

The Construction of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Serbia: The Case of the Musician Josif Schlesinger

Maja Vasiljević , Haris Dajč



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Submission date: 02/09/2019

Acceptance date:

Published: 03/04/2021

Last updated: 03/04/2021

How to cite: Maja Vasiljević , and Haris Dajč, "The Construction of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Serbia: The Case of the Musician Josif Schlesinger", *Musicologica Austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies* (April 03, 2021)

Tags: 19th century, Jewish identity, Schlesinger, Josif, Serbia

This article is part of the special issue "[Exploring Music Life in the Late Habsburg Monarchy and Successor States](#)," ed. Tatjana Marković and Fritz Trümpi (April 3, 2021).



Abstract

This article explores the status of Josif Schlesinger (1794–1870), the first Serbian composer and professional musician in the court of Prince Miloš Obrenović (1780–1860), in the complex process of constructing Jewish identity in the web of Jewish legislation at the crossroads of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Schlesinger was singled out as one of the most prominent Jews in the Principality of Serbia. His status was far more favorable than that of Jews of other professions, especially merchants. The attitude of the Serbian government towards Jews during most of the nineteenth century can be divided into two periods. During the first period, until the early 1840s, Jews were free to work, travel, and settle, while during the second period, which lasted until the Serbians achieved independence in 1878, Serbia had anti-Semitic laws that suppressed Jewish rights to work, travel, and settle. The anti-Jewish laws were so strict that the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* had to write to the major European forces during the talks leading to the Treaty of Berlin to inform them of the situation in Serbia; the anti-Semitic laws were abolished almost a decade later. The change of policy towards Jews in the 1840s was due to the economic interests of a part of the Serbian merchant elite, which was also very involved in trade and commerce. In the long period after the introduction of the first anti-Semitic laws, the majority of the Serbian government became very hostile towards the Jews. Jewish merchants were not supposed to work and live outside of their neighborhood in Belgrade. According to Schlesinger himself, Jewish musicians enjoyed a different social status as members of a rare profession. In this article, the authors also focus on the problem of music migration from northern parts of the Habsburg Empire both to its south and to the newly (in 1867) established independent Principality of Serbia. The authors' approach is based not only on an intersection of military and political history but also on a sociological perspective on migration and the issues of minorities which deepens the musicological approach to the issue of "Jewishness" and music.



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Introduction

[1] During our preliminary research, we primarily asked ourselves why we needed to understand the position of the leader of the first Serbian military and court orchestra, Josif Schlesinger (1794–1870). We then singled out some of the answers, which afterwards became fragments of much larger controversial issues in the study of nineteenth-century Serbia in relation to minorities and the political, juridical, military, and social history in which music coexists.

First, Schlesinger's life mirrors the battle for modernization fought by nineteenth-century agrarian Serbia,^[1] particularly during the Obrenović dynasty (1815–42 and 1858–1903) and, for some years, the Karađorđević dynasty (1842–1958), which continued into the twentieth century. The whole of the nineteenth century and the period until the end of World War I was marked by the battle for education and the simultaneous migration of educated citizens from other parts of the Austrian Empire and, from 1867 on, Austria-Hungary.^[2] In our previous study, we reached the conclusion that “regarding music education, the whole of the nineteenth century is marked by the lack of local staff, so apart from the Czech music teachers who were coming from northern parts of Austrian Empire and then Austria-Hungary, also numerous Serbs named *Prečani* (the Serbs from Vojvodina, who lived in the Habsburg Monarchy; ‘preko’ means ‘across’ and is referring to the other side of the Danube) arrived.”^[3]

Second, we must bear in mind the existence of ethnic homogenization during Serbia's battle for autonomy,^[4] which resulted in the separation of the dominant Serb ethnic members as the most important ones in the process of establishing a national culture.^[5] In this context, we are dealing with the variable reception of Schlesinger in accordance with political and ideological conditions.

As a true pioneer of professional and orchestral music in Serbia from the 1830s to the 1850s and a founder of musical education and military/court instrumental performance in the Principality of Serbia,^[6] he was neglected in the awakening of Serbian nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century and during the first decades of the twentieth century. According to the theory of a “planned elite,” which was established by historian Ljubinka Trgovčević, we can conclude that when many Serbian musicians came back to their homeland from studying abroad,^[7] Serbian society no longer needed “fellow foreigners”^[8]—Czechs and Jews. Unfortunately, this topic would go beyond the scope of this particular study, and our focus is on understanding the position of Schlesinger in relation to identity struggles at the crossroads of two conflicting empires.

Our guiding principle was to diligently research the interesting position of Schlesinger, who is unequivocally present today in official music history as a pioneer of orchestral music and a music pedagogue to both the Serbian court and society but is not recognized for his identity struggles as a person who was also considered a foreigner, outsider, or exception. He was born an Ashkenazim Jew in 1794 in Sombor, which was declared a free royal city by Empress Maria Theresa (1717–80) in 1749 and was part of Bács-Bodrog County in the Kingdom of Hungary and then Austria-Hungary (until 1920), with a population of mostly Serbs and Bunjevci (Croats). Schlesinger finished regular school in 1805 and left Sombor in 1810 in search of work as a musician in Budapest and Novi Sad, among other places. Until he settled in Serbia, he was at the periphery of folk, popular, and art music practices and learning, performing, and teaching. He was primarily hired by aristocrats for music practice in their homes or in traveling music troops and chapels, all of which were considered “private practice.”^[9] During his stay in Novi Sad, where he also married Sara, the daughter of the former Zemun rabbi Jacob Friedenberga, he made some connections with church music and military bands for the first time.^[10] His marriage with

Friedenberg's daughter was important, as the Zemun Jewish community was a rare Jewish community that was allowed to flourish although it was part of the Military Frontier, situated just across from the Ottoman border and Belgrade. Schlesinger's time in Novi Sad was important, as that city was becoming one of the most important cities for Serbian citizens of the Austrian Empire and their cultural capital.^[11] We can only assume that during his time in Novi Sad Schlesinger learned more about his Serbian neighbors.

Therefore, for this article we went back to the roots, on the hunt for hidden or "microhistories of minorities" in nineteenth-century Serbia and their renowned representatives, such as Schlesinger. This kind of research allows for a deep understanding of the complexity of the Jewish presence in Serbia and their struggle for recognition, of which Schlesinger is an excellent case. That is why he became the focus of our research for this article. Following Schlesinger's biography, we left the Habsburg realm behind and arrived in the Principality of Serbia, as he did in 1829. He first settled in Šabac in the Palace of Jevrem Obrenović (1790–1856), the youngest brother of Prince Miloš Obrenović. Then, from 1831 on, he was in Kragujevac at the court of Prince Miloš, where he formed and led the Knjaževsko-srpska banda (Serbian Princely Band), a military-court orchestra, for over three decades and during numerous upheavals, up until the end of his life in 1870. In the following part of this article, we will examine the context that marked the Jewish communities in Serbia under the reign of Prince Miloš, and thus also the position of Josif Schlesinger.

Social Conditions for the Construction of Jewish Identity in Serbia

Jewish presence in Serbia can be traced—with minor breaks—to the early sixteenth century and the first settlement of Sephardim Jews, who arrived after the Turkish conquest of Belgrade in 1521.^[12] The first decade of the nineteenth century in Serbia was not easy for Jews, because in the newly liberated Belgrade, and under Austrian authority, they were perceived by the majority as connected to the Turkish population.^[13] After the short Second Serbian Uprising (1815–17) and the long period of peace, Jews were again becoming more present in Serbia as merchants and artisans due to the country's strategic position.

[2] Nineteenth-century Serbia is an interesting example of one of the fastest-changing political and social European entities for several reasons. First, Serbia was in constant struggle to gain independence, but it could expand only as long as the Ottoman Empire was the neighbor, because it was weak and in a defensive status at the time. Second, the path to Serbian autonomy, and later independence, meant that the state had to modernize, which was no easy feat to achieve given that it was predominantly an agrarian society of peasants, with limited resources for modernization.^[14] The territory of the new state had a lack of population, infrastructure, cities, and villages; it was in constant need of more people with knowledge and education, but also newcomers with economic resources. In that respect, the third issue was that nineteenth-century Serbia evidenced a lack of a merchant class, including artisans and freelance professionals, which made it fertile ground for both Serb and non-Serb newcomers and immigrants during this period. The Serbian state had to follow the European standards of removal of discriminatory laws against minorities under the requirements of the Treaty of Berlin (signed in

1878, but only put into force in 1888). As the Jewish community in nineteenth-century Serbia can be followed separately in Belgrade and the rest of Serbia, it is important to understand the divisions in the way Jews were treated “in” and “outside” of Belgrade, divisions that have existed throughout their Belgrade history. This is also very important for following the fate of the musician Schlesinger, who first came to Šabac in 1829, then lived in Kragujevac at the Serbian court of Prince Miloš from May 1831 until 1839, and then moved to Belgrade, the new capital of Serbia.^[15]



Figure 1: Johann Friedrich Gabriel Pöppel, “The appearance of the Belgrade Fortress”;
by courtesy of the Military Museum in Belgrade

In general, we can follow two perceptions of Jews among Serbs. On the one hand, they were nothing more than hostile Turkish millet.^[16] The Jews of Belgrade were killed by Serbian insurgents after December 1, 1806, and the Turkish defeat, only the few that had left for the fortress on time or made it to Zemun managing to survive. As a result, from 1806 to 1813 there were no Jews in Belgrade.^[17] On the other hand, there was a positive perception of Jews, cultivated by Prince Miloš Obrenović in both periods of his reign (1815–39 and 1858–60).^[18] This is why it is very important to understand the relationship between the first modern Serbian prince/ruler and Jews. His origin was no different than that of the rest of the Serbian revolutionists, who had humble backgrounds as merchants or respected local leaders—*knez* or *knjaz* (prince); however, his lifestyle and presence were much more akin to those of a Turkish pasha than a European ruler. Still, he had the first clear vision of what he wanted to achieve during his reign in Serbia. One of his most important and successful projects was the development and transformation of the few Serbian towns into vibrant cities. It was a slow process but an important one, as it allowed society to flourish and eagerly welcome foreigners, who were essential for the modernization of towns and therefore of society as a whole.^[19] He led his compatriots by example, surrounding himself with many important foreigners: Haim Ben David (nicknamed Davičo) was a Jewish arms dealer and a close ally of Prince Miloš;^[20] then there

were the Italian doctors Vito Romito and his son-in-law Bartholomeo Cuniberti (1800–51), who served as the physician for the whole Obrenović family from 1828 to 1839,^[21] the Greek builder Hadži Nikola Živković (1792–1870),^[22] his personal tailor Lazar Levenson, and finally the musician Josif Schlesinger, who was special among the others as he stayed in service the longest, from 1829 to 1858.

The period before the Sultan's *hatti-sherif* in 1830 and after the First Serbian Uprising,^[23] which brought official recognition of Serbian autonomy and gave Prince Miloš Obrenović the possibility to establish his dynasty, was a period of slow but gradual growth for the Jewish community in Belgrade. Prince Miloš's court was in Kragujevac, where he ruled from 1818 to 1839. Although Belgrade reached some degree of independence during the 1830s, it was still bordered by two great empires—Ottoman and Habsburg—and was the headquarters of a Turkish garrison under the command of a pasha.^[24]

The identity of Jews in nineteenth-century Serbia was determined primarily by their origin: either they were “Turkish” *čifuti* (Sephardim) or they were “German” *čifuti* (Ashkenazim).^[25] The “Turkish” *čifuti* or Sephardim were merchants or artisans, and they lived in their own *mahala* (ghetto) and dressed in the same oriental way as other citizens of Ottoman cities such as Belgrade. However, in Belgrade, we must have in mind what Attila Aytekin concludes about urban space regulations: “Belgrade urban space was not segregated. Although there were quarters known as the Turkish, Jewish and Serbian ones, these were not exclusive neighborhoods (*mahalles*). Muslims lived predominantly in the area between the fortress and the Danube; Christians inhabited the areas that extended towards the river Sava. The ‘Jewish quarter’ was in the midst of the Muslim one, near the Danube, and the borders between the two were vague.”^[26] Therefore, at first glance, Serbian residents did not perceive Jews as foreigners. After they re-migrated to Belgrade in the second decade of the nineteenth century, they could safely develop their businesses. Outside of Belgrade, they were also known as *čifuti torbai* (peddlers or travelling merchants), because they were merchants able to go to the most remote Serbian villages for any kind of trade. They were doing the same type of work Orthodox merchants had done in the eighteenth century in the Balkans, which helped them to develop the strong merchant class. Still, the local government and their Serbian colleagues (merchants and artisans) were trying to squeeze them out of the market, as they perceived them as a threat to their already established businesses.^[27] In addition, even when Jews were the only merchants doing trade in some remote places, they were also sabotaged from developing their businesses, despite local peasants needing them. With heavy taxation and in violation of the judicial system, local government tried to obstruct their business.^[28] It was only because of Prince Miloš that the growth of the Jewish communities did not stop until 1839. Aytekin is right to observe that until the Serbs finally achieved autonomy in 1867, the dual administration in the city did not always run smoothly; a number of issues caused conflict between the Serbian and Ottoman governments.^[29] One of the most visible problems concerned jurisdiction over the Jewish inhabitants of Belgrade. There was continuous disagreement between Ottoman and Serbian authorities as to who would have the say in the matter. As the “Jewish quarter” was located in the middle of the “Turkish quarter,” many Jewish homes and shops were surrounded by Muslim ones. The Serbian administration tried to restrict Jews who could afford to live in other parts of the inner city from settling outside the retrenchments. The Ottoman authorities, for their part, struggled not to abandon their claims of jurisdiction over the Jewish inhabitants of the city. One effective way in which they tried to do so was by safeguarding Jewish interests against the pressures of the Serbian authorities. The Jews themselves turned from time to time to the Porte for protection. Despite such instances and

competing claims of jurisdiction, Belgrade's Jews were effectively under Serbian rule for most of the period in question.^[30]



Figure 2: Carl Goebel, "The ruined gateway of Prince Eugene," Belgrade, 1865; © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

[3] The "German" Jews or Ashkenazim were not so numerous in Serbia at that time. The closest Ashkenazi community was in Zemun, just across from Belgrade. Except for trade, Ashkenazi Jews did not leave Zemun in the period for several reasons. First, Zemun had special status as the only Habsburg city at the Ottoman Danube border that had allowed Jews to settle since the mid-eighteenth century. Because of its special status, it was not easy for new Jewish families to settle there. Although the Jewish community was vibrant, it remained small until the boom in the 1770s, when Jews were even able to settle in border cities, which were seeing a new renaissance of Jewish life, such as Zemun, Pančevo, Zrenjanin, and others along the southern border of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. Jewish identity in all of these cities was almost completely Ashkenazim, although Zemun had a small Sephardim community.^[31]

The period of Prince Miloš's rule from the *hatti-sherif* until he was forced to leave Serbia (1830–39) represents a period of progress for Jews in Belgrade and Serbia, during which Jewish merchants and artisans could develop their businesses without much fear or obstructions. However, at this time we can also see the first signs of interference with Jewish lives and businesses. It is important to emphasize that in the early 1830s, Serbia gradually gained more autonomy, and as a result, Serbian merchants and artisans started to become increasingly hostile towards Jews. Up until 1839, there is evidence of a competition of sorts between the Serbian merchant class and Prince Miloš regarding the status of Jews, and the small community of Jews in Kragujevac was, at the time, more fortunate than the dominant community in Belgrade, as they were living in 'Miloš's city.' During this period, in 1838, the first Serbian-speaking higher education institution, the Lyceum of the Principality of Serbia, was founded in Kragujevac on the initiative of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864), later being moved to Belgrade.^[32] Moreover, the Prussian Adolf Bärmann established the Serbian newspaper and printing house *Novine srpske* (Serbian newspaper) in 1834. Finally, the state printing house was allowed to print Jewish books in Hebrew and Judaeo-Spanish/Ladino starting in 1837, and almost

60 books had been printed by the 1850s.^[33]

Schlesinger's Time in Serbia

This period was obviously the most important one for Schlesinger's musical mission in Serbia. He was the most important representative of the Ashkenazim Jews in Serbia at the time, yet had he not gathered with his fellow Jews for *minyan* for the Shabbat in Kragujevac, Serbs would not have thought him Jewish at all, as to them he looked more German or Austrian, or just like an European foreigner.^[34] Afterwards, the attitude of the public towards this far smaller group of educated professionals was far less negative, because the young Serbian society still did not have enough educated professionals, who were essential for modernization. In this sense, we can conclude that Schlesinger, although he was a "foreigner," was accepted by the Serbs. After all, he was one of the very few Ashkenazi Jews in Serbia who understood Serbian, as he was raised in Sombor—where he went to a public primary school (until 1805), and whose population was predominantly Serb and Bunjevac—speaking the "ekavski" dialect. Moreover, the time he spent in Novi Sad also contributed to his knowledge of Serbian language and Serbian culture.

Before Schlesinger came to Serbia, formal music education all around this territory meant only church singing in the newly established Great School, and after the *hatti-sherif* this kind of church choral singing became imperative in all schools. Another kind of music was secular folk music. Instrumental music in the Principality of Serbia meant Turkish orchestras or folk music of different ethnic groups. According to Višnja Protić, a historian of early music education in Serbia, Josif Schlesinger initiated a new period of music history.^[35] When Schlesinger became a Serbian citizen at the end of June 1830,^[36] he founded the first orchestra—called Knjaževsko-srpska banda (Serbian Princely Band)—at the court of Prince Miloš. For the orchestra, and through his diligent efforts, Schlesinger made professional musicians out of soldiers who had previously been only amateur musicians. The slow but prosperous professionalism of this military orchestra enabled Schlesinger to arrange folk tunes and art music and ultimately compose music especially for the musicians. They performed at national festivities, parades, balls, and family gatherings of the Obrenović dynasty and helped the provincial court society and culture to progress. In 1835, he composed music for the *komad s pevanjem* (theater play with music numbers) *Šnajderski kalfa* (Tailor's journeyman) by a pioneer of Serbian theater, Joakim Vujić (1772–1847).^[37] Afterwards, he composed music for numerous plays with plots from Serbian heritage and history for two famous Serbian playwrights, Jovan Sterija Popović (1806–56) and Atanasije Nikolić (1803–82).^[38] Besides the aforementioned stage music, which was important for the researching and understanding of music life at the court of Miloš Obrenović, Schlesinger also composed numerous compositions for the military wind band he conducted during this period. For this article, however, it is more important that in 1837 he composed the only piece of music dedicated to a Jewish holiday—op. 89 no. 2 *Jewish prayer "Adir Hu"* (Mighty is He) for *Pessah (Easter)*^[39]—for a military band.^[40] This prayer was particularly connected with the Ashkenazim ritual for Passover Seder. We can assume or even conclude that *Jewish prayer* is the only art music of this period to have been composed in Serbia and dedicated to a Jewish holiday, and so to Judaism too.

Therefore, during this period, Prince Miloš managed to defend his Jewish citizens from the discriminatory moves of his Serbian compatriots. The Jewish community flourished despite not being very rich and numerous, and the number of community members increased to around 1500 in the mid-1830s.^[41]

[4] This period ended with the so-called Jovan's Rebellion in May 1839^[42] and the inauguration of the new Karađorđević dynasty two years later. After the rebellion had been extinguished, Schlesinger was first thrown into the mud and beaten by the leader of the rebellion Toma Vučić Perišić (1787–1859), and then he was arrested and taken with 26 other arrestees, mostly soldiers and only four civilians,^[43] to the District Court in Belgrade, in which they were imprisoned. Schlesinger was in prison from 16 May to 30 September 1839,^[44] and although historians assumed that the reason for this was because he was a close friend of the exiled Prince Miloš Obrenović, documents prove that Schlesinger was officially “accused of inciting rebel soldiers and joining them on their way to Belgrade.”^[45] There is proof of the difficult prison days Schlesinger experienced^[46] and several attempts by Prince Miloš to have his bodyguard pulled out of prison, but he obviously did not perform this service for Schlesinger, as there is no mention of any such attempts to release his court musician.^[47] During this whole difficult process, Schlesinger was the only prisoner of the rebellion who insisted on an Austrian consul to participate in his trials, and his request was respected.^[48] When he finally left prison, he spent months trying to reclaim his salaries, the loss of which had caused his family to borrow money. Interestingly, the play *Ženidba cara Dušana* (Tzar Dušan's wedding) by Atanasije Nikolić, for which Schlesinger wrote one of his more successful stage compositions, was performed just a month and a half after Schlesinger got out of prison, in celebration of the name day of Prince Mihailo Obrenović (1823–68) on November 21 (Saint Mihailo for Orthodox believers).

The next period of the Jewish fight for recognition is during the time of the conflict between the Serbian merchant class led by the Ustavobranitelji (Defenders of the Constitution) and the Karađorđević dynasty, which preferred to exclude Jewish trade and other competition. Since Prince Miloš Obrenović was living abroad in Vienna at the time, the best way to study this period is through the new laws limiting Jewish presence outside of Belgrade that started to emerge in early 1844.

For the first time, Jews were not able to work and live outside of their neighborhood in Belgrade, and so for those living outside of the capital, their businesses and lives did not have much of a promising future. An interesting sign of this new trend was the anti-Semitic publication *Against the Jewish Fate*, which was published in 1840 in Belgrade after the publisher Manojlo Solar got the green light from the state censor in Kragujevac.^[49] The following year in Belgrade, after the sudden death of 17-year-old Pantelija Avramović on September 1, 1841, Belgrade Jews were accused, albeit wrongly, of his death, triggering an anti-Semitic response.^[50] A few years later, in 1844, the new Serbian Prince Alexander Karađorđević (1806–85) did not follow report when, on February 18, the Ministry of Interior Affairs sent a report about the growing presence of Jews (as a result of them fleeing from Romania and, to a lesser extent, from Bulgaria). Later in the same month, the main representatives from 14 different city guilds wrote to the city authorities, complaining that their businesses were suffering because of the Jews and begging for help as Jews were in a privileged position. Because of the growing anti-Semitism, in December 1844 the Ministry of Interior Affairs sent a new circular to all smaller police offices outside of Belgrade, stating that Jews were not allowed to live anywhere outside of Belgrade and Kragujevac.^[51] On October 30, 1846, the Serbian authorities reissued the law that did not allow Jews to live and work outside their community, and by supporting it, Prince Alexander Karađorđević took away the civil rights from the rest of the Jewish population. In the 1840s, Jews in Belgrade and Serbia found ways to outmaneuver the system: they managed to postpone the implementation of the law. According to the law, the religious rights of Jews were not endangered but only their citizen rights.^[52]

In the 1850s, the situation did not get much brighter for the Jews, starting with the Law on the Freedom of Religion in 1853.^[53] There were some cases of fighting against anti-Semitic actions by foreign powers, as in the case of the Don Pacifico Affair in Greece in 1850 (involving the protection of a Jewish resident of Athens and a British citizen), and although that case was very popular, as the UK was defending its citizen as a champion of democracy, there were no similar cases in Serbia, as we do not know that there were any Jews in Serbia that were also British citizens. The Don Pacifico Affair was important, as it was a perfect example that the newly established Balkan states and administrations had an obligation to defend all citizens and their property and respect citizen rights.^[54] Just a few months after the end of the Crimean War, on October 30, 1856, Prince Alexander signed the law that Jews should be treated in the same manner as others and as the equal citizens and that they could thus also settle all around Serbia and not only in Belgrade.^[55]

Much later, with the Constitution of Saint Andrej, that is, the Svetoandrejska National Assembly, and the restoration of the Obrenović dynasty, Prince Miloš became Prince of Serbia for the last time in his life in 1859. Jews could hope that they finally had the well-known person who would fight for their equality. In late September 1859, he passed a decree emphasizing that every citizen of Serbia, regardless of their faith/religion, was free to work in whatever field they wished in Serbia.^[56] Miloš Obrenović's decision was very powerful, but still he could not outweigh the decision made on September 18 by Parliament, or the so-called Malogospojinska National Assembly, that reaffirmed that Jews could not settle and work outside of Belgrade.

[5] However, Miloš Obrenović died in 1860, and his son did not have the strength to continue where his father had left off.^[57] Although the 1860s started with a lot of optimism, the lobbying of the Serbian merchant class was too strong for the young Prince Mihailo Obrenović, and that is why we can trace the number of discriminatory laws up until the Serbian Wars for Independence. In 1861, because of the pressure, Prince Mihailo passed a law in continuity with the Constitution of September 1859, casting out some of the Jewish families living in Central Serbia.^[58]

The reason why this period is more interesting than others is because European diplomats started to become more worried about the fair treatment and basic rights of Jewish citizens. Along these lines, we can follow the activities of the British diplomats, and for the first time the Belgrade Jewish community wrote to the *כל ישראל חברים* (*Alliance Israélite Universelle*: AIU) in Paris for help.^[59] This was a good move, as the AIU, through the British diplomats, put pressure on Serbian Foreign Affairs Minister Ilija Garašanin (1812–74) to stop practicing anti-Semitic laws. Still, although Prince Mihailo passed the decree as early as 1859, the lobby of Serbian merchants was still very strong and the laws did not change. In the 1860s, we can trace a much higher level of anti-Semitic behavior, especially in the city of Šabac, where, in 1865 on two separate incidents, two innocent Jews were killed and the perpetrators never found. Only after the death of Schlesinger and the Berlin Congress did the position of Jews legally change. After the dynasty change in late 1858, Schlesinger was promoted by the old Prince Miloš Obrenović to the guardian captain in 1859. His life in Serbia since his arrival in Šabac in 1829 and his legacy were so important for the development of Serbian music and art that every professional musician was called by his nickname during his life as well as in the decades that followed.^[60]

Conclusion

The case of Josif Schlesinger helps us to understand the importance of a minority individual and his impact in small countries like nineteenth-century Serbia. A personal relationship with a ruler and the respect and understanding of Serbian folk music traditions led to a series of unexpected events in the life of this composer, bandmaster, and musician. As such, we can conclude that the micro-perspective reflects on the macro-perspective as well. Josif Schlesinger and his life and work in Serbia were of high importance, not just because of his achievements on a professional level but because of the positive image he created for his Jewish compatriots (Ashkenazim or Sephardim). Additionally, his case highlights the importance of local microhistory in the research of the role of music and musicians in the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires.

Schlesinger's contribution to Serbian history, not only as a pioneer in music but as a Jewish pioneer in music whose name became synonymous with composers and musicians for decades, is important as it is very unique and represents one of the few exceptions of Jewish citizens in Serbia who became famous. Foreigners—like Schlesinger—who came to Serbia as outsiders were essential for the development of the young Principality, but most of the Jews that settled in Belgrade in Schlesinger's time remained second-class citizens.

Due to these circumstances, the role of Schlesinger is even more important, as he managed to retain his Jewish identity but still become very popular among other citizens who experienced him as a Jew, and later they would refer to him as a “Serb of Moses's Faith” in official statistics, the laws of the Principality, and the Kingdom of Serbia. We think that knowledge of the Serbian language and the possibility to create in and collaborate with leading Serbian directors and playwrights like Joakim Vujić, Jovan Sterija Popovića, and Atanasije Nikolić helped him keep his high reputation in Serbian society without drawing much attention to his religious identity. Through his case, we can see how Jews were accepted and assimilated; however, the second generation, for example Schlesinger's son and daughter, had to change their family name for state service.^[61] Even if we know that a deeper process of modernization came after the death of Josif Schlesinger, it is obvious that he acted and was recognized in Serbian society as a pioneer of the modernization of Serbian society—and the modernization, construction, and preservation of the nation through the collection of folk songs, the writing of songs inspired by the national idea, etc.—through Serbian music and theater. He also managed to pave the way for the perception of the Jews as “Serbs of Moses's faith,” which became very popular after Serbia's independence and achieved its peak during the Balkan wars of 1912–13. For future research on his identity struggles, it is important to examine further to what extent Schlesinger's musical poetics and experience with different musical practices contributed to the Western canon and thus bestowed a Habsburg legacy on the longstanding Ottoman heritage of the province of Serbia.



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2. Trgovčević, *Planirana elita*, 9; Maja Vasiljević and Haris Dajč, "Between Courtly, Civil, and Military Service: Military Musicians in the Principality and Kingdom of Serbia," *Istraživanja, Journal of Historical Researches* no. 28 (2017): 129. ↑
3. Vasiljević and Dajč, "Between Courtly," 129. ↑
4. Turkish historian Attila Aytakin is right to observe: "After a tumultuous period that followed the first revolt, Serbia officially became an autonomous principality in 1830. A de facto autonomy, however, had been in place since 1817. Similarly, Serbia became formally independent in 1878, but the Ottoman garrison and the civilian Muslim population had left Belgrade and other towns in 1867." E. Attila Aytakin, "The Production of Space during the Period of Autonomy: Notes on Belgrade Urban Space, 1817-67," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 6 (2016): 588. Therefore, the whole period we examine in this article can be understood as being a part of the battle for autonomy and the decomposition of Ottoman rule in "Turkey in Europe," as was the name for all of the provinces or regions of the Ottoman realm, later called the Balkans. ↑
5. Aytakin concludes that "Muslim and Jewish populations steadily declined as the nascent nation-state strived to mark the city with several planning and public works projects The birth of the Serbian national state and processes of de-Ottomanization should not be seen as the sole determinants in the development of urban space. The need for a fresh approach to the history of the city under the dual administration is necessary and relies on a perspective that considers the nationalization of Belgrade and similar state projects as being not the sole, but only one of the factors that reshaped the city, stressing the complexity of the production of urban space." Aytakin, "The Production of Space," 590. ↑
6. For a complex and rich history of Schlesinger's activities in the court of Prince Miloš, see Gordana Krajačić, *Vojna muzika i muzičari: 1831-1945* [Military music and musicians: 1831-1945] (Belgrade: Vojska, 2003), 14-31; and Radosav Marković, *Vojska i naoružanje Srbije kneza Miloša* [Prince Milos's army and the armament of Serbia] (Belgrade: Akademija and Naučno delo, 1957), 28-36. For his position in the Principality of Serbia's history of the arts, see Tihomir Đorđević, "Umetnost u Srbiji za vreme prve vlade Milana Obrenovića (1815-1839)," [Art in Serbia during the first government of Milan Obrenović (1815-1839)] *Prosvetni pregled* 2 (1921), 25-37. ↑
7. Trgovčević, *Planirana elita*, 183-85. ↑
8. Ivana Vesić, "Davorin Jenko 'naš stranac' u kulturnom životu Beograda (1865-1914): kontradiktornosti etničkog koncepta nacionalnog identiteta" [Davorin Jenko "our foreigner" in Belgrade's cultural life (1865-1914): contradictions of ethnic concept of national identity], *Limes plus* 2 (2013): 179-89. ↑
9. For more on this, see Franjo Š. Kuhač, *Josip Šlezinger: Prvi srpski kapelnik knjaževske garde* [Josip Šlezinger: The first Serbian chaplain of the Prince's Guard] (Zagreb: Dionička tiskara, 1897), 8-15. ↑

10. The first biography of Schlesinger and the basic research on his activities before coming to Serbia were based on conversations he had with his young colleague, a Croat from Osijek called Franjo Ksaver Kuhač (Franz Xaver Koch, 1834–1911). Kuhač was the first collector of folk melodies in Croatia and a prolific writer and researcher on music and the Illyrian movement, tied to Schlesinger by friendship and cooperation on the gathering and publishing of Serbian and Croatian songs. Alongside their friendship and his respect for Schlesinger's legacy, Kuhač's biography of Schlesinger expanded upon an earlier biography written by linguist Ignatz Reich, who presented Schlesinger's legacy as a Jewish missionary and a part of the history of *Israeliten* in Hungary: [Ignaz Reich, *Beth-El: Ehrentempel verdienter ungarischer Israeliten*, 2nd ed. \(Budapest: Alois Bucszánszky, 1867\), 2:214–32.](#) ↑
11. For more on this, see Dejan Mikavica, Nenad Ninković, Goran Vasin, and Nenad Lemajić, *Srbi u Habzburškoj monarhiji od 1526 do 1918*, vol. 1, *Od Mohačke bitke do Blagoveštenskog sabora 1526–1861* [From the Battle of Mohács to the Annunciation Council 1526–1861] (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2016). ↑
12. See Ženi Lebl, *Do konačnog rešenja: Jevreji u Beogradu 1521–1942* [Until the final solution: Jews in Belgrade 1521–1942] (Belgrade: Čigoja, 2001); Haris Dajč and Maja Vasiljević, "Status Jevreja u osmanskome i habzburškom Beogradu (XVII–XVIII vek): stranci, manjine ili saradnici?" [The status of Jews in Ottoman and Habsburg Belgrade (17th–18th centuries): foreigners, minorities or associates] *Limes plus* 59, no. 2 (2013): 85–104; and Bogumil Hrabak, *Jevreji u Beogradu do sticanja ravnopravnosti (1878)* [Jews in Belgrade until gaining equality (1878)] (Belgrade: Srpski genealoški centar, 2009). ↑
13. For further reading on the connections of Jews with Muslim populations in earlier times of Belgrade history, see Dajč and Vasiljević, "Status Jevreja." As a prerequisite for understanding the long process of friendly and hostile relations to Jews according to changes in the administration of Belgrade, we have to mention that the Turks conquered Belgrade in 1521, 1690, and 1739 and the Austrians reconquered it in 1688, 1717, and 1791. ↑
14. For further details, see Čalić, *Socijalna istorija Srbije*. ↑
15. This is mentioned in a letter that Jevrem wrote to his brother Prince Miloš about sending him Schlesinger and several band musicians from Šabac: Kuhač, *Josip Šlezinger*, 13; Krajačić, *Vojna muzika i muzičari*, 16; Marković, *Vojska i naoružanje Srbije*, 28–29. ↑
16. For more on the system of millets and Jews in southeastern Europe, see Dimitrios Stamatopoulos, "From Millets to Minorities in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire: An Ambiguous Modernization," in *Citizenship in Historical Perspective*, ed. Steven G. Ellis, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, and Ann Katherine Isaacs (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2006), 255–58; and Tulia Catalan and Marco Dogo, eds., *The Jews and the Nation-States of Southeastern Europe From the Nineteenth Century to the Great Depression: Combining Viewpoints on a Controversial Story* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016). ↑
17. Because of the 1806 changes, the old Sephardic synagogue in Belgrade was also destroyed for the last time before World War II. Jews that survived left Belgrade for Zemun, as it was a part of the Habsburg realm: Haris Dajč and Nikola Samardžić, "Holocaust, Communism, and the Fate of Belgrade Synagogues: Drowning in Ideological Mainstream," in *Architecture and Ideology 2012*, ed. Vladimir Mako, Mirjana Roter Blagojević, and Marta Vukotić Lazar (Belgrade: Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, 2012), 111–20. ↑

18. For further details and an analysis of his political personality and the main features of his reign, see Slobodan Jovanović, *Druga vlada Mihaila i kneza Miloša* [Second government of Michael and Prince Miloš] (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1923); idem, "Knez Miloševa unutrašnja politika," [Domestic policy of Prince Miloš] in *Srbi i demokratija*, ed. Luka Mičeta and Marinko Vučinić (Belgrade: Vidici, 1992), 21–36; and idem "Knez Miloš i seljačko pitanje," [Prince Miloš and the Agrarian Issue] *Sociološki pregled* 1 (1938): 13–26. ↑
19. For more on this, see Čalić, *Socijalna istorija Srbije*; and Haris Dajč, "Sava Slope: Its Urban and Historical Development 1867–1914," in *Prostori pamćenja/Spaces of Memory*, vol. 1: *Arhitektura/Architecture*, ed. Aleksandar Kadijević and Milan Popadić (Belgrade: Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2013), 148–49; Roksanda Pejović, "Czech Musicians in Serbian Musical Life (1844–1918), part 1," *New Sound* 8 (1996): 57–64; and idem, "Czech Musicians in Serbian Musical Life (1844–1918), part 2," *New Sound* 9 (1996): 64–75. ↑
20. Haim Ben David/Davičo was a highly respected Belgrade Jew who was a close friend of Prince Miloš. He was his personal "banker" and purveyor. There is a well-known story of how he saved the prince's life when Belgrade's vizier Yusuf Muhlis Pasha (governor of Belgrade Fortress, 1835–37) planned to assassinate Prince Miloš in 1835 after his arrival in Belgrade. For further details, see Lebl, *Do konačnog rešenja*, 78. ↑
21. Cuniberti was an Italian who, after receiving a degree in medicine, ended up in Serbia via Istanbul during the first reign of Prince Miloš. He was a close friend to Prince Miloš, and after the prince's abdication, he left Serbia in 1839. The prince was godfather to Bartolomeo's son. In addition to being the prince's personal doctor, he was also an adviser who periodically played important political roles, like in the case of the British consul Sir George Lloyd Hodges (1792–1862) and the negotiations between the consul and the prince. For further details on Cuniberti, see Dragana Antonijević, "Bartolomeo Kunibert: Uspomene na Srbiju iz prve polovine XIX veka," [Bartolomeo Kunibert: Memories of Serbia from the first half of the 19th century] *The Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnography of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts* 45 (1996): 77–87. ↑
22. Hadži Nikola Živković (known also as Hadži-Neimar) is considered to be among the most important architects of Belgrade in the early nineteenth century. Although he did not have a formal education, he was among the most eminent builders of Belgrade. Among the buildings he designed that have survived to the present day are Konak of Knjeginja Ljubica, Đumurkana, and Konak Kneza Miloša in Topčider. For more on this, see Zoran Manević et al., *Leksikon srpskih arhitekata XIX i XX veka* [Lexicon of Serbian architects of the 19th and 20th centuries] (Belgrade: Klub arhitekata, 1999), 201; and Branislav Kojić, "Arhitektura Beograda od 1815. do 1941. godine," [The Belgrade architecture from 1815 to 1941] in *Istorija Beograda* [The History of Belgrade], ed. Nikola Tasić and Miodrag Draginić (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 1995), 266–67. ↑
23. For more on this, see one of the first historians dealing with this topic, the famous Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886): [Leopold Ranke, *The History of Servia and the Servian Revolution; with a Sketch of the Insurrection in Bosnia*, trans. Alexander Kerr \(London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853\).](#) ↑
24. Ottoman garrisons existed in six Serbian cities: Belgrade, Fetislam (Kladovo), Smederevo, Šabac, Soko, and Užice. ↑
25. The use of Turkish *čifuti* and German *čifuti* can be traced in several archival documents

within two fonds of the Historical Archives of Belgrade: Fond Administration of the City of Belgrade 1839–1944 and Fond Zemun Magistracy 1751–1934. A similar division, but on a much larger scale, happened in Bosnia after 1879 and the Austro-Hungarian presence there. [↑](#)

26. Aytekin, “The Production of Space,” 594. [↑](#)
27. In the Historical Archives of Belgrade, Fond Zemun Magistracy 1751–1934, we found plenty of examples and reports from the 1830s which provide ample proof of this. [↑](#)
28. Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 28–29. [↑](#)
29. Aytekin, “The Production of Space”, 589. [↑](#)
30. *Ibid.*, 593. [↑](#)
31. For further information, see Ignjat Šlang, *Jevreji u Beogradu* [The Jews in Belgrade] (Belgrade: M. Karić, 2006). As the result of the First Serbian Uprising, many Jews that survived December 1806 moved across the river to Zemun. Therefore, Zemun also had a Sephardim community from that period until the Holocaust. [↑](#)
32. In reference to foreigners or newcomers, when the school opened in 1838/39, all the professors were *Prečani* Serbs—which was what Serbs from the Habsburg Monarchy were called. It was only from the 1860s on that half of the professors were autochthonous Serbs. [↑](#)
33. Katja Smid, “Ladino Rabbinic works printed in Belgrade: A Rich Jewish Past on its Way to Oblivion,” *Balkania* no. 6 (2015): 1–14. [↑](#)
34. Šlang, *Jevreji u Beogradu*, 76–77. [↑](#)
35. For details on the history of early music education in Serbia, see Višnja Protić, “Počeci muzičkog obrazovanja u Srbiji u vreme Karađorđa i prve vlade Miloša Obrenovića,” [The beginnings of music education in Serbia during the time of Karadjordje and the first government of Milos Obrenovic] in *Nastava i vaspitanje* 43, nos. 1–2 (1994): 65–75. [↑](#)
36. It is interesting to know that Jevrem wrote on August 25 to his brother about Schlesinger, calling him an “ex-Jew who became Catholic”: Đorđević, “Umetnost u Srbiji,” 24. However, there is no other evidence to suggest he ever changed his religion. [↑](#)
37. This was a translation of the play *Die Schwestern von Prag* by Joachim Perinet. [↑](#)
38. Schlesinger composed music for the following plays of Jovan Sterija Popović: *San Kraljevića Marka* (Kraljević Marko’s dream, 1848), *Miloš Obilić* (1828), *Bojna Kosovu* (Battle on Kosovo, 1828). Afterwards, he composed music for Atanasije Nikolić’s play *Kraljević Marko i Arapin* (Prince Marko and Arab, 1841) and others. [↑](#)
39. From Hebrew to English, this prayer is: “Speedily, speedily / In our days, and soon to come / Build, O God! Build, O God / Build Thy house speedily.” [↑](#)
40. The original title in a list of compositions Schlesinger sent to his friend Kuhač is *Židovska pjesma ‘Ad dir hu jivne hu’ za pasha (Voskrs) za vojničku kapelu*. In the same opus 89, for the first piece, he composed it as *Song of the Princess Catherine Obrenović*. See Archive of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, list of Schlesinger’s compositions (without fond

number). [↑](#)

41. Marko Perić and Srećko Stanić, “Jevreji Beograda u popisima stanovništva XIX i XX veka,” [The Jews of Belgrade in the censuses of the 19th and 20th centuries] *Zbornik Jevrejski istorijski muzej* 6 (1992): 249–75. [↑](#)
42. For the complex and interesting history of this event, see Petar Stanković, “Črezvičajni sud nad buntovnicima (1839) i Preki sud formiran povodom Katanske bune (1844),” [The Extraordinary Court over the Rebels (1839) and the Martial Court formed on the occasion of the Catan (Hussars)’s Rebellion (1844)] PhD diss., University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Law, 2016. [↑](#)
43. He was imprisoned with 22 garrison soldiers, three civilians (Jefta Vukićević from Svetlić, Stefan Gavrilović from Orašac, and Nikola Urošević from Kušiljevo), and one of Prince Miloš’s bodyguards, Marko Obradović, nicknamed “Gavaz.” [↑](#)
44. Stanković, “Črezvičajni sud,” 35. [↑](#)
45. Ibid., 40. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own. [↑](#)
46. On the basis of archive sources on this event and imprisonments, Petar Stanković observes in his dissertation that the health of the detainees was not taken into account. He specifically highlights the “fact that the beaten Josif Schlesinger in custody had to ask himself to enable treatment by bloodletting. The Ministry of Justice had approached Schlesinger for the ‘bloodletting’ and given him medication. The treatment of Schlesinger was entrusted to the famous doctor of Prince Miloš, Karl Pacek.” Stanković, “Črezvičajni sud,” 35. [↑](#)
47. Stanković, “Črezvičajni sud,” 35. [↑](#)
48. For more details on this, see *ibid.*, 75. [↑](#)
49. Miroslav Jovanović, Predrag Marković, Dubravka Stojanović, and Milan Ristović, *Živeti u Beogradu: Dokumenta Uprave grada Beograda 1837–1941* [Living in Belgrade: Document of the City Administration of Belgrade 1837–1941] (Belgrade: Čigoja, 2003), 203–4. [↑](#)
50. Hrabak, *Jevreji u Beogradu*, 317. [↑](#)
51. Just a year later, we can follow the very active correspondence between Belgrade Jews, the city authorities, and the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The pattern was the same: the Jews were complaining, but no answer was given on behalf of the state. [↑](#)
52. Lazić, Željko. “Pravni aspekti građanskih i verskih sloboda jevrejske zajednice na našim prostorima,” [Legal aspects of civil and religious freedoms of the Jewish community in our area] *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Nišu* 54, no. 71 (2015): 293–309. [↑](#)
53. Закон од 9. септембра 1853 [Law of September 9, 1853], *Сборник закона и уредби и уредбени указа и здани у Књажеству Србији* [Collection of laws, decrees and edicts in the Principality of Serbia], vol. 7 (Belgrade: National printing house of the Ministry of Kingdom of Serbia, 1854), 78–79. See further in Lazić, “Pravni aspekti,” 296. [↑](#)
54. For more details on this, see Elpida K. Vogli, “Οι ‘προστάτιδες Δυνάμεις’ και το ελληνικό βασίλειο: από τον Αγώνα της Ανεξαρτησίας μέχρι το επεισόδιο Pacifico” [The Greek Kingdom under the protection of the Great Powers: From the War of Independence to the Don Pacifico Affair], in *E-Istorika (Eleutherotypia): Don Pacifico Affair, the British Blockade*

of Piraeus in the 1850s (Parkerika) and the International Humiliation of Greece, eds. Artemis Psaromiligos and Vasiliki Lazou (Athens: Eleutherotypia, 2011), 37–68. ↑

55. Anon., “Rešenje o nastanjivanju Jevreja srpskih podanika u unutrašnjosti Srbije od 30. oktobra 1856” [Decision on the accommodation of Jews of Serbian subjects in the interior of Serbia on October 30, 1856], in *Sbornik zakona i uredba i uredbenny ukaza: izdany u Knâžestvu Srbii* 30 (Belgrade: Knjažesko Srpska knjigopečatnja, 1857), 340–41. ↑
56. Anon., “Ukaz knjaza Miloša o slobodi rada i zanimanja za sve građane srpske bez razlike vere i narodnosti od 26. septembra 1859” [Order of Prince Miloš on the freedom of work and occupation for all citizens of Serbia without differences of religion and nationality of 26 September 1859], in *Sbornik zakona i uredba* 30, 346. ↑
57. An interesting fact is that in the same year in Zemun, the future founder of the Zionist movement Theodor Hertzl (1860–1904) was born. ↑
58. Anon., “Tumačenje rešenja o Jevrejima od 30. oktobra 1856. i drugog od 26. septembra 1859. i raspisa popečiteljstva finansije od 28. februara 1861. o tome, da oni ne mogu imati nepokretnosti u unutrašnjosti Srbije i da se njino trgovanje ograniči na ličnost sadanjih Jevreja trgovaca od 4. novembra 1861” [Interpretation of the decision on the Jews on 30 October 1856, and the second from 26 September 1859, and the publication of the book of financials from 28 February 1861, that they cannot have immovables in the interior of Serbia and that their trading is limited to the personality of the Jewish traders since 4 November 1861], in *Sbornik zakona i uredba* 14, 94. ↑
59. The AIU was headed by the well-known and influential Jewish philanthropist Ser Moša Montefiore, the great protector of Jews throughout the world and especially in the Turkish provinces. ↑
60. Krajačić, *Vojna muzika i muzičari*, 14. ↑
61. His daughter Keća changed her name to Milica. His younger son Herman studied medicine at the university in Pest and after he received his diploma in 1848, he returned to Belgrade to work as a surgeon. He became an Orthodox Christian and changed his name. However, as a tribute to Schlesinger, Kuhač found a composition by Schlesinger's older son Adolf called *Symphony on the theme 'Building of the Ravanica'* and also mentioned that he published Serbian melodies for piano under his changed name Đorđe Š. Milanović (Kuhač, *Josip Šlezinger*, 13). For details on the Schlesinger family, see Andrija Radenić, “Jevreji u Srbiji – Genealoško stablo Josifa Šlezingera i njegovih potomaka,” [Jews in Serbia – Genealogical tree of Joseph Schlesinger and his descendants] *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja*, no. 6 (1992): 113; and Živana Vojinović, “Najpoznatiji šabački Jevreji,” [The most famous Šabac Jews] *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja*, no. 10 (2015): 183–274. ↑

Cover picture: Portrait of Josif Schlesinger, from Ignaz Reich, *Beth-El: Ehrentempel verdienter ungarischer Israeliten*, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Alois Bucsánszky, 1867).