

JEWES IN THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL LIFE OF CROATIA AT THE END OF THE 19TH AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY: THE EXAMPLE OF OSKAR WEISZMAYER (1855–1931)*

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Drawing on literature, newspapers, and archival sources, this paper examines the life and work of Oskar Weismayer, one of the most recognizable members of the Jewish community in Croatia in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. Elucidating his overall economic, cultural, social, and political activities in Osijek and Zagreb is an important contribution to a better understanding of the history of the Jews in Croatia.

Keywords: Oskar Weismayer, banking, Jews, Osijek, 19th century, 20th century

Introduction

When the fifth anniversary of the death of Oskar Weismayer, the banker from the city of Osijek, entrepreneur, trader, economic expert of Jewish origin, arrived in July 1936, the local newspaper *Die Drau* published an extensive article remembering the deceased. The author, identified by the initials F. B., appeared to be a close acquaintance of Weismayer. At the outset of the text,

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he reproached the 'ungrateful' residents of Osijek, who had seemingly forgotten Weismayer, described as 'one of the greatest citizens of Osijek'. The author lamented that had Weismayer been a member of parliament, a people's tribune or a notable football player, the appreciative people of Osijek would have already honoured his memory with a memorial plaque, a street name, or a similar commemoration.¹

For precisely half a century, Weismayer distinguished himself in the life of the city on the river Drava through his roles as one of the first highly educated merchants, an entrepreneur, a banker, and an industrialist. Over this period, he made a lasting impact across various spheres of public life. Following his death, numerous newspaper articles were published expressing various praises and gratitude. However, not long after, he seemed to fade from memory in his Osijek. This apparent forgetfulness may be attributed, in part, to Weismayer's residence in Zagreb during the last ten years of his life, as well as the fact that he had no descendants.

As the aforementioned author with the initials F. B. observed, it was not surprising the people of Osijek quickly forgot Weismayer. It is equally unsurprising that he was even more thoroughly hushed up during the socialist period. A capitalist and banker of foreign origin, with a particularly unusual, Hungarianized surname (Weismayer instead of the original form – Weissmayer), he was rarely mentioned, usually not in a positive context. A notable example can be found in the writings of Croatian writer and publicist Miroslav Krleža, where, in one of his characteristic enumerations, he mentioned the banking house of Jakob Sorger and Oskar Weismayer.² Whether knowingly or unknowingly, he altered the name of the bank, presenting it in an unusual form that sounded even more foreign than it actually was ("Sorger-Weissmayer Comp. Cie" instead of *Sorger-Weismayer Cie*). Furthermore, Krleža's broader assertion that this banking house financed *Hrvatska zemaljska banka* [Croatian Land Bank] did not correspond to the truth. It was rather the same banking house that changed its name after the entry of Czech capital.

Even in the subsequent decades, Weismayer was rarely mentioned in a positive context. It was only after the democratic changes that several texts were published, once again highlighting his importance and various merits, particularly in the context of the economic development of Osijek and its surroundings at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Chronologically and in terms of content, Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević's article on the Croatian Land Bank stand out as 'the most significant for our understanding of the history

¹ F. B. "Andenken an Oskar Weismayer", *Die Drau* (Osijek), no. 1 (174), August 1, 1936, p. 2.

² Miroslav Krleža, *Deset krvavih godina i drugi politički eseji* (Zagreb: Zora, 1957), 469.

of the Weismayer's banking house.³ In the *Židovski biografski leksikon* [Jewish Biographical Lexicon], or its working version, Weismayer is represented by a relatively exhaustive biography.⁴ Recently, Paula Rem's article was published, which predominantly focuses on Weismayer's economic role and significance, specifically on the role of his bank in the overall development of the city of Osijek.⁵ Apart from the aforementioned texts, it should be noted that Weismayer is indispensable in a series of other journalistic and historiographical works, especially those dealing with the history of Osijek.⁶

Origin

Oskar Weismayer was born in 1855 in Pécsvárad (Croat. Pečvar), a small town located twenty kilometres away from Pécs (Croat, Pečuh). At the time of his birth, his family was already considered among the indigenous families in that area, as the surname Weismayer is associated with the very beginnings of a significant Jewish presence in Pécs and its surroundings. The already Hungarianized form of the surname (Weismayer) attests to the roots of the family in this region, as indicated in various sources. Regarding the surname, it is worth noting that in Croatia, it was sometimes given in its certainly original form, such as Weissmayer. However, in the vast majority of cases, the form Weismayer continued to be used, and this persisted until his death.

Weismayer's background and education were exceptionally strong for that time, one might even say, top-notch. In 1871, he completed his education by graduating from the prestigious Trade Academy in Pest.⁷

³ Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Što se dogodilo s najvećom osječkom bankom poslije 1918. godine? Prilog poznavanju povijesti Hrvatske zemaljska banke 1909. – 1945. godine", *Osječki zbornik*, no. 22-23 (1997), 209-228.

⁴ "Weismayer, Oskar (Weissmayer)", *Židovski biografski leksikon. Radna verzija*. <https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=2798> (access achieved on June 17, 2023).

⁵ Paula Rem, "Osječki san' i transformacija Osijeka u značajan centralnoeuropski grad: doprinos Oskara Weismayera ekonomskom životu Osijeka krajem 19. i početkom 20. stoljeća", in *Ugledni Nijemci, Austrijanci i Židovi u javnom životu Osijeka tijekom povijesti*, eds. Ljubica Kordić, Dubravka Papa and Željko Rišner, (Osijek: Pravni fakultet Osijek, 2022), 169-186.

⁶ At this point, I would like to emphasize Ljiljana Dobrovšak's book *Židovi u Osijeku. Od doseljavanja do kraja Prvoga svjetskog rata* (Osijek: Židovska općina Osijek, Čarobni tim d. o. o., 2013).

⁷ Lipót Bricht, *A budapesti Kereskedelmi Akadémia története alapításától 1895-ig* (Budapest: Singer és Wolfer könyvkereskedők bizománya, 1896), 149. This academy was the first commercial higher education institution in Central Europe and the second in all of Europe, following Paris.

Merchant, Industrialist, and Banker

After graduating from the Academy of Commerce, Weismayer arrived in Osijek in the early 1870s and secured a position as a bookkeeper in the largest wood trade company in Osijek, Neuwirth & Comp. The energetic and capable young man swiftly advanced, soon becoming one of the leading figures within the company. Today, we can only speculate about what attracted the young and educated Hungarian Jew to Osijek and Slavonia. However, it is worth noting that among the graduates from the Trade Academy in Pest in the same year as Weismayer, there was only one from Croatia and Slavonia – Sándor Obersohn from Vukovar. Later, at the end of the 19th century, Obersohn became one of the leading figures in the management of the large Gizella mill in Budapest.⁸ It is not excluded that Obersohn was the link between Weismayer and Osijek, given that one member of the Obersohn family, Paulina, was married to Leopold (Ladislav) Neuwirth, co-owner of the aforementioned company.⁹ Therefore, it is plausible that the answer to how Weismayer arrived in Osijek lies precisely in these connections.

Be that as it may, in 1873, the collapse of the Vienna Stock Exchange occurred, significantly impacting the timber trade. Neuwirth & Comp., the company where Weismayer was employed, also faced challenges from which, as subsequent events revealed, it would not recover. By all accounts, Weismayer returned to Hungary.¹⁰ That return was, however, only temporary. Later, Weismayer came back to Osijek and became a partner in Jakob Sorger's company – *Sorger & Comp.*¹¹ It is worth noting that on January 1, 1879, the company Neuwirth & Comp. was officially closed, and Jakob Sorger took over the ongoing affairs of one of the oldest and most respected commercial companies in Osijek, as reported by *Die Drau*.¹² With his second arrival in Osijek, Weismayer firmly tied his fate to the city, as well as to Jakob Sorger. In 1880, Weismayer married Klementina Sorger, the daughter of his boss at

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ Even prior to the collapse of the company, some members of the Neuwirth family relocated to Vienna and Budapest. However, Josip, the son of Leopold and Pauline, chose to stay in Osijek and gained distinction as the head of the Jewish Worshipful Municipality. "Pauline Neuwirt geb. Obersohn – gestorben", *Die Drau* (Osijek), no. 91, April 19, 1916, p. 2.

¹⁰ F. B. "Andenken an Oskar Weismayer", p. 2; "Upisi tvrdkah", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 196, August 28, 1883, p. 6.

¹¹ F. B. "Andenken an Oskar Weismayer", p. 2.

¹² "Dissolution", *Die Drau* (Osijek), no. 4, January 12, 1879, p. 2. The company Neuwirth & Comp. was eventually deleted from the register at the Commercial Court in Osijek in 1883. At the time of deletion, its members were Ladislav Neuwirth and Makso Eisner, both listed as 'timber traders'.

the time, Jakob Sorger, born in 1863 in the Hungarian town of Bogdas.¹³ This marriage likely had a business aspect, confirming Jakob Sorger's recognition of Weismayer's ability and enterprising spirit. Sorger was willing to take him as a partner and entrust him with his daughter's hand. Furthermore, in 1885, Weismayer officially became a full-fledged resident of Osijek.¹⁴

Thanks to Weismayer, and, of course, to timber conjuncture, *Sorger & Comp.* operated successfully, achieving significant profits primarily from exporting wood and timber abroad (to France, Germany, England, and other countries). During the 1880s, the company also acquired extensive estates of the Adamović family in Vladislavci.¹⁵ These estates were partially situated in the swampy area along the Vuka river, with the Palača swamp being the largest in Slavonia. There had long been plans to regulate the Vuka river, including draining the swamp. To utilize the acquired property, Sorger and Weismayer, along with other interested parties from the area, formed the Cooperative for the Regulation of the Vuka River [Croat. *Zadruga za regulaciju rijeke Vuke*]. By the beginning of the 20th century, they successfully regulated the river, converting more than 20,000 acres of wetland into agricultural land.¹⁶

As previously mentioned, *Sorger & Comp.* was primarily focused on export and actively sized opportunities to showcase its products to a receptive market. Towards the end of the 19th century, there was scarcely a better opportunity for this than international exhibitions, where Sorger & Comp. consistently achieved notable success. One such significant event was the National Exhibition [Hung. *Országos általános kiállítás*] held in 1885 in Budapest,¹⁷ in which Sorger-Weismayer's company delivered a particularly impressive

¹³ Register of marriages, Osijek; *Zavičajnici grada Osijeka 1901.-1946.*, eds. Stjepan Sršan and Vilim Matić (Osijek: Državni arhiv u Osijeku, 2003), 895.

¹⁴ *Zavičajnici grada Osijeka*, 895; *Zapisnici grada Osijeka 1876.-1886.*, ed. Stjepan Sršan (Osijek: Državni arhiv Osijek, 2006), 429.

¹⁵ The owner of the estate at the time, Bela Adamović (1856 – 1933), was more dedicated to art and music than to the maintenance of the family estate. This inclination was a contributing factor to the decision to sale the Vladislavci estate to Sorger's company. Denis Njari, *Vladislavci* (Vladislavci: Studio HS Internet, 2012), 49.

¹⁶ F. B. "Andenken an Oskar Weismayer", p. 2. The company *Sorger & Comp.* retained ownership of the estate in Vladislavci until the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and at that time of the year it covered 12,020 acres and three majors and included a steam mill and a roller mill. Zdenka Šimončić-Bobetko, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija*, vol. 1, ed. Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, (Zagreb: AGM, 1997), 72.

¹⁷ See more about this exhibition in: Branko Ostajmer, "Opća zemaljska izložba u Budimpešti 1885. i njezin odjek u najvažnijim novinama banske Hrvatske", in *X. međunarodni kroatistički znanstveni skup*, ed. Stjepan Blažetin, (Pečuh: Znanstveni zavod Hrvata u Mađarskoj, 2012), 349-380.

performance. Among other things, the company gained attention through a unique publicity stunt: the exhibition of a massive barrel with a capacity of 1,800 acres. During the exhibition tour, King and Emperor Francis Joseph entered the barrel and expressed his satisfaction, stating: "That is truly colossal!"¹⁸ Weismayer also received a form of personal recognition at this exhibition, serving as one of the jurors.

Three years later, in 1888, at the economic exhibition in Brussels, Weismayer was awarded a large gold medal.¹⁹ The subsequent year, in 1889, he took part as a member of the Executive Committee in organizing the Economic and Forestry Exhibition [Croat. *Gospodarska i šumarska izložba*] in Osijek, marking the first occurrence of such an exhibition in Slavonia.²⁰ During that period, the father-in-law and son-in-law embarked on a new venture – the establishment of a bank initially named *Sorger, Weismayer & Cie.*, later to be renamed *Hrvatska zemaljska banka* [Croatian Land Bank]. In its early days, this modest financial institution was closely tied to the tannin (oak wood extract) industry, the fundamental industrial sector of its founders. However, it experienced gradual expansion, evident first and foremost in the growth of its share capital.

The bank was under the leadership of Weismayer, who demonstrated himself as a 'financial genius', according to Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević. There is little doubt that the establishment of the bank was largely the result of his initiative. It is worth noting that Oskar Weismayer, in the late 1880s, proposed the establishment of a land mortgage bank in Croatia-Slavonia with its headquarters in Osijek, primarily to serve Croatian and Slavonian farmers.²¹ Croatian-Slavonian ban (governor) Dragutin Khuen-Héderváry and the Land Government accepted these suggestions, and by the end of the 1880s, the *Hrvatsko-slavonska zemaljska hipotekarna banka* [Croatian-Slavonian Mortgage

¹⁸ "Brzojavne vesti 'Narodnim Novinam'", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 101, May 4, 1885, p. 4; V. [Stevan Vasin Popović], "Obća zemaljska izložba. (Od našega posebnoga izvjestitelja.) II. U Budimpešti, 3. svibnja.", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 104, May 7, 1885, p. 3; "Sa zemalj. izložbe u Budimpešti", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 127, June 6, p. 3.

¹⁹ At the same exhibition, the company owned by his father-in-law, Jakob Sorger, received an honorary diploma. "Odlikovani slavonski izložitelji na bruseljskoj izložbi", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 217, September 21, 1888, p. 2.

²⁰ "Gospodarska izložba u Osieku", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 103, May 4, 1889, p. 5.

²¹ It should, however, be pointed out that this idea had already been present in Croatia earlier, and some individuals, regardless of their political beliefs, highlighted the severe lack of favourable loans for farmers. Cf., for example: "O hipotekarnoj banci", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 157, July 13, 1881, p. 1; "O hipotekarnoj banci", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 77, April 4, 1882, p. 1.

Land Bank] was indeed founded, starting its operation in 1892.²² However, Weismayer's proposal was not fully acknowledged, as Zagreb was designated as the capital of the new bank instead of Osijek, as he had proposed. This circumstance raises question about the extension of Slavonia under Khuen and Slavonic regionalism.²³ In response, business circles in Osijek and Slavonia demanded the establishment of at least a branch of this bank in Osijek. However, Khuen rejected this request.²⁴ Additionally, at the early months of 1887, the banking house *Sorger, Weismayer & Cie.* became the main representative of the Vienna Insurance Company and the Vienna Life and Annuity Insurance Institute in Slavonia.²⁵ This association allowed this banking house, originally one of several similar financial institutions in Slavonia, to gradually expand and become an increasingly significant factor in the economic and industrial growth of Osijek and its surrounding areas. Nevertheless, the pivotal year in the bank's history was 1909 when, with the entry of capital from Prague's *Živnostenska banka* and a renaming to *Hrvatska zemaljska banka*, it transformed into the largest banking institution in Osijek and Slavonia.²⁶

In 1890, the company *Sorger & Comp.* became a co-founder of a new joint-stock company involved in the production and export of tannins. The company was headquartered in Gunja and registered trilingually in Croatian, Hungarian and English (*Slavonska tvornica hrastova izvadka / Szlavonia tölgyfa kivonat, gyárreszvény társág / Slavonian Oak Wood Extract Company*). Alongside Sorger's company, three other companies from Budapest were co-founders, and the five-member board included Jakob Sorger and Oskar Weismayer.²⁷

In addition to the aforementioned ventures, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Weismayer's name was linked to a myriad of other industrial

²² "Sedamdeset i pet godina Trgovačko-obrtničke komore za Slavoniju u Osijeku. Proslava 75-godišnjice", *Hrvatski list* (Osijek), no. 141 (2529), May 20, 1928, p. 9.

²³ Due to Khuen's key role in the establishment of this bank (he later became a member of its board of directors), as well as the significant involvement of Hungarian capital in its formation, this institution has been a target of criticism from the Croatian opposition since its inception. Even in historiography, the role of this bank is not always perceived with complete objectivity.

²⁴ "Podružnica hipotekarne banke u Osieku", *Viestnik županije virovitičke* (Osijek), no. 16, August 15, 1892, p. 127.

²⁵ [Announcement], *Sriemski Hrvat* (Vukovar), no. 8, January 26, 1887, p. 4.

²⁶ For details on the bank's operations cf. Tomislav Timet, "Razvitak hipotekarnih i komunalnih zajmova klauzuliranih za izdane hipotekarne založnice i komunalne zadužnice kod novčanih zavoda u Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji", in *Prilozi za ekonomsku povijest Hrvatske*, ed. Ivo Vinski (Zagreb: Institut za historiju radničkog pokreta Hrvatske, 1967), 235-251.

²⁷ "Upisi tvrdkah", *Narodne novine* (Zagreb), no. 267, November 20, 1890, p. 8.

initiatives in Osijek and its vicinity. There was scarcely an enterprise in which he was not involved, whether as an initiator, founder, member, or financier. The significance of *Hrvatska zemaljska banka*, is particularly noteworthy, as, with the assistance of Czech capital, it played a crucial role in establishing numerous large industrial companies. This included the Osijek sugar factory, the machine factory, and ultimately, in 1912, the Osijek iron foundry and machine factory.²⁸

All the mentioned endeavours resulted in elevating Weismayer's standing in Osijek and Slavonia, particularly in commercial and industrial circles. The most visible confirmation of this was likely his ascend in the Osijek Chamber of Commerce and Crafts, where he was elected president in 1911 and subsequently held that position for many years. Furthermore, Weismayer actively participated in the administrations of various professional associations and economic institutions. Notably, he served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Slavonic Economic Society in Osijek for many years.

Weismayer's expertise is affirmed by his journalistic activity, focusing exclusively on expert banking and economic issues. His active involvement in this field further indicates that Weismayer gained proficiency in the Croatian language over time. According to the previously cited biographical text from *Die Frau*, Oskar Weismayer was knowledgeable about the greats of world literature and spoke German, Croatian, Hungarian, French, and English perfectly.²⁹

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In Oskar Weismayer's biography, it should be emphasized that his focus extended beyond his personal business ventures. He genuinely considered public interests, especially those of the city of Osijek. Notably, he served as a representative in the Osijek city council for many years, where he distinguished himself through his active involvement and expertise. He was elected in the first electoral class, among the select group of electors who paid the highest annual tax (over 280 forints). There were 104 such electors who elected 12 deputies.³⁰ Equally significant was Weismayer's role as an almost indispensable member of numerous Osijek delegations, where he travelled to Zagreb or, more frequently, to Budapest, with the aim of advocating for specific commercial or transport interests of Osijek. In the latter case, Weismayer's qualifications were limited to his expertise but also extended to his fluency in the Hungarian language.

²⁸ See more in Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Što se dogodilo s najvećom osječkom bankom poslije 1918. godine?"

²⁹ F. B. "Andenken an Oskar Weismayer", p. 2.

³⁰ Stjepan Sršan, "Predgovor", in *Zavičajnici grada Osijeka 1901.-1946.*, eds. Stjepan Sršan and Vilim Matić, (Osijek: Državni arhivu u Osijeku, 2003), 8-9.

In Social and Political Life

In Osijek, and subsequently in Zagreb, Oskar Weismayer and his wife Klementina were regarded among the highest echelons of citizens, a status confirmed in various ways. Weismayer was a member of numerous Osijek societies, and his reputation and financial standing almost obliged him to provide support for significant cultural endeavours, irrespective of national or religious affiliations.³¹ His wife, Klementina, adhering to the customs of the time, actively participated in the social life of Osijek on various occasions. A notable example is her long-term involvement in the Osijek branch of the Red Cross.³² Additionally, during the First World War, she was among other prominent women from Osijek actively engaged in the Osijek Society for the Support of War Invalids.³³

In this context, it is important to note that Weismayer was also one of the most prominent freemasons in Osijek, in fact, one of the founders of the Osijek freemasonry lodge *Budnost*, established in 1912. He embraced the idea of Freemasonry many years before the establishment of this lodge, as he had already become a member of the Zagreb lodge *Hrvatska vila* on June 6, 1898.³⁴ Over the subsequent years, Weismayer actively worked to gather like-minded individuals from Osijek, leading to the establishment of the Osijek branch (“vjenčić”) of the *Hrvatska vila* lodge. Weismayer headed this branch, named *Budnost* [Vigilance], from its inception in 1899. After his resignation in 1904, the Osijek “vjenčić” fell into a crisis and practically ceased to exist.³⁵ Among the most significant activities of “vjenčić” and Weismayer as his leader was the founding of the Society for the Protection of Abandoned Children in 1901.³⁶

³¹ He was, among other things, one of the most respected individuals from Osijek who were among the first founding members of the Osijek Croatian National Theatre. Dragan Mucić, *Prvih četrdeset godina. Hrvatsko narodno kazalište u Osijeku 1907. – 1941.* (Osijek: Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, 2010), 47.

³² “Rotes Kreuz”, *Die Drau*, no. 80 (7009), April 7, 1911, p. 5; Ljiljana Dobrovšak and Vijoleta Herman Kaurić, “Židovke dobrotvorke – uloga ženskih članova židovskih obitelji za vrijeme Prvoga svjetskog rata u banskoj Hrvatskoj”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 49, no. 3 (2017), 469.

³³ Dobrovšak and Herman Kaurić, “Židovke dobrotvorke”, 470.

³⁴ Grgur Marko Ivanković, “Slobodnozidarska loža ‘Budnost’ u Osijeku (1773.-1945.)”, in Grgur Marko Ivanković and Ante Grubišić, *Ostavština osječke slobodnozidarske lože “Budnost”*. Katalog izložbe. Osijek, srpanj – prosinac 2003. (Osijek: Muzej Slavonije, 2003), 47.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 48. Apparently, Weismayer later rejoined the Freemasons in Zagreb. *Idem*, 75.

³⁶ Weismayer was the vice-president of this society. *Idem*, 48.

The Weiszmayers not only provided support for art but also held a genuine appreciation for it, as exemplified by Oskar commissioning his portraits, likely also portraits of other family members. His discerning taste is evident in the fact that he entrusted such assignments to the most esteemed Croatian artists of the time. In 1918, Weiszmayer was portrayed by Vlaho Bukovac in an oil-on-canvas painting,³⁷ and a bronze bust of him was crafted by Rudolf Valdec.³⁸

In political life, Weiszmayer aligned with the views of the majority of Osijek Jews, supporting the National Party (derogatorily called “Magyarons”). His support for the party primarily stemmed from his advocacy for preserving the Croatian-Hungarian state union. However, it is evident that Weiszmayer made efforts not to prominently stand out in political life, maintaining a passive role in supporting the National Party. A change occurred in 1906 when broader political shifts in the Austro-Hungarian Empire unsettled the position of the National Party, and Osijek Jews felt compelled to openly enter the political arena. In the decisive parliamentary elections in May 1906, Weiszmayer became a candidate of the National Party in Osijek, with the majority of Osijek’s Jewish citizens supporting his candidacy. Despite these efforts, Weiszmayer was defeated in Osijek, the National Party lost the elections, and shortly afterward, it ceased to exist. For Weiszmayer, his parliamentary candidacy marked both the beginning and the end of his active political career.³⁹

The information regarding Weiszmayer’s involvement in the city committee established in 1905 to erect a monument to Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek adds depth to Weiszmayer’s personal and political profile.⁴⁰ The bishop had passed away two months earlier, and the committee comprised city dignitaries, many of whom had long been public supporters and admirers of Strossmayer. While Weiszmayer was not counted among this group, his willingness to join the committee undoubtedly indicates a sense of respect for arguably Osijek’s greatest figure at the time, despite differences in political views. With the exception of Mayor Konstantin Graff, who served as the committee’s chairman, all other members were, to varying degrees, proven opponents of the Khuen regime.

As previously mentioned, Weiszmayer held multiple terms as a representative in the Osijek city council. Actively engaging in discussions, he primarily

³⁷ Vlaho Bukovac, *Moj život* (Zagreb: [1918.]), 156.

³⁸ Antonija Tkalčić Koščević, *Sjećanja na prve generacije Umjetničke akademije u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti – Arhiv za likovne umjetnosti, 2007), 116.

³⁹ See more about these elections in Milenko Patković, “Izbori za Hrvatski sabor 1906. godine u Osijeku i pobjeda politike novog kursa”, *Osječki zbornik XIII* (1971), 169-188.

⁴⁰ “Für ein Stroßmayer-Denkmal in Esseck”, *Die Drau* (Osijek), no. 70, June 11, 1905, p. 7.

focused on economic and traffic matters, avoiding direct statements about his political views and preferences. The city elections involved civic lists without explicit political affiliations, yet the divide between those aligned with or opposed to the government in Zagreb was discernible. During the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Osijek was traditionally dominated by pro-government, “pro-Magyarons” political forces, a category that included Oskar Weismayer.

Like many industrialists, entrepreneurs, and bankers of his standing, whose political allegiance primarily lay with the Habsburg dynasty, Weismayer received several decorations from Vienna during his long public career. These included the Order of the Iron Crown, 3rd class, and the Knight’s Cross of the Order of Francis Joseph (awarded in 1909). In the twilight of the Monarchy, in the fall of 1918, he was also awarded the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Francis Joseph. This recognition, once again highlighting his merits in the economic field, came at the time when the Monarchy approached its final days and the thought of South Slavic unification permeated Croatian politics. Weismayer’s acceptance of this final Habsburg honour occurred as a public event extensively covered by the Osijek press, and more openly by the Yugoslav-oriented periodical *Jug*. During the small ceremony, Weismayer delivered a lengthy speech in which, among other things, he emphasized that he was, admittedly, not the son, but the adoptive son of the Empire.⁴¹

However, just a month later, circumstances changed dramatically. Austria-Hungary fell apart, and a twist involving Weismayer and his decorations unfolded. At the end of November, the Osijek press reported that the president of the Croatian National Bank had returned all the Habsburg decorations he had been awarded, making them available to the State Tax Fund.⁴² On the same day, a session of the presidency of the Chamber of Commerce and Crafts was held in Osijek. During this session, Weismayer was once again unanimously voted in as the president.⁴³

Moving to Zagreb in 1922

During the years of the First World War, Oskar Weismayer, an prominent and respected banking and economic expert, forged close ties with the Zagreb community. In the midst of 1915, Ban Ivan Skerlec appointed him as

⁴¹ “Svečani dan Hrvatske Zem. Banke”, *Jug* (Osijek), no. 182, October 13, 1918, p. 5.

⁴² “Zurückgelegte Orden”, *Die Drau* (Osijek), no. 267, September 21, 1918, p. 4.

⁴³ “Eine Vertrauenskundgebung für den Kammerpräsidenten”, *Die Drau* (Osijek), no. 261, November 15, 1918, pp. 2-3.

a member of the National Economic Commission, lauding him as an ‘excellent financial and economic expert’. Zagreb weekly, *Hrvatski Lloyd*, emphasized on that occasion that this state body, with Weismayer as ‘agile and, hopefully, a good connoisseur of our economic conditions, and a financial expert imbued with patriotic feelings, gained [...] an equally excellent force’. However, the publication expressed regret that Weismayer did not reside at the commission’s headquarters, which hindered his ability to dedicate his energies to this vital institution as successfully as possible”.⁴⁴ At that time, it uncommon for experts from the province to be appointed to state commissions located in the capital. In Weismayer’s case, this particular decision by Ban Ivan Skerlec in 1915 can be attributed to the fact that, at that time, Zvonimir Žepić (1863-1932) headed the Government Department for the National Economy. Žepić had previously served as the secretary of Virovitica County and as the deputy of the Supreme Court in Osijek for several years (1902-1906), effectively overseeing Virovitica County. During his service, Žepić undoubtedly had the opportunity to thoroughly acquaint himself with Weismayer and his capabilities.

Nevertheless, throughout the war years, Weismayer increasingly engaged in Zagreb’s economic life. Simultaneously, the bank under his leadership expanded beyond the confines of Osijek and Slavonia. This expansion was evident in the extension of the building housing the bank’s headquarters in Osijek, a project executed according to the designs of Hugo Ehrlich.⁴⁵

Considering all of the above, it was not a big surprise when, in 1922, Weismayer personally relocated the bank’s headquarters to Zagreb. Weismayer was not an exception, a large number of other entrepreneurs from Osijek and Slavonia followed the same path. On September 25, 1922, Weismayer resigned from the position of president of the Osijek Chamber of Commerce and Crafts. In recognition of his contributions to the Chamber and the public life of Osijek over forty years, its members elected him an honorary president.⁴⁶

With the relocation, Weismayer and his bank adapted to the new circumstances. In 1922, they underwent a name change, and since then, this banking institution, now headquartered in Zagreb, has been known as *Jugoslavenska banka* [Yugoslav Bank]. In the subsequent years, Weismayer became involved in the administration of numerous other financial and industrial institutions

⁴⁴ Alongside Weismayer, the distinguished Zagreb industrialist Šandor A. Alexander (1866–1929) also became a member of this committee on the same occasion. “Proširenje zemaljskog gospodarskog povjerenstva”, *Banovac* (Petrinja), no. 31, July 31, 1915, 3.

⁴⁵ *Žarko Domljan, Arhitekt Ehrlich* (Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 1979), 246.

⁴⁶ “Sedamdeset i pet godina Trgovačko-obrtničke komore za Slavoniju u Osijeku. Proslava 75-godišnjice”, *Hrvatski list* (Osijek), no. 141 (2529), May 20, 1928, p. 9.

in western Croatia, extended even to the territory of Slovenia. Concurrently, his bank experienced further growth, as reflected in its personnel policy – several other capable economic experts joined the bank’s management, including the prominent banking expert Edo Marković.⁴⁷

Family

In the final years of his life, Weismayer retired and resided in Zagreb, Hatzova Street no. 16., within the premises that once served as the headquarters of the architecture firm of Adolf and Ernest Ehrlich. Notably, *Jugoslavenska banka* had acquired this house for its owner’s requirements, and Hugo Ehrlich undertook a house adaptation project.⁴⁸

As previously mentioned, Oskar Weismayer was married to Klementina, born Sorger. According to the assessment of one personal acquaintance,⁴⁹ their marriage was notably happy, despite the absence of children. In 1930, Oskar and Klementina celebrated their golden anniversary. The following year, on July 15, 1931, Oskar reached the end of his life’s journey. He passed away in the baths in Bad Ischl, where he presumably sought a cure for his illness.⁵⁰ Four days later after his death, on July 19, he was laid to rest in the Jewish section of the Mirogoj cemetery in Zagreb.

In addition to his widow Klementina and *Jugoslavenska banka*, obituaries for Oskar Weismayer were also published in the daily newspaper by the management of the *Kranjska tvornica željezne bravarske robe i kovinske robe “Titan”* [Kranj Factory of Iron Locksmith and Metal Goods “Titan”], the management of the *Domaća tvornica pređenja i tkanja pamuka* [The Domestic Cotton Spinning and Weaving Factory] from Duga Resa, where Weismayer served as a vice president, and the directorate of the *Prvo hrvatsko-slavonsko dioničko društvo za industriju šećera* [The First Croatian-Slavonic Company for the Sugar Industry] in Osijek, where he also held a position of vice

⁴⁷ Vladan Jovanović, “Edo Marković (1885. – 1939.): prilog za biografiju”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 52, no. 1 (2020), 134.

⁴⁸ The same Zagreb architect was involved in the reconstruction of the headquarters of *Zemaljska (Jugoslavenska) banka* in Osijek, located on the corner of Kapucinska and Jäger Streets. Additionally, he was entrusted with the project of a two-story residential building in Osijek intended for the officials of the same bank, situated in today’s Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac Street. Grgur Marko Ivanković, “Zgrada sagrađena za stanovanje bankovnih činovnika”, *Glas Slavonije* (Osijek), no. 31652, April 12, 2021, p. 12.

⁴⁹ F. B. “Andenken an Oskar Weismayer”, p. 2.

⁵⁰ F. B. “Andenken an Oskar Weismayer”, p. 2.

president. Apart from these obituaries, several tributes were featured in the Yugoslav press, all of which spoke highly of the deceased's contributions.

Julijo Pfeiffer, a longtime acquaintance and collaborator of Oskar Weismayer in various spheres of Osijek's public life, bid farewell to him in the pages of Osijek's *Hrvatski list*. After providing basic details of the deceased's life, Pfeiffer portrayed Weismayer as a man of significant financial and economic knowledge, emphasizing his tireless work until the very end. With Weismayer's move to Zagreb, it was noted that a considerable void had been created in the economic life of Osijek. However, it was also remarked that "his heart still belonged to our city [Osijek], where he spent the best years of his life".⁵¹

Pfeiffer's observation, that Weismayer remained closely connected to Osijek even after moving to Zagreb, was corroborated by his widow Klementina. In accordance with the customs of the time, Klementina generously donated a substantial sum to various Osijek charities upon her husband's death. Specifically, she distributed the total sum of 12 thousand dinars as follows: 2000 dinars to the Student Home, 2000 dinars to the Children's Home, 2000 dinars to the Jewish Supply House, 2000 dinars to the Jewish Ladies' Society, 1000 dinars to the Old People's Home, 1000 dinars to *Kolijevka* (charity association), and 2000 dinars to the Jewish Holiday Colony. The funds were deposited in the treasury of *Hrvatski list*, from where it they were allocated to the mentioned societies.⁵²

Weismayer's wife, Klementina (nee Sorger), eight years his junior, continued to reside in Zagreb after her husband's passing. She passed away during the the Second World War, following the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, and became one of the thousands of victims of the Ustasha regime.

Conclusion

Despite the increasingly comprehensive research and a growing number of historians dedicating to systematically researching the history of the Jewish community in Croatian lands, and notwithstanding the multitude of recently published books, articles, and doctoral dissertations on related topics, many aspects of the history of Jews in Croatia remain inadequately researched. The overall role of Jews in the political, economic and cultural life of Croatia is still relatively unknown. Furthermore, the biographies of numerous prominent

⁵¹ Julije Pfeiffer, "Oskar Weismayer", *Hrvatski list* (Osijek), no. 193, July 17, 1931, p. 6.

⁵² "Lijep dar humanitarnim društvima", *Hrvatski list* (Osijek), no. 334 (3803), December 5, 1931, p. 6.

individuals of Jewish origin remain unwritten to this day. Weismayer stands out as one of the most prominent figures in the economic life of Croatia at the end of the 19th and in the first decades of the 20th century, particularly in the region of Osijek and Slavonia.

Weismayer spent the majority of his life in the multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic city of Osijek, where he displayed an exceptional entrepreneurial spirit from an early age, propelling him swiftly up the social ladder. Engaging in nearly every significant industrial and economic enterprise in and around Osijek, Weismayer undoubtedly emerged as the central and one of the central figures in the history of Osijek's economic life. Given his proficiency in both Hungarian and German, he frequently led delegations and represented the commercial and economic interests of Osijek and Slavonia, particularly in Zagreb and Budapest, notably at the Ministry of Trade.

Among Weismayer's diverse and extensive activities, with significant roles in various economic entities, the most notable is undoubtedly linked to the bank he co-founded in the 1880s with his father-in-law, Jakob Sorger. Initially established as a small Osijek bank named *Sorger, Weismayer & Cie*, it underwent a transformation in 1909. With the infusion of Czech banking capital from *Živnostenska banka* in Prague, this bank expanded into the Croatian Land Bank and spread its influence far beyond Osijek.

Devoted to entrepreneurship, economy, and banking, as well as to art, social activities, and charity work, Weismayer skilfully avoided active involvement in politics, although he did not conceal his political views. His primary focus was on preserving the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Croatian-Hungarian union within that imperial framework. This meant supporting unionist currents in Croatian politics. However, he made it clear on several occasions that this stance did not diminish his role as a Croatian patriot genuinely concerned about Croatian territorial integrity and other national interests. In 1906, when the unionist idea faced significant challenges, Weismayer entered the political arena for the first and only time. However, both he and his National Party were defeated, and political life was subsequently dominated by political forces guided by a completely different goal.

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