

**„ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI  
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**Jewish Intellectuals of Iași  
in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
and at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century:  
Elias, Moses and Wilhelm Schwarzfeld**

**- PhD THESIS -  
Summary**

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**IAȘI**

**2022**

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## Introduction

As a result of the Jewish Enlightenment project of modernization initiated by Iuliu Barasch in the Romanian space, Jewish intellectuals of the second generation – a perfectly acculturated generation (Lazăr Șăineanu, Moses Gaster and the Schwarzfeld brothers) took upon them the project of reviving Romanian Judaism, perhaps the most important part thereof being the cultural one. Thus, the institutionalization of Jewish historiography as a scientific discipline in Romania, under the auspices of the emergence of the science of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*), is part of the efforts of Jewish intellectuals to modernize the Jewish minority in Romania.

The stated ambition of these scholars was to popularize culture for the masses in the hope of gaining cultural legitimacy within Romanian culture and, organically, to obtain political and civic legitimacy. Dissatisfied with the cultural backwardness of Romanian Jewry, which still perceived Yiddish as the main language of communication, the self-emancipation program initiated by these Jewish intellectuals mentioned that speaking the language of the country was one way to integrate into Romanian society, as they themselves were the beneficiaries of education within the Romanian public system. The initiative was successful, so that, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Romanian became the mother tongue of the majority of Jews, while Yiddish retained its function as a language of culture, not only among Romanian Jews, but throughout Eastern Europe.

The aim of this research is to make an analysis of the beginnings of Romanian-Jewish historiography in the broader context of European Jewish historiography during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, the present work is a scrutiny of Jewish intellectual history, focusing on the biographies of the spiritual mentors of Romanian Jews during the struggle for emancipation and cultural progress – brothers Elias, Moses and Wilhelm Schwarzfeld. Unlike a classic work on a subject of Jewish history, this work outlines the portrait of a unique Jewish family in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Chapter I

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### The question of Jewish emancipation in Romania

If, during the 1660s and 1670s, the Jewish people were perceived as a diffuse population, as of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after having been granted equal rights to other nationalities, phrases such as "English Jew" or "German Jew" eloquently sum up the whole emancipationist ideology in the Western societies. By association, the term "Romanian Jew" was unthinkable both in theory, in terms of legislation and in the collective mindset.

The naturalization of the Jews in Romania became a favorite topic especially after the 1848 Revolution. The emancipation of the Jews was included in the program of the Moldavian and Wallachian revolutionaries, and although they did not win their fight, the Revolution entailed the context for the integration of the Jews in their adopted country as full citizens.

Alexandru Ioan Cuza's reign seemed to change the fate of the inhabitants of Mosaic faith by the introduction of the principle of gradual emancipation, but this goal was not achieved. The path to the naturalization of the Jews seemed possible after the new Civil Code, promulgated in 1864, was drafted and it included provisions that referred to the possibility of obtaining the Romanian citizenship. After the forced abdication of the ruler who made the Union a fact, Romania joined the 'club' of constitutional monarchies, and the issue of emancipation was high on the Romanian political agenda. Following the intervention of international Jewish organizations, Article 6 of the new draft of the Romanian Constitution provided for the possibility of emancipation of the Israelite population. After heated discussions in the Parliament on this article and a protest of the people against granting rights to Jews, the Constituent Assembly decided to reject emancipation and adopted Article 7 of the Constitution, which formalized the Jewish question in modern Romania.

The outbreak of the Eastern Crisis was a first step in granting Romania her independence. Out of solidarity and devotion to their Romanian homeland, Jews took part in the War for Independence in 1877-1878, despite the fact they were not Romanian citizens at the time. The Congress of Berlin in 1878 brought new hopes to the Jews in terms of an improvement of their civic-political situation, as Article 44 of the Treaty of Berlin was adopted. Nevertheless, it was rejected by the Government. Only 883 Jewish soldiers who took part in the War of Independence were naturalized under a special law. For the Jewish population, the path to emancipation continued until 1923. Following numerous decree-laws

adopted by the Romanian state, which mentioned the conditions for granting Romanian citizenship to Jews, it was only after the 1923 Constitution came into force that the unfortunate Article 7 was replaced by Article 133.

## Chapter II

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### Jewish Romanian historiography in the context of European Jewish historiography

In the spirit of the Haskalah principles, the foundations of a modern Jewish historiography were laid, and this would be of vital importance in the development of the Jewish thinking during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It set out to study Judaism as a religion and as a historical phenomenon, with both an internal purpose (reforming the rituals and dealing with tradition from a scientific perspective) and an external one (seen as a propaganda weapon for emancipation).

Motivated by the desire to reconcile the new ideals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the problematic status of the Jews, seven young Jewish intellectuals founded the "*Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Judentums*" in Berlin in 1819, with the aim of improving the social stand of the Jews and to stop the phenomenon of Jewish conversion to Christianity, which was gaining momentum within the Berlin community. One member of this society, Immanuel Wolf, argued that the establishment of the science of Judaism became a necessity of the period, i.e. it was necessary to bring Judaism in line with the spirit of the times. He also suggested that Jews should be part of the common endeavors of humanity in order to remove the stigma of otherness that dominated their relations with the outside world. Wolf also pointed out the directions of Jewish study: philology, history and philosophy. In order to achieve these goals, therefore, these young people planned to establish educational institutions dedicated to Jewish studies – the literature and history of Judaism.

As a result of these efforts, the work of the first modern historian of the Jews, Heinrich Graetz, was published between 1853 and 1876, *The History of the Jews*, in 11 volumes. Even for today's standards, is still considered a reference work in the field of world Jewish historiography.

The travel notes of Iuliu Barasch, a Maskil born in Galicia, represent the first documentary testimony about the Jews in the Romanian Principalities and they included aspects pertaining to the economic, social, cultural and religious life of the local Jews. In 1861, Barasch also took a stand on the *Israelite question*, having anonymously published in Paris a booklet titled *L'émancipation israélite en Roumanie*. The text was a properly motivated presentation of the plight of the Romanian Jews, being the first propaganda booklet in favor of the civil and political emancipation of Jews in the Principalities.

Jacob Psantir, born in Botoșani in a family of local Jews, is considered the first chronicler of the Jews in Romania. When Article 7 of the Constitution was being debated in the Parliament, he began to look into the past of the Jews in Romania, collecting documents so as to establish their long history in the Romanian lands. He gathered a vast amount of documentary material by deciphering the inscriptions on tombstones and compiled it into a corpus of sources in the two volumes he published in Yiddish, but with Hebrew titles: *Sefer Dibre Haiamim Learțos Rumanie* (Chronicle of the Romanian Principalities) and *Corot Haiehudim be Romania* (History of the Jews in Romania).

The erudite philologist Lazăr Șăineanu can also be considered one of the forerunners of Jewish-Romanian historiography. In the *Anuar pentru israeliți*, Șăineanu published his first biographies and historical studies, together with literary works and translations. In this respect, he is famous for his translation of Barasch's work, *Emanciparea israelită în România* (*The Israelite Emancipation in Romania*). Another one of Șăineanu's historical studies is *Calomnia luării sângelui* (The Blood Libel), which appeared in the *Anuar pentru israeliți*, 1882.

*Israelitul Român*, the newspaper founded by Iuliu Barasch in 1857, is the first Jewish newspaper to publish an article on the antiquity of the Jews, "*Despre vechimea israeliților în țările daco-române*" (On the antiquity of the Israelites in the Daco-Roman lands). Publications such as *Timpul* or *Gazeta Româno-Evreiască*, edited in Iași in 1859, had the same objective as Barasch's newspaper: to mediate the *cultural integration of Jews into the common Romanian homeland*. In contrast, *L'Écho Danubien*, which appeared in 1865 in Galați, was a combative publication which meant to denounce the abuses made by the authorities against Jews. In the same vein, *Vocea Apărătorului* (The Voice of the Defender), published in Iași in 1872, is mentioned in the history of the Romanian-language Jewish press as the first polemic newspaper which aimed to make a stand. It was run by a group of young publicists educated in Romanian schools, including Elias Schwarzfeld, who was a high school student at the time.

*Revista israelită* (The Israelite Review), edited by Rabbi M. Beck, was engaged in researching the Romanian-Jewish historical past and in implicitly supporting the argument in favor of a Jewish lengthy existence in the Romanian lands. In line with the principles of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the magazine's stated agenda emphasized the importance of providing historical evidence to support Jewish claims.



## Chapter III

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### Contributions of the Schwarzfeld brothers to the publishing industry of the time

*The Anuar pentru israeliți* (Yearbook for the Israelites) was the first Romanian publication influenced by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. It also functioned as a reading circle that brought together young Jewish intellectuals of the capital city. It published research papers and studies in the fields of history, epigraphy, philosophy, as well as fiction. The publication was well received both at home and abroad, and was considered the best of its kind by Isidore Loeb, secretary of the Universal Israelite Alliance.

Having been guided by the principles of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the publication aimed to establish an intellectual dialogue between Jews and the Romanian Christian majority.

The *Anuar* ceased publication after its 19<sup>th</sup> year, in 1899, when the editor, Moses Schwarzfeld, decided to devote his efforts entirely to his recent newspaper, *Egalitatea*. The publication revealed a number of firsts: the first Romanian-language Jewish poet – J.B. Brociner; the first novelist to deal with topics pertaining to Jewish life – Elias Schwarzfeld; the first chronicler of the Jews in Romania – Iacob Psantir; the first woman of Jewish origin to write literary sketches in Romanian – Ana Jurescu; the first historians of Jews in Romania – Elias and Moses Schwarzfeld, the first epigraphist – Wilhelm Schwarzfeld, the founders of the first generation of Romanian linguists and philologists – Moses Gaster, Lazăr Șăineanu and I. Candrea.

*Fraternitatea*, founded in 1879, marks the beginning of a new era in Jewish publishing, as it openly fought for equal rights of the Jews in Romania. In 1881, Elias Schwarzfeld became the new editor of *Fraternitatea*, changing the defensive stand of the paper, as it had been influenced by Rabbi Beck, the first editor of the newspaper. *Fraternitatea* is the first publication to succeed in publishing, in a pro-Zionist manner, a series of excerpts and original documents referring to local Jews, thus seeking to demonstrate the ancient history of the Jews on the Romanian lands and the need to grant them equal rights.

*Egalitatea* was founded by Moses Schwarzfeld in 1890, modelled after *Fraternitatea*. The publication focused on Jewish life in all its aspects (the struggle for emancipation and cultural progress, the promotion of Zionist ideology, the fight against anti-Semitism and assimilationist trends), as well as on the political struggle (through the Union of *Local Jews*

and later, the Union of Romanian Jews, which further became the Jewish Party). As of 1907, the newspaper became involved in the political Zionist movement, becoming the official outlet of the Jewish National Fund. In 1910, the newspaper joined the Union of Local Jews (*Uniunea Evreilor Pământenii* – U.E.P.), which promoted the interests of the community both in the country and abroad. In terms of political representation, the Union (which was renamed *Uniunea Evreilor Români* – the Union of Romanian Jews in February 1923) took action to eliminate discrimination in the granting of civil and political rights to Jews of the Country.

*Egalitatea* is the longest-running newspaper of the Jewish community, having been published continuously from the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the late 1940s.

## Chapter IV

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### **The Institutionalization of Jewish historiography in Romania: the „Iuliu Barasch” Historical Society and the importance of the „Iuliu Barasch” Historical Society’s Annals**

As the phenomenon of historical reconstruction was in full swing in Israelite societies in countries such as Germany (the Society for Jewish Culture and Science) and France (the Society for Israelite Studies), where the stage of research was quite advanced, such an approach was also asked for by the Jewish society in Romania. The idea of establishing a historical research centre took shape on June 26, 1886 in Bucharest, when the first scientific society of the Jews in Romania – the "Iuliu Barasch" Historical Society – was founded. This time, too, the founder of the society was Moses Schwarzfild, who was the first secretary of the institution and who focused on the research work.

The historical society was named after the Galician scholar Iuliu Barasch, who had not been a well-known historian, but reminded of the personality of a great scientist and an eminent Romanian writer who had first shown interest in the past of the Jews in the Romanian lands, a topic he devoted a cultural-historical study to.

The aim of the society was to investigate, on a scientific basis, the past of Romanian Jews. The society existed for five years, during which time the creative work of its members resulted in the publication of *the Annals of the „Iuliu Barasch” Historical Society*. Among the members of the society we find Elias Schwarzfild, Wilhelm Schwarzfild, Iacob Psantir (the chronicler of Piatra Neamț and the explorer of cemeteries in Bucharest), H. Bejarano, M. Gaster, I. Kaufman, M. Braunstein-Mibachan and others.

Moses Schwarzfild was always at the core of the work of this society and the one who made a deep intellectual effort to recover Jewish past in Romania. In spite of a prodigious scientific activity, the *Annals* ceased publication for the same reason as the *Yearbook*: the establishment of a permanent periodical – *Egalitatea* – led Moses Schwarzfild to focus on administrative and editorial efforts to the detriment of historical and folkloristic work. Schwarzfild responded to need of the Jewish society to have her own press outlet whose stated aim was to defend her interests.

## Chapter V

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### The Schwarzfeld family – the first family of modern Jewish intellectuals in the Romanian space

The Schwarzfeld family was a force of the Jewish intellectual world in Romania during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At a time when the Jewish world in Moldavia was haunted by "darkness" and fanaticism, Benjamin Schwarzfeld, together with other *Maskils* of Iași, sent an impulse of modernization by founding several schools.

Maskil **Benjamin Schwarzfeld** was born in 1822 in the small town of Stanislav, Galicia. After reaching Iași, Benjamin Schwarzfeld became a true emissary of modern Jewish culture and a respected banker. With the support of his brothers-in-law, Bernhard and M.E. Finkelstein, Benjamin Schwarzfeld founded the Israelite boys' school in 1853, and was also a proponent of the modernization of Jewish dress, according to the European model. His sons – Elias, Moses and Wilhelm Schwarzfeld – were brought up in the spirit of escaping from the spiritual ghetto and became continuous of his work, albeit in other fields.

**Moses Schwarzfeld** was born in Iași on 8/20 December 1857. After a stint at the *cheder* (Jewish traditional school), Moses Schwarzfeld attended the "Iosef Broder" institute where he learned to speak Romanian. After that, he went to the "*Sfântul Sava*" primary school and the "*Trei ierarhi*" school, graduating in 1871. In 1874, Moses made his debut as a publicist in the *Revista Israelită* of Iași. For two years, he was a medicine student in Bucharest, after which he decided not to continue and joined the students of the Faculty of Letters. During this period, he helped print the first *Calendar pentru israeliți* (*Calendar for Israelites*), under the editorship of A. L. Löbel. As a publicist, Moses Schwarzfeld made a name for himself in the pages of the *Fraternitatea* newspaper, where he first wrote simple notes and travel descriptions, and later signed polemical articles. He was also a great biographer and memoirist. His work at *Egalitatea* was put to an end in 1940, when the newspaper was closed down.

**Elias Schwarzfeld** was the first son of Benjamin and Chaia Schwarzfeld. He was born in Iași on 7/19 March 1855. He learned Hebrew and the first notions of Judaism at the *cheder* run by Zellig Melamed and at the "Broder" school, after which he attended the "*Sfântul Sava*" and the "*Trei Ierarhi*" schools in Iași. In 1872, together with other young publicists educated in Romanian schools, he founded the first polemic Jewish newspaper – *Vocea Apărătorului*.

As first editor of the *Fraternitatea* newspaper, he denounced the persecution faced by Jews by publishing polemic articles about the expulsion of the Jews from the locality of Brusturoasa and the pamphlet " *Adevărul asupra revoltei de la Brusturoasa*" (The Truth about the revolt of Brusturoasa). As a result, the journalist was expelled along with ten other Jewish intellectuals. He settled in Paris, where he continued his research into the history of Jews in Romania. He was a member of the J.C.A. (Jewish Colonisation Association), an organization that encouraged Jewish emigration from Romania to Canada and the United States.

**Wilhelm Schwarzfeld** was born in Iași on May 22, 1856 and died at the age of 38, on February 22, 1894. He was initiated into the study of Hebrew by his father, Benjamin Schwarzfeld, and by M. Braunstein-Mibaschan. After graduating from high-school and receiving a bachelor degree, he became a student at the Faculty of Letters in Iași, but later decided not to continue his education there, devoting his time to individual study. In 1880, he settled in Bucharest to resume his studies in Letters and remained there until November 1885. After the expulsion of his brother Elias and the close-down of the *Fraternitatea* newspaper, he returned to Iași, where he explored tomb inscriptions in the local Jewish cemetery together with archaeologist Nicolae Beldiceanu and Judaism scholar M. Braunstein-Mibaschan. He returned to Bucharest to write at the *Egalitatea* newspaper for almost four years.

## Chapter VI

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### The Schwarzfeld brothers: founders of the modern historiography of the Jews in Romania

After the establishment of the „Iuliu Barasch” Historical Society – a group of Romanian-Jewish historical researchers founded by the Jewish intelligentsia after the model of European and Romanian historiography – they became more aware of the importance of methodology in the field of historical research. The members of the society awarded the Jews of Romania a first summary of their history in the Romanian lands, meaning that they were also "the initiators of a trend of historiographical opinions". Brothers Elias, Moses and Wilhelm Schwarzfeld were the first to write a history of the Jews in the Romanian context, having thus outlined the particular features of their history.

Elias Schwarzfeld's historical studies, which appeared in various publications, were genuine analyses of Jewish communal life in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, of the relationship between Jews and Romanians, of their legal status and their overwhelming role in Romanian economic life. Elias Schwarzfeld's studies of history can also be found in the pages of the *Egalitatea* newspaper, among sketches, stories, novellas and historical novels. He contributed to the popularization of Jewish history through the series titled "*Momente importante din istoria evreilor*" (Important Moments in Jewish History), where he provided his readers with pieces of information based on a solid documentation of Romanian sources.

In his capacity as specialist in legal issues, Elias approached the Jewish question from a legal point of view and published a work on the legal status of the Jews at various times: *Les Juifs en Roumanie, depuis le traité de Berlin (1878) jusqu'à ce jour. Les lois et leur conséquences*. This work underlined Elias Schwarzfeld's polemic with Radu Rosetti (Verax), author of *La Roumanie et les juifs*, written at the order of the liberal government led by D.A. Sturdza.

In the field of historiography, Moses Schwarzfeld began as a simple collector of documents and oral traditions, but later became a chronicler and completed his works by publishing the summary of the *Annals of the "Iuliu Barasch" Historical Society*, as well as an extensive monograph dedicated to Iuliu Barasch, published in 1919. Like his brother Elias, Moses followed historical sources, showing the contribution of Jews to the modernization of Romania.

Moses Schwarzfeld published the first summaries on the history of the Jews in Romania, the scientific reports of the „Iuliu Barasch” Historical Society: "A look at the

history of the Jews in Romania from the beginning until the middle of the century", "Critical insights on the history of the Jews in Romania from the beginning until the middle of the century", "Moments in the history of the Jews in Romania". These works had the same thematic structure and they completed each other in terms of information.

Unlike the other brothers, Wilhelm Schwarzfeld was less interested in the field of history, being mainly concerned with Hebrew grammar. His cultural and epigraphic studies, published in the *Yearbook for Israelites* and in the *Annals of the „Iuliu Barasch” Historical Society*, are valuable pages in the cultural history of Romanian Jewry.

## Conclusions

Modernity confronted the Jewish world with multiple dilemmas: tradition versus the Haskalah; autonomy versus integration/assimilation/conversion; struggle for emancipation versus emigration and Zionism; communal solidarity versus socialism, etc. Only some of the Jews have firm, clear-cut options. Most live in a reality of multiple identities.

Jewish intellectuals, having been aware of the role they assumed or which was assigned to them, of leaders, of spiritual guides and cultural strategists, felt a huge responsibility towards which they generally responded with moderation. Most of them lobbied for the integration of Jews into the larger Romanian society and set a personal example by specializing in areas of Romanian culture or producing Romanian-language literature in which the important topics of the time were discussed. Given the mentions found throughout this work, we can speak of the presence of generic precursors of Jewish-Romanian historiography researchers that led to the popularization of names such as Barasch, Psantir and Șăineanu, but, when taking into consideration the contribution of the Schwarzfeld brothers, we witnessed the entry into a professional stage of Jewish historiography.

Characterized by a modern concept of history, the Schwarzfeld brothers, along with their peers, made intense efforts to reconstruct the past of Romanian Jews. Elias, although lacking proper conditions for historical research, with limited access to Romanian archives and to document collections following his expulsion in 1885, was a genuine historian who studied documents of overwhelming significance for the legal status of Romanian Jewry. Moses Schwarzfeld is the founder of the first publication dedicated to the literature and history of Judaism in Romania, *Anuar pentru israeliți*, which was an intellectual melting pot that focused on knowledge and research in the humanities. The interest in historical research shown by the intellectuals who contributed to the *Anuar* was so strong that M. Schwarzfeld also founded the first society dedicated to the professional, methodological study of the history of Romanian Jews, which aimed to write about the history of the local Jews based on historical and documentary sources. Because of his poor health, Wilhelm Schwarzfeld, the third figure of this paper, did not write works of a similar level to those of Elias and Moses, but he will be forever remembered for his contributions in the field of epigraphy, as well as his studies of cultural history and the grammar of the Hebrew language.

At the micro level, this PhD thesis outlines the life and work of the Schwarzfeld family, but, at the same time, it opens up other research topics, such as the development of Jewish



historiography during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The results of these scholarly endeavors set the basis for future research institutes on Romanian Judaism, under the modern vision determined by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Moreover, in the background, the results led to the shaping of an argument in the later debate on granting political rights to local Jews and, last but not least, to the documentation and legitimization of the ancient presence of Jews in the Romanian space.

On the basis of these preliminary ideas, one can conclude that the role of the Schwarzfeld brothers was essential in establishing modern Jewish historiography as a scientific field in Romania.

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