

Carsten Wilke

Rabbi Wolf Meisel's Attempt to Establish a Midstream Judaism in Hungary, 1859–1867

Abstract

During the years that led to the Hungarian Jewish schism of 1869, Orthodoxy reigned relatively unchallenged in communities of long standing or East European immigration, while Neology spread in the recently founded urban synagogues. Only the steadily growing community of Pest, Hungary's economic capital, presented an appropriate testing-ground for religious forces that tried to withstand the progressive cleavage. My paper will focus on the exceptional moment after 1859, when Chief Rabbi Wolf Meisel (1815-1867), a Bohemian compatriot of Zacharias Frankel, formulated in his short-lived journal *Der Carmel* a popular midstream ideology that was largely independent from the Breslau-style „Science of Judaism.” Jointly attacked by the Orthodox party as well as by Leopold Löw's progressive journal *Ben-Chananja*, Meisel's religious position was undermined by the rise of Hungarian nationalism and the more successfully mediatized Magyarization efforts of the Neologs. My paper will ask for the ideological and social characteristics of Rabbi Meisel's failed peace movement, the controversy it aroused, and its long-term repercussions on Hungarian Jewish modernism.

Keywords

Meisel, Wolf Alois, Löw, Leopold, Schwab, Löb, Jost, Isaak Markus, Reform, Neology, Orthodoxy, Pest, Budapest, Breslau Rabbinical Seminary, confessionalization

Received 19 November 2016

Accepted 19 January 2017

Most of the Jewish journals that existed in 1861 took part in the controversy between Samson Raphael Hirsch and Zacharias Frankel concerning the origins of the Rabbinic Law and, more particularly, their representation in the doctrine of the Jewish Theological Seminary that had recently been founded in Breslau. The coverage in the Pest journal *Carmel*, *Allgemeine Illustrirte Judenzeitung* (“Carmel: General Illustrated Newspaper for Jews”) surprises for two reasons.¹ First, these very first steps of the illustrated journal document a pioneering attempt to reflect Jewish religious life in images. *Carmel's* editor “Dr. W. A. Meisel, Ober-Rabbiner zu Pest” was indeed convinced that “the newest generation demands illustrations to please the eye.”² Second, Rabbi Meisel adopted the media neutrality of democratic times by printing the portraits of both opponents on the title pages of two subsequent issues. In the brief articles commenting on the images, the journal hides its views by quoting the judgments of other authors, still the selection of quotes shows that Frankel is its hero, not Hirsch.

From today's perspective on the nineteenth-century Jewish press, *Carmel* must appear as a very obscure publication: it survives worldwide in one single copy owned by the Austrian National Library in Vienna. In its time, however, *Carmel* claimed to be the organ of the centrist mainstream of Hungarian Jewry. The rationale behind its impartiality had been formulated by Rabbi Meisel already in the zero number of the journal, which he launched in October 1860. He wanted “to fill, or at least to bridge, the rift that has widely opened between the Jewish Orthodox and the Reformers, to mediate concord inside the communities [...] to refine synagogue service

¹ *Carmel* II,17 (26.4.1861), pp. 134–135, on Hirsch; *Carmel* II,19 (10.5.1861), pp. 149–150, on Frankel.

² Wolf Meisel, *זכות אבות, Homilien über die Sprüche der Väter (פרקי אבות) zur Erbauenden Belehrung über Beruf und Pflicht des Israeliten* (Stettin: Friedrich Nagel, 1855), VI.

without transgressing traditional institutions, to educate and cultivate the young generation in the spirit of our time without alienating it from religion and religious literature, and, therefore, speak up especially for schooling.”³

Carmel was not the only Hungarian Jewish paper that defined its position in the center. When Rabbi Leopold Löw in Szeged founded in 1857 his *Ben-Chananja* (so much better known), he had chosen the name because Graetz called this Tanna “the man of the golden mean.” And even the ultra-Orthodox of the time pretended to be the “party of the middle,” because they fought for maintaining the almemor in the center of synagogues. Rabbi Wolf Meisel, *Carmel*’s editor, knew that he was the one who did really live up to his centrist claim. His paper’s tendency claiming to undercut the ongoing distribution of the Jewish press into parties, while in fact defining a third track in modern Jewish religious observance, seems to be a perfect example of the paradox in which the schism in nineteenth-century Judaism gave birth to a midstream movement, reluctant to define itself in opposition to the more extreme wings.

In 1868, shortly after Meisel’s demise, Löw attacked this tendency in his pseudonymous book “The Jewish internal struggles in Hungary” (*Die jüdischen Wirren in Ungarn*) from the standpoint of a more pronounced reformist agenda. He fustigated the “rabbinic pseudo-reformers” (*rabbinischen Afterreformer*)⁴ who fought for minor changes in the religious service while lacking the courage to confess a new theological discourse. According to Löw, the Jewish leaders who were then designing the Hungarian rabbinical seminary (which was to be opened a decade later on the model of the Breslau institution) were such pseudo-reformers, as the ideas they followed were in fact orthodox.⁵ After political reaction had successfully been overcome and the fight for Jewish emancipation completed, the needs of self-defense that had hitherto prevented schism were no longer at work, yet an irrational fear of division subsisted and, according to Löw’s anonymous polemic, this fear was the major obstacle that prevented Hungarian Jewry from coping with the needs of modernity. Caricaturing Meisel’s approach, Löw insists upon the idea that the cleavage cannot be talked away as in the Biblical verse “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14 NIV).

Löw compares “the ardent battle between Orthodox and Reformers”⁶ in the Hungarian Jewish community of the 1860s with the Christian schism between Catholics and Protestants,⁷ and he proposes to solve it in the same way, by division and confessionalization, the most beneficial solution of any conflicts according to a “law” of religious history.⁸ The schism he recommended is indeed what should happen, after in February 1869 the Orthodox minority walked out of the Hungarian Jewish Congress that had been convened in Pest in order to decide about a country-wide Jewish organization. In Germany, Hungary, and the United States, these three multi-denominational countries, an intra-Jewish confessionalization process mirrored the preceding Christian one, leading by the turn of the twentieth century to separate institutions, community federations, rabbinical assemblies, and rabbinical seminaries. In France, Austria, the Czech Lands and Italy, where Catholicism was the only recognized church on the eve of modernity, modern Judaism tended to develop a religious center unified and amorphous enough to be acceptable to the great majority of Jewish communities, while relegating the militant forms of reform and separatist orthodoxy to fringe phenomena.

With Löw already drawing this Christian–Jewish parallel, it might not be entirely illegitimate to look at this process through the lens of Confessionalization Studies that were pioneered by the German historians Heinz Schilling and

³ *Pränumerationen-Einladung auf die vom 1. Oktober 1860 neu erscheinende israelitische Zeitschrift unter dem Titel: ‘Der Carmel’* (Pest: [Publisher not identified], 1860). The only remaining copy of this leaflet is in the National Library of Israel (L 973) and has been digitized. The text is quoted in M. Kayserling, *Dr. W. A. Meisel. Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild* (Leipzig: Th. Grieben’s Verlag, 1891), p. 66: “die Kluft, welche in der Judenheit zwischen der Partei der Orthodoxen und der der Reformen gähnt, auszufüllen oder doch zu überbrücken, ferner die Eintracht in den Cultusgemeinden selbst, sowie ihre gegenseitige Wechselwirkung zu vermitteln ... den synagogalen Gottesdienst veredeln, ohne gegen überkommene Institutionen zu verstoßen, für zeitgemäße Bildung und Erziehung der Jugend streben, ohne sie der Religion und ihrem Schriftthum zu entfremden, und deshalb besonders der Schule das Wort reden.”

⁴ [Leopold Löw,] *Die jüdischen Wirren in Ungarn: Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte. Von Leon da Modena Redivivus. Erster Theil: Vor dem Kongresse* (Leipzig: Karl Frank Köbler, and Pest: Aigner & Rautmann, 1868), p. 28.

⁵ Löw, *Die jüdischen Wirren*, p. VI.

⁶ Löw, *Die jüdischen Wirren*, p. V.

⁷ Löw, *Die jüdischen Wirren*, p. 20, introduces this comparison.

⁸ Löw, *Die jüdischen Wirren*, p. 33–34.

Wolfgang Reinhard in the 1980s and have recently been extended, for example, to the relations of Sunnite and Shi'ite Islam.⁹ The confessionalization thesis means that an organized symbolic and ritual diversity was a trigger of early modern processes of collective identity and social control.¹⁰ Often boundary-tracing and boundary-crossing use the same concepts: the divisive and the unifying discourse are the same. The Orthodox evoke the norm, the Reformers the time, and the centrists the peace as the objective legitimation basis of their respective current and the reason why they claim to broker a Jewish consensus.

In the Jewish case, however, confessional division was not carried out by state authorities, but against them. In Hungary, minister of culture count József Eötvös had still proclaimed before the congress that he only recognized one Jewish denomination. There were no excommunication bulls, no Saint Barthelémy massacres, no Thirty Years' Wars, and no minority expulsions in the Jewish confessional war, but fierce press polemics became the substitute of all this. Its outcome since the 1870s was in fact a bipartition between the Neolog and the Orthodox camp, with a negligible middle ground, the "Status Quo" communities, which summed hardly more than 5% of Hungarian Jewry.¹¹ The Hungarian Neolog movement was in its religious positions constantly more tradition-oriented than the German or American Reformers; more precisely, it eventually identified with a platform in accordance with the historical school emerging from the Jewish Theological Seminaries of Breslau and New York. As Löw had foreseen, the Budapest rabbinical seminary was founded in 1877 in the image of its Breslau predecessor with the participation of two graduates of the latter, Wilhelm Bacher and David Kaufmann. The Neologs thus fulfilled the function of the modernized left in the confessionalized social order, they built on precedents of the reform movement led by Leopold Löw; nonetheless, they were associated with the main tenets of midstream Judaism. In our Christian–Jewish parallel, Breslau thus represents the "Catholic Israel" of *American Jewry* (in the famous formula of Solomon Schechter)¹² while it is the basis of Protestant Israel among *Hungarian Jews*.

How to explain the observation that Hungarian Neology embraced the Breslau school? This was not due to Bacher and Kaufmann, as Löw already in 1868 complained of the almost Orthodox traditionalism that characterized the plans for the Hungarian rabbinical seminary. Nor was it due to the previous influence of other Breslau graduates, as only two of them had accepted Hungarian rabbinate, namely, Samuel Kohn in Pest and Alexander Kohut in Kaposvár. Leopold Löw attributed the loss of Reformist momentum to the generally more conservative climate and a "lack of culture, education, and civilization."¹³ Similarly, Michael Meyer concluded that, "for the most part, the Hungarian version of Reform was simply characterized by the externals of the choir temple; and by the last decades of the century, it lacked ideological commitment and spiritual vigor."¹⁴

I will resort to a supplementary explanation and consider the theological profile of the Hungarian Neolog movement as the outcome of inner fight. This conflictual construction has been proposed by Michael K. Silber, who detects a major and a minor conflict in the Hungarian schism during the 1860s: behind the fronts of the ongoing cultural war between the Neologs and the Orthodox, there was also a "relentless sniping" from Löw against his more conservative colleagues and especially against Chief Rabbi Meisel of Pest.¹⁵ Löw's review *Ben-Chananja* at times became an "arsenal of poisoned darts," as Meisel's biographer Meyer Kayserling called it.¹⁶ It is my intention to follow the press battle between the left and the right inside the Neolog camp, track the logics of

⁹ This was, for example, the object of the recent conference *Building Confessional Identities in the Ottoman Empire (16th-18th centuries)*, École Française de Rome, Rome, 6 February 2017.

¹⁰ Susan R. Boettcher, "Confessionalization: Reformation, Religion, Absolutism, and Modernity," *History Compass* 2.1 (2004), pp. 1–10; J. M. Headley, H. J. Hillerbrand and A. J. Papadas (eds), *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555-1700* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2004); Ute Lotz-Heuman, "Confessionalization II," in David M. Whitford (ed.), *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research* (Kirksville, MO, 2008), pp. 136–57; <http://alexandergannon.blogspot.de/2010/10/historiography-of-confessionalization.html>.

¹¹ Howard Lupovitch, "Between Orthodox Judaism and Neology: The Origins of the Status Quo Movement," *Jewish Social Studies* 9.2 (2003), pp. 123–153.

¹² Solomon Schechter, *Selected Writings*, ed. Norman Bentwich (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946), p. 35: "the collective conscience of Catholic Israel as embodied in the Universal Synagogue."

¹³ Löw, *Die jüdischen Wirren*, p. 12.

¹⁴ Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), p. 196.

¹⁵ Michael K. Silber, "Budapest," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Gershon David Hundert, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), vol. 1, p. 260–274.

¹⁶ M. Kayserling, *Dr. W. A. Meisel. Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild* (Leipzig: Th. Grieben's Verlag, 1891), p. 63.

confessional war that was at work in these ritualized polemics, and ask for the function that the Breslau ideology fulfilled for both competitors.¹⁷

To be sure, the conflict between the two rabbis was mainly fueled by professional rivalries and Leopold Löw's well-developed vanity and aggressiveness. Such was the personal style of Leopold Löw who, as Meisel himself put it, "eats with his fingers, but writes with knives and forks."¹⁸ However, we can cross the border from historical gossip into historical inquiry by asking to which degree collective reactions espoused or rejected these individual antagonisms.

Let me evoke thus the personal and the local background. Nineteenth-century Hungarian Jewry showed a cleavage between the old orthodox communities of the North, followers of Moses Sofer in Pressburg, and the new progressist urban communities of the South, such as Löw's Szeged. The rabbinate of the heterogeneous Pest community was logically given a centrist stance by its first chief rabbi Loeb Schwab, deceased in 1857. He had managed to keep the groups together by offering German sermons to the modernists and learned Talmudical disputations to the Orthodox, finally by limiting prayer reforms to the moderate level of the Vienna-type *Chorschule*. When his successor was elected in 1859, he was expected to conform to the standards set by Schwab. The Jewish community of Pest, which had only been organized in 1821, had by then changed profoundly. With 30,000 members, it was the most populous community of the Habsburg Empire. It consecrated in 1859 what was then (and reputedly still is now) Europe's biggest synagogue: the *Pester Israelitischer Tempel*, today the Great Synagogue of Budapest. Religiously as well as economically, this immigrant community was extremely diversified, including a thriving bourgeoisie and a large underclass of paupers. Contemporary observers were troubled by the hundreds of children who were sent by their poor parents to English missionaries' schools and by the plight of single young women stranded in the city. With regard to the expenditures on the synagogue and the poor relief, the community could not afford a schism and sought to avoid it at all costs.¹⁹

Kayserling supposes that Löw flattered himself with expectations for a call to Pest, which to some extent explains his hostility to the later incumbent of rabbinic authority there. "Löw was Löb Schwab's son-in-law, and successors are usually not well received by the relatives of predecessors; furthermore Löw himself held hopes and had apparently even some prospects of being called to Pest in the place of his famed father-in-law."²⁰ In reality, Löw was far too controversial for this delicate position.²¹ In search of a consensual candidate, the community entrusted the job search to a committee of no less than seventy members from all social classes.²² These electors searched for a chief rabbi who should be traditional enough to contain Orthodox complaints, academically trained to please the modernists, and endowed with the voice and the rhetoric to fill up the huge space of the new temple with sermons in classical German rhetoric and a dialect-free accent.²³ It was obvious that such a personality did not exist in Hungary. The ideal candidate in the eyes of the Pest community board was Michael Sachs (1808–1864), the "Rabbinatsassessor" in Berlin, a great preacher, a refined poet, an academic scholar, and a traditionalist, familiar with conditions in the Habsburg Empire from previous activity in Prague. When Sachs refused the offer, the Pest committee shortlisted two younger candidates. The first was Adolf Schmiedl (1821–1913), rabbi of Prossnitz (Prostějov) in Moravia, who had studied at Moravian yeshivot and at the University of Vienna, a close collaborator of Löw, a scholar of Judeo-Arabic religious philosophy, and a famed preacher, who

¹⁷ Existing research literature on the subject includes besides Kayserling's biographical study, an article by Zsigmond Groszmann, "Meisel pesti főrabbi kora," *Évkönyv IMIT* 1939, pp. 110–113; and the recent work by Géza Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon, II: 1849-től a jelenkorig* (Bratislava: Kaligram, 2012) see especially the chapter "Német rabbi a Dohányban" (pp. 48–52).

¹⁸ Josef Natonek, *Rabbi Moscheh Sofer seligen Andenkens und der Magier Ben Chananja* (Prague: S. Freund's Witwe und Comp., 1865), p. 12.

¹⁹ Zsuzsanna Toronyi, "Die jüdische Kultusgemeinde von Budapest zur Zeit des Tempelbaus," in *Juden in Ungarn: Kultur – Geschichte – Gegenwart*, ed. Eszter Götz (Budapest: Ungarisches Jüdisches Museum, [1999]), pp. 59–64.

²⁰ Kayserling, *Dr. W. A. Meisel*, p. 63.

²¹ Komoróczy, *A zsidók története*, II 38

²² Budapest, Magyar zsidó levéltár, Collection "Pesti zsidó közösség iratai 1867 előtt," series "Gemeinde-Protocoll," March 19, 1858. The file on the rabbi's election, still quoted by Groszmann, "Meisel pesti főrabbi kora," p. 102, is most probably lost. I thank Zsuzsanna Toronyi, the director of Hungarian Jewish Archives, for her kind information.

²³ Philaethes, "Pest, 11. August," *Ben-Chanja* 2.9 (1859), pp. 427–428. The author is most probably Joseph Perles, who is named in *Ben-Chanja* 1860 as "Philaethes in Breslau."

would later become Adolf Jellinek's successor in Vienna. The second candidate was Wolf Alois Meisel (1815–1867), who was technically a subject of the Habsburg monarchy, born in the Bohemian province, but he had grown up in Hamburg and was rabbi in Stettin in Prussia. Meisel had acquired his Talmudic education in private studies with militant orthodox authorities in Germany, among them, Jacob Ettlinger in Hamburg and Solomon Tiktin in Breslau, and studied at Prussian universities.²⁴ There he had broken with his Orthodox mentors and later, in 1846, embraced Frankel's abortive attempt to create a centrist "assembly of theologians." Meisel, who had tried to obtain rabbinates in Leipzig, Prague, and Vienna, topped Schmiedl in Pest mainly because he had the louder voice. Moreover, Habsburg Jews loved the North German accents: while Austrian German resembled Yiddish, the pronunciation of Mannheim, Hirsch, Hildesheimer, Gudemann, and Kayserling appeared as the more "goyish" interpretation of German.

Unlike Frankel, Meisel was not an academic philologist—his publications were of the homiletic, edifying, and poetic genres.²⁵ His scholarly work consists of a biography of Naftali Herz Wessely and German verse translations of medieval Hebrew poetry, visibly under Sachs' influence. Nothing in his oeuvre did impress his scholarly contemporaries, who not even in their necrologies would make any secret of their disdain. *Ben-Chananja* stated that "besides his merits as a great pulpit orator, he founded an orphanage in Stettin and here [in Pest] a children's school, a soup kitchen and a business credit association," leaving his publications unmentioned.²⁶ The *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* wrote that "his literary creations had some merit, but no importance. He was indeed a preacher in the first place."²⁷ In a commemorative sermon on the rabbis of Prague and Pest, their Bohemian colleague Joel Müller opposed the scholarly minded intellectual S. L. Rapoport to the affectionate Meisel, who had preached love, peace, and reconciliation in the midst of Hungarian religious antagonisms.²⁸ What even his admirers highlighted most was his unconditional commitment to the *Gemeindefrieden*, the peace inside the community.²⁹ Among recent Hungarian historians, György Haraszti sums up the general verdict when he calls Meisel "a mediocre but otherwise worthy man."³⁰ Géza Komoróczy credits Meisel with "poetry or, let us rather say, naive rhymery," and with "synagogue speeches of literary value, always held in German with a rather weak voice."³¹

The three sermons by which Meisel introduced himself in Pest, respectively, for his candidacy speech, his taking of office, and his festive inauguration of the new temple, all met with undeniable success among his future community. The first text is lost, but the two others survive in very rare imprints. For his taking of office, Meisel chose to reflect the mutual obligations of the Jewish community and its rabbi allegorically in the wording of the espousal contract that according to Jewish law binds the bride and the groom in a specific and symbolic way.³² The consecration of the *Pester Israelitischer Tempel* took place with an enormous pomp: the joint impression of the architecture, the organ, the cantor, and Meisel's sermons was described in the press as a truly uplifting aesthetic experience. "The

²⁴ Carsten Wilke, *Die Rabbiner der Emanzipationszeit in den deutschen, böhmischen und großpolnischen Ländern, 1781–1871* (Biographisches Handbuch der Rabbiner, ed. Michael Brocke and Julius Carlebach, part 1) (Munich: Saur, 2004), II, p. 653–655.

²⁵ In a letter to Leopold Löw on July 11, 1859, Samuel Holdheim concluded from Meisel's election that among the Jewish communities, there was no more a demand "einer gründlichen rabbinischen Gelehrsamkeit, die in Verbindung mit der historischen Wissenschaft, wie sie unfehlbar der mächtigste Hebel des Fortschrittes ist, so auch die conditio sine qua non in der Befähigung zum Rabbinat bilden sollte." See Löw, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Immanuel Löw (Szeged: Ludwig Engel, 1900), vol. V, p. 161.

²⁶ "Dr. Alois Wolf Meisels, Oberrabbiner zu Pest," *Ben-Chananja* 10.24 (Dec. 15, 1867), col. 743–744: "daß Meisel, nebst seinen Verdiensten als großer Kanzelredner, in Stettin ein Waisenhaus, hier eine Thalmud-Thora, eine Suppenanstalt und einen Vorschußverein begründet hat, welcher letzere Verein hier Meiselverein genannt wird."

²⁷ *AZJ* 1891, p. 61f: „Seine litterarischen Schöpfungen waren werthvoll, aber nicht bedeutend. Er war eben vorzugsweise Prediger, als solcher voll poetischer Inspiration, voll inniger Gemüthstiefe, voll warmer Begeisterung.“

²⁸ Joel Müller, *S. L. Rapoport und W. A. Meisel, Gedächtnisrede. Gehalten am 28. Tewet 5628 (23. Jänner 1868), dem Gedenktage des frommen Vereines der Wohlthäter, in dem isr. Tempel zu Böhm.-Leipa* (n.p., 1868), 11–12 [Jerusalem, National Library S 59 B 1844].

²⁹ Abraham Treuenfels, *Gedächtniß-Rede bei dem Trauer-Gottesdienste für den verewigten Oberrabbiner zu Pest, Dr. W. A. Meisel, gehalten in der Synagoge zu Stettin am 12. Tebet 5628 – 7. Januar 1868* (Prague: H. Dominicus, 1868), p. 10. [Jerusalem, National Library S 2006 B 972].

³⁰ Györgyi Haraszti, *Két világ határán* (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 1999), p. 224: "egyébként derék, középszerű ember."

³¹ Komoróczy, *A zsidók története*, 48–49: "Mindig irodalmi értékű templomi beszédeit németül tartotta, kissé erőtlén hangon. Verseket is írt, inkább mondjuk így: naiv verselmenyeket, és vallási folyóiratot adott ki (Ha-Karmel) anyanyelvén."

³² Meisel, תנאים *die Bedingungen des Bundes. Antritts-Rede, gehalten im Cultus-Tempel zu Pest, am [...] 13-ten August 1859, und auf Verlangen herausgegeben*, Pest: R. Lampel, 1859 [copies British Library St Pancras; Harvard; Ohio State]; see "Pesth, 16. August," *AZJ* 23.36 (Aug. 29, 1859), p. 519; Heinrich Spitzer, Rabbinats-Candidat, "Pesth, 15. August," *Ben-Chananja* 2.9 (1859), pp. 428–429; Philalethes, "Pesth, 14. August," *Ben-Chananja* 2.9 (1859), pp. 429–431; Kayserling, p. 62.

theme of the sermon was fittingly chosen, and it followed no less smoothly all the different turns of the speech," wrote the local newspaper *Pester Lloyd*. "The venerable orator chose for his argument an allegory that was no less meaningful than it was adapted to his purpose." To his praise of the finished synagogue, a home for God and the Torah, Meisel had once more given the form of a popular tale based on images from Jewish family life. God acted like a father who, not wanting to part with his daughter after her marriage, settled in the land of his son-in-law, who offered to build a dignified residence for him.³³ In both sermons, Meisel defended a consensus-oriented interpretation of his tasks when he praised the virtues of "Truth" (*emet*) and "Right" (*din*) but insisted that the indispensable "vessel," namely Peace (*shalom*), needed to envelop both of them and "be defended at all costs."³⁴

In his leadership, Meisel made another effort to become popular with the Pest Jews. His successful initiative as an organizer would indeed win him his community's gratitude. Three months after his taking of office, he had already founded enough free school classes for the children who learnt with the English missionaries.³⁵ Later, with women activists, he founded the "Pest Women's Society" (*Pesti Izraelita Nőegylet*) with a considerable social work aimed at supporting unmarried young women who found themselves in economic straits. His saving the boys from the missionaries and the girls from the pimps counted a lot in the community.

Löw and his ally Hirsch Fassel, who had loudly campaigned for Schmiedl,³⁶ were taken by surprise by Meisel's election,³⁷ but then tried to stem the tide of enthusiasm.³⁸ In a succession of polemical articles, the *Ben-Chananja* authors blamed the newly elected rabbi of "North German coldness," of alleged expressions of German cultural superiority over Hungarians,³⁹ of being an autodidact in the Talmud—unlike Löw, he had not attended a yeshiva.⁴⁰ Löw repeatedly stressed that Meisel was a foreigner and did not speak Hungarian,⁴¹ apparently forgetting that he, Löw, had been in the same situation when he arrived in Hungary 20 years earlier.

In November, Löw launched the all-out attack. He invited his Frankfurt friend Isaac Marcus Jost to publish in *Ben-Chananja* an "impartial" criticism of Meisel's two sermons, which had meanwhile been printed. Jost, as expected, sent a duly devastating review, blaming these speeches of "ice-cold expression" void of emotions and rhetorical skills. Jost composed long lists of Meisel's metaphors that were either too common or too uncommon, too prosaic or too flowery. Jost especially vituperated Meisel for his mixture of the German sermon with aggadic and allegorical elements, which he found ridiculous. He called it "gibberish" (*Gallimatias*), full of absurd allusions and over-interpreting translations. He concluded that the choice of such a preacher documented "his new community's sad state of culture and its incapacity of any aesthetic judgment according to the present day's standards."⁴²

The provocation was enormous. Letters reached the Jewish journals by readers who remembered that they had been moved to tears by the same sermon that Jost had called icy. Two intellectuals of the Pest community wrote refutations. One of these replies, which refuted Jost's review meticulously point after point, was signed by Lev Rafael Landau and appeared as a paid appendix to the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*.⁴³ The second reply,

³³ Meisel, *Die Himmelstochter und ihre Freier. Rede, gehalten bei der Einweihung des neuen Cultustempels der israel. Gemeinde zu Pest, am 6. September 1859*, Pest: M. E. Löwy, 1859 [British Library St Pancras]. See "Die Schlußsteinlegung und Einweihung," *Pester Lloyd*, Sept. 7, 1859, p. 2: "Das Motiv der Predigt war eben so passend gewählt, als es sich zwanglos den verschiedenen Wendungen der Rede anschmiegte [...] Der ehrwürdige Redner wählte zur Durchführung des Beweises eine eben so sinnige als der Beweisführung entsprechende Allegorie." See also "Pesth, im August," *AZ* 23.39 (Sept. 19, 1859), p. 566.

³⁴ Meisel, תנאים *die Bedingungen des Bundes*, p. 29.

³⁵ [Ignaz] F[riedman]n, "Pesth, 9. November," *Ben-Chananja* 2.10 (1859), pp. 473.

³⁶ ...u..., "Pesth," *Ben-Chananja* 2.5 (1859), pp. 223–224.

³⁷ In his quoted letter, Holdheim wrote to Löw: "Daß Sie nicht zu der so wichtigen Stelle berufen worden sind, daran mögen örtliche Verhältnisse die Schuld tragen. Aber wenn nicht Sie, warum nicht ein anderer בדמותך ובצלמך [in your image and likeness]?" See Löw, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II, p. 162.

³⁸ See on the polemic Kayserling, *Dr. W. A. Meisel*, p. 63–65.

³⁹ Einige Leser des *Ben-Chananja*, "Pest, im Mai," *Ben-Chananja* 2.6 (1859), pp. 280–282, and especially Löw's footnote p. 280.

⁴⁰ R. "Groß-Kanizsa, im August," *Ben-Chananja* 2.9 (1859), pp. 431–432.

⁴¹ Footnote to *Ben-Chananja* 2.9 (1859), p. 430.

⁴² I. M. Jost, "Würdigung der Antrittsrede des Hrn. Oberrabbiners Dr. W. A. Meisel in Pesth (gehalten am 13. August 1859)," *Ben-Chananja* 2.11 (1859), pp. 530–534.

⁴³ Lev Rafael Landau, "Herr Dr. Jost und der Herr Oberrabbiner in Pesth. Eine Antikritik," *AZ* 23.49 (Nov. 28, 1859), Beilage, S. [1r]–[2v].

more offensive, appeared as an anonymous brochure under the title *Rezensenten-Wirtschaft* ("Reviewers' Biz"). The author—who has been identified with a certain Sigmund Kraus, said to be close to the reform movement⁴⁴—tried to prove that Jost's review was a piece of "slander" (*Verleumdung*) based on falsified quotes, ignorance of midrashic sources, and obsessive stylistic pedantry incapable of suffering any expression of originality: "Don't you have to laugh, German reader, of this Jost who wants to be more German than German?"⁴⁵ The author does not hesitate to accuse Löw and Jost of blind envy: these "learned experts" would never be able to forgive Meisel three things. His first crime was the fact that he devoted himself entirely to the tasks of a rabbi of the good old school; his second crime was his revivalist Jewish learning, eager to restore Judaism in its pristine purity, whereas *Ben-Chananja* preferred the destructive mode of science: "you do not rest before you have dealt the final and deadly blow to Judaism; you dig and search in Judaism's shafts not in order to tap its living waters, but in order to make appear as dead whatever is still alive *about it* and in it." Meisel's third and most unforgivable crime was to be elected, honored, and beloved as the rabbi of Pest. Kraus finally finds an objective difference between Meisel's religious culture and that of Löw's jealous *Wissenschaft* clique. The latter, he argues, expects the dry scholarly lectures that German rabbis use to proffer in their empty synagogues, while Meisel knows to hit the popular edifying tone that delights a Hungarian Jewish audience.⁴⁶

By spurning Meisel's sermon, Jost had insulted Hungarian Jewry, its major urban community, its new expensive synagogue, and its chief rabbi. Fifty members of the Pest community protested in a confidential address to Löw against the polemics he had invited to his journal. They insisted on the fact that Meisel was the only one personality who could prevent the threatening schism and implored Löw not to precipitate it.⁴⁷ Löw, however, had no intention to reduce the damage. In the December issue of his journal, he inserted a polemical note denouncing the "poison-pen letter" (*Drohbrief*) that he had received from Pest, where he claimed that his assault against Meisel was protected by the "autonomy of scholarship, which may demand its due respect. Literary criticism, as you know, is not a community affair."⁴⁸

Kraus dismissed this justification when he published his anonymous pamphlet in December. Where science had become despotic passion, he argued, and where critique had become insult, both against a rabbi and his community, the latter was obliged to bring the editor to reason in order "to assure the peace in the community" (*um den Gemeindefrieden zu sichern*). Kraus dedicated his publication to "the staunch and tactful friends and admirers of His Reverence, Chief Rabbi Dr. W. A. Meisel in deep respect and veneration."⁴⁹

Jost provided *Ben-Chananja* with polemical rejoinders against both Pest adversaries, sending his "sincere respect" to Landau in January⁵⁰ and his "deep disdain" to the Anonym in February. He flaunted the "old-fashioned taste of incoherent *Drush*," the "degenerated taste" and the "unbridled crudeness" of those Jews who had been ready to applaud Meisel, while he exempted "the educated part of the Hungarian communities" from his condemnation.⁵¹ Kraus replied in a brief and insulting note in the *Pester Lloyd*, where he pitied Jost, the "little Sultan" for his accesses of megalomania and his incapacity to take advice from his many opponents.⁵²

⁴⁴ *Ben-Chananja* 4.5, p. 225: "Verf. eines moralphilosophischen Werkes, Fortschrittsmann."

⁴⁵ [Sigmund Kraus,] *Rezensenten-Wirtschaft oder Bemerkungen eines Laien über den im elfften Hefte des diesjährigen "Ben-Chananja" erschienenen Artikel: "Würdigung der Antrittsrede des Oberrabbiners W. A. Meisel in Pest von J. M. Jost"* (Pest: F. Pfeifer, 1859), 16 [Vienna, ÖNB 68604-A Neu Mag]. The main piece contained in the brochure is dated of Nov. 10, 1859. Its sub-title "Kritik der Kritik" seems to allude to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die heilige Familie oder Kritik der kritischen Kritik* (Frankfurt: J. Rütten, 1845)

⁴⁶ [Kraus,] *Rezensenten-Wirtschaft*, 7–8. The allusion to "Siloa" means Ludwig Philippson, *Siloah. Eine Auswahl von Predigten. Zur Erbauung, so wie insonders zum Vorlesen in Synagogen, die des Redners ermangeln*, Leipzig, 1843–1858.

⁴⁷ "Sendschreiben an Herrn Leopold Löw, Oberrabbiner in Szegedin" (Nov. 13, 1859), with 50 signatures, in: Löw, *Zur neueren Geschichte der Juden in Ungarn: Beitrag zur allgemeinen Rechts-, Religions- und Kulturgeschichte*, 2nd ed., Budapest: Ludwig Aigner, 1874, pp. 167–169.

⁴⁸ *Ben-Chananja* 2.12 (Dec. 1859), p. 581.

⁴⁹ [Kraus,] *Rezensenten-Wirtschaft*, pp. 1*, 3.

⁵⁰ Jost, "Antwort auf die Antikritik des L. R. Landau in der „Allgemeinen Zeitung des Judenthums“" (Dec. 2, 1859), *Ben-Chananja* 3.1 (Jan. 1860), p. 42–43, with the date of Dec. 2, 1859.

⁵¹ Jost, "Antwort auf die Schrift: „Rezensenten-Wirtschaft,“" *Ben-Chananja* 3.1 (Feb. 1860), 99–100.

⁵² [Kraus,] "An Herrn Dr. I. M. Jost in Frankfurt a. M.: Endgiltige Beantwortung seiner Antwort im 2. Hefte des diesjährigen „Ben Chananja,“" *Pester Lloyd*, Feb. 9, 1860, p. 3.

The polemic ended here, and Jost survived the showdown only by a few months. His last replies allow some doubt that there was any common criterion for distinguishing between a convenient or an inconvenient metaphor, the only objective cultural issue on which the parties disagreed was Meisel's mixture of genres. Besides pronouncing rabbinic *derashot* for the Orthodox, the new chief rabbi had indeed integrated darashic elements into his German homily. He was not the only rabbi of the time who experimented with the synthesis of the two homiletic genres; especially Adolf Jellinek in Vienna made the aggadization of the synagogue sermon into his hallmark, and his example eventually spread abroad as well.⁵³

In sum, the Löw–Meisel polemic was the result not of arguments but of networking on both sides. When *Ben-Chananja* defends the “educated and intelligent Jews” against the “rich Jews” in the Pest community,⁵⁴ it is easy to see the discontent with the wholesalers and bankers who then dominated the board and who had nominated Meisel.⁵⁵ The latter was not wary to praise bankers as “spiritual princes in Israel” and to speak of the banks, stock markets, and other temples of money discretely as “these halls where the wonderfully organized exchange of this instrument that serves us in all our exchange and commerce has found its place.”⁵⁶ While Meisel's enemies had claimed to uphold the values of independent scholarship against the boorish taste of the Pest *nouveaux-riches*, Meisel's defenders pitted the democratic consensus against the power fantasies of a clique of press scribblers, whose arrogance was no less pathologic than it was pathetic.

While *Ben-Chananja* provided Löw with a stable mouthpiece where he could make his friends and colleagues launch polemical attacks month after month, Meisel's allies had to sell pamphlets and buy space in foreign periodicals; Kraus explicitly lamented that most Jewish journals were hostile to “our honorable community representatives.”⁵⁷ The Pest chief rabbi on his side realized that he would not breathe freely unless he had broken Löw's monopoly on the Hungarian Jewish press. In 1860, thus, shortly after the polemic on the inauguration sermon, no less than two Jewish midstream weeklies emerged in Pest. Joseph Bärmann founded the *Allgemeine Illustrirte Judenzeitung* in August, which claimed rabbi Schwab's heritage of “positive” Judaism,⁵⁸ and Meisel published from October *Der Carmel, religiöse Wochenschrift für Synagoge, Schule und Haus*.⁵⁹ Both papers merged in April 1861 under Meisel's editorship, but the Pest chief rabbi renounced this task already at the end of the year. David Schwab published the *Judenzeitung* for another year according to the previous formula, before he had to close the journal by the end of 1862.

Carmel's ephemeral history was nothing exceptional. During the same years, the journal *Die Neuzeit* was published by a Hungarian, Simon Szántó, in Vienna; and two Hungarian-language Jewish journals emerged in Pest, the Reformist *Magyar Izraelita* and the Orthodox *Magyar Zsidó*. All papers, German as well as Hungarian, except the *Neuzeit*, had folded by the end of the 1860s, and it took more than a decade to revive the Hungarian Jewish press. In 1871–1872, the Pest rabbis Sámuel Kohn and Meyer Kayserling tried an *Ungarisch-jüdische Wochenschrift*, which also remained short-lived. Only in the 1880s, two stable journals emerged in Hungarian, *Egyenlőség* and *Magyar Zsidó Szemle*.

⁵³ Alexander Deeg, *Predigt und Derascha: Homiletische Textlektüre im Dialog mit dem Judentum*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006, pp. 121–162: “Zwischen Derascha und Predigt: Jüdische Predigt und jüdische Homiletik im 19. Jahrhundert.”

⁵⁴ “Pester Briefe,” *Ben-Chananja* 3.1 (Feb. 1860), 95: “Die Herren sollten aber bedenken, daß gebildete und intelligente Juden allenthalben die Hebung und Belebung des Judenthums in viel höherem Maße fördern, als reiche Juden.”

⁵⁵ Meisel received his nomination under the presidency of Dávid Fleischl (1800–1868). In October 1859, the authorities appointed Saje Wolf Schossberger (1796–1874) in his stead. A member of a different elite and generation, the ophthalmologist Ignác Hirschler (1823–1891), became president in 1861–1863; subsequently, the authorities appointed Schossberger again. See “The Sequence of the Rashekols” in Kinga Frojimovics, Géza Komoróczy, Viktória Puztai, and Andrea Strbik, *Jewish Budapest: Monuments, Rites, History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), p. 257–262, here p. 260. On Fleischl, see Julia Richers, *Jüdisches Budapest: Kulturelle Topographien einer Stadtgemeinde im 19. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Böhlau, 2009), p. 245.

⁵⁶ Meisel, *Trauerrede Seiner Hochwürden des Oberrabbiners Dr. W. A. Meisel, bei der Leichenfeier Jakob Kern's am 6. Oktober 1864. Nach stenographischen Aufzeichnungen* (Pest: Gebrüder Pollak, 1864), p. 5, 7. [Jerusalem, National Library SB 63 B 1930]

⁵⁷ [Kraus,] *Recensenten-Wirthschaft*, pp. 28–30.

⁵⁸ *Allgemeine Illustrirte Judenzeitung* I,21 (Dec. 21. 1860), pp. 162–163.

⁵⁹ *Der Carmel, religiöse Wochenschrift für Synagoge, Schule und Haus*. Herausgegeben von Dr. W. A. Meisel, Oberrabbiner in Pest. 1. Jahrgang 1860. Pest: Ph. Wodianer, 1860.

Carmel enjoyed a distribution throughout the Hungarian kingdom including the Croatian and Carpatian borderlands, where this journal was read by the “intelligent tradesman” and the “cultivated women.”⁶⁰ The regular contributors to *Carmel* were all Meisel’s subalterns: the old rabbinical assessor Jehuda Wahrmann (1793–1868), chief cantor Moritz Friedmann (1826–1891), the director of the teacher’s seminary Abraham Lederer (1827–1916), the director of the Talmud Torah founded by Meisel, Heinrich Deutsch (1822–1889),⁶¹ and several teachers of the same institutions. The journal was mainly dedicated to school and community topics and left only a very limited space to scholarly matters.⁶² In the sermons and poems included in the paper, the authors activate a revivalist discourse, promising to enhance “the warmth of religious participation” in their Jewish public.⁶³

The title of Meisel’s journal expressed his idea of a civilizing process that the prophet Elijah allegedly underwent between the massacre he committed among Baal’s priests and the theophany experience in the cave, when he recognized God not in the storm wind but in the gentle breeze. Meisel’s revivalist peace education implied emulating the uncompromising religious fervor that inspired Elijah’s massacre, while being committed to the mildness and loving-kindness of the breeze.⁶⁴ The call for peace and conciliation was justly perceived as the journal’s “tendency” by readers,⁶⁵ and an Orthodox rabbi even tried to save the biblical Elijah from the reproach of fanaticism.⁶⁶ Besides calling constantly for “the peace in the communities,” Meisel made his collaborators write special articles on the virtues of peace.⁶⁷ For instance, the young poetess Minna Cohen contributed a long poem with the title “Peace for Israel.”⁶⁸ A correspondent of the journal sums up its guiding narrative when he declares that the intransigency of the Orthodox has favored “the contaminating breath of unbridled and groundless reformania” (*dem pestilenten Hauch zügel- und bodenloser Reformsucht*), that a position between both extremes must now be strengthened and that this could only be on the basis of a dynamic Talmudism. “The Talmud, this eternally fresh source of our religious life, hasn’t it saved often enough the masses by rejecting unviable elements from practical life?”⁶⁹

Thus was the ideology that the journal sought to defend against challenges from three sides: the reformist *Ben-Chananja* circle, the Magyar nationalists, and the Orthodox. Relations with Löw were, of course, the Achilles’ nerve of the paper, as readers recognized perfectly.⁷⁰ Meisel complained of the “disgusting and intense polemic of our daily press,”⁷¹ and he singled out *Ben-Chananja* as the source from which that snake’s poison was spread.⁷² In a sermon he pronounced on December 3, 1860, in the Great Synagogue, Meisel himself addressed his desperate situation confronting three classes of enemies:

“Malicious subverters, disreputable slanderers, who sow the seed of discord everywhere, have caused much disease and disaster among us. The shepherds who congregate for *unanimous* goals are not recognized as being

⁶⁰ David Löwy from Vukovář, *Carmel* I,9 (30.11.1860), 156 “intelligente Kaufmann,” “gebildete Frauen.”

⁶¹ See on him Ignaz Reich, “Deutsch Heinrich,” in *Beth-El: Ehrentempel verdienter ungarischer Israeliten*, Pest: Alois Bucsansky, 1878, pp. 94–102.

⁶² Gideon Brecher, “Abaii. Biographische Skizze, vom Standpunkte der Beziehung Abaii’s zur Medizin,” *Carmel* I,6 (9.11.1860), col. 87–91; H. Deutsch, “Das Leben R. Jochanan b. Saccai’s” I,7 (16.11.1860), col. 106ff.

⁶³ *Carmel* I,1 (5.10.1860), col. 5: “tiefe religiöse Innerlichkeit,” “den Wärmegrad der Betheiligung an Religion zu steigern.”

⁶⁴ Meisel, “Warum ‚Carmel?‘,” *Carmel* I,1 (5.10.1860), col. 1–6; II,15 (Apr. 12, 1861), p. 117, “daß das theuerste Gut Israel Friede und Eintracht sei.”

⁶⁵ Josef Reichsfeld, “Altsohl,” *Carmel* I,10 (7.12.1860), p. 172: “... kam mir der ‚Carmel‘ mit seiner versöhnenden und friedensverkündenden Tendenz zu Gesicht. Möge es ihm gelingen brüderliche Eintracht und Gemeinsinn in unserer Mitte zu wecken, auf daß an ihm und an uns in Erfüllung gehe **יחשוב לייער הכרמל לייער הכרמל**! Die Wüste wird zu Carmel und Carmel für uns zum Lustgarten werden!”

⁶⁶ Lasar Schlesinger, “Alba,” I,6 (9.11.1860), col. 99.

⁶⁷ [Ignatz] F[riedmann]n, “Was jetzt dringlich Noth thut!,” *Carmel* II,25 (21.6.1861), 195–196. On the author, see below Meisel’s footnote p. 239, 241; D. L. Strasser, Kula, “Der Friede vom jüd. religiösen Standpunkte. Kurze Bemerkungen,” *Carmel* II,31 (2.8.1861), 241–242.

⁶⁸ Minna Cohen, “Friede über Israel,” *Carmel* II,26 (28.6.1861), pp. 203–204. See also the poem by A. S. Fischer, “Eliahu auf Horeb,” *Carmel* II,29 (19.7.1861), 227–228, with the verse “Des Propheten Herz bewegt nun Frieden.”

⁶⁹ A. Stern, Rabbiner in Langyel-Tóti, “Zur Kethuba-Frage,” *Carmel* II,16 (19.4.1861), p. 124.

⁷⁰ *Allgemeine Illustrirte Judenzeitung* III,11 (14.3.1862), p. 97, referring to polemics against Löw, “eines von mir und Unzähligen sehr geehrten Mannes, bezüglich dessen Sie, Herr Redacteur, übrigens stets – in vor- wie nachkarmelitischer Zeit Ihres Blattes – jeden leisesten Vorwurf des Coteriewesens sich ferne zu halten wußten.”

⁷¹ *Carmel* I,9 (30.11.1860), col. 160 “Der ‚Carmel‘ mag der, leider schon so widerlichen und heftigen Polemik unserer Tagespresse keine Nahrung und keinen Vorschub geben **אהבו [!] מה שנאמר האמת והשלום**!”

⁷² L. Horowitz, “Pest, 25. Oktober 1860,” *Carmel* I,4 (26.10.1860), col. 58.

the *right* ones, while those who are recognized as such stay eternally inactive, leaving the field to others who, driven by their selfishness, call their passion enthusiasm and undermine the foundation of any existing order.”⁷³

Yet the chief rabbi called for law, order, and peace and made an effort not to return *Ben-Chananja's* aggressive polemics. *Carmel* often tried objective arguments by defending, for example, “how much the ritual exercises in Judaism contribute to reviving and strengthening religious consciousness.”⁷⁴ But controversies with *Ben-Chananja* flared up almost inevitably on any pretext: whether the Ketubba should be read aloud during wedding ceremonies or not,⁷⁵ whether Jewish schools should teach the Hebrew Bible or the catechism, whether rabbis should be forbidden to receive donations from individuals,⁷⁶ and other such topics. In the question of civil marriage, the importance of ritual, and other issues on which Löw disagreed with Frankel, Meisel regularly backed the latter.

Hungarian linguistic expertise had not been among the criteria for selecting the Pest chief rabbi in 1859 and did not play a role in the first issues of *Carmel*. All indicates that the mostly German-speaking Jewish elites were completely taken by surprise when on October 20, 1860, the institutions of the Kingdom of Hungary were restored, and large Jewish population segments entered Magyarization immediately and with enthusiasm. Caterwauling by young people was the usual terror applied against Meisel and other rabbis who were unwilling or incapable to preach in Hungarian.⁷⁷ The Hungarian journal *Magyar Izraelita* edited by two rabbinical colleagues, Leopold Rokonstein and Wilhelm Józseffy, pressured the community to dismiss him. *Carmel* opened a new patriotic front, compensating its own use of German. Meisel’s collaborator Heinrich Deutsch—*nomen est omen*—warned at the same time to precipitate Magyarization of community schools. Meisel himself dedicated his book to minister József Eötvös (1813-1871), and he spoke at commemoration events for the first anniversary of the death of Hungary’s national hero, count István Széchenyi (1791-1860).⁷⁸

Still more difficult were the relations with the Orthodox, who were a frequent target of polemics by the journal’s contributors. Meisel himself intervened in the two controversies in which, he believed, the Orthodox created artificial borderlines of traditional Judaism, namely, the shift of the Almemor towards the Ark⁷⁹ and the celebration of weddings in the synagogue.⁸⁰ He argued at length against the responsa of the main Orthodox spokesman, Rabbi David Schlesinger of Sered, who replied in 1861 with a very polemical pamphlet, “Mount Tabor: Book of Responsa which Stands up against Mount Carmel, or, a Recipee for Dr. W. A. Meisel”—the latter’s rabbinic title was ignominiously omitted. To his Hebrew responsa on the almemor question, Schlesinger added a summary in German so that, he writes, *Herr Doktor* would also be able to understand them. Meisel, Mount Carmel, and its “poisonous lava” were accused of being the main tool of the “revolutionary party” (*Umsturzpartei*) of the Neologs in their battle against tradition that Rabbi Schlesinger describes with blood-stained metaphors.⁸¹

⁷³ Meisel, *Der Stein auf dem Brunnen: Predigt gehalten am Sabbath 5621 ויציא im israelitischen Cultustempel zu Pest* (Pest: M. Löwi und Sohn, 1860), p. 10; cf. Kayserling, *Meisel*, pp. 71–72.

⁷⁴ Dr. B., “Ueber das Zeremonienwesen im Judenthum, dessen hochwichtigen Einfluß auf die Belebung und Kräftigung des religiösen Gottesbewußtseins,” *Carmel* II,20 (17.5.1861), pp. 154–155; II,21 (24.5.1861), pp. 162–163, quote from p. 163.

⁷⁵ David Löwy, Bukovar, “Die Integrität der ‘Ketuba’,” *Carmel* II,32 (9.8.1861), pp. 248–249, reconstructs the debate between *Ben-Chananja*, *Carmel*, and the Orthodox camp.

⁷⁶ Samuel Rosenberg, “Das Einkommen des jüdischen Seelsorgers. Halachisch-historische Abhandlung,” starts *Carmel* II,4 (25.1.1861), col. 61; against Straßer’s article in *Ben-Chananja* 1859, 245ff.

⁷⁷ *AZJ* 1861, p. 2.

⁷⁸ *Carmel*, II,15 (Apr. 12, 1861), p. 117.

⁷⁹ Meisel, “בימה Muß das ‘Almemmer’ in der Mitte der Synagoge stehen?” *Carmel* I,13 (28.12.1860), col. 209–213; II,1 (4.1.1861), col. 1–5; II,2 (11.1.1861), col. 17–21; II,3 (18.1.1861), col. 33–37; see I col. 209 “der Frieden der Gemeinden.”

⁸⁰ Meisel, “Die Trauung in der Synagoge,” *Carmel* II,4 (25.1.1861), col. 57–61, II,5 (1.2.1861), col. 73–77; II,6 (8.2.1861), col. 89–91; II,7 (15.2.1861), col. 105–108; II,9 (29.2.1861), col. 137–141; II,10 (8.3.1861), col. 153–156; II,11 (15.3.1861), col. 169–173; II,13 (29.3.1861), col. 203–207, see last sentence: “Ist es nun eine Frage, auf die es so bestimmte und ausreichende Antwort giebt, es werth, die friedliche Entwicklung des Gemeindelebens zu stören und Zwietracht auszustreuen?”

⁸¹ *Sefer ShUT har Tavor wehu? ſomed neged ha-Karmel. Der Berg Tabor oder das Recept für Dr. W. A. Meisel*, von David Schlesinger (R. D. Sered), Pressburg 1861, p. 7: “Sie legen uns zur Last, daß wir den Saamen der Zwietracht säen; während Sie selbst durch Ihre höchst mißlungenen Thesen die Mittelpartei aufstacheln und ihr erst recht einen Anhaltspunkt geben, dasjenige wieder an sich zu bringen, was ihr gewaltsam entrissen wurde.”

Meyer Kayserling reports that Meisel gave up editing *Carmel* because of the controversy with the Orthodox.⁸² We may be more precise and observe how *Carmel* ran into difficulty by antagonizing all the different camps because of imprudent tactics. During the last three months of the journal's existence, it had apparently severe problems filling its columns, as it resorted to the solution of printing Meisel's weekly sermons,⁸³ as well as anonymous correspondences that were not always checked carefully enough. Meisel revealed himself strangely unwilling to follow party interests in his clumsy selection of this material. For example, he printed the polemic of a Neolog correspondent who mocked his Orthodox rabbi for having finally accepted the new place of the almemor. Instead of honoring this concession to community peace, the anonym slandered the rabbi by claiming that the latter had changed his principles for greed of money.⁸⁴ Meisel also reproduced the letter of a Moravian pseudonym "Philalethes" from Nikolsburg, who praised the new community rabbi Meyer Feuchtwang and suggested giving him the rank of Moravian chief rabbi (*Landesrabbiner*) by stripping the present incumbent Abraham Placzek of this dignity. The article was full of outrageous slander against the latter.⁸⁵ By printing this gross insult, Meisel had stirred up a hornet's nest, because Feuchtwang was a Hirschian, while Placzek was, like Meisel, committed to conserving community peace by cultural bricolage.⁸⁶

At the time when Meisel decided to close down his paper, his irenic journalism had paradoxically led to conflicts with all sides. In the following two years, Löw's attacks reached their acme. The rabbi of Szeged had the habit of shooting down any publication that Meisel dared to give to the press,⁸⁷ so that Meisel eventually refrained from publishing anything. But the worst was still to come. In 1863, when the authorities suppressed the autonomous government of the Pest Jewish community, *Ben-Chananja* affirmed that shortly before this draconic intervention, Meisel had sought for state support in a confidential memorandum, in which he denounced the elders and thus willingly provoked the persecution.⁸⁸ In reaction to this slander, the police came to search the journal's offices in Szeged. Löw supposed that Meisel had incited this raid and commented: "Herr Doktor has probably decided to show his magnificent juridical expertise in order to excuse the fact that he understands little more than nothing of Hebrew grammar and the Talmud."⁸⁹ When Meisel committed, in addition, the blunder to affirm that a Jewish oath in Hungary needed to take place with previous rabbinical admonition, Löw treated him in a long series of bilious articles as a continuator of the infamous oaths *more judaico* and even denounced him as a malicious opponent of emancipation.⁹⁰ The campaign ended with Meisel's public humiliation, who had to vow that he would henceforth refrain from any direct communication with the authorities.

By 1865, Löw had gone too far in his hate-mongering, even in the eyes of some of his erstwhile loyal followers. Adolf Schmiedl lamented of the aggressive style in Jewish papers; and Abraham Hochmuth (1816–1889), rabbi of Veszprém, Löw's collaborator, announced in 1866 that he would quit *Ben-Chananja* because of the editor's rhetoric "vandalism," whose continuous insults against anything taken for sacred by the Orthodox had precipitated the rift that wrecked Hungarian Jewry. According to Hochmuth, many of Löw's collaborators felt the same, but they feared to stop writing for *Ben-Chananja*, because whoever dropped out from Löw's client network would be slandered by ferocious book reviews.⁹¹ Löw progressively lost support for his journal. Symbolically, the December number of 1867 in which he announces Meisel's death and the emancipation of the Jews in Hungary is also the one with which he closes his shop.

⁸² Kayserling, *Dr. W. A. Meisel*, p. 73.

⁸³ "Der mosaische Welterschöpfungsact, von Dr. M.," *Carmel* II,38 (29.9.1861), 297.

⁸⁴ See the critical comment by Jakob Heinrich Hirschfeld, rabbi in Pécs, in *Carmel*, II,19 (10.5.1861), pp. 149–150.

⁸⁵ Philalethes, "Aus Mähren," *Carmel* II,38 (29.9.1861), p. 303–304.

⁸⁶ "Eingesendet. Brünn," *Carmel* II,40 (11.10.1861), 320; see also II,42 (25.10.1861), p. 333.

⁸⁷ Joel Nathan, *Wörterbuch zu den fünf Büchern Moses*, Pest: M. E. Löwy, 1860 (see Kayserling, p. 67); criticism in *Ben-Chananja* 1860, col. 549ff.

⁸⁸ On this affair see *AZJ* 27.11 (March 3, 1863), p. 163; Kayserling, *Meisel*, pp. 76–79; Groszmann, "Meisel pesti főrabbi kora," 105–106; Kormoróczy, *A zsidók története*, vol. II, p. 50. An extract from the ill-formulated memorandum, written on January 12, 1863, was published in "Auszug aus dem Memorandum des Oberrabbiner[s] Dr. [W.] A. Meisel zu Pest," *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 27, no. 19 (May 5, 1863), Beilage, p. I-II.

⁸⁹ *Ben-Chananja* 1863, p. 156.

⁹⁰ *AZJ* 27.16 (April 4, 1863), p. 248; Kayserling, *Meisel*, p. 80.

⁹¹ Hochmuth, *Löw*, p. 14; see already [Hochmuth,] "Die jüdische Presse in Ungarn!," *Die Neuzeit* 6.4 (Jan. 26, 1866), pp. 36–37.

Though the *Ben-Chananja* network may have been largely based on mafia-style blackmail, it epitomized the triumph of Jewish historical school in Hungary. The *Carmel*, on the contrary, was still functioning in accordance with older thematic preferences. The *Allgemeine Illustrirte Judenzeitung* had started with an article by the Pest teacher Ignaz Friedmann in favor of historical study as a means of promoting popular Jewish culture,⁹² but Meisel, when he invites scientific contributions for his journal, only mentions religious philosophy and Hebrew linguistics, as if he was quoting from a dated Haskalah canon. His ideas on the complete disjunction of revelation from science still sound strangely Mendelssohnian.

“If we wish to decide on a religious question, to what end should we first go into social and political justice, physics, astronomy, mathematics and philosophy? In such a case, scriptural law must decide in the simple sense and spirit with which the oral tradition has endowed it. Any further consideration would be superfluous. We have *ḥukim*, laws that cannot be reduced to reason, that cannot be conciliated with the natural laws, that cannot be read in the stars, that cannot be mathematically demonstrated, that philosophy proudly dismisses – does this make them lose anything of their validity, their binding force that they have for us? We can here apply what our Sages have rightly remarked on such an occasion: “I (God) have given the Law, I have proclaimed the order, and it is not your task to find out my intentions.”⁹³

While *Ben-Chananja* attracted several among the Hungarian Breslau students, such as Joseph Perles, none of them ever accepted to write for *Carmel*. Still more surprising are the considerations that *Carmel* brings on the planning process of the Hungarian rabbinical seminary. The author urges the modern rabbis to control the project. As things were evolving, either ignorant lay leaders would create watered-down institutions of learning where serially fabricated progressive rabbis would learn rabbinical wisdom from text books (an obvious allusion to the pedagogy of the Padua seminary) or the Orthodox would “transform the *‘yeshiv’che*’ of E. into the official *‘Seminär’che*” (allusion to Hildesheimer’s modern yeshiva in Eisenstadt) or, finally, one would “attribute supremacy to the great institute of obscurantist studies on the Schlossberg” (allusion to the Pressburg yeshiva).⁹⁴ Meisel’s journal calls for a midstream solution of rabbinical training, unlike Austria’s heretofore existing centers in Padua, Eisenstadt, and Pressburg, but Breslau is nowhere quoted as a model. Its existence is not even mentioned in the article.

In a word, Meisel tried to create a religious midstream without any deeper influence from the historicist school of Breslau.⁹⁵ His tendency was framed by the peculiar situation of the Pest community; and though his partisanship with Zacharias Frankel’s agenda seems to have motivated him to some extent, his religious thought was inspired by remainders of the East Central European Haskalah and by the Germanized traditionalism of the Vienna Kultustempel, not by the historical school. Midstream Judaism was a default value that Meisel wanted to achieve through the removal of excesses on either side. The unspecific, unscientific, and opportunistic modernism that Meisel defended in Hungary merged with the Breslau ideology only after the latter was implanted by Kohn, Kohut, and other young rabbis, with the subsequent marginalization of Leopold Löw and his followers.

⁹² Ignatz Friedmann, “Weshalb soll das Judenthum seine Geschichte pflegen?,” *Allgemeine Illustrirte Judenzeitung* I,1 (Aug. 3, 1860), pp. 4–5.

⁹³ Meisel, “Trauung,” *Carmel* II,5 (1.2.1861), col. 73–74: “Wozu bei der Bestimmung einer religiösen Frage die gesellschaftlichen und staatsrechtlichen Bestimmungen, die Naturgesetze, die Astronomie, die Mathematik und die Philosophie erst heranziehen? Hier entscheidet einfach das schriftliche Gesetz im Sinne und Geiste, den ihm die mündliche Tradition gegeben. Alles Andere ist ein Ueberfluß. Wir haben **חוקים**, Gesetze, die sich auf Vernunft nicht zurückführen lassen, die mit den Gesetzen der Natur nicht in Einklang zu bringen, und deren Giltigkeit in den Sternen nicht zu lesen ist, die man mathematisch nicht beweisen kann, über welche die Philosophie stolz den Stab bricht – haben sie deßhalb für uns keine Giltigkeit, keine bindende Kraft? Hier gilts was unsere Weisen bei solcher Gelegenheit richtig bemerkt haben: **חוקה מידותי גורה גורתי אין לך להרהר אחר מידותי**, ich (Gott) habe das Gesetz gegeben, den Beschluß verhängt, und dir steht es nicht zu, meine Absichten ergrübeln zu wollen.”

⁹⁴ D-b, “Das Rabbinerseminar,” *Carmel* II,27 (5.7.1861), p. 211, on two expectations, “ein Landesinstitut ... an welchem jüdische Candidaten aus Compendien und Heften die rabbinische Weisheit schöpfen, und so zu jüdischen, natürlich aufgeklärten und fortschrittfreundlichen Seelsorgern gedrillt, als Alleinbefugte die Rabbinatsposten in den Gemeinden antreten, in welchen alsdann aller Zank und Hader ein Ende hat und Alles derart geregelt ist, daß das Reich des Friedens seine ewige Herrschaft antritt”; other expectation: “Ob es sich darum handelt, das E...er Jeschiv’che zum staatsgültigen Seminär’che zu gestalten, oder darum, der großen Verfinsterungsanstalt auf dem Schloßberge die Suprematie zu verschaffen [...] Gutes und Heilsames haben wir da nicht zu erwarten. – Aber um so dringlicher stellt sich die Nothwendigkeit heraus, auch von anderer Seite die Sache ernstlich ins Auge zu fassen.”

⁹⁵ Pace Komoróczy, *A zsidók története*, vol. II, p. 48: “Meisel a breslauer Seminarban tanult.”

In 1866, one year before he died of a brain stroke at the end of a Sabbath prayer, Meisel had been forced to share his preacher's office with his young, Breslau-trained, Hungarian-speaking colleague Sámuel Kohn (1841–1920). After this linguistic division of the Pest rabbinate between a Germanophone and a Mayarophone incumbent, the religious split between Orthodox and Neologs consumed in February 1869 was accompanied by an internal unification process inside the latter two camps. While the orthodox rallied around the leadership and cultural model of the Pressburg Yeshiva,⁹⁶ the religious leftists embraced the formula offered by the Breslau Seminary. The reduction of the range of religious options evicted those of Hildesheimer's modern orthodoxy, the tolerant traditionalism of the status quo communities, and radical reform.

After Löw's death, only individual thinkers held decidedly reformist positions. Among them was the orientalist Ignaz Goldziher, who was nominated into the Seminary Committee in 1877, but could never become a regular member of its faculty. Goldziher appreciated Sámuel Kohn but could not bring him to share his views.⁹⁷ With David Kaufmann, he clashed for various reasons. Some were related to their respective religious and scholarly standpoints, but most of Goldziher's misgivings had to do with Kaufmann's personality and social strategies, as he noted in his 1890 diary:

"Among these so-called professors, the young Kaufmann stood out for his talent, but also for his bigotry. He was an eager self-advertiser, but also a flat-headed windbag, whose famed learning consisted in futile footnotes and curiosity-mongering, his attempts at preaching were void verbiage and impudent hypocritical attempts at heroic gestures [...] Everything about this person was window-dressing, fraud, propaganda, accountancy, financial speculation. His character pushed him to get married with a jaded spinster from an entirely un-Jewish family [...] And the stench of holiness kept stinking from that great man's head."⁹⁸

Kaufmann, who by that time represented the mainstream in the Neolog movement, is here accused of pursuing self-interested consensus engineering rather than the commitment to any kind of truth; his *Wissenschaft* being nothing more than a stratagem in the quest for social respectability. To be sure, Kaufmann's culture was of an entirely different kind than Meisel's, but Goldziher's slander continues the argument that Löw had voiced against the *Afterreformer* during the 1860s and, in fact, already against Meisel when the latter took office in 1859. What Goldziher, manifestly, sensed and resented most in Hungarian midstream neology was the opportunistic subtext that it had inherited from the *Carmel* years, when it was started not as a scientific trend but as a peace movement by the leadership of Pest's accruing and disunited Jewish community.

Carsten L. Wilke is associate professor at the Departments of History and Medieval Studies of Central European University, where he serves as director of the Center for Religious Studies. A Ph.D. graduate in Jewish Studies of the University of Cologne (1994), he held research appointments at the College of Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, the Documentation and Research Center of the Ashkenazi Community in Mexico City, the Steinheim Institute for German Jewish History in Duisburg, the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in Philadelphia, and the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies in Hamburg. In his research he explores the social and intellectual interaction of Jews and their non-Jewish environment in medieval and modern Europe, with particular interest in Jewish-Christian relations, Iberian crypto-Judaism, Jewish historiography, and the modernization of rabbinical culture. Among his most recent books are *The Marrakesh Dialogues: A Gospel Critique and Jewish Apology from the Spanish Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); *Jewish Scholarship in Hungary: The "Science of Judaism" between East and West*, co-edited with Tamás Turán (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); and *Farewell to Shulamit: Spatial and Social Diversity in the Song of Songs* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

⁹⁶ Michael K. Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in: Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), pp. 23–84; see pp. 46–47.

⁹⁷ Groszmann, "Meisel pesti főrabbi kora," 104.

⁹⁸ Ignaz Goldziher, *Tagebuch*, ed. Alexander Scheiber (Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 87–88. *Ibid.*, 106, adds similar polemics against Immanuel Löw when he reports in 1885 on the foundation of the review *Magyar Zsidó Szemle*.