

Magyar-zsidó identitásminták [Hungarian-Jewish identity patterns]. Edited by Iván Zoltán Dénes. Budapest: Ráció, 2019. 267 pp.

An interesting volume entitled *Hungarian-Jewish Identity Patterns* was published by the Budapest-based Ráció Kiadó in Hungary. The volume aims to trace the spiritual path of Hungarian (Neolog) Jewry through the fates of two Hungarian Jewish scholars, Henrik Marczali (1856–1940) and Bernát Alexander (1850–1927). The editor, Iván Zoltán Dénes, is the leader of the Henrik Marczali Research Group at the Jewish Theological Seminary at the University of Jewish Studies. Dénes analyzes how a 2018 conference which was held at the Institute of Philosophy of the Center for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences led to this volume. The spiritual foundation of the book is also provided by Károly Kecskeméti in his introduction, which focuses on the activities and identities of Neolog scholars or, as he writes in connection with the two scholars, “Jewish scholar[s] who at the same time identif[y] with the Hungarian nation” (p.9). Dénes also doubts the apologetics of assimilation, orthodoxy, and Zionism, as well as their idealization as an eternal explanation for every event, thus giving the *ars poetica* of the book, at least to be assumed.

We can read Mihály Huszár’s thorough study on Henrik Marczali’s father, Mihály Marczali, in the “Chapter of Identity Samples,” who was the first rabbi of the village of Marcali. Huszár writes about the role Mihály Marczali he played in the formation of the identity of the family. Dénes analyzes the Hungarian-Jewish identity of Henrik Marczali, and then Szilvia Peremiczky describes the appearance of three Hungarian Jewish authors (Bertalan Ormónyi, József Kiss, and Emil Makai) in Hungarian literary life.

The next chapter is entitled “Situation Assessments, Strategies, Pathways I.” Here, Miklós Konrád deals with the problems of depictions of the Dualist era as the Hungarian Jewish golden age. András Zima writes about modern Jewish integration strategies at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Gábor Schweitzer examines the search for the Neolog rabbi identity in Hungary by analyzing the events between the rabbinical meeting in Győr and the foundation of the National Rabbinical Association.

In the next section, entitled “Location Assessments, Strategies, Findings 2,” Péter Zóka analyzes the role of Alexander Bernát at the Hungarian National Congress of Free Teaching. Péter Turbucz describes the views of Bernát Alexander and Henrik Marczali in a long study on World War I, and Péter András

Varga writes about Alexander Bernát and his circle of students as a “problem of philosophical history writing.”

The volume strives to situate a defining part of Hungarian Jewry within the framework marked by the oeuvre of the two great Neolog scholars. In this respect, this book can be said to have been successful, because not many professionals have tried to trace the process of the historical formation of the Neolog Jewish identity. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that we are not talking about all of the Hungarian Jews at that time, but only about a community within this larger group, which means that we are only talking about a kind of intellectual history.

However, if we assume that historian Henrik Marczali and philosopher Bernát Alexander were role models for Hungarian Neolog Jewry, their unbroken enthusiasm for Hungarian national goals, for instance, which made them apologists for the “Great War” (as Péter Turbucz makes clear in his study), seems a bit odd today. Of course, it would be anachronistic to question the degree of enthusiasm at the time, yet at the same time, this unconditional loyalty and enthusiasm proved to be an illusion from a historical perspective.

I would like to highlight a few studies from the book which I feel are essential to an understanding of the message this collection of essays seems to endeavor to convey to the general readership. The essay by Miklós Konrád, which analyzes the attitude of the Hungarian Neolog public and intellectuals about dualism, is extremely interesting. Konrád convincingly demonstrates that, contrary to popular belief, the Neolog Jewry was dissatisfied with the conditions and was increasingly frustrated, and in the end, many of them took a left-wing turn, which in this case meant supporting the revolution of 1918.

The book offers insightful articles about Alexander Bernát and Henrik Marczali, which examine certain stages of their lives and their relationships to decisive historical events. Péter Zóka analyzes Alexander’s speech in Pécs (October 1907), which was delivered at the Hungarian National Congress of Free Teaching, where many people were present, from Oszkár Jászi to Ottokár Prohászka. Alexander, in whose view nurturing the desire for knowledge and raising the level of general education were the fundamental goals, condemned all uses of education for partisan political purposes and denied the accusation brought against him that he sought to relativize the truth.

At the end of the volume, Péter András Varga analyzes the circle of students of Alexander Bernát. Bernát’s disciples were extremely important people in the history of Hungarian fiction. Béla Zalai, who died in a Russian prisoner

of war camp, Jenő Varga, head of the Moscow Institute of World Economy, Vilmos Szilasi, who had a “European career,” and Béla Fogarasi, an important personality of Hungarian Marxist-Leninist philosophy, were all talents whose early interests were significantly influenced by Alexander. Varga sees in the phenomenological philosophical connection the point where these personalities were also connected to one another.

My main criticism of the book would be that it is a somewhat haphazard compilation of very high-quality studies. It sheds light on the careers of the two prominent Hungarian Jewish scholars in many respects, and it offers clear explanations of the relevance of their activities to the Hungarian Jewish intelligentsia in general. We are talking about people who were Jews but who considered themselves Jewish on the basis of religion only and who were otherwise essentially assimilated. They identified themselves as Hungarian, and in this respect, they also stressed the importance of being more than a member of a given nation. However, their unflinching Hungarian nationalism proved to be a failure in all respects, and this caused them great frustration and, paradoxically, prompted them to identify more passionately with the idea of the integral Hungarian state. This was paradoxical given the events of the subsequent decades, when the notion of the Hungarian state as defined by the borders of the medieval Hungarian kingdom proved a mirage, as did the notion that Hungarian society accepted Jews as Hungarians.

This volume is a significant contribution to the secondary literature in part because it brings identity disputes off the emotional plane and places them between the cornerstones of the historical facts and science.

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