

Episode 41 - Prominent Romanian Jewish Personalities and Families from Bârlad and Focșani

Hello again, I am Adrian Iosifescu, your host of the History of Romanian Jews podcast, and this is episode 41, where we will look at the Jewish life in the Moldavian towns of Bârlad and Focșani (see their location on the Romanian map presented in the notes).

You just listened to Damian Luca in the song “Geamparalele din Bârlad” (Geamparalele = a fast, lively, and highly energetic type of traditional folk dance, from Bârlad); a link to the full recording is provided in the episode notes.

Bârlad Jewish History

Jews first settled in Bârlad during the first half of the 17th century. We know this from inscriptions found on gravestones in the old Jewish cemetery located in the center of the city. In a document dating from the year 1738 there is mention of a “starosta” [Polish: a community leader] who stood at the head of the Jewish guild, which is assumed to have been established as far back as the preceding century. The traveler Boscovici relates about the Jews who dwelt in the city in 1762. A Romanian certificate from 1769 deals with Jewish merchants of Bârlad and also, at the same time, informs us that there was a “Street of the Jewish Storekeepers”. Bârlad served as a wheat marketing center for all the neighboring counties. In 1887, out of the 954 merchants, 389 were Jews.

At the end of 19th century the Jewish population's economic situation deteriorated due to persecutions against them, and it was the middlemen and merchants who suffered in particular. The Romanian merchants in Bârlad opposed the discrimination against their Jewish colleagues, and in 1898, presented their objections to the ministry of Commerce in Bucharest opposing the decision by the local office of commerce to remove the Jewish middlemen.

In 1867 the Christians brought a libel suit against the Jews in Bârlad accusing them of killing a monk. The rabble fell upon Jewish homes. The government ordered an investigation into the matter, and the Minister of the Interior announced in parliament that the Jews were at fault in this incident. In 1868 another riot occurred because of the feud between a Greek and a Jew. In 1870 the French consul protested against the persecution of the Jews in Bârlad and demanded intervention by the responsible world powers. In 1886 a new wave of persecutions occurred which brought about the beginnings of Jewish emigration out of the city. In the fall of 1899 emigration from Bârlad increased. Every two to three days about ten to fifteen families left.

At the beginning of 1900 the flow of emigration had been established to such an extent that it was from Bârlad that the initiative to emigrate spread throughout the country. Bârlad holds in this respect a unique place in the history of Jewish emigration as the birthplace of the “Emigration on Foot” movement, *fusgeyer* in Yiddish — one of the most dramatic chapters in the story of Romanian Jewry. The first such group was created in May 1899 in Bârlad. A man named Ginsburg recruited 94 people who started calling themselves “the Wayfarers from Bârlad.”

The Bârlad Fusgeyers left the town of Bârlad in April 1900 and journeyed some 200 miles in a large semicircle around the base of the Carpathian Mountains. They supported themselves by

staging theatrical performances and selling brochures in Jewish towns along their route. Consisting of 75 single men and three women, the Bârlad Fusgeyers generated much publicity and public support, and received gifts of food and clothing from both Jews and Romanian peasants. Their success encouraged hundreds of other groups to follow. The fusgeyers published occasional bulletins in Romanian and Yiddish, among them *Emigranții* (The Emigrants); *Rămas bun* (Farewell); and *Bas ami* (Daughter of My People). The total number of Jews who left Bârlad between 1899 and 1902 came to six hundred. For more details on the *fusgeyer* movement, please see Episode 9 - Romanian Jewish Emigration.

From an inscription found on a gravestone in the Iasi cemetery we learn that in 1831 a Rabbi Binyamin Bins, who had served as vice-president of the Jewish community at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Bârlad, was killed and there buried. A progressive leadership was organized in Bârlad in 1870, but disbanded in 1885 because of the rift between followers of the more orthodox rabbi and the supporters of the modern rabbi, Rabbi Isaac Taubes.

In 1896 activities of the Kehillah, the Jewish self-government, were renewed. In 1901, alongside the Kehillah, an "Assistance Council" was in operation, because the Kehillah had ceased to be able to supply all the needs of the community. The soup kitchen for the community's poor was supported by monies from the Jewish Colonization Association. In 1891 the hospital was revived after it had been closed during the crisis in the community; it had been necessary to reestablish it, because the city hospital had stopped admitting Jewish patients. In 1899 a new special building was built for the Jewish hospital.

A modern public Jewish school was founded in Bârlad in 1873, with the initiative of the bureau of the "Bnei Brit Tzion" ("The Covenanters of Zion") and with the support of the community. From 1875 the school was maintained by the Bnei Brit but, because of a lack of means, it was closed in that same year, and was re-opened no less than seven years later. In 1883 it was closed again and then opened a third time in 1896, with the renewal of the community's activities. In 1874 the office of the Bnei Brit also opened a public school for young women, which closed within a year. In 1882 evening classes for adults were held. In 1910 the boys' school had 236 students, and the girls' school 235 students. In the cheders, the traditional religious schools, 200 boys were being educated.

In 1881 a branch of the movement "Yishuv Eretz Yisrael" ["Settlement in the Land of Israel"] was established in Bârlad. In 1883 a group of twenty families was organized in order to purchase land in Israel and to emigrate there. In 1896 the association of "Bnei Tzion" ["Children of Zion"] was established, and in 1897 a branch of "Chovevei Tzion" ["Lovers of Zion"] in memory of Max Nordau was founded in the city. For the support of this branch, a tax on meat, bread and kerosene was imposed. In 1898 a women's association was established called "Bettulat Bat Yehudah" ["Virgin Daughter of Judea"]. In 1910 a Zionist culture club named after Max Nordau was established by the students of the gymnasium. At the head of this club stood Michael Landau, who served as representative in the Romanian parliament. All the students

who participated in the establishment of the club were expelled from the gymnasium for one year. Between the years 1913 and 1919 a monthly Zionist publication called, "Bar Kochba", appeared in Bârlad.

The Jewish community numbered 2,000 in 1859; 5,883 (24% of the total) in 1899, with about one-third of the merchants and artisans in the city being Jews; and 3,727 in 1930 (14% of the total), mainly occupied in commerce and as artisans. Just before the outbreak of the Second World War there were eight synagogues and prayer rooms, and three Jewish cemeteries, two of which were ancient.

One of the first pogroms in Bârlad took place in 1868, and when Moses Montefiore learned of it, he sent a letter to Prince Carol I, who promised that things would change, and the Jews who were harmed would receive compensation for the damage according to the assessment of the judges. However, this did not happen, and the pogroms against the Jews continued.

In the period between the two world wars Bârlad was a center of pogroms. The Christian teachers in the government gymnasium, headed by the school principal Cezar Ursu, used to regularly incite the students against the Jews. Their pogroms increased when the students in the Romanian universities began to demand a "numerus clausus" against Jews. Whenever the Jewish youth had any kind of cultural event, they used to organize anti-Semitic demonstrations. The Jews convened a protest meeting and demanded the establishment of an official inquiry into the riots, which should include on its board two representatives from the Jewish community. They sent representatives to the county head, and demanded that he take action to restrain the students by making an announcement expressing the authorities' reservations concerning the violent actions against the Jews. The chief of police suggested to the Jews that they close their stores during the riots, and the authorities did not take any action.

In October 1922 the riots reached new heights. The pretext was the raising of the blue and white flag side by side with the Romanian flags on the occasion of the celebrations in honor of the king's coronation. The students broke into the Jewish quarter, smashed windows and destroyed everything that came their way. The police reacted by arresting several Jewish merchants.

The sufferings of the local Jews increased during the days of terror by the Iron Guard. In November 1940, Jewish males were taken for forced labor. After a short time the academics among them were let go. This was the result of protests from the Romanian academic community, who threatened that they too would come to work together with their Jewish colleagues.

With the outbreak of war between Romania and the Soviet Union in June of 1941, all the Jews from the villages of the county were deported into Bârlad.

The economic results of the oppression against the Jews are reflected in these statistics from the year 1942: from a total of 325 Jewish craftsmen and laborers, there were 125 without work; out of 294 Jewish clerks only 136 were employed; among 428 Jewish merchants and industrialists 254 were active and from 43 Jewish academics, only 23 were employed. In this year only 24% of Jewish professionals were able to work in their professions.

With their retreat from the advancing Red Army, the German forces under the command of General Woehler came into Bârlad. The general suggested exterminating all the Jews of the place under the pretext that the Jews were trying to trade with his soldiers. Only the developments on the front, which were to the disadvantage of the Germans, spoiled this plan.

After World War II Jewish life was reorganized for only a short period of time as Jews started emigrating in masse, mainly to Israel. In 1969, 100 Jewish families lived in Bârlad where there was one synagogue. In 2004, only 46 Jews lived Bârlad.

Bârlad Rabbinical Leaders

In reviewing Bârlad's Jewish personalities we will start with the rabbinical leaders.

Rabbi Yitzhak Aizic Taubes (1837–1920) was a "modern" maskil rabbi, a descendent of Rashi [Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhakil, grandson of Rabbi Aharon Moshe Taubes from Iasi and the son of Rabbi Michael Taubes from Vaslui. In 1862 he gained official recognition from prince Cuza as rabbi of Bârlad. He was the author of the 1869 polemical booklet *Ha-Yehudim be-Romanyah v'ha-minister Bratianu* (The Jews in Romania and the Minister Brătianu; 1869). In 1872 he anonymously published a booklet on the persecution of Jews in Romania. This booklet also was translated by the Alliance into English, French and German, and caused a stir in the Romanian parliament. In the same year Rabbi Taubes started 'a propaganda campaign in Europe for the granting of aid to the Jews emigrating from Romania. Due to his influence a conference of Jewish leaders was convened in Brussels to discuss the matter, but the idea was not accepted by them. Rabbi Taubes was the first rabbi in Romania who gave his sermons in the Romanian language. He participated in the struggle for the granting of rights to Jews, and in the battles against anti-Semitism and against the "Jewish oath". In 1891, Taubes published a pamphlet which was a polemic against the famous anti-Semitic leader, Ceur-Aslan.

Rabbi Taubes worked to establish secular schools in Bârlad, Husi, Tecuci, Vaslui, Braila and in other places. He translated the poems of the Romanian poet Vasile Alecsandri into Hebrew. Also, he published articles in the Hebrew press on the situation of the Jews in Romania. Taubes also translated Romanian literature into Hebrew. He represented a remarkable bridge between Orthodox scholarship and the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), and was one of the most intellectually distinguished rabbis of 19th century Moldavian Jewry.

Another remarkable rabbi was **Rabbi Shimshon Thenen** who served in Bârlad, the son of Rabbi Moshe Thene, who was born in 1857, and began his term in 1889. He wrote several books on Halakhah, among them *Midot hakhamim* (1909) "Qualities of the Wise" and *Ziv ha-shemesh* (1910) "Radiance of the Sun".

Bârlad Artists, Intellectuals and Civic Leaders

Let's now look at Bârlad artists, intellectuals and civic leaders.

In Bârlad was born the poet **Avram Axelrad-Luca** (1879-1965), who began his literary activities under the influence of "The Emigration on Foot"

Felix Aderca (Froim-Zelig Aderca) (1891–1962) is the most internationally recognized literary figure associated with the Bârlad Jewish community. Felix Aderca was a Romanian novelist, playwright, poet, journalist, and critic, noted as a representative of modernism in the context of Romanian literature. As a member of the Sburătorul circle and close friend of its founder Eugen Lovinescu, Aderca promoted the ideas of literary innovation, cosmopolitanism, and art for art's sake. Aderca's rejection of tradition, his socialism and pacifism, and his exploration of controversial subjects resulted in several scandals, making him a main target of attacks from the far-right press of the interwar period. He also published hundreds of articles about antisemitism and translated into Romanian books dealing with Jewish themes, among them the trilogy of Sholem Asch. Aderca believed in the idea of symbiosis between his Judaism and the Romanian language and culture. Persecuted during the Holocaust period (1938–44), he ended up working as a librarian in the Jewish community of Bucharest.

The Leibovici Brothers — Lucian Raicu & Virgil Duda, from a Jewish family from Bârlad, became prominent figures in Romanian letters under pen names.

Lucian Raicu (born Bernard Leibovici, 1934–2006) was a Romanian literary critic, biographer, memoirist, and magazine editor. As a Jewish youth growing up in Bârlad, he was drawn into leftist causes shortly after World War II. As a staff critic at *Viața Românească*, he initially pledged himself to Socialist Realism, though more privately he was embracing dissident stances and questioning the standards of Marxist literary criticism. He is regarded as one of the three greatest Romanian literary critics of the postwar period.

Virgil Duda was born in 1939 as Rubin Leibovici. Orphaned early, he followed in the footsteps of his older brother Lucian Raicu and moved to Bucharest. He studied law and subsequently wrote and published his first collection of short stories *Povestiri din provincie* (1967) “Stories from the province”.

Other notable Jewish intellectuals include engineer **Martin Bercovici**, military historian **Eugen M. Bantea**, and economist **Avram Rosen**, who published studies on the economic history of Romanian Jews.

Marcel Saragea is considered the father of physiopathology in Romanian medical schools and an honorary member of the Academy for Medical Sciences.

Shim'on Rubinstein, an Israeli historian of Bârlad origins, was a major contributor to the documentation of Romanian Jewish history.

The most prominent Bârlad family associated with the Zionist movement was the **Gutenmacher family: Sapsa Gutenmacher** — later the Israeli ideologist, writer, and publicist Shabetai Nadiv, a leading member of Bârlad's strong Revisionist Zionist group and **Shmil Micki Gutenmacher**, his brother, who was killed on the *Struma*, a ship that was wrecked en route from Romania to Palestine in 1942 — one of the most tragic episodes of wartime Jewish history, in which over 700 Romanian Jews perished.

Epstein Family was active in commerce in Bârlad. **Iuju Epstein** (later Yehudah Epstein) who became a successful businessman in Israel.

Steinberg Family is tracing its roots to 19th century Bârlad. There were prominent merchants like **Ben Zion Steinberg** and **Haim Steinberg** (veteran of the Romanian Army), well established in Bârlad and neighboring Tecuci.

Buhuș Hasidim, while not a single family, were the followers of the Friedman dynasty from Buhuși and constituted the largest religious bloc within Bârlad's Jewish community for much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, with their own institutional infrastructure parallel to the maskil-led community.

From the anonymous young man who sparked the fugey movement to Nobel Prize-caliber scientists, bold literary modernists, and resilient Zionist activists, Bârlad's Jewish community left a mark on Romanian, Israeli, and world Jewish history that far outweighs the modest size of this Moldavian town.

Focșani Jewish History

Now, let's visit the town of Focșani.

Focșani had a unique geopolitical position that made it commercially exceptional; it sat exactly on the border between Moldavia and Wallachia, the two Romanian principalities, that united in 1859 under Alexandru Ioan Cuza. Before unification, Focșani was literally a divided city, the northern half in Moldavia, the southern half in Wallachia, with different laws, customs regulations, and tax regimes. This made it a natural entrepôt and smuggling hub; goods could be moved across the internal border to exploit price differences and avoid duties. After the 1859 unification, it remained an important regional market town as it also sat on the main route connecting Galați and Brăila to the east, with Transylvania via the mountain passes to the west.

Focșani fits well into the commercial geography: Transylvania → mountain passes → Focșani → road/rail → Brăila/Galați → Danube → Constanța → Black Sea → World markets.

Jewish merchants were ideally positioned for this because their family networks often spanned both principalities. Goods commonly traded across the border included textiles, spirits, tobacco, salt, and agricultural produce.

Jewish merchants also played a significant role in the wine trade, as brokers between producers and exporters, as tavern operators, and as distributors. Some families were involved in wine export toward Galați and Brăila for onward shipping.

Jewish merchants in Focșani organized the timber trade: buying cutting rights, organizing log floating down the Milcov and Putna rivers, and selling to construction merchants and exporters. Jewish merchants acted as the familiar intermediary layer between local producers and the large exporters in Galați and Brăila.

The first Jewish settlement dates from the second half of the 17th century; there were 20 tax-paying families by 1820. There was a Jewish cemetery in the Moldavian part of the city (Str. Bahne), which was closed around the middle of the 18th century.

In 1797 the Jews had a synagogue. During the Greek uprising against the Turks in 1821, the city was burned by the rioters. On this occasion, anti-Jewish demonstrations also took place, resulting in many casualties.

In 1859, the Jewish community in Focșani numbered 1,855 souls. During this period, Jewish community life continued to develop and organize. In 1866 a Jewish school was opened, but after three years it was closed due to opposition from religious circles. The Lev Ehad ("One Heart") organization began to function to help the elderly, orphans, and poor students.

In 1874 the school reopened and had 200 students. In 1888 the number of students increased to 300, and in 1897 the community opened two schools: one for girls and one for boys. The girls' school was built with a donation from the banker Wilhelm Schleyer, a Focșani native originally from Vienna. In 1885, a kindergarten began to operate, on the initiative and donation of Sigismund Gottfried. In 1896 the Great Synagogue was built, and next to it, two other smaller temples, as well as a ritual slaughterhouse for birds.

The community numbered 736 in 1838, 1,855 in 1859 (19.2% of the total), and 5,954 in 1899 (25.2% of the total), 4,301 in 1930 (13.2% of the total), and 4,935 in 1941 (10.5% of the total).

In the 19th century, when Romanian Jews were fighting for Romanian citizenship and political emancipation, the thought of colonizing Palestine by the Jews of Romania came up during discussion of the proposal of the American consul Peixotto concerning emigration from the country in 1872. The idea of agricultural colonization in Palestine spread quickly among the Romanian Jews and in 1875 a society called Jashub Eretz Israel (The Colonization of Eretz Israel) was founded at Moinesti. Similar societies were created in other cities and a turning point was reached by the new movement of Jewish national renaissance at the Focșani conference of 30 December 1881 and 1 January 1882. This conference is considered by many scholars and historians to be the first organized Zionist congress, preceding Theodor Herzl's First Zionist Congress in Basel by sixteen years. 56 delegates representing 29 localities took part in the conference which was held symbolically in the town where the union of the two Romanian principalities had been previously proclaimed. It was decided to encourage and coordinate all efforts towards organized emigration and successful colonization in Palestine.

The conference had a great impact on the Romanian Jews and one immediate result was the departure of the ship Thetis from Galatz in August 1882, bearing 228 immigrants and the creation of the first farming colonies, Samarin-Zichron and Roch Pina. A new era began in the modern history of the Romanian Jews.

For more details on the Focșani conference please see Episode 8 - Romanian Jews and Zionism.

In 1923 the local publication of *Torța* (The Torch) appeared, bringing to the Jewish population news from the life of the community, the education of the youth, and other relevant topics. In 1924 another local periodical appeared, *Unirea* (The Union) and in 1925 *Acțiunea Noastră* (Our Action).

On the eve of World War II the community had eight synagogues, the oldest dating from the 18th century, two primary schools, a kindergarten, a medical dispensary, a public bath, and three cemeteries.

When the war with the Soviet Union broke out in June 1941, all Jewish males aged between 16 and 60 were imprisoned. A few weeks later they were released, except for 65 hostages including the rabbi and community leaders. Three months later the number of hostages was reduced to ten; each was held for a while and then relieved by other Jews. The number of Jews in Focșani increased considerably with the arrival of Jews who had been driven out of the villages and towns in the district, as well as Jews from Ploesti. They were cared for by the local community which also aided a group of 400 Jews from southern Transylvania who had been brought to the district as forced labor. A number of Jews from Focșani were also sent away on forced labor. In the spring of 1944, 210 Jewish orphans from Transnistria were brought to Focșani and put under the care of the local community. On May 12, 1944, the local military commander mobilized all male and female Jews aged between 15 and 55, to dig anti-tank ditches for the defense of the town against the approaching Soviet forces.

In the postwar period the Jewish population, which numbered 6,080 in 1947, decreased to 3,500 by 1950 as a result of emigration to Israel. By 1970 continued emigration had reduced the number further to about 150 families. One synagogue remained open. In 1994, 80 Jews lived in Focșani, dropping to 70 in 2004.

Focșani Rabbinical Leaders

As usual, we will start the Focșani Jewish personalities with the rabbinical leaders.

In the 17th century **Natan Note Hannover**, served as the city's rabbi. He authored *Yeven metsulah* (Greek Hell), about the anti-Jewish riots and prohibitions of 1648-1649, and *Sha'are tsiyon*, which contains poetry of a religious nature. His study *Tokef yayin*, on the significance of Purim, is preserved in manuscript form at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Turkish soldiers killed him there in 1683.

Hannover's two major works, *Sha'are Tsiyon* and *Yeven metsulah*, greatly influenced Ashkenazic culture, the former serving as a conduit for the introduction of Lurianic prayers into the daily service. The latter remained popular for generations, and even influenced a number of modern authors, including Sholem Asch and Sha'ul Tchernichowsky.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon Halevy Goldring (1847–1890) was active in the pre-Herzl Zionist movement, served as a prominent Rabbinic leader and the Honorary President of the Jewish Community Committee in Focșani. He was a key figure who advocated for local Jews through vocational schooling and agricultural settlement, promoting unity across Focșani's Jewish population.

As mentioned before, Focșani was a major center of Zionist activity in Romania, largely driven by **Rabbi Jacob Nacht**, who served the community from 1900 to 1919.

Focșani Artists, Intellectuals and Civic Leaders

Moving over to **Focșani** artists, intellectuals and civic leaders, we should first mention the famous Froim Moise, known in Romanian literature as **Cilibi Moise**, was the son of Alexander Sender Schwartz, a native of Galicia. Illiterate in Romanian, Moise would dictate his compositions to printers and sell them in pamphlets in the market towns of Walachia, where he

was a traveling merchant. The 14 pamphlets issued as of 1858 included adages and sayings, maxims, thoughts, and moral lessons drawn from the school of life, revealing a picturesque and lively mixture of popular wisdom, Balkan humor, and Jewish folklore.

Beyond Cilibi Moise's words of wisdom, he presented a philosophy of life that combined skepticism with serene resignation to poverty and hardship, and also demonstrated a critical and ironic overview of social rules and injustice. He commented on the manners of his times, as well as on human nature and the human condition, with echoes from Ecclesiastes ("Remember where you come from, where you stand and where you are headed to"). Several thoughts are extremely powerful, though expressed in a lapidary style: "It is hard for the poor to live, while it is hard for the rich to die"; "Time is a stairway: one goes up, another comes down." His self-mockery and black humor derive from Jewish popular origin: "Moise, the Jew, keeps a bell on his table; when he rings once, he brings water himself as he does not have a servant"; "One day Cilibi Moise suffered a great embarrassment: thieves broke into his house at night and didn't find anything"; "Cilibi Moise has been asking poverty for several years to get out of his house at least for as long as it takes him to get dressed."

Encouraged by Moses Gaster, the folklorist Moses Schwarzfild collected and edited a posthumous book of Cilibi Moise's sayings, titled *Practica și aporourile lui Cilibi Moise vestitul din Țara Românească* (The Practice and Sayings of the Renowned Cilibi Moise from Walachia; 1883). Cilibi Moise became, mostly after his death, a legendary figure, an embodiment of popular wisdom and humor, nostalgically evoked by the great Romanian writer Ion Luca Caragiale, or turned into a character in several plays. He is considered to be the first Jewish author of literary pieces, naive though captivating, and enjoyed by both Romanian readers and the Jewish public. Rightfully considered an "oral genius," his style set the stage for Romanian Jewish writers of the modern age.

Camil Baltazar, born Leopold Goldstein (1902 -1977) in Focșani, is one of the most prominent Jewish writers and poets in Romania. Baltazar's first poems appeared in 1921 in "Sburatorul Literar", a review edited by the Romanian critic Eugen Lovinescu, and his contributions were published thereafter in many of the leading literary periodicals. Baltazar's poetry was written mainly before World War II. His first collection, *Vecernii* (Vespers), appeared in 1923. This was followed by *Flaute de matase* (Silken Flutes, 1924), *Reculegeri in nemurea ta* (Meditation on Your Immortality, 1925), *Biblice* (Biblical Poems, 1926, a volume of erotic poems with ancient Hebrew Biblical themes), *Strigari trupesti pe langa glesne* (Poems on Amorous Yearnings, 1927), and *Cina cea de taina* (The Last Supper, 1929). In his themes and mode of expression, Baltazar was, from the outset, hailed as an innovator. Though his sensitivity led to preoccupation with human suffering, he was widely known as "the poet of light" because of the serenity with which he transfigured the most somber themes. During the early 1930s, Baltazar published an anthology of Russian prose (1930) and translations from such German writers as Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, and Jakob Wassermann. His completion of this work was marked by the verse collection *Intoarcerea poetului la unelte sale* (The Poet's Return to his Tools, 1934), which are poems in prose about his work as a writer and a literary editor, written under the influence of Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars. In 1928 he edited the literary review "Tiparnita literara" (The Literary Printer) and in 1932 was secretary of redaction of the literary weekly "Romania literara" (Literary Romania), edited by Liviu Rebreanu. After World War II, Baltazar became a

contributor to the Romanian Jewish newspaper “Revista Cultului Mozaic” and published further collections of his poems.

Felicia Antip, a journalist of great value, was born in Focșani. Between 1950 and 1963 she was an editor at “Agerpres”, and between 1963 and 1971 at the magazine “Lumea.” Between 1971 and 1984 she worked at radio and at “Tribuna României”. She was one of the most important columnists of foreign literature at the publication “România literară” before 1989 and at “Adevărul literar și artistic” after 1990.

Remarkable Focșani business leaders were the **Fișer / Fischer family**, involved in grain and spirits trade, the **Goldenberg family**, involved in textile trade and the **Șapira / Shapira family**, connected to the wine and spirits sector in Vrancea

I would also mention **Heinrich Israel**, my maternal grandmother's brother, who was a prominent Jewish community leader in Focșani prior to World War II.

Finally let's add to this list another renown personality from Focșani, **Rabbi Solomon Schechter**. He was a rabbi, academic scholar and educator, most famous for his roles as founder and President of the United Synagogue of America, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and architect of American Conservative Judaism movement. He was born in Focșani, Romania, to Rabbi Yitzchok Hakohen, a shochet, "ritual slaughterer", and a member of Chabad hasidim. In his 20s, he went to the Rabbinical College in Vienna, where he studied under the more modern Talmudic scholar Meir Friedmann, before moving on in 1879 to undertake further studies at the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums and at the University of Berlin. In 1890, after the death of Solomon Marcus Schiller-Szinessy, he was appointed to the faculty at Cambridge University, serving as a lecturer in Talmudics and reader in Rabbinics. His greatest academic fame came from his excavation in 1896 of the papers of the Cairo Geniza, an extraordinary collection of around 300,000 documents of rare Hebrew religious manuscripts and medieval Jewish texts that were preserved at an Egyptian synagogue. The find revolutionized the study of Medieval Judaism. He became a Professor of Hebrew at University College of London in 1899 and remained there until 1902 when he moved to the United States. In 1902, traditional Jews, reacting against the progress of the American Reform Judaism movement, recruited Schechter to become President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA). Schechter served as the second President of the JTSA, from 1902 to 1915, during which time he founded the United Synagogue of America, later renamed as the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. For more details on Rabbi Solomon Schechter please see Episode 29 – Remarkable Romanian Rabbis and Tzadikim.

This concludes this episode the Moldavian towns of Bârlad and Focșani. In the next episode we will be visiting the cities of Brăila and Galați. Until then, be well.