed by József and László Vágó



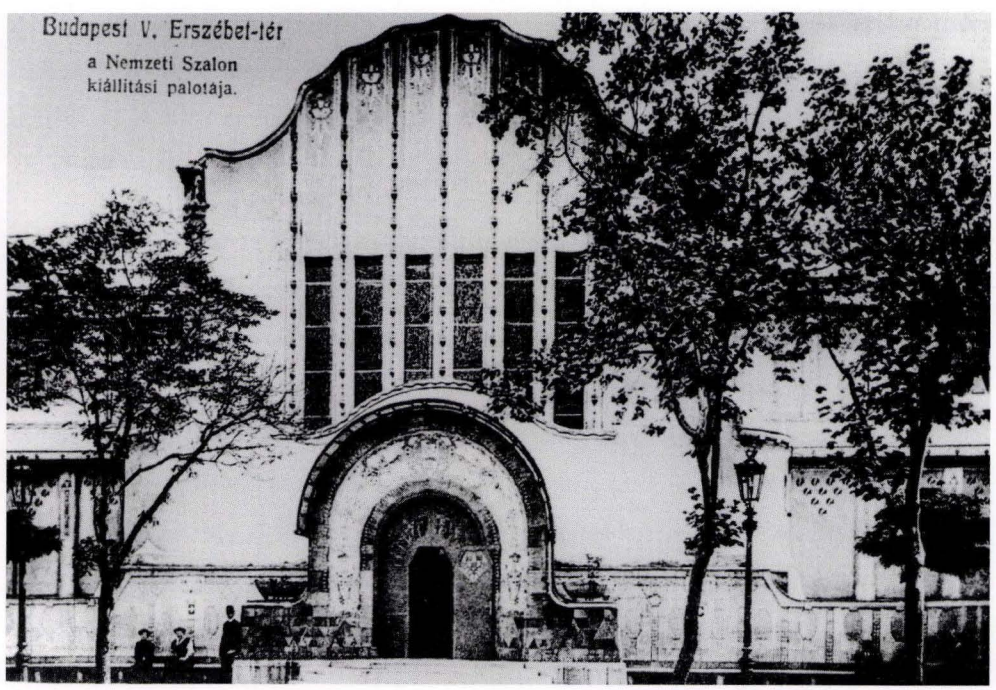
185

Marcel Breuer (born in Pécs) became a master of the famous Bauhaus school in pre-Nazi Germany, but he was not admitted to the Hungarian Chamber of Engineers, and emigrated to England in 1935. After World War II, he became a leading figure on the international architectural scene. Oszkár Kaufmann emigrated from Hungary to Palestine, where he designed important buildings.

The majority of Jewish architects remained in Hungary in the 1920s and 1930s. Among their other achievements, in conjunction with Jewish clients, they built a unique Jewish middle class neighborhood in the 13th district of Budapest, the Újlipótváros, concentrated around Szent István Park. Again, their architectural language highlighted their Jewish identity: it was modern in an

186






187

anti-modern country – related to the avant-garde – but toned down in a rather classicist manner, slightly akin to the official neo-Baroque. It had its own unique flavor, discernible only in a wider architectural-social context. The most important figures of this slightly conservative modernism were András Domány and Béla Hoffstädter, who built the most beautiful apartment house in the 13th district in Pozsonyi Road 38–42, and in Buda on Margit Boulevard 15–17.

With that the cycle ended: in the second half of the 19th century, early Jewish emancipation had acquired a particular architectural expression with narrative utterance – the "graven image" of late Eclecticism (Schoßberger Palais). During the Art Nouveau period, the plastic ornamentation disappeared, and the flat surface was established, but covered with the structurally detached, decorative cladding. Finally, pure, geometric language took over, highlighting the abstract nature of Jewish thought. This time the Jews were not assimilating some formal Christian language, giving it a Jewish touch; now the Western avant-garde met up with the abstraction of Judaism. It is not surprising, therefore, that Modernism was banned by both the Nazis and the Communists.

Although the significant Jewish contribution to Hungarian architecture ended with the Holocaust, the extant architectural heritage of the country manifests the decisive Jewish contribution to the cultural and economic life of the country, during the Gründerzeit (1860s and 1880s), at the onset of Modernism (around 1900) and during the establishment of the International Style (1920s and 1930s).



188
Stairway of 33 Pozsonyi Road
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)


KAFFEE MESSINGER KÁVÉHÁZ
כשר
WIENER KÜCHE
EINGANG SPEISESAL CARTEN
CAFE MESSINGER

# Jews of the Hungarian Provinces Until 1918

Raphael Vago

Any attempt to define the term "Hungarian Jewry" is problematic, because of the various changes in Hungary's role and place within the Austrian Empire, changes that were generated by political developments and by shifts in the administrative and judicial divisions of the area under Hungarian rule. To these should be added the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy which divided the Jewish population of the Hungarian territory into those living in Hungary itself, within the post-Trianon borders, and those who found themselves in the "successor states" of the monarchy. Thus, the Trianon borders split Hungarian Jewry, since Jews who had a Hungarian cultural and linguistic background or had lived under Hungarian rule for generations belonged, from 1920 on, to Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. Only on the eve of World War II and immediately after it commenced some of these territories were reannexed to Hungary, and thus their Jewish communities suffered a similar fate during the Holocaust to that of the Jews of Hungary proper.

The political changes in the wake of World War I created an identity problem for those Jews who had been considered "Hungarian Jews" and now became citizens of the new states. Although these Jews did develop a sense of identity, however artificial, with their new host states, is was impossible for them to discard their "Hungarian" legacy, shaped through years of living under Hungarian rule, language and culture.

The differences between the Jews of Hungary and of the provinces, which were foreign territory after 1920, were not solely the result of the post-war changes. Regional differences, the social-economic as well as the ethnic characteristics, differences in the level of development between the areas closer to Budapest and those in the provinces, the patterns of modernization and urbanization all left their mark on the respective Jewish communities. The contact between Jews and local Slovaks, Ruthenians, Romanians, Germans, or South-Slavs, according to the ethnic makeup of the region, had an impact on the local Jewish population. Regional differences between Hungarian Jewish communities were also the result of cross-border influences, such as the regional impact of Hassidism on the northern areas of Hungary, or the Sephardic character of some of the more southern communities in the Bánát and Transylvania.

189

189
Trencsénteplic, a holiday resort popular with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The inscription "Kosher" on the Messinger coffee house, 1910s (Photo by Divald and Monostory)

Such differences, which were significant, justify the separate discussion of Jewish communities in the different areas, as both common and divisive patterns of development should be taken into account. The local conditions and patterns of development in modern Hungary did not necessarily create a "center" versus "periphery" relationship. True, major political, social and economic influences spread from the center towards the outlying areas, but Jewish life in the Hungarian-speaking territories had its own dynamics. The religious movements and trends which emerged in the "periphery" actually functioned, for example in the northern areas of the Hassidic communities, as "centers" of Jewish life. As regards the various Orthodox centers, new ideas, new trends, and commentaries relating to all major issues of Jewish life emerged in what could be defined as outlying and economically underdeveloped areas of Hungary. In such cases, it was the provinces which dictated the tone in matters related to Jewish life, and the ideas generated there were picked up and implemented in various regions of the country, and often in neighboring areas outside Hungary.

**Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia**

In the modern era, the northern and northeastern regions of Hungary served as major centers of Jewish life. The large area encompassing parts of modern Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, today part of the Ukraine, underwent numerous political and administrative changes in the 20th century, which transformed the area into a bridge and a meeting place between various cultures. The encounter within the Jewish community between Jews originating from different parts of central and eastern Europe, and the meeting between the Jews as a whole and the local nationalities in this largely underdeveloped area of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, created a special Jewish experience. Mysticism, Hassidism, Orthodoxy and the inevitable clashes with modernity all had their impact on Jewish life, in the area that is now divided between Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania.

The Jews in Slovakia, numbering some 140,000 according to the 1910 census, found themselves from the mid-19th century on caught in the crossfire of the growing nationalist antagonism between Hungarians and Slovaks. As was the case in Transylvania, the overwhelming majority of the Jews identified with the Hungarians – the ruling nation – although some Jews sympathized with the emerging Slovak national movement. Slovak anti-Semitism perceived the Jews generally as a "Magyarizing" element, supporting Hungarian policies towards the Slovaks.

With the process of emancipation and modernization Jews entered the middle class, and played a major role in the economic life of the region. The consequence was the intensification of anti-Semitism, as the new aspiring Slovak generations felt that Jews, being closer to the Hungarians, were integrating into society more rapidly and advancing up the social ladder. The Slovak People's Party, active since the end of the 19th century, represented the interests of the common Slovaks, who wished to displace the Jewish elements from their positions, perceiving them as a "pro-Hungarian" barrier to the development of the Slovak nation.

Following the emancipation, Jewish cultural activities entered a new phase. While the majority of the Jews in the eastern parts of Slovakia kept up with the Yiddish language,

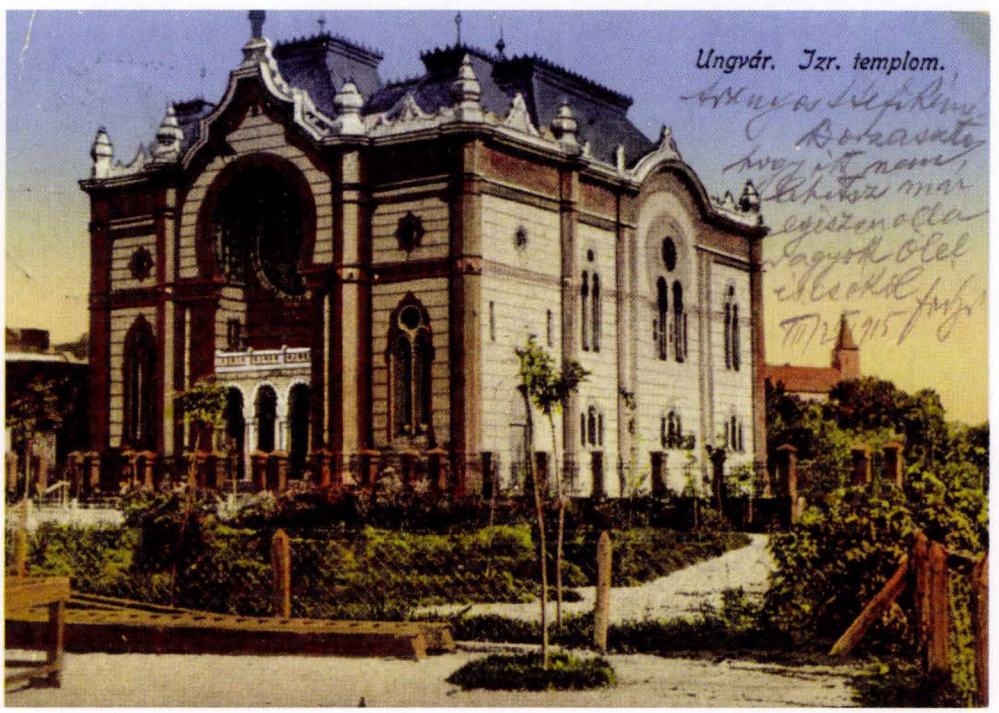
190
The ghetto in Pozsony (1920s)



in other areas the predominant languages were German, Hungarian increasingly, and Slovak to a much lesser degree. The first Jewish organ, *Der Jude*, started publication in Kassa in 1866 in Yiddish, but several new publications started to appear in German and Hungarian, reflecting the new cultural-religious trends among the Jewish population.

In spite of Slovakia's image as a backward area of the Monarchy, the Jewish contribution to the cultural and scientific life of the region was significant. The rabbinical traditions laid down by the Chatam Sofer influenced generations of Jewish scholars. Following the process of enlightenment and emancipation, the new Hebrew literature was represented by Simon Bacher and Adolf Munk, who depicted Jewish life in Slovakia. The Révai family from Eperjes founded a publishing house and edited-published the twenty volumes of the Révai's Great Encyclopedia. One of the foremost contemporary orientalists, Ármin Vámbéry, who converted to Christianity but did not deny his Jewish origins, and had close ties with Herzl, was born in Slovakia. Zionism also made some headway in Slovakia from its early stages, and the first Zionist conference took place in Pozsony in 1903.

The Jews of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia lived in what was possibly the most ethnically diversified and multinational area of Hungary. The Jewish population, which numbered




191
The synagogue in Ungvár, designed by Gyula Papp and Ferenc Szabolcs,1904 (Postcard about 1915)

some 100,000 at the end of World War I, comprising some fifteen percent of the population, had lived for generations among Ruthenes, Ukrainians, Poles, Hungarians, Slovaks and Romanians. Sub-Carpathian Jewry was shaped by the waves of emigration into the region from northern and eastern areas, from Poland and the Russian Empire, and a small Sephardic community in Ungvár added to the diversity of the Jewish communities. The administrative changes through the years, as well as the emerging character of the Habsburg, or rather Hungarian rule over the area, makes it difficult to pinpoint special local characteristics of the Jewish community. But, there is no doubt that in their religious fervor and adherence to their traditional ways of life in this backward area of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Jews of the area created unique ways of life, blending the various influences that shaped the character of the area.

About two-thirds of the Jews in the area lived in small communities, but with the slow advance of urbanization there was a marked growth in the urban Jewish population, especially in Munkács, which became the educational and cultural center for the Jews of the region. The urbanized Jews made their living from similar trades and professions to those in Hungary proper, and were active promoters of the emerging process of modernization in the area, which never reached the proportions it attained in the major urban centers of Hungary. Soon, the Jewish traders, artisans and members of the liberal professions made up the bulk of the local petit-bourgeoise and even of the more well-to-do stratum of the local society. The rural Jewish population lived in great poverty, and their economic situation was not much better than that of the local Ruthenes and Ukrainians, although they were better educated than their village neighbors. Most of the rural Jews worked on the land or cultivated livestock.

Modern anti-Semitism, which appeared in the area by the end of the 19th century, was based on different motifs to the anti-Semitism of the more developed areas of Hungary, especially Budapest. The argument that the Jews had infiltrated the economy, the culture and all of society was not feasible in the backward Sub-Carpathian region. The local anti-Semitic arguments were based, rather, on the role of the small Jewish merchant and peddler and were aimed against the newly arrived emigrants from Galicia, who were depicted as parasites, compared to the more established veteran Jewish population of the area. With the process of urbanization and the emergence of a more prosperous Jewish

192
Greetings from Munkács (Postcard, 1904)






193
Greetings from Huszt (Postcard, 1910s)

middle class, anti-Semitic agitation was aimed, prior to World War I, at the new social developments.

The nature of the region, the harsh conditions, the underdevelopment and backwardness, as well as the complex relationship with the local multi-ethnic population, dictated the nature of the Jewish communities, which largely preserved their traditional ways of life. Nature itself seemed to contribute to the atmosphere, as the scenery of the Carpathian mountains served as a background for the mystic experiences and the rise of Hassidism. The yeshivot of the region were among the most influential in Hungary, especially those in Munkács, Huszt, Ungvár. The split within the Jewish communities was very bitter and the ideological struggle between those advocating changes and adaptation to the new realities and those preserving the traditional Orthodox life was among the most intense among Hungary's Jewry.

The deep divisions which also affected the Orthodox camp continued into the inter-war period and the debates and power struggles between the Munkács rabbis had their roots in the pre-war period.

The divisions and splits within the Jewish community influenced the educational institutions as well. The opening of Jewish schools including high schools in Munkács and Ungvár in the inter-war period reflected the desire of the younger generation to provide their children with a more general education as opposed to the world outlook of the Orthodox leadership. Following the split between the Orthodox and Neolog communities, only a few joined the Neologs in the beginning, and two small communities were formed in Munkács and Ungvár.

After World War I, the Jews of Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia entered into a new period until 1938, the Czechoslovak chapter. In spite of being cut off from Hungary and its Jewish communities, the Jews of the two regions continued to preserve their Hungarian language and culture, the result of the cultural infrastructure laid down since the period of emancipation.

**Transylvania and the Bánát**

The most significant feature in the history of the Jews in Transylvania in the modern era is the rapid growth of the Jewish population. In the 18th century there were less than 9,000 Jews in the region, while following emancipation the number reached some 24,000

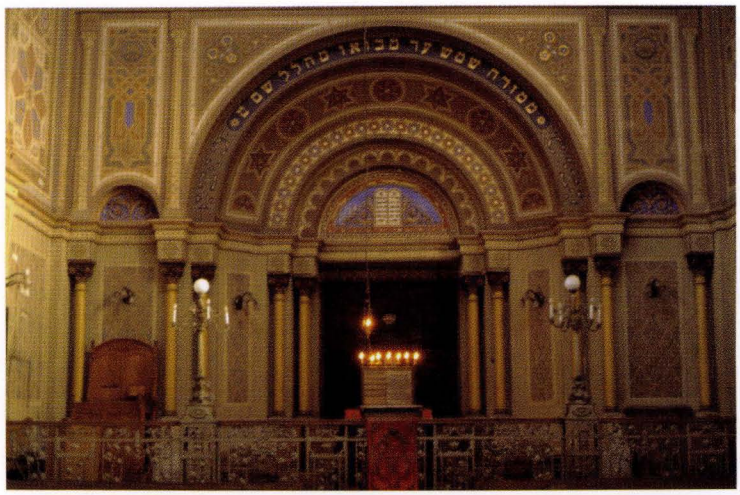



194
Office building of the Temes-Béga Valley River Regulation Authority, in Temesvár, designed by Lipót Baumhorn (1909)

by the last third of the 19th century, and by the end of World War I had risen to around 223,000.

In the first half of the 19th century, new communities were formed and organized in addition to that of Gyulafehérvár, until then the only accepted and recognized Jewish community. The split in Transylvanian Jewry followed the same pattern as in other parts of the country. The Orthodox communities had their stronghold in the north, as in the area of Máramarossziget, but the Neolog communities, their synagogues, the spiritual and cultural legacy, for example in Temesvár and Kolozsvár, remained highly influential until the Holocaust. In contrast, the Orthodox communities refused to adopt the Hungarian or German languages and had no influence on the province's cultural and spiritual life.

The main issues that preoccupied the growing Jewish population were the anticipation of receiving civil rights which would ensure better economic and social functioning, and recovery from the anti-Semitic hostilities of 1848–1849. Following emancipation and the split within the Jewish population, the main subject on the public agenda was the impact of the schism and the bitter disputes that often tore apart the fabric of small and previously cohesive communities. In several localities Neolog communities were organized, and after considerable financial and organizational effort, they moved to new places of worship and other communal facilities. One of these was the impressive new



195
Interior of the synagogue in Nagyvárad
(Photo by Rudolf Klein)

Neolog synagogue in splendid Mauri style opened in Kolozsvár in 1887. In Nagyvárad, a similar imposing synagogue was built in 1878. The community there was led for more than forty years by Rabbi Lipót Kecskeméti, who until his death in 1936 was one of the leading figures in Transylvanian Jewry, known for his advocacy of close ties with the Hungarian nation and culture.

Educational activities occupy a special place in the legacy of the Jews from Transylvania, and had an impact which lasted into the inter-war period. Jewish schools operated in the major centers of the area even before 1867, some of them inaugurated after the granting of emancipation. Following the split within the communities, the independent Jewish education networks were somewhat reduced, due to the impact of assimilation and the financing problems of the newly divided communities. By the end of the 19th century, there were some sixty elementary schools, several of them very small with only a handful of pupils. In most of the newly opened schools, the language was Hungarian. These schools served as the basis for the emergence of Jewish high schools in the inter-war period.

Following emancipation, the Jews in Transylvania played a major role in the development of economic, social and cultural life of the region. The Jews had a leading role in the development of the urban middle class. In the multi-ethnic reality of Transylvania, the role of the Jews as a loyal group towards the Hungarians and their culture was very evident. Economic development in Transylvania and the Bánát was very similar. In the newly emerging industrial centers, such as Nagyvárad, Temesvár, Kolozsvár, Arad, and the other urban centers, such as Brassó and Marosvásárhely, the Jews played a leading role in all fields of light and heavy industry. Jewish initiative, investments and ownership were behind such enterprises as the Renner leather works in Kolozsvár and the pharmaceutical industry.

With the new possibilities in the era of emancipation, the Jews in the Bánát underwent the same pattern of development as those of Hungary. The major development was the entry of the Jews into the mainstream of the economic and commercial life of the area, along with the process of urbanization. The Jews were among the first to benefit from the gradual process of modernization and urbanization, as they drifted towards the cities and towns of the region.

For generations there were close ties among neighboring Jewish communities in the Bánát region. The communal regulations, which are extant in the community archive in Temesvár, and have become available to researchers in the past few years, indicate a closely knit community structure and a high degree of cooperation among communities, especially in the religious and educational areas.

The improvement in the economic status of the Jewish population had an immediate impact on all areas of community activities. The Temesvár community was the largest, with some 6,728 members in 1910 among a total population of 72,500. Following the split between the three groups, several new synagogues were built, the most impressive of them in the Citadel area of the city, built between 1860–1865 under the initiative of Ignác Buziási Eisenstadter, the first Jew from Temesvár to receive a title. The building of new synagogues, impressive undertakings with significant artistic results, indicated the economic prosperity and the self confidence of the Jews, who, having obtained equal rights, were openly displaying their religious identity as well as economic stability. The improvement in the economic situation of the Jews, as a result of the opportunities opened up by emancipation, facilitated community life after the inevitable split, as it made it possible, despite the difficulties involved, to bear the cost of dividing up community assets, and open new institutions, such as schools and synagogues.

Relations with the various nationalities in the area improved following emancipation. However, modern anti-Semitism also reached the border areas of the monarchy. The Jews tended to perceive anti-Semitic manifestations as a passing evil, which would not impede their integration into society. However, several incidents, such as the damage inflicted by a mob in Marosvásárhely in Transylvania in 1862, indicated that in fact the communities faced constant dangers to the community institutions, as well as to life and property.

As in other parts of the monarchy, the Jews in the Bánát made up a significant part of the new emerging middle class which promoted liberal ideas. The Jews were in the

vanguard of introduction of new ideas, and their contribution to the social and cultural life of the Bánát was immense. Their loyalty to the Crown was demonstrated again and again, and resounding proof of such loyalty was the invitation to Emperor Franz Joseph to attend the opening of the new synagogue in Temesvár. The Neolog synagogue in Temesvár was officially opened in 1872 during the Emperor's visit, although it had been functioning already for some time. The memorial plaque honoring the visit served as testimony to the respect of the Crown towards its Jewish subjects.

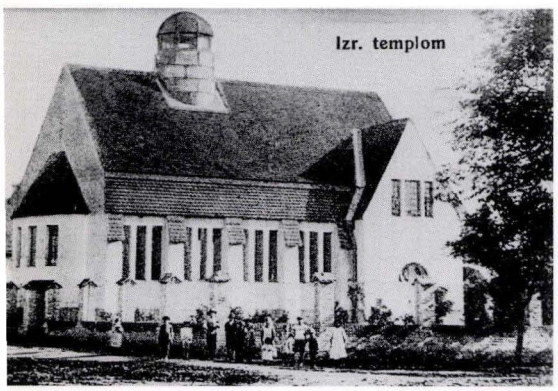
The changes following emancipation were also evident in Jewish community culture. There was a distinct transition from the German language to the Hungarian, and according to the census of 1910, between sixty and ninety percent of the Jewish population spoke Hungarian. In the Neolog schools, especially in the urban areas, Hungarian was predominant.

Spiritual life was deeply influenced by the legacy of Áron Chorin from Arad, who served as the town's rabbi from 1789 until his death in 1844. In his writings, he called for a compromise between the *halakha* and the realities of the era of emancipation. Chorin advocated reforms suited to the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual character of the region by urging Jews to learn the languages and habits of the local peoples. His long-lasting influence transcended Transylvania and Bánát. The chief rabbi of Bánát, Dávid Oppenheimer, and his son followed in the footsteps of Chorin, and their influence, too, extended much further than the Bánát region alone.

In the modern era, the Vajdaság region, partially corresponding to the post-World War II area of Vojvodina in Yugoslavia, underwent several changes in geographical borders as well as in the nature of the local administration. In the 16th and 17th centuries the area was under Ottoman rule, in a period when the Jewish population was very small. Local conditions were shaped both by the Hungarian rule, before the Ottomans, and by the influence of local Slavs, especially Serbs, inhabiting the area. The Jews enjoyed the same privileges as other national groups and a large degree of tolerance but with clear limits on their role and place within society. Generally, the situation of the Jews was better than that of the Christians. Jewish traders, encouraged by the authorities, played a major role in the economy of the region.

With the withdrawal of Ottoman rule, Vajdaság fell under Habsburg rule, the actual masters being the Hungarians, until the collapse of the monarchy and the formation of

196
The synagogue in Törökkanizsa, designed by Béla Jánszky and Tibor Szivessy (1913), was later destroyed



Yugoslavia following World War I. The fate of the Jews in Vajdaság was similar to that of other communities in Hungary, although the ethnic factor played an important role, as the Jews lived in areas with a predominantly Serb population whose attitude towards the Jews was mixed. Following emancipation in 1867, the number of Jews was roughly 30,000. Similarly to the Jews in neighboring Bánát, they benefited from the emancipation and integrated well into the social and economic structure of the area, above their ratio in the general population. The Jews ascended the social scale rapidly, including the administration, bypassing other national groups. As in other areas of the kingdom, their loyalty to the Hungarian Crown was total.

The rise of modern anti-Semitism in Vajdaság displayed similar features to that in other parts of Hungary, but local conditions were also significant. The rising Serb nationalism, especially the emergence of the Serb Radical Party, created conflict between Serbs and Jews, as the latter were accused of being "pro-Hungarian" and of rising rapidly up the professional ladder thanks to Hungarian support. The Serb Orthodox Church reinforced this image of the Jews and further fueled anti-Jewish resentments. As to the Hungarians in the area, they were influenced by the emergence of anti-Semitism in Hungary, especially during the Tiszaeszlár blood libel of 1882. Thus, the Jews of Vajdaság were caught in the crossfire between the Hungarian and Serb nationalists, as each side accused the Jews of supporting the national side of the other, a classic situation, characteristic of the multinational areas of central and eastern Europe. The changes in the fate of the region, both due to the nature of the Hungarian rule in the face of the rising tide of Serb nationalism, and the revolutionary events in Hungary in 1848–1849, also had an impact on the Jewish communities. The largest community in the area was in Újvidék, with some 1,136 Jews, about seven percent of the population by the middle of the 19th century. With Emancipation, the Jews gradually changed their economic activities from peddling to small trade and free professions, changes which affected their role in the local economy and society. Similar trends were evident in other localities of the region, in which Jews won leading positions in economic, social and cultural domains. In such towns as Becskerek and Szabadka, which became local economic and trade centers, the Jews played a major role in the local banking and trades and participated actively in the modernization of local life. Jews also played a major role in the emerging civic and political movements, such as the Hungarian Social-Democratic Party, and other Hungarian political movements, except the nationalist ones. They were also very active in the

development of social-cultural institutions, such as cultural clubs and mutual aid funds. The decades between Emancipation and World War I were years of flourishing community, educational and religious activities. Several Jewish schools were opened in this period, such as that in Szabadka which was recognized by the municipal authorities.

The Neolog communities built new synagogues, for example in Újvidék (1909) and Becskerek (1896), and renovated existing places of worship. As in Bánát, such activities indicated the relative prosperity and the intensity of Jewish communal and religious life, which continued after the great split within the communities. Local dignitaries and high level representatives of the regime participated in local Jewish ceremonies, which indicated the high level of integration and understanding between the Hungarian authorities and the local Jewish population.

Religious life was conducted in the shadow of the bitter disputes and arguments, such as the controversy on the use of an organ in Becskerek at the end of the 1850s. Such local disputes embittered relations within the communities, as the leading rabbinical figures of the area tried to cope, often unsuccessfully, with the pressures created by the emancipation and the process of modernization. Some of them, like Rabbi Oppenheim, the rabbi of Becskerek from 1857, were educated people, with wide horizons, fluent in the languages of the area, and with great experience in guiding their communities through periods of intense crisis.

Jewish community leaders were in close contact with the Hungarian administration, and as a result of these ties, and the pro-Hungarian stance of the Jews, the symbiosis seemed to work, as Jews were more favored than local minorities. However, the rise of Hungarian as well as Serb nationalism served as a warning sign of the dangers the Jews might face.

On the eve of World War I, into which the Jews were drafted as was the case elsewhere in the Dual Monarchy, they were caught in a trap because of their pro-monarchy positions and the growing Serb nationalist agitation. The worsening economic crisis during the war, the doubts cast on their loyalty, and the general atmosphere endangered the 25,000-strong Jewish population as they faced the possibility that their hard-earned role in society would be undermined. The formation of the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia severed this territory from Hungary until 1941, when the fate of the local Jews once again depended on the Hungarian regime.

# Provincial Jewry in Hungary

Victor Karady

Hungarian Jewry became strongly urbanized by the early 20th century compared to all other ethnic groups in the country, with as much as almost one-quarter of the Jewish population living in the capital in 1910.

This proportion rose to more than one half by 1920 after the loss of two-fifths of the territories of the historic state. With the transitory recovery of some of the latter territories between 1939 and 1944, provincial Jewry was once again numerically preponderant (519,000 out of 725,000 according to the 1941 denominational census). This was so even though Jewish converts and those reclassified as Jews by the 1939 Second Jewish Law (of whom there was a much higher proportion in Budapest than in the provinces) were included in the count this time. The Holocaust and the subsequent emigration to Israel and the West, and the concentration in Budapest of the majority of provincial survivors finally destroyed the supremacy of the provinces. The 1949 census, the last to specify denominations, found fewer than 33,000 Jews by religion in the provinces as compared with 101,000 in the capital. Today, provincial Jewry has all but vanished in Hungary, except for a few remnants in certain cities (such as Szeged, Pécs, Debrecen, Miskolc).

The community structure of provincial Jewry differed vastly from that of the capital from the very beginning of the schism initiated at the Jewish Congress of 1868–1869. Whereas in Budapest, the Neologs were predominant from then on (with only 5–8% of local Jewry remaining in the Orthodox fold), outside the capital Orthodoxy prevailed up to the Holocaust in overall membership and number of its communities though these communities were, on the average, much smaller than their Neolog or Status quo ante counterparts.

Division and opposition between Neologs and Orthodox, a central feature of the internal structure of provincial Jewry, fraught with inter-community tensions and conflicts, obeyed a double logic: degrees of urban concentration and socio-economic modernization on the one hand, geographic and cultural origins, on the other.

Orthodoxy remained essentially rural, while Neology was much more, and increasingly, concentrated in cities. Up until the Holocaust, a large proportion of the Orthodox as dispersed in small villages, separate from but mostly living in harmonious socio-economic symbiosis with local Gentiles.

197



197
Interior courtyard in the Új Street of Sopron



198

198
Kosher slaughtering of a lamb in Pográny, Nyitra county, 1911 (Photo by József Ernyey)

In cities, in a manner similar to Budapest, the Orthodox-Neolog division was reflected in the residential pattern of local Jewry, the Orthodox often gathering in a few old-style, ghetto-like streets near their prayerhouses and other ritual institutions, the Neologs choosing central and more modern housing around local business centers. Distance and separation of the Orthodox from Gentiles of comparable social standing was obviously somewhat more marked than for Neolog Jewry, whose leadership and members were closely integrated into the local social network in many towns. Nonetheless, Hassidic *tzaddiks* were venerated as miracle-workers by the Gentile peasantry of their region, just as Neolog scholars celebrities – such as the two Lőws in Szeged – were subjects of local patriotic pride both for the elites and the general population.

As to migration patterns, the bulk of provincial Orthodoxy in the east and the north of the country was characterized by its Galician origins, with Yiddish as their home language. Some of these communities indeed represented extensions of Galician stetl culture in Hungary, typically in Máramaros, Ung, Ugocsa or northern Bereg and Zemplén counties. Elsewhere, especially in some westernmost regions (such as Pozsony, Moson, Nyitra and Sopron counties), strict Orthodoxy prevailed, linked to the Western Orthodox or neo-Orthodox rabbinical tradition with German-Austrian or Moravian type with Yiddish-German as the mother tongue, before the completion of linguistic Magyarization. (Small groups of Sephardic origin can be traced in



199
The main square of Kecskemét, with the synagogue in the background

Transylvania, which also harbored a unique proselyte community converted from Sabbatian Christianity.) While Jews of Galician origin remained on the whole close to their initial settlement area, those of Moravian or Austrian origin tended to move during the 19th century further to the center, the south and even the southeast of the historic kingdom.

The differences between Neologs and the Orthodox on the one hand, Western and Eastern Orthodoxy on the other hand, were expressed in many ways: rituals, linguistic habits, community organization, the power conferred respectively on the rabbi and on lay functionaries, intellectual and spiritual references, etc. But the influence of Hassidism constituted a major line of division. Thus, by spiritual affiliation and also, in part, by geographic and residential establishment, provincial Jewry was formally split into not less than six clusters of unequal and historically fluctuating size: Neolog, Status quo ante, Western and Eastern Orthodox and Hassids proper, to which should be added the growing category of the denominationally indifferent as well as many of the converted Jews – whether offspring of mixed marriages or voluntarily converted. This last group too continued to be defined as Jews by their social milieu, most often on both the Jewish and the non-Jewish side of the denominational barrier. In the inter-war years, the increasing presence of secular Jews was manifest not only in the middle class districts of Budapest, but also in cities of western and central Hungary, like Szeged, Pécs, Szolnok, Székesfehérvár,

Szombathely, Győr, Hódmezővásárhely, Kecskemét and others. This had already been the case for some time in other Neolog-dominated cities which after 1919 came under the rule of successor states, like Nagyvárad, Kolozsvár, Arad, Temesvár, Újvidék, Szabadka, Zombor, etc. More often than not, Neology served as the social framework for secularization, whether it led to a formal break with religious Jewry or was kept within community bounds.

The impact of this complex set-up of religious divisions can be identified by the most relevant social indicators available, like patterns of urbanization (as shown above), but also by those related to demographic behavior, identity management, social mobility and schooling strategies. However, the use of these indicators must be confined in most cases to the examination of the broad Neolog-Orthodox division and some regional divisions, for lack of more precise data permitting the specification of secondary differentiations. At the price of some simplification, such divisions can be interpreted in terms of degrees of "modernization," that is to say, distance from traditional ways – although this is by no means a normative, moral or philosophical evaluation. With significant exceptions, in some instances unique in the annals of world Jewry, Orthodoxy in the Hungarian provinces typically equalled traditionalism, while Neology implied a degree of openness to social innovations. The latter's propensity for modernism indeed vastly surpassed not only that of Orthodox Jewry but also, more importantly, that characteristic of non-Jews of comparable standing in local society. Thus, in most areas of collective enterprise, in the provinces almost as much as in Budapest, Neolog Jewry served as initiator and model for socio-economic or cultural modernization, or at least took an over-proportionate share in the burden (and the occasional benefits) of such activity under the pre-Communist regimes.

The dichotomy between Orthodoxy and Neology was manifest in demographic conduct as well. The norm in Orthodox circles in the inter-war years was stringently-controlled sexuality, endogamy (excluding generally even non-Orthodox Jews as possible marital partners), arranged matches, early age of marriage and large patriarchal family patterns. Neolog urban Jewry, on the other hand, from as early as the turn of the century, started to accept a measure of sexual freedom for young males, individualized matrimonial (as well as sexual) choices, a later age of marriage, a rapid diminution of family size and – less and less infrequently – outmarriage.

Differential attitudes to matrimonial mixing were obviously connected to issues raised by the process of assimilation, which was regarded by those involved – simultaneously or alternatively – as a major chance, a challenge or a menace. The main differences, but also some of the striking analogies, between the social strategies of provincial Neologs and Orthodox lay indeed in the




200
The shop of the Goldstein brothers on Erzsébet Square, Nagykanizsa, 1890s (Photo by József Fodor)

management of public social identity. Observed disparities in this respect offer a far more complicated pattern, not easily reducible to the Orthodox-Neolog division. Clearly enough, Neolog Jewry was marked, in the provinces as well, by enthusiastic adoption of the assimilationist credo of becoming "Magyars of the Mosaic faith," as early as the years preceding and following 1848. The Orthodox were on the whole slower and at first often reluctant to accept the assimilationist social contract proposed for all ethnic aliens by the ruling liberal gentry. However, most of those living within Magyar ethnic frontiers and many even beyond them (in the Great Central Plain, the Western Small Plain, Transdanubia as well as in Transylvanian towns) agreed, initially under pressure, later with growing emotional investment, to profess cultural and political Magyarism, on condition that it did not imply concessions in terms of religious traditionalism.

Thus, by the turn of the 19th century, Neolog Jewry in the provinces had switched almost completely to the Hungarian language in their schools and synagogues, while Orthodoxy had split into two sectors: Magyarizers and cultural traditionalists. By the early 20th century, practically the whole network of Jewish elementary schools in the public sector (whatever their community affiliation) was teaching exclusively in Hungarian. The national language became preponderant in sermons presented in Neolog synagogues, and also began to be introduced in Orthodox prayerhouses as well. Jewish education became the third area to be fully "nationalized," following the two Christian denominations of exclusively Magyar recruitment (Calvinists and Unitarians). In elite secondary schools, Jewish students attained the highest degrees of excellence in subjects of national culture (Latin, Hungarian literature, history) even as compared with the sciences, let alone gymnastics. Eastern Hungarian Jewry was apparently the only sector of world Jewry marked by Hassidic influence with significant cultural achievements

in the local "non-Jewish" language. In Trianon Hungary, linguistic assimilation could be considered indeed as complete even in the most remote communities, allowing for the extended practice of multilinguism among the elderly.

Language switch and cultural assimilation were accompanied, in many communities as far back as 1848, by political identification with Magyar national causes, which, in the pre-1918 Liberal era, generally meant pro-government political conformism and even a measure of "understanding" for some aspects of political anti-Semitism. Magyarized Jews living in territories with non-Magyar majorities before 1918 – in Slovakian or Romanian villages – frequently became in their turn paragons of chauvinistic Magyarization, thus becoming the target of nationalist and anti-Semitic hostility. Jewish soldiers shared the nationalist ardor of their Gentile counterparts for defending Hungary's "thousand year old frontiers" in World War I (also, under the short-lived Soviet experience in 1919). After this, in spite of the White Terror that followed, which claimed hundreds of innocent Jewish victims particularly in the provinces, Jews of all shades sincerely shared in the national mourning for the loss of historic territories, all the more because it often cut across their own larger kinship networks as well. In regions which fell to the successor states, many of the actively contributed to keeping Magyarism alive, often as supporters of the Magyar parties. For this too they were ignominiously rewarded by indiscriminate deportation to Nazi death camps during spring 1944 via the murderous diligence of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie.

Nationalist assimilation, when accompanied by the relaxation of religious discipline, could be conducive to a formal break with Jewry, whether concominant with or independent of mixed marriages. While the Orthodox continued, by and large, to be preserved from the temptations of baptism even under the increasing antisemitic pressure of the inter-war years, Neolog and secular Jewry was less and less protected even in the provinces. The statistical curve of conversions (and sometimes the proportions per population unit as well) in cities like Szeged, Pécs and elsewhere in Central Hungary closely followed that of the capital, mostly (if not exclusively) as a response to the growing tide of anti-Jewish hysteria.

There are only scant indications of the specific ideological orientation of provincial Jews, particularly as regards Zionism and the universalist political salvation doctrines (like socio-democracy and communism). Most of them suggest that the more Jews were estranged from traditional identity, the more they were liable to join such movements alien to and mostly rejected by local community authorities. Communism and social-democracy appealed to many




201
Delicatessen in Piac Street, Debrecen (1910s)

converts or secular Jews who often found in them efficient alternative frameworks for much desired social integration and solidarity, indifferent to their Jewish background, for which they were stigmatized elsewhere. As for Zionism, even if no hard data are extant on the regional origins of the few Hungarian immigrants in Palestine in the inter-war years (a mere 4,600 over two and a half decades, many fewer than the number of converts in Budapest in a single year such as 1919 or 1938), there are scattered indications that provincial Jews were more inclined to develop Zionist expectations than those in Budapest. This appears to be particularly true of erstwhile Magyar assimilated Neologs in Transylvania, Vajdaság and Slovakia. For them, Zionist identity offered a prospect of escaping the assimilationist pressure of the successor state, resisting local anti-Semitic policies (especially in Romania), and coming to terms (intellectually and politically) with state-supported anti-Semitism in their former mother country. It also enabled them, under the aegis of a great collective project, to establish a new type of togetherness in which traditional links, such as religion, were henceforth considered not only invalid but even detrimental and divisive.

Identity options and ideological orientations as well as institutionalized community ties were heavily influenced by economic and professional standing and prospects of mobility. The

Orthodox-Neolog division was notably manifest in the contrasting patterns of social stratification of provincial Jews. But in the provinces, just as in Budapest, the main demarcation in this respect followed the line of separation between those adhering to traditional professions (local or regional trade, agriculture, crafts, petty industry, religious service) and those who responded to the new market opportunities emerging in the wake of the post-feudal economic boom or to the opening up for Jews of old Gentile professions after Emancipation.

Thus Eastern Orthodoxy remained strongly rural while Western Orthodoxy was marked by the high proportion of small self-employed and a few members of modern academic professions. Among those registered to commit themselves to the observance of the Sabbath in 1926 there was not one (!) medical practitioner, lawyer or other intellectual from outside Budapest. Thus, on the whole, the social basis of Orthodoxy remained economically also very traditional. Neolog and secular Jews, on the contrary, chose – indeed often created by way of entrepreneurial innovation – new avenues of upward mobility. These avenues led them, if they succeeded, to the professions, banking, big industry, wholesale trade as well as to emerging fields of cultural production (filmmaking, publishing, art trade, photography, etc.); if they failed, they swelled the ranks of the urban proletariat. Thus, in Neolog provincial cities, one could find a relatively high proportion of middle class employees and the self-employed – executives in industry and trade as well as independent professionals and a sizable number of manual workers, though the proportion of the latter was lower than in Orthodox towns. The socio-economic set-up of Neolog regions was indeed close to that of Budapest Jewry, often with an even higher proportion of intellectuals among the professionally active. This explains why in professional chambers of lawyers and doctors, even in the inter-war years, provincial Jews maintained almost as strong positions as earlier, or as their Budapest coreligionists. In 1940, after twenty years of academic Numerus Clausus and the beginning of the infamous Aryanization process, 44% of provincial lawyers were still Jewish. Among physicians, proportions were lower by that time, but in 1941, 23% of the provincial medical staff was still Jewish, mostly active in cities.

Differences in professional stratification largely parallelled variations in schooling strategies. On the level of compulsory schooling (from 6 to 12 years of age according to the 1868 Law on primary education), the ultra-Orthodox tended to resist secularization, keeping exclusively to the *heder* and the yeshiva. This was typically the case in Máramaros where no Jewish schools of public status were founded up to World War I and where the general rate of illiteracy in an official national language (outside Yiddish or Hebrew) remained 65% in 1910, compared to the very low nationwide Jewish average of 13%. The Magyarized Orthodox accepted Magyar curricula,

notably in their own primary or lower secondary schools (*Bürgerschule*), particularly when they could combine it for their young males with complementary yeshiva education, but they tended to refrain from higher secular elite education. Neologs were divided on this issue. In most provinces they were eager to set up their own network of public primary schools, which were not infrequently attended by Christian children as well, due to their acknowledged pedagogical standards. Elsewhere, in some Neolog cities outside Budapest, many Jewish parents (mostly secular Jews) sought education for their offspring in state-run, municipal or even Christian schools, when accessible.

But the Neolog-Orthodox division became most striking on the advanced level. In 1910 in Máramaros, less than 2% of Jewish males had spent more than eight years in a classroom (with at least four years of high school), which compared very unfavorably to the extremely high nationwide Jewish average of 22%, mounting to 32% in towns with a Neolog majority. The latter indeed tended to build high public educational attainments into their strategies of social mobility both in terms of quantitative and qualitative "overschooling." Recent research has shown that in high schools of cities like Szeged, Kiskunhalas, Jászberény and others, Jewish scholarly excellence far exceeded that of their Gentile fellow students (except for Lutherans). Their academic performances were particularly striking in foreign languages (German and Latin) and in "verbal" and "national" subjects. Neolog schooling choices often followed assimilationist strategies proper via enrollment, whenever possible, in Christian secondary schools, for example those run by the Lutheran or Calvinist Churches or the Piarist Fathers (as in Szeged), even when state schools were accessible. However, in the inter-war years most Church authorities introduced segregationist recruitment policies in their high schools directed against all candidates of a different religion. This was implemented first by the Catholics and lastly by the Lutherans. Thus, it became increasingly difficult for Jews to realise their aspirations for advanced learning, already curbed in Hungarian universities by the 1920 Numerus Clausus law, anywhere but in state high schools. These remained fully operational until 1939 and, with limitations, afterwards (there was a 6% Jewish quota for the newly-enrolled students). It should be noted that the provincial universities (the Medical Faculty of Pécs for Szeged, or example) were affected less severely by the academic Numerus Clausus and the not less ignominious incidents of "Jew-beating" staged by anti-Semitic student corporations, than those of the capital.

Thus, it may be seen that, on the whole, the social condition of provincial Jewry did not differ fundamentally from that of Budapest Jews, once the self-defined spiritual and professional constituencies inside local Jewry is distinguished.

202
View of Szolnok with the synagogue
(Postcard, 1930s)

203
The synagogue of Kecskemét, damaged by the 1911 earthquake

204
Pécs, Majláth Square, with the synagogue in the background (Postcard pre-1910)



202

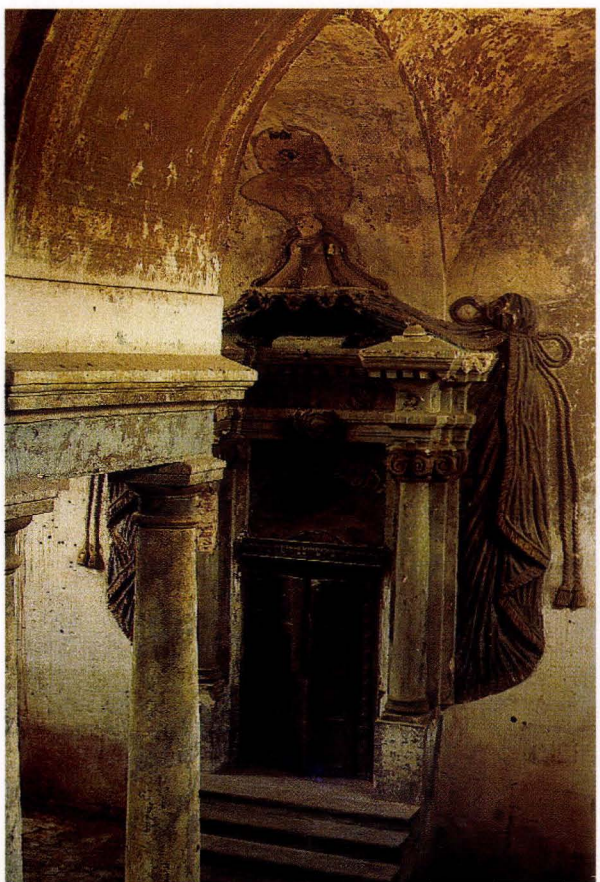


203



204

205



206





207

205
Ark of the Baroque synagogue
in Bonyhád
(Photo by Ágnes Takách)

206
The synagogue of Zalaegerszeg,
detail of the painted wall
(Archive photo)

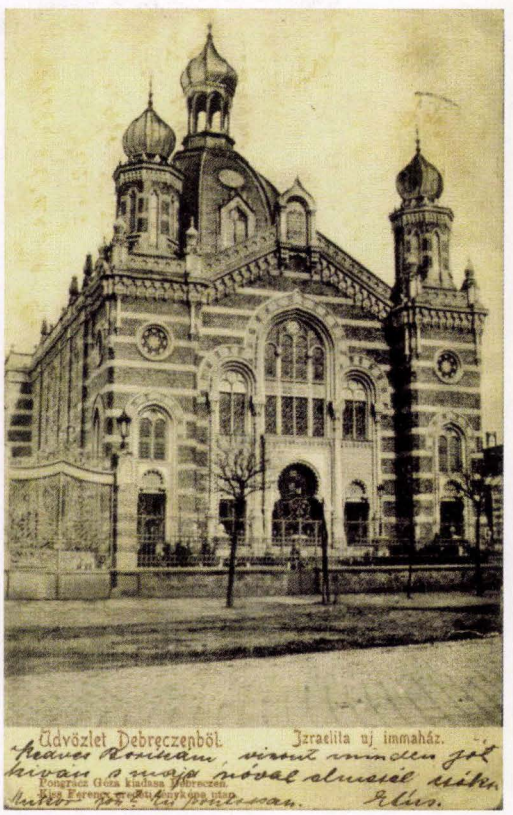
207
The synagogue in Hódmezővásárhely
(Photo by Ágnes Takách)

208
Interior of the Orthodox synagogue
in Miskolc
(Photo by Ágnes Takách)

209
The synagogue of Debrecen
(Postcard, 1900s)

208






209



# Jewish Wedding Customs in the Sub-Carpathian Region

Miklós Rékai

*Be thou the mother of thousands of ten thousands...*
(Gen. 24: 60)

First, let me review, in brief, ethnographic research on Jewish life in Hungary. An appeal for research into Jewish folklore was first made by Max Grunwald, a Hamburg rabbi, in 1896. The collections which were assembled on the basis of his questionnaire and its specifications formed the backbone of the periodical he later launched (*Mitteilungen zur Jüdischen Volkskunde*) of which thirty-two volumes appeared in all. His contemporaries cautioned the editor to be careful to avoid even the suspicion of representing a *"völkisch"* ideology (which was later to become one of the main sources of inspiration of Nazi ideology). Hungarian rabbis and such prominent scholars as Ignác Goldziher frowned on this ideology since, in purely Jewish terms, any attempt to study folklore – regarded as an element of religion – from the perspective of secular scholarship was considered nothing less than blasphemy. One instructive example in this respect is Bertalan Kohlbach who, although a rabbi, was interested in folklore, and was compelled to defend himself in 1910, after lecturing at a meeting of the *Izraelita Magyar Irodalmi Társulat* (IMIT – Jewish Hungarian Literary Society) since he had approached this problem by neglecting the religious aspects. ("One or other of the points I raise may be problematic but in the end the conclusions I reach are not, but still, the conclusions I reach can scarcely be regarded as *halakha*.")

One may ask why the institutions of Hungarian ethnography, mostly created at the close of the 19th century, did not feel that this subject was their concern, in spite of the fact that its scholarly importance could hardly be challenged. One answer to this question is that in Hungary – similarly to other countries of Europe – Jewry was defined as a religious denomination at the time of its Emancipation. This concept is rooted in the legislation of Napoleonic France, which declared that "nothing for Jewry as a nation and everything as a denomination." This general and, at the time, liberal legal principle was adopted in Hungary. Jewry was regarded as a religious denomination and since ethnography did not consider the research of denominational cultures as its task, Jewish folklore was simply ignored.

Even so, some attempts were made to research "Jewish folkways." In 1899 IMIT published an appeal and questionnaire, put together by the linguist József Balassa. He urged that this work be

210
Itinerant merchant buying hemp, Debrecen, 1940
(Photo by Sándor Gönyei)

211



212



commenced, since he feared that the traditional lifestyle of Hungarian Jews would simply disappear in the fervor of assimilation. His contemporaries believed his undertaking to be totally impracticable, either because they believed that there was nothing to record or because there was too much to be done. Although systematic research was never actually carried out, an impressive ethnographic corpus was nonetheless published in various Jewish weeklies and other periodicals and, not least, in a variety of literary works. The systematic analysis and evaluation of this immense body of material remains a task still to be accomplished.

Professor Sándor Scheiber, who in countless studies offered an interpretation of various folkloric phenomena from a philological point of view, noted bitterly after the Holocaust that the pessimistic prophecy had come true: no systematic research work had been done, when this was still possible.

In fact, however, the traditional Jewish culture still survives in Hungary among the elderly, and the main problem is the lack of researchers with a suitable background in Jewish studies. To this should be added the sensitivity of the elderly Jewish population to extraneous observation by some scholar interested in their past. Thus, the study of the living culture of one of the major Jewish communities in Europe calls for acquisition of the proper knowledge by researchers and great sensitivity towards the subjects of the research.

As a researcher in the Ethnographic Museum of Budapest, I have conducted research since 1991 in the Sub-Carpathian region that today is part of the Ukraine. The following study covers my experiences in that region and offers a summary of the data I have published in various articles.

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Sometime in the 1930s, one spring morning, the Jews of Munkács were preparing for joyful festivities. None other than the famed Rabbi Eliezer Shapira, the legendary *tzaddik*, was marrying off his daughter. The town was decked in flowers, a wooden gate was erected at the entrance of the street where the *kale*, the bride, lived, and the inscription *Mazl tov!*, woven from flowers, was set above the wooden gate. Blue and white ribbons were woven into the manes of the horses pulling the carriages of the wedding procession. The wedding ceremony was followed by a celebration lasting for seven days to which all the notables and Hassidim of the region, had been invited.

Jewish life flourished in this region, on the periphery of the Hungarian linguistic area, the "Jerusalem of Upper Hungary" as it was called on an old postcard, since the largest religious denomination of the town – with its population of 17,000 – was the Jewish community. According

to the 1910 census, forty-four percent of the town's population followed the Mosaic religion. Traders and artisans formed the backbone of local Jewish society; most families also owned some land, but even so, about two-thirds of the Jewish population did not have a permanent means of livelihood. Another important point is that seventy percent of the local Jews professed to be Hungarian-speaking in 1921, the others named Yiddish, Slovakian, Ukrainian or Polish as their mother-tongue. Yiddish, the *mame loshn* spoken by all, was the lingua franca between the different Jewish groups, a tongue spoken also by many other non-Jewish ethnic groups in the region. The Hassidic spirit essentially defined the religious life of the town.

213



There were few opportunities for choosing a marriage partner in the old ghettos. The social life of the young people was kept within narrow limits – the strict endogamy in the Jewish communities was based on biblical precepts – and contact between them was limited for reasons of propriety. Strict rules regulated possible marriage between young people who were related. Jewish marriages were customarily arranged by the parents, who often employed the services of the *shadchen*, the matchmaker. In many places, this role was played by older widows who knew many people and were privy to the latest news, and thus life in the old ghettos would have been practically unimaginable without them. Many people turned to the *shadchen* for counsel even if they did not actually need his/her services. The groom's family paid their fees. More well-to-do families often sought a partner for their child from a scholar's court. The arrangement of such – no doubt rare – marriages brought a high reward for the *shadchen* and also enhanced his or her fame.

No coercion was permitted in choosing a partner since Jewish religious precepts expressly forbade this. Divorce, however, was permitted by the *halakha*, though not encouraged, when the marriage failed. The *get* is in fact a ceremony in the course of which the husband hands over a bill of divorcement to his wife in the presence of three rabbis. Its text was strictly regulated and it was only valid if there were no mistakes in it.

211
Cutting the bread (Postcard)

212
Hassid from Máramarossziget

213
Family portrait
(Photo by Homonnai)

The traditional community did not tolerate mixed marriages and it was the custom even in the recent past for parents whose children wed non-Jews or non-observant Jews to sit *shiva* to mourn the loss of a child. This was a symbolic punishment imposed on those who had abandoned the community.

Traditional wedding celebrations are now rare in the Sub-Carpathian region since most of the young people have moved away from their home towns. The elderly few still remember well the traditional customs, and when required, they practice them and adapt them to changing circumstances. In the marriage customs described below one can discern traces of age old tradition with several innovations.

Preparations for the wedding begin well before the actual ceremony. The groom, the *hatan* (*khosn*), is called to the Torah on the day before the wedding, enabling him to recite the preliminary blessing – both an obligation and an honor. The groom is then showered with sweetmeats and pieces of colored paper, confetti. The older generation still recalls that "at the time when we still had real Jewish life here" they showered the groom with small pieces of chocolate and paper figures of birds and fish, symbols of the sweetness and happiness of married life. Younger girls vied with each other during the *bevarfenolás* (*bavarfn*) for the sweets, since catching one was a good omen for imminent marriage.

In the meantime, the *kale* visits the *mikveh* for the first time. The ritual bath is usually located in a wooden shed in the backyard. The *kale* marks her new status by immersing herself in the *mikveh*; the same is true of her future husband. The couple's recitation of the *vidduy*, the prayer for repentance, before the wedding and their fast also symbolize their change in status. The fast is a reflection of the rabbinical teaching that a wedding is equal to Yom Kippur. Although the *vidduy* is no longer recited, the custom of fasting is still practiced.

A Jewish wedding may be held on any day, with the exception of certain fast days and days of mourning when it is forbidden to purchase any property. The roots of this precept can no doubt be sought in the symbolic act of acquisition with a marriage and in the fact that the groom came into possession of the dowry at this time, even if with certain limitations. Tuesdays were especially favored days for holding weddings since the words "And God saw that it was good" occur twice in the biblical narrative of the third day of Creation. Days with a full moon are also considered a good omen for weddings. However, most weddings are now held on Sundays for practical reasons.

In the old days, one of the most important events was the cutting of the bride's hair on the day after the wedding ceremony. Every observant woman wore a wig or a kerchief throughout her life. According to Jewish belief, the demon of sexual temptation resides in the hair and thus the shearing of the bride's hair served to preserve the purity of marriage. Very few women in the Diaspora cut off their hair today, since this act evokes the horrors of the concentration camps.

The bachelor party for the groom, called *forshpil*, was held after the Sabbath *aliyah* in the synagogue. Today the *forshpil* is little more than a blessing recited over a glass of wine and a slice of cake. It was customary to break a *mazltopf*, a good-luck vessel – usually a cup or a bowl. The vessel was inscribed with a Hebrew text, "The voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride." Unmarried girls usually kept shards from these vessels, since these promised an early marriage. The Jews of Munkács usually hold the *forshpil* on the day of the wedding, before the ceremony, but they no longer break a vessel.

The wedding ceremony was held in the court of the synagogue or in the courtyard of the bride's or groom's parents, under the open sky, to symbolize the promise made to Abraham, that his offspring shall be as countless as the stars in heaven. The men spread out a heavy canopy of red velvet, decorated with gold fringes and a Magen David. In most communities the *huppah* (*hüpe*) is supported by ornately carved, heavy wooden posts. In less wealthy communities the *huppah* rests on four slender poles held by the men of the community. It is considered a great honor to be asked to hold the canopy. In antiquity it was customary to plant a cedar tree when a boy child was born and a cypress tree for the birth of a girl. The trees were cut down before the wedding and carved into posts supporting the *huppah*. In Hungary the *huppah* was usually a gift given by the women's association active in the community, as shown by the embroidered inscriptions.

While the men busy themselves with setting up the *huppah*, the groom makes his way to his bride's home. The *kale* sits on a "throne"' made especially for the occasion, receiving the good wishes and gifts of relatives and friends.

The *hatan* takes up his place at his future wife's side wearing a white shirt and a white *kippa*. His costume reflects the customs of the strictly observant communities: the groom used to wear a *kittli* (*kitl*), a white garment symbolizing the shroud on the wedding day, and on his head he wore a *hajbli*, a funerary cap. The evocation of mourning is one of the most characteristic elements of Jewish festivities: no festivity or celebration is complete without remembrance of the destruction of the Temple.

The groom covers his bride's face with a white veil (*bedekol, badekn*), an act signifying that he can only glimpse his wife's face on their wedding day. It was once customary at Ashkenazi weddings for the bride, sitting on the throne, and the guests to listen to the *marshalik*'s mournful-joyful song – the *kale bazingen* – about the bride's future sorry fate.

The couple is then led to the wedding canopy separately by the *unterfurers*. Before the bride takes her place beside the groom, she circles him seven times, symbolically tying her beloved to herself.

The ceremony proper begins with recitation of the *Kiddush*, the blessing over wine under the *huppah* by the rabbi conducting the ceremony.

The recital of the seven blessings is an important moment in the wedding ceremony. Although the order and the text of the blessings vary from region to region, the matriarchs, Rachel, Rebecca and Leah are invariably mentioned. The bridegroom's blessing as he hands over the wedding ring "Behold, thou are consecrated to me with this ring, according to the Law of Moses and Israel," is the culmination of the ceremony. The *ketuba* (marriage contract), which has been signed by two witnesses and specifies the obligations and rights of the couple, is then read out, whereby the marriage became valid. The bridegroom then crushes a glass, wrapped in white cloth, in remembrance of the destruction of the Temple. The shards of broken glass are also considered good omen for marriage, and in some regions unmarried girls used to set these shards in silver and wear them. The breaking of the glass is greeted by shouts of *Mazl tov!* from the guests.

Although religious law does not require this, a *minyan* usually gathers for the wedding, holding candles. The candle may often symbolize remembrance of the couple's deceased parents, but the custom is observed even when the parents are present. Before the Holocaust, the final act of the ceremony was the knocking together of two loaves of *barchesz* (braided challah) above the heads of the couple as they left the *huppah*, to wish them a prosperous life.

In actual fact, only the Hassidim celebrated weddings for seven consecutive days in remembrance of Jacob's years of servitude for his two wives. The memory of the old Hassidic weddings is still alive in Munkács, and the elderly still recall how the *tzaddikim* used to distribute food they had blessed among the guests.

The custom of eating gefilte fish at weddings can be traced to antiquity since fish symbolizes fertility. The bridegroom used to deliver a sermon to the guests and in return was given a gift – a *drasha-gashenk*. It was the *marshalik*'s duty to announce the wedding presents, while making sarcastic comments on the parsimony of the guests.

One of the high moments of the wedding was the performance by the *Klezmorim*, Jewish musicians. Fragments of their vast musical repertoire can still be found in present-day *klezmer* bands. Their music accompanied the *mitzva* or kerchief dance, which the bride danced with the groom and the community notables, while holding a kerchief between them for modesty's sake. The *marshaliks* made mocking comments to tease the dancers. At Hassidic weddings the dances also included the *brojgez tants* (quarrel dance), the *klaper tants* (clapping dance), and the *kojlics tanc* performed with challah in hand and a bottle of wine balanced on the head.

Old *klezmer* music is now performed at very few weddings in the Sub-Carpathian region. It has been replaced by modern music – reflecting how the rich world of the past is often no more than a playful tradition for today's young people.

214
*Hochzeits-Mützve-Taenzel* (Postcard)



# Yiddish in Hungary

Vera Szabó

For an entire millennium, until the eve of World War II, Yiddish was the language spoken by the majority of Ashkenazi Jewry in eastern Europe. Though there were numerous Yiddish publications before, it was in the second part of the 19th century that a secular Yiddish culture began to flourish, with hundreds of periodicals, thousands of books, Yiddish films, theater and even a Yiddish-language secular school system.

Hungary was not part of this late, but all the more important, development of Yiddish. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise and the Emancipation Act of 1867, Hungarian Jewry underwent serious social changes, one aspect of which was the linguistic assimilation from Yiddish and German to Hungarian. The pace and extent of this change varied in the different territories of Greater Hungary and in the different segments of Jewry. In general, we could say that the Neologs, the socially progressive and more prosperous Jews embraced Hungarian while the Orthodox adhered to Yiddish. More Yiddish was spoken in Burgenland, Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia and Transylvania, *oyberland* and *interland*, than in Hungary proper, *mameland*.

The Yiddish spoken in Hungary was not uniform from a linguistic point of view. Three of the four most important dialects were represented here: Western Yiddish, Polish and Ukrainian Yiddish.

Some attempts were made to publish Yiddish periodicals, mostly in Transylvania between the 1890s and the 1930s. Among them were *Marmarosher yidishe tsaytung*, *Yidishe folkstsaytung*, *Di varheyt*, *Di yidishe folksblat*, *Yidishes blat*, *Sigeter tsaytung*, *Der shtern*, and *Oyfgang*. Most of these were, however, fairly short-lived, and even the most committed of editors, Dezső Schön, was forced to realize that Yiddish publications had no prospects: the Zionists read Hebrew, assimilated and secular circles read Hungarian and those who cared about Yiddish were not customers for secular literature. He turned to Hungarian journalism and became the editor of *Új Kelet*. The only significant Hungarian Yiddish poet was József Holder. A poet in his own right, he also translated some pieces of Hungarian literature into Yiddish, including *Di tragedye funem mentshn (The Tragedy of Man)*, the major Hungarian national drama by Imre Madách.

Nevertheless, Yiddish was a spoken language in Hungary, albeit by an ever-decreasing number of people and mostly Orthodox Jews, until as late as the 1950s. It was used at home, in the




215
From Lipót Herman's series, commemorating sayings and proverbs common among Hungarian Jewish families, "A young widow is much better then an old maid"

synagogue and often in the street, too. Yiddish was the language of study in the *heder* and in the yeshiva. As late as the 1940s, the Torah, *di toyre mit rashi* was still "translated" into Yiddish, even in some of those yeshivot where the students did not understand Yiddish. And in some homes, though Hungarian was spoken during the week, on *shabes*, the holy Sabbath, the family reverted to Yiddish at home, granting it the status of "holy tongue" – an attitude carried on by some Hungarian Hassidim to the present day.

Written and recorded proof that Yiddish was once spoken by Hungarian Jews is provided today by three major sources. The *Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry*, has recording of inteviews conducted in the 1950s in New York and Jerusalem among eastern European immigrants; József Bihari and C. J. Hutterer circulated questionnaires and prepared recordings of Yiddish in the early 1960s in Hungary; and the scholarly journal *Magyar Zsidó Szemle* collected and published Yiddish folkloric materials in the first part of the 20th century. These materials served as a basis for the linguistic analyses of Hungarian Yiddish.

The folkloric material published in *Magyar Zsidó Szemle* reveals the richness of the Yiddish spoken in Hungary, and indicates the various places, social groups and situations where Yiddish was used. The numerous Yiddish songs (e.g., lullabies, Purim songs, wedding songs, Hassidic and non-Hassidic songs, etc.), folktales, comedies (among them a Haskalah comedy, *Der falshe kashtan* by M. G. Saphir), parodies and ballads, including a Yiddish parody of Schiller's *Das Lied von der Glocke* by Mechele Marshalik, the most famous wedding jester of Transylvania, proverbs, sayings, local mock-names, funny table-rhymes, riddles, idiomatic phrases, collected from all over Hungary, constitute a memorial to the Yiddish once spoken by Hungarian Jews.


ZSIDÓK
EVEI SE
TILOS

# Anti-Semitism in the Inter-War Period

Raphael Vago

The anti-Semitic tendencies in Hungarian society took a dangerous turn for the worse in the inter-war years. The fact that this change would ultimately lead to the annihilation of the Jewish community was not yet evident to those who lived the drama. Whereas the extreme policies adopted during World War II – the anti-Jewish legislation and policies, the German pressures, the phases of the deportations and the extermination of large parts of Hungarian Jewry – were all well-documented and analyzed, the same is not true of the stages in the process whereby Hungarian society gradually removed and expelled the Jews from the social, economic, cultural life of the country. The rise of anti-Semitism and its impact in the inter-war period was often an elusive process rather than a constant and clear progression towards an inevitable fate.

In the inter-war period, Hungarian Jewish life was conducted in the shadow of the growing trend towards radicalization, right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism, which were now deeply rooted in Hungarian society. On the one hand, there was an impressive Jewish presence in all walks of life. On the other hand, it may well be that it was this very presence, namely the achievements and influence of Hungarian Jewry, that created the nationalist and anti-Semitic backlash and reinforced the demand for the banishment of the Jews from the country's social and economic life.

One of the major ideological and cultural trends in Hungary was the populist movement (*népies*) which sought to return to the "authentic values" of the Hungarian nation, and to rejuvenate the "pure national spirit," based on national traditions, and on simple, rural, pre-industrial values. The populists idealized a past which was more reinvented than based on reality, and rejected the "foreign body" – mainly the Jews – which had disrupted the delicate equilibrium within Hungarian society. Modern urban reality was perceived by them as a source of society's sins and evils, and Budapest, where a quarter of the population was Jewish, was perceived as a symbol of corruption, of Jewish greed and its destructive impact of the Hungarian soul. In his novel, *Az elsodort falu* (*The Village that Drifted*), published in 1919, Dezső Szabó, one of the major literary figures of the period, mourned the demise of the pure Hungarian village because of destabilization by foreign forces, and the rise of the urban, bourgeois Jewish society. As was the case with similar

216
Endre Bálint's drawing,
"Feeding the Jews is forbidden" (1938-1941)

217



M. kir. belügyminiszter

ad.256.836/1939.
II.a

Állampolgársági bizonyítvány.

1 9 3 4

A rendelkezésemre álló hiteles adatok alapján bizonyítom, hogy az Esztergom vármegyei Párkány községben az 1903.évi október hó 29.napján született STEINER SÁNDOR ISTVÁN Budapesti lakos magyar állampolgár.

Budapest,1939.évi március hó 21.-én.

A miniszter rendeletéből:

miniszteri tanácsos.

218



község / város — A személyi lap száma

népmozgalmi nyilvántartójától — budapesti kerület

**Polgári személyi lap**

részére.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Azonossági száma: | | | | |
| 2 | Szülőanyjának leánykori, családi és utóneve: | | | | |
| 3 | Születésének | ideje | | | |
| | | helye | | | |
| 4 | Vallása | | 5 | A törvényes rendelkezések szerint zsidónak tekintendő-e? | |
| 6 | Foglalkozása (állása, alkalmaztatása) | | | | |
| 7 | Szakképzettsége (tanult mestersége, képesítése) | | | | |

557 r. sz.

217
Citizenship document bearing the seal of the Hungarian Royal Ministry of Interior (March 21, 1939)

218
Identification paper. The questionnaire includes the question, "Are you to be regarded as a Jew according to the regulations?"

intellectual trends in Germany, the Hungarian populists were preoccupied with the racial purity of the Hungarian nation in the face of the foreign, Jewish onslaught. But it was not only the urban middle classes that were bitterly criticized by the populists. They targeted Marxism too, as "alien to the Hungarian spirit." Thus, from two different angles, anti-capitalist and anti-Marxist, the Jews were stereotyped as an alien and foreign body that must be removed from Hungarian society.

Such views were echoed in the writings of the well known cultural historian Gyula Szekfű, who, in his book, *Három nemzedék* (*Three Generations*), attacked the destructive elements in Hungarian society, namely Jewish capitalism, the liberalism of the "foreigners" and the decadence and corruption of modern urban civilization. Szekfű depicted the Jew as the destructive element undermining Hungarian society from within. He decried the economic power of the Jews and their grip on Hungarian social and cultural life since the 19th century and called for their removal from positions of influence. However, with the introduction of the Jewish Laws at the end of the thirties, which were partly based on his ideas, Szekfű retracted some of his views. Yet, there is no doubt that such works as *Three Generations* had a destructive impact, as the antisemitism with which they were imbued shaped the ideals of a generation whose political culture perceived the Jews as an existential danger to the future of the Hungarian nation.

Hungary was the first European state to promulgate a Numerus Clausus law (1920), which limited the number of Jews in institutions of higher learning to five percent, their proportion within the general population. The law came as a great shock to Hungary's Jews and aroused opposition abroad, and the Hungarian regime gradually decided to mitigate it, not because of any relaxation of antisemitic tendencies, but rather due to practical political considerations. The years of István Bethlen's premiership 1921–1932, the era of consolidation, were marked by an attempt to stabilize Hungary's situation. Anti-Semitic tendencies were checked, as the regime took care to minimize outbursts which might harm Hungary's image. However, beneath the surface, antisemitic and racist ideas continued to infiltrate all strata of Hungarian society, and very soon emerged overtly as well.

Italian Fascism had a great influence on the world outlook of Gyula Gömbös, who served as prime minister from 1932–1936. Officially the Gömbös' regime defined itself as "fascist and totalitarian." This did not prevent Gömbös from reaching a modus vivendi

with the Hungarian Jewish leadership, which supported the regime's political and economic policies. The upper echelons of the Hungarian elite around Admiral Horthy attempted to downplay the destructive allure of Italian Fascism and German Nazism, but the trend towards extremism and the intensification of antisemitism clearly reached deeper into Hungarian society.

Organizations such as the Awakening Hungarians, which advocated racist and extremist antisemitic ideas, were responsible for several acts of terror and murder aimed against Jews and Jewish targets. Although such acts endangered the stability of the regime, little was done by the authorities to clamp down on extremists. Influenced by Nazi ideology, several groups sprung up which called for a Hungarian "racial democracy" as opposed to the "decadent Jewish democracy." Although, initially, such groups appeared to be marginal and without public influence, extremist ideas had an cumulative effect. The relentless and effective anti-Semitic propaganda denied the Jewish contribution to Hungarian society and strengthened the stereotype of the "parasitic Jew." The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were published in Hungary in 1934, and in presenting this forgery, Zoltán Bosnyák, one of the most vehement and vitriolic anti-Semites in Hungary, wrote that since the First Zionist Congress in Basel, world Jewry had succeeded in implementing most of its plans for taking over the Western world, through Jewish capital and the leftist revolutionary movement. The mushrooming right-wing press reiterated the myth of the "moral and racial regeneration of the Hungarian race," as it called for a relentless struggle against Jewish influence. Social Democrats in Parliament and outside were cautious in their response to the rising voices of the extreme right, and Hungarian public figures and the media also warned against this upsurge of extremism. In spite of such stances, the campaign against the Jews took on alarming forms, and became a constant factor in the country's political and public life. Jewish reaction to the alarming signs was slow to develop, and it seems that the Jewish leadership and the public were somewhat passive in their response because the expansion of extremism and antisemitism and their penetration into the national discourse were gradual processes. The fact that until the late thirties the regime did not pursue an active and open antisemitic line may have influenced the nature of the Jewish reaction.

In 1935, the Fascist Arrow Cross movement made its appearance in the political arena, initially as the Party of National Will, led by Ferenc Szálasi, a general staff officer with extreme right-wing views. From its early stages it was clear that the Arrow Cross was

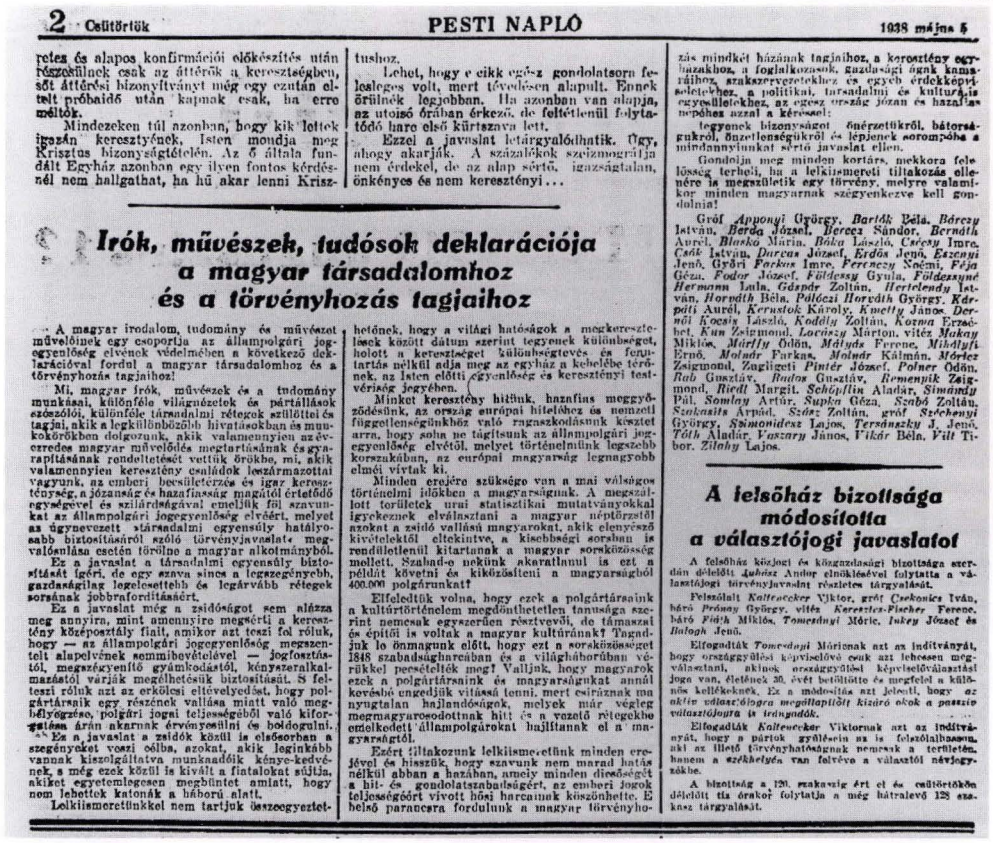



219
Anti-Semitic election poster

the most dynamic and extremist movement in the wide spectrum of Hungarian nationalist and extremist groups. The Jewish question was already at the center of its 1935 platform. The movement called for racial laws in the Nazi style, and for the "elimination of the Jewish mentality, present in all fields of life." The Arrow Cross called for drastic and practical steps against Jews, such as the banishment from Hungary of all Jews who had entered the country after World War I, and for the expropriation of Jewish capital. It rapidly penetrated the middle class and the working class and gained some twenty-five percent of the votes in the 1939 elections, becoming the major opposition party in the country. The electoral success served as an indication of the mood of wide segments of Hungarian society.

The Horthy regime made several attempts to block the advance of the extreme right, but the actions of the government were sporadic, ineffective and came too late. The Hungarian regime drifted towards antisemitism, and as the special relationship with Germany became more intense, the ground was prepared for the First Jewish Law of

220



2 Csütörtök PESTI NAPLÓ 1938 május 5

retes és alapos konfirmációi előkészítés után részesülnek csak az áttérők a keresztségben, sőt áttérési bizonyítványt még egy ezután eltelt próbaidő után kapnak csak, ha erre méltók.

Mindezeken túl azonban, hogy kik lettek igazán keresztyének, Isten mondja meg Krisztus bizonyságtételén. Az ő általa fundált Egyház azonban egy ilyen fontos kérdésnél nem hallgathat, ha hű akar lenni Krisztushoz.

Lehet, hogy e cikk egész gondolatsora felesleges volt, mert tévedésen alapult. Ennek örülnék legjobban. Ha azonban van alapja, az utolsó órában érkező, de feltétlenül folytatódó harc első kürtszava lett.

Ezzel a javaslat letárgyalódhatik. Úgy, ahogy akarják. A százalékok szelvénygrafja nem érdekel, de az alap sértő, igazságtalan, önkényes és nem keresztényi...

## Irók, művészek, tudósok deklarációja a magyar társadalomhoz és a törvényhozás tagjaihoz

A magyar irodalom, tudomány és művészet művelőinek egy csoportja az állampolgári jogegyenlőség elvének védelmében a következő deklarációval fordul a magyar társadalomhoz és a törvényhozás tagjaihoz!

Mi, magyar írók, művészek és a tudomány munkásai, különféle világnézetek és pártállások szószólói, különféle társadalmi rétegek szülöttei és tagjai, akik a legkülönbözőbb hivatásokban és munkakörökben dolgozunk, akik valamennyien az évezredes magyar művelődés megtartásának és gyarapításának rendeltetését vettük örökbe, mi, akik valamennyien keresztény családok leszármazottai vagyunk, az emberi becsületérzés és igaz kereszténység, a józanság és hazafiasság magától értetődő egységével és szilárdságával emeljük fel szavunkat az állampolgári jogegyenlőség ügyében, melyet az ügyenevezett társadalmi egyensúly hatályosabb biztosításáról szóló törvényjavaslat megvalósulása esetén törölne a magyar alkotmányból.

Ez a javaslat a társadalmi egyensúly biztosítását ígéri, de egy szava sincs a legszegényebb, gazdaságilag legelesettebb és legárvább rétegek sorsának jobbraforditásáért.

Ez a javaslat még a zsidóságot sem alázza meg annyira, mint amennyire megsérti a keresztény középosztály fiait, amikor azt teszi fel róluk, hogy — az állampolgári jogegyenlőség megszentelt alapelvének semmibevételével — jogfosztástól, megszégyenítő gyámkodástól, kényszeralkalmazástól varrják megélhetésük biztosítását. S feltételezi róluk azt az erkölcsi eltévelyedést, hogy polgártársaik egy részének vallása miatt való megbélyegzése, polgári jogai teljességéből való kiforgatása áran akarnak érvényesülni és boldogulni.

Ez a javaslat a zsidók közül is elsősorban a szegényeket veszi célba, azokat, akik leginkább vannak kiszolgáltatva munkaadóik kénye-kedvének, s még ezek közül is kivált a fiatalokat sújtja, akiket egyetemisegesen megbüntet amiatt, hogy nem lehettek katonák a háború alatt.

Lelkiismeretünkkel nem tartjuk összeegyeztethetőnek, hogy a vilá'zi hatóságok a megkeresztelések között dátum szerint tegyenek különbséget, holott a keresztséget különbségtevés és fenntartás nélkül adja meg az egyház a kebelébe térőnek, az Isten előtti egyenlőség és keresztényi testvériség jegyében.

Minket keresztény hitünk, hazafias meggyőződésünk, az ország európai hitelához és nemzeti függetlenségünkhöz való ragaszkodásunk késztet arra, hogy soha ne tágítsunk az állampolgári jogegyenlőség elvétől, melyet történelmünk legszebb korszakában, az európai magyarság legnagyobb elméi vívtak ki.

Minden erejére szüksége van a mai válságos történelmi időkben a magyarságnak. A megszállott területek uraí statisztikai mutatványokkal igyekeznek elválasztani a magyar néptörzstől azokat a zsidó vallású magyarokat, akik elenyészö kivételektől eltekintve, a kisebbségi sorsban is rendületlenül kitartanak a magyar sorsközösség mellett. Szabad-e nekünk akaratlanul is ezt a példát követni és kiközösíteni a magyarságból 400.000 polgárunkat?

Elfeledtük volna, hogy ezek a polgártársaink a kultúrtörténelem megdönthetetlen tanúsága szerint nemcsak egyszerűen résztvevői, de támaszai és építői is voltak a magyar kultúrának? Tagadjuk le önmagunk előtt, hogy ezt a sorsközösséget 1848 szabadságharcában és a világháborúban vérükkel pecsételték meg? Valljuk, hogy magyarok ezek a polgártársaink és magyarságukat annál kevésbé engedjük vitássá tenni, mert csiráznak nyugtalan hajlandóságok, melyek már végleg megmagyarosodottnak hitt és a vezető rétegekbe emelkedett állampolgárokat hajlítanak el a magyarságtól.

Ezért tiltakozunk lelkiismeretünk minden erejével és hisszük, hogy szavunk nem marad hatás nélkül abban a hazában, amely minden dicsőségét a hit- és gondolatszabadságért, az emberi jogok teljességéért vívott hősi harcainak köszönhette. E belső parancsra fordulunk a magyar törvényhozás mindkét házának tagjaihoz, a keresztény egyházakhoz, a foglalkozások, gazdasági ágak kamaráihoz, szakszervezetekhez és egyéb érdekképviseletekhez, a politikai, társadalmi és kulturális egyesületekhez, az egész ország józan és hazafias népéhez azzal a kéréssel:

tegyenek bizonyságot önérzetükről, bátorságukról, önzetlenségükről és lépjenek sorompóba a minden magyarunkat sértő javaslat ellen.

Gondolja meg minden kortárs, mekkora felelősség terheli, ha a lelkiismereti tiltakozás ellenére is megszületik egy törvény, melyre valamikor minden magyarnak szégyenkezve kell gondolnia!

Gróf *Apponyi György*, *Bartók Béla*, *Bárczy* István, *Beöthy* József, *Berecz* Sándor, *Bernáth* Aurél, *Blaskó* Mária, *Bóka* László, *Czéczy* Imre, *Csók* István, *Darvas* József, *Erdős* Jenő, *Eszenyi* Jenő, *Gyóri Farkas* Imre, *Ferenczy* Noémi, *Féja* Géza, *Fodor* József, *Földessy* Gyula, *Földessyné Hermann* Lola, *Gáspár* Zoltán, *Hertelendy* István, *Horváth* Béla, *Pálóczi Horváth* György, *Kárpáti* Aurél, *Kernstok* Károly, *Kmetty* János, *Dernői Kocsis* László, *Kodály* Zoltán, *Kozma* Erzsébet, *Kun* Zsigmond, *Lacsiny* Márton, vitéz *Makay* Miklós, *Márffy* Ödön, *Mátyás* Ferenc, *Mihályfi* Ernő, *Molnár* Farkas, *Molnár* Kálmán, *Mórtez* Zsigmond, *Zagligeti Pintér* József, *Polner* Ödön, *Rab* Gusztáv, *Rados* Gusztáv, *Remenyik* Zsigmond, *Riedl* Margit, *Schöpflin* Aladár, *Simándy* Pál, *Somlay* Artúr, *Supka* Géza, *Szabó* Zoltán, *Szakasits* Árpád, *Szász* Zoltán, gróf *Széchenyi* György, *Szimonidesz* Lajos, *Terzánszky J.* Jenő, *Tóth* Aladár, *Vaszary* János, *Vikár* Béla, *Vilt* Tibor, *Zilahy* Lajos.

## A felsőház bizottsága módosította a választójogi javaslatot

A felsőház közjogi és közgazdasági bizottsága szerdán délelőtt *Lukácz* Andor elnöklésével folytatta a választójogi törvényjavaslat részletes tárgyalását.

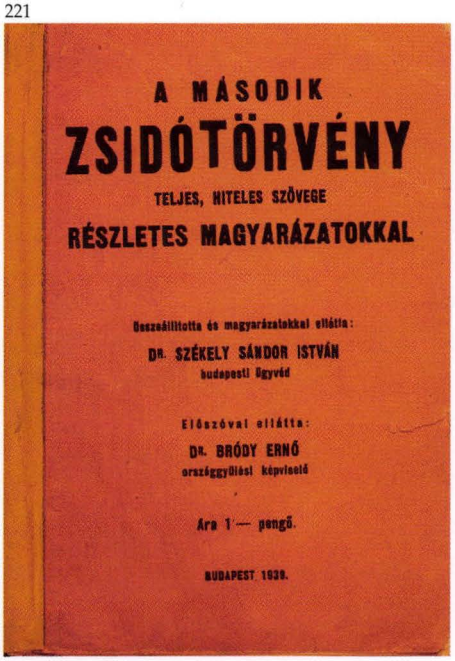
Felszólalt *Kaltenecker* Viktor, gróf *Csekonics* Iván, báró *Prónay* György, vitéz *Keresztes-Fischer* Ferenc, báró *Fejérth* Miklós, *Tomcsányi* Móric, *Lukey* József és *Halogh* Jenő.

Elfogadták *Tomcsányi* Móricnak azt az indítványát, hogy országgyűlési képviselővé csak azt lehessen megválasztani, akinek országgyűlési képviselőválasztási joga van, életének 30. évét betöltötte és megfelel a különös kellékeknek. Ez a módosítás azt jelenti, hogy *az aktiv választójogra megállapitott kizáró okok a passzív választójogra is irányadók.*

Elfogadták *Kaltenecker* Viktornak azt az indítványát, hogy a pótlók gyűlésein az is felszólalhasson, aki az illető törvényhatóságnak nemcsak a területén, hanem a *székhelyén* van felvéve a választói névjegyzékbe.

A bizottság a 120. szakasznál ért el és csütörtökön délelőtt tíz órakor folytatja a még hátralevő 128 szakasz tárgyalását.

221




220
Writers, artists and scientists protest against the drafting of the planned Jewish Law (May 5, 1938)

221
Title page of the text and explanation of the Second Jewish Law (1939)

May 1938. This Law, seen as a break with the previous Hungarian perceptions of the Jews as a legally accepted religious denomination, restricted Jewish participation in the fields of commerce and professions to twenty percent. This was a devastating blow for the Jews, especially the middle class, and it soon became clear that the First Jewish Law of 1938 was an indication of the shape of things to come.

The legal process of excluding the Jews from the life of the Hungarian nation, as a phase leading to their expulsion from Hungarian soil and the final solution, reached a new peak with the legislation known as the Second Jewish Law of May 1939, which was based on criteria to the racist Nuremberg Laws of 1935. It limited Jewish economic activities in the free professions to six percent, and defined the term "Jew" according to the Nazi criteria. The Second Jewish Law ruined economically the large masses of the Jewish population, and completed the process by which, with the outbreak of World War II, Hungary's Jewry became legal outcasts. In presenting the draft of the legislation, Prime Minister Béla




222
Poster of OMZSA (National Hungarian Jewish Assistance Fund, 1940)

Imrédy, among the most extremist of Hungary's leaders, expressed the fear that due to the plight of the Jews in those countries where they faced restrictions, waves of refugees might attempt to enter Hungary.

The upper echelons of the Hungarian Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant, used ambiguous language, but in fact supported the anti-Semitic steps and, by their silence, provided it with legitimation. The Church did not find a suitable formula to

relate to the overtly racist content of the anti-Jewish legislation. Since the Church supported conversions, it had to confront the linkage between race and religion; if the Jews were a race, racial origin could not be obliterated by conversion to another religion. Nonetheless, the Hungarian Churches claimed that Jews could mend their ways and attain salvation by converting to Christianity, thus overcoming the issue of their race. The top religious leaders even dared to preach to the Jews, claiming that the anti-Semitic atmosphere could have been avoided if the Jews had changed their ways, in other words, the Jews were to blame for anti-Semitism. There is no doubt that the position of the Church on the eve of the Holocaust made it easier, in the long run, to carry out the process of ghettoization and deportation to the extermination camps.

In April 1941 the Prime Minister of Hungary, Pál Teleki, committed suicide following his promise that Hungary would not participate in the dismemberment of Yugoslavia. Two weeks later, after new legislation, Hungary ordered the compulsory drafting of Jewish youth to military labor service, a step which sealed the fate of tens of thousands of young Jews, who were doomed to die during the war in the labor battalions.

The outbreak of World War II intensified the influence of the anti-Semitic factors, and there was growing pressure from the Arrow Cross to complete the legal measures for the removal of the Jews from the life of the Hungarian nation, achieved through promulgation of the Third Jewish Law in August 1941. This legislation related to the Jews as an inferior and alien race and completed their expulsion from society, their economic exclusion having been ensured by the first two Laws, passed in 1938 and 1939.

With the first Nazi victories in Poland, the Hungarian extreme right sensed that the final hour of reckoning with the Jews was approaching, even if the ways and means were not yet clear. One of the Arrow Cross members of Parliament, Miklós Serényi, demanded that the Jews be secluded from the Hungarian population and sent to labor camps or ghettos, the aim being eventual deportation. "The ghetto system," he said, "has proved its efficiency in Warsaw, and should be emulated."

With Hungary's entry into the war against the Soviet Union in June 1941, in circumstances which are still the subjext of debate, Hungary's Jewry entered into a new period of danger and uncertainty.



223

# A Brief Survey of Jewish Scholars in Hungary

István Gazda

There were numerous excellent Jewish scholars in Hungary in various spheres of the humanities and social sciences, who enjoyed international reputations. The distinguished philosopher, Bernát Alexander and József Bánóczi were the founder-editors of the *Library of Philosophers* series. Alexander became a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1892, while Bánóczi won a prominent place in Hungarian cultural history by founding and editing the *Yearbook of the Hungarian Israelite Society*.



224

223
Bernát Munkácsi

224
Bernát Alexander

The *Csemegi Codex*, the first Hungarian criminal law, was written by the lawyer Károly Csemegi in 1878. It was in use for a very long time. On the occasion of the millenial celebrations of the Hungarian state, Csemegi's contemporary, Dezső Márkus published a series called *Hungarian Codes of Law*, a collection of all the laws issued in Hungary since the time of King Stephen I, both in Latin and in Hungarian. This series is one of the most important sources of the history of Hungarian law today. The first Hungarian criminologist was Rusztem Vámbéry, who published several valuable volumes in his field.

Countless Hungarian Jewish scholars were interested in linguistics and the history of language. Bernát Munkácsi was awarded membership in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for his linguistic studies. He compiled a dictionary of the Votyak language and wrote important studies about the relation of the Hungarian and the Finnish language. Móric Szilasi compiled the Cheremis dictionary; Ödön Beke and József Balassa were also active in dialect research. Ignác Halász is known for his research regarding the Lapps. Zsigmond Simonyi was the creator of Hungarian syntax scholarship and co-author of the *Historical Dictionary of the Hungarian Language*. Ignác Kont carried out research regarding French-Hungarian relations, Mózes Rubinyi explored the dialect of the Csángó people in Moldavia.

An important historian and the director of the Hungarian Historical Institute in Vienna was Dávid Angyal. Ignác Acsády was prominent researcher of the history of serfdom

and one of the compilers of the *Dictionary of Economy*. Henrik Marczali compiled a *Great Illustrated World History* in twelve volumes in honor of Hungary's millenium. Their work was supported by cartographer Ignác Hatsek who produced an interesting series of maps.

There were several noted experts among the travelers, discoverers and travel writers, too. Mór Dechy explored the Caucasus, Aurél Stein was a world renowned orientalist and Ármin Vámbéry is most often quoted for his research of Central Asia. Moreover, research on these fields in Hungary was only possible because some of these prominent scholars bequeathed their collections to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Hungarian Jewish scholars distinguished themselves in the field of natural sciences and mathematics, too. Among them were botanist Ágoston Kanitz, a noted scholar from Transylvania; Manó Beke, who developed mathematics and physics education in Hungary; and Lajos Schlesinger, who studied the Bolyai heritage. Miklós Schweitzer is commemorated by a maths competition named after him. Gyula Kőnig was prominent in the field of algebra, set theory and geometry. He also helped develop of the theory of the Bolyais, and since 1917 a prize has been awarded in his memory. In 1900 Lipót Fejér published a study about the Fourier series, suddenly breaking into the scholarly world. At only thirty, he became a professor at Budapest University, and was internationally known known for research on trigonometric series and the theory of interpolation. He was one of the four European guests of honor at the 1933–1934 World Exhibition in Chicago. Numerous foreign universities invited him to teach, yet he remained in Hungary even under the Nazis. Frigyes Riesz was the most acknowledged expert of abstract fields and functional analysis, a founder of a new school.

Because of the historical events, several excellent Hungarian mathematicians pursued their studies and research outside of Hungary. Some of the most famous ones were János Neumann, whose name is connected with the development of high-speed computers, Mihály Fekete, Kornél Lánczos, György Pólya, Gábor Szegő, Marcell Riesz, János György Kemény and Péter Lax.

Other prominent physicisits – Leó Szilárd, Ede Teller, whose name is connected with the development of the atom bomb, Jenő Wigner, Dénes Gábor, and others achieved fame only after leaving Hungary. Of the scientists who remained in Hungary we should mention Mór Réthy, the first Hungarian theoretical physicist, professor at the Technical

University. Imre Bródy, a nephew of the distinguished Hungarian writer Sándor Bródy, played an important role in introducing the more economical krypton-filled light bulbs in Hungary. The electricity meter itself is a Hungarian invention. Ottó Titusz Bláthy participated in the development of the first alternating current transformer, which was then produced and exported worldwide by the Ganz factory. It was also utilized for the electric train. His contemporary, Donát Bánki, invented the carburetor, the Bánki-engine, a water turbine and several other useful objects.

Some other Hungarian Jews who achieved fame abroad were László Bíró, the inventor of the Bíró pen; Dávid Gestetner, one of the inventors of the stencil method; Péter Károly Goldmark, a nephew of the famous composer, the inventor of the LP and one of the scientists who formulated the theory upon which the color TV is based.

The chemist György Hevesi received the Nobel Prize mainly for the research that he carried out in the field of radioactive indication; he developed an isotope method that is widely used in medicine even today. Chemist György Oláh received the Nobel Prize not long ago. Mihály Polányi became an internationally known scientist in England. His field of research was initially chemistry but later he turned to the philosophy of science. His son, who emigrated to Canada, also received the Nobel Prize in chemistry.

The list of famous Jewish doctors who lived in Hungary is very long. The first to receive his diploma in Hungary was József Manes Oesterreicher. He was also the founder of the health resort in Balatonfüred, and Henrik Mangold helped popularize it internationally. Among the world-famous Hungarian physicians was Mór Kaposi (Kaposi's sarcoma) and members of the Grosz family, founders of ophthalmology and the first eye clinic in Hungary. Frigyes Korányi (formerly called Kornfeld) was one of the founders of internal medicine in Hungary, and a pioneer in the fight against tuberculosis. Professor Korányi was awarded the title of baron in 1908. The pathologist, Lajos György Arányi, was elected a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and was awarded a title. He was also a distinguished art historian and archeologist. Géza Kresz organized a voluntary ambulance service. Hungary produced numerous world famous surgeons, among them Manó Herczel, Vilmos Scheiber and Lajos Ádám. Scheiber was an orthopedist, the inventor of arch supports for shoes. Jenő Pólya healed hernias and various kinds of gall-bladder diseases with great success. The world-famous Richter Gedeon Pharmaceutical Factory was established by the chemist Gedeon Richter.




225
József Manes Oesterreicher, the first Hungarian Jewish physician to receive a diploma from a Hungarian university (1782)

"The Royal University of Buda has received special instructions from His Majesty that the freedom of physicians, in other words, the doctorate of physicians be conferred on non-Catholics in the same manner as on Catholics. Now, on the twenty-first day of the month before Lent this honor has been conferred on József Manes Oesterreicher of the Jewish nation and faith. There can be no doubt that this new order will promote the welfare of the University. The above named physician doctor, who has recently authored an elaborate and fine study on the medicinal waters of Buda and other regions, is from Buda by birth and will herewith become the official physician of the bitter waters of Füred."

Eighteenth letter of *Magyar Hírmondó*, 1782

# Jewish Sportsmen in Hungary

Ágnes Keleti




226



227

226
Membership card of VAC

227
Alfréd Hajós

Physical culture and involvement in sport were among the characteristics of Hungarian Jewry in modern times. For Jewish youth, sport was a means of integrating into Hungarian society and achieving success and fame. At the same time, the Jewish sport clubs were the focus of national consciousness and the expression of Zionist ideas. In both cases, Jewish sportsmen were anxious to cast off the image of the weak and persecuted Jew and to foster the new Jew, healthy in both body and soul. Jewish youth devoted their free time to various sport activities at various professional sports clubs, including the Fencing and Athletic Club (VAC) and the Hungarian Athletic Club (MTK).

About thirty three percent of all the golden, silver and bronze medals won by Hungary at various Olympic games were won by Jews. This happened at a time when Hungary was among the leading countries in fencing, water polo, the modern penthathlon, rifle shooting, swimming, rowing, women's gymnastics, table tennis and football.

Some of the most successful Hungarian Jewish Olympic champions were Viktor Barna, László Bellák, Anna Sipos and István Barta in table tennis, György Bródy and Miklós Sárkány in water polo, László Fábián in kayak. Rudolf Kárpáti, Dezső Földes, Jenő Fuchs, Tamás Gábor, Sándor Gombos, Ildikó Rejtő and Lajos Werkner in fencing, and Richard Weisz in wrestling. Others were Alfréd Hajós, the first Olympic champion from Hungary in swimming, an architect, stadium designer and champion at the Paris Spiritual Olympics; Zsuzsa Körmöczi, the most successful tennis champion; Lili Kronberger, a champion ice skater and Ferenc Mező, sports historian, champion of the 1928 Amsterdam Spiritual Olympics. The Polgár sisters, Judit, Zsófi and Zsuzsa, were multiple Olympic and world champions in chess. Éva Székely was a swimming champion.

There were numerous unforgettable Jewish trainers. Among them were Béla Komjádi, Béla Rajki and Imre Sárosi in swimming and water polo, Zsigmond Adler in boxing, Zoltán Duckstein in gymnastics and handball, Tamás Gábor in fencing, Gyula Mándi and Zoltán Opata in football. Outstanding sports leaders and benefactors were István Sárkány,



228



229

who survived Mauthausen, and became the secretary of the Gymnastics Association; founders of various sport clubs included Alfréd Brüll of MTK, Oszkár Aschner of UTE and Manfréd Weiss of the Csepel Sports Club.

The fact that the Hungarian national hymn was played seventy-six times at Olympic games to celebrate the achevements of Jewish sportsmen could not save the sportsmen themselves. Feri Vidor, Noe and Endre Steiner died in forced labor camps, Endre Kabos was shot to death on the banks of the Danube, János Garai was killed in Mauthausen. Attila Petschauer, multiple Olympic and European champion in fencing, was murdered in an icy-cold Ukrainian winter.

228
Running competition

229
Attila Petschauer

# BOLOND MISKA.



**Budapest, Márczius 21.**
**1875. 12-ik szám.**

Megjelen minden **vasárnap.** — Előfizetési díj : negyedévre **2** frt, félévre **4** frt. egész évre **8** frt. Az előfizetés és minden reclamátió a »BOLOND MISKA« kiadóhivatalába (barátok-tere, Athenaeum-épület) utasitandó. Szerkesztőség Mészáros-utcza 6. szám I emelet.

**XVI. évfolyam.**

## HORN EDE.

Emberem, a ki nevetni szeretsz, csak kaczagd ki magad elöre a Horn vastag orrán, görbe lábain és furcsa eloquentiáján.

És nevess azon, hogy hat választó kerületet végig bukott Magyarországon, mig bebukhatott a képviselőházba, mint e vers mutatja :

*Pápa, Pozsony kétszer. Kanizsa. Csáktornya, Vagujhely.*

Meg azon, hogy államtitkár léttére jockeynek kell lennie, mert minisztere passionatus lovar.

Meg azon, hogy ő egy megforditott zsidócska, a ki a közhasznon spekulál, maga kárával is.

Valamint azon, hogy 48-ban csak rabinus volt, a ki tábori papként gyóntatta a zsidó honvédeket, s aztán nehogy azok bevallott bűneit ugy vegye ki belőle a becsületes Haynaú mint Nepomuki szent Jánosból dr. Wenzel cseh király : — emigrált.

Mint szintén azon, hogy a furcsa zsidócska odakint Kossuthról és Rákócziról irt vastag könyveket németül, francziául. Hogy az empire grasszálása idején mint népszónok lépett fel a párizsi nagy meetingeken. Hogy belekotyvant a nemzetgazdaságba, és lett Michel Chevalier mellett segédtanár, s szerkesztette a Journal des Debatst. Hogy irt Páris városi háztartásáról feltünést okozó tanulmányt. S a Bankszabadsággal betolakodott az európai államgazdák első sorába.

Mikor Lónyai megkötötte a nagy vasuti kölcsönt: Horn látva hogy itt nagyon sápoltatik, engarde lépett a franczia sajtóban, és támadott. Lónyaira. — A jobboldal szidta, hogy megingatja az államhitelt, a baloldal pedig hazahitta. Jókai tartotta keresztvizre.

Itthon kezdődnek praktikus vállalatai, a melyek hogy nem prosperáltak, csak Generál Krachon mult, s a melyek megmuttaták, hogy milyen rosz zsidó ő. Pedig működésének basisa ebben a zsidó szóban fekszik: consortium.

A magyarbank eszméjét ő frissiti föl ujra, küzd érte három miniszteriumon át, hisz a kivitelre már neki consortiunak is van. Dolgozik a Hordárka Imrék által elusztatott gőzhajótársaság megmentésén, s hogy hiába, nem az általa szervezett consortiumon mult. Tisza Lajos felveti a vasuti fuziókat, ő készrá consortiumot teremteni. Egyáltalán mindent consortiummal! A vasutakat consortiummal adni, államkölcsönt consortiummal kötni, bányák mivelését, erdők levágását, csatornázást, köztárházakat, távirdát, postát, államjavakat consortiumnak adni, ménteleppeket consortiumra bizni.

Hanem meg is bünhődött érte: elitélték államtitkárságra. S ezen még csak a kegyes Magyar Állam sem ütközött meg, s nem imádkozta körül a jebezeusmivoltát.

Ezt már még sem érdemelte.



# Jewish Presence in Hungarian Journalism

Géza Buzinkay

The first Hungarian language newspaper was launched in 1780 in Pozsony, then the capital of Hungary. The first generation of journalists and editors were mostly Protestant pastors and teachers raised in the spirit of the Enlightenment. After them, however, this task was taken up by politically active members of the nobility, those who had advocated extensive reforms and considered the press an open political forum. By the late 1830s this group of "reform nobility" decided to fight for the civic equality of Jews and welcomed them as equal partners in their publications.

The first Jewish journalists edited German-language newspapers, starting from 1842. Among them were Herman Klein, Jakab Steinhardt, Adolf Neustadt and Vilmos Beck, the caricaturist and editor of the first comic paper in Pest – a Hungarian specialty. The first Hungarian Jewish journalist, Gusztáv Zerffi, appeared in 1846. Interestingly enough, he worked for a conservative newspaper, *Honderü*. Several more Jewish journalists started their careers at the time of the 1848 Revolution. The most renowned of these was probably Ignác Helfy, "chief of press" of Lajos Kossuth during his years of Italian exile. After the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, Helfy became one of the leading journalists championing the cause of independence.

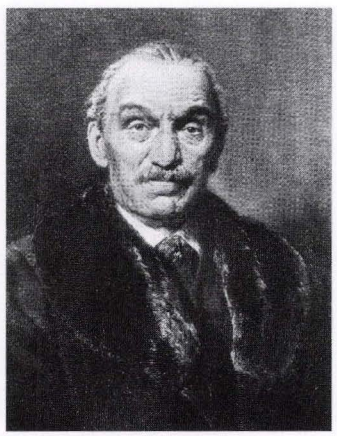
Hungarian Jewish journalists remained bilingual for a long time and were equally divided between Hungarian and German publications. Many used German and Hungarian alternately in various phases of their lives, e.g., Zsigmond Chorin, Mór Gans Ludasi, Ede Horn, Lajos Hevesi, Zsigmond Bródy, Leó Veigelsberg or József Vészi. A particularly prominent journalist was Miksa Falk. In the 1850s, in the period of oppression that followed the failed revolution, he "invented" the journalistic style where the message was hidden between the lines in order to evade censorship. He was also among the creators of a new press, much closer to spoken than to literary Hungarian. In the course of his long career he also established the business press in Hungary. His paper, *Pester Lloyd*, brought him fame throughout Europe.

The Emancipation Act in 1867 opened the door for Jews, especially Neologs, to create their own press and to participate in the general Hungarian press.

Adolf Ágai, who was one generation younger than Falk, also made important contributions to Hungarian journalism. He was a zealous guard of the purity of the Hungarian language. He



231



232

230
Caricature of Ede Horn
in the cartoon journal *Bolond Miska* (1875)

231
*Ágai with tiny Jankó Borsszem* [Tom Thumb]
(Cartoon by János Jankó, 1887)

232
Miksa Falk




233
The editorial board of *Egyenlőség*, on the thirtieth anniversary: Lajos Szabolcsi, Ernő Mezei, Sándor Komáromi, Sándor Mezey, József Patai, Miksa Szabolcsi, Hugó Hazai, Sándor Fleischmann (1911)

234
The publishing office of *Az Est* on Erzsébet Boulevard, 1913 (Photo by Jenő Kellner)

233
234

wrote amusing, chatty feuilletons (under the pseudonym Porzó) and also fathered the Hungarian-language political satirical journal. He established and edited, for almost fifty years, the famous journal *Borsszem Jankó* (under the pseudonym Csicseri Bors). He also wrote some children's books and founded a children's magazine (*Kis Lap* – under the pseudonym Forgó Bácsi), which were all based on the most modern pedagogical concepts of his time.

The political press, whose function was to form public opinion, remained for a long time in the hands of the Hungarian political elite and the middle class intellectuals who supported them. Jews on the other hand played a major role in creating other sorts of periodicals that were designed for profit as well. At the end of 1878 Károly Légrády launched *Pesti Hírlap*, a political daily with a completely new character. His main goal was to reflect the opinions of the public and to satisfy their demands. This editorial concept generated the modern political press, which was to control rather than serve the interests of the various political parties. Yet the grounding of journalism on readers' demands led to another kind of development as well, which was universal – the birth of the gutter press.

The blood libel of Tiszaeszlár, the subsequent trial and the temporary, but all the more boisterous, polarization of Hungarian society brought a new era in Hungarian journalism, too. Some short-lived and insignificant antisemitic papers were founded, but the period also witnessed the birth of the two most important social-cultural journals of Hungarian Jewry: *Egyenlőség* in 1881, and in 1911, *Múlt és Jövő*, the journal of the young generation, somewhat closer to the spirit of Zionism.

In 1896, the year of the Hungarian millennium, a new type of cheap, small-format paper was launched, available mostly on the street. The informative and reader-oriented gutter press could not have been born without Hungarian Jewish journalists. The first Hungarian tabloid, *Esti Újság*, was first published by Simon Zilahi in 1896. Contemporaries called its editor, Izidor Barna, "the first Hungarian reporter." Eight years later Sándor Braun launched his sensational paper, *A Nap*, and in 1910 *Az Est* was founded, the most professional and successful paper of its time. Its readership reached half a million during World War I. The career of owner-editor Andor Miklós was hitherto unparallelled in Hungary. Born the eighth child of a poor family, he did not even attend elementary school. He earned his living as a newspaper boy, but by the end of the 1910s had become the owner of the *Est* Concern, the largest press undertaking in Hungary. This concern published the three dailies with the largest circulation in Hungary, the morning *Pesti Napló*, the afternoon *Az Est* and the evening *Magyarország*. The Athenaeum Publishing House and Printing Ltd. also belonged to them.

"*Az Est* was the first American style tabloid published in Hungary. Its incredible success can be attributed to a number of innovations in its form and contents. The light, slightly cursive five letters drawn with bold lines instead of the usual austere titles on the letterhead was in itself eye-catching. This paper could boast the very first neon sign on the building housing the editorial offices. At dusk the *Az Est* words shone in bright red, underneath it shone the blue color of the flourish under the letterhead. The editorial offices had several typists and the journalists used to dictate their articles – a most unusual practice at the time."

Péter Sípos, 1999



235

235
Simon Tolnai (1920s)

236
Pandour in the village inn (Caricature, 1868)

237
Lipót Skrek's advertisement (1926)

238
Greeting card for Pesach

239
"Shana Tova", greeting card for the New Year

240
To Egypt and Palestine

241
Life in the coffee houses of Budapest (Caricature, 1890)

242
The student

243
Advertisement for Hutter soap (1930)

By the turn of the century there were several "press palaces" in Budapest, the homes of press empires where editorial office, publishing house, printing house, advertising and distribution department were all concentrated in one building. All but one of these well organized enterprises were established and run by Jewish publishers and editors: the Légrády Brothers Ltd.; Zsigmond Bródy, owner of some German language dailies, editor of *Neues Pester Journal* and also known for his charitable foundations; Simon Tolnai, the founder of *Tolnai Világlapja*, the first major magazine in Hungarian which appeared in well over one hundred thousand copies during World War I. In the same period, *Színházi Élet*, the theatrical weekly edited by Sándor Incze, won great popularity.

By the beginning of the 20th century the press business was financially so successful in Budapest that several of the owners, publishers and editors were among the highest taxpayers in the city. Leading pressmen received badges of honor one after the other: Lajos Dóczi was made a baron, Miksa and Zsigmond Falk became knights, and many others, including Zsigmond Bródy, József Wolfner, Zsigmond Singer, Ödön Gajári and József Vészi, received various titles of nobility (court counsellor, member of the Upper House). This official acknowledgement came from a conservative government with a slightly liberal disposition. Yet a considerable number of influential pressmen were actually opposed to their colleagues who had been honored, either because they represented a spirit too frivolous for their middle class norms – like Jenő Heltai (a nephew of Theodor Herzl), Ferenc Molnár, Lajos Biró and Simon Kemény – or because their ideas were too radical – like those of Ignotus, Lajos Hatvany, Dezső Szomory, Miksa Márkus and Oszkár Jászi. Some of them had even become socialists or communists, like the editor and some of the journalists of *Népszava*, Ernő Garami, Jakab Weltner, Zsigmond Kunfi, Béla Somogyi, Béla Révész, or Béla Kun, Tibor Szamuely, Béla Vágó, journalists who became people's commissars of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, as well as László Rudas and József Révai.

The first anti–Semitic accusations against the Hungarian press appeared in the 1880s: the complaint was aimed at the high number of influential Jewish journalists. For a long time, these attacks were part and parcel of the spirit of rivalry rife within the Hungarian press. When the

236



Pandur a csárdában.

239

237






לשנה הבאה בירושלים:

238




242




240




241




243



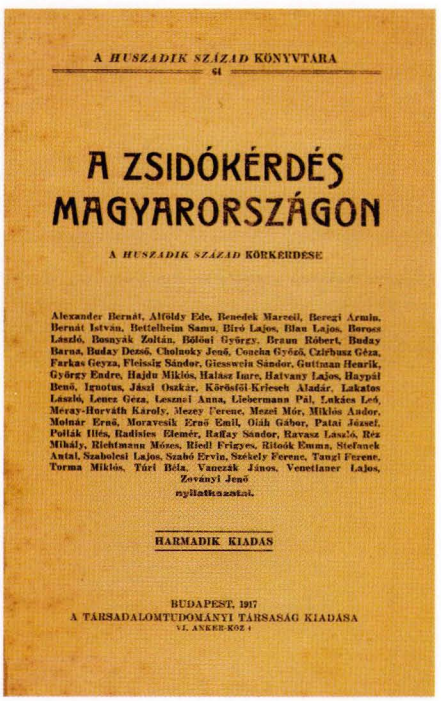
journal *Huszadik Század* published its famous query about "the Jewish Question" in 1917, many of those who reacted claimed that the question was outdated. Yet only a few years later – after a lost war, the fragmenting of the country and a communist revolution – some influential politicians launched an attack against the "Jewish press," blaming them for all the plagues that had afflicted the country. It was at this time, in the 1920s, that the Hungarian politicians realized the importance of the press. In the dailies, in the repressed social-democratic papers and in the flourishing liberal press (*Pesti Hírlap*, the papers of the *Est* Concern and later *Magyar Nemzet*), some excellent publicists, e.g., György Bálint and Béla Zsolt, were fighting for the freedom of press, for individual liberty and the right to information.

After World War I, the conditions in the Hungarian press changed radically. Many journalists fled Hungary, some escaping the communists, others the White Terror following the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. Béla Somogyi, the editor of *Népszava*, was murdered by a military detachment.

During the previous decades, all the national newspapers had been produced in the capital, Budapest, while the newsmen writing for them were trained in the editorial offices of paper in the major town, mostly in Kolozsvár, Nagyvárad, Arad, Temesvár and Szabadka. The careers of Sándor Bródy, Lajos Biró, József Vészi and Ernő Szép also started in these towns. As a result of the Trianon Peace Treaty, these towns were suddenly outside of Hungary. One of the several severe consequences of this situation was that the national press lost its traditional supply of journalists. Successful and high quality dailies and magazines declined and of the seventeen comic papers of the turn of the century, only three remained. Among these there was *Az Ojság*, the great and brave comic paper of Imre Nagy, who was also known as the publisher of several superb collections of Jewish jokes.

In 1938, the Hungarian Parliament enacted some discriminatory Jewish Laws. A Press Chamber was established, where the number of Jewish members – journalists, publishers and editors – was limited first to twenty percent and later to six percent. Since only members of this chamber could be employed as journalists or editors, the effect of this law was severe: the number and quality of Hungarian newspapers decreased rapidly and the liberal and left-wing press disappeared almost completely from the scene. This "changing of the guards," as it was called in racist and Arrow Cross circles, demolished the flourishing, colorful press of Hungary. The last stage of this process occurred when innumerable Hungarian Jewish journalists fell victim to the Holocaust a few years later.

244
Title page of *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon – A Huszadik Század körkérdése*
[The Jewish question in Hungary – Question of *Huszadik Század*] (1917)


A *HUSZADIK SZÁZAD* KÖNYVTARA
61
A ZSIDÓKÉRDÉS MAGYARORSZÁGON
A *HUSZADIK SZÁZAD* KÖRKÉRDÉSE
Alexander Bernát, Alföldy Edo, Benedek Marcell, Beregi Armin, Bernát István, Bettelheim Samu, Biró Lajos, Blau Lajos, Boross László, Bonyai Zoltán, Bölöni György, Braun Róbert, Buday Barna, Buday Dezső, Cholnoky Jenő, Concha Győző, Czirbusz Géza, Farkas Geyza, Fleissig Sándor, Giesswein Sándor, Guttman Henrik, György Endre, Hajdu Miklós, Halász Imre, Hatvany Lajos, Haypál Benő, Ignotus, Jászi Oszkár, Körösfői-Kriesch Aladár, Lakatos László, Lenz Géza, Lesznai Anna, Liebermann Pál, Lukács Leó, Mezey-Horváth Károly, Mezey Ferenc, Mezei Mór, Miklós Andor, Molnár Erná, Moravcsik Ernő Emil, Oláh Gábor, Patai Józsel, Polák Illés, Radisics Elemér, Ratay Sándor, Ravasz László, Rez Mihály, Richtmann Mózes, Riedl Frigyes, Ritook Emma, Stefanek Antal, Szabolcsi Lajos, Szabó Ervin, Székely Ferenc, Tangl Ferenc, Torma Miklós, Túri Béla, Vancsák János, Venetianer Lajos, Zoványi Jenő
nyilatkozatai.
HARMADIK KIADAS
BUDAPEST, 1917
A TÁRSADALOMTUDOMÁNYI TÁRSASÁG KIADÁSA
VI. ANKER-KÖZ 1

# Jewish Authors and Jewish Themes in Hungarian Literature from the 1840s to the Holocaust

Anna Szalai

Disregarding a few early literary experiments, such as the anonymous poet enthusing over the 1840 legislation, and the pamphlets discussing and popularizing emancipation and Jewish civic rights – for example, those by Móric Bloch (1840) and Móric Rosenthal (1841) – the first Jewish poet to write in Hungarian was the multilingual Mihály Heilprin. His life was fairly typical of the Jewish intellectuals of Hungary whose careers were essentially shaped by events. In his poems, Heilprin, who came to Hungary from Poland, saluted his adopted country, where freedom awaited the suppressed Jews. At the time of the 1848 Revolution, he exhorted the nation to take up arms against the Austrian oppressors and he served the Hungarian cause in the Prime Minister's press office. After the Revolution, he emigrated to America and died there.

245
Móric Bloch, 1880s
(Photo by Ede Ellinger)



The first Hungarian publication which was written by Jews appeared on the eve of the 1848 Revolution. The *Első magyar zsidó naptár és évkönyv 1848-ik szökőévre* (*First Hungarian Jewish calendar and yearbook for the 1848 leap year*), published by The Pest Association, Discussed and Popularized the Use of the Hungarian Language among Hungarian Jewry. The authors of the yearbook, representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia, who supported the Hungarian Reform movement of the period and who championed Jewish religious reform, emphasized the need and the possibilities for forging a double identity.

Mór Szegfi, secretary of the association and one of the yearbook's editors, had earlier published short stories depicting everyday life among the Jews. The value of these short stories lies in the fact that these writings were the first to introduce Hungarian Jewish families and communities into Hungarian literature with their descriptions of the Shabbat atmosphere in the home of the village innkeeper and of the women's gallery in the synagogue. One interesting detail in the description of the preparations for the feast of Purim is that the national tunes are played by a Gypsy band in one of the rooms.

Szegfi's short story, which was published in the yearbook, describes the beauty of religious life, its contradictions and the tragic effects on the individual of unduly strict interpretation of the religious laws, against the principles of religious reform. His writing emphasizes the need to

preserve the inherent beauty of Jewish traditions – although, at the same time, he also urges modernization, and stresses the need and importance of reform.

The key study, conceptualizing this dual identity as a program, was written by Márton Diósy, the other editor of the yearbook; he exhorts his contemporaries, the "enlightened Hungarian Jews," to remain faithful to the Bible and the Hungarian flag. One interesting feature of Diósy's article is that, although "Magyarization" is set as the ultimate goal, he nonetheless cautions the Jews to refrain from participating in Hungarian national movements.

Like his successors, Diósy himself did not consider the admonition to his contemporaries as binding upon himself. Like Heilprin, he too played an active role in the 1848 Revolution. Together with his associates, who called for Magyarization and supported all manners of reform, he fled abroad after the crushing of the Revolution and became an enthusiastic advocate of the Hungarian cause. Most of them returned to Hungary in the 1850s, and their lives took an altogether different direction.

Ignác Einhorn served as a field chaplain during the 1848 Revolution. Changing his name to Ede Horn, he became a member of parliament in the late 1860s and, as state secretary to the Ministry of Trade, he was the first Jewish state official. Móric Bloch, who translated the Torah into Hungarian and who was the first Jew to be elected a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, served as a captain in the 1848 army. From the early 1850s, having changed his name to Mór Ballagi, he taught at the Academy of Protestant Theology and was one of the outstanding professors of Hungarian linguistics. Mór Szegfi, who also served with the rank of captain, was wounded in the Revolution. In 1861 he married an Evangelical editor and began writing novels in the popular tradition.

The promotion of the Hungarian cause outside Hungary after the crushing of the Revolution remained a priority. The writers of Jewish origin made good use of their command of various languages, and as gifted journalists and translators, they undertook voluntarily a unique cultural task from the early 1840s. Working for various Hungarian and German papers, they forged an intellectual link between Hungary and western Europe, and, as translators, they popularized the most acclaimed Hungarian writers abroad. Adolf Dux was the first to translate Petőfi's poems into German, and he can also be credited with the translation of various works by Arany, Eötvös and Jókai. Mór Gans Ludasi translated Petőfi's and Vörösmarty's poems into German.

From the late 19th century, Hebrew poetry too began to appear in Hungarian translation. Emil (Fischer) Makai, poet and journalist, and Arnold Kiss, professor of Hebrew literature at the

Rabbinical Seminary, a writer and a poet in his own right, translated into Hungarian Hebrew religious poetry, as well as works by medieval and modern Hebrew poets.

The publication of the weekly *Egyenlőség*, the most important organ of assimilated in Jewry Hungary – which appeared between 1881–1938 – can be linked to the decades following the Emancipation of the Jews in 1867. The weekly was first edited by Miksa Szabolcsi and, after his death, by his son Lajos Szabolcsi. This political, social and literary paper urged the assimilation of Jewry into Hungarian society and took a definitely anti-Zionist stand. Still, its editor, Miksa Szabolcsi, organized the first group pilgrimage to Palestine in 1905.

As a writer, Lajos Szabolcsi wove together many Jewish themes. In his novel, *A csillag fia* (*Son of the Star*, 1918), he immortalized the Bar Kochba uprising, and his collection of short stories, *A leveleki menyegző* (*The Wedding of Levelek*, 1920), commemorated the Hassidic traditions of Hungary and the legends surrounding Eizik Taub, the renowned Hassidic rabbi from Nagykálló.

The writings of Péter Ujvári, writer, essayist and editor of the (*Magyar*) *Zsidó Lexikon* (1929), also appeared on the pages of *Egyenlőség*. Ujvári's novels depict the life of the Jewish communities in the multi-ethnic villages and small towns – the superstitions, the world of the yeshiva, the Jews who adjusted to town life. His writings also portray Jews who converted to Christianity.

Although József Patai began his literary career as an editor of *Egyenlőség*, he is better known as the editor of the journal *Múlt és Jövő* (1911–1944), the "Jewish art, literary, social and critical monthly" which he launched. He was not simply an editor. He was a poet, much admired for his Hebrew and Hungarian poems, and a composer of synagogue songs; his novels drew from, and portrayed, the Hassidic world and its *heders*; he was a scholar of medieval Hebrew poetry and he translated medieval and modern Hebrew poetry into Hungarian. He was also editor of the *Magyar Zsidó Könyvtár* series and his numerous writings were collected and published in several volumes.

József Patai first visited Palestine in 1926. The *Magyar Zsidók Pro Palesztina Szövetsége* (Pro-Palestine Alliance of Hungarian Jews, 1927) was founded on his initiative and he became president of the cultural section of the Alliance. The main goal of the Alliance was to familiarize Hungarian Jewry with the various activities in Palestine and to forge economic and cultural ties between Hungary and Palestine, as well as to support scholarly work at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

This purpose was served by the various articles, short stories, reviews, art supplements and

"At three I prayed from a Hebrew prayer-book, at four I translated the Bible in the *heder*, at six I learnt the Talmud, and from ten to seventeen my restless blood swept me from yeshiva to yeshiva. At Kisvárda and Sátoraljaújhely, at Szatmár and Mármaroshuszt my soul sipped the sad Talmud songs on endless nights by pale candlelight, the only nourishment of my soul. And suddenly the eventides lit by the departing sun, the sleepless nights and the mystical dawn-awakenings swept me over to the Kabbalah and to Hebrew poetry, all forbidden fruits in the Talmud schools. I was therefore forced to leave Huszt and its yeshiva. At Nyitra, dazzled by the seductive theatre bills I donned my elderly landlady's clothes, combed my sidelocks to one side and sneaked up to the theatre gallery. [...] For this I had to leave the other yeshiva. Finally at Szatmár, where I was allegedly caught in act of heresy and after a long calvary of persecution [...] I defiantly turned my back on the ghetto and swore to be an apostle of the war against religion. This 'apostolic activity' lasted for all of three years, during which I graduated from high school privately [...] and changed from side-locked Talmudist to one of the so-called 'intellectuals.' [...] I saw the spiritual barrenness of the Jewish intellectuals, their spiritual poverty, for they have nothing that they can truly call their own, nothing that is not borrowed or a cast-off from true lords. [...] And then a great light pierced my consciousness – that it is as prejudiced to blindly declare war on enlightenment in the name of religion as to blindly declare war on religion in the name of enlightenment. Inquisition will remain inquisition, be it black or red. What is needed is neither a declaration of war, nor inquisition, but education and love. And with eyes refined by the Greek and Latin classics I began to read the prophets, the first freethinkers of humanity, in whose books we can discover the entire dictionary of today's progressive ideals. I familiarized myself with the vast treasury of Jewish literature and poetry, I perceived the cultural values concealed in Jewish religion, and I began to rejoice in the treasure which I had acquired during the years I had believed to have been barren and wasted. Two great tasks began to loom brightly as redemption in my soul: to bring my co-religionists languishing in the dimness of the ghetto closer to culture with the benign means of enlightenment and to save, using the weapons of enlightenment, for the Jewish intellectuals from Jewish culture all that means the future, all that is culture, all that is truly ours, all that we can proudly declare our own."

József Patai, 1914

photos of Jewish life in Palestine and various European countries, as well as the organized trips to Palestine and Patai's travelogues of his own travels to Palestine. *Múlt és Jövő* became the single most important organ of Jewish cultural traditions and values, as well as of the Zionist ideal, one of its main goals being an insistence on familiarity with and knowledge of the past and the assertion of hope in the Jewish future. Patai immigrated to Palestine in 1939.

246
József Patai

247
József Kiss

248
Fülöp Ö. Beck's plaque of Kelemen Mikes, the emblem of *Nyugat* (1908)

249
Dezső Szomory

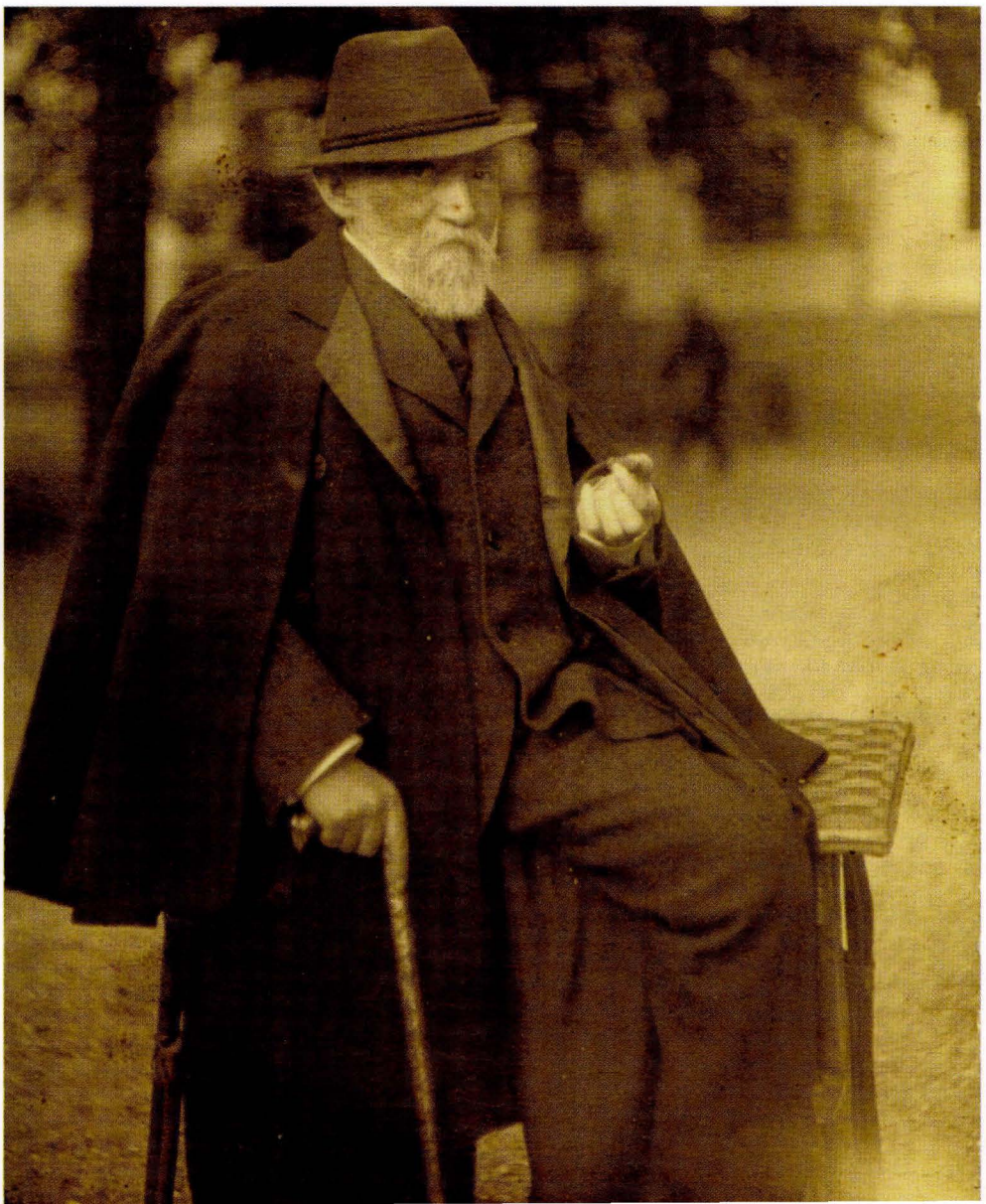
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Title page of Endre Ady's volume, *Ki látott engem?* [Who saw me?] designed by Anna Lesznai

From the 19th century, Jewish writers played an important role in the organization of literary life, in the writers' groups and in editing literary journals. As writers, editors, critics and generous patrons of the arts, they played an active role in the birth of modern Hungarian literature.

József Kiss, the most acclaimed Jewish poet of the *fin-de-siècle*, whose ballads nurtured successive generations, edited and published *A Hét* (1890–1924), a literary journal. Many of the talented new crop of writers of the early 20th century and the inter-war period began their careers in József

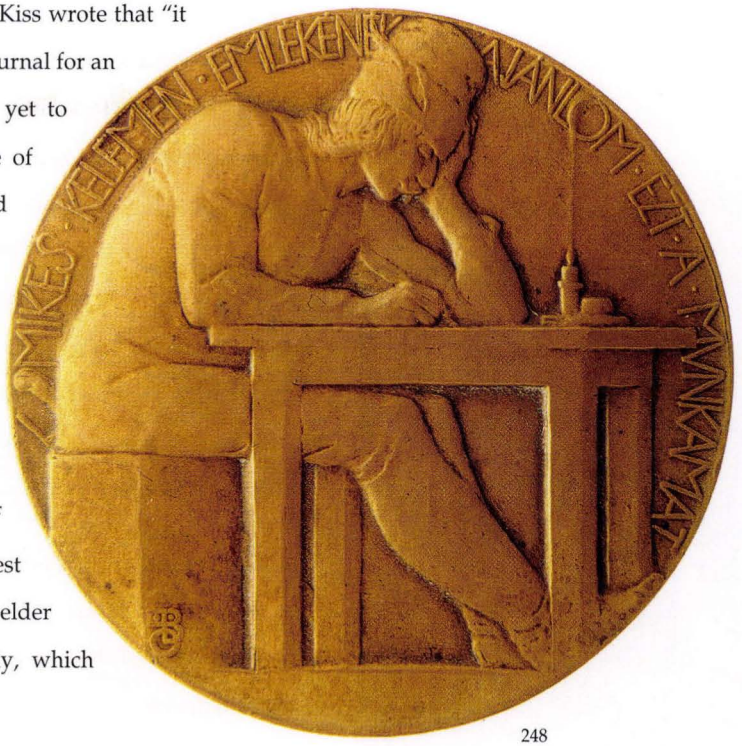


246



247

Kiss' literary workshop. Ten years after launching *A Hét*, József Kiss wrote that "it is ten years since I embarked on the venture to create a literary journal for an audience which did not yet exist and with writers who had yet to appear. [...] Does some firm principle govern the appearance of gifted artists or was it mere chance that a wealth of new talented writers, though differing widely from each other, appeared at the very time when *A Hét* was launched? [...] Perhaps it was not mere chance. [...] A tablet, inscribed with gold letters, is hung above the entrance to *A Hét*: 'Honor talent!'"




248

The first short stories by Tamás Kóbor also appeared on the pages of *A Hét*. His autobiographical novel, *Ki a gettóból* (*Out of the Ghetto*, 1911), immortalizes the characteristic types of the Pest ghetto, describing the crisis arising from the tensions between the elder son, who marries into a wealthy family, and his poor family, which remains confined to the ghetto.

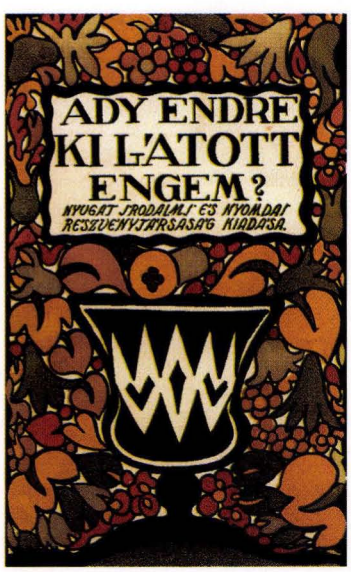
The literary role and importance of *A Hét* began to fade when the most important literary journal of the early 20th century, *Nyugat* (1908–1941), was launched. The authors of *A Hét* figured prominently in the three major generations of writers whose activity can be linked to *Nyugat*: Sándor Bródy, one of the creators of modern Hungarian prose, and of the new literary theme of city life, Dezső Szomory, an outstanding novelist and playwright, Jenő Heltai, author of still popular comedies, and Ernő Szép, author of perceptive and lyric poems, short stories and novels all evoking the memories of childhood. The first editors of *Nyugat* included Ignotus, Miksa Fenyő and Ernő Osvát, all leading spirits of Hungarian literature and literary critics of the next period.

249



*Nyugat* strove to express the re-orientation of new Hungarian literature towards modern western artistic and literary currents. At the same time, the logo of the journal's title page, a plaquette by Fülöp Ö. Beck, symbolized the continuation of Hungarian literary traditions. Works by Endre Ady, the outstanding Hungarian poet of the early 20th century, were the hallmarks of this new literary journal. Ady's circle included Lajos Biró, who was the first to note Ady's talent, Anna Lesznai, who illustrated the title pages of Ady's volumes, and Lajos Hatvany, the renowned patron of *Nyugat* and of Hungarian literature.

250



251



252



251
Baron Sándor Hatvany Deutsch
with his sons,
the writer Lajos Hatvany
and the painter Ferenc Hatvany

252
Tibor Déry as a young man

Lajos Biró's historical novel, *A bazini zsidók* (*The Jews of Bazin*, 1921), commemorates the martyrs of the 1529 blood libel. The novel, based on historical events, explores the eternal problems of Jewish fate and Jewish identity. Anna Lesznai began writing her novel on the history of *fin-de-siècle* assimilated Jewry, *Kezdetben volt a kert* (*In the Beginning Was the Garden*, 1966), based in part on autobiographical elements, in the 1930s. Lajos Hatvany's trilogy, *Urak és emberek* (*Of Lords and Men*), also incorporates many autobiographical elements. The first volume of the planned trilogy appeared in 1926 (the unfinished trilogy was eventually published in 1963) and it describes the lives of successive generations, illustrating the history of 19th century Jewry of Hungary. The descendant of a Jew with sidelocks, a grain merchant, founds his own bank at the end of the century and marries a countess. But, no matter how successful assimilation was on the whole, the individual's life was still doomed to end in tragedy.

World War I and the 1918–1919 revolution wrought a major change in the lives of the Jewish writers too. Béla Balázs, the librettist of Bartók's opera and ballet *A kékszakállú herceg vára* (*Bluebeard's Castle*, 1910) and *A fából faragott királyfi* (*The Wooden Prince*, 1912), enlisted for military service on the front. Menyhért Lengyel, the acclaimed author of various plays, including the one on which Bartók's ballet, *A csodálatos mandarin* (*Miraculous Mandarin*, 1917), was based, dispatched his anti-war writings to *Nyugat* from Switzerland. Ferenc Molnár, the world-famous author of numerous short stories, plays and the novel *A Pál utcai fiúk* (*The Paul Street Boys*, 1907), was also a war correspondent. His novel *Andor* (1918) is less known. The half-Jewish main character, a rootless and indecisive young man, is doomed to failure and he commits suicide.

Many Jewish writers who played an active role in Hungarian intellectual and literary life also participated in left-wing movements. Many of them became members of the Writers' Directory, the National Council, the Commissariat of Public Education and the Vörösmarty Academy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919.

Many of these writers left during the White Terror, or later, when the Jewish laws were enacted; they moved to Vienna, Berlin, Switzerland, Rome, Paris and London, and even as far as the United States. Some went to Moscow. Sándor Barta, the avant-garde poet who had by this time begun to write realistic novels, went to Moscow, where he later became a victim of the showcase trials.

Under the influence of the intellectual and ideological currents of the 20th century, literary works tackled the problems of Jewish identity from many different angles. Károly Pap took an unusual approach to the controversial problem of Jewish-Hungarian coexistence in his pamphlet, *Zsidó*

*sebek és bűnök* (*Jewish Wounds and Vices*, 1935), in which he assumed the prophet's role and called for Jewish soul-searching, stirring up a bitter debate. His novel of rebellion, *Azarel* (1938), combines autobiographical elements with countless Jewish motifs. Himself the son of the Sopron rabbi, he criticizes the lifestyle of the Orthodox grandfather and the Neolog family from the rebellious son's point of view.

Tibor Déry's monumental novel, *A befejezetlen mondat* (*The Unfinished Sentence*, 1933–1938, first published in 1947), paints a colorful historical tableau of central Europe in the 1930s. The bourgeois intellectual main character of this novel, incorporating numerous autobiographical elements – one can guess, despite the writer's reticence, that he is Jewish – tries unsuccessfully to find his identity while flirting with various left-wing movements.

The problem of "Jewish Hungarian" or "Hungarian Jewish," reflecting the uncertainties in identity, remained an unresolved question for intellectuals of Jewish origins who wrote in Hungarian and blended into Hungarian intellectual life from the 1840s. After the anti-Jewish legislation and outbreak of World War II, and before the Jews of Hungary were actually incarcerated in ghettos and deported, Jewish writers and literary historians felt the need to reaffirm their Hungarianness in spite of, and as a protest against, the discriminatory measures. It is a tragic irony of fate that between 1940 and 1943 several anthologies appeared, which purported to prove that for the past century Jewish writers had enriched Hungarian literature as Hungarian. Still, these facts of literary history did not save their lives, no matter how outstanding their contribution to the flourishing intellectual life of the preceding decades.

Artúr Elek, the art critic of *Nyugat*, committed suicide after the German occupation. Károly Pap was last seen in Buchenwald sometime in early 1945. The poet György Sárközi, a regular columnist of *Nyugat*, the reader of the Athenaeum Publishing House and series editor of the first Hungarian sociography series, died of hunger in the Balf camp. Antal Szerb, the outstanding essayist of the period, author of *Magyar irodalomtörténet* (*History of Hungarian Literature*) and A *világirodalom története* (*History of World Literature*), died at Balf, as did Gábor Halász, literary historian, literary critic and one of the best essayists of his time. Andor Endre Gelléri, an acclaimed novelist, died in Günskirchen, after the liberation of the camp. György Bálint, the excellent journalist, perished somewhere in the Ukraine.

Miklós Radnóti, the poet of the youngest *Nyugat* generation, was deported to the Bor camp. In the fall of 1944, he took part in a forced march of camp inmates towards Germany. His last poems, jotted down in a notebook, were found in his pocket after the exhumation of a mass grave.

Miklós Radnóti

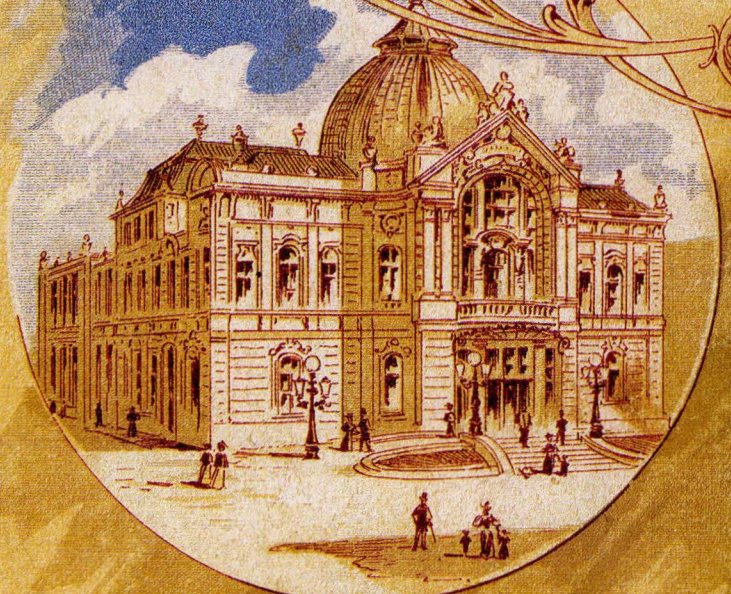
**FORCED MARCH**

A fool he is who, collapsed,
rises and walks again,
Ankles and knees moving
alone, like wandering pain,
Yet he, as if wings uplifted him,
sets out on his way,
And in vain the ditch calls him
back, who dare not stay.
And if asked why not, he might answer
– without leaving his path –
That his wife was awaiting him,
and a saner, more beautiful death.
Poor fool! He's out of his mind:
now, for a long time,
Only scorched winds have whirled
over the houses at home,
The wall has been laid low,
the plum-tree is broken there,
The night of our native hearth
flutters, thick with fear.
O if only I could believe
that everything of worth
Were not just in my heart –
that I still had a home on earth;
If only I had! As before,
jam made fresh from the plum
Would cool on the old verandah,
in peace the bee would hum,
And an end-of-summer stillness
would bask in the drowsy garden,
Naked among the leaves
would sway the fruit-trees' burden,
And She would be waiting, blonde
against the russet hedgerow,
As the slow morning painted
slow shadow over shadow, –
Could it perhaps still be?
The moon tonight's so round!
Don't leave me friend, shout at me:
I'll get up off the ground!

*15 September 1944*

Translated by
Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

1896
május 1.



# PROLÓG

A
BUDAPESTI
VIGSZÍNHÁZ
megnyitása
alkalmára
irta KOZMA ANDOR.

KUNOSY VILMOS és FIA ZENEMŰNYOMDÁJA BUDAPEST.

# In the Service of Thalia

## Tamás Gajdó

The opening of the first permanent Hungarian-language theater in 1837 in Pest-Buda, soon to become the capital of Hungary, was a definitive event in the history of the Hungarian theater. On that festive occasion, the stage of the Hungarian Theater of Pest was occupied by allegorical figures – characters in a play written by the national poet, Mihály Vörösmarty, especially for this occasion: Árpád, the leader of the Hungarian conquerors, the "Poet" and the "Actress," and the "Construction Worker." This tribute to tradition diverted attention from a minor but nonetheless important fact which might not have been to the taste of the resurgent Hungarian nation: namely, that Márk Rózsavölgyi, the best Hungarian *csárdás* composer, who composed two pieces for this occasion, was formerly called Márk Mordechai Rosenthal and was a Jewish salesman. Could anyone have believed at the time that half a century later several talented actors, directors, playwrights, and even the director of the National Theater would be of Jewish origin?

But let us start telling the story from the beginning. Two distant but still interrelated conditions had to be fulfilled before Jewish theater-makers could take the leading role in the history of the Hungarian theater: one was Jewish emancipation, and the other the acceptance of the fact that the function of theater had changed. In earlier times, theater fulfilled an elevated moral-educational and linguistic task, and played a prime role in the formation of Hungarian national identity. Now it could also be considered as pure entertainment and as a business undertaking.

After the 1880s, Jewish actors and theater directors started appearing in theater companies especially outside of the capital.

The Folk Theater, opened in 1875, was a milestone, the first place in the capital where Jewish actors were allowed to perform on stage. The first two Jewish comedians were Izsó Gyöngyi and Adolf Tollagi.

The repertoire of the Folk Theater played a pioneering role in the promotion of religious tolerance. Almost all of the folk plays and especially those about the 1848–1849 Revolution and War of Independence included a Jewish character with strong Hungarian national feelings.

The autobiography of Izsó Gyöngyi reveals a peculiar aspect of Hungarian theater history. In the light genres, Jewish actors and directors did not scorn any type of entertainment. Most of the bars

253
*Prologue* written on the opening of the Comedy Theater (May 1, 1896)

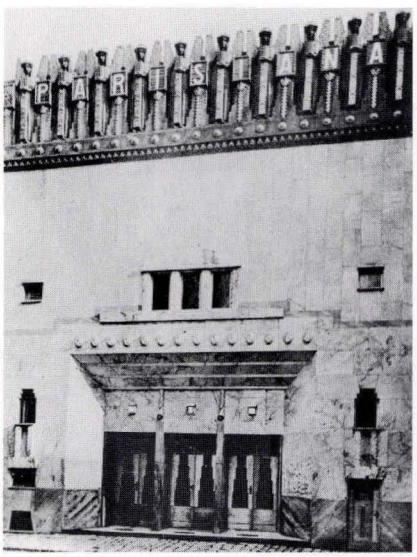
of dubious fame and cafes chantantes, which were established in the last decades of the 19th century for profit purposes, were transformed into quality music theaters around the turn of the century: they included the famous Somossy Music Theater, the Royal Music Theater, the Parisiana. These institutions brought urban and cosmopolitan forms of entertainment to Budapest. The main attraction in the infamous Blau Katz and other night clubs on Király Street were the obscene routines performed in German by comedians. This phenomenon was frequently mocked by anti–Semites and very soon the emerging Jewish intelligentsia – journalists, writers, actors and directors – also began to condemn them. Though there were German language shows even in the 1920s, from the beginning of the century on the establishment of a Hungarian cabaret genre was on the main agenda.

Károly Baumann was the first to sing in Hungarian at a German night club. Attempts were made to run a Hungarian show in 1901 (Tarka Stage) and 1907 (Bonbonniere), but the first real success was the Modern Stage (1908-1913). Here Endre Nagy created his famous literary cabaret – a master of ceremonies chatting casually about current political and social issues. Notable literary figures wrote the scripts. Two of them, Ferenc Molnár and Menyhért Lengyel, became world famous. Most of the characters were taken from the upper middle class or the petit bourgeoisie and the Jewish world. Thus, for example, the characters of men and women of the nouveau riche

254
Parisienne nightclub, designed by Béla Lajta

255
Lipót Herman's drawing of Menyhért Lengyel and Jenő Heltai in the Fészek coffee house (1927)

256
"Let there be a bit of cabaret!" István Szigethy's cartoon Endre Nagy, Jenő Herczeg, Vilmos Komlós, Béla Salamon, Dezső Kellér (about 1935)




254




255


Egy kis kabaré is legyen!
Ez itt Nagy Endre bácsi szelleme amint éppen vakarja a fejét.
A két nagy gyerek: Herceg és Komlós bácsik
Salamon bácsi
Még egy kis fiú:
Nagy cipőben kis fiu, „a" szellér

257



257
József Sziklay, Marcsa Szilágyi and Sándor Rott on the stage of the Komédia Orfeum (Photo by Dezső Áldor, 1935)



258

258
Hacsek and Sajó were cabaret figures created by Jenő Herczeg and Vilmos Komlós. The "pseudo-idiot" and the "angry, but well-meaning"ordinary citizen discuss the affairs of the world beside the imitation marble table

class living in the Jewish quarter of Budapest (Lipótváros), who converted to Christianity, or dubious characters haunting the artistic world as if they were at home in it, were male characters dominated by their wives, etc. Endre Nagy established a new tradition with his political and social parodies, by setting to music classical Hungarian literary works, by his improvisational style and by maintaining constant contact with the audience. Though the importance of the cabaret changed from time to time, the tradition survived.

A legendary cabaret comedian was Sándor Rott. Students at the actors' training school were advised by their teachers to try to glean from his techniques. His legendary role as Grün, the kibitzer in *Kalábriászparti*, is an archetype of Hungarian cabaret.

The changes that occurred in Hungarian theater around the turn of the century can best be portrayed by telling the story of the Feld family whose members were all involved in the Magyarization of Budapest and in instituting modern theater there. Zsigmond Feld arrived in Budapest as a German actor. He opened a German-speaking summer theater in 1879 and offered Hungarian language performances from 1889 at the Városligeti Theater. His daughter Irén, who was also one of the first Hungarian feminists, organized a company called the Chamber Theater. They were the first to stage in Hungarian the works of Ibsen and Wedekind, Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Both the elder Feld and his son, Mátyás, invited famous Italian guest artists whose performances attracted even people who would otherwise have stayed away from the "Feld Theater." The parodies performed every summer by Mátyás Feld mocked the success of the permanent theaters. And when anti–Semitism began to spread in Hungary, they did not remain silent. To defy anti-Jewish sentiments, they produced the plays of Mátyás Feld: *There Isn't a Jew Left in Pest* (1924) *I Can't Live Without A Jew* (1929), as well as an operetta, *It's Hard To Be A Jew* (1930), written by Mihály Erdélyi, based on the ideas of Mátyás Feld.

What was going on at the National Theater in the meantime? Under the direction of Ede Paulay, this crucial national institution achieved European rank in the 1870s. In 1873, the first Jewish actor, Antal Faludi, was employed at the National Theater. Faludi himself only played waiters in French comedies, but those Jews who followed him, Ede Újházy, Szeréna Fáy, Jenő Iványfi, Teréz Csillag, Oszkár Beregi, Gyula Bartos, Gyula Gál and Kálmán Rózsahegyi, became significant personalities and leading actors at the prime theater of Hungary.

In 1896 a new theater was opened in Budapest. The Comedy Theater, located among mills and factories, became a symbol of bourgeois Hungary, and of the career of the Jewish bourgeoisie and Jewish artists. The founder and owner, Gábor Faludi, was originally a grain merchant. His sons, Jenő, Sándor and Miklós, became theater directors. The first artistic director of the theater, Mór Ditrói, amalgamated former members of the National Theater of Kolozsvár with young actors and the company created a style of its own.

In the first decades of the 20th century some committed artists made several attempts to create art theaters to match the latest trends of European culture.

Hungarian Jewish theater experts played a major role in the progressive movements of Hungarian theater, as well. The Thalia Society (1904–1908), László Bánóczi, György Lukács, Sándor Hevesi, and the New Stage (1912), led by Artúr Bárdos and Béla Révész, aimed not only at performing modern European dramas but also at bringing modern theatrical trends to Hungary and making theater an accepted, independent branch of art. Though they could not break the actor-centered tradition of Hungarian theater, many Jewish painters and stage designers contributed to the introduction of scenic elements, and to the reform of costumes and stage props.

Hevesi, who converted to Catholicism, was later appointed director of the National Theater. This step went along the lines of the political consolidation that followed the White Terror reaction to the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic. For ten years he was supported in his plans to refresh the repertoire and acting style of the theater. Hevesi founded the Chamber Theater of the National Theater, and instead of old fashioned classic productions, he directed productions that truly appealed to the audience. When radical politics came to the fore again he was dismissed. He then became director of the Hungarian Theater, located in Erzsébetváros, the district where the Hungarian Jewish petit bourgeoisie lived.

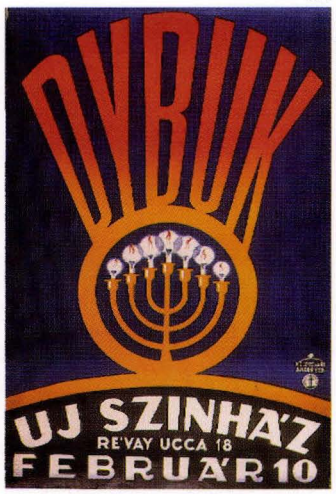
Artúr Bárdos had been fighting the monopoly of comedy productions all his life, with

259
In 1928 the Új Theater staged An-Ski's *Dybbuk*, a Kabbalist legend (Poster by Andor Kolozsvári)

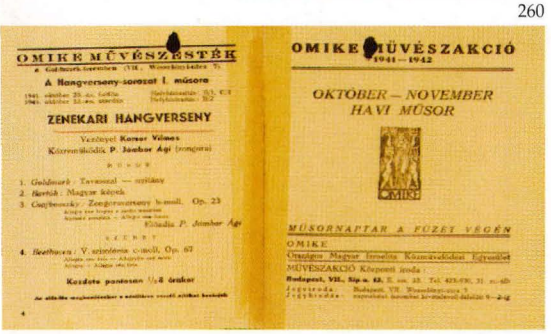
260
The program of OMIKE (National Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association) in October-November, 1941

261
Oszkár Beregi and Immánuel Löw in the synagogue of Szeged. In the 1930s, Beregi held readings from the Old Testament in various synagogues in Budapest and other Hungarian towns and cities

259




260




261



considerable success. He worked in private theaters. In 1936 he produced G. B. Shaw's *Saint Joan* at the Belvárosi Theater. This production secured his place among the brightest stars in the history of the Hungarian theater. However, the wealthy Jews, whose financial support enabled the staging of quality productions which were not box-office successes, are generally forgotten.

It should be remembered that there were theater directors outside of Budapest too. At the beginning of the 20th century there were several quality theaters in the provincial towns of Hungary as well. Jenő Janovics became the director of the National Theater of Kolozsvár. He elevated the theatrical tastes of the people of Kolozsvár by producing classical and Hungarian dramas. Since theater audience in the small towns demanded all the theatrical novelties of the capital, the theatrical troupes had to be supplied with costumes and stage props to match the needs of a varied repertoire. For a long time, it was these troupes alone which linked the small towns to the prevailing culture, and their role remained crucial even after the opening of movie theaters.

It was Jews who established the urban entertainment business in Budapest, helped bring modern artistic trends to Hungary and participated in the theatrical press. They took part in actor training, maintained theater and stage literary agencies, and raised future generations of actors and audiences in the children's theaters. Jewish theater critics always had their eye on the latest developments in the Hungarian theater. However, due to assimilation, these artists and literary figures did not participate in cultural life as Jews. Only a few of them had anything to do with Jewish religious tradition. Artists of Jewish origin constituted a separate caste in the artistic society of Budapest. They considered themselves Hungarian and cosmopolitan at best. Only after 1938 did they become Jewish again, forced to do so by the Jewish laws.

After 1939, almost every important actor of Jewish origin took to writing his memoirs, only partly as a source of income. These books were meant to substitute for their presence on the stage so that the audience should not forget their former favorites. They did not believe, they could not believe, in the finality of their situation. These memoirs are written in a tone of sad astonishment, rather than resentment. None of these artists could comprehend how they ended up ostracized from the Hungarian nation.

In 1938, the Theater and Film Chamber was set up, in which the membership of artists of Jewish origin was limited to 20%. Only members of the Chamber could get work contracts at any theater. As a consequence of this measure, masses of Jewish actors became unemployed. Their hardship was somewhat eased when in the fall of 1939 the OMIKE (*Országos Magyar Izraelita Közművelődési*

*Egyesület*) (National Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association) received permission to organize opera and theater performances in the Goldmark Hall cultural center of the Pest Jewish community. These performances could only be attended by members of the association. The director of the theater, Oszkár Beregi, noted about the OMIKE Artists' Action in his diary, "We were deprived of our intellectual work and physical livelihood at the same time. We may have survived the latter, but we choked on the 'word' which we were forbidden to utter. Work at Goldmark Hall was financially completely insignificant, but this was our 'pulpit.' And it is to my satisfaction that we did not use this pulpit for cheap, inferior purposes."

In the course of the OMIKE Artists' Action, classical plays were performed – Racine's *Esther*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* – and also works by Hungarian playwrights who were now silenced. Lakner bácsi held children's performances and there were cabaret and musical shows, trying to bring back the jolly atmosphere of better times. It was the German occupation of Budapest that ended these theatrical performances in March 1944.

Several excellent theater experts also fell victim to the Holocaust. Lajos Gárdonyi and István Bondy, both actors of the Comedy Theater, György Nagy, actor and script writer, and Sándor Radó, the unforgettable comedian, did not return from forced labor service. Jenő Sziklai, the director of the Theater of Szeged and later of the Operetta in Budapest, was deported. Artúr Lakner, the director of the children's theater, disappeared without a trace. Géza Steinhardt, an important figure of the cabaret, perished as well. Emma Komlóssy starved to death during the siege of Budapest. Imre Roboz, the financial director of the Comedy Theater, Irén Feld, an actress, and Jenő Erődi, a theater historian, fell victim to Arrow Cross henchmen.



262
Performance of *Szulamit*, a musical by László Beöthy, Emil Makai and Albert Kövessy, as part of the Artist's Action of the National Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association. The music was composed by Endre Donáth (December 21, 1941.)



# Jewish Photographers in Hungary

Michael Simon

Photography first made its appearance in 1839, and by mid-century it was widely employed in technically-advanced countries. In Hungary it developed more slowly. Until the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Hungary was a backward country, but by the 1880s its economy was growing rapidly, and undergoing industrialization. There was growing need for a managerial middle class, but the Hungarian middle classes, which had the educational qualifications required for the task, refused to be drawn into the country's commercial life. They believed that gentlemen might work for the state, for the army or for the church, but that commerce was beneath them.

Jews were not so restrained. As soon as Emancipation permitted them to gain the necessary education, they took on the business sector. When Jews made money, they provided their children with education and inspired them with intellectual ambition. The next generation wrote, and engaged in trade, medicine or the law. Those with artistic aspirations chose photography.

The art of photography was made for young Hungarian Jews, since it had no established conventions, and among Jews there was a lack of visual tradition. In photography, emancipated Jews found a ready source of expression of their newfound freedom from discrimination and from the restrictions religious life had imposed on their parents and grandparents.

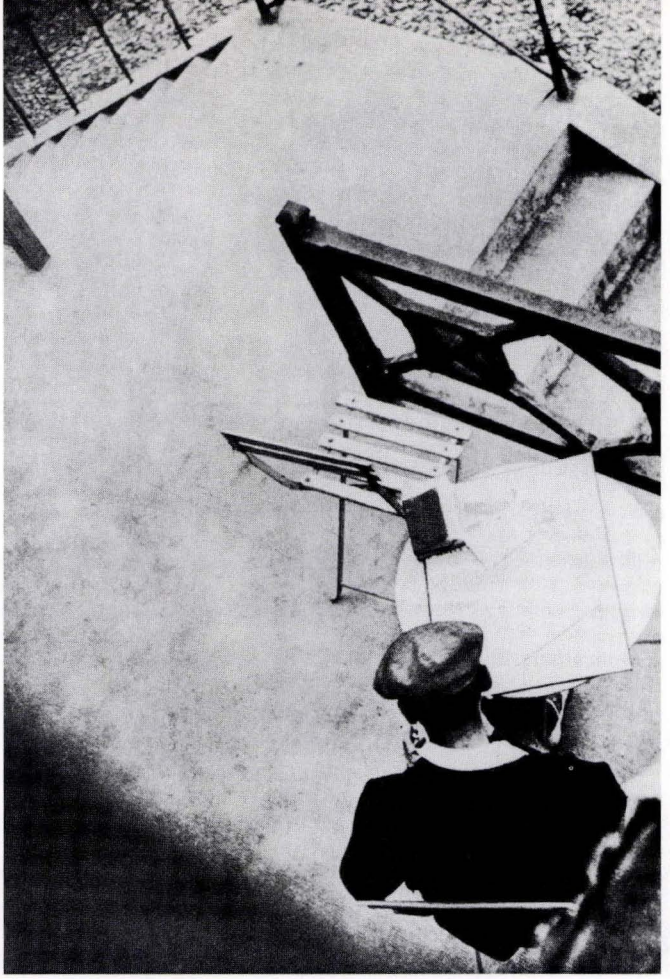
In Hungary, photography was the domain of tradesmen until the turn of the century. Around 1905, inspired by Western examples, the amateur photography movement gathered momentum. Camera club publications brought pictures and technical information to the public. No wonder, therefore, that bright young Jews chose the camera as their means of self-expression.

André Kertész bought his first camera in 1912. Although he earned his living on the stock exchange, photography was the center of his life. When war came, his camera accompanied him to the trenches. His photographic documentation of the soldiers' life records the Great War with clarity, compassion and humanity.

To recuperate from his battle wounds, Kertész spent the last years of the war in the provincial town of Esztergom. There, too, he photographed with the insight that was later to bring him fame. His sensitive portrayal of the lives of ordinary people marked the foundation of the approach often denoted humanist photography.

263

263
André Kertész, *Blind Musician* (1921)



264
László Moholy-Nagy, *View from above*

By the mid-twenties, Kertész had realized that economic, intellectual and political limitations had erased his prospects for a photographic career in Hungary. In the mid-twenties, he emigrated to Paris. There, artistic circles accepted the young photographer as an equal, and he was exposed to the company of painters whose visual influence left a lasting mark on his work.

Moholy-Nagy, whose aristocratic-sounding name disguised his beginnings as László Weiss, wrote poetry while in law school. After his military service, he became a painter. At the end of 1919, his left-wing political affiliations made his departure from Hungary imperative. He soon found himself in Berlin, where he discovered photography. In Moholy-Nagy's hands, the photographic process became an experimental tool. He tested the camera's ability to describe perspective and tactile surfaces.

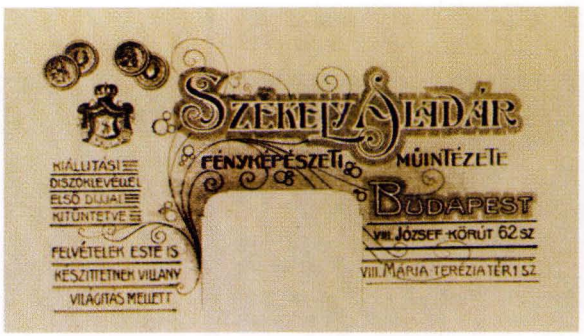
In the early thirties, Robert Capa's camera recorded the Loyalist defense of the city of Madrid. From then on, he became a photographer of armed conflict. In the early forties, Capa moved to the United States, where he worked as a reporter for *Life Magazine*. He landed with the first wave of troops on the Normandy beaches on D-Day, and his photographs have become synonymous with World War II. In 1948, Capa documented Israel's War of Independence. In 1954, while photographing the French action in Vietnam, he was killed by a landmine.



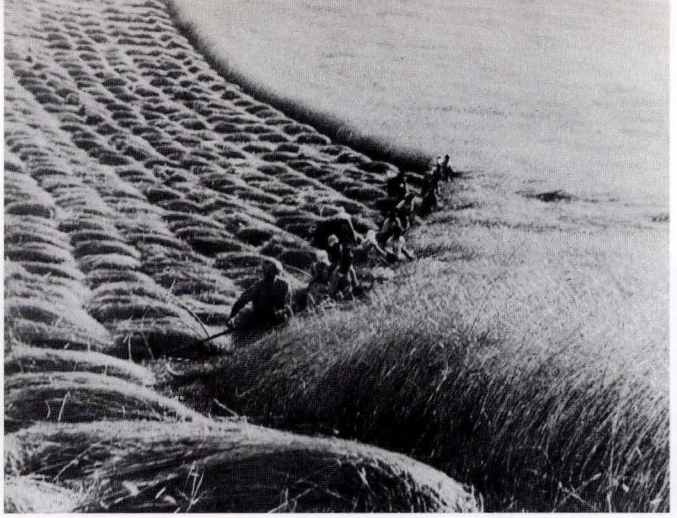

265
Robert Capa, *Liberation of Paris, III* (1944)

Kertész, Moholy-Nagy and Capa left Hungary in search of political climate congenial to their work. However, many photographers remained there, whose work is unknown outside the country's borders. A large number of them were Jews. In retrospect, their involvement with the Hungarian amateur movement seems anomalous, because the Hungarian photographers of the inter-war years advocated the right-wing political tenets of the Horthy regime.

The Hungarian nation was united in the conviction that the soul of the country was located in its




266



267

266
Advertisement for Aladár Székely's atelier

267
Ernő Vadas, *Harvest* (1937)

villages. Photographers recorded a sanitized, optimistic, beautified version of life in the country, in a style which came to be known internationally as the Hungarian Style. Ernő Vadas was its best known exponent. His technical mastery enabled him to present rural life with great brilliance, and ability to organize the picture-plane earned him an international reputation.

The Hungarian political scene was split between believers in fascism or communism as the force capable of leading the world to a better future. The same division existed among Hungarian photographers. Although proponents of the Hungarian Style did not see themselves as the propagandists of fascism, that was the ideology they promoted.

At the other end of the political spectrum, left-wing photographers aimed to promote the class struggle by documenting the living and working conditions of the lower classes. Kata Sugár depicted life in the Hungarian village in terms which were the antithesis of what the world saw in Hungarian Style photographs. While Vadas showed the village as an idyllic spot, Sugár criticized poverty and the social structure.

Political circumstances altered the face of photography after 1945. In many ways, Socialist Realism continued the tradition of the Hungarian Style. The subject matter may have changed, but the attitude remained. Before 1945, photographers recorded the beauty of village life; after 1945, factories and the beauty of labor became their subject matter. In these years, Ernő Vadas produced sparkling images, best among them his *November Morning*.

The early fifties were a stifling period in Hungary, when the Communist government controlled all aspects of art. However, despite the dictatorial control, some memorable images were created. Marian Reismann photographed a meeting in a village, that was hailed at the time for supporting collectivization. That praise notwithstanding, Reismann's photograph rises above political events to celebrate basic human values.

Following the Revolution of 1956, Hungarian political life proceeded on a more moderate level, but the control over photography remained tight. Photographs imply truth and the country's



268
Marian Reismann,
*Meeting at the Bag collective farm*
(1953)

political leaders wanted only their own truth to be documented. By the seventies, the control had been relaxed. In the middle of that decade, several photographers embarked on social criticism, believing that social improvement required the definition of social ills. The camera of Tamás Féner, their leader, reflected not the beauty of socialist labor but the arduous labor in Hungarian factories. He painted a grim picture of the Gypsies' life of poverty. His photographs contributed to the disintegration of the Communist system a decade later. In more recent years, Féner has published a series of photographs on traditional Jewish life.

Hungarian Jews left a significant mark on photography, in which they found the perfect medium to describe their experience. Photography spoke of modernity, and modernity promised a better world. Hungarian Jews felt themselves to be Hungarian; they spoke Hungarian, but emotionally they remained outsiders. This separation gave them the perspective which the recorder requires. Hungarian culture is richer for their contribution.



# In the Maze of Movie

## István Nemeskürty

In the 1910s, Jenő Janovics, the director of the National Theater of Kolozsvár, decided to produce films. Janovics, the son of a poor Jewish family from Ungvár, recognized the great opportunity offered by the silent motion picture. Since everything was communicated by visual images, all linguistic difficulties were overcome. As a first step, he wanted to provide his actors with some occupation for the summer break. He built a small studio, more of a little hut than a real building, and began to look around for experts. At the time, acclaimed theater directors were not yet willing to "descend" to the level of motion pictures, so he employed young people who had just started to learn about movies.

The first of these was the journalist, Sándor Kellner, from Budapest, who had spent a few weeks in Paris among filmmakers. Kellner, the orphaned son of a Jewish peasant family from Túrkeve, started his filmmaking career on Janovics' team under the name of Sándor Korda. He made a film version of Gergely Csiky's play, *The Grandmother*, which is often performed to the present day. Since his films were a great success, Korda soon moved to Budapest, founded his own film company and started editing a film magazine.



270

269
Poster of the film made from Mihály Babits' novel *A gólyakalifa* (1917) by Frigyes Karinthy and Sándor Korda. Oszkár Beregi and Judit Bánky (Photo by Kovács)

270
Film made from Sándor Bródy's play, *Lyon Lea*, by Sándor Korda and Miklós M. Pásztory (1915) Scene from the movie, with Márton Rátkai in the center




271

271
István Zágon, Károly Nóti,
*Hyppolit, the Lackey,*
István Székely's film.
Gyula Csortos, Gyula Kabos,
Mici Haraszti, Sándor Goth (1931)

272
Poster for a film by the great humorist,
Frigyes Karinthy, *My Wife is Stared At!*
(1914)




272

Janovics, who started directing himself, invited the actor, Mihály Kertész, who had previously worked in Denmark, to work with him. (Kertész emigrated to the United States of America in the 1920s and changed his name to Curtis upon arrival in Hollywood). Kertész's most famous film was an adaptation of the Hungarian national classic drama, *Bánk Bán*, by József Katona, with the participation of the leading actors in Budapest, including Mari Jászai. The third Jewish member of Janovics' team was Márton Garas. Garas made, among others, a film version of the ballad, *Tetemrehívás*, by János Arany. Later he was invited to work in Berlin. His film, *Anna Karenina*, directed in 1918 in Budapest, with Irén Varsányi in the title role, was an extraordinary success.

Due to the pioneering efforts of Janovics, Hungarian film studios became a reservoir of talented Jewish directors and actors in the 1910s. Adolf Mérei made a film of the ballad *Judit Simon*, by József Kiss, Lajos Lázár filmed the drama *Typhoon*, by Menyhért Lengyel, Kertész adapted the comedy *The Devil*, by Ferenc Molnár, and Korda made a film out of Edward Knoblauch's comedy *Faun*, with Gábor Rajnai in the main role. It was Korda who first took the initiative to film the works of the great Hungarian novelist, Mór Jókai (*Man With the Golden Touch*). The first person to make a Jewish film in Palestine in 1935, entitled *This is the Land*, was Lajos Lázár.

After World War I, both Kertész and Korda left Hungary. Now known as Alexander Korda, he supported young filmmakers and his former master, the aged Jenő Janovics, from London.

Hungarian born Adolph Zukor, the founder and owner of Paramount Pictures, took pride in his Hungarian Jewish family until his death (at the age of 104), and supported his hometown, Ricse, even after World War II.

Sándor Korda's two younger brothers followed him along the path to fame. Zoltán became a famous film director (*Sanders of the River*), while Vince was a painter and stage prop designer.

Some of the distinguished personalities of inter-war film making were Béla Gaál (*The Wonder Car*), Viktor Gertler, the brother of the famous violinist Endre Gertler (*Gaudy Misery*), Artúr Bárdos, theater manager and artistic director (*It Was Me*), and László Vajda (*Man Under the Bridge*).

A notable film was *The Bride of Torocko*, adapted by Márton Keleti from the world-famous play by Ottó Indig. The heroine was suspected of being a Jewess and thus the rich peasant boy could not marry her. The film openly and bravely criticized anti–Semitism.

As a result of the shameful Jewish Laws, Jewish filmmakers were forced to leave their studios after 1939. Many of them were taken to concentration camps and murdered there. This was the tragic fate of the above mentioned Béla Gaál and István Mihály, the most significant Hungarian script- and songwriters. Others, such as Gyula Kabos, one of the greatest Hungarian actors ever, escaped by emigrating to the United States of America. Kabos could not find work in the foreign land and died of a heart attack.

Of the above-mentioned directors, Márton Keleti and Viktor Gertler continued to make films after 1945. Some of their most successful and popular films were *The Corporal and the Others* and *And Then the Guy...*

This brief survey of the accomplishments of Hungarian-born Jewish filmmakers in Hungary and abroad leads us to examine the underlying reasons for the very strong participation of Jewish artists not only in the cinema, but also in literature, music and the arts. They did not play as prominent a role in other countries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Austria, Bohemia and Moravia. One explanation may be that Hungarians have a highly developed visual imagination. The rich visual imagery of Hungarian folk carvings, folk tales and poetry bear witness to this fact. Jewish filmmakers, whose mother tongue was Hungarian, also enjoyed this mastery. Sándor Korda started his career as a poet, and even published a volume of short stories, and Gyula Kabos, in his United States exile years, published a collection of short stories in Hungarian. And finally the most important reason: prior to 1918, Hungary accepted and supported almost all kinds of movements, persuasions, religions and outlooks.



273
The Korda brothers: Vince, Sándor, Zoltán

# Secular Jewish Musicians in Hungary

Judit Frigyesi

In its secular repertoire, Hungarian Jewish music shows a pattern rather different from the rest of the Eastern Ashkenazi territories. Whether because of a long history of relatively stable coexistence with Christian Hungarians or for the other social reasons, Hungarian Jews seem to have shared the secular repertoires of their non-Jewish neighbors. Alongside Yiddish and Hebrew-language songs, rural Jews sang Hungarian peasant songs in a perfectly traditional peasant style, indistinguishable from the performance of Hungarian peasants.

The situation is similar in the case of Jewish instrumental music. The (non-liturgical) musical activities of Jews are mentioned first in 1476, in the description of the wedding ceremony of King Matthias and Beatrix. Several 17th and 18th century documents attest to the presence of Jewish musicians, the best known among them is Csokonai's description in his *Dorottya* (1798). It is clear that, at least in the 19th century, Jewish instrumentalists played on certain Jewish holidays (especially on Purim) and at weddings, sometimes together with Gypsies.



274
Lipót Herman, *Purim* (Oil painting, 1943)

Whereas these sources confirm the existence of Jewish musicians, we cannot be certain of whether there was a specifically Jewish instrumental repertoire, performed only for the Jewish community. Such a Jewish instrumental repertoire, the so-called traditional klezmer music, can be found in the territories east of Hungary. The surviving oral documents (interviews and collected music recordings) suggest that this repertoire was not known in the Hungarian territories west of Transylvania, and that even in Transylvania it was less prominent in the Hungarian-speaking than in the Yiddish-speaking communities. Various sources mention that Hungarian Jews used the Rákóczi March for the wedding procession, and danced Hungarian rather that Jewish dances (though modified in the case of pair dances). Jews occasionally hired Gypsy musicians for weddings, who played partly the traditional Hungarian instrumental dance repertoire (*verbunkos*) and partly a mixed Gypsy-Jewish repertoire.

The first famous Hungarian Jewish composer and performer, Márk Rózsavölgyi, is said to have been the descendant of generations of *klezmerim*. Rózsavölgyi played a decisive role in Hungarian music, and was among the first to compose *verbunkos* style pieces in the form of symphonic art music. The struggles of Rózsavölgyi are indicative of the status of Jewish musicians. At a time when he was celebrated by the whole country, Rózsavölgyi was denied permission to settle in Budapest, and when he decided to stay there anyway was repeatedly ordered to relocate. For the authorities, Rózsavölgyi was no more than a suspect wandering Jewish fiddler, who was unable to earn a "proper" living.

As in other rapidly developing countries of eastern Europe in the 20th century, a great number of Jewish musicians emerged in Hungary in all spheres of the urban repertoire. Since they came from traditional *klezmer* families with considerable knowledge of popular music, it is not surprising that many of the assimilated Jews continued to work in this field. Jewish violinists often began their careers as leaders of Gypsy bands, as for instance, Lipót Fehér, who later became a celebrated violinist. Among the composers of *magyar nóta* (Hungarian folk-song-like popular song), there were many Jews, including László Ányos, Zsigmond Bodrogi, Náci Sas, Béla Hegyi, Ernő Lányi, Miksa Lengyel.

However, much of the Jewish musical activity focused on the more cosmopolitan genres of popular music. Besides well-known figures such as Károly Goldmark, József Konti, Imre Kálmán, many others devoted their talent to operetta (Szidor Bátor, Izor Béldi, József Bokor, Aladár Rényi, Adolf Szikla, Albert Szirmai, Leó Kern), and some of them (e.g., Rényi) composed also in more



275

276




275
Károly Goldmark in his birth-place, Keszthely, March, 1910 (Photo by Gyula Jelfy)

276
Márk Rózsavölgyi (Lithograph by Miklós Barabás, 1844)

serious genres. The operetta was virtually dominated by Jews, not only the composers but a large number of the performers and the audience also being Jewish. The leading figures of the Budapest cabaret and chanson were also Jewish (Béla Reinitz, Endre Nagy).

Jews were also the main supporters of the Hungarian modernist movement. At the crucial period of his development, Bartók was surrounded by Jews in his intellectual and musical environment (Emma Gruber, István Thomán, Viktor Herzfeld, Béla Balázs, György Lukács, Jelly Arányi, Stefi Geyer, etc.). In 1929, the (*Magyar*) *Zsidó Lexikon* listed more than four hundred Jewish musicians, who by that time enjoyed international or national reputation.

Jews remained in the forefront of the musical scene throughout the 20th century, although after World War II, and again after the Revolution of 1956, many of them emigrated. We find Jews among the leading composers, conductors and performers (composers: Sándor Jemnitz, Pál Arma, Pál Kadosa, György Kósa, Antal Molnár, Aladár Radó, Béla Reinitz, Albert Siklós, Leó Weiner; conductors: Antal Doráti, Antal Fleischer, Vilmos Komor, Emil Lichtenberg, Jenő Ormándy, Frigyes Reiner, Frigyes Sándor, György Solti, György Séll; violinists: Jelly Arányi, József Bloch, Endre Gertler, Stefi Geyer, Rezső Kemény, József Szigeti, Zoltán Székely; pianists: Iván Engel, Annie Fischer, Géza Fried, Lajos Hernádi, Ági Jámbor, Pál Kadosa, Imre Ungár, Tivadar Szántó, Margit Varró; cellists: Pál Hutter, Dávid Popper, Adolf Schiffer; opera singers: Gitta Alpár, Oszkár Kálmán, Mihály Székely). Jews were active as teachers (Viktor Herzfeld, Pál Kadosa, Albert Siklós, Leó Weiner, Lajos Hernádi, István Thomán, Margit Varró, Paula Braun, Dezső Rados, etc.), as historians of music and music critics (Izor Béldi, Bertalan Fabó, Géza Falk, Gyula Fodor, Sándor Jemnitz, József Keszler, Antal Molnár, Géza Molnár, Bence Szabolcsi), and they were the major music publishers (Rózsavölgyi, Kálmán Nádor, Ferenc Bárd, Zipser and König). In our era Hungarian Jews have become internationally known composers; György Ligeti and György Kurtág are considered today to be among the greatest composers of the second half of the 20th century.

But even more important than the list of names is the fact that Jews were the supportive public for serious music, including the avant-garde music of Bartók and Kodály; indeed, they were the creators of the modern musical environment in Hungary. For instance, Emil Lichtenberg was not simply a conductor and chorus leader; with his legendary Bach performances, he established a tradition of baroque vocal music in Hungary. A fascinating figure in the first half of the 20th century was Sándor Jemnitz, a composer who introduced the Schoenbergian twelve-tone system. His influence extended beyond composition: he was also an influential music critic, educating the

Hungarian public on a high level about modern music, providing information on the novelties of the West. Similarly, Béla Reinitz was more than a chanson composer: his songs based on Ady's poems were instrumental in paving the way for Ady's popularity (it is characteristic that Bartók dedicated his Five Ady Songs, Op. 16. to Reinitz).

Among the Jewish musicians, Leó Weiner was the most influential. Rather than teaching a body of knowledge, Weiner transmitted an attitude: a continuous search for the deepest musical message hidden in the score. Weiner inspired in his students the desire to discover the inner expressive meaning behind every musical pattern, a view that may seem specifically Jewish to those who are familiar with the traditional Jewish attitude toward text and its performance. Weiner educated virtually the entire new generation of Hungarian musicians.

It is surprising that, despite such a strong Jewish presence in music, we do not find a movement similar to the Petersburg school of Jewish composers. The Jewish composers in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century took a great interest in Jewish folklore and regarded it as their duty to create a specifically Jewish art music. In Hungary, despite the stimulating example of Bartók and Kodály, no similar movement emerged.

It appears that one of the reasons for the Hungarian Jews' lack of interest in their own musical tradition was that they were completely devoted to the Hungarian modernist movement. They believed that to emphasize their Jewishness would have created a split within the already small group of modernists who struggled for survival in a basically conservative milieu. Building something modern, and creating a democratic cultural atmosphere in symbiosis with those Hungarians who accepted them, seemed more important to them than to foster ethnic separateness. It is characteristic that when these Jews emigrated to Israel, where they found a somewhat similar attitude to the "building of a modern national culture," they immediately dedicated themselves to the cause of new Israeli music (e.g., Ödön Pártos, Ilonka Fehér, André Hajdú).

For Hungarian Jews music provided a territory where one could speak through a language of symbols without addressing political and national issues. The musical world was by no means free of political and national connotations but it was still the most abstract and symbolic of all intellectual domains (thanks also to Bartók's sublime way of using folk materials). Thus these modern-minded Jews escaped to a world of spirituality, so to speak, where existence could be explained through emotions and the symbols of art. They were reluctant to expose this world to the threat of ethnic hatred.

For these intellectuals, Jewishness was an ideal and not a pragmatic formulation of ethnicity, and thus material manifestations, such as folk art and traditional customs, were unacceptable. For all its achievements, this attitude failed to provide a basis for understanding Jewish identity, and Hungarian Jews suffer to this day from this problem.

Paradoxically, however, this world of music suited the secular Hungarian Jews not only because it helped them avoid the issue of Jewishness but also because here they could feel themselves be Jewish in a profound way. Many of them believed what Bence Szabolcsi expressed so beautifully, that the greatest achievement of Judaism (and indeed of civilization) is to carry on the "prophetic tradition," meaning to aspire to become the "uncompromising conscience" of mankind. Being involved in the spirituality of music, being missionaries of modern art, enabled Hungarian Jewish musicians to live in accordance with that ideal.

277
Jewish and Ruthenian musicians
(Verecke, 1895)



# Jewish Fine Arts in Hungary

Frigyes Porscht

In the early 19th century the spirit of the Enlightenment spread throughout Europe and reached Hungary. As many centuries of self-imposed or forced isolation came to an end, tremendous intellectual energy was released and manifested in various branches of science and the arts. In Hungary, conditions for artists were difficult due to the lack of a responsive audience. When Széchenyi, who could scarcely be accused of conservatism, visited Rome, he was amazed to find a Hungarian pupil in Thorvaldsen's studio. He could certainly never have imagined the existence of Jewish artists.

The Jews entered the various arts only gradually. Their sensitivity and creativity evolved in the context of the traditional Jewish culture. Thus, for example, scribes were always highly honored in Jewish communities. Most of them illustrated their work, often with figurative decorations. Jichak Eizik from Kabold, who finished writing and illustrating the Nagykanizsa *Hevra Kadisha Gold Book* in 1792, depicted many scenes from the life of the community, in charmingly naive illustrations. The text and the pictures were surrounded by motifs from folk embroideries.

In 1800, an unknown artist in Gyöngyös created twelve tableaux of community life on parchment. The micrography made by Mordechai ben Eliezer, the cantor of Megyer, at the beginning of 1828, is unique of its kind. Extracts from the texts of the five scrolls and of Psalms are formed by minuscule letters into five sitting figures surrounded by classical architectural elements.

Herman Cohn was the first Jew who considered himself an artist. He was born in 1797 in Nagymarton, chose for himself a name which sounded French – Tivadar Alconiere – and was proud of his Judaism. He lived in Vienna, and Amerling was his friend. The title of his most successful work is *Soap-Bubble Fairy*. His painting of Napoleon on horseback was exhibited in Pest at the first Fine Arts Exhibition, the *Műkiállítás*. He led a very romantic life, yet despite his pioneering role, he and his work have been forgotten.

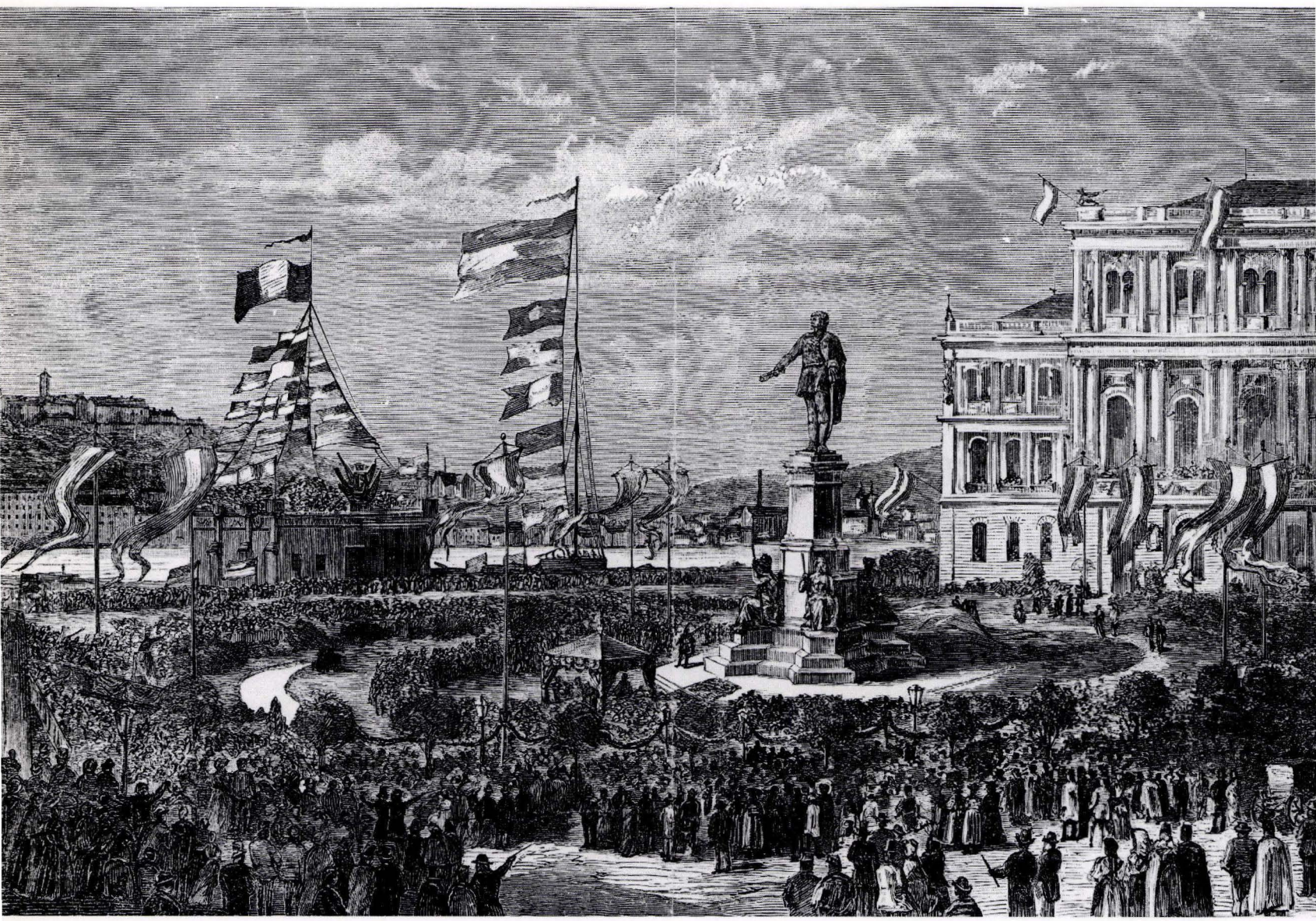
The following decades witnessed a growth both in the audience of art lovers and in the number of artists. József Tyroler was a prominent artist who created portrait-engravings of the outstanding personalities of his age. It was he who designed the bank notes of the 1848 revolutionary government, which carried Kossuth's signature. Other artists, who were highly appreciated by their contemporaries, worked in a variety of styles. The idealized portraits by Mór

Adler, Béla Gross and Ferenc Ingomár were popular for decades. The same was true of the genre-paintings of Lajos Bruck, one of the first Hungarian artist to be influenced by French trends.

During the two decades between 1848 and 1867, the work of Hungarian Jewish artists became well-known and generally recognized. The statues they produced between 1867 and 1914 played a very important role in forming the character of Budapest, above all, but also that of provincial towns.

278
Unveiling of József Engel's statue of Széchenyi (May 23, 1880)

The statue of Prince Eugene of Savoy by József Róna and the totem animal of ancient Hungarians, the *Turul* by Gyula Donáth, can still be seen today in the Buda Castle. The statue of Széchenyi, by



279



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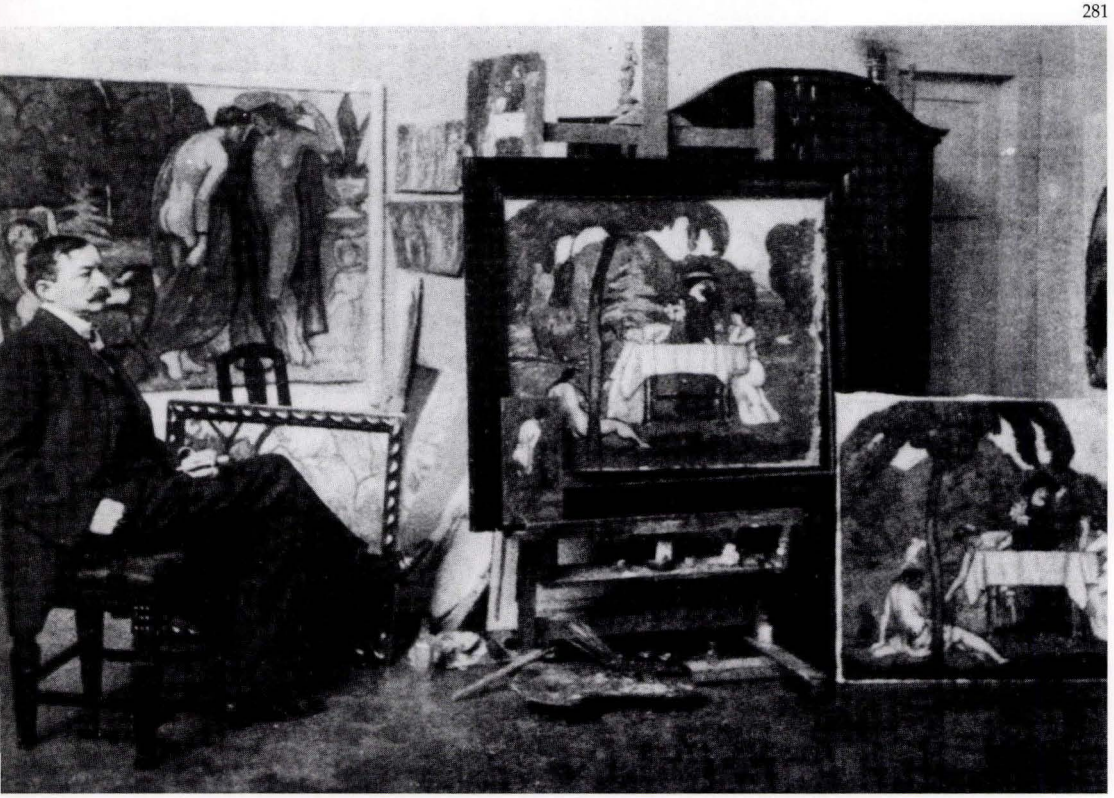

József Engel, is located in front of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the Vörösmarty statue by Ede Telcs and Ede Kallós is in the city center. The Ady memorial is the work of Géza Csorba, and the Anonymus statue in the City Park (*Városliget*) is the work of Miklós Ligeti. The statue of Pista Dankó by Ede Margó in Szeged expressed a whole generation's attitude towards life. György Goldmann created both small and monumental statues, and Dezső Bokros Birman created statues of workers, marked by social sensitivity. The highly-talented István Csillag, Jenő Mester, Dezső Vágó, Fülöp Ö. Beck, Vilmos Fémes-Beck and Gyula Murányi concentrated on statuettes and medals, and Hajnalka Zilzer excelled in decorative application of naturalistic forms.

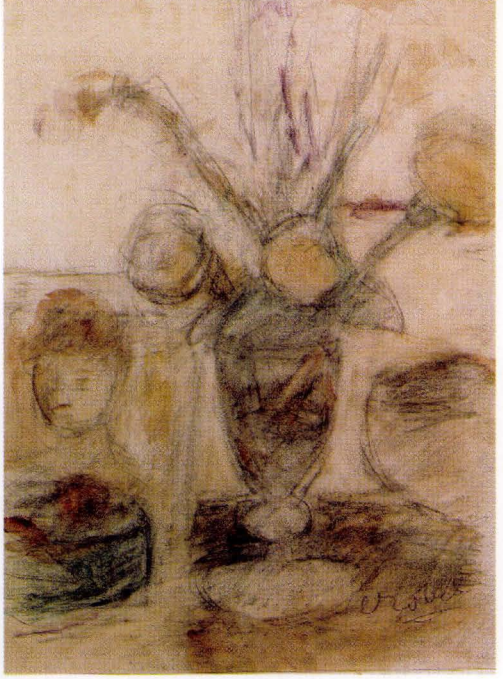
The popularity of artistic work was determined by their success in aiming at popular taste. In an age when the most popular theater performances were folk plays, plays about peasants and village life, often written by Jews, it is no wonder that many artists also depicted rural life. Sándor Bihari was the most famous of them, followed by Kornél Hernádi-Herzl and Kálmán Déri, who followed the Munich style. Mór Karvaly and Skuteczky depicted army life, while Gyula Tornai's paintings are of ethnographic character. The oeuvre of Artúr Halmi, Zsigmond Vajda, Lipót Horovitz, Artúr Ferraris and Izsó Köves was also quite well-known. The English royal court commissioned portraits from Fülöp László. At the turn of the century the wealthy bourgeoisie of Pest often commissioned portraits from Lajos Márk, Imre Knopp and Fülöp Szenes.

279
Ede Telcs' statue of Kossuth in Kecskemét

280
Miklós Ligeti's statue of Anonymus
in the City Park of Budapest
(Photo by Egon Gottl)

281





282

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Béla Iványi-Grünwald's atelier

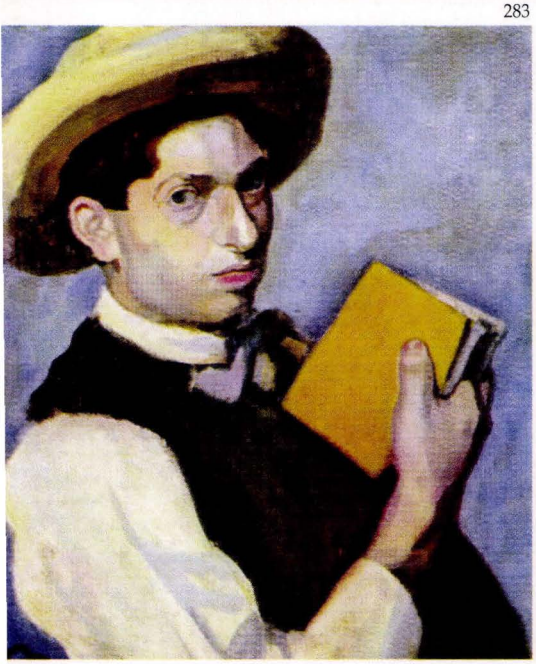
282
Béla Czóbel's painting

283
Róbert Berény, *Self-portrait with a straw hat* (1906)

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Lajos Tihanyi, *Self-portait* (1912)

285
Hugó Scheiber, *Self-portrait*

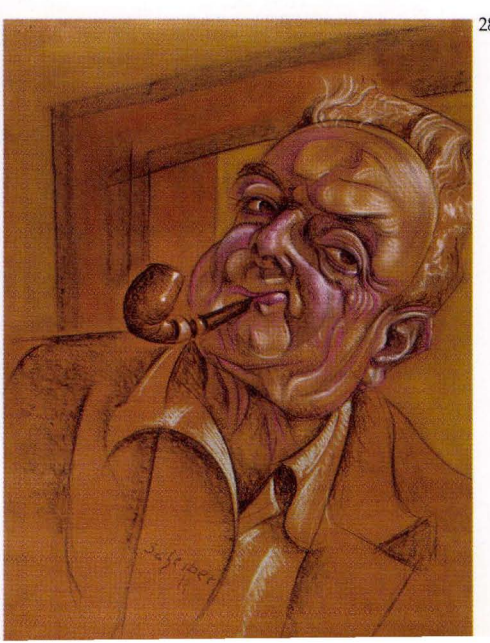
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284



285



Jewish artists played an important role in the most significant artistic trends and groupings of the beginning of the 20th century. Béla Iványi-Grünwald was one of the founders of the Nagybánya school and Adolf Fényes of the Szolnok artists' colony. Béla Czóbel exhibited his work at the Paris exhibition of the Fauves group in 1905. Nándor Katona became famous for his landscapes with their mystical atmosphere. After studying in Vienna, Izidor Kaufmann devoted his artistic career to depicting the life of Galician Hassidim.

The members of the Eight Group staged their first exhibition in 1911. Besides Czóbel, Róbert Berény, Dezső Czigány, Bertalan Pór, and Lajos Tihanyi exhibited works. Vilmos Perlrott-Csaba, Sándor Ziffer and Alfréd Réth represented innovative trends.

Among the artists who began to create at the beginning of the century and reached their peak between the two World Wars were Hugó Scheiber, Rudolf Diener-Dénes, József Bató, László Medgyes, István Farkas, András Szenes, Armand Schönberger and Vince Korda.

Adolf Fényes and Lipót Herman constitute a separate chapter in Hungarian art history. In addition to the fashionable topics of the day, they often depicted scenes from the Bible or from the secluded Jewish communities of their youth.

286
Adolf Fényes, *The Jews rout the army of Amalek* (1915)

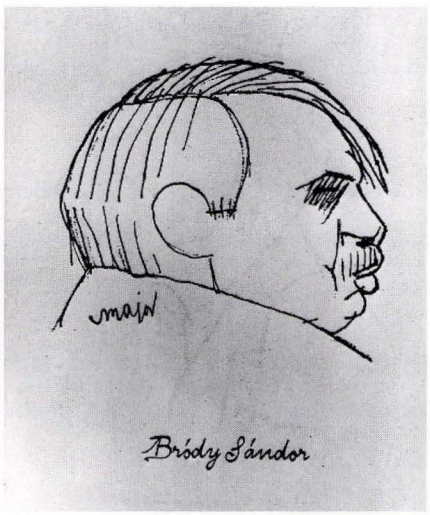


287



287
Lili Ország, *The Tower of Babel*

288




288
Sándor Bródy (Caricature by Henrik Major)

József Faragó, Dezső Bér, Alfréd Lakos, Jenő Feiks, Leó Kóber and Lajos Márk, who excelled in graphic art and caricature, were, for decades, the most famous cartoonists in the satirical journals of Hungary. Henrik Major, Lipót Gedő, Marcel Vértes, Imre Kelen and Lajos Dezső became world-famous.

In graphic design of advertising and books, Árpád Basch, Lajos Márk, Mihály Biró, Elek Falus, Lajos Kozma and Arnold Gara were among the outstanding artists. In fine arts and graphic design, Lajos Csabai Ékes was a highly influential teacher and graphic designer. The book illustrations of István Teván became famous.

One of the most significant groups in 20th century Hungarian fine arts was the Szentendre Circle, including Imre Ámos, Lajos Vajda, Endre Bálint, Margit Anna, Júlia Vajda, Dezső Korniss and Piroska Szántó. Although they differed in terms of views, concept and creative method, they should indisputably be classified together.

Lili Ország was one of the most original painters of the mid-century. Her non-figurative, surrealistic pictures often contain shapes of Hebrew letters.

Those artists whose works bear scant traces of their Jewish origin constitute a separate group. Although Gusztáv Magyar-Mannheimer painted a picture of the infant Moses at the Nile, the bulk of his work consisted of romantic scenes and landscapes. His disciple, Izsák Perlmutter, was



289



290

289
Imre Ámos, *Jom hakipurim*

290
Margit Kovács, *Noah*

one of the most famous Hungarian artists abroad, and won prizes and medals at international exhibitions. He painted landscapes, gardens and interiors. Vilmos Perlrott-Csaba and his wife, Margit Gráber, were always receptive to new trends in their creative work. The portraits and landscapes of Hugó Scheiber were often considered scandalous by the old-fashioned.

It is difficult to draw a line between artists in the strict sense of the word, and those who sought to achieve a harmonious combination of the applied and aesthetic aspects of art. Designers of coins and textiles, architects and interior designers were also artists to a certain extent. The stained glass windows of Miksa Róth, the ceramics of Margit Kovács, the porcelain of Gitta Gyenes and the wall-hangings of Sándor Nagy are not essentially different from the realistic paintings and impressionistic landscapes of Lajos Kunffy, which won him a medal of distinction.

Dezső Orbán, István Farkas, Anna Lesznai, István Zádor, Cézár Kunwald, Frigyes Frank, Viktor Erdei and Móric Gábor are prominent and highly gifted representatives of 20th century Hungarian painting. Miklós Farkasházy was distinguished by his compositional conception, unparallelled in Hungarian art.

Many of the outstanding artists perished in the Holocaust. Adolf Fényes died of starvation, György Goldmann did not return from Dachau, Lajos Csabai Ékes disappeared without a trace. Imre Ámos continued heroically to sketch in the forced labor camp until shortly before his death.



# The Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry

Raphael Vago

Hungarian Jewry underwent several major dramatic changes after the outbreak of World War II, from Hungary's participation in the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, to the Nazi occupation of Hungary in March 1944. By that time, due to Hungary's territorial gains – including the areas that were annexed to Hungary, parts of Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, Northern Transylvania, and parts of former Yugoslavia – the Jewish population had risen to some 825,000,

In this period of rapid expansion of Hungary's Jewish population, the Jews endeavored, on both the community and the individual level, to continue their daily lives as usual, to cope with the anti–Semitic legislation and the rising tide of right-wing extremism and violence, while suppressing thoughts of what the future might bring. The character, conduct and attitudes of the Hungarian Jewish leadership have been the subject of numerous contemporary memoirs as well as research by historians trying to fathom their mentality and actions during the Holocaust. Even if the present outline does not refer to any specific event, it can be stated generally that the Hungarian Jewish leaders trusted Horthy and the members of the Hungarian elite and ruling class who surrounded him. The prevailing concept was that the negative developments – prior to 1944 – were the corollary of the wartime situation, and that only by maintaining a dialogue with the Hungarian leadership, and remaining calm, could the Jews survive intact and without harm. This picture was to change completely with the German occupation of March 1944, but until then, even after Hungary's entry into the war as an ally of Germany, and with all the hardships that befell Hungary's Jewry, such as the drafting of the young men into the labor service, there was a clear and organized attempt to try and live as usual.

Jewish life continued in spite of the growing crisis. The Jewish press reported on numerous cultural activities, which conveyed a picture of "business as usual." The tough economic measures against Jews, which actually excluded them from Hungarian society, dealt a devastating blow to the poorer groups among the Jewish population. Notwithstanding, there was a massive effort to adjust to the deteriorating situation and live with it, perhaps out of a feeling that Jews in other parts of Europe were suffering a worse fate.

291
Lipót Herman, *History of the Holocaust*
(Oil painting)

Some 15,000 Jewish refugees entered Hungarian territory, especially from Poland, in 1941. Many of the refugees received support from local Jewish communities, but there was no overall and coordinated effort on the part of Hungarian Jewry to aid the refugees. Emotionally, there was a strong sense of identification with the plight of the homeless refugees, but it apparently evoked a certain apprehension that Hungarian Jewry was doomed to suffer a similar fate.

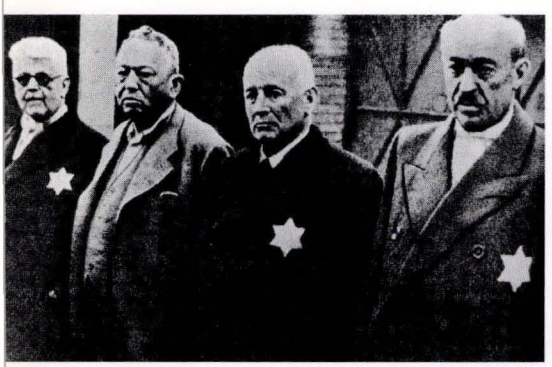
Towards the Jews from the reannexed territories, the attitude of Hungarian Jewry was mixed. There was no attempt to "absorb" them in the sense of providing them with special help, as Hungary's Jews were in a dire situation, but there was a sense of solidarity with those who had been cut off from Hungarian Jewish life in the inter-war period. The leaders of the local Jewish organizations in the areas restored to Hungary felt that the Hungarian Jewish leadership was treating them in a rather alienated fashion. In spite of the solidarity and sense of shared fate on the individual level, the Hungarian Jewish leaders were unable, or perhaps even unwilling to evolve a unified approach towards the authorities, especially on matters related to the problems of the Jews of the reannexed territories. As the threat of imminent tragedy became clearer, increasing attempts were made to unite and coordinate Jewish activities across Hungary, but such actions came too late and were mostly ineffective.

292
Men in one of the forced labor service battalions

293
Cable sent by Prime Minister Döme Sztójay to the Hungarian embassy in Lisbon. "Following the arrival of the German troops in Hungary, German security organs put dozens of prominent Jews under house arrest in order to prevent events from running their normal course" (June 30, 1944)



292



293

In the early years of the war, despite the drafting of Jewish men for "labor service" (*munkaszolgálat*), the worsening economic conditions, and more drastic actions by the extreme right, there was still a feeling that the Hungarian nation would not abandon the Jews if and when the hour of trial arrived.

The first stage of the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry started with the compulsory labor service, concomitantly with the introduction of the anti-Jewish legislation and the exclusion of the Jews from the economy and society. It was clear from the Jewish Laws of 1938–1939 that the army and the security forces would also have to apply special methods to the "Jewish question." With the legislation on this matter and the forming of the labor battalions, which in fact were hard-labor units, the Hungarian legislators sealed the fate of many thousands of young Jews, and moved one step forward in their scheme to remove the Jews from Hungarian society. Branded as "unfit" to serve in the army and bear arms, the Jews were drafted into the labor service as a cheap and expendable work-force.

The labor service administration went into action on July 1, 1939. By the end of 1940, 52,000 young Jewish men had been drafted into 260 labor companies. Their situation went from bad to worse, as their fate often depended on the attitude and behavior of the Hungarian staff commanding the labor companies, which were used in fortification works, bridge building and road building. In spite of the arduous conditions under which the Jewish conscripts worked and lived, local commanders often treated them quite humanely and, until the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 in which Hungary participated, many of the draftees and their families felt that the situation was bad but not catastrophic.

The situation began to change for the worse even before the invasion of the Soviet Union. Gradually the Jews were banned from wearing Hungarian uniforms, and were obliged to wear special badges, such as yellow arm bands. Following the invasion in June 1941, the Hungarian authorities began to respond to German protests that some Jews were still wearing Hungarian uniforms. The treatment of the labor draftees became harsher, and in the front line their living conditions were intolerable, as many of the Hungarian staff behaved in a most sadistic manner. As a result of the terrible working conditions, the meagre rations, lack of medicines, their deployment in the most dangerous zones of operation without adequate means of shelter, and Soviet military actions, the mortality and casualty rates were very high. In summer of 1942, almost 50,000 such forced laborers were attached to the Hungarian Second Army, which was routed following successful Soviet counter-attacks. Although the Hungarian Minister of Defense ordered that the Jews be treated more humanely, and not as "punishment units," the killings and maltreatments continued. Gradually, men of over 42 were also called up, so that the labor service encompassed most of the Jewish males. Thousands were captured as POWs by the Soviet troops, and sent to camps in the Soviet Union. Only about 7,000 returned years later from Soviet captivity. There are various estimates as to the total number of Jewish men called up for labor service, but the number of those who were killed or died during service is generally agreed to be approximately 42,000, including those who perished in the Soviet camps.

The dramatic turning point came in 1944, when, following the German occupation, the Hungarians and the Germans launched a program of ghettoization, deportation and extermination of the Jews. Hungarian officials had prepared the groundwork and the organizational measures required to carry out such mass actions. According to the extant

294




295



296




data, from the early stages of the war extremist Hungarian officials started to prepare plans for the solution of the Jewish problem and expulsion of the Jews from Hungary, although it should be noted that in 1941–1942 they were not yet aware of the final destination of the deportees and their ultimate fate. The desired model was Kamenets-Podolsk where some 12,000 Jewish refugees who had entered Hungary were expelled and murdered by the Germans, with the active participation of some Hungarian units.

The original plans were aimed at the "foreign" Jews – the thousands who entered Hungary after the occupation of Poland. By 1942 it was already clear to the Hungarian officials what the fate of the refugees was to be. In October 1942, Dieter Wisliceny, the SS officer in charge of the deportation of Slovak Jews, visited Hungary. Talks with Hungarian officials clarified to him that the Hungarian side had made preparations for the rounding up and deportation of the Jewish population in several stages. The plans called first for the deportation of some 100,000 Jews from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, followed by the other areas of the country, and finally from Budapest. It seems that Prime Minister Miklós Kállay was not aware of the plans. The very fact that such plans existed, though not yet in an operational form, indicated the determination of Hungarian extremist elements to "solve" the Jewish question, even prior to Nazi pressure on the matter.

The fate of Hungarian Jewry was sealed with the German occupation of March 19, 1944. The occupation ended Horthy's attempts to keep some options open vis-à-vis the Germans and eventually to extract Hungary from the war as Germany's ally. The new government led by Döme Sztójay fulfilled loyally all Nazi demands even though his government was not totally in extremist hands. As German pressure on Jewish issues intensified, Horthy made several concessions and agreed to the transfer of 300,000 Jews to work in the German war industry. Some elements in Horthy's policies are disputed to this day, but it is clear that when the ghettoization and deportation to the death camps of the provincial Jews took place in April–June 1944, Horthy did nothing to stop them.

The first stage in the destruction of Hungary's Jewry began with their concentration in ghettoes, starting from April 1944. The elaborate planning, the division of labor between the various branches of the Hungarian administration, the cooperation between the various military and police units, the logistical planning effort for the concentration of

294
Leaflet of the Hungarian National Socialist Party (1944)

295
The ghetto in the territory occupied by the Hungarian army in Yugoslavia: gendarmes escorting the population forced to move from the villages into the district seats and from the district seats to the county towns

296
The temporary gate of the ghetto in Zalaegerszeg: "Jewish quarter. Entry forbidden to Christians."

297
Family portrait in spring 1944

298
The train with the deportees has arrived at its destination

the Jews all attested to the fact that in the efforts to destroy Hungary's Jewry, the Hungarian state functioned like a well-oiled machine. The Nazi representatives, the SS and Wehrmacht officials and officers merely had to approve the Hungarian plans and to coordinate the rounding-up actions with the Hungarian side. Adolf Eichmann's limited staff enjoyed the full cooperation of the Hungarians. The plans, drawn up and signed on April 7, 1944, for the ghettoization of Hungary's Jews and their preparation for deportation, included detailed orders of action for the ten gendarmerie districts into which the country was divided. The order outlined the ways and means of concentrating the Jews and detaining them in the most humiliating ways. The swift and brutal process of ghettoization moved from north to south, and from west to east, as a total of 437,000 Jews were rounded up. Only the Jews of Budapest, some 220,000, remained at that time outside ghettoes.



297



298

The process of ghettoization encountered very little opposition on the part of the Hungarian population. The conditions in the ghettoes were inhuman and humiliating, and from documents of the various branches of the Hungarian authorities it was clear that they were fully aware of these conditions. On the eve of the destruction of the Jewish community, the Hungarian government issued a series of laws and orders which limited all contacts between Jews and non-Jews, from the ban on the use of public toilets to the confiscation of their property and private possessions. The edicts banning Jews from using cars and public transportation and ordering them to wear a yellow Magen David completed the total humiliation of Hungary's Jews before they were handed over to the Germans for the "final solution." As almost a last gesture to the Jews, Jewish cultural works were banned in order to "defend Hungarian culture."

Deportations from Hungary began in April 1944, and reached their peak in May. Within six weeks, at least 450,000 Jews were sent to the concentration camps where, according to some estimates, some seventy to eighty percent perished. On July 7, Horthy stopped the deportations to facilitate Hungary's efforts to negotiated with the Allies the terms of a separate peace. By early August the deportation were halted, but by that time the great majority of Hungary's Jews were already in Nazi hands.

Horthy's removal and the rise to power of the Arrow Cross regime on October 15, 1944, launched the last phase in the destruction of Hungary's Jewry. At least 60–70,000 Jews of Budapest fell victim to the Arrow Cross reign of terror, marked by indiscriminate killings



299
Samu Stern

in Budapest, mass shootings on the banks of the Danube, and death marches towards the western border.

The attitude of the churches remains a controversial subject. In recent years, new evidence has indicated that in numerous cases, churchmen of various levels helped and defended Jews, and not only those who had converted to Christianity. These acts, such as the brave words of Bishop Áron Márton in Kolozsvár in May 1944, condemning the inhuman treatment of Jews, and other acts of heroism, could not hide the overall picture: the churches in Hungary stood by while Hungary's Jews were exterminated. And in those cases where their voices were heard, too little was said and too late.

**Rescue and Support Activities**

The rescue and mutual support activities can only be comprehended against the background of the mood of helplessness and the conditions which Hungary's Jews faced immediately after March 19, 1944. It was only then, when they were detached from Hungarian society, that they and their leaders realized how isolated they were, abandoned by the Hungarian nation, betrayed by the Hungarian elite in whom they had trusted, in fact under sentence of death. Rescue and support activities took place on several levels, often without coordination, and there were often conflicts between the various participating bodies and individuals. The real heroes were the young members of the various youth movements who carried out almost impossible tasks under the most difficult conditions. Their conduct was in sharp contrast to that of the established leaders of Hungarian Jewry, most of whose efforts met with failure, according to the historians of the period.

There were three distinct channels of rescue activities, the Jewish Council, the Relief and Rescue Committee and the *Hehalutz* (Zionist) youth movements. To these should be added individual and group initiative unconnected to these three bodies. The parachutists despatched from Palestine, rescue activities by Hungarians, and the activities of foreign diplomats belong in this category.

The *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) was established by the Nazis soon after the occupation of Hungary in March 1944, in line with German policy in other occupied countries. The *Judenrat*, which was led by Samu Stern, the seventy-year-old head of the Jewish Neolog community, consisted of representatives of the various organizations and religious bodies, including the Zionist movement. The Council acted under grim conditions which



300
The Rescue Committee: Zvi Goldfarb, Ottó Komoly, Rezső Kasztner, Hansi Brand, Perec Révész (1944)

deteriorated even further as the German plans for the "final solution" were carried out. The open questions asked years after the Holocaust in Hungary focus on the activities or rather non-activities of the *Judenrat* in warning the Jewish population of the nature of the approaching danger. The Council's sources of information were good, and there is no doubt today that the Hungarian Jewish leaders received accurate information on the anticipated fate of Hungarian Jewry. In the second half of June 1944, the Jewish Council handed over to Horthy the "Auschwitz Protocols" – a detailed report on the death camp by five young Jews who had escaped, and provided a first hand description of the fate that would befall Hungarian Jewry. The report was available from April 1944, before the massive deportations began. The Council lost valuable time in dealing with the report and sending it to Horthy in a manner that historians consider "unforgivable." The report influenced Horthy's decision to halt the deportations. The Jewish leadership did not alert Hungarian Jewry and those Hungarians who could have been of some help to the expected developments and the planned fate of the Jews. There is also evidence that the Jewish leadership tried to allay any anxieties among the Jewish population. Thus, the Jewish Council unwittingly contributed to furthering the very aim for which it was set up by the Germans, facilitating the deportation and elimination of Hungarian Jewry without panic. The question of the prospects for rescue and survival if the Jews had been more aware of their imminent fate remains open.

However, despite the difficulties involved, the Jewish Council succeeded in saving a large number of Jews in Budapest, and also groups from smaller towns, in a period when the Jews of the provinces were already in ghettoes. Through its working committees, it was also effective in relief activities in various localities.

The second channel of rescue activities was the Relief and Rescue Committee formed in January 1943. Until March 1944, the Committee was active and very effective in establishing connections between various communities inside Hungary and in obtaining information on the situation in neighboring countries, maintaining contacts with the



301
Passengers on the Kasztner train

Hungarian administration and foreign organizations, and conducting relief activities to ease the situation of those drafted into the labor service. The Committee was made up of representatives of the Zionist movement led by Ottó Komoly, but the dominant figure was Rezső (Israel) Kasztner, born in 1906, a lawyer and ardent Zionist from Kolozsvár. Kasztner conducted the negotiations with the S.S. on the German offer to trade in the lives of Hungarian Jews. Kasztner's rescue activities, the mission of Joel Brand, member of the Committee, the contacts with the Yishuv's leadership in Palestine and the British authorities, who refused to deal with the Nazis, remain one of the disputed chapters in the history of the Holocaust in Hungary and in general. Kasztner's trial and his assassination in Israel in 1957 continue to stir public emotions in Israel and among Hungarian Jews. There is no doubt that many were saved by Kasztner's activities, just as his actions and style were resented by the Jewish leadership and the public. The special status enjoyed in those times by members of the Committee was exploited by the Nazis against them. But it is also evident that their special status, extended to members of their families, which provided them with a certain sense of security despite all the dangers involved, was utilized by the Committee members for relief and rescue activities. Thanks to Kasztner's activities, some 1,700 Jews were saved, and the transfer of 18,000 Jews to Strasshof in Austria was also a result of Kasztner's dealing with the Nazis.

Numerous rescue and relief activities were carried out by "combined" operations of various factors, namely local Hungarian, Jewish and international organizations. In this way, several thousand children were saved in children's homes, several of them staffed



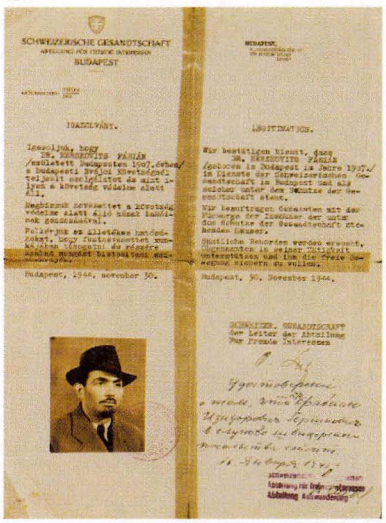
302
The Glass House in Vadász Street, Budapest, Representation of Foreign Interests, the Emigration Department of the Swiss Embassy, where the Palestine Emigration Office of the Swiss Consulate operated. About three thousand persons found refuge here thanks to the Zionists. The crowd is waiting for certificates on Vadász Street.

by the International Red Cross. During Arrow Cross rule after October 1944, members of the Zionist youth organizations were active from such places under foreign protection.

**Youth Movements**

Although the Zionist movement was weak in the inter-war period, the situation changed during the Holocaust, especially where the youth movements were concerned. Most of the effective acts of resistance, relief and rescue were carried out by members of the *Hehalutz* movements – the umbrella organization of the Zionist youth movements. Within these groups, members of the *Hashomer Hatzair*, *Maccabi Hatzair*, *Dror* and *Bnei Akiva* movements were especially active. Their actions often ran counter to the policy of the Jewish Council and the Rescue and Relief Committee, and were aimed specifically at rescue and relief missions. Their achievements were significant, and even though they did not engage in armed resistance, it is indisputable that their actions constituted a form of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. The composition of the youth movements reflected the specific social and ideological characteristics of the various localities and regions in Hungary. With the annexation of the territories by Hungary, their ranks were augmented by members of the youth movements from Slovakia, Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania. It was only natural that many of the activists were refugees from Poland and the "new territories." Until the German occupation, members of the youth movements were especially active in obtaining certificates, mostly forged, for Jewish refugees from the north. Immediately after March 19, 1944, when tougher anti-Jewish steps began, the activities were stepped up and focused on the sending of emissaries,

303




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Card issued by the Swiss Embassy

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Simha Hunwald, member of the Zionist resistance movement

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Raoul Wallenberg

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Carl Lutz

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Hanna Szenes

who travelled under dangerous conditions, to alert the Jewish public and leadership in provincial localities to the imminent dangers. The contacts with the provincial towns and the provinces were among the most complicated operations, as the young emissaries, often women, were endangering themselves by travelling under the wartime conditions and constant surveillance by the various security organs, including the Germans. At the same time dozens of young members of the movements were active in relief, support and rescue operations, working in underground conditions using forged documents, often Arrow Cross and even German Army and S.S. papers.

The initiative for the rescue activities emerged from the various movements, without any master plan or large scale coordinating activity, although some of the actions were known to the Rescue and Relief Committee and were carried out with its support. Most of the activities were the result of local initiatives, exploiting local conditions, and always in the face of mortal danger. Thus, for example, in Northern Transylvania, members of the *Hanoar Hatzioni* helped rescue Jews from the Hungarian side by smuggling them into Romanian territory.

With the establishment of the Fascist Arrow Cross regime in October 1944 and the beginning of the death marches to the western borders of Hungary, the *Hehalutz* underground intensified its activities, working under the hazardous conditions of the Arrow Cross reign of terror. Members of *Hashomer Hatzair* made contacts with the Communist underground which until then was very minimal, with a view to cooperating in some areas, such as the preparation and distribution of forged documents. For almost forty years, Communist historiography in Hungary ignored the anti-fascist underground activities of the Zionist movements, and only since the early eighties has information on their activities been published openly in Hungary.

The mission of the parachutists from Palestine into occupied eastern Europe and the Balkans represents, in 1944, one of the most impressive chapters in the attempts of the Yishuv – the Palestine Jewish community – to help and rescue European Jewry. Several parachutists, among them Hanna Szenes, aged twenty-three, with two of her comrades, Joel Nussbecher (Palgi) and Ferenc (Perec) Goldstein, landed in March 1944 in the partisan-held liberated territory in Yugoslavia. The main aim of the mission was to contact Jewish organizations, organize resistance, especially from the ranks of the youth movements, and to gather information on the fate of Jewish communities at that stage of

the "final solution." The group that was supposed to act in Hungary was soon caught, and Hanna Szenes' heroic story became a symbol of Jewish resistance and of the attempts by the Yishuv to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Hanna Szenes was held captive by the Hungarian authorities, and was tried and executed by the Arrow Cross regime on November 7, 1944. The trial, the cruelty of her captors, and her execution – at a stage when the collapse of the Arrow Cross regime was nearing – is an indication of the character and fanaticism of the Hungarian Fascist regime. Of the small group that was despatched to Hungary, Goldstein perished in a concentration camp, and only Joel Nussbecher survived. The Hungarian and Nazi authorities attached great importance to the mission of the three parachutists, much beyond the potential danger that the three presented. Even though the mission failed, the very heroism and determination shown by the parachutists, who were active in Slovakia and Romania as well, served as inspiration for Jewish youth, and contributed to the strengthening of the bonds between the Jewish community in Palestine and Hungarian Jewry, then in the last throes of its tragic fate.



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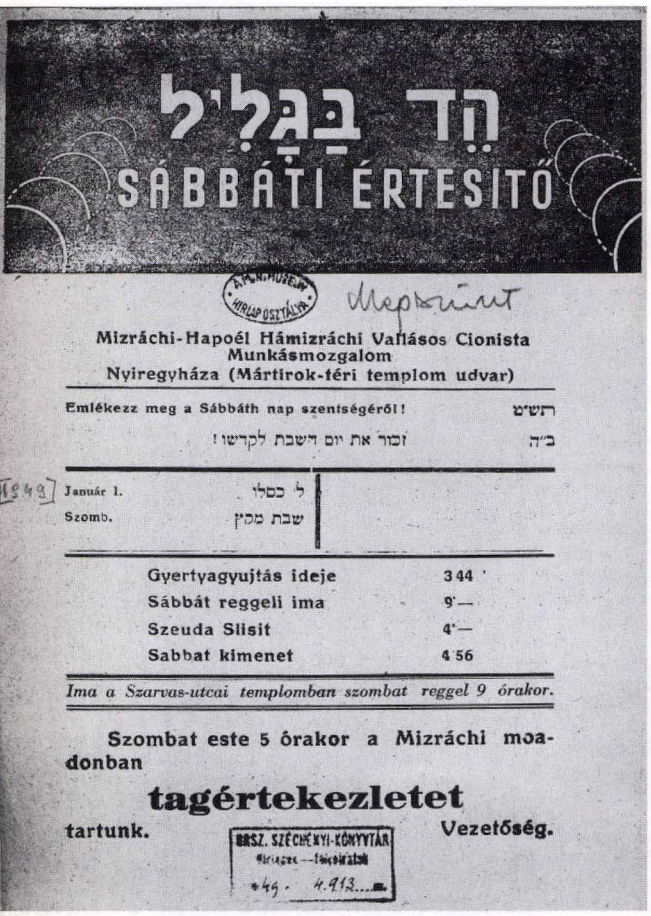
Following the halting of the deportations by Horthy in July 1944, the fate of the Jews in Budapest hung on a thread. German plans for swift deportations from Budapest failed, or at least were not carried out because of the military developments in the front and the situation in Hungary. With the upsurge of Arrow Cross terror from mid-October 1944, the rescue and relief activities of foreign factors were intensified. The most significant actions were those of foreign diplomats in close cooperation with members of the Zionist movement, its youth movements and the Jewish leadership. The Swiss consul, Carl Lutz, who commenced his activities before the forming of the Arrow Cross regime, supplied thousands of documents which were prepared by *Hehalutz*. In addition, the wide ranging activities of Raoul Wallenberg, who saved thousands of Jews in the international ghetto and in the death march in November 1944, and of certain Swiss, Swedish and Portuguese diplomats, constituted a magnificent effort to save human lives at those darkest hours. The activities of the Red Cross are the subject of controversy, as records indicate that much more could have been done by the organization.



307

When Budapest was liberated in January 1945, most of the 120,000 Jewish survivors in Hungary were in that city. According to reliable estimates, the total number of Jews who perished from territories under Hungarian rule was around 570,000. Thus, the figure of 600,000 victims remains as solid evidence for the magnitude of the Holocaust despite attempts to present lower figures.

308



הד בגליל

SÁBBÁTI ÉRTESITŐ

Mizráchi-Hapoél Hámizráchi Vallásos Cionista Munkásmozgalom
Nyiregyháza (Mártirok-téri templom udvar)

Emlékezz meg a Sábbáth nap szentségéről! תשי"ט

זכור את יום השבת לקדשו! ב"ה

1949 Január 1. ל כסלו
Szomb. שבת מקץ

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| Gyertyagyujtás ideje | 3·44 |
| Sábbát reggeli ima | 9·— |
| Szeuda Slisit | 4·— |
| Sabbat kimenet | 4·56 |

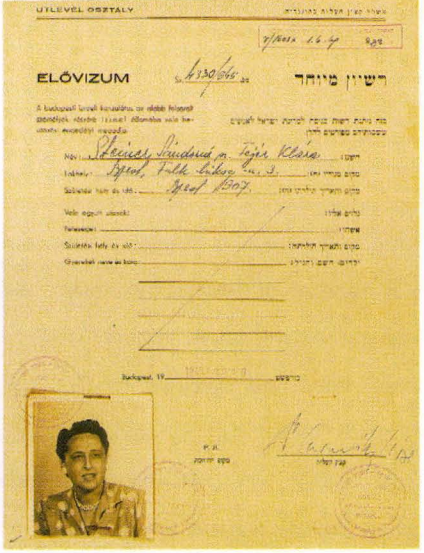
*Ima a Szarvas-utcai templomban szombat reggel 9 órakor.*

**Szombat este 5 órakor a Mizráchi moadonban**

**tagértekezletet**

tartunk. Vezetőség.

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ÚTLEVÉL OSZTÁLY

ELŐVIZUM

רשיון מיוחד

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*Sábbáti Értesítő* (January 1, 1948)

309
Preliminary visa issued by the Israeli consulate in Budapest (1949)

310
Sándor Gondos' book tent in Budapest (1946)

311
Jewish orphans on their way to Israel, Budapest (1948)



311

# Jews in Post-War Hungary

András Kovács – Eszter Andor

The Shoah destroyed the majority of Hungarian Jews. Depending on the method of calculation, estimates of the losses of Hungarian Jewry in the present borders of Hungary vary between approximately 210,000 and 300,000. Scholars agree that in 1941, date of the last census to include religion and origins, 400,000 persons of Jewish religion and 50–90,000 Christians of Jewish origin lived in the *territory of post-war Hungary*, and it is estimated that between 190,000 and 260,000 *survived in that same territory*. Due to the almost complete annihilation of provincial Jewry, the majority of the survivors, 144,000 persons, lived in Budapest. In many provincial towns the Jewish community was reduced to a handful. It is estimated that one-third of the survivors were not Jewish by religion. The Jewish population was further decimated by emigration, mixed marriages and low birth rates, which reflected not only the death of spouses and the aging process, but also the material and psychological consequences of persecution. The two waves of emigration in 1945–1948 and 1956–1957 – during which 60–75,000 Jews left the country – strengthened the assimilation trend, as did uneven age and gender distribution resulting from the selective losses which forced many Jews, especially women, to marry non-Jews.

Estimates of the numbers of Jews living in Hungary today vary between 60,000 and 150,000. It is all the more difficult to give precise numbers since, due to secularization and assimilation, relatively few Jews are affiliated to religious and cultural institutions. In 1992, community leaders estimated that only one-fourth or one-fifth of Jews were associated with community institutions. According to a survey carried out in 1995, 7% of a representative sample of Hungary's adult population claimed they had Jews in their families.

**Jews in Post–War Politics and Society**

The social structure of the surviving Jewish population was greatly altered. While the more religious and traditional provincial Jewry had been almost completely wiped out (or left the country soon after the war), the majority of the Jews of Budapest, and especially the more urbanized, assimilated, middle class, had survived. As a result of nationalization, which liquidated the private sector of the economy, along with private employment and the freelance intellectual stratum, many Jews lost their livelihoods and were forced to find new occupations. In

the process of restratification of society, the Jews enjoyed a certain advantage, owing to their better education, higher qualifications, and traditionally greater propensity for mobility. They were also regarded as politically reliable, having been the victims of persecution. Prospects now opened up for them to pursue careers from which they had been barred for political reasons before the war. A number of Jews entered the reorganized administration, public service, political institutions and the law-enforcement organizations. While some Jews were following new paths of mobility, a substantial number forfeited their former social status, and the majority of the Jews were just as oppressed as the huge majority of the non-Jewish population. Similarly to Gentiles, they suffered from the confiscation and nationalization of their assets, and the Jewish middle class and petit bourgeoisie were also victims of the anti-religious and anti-bourgeois measures of the government. Along with non-Jews, many Jews who were considered to belong to the so-called "exploiting classes" were sent into internal exile. Moreover, they were also targets of anti-Zionist campaigns, as manifested in the forced dissolution of the Zionist Association and the subsequent arrest of several of its members. The president of the Jewish Community and the chief surgeon of the Jewish Hospital were arrested in 1953, following the trial of the Jewish doctors in the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, due to the role of the Soviet army in the liberation of the Budapest ghetto and of the concentration camps, and the proclaimed commitment of the communists to end discrimination, a proportion of Jews were loyal to the communist system. Some joined the party and assumed middle and high cadre positions before the 1956 Revolution. Cadres of Jewish origin rejected their former identity, cultural traditions and community ties. Later on, however, when faced with the reality of Stalinism, the majority of the Jewish intellectual supporters of communism gradually became disillusioned, and many of them joined the emerging opposition and played a militant part in the 1956 Revolution. After the Revolution, and especially after the 1967 Six Day War in Israel, the ruling communist party covertly restricted the role of Jews in politics. In the 1960s, a new Jewish generation was coming of age which pursued intellectual careers and other middle-class professions.

**Religious Life, Culture and Education**

The restoration of religious and community life started soon after World War II, with the re-establishment of 258 communities, mostly Neolog, but because of migration, emigration and political upheavals, only 60 to 80 of them survived in the 1950s, mostly in the larger towns. In 1950, the institutions, organizations and associations of the various branches of the Jewish community were forced to merge under the leadership of the National Office of Hungarian

Israelites and the National Representative Organization of the Hungarian Israelites, which spelled the end of an independent Orthodox community. These organizations functioned strictly as religious associations within the limits set by the state. They were loyal to the regime to the point of denouncing Zionism and distancing themselves from Israeli politics. After 1948, the only Jewish publication of the community was *Új Élet*, which – in steadily decreasing size and frequency of publication – dealt only with religious matters and the achievements of the communist regime. Jewish life was restricted to religious observance, which became increasingly difficult – Saturday, for instance, was a working day – and all forms of community life were suppressed. However, throughout the period, the community was permitted to run a hospital, an orphanage and an old peoples' home, and to provide kosher food products.

The seventeen Jewish elementary schools and three *Burgerschulen* and four of the five high schools, as well as the Israelite Teachers' Training College, which survived the war, were nationalized in 1948. The Anna Frank High School and the Rabbinical Seminary continued to function under the supervision of the communist-controlled State Office for Religious Affairs. The Seminary, the only institution of its kind in Eastern Europe, which also houses a significant library, attracted students from neighboring countries as well, though the number of students and faculty was very low. The high school was increasingly poorly attended (with only ten students in 1976), but the trend changed at the beginning of the 1980s.

Research in Jewish subjects became increasingly difficult to accomplish, and there were very few publications. The only periodical of scientific merit was the *Vidéki Rabbikar Körlevelei* (Bulletins of Provincial Rabbis), a typewritten journal treating theoretical and practical issues of religious life. The situation improved after 1956, with the publication of monographs of Hungarian Jewish communities, and the continuation of the *Monumenta Hungariae Judaica*, edited by the late director of the Rabbinical Seminary, Rabbi Sándor Scheiber. Several books appeared on the pre-World War II history of the Jews in Hungary, but none that dealt with the post-war history of Jewish communities.

Following the easing of the dictatorship, Jewish community life began to revive. Lectures on various Jewish subjects were held at the Rabbinical Seminary during the kiddush ceremony on Fridays, and, from 1982, a lecture series treating the Bible, Jewish rites and prayers was organized for adults. The first alternative secular Jewish organization, the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, was founded in November 1988, with the dual aim of preserving Hungarian Jewish culture and reviving secular Jewish life. After 1989, efforts to foster religious and ethnic identity were no longer suppressed, so that people could choose freely among the emerging identity

options. An increasing number of Jews started to take an interest in Jewish religion/traditions and culture. Religious life became animated, and a number of cultural, religious and Zionist organizations have been set up or revived.

Nevertheless, only a small number of Jews turned to religion and strict religious observance. This religious revival is being strongly supported by the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, which has assigned a rabbi to Budapest and recently initiated a kindergarten and a yeshiva school. It is also being encouraged by such institutions as the Foundation School, founded by the Reichmann Foundation in 1990 to provide a traditional religious Jewish education.

The majority of Jews still maintain the traditional assimilationist identity pattern of Hungarian Jewry, but they are now more willing to admit their Jewishness openly. This attitude is reflected, for example, in the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, whose membership includes many Jewish intellectuals who were unwilling to step forward as Jews before 1989. It was established as an umbrella organization, with about 300–400 founding members, covering various groups and sections. Some of these groups, like the National Association of Forced Labor Battalion Conscripts and the Hungarian-Israeli Friendship Society, later became independent.

A number of Jews are critical of community policies. These young revivalists around the journal *Szombat* (*Sabbath*) believe that the political representation of the Jews should be organized along more democratic principles. The revivalists also criticize the so-called Jewish renaissance, which they see as lacking proper historical grounding, for not creating a serious or cultural revival. The future of the Jewish community, they argue, can only be based on group and not individual integration into Hungarian society, on the reinforcement of a Jewish identity which combines elements of similarity to and differences from Hungarian society, and on the acceptance of dual attachment. Jewish publications have proliferated since 1989. The renewed *Új Élet*, the bimonthly of the Alliance of Jewish Communities of Hungary, reports on the life of religious Jewry and announces community and religious events. *Szombat*, published ten times a year by the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, covers social, political and cultural aspects of Jewish life and is the only journal to devote a special column to Israel. *Múlt és Jövő*, revived in 1989, is a literary and art journal. Beside these three major journals, there are several smaller ones, for example *Egység*, published by Chabad-Lubavitch, and *Erec*, issued by the Hungarian Zionist Alliance and the Jewish Agency for Israel. The publication of Jewish books is flourishing. There are two Jewish publishers, Makkabi and *Múlt és Jövő*, both established in 1989, and many books dealing with Jewish history, literature, religion, etc., have been published over the past decade by other publishing houses.

Jewish education is also expanding. In addition to the Orthodox secondary school, there are two other schools: the Sándor Scheiber Elementary and High School and the Lauder Yavne Jewish Community School (and kindergarten). The latter, founded in 1990, offers a liberal Jewish education by incorporating the teaching of Jewish history, literature, religion and Hebrew into a secular curriculum. Since the fall of communism, the Rabbinical Seminary has grown by establishing the Jewish University. An important cultural center, the Bálint Jewish Community Center, was founded in 1995 in a building which was restored to the community. The Center, which also accommodates several social and youth organizations, organizes various cultural activities, lectures, language courses and clubs, concerts, book presentations, an Israeli dance course, etc. There are also numerous, albeit small, youth organizations, from the Zionist *Habonim Dror* and *Hashomer Hatzair* to the Union of Jewish Students in Hungary. The Jewish community operates a number of welfare institutions, among others, an old peoples' home, two nursing homes and a community kitchen, and several senior citizens' clubs are run in synagogues.

**Compensation, Restitution**

Under communist rule, Hungarian Jews received no moral or material restitution from the government and Hungary's responsibility for the oppression, deportation and murder of Hungarian Jews was not officially acknowledged. After the fall of communism in 1989, the question of compensation was raised again. Governments expressed regret at what had been done to Hungarian Jewry during World War II and the question of material reparation was discussed in parliament. According to the compensation laws passed by the democratically elected parliament, all Hungarian citizens who were persecuted after 1939 or whose property was confiscated and who were illegally executed or deprived of their freedom for political reasons are entitled to compensation (Act 25/1991, Act 24/1992 and Act 34/1992). On the basis of these general laws which enabled Jews to claim compensation for losses and injuries suffered during the Horthy regime, the Nazi occupation and communist rule, approximately 30,000 Jewish victims, their spouses and descendants were offered compensation. Act 10/1997 on compensation of the Jewish community enacted that paragraph of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 which ruled that confiscated Jewish property not claimed by survivors or heirs of the victims should be used to set up a fund that was to be used for various Jewish communal purposes. After negotiations with the Alliance of Jewish Communities and with other Hungarian Jewish organizations and the World Jewish Congress, a foundation called the Public Funds for the Preservation of the Jewish Heritage of Hungary was set up to administer the distribution of the compensation paid by the

state to survivors in the form of a life annuity, and to manage the properties restored by the state or the local authorities. Those eligible received compensation vouchers, part of which could be exchanged for a supplementary pension.

Restitution of property formerly belonging to the officially accepted denominations, among them the Jewish community, was based on Act 32/1991, which made it possible to reclaim denominational property confiscated after 1948. Following the contract signed by the Hungarian government and the Vatican in June 1997, concerning the restitution of property, the officially accepted denominations are entitled to financial compensation for all the buildings they formerly owned and have given up to their present owners. In 2000 the government declared that it would support the maintenance of the more than 1,000 abandoned Jewish cemeteries in Hungary. Negotiations to recover works of art belonging to Jews, seized by the Germans in 1944, are also complicated. Some of these were later taken by the Soviets and it is almost impossible to ascertain their exact number. Approximately 6,000 works of art stolen from Hungary were seized by the Allied Forces in Austria and later committed to the care of the Austrian administration. Negotiations are continuing about the restitution of these objects.

**Anti–Semitism**

Since the fall of the communist regime, anti–Semitic manifestations have surfaced in Hungary. It would be difficult to gauge whether anti–Semitism has burgeoned since 1989 or whether already-existing emotions, attitudes and opinions are now being expressed more openly. Some of its manifestations in no way differ from indications of anti–Semitism in the Western world. Impoverishment, the spectre of unemployment among young people and the emergence of youth sub-cultures have brought to the surface inarticulate forms of racism, including anti–Semitism, which serve as an aggressive form of compensation for social frustrations.

After the changes in 1990, political anti–Semitism also reappeared in Hungary. It is expressed overtly only by marginal extreme right-wing political groups without substantial political support. The largest extreme right political organization, the Hungarian Truth and Life Party, entered following the 1998 general elections. However, another form of anti–Semitism has appeared, stemming from the traditional Hungarian ethnocentric, xenophobic nationalism, as expressed between the two World Wars. It singles out Jews as a group of foreign origin and values, who are the source of the "danger" threatening the nation.

# A Generation Discovers its Identity

Nomi Gur

In communist-ruled Hungary between 1948–1989, a generation grew up whose parents concealed their Jewish origins. These parents, who were Holocaust survivors, driven, so it would seem, by a combination of emotions – despair at the past, fear of the future and the desire to protect themselves and their children – chose to sever themselves from the Jewish people and to hide their Jewishness from their children. Their offspring grew up with no knowledge of their past, ignorant of Jewish tradition, unaware even that they were Jewish.

To conceal their origins was a difficult and often painful decision for a large number of Jews. It meant that they were obliged to maintain an alien lifestyle, to make constant efforts to disregard the past and to observe silence and secrecy under all circumstances. At the same time, the decision was not taken in a vacuum and was not detached from the social and political conditions in Hungary of the 1950s. For most of the Jews, this severance from Judaism was not an abrupt break, but rather a stage in a lengthy process. The Holocaust survivors regarded the new regime as a historic opportunity to resolve the stubborn struggle which Hungarian Jewry had waged for integration into Hungarian society from the 19th century on.

In general, Hungarian Jews believed that the time was ripe to open a new chapter in their lives, and that it behooved them to leave behind problems of religion, culture, ethnic affiliation and, in particular, the fate they had suffered. This state of mind created families without a past, without identity and without any suspicious indications of origin. This situation is reflected in interviews conducted with dozens of young Jews in Budapest in the 1990s.

"Judaism was not a forbidden subject in our home, but it was a subject which was suppressed. There were no indications of Judaism in our house, religion was never a subject of discussion."
"My parents gave us the feeling that there was no room for questions, that anything connected to the past was tabu. We don't deal with the past. That was the message I received from them."

"My grandmother, who raised me until the age of 14, never mentioned to me, in a single word, the fact that we were Jewish. It seems that there was not only silence but also deliberate obscuring concealment."

"There was a picture of my grandfather, surrounded by a black ribbon. When I asked what happened to him, I was told my grandfather fell in battle. I later discovered he perished in the Holocaust."

"All the children in the family were named after kings of Hungary. My parents apparently wanted to be sure that we could not be identified according to our names and that we too would suspect nothing."

"My grandmother lit a candle every Friday evening in the pantry. When I asked why she did it, she replied that it was in memory of the dead. She didn't say that it was a Jewish custom."

In the end, the young people discovered the secret of their ancestry – mostly in adolescence – from strangers, from anti–Semitic hints and due to embarrassing incidents. Most were able to pinpoint and identify the discovery event. For most, it was a traumatic emotional experience, with negative significance for their self-perception:

"I was about 12 when a good friend of mine opened my eyes to my Jewishness. There was a girl in our class who boycotted me for no reason. I told my friend, and he laughed and said: 'It's because you're Jewish and she's anti–Semitic.' I was stunned. Where did he get the information that I was Jewish? 'Everyone knows except you,' he said."

"I was about 10 when I sang at home anti–Semitic songs I had learned in the neighborhood. My grandmother heard me, went pale, was very angry and forbade me to sing such songs, and told me that she herself was Jewish. I was quite scared, because I had never seen her in such a state."

"A friend of mine shouted at me at the height of a squabble between us: 'You'd better shut up, because I know something about you, and if I tell you what it is, you'll be ashamed to walk down the high street.' I had a very bad feeling. In the end, he said: 'You're Jewish.'"

More than the content, it was the emotions which accompanied the act of discovery and the way it occurred that left their mark. These young people learned that they were Jewish without knowing the meaning of "being Jewish," and at the same time felt that it was something negative. From their parents' reactions, they understood that it would be best not to ask questions. At this stage, most of them became reconciled to the situation. "Perhaps it really is best not to know." The young people avoided in every possible way confrontation with facts that might disrupt their world picture. "I didn't know, didn't understand, didn't think, didn't ask." These statements, which recur again and again, attest to attempts to shut themselves in, to preserve the status quo and to continue the rediscovery of life.

"It was only when I was 18–20 that I started asking questions about my parents' childhood and about Judaism. Until then I merely pricked up my ears when I heard the word 'Jew.'"

The inner reluctance to tackle questions of Jewish identity was reinforced by the ideological conception rife under communism and the accepted social norms of behavior which condemned discussion of such matters.

Nonetheless, mainly because of the shock it caused, the discovery event struck deep roots in their consciousness. It was engraved on their memories as unfinished business and left them with a sense of being different. In fact, it was only in the third decade of their lives, a very active period of study and career-building, that these people reverted to examination and clarification of matters pertaining to identity and affiliation.

"I gradually reached a state where I could no longer ignore my identity problems, the sense of lacking roots. I grasped, to my astonishment, that I had no tradition, that I belonged nowhere and this troubled me. I felt that I must clarify these things one way or another."

The growing sense of dissatisfaction with their anomolous situation evoked an urgent need or the inner compulsion to find an answer to questions of essence and affiliation. Concealment was replaced by the desire and the practical attempts to uncover the past, to discover roots and to know more about Judaism.

The inner change occurred in the socio-political context of the gradual thaw which took place in Hungary in the 1980s in all areas of life. In this period, books and articles began to be published on Jewish subjects and they became accessible. It also became possible to meet and to discuss socio-political problems such as "the Jewish question" by studying it and acquiring knowledge.

The change wrought in these young people and their perception of themselves as Jews evoked in them the need to meet people in similar personal and social situations. All of them attest to brief or protracted association with Jewish groups of one kind or another:

"Since the Jewish subject became important to me, I have been trying to clarify for myself which of the people in my surroundings are Jewish. I have recently joined up with people who are in search, just as I am, and who want to experience their Judaism."

The encounter with Judaism and with Jews aroused the desire to uncover the family past, since, in addition to the physical lack of an extended family, the young generation has been deprived of knowledge of members of the family who perished in the Holocaust.

"I started collecting photographs of the family, noted down on the back names and dates. I tried to create a history for myself."

"I went to the United States to find out from relatives there whether my parents had any childhood at all."

Exposure of the family background led to an inevitable experience: the first direct contact with the source of the pain which was present in disguised form in their childhood – namely, the story of their parents and family during the Holocaust:

"I discovered that my family history is the history of Jewish suffering." The young people are eager to learn and hear about this period in their parents' lives. The difficulty is that even after four decades, the parents have neither the desire nor the emotional strength required to remember, to reexperience and to talk about what was destroyed in their world and in their souls.

"The shock my father experienced during the Holocaust was so profound that he apparently could not act otherwise; he decided to put an end to this terrible fate once and for all; never again to be a Jew! He also did it for me and with the intention of protecting me – improving my destiny."

While searching for the family past, the young people succeed in dredging up experiences from their own memories and, in retrospect, understanding their significance and their connection to Judaism or to the Jewish context. These become treasures to them:

"I remember a little black box and leather straps brought by a distant relative. They were immediately hustled away from my inquisitive eyes. I never saw them again, but I remember the incident and today I know that these were the *tefillin* of my perished grandfather."

"I remember seeing the number on my father's arm. It didn't look like the scar of a wound, as he said and I believed."

The memories include memories of periods when Israel was at war as times of inexplicable emotion at home.

The link up with Judaism, the construction of identity and the search for its roots are a long and complex process, which demands considerable emotional investment. Despite all the investment, what was created in the end is a shallow-rooted and vague identity, which might have been maintained on a minor level if the communist regime had not collapsed at the end of the 1980s.

The end of the communist regime created a crisis situation, constituting a threat to the continuity of the life and identity of every individual. The crisis opened up options and opportunities, which called for real choices and decisions and new commitments. In Hungary in general, analysis of the identity question has become a mass phenomenon in no way confined to Jews, but it certainly

characterizes them. Jewish identity has ceased to be a private matter for the individual consciousness. The reemergence of the Jewish question in the Hungarian public – the revival of anti–Semitism, the combination of Judaism and Hungarianism, and the inculcation of Judaism in children – all these are fateful issues which call for decisions:

"I was able to compromise with my Judaism. After I discovered it, it was clear to me that I want to live in Hungary, that I am closely linked to this place with all my heart. I did not want the fact that I am Jewish to influence my decision to continue living here. Recently, I have begun to feel that great changes are occurring within me. It seems to me that something is missing in my life, a sense of true belonging."

"I don't think of myself as a Hungarian Jew. I am a Jew who lives in Hungary. I don't feel that I can combine the two, be both a Jew and a Hungarian. This is how I feel now and it seems that this will oblige me to make a practical choice. It seems that it is not possible to maintain the compromise."

These statements seem to represent two poles of the continuum on which Hungary's Jews now find themselves. The common factor is that in the 1990s it is difficult to ignore one's Jewish origin. The subject surfaces from numerous directions, even when individuals do not wish this to happen.

Recently, the subject which has preoccupied the young Jews more than any other and with greater intensity is the reemergence of crude, overt anti–Semitism. In light of the renewal of anti–Semitism, the state of "being a Jew," which was once perceived as being a matter of choice, becomes involuntary. From now on, willy nilly – they are regarded as Jews.

"Recently I have been hearing anti–Semitic voices everywhere. People make jokes at the expense of Jews and make vicious comments. When I react, they say, 'We weren't referring to you, you're different, it's the others'."

"At this stage, when some anti–Semitic provocation is voiced in my presence, I object openly – I don't run away any more."

"In unfamiliar company, I announce in advance that I'm Jewish, so that they won't make anti–Semitic comments in my presence and offend me."

"Now I have a constant sense of danger. If something happens here and anti–Semitism increases, I will be in trouble. I'll be a Jew and nothing will save me."

Due to the reinforcement of the sense of ethnic, religious or national belonging, the ties between many couples in mixed marriages are being put to the test. Differences of opinion, sharp disputes,

particularly on the subject of influence over the children, are threatening the delicate fabric of relationships inside the family.

"The mother of my children is Gentile, and after our divorce they remained with her. I am in close contact with the children, but I never interfered in their religious upbringing, because there was none. Recently, I have discovered that my ex-wife has begun to attend church and she is taking our small daughter with her. One day my daughter came to visit me and brought me a present, a wooden crucifix she carved for me. I saw this gesture as an indication for the future – she is trying to influence me like a missionary in her innocent fashion. It doesn't seem to me that I can hold on to my neutrality for long. I've discovered that I'm not like that. This, undoubtedly, is going to make things complicated for all of us."

"They have recently begun to establish schools on a religious basis. My first husband – who is a Gentile – asked me to agree that our son should study at an evangelical high school – a school with good standards. I felt that it would border on self-betrayal for me to agree. Even if the child is not an actively observant Jew – evangelical education! I could never agree to that. When the school sent me a form for assent, I declared that I was Jewish and that was enough for them not to accept him."

"My children are attending a Jewish school. I wanted them to know clearly where they belong, not like me. Did I do the right thing? Perhaps it will be a stigma for my sons, their Judaism? I have constant fears as to what could happen here."

The stand of neutral avoidance is being replaced by the desire, expressed with varying intensity, to provide the children with a natural basis for creating identity: "Let them know that they are Jewish and what it means to be Jewish at an early age and in natural fashion."

The children themselves are not passive about their Jewishness. The young generation is well aware of it, has discerned clearly who is Jewish and who is not. They are inquisitive, hesitant, fearful and attracted to Judaism, and most of them maintain contact with Israel. Israel fires the imagination of many of them, evokes pride and constitutes a real option.

There can be no doubt that forty years of silence and estrangement from Judaism have left their mark on the Jews of Hungary. The Jewish identity of the young generation is shallow-rooted, lacking in content and often lacks essence, but nonetheless, the Jews of Hungary have not renounced their Jewishness. They feel a strong emotional link to their past, they deal tirelessly with the subject of the Holocaust, maintain links with Israel and maintain a Jewish educational system which is expanding and gaining force in an optimistic atmosphere.

312
Title pages of Jewish journals (1990s)



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The publication of this book coincides with the launching of a new virtual exhibition *In the Land of Hagar, The Jews of Hungary* in Beth Hatefutsoth, The Museum of the Jewish Diaspora website at **http://www. bh.org.il/v-Exh/hungary/index.html**


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# Index-Persons

The figures in *italics* refer to pictorial material


Abraham ben Jakov (Ibrahim ibn Jakub) 13
Acsády, Ignác (1845–1906) 215
Ádám, Emil 91
Adler, Mór (1826–1902) 258
Adler, Zsigmond (1901–1982) 218
Ady, Endre (1877–1919) *230*, 231, 255, 259
Ágai, Adolf (Csicseri Bors, Porzó, Forgó bácsi) (1936–1916) 221, *221*, 223
Alconieri, Tivadar (Cohn, Herman) (1797/8–1865) 257
Áldor, Dezső *238*
Alexander, Bernát (1850–1927) 215, *215*
Alpár, Gitta 254
Altmann, Shimon (1894–1944) 71
Amerling, Friedrich (1803–1887) 257
Ámos, Imre (1907–1944/5) *9*, 262, 263, *263*
Angyal, Dávid (1857–1943) 215
Anna, Margit (1913–1991) 262
An-Ski (Rappaport, Shlomo Seinwill) (1863–1920) *240*
Ányos, László 253
Arany, János (1817–1882) 250, 228
Arányi, Jelly (1893–1966) 254
Arányi, Lajos (György) (1812–1887) 217
Arma, Pál (1905–1987) 254
Árpádian Dinasty 15
Artzi, Pinhas (Landler) 86
Aschner, Oszkár 219
Aszóder, Jehuda (1796–1866) 70

Bach, Johann Sebastian (1685–1750) 254
Bacher, Simon (1823–1891) 62, 84, 176
Bacher, Vilmos (1850–1913) 82, 83, 84
Baal Shem Tov, Jisrael (1700–1776) *74*, 75
Balassa, József (1864–1945) 197, 215
Balázs, Béla (Bauer, Herbert) (1884–1949) 232, 254
Bálint, Endre (1914–1986) *207*, 262
Bálint, György (1906–1943) 226, 233
Bánki, Donát (1859–1922) 217
Bánki, Judit *248*
Bánóczi, József (1849–1926) 84, 215
Bánóczi, László (1884–1945) 239
Barabás, Miklós (1810–1898) *253*
Bárd, Ferenc (1865–1935) 254
Bárdos, Artúr (1882–1974) 239, 251
Barna, Izidor (1860–1911) 223
Barna, Viktor (1911–1972) 218
Barta, István (1895–1948) 218
Barta, Sándor (1897–1938) 232
Bartók, Béla (1881–1945) 151, 232, 254, 255
Bartos, Gyula (1872–1954) 239
Basch, Árpád (1873–1944) 262
Bató, József (1888) 261
Bátor, Szidor (1860–1929) 253
Batthyány family 19, 31
Bauer, Hermann 41
Baumann, Károly (1871–1920) 236
Baumhorn, Lipót (1860–1932) 98, *99*, *179*
Beatrix, Aragon (1457–1508) *16*, 252
Beck, Ignatz Wilhelm 70
Beck, Ö. Fülöp (1873–1945) *230*, 231, 259
Beck, Vilmos (1824–1862) 221
Beer, Friedrich 121
Beke (Beck), Manó (1862–1946) 216
Beke, Ödön 215
Béla IV (1206–1270; 1235–1270) 15, 15, 59
Béldi, Izor (1867–1926) 253, 254
Bellák, László 218
Ben-Ezer, Ehud 129
Benczúr, Gyula (1844–1920) *50*
Beöthy, László (1873–1931) 241
Bér, Dezső (1875–1924) 262
Beregi, Ármin (1879–1955) 131, 142, 143
Beregi, Oszkár (1876–1965/6) 239, *240*, 241, *249*
Berény, Róbert (1887–1953) *260*, 261
Bernát, Mandel 50
Bethlen, Gábor (1613–1629) 29
Bethlen, István (1874–1947) 208
Bialik, Haim Nahman (1873–1934) 63
Biedl, Samu (1872–1938) 134
Bihari, József (1901–1981) 205
Bihari, Sándor (1855–1906) 259
Biró (Blau), Lajos (1880–1948) 224, 226, 231, 232
Bíró, László 217
Biró, Mihály (1886–1948) 65, 262
Bismarck, Otto von (1815–1898) 126
Bláthy, Ottó Titusz (1860–1939) 217
Blau, Lajos (1861–1936) 84, *85*
Blayer, Ignác 41
Bloch, József (1862–1922) 254
Bloch, Móric (Ballagi, Mór) (1815–1891) 41, 227, *227*, 228
Bloch, Mózes (Moshe Arieh) (1815–1907) *82*, 83
Bodrogi, Zsigmond (1874–1937) 253
Bokor, József (1861–1911) 253
Bokros Birman, Dezső (1889–1965) 259
Bolyai, Farkas (1775–1856) 216
Bolyai, János (1802–1860) 216
Bondy, István 241
Bonfini, Antonio (1434?–1503) *17*
Bornemisza, Joannes *18*
Bornstein, Emil 91
Borsányi *167*
Bosnyák, Zoltán (1905–1952) 209
Brand, Hansi (Hartman, Hajnalka) (1912–2000) *271*
Brand, Joel (Jenő) (1906–1964) 272
Braun, Paula (1881–1962) 254
Braun, Sándor (1866–1920) 223
Breuer, József (1882) 131
Breuer, Marcel (Lajos) (1902–1981) 170
Bródy, György (1908–1967) 218
Bródy, Imre (1891–1944) 217
Bródy, Sándor (1863–1924) 217, 226, 231, *249*, 262
Bródy, Zsigmond (1840–1906) 221, 224
Bruck, Lajos (1846–1910) 258
Brüll, Alfréd (1876–1944) 219
Burgmair, Hans (1473–1531) *18*
Buxbaum, Joshua (?–1944) *70*
Buziási Eisenstadter, Ignác 181

Capa, Robert (Friedmann, András/Endre) (1913–1954) 244, 245, *245*
Carmilly-Weinberger, Moshe (1908) 86
Chagall, Marc (1887–1985) *131*
Chatam Sofer (Schreiber, Moses) (1762–1839) 23, 24, 40, *67*, 69, 70, 71, 76, 84, 102, 103, 129, 130, 156, 159, 176, 182
Chekhov, Anton (1860–1904) 238
Chorin, Áron (1766–1844) 39, *39*, 41, 182
Chorin, Zsigmond (1829–1879) 221
Clarot, Johann *39*
Czigány, Dezső (1883–1937) 261
Czóbel, Béla (1883–1976) *260*, 261

Csabai Ékes, Lajos (1896–1944) 262, 263
Csáky, Albin (1841–1912) 110
Csemegi, Károly (1826–1899) 215
Csiky, Gergely (1842–1891) 249
Csillag, István (1881–1968) 259
Csillag (Stern), Teréz (1862–1925) 239
Csokonai Vitéz, Mihály (1773–1805) 252
Csorba, Géza (1892–1974) 259
Csortos, Gyula (1883–1945) *250*

Dankó, Pista (1858–1903) 259
Déchy, Mór (1851–1917) 216
Deli, Lajos 100
Déri, Kálmán (1859) 259
Déry, Tibor (1894–1977) *232*, 233
Deutsch, Aron David (1812–1878) 71
Dezső, Lajos (Alajos) (1888–1964) 262
Dezső, Márkus 215
Diener-Dénes, Rudolf (1889–1956) 261
Diósy, Márton (1818–1892) 228
Ditrói (Himmelstein), Mór (1851–1945) 239
Divald, Károly (1830–1897?) *173*
Dóczi (Dux), Lajos (1845–1918/9) 224
Domány, András 171
Donáth (Donát), Gyula (1924–1984) 258
Donáth, Endre 241
Doráti, Antal (1906–1988) 254
Dreyfus, Alfred (1859–1935) 123, 124, 127
Duckstein, Zoltán (1894–1962) 218
Dushinsky, Josef Zvi (1868–1948) 70, 73
Dux, Adolf (1822–1881) 228

Ehrenfeld family 24
Eichmann, Adolf (1906–1962) 85, 269
Eizik Jichak (from Kabold) 257
Eiss, Alexander von (1832–1921) 117
Elek, Artúr (1876–1944) 233
Elkabetz, Shlomo 157
Ellinger, Ede *227*
Emden, Jakob (1697–1776) 128

Engel, Iván (1899–1985) 254
Engel, József (1815–1901) *258*, 259
Eötvös, József (1813–1871) 40, *40*, 228
Eötvös, Károly (1842–1916) 115, 116
Erdei, Viktor (1879–1945) 263
Erdélyi, Mihály (1895–1979) 238
Erődi, Jenő (1882–1945) 241
Esterházy family 19, 20, 29, 34

Fábián, László 218
Fabó, Bertalan (1868–1920) 254
Falk, Géza (1899) 254
Falk, Miksa (1828–1908) 221, *221*, 224
Falk, Zsigmond (1870–1935) 224
Faludi, Antal 239
Faludi, Gábor (1846–1932) 239
Faludi, Jenő (1873–1933) 239
Faludi, Miklós (1870–1942) 239
Faludi, Sándor (1873–1945) 239
Falus, Elek (1884–1950) 262
Faragó, Ferenc 100
Faragó, József (1866–1906) 262
Farkas, István (1887–1944) 261, 263
Farkasházy, Miklós 263
Farkasházy, Vilmos *47*
Fáy, Szeréna (1865–1934) 239
Fehér, Ilonka 255
Fehér, Lipót (1847–1915) 253
Feiks, Jenő (1878–1939) 262
Fejér, Lipót (1880–1959) 216
Fekete, Mihály (1886–1957) 216
Feld, Irén (1883–1944) 238, 241
Feld, Mátyás (1876–1953) 238
Feld, Zsigmond (1849–1939) 238
Feldmann, Mózes (1860–1927) 84
Fémes–Beck, Vilmos (1885–1918) 259
Féner, Tamás 247
Fényes, Adolf (1867–1945) 261, *261*, 263
Fenyő, Miksa (1877–1972) 231
Ferdinand III (1608–1657; 1637–1657) 48
Ferdinand V (1793–1875) *58*
Ferraris, Artúr (1867) 259
Feszl, Frigyes (1821–1884) 95
Fisch, József 91
Fischer, Annie (1914) 254
Fischer Farkasházi, Mór (1799–1880) 47, 49
Fleg (Flegenheimer), Edmond (1874–1963) *131*
Fleischer, Antal (1891–1945) 254
Fleischmann, Sándor (1862–1916) 222
Fodor, Gyula (1890–1948) 254
Fodor, Lajos 136
Földes, Dezső (1880–1950) 218
Förk, Ernő (1868–1934) *19*, 99
Förster, Ludwig (1797–1863) 95
Frank, Frigyes (1890–1976) 263
Frankel, Zeharia (1801–1875) 82
Franz Joseph (1830–1916; 1848–1916) 70, 82, 107, 182
Frenkel, Jenő (1902–1989) 83
Fried (Frid), Géza (1904–1989) 254
Friedman, Dávid 138
Friedmann, Mór (1826–1891) 91
Friedrich, István (1883–1958) 142
Friesenhausen, David Meir (1750–1828) 39, 82
Fuchs, Abraham (1890–1974) 69
Fuchs, Jenő (1882–1955) 218
Fuchstaller, Alajos (1815–1863) *93*

Gaál, Béla (1893–1944) 251
Gábor, Dénes 216
Gábor, Móric (1889) 263
Gábor, Tamás 218
Gajári, Ödön (1852–1919) 224
Gál, Gyula (1865–1945) 239
Ganzfried, Shlomo (1804–1886) 71
Gara, Arnold (1882–1929) 262
Garai, János (1889–1945) 219
Garami, Ernő (1876–1935) 224
Garas, Márton (1885–1930) 250
Gárdonyi, Lajos 241
Gaon of Vilna (Elijahu ben Shlomo Zalman) (1720–1797) 76
Gedő, Lipót (1887–1952) 262
Gelléri, Andor Endre (1907–1945) 233
Gertler, Endre (1907) 251, 254
Gertler, Viktor (1901–1969) 251
Gestetner, Dávid (1854–1939) 217
Géza (972–997) 13
Geyer, Stefi (1888–1956) 254
Glasner, Moshe Shmuel (1856–1924) 137
Goldberger, Albert *49*
Goldberger, Arnold *49*
Goldberger, Bertold *49*
Goldberger, Ferenc *49*
Goldberger, Gusztáv *49*
Goldberger, Gyula *49*
Goldberger, József (1818–1882) 62, 63
Goldberger, Ödön *49*
Goldberger, Samu *49*
Goldberger, Sámuel (1784/7–1848) 49
Goldfarb, Zvi (1921–1977) *271*
Goldmann, György (1904–1945) 259, 263
Goldmann, Nahum (1895–1982) 136
Goldmark, Károly (1830–1915) 253, *253*
Goldmark, Péter Károly (1906–1977) 217
Goldstein brothers *189*
Goldstein, Perec (Ferenc) (1923–1944) 274, 275
Goldziher, Ignác (1850–1921) 84, *84*, 197
Gombos, Sándor (1895–1968) 218
Gondos, Sándor (1906–1995) *276*
Góth, Sándor (1869–1946) *250*
Gottesmann, Miklós *50*
Gottlieb, Fischer (19. cen.) 103, 104
Gömbös, Gyula (1886–1936) 53, 208, 209
Gömöri György (1934) *27*, *233*
Gömöri Markus, Mari *27*
Gráber, Margit 263
Greenhut, Elazar 130
Gross, Béla (1835–1914) 258
Grosz family 217
Groszman, Gyula (?–?) 64
Gruber, Emma 254
Grunwald, Max (1871–1953) 197
Grünfeld, Jehuda (1837–1907) 71
Grünfeld, Shimon (1881–1930) 71
Grünwald, Eliezer David (1867–1928) 73
Grünwald family 24
Grünwald, Jakob Jehezkija (1882–1941) 71
Grünwald, Josef 71
Grünwald, Joshua (1909–1968) 73
Grünwald, Moshe (1853–1910) 73
Grünwald, Samuel 91
Grünwald, Jehuda (1849–1920) 72
Guggenheimer, Joseph 104
Gut, Árpád 131
Gutman, David 129
Guttmann, Mihály (1872–1942) 84

Gyenes, Gitta (1890) 263
Gyöngyi, Izsó (1860–1923) 235

Habsburg Dinasty 19, 29, 32, 48, 113, 177
Hacohen, Arieh Jehuda Leib 128, 129
Hacohen, Ephraim 128
Hacohen, Zvi 128, 129
Hager, Haim 77
Hager, Menahem Mendel (1885–1940) 73, *76*, *76*
Hahn, István (1913–1984) 84, 85
Hajdú, André (1932) 255
Hajnal, Anna (1907–1977) *27*
Hajós, Alfréd (1878–1955) 218, *218*
Halász, Gábor (1901–1945) 233
Halász, Ignác (1855–1901) 215
Halevy, Ber Frank *67*
Halmi, Artúr (1866–1939) 259
Hameiri (Feuerstein), Avigdor (1890–1970) 85, *131*
Haraszti (Hinkelmann), Mici (1882–1964) *250*
Harkányi, Frigyes (1826–1919) *50*
Hasdai ibn Shaprut (about 915 – about 970) 13
Hatsek, Ignác (1828–1902) 216
Hatvany, Ferenc (1881–1958) *232*
Hatvany, Lajos (1880–1961) 224, 231, 232, *232*
Hatvany, Deutsch Sándor (1852–1913) *232*
Haynau, Julius Jakob (1786–1853) 42
Hazai, Hugó (1867–1930) *222*
Hazai, Samu (Kohn, Sámuel) (1851–1942) 117, *118*
Hegedüs, Ármin (1869–1945) *167*
Hegyi, Béla (1858–1922) 253
Heilprin, Mihály (1823–1888) 227, 228
Helfy (Helfer), Ignác (1830–1897) 221
Heller, Bernát (1871–1943) 84
Heller, Zvi Hirsch (1776–1834) 71
Heltai, Jenő (1871–1957) 224, 231, *236*
Herczeg, Jenő (1886–1961) *236*
Herczel, Manó (1862–1918) 217
Herman, Lipót (1884–1972) *205*, *236*, *252*, 261, *265*
Hernádi, Lajos (1906–1986) 254
Hernádi–Herzl, Kornél (1858–1910) 259
Herzfeld, Viktor (1856–1919) 254
Herzl, Theodor Benjamin Zeev (1860–1904) 115, 117, *121*, 121–127, *122*, *123*, 131, 133, 176

Hevesi, Ferenc 85
Hevesi, György József (1885–1966) 217
Hevesi (Lőwy), Lajos (1843–1910) 221
Hevesi, Sándor (1873–1939) 239
Hevesi (Handler), Simon (1868–1943) 84, 85
Hildesheimer, Azriel (Israel) (1820–1899) 103
Hildesheimer, Meir (1864–1934) *24*
Hirsch, Maurice de (1831–1896) 124
Hirsch, Samson Raphael (1808–1888) 104
Hirschel, Izsák (18. cen.) 35
Hirschler, Pál (1907–1944) 85
Hirschler, Ignác (1823–1891) 105
Hitschmann *24*
Hoffer, Ármin (1870–1941) 84
Hoffstädter, Béla 171
Holder, József (1893–1945) 204
Holzer, Leopold 91
Homonnai *199*
Horn, Ede (Einhorn, Ignác) (1825–1875) 221, *221*, 228
Horovitz, Izrael Zeev 130
Horovitz, Lipót (1838–1917) 259
Horovitz, Pinkas 102
Horthy, Miklós (1868–1957) 119, 209, 265, 268, 269, 271, 275,
Hunwald, Simha (1914–1945) *274*
Hutter, Pál 254
Hutterer, Miklós (Claus, Jürgen) 205

Ibsen, Henrik (1828–1906) 238, 241
Ignotus (Veigelsberg, Hugó) (1869–1949) 224, 231
Imrédy, Béla (1891–1946) 54, 212
Incze, Sándor (1889–1966) 224
Indig, Ottó (1890–1969) 251
Ingomár, Ferenc (Frankel, Ignác) (1838–1924) 258
Istóczy, Győző (1842–1915) 114, 115, 116
István V (1239–1272; 1270–1272) *15*
István, Saint I (997/1000–1038) 13, 215
Istvánffy, Miklós (1538–1615) *18*
Iványi, Jenő (1863–1922) 239
Iványi-Grünwald, Béla (1867–1940) *260*, 261
Izsák, Ede 139
Izsák of Kassa 17
Izsák of Nagyszombat (end of 14th cen.) 18

Jakab, Dezső (1864–1932) 98, *100*, 165, 166, *166*, 168
Jakob Isak HaHoze (Lublin) (1745–1815) 75
Jámbor, Ági 254
Jankó, János *221*
Janovics, Jenő (1872–1945) 240, 249, 250
Jánszky, Béla (1884–1945) 182
Jászai, Mari (1850–1926) 250
Jászi, Oszkár (1895–1957) 143, 224
Jaurès, Jean Léon (1859–1914) 135
Jelfy, Gyula 253
Jellinek, Mór(ic) (1823–1883) *50*
Jemnitz, Sándor (1890–1963) 254
Jókai, Mór (1825–1904) 228
Jónás, Dávid (1871–1951) *167*
Jónás, Zsigmond (1879–1936) *167*
Joseph II (1741–1790; 1780–1790) 33, *34*, 36, 37, *37*, 49, 59, *75*

Kabos, Endre (1906–1944) 219
Kabos, Gyula (1888–1941) *250*, 251
Kaczér, Illés (1887–1980) *74*, *75*
Kadosa, Pál (1903–1983) 254
Kahani, Meir 138
Káldi László 91
Kállay, Miklós (1887–1967) 268
Kallós, Ede (1866–1950) 259
Kálmán, Imre (1882–1953) 253
Kálmán, Könyves (Coloman the Beauclere) (1074–1116; 1095–1116) 14
Kálmán, Oszkár (1887–1971) 254
Kanitz, Ágoston (1843–1896) 216
Kaposi, Mór(ic) (1837–1902) 217
Karinthy, Frigyes (1887–1938) *249*, *250*
Kárpáti, Rudolf 218
Karl III (1711–1740) 33, 35
Károlyi, Mihály (1875–1955) *119*
Károlyi, Sándor (1669–1743) 31
Karvaly, Mór (1860–1899) 259
Kasztner, Rezső (Israel) (1906–1957) 78, *271*, 272, *272*
Katona, József (1791–1830) 250
Katona, Nándor (1860–1932) 261
Katz, Asher Anshel (1881–1944) 70
Katz, Jakob (1904–1998) 111
Katz (Wannfried), Menahem (about 1800–1891) 24
Katzburg, Nathaniel (1922) 24
Kaufman 160
Kaufmann, David (1852–1899) 83, 84, *84*
Kaufmann, Izidor (1853–1921) *69*, 72, 261
Kaufmann, Oszkár (1873–1956) 170
Kecskeméti, Lipót (1865–1936) 180
Kelen, Hugó (1888–1956) 91
Kelen, Imre (1896–1978) 262
Keleti, Márton (1905–1973) 251
Kellér, Dezső (1905–1986) *236*
Kellner, Jenő *222*
Kellner, Sándor 249
Kemény, János György (1926–1992) 216
Kemény, Rezső (1871–1945) 254
Kemény, Simon (1882–1945) 224
Keppish brothers (18. cen.) 35
Keresztirer (Steiner), Shajele (1851–1925) 78
Kern, Leó 253
Kertész, André (András) (1894–1985) 243, *243*, 244, 245
Kertész, Mihály (Curtiz, Michael) (1888–1962) 250
Keszler, József (1846–1927) 254
Kinszky, Imre *155*
Kiss, Arnold (1869–1940) 228
Kiss, József (1843–1921) *142*, 230, *230*, 231, 250
Klein, Herman 221
Klein, Samuel Shmelke (?–1875) 73
Knoblauch, Edward (1874–?) 250
Knopp, Imre (1867–1945) 259
Kóber, Leó (1876–1932) 262
Kóbor, Tamás (1867–1942) 231
Kodály, Zoltán (1882–1967) 254, 255
Kohányi 62
Kohlbach, Bertalan (1866–1944) 197
Kohn, Sámuel (1841–1920) 84, 85
Kollonich, Lipót (Kollonitsch, Leopold) (1631–1707) 31
Kolozsvári, Andor (1900–1982) 240
Komáromi, Sándor (Haber, Samu) (1866–1922) *222*
Komjádi, Béla (1892–1933) 218
Komlós, Vilmos (1893–1959) *236*
Komlóssy, Emma (1881–1944) 241
Komoly, Ottó (Kahn, Nátán) (1892–1945) *271*, 272
Komor, Marcell (1868–1944) 98, 100, 165, 166, *166*, 168
Komor, Vilmos (1895–1971) 254
Kondor, Ignác (?–1928) 62
Kont, Ignác (1856–1912) 215
Konti, József (1852–1905) 253
Koppel, Jacob 75, 76
Korányi (Kornfeld), Frigyes (1827–1913) 217
Korda (Kellner), Sándor (Alexander) (1893–1956) 249, *249*, 250, 251, *251*
Korda, Vince (1897–1979) 251, *251*, 261
Korda, Zoltán (1895–1961) 251, *251*
Kornfeld, Zsigmond (1852–1909) *52*
Korniss, Dezső (1908–1984) 262
Kósa, György (1897–1984) 254
Kossuth, Lajos (1802–1894) 40, *74*, 102, 221, 257, *259*
Kovács *249*
Kovács, Margit (1902–1977) 263, *263*
Kozma, Lajos (1884–1948) *167*, 262
Kölcsey, Ferenc (1790–1838) 40
Kőnig, Gyula (1849–1913) 216
Körmöczi, Zsuzsa 218
Köves, Izsó 259
Kövessy, Albert (1860–1924) *241*
Krausz, Jakab 91, *91*
Kresz, Géza (1846–1901) 257
Kriehuber, Joseph (1801–1876) *57*
Kronberger, Lili (1890–1974) 218
Ktav Sofer (Abraham Shmuel Benjamin Wolf) 102, 130
Kun, Béla (1886–1939) 118, 119, 143, 224
Kunewalder, Zsigmond *42*
Kunffy, Lajos (1869–1962) 263
Kunfi, Zsigmond (1879–1929) 224
Kunwald, Cézár (1870–1947) 263
Kurtág, György (1926) 254

Lajta (Leitesdorfer), Béla (1873–1920) 99, 100, *163*, 168, *168*, 169, *169*, *236*
Lajta, Henrik 168
Lajta, Rezső *168*
Lajos II (1516–1526) 17
Lakner, Artúr (Lakner bácsi) (1893–1944) 241
Lakos, Alfréd (1870–1961) 262
Lánczos, Kornél (1893–1974) 216
Landau, Jehezkel (Noda biJehuda) (1713–1793) 156

Lányi (Langsfeld), Ernő (1861–1923) 253
László, Fülöp (Laub Philip) (1869–1937) 259
László I, Saint (Ladislaus) (1077–1095) 14
Lax, Péter 216
Lázár, Lajos (1885–1936) 250
Lechner, Ödön (1845–1914) *163*, 165, 168
Légrády (Pollák), Károly (1834–1903) 223
Légrády brothers 224
Lehnhardt, Sámuel (1790–1840) *44*
Leopold I (1640–1705) 31, 36
Lengyel, Menyhért (1880–1974) 232, 236, *236*, 250
Lengyel, Miksa 253
Lesznai, Anna (Moscovitz, Amália) (1885–1966) *230*, 231, 232, 263
Levi M. 159
Lewandowski, Louis (1821–1894) 91
Lichtenberg, Emil (1874–1944) 254
Lichtenstein, Hillel (1815–1891) 103, 104, 129
Lichtenstein, Joseph 130
Lichtenstein, Pinhas 129
Liebermann, Eliezer ben Farkas 39
Liebermann, Jehuda 15
Ligeti, György (1923) 254
Ligeti, Miklós (1871–1944) 259, *259*
Lindenbaum, Lipót 137
Lombrozo (1848–1923) 126
Louis (the Great) Anjou (Nagy, Lajos) (1342–1382) 15
Löffler, Béla (1880–?) 100
Löffler, Sándor (Samu) (1877–?) 100
Löw Immánuel (1854–1944) 98, 186, *240*
Lőw, Lipót (Leopold) (1811–1875) *39*, 41, *41*, 42, 82, *86*, 186
Löwinger, Sámuel (1904–1980) 84, 85, 86
Ludasi Gans, Mór (1829–1885) 221, 228
Lukács, György (1885–1971) 150, 239, 254
Luria, Jitzhak (1534–1572) 157
Lutz, Carl (1895–1975) *274*, 275

Madách, Imre (1823–1864) 85, 204
Magyar–Mannheimer, Gusztáv (1859–1937) 262
Maimonides, Moses (Rambam) (1135–1204) 39
Major, Henrik (Sicu) (1889–1948) 262, *262*
Makai (Fischer), Emil (1870–1901) 228, *241*
Mándi, Gyula (1899–1969) 218
Mangold, Henrik (1828–1912) 217
Márai, Sándor (1900–1989) *102*
Marczali, Henrik (1856–1940) 216
Margó, Ede (1872–1946) 259
Maria Theresia (1717–1780) 23, 36, *75*
Márk, Lajos (1867–1943) 259, 262
Márkus, Miksa (1868–1944) 224
Marshalik, Mechele 205
Márton, Áron (1896–1980) 270
Matthias (Corvinus) Mátyás (1443–1490; 1458–1490) *16*, 17, 93, 252
Mauthner, Henrik 137
Medgyes, László 261
Meir ben Isak 23
Mendel family 17, 93
Mendel, Jakob (1493–1522) *16*
Mendele, Mocher Sfarim (Solem Jankev Abramovits) (1835–1917) 63, 159
Mérei, Adolf (1877–1918) 250
Mester, Jenő (1882–?) 259
Mezei, Ernő (1851–1932) 125, 133, *222*
Mezey, Sándor (1884–?) *222*
Mező, Ferenc (1885–1961) 218
Mihály, István (1892–1944) 251
Mikes, Kelemen (1690–1761) 230
Miklós, Andor (1880–1933) 223
Miklós, Gyula 139
Miksa I (1493–1519) *18*
Minc (Münz), Moshe (about 1750–1831) *44*
Moholy–Nagy (Weiss), László (1895–1946) 244, *244*, 245
Molnár, Antal (1890–1983) 254
Molnár, Ferenc (1878–1952) 224, 232, 236, 250
Molnár, Géza (1870–1933) 254
Monostory *173*
Mordechai ben Eliezer (from Megyer) 257
Moskovits, Yehiel Zvi (1917–1999) 86
Munk, Adolf 176
Munkácsi (Munk), Bernát (1860–1937) 215, *215*
Murányi, Gyula (1881–1920) *118*, 259

Nádor, Kálmán 254
Nagy, Endre (1877–1938) 236, *236*, 238, 254
Nagy, György (1905–1945) 241
Nagy, Ignác (1810–1854) *45*
Nagy, Imre 226
Nagy, Sándor (1868–1950) 263
Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) 257
Nendtvich, Károly 16
Neumann, János (1903–1957) 216
Neumann, Salamon 41
Neustadt, Adolf 221
Nissel 159
Nordau, Max (Südfeld Miksa, Suedfeld, Simcha Meir) (1849–1923) 121–124, *122*, *123*, 126, 127
Nóti, Károly (1892–1954) *250*
Nussbecher, Emil (Palgi, Joel) (1918–1978) 274, 275

Oesterreicher, József Manes (1756–1832) 217, *217*
Oláh, György 217
Opata, Zoltán (1900–1982) 218
Oppenheim 184
Oppenheimer, Dávid 182
Oppenheimer, Samuel (1630–1703) 32, *32*, 49
Orbán, Dezső (1884–1986) 263
Ormándy, Jenő (1899–1985) 254
Ország, Lili (1926–1980) 262, *262*
Osvát, Ernő (1876–1929) 231

Pálffy family 31, 34
Panet, Menahem 78
Pap, Károly (1897–1944) 232, 233
Papp, Gyula *176*
Pártos, Ödön (1907–1977) 255
Pásztory, Móric Miklós (1875–1922) *249*
Patai, József (1882–1953) *129*, *131*, *222*, 229, *229*, 230, *230*
Paulay, Ede (1836–1894) 239
Pauler, Tivadar (1816–1886) 108
Peretz, Jitzhak Leib (1852–1915) 159
Perlmutter, Izsák (1866–1932) 262
Perlrott–Csaba, Vilmos (1880–1955) 261, 263
Perrier family 169
Petőfi, Sándor (1823–1849) 228
Petschauer, Attila (1904–1943) 219, *219*
Pfeiffer, Jichak (Pap, Izsák) (1884–1945) 85
Polányi, Mihály (1891–1976) 217
Polgár, Judit 218
Polgár, Zsófi 218
Polgár, Zsuzsa 218
Pólya, György (1888–1985) 216
Pólya, Jenő (1876–1945) 217
Popper, Dávid (1843–1913) 254
Popper, Lipót 105
Pór, Bertalan (1880–1964) 261
Preiss, Moshe 91

Quittner, Zsigmond (1857–1918) *167*

Raab (Ben–Ezer), Jehuda (1858–1948) 129
Rabba 158
Racine, Jean de (1639–1699) 241
Radnóti, Miklós (1909–1944) 233, *233*
Radó, Aladár (1882–1914) 254
Radó, Sándor (1891–1944) 241
Rados, Dezső (1891–1974) 254
Rafael, Mór 91, *91*
Rajki, Béla 218
Rajnai, Gábor (1885–1961) 250
Rákóczi family 31
Ramban (Moses ben Nahman) (1194–1270) 156
Rashi (Shlomo ben Jitzhak) (1040–1105) 67, 156, 158
Ráth, Mózes 63, 64
Rátkai, Márton (1881–1951) *249*
Reiner, Frigyes (1888–1963) 254
Reinitz, Béla (1878–1843) 254, 255
Reissmann, Károly Miksa (1856–1917) *128*
Reismann, Marian 246, *247*
Rejtő, Ildikó 218
Rényi, Aladár 253
Réth, Alfréd (1884–1966) 261
Réthy (Rothbaum), Mór (1848–1925) 216
Révai family 176
Révai, József (1898–1959) 224
Révész, Béla (1876–1944) 224, 239
Révész, Perec (1916) *271*
Richter, Gedeon (1872–1944) 217
Richtmann, Mózes (1880–1972) 85
Riedl, Béla *167*
Riesz, Frigyes (1880–1956) 216
Riesz, Marcell (1886–1969) 216
Roboz, Imre (1892–1944) 241
Rokonstein, Lipót 41
Róna, József (1861–1939) 258
Rónai, János 133

Rosenberg 55
Rosenfeld M. Liebman 55
Rosenthal, Móric 41, 227
Rosh (Asher, ben Jehiel) (1250–1327) 156
Rosner Segal, Jehuda (1879–1944) 72
Roth, Moshe Arieh 137
Róth, Ernő (Abraham Naftali Zvi) (1908–1991) 84, 85, 86
Róth, Miksa (1865–1944) 263
Rothschild family *146*, 169
Rott, Sándor (1868–1942) *238*
Rózsahegyi, Kálmán (1873–1961) 239
Rózsavölgyi 167
Rózsavölgyi (Rosenthal), Márk (Mordechai) (1787/89–1848) 235, 253, 253, 254
Rubin, Israel (1923) 76
Rubinyi, Mózes (1881–1965) 215
Rudas, László (1885–1950) 224

Salamon, Béla (1885–1965) *236*
Sándor, Frigyes (1905–1979) 254
Saphir, Moritz Gottlieb (1795–1858) 205
Sárkány, Miklós 218
Sárközi, György (1899–1945) 233
Sárosi, Imre 218
Sas, Náci 253
Savoy, Eugen (1663–1736) 258
Scheiber, Sándor (1913–1985) 84, 86, *86*, 198, 280
Scheiber, Vilmos (1889–1979) 217
Scheiber, Hugó (1873–1950) *260*, 261, 263
Schick, Maharam Moshe (1807–1879) 73, 103
Schiff, Emile 121, 125
Schiff, Friedrich 121, 123–127
Schiffer, Adolf 254
Schiller, Johann Christoph Friedrich (1759–1805) 205
Schlesinger family (18. cen.) 35
Schlesinger, Lajos (1864–1933) 216
Schlesinger, Akiva Joseph (1837–1922) 103, 129
Schlesinger, Josef 158, 159
Schmidl, Sándor *163*
Schömer, Ferenc *101*
Schön, Dezső (1907–2000) 204
Schönberger, Armand (1885–1974) 261
Schönfeld, József (1884–1935) 139
Schreiber, Benjamin Wolf 102
Schreiber, Hugó *117*
Schreiner, Márton (1863–1926) 86
Schulhof, Izsák (?–1733) 29
Schwab, Lőw (1794–1857) 41, 42
Schwandtner *16*
Schweiger, Márton (1837–1905) 109
Schweitzer, Miklós (1923–1945) 216
Sebestyén, Artúr (1868–1943) *167*
Séll, György 254
Semper, Gottfried 168
Serényi, Miklós 213
Shaag, Abraham 130
Shakespeare, William (1564–1616) 241
Shabbatai, Zvi (1626–1676) 76
Shabbethai de Chazzan 14
Shapira, Eliezer 198
Shapira, Haim Elazar (1872–1937) 73
Shapira, Lazar 78
Shapira, Salamon (1832–1893) 78
Shapira, Zvi Elimelech (?–1841) 78
Shapira, Zvi Hers (?–1913) 78, *78*
Shaw, George Bernard (1856–1950) 240
Shneur, Zalman (Zalkind) (1889–1959) 63
Siklós, Albert (1878–1942) 254
Silberstein, Jesaja (1856–1935) 71
Simonyi, Zsigmond (1853–1919) 215
Singer, Zsigmond (1850–1913) 224
Sipos, Anna (1908–1988) 218
Sipos, Péter *223*
Skrek, Lipót *224*
Skuteczky, Döme (1850–1921) 259
Sofer (Szofer), Haim (1821–1886) 78, 103, 159
Sokolov, Nahum (1859–1936) 134
Solti, György (Georg) (1912–1997) 254
Somogyi, Béla (1868–1920) 224, 226
Sonnenfeld, Joseph Haim (1849–1932) 130
Spiegel, Jehuda 76
Stampfer, Joshua (1852–1908) 129, *129*
Stein, Aurél (1862–1943) 216
Steiner, Ármin 159
Steiner, Endre 219
Steiner, Noe 219
Steinhardt, Géza 241
Steinhardt, Jakab 41
Steinhardt, Jakab 221
Sterk, Izidor (1860–1935) *167*
Streliszky, Lipót (19. cen.) *44*
Stern, Gershon (1861–1936) 131
Stern, Salamon 91
Stern, Samu (1874–1947) 270, *270*
Strausz, Adolf (1853–1944) 142
Strindberg, Johan August (1849–1912) 238
Sugár, Kata (1910–1943) 246
Sulzer, Salomon (1804–1890) 91
Szabó, Dezső (1879–1945) 207
Szabó, Ödön (Elijahu Jesurun) (1914–?) 64
Szabolcs, Ferenc (1874–1959) *176*
Szabolcsi, Bence (1899–1973) 254, 256
Szabolcsi, Lajos (1889–1943) 222, 229
Szabolcsi, Miksa (1857–1915) 130, *222*, 229
Szálasi, Ferenc (Szalosjan) (1897–1946) 209
Szamuely, Tibor (1890–1919) 224
Szántó, Piroska (1913) 262
Szántó, Tivadar (1877–1934) 254
Széchenyi, István (1791–1860) 39, 257, 258, *258*
Szegfi, Mór (1825–1896) 227, 228
Szegő, Gábor (1895–1985) 216
Székely (Bleyer), Aladár (1870–1940) *246*
Székely, Éva 218
Székely, István (1899–1979) *250*
Székely, Mihály (1901–1963) 254
Székely, Zoltán (1903) 254
Szekfű, Gyula (1883–1955) 208
Szenes, András (1895) 261
Szenes, Fülöp (1863–1944) 259
Szenes, Hanna (1921–1944) 274, *274*, 275
Szép, Ernő (1884–1953) 226, 231
Szerb, Antal (1901–1945) 233
Szerencsés, Imre (Fortunatus, Emericus; Shlomo Seneor) (?–1526) 17, *18*
Szigeti, József (1892–1973) 254
Szigethy, István (1891–1966) *236*
Szigligeti, Ede (1814–1878) *45*
Szikla, Adolf 253
Sziklai, Jenő 241
Sziklay, Jozsef *238*
Szilágyi, Dénes 140
Szilágyi, Marcsa *238*
Szilárd, Leó (1898–1964) 216
Szilasi, Móric (1854–1905) 215
Szirmai, Albert (1880–1967) 253
Szitányi, Izidor *50*
Szivessy, Tibor (1884–1963) *182*
Szomory, Dezső (1869–1944) 224, *230*, 231
Sztójay (Sztojakovich), Döme (1883–1946) *266*, 268

Tanhuma bar Aba (4th cen.) 158
Tartakover, Arieh (1897–1982) 16
Taub, Jichak Eizik (1750–1829) 74, 75, *75*, 76, 229
Tchernichovsky, Saul (1875–1943) 63
Teitelbaum, Elazar (1788–1855) 77
Teitelbaum, Haim Hers 77
Teitelbaum, Hananja Jom Tov Lipa (1830s–1904) *77*
Teitelbaum, Jekutiel Jehuda (1808–1891) 77, *77*
Teitelbaum, Joel (1887–1979) 71, 73, *77*, *77*, 78
Teitelbaum, Moses (1759–1841) *74*, 75, 76, 77
Teitelbaum, Moses (20. cen.) 78
Teitelbaum, Zalmen Leb 77
Telcs, Ede (1872–1948) *167*, 259, *259*
Teleki, Pál (1879–1941) 213
Teller, Ede (1908) 216
Tetinger, Róza *44*
Teván, István 262
Teweles, Heinrich (1856–1927)
Thomán, István (1862–1940) 254
Thorvaldsen, Berthel (1770–1844) 257
Tihanyi, Lajos (1885–1938) *260*, 261
Titus, Flavius Vespasianus (41–81) 159
Tkatsch, Izrael 91
Tollagi, Adolf (1862–1925) 235
Tolnai, Simon (1868–1944) 224, *224*
Tornai, Gyula (1861–1928) 259
Trebitsch, Mose Leb Wolf (18th cen.) *89*
Trefort, Ágoston (1817–1888) 109, 110
Tyroler, József (1822–1860s) 257

Újházy, Ede (1844–1915) 239
Ujvári, Péter (1869–1931) 229
Ulászló II (1490–1516) 17
Ullmann, Károly *50*
Ullmann, Mór(ic) (19. cen.) *56*, 57
Ullmann, Salamon 55
Ulman family 24
Ungár, Imre (1909–1972) 254
Ungár, Joel (1802–1855) 71, 110
Unger, S. D. 70

Ussishkin, Abraham Menahem Mendel (1863–1941) 134

Vadas, Ernő (1899–1962) 246, *246*
Vágó, Béla (1881–1939) 24
Vágó, Dezső (1882) 259
Vágó, József (1877–1947) 170, *170*
Vágó, László (1875–1933) 100, *170*
Vágó, Péter (Pierre) (1910) *170*
Vajda (Richter), Júlia (1913–1982) 262
Vajda, Lajos (1908–1941) 262
Vajda, László (1878–1933) 251
Vajda, Zsigmond (1860–1931) 259
Vámbéry, Ármin (Vamberger, Hermann) (1832–1913) 176, 216
Vámbéry, Rusztem (1872–1948) 215
Vámos, Leó 131
Varró (Picker), Margit (1881–1978) 254
Varsányi, Irén (1880–1932) 250
Vasquez, Carl *IV*, *44*, *56*
Veigelsberg, Leó (1846–1907) 221
Vértes, Marcel (1895–1961) 262
Vészi, József (1858–1940) 221, 224, 226
Vidéky *45*
Vidor, Feri 219
Vízkelety, Béla (1825–1864) *16*
Vörösmarty, Mihály (1800–1855) 228, 235, 259

Wagner, Otto (1841–1918) 96, 168
Wahrmann, Mór (1832–1892) *104*, 105
Wallenberg, Raoul (1912–1947) *274*, 275
Wedekind, Frank (1864–1918) 238
Weiner, Leó (1885–1960) 254, 255
Weiser, Fülöp 91
Weiss, Franz *44*, *56*
Weiss, Manfréd (1857–1922) *51*, 219
Weiss, Nissan Márkus 39
Weisz, Miksa (1872–1931) 84
Weisz, Richard (1879–1945) 218
Weisz, Pál (Weiss, Meir) 85, 86
Weltner, Jakab (1873–1936) 224
Werkner, Lajos (1883–1943) 218
Wertheimer, Samson (1658–1724) 23, 32, *32*
Wesselényi, Miklós (1796–1850) 40
Widder, Salamon (1880–1951) 62, 84
Wigner, Jenő 216
Wilmer, Clive *233*
Winkler, Mordechai Leib (1844–1932) 71
Wisliceny, Dieter von (1911–1948) 268
Wodianer, Mór (1810–1885) 57, *57*
Wodianer, Rudolf 56, 56
Wolfner, József (1856–1932) 224

Zádor, István (1882–1963) 263
Zágon, István (1893–1975) *250*
Zak, Jakob (17th cen.) 128, 129
Zerffi, Gusztáv, Hirsch (1820–?) 221
Zichy family 34
Ziffer (Cziffer), Sándor (1880–1962) 261
Zilahi, Simon (1849–1913) 223
Zilzer, Hajnalka 259
Zimády, Ignác 116
Zipser, Meir (1815–1869) 41, 103, 104
Zipser and König (music publisher) 254
Zukor, Adolf (Adolph) (1878–1976) 251
Zunz, Leopold (1794–1886) 81, *81*

Zsolt, Béla (1895–1949) 226

# Index-Places

The figures in *italics* refer to pictorial material


Abaújszántó *163*
Altona 129
Amsterdam 21
Anatolia *129*
Andrássy Road (Budapest) 165
Antwerp 78
Apostag 94
Aquincum *13*
Arad (Arad) 39, *39*, 41, 42, 180, 182, 188, 226
Aussee104
Austria 14, 19, 113, 114, 115, 117, 251, 172, 283
Austrian Alpine 33
Austrian Republic 24

Bács-Bodrog county 166
Baja 94
Balassagyarmat 71
Balatonfüred 217, *217*
Balf 233
Balfouria 130
Bánát (Banat) 173, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184
Basel 135, 209
Bavaria 82
Bazin (Pezinok) 14, 18, 34
Becskerek (Becicherecu) 183,184
Belz 78
Bereg county 76, 186
Beograd (Belgrade) *18*
Berlin 6, 24, 39, 81, 86, 129, 232, 244, 250
Beszterce (Bistriţa) 105
Black See 13
Bnei Brak 78
Bohemia 33, 36, 251
Bonyhád 71, 72, 94, 156, *195*
Bor 233
Brassó (Braşov) 180
Breslau (Wrocław) 81, 82, 84
Buchenwald 233
Buda see Budapest
Budakeszi *51*
Budapest *5*, *7*, *13*, 14, 15, *16*, 17, 18, *18*, *29*, 35, 36, *39*, 40-42, *45*, 52, 55, 60, 64, 73, 78, 81, 82, 84-86, 91, 93, 95-100, 105, 107, 110, 111, 115, *118*, 121, *123*, 125, 128, *129*, 131, *133*, 134-137, 139, 142, 143, 145, *145*, *146*, 147-149, *149*, 150-153, 155-160, *162*, 165, *167*, 169-171, 177, 185-187, 191-193, 207, 221, 224, *224*, 226, 231, 236, 238-241, *240*, 249, 250, 253, 254, 257, 258, 259, *259*, 268-271, *273*, 275, *276*, 278, 279, 281, 284
Burgenland 19, 20, 24, 29, 130, 204
Bűdszentmihály 71

Canada 217
Carpatian Mountains 75, 178
Chicago 216
Cracow (Kraków) 93, 139
Crimean Peninsula 13
Czechoslovakia 137, 173

Cseklész (Bernolákovo) 14
Csepel 51

Dachau 263
Dacia 13
Danube (Duna) 14, *56*, 149, 156, 219, 270
Debrecen 85, 111, 134, 185, *191*, *195*, *197*
Denmark 250
Dés (Dej) 78
Deutschkreutz (Sopronkeresztúr, Németkeresztúr) 19, 20, 24
Dévény (Devín) 14
Dinov 78
Dob Street (Budapest) *148*, 157, 158
Dohány Street (Tabakgasse, Budapest) *93*, *95*, 96, *96*, 100, 110, 125
Dunaszerdahely 70

Eger (Erlau) 14
Egypt 65, *224*
Eisenstadt (Kismarton) 14, 19, 20, *21*, 22, 23, 24, *24*, 29, 103
Ellend 13
England 49, 170, 217
Eperjes 176
Érsekújvár (Nové Zámky) 143
Erzsébet Boulevard (Budapest) *222*
Erzsébetváros (Budapest) 239
Esztergom 14, 47, 243

Felsővisó 73
France 124, 170, 197
Frankfurt 23, 104
Frauenkirchen (Boldogasszony) 20

Galánta (Galanta) 70, 84
Galgóc (Hlohovec) 14, 29
Galicia 31, 75, 76, 78, 177
Germany (Germania) 6, 14, 81, 85, 113, 114, 115, 128, 208, 211, 233, 265, 268
Givat Ada 130
Günskirchen 233

Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) 29, 179
Gyöngyös 100, 257
Győr 31, 42, 85, 97, 156, 188

Hadera 131
Haifa 131
Hajdú-Bihar county 166
Háromszék county *107*
Hatvan 136
Hegyalja 71
Herend *47*, 50, *162*
Hódmezővásárhely 188, *195*
Hollán Ernő Street (Budapest) 135
Holics (Holíč) 14
Hollywood 250
Huszt (Khust) 70, 73, 103, 178, *178*, *229*

Intercisa (Dunaújváros) 13
Ischl 121
Israel (Eretz Israel, Palestine) 21, 63, 64, 65, 70, 73, 78, 86, 100, 115, 128-131, 133, 134, 137, 139-141, 170, 185, 191, *224*, 229, 230, 244, 250, 255, 270, 272, 274, 275, 279, 281, 287, 289

Jászberény 193
Jerusalem 64, 70, 78, 84, 86, 94, 96, 128-131
Jisreel Valley 130, 131
Józsefváros (Budapest) 149

Kamenets-Podolsk 7, 268
Károlyi Street (Budapest) 142
Kassa (Košice) 64, 138, 176
Kazinczy Street (Budapest) 100, *101*, *155*, 157, 158, *158*
Kecskemét 98, *187*, 188, *194*, *259*
Keszthely *253*
Kfar Gideon 130
Király Street (Budapest) 143, *155*, 157, 158, 159, 236
Kiskőrös 156
Kiskunhalas 193
Kisvárda 64, *229*
Kittsee (Köpcsény) 20
Kobersdorf (Kabold) 20, 257
Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) *47*, 137, 179, 180, 188, 226, 249, 270, 272
Komárom (Komarno) 14
Kosov 75-77
Kozma Street (Budapest) *163*
Kőszeg 14, 97

Lackenbach (Lakompak) 20, 24
Lipótváros (Budapest) 99, *101*, 149, 153, 238
Lisbon 266
Lithvania 75
London 78, 81, 126, 136, 232, 250
Lublin 75, 81

Mád (Mádzombor) 71, 75, 94, *95*
Madrid 244
Mainz 14, 86, 97
Majláth Square (Pécs) *194*
Makó 137
Máramaros county 73, 75-77, 186, 192, 193
Máramarossziget (Sziget, Sighet, Sighetu Marmaţiei) 7, 68, 77, 130, 179, *199*
Margit Boulevard (Budapest) 171
Maribor 93
Maros-Torda county 166
Marosvásárhely (Tîrgu Mureş) *139*, 166, 180, 181
Mátészalka 72
Mattersdorf (Nagymarton) 14, 20, 23, 24, 59, 257
Mauthausen 219
Mea Shearim (Jerusalem) 130
Megyer 257
Metz 81
Mezeritsch 128
Miskolc 60, 64, 68, 134, 185, *195*

Modor (Modra) 34
Mohács 18, 48
Moldavia 215
Monok *74*
Monor 85
Moravia 29, 33, 36, 55, 103, 104, 128, 251
Moson county 186
Moscow 232
Munkács (Munkacsevo, Mukachevo) 73, 77, 78, 85, 138, 177, *177*, 178, 198, 201, 202

Nagybánya (Baia Mare) 261
Nagykálló (Kálló) 75, *75*, 157, 229
Nagykanizsa *27*, 31, 41, *189*, 257
Nagykároly (Carei) 67, 78
Nagykörút (Budapest) 149
Nagymihály 103, 104
Nagyszeben (Sibiu) 133
Nagyszombat (Trnava, Tyrnau) 14, 17, *17*, 18, 41
Nagyvárad (Oradea) 14, 41, 98, 166, *166*, 180, *180*, 188, 226
New York 76, 86
Nürnberg 98

Nyíregyháza 134
Nyitra 14, 29, 33, 70, *229*
Nyitra county 186, *186*

Óbuda 14, 34-36, 42, *44*, *45*, 94, 110, 145, 148, 149
Olaszliszka 78
Ónod 68
Ópályi 72
Orkuta (Orkucany) 37
Orsova (Orşova) 77, 78

Padova 81
Paks 59, 71, 110, 156
Palics (Palić) 166
Pannonia 13, 156
Pápa 34, 41, 42, 71, 94, 137, 156
Paris *39*, 121, 123-127, 218, 232, 244, 249, 261
Páva utca (Budapest) 100
Pécs 13, *37*, *44*, 170, 185, 187, 190, 193, *194*
Pest, Pest-Buda see Budapest
Petah Tikva 129, 130
Petersburg 255
Piac Street (Debrecen) *191*
Pográny (Pohranice) *186*
Poland 36, 75, 177, 213, 227, 266, 268, 273
Pozsony (Bratislava, Pressburg) 14, 15, 17-19, 24, 31, 33, 40, 41, *43*, 48, *58*, 59, 62, 69, 70, 76, 110, 133, *133*, 137, 156, *175*, 176, 221
Pozsony county *186*
Pozsonyi Road (Budapest) 171, *171*
Prague (Praha) 85, 128

Regensburg 14, 93
Ricse 251
Rimamurány 51
Rohonc (Rechnitz) 31, 104
Rome 232, 257
Romania 73, 173, 174, 191, 275
Rumbach Street (Budapest) 84, 91, 96, 97, *97*, 110, 158
Russia 14, 118, 119, 141, 142, 177, 255

Safed 128, 157
Salgótarján 51
Sarajevo 48, 128
Sáros county 37
Sátoraljaújhely (Újhely) *74*, 75, 77, *229*
Selmecbánya (Banská Štiavnica) 14
Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfîntu Gheorghe)
Silesia 33
Síp Street (Budapest) *146*
Slovakia 69, 71, 156, 174-176, 178, 191, 265, 273, 275
Sopron (Ödenburg) *13*, 14, *16*, 18, 19, 41, 48, 93, *186*, 233
Sopron county 59, 186
Soviet Union 213, 265, 267, 279
Spinka 73, 157
Strashoff 272
Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia 76, 77, 174, 176, 177, 178, 197, 198, 200, 203, 204, 265, 268, 273
Switzerland 78, 232
Syria *129*

Szabadka (Subotica) 98, 166, 183, 184, 188, 226
Szabolcs county 14, *75*
Szakolca (Skalica) 14
Szalónak (Schlaining) 14, 31
Szatmár county 71-73, 76-78, *229*
Szeged 14, 42, *43*, *86*, 98, *99*, 119, 134, 158, 185-187, 190, 193, 241, 259
Székelyhíd 72
Székesfehérvár 17, 41, 85, 103, 104, 134, 187
Szekszárd 110, 156
Szentendre 262
Szentes 64
Szentgyörgy 14
Szent István Park (Budapest) 170
Szered (Sered') 143
Szerencs 75
Szikszó 104
Szolnok 187, *194*, 261
Szombathely *129*, 188

Tahitótfalu *160*
Táncsics Mihály Street (Budapest) 93
Tapolcsány (Teplicany) 14, 29
Tata 14, 34
Tel Adashin 130
Tel Aviv 131
Teleki Square (Budapest) *145*
Temesvár (Timişoara) 30, 179, *179*, 180-182, 188, 226
Terézváros (Budapest) *IV*, 149
Thessaloniki 48
Tiberias 131
Tiszaeszlár 115, 116, *117*, 183, 223
Tolcsva *163*
Törökkanizsa *182*
Transylvania (Erdély) 29, *30*, 33, 72, 75, 76, 130, 168, *169*, 173, 174, 178-182, 187, 189, 191, 204, 205, 216, 252, 265, 273, 274
Trencsén (Trenčín) county 14, 33, 105
Trencsénteplic (Trenčianske Teplice) *173*
Trieste 130
Turkey *129*
Túrkeve 249

Ugocsa county 76, 77, 186
Új Street (Zsidó Street, Sopron) 93, *186*
Újlipótváros (Lipócia, Budapest) 149, 170
Újvidék (Novi Sad) 183, 184, 188
Ukraine 141, 174, 198, 233
Ung county 76, 78, 186
Ungvár (Uzsgorod, Uzhhorod) 85, 104, 138, *138*, *176*, 177, 178, 249
United States (of America) 78, 227, 244, 250

Vác 71, 137
Vadász Street (Budapest) *273*
Vágújhely (Nové Mesto nad Váhom) 60
Vajdaság (Vojvodina) 182, 183, 191
Városliget (City Park, Budapest) 165, 259, *259*
Vas county 31
Vas Street (Budapest) 169, *169*
Vasvár 14
Verecke *256*
Vienna (Wien) 23, 29, 32, 40, 55, 60, *65*, 81, 121, 126, 128, 158, 215, 232, 257, 261
Vietnam 244
Vilna 76, 128, 158
Vishnitz 73, 75-77, 157

Wesselényi Street (Budapest) 157
Williamsburg (Brooklyne, New York) 78

Yugoslavia 173, 182-184, 213, 265, *269*, 274

Zagreb 14
Zala county 31
Zalaegerszeg *195*, *269*
Zanz 157
Zemplén county *74*, 104, 186
Zombor (Sombor) 188

# Sources of Pictures

**Museums, libraries**

*Hungary*

Ámos Imre Múzeum Szentendre 289

Budapest Történeti Múzeum 100, 113, 278

Budapest Történeti Múzeum Kiscelli Múzeum 83, 145, 150

Déri Múzeum, Debrecen 201

Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár Budapest Gyűjtemény 151

Hadtörténeti Múzeum 43, 118, 121, 134

Kovács Margrit Múzeum, Szentendre 290

Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum, Kecskemét 263, 265, 267, 268

Magyar Nemzeti Galéria 119, 248, 286

Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum On the opening page, 47, 62, 63

Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Röplapgyűjtemény 294

Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Történelmi Képcsarnok 61, 64, 98, 276

Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Történeti Fényképtár 144, 148, 189, 234, 245, 275, 297

Magyar Vízügyi Múzeum Esztergom, Budapest Történeti Múzeum 50

Magyar Zsidó Múzeum és Levéltár On the opening page, 1, 19-27, 46, 49, 54, 82, 85-87, 89, 90, 92, 95, 106, 107, 127, 129, 130-132, 142, 156, 159, 162, 216, 223, 228, 229, 238, 247, 249, 261, 274, 285

MTA Történettudományi Intézet 33

Néprajzi Múzeum 114, 198, 210, 212, 277

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár 41, 42, 52, 55, 58, 59, 116, 117, 149, 157, 220, 224, 230-232, 235-237, 241, 288, 308

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Plakáttár 71, 259

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Színháztörténeti Gyűjtemény 51

Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet 257, 269, 270

Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet Aprónyomtatvány-tár 253

Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet Fotótár 262, 271

Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet Képzőművészeti Gyűjtemény 256

Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum és Kortárs Irodalmi Központ 251, 252

Thury György Múzeum, Nagykanizsa 200

Zempléni Múzeum, Szerencs 192, 193, 211, 214

*Israel*

Beth Hatefutsoth 4, 5, 11, 14, 16, 31, 32, 37, 44, 45, 53, 56, 65, 72, 75, 80, 94, 112, 120, 122, 135, 136, 138, 139, 190, 219, 222, 225, 300-302, 305, 306, 310, 311, 312

World Zionist Organization, Central Zionist Archives 124, 125, 128

Memorial Museum of Hungarian Speaking Jewry, Safed 137, 226

Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem 36, 40, 140, 141

Szirtes Collection, Natanya 291

*Austria*

Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Flugblatter-, Plakate- und Exlibris-Sammlung Inventar 272

**Books, periodicals**


Alfasi, Jichak. *Hasidim medor ledor.* Jerusalem, 1995. 77-79, 81

Ember, Mária – Herman, Lipót. *Jár-kel, mint zsidóban a fájdalom.* Budapest, 1988. 215

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Passuth, Krisztina. *A Nyolcak festészete.* Budapest, 1967. 283, 284

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Wirth, Péter. *Itt van elrejtve.* Budapest, 1985. 164, 165

Zolnay, László. *Kincses Magyarország.* Budapest, 1977. 12, 13

*Zsidó Plutarchos* I. Budapest. 84


**Private collections**

*Hungary*

Alpár, Ágnes 258

Csoma, Zsigmond and Deáky, Zita 29, 30

Gerle, János 108, 109, 170-182, 185-187, 194, 196, 227, 254

Gottl, Egon 126, 163, 280

Horák, Magda 221

Kiss, Marianne 60

Nagy S., Katalin 287

Ritter, Doron pp. 4–5

Szabolcsi, Miklós זייל 233

Others 57, 146, 154, 191, 202, 204, 209, 239

*Israel*

Bar-Sela family 158, 217, 260, 309

Frenkel, Zvi 88

Gur, David 218, 304

Herskovics, Magda 303

Klein, Rudolf 101, 102, 110, 152, 153, 155, 166-169, 183, 184, 188, 195

Lewy, Arieh 66-70

Senesh family 307

Zakai, Mira 246

Others 123, 160, 161, 244, 250, 266, 282

*United Kingdom*

Private collection, 73, 74

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On the cover: Window in Szabadka synagogue. Photo: ***Rudolf Klein***
On the opening page: Torah ark curtain. End of 19th century. The Jewish Museum, Budapest.
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