

The Illusion of Homogeneity

The Jewish Community from the Lower Danube and from Southern Bessarabia*

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“**I**NTERWAR ROMANIA,” “Greater Romania” or “Romania Reunited”—as it is known in the Romanian memory and historiography—was formed at the end of WWI by the union around the Old Kingdom of certain provinces claimed by Romanians throughout history: Bessarabia, Transylvania and Bukovina. The territorial increase as well as the doubled number of people transformed Interwar Romania into a European force. Nonetheless, this new status had its own drawbacks. The Romanians, who joined the new boundaries set after 1918, were also added significant percentages of people belonging to different ethnic groups, thus prompting the transition from a homogeneous state to a heterogeneous one. The Old Kingdom, which expanded its structures in the new provinces after 1919, had neither the administrative capacity, nor the cultural support to attract Romanian citizens belonging to different ethnic groups, a fact that generated crises and disappointments. The failure of inclusion or at least partial integration of ethnic minorities (especially Jews, Russians, Ukrainians and Hungarians) triggered a strong antiminority psychosis. “The euphoria of success (the reunited Romania), alongside with the fear of losing everything, gradually gave rise to a persistent nationalism, unable to nourish itself endlessly. Romania was living the case of a man, who had become rich overnight, with the threat of madness brought forward by a sudden impoverishment.”¹

Besides, until the eve of the WWI, the only real experience that the Old Kingdom had in the problem of minorities had only been related to the Jews.² The Jews, the main ethnic minority at that moment,³ deprived of all civic and political rights but eager to integrate into the Romanian state, made their problems known beyond the borders of Romania. Therefore, they relied on the international pressures which some supranational Jewish associations could make on the Romanian state. In all the

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cases, the opposition of the Romanian politicians was fiercely presented in public.⁴ After the formation of unified Romania, the Jews eventually obtained their emancipation in 1921, not without internal disputes and political convulsions,⁵ their rights being acknowledged in the text of the Constitution of Greater Romania in 1923.

The antiminority psychosis was transmitted to the Romanian majority population, fact that allowed the rise of ultranationalist political forces which took advantage of the exaggerated existing prejudices that were present in the collective mind of the Romanians and that were related to the Jews. The most antisemitic of them, the Legion of Archangel Michael, developed through its leader, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, an entire theory related to the threat posed by a direct enemy personalised by Judaism. As the Legionnaires viewed facts, the occult forces of Judaism (masonry) were those that initiated and supported the Bolshevik revolution as a façade of their own interests. Therefore, the enemy was not to be sought outside, because it was inside—the Jews. As a consequence slogans such as “Judaeo-Communism,” “Judaeo-Bolshevism” and “Judaeo-Masonry,” through which all the Jews were considered communists, sympathizers of the Soviet Union and the Masons, were born and used.⁶

As previously demonstrated, the judgments of guilt given by these antisemitic groups were done on behalf of all ethnic groups, without taking into account at least the differences between the Jews from the Old Kingdom and those from the new provinces. Beyond the “political and electoral reasons,” we wonder why these verdicts, characterized by a totally absurd degree of generalization, were nevertheless accepted as genuine by a fairly significant percentage of the Romanian population. Paradoxically, the answer may be indirectly obtained from a verbatim report that reproduces the Politburo meeting of the Romanian Communist Party on October 15th, 1945:

Comrade Vasile Luca: . . . For the Jews, in general, you can not solve this issue. In order to fight antisemitism, you need to win the sympathy of the people which are poisoned by antisemitism, which fight against everything that is rotten within the Jewish population. Furthermore, if we are to consider facts dialectically, then we should not complain that given the current situation and with this terrible anti-Semitic legacy, we took the decision not to raise any Jewish elements in the leadership of the organizations. And this is what any Communist Jew should comprehend. And when we have a mass being poisoned by antisemitism, when they see only one chief or commissioner, they say that they no longer have a Romanian police, but a Jewish one. . . .⁷

Thus, antisemitism was designed to provide all those afflicted by its poison the representation of a uniform and homogeneous Jewish community. Nevertheless, the picture is not a real one; it is however a mirror image, upside down, given that the whole in its entirety is defined by the characteristics of a nonessential and peripheral part, along with a negative perception on the outside.

The image of a uniform and homogeneous Jewish community was also built by their political and religious leaders. Such reasoning is normal and as simple as it can

be: the power of a national minority is directly proportional to the number and the degree of unity displayed by the members who make it up. Immediately after the Great Union, the Romanian authorities sought to divide the Jewish communities in order to counteract their claims for autonomy. Between 1918 and 1919, when the Jewish struggle for emancipation reached the highest points, Ionel Brătianu, head of the Romanian government, was extremely annoyed by Filderman's determination, the Autochthonous Jews Union's representative (as of 1923, The Romanian Jews Union), of also including in the claims the Jews from the new territories. "The endeavours of some of the political circles to detach him (Filderman) from the interests of these Jews, in exchange for a promise that in this way he will be able to better defend the Jews from Old Kingdom, failed. He remained consistent to the idea that Jews constitute a unified minority throughout the Greater Romania that is inseparable, that the state needs to recognize equal rights and duties."⁸

In the same way, by supporting the unity, the interests of Jews across the entire country were defended by the two interwar Chief Rabbis: Iacob Niemirower (1921-1939) and Alexandru Şafran (1940-1947). The latter, in the pages of his memoirs published rather late, at a time when his statements could no longer have an impact on the few Jews who still were found in Romania, would admit that the homogeneity of his countrymen in Greater Romania was far from being a genuine one.⁹

Our study aims precisely at discussing this so-called homogeneity and unity of the Jewish minority in the interwar period. Starting from the general, from the situation as well as the known concerns of the Jewish community throughout the country, we aim at systematically analyzing a particular case, namely the region around the mouths of the Danube. The perspective offered by us is a comparative one, meaning that we seek to identify the similarities / differences between the Jewish communities of the Old Kingdom and those in southern Bessarabia. Although at first glance the region surrounding the mouths of the Danube seems to be a fairly narrow area, in fact it comes across as interesting from a sociological point of view as well as representative, including parts of the following historical regions: Muntenia (Râmnicu Sărat and Brăila counties), Moldavia (the counties of Covurlui, Fălciu, Putna, Tecuci and Tutova), Dobrudja (Tulcea county) and Bessarabia (the counties of Cahul, Ismail and Cetatea Albă).

The fight for civil rights among the Jews everywhere could not have left any traces in their midst. The Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) urged the Jews to integrate into the country they were part of, by adopting its language and culture and by actively participating in its social and political life as well as its development. Thus, there gradually developed a form of patriotism, despite, for example, the exclusion of Jews from the Old Kingdom politics or the violent pogroms in Russia.

Emancipation—a genuine Jewish revolution—meant allowing the Jew to leave the ghetto (from his isolation as the representative of a foreign and exiled people) and rendered him before a series of elections. To integrate in a State, any individual Jew, group or community had to resign some of the elements of its identity. The process of integration is finally summarized in two points: reducing Judaism to a re-

ligion and replacing the ceaseless search of a legendary homeland with the reality of a European homeland. This programme was quickly adopted by the Jews in Western Europe, while in Eastern countries it was quite delayed, due mainly to the refusal of state authorities to grant Jews the right to emancipation. Although much later and more slower than in the west, the east also experienced a process of cultural integration by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the next century, which led to “Russification” (for the Tsarist Empire), “Germanization” or “Magyarization” (for the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and “Romanization” (for the Old Kingdom). A particular case was represented by Russia, where, at the turn of two centuries, the Jewish youth began to manifest enthusiasm for education, thus attending schools and universities. Such youth was to discover socialist ideas along with a radical way of applying them (Bolshevism).¹⁰

Inevitably, the new territorial configuration of Romania after the Great Union of 1918 had profound effects on the structures within the Jewish community, which included besides the “Romanized” Jews also the powerful community of “Germanized” Jews from Bukovina, the “Magyarized” ones from Transylvania as well as the “Russified” Jews from Bessarabia. The Jewish historian Jean Ancel admitted that “depending on the region, the Jews have experienced varying degrees of assimilation, among the population.”¹¹

The situation of Bessarabia was different. Annexed by Russia in 1812, the province experienced an intense colonization with this ethnic element: 20,000 in 1812, 43,000 in 1836, 94,500 in 1867 and 228,000 in 1897. They were religious and attached to their traditional culture and education; “Russified” to a much smaller proportion compared to the high degree of “Germanization” reached by the Bukovinian Jews.¹² As if it was not enough, the Russian civil war between the whites and reds (Bolsheviks), gave an impulse to the uprooting of the Jewish communities from the Ukraine area. Many Jews originating from here came continuously, in a clandestine manner, to Bessarabia in the early ‘20s. The major problem of the Bessarabian Jews was not related to their occupations or specific traditions, but to their proximity to the Soviet Union and the fact that Moscow never recognized the union of Bessarabia and Romania. The Romanian nationalism, which was antisemitic by definition, became in the interwar period more extremist and intolerant, because it was intermingled with an absolute anticommunism. The Jews came to be regarded simultaneously as “Communists” and “Russians” in Bessarabia, “Hungarians” and “Foreigners” in Transylvania, “Galician” and “Enemies” of the state in Bukovina. Later on, they would be accused and blamed for the territorial losses of Romania in 1940.

Therefore, the Jewish minority in Romania Reunited was far from being uniform or homogeneous, although, from completely different reasons, this was supported either by the political and religious leaders in Bucharest, or by the ultranationalist and extremist Romanian forces.

The Jews of the Old Kingdom and those of the new provinces had a significantly different social cultural profile, which led to the reorganization of the communities in terms of cultural, religious and social autonomy. On Filderman’s initiative, in

February 1921, there was convened a congress of the communities existing in the country, whose programme was to settle them on legal foundations, with a homogeneous status, compulsory for all the communities and to choose the leaders democratically.¹³ The initiative was a brilliant one, because, as *form*, the Jewish communities throughout the country knew the same type of organization, without interfering with the *fund of the matter*, namely, the specific features of each community.

Let us see to what extent, over one decade from the Great Union, the common development within the same state resulted in blurring the differences existing between the Jewish communities of the Old Kingdom and southern Bessarabia. We will analyze the case of the region around the mouths of the Danube taking account of the data provided by the census of December 1930.

TABLE 1.
THE POPULATION SETTLED AROUND THE MOUTHS OF THE DANUBE, BY AFFILIATION TO THE NATION

No	Province / County	The total number of the population	Romanians	Jews	Russians	Ukrainian Ruthenians	German	Other nations
I.	Counties from the Old Kingdom	1,409,217	1,239,679	46,454	27,554	181	5,719	89,630
		100%	87.97%	3.30%	1.95%	0.01%	0.41%	6.36%
II.	Counties from southern Bessarabia	763,378	235,683	22,130	140,649	81,369	65,225	218,322
		100%	30.87%	2.90%	18.43%	10.66%	8.54%	28.60%

SOURCE:

Recensământul General al Populației României din 29 decembrie 1930, II, *Neam, limbă maternă, religie* (Bucharest, 1938), pp. XXVIII, L. According to the criterion of belonging to a certain nation, the Jewish population in Romania consisted of 728,115 people (4% of total population), with the following distribution: Oltenia: 3,305 people (0.2%); Muntenia: 86,545 (2.1%); Dobruja: 3,795 (0.5%); Moldavia: 158,421 (6.5%); Bessarabia: 204,858 (7.2%); Bukovina: 92,492 (10.8%); Transylvania: 78,626 (2.4%); Banat: 11,248 (1.2%); Crișana and Maramures: 88,825 (6.4%).

Comparatively, we may note from the onset, an enormous difference in the proportion of Romanians in so far as the structure of the population is concerned—87.97% in the Old Kingdom, up to 30.87% in southern Bessarabia. Although the density of the Jewish minority in southern Bessarabia (2.90%) is low, below half compared to the entire province between Prut and Dniester (7.2%), the absence of a numerous Romanian population that would exert constant cultural pressure led to the process of integration of the Jews in the structures of Greater Romania to be affected. Consequently, the whole process of “Romanization” was exercised only through state institutions, from top to bottom, which endowed it with a compulsory character. Unavoidably, any attempt to force an individual or a mass would by all means trigger a reaction of opposition, which in the case of the Jews from southern Bessarabia was manifested by the maintenance of “the ghetto.” A report addressed to The Police Commissariat in Chilia Nouă (Ismail County), on August 3rd, 1938, stated that Jews resistance to integration in this town was contrary to the interests of the Romanian state:

If one analyzed the political activity programme adopted by the Jewish community so far, he or she might come across a tradition in the perception of the community, and this tradition is known as the ghetto. By ghetto, the Jews activated the Jewish social, national and religious policy. The ghetto is the fundamental cause which maintained the Jews in their own society, isolated from the rest of the nations in which they had lived that far.¹⁴

The statement in itself expresses a state of spirit that was commonly found in Bessarabia: on the one hand, the refusal of the Jewish minority to integrate into the Romanian society and on the other hand, the frustration and helplessness of the Romanian authorities to assimilate them.

Both the conservatism as well as the resistance to change manifested by the Jewish community in southern Bessarabia was also due to the specific ethnic environment of the area. In the southern province between Prut and Dniester, during the interwar period, there cohabitated several populations without any of them being able to dominate by number or culture the others—Romanians (30.87%), Russians and Ukrainians (29.09%), Bulgarians (18.75%), Germans (8.54%), Gagauzians (7.70%). Moreover, taking into account the fact that both the Romanians and Germans slid to the extreme right, fact that was obvious especially after 1933, Jews were naturally driven towards the Russians and Ukrainians.¹⁵ From here to considering all of these three minorities as filocommunist was only one step, considering that the theory according to which “the communist regime would be supported by Jewish brains, Latvian rifles and by Russian idiots” was circulating since the early Bolshevik revolution in Russia.¹⁶ Furthermore with a similar implied meaning, a statement carried out by the Police of Ismail on how they, socio-economic and religious political trends evolved during 1938 throughout the commissariat, pointed out the following:

Russians cherish anti-Romanian feelings. Most of them are supporters of the communist movement and, if circumstances allowed it, they would be active in this respect. The vast majority (95%) are illiterate and uneducated, easily corruptible; therefore the Jews use them as their instruments for various subversive activities¹⁷

On the other hand, the desire of the Jews from the Old Kingdom to integrate into the Romanian society is a well known fact. Illustrative in this respect is the path of lawyer Arnold Schwefelberg (1896-1979), a close associate of Filderman. This is representative for the intellectuals and, by extension, for the Jewish society formed in the structures of Romania before 1918. Schwefelberg is a modern intellectual with solid studies in Romania and in the West, emancipated and detached from the Jewish religious tradition, but still sensitive to antisemitism and the violation of civil rights, recently acquired by the Romanian state in the interwar period. He has Zionist sympathies, however more sentimental rather than militant, he is the prototype of the Jew *integrated* (our note) in the Romanian society, but who continues to maintain a strong Jewish identity.¹⁸

The history of the family of Schwefelberg comprises the main stages of emancipation and integration into the Romanian society of the Jews from the Old Kingdom. His grandfather, his father's father, Iancu Pecetaru Schwefelberg, came from Galicia, which explains the German resonant name, and was a well known manufacturer of seals and coins in the Royal Court from Iasi. His son, Isaac (father of lawyer Arnold), a graduate of Romanian school, which enabled him to be brought to Galați in 1878 as the Romanian language teacher in a traditional Jewish school after the compulsory introduction of teaching Romanian in these schools. It was here that Isaac met his wife, through her father, Vevl Stein (teacher of Yiddish and Hebrew), a colleague in the same school. After the wedding, Arnold's parents moved to Braila, where Isaac was first a schoolteacher and later a head of the Israeli school for Boys "The brothers Abraham and David Schwarzmann." None of the five Arnold's brothers attended the Jewish religious primary school. "Therefore—according to his memoirs—our native language or, more precisely, the paternal language, is Romanian; our parents sometimes spoke Yiddish to each other, we understood it, but almost did not know at all to speak Yiddish."¹⁹

Certain information regarding assimilation and the spoken language (mother tongue) in the Jewish communities around the mouths of the Danube emerges from the following table:

TABLE 2.
THE JEWISH POPULATION AROUND THE MOUTHS OF THE DANUBE, BY RELIGION, RACE AND DECLARED MOTHER TONGUE

No.	Province / County	By Judaic religion	By affiliation to nation: Jews	Assimilated Jews ^a	Jews whose mother tongue is Yiddish	Jews with a different declared mother tongue
I.	Counties from the Old Kingdom	48,024	46,454	1,570	26,942	21,082
		100%	96.73%	3.27%	56.10%	43.90%
II.	Counties from southern Bessarabia	22,277	22,130	147	21,217	1,060
		100%	99.34%	0.66%	95.24%	4.76%

SOURCE:

Recensământul General al Populației României, II, p. LVIII-LIX (by religion), LXXXI-LXXXVI (by mother tongue).

NOTE:

a. The population was of Mosaic faith, but who declared a different ethnic identity than Jewish.

When the aspiration that the Jews had pursued during the whole modern period of being accepted and even loved by the society became an obsession or an end in itself, we are witnessing the assimilation process. Having reached this point, it is necessary to distinguish between "integration" and "assimilation." Integration presupposes acquiring the citizenship, the culture, the customs and the forms of civilization of the surrounding society by the Jews who proclaim themselves and feel Jewish. Through assimilation, we understand the refusal of the individual, formulated or specifically done, of belonging to the Jewish community.

Schematically, we can distinguish several assimilation trends. The first and simplest one means keeping the Mosaic religion, however that particular individual or individuals refused to declare or to feel Jewish. This phenomenon can be seen in the census of December 1930, by comparing two tables: according to the declared religion (Jewish); according to the declared nation (a Jew). By making a simple reduction calculus, we may also highlight the magnitude of this phenomenon. Thus, in the counties of the Old Kingdom it was more accelerated, 1,570 people of Mosaic religion reported that they belong to other nation than the Jewish one (3.26%), as opposed to 147 people in southern Bessarabia (0.66%). Beyond any other possible explanations, one thing is clear: the opening of the Jews from the Old Kingdom and their sincere willingness to integrate into the Romanian society during the interwar period also brought with itself the risk of losing their own ethnic identity. On the other hand, in southern Bessarabia, the traditional way of life, that of maintaining the pattern of the ghetto and using “the jargon” (Yiddish) slowed the process of integration and with it the assimilation risks as well. At the same time, the fault of keeping “the ghetto” in southern Bessarabia should not be all put here on account of the Jews’ refusal to integrate into the Romanian society. On the contrary, the obsessive surveillance of communities here by the Romanian authorities aroused reactions of rejection in the ethnic minority, a truth also noticed by Filderman. Thus, assimilation “was the Jews’ right to enjoy all freedoms and obligations of citizenship . . . , partakers with the mass of the Romanian people for better or for worse. However a population thrown into the ghetto, prevented from exercising certain professions, excluded from the elementary rights cannot be assimilated, being thus impeded even by those who would expected assimilation.”²⁰

A second trend of assimilation also implied the conversion to Christianity. Without being able to quantify the converts, we may still say that those who renounced the Mosaic religion were not many.²¹ Both those who gave up their ethnic belonging, as well as those converted to Christianity, did all that more out of social pragmatism. They wanted the additional status, functions, relationships or wealth. From this point of view, it is not surprising that the process of assimilation was strongest in the Danube harbours, where business opportunities were greater, a fact that facilitated the opening of the Jewish Community and the ethnic contacts. This is noticeable in the case of harbour cities along the Danube in southern Bessarabia (Ismail County)—Ismail, Chilia Nouă, Reni and Vâlcov.²²

Last but not least, the process of acceding to communism eventually required a process of assimilation, an assimilation based on atheist humanism which sought a radical de-Judisation.²³

An obvious dissimilarity between the counties from the Old Kingdom and the counties from southern Bessarabia was also represented by the Jews’ declaration of Yiddish (“the jargon”) as their mother tongue. Therefore, in the area of the maritime Danube, in the counties from the Old Kingdom, only 56.10% of those of Mosaic religion declared that mother tongue was Yiddish, unlike the overwhelming

proportion from southern Bessarabia—95.24%. Several causes have contributed to achieving this result.

Firstly, we must start from the different history of the Jewish communities from Bessarabia when compared to the Old Kingdom. Throughout the Tsarist Russia, as well as in Bessarabia, the antagonism between the assimilated Jews (“Russified”) and those who resisted assimilation was more radical than in Romania. The Russian Jews belonging to the middle classes had chosen, in a significant proportion, to provide their children a laic education in the Russian language, which was not easy while the percentage of Jews could not exceed in public schools more than 10% of the total number of the students.²⁴ The Russian Antisemitism, which after 1880 went through the stage of pogroms,²⁵ produced, among others, a decisive rupture between the assimilated Jews and the others, the first being completely excluded from the community. Therefore, despite the Zionists’ support of the Hebrew language, in Tsarist Russia we are witnessing an unprecedented development of Yiddish (“Yiddishism”) at the beginning of the 20th century which sought that Jews remain Jews, i.e. not to allow themselves to be assimilated.²⁶ Supporting the Yiddishism was facilitated by the fact that all Jews from Russia belonged to the Ashkenazi branch, a branch which gave rise to this German idiom.

On the other hand, Romania before 1918 had not reached such a violent form of antisemitism and therefore neither as strong a reaction to counter “the betrayal” amongst the Jewish community. What is more, the development of Yiddishism as a weapon against assimilation could not have been applied in Romania, as the Romanian area was a place of immigration, both for the Ashkenazi Jews coming from the north, west and east, speaking Yiddish, as well as for the Sephardic Jews who came from the southern Balkan peninsula, speaking the Ladino dialect (a mixture of Spanish with Hebrew words). That is why, the Zionist solution—that of transforming the Hebrew language into a living language—was unanimously accepted. After the establishment of Greater Romania, the emphasis laid on both culture along with increased culturalisation in the Hebrew language, demanding that Jewish schoolmasters should be some of the most skilled teachers and that the Hebrew language should get more classes in schools—both public ones, and the Israelite-Romanian ones—under the slogan: “Hebrew is the language of our past, as well as our future.”²⁷ Hence, adopting Judaism was not intended solely to encourage Zionism, but it was also a welcoming measure to help levelling the differences among the Jewish communities throughout the country.

All these realities are reflected in the figures obtained by processing the data provided by the census of 1930 (Table 2). One can notice that the number of Sephardic communities²⁸ declaring Yiddish as their mother tongue was reduced: Muntenia—Râmnicu Sărat (37.99%) and Brăila counties (46.29%), and Dobrudja - Tulcea County (57.97%). However, the degree of urbanization and economic welfare of the communities not only acted as a factor of assimilation (“Romanization”), but also as a Hebraistic factor, through the existence of powerful schools and of some

skilled teachers. Here, in large cities such as Galati and Brăila, the Hebrew language started to gain ground on Yiddish.

The feeling of a heterogeneous Jewish minority was given, in addition to the autonomy of the communities that we have already discussed, by the multitude of associations, committees, foundations, companies, organizations, leagues etc. For example, in a report drafted by the police of Chilia Nouă, in June 1932, there were no less than 18 such Jewish organizations across its territory, mostly subsidiaries.²⁹ Despite all these disagreements, even if the Jews of Great Romania were not homogeneous linguistically, culturally, religiously, economically or politically speaking, they apparently found unity under the banner of Zionism. In his memoirs, Alexander Șafran, stated:

We made appeal (in the early 1940s) to the unity of all Jews in the country and did not hesitate in front of the government representatives to emphasize that this was done around the Zionist ideal, children of Israel, with the consent of all mankind, we had to fight tirelessly to find our land, Eretz Israel (A.Ș. note).³⁰

The power of Zionism, that of gathering the Jews together in a unitary block, was also seized by the Romanian theologian Gala Galaction, who will dedicate them the brochure “Zionism with friends.”³¹ But for all this aptitude, Zionism acted all along as a factor blocking the Jewish integration in the territories united to the structures of Greater Romania. After 1919, under the impression of Zionism, a significant majority of Jews in Romania regarded the Romanian state as a host state, in which they had to stay for a shorter or longer period of time until their departure and final settlement in Palestine. Those who thought such things considered that the effort of learning the language, the history, the culture or the Romanian mentality was not worth making. We also know that Zionism enjoyed great popularity in the province between the Prut and Dniester. Under the coordinates of this logic, we can understand why the Jewish society from southern Bessarabia refused to open up (to leave the ghetto), retained the traditional character as well as the Yiddish language and, in general, blocked almost every opportunity to “Romanization” itself. Instead, the Jews of the Old Kingdom, living for a longer period within the Romanian society, sought to enjoy these rights so difficult acquired after the WWI. For them, at least until the formalization of antisemitism as a state policy, Zionism was not only the only option for the future, but it was one of them. Because of all these causes that were also perceptible at the level of the counties surrounding the mouths of the Danube, the roughly two decades of existence of Greater Romania did not allow the birth of a unitary Romanian Judaism, by levelling the vast differences between the Jewish communities throughout this state.



Notes

1. Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919-1941. Mistica ultranaționalismului* (Bucharest, 1993), 36.
2. The Jews in the Old Kingdom had been denied the Romanian citizenship on the consideration that they were not Christians (Article 7 of the Constitution of 1866).
3. In 1912, the Jews from the Old Kingdom were estimated as being around 240,000 people (3.3%).
4. Leon Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă și 'problema evreiască' în România anilor '30* (Bucharest, 1995), 23–41. Bringing the Jewish issue to public debate inevitably gave rise to an antisemitic universe that included almost all sections of society.
5. A famous episode is represented by the signing of the renowned document concerning minorities, which accompanied the treaty with Austria at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.
6. Lya Benjamin, *Prigoană și rezistență în istoria evreilor din România. 1940–1944. Studii* (Bucharest, 2001), 13–25.
7. Arhivele Naționale ale României, fund C. C. al P. C. R.—Cancelarie (1921–1953), file 86/1945. Part of the document is found in H. Kuller, *Opt studii despre istoria evreilor din România* (Bucharest, 1997), 26–30.
8. S. Schafferman, *Dr. W. Filderman. 50 de ani din istoria judaismului român* (Tel Aviv–Bucharest, 1986), 60–61.
9. Alexandru Șafran, *Un tăciune smuls flăcărilor: Comunitatea evreiască din România 1939–1947. Memorii* (Bucharest, 1996), 43.
10. For more details, see Josy Eisenberg, *O istorie a evreilor* (Bucharest, 1993), 275–276.
11. Jean Ancel, 'Introduction', in A. Șafran, *Un tăciune smuls flăcărilor*, 11.
12. Jean Nouzille, "La question juive en Roumanie jusqu'en 1940," eds. Ladislau Gyémánt and Maria Ghitta, *Dilemmas of coexistence. Jews and non-Jews in Central and Eastern Europe before and after Shoah / Dilemmes de la cohabitation. Juifs et Non-Juifs en Europe centrale-orientale avant et après la Shoah* (Cluj-Napoca, 2006), 108.
13. S. Schafferman, *Dr. W. Filderman*, 77–78.
14. Державний архів Одеської області [The State Archives of Odessa Region (Ukraine), hereinafter SAOR], fund 873, 19, 68.
15. SAOR, fund 891, 462, 190 (proposals among the Germans in southern Bessarabia to boycott the Jewish goods), 383 (the incidents between Germans and Russians during a protest against the revision of peace treaties, i.e. a demonstration held on May 28, 1933, in the town of Cetatea Albă and attended by 4,000 people), 462–465 (July 19, 1933, a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the activities of extreme right movements of Cetatea Albă County where Romanians and Germans were active, as well as the accusations of the Communists and sympathizers of the Soviet Union that they brought them the Jews).
16. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Troțki eternul radical* (Bucharest, 1997), 49–50. In essence, it was only about the revival of antisemitism in the Russian society, amid the dissatisfaction caused by the civil war.
17. SAOR, fund 837, file 128, 130–137.
18. Leon Volovici, "Traiectoria unui intelectual evreu din România: Arnold Schwefelberg," *Studia et Acta Historiae Iudaeorum Romaniae*, V, edited by Silviu Sanie and Dumitru Vitcu (Bucharest, 2000), 239.
19. Apud Ibid., 239–240.
20. Apud S. Schafferman, *Dr. W. Filderman*, 47–48.

21. Teșu Solomovici, *România Judaică. O istorie neconvențională a evreilor din România. 2000 de ani de existență comună*, I, *De la începuturi și până la 23 august 1944* (Bucharest, 2001), 134.
22. Of the 1,570 people of Mosaic faith, but who declared a different ethnic identity than Jewish, 1,276 (81.27%) lived in the Danube port cities: Galați: 663 people; Brăila: 479, Ismail: 57; Reni: 31; Tulcea: 22; Chilia Nouă: 17; Vâlcov: 6; and Sulina: 1.
23. Jacob Neusner, *Judaismul în timpurile moderne* (Bucharest, 2001), 216–217.
24. D. Volkogonov, *Troțki eternul radical*, 32–49. At least, this was the reality in 1888 when young Lev Davidovich Bronstein (Trotsky) was enlisted by a relative of his mother at a state school from Odessa.
25. J. Nouzille, “La question juive en Roumanie jusqu’en 1940,” 96–97. The Jews of Russia went through three waves of pogroms: after 1880; during the revolutionary crisis of 1903–1906; and during the civil war of 1917–1921, that followed the Bolshevik revolution.
26. Alexandr Soljenițin, *Două secole împreună. Evreii și rușii înainte de revoluție*, I, 1795–1917 (Bucharest, 2004), 492.
27. H. Kuller, *Opt studii despre istoria evreilor din România*, 257. Demands made at the Zionist Congress of Bucharest (1919).
28. Some psychomental differences between the Sephardic Jews and the Ashkenazi were also maintained in the interwar period, being considered “Spanish separatism”. For more details, see Lucian-Zeev Herșcovici, “Între specific și general: mișcarea iluministă (haskala) și procesul de modernizare în rândul evreilor sefarzi din România,” *Studia et Acta Historiae Iudaeorum Romaniae*, edited by Silviu Sanie and Dumitru Vitcu (Bucharest, 2003):8, 25–59.
29. SAOR, fund 873, 33, 1–5.
30. A. Șafran, *Un tăciune smuls flăcărilor*, 48.
31. G. Galaction, “Sionismul la prieteni,” *Opere*, VI, *Varia: Creștinism, Sionism, Socialism*, edited by Teodor Vărgolici (Bucharest, 2000), 85.

Abstract

The illusion of homogeneity:

The Jewish community from the Lower Danube and from Southern Bessarabia

The establishment of Greater Romania drew with it a number of drawbacks, including the inclusion in the new frontiers of a number of high percentages of people belonging to diverse ethnic groups, the Jews being one of them. The tripling of the Jewish population by including in addition to the “Romanized” Jews of the Old Kingdom, a powerful community of “Germanized” Jews in Bukovina, “Magyarized” in Transylvania and “Russified” in Bessarabia, raised the issue of their homogeneity. In time, the image of a uniform and homogeneous Jewish community across the country was given, for different reasons, either by their own political and religious leaders or by the Romanian antisemitic ultranationalist forces (extreme right). Our study aims at examining precisely this so-called homogeneity and unity of the Jewish minority in the interwar period, by systematically analyzing a particular case, namely the region around the mouths of the Danube. Although at first glance the area surrounding the mouths of the Danube seems to be a fairly narrow area, in fact it announces to be interesting, sociologically speaking, representative, including portions of the following historical regions: Muntenia (Râmnicu Sărat and Brăila counties), Moldavia (the counties of Covurlui, Fălciu Putna, Tecuci and Tutova), Dobruđa (Tulcea county) and Bessarabia (the counties Cahul, Cetatea Albă and Ismail).

Keywords

The homogeneity of the Jewish Community, the Lower Danube area, the southern Bessarabia, the interwar Romania, the Romanian antisemitism