

Lunching under the Goya. Jewish Art Collector during Budapest's Golden Age

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the passion for art collecting which was in vogue among the representatives of the Jewish haute bourgeoisie of Budapest in the beginning of the 20th century. In the center of investigation is the collection of Baron Mór Lipót Herzog who not only became one of the leading art collectors of Budapest but influenced the development of the European artistic taste. The Jewish industrialist and banker played instrumental role in the rediscovery and popularization of El Greco.

In 1930 Hungarian painter Lipót Herman paid a visit to the Munich residence of Marcel Nemes, the legendary art collector, dealer and the fellow Hungarian. The opulent dwellings of the aged Nemes situated in the center of the city on the snobbish Leopold Strasse. The apartment, which looked more like a palace impressed the painter. Herman noted in his diary, “Extraordinary rarities which you can hardly see in any apartment. Lunch under the Goya, black coffee in the shadow of Rembrandt and Titian.”¹

In the 1930s the star of Nemes was setting. He belonged to a different epoch. The treasures accumulated by him were sold, then accumulated again just to be sent yet again to the auction room. Nemes began his career as a coal trader in Transylvania, finally became an art collector, dealer and international celebrity rubbing shoulders with art critics such as Julius Meier-Graefe, and such European museum directors like Hugo von Tschudi and financial tycoons in Budapest, Vienna, Munich and Berlin. Not over scrupulous and eager for luxury Nemes was constantly pursued by financial troubles, by overspending on art works and luxurious residences. He loved publicity and mercilessly courted the press, understanding the power the fourth estate, which he gained by the end of the 19th century. Nemes often exhibited his newly acquired treasures in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest attracting the public's attention to his finds and those finds were worthy of attention. Nemes collected old masters, French impressionist and contemporary Hungarian painting. He was especially fond of El Greco and Goya and helped to establish the fashion for the collecting of Spanish art in Hungary, in

¹ Peter Molnos, “Passion and Knowledge. The Bedo Collection and its Place in the History of Hungarian Art Collecting”, *Rudolf Bedo's Art Collection*, (Budapest: Kieselbach Gallery, 2010), 319-320.

particular within Central Europe in general. In 1911 with the help of von Tschudi he organized an exhibition of the canvases in his possession of El Greco in the *Alte Pinakothek* in Munich.²

His most important accomplishment was the ability to establish close a relationship with Baron Mór Lipót Herzog, the fantastically rich industrialist and banker, whom Nemes succeeded in transforming into a fanatical art collector.

A Jew from Transylvania, who quit coal trade for the glitzy world of art dealing, converted the scion of the Jewish family, which started its businesses in 1830s in southern eastern Baranya County by consigning wool and tobacco, and was able to establish by the end of the 19th century this huge financial empire, into a religion of art.

Nemes was a prophet, who heralded the beginning of so called Golden Age in the Budapest Jewish art collecting, which coincided with the beginning of the 20th century. In no time the Budapest Jewry amassed impressive art riches turning the villas on the Buda hills and palaces on the tree-lined Pest avenues into private museums. The intensity of the Hungarian-Jewish art collecting had no equivalent in other countries in Central Europe, where the Jewish bourgeoisie also fell victim to the idolatry of art.

This collecting frenzy coincided with a peak the assimilation of the Hungarian Jewry and manifested the transformation of heirs to provincial Jewish merchants into industrialists and bankers – the last aristocracy of the Dual Monarchy.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Jews of Budapest were probably the best assimilated Jews in Central Europe.³ As bankers and lawyers, doctors and entrepreneurs they constituted the core of the urban bourgeoisie within the dual monarchy's second capital. They dominated the financial elite and many were knighted by the emperor Franz-Joseph⁴. They were members of parliament and habitués of elite clubs, patrons of art and literature societies and very often better Hungarians than ethnic Hungarians themselves. As patriotic citizens of their country, the Jews of Budapest spoke and thought in Hungarian. They felt more at home in Budapest than the Jews of Prague or Vienna did in their respective cities. In fact, many of them did not want to be Jews any more. For long period it was possible, all that was required was loyalty to the Kaiser and King and they were loyal subjects indeed. By 1900, many members of the Jewish elite in Budapest had already spent two generations decorating their stationary with the baronial coats of arms and decorating their splendid mansions with Christmas trees in

² *Katalog der aus der Sammlung des Kgl. Rates Marcell von Nemes - Budapest ausgestellten Gemälde*, ed. Hugo von Tschudi, (Munich: Alte Pinakothek, 1911).

³ William McCagg Jr., *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary*, (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1972.)

⁴ *Ibid.*, 131 – 158.

December. The Hatvanys, Herzogs, Weisses, Chorins and Kornfelds were converted Christians and would inspire the young native of Budapest Herzl Tivadar – better known as Theodor Herzl – to believe that the mass conversion of the Viennese Jews in St. Stephen’s Cathedral would solve all their problems.⁵

Yet, this seemingly successful assimilation showed signs of cracking, as at the end of the 19th century those who did not want to be Jews were increasingly reminded that they were Jews despite their coats of arms and Catholic rosaries. The growth of German, Hungarian and Czech nationalism and populist political movements heralded the coming of a storm. Karl Luger, the notorious Austrian anti-Semite and able mayor of Vienna, invariably referred to the Hungarian capital as “Judapest.”⁶ But at this early stage both Luger’s rhetoric and the anti-Semitic escapades of some homegrown Hungarian Luger appeared to be merely demonstrations of vulgarity and not the forecast of potential danger.⁷ It was as foreign to the attitudes of true Hungarian nobility (the provincial gentry would behave differently) as to the bourgeois “bildung.” Jewish aristocrats continued to run their financial empires and were invited to the palace on the days of the emperor’s visits. Most importantly, they served culture, which was their true religion. It appears that money, conversion and knighthood were not in themselves sufficient enough for the Jewish elites of Budapest to feel as if they were true nobles. Art and literature became even more important mechanisms for social legitimization of the “last aristocracy” than that of mentioning their Austro-Hungarian knighthood. As a result, it seems today as though every representative of the Jewish elite in *fin de siècle* Budapest poured energy and resources into collecting art.

This accumulation in art manifested the new stage in the difficult relationship of European Jewry with visual arts. The ritual prohibition of imagery in Judaism and the practical absence of the tradition of figurative art for centuries excluded Jews from the development of artistic culture in Europe. The violation of the prohibition coincided with the development in the assimilation process. The first Jew to become a professional painter of note was only in the 18th century, but he remained the exception proving the rule. Only the 19th century tentatively set ajar the doors of art schools for those people who before were only destined for the education in yeshiva. During the second part of the 19th century two main types of European Jewish artists were formed. The first group would be represented by the Russian Jew – landscape painter Isaak Levitan, who created extremely nationalistic art

⁵ Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 118-120.

⁶ Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 35.

⁷ McCagg Jr., *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary*, 129.

deprived of even the slightest Jewish references, the second by the German Max Libermann, the modernist painter who produced cosmopolitan art foreign to both nationalism and Jewishness.⁸ (It is interesting that introduction of the Jewish topicality into art produced by Jews from the symbolist illustrations of Ephraim Moses Lilien to the ‘*shtetl* cubo-futurism’ of Marc Chagall was bound to both the rise of modernism and Zionism).⁹

But if the transformation of a Jew into a painter heralded the arrival of assimilation, then the metamorphosis which turned a rich merchant-industrialist into an important art collector, coincided with its focal point. In Berlin “James Simon and Eduard Arnold, two of imperial Germany’s richest men – both known as *Kaiserjuden*, Jews on fairly close terms with Wilhelm II – were important collectors, with Arnold graduating to Renoirs and Cézannes after casting off safer, more traditional art, and Simon specializing in painters of the Italian Renaissance.”¹⁰ In Vienna while Bloch-Bauers were commissioning paintings by Klimt, Rudolf Gutmann amassed Rembrandt prints and Oskar Bondy was hunting for Renaissance and mediaeval art. The art treasures from the regal Rothschilds of Vienna were strengthening their wealth and influence.¹¹

Why did Jews begin to collect art with such intensity? Was it just an instrument of legitimization in this gentile society, the *noblesse oblige* behavior of *nouveau riche parvenus*? Obviously such factors played an important role, but it appears that this genesis in Jewish art collecting was more complicated. The prohibited fruit of visual art finally became available to the people of the book, who for centuries had resisted temptation of an image. Jewish art collections were essentially different to the traditional aristocratic collections usually assembled not just by one person, but by generations of the same family. It was marked by history, because it represented a continuous flow of it. The material world from the noble estates by definition was multilayered and embodied temporal change in tastes – the old fashioned could not easily be excluded, because even if it could be interpreted as ‘bad taste’ it was the taste of predecessors. Every Central European castle and palace unavoidably housed a portrait gallery. Such gallery mirrored changes of art styles through the epochs, but in this case art history simply mirrored in the family’s visual chronicle were the great grandfather in the

⁸ See Igor’ Grabar’, *Isaak Ilich Levitan. Zbiżny i tvorčestvo*, (Moscow: Knebel’, 1912). See also, Lothar Brauner, *Max Libermann*, (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1986).

⁹ On Lilien see Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 98-112. On Chagall, see Aleksandr Kamensky, *Chagall: The Russian Years, 1907- 1922*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

¹⁰ Peter Gay, *Modernism. The Lure of Heresy From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, (New York, Norton: 2007), 86.

¹¹ See Sophie Lillie, *Was Einmal War*, (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2003).

powdered wig, painted by a provincial Austrian painter, was first of all an ancestor and only in the second place a masterpiece of the provincial baroque.

Jews were deprived of their ancestors – the wise rabbis and shrewd merchants existed mainly as legends sometimes reflected on the pages of manuscripts and rarely existing as unskillful portraits or engravings of the late 18th- early 19th century. They would not fill the spacious galleries in the newly acquired baronial castle in Htavan or of the lofty palace on Andrassy Avenue in Budapest. The attitude of the new aristocracy to the ancestors was ambivalent - on the one hand the ancient legends about the distant relationship to the legendary Judah Loew ben Bezalel, known as the Maharal of Prague, the creator of Golem who advised Emperor Rudolf II on the secrets of Kabbalah, were flattering, yet on the other hand the succession of the less illustrious predecessors - merchants spread around provincial Hungarian towns, working hard to establish the foundations of future success, were less exciting.¹² Those people knew how to count money, but lived before the emancipation, out of the bounds of ‘civilization and culture’. They were not introduced to the bon ton, which according to the definition of Lajos Hatvany, the son of the Jewish industrialist Sandor Htavany-Deutsch, who became a writer and a literary patron, included conversion to Christianity which was as socially obligatory as dressing up for an evening in a tuxedo.¹³

In the context of the Jewish art collection the portrait gallery was filled with the canvases, which were selected not because they depicted the great-grandfather, but because they were representing Baroque, Renaissance, or any other period in the history of art. The principle of such gallery was opposite to the traditional visual chronicle of the noble clan – it was also about history, but such history was much broader even than that from the artistic annals of the respected European royal houses. If in the traditional aristocratic portrait collection an incidental masterpiece could be found among the numerous images of ancestor in the Jewish portrait gallery an incidental portrait of a predecessor might be lost among numerous masterpieces. The owner of such a portrait gallery was not only entitled to select the faces he wanted to see on his walls, but was becoming an heir to history as such. This historical cosmopolitanism permitted a combination on one interior, a portrait of a Venetian nobleman by Tintoretto, an image of a woman with prayer

¹² According to the family legend Hatvany family was related to Rabbi Loew. The history of the Hungarian Jewish family from Emancipation to the knighthood was described in the novel of Lajos Hatvany, *Lords and People*. The first volume of the unfinished trilogy was translated into English. See Lajos Hatvany, *Bondy Jr.*, (London: Hutchinson, 1931).

¹³ Janet Elizabeth Kerekes, *Masked Ball at the White Cross Cafe: the Failure of Jewish Assimilation*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005),140.

book by Andrea Solario with that of a portrait by the painter Louis-Alexis Jamar by Theodor Gericault or a self-portrait of Hans von Mare.¹⁴ Faces, which were looking down from the walls of the collector's house were belonging to the family of mankind and did not illustrate a private history of kin, but a history of development of art - an illustration of progress as such.

In a certain sense, the composition of the grand Jewish collections of Budapest were manifested from a notion that the ownership of history and cultures, the borders of which were extended much broader than that of a family chronicle or history of a nation. Such collections reflected perfectly the taste and tendencies of the time. One of the leading predispositions was the secularization of art conception, which on one hand permitted the newly converted Jewish collectors to amass art works on Christian topicality including devotional medieval images and on the other hand, gave opportunity to a few pious collectors who did not compromise the faith of their fathers in order to transform collections of Judaic liturgical objects into an aesthetic exercise.

Mór Lipót Herzog and Ferenz Hatvany decorated the walls of their palaces and villas with the images of Catholic saints, the canvases were important for them not because of who was depicted, but by whom that person had been depicted by. The passions of Christ or images of evangelists and apostles were codified by the names of El Greco or Cranach. Such a definition of a religious image by means of its creator's name helped to remove it from an ecclesiastical context and to root it firmly in the history of world art, interpreted as a succession of illustrations in human progress. However the transformation of religion into art which led to a sacralisation of art and culture in general was not less powerfully reflected in the stockpiling of Dr. Ignac Friedmann who gathered more than 200 Torah scrolls, more than 300 Torah crowns and hundreds of silver liturgical objects mostly dated to the 18th century. Etrog containers, menorahs, and Seder plates were collected by him not only because they were Jewish, but because they were beautiful and their silverwork was exclusive. Friedmann applied to Judaica the aesthetic approach, not fully relieved of a certain notion of exoticism. Trying to keep himself in the framework of such strictly Jewish accumulations Friedmann couldn't escape unexpected lapses into buying Japanese prints, Donatello marbles or an incidental Paul Signac pastel.¹⁵

The Jewishness of the Ignac Friedmann's collection was more of an

¹⁴ All the mentioned paintings belonged to the collection of Ferenz Hatvany. See Laslo Mravik, *The "Sacco di Budapest" and Depredation of Hungary, 1938-1949: Works of Art Missing from Hungary as a Result of the Second World War: Looted, Smuggled, Captured, Lost and Destroyed Art Works, Books and Archival Documents: Preliminary and Provisional Catalog*, (Budapest: Published by the Hungarian National Gallery for the Joint Restitution Committee at the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education, 1998), 223-275.

¹⁵ Mravik, *The "Sacco di Budapest" and Depredation of Hungary*, 196-208.

exception than the rule. Despite of its demonstrative character it belonged to that type of specialized collections amassed by numerous representatives within the Budapest Jewish haute bourgeoisie. In its principle it was not too different to those collections of Berthalan Hatvany, who being a self-taught Orientalist gathered objects of Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Persian art or those in the private museum of porcelain created by Baroness Joseph Hatvany.¹⁶

Such specialized collections were dwindling in comparison to the grand private museums, which usually had a special focus on certain art movements or artists, but at the same time laid claim for a universal approach. The universalism of the Budapest Jewish collectors corresponded to that of another trend at the time. Remaining Euro-centrist they were expanding the borders of art by including Oriental accents into their private museums, for example, the famous assortment of rugs created by Ferenz Hatvany.¹⁷ However such inflections were secondary decorations compared to the main historical narratives in the progress of European art from the middle ages (sometimes with the inclusion of a few Egyptian and Greek and Roman objects) to the Hungarian paintings of the *Belle Époque*. By the end of the 19th century this very category of universal art collections formed in the 1880s became a bit old fashioned, too linked to the positivist model of progress in arts i.e. civilization.

Unavoidable Gothic sculpture was followed by Flemish primitives, Italian Renaissance paintings, works of Cranach, and the occasional examples of Austrian 19th century art. The end of the 19th century was richly represented by French impressionism and Hungarian painting.

If the Herzog and Hatvany collection followed in general such a historical narrative, both of them still had strong specific focuses. Such deviation from the positivist model of a collection as illustrations to the history of art, manifested by the inclusion of groups of art works which reflected the trends in typical artistic tastes at the end of the century. The record of the development of art through time was destroyed by the excessive attention to one historical period, which overshadowed other works of art reducing them to the role of frames for the epoch/artist chosen to become a paramount manifestation of the collector's taste.

Baron Mór Lipót Herzog (1869-1934) belonged to a family, the destiny of which perfectly reflected the speedy enrichment and emancipation of Hungarian Jews in the 19th century. His grandfather Adolf relocated to Budapest from Baranya County in about 1836. He established a solid involvement in tobacco and wool consignments, but did not achieve any striking financial success. The situation changed after 1862 when his son

¹⁶ On Berthalan Hatvany see Mravik, *The "Sacco di Budapest" and Depredation of Hungary*, 213-222; on Baroness Joseph Hatvany see, *Ibid.*, 276-301.

¹⁷ Mravik, *The "Sacco di Budapest" and Depredation of Hungary*, *Ibid.*, 269-272.

Peter took over the company. A shrewd investor, he was able to make a profit during the economic crisis of 1873. The tobacco consigner became the owner of the biggest flour mill in Pest and received nobility by the end of 1886. By the end of the century Herzog monopolized trade of Balkan and Turkish tobacco in Central Europe. The family company diversified assets investing in the chemical and coal industries. After the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia in 1878 Herzog constructed chemical plants and invested in tobacco fields in the new protectorate. After the 1900's the family business made another turn – Herzogs established one of the biggest commercial banks in Hungary. In 1906 Herzogs became barons.¹⁸ Financial wealth and political power was then to be converted into cultural capital. Such conversion was realized by Mór Lipót, who having been seduced into collecting art by Nemes soon became, not only a successful businessman, but professional collector. Herzog established a universal art collection, which was typical for the end of the 19th century. His interests were numerous. The baron was taken by applied arts – his selection of Gothic and Renaissance goldsmith objet d'art was the best in Hungary. He also collected sculpture, but the larger portion of the Herzog treasures was undoubtedly the picture gallery. Paintings from the Early Renaissance, Flemish primitives, and canvases by Bassano and Tiepolo, and Dutch painters of the 17th century formed the core of the collection. As true son of his time, Herzog was not able to escape the French revolution in art; on the advice of his friend and mentor Marcell Nemes, he began purchasing works by French artists. Paintings of Corot and Renoir, Manet, Cezanne and Gauguin appeared on the walls of Herzog's palace.¹⁹ Herzog's appetite for collecting was insatiable. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Andrassy Street palace had no space left for living - the collection actually exiled its owner. The family mansion had turned into the family museum. Only two habitable rooms remained in the gigantic palace; the collector's sister occupied one of them. Another room served as the Herzog study which was destined to become the sanctuary for those favorite artists of the Budapest collector. The walls of the room were covered by El Greco canvases. It was the best private collection of El Greco outside of Spain.

¹⁸ William McCagg Jr., *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary*, 152-154.

¹⁹ Laslo Mravik, "Princess, Counts, Idlers and Bourgeois' - A Hundred Years of Hungarian Collecting", *Modern Hungarian Painting 1892-1919*, (Budapest: Tamás Kieselbach, 2003), 19-20.



Fig. 1, Study of Baron Mór Lipót Herzog decorated by canvases of El Greco, 1910s. Courtesy of the Commission for Art Recovery of the World Jewish Congress

Amongst the masterpieces amassed by Herzog were: *The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*,²⁰ *The Agony in the Garden*,²¹ *Holy Family with St. Anne*,²² *The Disrobing of Christ*,²³ *Study of a male head (St. Paul)*,²⁴ *Saint Andrew the Apostle*,²⁵ *Annunciation*,²⁶ and *Apostle St. James*.²⁷

Such an obsession for El Greco was initially provoked by the influence of Nemes - one of the first Central European collectors, who

²⁰ Now in the collection of Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid:

<http://www.lib-art.com/artgallery/11755-the-virgin-of-the-immaculate-concep-el-greco.html>

²¹ Now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest:

"<http://www.szepmuveszeti.hu/web/guest/gujtemenykereso?themeId=navigation.4.la.yout.id.29.21>"<http://www.szepmuveszeti.hu/web/guest/gujtemenykereso?themeId=navigation.4.layout.id.29.21>

²² Now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/menesje/3841624337/in/set-72157622052260292>

²³ Now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/menesje/3844303067/in/set-72157622052260292>

²⁴ Now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/menesje/3841624553/in/set-72157622052260292/>

²⁵ Now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/menesje/4364531749/in/set-72157622052260292>

²⁶ The painting was in collection of the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio. It was auctioned by Sotheby's in 2007:

http://invertirenarte.es/mercadodearte/imagenes/Enero%2013/sothebys_greco_la_annunciacion.jpg

²⁷ The painting now is held in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow:

<http://www.heraldofeurope.co.uk/Article.aspx?ArticleID=1111518266>

rediscovered the Spanish school. However the fascination of Herzog with the distorted images produced by the champion for Catholic exaltation was typical for that time. The mannerist excesses of the Spanish painter were in rhythm to the irrational trend of the European modernism. The rejection of rationality in 19th century academic art in particular and a positivist project provoked the search for the new idols. El Greco undoubtedly was one of them. Despite the fact that his paintings were included in the French Gallery in the Louvre which opened in 1838, the real rediscovery of the legacy left by the native Cretan, who was destined to become the quintessential Spanish painter, took place only at the end of the 19th century. Thanks to the efforts of the Basque artist Ignacio Zuloaga El Greco attracted the attention of cultural figures at that time, such as, the art critic Julius Meire-Graefe and the poet Rainer Maria Rilke.²⁸ Meire-Graefe, who in 1910 published his *Spanische Reise* – the exalted eulogy of El Greco – saw in the painter the precursor of European modernism.²⁹

In 1920 Max Dvořák, the professor for the History of Art at Vienna University and the person who created the conception of *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte* in his lecture dedicated to the Spanish master stated:

“It is not difficult to see why, over the next two hundred years, El Greco was to become more and more neglected; these were years dominated by the natural science, by mathematical thought and superstitious regard for causality, for technical development and the mechanization of culture – years dominated by the eye and the mind but demonstrating an almost complete disregard for the heart. Today, this materialistic culture is approaching its end. I am thinking not so much of its external demise as of its inner collapse which, for over a generation now, we have been able to observe affecting every sphere of cultural life, especially our philosophical and scientific thinking [...] We have seen how both in literature and art there has been a turning towards a spirituality freed from all dependence on naturalism, a tendency similar to that of the Middle Ages and the mannerist period. [...] It is thank to this turn of events that we have come to recognize in El Greco a great artist and prophetic spirit, one whose fame assured for all the time.”³⁰

²⁸ Michael Scholz-Hänsel, *El Greco: Domenikos Theotokopoulos, 1541-1614* (Cologne: Taschen, 2004), 89-90.

²⁹ Julius Meire-Graefe, *Spanische Reise*, (Berlin: Fischer Verlag, 1910). On the Meire-Graefe's discovery of El Greco see Eric Storm, “Julius Meier-Graefe, El Greco and the Rise of Modern Art”, *Mitteilungen der Carl-Justi-Vereinigung*, 20. Jahrgang 2008, (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2009), 113-133.

<https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/14812/Meier-Graefe.pdf;jsessionid=82D41A4A23D169AF1DF17F578BDE520F?sequence=1>

³⁰ Max Dvořák, *The History of Art as the History of Ideas*, (Routledge: London, 1984), 108.

What Dvořák saw as the desired return to spirituality and rejection of naturalism – “a tendency similar to that of the Middle Ages”, heralded in reality the collapse of the European cultural model of the 19th century. The newly formed fashion on the ‘prophetic spirit’ of El Greco became a prophecy in itself. According to the sharp observations made by Francis Haskell directed at the Viennese art historian, “El Greco fulfilled the more mystical requirements of a prophetic role by almost unconsciously incarnating and expressing those aspects of the spirit of his time – so Dvořák hoped [...] were about to prevail in the wake of the World War.”³¹

On the part of Herzog El Greco was also the sign of the times, the genius, whose art was in tune with the *fin de siècle* stance. However it is difficult not to notice the irony of the situation. The grandfather of Mór Lipót Herzog was a petit businessman able to escape from the provinces to that of urban life and whose main success was to remain solvent, his father thanks to his commercial attributes became the Baron of the Dual Monarchy and one of the richest people in Hungary. They succeeded within the term of two generations to turn the family of poor Jews into a clan of rich barons, mostly due to the ‘materialistic culture’ of the 19th century, which believed both in the development of an individual and the progress of industry. The grandson of a pious Jew from Baranya County, baptized and obviously dressing up for an evening in his tuxedo, found his life’s mission in collecting images of the Catholic saints, produced by the Spanish painter, who was seen as the precursor of modernism inspiring both Expressionists and Cubists.³² Herzog embraced the courage of that time, by becoming one of the major collector of the works by the artist who, in turn left strong imprint not only on the avant-garde of the 1900s but on the entire culture of the 20th century from the theory of film by Sergei Eisenstein³³ to the Abstract Expressionism of

³¹ Francis Haskell, *History and its Images. Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1995), 413.

³² Viennese art historian Hans Tietze, who was closed to the expressionists circles wrote, “El Greco aroused an enormous interest at about the beginning of this century: he seemed to have anticipated everything at which expressionism aimed, as the problems of the generation of impressionists found parallels in Velasquez.” Hans Tietze, “The Spanish Classics in Their Connection with the General Evolution of Art”, *Parnassus* 4/2 (Feb. 1932): 8. He was right – such participants of the expressionist movement as Franz Marc many times expressed their fascination with the Spanish painter. See: Veronika Schroeder, *El Greco im frühen deutschen Expressionismus. Von der Kunstgeschichte als Stilgeschichte zur Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998). Picasso was under strong influence of El Greco and often re-worked motives of his paintings, for example, in the scandalous *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. Version O)*, the artist relied on *The Vision of St. John*. (The Opening of the Fifth Seal), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), the canvas of El Greco, which was in possession of Ignacio Zuloaga. Scholz-Hänsel, *El Greco*, 90.

³³ See Sergei Eizenshtein, “Vertikal’nyi montazh”, in Sergei Eizenshtein, *Montazh*, (Moscow: VGIK, 1998), 102 – 191.

Jackson Pollok.³⁴

However being open to the ‘shock of the old’, Herzog remained jammed at the shock of the new. His taste in contemporary art was limited by that of the Impressionists and such Post-Impressionists like Gauguin and Cézanne (it was only the last artist who fell under the spell of El Greco). In the first decade of the 20th century such a choice was respected and common. The Hungarian collector remained immune to both French Cubism and German Expressionism. In a sense his approach to the great Spaniard was reminiscent of the passion of Rainer Maria Rilke, the great Austro-Hungarian poet, who discovered El Greco during his trip to Spain in 1912. According to Fatima Naqvi-Peters, “The allegiance with El Greco, who is appropriated by critics and art dealers to legitimize – and sell – the Impressionists and Secessionists to a skeptical public, also allows Rilke to situate himself in a modernist context while avoiding a problematic alliance with the radical avant-garde.”³⁵ Both the poet and the collector preferred to remain on the threshold of modernism of the first decade of the 20th century, but never to cross it.

The Spanish collection of Mór Lipót Herzog was not limited to El Greco. Another favorite of the Budapest industrialist was Francisco Goya, the artist, who like El Greco was consonant with modernism. Contrary to El Greco, Goya, who during the 20th century was nicknamed “the father of the modernism” and “the first modern artist,”³⁶ was not forgotten. In the 19th century his fame was unwavering in both admiration and rejection of his art. If the likes of the late Romantics such as Eugène Delacroix and Theodor Gericault admired Goya’s images, John Ruskin in 1872 burned a set of Goya’s *Caprichos* because of their “immorality.”³⁷ Édouard Manet used the famous scene of execution *Third of May* painted by Goya as the model for his *Execution of Maximilian*.³⁸ Cézanne too fell under the influence of the Spanish artist, which was especially visible in his self-portraits.³⁹ Contrary to El Greco,

³⁴ James T. Valliere, “The El Greco Influence on Jackson Pollock’s Early Works”, *Art Journal* 24/1 (Autumn 1964): 6-9.

³⁵ Fatima Naqvi-Peters, “A Turning Point in Rilke’s Evolution: The Experience of El Greco”, *The Germanic Review* 72/4 (Fall, 1997): 345.

³⁶ Arthur C. Danto correctly noticed, “It is an art history truism that Francisco de Goya is the Father of Modern Painting, and a truth of art history that later painters, in fact associated with modernism as a style, acknowledge him as an influence. But one may stand in a paternal relationship to modernists without being modern oneself – after all, Velazquez inspired Manet without anyone caring to push the origins of modernism back to the time of Philip IV. And Goya’s philosophy of painting stands far closer to Velazquez and Rembrandt than to Manet.” Arthur C. Danto, “Shock of the Old: Arthur C. Danto on Three Goya Biographies”, *Art Forum* 7 (March 2004): 49.

³⁷ Robert Hughes, *Goya*, (New York: Knopf, 2003), 202.

³⁸ Kathryn L. Brush, “Manet’s Execution and the Tradition of the Histoire”, in *Edouard Manet and the Execution of Maximilian: An Exhibition by the Department of Art*, (Providence, Rhode Island: Department of Art, Brown University, 1981), 34-49.

³⁹ Steven Platzman, *Paul Cézanne: The Self-Portraits*, (Berkeley: University of California

who appeared as the shooting star on the European horizon after the 1900's, Goya was around, he was addressed and studied, used as a model and collected. Hundreds of copies of *Caprichos* circulated around Europe. Goya indeed was present, but not all of him. The macabre later paintings, expressionist in manner and full of the dark grotesque were not known to the connoisseurs of Spanish art. They resurfaced only in 1878. In 1873 Baron Frederic-Emil d'Erlanger bought the Goya's house in Madrid - *Quinta del Sordo* (House of the Deaf Man) - for the development purposes. On the walls of *Quinta del Sordo* were so called Black Paintings – the most powerful creations by the late Goya. Amongst them were such known masterpieces as *Saturn devouring one of his sons*, *The great he-goat (Witches Sabbath)*, *A pilgrimage to San Isidro*, and *Asmodea*. The Baron paid for the paintings to be transferred to canvas and sent them to France, where they were exhibited at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1878. It was too early for any appreciation of Goya's nightmares in France. The industrious Baron d'Erlanger showed the Spaniard's latest creations, with the aim of selling them, but did not find any buyers. Three years later he donated the Black Paintings to Prado in Madrid.⁴⁰

The visitors to the Paris Exposition, in addition to the macabre paintings of Goya, could also enjoy the head of the Statue of Liberty exhibited in the park of Trocadero, the telephone of Alexander Graham Bell, Yablochkov's candles (arc lamps) illuminating Avenue de l'Opéra, and Thomas Edison's phonograph.⁴¹ Such a neighborhood transformed the creations of the deaf painter into the unmistakable signature of modernity. The re-interpretation of Goya's legacy over the last few decades of the 19th century turned the artist into the “father of modernism.” However this new interpretation of his old art was only possible because of its initial unconventionality. The first European artist to make a fetish of images of violence succeeded in touching a hidden cord under the elegant frock-coat of the *Belle Époque*. Goya was drafted in to legitimize modern art – in 1902 the famous German art dealer Paul Cassirer organized an exhibition, which included the works of Goya, Degas, Monet, Manet, Pissarro, Rodin, Libermann, Whistler and Sisley.⁴²

Press, 2001), 55-57.

⁴⁰ Nigel Glendinning, “The Strange Translation of Goya's ‘Black Paintings’”, *The Burlington Magazine* 117/868 (July 1975): 466; Barry Lord, Gail Dexter Lord, *Artists, Patrons, and the Public: Why Culture Changes*, (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2010), 76-78.

⁴¹ See Arthur Chandler, “The Paris Exposition Universelle of 1878: Heroism in Defeat”, *World's Fair* VI/4 (1986): 9-16; On the illumination of Avenue de l'Opéra, Fabienne Cardot, *La France des électriciens, 1880-1980: actes du 2e colloque de l'Association pour l'histoire de l'électricité en France, Paris, 16-18 avril 1985*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), 242.

⁴² Jay A. Clark, “Space as Metaphor”, in *Of 'truths impossible to put in words': Max Beckmann contextualized*, (Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 60.

Twenty four years after the show at the *Exposition Universelle*, paintings by the great Spaniard were again exhibited surrounded by the symbols of modernity. However the symbols were different – the electric bulbs and gramophones were replaced by the canvases of the Impressionists. After the ‘rediscovery’ of El Greco he, like Goya joined the rows of contemporary artists on the walls of the Cassirer gallery at Victoriastrasse 35 in Berlin. In October of 1907 the canvases by El Greco were exhibited surrounded by the creations of Édouard Manet Claude Monet and Ferdinand Hodler.⁴³

Among the Goya canvases owned by Herzog were such paintings, the *Picadors and Bulls Before a Tower*,⁴⁴ the expressive *Carnival*,⁴⁵ and *The Topers*⁴⁶ (downgraded during the second part of the 20th century by museum curators to be a painting “in the style of Goya”).

This Spanish focus of the private museum of Mór Lipót Herzog emphasized the difference between the collection of the Budapest banker, to that pertaining to the European universal collections of 1880s. El Greco, the visionary of Catholic ecstasy, was rediscovered at the beginning of the 20th century thanks to the efforts of the Hungarian (Marcel Nemes, Mór Lipót Herzog) and the German (Julius Meire-Graefe, Paul Cassirer) Jews. By the same time Francisco Goya, being re-interpreted as the first artist of modernity, attracted attention of the same circle of collectors and connoisseurs, including Mór Lipót Herzog. For him the history of art transformed into a prelude for spiritual investigation into contemporania.

The palace of Herzog family on the Andrassy Avenue looked at first sight as a simulacrum of aristocratic dwellings – carpets, antique furniture, tapestries on the walls and gilded frames of expensive paintings all obviously created a reference to the past. But this mimicked a noble palace to the same extent a museum hall was mimicking it too. Within the Herzog collection the past was predominantly talking with regards to contemporary tastes and even hinted at the future. The collector was not radical enough in order to embrace the new art boiling in neighbouring Vienna, France and Germany. Even the choice of Hungarian art was conservative: in addition to the unavoidable 19th century realist Mihály Munkácsy, who had become an international star by 1880s, Herzog collected the works of József Rippl-Rónai, the most Parisian of Hungarian artists in the Fin de Siècle.⁴⁷

⁴³ Peter Paret, “Modernism and the ‘Alien Element’ in German Art”, in *Berlin Metropolis: Jews and the New Culture, 1890-1918*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999), 45.

⁴⁴ Location unknown.

⁴⁵ Now is in Moscow in Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts:

http://www.newpaintart.ru/artists/g/goya_f/carnival.php

⁴⁶ Now is in the North Carolina Museum of Art (Style of Goya):

<http://collection.ncartmuseum.org/collection11/view/objects/asitem/id/1110>

⁴⁷ Mravik, *The “Sacco di Budapest” and Depredation of Hungary*, 329.

The artistic taste of Mór Lipót Herzog was the taste of the enlightened European from the first decade of the 20th century. He was not sufficiently radical in embracing the avant-garde and remained on a similar level of taste as that of the Cassirer exhibitions mixing the canvases of Goya and El Greco with the Impressionists, being that the only difference was that in his house he did not hang them in the same rooms. As was stated above, Herzog remained on the threshold of modernism, but he embraced the transformation in understanding the history of art which was a sign of a tectonic change in European culture. This change preceded and heralded the historical upheaval which was destined to ruin the Herzog collection and many other private museums around Europe.

Epilog: Goya and Goyim

The first of the Duino Elegies, which reflected the fascination of Rainer Maria Rilke with the Spanish painting, began with the verses:

*Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel
Ordnungen? und gesetzt selbst, es nähme
einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem
stärkeren Dasein. Denn das Schöne ist nichts
als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade ertragen,
und wir bewundern es so, weil es gelassen verschmäht,
uns zu zerstören.⁴⁸*

The 20th century proved that the beauty rarely spared people, especially if they had the misfortune to own it.

In 1919, young Jewish intellectuals from well-to-do Budapest bourgeois families became the commissars of the short-lived red republic, which would be only in existence for less than five months. Amongst the leaders of the republic, Baron Georg Bernhard Lukács von Szegedin – better known to future generations as the most important and independent-minded Marxist philosopher Georg (György) Lukács – was responsible for an untraditional exhibition which undoubtedly became the main event in the cultural life of the republic.

The Lukács family history is very reminiscent to that of the Herzog family. Lukács's father, the wealthy Jewish investment banker József Löwinger, was knighted and received a baronial title.⁴⁹ Returning to

⁴⁸ “Who, if I cried out, might hear me – among the ranked Angels?

Even if One suddenly clasped me to his heart. /I would die of the force of his being. For Beauty is only/the infant of scarcely endurable Terror, and we are amazed when it casually spares us.” Translation of Stephen Cohn. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, (Chicago: North Western University Press, 1989), 22.

⁴⁹ McCagg Jr., *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary*, 106-108.

Budapest from his studies in Germany, Lukács was at first interested in Symbolism and Dostoevsky but, following the October Revolution in Russia, his interests turned to politics, and he became a devoted, indeed fanatical Marxist. The installation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic gave him the opportunity to explore his newfound taste for revolutionary violence. On his orders, soldiers and sailors broke into the palaces of the Hungarian aristocrats and Jewish collectors, stripping them of their art treasures. An impressive exhibition of the newly nationalized masterpieces was subsequently organized at the Budapest Palace of Exhibitions.⁵⁰

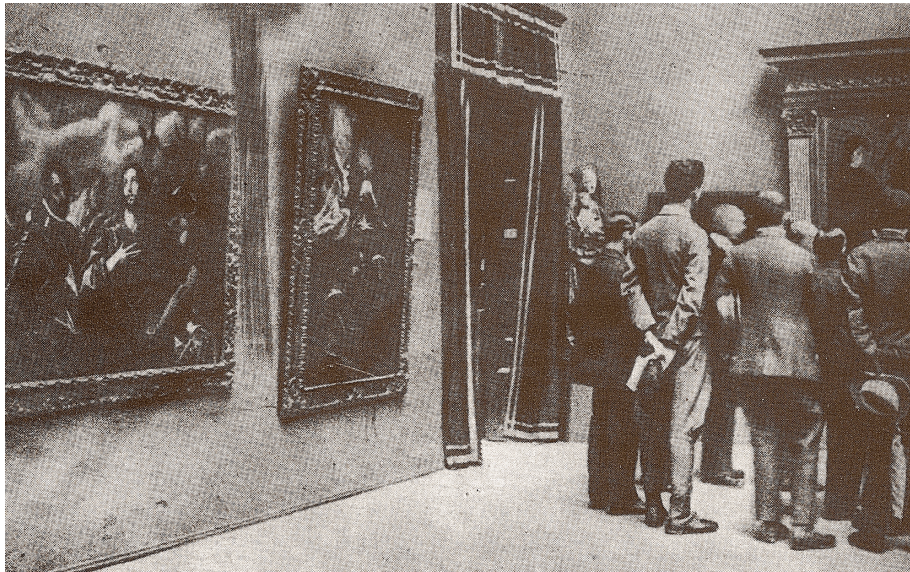


Fig. 2, Exposition of the confiscated paintings belonging to the Budapest bourgeoisie in the Place of Exhibitions, 1919. Hungarian News Agency)

Herzog's El Greco's and Goyas for the first time left the palace on Andrassy Avenue under a military convoy.

After 133 days under a revolutionary regime marked by the "Red Terror" – the random killing of over 500 political opponents – Budapest was occupied by the Romanian army.

In November 1919, the troops of Admiral Miklós Horthy entered the city after it was vacated by the Romanians. The following year, the Admiral became "His Serene Highness, the Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary." In 1921, the Regent preempted two unsuccessful attempts by Charles, the last emperor of Austro-Hungary, to seize the Hungarian throne. The unfortunate Charles was exiled, and Horthy became the regent of this kingless kingdom. Horthy presided over succeeding waves of the "White Terror" – which were no less bloody than that of the

⁵⁰ Arpad Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics*, (Cambridge, Ma. - Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 220-221.

“Red,” and were, in addition openly anti-Semitic – which finally subsided in the mid-1920s.⁵¹ However the canvases confiscated by the revolutionaries from the mansions of the Jewish bourgeoisie were eventually returned to their rightful owners.

The 1919 confiscation was just a prelude to further upheavals during the century, which would destroy practically every Jewish private collection around Europe. Fortunately for Mór Lipót Herzog he did not have to witness the ruin of his museum. The Baron died in 1934. The collection was inherited by his widow and after her death in 1940 by the three children of Baron – Erzsébet, István and András. Even before the beginning of the Second World War the family had foreseen the upcoming storm. András unsuccessfully tried to send the art treasures abroad hoping to give them on loan to the National Gallery in London. In spite of the support given by Kenneth Clark, who was the director of the gallery at that time, the Hungarian government prohibited the loan agreement.⁵² In 1942, András Herzog as a Jew was drafted for service in a forced labor battalion on the Eastern front, where he perished in 1943.⁵³ In 1944 when Hungary was occupied by the Nazis, Erzsébet and her daughter were sent to Portugal as a result of the notorious deal made by her husband and a group of Hungarian Jewish industrialists with SS *Standartenführer* Kurt Beher, who was sent to Hungary not to eliminate the Jews, but to extort money from them, and who offered to save their lives in exchange for all of their assets. Erzsébet’s husband Alfonz Weiss remained as an SS hostage and was liberated only after the end of the war.⁵⁴ István, arrested and already thrown on the train bound to Auschwitz was saved at the last possible moment by his wife and spent months in hiding.⁵⁵

The fate of the collection which, during the interwar period became the jewel of Budapest attracting visiting international celebrities such as Thomas Mann, was not different to the fate of the family.

On May 31, 1944 the Hungarian magazine *Magyar Futár* published an untraditional photo reportage, which had no parallels within the Axis press during the Second World War – Nazis and their allies seized art works belonging to Jews all around Europe, but they never searched for publicity and nor did they try to turn their robbery into a news scoop⁵⁶. It

⁵¹ Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, (Budapest: Corvina Osiris, 1999), 108-116.

⁵² Mravik, *The “Sacco di Budapest” and depredation of Hungary*, 72.

⁵³ See ‘Family History’ in *Hungary on Trial*
http://www.hungarylootedart.com/?page_id=30

⁵⁴ Szabolcs Szita, Sean Lambert, *Trading in Lives? Operations of the Jewish Relief and Rescue Committee in Budapest, 1944-1945*, (Budapest - New York: Central European University Press, 2005), 125-135.

⁵⁵ See note 53.

⁵⁶ “Zsidó kincsesláda a napfényen”, *Magyar Futár*, May 31, 1944, 12 -13.

seems that in Hungary the quest for depriving Jews of their property was seen in much different light. The reportage which appeared in the *Magyar Futár* was dedicated to the confiscation of the Herzog art collection. The collection was hidden in the cellars in Budafok on the outskirts of Budapest. It is difficult to say were the paintings secreted to save them from the Hungarian Nazis or to protect them from Allied bombardments, which from 1943 became a greater threat within the Hungarian capital. The photographs exhibited the excited members of the State Security Surveillance, nicknamed the “Hungarian Gestapo” posing with the canvases of El Greco and other old masters found in the cellars.



Fig. 3, Paintings from the Herzog collection discovered by the Hungarian secret police in the yard in Budafok, 1944. Photograph from the Anti-Semitic magazine *Magyar Futár*. Courtesy of the Commission for Art Recovery of the World Jewish Congress.

The confiscation of the paintings was led by Inspector Péter Hain, the notorious Hungarian Nazi, head of Security Surveillance, and a secret agent for the German Gestapo. The discovery of the Herzog collection was conceived as a PR event – photographers and journalists were invited to the scene to observe the policemen breaking the heavy chests containing art works. Dénes Csánky, the Director of the Museum of Fine Arts and Government Commissioner for the Registration and Safekeeping of Art Works Sequestered from Jews was at the scene compiling an inventory of the unpacked paintings. He gave interview stating that, “The Mór Herzog collection contains treasure, the artistic value of which exceeds any collection in the country. The former banker

obtained these Goyas, Greco's and other pictures from his fellow-Jew Marcel Nemes and after his death his immediate relatives inherited them. If the state now takes over these treasures, the Museum of Fine Arts will become a collection ranking only just after that in Madrid."⁵⁷

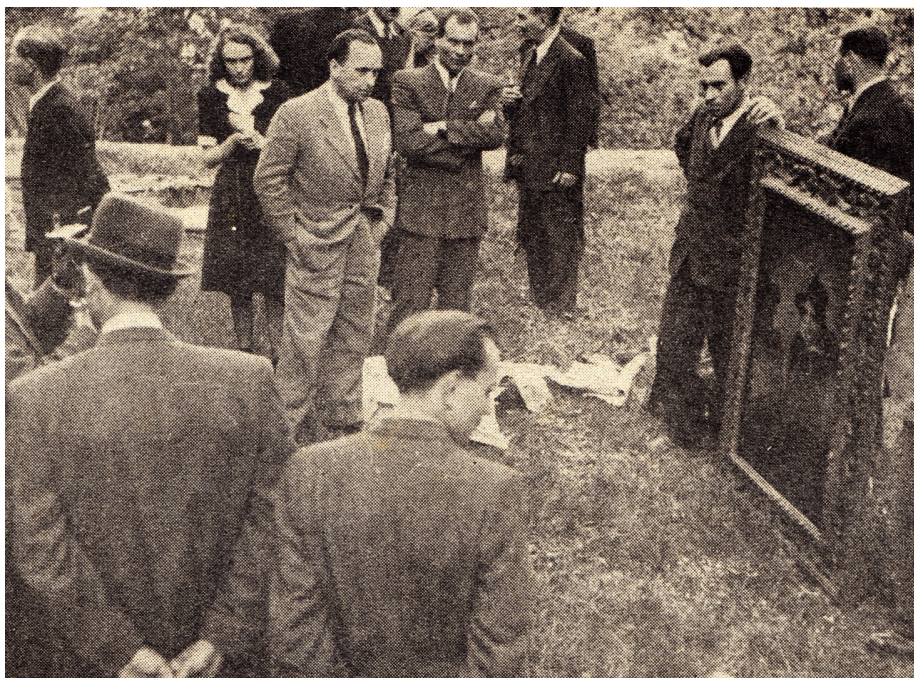


Fig. 4, Hungarian secret policemen enjoying painting by Goya *The Topers*. Photograph from the Anti-Semitic magazine *Magyar Futár*. Courtesy of the Commission for Art Recovery of the World Jewish Congress.

The newly discovered Jewish treasures were first taken to the Hotel Majestic, the Bauhaus style building situated on the Sváb Hill in Buda, which was home not only to the “Hungarian Gestapo,” but also the Sonderkommando Eichmann, a special group of SS personnel under the command of Adolf Eichmann, which arrived in Budapest on March 19, 1944 to conduct “the final solution to the Jewish question.” According to some sources the notorious SS henchman not only enjoyed the confiscated paintings, but pocketed some of the Hain’s loot.⁵⁸ It seems that the “banality of evil,” did not prevent its main perpetrator who, according to common belief, was only obeying orders, and was not considering his own self-interest.

After this ‘pre-selection’ the canvases found in Budafok were sent to the Museum of Fine Arts. The Hungarian press excelled itself in its proud reporting with regards to these art treasures salvaged from the “Jewish profiteers.” One of the anti-Semitic rags published a cartoon of The

⁵⁷ Mravik, *The “Sacco di Budapest” and depredation of Hungary*, 69.

⁵⁸ Jenő Lévai, *Eichmann in Hungary: Documents*, (New York: H. Fertig, 1987), 199.

Toppers. The caption of the cartoon called “The Joy of the Drinkers” stated, “It was Goya who created us, but only now do we find ourselves among the goys. Let’s drink to this.”⁵⁹



Fig. 5, Cartoon published in *Magyar Futár* depicting the painting of Goya *The Toppers*. Courtesy of the Commission for Art Recovery of the World Jewish Congress.

The collection, which was once the pride of Budapest, was now ‘liberated’ from its Jewish owners.

The confiscated Herzog El Greco’s and Goyas were inventoried by the Government Commission for Registration and Safekeeping of Art Works Sequestered from Jews. Its emblem was decorated by the Hungarian coat of arms, held by two angels.⁶⁰ Their schematic images were not as refine as those angels depicted in El Greco paintings. However they undoubtedly were the angels of modernity, whose embrace led to the inevitable death.

Konstantin Akinsha is art historian and art journalist. Among his books are *The Holy Place*, (co-authored with Gregorii Kozlov, Sylvia Hochfield, New Heaven: Yale University Press, Fall 2007); *AAM Guide for Provenance Research*, (co-authored with Nancy Yeide and Amy Walsh, Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2001); *Beautiful Loot: Soviet Plunder of European Art*

⁵⁹ *Magyar Futár*, May 31, 1944, 20.

⁶⁰ Reproduced in Mravik, *The “Sacco di Budapest” and Depredation of Hungary*, 64.

Treasures, (co-authored with Gregorii Kozlov, Sylvia Hochfield, New York: Random House, 1995). In 2010 and 2009 he was awarded by Clarion Award for Cultural Journalism. In 2009 he was awarded by The Society of Silurians Excellence in Journalism Award.

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