

PhD THESIS

ANNA GÁBOR

SETTLING HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURAL RELICS OF JEWS  
IN NORTHEASTERN-HUNGARY

SUMMARY

Supervisor: Dr. Attila Paládi Kovács professor

Full member of Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA)

PhD School of Historical Sciences

Ethnography

PhD Program of European Ethnology

BUDAPEST 2010

I began this work in the 1980s with two goals in mind: to look for memories in buildings and to examine the origin of rural Jewish life. I wanted to understand how Jewish history started in Hungary. Therefore, I undertook my field research in the region of Szabolcs Szatmár County.

In researching the historical literature it became clear that a less well-known – and for me more interesting - third wave of Jewish immigration to Hungary followed those of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The earlier history is described in the work of Kohn Sámuel and subsequent studies appear to rely on his research. Additional material can be found in the Hungarian Jewish Archives, specifically volume VII which includes the paper of Grünvald Fülöp and Ember Győző. The study of Virág István mentioned in the preface of my work, „Azsidók jogállása Magyarországon 1670-1780 (The legal rights of Jews in Hungary, 1670-1780).

These studies describe in broad lines the process of immigration. As I was interested in the exact details, I continued my research in the Szabolcs-Szatmár Regional Archives looking for information with local content. I focused on three particular areas: when the Jews came, where they came from and what their occupations were. Ethnographies and studies of local history from this time period do not deal with these subjects at all.

My research relied heavily on the Jewish censuses, so much so that I based my study of Jewish immigration to the Szabolcs region upon them. At the time there were no academic publications on the subject. Only a handful of documents in the volumes of Hungarian Jewish Archives and the late nineteenth century work of Kohn Sámuel can be considered a prelude to this research. As became apparent later, I was not alone in my study; Farkas Rózsa was working on a similar subject at the same time, analyzing the Jewish census of the Szatmár Region from the year 1848. Varga László also published work describing Jewish immigration to Hungary in the Modern period.

My work consists of two parts.

The first discusses Jewish immigration to the North—Eastern region of the country, the history of their settlement and, in some measure, their economic history. I have focused on the development of their occupations, about which I had some preconceptions that I wished to examine academically. I succeeded in this to differing extents in different regions. The appearance of skilled professions among the Jews had clearly manifested itself already at the beginning of the nineteenth century; as soon as the prohibitions related to professions were eased or even removed, the number of professions began to increase progressively, as did the

number of Jews working in them. I considered it important to detail their professions and other occupations.

In my study, I am publishing and analyzing unpublished census data, as well as using some very early, previously published censuses and the 1749 census. Whenever I use published census data, I am referring to volume 7 of the Hungarian Jewish Archives. I only used previously published registers in order to illustrate the situation of the Jews at that time and to help shed light on the state of affairs that could be subsequently reconstructed from the census data.

The analysis is based on census data which was collected countrywide by the Chambers and later the Residential Council (Helytartótanács) and locally by the counties, mainly for taxation purposes. The last separate census for Jews was that of 1848. This census already differs from the previous ones, in that it was created for a different purpose and was not undertaken nationally. Hence, I was only able to include it in my study for the region of Szabolcs. For the two other counties the separate census had already stopped by the end of the first third of the nineteenth century.

The second part of my work deals with buildings. I did not look primarily for synagogues. I concentrated on other buildings that have eluded the attention of the few interested scholars, namely private dwellings, the houses of rabbis, ritual bath houses and other buildings that once belonged to a Jewish community. Here the available material is from a later period than that used in my investigation of Jewish immigration. Allowing for some exceptions, the buildings date from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. This part of my dissertation is based entirely on field work.

My archival research also served for the preparation of this field work. I looked for settlements that had large Jewish populations, my assumption being that large concentrations of Jews would have given rise to large numbers of Jewish buildings. Similarly, larger concentrations of buildings would suggest a higher probability that some survived. Accordingly, I focused my search on precisely such places. I was later vindicated in these assumptions. I photographed and measured the buildings I encountered in order to prepare technical drawings for their documentation.

My field work was supported between 1986-88 and 1989-90 by two separate grants from the Soros Foundation and in 1990 by a modest grant from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. Furthermore, I received support for my work from the historian Németh Péter who was at that time the director of the Jósza András Museum

## **The Historical Part**

### **Sources and methods of data analysis**

The historical part of the dissertation is based mostly on unpublished archival sources, census data and tax registers. For the sake of completeness I also mention the few registers from the 16th and 17th century which were published in the Hungarian Jewish Archives.

Jewish people were registered separately, for the collections of various taxes such as extraordinary tax, wartime tax, and later *taxa tolerantialis*.

Such registrations were prepared from the start of the 1700s by the Chambers. The Szepesi Chamber (Szepesi Kamara) in the northern part of the country was especially active in this respect. Later this task was taken over by the Regent Council (Helytartótanács). In addition the counties also taxed the Jews in their area and prepared their own lists for this goal.

The 1848 census of the Jews deserves a special note as it was prepared with a completely different goal. The new Hungarian government prepared the census in order to grant the Jews in their territory Hungarian citizenship and equal rights. Unfortunately, they were unable to complete the task during the short period that they were in power. Some regions complied with the request and prepared a very detailed census. From the regions investigated by me, I only found the census data in the Szabolcs county. In the two other counties the Jewish censuses are closed in the first third of the 19th century.

My work mainly has based on these data that I have analysed and scheduled for the aim of better perspicuity and for comparison. In most cases I have prepared a table and populated it with the available numerical data for clearer overview and comparison. In addition I have also analysed the available textual information. In case of small and fragmented census data, I only mention textually. The larger groups of census data as well as those that indicate a changing trend are always presented in a table categorized according to different aspects.

If I have got possibility when data was available, I have featured highlighted the following aspects:

Territorial apportionment distribution of the population, numbers of the families, and numbers of people, place of birth, immigration date to Hungary, where did they come from, professions, numbers of children, the average age of the children, the average age of the heads of the family.

I use the township as territorial unity, however, in all of the three counties I have analysed some small town and village too. This provides information on the position of the Jews (the heads of the families) in the local society, and the structure of the local Jewish community.

It is important to publish these yet unpublished sources as the relevant documents from the period. Beside that they strongly challenge the enrooted ideas and beliefs related to the mass immigration of Eastern Jews, at least till the middle of nineteenth century.

### **Historical research in the three counties**

In the mid of the 1980s only material related to the historical Szabolcs county was available, in Szabolcs-Szatmár County Archives in Nyíregyháza. There was only fragmented material available about Szatmár county. The material related to what used to be Bereg county is in Beregszász and was not accessible at that time, even these days is difficult to reach. However, the material related to the historical Szabolcs county was detailed enough to provide answers to the issues that were of interest to my research providing a clear history of Jewish immigration to Szabolcs county from the beginning of the 18th century to the middle of 19th century

The first significant result demonstrated by the information that was retrieved from the sources is the fact that Szabolcs county is a secondary Jewish immigration site, in other words there existed migration within the country with a main route from the North-East to the South. Families may have settled along the route and possibly only the children continued the migration. This internal migration and settlement occurred in various periods and continued even in the middle of the 19th century. They were forced for that mobility, since the jobs they could reach (were not forbidden) were limited.

Despite the difficulty, the limitation in professions created a large variation of occupations. The list of these extends from the lease holders (arendator principalis) to the secondary lease holders, the one caldrion distiller to the wage-workers and cottars, from the few well-to-do traders to the numerous peddlers, from the tutors to the craftsmen and the almost endless variation of these.

The craftsmanship is appeared first in the census of 1770. Till that time the only one profession that can be part of this list was the butcher. At that time the craftsmanship was represented by a patch tailor and two goldsmiths

By the beginning of the 19th century the number of group of occupation increased and by the middle of that century it reaches the same popularity as the various forms of trading. Tailor was the most popular craft on the ever widening list of occupation during the whole period.

In Szabolcs county Jews also worked as tillers. Intelligentsia was represented by one-one physicians (mostly immigrants) tutors and rabbis represented the intellectuals. The religious professions were often fulfilled from Poland or from the traditional big communities in North-

Hungary. The Jewish population was economically divergent. At a later time, divergence also occurred along divided religious lines, but that period exceeds the time frame of my study. In most cases the newcomers were young families. This is apparent from the age of children. Some of the censuses registered the place of birth of the head of the family which can indicate the direction or the route of the migration. There were solely families in the Jewish population. They did not marry at an exceptionally young age, but marriage was considered a firm obligation. Thus only a few widows and widowers lived alone. The marriage at least in the beginning was territorially exogenous, but it is difficult to conclude more than this from the available data. The families were micro families, very rare that sibling or one of the parents live with the family.

The routes of the migration in the first half of the 19th century are clearly indicated by the census of 1848 which registered the place of birth of the children as well. In 1840 the territory that was open for free movement of Jewish population has increased, towns that were previously closed for Jewish settlement were opened for them to reside. This created new Jewish population movement to utilize the increased possibility.

In the same census of Szabolcs county in case of Nyíregyháza provides a clear view of the commencement of this process and its progress. Most of the immigration to Szabolcs county occurred in the first two decades of 1800s. From that period until the middle of 19th century there was no immigration of that magnitude.

My plan was to trace the internal migration routes back from Szabolcs county to their respective origins. As most of the settlers in Szabolcs county originated in Zemplén county, I continued my research there.

Based on this plan if I insist that idea the next places to investigate would be some now Eastern –Slovakian counties, like Sáros and Abaúj, but I decided to investigate Borsod, since there were also migration connection, and with the history of these three county I was able to have mapped most of Hungary's North-eastern region.

As the sources available in the historical Zemplén county are scarce and more fragmented, so the settling history that I could draw is less detailed. There was no Jewish census in Zemplén in 1848, and the latest very fragmented one is from 1821 that I could study.

The oldest censuses in Zemplén county are from the late 17th century by the Szepesi Chamber. At that time Jewish people lived only in the northern part of the county. They gained their livelihood from lease holding and trade.

In the years of 1720s they have settled already also at the southern part of the county. We already find some Jewish families at places that became the hometowns of large Jewish

communities for the end of the century.

At the 1730s number of Jews in Zemplén is more than half thousand. Most of the newcomers originated in Poland, but there was also a smaller number arriving from Moravia. Those whose birthplace was in Hungary, migrated from the northern counties of the country, where Jewish people already had settled earlier. In these early times the majority of Jewish population had changed their domicile rather often, but there were others whose as a minority chose to settle down and remained at the same place for decades. The contracts were renewed in every year, and this also can provide possibility to move another place.

Much can be learned about the occupations of the Jews from the census data of 1770. They were lease holders, sub leasers and employees in service of these people. The most popular lease was the inn keeping, the operation of inns and distilling. In Szabolcs county the brewery was common occupation. While in Zemplén county we find mostly brandy distillation, but we find beer brewing as well. In Borsod county the most extended occupation was the distillation. They use their own caldron or rented it from the landlord, or lease holders as sublease holders. There are only a few craftsman; we can find some tailors one goldsmith and silversmith, cobbler and bookbinder in the cities.

Jews were not segregated in the settlements. Through their work they had daily contacts with the Christian habitants by their work. This worked vice versa as they were not self supplying and needed the services and produce of Christian habitants. In the Hungarian settlements segregation of Jews did not occur also at later periods. There were no Jewish quarters not Jewish streets. The census data shows that there were often Christian servants employed by Jews quite often.

The examined period contains the II. Joseph's Edict of Tolerance. (1783) The declaration included in addition to the regulation of language usage and the obligation to use the language spoken in the province of the empire for teaching of general subject, also the permit to the Jews may follow craftsmanship, not only for the needs of nobility and not only in cities where were not guilds of that craftsmanship as it had regulated before. The impact of the new regulation is clearly visible in the census of the first decades of 19th century; The number of craftsmen and skilled professions has notable increased.

There has remained a fragmentary census from the first decade of the years of 1800s in Zemplén county. The heads who were born in this county are more than half of the whole, and those who had come earlier are from the neighbouring counties. Those who settled in from foreign countries generally one third of the heads (the rate is almost the same in the tree counties). Apart from a negligible minority they all came from Galicia.

In the southern parts of the county in the towns we find large Jewish communities, but in the northern part they are scattered in small villages.

Craftsmanship first appears in the towns. There are relatively few traders. The main source of livelihood is still lease holding. The taxes that were paid to the treasury and to the county Jews paid together. The well to do members of the community paid more, the poorer less tax, and the real poor people did not pay. The poorest people were sign as beggar or pauper in the census. This phenomenon was countrywide.

The majority of Jews who arrived in Borsod in the start of the 1700s, immigrated from Moravia a few came from Poland. Later, similarly to the other two counties, new settlers came from the northern Hungarian counties.

In Borsod the main occupation was the distillator, the innkeeper and various kinds of jobs connecting to that business. The circle of jobs barely extended, just very slowly with other type of lease holding.

The majority of tradesmen were peddlers the profitable trading was rare. ( income seems from the taxes). At the years of 1730th all the Jews who lived in Miskolc worked as traders.

For the last third of the century formed bigger community in (Hejő)Csaba, Miskolc, and Váttha. That meant families between twenty and thirty. Jewish families lived at 59 bigger and smaller settlements in the county. Formation of occupations is interesting data for the rural society at the second half of the 18th century. One could think, as the occupations for Jews were limited, very few jobs were reachable for them. This is partly true, but they formed such a various combination of that few jobs, that the whole list of occupations is very colourful.

Anyone who was able or who need to often worked in more than one professions, sometimes in three. They had to maximally use the narrow possibility, because they had to pay everywhere and for everything. They pay to the landlord on the different occupation, not only for the lease holders.

Lease holders were relatively few, they were the mean lease holders, and they had a lot of sublease holder and some of them were employee or employees in this system the poorest person could find some work. The employees generally lived in the house of the employer. The wives of the poorest as some tutor, some inn worker worked as a worker as well. The lonely old or ill people were supported by the community.

We could find craftsmen in Borsod first time in the 1774 census, but only a few. The crafts are the same as were in Zemplén. In Borsod county the number of nobles were higher than nationwide, and that made easier the settling for Jews, as that provides possibilities for lease



holding beside the squatters.

From Borsod county I have presented the fragmentary census from 1821. I have presented however the whole of the complete census from 1831. The occupations are hardly changed, most of the family heads are lease holders and peddlers, and the number of the craftsmen is much smaller than in the other two counties.

The Jewish history of the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century is neglected. Scholars of the later period use to refer in generally for this time. With this documents based research I try to contribute to the formation of clearer view of that period.

### **Architectural relicts**

With the research on Jewish architectural relicts my primary aim was the documentation. I wanted to embalm something from the architectural heritage of the perished Jewish communities. I cannot say that it was in the last minute, because at that time it had passed away.

Knowing the villages where people usually save all the things for longer time than in towns, I hoped to find something. While I had studied the settling history, I went to the middle of 19th century this was not the case with the buildings. At the time of my fieldwork the available buildings with some exceptions, like for example the synagogue and yeshiva in Mád, were built on the end of 19th century or the beginning of 20th century.

I have looked for private houses, houses of rabbis, ritual bathes, since nobody paid attention that type of buildings, while the synagogues were better examined even at that time.

With a short chapter I deal with the building complex of Mád, since my work involves the houses of the rabbis and the yeshiva, and in this case I may not neglect the beautiful synagogue.

In the first period of their immigration in modern times Jews did not possess any buildings. They were tenants in the manorial houses and in other buildings. They rented the brewery, the inn, the mill, butcher stall, and they had to take care of them at most. In the census data of the early time we could find examples for whose houses Jewish people lived in. The Hungarian Jewish Archive publishes a Szatmár county census of 1740 where the living conditions are described in detail.

According to this, the houses had several rooms in a row with a separate entry, and each of them served as residence to a family. One of these rooms was the prayer room. There were unrelated men, mostly new arrivals who still did not have a family or did not yet bring their family over lived in the same room. Some Jewish lived in Christian's houses as well. Here we

find some Jews who have built his own house.

The cottar Jews are in a different list, they lived in the houses of some lease holders, and some of them lived in Christian's houses.

After the Edict of Tolerance declared by Joseph II., from the end of the 18th century, occurred possibility for the communities to build synagogues. At that time we could find not only permanent settling, but considerable religious life, and the places where Jews could build synagogues, significant financial basis. As long as they could not build synagogues Jews prayed in prayers room. This naturally does not provide a precise picture of the start of own building construction but can be used as a reference point.

In Szabolcs county we have information about the dwelling houses from the documents of the Fire Damage Exemption Institute established in 1843. This source mentions many references to the types of buildings in which Jews were residing in 1840s.

Although in certain parts of the country Jews lived permanently, the settlements of them are not continuous. As I have referred, the legal situation of Jews had changed, they settled in new places, and there were not effects of medieval regulations, they settled down where they could. Around the synagogue lived usually Jews. The centre of the towns and the villages in most cases were built in the Middle Ages so Jews who immigrated later, settled in newer streets. In that small towns, where urbanisation started to develop partly result of the presents of Jews, they lived in the newly opened streets, or the newly built centres of the town. In most cases they lived in the same house where the shop or the workshop was. These modest flats were quite often located in the inner court of the house. In small towns there were common to live in a ground floor house, one flat or only shop and workshop opened in the street some flat opened in the courtyard. This was already an urbanised structure. The poorer families rented the smaller flats at the back part of the house.

In the villages the houses of Jewish families were not different, than the houses of other habitants. When Jews had possibility to carry on own buildings they took over the local building customs. However, I have founded some buildings that have some significant characteristics. These specifics preserved the trace of a late immigration. The immigrants brought in the building customs of their former home. These characteristics are well distinguishable. The most conspicuous characteristic is the built sukka that means a roof that has a convertible part, and the room under it serves as a sukka.

I have written at the first time about these sukkas in the ethnographical literature in Hungary.

Fragmentary it was published in *Múlt és Jövő* 1992/1.

First of all I present tree building, where the owners brought in the architectural traditions of

their former home.

The presentation follows with five buildings that has built sukka, convertible roof.

I also looked for ritual bathes (mikve) and I have found four of them. One of them was built after the II World War in the ground floor of the rabbi house in Mátészalka. There was a ritual bath in Újfehértó which was the community's property before the II World War. The other two were private mikve.

I have found and documented some houses of rabbis all of them has its own architectural specific and importance as well. In Bodrogkeresztúr in that house was, the home and the office of one of the last miracle rabbi, Reb Sájele., as well as the late rabbi's house in Olaszliszka. The rabbi's house usually was located nearby to the synagogue, and next to them were the other important buildings of the community.

I have documented the Hassid synagogue also. The building served as poor homes, it was out of the researcher view. It is belongs the same group of buildings that the majority that I have collected.

### **Author's Publications in this theme**

Settling History of Jews in present Szabolcs –Szatmár county from the beginning of the 18th century to the middle of 19th century. In.: In the Bonds of Tradition (A hagyomány kötelékében) Ed. Ildikó Kriza. Budapest, 1990. 187-192. p.

The whole study: The Settling History of Jews in Szabolcs and Szatmár County 18-19th century. Szabolcs-Szatmári Szemle 1991/1. 32-50. p.

The Sukkah. Múlt és Jövő 1992/1. 87-90. p.

From Dura to Rembrandt. Rachel Wischnitzer and The European Synagogues. Pávilon /9. 1994. 2-6. p.

Settling History of Jews in Zemplén County from the End of 17th Century to the Beginning of 19th Century. In. Otthonkeresők, otthonteremtők. Ed. Schweitzer Gábor, Budapest, 2001. 18-43. p.

The Synagogue in Nagykanizsa. Budapest, 2010.

Jewels of the Thora. Interpretation of Symbols. Under publication ( Ethnica )

Thora Courtain from Óbuda, 1742. Interpretation of Symbols. Under publication ( Hungarian Applied Art 2010/4 )

### **References to her work**

Buczko, József: Jews in Újfehértó. Publications of Town Museum Újfehértó 2. 1998.

Csíki, Tamás: Some Speciality of settling in Towns and economical expansion of Jews in North- and Northeasten Hungary. ( [mek.hiif.hu/02000/02097/html/csiki.htm](http://mek.hiif.hu/02000/02097/html/csiki.htm) ) ( last download 16. 09. 2010 )

Csíki, Tamás: Jews in Towns in Northeastern and Eastern Hungary. Budapest, 1999

Halmos, Sándor: Data for the History of Jews in Bereg and Szabolcs counties, from the beginning of the settling to these days. (Gondolat) 2009

Kövér, György: „Jewish Society” in Tiszaeszlár on the eve of grate process. Korall 17. 2004.5-42.

Synagogues in Hungary. (Chief Ed. Gerő László) Budapest, 1989

Nagy, Ferenc: Devastation of Jews in Nyíregyháza. Nyíregyháza, 2004

Ricu, Zoltán: History of Jews in Nyíregyháza (1840-1872) Phd Dissertation ([phd.okm.gov.hu/disszertaciok/ertekezesek/2004/de-2142.pdf](http://phd.okm.gov.hu/disszertaciok/ertekezesek/2004/de-2142.pdf))(last download 16. 09. 2010)

Varga, László: Jewish immigration in Hungary. Századok 1992/1