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# P A R A D I G M S

## The Life of Books and the Life of People The Book Collection Stored in the Synagogue of Satu Mare (18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

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*“Son of the People of Israel,  
I am well and healthy and  
the same I expect to hear  
from you.”*

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**T**HE TRAJECTORY in time and space of the book as a spiritual message and as an object is determined by the book owner and the way he perceives it through reading. Both the book as an object and the book as reading shape their essence in accordance with the interest individuals or communities project upon them.

### The Circulation of Books: Geographic and Temporal Itineraries

**T**HE BOOK OWNERS' handwritten notes illustrate the cultural propinquity that existed between the Jewish communities scattered over a geographic area that stretched from West Germany to the expanses of Russia, between the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Second World War.

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The passage of books from one owner to another reveals the value and importance of books in Jewish life. At the same time, books were efficient communication vectors between various communities and part of decisive strategies meant to preserve religious identity and illustrate the influences and the cultural and religious experiences of the Jewish world in the European diaspora. The fame of the sages and the fame of their books transcended all borders and, as such, “fama vagatur” turned into “liber vagatur,” in the sense that exemplary destinies and implicitly the books they created were dispersed all over the Jewish world. Consequently, it may be said that the fame of an author was spread abroad by the circulation of his book. The wide prestige and fame of the authors were disseminated through the rabbis and the students of the *yeshivot*. Moreover, fame was the corollary of prolonged investigations and experiences that involved messianic expectations. Fame and exemplariness were associated on a secondary level with a propensity for the miraculous and messianic, and the reflexive dissemination of the great messianic expectations was represented by the wide recognition and fame of the authors.

The owners’ handwritten notes map the editorial and typographical trajectories as well as the itineraries that books followed. Thus, three or four concentric circles may be discerned, revealing the internal dynamics of these trajectories. Accordingly, there is a *local proximity*, i.e. books passed from one owner to another within the same locality. Such an example is a book entitled *Likutei Etsot*, printed in Warsaw in 1875, which circulated within the village Tarna Mare from Josef Frischman to Simon Katz and then to Moshe Josef Salamon.<sup>1</sup>

Similar examples are *Masechet Suka min Talmud Bavli* and *Arugat habosem*. In the first case, the year of publication and the publisher’s name could not be identified as the title page is missing, but the handwritten notes indicate that the book circulated in Satu Mare from Avraham Hanoach to David Rozenberg and Hajna Rozenberg.<sup>2</sup> The second one was printed in Khust in 1913 and, according to the handwritten notes in Hebrew, it first belonged to Hayim Salamon and then passed to Moshe Shmuel, both of them inhabitants of Satu Mare.<sup>3</sup>

A second type of circuit is represented by the movement within an *average proximity*. Thus, *Sefer Tebilim*, a book printed in Krakow in 1894 belonged first to Mano Brodi from Satu Mare and then it went to Ignatz Leibovits from Batarci, a village in the northern part of Satu Mare County.<sup>4</sup> A copy of *Yore Dea*, printed in Munkács in 1926, belonged at first to Herman Friedman from Tarna Mare and then it came into the possession of Vilmos Neuman from Șomcuta Mare, both localities situated at that time at the extremity of Satu Mare County.<sup>5</sup> According to the *ex libris* and the handwritten notes inscribed on a book entitled *Yalkut Sofer*, printed in Paks (Hungary) in 1892, it was at first in the

possession of Leopold Stoszel from Szent Margita and then it got to Halpert Naftali, the last rabbi of the Jewish community of Satu Mare.<sup>6</sup> The book *Masechet Sh'vuot min Talmud Bavli* circulated within the same geographical perimeter of average proximity. It was printed in Vilna in 1911 and its first owner was Dezső Weintraub from Oradea, but afterwards it became the property of David Arie Haas, a *shohet vebodek* (slaughterer) from Satu Mare.<sup>7</sup>

A third type of book circuit is one of *extreme distances*. In this case, the circulation of books covered large distances, from Germany, Ukraine and Poland to Northern Transylvania. A first example of this kind would be *Yad Malachi*, a book printed in Przemyśl in 1888. From Frankfurt am Main, Germany, it reached Satu Mare: from “Wohlgebarn Herren E. Rosenhein—Konigsuarterstrasse in Frankfurt Am Mein Preissen” (Latin script) it went to the Kandel family represented by “Kandel Leib, Kandel Bernat” (Latin script), “Shlomo Kandel, Hayim Kandel, Moshe Kandel” (Hebrew letters).<sup>8</sup> Another book entitled *Reshit Hochma*, title page missing, before getting to Satu Mare at Jacov Holzer it belonged to Shalom Segal from Brody, Poland.<sup>9</sup> Then, a copy of *Hilchot Alfās*, printed in Vilna, no year mentioned, which at first belonged to the “book acquisitions society of the young students of the *yeshiva* in Arschiva,”<sup>10</sup> became the possession the book acquisitions society of the young students of the *yeshiva* in Carei.<sup>11</sup> Such a book trajectory that includes two institutions belonging to *yeshivot* proves the perpetual circulation of “students from one *yeshiva* to another,” which was included in the educational and schooling program of the “*talmidei hachamim*” (*Yeshiva* students) aimed at shaping the competences and personality of those who would form the elite of the Jewish community. The “wandering of the students” was encouraged in order to weaken the bond between rabbis and their students and to “prevent the total identification of pupils with specific teachers.”<sup>12</sup> Students did not stay in one place for more than a year or even half a year, their traveling from a *yeshiva* to another<sup>13</sup> facilitating the circulation of the books.

To recompose the book circuit through the succession of owners also means to analyze and emphasize the transfer of cultural and religious values from one region to another, as well as the learning and reading choices of various communities. These trajectories maintained a common treasury of religious, ethical and cultural values in a period when Jewish identity was facing strong tensions between tradition and assimilation.

## Fragments of Biographies, of Family Histories and of Daily Life

**T**HE NOTES handwritten on books convey spontaneous and sequential fragments of personal biographies, of family histories, of a “lived history” as experienced by the books’ owners. The “circumstances,” as Nicolae Iorga called them, written down by the common people become historical sources.<sup>14</sup> At the level of individual or family living experiences, they assemble the living history, the authentic history, more precisely, the “present” of the people from the past, as defined by Pierre Chaunu.<sup>15</sup>

The notes containing biographic details such as birth, death and family destinies are prevalent. Many of the handwritten notes also refer to the political and historical context of the moment. In other words, family history intersects and interferes with the “great history.” Along these lines, mere family events combine with and reveal new information coming from the “great history.” In many of the handwritten notes, family events such as festivals, births and deaths, in their syntagmatic course, are often completed with details concerning the political life of the time. There is a handwritten note on a *Sidur: Or haYashar*, printed in 1928 at Bilgoraj which says: “Praise God, God will watch over me, David, the son of Avraham Josef and Sarah Hana. There is no people like the People of Israel and its enemies will fall. 1940.”<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, it is a text that concentrates a profound religious meaning, but its association with the year 1940 brings new significance to the biblical sense. By associating the year 1940 to a biblical benediction, the author of the note set forth his own understanding of the frightful contemporary developments (anti-Semitism, Nazism) that threatened the Jewish people at the beginning of the fifth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The appeal to prayer, to an exemplary devotional gesture, as required by the written religious text and the invocation of God’s covenant with the People of Israel, may be interpreted as an ad hoc strategy of self protection against the “great history,” against the enemies that would ultimately be defeated. The biblical, psalmist tonality of this record indirectly conveys the sensitivity of a “lived history” written down in spontaneous and succinct notes by the book owner. The aforementioned note was made by David Ben Josef from Crăcești (a small village in Maramureș, northern Transylvania). There are a few other handwritten notes on the same book: “1944, at Pesah,” “23.03.1945, Desești,” “1945, March 23, Crăcești,” all of them in Hebrew. There are also notes in Yiddish on the death of persons that might have perished in the Holocaust. Another note says: “The eighth day after Pesah, 1944.” It was the last festival before the deportation and the extermination of the Jews in Transylvania,

and the note heightens the implications of a personal history lived amid great historical events that undoubtedly left a strong mark upon the destiny of Jews. Similar notes, written between 1940 and 1944, paint a comprehensive portrait of the experiences that individuals faced when confronted with the threat of “grand history.”

Many of the notes succinctly listed, during a chronological segment of several decades, births and deaths that occurred in the life of the family, which were considered major events that had to be recorded. On a *Mahzor* printed at Przemyśl, no year mentioned, Israel David wrote in Hebrew: 1. “Israel David was born [?]; Moshe Eli was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of Sivan 1925; Josef Menahem was born on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, 1922”; “Bayer” 2. “My father died in the month of Kislev, in the 21<sup>st</sup> day; my mother died in the month of Tevet, the 5<sup>th</sup> day, 1937; [signed] Israel David.”<sup>17</sup> In the category of handwritten notes referring to family events, those that mark down the birth of children are predominant. On *Noam Elimelech*, a book printed in Warsaw in 1880, the following notes were written in Yiddish: “My daughter Hava was born in 1911, in the day of Freitag [Friday], 1911, April 28”; “My daughter Liba was born in 1915; Majus [May] 10, 1915”; “my son Meilech was born . . . in 1917, Majus [May] 8”; “My daughter Sara was born in the month of Sivan, day 5.”<sup>18</sup> There are cases of family events recorded during a long period of time. Such is the case of the notes written on a book of *Mishnayot: Seder Nezikin*, printed in Warsaw in 1880. Births and deaths within the family are recorded between 1890 and 1974. Six childbirths are noted: in 1905, 1911, 1937, another childbirth but no year is mentioned, 1948, 1974, and four deaths in 1890, in 1905, no year mentioned, 1922. In Hebrew: “The woman Miriam Rivka died on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Tamuz, 1890”; “R. Reuven, son of Jacov, died on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the month of Tevet, 1905”; “My son, the child Jacov, was born on the [?] day of the month of Tevet, 1909, January 17, 1909, Sontag [Sunday]”; “My son, the child David, was born on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Elul, 1911, August 25, 1911, Freitag [Friday]”; “My father, Rabi Elimelech died on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Shvat”; “The little girl Sherli was born in the month of Shvat, 1937, January 29, 1937”; “My son, the child Josef, was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz [?];”; “The child Ariel, the son of Jekutiel [?], was born on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Av 1974, July 31, 1974”; “R. Moshe Jacov died on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Av, 1922”; “My son, the child Jacov, was born in the year 1948, June 6, the month of Sivan.”<sup>19</sup> It seems to be a repertoire of family events that continues for three generations.

Taken together, all the notes that recorded successive family events show a certain *automatism* of the act of writing and are linked in an auctorial concatenation, as they were made by different book owners that belonged to the same

family. Therefore, the handwritten notes articulate in an inconspicuous manner the generational succession within a family. The alternation of terms such as “my father” or “my son” marks the shift of generations perceived from the auctorial pole of those who made the notes.

A note, very consistent in meaning and which recorded family events, was made on a book entitled *Hok Israel: Sefer Devarim*, printed in Warsaw in 1897. The book belonged to two families, probably kindred, Kohn and Weisz, as they were both mentioned in the notes. The handwritten notes were written between 1915 and 1938. It must be said that all notes are bilingual, i.e., they were written in Hebrew and Hungarian, while the last ones, from a chronological point of view, were written in Romanian. Here are the handwritten notes: “My son, Hayim Menachem, was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Tishri, 5676, Dienstag [Tuesday]” (Hebrew); “Kohn Henrik, September 21, 1915, was born in Nagy Károly” (Hungarian); “My daughter, Dina, was born on [?] of the month of Av, 5678, Freitag [Friday]” (Hebrew); “Weisz Dora was born in 1918, July 26 at Érmihályfalva” (Hungarian); “My son, Itzhac Shalom, was born in the month of Tevet, the 13<sup>th</sup> day, Sontag [Sunday], 5680” (Hebrew); “My son, Weisz Ignatz, 1920, January the 4<sup>th</sup>, at Érmihályfalva” (Hungarian); “My daughter, Hava Perl, was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Elul, 5681, Donnerstag [Thursday]” (Hebrew); “Weisz Hanika, 1921, September 22, Érmihályfalva” (Hungarian); “My son, Avraham Moshe, in the [?] day of the month of Tamuz, 5683, Dienstag [Tuesday]” (Hebrew); “Kohn Avraham, 1923, July 4, at Érmihályfalva” (Hungarian); “My son, Shimon, [?] on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the month of Tamuz, 5686, Dienstag [Tuesday]” (Hebrew); “Kohn Shimon, 1926, June 15, al Érmihályfalva” (Hungarian); “My daughter, Miriam Lea, the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the month of Sivan, 5688, Montag [Monday]” (Hebrew); “Kohn Lea, 1928, May 21, at Érmihályfalva” (Hungarian); “My son, Josef Noah, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day the month of Marheshvan, 5691, Sontag [Sunday]” (Hebrew); “Kohn Josef, 1930, October 26, at Érmihályfalva” (Hungarian); “My daughter, Rachel Eszter, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Shvat, 5695” (Hebrew); “Kohn Esztera, 1935, January 26, at Valea lui Mihai” (Romanian); “My son, Jonah, [?] in the month of Nisan, in the year 5698” (Hebrew); “Kohn Jenő, 1938, April 6, at Valea lui Mihai” (Romanian).<sup>20</sup>

It has been ascertained that the alternative use of Hebrew, Hungarian and Romanian in writing the notes uncovers the *duality in expressing identity* that depended on the cultural, historical and political context of the moment, while the use of German in writing the days of birth (in the Hebrew notes) reflects a linguistic process that ontogenetically reproduces the replacement of German with Hungarian as a teaching language in Hebrew schools, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Undoubtedly, the preservation of German in transcribing birth dates explains



the phenomenon. Moreover, the double way of expressing identity causes a dissimilarity in the names of persons in Hebrew versus Hungarian: *Hava* in Hebrew, *Hanika* in Hungarian, *Jonah* in Hebrew, *Jenő* in Hungarian, *Dina* in Hebrew, *Dora* in Hungarian. This onomastics is an adaptation rather than a translation and it definitely is a historically determined cultural phenomenon. The onomasiologic facts construe the relation history–reality and place Jewish identity in the historical and political context of the moment. Also, in the Hebrew notes only the first names were mentioned, while in the notes in Hungarian and in Romanian both family and first names were written. It was a consequence of a modern and secularized system of registering the population that was rigorously standardized in order to keep a clear and efficient control over the citizens of the state.

Beside family notes, there are some other handwritten notes that convey a certain *familiarity* reminiscent of the epistolary genre. Thus, on a book entitled *Hok leIsrael* there is a handwritten note in Romanian saying: “Son of the People of Israel, I am well and healthy and the same I expect to hear from you. How are you? How are you doing? Where are you staying? Rozen Saie.”<sup>21</sup> This text may carry a symbolic, a synecdochic and symbolic meaning to be more precise, that hinted at the Jewish people’s fate before and during the Second World War. The personification of the Jewish people as the addressee of a letter and the familiar register that used all the stereotypical formulas proper to epistles bestow an obvious accuracy upon the handwritten note.

## School, Learning and Study

**S**CHOOL LIFE, the place and the role of learning and study were appreciated in the Jewish communities, and therefore many of the notes made on books referred to those moments. Generally speaking, this kind of notes recorded periods or certain moments from the years of study and offered information on the schools, especially *yeshivot*, that the book owners attended. These notes recompose, at the level of the *lived history*, chapters from the history of the Jewish schools in Transylvania at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A first category of notes describes schools, school curricula and subjects that were learned, study books and methods. A second category of notes emphasizes the prestige of school and learning in the biographies of those who made the notes.

On a book printed at Lublin in 1901, entitled *Kitvei Kodesh: Esvim vearba’a*, there is a note in Hebrew that refers to the *yeshiva* in Sighet: “In 1934–35 taught

here, in the *Yeshiva haRama*, Rabbi Jekutiel Jehuda Teitelbaum and also Jekutiel Jehuda Gros, about the treatises *Kidushin*, *Orah Hayim*, *Hilchot Shabat*, *Hilchot Trefot* and *Yore Deah*. Melucha [?]<sup>22</sup> This note may be corroborated with other sources that refer to the history of this *yeshiva* of Sighet. It was set up in 1858 by Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum from Újhely and by his son Jekutiel Jehuda Teitelbaum (the one mentioned in the note above) and was attended by some 100 students.<sup>23</sup> The rabbi that founded it was the author of important books such as *Sefer Tehilim*, a book of commentaries printed in Svaliva in 1907 and edited by Moshe David Teitelbaum, the author's grandson, in Târgu-Lăpuș.<sup>24</sup> The same handwritten note offers information on the school curriculum, typical for all *yeshivot*, centered on *halacha* and *hidushim*.

Another handwritten note provides information on the *yeshiva* in Tășnad. Thus, there is a handwritten note in Hebrew on a copy of *Shulhan Aruch: Orah Hayim*, printed at Seini in 1925 that says: "This [copy of] *Orah Hayim* belongs to the young Ben-Zion Jacov Guttman from Satu Mare who studies here, in Marghita. [In the] year 1937."<sup>25</sup> Another note in Hebrew but in a different handwriting says: "This [copy of] *Orah Hayim* belongs to the young Ben-Zion Jacov Guttman from Satu Mare who is a student here in the *yeshiva* of Tășnad in the year of 1936." A third note in Hebrew says: "This [copy of] *Orah Hayim* belongs to the young Ben-Zion Jacov Guttman from Satu Mare who is a student here in Marghita. May God build and make this town beautiful. 1937. With the scholar [who is a] a *hasid*, *dayan* and *more tzedek*, may God give him a long life." Another note in Hungarian says: "Guttman Jenő, Satu Mare, Mircea cel Mare Street, No. 31." Such an informative sequence on the *yeshivot* in Tășnad and Marghita may be completed with details taken from other sources. The *yeshiva* of Tășnad was set up in 1919 by Rabbi Mordechai Brisk, a former *dayan* in Marghita, who was the son of the rabbi of Tisza, Hungary, the one who set up *yeshivot* in Lithuania. After settling down in Tășnad, he used his previous experience at the *yeshiva* in Marghita and developed a strong and important *yeshiva* there. Next to it, he built a boarding school for 100 students, a canteen and a *Beit Midrash* with 150 places. After 1930, students from all over Romania and Hungary came to study at his *yeshiva*, so that 450 students were registered in 1935. Therefore, in 1935 a two-story *Beit Midrash* was built that had the canteen on the ground floor and classrooms for learning and study on the first floor. The construction of the *yeshiva* was financed by Naftali Feuerstein from the USA and, to honor his generosity, it was named after him. The *yeshiva* had also an important library and the textbooks used in teaching were printed in Tășnad by Leibush Weinger's printing house. More than 18 textbooks were printed in that printing house for the use of the students of the *yeshiva*.<sup>26</sup> A closer look at the handwritten note reveals that its author used a double name when



he signed it: Ben Zion Jacov, which was his religious, traditional Hebrew name, and Jenő Guttman, the name recorded in the civil registration documents. Additional details on the *yeshiva* of Tășnad and its widespread prestige are to be found in two notes in Hebrew written on a book entitled *Avodat Kodesh*, printed in Warsaw in 1893: “I bought these books here, at Tășnad, while I was studying here, in the *Yeshiva haRama* of Tășnad. I, Avraham Brener, one of the natives of Alba Iulia” and “I studied here, in the *Yeshiva haRama* of Tășnad, with Rabbi Zalman Brener [undecipherable signature].”<sup>27</sup> The fact that students from Alba Iulia went to study in the *yeshiva* of Tășnad is obvious proof of the impressive prestige of the school set up by Rabbi Brisk.

Another *yeshiva* mentioned by book owners in their handwritten notes was the one in Halmeu. In contrast to the *yeshiva* of Tășnad, the *yeshiva* of Halmeu did not gain the same fame, for only students from the surrounding area studied there. A handwritten note listed the names of the students that bought the book *Masechet Sanhedrin min Talmud Bavli*, printed in Vilna in 1927. The note was written on a copy of the book and the list maps out the area covered by the *yeshiva*: “Here are the names of the *yeshiva* students that gave money in order to buy the SHAS. It was bought by the *gabaim* Mordechai Zinger from Baia Mare and by Hanania Dascal from Halmeu. The young Jacov Holzer—Sătmar, [?] Berkovics—Sighet, David Zvi Spiegel—Carei, Zeev Waxberger—Săcuieni, Joshua Gottlieb—Halmeu, Menahem Mendel Farkas—Halmeu, Israel Ari Zelig—Comlăușa, Yona Hitter—Halmeu, Juda Broch—Baia Mare, Itzhac Gross—Negrești, Itzhac Eizik Brecher—Baia Mare, Moshe Ullmann—Bistrița, Meir Weis—Negrești, Zvi Ari Malek—Sighet, Shmuel Zeev Davidovitsch—Baia Mare.”<sup>28</sup> The farthest towns from which students came to study were Bistrița and Săcuieni. Therefore, the *yeshiva* in Halmeu did not achieve the same prestige as the one from Tășnad.

Very suggestive first-hand descriptions of the study and examination methods in the *yeshivot* are also present in the handwritten notes. They undoubtedly complete the information on instruction techniques and didactic strategies applied in those academies. On a book entitled *Sefer Yore Dea*, printed in 1910 in Munkács, there is a Hebrew note that says: “Here in Ardu . . . Gantz” and a second one in Hungarian: “In 1940 I studied here in the *yeshiva*. Gantz.”<sup>29</sup> The notes are followed by the content of the book recopied with spelling mistakes by the same person that wrote the notes. To summarize the books or chapters from books, or to recopy the content of a book, as is the case of this last note, might have been methods of teaching and learning. On the book printed in Vilna in 1927 and which has a note on the life in the *yeshiva* of Halmeu, there is another note that says: “I also studied, with God’s help, the *Gemara* with my dear friend Moshe Dangberg.”<sup>30</sup> This note confirms the fact that in *yeshivot* the

*baburim* studied alone, while the *naarim* studied with the help of their fellow colleagues and monitors.<sup>31</sup>

The importance of examinations in the *yeshiva* is emphasized in a note written in Hebrew on a book entitled *Melitsei Ash*, printed in Vranov nad Topľou (Poland) in 1932: “The book was given as a present to Shimshon, who was hardworking, passed the exam in *halacha*, and answered correctly, with subtlety and wisdom, to all the questions on meat and cheese. He earned a good reputation and his parents are satisfied. He hopes to leave singing for Zion, soon. The winter of 1944.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, examinations were significant moments and successfully passing them meant considerable social recognition. This note makes the transition to another set of meanings that school and education had in Jewish society. To complete higher education meant recognition within the community and eminent social positions, a certified qualification, and it also confirmed the revived and recognized Jewish identity and endorsed the dignity of those who would return, singing, to Zion, their native land. The Zionist goal of returning to the native land implicit in a biography that included higher education became evident in the circumstances of the winter of 1944, when the Jewish population in North-Western Transylvania was deported to the extermination camps by the Hungarian authorities. This note brings indirect information on life and education within a biographic context.

In addition, in the handwritten notes, book owners marked the most important moments and periods of their school life. On the title page of a book entitled *Pelah haRimon*, printed in Seini in 1932, the book owner Hayim, the son of Kandel, who was the editor of the book, wrote that he had the book printed while he was a *yeshiva* student: “Due to the endeavors of Hayim Kandel, son of Ari Kandel, son of Hayim who was a *shohet vebodek* [slaughterer] at Remetea. At the moment, I am studying in the *yeshiva* of Săpânța.”<sup>33</sup> A similar attitude of deference to school and study is penned by David Weisz from Negrești-Oaș in his handwritten notes on a copy of *Masechet Brachot min Talmud Bavli*, printed in Vienna in 1877: “Weisz David, Negrești” (in Romanian); “I studied at the *Yeshiva Rama* of Satu Mare. I hope that I will remember everything that I have learned here and that it’ll stay in my heart. And right now, I am in Satu Mare. David” (in Hebrew).<sup>34</sup> The note clearly shows that school years remain an important period in individual biographies, conveying not only formative and instructive values (“everything that I have learned here”) but also ethical and affective behavioral virtues. On such values would be shaped not only individual intelligence and intellectual competence, but also a certain sensitivity needed in order to complement and guide human behavior (“I will remember everything . . . and it’ll stay in my heart”). Identical messages can be found in other shorter notes, such as the one that appears on a copy of *Torat*

*Hovat haLevavot*, printed in Warsaw in 1875: “I studied in the holy school. Avraham Iaschar Hopenfeld, Satu Mare” (in Hebrew).<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the perception of school in the handwritten notes follows an itinerary that gradually incorporates attitudes of respect, gratitude, prestige and then deferential descriptions, such as the “holy school” in its broadest meanings (not only as a confessional school). Therefore, it is valid to assume that in the handwritten notes inscribed on the books, the book owners associated notions such as book, school, and study, with the Jewish individual and collective identity.

## “The Great History”: Weather and Climatic Events in the Handwritten Notes

REFERENCES TO the “great history,” to the political and military events that had a direct impact on the life of “ordinary people” are only vaguely present in the handwritten notes. Jewish life focused mainly on events that occurred within the community and was impervious to what was happening in the exterior. Therefore, its defensive attitude was a survival strategy and it kept the Jewish community away from the “great history,” except when it directly affected it. This secluded life was dramatically disturbed by death, especially when it occurred in unnatural circumstances or as a consequence of epidemics, and all the more so when death was caused by violence and brutality. Relevant from this perspective is a handwritten note in Hebrew that alluded to the “great history.” It appears on a copy of *Mishnat Hachamim*, printed in Lemberg in 1900, and successively recounts the death of several family members: “In memory of my mother, Hinda Lupsa, daughter of Bracha and Eliezer, deceased on the 11<sup>th</sup> of the month of Av; My father, Shlomo Ben Simha, deceased on the last day of Pesah; My sister, Sara, daughter of Menahem and Hinda Lupsa, deceased on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Adar; The son in law, Avraham, son of Pesah and Belina, deceased on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Tevet; My sister, Sara, daughter of Shlomo and Bracha, deceased on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Shvat.” The notes are followed by “God will avenge their blood,” a curse invoked when death occurs from unnatural causes such as pogroms or murder. Without explicit statement, the note indirectly refers to repressive events of the “great history” and it is an illustration of the way individual sensitivities perceived the unfolding of historical events.

Individual sensitivity, with euphemistic references to the “great history,” undergoes successive changes and finally shapes the collective awareness of the adversity of the historical and political context. When the hostility of the “great history” is acknowledged at a collective level, it radically changes the rhetoric

of the notes, rendering it more direct, expressive and analytical. Very significant is a note written in Hebrew on a copy of the book *Gittin*, printed in 1932, probably in Ukraine:

*I collected this book Gemara in Grosswardein while I was serving as a soldier in the labor regiments of the Kingdom of Evil, that is, the Kingdom of Hungary, which did a bad thing when it gathered all the Jews of Hungary, from youngsters to elders, women and children, and deported them to the Land of Ashkenaz and to its cruel leader known under the name of Hitler. May his wicked name rot!<sup>36</sup> But God will forestall his plans and will gather them together again and send them back and each and every one will go back to his family and to his home, in the land of our ancestors, and happily we shall rebuild our homes.<sup>37</sup> So be it, amen! Bucharest. May God watch upon it and build it! 5 Noeh '944.<sup>38</sup> Now among the refugees, here in the capital city of Bucharest, may its name be blessed! The humble Jehuda Schwartz.<sup>39</sup>*

In its entirety, the note is a historical chronicle of “the little ones” that records the events of the year 1944. The author, Jehuda Schwartz, took refuge in Romania after serving in the labor corps of the Hungarian army. The “Kingdom of Evil” identified with Hungary deported all the Jews in the “Land of Ashkenaz.” The author of the note, dated October 1944, expressed his hope that with God’s help the deported ones would go back to their homes and eventually to Israel. Furthermore, he felt thankful to Bucharest, the city that offered him shelter and saved his life, and blessed it in biblical terms: “May God watch upon it and build it!” It is an undisputable argument testified by personal experiences that by taking refuge in Romania, the Jews of Northern Transylvania were saved from deportation to the extermination camps. Such examples of “lived history” convey undeniable truths and judgments on the events witnessed by the protagonists. The end of the historical chronicle was never written for the majority of those deported to Auschwitz and to other extermination camps, who never came back. Therefore, the ethical conclusions that would credit Bucharest and Romania as place of refuge and salvation are not sufficiently strong. The tragedy and its unique and unimaginable dimensions were not recounted in the note of “the humble Jehuda Schwartz” as they were not entirely perceivable at that moment. Therefore, Bucharest and Romania were never ethically evaluated as real places of refuge and salvation during the Holocaust.

This note might cause a complex confrontation between the lived and the narrated history, on the one hand, and the historiography on the Holocaust of the last two decades, which proved to be a biased and vindictive one that delib-

erately leveled responsibilities. To trivialize evil means to uniformly distribute all guilt, and, in the case of the Holocaust, if responsibility, culpability and guilt are not precisely defined for each and every country and historical and political context, the discourse on the Holocaust might also lapse into trivialization. Every consideration or judgment on the Holocaust should be confronted with the testimonies of the survivors, of those who went through the atrocities of that time.

Apart from tragic events such as the Holocaust, weather and other natural phenomena marked the perception and the collective and individual sensitivity of the people. They were recorded as exceptional moments that occurred in daily life: cloudbursts, earthquakes, unprecedented frost or heat, floods. All these events affected the collective psychology, which turned them into memorable moments, and many of them were written down by the book owners. On one of the books in the Satu Mare collection there is a handwritten note in Romanian that mentions unprecedented heat in the summer of 1950: “1950. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of May there was such a heat that we could not leave the house. Carei”; “Deutschnej, Carei, 934/VI 17”<sup>40</sup> (i.e. June 17, 1934). This note completes the living, authentic history in the anonymous perception of the witnesses to past events and episodes.

In conclusion, it may be said that the handwritten notes made on Hebrew books provide valuable documentary material referring to the lived history of Jewish communities over the last two centuries. The information on events that occurred in individual or family life, as well as in the “great history,” presents the picture of Jewish society and describes the dynamics of a Jewish identity confronted with tensions coming from both tradition and assimilation tendencies. The effort to decipher and interpret the notes, most of them written in Hebrew, is a complex and challenging one, but the information they offer contains aspects that, to my knowledge, have not yet been studied by either American or Israeli historiography.

□

## Notes

1. The Satu Mare Hebrew book collection stored in the old synagogue on Decebal Street (hereafter called SM coll.), Warsaw, 1875, 19/228.
2. SM coll., no title page, 13/13.
3. Ibid., Khust, 1913, 1/127.
4. Ibid., Krakow, 1894, 4/1.
5. Ibid., Munkács, 1926, 12/78.

6. Ibid., Paks, 1894, 1/276.
7. Ibid., Vilna, 1911, 22/375.
8. Ibid., Przemysł, 1888, 3/39.
9. Ibid., no title page, 14/13.
10. Artyshchuv, Ukraine.
11. SM coll., Vilna, n.d., 28/77.
12. Jacov Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 169.
13. Ibid., note 35.
14. Nicolae Iorga, "Istoria țării prin cei mici," *Revista istorică* (Bucharest) 7, 1–3 (1921): 26.
15. Pierre Chaunu, *La memoire de l'éternité* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1975), 242–243.
16. SM coll., Bilgoraj, 1928, 2/33.
17. Ibid., Przemysł, no year, 7/232.
18. Ibid., Warsaw, 1880, 37/184.
19. Ibid. Warsaw, 1880, 40/335.
20. Ibid., Warsaw, 1897, 65/16.
21. Ibid., n.d., 8/112.
22. Ibid., Lublin, 1901, 13/241.
23. Y. Schwartz, *Toldot haKehilot beTransylvania* (Hadera: Aguda Yad Kehilot Transylvania, 1976), 43–44; Hacoheh Weingarten, *Yeshivot in Hungary* (Jerusalem, 1976).
24. SM coll., Svaliva, 1907, 1/237.
25. Ibid., Seini, 1925, 3/190.
26. Avraham Fuchs, *Tasnad, HaKehila, haSviva, Yeshivot Maharam Brisk* (Jerusalem, 1974), 53–58.
27. SM coll., Warsaw, 1893, 59/170.
28. Ibid., Vilna, 1927, 26/139.
29. Ibid., Munkács, 1910, 26/379.
30. Ibid., Vilna, 1927, 26/379.
31. Katz, 167.
32. SM coll., Vranov nad Topľou, 1932, 1/282.
33. Ibid., Seini, 1932, 6/257.
34. Ibid., Vilna, 1877, 2/380.
35. Ibid., Warsaw, 1875, 20/150.
36. The curse is taken from Ps. 109:13 and Deut. 29:19. It invokes the obliteration of the name and memory of the wicked and was usually used in relation with Haman, Shabbatai Tzvi, a heretic, sectarian leader who pretended to be Messiah and Hitler. Cf. *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1989), 133.
37. It is an allusion to the Messianic era.
38. A week after Sukkot, October–November.
39. SM coll., no title page, 4/19.
40. Ibid., no title page, 12/280.



**Abstract**

The Life of Books and the Life of People:

The Book Collection Stored in the Synagogue of Satu Mare (18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

The study presents a number of handwritten notes found in the Satu Mare Hebrew book collection stored in the old synagogue on Decebal Street. These notes provide valuable documentary material referring to the history of private life in the local Jewish communities over the last two centuries. The information on events that occurred in individual or family life, as well as in the “great history,” presents a picture of Jewish society and describes the dynamics of a Jewish identity confronted with tensions coming from both tradition and assimilationism. The contents of the notes in question ranges from references to the main moments in family life—birth and death—to comments concerning the owners’ education and other major life experiences.

**Keywords**

Hebrew books, Holocaust, Transylvanian Jews, Jewish education in Transylvania