Orthodox Judaism and Neolog Judaism. A parallel of the two Jewish communities in Timişoara

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FOUND AT THE border of two empires, Timişoara (Hungarian Temesvár, German Temeschwar, Serbian Temišvar) has managed to build an identity of its own, gaining its well-deserved renown through ethnical and cultural diversity.

A research into the Timisoara community is a fascinating domain, full of surprises. Mentioned sporadically in medieval sources, and then in the official documents of Habsburg authorities, the Jews settled in Timisoara, hoping to find a better living. The history of the Timisoara community crosses 4 uninterrupted centuries under the various rulers of the city. The integration of Banat into Greater Romania opens a special chapter into the history of Timisoara Jews. Mostly Hungarized, they had to face the new modern requirements, but also had to adapt to the conservative Romanian society.

It was possible for communities of multiple religions (Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist, Mosaic, Mohammedan), to live together thanks to the

I. The Evolution of the Community from the beginnings until the Unification of 1918

1. FROM THE CASTRUM Temesiensis to the Königliche Freistadt – the settlement of Jews in Timişoara and their evolution until the beginning of the 20th century.

The attempts to determine the zero year of the Jews' presence in Timişoara have stumbled upon lack of documents. However, the first traces of Jewish presence in Banat, found in archaeological sites and dating from the 2nd -3rd

centuries A.D. (coins dating back to the time of Bar Kochba, inscription plates, Hebrew names engraved thereon), unmistakably point to the presence of Jews in first millennium Dacia[1].The first document containing Jew-related measures comes from governor Bela the Fourth; issued in 1251, the document, promising, in 30 points, protection for Jews, stimulates them to settle in Hungary and Transylvania. We list just a few of the most important: Jews were promised freedom of movement, the possibility to buy houses, to have Jewish lawyers in their court trials. All these provisions lead to Jewish immigration. Apart from the directives of Bela the Fourth, there is no other surviving written document referring to Jews in the 13th century, so Jewish traces in Timişoara disappear for a long time.

The destructions, pillages, arsons provoked by the Tatars and Turks to conquer the city are reasons why the documents referring to the history of Jews in Banat in the 12th-14th centuries to be practically non-existent.

Timisoara's transformation in an Ottoman vilayet capital, in 1552, under the leadership of a vali (governor) or beilerbei (sometimes a ranking paşă or even vizir), brings great changes to the city, first and foremost in which regards its ethnical structure.

Privileged Muslims (and alongside them the first, Sephardi, Jews) come here and develop commerce, besides agriculture. Witnesses are the Spanish-sounding names found in documents and on tomb stones. Such a tomb stone in the Jewish cemetery of Timişoara, bearing the year 1636, one can read the name of Azriel Assael, from Thessaloniki[2].   Other official documents acquaint us with the names of Nissim, Baruch, Mussafia, names indicating a Spanish-Sephardic origins. 30 years later, there are tax lists confirming the presence of Jews in Timişoara.

Starting with the 17th century, there are several proofs attesting to the presence of Jews in Timişoara, and Francisco Grisellini is among the first to mention them. In his monograph on Banat, he states that „*in the 17th century, a few Jewish families from the South of Danube settled in Timişoara, later to be joined by others coming from Austria, Germany, Czech territories, Moravia, Poland and Hungary; we are thus dealing with two sources of Jewish communities: Sephardi and Ashkenazi.*" [3] Researches conducted so far outline the presence of Jews of both rites in Timişoara. The town was also a transit point for Jewish traders, noted in the 17th century, when Banat was part of the Ottoman Empire. In the 18th century, Ashkenazi entrepreneurs are mentioned within the Habsburg Empire. They are the ones to have built a large number of enterprises, such as the beer factory, water mills, thus contributing to the economic development of the city. The early 18th century finds the two Jewish communities – Sephardi and Ashkenazi – living together peacefully, however, observing their own ritual of religious

manifestation, only to separate in 1722-1723 function of rite, remaining united only from an administrative point of view[4].

There were 5 families of Sephardi Jews to settle in Timişoara, still in the suburbs, in 1736. Events leading to the integration of Transylvania in the Habsburg Empire affected both the city and the local Jews[5].

The period of the permanent Jewish settlement under the Austrian Habsburg regime includes the increase of the Jewish population, following immigrations from Galicia (starting from the end of the 18th century)[6].

The first archive items speaking of the organization of Jews in the Banat date back to 1739 and 1743. The document of 1739 – a conscription coming from the archives of the Hungarian state – attests to the varied composition of the Timişoara community: Sephardi and Ashkenazi.

In the census of 1739, 46 Jewish families were found to be living in Timişoara, of which 31 Ashkenazi families (139 members) and 15 Sephardi families (81 souls). The Ashkenazis were living in a house called "The Exodus From Egypt", and the Spaniards in the one called „The Hispanic Castle". A second testimonial comes from the archives of the Timişoara community and it indicates the Imperial agreement regarding the transfer of the Jewish population from the city of Belgrade to the city of Timisoara. The Jews were always admitted to the city based on a fee set up by the imperial authorities, on their proving their usefulness in the fields of manufacturing, trade and liberal professions, as well as function of the health of each individual.

The Spanish Jews are former inhabitants of Belgrade, Ragusa, from Nicopolis and Rusçuk. They organized what the documents call the "*Spanische Judengemeinde*". Jews born in Buda, Vienna, Pressburg (modern Bratislava), Krakow were Ashkenazi and they set up the "*Conscriptio Judaeorum Deutsche Judengemeinde*." Their organization depended on the dictates of the House of Habsburg.

After the unification of the two communities, German Jews shall play the role of coordinators, being preferred by the imperial administration. The rabbi, the Jewish Judge and the liaison clerks wrote all the documents in German.

However, the peace of the Jewish community is disturbed by the orders of Empress Maria Theresa (1740-1780).

In a petition of 1741, The Magistrate of Timişoara requests, among others "*the banishment of German and Spanish Jews*", as „*they live in too large numbers and they own 2 synagogues*". A first imperial resolution affecting the religious freedom of Timisoara Jews was issued in 1742 and it provisioned the unification of the two communities, the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi[7].

Shortly after, in 1776, Empress Maria Theresa issues the famous „*Judenordnung*", regulating the lives of Timisoara Jews. This document aims

at: stopping the numerical increase of Jews and limiting their economic activity. There was a disposition regarding the unification of the two communities and the total number of families was limited to 49, itinerant commerce was banned, and it was stipulated that no one could marry without prior approval.

In order not to increase the number of families, local Jews cannot house strangers for more than 12 hours and they have to pay higher taxes than Christians, anyway (this law remained into effect until 1778)[8]. By the decree of August 1749, it was established that only rabbi Levi Isac (probably the son of Levy Abraham Mayer), hakham Iuda Israel, Iacob Cohn, Philip Elias, "horse whisperer" Joseph, Israel Ruben and Iacob Coronelle, could remain in Timişoara. But the respective regulation was disregarded by the authorities, as in August the same year the empress sends a trenchant letter to the commander of the Timisoara garrison, ordering him to ban the settlement of Jews in Timişoara and Pancevo (nowadays Serbia)[9]. As one can easily notice, intolerance against Jews becomes an integrant part of the official policy during the Theresian period.

Although she was considering the Jews to be "*innere Feinde*" (internal enemies), after 1760, she issued some edicts providing a certain protection to Jews throughout the Habsburg Empire (ex. 1762 – the forced converting of Jewish children to Christianity).

According to the diet project *Opinio de Iudaesis*, the Timiş county held 1598 Jews in 1781. Count Paolo Wallis, the commander of Timişoara city, acknowledges the presence of 144 Jews in the city.

He praises them, calling them „*always loyal*" and demands that the Timisoara military authorities grant them protection and give them the possibility to carry out their trade.

In 1783, reforming emperor Joseph II issued the famous tolerance decree for Hungarian Jews, called „*Systematica gentis Judaicae Regulatio*" – The Systematic Regulation of the Jewish People's Statute – a document of an exceptional value, cancelling many of the discriminatory dispositions that had regulated the life of Jewish communities[10].

The most important decisions of the imperial patent refer to the usage of Hungarian, German and Latin languages for the creation of various documents, to the opening of a school system similar to the model of Christian schools, to the permission to attend higher education national schools and to the abolishment of distinctive signs.

The ordinance of 1787 was part of the general integration policy inaugurated by Joseph II and shows the government's tendency to include Jews in the modern state[11].

Together with the commencement to introduce citizens' rights in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the number of Jews increased through Ashkenazi

immigration, but its rhythm remained somewhat slow due to limitations. Banat, a province managed directly from Vienna, faced a more Ashkenazi than Sephardi migration in the beginning[12].

As of 1830, there is a modest increase in the number of Jewish families in Banat, through immigration from the West (Partium or Hungary) or from Poland and the Romanian Countries (Moldavia and Wallachia). In mid-18th century, the city of Timişoara was „*a favourite refuge for the Jews of the Balkan Peninsula*" withdrawing from the Ottoman Empire.

Although enthusiastically involved in supporting the ideals of the Revolution of 1848, both in Banat and in Hungary (some even hungarized their names), the situation of Timişoara Jews faced a serious decline following the events from the autumn of 1848. Lack of food made the commander to banish from the city a large part of the civil population, among which many Jews, on 21 May 1849. However, the city met a special ethnical and confessional tolerance under N.J. Preyer – mayor of Timişoara (1840 – 1850); it was this tolerance that allowed the Jews to become even more involved in commerce.

The period following the emancipation includes the process of integrating Jews into society and their linguistic Hungarization. It is the moment of the breach between communities, following the dispute between Orthodox and Reformist Jews, declared at the Congress of Hungary Jews (1868), into Orthodox, Neolog (Reformist) and status-quo communities. Orthodox communities, in turn, separate into Hasidic communities and communities opposing Hasidism or non-Hasidic. The Reformist (Neolog) strengthens especially in the great cities[13].

On 8 June 1867, Emperor Franz Josef crowns himself as king of Hungary and approves the union of Transylvania and Hungary. The new political framework shall create the premises for the change in the legal status of Transylvania Jews. In November 1867, the law ratified by the Parliament contained 2 articles:

1. Israeli dwellers of the countries are deemed equally qualified like Christian dwellers with regards to exercising all their civil and political rights;

2. any contrary law, custom or decree is annulled[14].

In December 1867, by the issuing of the Emperor-confirmed text, the civil emancipation of Hungary and Transylvania Jews was a reality. In the context of debates regarding the legislation of Jews' civil emancipation in 1867, the Pest community proposes the assembly of a Congress of Representatives, through a memorandum addressed to all the Jewish communities in Hungary and Transylvania, in order to create a new institutional and educational system. 68 delegates participated from Transylvania.

The Congress works were carried out in Pest in February 1869 and had the following agenda:

1. the enactment of a new community organization;

2. regulating the Jewish educational system;

3. the institutionalization of such congresses;

The 1867 political reorganization of the Empire, by setting up the double leadership, Austrian and Hungarian, also brought along some changes in the lives of Banat Jews: their emancipation is recognized throughout the empire and in 1895 the Judaic faith became equal in rights with the other beliefs (after 1867, there had been a considerable improvement in the material and social situation of the Jewish community)[15]. The reformism of Joseph II made it possible to have access to writings, ideologies, it conquered the progress-loving intellectual elite.

While Reformist Jews were satisfied with the law, a large part of the Orthodox was reserved, seeing the emancipation as a threat to the Judaic identity. The emancipation, recognizing the equality of rights with the other religious and linguistic communities and the following acceptance by the Jewish community administrations of the existence of separations function of rite had a positive influence on the increase of the number of Jews in the city.

Following the Hungarization process, the number of Jews shall determine a forced increase of the population after 1867, as they would be included in the Hungarian population. According to the census of 1880, in Timisoara the number of Jews was of 4199, of which 4019 in the city, 3 in the Freidorf neighbourhood and 177 in Mehala. Following the census of 1900, one learns that the number of Jews has increased considerably; thus, there were 6058 Jews registered in Timişoara.

The Jewish community of Timisoara increased in numbers, reaching nearly 7000 persons around the time of World War One (approximately 10% of the entire population).

Faith Groups

The differences emerging during the Congress of Pest of 1868 drove a so-called Orthodox minority – 56 members, to leave the proceedings and to organize their own congress in August 1870, where they issued their own statutes and to which 130 Orthodox communities adhered[16].

It was thus that 3 views were created within the Jewish community of Hungary and Transylvania. Those accepting the system adopted by the Congress of Pest formed the Neolog branch, those choosing the validity of the Statute of 1870 are the Orthodox, while the community preferring to maintain the state of affairs existing before the adoption of these changes formed the status quo trend. The statutes adopted by the Congress would henceforth set the bases for the organization of the Neolog Jewish communities of Hungary and Transylvania. According to the adopted orientations, the Timisoara group was, in the early 20th century, a large Western rite (Neolog) community, based in the City, 3

Orthodox communities based in Fabric, Mehala and Iosefin, the status quo ante community and the Spanish rite community – both in Fabric.

After the creation of its state unity, Romania inherited a complicated national problem. Although not having the aspects that the new multinational states resulting from the breakdown of Austro-Hungary were facing, the presence and behaviour of the cohabitating nationalities in the new provinces required a fundamental regulation of their relationship with the Romanian nation and state[17].

Thus, the Law for the General Status of Faith Groups was classifying faith groups into:

- historical faith groups (Orthodox, United Greek Catholic, Catholic (of Latin, Greek-Ruthenian and Armenian rite), Reformed (Calvin), Evangelic-Lutheran, Unitarian, Armenian-Gregorian, Mosaic, Mohammedan.

- new groups

- associations[18]

Compared to other faith groups, the Mosaic did not have a central group authority, to encompass all the Jews of Romania. It was organized by autonomous communities of various rites: Sephardim, Orthodox (Ashkenazim) and reformed.

The Timisoara was Neolog par excellence.

Neologs

The Timisoara Sephardi kept their rite unaltered in the synagogue of the Fabric neighbourhood. Following the decrease in the number of parishioners, they administratively joined the Neolog community from the City in 1894[19]. After the general Jewish Congress of 1868, the Timișoara community declares itself to be Neolog. The Neologs had the headquarters in the City, where it remains to this day.

Orthodox

The Orthodox community, although created since 1869, could only have a full-time rabbi in 1901. A small Orthodox community also survived in the Fabric district, led by rabbi Herman Sofer, a descendant of the famous Gaon family. Orthodox – ancient traditions and forms of religious expression. The Orthodox community would be set up in 1871, and its synagogue would be built in 1895. Before World War One, their number had reached approximately 200 families in Iosefin and around 100 families in Fabric[20].   They obeyed the Jewish traditions severely. Jewish Orthodox communities were settled in Fabric, on Ion Creanga Street, where there was a proper Jewish neighbourhood. Another Jewish Orthodox Community also existed in Iosefin, on Resitei Street.

The synagogue built in 1910 still exists there.

Status quo

The few status –quo communities alternatively installed Orthodox and Neolog rabbis. The Fabric community separated from the City Community. A Neolog-type interior was created in the synagogue, and a bar-mitzvah was introduced for girls. Dr. Iacov Singer (1910 – 1930) was closer to the Neologs, making an administrative unification with the City community, in 1933. He was a very special preacher, leaving behind valuable historical works regarding the Jews of Timisoara[21].

2. Reformed Judaism versus Orthodox Judaism.
Europe vs the United States of America

Until the Enlightenment, Judaism was able to keep all its forms of life, Law and faith as developed in the Middle Ages. But with the 18th-19th centuries, the long Jewish Middle Ages and the initially desired and subsequently forced *"isolation"* of Jews from the rest of the world had gone for good. This is the point of the spiritual departure from the ghetto, as well.

Human rights for Jews meant: giving up their old autonomy and self-established rabbinic isolation – not only in France and England, but also in the German states and in the kingdom of the Danube. Moreover, it was in Germany where the great dispute regarding the reform of Judaism was reached. It was in a fully aware and energetic way that German Judaism made all the efforts to enter and integrate the bourgeois society.

 - instead of the mediaeval isolation and autonomy of the Jewish community, we now speak of the legal-political-social integration of believer individuals and communities within the modern national state: a new community order and the partial replacement of the Halakha law by the state law.

 - instead of a life in the ghetto, restricted and isolated through all the possible mediaeval customs, we are now talking of a modernization of the entire structure of Jewish life, starting with clothing and up to eating habits.

Reformed Judaism started as Judaism through some modest changes, under the shape of prayers and liturgy in synagogues; it ended as the most important and efficient Judaism of the 19th century in Central Europe, and towards the end of the 20th century in America as well. The explanation is that reformed Judaism approaches the issue of integration and segregation and it explains the way in which, in the conditions of social and political integration, a certain Judaism can still blossom. As a movement dealing with the issues of time and the condition

of Jews, it was capable of changing itself, changing its most profound values and concerns. Reformed Judaism is presented by those Jews who want to understand Judaism not as a legal-ritual religion, but as a prophetic-ethical religion. This type of Judaism has an evolutional, historical thinking, both in theory and in practice.

The full and time-honoured statement of Reformed Judaism gained expression not in Europe, but on the American continent. In the United States, Reformed Judaism was especially strong, when important rabbis, such as Leo Merzbacher, Samuel Adler, Isaac Mayer Wise had emigrated from the German-speaking area. They initially set up "reformed leagues" and „temples" (this name was preferred to the name of synagogue). Moreover, thanks to the initiatives of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, a radically reformed prayer book was published in 1857, in German and Hebrew, which, significantly, lacks any indication referring to a promised land and a restoration of the Jewish state.

The culminating point of this movement is the Pittsburgh Platform (1885), accepted as definitive position of Reformed Judaism. On this meeting of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the official organ of reformed rabbis approached the matters dividing Judaism and made an official statement about them. These rabbis were not the founders of a new faith, but the supreme authorities of a well-established and long-lasting belief. At the end of the 19th century, Reformed Judaism already was a major component of religious life in America and Germany, now also penetrating other countries. Reformed Judaism is expressly defined as a "progressive" religion, a religion that always aims to be "according to the requirements of reason" and "to progress" in gnosis[22].

While Orthodoxy is about keeping the mediaeval status quo-ante, in Reformed Judaism we are dealing with an amazing religious-cultural reform, with a reform of the Judaic law, education, language, architecture, of practically the Judaic way of life.

A first counterweight to Reformed Judaism was Orthodox Judaism. Reformed Judaism, widespread towards the end of the century, started to pay the price for its policy of assimilation: the decreased participation to the divine service, where only a few of the elements from the old Jewish religion were to be found. It no longer seemed unlikely that modern reformed Judaism should combine with the liberal Christianity.

The word „Orthodoxy" which met a large scale usage during the 19th century to delimit it from Reformed Judaism was used for the first time, referring to Judaism, in 1795: a synonym for „faithfulness to the Law", „faithfulness to the Torah". Up to this day Judaic Orthodoxy encompasses all those Jews who still feel bound to the written Torah, as word inspired by God, and to oral Torah, as interpretation of the former, representing only the two main sources of the

Halakha, the Judaic law, that the Orthodox have to follow in their daily actual lives[23].

Among modern Judaic concepts, Orthodox Judaism is that integrationist system that mediates between the inherited Judaism of the dual Torah and the requirements of an existence integrated into modern circumstances[24].

Orthodox Judaism appeared in Germany, mid-20th century. It acquired a compact shape among the Jews who rejected reform and who took the decision to remain stuck in the way of living and view of the world that they had known. The reformed claimed that Judaism could change and that it was a product of history. Orthodox contesters denied any possibility of change, claiming that Judaism appeared by the will of God, that it was eternal and supernatural and not historical at all.

In the United States, the European Orthodoxy attempts to unite: in 1896, Rabbi Isaac Elchannan sets up a first American Yeshiva, that would generate, in 1928, the first institution of general higher education under Jewish leadership – Yeshiva College.

In 1902 the Union of Orthodox Rabbis was founded, surviving to this day, however a union to which only a part of the East-European communities and rabbis adhered.

The rise of Orthodoxy in America is primarily based on demographical causes: in 1908, there were 1.8 million Jews in America and of these three quarters were of Eastern European origins (see the pogroms and anti-Jewish laws in Russia and Poland). The Eastern Jews were marked by their mediaeval religion and remained faithful to the traditional way of life and structures. They have a distant external attitude towards latent modernity and they wear their dark, traditional costumes of 18th century Polish peasants on the streets of Paris or New York.

The result: function of the Jew's origin, one gets from the religious circle of life, from the layer of population to an asynchronicity of consciousness.

From the beginning to the end of the 19th century the two studied Judaic systems were created: first, Reformed Judaism then, a few decades later, Orthodox Judaism. During this period, both trends reached a coherent form of expression, each having a clear image of what they required to be done and of doctrines. What these two trends have in common is that both ideas call on the ideas and documents of the Torah.

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Notes

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Abstract

The study deals with the evolution of the Jewish Community in Timisoara, from the first documentary record until the 20th century it also mentioned the legislation that governed the life of this community, decrees which granted or cancelled certain rights. It stressed in particular the division in 3 orientation: Orthodox, Neolog and Status quo, after Congress of Jews in Budapest in 1868. The dichotomy between Orthodox Judaism and Reform Judaism is traced both in Europe

and in US, where Reform Judaism emerged as a major component of religious life.

Keywords