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The pursuit of the Sanhedrin: the Hungarian Jewish Congress in the tradition of nineteenth-century synods

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the Hungarian Jewish Congress of 1868–1869 from a European perspective. During the run-up to the Congress, the Jewish press discussed intensely the organizational models found in Jewish history, in modern Jewries abroad, as well as in the minority churches of Hungary. Central European Jews challenged the success narrative that had come to be associated with the Napoleonic Sanhedrin and the central administration of French Jewry. Comparison with other religious unification attempts can teach us about the expectations that were projected onto the effort to control the Hungarian Jewish pluralization processes with the devices of parliamentary democracy.

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The most common historical perspective on the Hungarian Jewish Congress of 1868–1869 can be described as national and diachronic: it sees the community split between Neolog and Orthodox Jews as a turning point in the modern history of Hungarian Jewry, whose long-term cultural developments culminated at that point and created alliances and conflicts that have remained with us until this day.¹ While I have no intention to diminish the unique, even idiosyncratic character of the Hungarian Jewish experience, my aim in this article is to open up a comparative perspective on the events of 1868–1869. I hope to explore an overlooked transnational and transconfessional dimension by placing the Jewish communities of Hungary inside various continental developments: the rise of constitutional and parliamentary politics,² the new strategies of Jewish self-organization inside the emerging nation-states of Europe, and finally the example of the Christian churches, which, not unlike the Jews, adapted to the political changes in the aftermath of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867.

Councilomania: a century of conferences

Indeed, the assembly of Hungarian Jewish deputies in the winter of 1868–1869 was neither the first nor the last effort to unite diaspora communities by means of debate and vote. At key moments of Jewish history, the ancient legendary example of the Synod of Yavneh encouraged efforts to convene the most prestigious leaders of a given generation in order to coordinate an accelerated adaption to changing circumstances.³ In the

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midst of the modernization crises of the nineteenth century, Jewish assemblies of this kind were more numerous than ever. The century that started with the Napoleonic Sanhedrin of 1807 and finished with the First Zionist Congress in Basel of 1897 endowed the very idea of the Jewish assembly with a strong and yet ambivalent symbolism, which is reflected even in the antisemitic myth of the 'Elders of Zion.'⁴

We should therefore not overlook the parallels between the Hungarian Jewish Congress and the parallel institutions created in Germany and Italy in the course of those countries' unification processes. Moreover, these Jewish assemblies took place during a proliferation of national and international gatherings, which the densification of the continental railway network had suddenly made possible. The Europe-wide trend of convening assemblies seized groups that differed most widely in their political framework, their participants, and their agendas. In July 1868, five months before the opening of the Pest Congress, a correspondent from the Viennese Jewish weekly *Die Neuzeit* depicted this new phenomenon in a satirical tone:

Holding synods has simply become fashionable, and the world has become conciliomaniac (*conzilientoll*). The pope sends out a call for an ecumenical assembly [...]. The rabbis of Mihalovititz [!] come together in their hordes [...]. The educated rabbis of Germany want to meet [...]. The marksmen of Germany come together [...]. There are diets for teachers and for lawyers, there are synods of physicians and congresses of princes, and they always find a good reason to gather.⁵

The Hungarian Jewish Congress belonged to this new institutional category, and its self-definition on the basis of a complex historical genealogy is the focus of this article. The Jewish press discussed this issue abundantly during the spring months of 1867, when the plan for a country-wide assembly was first conceived. At this moment, on which I will zoom in below, the emancipation process had not yet come to completion. The weekly *Magyar Izraelita* therefore called to Hungarian Jews to fight simultaneously and independently on two fronts for equal rights and for organized community life⁶; and a local author in the daily *Pester Lloyd* gave out a similar command, arguing that Hungarian Jewry should be both 'internally organized and externally dignified.'⁷ But preparations for the assembly were suspended in the summer due to the delay in the emancipation process; when they resumed in early 1868, debates mostly tackled practical issues. While the early months of the planning process have only received a short mention in Jacob Katz's book and elsewhere in the literature,⁸ this time period was, from the perspective of political institution-building, the most interesting phase of the debate. Jewish contemporaries tried to make sense of the reorganization plans in the light of the precedents in Jewish history and modern European politics. At that time, Neolog and Orthodox Jews were still striving for a common future rather than for a good divorce, and this perspective only started to change in the spring of 1868 when, as Michael Silber has argued, some Orthodox groups 'first began to entertain the notion of a schism on a nationwide scale.'⁹

I will approach this subject here through the lens of conceptual history. When the assembly was opened in December 1868, it was called the 'Countrywide Congress of the Israelites in Hungary and Transylvania' (in Hungarian: Magyarországi és Erdélyi Országos Izraeliták Kongresszusa, and in German: Landes-Congress der Israeliten in Ungarn und Siebenbürgen). This, however, was not the terminology under which the idea for such an assembly had first been launched a year-and-a-half earlier. I will now review the

associations and connotations that come with the competing precedents for such a nationwide gathering: the diet, the Sanhedrin, the synod, and, finally, the congress.

The ambiguous first move

A dominant historical narrative inherited from Nathaniel Katzburg and Jacob Katz gives to the Hungarian minister of education, Baron József Eötvös (1813–1871), the leading role in the design of the Congress and the definition of its political goals. Though one might agree to some extent with this analysis, one should also take into account the sources of the institution in Jewish history.¹⁰ As is known, Eötvös joined the Andrassy cabinet in February 1867; and when he officially took office he received a delegation from the Pest Jewish Community that was headed by its president, the banker Jakab Lányi (1816–1879).¹¹ On behalf of the Jews of the capital, Lányi voiced some ‘wishes and complaints’ regarding their political condition, and Eötvös then asked the delegation to formulate their suggestions in a written memorandum. The community board submitted this memorandum on 14 April 1867, expressing a reluctance to speak for all of Hungary’s Jews and suggesting that Eötvös, in order to obtain a more representative sample of Jewish public opinion, convene an assembly of deputies from all Hungarian congregations. In the text of the memorandum, this idea was developed to such a great extent that this new consultative body was to be given the Herculean task of working out a ‘swift and radical remedy’ to the disorganization of Jewish life in Hungary.

In which way the Israelites of our Hungarian fatherland are ready to apply this remedy is a question that only an assembly (*gyűlés*) of elected deputies from all the communities of our Hungarian fatherland will be entitled to answer. It is therefore our humble request that Your Excellency would gracefully convene such an assembly for the organization of a country-wide general corporation (*község*) and a central representation (*képvisélet*) laying the grounds of the new system and the much-awaited better future.¹²

Though there had already been some thought about a supracommunal organization on both the Neolog¹³ and on the Orthodox¹⁴ side, the concrete project of a Jewish assembly that would create a permanent national authority structure came out of the blue and caused some surprise when the Pest Jewish community sent it to the minister while sharing it at the same time with the other congregations of the kingdom.

The Congress planning process was discussed in several specialized article series in the Jewish and general press. The first report appeared in April in the leading liberal daily of Pest, the *Pester Lloyd*.¹⁵ The two Jewish journals appearing in Hungary, namely the German-language biweekly *Ben-Chananja* in Szeged¹⁶ and the organ of Magyarization, the *Magyar Izraelita* in Pest, launched article series since early May.¹⁷ From mid-May, the issue was discussed in Jewish journals of Austria and Germany as well, namely *Die Neuzeit* in Vienna,¹⁸ the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* in Bonn,¹⁹ and the Modern Orthodox weekly *Der Israelit* edited in Mainz.²⁰ Much later, the Hebrew-language paper *Ha-Maggid*, published out of East Prussia, likewise commented on the Congress preparations. The participants in this debate tried to assign to the planned assembly an ideal location on a scale from consultative to legislative, from regional to European, from religious to secular, and from orthodox to progressive.²¹ They also tried to justify their respective solutions in the light of the Jewish political tradition.

Ha-Va'ad: premodern precedents

In order to frame their attempts to organize the Congress, the authors of the memorandum claimed that they were following the 'the example of our ancestors,'²² referring to the precedent of holding regional councils in premodern Jewish history. Further, they stated that the Hungarian revolutionary government of 1848 had been about to renew these councils in a modern form. The words *gyűlés* and *Landesversammlung*²³ are certainly vague enough to evoke the venerable Jewish synods of the medieval past. Hebrew-language newspapers such as *Ha-Maggid* would indeed give the Congress the traditional name of *ha-va'ad ha-gadol*.²⁴ However, as Daniel Elazar and Stuart Cohen have stressed in their book *The Jewish Polity*, premodern *va'adim* were not law-giving bodies – they had always been federal and consensual, and had always submitted to traditional Jewish law, *halakha*.²⁵ Moreover, there was no certainty on whether Hungary could claim any precedent of a supracommunal authority, a *Landjudenschaft*, in its premodern past. A knowledgeable correspondent of Löw's *Ben Chananja* affirmed that premodern Judaism only very rarely developed supracommunal authorities. One finds about ten cases at best in which synods were convened by Jewish communities in France, Spain, Germany, Poland, and Italy, and the only country-wide representation that ever existed among Hungarian Jewry was the one that distributed the toleration tax.²⁶

This debate, however, motivated more nuanced studies of and appeals to premodern history. At the Leipzig assembly of 1870, for example, one participant reminded his colleagues of the Frankfurt Synod of 1603 in order to prove that the German Jews had a more than 250-year-old parliamentary tradition.²⁷ In 1872, the *Neuzeit* backed up the community assembly that was then held in Germany with a far greater wealth of historical material.²⁸ It claimed four prestigious precedents: the Council of Moravian Jews that proclaimed the Shai Takkanot (311 Statutes) in 1650²⁹; the Takkanot Shum that the Rhenish communities agreed upon in 1220³⁰; the Danish–German federation that the Lower Elbe communities created in 1671,³¹ and finally the 'Council of the Four Lands' that was assembled in early modern Poland.³² In the light of the close historical relations that Hungarian Jewry had especially with Moravia, it is surprising that these precedents had not been raised in the Hungarian debate. The fact that 'Moravian Jewry's communal affairs had fallen into disarray' after 1848³³ did not make them attractive as an example to follow, and research on the history of Jewish self-government had barely started. However, it may also be possible that the scope of early modern regional authority was not deemed ambitious enough anymore.

Sanhedrin: the symbol of new beginnings

Lányi's memorandum had asked for an assembly that would endow Hungarian Jewry 'with a country-wide general corporation and a central representation.' This idea of a church-like administrative apparatus imitates those already in place in the 'accepted' religions of the Habsburg monarchy,³⁴ which all had their organic statute (*Kirchenverfassung*) and their bylaws. In the world of Judaism, moreover, this plan for a state-recognized institutional framework had its classical example in the bold innovation of Napoleon's government, which convoked an Assembly of Jewish Notables in 1806 and a Great Sanhedrin with a rabbinical majority in 1807.³⁵ In accordance with these

assemblies' recommendations, French law divided the Jews in the Empire from 1808 among a hierarchy of consistories. The public representation and central organization of the Jewish community were in the interest of both the state and the community elites: indeed, the idea of a Jewish high council headed by a patriarch had been proposed to Napoleon by the German Jewish court agent and reformer Israel Jacobsohn.³⁶ The Empire-wide establishment of a new administrative framework for the postemancipatory Jewish condition through the intervention and recognition of the state was seen as a success and was occasionally imitated by nineteenth-century Jewries elsewhere. The Sanhedrin became a symbol for Jews of synergy and forceful innovation. And it was a lasting symbol: even in a more recent time, journalist and historian Patrick Girard welcomed the Jewish revival within the French Jewish community during the 1970s with the phrase 'There is Sanhedrin in the air.'³⁷

The restoration of the Sanhedrin as the supreme Jewish council had therefore both messianic and modernist undertones. When in 1844 Ludwig Philippson opened in Brunswick the first assembly of Reform rabbis, he wished to start with a commitment to the Great Sanhedrin's decrees.³⁸ Napoleon's reorganization of French Jewry in three steps – a secular assembly and a rabbinical assembly creating a permanent central administration – can be seen as the ideal that Lányi's fatidic memorandum was aiming at.

There is another indication that strongly points in this direction. On March 15, one month before the memorandum was issued, an anonymous 'subscriber to *Ben-Chananja*' had published in this Hungarian Jewish journal a plan that he intended to send to the Jewish leaders of Paris, Vienna, and Berlin in order to encourage the formation of a Sanhedrin of a new kind: it should, as in the case of the American rabbinical assemblies, only represent one Jewish party, namely the modernist one, act globally by representing all the like-minded Jews of Europe and America, and undertake the historical task of revising and reforming the Jewish religion.³⁹ In 1868, an anonymous 'old man' from Hungary shared with *Die Neuzeit* his enthusiastic expectation of such a bicontinental Sanhedrin.⁴⁰ In both cases, the ambitious supracommunal organization depended on the option of a separation between innovative and traditional Judaism: to some extent, these plans anticipated the Hungarian schism that would take place in the years to come.

Consistory: the specter of French centralism

Just as the Great Sanhedrin had founded the consistorial system, the memorandum created a close connection between the assembly and the 'central representation' of Hungarian Jewry as a joint corporation. The term 'central representation,' *központi képviselőlet* in the Hungarian original, was translated exactly as *Zentralvertretung* in the report published by the *Pester Lloyd*.⁴¹ *Ben-Chananja*, however, eventually came to speak of a 'central administration,' *Zentralverwaltung*,⁴² which obviously crossed the line from a body with representative power to one with authoritative power.

Especially, the Orthodox press uttered doubts about whether the French centralized regime was adequate and desirable for Hungarian Jewish congregations. Markus Lehmann's journal *Der Israelit* expressed fears that the project of a central authority might repeat earlier experiences with state-sponsored reform that had proven 'dangerous for Judaism.'⁴³ Lehmann drew up the historical inventory of these pernicious attempts, mentioning the despotic way in which the Napoleonic Empire had made the rabbis

decide reforms, the police-enforced halakhic reforms of the Kingdom of Westphalia, and finally the exuberant reformist church bureaucracy of the Kingdom of Württemberg.⁴⁴ Another Orthodox leader, Esriel Hildesheimer, followed Lehmann in his pamphlet *Zum Congresse*. He praised the spontaneous and nonstandardized religious expressions of Bavaria and the free cities and contrasted them with the professionalized and formalized community government in France, Belgium, and Württemberg, where 'the ice cover of frosty formalism asphyxiates any fresh, airy, vivid, and individual flow.'⁴⁵

The negative evaluation of the French and Belgian consistorial order was not only commonplace among the Orthodox, but it was also quite widely spread in the Neolog camp. In June 1867 already, *Ben-Chananja* called on the Pest board to give up the plan for a country-wide central administration.⁴⁶ The *Allgemeine Zeitung* recommended a year later that the Congress should not try to impose a French-style consistorial regime 'that would deprive the congregations of their autonomy.'⁴⁷ From the far left, Leopold Löw created a curious consensus with the Orthodox camp in the pseudonymous pamphlet that he published shortly before the Congress: not unlike Hildesheimer, he included a flamboyant defense of 'congregationalism or independentism' that had allegedly reigned all throughout Jewish history.⁴⁸

The press organs from Pest – that is, the *Magyar Izraelita* and the *Pester Lloyd* – were virtually alone in calling for a central order. But the latter newspaper diligently denied any intention to create a rabbinical hierarchy with a chief rabbinate as it existed in France.⁴⁹ And the former affirmed that 'the free-minded Hungarian Jewish intelligence must not, and cannot, deny the first and most sacred right of man: religion, conscience, conviction, the freedom of thought.'⁵⁰ On both sides, the right and the left, the Sanhedrin was thus seen as too far-reaching a model of centralization, one that was synonymous with religious coercion.

Synod: the example of protestant church politics

In the press discussions of 1867, the name of the planned assembly changed several times. What had been a Sanhedrin in *Ben-Chananja's* March issue became a *gyűlés* or *Landesversammlung* in the April memorandum. When, in its already quoted report, the *Pester Lloyd* translated the information given by the *Magyar Izraelita* on April 20, the article was titled 'A Hungarian Jewish Synod' ('Eine israelitische Landessynode').⁵¹ The term 'country synod' swiftly entered *Ben-Chananja's* vocabulary when this newspaper reported the memorandum two weeks later.⁵² The concept stuck, and, after another two weeks, the *Allgemeine Zeitung* also started using the term *Landessynode*.⁵³

Through the mediation of the *Pester Lloyd*, a non-Jewish journal, a concept was brought into the Jewish debate that had a complex history. In 1848, the Hungarian emancipation law had demanded that the Jews create a synod explicitly dedicated to the reforming of their religion. In Christian Hungary, synods were the usual way in which minority churches administered their affairs; and they became popular among nineteenth-century Protestants as the democratic counterweight to the hierarchically organized consistories.⁵⁴ More precisely, the terminology that the *Lloyd* invented almost instinctively referred to the Hungarian experience of synods as extraordinary legislative bodies. After the toleration edict of Joseph II, all Protestant communities of Hungary convened synods in 1791 in order to determine their future organization in the kingdom:

the Lutheran synod met in Pest, while the Calvinist synod came together in Buda. The organizational structure was accepted in the Lutheran Church, while the five Calvinist districts could not arrive at a consensus. Only in 1881 with the Synod of Debrecen did a common structure for the Hungarian Reformed Church come into being.

In Protestant synods, an iron rule demanded the numeric parity between laymen and pastors, and we have seen that, in the eyes of *Ben Chananja's* correspondent, a Jewish synod could not be composed otherwise. He assumed

that a country-wide synod (*Landessynode*) should be convened in Pest, for which all communities would freely have to elect a proportional number of secular *and* rabbinical members, so that [...]. the future decisions of the synod, after receiving their sanction from the diet and the crown, would have a universally binding power.

The synod should focus on community administration and exclude all questions of dogma and theology.⁵⁵ It seemed necessary to take this precaution in order to ensure that the new institution would have authority without harming religious freedom.

Congress: the example of Romanian Orthodox parliamentarism

A nonreligious synod, however, was a squared circle. In the following issue of *Ben-Chananja*, published on May 15, the same author disavowed his own terminology; he even warned of the misunderstanding that the use of the term 'synod' would inevitably produce. 'The word "synod" is very theological-sounding,' he remarked. He went on to say that if one aspires to an assembly of a secular character, it is important to avoid this compromising term and to exclude rabbis from participating in it.⁵⁶

Jewish politics, the author wrote, is not subject to any religious norms. It is a 'blank page'⁵⁷ that the congregations can fill according to their will and their traditions. He illustrated the difference between secular and religious rule with an uncommon comparison. In compliance with Hungarian state pressure, the Orthodox Church of the Romanian majority in Transylvania reduced the power of its patriarch by dividing its central leadership into two permanent councils: the 'Synod,' on the one hand, and the 'Congress,' on the other. While the Synod was composed of bishops, the Congress had a majority of laymen: as the correspondent wrote, there were 75 *Bürgerliche* (third-estate members) as against 25 priests.⁵⁸

It is unexpected but understandable that the transformation of the Orthodox churches from a clerical hierarchy to an ethnonational leadership structure under the Habsburgs became a role model for Jewish modernization. The Romanian Orthodox Church, which had been subject to the Serbian patriarch after the toleration decree of 1783, became independent in 1864. Its metropolite, Andrei Şaguna (1809–1873), had convened two synods in 1865; at that point already, he had obtained the state sanction for a Romanian National Church Congress (*Nationalkirchenkongreß*, NKK).⁵⁹ This Congress would take place in September 1868 in Nagyszeben/Sibiu (today in Romania), just three months before the Hungarian Jewish Congress of Pest. On its last day, the Congress decided on an organic statute, and Şaguna abdicated his power in favor of the elected assembly. In taking this step, he presented himself as a partisan of the rule of law. The historian does not have to take this affirmation at face value: it seems likely that he retired from politics because the Hungarian central government forced him to do so.⁶⁰ Şaguna's church

organization has been described as an import from modern constitutionalism and Lutheran *Kirchenverfassung* into Orthodoxy.⁶¹ However, the *Ben-Chananja* correspondent emphasized the difference between both models, since he recommended the two segregated assemblies of the Romanian Orthodox as being more appropriate for Hungarian Jews than the parity rule of the Protestants.

The unlikely parallel between the Jews and the Romanian Orthodox on the pages of *Ben-Chananja* may explain why the label used for the planned Hungarian Jewish assembly progressively shifted from 'synod' to 'congress.' After *Ben-Chananja* incidentally employed the new term (with respect to the Romanians) in mid-May 1867, *Magyar Izraelita* was the first organ to popularize it systematically. The Hungarian weekly regularly reproduced letters of support that the Pest Jewish leaders received from the countryside for their memorandum. Although not one of the correspondents spoke at that time of a 'congress,' the letters were printed under the common heading 'On the Congress Issue,'⁶² and a second series of regular articles bore the title 'Congress Developments.'⁶³

Diet and Synod: the German Jewish separation of powers

The importing of the Romanian Orthodox congress idea into Judaism aroused the expectations for the emergence among the Hungarian Jews of an organization charged with a merely secular political representation, a plan that the *Ben-Chananja* correspondent saw embodied in another example, the Board of Representatives of the British and American Jews.⁶⁴ Once such a secular representative body had been imagined, the semantics of the term 'synod' could be resacralized, separated entirely from their connection to state politics, and even raised to a transnational level. Comparable to the Sanhedrin fantasies that *Ben-Chananja* ventilated in March, Ludwig Philippson published in the September issues of the *Allgemeine Zeitung* the plan for a universal synod that he had obtained from certain Jewish circles of Paris.⁶⁵ Such a synod, responded David Rothschild in *Ben-Chananja*, should be limited to religious matters and have only consultative functions, but it should also remain inside a national framework.⁶⁶ It was assumed at the time that a synod, by definition, must respect religious conscience and cannot strive for unity.⁶⁷

Ever since the draft statute for the Congress, the parallel organization of a synod to deal party-wise with religious matters was repeatedly proposed. However, it did not find enough supporters.⁶⁸ Two years later, the federation of Jewish congregations in unified Germany⁶⁹ realized exactly this bifurcated model.⁷⁰ Both a secular 'diet,' the *Gemeindetag*, and a reform-oriented 'synod' met during the summer of 1869 in Leipzig. Both assemblies claimed to have strictly different goals. The *Gemeindetag* eventually founded the *Deutsch-Israelitischer Gemeindegund* (DIGB), which was a federation destined to work for the pursuit of common interests, charity, and defense against defamation and which was to explicitly exclude religious matters from its purview.⁷¹ The synod, on the other hand, was expected to show some kind of parity: as in Protestant churches, it should meet periodically⁷² and be composed of both rabbis and laymen.⁷³

This separation between the diet and the synod hardly sufficed to convince the Orthodox,⁷⁴ since some organizers, such as Professor Moritz Lazarus, held major positions in both assemblies. In Italy, where delegates of the Jewish communities met in July 1863 for a congress in Ferrara, there was no effort to distinguish secular from religious interests, and in May 1867 community delegates deliberated in Florence on the transformation of

the Padua seminary into a national institution. The congregations wisely refrained, however, from founding a national federation, which only wound up taking shape in 1911.⁷⁵

In Hungary, the will to carry out a strict separation between synod and congress failed, since the Protestant ideal of parity between ecclesiastical and secular deputies remained convincing. When the idea of a congress dealing exclusively with secular matters was pushed to the logical consequence of not admitting rabbis as delegates, the Jewish Orthodox party insisted once more on the model of the Protestant synods, which always gave a leading position to pastors.⁷⁶

The organization of the Congress therefore tried to satisfy contradictory norms. Leaders of both conflicting parties agreed on the necessity of a common representation that should not decide on religious subjects, but at the same time the exclusion of the *homines religiosi* seemed too scandalous to be carried out.⁷⁷ This dilemma led to subtle compromises between order and freedom, especially in the self-representation of the Orthodox.

After the latter founded the association *Shomrei ha-Dat* in April 1868, Neologs compared them polemically with Jesuits, Ultramontanes, and other conservative extremists in the Catholic Church of Pius IX.⁷⁸ In order to return these accusations against the Neolog party, Esriel Hildesheimer in particular constructed a sharp opposition between the centralization attempts of the Pest elites and the rights of the local communities to what he labeled with an Anglicism 'Selfgovernment.'⁷⁹ *Ben-Chanaja* writers commented with indignation on the turn of the Orthodox from their pact with reaction to the rhetoric of democracy.⁸⁰ But in his speech before the Congress, Hildesheimer insisted on his commitment to the democratic idea. He claimed to pursue a balance between two contradictory facts: the undeniable efficiency of centralization⁸¹ and the greater creativity obtained under conditions of freedom, autonomy, and decentralization. The Hungarian Jews of 1868 reenacted the Battle of Austerlitz, where Napoleonic centralism clashed with the federalism of the Holy Roman Empire. The latter in 1806 lost the battle, but the loss was not simply due to its having been the weaker political system. Federalism, Hildesheimer argued, may for social development still be the better option, since diversity is 'the fundamental law of creation and political life.'⁸² In his conception of the Congress, this Prussian-born rabbi thus bowed to the political principles of the Habsburg Empire.

Conclusion

By aspiring at a community federation, Hungarian Jewish leaders tried to implement solutions similar to most European Jewries, however with much less success. In an editorial published in August 1868, the newspaper *Die Neuzeit* compared the undramatic organization of Jewish communal affairs in Germany and Italy with the passionate indignation that the same projects aroused in Hungary.⁸³ The writer explained the conflicts with the lack of culture and education that characterized large sectors of Hungarian Jewish Orthodoxy. Among recent historians, a similar kind of cultural stereotyping can be found in Raphael Patai, who reflected on the geopolitical position of Hungary that was torn 'between two Jewish worlds.'⁸⁴ In contrast, Jacob Katz has in some way inverted the scheme of explanation by pointing to Hirschian ideology and the new, historically grown 'Orthodox aspirations to independence' as a motor of the schism.⁸⁵ It seems important to recognize the political conflict between institutional models that the Congress would unsuccessfully try to bridge. Hungarian Jews of both camps embraced concepts and forms of modern politics, an

abundance of institutional models were experimented with, and a fast historical evolution filled the planning horizon with *va'adim*, sanhedrins, consistories, synods, and parliaments. What eventually won the race is a model that in its time was utopian and minoritarian, but quite explicitly elaborated in the isolated plan of one anonymous 'Ben-Chananja subscriber.' This writer proposed ideologically segregated federations that would unite Jews of common religious convictions on a country-wide and even global level. The 'subscriber' had claimed the time-honored label of the Sanhedrin for his visionary project, which was on the table when the Pest elders engaged Hungarian Jewry into one of the major historical controversies on Jewish political self-government.

Notes

1. On the history of the Congress, see Thomas Domján, "Der Kongress der ungarischen Israeliten 1868–1869," *Ungarn-Jahrbuch* 1 (1969): 137–162; Nathaniel Katzburg, "The Jewish Congress of Hungary, 1868–1869," *Hungarian Jewish Studies* 2 (1969): 1–33; Catherine Horel, "Orthodoxes et néologues: le congrès des juifs de Hongrie et la scission de la communauté, 1868–69," *Études danubiennes* 10, no. 1 (1994): 25–42; Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 312–27; Jacob Katz, *A House Divided: Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-Century Central European Jewry*, trans. Zipora Brody (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 87–165; Kinga Frojimovics and Géza Komoróczy, *Jewish Budapest: Monuments, Rites, History* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 121–26; Walter Pietsch, *Reform és ortodoxia: a magyar zsidóság belépése a modern világba* (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 1999), 51–71; and Brigitta Eszter Gantner, "Az egyetemes izraelita kongresszus 1868–69-ben: Küzdelem az asszimilációért és ellene," in *Honszeretet és felekezeti hűség: Wahrman Mór 1831–1892*, ed. Tibor Frank (Budapest: Argumentum, 2006), 91–110.
2. Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848–1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); George Barany, "Political Culture in the Lands of the Former Habsburg Empire: Authoritarian and Parliamentary Traditions," *Austrian History Yearbook* 29, no. 1 (1998): 195–248; John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).
3. On Yavneh, see the seminal article of Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984): 27–53, reprinted in Id., *The Significance of Yavneh and Other Essays in Jewish Hellenism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); on its medieval and modern reception, see Carsten L. Wilke, "Rabbinerkonferenzen," in *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur*, ed. Dan Diner, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2014), 74–9.
4. Iokhanan Petrovskii-Shtern, "The Enemy of Humanity: The Protocols Paradigm in Nineteenth-Century Russian Mentality," in *The Global Impact of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A Century-Old Myth*, ed. Esther Webman (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), 44–66.
5. "Aus der Versammlung der Mucker in Breslau," *Die Neuzeit* 8, no. 30 (24 July 1868): 358–360, here 359. The author alludes to the First Vatican Council, the rabbinical assembly of Mihalovce, the rabbinical assembly of Kassel, the foundation of the *Deutscher Schützenbund* in Gotha 1861, the 41st Assembly of German Scientists and Physicians in Frankfurt, September 1867, and the meeting of Napoleon III and the Czar at the Paris World Fair of 1867.
6. *Magyar Izraelita* 4, no.7 (16 May 1867): 49.
7. "Zur Frage des jüdischen Kongresses," *Pester Lloyd*, 22 January 1868, 2.
8. Katz, *A House Divided*, 92–7.
9. Michael Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 23–84, here 46.
10. Katz, *A House Divided*, 91–2.

11. Frojimovics and Komoróczy, *Jewish Budapest*, 260.
12. "Pest," *Magyar Izraelita* 4, no.3 (18 April 1867): 18.
13. *Die Neuzeit* 3, no.50 (11 December 1863): 574.
14. Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy," 44–5.
15. "Eine israelitische Landessynode," *Pester Lloyd* 1867/94 (20 April 1867): 2. Several Jewish journalists wrote for the *Pester Lloyd* at the time; see Hedvig Ujvári, "Zsidó újságírók a magyarországi német nyelvű időszaki sajtóban a *Pester Lloyd* megalapítása után," *Múlt és Jövő* 2010, no. 3: 40–50, here 42.
16. "Die Pester Eingabe beim ungarischen Kultusminister," *Ben-Chananja* 10, no.9 (1 May 1867): col. 291–6; no.10 (15 May 1867): col. 325–35; no.11 (1 June 1867): col. 366; no.12 (15 June 1867): col. 404–6. The article is clearly written by *Ben-Chananja's* editor, Leopold Löw.
17. "A Congressus tárgyában," *Magyar Izraelita* 4, no.6 (9 May 1867): 42–3; no. 7 (16 May 1867): 50–1; no. 9 (30 May 1867): 59; "Congressusi előzmények," *Magyar Izraelita* 4, no. 8 (24 May 1867): 57–8; no. 10 (6 June 1867): 73; no. 11 (13 June 1867), 81–2. The author, who only signs with the letter "z-," was most probably Pál Tenczer (1836–1905), the editor of the newspaper, who participated in the Hungarian Jewish Congress as a member of the Neolog party. See on him Péter Ujvári, *Magyar zsidó lexikon* (Budapest: A Magyar zsidó lexikon kiadása, 1929), 891–2.
18. "In der Osthälfte," *Die Neuzeit* 7, no. 20 (17 May 1867): 225–8; no. 21 (24 May 1867): 237–8; no. 22 (31 May 1867): 248–51; no. 23 (7 June 1867): 261–3; no. 24 (14 June 1867): 275–6; no. 25 (21 June 1867): 285–6; no. 26 (28 June 1867): 298–301. This series may also be attributed to the newspaper's editor, Simon Szántó.
19. The coverage of Congress preparations in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (henceforth: *AZJ*) was assured in the news section by two Hungarian correspondents, one of them being an anonymous reporter from Pest and the other Salomon Blum in Újverbász (Neu-Werbass, Vrbas), a small place in the Bácska.
20. "Die Vorgänge in Ungarn," *Der Israelit* 8, no. 20 (15 May 1867): 333–5; no. 21 (22 May 1867): 351–2; no. 22 (29 May 1867), 367–8; no. 23 (5 June 1867): 389–90; no. 25 (19 June 1867): 425–6; no. 26 (26 June 1867): 443–4; no. 28 (10 July 1867): 483–4; no. 29 (17 July 1867): 499–500; no. 30 (24 July 1867): 515–7. The article appears to be written by the editor, Markus Lehmann, on the basis of his correspondence with Esriel Hildesheimer, rabbi in Eisenstadt, who signs some later instalments of the series with the words "Aus Eisenstadt."
21. *Der Israelit* 9, no. 7 (12 February 1868): 108.
22. *Der Israelit* 8, no. 20 (15 May 1867): 335.
23. "Die Pester Eingabe," art. cit., no. 12 (15 June 1867): col. 404.
24. *Ha-Maggid* 13, no. 2 (13 January 1869): 2.
25. Daniel J. Elazar and Stuart A. Cohen, *The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 181.
26. "Die Pester Eingabe," art. cit., no. 10 (15 May 1867): col. 327–9. This claim is not entirely correct; cf. *A magyar országgyűlés mélyen tisztelt képviselőházához intézett emlékirata az izraelita egyetemes gyűlés bizottságának* ([Pest 1870), p. 5.
27. *Die Neuzeit* 10, no. 21 (27 May 1870): 238.
28. "Der Gemeindebund," *Die Neuzeit* 12, no. 5 (2 February 1872): 50.
29. Israel Halpern, ed., *Takanot Medinat Mehrin. Constitutiones Congressus Generalis Judaeorum Moraviensium (1650–1748)* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1951); Michael L. Miller, *Rabbis and Revolution: The Jews of Moravia in the Age of Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 22–4.
30. Rainer Josef Barzen, *Taqqanot Qehillot Šum: Die Rechtssatzungen der jüdischen Gemeinden Mainz, Worms und Speyer im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019).
31. Heinz Mosche Graupe, *Die Statuten der drei Gemeinden Altona, Hamburg, Wandsbek: Einleitung und Übersetzungen* (Hamburg: Christians, 1973).
32. Israel Halpern, ed., *Pinkas Va'ad 'Arba' 'Aratsot: Likutei takanot, ketavim ureshumot. Acta Congressus Generalis Judaeorum Regni Poloniae (1580–1764) quae supersunt omnia cum*

- deperditorum fragmentis et testimoniis* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1945; reedited by Israel Bartal [ibid., 1990]).
33. Miller, *Rabbis and Revolution*, 329.
 34. See Katz, *A House Divided*, 90, on the discrimination between ruling, accepted, and acknowledged faiths in Austria.
 35. Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).
 36. Pierre Birnbaum, *L'Aigle et la Synagogue: Napoléon, les Juifs et l'État* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 109.
 37. Patrick Girard, "Les petits neveux du grand Sanhédrin," *L'Arche: le mensuel du judaïsme français* 282–283 (1980): 73–7, here 73.
 38. *Protocolle der ersten Rabbiner-Versammlung abgehalten zu Braunschweig vom 12ten bis zum 19ten Juni 1844* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1844), 19–20.
 39. "Ein Wort zur Zeit. Von einem Abonnenten des "B. Ch.,"" *Ben-Chananja* 10, no. 10 (15 March 1867): col. 217–223, here 219.
 40. *Die Neuzeit* 8, no. 9 (28 February 1868): 99–100, letter from "Ein alter Jude aus Transleithanien" in Pest.
 41. "Eine israelitische Landessynode," art. cit.
 42. "Die Pester Eingabe," art. cit., no. 9 (1 May 1867): 295, reproduced in *Der Israelit* 8, no. 20 (15 May 1867): 334.
 43. "Die Vorgänge in Ungarn," art. cit., no. 20 (15 May 1867): 333. See again *Der Israelit*, no. 21 (22 May 1867): 351–2; no. 30 (24 July 1867): 517.
 44. "Die Vorgänge in Ungarn," art. cit., no. 25 (19 June 1867): 426.
 45. Hildesheimer, *Zum Congress: Beurtheilung der drei von der Majorität der in Pest versammelten Conferenz dem Kultus-Minister unterbreiteten Statute* (Prague, 1868), 21–8, quote from 28.
 46. "Die Pester Eingabe," art. cit., no. 12 (15 June 1867): 405.
 47. *AZJ* 32, no. 50 (8 December 1868): 1001.
 48. [Leopold Löw,] *Die jüdischen Wirren in Ungarn: Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte. Von Leon da Modena Redivivus. Erster Theil: Vor dem Kongresse* (Leipzig: Karl Frank Köbler, and Pest: Aigner & Rautmann, 1868), 9–10.
 49. "Zur Frage des jüdischen Kongresses," art. cit.
 50. *Magyar Izraelita* 4, no. 10 (6 June 1867): 73.
 51. "Eine israelitische Landessynode," art. cit.
 52. "Die Pester Eingabe," art. cit., no. 9 (1 May 1867): 295.
 53. "Pest," *AZJ* 31, no. 20 (14 May 1867): 398. The translation is that of the *Pester Lloyd*.
 54. Árpád Zeller, *A magyar egyházpolitika 1847–1894: A vallásszabadság, a polgári házasság, a katolikus autonomia, az alapok és alapítványok s egyéb egyházpolitikai kérdések történelmi fejlődése hazánkban*, vol. 1 1847–1872 (Budapest: Boruth, 1894).
 55. "Die Pester Eingabe," art. cit., no. 9 (1 May 1867): 291.
 56. "Die Pester Eingabe," art. cit., no. 10 (15 May 1867): 326.
 57. *Ibid.*, 333.
 58. *Ibid.*, 327.
 59. *Illustrierte Zeitung* no. 1124 (14 January 1865): 22.
 60. Paul Brusanowski, *Rumänisch-orthodoxe Kirchenordnungen (1786–2008): Siebenbürgen – Bukowina – Rumänien* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2011), 19–24. The organic statute received state sanction on 29 May 1869 and remained in force until May 1925.
 61. Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan, *Ortodoxie și Luteranism în Transilvania între Revoluția Pașoptistă și Marea Unire: Evoluție istorică și relații confesionale* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2015), 628–706.
 62. "A Congressus tárgyában," art. cit.
 63. "Congressusi előzmények," art. cit.
 64. "Ein Seminar in Amerika," *Ben-Chananja* 10, no. 17 (1 September 1867): col. 566–8, here 566.
 65. Ludwig Philippson, "Eine allgemeine jüdische Synode," *AZJ* 31, no. 36 (3 September 1867): 709–11, here 709.

66. David Rothschild, "Ueber Synoden," *Ben-Chananja* 10, no. 20 (15 October 1867): col. 637–43, here 637–8.
67. *Ibid.*, 640.
68. *Die Neuzeit* 10, no. 18 (6 May 1870): 202; A. Stein to Rabbi A. Stern in Ujpest.
69. Jacob Toury, *Soziale und politische Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland 1847–1871: Zwischen Revolution, Reaktion und Emanzipation* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977).
70. There were separate assemblies of the Breslau alumni on June 30–2 July 1868, and of reform rabbis in Kassel on August 12–13, 1868.
71. From June 20 to 4 July 1869, deputies of 48 German Jewish communities met for the "Erster Deutsch-Israelitischer Gemeindegtag" in Leipzig; see *Protokolle der am 29. Juni, 1. Juli und 2. Juli 1869 zu Leipzig stattgehabten Sitzungen des ersten jüdischen Gemeindegtages* (Leipzig [1869]); *Vorläufiger Entwurf zu den Satzungen eines zu begründenden Gemeinde-Verbandes für die Israeliten Deutschlands als Unterlage für die Berathungen der ersten israelitischen Gemeindegtages von Moritz Köhner* (Leipzig [1869]).
72. *AZJ* 32, no. 35 (25 August 1868): 696: "die Idee von periodisch wiederkehrenden Synoden."
73. Ludwig Philippson, "Zur bevorstehenden Synodalversammlung," *AZJ* 33, no. 4 (26 January 1869): 61–3, here 63.
74. *Die Neuzeit* 10, no. 21 (27 May 1870).
75. *Die Neuzeit* 3, no. 31 (31 July 1863): 367; 7, no. 24 (14 June 1867): 279; cf. Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Il Collegio Rabbinnico di Padova: Un'istituzione religiosa dell'ebraismo sulla via dell'emancipazione* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1995), 310–8.
76. *AZJ* 32, no. 21 (19 May 1868): 418–9.
77. *Der Israelit* 9, no. 7 (12 February 1868): 108.
78. *AZJ* 32, no. 14 (31 March 1868): 271; no. 17 (21 April 1868): 336; 33, no. 2 (12 January 1869): 28. [Hildesheimer] of Eisenstadt, "Die Vorgänge in Ungarn," *Der Israelit* 9, no. 21 (20 May 1868): 386–9,, here 387–8, quotes a similar slur uttered by one of his opponents.
79. *Ibid.*, 388.
80. "Freiheit, Fortschritt, Friede," *Ben-Chananja* 10, no. 19 (1 October 1867): col. 609–4, here 609–10.
81. Esriel Hildesheimer, *Ausführlicher Rechenschaftsbericht* (Prague 1869), 23.
82. *Ibid.*, 89–90.
83. "Die Versammlung in Cassel und die Bewegung in Ungarn," *Die Neuzeit* 8, no. 35 (28 August 1868): 418.
84. Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*, 323.
85. Samuel Singer, "Der ungarisch-israelitische Congress," *AZJ* 33, no. 5 (2 February 1869): 86–9, here 87; Katz, *A House Divided*, 277.

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