

Episode 18 – Sephardic Jews in Romania

Hello, I am Adrian Iosifescu, your host of the History of the Romanian Jews podcast and this is episode 18 where we will be discussing the presence of Sephardic Jews in the three Romanian Principalities of Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania.

Brief Sephardic History

Sephardic Jews also known as Sephardi Jews or Sephardim are a Jewish diaspora population associated with the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal). The term is derived from the Hebrew *Sepharad* for 'Spain'.

The Jewish communities of the Iberian Peninsula prospered for centuries under the Muslim reign of Al-Andalus following the Umayyad conquest of Hispania, but their fortunes began to decline with the Christian *Reconquista* campaign to retake Spain. In 1492, the Alhambra Decree by the Catholic Monarchs of Spain called for the expulsion of Jews, and in 1496, King Manuel I of Portugal issued a similar edict for the expulsion of both Jews and Muslims. These actions resulted in a combination of internal and external migrations, mass conversions, and executions. By the late 15th century, Sephardic Jews had been largely expelled from Spain and scattered across North Africa, Western Asia, Southern and Southeastern Europe, either settling near existing Jewish communities or as the first in new frontiers, such as the far way Silk Road in Asia. Historically, the vernacular languages of the Sephardic Jews and their descendants have been variants of either Spanish, Portuguese, or Catalan, though they have also adopted and adapted other languages. The historical forms of Spanish that various Sephardic communities spoke communally were related to the date of their departure from Iberia and their status at that time as either New Christians or Jews. Judaeo-Spanish, also called *Ladino*, is a Romance language derived from Old Spanish that was spoken by the Eastern Sephardic Jews who settled in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially in the Ottoman Empire, after their expulsion from Spain in 1492.

Sephardic Jews Arrival in the Romanian Lands

The Romanian Jewish community had a specific character because of the cohabitation of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. Typically, in south and southwest of Romania the Sephardic communities prevailed, while to the north Ashkenazi Jews were a majority. The Sephardic Jews came from Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Damascus or Cairo, while the Ashkenazi Jews came mainly from Galitia and Poland, and they coexisted in the same geographical space, with separate community associations (*kehillah*), synagogues, ritual baths and cemeteries. Bucharest, even today, has two major Jewish cemeteries, a Sephardic one and an Ashkenazi one. Being a product of this culture, I have a set of grandparents in each of the two cemeteries. My parental grandma although born in Romania, came from a Sephardic family from Vienna while my maternal grandparents, both born in Romania, came from Galician families.

Documents show Spanish Jews in the Romanian Principalities as early as 1496. This most likely was as a direct result of the Iberian diaspora, as they were welcomed with open arms in the Ottoman Empire under Sultan Bayezid II – Wallachia and Moldova, as well as other Balkan states were part of the Ottoman Empire at that time.

Sephardic Jews were a marginal element in Eastern Europe with the exception of Romanian lands, where because of their relatively larger numbers, they played a somewhat more significant role. Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century, and *conversos* leaving those lands in later periods, are established as having resided in various areas of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, covered by the Ottoman Empire of the 16th and 17th centuries. Along with Iberian Jews, there were Italian, Greek or Romaniot, and Arabic- and Persian-speaking Jews who were often identified as Sephardim in Eastern Europe. In addition, Ashkenazic Jews sometimes married and assimilated into the group; actually “Ashkenazi” became a common Sephardic surname. For two centuries, Turkish and Spanish Jews were prominent in international trade in Eastern Europe along the routes linking the trade hubs in Salonika (Thessaloniki), Adrianople (Edirne), and Istanbul in the South to Gdansk, Leipzig, and Frankfurt in the central and Northern parts of Europe. Along with Armenian, Greek, and Turkish competitors, the Sephardim traveled West from the Aegean Sea through Belgrade and Buda (Budapest) to Pressburg (Bratislava) and Kraków. To the East, the shorter but riskier “Tartar routes” linked Kaffa (Feodosiya), Cetatea Albă (Belgorod), and Chilia (Kiliya) on the Black Sea, along the Dniester and Siret rivers in Moldova, to the trade center in Lwów and eastward to Kiev and Novgorod in Russia or westward to Kraków, Leipzig, and Gdańsk.

It is believed that Spanish Jewish merchants crossed the Romanian Principalities even before the 1492 expulsion; according to Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga they were the first who used, long prior to 1480, the alternative route from Constantinople via Silistra and Galați in Wallachia to reach Western Europe. It was only after their settlement in the Ottoman Empire that the Sephardim started crossing the border into Wallachia and Moldova regularly, and established local communities in Bucharest, Iași, Craiova, Turnu Severin, Corabia, Calafat, Turnu Măgurele, Ploiești, Giurgiu, Constanța, Brăila, etc.

According to Yitzchak Kerem, as early as “the 16th century we find in Wallachia Sephardic Jews who worked for the Ottoman administration. The most famous character of that time was undoubtedly Don Joseph Nasi (1520/1524-1579), the wealthy and prominent Portuguese Sephardic diplomat from the Mendes/Benveniste family, nephew of the famous Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi, with whom he left Portugal in 1536. He became influential at the Sublime Porte under Sultans Suleiman I and Selim II, thanks to his commercial relations throughout Europe. His services to the Sublime Porte brought him the appointment as Duke of Naxos and the isles of Cyclades. Among many other things, he is said to have sponsored the construction of new worship places, including the Senora (Geveret) Synagogue in Izmir, which unfortunately was burnt down in the fire that swept the city in 1660. Nasi had great influence in both Wallachia and Moldova and supported their Princes politically and financially. Sultan Selim II actually offered him the option of becoming himself the Prince of one of the two Principalities, which Don Joseph was wise enough to decline. He nevertheless retained monopoly of the wine trade,

from which he was thought to earn about 15,000 ducats each year. For a longtime he was the liaison and power broker between the Romanian Princes and Sephardic financiers in Constantinople. Nasi was a personal counselor and diplomat for sultan Selim II, handling peace negotiations with Poland in 1562. In return, he was granted extensive trading concessions with Poland. His agents established themselves in Lwów, developing a wide network of branches along the way south; their traces can still be documented in cities and towns throughout southern Poland, western Ukraine, and eastern Romania.

Later on, Sephardim also came from various Italian towns and much later from Vienna.

In Romanian lands the first mention of Spanish Jews appears in 1559, locating them in the Walachian towns of Silistra, Bucharest, and Craiova in transit to Transylvania and Hungary.

Sephardic trade between the Ottoman Empire and the Romanian Principalities increased in the second half of the 16th century, when we find more and more Spanish Jewish merchants crossing Wallachia and Moldova and Spanish Jewish creditors giving loans to the local rulers, which indicate their involvement not only in the economy but also in political life. This is also when stable communities start being mentioned, such as the one in Bucharest in 1550, and later on in Craiova, in 1650, or Focșani, in 1700.

For many years small Sephardic communities of Ladino speakers functioned in the port towns of the Danube and in Southern Dobrogea.

Sephardic Jews in Moldova

Sephardim immigrated to Moldova especially during the reign of Stephan IV (1517-1527, very soon after their expulsion from the Iberian peninsula. Their number increased with the arrival of fellow Jews from neighboring Ottoman Bulgaria, for economic but also political reasons.

Places like Cetatea Albă in Moldova had an important community of Byzantine and later Sephardic Jews after 1591. The town of Hotin in Moldova was the main link with the Jewish merchants of Lwów; Sephardic Jews settled in Hotin in the 16th century. They traded and sometimes settled in the Moldovan towns of Cernăuți, Siret, and Suceava. In Iași, the capital of Moldova, a Sephardic settlement developed after 1565 and dominated the wine and alcohol trade.

In a travel account of 1619 the great scholar Joseph Solomon Delmedigo from Crete and a former disciple of Galileo Galilei, says that in 1580 the Jewish community of Iasi was led by the rabbi, doctor and kabbalist Solomon ben Arroyo, a Sephardi of Italian origin, probably a descendent of the Arbib family from Salonica, with whom Delmedigo studied for 11 years. The information is confirmed by another traveler, Paolo Bennicio of Malta, who crossed the Moldovan capital in 1632. The Russian traveler of Dutch descent Leon Peres Balthasar von Campenhausen (1746-1808) relates that during the Russo-Turkish war (1781-1791), when he

crossed Moldova, the Ottoman Sephardim settled there during the reign of Stephan IV “still spoke and wrote in Spanish but with Hebrew letters”.

Nicolae Iorga, the well-known Romanian historian, points to a late 17-th century massive migration of Galician Jews into the Romanian Principalities, a geographical space with few anti-Jewish laws at that time, due to pogroms and worsening living conditions in Poland. They settled especially in Moldova, having an important role in the commercial transit on the Moldovan road, between the Ottoman Empire and Poland, exporting cattle, raw skins, wax, wine, and importing foreign currency and textiles. The immigration from Galicia gradually led to an overwhelming Ashkenazic majority into which the Moldovan Sephardic Jews were absorbed.

Sephardic Jews in Transylvania

Following Hungary’s 1526 defeat at Mohacs, Transylvania became autonomous under Turkish suzerainty, with southern and central Hungary incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. The status of the Jews changed dramatically; they were granted the same rights as in the rest of the empire. Many Sephardim then immigrated to the region, chiefly from Istanbul, Salonika, and Belgrade. Under Ottoman suzerainty in Transylvania (1541–1690) Sephardic Jews settled in Alba Iulia, the only town permitting Jewish residence, and spread out to rural areas during the second half of the 16th century. Prince Gabriel Bethlen (1580–1629) granted them autonomy and trading concessions with the Ottoman Empire in 1623. Sephardic physicians were present at the prince’s court, as were Sephardic translators from Turkish into Hungarian and Latin. Influenced by the Calvinist faith of the Transylvanian elites and possibly by his Sephardic court physician, Avraham Sasa of Istanbul, prince Bethlen permitted *conversos* to openly return to Judaism, and to wear clothes without distinctive Jewish signs. At the end of the seventeenth century there were 70 Sephardic families in Alba Iulia. Many Sephardic Jews were known to be living in other Transylvanian towns such as Dej, Carei and Cluj.

The Timișoara region received Sephardic immigration during the 16th and 17th centuries. Turkish armies occupied Timișoara in 1552, after which Sephardic Jews coming from Belgrade and Istanbul settled throughout the area. In Lugoj to the North, Caransebes to the East, and Făget to the South, Sephardic Jewish settlements were documented in 1733, 1746, and about 1750, respectively. At the time of the Habsburg occupation in 1716, Sephardim in the city of Timișoara were given the option of remaining and living on the city’s outskirts; many chose to stay. Don Moses Pereira became a leading merchant and held the tobacco monopoly for the whole Habsburg Empire, while Diego Aguilar obtained the right in 1739 to establish a community composed of both Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Two synagogues, one of them Sephardic, were built in 1762. During the nineteenth century, two Sephardic communities, one Orthodox and one modern, were founded (along with three Ashkenazic ones), led by rabbis Mosheh Alkalay between 1831 and 1863 and Yosef Levi between 1815 and 1856, respectively. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were approximately 1,000 Sephardim in the city.

In Porumbacul de Sus near Făgăraș, in southern Transylvania, Sephardic Jews are credited with introducing glass manufacture to the region. In Târgu Mureș, Sephardim are mentioned from

1582; a permanent community was founded in 1601 in the nearby village of Názánfalva. The first known communal leader was Mosheh Aizik Frenkel, heir to a *converso* family.

Sephardim were an important portion if not a majority of the Jews in Transylvania under Turkish rule, dealing in local and international trade and paying taxes in return for their rights; their religious and scholarly life flourished. But at the end of Turkish domination in 1690, most preferred to return to the Ottoman Empire. The remaining few were gradually assimilated among waves of Ashkenazic immigration from Bohemia, Austria, and Galicia.

Sephardic Jews in Wallachia

The Sephardic presence in Romanian lands is recorded for the first time in Bucharest, in the 16th century. A document issued in 1550 by Prince Mircea Ciobanul (Mircea the Shepherd) attests to the existence of some Jews who owned "shops" or had a certain "position".

The information is corroborated in 1550 by the *responsa*, a rabbinical term denoting an exchange of letter, of the Chief Rabbi of the city of Thessaloniki, Samuel de Medina, at the request of some Jews from Bucharest, regarding the death of a co-religionist of the city. In the *responsa* we also find many of their names, all of Ottoman Sephardic origin: Habib Amato, Isaac Rufus, Iuda ben Gerson, Iuda and Iosef Rufus, David ibn Usa, Abraham ben Eliezer, Iacob ben Habib, Samuel Estelega. It is interesting to note that we find the names of Habib Amato and Samuel Estelega in a second *responsum*, issued in 1559, this time by Rabbi Iosef Caro of Nicopolis, regarding a certain Moise Vidal, sent by his brother, Solomon ibn Benvenisti, to collecting debts in Wallachia and killed by one of the debtors, a Gentile from Drikov, near Bucharest. The mention of Sephardim in the Wallachian capital nine years later demonstrates the stability of their presence in these lands.

Bucharest was home to the largest Sephardic community in Romanian lands, though there was an Ashkenazic majority by the mid-seventeenth century. Information about the origin of the Romanian Sephardim in Bucharest, can also be found in the Sephardic cemetery. Opened in 1865, the Sephardic Cemetery of Giurgiului Street hosts Jews who came from Turkey (born in Constantinople, but also in Smyrna, Adrianople, etc.), Greece (born in Salonica, and Janina), Italy (born in Caspoli or other towns), Austria (born in Vienna), Serbia (born in Belgrade), Macedonia (born in Skopje), France (born in Paris), and an impressive number from Bulgaria (half of which were born in Rustchuk, and the rest in Silistra, Nicopole, Vidin, Varna, Bazargic, Stara Zagora, Sofia, Burgas, etc.).

The majority of the 17th century documents that speak of the Sephardic Jews of Wallachia, date back to the principality of Constantine (Brancoveanu (1688-1714). The Treasury Registry, "Condica Visteriei" in Romanian, of 1649-1701, for example, precisely indicates the sums paid by the "guild of the Jews", in Romanian "breasla jidovilor", as a contribution to the payment of taxes and duties due to the Prince. The houses of the Jews were located in the south-eastern part of Bucharest, in the suburb, "mahala" in Romanian, of Jignița, where their synagogue was also located, which would later be demolished by Brancoveanu's successor in 1714. The name

of a doctor, one Avram the Jew, “Avram jidovul” in Romanian, who, together with other Christian colleagues, took care of Brancoveanu’s health”. The Registry also informs us about the exact amount of the fee paid by the Prince to Avram for his services (a horse and 20 thalers), as well as about the frequent and important sums of money borrowed and paid by Brancoveanu to some Jews of Constantinople and Adrianople.

During the course of the century religious tolerance towards the Jews began to wane, a situation which was also reflected in the appearance of restrictive measures of an economic nature aimed at the Jews. The culmination was reached in 1714, when, as Anton Maria del Chiaro recounts, to obtain consensus and make people forget his role in the killing of his predecessor Brancoveanu, the new prince Stefan Cantacuzino (1714-1716) decrees the demolition of the synagogue of the Jews, even if it is located in a remote place, and forcefully orders that they no longer gather together to make their prayers.

The beginning of 18th century was undoubtedly marked by Daniel ben Abraham de Fonseca (ca. 1668–ca. 1740), yet another Portuguese Sephardic physician who became famous for his involvement in Ottoman politics and diplomacy. Fonseca was born into a Marrano family in Porto. He grew up as a Christian because after his grandfather and uncle were burnt at the stake by the Inquisition, his father was forced to flee the country, leaving him behind. Despite the fact that he was baptized and forced into priesthood, he apparently continued to practice the Jewish faith in secret. In danger of being caught, he eventually fled, in his turn, to France. There he attended the School of Medicine in Bordeaux and Paris. Sometime before 1702, he arrived in Constantinople, where he was able to publicly revert to Judaism. His medical skills made him very popular among Ottoman officials. Highly appreciated both in the Orient and in the West, as a diplomat he consistently supported the cause of France. In March 1719, after a 17-year faithful service to the French ambassador, de Fonseca moved to Wallachia, to serve as adviser and physician to Prince Nicholas Mavrocordatos, whom he had met in Constantinople. Prince Nicholas Mavrocordatos literally “kidnapped” him from the French Embassy in Constantinople, as mentioned in the French ambassador’s letter allowing de Fonseca to enter the service of the Wallachian Prince, while continuing to grant him French protection. Later on, de Fonseca returned to Constantinople, where he served as physician to Sultan Ahmed III until the latter’s deposition in 1730. He eventually decided to move to Paris, where he became close to Voltaire, who described him as “the only philosopher of his people”.

From de Fonseca we have information about the famous library of Mavrocordatos, from which de Fonseca deciphered and copied several Greek manuscripts which he then made available to scholars in France and Italy, popularizing in a vast correspondence the Prince’s collections, which included, just like in Constantin Brancoveanu’s case, a series of Hebrew manuscripts. As de Fonseca himself puts it in a letter of 14 September 1731, sent to the director of the Royal Library in Paris, “*in the entire Levant you will not find manuscripts more valuable than those in the library of the Prince of Wallachia, who promised to let me copy those we shall deem necessary*”. It was in fact de Fonseca and Mentés Bally, another important Ottoman Sephardic merchant and creditor who enjoyed Mavrocordatos’s appreciation, that convinced the Prince

to recognize in 1730 the Sephardic community of Bucharest as a separate and independent structure.

The first Sephardic Jewish boys' school in Bucharest dates back to 1730, and after the mid-18th century more and more Jewish merchants are mentioned in Bucharest, and not in just any place, but in the commercial center of the city. In their shops these merchants sold tobacco, cotton, iron, rice, ropes, copper, boots, salt, household items and jewels. The few of them who had the right to own houses and shops thanks to special princely decrees also dealt with real estate transactions, in which we find them both as sellers and as buyers.

The most important Sephardic century remained however the 19th century, when a series of important personalities coming from the Ottoman Empire managed to impose themselves as leading figures in the most diverse areas. Some of them were repaid for their contribution by being granted certain facilities, like to the first generation of bankers, and even individual citizenship to the second generation born in Romania.

In 1811 the Hevra Kaddisha statute of the Sephardic Jews appeared, which regulated the duties of members towards their brothers in the event of illness or death, as well as the actions of solidarity and charity that all members of society must comply with. Six years later, in 1818, the Prince of Wallachia Ioan Caragea (1812-1818) approved the request of the Sephardic Jews to build a synagogue on the land purchased in the suburb of the capital known as Mahalaua Popescului, "since there are there aren't any churches", asking that "a high wall" be built around it. The synagogue, Kahal Grande, or the Great Spanish Temple, was built in 1819 on the initiative of Gabriel Cohen and Marcu Aschlech. Due to the sandy soil, the building had to be renovated in 1853 and rebuilt in 1890, in Moorish style. Renovated in 1938, the synagogue was very seriously damaged during the rebellion of the Legionaries of the Iron Guard in January 1941; never rebuilt, it was finally demolished in 1955. In 1842, a second Spanish synagogue Kahal Cicu, or the Small Synagogue, was built, resolving tensions between the conservative Orthodox and the modern liberal factions. In 1864, Sephardim separated from the Ashkenazim and built their own cemetery which opened, as I said, in 1865.

Iuliu Barasch wrote about the Sephardim in 19th century Wallachia: *"The other part of the Israelite population here is composed of the so called Spanish Jews; they wear the typical dress of the country, which is Wallachian, and speak among themselves a Spanish- Castilian dialect, which is now of course more or less corrupt in their mouth. They can only communicate with the Christians and the Polish Jews in Romanian. The Jews of the entire Orient, like for instance those of Constantinople, Smyrna, Salonica etc. are all of the same origin. Among them there are many rich and considerate families"*.

Lazar (Lazaro) Ascher, a board member of several Sephardic organizations in Bucharest in the 19th century, wrote in a letter about Bucharest's Spanish Jews: *"After all these centuries, the Spanish Jews preserve a striking number of old customs. For instance, we refer to parents, older siblings and aged relatives as Señor Padre, Señora Madre and so on. We address them with the formal "you" (not tú), and on holidays we kiss their hands. We address old men and old women*

who are not our relatives as Tío (Uncle) or Tía (Aunt). If a child falls down, people say to him la hora buena (I wish you well). When a child sneezes, they say crecascas y enflorescas (may you grow and flourish). Even meals differ from those of our neighbors and closely resemble those of Spanish Jews in other places."

But not only Sephardim merchants arrived in Wallachia; many came as refugees from Bulgaria and Dobrogea during the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829.

The number of Sephardim in Bucharest increased in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The 1832 census registered 2,600 Jews, among them 80 Sephardic families. Reinforced by immigration from Bulgaria and Anatolia, the community grew to 150 families by 1858 and to 330 by 1899. There were 665 families in 1917 and 1,500 (6,000 persons) in 1940.

Wallachia is the only area in Eastern Europe where Sephardic communities such as Bucharest, Craiova, and Timișoara endured, reinforced by a wave of Sephardim, especially from Bulgaria, after the treaty of Adrianople (1829). Involved in the import-export trade, they established new communities in Danube ports such as Călărași, Giurgiu, Turnu Măgurele, and Calafat. The most important was in Turnu Severin; in 1833, numerous Jews from the Balkans, Bucharest, and Hungary, two-thirds of them Sephardim, resided there.

The old Sephardic settlement in Craiova was reinforced by immigration from Vidin in Bulgaria and by 1806 had a Spanish synagogue. In 1882, about 40 percent of the community were Sephardim (150 out of 370 families). In 1893, the Sephardic community obtained legal standing, a rare achievement at the time. In Ploiești, Sephardic Jews began to arrive in 1806; they shared the community with the Ashkenazim, having separate synagogues and burial societies.

In Brăila, a Jewish community with a Sephardic majority developed from the end of the 15th century until the mid-19th century, when it was overwhelmed by Ashkenazim.

Eliezer Hillel Behor Manoach (1785-1862), a Sephardic Jew whose name started appearing in 1820's in the Treasury Records of the Principality of Wallachia as one of the main creditors of the state. A decree issued by Prince Gregory Ghica in 1827 confirms that Hillel Manoach and his brother Israel were granted tax waivers and benefited from various privileges, as a reward for their services to the prince. Hillel Manoach became the official banker of the treasury, but also the personal banker of the prince. Later on, in the 1830's we find Manoach among the main creditors of the Moldovan state as well. According to various documents of the time, he continued to sponsor both Principalities until their unification in 1859.

What is extremely interesting to note in regard to the 19th century migration is the directions in which the Ottoman Sephardim circulated. Take the case of Isaac Nassi: born in 1855 at Constantinople, moved, as an Ottoman subject, to Constanța, where in 1894 he married Neama, herself an Ottoman subject, had 4 children and worked as a commercial clerk at the local branch of the Marmorosh Blank Bank. In 1916, Isaac applied for naturalization and was granted Romanian citizenship. A little later his wife Neama died and in 1920 Isaac decided to

return with the children to Constantinople, where he was registered as commercial clerk at the local branch of the same Marmorosh Blank Bank, but this time as a Romanian citizen!

Another story is Solomon Avram Rozanes, born in 1862 at Ruse, later in Bulgaria. He was a student of Haim Bejarano and had an extraordinary talent for foreign languages. Rozanes learnt Turkish and French at the school opened by the Alliance Israelite Universelle in his hometown, Ruse, Arabic and Hebrew in the Holy Land, where he traveled at the age of 12, German at Zemlin, near Belgrade, where his family moved following the break out of the Bulgarian independence war, Romanian in Bucharest, where he came to get medical treatment for a wound and Greek and Italian at Galați, where he stayed for a short while. He lived for some time in Constanța as well, from where he contributed articles about Joseph Caro, a prominent Sephardic Jewish Rabbi, and the Jewish origins of Bulgarian Queen Theodora to the Jewish magazines *Amagid* and *Israel*, but he remained famous particularly for his initiative to write a book on the History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire in Hebrew.

Sephardic Jews in Modern Romania

In most cases the Ottoman Sephardim coming to the Wallachia and later on in Romania in the 19th century remained here, and brought important contributions to the country's development, in the most diverse fields. From bankers like Menachem and Jacques Elias, Mauriciu Blank, Solomon Halfon, Hillel Manoach, publicity agents like David Adania, mathematicians like David Emmanuel and Ernest Abason to literates and journalists like Alexandru Vona (born Alberto Henrique Samuel Bejar y Mayor), Raoul Siniol, Ezra Alhasid, musicians like Clara Haskil, Filip Lazăr, Leon Algazy, Mauriciu Cohen Lânaru, Alexandru Mandi, Avraham Cohen Bucureșteanu, Benedetto Franchetti, Abraham Levi Ivela, Alberto della Pergola, editors like Leon Alcalay (1847-1920), the Samitca and Benvenisti families, theatre actors like Maria Ventura, Alexandru Finți, Moscu Alcalay or Rosina Campos, all Sephardic personalities born in Romania.

The Sephardic contribution to Romania's economy and culture was notable in both commerce and cultural life. Two significant innovations are credited to Sephardim: at the end of the nineteenth century, Michael El Nahmias edited *Mercurul Român*, the first financial periodical in Romania. The other one is Jewish printing house Samitca, the oldest in the country, pioneered the technology of lithography (1878) and the use of the engine in the printing industry (1893). In 1868, Samitca opened a branch in Turnu Severin, publishing two periodicals in Ladino.

In the period of modern Romania, Sephardim grew more secularized and became active in Romanian national politics, supporting the revolutionaries of 1848 politically and financially, and volunteering in Romania's war for independence of 1877–1878.

Ottoman Empire political relations with Romania underwent significant changes after the Independence War of 1877 and the Berlin Treaty of 1878, which brought the Romanian Kingdom not just the recognition of its independence but also the territory of Dobrogea. One of the first moves of the Sultan was to appoint a Consul General pro bono of the Ottoman Empire

in Bucharest, in the person of Abraham Halfon (1808-1884), yet another Sephardic Jew. The choice was only natural, given that Abraham Halfon was born in 1808 in Adrianople, to a merchant called Solomon Halfon (1790- 1842), who was later appointed vizier of the Governor of the Eyalet of Edirne (1820) and respectively Silistra (1824). The year 1828 found Solomon Halfon running a financial enterprise in Brasov, at the time an Austrian town. One year later, in 1929 he eventually settled together with his entire family in Bucharest, where he soon became a significant creditor of both the Treasury and the Prince of Wallachia, just like Hillel Manoach, with whom he was not only business partner, but also related through the marriage of two of their children. Abraham Halfon's appointment as the Ottoman Consul General in Bucharest was deemed a paramount event by the international media, as proven by the note published in London-based The Jewish Chronicle of November 14, 1879.

The decline of the Sephardim in Romania occurred in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Assimilation and secularization increased, mixed marriages proliferated, and Judeo-Spanish lost prestige. Zionist organizations such as Hoveve Tsiyon and Bene Tsiyon encouraged aliyah. And like all Romanian Jewry, Sephardim witnessed a surge of fascism and antisemitism. The final blow came with the loss of state subsidies (1939), followed by antisemitic legislation and Iron Guard persecution resulting in requisitions (confiscation of property and communal buildings) and destruction by fire of the "Spaniards' Synagogue" in Ploiești (1940) and the Kahal Grande synagogue in Bucharest (1941).

After the Holocaust, under Communist rule, in 1948, what was left became a "Sephardic section" of the Romanian Jewish community. Many left for Israel, and others assimilated; only a tiny group, centered around the Kahal Cicu synagogue in Bucharest, preserved the Sephardic tradition.

Romanian Sephardim also became famous in the USA: Jacob Levy Moreno (born Iacob Levy in Bucharest on 18 May 1889 who died in New York on 14 May 1974), was the son of Moreno Nissim Levy, a Sephardic merchant born in 1856 at Plevna, Bulgaria and of Paulina Iancu (Wolf), also a Sephardi, born at Călărași, who had moved to Romania during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877- 1878. Jacob Levy Moreno was a psychiatrist and psychosociologist of international repute, philosopher and educator, especially known as the founder of psychodrama and as a pioneer in the field of group therapy.

The various Sephardic-specific surnames of Romania demonstrated the multi-ethnic roots of the Sephardim. This includes the names: Aftakion, Alcaly, Alfanderi, Behar, Graniani, Medina, Mitani, Nahmias, Papo, and Semo; these representing Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and the Arabic countries.

This concludes our discussion of the Sephardic Jews in the Romanian lands. Until the next episode of this podcast, be well.