

## SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

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### JEWISH ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS IN MISKOLC IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD\*

#### Abstract

In 1920 Hungary's second largest Jewish community lived in Miskolc, where they maintained a variety of community organisations whilst partaking in the city's various economic, professional and political establishments. Their Jewishness was a simple matter of faith, not a question of nationality. The present essay purports to provide a detailed description of Jewish institutions and organisations in an effort to demonstrate the operation of this special (Hungarian) Jewish identity in an urban setting in the countryside.

**Key Words:** Jews, Miskolc (Hungary), Interwar Period, organisations, Jewish-Christian relations.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Żydzi, Miskolc (Węgry), okres międzywojenny, organizacje, stosunki żydowsko-chrześcijańskie.

In 1920 the Jewish population of Miskolc peaked at 11,300 people, ranking only second to the much more populous community of Budapest, the capital of Hungary. In fact, Miskolc featured as “the most Judaised city of the Hungarian countryside” as more than one-fifth of the approximately 50,000 Jews living in urban centres outside Budapest resided in this north-eastern city.<sup>1</sup> The number of Jews started to increase significantly in Miskolc in the middle of the nineteenth century, and by the end of the First World War they had become a well-established and respected segment of the local society. Besides their community-maintained

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<sup>1</sup> In 1920, more than 200,000 people (accounting for 45 percent of all Hungarian Jews) were concentrated in Budapest. István Dobrossy and István Stipta, eds., *Miskolc története V/1: 1918-tól 1949-ig* [The history of Miskolc V/1: From 1918 to 1949] (Miskolc: Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltár, Herman Ottó Múzeum, 2007), 176.

institutions (e.g. religious, fraternal, educational), Jews had gained membership – including leadership positions – in various local as well as regional and national economic, professional and political organisations.

Being a piece of institutional history, the present essay purports to provide a detailed description of the diverse Jewish institutions and organisations of interwar Miskolc in an effort to demonstrate the unique experience of Hungarian Jewish existence in an urban setting of the countryside. Unlike the neighbouring countries of Czechoslovakia and Romania where Jews maintained a strong Jewish identity and actively supported Zionism, Hungary stood “half-way between the western and eastern models of integration”,<sup>2</sup> which made Jewishness a simple matter of faith instead of a question of nationality. A closer look at the Jewish institutions of the time in Miskolc illustrates the operation of this special Jewish identity in the local community. At the same time, while Jews maintained institutions separate from – but similar to – those of the larger Christian community, they actively participated in the city’s economic, cultural, and political life, a telling fact of the extent of their integration into the host society. Their professed Hungarian patriotism and the limited influence of Jewish nationalism in the city are further proof to the high degree of assimilation among local Jews.

According to Viktor Karády, the fact that numerically Roman Catholics, followers of the state religion in Hungary, remained a minority proved the existence of fairly balanced power relations between religious groups, which was a factor driving religious toleration and hastening Jewish integration in the country.<sup>3</sup> The religious distribution of Miskolc in 1920 supported this assumption. Table 1 (see below) shows that the Jewish community accounted for 19.8 per cent of the city population, which made it the third most populous religious group in Miskolc. At the time Jews were preceded by Roman Catholics, who constituted almost half (44.3 per cent) of the local inhabitants, and by Reformed Christians, who had a share of 26.8 per cent.

Table 1

Religious distribution in Miskolc (1920)

Religious affiliation	Number	Percent
Roman Catholic	25,230	44.3
Greek Catholic	2,175	3.8
Reformed Christian	15,278	26.8
Evangelical	2,784	4.9
Israelite	11,300	19.8

SOURCE: Béla Halmay and Andor Leszih, eds., *Miskolc* [Miskolc] (Budapest: Magyar Városok Monográfiája Kiadóhivatala, 1929), 175.

<sup>2</sup> Viktor Karády, *Zsidóság Európában a modern korban: Társadalomtörténeti vázlat* [The Jews of Europe in the modern era: A socio-historical outline], Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2000, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168.

Although, as a result of increasing emigration and worsening economic conditions in the aftermath of the Great Depression, Jewish numbers and ratios started to decline after 1920 (see Table 2 below), Jews in Miskolc continued to live in a community appreciated by the general public and continued to maintain several own institutions and organisations while still forming an integral part of the local society. Despite a general flare-up in anti-Jewish sentiments in Hungary, anti-semitism did not take deep root in Miskolc. Fundamental changes occurred there only as a result of anti-Jewish legislation by the Hungarian Parliament in the late 1930s<sup>4</sup> and of the German occupation of the country on 19 March 1944, ultimately leading to the Holocaust and the murder of the great majority of Miskolc Jews.<sup>5</sup>

Table 2

Jewish population in Miskolc (1920–1941)<sup>6</sup>

Year	Number	Percent
1920	11,300	19.8
1930	10,862	17.6
1941	10,428	13.5

SOURCE: *Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények Új Sorozat* [Bulletin of Hungarian statistics new series], vol. 83, *Az 1930. évi népszámlálás* [The census of 1930], part 1, *Demográfiai adatok községek és külterületi lakóhelyek szerint* [Demographic data by municipalities and settled outskirts] (Budapest: Magyar Kir. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1932), 26–27; *Történeti Statisztikai Kötetek: Az 1941. évi népszámlálás* [Volumes of historical statistics: The census of 1941], part 2, *Demográfiai adatok községek szerint* [Demographic data by municipalities] (Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vállalat, 1976), 207. (Hereafter cited as *Az 1941. évi népszámlálás*.)

The organisations maintained by Jews in interwar Miskolc followed the traditional patterns of other Jewish communities in Hungary and abroad, developing

<sup>4</sup> The Hungarian Parliament passed three anti-Jewish laws in 1938–1941 that effectively restricted the Jewish presence in the economy, the professions and culture. The third anti-Jewish measure in 1941 was a racial law that provided a strict definition as to who was considered to be Jewish.

<sup>5</sup> The exact number of victims is unknown. Approximately 80 per cent of the Jewish population of Miskolc perished in the Holocaust. See I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *op. cit.*, pp. 206–207; Randolph L. Brahm, *A népi társaság politikája: A Holocaust Magyarországon* [The politics of genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary], vol. 1, Budapest: Belvárosi Könyvkiadó, 1997, p. 674; Tamás Csiki, “A miskolci zsidóság a holocaust időszakában” [The Jews of Miskolc during the Holocaust], accessed June 3, 2013, [http://epa.oszk.hu/02000/02030/00033/pdf/HOM\\_Evkonyv\\_40\\_335-345.pdf](http://epa.oszk.hu/02000/02030/00033/pdf/HOM_Evkonyv_40_335-345.pdf), 345.

<sup>6</sup> By way of comparison, the Jewish ratio was 16.4 per cent in Košice in 1930, 2.6 per cent in Opava in 1931, and 25.8 per cent in Kraków in 1931. See “‘Kosice’ – Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities, Slovakia,” JewishGen, accessed June 3, 2013, [http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas\\_slovakia/slo495.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_slovakia/slo495.html); “Opava,” Jewish Virtual Library, accessed June 3, 2013, [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0015\\_0\\_15119.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0015_0_15119.html); Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 23.

around the core teachings of Judaism such as worshiping God and emphasis on study, work and benevolence.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, they fell in four major categories: 1. religious establishments; 2. institutions of learning; 3. work-related organisations; 4. and benevolent and public service institutions. Some of the organisations had been established as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the majority originating in the 1800s and only a few founded between the world wars. When speaking of the Interwar Period, one must add also a fifth category to the list, that of Zionist associations that sprang up in considerable number in Miskolc in the late 1920s and in the 1930s. The following pages will elaborate on these categories one by one.

### Religious Establishments

Starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a number of uncertainties surround the early history of Jews in Miskolc. One ambiguity concerns their date of appearance in the city. While historical records show that the first Jew permanently settled there sometime between 1727 and 1736,<sup>8</sup> the exact date of his arrival and the precise year when a Jewish congregation was formed are unknown. But, surely, among the first Jewish institutions were religious establishments such as the cemetery, which was opened in 1759 and was still serving the community in the Interwar Period. Prayer houses, which in the beginning served as the centres of religious life, were also quickly appearing. Already in 1795, the city records documented the opening of a “newly-built” synagogue of the Jewish community.<sup>9</sup>

In the interwar years, Miskolc Jews attended two synagogues and several prayer rooms and prayer houses to practice religion. The older Kazinczy Street Synagogue was opened to the public in 1863 followed by the Palóczy Street Synagogue in 1901, which was built on the remains of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century prayer house.<sup>10</sup> The two houses of worship reflected the inner conflicts of the community

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, according to Judaic teachings, the World rests on three pillars: Torah (i.e. reading and learning the Torah), divine service (prayer), and acts of kindness (charity and good deeds). See “World’s 3 Pillars,” Kabbalah Online, accessed May 15, 2013, [http://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article\\_cdo/aid/379488/jewish/12-Worlds-3-Pillars.htm](http://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/379488/jewish/12-Worlds-3-Pillars.htm). Clearly, these teachings served as guidelines in the development of community establishments in Miskolc.

<sup>8</sup> Howard N. Lupovitch, *Jews at the Crossroads: Tradition and Accommodation during the Golden Age of the Hungarian Nobility, 1729–1878*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007, p. xxii.

<sup>9</sup> János Szendrei, *Miskolcz város története és egyetemes helyirata* [A general history of the town of Miskolc], vol. 4, *Miskolcz város története 1800–1910* [The history of the town of Miskolc, 1800–1910], Miskolcz: A város közönsége, 1911, pp. 396–397. After it had burned down in 1843, the first synagogue was rebuilt but, in time, proved to be too small for the growing community. The Kazinczy Street Synagogue was built as a result between 1861 and 1863. See Béla Halmai and Andor Leszi, *Miskolc*, Budapest: Magyar Városok Monográfiája Kiadóhivatala, 1929, pp. 202–203.

<sup>10</sup> J. Szendrei, *op. cit.*, pp. 398–399.

that originated in the Hungarian Jewish schism of 1868–1869,<sup>11</sup> which arose in the aftermath of the emancipation of Jews in Hungary in 1867. The Hungarian community consequently split into three distinctive groups – Neolog, Orthodox, and Status Quo Ante – that reflected ideological differences in regard with acculturation and religious reform. In 1871, the conflict ended with the formation of an Orthodox congregation in Miskolc and the city eventually evolved to be the centre of Orthodox Judaism in Hungary.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the advance of the reform movement among members of the Jewish elite in Miskolc, which led to the erection of a Neolog temple on Kazinczy Street<sup>13</sup> and the introduction of Hungarian as the language of sermons as well as of the language of communal protocols. These developments were indicative of the progress of assimilation among Jews in Miskolc, which paralleled and even surpassed national statistics. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hungarian-language sermons were given in 87 per cent of the Neolog synagogues and in 13 per cent of the Orthodox ones. Furthermore, while, in 1910, 76 per cent of all Hungarian Jews claimed Hungarian to be their mother tongue, the ratio among Miskolc Jews reached as high as 97.4 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of the growing influence of the Jewish reform movement in the late 1800s, Orthodoxy prevailed so much so that extremely conservative-minded members, the so-called Sephardim, made repeated attempts even as late as 1925 to establish an autonomous congregation. Although they failed in their efforts except for a brief period between 1877 and 1888, the ultra-Orthodox minority, which numbered merely 150 in 1919, chose its own Sephardic rabbi in addition to maintaining a ritual bath (*mikveh*), kosher slaughterhouses, a matzo bakery, a school and prayer houses. Meanwhile the official Orthodox community operated parallel religious facilities, including the Neolog-turned-Orthodox synagogue on Kazinczy Street and the temple on Palóczy Street.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Similar developments resulted in neolog majorities in Opava and Košice, and the growing presence of progressives in Kraków earned the city “its reputation as a centre of Polonised Jewish culture.” “Kosice” – Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities, Slovakia”; “Opava”; Sean Martin, “Kraków: Kraków After 1795,” accessed June 3, 2013, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Krakow/Krakow\\_after\\_1795](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Krakow/Krakow_after_1795).

<sup>12</sup> Hungarian Royal Minister of Religion and Education, Ministerial Statement No. 1024-II. 1925, Box 31/1, Folder IV. 1925/B, Records of the Miskolc Israelite Community, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltára [Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives]. (Hereafter cited as Records of the Miskolc Israelite Community).

<sup>13</sup> The synagogue on Kazinczy Street was later redesigned as an Orthodox shul and is still serving the community.

<sup>14</sup> J. Szendrei, *op. cit.*, p. 400; V. Karády, *op. cit.*, p. 168; Alajos Kovács, *Miskolc lakosságának összetétele* [The population composition of Miskolc], Budapest: Magyar Kir. Udvari Könyvnyomda, 1930, pp. 14–15.

<sup>15</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, eds., *Miskolc története V/2: 1918-tól 1949-ig* [The history of Miskolc V/2: From 1918 to 1949] (Miskolc: Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltár, Herman Ottó Múzeum, 2007), pp. 299–301; Hungarian Royal Minister of Religion and Education, Ministerial Statement No. 1024-II. 1925, Records of the Miskolc Israelite Community; Minutes of

Chief Rabbi Samuel Austerlitz headed the Orthodox congregation in Miskolc during the crucial decades between 1914 and 1939. While his conservatism was without doubt, he kept a balance between the Neolog and Orthodox attitudes in the community. It was proof to his conservativeness that he preferred praying at the Palóczy Street Synagogue where, in accordance with Orthodox tradition, the *bimah* (the platform for reading the Torah) was placed in the centre of the building instead of before the Holy Ark. In fact, Rabbi Austerlitz spent most of his time at Palóczy Street, as his house stood in the courtyard of the synagogue where a famous *yeshivah* (a special kind of Jewish school) also operated.<sup>16</sup> Jewish educational facilities will be the topic of discussion in the next part of the essay.

### Institutions of learning

In the Interwar Period, several institutions served the Jewish population of Miskolc in fulfilling the educational requirements of Judaism.<sup>17</sup> While most Jewish organisations of the time dated back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the sphere of education saw a number of new creations both at the elementary and secondary levels. While a positive development in itself, the opening of new community-owned educational facilities came as a necessity since non-Jewish institutions increasingly declined to accept Jewish students after the First World War. It is no surprise, therefore, that it was the area of education in which Miskolc Jews truly excelled during the decades between the world wars.

In the Jewish faith, the temple serves multiple functions: it is a house of prayer, of assembly, and of social work just as it is a house of study. In the Interwar Period, two types of schools existed in Miskolc in close relation to the synagogues: the Talmud Torah and the yeshivah. While the Talmud Torah was a community facility for poor children under the age of 13, the yeshivah provided a higher level of education for advanced students over 13 who, upon completing their studies,

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Meetings on 24 February 1919, 25 December 1921, and 19 August 1925, Records of the Miskolc Israelite Community; Estimate of Properties Owned by the Israelite Orthodox Community, Records of the Miskolc Israelite Community. The Palóczy Street Synagogue was severely damaged in the Second World War and was subsequently demolished in 1963. See I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, p. 299.

<sup>16</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, pp. 298–299.

<sup>17</sup> Already in ancient times education was free and compulsory up to 13 years of age in Jewish communities. 5–6-year-old children started to study the Torah at the traditional Jewish elementary school called *cheder* (meaning 'room') and continued with the Talmud in upper grades. The first Jewish elementary school in Miskolc opened in 1784. See Tamás Raj, *Száz jiddis szó: Zsidóságismeret új megközelítésben* [One hundred Yiddish words: A new perspective on Judaism], accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.zsido.hu/ujelet/archiv/u971308.htm>; Péter Újvári, ed., *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon* [Hungarian Jewish encyclopedia], Budapest: Magyar Zsidó Lexikon, 1929, p. 607.

could decide between becoming rabbis and choosing a civil profession. At the end of the 1920s, there were three of each type of schools in Miskolc.<sup>18</sup>

Besides educational institutions with a primarily religious function, the Jewish community maintained facilities that satisfied the general needs of the community just as well as Hungarian legal requirements for compulsory school attendance between the ages of 6 and 15. The Erzsébet Israelite Elementary School, which began operation in 1901, featured as the best-known school of Miskolc Jews in the Interwar Period, when it was one among the fourteen elementary schools in the city. This modern institution had a conference room and an assembly hall in addition to its eighteen classrooms. The number of its pupils reached record height in 1925 when 1,751 students attended the facility: 780 children studied at the elementary level and 971 at the secondary level.<sup>19</sup>

The reason for the presence of upper-grade students at the Erzsébet elementary school was the establishment of two Jewish secondary schools shortly after the end of the First World War. The number of secondary schools subsequently grew to six in Miskolc. First, the Israelite Orthodox Secondary School for Girls was opened in 1919 followed by a parallel institution for boys in 1923. Before 1926, the Erzsébet elementary had housed both upper-level facilities under the direction of Dr. Adolf Serbu but, due to an increase in the student population, the girls' secondary eventually moved into its own separate buildings. The girls' school had 47 pupils at start in 1919 but already in the 1920–1921 school year, the number of attendees reached 182 and, with the opening of consecutive grades, it ultimately grew to 422. When the school moved into its own facilities in 1926, even a tennis court and a skate rink were added. In this year the teaching staffs of the two secondary schools also became separated with five teachers educating boys and ten educating girls in the 1927–1928 school year. The boys' secondary consequently came under the direction of Norbert Bartos until the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>20</sup>

The Orthodox Israelite Teacher Training Institute, which opened in 1929 under the leadership of Dr. Serbu, was a unique institution of Miskolc Jews – the only one of its kind in Hungary and, in fact, in all of Central Europe.<sup>21</sup> It began

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<sup>18</sup> Philip Birnbaum, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1998, pp. 81, 204; P. Újvári, *op. cit.*, pp. 607–608.

<sup>19</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, p. 324; “Kő és korsó:” *Képek Észak-Kelet-Magyarország zsidóságának történetéből* [Stone and jug: The history of the Jews of Northeastern Hungary in pictures], Miskolc: Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Múzeum Igazgatóság, 1992, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, pp. 332–333; Ráv Slomo Paszternák, *Miskolc és környéke mártírkönyve: A szent gyülekezetek Hidasnémetitől Mezőkövesdig és Ózdtól Szerencsig* [Book on the Martyrs in Miskolc and the surrounding areas: The sacred communities from Hidasnémeti to Mezőkövesd and from Ózd to Szerencs], Tel Aviv: A szerző kidása, 1970, pp. 38–39; B. Halmay and A. Leszih, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>21</sup> Since Evangelicals and Catholics ran separate institutions, at the time there were three teacher training institutes in Miskolc. See I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, pp. 349–351.

operations on the second floor of the building of the girls' secondary with a staff of seven full-time and two part-time teachers, including one teacher of religion. After having opened all five grades, the number of students stood at 113. Due to the changing general atmosphere before the Second World War, the student population started to decrease in the middle of the 1930s. Since half of the student body was made up of pupils who held residence outside of Miskolc and since those from faraway counties ceased to enrol at the institute after 1940, the number of attendees dropped to 47 in the 1941–1942 school year. In 1943, the seniors, who comprised the last class completing all exams, numbered no more than 25.<sup>22</sup>

Besides Jewish institutions, Jewish students also attended schools of the Christian communities: Reformed Christian, Catholic, and Evangelical educational facilities. Table 3 below shows the changing number of Jewish students at Jewish and non-Jewish institutions in the decades between 1915 and 1935. Obviously, the Interwar Period saw a sharp increase in the number of pupils attending community-operated schools as compared with the pre-First World War period when an approximately equal number studied at Jewish and at Christian facilities. The tendency paralleled the national phenomenon of Jews increasingly being pushed out of Christian schools in these decades.<sup>23</sup>

Table 3

Number of Jewish students (1915–1935)

Year	Jewish schools	Other schools	Total
1915	1,109	1,078	2,187
1925	1,751	820	2,571
1935	1,051	709	1,760

SOURCE: Paszternák, *Miskolc és környéke mártírkönyve*, p. 40.

Jewish youth, however, formed a considerable portion of the student body at Christian institutions in Miskolc despite the high tuition fees required and other difficulties involved. At the Reformed Christian Grammar School, for instance, they were 7.5 per cent of the student body and, at times, reached 10 per cent between the world wars. The representation of Jews at the Royal Catholic Grammar School was even higher. Already in 1913, 200 Jews out of a total number of 546 pupils studied at the institution, and Jews accounted for 14 per cent of the student body in the Interwar Period. According to Professor Karády, Hungarian Jews returned such hospitality with good grades especially in the so-called “national cultural” subjects of history and Hungarian language and literature.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> B. Halmai and A. Leszih, *op. cit.*, pp. 226–227; I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, p. 351.

<sup>23</sup> V. Karády, *op. cit.*, 235.

<sup>24</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, pp. 345–346, 348; V. Karády, *op. cit.*, pp. 235, 238–239.

Despite all hardship in the aftermath of the First World War, the changing historical environment made it possible for Miskolc Jews also to conduct studies at an institution of higher education in their own locality. In 1919, as Upper Hungary came under Czech occupation, the Evangelical Law Academy from Eperjes (Prešov) was transferred to Miskolc. Although, in 1920, a Hungarian law called *numerus clausus* (meaning ‘closed number’) imposed restrictions on the number of admissible Jewish students, the Evangelical Church defied the new regulation claiming immunity from the law on a founder’s right.<sup>25</sup>

### Work-Related Organisations

The third major category of Jewish organisations in interwar Miskolc involved the sphere of work. One way for Jews to fulfil the corresponding commandments was by participation in various work-related organisations, most of which had been established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued to operate in the Interwar Period. They included exclusively Jewish as well as non-denominational institutions. The most important among them was the United Jewish Industrial Association. Its predecessor, the Jewish guild, had been formed in 1836 and put on the new name in 1864. The association was not simply an interest group but also engaged in philanthropy – in 1911, it established an own asylum to care for aged artisans and people unable to work. Prominent representatives of the Jewish community sat on its executive board between the world wars such as Jakab Pick, József Freund, Jakab Ariel, Dezső Fazekas, and its honorary president, Ödön Györi.<sup>26</sup>

Jewish commercial interests of Miskolc founded separate institutions. Their most influential organisation was the Merchants and Agriculturists Club, which was created in 1900 and whose membership numbered 709 in the late 1920s. It involved representatives of the Jewish elite and was the most populous casino in the city. Several times each year, the club hosted banquets and political, scientific, and literary lectures, thereby making precious contribution to the city’s cultural life. Pál Munk and Samu Munk were among the founders of the organisation, and Gyula Baruch served as its director.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to organisations whose membership was restricted to Jews, Miskolc Jews joined several non-denominational associations and usually gained a prominent role in their operation. One such institution was the National Casino,

<sup>25</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, pp. 351–352.

<sup>26</sup> P. Újvári, *op. cit.*, p. 606; J. Szendrei, *op. cit.*, pp. 708–710, 716; B. Halmai and A. Leszih, *op. cit.*, p. 204; Béla Kórákó and Andor Vér, comps., *Miskolc thif. város társadalmi, kulturális és közgazdasági vezető férfainak albuma* [Album of leading personalities of Miskolc in society, culture, and economy], Miskolc: Klein-Ludvig-Szelényi Nyomda, 1927 (Hereafter cited as Kórákó and Vér, *Miskolc vezető férfainak albuma*).

<sup>27</sup> Béla Zsedényi, *Miskolc szellemi élete és kultúrája* [The intellectual and cultural life of Miskolc], Miskolc: Magyar Jövő, 1929, p. 71; B. Kórákó and A. Vér, *Miskolc vezető férfainak albuma*.

which was founded in 1833 and became the only casino with a mixed Jewish-Christian membership in the city.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, a great number of Jews were among the members and leaders of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, including President Adolf Neumann who served in the same capacity on the Jewish-dominated Board of Trade. It is telling of the extent of Jewish influence over the latter body that only four of its twenty-three officers were exempted from the Second Anti-Jewish Law in 1939, and only for reasons of distinguished service in the First World War. One of the exempted persons, Károly Ferenczi, was an emblematic figure of the city's social and cultural life as the owner of a famous bookshop and a concert hall, which invited musicians from all over the world to perform in Miskolc. With Samuel Stern acting as vice-president, the Board of Industries was one more organisation in which Jews exercised great leverage.<sup>29</sup>

Jews were likewise active in joining various professional associations. Besides the all-Jewish Israelite Teachers' Welfare Association, they were deeply involved with the Miskolc Chapter of the National League of Commercial Workers, and several presidents of the Chamber of Lawyers, such as Gusztáv Hollaender, Dr. Károly Glós, Aladár Röck, and its all-time vice-president Dr. Sándor Frankfurter, were Jewish. Gyula Baruch of the same religious background served as president of the Board of Pharmacists, and Samu Klein presided over the National Association of Newspaper Publishers of the Countryside to mention but a few of the involved organisations.<sup>30</sup>

The last area in the work-related category is Jewish participation in the governing bodies and political life of Miskolc. In addition to most of the aforementioned personalities including Chief Rabbi Austerlitz; Mór Weltner, the manager of the Borsod County Savings Bank; Dr. Miksa Egry, chief physician of Borsod County; and Dr. Dezső Forgács, a lawyer, sat on the City Council and its subcommittees. In fact, the number of Jewish representatives in the General Assembly was so high – twenty-five persons – that the body became almost inoperable as a result of the implementation of the Second Anti-Jewish Law. Dr. Lajos Láng, one more lawyer by profession, was another member of the city governance, and even more than that. He was the founder of the Miskolc chapter of the Democratic Party and,

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<sup>28</sup> Membership in the Civil Casino – the third casino of Miskolc established in 1837 – was limited to Christians. I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, p. 120; B. Zsedényi, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/1*, p. 187; B. Kőrakó and A. Vér, *Miskolc vezető férfainak albuma*; Office of the Mayor, Miskolc, General Records, Box XXI. 503/a, Folder IV. 1906, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltára [Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives]; Tamás Csíki, "A zsidóság városokba telepedésének és gazdasági térfoglalásának néhány sajátossága Észak-, Északkelet-Magyarországon" [Some characteristics of urban Jewish settlement and economic expansion in northern and northeastern Hungary], *Studia Miskolcinsia 3. Történelmi tanulmányok* [Studies in history](1999), accessed May 31, 2013, <http://mek.oszk.hu/02000/02097/html/csiki.htm>; László Nagy Thurzó, *Miskolci lexikon* [A lexicon of Miskolc], vol. 2/A. (manuscript), pp. 44–45.

<sup>30</sup> B. Kőrakó and A. Vér, *op. cit.*

in his capacity as newspaperman, an ardent critic of anti-Jewish regulations. His disapproval of contemporary anti-Jewish attitudes, however, did not prevent him from acting as an advocate of Jewish patriotism, which will be demonstrated at the end of this essay.<sup>31</sup>

### Charitable and public service institutions

The penultimate type of Jewish organisations in interwar Miskolc was established to serve the public good. They featured some of the oldest institutions of the community such as the Hevrah Kaddisha and the Bikkur Cholim Society. The Chevrah Kaddisha, or Burial Society, was formed in 1768 with its chief responsibility being the care of the dying and the dead as well as the supervision of burying arrangements and the cemetery. In the 1920s Adolf Neumann, Ármin Bloch, József Klein, and Lajos Stamberger sat on its executive board. The other equally important organisation, the Bikkur Cholim Society, was founded in 1817 as an institution for tending the sick. Every day two members were required to visit sick people and two of them had to provide permanent supervision in cases of serious illnesses. Besides Márton Politzer, Izidor Feuerstein, and Ignác Gerő, Ármin Bloch of the Hevrah Kaddisha was a leading figure also of the Bikkur Cholim Society.<sup>32</sup>

Other bodies in this category included the Israelite Patronage Society and two women's organisations: the Israelite Women's Club and the Deborah Benevolent Society of Women. Founded in 1903, the Patronizing Society was one of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century establishments of the Jewish community that served two basic purposes: patronage of male children born to legally married couples and support of poor women after childbirth even if they lacked membership in the society. Of the two women's organisations, the Women's Club had had a longer history since its foundation in 1847. Its soup kitchen, which operated at the Erzsébet Elementary School and provided food for the needy – 200 persons per day – regardless of religious affiliation, served the public well in times of war and economic downturn. Furthermore it collected clothing for poor children and provided aid for their families. Mrs Samu Gencsi – who also ran a literary circle in her home – served as president of the club whose membership totaled 850 in the late 1920s and included in its leadership Mrs Ármin Szabó, Mrs Zsigmond Steinfeld, Mrs Pál Munk, Mrs Sándor Balog and Mrs Jakab Hochmann. The Deborah Benevolent Society of Women was, on the other hand, a later creation as it was founded by Mrs Jakab Princz in 1912. It agreed, however, with the Women's Club in its overall objective, namely the aid of the needy. Female members of the community joined it in great numbers resulting in a total membership of 1,415 at the end of the 1920s, including Mrs Hermann Blitz, Mrs Dávid Reich, Mrs Adolf Lőrinczi,

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*; I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/1*, p. 195.

<sup>32</sup> *Kő és korsó*, p. 9; B. Halmay and A. Leszih, *op. cit.*, pp. 201–202, 204.

Mrs Lajos Bonis and Mrs Manó Singer. The large number of followers made it possible for the society to run separate girls' and youth chapters.<sup>33</sup>

The Miskolc and Upper Hungary Jewish Hospital Association was the only newly-created public-service establishment of Jews in the Interwar Period. Following several similar initiatives in the past,<sup>34</sup> the foundation of a Jewish hospital had become a practical necessity in the 1920s, which established the association in 1924 under the leadership of Ödön Győri and Adolf Neumann. Plans called for the building of a 60–70-bed facility and constructions started accordingly. Although, already in 1925, a three-storied-building for use by the general public had been completed, in 1936 the facility was turned over to the army because of financial difficulties.<sup>35</sup>

### Zionist organisations

In describing Jewish organisations between the world wars, one must pay attention to the emergence of Zionist groups, a considerable number of which formed in Miskolc in the interwar years. Returning prisoners of war from Russia after the First World War introduced to local Jews the idea of a national home in Palestine. Together with members of the Kadimah Jewish boy scouts group in Budapest (established in 1913), these former POWs made a deep impression on secondary school youth who were excluded from all other boy scouts groups during the Hungarian White Terror of 1919–1920.<sup>36</sup> It was these young people led by Elemér Báneth who consequently created a Kadimah group in Miskolc.<sup>37</sup>

Yet the real beginning of the movement occurred in the late 1920s under the influence of Zionist organisations in Budapest. By this time the Kadimah had dispersed and, in 1927, two youth groups sprang up in its place: Zoltán Groszmann came to lead the Barissia for men and Rózsi Reinitz headed the Aviva for women. The local Orthodox congregation provided moral and financial support for the groups, which operated as its Cultural Youth Club in a two-room apartment donated by the community. Their total membership numbered about 50, and their main objectives included learning Hebrew and the study of Zionism, history, and the geography of Palestine.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, p. 109; *Kő és korsó*, p. 9; B. Halma y and A. Leszi h, *op. cit.*, pp. 202, 204, 323–324; B. Kőrakó and A. Vér, *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> During the First World War, for instance, the Jewish community operated, without any state or municipal support, a war hospital that accommodated 100 patients. See Minutes of Meeting on February 24, 1919, Records of the Miskolc Israelite Community.

<sup>35</sup> I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története V/2*, pp. 180–181.

<sup>36</sup> A wave of terror wrecked Hungary in 1919–1920 in retaliation of the acts of the Communist regime of Béla Kun, which had been established following the country's defeat in the First World War. Since a number of Jews sat on the Communist government, Jewish citizens became the primary targets of violence.

<sup>37</sup> R.S. Paszternák, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

The 1920s saw the emergence of further Zionist organisations in Miskolc such as the leftist Hashomer Hatzair<sup>39</sup> led by Sándor Groszmann and Zoltán Zeisler and the Mizrahi-influenced<sup>40</sup> Ben Zakkai, which eventually turned into B'nai Akiva and became the most active Zionist group in the city under Károly Klein, Hugó Berger, and Ruben Schön. They joined the Hachshara movement<sup>41</sup> of Alfréd Zuzman and József Wertheimer, who established the first Hachshara as a joiners' organisation in Miskolc. Its members constructed various pieces of furniture, which would later be used in the ghetto hospital set up during the concentration phase of the Hungarian anti-Jewish drive in May 1944. Chief Rabbi Samuel Austerlitz himself was a proponent of religious Zionism.<sup>42</sup>

The number of Zionist-influenced organisations continued to increase in the 1930s in response to the changing attitude toward Jews in Hungary. In 1930 young intellectuals like László Feldmann, Dr. József Szerényi, and Dr. Sándor Sebő established the Herzl Club<sup>43</sup> to heighten interest in Palestine. A local group of the Pro Palestine Association under Dr. Jakab Venetianer was another formation that sympathised with, although did not actively support, Zionists. A special kind of Zionist initiative was the establishment of an exclusively Jewish sports club called Előre [Go!] in the early 1930s, which achieved considerable success in soccer, table tennis and tennis competitions under the leadership of Elemér Báneth, László Mandula, and Ignác Gottlieb. Finally Zionist organisations also made cultural contributions as, two or three times a year, they hosted public lectures to entertain a Jewish audience in the assembly hall of the Erzsébet Elementary School.<sup>44</sup>

Rather deceivingly, all of the above information suggests that Zionism found fertile ground in Miskolc. Yet a closer look at the combined membership of the aforementioned groups, totalling 250 persons, reveals that only a small minority of the city's Jewish population – 2.4 per cent according to the 1941 census – engaged in Zionist activities. This state of affairs in Miskolc was not a unique phenomenon, as the movement had a restricted influence in all of Hungary. By this time Hungarian Jews had acquired a “national” character, and the majority of the

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<sup>39</sup> Hashomer Hatzair was the first Zionist youth movement. It was established in Poland in 1913. Hashomer Hatzair, accessed May 31, 2013, <http://www.hashomer-hatzair.org/pages/english.aspx>.

<sup>40</sup> Followers of the Mizrahi Movement were religious Zionists.

<sup>41</sup> In order to make aliyah (i.e. to emigrate to Palestine) in the pre-WWII period, it was necessary to spend a certain amount of time at a hachshara, a special kind of Zionist establishment, where young people received training to be able to perform agricultural or industrial work in Palestine. Sófár Egyesület, accessed May 31, 2013, <http://regi.sofar.hu/en/enciklopedia/lexikonok/cionizmus/hachsara>.

<sup>42</sup> R.S. Paszternák, *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 45–46; I. Dobrossy and I. Stipta, *Miskolc története* V/2, 300.

<sup>43</sup> Theodor (Tivadar) Herzl, a Hungarian Jew, was one of the founders of modern Zionism and the leader of political Zionism. Herzl Museum, accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.herzl.org/english/Article.aspx?Item=492&Section=491>.

<sup>44</sup> R.S. Paszternák, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Jewish community in Miskolc – just like the majority of the Jewish community in Hungary – viewed themselves as Hungarians of the Jewish faith rather than an ethnic minority.<sup>45</sup>

In interwar Miskolc Christians and Jews lived peacefully side by side. At the same time that Jews joined various non-denominational organisations, they – just like Christians – maintained religious, educational, work-related, fraternal and charitable institutions, some of which served the general public just as they did members of the Jewish community. It is no surprise, therefore, that neither anti-semitism nor Zionism took deep roots in Miskolc and that local Jews professed deep patriotic feelings. One occasion of their patriotism unveiled occurred in a speech given by Dr. Lajos Láng in January 1939, only a few months before the outbreak of the Second World War. In this public speech Dr. Láng reacted to the debate surrounding the passage of the Second Anti-Jewish Law then under discussion in the Hungarian Parliament and stated:

But even under the worst of conditions we have to stand firm here, in our homeland... [W]e have no trouble with the old Christian inhabitants; we are, we will be, and we will remain Hungarian Jews even if we experience only suffer and neglect. We have always worked for the benefit of the Hungarian nation. We do not want to be termed an ethnic group.<sup>46</sup>

The loyalty of the Jews to Miskolc and to Hungary did not remain unnoticed. In 1925 the Administrative Committee of Miskolc praised the Israelite congregation for its maintenance of “great cultural and charitable organisations” and for the many examples of “patriotic sacrifice” it had shown in the past.<sup>47</sup> Even so, the mutual appreciation of Jews and Christians was not enough to save the Jewish community from disaster because assimilation in itself was no remedy against Nazi plans. As a result of the expansion of right-wing politics in Hungary and the ramifications of the Second World War, Jewish institutions in Miskolc disappeared together with the majority of the community, thereby bringing in 1944 a tragic end to the long history of amicable relations between local Jews and Christians.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44; *Az 1941. évi népszámlálás*, p. 207; V. Karády, *op. cit.*, pp. 164, 311–313. In neighbouring countries the influence of Zionism was much stronger. The movement attracted great numbers in Košice, Opava, and Kraków as well. See “‘Kosice’ – Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities, Slovakia”; “Opava”; Martin, “Kraków.”

<sup>46</sup> *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap* [Upper Hungary morning news], January 29, 1939 (my translation).

<sup>47</sup> Decision of Administrative Committee of Miskolc, March, 9, 1925, Records of the Miskolc Israelite Community.

*Dorottya Sziszkoszné-Halász*

## ŻYDOWSKIE ORGANIZACJE I INSTYTUCJE W MIĘDZYWOJENNYM MISZKOLCU

### Streszczenie

W 1920 roku druga co do wielkości społeczność żydowska na Węgrzech zamieszkiwała Miskolc, gdzie utrzymywała liczne organizacje i instytucje gospodarcze, zawodowe oraz polityczne. Ich żydowskość była kwestią religijną, a nie narodową. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu opisanie żydowskich instytucji i organizacji, a w szczególności przedstawienie znaczenia świadomości węgierskiej żydowskości w miejskim środowisku poza stolicą.

Organizacje żydowskie funkcjonujące w Miskolcu w okresie międzywojennym skupiały się na nauczaniu judaizmu i funkcjonowały w czterech głównych kategoriach: 1. instytucje religijne; 2. instytucje edukacyjne; 3. organizacje zawodowe, oraz 4. organizacje dobroczynne. Mówiąc o okresie międzywojennym należy dodać organizacje syjonistyczne, które pojawiły się w latach dwudziestych oraz trzydziestych. Wszystkie kategorie zostały omówione w artykule.

Społeczność żydowska w Miskolcu, podobnie jak wszyscy żydzi węgierscy, postrzegali samych siebie jako Węgrów wyznania mojżeszowego, a nie mniejszość narodową. W omawianym okresie żydzi i chrześcijanie współżyli pokojowo. Ani antysemityzm, ani syjonizm nie były powszechne i ugruntowane. Pomimo tego, na skutek wydarzeń drugiej wojny światowej, historia pokojowego współistnienia żydów i chrześcijan w Miskolcu dobiegła do tragicznego końca w 1944 roku.