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Faculty of European Studies  
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**JEWISH SCHOLAR CONTRIBUTION TO  
ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN  
NINETEENTH CENTURY**

**- THE SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS-**

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## Summary

**Key words:**

**philological nationalism, politics and symbolism, the great contributions of Jews scholars in the field of philology and Romanian folklore.**

I tried to highlight in the pages of my work the effort of affirmation of a few Jews intellectuals of nineteenth century, on the field of Romanian and universal culture. I have pointed out four case studies: Moses Gaster, Lazăr Șăineanu, Moses Schwarzfeld and Mihail Canianu. Through the activity and the works produced – many of which are philological studies, published in volume or in magazines and newspapers of the time – these four great personalities had a contribution on promotion of Romanian culture, in the country and across borders in the troubled nineteenth century.

Our research aims to make them known to the concerned public, to disclose their identity and creation, by highlighting the major contribution of their scientific work to the development of Romanian culture in the following fields: philology, history, linguistics, folklore and publishing.

My work consists of four distinct chapters. The first one begins with an ample presentation of the political, legal and demographic situation of the Jews from Romania Principalities and Transylvania. We thus clarify a matter of fact. Romania of nineteenth century perfectly consistent with similar movements across Europe, encouraged the European scourge of anti-Semitism, which completely covered the political behavior of local intellectuals.

The writing of several prestigious intellectuals of the time gave authority to anti-semitism, by spreading it rapidly in all environments. The external pressures for the emancipation of the Jews were manipulated and used by the political men to create an atmosphere of vigilance and latent alarm in front of the „Jewish danger”.

I approached the assertion of the Jews in Romanian culture in the broader context of their struggle for emancipation, from the creation of the first Jewish schools with tuition in Romanian or their direct involve in the Romanian education, until the appearance of Jewish publications/works in the native language.

The nineteenth century was one of nationalism and of the search of the own identity both for the Romanian peopl, who tried to legitimize the new state in European

civilization and also for the Jewish people who aspired on the one hand to equal the rights on the land of his birth, and on the other hand, due to the Zionist current, tended to his homeland.

The period of the Jewish assertion that i mentioned coincides with the extension of the political influence in the cultural sphere, on the background of consolidation of the new national state.

The bibliography concerned highlights that in that time, there is a general tend to eliminate the so called foreign elements from the cultural sphere. Trying to penetrate several prominent Jewish scholars in the field of Romanian science, specifically in the field of philology, history, linguistics or folklore created animosity and virulent nationalist speeches because these areas were regarded at that time as belonging only to Romanian intellectual elite. Thus the works of Jewish scholars were faced a philological antisemitism that aimed to reduce the Jewish authors as long as they are considered foreign, raised in a different language and another culture, and therefore „they do not know Romanian well”, they are not familiar with the misterious of the host culture and especially they cannot be cultural models for Romanian people.

From this position it was sought and it was obtained the limited access of Jewish intellectuals in the fields of influence and academic ones. Created on such foundations, the political, cultural and institutional framework of the present time cannot respect the principle of meritocracy. Despite these difficulties Jewish personalities produced scientific studies of a high erudition.

The second chapter presents the life and work of the great scholar Dr. Moses, Gaster, in Romania and England, as: philologist, literary historian, publicist, folklorist, especially in Romanian language and culture and Jewish studies. Rabin Jew, honorary member of the Romanian Academy was a tireless fighter for the emancipation of Jews in Romania and an important Zionist leader.

I have highlighted the most important studies in the country and abroad. Jewish Theological Seminary from Breslau, then at the universities in Breslau and Leipzig. In 1877 he obtained the PH.D from the university of Leipzig, and in 1881, Rabin degree from the Theological Seminary from Breslau.

The activity held in Romania is dominated the desire to obtain the rights and liberties of Romanian Jews. In this sense i have remembered and detailed the scholar striving to join the Romanian Committee in Berlin, that was met after the Russo-Turkish War, it tried to link the recognition of Romanian independence by granting full civil rights to non-christian minirities namely Jews. In the country he was friend and collaborator of the philologist L. Saineanu and of many intellectuals from the Romanian elite: C.Mille, Al.Odobescu, Al. Macedonski, Haşdeu, Gr.Tocilescu, Maiorescu, Eminescuand or Romanian-Jewish: Ronetti-Roman, Adolphe Stern, Lazar Edeleanu and others.

Other concerns are related to scientific activity. He publishes articles in the field of Romanian philology in the magazines: „Junimea” and „Columna lui Traian” of Hasdeu. He is committed since 1878 to study old literature and Romanian folk literature. He holds lectures of Comparative mythology at the University of Bucharest and collaborates on important cultural publications of the time.

In 1885 he was elected member in the company „Romanian Athenaeum”.

As a result of restrictive legislative measures, administrative abuses and propaganda against Jews, in the same year, was expelled from Romania, from the order of Bratianu’s Liberal government, together with the main opinion leaders of Jewish press. He is established in London after a short stay in Viena.

He keeps at Oxford the conference cycle „Ilchester” about Slavonic literature. In 1887, he is named Rabbi (Haham) of the Sefarde Community. Dring 1890-1896, he is the rector of the Jewish College “Judith Lady Montefiore” from Ramsgate, that he attempts to transform taking into consideration the model of the Seminary in Breslau.

He held important academic positions: President and then Vice President of Folklore Society, the oldest and the most restigious folklore society in the world; the president of Jewish Historical Society, vice president of Royal Asiatic Society and a member of many other scientific societies.

He joined the political Zionist movement, since its beginning and he was named Vice President of the second, third, forth and seventh Zionist Congress. Gater was the founder and president of English Zionist Federation.

Follower of the cultural Zionist not allowing a teritorialist compromise, as



creating a national pre-state Jewish entity or autonomous in other territories other than Palestine, Gaster was involved in the negotiations held with British authorities concerning the fate of the Jewish home in Palestina.

The chapter underlines the great contribution to the development of philology, folklore and Romanian and Jewish literary history. Even though his studies begin with the Romanian language, returned from Breslau, his interest turns to Romanian folk literature. He is the author of the first attempt to systematize the Romanian literary folklore in „Romanian folk literature” which aims to demonstrate the genetic relationship and typological of Romanian folk literature with universal popular literature, stating for the first time its presence as an important link between East and West, especially since to the previous research it was completely foreign. Gaster wants to demonstrate through the description of Romanian folk literature that a part of the written literature and oral migration from East to West had a great acting upon the spirit of the people.

His works were considered many years, reference works making known in the European specialist media the Romanian language and literature. The same purpose was followed by the lectures held in Oxford or by the studies published in the professional magazines.

Follower of the comparative method in studying folklore, found Slavo-Bizantine folk literature as a bridge between pre and post Talmudic folk literature and European folklore. A constant of his comparative studies is the argument that oral folk literature takes and transmits many products of medieval literature, these ones being in fact as a first source, oral popular creation being largely the direct result of several texts assimilation, specific motives or cultivated themes, which he identifies and illustrates in written literature creations. This thesis that is a red thread which connects all his studies of comparative folklore will be questioned by the professor N. Cartoian who takes into account also the possibility of reverse phenomenon – which states that anonymous oral sources to be entered in manuscripts and prints that belong to an author.

He worked at the prestigious scholarly publications and almost all his research will make reference to Romanian literature..

As a linguist he supported the romanity of Romanian people and the latin feature of Romanian language in works like:

As a linguist, he argued the romanity of the Romanian people and the latinity of Romanian language in works like: „Stratification of latin element in Romanian language”(„Stratificarea elementului latin în limba română”) or „Die Nichtlateinischen Elemente im Rumänischen”. The most important work in the field of philology is „Romanian Crestomacy” („Crestomația română”), a work in two volumes including reproduction of over 200 manuscripts of XVI-XVIII centuries many of which being unpublished. Thoroughly, the author shows a specific care for the accuracy work clearly noting the direct source, the tab and page of the original, his work being an important source for understanding the forming process of developing our literary language.

He will make known to the English public the beauty of Romanian folk tales in the work Romanian Bird and Beast Stories, (Povești românești despre păsări și animale). Here he will continue and argue his theory about the origin of Eastern European folk tales, where they were widespread during the construction of modern Europe, from people to people. The argued phenomenon with diffusionist theory was favored by the great religious movement of the Manichaeans and Bogomil who contributed to the dissemination of popular balads and popular carols to Slavic peoples less cultivated..

As a literary historian he was concerned about the age and periods of Romanian language, location and importance of Romanian literature and cared the best edition from : „Talk Story” „Povestea vorbei” of Anton Pann.

He developed studies about Jewish folk literature in works such as: „Talmudic fairy tales and stories”, „Talmudic Tract”, „Talmudic legends and Romanian legends” („Basme și istorii talmudice”, „Tractatul talmudic”, „Legende talmude și legende românești” etc.) He was elected honorary member of the Romanian Academy, on mrrch 1929. In 1936 he donated to Romanian Academy the whole his collection of old books and manuscripts.

Defender of citizen rights and liberties, a renowned philologist, literary historian, publicist, author of several monumental works, M. Gaster is one of the great Romanian personalities of Jewish origin from our country. His life, activity and work deserve to be known by present and future generations.

In the research that was undertaken by our scientist, he proves familiarity with the relevant European guidelines. They have the merit to have been included for the first time both the Romanian cultural material and the Jewish one in a world of values, together

with the great texts and humanity ideas. The approach can be considered as a first step towards culture anthropological research, towards systematization and description their essential features and towards global understanding of cultural phenomenon.

In the third chapter, we make known to our readers the personality of Lazar Saineanu – Schein, scientist of Jewish origin. Linguist and folklorist, he was assistant of the chair of B.P.Hasdeu. He met closely his mentor's passion for knowledge of Sanskrit and his research concerning the relationship between ancient Indian literature, philology and Romanian folklore. Together with Mosses Gaster he continued the research of B.P. Hasdeu in the field of comparative folklore. The legislative chambers refusal to grant him citizenship because of his numerous requests and actions, determine him to settle in France, in 1901.

I pointed out in an extensive way the research of this great scholar, detailing specific aspects not only concerning the work of gathering, interpretation of facts, documentation methods, correlation data but also difficulties encountered in publishing his work.

We review the most important works and concerns. He publishes the volume *Basmel românilor*, awarded at the contest of Romanian Academy in 1894. The work is the first bibliographic tipology of a national repertory, it had a unique character when it appeared in the universal folklore and it was for a long time the only source of documentation for specialists. After the comparative analysis, the scientist like most folklorists today adopted the anthropological theory which considers that a tale is a spontaneous product, the result of imagination. The national character, emotion and imaginative power of each people explains the diversification of tales of a people to another. The scholar merit is to be gathered all the known tales to appear in volume and to present them in a review together with their types and variants in a system that highlighted their themes.

L. Saineanu is the author of an encyclopedic dictionary: Universal Dictionary of Romanian language appeared in 1896.

In 1892 he publishes the History of Romanian philology, - the first synthesis of Romanian folklore to which he gives a large space. After he included the Romanian folklore in the European scientific trends, L. Saineanu ranks on a value criterion the contribution of several Romanian folklorists. The similarities between the folklore of

different peoples which have never been in contact with each other are put on popular psychology underlying anthropological stories about their origin, theory embraced today by modern ethnology demonstrated by L. Săineanu in his studies.

The work *Eastern Influence on Romanian language (Influența orientală asupra limbii române)* appeared in 1900, designed as a historical and linguistic synthesis of the relations between Romanian language and Eastern languages, it has many similarities with the folklore. The author identifies an important number of Eastern influences in our folk creations at the level of paremiology, stories, anecdotes, folktales, affirming the primacy of popular genius.

Settled in Paris in 1901, L. Săineanu signs French linguistic studies: *L'argot ancien, Les sources de l'argot ancien, La langue de Rabelais*, his research becoming later references for all those interested in special languages..

The studies and articles republished, the reprints in the volumes: *Romanian fairytales (Basmele românilor)* in 1978, *The universal Dictionary (Dicționarul universal)*..., in 1995- 1996, *Încercare a semasiologiei române*, in 1999, *Folk Studies (Studii folclorice)*., in 2003, etc prove once again the value and the authenticity of his work

The fourth chapter, illustrates the activity on the realm of culture of two great scholars of the century: Moses Schwarzfild and Mihail Canianu- Moritz Cahana. We mention that we faced difficulties in establishing benchmarks of their life and work, because some bibliographic data, several magazines and newspapers of the time where they published, were not preserved.

From the brief existing bibliography, regarding the life and scientific work of the great personality that was Moses Schwarzfild, it results that like M. Gaster he concerned the assertion of the Jewish identity, acquisition of rights and liberties.

A great publicist in that period of time, his name appeared as being collaborator and/or editor of newspapers, almanacs, memoirist, folklorist, founder of companies etc. We remind that he is the initiator – the editor of *Anuarul pentru israeliti* newspaper, appeared in 1874, one of the few publications, having a Jewish scientific and literary feature; he was also the author of *Calendarul pentru izraeliți*, during 1877-1878. On the appearance of the second volume, the calendar became Directory (Anuar) with supplement calendar. It appeared in 19 volumes. Moses Schwarzfild collaborated since

1879 on the *Fraternitatea* newspaper until 1885. He is a founding member of Historical Society Iuliu Barasch, (Societății Istorice Iuliu Barasch) on 22 of June in 1886, of which activity resulted in the Annals of Historical Society of Iuliu Barasch, (Analele Societății Istorice Iuliu Barasch). A great memoirist, he publishes articles in the Equality (Egalitatea) newspaper under the title A life story (Povestea unei vieți). He is the president of Chowewe Zion David Society. We find his name in the front of many companies of benefit such as: Înfrățirea, Sion, Chowewe etc. Adhering to the Zionist Herzlian movement and to the emancipation grouping and political struggle of the Union of Earthly Jews ( Uniunii Evreilor Pământeni), becoming after 1921 the Union of Romanian Jews..

As a folklorist he edits, in 1883, the Cilibi Moise's work, *Practica și apropourile lui Cilibi Moise, vestitul din Țara Românească*, accompanied by a biographical sketch and by laudatory comment; then he publishes two theoretical articles of folklore: *Poezii populare colecția Alecsandri sau cum trebuie culese și publicate cântecele populare*, appeared in Iasi, in 1889, at the magazine edition *Contemporanul* and *Vasile Alecsandri sau Meșterul drege strică și apărătorii săi*, a study appeared in Craiova in 1889 at the edition of *Revista Olteana*. In these studies the researcher calls for respecting the authenticity of folk material, placing itself in the new methodological paradigm of the Romanian folklore.

He publishes *Tezaurul popular evreiesc*, in two volumes, which include: proverbs, sayings, jokes, stereotypes formulas, riddles, bantering, subtle and funny questions, kids games etc. All being accompanied by a Romanian translation. The collection includes 12 chapters with a preface, a Glossary and a study named *Colectivitatea evreiască sub unghiul tezaurului popular*.

He published popular ethno-psychological studies concerning the way in which the Jew is represented in the folk productions, of Romanian folk and universal literature:: *Anecdote populare române referitoare la evrei –cercetare critică, Evreii în literatura populară română. Studiu de psihologie populară, 1891; Evreii în literatura populară română și universală, Wiegard, 1892; Evreii în literatura lor populară, 1898* etc. The folklorist collects proverbs, sayings and anecdotes about Jews showing the origin, evolution, geographic dissemination, survival or decline or disappearance of stereotypes

that consider the physical, moral and spiritual features of the „imaginary Jew”.

In the comparative studies of folklore published in *Anuarul pentru israeliți*, where he draws parallels between Jewish tales, Romanian tales and the Universal ones, the researcher states and argue the moral dimension of the folklore. He thinks that the this science may light the antisemites with a wandering mind, by the fact that shows that there is a popular psychology common to all peoples, thus to Jewish people as well. From this fact results that besides temperaments there are not substantial differences between people and between nations, and the differences are related only to certain traditions and customs. The folklore shows how much resemble and how vary the concepts, feelings beliefs and customs of the peoples of all pupular products. The psychological background common to all peoples, the artificial barriers between people, for which the researcher finds folk arguments remove obtuseness of anti-Semitic views.

The last intellectual Jew, on whom we stopped our analysis is Mihail Canianu – Moritz Cahana. In the little bibliografy that we have it is considered as being worthy preoccupations in areas like: publishing, folklore, dialectology and translation. I specified and detailed studies and collections of folklore, articles social-themed

The last Jewish intellectual, on whom we stopped in our analysis is Mihail Canianu – Moritz Cahana. In the little bibliography it is considered that he had important concerns in fields like: publishing, folklore, dialectology and traslation. I specified and detailed studes and collections of folklore, articles with social theme, in: *Familia*, *Drepturile poporului*, *Lumea ilustrată*, *Românul*, *Revista pentru istorie, arheologie și filologie etc.*

The scholar founded the methodological basis of modern Romanian folklore. He was involved in collecting the folklore for compiling certain national corpora, contributing to the appearance of the volume *Materialuri folcloristice* of Grigore Tocilescu, and respective *Proverbele românilor* of Iuliu Zanne.

Scattered in magazines and newspapers of that time, long time Canianu's work was considered a bibliographical rarity. It appeared in volume in 1999 Mihail Canianu, *Studii și culegeri de folclor românesc*, edition edited by Al. Dobre and Mihail M. Robea, at Minerva Publishing.

Canianu's fundamental work is „Folk Poetry – Poezii populare”, Doine, Culese si

publicate intocmai cum zic, Iasi 1888. It is the first work in which poems are printed in their authentic form, by phonetic transcription of the texts collected. Detailed in a comprehensive chapter of our work, it is in fact a collection accompanied by a preface which reveals that the methodology that he followed in his study, a preamble and 333 poetic texts. He devoted a considerable attention to choosing interviewees, phonetic transcription, focusing on a small geographic region, opening up a new direction, then picked up and amplified by other researchers. We highlight once again the pioneering role of the author in the collection and publishing popular poetic texts, stories and incantations, in dialect.

În 1893 publică studiile *Deochiul și Faptul și Din psihologia poporană. Descântece, farmece și vrăji*. Sunt primele cercetări monografice asupra descântecelor populare, a farmecelor și a vrăjilor. Traduce în limba română opere celebre ale literaturii universale cum ar fi: *Crimă și pedeapsă* de Dostoievski, *Que Vadis* de Sienkiewicz sau *Minunile convenționale ale civilizației noastre* de Max Nordau.

He contributed with other partners to the elaboration of geographical dictionaries of Dolj and Putna counties presented comprehensively in our work. He dedicated medallions in the pages of famous personalities of the era.

Unlike the other three Jewish intellectuals illustrated in the chapters of this work, Mihail Canianu was not interested in the culture and spirituality of the Jewish people.

Currently it is not known any work signed by Mihail Canianu from this cultural area. As he himself states, he remained an avid of Romanian folklore.

He won a reputation at that time and maintained that position until today, his name being included in most encyclopedic dictionaries.

Our attempt to approach the works of these four Jewish scholars aimed to show that Moses Gaster, Lazar Șaineanu, Moses Schwarfeld and Mihail Canianu brought a contribution indisputable in several fields of Romanian culture on the realm of Folklore, historical phonetics, lexicology, lexicography, onomastics, toponymy, historical grammar, orthography, publishing, translation. The chapters of this work highlights their huge contribution on the development of philology, folklore, Romanian and Jewish literary history.

We are convinced that by reading this work, the reader acquires the necessary

level of understanding the intellectual human effort of the four Jewish scholars, to assert their views on a scientific realm.

Our analysis, of which the declared aim was and is reconsidering the work of several brilliant minds of nineteenth century on the realm of culture, can be a point of starting for identifying other brilliant minds, other scholars, overlooked until now.