

GENERAL ASPECTS REGARDING THE JEWS IN SATU MARE COUNTY AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Abstract: According to the census made in the time of Joseph II, the Jews in Satu Mare County accounted for 1.9% of the population as a whole. Their main occupations were related to agriculture, the crafts, trade, and land leasing. In view of the legislation in force during that period, no Jew lived in the mining towns of Baia Mare and Baia Sprie. In the city of Satu Mare, their number was very small. The majority lived in rural areas, ensuring, by virtue of their activities, the link between urban and rural areas. Their religion, which was different from that of the Christian population, their mentality, clothing and physical appearance meant that they were regarded with reluctance by the majority of the population from Satu Mare County, this situation lasting until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Jews, population, county, census, conscription

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General aspects of the Jewish population in Hungary during the eighteenth century

The origins of the Jews in eighteenth-century Hungary are relatively recent, dating no further back than the end of the seventeenth century, when after a century and a half of Ottoman occupation, Hungary was recaptured by the Habsburgs. The increase in Jewish population from a few thousand people in the late seventeenth century to about 300,000 in 1830 was due to a large immigration, fostered by promising economic conditions and relatively favourable legislation.

This immigration occurred in two stages. The first wave brought Jews from the Balkans and the German states, or from even more remote regions, such as France. They were included in the colonisation of fertile lands in the southern region of Hungary, a region that had recently been freed from Ottoman occupation. The *Judeorum* conscription ordered by Charles IV recorded 12,000 Jews in Hungary, in 1735-1738. The second wave of immigration occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, between 1735 and 1785-1787. The number of Jews who were settled now in these areas was around 60,000. They came in two stages. In the first stage, about 30,000 to 35,000 Jews came mainly from neighbouring Moravia and fewer from Bohemia, where, as of 1726, family legislation had established a series of limits on the number of Jewish families. The majority settled on the northern borders of Hungary, not far from their communities of origin, along the of the western regions of the Burgenland, near Vienna, or in the mountainous

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regions of Slovakia, where they formed a community similar to the one in Moravia, which the Hungarian Jews called Oberland. Another group, lower in number, settled down in Croatia or in the region of the military border, as well as in Banat and Transylvania. Here one could find a small number of Sephardi Jews, who had come from the Balkans.

In the second stage, the Jewish population came from Poland and, after its dismantlement, especially from Galicia. In the beginning, this migration was slow, but it gained momentum from the last third of the eighteenth century until 1830. A wave estimated at 25,000 arrived before 1780, and another of 45,000 before 1830. Hungary became a country of opportunities for the 10,000 Jews from Galicia.² Especially in its eastern half, this was the region with the densest Jewish population in Europe, a region which proved to be inexhaustible for emigration, sending waves of emigrants not only to Hungary, but also to the Romanian Principalities, Ukraine and Southern Russia, as well as to Vienna or the United States of America towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The vast majority of the Jews in Hungary were concentrated in three relatively compact regions in the north-east, north-west and in the centre, on a radius of approximately 50 miles around Bratislava, Sátoraljaújhely and Budapest. The census of 1787 recorded two-thirds of the Jews of Hungary as living in the border regions of Hungary. In the south, the Jews were spread out in villages or in a chain of communities that stretched down from Nagykanizsa in the west to Arad in the east. During the eighteenth century, most Jews lived alongside Germans, Slovaks, Ruthenians and Romanians. In the nineteenth century the centre of gravity started to be represented by the regions inhabited mostly by the Hungarian population. Around 1830, a third of the population was located only in the territorial area of present-day Hungary. By 1880, this number had increased to more than half of the population, a percentage which did not change significantly until the First World War.

Settlements with a population of 2,000 to 10,000 represented a type of settlements where the Jewish population had a higher percentage. These boroughs reflected the most characteristic function played by Jews in the economy, as mediators between the rural and the urban areas. They had a typical position in the life of the community. Jews settled in such localities ruled by the great families: Esterházy (Eisenstadt, Mattersdorf, Pápa), Batthyány (Rechnitz, Nagykanizsa), Pálffy (Bratislava, Stampfen), Károlyi (Carei), Festetics (Keszthely), Zichy (Óbuda until 1765), Schönborn (Munkács, Beregszász), some prelates (Makó, Veszprém), the royal chamber (Óbuda) and others.³

² Michael K. Silber, Hungary before 1918, in http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hungary/Hungary_before_1918

³ *Idem.*

The data preserved until today show that during the reign of Joseph II, on the territory of Hungary lived 6,085,236 people, 78,345 of whom were Jews. Thus, they represented 1.28% of the total number of inhabitants.

Table no. 1 – The number of the Jewish population of Hungary and Transylvania

| Region | Total population | Jews |
|--------------|------------------|--------|
| Hungary | 6,085,236 | 78,345 |
| Transylvania | 1,372,090 | 1,940 |

Of these, the largest percentage (1.8%) lived in the region “The left bank of the Danube”. At the opposite pole was “The area between the rivers Tisza and Mureş”, inhabited by Jews in a percentage of only 0.1% of the total population. This irregular distribution of the Jews on the territory of Hungary was due to several factors that influenced their settlement in different areas of the country.

Table no. 2 – The total population of Hungary in 1787, by denomination/religion (in %)⁴

| Region | Catholics | Evangelicals | Reformed | Orthodox | Jews |
|---|-----------|--------------|----------|----------|------|
| The right bank of the Danube | 73.5 | 9.3 | 14.7 | 1.2 | 1.3 |
| The left bank of the Danube | 78.4 | 78.1 | 1.7 | 0 | 1.8 |
| Between the rivers Danube and Tisza | 60.5 | 8 | 22.2 | 8.5 | 0.8 |
| The right bank of the Tisza | 68.3 | 12.2 | 17.7 | 0.1 | 1.7 |
| The left bank of the Tisza | 35.6 | 1.6 | 41.2 | 20.4 | 1.2 |
| The area between the rivers Tisza and Mureş | 17.1 | 0.7 | 1.2 | 80.9 | 0.1 |

Hostile geographical conditions and the prohibition to settle in privileged regions, such as the mining areas and Jász-Nagy-Kun – Szolnok

⁴ Thirring Gusztáv, *Magyarország népessége II. József Korában*, A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Kiadása, Budapest, 1938, p. 50.

and Hajdu, created a barrier to the establishment of the Jews in the centre of Hungary, by controlling the expansion of Galicia to the west, and the one from Moravia and Bohemia to the east. The buffer area delineated two distinct regions of the Jewish settlement in Hungary, separated by the river Váh, towards the Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca. Even after the settlement restrictions were lifted in the mid-nineteenth century, this division proved to be remarkably long-lasting. The linguistic differences of the Yiddish spoken in Central and Eastern Hungary by the Holocaust survivors corresponded with the regions of origin in Moravia and Galicia noted in the census of 1735.⁵

In the eighteenth century limits were established for the settlement of Jews. Certain regions were granted privileges because they did not tolerate the Jewish population (Croatia, the regions of Jász-Nagy-Kun- Szolnok and Hajdu, mining towns and their contiguous areas) or because they had restrictions as regards accepting them (the military frontier, Banat, Transylvania).

The occupational structure of Jews was linked to the agrarian character of the economy. A conscription organised in 1767-1768 gives us a picture of the occupations of about 5,500 family breadwinners. For about a third the occupation was not known, so most of them were recorded as very poor families. Lessees, publicans and alcohol producers amounted to approximately 17% of the family breadwinners. Another 17% were craftsmen: butchers, tailors, furriers, glaziers, shoemakers, etc. The rest of the 1,800 family “heads” were employed in trade. Of these, those who had a higher social status were merchants (*mercatores*); about a quarter were tradesmen (*quaestores*) selling certain categories of goods, such as leather, textile, wool and tobacco; and more than half were traders.

The lowest positions were occupied by peddlers, the so-called “bundle Jews” (*Pinkeljude* or *dorsarius*) who roamed the villages, chased by dogs and hit by the stones children threw at them, carrying their merchandise on their backs, selling needles, thread, umbrellas, hats, scissors and other utensils, collecting old clothes or small animals. The most prosperous collected goods from the production of grain, by amassing stocks in the city. In exchange, they brought to people living in villages colonial goods, such as spices, coffee, tea, ironwork, good quality textiles. Many worked for the commission of agrarian traders in Vienna, Bratislava and Pest, employed in import-export businesses with foreign markets.

After his accession to the throne, Joseph II was concerned about how to improve the situation of the Jews in Hungary. His intentions were communicated to Count Esterházy Ferencz, on 13 May 1781. Thus, on 31

⁵ Michael K. Silber, Hungary before 1918, in http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hungary/Hungary_before_1918

May 1783, the Hungarian government signed a decree known as *Systematica gentis Judaicae regulatio*. This laid down the following:

- With the exception of mining towns, royal free cities were opened to the Jews;
- The legislation relating to the Jews should no longer be drafted in Hebrew or Yiddish, but in Latin, German and Hungarian, the languages that were used in that period in Hungary and that young Jews were required to learn within two years.
- Documents written in Hebrew and Yiddish were no longer legal; books in Hebrew were only used in prayer;
- Jews were to organise elementary schools. The themes studied in Jewish schools had to be the same as those in state schools; the same textbooks had to be used in all elementary schools; anything that might undermine religious agreements had to be omitted. In the early years, due to a lack of Jewish teachers, Christian teachers had to be employed, but they were not allowed to have anything to do with the religious life of the students;
- Young Jews could be accepted in the universities and they could specialise in any area, except in theology;
- Jews could also deal with agriculture if they could cultivate the same crops as Christians, without their help;
- Jews were allowed to engage in various industrial activities and to be admitted into guilds. Also, they were allowed to have seals and to sell gunpowder, but their exclusion from mining towns remained in force. Christian craftsmen were allowed to have Jewish apprentices.
- All the distinctive signs worn by Jews until now had to be abolished, and they could even wear a sword. On the other hand, men had to give up all the distinctive signs imposed by religion, including shaving their beards.

This last provision aroused the discontent of the Jewish population, who signed a petition on April 22, 1783, expressing their gratitude for the favourable new legislative changes. However, they requested the emperor to give up the provision that forced them to shave their beards, by reminding him of his own principle according to which one should not interfere in anyone else's religion. Joseph II approved this request.

There followed two other decrees that influenced the lives of the Jewish inhabitants of Hungary, namely the decree of 23 July 1787, by which Jews had to choose German first names and surnames, and that of 1789, which established that Jews had to serve in the military. Although the intentions of the first decree were to standardise and educate the Jewish population, name differences appeared between the Christian population and the Jewish one throughout time. The surnames adopted by Jews soon became identified as Jewish regardless of their Teutonic origin and they were quickly

abandoned by non-Jews. As regards military service, it must be said that the military conscription of the Jews in Hungary took place on August 10, 1788, half a year after it started in Galicia. Jews did not have to serve in combat units, but only in transportation bodies. Initially 204 Jews were to be recruited. Although, initially, their representatives tried to convince the emperor to abandon the idea of military service, they were not successful in this regard.

At the end of his reign, Joseph II was faced with the dissatisfaction of the Hungarian nobility against his reforms. On his deathbed he relinquished a part of the edicts for Hungary, except for the Edict of Tolerance and two other laws. Almost immediately after the death of the emperor, royal free cities sought to banish Jews from their premises. Law 38 of 1790, known as *De Judaeis*, was approved by the Hungarian Diet and it stipulated that the Statute of January 1, 1790 should be maintained in force. This was understood by Jews as being related to their legal situation, entailing also the fact that there would be no restrictions on their lives in royal free cities. However, the Christian inhabitants thereof interpreted the law in the sense that the size of the Jewish population in these cities should be frozen at the level of the year 1790. Half a century had to pass for the Diet to consider a more comprehensive legislation so as to determine the legal status of Jews.

In the absence of state intervention, the Josephine school system in Hungary decayed slightly, not because of the authorities' opposition, but because of the financial difficulties faced by Jewish communities. Only a few schools in the larger cities survived.

The demographic evolution of Jews in Satu Mare County

After the end of the rebellion led by Rákóczi II, the Court of Vienna began to take measures for the reorganisation of the territories affected by these events. In accordance with this official policy of the Habsburg Empire, Count Károlyi Sándor, the supreme leader of the county of Satu Mare, started the colonisation of Danubian Swabians on the territory of his domain. Thus, several families of Swabians who were to live there and work in agriculture were brought from the south of Germany, in the regions of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. His wish was to populate the regions in which the number of inhabitants had dropped very much, to intensify labour in agriculture, to cultivate plots of land that had not been worked until then, and to increase the number of Roman Catholic believers in this area.

The newcomers were faced with numerous hardships, one of them being the differences arising between them and the native Hungarian population, most of which was of Protestant denomination. In parallel with the attempt to solve the problems emerging in connection with the Swabian settlers, Count Károlyi began steps to bring families of Jews who had been expelled from Poland on his estates in Satu Mare County. To that end, he requested from the Court of Vienna permission to colonise the territory of Szatmár with a Swabish population that would help the economic and

commercial stability of the county. The Royal Locumtenency Council approved the request of the count, provided that the authorities of the county had a clear picture of all the Jews who would live in this region.

Thus, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, several Jewish families settled on the territory of Satu Mare County. We know that, according to the conscription from 1720-1721, 112 Jews lived in this area, i.e. 0.27% of the total population of the county. In 1723, Count Károlyi concluded a contract with some of them regarding their rights and obligations on his domain. The contract was renewed in the next period.⁶

The expectations that Count Károlyi Sándor had from the colonisation of Jews on the territory of the county were partly confirmed. Their main occupations were landholding, brandy production, publicanism, more rarely, agriculture and trade. They transported goods not only to different parts of Szatmár, but also in the more remote regions of Hungary, Poland and Moravia. In case their work was considered profitable by the Austrian authorities or by the Royal Hungarian Locumtenency Council, they were supported to achieve their economic or commercial objectives. Thus, there are documents that indicate that in 1771 the central authorities intervened with the local authorities to grant commercial passports to Jews who transported good quality bread.⁷

The study of the demographic evolution of the Jewish population in the county of Satu Mare in the eighteenth century faces a series of obstacles that are difficult to pass, due to gaps in the official documents of the period under consideration. Thus, only the counties of Arad, Maramureş and Bihor, and the town of Satu Mare appeared in conscriptions regarding the Jewish population from 1727 and 1735-1739. The conscriptions from 1743-1745 included only the counties of Arad and Bihor. The one from 1746-1748 contains information about the situation in the counties of Satu Mare (including the city with the same name), Arad and Maramureş.

The population census of 1784-1787, conducted at the order of Joseph II, included information about the family, social and material situation of the Christian and Jewish population. However, although Jews were listed under special headings, the information about them is not usable for determining their occupation and age groups. This fact is due to the aggregation of data referring to Jews with those about the Christian population.⁸ After the death of Joseph II, the vast majority of the documentation collected in the census of 1784-1787 was destroyed. Thus, an important demographic source for the situation of the population at the end of the eighteenth century was lost.

⁶ Anton E. Dörner, *Evreii din comitatul Satu Mare în veacul al XVIII-lea*, in Hans Gehl, Viorel Ciubotă (eds.), "Relații interetnice de contact româno-maghiaro-ucraineană din secolul al XVIII-lea până în prezent", Ed. Muzeului Sătmărean, Satu Mare, 1999, p. 135.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

⁸ Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, *Istoria evreilor din Transilvania (1623-1944)*, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 1994, p. 20.

Table no. 3 – The legitimate population by religion⁹

| County/ City | Number of households | Number of Christian families | Number of Jewish families | Total | The Christian population present | The Jewish population present | Total |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|---|--|---------|
| Satu Mare | 23,367 | 23,343 | 524 | 26,867 | 131,990 | 2,569 | 134,559 |
| Satu Mare | 1,735 | 1,836 | 1 | 1,837 | 8,205 | 4 | 8,209 |
| Baia Mare | 777 | 934 | 0 | 934 | 3,882 | 0 | 3,882 |
| Baia Sprie | 812 | 973 | 0 | 973 | 3,819 | 0 | 3,819 |
| Bereg and Ugocea | 16,055 | 17,491 | 440 | 17,931 | 88,994 | 2,170 | 91,164 |
| Maramureș | 19,653 | 17,861 | 479 | 18,340 | 83,864 | 2,254 | 86,118 |
| Bihor | 52,835 | 61,108 | 231 | 61.339 | 316,862 | 1,093 | 317,955 |

According to statistics drawn up in 1784-1787, 26,867 families lived in the county of Satu Mare. 524 of those families were Jewish, representing a percentage of 1.95%. With the exception of a single family (composed of 4 members), who lived in the royal free city of Satu Mare, all the others lived in various rural regions of the county. The 524 Jewish families included 2,569 people, that is, 1.90% of the total population of Satu Mare County. The legislation at the end of the eighteenth century relating to the Jewish population is reflected very well in the preserved demographic data. Thus, the mining towns of Baia Mare and Baia Sprie were not inhabited by any Jew, respecting the legislative provisions in this regard that had been introduced at the time of Empress Maria Theresa's reign.

Table no. 4 – The faith of the legitimate population, including differentiation by sexes¹⁰

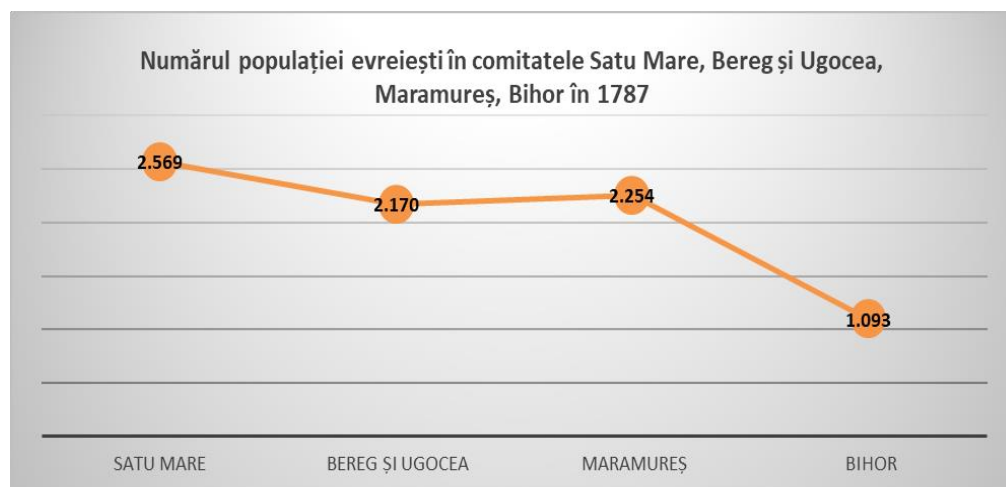
⁹ Thirring Gustáv, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

| Coun-ty/ City | Christi-an men | Christian women | Total | Jewish men | Jewish women | Total | Total men | Total wo-men | Total popula-tion |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------|------------|--------------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Satu Mare | 67,610 | 64,380 | 131,990 | 1,318 | 1,251 | 2,569 | 68,928 | 65,631 | 134,559 |
| Satu Mare | 4,023 | 4,182 | 8,205 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4,025 | 4,184 | 8,209 |
| Baia Mare | 1,919 | 1,963 | 3,882 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,919 | 1,963 | 3,882 |
| Baia Sprie | 1,894 | 1,925 | 3,819 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,894 | 1,925 | 3,819 |

Out of the 2,569 people of Jewish religion who lived in the county of Satu Mare, 1,318 were men and 1,251 women. In the city of Satu Mare, in 1787, the authorities recorded a single family consisting of 2 men and 2 women. If we make an analysis of the entire population of Satu Mare County, we will notice that men (Christians and Jews) outnumbered women by 3,297 individuals.

Chart no. 1 – The number of Jewish inhabitants in the counties of Satu Mare, Ugocea, Maramureş and Bihor in 1787¹¹



To get a clearer picture on the number of the Jewish population in the county of Satu Mare, we conducted a short comparative study with the surrounding counties, Bereg-Ugocea, Maramureş and Bihor. Analysing the data of official statistics from the end of the eighteenth century, we can see that in the regions neighbouring Satu Mare there was a much smaller number of Jewish residents than in the county in our attention. 1,093 Jews lived in

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

Bihor, which is less than half of the population of the same religion that lived in the county of Satu Mare. In Maramureș, in 1787, there were 2,254 Jews, and in Bereg-Ugocea 2,170. These numerical differences with regard to the Jewish population can also be explained by the attitude of the county authorities, the nobility and the rest of the Christian population towards the Jews. To this were added the economic conditions of the county, which could be favourable or unfavourable to the activities of the Jewish population.

Conclusions.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Jews in Satu Mare County accounted for 1.9% of the population as a whole, the percentage comprising both men and women. Their occupations were related to agriculture, crafts, trade, and landholding. The amount of their contribution per person ranged between 400 and 500 florins, to which was added an annual fee of 5 Thalers. These amounts were determined by the Diet, but the nobles on whose lands they had settled, the city of Satu Mare, the county authorities and the Catholic and Protestant Churches could charge other fees for their own treasury.

In compliance with the legislation in force, no Jews lived in the mining towns of Baia Mare and Baia Sprie. Even in the city of Satu Mare, their number was very small. The majority lived in the rural area, ensuring, through their activities, the link between the urban and the rural areas.

Their physical appearance, clothing, mentality and religion were completely different from those of the Christian population, leading to Jews being regarded with reluctance by the population of Satu Mare County. This situation lasted until the mid-nineteenth century.