

THE JUDAIC STUDIES CENTER “ACADEMICIAN NICOLAE CAJAL” FROM ARAD

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Abstract:

The Judaic Studies Center from Arad has become an important priority of the academic community, especially the ones who revolves around “Vasile Goldiș” Western University. The important mutations that take place at the level of the collective mentalities in the contemporary age, the junction that has taken place on the level of the most recent historical and philosophical concepts, between Judaism and Christianity, have managed to shadow the millennia old prejudices. Currently, the amplitude of the history of the Jewish people is recognized. Jews have adopted Jesus as the one who, out of their ranks, came forth bearing a message for the Jews and all humanity, and the Great Churches of today’s world (orthodox, catholic, protestant) have accepted Jesus the Jew as a representative of an exceptional culture. The historical investigation of the Bible, in this situation, is necessary for a profound understanding of the existence. It is a very clear and profound signal, which marks the transition from inter-culture to multi-culture.

The initiative of founding the Judaic Studies Center from Arad also comes to meet the trends manifested by the Ministry of Education, which supports the research focused on some crucial issues of contemporary history, the Holocaust being one of them. We musn’t forget that this genuine disease of humanity’s history is an inexhaustible source of teachings, both for our contemporaries, but also for the generations to come.



The inauguration of the Judaic Studies Center from Arad, in the presence of Israel's Ambassador, RODICA RADIAN GORDON, together with the University's President, AUREL ARDELEAN, and Arad's Archbishop, TIMOTEI SEVICIU.

In the spring of 2004, on March 29th, the opening of the CENTER OF JUDAIC STUDIES from Arad took place in a festive manner. Since then, it has been a part of the “Vasile Goldiș” Research and Studies Institute, which is comprised of no less than 12 research centers from around “Vasile Goldiș” Western University.

Taking into consideration the fact that the higher education must set the tone regarding the development of a country or a region, in all respects, “Vasile Goldiș” Western University has molded itself according to a new vision of the entrepreneurial University. The university is not only the most important catalyst of the community's life, it is also an open book for those who wish to be included in the community to which they pertain, it is the conscience of the community. This explains the numerous initiatives developed on the cultural realm, coming from the academia.

In this context, the necessity of establishing a Center of Judaic Studies at Arad had become a priority of the academic community, especially the one revolving around “Vasile Goldiș” Western University. The important mutations that take place at the level of the collective mentalities in the contemporary age, the junction that has taken place on the level of the most recent historical and philosophical concepts, between Judaism and Christianity, have managed to shadow the millennia old prejudices. Currently, the amplitude of the history of the Jewish people is recognized. Jews have adopted Jesus as the one who, out of their ranks, came forth bearing a message for the Jews and all humanity, and the Great Churches of today's world (orthodox, catholic, protestant) have accepted Jesus the Jew as a representative of an exceptional culture. The historical investigation of the Bible, in this situation, is necessary for a profound understanding of the existence. It is a very clear and profound signal, which marks the transition from inter-culture to multi-culture.

The initiative of founding the *Center* also comes to meet the trends manifested by the Ministry of Education, which supports the research focused on some crucial issues of contemporary history, the Holocaust being one of them. We mustn't forget that this genuine disease of humanity's history is an inexhaustible source of teachings, both for our contemporaries, but also for the generations to come. In fact, the goal that the Center from Arad has set out to achieve, is clearly summarized in a few, but generous words, in the preamble of the Center's Program: "... involvement in its activities of as many people as possible from as varied domains as possible, in order to know, understand and deepen the civilization and history of the Jewish people, from ancient times until today". The Judaic Studies Center has a Scientific Council composed of the members from the Department of History from the Political, Administrative and Humanities College (Marius Grec, Sorin Bulboaca, Simona Stiger, Stelean Boia), alongside whom have been recruited as collaborators: Francisc Schneider (Member of the Medical Academy), Speranța Milancovici (Department of Modern Languages), Ladislau Klein (Economics College) or from abroad: Halmos Sandor (Debrecen), Marosi Emeric Miki (Israel).

The Jewish community from Arad played an important role at the opening of the center, especially its chairman, eng. Ionel Schlessinger, who responded with great pleasure to our university's invitation. The festive opening, a mere formality, but with a great emotional and cultural load, was honored by the presence of numerous personalities of the local cultural and political life, both national and international. The most excited person from the festivity turned out to be Israel's Ambassador in Romania, Miss RODICA RADIAN GORDON. Born in Romania, she leaves the country at a young age (6 years) only to return in her native country in a major diplomatic position.



Israel's
Ambassador, DAVID
OREN, together with the
University's President,
AUREL ARDELEAN

Accepting the invitation made by “Vasile Goldiș” Western University, his Excellency visits for the very first time the western are of the country, on which occasion we recorded the following confession: “... I am very excited and wish to thank the entire academic community from VASILE GOLDIȘ Western University, for the reception I was given ... I heartily congratulate you for the inauguration of the Judaic Studies Center ...”

(*From then until now our center has also been visited by the following ambassadors of Israel: DAVID OREN and DAN BEN ELIEZER.)



Israel's Ambassador DAN BEN ELIZER, with the Chairman of the Jewish Community from Arad, IONEL SCHLESINGER (on the right) and the Director of the Judaic Studies Center, MARIUS GREC (on the left)

The messages we received at the inauguration, from leading figures of the Romanian and European cultural life, were extremely honorable for us:

“... Dear Prof. Grec, I am very glad that you have also managed to establish at the University from Arad a center of Judaic studies ... I hope that I will have the privilege of knowing the center's activity and that we will find the opportunity to collaborate. Best of luck, Leon Volovici” (Univ. of Jerusalem)

“... Dear Prof. Marius Grec ...

... I wish you and your colleagues to be successful.

Good luck!

Best wishes,,

Andrei Oișteanu” (Univ. of Bucharest)

“Dear Director Dr. Grec,

It is a joy for me to know that a Judaic Studies Center will be opened in Chorin's city ... allow me to convey our availability to help you, as much as we can, but first I would like to assure you that the action you undertake is of crucial importance in identifying the Judaic component of the Romanian space, in its reformist coloring. I congratulate you, wish you good luck in all your endeavors ... and La mea esrim to your school.” (Ioan Chirilă, Dean – Faculty of Theology from Cluj-Napoca)

In the beginning, the center did not have its own headquarters; it was temporarily established in the Humanities College building. This was also one of the first objectives that we tried to solve: creating a proper headquarters. Due to the understanding and excellent collaboration we have with the Jewish community from Arad, on 11th October 2004 we inaugurated our offices, located in Arad's Jewish community's building (Tribunul Dobra St., nr. 10, first floor), arranged by the university, under the Center's administration and at the disposal of Arad's inhabitants. We managed to open these headquarters precisely when, in the whole country, legally, for the first time, based on a decision of the Parliament, the Holocaust Day was being commemorated. Thus, Monday, October the 1st 2004, after participating at a moving commemorative event at the Old Jewish Cemetery, together with the few Jewish citizens of Arad's Community, a second event followed, filled with numerous meanings: the inaugural ribbon cutting.

The hall which hosts the Center (which has 45 seats, its own library, the necessary equipment to use a computer database) proved to be too small for everyone who wanted to see and hear the speeches of those present at the presidium table: Arad's Archbishop, Arad county's prefect, the vice-president of the County Council, Arad's vice-mayor, the founding rector of “Vasile Goldiș” Western University, the deputy school inspector, the Chairman of Arad's Jewish Community...

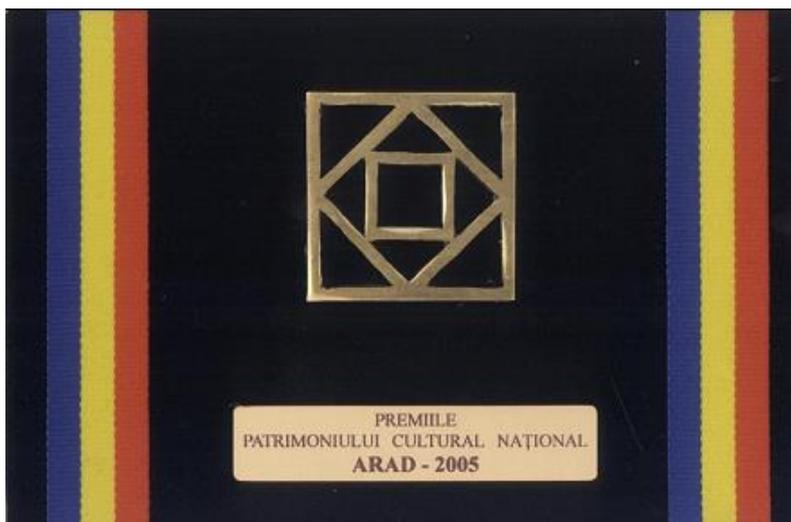
The guest of honor of this event was Otto Adler – Chairman of the Association of Jews from Romania, victims of the Holocaust. He said, in a meeting that we had after the inauguration of the center: “My visit to Arad comes after a hiatus of 40 years, in which I did not visit it. Even if the city did not chance much in general, I did notice a few changes that simply astonish me. My first encounter with Arad's citizens was ... in a cemetery, where I listened to some thoughts, where I talked to some people who had me hooked from the very beginning. Our second encounter was at a sort of formal inauguration of a hall. Well, at this formal meeting, I met other people who talked in a way which simply excited me. And then,

we met again yesterday, at the first working session of this Judaic center. I can say that I was full of enthusiasm. Not only for what had been done, but also for the general atmosphere that existed, an atmosphere of mutual understanding. An atmosphere of humanity ... I may be making a silly exaggeration if I say that for me, Arad represents a point of origin of an absolutely modern and necessary for our age spiritual movement, of understanding between people; of course that for now, it is on a small scale, but it starts from a city with a great, great heritage and with extraordinary people and I am convinced that it will have a continuity in the most beautiful sense of the word. I have met clerics of an exceptional value, from a young chaplain up to a bishop, of completely different rites. I have met university academics from a university that has achieved some absolutely incredible feats. Apart from being able to gather a group of extremely valuable teachers, ensuring the “soft” of the university, it also ensured its “hard”. Some old buildings which have undergone some changes, both literally and figuratively. I have seen top notch classrooms in a building that I think was older than one hundred years, I have seen a pub transformed in a library, I’ve seen things that literally overwhelmed me. I leave this place truly delighted; I cannot wait to tell my friends ... that I have seen some miracles, in a good way. These are my general impressions of Arad. May God grant me strength, both physically and mentally, so I can revisit Arad and see the progress it has made ...” (original interview conducted by yours truly)

The second day, October 12th, at 17:00 hours, the first activity was organized at the Center: the commemorative session dedicated to the Holocaust Day, followed by a round table on the same topic. It was attended by university and highschool teachers, students, pupils, representatives of Arad’s Jewish community, a large audience. The event was of a very high level, the communications presented covering a wide array of issues. (Aurel Ardelean, The Holocaust’s Lesson for the 21st Century; Stelean Boia, The Holocaust in the 21st Century’s Historiography (points of view); Marinca Grec, Psychosocial Mechanisms of the Attitudes regarding the Holocaust; Sorin Bulboacă, The Jew’s Status in Medieval Europe (considerations); Nicoleta Huszarik, Pavel Huszarik, The Jews from Nădlac from 1752 till today; Paula Dărău, Jewish Children are Children as Well.)

The round table that followed focused on discussing issues with historical connotations, the international complex conjecture neither being spared. The special guest of this event, Otto Adler, as a survivor of the Auschwitz, evoked to those present meaningful moments from his detention period, which made it crystal clear that one cannot blame entire peoples for what transpired there, but only individual.

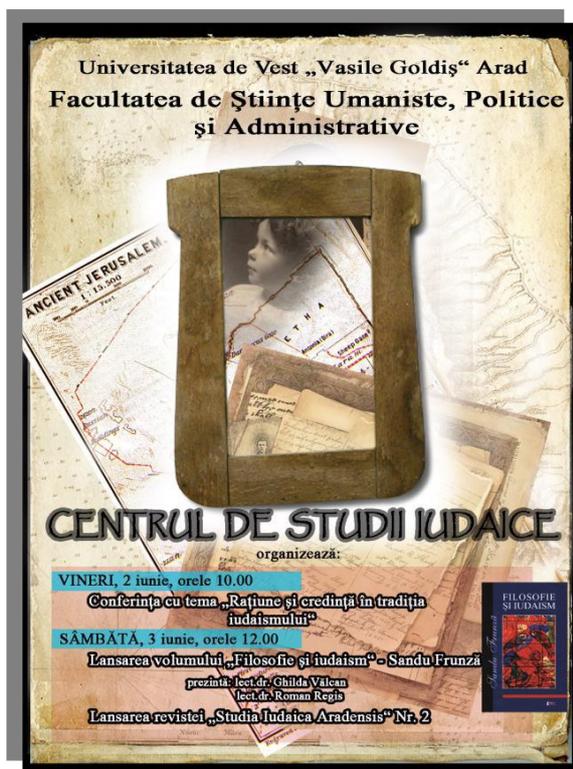
In a volume that I recently published (“Zamolxis, Reality and Myth in the Geto-Dacians’ Religion”, European Institute Publishing House, Iasi, 2009, Argument, p. 15), I emphasized: “... We all know that in order to survive throughout history, “the cultural man” must become a mass reference, i.e. a way of life capable of establishing values and of enabling the creation of values which re-signify his primordial endowment. Some brand this adventure of becoming a horizon of history from individuality as “socialization”. Thus, communities make their entry into history not only through the reflexes of a collective imagination (as credited today), but also through a prodigious cultural reality: through its force of establishing values, which the individuality takes as a shield of its identity. Others plainly brand this cultural subsistence effort as “education”. That is why there are no “bad” or “despicable” people or nations per se. Precarious communities or mobs, that take upon them the subterranean evil have emerged plummeting into the abyss of “non-history”, but they were neither tribes, nor peoples or nations...”



An
important prize
awarded to the
Judaic Studies
Center.

Our Center’s program is ambitious, but also realist. The coordinate we have in mind is a pragmatic one. We want to combine our research with more popular actions. Therefore, each member of the Scientific Council has established – according to his or her own competences – the analysis of the Judaic phenomenon from a historical, social, political point of view ...; this is followed by the popularization of the results, which will be made via at least two channels: “Studia Iudaica Aradensis” – the center’s magazine, the second channel being meetings, round tables, conferences or the individual or collective published volumes ...

Other provisions of the center's program include: the gradual introduction of optional subjects in the academic curricula, particularly at the Humanities College (the study of the Holocaust was introduced as an optional subject, starting with this year), the preparation of training aids for teaching the Holocaust theme in highschoools, the certification of the center to support training courses regarding the Holocaust (for highschoool teachers); the creation of opportunities for those interested of receiving scholarships in Israel – in order to improve their Judaic studies; launching a contests over the internet, based on Judaic themes – with the possibility of publishing some of the best works ... We musn't forget the MA in Judaic history, culture and civilization – approved by the Ministry of Education.



It should be emphasized that the Judaic Studies Center from Arad is part of the Humanities College; it is at the disposal of Arad's community through its research activity that takes place under the aegis of the center, but also directly, through the actions it carries out, and on Wednesdays, between the hours of 12.00 to 14.00, a member of the Scientific Council is at the disposal of those seeking information about the center or who wish to aid in its development.

In an era in which the European integration has become a reality, such a center can do nothing else but become a liaison of understanding and mutual familiarization.



Activity with the students at
the center's headquarters.



Hary Kuller, Ionel
Schlesinger, Stelean Boia
and Marius Grec – the
opening of an exhibition of
the pupils' drawings on the
Holocaust theme.
Location: SABIN DRĂGOI
Art Highschool, Arad



LIA BENJAMIN, guest of the Judaic Studies Center together with MARIUS GREC, director of the center.

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