

The Jews of Oradea and the Parable of the Crushed Olives

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THE PERSON asserting that the Jews do not form a nation, but give meaning to and validate what is called to have a destiny, is quoting Franz Kafka, who liked a certain phrase of the Talmud in particular: “We, the Jews, like olives, give the very best in us only when we are crushed.”¹ If Emil Cioran himself had invented the terrible characterization and had not taken precautions, by quoting from Talmud *via* Kafka’s diary, taking into consideration his inter-war past, the cherished sympathies and the articles published in the press of the time, the allegations that had been made to him would have legitimized even more Lucien Goldmann’s diatribes² on the issue of the juvenile anti-Semitism of the son of an Orthodox priest from Marginimea Sibiului. Thus, however, the similarity between the Jews and the crushed olives no longer shocks, while balancing the discussion towards the grounds of the Jewish creativity filtered through suffering and tragedy. A bargain insinuates this time as well, with reference to a well-known European cultural topos—Faust, from Goethe to Thomas Mann! To succeed in a daring spiritual approach, the association with an avatar of the Evil seems inevitable. This time, the text of the Talmud suggests not a clique with Satan, but the assumption of the abyss as a springboard to triumph. The suffering distills the moment of bliss once the damnation seems to be the only thing reserved to the Jew. Wandering, covert and special, the descendant of Moses has always played in history a game adjacent to misfortune, as long as he has held on a particular identity by his fingertips. To be another one or to be different does not instantly invoke positive feelings, but escalates uncontrollably from suspicion to hatred, from annoyance to violence. The obscure nutriment of the pogroms was the resentment. The scapegoat is the ingenious or prosaic scenario out of the embarrassments of the history rather than a subterfuge. Most of the times, the evil is frugally disguised in grudge, frustration, reproof or the humiliation of daily failures. Maybe that is why the olives were crushed wherever a synagogue was built in the clamors of some communities infiltrated by prejudices, anxious rumors or vatic ideologies.

Fortunately, the comparison between the Jews and the crushed olives has, at least on certain sequences throughout history, only suggestive force and no apodictical substance. On the other hand, the analysis of the evolution of Jewish community of Oradea, in the context of the Central Europe in the second half of the 19th century and the first four decades of the 20th century will detect a particular recessive component, a subtended level according to which the metaphor of the crushed olive will open the abominable

horizon of the “final solution.” But preliminary to the agony, let us look at the time of the Jewish destiny where everything seemed to enact a functional, credible and invigorating paradise, whistled up—unexpectedly and amazingly—from a historical *puzzle* sometimes foreseeable, sometimes inconsistent or even pernicious. Historians, sociologists and intellectualists called this “drawing” of the world modernity. Perhaps no other people except for the Jews claim its spirit more subtly and embody its potential in a more refined manner. In Oradea, the impact of modernity on the local Jewish community has allowed the yesterday’s marginals, those being always in a dangerous approximation of every day life, to become decision makers of a city that was living the zenith of civilization and culture up to the First World War. Oradea of the “golden age,” as it is called by Randolph L. Braham,³ is led by the 15,000 people living with their eyes open a dream made predictable by the Joseph’s reforms 100 years ago, but no way possible. Mitteleurope was facing a liberalism and a doctrine of openness to the Jews, admittedly, in an assimilationist spirit and direction; however, at the same time on the banks of the Seine, during a famous trial, everybody was shouting lustily not “Down with Dreyfus!,” but “Down with the Jews!,” as a result of a climate inflamed with great mastery by most of the French press. At about the same time, to illustrate a wider European picture, Nietzsche noted an observation that may be the explanation (an additional one) for what would follow: “I have never met a single German to love the Jews.”⁴ Traumatized by a medievalism heavily marked by the Christian dogmas, vindictive and obsessed with attacking the sin, western or eastern Jewish communities had to perform a discount. Frenzied and meticulous, with discipline and inventiveness, “designed in the modern world, they had to cover in one century—the 19th—all currents that had shaped modern Europe by a slow progression: Humanism, Renaissance, Reformation, Nationalism and Socialism.”⁵ This opening from the ghetto paradigm to the borough paradigm is called emancipation by the majority. The causes which had determined it precipitate a few nodal points and intimate processes of modernity itself: on the one hand, the 1848 French Revolution, the events that allowed the late establishment of certain European nations, and on the other hand the bourgeoisie marching to political power, transformation of ethnic affiliation sense in love of the motherland, safeguard of civic freedoms in direct relation to the elective rule of law, extended institutionalization of education, press matureness, as the place of opinion disputes and civic commitments, technological progress and scientific research under the impetus of the second industrial revolution. Modernity means competition in its spirit. The bitter amongst all is the competition with time. Modern man is far less willing to suitability to the transcendent, in the more urgent and plausible favor of a connection to the world. In this new and dynamic reality, the Jew had the most laborious and thorough experience of suitability/adaptability, under paradoxical and strict conditions of compliance with traditions. The impact between the censoring ritual prescriptions and the spirit of the new Europe has choreographed the Jews’ relations with the nations that they existed in. The year 1867, which meant the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian dualism solution, found the Jewish community in Oradea ready for involvement. The essential condition of such an assumed approach assumed was the exercise of the citizen role, a raw material in any scenario of a participatory democracy. Mid-1910s Oradea was, as image, spirit and civilization, the fervent synthesis of the Judaism relationship with central European modernity during a half-century.

In Oradea, the Jewish community, quite limited and affected by restrictions along the 15th, 16th or 17th centuries (among other things, they had no right to stay overnight inside the Fortress or to practice arts or farming), was formed as an ethnic group organized in 1722, and later, in 1731, “the Israeli Sacred *Hevra Kedoša*) was created, the most noble and human union of the Jewish collectivity.”⁶ In 1786 the Jewish hospital was established, which, according to Téreza Mozes, had a single room, and the main responsibilities aimed at harboring the foreign Jews and caring for the elder ones (the *Hekdeş* was designed on the model of the monachal hospitals, operating without doctors). In the context of Jews’ access to higher education (1790), the first certificated doctors emerged, the most important of them being Grosz Frigyes, doctor of philosophy, physician and surgeon, who founded the Institute for the Visually Impaired Poor of Oradea in 1830.⁷ As for education, the first Jewish public school in Oradea was opened in 1796, with the German language as the teaching language until 1861, followed by the Hungarian language.

The 1848 revolution finds the Jews in Oradea in full effort of public assertion, of preservation of the freedoms obtained and consolidation of an honorable and respectable social status. Emancipation would be prepared and adopted in this mentality. We mention a historical event for the Israeli community, that happened in 1851; it was extremely eloquent as regards the anticipation of openness and involvement desire—the first Jew, Mihelffy Albert,⁸ managed to be accepted in the City Council, he bore a striking physical resemblance to the leader of the Hungarian revolution, Kossuth Lajos, whose opinion in the Jewish problem was as firm as possible—the melting of the Jewish communities in the Hungarian nation mass and the arrest of penetration of traditionalist Jews of Galician origin.⁹ The dualistic solution or the formation of the Bicephalous Empire met the expectations of the Jews, many of them prepared for the concession of assimilation (in 1847 the first sermon in Hungarian had already been preached by Rokkonstein Lipót in a synagogue).¹⁰ Emancipation was no longer a wish, but a certainty; however, instead of the 6,000 members of the Jewish community on the Crisul Repede to have a joint project, a single vision, we witness a rupture, basically a net delimitation of Orthodox Jews and Neolog Jews (pro-Hungarians, but anti-Germans, ready for compromises, so as to be able to assert freely in the Hungarian Kingdom area).¹¹

What was going to happen in Oradea, after 1870, was strange but as spectacular as possible. Randolph L. Braham calls the temporal gap until 1914 the “golden age,” extending it to the entire Hungary. The role of the Jews in all that had been done, in cultural terms, urban buildings or services, industry and commerce was considerable, and we think it was decisive in Oradea. It was made possible by a concession of the Hungarian aristocracy folded on an availability of the Jewish elites: “The ruling classes—the nobility and the conservative aristocracy—have adopted a tolerant attitude toward the Jews. They were motivated not only by economic factors, but also by the desire to perpetuate the dominant political role they were holding in a multinational empire where the Hungarians were a minority.”¹² The stake was subtle, points out the American professor born in Bucharest and raised in Dej, as long as the Jews were the only ethnic community of the *K. und K.* that had no territorial claims to make to proclaim a State or to attach itself to a State already established. In addition, the assimilation process was proven not to be a forced one, but benevolence: the Jews “eagerly agreed with the magyarization process, choosen not only for the change of their names, but also for the active involvement in the process of economic modernization and cultural magyarization of the polyglot areas of the Hungarian

Kingdom inhabited by other minorities.”¹³ The phenomenon was all the other way to the Romanian case. Perceived as a threat to the Hungarian nation due to Romanian majority of Transylvania, as well as to an accelerated process of social, cultural and economic emancipation, they were regarded with increasing hostility. Moreover, the Romanians fought inveterately against the ethnic assimilation policy and name magyarization policy, unwilling to practice the kind of patriotism invoked by Professor Braham and adopted “fervently” by the Jews feeling “an increasingly powerful sense of belonging to the Hungarian State.”¹⁴

Whatever Randolph L. Braham believes to be specific for Hungary as regards the assimilation and the rise of the Jews is true for the Jewish community of Oradea. Basically, there is a phenomenon of de-centering followed by one of ethnic re-centering at significant scale. Nearly a quarter of the Jews living in Oradea were Neologs, in the context of a significant increase in the city population, their percentage tending to one-third of the total population, at the time of deportation (1870—6,438 Israelites; 1880—8,186; 1890—10,115; 1900—12,111; 1910—15,040; 1929—9,000 Neologs, plus 25,000 Orthodox Jews).¹⁵ The entire population of the city increased from almost 29,000 in 1870 to over 61,000 in 1910, what may be a clue as to the urban, spiritual and economical transformations. As for the ethnic re-centering of the Israelites, it involves in a significant proportion a phenomenon rarely encountered—the migration of groups from a particular ethnic identity to another, with all that it entails (a different language, a different mentality, a different set of values, behaviors and symbolic goods assumed). The Neolog Jews were at the same time Hungarians. Double identity was, however, not balanced in the specific sense that the Hungarian component of the new identity eclipsed the abandoned identity.¹⁶ The Orthodox Jews’ reactions soon appeared, but assimilation continued despite the rules and precepts put forward as a tradition and dogma. “The demon” of modernity could neither be annihilated, nor even becalmed any longer. Psychologically and attitudinally, we may keep a record of the Jews’ empathy towards Hungarians to such a large extent that it involved the self-forgetfulness.¹⁷ Their destiny became obstructed in favor of a project in which the outsider was substituted as a model, as a generative matrix. And from this point of view we see the opposition between the strategy of the Romanian community in Oradea and the strategy adopted by Jews, in particular by Neologs. Therefore, the reaction to magyarization is significant, coordinated through the branches of the *Central Society for Name Magyarization* (established in Budapest in 1893) and monitored operationally in the way the instructions set out in a booklet with the title *How to magyarize the last name*¹⁸ were applied. The Jews living in Oradea embraced the idea of name magyarization, especially since the requirement was addressing more acutely the civil servants, craftsmen, merchants, priests and teachers. The newspapers of the time were recording “with patriotic satisfaction” the success seen among the railways workers, where name magyarization was completed even by March 1898.¹⁹ Ethnic re-centering could be therefore rightfully described as a “fervent patriotic feeling,” and even a tendency to fanaticism, with full coverage in the deeds and behaviors of a period of time when, at European scale, we witness an irreversible massification process. After standing apart for centuries, the Jews would bid their card, adopting an entirely different perspective of the relationships with the social environment, institutions and forces that were managing the power.

The assimilation of the Jews in the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century have left indelible traces in Oradea. The city itself still has, like a precious garment, the patina of the “golden age.” Firstly, the architecture is a silent and fabulous witness of those times. The emancipation of the Jews living in Oradea, however, meant a lot more. Basically, the entire urban life has been the subject of complex transformations generated by the new pace of city development, as if the equation of development had included suddenly and beneficially a driving force that showed its energy, perseverance and value. The Jews were the ones causing, to use a notorious paraphrase, “the transfiguration of Oradea.” It was all made possible by exploiting its economic potential. A whole series of industrial enterprises start to produce, being assisted by peaks of the Jewish community as sponsors, entrepreneurs or managers. Many got rich; the city budget was increased so that bold architectural projects would be possible, modernization or establishment of public services, the improvement of the standard of living, the blossoming of culture and flourishing of commerce, in a tolerant human settlement, where the Jew was allowed in the select circles of the political, artistic or social high class. The end of the 19th century found Oradea aligned to the big cities of the Empire, connected to the fashions and refinements of Vienna or Budapest, but, more importantly, with the right to hope and plan an even more daring future. Hatred, racial violence, psychosis of ritual killings or the sour lesson in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion did not seem to be dangers or residual obsessions intended to generate collective neuroses.

There are numerous testimonies that record the boom of the era, but at the same time the merit of Jews. The writer and publicist Nagy Márton believed that Jews, “with their ability to see into the future, have created our trade and founded the greatness and blossoming of today’s Oradea.”²⁰ In his turn, Ady Endre, in a discussion recorded by his interlocutor, Nagy Endre, says about Oradea, the city where he has worked as a journalist, written and loved impartially: “There was a lot of ferment in this city. Although its small streets were poorly paved, and the houses, small like those of a bourg, all those have turned, however, this city into a real Paris on the banks of Peta. . . The ferment came out of the basket. The Jews of Oradea have raised the city from its provincial condition.”²¹ But perhaps the most competent opinion was the one of the city’s registrars, who had the merit of preserving many of the things that had happened and many characters in the history of the place—Lakos Lajos: “The history of the Jews in Oradea, their gradual development . . . , I see and I know their sense of soul with regard to culture, commerce and industry from my experience of several decades. . . [The Jews] have been partakers in Oradea’s raising to the rank of emporium between the provincial towns, in its raising among the localities envied by everyone.”²²

The modern destiny of the city means a multitude of investors that brought fame to fame a settlement at the border of the Empire, which, until the mid 19th century, was recognized, contingently, for the quality of its wines²³ and for the fairs gathering craftsmen and traders across Central Europe. The bourg had become a real city and workshops had turned into factories. The metamorphosis seemed to be the work of a . . . Golem! Skilful Jews were investing in profitable industries: “Emilia” roller mill, “Adria” mill or those in Diosig or Valea lui Mihai, alcohol, yeast, rum, brandy and chemicals factories, printing houses, shoe, lime, building materials, ropes and industrial nets factories and

the soap factory²⁴. There are just some of the brands that, invented and run by Jews, would thrive, producing goods for the local market, but also for those of the wider world. Names like Weinberger, Ausfricht, Moskovits, Weisz, Weissenberger, Schwartz, Sonnenfeld, Weiszlovits, Lederer and Kallman imposed themselves primarily because of a strategy inherent in the Jewish spirit itself. Tereza Mózes reveals the secret: “It had become almost an obligation for every craftsman to send their sons abroad for appropriating the most hidden secrets of the craft. This was possible because they knew the German or Yiddish.”²⁵ This is how it was possible to bring cutting-edge technologies to Oradea and to use them to produce saleable, sought and cherished goods. The Commercial Hall opened in 1869 was also the work of a Jew, Reismann Mór, the one that would get involved in the building of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the opening of Oradea branch of the Austro-Hungarian Bank.²⁶ As for the banking and credit institutions, as well as goods storage warehouses or stores engaged in retail trade, the Jews did not have a competition worthy to be taken into account. Their ascent towards the political and spiritual high class of the city was favored not only by the financial capital which they had already managed to use for their business development and strengthening, but also by the new scale of the city. In this regard, two issues are important. The first pertains to the introduction of public utilities and services that had the gift to raise the urban standard and synchronize it with cities in Central and Western Europe: the construction of railroads connecting Oradea to Budapest and Cluj-Napoca, the introduction of electricity, telephony (the first telephone exchange, opened on February 28, 1888 with 18 subscribers, was the result of the efforts made by Roth János),²⁷ the development of public safety services, construction and commissioning of the first trams and lines (1906). Secondly, it is about redrawing the city image by urban planning (parks, the banks of the Crisul Repede River, recreational spaces) and significant real estate investments. Jewish architects and builders are involved this time also in the designing and construction of buildings, while the large economic, commercial and banking investors were involved in financing the erection of those buildings. The central area of the city witnessed an intense fever of the various projects. The Big Railway Station, then the Law Academy and Premonstratens Gymnasium, Post Palace, the City Hall, the Theatre, several hotels (Parc, Pannonia, Crisul Repede, Széchenyi,²⁸ restaurants, public baths, cafés, churches, synagogues, schools and the headquarters of the Greek Catholic Episcopate were built, as well as palaces named after the owners commissioning the construction and belonging, almost entirely, to the extremely rich Jewish environment (bankers, industrialists, merchants): Ullmann, Stern, Adorján, Füchsl, Deutsch, Vágó.²⁹ Not to forget about Poyнар House (a noble family with Macedonian-Romanian origins; the house was designed by the architect Sztarill), Apollo’s Palace, Emke Palace of Darvas la Roch, to leave at the end maybe the apex of the architecture by its scale and stylistic refinement—the Black Eagle Palace, built between 1907 and 1909 according to the design of the architects Komor Marcell and Jakab Deszö. And this time, a particular feature of the Jewish spirit was the premise or the antecedent or the prius the project was born of and then, in the end, the construction. Elias Canetti believes that Jewishness is defined in its final essence by the famous *exit from Egypt*, namely the 40 years spent in the wilderness, on the way guided by Moses to the Promised Land, which is in fact the transformation of a tribe in the “chosen people.”³⁰ To search, to be on track, to learn, to turn on the go, always be yourself but in the depiction of the

eternal pilgrim in research on how and what the something else is, here is what gave birth to the Black Eagle Palace. Adorján Emil and Kurländer Ede made a documentation travel for building a monumental architectural ensemble in Oradea. They visit Paris, Berlin, London, USA and Milan, and when they come back they launch a contest for the upcoming construction. The tandem Komor-Jakab won and after two years the secession style splendor, very popular in that time, was inaugurated.³¹

The “golden age” (1870–1914) was for Oradea what *la belle époque* was for the Parisian artistic world, with the Maxim restaurant and the Impressionist movement in painting as glorious references. What is the Jews’ contribution to the reaching of these heights? A huge and decisive one: they invested the money, they put at stake the genius of people who stood out in the industry, trade, services, “delivered” doctors, teachers, lawyers, artists, journalists, architects, people with vision, but especially with vocation for the insatiable appetite for grandeur and superlatives of modernity.³² The Jews have created Oradea they needed, which they have thought and dreamt of every night. At the same time, they created Oradea after the image of the places they had visited so that they could take them home. Oradea of the “golden age” is an imaginary town, but it had the respite, means and the good fortune to become reality through the will of the people who negotiated their immemorial traditions in exchange for a tangible world. What happened in Oradea is not, of course, singular, but synchronous with the effects of Jews’ emancipation in the West and particularly in America: “American Jewry had borrowed the Jewish enlightenment tone of German nature: liberal, optimistic, sober, rational, patriotic, inconspicuous and extremely decorous. . . . Reform was the way by which Judaism had the biggest chances to make Jews become prosperous businessmen, who were beginning now to emerge as major figures on the American scene.”³³ The assimilation (or even ultra-assimilation) phenomenon led to the emergence of a new “ethnic group”, the *non-Jewish Jews*. But it was probably a predicted or collateral loss.

In Oradea, the “melting” of some Jews in the Hungarian nation mass is not at all a surprise. Most of them repudiated Zionism and regarded the city as a mythical Arcadia that their ancestors could not even hope for. Hungarian and Jewish elites had merged. They felt good together, whether it was the cultural group or society “Holnap,”³⁴ or the brotherhood in the “King Ladislau” Masonic lodge, created in 1876 with a venerable Jew as the master. Gatherings from the “Green Tree” Restaurant, the bohemian air of *Royal* or *Emke* Cafés and discrete escapades at the report house “Blue Cat,” to enjoy the “boundless shame benefits,” as Hans Castorp, the hero of the *Enchanted Mountain* would say, the hero of the *Enchanted Mountain*, vespereal promenades on the *Corso*, were all contexts in which the Jews and the Hungarians have fraternized in the name of national ideals preached by Kossuth Lajos and reiterated then by the politicians of the Bicephalous Monarchy. After the Romanian administration was established in Oradea, following the disintegration of the Empire, at the end of World War I, local Jewishness will continue to entertain the same patriotic feelings towards the nation that allowed its emancipation, ascension and success. No wonder, as the nationalism had gone out of stasis and grew thundery. Somebody said that the patriotic sentiment in question was characteristic, being the expression of “a remarkable attachment, the continuation of the attachment showed by the Jews toward the ideal of return to the Holy land. Emancipation thus becomes a fulfilled messianism.”³⁵ Step toward chauvinism is not great.

Moreover, the interwar period indicates a specific phobia of Jewish communities in Transylvania against the Romanians, as well as latency or even recurrence of prewar affiliations. An example may be illuminating.

The story was related by George Nichita Farcu in a commemorative volume signed by Tiron Albani, a journalist at *The Tribune*, and later at the daily newspaper *The Western Gazette*.³⁶ It all started in August 1916, when Romania entered the war alongside the Triple Entente. In a specific context, many Uniate priests of the Hateg area were arrested, boarded the train, deported, and admitted in a camp in the heart of Hungary. In Arad railway station, while the train was stationing, a prisoner, father Leon Manu, the Superior of Prislop monastery, manages to escape, taking advantage of the darkness of the night. On the day that followed, the imprisoned people had faced frequent manifestations of hatred against them from civilians, including an individual “with beard and hat with wide borders, which resembled a Romanian priest,”³⁷ but which, in fact, was a Jewish merchant, Ignatz Klein. On the spot, Farcu has the idea to cover his comrade break, warning the accompanying gendarmes that a person of the group is on the platform, with the intention to escape. Thus, despite all his protests, Ignatz Klein was grabbed and taken together with the others to Budapest, and then near the Fertő Lake, and finally arriving in a camp in Sopron. Facing an extreme situation, i.e. the risk of having the so-called priest executed, the imprisoned Romanians admitted the truth, after the Sopron Prefect had promised that they would not be punished. Ignatz left the camp safe and sound, after having acquired a more or less fluent Romanian language during the months spent in the priestly group. After the Union, George Nichita Farcu met the Jewish merchant in Cluj. Ignatz not only bore him a grudge for what he had suffered while being deported, but even offered him a dinner. It was all cleared up when he had shown him a paper that read—“Imprisoned and admitted for Romanian national feelings.” It had been handed over by the Hungarian authorities at the time of his release. Based on that document, Ignatz Klein had been called supplier of the Romanian army by the General Traian Mosoiu!

The Jews living in Oradea did not have, by far, the happy fate of the hero of the story related. Slowly, a dire threat besieged them and cut any chance they had. The golden age ended and what appeared to be a nightmare pounced upon a defenseless community, hypnotized by the illusion that something like this could not happen. The Vienna Dictate, the racial laws, the ghetto and then deportation—everything was like in an absurd movie, in which the Evil was installed and built its metastasis. In the last days of May and early June 1944, Oradea’s ghetto was emptied. 27,000 souls were heading for Auschwitz, boarded into wagons for cattle. Such a soul bears the name of a young woman—Simon Magda. Born in Satu Mare in 1908, she worked in *Nagyváradai Napló* editorial office and wrote articles about Ady, whose poetry she cherished almost mystically.³⁸ Barely arrived in Auschwitz after escaping from the sorting of the death ramps, Simon Magda closes her eyes, hoping for a miracle: “Isn’t it all just a nightmare? Maybe I will wake up in a little while.”³⁹

Finally, the Talmud is not deluding—the olives were crushed. Destiny worked its way. No matter how cunning or absurd. So many are still looking for an answer to the question of how it was all possible. Some doors are without keys. “A certain *depth in the fallibility* seems to me be the essential sign of modernity,”⁴⁰ said the *unleashed skeptic*.



Notes

1. Emil Cioran, *Notebooks I* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992), 176.
2. Ticu Goldstein, "Between Céline and Cioran," *Cultural Observer* 506/507 (December 2009): 7.
3. Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocid. The Holocaust in Hungary* (Bucharest: Hasefer P.H., 2003), 17–18.
4. Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism. Suicidal Europe (1870–1933)*, vol. 4 (Bucharest: Hasefer P.H., 2000), 11.
5. Josy Eisenberg, *A History of the Jews* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 245.
6. Téreza Mózes, *The Jews of Oradea* (Bucharest: Hasefer P.H., 1997), 27.
7. *Ibid.*, 72
8. *Ibid.*, 76.
9. *Ibid.*, 80.
10. *Ibid.*, 91.
11. The rupture is effective in 1870, leading to three distinct communities: the Neologs, the Orthodox, as well as a group called Status-quo-ante, oscillating between the first two and wishing to restore the situation prior to the rupture, which has been proven to be impossible (Mózes, *The Jews*, 82–88).
12. Braham, *The Politics of Genocid*, 18.
13. *Id.*
14. *Id.*
15. Mózes, *The Jews*, 98–147.
16. On the intimate mechanism of ethnic centering, de-centering and re-centering – in Gabriel Liiceanu, *About the Limit* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), 24–32.
17. Contradicting thus the Psalm of David (137): "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill".
18. Liviu Borcea and Gheorghe Gorun (coordinators), *The history of Oradea's city* (Oradea: Editura Arca, 2007), 261.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Nagy Márton, *Régi idők, régi emberek* (Oradea: 1925), 201–203, *apud.* Mózes, *The Jews*, 98.
21. Nagy Endre, *Egy város regénye. A kabaré regénye* (Budapest: 1958), 20–22, *apud.* Mózes, *The Jews*, 98.
22. Lakos Lajos, "A váradi zsidóság története," *Nagyvárad* (1912): 7, *apud.* Mózes, *The Jews*, 97–98.
23. Unfortunately, fame of Oradea's wines will permanently fade after 1890, when crops were damaged by phylloxera. In 1889, the vineyards of the hills surrounding Oradea were producing 36,176 hl of wine and in 1890 the production was only 6,589 hl. Borcea and Gorun, *The history of Oradea*, 218–219.
24. Borcea and Gorun, *The history of Oradea*, 222–226.
25. Mózes, *The Jews*, 100.
26. Borcea and Gorun, *The history of Oradea*, 222.
27. *Ibid.*, 238.
28. *Ibid.*, 448–449.
29. The history of these buildings as well as of the celebrities living it, some moments that built up in the true legends or fads of local history are recorded in a book of reference – Liviu Borcea, *Memory of the Houses* (Oradea: Arca Publishing House, 2003).
30. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2009), 237.

31. Borcea, *Memory*, 135–136.
32. The beginning of the 20th century found in Oradea in full activity: 29 teachers, 48 physicians, 6 pharmacists, 58 lawyers, 23 civil servants, 500 private servants, 10 owners of printing houses and 8 journalists—all Israelites (Mozcs, *The Jews*, 118).
33. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (Bucharest: Hasefer P.H., 2003), 293.
34. The most prominent representative of this literary movement were Ady Endre, poet and publicist who lived in Oradea from 1900 to 1904, a member of *Szabadság* and *Nagyvárad* *Napló* editorial offices. He fell in love with Brüll Adel, a beautiful Jewish woman which will be his muse under the name of Leda. “Holnap” had in its select lines the Jews Emőd Tamás, Miklós Jutka, Balász Peter, Bauer Herbert and the plastic artist Tibor Ernő, murdered in the Holocaust (Mozcs, *The Jews*, 123).
35. Eisenberg, *A History*, 277.
36. Tiron Albani, *Twenty Years since the Union*, vol. 1 (Oradea: 1938).
37. *Ibid.*, 74.
38. The moment Simon Magda enters *Nagyvárad* *Napló* daily newspaper editorial office, whose editor-in-chief was a Jew, Fehér Dezső, she got a job at the desk where Ady Endre had worked, before leaving for Paris, enchanted by Leda.
39. Simon Magda, *On the Great Carousel* (Bucharest: The Literature Publishing House, 1969), 32.
40. Emil Cioran, *Notebooks*, 216.

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Abstract

The Jews of Oradea and the parable of the crushed olives

After the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian dualism (1867), the Jews living in Oradea began to enjoy the rights acquired, the emancipation process starting with a dispute between traditionalist (Orthodox) Jews and the followers of reformism, namely the Neologs. Increasingly involved in public life, inclined but also willing to a rapid assimilation into the Hungarian nation, Jewish local environment has contributed significantly to what we might define as the “golden age” of Oradea, under the relation of modernity and construction of an institutionally and architecturally functional city planning. The Jews were not only present in everything that defined, in 1870-1910, the life of a city developing harmoniously, synchronously with the large Central European metropolises, but they were also the decisive element, the ferment that gave a style, an identity and a vision to modernity in Oradea. Trade, industry, education, health, liberal arts, entertainment accounted for all facets of a spirit that was fed from a dream to build a reality where, after leaving the ghetto, the Jews felt in Oradea as in a substitute Jerusalem. The first decade and half of the 20th century, and to some extent also the interwar period, seemed to forget a terrifying warning of forgotten of *Tórah*, which Kafka often invokes: “We, the Jews, like olives, give the very best in us only when we are crushed.” Emancipated, educated, feeling all better in a world in which, finally, had been admitted, the Jews of Oradea lived their moment of grace and fulfillment. What happened in the summer of 1944 is the hideously end of another flight with wax wings.

Keywords

emancipation of the Jews; assimilation; magyarization, Oradea and the golden age; modernity; Jewish spirit.

Joseph Salvador (1786-1873)

Un juif montpelliérain, défenseur du judaïsme

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1. Itinéraire d'un juif de Montpellier issu d'un mariage mixte

JOSEPH SALVADOR naît en 1796 à Montpellier, d'un père, juif médecin, Ayen Salvador dont la famille est de souche ibérique; sa mère, Elisabeth Vincens, était une catholique peu pratiquante. Gabriel Salvador relate, dans la biographie qu'il a établie sur son oncle en 1881,¹ que la sœur de Joseph a épousé un juif, tandis que le frère Benjamin, receveur des finances au Vigan, s'est marié dans une famille protestante des Cévennes. Autant dire que Joseph Salvador, qui a été circoncis, a pu recevoir à Montpellier, « une éducation juive empreinte d'une grande tolérance »,² dans le cadre d'un milieu multi-confessionnel ouvert et tolérant, viscéralement reconnaissant à la France révolutionnaire émancipatrice, et épris de la philosophie des Lumières. Au début du XIX^e siècle, en 1808, la petite communauté juive montpelliéraine ne compte que 123 membres, et entretient des rapports harmonieux avec les catholiques et les protestants de la ville.³ Né dans une famille « mixte », il a toujours revendiqué sa « judéité », tout en affirmant un « double héritage », notamment dans *Paris, Rome et Jérusalem* (1860) :

J'appartenais à la loi de Jérusalem, par mes frères qui se disaient de race choisie dans la race même des Juifs et que l'Eglise reconnaissait pour tels [...] J'y démêlais avant tout une circonstance qui semblait faite pour m'avertir de l'impartialité que le ciel m'imposait avec plus de rigueur qu'à personne. Quelques germes, provenant de religions différentes, ou plutôt présentant des branches différentes du même tronc religieux, se trouvaient comme réunis et confondus dans mes veines, dans mon sein.⁴

Au Lycée de Montpellier que fréquente alors Auguste Comte,⁵ Joseph Salvador est un brillant élève qui excelle en poésie ; entré à l'école de médecine de la faculté de Montpellier, il obtient son doctorat dès 1816, avec une thèse traitant de « L'application de la physiologie à la pathologie », et va à Paris poursuivre des études concernant notamment l'histoire des religions et l'exégèse biblique.