

# The Hebrew Print and the Jewish Society in North Transylvania in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Hebrew Printing House from Seini, Satu Mare County

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## Abstract

The article is a study research that attempts to reconstitute one facet of the Jewish cultural history, represented by the Jewish typographical activity in a geographic and historic context, i.e. North Transylvania at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

The core of the study is represented by a detailed research of the typographical activity of Jacov Wieder's printing house that he had set up in 1897 at Seini, a small locality in the county of Satu Mare. Wieder's printing house, where some 150 Hebrew book titles were printed, was activated alongside with some other 20 Hebrew printing houses of the same county until 1944. The Hebrew books printed at Seini are thoroughly examined from the point of view of their subject and authors.

The high technical quality of the print of Wieder's printing house and not less the prestige of the authors contributed to its fame and reputation. The books were distributed throughout the world and reached the Jewish communities from countries in the immediate proximity Eastern, Central and Western Europe and even North America and the Land of Israel.

## Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel ist eine Forschungsarbeit, die eine Facette der jüdischen Kulturgeschichte beleuchtet, welche durch die jüdisch-typographische Aktivität in ihrem geographischen und historischen Kontext repräsentiert wird. In diesem Fall bezieht es sich auf den Norden Transsylvaniens an der Wende vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert.

Der Kern dieser Studie ist eine Detailuntersuchung, die sich der typographischen Aktivität des Verlags von Jacov Wieder widmet. Wieder gründete den Verlag 1897 in Seini, einer kleinen Ortschaft in der Region Satu Mare. Der Wieder Verlag, in dem an die 150 hebräische Titel gedruckt wurden, bestand neben circa 20 anderen hebräischen Verlagshäusern im selben Bezirk bis 1944. Die hebräischen Bücher, die in Seini gedruckt wurden, werden in Bezug auf ihre Inhalte und die Autoren sorgfältig untersucht.

Die hohe technische Qualität der Druckerzeugnisse des Wieder Verlags und nicht zuletzt das Prestige der Autoren trugen zu seinem Ruhm und seiner Reputation bei. Die Bücher wurden in der ganzen Welt verbreitet und erreichten jüdische Gemeinden in vielen Ländern Ost(mittel)europas, Westeuropas und sogar Nordamerika und in Eretz Israel.

## Historical context

The emergence and development of the Hebrew print at Seini may be circumscribed in the evolutionary trend of the Hebrew printing in Transylvania in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Beyond the cultural reasons that the spread and development of the Hebrew print in that period incorporate, the emergence of the Hebrew printing houses was undoubtedly a reaction to the attempts of assimilation and a way to preserve spiritual identity. On the other hand, the Hebrew print was part of a general trend in the economic and industrial evolution as printed books were destined to market and to trade – it was generally subject to economic reasons in a modern society.

The Jews of this part of Europe, more exactly those from the territories placed under the authority of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, hold important positions in the country's economy. Two thirds of the Jewish population were part of the lower bourgeoisie and the industrial working class; one fourth, respectively, half of the writers, artists, journalists, lawyers, engineers, doctors and a fifth of the liberal professions were represented by the Jews at the turn of the centuries. Similarly, the Jews occupied an important part among the merchants, the industrial entrepreneurs, leaseholders in agriculture and in finances.<sup>1</sup>

Within the printing business, the Jews represented 57.5 % of the total number of the printing house owners and 18.37 % of the printers in Hungary at 1910 were also Jewish. According to the occupational employment statistics in Hungary there were 554 Jewish printing house owners and 2,813 Jewish printers. The Jewish printing house owners represented the largest segment within the occupational crafts hold by Jews. Thus, 57.05 % of the printing houses in Hungary belonged to Jews, 47.31 % of the workers in the supplying services, 23.62 % of the butchery owners, 22.85 % of the bakery owners, 20.90 % of the tailors, 12.03 % of the barbers, 8.91 of the shoemakers, etc.<sup>2</sup>

A general view of the Jewish printing houses of the North West of Transylvania in the interwar period may be reconstituted based on documents and re-

1 Barany, G.: *Magyar Jews or Jewish Magyar? Reflections on the Question of Assimilation*. In: *Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe*. Vago and Mosse, New York, 1974, p. 670.

2 Katus, L.: *The Occupational Structure of Hungarian Jewry in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. In: *Jews in the Hungarian Economy, 1760-1945*, Ed. by M.K.Silber, Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1992, p. 103; also cf. Dr. Venetianer, L.: *A Magyar Zsidóság Története*. Budapest, 1922, p. 483.

ports indited at the request of the Romanian governmental authorities. Those reports recorded and pointed out the entire printing activity in Romania and had a double purpose: on the one hand to set clear rules regarding the legal repository of printed books and on the other hand to have a clear control on all printed matters that were published after 1922 when the number of communist, irredentist and Anti-State publications multiplied exceedingly. This last objective was not clearly formulated but it derives from the orders and regulations issued by the authorities when all the printing houses were inventoried.

The authorities of the county of Satu Mare, just as those in the other parts of Romania, periodically submitted reports on the printing houses that included details on Jewish printing houses and those that printed with Hebrew characters. Thus, in 1923, the Ministry of Instruction, the Department of "The House of Schools and Cultural Life" sent the address No. 2219, signed by the minister C. Angelescu to the Prefect of the county of Satu Mare. In it, the authorities were asked to send in accordance with "the law concerning the obligations of the graphical arts workshops issued on March 19, 1904" (supplemented by the law of December 18, 1922) "to all the libraries mentioned by the law during the month of January of each year, a list with all printing houses and graphic establishments functioning in their district and give periodical reports on all the later changes". Also, it was stipulated that the lists "destined to the Library of the Romanian Athenaeum be sent directly to the House of Schools".<sup>3</sup>

In 1926, the Ministry of the Interior, through the agency of the Department of General Administration, Disputed Claims and Statistics, required the Prefect of the county of Satu Mare to send to the Romanian Academy "a list containing printing houses and graphic workshops" functioning in the county because "the Academy could not get hold of all the publications printed throughout the country that had to be included in the collection of its library". Moreover, the Academy "could not make a record of all the printing houses and graphic workshops existing in the country" the more so as they were "cultural documents of a great value and are indispensable for the control of all types of publications that are issued." All along the same line, it becomes clear that the county Prefect's offices were mandated to send the "Romanian Acad-

3 The National Archives of Satu Mare. The Prefectura of the Satu Mare county Fund, No. 56, leaf 42.

emy, during the month of January of each year such a record with all the changes that occurred meanwhile".<sup>4</sup>

Following those addresses, many records of the kind were indited, such as "a list of printing houses, lithographies and graphic workshops" that operated in the city of Baia Mare that comprised the printing house "Dacia" (a joint stock company), situated at No.1, Decebal street; the printing house "Hermes" (a limited partnership society owned by Andrei Barotan and spouse), situated at No.1, Crisan street; the Jewish printing house of Aladar Frankovits, situated at No. 17, Unirea Square; and the printing house "Presa Libera", a branch of the enterprise of Satu Mare, located at No. 13, Unirea Square.<sup>5</sup>

On February 22, 1927, in "a table of all the printing houses and other establishments of the sort functioning in the county of Satu Mare", 17 printing houses were listed. Many of those printing houses were owned by Jewish proprietors: Alexandru Weisz, Emeric Singer, Natan Hirsch and Josef Scheiman from Satu Mare, Aladar Frankovits from Baia Mare, Herman Friedman from Halmeu and Jacob Wieder from Seini.<sup>6</sup> In 1927, reports of the same sort were written, but this time by the county chiefs and local notary offices. Thus, the county chief's office from Seini mentioned that "in the town of Seini there is Jacov Wieder's printing house and book binding workshop", the notary office from Halmeu mentioned the printing house of a "small size with manual work" that belonged to Herman Friedman and in the city of Satu Mare eight printing houses are listed, out of which four belonged to Jewish proprietors: Alexandru Weisz, Josef Scheiman, Emeric Singer and Natan Hirsch.<sup>7</sup> In 1927 another printing house is mentioned in Carei that belonged to Sigismund Roth and Ludovic Komaromi.<sup>8</sup> In 1929, beside the already well known printing houses, some more were set up, those belonging to Jelenik and Davidovits, Kleiman and Heinrich and that of Emerich Horovits.<sup>9</sup>

A last report on the printing houses from the county of Satu Mare dates from 1930. 12 printing houses are mentioned in the city of Satu Mare and other five dispersed in the county. Those owned by Jewish proprietors were Frankovits' printing house in Baia Mare, Jacov Wieder's "Viata Culturala"

4 Idem, No.23, l. 8.

5 Idem, No.56, l.19.

6 Idem, No.23, l.20.

7 Ibidem, l.14-25.

8 Ibidem, l.27.

9 Ibidem, l. 57.

printing house in Seini, whereas the printing house from Halmeu was no longer mentioned.<sup>10</sup> The printing house from Seini is mentioned by the name of “Viata culturala” since 1928.<sup>11</sup> The name of the Satu Mare printing house owned by Jelenik and Davidovits was “Unitas” while that owned by Emeric Singer was named “Globus”.<sup>12</sup>

Certainly, in the county of Satu Mare the majority of the printing houses belonged to Jews. Thus, out of 20 printing houses that functioned in the county between 1922-1930, 10 were owned by Jewish proprietors and two of them, that of Hirsch from Satu Mare and the one owned by Jacov Wieder at Seini, printed also with Hebrew characters.

The table below indicates the printing houses that were operating in the Satu Mare county between 1922-1930 as mentioned in the archive documents:<sup>13</sup>

Nr. Crt.	Name of the printing house	Proprietor	Address	Locality
1.	„Pallas”	Dr. Schefler Anton	5, Gh.Lazăr Str.	Satu Mare
2.	„Presa liberă”	Presa liberă, S.p.a.	4, Cuza Vodă Str.	Satu Mare
3.	„Nord și Orient”	Szasz Francisc	26, Ștefan cel Mare Str.	Satu Mare
4.	„Gloria”	Balogh și Kővári, S.A.	1, Cuza Vodă Str.	Satu Mare
5.	„Patria”	Manyák Carol	24, Mihai Viteazul Str.	Satu Mare
6.	„Unitas”	Jelenik și Davidovits	4, Crișan Str.	Satu Mare
7.	„Weisz”	Weisz Alexandru	9, Brătianu Sq.	Satu Mare
8.	„Scheiman”	Scheiman Josif	23, Mihai Viteazul Str.	Satu Mare

10 Ibidem, l.60.

11 Ibidem, l.50.

12 Ibidem, l.27-50.

13 Ibidem, passim.

9.	„Hirsch”	Hirsch Ludovic	8, Cuza Vodă Str.	Satu Mare
10.	-	Kleinman și Heinrich	4, V. Lucaciu Str.	Satu Mare
11.	„Boros”	Boros Adolf	10, V. Lucaciu Str.	Satu Mare
12.	„Horovitz”	Horovitz Emerich	51, Negru Vodă Blvd.	Satu Mare
13.	„Szamos”	S.A.	4, Cuza Vodă Str.	Satu Mare
14.	„Roth și Komaromy”	Roth Sigismund și Komaromy Ludovic	3, Iuliu Maniu Str.	Carei
15.	„Dacia”	S.A.	1, Crișan Str.	Baia Mare
16.	„Frankovits”	Frankovits Aladar	12, Unirii Sq.	Baia Mare
17.	„Minerva”	S.A.	14, Unirii Sq.	Baia Mare
18.	„Friedman”	Friedman Herman	-	Halmeu
19.	„Mercur”	Emil Pop	-	Șomcuta Mare
20.	„Viața Culturală”	Wieder Jacob	-	Seini

### The printing house from Seini

Apparently, the printing house from Seini that belonged to the Wieder family began its typographic activity in 1897 as it is mentioned in a document issued by the county chief office of the Seini rural district on September 17, 1897. The document acknowledges that the printing house “possesses a patent of industry No. 716/1897 issued on February 9, 1897 as recorded in the industrial registers”. Based on this act, the firm was re-registered in 1931 at the

Chamber of Commerce and Industry.<sup>14</sup> Another document entitled “Request for registration” of August 21, 1931 mentions that Jacov Wieder, resident of Seini, born in Baia Sprie on July 12, 1872, requested the re-registration of his firm with “print, typography, book binding and foundry” as objects of activity, that was set up on February 9, 1897. It is mentioned in the request that the firm was not adjudged insolvent in the last ten years. The Seini printing house had a branch in Alesd, the county of Bihor, that was managed by David Pollak.<sup>15</sup>

In 1938, after a large campaign of checking the citizenship of the Jewish population launched by the Romanian authorities, the Rural Court of Seini issued a “final decision” on August 30, 1938, which certificated that Jacov Wieder had been recorded in the Register of Nationality and was granted “the right of indigenization in the town of Seini”. The document also mentions that Wieder proved, that before February 24, 1924 he had not asked, as granted by the law, for “another citizenship and did not give up the Romanian one” and that “he was granted the Romanian citizenship that he had not lost”.<sup>16</sup> The certificate attesting his citizenship served Jacov Wieder to forward to the Register of Commerce, on April 12, 1939, another “petition of re-matriculation of his firm”. Based on the 1931 matriculation, Wieder’s firm was re-registered in 1939 and was granted the right to legally function.<sup>17</sup>

Beginning with the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the activity of the Wieder printing house became undoubtedly part of the Seini economic and industrial growth to which the Jewish entrepreneurs essentially contributed. Among the most important industrialists of Hungary at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Lipot Holicser who opened a liquor factory at Seini.<sup>18</sup> Beginning with the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century all through 1944, the economic and industrial development in Seini was subsequent to the demographic growth of the Jewish population that gradually acquired an unprecedented economic position.

The first Jews settled at Seini in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Documents mention that in 1756 a certain Jacobus Israel moved from Seini to Potau<sup>19</sup> and in 1757 the Jews from Seini did not “pay their dues consisting of 70

14 National Archives of Satu Mare county, the Satu Mare Courthouse Fund, File No. 2522, leaf 2.

15 Ibidem, leaf 1.

16 Ibidem, l.4.

17 Ibidem, l. 3.

18 Dr. Venetianer, Lajos: *A Magyar Zsidóság Története*. Budapest, 1922, p. 483.

19 Dorner, A.E.: *Evreii din comitatul Satu Mare in secolul XVIII, 1723-1760*, Cluj Napoca, Cluj University Press, European Studies Foundation Publishing House, 1998, Vol. I, p. 305.

fowls” to the *comitatense* (the county) institutions.<sup>20</sup> In the occupational structure, the Jews of Seini in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were mainly merchants and cattle and sheep breeders. In 1761, the registers of the revenue authorities mention that all the financial obligations for the year 1760 of a certain Moises Israel from Seini have been paid off.<sup>21</sup> Another document of 1762 mentions that Abraham Zelikovics from Seini “made a deal with the inhabitants of the village of Bo-inești for supplying local inns with liquors, for which he paid all the taxes, although the value of the merchandise (liquor) was never paid; that is why he asked for justice in court”.<sup>22</sup> In 1768, another liquor merchant is mentioned to whom “the same Itsok Vamos did not pay back the 35 Florins that he owed him for wine and brandy that he had sold”.<sup>23</sup> In the conscription of 1781 the Jews of Seini that had to pay the tolerance tax were enumerated to 34 householders.<sup>24</sup> During 120 years, the number of Jewish families living in Seini sextupled, thus in 1944 there were about 200 Jewish families in Seini.<sup>25</sup>

In this general social, historical and economic environment of Seini, Wieder’s printing house started to operate in 1905 when the first book written with Hebrew characters was printed. It was a collection of sermons entitled *Yeroth Devasb* that belonged to Rabbi Jehonatan Oeibschitz, and was written in Yiddish.<sup>26</sup> The printing house functioned until 1943 and printed about 150 Hebrew book titles and journals such as *Apirion*, *Bet veAd leHachamim*, *Obel Yitzḥac*, *Kvutsei Efraim*, etc.<sup>27</sup>

The topics of the books printed at Seini are of a rich diversity: *she’eloth utschuvot*, *hidushei Shas*, *drasbot*, *musar* literature, biblical commentaries, new editions of manuscripts of biblical commentaries and many books in Yiddish.<sup>28</sup> Most of them were printed in Rashi writing. From a technical point of view

20 Idem, p. 307.

21 Dorner, A.E.: *Evreii din comitatul Satu Mare in secolul XVIII, 1723-1760*. Cluj Napoca, Cluj University Press, European Studies Foundation Publishing House, 2000, Vol. II, p. 115.

22 Ibidem, p. 121.

23 Ibidem, p. 173.

24 Ibidem, p. 299.

25 Cohen, Y.: *HaDefus baYvri beTransilvania*. In: *Kiryat Sefer*. Jerusalem, Ed. Magnes, 1958, p. 388.

26 Cf. Adler, A.N.: *A Gazetteer of the Hebrew Printing*. London, 1917; the author erroneously mentions that the first book ever printed at Seini was a Talmud Yerushalmi in 1900. In fact, the first book was printed there in 1905 and the Talmud Yerushalmi that Adler mentions was printed only in 1909.

27 Cohen, Y., *op. cit.*, p. 388. In his article, Cohen affirms that 126 Hebrew books were printed at Seini. In the collection of the National Library in Jerusalem I identified 24 more book titles printed at Seini that Cohen did not mention, which makes a total of 150 Hebrew book titles.

28 Ibidem.



the books were craftsmen work, with fine letters and on first class paper, facts that contributed to the growing prestige of the printing house.

Among the most important periodicals printed at Seini was the *Apirion* (The Canopy). It was first published in Budapest for two years, between 1923-1924. Its editorial board that was in New York moved its printing to Seini in 1925. It was there that the journal was uninterruptedly printed from 1925 – when its first issue of the third year of publication came out – until 1928<sup>29</sup>. *Apirion* was a religious periodical that comprised sermons and commentaries on various topics. The editorials were signed by Shmuel Miller from New York who was also editor of the review. During the years when the journal was printed in Seini, Miller's editorials approached many aspects of the Jewish life and tradition and touched moral, religious, theological questions. In this context some of the titles should be emphasized: "The Rules of the American Communities", "In Mattatiah's Days", "The Nights in the Month of Tevet", "Gathering and Separation", "Halachot for Leil Seder", "Preparation and Holiness", "The Reading of the *Shema* prayer in the Morning", "When the Month of Av Begins", etc. The journal also published religious poetry signed by local poets such as M. D. Edelstein from Timisoara, or by poets from abroad such as Manase Blumenthal from Jerusalem.

Beside Hebrew books and journals, the leaflets make up another category of Hebrew printed works that came out at Seini in Wieder's printing house. They were special issues that were published on different occasions: at the decease of a Rabbi or an important personality. Many were leaflets containing prayers for women, summons or questions addressed to rabbis on conflictual matters, public protests against community leaders, etc.

### Authors that printed at Seini

Most of the authors of the books printed at Seini came from the rabbinic world scattered all over the Jewish Diaspora. The reason that attracted the authors to this printing house was the fact that it was the third important in Transylvania after those from Sighet and Satu Mare. 116 authors were identified who might be classified according to the place of their origin as follows:

<sup>29</sup> Cohen, Y.: *Mekorot veKorot*. Jerusalem, Ed. Rubin Mass, 1982, p. 398.

Nr. Crt.	Zone	Number of authors	Percentage
1.	Transylvania	38	32 %
2.	The Old Regat, Bessarabia și Bukovina	26	22 %
3.	Hungary	23	19,8 %
4.	Poland and Galicia	15	13 %
5.	U.S.A. and England	8	6,89 %
6.	Israel	6	5,17 %
	Total	116	100 %

The rest of the books were mainly prayer books with no authors or re-editions of the classical writings.<sup>30</sup>

The geographical distribution of the authors that printed at Seini might be separated into three areas of *proximity* to the printing house from there. A first area covers the *proximate* region, the nearest area: rabbis that came from the neighborhood localities. This proximal region included authors such as Jehuda Grunwald, *tsadik* and *av bet din* at Satu Mare, who printed at Seini a book entitled *Hasidei Avot*, in 1925. From the information given on the title page of the book we find out that before settling in Satu Mare he “disseminated the Tora (teachings) in Sobotics, Bonihad and Suran”<sup>31</sup>. Shlomo Jehuda Tabak, “*dayan ve more tsedek* at Sighet, the son of the deceased rabbi .... (etc) Pesah Zvi ..... (etc.)”, is the author of many valuable books on the four parts of the *Shulban Aruch*, on the Tora, books of *she’eloth utschwof*<sup>32</sup> and of the book *Erech Shai* that he printed at Seini, in 1928. Rabbi Moshe David Friedman from Oradea, president of the *Hevra Malbush Erumim* printed his book *Pri Hemed* at Wieder’s printing house in Seini in 1933.<sup>33</sup>

30 *Pinkas haKehilot Romania*. Vol. II, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1980, p. 200.

31 Grunwald, Jehuda: *Hasidei Avot*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing House, 1925, p. 1.

32 Tabak, Shlomo Jehuda: *Erech Shai*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing House, 1925, p. 1.

33 Friedman, Moshe David: *Pri Hemed*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1933, p. 1.

A second category of authors that printed at Seini contains those who lived in regions outside the historical province of Transylvania, but still on the Romanian territory of the interwar period. It is undoubtedly a strong argument that asserts the idea that there was permanent communication and cultural and religious dialogue between the Jewish communities throughout Romania. The interregional system of relationships that took shape on the Romanian territory makes an example of the process of aggregation and growth of the Jewish population in a specific historical period and on a specific geographical territory, i.e. the interwar Romania. Moreover, in an area that experienced an unprecedented economic, cultural and political boost, the Jewish communities regrouped, reassembled around the new Zionist cultural model that aimed at shaping and strengthening the Jewish national consciousness and identity.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, in 1925, Rabbi Eliahu Rozenthal from Podu Ilioai (Moldavia) had his book *Yore Derech*, a Hasidic book that approaches ethical questions on religious faith, printed at Wieder's printing house in Seini.<sup>35</sup> Baruch Hirsch's book *Sipurai Tanach* was printed the same year. He was "hazan and teacher in Bucharest. Born in Botosani, he was known under the name of Baruch Hirsch Rozen."<sup>36</sup> Also from Bucharest was the author of the book *Zekhut Israel*, published in 1925 and "written by Israel, the son of Rabbi Itzhac Simha, blessed be his memory, from Bucharest".<sup>37</sup> The author and editor of the book *Meconen Evlenu*, Mordechai Drexler, was from Timisoara: "The book is written on a manuscript of R. Itzhac Ben Hayim Hachohen, found (in the collection) at the British Museum (and was) edited by Mordechai Ben Jehuda. Dr. Drexler, *av bet din* of the community of Timisoara". It was printed at Seini in 1932.<sup>38</sup>

Many of the authors that had their books printed at Wieder's printing house in Seini dwelt at great distances away, in remote regions of Europe, the U.S.A. and Israel. The fact that authors from far off were attracted by Wieder's printing house in Seini indirectly validated the prestige of the printing house within the Jewish communities and accredited it an exemplary reputation in a very competitive environment. Equally, the presence of authors from great geographical distances in the editorial production of Seini was part of and

34 Mendelsohn, E.: *Reflections on East-European Jewish Politics in the Twentieth Century*. In: *Yivo Annual*. Vol. XX, 1991, pp. 27-36, cf. and Idem: *The Jews of East-Central Europe between the World Wars*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987.

35 Rozenthal, Eliahu: *Yore Derech*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing House, 1925, p. 1.

36 Hirsch, Baruch: *Sipurai Tanach*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing House, 1925, p. 1.

37 Berger, Israel: *Zekhut Israel*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1925, p. 1.

38 Drexler, Mordechai: *Meconen Evlenu*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1932, p. 1.

strengthened the permanent communication and cultural and religious relationships between the Jewish communities of the Diaspora.

Ever since its inception, the printing house from Seini aroused the interest of rabbis from beyond the borders of the country. For instance, Jacov Ben Shraga, from “Izbica, the gubernia of Kalisz, Russian Poland”, had his book printed at Seini in 1907. The title of the book was *Kol Jacov* and was an anthology of commentaries on the significance of the prayer. The kabalistic character of the text limited its public to those few who were educated and initiated in the mystical exegesis and ritual.<sup>39</sup> The author of another book printed at Seini in 1924 was from Eastern Europe as well. His name was Hillel Posk, “the son the *gaon* Eliahu Posk, a Rabbi at Tatarbunar, and before (that) the Rabbi of the community from Zlatopoli”, and the title of his book was *Bet Hillel*.<sup>40</sup>

The western side of Europe, especially Great Britain and Holland, was represented in the Seini book production by many authors that issued at Jacov Wieder’s printing house. Avraham David Moshe Menosohn from England, who “was a Rabbi in Sednov, very close to Czernikov, in the State of Russia, and then in the State of the English people, in the city of Grimsby, and now in the city of Getshed, on the river Tyne” had his book *Ma’arbei Adam* printed at Seini in 1929.<sup>41</sup> The geographic trajectory that followed the author epitomized the permanent connections between the Jewish communities from Europe whereas the printing house from Seini became a central point in the cultural exchanges that took place within the Jewish world of the Western, Center and Eastern Europe.

Abraham Leichtag Waxman from Holland printed *Bet ve-Ad leHachamim* at Seini in 1928. He was the Rabbi of the community of Scheveningen and was the author of a book entitled *Gai Hazon*.<sup>42</sup> Mordechai Schreibman from Palestine was among those who printed at Seini. His biographic trajectory delineates the itinerary of the great history of the Jewish people in the context of their return to their homeland. He “who before (that) was a Rabbi at Birzola, Moscow, Tsirkizovo and now he is in Tel Aviv, Eretz Israel” was the author to the

39 Shraga, Jacov Ben: *Kol Jacov*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1907, p. 1.

40 Posk, Hillel: *Bet Hillel*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1924, p. 1.

41 Menosohn, Avraham David Moshe: *Ma’arbei Adam*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1929, p. 1.

42 Waxman, Abraham Leichtag: *Bet ve-Ad leHachamim*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1928, p. 1.

book *Minbat Mordechai*, printed in 1935. The first page also mentions that the book was ready for print since 1908.<sup>43</sup>

Many of the authors that chose Wieder's printing house were from the U.S.A., a fact that vouches for its *overseas* prominence. The American authors discovered the Seini printing house immediately after WW I when they first appealed to Wieder in order to have their books printed; yet, the richest period of their cooperation was between 1923-1933, when most of the books of American provenance were printed. Rabbi Baruch Meir Klein from New York had his book *Imrei Baruch* printed in 1923. It was a book of rabbinical commentaries that he published with the help of the "holy community of New York" where "he was the Rabbi of (both) the people from the upper side of the city that loved their brethren and of those from the lower side who loved the truth".<sup>44</sup> Also from New York was Yeshaiahu Josef Margolin, "*rav and av-bet-din at Hevrat Ansbei Hesed from Brooklyn and at Hevrat Tiferet Yeshayahu from New York and at Hevrat Shomrei Shabat Benei Israel from Bronx. Heretofore I was av-bet-din at Syracuse and Newark*". At Seini he printed his book in three parts *Tiferet Maharashim*., an anthology of rabbinical commentaries, *she'etoth utschwot* and homilies.<sup>45</sup>

It is true that most of the American authors were from the East coast (New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts), but there were authors also from the Western coast that printed their books at Seini. One of them was Moshe Aharon Tobenkin, the son of Jehuda Tobenkin, from Oakland, California. His book *Sefer Ben Porat Josef*, a collection of *halachic* and *aggadic* commentaries, was printed at Seini in 1935. To publish his book, Tobenkin benefited from the help of Simon Pollak from Satu Mare, the editor of the journal *Bet ve-Ad le-Hachamim*, where he was responsible for the "book reviews" column.<sup>46</sup>

A distinct category of authors that printed at Seini consisted of famous rabbinical personalities, of rabbis of undisputable authority. One of them, Eleazar Ben Ari Leib Ben Pinhas Zelig (Munz), the author of the book *Same deHayiei*, printed at Seini in 1906. He "was a rabbi in six communities: Pilz Tritsch, Ransburg, Pilzen, Glatui, Mukolos, Santov where he disseminated the Tora

43 Schreibman, Mordechai: *Minbat Mordechai*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1935, p. 1.

44 Meir Klein, Baruch: *Imrei Baruch*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1923, p. 1.

45 Margolin, Yeshaiahu Josef: *Tiferet Maharashim*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1926, p. 1.

46 Tobenkin, Moshe Aharon: *Sefer Ben Porat Josef*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1935, p. 1.

(teachings) among thousands of disciples”.<sup>47</sup> He was the author of more than 20 books of rabbinical commentaries and *she’eloth utschuvot*. Another important author whose books were printed at Seini was “the great *darshan*, the famous rabbi and *gaon* (...) light of Israel, *morenu ba-rav* Israel Betsalel, of blessed memory, from Slotsk, in the State of Lithuania”. His book *Pelah Rimon* was printed at Wieder’s printing house in 1932. The first edition of the book was printed in Prague in 1689, a second one in Lvov and the third one in Seini.<sup>48</sup>

The names of the authors of the Hebrew books were frequently acronymed or encrypted. The combinative, cryptic, grammatologic game, as well as the gematria system of using the numerical value of letters and words were typical for the Hebrew writings.<sup>49</sup> Abbreviations and encryptions were commonly used when inscribing the name of the author on the books printed at Seini. Such techniques of concealing the auctorial identity potentiated the role and the mystery of the author’s talent and refinement. In 1926, Avishai Reinhold printed *Hidushei Avrach*. It was a book of *balachic* commentaries and its title contained the acronym of the author’s name *Avishai Reinhold heHasid*.<sup>50</sup> In the book *Hasidei Avot* written by Jehuda Grunwald from Satu Mare and printed at Seini in 1925, there was a note by the author following the editor’s introduction that says “My name, the name of my family and that of my rabbis appear in the text of the book in a concealed manner, (that can be deciphered by) the positioning of the letters on the page, the form of the characters, etc.”.<sup>51</sup>

The tradition to encrypting the auctorial identity on the books originates in the Tetragrammaton of the Divine Name<sup>52</sup> that is not pronounced, not vocalized. Therefore, any attempt to conceal the auctorial identity through such a grammatologic game transposes the unnamable character of the author that creates and thus, becomes a particular replica of the primordial, archetypal aucturity.

Of similar importance were the regulations concerning the copyright that were printed on the books printed at Seini. Both, the auctorial, as well as the typographic monopoly were formulated in different manners. In the introduc-

47 Eleazar Ben Ari Leib Ben Pinhas Zelig (Munz), *Same deHayiei*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1906, p. 1.

48 Betsalel, Israel: *Pelah Rimon*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1932, p. 1.

49 Idel, Moshe: *Hasidism between Ecstasy and Magic*. (translation into Romanian) Bucharest, Hasefer, 2001, pp. 528-533.

50 Reinhold, Avishai: *Hidushei Avrach*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1926, p. 1.

51 Grunwald, Jehuda: *Hasidei Avot*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1925, p. 1.

52 Idel, Moshe: *op. cit.* p. 533.

tion to Shlomo Jehuda Tabak's book *Erech Shai*, printed in 1928, the editor mentioned: "I received the copyright (of the book) from the author's sons for 25 years, (with the right) to reprint (the book). Today, I have sold this right to my associates, to my brother Itzhac Tabak, my uncle and my cousin, Alter Josef Tabak. And from now on, they will be granted all the rights to reprint (it) as provided by the laws of the state. God willing, here in Sighet, on November 11, 1927".<sup>53</sup> In his introduction to the book *Aspaklaria haMeira* printed in 1930, its author, Aharon Weisz Halevi wrote: "It is forbidden to reprint the book without my approval and the books that do not bear my autograph signature will be considered theft".<sup>54</sup> Such acknowledgments printed on books set the regulations of the copyright that only the autograph signature on each copy authorized the books for sale. The double prohibition coming from the auctorial pole that forbade not only any reprint or reproduction without specific consent but also any marketing of the books that did not bear the holograph signature of the author reveals that the monopoly of print and trade belonged to the author exclusively.

Moreover, the authors of the Hebrew books printed at Seini were concerned about the way their books were read; therefore, they *monitored the reading* and put forth the "ars legendi", the didactics of perusal. Thus, on the book above the author's name it was also mentioned: "The book has to be read through with thoroughness, following one page after another, not riffing from chapter to chapter for only by carefully and attentively reading the pages in their order the ideas that the book contains can be discovered".<sup>55</sup> By monitoring the reader the authors constrain for a *formative reading* and the book becomes an enlightening agent meant to educate on the one hand. On the other hand they empower *reading with normative functions*, for an unsystematic and haphazard reading may lead to deviant, uncanonical interpretations.

The *auctorial precautions* that prefaced the books printed at Seini made another component that appertained to the authors' world. They pertained to the editorial stereotypes relating to Hebrew books that were printed in a non Jewish cultural, historic environment and a political, administrative authority. The auctorial precautions were meant to prevent the adversity of the non Jews, their mistrust in the content of the Hebrew books and bring forth notions such as *goim* (non Jews) and *acum* (abbreviation for pagans that venerate stars

53 Tabak, Shlomo Jehuda: *Erech Shai*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1928, p. 1.

54 Weisz Halevi, Aharon: *Aspaklaria haMeira*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1930, p. 1.

55 Idem, p. 2.

and fortunes). The two terms appeared in formulations of a fixed form that brought about a *double exclusion* originating from the duality in meaning that the two idioms, pagans and non Jews, incorporated. The first exclusion referred to nations and people the Jews lived with, within the borders of the same country while the second exclusion was centered on a polytheist, unfaithful world. Consequently, the double exclusion circumscribed certain *limitations*, semantic closures: a first limitation would confine ethical and political components (people of a country or community) and the second limitation referred to the religious component (polytheist people). From a phenomenological perspective those limitations induce a *circumstantial* precaution related to the country, people, religion and the culture where the Jews lived as well as a *fundamental* precaution in relation with the polytheist pagans. Nevertheless, there is a third exclusion, a *narrative-historical* one that places all reference to pagans and non Jews in prehistoric, pre-Christian, obsolete times. The semantic reference to a *historical closure* irretrievably fortifies the precautions taken by the author. Referring to past times disqualified any hostile interpretation against the authors and their books.

Such a semantic game of symbolic identity negotiation enclosed in the text of the auctorial precautions contextualizes the phenomenon of the Hebrew book and its message in a non Jewish environment – that of the *galut*. The book becomes a literary and conceptual, exegetic agent of communication between a Jewish world and a non Jewish world. To decipher the semantics of the phrase in the auctorial precautions inscribed in the Hebrew books means to discover a very complex and thorough strategy of survival in an adverse and suspicious Diaspora where the anti-Semite manifestations and outbursts were recurrent.

Two distinct types of phraseology may be discerned in the auctorial precautions inserted in the prefaces of the Hebrew books printed at Seini. The expressions and formulations used to deliver the precautionary message render the two groups dissimilar. A first type of phraseology is represented by a “Notice” inserted on a book entitled *Imrei Baruch*, printed in 1923. It acknowledges that “In whatever context the words עכו"ם (*acum*), גוי (*goi*) and *all the nations of the world* may appear they all allude to ancient peoples of the world that lived in a distant past, pagans that worshiped statues and masks, people who did not recognize God. We do not refer to peoples of our times, among whom we



dwell in this country and we pray for their welfare every day.”<sup>56</sup> The second type is represented by the insertion in the book *Binat Isaschar*, printed in 1924. This time, an encomiastic tone can be discerned in the reference to the country the Jews live in. “When the word עכו"ם appears in the book, it does not refer to the people among whom we dwell in this country as tolerated, it refers to peoples that in ancient times did not recognize God. It does not refer to the Kingdom of Mercy where we now live and for it we pray”.<sup>57</sup>

Another set of significant facts incorporated in the auctorial interpolation are to be found in the *intellectual biographies* of some of the authors that were included in the books, or in the authors’ confessions on the “urge” they felt to conceive and write books. Those details supplement the auctorial universe with relevant autobiographic sequences. Thus, the dedication that Simha Jona Hulin, the author of the book *Kol Simba* printed at Seini in 1926, addressed to his wife is an appropriate example. He inserted the confession in the dedication addressed to his second wife: “Mrs. Fredl, daughter of R. Moshe Zeev, known as Rabbi Moshe Hasid, whom I married when already an old man, and who kept the house so that I have time to study the Tora and she worked to provide the family with maintenance and support although she was old as well, and she helped me a lot to have the book printed. (I mention) all this so that she have a place in the world to come. God will give her days more so that we may see Zion and Jerusalem reconstructed”.<sup>58</sup> The author’s will to write the book required a lot of effort and sacrifice from his wife who provided him a good living and ensured all the necessary conditions for him to continue his intellectual preoccupation. Thus, the “urges” for an intellectual effort were extended over the family, the milieu where relentless and persistent study and was highly valued and fully supported. With this in mind, we may assume that the importance given to intellectual endeavors in the Jewish family turns the book and its learning into a social phenomenon.

Other texts offer intellectual itineraries followed by the authors throughout their formative years, printed at the beginning or end of the books. Thus, Dr. Dexler, *av bet din* of the Jewish community from Timisoara and editor of Itzhac Ben Hayim Hacohen’s book *Meconen Evlenu*, inserted some autobiographic notes in the introduction to the book he printed at Seini. As a young student, he was sent to England by his parents and teachers to study the Hebrew

56 Meir Klein, Baruch: *Imrei Baruch*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1923, p. 2.

57 Kohn, Isaschar Baer: *Binat Isaschar*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1924, p. 2.

58 Hulin, Simha Jona: *Kol Simba*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1926, p. 2.

manuscripts of the Bodleiana collection. The proposal came as a reward and appreciation for two books that he had published before: “Ascetism in Hebrew Literature until Maimonides” (published in 1906) and “Avraham Geiger’s Philosophical Thinking”(1907). One of the manuscripts he found was the one that belonged to Itzhac Ben Hayim Hacoheh, a victim of the Inquisition who was expelled from Spain and finally settled in Italy and then in Turkey.<sup>59</sup>

Mordechai Schreiberman, the author of the book *Minbat Mordechai*, printed at Seini in 1935, introduced some autobiographical details on the first page and in the introduction to his book. He studied in Lithuania and he was the student of Ihel Halevi Epstein, Rabbi at Novardok and important figure of the Lithuanian rabbinic learning. Exceptionally smart, endowed with remarkable intellectual abilities he already produced *biddušim* and *poskim* at 14 years of age. At 23, he finished his book of commentaries on *Shulban Aruch* and *Jore Dea*. He was a rabbi at Birzola, Moskow, Tsirkizovo, and at the age of 50 he settled in Tel Aviv, Eretz Israel.

## Conclusion

These biographic and intellectual trajectories mark out a world of great diversity that the auctorial pole encloses. From this point of view, it may be ascertained that the Wieder printing house from Seini was one of the most important Hebrew printing houses from Central East Europe that attracted many authors and book editors. The prestige of the printing house was sustained by the prestige of the authors that had their books printed there and by its typographical art.

The Wieder printing house from Seini makes an eloquent example that illustrates the close relationship between print and society in the Jewish community of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This printing house, located in North Transylvania, a region with a dense Jewish population, edited books that were destined to the entire Jewish population of the European or American Diaspora and for those who already made aliyah to the Land of Israel, as well. The remarkable quality of the print, the craftsmanship of the printers and the outstanding typographic technology of the printing house attracted famous authors and editors from all over the world. The substantial details that were included at the beginning or end of the books, in the introductions, *bascamot*, lists

59 Drexler, Mordechai: *Meconen Evlenu*. Seini, Jacov Wieder printing house, 1932, pp. 1-3.

of *prenumeranten*, announcements of the authors, editors, censors, printers, offer a rich documentary support for future attempts to reconstitute the cultural, social, political history of the Jewish society in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The auctorial and editorial poles revealed in the Seini prints point out the cultural links and the permanent communication that united the Jewish world in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The book served as agent of cultural and religious education and learning remained the prime and most important messenger of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora.