

IMAGE OF JEWS IN THE MEMORY OF RESIDENTS OF MAKÓ*

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Abstract: This case-study reveals the elements of coexistence of Jews and Hungarians at a market town, Makó, in the Great Hungarian Plain, exploring relations in the interwar years and in particular the period between the Great Depression and the adoption of the first Jewish law, 1929–1938. Based on numerous interviews, the author has collected the mainly stereotyped opinions of the Hungarians about their Jewish neighbours.

Keywords: stereotypes, onion production, onion trade, social strata, Orthodox Jews, Reform Jews

There are two basic questions in the investigation of the coexistence of different, clearly definable groups:

- a) the mechanism of relations between the groups,
- b) the image of the other group formed in the awareness of the groups.

It is easier to understand the relationship between groups and the individuals within them if we know the image the groups have of each other, and the circumstances that shaped these images. The opinions shaped by the experiences of our immediate and wider environment influence the relations we form with people belonging to other groups. These generalisations do not reflect the reality. This could not be otherwise since our everyday experiences are incidental and have little to do with the systematic, conscientious study of reality. They also have another drawback, namely that emotional elements dominate in opinions formed in the wake of incidental contacts. The result is the stereotyped structures that form the store of “wise sayings” and which often constitute the sole elements in our knowledge of other ethnic groups.

These stereotyped structures are passed down from generation to generation and become part of the common tradition of the given group. The objective, factual value of these generalisations is slight. It is sufficient to think of the stereotypes of Hungary with associations of the “csárdás, goulash, puszta” type. These abbreviations, details and distortions are always coloured with a strong emotional influence.

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Despite all these negative aspects, such generalisations are of great significance in the life of society. Often and for many of us they determine our behaviour towards others, shape our opinions and deeds. They find a place in our intellectual culture.

We attempted to reconstruct the contacts between the local population and the Jews in a single settlement, Makó. Makó is found in the South of the Great Hungarian Plain, beside the Maros river which was a waterway from Transylvania towards Southern Hungary. Makó is a market town with an extensive network of outlying farms; it joined in the European economy in the last quarter of the 19th century through its intensive monoculture, onion production. In the first half of the 20th century the town had an agrarian society in the process of embourgeoisement where the propulsive branch was market gardening, with fodder production on large areas (the town had around 26,000 hectares of land) served for stabled animal husbandry. 54.5% of the active population engaged in agriculture. At the same time, it was characteristic that there were only four estates larger than 60 hectares and none larger than 300 hectares; four enterprises employed more than 30 workers and only six employed more than ten. Taking all the farming units together, there were 2.1 earners per farm. Makó was a town of small farms.

In 1740 Bishop Stanislavich of Csanád authorised the settlement of Jews in the town, in a separate district, beside the Greek Catholics. According to the first census conducted in 1773 50 Jewish families with a total of 158 persons lived in Makó. By occupation, 21 of the household heads were wine merchants, 8 were retail merchants and 5 were tradesmen.

Our investigation was aimed at exploring relations in the interwar years and in particular the period between the Great Depression and the adoption of the first Jewish law, 1929–1938. We conducted interviews with elderly people who had direct contact with the Jews in the interwar years. In 1930 the population of Makó was 35,824 persons, of whom 2,052 were Jews, that is, 5.7% of the town's population. At the time of the research, in 1989 8 persons declared themselves Jewish. In 1930 62.3% of all farms grew onions. Of the 3350 farms, approx. 1000 were market gardens producing onions and around 2000 were market gardens (ERDEI 1982: 11–12).¹

We conducted our investigations in a very limited sample. It must therefore be pointed out firstly that the interviewees are not representative of society at that time and secondly that it was not a living contact that we were studying.

Memory fades and distorts; the experiences and opinions expressed had time to settle. Later historical events and the time of the research (1989–1990) not only influenced the interviewees in the way they formulated their recollections but also in how they selected them. Besides the interviews, we also had at our disposal the entire local press of the period. This article is based primarily on the interviews.

Although we did not encounter any refusals when conducting the interviews, it was clear that the interviewees were exercising conscious control. Most of the in-

¹ We refer a number of times in the notes to this study by Ferenc Erdei. Although the full text was not published until 1982, the outstanding sociologist, who was born in Makó, wrote the first draft in 1934.

formants spoke much more freely on other subjects related to the given period. It must also be noted that not only the informants but also the researchers had difficulty coping with the unaccustomed theme.

Contact with members of another group always takes place in connection with something, through something. *What were the meeting points in Makó?*

The *peasantry*, or more precisely the various strata of people engaged in agriculture, came into contact with the Jews in the economic sphere. (It should be noted that 90% of our informants had earlier belonged to this stratum or in particular to the group of several thousand onion farmers.)

The contacts between Hungarians and Jews appeared most strongly in the *onion trade*. "The history of the Makó onion business up to 1939 can be divided into three main stages. Up to 1918 Makó supplied the internal markets of the Monarchy, making use of the very efficient and cheap railway transport. Between 1920 and 1934 the market was practically entirely domestic and the prices were very depressed. Makó onions entered the world market in 1934 with the help of the onion syndicate which represented the majority of traders and was largely in the hands of Jewish merchants. The export earnings brought considerable profit not only to the growers and the merchants but also to the local authority. The financial transactions were made through the local banks which were consequently able to extend more credit in turn enabling the financing of other branches." (ZSIGMOND 1992: 24)

The great majority of farmers in Makó were onion growers and 80% of the onion merchants were Jews. Their relationship was determined by the fact that the grower and the merchant were mutually dependent. We obtained a precise description of the course of the business and the stratification of the merchants; we heard eloquent reports of the conditions at the market, of how purchases and deals were made. Practically everyone knew the names of the wholesale merchants; the informants were able to give details on the merchants with whom they were in contact, how the trade between them was conducted, what prices were paid for the onions in which year, etc. In Makó onions were bought and sold in the onion market at the beginning of Deák Ferenc utca. Trading was conducted on the basis of samples.

"There were thousands of people at the onion market. How did they sell? For example, they took out a sack or half a sack of onions in a wheelbarrow and then the merchant came. How much have you got of these? What's the price? It was the fashion among the gardeners to take a bunch of onions, tie them up in a faded kerchief, hang it over their arm with the tops hanging out. Then they strolled up and down and they were asked: how much of those have you got? What price are you asking? They (the merchants) were already up at two in the morning, out in the market, and they bought up onions till seven in the morning. In the meantime, phone calls came and someone shouted out to them in the market: Áron, come here! or Moses, come here! He ran in, and took an order for two wagons of onions, or a wagon of vegetables. Then he ran out and got the vegetables together. The stronger merchants had an office there at the market, and a storeroom. This trade went on all year because the vegetables were not lifted in autumn, they were left until the spring when they had nice green leaves. Root vegetables with green leaves were much easier to sell in the spring."



Fig. 1. Onion market at the Makó market, around 1926/1997, No.: 11119 10 × 15 cm gelatin dry plate.
From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó²

Besides the specific descriptions and their evaluation, the informants always expressed opinions and made observations on the trade in general, often comparing it to their negative experiences in the period following the nationalisations in 1948.

² In 1953 20,000 glass negatives came into the possession of the Attila József Museum in Makó from a photo studio no longer in use. As it was later discovered, the negatives were from the town's most prestigious photographic studio. Natán Homonnai was born in Székelyudvarhely (now Romania) and moved from Kolozsvár to Makó when he married. In the spring of 1904 he opened his photo studio which operated, first under his direction and later by his inheritors, right up to 1936. (For more details on this valuable legacy of industrial and cultural history see: Foto Homonnai. Egy makói fényképészcsalád hagyatéka [Photo Homonnai. Legacy of a family of photographers in Makó]. Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum, Budapest, 1998.)

In addition to posed portraits made in the well appointed studio, the plates also include photographs taken at the opening public buildings and institutions, performances by cultural groups of Makó, sports events and receptions for famous people.

Unfortunately, the studio's records, which would have facilitated identification of the persons, families and events portrayed, were not found. "Our situation was made more difficult by the fact that while our informants remembered exactly where the studio had operated, they were able to give hardly any information about the photographers and their family ..." writes the photographer Tibor Szűcs who catalogued and restored the material. This sentence has been cited because it reinforces what was said in my study, namely that Hungarians knew very little about the Jewish families living together with them, while the surviving 20,000 photographs cover all social strata in what was then the county seat: members of the leading strata of the town that was in the process of embourgeoisement, representatives of the middle class, landowners from the neighbouring villages, manufacturers, merchants, onion-growers, farmers and poor peasants. This very broad range of subjects was due to the recognised quality of the work and no doubt also to the photographer's excellent personal contacts.



Fig. 2. Unknown person, around 1929/1997, No.: 14898 13 × 18 cm gelatin dry plate. From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó

The judgement of the Jewish merchant in Hungarian society is very contradictory. The adjective is not really needed: this is essentially a judgement of the merchant. The nobility and the peasantry regarded trading as an auxiliary branch of economic life. They did not accept it as a full-time occupation for themselves, but at the same time, for precisely this reason, the Jewish merchant enjoyed respect.

In the interviews this was expressed in the first, involuntary formulation as: *“the Jews didn’t work”*, then later, when this was interpreted, a lengthier explanation was given on the importance of trade. Everyone recognised the importance of the trade and the abilities of the Jewish merchants. Relations between the growers and merchants were naturally not always free of conflicts and were influenced by falling prices and loss of markets. The Great Depression caused a setback in the onion business and led to serious conflicts between the growers and merchants, occasionally even marked by “incitement against the denomination and class” (in the words of the mayor of that time).

A few opinions on the merchants and on the trade:

– *The onion business was thanks to Jewish exports. People sometimes grumbled,*

that's natural, but it didn't become open hostility, especially because the market was dominated by two or three big Jewish merchants. The wholesale trade did whatever it wanted with the retailers too, whatever its interests dictated.

– The states that trade are in a much different position from the ones that only produce. There was a supplementary tax, that stayed here in the town. The more taxpaying citizens there were, the more taxes went to the town.

– The life that existed here thanks to trade, disappeared. I regret it.

– Trade was what I would call an occupation that was a bit looked down on and no one (Hungarian) wanted to take it up.

– The onion trade was risky, you could go bankrupt in it. There wasn't anyone who saved up a lot of money and then lived on his capital. They came here for the trade, because their livelihood was ensured here, they could live without working.

Lots of Jews were merchants. They knew my father and they knew me too. I gave them the produce. Because one hand is one trade. It's not good for the grower when there's no competition.

– Because the Jew said: better the frequent penny than the rare pound.

– If he could, the Jew supplied goods anywhere in the country, anywhere in the world.³

– Whatever they bought, the price they paid always covered the production costs.

– They worked for a very small profit.

– These people paid taxes here, and you could see the effect on the town.

– Neither the Jew nor the Gypsy liked to work. There were many of them who spent only a few hours in the shop. They weren't there from six in the morning till three in the afternoon!

– We knew that the Jew traded. But we weren't interested in how he did his business. It was only the money that mattered.

– They worked in trade, not on the land. They invested their money and lived from that. That was work too, because they were up at two in the morning, because the market was on by then, and they bought till seven. And they got phone calls, to supply such and such an amount to such and such a place. Because the stronger merchants had offices there in the market, and a store. Then they ran out (to the market) and put together the vegetables.

– Well, the Jews were gentlemen here, they really were! Not like in their country, my father was there. They plough and sow there, like the peasants here. Here, in Hungary, they're gentlemen!

– On the average the Jews here in Makó didn't get rich. They just lived, some of them bought a house. They brought up five or six children and used their money as operating capital. They were satisfied if they could observe their religion every year, and raise their children to be religious, and if they had enough money for clothes and to support their family, and the women didn't work. Old Paskesz, for example, had an inn, and he lived as a tenant in my aunt's house.

³ In 1934, for example, 1400 wagons of onions and garlic were exported to England, Germany, Austria, Norway, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland.



Fig. 3. Unknown persons, ?/1997, No.: 20991 gelatin dry plate. From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó

Jewish owners were also involved in the other branch of trade: *retail trade*. Naturally, people tend to remember best and most reliably the shops where they were regularly customers: their location, external appearance, interior furnishings, the sales staff, the service and the quality of the goods. E.g.: “*opposite the Korona (hotel), on the left. The big shop was upstairs. The girls sewed inside. Outside was the big ready-made clothing shop. Beside it was a cellar, it had a big arched doorway and you had to go down several steps to get there. It was a citrus and tropical fruit shop.*”

There were lots of market stallholders among them. Mamuka had a stall there where you could buy anything under the sun, she sold for credit at her own risk.

A typical figure in trade was the *itinerant trader*, and the Jewish feather merchant went out to the farms as well. “*He had half a sack of feathers over his shoulder and a crooked stick in his hand. He wore checked clothes and a peaked cap. They came out to the farms to collect rags and they brought fine plates. Take your pick! Pay with rags! They were really beautiful (the plates).*”

Others made the rounds of the neighbouring villages on market days, *buying up* produce and small animals to sell to the wholesalers.

SPATIAL LOCATION

The Jews lived in Eötvös utca. This was Little Jew street; Deák Ferenc utca was Big Jew street. Up to the last third of the 19th century the market town was made up of village-like units. "In Makó the constituent units were Szentlőrinc, Buják and Oroszrész, like peasant villages, with autonomous church congregations and a specified share in the town's public administration ... wedged between these peasant villages was the Ghetto and the Centre... The present population now forms a single social community" (ERDEI 1982: 7). The big Jewish houses were in the Főtér (Main Square) and they also lived in Kossuth utca.

– *The truth is that only the hószet Jews lived together that way, the Hungarian Jews were scattered around the town. The little shopkeepers lived in different parts of the town, as well as, for example, the soda water merchant and the cement man who made well-cylinders. There, in one district, where they lived in the centre of the town, they had their school and their church, all together. The ones in Deák Ferenc utca were generally wealthier. The big Jews. That's where those big onion merchants were.*

The informants who had lived in or close to the town centre, met Jewish people far more often and in more situations than those who lived in the outer parts of the town or out on the farms. This is why the interviews became briefer as we moved out from the town centre and the informants used increasingly stereotyped terms with few real life situations behind them.

"NEURO AND HÓSZET JEWS"⁴

"Inherited traits distinguish the Jewish middle class from the others. They are *citoyens*, perhaps the most European in Makó, but solidarity tugs them towards the Ghetto, and folk and historical separation pushes them away from the gentry and the agrarian proletariat, making them a separate part of the town's society between these two borders" (ERDEI 1982: 45). The difference between the Reform and Orthodox Jews was identified in external appearance and in part in behaviour, dress and their differing occupations.

– *The hószet Jews didn't talk to us, they had side-locks and the women wore wigs. Their church was different, their ceremonies were different. (No one was able to give a clear description of the latter.)*

– *The hószet Jews used Hebrew among themselves, but they spoke very good Hungarian too.*

– *The Hungarian Jews went around like the Hungarians, the women wore very fashionable clothes.*

– *Religious life was not so strict among the Hungarian Jews as it was among the hószet Jews – claims a former servant. On Saturdays the shops here were closed.*

⁴ The "neuro" is a corruption of "neológ", the Hungarian term for Reform Jews, that is, the more middle class, assimilated Jewry; "hószet" is a corruption of Hasidic, one of the branches of Jewish Orthodoxy.



Fig. 4. Unknown couple, around 1921/1997, No.: 5685 10 × 15 cm gelatin dry plate. From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó

– *There were the neuro Jews, the ones who shaved. Because the Jews weren't all the same. The new faith Jews used a safety razor; the Orthodox Jews used a wooden knife.*

– *The ones with beards were called hószet Jews. But the Svarces, they were shaved just like the Hungarians.*

The Hasidim were generally the onion merchants.

– *The hószet Jews were all onion merchants. We never saw a bearded Jew like that in a shop. Foreign merchants came, they were Jews too. They were rich, they lived well, they dressed well (they were Reform Jews). Some of them you could only tell from their features that they were Jews, otherwise you couldn't tell. During the war (World War One) some of them had been soldiers, officers, they were decorated.*

– *They had their own baker. They had a shochet to slaughter their poultry, when we sold them a fattened duck. If the shochet found that its throat was a little damaged, they wouldn't eat it. They sold it to Christians. None of them, not even the ones who shaved, they wouldn't eat it either. They had their own baker and the shochet.*

– *The ones with beards, they weren't so clean, they were dressed shabbily, a bit dirty. The ones with twists (Hasidim), they were all dirty.*

Everyone mentioned the *religiosity* of the Jews. “The Orthodox branch of the Israelist denomination represents the most traditional and the most intensively religious life in Makó. It is here that we find the least laxness in religious life. However, the constant increase in the number of Reform Jews and the switches show processes similar to those which can be observed in the Christian denominations” (ERDEI

1982: 87). The author noted that the number of those living a serious religious life was declining and the institutional system did not include all those living a religious life.

The observations apply mainly to traits that can be understood and noted by the outside observer, but the moral values attributed to the Jews were also associated with their religiosity, e.g. the large number of children or the absence of divorces.

– *Their religious life was very strong. The merchants were all religious people, just they didn't believe in God. In the Lord Jesus. My grandfather spoke with them, and they said: "Uncle Hăzi, don't believe that he was the son of God. He was a learned Jew". My grandfather was so angry that he didn't speak to them any more. However such conversations were rare. It was mainly at school that the children acquired fragmentary knowledge, such as: – they had a prophet too, and they waited for the Messiah, my schoolmate who was from a family of priests told me that.*

The first synagogue was probably built between 1770 and 1780 on a site between Big Jew Street and Little Jew Street. The school building and beside it the ritual bath stood on the same site as the synagogue. Later a new ritual bath was built, on a site further down the street. In the meantime the second synagogue was built in the early 1870s for the Orthodox community. The winter prayer-room and the caretaker's apartment attached to it is in a single-storey house opposite the synagogue. This small building already existed in the 1820s. The small community still uses the prayer-room. Renovation of the synagogue was completed in March 2002. The members of the new, Reform Jewish community, who were among the town's respected citizens by the turn of the century, erected a building befitting their numbers, prestige and financial situation. It was opened in 1914. The first synagogue was demolished in 1919 and the Reform community's temple in the 1960s (GERŐ 1989: 126–127).

Practically everyone looked into the temple once in their lifetime, usually in their youth.

– *We went into the hőszer church once and they kept on saying "zájbudi, zájbudi". We asked, what does it mean? – I cheat the Hungarians, I cheat the Hungarians! There were little alcoves, and a Jew was going "zájbudi" there. It wasn't open at other times, only when there was a ceremony. How did we dare to go in? I don't now. We went into the church of the Hungarian Jews too, it was like the Catholic ceremony. Altars, the priest dressed up.*

– *We students often went into the Jewish temple, out of curiosity and because it was interesting.*

– *They invited me too into their church, but somehow things turned out that I didn't go. There were all kinds of shining things in there, because the church door was open.*

– *A childhood memory: we were on the way home from school and the door of their temple was open, we crept in and there was apples and grapes in something like a big clothes-basket. There was still a Jewish priest then, and he was saying the ceremony.*

– *I went to the temple. I didn't know their customs, their religious rules, and I went in bare-headed. One of their leaders came up to me and said: you must wear a hat to come in. The way they held the religious service, the singing, what the cantor said, almost*



Fig. 5. Unknown family, around 1922/1927, No.: 6821 13 × 18 cm gelatin dry plate. From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó

sent shivers down my spine. I have never in my life heard anything like it. He sang so perfectly, so beautifully, from high C to bass baritone, sometimes rising and sometimes dropping down. I was really stunned.

In country towns funerals are always held in full view of everyone. Hungarians were familiar with the elements of Jewish religious life that took place before them. They did not know anything about what happened behind closed doors, in the community. One such event that in itself attracted the interest of the outside world was the *funeral*. Practically all the informants was able to speak about it.

– *My younger brother's acquaintance carried the dead on a very simple cart. He said that however far away the Jew may be, when the anniversary comes around, they all come to visit the grave, they look at it but they don't take flowers or anything.*

– *They lay out the body of the dead at home. They put it in a box, put a brick under the head, covered it and that's all. The Hungarian Jews buried properly. They didn't nail down the coffin, just covered it with a black cloth. When the *hószet* Jews heard that one of theirs had died, they tore their clothes and they did this at the funeral too. When they said farewell they put the body out in the yard. They took it to the Jewish cemetery, they went behind it in carriages.*

The fact that *divorces* were unknown in Jewish families was attributed to their respect of religious norms.



Fig. 6. Unknown persons, ?/1997, No.: 8944 10 × 15 cm gelatin dry plate. From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó

– *And they didn't divorce either! There were ten, twelve, fourteen children. There was no divorce there! The mother didn't work there, she brought up the children. But they had servants. There were swarms of Jewish children in those two streets.*

It should be mentioned here that we know of only one *mixed marriage*. A Hungarian woman married a Jewish man and converted to her husband's religion. (Mixed marriages between Catholics and Calvinists were not common either in the interwar years.)

– *The Jews were a rather closed community. They did not look with approval on Christians trying to worm their way in.*

The informants attribute it to upbringing, respect of religious teaching and the community's role of control that *when I was growing up I never heard of a Jewish murderer, burglar or thief.*

RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS

– *When the star came up at four in the afternoon, the feast started, the "sábec" had begun. That's how they called it.*

– *I mainly remember that she got someone else to light the candle on Friday evening, or to heat up the supper and lunch, and they milked the cow into their own can.*

These are the two elements known and mentioned by practically all the informants.

– *On their feast of tabernacles, even as grown-ups we went to see their booth. It was a sensation!*

– *When it was the long day, they celebrated it and they stood around in front of the temple and sniffed quinces. Probably it was a way of deceiving themselves, of overcoming their hunger and thirst all day, because they were not allowed to eat or drink.*

– *When they had their long feast they didn't eat anything, just cibak. Because when they fled they had to bake unleavened bread. They called it cibak.*

– *When they went out of the room there was a kind of slat (the mezuzah), they ran their hand across it, or when they came home, and then they put their hand to their mouth.*

– *Perhaps they observed the feasts better than the Christians.*

– *At the weddings the women and the men gathered separately, they were in separate rooms and danced separately.*

The informants also attributed the fact that the Jewish families had many children to the respect of religious rules:

– *There were a lot of Jewish children, they had big families.*

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

In 1922 there was a total of 51 *virilists* (biggest tax-payers) in Makó, of whom 21 (42%) were Jews. By occupation they included 11 merchants and 4 professionals. In 1932 slightly more than 50% of the 50 biggest tax-payers were Jews and in 1935 this proportion increased further (60%). At the same time, their representation in the municipal assembly was proportionate to their numbers within the population, that is, 10% (ZSIGMOND 1992).

– *The first, the top level, was the factory owner, the bank director, wholesaler, mill owner, timber merchant who had his own mill. When Greater Hungary existed (before the Treaty of Trianon) Makó was full of rafts, they brought timber down the Maros. That was a very big asset.*

– *A few of the big lords here were Jews, they rented big estates, they didn't farm their own land. They rented one or two hundred hectares of land and farmed in a big way, they grew sugarbeet. – Before the war I reckon that seven of the ten wealthiest men were Jews.*

– *There were a few wholesalers, onion merchants, who didn't go out to the market. They had five, ten, twenty agents. Young Jewish men who didn't have money to invest, didn't have a store, didn't have anything. They even went out to the farms if they had to.*

– *The hószet Jews didn't have employees. The Hungarian Jews, the ones with bigger businesses did.*

– *There were lawyers among them, doctors and pharmacists, and teachers in the secondary school.*



Fig. 7. Unknown tailor's workshop, around 1923/1997, No.: 7855 gelatin dry plate. From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó

The next stratum is the group of *tradesmen*. "The Jews are still a colourful and lively part of the *petit bourgeoisie*. Every Jewish family followed a course that was almost a standard pattern. The first generation began as ragmen or market stallholders, and the second was already certain to be the owner of an enterprise, and the following or even further generations rose higher or at least remained on that level. ... They form a closed group. Their trade and commercial occupations also unite them with countless bonds, while their denominational and ethnic identity joins them into a readily identifiable group" (ERDEI 1982: 47).

Corset-maker, upholsterer, a tinsmith. Small merchants, shopkeepers. There was also a photographer and a hat-maker. A petrol merchant. There were inn-keepers among them, and one had a bridal salon. There were the onion merchants, and innkeepers, shopkeepers, wine merchants, grain merchants, carter; another had a timber depot.

According to another opinion: *it is an interesting thing that there were hardly any tradesmen among them, they didn't take out tradesmen's permits to do manual work.*

At the edge of the town there were a few general stores. – They were near the weekly market, all tiny shops, barely a few square meters, but you could buy everything there.

– They lived very simply. The way they dressed, you couldn't tell that they had money. I can confidently say that from the highest level down, they were all very simple

in behaviour and dress. But (the general shopkeeper was) wealthier than the poor onion merchants, because he would give goods on credit. His home was very simple too, but very few people ever saw it inside.

– There were poor Jews too. – Uncle Ligeti had countless children. He sewed underwear and carried it out to the market in a crate. There were small wood merchants too. Yes, you could find all kinds among them too.

– I lived in the Workers' District, I only knew Jewish hawkers, they bought old rags and things, they were the Jews who went from house to house. They weren't very well off, the ones who went around the streets collecting things that they turned into money. We knew them by name, they went around the outer parts of the town.

WEEKDAYS

Jews and Hungarians were in contact in connection with business. Outside work they had very little insight into each other's lives. What did the Hungarians observe? The use of language by the Jews of Makó was striking.⁵

– They spoke German, but they spoke Hungarian too, if you asked them something in Hungarian, but when they spoke among themselves you couldn't hear any Hungarian.

The most striking difference was the dress of the Orthodox Jews. *– The old Jew had a big beard, side-locks, a black hat, one with a big brim. They wore coats like caf-tans.*

We have seen elsewhere that it was on the basis of external appearance that Reform Jews were distinguished from Orthodox Jews, but when the question of the dress of Jews in Makó was raised, almost everyone first came up with this stereotype image since the Reform Jews dressed in the same way as the members of the middle class in Makó.

We obtained slightly more information on their housing customs, but very little about the interior furnishing of the *apartments* or the use of the apartment itself.

– Few Jewish families had their own house.

– They lived as tenants of Christians.⁶

– The Jews didn't rent out to tenants because they had big families themselves.

– The Jews didn't own houses to rent.

– They often lived in buildings the Hungarians regarded as low, dilapidated houses, where the bedroom, crammed full with beds, took up most of the space.

– The houses of more well-to-do Jewish merchants also served as a shop or store. Location of the apartment and shop in the same building, or the apartment and store under one roof was a typical solution.

⁵ The fact that Fábíán Sveiczner made a speech in the community in Hungarian for the first time in Hungary in 1814 is an indication of the close language ties (ZSIGMOND 1992: 5).

⁶ As this was a town with extensive farmlands there were relatively many houses to rent because those who could afford to bought a house in the town as well and this was used permanently by only a part of the family.



Fig. 8. Wedding photo of an unknown young couple, around 1935/1997, No.: 20682 gelatin dry plate. From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó

– *They had a big house with entrances from two streets. There was a shop in it and they carried the goods they bought there too.*

– *They always had a servant. She washed and cooked. The servant was always Christian. She didn't know much. Later her husband used to say: "Anyone can see you were a servant for Jews" – meaning that she knew nothing about peasant work.*

Regarding the state of hygiene in the homes, practically everyone repeated the same commonplace, regardless of the fact that they had been in the homes of Jewish families only once or twice and it was not the custom for them to visit each other:

– *Those who were clean were very clean, spotless, and the ones who were dirty were terribly dirty. There was no half-way among them.*

The Hungarians have only fragmentary knowledge of their dishes too.

– *They lived well: roast goose, cakes, milk-loaf.*

– *Yes, they were always buying ducks, geese, they lived on poultry. They cooked with goose fat.*

They always bought things at good prices. It cost a lot, Hungarians wouldn't have bought them, couldn't afford them. The ones who had money raised them themselves.

An elderly woman who had been a servant for two years with a Jewish family, provided somewhat more detailed information.

– *They had paprikás potatoes for lunch on Fridays. For supper there was roast duck, or better. On Saturday the wife didn't cook. There was fish and pound cake for supper. It was a rare Friday they didn't have fish. On Saturday at noon there was sólet. The oven*

was outside, we took it out of the oven. We stuffed the goose's neck, or the duck's neck. At Easter (!) they ate maci instead of bread for eight days. Matzoth was widely known among the people of Makó as "maci" and they were also familiar with matzoh dumplings.

– Among their dishes we knew cibak: salt, flour, water and a little sugar. They must have baked it in a tin of some kind because the top was square.

The knowledge the Hungarians have of the hygienic rules in the Jewish kitchen are based not on an observation of the rules but on interactive contacts:

– They took milk from us. We had to wash our hands before milking. They put the can in our hands and we milked the cow into it, we strained the milk into their can and they took it away. Their milk couldn't go into our cans.

– They didn't let us milk with fat, it had to be done dry. It was hard that way. They brought coconut fat with them. But the Hungarians were cunning enough to trick the Jews. They sat on a milking stool to milk the cow and they spread a little fat under the stool. Then, when they took their own can and we had to milk into that and they stood there while the cow was being milked. And when we put down the milking stool, it spread the fat on our fingers. We felt sorry for the cow, to milk it with dry hands.

– There were cow owners who wouldn't give milk to Jews.

In emergencies Hungarians went to shops specifically stocking goods meeting religious rules:

– Hungarians only bought bread from the Jewish baker when they couldn't get yeast.

RELATIONS WITHIN THE GROUP

Hungarians knew little about the relations within the Jewish society in Makó. They saw that they did not visit each other frequently but that from time to time relatives living in other settlements arrived to stay with the families for a few days.

What was most striking for the Hungarians was the *solidarity* within the group. This was stressed by all informants. It was expressed in general terms as:

– There weren't any poor Jews in Hungary, any who were really poor. They helped each other out.

On the subject of solidarity, besides this stereotyped declaration they also gave examples:

– We respected them for their very strong cohesion. They had a big purse, if I remember rightly it was dark purple, and the Jewish teacher went around with it to the ones who were better off, collecting the necessary money for the wedding or funeral (for the poor).

– Right out there, they made a big building, they called it the "poor Jews' house". The people who lived there were poor but honest. I took sour cream and curd cheese to one of them. "Listen here, that window there is always left open, if I'm not home, just put it in there." Then next time I went he paid me.



Fig. 9. Unknown persons, around 1921/1997, No.: 5110 13 × 18 cm gelatin dry plate. From the collection of the Attila József Museum, Makó

– *They say that Jews always got loans. Yes, if they were known. If the Hungarian was known in the bank, or someone spoke for him, he got one too, otherwise no. A guarantee or a guarantor was needed.*

– *If someone went bankrupt, he started again, they helped each other. True, it was easier for the merchant to get credit than for the grower, because the money turned over quicker. It was harder for the manufacturer or the agricultural producer.*

SCHOOL, STUDY

– *Jewish parents generally insisted that their children study.* This is also a stereotyped statement; we did not find any opinion to the contrary.

– *The Jews had only a primary religious school. After that they went to the state school.⁷ The Jewish children were somehow more serious, they didn't take part in the collective games.*

⁷In 1930 in the three lower secondary schools (ages 10–14 years): there were no Jewish students in the Catholic boys' school, 14% of the students in the Calvinist boys' school and 9.5% of the students in the municipal lower secondary girls' school were Jewish. Jews represented 17% of the students at the boys' commercial school, 10% at the Calvinist girls' commercial school, 12% of those in the upper commercial school and 9% of students in the general secondary school. In this way there was daily contact between Jewish and Christian youth.

– *The children were mixed in the lower secondary school. But they didn't make friends because the groups were organised mainly according to where they lived. And only a few Jewish families lived outside the town centre.*

– *I didn't play with them because there weren't any Jewish families anywhere near our district (this was at the edge of the town).*

According to the other version:

"The hósztet girls didn't talk to the Hungarian girls, only the Hungarian-Jewish girls. These two kinds of Jewish girls didn't have much contact with each other either.

The most memorable example of the otherness of the girls' upbringing:

– *They read a lot, and listened to the radio.*

– *The commercial school was different. Not many Jewish children went as apprentices, to learn a trade.*

– *I got to know a Jew personally, and made a friend when I became an apprentice. We were mixed together there.*

Before the First World War the farmers of Makó sent their sons to the Banat as exchange children, to learn German. When the possibility ceased to exist, some of them enrolled their children in the Jewish school, because German was taught there in primary school too.

CONTACTS WITH THE CHRISTIANS

"... The constant and regular contacts of other (i.e. not "upper class") strata in the market town takes place not within the frame of autonomous social units but on the occasion of elements of the production process... Contacts on a smaller scale between the peasantry and the non-peasant petit bourgeoisie are also largely linked to production occasions..." (ERDEI 1982: 79).

– *There were six to six and a half thousand market gardeners here and perhaps ten percent of them didn't willingly do business with the Jews. The Jews were the merchants, they looked to them to sell their produce. The Jewish family lived from the Christian producer, but the produce that the Christians produced had to be sold. So they were on good terms.*

– *They didn't show, they weren't on such intimate terms that they would have told a Hungarian about their life. It was only business. No, they weren't so close to the Hungarians (that they would have invited them into their homes).*

– *They were very reserved, you couldn't get to know them.*

– *The merchants were easy to get on with. There were contacts between producers and merchants that lasted through several generations.*

– *Hungarians came to them only for business, otherwise they didn't pay visits to each other.*

– *The hósztet didn't go into a Hungarian house. They were very choosy about where they went.*

– *Ah, the hósztet didn't talk, he just served. But the Hungarian Jews were all friendly. The Hósztets were friendly too.*

– *They didn't try to form a close friendship with the Hungarians.*

Young girls of the same age were friends but *they didn't go out together for entertainment or strolling. The girls talked politics! Not with my parents, they used to tell me about it.* – *They gave us food to taste too: cibak and sólet. Sólet was beans, mashed. We had our sewing done by them and they bought milk from us. We cooked beans like that too.*

– *I wasn't at a wedding or in the church because I was still at school and the teacher told us not to go into the Jewish church.*

– *When I became an apprentice there were a few Jewish children there in the school: apprentice fitters and photographers. I became so friendly with one of them that we were still going out together when we were young men. We went around the town together. The fact that I was a friend of a young Jewish man didn't mean that I went to their place. There were places where we went together: the workers' club, the promenade.*

– *I got to know young people and adults of Jewish religion in the workers' club. – The Reform Jews were active in politics, mainly in the social democratic party: dentist, lawyer.*

– *There were a lot of Jews among the trade union leaders, and at the top too, in Pest.*

The stratum of local officials, intellectuals and the economic elite had close social contacts that were determined not by religious conviction but by social status. The Jewish leading economic stratum was in direct contact with the heads of the county and municipal administration, through the assembly of representatives, the banks, the merchants' organisation, etc. The Jewish family most frequently mentioned in the Makó press was the Dózsa family. In 1923 all of the county office-bearers headed by the Lord Lieutenant attended the funeral of Sámuel Dózsa, founder of the most influential Jewish family in Makó who for many years had been the chief prosecutor of the county. His brother, Simon Dózsa, who was also not incidentally founder of the first Makó daily paper, was a member of the county and municipal assembly and legal adviser to the bishop of Csanád (ZSIGMOND 1992: 31). We had few informants from this group. The intellectuals had club-like events that were attended by the doctor, book distributor, lawyer, pharmacist, doctor, etc. At family gatherings of Reform Jews and Hungarian Christians: *they did not emphasise their Jewishness, e.g. if people were invited for supper there were no Jewish dishes.*

Contacts among young people went no further than loose friendship:

– *The religious differences between all the churches existed in courting and marriage, and even the class differences too; for example, a farmer's daughter couldn't marry a teacher or a Calvinist minister.*

There was no celebration mobilising the whole society in which all religious groups and all social strata participated, with which everyone identified.

– *Well, August 20th ... Saint Stephen's day, was so much a Catholic feast that they didn't come, at the most there were the converted Jews, who wanted to show where they belonged.*

– *I learnt how to trade from them – said a former agricultural labourer. At the end I went out to the market with them. They bought up chickens and eggs from the stall-*

holders and then sold them to bigger merchants. They made a little profit on it. They exported turkeys and fattened geese. There was a bit of trickery in it too: they put a piece of iron under the scales and the produce weighed a few kilograms less.

Not many of them moved away from Makó, they moved here instead because they could make a living here and people got on together.

FOLKLORE

The memory has survived of a few Jewish people who stood out from the others for their behaviour, such as *old Steinberg* (a wholesale merchant), *who always went to enjoy himself in the Korona* (a hotel) *whenever he came down to Makó. He had the Gypsy play for him all night, and he paid generously.*

“Mamuka” and “Tatuka” were popular elderly merchants at the market.

While they said that both sides strove to maintain fair relations in commerce, it could not be by chance that the saying survived: *I cheat the Hungarians, I cheat the Hungarians, I'm sorry but I don't mind.*

We also encountered narratives of such experiences:

– And on one occasion my grandfather rescued a two-year-old Jewish child from a ditch that had suddenly filled with water. When that child grew up they invited my grandfather to the wedding. They were hószet Jews.

Use of the well: *Old Jews let even people (neighbours) who were not members of the society use the water. Everyone has the right to water, that's in the Bible too. They were fined twice for that, and there was a court case. Respect was based on behaviour like that.*

An example of a rhyme reduced to a mocking song but also existing in a full version:

Jew, Jew, bechendo, dead horse in the ditch.
Jew, Jew, beckenróth,
Dead horse in the ditch,
Two little dogs pulled it out,
Your grandfather skinned it.

In the 1970s the international literature on stereotypes bears witness to a radical renewal. Up to then the stereotyped description of the properties of groups came close to prejudice in conception rather than generally negative attitudes. As we have seen, the image of Jews evoked from the memory of the people of Makó is largely based on stereotyped conclusions and evaluating opinions. At the same time it can also be seen that this image is not hostile to the other group. The opinions expressed in the interviews were partly based on personal experience although there were also generalisations that did not appear to rest on experience. And some of the opinions differ in a positive direction from the earlier, real state of affairs.

We based our conception on the interpretation of stereotype which regards it as a cultural heritage generated and passed on by society (HUNYADY 1996: 3). We began to

collect out material at an exceptional time in history (1989–1991), when people had begun to speak their opinion more freely on questions that had previously not been mentioned in public, but at the same time there had as yet been little mention in the media of the Jews. As a result, we believe that the opinions reflect the informants' own experience, often repeated ideas or the formulations passed down within micro communities. At the same time the group image is informative in many elements and is not only or not really qualifying. The group image presented here is the categorisation formed by the outside observer, by persons not belonging to the group, which indirectly also gives an insight into the attitude of those outsiders.

The image we obtained from the interviews is an established, static one since contact between Hungarians and Jews was practically broken off: the Jews who survived the Holocaust and returned, and those who remained in Makó – with a few exceptions – left the town and for the most part also the country in 1956.

As already noted in the introduction, the informants did not include anyone who had previously been part of the town's leadership. The four or five intellectuals or close to intellectuals were rather minor bureaucrats. As a result the rich cultural life of the town's bourgeoisie⁸ and the role of the Reform Jews in this life is entirely absent from our study. The cultural and social societies of the "lower classes" and of the Orthodox Jews organised along religious lines were not places where groups belonging to different religions met.

In the introduction we mentioned the role of stereotypes. The way in which the material was processed also calls for explanation. Our aim was, as far as possible, to present all areas of life in which Hungarians have preserved a memory of the Jewish community in their settlement. Many readers may think that the resulting image is very meagre and, in fact, it is astonishing, but what we have been able to show here is only the skeleton of the interviews.

Several dozen interviews were conducted with people of Makó who still have personal memories of the Jewish community living with them. It must be repeated that we asked them to evoke memories that were decades old. Many pages of the interviews are devoted to accounts of the details of commerce, naming the exact place of the market, the circumstances there, the infrastructure of trade, the time

⁸ "Scholarly life can be found only among the bourgeoisie; the lower classes are not accepted on the path where this is accessible today. The organised workers cultivate the social and economic sciences they have themselves produced. Documents of the restricted scholarly life of the bourgeoisie are to be found in the Csanád County Library, the Archaeological and Historical Society, and in the libraries of the general secondary school and the county... Each year they hold 4–5 exhibitions... Four of five painters and one or two sculptors are permanent residents of the town ... their stylistic efforts are very far from the social stirrings of the market town... Reading works of literary fiction ... is characteristic only of the more bourgeois strata. There are local authors, and there are "natural talents" below the bourgeois level who would be peasant artists if the peasant mode of art production still existed, but since it does not they are only amateur writers... At the upper level among the bourgeoisie the philharmonic society performs classical music, while at the lower level peasant songs adapted for bourgeois use and the latest products of music represent the art of music" (ERDEI 1982: 85–86). We know from items in the local newspapers that amateur groups gave many performances to entertain the public and the patronage of the arts by secondary school students was also an important factor in the education of youth.

when deals were made; almost everyone remembered the prices, spoke of the quantity of produce sold, described in detail the differences in quality, some of them thought that they knew the number of wagons of onions that left the station in the main season. Naturally, in connection with the onion trade they also gave a very detailed account of their own farming. However, in both the long and the shorter interviews, all the information given on the Jewish onion trade, the onion merchants themselves (and the other, mainly retail, merchants) has been presented here. The opinions and fragments of memory quoted here have been deliberately removed from their context. We did not want secondary happenings or the linguistic environment to obscure the fact that the Hungarians actually knew very little about the Jews, even though they were in daily contact. Merchants and farming families often traded with each other for generations. But this relationship did not extend to other areas of life. It is not by chance that the informants had the most to say about the trade and the merchants because both communities remained closed to each other. The other did not see into their everyday lives. They knew practically nothing about what happened inside the home and in the social organisations. And they knew even less about each other's thoughts. They scarcely knew anything about the internal life of the families, the relations between couples, child-raising, the system of connections among the members of the community, in short about the questions which are the organising principles of a micro or macro society. They only knew what could be seen by an outside observer, in the substantive and physical meaning of the term, that is, someone living outside the given group, and conclusions drawn from happenings by the observer, such as that in cases they gave loans to help persons in their community in trouble. Their opinions on relations among the others are based on deduction.

The Jewish image that can be formed from the interviews has been deliberately presented in a stripped down form. The observations about different scenes of life were made in the great majority of interviews. Only one or two people knew slightly more than the average: mainly persons who were able to see more of their lives because of their occupation (e.g. they were servants in Jewish homes). Despite the fact that we spoke with elderly informants who have their own experiences and memories of the co-existence, statements with practically identical content were made so frequently in the interviews that it must be concluded that the experience of many years and individual opinion has gone through the community filter and become fixed in memory in linguistic stereotypes. Naturally, the narratives and opinions must be treated with caution. The continuity of co-existence was broken off decades ago, it was the interviewers who made them recall events of the distant past, perhaps not always with success, and as it has been noted in the introduction, this was in the period immediately prior to the systemic change when people still did not speak willingly about certain subjects judged to be "delicate".

The Hungarians and Jews lived in the same town, spoke the same language, moved about the town, met in the shops and on the street, greeted each other, exchanged a few words, on occasion attended events open to the whole town, sent their children to the same school, in short they lived together in a not very big town. How-

ever, it can be seen that although the two cultural communities lived in the same town the two worlds were very far apart despite their daily encounters and common economic interests.

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