

“ON THE BORDER OF TWO WORLDS”

SOME ASPECTS OF THE CO-EXISTENCE OF RURAL JEWS AND PEASANTRY IN HUNGARY

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Abstract: The paper investigates the symbolical and real borders in the areas of contact between the Jews of the Hungarian countryside and the peasants between the two world wars. The symbolical borders are created principally by differences in mentality. These are the borders which for the most part and inherently separate. Tradition, culture, religion, way of life, in many cases the language, and the minority or majority status all separate. Most of these raise an insuperable barrier between the two social groups although – as we shall see – there are cases when some of these borders can be crossed. In contrast, economic interests and the need for social contacts generally make the Jewish and peasant communities dependent on each other, and here the borders also open up more often.

Keywords: otherness, rural Jewish culture, minority questions, Jewish immigration, separation of the Jews, Jewish and Christian feasts

An important component of Pesach, one of the main Jewish feasts remembering the birth of the Jewish people, is the “Passover”, when the angel of death passed over the Jewish houses marked with blood and so they escaped the tenth scourge, the death of the firstborn. Separation and its indication with external signs, at the same time calling attention to borders that cannot be crossed, has played an almost continuous role in the history of Jewry. From a certain point of view the history of this people can be seen on the one hand as the narrowing or at times the widening of these borders, adaptation to the given environment, and on the other hand as the efforts of the outside world to either maintain or to step over these borders. Borders that separate and bind together: the acceptance and constraint of separation and the need to create contacts. The intention of this article is to illustrate this with a few examples, mainly from the early 20th century, of the rural Jews and the peasants living together with them in Hungary.

Jewish culture – peasant culture: the comparison at first appears odd. The comparability can be based on the definition given by Mihály Sárkány who regards the general characteristics of peasant culture to be the following: “community character, the totality of attitude and the traditionalising character” (SÁRKÁNY 1981, 184). These definitions can also be more or less valid for Jewish communities, despite the fact that we could also find arguments for stressing the differences. Such a contrasting of the two groups and this kind of question is justified even though these were naturally not the only two communities co-existing in the “rural areas” on which I focus, the market towns and villages of Hungary.

In the case of the Jewry, the question of otherness can be examined at several levels. First of all it must be stressed that otherness can only be interpreted in relation to something else. Here the basis of comparison is Hungarian peasant society – likewise rather difficult to define – in the period under consideration, that is, between the two world wars.

In this respect too, one of the determining elements in otherness is the contradiction between *original inhabitant* and *immigrant*. Practically all societies and communities in the course of history have had to face this. Here the time factor generally plays an extremely important role. The longer an immigrant community has lived in a given place, the deeper are its ties to the host community, language and culture. At the same time this also means that the ties to the sending community weaken. In the case of the Jews, continuous immigration did not promote isolation from the sending community (LESTSCHINSKY 1961: 1544), consequently in their respect we can speak much more of a dual allegiance, practically throughout the period.

The next element is the question of *minority status*, in both the *ethnic and religious* sense. The Jews are a unique minority group who are distinct from the host community in origin, culture, (in many cases) language and religion. These many different kinds of otherness and, as we shall see, the efforts to preserve them – at least in certain elements – do not facilitate identification with the other for either side. In the case of the Jews, religion played an important role also in that for a long while the religious community, to which all Jews necessarily belonged, served as the basis for the exercise of social and economic influence (MCCAGG 1989: 57).

Over the course of time the co-existence, points of contact and complex system of relations between the two social groups drew or dissolved many borders and the ethnological/anthropological analysis of these borders can be very instructive.

The anthropologist or ethnographer setting out to study the life of the Jews in Hungary is not in an easy situation. The least that can be said is that the Hungarian ethnological literature did not regard research on the Jews as belonging in its field. Besides and before political considerations, this was due for a long while to the approach that ethnological research examined almost exclusively the peasantry and peasant culture. In most ethnological works the Jews figure at the most as a foreign ethnic element or merchant, and they are almost never named. Another consequence of this is that because of the lack of primary and secondary sources and the death of those who still remember, the possibilities for research are extremely limited. It is not by chance that the few ethnological works dealing with the Jews, for lack of a better source, draw on the recollections of non-Jewish informants and so are inevitably able to draw only a one-sided, and possibly not authentic, picture.

The literature of history and sociology has paid much more attention, especially since the 1990s, to the role of the Jews in Hungary. There is a great wealth of literature on the assimilation of the Jews, identity problems and the role they played in the economy (works by László Gonda, Péter Hanák, Viktor Karády, András Kovács, Anikó Prepuk, Vera Ránki, Károly Vörös and others). However, because of the nature of these disciplines, most of these concentrate principally on the big social processes and trends and do not always give a picture of the life of smaller communities.

But it is important to make a distinction between the two, and certainly in the question I have raised. This is not an easy task. An examination of the differences between general trends, the characteristics of the small community and individual life strategies calls for great circumspection. Apart from the fact that unfortunately we can now ask only one side – the non-Jewish – about the questions, difficulties and conflicts of co-existence, the researcher comes up against caution arising from unspoken fear, prejudices and mistrust, a caution that leads mainly to the formulation of stereotypes and makes it very difficult to gain an insight into the real nature of the relationships. All this is further compounded by the fact that we are dealing with a relatively remote period, a reconstruction study, which brings re-evaluation, the formulation of present opinions and behaviours not those of the past, the projection into the past of our present values and experiences. In an attempt to shift the balance a little to the other side, this paper consciously places slightly more emphasis on the Jewish side which is perhaps less known from this angle.

There are symbolical and real borders in the areas of contact between the two cultures. The symbolical borders are created principally by differences in mentality. These are the borders which for the most part and inherently separate. Tradition, culture, religion, way of life, in many cases the language, and the minority or majority status all separate. Most of these raise an insuperable barrier between the two social groups although – as we shall see – there are cases when some of these borders can be crossed. In contrast, economic interests and the need for social contacts generally make the Jewish and peasant communities dependent on each other, and here the borders also open up more often.

The differences also create real, physical borders in addition to the symbolical borders. In the course of the history of the Jews the host communities almost always and everywhere imposed limits on where they could settle, thereby setting limits on their life, activity and even their death.

This was the case in Hungary as well: right up to the end of the 18th century it was forbidden for Jews settling in Hungary to move into the royal towns, which is why they sought a livelihood mainly on aristocratic estates, and in market towns and villages. An act passed in 1840 gave them the right of free settlement, although even then with certain restrictions (they could not go to the mining towns of Upper Hungary). Naturally, this geographical limitation, a narrowing of borders, had an influence on everything else. The Jewish immigrants arriving in Hungary lived as a population tolerated on the estates of the nobility, on the fringes of the feudal world. They were outside the feudal order and retained this legal border situation until emancipation and, to a certain extent, even afterwards (KARÁDY 2000a: 11).

The ghetto, the characteristic way of life and life space of the Jews of Eastern Europe, can be regarded as a border within a given geographical area. Later, during the Second World War, an attempt was made with considerable success to revive this form almost throughout Europe. The ghetto, inherently a form of cultural segregation, in many places and times the determining frame of Jewish life in the diaspora, in most cases was an imposed constraint but there were certain situations in which it arose and operated voluntarily. While for the Jews living in the ghetto contacts with

the outside world were categorical but at the same time rather opaque, their own community definitely provided a kind of security of the home. Here they could break away from the forms and frames of the non-Jewish world that they found uncomfortable, and despite being closed in they could feel relatively free here. In contrast with the cold, strict rules and contacts of the outside world, they found warmth and intimacy among their fellow Jews. This was even more true for family relations. In the innermost circle of their own group they found the appreciation, sympathy and understanding that the outside world could not give them. Here, the Jew was a person with a precisely defined status, in contrast with the formal position he occupied in the outside world (WIRTH 1956). The ghetto, which closes and separates, but at the same time also provides a degree of security and protection in face of the outside world was nevertheless an ill-fated form of cultural separation: “one lives on a closed and insecure island, surrounded by the hostile sea which threatens to swamp it at any moment” (JEGLE 1994: 16).

Although the ghetto-type way of life was not typical in Hungary, in some settlements the local separation of the Jews can be observed to varying degrees. In general, it can be said that the bigger a settlement, the more striking was the physical separation of the Jews. In Budapest, for example, in the early 20th century, a substantial Jewish population was found mainly in two districts. The poorer strata lived and worked in today's districts VI and VII in the Inner City (the area of the later ghetto). Traces of the characteristics of this “Jewish quarter” can still be found. Not only the large number of synagogues, but also the nature of the houses – narrow, multi-storey buildings with a shop on the ground floor and living quarters above it – are all revealing signs. (A current debate that can be followed in the press is relevant to the theme of borders and separation. The question arose when one of the districts of Budapest, Erzsébetváros, was having a coat of arms designed, whether it should include the menorah, one of the most important symbols of the Jews. The designer – who had looked into the history of the district – considered that the Jews had played such an important role in the life of the district that it should definitely be indicated on the arms. However, his idea was not welcomed by everyone.) The more prosperous Jewish middle class at that time settled mainly in the area close to the Danube, today's Újlipótváros. The separation here was not so striking as in the former area (FROJIMOVICS–KOMORÓCZY–PUSZTAI–STRBIK 1995), and the houses did not differ significantly in appearance from the others either.

In country towns with a considerable Jewish population, the Jewish community was generally also located in a compact group. In Gyöngyös the centre of the town was inhabited largely by Jews; in Makó there was a “little Jew street” and a “big Jew street”, where the difference between little and big principally applied to the social stratification within the Jewish population. In Mezőkövesd, a somewhat smaller settlement in Northern Hungary, Jews lived in many of the houses on the main street, and this was also the case in Tokaj and Bodrogkeresztúr, places renowned for wine production. Where the size of the settlement did not allow separation, the otherness was manifested in external features: in the small villages of Szatmár and Bereg counties in Eastern Hungary, for example, in contrast with the typically

whitewashed houses of the peasants, the buildings inhabited by Jews were distinguished by their reddish yellow colour (CSISZÁR 1994: 169). The objects related to religious ritual, such as the menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum, perhaps the most important symbol of the Jews), the mezuzah (the small container holding sacred texts affixed to the side of the door) also represented a perceivable difference.

Borders also existed within the individual houses. As already noted, the combination of residential and economic function was a characteristic feature of some of the houses inhabited by Jews. The business (food store or mixed store, haberdashery shop, ironmongery shop, inn, etc.) was located in one part of the building and the family's living quarters in a separate part. And while the shop, by its nature, was open to all the inhabitants of the locality, the private sphere in the living quarters represented a border that could not be crossed by the peasantry. Apart from other Jews, very few people were allowed to enter.

The fence, a border also in the physical sense, also played a determining role on both sides. It excluded and separated. An informant from Makó recalling her childhood said that the Jewish children could not play out on the street; their father would not let them out, so they stared out through the fence. (Extract from an interview, Makó. Török K. 45.)

Peasant children peered through fences to observe what was happening in the yards of Jewish houses. "The children of Kővágóőrs (Balaton Hills) climbed up on the bastions and stone walls, and stood on tiptoes in their curiosity to see what was happening in the yard of the local *shochet* (who slaughtered animals in keeping with the kosher rules)" (CSOMA-LÖWY 1994, 106).

This leads us to the question of symbolical borders between the two cultures which sharply and clearly separate, but at the same time ensure permeability at a few points. It is very difficult to separate the differences that are also manifested in externalities from the deeper differences in those who wished to maintain the collective identity from inside. For, apart from external appearance, these were all directed at preserving the separation and certain features of identity on the inside much rather than on the outside. As Géza Komoróczy writes: "Sabbath, kosher, circumcision: these three distinguishing signs of Jewish identity, by their nature, can be observed only in private life, in the immediate family circle. They serve the "hidden" identity. They are more a distinguishing sign for themselves than a mark of separation. They are rather a means for ensuring the internal cohesion of the family and the group than of opposing others" (KOMORÓCZY 1992: 267). While this statement can be basically accepted, it must be noted that in certain situations these factors can become forces of separation. On the subject of *circumcision* Sándor Kányádi writes: "And the three of us often splashed together (i.e. the author and Jewish boys of the same age from the village) in the perfumed Küküllő. Stark naked of course, and usually only in the evenings. Because of modesty over the little "difference" they did not need to be ashamed of in front of me. It was only later, as an adult and in the light of what happened, that I understood they were moved by an instinctive fear of being put to shame, even there beside the Küküllő." (KÁNYÁDI 1989: 197).

Returning to the previous train of thought, it can be said that *nutrition* can definitely be regarded as a symbolical border. The *kashrut* (kosher) system of Jewish dietary rules comprises the appropriate foods and the way in which they are to be processed, prepared and eaten. The dietary rules represent the most ancient stratum of Jewish culture and their observance can be justified on health grounds and on the basis of their divine origin. They play an important role in maintaining the Jewish sense of being chosen and consequently in their survival as a community (RÉKAI 1997: 69). The respect of these rules can also be regarded within Jewry as the yardstick of religiosity. It is my own experience, confirmed by the sources available, that in many cases these rules can be given a quite individual interpretation (naturally, with the exception of the ban on eating pork). With the weakening of religious orthodoxy these rules have been greatly relaxed, but they persisted for a long while even if in modified form. On the subject of the dietary rules Mihály Sozan wrote in connection with his research in Aba: “While they kept a kosher kitchen, the Jewish housewives ‘cooked in the Hungarian manner’. ... By the 1930s many Jews, especially those of the younger generation, no longer kept a kosher household. The saying ‘son, if you must eat *trayf* (not kosher), at least put on your hat’, originates from this period.” (SOZAN 1986: 188). Their kitchen equipment was similar to that of Hungarian peasants, with the difference that, to comply with the rules for a kosher household (keeping milk and meat dishes separate), they had to have a more differentiated set of implements.

However, the inherently strict dietary rules, which also had the clearly defined and obvious function of separation, also brought the Jews and peasants closer together at certain points.

Jewish families rarely kept their own cow, preferring to entrust it to their neighbours. In Bodrogkeresztúr, for example, it was the general practice in the 1920s and 1930s for peasant farmers to feed and care for the cows of Jewish families. When they needed milk, they generally milked the cows themselves, into their own kosher vessels. This mutual dependence was also found in keeping and fattening poultry. On market days Jews who respected the kosher rules bought hens and geese – fattened for this purpose – from peasant women from the surrounding villages (Devecser, Kővágóórs). The peasants also fattened geese for their livers because the Jews were fond of goose liver (Tokaj). If it was found during the ritual slaughter that the bird was not kosher the Jews could not eat it, so they gave it to peasant families they knew. In Devecser Christian women collected the blood from poultry slaughtered by the *shochet* (the consumption of blood was strictly forbidden for Jews (!)) which they took home to fry with lard (CSOMA–LÓWY 1994: 104–108).

The peasantry perceived and were perfectly aware of the differences in such contacts, but they showed no interest in the reasons. In Bodrogkeresztúr the peasant women helped to pluck the poultry and they had to learn, for example, that the Jews plucked the feathers “dry” and did not scald the bird.

The making of kosher wine for the Jews was a common bond in that the peasant farmers grew the grapes, but at the same time it also separated them because only Jews could take part in processing the grapes. In Abaúj the only difference

between *kosher* wine and *trayf* was that the “Jewish merchants themselves trampled the grapes and filtered the wine at the home and using the equipment of the grower from whom they purchased the grapes” (PALÁDI-KOVÁCS 1967: 21). It was a special feature of the process that “the wine-grower could not go down into his own cellar – even if the Jewish kosher wine merchant bought his crop – until the wine there had been filtered after thorough cleaning. What made this more mysterious was that a non-Christian with unusual dress and behaviour entered the cellar, arranging it and acting there according to Jewish religious laws” (CSOMA-LÖWY 1994: 115).

The border between *kosher* and *trayf* – what could and could not be consumed by the Jews – could be crossed with relative ease by one side only. Food and drinks declared to be *trayf* were acceptable for the peasants; they could eat and drink them, but dishes prepared by the peasants were quite clearly forbidden for the Jews. Although a full exploration of the subject far exceeds the limits of this paper, it is important to note that in certain situations the Jews could also cross these borders. It is sufficient to consider, in the one hand, the question of assimilation where crossing these borders was one of the yardsticks, and on the other hand, emergency situations (such as the Second World War: forced labour service, concentration camps), when breaking these rules was essential for survival.

Respect of the dietary rules was especially important on feast days. The dividing, separating nature of the *feasts* is also quite striking. In particular, special mention must be made of the Sabbath which every week stressed the differences between the two cultures. The Sabbath is a weekly day of feast and rest for the Jews but an ordinary working day in Christian culture. On the Sabbath the doors of Jewish homes are closed, making the borderlines even sharper. However, a certain permeability remains even then, since external help is needed to respect the religious rules and perform the rites. And this is the point where the peasantry gained a glimpse into what was for them the mysterious world of Jewish culture. On Saturdays shops owned by Jews were either closed or they regularly asked a neighbour or acquaintance to keep the shop open on that day. This was most commonly the case for inns. Because of the ban on work on the Sabbath, someone else had to light the fire. In many places these persons were known as “Sabbath goyim”, they were the non-Jews who went over by previous arrangement to light the stove (CSOMA-LÖWY 1994: 123). In many places Christian neighbours were also asked to heat the Sabbath food and turn on the lights (Makó). When the Sabbath candle burnt down, children were often called in – for small rewards – to blow out the candle (Bodrogkeresztúr).

The two cultures were also isolated from each other at certain points of the celebrations marking milestones in human lives. They never entered each other's sacred places, the churches and temples. In Bodrogkeresztúr, when their Christian girlfriends were married Jewish girls often helped to dress the bride but then accompanied her only to the door of the church. The situation was similar in the reverse case: Christian girls waited around the vicinity of the synagogue to congratulate their girlfriends after the ceremony.

But Jewish youth could take part in festive occasions of the Christians which were no longer so closely linked to religious tradition, such as the Easter “sprinkling” or erecting a maypole (SOZAN 1984: 15).

The function of costume as a form of designation is well known from the ethnological literature. It played an important role in the history of the Jews too, and for a long while its separating nature was determining. However, in the period under consideration only certain elements of this still survived as the degree of assimilation in external appearance to the host culture was one of the yardsticks of assimilation. The separating nature remained unchanged in the Orthodox communities and especially in the Hassidic communities in North-East Hungary. The most typical part of men’s costume was the caftan and of women’s the wig and the head scarf tied at the back of the neck. The peasant women occasionally copied this latter style. According to an informant in Bodrogkeresztúr: “at home in the kitchen, when it was hot, it was always tied at the back, not in the front, always at the back. Then sometimes we Christians also wore the scarf the way they did. Yes, we followed the same fashion. Say, I wore a scarf at home, because I was going out to pick beans. They always wore it like that. They tied it at the back, and we did the same at home.”

Mention must be made of the kippa, the distinguishing headgear of Jewish men which played a decisive role in its meaning and as a distinguishing mark. “Jewish tradition demands that, as a sign of modesty and morality, men cover their head before the Lord, and as a sign of the same modesty and morality, women cover their head before men” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 1971: 2). Covering the head was compulsory in any form of contact with God (mourning, prayer, studying mysticism, etc.). In Egyptian and Babylonian times this obligation was limited only to persons held in public esteem; many images have survived showing the Jews bare-headed. On the other hand, covering the head – especially in the case of children – also played a role in ensuring piety and in preventing evil spells. According to the Talmud, covering the head is optional and not an absolute obligation. In the Middle Ages covering the head when reading the Torah and for prayer was made compulsory and appeared mainly in the Ashkenazic tradition as an expression of respect for the Lord. In the course of the 17th century another meaning became associated with this custom: it served as a visible sign of separation from the Christians since the Christians prayed bare-headed.

The custom of covering the head thus has two almost inseparable components among the Jews: it is an expression of respect for God and signals that the person concerned is a Jew. And although there are rules concerning when a head covering must be worn (in the synagogue, on Jewish religious occasions, at feasts, meals, etc.), the actual wearing of a head covering differs from one person to another, on the one hand expressing the degree of religiosity and on the other hand reflecting the expression of identity and distinction from others. In this respect the rules of Orthodoxy are much stricter and allow the individual less freedom. (Although there are also differing degrees of Orthodoxy, and the relationship to Orthodoxy can be interpreted individually in this question as well.)

Permeability of the borders between the two cultures was ensured for certain persons and institutions. Perhaps the school was the most important of the mediating institutions. In the late 18th century the secularisation of Jewish schools began and it also became possible for Jews to attend Christian schools. As a result, some types of schools became open in both directions. Children were able to get to know each other better in the schools and everyday contacts became unavoidable. It was mainly here that relations that could be described as friendly were able to develop, especially among the girls.

It is not possible to list all the mediating persons but special mention must be made of the occupational groups in close connection with peasant culture. It is well known that the occupational distribution of the Jews differed from that of the rest of the population. Their occupations covered a narrower spectrum and included mainly trade and later certain intellectual occupations. The characteristics of the occupational structure of Central European Jewry can be summed up as follows:

1. Jews rarely engaged in agriculture by actually tilling the land themselves.
2. The majority of the economically active Jewish population made a living in industry and commerce. Within these branches:
 - a. they traded mainly in consumer goods,
 - b. they sold their products on the free market, through a network of retailers,
 - c. their businesses required a relatively small amount of capital,
 - d. these were small, independent businesses in their own ownership (DON 1989: 142).

Because of the differing nature of their occupations, the rural Jewry was on a higher level of *embourgeoisement* than the peasantry and this fact did not help to bring them closer together. However, the merchants nevertheless represented the most important occupational group among the mediators; they were the most open group because they were able to cross between the two cultures. The mutual dependence and hence the movement across the borders was the most obvious in their case. In their activity the Jewish merchants had to adapt to the demands of the peasants and in doing so they often had to cross the borders of their own culture. This gave rise to such interesting and unusual phenomena as the case of Mezőkövesd where, in the early 20th century, Jewish merchants became the mediators, disseminators and even the shapers of *matyó* embroidery, one of the symbols of peasant culture (SZARVAS 1990, 2000).

Those who could gain a deeper than average insight into Jewish culture were the large numbers of Christian servants who took part in the everyday life of the Jews and in doing so had to become acquainted with the religious rules, particularly the kosher rules. This was a long learning process with occasional mistakes. In Somlósárhely, for example, a young girl working as a servant for a Jewish family “washed the family’s milky and fatty plates and cutlery in the same dishwater. When the wife noticed this she shouted, *she’s made them trayf*, then explained that the girl was expected to wash the two groups of plates and implements separately. The servant girl asked for forgiveness, and before she knew what was happening, to her great surprise, the family members smashed the plates and implements and buried

them in the garden because they were impure. The Catholic servant girl never forgot the incident and after that made a great effort to meet the family's expectations" (CSOMA-LÖWY 1994: 99).

The midwives were another occupational group that played a significant mediating role. The Jewish midwife was the first who could enter the peasant house where she took part in and assisted at birth, one of the most intimate moments in human life. Naturally, this contact was not entirely without conflict either, because of the different rules of the two religions. It must be noted that in this case the border could be crossed from one side only because the Jews always attempted to call a midwife from their own faith to the birth of a child (DEÁKY 1994: 145–149).

Last but not least, I would like to present briefly a characteristic figure among the mediating persons: the rabbi of miraculous powers. These rabbis appeared from the end of the 18th century, mainly in certain settlements of North-East Hungary where they were the leading personalities of a characteristic Jewish religious movement, Hasidism. These persons with charismatic power not only acted as religious leaders but also carried out functions as organising, pastoral, judicial, social and educational tasks (KARÁDY 2000a: 11). The fame of these rabbis and the scope of their activity spread beyond their own community in their own lifetime. Local Christians also visited them to seek help and advice before making major decisions or in case of illness. Their person and activity lived on for a long while in the memory of the non-Jewish population too (DOBOS 1990: 31).

This is of special note because in this case it is a Jewish religious leader who comes into contact with the Christian peasant culture and his influence on it – principally in folklore – can be traced for a long while after.

The following story about the Bodrogkeresztúr rabbi of miraculous powers perhaps throws some light on the connection between the two cultures also mediated by the rabbi: "Christians or Jews, anyone could go to him for advice. He didn't ask payment for it. He helped them, however poor they were... It was a little city of David. They lived from the Jews. There were poor women there who were widows. He called them in to clean, whitewash, carry water, cut wood. That priest had a heart and soul like the soul of Jesus Christ. He gave to everyone. Wagons of flour, sugar and turkeys came from abroad. If a poor person was in need, he helped everyone. Whatever he got, he distributed ... You should have seen there on a Friday... the number of turkeys and geese they killed! Three, four, five hundred foreign Jews ate there..." (DOBOS 1988: 368).

Many more examples could be given but perhaps these are sufficient to illustrate the complexity of the relations, the possibility or impossibility of crossing the border. In place of a summary, I shall quote from a work of literature which sums up what I have to say more clearly and eloquently than anything else:

"Ruthenian shepherds and woodcutters, Jewish tradesmen and merchants live here. Poor Jews and more prosperous Jews, poor Ruthenians and even poorer Ruthenians.

True, the Greek Catholic Christian would not, for all the world, eat a dish made of milk during the fast of Peter and Paul, and the Jew would rather die than drink

wine touched by a goy, but over the centuries they have become accustomed to each other's oddities, religious hatred is foreign to them, and if the Ruthenian laughs at the Jew because he does not eat bacon, eats lunch with a hat on his head, and wastes expensive candles on Friday evening, the laughter is good-natured, and if the Jew disdains the Ruthenian because he prays to a man who was executed in an ugly way..., this disdain is of an abstract nature. They can see into each other's ritual mysteries and religious ceremonies just as clearly as they can into each other's kitchens and rooms, and if the farmer comes in the morning to the Jewish craftsman who happens to be conversing with his God, the master does not bother to remove the striped tallit on his shoulder, the tefillin box on his forehead, the tefillin straps on his left arm, wishes the neighbour good morning and then bargains in detail the fee for the iron fittings on a cart, the repair of a pair of moccasins or the glazing of a window; the Everlasting is in no hurry and will wait for him. Life has made the Ruthenian and the Jew dependent on each other. They visit each other, they owe each other a little cornflour, a few eggs, fodder, they are indebted for the loan of fodder, horse teams, labour and cash. That is how it is on weekdays. But beware of tossing a thought among them! In an instant two kinds of brain, two kinds of nervous system will stand opposed. And the two Gods will cast flashes of lightning at each other" (OLBRACHT, 1987: 199).

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