

**UNIVERSITATEA „DUNĂREA DE JOS”
Școala doctorală de Științe Socio-Umane**



TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

**COMUNITATEA EVREIASCĂ DIN GALAȚI
ÎN SECOLUL AL XIX-LEA ȘI ÎN PRIMA JUMĂTATE A
SECOLULUI XX**

Doctorand,
Mariana-Delia (POHRIB) UNGUREANU

Conducător științific:
Prof. univ. dr. Constantin ARDELEANU

**Seria U3: Istorie Nr. 8
Galați
2018**

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THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF GALAȚI IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND THE 1ST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Keywords: ethnicity, minority, Israelite, Ethnic-religious communities, Jews, Jewish community, synagogue, schools, cheder, hospital, hecdoš (Ha'kadosh), cemetery, burial society, statutes, philanthropy, anti-Semitism, Zionism, emigration.

Abstract

The paper sets out to shape the history of the Jewish Community of Galați, scrutinizing the period between the 19th century, at the beginning of which we witness the crystallization of the community beginnings, and the first half of the 20th century, when, towards the late 1930's, we notice the entry into an authoritarian regime with direct and serious repercussions on the legal status of the Jews.

Far from a linear development, similarly to the history of the Romanians, the history of the ethnic-religious communities of Galați alternated constructive periods with stagnation or even involution periods. The factors that influenced this oscillating path were intrinsic (number of community members, relations within the community, the institutions created by the community) or extrinsic (international and domestic events, laws, specific local conditions, relations with local authorities, economic evolution etc.).

The study attempts to seize and identify the formation, adaptation and survival mechanism of the Galați City communities, by following and analysing their confessional, ethnic and linguistic features.

The topic, which is extremely generous in both chronological span and sources, had to be approached due to at least four reasons: the opening of the archives after 1989, the tangential approach of the topic in historiography, the special economic and strategic importance of Galați City and, in the end, the demographic ratio of the Jewish element in the Danube city.

From the very beginning, it must be specified that our paper does not claim to be exhaustive. Departing from the hypothesis that the historical discourse is perfectible, we subject ourselves to potential corrections imposed by the identification and publication of documents or the development of new working methods that might accomplish the approach we started. The finished form of the material was the outcome of approaching research methods such as synthesis, critical and comparative analysis of documents and the corroboration of the obtained data with information from other sources.

In the first chapter, the community concept was analysed from an interdisciplinary perspective, focusing on the sociological vision, then a few general considerations were formulated with regard to the economic and political interests of the great powers and the demographic evolution of foreigners in Galați.

The next three chapters have a historical and sociological approach of the Jewish community of Galați City, in different historical ages: the period between the Organic Regulation and the voting of the Constitution (1832-1866), characterized by the crystallisation of the community institutions, the period between the enactment of the Constitution and the end of the First World War (1866-1918), in the battle for earning political rights and finally, the interwar period (1919-1938), when we noticed the efforts to capitalize and maintain these rights.

In turn, each chapter was structured into 2 large subchapters, the first outlining the evolution of the Jewish communities at the national level and the second the particular evolution of the Galați Community. The approach of the organisation and operation manner of the Galați Jewish Community was based on the following coordinates: demographics, occupational structure, Community organisation, anti-Semitism, Zionism and emigration. The context of the occurrence and evolution of community institutions was also envisaged: synagogues, charity and mutual aid societies, hospital, cemetery.

The last chapter approaches the ethnic-religious diversity in the harbour-city of the Lower Danube, certain communities being brought to attention: Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Catholics, Evangelists, Calvinists, Greek-Catholics, Russians from Lipova and the

Mohammedans. The community organization was also analysed from a comparative perspective so that the history of the Jewish community might be understood not only in relation to the majority population but also to the other ethnic and confessional groups living in the Danubian city.

The Jewish Community of Galați and the beginnings of its organization (1832-1866). The Organic Regulations (1831, Wallachia; 1832, Moldova) comprised provisions regarding the Jews inspired by the anti-Semite Russian laws. Native Jews lost their civil and political rights, being considered as foreigners. In 1834, a well-established Jewish institution, Hakham Bashi, was disbanded along with the abolishment of the fiscal and legal autonomy of the communities, the institutions they had created being subordinated to the state authority. The Jews, due to the religious restrictions and food specifics, had an absolute need for the community organization, so that in the important towns Israelite communities having legal status appeared. On the other hand, the Organic Regulations brought about the access of the ethnic minorities children, Jews included, to state education. The rulers of this period generally adopted a cautious policy towards the Jews, with the exception of Mihail Sturdza (1834-1849) who encouraged the immigration of Jews, especially from Tsarist Russia.

During the regulatory period, the Jewish communities had interdictions as to set their own taxes and withholdings, so that they faced major difficulties in providing the incomes required for the operation of their own institutions (hospital, school etc.). In the face of this situation, at the end of the year 1845, the members of the Galați community requested ruler Mihail Sturdza to establish a 1/1,000 tax on all the commodities imported and exported by the Jews of Moldova, which was approved on 25 February 1846, its cashing falling to the Galați Israelite Community. The document in itself constituted an important fiscal constraint instrument that provided the community with the required funds for the institutions' operation, but it subsequently acquired new meanings, being considered that by this act, the reign acknowledged the Israelite Community of Galați as moral and legal person.

The revolutions from 1848 triggered a vast emancipation process, while the Union of the Principalities (1859) and the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859-1866) brought an improvement in the Jews' status, who managed to obtain certain civil rights, especially reflected in the Communal Law (1864) and the new Civil Code (1865).

Despite the international mobilization of the Jews, the 1866 Constitution was a step back as to the Jews' fight for equal rights, because the Romanian citizenship was denied to them on grounds of not being Christians.

The Jewish Community of Galați has a similar evolution to all Jewish communities, which was imposed by the existence of the legislative framework, yet its own evolution is noticed, which was dictated by the economic interests and realities of the harbour city.

During the period between the Organic Regulation and the Union of the Principalities a constant growth of the number of Jews in Galați City has been found: 10 families (1830), 123 families (1839), 302 families (1845), 4,305 Israelites (1859).

In order to cover the expenses claimed by the duties of the Supervisory Committee of the Jewish Community of Galați, an indirect levy called "salt tax on cattle cutting for the Israelite meat" was collected. The levy itself had been used long before but it was consecrated by the Royal Charter of 1 February 1823 issued by Ion Sturdza, published in the Administrative Manual and the Organic Regulation. Throughout time, this levy that was assigned to third parties by periodic auctioning, gave rise to numerous polemics within the Jewish society, so that fluctuating periods were recorded when it was collected, which influenced the activity and even the existence of the institutions created by the community in general, and of schools in particular.

From the oldest times and in all countries where Jews settled in, the first concern was to have a place to gather in order to pray together; the second concern was whom to trust the children to teach them, and the third concern was to find a place to bury the dead. Therefore, the synagogue, the school or the cheder and the cemetery are the first institutions of the Jewish communities. The synagogue identifies with the notion of Jewish settlement. The synagogue institution accompanied

the Jews throughout their wandering, the entire Jewish life gathering together around synagogues from the cultural, religious and philanthropic standpoint.

Prayer houses were arranged in simple living homes, many of which short-lived. Thus, by the first half of the 18th century, the most representative prayer houses were: „Beth Akneseth şel Maz-nefeth"; "şel Asandlers", "şel Haiuţirn" and "Beth Hamidrasch", to which the Great Synagogue added in the year 1780. In the first half of the 19th century the establishment and building of several places of worship stands out, the most representative being: "The Tailors' Synagogue" (1826), "Habad" Synagogue (1846), "Blinzer" Synagogue (1847), "Idl Blecher" Synagogue (1847), "Oiel" Synagogue, (1848), "Dolingher" Synagogue (1854), The "Blacksmiths' Synagogue" (1856), "The Apple Sellers' Synagogue" (1858) and The Coachmen's Synagogue" (1860).

During the year 1859, with considerable efforts of the Community who managed to reintroduce the salt tax, the first Community primary school was established. The school had four primary classes and functioned by the state curriculum; Hebrew and German courses were taught separately. The school would subsequently be consecrated under the name of "B. Gottesmann" Primary School No. 1 for Boys of the Israelite Community of Galaţi.

Preoccupied with the fate of the community members, in the year 1834, the "Ha'kadosh" health house was established, which would institutionally give birth to the Israelite Hospital. Although the hospital effectively started its operation in 1848, the incomes were secured through a royal charter by Mihail Sturdza ever since 1846, granting to the benefit of this hospital 0.1% of all the cereals imported or exported by the Jews through the Galaţi Harbour.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the documentary sources attest to the existence of the Jewish cemetery in several locations in the city valley, in which area Jews were otherwise concentrated. In the year 1867, the Community purchased a land located on the domain of Costi village, on the outskirts of Galaţi City, which was transformed into a cemetery. We also notice the fact that in the year 1805, the "Chevra Kadisha" Sacred Burial Society was established with the purpose of

burying the dead in their own cemetery, according to the ritual and prescriptions of the Mosaic religion.

The social contradictions, the existence of a discriminatory legislative framework, the religious differences, the economic interests sometimes manifested themselves aggressively by anti-Semite disorders (1840, 1846, 1853, 1859), intensely advertised by the local media, but especially by the international media, impacting on the European diplomatic media.

The international events, the game of the great powers and the decisions made in the Romanian political life resulted in the officialization of the Jewish problem, that the political classes could not find a solution to, on the contrary, after 1866, we witness the exacerbation of the problem.

Period of the fight for political rights (1866-1918). Between 1866 and 1918, from the demographic standpoint, both the city and the Jewish population recorded a significant growth. Thus, in the case of Jews, the following evolution was recorded: 8,260 Jews (1880); 13,087 (1890); 13,970, (1899); 11,461 (1913). The reduction of the Jewish population between 1899 and 1913, from 13,970 to 11,461 Jews, was the effect of the massive emigrations taking place during this period, especially to the United States of America. Against the city population, the percent of the Jewish population varied between 22.30% (1899) and 16% (1913).

Due to the anti-Semite legislation, numerous branches of the small trade and manual professions were closed, the Jews being forced to work in unequal conditions. Thus, Galați was a city of contrasts, on the one hand, the rich Jews involved in industry, international trade or banking system, who made the elite, a relatively well-represented middle class who contributed throughout time by taxes and fees to the shaping and existence of the community institutions, and in the end, the Jews at the poverty limit, wherefrom the waves of emigrants were recruited, who were the beneficiaries of the aids granted by the Community.

In the fall of the year 1875, we witness a rebirth of the community life. Thys, further to a public summons launched through

the synagogues, that all the Jews of Galați were invited to attend, a Committee was elected which received the Mandate to regulate the maintenance of the hospital, schools and other Israelite charities of Galați, the equivalent of a true statute.

Unfortunately, in the spring of 1877, the Ha'hachamim (wise men) and butchers of Galați revolted against the Community and refused to pay the taxes and fees, due to which reason in July of the same year, because of the financial difficulties, the Committee ended its activity, a new committee being instituted only in the year 1893, when the first Statutes of the Israelite Community would be adopted, thus returning to the former governing body, the Supervisory Committee.

Through the statutes adopted in time the following were adopted: the attributions and duties of the Community and the members, how elections and vote exercise were performed, the composition of the Supervisory Committee, mandate duration, trustees' attributions and responsibilities, dismissal conditions, organization of the community's institutions, income sources and how financial resources were spent, general meetings' venue conditions and manners, decisions falling to them.

Because of the anti-Semite legislation, the promotion of Zionism but in particular due to the crisis caused by the drought, in the year 1899, an emigration trend to the United States of America, Canada and Argentina was born. Hundreds of families from different cities came to Galați from where they boarded in foreign ships to the destination. These emigrants lacking the material means had to wait for weeks until the ship departed, due to which reason an "Emigration Committee" was established.

Between 1866 and 1900 at least ten synagogues were built (some took the guilds' names, others the names of their founders) and those in advanced degradation condition were repaired. They had an extremely important role in the community's life, ensuring the connection between the Supervisory Committee and the Jewish population. The existence of the professional societies (guilds) entailed the building of many of the synagogues.

In the period of reference, we also witness a boom (over 40) of the number of Israelite, Zionist, philanthropic, mutual aid, professional,

cultural and sports societies; the majority filed the diligence for the acknowledgement of the legal personality by the authentication of the articles of association and statutes by the Covurlui County Court.

“B. Gottesmann” Primary School No. 1 for Boys of the Israelite Community of Galați (1859) continued to operate with some interruptions in the second half of the century as well, but the educational needs determined the Community to establish new education institutions: Primary School No. 1 for Boys of the Israelite Community of Galați (1894); Commercial School/Commercial Secondary School (1898); Israelite-Romanian Primary School for Girls (1899); Popular Housewifery School “Charlotte and Arnold Weinrauch Foundation” – “Lumina” Society (1901).

The old health house (Ha’kadosh) no longer met the requirements of the population, so that in the year 1897 the decision was made to build a new hospital, the building being inaugurated in the fall of the year 1903. Because of the fact that within the hospital patients originating from the poor classes were treated, regardless of religion, the municipality was contributing to the hospital’s operation with annual subventions.

In the year 1867, after the Community purchased a land located in Costi village, the cemetery’s area was extended by the purchase of a new land in 1906. At the beginning of the year 1908, the chapel of the Israelite Cemetery was built from private initiative.

Just as during the 1877 Independence War of the 1913 campaign during the First World War, the Jews manifested their full solidarity in the fight for their home, the blood contribution of the Galați Jews raising up to 130 soldiers.

The relationship with the local and central authorities was oscillating. The community’s interest obviously came first but in the decisive moments, the Jews knew how to show that the general interest of the state and the other inhabitants prevailed.

An important role in growing the community feeling also had the development of a relationships system by aiding certain communities in the country but also by receiving aids and support from the other domestic or foreign communities.

We may conclude that the presence of the Community's Universe was felt in the Jews' life from their birth and continued with the educational factor, by assuring the elementary training within kindergartens and schools. When they came of age, they were offered the possibility of participating in the community's life, either directly or indirectly by the integration into one of the numerous professional or charity societies. If they were unable to provide for the daily life or fell sick, they benefitted from the financial and moral aid of the charity societies and treatment within the Israelite Hospital. In the event they wanted to emigrate they received support and help from both the local or domestic communities and the international Jewish organizations. At an old age, the community members could benefit from the services of the Nursing Home and after death by the religious services of the Burial Society.

The interwar period. Although no information was identified with regard to the Jewish population of Galați City, in the period immediately following the end of the First World War, between 1913 and 1926 a population increase from 11,461 to 18,280 Jews was noticed. The population had an ascending trend by the year 1930 when the census returned a number of 19,915 Jews in the city, then it declined, so that in the year 1942 only 12,888 inhabitants of this ethnicity were found. The demographic dynamics between the years 1930 and 1942, when the percentage of the Jewish population of Galați City dropped from 19.13% to 13.7% must be attributed to the emigration phenomenon, given the rise in influence of Zionism and the escalation of anti-Semitism.

Greater Romania would find the Galați Jews, the first minority in terms of the number of inhabitants, in a complex situation. The decrees-law for granting citizenship issued between 1918 and 1918 to the Jews who had an oscillating attitude mobilized the administration of the Galați Community in providing legal assistance, so that in the year 1919 approximately 1,600 heads of families opted for the Romanian citizenship. A new stage in the citizenship granting process distinguished itself along with the enactment of the 1923 Constitution, which ratifies the previous decrees-law so that the citizenship was

individually obtained by approximately 700 Jews of Galați, although approximately 2,000 had applied.

The new historic conditions created by the act of the Great Union brought to the community debates and controversies related to the modification of the statutes, some of the main objectives being the introduction of the universal vote in the election of the Supervisory Council and the centralization of all the Jewish institutions in the city under the aegis of the community. The situation was perpetuated until the year 1925 when the Elections Regulation of the Israelite Community was modified, which specified that the “elections are done by universal, equal, direct, secret and proportionally represented vote” for all the community sections, which represented, besides the democratization of the electoral process, a centralization of the sections under the aegis of the Community.

At the end of the year 1930, the name of the Israelite Community was changed, the new official designation being the Jewish Community of Galați, while in the following year the Statutes of the Jewish Community of Galați were elaborated (1931). The new statutes represented the expression of the “enthronement of true democracy”, which fulfilled two desiderata: centralization of the Jewish institutions under the aegis of the community and the broadening of the voting right, by granting this right to the persons who were 21 years of age, women included. The Community’s Supervisory Committee represented the managing body of the community, made up of Community Sections (Cult and Administration Section; Schools Sections; Hospital Section; Social Assistance Section; Sacred Section), Community Agency and the Community Council. The Jewish communities were also bound, within a year since the voting of the Statutes, to put their own statutes in line with the Community Statute.

The places of worship enjoyed special attention, benefitting both from subventions from the Community and parishioners’ donations. Thus, during the interwar period the Oiel Nou Synagogue was built (1923), there were rebuilt from ground the Blinzer Synagogue (1922), Oiel Synagogue (1922), “Porters” Synagogue (1925), “Israelite Taglöhner Fraternity” Synagogue (1927), Dolingher Synagogue (1929) and repairs were made on the “Tailors” Synagogue (1920),

Blacksmiths' Synagogue (1921), Choral Temple (1924) and the "Habad" Chabad Synagogue (1926).

The „Chevra Kadisha” Sacred Society continued to play an important role. In the year 1924, the Israelite Cemetery dedicated to the First World War heroes was inaugurated, and two years later the cemetery was extended by the purchase of a 2-ha land.

The societies established before the war continued their activity, the majority acquiring legal personality by adopting new statutes authenticated by the Romanian state authorities. Besides the old societies, the establishment of new societies was noticed, which dealt in the field of social assistance, for instance, the “Children’s Foster House Orphanage” (1919) and “Sochem Noflim” Society (1925) or on the cultural realm – “Menorah” Cultural Circle (1933), “Libertatea (Freedom)” Society (1934), “Idische Cultur” Jewish Cultural League – Galați Section (1924).

Education constituted an essential part of the cultural life, having a decisive role in the training process of children and the youth. Thus, special attention was paid to the pre-school education: in the year 1922, the reception of the "Tharbut" kindergarten building took place, in the year 1925 the "Sylvia Schmierer" kindergarten was established and in 1926 the "Talmud Thora" kindergarten. The Israelite-Romanian Primary School for Girls (which in the year 1925 became the Sylvia Schmierer" Primary School for Girls), received in 1928 the state's recognition of the public-school statute. Two years later, the two primary schools for boys also obtained the recognition of the same statute, which conferred them, among others, the right to benefit from state subventions. The Israelite Community High School, transformed into a military hospital during the war, resumed its activity, undergoing a revamping process concerning both the curriculum and the provision with didactic material so that in the year 1926 it obtains the statute of public education institution. The establishment of the "Israelite Teaching Staff Resource Centre of Galați" was noticed as professional organization form (1924).

The Israelite Hospital underwent a revamping process. It had an elite medical staff, the physicians practising in this hospital being graduates of prestigious domestic and foreign schools.

During the interwar period, several Zionist organizations were established in Galați – “Palestinian Office” Zionist Organization (1921), “Waad Eretz Israel” Society (1921), “Zeire Mizrachi” (1924) and “Jüdische Kleinkunstbühne” (1924) – which had an intense activity of supporting the Jews who intended to emigrate to Palestine and to raising the funds required for purchasing lands in this country. We also notice the fact that in the year 1920 the Committee for the protection of Jewish refugees from Ukraine was established, which led an intense humanitarian activity.

During the interwar period, in the harbour city on the Danube, approximately 20 Jewish publications appeared, some having an ephemeral apparition (in general, tribute issues and electoral campaigns bulletins) but also some daily newspapers that made proof of longevity and notoriety, among which “Ecoule” (Echo) and “Vocea Galaților” (Voice of Galați). In a few cases, the theoretical debates between Jews and Romanians were crossed over into physical confrontations.

The initiatives in the field of cultural or physical education were substantiated by the creation of associations, such as: “Orizontul Tinerimii” (The Youth Horizon) Society (1920), “Ivrya” Library of the Zionist Youth Association (1923), The Jewish Cultural League (1923), “Haghibor” Gymnastics Society (1923), “Hazomir” Cultural Circle (1924), “Dramatischer Winkel” Cultural Circle (1926), “Shalom Aleichem” Circle and Library (1927).

The “Ronetti-Roman” Cultural Circle enjoyed good reputation and appreciations from the cultural environment of Galați, organizing various activities in which the “darlings of the city intellectual circles” participated. At the beginning of the 1930's, the “Max Nordau” Cultural Settlement was among the few to teach English, French, Italian and German free of charge. The Jewish Women Cultural Association was, in turn, deploying an intense cultural activity, by funding a night class and sports organization for the girls.

Galați was a cosmopolite and modern city where mundane life throbbed. The “Central” Theatre, “Papadopol” Hall, “Miron” and “Francais” cinemas hosted numerous plays, school matinees, but also the latest cinematographic productions playing in the great European cities. Village feasts were present while in the city saloons dancing

nights, bridge, rummy, poker and chemin de fer games were organized. Throughout time, the city was visited by numerous national and international personalities, placing Galați on the European cultural map. Otherwise, after graduating from the city high schools, many students continued their studies in the great cities of the world, then returned to the country by bringing along a new, European air. Let's not forget that on 13 September 1926, Galați opened the works of the 6th Congress of Esperanto speakers, under the presidency of A. Fischer-Galați (Grigore Trancu-Iași and General C. Găvănescu being honorary presidents).

Overall, the relations between the ethnic-religious communities of Galați were good. While it is true that certain unwanted events having a strong anti-Semite nature were recorded, during the analysed period they were relatively few and of short duration. We may assess that the relationship between Jews and Christians manifested differently depending on the social status. Conflicts mainly occurred at the basis of the social pyramid, but while climbing the social hierarchy, the impact of the anti-Semite movements was reduced and lost intensity. Paradoxically, individuals having a certain intellectual training and well-placed in society were those fuelling and inducing a permanent anti-Semite attitude that, fortunately, was not always echoed down to the lower classes of the population.

Even though throughout time various anti-Semite normative acts were enacted, they were permanently contested and countered by various legal means (memoranda, contestations, protestations, diplomatic influences), on the background of a common, unitary action at national level, which reduced the impact of certain laws.

We might conclude that, although mingled into a new ethnic formula, the Galați communities actively and positively got involved in the economic and cultural life, collaborating with the local authorities, becoming, we might say, a model of inter-ethnic communion and cohabitation within the same city. Obviously, these communities brought their contribution to the consolidation of the Romanian national unitary state, to the development of democracy and pluralism, to social modernization and synchronization of Romania with other European civilized states.

The limitation of the documentary sources and the period subject to research did not allow for a broad exegesis of the Galați ethnic-religious communities, but these sources offered sufficient constructive elements capable of bringing them forward. A full analysis should necessarily comprise a deeper analysis of the linguistic, religious, economic, cultural or political phenomenon. Nevertheless, we consider that this study represents a starting point and, as much information is unexplored, our process might contribute to the subject's approach from new perspectives.