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## The Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest and Oriental Studies in Hungary

Oriental studies<sup>1</sup> in Hungary has been from time immemorial identical with research on the prehistory of the Hungarians. In Hungarian scholarship there are excellent studies on Tibet and Mongolia, as well as in Turkology, but all these studies originally took root in the interest in the obscure history of the tribes that originated on the eastern side of the Urals and arrived in the Carpathian Basin about 1200–1100 years ago in the last wave of the Great Migration (*Völkerwanderung*), after which they became Hungarians. In the thirteenth century, Julianus, a Dominican friar, ventured to find Hungarians who remained somewhere in Asia. His search (1235–1236, 1237) was not successful, but incidentally, it was he who brought to Hungary early information about the impending offensive of the Tartars. In the nineteenth century, Alexander Kőrösi Csoma (1784–1842), after studying Oriental languages in Göttingen (1816–1818) with Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827) and others, set out to discover the remnants of Hungarians in the East. He never encountered Hungarians during his travels, but he made his way eastward to Tibet, where he died after having succeeded in writing a Tibetan grammar and dictionary. The example of these heroes of discovery and the 160-year-long Ottoman rule (1526–1686) had a formative influence on the orientation of Oriental Studies in Hungary toward Central Asia and the Turkic peoples.

The idea that Hungarians were descendants of the Huns—the people of Atilla the Conqueror—was imported by the chronicler Simon de Keza in the late thirteenth century from medieval Western European scholarship; that is, as a classical geographical topos. Jesuit scholars in the eighteenth century, naive and enthusiastic linguists and philologists driven by patriotism and nationalism, developed an interest—indeed, in some cases a serious scholarly interest—in the peoples with whom these Hungarian tribes had developed relations in the course of their wanderings. German romanticism gave a new impetus to historiography and to Oriental Studies in Hungary, accelerating their modernization and methodological improvement. The leading Oriental scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries dealt mainly with the languages and cultures of peoples connected to the remote Hungarian past. Some of them even became fascinated with the idea of a common Turanian origin for all these languages and peoples.

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<sup>1</sup> Keynote lecture delivered on October 14, 2012, in Budapest at the conference “Wissenschaft between East and West: The Hungarian Connection in Modern Jewish Scholarship.”

The concept that Hungarians were an *ethnic* nation, namely an oriental one, has remained a dominant idea up to the present, with all its consequences, including the demand for the assimilation of minorities and for national unity, or deeply rooted anti-Semitism, and so forth.

In the very early descent-tradition or myth of Hungarians there was a parallel lineage; namely, a relationship with the Jews. Harigerus *abbas*, a Benedictine monk in Hainaut, Wallonia, Belgium, wrote circa 980 that “it is known of the Hungarians that they eagerly agree with the rumor, and even boast with it, that they descend from the Jews” (*Ungros dēnique notum est huic famae assentari velle, qui et iactant se a Iudeis originem ducere*).<sup>2</sup> In his *Gesta Hungarorum* (1282–1283), the learned Hungarian chronicler of the Middle Ages, Simon de Keza, traced the origins of the Hungarians to the biblical Nimrod, *Menroth* in the chronicler’s Latin, similarly to the alleged Trojan or biblical origins of other nations. In the sixteenth century, there were a number of narrative songs in circulation (clearly influenced by the Reformation) about the close parallel between the histories of the (biblical) Jewish people and the Hungarians, adapted to the well-known biblical narrative framework of the rebellion against God and the subsequent punishment.

The great Protestant encyclopedist of the seventeenth century, János Apácai Csere (1625–1659), who returned to Hungary from Amsterdam to teach at the Academy of Kolozsvár, wrote a long Latin treatise on teaching in which there is a beautiful eulogy on Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> Apácai here solicited his students (without much success, it seems) to study the Bible with the Targums and the “excellent commentaries of rabbis”; subsequently, he urged them to read the “letters” written by rabbis (that is, responsa literature), the *piyyutim*, Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides, all in Hebrew, and only after that turn to Arabic.

The peculiarities of Hungarian grammar were explained by the similarities and parallels in Hebrew, and Hebrew etymologies of Hungarian vocabulary were proposed. This tradition remained alive until the nineteenth century, supporting swelling Hungarian national pride and romantic nationalism. A historian, professor of diplomacy and sigillography, and the chief-librarian of the University of Pest, István Horvát (1784–1848), went as far as to assert that the Jews of the Bible were Hungarians. “The Bible is full of ancient Hungarian names,” he wrote in

2 Rudolf Köpke (ed.), “Herigeri [...] gesta episcoporum [...] Leodiensium,” in *Scriptorum tomus VII* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores, 7), edited by Georgius H. Pertz (Hannoverae: Impensis Bibliopolii Aulici Hahniani, MCCCXLVI [1846]), 171, 51–172, 50.

3 Johannis Apatzai [Johannes Apacius / Apácai Csere János]. *Oratio de studio sapientiae...* Habita cum Recturam in Illustri Collegio Albensi susciperet A. C. M. DC. LIII. [1653] Mense Novembri. 33–35. – Facsimile edition: (Budapest: Országos Pedagógiai Könyvtár és Múzeum, 1975).

1825.<sup>4</sup> Even today, one occasionally encounters popular etymologies formed on the basis of Hebrew, mostly proposed by elderly Israelis who emigrated from Hungary, but these theories reflect merely grief and nostalgia for their former homeland.

The word *Wissenschaft*, mentioned in the title of this conference, is of course a code name for *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which emerged in the 1820s. Hebrew and “Chaldaean,” that is, the Aramaic of the Targums, were taught at Budapest University (now Eötvös Loránd University) since its foundation in 1635 at the (Roman Catholic) theological faculty, and a couple of good grammatical texts were written and published in Hungary, first in Latin, and later in Hungarian. Protestant theologians attended universities in Western Europe, and some of them returned to Hungary with handwritten Hebrew grammars copied from the widely used books of Alting, Schroeder, Schultens, or from notes taken during the classroom lectures of the great Gesenius. Biblical Hebrew had its proper place in the academic and spiritual life of Christian society. In the early nineteenth century, the local university press—in order to compete with the Hebrew editions of the famous book publisher Anton Schmid of Vienna and Pressburg, and along with books for religious life in Serbian, Romanian, Slovak (national minorities in the Hungarian Kingdom)—also started to print Jewish books in Hebrew and in Yiddish,<sup>5</sup> the first one being a eulogy for Napoleon by Moshe Münz, rabbi of Óbuda (Alt-Ofen), in 1814. The Christian framework for the study of Hebrew and—with much less intensity—for the romantic interest in Jewish life and customs survived the following two centuries.

The idea of founding a rabbinical seminary in Hungary was proposed for the first time in 1806 by Rabbi David Friesenhausen (1756–1828), a mathematician, then *dayyan* in Hunfalva (Unsdorf, northern Hungary, today Huncovce in Slovakia), and later a critic of the pious but peculiar mysticism of Moshe Teitelbaum (1759–1841), the rabbi of the nearby Sátoralja-Újhely (*Uyhely*). A national rabbinical assembly considered the idea again in the 1830s, and it went under review in both houses of the parliament in the 1840s. Finally, it was proposed yet again in all seriousness by Rabbi Leopold (Lipót) Löw (1811–1875) in a paper written for the *Pesti Hírlap* (June 2, 1844), the newspaper edited by the well-known Lajos Kossuth (before long, a popular leader of the country). The proponents strove to improve

<sup>4</sup> István Horvát, *Rajzolatok a magyar nemzet legrégibb történeteiből* [Notes on the Most Ancient History of the Magyar Nation] (Pest: Trattner, 1825): “Pözsög a Szent Írás mindenféle régi magyar nevektől és régi magyar írásmódtól.”

<sup>5</sup> Regarding books in Yiddish, see Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy, *Yiddish Printing in Hungary: An Annotated Bibliography* (Hungaria Judaica, 25.) (Budapest: Center for Jewish Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2011).

the education of rabbis in keeping with the ongoing modernization of Jewish life and ritual in Western Europe. Löw himself, with his early articles on Hungarian Jewish history in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* starting in the 1830s, and on Talmudic and halakhic questions, could have fit into the *Wissenschaft*. In his journal *Ben Chananja* (1844, 1858–1867), he established an equivalent of its kind for the *Monatsschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, a rabbinical counterpart on a firm basis with the *Wissenschaft*, but neither he himself nor his journal could become the measure or norm in Hungary for *Wissenschaftlichkeit* or reformed *Religiosität*. Let me only mention his sharp criticism of the complete grammatical ignorance of the Pressburg yeshiva and of its head, Rabbi Abraham Sofer (“Ketav Sofer,” 1815–1871), in contrast to the enormous prestige and influence of the latter.

When it was established in 1877, the *Országos Rabbiképző Intézet* or “National Rabbinical Seminary,” was intended to be a solution for the deficiencies of Jewish higher education in Hungary.<sup>6</sup> The model was the *Jüdisch-theologisches Seminar (Fraenckel’scher Stiftung)*, or the Breslauer Seminar (founded in 1854), where one of the first professors of the Rabbinical Seminary and later its rector, Wilhelm (Vilmos / Zeev) Bacher (1850–1913), had studied (1868–1876) and was ordained. David Kaufmann (1852–1899), another graduate of the Breslau Seminary who earned his doctorate in Leipzig, was also invited to be a professor. Over the next seventy-five years the Breslau Seminary was a quasi-mother institution for the Budapest Seminary, admitting students from Hungary until the Nazis closed it in 1939, after which some students from Breslau graduated from the Budapest Seminary.

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<sup>6</sup> The history of the Seminary and its changes of fortune are amply documented by the several accounts written on its jubilees in sequence. See Salamon Schill, *Az Országos Rabbiképző Intézet története* [History of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Hungary] (Budapest: n. p., 1896); Lajos Blau, ed. *Adalékok a Ferenc József Országos Rabbiképző Intézet történetéhez* [Contributions to the History of the Franz Joseph National Rabbinical School]. Budapest: n. p., 1917) (Published immediately after the Seminary was named for the late king and emperor.); Lajos Blau and Miksa Klein (eds.), *Emlékkönyv a Ferenc József Országos Rabbiképző Intézet 50 éves jubileumára* [Festschrift on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Franz Joseph National Rabbinical School] (Budapest: n. p., 1927); Adolf Wertheimer, Mihály Guttmann, Sámuel Löwinger, and Henrik Guttmann (eds.), *A Ferenc József Országos Rabbiképző Intézet hatvanéves jubileuma* [The Sixtieth Anniversary of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Hungary] (Budapest: n. p., 1937); Samuel Löwinger (ed.), *Seventy Years: A Tribute to the Seventieth Anniversary of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Hungary (1877–1947)* (Budapest: n. p., 1948). (In this booklet one finds a thorough overview in Hebrew by István Hahn on the last 30 years of the Seminary.); Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), *The Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest, 1877–1977: A Centennial Volume* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1986).

Leaving aside the historical circumstances, as well as the confessional controversies and early attacks on the Seminary, I would like to highlight the institution's strong commitment—in a changing world, a reform in itself—to the strict religious tradition. The inauguration of the Seminary took place on October 4, 1877, Tishri 27, 5638 according to the Jewish calendar, a day very close to the High Holidays, as is proper. By the way, it is a subtle allusion to that eminent day that the day before the opening of this conference on October 13, 2012, a Shabbat, was also Tishri 27. In the Seminary there were always, at least until World War II and the Holocaust, only three professors appointed. In my understanding, this was clearly done out of respect for the traditional rabbinical ordination (the *semikha*) in which three rabbis must give their consent, or due to the desire to secure the approval of Orthodox Jews.

In connection with the commitment of the Seminary to this centuries-old tradition, I would like to make a comment on the biting remarks Ignaz Goldziher recorded in his *Tagebuch* on the Seminary and the community leadership for not having been appointed as a professor at the new institution. Goldziher served in the Seminary as a member of the Board of Governors, and during the last two decades of his life (from 1900) he was a Reader in medieval Jewish philosophy and comparative history of religions there. His resentment is in part simply a misinterpretation of the situation, for he was not a rabbi, and thus, according to institutional standards, he was not eligible to become a professor.

Having established the Rabbinical Seminary in 1877, the Jewish community obviously met the demands of the so-called Neolog confessional wing (historically similar to the Conservative or Masorti movement in contemporary international terminology). Neither from society at large, nor from Budapest University or the Academy of Sciences, of which Goldziher was himself a member from 1876 (as well as a *Privatdozent* [1872], an honorary [1894], and an *ordentlicher* university professor [from 1905]), was there ever any initiative to establish Jewish Studies beyond biblical Hebrew in any secular or state-sponsored institution.

The foundation of the Seminary was supported by the Hungarian authorities without any reservations, from the *König und Kaiser* downwards, with the Hungarian premier at the time, Kálmán Tisza, attending the inauguration ceremony (can you imagine such a thing today?). In light of these facts, and considering that the Seminary took up the teaching and representation of traditional Jewish Studies in its entirety, I would suggest that the Hungarian scholarly community, the public, and society at large accepted the Seminary as filling the gap in Oriental Studies and Semitics for the whole nation. They also felt relieved from any responsibilities of further academic care of Jewish Studies.

Yet, some Jewish scholars regarded the boundaries enclosing Jewish Studies in Hungary as impediments to their research. Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907),

one of the scholars par excellence of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, declined to accept a position at the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest, with the explanation that “the subjects which he could teach and his conception of Jewish scholarship would not fit an institution which held itself aloof from the university.”<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, he did not join the Breslau Seminary for the exact same reason.

Steinschneider’s objection was to a certain degree groundless because in 1891 the Ministry for Religion and Culture decreed (and the Seminary stipulated conditions in the curriculum) that students of the Seminary must study at Budapest University for two semesters and take twelve hours each semester. There were some restrictions on this regulation, and later there were unfavorable changes as well, but the system worked well and was maintained until after World War II, producing about 250 Doctor-Rabbis over three-quarters of a century. In the 1930s, students of the Seminary attended Professor Eduard (Ede) Mahler’s and Antal Dávid’s classes in Ancient Near Eastern History, Cuneiform, and Semitic linguistics, and the theses of post-World War II graduates, such as József Schweitzer, were supervised and approved by the renowned scholar of Ugarit, József Aistleitner (1883–1960), a devout Roman Catholic priest, professor of Oriental languages in the Theological Faculty, and former rector of the university.

Regarding the origins of studies on the Ancient Near East, Western Asia, and Egypt in Hungary, a few interesting moments are notable. The history of the introduction of Assyriology in Germany repeated itself in Hungary, only in a slightly different form. In Germany, it was Eberhard Schrader (1836–1908) who established the regular study of Cuneiform in Jena (1873). Both he and his pupil, Friedrich Delitzsch (1850–1922), turned to Assyriology from their studies of the Hebrew Bible. Friedrich Delitzsch was the son of Franz Delitzsch, the prominent scholar of medieval Jewish manuscripts and himself a Christian and a missionary among the Jews. In this way Assyriology emerged, if not as a ramification of Jewish Studies, then as its close relative. Eduard Mahler (1857–1945), who introduced the field of Ancient Near Eastern Studies to the University of Pest, was an astronomer by training, and raised as the son of an Orthodox rabbi, who later joined the so-called “progressive” (close to, but not identical with, the Neolog) direction in Pressburg [Bratislava]. Later, Mahler received his scholarly training in Oriental Studies in Vienna from David Heinrich Müller (1846–1912), who grew up in a yeshiva and in the Breslau Seminary. In both cases, in that of Delitzsch in Germany and Mahler in Hungary, Jewish Studies was the soil from which Assyriology sprouted.

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<sup>7</sup> However, one-and-a-half decades earlier, in 1859, Steinschneider had taught for a while in the *Veitel-Heine-Ephraim'sche Lehranstalt* in Berlin, a sort of *bet-midrash*.

After the Cuneiform languages were deciphered, a Turanian or Finno-Ugric affiliation was proposed for one of these languages that now we call Sumerian. This notion, not absolutely absurd at the time, arose in Hungary for a reason that was easy to understand: a vivid interest. People behind the language in question were immediately connected with Hungarian tribes of bygone days. Goldziher, who attended international Oriental congresses abroad and was informed about the so-called Sumerian question, hastily embraced the allography theory developed by the French Orientalist Joseph Halévy (1827–1917) circa 1875.<sup>8</sup> Halévy explained the newly rediscovered language as an allography or mirror-translation from Semitic. This was among the apparently few substantial scholarly issues where Goldziher was proved wrong.

If we enumerate the Hungarian scholars in Oriental Studies who achieved worldwide fame from the last third of the nineteenth century onward, Jewish scholars come to the fore. Let us just name Goldziher, Bacher, David Kaufmann (a “naturalized” Hungarian Jew), and Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943), the British archaeologist of Middle Asia.<sup>9</sup> One can add to this list the following individuals: Eduard Mahler; Ármin Vámbéry (1832–1913); Bernát Munkácsi (1860–1937), a Finno-Ugrian scholar and the chief inspector of Jewish schools; Immanuel Löw (1854–1944), the son of Leopold Löw, chief rabbi in Szeged, author of *Die Flora der Juden*; and from later generations, Zsigmond Telegdi (1909–1994); István Hahn (1913–1984), whose highly acknowledged papers, partly in Hebrew, range from *Miggo* and *Minim* and *Mesiah le-fi tumo*<sup>10</sup> to Qumran, Roman history, Sassanian taxation<sup>11</sup> and the Syriac *Schatzhöhle*; Sándor (Alexander) Scheiber (1913–1985); and from the recent past, Pinhas Artzi (1923–2007), who—while still living in Hungary—was trained in Rabbinics (at the Seminary) as well as in Assyriology (with Antal Dávid), and after his *aliyah* (1950) he became a professor of Assyriology at Bar-Ilan University and an expert in the Tell Amarna tablets. Let me add to this list the names of some other scholars—even if they are connected to Jewish Hungary only through descent, native language, elementary school, or at most university studies—names dear to my heart: Erica Reiner (1924–2005), a decades-

<sup>8</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, “Jelentés az orientalisták IX. nemzetközi kongresszusáról, 1892” [Report on the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists], *Akadémia Értesítő* 3, no. 35 (1892): 632–653.

<sup>9</sup> A nephew of Ignác Hirschler (1823–1891), a famous ophtalmologist, member of the Upper House and of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and once president of the Pest Jewish community. Aurel Stein was baptized at birth.

<sup>10</sup> Hahn’s papers on these topics were published in *A Blau Lajos Talmudtudományi Társulat évkönyve* [Yearbook of the Ludwig Blau Society of Talmudic Scholarship], 5694–5696 / 1934–1936.

<sup>11</sup> István Hahn, “Sassanidische und spätrömische Besteuerung,” *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 7 (1959): 149–160.



long editor of the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*; Menahem Zevi Kaddari (1925–2011), a former student of the Seminary, rector of Bar-Ilan University (1971–1974), and for a long period vice-president of the Academy of the Hebrew Language; Raphael (Rafi) Kutscher (1938–1989); Joshua Blau (born 1919), now an emeritus professor at Hebrew University, and who made a name for himself in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic linguistics; and Jacob Klein (born 1934). Professors Kaddari, Joshua Blau, and Jacob Klein were members of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities, and Kaddari and Blau were awarded the Israel Prize. The Sumerologist Rafi Kutscher, born in Budapest, moved to Jerusalem as an infant with his parents, grew up there, became an eminent scholar of Cuneiform, learned Hungarian as a child, and maintained it at a level sufficient for editing Hungarian references in linguistic books on Hebrew and Aramaic by his father, the Israel Prize laureate Professor Edward Yehezkel Kutscher (1909–1971). Jacob Klein, who left Hungary during his school years along with his parents, speaks Hungarian well even today. This is a wide range of outstanding orientalist scholars in and from Hungary, all of whom are Jewish and the majority connected in one way or another to the Rabbinical Seminary. Furthermore, most have used, wherever possible, Hungarian material in their scholarship as well.

Ignaz (Yitzhak Yehuda) Goldziher (1850–1921) stands alone. In his *Tagebuch* he complains about being ignored by his Jewish coreligionists, but that was nothing compared to the Hungarian scholarly community's disregard for him. Despite having been elected as a member of the Academy of Sciences, and having the habilitation (*venia legendi*) at Pest University, during his best years the chair of Arab and Semitic philology was occupied by Péter Hatala (1832–1918) and György Kanyurszky (1853–1920)—both virtually unknown scholars today, even though the latter very often appears in the novels and short stories of Gyula Krúdy (1878–1933), one of the best writers in Hungary in the first third of the twentieth century. For Krúdy, for example, in his novel *Boldogult úrfikoromban* [In my By-gone Days as a Young Lad], 1929, the Reverend Kanyurszky was a nice fellow, a ludicrous drunkard, and an avid chess player in coffee taverns. Goldziher directed his intellectual energies toward Islam after the harsh rejection of his *Mythology* (1876)<sup>12</sup>—in which he applied the astral mythology of Max Müller to the Bible without due caution, yet simultaneously opened the way for the analysis of biblical narrative towards the comparative history of religions. But if we recall his own description of his Jewish learning (in his *Tagebuch*), if we consider the depth and breadth of these studies, and if we recall how he—together with Wilhelm Bacher, also a

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<sup>12</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Der Mythos bei den Hebräern und seine geschichtliche Entwicklung: Untersuchungen zur Mythologie und Religionswissenschaft* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1876).



student of Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer—commemorated *Tish'ah be-Av* in Leipzig (1869–1870),<sup>13</sup> we can see that his studies on the Arab Hadith were influenced by his early immersion in the *Torah she-be-'al-peh*. And we can also understand why in different periods of his life, after he had achieved all the recognition and scholarly positions he had sought, Goldziher demonstratively turned up again in Judaism and published some of his work in Jewish publication venues.

During the decades after Goldziher's death—that is, in the interwar years and even after World War II, though then for different reasons—the chances for a Jew to achieve an academic position in Jewish Studies were much lower than in Goldziher's time. The politics of the Horthy regime (1919–1944) fostered only the so-called national branches of learning. At Budapest University, Goldziher's *Nachfolger*, the professor of Semitic languages, was Mihály Kmoskó (1876–1931), a Roman Catholic priest and formerly a professor at the Theological Faculty. In 1919, Kmoskó became a blustering antisemitic propagandist, so much so that during the postwar consolidation he became a burden even on his own Church and was banished to a provincial parish where he dealt with Syriac authors on early Hungarian tribes. In reality, his work proved to be an important contribution since its recent, posthumous publication because it demonstrates that the notion of ethnically homogenous Hungarian tribes is merely a myth. In 1928, the Chair of History of the Ancient Near East established by Eduard Mahler was renamed as the Institute of Eastern Asia and was given to a militant antisemite and national-socialist, Vilmos Pröhle. After Kmoskó died, his (before, Goldziher's) chair was integrated into that Institute.

The teaching of Arabic and research on Arab literature were permanently on the agenda at the Rabbinical Seminary. In the early decades of the Seminary before World War I, the library collected grammars and some secondary literature on Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran (with respect to Wilhelm Bacher's Persian Studies), Arabia, and general Semitics, but later these branches were suspended, and interest in them faded. Oriental, or specifically Semitic Studies, actually meant Arabic, or rather Judeo-Arabic, in the Seminary.<sup>14</sup> Bernát (Dov) Heller (1871–1943),

<sup>13</sup> According to an anecdote recorded by Leopold Grünwald (Yekutiel Yehuda Greenwald, 1889–1955) in *Appiryon* 2 (1924–1925): 20–22. A Hungarian translation (by Ágnes Vázsonyi) of this recollection was published as “Tisa-beÁv a lipcsei egyetemen” [Tishah be-Av at the Leipzig University], *Szombat* 4, no. 6 (Sivan 5752 / Summer 1992): 21–22.

<sup>14</sup> On this topic, see the passing remarks by Raphael Patai, a graduate of the Seminary and himself a student of Arab folklore: Patai, “The Seminary and Oriental Studies,” in *The Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest, 1877–1977: A Centennial Volume*, ed. Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1986), 205–214.

author of the *Antarroman* (*Sirat ‘Antar*),<sup>15</sup> a faithful disciple of Goldziher who occupied Bacher’s former chair in the Seminary, pursued Arabic Studies in the framework of his broad research on folklore, tracing Jewish elements in the Oriental, and first and foremost, Arabic, tradition.<sup>16</sup> The manuscript of Yūsuf ibn Ibrahim (Joseph ben Abraham ha-Kohen) al-Basīr’s *Kitāb al-Muhtavī* [The Comprehensive Book]—in its Hebrew translation: *Sefer ne‘imot* [Book of Dispositions]—a Karaite theological treatise in Arabic written in Hebrew script from the early eleventh century in the Kaufmann Collection,<sup>17</sup> was distributed by Goldziher and later by Heller, chapter by chapter, for theses in the Seminary from the 1910s onward. But a critical edition of the work in its entirety was published only much later (1985) by Georges Vajda (1908–1981). Vajda had attended the Seminary but left for Paris in 1928, and there he became “one of the towering figures of Jewish Studies in this [the 20th] century,” as an obituary wrote of him.<sup>18</sup> It is no small thing that Vajda’s bibliography is even somewhat longer than Scheiber’s. At Budapest University, the doctoral theses of István Hahn<sup>19</sup> and Alexander Scheiber,<sup>20</sup> both students of Heller in the Seminary, demonstrated good, and in the case of Hahn even excellent, knowledge of Arabic. In the mid-1950s, once Hahn dared again to publish on Jewish topics after having left the Seminary in 1948, these second-degree brothers-in-law and first-degree Jewish scholars wrote a few papers together on texts from the Cairo Genizah and from the Kaufmann Collection. Scheiber was responsible for the manuscript, and Hahn for the Arabic.<sup>21</sup> The tension caused by Hahn’s former withdrawal from the Seminary was followed by their full personal

<sup>15</sup> Bernhard Heller, *Die Bedeutung des arabischen ‘Antar-Romans für die vergleichende Literaturkunde*. (Form und Geist, 21) (Leipzig: H. Eichblatt Verlag, 1931). The preliminary version of the book, in Hungarian, was published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1918.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding Heller’s research on folklore and Arabic popular literature, see Alexander Scheiber, “Bernhard Heller,” in Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.) *The Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest*, 194–204.

<sup>17</sup> A testamentary donation (1905) by the mother-in-law of David Kaufmann (Róza Gomperz) to the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, rich in Hebrew manuscripts and rare books.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Altmann, *title missing* in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 50 (1983) XIX.

<sup>19</sup> István Hahn, *A világteremtés az iszlám legendáiban* [The Creation of the World in Islamic Legends] (Budapest: n. p., 1935).

<sup>20</sup> Sándor Scheiber, *Keleti hagyományok a nyelvek keletkezéséről* [Oriental Traditions on the Origin of the Languages] (Budapest: n. p., 1937).

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Scheiber – István Hahn, “Two fragments from the Kitāb al-Sahadat wa-l-Wata’iq of Saadia,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 5 (1955): 231–247; “Leaves from Saadia’s Kitāb al-Sarāi,” *Acta Orientalia* 8 (1958): 99–109; “Further Chapters from Saadia’s Kitāb al-Sarāi,” *Acta Orientalia* 9 (1959): 97–107. Besides these, see their Hebrew papers in *Tarbiz* 25 (1955/1956); and 28 (1958/1959).

reconciliation only in 1983, a year and a half before Scheiber's death, when Hahn, then a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, ministered and officiated at the granting of a degree of the Academy to Scheiber.<sup>22</sup>

It should be emphasized that many of the scholars at the Rabbinical Seminary in Hungary, including those connected to it or coming from its intellectual surroundings, were and are counted in the innermost circle of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Kaufmann, a professor and rabbi at the Budapest Seminary, achieved an indisputably high reputation by discovering and publishing manuscripts of great importance, among others the *Megillat Ofen* by Isaac Schulhof on the re-conquest of Buda in 1686<sup>23</sup> and Glückel von Hameln's autobiography,<sup>24</sup> even if he sometimes corrected the Yiddish or Hebrew wording of the manuscripts according to his own linguistic taste. Anyone who had the opportunity to hold in his or her own hands Bacher's desk copies of his own writings, *durchgeschos-sen*, which are full of marginal and additional notes in his minute handwriting,<sup>25</sup> would realize that he was both a medieval Talmudist with an incredible memory and a giant of nineteenth century philological meticulousness. As for the 1930s and 1940s, Bernhard Heller published seventeen papers, reviews, or short notices altogether in the last dozen or so volumes of the *Monatsschrift*, far more than anyone else. The collected volume, representing the *Wissenschaft* in German and edited by Kurt Wilhelm in 1967,<sup>26</sup> republished papers by Wilhelm Bacher, Lajos Blau (1861–1936), Michael Guttmann (1872–1942), David Kaufmann, Samuel Krauss (1866–1948), and Immanuel Löw. Three of them—Bacher, Blau, and Guttmann—were directors of the Seminary, while Guttmann was also the director of the Breslau Seminary for some time.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Seminary edited a series of *Festschriften* and memorial volumes honoring or commemorating Hungarian Jewish

<sup>22</sup> István Hahn, "Scheiber Sándor tudományos munkássága" [Scholarly Achievements of Alexander Scheiber], In [IMIT] *Évkönyv, 1983–1984* (Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselőlete, 1984), 3–12.

<sup>23</sup> David Kaufmann, *Die Erstürmung Ofens und ihre Vorgeschichte nach dem Berichte Isak Schulhofs (1650–1732)* (Trier: Sigmund Mayer, 1895).

<sup>24</sup> David Kaufmann, *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln, 1645–1719 / Zikhronot marat Glikl Hamil mi-shenat 407 ad 479* (Frankfurt am Main: Kaufmann, 1896).

<sup>25</sup> These books are now in part filed in the Seminary's library, and in part in the care of his grandson.

<sup>26</sup> Kurt Wilhelm, *Wissenschaft des Judentums im deutschen Sprachbereich: Ein Querschnitt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967).

scholars such as Ludwig Blau,<sup>27</sup> Goldziher,<sup>28</sup> Michael Guttmann,<sup>29</sup> Bernhard Heller,<sup>30</sup> Immanuel Löw,<sup>31</sup> and Eduard Mahler.<sup>32</sup> Some of these volumes could be printed only after a significant delay (after the Holocaust), and some of them only abroad, most notably in Israel. The posthumous *Scheiber Volume*, published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, is an addition to this series.<sup>33</sup> These *Festschriften* were virtual international encounters in Jewish and Oriental Studies, in part replacing the actual presence of extensive Oriental Studies at the Seminary. Most of these volumes include papers on the Ancient Near East as well.

After Goldziher's forgettable Sumerian mistake and Mahler's semi-popular writings on Babylonia, the Ancient Near East reappeared on the horizon of the Seminary in the late 1930s. Sámuel Löwinger (1904–1980) used firsthand Cuneiform material in his paper on Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>34</sup> He was the last member of the Seminary's faculty who maintained a scholarly interest in Cuneiform. Also worthy of mention is his fiery study on Paul de Lagarde's antisemitism,<sup>35</sup> heavy with the arguments of an Oriental scholar embedded in political polemics. After

27 Simon Hevesi, Mihály Guttmann, and Sámuel Löwinger (eds.), *Zikhron Jehuda. Tanulmányok Dr. Blau Lajos (1861–1936), a Ferenc József Országos Rabbiképző Intézet néhai igazgatójának emlékére* [Studies in Memory of Ludwig Blau (1861–1936), the Late Director of the Franz Joseph Landesrabbinschule] (Budapest: Országos Rabbiképző Intézet, 1938).

28 Sámuel Löwinger, Joseph Somogyi (eds.), *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, [vol. I] (Budapest: n. p., 1948); Samuel Löwinger, Alexander Scheiber, and Joseph Somogyi (eds.), *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, vol. II. (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1958). Due to the political changes in Hungary after 1948, vol. II of the *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume* could not be published in Budapest, where it was collected and edited. Samuel Löwinger, the former director of the Rabbinical Seminary and one of its editors, who was already living in Jerusalem, arranged its publication there.

29 S. Löwinger (ed.), *Jewish Studies in Memory of Michael Guttmann* (Budapest, 1946).

30 A. Scheiber (ed.), *Jubilee Volume in Honour of Prof. Bernhard Heller on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Budapest: n. p., 1941).

31 Alexander Scheiber (ed.), *Semitic Studies in Memory of Immanuel Löw* (Budapest: n. p., 1947).

32 Adolf Wertheimer, József Somogyi, Sámuel Löwinger (eds.), *Emlékkönyv dr. Mahler Ede (...) nyolcvanadik születésnapjára. Dissertationes in honorem dr. Eduardi Mahler, professoris emeriti Universitatis regiae scientiarum Budapestinensis de Petro Pázmány nominatae natali die octogesimo ab amicis, collegis et discipulis eius conscriptae et editae*. Budapestini: Mahler Ede Jubileumi Emlékbizottság, 1937.

33 Róbert Dán (ed.), *Orient and Occident: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Scheiber* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó – Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988).

34 Samuel Löwinger, "Nebuchadnezzar's Dream in the Book of Daniel," in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, [vol. I], eds. Sámuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi, 336–352 (Budapest: n. p., 1948).

35 Sámuel Löwinger, *Germánia "prófétája": A nácizmus száz esztendeje* [The "Prophet" of Germany: One Hundred Years of Nazism] (Budapest: The author's publication, 1947).

Mahler's retirement, rabbinical students attended Cuneiform classes offered by the *Privatdozent* Antal Dávid at the university. One of these students, László Némethy, who was engaged in the study of Urartu in the first millennium BCE, died during forced labor service in World War II. The popular book of Leonard Woolley (1880–1960), *Ur of the Chaldees* (1929), was translated into Hungarian by the director of the Jewish High School (*Zsidó Gimnázium*) in Budapest, Salamon Goldberger (1892–1945), under the pseudonym Gábor Salamon during the difficult days of war in 1943.<sup>36</sup> Even today, Hungarian bibliographers have yet to decipher his pseudonym. These two items, certainly not as important as Goldziher's, Bacher's, or Telegdi's many scholarly books and studies, still matter, for they demonstrate the widening of the strictly rabbinical horizon into history at large. During the time of persecution, even the imaginary or constructed history, like Woolley's tale of Abraham's life in Mesopotamia around 2000 BCE, can be interpreted as a spiritual escape. In 1944, Antal Dávid's son and his other Cuneiform students (Erica Reiner, among others), some of them from the Seminary, participated in actions against the German occupation; Dávid's son subsequently died in the Dachau concentration camp.

Telegdi never wanted to become a rabbi, but for him the Seminary represented the only chance to pursue university studies.<sup>37</sup> In praise of Telegdi, who was not a valiant person, I must mention his two large and excellent Oriental studies published in Hungarian in the *Yearbook* of the Hungarian Jewish Literary Society [*Izraelita Magyar Irodalmi Társulat* / IMIT]. These works, one on the spread of Semitic writing in the East and another on the Khazars, were both daring and brave scholarly accomplishments in the political atmosphere of the 1930s. In the first article,<sup>38</sup> he demonstrated the contribution of the ancient Semites, including Jews, to the culture of humanity. In the second paper,<sup>39</sup> he debunked a myth that had emerged in the enthusiastic patriotism of the Jews in the late nineteenth century (that is, the myth of Jews allegedly joining Hungarian tribes in the conquest of the country). Telegdi was thus engaged in a two-front fight for scholarly

<sup>36</sup> Sir Leonard Woolley, *Ur városa és a vízözön* [The City Ur and the Deluge] (Budapest: Officina, 1943).

<sup>37</sup> Both Telegdi and Hahn won the national high school competition in Latin in their last school year. Telegdi used the prize to make a study-trip to Paris (where he later received an opportunity to study as well), and Hahn bought the Hebrew dictionary by Gesenius.

<sup>38</sup> Zsigmond Telegdi, "A sémi írás útja a Földközi-tengertől a Csendes Óceánig" [The Way of the Semitic Writing from the Mediterranean to the Pacific], in *IMIT Évkönyv, 1937* (Budapest: Izr. Magyar Irodalmi Társulat, 1937), 200–227.

<sup>39</sup> Zsigmond Telegdi, "A kazárok és a zsidóság" [The Khazars and the Jews], in *IMIT Évkönyv, 1940* (Budapest: Izr. Magyar Irodalmi Társulat, 1940), 247–287.

truth. But first and foremost, it is his earlier dissertation on the Iranian loanwords in Talmudic Aramaic that remains a classic.<sup>40</sup>

The deportation of Jews from the countryside killed, along with their communities, rabbi-scholars such as Béla Bernstein (1868–1944) and Sándor Büchler (1869–1944), both former students of Kaufmann at the Seminary and eminent historians in their own right; Pál Hirschler (1907–1944), a former student of Bernát Heller, a Semitic linguist; Ernő Winkler (1894–1944), a historian of medieval Jewish law; and most important of all, Immanuel Löw, the 91-year-old doyen of Semitic scholarship and previously a member of the Upper House of Parliament. Rabbi Löw was deported along with his community in Szeged, but on the way he was taken off the train and died in the Budapest Jewish hospital. These rabbis were genuine scholars, and partly Oriental scholars, according to any academic standard. The loss of these irreplaceable men was profound indeed.

A few years later, emigration and *aliyah* decimated the ranks. Löwinger, the historian, and Ernő (Abraham Naftali Zvi / Ernst) Róth (1908–1991), the best halakhist in Hungary for many decades, left Hungary. Löwinger emigrated in 1950 to become the keeper of the microfilm collection at Hebrew University, while Róth fled abroad in 1956 to serve as a rabbi and to catalogue Hebrew manuscripts in European collections. Some left the Seminary for the university. After years of existential uncertainty, Telegdi emerged as the director of the newly established Institute of Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1950), and he became a professor of general linguistics and Iranian Studies at the Eötvös Loránd University (1959) dealing with Tajik linguistics which was a sort of Soviet-Persian. At the time, he used to visit the Oriental Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on Saturday mornings. Later on, it was he who introduced general linguistics to Hungary, building an entire school and guiding the linguistic thinking of a whole generation. In his scarce free time during his forced labor service in the 1940s, he translated Plato's *Symposium* into Hungarian,<sup>41</sup> and in his later years he collaborated on a poetic translation of Firdausi's *Shahname*.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Sigmund Telegdi, "Essai sur la phonétique des emprunts iraniens en araméen talmudique," *Journal Asiatique* 226 (1935): 177–256. All three of Telegdi's studies quoted here are reprinted in his *Opera omnia*, ed. Éva M. Jeremiás (Acta et Studia, 4) (Piliscsaba – Budapest: The Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies – Akadémiai Kiadó, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Platon, *A lakoma* [Symposium], fordította és bevezetéssel ellátta [translated and introduced by] Telegdi Zsigmond (Budapest: Officina, 1941), second edition: 1942, further editions after World War II.

<sup>42</sup> Firdauszi, *Királyok könyve* [Book of the Kings], fordította [translated by] Devecseri Gábor (Európa, 1959). In his preface to the translation, Devecseri thanks Telegdi for his help in Persian matters.

István Hahn, after having been a professor at the Seminary since 1941 lecturing on Jewish philosophy in fluent Hebrew and serving as the deputy director of the short-lived Tarbut Grammar School in Budapest, closed the doors of the Seminary behind him without saying good-bye. A symbolic milestone of his ideological conversion was his paper in the *Yearbook* of the former Israelite Hungarian Literary Society (IMIT) in 1948, the first and only volume after World War II. The two words in the title of his paper, “The revolution of the prophets”<sup>43</sup> (literally, “the prophets’ revolution”), point to his previous and later commitments at the same time. The paper itself is a brilliant socio-historical analysis of social protests in ancient Israel, as reflected in the prophetic corpus of the Bible. After significant difficulties, in part because of his rabbinic background and because of his postwar membership in the Social Democratic Party, Hahn obtained an appointment at the Eötvös Loránd University in 1957 and finally became the Chair of Ancient History, a prominent and celebrated teacher and scholar, and a member of the Academy of Sciences (which Scheiber never was). His high school textbook on Jewish history,<sup>44</sup> written during his Seminary years, and his other books on Jewish customs and holidays<sup>45</sup> have been republished again and again.<sup>46</sup> His history textbook ends with the establishment of the State of Israel, and it is still read today by college students. On a personal note, I was sitting at his feet in his one-student Hebrew class every Saturday morning for years (1957–1961); texts such as the Tanakh, Mishna, and the Isaiah scroll were in front of me, and he was looking at them upside down, or simply reciting them by heart—a truly unforgettable teacher. For Telegdi and Hahn, and for others of their generation, the Seminary was an intellectual refuge during periods of persecution, and in the 1950s the university was an escape from the intellectual ghetto the Communist regime created around institutions of all faiths.

After a few years (1950–1956) in which the directorship of the Seminary alternated between Ernő Róth (professor from 1941 onward) and Alexander Scheiber

<sup>43</sup> István Hahn, “A próféták forradalma,” in [IMIT] *Évkönyv, 1948* (Budapest: n. p., 1948).

<sup>44</sup> István Hahn, *A zsidó nép története a babilóni fogságtól napjainkig* [History of the Jewish People from the Babylonian Captivity to our Days] (A Pesti Izr. Hitközség vallásoktatási kiadványai [Publications of the Pest Isr. Community for Religious Education], vol. 1) (Budapest: Új Idők Irodalmi Intézet / n.d. [Singer és Wolfner], [1947]), 157–181.

<sup>45</sup> István Hahn, *Zsidó ünnepek és népszokások* [Jewish Holidays and Customs], Új zsidó könyvtár [New Jewish Library], (Budapest: Viktória Nyomda, 1940); *A fény ünnepe (Chanukka)* (Javne Könyvek [Javne Library], vol. 3 (Budapest: Magyar Zsidók Pro Palesztina Szövetsége, n. d. [1941])).

<sup>46</sup> *Zsidó ünnepek és népszokások*, reprinted (Budapest, 1995, 1997, 2004); *A fény ünnepe*, reprinted: (Tel Aviv: Sinai, n. d.); *A zsidó nép története*, reprinted (Budapest, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2004).



(professor from 1945 onward), Róth left and Scheiber remained alone, perhaps because of their ambitions that were mutually embarrassing for both men. I quote Scheiber's own words, modest and proud at the same time, uttered on the occasion of his seventieth birthday: "I was not a great scholar, I just remained alone." Neither one of these assertions is completely true. He was not alone in the Seminary, and he was a great scholar indeed. He pursued his research in *aggadah*, medieval manuscripts, and Genizah Studies in particular,<sup>47</sup> the field in which he was among the best scholars worldwide. The *Acta Orientalia* of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was eager to publish his text-editions from the Kaufmann Collection, but deliberately only once a year in order to maintain the extensive international inter-library book exchange. Besides, or rather through, his scholarly and teaching commitments, Scheiber was able to maintain the spirit of a Jewish community around the synagogue of the Seminary during a critical period. His *kiddush* in the ceremonial hall on the second floor of the Seminary, held after the Friday evening services, eventually became a semipublic forum of Jewish intellectual life, perhaps the only such forum at the time, in which—thanks to the erudition of Scheiber himself and the frank talks by his visiting guests from abroad—issues in, and the latest results of Jewish scholarship, including his own, were covered.

In the early 1980s, the Oriental Studies Committee of the Academy of Sciences—presided over by the "great mogul" of the academy, the Mongolian and Tibetan scholar Lajos Ligeti—examined the situation of *Judaic Studies* in Hungary. The generous decision of the board was that it would be enough if Jewish Studies were continued in the Rabbinical Seminary, and Hebrew taught at Eötvös Loránd University in the fields of general Semitics and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. The latter "forum" was this writer, holding regularly a *privatissimum* for a slowly growing number of students from the academic year 1962/63 onwards. The institutionalization of Jewish Studies either at a university or the Academy was, in these decades, out of the question in Hungary.

In 1987, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in New York proposed that the Hungarian Academy of Sciences establish, with the Foundation's initial assistance, a research and teaching institution in Jewish Studies. Iván T. Berend, an economic historian and then president of the Academy, reacted positively, and the Center for Jewish Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was set up within a short period of time. For its teaching tasks, it was affiliated with the Chair of Assyriology at Eötvös Loránd University, which was, in turn, renamed the Department of Assyriology and Hebrew Studies. The following year, scholars such as Ephraim E. Urbach (former president of the Israeli Academy of Sciences

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<sup>47</sup> Alexander Scheiber, *Geniza Studies* (Collectanea, 17.) (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1981).

and Humanities), Peter Schäfer (then professor at Free University in Berlin), Géza Vermes (professor at Oxford University), and Pinhas Artzi (professor at Bar-Ilan University) took part in the inauguration. Urbach gave the keynote lecture on “Academic Research and Religious Scholarship.” Over the course of the following twenty-odd years, this small institute, never larger than three or four researchers, produced, wrote, or edited over thirty-five large volumes of scholarship in the series *Hungaria Judaica*, and wrote or supervised over fifty BA, MA, or PhD theses in Jewish Studies, all based on Hebrew texts. Our former students and graduates can be found in virtually all important institutions of higher education in Hungary where Hebrew is taught or where Jewish Studies exists—as students, researchers, fellows, leaders at Central European University, the Rabbinical Seminary, the Jewish Museum, the Jewish Archive, and Jewish schools. Our students have been accepted to PhD programs at prestigious universities abroad, such as Harvard, Oxford, and the University of Pennsylvania, and have found scholarly appointments at renowned institutions; for example, at the British Library or Yad Vashem. There has been consistently good cooperation between our Center and the Rabbinical Seminary. Joseph Schweitzer, its director at the time, was a permanent source of help. He and other faculty members at the Seminary, including visiting instructors from Israel, have participated in our teaching program, and our students have participated in academic exchange programs.

In 2012, after some twenty-five years of activity, this center became a shadow of its former self. With the approval of the General Assembly of the Academy, the current president reorganized the entire research network of the academy and established an all-encompassing Center for Social Sciences, in which our center became a nameless fragment—a small section of its Institute for Minority Studies. The name Center for Jewish Studies, as featured in the program of this conference, has ceased to exist officially, and can be used only informally, depending on the leniency or favor of the authorities. There have been significant cuts in personnel as well. The research group consisting of 2.75 appointments all together (2012) has no appointed head, no independent budget, no right to employ anyone, no secretary or administrative assistance, and not even the right to order books or to apply for grants on its own. We have, so far, enjoyed the benevolence of our direct superiors and work continues, but we have been deprived of our integrity. The system is wrong: an effective academic institution of Jewish learning within the Academy of Sciences and the University is eventually going to disappear this way. Removing Jewish Studies means, at the very least, a return to the nationalistic notion of Oriental Studies. After the Holocaust, it was possible to establish an institute for Jewish Studies anywhere given certain preconditions; but to close such an institute is shocking. Even the name holds symbolic value.

Nonetheless, there is good news as well. Central European University (CEU), our host tonight, offers a Jewish Studies specialization at the MA and PhD levels, which is integrated into the History, Medieval Studies, and Nationalism Studies departments. At the beginning, the teaching program at CEU was mainly oriented towards politics, but it has always had the opportunity to invite outstanding scholars from abroad and has always done so in various subfields within Jewish Studies. And now it has outstanding fellows in early modern and modern Jewish and rabbinic history. CEU and our Center have always had students in common, much to our mutual intellectual benefit.

The Rabbinical Seminary was transformed in 2000 into a National Rabbinical School – Jewish University (Országos Rabbiképző – Zsidó Egyetem / ORZsE), adhering to the spirit of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* tradition. In addition to rabbinical and cantorial subjects, it now teaches Jewish history and culture and offers various degrees at several levels. It has resumed the publication of journals from the earlier Seminary, initiated reprints of books by Bacher, Blau, Guttmann, and other luminaries of the Seminary, and has many talented students. In short, it has enormous academic potential that has not been fully exploited yet, as well as a unique perspective. One can only regret that in preparation for this conference no cooperation with ORZsE, which celebrates its 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, was possible.

To sum up this historical overview, Hungarian academia and the Academy of Sciences, involved in all national branches of Oriental Studies, were never engaged in Jewish Studies, except in the latter's decision in 1987 as previously mentioned. As for the Rabbinical Seminary established 135 years ago, besides its main duty and mission of educating rabbis, it represented in its own way the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Despite its disregard in academic circles in Hungary, rabbi-professors at the Seminary did their best, and they established a glorious place in the history of academic scholarship and Oriental Studies.

By now, at the end of my paper, I think that all of you have understood why I refrained this time from outlining a precise definition of Oriental Studies (*Orientalistik*), be it called Middle Eastern, Asian and African, or Ancient Near Eastern Studies. I am aware of the problems inherent in the title of my lecture; namely, whether Jewish Studies is to be included in any of these disciplines. It is my conviction that the field of Jewish Studies must stand independently and certainly must have a place in the academic world. Through scholarly and even secular research, and by adhering to academic standards of research as well as to freedom of opinion, Jewish Studies can and must help reconstruct Jewish intellectual life and increase awareness in society at large about the role Jews have played in history and continue to play in the present.