

## The Jewish Face of Cluj-Kolozsvár

### A Community in Building

Jewry appeared in the history of Cluj by the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, nevertheless for a few centuries the community had no direct interference with the life of the town, because due to restrictive regulations no permanent Jewish population could develop.

The first law to make their settlement in towns possible, nr.XXIX, was passed in 1840, consequently the Israelite population of Cluj started to increase. The 1835 city council report mentioned 61 Jewish men and 48 women, while at a census in 1846 the number of Jewish families was 58.<sup>1</sup> The tabernacle in Kül-Magyar street proved to be too small for the community, thus a synagogue was built of stone, in the classical style, in today's Párizs street, in 1851.<sup>2</sup> This synagogue, with the buildings constructed in its vicinity (dwelling houses for the rabbi and teacher, ritual bath) later became the religious and cultural center of the orthodox Jewish congregation.

The schism of the Israelite denomination in Hungary came by with the Budapest 1868 Hebrew congress, this is when the community separated into orthodox and congressional groups. The Jewry in Cluj joined the orthodox wing of a conservative bent, nevertheless in a few years' time the signs of discord appeared.

The first to separate were the most conservative *sephards*. They built a tabernacle under the name of *Beth Avrohom* in Malom street in 1875. The more liberal Jewish middle class, mainly consisting of intellectuals, followed in 1881 and founded a congregation on *status-quo ante* bases, which later became congressional. Their elected leader was Farkasházi Fischer Vilmos, son of the founder of the Herend Porcelain Manufactory.

The congressional congregation built a synagogue in 1887 in today's Horea street. The great moor style church was constructed by the Horváth brothers and Reményik Károly, according to the design made by local railway engineer Izidor Hegner.<sup>3</sup>

As in the case of other Transylvanian Jewish communities, several tabernacles were built in Cluj, operated by various religious or professional groups.

The first to found a school was the orthodox community. They started an elementary school for boys in 1875, and included classes for girls in 1908.<sup>4</sup> The number of pupils increased continuously, thus while in the beginning the school had two teachers and forty pupils, by the

time of the first world war the number of pupils exceeded three hundred. The congressional community founded its own elementary school in 1904.<sup>5</sup>

Owing to the social mobility made possible by the 1867 emancipation, the Hebrews in Cluj assumed increasingly substantial roles in the development of culture and economy. Their overwhelming majority found jobs in commerce, industry or became freelancers.

### **In Between Changes in Power**

Both in number and significance, the Hebrews in Cluj passed for the greatest Israelite community in Transylvania. Beside Cluj, the settlements to host Jewish communities with over ten thousand members in 1930 were Oradea-Nagyvárad, Sighetul Marmăției-Máramarosziget and Satu-Mare-Szatmárnémeti.

The 1910 census reported 7046, the 1930 one 13 504, the 1941 census 16 763 persons of Israelite religion in Cluj.<sup>6</sup> The Jewish community gave around 13–15% of the town population in between the two world wars. The mother tongue and culture of their majority was Hungarian.

In the second half of the nineteen thirties, there were 4000 Jewish families from among which 150 passed for upper middle class, 800 middle class, the rest lower middle class or poor.<sup>7</sup> In 1938, 800 Jewish families lived in Cluj that were poor to the extent of being unable to procure, by themselves, the documents necessary for certifying their Romanian citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

The social structure of the Jewish society in Cluj reveals a middle-class community actively engaged in the economic and cultural life of the town. In 1930, the income of 33% of Hebrews in Cluj came from industry, while 31% made a living on commerce and crediting. From among the 435 companies registered in 1937 at the Trade Registry, 246 were owned by Hebrews (57%), while 665 of the small entrepreneurs registered at the Cluj Labor Chamber were Israelites (24%).<sup>9</sup>

Young Hebrews often chose to become physicians or lawyers, while due to their excellent professional fame they attracted a great number of clients. There were 472 registered physicians in Cluj in 1937, out of which 158 were Hebrews.<sup>10</sup>

The role played by the Jewish population in commerce and industry had a significant impact over the atmosphere of the town. The central stores were almost without exception owned by Hebrews (or Hungarians).<sup>11</sup>

When the Jewry in Transylvania and Cluj found themselves under Romanian rule in 1918-1919, the legal security experienced under the Hungarian monarchy gave way to insecurity and defenselessness. The Mârzescu law on citizenship passed in 1924 and the control of citizenship in 1938 deprived hundreds of Cluj Jewish families of their citizenship.

Beside the congregational framework that traditionally provided for the organization of Jewish communities, Zionism, directed towards lay institutionalization, appeared after 1918. In only a few years, an institutional network encompassing the entire Jewish society was established at Cluj, which in meantime became the center of the national Jewish movement in Transylvania. This institutional network was meant to further the defense of interests and develop social care but also to form the identity of the entire community.

In November 1918 the *Transylvanian Jewish National Alliance* was founded while its Cluj group managed the local Zionist movement. Under the umbrella of the alliance, several organizations representing various social groups and interests developed. Such were the lay counterparts of the congregational women's associations, the international *WIZO* (Women's International Zionist Organization) group, the Cluj branch of which started to function in 1927. The *Transylvania Jewish Student Aid Group* came into being in 1932, while the *Transylvanian Jewish Orphan Support Group* played an important role in teaching industrial trades. The sick were taken care of in the *Jewish Hospital* while education was provided through kindergartens, elementary schools and the high-schools for boys and for girls functioning between 1920–1927, all supported by various Jewish congregations.

The vectors of cultural life were the Zionist Jewish political daily paper *Új Kelet* (New East) published in Cluj, the publishing houses editing books on Jewry and the *Goldmark Philharmonic Association*.

Important professional organizations were the *Poale Cedek Trade Union* and the *Paul Ehrlich Association of Physicians*. Poorer Jewish families and small entrepreneurs were aided by the *Small Credit Bank*.

Beside the Zionist camp constantly growing in number, there were still many families who felt to belong to the Hungarian community and chose the way of assimilation in this direction. Many industrials of Jewish origin, as Farkas Mózes, for instance, chose to support Hungarian cultural and social organizations while others made sacrifices for the functioning of the Zionist national structures.

Jewish authors were substantially represented in the Transylvanian Hungarian literature as well, we only need to think of the directors of the *Hungarian Theatre* in Cluj (Janovics Jenő, Kádár Imre), or of writers such as Karácsony Benő, Ligeti Ernő, Bárd Oszkár, Szántó György,

Markovits Rodion.

The National Hungarian Party in Romania had active members from the Cluj Jewish community: Weiss Sándor, Róth Hugó and Farkas Mózes. Róth Hugó had an active role in the leadership of the Hungarian party from its 1922 foundation to its dissolution in 1938.<sup>12</sup>

### **Creative Community**

Writers, poets, journalists of Jewish origin emerged in the cultural life of Transylvania and Cluj mainly after the Treaty of Trianon. Before the change in rule, gifted Transylvanian Jewish writers had usually moved to Budapest, the spiritual capital, to be closer to the circle of the *Nyugat* (West) literary magazine. Before the world war, Gyalui Farkas, former Israelite converted to Christianity, played an important role as director of the University Library, gifted literary historian and journalist.<sup>13</sup>

Cluj was the home of the lawyer Karácsony Benő. His first novel, *Pjotruska*, was published in 1927 by the Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh. Genuine success came with the later novels: *Új élet kapujában* (1932), *Napos oldal* (1936), *Utazás a szürke folyón* (1940), *A megnyugvás ösvényein* (1946).

Indig Ottó, moving back from Budapest for a period of time, found employment at the Cluj daily paper *Ellenzék* (Opposition). During his stay in the town, he wrote a series of successful plays: *A torockói mennyasszony* (1931), *Tűz a Monostoron* (1932), *Ember a híd alatt* (1933).

Among writers of Jewish origin, Ligeti Ernő has the most impressive oeuvre. Ligeti came from Oradea to the paper *Kolozsvári Hírlap* (Kolozsvár Herald) by the end of the first world war. Later he became an editor of the other daily paper, *Keleti Újság* (Eastern Paper). His most important essay is *Súly alatt a pálma*, presenting the life of Hungarian writers in Transylvania between the world wars. This is how Ligeti writes about Transylvanian Jewish writers: [...] „we continued to lead a Hungarian life under Romanian rule as well. Things around and above us seemed to be superficial and unreal. Bucharest seemed to be far more remote, even in the spring of 1940, than Berlin or Paris.”<sup>14</sup>

Several other writers helped maintain the quality of cultural and literary life in Cluj, such as Bárd Oszkár, Szerb Antal, Szántó György, Markovits Rodion and Szilágyi András.

Janovics Jenő had a significant impact on the history of Hungarian drama in Transylvania and Cluj. By founding a company of film in 1910, Janovics was the pioneer of silent cinema in Transylvania.<sup>15</sup>

After the change in rule, Janovics took an active part in the organizing of theatrical life in Cluj and Transylvania. He was present at the founding, in 1920, of the *Association of Actors from Transylvania and Banat*, presiding it from 1921 onward.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of visual arts, representatives of the new 20<sup>th</sup> century trends to create in Cluj, were: Keleti László (*Zsidók útja* – album, 1936), Kazár László (*A favágók*), Leon Alex (*A népkonyha*), Lázár Éva (*Jaszele*), Wald Herman (*A vádló, Fiát sirató anya*).<sup>17</sup> Their works were published in the anthology *Kelet és Nyugat között*, Cluj, 1937.<sup>18</sup>

The painter Lázár Éva belonged to the Baia Mare-Nagybánya group, her most famous paintings are *Imádkozó Bócher* and *Fogy a gyertya*. Among the sculptors of the era, important figures were Wald Herman and Löwith Egon.<sup>19</sup>

The Zionist movement basically pursued a revival of the Hebrew and Jewish culture. Nevertheless the language of Jewish cultural life was Hungarian as the background was, to a certain extent, also determined by Hungarian culture.

The daily paper *Új Kelet* had a program of an openly Zionist bent. It boasted the best of the Jewish journalists in Cluj: Székely Béla, Kaczér Illés, Újvári Péter, Giszkalai János, Szabó Imre, Benamy Sándor, Salamon László, Danzig Hillél.<sup>20</sup>

Between the two world wars, Jewish publishing flourished as well, a great number of Jewish publishing houses were founded, such as *Jewish Book Society*, *Jewish Student Aid*, *Pharos*, *Kadima*, *Fraternitas*, *Noár*. The great number of books on Jewish subjects led to the apparition of bookstores commercializing Jewish books and other published material in the subject. Such bookstore was the one opened in 1921 by Glasner Benjamin.<sup>21</sup>

The first Transylvanian Hebrew cultural association, *Ivria* was founded within the framework of the Zionist movement, at Cluj.<sup>22</sup> The *Jehudit* cultural association of Cluj Jewish women had the aim of promoting Jewish culture as well. The essence of their program is contained in the statutes as modified by the 1921 great assembly of the *Jehudit*: „The association has Jewish national bases its objective being to trigger and strengthen Jewish national identity in Jewish women.”<sup>23</sup>

In May 1925, the Cluj Jewish youth organizations founded a public library. At its opening, the library owned approximately 1800 volumes (mainly literature and science in Hebrew, Romanian, Hungarian, Italian and English.)<sup>24</sup>

*The Goldmark Philharmonic Association* was founded in 1936 as the cultural branch of the Cluj congressional congregation.<sup>25</sup> The assembly consisting of physicians, engineers and teachers gave symphonic concerts of resounding success.

The second dictate of Vienna and the anti-Semitic regulations introduced after 1940 reached a Jewish community which had actively contributed to the development of culture, economy and middle class values in Cluj.

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<sup>1</sup> Löwy Dániel: *A Kálváriától a tragédiáig. Kolozsvár zsidó lakosságának története*. Koinónia, Kolozsvár. 2005. 23., Ladislau Gyémánt: *Evreii din Transilvania în epoca emancipării*. Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2000. 55. és 110.

<sup>2</sup> Löwy: *A Kálváriától a tragédiáig...* 31.

<sup>3</sup> Uo. 32–34.

<sup>4</sup> Szabó Imre: *Erdély zsidói. Talmudisták, chászidok, cionisták*. I. köt., Kadima Kiadás Cluj, 1938. 139.

<sup>5</sup> Löwy: *A Kálváriától a tragédiáig...* 41.

<sup>6</sup> Varga E. Árpád: *Erdély etnikai és felekezeti statisztikája*. IV: *Fehér, Beszterce-Naszód és Kolozs megye. Népszámlálási adatok 1850–1992 között*. Teleki László Alapítvány–Pro Print Könyvkiadó, Budapest–Csíkszereda, 2001. 667.

<sup>7</sup> Szabó: *Erdély zsidói...* 180.

<sup>8</sup> *Új Kelet* 1938. május 13. 106.

<sup>9</sup> Sabin Cioranu: *Problema comerțului și meșteșugurilor în municipiul și județul Cluj*. Tip. Carpații S. A., Cluj, 1940. 5–16.

<sup>10</sup> Octavian Buzea: *Clujul: 1919–1939*. Tip. Ardeal, Cluj, 1939. 200.

<sup>11</sup> Csizmadia Andor: *Vázlat Kolozsvár társadalmáról*. Szent Erzsébet Nyomda Rt., Kassa, 1942. 16.

<sup>12</sup> György Béla: *Iratok a Romániai Országos Magyar Párt történetéhez*. I., Pro-Print Könyvkiadó – Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, Csíkszereda – Kolozsvár, 2003. 412–417.

<sup>13</sup> Löwy: *A Kálváriától a tragédiáig...* 53.

<sup>14</sup> Ligeti Ernő: *Súly alatt a pálma. Egy nemzedék szellemi élete. 22 esztendő kisebbségi sorsban*, Fraternitas RT., Kolozsvár, [1941]. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Löwy: *A Kálváriától a tragédiáig...* 68.

<sup>16</sup> Kötő József: *A színházi intézményrendszer Erdélyben a két világháború között*. *Korunk* 2002. 4. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Moshe Carmilly–Weinberger: *A zsidóság története Erdélyben 1623–1944*. MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, Budapest, 1995. 257.

<sup>18</sup> *Kelet és Nyugat között. Zsidó fiatalok antológiája*. A Zsidó Diáksegélyző Kiadása, Cluj, 1937.

<sup>19</sup> Carmilly–Weinberger: *A zsidóság története Erdélyben...* 257–258.

<sup>20</sup> *A kolozsvári zsidóság emlékkönyve*. (szerk. Moshe Carmilly – Weinberger) 2. kiad., Sepher Hermon Press, New York, 1988. 193–195.

<sup>21</sup> *Új Kelet* 1921. december 9. 271.

<sup>22</sup> *Új Kelet* 1921. január 26. 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Új Kelet* 1921. június 28. 137.

<sup>24</sup> *Új Kelet* 1925. május 4. 98.

<sup>25</sup> *Hitközségi Értesítő* 1936. 2–3. 7.