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Jewish Art Patronage in Budapest at the Turn of the Century

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This article will deal only with a single aspect (although certainly an extremely important one) of art patronage in turn-of-the-century-Budapest, that of the Jewish contribution to the support of the arts. It ignores the patronage of the Hungarian nobility, of the state and of the city. It is not my purpose to define the characteristics of a social stratum purely in terms of ethnic background, in this case Jewish. Instead, this study will focus on socio-psychological factors. It will seek to illumine the taste of those Hungarian citizens who possessed various grades of double identity. This multi-layered double identity was expressed through a twin allegiance to Jewish tradition and to Hungarian culture.

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The educated middle class of Budapest took up art patronage (in the form of collecting, commissioning and art sponsorship) three or four decades later than their counterparts in Vienna.[1] In the first half of the 19th century, artistic life in the Hungarian capital was very modest by comparison with Vienna: until the turn of the century there were no significant art exhibitions and hardly any art market. The most important area of creative activity was in any case literature – intellectual and cultural life in the capital was concentrated around the National Theatre and the Academy. By comparison with that of Austria, Hun-

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1 *Magyarország története 1849–1918* (The History of Hungary, 1849–1918) eds. Péter Hanák – Tibor Erényi – György Szabad, Budapest, 1972.: Péter Hanák, *Ungarn in der Donau-Monarchie – Probleme der bürgerlichen Umgestaltung eines Vielvölkerstaates.* (Hungary in the Danubian Monarchy: Problems of Bourgeois Transformation in a Multi-Ethnic State), Wien-München, 1984. pp. 281–442., *Magyarország története* 1848–1890. Vol 6/1, 6/2 (The History of Hungary) ed. Endre Kovács, Budapest, 1979.; Magyarország története 1890–1918, Vol 7/1. 7/2. (The History of Hungary) ed. Péter Hanák. Budapest 1978.; John Lukács, *Budapest 1900,* London, 1988.

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garian culture may therefore be described, in C.E. Schorske's phrase, as a culture of the word, not of the senses.

The Hungarian language occupied centre stage in cultural activity because of the drive to Magyarisation. In largely German-speaking Buda, Pest and Obuda (the three towns were only united in 1873), the prime motivation behind the promotion of culture was to establish Hungarian as the predominant language. The *sine qua non* for those who wished to be regarded as "genuine" Hungarians was a mastery of the Hungarian tongue. Consequently this became the most important skill for all German or Yiddish speakers whose ultimate goal was political emancipation and cultural assimilation.[2]

It is a commonplace that the emancipation and assimilation of Jews was accomplished more easily in the Hungarian Kingdom than in other territories of Eastern Europe. The reason for this was that the Hungarians, who were the state-forming nation, barely constituted a majority over minorities such as Slovaks, Rumanians and Serbs.

To understand the special character of Jewish assimilation to Hungarian culture, it is necessary to grasp several socio-historical factors.[3] According to latest research, Jewish emancipation and assimilation in Hungary was a particularly rapid process in the second half of the 19th century. This process was in effect driven forward by a collective decision of the Jews in Hungary during the period of Dualism. (Some of these had lived in Hungary for generations; others were recent immigrants from Galicia). Political and linguistic assimilation to the politically dominant nation was closely bound up with aspirations

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[2] On this question see George Bárány, Magyar Jew or Jewish Magyar in *Canadian-American Studies* Vol VIII, 1974. pp. 18–20. The alacrity with which the assimilated, intellectual Jews took to the Hungarian language is remarkable, as is the speed with which they developed an elegant speaking style. Language was the means of social integration and a symbol of the peaceful way in which Jews and non-Jews lived in the same community. The summary of the special features of the Jewish assimilation process relies on: Viktor Karády, Asszimiláció és társadalmi válság (Assimilation and the Crisis of Society) in *Világosság,* Budapest. (3) 1993 pp. 33–60. Idem: Principle Factors of the Emancipation and Modernisation of Jewry in the History of Hungarian Society, in: *The Jewish Question,* Budapest, 1989.

[3] On this see: Nathaniel Katzburg, Hungarian Jewry in Modern Times. Political and Social Aspects. In: *Hungarian-Jewish Studies* Ed. L. Braham, New York, 1966., Rolf Fischer, *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939* (The Development of Anti-Semitism in Hungary, 1867–1939), Münich, 1988., Wolfgang Häussler, Assimilation und Emanzipation des ungarischen Judentums um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts (Assimilation and Emancipation of Hungarian Jewry in the mid-19th Century) in: *Studia Judaica Austriaca*. Vol. III. Studies in Hungarian Jewry. Eisenstadt, 1976. pp. 33–79; Wolfdieter Bihl, Dad Judentum Ungarn (Hungarian Jewry) in: *Studia Judaica Austriaca* Vol. III. 1976. pp. 17–31.

to status within the new economic and political middle class. For this reason, the development acquired its own individual dynamic.

The strategies required to achieve assimilation and social mobility were common to all aspirants: further education, urbanisation, secularisation. The majority of Hungarian Jews benefited from legal emancipation, made available by liberal reforms in 1891 and 1895.[4] The consequent total assimilation of Jews to religious and secular institutions has been described by the sociologist Viktor Karády as the "institutional self-assimilation of Jewish communities in Hungary". According to Karády, this process was carried forward in Hungary with a determination and enthusiasm unparalleled in Europe.

For the reforming Liberal elite of the Ausgleich generation, especially in Deák's party, talented assimilated Jews were valued as influential allies in the struggle to modernise the country (they included such figures as Miksa Falk and Mór Gelléri). This drive to modernisation affected every sector of society and every sphere of life. There was a need for many highly qualified experts who – as long as they identified with the national interest – could very quickly be integrated into a modernising society and reach high positions within it. The crucial role of Jewish bankers (Mór Wahrmann, Adolf Ullmann, Zsigmond Kornfeld Senior, Leó Lányi), and of Jewish entrepreneurs (Ödön Neuschloss, Manfred Weiss, the Goldberger and Hatvany-Deutsch families) in the modernisation of the Hungarian economy is already well known. In what follows, I would like to draw attention to the same process as it affected culture, an area in which citizens of Jewish origin played a vital role.

The Free Professions

Within the free professions, medicine was always open to aspiring Jews; from the sixties onwards, journalism became open to them and gradually, also, the law. The economic and political development of Hungary offered educated Jews ever-increasing opportunities to climb into the upper middle class on the back of the financial boom.

The numbers of Jews increased rapidly, especially in the capital. By 1910 the Jewish population had already reached 20% of the whole. Unusually favourable chances for social acceptance and emancipation, and rapid assimila-

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4 Law regulating civil marriage § XXXI, 1891. The final step to complete emancipation for those of Jewish faith was taken with the recognition of the Jewish religion. § XLII, 1895. On this see Móritz Csáky, Die Römisch-Katholische Kirche in Ungarn (The Roman Catholic Church in Hungary) in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918* (The Habsburg Monarchy 1848–1918), Vol. IV. Ed. A. Wandruszka, 1985. pp. 289–303.

tion to Hungarian language and culture, accelerated the secularisation of Hungarian Jews and strengthened the trend toward the modernisation of the Jewish religion. The reform of religion and modernisation of its social attitudes produced in the Jews a strong belief in progress, reinforced by the educational ideal which was so esteemed in Jewish families. In an expanding world, where one could work one's way to the top of society by means of education and application (as did Mór Wodianer, Frigyes Korányi Senior, Zsigmond Kornfeld and Mór Gelléri), realistic career opportunities opened up for the new generation of emancipated Jews. By the turn of the century, this generation had achieved its aim of becoming a part of the new Hungarian middle class, and thereby theoretically gaining equal status with the German middle class, the gentry and petite noblesse.[5]

The easiest and most efficient way for Jews to achieve this aim was through an exceptionally thorough education in the Hungarian language. There is still no basic research (as there is for Vienna), which reveals the exact percentage of Jewish students in the elite Gymnasia of Budapest. However, it is generally recognised that Jews were over-represented at the Budapest university, considering their numbers in the population.[6] For example, in 1890 half of the medical students were of Jewish origin[7]. Since art collecting was a common practice among doctors, the number of collecting Jews in this profession was probably very high.

Art patronage in Budapest

The history of patronage in Hungary has not yet been properly examined, and so far there have been only a few studies and no primary research.[8] The ques-

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[5] On this see Lajos Venetianer, *A magyar zsidóság története* (The History of Hungarian Jewry), Budapest 1922., Péter Hanák, Magyarország társadalma a századforduló idején (Hungarian Society at the Turn of the Century) in: Péter Hanák (ed.) *Magyarország története* (The History of Hungary 1890–1918), Budapest 1978, William O. McCagg, *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary*, New York, 1972.

[6] Between 1890 and 1900 the number of lawyers in Hungary grew by 7.2 % (quoted by Gyula Szekfü, *Három nemzedék* (Three Generations), Budapest 1934. (Second Edition), p. 333.

[7] On this see: Lajos Venetianer, A *magyar zsidóság története* (The History of Hungarian Jewry), Budapest, 1922, Pál Ujváry (ed.) *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon* (Hungarian Jewish Lexicon), Budapest, 1929, William O. McCagg, *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary*, New York, 1972.

[8] On this see: *Válogatás magyar magángyűjteményekből* (A Selection of Hungarian Private Collections), Catalogue, Budapest, National Gallery, 1981. A valuable insight into the art establishment and into art collecting generally is supplied by the cata-

tion of patronage has also been little examined by architectural historians. Consequently no rounded picture of the history and structure of Jewish patronage can yet be formed. The present sketch of the parameters of the subject may hopefully stimulate some further research; this study can only suggest a few questions that need to be answered.

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At this point it may be useful to give a short overview of the development and periodisation of the fine arts between 1890 and 1914.[9] With the help of this, the conditions of Hungarian culture at the turn of the century may be clarified.

In 1896, a new generation of artists returned to Hungary from Munich and began to campaign for the autonomy of the fine arts. They regarded a number of reforms within the Hungarian art world as indispensable: the new artistic trends should be naturalised to the Hungarian context; an artistically literate public should be brought into being through education; patronage should be extended and new methods of training artists should be developed. In Vienna the Secession had quickly and successfully fulfilled similar demands; in Hungary, on the other hand, modern painting (as represented by Simon Hollósy's *plein air* school, which moved from Munich to Nagybánya in the summer of 1896, and by a few experimental artists like János Vaszary and József Rippl-Rónai) could only achieve these aims slowly and with difficulty.

The Nagybánya School struggled against the prevailing Hungarian taste for literary and historical allusion; only after six years were their efforts rewarded by success. Breakthrough for modern artists in Budapest was also hindered by the fact that reform-minded painters, architects and applied artists (in contrast to those of Vienna) tended to fight for their ideals individually and not in alliance with each other.

The relationship between Budapest and the Viennese Court deteriorated with the deep political crisis starting in 1903. In this situation, Hungarian national feeling was violently aroused and this led to a determined distancing of the art world from anything that smacked of "Viennese style". The question of a Hungarian national style became once again highly topical. Theoreticians of

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logue for the exhibition *Pulszky Károly emlékének* (In Memory of Károly Pulszky) ed. László Mravik, Budapest, 1988. I was greatly helped in the research for this article by Antal Géber's manuscript in the documentation archive of the Hungarian National Gallery and I am indebted to Dr Katalin Sinkó for drawing my attention to this.

9 See inter alia: *A Golden Age – Art and Society in Hungary 1896–1914* (Budapest 1989); Ilona Sármány-Parsons, Die Kunst der Jahrhundertwende in Ungarn 1896–1914 (Turn of the Century Art in Hungary) in *"Das Zeitalter Kaiser Franz Josephs"* Part II, Grafenegg, 1987. pp. 285–294.

art attempted to bring out the effect of national character in all important works of art. Especially in applied art and architecture, folk art and peasant art became one of the main sources of inspiration and creative artists became enthusiastically engaged in ethnographic research, (this occurred most famously in the sphere of music, where Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály went back to the nation's roots).

Around 1905, a regrouping can be observed in the artistic life of Hungary. The slowly increasing numbers of the art-oriented public were beginning to assimilate the decorative variations of *plein air* post-impressionism and the local version of Jugendstil. The young painters, however, took their cue from quite different models. Many travelled to France to study in Paris and returned after a few years bearing the imprint of a new style, and of new masters such as Gauguin, Matisse and Cézanne. From this time onwards, orientation towards Paris dominated Hungarian painting, an orientation that was parallelled in literature (cf. Endre Ady and the writers of the periodical "Nyugat").

The great breakthrough to avant-garde modernism began in Budapest in 1907/8, at the same time as in Paris, Munich and Vienna. As a consequence of general disillusionment with the policies of the national opposition, which had now come to power, the cultural sphere reacted with a political radicalization. Artists became more sensitized than ever to social issues, but also to the negative effects of modernization.[10]

The radicalised painters formed a group called Nyolcak ("The Eight") under Károly Kernstock. In painting, the Nyolcak represented a reaction against impressionistic and naturalistic "mood painting". The painters of the group saw their stylistic experiments as "research art", which for them meant "the art of reason", destined to replace the anachronistic "art of feeling" (Kernstock)[11]. For the first time, the metropolis was included amongst the subjects considered suitable for landscape painting and stylistic innovations were frequently combined with arcadian scenes, full of utopian rhetoric.

At the same time as the avant-garde upswing in painting, architecture experienced a breakthrough to modernism in the lands of the Monarchy. Although in Hungary all leading architects were certainly preoccupied with the idea of a

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[10] See inter alia: György Litván, *"Magyar gondolat – szabad gondolat"* (Hungarian Thought – Free Thought), Budapest, 1978, Ilona Sármány-Parsons, Entfremdete Nachbarn. Ein Doppelporträt der Wiener und Budapester Kunst um die Jahrhundertwende. (Alienated Neighbours: A Double Portrait of Viennese and Budapest Art at the Turn of the Century), in: *Kakanien* (Ed E. Thurner, W. Weiss, J. Szabó, A. Tamás), Budapest/Vienna, 1990.

[11] See Krisztina Passuth, *A Nyolcak* (The Eight), Budapest, 1967, *Nyolcak és Aktivisták* (The Eight and the Activists) – Catalogue to an exhibition, Budapest, 1981, *The Hungarian Avant-garde* – Catalogue to an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, 1980.

national style up to the First World War, around 1906 architectural theory underwent a fundamental change. In addition to style, social function, rational planning and economic benefit were factors that were now being taken into consideration.[12]

This new wave of stylistic experiments in architecture and applied art was impregnated with modern ideas of a socio-political and sociological nature and of urban reform.

The driving forces behind aesthetic culture in Hungary can be a summed up as follows: on the one hand, there was a desire to develop a specifically Hungarian identity, expressed through a national style; on the other, there was a determination to participate in the international modern movement at the highest level. At times, national considerations seemed to take centre stage and at other times the drive to be avant-garde took precedence. In the work of the most important artists the two aims functioned in symbiosis.

Of those painters who largely ignored the question of national style and national subjects, the Nyolcak devoted much attention to socio-cultural questions, at least in their theoretical writings. These artists were both artistically and politically committed and their avant-garde experiments had symbolic importance: they wanted to promulgate a new society, or utopia, through the medium of art.[13]

To return to our main theme of patronage, and bearing in mind the foregoing summary, two questions now suggest themselves: first of all, who were the chief promoters of the new stylistic experiments? And secondly, what was the specific character of the patronage of those of Jewish origin? To what extent or in which aspects did they differ from patrons of gentile origin? Answering these questions could well throw light on the similarities and differences between art patronage in Hungary and in Vienna.

The Beginning of Modernism in Painting and its Patronage

In the most important modern cultural weekly, *A Hét (The Week),* founded in 1890, József Kiss collected round him the first young writers of art feuilletons, and the first Jewish poets writing in Hungarian, whose ballads also dealt with the life of poor Jews in the ghetto. However it was not Kiss who made this

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[12] See: Ákos Moravánszky, *Die Architekten der Donaumonarchie.* Budapest, 1988; Gyöngyi Erdei, *Fejezetek a Bárczy-korszak történetéből* (Chapters from the History of the Bárczy Era), Budapest, 1991.

[13] On the Hungarian avant-garde, see Júlia Szabó, *The Hungarian Avant-garde* (Hayward Gallery, op. cit.) and Júlia Szabó, *A magyar aktivizmus művészete, 1915–1927* (The Art of the Hungarian Activists 1915–1927), Budapest, 1981.

journal so important, but the younger generation of writers such as Sándor Bródy, István Peterdi, Tamás Kóbor, Jenő Heltai, Ernő Szép, the critic Béla Lázár and the soon to be famous editor Ignotus, alias Hugo Veigelsberg.

This generation of cultural journalists, born in the late sixties and seventies became, in the nineties, the pioneers of the first wave of art produced in reaction to late Historicism. The new art was the many-layered counterpart to a similar movement in literature, dominated by naturalism and impressionism, that had occurred somewhat earlier. In painting, the first change came with several versions of naturalism. Bastien-Lepage, certain Dutch painters, and also painters like Uhde were the models for naturalism in Hungary. This was followed by variants of mood painting, symbolism and *plein air*.

The number of talented Jewish painters also increased. As we can tell from later memoirs, the financial security of the urban Jews made it possible for their sons to dedicate themselves to culture.[14] An anecdote may serve to illustrate this: Baron Sándor Hatvany-Deutsch, sugar magnate and landowner in Hatvan, had two sons, Lajos and Ferenc. When asked what his two sons were doing, he answered: "One of them paints and the other is also an idiot! *(sic)*." The two "idiots" played an important role in Budapest culture. The younger, Ferenc Hatvany, really did become a painter and one of the most remarkable art collectors. The older, Lajos Hatvany, studied in Berlin and became a writer and critic. He was the most generous supporter of the magazine *Nyugat* ("West"), which was the most significant literary forum for modernism in Hungary from 1908. As a patron he supported the greatest poet of his day, Endre Ady.[15] It would be tedious to list all the names of Jewish artists.[16] Suffice it to say that, in contrast to the period of Historicism, when Jewish artists, sculptors and musicians were comparatively rare, their numbers became ever greater in the late eighties and early nineties. Adolf Fényes, Béla Iványi-Grünwald, Izsák Perlmutter all became important painters, producing works of high artistic quality. Although in the perspective of time they may be regarded as minor masters, their works belong to the pioneering experiments of modernism.

The nineties really marks the breakthrough to modernism, although a decade was still to pass before a few patrons, commissioners and collectors started to show keen interest in experimental art and began actively buying the works of the most important Nagybánya painters, or those of Rippl-Rónai and Vaszary. The first Hungarian art nouveau interior was commissioned by Count

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[14] See: Mario D. Fenyő, Literature and Political Change, Budapest 1908–1918 in: *Transactions* Vol. 77. Part 6. Philadelphia, 1987. p. 6.

[15] Mario D. Fenyő op. cit., Lóránt Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature,* Oxford, 1994. pp. 306–342.

[16] See list in Venetianer, op. cit. (Note 7) pp. 412–414.

Tivadar Andrássy, but the majority of the new works of applied art were designed for art exhibitions.[17]

Even though the first masterpieces of Jugendstil and art nouveau were being produced in Budapest at the same time as in Vienna (one thinks of the pictures of Rippl-Rónai and Vaszary, or the architecture of Frigyes Spiegel), public recognition came only ten years later. While in Vienna the Secession immediately won the support of the well to do middle class, the same social layer in Budapest remained stubbornly attached to Historicism; it was mostly interested in collecting antiquities and for a long time showed no interest in supporting modern art. This began to change only in 1905/1907. Exposure to international exhibitions and continuous propaganda for art nouveau in the art journals and broadsheet dailies finally began to mould taste and broadened the public's tolerance of modern experiments. The first reformers were just gaining recognition when a new generation's artists began finding support right at the beginning of their careers from the Jewish, educated and property owning middle class. The different trends of modern painting (Impressionism, post-Impressionism, Expressionism) followed so quickly upon each other that their products arrived on the Budapest art market all at the same time. Although all the protagonists of these trends briefly formed an alliance in 1907, and exhibited together at MIÉNK[18] for a single show, they soon split into various camps.

The important collectors were not partisan in this rivalry. A few successful developers, such as Miksa Schiffer or Mór Grünwald, or industrialists such as Sándor Lederer, were the first to build substantial villas in art nouveau or pre-modern style in Budapest. These houses were constructed in the spirit of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (unified work of art), decorated with modern pictures and furnished with modern furniture[19]. Their owners were content to buy the works of both generations of modern painters, those of Nagybánya and of the Nyolcak. The younger generation of artists, the Nyolcak, whose most important patrons were to be found in the Jewish intelligentsia of Budapest, had already moved beyond the stylistic tendencies of *plein air* painting and Jugendstil, and were able to witness the artistic developments in Paris first hand. They

[17] Maria Bernáth, *József Rippl-Rónai,* Budapest 1976, Lenke Haulisch: *János Vaszary,* Budapest, 1978.

[18] MIÉNK: The Circle of Hungarian Impressionists and Naturalist Painters was an artists' association founded in 1908 which united all the modern painters. However after a year it split into various camps.

[19] The Lederer Palace was built by Bálint and Jámbor in 1907. It contained a rich collection of Italian painting. Miksa Schiffer also had an important art collection in his villa, which was built by József Vágó in 1911. Mór Grünwald owned important modern Hungarian sculptures, which decorated his villa, built also by József Vágó in 1914–16.

became the radical protagonists of early Hungarian modernism. Matisse, Gauguin and Cézanne were their idols, young aestheticians such as Géza Lengyel, Aladár Bálint and György Lukács were their allies and the fathers of these theoreticians were the collectors of their works.[20] (For example the family of the philosopher George Lukács also possessed several pictures by modern Hungarian masters).

In 1908–1909 the same thing happened in Budapest as had happened in Vienna in 1897–1898. The representatives of experimentalism in every artistic genre united and staged a rebellion against official artistic policy, which was in the hands of conservatives and reactionaries. A group of young feuilletonists supported the rebels in the press[21], and a numerically small, but wealthy and art-oriented upper middle class, together with a few well-to-do intellectuals, supported them financially. Assimilated Jews were represented in large numbers both among the patrons and among the artists they supported. In the avant-garde group of painters known as *Nyolcak* ("The Eight"), Jewish painters were in the majority.[22] Another area in which the new generation of assimilated middle-class Jews made the breakthrough to modernism, was the theatre. A young group of students, including László Bánóczy, and György Lukács founded, with the financial help of their parents, the Thália Társaság (Thalia Society) with the aim of modernising drama and performance. For four years they organised amateur productions of high quality with their friends, playing modern dramatists such as Ibsen, Hauptmann and Maeterlinck. These performances had an influence on the reform of Budapest theatrical practice which would be hard to underestimate. Architects and painters (Géza Márkus, Lajos Gulácsy, Ödön Márffy) supplied scenery and stage settings, and the young Thalia producers went on to make careers in the leading theatres of the city.[23]

It should be mentioned here that in the same period (between 1908 and 1910) the most generous financial supporters of the literary journal Nyugat were industrialists of Jewish origin (Lajos Hatvany, Miksa Fenyő). Its reader-

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[20] See: György Lukács, Az utak elváltak (The Parting of the Ways) in: *Nyugat*, 1910.

[21] The most important young art critics were Aladár Bálint (1881–1924), György Bölöni (1882–1959), Géza Lengyel (1881–1967), Elek Artur (1876–1944) and Lajos Fülep (1885–1970).

[22] The members of the Nyolcak (Eight) were: Robert Berény, Dezső Czigány, Béla Czóbel, Dezső Orbán, Bertalan Pór, Lajos Tihanyi and two who were not of Jewish origin: Károly Kernstock (leader of the group) and Ödön Márffy.

[23] See: Ilona Sármány-Parsons, Reform der Bühnenkunst in Ungarn um die Jahrhundertwende (Reform of Stage Design in Hungary at the Turn of the Century) in *Musiktheater*, Böhlau, Vienna, 1990, pp. 41–51.

ship among the Budapest intelligentsia was also mostly drawn from assimilated Jews.[24]

As in Vienna, the avant-garde artistic community met regularly in Budapest cafés, where lively intellectual discussion took place. These fora provided support in the struggle against the official art world. This activity gave birth to a new phase of modernism which is associated in music with the names of Bartók, Kodály and Leo Weiner; in painting with The Eight; in literature with the leading figures of Nyugat such as Endre Ady and Mihály Babits.[25] How does one explain that precisely the most radical avant-garde was to such a large extent initiated and furthered by intellectuals of Jewish origin? There are a number of factors involved:

Firstly, assimilated Jews with exceptionally high educational qualifications had been concentrated in the Budapest professions since the 1890's, and were active in the cultural field as journalists, teachers and professors. They were therefore well-placed to take advantage of the latest information regarding artistic developments abroad.

Secondly, these intellectuals were early on sensitized to the problems of modern urban society, as well as to its psychological consequences, and thus to the fundamental questions of the avant-garde.

Thirdly, as second and third generations of well-to-do middle class families, they could count on the financial support of societies and institutions dominated by the Budapest bourgeoisie. For example, they could cultivate the Casino (club) of the Leopoldstadt, and the Freemasons' Lodges, as well as their parents' circles of friends and the contacts they had made at elite schools.

Because the modernisation of the country was closely bound up with the problems of urbanisation and the growth of the metropolis, an open-minded, well-informed and well-to-do inhabitant of the city could see the necessity of attaching himself to the process. The young artists were able to exploit this factor right from the beginning, and it was certainly an integral part of modernisation's internal dynamic. This worked especially well in the capital where, under the neo-liberal leadership of the remarkable mayor, István Bárczy, there was a favourable climate for social reform and urban modernisation in which all branches of modern art were heavily involved.[26]

However, the above observations are at this stage largely speculative. While it is statistically demonstrable that in Vienna, Berlin or Budapest, many of the

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[24] See: Mario D. Fenyő, op. cit. (Note 14).

[25] Nyugat was founded in January 1908 under the editorship of Miksa Fenyő and Ernő Osváth, with Ignotus as Editor-in-Chief. The periodical existed until 1941. See: *Nyugat and its Circle, 1908–1941,* ed. Aranka Ugrin, Kálmán Vargha, Leipzig 1989, and Mario D. Fenyő, op.cit.

[26] See: Gyöngyi Erdei, *Fejezetek a Bárczy-korszak történetéből,* (Chapters from the History of the Bárczy Era), Budapest, 1991. pp. 62–99.

avant-garde artists before World War I were of Jewish origin, a socio-historical and socio-psychological analysis of these phenomena has yet to be carried out. The radical avant-garde of the first decade of the 20th century was an urban phenomenon in Hungary, as elsewhere in Europe, and avant-garde art was a preoccupation of the middle-class elite. Because people of Jewish origin were (in terms of numbers) over-represented in both the financial and the intellectual Budapest middle class elite, they had a major share in the patronage of the avant-garde.

The art collectors did not discriminate according to the confession of the painters, but bought works following their individual taste. In painting it is impossible to pin down any special affinity between those who commissioned the works of art and those artists of Jewish origin. There is only one field where a definite preference for a certain artistic trend can be detected, and that is in architecture.

Promotion of the Hungarian Style in Architecture by the Assimilated Middle Class

In the second half of the 19th century, the population of Budapest increased by a factor of five to 930,000; one consequence of this was a building boom, stimulated in part by the necessity to expand or create representational buildings for the metropolis. As a result, not only was the indigenous work force fully employed, but the numerous building projects also attracted many foreigners to Hungary – for example, Hungary's first Jewish architect, Ignác Wechselmann, who settled in Pest in 1854. [27]

As already mentioned, the middle-class Jews of Budapest had reached a level of financial security in the 1890's that allowed their talented sons to take up professions without a guaranteed income. This wealth, combined with assimilation to Hungarian culture, released a flood of creative energy in the younger generation. Not only were money and an easily accessible cultural elite available, but the early nineties was also a period of optimism and belief in progress. On the eve of the Millennium, the governing and wealth-creating classes believed their country to be on the threshold of a glittering future; they believed that the political and economic achievements of recent decades could be surpassed and that Hungary would soon become a flourishing, modern European state.

The Jewish middle class, which had substantially benefited from the economic boom and indeed had been instrumental in creating it, shared the pride

[27] Dénes Komárik, A pesti Dohány utcai zsinagóga épitése. (The Building of the Pest Synagogue in Dohány Street) in *Művészettörténeti Értesítő,* (1–2) 1991 pp. 10–11.

and optimism of other confessions. In 1895 the Hungarian Jews had even more reason to be optimistic, since in this year the Jewish faith was awarded equality of status with Christianity under the law. Naturally this increased the trust of the Jews in the Christian establishment and stimulated a number of special gestures of allegiance to Hungarian identity both in the social and the cultural spheres.

The unconditional loyalty of the Jewish middle class produced, both in art and in patronage, a remarkable phenomenon. The enthusiastic representatives and promoters of the so-called "Hungarian style" *(magyaros stilus)* in architecture were, for the most part, Hungarians of Jewish origin, or assimilated Jewish citizens, or even Jewish religious communities. [28]

The wish to create a national style in art and architecture had its roots in Romanticism and had little resonance in the period of Historicism, when only a few architects, such as Frigyes Feszl, concerned themselves with this idea. Even at the beginning of the 1890's, there was still only one important Hungarian architect, Ödön Lechner (1845–1914), who had dedicated himself to the creation of what turned out to be an extremely unusual national style.[29]

From the middle of the 1880's, Lechner, who besides being a restless experimenter in architecture was an impulsive personality with strongly anti-Habsburg political views, attempted to create new forms in each of his projects. For the most part they were sharply differentiated from the then-customary late Historicism. His inspiration was nonetheless eclectic: some of his forms recalled Gothic, others Moorish or even Indian architecture. His ideas for ornamentation were based on the recently published (1885) collection of József Huszkas, which was drawn from peasant art, embroidery and goldsmithery.

Lechner's idea of creating a national style par excellence, which was to be based on ancient national forms, yet which was to be at the same time modern, was a typical manifestation of the ambivalent cultural identity of the Hungarians at the turn of the century.

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[28] On the Hungarian national style in architecture, see: Ákos Moravánszky, *Die Architecture der Donaumonarchie* (The Architecture of the Danubian Monarchy), Budapest/Berlin 1988.; Ilona Sármány-Parsons, Nationale und übernationale Kunströmungen in der Habsburg-Monarchie (National and Supra-National Artistic Currents in the Habsburg Monarchy) in: *Lectures,* published by the Institute for Art History, Salzburg, 1989, pp. 7–15.; János Gerle, Attila Kovács, Imre Makovecz, *A Századforduló magyar építészete* (The Hungarian Architecture of the Turn of the Century), Budapest, 1990.

[29] Ödön Lechner (1845–1914). Father figure of stylistic experiment in Hungary at the turn of the century. His dream was to create a "Magyar language of form" which would be the basis for a national style.

As a counterweight to the Austrian half of the Monarchy, the Hungarian artists attempted to bring into play an individual cultural identity, one supposedly composed of exotic archetypal qualities brought from the east, a mythical well-spring of Hungarian-ness. It was supposed that the peasants were the true guardians of the ancient culture of the nation, and therefore that folk art was the only genuine and uncontaminated source for national art. Within the cultural elite, the ideals of modernism were not abandoned, but tension arose between the mythologising tendency of grounding national pride in the idea of eastern roots, and on the other hand the desire to join the developed, modern nations of Europe.[30]

The causes of this split identity were various, and only a few of them can be alluded to here:

1. The Hungarians, who traced their legitimacy as a state-forming nation a thousand years into the past, constituted barely a majority in their own kingdom. The political pressure from the combatant minorities who wanted autonomy (or national independence) was growing daily stronger and threatened the country with political collapse.[31]

2. The negative effects of modernisation (an industrialisation that had polarised rich and poor, the dissolution of agricultural communities, emigration, etc.) strengthened the case of the critics of modernisation and urbanisation at the turn of the century. As in other European countries, radical intellectuals reacted to this tension by turning away from positivism and becoming sceptical about the notion of progress. In the late eighties and early nineties, irrational ideologies became widespread in Europe; in the interests of creating a new, "true" picture of the world, artists turned to archaic cultures, considered to be ethnically purer. Within modernism, the rediscovery of folk art in Eastern Europe was part of this general trend.[32]

3. The Millennium Celebrations and the preparations for them stimulated a great deal of research into Hungary's historic culture, and into the ethnic inheritance of the nation. This research certainly provided inspiration for the artists in their stylistic experiments.[33]

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[30] Quoted in János Gerle, Thoughts on Architecture at the Turn of the Century in: Gerle-Kovács-Makovecz, op. cit. Note 40., p. 4. See also György Litván, "Magyar gondolat – Szabad gondolat", op. cit. Note 18.

[31] See Péter Hanák, *Ungarn in der Donaumonarchie* (Hungary in the Danubian Monarchy) op. cit. Note 1., Gábor Vermes, *István Tisza,* New York, 1985.

[32] Lajos Németh: Art, Nationalism and the Fin-de-siecle in: *A Golden Age*. op. cit. Note 9., pp. 19–29.

[33] Katalin Sinkó, Die Millenniumsfeier Ungarns (The Millennial Celebrations in Hungary) in *Das Zeitalter Kaiser Franz Josephs Part II 1880–1916,* Catalogue of an exhibition at Schloss Grafenegg, 1987. Vol I, pp. 295–301. Idem: A História a mi erős várunk – A millenniumi kiállitás mint Gesamtkunstwerk" (A Mighty Fortress is our

Ödön Lechner's first idiosyncratic, strongly orientalising masterpiece, the Museum of Applied Art in Budapest, was built for the Millennium Celebrations. It supplied inspiration and stimulus for the architectural community and for the art-oriented portion of the public, and it placed the question of national style in the forefront of artistic and cultural debate.

The older generation of architects, typified by the professors of the Technical University Alajos Hauszmann and Frigyes Schulek, all representatives of Historicism, remained sceptical; but the young architects who had mostly received their diplomas in the early nineties, were quickly converted to the idea of a "Hungarian national style". From 1898 onwards, the "School of Ödön Lechner" grew rapidly, and plans conceived in the Lechner style were submitted for all architectural competitions.[34]

In 1899 Lechner's Geological Institute was built, its design showing simplified, clearly delineated and easily imitable features. Even practising architects of the middle generation, such as Lipót Baumhorn, Ármin Hegedüs, Henrich Böhm and Sándor Baumgarten adopted the exterior stylistic features of Lechner's Geological Institute; Zoltán Bálint-Lajos Jámbor, the architectural partnership that designed the Hungarian pavilion for the Paris World Exhibition of 1900, borrowed several motifs from Lechner's architectural vocabulary in order to give their otherwise Historicist plan a touch of national flair.

The popularity of the Lechner variant of the "Hungarian style" reached its highest point in 1902, when art critics and young architects demanded the setting up of a special school under his direction, with the aim of perpetuating his ideas.[35]

The counter-attack of the conservative opposition led by Ignác Alpár was not long in coming; in all specialist forums, as well as in all the state institutions, the Alpár lobby was enormously successful in having the Lechner school suppressed.[36] Alpár had excellent political connections; he was an astute and merciless campaigner and was rewarded with most of the great banking and ministerial commissions in the early years of the 20th century. After building the Post Office Savings Bank (1900–1901), Ödön Lechner received no further state commissions, and gradually became a broken man, albeit canonised by his acolytes.

History – The Millennium Exhibition as a "Gesamtkunstwerk".) in: *A historizmus művészete Magyarországon.* (ed. Anna Zádor), Budapest, 1993. pp. 132–147.

[34] János Gerle, A Lechner követőkről. (On Lechner's Followers) in the catalogue: Ödön Lechner (1845–1914), Budapest, 1985, pp. 74–82.

[35] See: Ödön Gerő, Lechner Ödön mesteriskolája (The Master School of Ödön Lechner) quoted in Lechner Catalogue op. cit. p. 102.

[36] See: Ilona Sármány, Sorspárhuzamok a századfordulón (Parallel Destinies at the Turn of the Century) in: *Polgárosodás Közép-Európában,* (Embourgeiosement in Central Europe), Budapest, 1991. pp 341–356.

Because of the semi-official blocking of the "Hungarian style" engineered by the Alpár lobby, from 1902 onwards no state-sponsored municipal buildings were built in Budapest in this style. Even the previously accepted plan for the Music Academy had to be replaced by a more eclectic, and rather heavy, international version of Jugendstil. At the same time, the provincial cities became very enthusiastic about Lechner's demonstratively Hungarian style and cities on the Great Plain and in Transylvania promoted it strongly.

Even if Lechner's work was officially suppressed after 1902, his many young followers continued to build in the "Hungarian style" he had initiated. Villas, apartment blocks, schools, hotels, town halls and even a few synagogues were built in his richly decorated manner, the majority of them, however, in the provinces. Between 1902 and 1907 at least one third of the projects submitted to competitions for public buildings were conceived in a version of the "Hungarian style".

The opposition had already hastened to point out that many architects of Jewish origin were among Lechner's supporters.[37] Their observations were of course designed to cast doubt on the nature of the national style by means of anti-Semitic slur. This does not alter the fact that the Jewish intellectuals (but many others as well) certainly favoured the style, in their capacity as artists, critics or as patrons. Lechner was not himself Jewish, but the majority of his followers were, and certainly the most important of them: Henrik Bőhm, Ármin Hegedűs, Zoltán Bálint, Lajos Jámbor, Géza Márkus, Marcell Komor, Albert Kőrössy, the brothers Vágó and Béla Lajta.

What were the psychological, intellectual or other socio-cultural factors that sensitized these young talents so particularly to the Lechner style? Their motives were, of course, multifarious, but some were fairly widely shared.

At the turn of the century, the greatest challenge for an architect was to create a completely new style. Hardly any young talent could resist the lure of such a challenge. The "Hungarian" or "Lechner" style was considered to be home-grown, flexible, and modern but not "Secessionist" – that is, not influenced by Vienna. In architecture, the crucial difference between the Hungarian and the Viennese style of Otto Wagner and Josef Hoffmann was that the Hungarians chose a fluid, floral ornament based on peasant art, while the Viennese used pure geometric decoration and stressed the architectonic quality, in particular the cubic structure, of their buildings. The Hungarian architects wanted to be as different as possible from their Viennese contemporaries. This politically-coloured attitude played a major role in popularising the style, particularly in the countryside and in regions where Hungarians felt the political pressure of the minorities and were desperate to assimilate them. There is plenty of

[37] Quoted in Ferenc Vámos, *Lajta Béla* (Béla Lajta), Budapest, 1970. p. 352.

evidence to show how, in order to popularise the Magyar Style, the architects themselves tried to persuade their patrons to let them build in this manner.

Two age-groups may be distinguished among the Jewish followers of Lechner: the older architects, such as Henrik Bőhm, Ármin Hegedűs, Sándor Baumgartner, Zsigmond Herczegh, and also (in some of his works, such as the synagogue in Újvidék) Lipót Baumhorn, were strongly influenced by the Lechner style. In particular, Lechner's calligraphic-like ornamentation of brick "ribbons" framing and making rhythmic the stuccoed surfaces of the facades, his colourful flowers in Zsolnay ceramic and ceramic cornices, became typical stylistic features. (Examples include the Institute for the Blind in Budapest by Baumgartner and Herczegh and the Town Hall at Erzsébetfalva by Ármin Hegedüs). These older architects, who had earlier built in the style of Historicism, and who were already well-established, chose the most simple stylistic effects from the Lechner form palette, not so much out of a deep theoretic conviction that a national style was now indispensable, but simply because these variants were decorative, easily adaptable and well-received both by the public and the people who had commissioned the buildings.

The younger generation of architects, who had completed their studies in the early nineties and were at the beginning of their careers, felt an enormous sense of liberation as a result of the achievement of religious emancipation. For them this implied final acceptance by gentile Hungarian society. Thus, when the Lechner style came into vogue, they dedicated themselves to it wholeheartedly. Indeed, they attempted to develop it further, varying the motives and expanding the repertoire of forms, while remaining loyal to the spirit of the master.

The most important architects who worked in this mode were Géza Márkus, Marcell Komor and Dezső Jakab. They remained faithful to the ideal of creating a Hungarian style, even if by 1906/07 they were already departing from the Lechner model. For such architects, this attempt to create a style was also a means whereby they could bear witness to their national identity. They felt themselves to be fully assimilated and were recognized as national artists by those who gave the commissions. They had also worked for longer or shorter periods as collaborators on projects designed by Lechner himself. They often obtained commissions through family contacts or from recommendations made by the Jewish communities in their places of birth (for example Marcell Komor and Dezső Jakab designed a remarkably large number of buildings in Szabadka). From this it can be seen that an "old boy network" was already well-established in society.

Precisely because these artists were young, energetic and ambitious, they took part in a very large number of competitions and indeed used these as a vehicle for self-publicity. At the same time, the most important art critics and journalists of the day – regardless of confession – involved themselves enthusiastically in the discussion about national style. The natural consequence was that the protagonists of the style very rapidly became well-known.

Returning to the question of Jewish patronage in architecture, it is noticeable how many commissions for buildings in "Hungarian style" were given out by the wealthy Jewish middle class, or, perhaps even more remarkable, by the Jewish religious communities. It is likely that the patrons would have decided in favour of the plans submitted by sons, relatives or friends of their own members, rather than opt for someone completely outside their circle. However, we can see from the records of competitions that there were already so many young architects of Jewish origin among the contestants, that they were in fact competing with each other for commissions to build schools or synagogues.

"De gustibus non est disputandum". Artistic taste is a highly individual phenomenon and it is dangerous to make general statements about it. Nonetheless it says a great deal about the intensity of the assimilation of Jewish communities in Hungary that even a substantial number of synagogues were built in national style and decorated with ornament drawn from folk art.[38] The most beautiful example of this is the 1901/02 synagogue in Szabadka, built by Marcell Komor and Dezső Jakab, (they later built the town hall as well).

Perhaps one can see in this synagogue the artistic embodiment of the historical fact that, as Rolf Fischer puts it, "the Magyar-Jewish relationship was closer and more pronounced than the German-Jewish relationship ... the Magyar-Jewish symbiosis in the last decades before the First World War was of a quality not reproduced elsewhere in Central or Eastern Europe."[39]

Another artistically important synthesis of Hungarian style and modernism is to be found in the work of Béla Lajta (Leitersdorfer) (1873–1920).[40] Lajta was one of the young architects closest to Lechner and his earliest works are indeed almost interchangeable with those of the master. He had also been very active in collecting ethnic materials (1903–04). In the isolated villages of Transylvania, he painstakingly recorded wood carvings, peasant ornamentation and the details of peasant dwellings. In his own work, he assiduously drew examples of the latter and discovered thereby a geometrical style variant that was distinctively different from the well-known floral motif. Using this, he was able

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[38] Synagogues built in "Magyar Style": in Szabadka by Komor and Jakab, (1901–2); in Cegléd by Lipót Baumhorn (1904); in Újvidék also by Lipót Baumhorn (1906–9); in Kunszentmárton by József István Dobovszky (1911–12).

[39] Op. cit. Note 3, Rolf Fischer. p. 9.; On the complexity of this symbiosis see the anthology: *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus* (The Jewish Question, Assimilation, Anti-Semitism, with an introductory study by Péter Hanák, A lezáratlan per (The Unfinished Trial), Budapest, 1984.

[40] The most important studies on Lajta, Ferenc Vámos: *Lajta Béla* (Budapest, 1970); Ákos Moravánszky, Die *Architektur der Donaumonarchie* (The Architecture of the Danubian Monarchy) Budapest/Berlin 1988. pp. 111–116; Gerle-Kovács-Makovecz, op. cit. Note 28. pp. 109–116.

to develop Lechner's stylistic experiments further. After the conclusion of his studies in Budapest (1895), Lajta worked with Alfred Messel in Berlin and Norman Shaw in London. He was also strongly influenced by contemporary Finnish architecture (for example Saarinnen). This "pre/modern", rational brick architecture from the north could not be reconciled with the floral ornamentation of the Lechner school; but the geometric carved ornaments, originally on wood and made by peasant craftsmen, became an alternative to it.

Lajta created a new synthesis between modern international stylistic trends and the Hungarian architectural vocabulary. He was commissioned by Chevra Kadisa of Pest to do several buildings, including the Institute for the Blind (1905–1908), and the Jewish hospice. Lajta placed symbols of Jewish belief (such as the *menorah* or star of David) on his buildings, combining them with ornaments derived from folk art; in this way, his work symbolised the pluralistic identity of the Budapest Jewish community at the turn of the century.

The patronage and practice of art by people of Jewish origin in turn-of-the-century Budapest reflected their assimilation to Hungarian culture. Their activity implied mutual enrichment for two social groups with very different ethnic and cultural traditions. Each group recognised the contribution of the other to their common task of modernising Hungarian art and culture. The fruits of this collaboration are our inheritance. Gravestones decorated with majolica tulips, weeping willows and stars of David, or villas, schools, public buildings and synagogues: all these symbolise, even today, a double dream, that of creating a Hungarian national style, and that of nurturing a symbiosis of Jewish and Hungarian culture.