

The Romanian Zionist press between the Great Union and 1938

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THE PRESS represented one of the most dynamic manifestations of the Jewish community in Romania. Being a journalist, as well as being a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer or a professor gradually became one of the most widespread and appreciated careers among Jewish intellectuals.

From a chronological point of view, the Jewish press emerged relatively late, during the mid-nineteenth century, more specifically on October 10, 1855, when the Yiddish newspaper “Korot Haitim” (“Current Events”) was published in Iasi, its purpose being that of disseminating the idea of emancipation among Moldavian Jews. After this first step, the Jewish press would develop rapidly in the next decades, making up for lost time and improving its quality owing to the activity of some open-minded intellectuals working in this field.

The present study will refer to a certain segment of the Jewish press, the Romanian Zionist press, published between 1918, the moment of the Great Union and 1938 (the moment when the antisemitic policies of the Goga-Cuza government became official, the first of which was banning Jews from working as journalists in the context of measures meant to reconsider their citizenship status), in order to find its characteristics and themes. The study is divided into four parts, as follows: reviewing the main periodicals published in this time interval, defining the topics to be discussed, detailing the taxonomy and conclusions.

I. General overview of the Romanian Zionist press in the above-mentioned period

THE ZIONIST publication that represented the official position of the Romanian Zionist Federation (whose scope, nonetheless, often included the Old Kingdom only) was “Latest News from the Jewish World”, which later became “News from the Jewish World” (starting with no. 70, year II, March 2, 1924).

The first editor of “News from the Jewish World” was the well-known publicist I. Ludo. A few prominent names who collaborated with the newspaper include: F. Aderca, Ad. Bernhardt, Ad. Stern, H. Brezis, A. Mibashan, I. Niemirower, Meyer Ebner, Th. Loewenstein, Leo Motzkin, Alexis Nour, Barbu Lăzăreanu, S. Podoleanu. Throughout its lengthy print run, “News from the Jewish World” wanted to and succeeded in objectively informing its public on the complexities of Zionism in general and of Romanian Zionism in particular. There were numerous articles dedicated to youth movements, internal and external congresses, the role of Zionist women, the Palestine colonisation, the Keren Heyessod fund raising, the difficult situation of Zionists in Bolshevik Russia, news about Romanian and foreign Zionism, as well as to prominent Zionist figures (Th. Herzl, Max Nordau, Nahum Sokolov). One should not forget about the cultural section of the newspaper, the most relevant example in this respect being the prize contest for the writing the history of the Zionist press, announced in issue 153/1925. Unfortunately, this attempt initiated by B. Lăzăreanu, was not carried out, as the inventory of publications stopped at letter H.¹ Starting with 1931, the newspaper also published a series of free supplements, like “News for Children”, “The Jewish Woman”, “Literary News”, “Amudim”.

The publications of the radical Zionist faction were three successive newspapers: “Redemption”, “Rebirth”, “Our Rebirth”.

The personality who indelibly marked this faction was that of Abraham Leb Zissu, writer and editor, whose ideas formed the basis of the *Rebirth* circle.

His ideology was based on two main pillars: affirming Jewish national identity by “the reorganisation of the community on democratic and national Jewish bases”² and the creation of a single Jewish political body. The establishment of a party to represent the interests of the Jews as a community was, in his view, a stringent necessity, because “The Romanian Jews will not be able to accomplish the indispensable aims of a genuine Jewish life respecting the sovereignty of the Romanian state unless they have their own political representation.”³

Another of Zissu’s representative concepts regards the double duty of every Zionist to take part in rebuilding the Jewish national state, as well as in contributing to the flourishing of an authentic national life in the Diaspora. The premise from which he started out was that it was impossible for all Jews to emigrate to Palestine; the role of those remaining in Galuth would then be to

preserve identity by cultivating Jewish spiritual values.⁴

His ideas are detailed in the aforementioned newspapers.

“Rebirth’s” first issue appeared on January 24, 1919, being the first Zionist periodical in the history of Jewish press. The editorial of the first issue, “Cuvânt înainte”, stated the aims of the publication. Among them, one can find the idea of Romanian Jewry as a national minority, the newspaper pleading for “acknowledging the nationality of Romanian Jews by granting them full political, cultural and religious autonomy.”⁵

Second of all, the newspaper wished to document the social, political and cultural evolution of the Jewish population in Palestine through the articles it published.

Some of the newspaper collaborators included E. Aderca, cpt. Băgulescu, E. Brunea, I. Călugăru, cpt. Chițulescu, Filip Finkelstein, B. Fundoianu, S. Lazăr, Barbu Lăzăreanu, cpt. Marinescu, M. Rabinovici, I. Rosen, A. Schonfeld, I. Sternberg, M. Weissman.

The newspaper features editorials, commentaries, polemics, press campaigns, anniversary and commemorative articles, interviews, answers to letters, serial studies, serials on Jewish life, poems, general information, news from Bucharest and the rest of the country.

The last issue of the newspaper was its 1000th, published on July 25, 1922, dedicated to the ratification of the Palestine mandate by the League of Nations.

“Rebirth” marks the appearance of an ambitious newspaper wishing to make a name for itself “as an essential element in paving the way to the creation of a national party.”⁶

At the same time, it also wanted to fill the void left by the disappearance of the quality daily “Redemption”, as the director S. I. Stern pointed out in the “Cuvânt înainte” editorial.

The list of aims put forward by the newspaper overlaps that of the recently established *Renasterea* circle, whose founders were Cornel Iancu, Arnold Fachs, Lucian Löbel, Sami Singer, S.A. Stern, L. Mitrachi, Jean Aberman, Mayer Segall, L. B. Wechsler.

Zionism was regarded as the most comprehensive expression of Jewishness, whose two main goals were the rebuilding the national Jewish home in Palestine and the affirmation of the Jews as a distinctive national minority in the Diaspora.⁷

Throughout its printing run, the newspaper published political (Zionist or otherwise) and economic information, news from Palestine, analyses of the Zionist movement evolution in Romania, discussions on the merger of radical organisations in the new provinces, interviews on different topics with Jewish personalities (topics like school, community, the creation of a national party, Zionism), debates concerning the situation of Jewish schools.

Beginning with 1936, “Rebirth” became “Our Rebirth” – the new series, a newspaper supporting the Jews’ rights as ethnic minority, the creation of a national party, the merger of communities, the renewal of the spiritual, propagandistic and educational energy of the Zionist organisation. Issues 86 and 88, year II, on January 23,⁸ and January 30, 1926, respectively,⁹ reported on the student revolts at the University in a decidedly angry tone.

The newspaper continued to be published after 1930, but in a smaller format. The topics covered in this period referred to: the Jews’ rights as ethnic minority, the evolution of the situation in Germany, the boycotting of German goods (in 1936), the new conditions for emigration, the issue of sheltering the refugees, the fight against the wave of conversions in 1939-1940. The publication continued to appear until the spring of 1942, due to the concerns regarding the departure for Palestine.

“Hasmonaea” was one of the most long-lasting and successful Zionist cultural magazines. It made its debut as the periodical of the National Jewish Student Circle and appeared between 1915 and 1940, numbering over 100 single or double issues with a circulation that reached 3000 copied in the 1920s.

The magazine’s target were the Jewish intellectuals, especially students, as well as those Jews who, “without prejudices and thirsty for the truth, want to make a dignified and conscious contribution to the upcoming struggle for saving the Jewish people.”¹⁰

The editors in chief of the magazine during 1919-1940 were: S.I. Stern 1918-1920; S. Singer, S.A. Stern 1920-1921; A. Husling 1921-1922; L. Mizraki, L.B. Wechsler 1922-1923; L.B. Wechsler 1923-1924; C. Singer 1924-1925; I. Mendelovici 1925-1926; I.R. Rothenberg, P. Schwartz 1926-1927; L. Schwartz 1927-1928; L.B. Wechsler 1928-1930, T. Loewenstein (1930-1932); H. Hersovici (1932-1933); M.H. Bady (1933-1934), Iancu Leibu (1935-1940).

A significant number of authors from Romania or abroad wrote approximately 350 articles published by the magazine, among whom S. Agnon, Ben Isaia, N. M. Bialik, D. Birnbaum, Martin Buber, Izidore Cohn, Edmond Fleg, D. Frischman, M. A. Halevy, Th. Herzl, Martin Hess, Th. Löwenstein, S. M. Littman, Leon Mizrahi, I. Niemirower, Max Nordau, I. Peretz, Şalom Alehem, Gustiev Segal, C. Singer, Nahum Soholov, André Spire, Ad. Stern, E. Steinberg, A. L. Zissu, Stefan Zweig.

The summary of “Hasmonaea” included articles regarding the Jewish culture and spirituality, the Hebrew university, Jewish art and literature, the Jews’ understanding of the principle of nationality, the Jewish schools in Romania, the Jewish colonisation of Palestine, the creators of modern Jewish literature, the problems facing the Jewish students in Romania, the Sephardic community,

the Jewish theatre, synagogue music, the contribution of the Jewish spirit to German culture, the commemoration of personalities like Herzl or Peretz.

There is a balance in the magazine's sections among dealing with various literary, social, cultural or Zionist topics. One should also note that the Zionist topics are not the only ones covered by the magazine, as its editors considered that familiarising the Jewish youth with advanced topics in Jewish studies was more important. News about the collection of Keren Hayesod, the actions of the Young Zionists' Association, or the Jewish World Congress was also published. Sometimes, literature took up a more important space.¹¹

The magazine continued to appear until 1940. The profile of the publication remained unchanged, the articles published dealing with various topics, from Hebrew art and culture to the Arab question, the fate of Zionism during the third decade, the spreading of antisemitism, etc. Here are some article titles: **The Arabs and Us**, by V. Jabotinski; **The Jewish People in the 20th Century** by dr. N. Goldmann; **The Problems of Jewish Students** by Tully Rosenthal; **The World Zionist Congress** by M. H. Alfer; **The Chronicle of the Books** by S. Sanin and E. Susel; **Our Schools** by Ben Isaia; **The Palestine Colonisation Process**.

The last issue appeared in 1940 (year XXV, no. 1-2, July-September) and contained articles signed by I. Leibu (**The New Jewish School**), S. De Mayo about V. Jabotinski, R. Lazar (**Our Synagogues**) and reviews. "The Jewish Child" was the supplement of the prestigious "Hasmonaea", a publication focused, as the name itself shows, on educating children and teenagers in the spirit of Jewish and Zionist values. This supplement appeared between 1923 and 1940. Its themes included biblical legends, the history of the Jewish people, the study of the Talmud, games, jokes, original prose, pages written in Hebrew.

"New Paths" is a Zionist-revisionist publication, expressing the position of Vladimir Jabotinski's group. It was a weekly publication, whose headquarters were first in Galati and then in Bucharest (1935-1937). The frontline of the newspaper read "Zionism tends to create a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, one guaranteed by public right."

The spreading of revisionist ideas started in 1925, when Jabotinski paid visits to several important Romanian towns; the consequence of these visits was the establishment, on December 1, 1925 the first Zionist-revisionist organisation in Chişinău, which would soon open branches in Bucharest, Iaşi, Cernăuţi, Galaţi.

Details about the early moments of the organisation can be found in the article entitled **Revisionist Zionism in the Romanian Provinces**,¹² where we find out about the works and the resolutions adopted during the second National Conference held in Galati in June 1926. The analysis made by representatives from four provinces (Bessarabia, Bukovina, Moldavia, Vallachia) revealed

that the most intense activity took place in Bukovina (in the Cernauti centre), followed by Bessarabia (where the organisation was represented in five cities and was supposed to publish its own newspaper in Yiddish). There were two strong organisations in the Old Kingdom (in Galati and Bucharest), from where they coordinated an intense propaganda directed towards other centres as well, which included tours by personalities such as Mişu Weissman, Moti Rabinovici, Levanon Feller. The links with the Zionist youth organisations, especially the *Hasmonaea* students, represented an important aspect. Some of the authors who published in “New Paths” included Vl. Jabotinski, Th. Lessing, M. Grossman, Wolfgang von Weisl, R. Ben Sussan, I. Ludo, ing. Rudolf Seiden, Max Nordau, Leon Gold, dr. J. Brutzkus, I.R. Rothenberg, I. Schechtman. The majority of the articles share the same topics, such as revisionism, the Zionist organisation (year I, no. 1), the revisionist Zionism in Romania, the situation in Palestine and the Middle East (no. 4, year II, February 1928, published the articles **The Arab Sea, The Israeli Industry and The New Palestine Economic Policy**), Herzl’s ideas, (no. 7, year II, July 1928 published the articles entitled **Herzl and The Jewish State**), news about the debates of the various Zionist-revisionist conferences organised in the country.

Beginning with 1933 (year VIII, no. 1, 2nd series), the frontline of the publication read “New Paths, the official of the Jewish State Party in Romania”. The new series marked the division within the revisionist movement, as the supporters of the Jewish State Party did not agree to leaving the World Zionist Organisation, agreed upon by the majority of revisionists. Starting with year I, 4th series, no. 1/5 March 1936, “New Paths” became a biweekly Jewish information and documentation periodical. The editorial of the new series stated: “our aim is to turn ‘New Paths’ into a critical and informative publication, rather than into the publication of a Zionist organisation or group.”

“The Jewish Worker”, the representative newspaper of the leftist Zionist movement, appeared in Bucharest between 1932 and 1933, its editor being S. Frisch.

The editorial of the first issue (year I, no. 1, October 1932) announced the purpose of the newspaper, namely dealing with Jewish issues from the perspective of socialist ideology, stating that “This publication does not want to artificially inflate the large number of Jewish or socialist publications, but wishes to be a publication echoing the ideas and struggles confronting the socialist movement in general and the Jewish one in particular.”¹³

Its seventeen issues published articles dealing with topics such as **25 Years of Poale Zion**, by S. Frisch; **On the Past of the Jewish Socialist Movement Poale Zion in the Old Romanian Kingdom**; **The Community Congress**, on the congress of the Jewish communities convened to discuss the Regulation

of the Mosaic denomination; **Karl Marx and the Jewish Question** – a critical approach of Marx’s theory on the Jews as a social class; **Immigration facilities for Workers in Palestine**; **The Arab Unrest in Palestine**. The last issue (17/12 April 1934) published on its second page the **Programme of the Jewish Socialist Movement**, whose aim was to support the Hebrew and Yiddish schools, to fight against antisemitism and to become affiliated to the Socialist Internationale.

“Hatchia” (“Rebirth”) was published in Dorohoi on April 12, 1925. Its only issue was dedicated to the inauguration of the Hebrew University. The articles were signed by dr. Binder, I. Croitoru, Abraham Jager, Isac Cohn.

Another newspaper published in Moldavia was “Dawn”, the monthly publication of the Iasi Zionist organisation, whose first issue appeared on August 1, 1922. The frontline of the newspaper carries the inscription “Zionism tends to create a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, one guaranteed by public right.”

“The Jewish Tribune”, published in Iasi between 1932 and 1940, was a self-proclaimed independent Zionist publication seeking to reveal the aspirations of the Romanian Jews. Among its collaborators, one can count Th. Loewenstein, Mayer Ebner, H. Solomovici. Moses I. Duff.

The only issue of another publication, bearing the name “Dawn” – with no connection to the one mentioned above – appeared on October 5, 1926, with the purpose of representing the Association of Zionist Youth in Husi. The format of the publication was small; it was coordinated by a committee whose headquarters were in Husi, 148 Stefan cel Mare St.

One should also add the newspaper “Life” to the list of Moldavian Zionist publications; it first appeared on May 11, 1919. The authors of its articles included Kiva Ornstein, Iosif Schreiber, Rahel Schoenberg, M. H. Schein. One should note that, in addition to newspapers, numerous information bulletins were also edited.¹⁴

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Notes

1. See issues no. 155, 157, 161, 163, 165, 167 and 171 from “News from the Jewish World”, year IV, 1925.
2. “Rebirth”, year I, no.1, 14 Sept. 1924.
3. *Ibidem*, an I, no. 13, 7 Dec. 1924.
4. See Claudia Ursuțiu, *Senatori și deputați evrei în Parlamentul României (1919-1931)*, Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 47.
5. Quoted in “Redemption”, 24 January 1919, cf. Ursuțiu 2006, p. 43.

6. "Rebirth", year I, no.1, 14 Sept. 1924.
7. *Ibidem*.
8. "Our Rebirth", *Student Unrest. The Government Watches the Torture Our Children without Caring at All*.
9. *Ibidem*, *What Is the Purpose of Today's Agitation?*.
10. "Hasmonaea", year I, no. 1, June 1919.
11. For instance, no. 6-7, year VII, published six texts in the section Judaic Literature: *Ai fost odată o piatră (You Were Once a Rock)* by N. Sokolow; *Sichroinăs* by Gherșon Levin; *Frișman în vizită la Șalom Alehem (Frisman Visiting Shalom Alehem)* by Ș. Alehem; *Despre pacea eternă din țara de nicăieri (On the Eternal Peace in No Man's Land)* by Peretz; *Patru ani de la moartea lui Ansky (Four Years since Ansky's Death)* by I. R. Rothenberg; *Shylok* by L. A. Mitrachi.
12. "New Paths", year I, no. 1, June 1926.
13. "The Jewish Worker", year I, no. 1.
14. See Bianca Doris Bretan, *Istoria presei sioniste de limba română în perioada 1897-1938*, ed. Presa Universitară Clujană, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, pp. 199-201.

Abstract

The aim of the present study is that of analysing a segment of the Jewish press, the Zionist newspapers published in Romanian, in order to reveal its characteristics and topics covered. The period to which I will refer is between 1918, the year of the Great Union and 1938 (the moment when the antisemitic policies of the Goga-Cuza government became official, the first of which was banning Jews from working as journalists in the context of measures meant to reconsider their citizenship status). The study is divided into four parts, as follows: reviewing the main periodicals published in this time interval, defining the topics to be discussed, detailing the taxonomy and conclusions.

Keywords

Jewish press, Zionism, Zionist press, antisemitic policies, Husi