

Episode 46 - Prominent Romanian Jewish Personalities and Families from Cluj and Alba Iulia

Hello listeners, Adrian Iosifescu again, your host of the History of Romanian Jews podcast. In this episode, we will continue our virtual visit of Transylvania with the cities of Cluj and Alba Iulia (please see their location on the Romanian map presented in the notes).

You just listened to Adrian Socaciu singing “Așa i-am spus la mândra” (That’s what I told my sweetheart); a link to the full recording is provided in the episode notes.

Cluj Jewish History

We will not discuss the Jewish history of the city of Cluj as we did it extensively in “Episode 32 – Jewish Cluj (Kolozsvár In Hungarian, Klausenburg in German Kloyznburg in Yiddish)”. Instead, we will present a comprehensive overview of the prominent historical Jewish personalities and families of Cluj, the capital of Transylvania. I am only going to remind you of some relevant facts in the context of our focus on Jewish personalities from Cluj.

Until 1918, Cluj was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, specifically the Kingdom of Hungary, and as a result, it had a strong Hungarian cultural identity that profoundly shaped its Jewish community. The city’s Jewish history is primarily a Hungarian Jewish story that became Romanian after 1918.

Jews arrived in Cluj relatively late compared to Moldavia; significant settlements are only known from the early 19th century.

Cluj's Jewish community was dominated by the Neolog (Reform) movement, the Hungarian Jewish religious reform tendency. This was very different from the Orthodox and Hasidic communities of Moldavia. The Neolog community was modernizing, integrating, and deeply invested in Hungarian civic life.

The Jewish community of Cluj was one of the largest in Transylvania. Of the over 16,000 Jews who lived in the heart of Transylvania in 1941, only around 400 appear in the documents of the Jewish Community in 2013.

Cluj Rabbinical Leaders

As usual, we will start the personalities review with Cluj rabbinical leaders.

Alexander (Chanoch Yehuda) Kohut (1842 – 1894) was a rabbi and orientalist. He belonged to a family of rabbis, the most noted among them being Rabbi Israel Palota, his great-grandfather, Rabbi Amram (called "The Gaon," who died in Safed, Palestine, where he had spent the last years of his life), and his great-granduncle Rabbi Chayyim Kitssee, rabbi in Erza. Kohut's father, Israel Kohut, was a great linguist and well versed in rabbinic literature. He was so poor that he could not afford to send his son to the village school. There being no Hebrew school in his native town, Alexander reached his eighth year without having learned even the rudiments of Hebrew or Hungarian. His family soon relocated to Kecskemét, where Kohut received his first instruction. He attended the gymnasium and at the same time studied Talmud with an old scholar, Reb Gershom Lövinger. In his fifteenth year, while trying to decipher some foreign words in the Talmud with the aid of Landau's Dictionary, he conceived the plan of writing a complete lexicon of the Talmud, not having found the etymology of many words in Landau. After finishing the gymnasium course in Kecskemét, he moved to Budapest. Anxious to continue his rabbinical studies, he went to Breslau. In 1864 he received his Ph.D. degree from

the University of Leipzig. He obtained his rabbinical diploma in 1867 and he was called to the rabbinate of town of Székesfehérvár, in Hungary. Baron József Eötvös, the famous Hungarian poet and novelist, and afterward "Cultusminister," appointed him superintendent of all the schools in the county, this being the first time that such a position had been tendered to a Jew. The Congress of Jewish notables held in Budapest in 1868 appointed Kohut its secretary. In 1872 he was elected chief rabbi of Pécs, Hungary, remaining there for eight years. By this time his reputation as a Hungarian orator had spread so far that many noted statesmen and church dignitaries came to hear him from distant towns. Around 1873, Kohut began to compile his Dictionary of the Talmud, entirely in German, encouraged by the promise of a Christian nobleman to bear all costs of publication. It is this trait of untiring patience, which scorned all obstacles, that made the publication of vol. I, in 1878, possible. His Maecenas, in the meantime, had died, and Kohut was left to bear the burden of expense alone, save for the subvention of the Academy of Sciences in Vienna and of the Cultusministerium in Berlin. The first four volumes were printed during his residence in Hungary, and the last four during his sojourn in the United States, covering a period of fourteen years (Vienna, 1878–92). In 1880, Kohut was called to Oradea, where he remained until 1884. At Oradea he became acquainted with Kálmán Tisza, prime minister of Hungary, who, hearing him speak at a national gathering of notables, was so carried away by his eloquence that he caused him to be called to the Hungarian parliament as representative of the Jews. From 1884 to 1885 he served as the chief rabbi of the progressive Neolog Jewish community in Cluj. In 1885, Kohut was invited to be the rabbi of Congregation Ahavath Chesed in New York. Kohut was associated with the Rev. Sabato Morais in founding the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, becoming one of its advisory board, and being active as professor of Talmudic methodology up to the time of his death. In 1889, on the occasion of his finishing the *Aruch Completum*, he was the recipient of many honors, notably at the hands of various learned bodies in Europe. It was called a "great work", "epoch making" and "foremost work in Semitic lexicography".

Dr. Mathias Eisler was a highly prominent chief rabbi, scholar, and historian who served as a vital leader of the Jewish community in Cluj. He served as the Chief Rabbi of the Neolog Jewish community in Cluj for nearly four decades, from 1891 until his death in 1930. Under his leadership, the community saw significant cultural and institutional growth. Rabbi Eisler was a pioneering historian of Transylvanian Jewry. In the interwar period, Rabbi Dr Mathias Eisler began to research the history of the Jews of Transylvania; much of what we know about early community records from that region is preserved solely through his published academic work. As a recognized scholar of Semitic languages and history, he was a contributor to major academic projects of his time, including the widely referenced Jewish Encyclopedia.

Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam (1905 – 1994) was a rebbe (hereditary rabbinical leader) of the Hasidic dynasty of Sanz-Klausenburg. Halberstam was born in 1905 in Rudnik, Austrian Galicia, in what is present-day Poland. He was a great-grandson of Chaim Halberstam, founder of the Sanz hasidic dynasty. When he was 13 his father, Tzvi Hirsch Halberstam, the rabbi of Rudnik, died. In 1925, Halberstam married his second cousin, Pessel Teitelbaum. She was the daughter

of Chaim Tzvi Teitelbaum and therefore the sister of Moshe Teitelbaum as well as the niece of Joel Teitelbaum. In 1930 he became rabbi of a Nusach Sephardic congregation in Cluj. In 1941 Halberstam, his wife, and their eleven children were arrested and brought to Budapest, where the family was separated. He was jailed with a group of leaders who were to be sent later to Auschwitz, but eventually he was released and the family returned to Cluj. On 19 March 1944 the Germans invaded Hungary and Hungarian Jews were confined to ghettos and then deported to the Auschwitz death camp. The Cluj ghetto was established on 1 May 1944, and was liquidated via six transports to Auschwitz between late May and early June. Halberstam fled to the town of Baia Mare, where he was conscripted into a forced-labor camp along with 5,000 other Hungarian Jews. About a month after his arrival the Nazis took over Hungary. He was sent to Auschwitz, where his wife and nine of their children who remained with her in Cluj had been sent several months earlier. They did not survive. Halberstam was assigned to a work unit in the Warsaw Ghetto and later was sent to the Dachau concentration camp as a slave laborer, and then to the Muldorf Forest, where the Nazis were building an underground airport and missile batteries. In the spring of 1945 the Germans disbanded the Muldorf camp and sent the inmates on a death march from which the survivors, including Halberstam, were liberated by Allied troops in late April.

After Allied liberation, the Klausenberger Rebbe met Dwight D. Eisenhower and criticized Allied failure to bomb the death camps and train tracks leading to them, insisting it could have saved millions of Jewish lives. In spring 1946 he went to the United States, where he established his court in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, New York, in 1947.

In 1958 Halberstam established the Kiryat Sanz neighborhood in Netanya, Israel, and moved there from Brooklyn, in 1960. He also established the Kiryat Sanz neighborhood of Jerusalem. In 1968 he founded another Sanz community in Union City, New Jersey, and afterwards divided his time between that community and Netanya.

Halberstam established Laniado Hospital, a voluntary, not-for-profit 484-bed hospital in Kiryat Sanz, Netanya. The hospital's first building, an outpatient clinic, opened in 1975. The hospital includes two medical centers, a children's hospital, a geriatric center and a nursing school, serving a regional population of over 450,000.

Halberstam died in 1994 and he was buried in Netanya.

Moses Carmilly-Weinberger (chief rabbi, 1934–1944) was born into a religious family in Budapest, he studied in yeshivot and high schools in Transylvania and rabbinical seminaries in Budapest and Breslau, obtaining his Ph.D. from the Budapest University. For many years he led the Jewish Neolog community of Cluj, until 1944, when he left for Bucharest in the face of the danger of ghettoization and subsequent deportation of the North Transylvanian Jews to the German death camps by the fascist Hungarian authorities. From Bucharest he arrived in Mandatory Palestine, from where he then went to New York, where he pursued a career studying the history and culture of Transylvania's Hungarian-speaking Jews. After 1989 he contributed to the creation of the Carmilly-Weinberger Institute for the study of Hebrew and Jewish History, which operates within the framework of the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj. Here he organized many conferences and lectures about the history of Transylvanian Jews, their traditions, and their culture. Among his best known works is *Censorship and Freedom of Expression in Jewish History* (1977).

Cluj Jewish Artists, Intellectuals and Civic Leaders

The first recorded Jewish person permitted to live in Cluj was the tradesman **Löbel Deutsch**, who opened a shop around 1780–1790, during the reforms of Emperor Joseph II. When Emperor Joseph II's reform policies were withdrawn in 1790, local city authorities moved to shut down Deutsch's shop. When Deutsch complained to the administration of the province of Transylvania, his 11-year-old daughter was kidnapped and forcibly baptized; this case generated an important conflict involving the Court of Vienna and Emperor Francis II.

Abraham Wald (1902–1950) was born on October 31, 1902, into an orthodox Jewish family. A religious Jew, who did not want to attend school on Saturdays, as was then required by the Hungarian school system, was homeschooled by his parents until college. He qualified for university and attended King Ferdinand I University in Cluj (now known as Babeş-Bolyai University). He graduated with a degree in mathematics in 1928 before moving on to the University of Vienna for his Ph.D. He later moved to the United States where he famously solved a critical World War II armor problem by recognizing survivorship bias in returning aircraft: the military inspected returning bombers and found bullet holes mostly on the wings and fuselage, but very few on the engines. Officers wanted to add extra armor to the wings and fuselage where the holes were dense. Wald realized they were only looking at planes that survived; the absence of bullet holes on the engines meant planes hit there did not make it back. He recommended putting armor on the engines instead, which saved countless aircraft and crew members.

Egon Balas (1922–2019) was born in Cluj in a Hungarian Jewish family. His original name was Blatt, which was first changed to the Hungarian Balázs and then later to the Romanian Balaş. Balas obtained a "Diploma Licentiate" in economics from Babes-Bolyai University in 1949, Ph.D. in economics from the University of Brussels, in 1967 and Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Paris in 1968.

He was married to art historian Edith Balas, a survivor of Auschwitz, with whom he had two daughters. He was imprisoned by the Romanian Communist authorities for several years after the war. He left Romania in 1966 and accepted an appointment with Carnegie Mellon University in 1967. He was the Thomas Lord Professor of Operations Research at Carnegie Mellon's Tepper School of Business and did fundamental work in developing integer and disjunctive programming.

Olga Lengyel (1908 – 2001) was born in 1908 in Cluj and studied literature and geography at King Ferdinand I University in Cluj. She shifted to medicine after marrying Dr. Miklós Lengyel, working as a surgical assistant in their hospital. She was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944 alongside her parents, husband, and two sons. She worked in the camp infirmary and secretly aided the underground resistance, helping demolish a crematory oven. She survived the camp and a death march, though she was the only member of her family to survive the war. She moved to New York where she published *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* in 1946, one of the earliest and most impactful eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust.

Otto Adler (1929 – 2014) was born on 4 May 1929, into a large Jewish family from Cluj. During World War II, Adler was a prisoner at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. He was 15 years old when he arrived at the camp but despite a frail appearance managed to avoid certain death by answering that his real age was 17 when asked by the guards. He weighed 70 kg (150 lb.) when he arrived, but only 29 kg (64 lb.) when he left the camp. In 1953 he graduated at the Mechanical Faculty from the Politehnica University of Bucharest where he taught until 1994. From 1961 to 1991 he worked at the Metallurgic Research Institute in Bucharest. When talking about antisemitism in Romania Mr Adler declared: “I can honestly say that there is still anti-Semitism in Romania. And this when there are about 8,000 Jews in the country!”. Adler died on 6 May 2014, at the age of 85.

The Fischer family is probably the most historically consequential Jewish family in Cluj. **Dr. Theodor Fischer**, also known in Hungarian as Tivadar Fischer, was a prominent Hungarian-Romanian Jewish politician, Zionist leader, and industrialist who served as a core representative of the Transylvanian and Cluj Jewish professional and commercial classes during the interwar period. Following the collapse of Austria-Hungary, Fischer became a foundational architect of Jewish political autonomy in Transylvania. In November 1918, he helped lead a historic Jewish nationalist demonstration in Cluj, which resulted in the establishment of the Jewish National Association of Transylvania, with Fischer serving as its president. He co-founded the Jewish Party of Romania (Partidul Evreiesc) and was elected its first national president at its inaugural conference in Bucharest in May 1931. He worked alongside fellow Transylvanian leader József Fischer to champion minority rights, push back against rising state-backed antisemitism, and protect Jewish professional and commercial interests. Following the 1944 German occupation of Hungary, Fischer was forced into the Cluj Ghetto, where he was appointed a member of the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council). Because of his high standing among the Jewish leadership, Fischer, along with his family, was included on the Kastner Train. Fischer survived the war and continued to advocate for the shattered community of Northern Transylvania. During the post-war peace settlements, he drafted and submitted crucial memorandums regarding the rights of Transylvanian Jews for property restitution and legal reparations. His documentation was later leveraged by Romanian diplomats at international peace conferences to establish the historical extent of the Nazi and Hungarian economic exploitation of Jewish assets.

József Fischer (1887–1952), not related to Theodor Fischer, was a lawyer, head of the Neolog Jewish community, and a leading figure in the Jewish National Party, serving in the Romanian Parliament (1928–1933). During the Holocaust, he headed the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) of the Cluj Ghetto.

József Fischer was born into a wealthy Orthodox Jewish family in Tiszaújhegy, Austria-Hungary (present-day Nove Selo, Ukraine) on 15 December 1887. After taking his bar exam, he worked as a lawyer clerk at the law firm of Vilmos Vázsonyi in Budapest. Fischer moved to Cluj in 1913. He was the editor-in-chief of *Új Kelet*, a Hungarian-language Zionist Jewish periodical in Cluj, from 1919 to 1921. He was elected president of the Neolog Jew congregation of Cluj in 1919. He held this position until 1944.

Fischer was a founding member of the Transylvanian Jewish National League, serving its president from 1923 to 1930.

Initially, József Fischer had been a critic of Zionism, before being drawn into it by other Transylvanian activists, to become "one of Transylvanian Zionism's most important personalities". He was active member of the Jewish Party, a "unified party of Romanian Zionists" established on 4 May 1931 in Bucharest. Its first conference elected Tivadar Fischer as party president, while József Fischer became leader of the party's Transylvanian branch. The Jewish Party took part in the 1931 Romanian general election and won four seats in the Assembly of Deputies.

When Northern Transylvania, including Cluj, was ceded by Romania to Hungary in the Second Vienna Award in September 1940, József Fischer remained on Hungarian territory. Following the German invasion of Hungary in March 1944, his fellow Zionists offered József Fischer to escape to Romania, but he refused. When Germans established the Cluj Ghetto, József Fischer became president of the Judenrat. Fischer was responsible for organizing life and order within the walls of the ghetto. According to witnesses, he was repeatedly beaten and abused during his operation by local Gestapo men and the Hungarian police. Together with his son-in-law **Rudolf Kastner**, he took part in the organization of the Kastner train mission. Kasztner, the controversial Zionist activist and journalist, negotiated with Adolf Eichmann and organized the "Kastner train" which saved roughly 1,680 Jews, many from Cluj, from deportation. Fischer himself was on that train. They were instead transported by the Nazis to Bergen-Belsen, where he temporarily chaired a "committee" of exempted Jews, and subsequently allowed to leave for Switzerland in late June 1944. His mother and two brothers, however, were killed in Auschwitz. Fischer emigrated to Mandatory Palestine in the autumn of 1945 where he died in 1952.

The Eisler family was active in Cluj's commercial life across several generations.

The most prominent member of the Jewish Eisler family in Cluj was **Rabbi Dr. Mátyás (Matitiah) Eisler** (1865–1930), who served as the Chief Rabbi of the city's Neolog Jewish community and was a respected Semitic scholar and historian. He was a professor of Semitic languages and a notable historian who researched and published foundational works on the history of Transylvanian Jewry. Alongside Orthodox leader Rabbi Moses Glasner, Eisler helped steer Cluj's Jewish community through the tumultuous political transition after World War I, co-founding the National Union of Transylvanian Jews in November 1918.

The Hintz family, a well-established Transylvanian Saxon and Jewish family, was involved in pharmaceutical trade and commerce. The Hintz family owned and operated the city's oldest public pharmacy inside the historic Hintz House, from the mid-19th century until 1949. The building dates back to the Renaissance era and housed Cluj's first public pharmacy, which opened in 1573. The family inherited the building in 1851 and renamed the shop "*Saint George's Pharmacy*".

The Romanian communist regime nationalized the building and closed the active pharmacy in 1949. Remaining family descendants left Romania and migrated to West Germany during the 1970s. The restored building now features the city's Pharmaceutical Museum and a local cultural bookstore.

The Fekete family was a well-known Hungarian-Jewish merchant family involved in grain and commodity trade.

The Weiss / Weisz families were involved in Transylvanian commerce, with several branches active in Cluj.

One of the most widely documented story of Weisz families from Cluj is the survival story of **Buba Weisz Sajovits** and her sister **Icu**. Before the war, Buba was a champion sprinter in her hometown of Cluj. On May 31, 1944, Buba, Icu, and their parents, Bernard and Lotte, were rounded up along with the rest of the local Jewish community and packed into cattle cars heading for Auschwitz. The girls survived slave labor, while their parents perished. Buba eventually immigrated to Mexico in 1946.

Another widely cited historical record from Cluj belongs to **Shari Weiss** (born 1929). Though born in the nearby village of Herina, she moved to Cluj at age nine to live with her aunt and uncle. Following the 1944 German occupation, she was held in the infamous Cluj brick factory transit camp for three weeks before being deported to Auschwitz. She and her aunt survived and were liberated by the American army

The Brüll family was connected to both commerce and cultural life in Cluj. The Jewish Brüll family was part of the city's prominent, assimilated, and non-religious middle-to-upper-class community so they focused heavily on professional life, classical arts, and education rather than orthodox religious practice. Family members are referenced in Holocaust-era archives and survivor testimonies, such as through the Centropa collection, which details figures like **Silvia Brull** and her relations, who navigated the tumultuous period of Hungarian annexation (1940–1945) and subsequent anti-Jewish laws.

Alba Iulia Jewish History

Let's leave Cluj and turn our attention to the town of Alba Iulia.

Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár in Hungarian, Karlsburg in German) holds a special place in Transylvanian Jewish history as it was the oldest and, for two centuries, the only legally recognized Jewish community in the region, where, from 1653 to 1848, all Transylvanian Jews were legally required to reside.

Jews had a documented presence there from the end of the 16th century. The original Jewish settlers were Sephardim, arriving via Ottoman trade routes, an unusual origin for a Transylvanian community, which later grew increasingly Ashkenazi.

In 1623, the Jews in Transylvania were awarded certain privileges by Prince Gabriel Bethlen, who aimed to attract entrepreneurs from Ottoman lands into his country. Later, in 1653, the region's code of laws, the *Approbatae Constitutiones*, required all Jews in Transylvania to live exclusively in Alba Iulia. The city thus became the only legally permitted Jewish home in all of Transylvania for over a century, a concentration that made it simultaneously the most restricted and most important Jewish community in the region.

According to the testimony of the Swedish traveler Conrad Jacob Hiltenbrandt from 1656, Jews had already established a synagogue in Alba Iulia by the middle of the 17th century.

Under Habsburg rule, prohibitions on Jewish settlement were maintained across Transylvania, meaning new arrivals were only permitted to settle in Alba Iulia. Between 1754 and 1879, the

Jewish community of Transylvania was placed under the jurisdiction of a chief rabbi based here. From the 1690s on, Ashkenazi Jews began arriving alongside the established Sephardim, mostly from the Habsburg lands to the west, and existing privileges were reconfirmed, though now under the added oversight of the Roman Catholic bishopric.

For nearly 150 years, the rabbi of Alba Iulia was the spiritual leader of all Jews in Transylvania. According to minute books kept in Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, Spanish, Hungarian, and Romanian between 1736 and 1835, the Jewish community was administered by a president, a committee of five to seven members, and a bet din (rabbinical court) composed of three to five members.

The numbers of Jewish families in Alba Iulia increased from 12 in 1689 to 54 in 1754, with individuals rising from 150 in 1785–1786 to 735 in 1850–1851, 1,221 in 1869, 1,357 in 1891, and 1,586 in 1910, representing 13.6% of the total population.

The first synagogue in Transylvania was built in Alba Iulia in 1840, named for chief rabbi Ezekiel Paneth. A second, the Sephardic synagogue, opened in 1883, reflecting the community's older Sephardic roots.

The Jewish cemetery, from 18th century, one of the oldest in Romania, contains several opulent family mausoleums built in the early 20th century by wealthy local Jewish families.

Economically, Alba Iulia's Jews were prominent in viticulture (grape-growing/winemaking) before moving into crafts and trade; local Jewish entrepreneurs later built the town's first mill, distillery, slaughterhouse, and power plant in the late 19th century.

Jews participated directly in industrializing the region; they helped build the first railway in Transylvania (Arad–Alba Iulia–Teiuș, 1866–1868), and local Jewish families founded significant enterprises.

The surge of antisemitism between the two wars culminated in Alba Iulia with the destruction of the Ashkenazic synagogue in 1938 by members of the Iron Guard.

Importantly, Alba Iulia sat within southern Romania under direct Antonescu rule, not the Hungarian-controlled Northern Transylvania, which included Cluj, so while conditions were harsh (forced labor, property loss, restricted movement), the community was not subjected to the 1944 mass deportations to Auschwitz that devastated Northern Transylvanian communities like Cluj.

Starting June 1941, rural Jews from across Alba County were forcibly evicted from their villages and relocated into the town itself — roughly 2,000 people were crowded in by July 1941, and the local Jewish community organized its own relief kitchen, feeding around 300 people daily, to support them.

The community partially rebuilt after the war, reaching about 2,070 people by 1947. Steady emigration to Israel over subsequent decades reduced the population drastically, down to roughly 45 Jews by 2003.

Alba Iulia Rabbinical Leaders

Let's now turn our attention to Alba Iulia rabbinical leaders.

Ezekiel Paneth (1783–1845) was the most celebrated of all Alba Iulia's rabbis, whose influence extended across all of Central European Judaism. He was born in 1783 at Bielitz, Silesia, studied in the yeshiva of Leipnik, Moravia, under Rabbi Baruch Fränkel, and then went to Prague, where Chief Rabbi Samuel Landau and the assistant rabbi Eleazar Fleckeles were his teachers. After his marriage in 1802 he spent five years at Linsk in Talmudic studies, then joined the ranks of the Polish Hasidim, with whom he maintained close relations throughout his life. He was successively rabbi at Ostriak (1807–1813) and Tarczal, Hungary (1813–1823), and then chief rabbi of Alba Iulia from 1823 to 1845.

Since there were practically no other rabbis in the province, he supervised the religious life of the whole area, making regular journeys for this purpose to the smallest and most isolated communities. During his period of office the community of Alba Iulia gradually transferred from the Sephardi rite, which initially prevailed, to the Ashkenazi one. According to a family tradition Panet left about 18 bound volumes in manuscript, but only one of his works was published posthumously; the responsa *Mareh Yehezkel u-She'arei Tziyyon* (1875), the first volume of responsa of a Transylvanian rabbi, of great halakhic value and an important source for the contemporary history of the Jews of Transylvania.

Panet's sons and grandsons were prominent rabbis throughout Transylvania and Hungary:

Hayyim Bezaleel Panet became rabbi of Tusnad; **Lebush Panet** served at Tarczal; **Menahem Mendel Panet**, rabbi of Dej.

One of the longest-serving Chief Rabbis of Transylvania, **Rabbi Moshe Margolioth** held the chair at Alba Iulia for nearly four decades, spanning the transition from the era of Maria Theresa to the Napoleonic period. In 1779, Empress Maria Theresa once again ordered all Jews living in Transylvania to be concentrated in Alba Iulia; this plan was put on hold by her son, Emperor Joseph II, who also allowed for the building of a Sephardic synagogue, a project proposed as early as 1774 but not completed until the synagogue opened in 1886.

Rabbi Sándor Fischer served the community for 36 years from 1892 to 1928, presiding over it through the tumultuous transitions of World War I, the transfer to Romanian rule, and the interwar antisemitic pressure.

Rabbi Mór Krausz guided the community from 1928 through the Holocaust period and into the postwar era. In 1932, under his leadership, the community became unified and fully adopted Orthodoxy, but including a Sephardic section.

Alba Iulia Jewish Artists, Intellectuals and Civic Leaders

The artist and sculptor **László Keleti** worked in Alba Iulia after World War I, representing the cultural aspirations of the Jewish community in the interwar period.

The *Siebenbuerger Israelit*, the newspaper of Transylvanian Jewry, was published in Alba Iulia in 1883, reflecting the city's role as the intellectual capital of Jewish Transylvania.

Abraham Szasza was a Jewish physician from Constantinople, invited to Transylvania by Prince Gabriel Bethlen; it was largely at his urging that Bethlen granted the Jews of Alba Iulia a liberal charter of residential and trading privileges in 1623, then endorsed by the National Assembly in 1627. This charter is the founding document of organized Transylvanian Jewish life.

The Russo family was one of the oldest documented Jewish families in Alba Iulia, represented in the historical record by **Avraham Yitzhak Russo**, who served as the first formally recorded Chief Rabbi of Transylvania (1736–1738). They were descendant of Sephardic Jews who had found refuge in Transylvania under the tolerant reign of the Transylvanian Princes.

The Auerbach family was represented by Rabbi **Yosef Auerbach**, who served as chief rabbi between 1742 and 1750. This family was part of the learned Ashkenazic element that began settling in Alba Iulia from the early 18th century.

The Bürger family had business ties stretching across northwestern Romania.

Albert Bürger was a very prominent person in Alba Iulia, at some stage described as the wealthiest man in Transylvania. Albert Bernath Bürger (1861–1938) originated from an established local family with roots in Oiejdea in Alba County. He later based much of his primary operations in Târgu Mureș, where he became one of the wealthiest and most influential businessmen in the region, managing extensive holdings in brewing, real estate, and alcohol production. Expanding his commercial footprint, Bürger established and operated a prominent branch or subsidiary enterprise in Alba Iulia starting around 1904, contributing to the industrial and economic development of the area during the Austro-Hungarian period.

The Glück family were wealthy landowners in the region. A Glück served as a president of the local Jewish community during the early 20th century.

The oldest industrial alcohol production facility in the city, the distillery, was established by Adolf Janos in 1866. The factory was developed to a capacity of 12 hectoliters by **Iacob Glück**, a man who succeeded in elevating his family to the ranks of Transylvania's wealthiest Jewish households. It was subsequently expanded to a capacity that was substantial for the era, dominating the urban landscape of the Lower Town. His descendants carried the tradition further and established two other factories, in Galtiu in 1899 and Alba Iulia in 1905 as well as a similar enterprise launched by **Rudolf Glück** in 1907. The family owned large vineyards, and the wines produced were tasted in the "Europa" restaurant they owned in Alba Iulia. Near the railway station the family owned a flour and pearl barley mill, considered one of the most modern in Transylvania, which is still known to locals today as "Glück's Mill."

In 1905, a notable high-rise building, described as the first of its kind in Alba Iulia, was built for the Glück family.

The legacy of Alba Iulia in Jewish history is nevertheless monumental: for nearly 150 years it was the religious capital of Transylvanian Jewry, producing a succession of great rabbinical scholars, above all Yehezkel Paneth, whose influence shaped Orthodox Judaism across all of Hungary, Romania, and beyond.

This concludes the episode on Cluj and Alba Iulia Jewish personalities.
Next, we will be visiting the other cities of Transylvania, Arad and Timișoara.
Until next episode, be well.