

**“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca**

**Faculty of History and Philosophy**

**Doctoral Dissertation**

**Summary**

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**Phd Candidate:**

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**“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca**

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**“Image of the Jews from the Sighet area in the peasant  
memory”**

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**Key words: memory, peasant memory, collective memory, image, community, jew, private life, holocaust.**

“Image of the jews from the Sighet area in the peasant area” bring a missing element of jewish history from the Sigheia area: image in the peasant memory. This image is based primarily on the oral sources, on the testimonies of those who lived with hebrew, have known them and kept alive their image, plus the written sources: oral history research published on this topic, the archival documents, the published documents and works.

In the contemporary society the individual and community role is in a continuous redefinition, being searched his and the community identity consistently. The cerent history, twentieth century history, through the importance of cultural monopoly and the multiplication of the cultural polarity, gives to the history writer the important mission to develop critical thinking, abilities and communications skills of academic and civic communication, the opportunity to provide axiological selection and selection criteria.

The thesis focuses on the jews image through the eyes of the common man, of the small people which make the great history. In the rural world, more preserver of traditions, the image of “the different man” (in the meaning to belong to a different religion or a different ethnic group from that of the peasant of Maramures) always aroused curiosity, especially for children. The children since then, who attented school with jews, are the elders today, in very small number due to the natural laws of nature.

Another purpose of the thesis is to reactive in the memory of the contemporaries the importance that the jewish community had in the economic, social and cultural development in this area. Also, we can speak of an reactivation of jewish personalities who contributed at the dynamics of the community who were part, religious personalities considering that jews were defined first of all religious.

Concerns in history did not distinguish between a peasant memory and a intellectual memory. The peasant memory is represented by the people from village world who did not have access to information, whose memory was not influenced by the feelings of others, by technology, by the informations that can be found easily.

Andrei Oisteanu in his study, “Image of the jew in romanian culture: imagology study in Central and Eastern European context”, explores the image of the jew in romaniam culture but he done it

in a much broader framework. This study explores a more restricted area, where can be traced much better the image formed during cohabitation with hebrew.

Transylvanian jewish world was mostly found in the rural areas, each village had his own jews in a small or a larger number. Contact with jews in the village world was much higher than the city, where jews lived in jewish neighborhoods and romanians had less access to their privacy, even with the jews in general had limited contact. Each witness had hebrew neighbors, had schoolmates, had hebrew friends with whom they interacted, took part at events, was witness and can relate based on their own experiences.

The study presents originality through the peasant memory, which doesn't mean tradition but he has particular valences, customize the study. Peasant memory is a well defined concrete historical reality in space in historical time, is a rich memory, fertilize which blends positive and negative images. Hebrew image from the Sighet area in the peasant memory is subject to a variety of interference located in the area between history and memory. The witnesses are in the rural world, where they personally knew hebrew, had interacted daily and kept alive their image, many of them held memories which have not been subjected to to different influences over time.

In the first chapter of the study, "Historical landmarks of the city and the surrounding villages", I did a short history of the villages from the Sighet area in which took place the oral history research. Sighet was the the cultural, economic and administrative center of the historical Maramures and had an important influence on the villages around. Both in the town and surrounding villages were found archaeological evidence showing that these lands were inhabited since the Neolithic.

In chapter 2 I did a brief history of the jewish population in Maramures. In all villages subject of research the number of jews was meant, in some of these reaching even up to half of the population. An important thing to note is that jews from here, and of the entire Maramures, was a community defined primarily religious, very attached to religion and traditional values, many of them refused on this grounds the idea of assimilation.

In chapter "The image of the interwar jews from the Sighet in the peasant memory" I treated the image of the jew in the many aspects which build the image of a minority group, of an ethnic group, but also a person as an individual.

In peasant memory the arrival story of jews remained intact, many of the witnesses presenting it in the same form: at the beginning in the villages were a few jews, but they have been in contact with other hebrew communities from other countries. In those countries hebrew communities have not been able to develop and came here to be able to develop further. Witnesses say that before jews have learned their children to speak romanian to be able to interact with natives.

The portrait of jews in peasant memory consists in the physical and mental traits. About physical portrait in the peasant memory jews is associated with a distinct way of dressing, to wear sideburns, freckles, crooked nose and specific hebrew odor. In peasant memory jew clothing still remained associated with the intellectual clothes, even with the intellectuals of today: black hats, long robes and sober, women wearing skirts and dresses.

At the psychological portrait of jewish the peasants adds many shades: behavior in society, respect for religion, unity within the community, greed, patience, sense of conviction, goodness and wickedness. Jews have shown compassion and kindness to the romanian when they have asked for help on a problem, but they never helped without them not having won, even if it was very little.

The first occupation of the jews, after they arrived in the villages of Maramures, was building houses. Jews have built new houses of wood, with large windows, stoves which collect smoke, whitewashed with lime and floor below. But the main occupation of jews was the trade. They have commercialized products that were not found in peasant households and many of them were purchased from them. Jews used to buy apples and flowers in springs and sell after the apples to the peasants in winter, they were buying animal products from farmers in exchange for oil or sugar.

Romanians remember that jews were held weekly fairs at which they set all prices for the week ahead. These prices were fixed and do not change even they had not had wood to put on fire, they preferred to borrow from each other than to give the price established by the romanians and not by them.

Jews have built even the wagons used by the romanians, they had blacksmith and everything necessary in the village. They had bakery, although the romanians used to buy more

rarer than jews. Were owners of mills, some even recognized for their quality in the surrounding villages. Because of the religious restrictions in many villages the jews had their butchers, from where were supplied with the required meat and and sold to the romanians the meat they could not eat.

Many hebrew dealt with land cultivation and livestock. Almost in all the villages they were large landowners, for which the romanians have worked and were payd or the jews rented the land to them. Do not miss from among the jews the smugglers, the people who wanted to make money in a easy way.

Being in the little villages world the witnesses remember only a few professions owned by jews: accountant, doctor, secretary to the mayor and deputy mayor, but say that the jews were more learned like them and have followed high schools.

The jewish kitchenwas full of mystery and rules for the romanian peasants. Holidays were expected by children for the smell of cholent who reigned in the streets of the village when he was removed from the bakery and went home for lunch and coils which they received in exchange for small services rendered.

Witnesses say that jews never eat in a romanian house or elsewhere if they were not sure that the food follow the rules, at the sheepfold had a hired man who took care that the cheese be prepared by the rules and can be consumed by them, and if they had cows and romanian woman milk them, always a jewish women supervise the entire process.

The smell of garlic and onions was always there, for the smell the romanians say that the jewish girls were beautiful but they were not pleasant. In the jewish kitchen is used very much garlic, onion and spices; this are also used by the romanians but they considered her specifically jewish.

Jewish holidays still up admiration in romanians for the way they respected biblical rules and holiday, unlike them. The day of Saturday, feast of the every week, began Friday night when they were pulling the shutters and close the shops, and ends Saturday evening after the sunset. Romanians knew that in this interval should not bother or ask anything because the answer was negative, and they knew that any work they had undertaken on Saturday were going to be



rewarded. But do not miss from the collective memory the times when romanians needed urgent for help on Saturday and jews broke the rules to help them.

At the specific jewish holidays add the major life events: birth, marriage and death. About birth the witnesses have very few memories and do not even mention about circumcision. The marriage is shrouded in mystery and rules that many of them do not understand even now, but remember how the bride and the groom were married in a special tent and the bride was trimmed after marriage and was forced to wear a wig. Jewish weddings are characterized by peace, by people who respected the religious rules, pipe music, moderate consumption of alcoholic, unlike romanians weddings. Jews do not beat at the weddings as the romanians did and this meant peace for romanians, a quiet wedding.

The last act on the stage of life is death, the passing. Romanians remember that jews used to bury the death on the same day they died if the sun wasn't set, on the decesed face were pute pieces because if they wake up they can not say what they saw, or they were buried in feet or with to face at east to be able to raise easily to the call of the Lord; jews never put at the graves wooden crosses as they used to do, they put tomb stones.

Jews from Maramure, from villages and towns, have been a population that realized the importance and the role of education in the society. The education offered them an additional chance in society, in finding a job and a better position in the social hierarchy. Jews from Maramures had a special regime from the authorities, which allowed them to develop a culture, religious schools and provide to the community members access to education regardless of their social or economic condition. Sighet was the economic and cultural center of the ancient Maramures and allowed to the jews from the villages around access to schools and education.

An important and recognized yeshiva, a jewish religious institution of higher education, had to Sapanta, where the young eager studied Torah in the broadest sense of the word, with emphasis on the Talmud. Witnesses recall the yeshiva but do not remember how many jews attented it but do remember that were no illiterate among jews, fact proved by statistics with a large number of jews who attented public schools.

The private life of jews is described by witnesses in ways to spend their free time, the places where they had no access and communal baths, by things that was making them private,

by women condition and all the romanians did not attend. Many of romanian women were maids in the houses of the jews, broke in that private space that allowed them to see more, to keep more memories. Jews have shown a great unit to those of the same ethnic, have complied the religious and economic rules even if it meant that wood had to borrow than to buy at a price fixed by the romanian and not by them.

In the family privacy, in the village world, romanians were rarely welcomed in jews houses. Here they spoke yiddish, cleanliness and tranquility reigned, had no animals in houses like in many peasant households and jewish women cooked many sweets. Women were involved in cleaning, household maintenance and education, unlike the romanian women who went to work in the fields and everywhere with their parents.

The blinder of the jewish community is represented by religion, and embodied by the rabbi. When we speak about jews we refer to those who have judaism as religion, indifferent they were born as jews or accepted judaism by baptism. Judaism is focused on the fulfillment of 613 commandments, which are divided into prohibitions and positive commaandments listed in the five books of Moses or Torah, judaism bedside book. Witnesses say that faith was what kept them together, determined to help each other, to respect the ancient preserved principles. In all villages Rabbi image is central when we talk about religion and even about jews, and the Rabbi house was always located in the village center, close to the synagogue.

The Rabbi was according to the witnesses the economic leader because he found for each job by its capabilities, was helping the poor, shared food packages and advised the rich to help. He was the hebrew moral authority of which reprimand they feared.

In the chapter “The jews image in interwar media from Sighet” is analyzed the jew image reflected through the daily happenings, community issues and problems of the community. Jews led a strong cultural campaign through publications, sometimes romanian took it as an example and other times as an affront. The main themes developed in the Sighet press regarding the jews were: economy, religion, school and did not missed the antisemitic articles. Many of the articles were asking to the romanians to emulate the jews in order not to depend on the trade made by them, or in any other matter. The jew was described as diligent, hardworking, raise money and romanians do exactly the same thing, especially to be united as they. But is not missing from the

portrait deception, able to deceive when his gain is endangered, able to argue and fight if the situation requires.

In the chapter “The memory of the Jewish living” I drew the line between the living and resident memory. From the beginning Jews have distinguished themselves in the village world through a new way to build, by way of placing things in the house, the strict cleanliness and hygiene. House residents were almost identical, indistinguishable according to witnesses, while “aliens” homes enjoyed every comfort and many new things that they have brought. Romanian baths were a luxury for which many of them do not even dare to dream, while Jews had attached bathrooms to their home and communal bathrooms.

Mills for grinding grain, stores, slaughterhouses and cemeteries are places of memory. Each place is associated with the resident; the resident is the one who made it possible that place remained in the memory. Synagogues from villages remained in memory for being the most imposing places from the villages and shrouded in mystery due to their inability to penetrate into these places. Cemeteries remained the only places of memory that still show the Jews passing through these places.

A place of memory preserved in the collective memory, which is a stimulus for the memory to bring the past in the present, is the site of the former borough of Teceu where Jews were rounded up before being deported.

Life during the war continued normal even if the news regarding the Jews, Hitler's conquests and the inability of many governments came to the Jews of Sighet. Speaking of the Jews from Sighet we can talk about their psychological, ethnic and religious persecution. The psychological measures taken against the Jews were felt by the constant fear, the obligation to wear the Star of David as a distinctive sign, by rumors coming from countries where Jews have been subjected to extermination, the fear of tomorrow, the fear that parents have unwittingly passed on to children. Wearing the distinctive emblem, the Star of David, was for some Jews a sign of pride while for others was another reason to feel different, to feel excluded from among populations.

At psychological level news coming from all sides began to make its mark, even a Jew from Sighet who was deported together with other Jews and managed to escape returned to

Sighet to tell, to warn the jews what is going to happen but no one listened. Jews continued to believe in the humanity of the German people and the peoples of Europe that will not allow to happen to other people.

Persecution of the jews as an ethnic group held by decrees that limited the presence and activity of jews in the country, closed shops and banned from leaving the house except for certain times, searches, examinations and seizures of property. All these measures were directed against jews as an ethnic group. Witnesses recall the station, prayers and tears that jews shed before deportation, but all were in vain, scheduled deportation took place.

Witnesses remember that for the jews the hardest was religious persecution, destruction of synagogues, closure, finding it impossible to praying in the prayer houses. Although synagogues were closed jews were not prevented from praying, they continued to do it in the rabbis homes or in their own homes, holidays were observed and kept as in all years, only the uncertainty of tomorrow was more present.

Information on deportation are the most numerous in the peasant memory, is the first memory image returns when witnesses speak about jews. It is a traumatic image, an image that often dominates the jews recall.

In the peasant memory when jews were gather in synagogues is full of emotions when they saw how everything is left behind and they go with just a few bags. The fact that they were asked for help or simply have not seen them do anything embedded in the memory of communism coming as a punishment for their carelessness, because they did nothing to help their neighbors and friends.

On the improvised ghetto from Teceu many witnesses went with their parents or grandparents to bring food for jews, the image from Teceu is an incentive for bringing the past into the present. Cries and tears when deportation of jews are played and felt with the same intensity were tears of people who left behind everything and were heading into the unknown.

Chapter Seven, "End the war and the return of the Jews," complete the image of the Jew in peasant memory when they return, the attempt to reintegrate into society and final departure. After the jews were deported in their homes were either looted or were installed romanian and

hungarian. People have broken homes hoping to find gold and jewish money, but they partook of everything that could be taken. Witnesses put some unfortunate events that have happened to some villagers to the fact that they have stolen from jewish homes. Even the destruction of synagogues was a pity.

Upon returning Jews were welcomed with joy or indifference, some even with hatred for that they have returned to homes that have already been filled. Parents witness received from jews clothes to hide them so that when they return to find something. Their clothes were returned but what they were stolen from their homes have never received.

In addition to all they have suffered, what they went through in the ghetto on their way to the camps and extermination camps processes, jews had to face a new feeling on arrival: guilt. Many of jew have asked themselves why they were the ones who survived and what they did to deserve what happened to them.

Camp experience has led many survivors to abandon the strict power of faith mosaic childhood and parents. Witnesses say that after returning were jews that have converted to Christianity, began to believe in Jesus and the values of their neighbors before the deportation.

The final departure of survivors witnesses said hat was made because of call of Israel, a command that has come to reunite the nation. Others put departure on account of fear, insecurity they felt it in a place where they were deported, where they had only memories, which lacked the parents and other members of the jewish community. They no longer feel safe, fail to integrate, did not feel that they understood what they went through and chose to be with those who have gone through the same sufferings that they.

There were jews who refused to talk about what happened, not shared their experience with the romanian after they returned; witnesses say they did not want to arouse pity, but perhaps it was too traumatic and did not want to remember what they went through.

In the collective memory have been kept many jews names, but not all can be checked because many are associated with the appearance of jews, with their properties or with parents. We have the jews which have been associated with certain memory locations and their names

were withheld because places. I have and those whose names remained in memory because they were classmates or friends with witnesses.

The simple people memory became the only possibility to reconstruct the image of the jew, the past that sometimes leave very little written evidence. Memory of every man is a unique property, personal, original, and thus deserves attention all that together reconstruct the past.

Individual and collective memory have contributed and still contribute to the preservation of ethnic, cultural and religious, the two provides an overview of the jew of the Sighet. Hebrew community had an important contribution to the economic, social and culture surrounding villages Sighet.