

Who Was Buried in the Jewish Cemeteries in the Danube Region? (Contributions to the History of Rabbinic Families)

Radovan Sremac

Keywords: Bačka Palanka, Ilok, Jews, Rashi, Hatam Sofer, Hacham Tzvi, Shach, Elimelech Weisblum

The earliest history of modern Jewish communities in present-day Serbia and Croatia is largely unknown. The only exceptions are the big cities (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Zagreb, Osijek, etc.), which have been thoroughly elaborated and published due to the abundance of historical material. In addition to the unexplored archival holdings, the past of the Jews in these areas and the importance of this community have not been fully comprehended mostly because the old Jewish cemeteries have also been unexplored. Jewish community gave a whole host of personalities

that were of great importance not only internally to Jews but the whole society.

This paper discusses five extremely famous and significant rabbis and Talmudists and their unknown descendants buried in Ilok and Bačka Palanka. These rabbis and Talmudists are Solomon ben Isaac - Rashi, Moses Schreiber - Moshe Hatam Sofer, Tzvi Hirsch Ashkenazi - Hacham Tzvi, Shabbatai Hakohen - Shach and Elimelech Weisblum of Lizhensk.

Descendants of some of the most significant rabbis of the Middle Ages and the modern age were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Ilok.¹ Ilok's Jewish cemetery was probably formed in the mid-19th century since the oldest preserved tombstones date from the early sixth decade of the 19th century. Today, 144 marked graves are preserved in the cemetery. The number of burials in Ilok according to the death records was 223, which means that only 65% of the graves have been preserved (Sremac 2018: 20-30). In the first row, the fifth and sixth graves belong to the married couple Frida and Haim Ephraim Francoz. The tombstones are preserved but a new plaque with identical text has been placed on them.

The text on the tombstone of Haim Ephraim Francoz translated from Hebrew into English reads:

"Here lies the greatly honored man, a descendant of the Hacham Tzvi, a descendant of the Shach, a descendant of Rashi, a lover of the Torah and the truth, our teacher Rabbi Haim Ephraim Hachohen Francoz may he rest in peace, son of the righteous and gentle man who negotiated in faith the late Menachem Manis Mordechai may he rest in peace. He was born in the year 5620 in Stanislav, Galicia and died on 14 Sivan



1. Tombstone of Haim Ephraim Francoz in Ilok

¹ The work of the historian Slavko Gavrilović *Jews in Srem in the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century* (Belgrade, 1989) largely clarifies the history of the Jews in Srem. However, Gavrilović writes very little about the Jewish community in Ilok, and what he writes refers to a period that is not relevant to our topic.



2. Fanny Fridl (maiden name Stern) and Haim Ephraim Francoz

5697. May he enjoy an honorable rest. His mother's name was Esther, may she rest in peace. The tombstone was redone by his grandson Rabbi Moshe Katz Francoz from New York."²

Above the text is a carved representation of the so-called Crown of Priesthood, symbol of the priestly Cohanim family.

There is no information about the Francoz family before moving to the region of Sarmia/Srem. According to a later written birth certificate, Haim Ephraim was born on June 25, 1860, in present-day Ivano-Frankivsk (formerly Stanislaviv) in Ukraine. Haim Ephraim Francoz married Fanny Fridl Stern from Ilok on October 13, 1885 in Bonyhad, and soon after the wedding they settled in Šid.³ Haim Ephraim and Fanny had children: Juli (1886, Šid), Markus (1888, Šid),

² We are grateful to Uri Tadmor for translating the Hebrew text.

³ Marriage Records for Orthodox Jewish Community in Bonyhad. Source: https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/results?count=20&query=%2Bauthor_id%3A308167. (Website accessed on August, 14 2020).

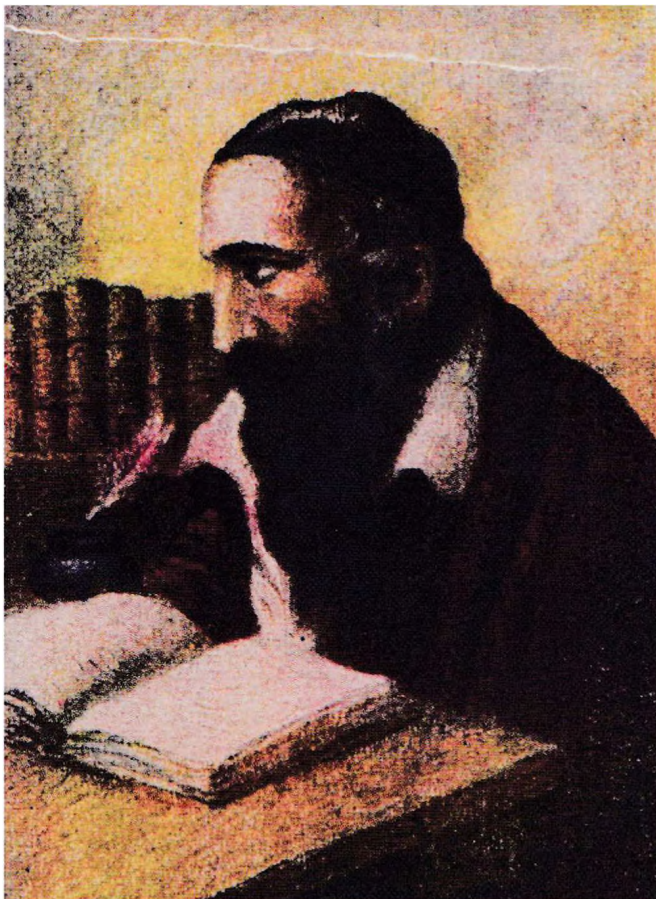
Mayer (1890, Šid), Feivel (1892, Šid), David (1894, Šarengrad), Jakob (1900, Erdevik), Devora (1901, Šid) and Josef Samuel (1906, Šid) (Sremac 2018: 50). They moved several times, to Šarengrad, then to Erdevik, then again to Šid. After 1908, the Francoz family finally moved to Ilok, where Haim Ephraim passed away on May 24, 1937.

The ancestors of Haim Efraim Francoz listed on the tombstone in chronological order from the younger to the older generation could turn the opposite direction in importance.

Solomon ben Isaac - Rashi is the greatest commentator on Tanakh, Mishnah and Talmud. The nickname Rashi is taken from three Hebrew letters, Resh, Shin, Yud, which denote the initial letters of "Rabenu Shlomo Yitzchaki" or "Rabbi Solomon, son of Isaac". Rashi was born in cca. 1040 in Troyes, southern France. After his initial education in his hometown, he went on to famous yeshivas in Mainz and Worms. After marrying, he returned to Troyes where he opened his own school in 1070 (Skolnik 2007: 101). Rashi made comments on most, if not all, Bible books. His commentary on the Babylonian Talmud is undoubtedly the most significant commentary on the Talmud. He made comments in a special Alphabet which was



3. Portrait of Rashi from 16th century



4. Shabbetai ben Meir Hakohen - Shakh

named Rashi's Alphabet by his name, and with which Tanakh, Mishnah and Talmud are still printed today. In the first printed edition of the Talmud of 1484, Rashi's commentary was printed on each page, which made him the basis for the study of the Talmud (Skolnik 2007: 102-105). He died on the 29th of Tamuz 4865, or on 13 July 1105. The following is known of his offspring: his eldest daughter Jochebed, married to Meir ben Samuel, had four sons: Samuel - Rashbam, Isaac - Ribam, Jacob - Rabbenu Tam, and Shlomo the "Grammarian" as well as daughter Chan who taught women's rights and customs. Rashi's middle daughter Miriam and her husband Judah ben Nathan had a daughter, Alvina, and the sons Yom Tov, the founder of Yeshiva in Paris, and Shimson and Eliezer. The youngest daughter, Rachel, was married (later divorced) to Elizer ben Shemiah. Rashi's grandchildren Rabbi Tam and Rabbi Samuel ben Meir with their students made famous comments on the Talmud known as *tosafot* (Skolnik 2007: 102-105).

Shabbetai ben Meir Hakohen - Shakh (1621–1662) is a Lithuanian rabbi, the commentator of the so-called code of Jewish law - *Shulhan Arukh*, and the posek. He is also known by the nickname Sha-Kh according to the initials of the title of his book *Siftei Kohen*. He was born in Amstibovo, Lithuania. In his

youth, his father and later Rabbi Joshua Hoeschel ben Joseph educated him in Tykocin. Later he studied in yeshivah in Cracow and then in Lublin. He published his first work in Cracow in 1646, *Siftei Kohen*, on the Shulhan Arukha, *Yoreh De'ah*. Then he wrote criticisms to *Turei Zahav* (by David ben Samuel ha-Levi) entitled *Nekuddot ha-Kesef*. Almost all rabbis in Poland and Lithuania supported the teachings of Shabbetai, while those in Germany favored the teachings of David ha-Levi. Shabbetai also wrote a commentary on *Hoshen Mishpat*, which was published in Amsterdam in 1663 after his death. As a chronicler and historian, he expressed himself in the text on the persecutions of Lithuanian Jews of 1648/9 under the name *Megillat Eifah*. He died as a rabbi in Holesov, Czech Republic. He ordered his children and grandchildren to always observe the *takkanot* of the Councils of the Lands (Skolnik 2007: 338-339). He had sons Rabbi Moshe HaKohen and Rabbi Meir HaKohen, and daughters Esther married Rabbi Menachem Manasha Chayos, Chaya, Tov, and two other unknown daughters.

Zevi Hirsh Ashkenazi ben Jacob (1656–1718), also known as Haham Zevi, was a rabbi and a halakhist. His father Jacob Sak, a famous scholar, and



5. Zevi Hirsh Ashkenazi ben Jacob – Haham Zevi

maternal grandfather Ephraim ben Jacob HaKohen had escaped from Vilna to Moravia during the 1655 uprising. Ashkenazi initially studied under them. In 1676 he went to yeshivah to Thessaloniki and then to Belgrade. There, he accepted Sephardic customs, and despite his Ashkenazi origin, he accepted a Sephardic title for a rabbi - Hakham, as well as the name *Ashkenazi*. He returned to Ofen in 1680, and after the siege of Ofen and the massacre by the Imperial Army of Leopold I, he escaped to Sarajevo where he became a rabbi of the Sephardic community. After moving to Berlin in 1689, he married the daughter of Meshullam Zalman Neumark-Mirels, *av bet din* of the Three Communities of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck. He later moved to Altona where he taught at the Klaus for eighteen years. After the death of his father-in-law in 1707, he was appointed as chief rabbi of Hamburg and Wandsbeck, although he shared his position in Altona with Moses Rothenburg. Due to controversy on certain religious issues, he left all three communities in 1709. He continued to lead the yeshivah at the Klaus in Altona until he became Rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Amsterdam in 1710. There he made excellent contacts with the local Sephardic community, which lasted until the arrival of Nehemiah Hayon, emissary of Shabbetai Zevi. Because he conflicted with him, Ashkenazi left the community in 1714 and moved to Poland. At the beginning of 1718, he was appointed as rabbi at Lemberg/Lavov/L'viv but he passed away after several months. His main work is *Hakham Zevi*, published in Amsterdam in 1712 (Skolnik 2007: 578).

There is another noteworthy grave in the Ilok Jewish Cemetery. It is the tomb of Menachem Ehrenfeld (Šurany, 1895 - Ilok, 8.2.1939), situated at the beginning of the ninth row. Above the grave, there is a monumental white marble stele that ends in a semi-circular manner at the top. The text on the tombstone, translated from Hebrew into English, reads:

“Here lies the rabbinical leader, dearer than gold and pearls, of the highest qualities and characteristics, a faithful man, akin to angels and gods, Rabbi Menachem Ehrenfeld, a native of Šurany. Dear son to his father, the famous and great man in Jewish history, Rabbi David Tzvi may he live long and prosper, and a grandson of the Hatam Sofer. He died to the great sorrow of his wife and children and his entire family, at the young age of 44 years, on Wednesday, 19 Shvat 5639.”⁴

Following this text, there is a song in Biblical Hebrew in combination with Aramaic, with allusions to the Bible, whose acrostic gives the deceased's name

Menachem. The first word in the poem was taken from the Bible book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:16. The bible verse after this first word contains the word identical with the deceased's name – *Menachem* meaning “consoler” but it was omitted from the tombstone. In the free translation into English, the poem reads:

“Solace is far from us; the source of the gladness of our heart and the glory of our family is no more. He was faithful to the Lord and carried out His will, and his feet never left the path of his ancestors. Adored and admired, beloved above (=by God) and



6. Grave of Emanuel Menachem Ehrenfeld in Ilok

cherished beneath (=on Earth), a striver for justice and a lover of honesty. He honored the Lord with his words and deeds; what a shame it is that this excellence is now buried in the ground.”

The text also contains sentences: “His mother's name was Miriam. May his soul be bound in the bond of everlasting life.”⁵

Emanuel Menachem Ehrenfeld was the son of David Ehrenfeld and Maria Miriam Friedlander.

⁴ We are grateful to Uri Tadmor for translating the Hebrew text.

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He got married in Ilok on October 30th 1923 to Julie Yittel Stern with whom he had sons Siegfried (Ilok, 19.10.1924 - Auschwitz, 21.9.1942) and Alfred (1938-1942) (Sremac 2018: 45). Julie and her sons were killed in the Holocaust. Following the origin of Emanuel Menachem Ehrenfeld, a direct line to Hatam Sofer can be established.

Moses Schreiber Sofer (1762-1839), better known as the Hatam Sofer was a rabbi and one of the greatest authorities of halakhic learning also considered to be the leader of Orthodox Jewry. He was born in Frankfurt in 1762. He began his service as a rabbi in Dresnitz in the Czech Republic and Mattersdorf. In 1806, he was appointed as chief rabbi of Bratislava/Pozsony, at that time the most important Jewish community in Hungary, and remained there until his death. He founded a yeshivah in Bratislava, considered the largest since Babylonian yeshivot, and became the center of orthodox Jewry in the fight against the reformist movement (Skolnik 2007: 742). Sofer also spread his influence through his manuscripts, though he published almost nothing in his lifetime. Immediately after his death, his family published all his manuscripts in seven volumes of responses, liturgies, novellas according to the Talmud, Torah commentaries, letters, poems and a diary. His ethical will is particularly significant. It is completely devoted to the fight for faith. The Sofer family played a significant role in the settlement of Jews in the territory of modern Israel during the 19th century, i.e. before Zionist immigration began.⁶ Sofer also fought to preserve the Hebrew language. After his first wife passed away without children, Sofer married Sorel-Sarah Eger, daughter of Akiva Eger, a rabbi from Poznan and the greatest Talmudist of their time. Sofer's children from this marriage will start a famous rabbinical family in Europe. One of their daughters, Rebecen Hindel Ehrenfeld married Rabbi David Zvi Hersh, with whom she had, among other children, a son Rabbi Samuel Ehrenfeld (1835-1883). Samuel Ehrenfeld with his wife Esther Paskus (1840-1908) had a son, Harav David Zvi Ehrenfeld of Surany, father of Emanuel Menachem Ehrenfeld, deceased and buried in Ilok. So, Emanuel Menachem Ehrenfeld is the great-great-grandson of Hatam Sofer. It must be mentioned that Emanuel Menachem Ehrenfeld had a sister Rohel (died in 1980) married to Rabbi Samuel Ehrenfeld (Skolnik 2007: 743).

The fifth rabbi whose descendant lived and died in present-day Serbia is Elimelech Weissblum of Lyzhansk. Bačka Palanka had an extremely strong



7. Moses Schreiber Sofer - Hatam Sofer, lithograph by Josef Kriehuber, cca. 1830.

Jewish community during the 19th century (Šosberger 1998: 11-14). There is a Jewish cemetery in the town today with 419 graves. The oldest preserved reliably dated tombstone dates from 1808 (Sremac 2019: 101). In addition to these *in situ* tombstones, the cemetery also has several broken monuments that have been collected and buried in the ground in one place so that they could not be lost. Among these fragmented tombstones is one which belonged to the tomb of Shmuel Samuel Pernis according to a preserved section of the text. The preserved part of the text on the monument translated into English reads: "Here lies Rabbi Shmuel Pernis, grandson of the great rabbi Elimelech who authored the book *Noam Elimelech*[...]"⁷ According to the typology of the monument and the way the text was written, the monument would date to the early 19th century. The historical sources for the history of the Bačka Palanka's Jewish community for this period are almost unknown. The Jewish Vital Records for Bačka Palanka have been kept since 1851. Before that year, there were two censuses of Jews in Bačka Palanka, from 1788 (Archive of Vojvodina, Fund 2. Bács-Bodrog County, Box 190, No. 42a/1788) and 1828 (Remer 1991: 244-245, 419-422). However, none of them mentions Shmuel Samuel

⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20100507103959/http://www.chasamsofer.com/>. (Website accessed on May, 24 2020).

⁷ We are grateful to Uri Tadmor for translating the Hebrew text.



8. Concrete fragmented monuments including the tombstone of Samuel Pernis (upper right corner)

Pernis. As Shmuel Samuel remained completely unknown to history, his ancestor became one of the most famous rabbis in modern Jewish history.

Elimelech Weissblum of Lyzhansk (1717–1787) is a well-known *zaddik* of the third generation of Hasidim and one of the founders of the Hasidic movement in the historical area of Galicia. Elimelech is considered a theorist and creator of “practical zaddikism”. He traveled from village to village with his brother Zusya from Hanipol following the teachings of *nedudei galut* (“wanderings of exile”). According to later interpretations, the purpose of their wanderings was the promotion of repentance. Elimelech immigrated to Lyzhansk in 1772, which made this city an important Hasidic center. Letters published under his name describe the struggle of Hasidim against their opponents Mitnaggedim. Elimelech had to

defend Hasidim from accusations of using Sephardic rituals. He was ascetic although he did not consider asceticism a good way of life for everyone. He formulated the customs of Hasidic life in his zaddik doctrine. He believed that the zaddik was not only a spiritual leader but a person with the task of leadership in all spheres of life. Elimelech did not seem to be able to cope with the pressures of the life of a zaddik, and at the end of his life, he devoted himself to a kind of self-fulfillment, he separated himself from his students and even denied his spiritual leadership in the community (Skolnik 2007: 348-349). The following are mentioned as his children: Rabbi Jacob ben Elimelech Weissblum, Rabbi Elazar Weissblum of Lyzhansk, Eliezer Lipa Lipman, Ester Etil (Oelbaum), Mirosh Elowitz (Lipman) and Esther Etil Lipman (Ehlbaum).

The presence of members of some of the most famous rabbinical families in the Danube region undoubtedly speaks about the importance of the local Jewish communities. What was their direct impact on these communities cannot be said. Certainly, the specificity of the Jewish community in Ilok, as the most orthodox Ashkenazi community in the area of Sirmia Srem and beyond, can be considered as the reason for the arrival of the descendant of the famous Rashi, Hatam Sofer etc.⁸ Although there was a small community of orthodox Jews in Bačka Palanka, it was probably not in any consequential connection with the presence of the Weissblum descendant in the city. In any case, the fact that the family of one of the fathers of the Hasidic movement lived in the area of Bačka is extremely interesting and significant in the context of the history of the local Jewish communities, as well as the Hasidic movement and teaching itself.

⁸ For more details on the Jewish community in Ilok, see: R. Sremac, *Židovske obitelji u Iločkom rabinatu / Jewish Families in Rabbinate of Ilok*, Ilok, 2018; and Lj. Dobrovšak, *Židovi u Srijemu od doseljenja do Holokausta*, Vukovar, 2017.

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Ко је сахрањен на јеврејским гробљима у Подунављу? (Прилог историји рабинских породица)

Радован Сремац

Кључне речи: Бачка Паланка, Илок, Јевреји, Раши, Хатам Софер, Хахам Цви, Шах, Елимелех Вајсблум

На јеврејском гробљу у Бачкој Паланци и Илоку сахрањени су потомци неких од најзначајнијих рабина средњег века и новог доба. У питању су следећи рабини и талмудисти: Шломо Ицаки – Раши (Shlomo Itzhaki – Rashi), Мосес Шпрајбер – Моше Хатам Софер (Moses Schreiber – Moshe Hatam Sofer), Цви Хирш Ашкенази – Хахам Цви (Зеви) (Tzvi Hirsch Ashkenazi – Nacham Tzvi), Шабатај Хакоен – Шах (Shabbatai Hakohen – Shach) и Елимелех Вајсблум од Лежајска (Elimelech Weisblum of Litzhenski). Илочко јеврејско гробље највероватније је формирано средином XIX века. На гробљу су данас сачувана 144 обележена гроба, што представља 65 % укупног броја сахрањених. Међу сачуваним споменицима налази се и споменик Хаима Ефраима Францоza, потомка Рашија, Шаха и Хахама Цвија. Раши је највећи коментатор Танаха, Мишне и Талмуда, а његов коментар на вавилонски Талмуд сматра се најзначајнијим коментаром на Талмуд. Шабатај бен Меир – Шах (1621–1662) је литвански рабин, коментатор тзв. кодекса јеврејског закона. Цви Хирш Ашкенази бен Јакоб (1656–1718), познат и као Хахам Цви, био је рабин и халахист. На илочком јеврејском гробљу налази се и споменик Менахема Еренфелда (1895–1939), потомка Хатама Софера. Мосес Шпрајбер Софер (1762–1839), познатији као Хатам Софер, био је рабин и један од највећих ауторитета халахистичког учења, сматран и вођом ортодоксног јеврејства. На јеврејском гробљу у Бачкој Паланци, на којем је сачувано 419 гробова од почетка XIX до средине XX века, налази се фрагментован и дислоциран надгробни споменик Шмуела Самуела Перниса, унука Елимелех Вајсблум од Лежајска. Елимелех Вајсблум (1717–1787) познати је цадик треће генерације Хасида и један од оснивача хасидског покрета у историјској области Галиције. Сматра се за теоретичара и креатора практичног „цадикизма“.

Присуство чланова неких од најпознатијих рабинистичких породица у Подунављу неупитно говори о значају овдашњих јеврејских заједница, иако се не може тачно рећи колики је утицај учење ових рабина имало на локалне заједнице. Поменути гробови свакако захтевају обавезну заштиту и презентацију јеврејских гробаља у Бачкој Паланци и Илоку.