

Industry and Industrialists in interwar Oradea

A few considerations based on jewish contributions

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AFTER OVERCOMING the difficult crisis brought about by World War I, and the shock of caused by becoming subject to a different state, which meant breaking some traditional connections linked to providing raw materials and product distribution markets, especially n the case of goods not exclusively intended for the local market, Oradea regained its position as industrial and commercial centre supported, as previously, primarily by Jewish and Hungarian investors, as well as Romanian ones, after the city's gradual integration in the economy of unified Romania. Important Romanian initiatives emerged and materialised, either at local or national level. An interwar infusion of foreign capital, especially German, French and American, contributed to the technical update of factories with modern machines and tools.

At the beginning of the 1920s, the Jewish inhabitants of Oradea underwent the effort of adapting to the new political realities. In the space of a few years, it was possible to rebuild even partially the pre-war relations with other factories or with supply and distribution markets situated outside interwar Romania. Added to this, there were other opportunities provided by the existence of the new state: an important distribution and raw materials market, alongside a place in the system of traditional economic ties that the Romanian state developed and supported abroad. Consequently, the interwar period was beneficial for the economic activity of Oradea Jews, as they were able to continue, resume or initiate new economic projects. At a closer look, this was the last moment when the Jews had the opportunity to make their voices heard (which they did) in a city where they had felt at ease and where they had brought their important contribution to its development and prosperity. As it is well known,

this period was followed by the ordeal of the ghettos and the Nazi extermination, organised with the complicity of the Hungarian Horthyst regime and, shortly afterwards, the successive blows from the communist regime that assumed power in Romania, the most tragic of which was the fact that the state became the owner of factories through nationalisation, thus leaving hundreds of families without the product of several generations' efforts, intelligence, financial and emotional resources. The Jewish populations' attempts to adapt to the realities of the communist regime was rather an exercise in survival, which revealed both the efforts of one party to demonstrate its contributions and merits to a leftist regime, and the highlighting of previously developed management skills that were useful even under the new circumstances. The next stage in the evolution of the Romanian communist regime, as it is known, was a nationalist one that encouraged the emigration of several non-Romanian ethnic groups – such as the Jews, which resulted in a dramatic reduction of the Oradea Jewish community with negative consequences for itself and for the city.

What was left behind to bear witness before history was the patrimony comprising the civil or industrial architecture of cotemporary Oradea, synagogues and schools. This is a valuable heritage that today's community has the duty of preserving well for the future generations as a token of the city's multicultural identity where the Jewish community, together with the Romanian and Hungarian ones, played a particularly important role.

After this brief presentation of the context, we will proceed to outline the general picture of Oradea's industry between 1920 and 1940, highlighting the important Jewish presence and the contribution of some representative Jewish industrialists.

The political changes did not bring essential changes in the structure of Oradea industry, characterised rather by continuity and solidarity with the prewar period in the case of developed industrialised sectors.

The presence of an important agricultural hinterland, the relatively numerous population of the city, and the traditions of previous decades contributed to the prominent position of the food industry within the city's economy. In agreement primarily with the needs of the local market, the large factories operating in the food industry sector were milling factories and bakeries. The previously existing factories, which had been established before the war, developed differently; *The Steam Mill and the Pearl Barley and Millet Decortication Factory "Adria"*, owned by Adolf Moskovits and sons, established in 1890, was destroyed in a fire in 1922; some others, like the "Rollinger" Water Mill,¹ the "Léederer și Kálmán" Steam Mill that had functioned since 1910² in a building designed and built by the famous architect Kálmán Rimanóczy junior³ or the "László and Hunyadi"

Joint Mills Stock Company with which it merged in 1924, the “*Emilia*” Roll Mill (the former “*Jakab Weinberger*” Roll Mill established in 1884)⁴ continued to exist and managed to keep up with the competition represented by newly established companies in the field, such as the “*Maria*” Luxury Mill – which became the “*Venetia*” Mill – created in 1925, the “*Ioan Ardelean*” Mill, authorised to function since 1927, or the “*Victoria*” Systematic Mill.⁵ The bakery production was provided primarily by the “*Elisabeta*” Bread Factory since 1922.⁶

An important share of the interwar food industry was represented by the confectionary industry – candy and chocolate – and pastry products by the “*Patria*” Chocolate and Pastry Factory, established in 1920, and by the “*Stepper and Petrovics*” Candy and Sugar Products Factory, created two years later.⁷

The earliest industrial endeavours in Oradea are recorded in the spirits industry, which made the transition from small manufactures to factories in the city: in 1848, Márton Hillinger laid the foundation of a small alcohol company, his example being followed in a short space of time by other local or naturalised businessmen who established the “*Dániel Berger*” Alcohol and Yeast Factory or the Fühsl brothers’ wine production and distribution company, both established in 1850, followed, a year later by the “*Henrik Löble*” Refined Alcohol Factory, the “*Léderer and Kálmán*” Joint Stock Refined Alcohol Factory (1857), the “*Adolf Moskovits and Sons*” Alcohol and Yeast Factory, inaugurated in 1864,⁸ and the “*Mór Moskovits and Son*” Alcohol Factory⁹ that continued to function until the 1948 nationalisation.

The “*Léderer and Kálmán*” Alcohol Factory was bought in the sixth decade of the 19th century by Antal Léderer and Ferenc Kálmán¹⁰ and it quickly became known all over Austria. Its products were appreciated and exported in the countries of the Balkan Peninsula and the Middle East. The factory functioned alongside one for the processing and packaging of milk.¹¹ The „*Léderer și Kálmán*” Alcohol Factory created in 1891 the *Factory of Artificial Fertiliser*. It also laid the bases of the “*Aurora*” Ether Factory in 1905. Towards the end of the third decade of the 20th century, the industrial complex was affected by the negative effects of the economic depression. Because of these circumstances, the board of directors decided to cease the activity of the alcohol factory and refinery; however, the mill remained operational.

During the interwar period, the largest alcoholic beverage factory in Oradea was the “*Dreher-Haggenmacher*” S.A. Beer Factory, which had borne this name since 1923, when it was reorganised. It was located on the premises where there had been a manufacture-type beer brewery owned by the Roman-Catholic Bishopric since 1727.¹² The company, with a capital of 30,000,000, established

in the General assembly of October 11, 1924, with an annual production of 16,500,000 litres, the company was ranked among the first five beer factories in Romania at the time.¹³ Until 1930, Antal Dreher and Oszkár Haggemacher became the majority shareholders.¹⁴ The beer produced here was appreciated all over the country, being distributed in other cities and having bottling capacities in Baia Mare, Târgu Mureş or Salonta.

The manufacturing industry also continued its activities from the pre-war period, especially in the case of the shoe industry, whose bases had been laid at the end of the 19th century when the "*Farkas Moskovits și Asociații*" *First Oradea Shoe and Boot Factory* was created; this flourished in the interwar period, becoming one of the largest factories in Oradea, with a daily production of 1,000 shoes. On February 10, 1924, the factory changed its name to the "*Derby*" *Shoe Factory*.¹⁵ It had 48 branches, 20 in Romania, 22 in Hungary, 3 in Czechoslovakia, 2 in Yugoslavia and one in Fiume. There was an increase in the number of workers and bureaucrats, as well as of shop assistants in its distribution shops as compared with the previous period. In 1922, the factory employed 150 workers and 60 bureaucrats and shop assistants. The company built apartments for its employees.¹⁶ Bela Muhary, who later became an important Oradea shoe manufacturer, worked in this factory; he owned a factory even before the war, and, upon returning from the war, he turned it into a genuine factory with modern equipment and 60-70 employees. The superior merchandise was distributed both in Oradea and in other Transylvanian cities. The company became the "*Triumph*" *Boot Factory*,¹⁷ on June 1, 1924, following an association with two other businessmen, Lázár Leitner and Jenő Mannhardt; it went on to become a profitable enterprise: it relocated to new headquarters, acquired modern equipment and increased the number of its employees to 250. The factory's profits declined at the beginning of the great depression, as it was unable to stand up to the competition of the Cluj "*Dermata*" *Leather Factory*.¹⁸

The "*Carmen*" *Boot Factory* was founded on January 1, 1923 as a small stock company, its major shareholders being Jenő Steiner, Miksa Hillinger and Adolf Katsher, who were all successful entrepreneurs in the field.¹⁹ It started out with 32 workers and a daily output of 50 pairs of lady's luxury shoes. The three owners decided to manufacture exclusively this kind of shoes because, until that moment, such items had been occasionally imported by entrepreneurs in Oradea and Transylvania from west-European countries.²⁰ These products were genuine works of decorative art made of silk and brocade, satisfying even the most pretentious tastes at much lower prices than those on the international market.²¹ The company changed into an anonymous company on December 4, 1924; its fields of activity were buying and producing leather articles, as well as selling finite products.²² The factory developed considerably in a short space of

time under the careful management of Jenő Steiner;²³ following his initiative, the "Primus" *Steiner and Co. Factory* was established in 1925; its object of activity was the manufacturing and selling of slippers.²⁴ This factory opened branches in some of the major Romanian cities, such as București, Brașov, Craiova, Deva, Ploiești, Sibiu, Târgu Mureș, Timișoara etc.²⁵

Other important companies in this field were: the "Delkan" *Boot Factory*, the "Triumph" *Boot Factory*, the "Armonia" *Romanian Shoe Factory* - Iosif Bulbuca & Comp., the "Mihai Faur" *Shoe Factory*,²⁶ the "We-Ego" *Luxury Ladies' Shoes*. The last company was owned by Jenő Weiss who, before the war, had sold shoes through the "Weisz and Gelbert" *Store*; after the war, he specialised in producing luxury women's shoes. His modernly-equipped factory produced the *We-Ego* shoes that were particularly appreciated all over the Romanian Kingdom.²⁷ The company employed 100-200 workers even during the Great Depression. After the recession, it started producing children's shoes as well.²⁸ Jenő Weiss was a member of the *Commercial Guild* and the *Romanian Industrialists' Association*.

The manufacturing of fur articles was undertaken by the "József Leichner" *Fur Atelier*, established in 1917; it became a factory in 1926, its main activity being curing and transforming sheep skins.²⁹ József Leichner was one of the most renowned industrialists in Oradea. His fur company was a Romanian premiere in the field. After completing his studies in Vienna, he specialised in Berlin and Paris. As a consequence of his skills and experience, he realised the importance of producing ready-made articles in parallel with the manufacture of luxury lambskin furs. In 1930, he took part in the *World Exhibition* of fur products in Leipzig, where he received a merit diploma. In acknowledgement of his outstanding contribution, he became a member of Oradea's *Commercial Guild*. In 1931, he was awarded the *Commercial and Industrial Order*, second class; a year later, he received the *Commercial and Industrial Order*, first class. His fur company also had a branch in Bucharest, deposits in some important national centres and foreign subsidiaries in Vienna, Leipzig and Paris.³⁰ The factory worked only with lambskins until 1940, the maximum daily output being 1,500 pieces a day produced by 300 employees working in three shifts.³¹ The production decreased after 1940 because of the lack of raw materials, as the factory mainly delivered products for the army;³² despite this aspect, the factory owner and his family were deported to the Auschwitz death camp and the company was ruined.

Samuel Motzen worked in the same field, the production and export of furs; in 1931, he laid the foundation of the "Majestic" *Leather Factory*, manufacturing *Chevreaux leathers* exclusively for Romania, alongside antelope skin products.³³ Besides the economic field, Samuel Motzen was active in the social field as well. In 1932, he was elected president of the Oradea Orthodox Jewish community.

There were several hat factories in interwar Oradea. One of them was founded in 1919 by Simon Klein,³⁴ a local entrepreneurs whose commercial experience had been gathered in Oradea and Budapest; he had learnt the art of hat-making at the *Siegfried und Orenstein* Viennese factory and, afterwards, he established a factory producing ladies' hats and, later one, men's hats; he also owned a fashion store for ladies.³⁵ His products, which always followed the latest fashion trends in Paris, London, Rome, were sold in several Transylvanian cities, as well as in Bucharest, where his company had branches. Simon Klein's factory and store continued to employ 100-200 workers even during the economic depression.³⁶ In 1920, a young man familiar with the new spirit of the age, Jenő König,³⁷ who had studied abroad the modern technologies of hat-making,³⁸ Another older company, founded in 1910 by Heller and Deutsch,³⁹ continued its activity; in the interwar period, it was the general subsidiary of the Budapest "*Gross and Weiss*" *Hat Factory*.⁴⁰ Its quality products were regularly advertised in the local papers by means of slogans such as "*Neither rain nor snow can damage my hat, because it is bought from Heller and Deutsch*".⁴¹ The factory depository, one of the largest in Transylvania, provided a wide range of hats for reasonable prices, the best selling models being the *Borsalino* and "*Antica casa*" hats.⁴² The company was awarded the *Gold Medal* at the 1928 Oradea *Commercial Hall Exhibition* in recognition of its activity, while its owners received the *Commercial Merit* medal.⁴³

The cloth and textile industry flourished in Oradea in the interwar period, some representative companies being "*Fibra*", created in 1924, specialising in the production of textiles, woven articles and ready-to-wear clothes; "*Record*", founded in 1927, owned by Maurițiu Berger and Jacob Rosenfeld, specialising in producing textiles, shoelaces and ribbons; the "*Regner & Weisz*" *Cotton Loom*, founded in 1928, one of the best-known and most enduring companies, its activity spanning over 70 years.⁴⁴ Kálmán Weisz⁴⁵ used his experience acquired in Vienna and Berlin in the field of textile trade to build this factory equipped with modern sewing machines and looms. The factory had deposits in Bucharest, Satu Mare, Timișoara, Arad, Galați and Brăila. The two owners, Kálmán Weisz and Károly Regner, due to their professionalism, managed to overcome the difficulties of the great depression. In 1940, the factory employed 99 workers and had a 90 horse-power capacity.⁴⁶

Lipót Incze, a well-known local entrepreneur and building engineer founded, probably in 1928, the "*Electra*" *Shoelace, Lace and Ribbon Factory* in Oradea.⁴⁷ In 1940, the factory employed 69 workers; its equipment functioned with the help of an 83 horse-power engine.⁴⁸

The chemical industry developed based on the production of primary chemical products, medication, varnish and paint, soaps and cosmetics. Among others, one could mention the following companies: the “*Vesta*” *Chemical and Pharmaceutical Factory*, in 1920; the “*Frații Müller*” *Chemical Factory* and the “*Dacia*” *Soaps, Cosmetics and Chemicals Factory*, both in 1921; the “*Fiii lui A. Zankl și Ignatie Huszár*” *Varnish, Paint and Chemicals Factory*, in 1923 and the “*Johanna*” *Soap Factory*, owned by Adolf Eduard Rothbart and Son, in 1925.⁴⁹ József Reich,⁵⁰ the son of an employee of the Orthodox Jewish Community, continued his activity in this field, after taking over, at the age of 18, the management of the Oradea soda factory following his training period in Germany – in Leipzig, Berlin and Breslau. Upon returning to Oradea, he founded in 1904 the *National Factory of Carbonic Acid*, whose distribution spanned the eastern part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire.⁵¹ At the end of the war, Reich expanded his field of activity by respecialising in the production of oxygen that was crucial for hospital activity. He was an active participant in the life of the Oradea Orthodox Jewish Community and was elected as its president in 1927.⁵² Jenő Feldmesser⁵³ was an important Oradea industrialist, who founded in 1924 the “*Clotild*” *Chemicals Factory*⁵⁵ as associate owner. Another important Jewish family of industrialists were the Rippners, whose first representative was Farkas Rippner, an employee, then the majority shareholder of the Oradea *Hungarian Needle and Celluloid Factory Ltd.*, founded in 1911. After the war, the factory had the advantage of being the only one of its kind in Romania, its products being sold all over the country. The factory employed approximately 200 workers even at the height of the economic depression. His son, György Rippner, who worked with his father in the management of the factory, inherited his trading skills and industriousness, graduating from the *Bern Commercial Academy* with a doctorate degree.⁵⁶ The “*Aurora*” *Ether Factory* was founded on August 27, 1905, by the “*Adolf Moskovits și fiii*” *Alcohol Factory*, in order to process its secondary products.⁵⁷ Consequently, the new factory acquired equipment for producing ether and chloroform. In the years before World War I, it exported large quantities of sulphuric ether, enjoying some favours from the state.⁵⁸ In 1924, the company’s shares were bought by the “*Léderer și Kálmán*” *Refined Alcohol Factory and Mill* and the Baia Mare “*Phoenix*” *Sulphuric Acid and Chemicals Factory Ltd.*, whose main shareholders were the Weiser family. The new owners wanted a different development path, so that, between 1924-1927, the factory bought equipment for the production of bitter salts and ethylic alcohol. Despite the investments, the factory proved to be non-profitable. Consequently, the “*Léderer și Kálmán*” *Refined Alcohol Factory* sold its shares in 1928 and the Weisers became its sole owners.⁵⁹ The factory flourished in the period after the economic recession. In 1935, it signed a four-year cooperation agreement with the German *Böhlme – Petrochemie Factory* in

Chemnitz.

The “*Vesta*” *Chemical and Pharmaceutical Factory* was founded in 1920 at the initiative of the chemist and pharmacist dr. Ármin Messinger as a collectively-owned company;⁶⁰ in 1922 it became a joint stock company, some of its shareholders including Jenő Schönfeld.⁶¹ He had previously worked at the chemical plant of the “*Krausz-Moskovits*” *Economic Enterprises* in Oradea, as head of the export department and assistant manager.⁶² In 1925, half of the company’s shares were bought by the Weiser family, who also had shares at the “*Aurora*” *Ether Factory*. Later, the company expanded its business all over the country, having strong connections with the *Ministry of Health*, the *Social Security Office* and the *Romanian Railroad Corporation*.⁶³ Between 1930 and 1931, it obtained approval to sell any product in the *Romanian Pharmacopoeia*, including those manufactured by foreign companies.⁶⁴ The factory opened a branch in Bucharest at the beginning of 1940.

The “*Fiii lui A. Zankl și Ignație Huszár*” *Varnish, Paint and Chemicals Factory* first started out as a branch of the Graz-based “*A. Zankl Söhne Farbenwerke*” *Pigment Factory*.⁶⁵ The Oradea factory was the largest in its field in interwar Romania. It was also known outside Europe, especially in the countries with which it had business ties: Egypt, Palestine, Syria, India, Argentina, etc. In order to draw more clients, the company issued a product catalogue with price information for 128 paint colours and shades. The prospectus also included information about where they could be purchased for reasonable prices.⁶⁶

The “*Farkas Rippner*” *Hairpins and Combs Factory* was founded in 1914 by the Oradea entrepreneur Farkas Rippner.⁶⁷ He bought the shares of the *Hungarian Needle and Celluloid Factory Ltd.*, which was going bankrupt. The factory developed gradually and became a model company, its products being appreciated all over Central Europe.⁶⁸ The factory survived the 1929 devastating fire because it was insured; it was then rebuilt from the ground and equipped with modern machines.⁶⁹ The “*Isomit*” *Combs and Bakelite Factory* was established on April 1, 1936, as a collectively-owned company that employed between 20 and 40 workers.⁷⁰ Its object of activity was the production of combs and other household objects made of artificial resin. The factory was owned by Eugen Birnfeld and Iuliu Weis who emigrated to Palestine because of the threats against the Jews during the Second World War.

Oradea’s urban development on the verge of the 20th century and later, during the interwar period, required considerable quantities of building materials, which triggered the emergence and development of brick and tile factories. The

tradition of the “*Kálmán Rimanóczy*” *Brick and Tile Factory*, founded in 1885, the “*Vilmos Rendes*” *Brick and Tile Factory*, built in 1888, the “*Tarr și Czeglédy*” *Terracota and Brick Factory*, established in 1893 and the “*Vulcan*” *Tile and Brick Factory*, created in 1906,⁷¹ was continued in the interwar period by the activity of the “*Ignátz Seemann și Asociații*” *Limescale, Tile and Cement Factory*, the “*Sándor Wasserstrom*” *Tile Factory*, both created in 1920, the “*Star*” *Building and Brick Factory Ltd.*, and the “*Delta*” *Brick Factory*, which had operated under these names since 1922. The “*Vulcan*” *Tile and Brick Factory Ltd.*, established as a joint stock corporation in 1906, whose board members included Jakab Weinberger, the owner of the “*Emilia*” *Roll Mill*, the lawyers Emil Adorjan and Ede Kurländer and the merchant Sándor Ullmann, continued to function in the interwar period as well.⁷² In 1928, the factory merged with the *Industrial Bank Ltd.* of Oradea.⁷³

Sándor Wasserstrom was an interesting Oradea entrepreneur; he was both a brick producer and the editor of the “*Népünk*” (“*Our People*”) Magazine,⁷⁴ a prominent representative of the Oradea Jewish Community, an active participant in the city’s economic and cultural progress. He studied at the Jewish school of Oradea, at the *Premonstratens Order* gymnasium, then at the *Law Academy*; in 1918, he bought the “*József Guttmann*” *Brick Factory*, created in 1879, together with the adjacent pieces of land,⁷⁵ which he divided in order to build houses on a 15-street alignment. The partial building of the Wasserstrom colony became possible by granting some facilities to the beneficiaries. He started publishing as a young man, one of his favourite topics being the social problems of the Jews. He was an active participant in the *Mizrabi* religious movement, serving as its Transylvanian president since 1928.

Other companies producing building materials operated in the city: “*Melocco*” and “*Izsó Rosenberg*”, the “*Bitumen*” *Romanian Asphalt and Flooring Factory*, an anonymous society created under this name on the basis of a 1923 company⁷⁶ that carried out the majority of asphaltting operations in Oradea and in other Romanian cities. The “*Melocco*” *Romanian Enterprises* operated under this name since 1922; they had previously been a subsidiary of the Budapest “*Péter Melocco*” *Cement and Building Materials Factory*.⁷⁷ The company produced cement products, reinforced concrete elements, pavement pieces and sewage pipes.⁷⁸ In 1923, it was taken over by the Czitter family, but retained its previous name. The recession during the fourth decade of the 20th century marked the construction business as well. Under these circumstances, the new shareholders tried to find new means of generating profit. Consequently, they established a section producing black graphite for stoves and one manufacturing cocoa powder, coffee surrogates, cocoa butter and various chocolate products in 1938.⁷⁹

The “*Izsó Rosenberg*” *Cement, Asphalt and Tar Industrial Products Factory* started its activity around 1902;⁸⁰ ten years later, it was ranked first in the competition with the cement factories from the central and eastern part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. It also played an important role in the constructions erected in Oradea and Bihor County.⁸¹ Equipped with modern hydraulic machines powered by electricity, it produced ornamental cement and marble pavement plaques and concrete tubes. The Rosenberg-administered factory contributed to the building of a considerable number of palaces and private homes in Oradea. It also provided the necessary materials for the city’s sewage system as a shareholder in the *General Sewage Factory*, and for covering the Peța and Paris springs. It also won the public competition projects to build 28 reinforced concrete bridges and great dams commissioned by the “*Crișul Negru*” *Flood Protection Association*, the consolidation of the Ciurgău (Ceanu Mare – Cluj county) *Pumping Station*, as well as for the *water basin used for washing hemp* in Sânicolau Român, Bihor county. Last, but not least, it built 16 reinforced concrete bridges on the Bihor county national roads.⁸² It became an anonymous society in 1920, its object of activity being expanded to cover the production and selling of asbestos schists and asphalted plaques, the chemical production of lubricants from vegetable oils, the fabrication and selling of tar products and the industrial production of various chemicals.⁸³ After adopting a new name, “*Duratex*”, the company opened a branch in Bucharest.⁸⁴ Izsó Rosenberg was an active participant in the city’s economic and cultural life, being one of the founding members of the “*Nagyvárad*” *Napló*” *Printing House* joint stock corporation.⁸⁵

During the interwar period, the number of Oradea printing houses increased significantly. A large number of them paradoxically belonged to the national minorities; this situation could be encountered all over Transylvania.⁸⁶ The most important printing house in Oradea, established in 1856, belonged to the Sonnenfeld family who were also major shareholders in a paper and envelope factory, as well as in an office supply company. The “*Biharea*” *Typographic Institute and Publisher* operated between 1920 and 1932; it took over the older “*Armin Laszky*” *Printing House*, whose purpose was to publish Romanian materials. Gusztav Sonnenfeld was among the directors of the printing house; he was also an associate in the most enduring printing house in the city.⁸⁷ This company continued its activity from May 16, 1933 as an anonymous society under the name of *Administrative Printing House*⁸⁸ specialising in printing ready-made materials.⁸⁹ It also published the *Western Gazette* daily.

The activities connected to the foundry and processing of materials were provided by the “*Frații Ivan*” *Foundry*, established around 1920 and the “*Phoebus*” *Factory – Iron Foundry and Machine Factory Ltd.*, founded in 1926 as a continuation of the “*Tátray și Klier*” *Foundry and Machine Factory*, created in 1906.⁹⁰ The latter

produced various forged pieces designed for local needs: construction pillars, water pipe and sewage covers, as well as articles that were imported at the time: car chassis, pumps and fountain parts, agricultural equipment.⁹¹ In 1910, it was transformed into a collectively-owned company by bringing in two engineer associates, Márton Juba and Adolf Schüller, who had come back from North America;⁹² a year later, it became a joint stock corporation under the name of "Tátray și Asociații" *Foundry and Machine Factory*, which also produced cattle cars. Among its directors at the time, one should mention Gyula Fleischhakker, the president of the *Bihar County Savings Office*, who was also a shareholder in the "Farkas Moskovits și Asociațul" *Boot and Shoe Factory* and Imre Darvas, the owner of the "La Roche și Darvas" *Forest Logging Company*.⁹³ After the end of the war, the shares of the company were bought by Zsigmond Erdős and his associates, Frigyes Rumlper and Gárdos.⁹⁴ Under their management, the factory soon became one of the most important industrial enterprises in the region, a fact acknowledged by the signing of a 10-year contract with the *Romanian Railroad Corporation (CFR)* to repair its cars and locomotives. Important investments were made in the following years, among which the building of a workshop for repairing and installing boilers and locomotives in 1922, a forge in 1923, and a new foundry during 1924-1925. The number of employed workers reached 600-700. On November 6, 1926, the company took the name of the "Phoebus" *Iron Foundry and Machine Factory Ltd.*⁹⁵ During the prosperous period of 1926-1930, its technical director, Anton Röschenthaler, introduced *explosion engines* in the factory. The production, which until that moment had been based primarily on producing locomotives, was expanded to other products as well. They started producing, besides agricultural equipment for general use, oil mills, cranes of different kinds and sizes and, for the first time, *tool machines*.⁹⁶ Around 1930, the factory management acknowledged the economic importance of crude oil both in Romania and abroad and started producing tools necessary in the oil industry. From this point of view, it was at the same level as all the important Romanian factories operating in the field. It also started producing high quality cranes used for mining, installations for processing hemp and linen, equipment for sugar factories and slaughterhouses, as well as funicular railway cables. In 1937, the factory moved its headquarters to Bucharest, while the Oradea factory remained a subsidiary.⁹⁷

Jenő Grünwald⁹⁸ became known in the field of metallic constructions and locksmiths; he founded a workshop in Oradea in 1893 and carried out fittings for the majority of important buildings in the city, such as the *City hall Palace*, the *Moskovits Palace*, the *Rimanóczy House*, the *Royal Coffee Shop Terrace*, the *Cadet School* (nowadays, the *Cris County Museum*), the *Gendarme School* (nowadays part of Oradea University). His workshop became known in other important cities in the eastern part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire: it carried out the

fittings of the Aiud *County Palace*, the Zalău *Courthouse*, the "Miramare" *Hotel* in Crikvenica (nowadays Croatia), the *Pallace Hotel* and several other palaces in Budapest. His name is also linked to the first-time introduction of autogenous welding in Oradea.⁹⁹ Following a training period abroad, in 1911 Grünwald established an *Iron Roll Factory*.¹⁰⁰ In 1922, together with his brothers, Mór and Herman Grünwald, laid the bases of the "Grünwald și Asociații" *Metal and Tin Products Factory*, which became "Frații Grünwald"¹⁰¹ in 1924; it produced a wide range of metal and tin products much in demand by food, chemical and medicine factories. They expanded their activities in 1929, with the production of wooden rolls. The factory supplied products to other large Romanian cities, in addition to those in Transylvania and Banat: București, Iași, Ploiești, Craiova, Brăila, Chișinău and Cernăuți. In recognition of his activity, Jenő Grünwald was awarded the *Order of Industrial and Commercial Merit*, second class, in 1930.

As can be seen, the Oradea interwar industry, largely represented by Jewish industrialists, flourished in the period prior to the 1929 economic depression during which the majority of the well-known Oradea companies survived. After 1933, there was a period of slow, but steady progress; in 1938, the local factories were once again faced with an economic crisis forecasting the beginning of a new world conflict. Production was reduced to a minimum, exports were deeply affected, while the financial institutions were faced with massive cash withdrawals. *The National Bank* intervened in order to re-establish order. Thus, the national currency was stabilised and the external partners slowly regained confidence in the Romanian economy.¹⁰²

The dynamic economic life of Oradea was undoubtedly due to the prewar existence of a group of local investors who were well-off, influential men involved in the administration of the city. This group of approximately 60 people took an active part in the economic, social, financial, architectural and cultural development of the city by investing large sums of money and the substantial profit taxes they paid for their businesses. Their names, as well as the sums of money they paid to the city treasury, regularly appeared in the press of the time, as the statistics of the *City Tax Office* published in the *Tiszántúl* newspaper of August 30, 1914, shows. Among the 110 names mentioned, one could find Lajos Weinberger, the owner of the "Emilia" *Roll Mill*, Adolf Moskovits, the owner of the „Adria" *Joint Stock Society for Industry and Agriculture*, Károly Andrényi, owner of the *Iron Foundry*, Károly Ignác Deutsch, who traded in glass and china, Izsó Rosenberg, producer of building materials, the architect Vilmos Rendes and József Popper junior, who owned a grocery store, and a wholesale deposit of spices, delicacies, wines, citrus fruits and mineral waters, etc.¹⁰³

The majority of Oradea industrialist and merchants were Jews, well versed in the commercial life of the times, which enabled them to developed prosperous

businesses. Even though some of them came from other places and settled in Oradea, attracted by the dynamic economic environment, they soon became citizens of the city that they faithfully served and participated in its prosperity. They knew how to develop their own businesses and defend their own interests without hurting the interests of the community. They were actively involved in other aspects of city life besides the economic one: culture, charity, sports. They were also loyal subjects of the various political regimes, even though these may have sometimes stood in contrast to their own beliefs.



Notes

1. Information from György Rollinger, born on 27 May 1936.
2. National Archives – Bihar County Office (henceforth A.N-D.J.Bh.), *fond Tribunalul*, register 12/1909-1911, f. 160v.
3. Idem., *fond Primăria*, dos. 5/1893-1911, f. 134.
4. Idem, *fond Asociația*, register 6/1884-1936, f. 3.
5. Ibid., register 6/1884-1936, f. 111, 112, 113, 125; Idem, *fond Tribunalul*, register 17/1924-1927, f. 199v.
6. Ibid., register 18/1927-1941, f. 283.
7. Ibid., register 15/1918-1920, f. 201; register 16/1920-1924, f. 278v.
8. Borovsky Samu (coordinator), *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai. Bihar vármegye és Nagyvárad enciklopédiája (Hungarian Counties and Cities. The Bihar County and Oradea Encyclopaedia)*, Budapest, Apollo Irodalmi Társaság, 1901, p. 312.
9. Ronald Hochhauser, „Obiective industriale bihorene cu valoare muzeală - S.C. Spirt & Drojdie S.A.”, in *Crisia*, Oradea, vol. XXX, 2000, pp. 479- 491.
10. * * *, *Biharmegye és Nagyvárad írásban és képből (Bihar County and Oradea in Writings and Images)*, Nagyvárad, 1912, p. 119; * * *, *Erdélyi magyar képes naptár az 1923. közönséges esztendőre (Calendar ardelean ilustrat, de limbă maghiară)*, Nagyvárad, Nagyvárad Napló Nyomda R.-T., 1922, p. 127.
11. * * *, *Biharmegye és Nagyvárad...*, p. 120.
12. A.N. - D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 16/1920-1924, f. 326v; Aurel Tripon, *Monografi-almanah a Crișanei*, Oradea, Tipografia “Diecezană”, 1936, p. 314.
13. A.N. - D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 16/1920-1924, f. 328f; Liviu Borcea, Gheorghe Gorun, (coordonatori), *Istoria orașului Oradea*, Oradea, Editura Cogito, 1995, p. 360.
14. A.N. - D.J.Bh., *fond Întreprinderea de bere*, inv. 284/1975, f. 3.
15. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 17/1924-1927, f. 105v, 106f.
16. * * *, *Erdélyi magyar...*, p. 74.
17. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 17/1924-1927, f. 126v.
18. Arvay József, *A magyar ipar (Industria maghiară)*, Budapest, Halász Pál

- Könyvkiadóvállalata, 1941, p. 140.
19. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 16/1920-1924, f. 339v, 340f; *Nagyvárad*, 1923, no. 227, p. 2; Horváth, Jozsef, (director), *Ghidul oraşului Oradea-Mare*, *Nagyvárad város útmutató tanácsadó címtára*, Oradea-Mare, Kosmos Nyomda, 1923, p. 157.
 20. *Nagyvárad*, 1923, no. 227, p. 2.
 21. Ibid.
 22. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 17/1924-1927, f. 133v, 134f
 23. The success of this factory was largely due to Jenő Steiner's management; he was a complex and dynamic personality: a socialist supporter and militant, he was arrested for his activity, expelled from Cluj. He went to Vienna and became known as a shoe producer, was elected as member of the *Vienna Fashion Academy* and as leader or editor in the associative movement. After the war, he settled in Oradea, where, observing that the children's shoe production and the haberdashery sector in Romania were declining, he founded the "*Carmen*" and "*Primus*" *Shoe Factories*, as well as the "*Esta-Sun*" *Special Chemicals Factory*. Approximately 800 people were employed in these factories.
 24. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 17/1924-1927, p. 143v.
 25. Idem, *fond Tribunalul*, register 17/1924-1927, f. 304f; *Revista economică*, 1938, no. 6-7-8, p. 51.
 26. Ibid., register 17/1924-1927, f. 126v, 143v, 176v; register 15/1918-1920, f. 233; register 6/1922-1941, f. 170; *Noua Gazetă de Vest*, 1938, no. 543, p. 7.
 27. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 6/1922-1941, f. 170.
 28. Fodor Laurențiu, Gal Zoltán, Pasztor Eugen, *Ghidul oraşului Oradea pe anul 1937-1938*, Editura autorilor, p. 268.
 29. *Partium*, 2001, no. 2, pp. 5-6.
 30. Fodor Laurențiu, Gal Zoltán, Pasztor Eugen, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
 31. *Partium*, 2001, no. 2, p. 6.
 32. Ibid.
 33. Árvay Jozsef, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
 34. Ibid.
 35. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 6/1922-1941, f. 59.
 36. Fehér Dezső, *op. cit.*, p. 281; after the factory ceased its activity, the store management was taken over by his wife, Serena Rossmann.
 37. Ibid., p. 280 .
 38. Ibid.
 39. Collection Constantin Demeter, Oradea.
 40. * * *, *Erdélyi magyar...*, p. 128.
 41. *Gazeta de Vest*, 1935, no. 1388, p. 2
 42. *Ecoul*, 1931, no. 216-217, page not numbered.
 43. Fehér Dezső, *op. cit.*, p. 301.
 44. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 17/1924-1927, f. 56v; register 18/1927 1941, f. 13; 142.
 45. Fehér Dezső, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

46. József Árvay, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
49. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 15/1918-1920, f. 209; register 16/1920-1924, f. 137v, 184v, 378v; register 17/1924-1927, f. 186v; Aurel Tripon, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
50. Fehér Dezső, *op. cit.*, p. 285.
51. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 10/1903-1906, f. 71v.
52. Fehér Dezső, *op. cit.*, p. 286.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
54. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 18/1927-1941, f. 132; Aurel Tripon, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
55. Fehér Dezső, *op. cit.*, p. 285.
56. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 10/1903-1906, f. 181v, 182f.
57. *Idem*, *fond Primăria*, dos. 866/1910-1918, f. 286.
58. *Idem*, *fond Aurora*, inv. 266/1906-1948, f. 1.
59. *Idem*, *fond Tribunalul*, register 15/1918-1920, f. 209.
60. *Ibid.*, register 16/1920-1924, f. 283f.
61. Fehér Dezső, *op. cit.*, p. 289; the "Krausz-Moskovits" Industrial Enterprises was the juridical successor of the "Mór Moskovits și Fiul" Alcohol Factory.
62. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Întreprinderea "Vesta" Oradea*, inv. 267/1945-1954, f. 1.
63. Alexandru Pop, *Farmacii onădene între anii 1919-1949* (manuscript), Oradea, 1988.
64. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 16/1920-1924, f. 299v.
65. *Idem*, *fond Fiul lui A. Zankl. Fabrică de vopsele Oradea*, inv. 288/1945-1950, f. 1.
66. *Ibid.*, f. 2.
67. *Idem*, *fond Tribunalul*, register 5/1906-1922, f. 258f.
68. *Idem*, *fond Rippner*, inv. 195/1914-1948, f. 2.
69. *Ibid.*, dos. 40/1945, f. 32.
70. *Idem*, *fond Întreprinderea "Isomit" Oradea*, inv. 906/1945-1948, f. 1.
71. Emődi János, "Istoria cărămizii în Bihor", în *Crisia*, XXXIV, Oradea, 2006, p. 141.
72. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 10/1903-1906, f. 289v; register 15/1918-1920, f. 260; János Emődi, *op. cit.*, p. 142; Fodor Laurențiu, Gal Zoltán, Pasztor Eugen, *op. cit.*, p. 175; Aurel Tripon, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
73. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 10/1903-1906, f. 290f.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
75. János Emődi, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
76. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalul*, register 18/1927-1941, f. 227; Aurel Tripon, *op. cit.*, p. 313.
77. * * *, *A „Nagyvárad” naptára*, Nagyvárad, 1914, page not numbered.
78. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Fabrica de ciment "Melocco" Oradea*, inv. 750/1935-1948, f. 1.
79. *Ibid.*, f. 281f.
80. *Tiszántúl*, 1902, no. 74, p. 8; *Vulturul*, 1897, no. 1819, p. 11.
81. * * *, *Biharmegye és Nagyvárad...*, p. 138.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

83. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalulul*, register 15/1918-1920, f. 191.
84. *Ibid.*, f. 200.
85. *Ibid.*, register 14/1914-1920, f. 277f.
86. Constantin Mălinaș, *Tipografi, tipografi și edituri în Bihor (1565-1948)*, Oradea, Editura "Mihai Eminescu", 1995, p. 13.
87. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalulul*, register 14/1914-1920, f. 114v.
88. *Ibid.*, register 19/1931-1941, f. 56.
89. *Gazeta de Vest*, 1935, no. 1389, p. 6.
90. *Tiszántúl*, 1906, no. 149, p. 8.
91. *Ibid.*, no. 190, p. 6.
92. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalulul*, register 12/1909-1911, f. 93f; Ducret Géza, (coordinating editor), *Nagyvárad ipartörténete (Industria orașului Oradea)*, Nagyvárad, 2008, p. 53.
93. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalulul*, register 12/1909-1911, f. 238f.
94. *Ibidem*, register 15/1918-1920, f. 82; Géza Dukrét, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
95. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalulul*, register 16/1920-1924, f. 333v, 334f.
96. Fodor Laurențiu, Gal Zoltán, Pasztor Eugen, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
97. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalulul*, register 17/1924-1927, f. 311f; *Revista economică*, 1940, no. 9-16, p. 52.
98. Fehér Dezső, *Bihor-Biharmegye...*, p. 279.
99. * * *, *Biharmegye és Nagyvárad ...*, p. 165.
100. * * *, *A „Nagyváradai Napló” naptár albuma („Nagyváradai Napló” Almanach)*, Nagyvárad, 1926, with numbered pages.
101. A.N.-D.J.Bh., *fond Tribunalulul*, register 16/1920-1924, f. 272v, 273f.
102. *Revista Economică*, 1938, no. 6-7-8, p. 5.
103. *Tiszántúl*, 1913, no. 199, p. 3.

Abstract

The first part of the present study is a brief outline of the interwar economic environment of Bihor county as a necessary framework for revealing the contribution of Jewish capital to its evolution. Later on, we highlight in the form of a monograph all the factories (from different fields: food and manufacturing industry, chemical, pharmaceutical industry, etc., whose products had a secure internal market) belonging to Oradea Jews who proved to be efficient entrepreneurs and whom, through their activity, created representative elements for the local economy. In fact, the industry of interwar Oradea and Bihor County was primarily represented by Jewish entrepreneurs.

Keywords

Oradea, Jews, industrialists, interwar period, merchants.