

“THE EMPEROR’S DELIVERANCE” –

JÁNOS LIBÉNYI’S ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST
FRANZ JOSEPH COMMEMORATED IN CONTEMPORARY
HEBREW POEMS

Abstract: The paper presents three Hebrew poems inspired by the joy over how Franz Joseph luckily survived an assassination attempt and his recovery in 1853. They were published in Vienna, in the periodical *Kochvei Yitzhak*. The focus of the analysis is that the three seemingly identical poems, in fact, reflect three different voices and attitudes. There is an inverse correlation in terms of traditionality of their content and form. In its content Simon Bacher’s poem is the most traditional, related to the prayer for the welfare of the emperor, while its form is the most fashionable of the three. The traditional form (Psalm) of Rabener’s poem is coupled with a theologically unusual content. Löwy’s piece is between the two. He begins by expressing his patriotic feelings: while the long-awaited legal emancipation of the Jewish community tilts the scales in favour of Franz Joseph, in the closing lines we find a very personal testimony of the poet’s loyalty to the emperor.

Keywords: Haskalah literature, Hebrew poems, loyalty, patriotism

On 18 February 1853, at around 1 pm Franz Joseph was taking his usual walk accompanied by one of his military aides, Maximilian Karl Lamoral O’Donnell (1812–1895), in Vienna, near the Carinthian Gates. When he walked up to the parapet of the then still existent bastion to survey the troops exercising below, János Libényi (1831–1853), a 21-year-old tailor’s apprentice born in Csákvár and working in Vienna at the time, threw himself on the Emperor and using a weapon made from a kitchen knife, stabbed him in the neck.¹ The wound itself was relatively slight and the Emperor could again appear in public in less than a month. The two people who intervened, O’Donnell and a civilian passer-by, Josef Ettenreich, were awarded the golden cross of the Salvador Order of Merit. János Libényi, who was shouting ‘Long live Lajos Kossuth!’ even as he was being led away

* MTA Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Minority Studies, H-1097 Budapest, Tóth Kálmán utca 4. Hungary. Email: banyai.viktoria@tk.mta.hu

¹ DOBAI 2000. 81–88.

after the attack, proved to be a solitary fanatic.² As he confessed after the event, he had been preparing for the attack since 1850, with the aim of freeing Hungary from the Austrian military and police oppression that followed the uprising and revolution of 1848–49. It was with this specific goal in mind that he had moved to Vienna in early 1851. Even though he was executed for high treason only 8 days after the assassination attempt, so there was no hope for a line-up, extensive investigations were carried out for months after the event, to find any potential instigators, accomplices, a mastermind behind the attack, or even those who supported it afterwards. Apart from potential links within Hungary and with the emigrant community, extensive after the fall of the revolution, a possible Italian connection was also considered, as the Milan uprising had been crushed by the Austrian troops only 12 days before the assassination attempt, on 6 February.

While the already existing bans and restrictions were tightened even further after the attack, and the ‘state of emergency made stricter’,³ a series of events were organised throughout the empire to express subjects’ sympathy and loyalty. These included masses and candle lighting ceremonies in towns and cities as well as a host of deputations and letters directed to Vienna to convey to the Emperor his people’s fervent wishes for a speedy recovery.⁴ Of course the actual support behind these actions varied in the different regions within the empire. A barber from the town of Veszprém, for instance, records the day of 22 February in his diary as follows:

‘Today every Catholic church in the country held a thanksgiving *Te Deum laudamus* mass, while all the other denominations prayed for the Emperor. Our big church was not quite full, though, and the pews were mostly filled with soldiers and students [...]. After 7 o’clock in the evening in the marketplace, in the fortress and in every street throughout the town all the windows were lit with pairs of candles. Above the gates of the Gentlemen’s Casino and in Szabadi Street in front of the gates of the Jewish Courtyard a portrait of Franz Joseph was put on display with candles lit in front of it. Apart from these, however, no respect is paid in the town and quite a large crowd is in the streets going about their daily business, freely ignoring the celebrations.’⁵

Among other symbolic acts of solidarity, a fundraising campaign was started to commemorate the fortunate outcome of the assassination attempt. As for the money that was gathered, one of the suggestions was to spend it on financial assistance for the Austrian soldiers wounded at the Milan uprising, as Franz Joseph was said to have noted after the attack that it was his privilege to share the

2 SOMOGYI 1989. 65.

3 DOBAI 2000. 81 cited in Adolf Frankenburg: FRANKENBURG 1880. 18.

4 DOBAI 2000. 87.

5 FRANCSICS 1973. 312.

fate of his soldiers wounded while defending the country.⁶ A Hungarian landowner, whose name is not mentioned in the historical sources, suggested that the money be spent on setting up a teacher training institute ‘so that by improving school education we can prevent young people’s spirit from becoming as barbaric as seen in Libényi’s case’.⁷ Eventually it was Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian’s suggestion that gained the greatest support, his initiative involved the building of a new church. While the resulting Votive Church constructed by 1879 has been one of the sights of Vienna ever since, the many poems inspired by the joy over the fortunate survival and full recovery of the Emperor have mostly sunk into oblivion.

In the D 46 Section of the Hungarian National Archives (*Archives of the Age of Absolutism – K. K. Militär- und Civil-Gouvernement für Ungarn – Civil Section*) there is a minor collection of richly ornamented slim velvet-bound volumes, each sent by a school, under the name ‘Deferential Vows of Loyalty to Franz Joseph after His Survival of the Assassination Attempt by János Libényi’.⁸ For example, the title of the booklet compiled from the poems by the students of the Calvinist College of Debrecen goes, ‘To Commemorate Our Utmost Joy at the Deliverance of His Apostolic Highness, His Royal and Imperial Majesty, His Grace Franz Joseph from the Assassin’s Hands by Divine Providence and Then His Full Recovery, Poems Written by the Students of the Calvinist College of Debreczen to Express Their Reverence and Eternal Devotion’ (Debrecen, 1853).

In my paper I wish to place alongside the already known Hungarian, German and Latin poems a set of Hebrew poems from the same context, whose authors and content might both be of considerable interest.

The Hebrew periodical *Kochvei Yitzhak*

The poems to be presented here were first published in the periodical *Kochvei Yitzhak*.⁹ This was a late product of the *haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) movement in the Habsburg Empire, published in Vienna between 1845 and 1873.¹⁰ (The movement itself continued to push eastward and by the 1850s it had spread

6 DOBAI 2000. 88.

7 FRANKENBURG 1880. 21.

8 TUZA 2013.

9 Apart from the poems presented here we know of numerous further Hebrew poems, among others, there are some published also by *Kochvei Yitzhak*: the poem by Markus Boss, a schoolteacher from Leipnik (*Kochvei Yitzhak* 19 (1854). 13–15) and those by Lelio Della Torre, professor of the rabbis’ school of Padova (*Kochvei Yitzhak* 24 (1859). 54–55). The poem of rabbi Lazar Horowitz, from Vienna was published in the Hebrew appendix of *Wiener Vierteljahrsschrift* (*Abne nezzer* 2 (1854). 11–12). In 1853 Joseph Kohn-Zedek of Lemberg published *Jesuot malki* [My King’s Deliverance] as a separate booklet, which included the German version as well.

10 See also PELLI 2016.

beyond Central Europe into the territories then belonging to Russia.) The 37 booklets of the *Kochvei Yitzhak* (meaning ‘The Stars of Isaac’) were all edited by Mendel Stern a.k.a. Max Emanuel Stern (b. 1811, Bratislava, d. 1873). Stern’s death in 1873 marked the end of a set of periodicals published in Hebrew in Vienna, which had included, before *Kochvei Yitzhak*, the 12 annals of *Bikkurei ha-ittim* (‘First fruits of the times’, published between 1821 and 1832) and the 9 annals of *Kerem hemed* (‘Vineyard of delight’, 1833–56).

Similarly to its predecessors, *Kochvei Yitzhak* also aimed at advancing the cause of Hebrew language, literature and academic fields (literary history, linguistics and exegetics). The original works and Hebrew translations/adaptations of Schiller, Herder, Goethe, Byron, Shakespeare, Young, Horace, etc. all conveyed European culture and aesthetics to its Hebrew-speaking audience. Its etymological papers, biographies, notes on literary history, etc., introduced the modern approach to scholarship. The verbose Hebrew subtitle states that *Kochvei Yitzhak* ‘Contains the Fruits of Research and Poetic Language from the Wisest of this Generation, As Well As a Collection of the Most Pleasant Poems of Our Age, for the Use of the Sons of Judah, to Teach Them the Writer’s Tools, to Lead Them Along the Path of Reason, to Understand the Words, Parables and Riddles of Wise Men, to Awaken Their Desire for the Sacred Language so that their Hands Wield the Pen of Bronze¹¹, for Justice, Faith and the Restoration of Past Glory’.

The set of authors was explored and processed in the form of a repertory with additional biographic data by Bernhard Wachstein: it includes over 60 authors linked in some way or another to Hungary.¹² Some of them appeared as the author of one single piece, while others published a series of writings, poems, translations and speeches or short articles. For some of them – who were schoolteachers from the country, the rabbis of small communities or educated merchants – these publications were the only forum for literary utterances, while others among the authors are also known for their volumes of poetry, school textbooks, books for young readers or scientific writings.

Editor Mendel Stern had been the Hebrew proofreader of Anton Schmidt’s printing house in Vienna, the author of several schoolbooks, and also a teacher at Jewish schools. He became editor of *Kochvei Yitzhak* in 1845, which twice received financial support from the Vienna Imperial Academy. The editor, as he himself never failed to mention on the cover of the publication, was elected an honorary member of the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* (Leipzig), and was awarded the *Pro litteris et artibus* golden medal by the emperor. Stern became a well-known figure of Vienna society and knew how to spread his network throughout the monarchy. The authors whose work he published, in turn, inundated him with the signs of their loyalty in the shape of odes and other poems addressed to him. Stern did not hesitate to include these in his publications: the 37 volumes contain a total of 32 writings praising Stern himself.¹³

11 Ps 18:3.

12 WACHSTEIN 1930.

13 FÜRST 1930. 208.

However, it was not just praising himself that Stern was so keen on. When on 13 August 1852 Franz Joseph completed his first (rather ambivalent) visit to Hungary by visiting Bratislava, Stern wrote a 21-stanza Hebrew poem in the name of the Jewish community of Bratislava to applaud the visit, which he published together with its German translation as the starting piece of the next edition of *Kochvei Yitzhak*.¹⁴ Considering all this, it is hardly surprising that in the 1853 edition he dedicated an entire section made up of three pieces to the poems celebrating the failure of the assassination attempt and the recovery of the emperor: obviously he was fishing for some extra merit points with the court.¹⁵ The actual authors, on the other hand, might be a bit more of a surprise. Not that they were not established authors of *Kochvei Yitzhak*: Rabener, Bacher and Löwy had published 10, 15 and 20 writings in it respectively.¹⁶ Moreover, especially taking into account these pre-existing links, we may assume that some of these pieces had been written at the explicit incentive provided by Stern. The one feature, however, that I wish to use as the focus of my analysis is that the three seemingly identical and completely commonplace poems, in fact, reflect three radically different voices and attitudes.

The Emperor's Deliverance by Simon Bacher

The author who is perhaps best known today is Simon Bacher (1823–1891). He was born in Liptovsky Mikuláš and went on to study in *yeshivas* in Nikolsburg (Mikulov), Eisenstadt and Bonyhád. Apart from Talmudic erudition, he acquired the literary German and French languages as well. In his youth he earned a living as a merchant, a lease-holder and then a teacher, while constantly publishing his writings in Hebrew publications. In 1853, at the time of writing the poem examined here, he was living in Szucsány (Turóc County), as the overseer of the salt tax collection and headmaster of the local Jewish school. In 1867 he moved to Pest, where he worked as the treasurer and notary of the Jewish Congregation of Pest until his death in 1891.

He had published 15 of his writings in *Kochvei Yitzhak* before 1853 – hardly an edition had come out without his contribution.¹⁷ Among these, there were poems written for special occasions, such as the opening of the new synagogue in Liptovsky Mikuláš or that of the new wing of the local Jewish school. He also wrote many poems later commemorating historic events in Hebrew, such as the coronation of Franz Joseph (1867), the opening of the Jewish Congress (1868), the death of Baron József Eötvös (1871) and the opening of the Rabbinical Seminary

14 *Kochvei Yitzhak* 17 (1852). 3–13.

15 *Kochvei Yitzhak* 18 (1853). 8–13.

16 WACHSTEIN 1930. 122–123 and 170.

17 WACHSTEIN 1930. 4–6.

in Budapest (1877). His best known writings, however, are his translations into Hebrew, among others of dramas translated from German and patriotic Hungarian poems by Petöfi, Vörösmarty, Arany and Kölcsey published under the title *Zemiroth ha-arec* (The Songs of the Land, 1868).¹⁸

*The Emperor’s Deliverance (excerpt)*¹⁹

Gratitude to Thee, God, Gratitude!
 For Thou have sent Thine emissary to deliver
 From Peril our father Franz Joseph
 We sing with pure hearts and tongues and rejoice:
 The knife was on the neck of our King
 And Thou said unto the Angel of Destruction, ‘Enough!’

When the Men of Murderous Intent attacked our King,
 Having lain in ambush like a fierce lion,
 Thou ordered Thine Angels to guard him eternally,
 Like speedy clouds they flew, faster than eagles,
 They preserved Joseph’s life, our life-giving breath,
 Not a hair did our King lose.

הַצֵּלַת הַקַּיִסָּר .

Am 18. Febr 1853. Von S. Bacher. Ward in der Synagoge
 nebst Psalmen und Gebeten in feierlichem Gottesdienste vorgetragen.

הוֹדִינוּ לָךְ אֱלֹהִים הוֹדִינוּ!
 כִּי מִלֵּאדָּךְ פָּגַעְךָ שְׁלַחְתָּ לְהוֹשִׁיעַ,
 קְדוֹת מִצַּר פָּרַאנִיזְ אֵינְךָ אֲבִינוּ,
 בְּקֶלֶל לֵבָב וְלִשׁוֹן לָךְ נָשִׂיר גְּרִיעַ: –
 עַל צְוֹאֲרֵי מַלְבָּנוּ הִיטָּח הַחֶרֶב,
 וַתֹּאמֶר לְמִלֵּאדָּךְ הַמְשַׁחִית: הֲרֵף!
 בָּקוּם עַל מַלְבָּנוּ אֲנָשֵׁי נְצַח
 אֲזַרְבִּים לְנַפְשׁוֹ קְאָרֵי בְּמִסְתָּרִים;
 לְמִלֵּאדָּךְ צִוִּיתָ: שְׁמַרְוֵהוּ נְצַח –
 וּבְקֶעֶב קַל דָּאוּ קְלוּ מְנַשְׁרִים;
 שְׁמַרְוֵהוּ חַי יוֹסֵף רֵיחַ אֲפָנוּ
 לֹא נִפְלַ מְשַׁעֲבַת רֹאשׁ מַלְבָּנוּ. –

Simon Bacher, The Emperor’s Deliverance (Excerpt). *Kochvei Yitzhak* 18 (1853) 12.

18 Simon Bacher’s works were collected and published by his son, Vilmos Bacher, and the first volume also contains a short biography in Hebrew: BACHER 1894. IX– XIV.

19 Rough translations from the Hebrew original by the author, English translation by Júlia Károlyi.

The poem, according to its German caption was read alongside psalms and prayers at a celebratory service in a synagogue. The circumstances of its conception are, then, quite clear: it was written for the thanksgiving service ordered to be held in every church of every denomination at the time. As the headmaster of the local Jewish school and a poet regularly publishing in Hebrew, Bacher must have been the obvious choice to write an occasional piece like this. The situational context of the utterance is defined by the synagogue setting – this is why it is full of biblical and liturgical vocabulary. The poem is closely related to the traditional prayer said for the emperor, one of the standard components of which is Psalm 144:10: “the One who gives victory to kings, who delivers his servant David from the deadly sword”.²⁰ The synagogue as a setting naturally evokes the gestures of pleading, thanksgiving and veneration, which is what the congregation finds natural. Reverting to the first person plural verb forms and possessives (‘our king’, ‘our father’, ‘we sing’, etc.) also reflects the act of speaking for the entire community. It is probably for the same reason that the poet uses the particular Hebrew word for the rank of the sovereign. While in the title he uses the word ‘emperor’, whose Hebrew equivalent ‘*kesar*’ is a Roman loanword from Talmudic times, the years of Roman rule, within the text his choice is the Biblical and liturgical term for ‘king’, ‘*melekh*’ – even though technically Franz Joseph was not king of Hungary at the time. As opposed to the archaic-liturgical language, the form of the poem is modern, with five stanzas of ABABCC rhyming scheme and two closing lines. The lines are of equal length, most of them made up of 11 syllables.

The poem makes no reference to the fact that the poet is a compatriot of the would-be assassin or that the assassination attempt might have had any regional political motive – these sensitive questions seem to be resolved under the recurrent reference to ‘the peoples of Austria’, who, according to the poem, are all united in rejoicing and giving thanks for the deliverance of the sovereign. However, the opening line of the last stanza, ‘us, the scattered herd, the Jews in exile’, narrows the scope of the group represented by the speaker, who goes on to say how many favours the emperor had extended to the Jews, which he likens to ‘freeing them from prison’. With this Bacher most probably refers to the equal rights provided to all subjects regardless of their denomination, in the Constitution of Olmütz (Olomouc) and later regulations.²¹ The end of the stanza connects the two by saying that ‘our Heavenly Shepherd has saved our earthly shepherd from the sword of rebels and the plot of plotters’.

²⁰ On the prayer for the welfare of the country and the emperor, and its cultural history in the Habsburg era see: DAMOHORSKÁ 2010.

²¹ KOMORÓCZY 2012. 28–30.

Der 18 Feber 1853 by Josef Löwy

Another of the authors was also from Hungary: József Löwy (1802–1882). He was born in Frauenkirchen and then lived in Nagykanizsa as a merchant, who could only dedicate his free time to the pursuit of Hebrew poetry and Jewish academic lore. He too had published some of his writing in *Kochvei Yitzhak* before 1853. One of these was a poem applauding the fact that the use of the organ in the synagogue was introduced in Nagykanizsa, a prose piece mocking Hungarian Orthodox Jews, and a longer paper published in instalments where he called for the introduction of Jewish numismatics, based on his own coin collection. As these three examples illustrate, he was a typical representative of the erudite Hungarian Jew who works in commerce and supports moderate Reform Judaism and modern education – it was this bourgeois social stratum that lent impetus to the Neolog movement then taking shape. This social group also supported Magyarization, or at least shared the aims of the Hungarian political class. Löwy articulated this very clearly in a sonnet about Ferenc Deák he had also published in *Kochvei Yitzhak* in 1846.²² Here he likened Deák to Cicero and Orpheus, but portrayed his oratorical skills as even better and his personal aura as even stronger.

This, in turn, raises the question of how the poem celebrating the saving of the emperor in 1853 sits with Löwy’s earlier views. How a dedicated follower of Lipót Löw could celebrate the sovereign who put Rabbi Löw in prison after the revolution of 1848–49.²³

Löwy had chosen a less fashionable, simple poetic form with rhyming couplets, short lines of varying length and relatively accessible vocabulary. Of course it also contains biblical phrases, the very first line being a paraphrase of “that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle (1Sam 3:11)”. The poem describes the circumstances of the assassination attempt in great detail, including the assassin and those who saved the Emperor. The text contains the date, the time of day, the location, mentions Csákvár and Székesfehérvár (‘Albargalis’), the name of Libényi and his profession, age and weapon, O’Donnell and Ettenreich, the medical treatment of the emperor, the prayers said for his recovery, which, in turn, were heard by God. It is this detailed, and even overly detailed description which seems to be a compromise between the compulsory show of loyalty and the poet’s patriotic feelings. The logical conclusion is that the poem, then, was specifically commissioned by Stern. It also seems to be an expression of the expected loyalty in that rather than presenting the usual set of varied adjectives and metaphors seen in other poems, here there is but one formula to go with the name of Franz Joseph, and that is repeated four times: ‘the King, Franz Joseph I, loved by his entire people like the apple of their eyes’.²⁴ Note the possessive: ‘his people’ rather than ‘our people’!

22 *Kochvei Yitzhak* 6 (1846). 25. The rough translation of the first lines: “Who is the man who conquers every heart?/ Truth on his lips and peace in his words.”

23 KOMORÓCZY 2012. 19–21.

24 When it comes up later, it runs ‘all his peoples’.

„Der 18. Feber 1853.“ Von Josef Löwy.

מי ישמע כזאת ולא תצלנה אזנים
 אחת זו שמענו, אחת היא ולא ישנים.
 איש אחד, נוצרי, מתושבי ארצנו
 מילדי הגר – הם! נישככה בכישתנו!
 לו אולד באי ציה ושממה,
 ותועבה כזאת לא נעשתה ישמה;
 או מי יתן ונאלמתי ולא אדבר במופי
 ממת בארץ מולדתי שמען דופי.
 הנה אחד מילדי הגר,
 חיט, ערורי, הקורא דגר,
 מספר טשאקנאר בגליל אלפארענאלים יושבת
 – ארוחה האדמה בעבורו, ארץ נוישבת! –
 בחור, ליבעני שמו, בן אחד ועשרים שנה,
 חשף משחור רוחו ומפגרי אלמנה,
 פאריה במסותרים יארוכ מיום ימים;
 ויהי כחצות היום לעת הצהרונים
 והפלך פראנץ יאזעף הראישון
 האהוב מפל עמו כאישון

Josef Löwy, Der 18 Feber 1853. (Excerpt) *Kochvei Yitzhak 18* (1853) 8.

At two distinct points of the poem, however, the poet casts aside the role of chronicler and speaks in the first person singular. In lines 5-8 he speaks passionately of the shame brought upon his homeland by one of his compatriots – although, significantly, a Christian rather than Jewish compatriot – who carried out the assassination attempt. ‘I wish I had been born on a barren and lifeless island, such an abominable thing would not have happened there.’ It leaves no doubt in the reader that the poet considers the attempt on the emperor’s life abominable and the death penalty a proportionate punishment for it (lines 31-32), while he is sure that the assassin went to Sheol for his deed.²⁵ In the last sixth of the poem (lines 55-66), the poet again switches into a more personal style: the life-saving assistance of O’Donnel and Ettenreich are praised in biblical phrases:

It is with highest joy that I remember Captain O’Donnel,²⁶
 It is to Mr Ettenreich that I raise the cup of my blessing.

²⁵ Sheol in the Hebrew Bible is the place where all the dead go without moral considerations, but after Late Antiquity, in the rabbinic interpretation, it came to mean the place of the wicked in the afterlife.

²⁶ Cf. Ps 137:6 – in the much-quoted original context it is Jerusalem that he considers his greatest joy.

They are our liberators in times of distress,²⁷
Had they been but one minute late in their act of helping –
They are worthy of not just gratitude but benediction.
Is there but one among us who would have acted differently?

In his answer to the question, made up of biblical phrases and closed by the recurring formula, which is also the closure of the entire poem, Löwy states that he himself would have leapt into action as well, to save the emperor, even sacrificing his life in the process.

My witness is in heaven, my advocate is on high,²⁸
I fall under his strength,²⁹ whether it means life or death.³⁰
Though he slay me,³¹ and I go down to the grave,³²
yet it will comfort me, to be a great deliverance³³
to King Franz Joseph I,
loved by all his peoples like the apple of their eyes.

This gesture goes beyond the expected show of loyalty. The pain felt at the shaming of his homeland indicates at the onset of the poem that he is undeniably a patriot, while the long-awaited legal emancipation of the Jewish community tilts the scales in favour of Franz Joseph, patriotic feelings aside.

***Psalm* by Matitjahu Simha Rabener**

The third author on our list is Matitjahu Simha Rabener (1826-?) from Lemberg (Lviv). He was a member of the *maskil* circle, that is, the enlightened Jewish intelligentsia, in Galicia and later (from 1860) in Chernovitz.³⁴ He studied philosophy, oriental languages and music at the university of Lemberg. He had been in touch with Stern ever since Kochvei Yitzhak was first published and continued regularly publishing his writings in it. For example, for Franz Joseph’s visit to Lemberg in 1851 Rabener composed a poem with a remarkable feat: it contained both an acrostic and a *telestich*, that is, the first and last letters of the lines (the latter backwards) both read ‘Franz Josef’.³⁵ The poem urged the inhabitants of

27 Jer 14:8.

28 Cf. Job 16:19.

29 Ps 10:10.

30 2Sam 15:21.

31 Job 13:15.

32 Cf. Gen 37:35.

33 Cf. Gen 45:7.

34 GOLD 1958, 58.

35 *Kochvei Yitzhak* 16 (1851). 2.

Galicia and specifically Lemberg (*Lwow* in the Hebrew text) to rejoice and extol 'the Habsburg lion', 'the anointed one of the Lord' and to bring their heartfelt exaltation before him as a sacrifice, shouting two or even three times, 'Long Live Franz Joseph! Franz Joseph is our king!'

Von M. S. Rabener aus Lemberg.

פ עזי נא ליציא רעה . יושבית סמא ק
 ר ממי הדבר סדך . ברוימן חונג ירוג ע
 א ריאל האבס בירג הנח בא משיס יי עזו ז
 נ גיד סמשל אוס סר נא , מושיע נרב את א
 י קלי ורמי יושבת לבויב פי טלבך בתוכב י
 י וסר פן סורר , בסוד גפורי חיל נעב י
 א תוי לאויבס לקראתו וסד וקסת ישרו נ
 ז כחו זכמי לבנגם , ורוזבילי שי לסר א
 ע ליו נהנתו הריעי , שני קשלו סהר ר
 ק ראנץ יאוער , וחי טלבני סר אנץ יאוע ע

Matitjahu Simha Rabener, Franz Joseph. *Kochvei Yitzhak* 16 (1851) 2.

In 1853, however, rather than choosing a format fashionable at the time, Rabener opted for the most traditional form – that of the biblical psalms. The opening sentence of the poem, like that of actual psalms, is an instruction to the conductor:

Psalm.

Zur Feier der glücklichen Lebensrettung und Wiedererhebung unseres allgeliebten jugendlichen Monarchen Sr. Majestät des glorreichen Kaisers Franz Josef des Ersten, am 18. Febr. 1853. **Von M. S. Rabener.**

למנצח לקור יהודה סומור לתורה ביום הציל יי את טלבני סבך סעגול
 (וחימן מיד לפנ א) : נאור אתה אלי סאר ישגבו סלאכותיך :
 ותכה עיראניש לחזות עזמו סלה : אביטה הליכותיך בקרש ולבני תסם
 יהלך : אף רוחי יתהלך שלל כמעט נסיו ישרעי סקרכי : סמלאמו נשיי
 לסרי ושמורות לשוני נאלסו : סתחנא דלשפתי ותרגח תהלותיך : ותקם
 תהו לתושיה בסקרה האסם לסני ישנות עולמים : הסירות אסל וצלמן
 כהלו ווחה עלי תהום רכה : ותסרוש כנסידוח נקעת ספלושי שמי קרם :
 הוסכי סצולה יפשת כונן ארץ ותעמוד על זרועות בליטה : בעלי אברה
 ויו ישרי ודגת הים כלהם אתה נחם סרחם הרת עולם : ותסקוד כבין רכבות
 יצורים כן יארם נושא צלטה : אצלת לו נחלת שרי נגוהות זרהה עליו

Matitjahu Simha Rabener, Psalm (Excerpt). *Kochvei Yitzhak* 18 (1853) 10.

‘To the conductor, a son of Judah: thanksgiving psalm commemorating the day when the Lord saved our king from the hands of the wrongdoer, from the hands of Labén [Libényi]’.

The long text is cut into sections by the *sela* formula also known from psalms, while parallelism, a basic tool of biblical psalms, is hardly ever used. All the more emphatic are the archaic vocabulary and grammar. It is in this elevated tone and archaic style that the poet tells the story of how God saved the life of the emperor – relying heavily on biblical quotes, while almost completely ignoring the actual details of the event. Towards the middle of the psalm, the Lord says to ‘Joseph’ (i.e. Franz Joseph):

You are my son, today I have become your father,³⁶ I am your shield,³⁷ I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.³⁸ I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you³⁹ (...) As Aaron’s staff had budded, the sceptre of your kingdom sprouted a month ago.

The use of biblical fragments and phrases – as already seen in Löwy’s poem – is a literary device employed widely in *haskalah* literature. In many cases the original context of the quotes, or allusions to the original texts (the intertextuality) are consciously used by the poets. In other cases they use the quotes just because they sound pleasing and elevated, at least for today’s readers.⁴⁰ The specific biblical allusions and quotes used by Rabener were all well known to the contemporary reader, who was also fully aware of the shift from the promise to Israel in the Bible to the way the author applied it to the Habsburg dynasty. This, however, is especially significant bearing in mind the next passage, which contains the real theological surprise:

Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness, and I will not lie to⁴¹ Rudolf, the sceptre will not depart from⁴² Habsburgs and the crown will be on the heads of their offspring.

By providing an actualization of the original psalm, the poet swaps David for Rudolf,⁴³ that is, the poet ascribes all the promise and eternal covenant in the

36 Ps 2:7.

37 Gen 15:1.

38 Jes 41:10.

39 Jes 54:8.

40 On the reconstruction of the perception and interpretation of the contemporary reader see Cohen 1994.

41 Ps 89:36.

42 Gen 49:10.

43 Rudolf, the first ruler of the Habsburg dynasty: 1273–1291.

original psalm to the Habsburg dynasty, the house of Rudolf.⁴⁴ In the second half of the same sentence the text recycles a section of the biblical text (Gen 49:10), which is a cornerstone in the Jewish-Christian theological debate as well. This, in turn, not only guarantees eternal rule on earth to the Habsburgs, but extends it into the Messianic era as well. Thus Rabener places the saving of the emperor in a historical-theological context, where the interpretation is that the Chosen One can not be ousted by any human agent, God himself protects the continuity of the Habsburg dynasty. Thus what happened is not a one-off exceptional act of grace and divine intervention, but the continuation of an age-old alliance. The framework the poet had chosen is indeed suitable for this grave statement: the biblical phrasing and allusions attempt to validate and justify the content, which very much goes against the Scripture.

If we look at the three poems side by side, as they lend themselves to it due to editor Stern's decision, we can see a strange inverse correlation in terms of traditionality of their content and form. In its content it is doubtless Simon Bacher's poem which is the most traditional, while its form is the most fashionable of the three. Rabener's poem is the other extreme; its very traditional form is coupled with a highly unusual, and, for any religious Jew, outrageous content. Löwy's piece is in between: its form is simple, its content is objective up to the very last lines, where biblical expressions are used, but still, we find a very personal testimony of the poet's loyalty to the emperor.

LITERATURE

BACHER, Wilhelm (Hrsg.)

1894 *Shaar Shimon – Hebräische Dichtungen, I-III*. Ch. D. Lippe, Wien.

COHEN, Tova

1994 *The Maskil as Lamdan. The Influence of Jewish Education on Haskalah Writing Techniques*. In: ABRAMSON, G. – PARFITT, T. (eds.): *Jewish Education and Learning*. Harwood Academic Publication, 61–73.

DAMOHOŘSKÁ, Pavla

2010 *The Jewish Prayer for the Welfare of the Country as the Echo of Political and Historical Changes in Central Europe*. Praha.

DOBAI, András

⁴⁴ The primary locus of the promise given to David and his offspring is 2Sam 7:9–16. By mentioning the house of David the poet also reminds the reader of the prophecy transmitted by Nathan.

2000 Merénylet a császár ellen, 1853. február 18. [Assassination attempt against the Emperor, 18 February 1853]. In: BŐSZE, Sándor (ed.): *Somogy megye múltjából – Levéltári Évkönyv* 31. Kaposvár, 81–88.

FRANCICS, Károly

1973 *Kis kamorámban gyertyát gyújték. [I Light a Candle in my Small Chamber]* Magvető, Budapest.

FRANKENBURG, Adolf

1880 *Bécsi élményeim, II. [My Experiences in Vienna, II]*. Sopron.

FÜRST, Aladár

1930 Magyar írók a bécsi héber sajtóban. [Hungarian Writers in the Viennese Hebrew Press]. *Magyar-Zsidó Szemle* 47. 203–213.

GOLD, Hugo

1958 *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina I*. Olamenu, Tel Aviv.

KOMORÓCZY, Géza

2012 *A zsidók története Magyarországon, II. 1849-től a jelenkorig. [History of the Jews in Hungary, II. From 1849 to the Present]*. Kalligram, Bratislava.

PELLI, Moshe

2016 *Kochvei Yitzhak, the Journal of the Haskalah in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1845–1873)* [Hebrew]. Magnes Press, Jerusalem.

SOMOGYI, Éva

1989 *Ferenc József. [Franz Joseph]*. Gondolat, Budapest.

TUZA, Csilla

2013 Merénylet Ferenc József ellen. [Assassination Attempt against Franz Joseph]. In: *Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, A hét dokumentuma, 2013. okt. 2.* http://mnl.gov.hu/a_het_dokumentuma/merenylet_ferenc_jozsef_ellen.html.

WACHSTEIN, Bernhard

1930 *Die hebräische Publizistik in Wien, I*. Wien.