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Author(s): Lucian-Zeev Herşcovici

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Benjamin Schwarzfeld's Polemics on the Cultural Situation of the Jews of Romania : a Chapter in the History of the *Haskala* Movement in the Jewish Community of Romania¹

Lucian-Zeev Herşcovici

Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem

How influential was the *Haskala* movement in the Romanian Jewish community in the 60s-70s of the 19th century? To answer to this question, we must note that in the Jewish community of Romania (and previously in the Jewish communities of the Romanian Principalities Moldavia and Wallachia) the movement began and developed later than in the Jewish communities of the neighbouring empires: if in the first half of the 19th century, in the Romanian Principalities there were *maskils* only, an organized *Haskala* movement emerged at the end of the 40s-beginning of the 50s of the 19th century. The *Haskala* movement in the Jewish community of Romania was strongly influenced by the *Haskala* movement of the Jewish communities of Galicia and Bucovina, which were Austrian provinces in the 19th century. Many "*maskils*" of Romania came from Galicia and immigrated to Romania. One of them was Benjamin Schwarzfeld. His polemics on the cultural situation of the Jews of Romania from 1873, as well as his activity as a *maskil* active in the founding of modern Jewish schools in Jassy are an interesting chapter of the history of the *Haskala* movement of Romania. In a polemical article, published as a Hebrew language leaflet in that year as a response to the claim by the Committee for Romanian Israelites of Vienna, that the low level of modern education of the Jews of Romania does not justify their emancipation, Benjamin Schwarzfeld argued that the level of modern Jewish education in Romania is not so far behind that existent in Galicia and Russia. Benjamin Schwarzfeld opposed the idea of so-called "merited emancipation" held by the Committee of Vienna, and affirmed that emancipation would advance modern education among Romanian Jews, who would be more interested in modern education if they were integrated into Romanian society. In his leaflet, Benjamin Schwarzfeld deals with the state of modern education

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among the Jews of Jassy, where he lived. Benjamin Schwarzfeld's leaflet, printed in Jassy, remained unknown by historians of Romanian Jewry for a long time: they used a Romanian translation, published by his son, Moses, in the journal "*Egalitatea*", but this was only a partial translation, oriented toward Romanization. In our article, we shall present the original Hebrew leaflet and analyze Benjamin Schwarzfeld's point of view.

Keywords: Romanian Jewry, Haskala, Benjamin Schwarzfeld, maskilim, Hasidism, polemics

The situation of Romanian Jewry in 1873

The situation of the "Romanian Israelites" at the end of the 60s and at the beginning of the 70s of the 19th century was problematic². The Romanian Constitution of 1866 allowed the naturalization of foreigners of the Christian religion only. Anti-Semitic steps adopted by the government persecuted the Jewish minority. Due to the conflict between "progressives" and "traditionalists", the antiquated Jewish communities began to disintegrate. The "Jewish question" in Romania became an international concern. Interventions by some European Jewish personalities, such as Adolphe Cremieux and Moses Montefiore, and of *Alliance Israélite Universelle* as well as some West European governments are known. The American government sent a special consul, Benjamin Franklin Peixotto, whose salary was paid by American Jewish organizations, and whose mission was to help the "Romanian Israelites" and to intercede for

² T. Lavi, "Toldot yehudey ha-Regat". *Pinkas Hakehillot: encyclopedia of Jewish communities: Romania*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1969, vol. I, pp. XXIX-XXXV; U. R. Q. Henriques, "Journey to Romania, 1867". *The century of Moses Montefiore*. (Edited by: Sonia and V. D. Lipman). London: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 230-253; Lloyd P. Gartner: "Roumania, America, and World Jewry: Consul Peixotto in Bucharest, 1870-1876" *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (New York) LVIII/1 (1968). pp. 25-117; Beate Welter: "The October 1868 anti-Semitic excesses in Galaţi in light of Austro-Hungarian consular reports". *Romanian Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem) I/1 (1987), pp. 97-106; Carol Iancu: *Les Juifs en Roumanie (1866-1919): de l'exclusion à l'émancipation*. Aix en Provence: Editions de l'Université de Provence, 1978, pp. 63-151; "Conférence de Bruxelles". *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle* (Paris), 2eme semestre 1872, pp. 55-58.

them opposite the Romanian government. The Romanian government claimed that it could not give Romanian citizenship to the Jews, because they didn't speak Romanian, and because they live as an isolated group. Modern Jewish schools were open in some towns, but in difficult conditions³. On October 29-30, 1872, an international Jewish conference with delegates from France, England, Prussia, Belgium, Netherlands, USA and Romania was organized in Brussels, whose aim was to find a solution for the Jews of Romania. Some delegates, among them the consul Peixotto, proposed emigration to the United States. The majority of the delegates opposed this idea and suggested improving the situation of the Jews in Romania. Thus, the participants decided on the foundation of a special committee in Vienna, to act for the improvement of the situation of the Romanian Jews. This committee, which acted as an executive commission, was called "*Kommittee fuer die Rumaenischen Juden*". In February 1873, its president was the knight Joseph von Wertheimer, who was also the president of the *Israelitische Allianz zu Wien*. The treasurer of the committee was Sachs Brandes. Another member of this committee was the writer Leopold Kompert. In February 21, 1873, the committee published a call in Hebrew in the journal "*Yvry anokhy*" of Brody. This call had previously been published in German and Romanian. The translator in Hebrew was the Romanian Jewish student Eliezer Cassvan; the publication in Hebrew resulted from a demand by Eliezer Cassvan to the redactor of *Yvry anokhy*, Baruch Werber⁴. This call was directed to "our dear brothers of Romania", and was signed by Joseph von Wertheimer, Sachs Brandes and Leopold Kompert. This call explained the idea of the committee of Vienna: emancipation must be earned by the Jews of Romania. The authors of the call asked the Jews of Romania to found modern schools and to send their children to them, because only this way would they be accepted by the Romanians who would cease to see them as foreigners and

³ Liviu Rotman: *Școala israelito-română (1851-1914)*. București: Hasefer, 1999, pp. 109-131; Lucian-Zeev Herșcovici: *Le mouvement de la Haskalah parmi les Juifs de Roumanie*. Thèse de doctorat, Université "Paul Valéry" – Montpellier III, 2009, vol. 1, pp. 506-634.

⁴ Eliezer Cassvan: "Wien". *Yvry anokhy* (Brody) IX, 19 (10), 24 Shvat 5633 (=21.02.1873), pp. 145-147.

would receive them like brothers. The Jews of Romania must look to "their brothers" from England, France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Austria and use them as examples. The authors mention that there are modern Jewish schools, which function on the base of the principles of the *Haskala* ("Torah and sciences") in only three towns of Romania: Bucharest, Galatz, Botoshani, and this is not sufficient. However, they mention that these schools are supported by the communities from the tax on *kosher* meat. The authors demand that the Jews of Romania not waited financial aid from the organizations *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and *Israelitische Allianz zu Wien*: these organizations would help them financially only in cases of strict necessity. The Jews of Romania must make the effort to found "Israelite-Romanian" schools themselves, based on the doctrine of the *Haskala*, in order "to plant the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life".

Benjamin Schwarzfeld: a Jewish *maskil* from Romania

Who was Benjamin Schwarzfeld? What was his role in the Haskala movement of Romania? To answer these questions we must search his biography.

Benjamin Schwarzfeld was born at Stanislavow, Galicia (now Ivan Frankisk, Ukraine) in 1822 as the son of a traditional (but influenced by the *Haskala* also) merchant, Leib (Leon). He received a traditional education, learning Torah and Hebrew language, as well as a modern education, learning the German language, and became a *maskil*. His first publications were Hebrew translations of selections from the writings of Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, and short original poems, published in the review "*Kochvey Yitzchak*" of Vienna, in 1846. He became friends with the editor of this publication, the *maskil* Emmanuel Stern. In the same year (or in 1847), together with a friend, also *maskil*, Benjamin Schwarzfeld founded a modern school in his native town; this school was active for only two years. In 1849, Benjamin Schwarzfeld moved to Jassy, invited by the local *maskil* Mikhel Alter Finkelstein to marry his daughter, Channah-Leah. At the marriage ceremony, the bride's father and the bridegroom dressed in modern rather than traditional clothes: this was the first

time in Jassy. Benjamin Schwarzfeld entered in insurance affairs and became a wealthy man. He also became a friend of his two brothers-in-law Moses-Eisic and Bernard Finkelstein, also *maskils*, and they began to work together to spread the *Haskala* in Jassy. Together, they founded the first Jewish modern school in Jassy (1853), opened until 1857. Benjamin Schwarzfeld was the director of this school. The school had only 18 pupils, mainly the children of the local *maskils* and two children of poor families. A *cherem* against this school was pronounced by the *Chassidic* Rabbi of Jassy, Aharon Moshe Taubes. Finally, it was closed due to lack of money: the Jewish community did not support it. Benjamin Schwarzfeld continued his activity as a Hebrew *maskil* publicist, in various periodicals from Galicia. In 1854 he had to cease, temporarily because in an article about the situation of the Jews in Bucovina he attacked the *Chassidic* society, with the result that and leaders of the *Chassidic* Jews of Jassy threatened his father-in-law with a boycott of his business. Mikhel Alter Finkelstein, a more moderate *maskil* than his son-in-law, asked him to cease his publicist activity. Later, Benjamin Schwarzfeld became a friend of the *maskil* teacher and rabbi Matitياهو Simcha Rabener, the editor of the Hebrew review *Zimrat Ha'aretz* of Jassy, and published an article and a translation in Hebrew in the first number of this publication (1872). In 1860, when the government published a circular inviting the Jews to change their traditional clothes for modern ones and proposed that they send their children to public schools, Benjamin Schwarzfeld supported this idea. He also renewed his support of turned Jewish education based on the ideology of the *Haskala* movement. He purchased ground to build a school, which he built with his own money. In 1860, three modern Jewish schools opened in Jassy. These schools were opened until 1863 and were supported by the community with money received from a tax on *kosher* meat. After a conflict, they were closed, but reopened in 1864: they functioned just 1866, and between 1866-1876 they were open intermittently. One of their directors was Benjamin Schwarzfeld. In 1873 he entered in polemics with the Committee for the Romanian Jews, of Vienna, concerning Jewish modern education in Romania. In 1876 he retired from pedagogical activity, but continued his friendship with *maskils* of Jassy and to publish some articles in Hebrew, supporting the ideology of the *Haskala*. He also supported the activity of *Alliance*

Israélite Universelle in Romania and was friends with one of its representatives in Romania, Joseph Halevy; the language of communication between them was the Hebrew. Benjamin Schwarzfeld had five children, three of them – Elias, Wilhelm, and Moses were *maskil* writers and fighters for emancipation. A daughter, married Wechsler, was the mother of the writer Benjamin Fundoianu-Fondane, who received his name. Benjamin Schwarzfeld died in 1896 at Jassy⁵.

The polemic leaflet published by Benjamin Schwarzfeld

What is known about the leaflet published by Benjamin Schwarzfeld? Where was it published, and why? In what form was it preserved, and why it was not used by historians before in the original Hebrew?

To these questions, we must note that this leaflet was privately published by Benjamin Schwarzfeld in "Jassy 15 Adar 5633" (יאס"י) (i.e. March 12, 1873; the Gregorian or the Julian date are not mentioned) at the printing house of H. Goldner, under the title מענה על קול הקורא בעברי אנוכי שנה זו בגליון י"ט (=Ma'aneh 'al qol haqor'e be 'Yvry 'Anokhy shanah zo begylayon y"t ; in translation: Reply to a call published in the number 19 of *Yvry Anokhy* of this year). The author signed under his full name: בנימין בר"ל שווארצפֿעלד (Benjamin, son of Rabbi Leib Schwarzfeld). The leaflet has three printed pages, in Hebrew only. Probably, it was distributed as a supplement to the Hebrew journals *Yvry Anokhy* of Brody, and *Hamagyd* of Lyck⁶, but was not printed in either of their printing houses. It is interesting to mention that this leaflet was not registered in the bibliography of the Hebrew printing from Jassy, prepared and published by the late historian and bibliographic scholar Itzik Schwartz-Kara in 1970⁷, or

⁵ Moses Schwarzfeld: "Beniamin Schwarzfeld: schiță biografică". *Anuar pentru Israeliți* (București) XIX (5658-5659 / 1897-1899), pp. 176-188; Israel Bar-Avi: *Familia Schwarzfeld*. Jerusalem: Cenuclul literar Menora, 1969, pp. 13-21; L. Z. Herşcovici, *Le mouvement* (see note no. 2), pp. 596-601.

⁶ Moses Schwarzfeld: "Beniamin Schwarzfeld". *Egalitatea* XXXII, 47 (25. 11. 1921), P. 170; L. Z. Herşcovici, *Le mouvement* (see note no. 2), p. 602.

⁷ Itzik Schwartz-Kara: "Hadevus hayvry beRomaniyah ad shnat 5660". Part I. *Kiryat Sefer* 45 (5730 / 1970), pp. 287-298.

in the Jewish bibliographic repertory prepared by Moise Schwab, and not in the catalogue of the National Library of Israel (Jerusalem) as an independent publication. It was quoted and partly translated to Romanian by Moses Schwarzfild, Benjamin's son, in two numbers of the journal *Egalitatea* (November 25, 1921 and December 2, 1921), at the 25th anniversary of his father's death, under the title "*Situația culturală în 1873: răspuns la un apel apărut în <<Ivry Anochi>> din 1873, no.19*". But this Romanian translation is cut down and partly distorted: some fragments concerning the Galician origin and personal identification of Benjamin Schwarzfild are missing. The apologetic trend of the publisher is felt. It is not clear if Moses Schwarzfild himself translated the leaflet from Hebrew to Romanian, or someone – possible his friend Louis Klinger – helped him. Of course, the selection of the fragments published and unpublished in translation was by Moses Schwarzfild. But this translation is useful because some personal names published in full, which in the original Hebrew edition they are sometimes abbreviated. It is interesting that the Romanian-Israeli historian Israel Bar-Avi (before: Doré Wertenstein) used only the Romanian translation, reprinted it, and came to the same apologetic conclusions in 1968⁸. We found a copy of the leaflet in the microfilmed edition of the journal *Yvry Anokhy*, at the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem. It was annexed to the number 19 of 1873 of this journal, of Shvat 24, 5633 (February 21, 1873), possible by mistake. If the date of the reply is Adar 15, 5633 (i.e. March 12, 1873), it could not have been published before this date, and distributed before the end of March 1873. However, if the leaflet was distributed as a supplement of this journal, it is a sign of objectivity of Baruch Werber, its redactor, and also of his respect for Benjamin Schwarzfild.

The aim of Benjamin Schwarzfild in publishing his leaflet and in his activity

What was the aim of Benjamin Schwarzfild in publishing his leaflet? We can understand it from the preamble to the leaflet, where he explains himself. Benjamin Schwarzfild began his leaflet with a

⁸ I. Bar-Avi, *Familia* (see note no. 4), pp. 19-26.

dedication, a phrase from the book of *Job* XXXII, 21-22. He declares that is not troubled by anyone and that he does not flatter anyone, because he does not know how to flatter. In the preamble to the leaflet, he explains the reason he published it: some letters he received from London, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna concerning the collective petition of many Jews of Romania, in which they ask the Romanian government for emancipation, but this petition was not answered. Those letters stressed the importance a modern education for the Jewish children: the idea of the “merited emancipation” appeared once again. Benjamin Schwarzfeld lectured on those letters to an assembly of the leaders of the Jewish community of Jassy, on the demands of the local committee of *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. Previously, a reaction to the connection between emancipation and weakness of the “modern” Jewish education in Romania came from his friend Chayym Mordekhay Daniel. This *maskil* of Jassy criticized not only the members of the Committee of Vienna, but also other European Jewish leaders, one of them being Moritz Lazarus, who supported the same idea: the refusal of modern education and of learning the Romanian language by the Jews of Romania causes the rejection of their emancipation. Benjamin Schwarzfeld’s idea was that those Jewish leaders have good intentions, but they received false information from some Jews in Romania interested in preserving their positions, followers of the ideas of emigration or of assimilation, or from journals and diplomats. His aim was to correct their knowledge. He saw himself as the spokesman of the Romanian Jews (i.e. of the Jewish *maskils* of Romania). He wanted to give accurate information to the leaders of European Jews: the call of the Committee of Vienna was not the reason of the publication of his booklet, but only a catalyst. Benjamin Schwarzfeld writes that he decided to answer this call which contains lies about the Jews of Romania. He stresses the collective self-justification. In other paragraphs of the leaflet, he stresses his individual self-justification, speaking about himself as a Galician *maskil* interested in spreading modern education, based on the ideology of the *Haskala* movement, among the Jews of his adopted country. He describes how he came to Romania, as a stranger, not as a refugee, but for marriage and after one year he helped his friends to found a modern Jewish school – and now, some of the graduates of this school, who went to the

university, are pharmacists, commercial secretaries, and advocates. He tells also about his later activity, in the 60s of the 19th century. Benjamin Schwarzfeld presents himself as a *maskil* interested in the field of education⁹.

*"I want to write an introduction for the readers so they understand what fills my heart to answer and to demonstrate that pedagogical methods are not unknown to me... I was born in Galicia and I became a foreign inhabitant of Romania. I did not come here as a refugee ... but I came here twenty-five years ago to marry the daughter of a wealthy and honorable man...and twenty-three years ago I decided to live here, in Jassy, where the situation of the Jews was good, and though I am not a teacher and don't believe in my soul and conscience that I am an erudite or a sage, because my occupations were already in commerce, I could not prevent myself from observing the situation of the education of the children of my people. Two years before my coming to Moldavia,... I founded a school together with a friend also a young man... in my native town Stanislavow... and I was appointed the director... of this school... Some of the pupils finished their studies and their university studies and became apothecaries, commercial secretaries, advocates... This school was the first founded there according to the principles of education and also according to the spirit of our times... and I never refused to inspect it, and I did it many times"*¹⁰.

In other paragraph of his leaflet, after describing his activity as director and inspector of the Jewish schools in Jassy in the 60s – beginning of the 70s of the 19th century, Benjamin Schwarzfeld tell again about his aim in publishing of this booklet.

*"To demonstrate to the Committee of Vienna, who says that it wants our benefit, that a man who knows very well the method of teaching, because he is occupied with it twenty-five years and did not work in his profession in this period, can judge the ways and the methods of teaching"*¹¹.

⁹ L. Z. Herşcovici, *Le mouvement* (see note no. 2), pp.604-608.

¹⁰ Beniyamin (=Benjamin) Schwarzfeld : *Ma'aneh al qol haqor'e be'Yvry 'Anokhy shanah zo begylayon y"t* (=19). Jassy : Dfus Goldner, 5633 (=1873), p. 1.

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 2

The state of the Jewish schools in Jassy, presented by Benjamin Schwarzfeld

What was the state of modern Jewish education in Jassy at the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s of the 19th century? The sources are archival documents and the leaflet of Benjamin Schwarzfeld. Information based on archival sources, published by Rodica Eugenia Anghel in a study about the activity of the Jewish schools in Jassy¹² may be compared and completed with the information given by Benjamin Schwarzfeld in his leaflet.

Benjamin Schwarzfeld mentions that in Jassy in 1873 - 694 Jewish pupils were in various modern schools, public and private, of various levels. Of course, most of them were pupils at modern primary schools: at the school called "*Vasile Lupu*" or "*Trei Ierarhi*" (the school of the Jewish community) - 80; at the school "*Sușinătorișcolii*" (=The sustainers of the school; also a school of the Jewish community, founded by the *maskils*, organized in a society known before on the name "*Societatea oamenilor adevărului*", i.e. The Society of the men of truth, a name which refers to the name of the "*Chevrat Dorshey Tov veTushya*") - 141; at private schools : *Broder* school - 130; *Goldstein* school - 100; *Fogel* School - 20; *Sandberg* school - 20; *Friedman* school - 30; *Moritz Schwartz* school - 21). They were also Jewish pupils at public schools: at the School no. 2 - 12; at the school of *Sărărie* district- 15; at the school *Pașcanu* - 12; at the school no.1 of *Tătărași* district- 8; at the school no. 2 of *Tătărași* district- 5; at the school of *Nicolina* district - 7; at the school no. 1 of *Păcurari* district - 12; at the school no. 2 of *Păcurari* district - 8. Benjamin Schwarzfeld also mentions Jewish pupils at the Romanian gymnasiums, secondary schools, and at an "*Academic Institute*". Concerning the Jewish pupils at the gymnasiums, he mentions: at the gymnasium "*Ștefan cel Mare*" - 32; at the gymnasium "*Alexandru cel Bun*" - 21; at the gymnasium "*Colegiul Național*" - 14. Concerning the pupils at the secondary schools ("*lycée*"), the number was few: at the "*Liceul Național*" - 2; at the "*Liceul Național cel Nou*" - 3. Concerning the

¹² Rodica Eugenia Anghel: "Comments on the activity of the Jewish schools in Moldova in the 19th century". *Studia Judaica* (Cluj-Napoca) VI (1997), pp. 107-114.

"Academic Institute" (possible the Pedagogic Institute), he mentions only 1 pupil¹³. Benjamin Schwarzfeld adds a "note", which is his commentary to these numbers and explains that he presented the boys' school only:

*"Don't be surprised at the small number of pupils in the secondary schools. Why good are their studies, if they don't have civil rights? Moreover, the pupils are persecuted by their teachers and by their schoolmates in these high-level schools. What will the students do who will finish their formal studies if the country blocks the possibilities of the Jewish inhabitants? Why make the effort if they don't bring for nothing? See notice also that many old fashion schoolmasters (<<melamedim>>), though they teach the Talmud by the old method, respectively they teach Gemara and Torah with a translation in jargon [Our Note: namely in Yiddish], they also bring Romanian language teachers everyday. Our daughters also learn in the public school, where some teachers are women with pedagogical instruction. There are seven of these schools, and also some private schools, and a school of the Union of the Israelite Women, and two gymnasiums for young girls. There is also a mixed conservatory. The short time did not allow me to estimate the number of young girls who attend the schools, but I can assure you that it is big, and as is any girls' school which is not attended by Jewish schoolgirls also"*¹⁴.

Benjamin Schwarzfeld presents a short history of modern Jewish education in Jassy, the attitude of the government to this question, and – of course – his personal activity in this field. Although polemic, Benjamin Schwarzfeld describes Jewish education based on the *Haskala* principles. The *maskils* were organized: their leaders were Benjamin Schwarzfeld, Moses Eisc Finkelstein (his brother-in-law), Chayym Mordekhay Daniel, and Yonah (Jonas) Byck. The problem was financial: the payment of the tax on *kosher* meat was not compulsory beginning in 1862, and many Jews were not interested in paying it, or in giving money for modern education. Also, the traditionalists, opposed to the *Haskala*, did not want to use the money collected this way for modern education. Of course, it is a sign that the leaders of the community were traditionalists,

¹³ B. Schwarzfeld, *Ma'aneh* (see note no. 9), pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ *Idem*, p. 3.

conservatives. Another reason for the difficulties in the activities of the modern schools of the community was the inner conflicts in the community. Although Benjamin Schwarzfeld accuses the government, the real culpability was of the Jews themselves: the tax was cancelled and became forbidden, but special donations were possible – and the money did not come. We can observe his thought: “*favorable to Jews*” is favorable to the Jewish *maskils* and to help them to apply their ideals, which were the ideals of the *Haskala*. It was a concurrence of interests. Benjamin Schwarzfeld did not compare the thought of Mihail Kogălniceanu with that of Mirabeau, Dohm, and Uvarov. Another important element is the position of the languages as disciplines of study in the Jewish modern school of Jassy. The position of the Hebrew remained stationary, for the moment: of course, the authorities saw it as the language of the Jews, of their religious practice. The position of the Romanian also remained stationary, or possibly that it became stronger: it was the language of the state. The position of German went down: it was considered a foreign language by the Romanian authorities.

“In 1860, Mihail Kogălniceanu, prime-minister of the Principate of Moldavia... made a good decision to found Jewish schools... In that period there was not yet persecution against the Jews, and Kogălniceanu was not favorable to the hate against the Jews, as it was later, but the heart of our minister was favorable to the Jews...I and one of my friends were invited to him sometimes to discuss the situation of the Jews ...He agreed to tax kosher meat to subsidize the necessities of the collectivity of Yeshurun... A schools’ committee was set up, in which I was member and the late Yonah (Jonas) Byck... and were founded some schools of four classes in which learned about hundred pupils and Hebrew, Romanian, and German were taught. Those schools were closed after three years... owing to many conflicts based on various opinions in the community... In 1864, my friends and I were obliged to reopen the schools and by the will of God and with the aid of the government we had open three schools with teaching of Hebrew and Romanian... German became a foreign language in the eyes of the Romanians...Although the government did not mix in the problems of the Jews and yet... was not against the Jews, Kogălniceanu agreed to collect the tax on kosher meat. I continued to be a member of the committee, my function being the supervision of the education and the necessities of the

school for two years, a period in which we have bought a house at 2300 gold pieces, and the school about which we spoke could be open later in that building. I was obliged to leave my functions in the committee due to my many businesses, and the reader can read the letters of gratitude that the leaders of our community published for me in the number 8 of the journal *Hamagyd* in 1866. The schools remained under the supervision of my friend Chayym Mordekhai Daniel and of my brother-in-law Moshe Eisc Finkelstein until the beginning of 1867... In this year the government no longer allows the collection of the tax on kosher meat... The schools were closed once again, but because they were very active and were successful in teaching Hebrew and Romanian to all of the pupils, many of them could continue their studies at a higher level"¹⁵.

Benjamin Schwarzfeld continues to present the history of the Jewish modern schools in Jassy and his role in their activity. He refers to the years 1871-1872. He mentions a conflict between the "Ne'orym" (=progressives, i.e. *maskils*) and the traditionalists, conflicts based on jealousy between the *maskil* activists, the idea of donations given by the wealthy men who supported the *Haskala* ideology to help the poor children, the idea of the scholar taxes. Also, he criticizes the activity of the Reform Rabbi Antoine Asher Levy, the preacher of the *Beth Yakov* (Neuschoz) Temple, at first had been his friend, because he abandoned his activity and finally returned to France. We can compare the critical presentation of Rabbi Antoine Asher Levy by Benjamin Schwarzfeld with the critical presentation of the same person by Yakov Chayym Korn, concerning Rabbi Levy's previous activity, as preacher at the Choral Temple in Bucharest¹⁶. These two critics include similar elements. Benjamin Schwarzfeld mentions that in a certain period he rested alone in the modern-educational activity. He is proud of the success of the school directed by him, visited by personalities of Bucharest, such as the community leader Nathanael Marcus and the American-Jewish consul Benjamin Franklin Peixotto.

¹⁵ *Idem*, pp. 1-2. In the original Hebrew, the names of Benjamin Schwarzfeld's friends are indicated by initials only; their full names are listed in the Romanian translation of Moses Schwarzfeld, who knew his father's friends [*Egalitatea* XXXII, 47 (25. 11. 1921), p. 169 (see also note no. 5)].

¹⁶ L.Z. Herşcovici, *Le mouvement* (see note no. 2), pp. 574-578.

"In 1871, there was a conflict in the town... Because the progressives decided to reopen the school without the tax on kosher meat, there were men of good intentions who gave donations and paid for the poor children, and the parents of the pupils paid a monthly scholar tax, not so high. I was not mixed in those conflicts and I did not support anybody and remained neutral... Although I was asked to be member in the committee, I refused, despite the fact that my friend the preacher Rabbi Levy was a member; finally, when I accepted, I received the promise that the school would not be mixed in the community problems. In schools, we have the liberty to teach the languages as we believe is best, because the studies in our schools are free, guaranteed by the Constitution. For this reason we taught Hebrew, Romanian, and German in a good form, as can prove the official from America in our country, Peixotto, and Mr. Nathanael Marcus after their visit in our school. I entered in the committee as a member for a half-year. The other members of the committee, who worked from their heart for our school, retired to their businesses. Only one of them, the secretary, helped me. Levy left for a bathing place in Belgium for a period of two months, and all the problems of the school fell on my shoulders. Nobody can deny the success of the first term. Although, my fellows were very envious and I retired to avoid another conflict... The members of the committee who stayed in their functions directed the school for one year, but – as is written in the book of Qohelet/Ecclesiast X, 18, <<through an oversight the roof has fallen>>. It remained without supervisor of teaching and without administrative director; Levy left once again for a bathing place... Some devoted persons called attention that if nothing shall be done, the school will begin to decline... The school closed in the next days. In August 1872 a new committee was chosen and they call me to return as a member of that committee, taking all the difficult tasks on my shoulder... The members of the committee left one after other; Levy left for Brussels and I remained alone... Because my businesses don't permit me to be active during the day, I worked during the night. And although that only more than half of the pupils present at the opening of the school year frequented the school and that the monthly donations decreased and the revenues were only a third of those which were in the beginning, the members of our collectivity were proud of this school and did not cease to praise it, saying that this school was not lower than any other Jewish school. I sent away the idle teachers and I employed others more diligent in their places"¹⁷.

¹⁷ B. Schwarzfeld, *Ma'aneh* (see note no. 9), p. 2.

The polemic aspects of Benjamin Schwarzfeld's leaflet

What were the polemic aspects of Benjamin Schwarzfeld's leaflet? Can we speak about only one polemic aspect, or several? Does Benjamin Schwarzfeld polemize against the members of the Committee of Vienna, or also (mainly) against Jewish personalities and groups of Romania? Was Benjamin Schwarzfeld not only a *maskil* and a polemist, but also an apologist of the *Haskala* movement in Romania and of the Romanian Jewry?

First, we shall answer to the last question. The answer is positive. As a *maskil*, Benjamin Schwarzfeld was also an apologist of the *Haskala* – and as a Jew of Jassy, living in the period of the polemics for Jewish emancipation, he was also an apologist for Romanian Jewry. But he believed in his claims. However, his interpretation of the numbers of the Jewish pupils in the modern schools published by him is problematic, though those numbers are real. Benjamin Schwarzfeld was proud of the success of the *Haskala* movement in the field of education in Jassy, based on the absolute numbers – 694 pupils – but from the percentage point of view this claim is problematic. We don't know the exact number of the Jews in Jassy in 1873, but in 1859 their number was 31,015 persons and in 1899 – 39,441 persons, representing 51% of the population. We may assume to an average of 34,000 persons in 1873. If we shall add the number 300 schoolgirls to the number 694 schoolboys, we may conclude that in Jassy were about 1000 Jewish children who learned in the modern Jewish schools and in the public schools. If we consider that the adolescents represented about 15% of the population, we may believe that their number was about 5100 persons. The number of 1000 represents about a fifth of them. If we assume that in the so-called “modernized *cheyders*”, in which the Romanian language was also taught, about 1000 schoolboys attended, we may conclude that circa 3000 Jewish children, who represented about two thirds of the Jewish children and adolescents of the town received traditional (and not modern) education.

Benjamin Schwarzfeld approaches to the Committee of Vienna in a polemical, but also in eulogistic form. He tries to answer them, but also he compares with the situation in other countries

although his comparison is not correct. This comparison wants to demonstrate his aim, his idea that the Jews of Romania are sufficiently prepared for the emancipation, and to oppose to the idea of “merited emancipation”. Simultaneously, he tries to demonstrate that the orientation of the Jews of Romania in the direction of the *Haskala* is stronger than the orientation of the Jews of Galicia and Russia. But he used relative information, not professional, probably inexact. Benjamin Schwarzfeld uses rhetorical invocations: it is his style.

“Israelites convinced of your confidence! I tried to deliver to you something that you did not understand just now about the Jewish children who learn Romanian here. If you knew the situation before, is it possible that it should not appear so difficult, and opposed to that presented by you? Is it possible that in this case would you avoid insulting us and hold up us to ridicule? You said that you are confirmed by our enemies: <<By your brothers that wished your well, to demonstrate that you are not ready for receiving the emancipation>>. Did you decide to punish us when you declared <<Go and teach Romanian to your children, that so they will receive civil rights in their country?>> Did you tell the truth when you claim that in Galicia and in Hungary there are more schools than in our country? Where are those schools attended more than to us? If you take as an example the great town which is Lemberg, were there more Jewish children who attend those schools before obtaining the freedom, than we have?... In Czernowitz, only six Jewish pupils attended the gymnasium in 1862... And the Jews received citizenship of the country... You speak also about the great towns of Galicia, e.g. Colomeea, where the Chassidism resided and there someone who wore European attire or who attended public schools is considered a heretic? Did you hear about small towns such as Horodenka, Vijnitza, Picinijne, and other hundreds like those? Did their Jewish inhabitants really agree to teach the national language to their children and to send them to public schools? How many Jewish schools exist in Galicia? In my opinion, they exist only in Lemberg, Brody, Tarnopol, Czernowitz, Bolichow, and perhaps in two other towns. And by what right do you irritate on us pretending that we do not fill our duty, and others are ready to receive the peal of the bell of liberty, but we are not ready?”¹⁸

¹⁸ Itzik Schwartz-Kara: *Contribuții la istoria obștii evreilor din Iași*. București: Hasefer, 1997, pp. 29, 40-41.

After these critical phrases addressed to the members of the Committee of Vienna, Benjamin Schwarzfeld spoke to them once again, asking them to be careful of the real situation and concerning the Romanian propaganda. He accuses the Romanian government of falsifying information about the Jews and about its refusal to grant the emancipation to the Jews for linguistic reasons. Benjamin Schwarzfeld's accusations against the members of the Committee of Vienna are very harsh. He doesn't allow them to speak in the name of the Romanian Jews. His claims lead us to consider the tendencies existent among the Romanian Jews in 1873. Who were the false informers? In his opinion, they were some assimilated Jews. He also asks the members of the Committee of Vienna to inform the members of the Committee of Jassy who those informants are, to list their names. Perhaps his aim was double: to know who those informers were, and to compromise them and to avoid any contact with them in the future.

"My brothers, please don't accuse us and don't believe the lies spread to induce them in error, which the cruel Romanians diffuse to denigrate and disregard us; they spread defamations and lies in their aim of disinformation... There are spies among us and they have spread the calumnious hearsays... These people say that there are enough schools for teaching Romanian now, and I ... can't support those lies. Because those people live in shadow and don't know the values of the Haskala for the Jews. They live among us, however some of them are foreigners who do not live in Romania, which must that before they can know the situation of the education with us, and also the level of teaching Romanian. Sirs, my brothers, please in the name of our brotherhood and of our Jewish love, reveal to us who those people are and reveal their names. I don't ask them to reveal their names in public, but only to write them to our committee to know if they had spoken that way from ignorance of the situation of the Jews in our country, or from wickedness..."¹⁹.

In the last part of his leaflet, Benjamin Schwarzfeld expresses his *credo* as a *maskil* oriented to the field of education. He mentions the necessity of the Jewish schools, of the necessity to teach Hebrew, and also Romanian and German. Again, he expresses his polemic

¹⁹ B. Schwarzfeld, *Ma'aneh* (see note no. 9), p. 3.

orientation against the Hasidism, against the Jews who don't want to send their children to the modern schools, and also against assimilation and against the lack of knowledge of Judaism among certain Jews and against its abandonment by conversion to Christianity. Benjamin Schwarzfeld is optimistic, and hopes for the creation of new Jewish modern schools to combat *Chassidism*. In his opinion, help must come from the government, which must impose the special tax on *kosher* meat. The money received by this tax could be used for the maintenance of the modern Jewish schools, of Jewish hospitals, and of religious schools, such as *Talmud-Torah* and *Yeshivas*. He hopes for a new organization of the Jewish communities. Concerning the Jewish schools, he mentions the fact that many parents prefer to send their children to these schools and not to the public schools, because in the Jewish schools the children learn German and Hebrew also. It is preferable for many Jewish parents to send their children to Jewish schools, because they are afraid that if they attend the public schools they will be influenced to leave Judaism and to convert to Christianity. He express his opposition to Yiddish, the "jargon", and hopes that the Jewish modern schools will be a bridge to higher schools and a way for the young Jews to leave the *Chassidism*. Benjamin Schwarzfeld demonstrates in this way his conception of the ideological and practical *maskil*: he does not accept the use of Yiddish for propaganda of the *Haskala* ideology, and prefers that the Jewish children attend the Jewish schools, not the public schools.

"And to conclude my answer, I can not leave you without quoting what I say concerning the schools. Really that the schools in the spirit of our times are indispensable, and as you saw me mention, I support their foundation. But not only in the aim that you imagine, for the learning of the language of the country, but also for knowing the language of God and of the religion which was given to us as our heritage, and also for many other reasons.

a) There are parents who do not want to send their children to public schools, being afraid that they will be considered heretics and their children will be among non-Jewish children, and they will change their religion, Heaven forbid!

b) Because besides the language of our forefathers, which is the language of God, the pure language, that our children will learn, they will also learn German, a language very important in commerce and affairs.

c) *And the most important reason is that the Jewish schools represent the point of transition to the public school, in which the pupils will study living languages and someone who is accepted in a modern school does not return to Chassidism for coming to a saint rabbi. Because the Torah is their base and illuminates their ways, the truth and the faith in the saint rabbis oppose one another. Many times I saw parents who did not want to send their children to public schools, but wanted to educate them in the knowledge of the languages to conduct commerce, and they sent them to us; and sometimes after those children tasted from the Tree of Knowledge, they asked their parents to continue their studies in gymnasiums, and the parents, although coming from orthodox families, accepted their demand. We wish for the schools from all our heart and soul, as you wish for them also. But the final aim – and the most important for these institutions of education – that in these schools, the pupils, also those of the public schools, will learn the religion, for the Torah of Israel shall not be forgotten. And what are the resources for the foundation of other schools for the Jews of Romania?... Only the government can supply them..., but not with arms and force, but with the spirit of goodness. If it shall promulgate statutes for us, as laws of communities; on the basis we could choose the leaders of the community... of Yeshurun. It must ... impose a tax on kosher meat, or a tax on the community, as in other towns of Europe... Sages will be chosen and they will take care of the religious necessities of the public, and they will maintain the hospital, and will supply the wages of the persons working in the community and in holiness, such as rabbis, religious judges, and others, - and also will support educational institutions, and other educational institutions the religious affairs. And then shall it be well for us and for our children at all times”²⁰.*

Benjamin Schwarzfeld's leaflet expresses the *maskils'* educational thought. The same ideas were expressed also by other *maskils* of the same period, from Jassy and from Bucharest. Some *maskils* of Jassy, such as the brothers Bernard and Moses Eisc Finkelstein (Benjamin Schwarzfeld's brothers in law), Yonah (Jonas) Byck, Matitياهو Simchah Rabener, Yehudah Leib Margosches, Moses Waldberg, Chayym Mordechay Daniel, Meshulam Zalman Goldboim, Nachman Frenkel, and others expressed the same ideas and were active in the same educational field. The *maskils* of

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

Bucharest Naftaly Popper and Yakov Chayym Korn thought the same. At the beginning of the 60s of the 19th century, the *maskils* of Romania were obliged to fight on two fronts: against the traditional and *Chassidic* society, and against assimilation. The political situation required them to fight for emancipation also and to navigate between it and the idea of emigration. The insufficient knowledge of the situation of the Romanian Israelites by Jewish organizations of other countries obliged them to explain the real situation from their point of view, and also to sometimes conduct polemics with them. It was the case of Benjamin Schwarzfeld, but not only his case: other case was of Yakov Chayym Korn.