

NORBERT GLÄSSER

## THE HOLY PRIEST OF KÁLLÓ

### A REFORM JEWISH INTEGRATION NARRATIVE IN INTERWAR HUNGARY<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** In the press discourses of the groups of Hungarian Jewry pursuing different strategies the T'nach (biblical) concept of the tsadik and his figure as it appears in Eastern European Hasidism was determined and reformulated by the split between the communities striving for traditionality and those consciously embracing modernism. The Hasidic stories can be regarded as a seeming point of encounter between urban Orthodoxy and Neology.

In the research the author examined Neology Jewish community values and the responses given to Hungarian civil religion in the Hungarian-language Budapest Neology weekly papers between 1918 and 1938. These are the responses of a journalism elite of an urbanising religious community to the trends towards the change in the Hungarian nation conception. The Kálló rebbe's rooster has become a symbol expressing Hungarian Jewishness.

**Keywords:** Hasidism, Orthodoxy, Neology, tsadik, civil religion, Kaliver Dynasty

In this case study I examine the problem of national self-identification and classification outside the group as reflected in the discourses of the editors behind the Jewish Reform weekly *Egyenlőség* (Equality). In interwar Hungary there was a change in the mainstream concept of the Hungarian nation that impacted also the life-worlds of the Jewish denominational trends. I analyse the process of symbolisation whereby Eizik Taub, chief rabbi of Nagykálló, regarded as the precursor of Hasidism in Hungary became by the early 1930s a symbol of the integration of Hungarian Jewry. Behind this process there was a change in the mainstream discourse within Reform Jewry. While before the First World War the Reform publications, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, criticised the Jews of Galicia for their "backwardness", in the interwar years the Jewish Reform weekly *Egyenlőség* endowed the chief rabbi of Nagykálló who had studied in Galicia with the romantic features of the rural Hungarian peasant. In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Reform Jewish publicists had looked on Hasidism as obstacles to the

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inclusion that arose from Jewish emancipation (1868). This is why the Hasidic Jew as a possible symbol of integration was so novel.

The folkloristic reinterpretation of the figure of the righteous man of Kálló<sup>2</sup> pointed far beyond the question of folklore. It bore the imprint of the society in which the reinterpretation came about and the strategies of the community that used him as a symbol can be followed through it. The questions raised by the study refer mainly to this societal reading. How are the assimilative and the ethnic concepts of nation reflected in these narratives? What symbolical contents are attributed to the figure of the “Hungarian Hasid”? What processes are reflected in the radical change in the Reform judgement of the Hasidim of north-east Hungary? Who made the former chief rabbi into a symbolic political figure?

### *The “demonised” Hasid immigrant*

The modern European self-image is built up of hierarchised pairs of opposites.<sup>3</sup> This was true also for the elite of the new urban modernising Jewish communities who had a complex and ambivalent attitude towards the rural communities they had left. This meant criticism of the rural way of life and at the same time its religious and romantic idealisation.<sup>4</sup> The press was one of the forums for these trends. Abrevaya Stein regarded the press as being both a manifestation and a mechanism of the change among Jews in the Modern age. The press was linked to the urbanising population.<sup>5</sup> Its readings of the Hasidim were determined by the life-world and self-image of the different groups. The interpretations appearing in the Budapest Jewish press were in line with the general trends of Jews in the German-speaking territories, offering its own adaptation of them. The rabbis, scholars and artists, the writers and publicists who took part in shaping the discourses could be linked only with difficulty to a single nation-state. Through their studies, the new posts they occupied, their travels or other connections, they acted as intermediaries among the centres playing a significant role in shaping Jewish culture.

The readings of the Hasidim given by institutions and movements close to the Orthodox, Reform and Zionist trends differed radically. At the same time this also comprised the responses given to the parallel readings, in polemical debate with other strategies.<sup>6</sup>

In the Reform readings, the discourses on the Hasidim on the one hand took place along the lines of expectations and the demand for conformity, and on the

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2 The concept of tzadik reaches back to Antiquity. While the concept was always present in Judaism, it was only in Hasidism that it came to the fore and began to be identified with specific individuals. A differentiated view of the concept shows that there are Hasidim who are not linked to a rebbe and not all tzadikim belong to Hasidism. GREEN 1997. 444.

3 ANTTONEN 2005.

4 HYMAN 1993: 191.

5 ABREVAYA STEIN 2004: 5, 7-9, 16, 213.

6 See: GLÄSSER 2013.

other were determined by the sense of a mission to spread Jewish enlightenment and by nostalgia for the world they had left behind. In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918) great emphasis was placed in the Reform press on the idea of belonging to the nation.<sup>7</sup> In this context the mission of Reform Jews was two-fold: on the one hand in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy protection of the interests of the Hungarians through Hungarian culture that could be acquired, and in areas inhabited by minorities through the representation and spread of Hungarian culture, and on the other hand an internal mission within Jewry to spread enlightened European culture. The criticism expressed by representatives of the internal cultural mission was directed mainly at education and the new generation. This pointed beyond the question of the immigration of Eastern European Jews through Galicia and can be regarded rather as a general criticism of the strategies aimed at traditionalism. In the cultural mission writings that appeared in *Egyenlőség* the figure of the Eastern European Jew became the vehicle of features showing an inability to assimilate.<sup>8</sup> The cultural mission discourse was also intertwined with the universalist moral mission of Reform Jewry, that reinterpreted the eschatological features of Judaism. In the new historical mission of the Jews the ideal Jew became a champion of modernity, setting an example for the whole of mankind. The cultural mission aspirations targeting the Jews of Galicia became the most intense during the First World War. These processes were nourished by the experiences of the Galician refugees and the certain hope of a victorious war.<sup>9</sup>

In his apologetic writings Miksa Szabolcsi (1857-1915), editor-in-chief of *Egyenlőség*, confronted the more important reforms of the Haskalah as the sole advisable path, with the demonised Hasid image. Because of the “failures” in bringing about the cultural transformation of the Hasidim, as a solution Szabolcsi urged that the Galician Jews should be kept away from Hungarian Jewish denominational life and at the same time kept outside the borders of the country.<sup>10</sup> The cultural mission provided an important frame for the social interpretation of the Hasidim, but it was not the only one. Parallel with the mainstream discourse in *Egyenlőség*, within Reform Jewry there was also an attempt to reinterpret the world of the Hasidim that was seen as an example to follow – even if they did not always discover in it their own idealised, longed-for worlds – or a more understanding attitude was shown towards Hasidism.

This understanding attitude was not closely associated with *Egyenlőség*, despite the fact that approaches departing from the rigid cultural mission discourse can also be found in that weekly. The cultural mission of the modernised Jews in itself also strengthened the legitimacy of the “Hungarian Israel” in the mainstream Hungarian concept of the nation before the First World War. This was because the representatives of that view made adoption of the language and culture

7 *Egyenlőség* 30 December 1882. / 4. A zsidóság missziója [The mission of the Jews], cf. ZIMA 2008. 247.

8 E.g. *Egyenlőség* 16 June 1912. / 1-4. Külföldi és Magyarországi orthodox vezérek [Orthodox leaders abroad and in Hungary] [by:] Miksa Szabolcsi

9 See: ZIMA 2013.

10 *Egyenlőség* 24 October 1897. / 5. Csodarabbik Magyarországon. – Magyarázat egy közre nem adott hirre. [Miracle-working rabbis in Hungary. – Explanation of an unpublished news item].

and identification with the vital issues of the Hungarian people as a criterion for belonging to the nation.

Following the death of Miksa Szabolcsi, his son Lajos Szabolcsi (1889-1943) took over the editing of the paper. Partly under the influence of the changing social conditions, and partly in the frame of self-representation closely intertwined with attempts to create denominational unity, the Reform weekly began to devote space to Orthodox news and articles by Orthodox rabbis or prominent Orthodox figures. Later this led to creation of the topos of the "Hungarian Hasid", "the holy priest of Kálló". All this occurred in an environment where, as a result of Hungary's loss of territories in 1920, the Reform trend gained numerical superiority over the Orthodox and there was a radical change in the mainstream concept of nation.<sup>11</sup>

### *Symbolic politics and old-new self-definition*

The figure of Jicchák Eizik Taub, the "holy priest of Kálló", and his song became an important symbol of Reform Jewish self-definition in the 1920s and 1930s. The song of the "Hungarian tzadik" interpreted by *Egyenlőség* was part of the Reform symbolic politics of the period. Interpreting the song opened up the possibility of merging denominational-religious determination and the nation-religion. The phenomenon is well illustrated by the words of Dr. Géza Dési, Reform MP on the song of the "holy priest of Kálló": "And however bad the times, the rooster always crowed at dawn, the sun always came out again, the flood waters subsided and the wild morals grew tamer. People could become brethren again."<sup>12</sup> Compared to the time of the Reform mainstream culture mission discourses before the First World War, the creation of a symbol based on ghetto nostalgia adapted from Western Europe was a significant change. This process was marked by a distinctive duality: below the surface of responses ensuring a feeling of changelessness, important social changes were taking place, while at the level of narrative strategies the mainline community discourses were being modified to reinforce the feeling of changelessness.

In the late 1920s the *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon* (Hungarian Jewish Encyclopaedia) edited by Péter Ujvári who often published in *Zsidó Szemle* defined the miracle-working rabbi in a way that included both moderate culture mission commonplaces and literary/philosophical reinterpretations of Hasidism.<sup>13</sup> The commonplaces well known from the press debates and widely held by consciously modernising Jews in the 1920s and 1930s could be found in the encyclopaedia.

The joint Hungarian-Jewish first settlement narrative of the emancipated Jewish bourgeois stratum in Hungary and the internal Jewish culture mission in the

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11 FROJIMOVICS 2008; ROMSICS 2010.

12 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 2. Dr. Géza Dési: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing...].

13 UJVÁRI 2000. 188.

Austro-Hungarian Monarchy together provided the basis for self-definition as “Hungarian Jew”. The narrative of the joint first settlement assumed that there were both Khazars and Hungarians who had converted to the Jewish faith among the Hungarian tribes that occupied the territory of what became Hungary. In the changed concept of nation and the changed social environment following the First World War this Khazar theory played an important part only in the apologetics of the attacks against Galician Jews, often referred to in anti-Semitic discourses as Khazars. While Reform chief rabbi Sámuel Kohn’s narrative of the joint first settlement was retained, after reaching a peak during the First World War the culture mission idea was gradually pushed into the background and transformed. The Reform journalism elite also drew on the symbolic political interpretations appearing in the Orthodox press that had been passed down from the previous period or formed part of a broader Hungarian Jewish apologetics. In this way, Mózes Teitelbaum, the miracle-working rabbi of Sátoraljaújhely could be fitted into the cult of national heroes arising from the memory of the 1848 revolution. The legend of a meeting between Lajos Kossuth and Teitelbaum became a historical topos attached to the Hasid rebbe in the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and also in the 1930s. In the Reform historical writing of Zsigmond Groszmann, the speech made by Kossuth in the Nagyvárad synagogue and the declaration of emancipation in Szeged were linked to the legend of the miracle-working rabbi.<sup>14</sup> In the interpretations of the Independence Party, the common “Hungarian-Jewish deprivation of rights” suffered because of Jewish participation in the 1848 revolution was a symbolic expression of belonging to the Hungarian nation.

The Hasidim appeared in the Reform paper as parts of the Hungarian nation. They appeared together with the Hungarians of the territories annexed in 1920 and as individuals suffering for their Hungarian identity in the frame of Reform symbolic politics linked to the borders.<sup>15</sup> In addition they were also presented as helpers of the Hungarian presence and the assertion of minority political interests in the apologetics of anti-Semitic accusations in Hungary directed against the “Khazars”.<sup>16</sup> In contrast with the earlier assimilative nation concept and its expression as a culture mission, under the changed circumstances of the 1920s and 1930s in its apologetic writings the Reform trend presented the Hasidic Jews as integral parts of Hungarian society. The “Hasideus” appearing in the real social space also became a manifestation of universal social values. In 1933 for example, *Egyenlőség* reported that in the main street of Sátoraljaújhely two Hasidic Jews, father and son, saved the Roman Catholic priest Stunz who had fallen under horses

14 *Egyenlőség* 18 June 1936. / 10. Dr. Zsigmond Groszmann: Kossuth Lajos és a rabbi áldás [Lajos Kossuth and the rabbi’s blessing].

15 GLESZER – ZIMA 2010. 41.

16 *Egyenlőség* 5 January 1935. / 6. Munkács, a zsidó város Helyszini riport Munkácsról, melyet a zsidók mentettek meg a magyarságnak [Munkács, the Jewish town. Report from Munkács, rescued for the Hungarian people by the Jews] By: Gyula R. Vozáry, vice-chairman of the Rusinsko Party

alarmed by the whistle of a train. "The rescued priest gratefully thanked the heroic Hasidic Jews for their self-sacrificing act"<sup>17</sup> – wrote *Egyenlőség*.

An interview in 1936 with the former Lord Lieutenant of Máramarossziget Zsigmond Perényi, Keeper of the Crown and interior minister in the government of István Tisza, was also an apologia for Hasidim appearing in the current political space. The statement, made by the scion of a noble family with a long past that had played an active part in the country's history, was presented as a refutation of the common accusations levelled against the immigrants from Galicia. Connecting to the discourse on Galician immigrants during the era of Dualism and responding to police raids against foreigners in Hungary after the war, the Keeper of the Crown clarified the question of the citizenship of the Hasidim in Hungary and in the annexed territories.

"I must say that there is a great deal of confusion over the designation "galicianer". It is generally used to mean the Jews with ear locks and wearing kaftans, *although even their great-grandfathers were born in Hungary, they were raised in the Hungarian spirit and are bringing up their own children in the Hungarian spirit too,*"<sup>18</sup>

– said Zsigmond Perényi.

The former minister also criticised the ethnic-based concept of nation that had been changed by the "numerus clausus" act. With this he touched on one of the central issues of Lajos Szabolcsi's paper.

"I can say that there have never been any complaints about their reliability and loyalty to the state. The question of national minorities was always a delicate one causing much concern in Upper Hungary and especially in Rusinsko. However, despite their strong religious separation, I never had any problem with the Jews – who I never regarded as a separate ethnic group."<sup>19</sup>

Among the many accusations made against the Jews of the annexed territories, it was said that they turned away from the Hungarian people and that they had

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17 *Egyenlőség* 3 June 1933. / 25. Hírek – Chaszideus, aki megmentette egy katolikus pap életét. [News – Hasideus who saved the life of a Catholic priest].

18 *Egyenlőség* 16 September 1936. / 5. A "galíciai" beszélgetés báró Perényi Zsigmonddal az ünnepi Egyenlőség számára A koronaőr, Tisza István belügyminiszter, a volt máramarosszigeti főispán megható nyilatkozata a felvidéki zsidóságról ["Galician" conversation with Count Zsigmond Perényi for the anniversary issue of *Egyenlőség*. Moving declaration by the Keeper of the Crown, Interior Minister under István Tisza, former Lord Lieutenant of Máramarossziget] – Béla Kornitzer

19 *Egyenlőség* 16 September 1936. / 5. A "galíciai" beszélgetés báró Perényi Zsigmonddal az ünnepi Egyenlőség számára A koronaőr, Tisza István belügyminiszter, a volt máramarosszigeti főispán megható nyilatkozata a felvidéki zsidóságról ["Galician" conversation with Count Zsigmond Perényi for the anniversary issue of *Egyenlőség*. Heart-warming declaration by the Keeper of the Crown, Interior Minister under István Tisza, former Lord Lieutenant of Máramarossziget] – Béla Kornitzer



not been loyal to the Hungarian state before Trianon. Through the Keeper of the Crown *Egyenlőség* strove to refute these accusations against the Hasidim.

“Politically too, the Jews were the element in which we could always trust. (...) Seventeen years have passed since the occupation, but the Jews of Upper Hungary are still the strongest pillar and guarantee of the Hungarian people. It is heart-warming to see how the Jewish intelligentsia of Upper Hungary continues to support the idea of Hungarian statehood,”<sup>20</sup>

– said the former Lord Lieutenant.

Perényi also spoke with recognition of Orthodoxy and the miracle-working rabbis of Máramaros. In the changed social and political context of the Horthy era, *Egyenlőség* incorporated the positive opinion of the Keeper of the Crown on the Hasidim into its Reform strategy – in contrast with its critical tone regarding the Hasidim a generation earlier.<sup>21</sup>

The causes for the Reform journalists’ change of attitude are complex. Firstly there were the anti-Semitic attacks that were increasingly affecting also the Reform trend now in an uncertain situation. Secondly, there was the changed nation concept that could not be opposed in all respects by the Reform journalists’ strategy that had been aligned to the old mainstream nation concept. However the culture mission commonplaces did not disappear entirely after the First World War either, they only dropped out of the main line of Reform discourses. A good illustration of this is the example of Dr. Géza Dési, member of parliament. Besides praising the historical and mythical figure of the “holy priest of Kálló”, in another article citing earlier topoi the MP took a stand against the “miracle-working rabbi” of Kisvárda, when the Budapest papers confused the local Orthodox chief rabbi with the miracle-working rabbi showing “Galicianer” features.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the writings of Secundus and Lipót Grünwald in *Egyenlőség*, the paper’s editor Lajos Szabolcsi also played a significant role in the creation of “Hungarian Hasidism”. In December 1921 Szabolcsi gave a literary lecture in

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20 *Egyenlőség* 16 September 1936. / 5. A “galíciai” beszélgetés báró Perényi Zsigmonddal az ünnepi Egyenlőség számára A koronaőr, Tisza István belügyminiszter, a volt máramarosszigeti főispán megható nyilatkozata a felvidéki zsidóságról [“Galician” conversation with Count Zsigmond Perényi for the anniversary issue of *Egyenlőség*. Moving declaration by the Keeper of the Crown, Interior Minister under István Tisza, former Lord Lieutenant of Máramarossziget] – Béla Kornitzer.

21 *Egyenlőség* 16 September 1936. / 5-6. A “galíciai” beszélgetés báró Perényi Zsigmonddal az ünnepi Egyenlőség számára A koronaőr, Tisza István belügyminiszter, a volt máramarosszigeti főispán megható nyilatkozata a felvidéki zsidóságról [“Galician” conversation with Count Zsigmond Perényi for the anniversary issue of *Egyenlőség*. Moving declaration by the Keeper of the Crown, Interior Minister under István Tisza, former Lord Lieutenant of Máramarossziget] – Béla Kornitzer.

22 *Egyenlőség* 21 January 1933. / 1-2. A “kisvárdai csodarabbi” [The “miracle-working rabbi of Kisvárda]. By: Dr. Géza Dési, member of parliament.

the Józsefváros synagogue on the history of Hungarian Hasidism.<sup>23</sup> The narrative built up of Hasid stories becomes important in the way it shaped the internal Reform image of the Hasidim in the Horthy era along the lines of the idea of the common Jewish fate and belonging to the Hungarian nation.

“Legends always arise in periods of Jewish persecution. The tortured Jewish soul brings forth colourful flowers, and who knows how many wonderful legends the present time will leave for the future. But one thing is certain: the memory of the miracle-working rabbi of Kálló is a living relic today too, a living sacrament of Hungarian Jewry, especially of conservative Jews,”<sup>24</sup>  
 – said Szabolcsi.

Szabolcsi linked his interpretation of Hasidism to Jews striving for traditionalism in Hungary rather than to independent, nationally motivated interpretations of the Jewish renaissance and Jewish ethnography. The ethnographical writings of the Viennese rabbi Grunwald, and the appearance in Budapest of the question of the Jewish popular mind were connected to the crisis of the mainstream Hungarian assimilative nation concept and the debates on Jewish self-definition among consciously modernising Jews. Through the political pieces in *Zsidó Szemle* András Zima pointed out that the Zionists on the one hand with the disintegration of the Monarchy raised the question of self-definition of the national minorities even before the peace talks began, and on the other saw the anti-Semitic attacks and the change in the mainstream Hungarian concept of nation as confirmation of the general failure of the Reform strategy.<sup>25</sup> Already in February 1919 after the *Egyenlőség* editorial office was ransacked by Communist and Zionist youth, Szabolcsi used the anti-Zionism of Hasidism appearing within the frame of Orthodoxy to condemn the secular Jewish national movement that had come into confrontation with the paper. Szabolcsi also reported on the case. After the Social Democrats and the Communists prevented Chajesz, the chief rabbi of Vienna from giving his lecture in the Vigadó – that had been organised by young Zionists in Pest – the angry youth marched to the editorial office of *Egyenlőség* and ransacked it, threatening to lynch Szabolcsi and the rabbis in Hungary.<sup>26</sup> Szabolcsi compiled the following issue of the paper on the theme of the dangers of Jewish national self-definition under the circumstances in Hungary. In an article by Lajos Grünwald published here the author drew on his youthful experiences concerning

23 *Egyenlőség* 10 December 1921. / 7-8. Lajos Szabolcsi: A chaszidizmus, [Hasidism]; *Egyenlőség* 14 January 1922. / 8-9. A chaszidizmus. II. előadás. A kállói pap. [Hasidism. 2<sup>nd</sup> lecture. The priest of Kálló]. Given in the Józsefváros Jewish temple by Dr. Lajos Szabolcsi. Summary of the lecture recorded in shorthand.

24 *Egyenlőség* 14 January 1922. / 8-9. A chaszidizmus. II. előadás. A kállói pap. [Hasidism. 2<sup>nd</sup> lecture. The priest of Kálló]. Given in the Józsefváros Jewish temple by Dr. Lajos Szabolcsi. Summary of the lecture recorded in shorthand.

25 GLESZER – ZIMA 2010. 44.

26 *Egyenlőség* 15 February 1919. / 5. Cionisták garázdálkodása az Egyenlőségénél. [Outrage by Zionists in *Egyenlőség* office].



the Hasidic rabbi of Sátoraljaújhely to confirm the interpretation of Zionism as a “wrong track” given by Lajos Szabolcsi as editor. Grünwald updated his article with autobiographical elements and classified it among the scholarly works of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In contrast to the earlier cultural mission argument, Grünwald saw as positive figures in the process of becoming Hungarian, the *tzadik* and the Hasid who rejected the new Jewish national movement within religious frames and wished to shelter the youth entrusted to their care from it.<sup>27</sup> The emphasis on Hungarianising and the turning towards Orthodoxy did not mean the entire disregard of the Western modern literary and philosophical interpretation of Hasidism, also linked to Jewish national self-definition. Szabolcsi reinterpreted these trends as the general interest above denominations shown by the educated world. In this way he resolved the contradiction between them and the aims of the paper.

“And if we see that in Zurich, Berlin and Vienna great Christian and Jewish scholars in one book after another turn their attention to the Baal Shem and Hasidism, then we too can devote a pious hour to our Hungarian saint, who was Jewish, because he drained the cup of suffering and was Hungarian, remained Hungarian, taught Hungarianness to his suffering followers, even in prison, amidst persecutions, in the days of bitterness and distress. The miracle-working rabbi of Kálló is for us the Master whose example we too wish to follow at all times,”<sup>28</sup>

– said Lajos Szabolcsi.

Szabolcsi also reinterpreted Hasidism, in the wake of the Hungarian “holy priest,” Baal Shem Tov and his followers became the historical forerunners of Hungarian Hasidism. Instead of the particular historical-social and martyrological interpretation of Hasidism, he placed the Hasidic teachings in the continuity of Jewish tradition, showing them to be an integral part of that tradition. And in using the expression “holy priest” he raised the Hungarian name widely used by the local Christian population into the interpretation that was taking shape of the Jewish denomination.

“There is a manifestation of such depth and such a wonderful philosophy here, just as in the teachings of the Baal Shem with which he brought a veritable rejuvenation and new birth for the whole of Eastern Jewry. It is not a new belief that the Hungarian saint of Hasidism proclaimed, but simply the rejuvenation of the old.”<sup>29</sup>

27 *Egyenlőség* 1 February 1919. / 13-14. Lajos Grünwald: Chasidizmus, cionizmus, atheizmus [Hasidism, Zionism, atheism].

28 *Egyenlőség* 14 January 1922. / 9. A chaszidizmus. II. előadás. [Hasidism. 2<sup>nd</sup> lecture].

29 *Egyenlőség* 14 January 1922. / 9. A chaszidizmus. II. előadás. [Hasidism. 2<sup>nd</sup> lecture].

At the same time Szabolcsi's historical narrative reinterpreted the Hasid in the high culture of the "educated world". However the articles in *Egyenlőség* clearly drew attention to this literary and artistic transformation, to the symbolisation that was moving away from real-life Hasidim, when they presented the Hasid living next door to the "modern world" as a curiosity of an unknown, mystical and exotic world.

"Modern Western Jews know about Hasidism only from what they have heard and read. [...] The works of Russian-Polish Jews in German translation also reached broad strata of Western Jewry and directed attention to the great moral and spiritual treasures slumbering in the souls of our Eastern brethren. **But few people know that Hasidism has many followers in Pest** and anyone who wishes a glimpse into the customs and traditions of this unusual world does not have to travel to ghettos in distant countries."<sup>30</sup>

But the search for curiosities did not stop at descriptions of the world of Hasidic prayer-houses in Pest, the paper's reporters and correspondents also offered a glimpse into the Hasidic courts of Munkács, Belz and elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> *Egyenlőség* presented the mystical world of the Hasidim not only in the form of legends, tales and travel writings, it also gave a gesamtkunst reinterpretation of that world in the frame of a cultural evening. The evening held in 1931 used the topos of the Kálló tzadik to show how the Jews belonged to the Hungarian people, their internal development merged with Hungarianness, the country and its people. In this process the "holy priest of Kálló" and the Hasidim of the Felső-Tiszavidék, Nyírség and Hortobágy regions became representatives of Hungarian Hasidism, the familiar figures and themes of the sacred writings of the Jews appeared in the setting of the Hungarian countryside, becoming part of it.

### *The rooster is crowing ...*

At a cultural evening in the Academy of Music organist Géza Wehner performed Jewish melodies from the Tisza region, the Hungarian Jewish Female Choir and the male choir of the National Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association (OMIKE) under the direction of cantor-conductor Jakab Krausz performed

30 *Egyenlőség* 20 May 1936. / 11. Kabbalisták Budapesten A Teleki-téri Klauszban a pesti chaszi-deusok lakomával, dallal és tánccal búcsuztatják el Szombat-Királynőjét – Egy különös világ, amelyről alig tud valaki [Cabbalists in Budapest. The Hasidim of Pest bid farewell to the Sabbath Queen in the Klausz establishment in Teleki Square – A strange world that hardly anyone knows about] (From the *Egyenlőség* reporter).

31 For a few examples, see: *Egyenlőség* 23 March 1929. / 9. A mikulincei "caddik" [The "tzadik" of Mikulince]; *Egyenlőség* 4 May 1935. / 16. Máramarosi rabbicsaládok fényes esküvője, melyre megnyitották a csehszlovák határt is... [Splendid wedding of Máramaros rabbi families, for which the Czechoslovak border was opened...]; *Egyenlőség* 22 October 1936. / 7-8. Trónörökös a belzi rabbinál [Heir to the throne of the Belz rabbi] (From *Egyenlőség*'s correspondent in Lemberg).

arrangements of Jewish religious songs said to be Jewish folk songs as the cheerful and sad music of Hungarian Hasidism.<sup>32</sup> In the next part of the programme a selection of music and prose, performed by Jewish artists of the Comedy Theatre and the Hungarian Royal Opera House, illustrated the Galician roots of Hasidism in Szabolcs County. The names given to the individual parts of the cultural evening reflected Lajos Szabolcsi's interpretation of Hungarian Hasidism.<sup>33</sup> The music was selected by cultural councillor Ármin Frisch and rabbi Dénes Láczer "on the basis of old Hungarian Jewish music and Hasidic documents".<sup>34</sup> The newspaper items announcing the event also interpreted the performances on the programme. "Faith, history and poetry, heaven and earthly life, this mood of Jewish folk life shines through the legends of the Jews. Before the many blows of history the Jews fled into the regions of religion and closeness to God,"<sup>35</sup> – in the words of the advertisement for the cultural evening. Earlier interpretations of the song of the Kálló priest could be found in the advertisement in which – independently of Miksa Szabolcsi's cultural mission – the Kabbalah and mysticism had now become a phenomenon adapted into the folklore of the Hungarian environment. By the 1930s the Jewish world that had already been slated for elimination in the frame of the culture mission had become the manifestation of Hungarian Jewish culture and consciousness. *Egyenlőség* presented this as the demand of Reform Jews.<sup>36</sup> The "holy priest", that is, a Hasid living in Hungarian territory and acculturated in external appearance could become the basis of a new Hungarian-Jewish self-definition, rising to a place beside the joint first settlement. In this narrative the emphasis was placed on the Hungarianisation of the "foreigner" who arrived later, on the mutual adaptation and merging of groups that had been living together over the centuries. With the figure of the "holy priest" and what were regarded as Christian, "folk" interpretations showing a positive attitude towards the Jews, they were able to find common ground. In this way too they emphasised the all-permeating, integral nature of coexistence. In this Reform self-interpretation, Hungarian Jews who had been classified as a race with the numerus clausus act could once again find the path to the nation in the social environment with many phenomena it regarded as pathological, as distortions arising from the lost war and the Trianon dictated peace, but at the same time also as ephemeral within the frame of the idea of revision widely held in Hungarian society.

32 The rooster is crowing..., The kaddish of Csenger, the prophet Elijah at the Debrecen fair *Egyenlőség* 3 January 1931. / 11. Framed page: Az egyenlőség nagy kulturestje január 18-án, vasárnap este felé 9 órakor a Zeneakadémia nagytermében [Big *Egyenlőség* cultural evening at 8.30 pm on Sunday, 18 January in the main hall of the Academy of Music].

33 First part: The holy priest of Kálló; second part: The Baal Shem; third part: Music of the ghetto.

34 *Egyenlőség* 3 January 1931. 11. Framed page...

35 *Egyenlőség* 10 January 1931. / 9. Framed advertisement: A zsidó legendák, a zsidó népköltészet, a zsidó zene misztikus álmvilága az egyenlőség nagy kulturestjén... [The mystical world of Jewish legends, Jewish folk poetry, Jewish music in the big *Egyenlőség* cultural evening...].

36 *Egyenlőség* 10 January 1931. / 9. Framed advertisement: A zsidó legendák, a zsidó népköltészet, a zsidó zene misztikus álmvilága az egyenlőség nagy kulturestjén... [The mystical world of Jewish legends, Jewish folk poetry, Jewish music in the big *Egyenlőség* cultural evening...].

“Let us trust in our roosters, on when to raise their voices. They know when they must speak and when they must remain silent. Because sometimes it is wiser to remain silent than to speak and it requires greater courage ... The real rooster is neither too early nor too late in announcing the dawn, he crows when dawn is breaking, when he is certain that the sun will shine...”<sup>37</sup>

– declared Géza Dési MP at the *Egyenlőség* cultural evening.

With the “holy priest of Kálló” the ghetto nostalgia of the turn of the century reached its peak in a novel interpretation of Hungarian-Jewish culture, representing the desired idyllic past. However, this in itself was also a selection among the phenomena of a lost world traces of which could still be found in the present, and an adaptation to the demands and cultural forms of expression of the educated middle class following Western patterns. Lajos Szabolcsi’s introduction placed the Hasidism of Galician origin into the Hungarian Jewish past, and regarded it as part of the past of a community that had immigrated mainly from the Czech-Moravian lands and through its family floating capital created the Jewish bourgeoisie of Pest as a life-world clearly distinct from that of the poor Jewish immigrants from Galicia. The context of the rabbinical cultural adaptation of the Hasidic world, making it Hungarian Jewish, became a concept of Jewish folklore originating from the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Rabbi Simon Hevesi – following the conception of the culture mission strategy of the past that made a distinction between the Hungarian-Jewish Reform elite and the rural Orthodox-Hasidic communities – introduced the Hasidic legends refined into literature as phenomena of the “Jewish legend poetry” bearing aesthetic value. The editor-in-chief of *Egyenlőség* and author of a number of literary adaptations gave a talk on the founder of Hasidism and his “miraculous mystery legends”.<sup>38</sup>

The cultural adaptation of the figure of the “holy priest of Kálló” was related to the social situation of Reform Jews and the new judgement of him that was taking shape in line with the concept of nation. In the leading article written after the cultural evening, in the reading of Dr. Géza Dési MP the Hasidism of Kálló had become an expression of apologetics for equal rights and belonging to the nation.

“I would like to speak today about the holy and great priest disappearing into the mists of time, and about the miracles and legends associated with his name. (...) Our cause is far too sacred to be mentioned together with day to day politics. They say there were two pillars in the temple of Solomon (...) Our temples were built on Hungarian soil and they look up to the heavens. Love of the Hungarian land and veneration of our ancient religion merge in the Hungarian

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37 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 1-2. Dr. Géza Dési: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing...].

38 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 1-2. Dr. Géza Dési: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing...].

Jewish temples. This wonderful unity is like a good marriage, in which one plus one is not two but one,"<sup>39</sup>  
– said the member of parliament.

The speaker contrasted the changing events of current politics with the universal moral values and spirit of reformed Judaism. In the member of parliament's interpretation, man's moral rise and advancement began in the recognition of belief in God, where the initiative for action shifted to man. The emphasis was no longer on divine revelation. The speech can be understood as encouragement to accept the faith of the Jews, as reinforcement of a positive Jewish self-image, but with the moral laws arising from the Ten Commandments it also refers to ways in which rights are curtailed and to the commonplaces of prejudices. "Our faith is simple and clear. There is no superstition in it, nothing to veil or hide. Everyone can understand it. It is not a secret reserved for privileged castes, it is equally open to kings and commoners. We have given the world a great deal,"<sup>40</sup> – said Dési. In his interpretation the soaring and fertility of Hasidic poetry appeared as a manifestation of Jewish intellectual genius under circumstances of affliction, with allusions to the deteriorating economic conditions and the segregation laws restricting access of Jewish youth to university studies.

"The Jewish soul is full of poetry, song, tales and legends. The Jewish genius breaks out and demands the sky. *If it is not allowed to walk, it grows wings and flies into endless distances and invisible heights.* The more strongly it is oppressed, the greater its will to live. The more it is pressured and *shackled in closed numbers*, the greater the effort it makes, the stronger its will, the more certain the irresistible impetus of its struggle for life."<sup>41</sup>

Dési grasped the mysticism interpreted within scholarly frames from the angle of its social explanations and placed it within a Jewish martyrology. In his interpretation persecution was a factor ensuring the survival of the Jews. With this Dési also threw light on one aspect of the contemporary Reform use of "Hasidism". At the same time he separated Hungarian Hasidism from its original location and made it a characteristic of Hungarian territory.

"It is amazing that the darker the environment was, the less the rights and freedom, the more wonderful were the wings on which the poetry of mysticism soared. Ethnographically and geographically it can be shown that Russia was the birthplace of Jewish mysticism and it was the Russian influence that gave it impetus. The further south we go, from the icy world of the mountains towards the

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39 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 1. Dr. Dési Géza: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing...].

40 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 1. Dr. Dési Géza: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing...].

41 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 1. Dr. Dési Géza: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing...].

freedom and warmth of the endless steppes, the more the poetry of mysticism changed. (...) It was on this plain of sunshine and rainbows, on Hungarian land, on the Nyírség puszta that the hero of legends, the holy priest of Kálló lived...<sup>42</sup>

In painting a picture of the Jewish environment of Szabolcs County, the speech turned back to the successful Reform discourses of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The speaker traced the presence of Jews in Szabolcs County back to Antiquity and to the Khazar theory of the joint first settlement, while also following the line of symbolic political discourses regarding the homeland in the interwar years.

“A beautiful, tough, stubborn, proud people inhabit Szabolcs. They loyally cling to the land of their birth, to the sacred Hungarian soil, in peace and war, through good and bad. But they also loyally cling to the old religion. Their love of the homeland goes together with deep religious sentiments. A whole series of legends have arisen on the Szabolcs plain.”<sup>43</sup>

The “holy priest of Kálló” became a Hungarian Jewish priest who moved among the Hungarian people, lived with them, sang with them. Dési’s interpretation – that drew on earlier writings in *Egyenlőség* – was a reinterpretation within national frames, but in a period when belonging to the nation was linked not to the common sentiment, language and culture, but to birth and ethnicity.

“He lived there in the star-studded Szabolcs fields, among shepherds and horsemen, he heard their songs and sang together with them. He looked up into the summer night and sought traces of the old God in the Hungarian heavens. He united the sacrament of belief with the sacrament of the Hungarians. He taught not within the stark walls of the yeshivas, but outdoors, in the infinite freedom of nature,”<sup>44</sup>

– said Dési, also drawing on the earlier culture mission commonplaces.

In the speech made at the cultural evening, just as most of the tales published in the paper, “holy” did not refer to a pattern arising from the chain of tradition but to the religious authority manifesting it. “Holy became a mysterious word of the mystical and fairy-tale world endowed with moral teachings and timely messages, and its meaning shifted from the religious towards the cultural conveyed in literature. This is also confirmed by Dési’s selective attitude towards religious authorities and traditions. Amidst the closed numbers, the economic crisis and the anti-Semitic phenomena, these tales, songs and legends were intended to

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42 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 1. Dr. Géza Dési: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing ...].

43 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 1. Dr. Géza Dési: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing ...].

44 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 2. Dr. Géza Dési: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing ...].



contribute to socialisation and shaping attitudes. An article written a year later by Pál Vidor on the subject of the Reform Jewish Scouts, confirms the aspirations evident in the MP's speech with his description of the summer camping practice. The Reform youth sang the song of the holy priest of Kálló around the campfire.<sup>45</sup> According to Dési "the song should be taught to all children so that they will not be afraid if dark times come but wait for dawn to break, and if they are in the high noon of happy times they will not be over-confident but remember that bright sunshine is always followed by dusk."<sup>46</sup> Pál Vidor regarded the reinterpreted Hasidic song – in the columns of the press – as the hymn of Reform Jewry, of "Hungarian Israel".

"The campfires three times a week also keep alive and nourish the Jewish sentiment. The flames leap high in the dark night (...) The wonderful melody of the Jewish waiting for dawn is like a sighed prayer: 'The rooster is crowing...' I watch the flames, listen to the melody. The past comes to life before my eyes, I see the dark, starless present, but I feel beside me the builders of the Hungarian Jewish future and I hear the hymn of the future, the song of the future: 'The rooster is crowing, dawn is breaking',"<sup>47</sup>

– wrote rabbi Pál Vidor on the spirit of the Scouts camp.

However, the Hasidic example appearing in the religious socialisation of the next generation differs fundamentally in the case of the Reform and the Orthodox journalism elite in Budapest. While the youth-related Orthodox piety held up for its readers the chain of religious tradition and the community frames, transmission of the Torah and respect of the Commandments as the path to be followed, the youth socialisation strategy of the Reform paper focused on the moral content of the denominational culture expressed in literary form, nostalgic memories and attitudes strengthening religious ties. While, in addition to loyalty to the state, Orthodoxy proclaimed withdrawal into religious / community life, the Reform strategy tried to combine religious life with state and national goals, but in its denominational discourses and its symbolic politics it ignored the fact that there had been a radical change in both the state and its nation concept. This is also reflected in the speech made by the Reform MP Dési:

"We believe and proclaim, in words and deeds, with every manifestation of our life, our loyalty to God and our country. We trust in the past and we trust in the future. The miraculous bird will return

45 *Egyenlőség* 3 August 1932. / "Szól a kakas már..." a tábornút mellett (A budai zsidó cserkészek táborozása) ["The rooster is crowing ..." beside the campfire (Camping for Jewish Scouts of Buda)] By: Pál Vidor.

46 *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 2. Dr. Géza Dési: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing ...].

47 *Egyenlőség* 3 August 1932. / "Szól a kakas már..." a tábornút mellett (A budai zsidó cserkészek táborozása) ["The rooster is crowing ..." beside the campfire (Camping for Jewish Scouts of Buda)] By: Pál Vidor.

and it will bring freedom, benevolence, justice. God will hear the prayers of we who have suffered for the past and the future,"<sup>48</sup>  
– as the song of the "holy priest of Kálló" became the national prayer of Hungarian Jews.

### *Institutional strategy in the light of micro-community trends*

*Egyenlőség* presented various discourses in its articles on representatives of Eastern European Jewish piety. There were shifts in emphasis with the ghetto nostalgia, the influx of refugees during and after the First World War and the change in the social environment. However, beyond the universal frame of the history of Jewish suffering in the Diaspora, a number of authors of those articles made a distinction between the Polish-Russian Hasidim and the "Hungarian Hasideus". At the same time this distinction with its implied value judgement also opened the way for new symbolic identification strategies. Lajos Szabolcsi and the journalism elite grouped around *Egyenlőség* in the changed social and political circumstances shaped the stories and songs of the "holy priest of Kálló" into a cultural capital that was intended to strengthen Reform Jewry in its self-interpretation as "Hungarian Israel", along both social and denominational lines. The song of the "holy priest of Kálló" symbolised the change in the social circumstances and the approaching end of the state of affairs that was regarded as temporary. The tzadik who had become one with the Hungarian land was intended to reinforce the readers of *Egyenlőség* in their self-identity, in their belonging to the nation that had been questioned, while the background of Hasidism and the sufferings of the Jews of Eastern Europe appearing in the Hasidic legends were supposed to become edifying examples of commitment to the faith. If we accept András Gerő's interpretation, in the present case the response given to economic anti-Semitism was a continuation of the "functioning logic of social assimilation", a furthering of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Reform strategy. The "holy priest of Kálló" became a new expression of the idea "that assimilation makes the citizens of the country more united socially, while acceptance of national – Hungarian – identity makes them more united politically and psychologically."<sup>49</sup> However in the present case the concept of assimilation is better used in the sense of integration. Within the nation, as part of the middle class the Reform journalism elite not only adopted numerous routines, customs, norms and ideals but also strove to strengthen denominational and national ties. And with the song, in Hungarian and Hebrew, of the tzadik of Kálló awaiting redemption, "Hungarian Israel" was able to express in symbolic form both resignation in face of the situation and the awaited better turn of their fate. However it can be rightly assumed that there was a discrepancy between the institutional strategy and the discourses of the local micro communities. Because

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<sup>48</sup> *Egyenlőség* 24 January 1931. / 2. Dr. Géza Dési: Szól a kakas már... [The rooster is crowing ...].

<sup>49</sup> GERŐ 2004. 270. In place of identity it would be better to use the concept of identification that better expresses the active shaping role played by the group's elite.

of its edited nature, the press as a source cannot tell us about its readers, individual opinions and the internal discourses of micro communities. Consequently, my source material does not throw any light on how its own idea of the Jewish national ideal was able to spread behind the official readings from the end of the First World War among individuals belonging to the Reform institutional system. The probability that this was spreading from below is confirmed by András Zima's studies on the Zionist press,<sup>50</sup> and the micro history research on Óbuda by Larissa Hrotkó. Pál Vidor who popularised the song of the "holy priest of Kálló" as the hymn of Hungarian Jewish Scouts, in the 1930s no longer strove to pass on among Jewish youth the Reform Hungarian Jewish denominational self-definition. After the Second World War the Zionist activists built the "khén" (Zionist nest) on the remnants of the Buda Scouts group. Traces of this can be found using the tools of oral history among the old "Újlaki" (now Frankel Leó úti) synagogue. *The rooster is crowing* could then be reinterpreted as a Hasidic song expressing the expectation of a Messiah and the longing to return to Zion within the frames of the modern Jewish nation ideal urging planned resettlement in the Holy Land. As a Scouts leader, Pál Vidor encouraged the Reform Jewish youth of Buda to build an independent Jewish identity within the existing community life.<sup>51</sup> A Jewish national reading of the song of the "holy priest of Kálló" also emerged and still has an influence today even though many representatives of Hasidism in Hungary who can be regarded as the original community have dissociated themselves from the modern Jewish national aspirations.<sup>52</sup>

From a distance of close to a hundred years the late-modern use of the song of the Kálló tzadik clearly illustrates the multivocality, intensity and unifying force of the symbol. In spite of the language shift from Yiddish-Hungarian to Yiddish-English, at their celebrations and *jahrzeit* commemorations held in Hungary the intellectual descendants of the Kálló rebbe sing in Hungarian the song that has become sacred, endowed with mystical content, as a tradition of their fathers. Besides these, many interpretations can also be found outside the community. The Kálló rebbe's rooster has become a symbol expressing Hungarian Jewishness, from the symbol of the Chabad Lubavich outreach in Budapest, through the flash mobs of Jewish mailing lists, to the Hanukkah celebration of the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association. This interpretation has been reinforced in the wider society by the settings of the song beginning with the words *The rooster is crowing* available on the folk music and world music market and performed at various concerts.

50 ZIMA 2014. 91-92.

51 Personal communication by Larissa Hrotko. Cf. HROTKÓ 2007.

52 Cf. RAVITZKY 2011

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