

THE VENETIANER BROTHERS

CHIEF RABBI, REFORMED CHURCH PASTOR, AND CATHOLIC PRIEST

The history of a Hungarian Jewish family with Moravian roots in the second half of the 19th century²

András Kövér



Sándor
(Alexander)



Adolf
(Adolph)



Lajos
(Ludwig)

* Translated by Eszter Szenczi and Judy Young Drache (Judit Balázs).

¹ György Vadász (1924-1997) was Katalin Venetianer's son and Sándor Venetianer's grandson. He was a graphic artist, typographer, and numismatist. In the last twenty years of his life he immersed himself in researching the family history of the Venetianers, especially that of Sándor Venetianer. The impetus for his research came from the numerous family letters left behind by his mother. He retyped, classified, elucidated and added historical background. He was successful in obtaining additional information about the Venetianers through correspondence from Vienna, Stuttgart, and Novi Sad. He focused especially on the period between 1850 and 1945. His work fills several thick folders (Vadász 1980-1997). I met György Vadász (who is my mother's cousin) for the first time by chance in 1990. By then, I had already been researching the Venetianer family on and off for over ten years. We shared information and had regular long conversations about problems as they arose. As a result of our differing interests, we complemented each other nicely.

² Presented as a lecture in German (with PPT) at the University of Olmütz (Olomouc, Czech Republic) on 14th November 2006. This version of the essay can be found in a slightly shortened version (without Sándor Venetianer's Latin autobiography) in Kövér 2012. Dr. Kálmán Tóth, for many decades Chair of Old Testament at the Ráday Theological Academy, was the first to examine the life and work of Sándor Venetianer in a systematic fashion (Tóth 1960). He was asked to do this in 1960 by Tamás Esze who was then the director of the Ráday Collection. Professor Tóth took his job very seriously and did a lot of thorough work but in the end had to leave it unfinished because the theological journal, in which his study was going to appear, ceased publication. In 1990 he made a gift of his valuable manuscript to me.

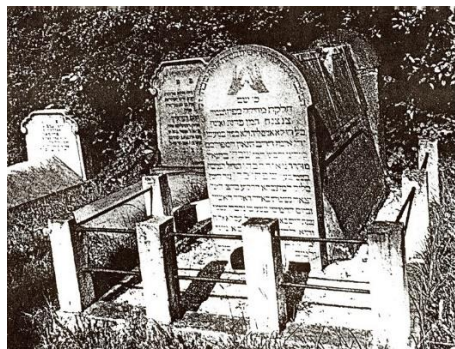
The Three Venetianer Brothers

It was in the early stages of my research that I made my first ever visit to the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary to inquire about Lajos Venetianer's work. It so happened that Chief Rabbi Professor József Schweitzer was in the reading room and heard what I was looking for. He immediately came to my assistance and very kindly brought me Lajos Venetianer's bibliography. From then on, he regularly called me Venetianer.

In this essay, I explore the history of a Jewish family living in Hungary in the 19th century, focusing primarily on one member of the family, Sándor Venetianer, who was born Jewish but converted to Christianity at the age of twenty.

INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGINS OF THE VENETIANER FAMILY

For the first phase of my research (prehistory of the family) I used the following sources: birth and marriage certificates, epitaphs and Jewish censuses, as well as an important but paradoxically very unreliable book³ about Hungarian Jewish families.



Holešov: the Jewish Cemetery

After Leopold I had expelled the Jews from Vienna and Lower Austria around 1670, the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia grew in size. Prague had become the home of the biggest Ashkenazi⁴ Jewish community in Europe by the end of the 17th century.

Emperor Charles VI's decree in 1726 resulted in a new migration – but in a different direction this time – in the countries of the “Czech Crown” (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia).⁵ In every Jewish family only one son, the oldest, was allowed to get married. Consequently, a lot of young Jewish men left Bohemia and Moravia for Hungary (especially northern Hungary) in order to start a family.

This is how Szender Venezia, the “patriarch” of the Venetianer family arrived in Liptósztentmiklós (now Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia) from Moravia, perhaps from Holešov (Holleschau).⁶ Certainly a lot of young Jews had left Holešov for Liptósztentmiklós from 1720 on.⁷ Part of the biographical

³ Kempelen 1937-39.

⁴ Jews from Germany and northeastern France as opposed to Sephardi Jews (of Spanish origin).

⁵ Cf. Venetianer L 1986, p. 70 (Emperor Charles VI ruled as King Charles III in Hungary) and McCagg 1992, p. 18 (in this book the date is mistakenly 1736).

⁶ Holešov is just a hypothesis – without any proof. Szender is the Yiddish form of Alexander (i.e. Sándor) and Venezia is the Italian name of Venice. It's possible that the family was originally from Venice.

⁷ The oldest still existing tombstone in the Holešov Jewish cemetery is from 1647. The illustration shows the tombstone – with the traditional Kohen hand position – of the famous Rabbi Shabbatai HaKohen (Shabbatai b. Meir ha-Kohen) also called Shakh for short) who died in 1662. He wrote one of the most important commentaries: *Sifte*

data about the Venetianers comes from the book mentioned above about Jewish families from Hungary. According to this book, Szender Venezia is the same person as a certain Itzik Lóbb Chajit.⁸ Based on other facts and documents (birth and marriage certificates) though, we can say that this is probably incorrect and Itzik Lóbb Chajit was very probably Szender Venezia's son⁹. In any case, this book contains a lot of incorrect information about the Venetianer family.

"Szender Venezia died in Liptószentmiklós in 1830. His tombstone still exists in the Jewish cemetery" – we read in the book published in 1937.¹⁰ It would be very good to see this tomb today, but the cemetery has been closed down and redeveloped. Before redevelopment, the existing tombs were photographed, and the photos are kept in the Jewish community office of Bratislava. Tom Venetianer had tried to see the photo of Szender Venezia's tomb in Bratislava but had no success. It seems this photo does not exist. The tombstone itself may have sunk too deep into the soil or had its inscription towards the soil; perhaps it became too dirty, or perhaps the weather had damaged it so much that the inscription became illegible. Once again, we see how hard it is to get reliable information on the basis of tombstone inscriptions from that time period, i.e. from the first half of the 19th century.¹¹

Another source of information is provided by the so-called Jewish censuses.¹² In the 18th century Jews were enumerated several times in Hungary either for the purpose of a population census or to help the government determine more exactly the amount of tolerance tax that Jews had to pay.¹³ But the data gathered from these censuses are also problematic and should only be used with caution. Since most Jews did not have a family name back then, they used names considered to be typically Jewish such as Itzhak ben Abraham ('Isaac, Abraham's son'). As a result, it is almost impossible to trace family relationships. It was only at the end of the 18th century that Emperor Joseph II forced Jews to take German family names.

In any case, Liptószentmiklós became the family home of the Venetianer family in Hungary. In the 19th century this town was an important centre¹⁴ of traditional Judaism.

Kohen for the *Shulchan Arukh* (more precisely for two of its sections *Choshen Mishpat* and *Yoreh De'ah* (Heřman no date, illustration 79).

⁸ See Kempelen 1937, p. 29–30. Chajit means tailor in Hebrew and Itzik is the nickname for Itzhak = Isaac.

⁹ At least this is what my relative Tom (Tomáš) Venetianer believes. He is my mother's fourth cousin. He was born in Košice (Kassa) and has been living in São Paulo, Brazil since the age of eight. He has done (and continues to do) a lot of research on the history of the extended Venetianer family. I got to know him – again by chance – in 1998. We kept up an intensive correspondence about the Venetianers, especially in the first few years.

¹⁰ Kempelen 1937, p. 29.

¹¹ As we have just seen, all the data about Szender Venezia's tombstone came from Tom Venetianer.

¹² 'Conscriptio': census. Tom Venetianer drew my attention to this too and I followed his recommendations in undertaking archival research as well. There are Jewish censuses at both the national and county levels, often with different results as the interest of the counties was to hide the real numbers so they would be the only ones taxing the Jews.

¹³ In 1746, Maria Theresa introduced the tolerance tax based on headcount and income as opposed to the earlier capitation tax (based on headcount only).

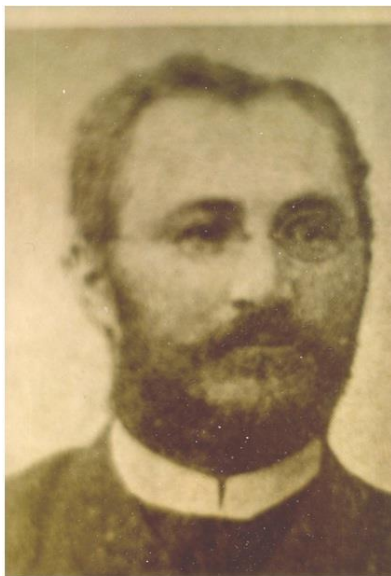
¹⁴ The famous scholar Vilmos Bacher was born there too, though later he worked in Budapest.

The first three generations of the Venetianer family (Szender, Izsák, Ábrahám) lived in Liptószentmiklós, the last two as poor tailors. One member of the fourth generation (Albert) was born there too, but he served as a rabbi in Fadd, Tolna County. His first children were born there: Sándor, the eldest in 1853, and his second son, Adolf, six years later. When Sándor turned nine, the family moved to Kecskemét. There Albert Venetianer worked as assistant rabbi i.e. as *dayan*¹⁵. His third son, Lajos, who later became chief rabbi, was born there in 1867. Albert had altogether seven children: three sons and four daughters.



Kecskemét

SÁNDOR VENETIANER (1853–1902), REFORMED CHURCH PASTOR



The young Sándor Venetianer

*Sándor Venetianer's early life, reasons for his conversion*¹⁶

Following tradition, the rabbi father destined his oldest son, Sándor to become a rabbi too. Naturally enough, the question arises: what happened to Sándor, and why did he leave the religion of his ancestors? The most authentic answer to this question comes from Sándor Venetianer's short Latin autobiography.¹⁷ This text, written when he was twenty-three is the most important source of information about the young Venetianer's life. It reveals that the reasons for his conversion were mainly psychological in nature, and that his father Albert is chiefly responsible for it. Let us examine the most important parts of the autobiography.¹⁸

Sándor had bad memories about what was considered most important in the Talmud school:

¹⁵ Dayan: rabbinic judge, member of the rabbinic court.

¹⁶ I mainly rely on his Latin autobiography written when he was twenty-three.

¹⁷ I received the original manuscript (Venetianer 1876 / CV) from Dr. András Vincze in Munich in 1989. He is the son of Frigyes Venetianer [Vincze], my mother's cousin. Sándor Venetianer's sons Hungarianized their last names to Vincze. Sándor himself kept the name Venetianer till the end of his life, although the Jewish Encyclopedia (*Zsidó Lexikon*, 1929, p. 945) states the opposite. The autobiography with its translation can be found in the Appendix. See also the first footnote of the translation.

¹⁸ By this time the tradition (among the Neolog Jews in Hungary) was that young Jews studied both in a Talmud school (a kind of *yeshiva*) and a Christian high school in order to gain secular knowledge as well. This is how Sándor Venetianer attended first the Piarist, then the Reformed Church high school in Kecskemét.

It was not Moses, nor the prophets, nor even prayers that would propitiate God. Sitting at the feet of the rabbis day and night was the only way to salvation. (CV, 2).¹⁹

A remarkable incident happened at the market when Sándor Venetianer was 13 or 14 years old.

It so happened that there was a market day in our town which my father attended with my tutor, and I was allowed to accompany them. My father bought a little Hebrew book²⁰ which he discussed with my tutor on the way home flipping through its pages. That is when I heard the word *Messiah* again. When I started asking questions, my father, stopping in the middle of the word,²¹ said firmly that it was none of my business and immediately hid the book.

This, however, aroused my curiosity. (...) Not much later a Bible seller came to our town. As I was learning French then, I bought a French Bible to have something that I could read easily.

What surprised me rightaway were the names “Old and New Testament”, especially The New Testament which I did not even know by name. I was astonished that I had never heard of it or read it before, especially as I thought it was a Jewish book. Naïvely, I took it to the Talmud school to ask my teacher about it. Taking the book away from me, he strictly forbade me from reading anything like that ever again.

Forbidden things are tempting.²² (...) Soon I got hold of another copy and started reading it enthusiastically. (CV, 2–3)

Sándor had another confrontation with his father.

It was winter and on a Saturday as I was running to school carrying all the books I needed, my father caught sight of me and asked: “Don’t you know that you can’t carry anything on Saturdays?” “I do know”, I responded, “but without books I can’t go to school and anyway I wouldn’t dare to.” Then he said: “At least hide your books under your jacket so no one can see them.”

I obeyed but from that moment on I turned my back on Talmudic as well as human dogma.²³ (CV, 3)

¹⁹ Where I quote from Sándor Venetianer’s Latin autobiography, I add CV (Curriculum vitae) after the citation.

²⁰ Reformed Pastor József Poór wrote the following about Sándor Venetianer in his obituary (Poór 1902, 59): “Both his father and his Jewish tutor bought a New Testament in Hebrew at the market.”

²¹ This is what the original Latin version says. If Sándor Venetianer had meant to use the more logical “stopped me” he made a grammatical error.

²² Literally: ‘We strive for what is forbidden.’

²³ A similar incident (not a literal quotation from the Talmud: *bPesachim* 66a) “On Saturdays, it is allowed to kill paschal lambs. A man asked the elder Hillel what to do if someone forgets to prepare the knife on Saturday evening. [It is forbidden to carry anything with us on Saturdays.] Hillel: Leave it to Israel. Even if they are not prophets, they are at least sons of prophets.” In other words: Let’s wait until tomorrow and see what the people will do, and we will do accordingly. “The next day the people hid the knife in the wool of the sacrificial lamb.” But there is a fundamental difference between the two incidents: Sándor Venetianer had to bring his book himself and in secret, whereas in the second case, it was the lamb not the people that carried the knife.

– There is another passage from the Talmud that fits here (Venetianer L 1913, 32 and Venetianer L 2003, 64): “Anytime the Sages made a prohibition because of ‘marit ayin’ (for the sake of appearance) it applies even in the most private of settings.” (*bShabbat* 146b – NB. Lajos Venetianer cites page 34b by mistake). (The purpose of such

Another incident with his father:²⁴

(Sándor Venetianer) relates that, as a seven-year-old child, he read and studied the Talmud with his father. He would get up early in the morning and memorize it. "It was a turning point in my life when at the age of fifteen my father was testing me on a particularly perplexing passage from the Talmud through serious cross – examination (he wanted me to dissect and analyze it into the finest details). I found this ritual splitting of hairs so offensive that I jumped up from the Talmud and declared that I would not study it anymore. We were in absolut disagreement."

What were the consequences of 15-year-old Sándor Venetianer's behaviour?

For a long time I felt confused and lived with a split conscience. I rejected my Jewish tutors' teachings, but I did not subordinate myself to the Word of God as I had not yet come to understand Scripture. (...) I had to leave my father's house because he realized that I had strayed from the teaching of the Talmud.²⁵ (CV, 3)

So Sándor, the oldest son, who was seventeen then, was disinherited by his father. Jews regard the disinherited as dead and the family mourns him.²⁶

Once he was banished, he moved from Kecskemét to Pest. There he met a missionary named Schönberger who had worked first for the Scottish then for the English mission. These missions, together with the German mission, did a lot of work among the Jews: this was the so-called Jewish mission. Most of those who worked at this mission were of Jewish origin who had converted to Christianity. After their conversion, they started to proselytize among Jews to win them for Jesus. Meeting Schönberger was one of the most important events in the then seventeen-year-old Sándor Venetianer's life. This is how he writes about it in his autobiography:

prohibitions is to make sure that an outsider does not mistakenly think that somebody is doing something which is forbidden.) Therefore, the Talmud does not allow even in the case of the lighter prohibitions, even in the most secret location, the carrying out of an action prohibited in public because of the principle of 'marit ayin'. From this it follows that the more serious prohibitions, such as those of the Shabbat, are completely forbidden in a secret or hidden location. So while Albert Venetianer, Sándor's father, fully intended to advocate for and defend the Talmud, his words and actions contradicted the Talmudic principles and laws. It is not surprising therefore, that his son suffered a mental crisis.

²⁴ Poór 1902, p. 59.

²⁵ An opposing opinion from the Talmud: "*Rabbi Jishmael's school taught the following: The Torah orders indulgence with those who have left the faith. Should the fallible, who left Judaism and dedicated himself to idolatry, be further punished with stones? No, as it is declared (cf. Lev 25, 48): even if he gives up Judaism and becomes a priest of idols, geula, [the chance of] redemption remains open to him.*" (cf. *bKiddushin* 20b)

²⁶ In his memento, Lajos Póth, Reformed Chaplain from Subotica writes the following about Sándor Venetianer (Póth 1989, p. 69): "*Juliánna Ölschléger told me that the Venetianer girls regularly visited her family to sew in Kecskemét, and one day they showed up in black. They mourned their brother Sándor, as he left his ancestors' religion, and thus he became dead to them.*"

Schönberger had me read with him the prophets, together with the Gospels, and the writings of the apostles. I suddenly lived in a new world and a new heaven. The Old Testament became something completely new for me. (CV, 3)

Eventually, he ran out of money, and had to leave Pest. He taught in a Jewish school in Körösladány and kept in touch with Schönberger through correspondence. Somehow one of Schönberger's letters got into the hands of some of his supervisors at the school and was read by them. To save his life, Sándor Venetianer had to flee immediately.

He returned to his family home. His father received him cordially, just like the prodigal son returning home. But he could stay only for a few days because his father believed that he was still straying from the right path so he banished him again, this time for good. Without money however, he could not even start out on his way. The principal of the Reformed high school helped him find a job as a private tutor in a Reformed family. This allowed him to take the baccalaureate.

Academic years

After the baccalaureate he moved to Vienna to study philosophy, oriental languages, and even natural sciences. But he did not find any joy in the worldly sciences (except for languages). His heart found solace only in the Scriptures. Two years after his baccalaureate, he was able to meet Schönberger again as the latter was working in Prague then. Sándor Venetianer struggled with his doubts for months and only after that did he ask to be baptized. He converted to the Lutheran faith in Prague in the German Lutheran Church (and only later accepted the Reformed faith in Vienna) and made the final decision to study the "sacred sciences" (Theology).

Eduard Böhl, Professor of Theology at the Protestant Theological Academy of Vienna had the greatest impact on Sándor Venetianer. He writes about him with great admiration in his autobiography:

By the Grace of God, this is the man to whom I owe most. It was he who made me hunger and thirst for the truth; and he showed me the wonders of the Word of God and all of God's wisdom. (CV, 4)

Böhl was partly German and partly Dutch (Flemish). His mother was Catholic and his father Lutheran; he himself converted to the Reformed Church only as an adult.

In the meantime, Sándor Venetianer studied the Bible and Oriental languages in Basel for two semesters. But he wanted to return to Vienna as quickly as he could.

After the end of the academic year I returned from Basel burning with desire to sit at Böhl's feet again. I thank God, now and forever, for giving me the opportunity to study with this man again for a year and a half. (CV, 4)

He completed his last semester in Vienna in 1877. Then he decided to take his chaplaincy exams to be ordained a minister in Debrecen, Hungary. He intended to serve as a pastor in Hungary. Debrecen is the "Calvinist Rome," the most important centre of the Hungarian Reformed

Church²⁷. Böhl asked his good friend, Ferenc Balogh, well-known Professor of Theology in Debrecen to help his student, Sándor Venetianer. Venetianer composed his *Curriculum vitae* to introduce himself to Professor Balogh. He was honest, he did not want to hide his Jewish background. He wrote his autobiography in Latin because people in academic circles knew it well and perhaps also because he did not want it read by other than the intended recipient. Later Professor Balogh became a fatherly friend to Sándor Venetianer. They corresponded for many years. Professor Balogh corresponded with almost all significant theologians around the world. The letters he received are carefully preserved in the main library of the Reformed College of Debrecen [Debreceni Református Kollégium]. The letters, which are important sources for research, take up several linear meters. This is how thirty-seven of Sándor Venetianer's letters survived, as well as other letters from Hungarian and foreign theologians who played an important role in Sándor Venetianer's life (eg. Eduard Böhl's letters). From these letters we can gain crucial information about Sándor Venetianer's life.

Assistant Pastor and Pastor

Sándor Venetianer's life as a Pastor can be divided into the following phases: first he worked in Hungary, then abroad for several years, and finally he served his Church in Hungary again.

(A) Hungary

Túrkeve: 1877 (Hungarian language Congregation)

Nagyvárad (Nagyváradolaszi district; today Oradea / Romania): 1877–78 (Hungarian)

Pancsova (in German: Pantschowa, Bánát / Southern-Hungary; today Pančevo / Serbia): 1878–80 (German-Hungarian)

Új-Sóvé (in German Neu-Sóvé, Bácska / Southern-Hungary; now Ravno Selo / Vojvodina [Vajdaság] / Serbia): 1880–84 (German)

(B) Abroad

Trieste (Austria; now Italy): 1884–87 (German–Italian and English–French–Dutch)

Rohrbach (near Odessa / Russia; now Novosvitlivka / Ukraine²⁸): 1887–89 (German)

(C) Hungary

Új-Sóvé: 1889–1902 (German)

²⁷ The Hungarian Reformed Church used to be the mother church of the Moravian Reformed congregations at the end of the 18th century. Sándor Venetianer even wrote an article about this: see Venetianer 1878.

²⁸ One can find a modern map of Rohrbach and vicinity at <http://www.rollintl.com/roll/uberesanmap.gif>. Rohrbach's Ukrainian name today is Novosvitlivka (its former Russian name was Novosvetlovka). A contemporary map of Odessa and surroundings can be found in the appendix of this book: Schnurr 1978. The best contemporary map of Rohrbach's close vicinity may be the one in the following book: Schnurr 1967/1968, p. 10.

(A) Hungary

In the first two places, which were Hungarian language congregations, he worked as assistant pastor. He did not feel comfortable and faced problems owing to his origin too. We learn this from his letters to Professor Balogh.

A year later in 1878 he was ordained as pastor. Right away, he was given a difficult task: to establish the Reformed Church in Pancsova. This was a German-Hungarian speaking congregation²⁹.

His next station was Új-Sóvé, another German speaking congregation. At that time there were a lot of German congregations in Hungary.



Új-Sóvé

Why, when, and from where had these Germans come to Hungary in such large numbers? At the end of the 17th century the Habsburg Armies chased the Turks out of Hungary. As a result of the Turkish occupation, the centre of the country lay in ruins and the size of the population had declined considerably. At the same time, overpopulation, unemployment, and high taxes created a really bad economic situation in the German lands, especially in Württemberg, Baden, and

²⁹ The Reformed Church of Pancsova has an interesting pre-history. When Mór Jókai, the famous Hungarian writer, travelled to the lower Danube to see the Island of Ada Kaleh and to collect information for his novel-to-be, *The Man with the Golden Touch* [Az arany ember], he visited Pancsova on the way. (Jókai's model for his non-existent "No man's Island" was the Island of Ada Kaleh.) As a fervent adherent of the Reformed Church, he was stunned to find that although there were Calvinists in Pancsova, there was no Reformed Church. When he returned to Pest, he drew the attention of his co-religionists to this scandalous situation. (See Póth 1989, p. 68.) As a result, the Reformed Diocese of Dunamellék (see Vajs 2015, 320) asked a newly minted theologian, Ferenc Márk, to undertake the necessary work. However, he felt unable to take on the assignment and recommended Sándor Venetianer instead. (Márk had already become a friend of Venetianer's in Basel.) See Márk 1902, p. 167.

Alsace. Therefore many Germans migrated to Hungary where they could acquire land under very favourable conditions.

(B) Abroad

a) Trieste

In 1884 Sándor Venetianer got the opportunity to serve as pastor in Trieste (Austria). The congregation there was German-Italian speaking. As Trieste was a significant commercial centre, French, English, and Dutch merchants also visited the Reformed Church to hear Sándor Venetianer's sermons. His exceptional linguistic skills enabled him to preach in each of the five languages mentioned above during his three-year stay in Trieste.

b) His invitation to Rohrbach; his licentiate and his application for the theology chairs in Debrecen

In 1887 he received an invitation to Rohrbach. The village is situated close to Odessa, about 80–100 km away (in Russia / Ukraine). In the same year, he received his so-called licentiate qualification from the Protestant Theological Academy of Vienna. Today this is the equivalent of the Doctor of Theology degree. The title of his thesis was: *Die Auslegung des Buches Jesaja und andere Schriften* ('An Analysis of the Book of Isaiah and Other Writings'³⁰). Unfortunately, his commentary on Isaiah cannot be found in Vienna, only the 'Other Writings' survived. He also published another 'commentary' on Isaiah in Hungarian in a theological journal in Hungary: the first ten chapters in 1884, and the following seven chapters five years later in 1889³¹. How close are the German and Hungarian versions? Unfortunately, we do not know the answer. Dr. Kálmán Tóth, Professor of Old Testament noted that the second part of the Hungarian commentary is substantially different from the first. In the second part the fate of Israel is in the centre of Venetianer's thoughts. This difference can be attributed to his two-year stay in Russia in between the two.³²

He was already in Rohrbach when, having earned his licentiate qualification, he decided to apply to one of the chairs at the Theological Academy of Debrecen. The first time (1887) he applied for the Old Testament Chair, he withdrew his application. The next year, when he applied to the Department of New Testament, he came second, so he stayed in Rohrbach³³.

c) The Rohrbach-centered Stundism and Sándor Venetianer

What do we know about Rohrbach? It was a German settlement in Russia but had a significant role compared to other settlements. This is because it was the place where *Stundism* had started

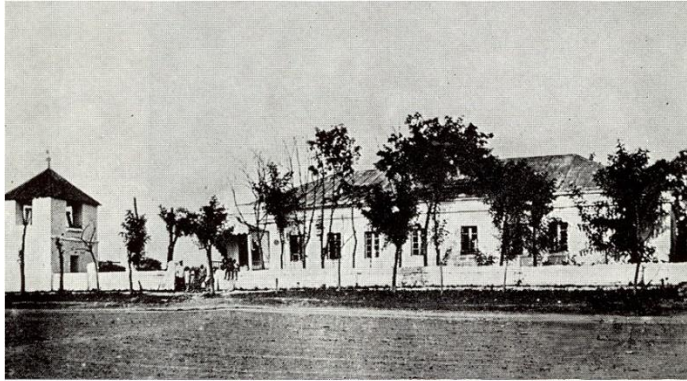
³⁰ It is interesting to note that Sándor Venetianer's Hebrew name is Yeshaya (Isaiah), based on the copy of the birth certificate from Fadd.

³¹ Venetianer 1884/89.

³² Tóth 1960.

³³ József Erdős got the position of the Chair of New Testament. He had followed Sándor Venetianer as pastor in Új-Sóvé for a few years. He also wrote a book on the history of the Reformed Church in Új-Sóvé and in general, maintained good relations with Sándor Venetianer.

out on its successful path in Russia a few decades earlier (in the first part of the 19th century). First, a few words about *Stundism*.



Rohrbach, the Reformed chapel



Rohrbach, the Lutheran church

In the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th a lot of German settlers arrived in Russia. First it was Catherine II who invited them and gave them permission to settle along the middle section of the Volga (they were the so-called Volga Germans). The settlers enjoyed a lot of benefits and privileges.

After the war against the Turks (1787–89) Russia extended its borders to the Black Sea. At that time this area was sparsely populated (as we have seen, Hungary was in a similar situation a hundred years earlier). Just like Catherine II, Alexander I also invited a lot of German settlers in order to populate the area around the Black Sea. These settlers mainly arrived from Württemberg, Pfalz, Baden, and Alsace³⁴.

Apart from the Catholic and Protestant (Lutheran and Reformed) German communities, a number of so-called ‘separatist’ communities came to life too. Among them were the *Stundists*³⁵. *Stundism* is a remarkable Protestant pietist movement whose origins go back to Württemberg. At that time many Germans were dissatisfied with the Church and the clergy, and the genuine believers wanted to cut their ties with the clerical hierarchy. That is why they regularly came together for so-called “hours” (*Stunden*) – hence the name of the movement. These “hours” were meant for spiritual fellowship and improvement and were led by “brothers” (*Brüder*). A series of turbulent events in European political history, such as the fall of Napoleon and the Russian “White Tsar’s” triumphant march from the East, coupled with crop failures and famine, led to the emergence of apocalyptic ideas. People were awaiting the advent of a millennial reign (“*Tausendjähriges Reich*”) which was supposed to unfold from Mount Ararat. The emigrés were driven by the goal of finding a safe haven on Mount Ararat from the approaching Apocalypse.

³⁴ An interesting fact: at the beginning of the 20th century, the choirmaster of the Saint Paul Lutheran Church in Odessa was none other than the father of Sviatoslav Richter, the world-famous pianist (see the photo of the choir and its choirmaster in Schnurr 1978, p. 32). Thus, Richter was also a descendent of a German settler family.

³⁵ For information on Russian *Stundism*, see Roemmich 1978.

However, the journey was very hard and many people died along the way. Others did not have the energy to continue on from Odessa, and so they settled in its vicinity.

Excursus

This is a short detour to explain and clarify the religious background to this situation. What was the effect of German *Stundism* (with Rohrbach as a centre) on Orthodox Ukrainians in Russia?³⁶

The situation of the Ukrainian Church in the second half of the 16th century developed as follows: in the western areas (eg. in Galicia) the Greek Catholic Church which belonged to Rome was created, in the eastern areas the Orthodox Church continued to dominate. There were serious spiritual conflicts between the two Churches. Both of them turned to the West for ammunition³⁷. While the Greek Catholic priests – not surprisingly – studied at western Catholic universities, the Ukrainian Orthodox priests did the same at Protestant (Lutheran and Reformed) universities, primarily in German lands, for example at Königsberg. Thus, Protestant theology had a significant impact on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's theology as well as on its followers.

As a result, German *Stundism* was able gradually to gain more and more Ukrainian believers. Thanks to the efforts of an excellent and famous missionary, Johannes Bonekemper, who worked for the mission in Basel, Rohrbach became the center of *Stundism* in southern Russia in the first half of the 19th century. Of course, conversion, and missionary work among the Orthodox population in Russia were strictly forbidden by the authorities. Thus, only indirect missionary work could be carried on. Chaplain Bonekemper allowed Ukrainian seasonal workers to attend the church services and the "hours" devoted to spiritual improvement in Rohrbach. As a result, *Stundism* spread quickly among the Ukrainian Orthodox population. By 1923 about two million people joined the Evangelical Christians (the new name of the *Stundists*).³⁸

So back to Sándor Venetianer now. As pastor he had to take care not only of Rohrbach but its extensive surroundings as well. A lot of Jews lived in that area so he gained the opportunity of undertaking missionary work among Jews too. In fact, he always considered the Jewish mission

³⁶ Roemmich 1978, p. 64-85.

³⁷ One cannot observe the same opening to the West on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church.

³⁸ Globally, in the 19th century, the largest number of sects existed in Russia, and in the 20th century in Africa. I would like to mention another interesting sect in Russia whose impact was the opposite of what the missionary work among Jews had achieved. Its followers were called *Subbotniks*; originally, these were members of the Russian or Ukrainian Orthodox Church who started to celebrate Saturday instead of Sunday as part of their return to the traditions of the Old Testament. That is why they came to be called *Subbotnik* (in Hungarian "szombatos"). (Subbota in Russian means Shabbat in Hebrew, i.e. Saturday). Many of the *Subbotniks* converted to Judaism later on. "Real" Jews did not accept them at first, but eventually they regarded them as real converts. There was a similar movement in Transylvania in the 16-17th centuries. In the later period Simon Péchi led the movement whose followers were the „székely szombatosok" i.e. Transylvanian-Sekler Sabattarians.

his most important duty³⁹. For weeks on end he would travel around the region by cart accompanied by Christians as well as Jews.

d) Kischineff, the Mecca of missionaries; the relationship between Joseph Rabinowich⁴⁰ and Sándor Venetianer.

He was still in Rohrbach when he published an article on his experiences in Russia, especially in Kischineff⁴¹.

Kischineff was the capital of Bessarabia, then part of Russia (today it is part of independent Moldavia, formerly a member state of the Soviet Union), and situated only about 200 km from Rohrbach (and Odessa). Numerous Jews lived in Kischineff and in the entire area of Bessarabia. In those years, Kischineff became the Mecca of those European missionaries who were proselytizing among Jews. Why did this city become so interesting for them?

A remarkable Jew by the name of Joseph Rabinowich (1837–1899) lived there. We learn the most salient events of his life from his autobiography⁴². To sum it up: as a young man he received a Hasidic education, but later his outlook on life underwent a fundamental change, as can be seen in his autobiography:

...the wave of scientific progress [enlightenment] emanating from Central Europe reached Bessarabia too. (...) The Russian Tsar gave the following *ukase* [order]: all children of Russian Hebrews have to learn to speak and write in Russian, and all Jewish teachers have to teach the Scripture according to Moses Mendelssohn's views and in his German translation⁴³.

This is significant as it means that the *Haskalah*, or Jewish enlightenment, found its way to Russian Jews through a tsarist *ukase*⁴⁴. Moses Mendelssohn was the architect and most famous representative of Jewish Enlightenment and of the spirit of modernity in Berlin in the second half of the 18th century. He and his collaborators were the first Jews to translate the Hebrew Bible into literary German (not into Yiddish) using Hebrew characters instead of gothic letters. Furthermore, Mendelssohn and his co-workers added a Hebrew commentary named *Biur* to their Bible translation.

These new ideas had such an impact on Rabinowich that he broke with Hasidism. Once – almost as an omen – someone gave Rabinowich a copy of the New Testament in Hebrew. After a number of pogroms in Russia (Warsaw, Kiev, Elizabethgrad) Rabinowich left for Palestine in

³⁹ In the last years of his life, back in Hungary, he told his friend Robert Feinsilber several times that the only thing that bound him to his position as pastor was his responsibility to his big family (wife and seven children), otherwise he would have devoted his life to preaching the Gospel among the Jews (Feinsilber 1902, p. 86).

⁴⁰ The transcription varies: In German it is Rabinowitsch; in English it can be also Rabinowitz.

⁴¹ See Venetianer 1888.

⁴² Delitzsch 1887.

⁴³ Delitzsch 1887, p. 8–9.

⁴⁴ This happened the same way in other places too. The goals of enlightened Absolutism were partly same as those of the *Haskalah*.

1881, to explore the possibility of the settlement of Jews there. He found the situation there disappointing but when he visited the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, an extraordinary transformation took place in his life. He became a follower of Christ and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour. After this he returned to Kischineff, and as a result of his missionary work, more and more Jews considered Christ their Redeemer.

What was Rabinowich's goal? He believed in Christ, but did not want to lose his national identity as a Jew. Therefore, he did not want to convert to Christianity in Kischineff or anywhere else in Russia. This is because Russian law stated that if Jews converted to Christianity, they would lose their Jewish national identity. So Rabinowich came up with a fairly complicated process. He had a good relationship with Franz Delitzsch, the well-known scholar and missionary living in Leipzig. They agreed that he would get christened in Berlin. In 1885 a Methodist minister and professor from Andover (Massachusetts, USA), C.M. Mead christened Rabinowich in a Czech Lutheran church in Berlin. Rabinowich himself wrote the articles of faith in Hebrew, in perfect accordance with the Apostles' Creed. Therefore, after Rabinowich's christening he became a member of Christ's universal Church without losing his Jewish identity.⁴⁵

In 1885/86 Rabinowich established a special Jewish community in Kischineff named *die Gemeinde der Israeliten des Neuen Bundes* ("The Community of Israelites of the New Testament"). The Russian authorities gave him the permission to establish a Judeo-Christian community, but prohibited the baptism of his followers. This prohibition caused Rabinowich a serious problem. The members of his community believed in Christ but considered themselves of Jewish nationality and kept some Jewish religious traditions. For instance, they held their services on Saturday and in their synagogue primarily so they could attract more believers in Christ from among Jews. The language of Rabinowich's sermons was Yiddish⁴⁶ which was widely used by Jews in the whole country. On Sundays, however, Rabinowich's followers eagerly participated in the Lutheran services as well which were held by the missionary Faltin. Later on baptism triggered a conflict between the Lutheran pastor and Rabinowich. Pastor Faltin did not want to agree to baptize Rabinowich's followers, if they were going to belong to Rabinowich's community instead of the Lutheran Church.

And it was at this time that Sándor Venetianer and Schönberger visited Rabinowich in Kischineff. This visit had a huge impact on Sándor Venetianer, who wrote the above-named report about it with the following title: *In Kischinew. Bei Rabinówitsch* ('In Kischineff with Rabinowich'). At the

⁴⁵ Kjaer-Hansen 1992, p. 190. (It was Tom Venetianer who drew my attention to this important and interesting article.)

⁴⁶ Yiddish is a German dialect from the Early Middle Ages which was/is still used and surprisingly well preserved by Jews. It is written using Hebrew characters. Evidently, Yiddish has many Hebrew elements and that is one of the reasons it belongs to the group of so-called Jewish languages. At a later stage it was also influenced by Slavic languages (Polish, Russian). It becomes quite clear in the Slavic linguistic environment that Yiddish is not a stilted version of German but the mother tongue of the Jews living in the area. Rabinowich's sermons were later translated into Hebrew and this made it possible for his sermons to be published in German, English, and even in Russian. There were some missionaries who learned Yiddish so they could convert Jews living in Russia more easily.

end of the visit they agreed that Sándor Venetianer would baptize Rabinowich's followers in Rohrbach. This is indeed what happened and this is how Venetianer baptized Rabinowich's three daughters among others. Soon, however, Sándor Venetianer was forbidden by the Russian authorities to help Rabinowich and his movement in this way.

The conflict around baptism gave rise to a variety of responses. Most of the missionaries supported Rabinowich, not only Sándor Venetianer and his friend Schönberger, but also missionary Faber who was the son-in-law of chaplain Faltin and who had been Delitzsch's best student and colleague. On the other hand, de le Roi⁴⁷, former missionary and later pastor in Elberfeld, had a different view about this issue and about Sándor Venetianer's role.⁴⁸ This how de le Roi describes this later:

With Rabinowich Sándor Venetianer made the same mistakes he had made with Rabbi Lichtenstein earlier. (...) he took a very one-sided position in the differences of opinion that arose between Faltin and Rabinowich. (...) Venetianer, who in other respects is a great preacher, needs to reduce the volume a bit with a more rational and unembellished tone⁴⁹.

Rabinowich's goal was to establish a Judeo-Christian national Church in Russia. He believed that it was better for the Jews if they accepted Christ not as individuals but as future members of the Judeo-Christian community.

Sándor Venetianer accepted Rabinowich's views wholeheartedly and described them vividly in his essay *In Kischinew. Bei Rabinówitsch*. True to character, Sándor Venetianer never denied his Jewish origin and always identified with Jews. He was convinced that a great and glorious fate awaited them within the Judeo-Christian framework. He considered the main goal of his life to be the missionary work among Jews. He explains this in the above-mentioned essay as follows⁵⁰:

Those individual Jews who join one of the existing [Christian] Churches can never dodge the suspicion that they are just trying to change the appearance of their situation, i.e. to free themselves from the shame of being a Jew. So when they are asked who they are, they can say: Lutheran, Russian, etc.

You, on the other hand, you take upon yourselves a new shame – that of accepting Christ; and the whole world will know that if you keep your faith, only one thing will matter to

⁴⁷ De le Roi 1891/92, p. 290–291/p. 276–277.

⁴⁸ The prehistory of de le Roi's opinion: In 1886, Rabbi Isaac Lichtenstein from Tápió-Szele wrote an essay entitled *Mein Zeugnis* ('my testimony') in which he acknowledged Jesus as „the greatest figure of true piety”, but not as his „Saviour and Redeemer”. Sándor Venetianer (still in Trieste) reacted to this essay immediately with an enthusiastic and congratulatory article (Venetianer 1886).

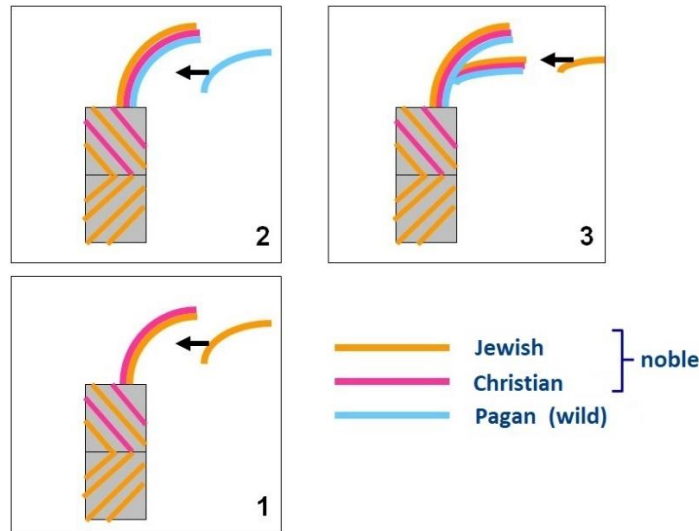
De le Roi felt that Sándor Venetianer greeted Rabbi Lichtenstein “as someone already standing in Christianity's gate, because he was not able to view things rationally as a result of his enthusiasm and his particularly strong sense of Jewish identity”. According to de le Roi “Sándor Venetianer did not recognize that the Rabbi's thinking was simply that of a humanist” (de le Roi 1891/92, p. 290–291/p. 277).

⁴⁹ De le Roi 1892, p. 277.

⁵⁰ Venetianer 1888, p. 17.

you: to accept Christ as the Lord. My friend, God entrusted the salvation of the Jews to you!

Sándor Venetianer characterized Rabinowich's movement on the basis of chapter 11 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. As it is hard to understand all this on first reading, here are some diagrams with explanatory comments. To illustrate the analogy of the metaphor in Venetianer's text, each diagram has the trunk of a "noble" olive tree with various branches.



The lower part of the trunk is Jewish (yellow), the upper part is Judeo-Christian (yellow-red). This symbolizes the fact that Christianity grew out of Jewish foundations and early Christianity was propagated among Jews (hence the term Judeo-Christian). However, parts of the branches broke off (Romans 11, 17–19). This means that the majority of Jews did not accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour, or the Messiah. This is why Paul the Apostle could graft the heathen (blue) – i.e. branches of the wild olive tree – into the trunk of the noble tree. In the allegory Paul compares the spread of Christianity to the grafting of trees. As we will see, according to Paul (as well as Rabinowich and Sándor Venetianer), Israel did not permanently lose its “chosenness.”

And now let's see Sándor Venetianer's original text⁵¹:

...I could visualize more and more clearly the radiant image of a future community which would worship Jesus as the “heir to the throne” – and [visualize] how important it would be that the broken branches [i.e. the Jews] would be grafted into their own olive tree! What an amazing life will flow in these natural branches (1st image)⁵² if such splendid life was created from the unnaturally grafted branches! (2nd image)⁵³ And that could only happen on the road that Rabinowich had taken!

⁵¹ Venetianer 1888, p. 17 and Venetianer 1888b, p. 20–21.

⁵² Romans 11, 23–24. The illustrations show the process of grafting; we can see the approach of the branch to be grafted as well as its product: the grafted branch.

⁵³ Romans 11, 24a.

Those individual Jews who join one of the existing Christian Churches are grafted only into the branches, not into the trunk and so they live their life indirectly: a life that has already flowed over every prairie and steppe through the centuries, and as it flowed, it lost a bit of its original essence here and added something strange there. (...) And yet people were frequently amazed to find that even such branches bring forth really delicious fruit. (3rd image)⁵⁴

Let the original force of the noble olive tree flow freely into its natural branches without canals and trenches, and I am sure that the world will gaze at this divine drama with awe and admiration. (1st image)

Interestingly enough, Chief Rabbi Lajos Venetianer also assigns an important role in one of his works to Chapter 11 of the Epistle to the Romans. The framework of Lajos's long study (already cited above)⁵⁵ is based on the same chapter of the New Testament. Lajos Venetianer claims that Paul made a minor error. In order to improve the quality of fruit, we do not graft the branches of the wild tree into the trunk of the noble tree but the other way round: grafting the branches of the noble tree will make the wild tree productive⁵⁶ (2nd image – Paul's idea). But Paul recognized that the relationship between Judaism and paganism was different and thus the branches of paganism were grafted into the trunk of Judaism (Judeo-Christianity)⁵⁷. Therefore, the analogy between the conversion to Christianity (the Judeo-Christian [noble]–pagan [wild] relationship) and improving the quality of fruit (noble-wild) is not right. In fact – from the point of view of grafting the noble into the wild or the wild into the noble – they are opposites of each other.

(C) Hungary

As mentioned before, the Russian authorities quickly made it illegal for Sándor Venetianer to baptize the followers of Rabinowich. As a result – and also because he was homesick – Sándor Venetianer returned to Hungary. He served until his death as pastor in Új-Sóvé, the same village in which he had already worked for four years.

After his return in 1889, his first wife, Mária Barth, whom he loved a great deal, died and left three young boys behind. In 1890, after a long inner struggle he got married, mostly for the sake of the children. His wife was Jolántha Hartmann, who was the offspring of a German family which immigrated from Württemberg at the end of the 18th century.

⁵⁴ N.B. This case is not mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans. (Sándor Venetianer was this kind of a Jew.)

⁵⁵ Venetianer L 2003.

⁵⁶ Venetianer L 2003, p. 37–38.

⁵⁷ Venetianer L 2003, p. 38.



Sándor Venetianer and Jolántha Hartmann (his second wife) shortly before their wedding

Her father, János Hartmann Jr., and grand-father, János Hartmann Sr., were both Reformed Church teachers. The former later worked as a notary in Új-Sóvé⁵⁸.

Sándor Venetianer made a few extended trips to London, England, in the 1890s. He visited his missionary friends, such as Schönberger, David Baron and others. He undertook long round trips in England – some of them taking several weeks – so he could give sermons on behalf of the Jewish mission.

IMAGE #12: Sándor Venetianer in London with Schönberger

In 1900 his beloved professor, Eduard Böhl, retired. Böhl picked Venetianer to replace him but he turned down his teacher's offer as he no longer wanted to work abroad for an extended period of time⁵⁹.

⁵⁸ I obtained a lot of useful information about the Hartmann family (and even about the Venetianers) in Stuttgart and its vicinity because near Stuttgart there are many Swabians who had to flee from Új-Sóvé from the Serbian partisans at the end of the Second World War. One of Jolán Hartmann's brothers, János, Hungarianized his name to Keményfy and between the two World Wars he was a well-known literary historian and a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

⁵⁹ Later it turned out that he would not have been named to the position anyway as Böhl – with his proposed candidate – was the lone conservative among the largely liberal professoriate. I have Tibor Vajs to thank for the detailed information about Böhl's succession (Vajs 2015, p. 319 and 323).

Owing to the twists and turns of fate, something similar happened to the Chief Rabbi of Újpest, Lajos Venetianer, Sándor's younger brother. The leadership of the Jewish community of Vienna announced a competition for the position of Chief Rabbi in 1914 and they invited Lajos Venetianer to participate. He was ranked first with his presentation entitled *Messiaschöpfung des Judenthums* ("Awaiting the Messiah in Judaism"). While he expressed his thanks, he declined the offer of the position saying that he would like to continue his work in his home country as rabbi of Újpest, and as teacher and historian at the Rabbinical Seminary. (See Marianna Varga's study, in Venetianer L 2003, p. 30). This paper was later published: Venetianer L 2006.



Sándor Venetianer in London with
Schönberger

In 1898 an important event happened in the history of the Hungarian Bible. The Hungarian Protestant Old Testament was revised and republished. Gáspár Károli of the Hungarian Reformed Church was the first to translate the entire Bible into Hungarian in the 16th century – that is where the traditional name Károli-Bible comes from. Several scholars worked on this new translation for many years. At the beginning (in 1886) Sándor Venetianer's name was listed among the translators, but then somehow his name was left out. I think we can say without exaggeration that among Protestant scholars of the time Sándor Venetianer was one of those whose knowledge of the Hebrew language was the best. He compared the revised translation and the Hebrew Bible. As he found a lot of mistakes in the new edition, he published a book with the following title: "The new Old Testament" (*Az új Ó-szövetség*)⁶⁰. He did not include his own editorial suggestions at certain key places in the

text⁶¹, but used the translation of the traditionally accepted versions (the Septuagint and the Vulgate) and several more recent translations (Luther's, and four other German ones⁶², as well as a French, English, and Dutch one). He also used the Israelite-Hungarian Literary Society's (IMIT) new translation of the Torah⁶³, which was obviously based on the original Hebrew text. As Venetianer wrote, he had found the latter very useful.

His criticism had serious consequences⁶⁴. The translation committee accepted his suggestions and this edition of the Bible had to be withdrawn from circulation! They continued their work in which they now included Sándor Venetianer. However, he lived only two more years and thus did not see the publication of the revised version of the translation. This Bible was published in 1908 (with 1905 as the publication date!).

THE TWO VENETIANER BROTHERS (SÁNDOR AND LAJOS)

And now a few words about the more important events in the life of Sándor Venetianer's younger brother, Lajos⁶⁵, and about their relationship.

⁶⁰ Venetianer 1900.

⁶¹ In his library I found the 1898 Bible that he used for his work. He did write his suggestions into his own copy.

⁶² These include the translation of his former professor Kautzsch from Basel. He was the one who had undertaken serious revisions in Gesenius's famous grammar of the Hebrew Bible. The Gesenius / Kautzsch classical Hebrew grammar is still considered one of the standard works in the field.

⁶³ The other parts of the IMIT Bible were only published later.

⁶⁴ For the reactions to Venetianer's criticism, see Vajs 2015, p. 330–331.

⁶⁵ For more information, see Marianna Varga's recollections of Lajos Venetianer (in Venetianer 2003).

Lajos Venetianer was the Chief Rabbi of Újpest and a professor at the Franz Joseph Rabbinical Seminary.



Lajos Venetianer, the chief Rabbi

His most important research areas include: history of religion, the literature and history of the Jews, as well as the comparative analysis of the Jewish and Christian faiths.

His main works are: *"The Organization of Jewry in European States"*;⁶⁶ *"The History of Hungarian Jews"*⁶⁷ and numerous other publications, essays, articles, etc. (Many of these appeared in German.)

It is well worth asking about the relationship between the two brothers.

Lajos was fourteen years younger than his brother, Sándor. Their relationship can be understood best by looking at Sándor Venetianer's diary⁶⁸. Unfortunately, this diary survived only partially, but the surviving parts are very important. In addition, we can gain useful information from a careful reading of the handwritten notes in Sándor Venetianer's books.

Here are some quotations from Sándor Venetianer's diary:

⁶⁶ Venetianer L 1901.

⁶⁷ Venetianer L 1986.

⁶⁸ The original unpublished manuscript can be found in the Main Collegial Library of Sárospatak. On the cover of the manuscript the following is written: *Unknown author's diary entries in Újsóvé* (Bács-Bodrog vm. [= vármegye = county]), 1890 and 1898, 28 pages. (see Venetianer 1890/98) It was identified by chance in 1968 by István Póth who was an associate professor at the Slavic Studies Chair of the Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University. He was born in Új-Sóvé where his father József Póth was the pastor between 1905 and 1925. József Póth knew Sándor Venetianer well, and his children heard about him at home. See József Póth Jr.'s notes about Sándor Venetianer's diary in the Main Collegial Library of Sárospatak.

Lajos wrote; he thanked for sending St. & Kr.⁶⁹ and read the suggested essays with appreciation. (30 August 1890)

I wrote to Lajos; reminded him of the New Testament speeches as prototypes of genuine Jewish sermons; I asked him ... to get me Plutarch and Plato's *Phaedon*. (17 September 1890)

Lajos wrote today; he tries nicely to refute my statement that the speeches of the prophets are not sermons; he writes very well. (20 September 1890)

I offered Lajos, among others, 10 Forints in case he wanted to send a classical work of art as a wedding gift⁷⁰; he cannot come himself. But who knows? He may view it differently! I don't think so. It would not be good or at any rate, would not be right. (10 October 1890)

Lajos offered me a copy of the IMIT [Izraelita Magyar Irodalmi Társulat = Israelite-Hungarian Literary Society] yearbook which includes one of his essays. He writes well. (1 March 1898)

Every so often Sándor Venetianer would ask his younger brother to buy him certain books. It sometimes happened that Sándor became the mediator between his two brothers Lajos and Adolf in some financial matter. He was not very successful at it: he got both of his brothers mad at him.

Sándor Venetianer had a library of about 4000 books. Out of this collection, about 3–400, mostly theological books still exist today⁷¹. From the notes in these books we learn the following: Lajos Venetianer gave his brother Sándor several valuable books, eg. the first edition of the Káldi (Catholic) Bible (1626). Lajos wrote the following in it with a pencil: „I couldn't find the two missing chapters but I will look for them and will send them to you: hugs, Budapest, 10 June 1901, Lajos.”

Some of Lajos's own books can be found in Sándor Venetianer's library. Lajos may have lent them to his brother and when Sándor suddenly died, they were not returned to their owner. Or perhaps he received them as presents from Lajos's own library. It is impossible to determine that now.

⁶⁹ A religious journal.

⁷⁰ This refers to the wedding between Sándor Venetianer and his second wife Jolántha Hartmann. At that time Lajos was only 23 years old. Although he was approaching the end of his university studies, he could not have had much money.

⁷¹ Most of them are with Sándor Juhász, Reformed pastor of Vésztő, who is the great-grandson of Sándor Venetianer. These books were presented to the Main Collegial Library in Debrecen. Sándor Juhász died on the 18th of September 2021, and that was the end of the priestly line in our family. About a dozen valuable books are with one of his grandchildren, Dr. Béla Juhász, family doctor and internist in Debrecen.

And now let's take a look at how the relationship between Sándor Venetianer and his family changed over time⁷².

Sándor Venetianer adored his mother. As a young man he wrote poems to her in German. His mother was never angry with him for his strangely aberrant – from a Jewish point of view – behaviour. They probably corresponded with each other on a regular basis.

His father, Albert Venetianer banished Sándor from home at the age of seventeen. Eleven years later (1881), when Sándor Venetianer's first child was born, Albert invited him back as the "prodigal son" with his family. We know from a later letter⁷³ that they stayed with his parents for a week. After that Sándor Venetianer carried on a correspondence with his father too. We read the following in Sándor Venetianer's diary (9 October 1890):

My father wrote too. And once he had convinced himself from Jolán's letter that my choice with respect to the future was promising and hopeful, he congratulated me.⁷⁴

Sándor Venetianer stayed in regular contact through letters with all his brothers and his sisters.

There is one more thing that is worth drawing attention to. Sándor Venetianer became a widower at the age of 36 for the first time. He had three underage (2–8 years old) sons at that time. He lost his second wife five years later after which he had to take care of six children (1 month–13 years). His third wife (who was the sister of his second wife) could not cope after a while, and eventually, a few years after Sándor Venetianer's early death, two of his siblings – both married without children – took over the education of the orphans for many years. It never crossed their minds to raise them as Jews. They respected the consequences of their brother's conversion even after his death.

⁷² Sándor Venetianer had two younger brothers and four younger sisters. With his first wife he had three sons, with the second he had one son and two daughters, and with the third he had a son.

⁷³ György Vadász, son of Katica Venetianer (Sándor Venetianer's older daughter) found this letter among his mother's letters.

⁷⁴ Jolán became the second wife. The father's letter arrived just before their wedding.

THE THREE VENETIANER BROTHERS



The third Venetianer brother: Adolf

Finally, I would like to explain the title of my work. I already mentioned that the third Venetianer brother was called Adolf. In one of Sándor Venetianer's brief obituaries⁷⁵ it says:

Another interesting fact about Venetianer's life is that the deceased's brother was a Jewish rabbi in Újpest and his other brother was a Catholic priest.

Another memoir⁷⁶, written about a hundred years later, quotes the above obituary and adds:

unfortunately, we do not know anything about the brother who became a Catholic priest.

This is not surprising because this Catholic priest simply did not exist! The third brother Adolf was a shopkeeper. This unusual story about the three Venetianer brothers (the famous and 'infamous' Venetianer family) stubbornly survived through the 20th century – primarily within the Hungarian Jewish community.⁷⁷

How does one explain this? Obviously, the story of the two Venetianer brothers (Reformed pastor and chief rabbi) is already special. But I believe we can find similar sibling stories among the members of the different Jewish missions (eg. the Scottish, English, and German) too. It seems that in the case of the Venetianer family the story of the two brothers in two different religious denominations was not sufficiently odd for popular Jewish mythmaking in Hungary. To deepen

⁷⁵ [Venetianer] 1902 (obituary without an author).

⁷⁶ Csekő 2001. Again, Tom Venetianer drew my attention to this article.

⁷⁷ One of my teachers told me that when he was a child his grandmother had talked about the three Venetianer brothers as representatives of three different religions. In another version of this tradition there is a Lutheran priest instead of a Catholic one.

the tension of the situation, a third brother was created who could not be anything but a Catholic (or Lutheran) priest.



Sándor Venetianer's
tombstone (Új-Sóvé)



Lajos Venetianer's tombstone
(Budapest, Kozma Street)

WORKS CITED⁷⁸

- Csekő 2001 Csekő, Ernő. „Három testvér – három vallás három papja (A Venetianer testvérek tevékenysége)” [Three Brothers – Three Ministers of Three Different Religions (The Activities of the Venetianer Brothers)] in *Megyei Napló*, május 10 [10th May], p. 6 [Public journal of Tolna County].
- De le Roi 1891/92 De le Roi, J. F. A., *Die evangelische Christenheit und die Juden unter dem Gesichtspunkte der Mission geschichtlich betrachtet*: 2. Band, A. *Zweite Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts. Das europäische Festland während des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin: H. Reuther & O. Reichard 1891; 3. Band, B. *Grossbritannien und die aussereuropäischen Länder während des 19. Jahrhunderts* 1892.
- [Lutheran Christianity and the Jews – a historical perspective from the point of view of the Mission: Volume 2, A: Second half of the 18th century. The continent of Europe in the 19th century; Volume 3, B: Great Britain and the non-European countries during the 19th century]
- Delitzsch 1887 Delitzsch, Franz (edit.), *Neue Documente der südrussischen Christentumsbewegung. Selbstbiographie und Predigten von Joseph Rabinowitsch*. Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke. [New documents of the Christianizing Movement in Southern Russia. The autobiography and sermons of Joseph Rabinowich.]
- Feinsilber 1902 Feinsilber, Robert, „Pastor Alexander Venetianer” in *Zions Freund* 4, (Aug.), p. 85–86.
- Heřman s.a. Heřman, Jan, *Jewish Cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia*, Prague: Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Socialist Republic.
- Kempelen 1937–39 Kempelen, Béla. *Magyarországi zsidó és zsidó eredetű családok I–III*. [Jewish families and families of Jewish origin in Hungary I–III], Budapest: [self-published].
- Kjaer-Hansen 1992 Kjaer-Hansen, Kai, „Rabinowitz and Lichtenstein” in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 56, p. 2–3. (<http://www.ctsfw.edu/library/files/pb/1365>)

⁷⁸ I would like to thank: Tamás Visi, Tom Venetianer, Marianna Varga (Lajos Venetianer’s granddaughter), Rita Kopeckzy, Ilona Lukács, Viktória Bányai, Domokos Szabó (Venetianer Sándor’s great-great-grandson), Kornélia Koltai, Katalin E. Kövér (Venetianer Sándor’s great-granddaughter), Zoltán Niederreiter, Ferenc Erdődi, Tibor Vajs, and Gergely Tóth.

- Kövér 2012 Kövér, András. „A Venetianer fivérek »Főrabbi, református lelkész és katolikus pap« Egy Morvaországból származó, Magyarországon élő zsidó család története a 19. sz. második felében” [„The Venetianer Brothers »Chief Rabbi, Reformed Church Pastor, and Catholic Priest « The history of a Hungarian Jewish family with Moravian roots in the second half of the 19th century”] in: *A szívnek van két rekesze. Tanulmánykötet Prof. Dr. Schweitzer József tiszteletére, 90. születésnapja alkalmából*, [The heart has two chambers. Volume of essays in honour of Dr. József Schweitzer on the occasion of his 90th birthday] Kornélia Koltai (edit.), Budapest: L’Harmattan – Magyar Hebraisztikai Társaság [Hungarian Hebrew Studies Society], p. 465–486 (*Studia Hebraica Hungarica*, 2 / MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport ÉRTESÍTŐ, 19 [Research group on Judaism of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences REPORT, 19]).
- Márk 1902 Márk, Ferencz Dr., „Venetiáner Sándor (1853–1902)” in *Debreczeni Protestáns Lap* [Protestant Journal of Debreczen] (márczius/March 8.): p. 153–154 and (márczius/March 15.): p. 167–168.
- McCagg 1992 McCagg, William O., *Zsidóság a Habsburg Birodalomban 1670–1918 [A History of Habsburg Jews 1670-1918*, Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989], Budapest: Cserépfalvi.
- Poór 1902 Poór, József, „Venetiáner Sándor emlékezete” [Remembering Sándor Venetianer] in *Keresztyén Evangyélista* [Christian Evangelist] 11, 7, p. 50–51 and 11, 8, p. 58–61.
- Póth 1989 Póth, Lajos, „Venetiáner Sándor (1853–1902)” in *Református Évkönyv (Újvidék)* [Reformed Church Yearbook (Novi Sad)]: p. 68–72.
- Roemmich 1978 Roemmich, Heinrich, „Stundisten-Evangeliumschrsten-Baptisten. Ihr Ursprung und ihr Weg zu einer protestantischen Kirche in der UdSSR”, in *Schnurr* 1978, p. 64–85. [Stundists, Evangelical Christians, and Baptists. Their origins and their path to a Protestant Church in the USSR.]
- Schnurr 1967/1968 Schnurr, Joseph, *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Rußland 1967/1968*, Stuttgart: AER Verlag Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Rußland [The “Heimatbuch” of Germans in Russia 1967/1968. Published by the Landsmannschaft of Germans from Russia.] (This book probably has the best contemporary map of Rohrbach and its vicinity.)
- Schnurr 1978 Schnurr, Joseph, *Die Kirchen und das religiöse Leben der Russlanddeutschen – Evangelischer Teil*, Stuttgart: AER Verlag Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Rußland [The Church and religious life of the Russian Germans – Lutheran section. Published by the

- Landsmannschaft of Germans from Russia.] (There is a contemporary map of the Odessa area in the appendix of this book.)
- Tóth 1960 Tóth, Kálmán, (*Venetianer Sándor élete és munkássága*), [Sándor Venetianer's Life and Work], Budapest [manuscript fragments].
- Vadász 1980–1997 Vadász, György, (*A Venetianer-család története 1850– 1945 között, különös tekintettel Venetianer Sándorra*) [The History of the Venetianer Family between 1850 and 1945 with special attention to Sándor Venetianer], Budapest [manuscript in several folders].
- Vajs 2015 Vajs, Tibor, „Venetianer Sándor – egy igaz református lelkész” [Sándor Venetianer – a True Reformed Pastor] in *Acta Papensia* 15 No. 3-4, p. 307–352.
(Includes the Hungarian translation of Sándor Venetianer's “Zum Zeugnis”.)
- Venetianer 1876/CV Venetianer, Sándor, (*Curriculum vitae*), Vienna [Latin manuscript, no date but definitely written in 1876].
- Venetianer 1878 Venetianer, Sándor, „A cseh és morva evangéliumi hívek mint lettek nagyobbára helvét hitűekké” [How the Czech and Moravian Protestants Became Mostly Followers of the Helvetic Confession of Faith] in *Evangeliumi Protestáns Lap* [Evangelical Protestant Journal], [4th January], p. 7–8.
- Venetianer 1884/89 Venetianer, Sándor (kommentár), „Ézsaiás próféta könyve (1–10)” [(commentary) Book of the Prophet Isaiah (1–10)] in *Gyakorlati bibliamagyarázatok* [Practical Explanations of the Bible] 4 (1884): p. 21–80 and p. 161–198; „Ézsaiás próféta könyve (11–17)” [Book of the Prophet Isaiah (11–17)] in *Gyakorlati bibliamagyarázatok* [Practical Explanations of the Bible] 9 (1889): p. 275–320.
- Venetianer 1886 Venetianer, A., *Zum Zeugnis – Offener Brief an den ehrwürdigen Herrn I. Lichtenstein, Bezirksrabbiner zu Tápió-Szele, in Ungarn, als Widerhall zu seinem „Mein Zeugnis”* [On the subject of testimony – open letter to the Venerable Herr Lichtenstein, district rabbi in Tápió-Szele, Hungary by way of response to his ‘My Testimony’], Wien: Verlag des Autors. [Vienna: Self-publication]
- Venetianer 1888 Venetianer, Alexander, *In Kischinew. Bei Rabinówitsch*, Wien: Verlag des Autors. [In Kischineff with Rabinowich, Vienna: Self publication]

- Venetianer 1888b Venetianer, A. III. – With Rabinowich in Kischineff (abridged transl. from the German) in: Saphir, Adolf, *Rabinowich and his Mission to Israel*, London: John F. Shaw & co., p. 10–21.
- Venetianer 1890/98 Venetianer, Sándor, (*Venetianer Sándor töredékes naplójegyzetei Újsóvéban*) [Sándor Venetianer's Journal - Fragments in Újsóvé] [Bács-Bodrog County] (Ms. 3752 in the Main Collegial Library of Sárospatak)
- Venetianer 1900 Venetianer, Sándor, *Az új Ó-Szövetség. Összehasonlító bibliai tanulmány.* (A Brit- és Külföldi Biblia-társulat által 1898. évben kiadott magyar protestáns tudósok munkája: „Ó-Szövetség, – az eredeti szöveggel egybevetett és átdolgozott kiadás” – alapján.) (sic!) [The New Old Testament. Comparative Study of the Bible] based on the following consolidated edition by Hungarian Protestant Bible scholars: “The Old Testament – compared with the original and revised” (sic!), published in 1898 by the British and Foreign Bible Association.] Szeged, [a békési *Keresztyén Evangyélista* kiadásában]. [Published by the *Keresztyén Evangyélista* of Békés]
- [Venetianer] 1902 [without author], „Egy tudós pap halála” [Death of a Scholar - Priest] in *Tolnavármegye* [Tolna County] [9th March], 3 [obituary].
- Venetianer L 1901 Venetianer, Lajos, *A zsidóság szervezete az európai államokban* [The Organization of Jewry in European States], (Az IMIT kiadványai, 16) [Publications of IMIT (Israelite-Hungarian Literary Society), 16] Budapest: IMIT.
- Venetianer L 1913 Venetianer, Ludwig, *Jüdisches im Christentum*, [Jewishness in Christianity] Frankfurt a. M.: J. Kauffmann.
- Venetianer L 1986 Venetianer, Lajos/Raj, Tamás (Előszó) [Prologue], *A magyar zsidóság története* [The History of Hungarian Jewry], Budapest: Könyvértékesítő Vállalat [Bookselling Company] (reprint). Reprinted in “Tudománytár”, a series of academic publications by the bookselling arm of the Association of Hungarian Scholars. Original Hungarian edition: 1922.
- Venetianer L 2003 Varga, Marianna, *Erinnerung an Ludwig Venetianer* [Remembering Ludwig Venetianer] & Ludwig Venetianer, *Jüdisches im Christentum* [Jewishness in Christianity], Duisburg: Peter W. Metzler Verlag. [Marianna Varga, granddaughter of the Chief Rabbi wrote the reminiscence on Lajos Venetianer in this reprint. The essay is included in both German and Hungarian.]

- Venetianer L 2006 Venetianer, Ludwig, *Die Messiashoffnung des Judenthums* [Awaiting the Messiah in Judaism], Duisburg: Peter W. Metzler Verlag. [Based on the presentation made in response to an invitation by the leadership of the Israelite Congregation in Vienna in 1915.]
- Zsidó lexikon 1929 Ujvári, Péter (szerk.) [editor], *Zsidó lexikon* [Jewish Encyclopedia], Budapest: A Zsidó Lexikon kiadása. Reprint in 1987. [Edition of the Jewish Encyclopedia]
- <http://www.rollintl.com/roll/uberesanmap.gif> [downloaded on 10th July 2012]. [Modern map of Rohrbach's vicinity.]

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Translation (from the Hungarian) of Sándor Venetianer's Latin autobiography⁷⁹

I, Sándor Venetianer (Károly Theodor) was born in Fadd, Tolna County, Hungary in 1853 as a child of orthodox Jewish parents who are still alive and in good health.

It was my father who taught me everything one has to learn in one's childhood.

Then from the age of nine I was registered and studied diligently in the high school of Kecskemét for eight years. After completing all the courses in the subjects taught at the school, I took the baccalaureate to prove my maturity for higher education. I met all the requirements successfully that the law specifies for starting one's university education. Thus, as someone in possession of the elementary levels of academic knowledge, I became eligible to study at the university.

I started with philosophy and natural sciences, but I gained little success in these subjects.

This is not surprising since I was driven by different dreams and pursuing different goals than other people. But like many people, I too started academic studies.

My intention was not to live my life by learning a trade or studying liberal arts (I did not appreciate the human professions and sciences too much). On the contrary, I endeavoured to seek out the only truth. To make this as clear as possible, I need to go back a few years in time and describe the events which I just summarized briefly above in the order in which they happened.

My father was a γραμματεὺς⁸⁰ and a νομοδιδάσκαλος⁸¹. He taught me the Torah at a young age and wanted me to follow in his footsteps. Some time ago, young (orthodox) Jews were taught only the Scriptures and the rabbinic teachings, and were carefully insulated from non-Jewish things whether material or spiritual in nature. Now, with the changing times the synagogue requires its leaders to be knowledgeable in the worldly sciences as well. So, I attended a Talmud school and a Christian high school at the same time.

It takes a long time to recall everything one by one so I will be brief.

It was evident that sooner or later an inner struggle would develop in my soul as to which school of thought I would attach myself to. But it was not at all obvious that in this struggle the Talmud

⁷⁹ The original manuscript (Venetianer 1876/CV) was provided to Dr. Kálmán Tóth Professor of Theology in 1960 by Sándor Venetianer's son, Dr. Frigyes Vincze, retired director-general of commercial education and former head of the Academy of Oriental Languages in Budapest. Professor Tóth typed the Latin text and translated it into Hungarian. Later, independently of this, György Vadász also asked someone to translate the autobiography. These translations, however, were not entirely satisfactory so in 2006 I asked Dr. Rita Kopeczky, Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Latin, Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University to revise the translation. In addition she helped revise the Latin text.

⁸⁰ grammateus = scribe

⁸¹ nomodidaskalos = teacher of the Law

school would be vanquished and my soul would be victorious in reaching the freedom of the sons of God. May we praise, glorify, and express our gratitude to God the Creator and Saviour who rules the world and directs our souls according to his will!

Whenever I think about my life's trajectory and some of its moments – to which I had not given much or even sufficient thought – it becomes quite clear to me that those moments had been created by God almighty, blessed be his name. The knowledge that there is a living God who is Father to his children, becomes more vivid and more certain than if it had been demonstrated as the truth by six hundred philosophers!

I was in the fourth year of high school when one day my Christian classmates mockingly asked me: "You, Jew, when is your Messiah finally coming?" I admit I did not understand the meaning of this question back then. I did not know who or what the "Messiah" was.

By then I had been studying the law and the prophets for years. Ever since I was a small child, I had prayed several times a day using the words of the Psalms and the solemn prayers of supplication which are full of yearning for the Messiah. But all this happened without my understanding since already as a child I had been taught that it was not Moses, nor the prophets, nor even prayers that would propitiate God. Sitting at the feet of the rabbis day and night was the only way to salvation.

I did not know anything about Christianity, I did not know that its doctrine had come from Zion.

It so happened that there was a market day in our town which my father attended with my tutor, and I was allowed to accompany them. My father bought a little Hebrew book which he discussed with my tutor on the way home, flipping through its pages. That is when I heard the word Messiah again. When I started asking questions, my father, stopping in the middle of the word,⁸² said firmly that it was none of my business and immediately hid the book.

This, however, aroused my curiosity.

I started to look through my father's library at home. I did not find the book I was looking for but found another one instead by an author named Keith. However, I did not fully understand this as I did not have the knowledge necessary for its comprehension.

Not much later a Bible seller came to our town. As I was learning French then, I bought a French Bible to have something that I could read easily.

What surprised me rightaway were the names "Old and New Testament", especially the New Testament which I did not even know by name. I was astonished that I had never heard of it or read it before, especially as I thought it was a Jewish book. Naïvely, I took it to the Talmud school

⁸² This is how it is written in Latin. If Sándor Venetianer had meant to use the more logical "stopping me" he used the wrong grammatical form.

to ask my teacher about it. Taking the book away from me, he strictly forbade me from reading anything like that ever again.

Forbidden things are tempting!⁸³

With my curiosity unfulfilled, I turned to my high school friends to teach me what is otherwise common knowledge in this field. Soon the well-known difference between the Old and New Testaments became clear to me. Soon I got hold of another copy and started reading it enthusiastically.

In the meantime, the suspicion of my Jewish elders was aroused; I was caught and betrayed. At the same time I found the Hebrew translation of Bunyan's book: *The Pilgrim's Progress* in my father's library. Though there were many words or sentences whose meaning I could not understand, nevertheless I was thrilled to read it.

Reading נתיבות עולם⁸⁴ had great – though largely negative – significance for me. By extraordinary coincidence, this happened just at the time when my father was pushing me away from the rabbinic faith.

It was winter and on a Saturday as I was running to school carrying all the books I needed, my father caught sight of me and asked: "Don't you know that you can't carry anything on Saturdays?" "I do know", I responded, "but without books I can't go to school and anyway, I wouldn't dare to." Then he said: "At least hide your books under your jacket so no one can see them."

I obeyed but from that moment on I turned my back on Talmudic as well as human dogma. For a long time I was confused and lived with a split conscience. I rejected my Jewish tutors' teachings, but I did not subordinate myself to the Word of God as I had not yet come to understand Scripture. To make that happen, God found Károly András Schönberger for me. The latter was living in Budapest – where I also went – working as a Christian missionary around the time when I had to leave my father's house because he realized that I had strayed from the teaching of the Talmud. While most people would consider my meeting with Mr. Schönberger accidental, I thank God for the wondrous ways in which he enabled me to meet him.

Schönberger read with me the Prophets, together with the Gospels, and the writings of the apostles. I suddenly lived in a new world, and a new Heaven! The Old Testament became something completely new for me.

After that I learned from a lot of trials and tribulations sent by God. I understood what God was saying in the parable of the sower. Having tasted the Lord's goodness, I was ready to take up the cross and follow him. That was when persecution, misery, and deprivation came into my life. The constant inner and outer anguish and the worry of making ends meet precluded any possibility of my finding some relief.

⁸³ Literally: We strive for what is forbidden!

⁸⁴ Netivot olam = The Pilgrim's Progress.

After I had left Pest, and as a result of the unfavorable circumstances, I took on a job as a teacher in a Jewish school in Kőrös-Ladány.

I kept in touch with Schönberger through letters. Then, through the will of God, one of his letters ended up in the hands of my supervisors, which resulted in my having to flee instantly in order to save my life.

Where could I possibly escape?

I returned to my parents' house.

My father received me affectionately, just like the well-known "prodigal son." However, I could only stay for a few days. As soon as my father decided that I was still on the wrong path, he chased me away from home.

Without any money, I could not even start on my way. By God's grace, the principal of the Reformed high school, to whom I told my troubles, helped me by referring me to a devout Reformed Church family which was looking for a tutor for their children.

So I lived with a Christian family for eight months in the town where my father was the rabbi of the local Jewish community. It was at this time that I passed the exams that qualified me for academic studies. With the money I had saved I travelled to Pest in August 1871. Then, as Schönberger was not there anymore, I went on to Vienna so I could start studying the tenets of Christianity at the university.

But everything I learned there only had the effect of alienating me from both Christianity and any other God-fearing religion. So then finally the Bible became the most precious and valuable force to touch my soul. After struggling so long with the worldly sciences, I finally found peace in the Holy Scriptures.

In 1872 I could once again send a letter to Schönberger after I found out that he lived in Prague. In the spring of 1873, after a long and hard struggle, surrounded by doubts, but through the grace of God, I could finally confess my faith in the name of the Lord. I was baptized on 10 August 1873⁸⁵. Driven by the burning desire to give myself completely to the Lord who redeemed me with his own blood, I made an irrevocable decision to study the "sacred sciences" [theology] at university.

To do so I returned to Vienna again, but as I had little in the way of financial resources, I offered private tutoring to make ends meet.

In my free time, I attended the lectures of the Protestant Theological Academy ["Evangelische Theologische Akademie"] in Vienna where I reached my final crisis. I would have lost everything that I had received from God had it not been for Eduard Böhl, Professor and Doctor of Sacred Theology who offered me spiritual nourishment through his abundant knowledge of Christ. By

⁸⁵ In Latin: four days before the *Ides* of August (*ides*: 15th of March, May, July, October; 13th of other months)

APPENDIX

the Grace of God, this is the man to whom I owe most. It was he who made me hunger and thirst for the truth; and he showed me the wonders of the Word of God and all of God's wisdom.

A little later I had the opportunity to travel to Basel where I devoted myself completely to the study of the Scriptures and of Oriental languages. After the end of the academic year I returned from Basel burning with desire to sit at Böhl's feet again. I thank God, now and forever, for giving me the opportunity to study with this man again for a year and a half.

With God's help I have been studying Theology for three years, and I now have a burning desire to use the strength given to me by the Lord to dedicate my life to the greater glory of God!⁸⁶

⁸⁶ There is no date on the autobiography. Sándor Venetianer wrote it in 1876, at the age of twenty-three. In the spring of 1877, in his fourth year he completed his theological studies in Vienna, and also in the spring of 1877, he passed his first chaplaincy exam in Debrecen. It is in advance of this that he had sought Professor Ferenc Balogh's advice. In his letter to him (in the fall of 1876) Venetianer wrote that he had attached his *curriculum vitae* to the letter.

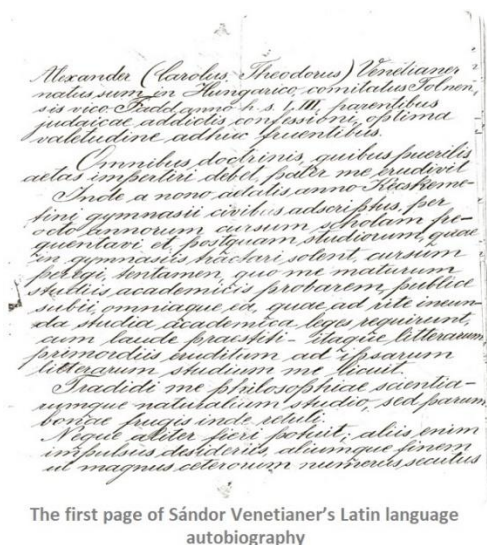
Sándor Venetianer's Latin autobiography in his own handwriting

Alexander (Carolus Theodorus) Venetianer natus sum in Hungarico, comitatus Tolnensis vico Fadd anno h.s. LIII, parentibus judaicae addictis confessioni, optima valetudine adhuc fruentibus.

Omnibus doctrinis, quibus puerilis aetas impertiri debet, pater me erudit.

Inde a nono aetatis anno Kecskemetini gymnasii civibus adscriptus, per octo annorum cursum scholam frequentavi et postquam studiorum, quae in gymnasiis tractari solent, cursum peregi, tentamen, quo me maturum studiis academicis probarem, publice subii, omniaque ea, quae ad rite ineunda studia academica leges requirunt, cum laude praestiti – itaque litterarum primordiis eruditum ad ipsarum litterarum studium me <pergere>⁸⁷ licuit.

Tradidi me philosophiae scientiarumque naturalium studio, sed parum bonae frugis inde retuli.



The first page of Sándor Venetianer's Latin language autobiography

Neque aliter fieri potuit; aliis enim impulsus desideriis, aliumque finem ut magnus ceterorum numerus secutus ad academica veni studia.

Non – artificio quodam percepto vel arte liberali cognita, vita perfrui (humana negotia atque studia ludibrio habebam) in animo mihi erat, im<m>o: unius veritatis petivi notionem. Quod ut melius possit intelligi, annos complures repetam, et res supra summatim tantum enarratas, nunc ordine, ut gestae sunt, perscribam.

Pater meus est γραμματεὺς et νομοδιδάσκαλος. Itaque jam me parvulum in lege erudiens, habebat in optatis, ut ipse forem aliquando illius ordinis; prioribus temporibus juvenes huic ordini ascripti in scriptura tantum et rabbinicis instruebantur praeceptis, externis, non judaicis rebus, vel materialibus, vel spiritualibus diligentissime prohibitis ac repulsis. Nunc mutatis temporibus Synagoga etiam postulat, ut ipsius antistites profanis quoque litteris eruditi sint. Talmudicam igitur scholam una cum gymnasio christiano frequentavi.

Longum est ad unum omnia enumerare. Brevi praedicam.

Haud aliter fieri potuit, quin mox certamen oriretur meo in animo utrius me addicerem scholae rationi? Id autem non ex ipsa rei natura factum est, ut in illo certamine inferior discederet talmudica schola et ut animus meus ad libertatem filiorum Dei victor

⁸⁷ < >: to be added; []: to be removed

perveniret. Deo creatori et salvatori, qui gubernat mundum et regit animos secundum beneplacitum suum, gloria et laus et gratia!

Quum contempler vitae viam usque ad hoc tempus peractam, et singula, tum vix spectata vel respectu digna habita, momenta nunc vero perspicua ut a Deo benignissimo et omnipotenti effecta: viva fit cognitio solidiorque quam si deducta sit e sexcentis philosophorum demonstrationibus: vivum esse Deum atque patrem filiorum suorum!

Quartae gymnasii eram discipulus, quum die quodam per ludibrium a christianis meis condiscipulis interrogarer: „Iudaei, quando tandem veniet Messias vester?” Confiteor, me tum huius interrogationis sensum non intellexisse, nesciebam, quid aut quem significaret vox „Messias”.

Multos jam per annos eruditus eram in lege ac prophetis; a parvula aetate quotidie compluries psalmorum et precationum solemnium verbis, quae abundant salvatoris desiderio, preces feci; sed haec omnia inscius – quia jam puero mihi inserebatur: „Non Moses, non prophetae, non precationes Deum propitium reddunt. Die et nocte ad rabbinorum pedes sedere, unum et solum iter ad salutem!”

Christiana mihi religio ignota erat, nesciveram, a Zione procedere ejus doctrinam.

Tunc contigit, ut mercatus esset in oppido nostro, quem pater visitavit cum praeceptore meo domestico, mihi quoque permissum erat, eos comitari. In mercatu pater parvum librum hebraicum emit, de quo revertens cum praeceptore meo loquebatur, paginas ejus percurrans. Tum iterum vocem Messiam audiavi. Mihi roganti pater media in voce resistens, aspere respondit: id nihil ad me attinere – statim libellum occultans.

Mea autem curiositas erat excitata.

Domi mox pervestigans patris bibliothecam non quaesitum reperi, sed alium librum Keithio auctore, quem lectum non intellexi totum, deficientibus plurimis, quae ad intelligendum necessaria sunt.

Paulo post homo quidam venit in oppidum nostrum biblias venditans; quum igitur illo tempore gallicam discerem linguam, ut haberem, quid facile legere possem, bibliam gallicam emi.

Statim nominibus Vetere – Novo Testamento commotus sum, prorsus Novum Testamentum, ne nomine quidem adhuc notum, admiratione me implevit. Mira[ra]bar me nunquam de eo audivisse, nunquam illud legisse, existimans, iudaicum esse librum. Simplex ego illud in scholam attuli talmudicam, magistrum consulturus, qui autem mihi, erepto libro severe interdixit, ne unquam talia legerem!

Nitimur in vetitum!

Curiositatis non satiatae causa ad amicos gymnasii me contuli, qui me rudimentis instruerent. Mox differentia Veteris et Novi Testamenti vulgo recepta, evidens mihi facta est. – Aliud exemplar paulo post nactus, studiose legi.

Excitata autem erat praepositorum quoque judaicorum suspicio. Observatus, proditus sum.

Translationem hebraicam libri Pilgrims Progress auctore Bunyan inveni in patris libris, quo etsi legens multarum sententiarum vocumque vim non intellexi, valde gavisus sum.

Magni etsi tantum negativi momenti erat libri נתיבות עולם lectio, et mirum in modum contigit, ut ipse pater illo temporis momento me a Rabbiorum religione abalienaret.

Hieme die sabbato in gymnasium profecturus et necessarios libros manu gestantem pater me vidit et interrogavit: „Tune ignoras nefas esse die sabbato aliquid gestare?“ „Sane,“ inquam, „at sine libris in scholam ire nec audeo nec possum.“ Tum ille: „Sub tunica saltem“ inquit, „gesta libros, ne videant homines.“

Parui, statim autem talmudi et hominum dogmatibus tergum verti.

Animo tum distento ac divulso diu vixi. Magistrorum Judaicorum praeceptis repudiatis nondum submiseram me Dei verbo, quia scripturam nondum animo complexus eram. Hoc ut fieret Deus Carolum Andr. Schönberger elegerat, qui illo tempore, quo patris domum, simulac ille me a praeceptis talmudicis abalienatum vidisset, relinquere coactus eram, Pestini, quo me contuleram, versabatur, ut doctrinam christianam propagaret missus. Via atque ratio, qua dominum Sch. inveni inter homines fortuita vel forte tantum oblata nominatur, ego vero gratias ago Deo, admirans itinera, quibus me ad eum traxit.

Sch. mecum perlegit prophetas unacum evangeliis et apostolis.

Orbe tunc novo coeloque vivebam recenti! Vere, novum mihi factum Vetus est Testamentum.

Multis tentationibus deinde a Deo missis eruditus sum. Cognovi, quid dixerit Dominus in parabola illa de satore. Gustata benignitate Domini promptus eram crucem portare eumque sequi; tum vero persecutiones, miseriae, inopiae in me inciderunt; multa externa internaue tormenta et victus quaeritandi cura omnem mihi consolationis occasionem praecluserunt.

Postquam Pestino me receperam, munere magistri scholae judicae in vico Kőrös-Ladány functus sum, rerum adversarum causa.

Per litteras colloquebar cum Schönb. Tum Deo auctore una epistolarum ejus in praepositorum meorum manus venit, quo factum est, ut vitae servandae causa in fugam statim me conjicerem.

Quo confugiendum mihi erat?

Parentum in domum reverti.

Sicuti „prodigum illum filium” reversum benigne suscepit me pater. Sed paucos tantum dies ibi mansi; cum enim vidisset pater, me etiam tum ipsius iudicio in errore versare, domo me expulit.

Deficiente pecunia proficisci non potui. Rector gymnasii, cui indicavi dolorem meum, Deo sic ordinante, me adjuvit, familiae religioni reformatae addictae, illo tempore⁸⁸ momento praeceptorem liberorum quaerenti, me commendans.

Octo igitur per menses in domo eram christiana eodem in oppido, ubi pater meus erat ecclesiae iudaicae rabbinus. Illis diebus examen, quo maturum me praeberem academicis studiis publice subii et Augusto mense Anno h.s. LXXI cum pecunia, quam collegeram primum Pestinum, posteaque, quum Schönb. ibi jam non esset, Viennam me contuli, ut in academia doctrinam christianam cognoscerem.

Omnia autem, quae audiebam, non solum a religione christiana, sed ab omni Dei cultu abducere erant idonea. Tum demum s. Biblia carissima et pretiosissima mihi facta est res, cuius in conscientia mea expertus sum vim; multum circumactus profanis literis in Scriptura tandem sola requiescebat cor meum.

Anno post Chr. nat. MDCCCLXXII denuo litteras dare mihi licuit Schönbergero, quem Pragae habitare cognovi; et vere anni LXXIII illuc profectus, longis durisque certaminibus et dubiis circumvolutus tandem per Dei gratiam ad confitendum nomen Domini accedere licuit, baptizatus ante diem quartum Id. Aug. anni post Chr. LXXIII.

Ardenti jam desiderio incitatus totum me tradere Domino, qui me sanguine suo redemit, litteris sanctis in academia operam dare deliberatum mihi ac constitutum erat.

Ad hoc perficiendum, quum facultates deessent, iterum Viennam reversus sum, institutione privata me alens atque sustentans.

Subsiccivis operis scholis evang. theologicis academiae Viennensis intereram, ubi ad ultimum discrimen adductus sum, omnia, quae Dei gratia accepi, amittendi, nisi Eduardus Böhl s. theologiae professor et doctor, ex abundanti Christi cognitione spiritualem cibum mihi praebisset. Huic viro, Dei gratia, plurimum debeo. Ille me ad veram iustitiae famem et sitim conduxit, ille mihi demonstravit miracula Verbi et summam Dei sapientiam.

Mox facultate abunde Basileam data, ibi totum studiis Scripturae sacrae linguarumque orientalium me dedi. Quo anno elapso a Basilea me recepi ardens desiderio, iterum sedere ad pedes illius Böhl et gratias ago agamque Deo, quod contigit mihi, hoc viro sex mensium et anni spatio⁸⁹ denuo⁹⁰ magistro uti.

⁸⁸ sic! Correctly: temporis.

⁸⁹ A small correction added in the original manuscript?

⁹⁰ Added later!

APPENDIX

Tres jam annos, Deo adjuvante, theologicis studiis me tradidi et nunc ardentem desiderans, viribus a Domino datis ad maiorem Dei gloriam uti! –