
One of the effects of the regime changes in East and Central Europe has been the growing number of historians in North America, Europe, and Israel who focus their research on the Jewish communities in the region. As the plethora of monographs published yearly in English primarily focus on the period of the Holocaust, Howard N. Lupovitch’s book *Jews at the Crossroads*, which describes the Miskolc Jewish community from its beginnings to the era of Emancipation, can be regarded as rather exceptional. An abridged version of the dissertation defended by the author at Columbia University, this monograph is a pioneering account for two main reasons. On the one hand, it is the first in-depth study of a provincial Jewish community in Hungary during the period in question available to an English-speaking audience. On the other hand, it strives to contest the widely held tenet of diametrically opposed reformist and conservative Jewish communities throughout Hungary, and East and Central Europe more generally. Drawing on the case of Miskolc as evidence, Lupovitch convincingly demonstrates that the possibility of reconciling conservative and reformist tendencies within a community was a viable option, and the process of modernization and the reactions it provoked by no means needed to lead to schism.

Using English language and Hungarian secondary literature, as well as contemporary Yiddish, Hebrew, German, and Hungarian sources, Lupovitch narrates the history of the Jews of Miskolc mainly focusing on the internal dynamics of the Jewish community, its connections with other East and Central European communities and the local magnates. By this, he breaks with the tradition of solely examining the reflections of political turning points on Jewish communities.

Placing the Miskolc community within the network of Kehillahs in Hungary, Moravia, and Galicia does not mean that Lupovitch’s monograph disregards local actors in Miskolc. Accordingly, Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrate the growing influence of local magnates—primarily the Grassalkovich family—on the city of Miskolc, and its beneficial consequences to the few thousand local Jews who, acting as the business agents and associates of the magnates, managed to overpower the local Balkan merchants and became the single most influential merchants in Borsod county (of which Miskolc was the administrative center) by the 1790s. Lupovitch convincingly describes how the first rudimentary organizations successfully served as substitutes for the lack of state bureaucracy in organizing and administering the Jewish population, and how the community itself—following the prompt of the nobility—controlled Jewish immigration, for instance, after the 1831 cholera epidemic. The balance struck by the Miskolc Jewry between Judaism and ardent pro-Magyar sentiments is well demonstrated through examples drawn from the Reform Era, 1848–1849, as well as the 1850s and 60s. In Chapter 7, Lupovitch even argues that the pro-emancipationist view of leading Hungarian liberals partially stemmed from their encounter with the pro-Magyar Miskolc Kehillah. The author’s most important statement is that the Miskolc Kehillah maintained a middle-of-the-way attitude between ardent reformism and conservatism, which led to their much protracted affiliation with the Orthodox congregation (taking place as late as 1878), but even afterwards they continued to have no more than “a tepid connection with the larger Orthodox movement” (255).

Probably the biggest contributions of *Jews at the Crossroads* are the meticulously researched chapters and case studies through which Lupovitch manages to reconstruct the making of a Central European Jewish Kehillah. The approach he uses is bottom-up with a special focus on
religious matters. The microhistorical bent of these passages succeeds through examining various personal sources on community leaders, rabbis, and merchant families, at providing a lively portrayal of the Jewish community in the late-18th and 19th century. Lupovitch is most successful when closely examining—among others—the nature of litigations between Jews and magnates, the everyday functioning of Jewish organizations, as well as when analyzing the heated debates behind choosing a new rabbi for the community.

Despite the obvious advantages of such an in-depth presentation of the Miskolc case, Lupovitch enters a less firm ground when he embarks on contextualizing his findings. He pays less attention to the available literature on Hungarian urban and social history, even though relevant comparisons could highlight why the Miskolc case conformed (or rather more likely, why it did not conform) to the general tendency in the region. The only Hungarian example he briefly cites is Nagymarton/Mattersdorf, presently Mattersburg, Austria, in the western borderland of the kingdom, which has only minute relevance to the Miskolc case. In fact, because a large number of Lupovitch’s analogies to Miskolc come from historians researching American, Polish, and Moravian history, he sometimes makes unfounded generalizations. For instance, he applies the less adequate notion of the “frontier” to the case of early 18th century Borsod county, and he goes on to quote an article by Gregory H. Nobles [“Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750–1800,” The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, 46 no. 4 (1989)] about the American frontier to illustrate the characteristics of Borsod as the “Hungarian Frontier.” Nevertheless, Miskolc was not “rebuilt from scratch” during the eighteenth century (28), as it had a thriving guild infrastructure and profited from the wine trade even during the decades of Ottoman occupation, as it is well demonstrated in the secondary literature, just as it is in the basic monograph on the history of Miskolc, such as the one by editors István Dobrossy and Béla Horváth et al., which Lupovitch accurately quotes many times when referring to later periods.

Although Lupovitch is well-versed in Jewish history, his work tends to echo some rather unfounded generalizations of the Hungarian context, for which he does not come up with convincing evidence. Jews at the Crossroads fails to probe beyond the rather static model of noble-Jewish relations as a relationship based on mutual advantages, even though the diversity of the sources he managed to interpret would serve as a fertile ground for a more multidimensional interpretation. Such an investigation would also have to answer uncomfortable questions that at least partly disturb this vision of a harmonious relationship—why for instance the noble led Hungarian Reform movement did not include Jewish emancipation in its agenda until 1849, despite the pro-Jewish bent of the Reform Diets. Lupovitch cannot evade making some unfounded generalizations when addressing the issue of emancipation either. Based on the case of Miskolc he argues that emancipation was a fait accompli on the local level by the time these laws were passed in 1849 and once again in 1867. To prove this, he cites county legislation from 1836 and Law 29 of the 1840 diet, as well as another county law from 1872, all favorable to Jews, demonstrating that the emancipation laws only “acknowledged existing developments” (190), even though these laws did not actually address the question of emancipation—besides the fact that the 1872 law came five years after the major Emancipation Edict.

Due to the complexity of language use among 19th-century Hungarian nobility, Lupovitch cannot avoid contradicting himself when he argues that Baron Joseph Eötvös—who is canonized as one of the greatest Hungarian authors of the 19th century—mastered Hungarian “with a limited success,” while on the following page he refers to a voluminous novel written in Hungarian by the very same Baron Joseph Eötvös (193–4). Since on the whole Lupovitch