

SUMMARY

Underway. Documents on the Transylvanian Jewish social and national construct attempts (1918-1940)

The present book consists of four major parts: 1. An introductory study on the Jewish national-Zionist movement in Transylvania between the two World Wars, 2. Eighty-three documents, 3. The chronology of the history of the Transylvanian Jewry between 1918 and 1940. 4. Short biographies of some important Transylvanian Jewish leaders between the World Wars.

Through the union of Transylvania, Bucovina and Bessarabia with Romania four different Jewish communities have been integrated into the same territorial administration, and thus they formed a population of over 750 000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, these communities differed in their history and level of integration in the different state polities prior to 1918. The Jewish communities in Bessarabia (200 000 Israelites) and Bucovina (90 000 Israelites), for example, were bound together by their Yiddish culture, but came from different state traditions: while the Jews from Bessarabia lived under an oppressive Russian regime, in Bucovina the Austro-Hungarian administration was more tolerant with the Jewish population.

Up to the second decade of the twentieth century the majority of the Transylvanian Jewry assimilated into the Hungarian nation: around 80 % of the Transylvanian Jews spoke Hungarian as mother tongue. On the East-Hungarian territories enclosed to Romania (henceforth Transylvania) lived 182 489 Israelites in 1910, while their number increased to 192 833 in 1930, that made 3,4% of the Transylvanian populace. The main Jewish centres were Máramarossziget (Sighetul Marmației), Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Temesvár (Timișoara), Arad, Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), Dés (Dej), Kolozsvár (Cluj) and Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș).

The matter of fact, the enclosure of Transylvanian to Romanian was the real turn in the life of the Transylvanian Jewry, since they became a minority together with the Hungarians, and consequently, segregations started within the Jewish community. The Transylvanian Jewry, as other communities that lived in Hungary before 1918, had to decide whether they throw in their lot with the Hungarians, or detach themselves from the Hungarians ceding to the Romanian dissimilation policy.

The contemporaneous Transylvanian Jewish communities were far from being unitary, and were split along different organizations, such as the Hungarian National Party, Transylvanian Jewish National Union, the Transylvanian branch

of the Romanian Jewish Union, Social Democratic Party, Communist Party (in illegitimacy from 1924) as well as other Romanian political factions.

The Hungarian National Party was instituted on ethnic and minority basis, thus mainly the assimilative Jews joined this political group. Contrary, the Transylvanian Jewish National Union was built up by Zionists, those who rejected the assimilation and acted for the national movement of the Transylvanian Jews. Primarily, the Romanian Jewish Union was established to defend the civil rights of the Jews in the Old Romanian Kingdom, and then in 1919 it turned to the moderate national wing. This party gained adherents especially among the scattering Romanian Jews in Transylvania and among those politicians who came into a conflict with the Transylvanian Jewish National Union (e.g. Miksa Klein). As a sort of conclusion it can be asserted that these three main policies shaped the Transylvanian Jewish society in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century.

The main research question of my survey refers to the identity of Transylvanian Jews. I try to outline the strategies adopted by the Transylvanian Jewry in defining their identity after the First World War and change of power, taking into consideration the confessional and social differentiations of a mainly Hungarian speaking Jewish population. At the same time I aim to present their answers to the new political and cultural challenges.

Nonetheless, I analyze the influence of Zionism, anti-Semitism, Romanian student movements and derogations from civil rights on the dissimilation from Hungarians and on the reinforcement of Jewish national identity. I also investigate the changes of Jewish political activity within the new state polity. Furthermore, I make an attempt to detect the Zionist movement's level and form of contribution to the self-organization of the Transylvanian Jewry, and reckon its role in the awakening and apperception of Jewish identity.

To conclude, I would assert that by the end of the inter-war period at least a quarter of the Transylvanian Jews became adherents of Zionism, and around fifty percent assumed the Jewish identity. The majority of the Jews, however, kept the Hungarian language and culture throughout this period.

The very few self-depending sources concerning the history of the Transylvanian Jewry are found in the archive of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania in Bucharest and at a few congregations. Since the archives of the Northern Transylvanian Jewish communities had been destroyed during the Holocaust or moved to yet unknown locations, the scholars can rely only on the Southern Transylvanian source material. The records of the Jewish institutions, advocacy organizations haven't been discovered yet, albeit those would have been of major importance for the research. Thus, as far as the inter-war Jewish social construct is concerned, I could rely only on the scarce and dispersed

documents in the Jewish community's archive in Arad and in the Jewish Federation's archive in Bucharest.

It is well known from published surveys, that a series of documents referring to the Transylvanian Jewry can be studied in different archives in Israel. Most of them related to Zionist youth organizations (e.g. correspondences with the international organization). Important further steps might be possible in the Transylvanian Jewish national movement research, if those documents are investigated.

Unfortunately the source collection of this book contains fewer documents regarding the Transylvanian Jewish orthodoxy. The disproportion is due to the lack of sources: the archives of the important Transylvanian Jewish orthodox congregations have disappeared during the war, or were destroyed. Therefore, I replenished the gaps with contemporaneous press-material and with the edited reports of the Jewish advocacy organizations.

As a matter of fact, there are four types of documents included in this selection: unedited primary sources, press-material, reports of organizations, and theoretical works on the Jewish identity issue.

The guiding principles of selection were on one hand the time span between the two World Wars, and the topics, on the other hand. I tried to select documents regarding the self-organization of the Transylvanian Jewry, the integration into the Romanian administrative and political system, and the Jewish attitude towards the Hungarian nation. Consistently, I aimed to reflect in the selection the debates within the Jewish community regarding the different opinions and self-definitions. However the image of the Jews within the larger community, the Hungarian - Jewish relations, and Jews with Hungarian identity are not included in the selection topics. Thus, the documents referring to Jews with Hungarian identity or to the assimilative public personalities are meant to reflect the relation and the dialog within the Jewish community.