

ASPECTS OF JEWISH HISTORY AND CULTURE IN ORADEA

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ABSTRACT: Aspects of Jewish history and culture in Oradea.

This article presents an overview of the rich and complex history of the Jewish community in Oradea, a city in northwestern Romania. The presence of Jews in Oradea dates back to the 15th century, although their permanent settlement was initially forbidden. It was not until the early 18th century that they managed to settle in the city, especially in the outlying areas. The community experienced significant growth in the 19th century, peaking in the early 20th century when it accounted for about 5.4% of the city's total population.

Keywords: *Oradea, Jews, history, contributions, heritage, cultural identity.*

Introduction

Oradea, a city in the north-west of Romania, was noted for its multicultural character, where ethnic and religious diversity wove a vibrant and cosmopolitan atmosphere. Hungarians, Romanians, Germans, Jews and other groups contributed distinctly to the city's identity, like unique pieces of a fascinating puzzle. In this article I will focus on the influence of the Jewish community on the city.

The presence of Jews in Oradea dates back to the 15th century, although their permanent settlement was initially forbidden. It was not until the early 18th century¹ that they managed to settle in the city, especially in the outlying areas. The community experienced significant growth in

1 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Sabatarienii în contextul vieții transilvane: (sec. XVI-XX) (The Sabbatarians in the context of Transylvanian life: (16th-20th centuries))*, vol. I., Cluj-Napoca, Risoprint, 2014, pp. 607-608.

the 19th century, peaking in the early 20th century when it accounted for about 5.4% of the city's total population.

"The history of Oradea is not complete and cannot be told without including the history of the Jewish community that lived here."² The presence of Jews dates back to the Middle Ages, contributing significantly to the economic, cultural and social life of the city, but the lack of medieval archives (destroyed during the Holocaust-according to the explanation of the Jewish community-Oradea) challenges the research of Jewish history in the city. However, the perseverance of historians and the discovery of new sources may gradually reveal fascinating details of this period. Uncovering and exploiting Oradea's Jewish heritage is essential for a better understanding of the city's identity. The history of Oradea's Jews spans several centuries and is rich in cultural, religious and social significance. Up to a third of Oradea's population was Jewish, making it the largest Jewish community in Transylvania. "The Jewish community of Oradea was one of the most important in Transylvania"³

In the interwar period, the Jewish community played a significant role in the economic, cultural and social life of the city. Oradea's Jews had an important share in various fields, such as trade, industry, liberal professions and art. Their integration into Oradea society was significant, as they were actively involved in various local organisations and institutions.⁴

Most of the Jews were merchants, so on Passover or other holidays, the market was empty, all the villagers knew the Jews were celebrating. This was the Jewish influence. All the villagers knew, the Jews have a holiday." Rabbi Asher G. Ehrenfeld-interview

Livia Cherecheș, member of the Jewish Community of Oradea, passionate about the history of the city, says:

The Jewish community of Oradea has also gone through these phases - the settlement of the Jews, the foundation of a community with all the specific institutions, the development of the community, its integration into the life of the city, the assimilation of local culture and values, the prominent presence in the economic, social and cultural life of the city and then the abrupt end

2 <https://www.tikvah.ro/ro/evreii-in-oradea/istoria>, accessed 04.05.2024.

3 Anca Măniuțiu, *History of the Jews of Oradea (1686-1944)*, Oradea, University of Oradea Publishing House, 2002, p. 50.

4 Péter László, "Jews in Oradea in the interwar period", *Studies and Researches in Social History*, no. 1-2, 2006, pp. 117-132.

*by physical extermination that in an instant erased everything that had been made in hundreds of years of history.*⁵

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Oradea became an important centre of Judaism. Between 1915 and 1944 the city on the banks of the river *Crișul Repede* became an extremely important centre of Hasidic Judaism. The members of the Hasidic community were known as the *Jews of the dynasty of Vijnitsa*. In the 19th century, with the emancipation of the Jews and the modernization of the town, the Jewish community expanded considerably. The Jews of Oradea contributed significantly to the economic prosperity of the city. Jews were involved in various fields, including industry, commerce, education and the arts.

1. Oradea the “Art Nouveau City”

1.1. The Palaces

Oradea is known as the “Art Nouveau City” due to the abundance of Art Nouveau buildings in the city centre. Many of these buildings were commissioned by wealthy Jewish families, who played a major role in the development of the city in the late 19th century and early 20th century. They built impressive synagogues, schools and charities, contributing to Oradea’s cultural diversity. Some of the most representative Art Nouveau buildings in Oradea with Jewish connections are:

The Fuchsl Palace was built in 1902-1903 in the central part of the town, as a result of the initiative of the brothers of the same name, who were trading in wine. As large owners of vineyards in the Biharia wine-growing area, the two brothers introduced a new architectural formula, combining the useful with the aesthetic. Clusters of grapes, twisted vine vines and palmate leaves are balanced on the facade and in the ironwork of the balconies. One can see the monograms F.T, which stands for Fuchsl Testverek (Fuchsl Brothers), under the 2nd floor windows.

The Stern Palace, built in 1907, was commissioned by the Stern family, a wealthy Jewish family who owned a bank. The building is characterized by its graceful curving lines and delicate floral ornamentation.

The Black Eagle Palace, built in 1908, was commissioned by the Moskovits, a wealthy Jewish family who owned a brewery. The building is richly ornamented with floral and animal motifs.

5 <https://www.tikvah.ro/ro/evreii-in-oradea/istoria>, accessed 02.07.2024.

The Darvas-La Roche house, built in 1909, was commissioned by the Darvas family, a wealthy Jewish family who owned a textile factory. The building is famous for its elaborate mosaics and stained glass windows.

Moskovits Adolf and Sons was designed by architects Vágo Laszlo and Vágo Jozsef in 1912 at the intersection of Unirii Square, the central point of the city, and Vasile Alecsandri Street. The architecture is in the Viennese Secession style. At the top of the façade, under the cornice, there is a series of sketched reliefs. They represent different scenes from the daily life of peasants: harvest gathering, a shepherd with a whistle in the family or the hora. They are executed in graffito technique. (the process of scratching a drawing into a coloured material, leaving a contrasting background).

The Ullmann Palace (completed in 1913 - the architecture is in the Viennese Secession style) is one of the few non-religious buildings in Oradea that clearly illustrates the Jewish faith. The Ullmann family was one of the first families of Oradea, arriving here in the 1860s. For the Jewish community, the Ullmann Palace is also charged with painful memories of the Second World War, the Ullmann Palace was part of the perimeter of the ghetto, here and in the surrounding area were housed Jews who were deported to extermination camps.

The Sztarill Palace, today the Astoria Hotel, located at the intersection of the present Theatre Street and Ferdinand Square was designed and built in the Secession style by the owner of the building Sztarill Ferenc in 1902. Sztarill was recognized as one of the most prolific architects of his time, having executed buildings such as the Black Eagle Palace, Adorjan House and other eclectic and Secession style projects in Oradea. The *Emke* (short for *Erdélyi Magyar Közművelődési Egyesület - Hungarian Cultural Association of Transylvania*) on the ground floor was a favourite meeting place for writers, poets and journalists such as Ady Endre, Octavian Goga, Zaharia Stancu. A commemorative plaque on the wall of the literary café tells us that it was the favourite place of the great Hungarian poet Ady Endre.

Even if most of the buildings mentioned refer to traditional Hungarian culture or to the Viennese school of architecture, the involvement of Jews in the life of the city in general and the construction of these buildings in particular is visible. These buildings betray the unique personality of their creator. For example, Ullmann Izidor (president of the Orthodox Jewish community of Oradea) built a small synagogue in his own building. Jews tried to integrate into society and the communities that adopted

them, rather than the natural desire to manifest their religious affiliation.⁶

1.2. The Synagogues

Synagogues and cemeteries are important landmarks of Oradea's Jewish heritage. There were about 17 synagogues according to the architects of Oradea, of which 10 were demolished, seven remain standing.

The Neolog Zion Synagogue, 22 Independence Street - renovated in 2015 - was inaugurated by the Neolog Jews, Busch Dávid, chief architect of Oradea and member of the Jewish community, in 1878. Facing Jerusalem, it is still an outstanding example of Moorish architecture. The skilfully restored synagogue now opens its doors to contemporary art, where events are organised for the general public: concerts, exhibitions, book launches and various cultural and religious events.

The Great Orthodox Synagogue, (Mihai Viteazu Street 4 - renovated in 2016) built in 1890, is an Orthodox synagogue that best reflects the Moorish influences that the Jews of Oradea borrowed from Western Europe. It is the only functioning synagogue in Oradea. It has a capacity of 1050 people of which 600 are for men, with rich interior decoration. A special feature is the clock on the right side of the cabinet housing the Torah scrolls, which at first glance looks like a clock that has long since been forgotten, with the tips of the hands pointing for a long time...to a certain hour, minute and second. Knowing that each figure, gesture, movement, colour hides a special meaning, I could better understand from Mr Rezmúves (the worship leader of the Orthodox Jewish Community of Oradea) this detail, which is in fact the pain of stopped Time... the pendulum of the clock has terrified time and has simply stopped it.

At first glance, this clock doesn't seem out of the ordinary for anything, which once showed the exact time for both the rabbi and the parishioners of the community. Tourists visiting the beautiful place of worship often pass by this magnificent pendulum wall clock unnoticed. The pendulum instead has a very sad story. May 25, 1944 - the Jews of the Oradea ghetto begin to be evacuated. On this date, the number of Jews in the ghetto was 19,021. They left the ghetto on Vămii Street - (now Sucevei Street) and entered Rhedey Park (now Balcescu Park), the starting point. Between 25 May and 3 June

6 C. Pușcaș, *Seven Oradea Synagogues*, Oradea, Muzeului Țării Crisurilor Publishing House, 2017, pp.52-56.

1944, 2,500-3,000 Jews were picked up in a planned manner every day. According to the testimonies of the survivors of the Jews of Oradea, they said that when the first freight train full of Jews left Rhedey Park (today's Balcescu Park) at that moment the clock in the synagogue stopped by itself. Since then this clock has been a witness for decades to what happened then. In 2008, when the renovation of the synagogue began, the question arose as to whether this clock should also be repaired and put back into operation. The overseers who were still alive that year said that it should not be repaired, because that way we would also know the exact time when our family members took the road to the death camps.

The top of the Synagogue's gable is decorated with various stylized ornaments: with the Star of David, stylized palmettes, and above the central gable is a stone plaque inscribed with the first lines of the Decalogue. In the synagogue courtyard on the right side, in front of the side entrance, are four stone pillars with decorated tops, intended for the construction of a ritual wedding tent.

The Hevra Sas Synagogue, 4 Mihai Viteazu Street was built in 1890 in eclectic style. It functioned as a place of worship until the official opening of the large Orthodox synagogue in 2018.

Aachvas Rein Synagogue, 25 Primaria Street, built in 1927-1928. After renovation it became the Jewish Museum, which houses a rich collection of artefacts illustrating the history of the Jewish community in Oradea, e.g. objects of religious worship (Torah, Menorah, Mezuzoturi), traditional prayer vestments, manuscripts and historical documents, photographs and art objects.⁷

Poale Cedek Synagogue, 18 Tudor Vladimirescu Street-built around 1910-built in an inner courtyard, less known to the people of Oradea, is to be rehabilitated. Now it has no functionality.

Wiznitzer Sil Synagogue, 2 Crinului Street, existing but abandoned. Built in 1931, the synagogue served as a spiritual centre for members of the Wiznitz Hasidic dynasty, a branch of Orthodox Judaism originating in Ukraine.

Private synagogue in the Ullmann Palace, 9, Square 1 December Street, completed in 1913, located in the palace courtyard and for the Ullmann family and their servants. However, during the Second World War,

⁷ C.Puscas, *Seven Oradea Synagogues*, Oradea, Muzeului Tarii Crisurilor Publishing House, 2017, pp. 89,116.

the building was part of the perimeter of the ghetto in Oradea, where Jews were gathered to be deported. After the end of the war, the building returned to its original use and is still today a block of flats, unfortunately in an increasingly poor condition.

Unfortunately there are 10 synagogues that have been demolished (Iesoda Hatora Synagogue, 32 Cuza Voda Street, Small Synagogue, 52 Cluj Street, Large Synagogue, 52 Cluj Street, Machzike Tora Synagogue, Civic Center, Reb Sele Sil Synagogue, 16 M.Viteazu Street, Klauss Temple, 16 Brediceanu Street, D.Cantemir Street 13, Agudat Israel Temple, Bradului Street 16, Small Neolog Prayer House, Independenței Street 22, Synagogue, Roman Ciorogariu Street 44) by their loss, both Oradea, the people of Oradea, and European culture and civilization, Jewish or not, “have irreversibly lost an essential heritage landmark.”⁸

2. The history of Jewish Education

The history of Jewish education in Oradea spans several centuries. From the earliest mentions of Jewish teachers in the Middle Ages, to modern schools and curricula today, education has played an essential role in the life of Oradea's Jewish community.

In the Middle Ages, the first evidence of Jewish teachers in Oradea dates back to the 13th century. These teachers provided religious education to Jewish children, teaching the Torah and other sacred texts. In addition to religious education, some teachers also taught basic reading, writing and mathematics.

In the 16th-19th centuries, Jewish schools were established where, in addition to religious subjects, other subjects such as Hebrew, German and Hungarian were taught. In the 20th century, some Jewish schools were closed and others had to adapt to new political and social realities. After the end of World War II, a small part of the Jewish community returned to Oradea. A few Jewish schools were re-established, but the number of pupils was small.

Most Jews who survived the Holocaust emigrated to Israel or other countries.

I interviewed Rabbi Asher G. Ehrenfeld who now lives in Israel, but who was a pupil in Oradea in the period immediately after the war and

8 C. Puscas, *Seven Oradea Synagogues*, Oradea, Muzeului Tarii Crisurilor Publishing House, 2017, p. 129.

who told the history of that time from his perspective, part of which he also received from his parents and grandparents. Given that most of the documents were burned during the Holocaust, these words are of immeasurable value.

In the 1930s, one third of Oradea's population were Jews. (In the years 39-41 before Auschwitz there were about 35,000 Jews in Oradea and the surrounding villages (Sălard, Marghita). In those years, Romanians were a minority, most of them Hungarians, and a third were Jews. Jews were also scholars, academics, but also workers, merchants, like everywhere else in the world. In terms of religion, 80% were Orthodox Jews and the rest were neo-orthodox (Reform). The Neolog Zion Synagogue on Independence Street was functioning at that time and only very rich people, lawyers, doctors, architects and snobs were members. They were very intelligent and rich, with influence in society. Their mother tongue was Hungarian.

It was the same in education. The Jewish tradition has always demanded that its members be educated, that they know how to read and write. We don't know in what setting Jewish education took place in 18th-century Oradea, but a map from 1797 shows a school next to the hospital.

1781 is the year Emperor Joseph II implemented the Toleration Law, marking important changes in laws that also affected the Jews. It included the right of Jewish children to enroll in religious or public schools, the right of Jews to work the land and practice various trades, which had previously been forbidden, and mandated the use of German as the official language, with Hebrew used only in religious practices⁹.

According to some documents, the first Jewish school opened in 1786, (already three years after the decree of the law issued by Joseph II). Probably just like in every Jewish community in the world, heders operated. The Orthodox Jewish School for Boys was located in the area of the Jewish community, now the N. Balcescu School, up to the Ullman Palace. The students who studied there were only Jews. The school had about 50 teachers. The building on M. Viteazu Street, corner of Cuza Voda Street, today's Colegiul Varadinum was the Jewish Girls' School before the war. Both were attended up to 7th grade. There was also a seminary in the girls' school building. The girls attended school until they were married around the age of 19-20.

9 <https://www.tikvah.ro/ro/>

Between the two World Wars, the number of young people going to college was very small, not only among Jews, but among the entire population. Young Jews did not want to go to state schools, choosing instead to study at community (denominational) schools, such as Catholic or Reform. In these schools, 60-70% followed the state school curriculum, and the rest studied Judaism. At the end of each year there were exams and inspections by the Inspectorate.

There were elementary classes of Judaism, where you studied from about 3 years old. Around 1920-1930 there were no kindergartens. Education, although not compulsory, was attended by a large number of pupils, the family wanted the young ones to follow their father's model. Jewish pupils studied in synagogues. There were about 2-3 locations where Jewish schools were held.

After the Elementary School, the young people attended the Jesiva Higher School of Theology. Young Jews celebrated their majority at the age of 13, and after the age of 14, those who wished could attend the Higher School. On Crinului Street No. 2 in Oradea, there is the ruin of a synagogue, the Wiznitzer Sil house, where Judaism was studied.

Rabbis inherited their leadership from one generation to the next, from father to son, with the firstborn of the family being the chief rabbi of his congregation, not the whole town. One such rabbi is from Satu-Mare who now has the largest community/whites in the world, now living in New York, ultra-Orthodox Jews. They are very wealthy. He was the Rabbi of the town before the war, survived and ended up in America.

However, most Jews attended public schools. The Jewish school operated after lunch, after the regular schools had finished, at about 1pm. Children stayed in the Jewish school until the evening. At the Jewish school, people also came from the villages, children came on foot, regardless of the season.

Those who already had a trade, and they had more children, they would go apprentice to learn a trade, like shopkeepers, shoemakers, and they would not go to school, they would bring money home. School was paid for out of the community's money for the poorer children, and the better-off paid their own way. That was one of the commandments of Judaism, to take care of the poor.

It is a faith, which we have received, written teaching, the Bible. We just call it the Old Testament. It was received by carving it in stone by God. We have another teaching that Moses gave us, an oral teaching. It says this in the Bible, how Moses was on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights, twice, without eating or drinking water or sleeping. I wonder what he did there? God taught him the oral TORA. Moses taught the generation of that

time this teaching which he passed on, because it is obligatory to pass it on from generation to generation, as there is a verse in the Bible, i.e. one of the obligations of every man, not just the Jews is this: teach your children, from generation to generation. And so it was. Everyone taught his children. And that's how the Jewish people lived, in the Holy Land. But things began to go wrong. And they didn't have time for teaching. Parents no longer had time to teach their children, as was the commandment from generation to generation. And they identified the problem. So Rabbi Simon ben Halafsta who was a scholar and knew Talmud noticed that there was a problem of his generation. Life being hard, people were giving their children to work at an early age, and they had no time to teach them. And he realized that his entire generation had this problem. That learning was being lost. And so he talked to the King then, and the important people of that time, and they decided on a law that is still valid today. He issued an order then that it was mandatory that any parent who couldn't homeschool their child should send them to school. That's how compulsory education came about, about 2000 years ago.

He relied on the commandment in the Bible that every father teach his children. Citing the reason that parents don't have time for that, they have to work to earn a living, so children have to go to school from 6 to 16. We have different laws, some of which cannot be explained and understood under 16. Girls, however, did not get an education then. They were not counted. If a man had e.g. 4 boys and 6 girls and was asked how many children he had? His answer was: 4 boys. This is not a written law. Girls in those years had no formal education.

The Jewish School (now N. Balcescu) continued after the war until 1948. When the nationalization law was passed, and the Jewish school was confiscated. But the Jews did not close the school, it was just taken as property. The school continued as a public school, where not only Jews came, but the children of local residents. Because the area was mostly inhabited by Jews and the students were then Jewish. And the Jewish "theological" school continued until almost 1958. After the war, because of the hard living conditions, they worked hard, were poor, they were not so interested.

I learned here too. If before the war there were many classes, there are two classes left, one for the big ones, one for the small ones. And it was done with many breaks. So there were private schools, but there was no more formal Jewish education authorized by the Ministry of Education.

Jews began to leave the country. Judaism is not a religion. Whoever says it's a religion wants us to perish, because religions perish, change, have reforms. Judaism is not a religion, it is a way of life.

3. Jewish cemeteries

Jewish **cemeteries**, considered a significant cultural heritage, are distinguished from other cemeteries by their unique gravestones. Jewish grave-stones are often decorated with Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David or the Menorah. They may also include inscriptions in Hebrew or *Yiddish*. *The Old Jewish Cemetery*, founded in 1775, is the oldest Jewish cemetery in Oradea and contains the graves of important personalities of the community, (now Velența Cemetery), *the Neolog Cemetery* established in 1881 on Umbrei Street, next to the Rulikowski Municipal Cemetery. This cemetery is still in use and houses the graves of important personalities of the Jewish community of Oradea and the *Orthodox Cemetery* established in 1876 on Toamnei Street, also near the Rulikowski Municipal Cemetery.¹⁰

Synagogues, churches, temples and art nouveau palaces or other buildings are important buildings in Oradea and are testimony to the cultural richness, being monuments of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.¹¹

4. Jewish cultural events and personalities

The artifacts of Oradea's Jewish history are a testament to the community's rich heritage and its significant contribution to the city's development. The preservation and enhancement of these artefacts is essential for the preservation of memory and the promotion of cultural diversity.

From the ranks of the Jewish community, several personalities have emerged who have distinguished themselves in the fields of literature, painting, medicine and even sports. For example, **Frigyes Grosz**, described as "the city's first important Jewish intellectual", an ophthalmologist by profession and author of many scholarly articles, founded the first ophthalmology hospital in 1830 where patients were treated free of charge (today the modernized City Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynecology).

Gabriela Bone - Holocaust survivor, "mother of puppets", first director of Arcadia- Oradea Children's Theatre Gabriela Bone founded the Arcadia Puppet Theatre in Oradea and ran it for five years. She has been

10 <https://www.crisana.ro/stiri/actualitate-2/o-istorie-icirc-ngropata-icirc-n-uitare-99699.html>, accessed on 02.08.2024.

11 Ioan Bolovan, "Oradea: A multicultural city", *Transylvania*, no. 4/2005, pp. 47-58.

called “the mother of puppets” ever since.

Oradea, like many other European cities, suffered under Nazi occupation during the Second World War. The Jewish community was severely affected, with deportations to concentration camps and ghettos resulting in the loss of thousands of lives. A black marble monument stands near Oradea’s Orthodox synagogue, serving as a reminder of the city’s once vibrant Jewish community that was decimated by the Holocaust, a silent symbol of loss.

After the war, the Jewish community in Oradea was reunited to a certain extent, but many Jews emigrated to Israel or other countries because of anti-Semitism and poor economic conditions. Today, Oradea’s Jewish community is much smaller than in the past, but continues to preserve its traditions and contribute to the cultural and religious life of the city. The Neolog Zion Synagogue in Oradea is now one of the outstanding symbols of the Jewish presence in the city. Here is an overview of the history of the Jews in Oradea described by Mr. Rezmues Ivan Robert:

Jews have been present in Oradea (historically known as Grosswardein or Nagyvárad) since medieval times, settling there probably as early as the 16th century. They were attracted to the city because of its strategic position on trade routes and its relative tolerance compared to other regions. Oradea’s Jewish community grew steadily over the centuries, with Jews engaging in various trades and professions. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Oradea had a vibrant Jewish population that contributed significantly to the economic, cultural and intellectual life of the city. Oradea’s Jewish community made significant contributions in various fields, including literature, music and commerce. Jewish-owned businesses were prominent in the city, and Jewish intellectuals and artists played a vital role in shaping the cultural landscape.

World War II and the Holocaust: During World War II, Oradea, like many other European cities, fell under Nazi occupation. The Jewish population of Oradea suffered greatly during this period, with deportations to concentration camps and ghettos resulting in the loss of thousands of lives.

Post-war period: after the war, the Jewish community in Oradea faced challenges in rebuilding their lives and community. Many survivors emigrated, while others sought to preserve their cultural heritage and religious traditions.

Decline and emigration: In the post-war period and especially after the rise of communism in Romania, many Jews emigrated from Oradea due to political repression, economic difficulties and anti-Semitic policies. This led to a significant decline in the city’s Jewish population.

Despite the declining number of Jews, Oradea's Jewish heritage remains an important part of its history. Efforts have been made to preserve Jewish landmarks, such as synagogues and cemeteries, and to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust through memorials and educational initiatives. Overall, the Jewish history of Oradea is a testimony to the resilience, contributions and struggles of a community that played an important role in the development and cultural identity of the city" (says in an interview with Mr. Rezmuves Ivan Robert, worship official in the Jewish Community of Oradea, on January 07, 2024).

Jewish cultural events in Oradea are of great importance, both for the Jewish community and for the city in general. They help to educate the general public about Jewish culture and to combat negative stereotypes, create a sense of social cohesion and promote tolerance and respect for diversity.

As an important cultural event for Oradea, which attracts spectators from all over Bihor county, we mention the presentation of the play "The Fiddler on the Roof", which is a play with a deep meaning for the people of Oradea, being a bridge between past and present, a celebration of cultural identity and a symbol of tolerance¹² and diversity. The play "The Fiddler on the Roof" presents the life of a traditional Jewish community Anatevka, a fictional village in Ukraine. Oradea, being a city with a similar history, the Oradea audience can easily relate to the play's theme. It is a moving story that stirs feelings of love, loss, hope and perseverance. The audience in Oradea has always identified with the characters of the play and the messages conveyed. "The Fiddler on the Roof explores universal themes such as cultural identity, tradition, family and religion. "It is the 16th most-performed Broadway show in history, and the first musical to exceed 3,000 performances." ¹³

The show was presented for the first time in Oradea in 2011, at the Regina Maria Theatre, where it was an extraordinary success. Since then, it has been revived several times, becoming an important cultural tradition for the city. The show has left its mark on generations of Oradea residents, who consider it a part of their cultural identity and it is highly appreciated

12 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Om-Demnitatie-Libertate (Man-Dignity-Freedom)*, Cluj-Napoca, Risoprint Publishing, 2019.

13 <https://www.teatrulreginamaria.ro/ro/trupa-iosif-vulcan/spectacole/1040-scripcarul-pe-acoperis-2>, accessed 02.09.2024.

by the public. In addition to the “Fiddler on the Roof” show, Oradea hosts other Jewish cultural events throughout the year. For example: the EU-ROIUDAICA Festival - an annual festival that takes place in September, lasting 7 days and highlighting the Jewish cultural heritage in Europe and Romania in particular. The festival includes concerts, theatre performances, art exhibitions, lectures and workshops, Jewish art exhibitions - the Cris Country Museum regularly hosts Jewish art exhibitions, showcasing works of art created by Jewish artists from Romania and around the world. In addition to the events listed above, there are a number of other Jewish cultural events taking place regularly in Oradea.

The Jewish community of Oradea organizes religious celebrations, such as Hanuka, Purim and Pesach, which until now were open to the general public (following the attacks in Israel - 10. 07 2023, for security reasons, they are no longer open to the public - information taken according to members of the Jewish community of Oradea).

Participating in Jewish cultural events is a great way to learn more about Jewish culture and traditions, promote tolerance and diversity, and build bridges of intercultural dialogue.

The poet Ady Endre, who trained in Oradea, wrote about Jews:

*This city with its multitude of Jews is as if someone, instead of putting flour in the flour, had put a handful of flour in the flour; the bread rose, the dough came out of the basket; the Jews of Oradea raised the city from its provincial state. All this has made this city a true Paris on the banks of the Petei.*¹⁴

Conclusion

The history of the Jews of Oradea is a complex and fascinating story, marked by periods of prosperity and tragedy. From their early settlement in the city to their significant contributions in various fields to the tragedy of the Holocaust, Jews played an important role in shaping Oradea's cultural identity.

For Oradea, history cannot be written without the history of the Jewish community. The city looks today as it does as a result of the creation over hundreds of years of three important communities, Ro-

14 <https://www.tikvah.ro/ro/evreii-in-oradea/istoria>

manian, Hungarian and Jewish, who have left their mark on Oradea throughout their coexistence.¹⁵

The history of the Jews of Oradea is a source of inspiration and a testimony to the power of hope and perseverance. It is a story that deserves to be known and celebrated by future generations. Although the Jewish community of Oradea is no longer the size it was in the past, its rich heritage remains a source of inspiration and a testament to hope.

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