

## Episode 32 – Jewish Cluj (Kolozsvár In Hungarian, Klausenburg in German, Kloyznburg in Yiddish)

Hello, I am Adrian Iosifescu, your host of the History of Romanian Jews podcast and this is episode 32 where we continue exploration of Jewish history of some of the major Romanian cities, with the city of Cluj.

You just listened to Jewish music from Transylvania played on accordion. A link to the full record is provided in the episode notes.

### Cluj

Cluj is officially called in Romanian Cluj-Napoca, Napoca being the name of the Roman settlement in Dacia on this location, Kolozsvár In Hungarian, Klausenburg in German and Kloyznburg קלויזנבורג in Yiddish. The Napoca addition to the city name happened in 1974, when the communist authorities made this nationalist gesture with the goal of emphasizing the city's pre-Roman roots.

Cluj is the second-most populous city in Romania after Bucharest. Geographically, it is roughly equidistant from Bucharest (445 km; 277 mi), Budapest (461 km; 286 mi) and Belgrade (483 km; 300 mi). Located in the Someșul Mic river valley, the city is considered the unofficial capital of the historical province of Transylvania. Prior to the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, it was the official capital of the Grand Principality of Transylvania. As of 2021, about 287,000 inhabitants live in the city. The Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area had a population of over 412,000 people. In 1850, 63% of Cluj population was Hungarian versus 21% Romanian while in 2021 the Hungarian city population represents 14% while the Romanian side reached 85%.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the city is one of the most important academic, cultural, industrial and business centers in Romania. Among other institutions, it hosts the country's largest university, Babeș-Bolyai University and nationally renowned cultural institutions such as the National Theatre and Opera.

As I mentioned before, on the site of the city was a pre-Roman settlement named Napoca. After the Roman conquest of the area in 106, the place was known as Municipium Aelium Hadrianum Napoca. Possible etymologies for Napoca or Napuca include the names of some Dacian tribes such as the Napolis or Napaei.

Napoca became a provincial capital of the Roman Dacia, Dacia Porolissensis, and thus the seat of a procurator. The *colonia* was evacuated by the Romans in 274.

The first written mention of the city's current name was in 1213 under the medieval Latin name *Castrum Clus*. It is believed that the county's designation derives from the name of the castrum, which might have existed prior to its first mention in 1213.

Although the precise date of the conquest of Transylvania by the Hungarian tribes is not known, the earliest Hungarian artifacts found in the region are dated to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In any case, after that Transylvania became part of the Kingdom of Hungary. In 1541, Kolozsvár became part of the Eastern Hungarian Kingdom that became the Principality of Transylvania in 1570, under the Turks, after the Ottoman Turks occupied the central part of the Kingdom of Hungary. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Klausenburg and all of

Transylvania were again integrated into the Kingdom of Hungary. During this time, Kolozsvár was among the largest and most important cities of the kingdom. After the first world war the Cluj electorate proclaimed the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania in the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918; the transfer of sovereignty was formalized by the international Treaty of Trianon in June 1920.

In 1940, Cluj, along with the rest of Northern Transylvania, became part of Horthy's Hungary through the Second Vienna Award arbitrated by Nazi Germany. On 11 October 1944 the city was captured by Romanian and Soviet troops and Transylvania was formally restored to the Kingdom of Romania by the Treaty of Paris in 1947.

### **Cluj Jewish History**

it is not possible to speak about a continuous Transylvanian Jewish history. Archaeological excavations provide evidence that Jewish soldiers of Palestinian origin came to and were garrisoned in Dacia together with the Roman legions. After the withdrawal of the Romans nothing is known about Jews, yet in the Árpáadian period, 9<sup>th</sup> century, they appear more and more frequently in the Western and Northern part of Hungary, also including Transylvanian territories at that time.

The Jewish presence in Cluj was first noted in a document dating from 1481 that referred to a conflict between Jews from Cluj and the powerful Haller family of Buda. One century later, in 1578, a Jewish presence at the Cluj fair was considered alarming by the authorities. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jews were allowed to settle in just one town of Transylvania, Alba Iulia; hence, only during the age of Emperor Joseph's II reforms (1780–1790) were there again indications of Jews in Cluj.

On the eve of the 1848 revolution, a census recorded 58 Jewish families in Cluj, of which the local authorities intended to have 16 banished. The community was denied the right to a synagogue, school, or cemetery.

The number of Jews in Cluj increased in 1850–1851 to 479 people; the first synagogue was established in 1851; and in 1852 the community elected its first rabbi, Hillel Lichtenstein. The rabbis of the Glasner family led the Orthodox community, a group that was formed as a result of the division that took place after the General Jewish Congress of Hungary of 1868–1869. Those who refused to accept the Orthodox orientation were organized in 1881 into a Status Quo community, neither Orthodox nor Neolog (Neolog corresponds to what we call today Reformed), which became Neolog in 1884, and which established its own synagogue in 1886. A Hasidic community was established in Cluj in 1921 and it existed until 1944 under the leadership of Rabbi Zalman Leib Halberstam.

In 1866 the number of Jews in Cluj was just 776; over the period immediately following the civil emancipation (1869–1870) this figure went up to 3,008. The census recorded 7,046 Jews in Cluj in 1910, accounting for 11.6 percent of the total population of the city. The Romanian census of 1930 recorded 13,504 Jews.

The Orthodox community opened an elementary school in 1875, and the Neolog community set up a similar institution in 1903; the first school for girls was founded in 1908.

In the 19th century, a Jewish-named street, Zsidó Kőz, known today as Horea, already appeared in Cluj.

Persecutions, restrictions, and the bans of the Holocaust brought an end to the flourishing age of Jewish life in Cluj. In 1944 Nazi troops occupied Hungary and on March 27 they entered Kolozsvár. On May 3, the ghettoization of Kolozsvár Jews began, and was completed within one week. The Jews were concentrated in the Iris brickyard, in the northern part of the city. This area consisted mostly of shacks used for drying bricks and tiles.

The Kolozsvár Ghetto was liquidated in six transports to Auschwitz, with the first deportation occurring on 25 May, and the last on 9 June. Altogether 16,148 inhabitants of the ghetto were deported. Upon arrival, 75% of them were sent to the gas chambers. The remaining were subjected to disease and starvation.

Though elementary and secondary schools were reopened after the war, and though a Jewish vocational school was established for survivors of the Holocaust, these institutions were then closed due to the Communist reform of the education system in 1948.

### **Cluj Jewish Culture**

Let me share with you the Jewish landscape of institutions and organizations operating in the interbelic Cluj:

In addition to the two large communities, orthodox and neolog, with their central synagogues, there were twenty small synagogues and houses of prayer.

Functioning Kadisha, which, in addition to their traditional function of burying the dead, engaged in social welfare activities.

The Jewish Women's Organization maintained a home for needy children as well as an Aged Women's Home. An Aged Man's Home was attached to the Po'ale Tsedek Synagogue. Each of the larger congregations maintained a Jewish school, and joined hands in the maintenance of high schools for boys and girls. The Talmud Torah of the Orthodox Congregation had hundreds of pupils. In 1934 a yeshiva named in honor of the Chatam Sofer was established.

In Cluj there was a Jewish orchestra, Goldmark Philharmonic Orchestra. The foundations were laid for the construction of a large Cultural House, while the Haggibbor Sporting Organization made provision for the physical education of Jewish youth.

In 1927 a Jewish Hospital was established, while Jewish doctors organized themselves in the Paul Ehrlich Society.

A Jewish Bank ("Kishitel – bank") operated with the aid of the American Joint Distribution Committee.

Excellent work was done by the Arvagondozo Orphanage Institution, which provided vocational training and preparation of the youth for life in Palestine.

The National Zionist Organization began its activities on November 20, 1918. It sponsored the establishment of high schools and the issue of Uj Kelet newspaper, edited by the late Dr. E. Marton. The Zionist parties and youth organizations were very active in Kolozsvár; the Keren Kayemet, Keren Hayesod and WIZO opened their national offices in Kolozsvár. A lodge of the Order of the Bnei-Brit was established and issued a monthly organ called Bnei Brith. Jewish students of the local university organized the Committee for Aid to University Students, which extended financial assistance to Jewish students throughout Transylvania.

A local Hebrew printing press contributed towards the diffusion of Torah, Hebrew language, and culture, not only among the local inhabitants of the city, but also in other parts of the country.

The Jewish community has figured centrally in the history of Transylvania, and in that of the wider region. They were a substantial and increasingly vibrant presence in Cluj in the modern era, contributing significantly to the town's economic dynamism and cultural flourishing in the late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although the community comprised a significant share of the town's population during the interwar period, 15%, this figure plummeted as a consequence of the Holocaust and emigration; by the 1990s only a few hundred Jews remained in Cluj- Napoca.

### **Cluj Jewish Cemeteries**

An important element of Jewish presence in Cluj is the existence of Jewish cemeteries. There are 35 Jewish cemeteries in Cluj from which only 4 in the city, 31 in Cluj County, Salaj and Mures. The Jewish cemeteries of Cluj reflect the city's rich history and the evolution of Jewish communities. From the Upper Házsongárd Cemetery, which began as an Orthodox cemetery and later became Neolog, to the New Neolog and Orthodox cemeteries, these places commemorate generations of Jewish life in the area. Each cemetery tells a unique story of tradition, change and commemoration.

**Upper Házsongárd**, the first Orthodox/Neolog cemetery (**Old Neolog Cemetery**) on Aviator Bădescu Street. This is located in the eastern part of the main Házsongárd cemetery, where the first Jewish graves were placed around 1840. It was not until 1843 that approval was received for this area, and until 1892 it was a resting place predominantly for Orthodox Jews. Starting with 1883, graves of neolog Jews began to appear, and in the first part of the 20th century, it became exclusively a neolog cemetery, until 1970 when it was closed. The famous rabbi Mátyás Eisler, who was a Neolog rabbi and a known historian, rests here.

**The New Neolog Cemetery** on Șoimului Street was established in 1925 with a small mortuary chapel and a separate area for the burials of mixed families, in which one of the spouses was of Christian religion.

**The Old Orthodox Cemetery** on Calea Turzii was established in 1892, being used until 2000. Most of the tombstones have inscriptions only in Hebrew.

**The New Orthodox Cemetery** also on Calea Turzii was established in 1928. At the entrance to the graves area, the first funerary monument was placed in 1947, dedicated to the memory of the Jews ghettoized and killed during April-May 1944.

### **Cluj Synagogues**

Let us discuss the Cluj synagogues, symbol of Jewish life in Cluj.

The **Neolog Synagogue**, also known as the **Temple of the Deportees**, is dedicated to the memory of those deported who were victims of the Holocaust and located on Horea Street. Designed by Izidor Hegner in the Moorish Revival style, the synagogue was completed in 1887. It was seriously affected after attacks by the Iron Guard on September 13, 1927, and later

