

Abstract template for the conference on “Grey Areas: Two Centuries of Wissenschaft des Judentums”

Heidelberg, 16-19 June 2019

Wissenschaft Within and Outside the Rabbinical Seminary: Modern Jewish Scholars in Hungary

Speaker: Carsten Wilke

Institute, Town, Country: Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

A peculiar place in the cultural geography of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* belongs to the pre-WWI Hungarian monarchy and its small successor state. Permanent state support for the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary, founded in 1877, turned this scholarly movement into the official cultural doctrine of Hungarian Jewry; and seminary scholars from David Kaufmann to Sándor Scheiber produced a multi-lingual output that is second in quantity and quality only to its German Jewish model. Hungarian *Wissenschaft* could defend its continuity even under the two dictatorships of the twentieth century. From the early nineteenth century, however, the anti-modernist camp of Hungarian Jewry had succeeded a parallel revival of yeshiva learning. The competition between traditional and modern Jewish scholarship did not only limit the latter's impact to less than half of the Hungarian Jewish communities, it also set limits to religious innovation. While the Rabbinical Seminary navigated between the hostile milieus of ultra-orthodox Talmud Torah and academic Orientalism, it also coexisted with various independent centres of scholarly production that contributed to the “Science of Judaism” and adjacent fields in sometimes more daring ways: émigré circles in Europe and America, provincial authorities such as the rabbis in Szeged, and a group of community employees in the capital, Samuel Kohn, Meyer Kayserling, and Ignác Goldziher, who respectively became the pioneers of Samaritan, Sephardic, and Islamic Studies. The present lecture will therefore not reduce the horizon of the *zsidóság tudománya* to the walls of the Seminary, but insist on its larger context, its important peripheries, and its internal diversity.