



12th EAJS CONGRESS

# BRANCHING OUT

Diversity of Jewish Studies

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## Abstracts

## 11.05 Jewish Culture in a Changing Central European Landscape

### ***The Family Correspondence of Rabbi Mayer Bretzfeld (c.1750-1823): Daily Life and Literacy of Franconian Rural Jewry***

Carsten Wilke; Central European University

Mayer Bretzfeld, who died in Schnaittach two hundred years ago, was the last incumbent of the oldest provincial rabbinate (Landrabbinat) in Bavaria. A scion of the famed Heller dynasty, he was one of the first rabbis who presented Judaism to a non-Jewish audience in a German publication issued in Munich in 1813. Yet he performed his functions of halakhic adviser, marriage broker, and circumciser in a rural environment where premodern patterns of rabbinic learning, children's education, and gender relations had largely remained intact. The recent discovery of a trove of family letters in the local archives, where they presumably arrived as Kristallnacht spoils, offers a glimpse into his social life. In their typical mix of rabbinic Hebrew and Franconian Jewish dialect, the letters record the voices, emotions, and Ashkenazi scripts of peddlers, teachers, women, and children in the Franconian countryside on the eve of the Emancipation era. The lecture will report on the edition and translation of the corpus that is currently carried out with the support of the Bavarian government and the Franconian Jewish Museum.

### ***"Dr. Elsass tends to place the coverbs incorrectly": A Sociolinguistic History of the Landesrabbinerschule in Budapest in the 19th Century***

Tamás Biró; University of Jewish Studies

Following Spolsky (2014:i), this paper "shows the value of adding a sociolinguistic perspective to issues commonly ignored in standard histories."

Established in 1877, the Jewish Theological Seminary (Országos Rabbiképző Intézet, a.k.a. Landesrabbinerschule) in Budapest, the flagship institution of neológ Judaism, is usually portrayed as a pioneer of Magyarization. It trained rabbis to become leaders of their modernizing, Hungarian-speaking communities, putting much emphasis on familiarity with the Hungarian language and culture. The Seminary also launched a monthly to promote the Wissenschaft in Hungarian.

This is the traditional narrative, which shall be nuanced by this paper. Many proposals for the establishment of a seminary had been advanced since the early 19th century, and they reflect the complexities and the slow changes in the sociolinguistic conditions of the Jews in Hungary. Data about the professors and students of the first decade also testify to the difficulties of transitioning from German to Hungarian. While Wilhelm Bacher worked hard to establish the discourse on Judaism and Jewish scholarship in Hungarian, and David Kaufmann learnt the language prodigiously quickly, some students did not. The 1889 case of Bernhard Elsass (who would end up as a reform rabbi in Prussia) shall be presented as a negative example.

### ***Jewish Landlords and Agricultural Modernisation in Western Hungary before 1947***

Tünde Csendes; University of Jewish Studies

My presentation will shed light on the role played by Jewish landowners in the agriculture of Western Hungary from the late 19th century until 1947.

This paper will seek answers to the following questions: How did the Mautner, Laendler and Bánki families in the West Hungarian region run their prosperous farms and pass them on to the next generation? To what extent was the abandonment of these families' religious tradition related to the family's place in mainstream society? How far has the increasingly active role of these families in the public sphere intensified the process of secularization across generations?

In order to put the answers into a new theoretical framework and to nuance the general picture of the life of Jewish citizens in Hungary, the available sources will be approached with methods of mental history, micro-history and historical anthropology.

The Jewish agro-entrepreneurial families of Győr were important representatives of the modernization process in Hungary. They saw agriculture as an entrepreneurial enterprise, a complex business including the processing industry. The key to their success was the rationalization of holdings, conscious farming and the adoption of modern techniques.

These families became victims of the worst anti-Jewish actions of all time, their properties were seized, their factories and estates looted, and their huge herds of cattle and everything they owned were taken away. The acceptance by the mainstream community they believed to be real was revealed as imaginary.