

REVIEWS

GRÜNFELDOVÁ, Diana. *DEJINY ŽIDOVSKÉJ KOMUNITY V ŠAMORÍNE* [HISTORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ŠAMORÍN]. Bratislava: Izraelská obchodná komora na Slovensku, 2023.

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Although research on the history of the Jewish population in the territory of today's Slovakia has been steadily progressing since the 1990s, and today we have a considerable number of high quality broadly and regionally oriented publications, studies and scholarly articles, as well as a unique thematically focused edition of sources (The Holocaust in Slovakia), we can also see a certain disproportionality in the territorial coverage of the historical literature mentioned above.

In my opinion, historians working on the territory of Slovakia have so far mainly dealt with the history of the Jews during the Holocaust, and territorially they have mainly covered that part of its territory which was part of the Ludák Slovak Republic, during the tragic period of 1939. The so-called Arbitration Territory, which means the southern parts of present-day Slovakia, that belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary after the Vienna Arbitration or was annexed by Hungary in the spring of 1939, were not given equal attention.

One of the reasons for this is the limited knowledge of the Hungarian language, which is a prerequisite for research, but other reasons are the preservation or availability of archival documents, which have been largely destroyed, exported outside Slovakia, or left unprocessed or insufficiently processed by Slovak archivists for many decades.

It is gratifying that in recent years several regionally oriented monographs have appeared dealing with the history of the Jews in Levice, Komárno, Dunajská Streda, and which have supplemented the monograph devoted to the history of the Jews of Nové Zámky, which remained relatively solitary for a long time.

Diana Grünfeldová's monograph, published in 2023 under the title *Dejiny židovskej komunity v Šamoríne* (History of the Jewish Community in Šamorín), in a way complements the afore-mentioned group of monographs. Grünfeldová's monograph is based on the author's student thesis, defended at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, and in my opinion, it is a more than successful achievement of a recent history graduate in terms of the quality of research and analysis.

Grünfeldová's book is the result of diligent archival research in Slovak archives and the author also used an extensive set of secondary sources when writing it. As is customary with this topic, she also drew on testimonies of Holocaust survivors obtained by the Oral history method, and here she also drew on a renowned foreign source archive (the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive).

From the opening pages of the monograph, it is clear that, despite the fact that it is her first book, Grünfeldová was aware of the complexity of the issues and the specific nature of the community whose history she was describing. She was also aware of the natural deficit of knowledge about the Jewish community among the majority of readers who

pick up her Slovak-written book. As an author, she therefore apparently and sometimes even insistently tried to explain the topic comprehensively from the opening pages, with explanations of specific terms associated with Judaism in the text of the book (e.g. mikveh, shoichet, etc.), which she highlighted.

The author also approached the history of the Jews of Šamorín in a similar way - comprehensively, with an attempt to analyse and present it in a broader regional and historical context. The first chapter of the book therefore begins with an introduction to the history of the Jewish community in Slovakia, and a separate subchapter is devoted to the mother Jewish religious community of Šamorín – the Jewish religious community in Mliečno. It was from Mliečno that a large part of the Jews who founded the Jewish community in Šamorín came after Jews were allowed to settle in towns.

The author presents the history of the Jews in Šamorín and its surroundings chronologically, with the individual chapters structured chronologically but also in terms of problems. Grünfeldová, in her attempt at detailed treatment, has gone so far as to insert entire passages interspersed with short biographies directly into the chronologically structured text, describing various functionaries, associations and institutions etc. In my opinion, she has managed the very difficult task of not interfering with the readability of the text. Much more experienced authors, often simplify this problem by relegating the biographical medallions to the annotation apparatus (footnotes etc.).

The author, in her attempt to explain and to mention, has even included lists of names into the main text, helping the reader to navigate by “structuring” the text by highlighting the name of the institution whose members she has listed, etc.

The difficult transitions from “big history” through regional history to microhistory and personal stories are managed well in the monograph. It can perhaps be faulted that some chapters are sometimes too “chopped up” into problem-oriented subsections (for example, when describing education in the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic), but this detail can be appreciated by the reader looking for specific information.

D. Grünfeldová has also treated the tragic and difficult period of the Holocaust in detail. Here, too, she moves from the broader context to microhistory and personal stories, in places framing the whole issue into specific problem-oriented chapters (such as the chapter Labour service in the Hungarian Army, the chapter Ghettoization and Deportation of Jews in Šamorín and District, the chapter Jewish Property Left Behind in Šamorín and District, etc.). Here, too, the chapters are sometimes too structured (some almost “episodic”). The monograph ends with a chapter devoted to the return of Jews to Šamorín and the district after the Holocaust (in 1945).

A somewhat weaker point of the Slovak-written book is the stylistics in places. One can feel that the author is not yet stylistically skilled in the Slovak language and, more importantly, that the otherwise analytically well-managed monograph deserves a better linguistic editing. The author would have avoided, for example, the unfortunate formulation “*The constant incitement of Catholics by the leaders of the Christian churches [sic!] against the Jews...*” (p. 21), where (leaving aside the factual aspect of the statement) there is no reason for either the adjective or the plural form of the word “church”.

Reviews

However, despite some of the weaker (and not significant) cosmetic moments mentioned above (over-structured chapters, weaker stylistics in places), the monograph *Dejiny židovskej komunity v Šamoríne* is a high quality works with a regional focus, and it places the regional context very well within a broader historical and cultural framework.

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