# The Romanian Jewry:
## Historical Destiny, Tolerance, Integration, Marginalisation

To discuss what was the attitude of the Romanian society towards the increasing economic, social and political role of the Jews throughout history is one of the aims of this paper. Serban Papacostea, the outstanding specialist in mediaeval history, makes use of the syntagm "hostile tolerance", which specified the general attitude towards the Jews of the Orthodox mediaeval world of Byzantine origin. Tolerance - defined the unlimited opportunity for Jews to be accepted, settle, move and act freely within the Romanian principalities, all the way to the status of possessing properties in Moldavia and Wallachia. There were, however, mixed feelings of hostility manifest at three distinct levels: mental, juridical and political. As for the mentalities, both popular and high brow education as well as prejudices held the Jews guilty for the death of Christ. Even if physically the Jewish presence in Romania has become symbolical, the history of the Jews, the traditions of the Jewish culture and spirituality, the imprint of the Jewish contribution on the emergence and development of the Romanian society will remain the perennial values of a historiography aspiring to fulfill its duty, forever preserved in the conscience of generations to come.

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To reconstruct the historical destiny of the Romanian Jewry, which is still a blank page in our historiography, remains a task for the historians and researchers. Such early attempts as were made by Hasdeu and Iorga to trace "the history of religious tolerance in Romania" or "the history of the Jews in our countries", springing amid the bitter dispute over the civil rights of the Jews in late 19th and early 20th century[1] , did not have the expected follow-up in further research which, it was hoped, would produce a synthesis of this important issue. The *Bibliography of the Jews in Romania*, published by Jean Ancel and Victor Eskenasy in Tel-Aviv in 1991[2] , is an inventory of partial contributions and documenting materials, which offer only the starting point for a future historical synthesis. The more recent *History of the Jews in Transylvania, 1623-1944,* published in Romanian and Hungarian versions by Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, former Chief-Rabbi of Cluj/Kolozsvár

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and Emeritus Professor of Yeshiva University New York, offers an excellent synthetic view on the history of the Jews in this particular region, even while it calls for a collective effort to approach similarly the entire Romanian Jewry[3] .

The beginnings of the Jewish history in this part of Europe are veiled by the legendary aura created by scholarly Humanism and militant Romanticism. Like other populations in the Central-East-European area, the Jews in Transylvania in mid 19th century, as shown in their political petitions for rights, looked for support in the historical awareness of their early presence in this part of the world. Such claims were put forth by the imaginative 16th century Saxon priest of Talmaciu by the name of Johann Lebel, who tried to trace the origins of the name of his village back to the Talmud. The ancient locals bearing the name had been allegedly called in to help the Dacian king Decebal against a common enemy, the Romans, after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the legions of emperor Titus[4] . Popular imagination added to, or overlaid, such scholarly constructions with oral folklore[5] , according to which such toponyms as Jidovar, Jidovina, Jidova a.s.o, were the links to the ancient Dacian and Roman fortresses or mediaeval strongholds attributed to hypothetical Jewish colonists[6].

While thorough historical criticism exposed the lack of foundation and the anachronism even of such folklore (for example, the origin of Talmud predates by far the age of Decebal), archeology, on the other hand, keeps producing hard evidence about the presence of Jews in Dacia in the first centuries AD. The coins issued by Simon Bar Kochba and discovered in the neighborhood of the Roman military camps in the province of Dacia, the artifacts bearing Hebrew inscriptions, and the sanctuaries devoted to the gods worshipped by the Helenised Jews of the Diaspora are just a few of the elements that speak of a Jewish presence both among the Roman troops stationed in Dacia and among the colonists brought from "all over the Roman world" to settle the newly conquered province[7].

These sporadic and scanty beginnings of Jewish life in Dacia fell victim to centuries of invasions in the wake of the collapse of the Roman rule, so that it is as late as the first centuries of the second millenium that documents in either Latin or Slavic offer the proof of the emergence and development of a Jewish society in Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia. After some indirect and uncertain data from the 12th to the 13th centuries, the 14th to 16th centuries provide more and more documentary proofs concerning the Jewish population in the above mentioned provinces. The Jews came to this area from the West (Germany, Bohemia, Hungary), North (Poland) and South (the Ottoman Empire, where the Sephards expelled from Spain found a tolerating haven). Their economic role as revealed in the contemporary documents was of intermediaries in trade on the route that linked Poland to the Black Sea and the Ottoman Empire, across the territory of Moldavia, and also in the relations established between the most important Transylvanian cities (Cluj, Brasov/ Brassó, Sibiu/ Szeben) and the regions across the

Carpathians or the Balkans. The second important component of the Jewish economic activity was that of suppliers of the credit necessary both for the rulers and the urban and rural comunities. Several of those who vied for the throne obtained the nomination after resorting to the services of the Jewish creditors who were influential in the Ottoman capital. The nobility, the boyars, as well as the city dwellers raised money from the Jews, who were thus integrated in the economic and social life by gaining properties, paying taxes, participiated in court both as the accused or the defended parties or as witnesses. The Jewish physicians, who practiced the courts of the Romanian or Transylvanian princes, were in great demand and efforts were put into bringing them over from Poland or the Ottoman Empire[8].

This economic and social role, made clear with every documentary material produced, was closely linked to involvement in the complex network of the international relations of the Central – and Southeastern European area. Isac Beg, the Jewish doctor of Ozun Hasan, the Turkmen Khan, during his mission in Europe to form an alliance against the Ottoman Empire, also mediated an improvement in the relations between Stephen the Great of Moldavia and Mathias Corvinus of Hungary, which resulted in an agreement sealed by the granting of mutual trade privileges[9]. In the second half of the 16th century, the Jewish personalities influential in the Ottoman world got directly involved in the political destiny of the Romanian principalities by backing and crediting pretenders to the throne and by integrating Jewish tradesmen into the region in an extended network of obtaining and transmitting information necessary to the expanding Ottoman Empire. Joseph Nassi, Duke of Naxos, adviser and favorite of the Sultan, supported the access to the throne of Moldavia of Alexandru Lapusneanu and Ion Voda cel Cumplit (the Terrible), even while in 1571 he himself was considered a worthy candidate to the throne. From among the creditors from Constantinopole who financed Michael the Brave to ascend the throne of Wallachia the main role was played by the influential Jewish financiers of the Ottoman capital[10].

What was the attitude of the Romanian society towards the increasing economic, social and political role of the Jews? Serban Papacostea, the outstanding specialist in mediaeval history, makes use of the syntagm "hostile tolerance", which specified the general attitude towards the Jews of the Orthodox mediaeval world of Byzantine origin. The first term – tolerance - defined the unlimited opportunity for Jews to be accepted, settle, move and act freely within the Romanian principalities, all the way to the status of possessing properties in Moldavia and Wallachia. Under the protection of the law, the free practice of their religion and the setting up of synagogues and schools complete this facet of the Jews' status in the Romanian territories during the Middle Ages. There were, however, mixed feelings of hostility manifest at three distinct levels: mental, juridical and political. As for the mentalities, both popular and high brow education as well as prejudices held the Jews guilty for the death of Christ. The mural paintings

of the monasteries in Moldavia and the popular writings about the lives of the saints place the Jews usually among the infidels and the heretics, responsible for the martyrdom of saints, doomed to the flames of Hell.

The juridical codifying of the 17th century following the model of the Byzantine codes stipulated the differences between the Jews and Christians, by forbidding conversion to Judaism, yet favoring those willing to convert to Christianity by granting them pardon for all the previous misdeeds. The fact that the Christian priests were forbidden to have any contact with Jews, to join meals in their homes, to be consulted by Jewish physicians, although not generally observed, is relevant for the mentalities of the epoch and the juridical approached. As for everyday policy, the hostility was motivated by the competition between the local and the Jewish tradesmen, the discontent of the debtors with their creditors, the Jews being considered agents of the Ottoman power in the Romanian provinces. Hence the restrictive economic measures and the onset of the struggle against the Ottoman rule by taking repressive measures against the Jewish creditors, who were at variance imprisoned and compelled to surrender their fortunes to Stephen the Great, or simply killed by Michael the Brave and Aron the Tyrant. Russian sources mention severe measures against the Jews taken by Petru Rares, including their general expulsion from Moldavia. On the other hand, one should not ignore the trade privileges and tax-exemptions granted them by rulers such as Alexandru the Good, Stephen Tomsa or Constantin Brancoveanu, or the protection offered them by Vasile Lupu against the Cossacks of Hmelnicki. The advice given by Archbishop Matei al Mirelor to the then prince to observe and keep the promises he had made the foreign tradesmen, Jews included, which would gain him fame in their distant homelands, completes the ambivalent status of the Jews in the mediaeval Romanian society, a status characterized by restraint and prejudices of old and new always accompanied and counterbalanced by a permissive tolerance[11].

Many similarities could be found in the situation of the Jews in Transylvania, where they made themselves useful as tradesmen, creditors and intermediaries in the relations with the Ottoman Empire beginning with the 14th century. After the first privilege granted in 1251 by Bela IV to the Jews in the Kingdom of Hungary, Transylvania included, a privilege confirmed and renewed by most of his successors until 1526, under the new circumstances as the autonomous principality of Transylvania, Prince Gabriel Bethlen granted them in 1623 a privilege which became the fundamental act of their social, economical and juridical status until mid 19th century. This privilege issued within the context of the policy of revival of the Principality by colonization ensured the Jews the freedom to settle and move within the country, to freely practice trade, to observe their religion without any discrimination, no discriminating signs included. Although these rights were later amended by the decisions of the Diet and the Code of Laws of the Principality limited the right to settle to the town of Alba Iulia/ Gyulafehérvár, these privileged

provisions reiterated periodically in the 17th and 18th centuries provided the Jews in Transylvania with the oportunity to engage in an increasingly dynamic economic activity and to lead a life in their specific tradition[12]. The Pinkas (Protocol) of the Community of Alba Iulia (the first and, for a long time, the only organized Jewish community in the Principality) reflects an internal organization with a rabbi who was beginning with the middle of the 18th century the Chief-rabbi of the Transylvanian Jewry, a local leadership elected by the majority vote, a legal system of its own, with taxes destined to cover the needs of the community, and two synagogues for the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews to practice their cult[13].

The 18th century, which marks the borderline between the pre-statistics and statistics period, will allow us for the first time a quantitative assessment of the presence of the Jewish population in the area under discussion. In Transylvania, the new Habsburg regime, established at the end of the 17th century, inaugurated the practice of recording the human and material resources by introducing a periodical census. The first general census of the Jews in the Great Principality of Transylvania, at the end of the reign of Maria Theresa (1779), registered 221 Jewish families with 461 children. The first modern census ordered by Emperor Joseph II, registered in the Great Principality 394 Jewish families with 2.094 members representing 0.14% of the entire population. In western present day Transylvania (counties Caras, Timis, Torontal, Arad, Bihor, Maramures, Satu Mare), then part of Hungary, the number of the Jewish population, registered at the same time, was 6,884. Up to 1840, the demographical evolution of the Jews in Transylvania was rather insignificant, their number never exceeding 3,000-3,500 in the Great Principality. A great increase occurred over the years prior to the Revolution of 1848, and the immediately following, so that the Austrian census of 1850-1851 registered over 15,000 Jewish inhabitants in the province. The reason of this increase is to be found in the massive immigration from the West and the North (Galitzia, Bukovina and Hungary) to the more favorable economic and social conditions offered by the Great Principality. In spite of the continuous increase, the Jewish population of Transylvania did not reach then 1% of the total population. After the civil emancipation in 1867, the Jewish population increased considerably from 23,536 in 1869 to 60,074 individuals in 1910, with an increase in its percentage of the total population from 1.2% to 2.4%. For the whole territory of present day Transylvania before World War I, the Jewish population reached the number of 223,082[14] .

In Moldavia, the first census taken by the Russian occupation military authorities during the war with the Turks in 1774 registered 1,300 Jewish families. When Bukovina fell to Austrian rule in 1775, successive statistics point to a decrease in the number of Jewish families from 650 in 1776 to 175 in 1785 due to the expulsions practiced by the new authorities. Later on, the relaxation of the restrictive measures marked a new increase to 554 families in 1791. In the first half of the 19th century, the data available for Moldavia show a sharp in-

crease in the growth of the Jewish population from 11,732 in 1803 to 79,164 in 1838. The explanation of this growth is to be found both in a spontaneous immigration from Poland and Russia, then experiencing poor economic conditions while enforcing severe anti-Jewish policies, and the colonization by the Princes, boyars and the Church with a view to pointing out the value of their respective domains. By 1848, over 60 smaller towns and villages had been set up with Jewish majority population. If we also add the natural increase due to early marriages, ritual sanitary and dietary prescriptions, and the low mortality due to abstinence and stable family life, one has now all the main causes of the growth of Jewish population until 1859-1860 to 134,100 persons, of which 124,897 in Moldavia and only 9,234 in Wallachia. In the same period (1856), the Jewish population in Basarabia, which had been integrated into the Russian Empire in 1812, reached the number of 78,751. By the end of the century, according to the 1899 census, the number of the Jews in Romania doubled, reaching 269,015, and representing 4,5% of the total population. Prior to World War I, in 1912, the census recorded a slight decrease in figures and ratio (239,967 persons and 3,3% as a result of the emigration due to declination of civil rights and the restrictive, anti-Jewish official policy)[15].

Simultaneous with the demographic increase, the 18th-19th centuries marked significant developments at the institutional level too. In Moldavia and Wallachia the leader of the Jewish communities became the so-called Hahambasha established by the Prince of Moldavia with a substitute in Wallachia. He had administrative, juridical and fiscal competence, the right to nominate the rabbis and the local community leaders. This centralized system was maintained until 1830 when the communities were granted the right to elect their own rabbis and lay leadership[16]. In Transylvania, the increase in the Jewish population brought about in the first half of the 19th century the setting up of new communities, in addition to the only legally recognized one of Alba Iulia. These communities with their own rabbis and leaders claimed the right to participate in the election of the Chief-rabbi and demanded an institutional decentralization accompanied by reforms of cult and education. The conflict between the advocates of the reforms and the advocates of the traditional system reached its climax at the inaugurations of the last two Chief-rabbis in 1820 and 1845-1846. In the years preceding the Revolution of 1848, the conflict was taken up by the Hungarian and Saxon newspapers in Transylvania. In the western part of present day Transylvania, in Arad, Chief-rabbi Aron Chorin rallied a powerful group who advocated renewal. Chorin declared himself for the modification of some of the traditional prescriptions, a renewal of the ritual and the substitution of Hungarian and German for Hebrew in sermons.

After the 1848 Revolution, the supporters of the institutional and educational reforms managed to organize two conferences of the representatives of the Jewish communities in Transylvania. In 1852 and in 1866, projects were proposed at these conferences for the re-

organization of the communities and of the school-system and for reducing the prerogatives of the Chief Rabbi. The chance for these projects to be implemented came with the civil emancipation, when in 1868 a congress of the Jewry of Hungary was organized in the new political conditions created by the Austro-Hungarian dualism. The main effect of the centralized institutional and educational system proposed by the Congress was a break between the Jewish communities, which lasted until World War II. Thus, those who acknowledged the resolutions of the Congress became the congressist or neolog communities, while their adversaries declared themselves Orthodox (supporters of a strict observance of ritual prescriptions and of a full community autonomy) or status-quo-ante (partisans of maintaining the situation previous to the Congress)[17].

Beyond these internal problems, the main concern of the Jewish society in the 18th and 19th centuries was emancipation, gaining full civil rights[18]. In Transylvania, the first half of the 18th century is characterized, as regards the official policy towards the Jews, by the alternation of restrictive measures taken by central and local authorities with periodical renewals of the privileges gained in the previous century. The situation of the Jews worsened sensibly during the reign of Maria Theresa, when, within a generalized system for Hungary, a special burdensome tax of tolerance was introduced for the Jews in western present day Transylvania. In Banat (counties Caras, Timis and Torontal), a regulation entitled Judenordung was adopted in 1776 restricting drastically the admissible number of Jewish families, restraining free mobility, the right to practice trade, confining residence to special districts, and strictly limiting the social and economic relations between Jews and Christians. This policy climaxed in 1779-1780, when it was determined that the entire Jewish population of the Great Principality be localized in Alba-Iulia, that all professions except trade were forbidden, and moving out of the area had to stop. The death of the Empress, and the ascension of Joseph II prevented the implementation of these projects, while the new era of Josephinism brought about a policy in the spirit of tolerance.

With a view to integrating the Jewish population into society as a class of useful taxpayers, Joseph issued in 1783 the Edict of tolerance for Hungary, applicable to the Jews in western present day Transylvania too. This meant access to trade training and membership of guilds, free admittance to public schools at every level, universities included, removal of the humiliating distinctive signs and creating opportunities to set up their own school system. In exchange, the Jews were asked to integrate into the general educational system, to introduce the Latin, German or Hungarian languages in their official or business records, to adopt German names[19]. In the Great Principality, some partial measures taken, such as permission to promote freely economic activities like peddling or brandy distilling, and stopping the practice of baptizing Jewish new-borns by midwives against their parents' will, are signs of a positive change, without however, finalizing into a general Edict of tolerance[20].

During the first half of the 19th century the issue of emancipation became a hot debate at the level of the state central institutions and the local authorities, as well as for the public opinion and the press of the time. Within the context created, the emancipation of the Jews became part of the reform-program promoted by the liberal gentry. Consequently, the Jews in western Transylvania benefited from the measures adopted by the Diet of Hungary in 1840 which provisioned their right to settle and live in all towns except in the mining area, to start factories and practice all trades and commerce. In spite of the claims by the Jewish communities of the Great Principality to civil rights similar to those granted for the rest of the population, the Diet of Transylvania did not consider the request until 1848.

Concomitant to these attempts at official level to improve their status, the Jews of Transylvania conducted a long and tenacious struggle in the towns and villages of the Principality for the right to settle, freely practice economic activities, observe the prescriptions of their cult and build synagogues and schools. The 1848 Revolution, instead of the expected and coveted emancipation brought about an outburst of anti-Jewish persecutions in the main towns of Hungary and Transylvania[21], while the Neo-Absolutist regime of 1849-1860, introduced by the Austrian Empire following the suppression of the Revolution, annulled such few rights as had been gained in the previous years (the right to purchase properties, for instance). After the liberalization of the political regime in 1860, the idea of emancipation imposed by a process of modernization in both the social-economic structures and mentalities, was materialized in 1867, conjectured by the new dualist Austro-Hungarian regime's attempts to prove its legitimacy by solving in a liberal spirit the long-debated problem of the Jewish civil emancipation through one of the first laws adopted directly after setting up.

The emancipation of the Jews in Moldavia and Wallachia proved to be a slower and more difficult process, although in mid 19th century the conditions seemed favorable for a positive solution. The liberal generation that prepared and carried out the 1848 Revolution adopted such provisions as "the emancipation of the Israelites and equal rights for all citizens of other denominations" (in Wallachia) or "the gradual emancipation of the Israelites" (in Moldavia). Attracted by these promises and interested in economic, social and institutional modernization and liberalization, the Jews supported the Revolution. The affiliation was maintained in the period following the defeat of the Revolution as part of the general struggle for the unification of the Romanian Principalities under the first ruler of the unified Romania, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, who opened up new ways of putting into practice civil emancipation in the years to come. Thus, some Jewish personalities were appointed to public office and the communal law of 1864 granted the Jews the right to participate, under certain conditions, in the municipal elections. The Civil Code issued in the same year stipulated the individual naturalization of the Jews after a ten-year residence in the country[22].

After the overthrow of Cuza, public opinion and the political class's attitude to the issue of Jewish emancipation changed radically. Adopted under street pressure, the 7th article of the 1866 Constitution granted the right to citizenship only to those of the Christian confession. The governments in power until 1872, led by the outstanding politicians of the liberal generation of 1848 such as Ion Bratianu, Mihail Kogalniceanu, or Ion Ghica inaugurated a series of anti-Jewish actions (mass expulsion, interdiction of settling in villages, restriction of economic activities), which were aggravated by an abusive local administration intent on implementing them. There are manifold and complex causes of this radical shift in direction in the Jewish policy of the liberal generation of 1848. The growing demographics of the Jewish population, the massive immigration, the orientation of the Jews towards professions characteristic for the middle class that was just taking shape in the Romanian society, all caused a negative reaction among the liberal political forces, who regarded the Jewish competition as the main obstacle in the building up of the social strata in Romania which they targeted as their main support. Within the electoral system established in 1866, the civil emancipation of the Jews would have meant a radical change in the third college, the electoral stronghold of the liberals. In Moldavia was formed a so-called liberal independent fraction, acutely xenophobic and anti-Jewish, whose indispensable support for the uphold in power of the liberal governments had a great contribution to the unfavorable turn in the liberal policy towards the Jewish issue.

As for the conservative political forces, they proved to be much too moderate as the representatives of the landholders interested in exploiting the economic resources with the help of the Jewish leaseholders and seeking social and political interest opposed to that of their liberal adversaries. Not incidentally then, the conservative government of Lascar Catargiu between 1872-1876 considerably mellowed the anti-Jewish measures of the previous governments, and political personalities of conservative orientation such as P.P. Carp, Titu Maiorescu, and Take Ionescu, endorsed the arrival at a just solution for the Jewish issue in Romania[23].

Under the circumstances, when the idea of emancipation became a reality across Europe and the international Jewish organizations had been acknowledged as politically influent, Jewish emancipation in Romania transcended the area of internal confrontations to attract the interest of the Great Powers in the delicate context of the "Oriental problem". At the end of the 1877-1878 War, when the Peace Congress in Berlin traced the new political frontiers in the Balkans, the Great Powers conditioned the recognition of the recently gained independence by Romania on the amendment of Article 7 of the Constitution to ensure civil rights to all the residents of the country irrespective of their denomination.

On being met with a strong opposition by the political forces and the public opinion in Romania, the modification of the Constitution triggered a real political storm consisting in new elections and changes of governments, whereas the long and tiresome negotia-

tions with the European capitals delayed by more than a year the recognition of the independence of Romania. Finally, an advantage was taken both of the specific contradictions and interests of England, France, Germany and Russia, and of the hesitant attitude of a part of the Jewish leadership in Romania, and a surrogate "solution" was propounded in the re-formulation of Article 7 offering the possibility of individual naturalization for the Jews with a ten-year residence in the country. With one single exception, that of the block-naturalization of the 883 participants in the war for independence, this solution of gaining civil rights for the Jews proved entirely impracticable, and the total number of Jews naturalized between 1878-1913 did not exceed 529[24].

From 1878 to World War I, a particularly restrictive legislation was added to this infelicitous solution, an aggravation to the drastic limits set to Jewish participation in industry and trade, in the liberal professions, and in public administration, also blocking access for the Jews to instruction at any level and legalizing the system of Jewish expulsion from the rural areas.

In order to counteract this discrimination, the *Union of the Native Jews* was set up in Bucharest in 1910, assuming the responsibility of coordinating the struggle for emancipation. It was these efforts, the support of the European public opinion and of the international Jewish organizations that prepared the field for the favourable conditions at the end of the World War I which made the Jewish emancipation a reality in Romania. The decrees issued in 1919 by Ion I. C. Bratianu's government and the acceptance by Romania, not without resistance, of the guarantees comprised in the Treaty for minorities imposed at the Versailles Peace Conference[25], also counted as contributions.

The civil emancipation, gaining full civil rights, did not mean here, as, actually in the whole of Europe (see the Dreyfus case) the expected and hoped for solution for the Jewish issue. The social integration of the Jews proved to be a process which, due to its implications, transcended juridical emancipation, triggering and arousing deep rooted sensibilities, reserves and hostility and, leading, eventually, to some tragic events. On the other hand, the opportunities offered to the Jews by their emancipation in the economic, social, political and cultural life, which they fully turned into account by gaining major positions in the economy, finances, press, the liberal professions, culture and education, caused the birth and rise of an organized type of modern anti-Semitism, one which embarked upon the programmatic elimination of the Jewish factor in society.

In turn, the Jewish community, despite some disposition at being assimilation, on the whole proved to be refractory to such process, which entailed the renouncement of their specific individuality.

For this complex situation emerging after the achievement of civil emancipation, the Jewish community tried to find three types of solutions. Part of the Romanian Jews adopted the ideology and mode of action of modern Nationalism, specifically of the Zionist movement, setting up the goal of transforming the Jewish people into a modern nation within an administra-

tive state on the territory of ancient Israel, with a national language, culture and institutions, similar to all other nations. This movement was popular in Romania where, prior to World War I and during the inter-war period, the Zionist organizations planned and achieved the gradual emigration to Palestine of a part of the Romanian Jews.

Another section of the Jewish community oriented itself towards the left-leaning and extreme left movements, considering that the solutions to the Jewish problems were to be found within the general re-organization of the society, which, by ridding all economic and social injustice, would wipe out the roots of ethnic or confessional discrimination. The advocates of such orientations played an important role in the organization and development of the socialist movement in Romania, with Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea as its most important opinion leader. After the World War I, both the Social Democrat and Communist movements featured an important Jewish component.

Lastly, the third group thought that the solution was to integrate into the Romanian society by preserving their specific cultural and spiritual individuality, and thus achieving full equal rights. It was the *Union of the Romanian Jews* which militated in favor of this idea and paved the way to a political and parliamentary solution for the objective, by participating in the elections in coalition with the governmental parties and by winning seats in the Parliament.

In Transylvania, where pro-Hungarian assimilation tendencies were strong in the wake of the emancipation of 1867, part of the Jewish population, after World War I and the Union with Romania, supported the Hungarian Party, while others constituted the *National Union of the Jews of Transylvania* featuring a strong Zionist orientation[26].

The inter-war period marked the strong affirmation of the Jewish component in the social, economic, political, as well as cultural life of Romania. An important network of community, philanthropic, cultural, artistic, and sports associations, a multitude of organizations and even political parties, a strong Jewish press, all emphasized the way in which the opportunities offered by the new emancipated status had been capitalized by the Romanian Jewry. The ascent of Fascism, of the extreme right movements in Europe and Romania, too, were the alarming signals of anti-Semitism in the pre-war period. The Iron Guard set for itself the task to eliminate physically the entire Jewish component of the Romanian society making known its intentions not only by an extremely aggressive press and literature, but also through violent actions against the Jewish persons and properties[27].

After the victory of Nazism in Germany, anti-Jewish pressure increased, extending at official and legislative levels. The signal sent in 1934 by the passage of the Law of the exploitation of Romanian labor, with provisions which limited the proportion of non-Romanian employers and managers in the economic companies, combined at the end of 1937 with the adoption by the ephemeral Goga-Cuza government of the first overtly anti-Jewish law which revised citizenship and endan-

gered the civil rights of thousands of the 756,930 Jews registered by the 1930 census. Although the economic boycott declared by the Jewish businesses against the government and the international protests proved efficient, and the Goga-Cuza government had to resign after three weeks, in the summer of 1940, the complex situation engendered by the blietzkrieg success of Nazi Germany, the fall of France, Romania's main ally of Romania, the major territory losses in Basaraby and Transylvania, made the Gigurtu government introduce a new anti-Semite legislation aligned to the Nazi model. The policy took on paroxysmal dimensions during the dual government of general Antonescu and the Iron Guard (September 1940-January 1941), and continued in 1941-1944. In line with the racial criteria of the Nûrnberg laws, the anti-Jewish legislation annulled civil rights and liberties, decreed the expropriation of all Jewish possessions (within a process called Romanization), eliminated Jewish manpower from the companies, introduced *numerus nullus* in education and the liberal professions, established restrictions on mobility, re-located the Jews from the countryside to towns, enforced compulsory labor and heavy taxation, and dissolved the institutional system of the Jewish communities. Although not all the measures were applied consistently (for instance, the process of "Romanization" of the Jewish properties and the elimination of the Jewish specialists was considered by Antonescu too long a process to avoid unfavourable economical consequences), the coming to power of the Iron Guard added physical violence to these laws, as an aggravating variable which climaxed in the massacres during the rebellion against Antonescu at the end of January 1941[28].

The war that broke in June 1941 turned violence from an exception into mass practice. After the pogrom of Iasi and the "death trains" of Moldavia, there followed in the autumn of 1941 the massacre and mass deportation of the Jews of Basarabia and Bucovina to Transnistria. They were declared "foreign Jews" siding with the "bolshevik enemy". During the summer and autumn of 1942, the plans for mass deportation of the Jews from old Romania and southern Transylvania to the extermination camps in Poland were at work. The opposition put up by leading personalities of the Romanian political and ecclesiastical elite, among which the Royal House was foremost, the actions of the Jewish leaders, especially of Dr. Wilhem Filderman, and not least of all, the change of the course of the war after Stalingrad, put an end to this project, and thus, about 300,000 Jewish lives were saved out of the 441,293 registered by the 1941 census on the territory of old Romania, southern Transylvania, Basarabia and Bucovina[29].

In Northern Transylvania, under the Hungarian administration introduced in August 1940, the 151,125 Jews recorded in the 1941 census had been subject to anti-Jewish legislation in action for some years in Hungary. This legislation was racial in nature and pursued the elimination of the Jews from the economic life, liberal professions, public services and the educational system. The German occupation in March 1944 and the

Slálasi government hastened the state of things towards a tragic end, ghettoing and deporting as many as 131,633 Jews from Northen Transylvania by June 1944. The courageous stand taken by such personalities as the Greek Catholic Archbishop Iuliu Hossu or the Roman Catholic Bishop Márton Áron, the salvation actions initiated by Jewish organizations with the support of some intellectuals and local peasants did not as much as limit the proportion of the disaster[30].

The Jewish population in Romania reduced to half as compared to the inter-war period (412,312 Jews in 1947) set its hopes, after the terrible shock of the Holocaust, in the new regime, democratic in the beginning, later Communist, which promised to solve once and for all national injustices. It is not by accident that the Jews participate in the building up of the new social-political and economic regime, which, unfortunately, proved very soon to be the deception of a new type dictatorship, whose ferocity was comparable to the one past.

The shattered expectations and the disillusionment with the Communist system corroborated with the emergence of the State of Israel, re-orienting the Jews in Romania towards emigration, so that the number of Jews decreased from 146,264 in 1956 to 24,667 in 1977. The Ceausescu regime, by depriving an entire population of the basic necessities of a decent life and by negotiating the emigration of Jews for hard currency, carried through the process of finishing off the Jewish community, with the result that the latest official census registered as few as 9,000 Jews in 1992, the indubitable sign of a twilight of a history of half a millennium[31].

Even if physically the Jewish presence in Romania has become symbolical, the history of the Jews, the traditions of the Jewish culture and spirituality, the imprint of the Jewish contribution on the emergence and development of the Romanian society will remain the perennial values of a historiography aspiring to fulfill its duty, forever preserved in the conscience of generations to come.

## Notes

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