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Prof. DR. LADISLAU GYÉMÁNT

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Cover: ARCH. AMALIA GYÉMÁNT
TRANSLATION: RALUCA MOLDOVAN

Editorial Board: Prof. Dr. LADISLAU GYÉMÁNT
Lect. Univ. Dr. CLAUDIA URSUȚIU
Lect. Univ. Dr. RALUCA MOLDOVAN

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“Dr. Moshe Carmilly” Institute for Hebrew and Jewish History, Cluj-Napoca
Croitorilor Str. 13, 400162, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Tel/Fax: 0040-264-532221

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THE INSTITUTIONAL LIFE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FROM CLUJ

ATTILA GIDÓ

A developing community, a transforming community

In the life of Cluj, the Jews were first mentioned at the beginning of the 16th century, but for a few hundred years, they only had an indirect contribution to the life of the city, as – because of various restrictive regulations – they were not able to form a stable Jewish population.

Article XXIX of the 1840 Law made it possible, for the first time, the establishment of Jews in Hungarian cities. This regulation, however, did not concern the Great Principality of Transylvania. Thus, the Jewish population of Cluj started growing only after 1851, when a Viennese ministerial decision was adopted. The city council report of April 1835 mentioned 61 men and 48 women of Judaic faith, and according to the 1846 census, the number of Jewish families was 58¹.

The house of prayer on Kül-Magyar (nowadays, Aurel Vlaicu) Street proved to be too small for the growing community; that is why, in 1851, the building of a classical stone synagogue started; this building

1. Ladislau Gyémánt, *Eveii din Transilvania în epoca emancipării (The Transylvanian Jews in the Age of Emancipation)*, Bucharest, Edit. Enciclopedică, 2000, p. 55, 110; Dániel Lówy, *A Kábitriától a tragédiáig. Kolozsvár zsidó lakosságának története (From Agony to Tragedy. The History of the Jewish Community from Cluj Napoca)*, Kolozsvár, Koinónia, 2005, p. 23.

can still be visible nowadays, on Paris street.² Together with the neighbouring edifices (the rabbi's house, the teacher's house and house of the person responsible for performing circumcision, the ritual bath), this synagogue became the religious and cultural centre of the future orthodox community.

The division of the Jewish communities in Hungary occurred in 1868, at the Budapest Jewish Congress. Although the Jews from Cluj had been supporters of the orthodox, conservative side, as opposed to the neolog one, the signs of this division would soon be manifest in Cluj as well.

First, the Sephards withdrew from the community (actually, Hasids, who used the name "Sephards" without having any connection with the Spanish Jews) which had adopted the most conservative religious orientation. In 1875, they built a house of prayer called *Beth Avrohom*, on Malom street (today, Gh. Barițiu street).³ Afterwards, the Jewish bourgeoisie, made up primarily of intellectuals, were the next to leave: in 1881 they formed a *status quo ante* community that later became a neolog community. The presidents of this community were Lázár Alenbergh and then Vilmos Farkasházi Fischer, the son of the Herend porcelain factory founder. In 1881, the new community numbered 51 members, who, together with their families, reached approximately 210-230 people.⁴ Three years later, this small religious group joined the progressive orientation, becoming a neolog community.

The neologs built a synagogue in 1887, a building that is nowadays situated on Horea street. The Moorish-style synagogue was built by the company of brothers Horváth and Károly Reményik, according to the project of railroad engineer Izidor Hegner.⁵

Similar to other Transylvanian Jewish communities, the Cluj community had several houses of prayer, which – generally speaking – were supported by various religious associations or professional societies.

2. *Ibidem*, pp. 55-56.

3. *Serviciul Județean Cluj al Arhivelor Naționale Române (Cluj County National State Archives)*, Folder 1 (Cluj City Mayor's Office), 1/6, file 7224/1875; Löwy, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

4. SJCANR, Folder 1, 1/6.

5. Löwy, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-34.

The first Jewish school was established by the orthodox community. In 1875, the first primary school for boys was founded, while the girls' school was founded in 1908.⁶ The number of school children increased gradually over the years: at the beginning, the school only had two teachers and forty pupils, but during World War I, the number of enrolled pupils reached over three hundred. The primary school of the neolog community was established in 1903.⁷

Owing to the opportunities for social mobility, as a result of the 1867 emancipation, the Cluj Jews started playing a more and more important role in the fields of economy and culture. The vast majority were involved in trade and industry or were members of the liberal professions.

Alternating the positions of power

Through their number and importance, the Cluj Jews formed one of the largest Jewish communities in Transylvania. In 1930, outside of Cluj, only Oradea, Sighetul Marmăției and Satu Mare had a Jewish population exceeding ten thousand inhabitants.

According to the 1910 census, there were 7046 people of Judaic faith in Cluj; in 1930, there were 13504 Jews, while in 1941, the Jewish population numbered 16736.⁸ In the interwar period, the proportion of Jews within the total population was between 13% and 15%. The majority of Cluj Jews were speakers of Hungarian and were familiar with Hungarian culture.

In the second half of the 1930s, out of the 4000 Jewish families in Cluj, about 150 belonged to upper bourgeoisie, 800 were middle class,

6. Imre Szabó, *Erdély zsidói. Talmudisták, chászidok, cionisták (Transylvanian Jews. Talmudists, Hasids, Zionists)*, vol. I, Cluj-Napoca, Kadima, 1938, p. 139.

7. L. Gyémánt, „Invtajmánul evreiesc din Transilvania. Tradiție istorică”, („The Jewish Education in Transylvania. An Historical Tradition”), in *Lingua B.*, 2002, no. 1, pp. 131-132.

8. Árpád Varga E., *Erdély etnikai és felekezeti statisztikája. IV: Fehér, Beszterce-Nászód és Kolozs megye. Népszámlálási adatok 1850-1992 között (The Ethnic and Confessional Statistics of Transylvania. IV. Counties Alba, Bistrița-Năsăud and Cluj. Census Data between 1850 and 1992)*, Budapest - Csikszereeda, Teleki László Alapítvány - Pro-Print, 2001, p. 667.

while the rest were part of the lower bourgeoisie or the poor class.⁹ In 1938, there were 800 Jewish families in Cluj which were too poor to be able to afford through their own means the papers necessary to prove their Romanian citizenship.¹⁰

The occupational structure of the Cluj Jewish community reveals an urbanised community with an active contribution to the city's economic and cultural life. In 1930, 34.5% of Cluj Jews were employed in industry or various industrial sectors and 36.2% were involved in trade or finance.¹¹ In 1937, out of the 435 societies registered by the Chamber of Commerce, 246 were owned by Jews (57%), 665 of the craftsmen registered with the Labour Department being Jewish (24%).¹²

The young Jews often opted for a career as doctor or lawyer, while their fame as professionals attracted a large number of clients. In 1937, there were 472 doctors in Cluj, of whom 158 were Jews.¹³

The important role of the Jewish population in trade and industry has a significant influence on the external aspect of the city. The central stores were largely Jewish (or Hungarian) properties.¹⁴

In 1918-1919, when the Transylvanian Jews – and Cluj Jews, implicitly – became Romanian subjects, the juridical stability they had enjoyed in the Hungarian kingdom was replaced by juridical uncertainty and inferior status. The Citizenship Law of 1924, initiated by George G. Mărzescu and the 1938 procedure of citizenship verification deprived several hundred Jewish families of their citizenship.¹⁵

9. Szabó, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

10. *Uj Kelet*, 13 May 1938, no. 106.

11. *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930. V, (Romania's General Population Census, December 29, 1930, V)*, Institutul Central de Statistică, Bucharest, 1940, p. 133.

12. Sabin Cioreanu, *Problema comerțului și meșteșugurilor în municipiul și județul Cluj (The Issue of Trade and Crafts in the City and the County of Cluj)*, Cluj, Tipografia Carpații S.A., 1940, pp. 5-16.

13. Octavian Bucea, *Cluj: 1919-1939*, Cluj, Tipografia Ardeal, 1939, p. 200.

14. Cizmădia Andor, *Văzlat Kolozsvár társadalomáról (Sketch on Cluj Society)*, Kassa, Szent Erzsébet Nyomda Rt., 1942, p. 16.

15. Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România, 1919-1938. De la emancipare la marginalizare (The Jews from Romania 1919-1938. From Emancipation to Marginalisation)*, Bucharest, Edit. Hasefer, 2000, pp. 96-101 and 256-265.

Alongside the traditional forms of organisation of the Jewish communities, the Zionist movement emerged in 1918; its purpose was the promotion of secular institutions. Cluj became the centre of national Jewish movement in Transylvania; here, in a few years, a network of secular institutions that spread to the entire Jewish community emerged. These institutions played an important role not only in promoting and protecting Jewish interests and social aid, but they also affected the formation of Jewish identity.

In November 1918, the *National Union of Transylvanian Jews* was founded; its Cluj branch was the leader of local Zionist life. Several organisations representing various social groups and interests were formed under the banner of the Union. Such a secular organisation that, in some cases, represented the competition for the women's associations affiliated to the Jewish communities was *WIZO* (Women's International Zionist Organisation), which opened up its Cluj branch in 1927.¹⁶ The *Association for Helping Transylvanian Jewish Students and Pupils*, founded in 1932, represented a source of support for the Jewish students in Cluj; the *Association for Protecting Jewish Orphans* played an important role in training apprentices in the field of industrial occupations. The protection of the sick was provided by the *Jewish Hospital* (opened up in 1928),¹⁷ while education was provided by kindergartens, primary schools and the Jewish high school for girls and boys functioning between 1920 and 1927, all of which were supported by the Jewish communities.

The beginnings of Jewish high school education date back to 1920, when, on September 7, the *Tarbut National Association for Jewish Education* established a gymnasium school with four grades for boys and four for girls.¹⁸ Thus, together with those in Timișoara (1919) and Oradea (1920), the number of Jewish high schools in Transylvania numbered three. By creating a network of Jewish schools, the Transylvanian Zionist movement pursued some well-defined goals: cultivating Hebrew and

16. *Az Erdélyi Zsidó Nemzeti Szövetség XVI. konferenciája (The 16th Conference of the National Union of Transylvanian Jews)*, Temesvár, Kiadja az EZSNSZ, 1939, p. 126.

17. Szabó, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-163.

18. *UK*, 8 September 1920, no. 52. The members of the community provisional commission were: Mátyás Eisler, Mayer Grünfeld, Simon Farkas, Hillel Kohn, Chaim Weisburg and Jakob Klein.

Jewish culture, strengthening Jewish identity, religious education and directing Jewish youth towards "lucrative professions." The institution was placed under the guidance of a committee formed by the representatives of the orthodox and neolog communities. Mathematician Márk Antal was appointed as the school's first director.¹⁹

During the first years, 600-650 students were enrolled in the school. However, from 1923 onwards, the number of students started to decrease because of the problems regarding the official recognition. Until 1922, both the boys and the girls were enrolled in four grades each. In 1922, eight grades were organised for boys and seven for girls. Since 1923, both sections had students enrolled in eight grades each.²⁰

The Jewish cultural life was represented by the Zionist political newspaper *Új Kélet* (*The New East*), published in Cluj between 1918-1940 (in 1939, its circulation was 7200 copies),²¹ by the publishing houses printing books on Jewish topics and by the *Goldmark Philharmonic Society*.

The craftsmen's associations included the *Poale Cedek Association* and the "Paul Ehrlich" *Doctors' Association*. The poorer families, small entrepreneurs and Jewish traders were supported by the *Small Credit Bank*.²²

Alongside the Zionist camp, with a large number of supporters, a significant number of Jews chose to share the destiny of the Hungarian community, considering that assimilation was the right way to follow. Many of the important entrepreneurs and businessmen from Cluj (for instance, Mózes Farkas) brought their support to the Hungarian social and cultural institutions, but many others were dedicated to organising national and Zionist structures.

The participation of Jews in the Cluj/Hungarian cultural and literary life was notable: one should mention here only a few names, like the directors of the Cluj *Hungarian Theatre* (Jenő Janovics, Imre Kádár) or

writers such as Benő Karácsony, Ernő Ligeti, Oszkár Bárd, György Szántó, Rodion Markovits.

The Hungarian National Party in Romania included some prominent members from Cluj, such as Sándor Weiss and Mózes Farkas. After the establishment of the Hungarian Party (1922), lawyer Hugó Róth played an active role in its leadership, until the disappearance of the party.²³

The artistic community

Jewish writers, poets, journalists brought their contribution to the cultural life of Transylvania, and Cluj implicitly, after the Trianon Peace Treaty. This was because of the fact that, before this change, talented Transylvanian Jewish writers used to move to Budapest, the intellectual capital, gravitating around *Nyugat* (*Occident*) magazine. Farkas Gyalui, the director of the university library and a converted Jew, played a very important role in the Cluj intellectual life prior to World War I; in addition to his activity as a literary historian, he was a talented journalist as well.²⁴

Another important Cluj literary figure was lawyer Benő Karácsony. His first novel, *Piotruszka*, was published in 1927 by the Erdélyi Szépművéses Céh (The Association of Transylvanian Hungarian Artists). His literary recognition came after the publication of the novels *Új élet kapujában* (*The Dawn of a New Life*) (1932), *Napos oldal* (*The Sunny Slope*) (1936), *Utazás a szürke folyón* (*Voyage on the Grey River*) (1940), *A megnyugvás ösvényein* (*The Mending Paths*) (1946).

Ottó Indig, returned from Budapest, was hired by the Cluj magazine *Ellenzék* (*Opposition*). During his time in Cluj, he made his debut with the plays *A torockói menyasszony* (*The Rimetea Bride*) (1931), *Tűz a Monostoron* (*Fire in Mănăstur*) (1932), *Ember a híd alatt* (*A Man under the Bridge*) (1933).

Of all the Jewish writers in Cluj, Ernő Ligeti has the most prominent work. Ligeti came to Cluj from Oradea at the end of World War I and

23. Béla György, *Iratok a Romániai Országos Magyar Párt történetéhez, I* (*Documents Concerning the History of the Hungarian National Party in Romania, I*), Csíkszereda - Kolozsvár, Pro-Print - EME, 2003, pp. 412-417.

24. Lówy, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

19. László Salamon, Antal Márk, in *Antal Márk Emlékkönyve*, ed. Weinberger Mózes, Kolozsvár, 1942, p. 30.

20. SJCANR, Folder 168 (Tarbut Jewish Highschool 1921-1948), dos. 5-6.

21. SJCANR, Folder 3 (Cluj County Prefecture), inv. no. 29, dos. 2039/1939, f. 1-5.

22. On Jewish institutions, see Attila Gidó, "Instituțiile evreiești interbelice din Transilvania" ("Interwar Jewish Institutions in Transylvania"), in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historiá*, 2003, no. 1-2, pp. 175-187.

was hired by *Kolozsvári Hírlap* (*The Cluj Newspaper*) magazine, at the time one of the city's most popular publications. Afterwards, he became a member of the editorial team of *Keleti Újság* (*The Eastern Newspaper*) magazine. Perhaps the most important of his studies is *Súly alatt a pálma* (*The Palm Tree under Weight*), presenting the life of Hungarian writers in Transylvania in the interwar period. Here, Ligeti writes the following about Transylvanian Jewish writers: "(...) even in Romanian times, we live Hungarian. What was above us and around us was superficial and unreal. Even in the spring of 1940, Bucharest was much further for us than Berlin or Paris."²⁵

The literary work of country doctor Oszkár Bárd from Gálgäu makes reference to Cluj. Antal Szerb, György Szántó and Rodion Markovits or András Szilágyi brought their contribution to raising the level of literary and cultural life in Cluj.²⁶

Another Jew, Jenő Janovics, played an important role in the field of Transylvanian and Cluj theatre. By establishing the Cinema Factory in 1910, Janovics is also considered one of the pioneers of silent film production.²⁷

During the transfer of power, Janovics was involved not only in reorganising the Cluj theatre activity, but also theatrical activity all over Transylvania. In 1920, he participated in establishing the *Erdélyi és Bánsági Magyar Színészegyesület* (Association of Hungarian Actors in Transylvania), serving as its president since 1921.²⁸

The representatives of new trends in the graphics of the 20th century include László Keleti (*Zsidók útja* – *The path of the Jews*, album, 1936), László Kazár (*A faviágók* – *Wood Cutters*), Alex Leon (*A népkönyha* – *The popular canteen*), Éva Lázár (*Jasztele*), Herman Wald (*A vádló, Fiát sirató*

25. Ligeti Ernő, *Súly alatt a pálma. Egy nemzedék szellemi élete. 22 esztendő kisebbségi sorban* (*The Palm Tree Grows under Weight. The Intellectual Life of a Generation. 22 Years as a Minority*), Kolozsvár, Fraternitas RT., 1941, p. 3.

26. Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, *A zsidóság története Erdélyben 1623-1944* (*The History of Transylvanian Jews 1623-1944*), Budapest, MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1995, pp. 136-139.

27. Löwy, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

28. Kötő József, "A színházi intézményrendszer Erdélyben a két világháború között" (*The Cluj Theatre System in the Interwar Period*), in *Korunk*, 2002, no. 4, p. 58.

anya – *The accuser; Mother mourning her children*).²⁹ Their works were published in Cluj in 1937 in an anthology entitled *Kelet és Nyugat között* (*Between East and West*).³⁰

Painter Éva Lázár was part of the Baia Mare painting school; her works include *Imádkozó Bocher* (*The praying Bocher*) and *Fogy a gyertya* (*The candle is burning*). Important sculptors include Herman Wald and Egon Lövíth.³¹

One of the main goals of the Zionist movement was the renewal of Jewish culture in Hebrew. The language of Jewish cultural life was Hungarian, and to some extent, its roots were influenced by Hungarian culture.

The *Új Kelet* newspaper's agenda was clearly Zionist. The elite of Cluj journalists were members of its editorial team: Béla Székely, Illés Kaczér, Péter Újvári, János Giszkalai, Imre Szabó, Sándor Benamy, László Salamon, Hillél Danzig, etc.³²

The publication of books increased in the interwar period, when several Jewish publishing houses were established: *Zsidó Könyvtárak Társasága* (The Association of Jewish Bibliophiles), *Zsidó Diákszegélyző* (The Association for Supporting Transylvanian Jewish Students), *Pharos, Kádimá, Fraternitas, Noáír*. The growing number of Jewish books and publications led to an increased number of bookshops selling Jewish books and publications, such as the *Glasner-Benjamin* bookshop, founded in 1921.³³

The first Hebrew cultural association in Cluj, *Ivria*, was founded within the framework of the Zionist movement.³⁴ Also, the cultural association of the Cluj Jewish women, *Jehudit*, was involved in promoting Jewish culture. The statute modification adopted at the 1921 general assembly put forward the main ideas of the *Jehudit* agenda, as follows: "this association is founded on the principle of Jewish nationality and its

29. Carmilly-Weinberger, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

30. *Kelet és Nyugat között. Zsidó fiátlak antológiája* (*Between East and West. The Anthology of Young Jews*), Cluj, A Zsidó Diákszegélyző Kiadása, 1937.

31. Carmilly-Weinberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-258.

32. *A kolozsvári zsidóság emlékkönyve* (*Tribute to Transylvanian Jews*), ed. Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, second edition, New York, Sepher Hermon Press, 1988, pp. 193-195.

33. *Új Kelet*, 9 December 1921, no. 271.

34. *Új Kelet*, 26 January 1921, no. 17.

precise goal is that of strengthening and awakening Jewish national consciousness within the ranks of Jewish women.³⁵

In May 1925, the organisations of young Cluj Jews established a popular library. From the beginning, the library numbered almost 1800 volumes (especially literary and scientific works in Hebrew, Romanian, Hungarian, Italian and English).³⁶

The *Goldmark Philharmonic Society* was established as a "cultural subsection" of the Cluj Neolog Jewish community.³⁷ The symphonic concerts organised by this orchestra made up of doctors, engineers and professors always attracted large audiences.

The Jews from Cluj brought their significant contribution to the economic and cultural development of the city. The Romanian laws in the second half of the inter-war period and the Hungarian ones, aiming at excluding Jews from various sectors of social life and adopted after Northern Transylvania became part of Hungary, had serious effects on the Jewish population. Forced work and the 1944 deportations were enforced upon a weakened and frightened Jewish community. Of the more than 16000 Jews in Cluj, only about 3500-4000 survived the Holocaust.

THE "JEWISH QUESTION" IN THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT.

THE 1866 MOMENT

CLAUDIA URSUTIU

The seventh decade of the 19th century brought, for almost all Western European Jews, the hope of a fulfilled destiny from the standpoint of equality of rights, following the fundamental changes originating in the French revolution. The Romanian provinces were also drawn into this European-wide tendency, but soon enough it became evident that the idea of emancipation and equal cohabitation would remain only theoretical. Thus, in the context of trying to adapt democratic structures to an environment still dominated by lethargy and the lack of a democratic tradition, the initial enthusiasm was quickly overcome, as diverging ideologies and opposing interests were taking shape. Consequently, one gradually witnesses the emergence of a "Jewish question" in the Romanian provinces, set against the background of national revival and the contradictions specific to a transitional era, evolving from the level of national problem to that of international issue, being inevitably influenced by the ever more numerous Jewish immigration from Tsarist Russia.

35. *Új Kelet*, 28 June 1921, no. 137.

36. *Új Kelet*, 4 May 1925, no. 98.

37. *Hittközségi Értesítő*, 1936, no. 2-3, p. 7.