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Jews and the Hungarian State

Integrative and Exclusionary Models from Medieval
to Modern Times

Abstract

In Hungary, official memory and history discourses often distinguish between 'Jews' and 'Hungarians', harking back to the Horthy-era concept of the 'Christian national' state. This dichotomy clashes with modern ideas of citizenship and acts as a carrier of antisemitism. This lecture analyses the role of political authority in fostering integration or exclusion over a long time span. It begins with the attitudes of those holding political power in the Kingdom of Hungary in the Middle Ages, when the distinction between Jews and Christians was based on religious affiliation. In particular, two processes will be examined: one leading to increased integration, granting protection and rights, and the other promoting segregation, demonisation and hostility. The lecture will then focus on key moments in modern history, exploring the functions of these two contradictory but related processes. It will finally tackle the question of the role of the state in (dis)continuities between medieval exclusion and modern antisemitism.

Current government discourse in Hungary distinguishes between 'Jews' and 'Hungarians', emulating and competing with the far-right. Examples include pronouncements by János Lázár, Secretary of State for the Prime Minister's Office, who was also responsible for overseeing the Holocaust commemoration year in 2014. He first assured the public that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán wished to respond to "all our Hungarian compatriots and Jewish co-citizens" on the controversial German Occupation memorial. Then he proceeded to accuse MAZSIHISZ (the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, the largest umbrella organisation for Jewish communities) of "sabotaging" the Holocaust commemoration year, and declared that "the ultimatum by MAZSIHISZ worries several people, and does not have a favourable impact on the coexistence of Jews and Hungarians, which had been a success for several centuries in the Carpathian basin".[1] As proof of this 'success', one commentator acerbically cited one of the last blood libels in Europe, that of Tiszaeszlár, and the murder of close to half a million Jews with the active participation of the Hungarian state.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán himself affirmed that he wanted to ensure the safety of all his Jewish co-citizens in Hungary. He explained antisemitism as "deriving from an inferiority complex. […] Many people think that the Jews are stronger than they and can therefore harm them. They have no intention of harming us. I explain to people that it is forbidden for us to see Jews as a danger; rather, we need to see them

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1   http://444.hu/2014/02/06/lazar-orban-jovo-heten-valaszol-a-zsido-kerekasztalnak/
http://budapesttimes.hu/2014/02/16/why-everyone-should-boycott-official-2014-holocaust-commemorations/
http://hvg.hu/itthon/20140225_Lazar_A_Mazsihisz_ultimatuma_megosztja_a (13.09.2015);
http://magyarnarancs.hu/villamnarancs/lazar-janos-es-a-zsido-magyar-egyutteles-sikerei-88914
(13.09.2015); http://hvg.hu/itthon/20140227_Heisler_a_Mazsihisz_nem_adott_ultimatumot (13.09.2015).

as the gift of God."[2] Speaking in such a manner, Orbán wields the pernicious terminology of "us" (Hungarian) versus "them" (Jews).

In addition, defending the German Occupation memorial against critics, the Prime Minister wrote a letter, intending it to be an open letter, on how the Archangel Gabriel (the main figure of the statue) symbolises "all the victims of Nazism" and not Hungary. Gabriel, according to Orbán, is a particularly appropriate representation of the victims because it "restores the surplus in representing the destructive evil that other solutions would be incapable of rendering. I am thinking of anti-Christianity". Because the Nazis destroyed Christian values, all the victims "whether they are of the faith of the Old Testament, Christians or faithless, were the victims of a dictatorship that was the personification of an anti-Christian tendency".[3] Jews, rather than primary targets, are present among the victims almost incidentally.

Worse, when the Prime Minister acknowledged Hungarian collaboration – relativising it heavily, claiming that collaboration with the Nazis was equally widespread everywhere in Europe – at the same time he rejected true responsibility, and, indeed, blamed Jews while speaking in a code: "there would have been no deportation without a German occupation. […] If one does not admit that, it is difficult to imagine a sincere coexistence in the future, founded on trust. Our generation became the partisan of radically anti-communist politics because we were fed up with the lies, built on distrust." The unspoken presence in this text is the Jews. Communism in right-wing code-speak is linked to Jews; and the post-World War II period of Hungary's membership in the Communist bloc – built on distrust and lies – in code-speak understood by all is blamed on Jews.[4] The message of this letter is that Jews are liars, and must admit that Hungarian society, in the final analysis, is not responsible for the Holocaust – otherwise they endanger their future existence in Hungary. The letter belies claims by various government functionaries to be fighting against hate-speech, and by Orbán himself to be a champion against antisemitism.

Jarringly clashing with modern ideas of citizenship and a carrier of antisemitism, the dichotomy raises questions about its historical roots. How far back can we trace the distinction between Jews and Hungarians? And what precedents do we find for state-sponsored political antisemitism in the service of garnering popular support? In what follows I shall therefore investigate the role of political authority over time in creating policies towards the Jewish population of Hungary.

My discussion will be avowedly one-sided: "the Jews" as subjects – and objects – of state policy are the constructs of the state. This is also relatively apparent in the numbers. While there are no reliable statistics before the late 19th century, Jews in the 11th-13th century kingdom of Hungary constituted several hundred to a thousand people, probably around 0.05 per cent of the total population; in the early 16th century, estimates for the maximum number range from 2,500 to 20,000. Jews remained a small minority in the modern period: in the late 19th century (1890) they constituted 4.67 per cent of the total population with roughly 708,000 people, in 1910 almost five per cent with about 911,000, and in 1930 5.12 per cent with approximately 444,500. In reality, people who identified themselves as Jewish in Hungary were never a monolithic group, and were we to focus on Jewish stances towards the state, we would find many different attitudes. I shall focus, however, on how the state in successive per-

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2   http://www.magyarhirlap.hu/orban-a-zsidok-isten-ajandeka (15.09.2015).

3   The letter was published online: http://www.origo.hu/attached/20140430davidk.pdf (The following quotation is also from the same letter) (15.09.2015).

4   An example of such use of terminology http://valasz.hu/publi/a-mult-fogsagaban-101365 (15.09.2015); and its decoding http://nol.hu/velemeny/schmidt-1473055 (15.09.2015).

iods conceptualised and treated its Jewish inhabitants. I should emphasise at the start that the nature of the state itself changed over time. The faceless bureaucracy we associate with a state is a modern phenomenon; the medieval state operated through personal ties. Power, personal bonds, and a competition for the right to wield violence distinguish it from its modern counterparts. The medieval kingdom of Hungary was a vast realm of many different peoples, who spoke various languages and had a diverse variety of legal statuses. The king governed together with the high nobility; power was much more personalised, and many of the familiar features of modern states did not yet exist.

The medieval period was characterised by a fragile type of integration of the Jews.[5] In order to understand it, I should emphasise that the framework for Jewish life was very different from the modern period. First of all, being a Jew meant adhering to Judaism, religious adhesion being the primary component of medieval categorisation. Secondly, three different sources of power coexisted, and political life, and hence the status of Jews in the medieval kingdom of Hungary, was determined by the balance between those three, namely, royal power, ecclesiastical power (which comprised the local prelates, who could also call on the papacy for help) and the nobility. Thirdly, Jews were not the only group with their own legal status (and not even the only non-Christian group) within the kingdom.

The kings of Hungary started to legislate about Jewish status from the time of King Ladislas I (1077–1095). During his reign and that of his successor King Coloman (1095–1116), the conceptualisation of Jewish status in the kingdom was purely religious: it was the religious divide between Jews and Christians that in the eyes of the Church necessitated the regulation of the place of Jews in Christian society. Royal legislation followed earlier models and emulated various ecclesiastical restrictions. Yet in comparison to contemporary legislation in Western Europe, measures aimed at segregation played a minor role. Intermarriage between Christian women and Jewish men was forbidden, as was the buying of non-kasher meat from Jews (which was understood as meat "despised" by Jews). Jews were to be prevented from engaging in activities deemed offensive to Christians such as trading on Sunday or Christian holy days, and holding Christian slaves. These regulations all derived from the idea that Christians, redeemed by the blood of Christ, could not be in any way under the power of Jews, seemingly inferior to them, when Christian theology maintained that Jews were cast off by God in favour of Christians. Coloman also attempted to restrict Jewish settlement to episcopal centres. Finally, credit and trade transactions were regulated; Coloman even tried to introduce the compulsory use of written charters in such interactions.

Such legislation integrated Jews into the kingdom as holders of a specific legal status, a status that entailed exclusionary aspects derived from Christian notions of the relative standing of Jews and Christians, while allowing settlement and economic activity. Being a Jew meant a specific legal status, and in the Kingdom of Hungary that status was also conceived of as the status of a *hospes* (guest), one that was given to immigrants (including Christians). From the perspective of Christianity, however, Jews could never be fully integrated as Jews, only if they converted to Christianity; as long as they remained Jews (and the expectation was ultimate conversion) they were set apart by their faith. Christian – Jewish interaction was to be limited, and Chris-

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5   More details on Jews in the medieval kingdom of Hungary: Nora Berend, At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary, c. 1000–c. 1300, Cambridge 2001. References to the medieval sources used in this lecture are also included there.

tian superiority was clearly expressed. At the same time, protection was to be granted to Jews within the frameworks laid down by legislation. Since Christianity in medieval Europe was not a matter of private choice, but a compulsory state religion, ecclesiastical ideas became part of the fabric of political authority. No separate religious sphere existed; yet the meaning and the interpretation of appropriate behaviour were open to contestation within medieval Europe.

Royal legislation followed along ecclesiastical lines, even if in a mitigated way, until the 13th century. Then these dynamics changed, however, due to royal interests. King Andrew II (1205–1235) and his son Béla IV (1235–1270) dodged or confronted ecclesiastical authority, the archbishop of Esztergom and the pope, by persisting in employing non-Christians, Jews and Muslims, as their officials. Canon law prohibited the employment of non-Christians with power over Christians in public office; the kings of Hungary, however, were more interested in ensuring the reform of their system of revenues, now based on farming out revenues – that is, leasing out customs duties, minting and other monetary revenues – to replace some of the revenues from landed estates. Taxes and customs duties were collected by the lessees. In this way, kings employed Jews and Muslims in 'public offices', that is, in roles connected to the treasury and mint. In other words, 'public office' in this period meant being a royal official, including leasing royal revenues.

Contestation brought together the nobility with ecclesiastics to put pressure on the kings. Nobles wanted to safeguard their positions and exclude competition; the archbishop Robert of Esztergom was both protective of his profits in the sale of salt and objected to the infringement of canon law. Clashes with the Church were followed by royal promises in the Golden Bull (1222) and the oath of Bereg (1233) not to appoint Jews and Muslims to positions overseeing the royal treasury and mint, and the trade of salt, nor to allow them to be in charge of customs duties. The renewal of the Golden Bull in 1231 summarised these as public offices. Such promises, however, were not kept, and Béla IV then submitted a well-researched request, referring to papal approval of such practices in Portugal allowing non-Christians to hold public office in 1239. He asked Gregory IX for papal permission to farm out royal revenues to non-Christians, referring to the permission given by Gregory IX himself in such a matter to Sancho II of Portugal. Papal reproaches for continued employment of non-Christians recurred in the later 13th century. Kings clearly placed their economic and political interests above papal interpretations of Christian requirements.

Béla IV innovated in another way as well, by issuing a charter of privileges in 1251, modelled on the Austrian charter of Duke Frederick of Austria (1244), to the Jews of Hungary. Because the Jewish elite at the time moved between Austria and Hungary, the initiative certainly came from them. 'Privileges' in the Middle Ages did not mean an unduly positive status compared to others, but rather, guaranteed protection and rights in return for specific obligations. These privileges were quite comprehensive and offered physical protection from attack from Christians by fining those who violated prohibitions against injuring or killing a Jew, raping Jewish women, and kidnapping Jewish children. Synagogues also came under royal protection. Compensation was ordered to be paid not only to the Jewish victims but also to the king, signalling that Jewish status was linked to royal claims over the Jews. Jewish religious practices were also protected: for example, Jews were not to be forced to return pawned goods on holy days, or to swear on the Torah for insignificant matters, or to pay customs duties when transporting their dead. Jews were also able to have recourse to three means of proof in litigation: Jewish witnesses, an oath on the Torah

and the judicial duel if a Jew was killed in secret but the identity of the killer was suspected. Cooperating with Christians, Jews were able to have recourse to the judicial duel in other cases as well.

The Jewish oath itself is an indicator of integrative or exclusionary intentions. The basic premise of Christian attitudes to oaths by adherents of other faiths was distrust, and effort focused on ensuring that an oath would be binding on those taking it. Jews were frequently considered perfidious in Christian sources, but no more faith was accorded to other non-Christians; it was a recurring *topos* that the word of a non-Christian cannot be trusted, because they wish to deceive Christians. Because it was divine vengeance that the oath-taker called upon themselves if they broke the oath, clearly an oath taken to a divinity one did not believe in would not ensure this outcome. Christians therefore devised various ways of ensuring that the non-Christian side took an oath he considered binding. For Jews, this included taking an oath on the *Books of Moses.* Forms of Jewish oath that developed in German lands from the late thirteenth century, however, in particular the second group of *Schwaben-spiegel* manuscripts from the last two decades of the thirteenth century, also often included degrading elements, such as the obligation of the Jew taking the oath to stand on the skin of a pig. Such humiliation was to remind the Jews of their inferiority compared to Christians.

In the Hungarian case, it is already significant that Jews were not barred from other means of proof (witnesses and duels that were used in cases between Christians as well). Moreover, degrading elements were not introduced into the Jewish oath. Coloman's *Decretum* about the Jews (between 1104–1116) already referred to their oath "according to the law of the Jews" that could be used to disculpate someone who was accused of theft and had only Jewish witnesses (who were to take the oath). Such a means of proof was not fully equal to other means, but it was better than having no proof at all: it would result in paying the fine for theft four times instead of twelve times. King Béla's privileges elaborated on the meaning of the Jewish oath, to be taken on the *Books of Moses* and mentioned no degrading aspects. By the early 16th century István Werbőczy's *Tripartitum* (1517) included the requirement for Jews to wear the Jewish hat and stand barefoot; even then, and influenced probably by the customs of German burghers, the Jewish oath in the kingdom of Hungary was not as humiliating as in some other areas. It signals that at the end of the Middle Ages, secular government was still using the peculiarly medieval form of integration without equality, guaranteeing a measure of protection.

Indeed, King Béla IV's privileges were renewed by subsequent rulers, and the same kind of dynamics, privileges and protection given to the Jews in exchange for service to the king continued. A short-lived exception occurred during the reign of Louis the Great (1342–1382) who expelled the Jews from his realm. Because Jewish settlement depended on royal permission, such permission could be withdrawn any time. Numerous expulsions from various European realms occurred in the later medieval period, including of course expulsions from whole kingdoms that were intended to be permanent. In the Hungarian case, the expulsion of c. 1360 lasted for a short time, and after a few years the Jews were allowed to re-enter the kingdom. (Most had gone to Austria and the Czech lands, thus not very far.) The element of gain from the expulsions was not absent: when they were permitted to return, the Jews had to settle in a new area of the royal centre, Buda, because the king had already given their old houses to his men. Yet the primary reason for Louis the Great's expulsion of the Jews, according to contemporary chronicle accounts, was his Christian piety: he wanted to convert them to Christianity but they stub-

bornly resisted.[6] While some scholars discount this and ascribe Europe-wide persecutions to the plague, this scepticism seems misplaced. Later, in Poland, Louis the Great also tried to convert Jews, and according to the chronicler converted Cumans and heretics. Of course Louis may have interpreted the plague as a sign to intensify missionary activity, but we have no information on that.

While the expulsion was an exceptional detour from the usual pattern of the political authority's relations to Jews in Hungary, a new element was introduced in the course of the late medieval period into the relationship of rulers and the Jewish inhabitants of the realm.[7] Although Jews continued to be useful to rulers in economic roles, receiving protection in return, political motivations in this period sometimes led kings temporarily to withdraw their protection from the Jewish communities. Thus the last king of Hungary before the Ottoman conquest, Louis II (1516–1526) still protected the Jews (this comprised protection from arbitrary urban taxes) to ensure their revenues for himself. Yet by this time kings were at times willing to sacrifice Jewish goods either to pacify influential groups, or for other benefits. Rulers could use their power to cancel debt to Jewish moneylenders as a bargaining chip. For example *killing letters* (Tötbriefe), that is decrees cancelling either interest or the full loan amount due to Jews, were offered in exchange for services or other benefits. Kings Sigismund (1387–1437) and Matthias (1458–1490) allowed repayment to be delayed or cancelled the interest several times at the demand of towns. They benefited from urban support against the high nobility. John Hunyadi, a prominent leader in the wars against the Ottomans and governor of Hungary (1446–1453) received weapons and warriors from Pozsony (modern Bratislava, Slovakia) in 1449 and released the citizens from all debts to Jews.

As royal financial difficulties increased, methods against the Jews turned harsher: Vladislas (Ulászló) II (1490–1516) ordered the imprisonment of the Jews of Sopron until they 'loaned' him the 400 forints he demanded. And while he granted privileges and protection to the Jews just like his predecessors had, in practice he was unable to protect them against urban legislation that excluded them from professions tied to membership in various guilds (e.g. tailors). The king also increasingly allowed towns to handle cases involving Jews, theoretically reserved for royal jurisdiction. Louis II's widow Queen Mary, while also taking money from Jews, backed urban attempts (by Pozsony and Sopron) to expel the Jews while keeping their property and cancelling their debts.

Throughout the medieval period, the strong link between Jews and royal power was maintained, although not unchanged. Rulers regulated Jewish status. Although there was ecclesiastical, noble, and in the later Middle Ages growing urban pressure on them towards increasing exclusion – discrimination and arbitrary economic measures – overall they tended to follow the route of integrating Jewish communities into the realm by granting them royal protection, while setting them apart as Jews who were therefore also at the mercy of royal goodwill. This is evident in three examples which are emblematic of the special ties between Jews and the king. These were the renewal of King Béla IV's privileges during the 14th–15th centuries; the institution of a representative of the king with jurisdiction over the Jews, and the Jewish ceremonial role during royal entries.

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6   József Fógel/Béla Iványi/László Juhász (Ed.), Antonius de Bonfinis Rerum Ungaricarum Decades, t 2, Decas II, Liber X, Leipzig 1936, 248.
7   For further details on many of the events treated in the second half of this lecture, see: Géza Komoróczy, A zsidók története Magyarországon, 2 vols, Pozsony 2012.

The privileges were regularly renewed, and without them, without royal protection, Jews would have been easy prey. The *Judex Judaeorum*, judge of the Jews, first appeared in Béla IV's privileges, but can only be traced in practice from the 1360s. The office of the judge of the Jews was granted to the highest official of the realm who dealt with financial matters, the *camerarius*. He was an official of the king and judged cases between Jews and Christians. In royal towns, the town judge filled that role. At the end of the 14th century, kings gave rights over Jews to landlords from the high nobility, literally the right to keep Jews (*ius tenere iudeos*), with full power over them, thereby withdrawing them from the jurisdiction of the judge of the Jews. In 1436, however, King Sigismund decreed that Jews under lords also owed royal taxes, thus reversing the detachment of the Jews from royal power.

King Matthias introduced a new system; he abolished the institution of the Judge of the Jews, and established instead a *praefectus* from among the Jews, the leader of the Jewish community of Buda. This prefect was even called prince or king of the Jews in contemporary sources; he was accountable to the royal treasury and was responsible for apportioning and collecting the tax of the Jews. In effect, therefore, one type of overseer was replaced by another, but this did not change the close association of Jews to the king himself. Finally, the late medieval role of Jews at the welcoming of the king during royal ceremonial entry (*introitus*), giving gifts and taking part in the parade (when the Jews also asked for and received the renewal of their privileges) was a visible enactment of the ties between Jews and kings. There are detailed descriptions of the Jews welcoming King Matthias Corvinus after his election, on his entry to Buda (15 February 1458), and again after the coronation.

The extent to which kings wished, or were able to, offer protection in practice varied. Two late medieval examples demonstrate that rulers were at times forced, or were willing, to sacrifice Jewish property to appease popular anger. Antonio Bonfini wrote of such a popular revolt against the Jews at Buda in 1496. The rabble plundered Jewish houses, taking valuables; when the bishop of Eger's men tried to intervene, this just raised popular discontent because he was held responsible for recent taxes. In the end the king sent soldiers who immediately captured and executed some of the wrongdoers, putting an end to the revolt. Yet for fear of fomenting further revolts the king did not dare to oppose the people more.[8] When the Jewish street of Buda was plundered in 1525, the count palatine (the kingdom's highest official, representative of the king) intervened only after several days to save the Jews.

Thus popular discontent associated those in power with Jews, and took vengeance on Jewish communities. At times kings even allowed this safety-valve to let off popular steam before intervening to protect Jewish communities. This was the flip side of royal protection, and one could ask what the difference between this and state-fomented antisemitism is, but I would argue that the distinction is significant. While royal power could allow discontent to be channelled against Jewish property, ultimately it was royal intervention that saved the Jews. Attacks were also very localised, and not state-wide. In the case of state-sponsored antisemitism, only a change in central political will or outside pressure could suspend the state machinery's active participation in destruction.

In the medieval period, we can find cases of a king wanting to profit at the expense of the Jews; bowing to ecclesiastical or popular pressure; acting out of religious zeal. But there are no cases of a systematic recourse to anti-Judaism as a political tool in

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8   József Fógel/Béla Iványi/László Juhász, Antonius de Bonfinis Rerum Ungaricarum Decades, t 4/1, Decas V, Liber V, Budapest 1941, 274.

medieval Hungary: rulers did not foster anti-Judaism out of political interest. As before, anti-Jewish rhetoric came from ecclesiastical circles, notably from sermons, and in the later medieval period from towns, which saw Jews as economic rivals. Kings at times espoused such anti-Jewish attitudes to some extent; at other times combatted them, but apart from Louis the Great's Christian zeal resulting in expulsion, all the kings adhered to integrative practices in their policies.

The early modern division of the kingdom into three political units, Habsburg Hungary, Ottoman Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania also impacted on Jewish status. In Habsburg Hungary this brought about a change towards exclusion, while in Ottoman Hungary and Transylvania Jewish status remained akin to medieval patterns. The Ottomans resettled some of the Jews from Hungary to the Ottoman Empire, but both there and in Ottoman Hungary they were treated according to the Islamic precepts of toleration for "peoples of the book" or *dhimmi*. This meant the autonomy of Jewish communities in communal affairs and at the same time also a secondary status, and subjection to special taxes. In the Principality of Transylvania the earlier status of Jews continued. Prince Gábor Bethlen (1613–1629) gave privileges to the Jews in 1623 inspired by Ottoman practices and following the suggestion of a Jewish doctor from Constantinople, Abraham Szasza. These privileges granted free trade in exchange for paying taxes, protected Jewish religious practices, and granted the right not to wear distinctive signs.

Jews in the part of the kingdom of Hungary that came under Habsburg rule, however, saw a deterioration of their legal status. Ferdinand I (1526–1564) allowed landholders, now recipients of tax from the Jews, to replace the royal treasury as the judicial authority over the Jews. The ties binding Jews to kings were loosened, and their usefulness to rulers was declining, although they still provided monetary revenues, and even in the 17th century the figure of the court Jew (*Hofjude*) played an important role in providing loans of money during the Thirty Years' War. In 1578, Rudolf I wished actively to encourage the emigration of Jews (and of Anabaptists) who had houses, by doubling the amount of tax they must pay. And in 1647, Ferdinand III, while legislating about the prohibition for Jews to rent customs duties, also stated that Jews were "incapable of having the rights of the kingdom, they were infidels and endowed with no conscience" (*jurium regni incapaces, infideles, et nulla conscientia praediti*[9]). Using the legal terminology of *incapax* conjured up the notion of having no discretion or intellect sufficient enough to grasp the distinction between right and wrong. It seems to be a variation on the long-standing Catholic *topos* of the irrational and therefore not fully human Jew.

Such negative attitudes were inspired by Catholicism; with the Habsburg dedication to the Counter-reformation from the mid-16th to the mid-17th centuries, not only Protestants, but Jews also experienced the exclusionary drive that now overrode earlier patterns of the central political authority's policies towards Jews. Catholicising and centralising power were intertwined in the Counter-Reformation. The expulsion of the Ottomans and Habsburg kingship in Hungary meant that the tradition of the Counter-reformation of the 16th–17th centuries, spreading the Catholic faith, became a high priority of the rulers of Hungary. Count Leopold von Kollonitsch's reform programme of 1689 advocated this also with respect to the Jews: if they were unwilling to convert they were to be removed from economic and social life. (They would have no right to exchange money, lease customs duties, or lease land, and they

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9   The text is reprinted in the collection of sources by Géza Komoróczy, Nekem itt zsidónak kell lenni [=I have to be a Jew here], in: Források és dokumentumok [=Sources and Documents] 96 (2012), Pozsony 2013), 232.

would have to pay heavy taxes). They were not to be allowed to settle on land reconquered from the Turks and were eventually to be removed from the whole kingdom. With hindsight, the count used hair-raising vocabulary: the kingdom is "to be cleansed" "from the harmful filth of the Jews" (*rainigen; schädlicher Unrat deren Juden*).[10] Thus, like Louis I, the Habsburgs of the late 17th century were intent on the elimination of the Jews through expulsion as a programme of the state, although in both cases conversion to Christianity nullified state persecution. Maria Theresa (Queen of Hungary 1740–1780) was also an advocate of restricting Jewish activities and saw them as a plague. Yet her state needed the Jews, and their taxes, and so despite her personal antipathy, in the end she allowed for continued Jewish life in Hungary. Indeed, starting in the 18th century, Jews became key beneficiaries of capitalist development, which also led to the start of mass assimilation in the 19th century.

The waning of the Catholic imperative and rise of modernisation during the reign of Joseph II (1780–1790) ushered in a radical change. Joseph II advocated both the education of his subjects and tolerance in matters of religion. Just as he ensured that the status of non-Catholic Christians was regulated, so too did he want to provide for the integration of Jews in a comprehensive manner. In 1783 he decreed that Jews were not to be disturbed in their religious customs, even ordering that heads of guilds were to accept the specific food practices of Jewish apprentices. Yet he tried to push a reform through that was to integrate the Jews by separating religion from everyday life, in other words, by secularising and modernising Jewish life. Jews were to undergo compulsory schooling in secular subjects (without it, they would not receive the right to have a business), either in Jewish schools to be set up or in the national schools. Indeed, they were to be encouraged to send their children to the communal schools with Christians. They were also to adopt the languages of the country (that is, Latin, German or Hungarian) for all official business, because only documents in these languages would be accepted legally. Hebrew was to be reserved for religious matters, but Yiddish (*jüdisch-deutsch*) and any linguistic use that was not pure Hebrew was to be completely eliminated, with imperial appointees controlling the implementation of this decision. Jews were also to adopt German family names.

I would like to use two types of examples to illustrate the differences between the integrative and the exclusionary drive prior to the emergence of emancipation: vocabulary and the regulation of clothing. In terms of vocabulary, I mean the terminology used to describe Jews. In terms of clothing regulations, I mean the rules dictated from above, concerning what Jews must or must not wear.

The vocabulary for centuries was mainly religious, contrasting Jews and Christians; *Judei* and *Christiani*. That is how the laws of Ladislas I, Coloman, Béla IV and others used the terms. Converts were at times designated as formerly a Jew, now a Christian. Antonio Bonfini at the end of the fifteenth century (in his *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*) is a rare exception: he contrasts *Hebrei*, Hebrews, and *Ungari,* Hungarians.[11] The terminology of Hebrews evokes Biblical times, and thus has religious connotations, as Bonfini's story itself confirms. In order to persuade the Jews, Louis the Great promised to treat them as Hungarians (*pro Ungaris*) if they converted. How should we understand such usage? According to Christian theology, the ancient Hebrews were the Chosen People; they lost that status when they refused to

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10 Quoted in: János J. Varga, Berendezési tervezetek Magyarországon a török kiűzésének időszakában. Az 'Einrichtungswerk' [=Establishing Plans in Hungary in the Times of the Expulsion of the Osmans. The 'Einrichtungswerk'], in: Századok [=Centuries] 125 (1991) 5-6, 449-488, here 480.

11 Fógel/Iványi/Juhász, Antonius ,248.

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acknowledge the Messiah, and Christians gained it. That many different peoples inhabited Christendom was commonly acknowledged. Conversion would therefore ensure membership among the local representatives of the Christian people, Hungarians. The classicising tendency of a humanist, rather than incipient racism was behind the choice of the term. Even in the later medieval period it is more frequent to find the religious comparison, Jews and Christians; or occasionally status groups, "lords, knights, squires, citizens of towns, and Jews" (*Herren, Ritter, Knechte, Bürger, auch die Juden*) as in the 1479 *Geschichte der Stadt Breslau* by Peter Eschenloer.[12]

Terminology can be also tied to the notion of a people, a *gens. Gens Judaica*, *gens Hebraica* and *Judaicae Nationes homines* were all used by Joseph II. Such terminology can be used in integrative strategies of according group privileges. The terms, however, even if unwittingly, are put in the service of exclusion when they stigmatise, carrying negative connotations. After all, if the semantic field of the term Jew denotes slyness, stubbornness, blindness and the like, can one wonder that sooner or later people who are fed this kind of fare daily will turn against Jews?

Yet in contrast, we should recognise the 'modernity' – in a strictly temporal, rather than value-judgemental sense, of course – of the contrast between 'Jew' and 'Hungarian' among citizens technically with equal rights. First, in such a context 'Jew' only makes sense when it is applied in line with racial laws devised in Nuremberg and in their wake elsewhere including Hungary. It is not a term that denotes the religious affiliation of people because it includes those who are not religious. It includes those who would not consider themselves Jewish, unless perhaps in opposition to antisemitism. It can only serve exclusion, even if the superficial message is one of protection or friendship. Such a binary division suggests that there are Hungarian citizens who are ethnically pure Hungarians and others who are not, who are Jews. That ethnic Hungarianness is a complete myth is well known. So is, of course, the racial Jew. The contrast has one meaning alone, and that is to suggest that some people, defined by the state, are more natural citizens or proprietors of the state than others. The opposition, by political authority, of Jews and Hungarians is a code designed to build political capital through exclusion.

Clothing regulation was initially exclusionary, although it came not from the ruler but from the Catholic Church in Hungary. The idea derived from papal policy: in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council claimed that the impossibility of distinguishing Jews from Christians led to unwanted sexual mixing, and to remedy the situation, ordered that Jews wear distinguishing clothing. That was soon interpreted as a demand for distinguishing signs, and these were introduced in various European countries, in a variety of different shapes. To Hungary, the sign was introduced late and by the insistence of a papal legate. The papal legate Jacob Pecorari, bishop of Praeneste (Giacomo da Pecorara), who compelled King Andrew II to take the oath of Bereg in 1233 concerning the prohibition of non-Christian public office holding, also included in the oath the general promise to introduce distinguishing signs for Jews (and Muslims), but this clearly did not go into effect and was not even specified further. Philip, cardinal-bishop of Fermo, held a synod at Buda in 1279 in which he prescribed the introduction of a red circle made of cloth, sewn on the left side of the outer garment to be worn by Jews of both sexes when they went outside their home. This regulation, however, lacked royal support to such an extent that the deadline by which it would have to be introduced was omitted from the manuscript.

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12 The text is reprinted in the collection of sources by Géza Komoróczy, Nekem itt zsidónak, 121.

Indeed, there is no evidence of distinctive Jewish clothing or a sign imposed on the Jews in Hungary until 1421 in the law-book of Buda (and this only had an effect on Jews resident there), in which the Jewish hat, red cape and yellow circle were prescribed; more generally in the kingdom evidence comes from the early 16th century regarding the requirement of a cape.

An integrative use of clothing regulation was included in Emperor Joseph II's *Sistematica gentis Judaicae regulatio* of 31 March 1783.[13] He introduced not only a compulsory use of local languages in documents that were to be legally valid, compulsory schooling in various secular subjects, while integrating the Jews more into society, but also demanded the abolition of all distinguishing signs that had set Jews apart from others: "omnia illa distinctiva signa, quae Judaicae Nationis homines a reliquis secernebant, deinceps tollantur". This, however, did not mean the abolition of Jewish hats or red circles on clothing. Jews were authorised to wear swords; and were ordered to divest themselves of their beards and of the external signs of their religion ("barbam, aliaque in usu existentia extrinseca Religionis suae signa deponere debeant"), in exchange for which they were to be protected against every insult and harm. This last requirement, on the shaving off of beards, met with vehement resistance and was soon dropped.

This example also alerts us to the fact that integration itself must be contextualised in its own period and culture. Thus King Béla IV promoted integration, as did Emperor Joseph II. The first, however, did it according to a common medieval pattern, giving privileges, that is, protection to the Jews, in effect providing a royal guarantee that they could practice their religion, trade and enjoy safety in his kingdom, while setting them apart as a group defined by their religion. Joseph II, however, while allowing them religious freedom, wished to integrate Jews in terms of their language and culture. The two forms of integration are very different from each other. Neither amounted to equality. I should also add that apart from the modern liberal agenda, even those who promoted integration contributed to maintaining the status of Jews as a religious group apart, and even if unwittingly, strengthened anti-Judaism. Thus Joseph II's decree is full of expressions vilifying the Jews. Their "inborn slyness and perfidy" means they may try to wriggle out of the demand for schooling, "their mistrust springs from their inborn partiality"; "their well-known stubbornness" poses a problem.

Complete equality for the Jews (emancipation) became a political programme in the 19th century. The liberal programme represented by József Eötvös stood on the platform of equal civic rights for all citizens. It was hoped that the granting of rights would be followed by modernisation – but a modernisation that was voluntary rather than imposed from above. Others such as Lajos Kossuth demanded assimilation as the precondition for gaining rights. During the 1848–1849 revolution, civic equality for Jews figured among the demands of some; in the end, emancipation passed into law in 1867. From that time, Jews in Hungary had the same civil and political rights as Christian inhabitants.

Yet the novelty of complete integration, with the freedom of personal choice in matters of religion, was not upheld long by the state. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (1918) and the humiliating Treaty of Trianon (1920), where groups previously living as despised nationalities within Hungary were awarded territories by the victorious allies, the Hungarian government drew on antisemitic rhetoric in a new way. Such antisemitism already existed, but while it had

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13 The text is reprinted in the collection of sources by Géza Komoróczy, Nekem itt zsidónak, 380-387.

been at most marginal in political life earlier, it now came to be incorporated into state policy. Jews were identified with communists. Many of those who played a role in the Republic of Councils, or Soviet Republic of Hungary (March-August 1919), including the leader Béla Kun, were seen as Jews by antisemites. Just how meaningless such categorisation was can be illustrated using the example of Béla Kun. He was born Kohn, of a Jewish father who had given up religious practice; he studied at an Evangelical-Reformed Christian secondary school and then Evangelical-Reformed College in Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca, Romania). He twice won the school prize for the best essay in Hungarian literature, the second time writing about the patriotic poetry of János Arany and Sándor Petőfi. He started to use the name Kun from 1905 and eventually his whole family followed suit when his younger brother received a gold Medal of Bravery for his service at the front in 1916. He was a prisoner of war during the First World War and became a communist. After the fall of the Republic, he fled to Austria and eventually was sent to Russia as part of a prisoner exchange.[14]

In the Horthy regime of the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, it was the antisemitic construct of 'the Jew' that was used to turn real Jews into scapegoats for all the ills of Hungarian society. Political antisemitism was used to divert popular anger from government policies that kept a large part of the population poor and the country backward. Depriving Jews of civic equality and rights, and eventually designating as 'Jews' not the adherents of Judaism, but the descendants of Jewish parents regardless of conversion or atheism, the Hungarian state used antisemitism as a political tool. The 'White Terror' organised by officers associated with Horthy between 1919 and 1921 often targeted Jews; the *numerus clausus* (1920) restricted Jewish access to university education; subsequently, from 1938, 21 further laws and 267 decrees concerning the Jews were promulgated. The systematic fostering of antisemitism by the state, identifying Jews as the cause of all ills, fomenting hate and creating a 'Jewish problem' to be solved was a novelty of the Horthy regime. It drew on pre-existing antisemitism, but reinforced, fuelled and channelled it for its own ends.

In the Horthy era, one can find expressions of antisemitism as self-defence. Distorting history, members of the regime liked to point out that Jews had always presented a danger to the Hungarian state, and that medieval kings of Hungary already recognised this. Allegedly their legislation – apart from that of weak kings – demonstrates their rightful antisemitism. One example of a supposedly scholarly assessment (not a rabid right-wing pamphlet, but a solid academic example) demonstrates the extent to which political antisemitism penetrated the fabric of society: Bálint Hóman, one of the leading historians of the Horthy regime, and Minister of Religion and Education between 1932 and 1938, wrote in his *Hungarian monetary history 1000–1325 (Magyar pénztörténet)* in 1916 that "The leasing of royal income […] aimed at maximizing these revenues. The lessee could afford to commit various smaller or greater malpractices […] because the king would ignore such abuse of powers in return for higher revenues. Therefore the king made money-minting a business venture when he leased it. But as soon as something became a […] well-remunerated business, the Jews, medieval Europe's financiers and bankers immediately appeared. They who – as the consequences showed – did not make the exploitation of the lease in prohibited ways a matter of conscience, could naturally increase the rent they paid to incredibly high amounts, and therefore it is no won-

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14 Lajos Árokay, Kun Béla, Budapest 1986, 7-12 and 29-46; Antal Józsa/Ferenc Mucsi, Kun Béla pályakezdése [=The starting point of Béla Kun´s Career], in: György Milei (Ed.), Kun Béláról. Tanulmányok [=About Béla Kun. Studies], Budapest 1988, 86-113.

der that weaker kings, in chaotic financial situations, willingly relied on their ser-vices."[15]

This presentation was already highly biased, but it was reformulated in even stark-er terms, now encouraged by the open antisemitism of the Horthy regime. In his book *The financial and economic policy of the Kingdom of Hungary under Charles Robert (A Magyar Királyság pénzügyei és gazdaságpolitikája Károly Róbert korában)*, published in 1921, Hóman asserted that Béla IV "having learned the sad lesson from the contracts concluded with unscrupulous Jewish and Muslim lessees of the royal treasury, contacted citizens whose wealth and character guaranteed their honest dealings as lessees. […] Charles Robert put nobles at the head of the mint to avoid the severe damage to the inhabitants of the country and […] the disintegration of inter-nal peace that had happened due to the activities of the 13th century Jewish and Mus-lim lessees of the treasury."[16] This misrepresentation, driven by politics, did not con-sider the power-struggle between nobles allied with ecclesiastics on the one hand and the king on the other hand, which led to accusations against non-Christians for leverage against the king in getting papal help; and omitted accounting for the fact that Christian lessees of the royal revenues far outnumbered Jewish and Muslim ones already in the 13th century.

I wish to underline that I am not contrasting some rosy period of medieval or mod-ern harmonious relations between Jews and Christians with the twentieth-century exclusionary drive. There was despoiling, many types of exclusion, attacks, pogroms and blood-libels in the Middle Ages and modern times even when the ruler or gov-ernment promoted integration. Yet outcomes were significantly different across Europe in situations where antisemitism was mobilised centrally for political purpos-es. In those cases, the effect was sweeping, to the detriment of a significant part of the Jewish population, whereas otherwise violent outbursts were local phenomena. More-over, full integration through equality cannot be achieved without complete state support, and it is entirely impossible to achieve integration in a state that operates an exclusionary mechanism. Although not the only modes of relations between the lead-ers of a state and its Jewish inhabitants, there were two key mechanisms fostered by political authority (be it a kingdom's ruler, or an elected government) that determined the life of Jewish inhabitants. These were integrative, granting protection and eventu-ally full equality; and exclusionary, putting the emphasis on religious exclusion, dis-crimination, and the political use of antisemitism to gain popular support.

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15 Hungarian original: "A királyi jövedelmek bérbeadása mindenütt s nálunk is a jövedelmek fokozását czélozta. A bérlő sok minden apróbb-nagyobb üzleti visszaélést megengedhetett magának, a mit a királyi tisztviselő nem tehetett meg, viszont a király a magasabb bérösszeg fejében szemet hunyt e visszaélések fölött. A pénz-verést tehát a király a bérlettel *üzleti alapra* fektette. Mihelyest azonban üzletről s jól jövedelmező üzletről volt szó, tüstént jelentkeztek a középkori Európa pénzemberei és bankárai, a zsidók. Ők, a kik – mint a követ-kezések megmutatták – nem igen csináltak lelkiismereti kérdést a bérletnek meg nem engedett módokon való kiaknázásából, természetesen hihetetlenül magasra tudták fokozni a bérösszeget is s így nem csodálható, ha a gyengébb uralkodók, zavaros pénzügyi helyzetűben, szívesen vették igénybe szolgálataikat." (I have used the digitised version which does not include page numbers: http://mek.oszk.hu/07100/07139/html/0004/0005/0013-265.html, Part 2, chapter 13.), (15.09-2015).

16 Hungarian Original: "IV. Béla – okulva a lelkiismeretlen zsidó és izmaelita kamarabérlőkkel kötött szerződések szomorú tanulságain – üzleti ügyekben járatos, tekintélyes városi polgárokkal lépett összeköttetésbe, kiknek vagyona és egyénisége biztosítékául szolgált a bérlet becsületes kezelésére. Károly Róbert viszont a pénzverés ügyének első rendezésekor (1323) *nemesurakat állított* a pénzverő kamarák élére. A kamaraispánok *üzletem-berek* voltak, fő céljuk saját jövedelmük gyarapítása volt. E cél érdekében – kellő ellenőrzés híján – oly vis-szaélésekre és túlkapásokra vetemedhettek volna, melyek az országlakosok súlyos károsodására, a közgaz-dasági élet megbénulására és a territoriális hatóságokkal való hatásköri összeütközések következményeképp-pen a belső béke felbomlására vezethetett volna, mint ahogy a XIII. századi zsidó és izmaelita kamarabérlő üzelmei nyomán mindezek be is következtek." http://mek.oszk.hu/07100/07139/html/0005/0010-2e5.html, chapter 9. (15.09.2015).

Integration through privileges (that is, an independent legal status, even if it was based on protection in exchange for the benefits gained from Jews) was always fragile. But in the Middle Ages it was the Catholic Church that was the main driver of anti-Judaism, and not the state. Popular discontent could be channelled against Jews in most periods, but whether it could be translated into anti-Jewish practice depended increasingly on the state. Many of those who wished to exclude repeatedly claimed that they meant no physical harm. Such "unintended consequences" included the massacre of Jews by crusaders. Medieval ecclesiastics wanted only to teach Christians that Jews killed Christ, were stubborn in adhering to their error, and were inferior to Christians. Although they did not intend Jews to be murdered, it is unsurprising that many Christians, conditioned by such a message and taught that to kill the enemies of Christ (Muslims in the Holy Land) was a meritorious activity, concluded that the offer of a choice between conversion and death was the appropriate approach towards Jews. We also find the idea that in the first half of the 20th century the state only wanted a "solution to the Jewish question" and not the murder of its citizens. Yet relentlessly driving home the message about Jewish inferiority, irrationality and culpability, about Jews as a dangerous presence, in the end leads to physical attack.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I chose to focus on the attitudes of political authority towards Jews. That does not mean at all that Jews were mere passive recipients of state policies. They were active agents, as attested for example in the Jewish elite's request for privileges from King Béla IV; the resistance to the shaving off of beards decreed by Joseph II (which resulted in the measure being repealed); movements from the late 18th and in the 19th century demanding emancipation; and resistance to the Orbán government's promotion of distorted historical memory. Nor were the Jews of Hungary ever one homogeneous group. For instance, in the 13th century the elites who moved freely between Austria and Hungary and gave loans to rulers were a world apart from servants who were even willing to convert to Christianity to escape from their lot. Similarly, Jews were not unified in their attitudes to emancipation. Faced with the possibility of assimilation in the 19th–20th centuries, some espoused it completely, while others rejected it. Thus for example Moses Schreiber (Szofér), the rabbi of Pozsony between 1806–1839, formulated the orthodox response to the challenge of assimilation. He wished to strengthen the religious fence to defend Jewish cohesion, and advocated a strict rejection of religious change as well as of assimilation into non-Jewish society. The Torah prohibits innovation, he claimed. It would be a separate task to investigate Jewish initiatives and responses. Yet, as a minority, Jews defined as a group either by voluntary identification, or constituted by outside definition, were always in a potentially vulnerable position. Political authority to a large extent determined the possibilities of and impediments to Jewish life, by creating legal frameworks, by intervening if necessary to protect Jews, or, inversely, by unleashing hate-speech and discrimination.

Current government practice is unusual even in the Hungarian context and harks back to the Horthy regime, which was the only government that systematically used antisemitism in its internal politics. The revival of government-fostered political antisemitism is in particular linked to the Horthy-era concept of the 'Christian national' state. The current regime is trying to establish continuity with the Horthy period and find its legitimation in reviving the vocabulary and mentality of the interwar era.

No matter how often public denials are uttered; no matter how varied messages play to different audiences; and regardless of whether the sometimes self-contradictory messages are sent intentionally or unintentionally, those who conjure up the

vocabulary of 'us' Hungarians versus 'them', Jews, harness antisemitism for political gain. Adults playing with fire cannot claim ignorance of the possible outcome of their actions. Likewise, no European politician in the 21st century can credibly claim to be unaware of the potential consequences of fostering political antisemitism.

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