

SEPHARDIC JEWS IN WALLACHIA AND MOLDAVIA UNTIL THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The history of the Romanian people and of the space inhabited by them also had, among its fundamental characteristics, a continuous contact with the neighboring peoples, the ones living away or on the Romanian territory. The permanent contact between the Romanians and the populations established in the Carpathian-Pontic-Danubian space enriched the history of the Romanians, developed their economy and added lustre to their culture, enabling them to join the major European and world trends.

The Jewish people had undoubtedly a major part to play in the history of the Romanians. The Jews, owing to the unparalleled richness of their culture, their trading and financial abilities, their vast political contacts and relations, especially in the Ottoman Empire, but also in Poland, Hungary and the Habsburg Empire, gave new dimensions to the history of the Romanians, most of all in terms of its belonging and contribution to world history.

As to the Sephardic Jews, the ones who make the object of this study, I should begin by explaining the origin of the name. The words *Sephardic* and *sephardism* come from the name *saphard*, which in the *Bible* and the Judaic tradition designates, very likely, the Iberian Peninsula.¹ Therefore, Sephardic designates the Spanish Jews and their descendants after 1492, the year when they were expelled from Spain.

Spanish Judaism was of rabbinic culture, more exactly it was scholastic and not sacerdotal.² The Rabbi had two teachings: *halakha*, which included behavioral rules, and *haggada* or the oral teaching, which included the historical tradition.³ In time, education was organized on two levels: *Beth-ha-sefer* or the House of the Book, the inferior form of education, and *Beth-ha-midrash*, the superior one. Both were based on the learning of the Torah, Talmud and Cabala.⁴ The most prominent figure of Spanish Judaism, even if having spent most of his life outside Spain, was undoubtedly the famous Maimonides (1135-1204).⁵ After 1492, many Sephardic intellectuals in exile would make themselves known, the most outstanding of them being Michel de Montaigne and Baruch Spinoza.

¹ *Diccionario de historia de España*, dirigido por Germán Bleiberg, tomo tercero, N-Z, Madrid, 1969, p. 630.

² Luis Suárez Fernández, *Les Juifs espagnols au Moyen Âge*. Traduit de l'espagnol et préfacé par Rachel Israël-Amsaleg, Paris, 1983, p. 37.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 93-100.

What were the causes which led to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492? Undoubtedly, one cannot speak of a sole cause, but rather of a complex of causes which led to this tragic break, the most tragic in the history of the Jewish people until the Nazi holocaust, such as considered by Josy Eisenberg.⁶ It was mainly the wish of the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castilla, to take hold of the fortunes of the Jews,⁷ the fact that the two, relying on the town patricians, were forced to make a concession and oust the Jews,⁸ just like they gave in to the pressures of the nobility, the feudal lords, to whom they offered a victory over the latter, who represented commercial capitalism,⁹ and, eventually, were also forced to give satisfaction to the hostility towards the Jews which was becoming ever more strong among the lower classes of society.¹⁰

However, the expulsion of the Jews did not occur all at once in 1492. It was preceded by the anti-Jewish laws adopted by the *cortes* of Madrigal in 1476,¹¹ and by the partial expulsions of 1483 from Seville, Cádiz and Córdoba.¹² The decree signed by the Catholic Monarchs on 31 March 1492 stipulated the expulsion of all the Jews who would not turn Christian. However, one should note that the decree in question did not have an anti-Semite character, but rather a religious and political one, Ferdinand and Isabella being unwilling to accept on the territory of Spain any religions other than the Catholic faith. This would explain the expulsion of the Moors in 1501, a partial one, followed by the total expulsion of 1609. This intransigence of the Spanish royalty carried the germs of what one should call a totalitarianism “avant la lettre”.

Faced with this difficult alternative of turning Christian or having to leave the country, some of the Spanish Jews, approximately 50,000, accepted the Baptism,¹³ thus becoming the victims to be of the Inquisition, but most of the Jews chose to leave the country. Such as believed by Luis Suárez Fernández, a maximum of 160,000 left the country, but more likely a little over 100,000.¹⁴ Josy Eisenberg believes 150,000 Jews to have left,¹⁵ and Raoul Siniol, 165,000.¹⁶ According to Raoul Siniol, the Jews who left Spain had the following destinations: 3,000 left for France; 9,000 for Italy; 21,000 for The Netherlands, England and Hamburg; 1,000 for Greece and Hungary; 93,000 for Turkey; 20,000 for Morocco; 10,000 for Algeria; 2,000 for Egypt; and, 5,000 for America.¹⁷ Even if these figures

⁶ Josy Eisenberg, *O istorie a evreilor*. Translation by Jean Roşu, Bucharest, 1993, p. 222.

⁷ L.S. Fernández, *op.cit.*, p. 283.

⁸ S. Haliczzer, *The Castilian Urbain Patriciate and the Jewish Expulsion of 1492*, in “American Historical Review”, nos. 7-8, 1973, pp. 35-58.

⁹ H. Kamen, *La Inquisición española*, Madrid, 1973, p. 73.

¹⁰ L. S. Fernández, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 289-290.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 290-292.

¹³ J. Eisenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

¹⁴ L. S. Fernández, *op. cit.*, pp. 300-301.

¹⁵ J. Eisenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

¹⁶ Raoul Siniol, *Portrete și schițe sefarde*, Jerusalem, 1981, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 12-13.

are approximate and could suffer alteration after subsequent research work, it is quite clear that over half of the expelled Spanish Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire, where they were able to enjoy the typical religious tolerance of the Turks and the numerous privileges which allowed them to carry on with their trades.

After expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, the history of the Jews recorded a period characterized by the development of settlements in the central and eastern basin of the Mediterranean.¹⁸ Most of the Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Peninsula, where they came upon the descendants of old communities of Byzantine Jews (*romaim*), whom they eventually assimilated owing to their superior culture. This region lying at the crossroads of the main commercial roads in Central and South-East Europe attracted the Spanish Jews who settled there and founded in the main towns communities with very well organized institutions, such as the Rabbinic Courts of Nicopolis and Rusciuk, and in other towns of lesser importance, factories and warehouses. The activity of the Balkan communities contributed to the development of economic and political contacts with Wallachia and Moldavia, paving the way for a transplant of the Spanish communities into the Romanian geographic space.¹⁹

One should also note in relation with the Spanish Jews who took refuge in the Ottoman Empire that in the mid-sixteenth century, only in Constantinople and Salonika, their number had risen to approximately 160,000.²⁰ The privileges granted by the Turks and the Turkish religious tolerance can explain why the Sephardic Jews preferred the Balkan Peninsula. There, they were able to practice their religion and trades. Therefore, the Spanish Jews who took refuge in the Ottoman Empire were rabbis, merchants, tailors, blacksmiths, glass blowers, weavers, dyers, goldsmiths, armourers, physicians, pharmacists, usurers, and diplomats.²¹ The towns of Salonika, Nicopolis and Rusciuk, owing to their strong Judeo-Spanish communities, contributed in a considerable way to the development of commerce in Wallachia and Moldavia.

This rather massive relocation of the Sephardic Jews to the Balkan Peninsula had demographic and economic consequences, but more important than these was the considerable cultural impact. Cultural centers of great complexity were set up in vicinity of the Romanian Principalities, Salonika counting as one of the most important.²² Quite significant is the fact that in the rabbinic literature of the time Salonika was defined as a “mother-town in Israel”.²³ Even if in Moldavia and

¹⁸ Irina Heinic, *Când s-au stabilit primii evrei sefarzi în Țările Române?*, in “Revista culturii mozaic”, XV, no 238, 1 October 1970, p. 5.

¹⁹ Victor Eskenasy, *Jews, Romanians and Ottomans. Some Political Aspects of their Relations in Moldavia (Fifteenth – Sixteenth Centuries)*, in *Romanian Jewish Studies*, Chief Editor Jean Ancel, Editor Leon Volovici, I, Jerusalem, 1987, pp. 7-14.

²⁰ Fernand Braudel, *Mediterana și lumea mediteraneană în epoca lui Filip al II-lea*. Translation by Mircea Gheorghe, Bucharest, vol. IV, 1986, p. 176.

²¹ Victor Neumann, *Istoria evreilor din România. Studii documentare și teoretice*, Timișoara, 1996, p. 22.

²² I.M. Goldman, *The Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra. A Social, Economic and Cultural Study of Jewish Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries as Reflected in the Responsa RDBZ*, New York, 1970.

²³ Victor Eskenasy, *Studiu introductiv to Izvoare și mărturii referitoare la evreii din România*, (to be further quoted as *Izvoare și mărturii*), vol. I, edited by Victor Ezkenasy, Bucharest, 1986, p. XXIV.

Wallachia the existence of the Sephardic Jews would become important only in the middle and second half of the sixteenth century, it is without doubt that the presence of the Jews north of the Danube must have been made itself know earlier. In any case, the development of the commercial centers on the Danube line, from Belgrade, Vidin and Nicopolis, laid the premises for the penetration of Jewish merchants, especially of Sephardic origin, in the Romanian space. The fact that the Jews came to control the main customs points on the Danube was a first step in this direction.

Commercial interests were not the only reason for the settlement of the Sephardic Jews first in Wallachia, and subsequently in Moldavia. They chose to settle here also owing to the hospitality of the population and of some of the ruling princes, who had an interest in developing trades and commerce in a fledgling country.²⁴ The way in which the Sephardic Jews were welcomed in Wallachia made Hary Kuller assert that Wallachia had become an East-European haven for the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula.²⁵

As to the concrete presence of the Spanish Jews in the Romanian Principalities, the first Sephardic Jew who came here, at the court of Stephen the Great, was the physician Isaac beg, ambassador of the Shah of Persia, Uzun Hasan, sent on a mission to Moldavia and further on to Venice.²⁶ This physician and ambassador of Uzun Hasan is mentioned in the diplomatic correspondence of the time as being of “*natione Hispanus, fide autem Hebraeus*”.²⁷ From Stephen the Great’s Court, Isaac beg set out for Venice, where he arrived in the second half of 1472.²⁸ At the end of this year, or at the beginning of 1473, Isaac beg was to return to Uzun Hasan, after having won the adhesion of Pope Sixt IV to the anti-Ottoman struggle and the alliance with the Persian Shah, as well as, very likely, with other Italian princes. On his return, he stopped in Buda, and possibly in Krakow, Suceava and Vaslui. He may have also spent some time at the court of Stephen the Great, attending the prince’s wound in the foot.²⁹ After the battle of Erzindjan (10 August 1473) in which Uzun Hasan was defeated, Isaac beg returned to Moldavia, probably by the end of 1473 or the beginning of 1474, with two letters by the Shah, one to Stephen the Great and another for Matthias Corvinus, in which the Shah was reasserting his anti-Ottoman policy and was trying to refuel the crusade spirit of the

²⁴ Raoul Siniol, *Momente sefarde. Cu prilejul jubileului de 250 de ani al Comunității sefarde din București*, Jerusalem, 1980, p. 15.

²⁵ Hary Kuller, *Opt studii despre istoria evreilor din România*, Bucharest, 1997, p. 51.

²⁶ *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, doc. 14, pp. 12-14; Nicolae Iorga, *Veneția în Marea neagră. III. Originea legăturilor cu Ștefan cel Mare și mediul politic al dezvoltării lor*, Bucharest, 1914, pp. 14-16; Mayer A. Helevy, *Le rôle d’Isaac-Beg, médecin et ambassadeur de Uzun-Hassan en Moldavie et dans les pays voisins*. Communication présentée au XV^e Congrès International d’Histoire de la Médecine, Madrid, 1956, 19 p.; idem, *Médecins Juifs d’origine Hispano-Portugaise dans les pays roumains*, extrait de la “Revue d’histoire de la médecine hébraïque”, Mars, 1957, no. 35, pp. 22-23; V. Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

²⁷ M.A. Halevy, *Médecins Juifs*, p. 23.

²⁸ *Idem*, *Le rôle d’Isac Beg*, p. 7.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

two.³⁰ It goes without saying that these attempts ended in failure, neither Uzun Hasan, nor Venice, and not even Stephen the Great being able to check off the expansion of the Ottoman Empire.

This singular presence of a Spanish Jew in Stephen the Great's Moldavia was followed after 1492 by an ever more numerous presence of the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain, at the beginning in Wallachia, and subsequently in Moldavia. Undoubtedly, the presence of the Sephardic Jews was more numerous in Wallachia, owing to its proximity to the Ottoman Empire and the commercial towns on the Danube, and less important in Moldavia, where the main body of Jews would come from the north, more exactly from Poland.

The first Sephardic Jews reached Wallachia, very likely, around 1496,³¹ and Moldavia in the time of Ștefăniță (Stephen IV), Stephen the Great's grandson, between 1517 and 1527. The Russian traveler of Dutch origin Leyon Pierce Balthasar von Compenhausen (1746-1808), who traveled through Moldavia during the Russian-Turkish war of 1787-1791, noted that in the time of Ștefăniță a colony of Spanish Jews was granted the right to settle in the country, these Jews continuing to speak Spanish,³² and their books being written in Spanish, however with Hebraic characters.³³

After these somewhat timid beginnings, the commercial and especially political interests made that an ever greater number of Sephardic Jews from the Ottoman Empire crossed the Danube to the north, most of them establishing themselves in Wallachia, and a smaller number in Moldavia. The history of these Jews can be divided, according to Meyer A. Halevy, the opinion of whom I share completely, into two major stages, more exactly: since 1496 and until the beginning of the Phanariot reigns in 1711, and since that moment until 1821, when the revolution of Tudor Vladimirescu ended the Phanariot regimes.³⁴

The time of the flourishing commercial relations of the Jews with the Romanian Principalities began towards the mid-sixteenth century. They included the commerce of transit, as well as credits and loans, many of these loans being granted to the ruling princes. These relations were also enabled to flourish owing to

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³¹ Bonifacius' Chronicle, *Rerum Hungaricarum*, 1586, p. 718; I. Heinic, *art. cit.*, p. 5; Raoul Siniol, *Momente sefarde*, pp. 17-18.

³² The Sephardic Jews expelled in 1492 have preserved to this day, with some alterations, the Spanish language of the fifteenth century (Marius Sala, *Phonétique et phonologie du judéo-espagnol de Bucarest*, Paris, 1971, p. 12).

³³ Leyon Pierce Balthasar von Campenhausen, *Bemerkungen über Russland besonders einige kroninzen dieses reiches und ihre Naturgeschichte betreffend, nebst einer kurzgefassten Geschichte der Zaporozjar Kosaken, Bessarabiens, der Moldau und der Krimm*, Leipzig, 1807, apud Matei Cazacu, *Un voyageur dans les Pays Roumains et son Histoire de la Moldavie: Leyon Pierce Balthasar von Campenhausen (1746-1808)*, in vol. *Național și universal în istoria românilor. Studii oferite prof.dr. Șerban Papacostea cu ocazia împlinirii a 70 de ani*, Bucharest, 1998, p. 411.

³⁴ Mayer A. Halevy, *Comunitățile evreiești din Iași și București până la Zaveră (1821)*, in "Sinai. Anuar de studii judaice", vol. III, Bucharest, 1931, p. 16.

the religious tolerance of the Romanians, who allowed the Jews to carry on their activities.³⁵ Owing to this evolution, in the mid-sixteenth century the first community of Sephardic Jews appeared in Bucharest, and was attested as such in a large number of documents. Therefore, one may note in 1550 a *responsa*, that is a Rabbinic Court Order,³⁶ issued by Samuel of Medina (1505-1589), rabbi of Salonika, at the request of some Jews established in Bucharest, in relation to the death of a Jew. The incident was the robbery of 4,000 and 1,600 aspres from the store of Isaac Rufus and Halich Amato, and the death of a Jewish servant occurred under obscure circumstances. The witnesses included Moses Angel and Samuel Estrelega. This *responsa* demonstrates the existence of a stable Sephardic community provided with its own institutions, among which Samuel of Medina also mentions “The Court of the Elders of the Community and of Its Scholars”.³⁷

The presence of this Sephardic community in Bucharest is also attested by the deed recording the case Arsen, son of Ushen, versus the Jew Mosko, concerning the price of the wool and silk brought from Salonika, which the latter had sold to the former,³⁸ the *responsa* of 1559 of the rabbi of Nicopolis, Josef Karo, who, referring to the murdering of a Jew in the village of Dridov, near Bucharest, also mentions the Sephardic Jews living in Bucharest, who were having direct contacts with Prince Mircea Ciobanul,³⁹ and the *responsa* of 15 June 1564 issued in Nicopolis by Judge Mordechai Tival, Judge Şlomo Saltiel and Judge Şlomo Țarfati concerning the murdering in 1562, in Wallachia, by three Greeks, of the Sephardim Jew Iţhak Bar Josef Castro of Adrianople, near the village of Orbeasca, on the Teleorman, near the Danube,⁴⁰ the will of the Sephardic Jew Simon, who died in Wallachia at a date that is difficult to define,⁴¹ as well as other documents no less important.

³⁵ B.P. Hasdeu, *Istoria toleranţei religioase în România*, Bucharest, 1868, p. 79.

³⁶ On the responses and their significance, see I. Kara (Iţic Şvart), *Jewish Sources on the History of the Jews in Romania*, in vol. *Studia et acta historiae iudeorum Romaniae*, I, Tel Aviv University, 1996, pp. 7-9.

³⁷ *Izvoare şi mărturii*, I, doc. 38, p. 3031; Mayer A. Halevy, *Din arhiva judaismului român. I. Documente din secolul XVI cu privire la Comunitatea spaniolă din Bucureşti. II. Comunitatea din Iaşi în literatura rabinică veche a Poloniei (înainte de 1848)*, in “Sinai. Revistă pentru studii judaice”, I, no 4, July-August 1926, p. 72 ; idem, *Comunităţile evreieşti din Iaşi şi Bucureşti*, pp. 41-42; J. Almuly, *Scurt istoric al comunităţii israeliţilor de rit spaniol d Bucureşti*, in “Revista culturii mozaic din R.P.R.”, an IX, no 107, August 1964, p. 2.

³⁸ S. Panova, *The Jewish Population of the City of Sofia (During the Seventeenth Century)*, in *Annual*, XV, Sofia, 1980, p. 45; G. Galabov, H. Duda, *Die Protokolibücher des Kadumtes*, Sofia-München, 1960, apud *Izvoare şi mărturii*, I, p. 31, no 2; V. Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³⁹ *Izvoare şi mărturii*, I, doc. 42, pp. 34-35; M.A. Halevy, *Comunităţile evreieşti din Iaşi şi Bucureşti*, pp. 44-45; J. Almuly, *art.cit.*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Şlomo Leibovici-Lais, *Pagini de istorie a evreilor în “responsae” rabinice şi în alte surse istorice*, in *Studia et acta historiae iudeorum Romaniae*, II, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 53-55; *Izvoare şi mărturii*, I, doc. 47, pp. 37-39; *Fontes hebraici ad res oeconomicas socialesque terrarum balcanicarum saeculo XVI pertinentes*, ed. Aşer Hananel et Eli Askenazi, I, Sofia, 1958, pp. 346-348.

⁴¹ Lucian Zeev Harşcovici, *Un “testament” din secolul al XVI-lea*, in “Hatzionut”, no 13, October 1989, pp. 17-19 and no 14, December 1989, pp. 10-11.

In the second half of the sixteenth century a Jewish community took shape in Jassy,⁴² albeit less important than the one living in Bucharest. A quite significant number of Sephardic Jews from Constantinople is recorded in Moldavia at that time, including Haim Cohen and Abraham Mosso in 1570-1571, Nahman Tor in 1573-1575, Abraham Gambais in 1585-1586, David of Constantinople in 1586-1597,⁴³ all merchants. However, the Spanish Jews would never challenge the Polish Jews in Moldavia, in terms of commercial or industrial activity.

This commercial penetration of the Sephardic Jews from the Ottoman Empire in the Romanian Principalities can also be explained by the fact that in the second half of the sixteenth century rural trade was beginning to be replaced with the Levant trade carried out by the Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and undoubtedly Sephardic merchants. The commercial position thus secured by the Sephardic Jews in the economic life of Wallachia and Moldavia enabled them to also play a matching political role,⁴⁴ the Sephardic merchants and usurers of Constantinople turning into a decisive element in the appointment of princes to the thrones of Wallachia and Moldavia.

Quite relevant in this respect are the close links of the Romanian princes with the Portuguese Jew of Spanish origin Josef Nassi, of the Mendez family.⁴⁵ The latter played a very important part in Constantinople between 1566 and 1579, Sultan Selim II (1566-1574) granting him the title of Duke of Naxos and Duke of the Cyclades. He convinced the sultan to wrest the Island of Cyprus from the Venetians in 1570, held the monopoly of the trade with Cretan wine in Moldavia,⁴⁶ and the monopoly of wax and honey trade from Poland.⁴⁷ Josef Nassi assisted the Moldavian princes Despot Vodă, in 1562,⁴⁸ Alexandru Lăpuşeanu, in 1563,⁴⁹ and Ion Vodă, in 1572,⁵⁰ and in 1571 he was on the point of climbing himself on the throne of Moldavia or Wallachia.⁵¹

⁴² V. Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴³ M.A. Halevy, *Comunitățile evreiești din Iași și București*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ N. Iorga, *Istoria evreilor în țările noastre*, in "Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice", s. II, t. XXXVI, 1913-1914, p. 169.

⁴⁵ For the life and activity of Josef Nassi, see E. Carmoly, *Don Joseph Nassi Duc de Naxos*, Paris, 1848; M.A. Levy, *Don Joseph Nasi*, Breslau, 1859; Abraham Galante, *Don Joseph Nassi duc de Naxos*, Paris, 1913; J. Reznik, *Le Duc Joseph de Naxos*, Paris, 1936; Cecil Roth, *The House of Nasi*, Philadelphia, 1947; idem, *The Duke of Naxos*, Philadelphia, 1947; P. Grunbaum-Ballin, *Joseph Nasi, duc de Naxos*, Paris, La Haye, 1968; N. Iorga, *Istoria evreilor...*, p. 172; Constantin Rezachevici, *În țările române între secolul al XVI-lea și începutul secolului al XVIII-lea*, in vol. *Contribuția evreilor din România la cultură și civilizație*, chief coord. Nicolae Cajal, member of the Romanian Academy, D. Hary Kuller, Bucharest, 1996, p. 26.

⁴⁶ *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, doc. 51, pp. 41-42; N. Iorga, *Istoria evreilor*, p. 172; C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 26.

⁴⁷ C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 27.

⁴⁸ *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, doc. 44, p. 36.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, doc. 45, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁰ C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 27.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

In this period, when the relations between the Romanian princes and the Sephardic merchants and usurers in Constantinople were dominated by the strong personality of Josef Nassi, one may notice an interesting economic fact, with consequences on the Ottoman interests in Wallachia. As a result of the increased fiscal burden and the considerable sums paid for accession to the throne Wallachia, the loans taken by tax-payers from the south-Danubian Jews, namely the Sephardic Jews, resulted in many sales of landed property. So as to put an end to this evolution, Sultan Selim II ordered Alexandru II Mircea on 21 October 1568 to protect his subjects against the Jews, to stop the contracting of loans at high interest rates, as well as the sale of property,⁵² which was impairing the capacity of Wallachia to meet her obligations towards the Porte. The prince was unable to do so, and the fiscal burden of the country knew a steady increase until the anti-Ottoman revolt of Michael the Brave.

Other princes also had close relations with the Sephardic merchants and usurers in Constantinople, including Mircea Ciobanul, Pătrașcu cel Bun, Petru cel Tânăr, Mihneștii (Alexandru II Mircea, Petru Șchiopul, Mihnea Turcitul), Michael the Brave and Aron Vodă Tiranul.⁵³ Therefore, Mircea Ciobanul (1545-1552; 1553-1554 and 1558-1559) came to the country, for accession to the throne, with a genuine retinue of merchants, creditors and agents of creditors in Constantinople, many among whom were Sephardic Jews. The latter included the Sephardic Jew Istergun, mentioned in a subsequent *firman* of Sultan Selim II, of 1568, who must have been one of the creditors of the new prince.⁵⁴ Around 1575, in the time of Alexandru II Mircea, a Spanish Jew going by the name of Șain, son of Joseph who had a good mastership of Slavon, acceded to the position of clerk of the prince.⁵⁵ In 1591, the tensioned political atmosphere in Moldavia brought about by Petru Șchiopul's flee and the intrigues woven around the appointment of a new prince, a Jew called Emanuel was on the verge of climbing on the throne of Moldavia.⁵⁶ The throne was eventually secured by Aron Vodă Tiranul, who in his turn enjoyed the assistance of the Sephardic Jews in Constantinople, and especially the support of the physician of Grand Vezir Sinan Pasha,⁵⁷ called Iacob Rabino (Robeno), who would be later captured by Michael the Brave in the winter of 1594-1595 and delivered into the hands of Sigismund Báthory, Prince of Transylvania.⁵⁸

⁵² Mihail Guboglu, *Catalogul documentelor turcești*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1960, p. 41, no 78; *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, doc. 53, p. 42.

⁵³ N. Iorga, *Istoria evreilor*, pp 170-171; C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ S. Savin, *Un evreu în slujba voievodului Mircea Ciobanul*, in "Revista culturii mozaic", XI, no 137, 15 April 1966, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Mayer A. Halevy, *Isaïe fils de Joseph le "secrétaire juif" des princes moldo-valaques au XVI^e siècle*, Paris, 1967; idem, *Contribuțiuni la istoria evreilor în România*, Bucharest, 1933, p. 38.

⁵⁶ Elias Schwarzfeld, *Un evreu în scaunul Moldovei la 1591*, in "Anuar pentru israeliți", VII, 1884-1885, pp. 113-116.

⁵⁷ Idem, *Măcelul evreilor sub Mihai Viteazul al Munteniei și Aron Vodă al Moldovei 1593-1594*, in *ibidem*, IX, 1886-1887, p. 74.

⁵⁸ C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 28.

The international background, dominated by the Turkish-Austrian war, which broke out in the summer of 1593, and the disastrous situation in Wallachia and Moldavia laid the premises for a strong anti-Ottoman revolt. Michael the Brave gave the signal of this revolt in November 1594, followed by Aron Vodă Tiranul. The beginning of the revolt in Bucharest was marked by a massacre of the Ottoman garrison and of all the prince's creditors in Bucharest, among whom many Sephardic Jews.⁵⁹ This massacre and the events that followed led to the almost complete destruction of the Sephardic communities in Bucharest and Jassy. After this powerful blow, the aforementioned communities would have to be rebuilt throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Nevertheless, one should mark that Michael the Brave's action, as well as the one taken by Aron Vodă Tiranul, did not have an anti-Semite or anti-Judaic character, be it racial or religious, but was aimed at the Ottoman domination which had become ever more unbearable to the country, the creditors massacred in Bucharest being not only Sephardic Jews, but also Greeks, Armenians, Turks, etc. Therefore, Michael the Brave act was directed not against the Jews, but against Ottoman domination, the Sephardic usurers killed in Bucharest being seen as an instrument of this domination. The condition of the Jews in Wallachia in Moldavia would worsen, owing to religious reasons rather than racial ones, only in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with the adoption of discriminatory laws and the taking of open action against the Jews and the Mosaic cult.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are extremely important from the point of view of the organization of the Sephardic Jews.⁶⁰ In Wallachia and Moldavia, *Hahambășia* was the highest civil and religious authority of the Jewish communities,⁶¹ the corporation being the form of organization by ethnical criteria. The relations between the Jewish community and the Romanian feudal state were established based on the principles of the old Romanian law, which ensured liberty of religious practice, self-determination and self-jurisdiction for any ethnical and religious community in the country. The deeds issued in the eighteenth century in Wallachia and Moldavia sanctioned the autonomy of the Jewish corporations, a

⁵⁹ Elias Schwarzfeld, *Măcelul evreilor...*, pp. 70-83; M.A. Halevy, *Comunitățile evreiești din Iași și București*, pp. 22-23 and 49-51; Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, III, 1, p. 465; Scarlat Calimachi, S. Cris-Cristian, *Călători și scriitori străini despre evreii din Principatele Românești*, Jassy, 1935, pp. 20-21. An account of Michael the Brave's harsh action against the usurers, and therefore against the Sephardic Jews, is made in a document in ladino dating to 1600, including the following passage: "...a non-Jew approached me and told me about the cruelty of the Romanian ruler (in the original: "el rei Vlaho") and without my asking, he added, 'I found my friends Joseph Rusu and the two step brothers of Ițhak Baron and Ițhak Amiel; they were always found together, and so were murdered together, and I buried them,'" (Rabi Ahason ben Sasson, *Responsae Torat Emet*, Ierusalim, *responsa* no 2, *apud* Șlomo Leibovici-Laiș, *art. cit.*, pp. 50-51). Also see, *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, doc. 89, p. 68; doc. 90, pp. 68-69; doc. 94, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁰ *Izvoare și mărturii*, vol. II, 2. Volume edited by L. Benjamin, M. Spielman, S. Stanciu, Bucharest, 1990, doc. 18, p. 19; doc. 46, pp. 52-53.

⁶¹ V. Neumann, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

significant fact in the history of the Jews living in the Romanian Principalities. Judging by their relations with the state power, the Jews were integrated and perceived as a constitutive element of the state.

However, the everyday life and the spiritual life did not have a linear evolution. The medieval prejudices persisted, and superstition continued to weigh down on mentalities in the Romanian Principalities. Despite the fact that in the seventeenth century the Romanian princes continued to take credit from the Spanish Jews in Constantinople, such as was the case of Mihnea III, Gheorghe Ștefan, Radu Leon, Alexandru Iliăș and Constantin Brâncoveanu,⁶² despite the fact that they were attended by Sephardic physicians, such as at Jassy, by Solomon ben Aroyo around 1620 and Cohen around 1646,⁶³ the limits of tolerance were clearly cut in the measures taken by the princes, as well as in the texts of canonic law. The judicial law drawn up in the time of Matei Basarab had a religious framework and included discrimination against inhabitants of faith other than Christian. According to *Îndreptării legii* (Strengthening of the Law) of 1652, only the Christianized Jew could hold certain offices and be endowed with landed property. Legally speaking, the Jews were able to enjoy additional rights only after having turned Christian and their testimony in court was disregarded.⁶⁴ *Pravila de la Govora* (The Law of Govora), printed by Archbishop Teofil in 1640, was also heralding – through the relations imposed between the priests and the Jews – the time of religious proselytism.⁶⁵ The testimony given by traveler Paul of Alep in 1657 follows the same line.⁶⁶

The persecutions against the Sephardic Jews reached an apex at the end of the autochthonous reigns, in the time of Ștefan Cantacuzino (1714-1715). In 1714, the first pogrom took place in Bucharest, ordered by the prince, in an attempt to gain popularity and with the hope that the part he had played in the ousting of Constantin Brâncoveanu would be forgotten. On the second Sunday after Easter, the demolishing of the Sephardic synagogue in Bucharest was ordered, the Jews were denied the right to gather for prayer, and were ordered to wear black or dark purple clothes.⁶⁷ The synagogue pulled down had lain in Mahalaua Popescului, where the granary of the prince was also located and where the first Spanish Jews had settled in Bucharest.⁶⁸ Anton Maria del Chiaro, former secretary of Brâncoveanu, who witnessed the events, noted: “Moreover, he had the old synagogue of the Jews pulled down, even if it lay far away, and ordered that they should no longer gather for prayer.”⁶⁹

⁶² C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 31.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 28; N. Iorga, *Istoria evreilor*, p. 172; I. Heinic, *art. cit.*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, p. 103.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, doc. 132, p. 96.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, doc. 136, pp. 107-108.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, II, 1, volume edited by Mihai Spielman, Bucharest, 1988, doc. 33, pp. 22-23; *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. VIII, Bucharest, 1983, p. 391; C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ C. C. Giurescu, *Istoria Bucureștilor din cele mai vechi timpuri până în zilele noastre*, Bucharest, 1966, p. 358; G. I. Ionescu-Gion, *Istoria Bucureștilor*, Bucharest, 1899, p. 333.

⁶⁹ Anton Maria del Chiaro, *Istoria delle moderne rivoluzioni della Valachia*, ed. N. Iorga, Bucharest, 1914, p. 184.

Despite these discriminations and persecutions, tolerance and understanding were the dominant elements in the relations between the Sephardic Jews on the one hand and the authorities and local population on the other. This explains the presence of the Sephardic Jews in Wallachia and Moldavia through the centuries, and the coming into being of new communities, such as the one in Craiova in 1650.⁷⁰ In addition, the cultural life of the communities in Bucharest and Jassy also continued, and witnessed important events. Therefore, in 1620 Solomon del Medigo (1591-1655), rabbi, cabalist philosopher, mathematician and physician, a Jewish intellectual of the late Renaissance, also known by the students of the Torah under the name of “Yashar of Candia”, that is the “Just” from Candia, Crete, his place of origin, or Yosef Shlomo Rofé, that is the physician, stopped at Jassy, on his journey from Constantinople to Poland.⁷¹ He would meet here the Sephardic physician Solomon ben Aroyo and remain in the capital of Moldavia for 11 years,⁷² as his disciple. Solomon ben Aroyo (or Arowi) was a distinguished physician, who had been studying the Caballa in Jassy for over 40 years and had written several books. During the 11 years spent by him, Solomon del Medigo acquired “knowledge atop of knowledge” and became a convinced cabalist.⁷³ The presence of other two Sephardic physicians is noted at Jassy, at the court of Vasile Lupu, namely Arie Jehuda Sia and Doctor Cohen.⁷⁴ Eventually, the account of the Swedish preacher Conrad Iacob Hildebrand, who traveled through the Romanian Principalities in 1656 and 1657, notes the existence of Jewish communities in Jassy, Soroca, and Ștefănești.⁷⁵

The strongest Sephardic community in Wallachia was located in Bucharest. Around 1676-1678, a Catholic missionary noted there the presence of many rich Jews, who had come from the Ottoman Empire, that is Sephardic Jews. Around 1700, the two Jewish communities in Wallachia were located in Bucharest and at Focșani, and were organized in fiscal corporations (*rufet*).⁷⁶ Unfortunately there is no information on the community in Craiova, founded in 1650, as already mentioned, the archives of which were lost in a fire in 1884.⁷⁷ The first cemeteries of the Sephardic Jews date to the same period, namely to the seventeenth century. The first was initially located in the village of Budești, then in the place where nowadays stand the cascades of Cișmigiu garden,⁷⁸ from which it was relocated at

⁷⁰ Leon M. Eskenasi, *Istoricul comunității israelite spaniole din Craiova*, Craiova, 1946, p. 21.

⁷¹ Lucian-Zeev Herșcovici, *Un filosof și un cabalist evreu la Iași la 1620*, in “Hatziotut”, no 19, September 1991, p. 8.

⁷² *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, doc. 116, p. 88; C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 28.

⁷³ L.R. Rosenbaum, *Documente și note privitoare la istoria evreilor din Țările Române*, I, (1476-1750), Bucharest, 1947, no 22, p. 22; R. Moise Mita, *Noveloth Hohma*, Basel, 1628; Brociner, *Chestiunea israeliților români*, I, Bucharest, 1910, p. 132; N. Iorga, *Istoria evreilor*, p. 173.

⁷⁴ M. A. Halevy, *Médecins Juifs*, p. 27; *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, doc. 130, pp. 95-96.

⁷⁵ *Călători străini*, V, p. 567; *Izvoare și mărturii*, I, doc. 144, pp. 104-105.

⁷⁶ C. Rezachevici, *art. cit.*, p. 32.

⁷⁷ Leon M. Eskenasi, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Raoul Siniol, *Momente sefarde*, p. 26; Ezra Alhasid, *Cimitirul evreiesc sefard din București (Șos. Giurgiului 2)*, in “Buletinul Centrului Muzeului și Arhivei Istorice a evreilor din România”, Bucharest, 1998, p. 178.

the end of the seventeenth century to the street called nowadays Sevastopol. According to Iacob Psantir, the oldest tombstone in this cemetery dates to 1682.⁷⁹ However, other historians, among whom Mayer A. Halevy, date it to 1715.⁸⁰

The establishment of the Phanariot regime in Wallachia (1716) and Moldavia (1711) marked a considerable improvement of the life of the Sephardic community of Bucharest and Jassy.

The most remarkable personality of the Sephardic intellectuals coming to Bucharest, to the court of Nicolae Mavrocordat, was undoubtedly Daniel Fonseca (1672-1733).⁸¹ Of Spanish origin,⁸² he had adopted the name Fonseca, which belonged to a well known Portuguese family, without for that matter having any links to the Portuguese milieu. His father had been burnt at stake by the Inquisition, and he himself forced to flee to France,⁸³ where he studied medicine at Bordeaux. In 1702 he left for Constantinople. Armed with a certificate of abilities issued by Voltaire himself, Fonseca became until 1723 physician and interpreter of the French Embassy to the capital of the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁴ As such, he assisted Nicolae Mavrocordat in keeping links with Francisc II Rákóczi, a refugee to Rodosto, which fact was signaled on several occasions by the Austrian Internuncio, Count Virmond.⁸⁵

However, Fonseca's links to the ruling princes in the Romanian Principalities dated back to the time of Constantin Brâncoveanu, who never hesitated to ask for his assistance.⁸⁶ While in Constantinople, Fonseca met Dimitrie Cantemir,⁸⁷ and became acquainted with Nicolae Mavrocordat, very likely at a time when the latter was Grand Dragoman at the Porte. After his accession to the throne of Wallachia, Nicolae Mavrocordat brought Fonseca to Bucharest,⁸⁸ where the latter would remain between 1719 and 1722. In his patent enabling Fonseca to travel to Bucharest, the Marquis of Bonnac, the French ambassador to the Porte, noted, "... he not only gave us and our predecessors proof of his great experience

⁷⁹ Iacob Psantir, *Cronica Țărilor Române*, f. 1., 1871, *apud* Erza Alhasid, *art. cit.*, p. 178.

⁸⁰ The tombstone of 1715 belongs to Mordechai ben Iehuda (Ha-Aluf Ha-Roș Ha-Manhig Medina) and bears the following inscription: "Here rests the saint leader, the martyre, the guild head. His celebrated name is rabbi Mordechai" (Mayer A. Halevy, *Comunitățile evreiești din Iași și București*, p. 83; *Izvoare și mărturii*, II, 1, doc. 37, pp. 26-27).

⁸¹ Concerning Daniel Fonseca, see M. Fuanco, *Essai sur l'histoire des Israelites de l'Empire ottoman depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, 1897, p. 117; Abraham Galante, *Turcs et Juifs*, Istanboul, 1932, p. 99; E. Schwarzfild, *Rolul medicilor evrei în Principatele române*, in "Anuarul pentru israeliți", XVIII, pp. 180-191; Silva Carvalho, *Daniel da Fonseca*, separata da Imprensa Médica", ano V, no. 17, 1939, Lisboa, 11 p.; Vasile Mihordea, *Un agent politic al țărilor noastre: Daniel Fonseca*, in "Revista istorică", XXIX, 1943, nos. 1-6, pp. 93-131.

⁸² For his Spanish origin, see *Mémoires du Marquis d'Argens*, Paris, 1807, p. 224.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ V. Mihordea, *art. cit.*, pp. 97-98.

⁸⁵ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, VI, pp. 278-279.

⁸⁶ V. Mihordea, *art. cit.*, p. 100.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

and skill in medicine, but also gained our esteem, as well as the esteem of our predecessors, for his spirit and erudition ...”⁸⁹

Fonseca’s activity in Bucharest was extremely rich. He was the physician of the Royal Court,⁹⁰ the political advisor of the prince, protecting the later from the exterior, and the Italian and French teacher of his children,⁹¹ as proof of his vast culture, specific to a forerunner of the Enlightenment.⁹² He also had a contribution to the development of the health system in the principality,⁹³ and obtained from Nicolae Mavrocordat the right for the Sephardic Jews of Bucharest to organize themselves into a genuine community. However, having also offered support to Grigore Ghica, the son of Nicolae Mavrocordat’s sister, against Mavrocordat himself, he was forced to leave Bucharest in 1722 and Constantinople in 1723. However, he would soon return to the capital of the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁴ Despite all this, he would receive from Nicolae Mavrocordat, until the death of the latter in 1730, an annual pension of 1,000 pounds,⁹⁵ very likely in remembrance of the time when the two were in good relations and offering one another assistance. He would receive a similar pension from Grigore II Ghica, after the latter’s accession to the throne of Moldavia in 1726.⁹⁶

No less interesting was his activity after his departure from Wallachia, when he strove to secure copies of the manuscripts housed by the princely archives of the Mavrocordats for the royal library in Paris.⁹⁷ His correspondence with Maurepas, the French minister of navy and of the colonies is quite eloquent in this respect.

Another prominent Sephardic personality, contemporary with Daniel Fonseca, can be found in the preponderantly Ashkenazi Jewish community of Jassy, namely the physician Josif Conian,⁹⁸ on whom there is unfortunately little information. Nonetheless, his tomb inscription of Jassy, of 5 October 1732, is quite relevant: “Here rests the scholar, sage, skilled physician, teacher of ours, senior Iosif Conian, Sephardic ...”⁹⁹ If one should admit the hypothesis put forward by Nicolae Iorga concerning the descent of Iosif Conian from the Spanish family Conigliano,¹⁰⁰ he would have been, according to Mayer A. Halevy, the last scion in the first series of Hispanic-Portuguese physicians practicing in Moldavia in the

⁸⁹ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, V, 1, p. 444; *Izvoare și mărturii*, II, 1, doc. 48, p. 33.

⁹⁰ N. Iorga, *Medici și medicină în trecutul românesc*, Bucharest, 1919, p. 32.

⁹¹ V. Mihordea, *art. cit.*, p. 102.

⁹² Andrei Pippidi, *Hommes et idées du Sud-Est Européen à l’aube de l’âge moderne*, Bucharest, Paris, 1980, p. 251.

⁹³ J. Almuly, *art. cit.*, p. 2.

⁹⁴ V. Mihordea, *art. cit.*, p. 102.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ Idem, *Biblioteca domnească a Mavrocordașilor. Contribuții la istoricul ei*, in “Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii istorice”, s. III, t. XXII, Bucharest, 1940, pp. 359-392.

⁹⁸ M.A. Halevy, *Comunitățile evreiești din Iași și București*, p. 68; Wilhelm Schwarzfeld, *Evreii spanioli în România*, in “Egalitatea”, VI, 1895, no 8, 24 February, p. 60; I. Heinic, *art. cit.*, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *Izvoare și mărturii*, II, 1, doc. 85, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰⁰ N. Iorga, *Istoria evreilor*, p. 175.

seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. Moreover, Halevy believes that the presence of the Jewish scholar and physician Tobias Cohen in Jassy, at the end of the seventeenth century, could be attributed to the latter's wish to meet Iosif Conian.¹⁰¹

Daniel Fonseca, together with Mentesh Bally, obtained from Nicolae Mavrocordat, owing to the tolerance of the Phanariot regime towards the Jews, the right for the Sephardic Jews of Bucharest to form a community in 1730.¹⁰² Until that year, the Sephardic Jews had nonetheless lived in well-structured communities, having their own institutions. However, in 1730 they became an official community, recognized by the state, able to protect its members and assert itself on the economic and cultural levels. Starting with 1730, the Spanish Jews of Bucharest, who until then had lived in a community more like a religious congregation, represented before the authorities by the same head of the corporation, elected by all the Jews in Bucharest and by all the heads of corporations, would be living an autonomous life, organized for centuries after the traditional way they had brought over from Spain, which included specific institutions. Therefore, there were religious institutions: the synagogue, the *şehita* and *bedica* services (circumcision), *Hevra Kedoşa sel levaia verehitza* (funeral service); cultural institutions: Talmud Torah; *ghemibut hassidim* (charity work and social service, home for the elderly, canteens for school pupils and adults); *bicur holim* (medical assistance), and other institutions of culture and in the service of the community.¹⁰³

One should also note that the Sephardic community in Bucharest also had the most ancient Israelite school in the city,¹⁰⁴ which was restructured in 1861.¹⁰⁵ The Sephardic Jews did not have a synagogue until the early nineteenth century. However, they had a house for prayer in Mahalaua Popescului.¹⁰⁶ It is only in 1818 that Caragea Vodă would grant to Gabriel Cohen and Marcu Alşech the right to have a synagogue erected.¹⁰⁷ The Spanish Temple "Grande", at 12 Negru Vodă Street, built in 1819 in the purest Arab-Spanish style, was renovated in 1858 and in 1890, but was destroyed in January 1941 by the fury of the Legionaries.

A remarkable activity was carried within the Sephardic community of Bucharest by Rabbi Eliezer Isac Pappo. Born in 1770 at Sarajevo, he came to

¹⁰¹ Mayer A. Halevy, *Médecins Juifs*, p. 28.

¹⁰² Raoul Siniol, *Momente sefarde*, p. 20-21; J. Almuly, *art. cit.*, p. 2; I.G. Cohen, *Cuvântare rostită la serbările jubiliare ale bicentenarului Comunităţii Sefarde 1730-1930*, Bucharest, 1932, p. 90; *Izvoare şi mărturii*, II, 1, p. 23; V. Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁰³ R. Siniol, *Momente sefarde*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰⁴ Moscu Aşer, *Serbăm şi aniversăm 150 de ani de la reorganizarea şcolii noastre de băieţi şi fete, fondată în anul 1730*, in "Egalitatea", 18 November 1894; J. Almuly, *art. cit.*, p. 2; Jacob Geller, *The Sephardic Jews in Rumania. The Rise and Decline of the Sephardic Jewish Community in Bucarest*, Tel Aviv, 1983.

¹⁰⁵ J. Almuly, *art. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ M.A. Halevy, *Comunităţile evreieşti din Iaşi şi Bucureşti*, pp. 97-98; G.I. Ionescu-Gion, *op. cit.*, p. 333; C.C. Giurescu, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

¹⁰⁷ Arhivele Naţionale Istorice Centrale, Condica Domnească 39, p. 350; I. Heinic, *art. cit.*, p. 5.

Bucharest during the Russian-Turkish war of 1806-1812. His rabbinic consultations published in 1820 in Constantinople show a vast culture and an excellent knowledge of Talmud subtleties. He published several works on morals, the most important being *Pali ioetz* (The Miraculous Advisor).¹⁰⁸ After the first reform of 1811 in Hevra Kedoša, in 1821 Eliezer Isac Pappo restructured in points of ritual the “Holy Brotherhood for Ritual Inhumation and Funeral Service”, establishing rules as to the assistance to the poor and the sick, and the cult of the departed, rules that have been observed to this day. The service was honorific, and an honor to the person entrusted to perform it.¹⁰⁹

Beside the Sephardic community of Bucharest, at least two other communities existed in Wallachia during the same period. The community of Craiova, attested for the first time in 1650, and mentioned again in documents at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1792, the Sephardic Jews of Craiova purchased from the Monastery of Hurezu a plot of land in Elca Street, the community counting approximately 250 family heads.¹¹⁰ The Israelite cemetery of Craiova, lying outside the Bucovăț barrier, near Luncea, dates to the beginning of the nineteenth century, as attested in a donation deed to the Spanish community by the Christian boyar Lăceanu.¹¹¹

A Sephardic community was attested in Ploiești at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1806, the Spanish Jews were allowed to settle in the town proper, but they had to build their synagogue in a backyard, in the Jewish street, and pay an annual tax of 50 lei, a sum exceeding the value of property.¹¹² This shows the economic power of the Sephardic Jews of Ploiești, and also their attachment to their culture and religious traditions.

The history of the Jewish communities, including the Sephardic communities living in Wallachia and Moldavia, witnessed in the time of the Phanariots notable changes, an increase in number, due to natural growth, and especially owing to immigration and colonization with elements from Polish Galicia, Ukraine, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. A development of the community institutions in Wallachia and Moldavia could also be noticed, together with the organization of the Jews in corporations of an ethnical character, with as leaders the *hahambașa* and *staroști*.¹¹³ The Spanish Jews who came to the Romanian Principalities in this period were well received.¹¹⁴ Not only owing to

¹⁰⁸ R. Siniol, *Momente sefarde*, pp. 130-132.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 25; J. Almuly, *art. cit.*, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Leon M. Eskenasi, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

¹¹² M. Schwarzfeld, *Vechimea. Originea evreilor români. Imigrațiunile. Chemarea evreilor în țară. Date statistice*, in “Analele Societății Istorice Iuliu Barasch”, II, Bucharest, 1888, p. 113; Paul Cernovodeanu, *În perioada domniilor fanariote*, in vol. *Contribuția evreilor din România la cultură și civilizație*. Head coord. Nicolae Cajal, member of the Romanian Academy, Dr. Hary Kuller, Bucharest, 1996, p. 39.

¹¹³ P. Cernovodeanu, *art. cit.*, p. 42.

¹¹⁴ Raoul Siniol, *Momente sefarde*, p. 26.

their trades and professions – physicians, weavers, goldsmiths, watchmakers, coppersmiths, leather dressers, and vine growers, and agents – or to their commercial and financial abilities, as bankers and usurers, in which case their relations with bankers abroad were extremely useful to the ruling prince and to the country. The Spanish had brought with them the fame of those who at Bordeaux and in the Netherlands had made a genuine aristocracy. They had brought over a culture developed to a superior level, to the benefit of the local population. Their language, Ladino, sounded very much like Latin to Romanian ears, and their typical sobriety, dignified appearance and ability to communicate heart-to-heart could only inspire confidence.

At the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, the Phanariot regime of Wallachia and Moldavia had the following characteristic traits: undisputed acceptance of their indigenous character, tacit acceptance of their civil rights, such imperfectly defined as they were for the entire population at that time, and despite all religious difference, the recognition of the *Jidani* corporation (in Moldavia) and of the Jewish corporation (in Wallachia) as relatively autonomous structures for the consecrated activities of the Jewish population: – commerce and trades–, the consolidation of the new institution of the *hahambășie* as an autonomous fiscal and administrative unit, which was in charge of the religious life of the community, and of the *starostie*, which controlled the lay Jewish institutions.

This evolution points out to the fact that the communities of the Sephardic Jews living in Wallachia and Moldavia had embarked upon a path to integration in the state without jeopardizing their ethnical being and cultural identity. The Jews were able to preserve their language, style of dress, customs, and rituals. They were able to develop their culture and specific institutions, and at the same time establish close links with the state authorities and the local population. Undoubtedly new details concerning their history on Romanian soil will be put into light by future research. On the other hand, based on the information at hand, one may assert that the integration of the Sephardic Jews in the Romanian society until the beginning of the nineteenth century can be a model and an example of how the Sephardic Jews were received and allowed to live their lives according to their rules, as well as of their structural integration in the Romanian society and the Romanian state.