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Doctoral thesis abstract

**The fate of heirless and/or unclaimed Jewish property
after the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania**

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In the fall of 1940, Northern Transylvania and, along with the territory, the Jewish population living there, came under Hungarian rule and consequently became the victim of anti-Jewish measures taken by the Hungarian state between 1940 and 1944. As a result of these measures, decrees, and laws, the Jewish population was gradually plundered and almost all Jews were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. Four fifth of the 164,000-strong Northern Transylvanian Jewish community felt victims of the Holocaust and a significant proportion of the property confiscated by the Hungarian state during the war remained without heirs after the war or, if there were heirs, they did not claim their properties.

With the post-war re-annexation of Northern Transylvania to Romania, the immovable property of the murdered Jews confiscated by the Hungarian state became the property of the Romanian state, while most of the movable property remained in the possession of the Hungarian state. Under the provisions of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, the states concerned were obliged to return confiscated movable and immovable property and all legal rights and interests to the persecuted individuals or, in the case of the heirless property and/or the property unclaimed within a certain period, to transfer it to the communities of survivors.

At the international level, another important political step was taken in 2009 on the initiative of the Czech Republic: The Terezín Declaration was adopted by the participants of the International Conference on the Holocaust held in Prague and Terezín (the former Theresienstadt, where a Nazi concentration camp existed during World War II). The event was attended by representatives from 47 countries, including Romania and Hungary, who adopted and signed the Terezín Declaration, committing themselves to continue the process of reparation for the Jews persecuted and totally plundered during the war, and to take decisive action to this end.

The research aims to examine the public policies that led to the appropriation by the Hungarian and Romanian states of the unclaimed property of Jews living in Northern Transylvania, now Romanian territory, or those who were left without heirs after the Holocaust, and to explore the current situation, size, and value of the property in question.

To contextualize the topic and to understand the historical context and political circumstances that made the dispossession of the Jews possible, chapter 2 presents the historical background in which the exclusion of the Jews of Northern Transylvania from society, their gradual and total dispossession and, eventually, the murder of the majority of them, could have taken place.

Chapter 3 is reviewing the previously published literature on this topic, presenting the results of all relevant previous research. The literature review highlights which segments of

the topic have been approached thoughtfully and which have not been explored more comprehensively.

Chapter 4 is describing the methodological aspects and identifies the main research methods and tools used in the following chapters that provide essential information for understanding the empirical material. For each chapter, the dissertation discusses the use of appropriate research methods identified in the literature.

Chapter 5 is analyzing the statistical data on the Jewish population in Northern Transylvania, using 1941 census data, to assess the size of the Jewish community on the eve of the Holocaust, whose property – due to numerous restrictive regulations – was later transferred to the Hungarian, or in some cases, the Romanian state. It is also examined the proportion of the Jewish population living in urban and rural areas during World War II, i.e., their degree of urbanization, as this information also provides a clear insight into the economic situation of the Jewish population.

Chapter 6 is discussing the anti-Jewish public and state policies that led to the complete plunder and eventual extermination of the Jewish population. To talk about the property left without heirs, it is essential to understand the political context in which restrictions, measures, and regulations to exclude the Jewish community were imposed at both the state and local levels, as a result of which the Hungarian state “legally” deprived its own citizens of all their property, segregated them from the rest of society, imprisoned them in ghettos that served as concentration camps, and then handed them over to a foreign power that killed almost all of them.

Chapter 7 is analyzing the Hungarian legislation enacted during the war to plunder the Jews and to exclude them completely from the economy, summarizing the various laws applied by the state and public policies described in Chapter 6. It is also describing the Hungarian and Romanian laws providing for restitution after the war, thus outlining the current situation of Jewish heirless property and the extent to which restitution and compensation have been realized in both Hungary and Romania. This chapter also explores press coverage of anti-Jewish public policies, looting and related legislation.

Data from press sources, archival sources, and literature are summarized in Chapter 8, presenting separately figures and data on movable and immovable properties from the press, literature, and archives.

Specific research results are presented in three case studies in Chapter 9. One of these deals with the situation of Jewish heirless or unclaimed movable property, and the other two deal with immovable property, discussing separately the situation of residential and

agricultural assets. In all three case studies, it is determined the approximate minimum amount of compensation not awarded.

The penultimate chapter of the thesis contains the conclusions drawn from the research, followed by the bibliography and appendices.

Keywords: Jewish property, heirless, unclaimed, Northern Transylvania, confiscation, plunder, compensation, restitution

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