

The Jews
and the Nation-States
of Southeastern Europe
from the 19th Century
to the Great Depression

The Jews and the Nation-States of Southeastern Europe from the 19th Century to the Great Depression:

*Combining Viewpoints
on a Controversial Story*

Edited by

Tullia Catalan and Marco Dogo

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	vii
T. Catalan and M. Dogo	

Part I. The Jews in Southeastern Europe

Chapter One.....	2
Neither Foreigners, nor Citizens: Romanian Jews' Long Road to Citizenship Emanuela Costantini	
Chapter Two	23
The Jews of Serbia (1804-1918): From Princely Protection to Formal Emancipation Milan Ristović	
Chapter Three	51
Jewish Identity and the Competing National Projects in the Western Balkans (1848-1929) Bojan Mitrović	
Chapter Four.....	73
Loyalty Sorely Tried: The Jews and the Bulgarian State (1878-1935) Marco Dogo	
Chapter Five	104
A Place in the Nation: Jews and the Greek State in the Long 19 th Century Evdoxios Doxiadis	
Chapter Six	135
The Tie and the Kaftan: The Hungarian Jews between Emancipation, Assimilation and Zionism (1848-1918) Gianluca Volpi	

Part II. Under Western Eyes

Chapter Seven.....	156
East European Jewry under Western Eyes: An Overview of the Official Publications of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (1860-1930)	
Annalisa Di Fant	
Chapter Eight.....	171
Looking East, Thinking West: Isidore Loeb (1839-1892) and the Jews in the Ottoman Empire	
Paolo L. Bernardini	
Chapter Nine.....	183
The Jews of Southeastern Europe and the Policies of Western European Philanthropic Associations (1878-1930)	
Tullia Catalan	
Chapter Ten	205
The Vienna Jewish Alliance (Israelitische Allianz zu Wien) and Its Attempt to Modernise Central Europe	
Björn Siegel	
Chapter Eleven	227
Luigi Luzzatti and the Oriental Front: Jewish Agency and the Politics of Religious Toleration	
Cristiana Facchini	
The Authors	246
Index.....	250

INTRODUCTION

TULLIA CATALAN AND MARCO DOGO

Southeastern Europe is *not*, in this volume, a geographical term. It is rather that part of Europe, surrounded by empires and itself an heir to empires, that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was being organized into nation-states. This meant the small Balkan monarchies which succeeded the Ottoman Empire, of course, but also the great kingdom of Hungary, whose Magyar identity was strengthened at the expense of Habsburg constraints; and the small kingdom of Croatia, whose elites in turn resented Hungarian restrictions. In that part of Europe, historical development had produced two typical structures of social and political organization: on the one hand, nation-states under nobiliary hegemony (Hungary, Romania), in which a privileged class of landowners had survived through the centuries and was now renewing its power in the forms of liberalism and of census suffrage; on the other, peasant nation-states (Serbia, Bulgaria), whose indigenous aristocracies had been destroyed centuries before, while new elites were now emerging through democratic/demagogic competition and universal suffrage. Everywhere, the middle class was non-existent, weak or at best in the process of being created. In this respect, also in relation to the type of state, Greece displayed particular characteristics.

For each of the governments in the region the essential source of legitimization and the main political resource was the *national interest*, in other words the presumed material and spiritual benefit of the majority of the population; of course, choices on how to achieve this were influenced by structural and cultural factors, as well as by ethnographic and geopolitical contexts, and the result was a non-uniform variety of “nationalist policies.” Jewish communities, for their part, in the different countries of the region, were far from being compact entities, characterized by a given identity. The different government policies (each guided by its own national project) towards them were in fact united by the negative acknowledgment of their *diversity* with respect to the social, cultural and religious profile of the majority of the population. However, in the actual management of Jewish diversity, a whole range of options

were available, including mutually convenient arrangements. Jewish minorities, for their part, carefully considered the desirability of adapting to their environment according to a variety of parameters that were both pragmatic and identity-related, and they ended up adopting an incredibly wide range of stances.

This complex and multi-faceted negotiation, in essence, is dealt with in the first six chapters of this volume, which are organized as parallel narratives along the vertical axis of time. Wishing to adopt a “horizontal” approach, meanwhile, it should be noted that some issues stand out for their transversal presence in the various stories—what can be evidently explained in terms of the nation-state on the one hand, and the changes affecting the Jewish community in general on the other.

If there is one issue that among all the others stands out as a stumbling block in relations between the governments of Southeastern Europe and their respective Jewish communities, it is that of *loyalty*. Given the small demographic size of the Jewish minorities, it is somewhat surprising that their presence in a country could be perceived as a factor of uncertainty for the state and a hindrance to its plans. Nevertheless, Jews were reproached, in the various contexts, for having sympathized with the Ottomans (or “Turks”), for having engaged in propaganda for the Bulgarians, for being German agents, for being instruments of Magyarization, and even, in the only republic in the post-WWI scenario, for being anti-republican.

Participation in the war, with its death toll, offered Jewish communities the chance to dispel this aura of suspicion. There was no lack of opportunities: the Eastern crisis of 1876-1878, the Serbian-Bulgarian War of 1885, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, and the European conflict of 1914-1918. Jews could express ideological reservations about joining the “war of others”, as part of a Zionist vision, or reservations of a circumstantial nature regarding the likelihood of killing fellow Jews deployed in enemy units. The other mode of patriotic legitimization, in this case bloodless, for the Jews in the various countries, was the political intervention of Jewish leaders in support of their governments in international fora.

It should be remembered that for each government in Southeastern Europe, Jews, however loyal and patriotic, were first of all a minority, one of the many crowding that post-imperial territory, a minority whose integration in the ongoing state- and nation-building processes could be more or less desirable according to criteria of socio-economic utility, demographic features, and even international decency (this naturally depended on the culture of the elites!).

Governments, on the other hand, were not entirely free to make their own assessments. They were subjected to internal constraints, such as the protest of those groups of people who claimed they were damaged by Jewish economic competition, or popular anti-Semitism, a rural phenomenon which had however some urban repercussions through the nascent mass journalism and opposition political circles (incidentally, the Orthodox church, as an institution, in the pages of this book is shown not to have been a main source of anti-Jewish prejudice); and especially aggressive post-WWI urban anti-Semitism, that while primarily threatening Jews also represented a challenge for the state. Governments and their respective regulations of the Jewish position, were also subject to supervision by the Great Powers—as in Berlin in 1878 and in Paris in 1919—as well as to the pressure put on the GP by Jewish international agencies (discussed in the second part of this book).

Each government, finally, would have liked to speak with all of its Jewish citizens through a single representative, preferably of a denominational nature, but this was not possible, since Jewish communities (as we will call them for the sake of narrative expediency) were heterogeneous in various aspects and had different aspirations. This leads us to the point of view, or rather points of view, of Jews regarding the content, variants and possible boundaries of their adaptations to the nation-state environment.

First of all, some Jews had been living in the territories of Southeastern Europe for over a thousand years (the Romaniotes), centuries (the “Spanish”), or since the partitions of Poland, while others were recent immigrants from Galicia and southern Russia (the Ashkenazim). In addition to linguistic and ritual differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, they could be distinguished from each other in terms of the imperial languages acquired over the generations—Greek, Turkish, German—and of their status as natives or foreigners, and as foreigners protected (by outside governments) or not. From the social point of view they could be predominantly urban, and in this case were distributed across the occupational and wealth hierarchy, from extreme poverty to the comfortable middle class; or provincial, with a *shtetl*-like organization.

Compared to the major current of modernization which invested European Jewry, they could be reformists or conservatives, but even so there were cautious reformists and experimental conservatives. Faced with the prospect of environmental adaptation they reacted by pursuing it, accepting it with reservations, or rejecting it; between the two extremes of integrationism and separatism they adopted an incredible variety of intermediate positions. Above all, it must be stressed that much more

interesting than statistically typable behaviours were the stories of enterprising individuals who managed to become actively involved in the dynamics of the nation-state.

As a minority group, albeit internally divided on the desirability of adaptation, Jews were exposed to various factors of linguistic integration, among which primary education stood out: parents could choose a community school instead of a state school for their children (and they did not always do so). In any case, their children were required to follow ministerial syllabuses and to become familiar with the “national” language. The results would be seen a few decades later, in the census data that in some cases showed surprising levels of acquisition of the majority language by Jews. And so, spontaneously or as programmatic decision by political authorities, in the early 1900s the formula “citizens (Hungarians, Croats, Serbs, Bulgarians ...) of the Mosaic faith” began to be widely used. This was a label that Jews either accepted or rejected on the basis of its assimilationist flavour.

In exactly the same period in which this happened, the Jewish communities in the various countries were swept along with the wave of Zionism. The effects, of course, should be examined case by case. But here we should note the impressive pragmatic compatibility of Zionism with various options about “what to do” in a given situation: the Zionists could be anti-assimilationist with the aim of protecting their identity, but could also, for expediency or conviction, be linguistic integrationists; they could align with the irredentism of their governments, just as they could pursue supranational visions in a Southeastern Europe devastated by war.

To conclude this first series of reflections, we should perhaps mention two cases in which the negotiations between the government and Jewish groups took place under exceptional conditions that resist any attempt at classification. The first is the assimilationist offer addressed by Lajos Kossuth to the Jews of Hungary, in around the mid-nineteenth century, which we can freely summarize in the appeal “reform, conform, and you will have everything!”. This extreme offer was both generous and terribly demanding, and above all unmaintainable: the greatness and failure of nobiliary liberalism. The other case is that of the absorption of the city of Salonica, with its strong and culturally homogeneous Jewish community, into the Greek state. This operation would have been painful for the local Jews in any case, but circumstances dictated that it was intertwined with two ruinous events in Greek history—first the “National Schism” and then the wave of refugees produced by the Anatolian catastrophe—that must have made it particularly traumatic.

From the 1860s until the start of World War I the Jewish communities of Southeastern Europe, which are analysed in the first part of this volume, were constantly observed by the emancipated coreligionists belonging to the liberal middle class of Western Europe, who were well integrated in the political and economic elites of their states. The so-called Jewish agencies—the philanthropic associations formed in the second half of the 19th century—were fundamental agents in this monitoring. The Alliance Israélite Universelle, formed in Paris in 1860, was the founding association, followed in later years by the Anglo-Jewish Association (1871), the Israelitische Allianz zu Wien (1872) and the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden (1901). The second part of this book is largely dedicated to the activities and relations between these philanthropic associations and the Jews of Southeastern Europe, with particular focus on the individual experience of some Jews active on the political and intellectual scene, who distinguished themselves in the years examined here by their actions in support of the civil and political rights of the Jews living in Eastern Europe.

This approach has been adopted in order to offer readers a double perspective: one internal, focusing on the individual states analysed in the first part, and an external one in the form of the sometimes severe Eastward gaze of the Western Jews, faithful supporters of Jewish Enlightenment and the regenerating potential of progress and education for the future of the new generations. Regarding the meaning of “regeneration”, the Alliance demonstrated its adherence on several occasions to the thesis of the abbé Grégoire, as can be seen above all in the idea that the revolution of traditions and customs and their adaptation to the Western models were necessary in order to reach the much longed-for full emancipation.

Amongst the objectives explicitly declared in the statutes of these associations, which serve to justify the existence of these observatories in the relevant territories, there was in primis the defence against anti-Semitism in all its forms and variations, and the vindication and protection of the civil rights of Jews in Eastern Europe. These first two aims stood alongside the progress, in the modern sense, of a secular education system for the younger generations in loco and the material support for Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe, which had become a real emergency after the Russian pogroms of 1881. The various associations also offered their own economic aid in moments of crisis, such as natural disasters and wars. The collective operation undertaken at the start of 1913 by these associations, in support of the Jews who were badly affected by the consequences of the first Balkan War, is a clear example of how much the

various international Jewish agencies were able to do and how much they were restricted, even by internal limitations, due to the high degree of conflict which characterised them. Up until the end of the First World War the desire for organisational and decision-making centrality in the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which was not very willing to consider the proposals and suggestions of the other associations, had created incomprehension amongst the agencies who, unlike Paris, were more open to the growing Zionist ideal. By the end of the nineteenth century the spread of Zionism to the East, in its many forms, was viewed in a negative light by the AIU which, unlike the other agencies, refused to face the issue, failing to recognise its important modernising influence.

Only in the 1920s did a full collaboration among these agencies take place, due to the profound change in the international political context and the diffusion of a new wave of anti-Semitism in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary.

The diplomatic interventions, led by several Jewish delegates from these philanthropic associations at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, were important and their aim was to promote a recognition of the civil and political rights of the Jewish minorities in Southeastern Europe, analysed in the first part of the book.

However, alongside these humanitarian intentions there were others of a colonial nature, not always made explicit in official documentation, but in reality just as important for the Jewish leadership guiding these philanthropic associations, who in this way could maintain constant and useful relationships with the respective Ministers of Foreign Affairs, providing them with the collected information. In this way, each of them had the opportunity to demonstrate patriotic loyalty to their own government, while at the same time competing with the other Jewish associations for influence in the territories, contributing to an emerging and enduring rivalry which reached a high level of conflict, for which the Jews in need of help inevitably paid the price, since they had to decide whether to send their children to French or German language schools.

As emerges from most of the essays collected in the second part of this book, placing Western Judaism in constant contact with Eastern Judaism was one of the ways in which these associations organised themselves: there was a widespread network of observers, chosen from amongst the local middle class; a large number of schools, provided with teachers who had been instructed in France, Germany, England and Austria. The way in which these actors behaved towards their coreligionists was paternalistic and imbued with a sense of cultural superiority: the biannual and annual publications of bulletins by these associations are a litmus test of how they

viewed the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. It is not uncommon to find stereotyped narratives, in which the difficulty of engaging on the same level as the Eastern Jews emerges, while one has the net impression that the bulletin writers had lost sight of the evident progress made on a social, cultural and even a political level in several of these Jewish communities from the end of the 1800s to the start of the 1900s.

The great caesura was brought about by the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, which marked the end of a period, characterised by a certain type of Jewish philanthropy, which was permeated by colonial and paternalistic intentions, whose primary objective was to emancipate the Eastern Jews and to begin for them a process of integration modelled on the Western world.

The essays which in the second part focus on the period between the two Wars highlight the turning point, bringing to the fore the emergence of anti-Semitism, and the need for a new collaboration and solidarity amongst the Jewish agencies, which were no longer able to operate as they once had, without constant support from overseas.

PART I.

THE JEWS IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

CHAPTER ONE

NEITHER FOREIGNERS, NOR CITIZENS: ROMANIAN JEWS' LONG ROAD TO CITIZENSHIP

EMANUELA COSTANTINI

Historiography about the condition of Jews in the Romanian nation-state is vast. The special attention historiography has paid to the Romanian case is due to the abnormal situation of the discrimination of Jews in a state which claimed itself liberal. Several scholars, both in Romania and outside, have studied this “juridical anti-Semitism,” as Carol Iancu has defined it.¹ It is obviously not possible, nor it is the object of this paper, to give an account here of the existing studies concerning this issue. What emerges from a general survey is the predominance of research about anti-Semitism, its main exponents, its roots and streams.² In the last years, new studies are being published. Experts on human geography and sociologists, making broad use of archival sources, have dealt with the profile and evolution of

¹ C. Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919). De la excludere la emancipare* (București: Editura Hasefer, 1996), 14.

² Among the other works about the period here taken into consideration: *Antisemitism in Romania: the image of the Jew in the Romanian Society: Bibliography*, ed. Z. Hartman (Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute, 1993); *Dilemele convingerii. Evrei și neevrei în Europa Central-Răsăriteană înainte și după Shoah*, eds. L. Gyémánt, M. Ghitta (Cluj Napoca: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006); D. Balan, *Național, nationalism, xenofobie și antisemitism în societatea românească modernă (1831-1866)* (Iași: Junimea, 2006); L. Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: the Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford, New York, Seul: Pergamon Press, 1991); L. T. Botaru, *Rasism românesc. Component rasială a discursului antisemit din România pînă la al Doilea Război Mondial* (Cluj Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2010); A. M. Vele, *România și Franța în a două jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Controversata chestiune evreiască* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2009).

Jews in Romania.³ In addition to this, Jewish scholars have studied the organization of Jewish communities, as well as aspects of their cultural and social life.⁴

Less interest has been shown in the reaction of Romanian Jews towards the political action of the ruling class, as well as in the impact it had on the Jewish community and on the Jewish culture. Among the few works dealing with this aspect, the book by Simona Fărcășan about Jewish thinkers in Romania in the 19th century is worth mentioning.⁵ The author examines the evolution of Jewish self-conception as a consequence of the transformation undergone by the Romanian politics and society. The aim of this essay is to extend the survey to the Jewish community as a whole and to briefly show the implications of the climate of hostility against it.

In the same way in which Fărcășan focuses on how the Jewish elite changed as the process of nation building developed, this essay attempts to analyse the attitude adopted by Romanian Jews when Romanian independence was achieved and also afterwards, within the new state. The main issue debated by Fărcășan, i.e. how Jewish identity was renegotiated in the constitutional state, when Jews were forced to leave the community and become citizens, is a major theme of discussion in almost every nation-state created after the French revolution, including Romania. After independence, the traditional Romanian society, divided into classes and structured in guilds, where the Jews' role was defined on a cultural/religious basis, came to an end. The building of a Romanian nation-state, whose members were citizens with rights and not aristocrats with privileges, peasants with duties or members of guilds with their rules, implied a redefinition of the Jewish place in Romanian society, as well as

³ P. Cernovodeanu, "O minoritate dinamică în Moldova secolului al XVIII-lea: evrei ashkenazi," *Revista istorică* 16, 3-4 (2005); A. Ciuciu, "Orient și Orientalism. Între ghetoul venețian și cartierele evreiești din București la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea," *Studia Historică* 6 (2006); S. Costachie, *Evreii din România, aspecte etnografice* (București: Ed. Top Form, 2003); Idem, *Evreii din România. Studiu de geografie umană* (București: Ed. Universității din București, 2004).

⁴ I. Braunștein, *Evreii în prima universitate din România. Catalogul documentelor aflate în Fondul Rectorat de la Arhivele Naționale, Direcția Județeană Iași. 1860-1948* (Iași: Edit. Dan, 2001); I. Braunștein, *Intreprinzatori evrei în Moldova. Catalogul documentelor aflate în Fondul Camarei de Comerț și industrie de la Arhivele Naționale, Direcția Județeană Iași. 1879-1950* (Iași: Junimea, 2003); C. Iancu, A. F. Platon, *Profesori și studenți evrei* (Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2012).

⁵ S. Fărcășan, *Între două lumi (intelectuali evrei de expresie română în secolul al XIX-lea)* (Cluj Napoca: Editura fundației pentru studii europene, 2004).

of Jewish organization. Belonging to the category of citizen (therefore with access to rights) implied a breaking up of traditional social groups: not only social classes, but also religious communities. This was also true for Jews, as Jacob Katz has shown,⁶ causing a major change in the system of reference, the religious community being unsuitable in a society based on individual subjects. This process in most cases determined an internal conflict in Jewish communities, between those who decided to comply with the new context and those who tried to resist it. Simplifying, it was the division between those who upheld the desire to be integrated into local societies, which implied a redefinition of identity, and orthodox defenders of tradition. This split was interwoven with the internal debate between the Haskalah movement and its opponents.

Nevertheless, the condition of Jews in Romania was heavily influenced by the internal environment, characterized by a strong anti-Semitism sentiment which spread also among the members of the leading class. The creation of a liberal and constitutional state did not weaken the hostility towards Jews, and the two contradictory elements of liberalism and anti-Semitism coexisted until the First World War. Few voices from inside the country were raised against discrimination. Attempts to change the existing discriminatory legislation were made only by other European countries and by international organizations using pressure on the Romanian Government in international assemblies, as described well by Carole Fink in *Defending the Rights of Others*.⁷

How did this particular scenario affect Romanian Jews' attitude towards the nation-state? What was their position during the wars Romania was engaged in? What kind of action did they undertake in an attempt to assert their rights? In order to study these subjects I will be referring to Jewish sources, such as memories, journals and, of course, the Jewish press, while archival and bibliographical sources will obviously be useful in retracing the background.

Who were Romanian Jews?

It is not clear when the first Jewish colonies settled in the Romanian lands. Before the 15th century their presence was probably neither stable nor

⁶ I. Katz, "Introduction," in *Toward Modernity. The European Jewish Model*, ed. I. Katz (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction, 1987), 2.

⁷ C. Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others. The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

significant.⁸ Only merchants and travellers occasionally passed through the Moldovan and Wallachian area. There are indirect statements about Jews in Moldova since the 15th century, but the first document referring to them is the “official call” from the Moldovan prince Ștefan Tomșa to Jewish merchants from Poland in 1612. During the 17th century Jewish presence began to increase and became stable.⁹ In roughly the same period Jews settled in Wallachia, as stated in several documents bearing witness to the presence of merchants and shopkeepers in Bucharest.¹⁰ Although they belonged to the same social classes, Jews in Moldova and Wallachia had different origins and cultural characteristics. The former came from Polish, Russian and Austrian lands and were Ashkenazim, while the latter came mostly from the Ottoman Empire and were Sephardim. From the mid 17th century onwards the two groups differed also in numbers, since Moldova became the principal destination of Jews escaping from pogroms in Polish and Ukrainians lands.¹¹ The number of Jews flowing into Moldova increased in the following decades. During the 18th and early 19th century a new wave arrived from the same areas, but also from the Habsburg and Prussian territories, due to the wars being fought in these countries and the episodes of anti-Semitism.¹² In 1803, Jews represented about 2% of the Moldovan population (there are no data on Wallachia). In 1831 the percentage had risen to 4.2 in Moldova and 2 in Wallachia.¹³

The Jewish communities’ organization in Romania was similar to that of other areas in Eastern Europe. In the towns, Jews had their own guild, the *breaslă jidovilor*. The religious leader of each community was the rabbi and the lay leader was the *staroște*. In 1719 Ottoman authorities established a leading role, the *hahambașa*, a hereditary position combining both religious and lay power. This figure was in charge of collecting taxes, solving the less important judiciary cases, representing Jews before the imperial authorities and appointing *staroști* and rabbis.¹⁴ The *hahambașa* resided in Iași, but had authority also over Wallachia. A representative of

⁸ S. Costachie, *Evreii din România. Aspecte geografice* (București: Editura Top Form, 2003), 30.

⁹ D. Dieaconu, *Evreii din Moldova de Nord. De la primele așezări pâna în anul 1938* (București: Editura universitară, 2009), 15-21.

¹⁰ F. Waldman, A. Ciuciu, *Stories and Images of Jewish Bucharest* (București: Noi Media Print, 2011), 11.

¹¹ S. Sanie, “Cultura judaică la Iași,” *Sahir* VII (2002): 22.

¹² D. Ivănescu, “Populația evreiască a orașului Iași în perioadă 1755-1860,” *Sahir* I (1996): 116.

¹³ Costachie, *Evreii din România. Aspecte geografice*, 46.

¹⁴ Fărcașan, *Între două lumi*, 74-75.

his, the *vekil hahambaşa*, resided in Bucharest. Jews from both principalities were divided into three categories: *pământeni*, *hrisovelîți* and *sudiți*. The first were descendants of families residing in Romania for centuries. The second were descendants of the merchants invited by local princes, and in the decades to follow were included in the first category. The last group was that of Jews under the protection of the countries from which they had come. Several conflicts, regarding fiscal issues and the appointing of Jewish high dignitaries, emerged between *pământeni* and *sudiți*.¹⁵ The relationship between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews was also difficult, reflecting a conflict between Wallachian and Moldovan communities. The Bucharest community, in particular, strove to gain an independent position, not accepting the religious and organizational leadership of Iași. This estrangement between the two regions was due to the specific characteristics of the two communities, one of which was closer to the Central-Eastern Europe Jewish world, while the other shared more similarities with the Jews of the Ottoman or post-Ottoman area. Social differentiation was also evident. Moldovan Jews lived in the cities or in small housing clusters called *târguri*, which can be identified with *shtetl*. Jews were invited by local princes to operate as intermediaries among boyars and peasants and they worked as small traders, craftsmen, innkeepers and money lenders. In Wallachia only small Sephardic communities were present and they lived almost exclusively in cities, mainly in Bucharest.

As the ideas originating in France spread and started circulating also in the Danubian Principalities, and the process of building a nation-state began, the traditional community system crumbled. This process was slower in Moldova, where rabbinic orthodox tradition was more rooted, above all in small villages in the countryside.¹⁶

Fighting for the homeland...

In Romania nation-building was the result of external and internal factors. The crisis of the Ottoman Empire strengthened the autonomy of the two principalities of Moldova and Wallachia, but after the war for Greek independence Russia managed to establish a protectorate over them. The abolishment of some of the obligations imposed by the Ottomans, such as the monopoly on trade, opened up new opportunities for the Jews and encouraged them to come to these regions.

¹⁵ Ibid., 75-77.

¹⁶ Ibid., 98.

In the same period, local aristocrats developed the idea of building an independent and united state for the Romanian people. Then in 1848, as in other towns throughout Central and Eastern Europe, troubles broke out in Bucharest and other Wallachian towns as the people demanded a Constitution and sovereignty. At the same time, Moldovan intellectuals and aristocrats signed a petition asking for the same.

In 1848 Romania appeared to follow the same trend as the other countries in which nation-building coincided with the acknowledgment of rights for all citizens and the end of discrimination; not surprisingly, Jews supported the fight. Revolutionaries actually were open to welcoming Jews into Romanian society, as stated in the Islaz declaration, the document presenting their requests. Article 21, in fact, says: “the Romanian people proclaim [...] the emancipation of Israelites and political rights for compatriots of every other confession.” The same Wallachian liberals who called the Jews “brothers” asked for their support in the revolution. Jewish participation in the revolt ought not, however, to be overestimated. The Jews gave their support to the revolution individually. They were mostly members of the Sephardi community of Bucharest: tradesmen Hillel Manoah, Davicion Bally, Solomon Halfon and Barbu Iscovescu, son of Haim Iscovici, a house painter in Bucarest, as well as the painter C. D. Rosenthal, born in Pest.¹⁷ Personal friendship also influenced their participation, such as those between Rosetti and Rosenthal and between Davicion Bally and Ion Heliade Rădulescu. Manifestos were affixed around the town where Jews declared their support to “our dear homeland”¹⁸ and Bern Poper wrote, “today, when you offer us your rights, when you extend your hand to us as brothers, we will stand by your side, strong and bold, we shall be able to fight with you and even to die for our dear homeland.”¹⁹ In Moldova also, the petition with which local boyars asked the prince for reforms implied the recognition of political rights for Jews, but “gradually.”²⁰

The difference in attitude towards the Jewish minority was also a consequence of their increased integration in the Wallachian society, which was both the cause and the effect of the influence of intellectual movements like the Haskalah.²¹ It was actually in the mid 19th century that Haskalah began to penetrate the Jewish environment in Bucharest, thanks

¹⁷ J. Kaufmann, J. Berkowitz, *Evreii în Revoluția română din 1848* (București: CSIER, 1999), 5.

¹⁸ Fărcășan, *Între două lumi*, 94.

¹⁹ Kaufmann, Berkowitz, *Evreii în Revoluția română*, 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

²¹ Fărcășan, *Între două lumi*, 98.

to leading figures such as Iuliu Barasch, a well-known scientist born in Galicia and educated in Germany, who moved to Romania in the 1840s and is considered the Romanian equivalent of Mendelssohn.²² In actual fact, Barasch came from an area (Galicia) which had been a fertile land for orthodox movements such as Hasidism,²³ but his contact with the German debate led him to develop reformist ideas. He was the promoter of the first secular school in Bucharest and the founder of *Israelitul român*, the first bilingual (Romanian/French) Jewish magazine in Romania.²⁴ By actively promoting Jewish Enlightenment in Romania, Barasch brought to Romania the reformist tendency that was spreading throughout Central and Western Europe and which, in Jacob Katz's opinion, was prevented from taking root in Eastern Europe due to the strong Hasidic culture.²⁵ Consequently, Romania became the boundary between West and East, i.e. between reformist and orthodox Jewish culture. Bucharest was the first place in Romania in which such a confrontation emerged. Opposition to the action of Barasch, in fact, gathered around the rabbi Malbim, who was strongly against the expressions of Jewish reformist movements, as is clear from his criticism of the new schools with their teachings not based on religion.²⁶

The influence of the ideas of the so-called "Jewish Enlightenment" caused a rift in the Jewish communities, between those who supported new ideas and were open to "modernity" and those who considered them a danger to the integrity of their identity. For the defenders of orthodoxy the prospect of the disintegration of traditional values was even more real since the cultural transformation underway was parallel to the political change. The creation of the nation-state implied the redefinition of individuals as citizens and the fracturing of their adherence to other groups, including the religious community. This was perceived by non-orthodox Jews as a favourable framework for the development of both economic activities and their personal culture. As regards the latter, the development of a modern Jewish school influenced by Haskalah was accompanied by the practice of completing education abroad.²⁷ Using *Israelitul român*, which became its mouthpiece, this group expressed to

²² Ibid., 121.

²³ Katz, "Introduction," 8.

²⁴ "Barasch, Julius," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Second Edition, Vol. 3, eds. F. Skolnik, M. Berenbaum (Detroit, New York, San Francisco, New Haven, Waterville, London: Thomson Gale, 2007), 34-135.

²⁵ Katz, "Introduction," 10.

²⁶ Fărcășan, *Între două lumi*, 107.

²⁷ Ibid., 102.

the Government the conviction that the integration of the Jews would benefit the entire Romanian population:

Principles like religious tolerance, political and civil freedom, equality before the law have been acknowledged and adopted since the 19th century. By these principles, modern nations can flourish and their institutions can have a long and stable life. Persecutions of the past centuries, intolerance and the inquisition have only been able to produce darkness, weakness, anarchy.²⁸

... of others

The success of the reformist ideas of Iuliu Barasch and the support of the national movement were due to the belief by a great number of Jews that the creation of the Romanian state would result in new opportunities for them, as had happened with the opening up to international trade after 1830. As the local economy became less traditional and closed, Jews had occupied spaces in trade and crafts, taking advantage of the lack of a local middle class. This resulted, in fact, in the flow of increasing numbers of Jews into Moldova and Wallachia, with percentages between 1831 and 1860 rising from 4.2 to 9 in Moldova and from 2 to 3.8 in Wallachia.²⁹

While orthodox Romanian Jews remained indifferent to the process of construction of the nation-state, reformists openly supported it. Therefore, after the Crimean war, they welcomed the creation of the Romanian principality with the union of Moldova and Wallachia, which maintained only a formal dependence on the Ottoman Empire. As Iuliu Barasch wrote in his pamphlet *L'émancipation israélite en Roumanie*, published in Paris in 1861, they hoped that the constitution of the new state would result in the official recognition of rights, transferring the spirit of tolerance that had spread among intellectuals to the whole population.³⁰ These hopes were based on the fact that, at the conference of Constantinople in 1856, England, France, Austria, Prussia and the Ottoman Empire included in the protocol with Moldova and Wallachia articles guaranteeing rights to people of every religion.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 154.

²⁹ Costachie, *Evreii din România. Aspecte geografice*, 46.

³⁰ Ibid., 120.

³¹ Daniela Balan, Dinu Balan, “Dezbateri interne și reacții internaționale cu privire la situația străinilor și jurisdicția consulară în anii luptei pentru unire în Moldova (1856-1859),” in *Dilemele conviețuirii în procesul modernizării societății*

Their hopes of becoming part of the Romanian population and gaining the status of citizens were doomed, however, to disappointment. The first sign of a hostile attitude towards Jews appeared when, after the Crimean war, they were prevented from participating in the elections of the assemblies for choosing the new prince and deciding the institutional assets of the area. Only a few political leaders, like the liberals Atanasie Panu and Mihail Kogălniceanu,³² contested this decision. In the same period accusations of ritual murders spread throughout the country.³³

While the first Romanian prince, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, was in power between 1859 and 1866, there was a certain degree of openness toward Jews. At that time Cuza tried to make use of Jewish capital to finance reforms. Contacts with Jewish bankers, such as those working for the Ottoman Bank (whose director in the early '60s was Adolphe Crémieux, president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle), were very frequent.³⁴ The administrative law of 1864 guaranteed the voting rights of certain categories of Jews, such as those performing military service, graduates of the Romanian universities, or those awarded a doctoral degree abroad.³⁵ Article 6 of the first draft of the Romanian constitution, voted in 1866, stated that religion could not be an obstacle to obtaining citizenship.³⁶

The attitude of the prince met with the opposition of most of the local political class. When, in the same year, Cuza was replaced by a Hohenzollern prince, Carol I, Adolphe Crémieux arrived in Romania to ask for better treatment for Jews. Other leading figures in the defence of Jews visited Romania in the same period, such as Émile Picot and Moses Montefiore.³⁷ This did not, however, produce the desired result: anti-Semitism was fuelled by the fear of a more liberal legislation and the political class exploited social dissatisfaction to strengthen discrimination. In the final text of the Constitution the possibility for Jews to have access to rights was cancelled: according to article 7 only Christian residents

românești în spațiul est-carpatic (secolele XIX-XX), eds. C. Turliuc, M. Ș. Ceaușu (Iași: Junimea, 2011), 29.

³² Balan, Balan, "Dezbateri interne și reacții internaționale," 36.

³³ Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*, 10-12.

³⁴ L. Bercovici, "Structuri profesionale ale evreilor bucureșteni în a doua jumătate a secolului XIX și la începutul secolului XX," in *Dilemele conviețuirii în procesul modernizării societății românești*, 332.

³⁵ Bercovici, "Structuri profesionale ale evreilor bucureșteni," 14.

³⁶ O. Hrihorciuc, "Naționalism și xenofobie în doctrina frațiunii libere și independente din Moldova," in *Dilemele conviețuirii. Evrei și neevrei în Europa Central-Răsăriteană*, 55.

³⁷ Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919)*, 80-95.

could be recognized as citizens. A few voices contested this choice, such as those of Titu Maiorescu and Petre Carp, two of the main leaders of the conservative party.³⁸ In actual fact, most of those contesting discrimination came from the class of major landowners, which was not surprising since Jews often worked for landowners as leaseholders. The more liberal representatives of the nobility felt endangered to a greater extent by the possibility that Jews would be included in economic life, due to their interests in finance and trade. This explained why the liberal leader Ion C. Brătianu, having several interests in finance, was one of the main promoters of the anti-Semitic legislation.

Discrimination against Jews revealed an inner contradiction in the declaration of liberalism of the Romanian ruling class. With Art. 7 they denied Jews the same rights they had advocated for Romanians in the past and continued to advocate for Romanians in the Habsburg Empire. Moreover, their conception of the Romanian nation became problematic. Notwithstanding its secular connotation as a community of Latin origin, whose main identifying feature was language, the criteria for separating citizens and non-citizens and, implicitly, the juridical foundation of the nation-state, became religious. The main root of Romanian anti-Semitism in the 19th century was probably not religious prejudice but economic and social competition. Jews represented the only middle class in Romanian society and that was perceived as a danger by landowners and aristocrats interested in investing in finance. Unlike what had occurred in Germany, where “because [the bourgeoisie] was not yet ready-made and had as yet no clear-cut boundaries, the idea of including the Jewish outsiders into it was easily conceived and accepted,”³⁹ in Romania the lack of a middle class made the local aristocracy feel endangered by the possibility of Jews occupying this empty social space. Moreover, they could count on the hostility spread in the countryside against Jews who, being the landowners’ leaseholders, were perceived by peasants as their real exploiters.

The difficulties faced by Jews soon after the creation of the nation-state were expected to diminish the inclination towards integration. In actual fact, however, this was not the case.

The wing that favoured integration was in a majority in the Romanian autonomous state, as demonstrated by the fact that in 1872, at the conference of Brussels on Jews in the Balkan states, the Romanian delegation scornfully rejected “in the name of devotion to the homeland” the proposal of the American consul in Romania, Benjamin Peixotto, of

³⁸ M. Petreu, “«Chestiunea evreiască» la Junimea,” *Dilemele conviețuirii. Evrei și neevrei în Europa Central-Răsăriteană*.

³⁹ I. Katz, “Introduction,” 10.

emigration to the United States. Peixotto's proposal actually caused a dilemma for the Jews, since, as shown by the newspaper *Românul*, if they decided to leave they would satisfy their enemies, but in choosing to stay they would demonstrate that their condition was not so bad.⁴⁰ The reaction of the Jews in the three decades after the birth of the Romanian state was twofold. On the one hand, they tried to convince the Romanian Government of their goodwill and their sincere support of the nation. On the other hand, they acted to exert pressure on an international level, thanks to the philanthropic associations of which they were members, especially the Alliance Israélite Universelle. Not only had the Alliance's president Crémieux tried to prevent discrimination in the Constitution of 1866, he also continued to report to the international community the abuses to which Romanian Jews were subjected. In 1867, for instance, he accused Brătianu (Minister of the Home Office) of having unjustly expelled Jews from Moldova under the specious accusation of separatism and incorrectly applying the law on vagrancy.⁴¹

Notwithstanding the hostile context they lived in, local Jews decided to support Romanian participation in the Russian-Ottoman war to win full independence from the Ottoman Empire, fighting in the army, offering financial aid and making use of their propaganda means. Nevertheless, at the congress of Berlin held at the end of the war in 1878, the Romanian delegation tried to resist pressure from the European powers to put an end to discrimination. Art. 44 of the treaty signed at the congress, subordinating Romanian independence to the acknowledgment of rights to every member of a minority, remained unfulfilled. Article 7 of the Romanian constitution was changed partially, allowing Jews to obtain citizenship on an individual basis and after a complex and lengthy procedure involving the fulfilment of several conditions, such as proving their presence in Romania for at least ten years, as well as having a stable job. The result was that in the forty years between 1878 and 1918 only 529 Jews were declared citizens, of whom 52 had fought during the war for independence in 1877-1878 and 330 were veterans of the Second Balkan War of 1913.⁴² In the following years, many other laws were passed limiting Jewish rights as far as economic activities, cultural life and political action were concerned. Jews were not allowed to work in public administration, could work as doctors and chemists only as general practitioners, could not sell tobacco and spirits, could work as peddlers only within given limits, could

⁴⁰ *Românul*, Aug. 7-8, 1872. See Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919)*, 296-298.

⁴¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Archive Group Casa Regală 1865-1814, Folder 7/1867.

⁴² Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919)*, 212-213.

own factories only if two thirds of the workers were Romanians, could attend schools only if the number of Romanian students was low enough (1887). From 1893 on they were allowed to attend public schools only after the payment of a tax and they could not attend faculties giving access to professions in public administration, namely law. In addition to this, although not Romanian citizens, they were subject to compulsory military service, but could not reach high military ranks (after 1895 they could not even be corporal or non-commissioned officers).⁴³ Expulsion under the accusation of vagrancy continued, again causing the reaction of the European Governments and of the international Jewish associations.⁴⁴

The Jews, therefore, who represented the main cultural and religious group in the country after the Romanian/orthodox group, were denied civil and political rights but subordinated to duties that foreigners did not have. This determined a *vulnus* in the self-assessed liberalism of the Romanian ruling class and in the conception of nation as deriving from the French tradition, which had been the reference point for the makers of national independence. The rights asked in the past by Romanians under foreign rule were now denied to local Jews.

Juridical discrimination also generated an empty space for Jews. The creation of the nation-states implied the disappearance of the old society structured on classes and guilds. In Romania, laws passed in the 1860s dissolved the councils regulating taxes and juridical affairs.⁴⁵ In liberal states, these competences were assumed by the state.⁴⁶ In Romania, however, juridical discrimination meant exclusion from or restriction of access by Jews to public services. Not only could they no longer rely on their self-regulated close community, therefore, but they could not access the rights reserved for citizens. This paradoxical situation was not specific to the Romanian environment: Jacob Katz has clearly shown how the "limitation of the communal authority applied" also to countries like Russia, "where not even the initial stages of emancipation had been introduced."⁴⁷ Romanian specificity lay in the fact that, while in Russia emancipation had not been introduced for anybody, in Romania it operated, but only for Christians. As a consequence, Jewish communities re-occupied spaces which had been taken by the public system, supplying

⁴³ Ibid., 206-234.

⁴⁴ ANR, Archive Group Casa Regală 1865-1814, Folders 26/1879 and 27/1879.

⁴⁵ Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*, 12.

⁴⁶ P. Birnbaum, I. Katznelson, "Emancipation and the Liberal Offer," in *Paths of Emancipation. Jews, States and Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 11.

⁴⁷ Katz, "Introduction," 1.

to their members services that the state denied.⁴⁸ The effect was that, despite the breaking of communal ties, anti-Semitism contributed to keeping Jewish identity alive, forcing Jews to continue to perceive themselves principally as Jews. Thus anti-Semitism actually acted as a centripetal force. It is not surprising, therefore, that as a reaction to such a situation Moldovan communities engaged themselves in preserving their cultural specificities. The second half of the 19th century was actually characterized by the flourishing of arts, as demonstrated by the founding of the first theatre in Yiddish in Europe.⁴⁹

But why, in such a difficult context, did Jews decide to stay in Romania and, at least until the end of the century, not emigrate to other countries? One possible explanation is that until the eighties they still hoped to take advantage of the ongoing economic transformation. After independence, they actually continued to create industries and to work in trade and finance. They also were numerous among professionals and in services such as health, as demonstrated by figures like Doctor Iacob Felix, a distinguished physician in Bucharest, whose surveys on nutrition of the rural population and on hygiene had some resonance in the country in the sixties.⁵⁰

Only in the eighties did the attitude of Jews towards the Romanian state begin to change. Juridical anti-Semitism became more and more evident and aggressive. Several intellectuals, like the philosopher Moses Gaster and the journalist Elias Schwarzfeld, were expelled from the country on the basis of a law of 1881 against foreigners “disturbing the public order.” They were given a term of 24 hours to leave.⁵¹ In the following years several towns were subverted by violent anti-Semitic uprisings, like those sparked in Iași by the protest of the National Students’ Committee claiming to defend “Romanianism.”⁵²

⁴⁸ For an example of this see the statute of the community of Diciosânmărtin-Târnăveni. ANR, Fond Comunității evreiești, Dosar 1/1890. See also Lupu Dichter, “Comunitățile și asimilarea,” *Revista israelită*, July 12, 1890, 319-323.

⁴⁹ Fărcășan, *Între două lumi*, 167.

⁵⁰ Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919)*, 333-334.

⁵¹ The law was introduced to prevent Russian populist refugees arriving in Romania, but it was often applied to expel Jews. See Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919)*, 231.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 256.

Loyalty (and voice) or exit?

Disenchantment about the possibility of changing Romanian authorities' attitudes resulted in Jews giving up their engagement to obtain acknowledgment of full rights. The old question of how much of their identity Jews were ready to relinquish to become Romanian citizens became more difficult to answer. The famous triad elaborated in 1970 by Albert O. Hirschman, describing the reaction of the members of a group when the condition within it deteriorates (*exit, voice, and loyalty*), can also be applied to Romanian Jews in the last part of the 19th century. Some reacted to discrimination by remaining *loyal* to the state, even when fighting to change their condition; others struggled to destroy nation-states, including that of Romania (*voice*), and still others decided to emigrate elsewhere or to build an independent Jewish nation-state (*exit*).⁵³

A consistent number of Jews was still convinced that conciliation between their cultural identity and citizenship was possible, even if a more militant attitude was to be adopted. Romanian Jewry became more and more engaged in claiming acknowledgment of its contribution to the development of the state. Intellectuals like Elias Schwarzfeld showed how Jews had protected Romanians during the Turkish occupation of 1821-1822.⁵⁴ Magazines like *Fraternitatea* and *Revista israelită*⁵⁵ emphasized the support offered by their coreligionists to Romanian history and the fact that "every Romanian Jew wants a strong Romania as a shelter with its own territory for a tightly united people, sharing the same languages, the same objectives, the same desires and disposition."⁵⁶ They criticized laws against Jews as being detrimental to the whole country. Limiting entrepreneurial action, for instance, prevented Romanian economic development, Jews being the only ones with experience in trade and industry.⁵⁷ The message was that Jews were not to be considered a problem, but an opportunity: "it is absurd to pretend they are a danger and that, being free, they would damage the local population. Indeed, it is the

⁵³ A. O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁵⁴ E. Schwarzfeld, "Evreii din Moldova sub ocupația turcească: Căimăcama lui Ștefan Vagaride, Căimăcămii Teodor Baiș și Petrachi Sturza (1821-1822)," *Almanahul Israelit Ilustrat* (1902-1903): 17-18.

⁵⁵ H. Kuller, *Presa evreiască bucureșteană. 1847-1994* (București: Editura Hasefer, 1996), 34.

⁵⁶ L. Dichter, "Comunitățile și asimilarea," *Revista israelită*, July 1, 1890, 318.

⁵⁷ "Piedicele intru dezvoltarea industriei noastre," *Fraternitatea*, Dec. 2, 1883, 369.

contrary.”⁵⁸ The Jewish press propounded the message that the perception of the “Jewish danger” was a consequence of anti-Semitic propaganda.⁵⁹

Jews still believing in the possibility to become part of the nation-state were obliged to acknowledge a worsening of the general situation. Thus they decided to act on a political level also, as demonstrated by the formation in 1909 of the Indigenous Jews’ Union (*Uniune Evreilor Pământenii*, UEP), whose aim was to achieve full recognition of rights for Jews and the end of all discrimination.

Those who decided to abandon attempts at dialogue followed three paths: emigration, Zionism and Socialism.

Jewish emigration became relevant at the very end of the 19th century. It was a result of anti-Semitism, as well as of the economic crisis of those years. The poorest emigrants left on foot, seeking solidarity from coreligionists in the towns they passed through. Most of them were directed to the Habsburg boundary and from there reached other countries in Europe. Many others used traditional means of transportation to reach the USA, Canada, Argentina, France and the UK. It is difficult to establish how many Romanian Jews left Romania during the 19th and 20th centuries, but the number allegedly amounts to several thousand (approximately 40,000 according to statistics released by the Alliance Israélite Universelle).⁶⁰

Emigration was also the most evident signal that the prospect of integration was no longer considered the best option for many Romanian Jews. After three decades, the refusal of emigration expressed in Brussels in 1872 became a choice for many Jews.

Some Romanian Jews also left for Palestine. Before the congress of Basel of 1897, which can be taken as the starting point for Zionism in Herzl’s definition, the hypothesis of migration to Palestine had circulated among Romanian Jews. For instance, the association *Yishuv Eretz Israel* had been founded in 1875 to support the emigration of poor people, small traders and shopkeepers to Palestine.⁶¹ Obviously, the climate of rising hostility and the deterioration of their living conditions at the end of the century contributed to the success of the Zionist option in the country. Two Romanian delegates were present at the Basel congress: Karpel

⁵⁸ Ploeșteanu, “Delicată și spinoasă,” *Egalitatea*, Dec. 3, 1910, 46.

⁵⁹ Regarding the acknowledgement of citizenship through the procedure established in 1878, the official press published false data, concealing the fact that very few procedures had been completed. See Ego, “In chestia indigenatelor,” *Revista israelită*, Apr. 15, 1890, 169-173.

⁶⁰ Quoted in B. D. Bretan, *Istoria presei sioniste de limba română în perioadă 1897-1938* (Cluj: Presa universitară clujeană, 2010), 49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 44.