

Hartman, Jehuda. Patriots without a Homeland: Hungarian Jewish Orthodoxy from the Emancipation to Holocaust. Translated from Hebrew by Shaul Vardi. 2023. Boston: Academic Studies Press. 393 pp.

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As cattle cars were carrying hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in the spring of 1944, a Neolog rabbi, Dr. Fábian Herskovits, issued an appeal to the Christians of the country. Excerpted in the Prolog to Hartman's thought-provoking book, the open letter, after begging Hungarians to stop the trains, concludes: "if our pleas for our lives fail to find an attentive ear, then our sole request of the Hungarians is that they end the expulsion and the evil that accompanies the expulsion, and put an end to our suffering here, so that we might be buried in our country, in our homeland."

Hartman's book explores the unusual and, as it turned out, fatally naïve attachment of Hungarian Jews to their Hungarian "homeland". The book is based on Hartman's 2016 dissertation for the PhD in History from Bar-Ilan University, earned after a long career in the sciences. Born in Hungary right after the liberation of Budapest in 1945, Hartman moved to Israel as a young child. His interest in the topic explored in the book has family roots, as he explained in an interview at the Danube Institute in April 2023; his mother retained fond feelings towards Hungary during his upbringing despite her nearly fatal Holocaust experience and later emigration to Israel. His father passed away too soon for Hartman to have an impression of his feelings towards Hungary. Rabbi Herskovits, quoted at the beginning of this review, was Hartman's maternal uncle. The fact that he was a Zionist hints at the complexity of the topics studied.

The identification of Jews with a host nationality was unusual in Eastern Europe. It was not typical in Poland or Romania. It had more in common with the attitudes of Western European Jews. Many Jews in Hungary adopted Hungarianness in the 19th century to such an extent that they subscribed to a myth according to which Jews, in the form of Kabars, participated in the 9th century "settling" of the country. (133) Because of the relatively late modernization of Hungary, and because of the major role that Jews played in that modernization, the Jews of Hungary did not just assimilate to their host country's nationalism, as did those of Germany and France, but felt a sense of "joint creation." These observations validate those of historians Jacob Katz, Mary Gluck, and Marsha Rozenblit, and set the stage for the major focus of Hartman's research: the

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extent to which Hungarian Orthodox Jews shared in this nationalism, as well as the related problem of how they reacted to the rise of antisemitism, itself a byproduct of modernization. Hartman's book is a welcome contribution to our understanding of an often-neglected portion of Hungarian Jewry, the Orthodox, who formed a majority of Jews in the Dualistic period and nearly a third in the interwar years.

Hartman argues that Hungarian Jewry, at least when considering the question of nationalism, should not be seen as a dichotomy of Neolog and Orthodox. This formal division came about when the newly autonomous Hungarian government in 1867 called upon the Jews to form a body that would represent them with respect to the government. Not being able to agree on religious matters, Hungarian Jewry split into two organizations, recognized by the government in 1870. The Neologs were eager to assimilate into Hungarian culture and adapted their religious practice to that end. The Orthodox maintained a spectrum of stricter observances. Orthodoxy subsumed two important, informal subdivisions, which, as Hartman points out, had many designations, including the rather counter-intuitive Oberlander (Highlander) and Unterlander (Lowlander). The pejoratively called Unterlanders (who actually lived on higher ground in the northeast of the country) immigrated mostly from Galicia while the Oberlanders, who were concentrated in Trans-Danubia, derived mostly from Moravia and other German speaking parts of the Monarchy. The Unterlanders tended towards ultra-Orthodoxy and Hassidism. These sects turned their backs on modernization. The Western Orthodox (another name used for the Oberlanders), while retaining strict observance of Jewish religious practices and traditions, participated more readily in modernization, though generally at lower professional levels than the Neologs. Hartman shows that the attitude towards modernization formed the more important dividing line in Hungarian Jewry, and this line ran within Orthodoxy, between the ultra-religious and the more modern Orthodox.

While others have noted the distinctions within Hungarian Orthodoxy, the main contribution of Hartman's work comes from its analysis of written forms of self-expression by the Orthodox as their attitudes towards Hungarian nationalism and antisemitism evolved between 1867 and 1944. The sources on which Hartman concentrates are two Hungarian language newspapers aimed at a Western Orthodox readership: the *Zsidó Híradó* (Jewish News), which appeared in the late Dualist period, and the *Zsidó Ujság* (Jewish Newspaper), which was published between 1925 and 1938. But he also examined other primary material such as sermons, rabbinic *responsa*, pamphlets, reminiscences and contemporary publications in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Hungarian. Hartman probes this material for attitudes on a variety of issues connected to nationalism: for example, the adoption of the Hungarian language in general or its use within the synagogues; the use of Hungarian surnames and given names; the attitudes towards Zionism; and participation in World War I. With regards to reactions to antisemitism, Hartman examines reactions to the Numerus Clausus and the later anti-Jewish Laws, as well as changing explanations for antisemitism and attempts to understand who the antisemites were. In general, he finds more similarities on these questions to the modern attitudes of the Neologs than to those of the ultra-Orthodox.

To explain these similarities, Hartman reminds us that the founding fathers of the post-1867 Hungarian state were liberals friendly to the Jews. Parliament "emancipated" the Jews in 1867, that is, it declared them *individually* to have equal rights to all other citizens of Hungary. In 1895 Jews were elevated even more in status by having their *religion* "received" ('bevett'). For the most part, Hungarian Jews appreciated the support that they received from the liberal

governing elite of Dualistic Hungary and its predecessors already in the Reform Era. But several influential rabbis feared that the equality promised by liberalism would lead to the "abandonment of the Torah and the commandments." (48). Some rabbis saw the antisemitic riots that broke out during 1848 as God's punishment of the Jews for "having cast off the yoke of the Torah." (222) But, after the 1867 Law of Emancipation, increasing numbers welcomed having equal rights with their fellow citizens. This was true even among the Orthodox, especially among the Oberlanders. The same dynamic of initial opposition and then grateful acceptance played out on the occasion of "reception" in 1895. The ultra-Orthodox maintained a separate identity as a people but most of the Western Orthodox and, of course, the Neologs (other than the few who adhered to Zionism) saw the Emancipation and the Reception Laws as recognition of the Jews as part of the Hungarian nation.

Even in the antisemitic Horthy Era, the Western Orthodox, like the Neologs, retained their sense of Hungarianness. Zionism had a much smaller foothold in Hungary than in other countries such as Austria, Czechoslovakia, or Poland. (140) During the debates over the Numerus Clausus Law of 1920, which limited the participation of Jews in education, Hungarian Jews asked foreign Jewish organizations not to interfere in Hungarian politics. Nor did Hungarian Jews form specifically Jewish parties as they did elsewhere. In fact, in Romania after World War I, it was Hungarian Jews who formed such parties, though they had not done so prior to 1918 when the territory they inhabited had belonged to Hungary. (199) Hartman points out that the attachment of Hungarian Jews to Hungarian identity was not constant throughout the periods surveyed. The avowals of patriotism changed from a sincere expression during the Golden Age of Dualism, especially in the 1890s, to a strategy for combating antisemitism, particularly after the passage of the anti-Jewish Laws starting in 1938.

Hartman's narrative stops short of the Holocaust. This decision is reasonable: his readers will no doubt be aware of the historically ironic outcome that the Jewish attachment to Hungarianness had for the community. That history is covered in detail by many historians, most prominently in English by Randolph Brahm. The tragic finale is foreshadowed in the above-quoted open letter of Herskovits with which Hartman starts his book.

In contrast to the once popular Israeli characterization of European Jews who passively allowed themselves to be driven as "sheep" to slaughter, Hartman exhibits historical understanding; he describes and explains without passing judgment. He mentions that although Jews in Hungary failed to organize for their defense before the German occupation of the country, they did occasionally take an activist stance. Their press tried to remind Hungarians that antisemitism is incompatible with "true" Hungarianness. (355) As an explanation for Jewish passivity, he points out that until the occupation in 1944, the Hungarian elite "allowed the Jewish community to continue to live in reasonable conditions—certainly by comparison to other areas under German control or influence." This is, in this reviewer's view, showing more understanding than either the Jewish or Hungarian leaders of the Horthy period deserve. A more activist attitude, for example, on the part of the Jewish Committee in Budapest in the spring of 1944 when it became aware of what was happening in Auschwitz—and a more sympathetic attitude on the part of the Hungarian leadership—would probably have saved many lives. I must also mention that the final English product is replete with misspellings. However, the book's rich details and analysis has great value in helping us understand the origins (and persistence) of the identification that many Jews felt for their adopted country.