

The Asmonean (December 21, 1855)

The right of possessing landed property is limited amongst the Jews (*rajas*) in the Principalities to possession. They cannot acquire landed property; they nevertheless used to be in possession of the right in Wallachia, since not many years ago, a rich Spanish Jew had an estate there. Both Jewish and Christian *Sardits* [sic: *sudits*] are equally prohibited from possessing property in the Principalities; but the Turks can neither, as *Sardits* nor as *Rajas* possess any landed property at all. [1]

As regards political rights, and particularly that of occupying public employments, I am not aware that they are excluded by the laws in Moldavia: but in reality hitherto, no traces have been found of their ever having been admitted to any, not even in the only branch in which such admission might have been possible—the medical profession; we have already seen that that career was closed to the Jews of Moldavia. The home direction of the community of the Jewish *rajas*, is entrusted to administrators named “*Epitropoi*” אפיטרפום appointed or confirmed by the government for three years.

The Rabbis and other functionaries are to a certain extent subordinate to them. The *Epitropes* have, with regard to the bodies administered by them an authority almost unlimited; for many matters, which elsewhere are only submitted to the competent tribunals, or taken as cognizance of by the Police, such for instance, the reparation of the taxes, small pecuniary disputes, matrimonial difficulties, and even short seizure and imprisonment, for slight misdemeanors are in this country taken in hand and settled by the *epitropes*. Unfortunately in Moldavia, the number of native Israelites is too small to enable them to occupy the functions and discharge these duties in a manner calculated to redound either to the honor or the advantage of the Jews. Thus it happened a few years since at Jassi, that the Government sent across the Danube, Jews who had been guilty of immoral conduct, and ordered to be incorporated into the army, other persons who had committed no other crime than traveling accidentally in a carriage on a Saturday, or who went on that day to Jassi, without having provided the *erub* [2], pocket handkerchief, &c. Of course the Jewish *Sardits* have nothing to do with this jurisdiction of the *epitropes*. The pecuniary position of the Jews in Moldavia is pretty satisfactory. It is true, no great wealth is to be found amongst them, but on the other hand there is not to be seen that extreme wretchedness which we meet with amongst them in Galicia, which lies near it. I am not aware of the existence amongst the Jews of Moldavia, of any charitable institutions beyond the Jewish hospitals at Jassi-Galatz. The total Jewish population of Moldavia exceeds perhaps 50,000 souls.

Amongst the important cities of Moldavia, containing large Jewish communities, we may cite after Jassi, Botscham and Galatz; this last is as is well known a considerable shipping place on the Danube. However, setting aside its mercantile importance, and considered only in an esthetic [sic] point of view, this last city loses much at a nearer view. In the irregularity of its con[s]truction, and its filthiness, Galatz is the picture of Jassi in miniature; but the Jews who reside in it are a [sic] somewhat more civilized. This arises, no doubt, from their daily intercourse with foreigners—whether these be Christians or Jews. Last year I met with a very interesting group, and which holds out great promise for the civilization of that community. At Galatz, where a large number of Greeks are established, these fanatic and savage heⁱes have some years since attacked and ill-treated the Jews during the Easter festival, observed so rigorously on the day in the Greek Church. They assaulted the Jews, the latter defended themselves as well as they could, and had


population more literally inimical to the Jews, more fanatic, more bloodthirsty, and at the same time more meanly cunning and more morally depraved than these very Greeks—that remnant of a people once so truly great—a people that has been the cradle of civilization, of art and science—the inexhaustible source of all that is noble, elevated and beautiful. This must not however, be taken in too general a sense; we know best, how unjust it is to judge of whole bodies by solitary individuals. I have in the course of my life been acquainted with sons of Helas, who might be placed in the ranks of the noblest of men. But it is a fact that those unhappy elements of intolerance, fanaticism, venality, abuse and moral objection, that are to be met with here and there in the Principalities, have been imported thither by those northern neighbors and others coming from the north. These moral defects are not inherent in the Romaic people.

W[e] now come to the position of the Jews in Wallachia. They are much less numerous than those of Moldavia. In a few great cities only, such as Bucharest, Ploeschti, Craiova, Braila, there are any thing like large communities, Bucharest for instance, all the Jewish congregations together, amount perhaps to a thousand families. It is certain that the number of Jews in Wallachia is very small. It is true that their experience in Wallachia is of a much later date than those who came from Moldavia. It is said that two hundred and eighty years since not a single Polish or German Jew was to be found in Moldavia, and a century back, not one of those distinguished, under the appellation of Spanish or Portuguese Jews existed in that country.

Though as already observed, there are much fewer Jews in Wallachia than in Moldavia. There is to be found in the Jewish circle, a new element which exists neither in Moldavia nor in Poland. We mean the Portuguese or Spanish Jews.

When speaking of the Jews in Wallachia, we must make a distinction between the Polish and the Spanish Jews. We shall first speak of the latter, who are less numerous.

The Portuguese Jews, at present in Wallachia, have immigrated from the East. The greatest number have crossed the Danube, coming from the Provinces of European Turkey, (Constantinople, Adrianople, Salonica, Widdin, Rustachuck, Siliastria, Varna, Belgrade, and other cities in Bulgaria and Servia,) some, however, are originally from the Levant proper, (Smyrna, Jerusalem, Damascus, etc). Nearly all came into this country in the course of the last century, and the immigration still continues steadily. For, on the whole, the Jews have been better off in the Principals, where there are great commercial resources; where they live independent; their persons and property being always respected, indeed, much more so than they used to be in former times under the Turkish Pachalics, properly so called.

In the Spanish Congregation of Bucharest there [are] even members that arrived there some thirty years ago very poor, and who have since realized large fortunes. Their chief source is trade. They count amongst them bankers, eminent merchants and persons engaged in very extensive trading operations. They enjoy a world-wide credit irrespective of their faith, because their reputation for integrity stands very high. This characteristic feature is appreciable, and many other qualities peculiar to the Orientals, one of which is a certain dignity, certain outward, calm gravity; the rare occasions in which they appear as litigants before the courts of justice, especially the matters relating to the community; but, likewise generally, their fine, social position has insured to them a certain degree of respect and consideration on the part of the authorities, and their chief men have even relations with the upper classes of society. It is  regretted that their Orientalism should be the cause of usages and habits that render them less adapted to modern tendencies and to good reforms, than their Western co-religionists generally, and even than those of their

on the contrary a new and manifest proof that the Jewish race with all the vital strength inherent in it, which permits it, like those enormous exotic plants, to bear every climate and to resist all opposing and contrary influences, could, nevertheless, not guard so completely against it (this would be contrary to nature), but to assimilate them; they produce in it that typic variety, that local diversity which is peculiar to, and belongs to, it; and as in the vegetable kingdom there are local varieties of the same species, so there are amongst men and within the sphere of our race. It is unjust, therefore, to commend in the Polish Jew, for instance, who for centuries has lived amongst the people (the Polish people),—a lively, witty people, but without firmness of character, or love of order—his shrewd mind, his quickness and activity; and yet, to reproach him at the same time for his want of aesthetic sentiment, of love of order and firmness of character, which seems to be the heir-loom [sic] of the Germanic race. It would be not less unjust to demand from the Oriental Jew anything more than his Orientalism, with his classic gravity and dignity, I was about to say plasticity, his hospitality and his patriarchal loyalty: but having likewise something of that indolence, and of that limited mind of the Oriental.

The costume of the Spanish Jews used to be that of the Turks, but it has been successively modified to approach that of the national Wallachian dress. Persons advanced in years are always dressed in a long robe; the Turkish costume exhibits itself, however, from time to time, it is to be found generally amongst the fresh arrivals from Turkey. The *Chackam* (Chief Rabbi) of the Spanish Synagogue of Bucharest, as well as the *Vice-Chacham* always dress in the Turkish costume, though they have resided a long time in the country; but the young persons have adopted the French fashion in dress, as in Wallachia. There is, however, some difference in this respect between the sexes. The young man, having adopted the French fashion, continues to follow it even after marriage; but the young girl, after having dressed according to the latest French fashion, changes after marriage: she preserves the cut and style of her vestments, but she covers her head with a row of small gold coins exactly as in the East, disfiguring thus her generally handsome countenance.

The degree of intellectual culture, and of European manners produces another difference between the two sexes; for, whilst the men, by their daily intercourse with foreigners enrich themselves with new ideas, the young Spanish Jewesses, who scarcely ever step beyond the threshold of their dwellings, have almost entirely remained as they were half a century back, and are what the women are, at the present day, in Turkey. No doubt, some exception must be made in favor of the young girls, especially the daughters of good families who, within the last few years, have begun to have their daughters educated in Christian boarding schools; where they are instructed in the Wallachian and French languages, and sometimes in German likewise, and in the usual female accomplishments.

[1] It is interesting to see, that in the *Turkish Provinces*, according to their geographical position, it appears that according to the ancient treaties with Russia, no Turk is allowed to fix his residence in the country—to acquire landed property in it—to till the soil, or hold a farm on lease—to build a Mosque, nor to publicly exercise his religious worship. Prior to the breaking out of the war, even during his temporary stay on business, he had to provide himself with a license from the Government of the Principalities, in addition to his Passport.

whom we are translating. After having descanted on the civilizing mission of the Allies in the East, the author proceeds to say: “To speak only of the Danubian Provinces, it may be confidently asserted that the influence of liberality which constitutes the foundation of the Policy of the Western Powers, manifests itself in the relations established between the Porte, and Moldo-Wallachia. A very interesting question has been laid before the Divan, and which it has solved in the interests of justice and humanity. The Jews settled in Moldavia, have demanded at Constantinople, to be admitted to the enjoyment of the same civil rights as the rest of the inhabitants of the Principalities, and have received a favorable answer to their petition. The Sultan’s Minister of foreign relations, in a letter addressed to the Hospodar Ghika, has requested that Prince to do justice to the Israelites, by placing them upon a footing of perfect equality with the other inhabitants...The Jewish population is very numerous in the Principalities, especially in Moldavia; they live in a deplorable state of inferiority, and hitherto they have not been permitted to hold either freehold or household property; the obstacles presented to their assimilation to the other classes, spring not only from national prejudices, but from this peculiar circumstance, that the wealthier Jews have become the holders of the mortgages by which the estates of the Boyards are so heavily encumbered. In short, there are serious difficulties in the way to the admission of the Jews to an equalization of civil rights; nevertheless, we cannot but congratulate the Porte on the favorable disposition which it has manifested towards a race unjustly prescribed. It appears, even, that its representation to the Hospodar, has not been altogether ineffectual, the latter having referred the subject-matter to his council with a recommendation to inquire into the complaints of the Jews, and to point out such as in the actual state of things might be susceptible of redress.

“The conduct of the Turkish government on this occasion contrasts in a striking manner with the persecutions heaped upon the Jews of the Russian Empire, by the Cabinet of St. Petersburg.”

[2] It is forbidden in the Talmud to carry anything about the person in unwallied cities, unless a loaf has been deposited somewhere, and this is called *erub* wages.

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