THE MIGRATORY MOVEMENT OF JEWISH POPULATION ON ROMANIAN TERRITORY
DURING THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

Jewish population of Romania represents one of the most interesting and complex ethnic group that inhabited Romanian land from centuries ago. Their history is linked to the Romanian history, with a period of almost 2,000 years of cohabitation in this part of Europe. The evolution of this ethnic group was heavily influenced by the migratory movement. Having a low birth rate, the immigration represented in almost every historical period the base of population evolution for Jews. More than any other ethnic group, the Jewish population of Romania travelled in or out our country starting with the beginning of our millennium until today. From this very large period of time, the 19th and 20th century represented “the tip of the ice”, the period that influenced the numeric evolution for good. This article tries to present just this important and complex period in the life of Romanian Jews and mostly, the changes that took place during the 19th and 20th century. Also, the motives and general reason is presented as a base of the future understanding of the migratory process.

Keywords: Jews, Romanians, emigration, immigration, numeric evolution

Introduction

The migratory movement has proved itself a very important demographical factor in the last 200 years of the Jewish population in these lands. At one point it represented the main reason for numeric evolution in some provinces of Romania (e.g. Moldova, Muntenia, but not the only…). It also caused a reverse effect, during the 20th century, along with a significant numeric decrease; the fall in birth rate determined the rapid decrease of Jewish population in Romania.

Evidence of migrational movement, whether immigration or emigration, is little and dispersed, lacking exact statistics. That is because this subject was considered to be “delicat” mostly at the end of the 19th century and in the first four decades of the 20th century. Such information is only contained in official documents (reports of the Ministry of Administration and Intern, Border Police etc.) barely accessible for a scientific study of this level.

This way, a scientific study on this topic will be highly connected with the sources of the information and well influenced by author’s sources as well as author’s point of view. We strongly force ourselves to avoid this trap and to present the basic, legal and verified information regarding the migratory processes that affected the Jewish population of Romania.
The 19th century, the “official” beginning of the mass migratory process

The rapid numerical increase in 19th century Moldova, is largely attributed to immigrating Jewish people, coming from all corners of Europe in to Romania for a multitude of reasons such as economic, political and social. The economic possibilities offered by the Romanian market on its early road in the 19th century, allowed the new population’s settlement and the development of a community throughout the years. We should also mention the political reasons (i.e. 1821, Filiki Eteria), that forced great numbers of Jews to move to Moldova and northern regions of Romania.

Protection or, on the other hand persecution of Jews in Austria, Russia and Galicia has led to the appearance of migration flows in the contact areas of these countries. Immigrations to Moldova are reported after the year 1803 (about 7,000 Jews in a period of 17 years), but also from south to north affecting Wallachia, between the years 1805 and 1815. A series of shepardi communities arriving from the Ottoman Empire, settle in Craiova, after crossing through Vidin (Bulgaria), thus demonstrating de connection, even over the frontier of the Danube, between the already existing Jewish communities in these areas1.

At the same time, political elements influence population movement along Moldova’s borders and over them. In 1812, after the occupation of Bessarabia by the Russian Empire, large numbers of Jews arrive in Moldova, due to the strong anti-Semitic policy led by Tsar Nicholas the First. The migrational movements increase after 1828, after signing the Treaty of Adrianopole, the “supplying” countries for Jewish population being Russia, Poland, Germany and Galicia.

After 1931, groups of Jews arriving from Poland and Galicia become larger and larger, but along with them also appear a series of immigrants from Hansa Towns in Prussia, Frankfurt and Hanover. The wave of immigrants slowly decreases after 1838; however we see the beginning of a movement to the south of the country, in Wallachia, where a reported 50,000 Jews immigrated from Moldova, over a period of 40 years (1859-1899), after the unification of the Romanian lands.

With the passing of time, a different situation emerges, where immigration is slowly being replaced by emigration, starting with reports from Moldova of a small number of departures, and later massive departures to European countries or to North America (later Latin America as well).

The modern history of Jewish emigration from Romania does not begin, as one might think, during the 20th century. Even at the beginning of the 19th century, parallel to the immigrant movement, emigration has been present. The movement of the Filiki Eteria in 1821, also worked in driving away the already settled Jewish communities from the two Romanian provinces, generating along side the acceptance (though for a short time) of new Jewish groups on Romania’s territory, a movement in opposite direction, running in either The Ottoman Empire or Transylvania.

20th century: new destinations, old routs

The movement of the Jewish population was known to the highest level as proved by the fact that on the 7th of April 1842, the Austrian authority in Vienna approved the application of the Aulica Transylvania Office Decree over the Government of Transylvania by which annual lists should be forwarded with the number of Jews willing to emigrate to Turkish provinces (including the two Romanian ones).

Still, the most important migratory movement of Jewish population is shown to have been to the outside of the Romanian territory, mainly towards Europe and the Americas (both north and south). To understand the importance of this problem to the Jewish communities, we shall mention only a few aspects: first of all, as early as 1881 (until 1908) a series of statistic records appear, on the number of Jewish emigrants from Romania to the USA, Canada, Australia, England, Palestine

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and Anatolia. Arthur Ruppin pinpointed that the number of Jewish emigrants of Romanian origin, in the period of 1881 to 1908, was over 96,000 people, of which (as his statistics show), about 75,000 left for the USA, Canada and Argentina, 20,000 for England, and only 1,000 for Palestine and Anatolia. Though these numbers may seem exaggerated, they can be confirmed (at least partially) through a series of documents belonging to the Jewish community, but also through some reports of the Romanian officials. In 1882, there was an emigration society in Botoșani city that eased this activity, signalling a number of over 1,000 Jews, inhabiting this jurisdiction, that wished to leave for Palestine (as colonists). It seems that at the end of the 19th century, Palestine was quite a major place of interest for the Jewish population emigration from the Romanian Kingdom. At the 1st of August 1882, the ship “Thetis” leaves for this destination, carrying aboard a number of 228 Jews which had arrived from Moinești, Galați, Bacău and Focșani, followed by a second departure on the 17th of August with a total of 475 people of Jewish nationality from Moldova. It seems that this emigration “policy” was not only encouraged by Romanian authorities, but also, and probably most of all, by the leaders of the Jewish communities in the Kingdom. Here we must also mention the weekly newspaper “Stindardul” that appeared in Focșani and encouraged emigration of the Jewish community out of Romania! The German press of the time (1882) reported that during the first 10 months of the year, a total of 1,332 Jews arrived in Palestine from Romania².

But Palestine wasn’t the only destination that Jewish emigrants had in mind in the late 19th to early 20th century. On the contrary, the USA was one of the most sought out destinations by Jews, due to the opportunities offered by the New World, economically and financially. In September 1886, a number of 2,426 Jews from Iași, Roman, Bârlad, Vaslui, Huși and Piatra Neamț leave for the United States. Four years later, in November 1890, the exodus to the United States had become so strong that weekly a number of 20-30 Jews would leave Iași³. To get a better idea of the migration wave from Romania to the USA, we can mention that the number of Jewish emigrants of Romanian origin that disembarked in New York (the main access way) only in October 1899, was of 911 people, and as a total for the first ten months of this year, over 1,500 people were reported (so informed the reports of the welfare society “United Hebrew Charities”). The information provided by this society, which had as main objective to help the newly arrived Jewish emigrants, are of great use in validating the before mentioned numbers.

Romanian documents speak of a total of 2,854 Jewish emigrants leaving the country, in the course of the year 1898, numbers very close to those shown in the Jewish records. At the same time as the waves of emigrants leaving for the US, another series of emigrants made their way to Germany (specially Hamburg), Cyprus, Crete, Austria and Palestine, with a total of 700 Jews leaving in these directions in February 1900, a number that maintains itself through March and April of that year. The exodus is so persistent that on the 19th of April 1900, the “Drumeții” (Travellers) Society is founded, with the sole purpose of organizing the migratory waves. Probably one of the causes that originated this society was the constant migration wave to the United States, if we take into account the reported 1,865 Jewish emigrants in the first 3 months of the year 1900, that disembarked in New York, or over 30,000 emigrants to the USA, Cyprus and Turkey registered in documents over the month of July in the same year. Moldova was the province most affected by this movement where, as an example we mention the jurisdiction of Tecuci that had, in February 1903 a total of 600 people. It seems that for the period of 1899 to 1904, according to official statistics and Jewish documents, over 42,900 Jewish emigrants left Romania⁴. This fact, correlated with the information made public by American sources (Federal Bureau of Migration), which maintained on the 11th of February 1906 that, between the 1st of October 1904 and the 30th of

September 1905, a number of 100,338 Jews disembarked in New York, of which 3,882 arriving from Romania, confirming earlier reported numbers. Emigrations to the United States continued throughout the first decade of the 20th century, within the same numbers, with a total of 1,347 Jews reported leaving the country between the 1st of January and the 30th of June during 1906 and another 1,838 during the 1st of July 1906 and the 31st of December 1906. The same numbers are reported the following year, with an estimated 2,294 reported Jewish emigrants from Romania. Even though the year 1906 represented a maximum in the Jewish migrational process from Romania, the annual departure of 2,000-3,000 Jews, leading to a dramatic population decrease that will be visible for decades to come. For the first decade, and even for the second, until the beginning of the First World War, the main direction that Jewish emigrants from Romania left for were the Americas (mainly USA), Europe (mainly England, France, Germany and Switzerland) and Asia including Turkey and Egypt.

New reasons for mass emigration. The forthcoming of the “Black” period

Concerning the reasons for these migrations, author Bar-Avi Israel, in his work titled *A history of Romanian Jews*, vol.1, *Emigrations during 1900*, said on page 6: “One thing is for sure. The Romanian population took no part and had no influence in the exodus. There is not one accusation to the Romanian people in any of the testimonies of documents referring to these migrations”. To have a better idea of the size of the migration movement for the Jews in Romania, at the beginning of the 20th century, we can reproduce an extract from the Ministry of Intern’s Bulletin, contained in L.Colesco’s work *La population de religion Mosaiq en Roumanie*, which makes reference to the emigrations between 1899 and 1909:

- Between 1899-1904 a number of 42,968 Jews emigrated;
- In 1905 a number of 3,406 Jews emigrated;
- In 1906 a number of 3,185 Jews emigrated;
- In 1907 a number of 2,294 Jews emigrated;
- In 1908 a number of 531 Jews emigrated;
- In 1909 a number of 654 Jews emigrated;

**TOTAL 1899-1909** 53,038 Jewish emigrants

For the interwar period, the complex situation and the lack of exact statistics in this area, do not allow a genuine assessment of the migratory movement from Romania at that time. There are however, a series of sources that allow shaping a plausible image for the 3th and 4th decades of the 20th century. What is certain is that, along with the natural migration movement of population, this process was defining for the numeric evolution of Romania’s Jewish population. Although the principles referring to Jewish migration, are not as strong after the Great Unification as they were at the end of the 19th century, the process continues throughout the interwar period. In October 1922, a group of over 300 Jews, arrived in Bucharest from Cernăuţi, Chişinău and Cluj, and migrated to Palestine as many others before them. In the following two years, the number of Jews that arrived in Palestine grew to 2,032, as local reports show. Two years later, until 1928, Jewish migration increases again, this time, mainly due to Jews arriving from Besarabia (about 60% of the Jewish emigrants registered between 1926-1928), with numbers again rising to 2,000-3,000 people per year5, leaving for countries as the US, Argentina, Uruguay and Canada.

The 4th decade slows down the emigration process from Romania but it does not stop it. An interesting fact is that of the parallel emigration and immigration process during the Second World War. After 1940, groups of Jews arrive in Romania in different ways, trying to escape the persecution that the Nazis had started in Germany and Czechoslovakia. Such an example is that of the ship “Spyrcula”, which arrived in Constanţa on the 21st of January 1940, bringing a number of

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5 In 1926 the number of Jewish emigrants went to 2,631; in 1927 to 2,869 and in 1928 it became 3,288.
1,300 refugees from Germany and Czechoslovakia. Still these newcomers will not remain here, but will go on their way to new countries. Starting with this date, due to new conditions imposed on Romania by its entrance in the Axis Forces, the Jews circumstances worsen greatly, and the migration process is accelerated more and more. At the same time, Romania’s status of country at war makes Jewish movement over the border consistently harder. The harsh conditions of WWII, lead to an increase in numbers of Jewish emigrants, but this process will only come to a rapid growth after 1948, when the founding of the State of Israel will redirect and profoundly motivate the migration of Jews from Romania. At the same time, the motivation behind emigration also changes, picking up political and economical aspects. Sadly, reports of this sort from the post-war communist period are close to none, the numbers of those leaving the country during communist rule, being strictly classified.

The proportions of the migration process in the post-war period can be estimated, considering the declining number of Jews in the censuses of 1956, 1966, 1977, 1992 and 2002, correlated with birth rate, death rate and population pyramid. Some general information is required if we are to properly understand this ethnical group’s presence and movement in the Romanian territory, through the course of the 20th century, but mainly in it’s second half.

**Post war migration. Communist regime and Jew migration**

The number and percentage of Jewish population has greatly varied in time, mainly showing a slow but persistent drop. In the 1992 census, Jews represented only 0.04% of the country’s population, being one of the smallest ethnical groups in the country, with only 9,107 people. Ten years later, the number went down to about half, the percentage of Jews reported to the country’s population being only 0.02%. In top periods, it is estimated that Jewish population had come to represent over 4% of the nation’s citizens (between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, up until the 4th decade) up until the 50’s when the population started dropping below this number. By some authors, in 1947 in Romania, lived a number of 428,312 Jews. The large population decrease in a period of 55 years (until 2002), of over 400,000 people can not be explained only by a small birth rate and a large death rate. This difference of 400,000 people is mainly explained by emigration. Correlating these values with the official numbers from the censuses of 1956, 1966, 1977 and 1992, we will find that some corrections are required, in the opinion of the Jewish community. The same author mentioned earlier, shows that a larger number of Jews were present in Romania during the censuses. As such, Harry Kuller speaks of about 450,000 Jews present in 1947, 170,000 in 1956, 60,000 in 1966, 35,000 in 1977, and 15,000 at the census in 1992. According to the numbers cited above, the Jewish population in Romania decreased 75 times compared to 1930 (considering the 1930 census), and 43 times compared to the year 1947. Though the author mentions that the dramatic fall in population after 1947 is mainly due to negative demographics, such as low birth rate and aging population, we must keep in mind that over 300,000 Jews left for Israel, 70,000 for the USA and 10,000 for other countries. At the same time, after 1947, when the communist party takes the power, Romania’s state policy not only discouraged emigration but even restricted it for periods of time. Not only did the level of migration change after 1947, but so did the direction of interest, the new waves of emigrants mainly going to the newly created state.

If, at the beginning of the 20th century, the US was the main destination for Jewish emigrants of Romanian origin, concentrating over 60% (over 150,000 emigrants left for this country between 1890 and 1924), and Palestine standing only on the 15th place as destination, after 1948, with the founding of the State of Israel, things changed. Between the 15th of May 1948 and the end of the year 1951, a number of 117,950 Jews emigrated to Israel. In this case, he year 1951

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6 Harry Kuller in his book *Eight studies of Jewish history on Romanian territory.*
represented the highest point of the movement. After 1952, for a period of eight years, migrations in this direction totalled 32,462 people, much below the raised demands. During the 70’s, the migration process picks-up again and in the next four years, until 1964, a total of 63,549 people emigrate to Israel. These high values, compared to the number of Jews remaining in the country, maintain for the following period (1965-1971), when another 22,635 Jews leave, mostly for the same country. In the period of 1972-1979, in a brief permissive period for emigrations, 18,418 Jews leave the country. In the next years, migration to Israel is close to “strangulated”, with barely 2,000 leaving the country in this period.

Knowing that Romania’s policy towards Jews was in a steep fall, over 130,000 Jews apply for permission to migrate, once the possibility shows itself in 1959. Only 16 years later, in 1975, the migration process was allowed to restart, due to the most favoured nation clause being awarded to Romania. These emigrants left for either Israel or the USA. After this date, migration to Israel gains new meaning: the social and professional structure of the emigrants changes, the number of people with a higher education and a well defined economic status grows, and at the same time the emigrants also changes, as more and more young people emigrate, sometimes even children of former dignitaries from the 50’s up to the 80’s. This socio-professional change along with that of emigrant’s age would later have major repercussions on the numerical evolution of the Jewish population. Right after 1948, up to the end of the 50’s the Jewish population that left was mainly from the middle class (small merchants, handicraftsmen etc.), after the upper class which had already left at the end of the war. In the following stage (1960-1970) the family members that already have relatives in the United States or Israel leave, with the motivation of “reuniting the family”. Many children and adolescents leave in this period. We can observe a major social and professional change in the emigrants after 1970, up to the mid 80’s, when intellectuals and political leaders become a majority, most of them former politicians from 1950-1970, dissatisfied with their position at the time. The thing that will most affect the demographics of Romanian Jews is the departure of the young population, after the 80’s, but mainly after 1989, when all restrictions regarding population movement are raised.

Table number 1. Emigrants by nationality between the years 1975-1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total number of emigrants</th>
<th>of which:</th>
<th>Romanian</th>
<th>Jews</th>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>10,701</td>
<td>3,274</td>
<td>2,176</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>9,336</td>
<td>3,201</td>
<td>1,999</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>17,810</td>
<td>4,778</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>19,780</td>
<td>5,856</td>
<td>1,201</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>17,084</td>
<td>6,134</td>
<td>978</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>24,712</td>
<td>8,276</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>20,886</td>
<td>8,260</td>
<td>1,008</td>
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<td>1982</td>
<td>24,374</td>
<td>9,750</td>
<td>1,401</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>26,300</td>
<td>9,592</td>
<td>1,187</td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>29,894</td>
<td>10,667</td>
<td>1,729</td>
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<td>1985</td>
<td>27,249</td>
<td>10,274</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>26,509</td>
<td>9,412</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>29,168</td>
<td>11,477</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>37,298</td>
<td>12,879</td>
<td>1,048</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>41,363</td>
<td>14,745</td>
<td>1,008</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>96,929</td>
<td>23,888</td>
<td>745</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>44,160</td>
<td>19,307</td>
<td>516</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>31,152</td>
<td>18,104</td>
<td>224</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1993 | 18,446 | 8,814 | 221
1994 | 17,146 | 10,146 | 177
1995 | 25,675 | 18,706 | 131


Interesting is the evolution of the percentage of Jewish population, among the migratory masses preceding 1989, but also in the following years. Though, in the big picture, the number of Jewish emigrants from Romania in the period of 1975-1989 varied from 9,336 people (1976) to as much as 41,363 (1989), the migration trend kept fluctuating between 1,000 and 2,000 people/year. The maximum number was reported in 1975 (2,176), probably due to an opening in this period, while the lowest was recorded merely 4 years later, in 1979 (978) probably due to the constraining policies in this period.

Post communism migration. Some conclusions

The situation after 1989 shows a change of views, but the main characteristics of Jewish migration remain the same. We must take into account the age structure of the Jewish population that remained in the country, considering the fact that most of the population that had desired to leave had already done so. Though after 1989 migration out of Romania maintained itself at a constant level, and was equally permitted to all ethnic groups, the number of Jewish people wishing to emigrate became smaller and smaller. These numbers continued to fall after 1995, thought not as dramatically. The remaining population is either too old or has lost interest in emigrating to Israel or the United States. Those remaining either have a job, or are already retired, and starting a new life elsewhere is not attractive anymore. The few tens of emigrants annually leaving Romania are all young people, with the desire to make a new start in better economic conditions than those offered by Romania. In conclusion, we may say that just like demographic evolution, the migrational movement of the Jews in Romania is part of a fundamental characteristic of this population, being perhaps the defining trait that makes this ethnical group different from the others found on Romanian territory.

References