

Episode 44 - Prominent Romanian Jewish Personalities and Families from București (Bucharest)

Hello listeners, this is Adrian Iosifescu, your host of the History of Romanian Jews podcast, and in this episode, we are going to spend most of the time discussing prominent Jewish personalities and families from the Romanian capital, Bucuresti (please see its location on the Romanian map presented in the notes).

You just listened to the orchestra of the București Jewish Theatre playing the Yiddish song “Lomir singen ciri bim, ciri bom” (Let's sing ciri bim, ciri bom); a link to the full recording is provided in the episode notes.

București Jewish History

We will not discuss the Jewish history of the city of București as we did it extensively in “Episode 30 – Jewish București (Bucharest in English, Bukharest in Yiddish. Instead, we will present a comprehensive overview of the prominent historical Jewish personalities and families of București (Bucharest), the capital of Romania and the largest, most diverse Jewish community in the country — a city where Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews built a civilization of banks, synagogues, theaters, schools, and political movements that shaped the entire nation. I am only going to mention that the first Sephardic Jews arrived in București in the 16th century. Around the beginning of the 17th century, during the Cossack uprising, the first Ashkenazi Jews came from Ukraine and Poland.

The Jewish population of București grew significantly, particularly in the second half of the 19th century. Jews also played major roles in the banking system from the 18th century, with prominent Sephardic and Ashkenazic bankers running successful institutions. At the beginning of the 20th century, București's Jewish population numbered 40,000 with 70 temples and synagogues. From this great number, only a few survived the brutality of fascism and communism — two still serve the city's present Jewish community. The Choral Temple of 1867, the Great Synagogue of 1850, and the Barașeum theater complex remain as the most important living monuments to what was once the most dynamic Jewish community in all of Romania.

București Rabbinical Leaders

We will start the presentation with București rabbinical leaders.

Rabbi Me'ir Leib Malbim was one the most important personality of the 19th-century București. Malbim was one of the great biblical commentators of the 19th century. Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, the Malbim, served as the Chief Rabbi of București and Romania from 1858 to 1864. The Malbim was an outspoken opponent of the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) and attempted to establish Orthodox standards. His strict regulations on kosher butchers and introduction of a new *eruv* alienated wealthy and assimilated Jews in the city; his opposition to Reform Judaism sparked fierce backlash from the upper class. His opponents falsely accused him of treason against the Romanian government, which resulted in his brief imprisonment and forced removal from his post in 1864 and eventual expulsion from the city. Following his leadership, the community built a synagogue in 1864 named after him. It was sadly demolished in 1987 to make way for Union Boulevard in București

Rabbi Hayim Bejarano, born in Bulgaria, was a well-known Sephardic scholar and poet in Ladino, who led the Sephardic community in București for 32 years. He was one of the most distinguished Sephardic religious figures in 19th-century București.

Rabbi Antoine Levy inaugurated the București Coral Temple on July 6, 1867, during a ceremony attended by government officials, foreign diplomats, and members of the Jewish community from across the country, which marked a significant moment in the religious and cultural life of București.

Rabbi Me'ir Beck, also known as Moritz or Meyr Beck, was a prominent Hungarian-born rabbi, biblical scholar, and key leader of Romanian Jewry. Arriving in 1873, he notably served as the rabbi at București's historic Choir Temple and directed the Loebel Jewish School. He promoted the expansion of Jewish education, established social welfare institutions, and actively worked to rebuild and unify the București Jewish community organization. In 1881, he compiled a Hebrew-Romanian dictionary of the Torah, and he later founded and edited the Jewish newspaper *Revista Israelită* (The Israelite magazine). He stood at the forefront of the fight against antisemitism and tirelessly advocated for the civil emancipation of Romanian Jews.

A remarkable personality was **Chief Rabbi Dr. Alexandru Șafran** (1910–2006). He was born in Bacău and received his doctorate in philosophy from Vienna University (1933). He became chief rabbi of Romania in 1940 — then the youngest chief rabbi in the world. In 1941, Șafran and Romania's Union of Jewish Communities, through intervention with Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu of the Romanian Orthodox Church, convinced Antonescu to revoke an order forcing Jews to wear the yellow badge. He was known as one of the most charismatic orators of his time, touching even the most hardened anti-Semites with his speeches. He guided the community during its most difficult years of the war. In 1947 he was forced into exile in Geneva, where he became chief rabbi until his death. He worked with the United Nations, Red Cross, and other organizations to improve human rights. He was elected an honorary member of the Romanian Academy in 1997.

Chief Rabbi Dr. Moses Rosen (1912–1994) is also known as The Tightrope Walker. On June 16, 1948, Moses Rosen was elected chief rabbi of Romania. Over the next 45 years, he managed the delicate and controversial task of maintaining a beneficial relationship with a communist and often antisemitic regime while cultivating good relations with world leaders. It was thanks to Rosen's astute political skills that the lion's share of the country's Jewish population of 450,000 was able to emigrate under communism, most of them to Israel. From 1957 he was a member of the Great National Assembly of Romania, representing a București constituency. He was the editor of the Journal of Romanian Religious Jewry, a trilingual biweekly in Romanian, Hebrew, and Yiddish — the only Hebrew publication in Eastern Europe during the Communist period. Rosen's maneuvering was a factor in Romania's refusal to break diplomatic relations with Israel after the Six-Day War in 1967, when Moscow and all other Warsaw Pact capitals severed ties with the Jewish state.

București Jewish Artists, Intellectuals and Civic Leaders

We are moving now to București Jewish artists, intellectuals and civic leaders.

Adolphe Stern (1848–1931) was Romania's first Jewish lawyer and a champion of Jewish emancipation. Adolphe Stern was born on November 17, 1848 in București, in a rich merchant family. He went to study law in Berlin after finishing high school, then received his law degree from Leipzig University in 1869, making him Romania's first Jewish lawyer. He returned to Romania and became secretary to the American Consul, Benjamin F. Peixotto. On November 27, 1909, the Union of Native Jews party was established and Stern was among its founders and served as its president until 1922. As a lawyer, he published the *Codicele române adnotate* (Annotated Romanian Codes of Law) and lectured on public and private international law at the School of Political and Administrative Studies in București. Stern actively fought for Jewish emancipation since the 1878 Congress of Berlin, where he represented Romanian Jews and influenced delegates like Benjamin Disraeli and William Waddington to secure Jewish civil rights.

The remarkable **Dr. Wilhelm Filderman** (1882–1963) is considered the greatest defender of Romanian Jewry. Wilhelm Filderman was born in București on November 14, 1882. In 1909 he became a doctor of law in Paris. In 1920 he became the representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Romania, and in 1923 was elected president of the Union of Romanian Jews party. In 1927 Filderman was elected a member of the Romanian Parliament on the Liberal Party list. He was also the president of the Jewish community of București (1931–33), and president of the Federation of Jewish Communities. After September 1940, when Antonescu took over, Filderman intervened with him as representative of the Federation, several times obtaining the revocation of serious measures, such as the wearing of the yellow badge and the deportation of Romanian Jews to Nazi camps in Poland. When he expressed his opposition to the special tax of four billion lei demanded of Romanian Jewry, he was sent to Transnistria in March 1943, returning after three months through the intervention of the papal nuncio and the Swiss and Swedish ambassadors. Though primarily a lawyer and civic leader rather than a merchant, Filderman came from a București Jewish merchant family which gave him the social capital to move in elite Romanian circles.

He is considered one of the most important figures in Romanian Jewish history

Moses Gaster (1856–1939) was born in the city in a highly influential family of Austrian descent that settled in București in the early 19th century. His father, Abraham Emanuel Gaster, served as the Consul of the Netherlands in București. Moses Gaster taught Romanian language and literature at the University of București, between 1881–85. In 1885, because of his protests against the treatment of the Jews, he was expelled from Romania to London where he became the chief Rabbi of the Sephardic community. He was an active Zionist in Romania and in England, where in 1899 he helped establish the English Zionist Federation. Historian James Renton argued that Gaster was integral to the "cumulative efforts and diplomatic strategies" that resulted in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. In 1925, he was appointed one of the six trustees of the YIVO Institute alongside Simon Dubnow, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Edward Sapir, and Chaim Zhitlowsky.

Dr. Iuliu Barasch (1815–1863) was a pioneering modernist figure and one of the most prominent Jewish intellectuals of 19th-century București; he is considered the father of Romanian popular science and Jewish journalism. Iuliu Barasch was a Galician-born Jewish physician, philosopher, pedagogue, and promoter of Romanian culture and science. He taught natural sciences at the Saint Sava Academy in 1852 and then became a professor at București 's School of Medicine and Pharmacy. Besides working as a doctor, he became a radical and ardent Romanian patriot, friend of C.A. Rosetti and Ion Heliade Rădulescu. In 1857 he helped found the first Jewish periodical in Wallachia, *Israelitul Român* (The Romanian Israelite), appearing in Romanian and French, established principally to further the cause of Jewish emancipation. He conceived the idea of publishing a scientific encyclopedia in Hebrew for East European Jews, spreading Haskalah ideas, and his accounts of Jewish communities he visited are an important historical source. In 1858 Barasch founded the first children's hospital in București. He is memorialized in București 's historically Jewish Văcărești neighborhood by the Barașeum Theater, now home to the State Jewish Theater, an adjoining clinic and a street bearing his name.

David Emmanuel (1854–1941) is considered the founder of modern Romanian mathematics. He was a Sephardic Jewish mathematician professor at the University of București for decades. He trained generations of Romanian mathematicians and represented the pinnacle of Jewish academic achievement in the country.

Adolf Albin (1848–1920), born in București to a wealthy family, was a pioneering chess master who authored Romania's first chess book in 1872 and gave his name to the Albin Counter-Gambit. His best result came at 1893 New York tournament where he finished second behind the renown Emanuel Lasker.

Moses Horowitz was a playwright and actor in the early years of Yiddish theater. He was born in Stanislau, eastern Galicia. He received the usual Jewish education, and also studied German. At age eighteen, he became a Hebrew teacher in Iași, before moving to București. He began to write plays for Israel Grodner and Sigmund Mogulesko after they left the Goldfaden's troupe. A favorite of București intellectuals, Moses Horowitz was at that time known for historical dramas, sometimes with improvised monologues (especially for his own roles); he was initially seen as a more serious playwright than Goldfaden, who at this time was writing vaudevilles, light operetta, and the occasional melodrama. Moses Horowitz was famous for the speed with which he turned out his plays, usually in no more than three days; he would sometimes start actors rehearsing the first two acts of a play while he wrote the third backstage. He wrote no less than 169 plays. Though a successful playwright, Horowitz failed as an actor, and after he went to America, he abandoned acting entirely. At one time quite wealthy and "the best-dressed man on the Lower East Side" he died poor and is buried in Washington Cemetery in Brooklyn.

Iosif Iser (21 May 1881 – 25 April 1958) was a Romanian painter and graphic artis, born to a Jewish family in București. He was initially inspired by Expressionism, creating drawings with thick, unmodulated, lines and steep angles. After studies in Munich, he returned briefly to

Ploiești before moving to București, where he exhibited in the *Tinerimea Artistică* show of 1905. After further study in Paris, with, among others, André Derain. He returned in 1909 and promptly organized the first exhibit of modern art at the Romanian Athenaeum, including some of Derain's works as well as his own.

Iser worked for the socialist press, *Facla* and the original version of *Adevărul*, publishing a large number of caricatures (most of them satirizing the Romanian Monarchy). He also started his first series of paintings with Dobrujan themes, usually featuring local Tatar portraits.

He traveled extensively in the interwar years: the Dobruja region along the Black Sea; several more years in Paris; at least some time in Berlin where he exhibited at the Secession Exhibition of 1926; and travels in Spain. Despite the wartime persecutions of Romanian Jews, his work was included in a 1943 show "Light and Color". He continued to paint in the postwar years, showing in New York City (1948), the Venice Biennale (1954), Moscow and Leningrad (1956), and Vienna (1957). In 1955, he was elected a full member of the Romanian Academy.

Marcel Janco, born Marcel Hermann Iancu (24 May 1895 – 21 April 1984), was a Romanian and Israeli visual artist, architect and art theorist. He is known as an architect and as an artist of oil painting, collage, relief, illustration, linocut, woodcut, watercolor, pastel, costume design, interior design, scenic design, ceramic art, fresco, tapestry; he did everything. Although a co-inventor of Dadaism with Tzara and a leading exponent of Constructivism in Eastern Europe, Marcel Janco experimented with Postimpressionism, Symbolism, Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Primitivism, and Abstract art.

Marcel Janco was born on 24 May 1895 in București to an upper middle class Jewish family. His father, Hermann Zui Iancu, was a textile merchant. His mother, Rachel née Luster, was from Moldavia. Later in life, when Janco revisited his childhood years, he wrote: "Born as I was in beautiful Romania, into a family of well-to-do people, I had the fortune of being educated in a climate of freedom and spiritual enlightenment. My mother, [...] possessing a genuine musical talent, and my father, a stern man and industrious merchant, had created the conditions favorable for developing all of my aptitudes."

Janco studied drawing art with the Romanian Jewish painter and cartoonist Iosif Iser, between 1910 and 1914. At just 17 he contributed drawings and layout for *Simbolul*, an avant-garde magazine published by two of his high school friends - Eugen Iovanaki and Sammy Rosenstock. Rosenstock was to later change his name to Tristan Tzara and go on to be a major figure in the Dada movement.

Together with Tzara and a number of other Romanians, he founded the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916 and launched Dada. Same year he exhibited at the first Zurich Dada show with amongst others Giorgio de Chirico, Paul Klee and Tzara. He went on to spend time working in Paris before returning to București where in 1922 he became the artistic director and editor of *Contimporanul* - the most important and influential Romanian avant-garde publication of its time. Throughout the 1930's the situation for Jews deteriorated in Romania. In 1941 he emigrated to Eretz Israel with his wife and two daughters, but not before his brother in law had been tortured and killed by the Legionaries - the Romanian fascist organization. He became a major artist in Israel, where he founded the artists' village Ein Hod in 1953.

More information about Janco and Tzara could be found in "Episode 13 - Jews and the Romanian Cultural Avantgarde"

Another reason I mention Marcel Janco here is for the opportunity to talk about his work as an architect in București, which has a glorious collection of Bauhaus and Modernist architecture. Several of the most impressive of these buildings were designed by Marcel Janco.

There is something very special about București's modernist jewels, many of which are in poor condition, some of which have been lovingly cared for and all of which are interesting. Some of these treasures have severe problems; some are not strong enough to stand up to the major earthquakes like the one from 1977, others have been vandalized by low quality renovations. The ownership of several remains in dispute after decades of misappropriations by one government or another and the efforts of original owners to reclaim them can take many years and be extremely complex.

The episode notes have images of these architectural masterpieces by Janco.

Clara Haskil (7 January 1895 – 7 December 1960) was a Romanian classical pianist, renowned as an interpreter of the classical and early romantic repertoire. She was particularly noted for her performances and recordings of Mozart and as a noted interpreter of Beethoven, Schumann, and Scarlatti.

Haskil was born into a Jewish family in București. Her father, Isaac Haskil (1858–1899), immigrated to Romania from Bessarabia but died of acute pneumonia when Clara was four years old. Her mother, Berthe Haskil (née Moscona) (1866–1917), was of Sephardi origin. Clara studied in Vienna under Richard Robert, whose pupils also included Rudolf Serkin and George Szell, and briefly with Ferruccio Busoni. She later moved to France, where she studied with Gabriel Fauré's pupil Joseph Morpain, whom she always credited as one of her greatest influences. Upon graduating from Conservatoire de Paris, Haskil began to tour Europe, though her career was cut short by one of the numerous physical ailments she suffered throughout her life. Frequent illnesses, combined with extreme stage fright, kept her from critical or financial success. Most of her life was spent in abject poverty. It was only after World War II, during a series of concerts in the Netherlands in 1949, that she began to win acclaim. In 1951 she moved to Vevey in Switzerland. Not long after that she was appointed a Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur by the French state. As a pianist, her playing was marked by a purity of tone and phrasing that may have come from her skill as a violinist.

Haskil collaborated with George Enescu, , Pablo Casals, Dinu Lipatti, Joseph Szigeti, Isaac Stern, Henryk Szeryng and Arthur Grumiaux, with whom she played her last concert. While renowned primarily as a violinist, Grumiaux was also a fine pianist, and he and Haskil would sometimes swap instruments. She played as a soloist under the baton of many conductors, including Ansermet, Barbirolli, Baumgartner, Boult, Celibidache, Karajan, Kempe, Klemperer, Kubelík, Markevitch, Monteux, Solti, Stokowski and Szell.

Haskil died from injuries received in a fall on a staircase at the Brussels-South railway station. She was due to play at a concert with Arthur Grumiaux the following day. She was aged 65. An esteemed friend of Haskil, Charlie Chaplin, described her talent by saying "In my lifetime I have met three geniuses: Professor Einstein, Winston Churchill, and Clara Haskil. I am not a trained musician but I can only say that her touch was exquisite, her expression wonderful, and her technique extraordinary." In a 2013 interview, Pope Francis mentioned Haskil as one of his favorite musicians, especially when performing Mozart.

Saşa Pană, born Alexandru Binder in a Jewish family in Bucureşti. He trained as a physician in Iaşi and Bucureşti, becoming a qualified combat medic in 1927 but he was more interested in a literary career, which he had begun in 1925, after publishing several Symbolism-inspired poems. From Symbolism he moved to Dada themes, and then to Surrealism soon after. Pană financed and edited the 1928 avant-garde magazine named *unu* (lower case was used on purpose). The magazine was the basis for a publishing house of the same name, which Pană used for printing works by the likes of Urmuz, Tristan Tzara, Stephan Roll, Ilarie Voronca, as well as his own. Many of Pană's writings were combined with drawings by notable artists such as M. H. Maxy, Man Ray, Victor Brauner, Pablo Picasso, and Marcel Janco.

The **Cajal family** was a prominent family of physicians. **Marcu Cajal** (1885–1972) was professor and pioneer in pediatrics in Romania. He was a student of Nicolae Paulescu and respected him for his scientific work, although they diverged on his anti-Semitic views.

Nicolae Cajal (1919–2004), Marcu's son, was a renowned virologist, the director of the Institute of Virology of the Romanian Academy (starting in 1967) and a key figure in the modernization of Romanian medicine. Nicolae was a member of the Romanian Academy (vice-president 1990-1994) and served as president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania from 1994 to 2004. He was a senator for Bucureşti (1990–1992) following the Romanian Revolution.

Eliezer Hillel Behor Manoach (1785-1862) was a Sephardic banker, philanthropist, and honorary consul of the Ottoman Empire, who served as president of the Sephardic Jewish community in Bucureşti. Manoach was deeply involved in everything that meant the relationship between finances and political projects of the time, the most important being that of building modern Romania. The Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia were faced with vital decisions for the continuation of their state existence; their unification was “the keystone without which the entire national edifice would collapse,” as the historian and politician Mihai Kogălniceanu wrote. Hillel Manoach was born at the end of the 18th century in Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, the year being uncertain, 1795 or 1797, into the family of a businessman. He and his brother Israel followed their father's career. They are mentioned both in documents among the creditors of the Wallachian prince Grigorie Ghica between 1827-1832, being exempt from taxes for services rendered to the state. In the following years, until the revolution of 1848, Hillel is mentioned as the main creditor of the national guard, the one on the basis of which the modern Romanian army would be established. It should be noted that without his financing, the Wallachian 1848 revolution had little chance of manifesting itself. Later, in the 1850s, he is among those who participate in the development of the banking system, the ancestor of the future financial banking of Romania. He was decorated by three emperors; he is the only one in Romanian history to receive decorations from the Tsar of Russia, the Emperor of Austria, and the Ottoman Sultan. He was a cultural patron, and his sons, **Isac** and **Emanuel**, five years after his death in 1864, when the University of Bucureşti was founded, in 1869, donated 100,000 gold lei to it for prizes and scholarships. For 70 years, prizes and scholarships were given from this fund, until 1939.

Abraham Halfon was born in 1808 in Adrianople, to a merchant called Solomon Halfon (1790-1842) appointed vizier of the Governor of the Eyalet of Edirne in 1820 and respectively Silistra in 1824. In 1828 the Sultan appointed a Consul General pro bono of the Ottoman Empire in București, in the person of Abraham Halfon. One year later, in 1829 he eventually settled together with his entire family in București, where he soon became a significant creditor of both the Treasury and the Prince of Wallachia, just like Hillel Manoach, with whom he was not only business partner, but also related through the marriage of two of their children. Abraham Halfon's appointment as the Ottoman Consul General in București was deemed a paramount event by the international media, as proven by the note published in London-based The Jewish Chronicle of November 14, 1879.

The Halfon family was a prominent Sephardic Jewish family of merchants and bankers who significantly influenced Romania's financial development in the 19th century.

Abraham Halfon enjoyed the appreciation of Prince Al. I. Cuza, who made him treasurer and, in that capacity, took him, along with various ministers, on his trip to Constantinople in June 1864. He participated in all the major banking operations in Romania during his time. In 1864, on behalf of a stakeholder group, Halfon Bank contracted a loan from the Imperial Ottoman Bank of Constantinople and from the Paris Oppenheimer Bank to cover some state expenses and then the Bank of the Stern Brothers in London, another to cover budget deficit. These loans have opened up to the Romanian state access to foreign banks. Abraham Halfon also counted among the founding members and the board of directors of the first Romanian insurance company, Dacia, founded in 1871 by a prince decree. Like Manoach Hillel, Abraham Halfon did not only engage in commerce and finance but also in culture. Besides the donation made to the Academy, he was even part of the members of the Israeli Culture Society founded by physician Iuliu Barasch in 1862.

Halfon House is an historic building recognized as one of the expensive, high-value historical properties in Romania. Halfon Villas (Kiseleff) were built between 1924 and 1926, an elite ensemble of six villas near the Triumph Arch, and commissioned by **Raphael Halfon** and designed by renowned architect Duiliu Marcu. These historic, multimillion-euro estates remain landmarks of București's architectural heritage.

Salomon Nissim Halfon was a vital leader of the București Sephardic community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, funding schools, synagogues, and charitable foundations.

Davicion Bally (1809–1884) was a merchant and banker, a leader of the Sephardic community of București, its president for some time, and a fighter for emancipation. Davicion came from a family of Sephardic bankers from the Ottoman Empire; descendants included scholars, educators, and writers. **Celebi Mentos Bally**, a banker from Constantinople, supported the Greek aristocrat Neculai Mavrocordat in becoming the ruler of Walachia. Mavrocordat then brought Bally with him to București and, in 1715, granted him the title of grand vizier. In 1730, Celebi Mentos Bally was the founder and leader of the first Sephardic Jewish community in Walachia.

Davicion Bally joined his family's business at an early age, upon the death of his father Abraham Bally. Davicion was self-taught and had a thorough knowledge of Greek, German, French, Italian, and Russian. Due to his excellent connections with the ruling authorities, he was appointed to be a cămăraș (administrator) of the salt mines in Walachia. In 1823, he established

a banking house that became one of the most powerful in the country; in 1836, he was appointed to be treasurer of the Agia (police), and in 1840 he leased the estates of the aristocratic Manu family. During the revolution of 1848, Davicion Bally provided financial support to the revolutionary government and had close ties to several of its members, including C. A. Rosetti and Ion Heliade Rădulescu. After 1850, Bally undertook several initiatives to modernize the city of București, among them funding a properly equipped firefighting unit and paving several main streets in the city.

Davicion Bally, who was self-educated, promoted Haskalah among Sephardi Jewry in Romania, tending to favor assimilation into Romanian culture. Bally called for administrative reforms in the Sephardi community and for new methods of educating Jewish youth. In 1861, when a boys' school was founded in the Sephardi community of București, Bally was appointed president of the executive committee. He emphasized the study of Romanian in the community school and also proposed the establishment of an educational framework for girls. However, his proposals and reforms encountered strong opposition; some were not accepted at all, while the remainder were short-lived. Bally fought against antisemitism and published articles in defense of the Jews in the press; as a result of his intervention the Ottoman governor (*Caimacam*) of Walachia withdrew a sharply anti-Jewish work from circulation in 1858. When anti-Jewish policy was enforced after 1866 by the government led by the former revolutionaries of 1848, Bally unsuccessfully attempted to influence them to abandon it. In 1882 Bally went to Palestine to spend his last years there and died in Jerusalem.

Isaac David Bally (1842–1922), Davicion's son, was a scholar, textbook writer, and translator. He was ordained as a rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and defended his doctoral thesis at the University of Breslau; he eventually returned to București to become headmaster of the Lea and Nissim Halfon Romanian Israelite School of the Sephardic community. He wrote many textbooks, including *Abecedar ebraic* (Hebrew Abecedar), following the method of using the Hebrew language to teach the language itself; and textbooks on Jewish history, such as *Istoria israeliților în epoca postbiblică* (History of the Israelites in the Postbiblical Age; 1887). Bally also wrote several popular texts on Jewish history and religion, such as *Seder Tu bi-Shevat* (1901), and *Prescripțiuni religioase de menaj pentru femeile Israelite* (Religious Rules of Housekeeping for Israelite Women; 1898). His translation into Romanian of the Passover Haggadah was widely used. Since he had a thorough knowledge of Ladino, Bally also developed a Judeo-Spanish abecedar that was for many years the basic textbook in Sephardic schools in Romania. He also contributed to the improvement of methods for teaching Hebrew by using illustrative material.

In 1885, Isaac David Bally was appointed secretary-treasurer of the București branch of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. On 22 June 1886, the Iuliu Barasch Historical Culture Society was founded in his home; he was extremely active in this society, acting as librarian and secretary from 1886 to 1889. Bally also published in the Romanian Jewish press, contributing articles, mainly on education, to *Egalitatea* (Equality), the main Jewish newspaper of the time, and to the *Institutorul evreu* (Jewish Teacher) magazine.

Jacques Menachem Elias was born in 1844, București, into a wealthy Sephardic family. Jacques Elias grew up in an environment where education and moral integrity were paramount. He studied in London, Brussels, and Vienna, preparing for a career in finance, and together with his

father and brothers managed the family business under the name “A. H. Elias Brothers.” Over time, he became one of the key figures of the Romanian economy — a banker, landowner, industrialist, and shrewd financial analyst. Although he obtained Romanian citizenship only in 1880, at the age of 36, through a personal recommendation from King Carol I, Jacques Elias always considered himself a Romanian in body and soul. He lived modestly, remained unmarried, and had no children. The principle that guided his entire life was simple yet profound: “Spend less than you earn.” Through discipline, perseverance, and exceptional intuition in business, he amassed a vast fortune — but used it in ways that inspired entire generations. He was advisor to King Carol I, who rewarded him with high honors for his contribution to the development of the Romanian economy. Jacques Menachem Elias died on May 14, 1923, in București. At the funeral, the whole Romanian government took part. By his will, written in December 1914, as he had no ascendants, he designated as the universal associate, the Romanian Academy, to whom he left all his wealth “wherever this fortune was in the country and abroad” (then estimated at 1 billion lei). According to his wishes, the Romanian Academy set up a foundation for national culture and public assistance called the Family Foundation Menachem H. Elias, the entire wealth being dedicated to promoting culture in Romania, relieving poor people's illnesses, encouraging valuable elements, supporting noble causes. The foundation was named after his father.

In his will he also mentioned the obligation to build and maintain in București a hospital with at least 100 beds in the most modern conditions for sick of both sexes, Israelites and any other faith. This hospital is called the Elias Hospital. Today, the hospital provides medical assistance to Romania's Presidency, Parliament, Government, and Academy, but — as stated in Jacques Elias's will — it remains open to anyone in need, regardless of gender, religion, or social status. Meanwhile, the Menachem H. Elias Family Foundation continues to grant scholarships, support research and education, and contribute to the advancement of Romanian culture. Through its ongoing work, the philanthropist's spirit lives on, nearly a century after his death.

In 1993, Jacques Elias was elected post-mortem member of the Romanian Academy.

The mausoleum of Jacques Menachem Elias (1844-1923) is in Vienna, where he and most of his family retired. The Mausoleum of Jacques Menachem Elias is one of the most important examples of Moorish renaissance architecture in Vienna. Based on the architecture of Moorish Spain, especially the Alhambra, it was built between 1908 and 1911 by architect Stefan Fayans.

Leon B. Alcalay (1847–1920) was a prominent editor, antiquarian, and bookseller. Known for his contribution to Romanian culture, he established the “*Librăria Universală Leon Alcalay*”, which published significant literary works, including those from the Romanian Royal House. Born in București in 1847, Alcalay was attracted to books from his adolescence. As the București of the 1870s was in a great fever of change and the infusion of books was massive, he started out as an itinerant seller of books, magazines and old prints. He was, what we call today, an antiquarian book seller. He placed his business on Calea Victoriei, at the intersection with Elisabeta boulevard, on the main street of the city, near the “Grand Hotel du Boulevard”. Leon Alcalay's book business was growing, and he moved to a higher level, publishing and marketing topical books. A modern spirit, Alcalay wanted to spread the universal values of humanism and culture in Romania as well. The greatest names of universal literature thus reached the Romanian readers. He followed the trends on the Western book market and

thus the pocket-book-format inspired by the famous “Library for all” collection from Reclams Universal Bibliothek in Leipzig appeared in Romania. Until the end of the First World War, Alcalay was one of the leaders on the Romanian book market. In 1920, he dies at the age of 73. His family inherited and continued the bookstore business. It was practically all over the country, not only in București. At the end of the 1930s, the name of the founder no longer appeared on the building that hosted the Alcalay publishing house, being replaced with the name of Remus Cioflec; the explanation for that change is state anti-Semitism.

The Marmorosch and Blank Families: The founders of the influential Marmorosch, Blank & Co. bank, **Jacob Marmorosch** and **Maurice Blank** were key figures in Romanian high finance in the 19th and early 20th centuries, deeply intertwined with the development of București's modern economy.

Jacob Marmorosch was born in 1823 in Kolomea, then Austria, now Ukraine and died in Vienna in 1905. He started as a money-changer and pawnbroker and in 1848 he founded the bank in the commercial area of București, on Lipscani Street, where he started his career. His partner, Maurice Blank was born in Pitești into the family of a Jewish tradesman and entrepreneur, Mauriciu Blanco. Blank studied economics in Vienna and Leipzig, and upon his return joined the bank in 1867 and gave the firm its lasting name. The Marmorosch-Blank was among the funders of Romania's war efforts during its war of independence in 1877.

By 1920 the Marmorosch-Blank Bank was Romania's largest commercial bank, with 25 domestic branches and 4 abroad in Paris, Istanbul, Vienna, and New York. The bank financed the laying of some of the most important railway lines in Romania, the building of bridges, the establishment of big factories, and was largely represented in the development of the important Romanian petroleum industry.

Aristide Blank (1883–1960), Mauriciu's son, a banker, airline pioneer and arts patron, took over the bank and introduced new ideas with a series of pamphlets. In 1920 he used bank funds to set up CFRNA (later renamed CIDNA) alongside aviator Pierre de Fleurieu — theirs was the first airline to offer a direct Paris–București flight, with an extension to Istanbul; the route was inaugurated in October 1921. Blank's name is also associated with the beginnings of domestic tourism in Romania, as he helped to found spas in Olănești and Tekerghiol.

He published a number of studies on finance, and some plays in Romanian and French. Aristide Blank was also a promoter of Romanian culture: he financed the publication of books on history and archaeology, bought the *Adevarul* and *Dimineata* dailies, and supported the Popular Theater of București and the Romanian school in Paris. He also founded the nonprofit Cultura Nationala publishing house, which published books in the fields of literature, the humanities, and social sciences, with the aim of encouraging writers and promoting good literature.

In 1950, ruined and persecuted by the Communist regime, Aristide Blank left for Paris, where he lived in poverty and died.

The Berkowitz family banking empire was one of Romania's most prominent Jewish-owned financial institutions, founded by **Leon Berkowitz** in 1880. Leon Berkowitz transitioned his successful 1880 discount operations into the Leon Berkowitz Bank. Upon his retirement in 1903, leadership passed to his three sons: **Elly, Adolph, and Max**. The bank was transformed into a

joint-stock company in 1926. Unfortunately, the worldwide financial crisis of the 1930s proved insurmountable. Despite grace periods and preventive concordats granted by the National Bank of Romania, the brothers could not save the family business from ultimate bankruptcy.

Following the closure of the bank, the brothers passed away in quick succession during the 1930s, and the remaining family subsequently emigrated from Romania.

The family is remembered by the iconic properties the bank operated from. Today, their former estates remain stunning historic landmarks across the city.

Former Leon Berkowitz Bank is located at Strada Lipscani 24 in Old Town. This building was constructed in 1905–1906 with French-inspired Belle Époque details. Today, the site hosts a restaurant.

Noblesse Palace, the 1881 eclectic palace designed by the renowned Romanian architect Alexandru Săvulescu, was purchased by Leon Berkowitz in 1903, to serve as the family's protocol center and, in 1936, the bank's final headquarters. It has since been fully restored and serves as a center for design, art, and culture.

Bercovici House, located at Calea Moșilor 126, is a refined historic residence built for banker Adolf Berkowitz and is now used as the headquarters for the General Association of Hunters and Sport Fishermen of Romania.

Farchy family in București primarily refers to the legacy of the prominent businessman and property owner **Albert S. Farchy**. Early branches of the Farchy family date back to the 19th century in București, contributing to the city's diverse and cosmopolitan heritage.

Albert S. Farchy is well-known in the city for the historic Casa cu Pelicani (House with Pelicans) located on General Alexandru Budișteanu Street (formerly Manea Brutaru). The house was designed in 1920 by architect C. Castelini for Albert S. Farchy, as an eclectic-style villa and became a well-known architectural piece in central București. Records show that in 1919, Albert S. Farchy inherited the land and the original, older house from his father, **Samson Farchy**. The family retained these properties until the late 1920s when a portion of the estate was acquired by the Romanian Royal House.

This concludes the episode on București Jewish personalities.

Next, we will be visiting the cities of Ploiești and Brașov.

Until next episode, be well.