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Religions and the Nation in Kassa before World War I

The paper aims to evaluate the role of religion in the everyday life of a multilingual town in the former Hungarian Kingdom in the second half of the long nineteenth century. It focuses in particular on the adaptation to and adoption of nationalist discourse and practice in religious communities. Religion as traditional and nation as modern ideological concept and symbolic order competed against each other for influence in society. However, religious representatives and nationalist activists also worked together in mutual initiatives. The main goal of the Hungarian nationalist program was linguistic homogenization, i.e. the Magyarization of society, and churches were assigned a special role in this project. They provided the possibility of gaining mass attention and could serve for mass inducement. At the same time, church institutions and services were spaces of everyday multilingual practice in mixed linguistic areas. In the end, different confessional communities in Kassa (German: Kaschau; today Košice, Slovakia) showed different strategies. The Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church, due to the resistance from the majority of believers or church clerks (who protested against Hungarian-only services), remained multilingual up to World War I. Other communities transformed themselves quite smoothly from multilingual to Hungarian-only and therefore “patriotic” or “loyal” communities, e.g. the Jewish Reform (Neolog) Community or the Local Greek Catholics, whereas the Calvinists had always regarded themselves as the true “Magyar Denomination.” In general, the churches always played a vital role in the social and cultural life of the town, in school and educational systems, in associations, or in the culture of memory. But many questions and discussions of the era were linked to nationalist requirements and objectives which concerned the church representatives.

Keywords: confessional community, church, multilingual town, Kassa/Košice/Kaschau, Magyarization, nationalism

1 It would be appropriate, given the perspective of the article, to use all three forms of the city's name consistently in order to emphasize its multiethnic and multilingual character in the past (and actually also in the present). But for easier reading, I will restrict to the official Hungarian name from the period under discussion, knowing that it wasn't a “Magyar” city in the nineteenth century (nor was it a purely “Slovak” or “German” one). For personal names I will also use the most popular form in the sources, the Hungarian one, although a German or Slovak form often existed as well.
The Nineteenth Century: 
Age of Confession or Age of Nation?

For a long time, the nineteenth century was primarily regarded as the age of emerging industrialization and the rise of the nation state, whereas the significance of religion was marginalized, since secularization seemed to have succeeded. Religion was considered a mere pre-modern, traditional factor of the ancient régime, and religious belief was said to have been replaced by the modern belief in the nation as a rational type of collective organization. Theorists of nationalism tended to exclusively tie nation and modernity to the progress of secularity.  

In 1995 Dieter Langewiesche, in an elucidating review on the international historiography of nationalism, still ascertained a certain “blindness on confession.” The historiography of East-Central Europe also widely neglected the religious factor in studies of nationalism and national movements. The relevance of religion within modern societies was reconsidered in general. Calling into question the abovementioned hegemonic narrative of the nineteenth century, Olaf Blaschke claimed that at least for Germany it is better described as a “second confessional age,” emphasizing the high relevance of church and religion in different domains of society. In his monumental Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, Jürgen Osterhammel confirmed this assessment from a global perspective.  

As a result, the late nineteenth century has to be regarded as both an age of the nation and an age of religion. But how can we describe the relationship between religion and nation(alism)? Instead of simply opposing religion and nation, Hartmut Lehmann analyzed them in a more complex and dialectic

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context. Neither was religion unaffected by the rise of the new national semantics, nor did nationalism simply replace it. In fact, the development can be better described as mutual adaptation, as a “secularization of religion and consecration of the nation.” Martin Schulze Wessel refined the concept towards a sophisticated approach of mutual “nationalization of religion and consecration of nation.” Instead of contending that nationalism marginalized or replaced religion, he encouraged a focus on “the processes of displacement, hybridization and synthetization of religion and nationalism.”

Nationalists, in East-Central Europe and elsewhere, used functions and forms of expression of religion for propaganda and mass mobilization, and religious representatives and institutions had to and often wanted to adapt to nationalist ideas in order to compete for authority, influence and resources. The churches remained a very important, if not the most important sphere, especially in small and middle towns, where people of nearly all social classes took part in religious life. This is why nationalists attached considerable importance to these institutions, since in doing so they were able to reach broader parts of the local society. I therefore would like to offer a detailed study of the attitude of the six religious communities of Kassa towards the Hungarian national idea during the period that began in the second half of the nineteenth century and lasted until the outbreak of World War I. Since the length of this article is limited, I won’t be able to make more than a few observations about local practices of the “consecration of the nation,” but I do take into account “the diverse manners in which religious and national practice overlapped and interrelated, which led rather to mutual amplification, not supersession of religion by nation.”

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“Nation,” “Ethnicity” and the nationality question in the Nineteenth-century Hungarian Kingdom

With the Compromise of 1867, Hungary became a nearly independent, autonomous state within the Austro–Hungarian Dual Monarchy. In addition to its confessional heterogeneity, it was one of the most multilingual and multinational states in Europe. The titular people, the “Magyars,” formed a relative majority of 54.5 percent within the state only just before World War I according to the 1910 census. The fear of the demise of “Magyars” and their language and the attempt to build a modern nation-state led to the emergence of a strong Magyar nationalism. Nationalists propagated the Magyarization of the country, i.e. the linguistic homogenization and assimilation of the “nationalities” or “national minorities.” The most populous nationalities in Hungary were the Germans, the Romanians and Slovaks. With the nationality law, which was passed in 1868, everyone was indeed allowed to use his or her mother tongue when addressing lower levels of administration. However, the status of Hungarian as the official language was unquestioned, as was the principle of the “national unity” of the country. This was a clear denial of collective rights for “non-Magyars” and more or less a compulsion to assimilate into the Hungarian nation. This pressure also led to resistance in the form of separate national movements within the kingdom. Magyar nationalism and national movements among the minorities in Hungary are therefore important aspects of the complex “national question” in Hungary.

This brief overview shouldn’t offer a misleading portrayal of the character of “nationality.” It is clearly not an objective and stable feature of individuals or groups, but has to be understood as a highly constructed product of the discourses and practices of nationalist activists, who claimed to speak for a

11 Agnes Deak, From Habsburg Neo-Absolutism to the Compromise: 1849–1867 (Bradenton: East European Monographs, 2008).
specific “national” or “ethnic” group. According to Rogers Brubaker, both “Nation” and “Ethnicity” are specific interpretative sets or prisms, “a way of making sense of the social world,” just slightly differing regarding the founding categories. The basic misconception is that “Nation” is an inclusive, liberal, tolerant, and modern concept, whereas “Ethnicity” is an exclusive, repressive and primordial one. Both are highly intertwined, since every national idea, may it be liberal and tolerant as the Hungarian one was in some respects, bears ethnicized borders that can be used for the demarcation of “them” and “us.” Taking this into account, I will also avoid the ascription of national group identity to an unspecific collective in Kassa, e.g. talking about “the Slovaks,” “the Germans,” “the Ruthenes” or “the Magyars” of the town, since this would be a retrospective ethnicization of the past. Were I to use such terms, I would be taking for granted constant, unchanging ethnic or national groups in history.

Regarding the relationship between nation and religion in Hungary, the “nationality question” did not arise in a secularized environment, although the Hungarian political elite followed an agenda of strict liberalism. Nonetheless, as Árpád von Klimó has pointed out, the century between 1848 and 1948 can be characterized as a “confessional age.” Religion mattered in Hungary, but the relationship between religion and the nation was a complex one. Since there was no single denomination that could be connected with the nation (as was the case in France, Spain and Britain), every church had to position itself individually

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with regard to nationalist programs. My analysis of a single city will uncover how different religious communities dealt with the national idea.

The question is if and how the Hungarian national idea and practice were adapted by churches in Kassa. Did they remain multi-lingual, “non-national” spaces, did they support Magyarization, or, in contrast, did they provide the foundation for the emerging minority nationalism of “Slovaks” or “Germans.”

I venture answers to these questions in this article. I provide a short introduction to the history, structure, staff and affairs of the six local communities: Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, Orthodox Jews and Neolog (Reform) Jews. How were they regarded by nationalist activists? What conflicts arose due to the fulfilling or failing of nationalist claims? Did church representatives engage in nationalist programs and campaigns? Did the communities take measures to meet the expectations of nationalist activists, and if so, what were these measures, and what expectations were they trying to meet?

Religion and Nation in Kassa

Kassa was (and actually is) characterized by an outstanding diversity of religions, which mirrored the profound linguistic diversity (see Table 1). Roman Catholicism remained the dominant confession over time, but the smaller communities consolidated and even gained new members. Between 1880 and 1910, the percentage of inhabitants of the city that followed the Roman Catholic Church declined from 70 percent to 63 percent. In contrast, the percentage of the population that was Greek Catholic increased from 6.5 to 8 percent, Calvinists from 4 to 8 percent, and the percentage of citizens of (one of the) Jewish Confession(s) expanded from 11 to 15 percent. Only the Lutheran Church lost a respectable share in the population – from nearly 8 down to 5.5 percent. This shift in the ranking of churches was—in comparison with other Hungarian cities of the same size, like Székesfehérvár, Pécs, Győr and Miskolc—a unique feature of Kassa.

18 There are numerous studies of multiethnic East-Central European cities, but only two of them focus in detail on religious communities: Till van Rahden, Juden und andere Breslauer (Göttingen–Bielefeld: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Iris Engemann, Die Slowakisierung Bratislavas: Universität, Theater und Kultusgemeinden 1918–1948 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012).

The two Catholic denominations of Kassa—Roman and Greek—constituted an absolute majority. In Hungary the bishop of Esztergom as entitled Prince-Primate controlled the dioceses, abbeys and other church institutions. He also was in charge of the Greek Catholics, who in the Union of Uzhorod (1646) had accepted the pope as head of the church but adhered to their orthodox rites and liturgy.21

Although the Greek Catholic community could be viewed as something a bit exotic in Kassa, they actually looked back on a long local tradition as well as a contemporary atmosphere of tolerance regarding their religious culture and practice. As early as the late fifteenth century, even before the official Union, Christian Orthodox believers lived in Kassa and its surroundings.22 Some historians equate the Greek Catholic belief with the ethnic group of Ruthenians, an eastern Slavonic people living in Transylvania, Galicia and the Carpatho-Ukraine, a region east of Kassa. Their belief and the use of Old Church Slavonic as the language of liturgy distinguished them from other denominations, but the idea that they saw themselves as a special ethnic group is questionable.23 At

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22 The following information is taken from Gabriel Szeghy and Peter Jambor, Košickí gréckokatolíci: Dejiny farnosti v rokoch 1797–1950 (Košice: Gréckokatolícky farský úrad, 2007).

23 For an affirmative approach of Ruthenian nationality see Paul R. Magocsi, and Ivan Pop, Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture (Toronto, Ont.: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2002). More critical of that Wofldieter
the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Greek Catholics of Kassa were
subordinated to the eparchie (Greek Catholic diocese) of Eperjes (today Prešov, Slovakia). They lacked an administration and chapel of their own, but the Roman Catholic bishop of Kassa allowed them to use the Franciscan Monastery in the city center. Nevertheless, representatives of the faith, specifically the chaplain Matej Bräuer (1817–71),24 a teacher at secondary school and city councilor, continued to push for an upgrade of the Greek Catholic community to an autonomous parish. His involvement in local schooling and politics already indicates the integration of Greek Catholics in Kassa. Bräuer’s successor Julius Viszlocky (1832–1907) finally succeeded in collecting thousands of Gulden for the erection of a Greek Catholic Church, which was finished in 1901.25 The fact that the lion’s share of the 40,000 Gulden project was contributed by people of other confessions in Kassa and the whole country confirms the contention that the Greek Catholic Church was seen as an integral part of the local society.

Although even in the new chapel the old liturgy in the Slavonic language was used, the community didn’t come under fire from nationalists. An occasion for Greek Catholics to demonstrate their national loyalty came in 1896, the year of the Hungarian “Millennium.”26 Chaplain Viszloczky arranged a festival service and gave a patriotic speech in Hungarian, which had to be translated for the audience. Ten years later, on the occasion of the reburial of Prince Ferencz Rákóczi II in Kassa,27 the press praised Viszloczky for organizing a mass service in the Greek Catholic chapel in Hungarian, which no longer needed to be translated. This, in the eyes of Hungarian nationalists, demonstrated the efforts of the community to assimilate linguistically and represented an example of extraordinary patriotism.28

24 All biographical data is, except as noted otherwise, taken from: Mária Mihóková, Slovník košických osobnosti: 1848–1918 (Košice: Štátna Vedecká Knjižnica, 1995).
25 The history of the church construction in: Szeghy and Jambor, Košickí gréckokatolíci, 79–110.
28 “Isteni tisztelet a hazáért a görög-katolikus templomban,” Napló, March 27, 1906, 2.
Csoma (1863–1922), who pushed for the comprehensive Magyarization of the community. In 1909, the bond between the Greek Catholic church and the Hungarian nation became irresolvable. A country-wide congregation met in Kassa and decided to abolish the Old Church Slavonic language from all church services in favor of Hungarian. This, according to Bishop Csoma, was an expression of love and loyalty to the nation, which was given the same value as the love to Christ.29

Thus, the Greek Catholic community of Kassa seemed to have adapted quite smoothly to the Hungarian national idea. This followed an integrative strategy. By breaking with the character of strangers and strengthening the support for their administrative autonomy, the Greek Catholic priests and bishops tried conspicuously to adapt to the ruling national concept of the united Hungarian state-nation by switching languages and showing patriotism.

In contrast, the negotiation of the relationship between religion and nation in the Roman Catholic community reveals much more ambivalence and conflict. In general, as research on Catholicism and nationalism indicated, there was an elementary difficulty of harmonizing the transnational, ultramontane character of the papal church with nationalist demands for nation-centered loyalty.30 In the special case of Hungary the tight bond of Roman Catholicism and the Habsburg emperors always provoked strong anti-Catholic resentments among Hungarian nationalists, although most Hungarians were actually Catholics.31

As of 1804, Kassa was a diocesan town. The share of Roman Catholic believers among the city’s population decreased, but the church held the dominant position within the urban society. In addition to the bishops, several Roman Catholic representatives played a vital role in various institutions. The chaplain Endre Kozora, for example, was elected head-solicitor of the city under the 34 year-long leadership of mayor Tivadar Münster and thus one of the most influential people within the magistrate. The bishops and many Roman Catholic officials were institutionally and personally involved in diverse activities related to Magyarization. Thus the church itself wasn’t a target of nationalist attacks, but the

local order of Dominicans was due to its language practice. In particular, József Timkó (1843–99), the editor-in-chief of the most nationalist weekly, *Abauj-Kassai Közlöny*, who was yearlong assemblyman and—not unimportantly—a Lutheran, used his public roles to agitate against their alleged “Panslavism.” Timkó argued that the Dominicans were spreading Slovak nationalism by holding church services in Slovak and using the language in elementary schools. He demanded the formation of a committee that would investigate the activities of the order. The idea was supported even by Roman Catholics like the theologian and subsequent school inspector Márton Mártonffy (1848–1917), who published a plea for the national mission of the Roman Catholic Church. According to him, the Church had the duty to magyarize the non-Hungarian “nationalities” among its believers by introducing Hungarian services and patriotic sermons.32

The targets among the Dominicans were the priests Anton Dominik Rašovsky (1815–94) and Hyacinth Vlačil (1857–92). They were accused of being “fanatic panslavists,”33 because they ordered Slovak-speaking prayer books, which was regarded as an attempt to “slovakize” the city.34 Strangely enough, accusations were even interchangeable. In 1895, the slightly less nationalist newspaper *Felsőmagyarország* called the Dominicans a “cancer” because the order ostensibly had submitted some documents in German to the financial board of Kassa. Now, the friars undoubtably were “Germanizators.”35

After several years of recurring attacks, the head of the order, Father Gergely, submitted a long letter to the press, in which he explained his standpoint to the nation and defended the practices of his priests. According to him, the order already limited Slovak-speaking services to the level that was still necessary. The main services had been held in Hungarian for years. But since there were still a lot of Slovak-speaking believers, the order couldn’t put a complete end to services in Slovak. However, Gergely assured the public, everyone was committed to use all means to encourage patriotism and the use of the Hungarian language.36 So, in the end, nationalist activists forced the order to issue a statement regarding their position towards the nation.

35 “Csakazért is!” *Felsőmagyarország*, January 17, 1895, 3.
The concentration on the Dominicans should not lead to a misunderstanding of the practice with regards to language in other Roman Catholic churches of Kassa: the Dome of the Holy Elisabeth—the biggest cathedral in the region—, the Michael-Chapel, the Premonstratensian-Abbey, the Franciscan-Abbey and the Ursuline-Abbey—not to mention the numerous smaller chapels in the city's periphery. The Roman Catholic bishops and priests of Kassa in general had to be aware of the linguistic diversity of their community. Even in the Dome, Slovak-speaking services were provided until World War I. Priests mostly had to master at least two languages, which again was regarded as scandalous in the Hungarian nationalist press.37

For the common believers, language use in church had little to do with the demonstration of national loyalty. Language, rather, was a tool with which to serve individual needs for religious guidance. This was without a doubt best fulfilled in one's mother tongue or a common language, which in many cases wasn’t Hungarian, even if people understood or spoke it in other situations. Ignoring the desire of the believers to at least pray and confess in the language of their choice also led to open conflict. In more than one case, some of the congregations stubbornly and resolutely insisted on the services being held in Slovak and even interrupted the priests and started a fray.38 To classify such a spontaneous event as nationally motivated would be a misleading conclusion. This wasn’t an expression of a specific national consciousness, but a demand for appropriate language use as usual.

Taking this into account, it’s hardly surprising that the Fathers of the Dominican order were not the only people who were accused of not fulfilling their national duties. The bishops had to cope with attacks in the press too, due to the fact that church services continued to be held in the three main languages of the city, German, Slovak and Hungarian. The newspaper *Kassai Hírlap* argued that 98 percent of the city’s population was able at least to understand Hungarian, so the author asked why bishop Zsigmond Bubics (1821–1907, bishop 1886–1907) allowed priests to use several languages, even though he in general was an advocate of Magyarization.39 Bubics, for example, even tried to influence Greek

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38 (Dr. H.) [Ignác Hohenauer], “A magyar nyelv,” *Felsőmagyarország*, October 25, 1903, 1–2; “Slowaken gegen ungarischen Gottesdienst,” *Kaschauer Zeitung*, January 1, 1904, 1.
Catholics who had emigrated to the United States of America by sending priests who would re-Magyarize or de-Americanize them.40

In fact every bishop—whether we are speaking of Bubics’ predecessor Constantin Schuster (1817–99, bishop 1877–86) or his successor Ágoston Fischer-Colbrie (1863–1925, bishop 1907–25)—was engaged in associations and campaigns which served to propagate Hungarian national identity, language and culture. In doing so, they always were flanked by other Roman Catholic officials like Menyhért Takács. The vicar of the Premonstratensian order served for a long time as head of the Közművelődési Egyesület (Society of Public Education), the main instrument of Magyarization in Kassa, which was under auspices of the bishops and the főispán, the governor of the Abaúj-Torna district, the capital of which was Kassa.

The main engagement of Roman Catholic officials in nationalist affairs didn’t take place during church services, but rather on occasions that were part of the public culture of memory. Every event of “national” importance, e.g. the anniversary of the Revolution of 1848, the “Hungarian Millennium” in 1896, or the cult of Ferenc Rákóczi II, was celebrated in the Dome of St. Elisabeth with huge services. The “nationalization of religion and consecration of nation” was most obvious on these festivities. Roman Catholicism and the “nation” were at least temporarily bound together in the performance and staging of national collective memory.41 In general, the Roman Catholic community remained multilingual, and for most believers, the church was still a rather non-national marked sphere of everyday life.

Protestants and Ethnic Segregation

The Protestant communities of Lutherans and Calvinists differed remarkably in their adaptation to Hungarian national idea. The latter had already been generally analyzed as bearing the self-image of being the true “Magyar confession,” since they had always used Hungarian and had fostered myths of struggling for the best of the nation since the sixteenth century.42 The Hungarian Lutherans, in contrast, used various strategies. Some felt as exceptional as the Calvinists in

40 “Amerikai pánszlávok a kassai gör. kath. egyház ellen,” Kassai Hirlap, June 29, 1905, 2.
41 I’d like to refer to the publication in which I analyze parts of the local culture of memory of Kassa in detail: Henschel, Vereinswesen und Erinnerungskultur.
respect of their ethno-national quality as “Magyars.” German-speaking Lutherans, on the one hand, fostered a state-centered patriotism, which acknowledged multilingualism and multiethnicity. Some Slovak-speaking communities, on the other, developed a separate national idea, based on the strong ties between the lower Lutheran clergy and the Slovak speakers of the community.43

As far as the Calvinists of Kassa were concerned, the above statement was true. They cultivated an image of themselves as the national elite, which was expressed, for example, by the construction of the highest spire in the city in 1895, measuring 40 meters. The censuses—though the results should be interpreted critically—indicated a rate of 98 percent of Calvinists in Kassa who identified themselves as “Magyars.” According to a local Calvinist chronicle, the community was proud that it always used the Hungarian language in church and was the strongest supporter if not the founder of the “Kuruc” movement, a series of anti-Habsburg rebellions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led by princes like the prominent members of the Rákóczi family.44 Ironically, the Calvinists of Kassa were not willing to tear down their church in favor of the construction of a statue of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II.45 However, all in all nationalist ideology was deeply integrated into religious practice, the more so as many Calvinist officials held positions in magyarizing institutions like the Közművelődési Egyesület. But the confessional elitist and nationalist attitude of Calvinists did not lead to total segregation from other communities. Together with the Lutherans they organized several cultural events in the Grand Hotel Schalkház, which were also joined by Catholic or Jewish personalities.46

Whereas Calvinists represented themselves as the Magyar confession, Lutherans had to deal with the same situation as the Roman Catholics. The community was multilingual, since speakers of Hungarian, German and Slovak were among the believers. Using their administrative autonomy,47 the Lutheran church found its own solutions to the situation.

In mid-nineteenth-century Kassa two communities existed that were separated along linguistic borders. Contemporaries, however, obviously tried to

44 Lajos Szabó, Kassai kálvinista krónika 1644–1944 (Kassa: Wiko, 1944).
45 Archiv Mesta Košíc (= AMK), Fond Magistratus (= FM), II/5252 1914, kart. 2281, Lajos Körmendy-Ékes, A Rákóczi-szobor elhelyezése, September 25, 1912.
avoid the impression of ethno-national segregation, since they simply named the German-Hungarian the “First” and the Slovak the “Second” community. Both shared one church in the city center. But it cannot be assumed that national arguments did not play an important role. Since the Slovak-speakers formed the overwhelming majority within the whole Lutheran church in Kassa compared to German- or Hungarian-speakers, the unification of the latter two in the 1840s can be interpreted as an attempt to form a block against a formidable “Slovak” hegemony. It was presumably expected that German-speaking Lutherans would soon magyarize themselves. Afterwards, a powerful “Magyar community” could more easily absorb the “Slovak” one by arranging a second unification. But up to the end of the nineteenth century German remained the predominant language even in the “First” community. Because of this, Abauj-Kassai Közlöny published a plea to all Lutherans asking them to support Hungarian-language church services, which often were poorly attended.48

The second (“Slovak”) community nevertheless worked steadily and despite the tense situation nearly undisturbed. Up to the late 1880s, it even ran a Slovak-speaking elementary school, which later fell victim to the Magyarization of the school system.49 After the turn of the century, the question of language became virulent again. The “German-Hungarian” community felt strong enough to promote a merger. A roundtable was created by the lawyer Géza Benczur (1843–1908) and priest János Csikó for the “German–Hungarian” community, and the teacher János Kresz (1843–1912) and priest István Homola (1864–1952) for the “Slovak” community. These four representatives decided to merge the two communities, which in the end was supposed to result in the abolition of all non-Hungarian church services.50 But the Lutheran believers themselves had to be asked for approval in separate assemblies. Despite a plea of Kresz to his Slovak-speaking believers to show “national morals,” they refused the unification.51 Services in Slovak and German remained untouched until World War I.

To understand the complexity of the case, one should note that it wasn’t only the program of Magyarization that led to negotiations for unification. The financial problems of the Lutheran church at the time had led to a cut-

Therefore it would have saved a lot of money to recruit just one or two priests with knowledge of Hungarian instead of three or four with knowledge of different languages. Furthermore, church officials hoped to gain financial support from the city’s magistrate with which to maintain the Lutheran elementary school in exchange for formally magyarizing the community.

In the end, the unification of the “German–Hungarian” and “Slovak” community never happened. Both communities refused to vote in its favor. The Slovak-speaking believers—despite the insistent plea of Kresz—feared the abolishment of Slovak-speaking church services. The “German–Hungarian” community also stopped all negotiations because the representatives feared a “Slovak” majority in the church institutions—although there never was a Slovak-national movement based on the Lutheran church in the region.

_Schism and Assimilation: the Local Jewry_

Jews were in a historical sense the “youngest” religious group in Hungary, since their immigration increased just around the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. They came from all over Europe and the Monarchy to Hungary, since in 1840 nearly every legal restriction for the settlement of Jews was banned in the law XXIX/1840. Full equality was only legalized in 1896, when the Judaism was granted the same legal status as Christian denominations. However, as Viktor Karády has described, Jewish immigration to Hungary was promoted by an implicit “Assimilatory Contract.” This contract included the grant of full civil rights and protection against discrimination or anti-Semitic violence in exchange for linguistic and national assimilation to Magyrdom. Jews were regarded as the missing percentage that would help to lift the share of “Magyars” in Hungary from a relative to an absolute majority compared to the national minorities.


Other historians have therefore characterized Jewish strategies of assimilation in Hungary as “Magyar–Jewish Symbiosis.”

Jews had lived in Kassa since the fifteenth century, but the consolidation of the local Jewish community dates back to 1844, when Abraham Seelenfreund was elected rabbi. The first prayer room was situated in Harang-út (today Zvonárska) on the brink of the city center, but it soon provided too little space for the rapidly growing community. In 1867, they erected one of the country’s biggest synagogues in the Old Town, but soon the emerging schism in Hungarian Jewry affected the community in Kassa, too. At the Jewish Congress in Pest in 1869, Jewish Orthodoxy separated from Reform-Jewry (called “Neologs”), which sought to modernize the religion in theory and practice and voted for further secularization towards an ethno-national assimilation.

The Neolog-community in Kassa was soon a clear majority within the Jewish community. In 1899, 2,500 males were declared members of the reform community, in contrast to just 1,600 of the orthodox. From the 1870s onwards, the Orthodoxy tried desperately to achieve its interests, be it a separate cemetery for orthodox funeral rites or a separate synagogue. Even after Markus Hirsch, a Budapest Rabbi who was sent by Minister of Culture József Eötvös to mediate the conflict, attested full congruence between the new contested synagogue and religious rules, local Orthodoxy refused to use it. However, bit by bit Orthodoxy lost ground, since a socio-economic, demographic and religious change took place, as Sándor Márai, the great “biographer” of fin-de-siècle Kassa, describes in his memoirs.


The consequence of the ongoing modernization of Jewry in Kassa was a changing self-relation towards the Hungarian national idea, but assimilation did not change everything immediately. Up to the turn of the century, multilingualism in the communities, whether the orthodox or the neolog, was an unquestioned practice. The Jewish elementary school taught Hebrew and German; most Jewish associations, e.g. the Charity Club of Godparents, used German in their meetings and for written correspondence, educated Jews in general used German and Hungarian equally. Therefore, more than once the liberal-nationalist press, in a strange phalanx with the conservative Catholic press, attacked local Jewry for using German in public or within community life.

There was no climate of permanent Anti-Semitism, but there was remarkable pressure to assimilate to the “Magyar” majority. This pressure, in connection with a desire for definite acceptance on behalf of Jewish representatives, led to a final decision. In 1904, the Jewish neolog community decided to magyarize itself. The respected physicians József Spatz and Elek Neuwirth submitted a proposal which stipulated the exclusive use of Hungarian for church services, correspondence and meetings. Violation of the stipulation was threatened with sanctions. The Jewish elementary school had already switched from German to Hungarian as the language of instruction. Furthermore, every member should be obliged to join the “Közművelődési Egyesület,” the main instrument of local Magyarization.

This was not the first expression of strategic assimilation within the Jewry of Kassa, but it was a remarkable one, since it affected all community members. Ten years earlier, the wealthier among them had already founded the “Kassai Társaskör” to promote Magyarization within the Jewish upper class.

There were also remarkable individual actors who can be described as national activists. One of them was the lawyer Sámu Fényes (1863 as Feuerlicht–1937), who founded the “Sovinista Egyesület” in 1901, which introduced strong nationalist semantics into the field of local economy. In his fight for general suffrage, Fényes emphasized its importance for the regions in Hungary, where

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60 AMK, FM, Archive Materials on Košice Jewry 1888, I/7, kart. 1701.
61 “Germanizáló rabbi,” Abauj-Kassai Közföny, September 10, 1891, 2; “A magyarosodás tengelyakasztói városunkban,” Felsővidéki Újság, June 18, 1908, 1.
64 Dr. M. I. [Mitzger Imre], “Sovinista egyesület,” Felsőmagyarország, April 24, 1901, 1.
according to him the system of voting at the time privileged the leaders of nationality movements, like Slovak or Romanian priests.\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{Conclusion}

The question I have sought to address in this essay concerns how the six religious communities in multilingual Kassa positioned themselves with regards to the Hungarian national idea during the age of Austro–Hungarian Dualism. National activists claimed supremacy for the Hungarian language, demanded individual and collective assimilation of non-Hungarian “nationalities,” and regarded the use of other languages as a sign of a lack of national loyalty or an attempt to cultivate a separatist national idea. One can venture the conclusion that no religious community remained unaffected by nationalist demands and claims, but the scope of Magyarization was quite different from denomination to denomination. The small community of Calvinists regarded itself as an originally and essentially “Magyar” denomination. They did not have to find a new way to adapt to the national idea, but strengthened their symbolic affiliation.

The other communities had to cope with the challenges of Magyarization in a more complex way. They all looked back on long traditions of multilingualism and an institutionalized system of church services in different languages. Quite often, even the language of church administration was not Hungarian, but was at least in part German/Hebrew (Jews), German/Slovak (Lutherans), Old Church Slavonic (Greek Catholics) or Latin (Roman Catholics). All denominations were confronted with demands for Magyarization, but in different ways.

The most complex case was the Roman Catholic Church. It represented the overwhelming majority of people in Kassa, but therefore had to manage the widest diversity of mother or colloquial languages. It was under steady surveillance by national activists, even more so because Catholicism was seen as something in opposition to the mostly Protestant national-liberal political elite. Thus, the officials tried to demonstrate loyalty to the nation. Bishops, priests and other representatives were engaged in several local nationalist institutions. They were involved in Hungarian nationalist memory culture and promoted the “consecration of the nation.” They tried to increase the number of church services in Hungarian, but linguistic homogenization failed because churchgoers

also stood up against Magyarization, since it affected the very private practice of praying.

The Lutheran church was confronted with the same problems, since their community was trilingual and until the mid-nineteenth century separated into three entities. After unification, a German–Hungarian and a Slovak community coexisted, but until World War I the leaders of both communities tried to enforce a final merger which in their eyes would lead to financial savings and Magyarization. This goal was not attained and a Slovak-speaking Lutheran community existed up until 1914, but never was a protagonist in a local or regional Slovak national movement.

Jews and Greek Catholics used different strategies. Both communities had a status of subtle “strangeness.” The Greek Catholics were a local particularity and had no country-wide church structure, but rather were subordinated to the Roman Catholic diocese until they were assigned an autonomous eparchy in Eperjes. Despite their “Slavic” background, they had little problem with local Hungarian nationalism and adapted to the Hungarian national idea by pushing forward linguistic Magyarization and ideologically avowing the fatherland. The bishops and priests had chosen an assimilative strategy to integrate their communities. They were able to avoid hostilities by replacing the Old Slavonic church language with Hungarian. They even generated support for the strengthening of their institutional autonomy.

The Jewry of Kassa, as the sole non-Christian community, was assigned a different status of strangeness. But here as in the whole country the mechanism of the “assimilatory contract” took effect. The schism of Hungarian Jews into Orthodox and Neologs lead to remarkable confessional conflict. Both competed for hegemony within the local community, but Neologs soon became the majority and thus their concept of national assimilation prevailed. Some turned into dedicated national activists, but it took until the first decade of the twentieth century to magyarize the community officially. Until then, and this is an important difference from the Greek Catholics, the Jews weren’t immune against attacks from the liberal nationalist or the conservative Catholic press, since many used the German language in business, public and private. But by World War I, the public, school and church life of the Neolog community was widely magyarized.

I have attempted to present the complex entanglements of religion and nation in a specific local context. Neither was there a simple replacement of religion by nation, nor was there complete immunization of multilingual, non-
nationalist traditions in churches. Rather, there was mutual interaction that can be described as a local form of “nationalization of religion” and “consecration of the nation.”

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