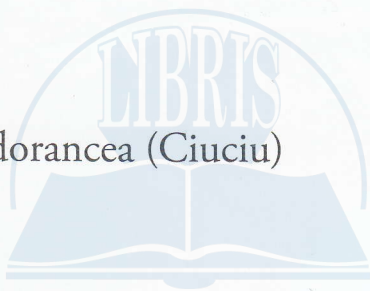


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Tales and Traces of SEPHARDIC BUCHAREST



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Why yet another book about Jewish Bucharest?

When our first volume, *Stories and Images of Jewish Bucharest*, published in 2011 in 1000 copies in Romanian and 1000 in English, went out of print in less than two years, it became obvious that there was more at work than the readers' interest (which was expectable given that the topic was relatively new in Romanian literature and imagery). The book's success also revealed a visible and genuine need to recover a past which today survives only in the memory of those who lived it, as its physical traces are lost forever, and which should for that very reason be saved, before it is too late, through the creation of a resource material in which both the experts and the general public may find some landmarks that could eventually become starting points for further investigations.

Just like its predecessor, this new volume is meant to be an open door to a world that nowadays seems drawn from a fairy tale, a beginning, a first step designed to incite the reader's curiosity and convince him or her, regardless of whether he or she is an expert or just someone interested in the city's history, to start looking for more sources and information about the presence and contribution of the Sephardim (as well as the Ashkenazim, and the other minorities) to the development and modernization of Bucharest. Given the flourishing of a genuine cultural movement determined to recover the Romanian capital's history, with numerous articles, books and albums appearing at an impressive pace, the efforts (and implicitly the results) would be incomplete if they did not take into account this aspect, which is in some respects indispensable, considering that in certain fields Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews (and minorities in general) were road openers. Without Sephardic bankers like Hillel Manoach or Solomon Halfon, who helped the state (Wallachia and Moldova in the first half of the 19th century and respectively Romania after 1859) with loans, and without their sons, who facilitated the much needed connections with the international banking system, Romanian economy would have had a much harder time trying to access the European market, and the establishment of the National Bank would have taken much longer.¹ Without Leon Alcalay or Simon Benvenisti Romanian and world literature would have been infinitely less accessible to the ordinary reader, with reduced financial possibilities, and without Dan Mizrahi, Mauriciu Cohen Lănuaru or Abraham Levi Ivela Romanian music would certainly not have been what it is today.

1. Emmanuel Hillel Manoach, Hillel Manoach's elder son, was elected the third of the first four censors of the Romanian National Bank (RNB) upon its establishment in 1880, with no less than 1414 votes out of a total of 2719 (minutes of July 15, 1880, RNB Archive, Administration Board fund, file 62, document 0, page 8).

CALENDARUL
CLAPONULUI
 ALMANAH HAZLIU ȘI POPULAR
 PE ANUL DELA MAHOMET
 1295
 DELA CHRISTOS
 1878
 ORCINE VA DA
50 de Bănuți
 VA CĂPÊTA ACEST ALMANAH
 GRATIS

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Este bine asortată cu tot felul
 de **cărți didactice** pentru cur-
 sul primar și secundar în limbe-
 le Română, Franceză, Germană
 și Elenă.

Asemenea se recomandă cu un
 bogat asortiment de **Papoterie**
 și **matrăi necesare pentru scribi,**
 cu prețuri foarte mode-
 rate.

In its turn, Romanian medicine would have been far poorer without Otilia Moscuna, the initiator of the special education system for children with mental disabilities, or Nicolae Cajal, the internationally renowned virologist.

The reader will thus discover, between the covers of this new album-book, yet another... puzzle. Old and new images, success stories and accounts about characters that once populated Sephardic Bucharest, are set before him so that by organizing them in various combinations he may get an overall picture of this world, which is today only virtual, but which is still too beautiful to be forgotten. For it is not just the synagogues and community buildings that have disappeared, but also the Sephardim themselves; of those who once represented the majority of Bucharest's Jews, so few are left now that one can almost count them on one's fingers.² This book is dedicated to them.

2. Following the departure from Romania of the last Sephardic rabbi, Sabetay Djaen, at the end of World War II, and the assumption by the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Alexander Șafran of its leadership, the Sephardic community ceased to exist as an independent entity, given that the number of Sephardim had considerably decreased, and became a section of the Ashkenazi community. The section disappeared, in its turn, in the '60s, for lack of members.

Rabbi Chaim Bejarano
 in the centre





The Sephardic Trail: From the Ottoman Empire to the Romanian Principalities

The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire

The success of the 14th and 15th century Ottoman military campaigns was beneficial for the Jews. Upon their conquest of Bursa, in 1324, the Ottoman troops found there a Romaniote Jewish community that had been persecuted for ages by the Byzantines. During the following period, the Ottoman lands became a safehaven for the Jews fleeing repression and expulsion from various parts of Europe, such as Hungary, France, Spain, Sicily or Bavaria. When Sultan Bayezid II invited them to settle in his Empire, under the motto “let the West’s foolishness be my gain” (or in the famous words attributed to him “you venture to call Ferdinand a wise ruler, he who has impoverished his own country and enriched mine!”), through the famous decree that guaranteed their security, ordering the governors of all the empire’s provinces not just not to refuse their entry, but, on the contrary, to receive them with open arms and give them all the necessary assistance for settling in their new home, many Sephardim migrated to the Balkans and assimilated into the Romaniote communities they found there, which they soon outnumbered and swallowed. But they also set up new, “Spanish” communities, such as those in Salonica, Nicopole and Rusciuk (today Russe). The members of these communities were merchants, tailors, blacksmiths, glassblowers, weavers, painters, jewelers, weapon manufacturers, doctors, pharmacists, moneylenders and diplomats, and they facilitated trading and political relations with the two Romanian Principalities, establishing and developing Sephardic communities there too.¹

History proved Bayezid right, for Jews indeed brought prosperity to the Ottoman Empire. The Sephardim settled mainly in Constantinople/Istanbul, Salonica, Adrianople/Edirne, Nicopole, Jerusalem, Safed, Damascus, Cairo, Prusa/Bursa, Tokat and Amasia in Anatolia. The most important Sephardic center was undoubtedly Salonica, where the Spanish Jews outnumbered not only the other Jewish groups but also the native inhabitants. For over a century ladino was the official language of the city.²

During the 17th century, Sephardim coming from Italy, Spain and even France, including a number of Maranos, continued to settle in Anatolia. Some converted to Islam, but most returned to Judaism. Halfway through the century, when the conditions in Salonica started deteriorating, Jewish preferences moved towards Smyrna/Izmir, but also the Balkans (Monastir, Skopje) and the island of Corfu.

1. Eugen Bernard Denize, “The Sephardic Jews in Wallachia and Moldova, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries,” in Paul Cernovodeanu (ed.), *The History of the Jews in Romania*, vol. 1, *From its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*, Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2005, p. 62.

2. Bülent Şenay, “Communal Autonomy of the Jewish *Millet* in the Ottoman-Turkish Tradition,” in Felicia Waldman (ed.), *Studia Hebraica* no.6/2006, University of Bucharest Press, p. 81-82.