

# Traces of Jewish life in Sighetu Marmatiei, Romania

## THE GREAT ORTHODOX SYNAGOGUE

In 1775, the Jews established in Sighet turned to the Imperial Court for permission to build a synagogue. After three years, with the Court approval, in 1778 they started building a wooden synagogue. After a short while, the wood deteriorated and the synagogue became too small for the ever-increasing Jewish population. In this situation, the construction of a new stone synagogue began. A simple building at first, with six pillars forming a rhythmic facade, in the early twentieth century a painted tympanum with elements reminding of baroque style was added to the building. It is interesting to remark that each time the gable was repainted, it got another model. The building was set on fire in 1944. Later the ruins were demolished together with the rabbi's house.

A few events which influenced the life of the Jewish community of Sighet are linked to the Great Synagogue. One of these was called "sihoter machlaike" which led to the division of the orthodox community in two parts: one of traditional rites, the ultraorthodox, led by the rabbi Teitelbaum, and another, more liberal, led by the rabbi Kahan and after that by rabbi Samuel Danzig, called "orthodox of Sephardic" rite. The Sephardic Jews had to leave the Great Orthodox Synagogue and were obliged to construct a new one for themselves. Because of this division something changed in the architecture too: in the orthodox synagogues the "bimah" (the table from where the Torah was read) was situated next to the Aron HaCodesh (the curtains behind which the Torah was kept), while in the reformist synagogues, like the Sephardic ones from Sighet, the "bimah" was situated in the middle of the synagogue, facing the congregation and raised to about one meter height.

## THE OLD SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE

Located on the so-called 'Jewish street', the synagogue was built between 1885-1886, after the division of the Jews and it was financed by the large and rich Kahan family. The style of the construction was eclectic with late baroque influences.

The synagogue functioned until 1902 when the construction of the new synagogue was completed, and was used as a cheder (yeshiva) school for boys after that.

Between the synagogue and the rabbi quarters there was a stone corridor, on the second floor there was a library, with a flight of stony stairs as access. The basement was used as a kosher slaughterhouse with big stone basins for plucking poultry.

After the war the synagogue was used to store religious books taken from the Jewish population. After the demolition of the building some books remained and were buried under the block of flats which was built on the place of the synagogue.

## THE NEW SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE

The only synagogue that is still standing in Sighet is the new Sephardic synagogue. The synagogue was built by the Sephardic community, which over the years began to count increasingly more members, so that the old synagogue got too small.

The monumental facade done in eclectic style, the inner decoration, the balcony for women and the cast-iron construction to support it as well as the light entering through the coloured glass windows, provide the synagogue with a unique, mystic air. Later on a small room was added to the northern wing in order to be used as religious school for children, called cheder.

The few Jews that returned to Sighet after the Second World War renovated the synagogue, thus saving a valuable architectural monument from destruction.

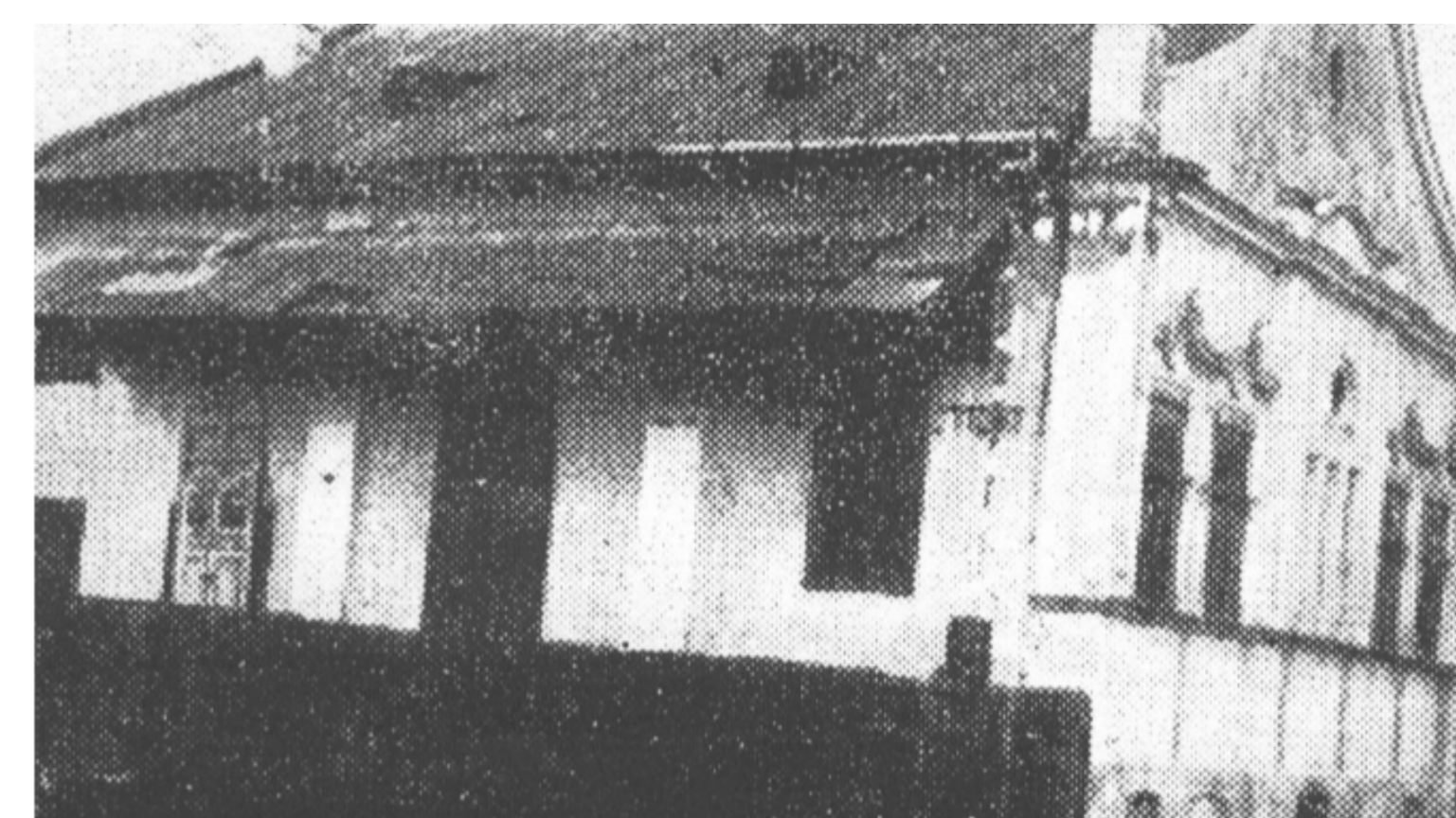
## THE MAHAZIKE TORAH SYNAGOGUE

Mahazike Torah was one of the most impressive synagogues in the city. It was built in an eclectic style due to the hard work of rabbi Lejb Jozovits. Being the only synagogue in the area called „Felsze(u)g“, thanks to its architectural grandeur, it did not go unnoticed by those who entered the city. The synagogue was demolished after the Second World War. The only room that existed longer was the ritual bath.



## MALBISH ARUMIN SYNAGOGUE

„Malbish Arumin“ - the organization that helped the poor owned a synagogue, which dominated the area through its height. It had an over-raised floor and a front with elongated windows ending in arcades. The synagogue was demolished after the Second World War.



## EZT CHAYIM (BEIT-MIDRASH)

It was built by the association with the same name. It was a building which was used as a house of prayer and was famous for its courtyard: here the Jewish and the non-Jewish population used to park their carts and their sheds were transformed into small rooms where the merchants passing through the town spent their nights.

## KOSOVER KLOIZ

House of prayer. In Sighet on almost every street where Jews lived you could see a school for boys (Beit-Midrash), a house of prayer (Kloiz) or a small synagogue (schilichel). There were also other houses of prayer around Sighet, with the ones from Craciunesti and Sapanta being the most important ones.