

**„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA  
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY**

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

**THE YIDDISH PRESS IN THE EXTRA-  
CARPATHIAN ROMANIAN TERRITORIES  
1855 – 1900**

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**KEYWORDS:**

History of Jewish press, Jewish press in Romania, Yiddish press in Romania, Yiddish periodicals in Romania, Yiddish journals in Romania

**ABSTRACT:**

The current research paper presented as a doctoral dissertation focuses on a relevant section in the history of communication from the Jewish communities in the 19th century Romanian Principalities, seen as a chapter of cultural history. The Yiddish press illustrates how the Jewish diaspora in this part of Europe evolved and developed continuously in multiple fields such as the social, economic, demographic or cultural.

My research endeavour is significant due to the fact that, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Yiddish periodical publications began to spread and diversify, the Yiddish journals in the Romanian Principalities emerged earlier, in a far larger number and a for a longer period of time than in other parts of Europe. In addition to the analyses that have already been conveyed regarding the history of the Jews in Romania in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, my interpretation proposes an internal perspective related to this topic. The paper contributes at providing answers to the following relevant questions: what are the tendencies and opinions of the members of the Jewish communities in the Romanian Principalities regarding some key issues that concern them (emancipation, antisemitism, the political situation of the Jews within the Romanian state)? What does the „Christian world” from both inside and outside Romania say about the „Jewish world”? How do the Jews residing in the Romanian state perceive Zionism and how do they react to this new cultural and political orientation? etc. Essentially, the research that I have conducted on the Yiddish periodicals tried to provide samples of the discourse that the Jewish communities from the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories conveyed about themselves.

Structured in eleven chapters, the dissertation comprises three major sections: the first one is a survey of the methodology and historiography related to the history of the Yiddish press, the historical context against which the Jewish communities in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories evolved, to which I have added a few historical considerations on the emergence of the Yiddish press in Europe; the second one identifies and interprets the stages of the Yiddish press in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories, part in which I have highlighted some relevant journals from the Romanian Principalities that had appeared

between 1855 – 1900 and the third one presents and delineates the main Zionist ideas and themes that are present in the Yiddish periodicals.

I have added to the dissertation as an appendix a catalogue of the Yiddish journals published in Wallachia and Moldova in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which I have listed and provided new and unpublished bibliographic data about the Yiddish press in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories and, moreover, I have tried to correct the technical and bibliographic errors in the previous repertoires and catalogues. I hope this catalogue would offer a thorough contribution to the emergence and further stages of evolution of the Yiddish press in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories.

In the first section of my dissertation I have tried to examine in a critical manner and from a broader perspective (both European and international) the historiography of the theme related to press and periodical publications. At first, my critical examination sought to identify the theoretical and conceptual considerations on the history of the press and periodical publications, encompassing several aspects: first of all, the history of editions or the editorial perspective, then the bibliographic perspective that describes the profile of the journals, followed by the sociology of reading perspective, in which I have tried to determine the impact that the Yiddish journals produced among the public, based on information about the subscribers and also on fragments of correspondence between the editors and their readers; then the cultural perspective that circumscribes the reading habits and the correlation between written and oral information in the Jewish communities, whereas the reading of the press can be placed between „tradition and innovation” and can be directly linked to the popular imaginary and representations; finally, I have tried to identify the contribution of the Yiddish press to the development of the public opinion and civic attitude in the Jewish milieus.

The historiographical survey on the Yiddish press analyses relevant reference works like dictionaries, lexicons, encyclopedias as well as monographs and related articles from scholarly journals or collective volumes dedicated to the Jewish press. I believe that the perspective on the historiography of the Yiddish press is completed and refined by adding an overview of the European framework in which the Yiddish periodicals appeared and diversified during the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The first section of my dissertation also includes an outline of the most important stages of the history of the Jews in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories that is, however, not bound exclusively to events and facts, an option which I consider irrelevant when applied to my research topic. Thus, I have chosen to concentrate the facts and events into a number of

essential themes that occur in a chronological sequence and illustrate the main directions of the historical evolution of the Jewish communities in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories. The main themes that I have mentioned and analyzed are: the community theme, the citizenship theme, the Jews as a state theme, the Zionist theme and the emigration theme. These five essential themes incorporate and expose the demographic, social, political, economical, institutional and constitutional trajectory of the Jewish population in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories.

The second major section of my research conveys a detailed description and an analysis of the journals that were published during the first decades of Yiddish press from the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories, between 1855 – 1878. The interpretative model that I have pursued in this part of my dissertation comprises the following elements: the historical context in which the Yiddish periodicals were published, the profile of their editors, the editorials and the structure of the journals, the period in which the newspapers displayed an interesting and relevant content that best reflects different aspects of Jewish life in the Romanian „Yiddishland”.

For the beginning of the Yiddish press in the Romanian Principalities I have selected the most representative Yiddish periodicals, both dailies, weeklies or newspapers with other periodicity and tried to convey synoptic monographs of the journals: *Korot ha-’itim*, Iași 1855 – 1871, *Gazeta română-evreiască*, Iași, March – April 1859, *Di Tzayt / Timpulŭ*, București, May – August 1859, *Et ledaber*, București, May – July 1859. Another criterion in selecting the Yiddish periodicals was the period in which they were published and, therefore, my dissertation includes a special chapter on the newspaper with the longest continuous history of publication in Romania: *Hajoetz le-Bet Israel be-Romania*, București, 1874 – 1895.

Due to the fact that the first Yiddish daily newspapers in the world were published in Romania, I have reserved an entire chapter to this issue (chapter seven). In it I have pointed out the significance for the history of the Yiddish press of the fact that the first Yiddish dailies in the world were published at the same time in București during the Romanian War of Independence: *Jüdischer Telegraph*, București, 1877 – 1878 and *Der Politiker*, București, 1877.

The third section of my dissertation comprises a thematic analysis of the Yiddish periodicals in Romania, that wishes to illustrate the most important and relevant directions of communication present in these journalistic endeavors. Hence, a first category circumscribes Yiddish periodicals of general interest, including political, scientific, cultural, economic and commercial newspapers. A common feature of these newspapers is the constant occurrence of

articles and of correspondence related to internal conflicts and contradictions within the Jewish communities in Romania. Belonging to this category are the following publications: periodicals of general interest like *Der Rumenishe Izraelit*, Iași 1882, *Jehudith*, București, 1883, *Hatokea*, Botoșani, 1885, *Das Neue Volksblatt*, București, 1892; political newspapers like *Galatzer Israelit*, Galați, 1887; scientific and cultural journals like *Bukarester Israelit*, București, 1895 and *Der Jüdische Geist*, Iași, 1898; economic and commercial publications like *Hatzofe*, Roman, 1890.

Another theme that occurs very often in the Yiddish periodicals refers to Zionism and to the impact that this new orientation had on the Jewish inhabitants of Romania. The Zionist subject was very important both to the Jewish diaspora in Europe as to the Jewish communities in Romania. Due to the complexity of this topic, many divergent discussions and debates emerged in the Jewish communities, causing a genuine revolution in the self-perception and in the cultural and political identity of the Jewish population. The very rich information that the Yiddish press provides on Zionism can amend and reform some of the historiographic clichés that focus exclusively on the emancipation theme, to the detriment of the Zionist one. The Yiddish press demonstrates that the Zionist theme surpassed the emancipation theme, by conferring a more conclusive insight into the inner debates and controversies that took place in the Jewish communities.

Related to the Zionist theme, the ninth chapter records periodicals that are not solely dedicated to the Zionist movement, but also deal with the emigration idea and, nonetheless, include more general issues. In this category I have mentioned *Die Jüdische Presse*, București, 1880, *Di Hoffnung*, Piatra Neamț, 1881, *Neue Jüdische Zeitung*, Iași, 1881, *Die Wahrheit*, Galați, 1883. In the tenth chapter I have analyzed the Yiddish journals that focus only on the Zionist movement, like *Haghibor*, București, 1886, *Jüdisches Volksblatt*, Iași, 1886, *Der Jüdische Volksfreund*, Iași, 1887, *Das Volksblatt*, București, 1891, *Der Wahre Hajoetz*, București, 1895, *Der Kolonist*, București, 1881, *Der Emigrant*, Galați, 1882, *Die Jüdische Zukunft*, Iași, 1899, etc.

To the thematic outline of the Yiddish press from the third section of my dissertation I have appended a separate chapter that analyzes the semantics of the titles of the Yiddish journals, attempt that helped me delineate patterns and recurrences of identity in the Jewish milieus of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The way the titles are formulated indicates the main themes that are a central point of interest in the Jewish society from Romania in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The first semantic series that the titles of the newspapers suggest relates to the question of identity. The titles reveal that the Jewish communities experienced the emergence of new identity profiles like: The Colonist (*Der Kolonist*), 1881, The Emigrant (*Der Emigrant*), 1882, The Wanderer (*Der Wanderer*), 1885, The Hero (*Haghibor*), 1886. These new personality types that the Jewish community saw emerging hint to the Zionist idea and, moreover, indicate major identity shifts that these communities experienced.

The second semantic series pointed out by the titles of the newspapers displays political and civic content like: The Politician (*Der Politiker*) and The Hero (*Haghibor*). The third semantic series that the titles of the journals indicates is connected to the topic of community issues and illustrates the emergence of "authority-characters" in the Jewish communities as a result of the confrontation between tradition and innovation. These titles denote sapiential and emotional features like: The Advisor (*Hajoetz*), 1874, The Alarm Clock (*Der Wecker*), 1896, The Friend of the Jewish People (*Der Jüdische Volksfreund*), 1877, The Translator of the People (*Der Volks Dolmetscher*), 1894.

The last section of my dissertation summarizes some of my opinions and conclusions upon finishing the research on the Yiddish periodicals in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories between 1855 – 1900. The research stresses the multicultural profile that has been a constant characteristic of the intellectual life in Romania throughout the centuries; furthermore, it demonstrates that the Jewish communities had a very strong cultural potential, that was able to support a wide range of Yiddish journals, reflecting various and diverging orientations and standpoints; also, it proves that the communication network within the Jewish community changed and improved, it indicates that a new type of social cohesion appeared and took shape among the members of the Jewish communities, it illustrates the impact that a number of great events had on the Jewish communities, it shows the profound influence that the Zionist ideology exerted upon the Jewish communities in the extra-Carpathian Romanian territories in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To conclude, the dissertation provides an inner perspective of the life and beliefs of the Jewish communities in Romania in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.