MOLDOVA STATE UNIVERSITY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND EDUCATION SCIENCES

CONSORTIUM: Moldova State University, „Alecu Russo" State University of Bălți, „Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu" State University of Cahul

As a manuscript
U.D.C.: 94(=411.16)(478):39(043.2)

PALIHOVICI IULII

JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF BESSARABIA: ETHNOCULTURAL ASPECTS

SPECIALTY: 612.01 – ETHNOLOGY

PhD in history thesis abstract

Chișinău, 2025

The thesis was completed within the Doctoral School of Humanities and Education Sciences of the Moldova State University.

PhD supervisor: CONDRATICOVA Liliana, Dr. habil. in Arts Studies; Dr. habil. in History, Associate Professor.

Members of the Steering Committee:

1. **COJOCARU Ludmila** D., PhD in History, Associate Professor
2. ȘIHOVA Irina, Ph.D. in Philology
3. **DAMIAN Victor**, PhD in History

Composition of the Doctoral Commission, approved by the decision of the Scientific Council of the Moldova State University on September 24, 2025, minutes no. 11

Președinte: **TOMULEȚ Valentin**, Dr. habil. in History, Professor, Moldova State University

Scientific supervisor: CONDRATICOVA Liliana, Dr. hab. in Arts Studies; Dr. habil. in History, Academy of Sciences of Moldova

Speaker 1: **COJOCARU Ludmila D.**, PhD in History, Associate Professor, National Museum of History of Moldova

Speaker 2: **GUMENÂI Ion**, Dr. hab. in History, Professor, Moldova State University

Speaker 3: **DUMITRAN Daniel**, Dr. habil. in History, Professor, 1 December University, Alba Iulia, Romania

Scientific Secretary: **DEMENTIEVA Diana**, PhD in Philology, Moldova State University.

The defense will take place on October 31, 2025, at 2:00 p.m., during the public meeting of the Doctoral Commission of the Doctoral School of Humanities and Education of the State University of Moldova, in auditorium 530, "Gh. Brătianu" Hall, central block of USM, Chisinau, 60 Alexei Mateevici Street. The doctoral thesis and abstract can be consulted at the National Library of the Republic of Moldova, the Central Library of the State University of Moldova, and on the ANACEC website.
The abstract was sent on September 30, 2025.

Author:
PALIHOVICI Iulii

PhD supervisor: **CONDRATICOVA Liliana**, Dr. hab. in Arts Studies; Dr. hab. in History

Chair of the Doctoral Committee: TOMULEȚ Valentin, Dr. hab. in History, Professor, Moldova State University

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Relevance and importance of the research topic. Jewish communities of Bessarabia have been a fundamental element of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the region, contributing significally to the economic, social, and spiritual dynamics of the region. Studying the Jewish communities of Bessarabia is a research topic of a special relevance in the current context, marked by the intensifying interest in recovery of historical memory and promotion of historical heritage, reassessing cultural identities and strengthening social cohesion in Eastern Europe. Research into these communities goes beyond mere historical recollection, representing an effort to reconstruct ethnocultural identity, but also a precursor to the development of a multicultural model of regional identity.

We have opted to use the term *Jewish communities* rather than *Jewish community* for several reasons, the distinction between the two being important. The *Jewish community of Bessarabia* is a concept that refers to the entire Jewish population of the region as a single socio-cultural and religious community. The term encompasses all Jews in Bessarabia, regardless of their geographical location, and implies common historical destinies, cultural traditions, legal status, and socio-economic processes characteristic of the region as a whole. The *Jewish communities of Bessarabia* refer to specific local entities—individual Jewish settlements organized in various cities, shtetls, and colonies. In this context, we would like to clarify the meaning of these terms. Shtetls are semi-urban settlements in Eastern Europe, most often with a predominantly Jewish population. The term shtetl is equivalent to *местечко* in Russian, i.e. an urban-type settlement with an urban-type structuring of the economy. Jewish agricultural colonies are Jewish settlements organized by the Russian Empire during the 19th century to encourage Russian Jews to engage in agricultural labor and agricultural development of newly acquired lands, such as Bessarabia.

Each community was an independent administrative and religious unit. This distinction is justified both in Jewish tradition and in historical law. In the context of traditional Jewish terminology, each local community was called *kehila kdosha* (השודק הליהק – *holy community*), which emphasized its sacred status and autonomy in matters of religious and social life. In the interwar Romanian context, the distinction between singular and plural also reflects the difference between the legal status of Jews as citizens of the state and as members of autonomous religious-community entities. *The Jewish community of Bessarabia* is a historiographical concept for analyzing processes at the regional level, while the *Jewish communities of Bessarabia* are specific historical subjects, with their own organizational structure, leadership, and local specificity.

The contributions of Jewish communities to the development of socioeconomic practices, intertwined with their ethnocultural achievements in Bessarabia, are impressive, as evidenced by the valuable vestiges of tangible and intangible cultural heritage left as a legacy to posterity. This theme is all the more relevant given that, in the post-Soviet period, efforts to recover and capitalize on the heritage of ethnic minorities, especially those deeply affected by the traumas of the 20th century, have intensified. In addition to the two world wars, revolutions and other historical events that affected the whole of

Europe, Jews were affected by pogroms and the tragedy of the Holocaust). Research into the ethnocultural dimensions of Jewish life becomes imperative in perpetuating the identity of communities that are representative of the cultural, historical, and socio-economic development of Basarabia. At the same time, in the context of re-evaluating the sources of identity and reviewing the fundamental values of communities, this scientific approach offers an effective way of understanding historical diversity and interethnic coexistence.

The proposed theme fits into a transdisciplinary context and aligns with the international agenda promoted by organizations such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and the European Commission, which emphasize the importance of protecting ethnic minorities. In this sense, the study of Jewish communities in Bessarabia takes on a European dimension, being correlated with research on Jewish heritage in Central and Eastern Europe, but also with efforts to combat anti-Semitism and promote tolerance and multicultural education. At the national level, the research is in line with the academic and cultural priorities set by the official structures of the Republic of Moldova, including through scientific research development strategies and cultural heritage protection programs. Examined from an interdisciplinary perspective, the topic allows for the articulation of several methodological and epistemological perspectives: historical, ethnological, anthropological, and sociological approaches. This integrative approach is essential for addressing the phenomenon of Jewish communities as dynamic cultural entities influenced by multiple historical and social contexts.

The aim of the thesis is to conduct a comprehensive study of Jewish communities in Bessarabia during the Tsarist and interwar periods through a multidisciplinary examination of ethnocultural components, identifying, analyzing, and interpreting the specific characteristics of Jewish communities as distinct forms of ethnocultural organization in relation to the regional socio-historical context.

To achieve the aim of the thesis, we set the following **research objectives:**

1) researching and systematizing the historiography of the issue, as well as analyzing documentary sources on the development of Jewish communities in Bessarabia from an ethnocultural perspective;

2) researching Jewish communities through aspects provided by legislative sources from the Tsarist and interwar periods;

3) establishing and examining the traditional occupations of Jews and social organization in the two chronological periods of development under analysis;

4) determining and identifying the role of educational, religious, and cultural institutions of Jewish communities in Bessarabia;

5) scientifically capitalizing on field research conducted in localities where the presence of Bessarabian Jews has been documented, including the memoirs of community members in the scientific circuit;

6) multidimensional reflection of Jewish communities in urban, rural, and diaspora environments from an ethnocultural perspective;

7) identifying and examining Jewish epigraphy as a source of study;

8) assessing how Jewish identity is preserved in today's public sphere; proposing concrete models for reconstructing ethnocultural identity, promoting Jewish ethnocul-

tural heritage, and establishing educational and cultural policies based on diversity and inclusion.

The issue at hand involves not only highlighting the common features of Jewish communities in different localities in Bessarabia, but also understanding their internal diversity, adaptation processes, and how they interacted with other ethnic groups. The relevance of this approach lies in establishing the extent to which these communities have preserved a distinct identity and how this identity has manifested itself in intercultural interactions in the region. The priority is to conduct in-depth interdisciplinary research on the Jewish communities in Bessarabia, highlighting their ethnocultural specificity and the role they played in the history and development of the region.

We thus aim to represent the life of Jews in Bessarabia as part of the local social organism by defining the local particularities of Jewish communities based on ethnological field research, analysis of their economic activities, study of traditions, and localization of forms of material culture in specific historical and ethnographic regions. This approach aims to highlight the dynamism and adaptability of Jewish communities in the face of historical and social challenges, as well as their active role in shaping the cultural heritage of Bessarabia.

Methodological and theoretical-scientific support. The research is based on respect for the authenticity of documented ethnocultural facts. We opted for *documentation methods* such as observation, oral communication, and recording (audio, video); *gathering oral information* based on a preformed technical framework; *applying conversation and interview methods*: directive, non-directive, and semi-directive interviews; individual, group, overlapping, and cross-interviews.

Chronological framework. The chronological limits of the research cover the period 1812–1940 in order to present the two distinct historical periods. The lower chronological limit is 1812, when, following the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–1812, Bessarabia was annexed by the Russian Empire. The upper chronological limit marks the year 1940, when Bessarabia was annexed by the Soviet Union.

The geographical framework of our research encompasses the territories between the Prut, the Dniester basin and the Black Sea.

The innovation and scientific originality of the results. The scientific originality of the results is based on an ethnocultural approach to the problem, corroborated by multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. Ethnological research is amplified by co-opting information from history, sociology, economics, geohistory, statistics, demography, historical psychology, memoirs, culturology, literature and publishing. For the first time, Jewish communities in Bessarabia during the Tsarist and interwar periods were examined in a comprehensive manner in order to highlight the ethnocultural aspects, legislative system, occupations, and religious and educational institutions of Bessarabian Jews. At the same time, the issue of Jewish communities in urban, rural, and diaspora environments was addressed for the first time, and a comprehensive model for studying these communities was developed, which is applicable to other localities and fields of study.

The theoretical importance and practical value of the work. The scientific importance of the thesis is reflected in the multifaceted and multidimensional approaches to the

issue of Jewish communities in Bessarabia from an ethnocultural perspective. The material presented in the thesis can be used in practice to develop university courses, optional and special courses and seminars focused both on the theme of Jewish communities in Bessarabia in their ethnocultural aspects and on the valorisation of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of these communities in the economic and tourism fields. **From an applied point of view**, in terms of science and teaching, the material analyzed will be of real use both to young researchers in the development of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral theses, as well as to experienced authors involved in the process of research, teaching, and the development of scientific and educational works dedicated to ethnic communities that have created valuable vestiges of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The **research hypothesis** assumes that, despite historical pressures, Jewish communities in Bessarabia managed to maintain a distinct cultural identity, expressed through traditions, institutions, and symbols. At the same time, it is argued that these communities contributed significantly to the formation of a regional culture characterized by syncretism and ethnic interaction. Certainly, the Jewish heritage of Bessarabia can be exploited today not only hypothetically in its cultural and historical dimensions, but also as an educational, scientific, civilizational, heritage, and tourist resource.

Research problem. The scientific problem addressed in this thesis refers to the identification, analysis, and interpretation of the specificity of Jewish communities in Bessarabia as distinct forms of ethnocultural organization in relation to the regional socio-historical context. This issue involves not only highlighting the common features of Jewish communities in different localities in Bessarabia, but also understanding their internal diversity, adaptation processes, and how they interacted with other ethnic groups. The fundamental question is: to what extent did these communities preserve a distinct identity and how did this identity manifest itself in intercultural interactions in the region?

The research results outline an overview of the life of Jewish communities in Bessarabia in the 19th and 20th centuries, highlighting the complexity of a multi-layered social and cultural phenomenon. The multidisciplinary analysis shows that these communities went through periods of stability, but also of crisis, influenced by political and administrative changes in Bessarabia—from integration into the Russian Empire, to Romanian administration, and finally to the Soviet period. This succession of regimes profoundly shaped the internal structure of the communities, their legal status, economic opportunities, and forms of cultural and educational organization.

Approval of results: The results were disseminated at 11 national and international scientific conferences and validated through publication in academic journals and specialist collections – 8 articles in national journals, of which 7 articles indexed in SCOPUS database journals (*Revista de etnologie și culturologie*); 2 articles in international scientific journals, 3 publications at scientific conferences, and 8 theses of scientific communications published in conference materials).

Implementation of research results. Excerpts from the thesis have been included in: educational projects (teaching materials) for high schools and universities in the Republic of Moldova: *Jewish Cemeteries in the Classroom* (2020); projects for the preservation, enhancement, and promotion of Jewish cultural heritage: development of the

open-air museum *Chișinău Jewish Cemetery* (2023–2025), creation of the open-air museum *Jewish History of Onițcani* (2022), *Catalogue of Best Practices for Jewish Cemetery Preservation* (2021); projects to promote tourist circuits: audio guide *Chișinău. Discover Discover Jewish life in Chișinău* (2020, in Romanian, English, German, and Russian), *Bessarabia. Discover Jewish Life in Bessarabia* (2021, in Romanian, English, German, and Russian), *Jewish Cemeteries and Tourism Development* (2022), *Jewish Cemeteries as Visitor Destinations* (2023).

Keywords: Jewish communities, Bessarabia, ethnocultural aspects, Tsarist period, interwar period, legislation, migration, traditional occupations, epigraphy, oral history, family history, memoirs, education, culture, heritage, valorization.

CONTENTS OF THE THESIS

The thesis is structured in three chapters with subchapters, ending with general conclusions. The **INTRODUCTION** presents the relevance and importance of the topic, the chronological and geographical limits of the study, and the degree of investigation of the problem. It also indicates the purpose and objectives of the research, presents the research methodology and working hypothesis, the novelty and originality of the research, the implementation of the results obtained, and the theoretical and practical value of the thesis.

Chapter I „Ethnocultural aspects of Jewish community life reflected in theoretical studies and research sources" is structured into two distinct subchapters and is dedicated to the multilateral examination of historical and oral sources used to reflect the stated aims and objectives. In subchapter **1.1. „Historiography of the issue"**, we analyzed publications from different periods that directly or tangentially referred to the ethnocultural aspects of Jewish communities in Bessarabia, examined for the Tsarist and interwar periods. The publications examined were divided into the following categories: a) Pre-modern and modern historiography; b) Interwar historiography; c) Soviet historiography; and d) Recent historiography (1991–2025). The specialized literature on the history of the Jews in Bessarabia includes a significant number of works, studies and articles, but they are mostly fragmentary. The contributions of a number of scholars are noteworthy, dealing with issues such as demography, anti-Semitic legislation, synagogue architecture or cultural activity. However, these studies are mainly focused on isolated episodes in Jewish history or on limited geographical areas. There is a dearth of works that treat Jewish communities as ethnocultural entities in a holistic and interdisciplinary way, emphasizing the interaction between the Jewish element and the indigenous context. Moreover, previous research has placed little emphasis on oral sources, field research and the everyday dimension of Jewish heritage. This lacuna is significant, as collective memory and direct testimonies can provide essential insights into understanding Jewish life in Bessarabia. In our approach we have applied a cross-linking of sources, combining clerical work with expeditions of documentation and field information gathering. Essentially, our research was based largely on oral history and personal histories, resulting from field activities, interviews with informants at home and abroad.

The literature and documents studied, in conjunction with the materials of the expeditions undertaken since 2019, have led to the selection of a series of memoirs that have supplemented the existing information at this stage of research. During the ethnological expedition, field data was collected, locals were interviewed, and household books from the years 1945–1947 were studied, in which the names of the last remaining Jews in the village during that period were identified. The field documentation allowed us to collect a rich ethnographic material, audio, video and photographic documents.

We also note that insufficient attention has been paid to the valorization of Jewish heritage from a museum and educational perspective, despite its formative potential. A study of the specialized literature on the life of Jewish communities leads us to conclude that, to date, this subject has not been studied in all its complexity. In this context, we would like to mention the theoretical publications of historians Nicolae Iorga [19; 20], Ion Nistor [22], as well as those of contemporary researchers: Brighita Covarscaia [47], Iacov Copanschi [48], Valentin Tomuleț [41, pp. 239-250], Daniel Dumitran [11; 12; 13], Ion Gumenâi [16, pp. 253-262; 17, pp. 179-183; 18, pp. 260-272], Andrei Emilciuc [14, pp. 100-106; 15, pp. 16-17], Sergius Ciocanu [6, pp. 95-102; 7, pp. 44-49], Alexandru Roitman [30, pp. 105-109; 31, pp. 91-102; 32, pp. 113-118; 33, pp. 154-160; 34, pp. 94-99], Liliana Condraticova [8, pp. 50-51; 10], Alla Ceastina [4, pp. 302-308], Valentin Arapu [3, pp. 126-134], Irina Șihova [36, pp. 63-67; 37, pp. 89-98; 38, pp. 74-79; 39, pp. 76-85; 46] et.al. However, we have found that there are few publications on Jewish ethnology, which justifies our intention to conduct a comprehensive study on the ethnocultural aspects of Jewish communities in Besarabia.

In subchapter **1.2. „Documentary Sources",** theoretical publications were linked to information gathered from archival files and supplemented by field research, interviews, and contemporary press reports. In this context, our approach focused on reconstructing the ethnological layer of Jewish life in Bessarabia. We sought to offer a multidimensional perception of this presence, highlighting its structural, functional, and symbolic character in local society. We conducted an in-depth analysis of the regional characteristics of Jewish communities, focusing on economic and daily activities, the close connection with ethnic traditions, the specificity of forms of material culture, and belonging to certain historical and ethnographic spaces. This approach allowed us to contextualize the evolution of Jewish communities more carefully and to gain a more nuanced understanding of the interethnic interactions that shaped local identities. Based on historical sources, we have attempted to reconstruct the ethnological dimension that provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of the presence of a population considered foreign, but which, in fact, has become an integral part of Bessarabian society. We focused on the immediate and long-term consequences of this presence, on how Jewish communities influenced and were influenced by the social, economic, and cultural realities of the region. Along with written sources and archival files, we emphasize the importance of interviews and local history, oral history, as well as data provided by gravestones identified during research on Jewish cemeteries in localities throughout the Republic of Moldova. Much of this data is being introduced into the scientific community for the first time and constitutes an important source of study in

the event of an expansion of the thematic and chronological framework of the study of Jewish cemeteries in urban and rural areas.

The examination of scientific publications and the study of documentary sources have allowed us to outline a complex picture of the process of formation, consolidation, and affirmation of Jewish identity in a geographical and historical context marked by political changes, migrations, and cultural interference, with the following **conclusions in Chapter 1**:

1) Most historical works on this topic have examined Jewish communities mainly in phenomenological terms, presented through figures, archival documents, and statistics, without significantly delving into the relational, cultural, and social dimensions of this presence;

2) Although the contribution of each researcher to understanding the phenomenon itself is immeasurable, we note the lack of information necessary for a deeper understanding of the relationship of coexistence between Jews and the indigenous population or other ethnic groups. Thus, the remarkable contributions of historians such as Nicolae Iorga, Zamfir Arbure, Ion Nistor, and in the contemporary era, Valentin Tomuleț, Andrei Emilciuc, Alexandr Roitman, Ion Gumenâi, and others, remain fundamental to the study of the history of Jewish settlement in Bessarabia.

3) Aspects related to everyday life, cultural values and norms, material forms of Jewish culture, and the dynamics of interethnic relations are areas that belong more to ethnology than to traditional history. Unfortunately, in existing historiography, these aspects have been considered irrelevant, often treated in a fragmentary manner, without a systematic and interdisciplinary vision that would integrate them organically into the overall picture of Bessarabia's evolution. In this context, our approach has focused on reconstructing the ethnological layer of Jewish life in Bessarabia. We have sought to offer a multidimensional perception of this presence, highlighting its structural, functional, and symbolic character in local society.

Chapter Two „The Historical Context of the Jewish Population in Bessarabia" is structured in four subchapters and offers a broad and structured perspective on the historical, demographic, legislative, and economic context of the Jewish community in Bessarabia, outlining its evolution during the era of Russian domination and the Romanian interwar period. In subchapter **2.1. „Jews in Bessarabia"** according to population census data, we focused our attention on examining statistical information regarding the Jewish population as reflected in the Population censuses of 1772–1773 and 1774, the general census of the population of the Russian Empire in 1897, and the general census of the population of Romania in 1930. We note that the censuses of 1772–1773 and 1774 were carried out at the behest of Russian Marshal Pyotr Rumyantsev, but through the efforts of the officials of the Moldavian Divan, and their purpose was to publish lists of taxable residents or those who participated as volunteers in the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774).

Census data provide us with the names of Jews from most of the localities surveyed, often even indicating their occupation. After the annexation of Bessarabia by the Russian Empire in 1812, the imperial authorities initiated the first general census of the pop-

ulation in 1817, which, in fact, was not a modern census, but rather a fiscal and administrative review, intended to establish the population, localities, tax obligations, and social status of the inhabitants. The census recorded a total of approximately 19-20 thousand Jews in Bessarabia, and these figures vary depending on the source, as they are the result of a deduction, a mathematical calculation based on the number of heads of families multiplied by an estimated average number of family members (4 or 5 members). After studying the statistical data from this census, it was found that most Jews lived in towns and cities, but there were also families scattered throughout rural areas [45]. Jews had a special status, were registered separately, and were considered a distinct category. The census notes typical occupations—trade, crafts, leasing (especially the leasing of taverns and mills), but also agriculture in several localities. The importance of this census for our study lies in the fact that it is the first official statistic of the Jewish population in Bessarabia under Russian rule, and it showed that Jews already represented a significant component of the urban population. The year 1817 marked the beginning of a rapid growth of the Jewish population, with Bessarabia becoming one of the regions with the largest Jewish communities in the Russian Empire in the following decades.

In 1859, the last, tenth revision of the population (*Lists of Localities of the Russian Empire*) took place on the territory of the Russian Empire, begun in 1857 and published in 1861. This census was the last in a series of censuses conducted since 1719 and represented the last comprehensive record of the population before the first general census in 1897.

The 1897 census was the first and only general census of the population of the Russian Empire. Examining the census data, we find that Jews represented 11.79% of the total population of the Bessarabia province, confirming the existence of a large and well-established community. If we analyze the geographical distribution, we see an uneven distribution between urban and rural areas—in cities, Jews constituted an impressive 37.18% of the population, while in rural areas (counties, excluding cities), Jews made up only 7.25% of the population [49].

Between 1918 and 1940, after the Great Union and the return of Bessarabia to the Kingdom of Romania, the Jewish community in this province underwent a period of intense socio-economic and cultural reconfiguration. After 1918, Jews were allowed, to a certain extent, to organize their community life autonomously, especially in the fields of education, culture, and social assistance. Jewish education developed in parallel with a network of charitable and health institutions. By the 1930s, there were 13 Jewish hospitals, nursing homes, and other forms of social assistance in Bessarabia, supported both by contributions from local communities and by international organizations, especially the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In 1922, there were approximately 140 Jewish schools operating in Bessarabia, most of them concentrated in the cities of Chișinău, Bălți, Soroca, and other urban centers with significant Jewish populations [27]. The 1930s can be considered a period of maximum development for the Jewish community in Bessarabia. A symbolic moment in this direction was the formation, around 1935, of the Union of Jewish Communities in Bessarabia. This union, which brought together about 40 local communities, aimed to coordinate religious, educational, and charitable activities, represent the interests of Jews before the authorities, and strengthen the sense

of community solidarity. The general census of Romania's population took place on December 29, 1930, and is important because it was the first of its kind in the country after the Great Union. The results of the census were published by the Central Institute of Statistics in Bucharest, starting in 1938. Given the very large volume of data, a total of 10 volumes were published over several years [25]. According to the data obtained, Romania had a total population of 18,057,028, of which 728,115 (4.13%) were Jewish [28]. Corroborated with information identified in the Chișinău city yearbooks for 1924 and other publications [2], census data is relevant for determining the number of Jews involved in trade, crafts, banking, health, education, culture, and religion.

Subchapter ***2.2.*** **„Research into the Jewish community through aspects provided by the legislative sources of the time"** focuses on the analysis of legislation regarding the residence of Jews, the practice of certain occupations, the holding of office, settlement in the Zone of Residence, and the rights and obligations of Jews in Bessarabia as part of the Tsarist Empire (1812–1918) and in unified Bessarabia (1918–1940), with certain stages in the evolution of legislation concerning Jews being observed chronologically. The Russian Empire's policy towards Jews could be more permissive or harsher, depending on the period. Jews could choose to pay double taxes to the state or convert to Christianity in order to remain in the Russian Empire, otherwise they were forced to emigrate. As a result, desperate poverty prevailed among the Jews, the kahals accumulated huge arrears, and only the most resourceful survived in business. Despite these hardships, few Jews converted to Christianity.

The annexation of Bessarabia to the Russian Empire in 1812 marked the beginning of a new phase for the Jewish population in this region. Jewish communities, which had existed here since previous centuries, faced a specific legal framework resulting from the Russian Empire's general legislation on the *Jewish question*. The legal status of Bessarabian Jews was complex, oscillating between periods of tolerance and moments of restriction, influenced by the centralizing policies of the tsarist authorities, economic realities, and interethnic relations in the province.

After the annexation of Bessarabia in 1812, the Russian administration adopted a series of measures to integrate Bessarabia into the imperial legal system. Jews were confirmed the right to live in the province, but the general restrictions existing in the Empire were applied to them. The 1818 decree maintained Bessarabia's status as a special administrative territory with a certain degree of autonomy, with Jews also enjoying relatively greater freedom than in other provinces, being able to engage in trade, lease estates, and participate in fairs.

From the 1830s, with the stronger integration of Bessarabia into Russian structures, the restrictive legislation of the Empire was extended here as well. As a result, restrictions on the settlement and mobility of the Jewish population followed. Tsarist legislation limited the freedom of settlement of Jews because, according to the new laws: a) Jews could only live in cities and towns, not in villages or on noble estates (with exceptions for tenants); b) in Bessarabia, the authorities periodically attempted to limit the concentration of Jews in urban centers (Chișinău, Bălți, Soroca, Hotin); c) in the second half of the 19th century, legislation introduced additional prohibitions, such as restrict-

ing Jews' access to land ownership rights [36, pp. 61-66]. The legislation of the Russian Empire applied to Jews in Bessarabia between 1812 and 1918 was a mixture of limited tolerance and systematic discrimination. While in the early years after the annexation of Bessarabia Jews enjoyed a relatively lenient regime, later, as Tsarist authority consolidated, all the restrictions specific to the Zone of Residence were extended to them. Restrictions on freedom of settlement, economic restrictions, educational barriers, and lack of political rights created a permanent climate of legal insecurity. Despite these constraints, the Jewish community managed to develop, contributing significantly to the economic and cultural life of Bessarabia. The period 1812–1918 remains a defining one for the shaping of the identity and destiny of Bessarabian Jews, in which Tsarist legislation played an essential role.

After 1918, decisive action was taken in Bessarabia to eliminate the discrepancy in the political rights of Jews. While Jews in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania were Romanian citizens de jure, Article 7 of the Romanian Constitution contained certain restrictions on Jews in the Old Kingdom. A step towards removing this differentiation was taken by the decree-law of December 30, 1918, which established that the inhabitants of the Kingdom, without any religious distinction and who did not have full rights, would acquire these rights when they proved that they were born in the country and that they were not subjects of a foreign state. On May 28, 1919, another decree was published, stipulating that Jewish inhabitants of the old Kingdom, born in the country and who were not subjects of a foreign state, were Romanian citizens and would enjoy all civil rights if they expressed this desire by declaring that they were born in Romania and had not benefited from foreign protection [24]. The recognition of Jews as citizens of Romania was an essential condition for their participation in the electoral process and for their access to the legislature. In 1923, the Union of Native Jews changed its name to the Union of Romanian Jews, an organization that also included branches in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania. Five years later, in 1928, the Jewish Parliamentary Club was established, with the role of centralizing and harmonizing the activity of Jewish representatives in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate [35, p. 18]. In 1931, the Jewish Party was founded, and in 1936, the National Council of Jews in Romania was created, whose main objective was to defend the democratic rights and freedoms provided for in the 1923 Constitution and to combat anti-Semitism [35, p. 18]. Examining the activity of Jewish communities in Bessarabia through the lens of legislative acts from the Tsarist and interwar periods has allowed us to outline some comparative aspects regarding the settlement of Jews in Bessarabia, their rights and freedoms, the permission or restriction of access to political offices and dignities, the right to practice certain professions and economic activities, etc. It was precisely these privileges or restrictions, at certain periods of time, that conditioned the activity of Jewish communities in Bessarabia.

In the pages of subchapter 2.3. „**Particularities of the economic activity of Jews in Bessarabia",** we have chosen to present the two different historical stages (1812–1918 and 1918–1940) through the prism of the analysis of the economic activity of Jews. After Bessarabia was annexed to the Russian Empire in 1812, the urban population of the province was divided into social categories according to the model of the internal Rus-

sian provinces, in accordance with the 1785 Urban Regulations—merchants, craftsmen, petty bourgeois, etc. In addition to communities formed on social principles, there were also communities united on ethnic principles (those of Moldovans, Greeks, Bulgarians, Velikorusians, Armenians, Jews, etc.) and religious principles (communities of Old Believers, Jews converted to Orthodoxy, etc.). Thus, until 1830, merchants in Bessarabia were not divided into guilds, *commercial activity being equal for all, and the population was divided according to ethnic principles – Velikorussian, Moldovan, Bulgarian, Greek, Armenian, Jewish* [41, pp. 239-250]. More and more Jews became involved in agriculture, and between 1836 and 1853, Jewish agricultural colonies were established in Bessarabia, concentrated mainly in the northern counties, on land either purchased or leased from Christian or Jewish landowners. The first Jewish agricultural colonies were established between 1836 and 1853, starting with Dumbrăveni, Briceva, and Valea lui Vlad (1836), followed by Alexăndreni and Mărculești (1837), then Vertiujeni (1838), Liublin (1842), Zgurița (1851), and finally Căprești (1853). Most of these settlements were founded on leased land, providing a stable basis for the development of Jewish agriculture in Bessarabia [43, pp. 271-282]. In terms of occupation, Jews in Bessarabia were divided in 1858 into four social categories: merchants, farmers, craftsmen, and the petty bourgeoisie, which represent the main areas of activity in cities and counties. In particular, in Hotin County, almost 96.6% of Jews belonged to the petty bourgeoisie and merchants category, which highlights their major contribution to the circulation of goods and services in rural areas. In the first half of the 19th century, 56.2% were Jewish merchants, compared to 26.7% native/Russian and 9.1% Greek [26, pp. 315-327; 41, pp. 239-250]. The situation varied depending on the type of activity and the category of the locality. Thus, in 1898, according to data from the Jewish Colonization Society, of the 38 factories in Chișinău, 29 belonged to Jews; of the seven steam mills, six were owned by Jews, with 120 workers, most of whom were Jewish; of the seven tobacco factories and warehouses, five were owned by Jews with 170 workers (almost all of whom were Jewish). Of the five printing houses in Chișinău, four belonged to Jews. Among the crafts practiced by the Jewish population, sewing and woodworking were particularly developed. The Jews of Chișinău were engaged in trade in agricultural products (2,470 people), textiles and clothing (over 1,000 people); 450 Jews were employed in freight transport, 400 porters and approximately 500 seasonal workers in vineyards were documented [50].

The lifestyle of Jews in Bessarabia during the interwar period did not change substantially. According to the 1930 census, Jews represented 7.2% of the total population of Bessarabia, 26.8% in urban areas and 4.3% in rural areas [1].

After 1918, under Romanian administration, Jews in Bessarabia continued to be economically active despite new challenges: trade and crafts remained their main occupations; with the emergence of Jewish trade unions and economic organizations, Jews attempted to adapt to Romanian economic conditions. However, the global economic crisis and policies restricting rights seriously affected the economic stability of Jews in the 1930s. According to the 1930 census, national minorities in Romania represented 28.1% of the total population. There were 728,115 Jews registered, representing 4% of

Romania's total population. Statistics compiled by the Ministry of Industry and Trade in 1937 showed that there were 173, 145 individual commercial companies, of which: 83,821 were Romanian (48.4%) and 89,324 (51.6%) belonged to national minorities, of which 32.7% were Jewish [29]. At the same time, in a separate case study, in order to highlight the economic, commercial, and craft activities of Jews in interwar Bessarabia, we examined the occupations of Jews according to documents of the time, calendars and yearbooks, and advertisements by craftsmen who knew how to sell their products and establish themselves in the Romanian economic arena.

Subchapter **2.4. „Synagogues and Jewish Educational Institutions in Bessarabia"**, contains relevant information about synagogues and Jewish places of worship, as well as Jewish heritage in the territory of the present-day Republic of Moldova, which, from an ethno-historical point of view, have attracted relatively little attention from researchers. In 1994, the Center for Jewish Art in Jerusalem organized an expedition to the Republic of Moldova to document the actual state of Jewish material heritage, with the results of the expedition being included in the Center's database [40]. In 2009, the US Commission for American Heritage Abroad organized a similar expedition. The results of the expedition were included in the report *Jewish Heritage Sites and Monuments in Moldova* [21]. It contains only 17 synagogue buildings – while it is evident that there must have been hundreds of synagogues on the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

At the same time, the Jewish education system has existed for at least three thousand years and has played a decisive role in preserving the integrity of the Jewish people and developing their culture. No religion has attached as much importance to education as Judaism. The classic stages of education are as follows: at the age of five, they begin to study the Torah, at ten – the Mishnah, and at fifteen – the Talmud. After a person has studied the texts themselves, everything that is stated literally in the sources, they must reach the inner meaning of the texts and, subsequently, the secret teaching. It is important to understand the level of education of the Jews in Bessarabia. From the 1897 census data on literacy in Bessarabia, we see that every second Jew was literate, although there is no concrete information on the criteria used to assess education [49]. The state Jewish schools founded by the government in 1847 were not popular. The spread of secular education progressed much more rapidly in the 1860s and 1870s, when, as a result of Alexander II's reforms, the civil status of Jews was improved and hopes for emancipation arose. Between 1881 and 1914, private Jewish schools for boys and girls continued to be established. In 1883, there were 66 Jewish schools; in 1893, there were already 332, and in 1899, there were 372, with 17,604 students (7,708 boys and 9,896 girls). Towards the end of the 18th century, Hasidism penetrated Bessarabia, becoming the main factor in their spiritual life. Many of the Jews living in villages adopted much of the lifestyle and customs of the Moldovan peasantry. In the 1830s and 1840s, the Haskalah1 Enlightenment movement began to penetrate Bessarabia. At the end of the 1840s, Jews in Bessarabia opened secular schools. In 1855, there were six such schools in Bălți, Hotin, Briceni, Ismail, and two in Chișinău, with 188 students. Private secular education also appeared, and from the 1860s, Jews in Bessarabia, especially the wealthiest, began to send their children to general schools. In the 1870s, 30–40% of the

students in some secondary schools in the region were Jewish. In 1894, however, 60.9% of Jewish school-age children were attending heders. The 1897 census showed that only 27.8% of Bessarabian Jews over the age of ten could read Russian.

As a **conclusion to Chapter 2**, we will mention that the information identified and concentrated in Chapter 2 of our investigative approach offered a broad and structured perspective on the historical, demographic, legislative and economic context of the development and consolidation of the Jewish community in Bessarabia, outlining its evolution in the two distinct historical periods – 1) the era of Russian domination and 2) the Romanian interwar period, which allowed us to make a comparative study of the two periods of the Jewish communities' activity from several aspects. The Jewish communities in Bessarabia were researched by means of the aspects offered by the legislative sources of the time, and we were able to answer several questions concerning the identification and examination of the traditional Jewish occupations and social organisations, as well as the role of educational, religious and cultural institutions, which allowed us to draw the following conclusions:

1) Data from the 1897 Russian Census confirms the status of Jews as the main urban minority in Bessarabia, accounting for over 37% of the population in urban centers;

2) Russian Empire legislation, examined in detail within the limits of the sources available at this stage of the study, oscillated between periods of relative openness and periods of discrimination;

3) After 1812, Bessarabia was fully integrated into this system, and local Jews were subject to the same restrictive regulations, despite the region's partial autonomy until 1835. Jewish colonies, although initially effective, were gradually abandoned, and Jewish economic activity shifted towards trade, light industry, and the financial sector.

4) The situation changed with the integration of Bessarabia into the Romanian state after the Union of 1918. The participation of Jews in political life, including in elections and in Parliament, was an indicator of democratic integration, but this positive development was quickly compromised by the nationalist and anti-Semitic climate of the 1930s and especially around the time of World War II;

5) Economically, Bessarabian Jews continued to play a central role in trade, small industry, crafts, and banking. Many of the factories and businesses in Chișinău, Bălți, and other cities belonged to Jews, and their involvement in international trade, especially due to their geographical location and external contacts, was essential for connecting the region to the global economy.

6) The life of Jewish communities in Bessarabia was deeply shaped by legislation, demographics, and economic realities, reflecting the constant tension between integration and exclusion, between adaptation and marginalization.

7) In terms of education, there is a notable tradition of providing children with the best possible education. Judaism is based on three main concepts: faith, deeds, and learning.

Chapter III „Ethnocultural and regional aspects of jewish communities in Bessarabia" represents the innovative contribution of our research and integrates case studies, concentrated in four subchapters – the result of our desk and field research.

Although the case studies are apparently different in terms of content, issues, and chronological periods, we find that they have a common denominator, representing accounts and interviews about the lives of members of Jewish communities in Bessarabia in the 19th and 20th centuries. Our field research conducted in the cities of Chișinău, Bălți, Orhei, Telenești, Edineț, as well as in the towns and villages of the Republic of Moldova, allows us to generalize a unique picture of the importance of the Jewish presence on the current territory of the Republic of Moldova and the contribution of Jewish communities to the economic and cultural development of the country.

The case studies analyzed in this chapter, as well as subsequent fieldwork, demonstrate not only the growing interest in the history of Jewish communities in Bessarabia, but also the fundamental importance of local history, oral history, and memoir writing as a method of researching and visualizing the past, offering an innovative algorithm for complex research on Jewish communities. Each case study offered us a deeply human and detailed look at Jewish life in different contexts – urban (Chișinău), rural (Vadul Rașcov), and diaspora (migration from Bessarabia) – complemented by recent field discoveries.

The case study on Chișinău as seen by the Jews who once lived there contains material from archives and testimonies of the city's Jewish inhabitants. The study of the life of the Jewish community in Chișinău, using material provided by architects, is confirmed by micro-histories gleaned from interviews conducted by the German institute Centropa and demonstrates the assertion that micro-histories illustrate macro trends in historical development subchapter **3.1 „The Jewish community in urban areas. Case study: the city of Chișinău)".** The idea of using information published by researchers and the testimonies of city residents in parallel contributed to the implementation of the research results by creating a tourist guide to Jewish Chișinău in four languages: Romanian, English, German, and Russian. The project was made possible with the financial support of the German institute Centropa, and the guide is open access [5].

Similarly, the case study of the village of Vadul Rașcov draws attention to the important role that Jews play in the economic and social life of a provincial market town (subchapter **3.2 „The Jewish community in rural areas. Case study: the village of Vadul Rașcov)".** The fieldwork methodology allowed for the collection of a wide range of information, both through formal methods (questionnaires, observation) and through participatory approaches that facilitated the telling of authentic micro-stories. The study is based on field research methods such as direct, participatory observation; the use of semi-structured questionnaires (regarding customs and traditions) and structured questionnaires, less formal questions, which provide much of the field information; and the recording of materials through photography and the schematization of results. In this case, we are also talking about implementing the research results by creating a tourist guide [44].

The subject of the third case study **3.3 „The Bessarabian Jewish community in the diaspora. Case study – Migration of Jews from Bessarabia (based on a written testimony)"** was developed based on a testimony, the history written by French Jew Jacqueline Alis-Barchmann, whose roots trace back to Bessarabian Jews. The case study on the migration of Jews from Bessarabia represents a change of perspective –

from geographical fixation to mobility and individual destiny. The saga of the Jewish family who left Bessarabia, accidentally remained in Egypt, and eventually ended up in France, is moving and depicts, as if in a film, what happened to Jews who migrated to other countries [23, pp. 102-108].

Field research in recent years has yielded several discoveries that can certainly be called sensational, as reflected in subchapter **3.4 „Local Heritage. Case Study – Jewish Epigraphy".** In 2019–2022, in the cities of Chișinău, Soroca, and the villages of Onițcani (Criuleni district), Iagorlîc, Gherșunovca (villages on the left bank of the Dniester, Dubăsari and Râbnița districts), field research was conducted, which clarified some moments in the history of the Jews in the current territory of the Republic of Moldova. Epigraphic expeditions by the Sefer Center in Rașcov (2017) and Orhei (2019) scientifically confirmed the hypotheses about the age of these cemeteries, firmly dating the stones there to the beginning of the 18th century. At the same time, the last few years of field research have brought several relevant discoveries. As a result of the discovery of abandoned gravestones, we were able to build an open-air museum in Onițcani (Criuleni district) in memory of the local Jewish community that has disappeared. In addition to the three case studies, the identification and mapping of old Jewish cemeteries and the construction of an open-air museum in Onițcani reflect an attempt to actively recover and preserve Jewish memory. These actions are not merely symbolic gestures, but real interventions in the historical and cultural space, aimed at preserving the memory of vanished communities. The case studies and related activities reflect a model of applied research in which local history, memoir, oral history, fieldwork, archival research, and narrative interpretation are combined in a coherent and productive approach. They demonstrate that the past of Jewish communities in the Bessarabian space is not just a passive legacy, but a living heritage that deserves to be documented, transmitted, and integrated into public and educational discourse [39, pp. 76-85].

The **conclusions** of the third chapter are as follows:

1) The case studies analyzed in this chapter, as well as subsequent field research, demonstrate not only the growing interest in the history of Jewish communities in Bessarabia, but also the fundamental importance of microhistory as a method of researching and visualizing the past. Each case study provided us with a deeply human and detailed insight into Jewish life in different contexts – urban (Chișinău), rural (Vadul Rașcov), and diaspora (migration from Bessarabia) – complemented by recent discoveries from field research.

2) Field research on Jewish heritage in the Republic of Moldova has intensified in recent years, primarily through projects to map cemeteries and study Jewish necropolises. New discoveries between 2019 and 2022 have shed light on certain moments in the history of Jews in the Republic of Moldova. Each of these discoveries opens a new page in the history of the Jews of Bessarabia and gives impetus to new research, both historical and fieldwork, as well as cultural, ethnological, and epigraphic.

3) The study of Jewish community life in an urban setting – the city of Chișinău – using material provided by architects is confirmed by memoirs identified in interviews conducted by the German institute Centropa and supports the view that personal histories, memoirs, and oral history illustrate trends in historical development.

4) The case study on the rural area – the village of Vadul Rașcov – draws attention to the important role that Jews play in the economic and social life of a provincial market town. The fieldwork methodology allowed for the collection of a wide range of information, both through formal methods (questionnaires, observation) and through participatory approaches that facilitated the telling of authentic micro-stories.

5) The case studies and related activities reflect a model of applied research in which personal history, memoirs, oral history, fieldwork, archival research, and narrative interpretation are combined in a coherent and productive approach. They demonstrate that the past of Jewish communities in the Bessarabian space is not just a passive legacy, but a living heritage that deserves to be documented, transmitted, and integrated into public and educational discourse. The projects, implemented in cooperation with the Centropa Institute, confirm the effectiveness of international partnerships in promoting cultural heritage and highlight the role of oral history and memoir writing in complementing classical sources.

6) In addition to their historical, ethnological, and documentary value, the projects implemented have had a significant educational and social impact. These initiatives contribute to the formation of a culture of memory, to the fight against stereotypes and oblivion, while also strengthening a collective identity based on diversity and mutual respect. In a still sensitive regional context, where ethnic and religious coexistence is not always valued, popularizing the history of Jews in Bessarabia becomes a civic act, a form of education for tolerance, and a bridge between the past, present, and future.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research into the life of Jewish communities in Bessarabia has enabled a complex and integrated approach to the phenomenon, highlighting ethnological, historical, legal, economic, and cultural dimensions, emphasizing its relevance to anthropological studies, where aspects of daily life, interethnic relations, traditions, and collective memory are essential for understanding the evolution of a community. Multidisciplinary research has allowed the following final conclusions to be drawn regarding the ethnocultural aspects of Jewish communities:

The study has allowed us to outline a complex and nuanced picture of the process of formation, consolidation, and affirmation of Jewish identity in a geographical and historical context marked by political changes, migrations, and cultural interference. We note that, up to a certain point, the Jewish presence in Bessarabia was mentioned in most historical works rather as a fact, a recorded phenomenon, than as an active element of a complex social and cultural reality. Traditional historiography has treated the Jewish presence in Bessarabia in a mainly descriptive manner, through statistics, demographic data, and official documents, leaving the cultural and social reality of this community in the background. Jews are mentioned by chroniclers and historians (Cantemir, Neculce, Iorga, Nistor), but their presence is recorded more as a historical fact than as an active part of society. In this context, the present research has made a significant contribution, reconstructing the ethnological dimension of Jewish life: values and norms, everyday relationships, religious and cultural traditions, and forms of material culture. We conclude that Jews cannot be considered foreigners in Bessarabia, but rather an active and

adaptable group that contributed to shaping regional identity through their ability to integrate and interact with other communities. From an ethnological perspective, this contribution is fundamental, as it confirms the importance of studying interethnic relations and heritage. We conclude that Jews cannot be considered foreigners in Bessarabia, but rather an active and adaptable group that has contributed to shaping regional identity through its capacity for integration and interactions with other communities. From an ethnological perspective, this contribution is fundamental, as it confirms the importance of studying interethnic relations and common cultural heritage.

The role of historical, demographic, and legislative context in shaping the particularities of Jewish communities was highlighted. Analysis of data from the 1897 census confirms that Jews were the main urban minority in Bessarabia, accounting for over a third of the population in urban centers. This location was not accidental, but the result of both occupational specificity (trade, crafts, transport, liberal professions) and legislative constraints imposed by the Russian administration, which prohibited Jews from settling in rural areas and owning agricultural land. The evolution of Jewish communities thus reflects the tension between relative economic freedom in urban areas and legal marginalization imposed by the state.

Economically, the findings showed that Jews contributed decisively to the dynamics of Bessarabia's modernization: they introduced new business models, developed banking infrastructure and distribution networks, and invested in small industries and manufacturing. Education also played a central role, despite restrictions. The Jewish tradition of valuing learning led the community to create its own schools, support children's access to education, and promote a culture of study. Despite discrimination, Jews continued to be an active force, capable of adapting and innovating. From an ethnological perspective, it is clear that community identity cannot be separated from the historical and legislative context, and the way in which a community responds to external constraints is an indicator of its cultural resilience.

Microhistory and field research, two methodological approaches of great relevance to ethnology, were brought to the fore. The study of Jewish life in Chișinău showed that synagogues, schools, orphanages, and charitable organizations formed a well-articulated social and cultural system that integrated the community into the urban fabric. In Vadul Rașcov, the role of Jews in the economic development of the town was confirmed both by archives and by the testimonies of current residents.

Istoria familiei Barchmann, emigrată din Basarabia, a ilustrat dimensiunea emoțională a migrației, transformând statisticile reci în povești vii, exemplare pentru fenomenul mai larg al exodului evreiesc. În plus, descoperirile recente de pe teren – cimitire, pietre funerare, muzeul în aer liber de la Onițcani – au demonstrat valoarea patrimoniului material și importanța conservării sale. Ghidurile turistice multilingve, tururile audio și expozițiile au confirmat utilitatea socială a cercetării, transformând rezultatele științifice în instrumente educaționale și civice.

The study of Jewish communities in Bessarabia, conducted through an interdisciplinary historical and ethnological approach, sought to go beyond the descriptive level of traditional historiography and bring to the fore deeper dimensions of Jewish life: interethnic relations, tangible and intangible heritage, cultural and educational values, as

well as individual experiences that shape the historical phenomenon. The conclusions lead to several main ideas that define the place and role of Jewish communities in Bessarabia and, by extension, in Romania and Eastern Europe.

1. The Jewish communities of Bessarabia are a constituent element of local society. One of the key findings of the research is that Bessarabian Jews cannot be considered merely a passive minority, but rather a constituent factor of the local social organism. Their presence has been attested since the 15th–16th centuries, but the development of these communities experienced intense dynamics, especially after the annexation of Bessarabia by the Russian Empire (1812). The cities of Chișinău, Bălți, Soroca, and Cahul experienced rapid urban development thanks to the activity of Jews, who were merchants, craftsmen, doctors, and teachers. The cities of Chișinău, Bălți, Soroca, and Cahul experienced accelerated urban development thanks to the activity of Jews, who were merchants, craftsmen, doctors, lawyers, and community leaders.

Their status as the main urban ethnic minority, confirmed by the Russian census of 1897 (which indicated a share of over 37% of the urban population), but also by the Romanian census of 1930, shows that Jews were not a marginal group, but an integral part of urban society. Thus, the regional economy, commercial networks, and even certain banking and industrial infrastructures were based on their contribution. Therefore, the economic and cultural life of modern Bessarabia is inconceivable without the contribution of Jewish communities. Classical historiography (from Iorga and Arbure to Nistor) tended to present these communities as a statistical phenomenon, without insisting on everyday life and interactions. The present research has attempted to go beyond this framework, demonstrating that Jews were not tolerated strangers, but active participants in the life of Bessarabian society.

2. The dynamics of Jewish community life were influenced by internal and external factors and shaped by the interaction between internal factors (religious solidarity, cultural traditions, education, community cohesion) and external factors (legislation, discrimination, geopolitical changes). Internal factors were decisive for the resilience of communities. The Mosaic religion, community institutions (kahals), schools, and charitable organizations provided a framework for cohesion. Education played a central role—the tradition of providing children with the best possible education, even in conditions of persecution or marginalization, generated a cultural and professional elite with a visible impact on society.

However, external factors were decisive in shaping the collective trajectory. During the Tsarist period, the restrictive regime of the Zone of Residence, double taxation, and property restrictions led to the concentration of Jews in urban areas and their orientation towards trade and crafts. After 1918, integration into Romania opened up prospects for emancipation through the 1923 Constitution, but the nationalist and anti-Semitic climate of the 1930s undermined this process. Furthermore, contradictory legislation (legal equality on paper, but practical exclusion through decrees and citizenship reviews) created a permanent state of insecurity. This combination of factors generated an adaptable, resilient community, but one constantly confronted with the tension between integration and marginalization.

3. Another important result of the research is the revelation of the value of microhistory and oral history in understanding the Jewish experience. Case studies dedicated to Chișinău, Vadul Rașcov, and the migration of a Bessarabian Jewish family demonstrate that statistics only make sense when complemented by the voices of individuals.

Jewish Chișinău, with its synagogues, schools, and orphanages, but also through the stories of its former inhabitants, emerges as a living space of memory. Vadul Rașcov, a provincial market town dominated numerically by Jews at the beginning of the 20th century, shows how a small community can have a major economic and cultural influence. The story of the Barchmann family migrants, as told in the memoirs of Jacqueline Alÿs-Barchmann, confirms that major historical processes (exodus, diaspora) are shaped by the experiences of individuals. The story of the Barchmann family migrants, as told in the memoirs of Jacqueline Alÿs-Barchmann, confirms that major historical processes (exodus, diaspora) are better understood through individual destinies. Oral history, personal histories, and memoirs not only complement history, but also lend it legitimacy and depth. They make the experience of communities transmissible and intelligible to contemporary audiences.

4. Field research, supplemented by recent discoveries, has demonstrated the fragility but also the value of Bessarabia's Jewish heritage as an identity and civic resource of great importance to society. Abandoned synagogues, forgotten cemeteries, degraded funerary monuments, and disappearing oral traditions are testimonies that must be preserved. Initiatives such as the mapping of cemeteries, the open-air museum in Onițcani, and the multilingual tourist guides produced in collaboration with Centropa show that heritage can not only be documented, but also capitalized on by integrating it into the educational and tourist circuit. In this way, the memory of Jewish communities is not only recovered, but also transformed into a tool for promoting tolerance, mutual respect, and social cohesion. Preserving heritage is not exclusively a Jewish issue, but a collective responsibility, as this heritage reflects the history of interethnic coexistence and the contribution of Jews to regional identity.

5. Following the lengthy process of researching Jewish history and heritage, it has been demonstrated that an interdisciplinary approach could serve as a model for the study of other ethnic communities. The research has demonstrated the effectiveness of a methodology that combines historical analysis, ethnological interpretation, field research, microhistory, and oral history. This integrated approach provides a valid model not only for the study of Jews, but also for other ethnic communities in Romania and Eastern Europe. Applying the same methodology could reveal new dimensions of the Armenian, German, Bulgarian, or Gagauz communities in the region. Interdisciplinarity allows us to go beyond the limits of each discipline and gain a more complete perspective on the phenomena of coexistence and cultural interaction.

Overall, the research confirms that Bessarabian Jews were an integral part of local society, that their evolution was marked by the interaction between internal and external factors, that individual testimonies add value to the research, that Jewish cultural heritage must be preserved and valued, and that an interdisciplinary approach provides a solid methodological framework for the study of cultural diversity.

The work demonstrates that the history of Bessarabian Jews is not just a chapter in Jewish history, but an integral part of the history of Bessarabia and Eastern Europe. It has scientific, educational, and civic relevance, constituting a resource for promoting tolerance and building a collective memory based on diversity and mutual respect. In a context still marked by identity tensions, the study of Jewish communities in Bessarabia becomes an act of memory recovery, but also an instrument of civic and intercultural education, confirming the relevance and value of the research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the examination of Jewish communities in Bessarabia during the Tsarist and interwar periods from an ethnocultural perspective and based on the general conclusions outlined above, we offer the following theoretical and practical recommendations:

1. **Continuing interdisciplinary research** is essential because the study of Jewish communities in Bessarabia cannot be reduced to a single perspective, and the phenomenon is multi-layered and involves ethnological, historical, linguistic, religious, and socio-economic dimensions. The use of complementary methods – from documentary and archival analysis to field research, oral history interviews and visual anthropology methods – provides an accurate picture of reality. Extending research to Bessarabian localities that have been less studied to date will complete the picture and allow for the emergence of regional typologies of Jewish life. Comparing the situation of Jewish communities in Bessarabia with those in other regions of Eastern Europe will contribute to understanding the phenomenon in transnational contexts.

2. **Preservation of Jewish cultural heritage** left behind by Jewish communities—synagogues, cemeteries, funerary monuments, community buildings, and commercial spaces—bears witness to a long historical presence. Unfortunately, many of these sites are now in an advanced state of disrepair. Photographic documentation, mapping, and digitization are essential steps in saving the collective memory. Restoring them and including them in cultural circuits would not only increase the visibility of Jewish heritage, but could also contribute to the development of localities by attracting visitors. Intangible heritage: life stories, religious traditions, holiday customs, recipes—must be collected, archived, and made available to the general public, including through accessible digital platforms. This will build bridges between generations and ensure the transmission of universal cultural values.

3. The **educational and civic value** of research findings is fundamental to the integration of the history of Jews in Bessarabia into school and university curricula and is a prerequisite for building a balanced collective memory. The development of textbooks, teaching aids, and digital resources that include chapters dedicated to the presence of Jews in Bessarabia would help reduce stereotypes and prejudices. Extracurricular projects – thematic exhibitions, historical guides, interactive tours of former Jewish neighborhoods – can become effective educational tools for young people, stimulating understanding of diversity and cultivating mutual respect. Such initiatives also have a strong civic dimension, promoting the values of tolerance, intercultural dialogue, and social cohesion.

4. The promotion of **cultural tourism** can and must be achieved by using research results for the local development of cultural tourism. The organization of thematic routes – the Synagogue Road, Jewish Cemeteries in Bessarabia, Jewish Neighborhoods of Yesteryear – would create opportunities for heritage valorization and, at the same time, stimulate the economy of communities. The creation of local museums, traveling exhibitions, or cultural festivals dedicated to Jewish heritage would strengthen its visibility, attracting both researchers and the general public. Through such initiatives, historical memory is not only preserved but also transformed into a tool for sustainable development and the strengthening of local identity.

5. Strengthening **international cooperation** would be another essential direction, consisting of creating and consolidating partnerships with academic institutions, research centers, Jewish organizations, and international cultural foundations. These collaborations can provide financial resources, methodological expertise, and global visibility. Joint projects, international conferences, and academic exchanges would allow research on Bessarabia to be integrated into a broader comparative framework, revealing connections with other Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe. The involvement of international Jewish organizations could support both the documentation of heritage and the restoration of monuments or the publication of materials dedicated to Jewish memory.

The study of Jewish communities in Bessarabia is not limited to academic interest, but has profound social, educational, and cultural value. The recommendations made aim to strengthen scientific research through an interdisciplinary approach, but also to put the results to practical use for the benefit of communities by promoting heritage, civic education, and intercultural dialogue. By combining the scientific and practical dimensions, the preservation of Jewish memory and its transmission to future generations can be ensured.

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Adnotare

PALIHOVICI Iulii. „COMUNITĂȚILE EVREIEȘTI DIN BASARABIA. ASPECTE ETNOCULTURALE”. Teză de doctor în istorie, specialitatea 612.01 – *Etnologie*. Chișinău, 2025.

Structura tezei include introducere, trei capitole cu subcapitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografie cu 249 titluri, 150 de pagini de text de bază, și 4 anexe. Volumul total al tezei este de 222 de pagini. Rezultatele cercetării au fost publicate în 8 articole în reviste naționale, dintre care 7 articole indexate în baza SCOPUS, 2 articole în reviste internaționale, 3 comunicări la conferințe naționale și 8 rezumate ale conferințelor; rezultatele au fost susținute la 11 conferințe științifice.

Cuvinte-cheie: comunități evreiești, Basarabia, aspecte etnoculturale, legislație, migrație, ocupații tradiționale, epigrafică, istorie orală, istoria familiei, memorialistică, educație, cultură.

Scopul lucrării: cercetarea complexă a problemei comunităților evreiești din Basarabia în perioada țaristă și perioada interbelică prin prisma examinării multidisciplinare a componentelor etnoculturale, identificarea, analiza și interpretarea specificului comunităților evreiești ca forme distincte de organizare etnoculturală.

1Obiectivele cercetării: cercetarea și sistematizarea istoriografiei problemei, analiza surselor documentare cu privire la dezvoltarea comunităților evreiești din Basarabia sub aspect etnocultural; cercetarea comunităților evreiești prin intermediul aspectelor oferite de sursele legislative din perioada țaristă și perioada interbelică; stabilirea și examinarea ocupațiilor tradiționale ale evreilor și a organizării sociale în cele două perioade cronologice de dezvoltare supuse analizei; determinarea și identificarea rolului instituțiilor educaționale, religioase și culturale ale comunităților evreiești din Basarabia; valorificarea științifică a cercetărilor de teren desfășurate în localitățile unde a fost documentată prezența evreilor basarabeni; reflectarea multidimensională a comunităților evreiești din mediul urban, rural și diaspora sub aspect etnocultural; identificarea și examinarea epigrafiei evreiești ca sursă de studiu; evaluarea modului în care identitatea evreiască este conservată în spațiul public actual; propunerea unor modele concrete de reconstituire a identității etnoculturale, valorizarea patrimoniului etnocultural evreiesc.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică constau în utilizarea unor informații inedite obținute prin cercetări de teren, interviuri și surse orale, care aduc o perspectivă complexă asupra istoriei, culturii și spațiului locuit de evreii basarabeni. Pentru prima dată comunitățile evreiești din Basarabia în perioada țaristă și în perioada interbelică au fost examinate în complex, pentru a putea fi puse în evidență aspectele etnoculturale, sistemul legislativ, ocupațiile, instituțiile religioase și educaționale ale evreilor basarabeni.

Rezultatele obținute contribuie la conturarea unei imagini relevante asupra vieții comunităților evreiești din Basarabia în sec. XIX–XX, evidențiind dinamica socială, educațională și culturală, precum și interacțiunile interculturale cu populația majoritară.

Semnificația teoretică constă în aducerea unei contribuții importante la reconstruirea memoriei istorice și identitare a evreilor din Basarabia prin abordarea interdisciplinară și valorificarea complexă a surselor istorice, orale și materiale.

Valoarea aplicativă a tezei este reflectată în posibilitatea utilizării rezultatelor în elaborarea unor programe educaționale privind istoria, etnologia și cultura evreiască, precum și în proiecte muzeale și culturale menite să conserve și să promoveze patrimoniul cultural evreiesc din regiune.

Implementarea rezultatelor științifice s-a realizat prin diseminarea în cadrul conferințelor științifice naționale și internaționale, publicarea în reviste de specialitate și includerea unor fragmente în proiecte culturale: muzeul în aer liber *Istoria evreiască a Onițcanilor* (2022), dezvoltarea muzeului în aer liber *Cimitirul evreiesc din Chișinău*, ghiduri audio *Chișinău. Descoperă viața evreiască a Chișinăului* (2020), *Basarabia. Descoperiți viața evreiască din Basarabia* (2021); ghiduri *Jewish Cemeteries în the Classroom* (2020) *Catalogue of Best Practices for Jewish Cemetery Preservation* (2021), *Jewish Cemeteries and Tourism Development* (2022), *Jewish Cemeteries aș Visitor Destination* (2023).

Annotation

PALIHOVICI Iulii. „JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN BASARABIA. ETHNOCULTURAL ASPECTS”. PhD thesis in history, specialty 612.01 – *Ethnology*. Chișinău, 2025.

The structure of the thesis includes introduction, three chapters with sub-chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography with 249 titles, 150 pages of basic text, and three appendices. The total volume of the thesis is 222 pages. The research results have been published in 8 articles in national journals, of which 7 articles indexed in SCOPUS, 2 articles in international journals, 3 papers at national conferences and 8 conference abstracts; the results were presented at 11 scientific conferences.

Key words: Jewish communities, Basarabia, ethnocultural aspects, legislation, migration, traditional occupations, epigraphy, oral history, family history, memoirs, education, culture.

The aim of the paper: comprehensive research of the problem of Jewish communities in Basarabia in the Tsarist and interwar period through the multidisciplinary examination of ethnocultural components, identification, analysis and interpretation of the specifics of Jewish communities as distinct forms of ethnocultural organization.

2Research objectives: Research and systematization of the historiography of the problem, analysis of documentary sources on the development of Jewish communities in Basarabia from the ethnocultural aspect; research of Jewish communities through the aspects provided by the legislative sources of the tsarist and interwar periods; establishment and examination of traditional Jewish occupations and social organization in the two chronological periods of development under analysis; determination and identification of the role of educational, religious and cultural institutions of Jewish communities in Basarabia; the scientific valorization of the field researches carried out in the localities where the presence of Basarabian Jews was documented; the multidimensional reflection of the Jewish communities in urban, rural and diaspora environments from the ethnocultural aspect; identifying and examining Jewish epigraphy as a source of study; the evaluation of the way in which the Jewish identity is preserved in the current public space; the proposal of concrete models of reconstitution of the ethnocultural identity, the valorization of the Jewish ethnocultural heritage.

The novelty and originality of the research consist in the use of previously unpublished information obtained through field research, interviews and oral sources, which provide a complex perspective on the history, culture and space inhabited by Basarabian Jews. For the first time, the Jewish communities in Basarabia during the Tsarist and interwar periods have been examined in a comprehensive manner in order to highlight the ethnocultural aspects, the legal system, occupations, religious and educational institutions of Basarabian Jews.

The results obtained contribute to the development of a relevant picture of the life of Jewish communities in Basarabia in the sec. XIX-XX, highlighting the social, educational and cultural dynamics, as well as intercultural interactions with the majority population.

The theoretical significance consists in making an important contribution to the reconstruction of the historical memory and identity of the Jews of Basarabia through an interdisciplinary approach and the complex utilization of historical, oral and material sources.

The applied value of the thesis is reflected in the possibility of using the results in the development of educational programs on Jewish history, ethnology and culture, as well as in museum and cultural projects aimed at preserving and promoting Jewish cultural heritage in the region.

The implementation of scientific results was achieved through dissemination at national and international scientific conferences, publication in specialized journals and the inclusion of fragments in cultural projects: the open-air museum *The Jewish History of the Oniţcani* (2022), the development of the open-air museum *Jewish Cemetery in Chișinău*, printed and audio guides *Chișinău. Discover the Jewish Life of Chișinău* (2020), *Basarabia. Discover Jewish Life in Basarabia* (2021); *Jewish Cemeteries in the Classroom* (2020), *Catalog of Best Practices for Jewish Cemetery Preservation* (2021), *Jewish Cemeteries and Tourism Development* (2022), *Jewish Cemeteries as Visitor Destination* (2023).

Аннотация

ПАЛИХОВИЧ Юлий. „ЕВРЕЙСКИЕ ОБЩИНЫ В БЕССАРАБИИ. ЭТНОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ”.

Докторская диссертация по истории, специальность 612.01 - *Этнология*. Кишинев, 2025.

Структура диссертации включает введение, три главы с подглавами, общие выводы и рекомендации, библиографию из 249 наименований, 150 страниц основного текста и три приложения. Общий объем диссертации составляет 222 страницы. Результаты исследования опубликованы в 8 статьях в национальных журналах (в т.ч. 7 в SCOPUS), 2 статьях в международных журналах, 3 статьях в сборниках материалов национальных конференций и 8 тезисах докладов на конференциях; результаты работы были представлены на 11 научных конференциях.

Ключевые слова: еврейские общины, Бессарабия, этнокультурные аспекты, законодательство, миграция, традиционные занятия, эпиграфика, устная история, семейная история, мемуары, образование, культура.

Цель работы: комплексное исследование еврейских общин Бессарабии в царский и межвоенный периоды через междисциплинарное рассмотрение этнокультурных компонентов, выявление, анализ и интерпретацию специфики еврейских общин как отдельных форм этнокультурной организации.

3Задачи исследования: изучение и систематизация историографии проблемы, анализ документальных источников о еврейских общинах Бессарабии в этнокультурном аспекте; исследование еврейских общин через анализ законодательных актов царского и межвоенного периодов; установление и изучение традиционных еврейских занятий и социальной организации в анализируемые периоды; определение и выявление роли образовательных, религиозных и культурных учреждений для еврейских общин Бессарабии; интерпретация полевых исследований в населенных пунктах с историческим присутствием евреев; многомерное отражение еврейских общин в городской, сельской и диаспоральной среде в этнокультурном аспекте; выявление и изучение еврейской эпиграфики как источника исследования; оценка способов сохранения еврейской идентичности в современном публичном пространстве; предложение конкретных моделей реконструкции этнокультурной идентичности, еврейского этнокультурного наследия.

Новизна и оригинальность исследования заключается в использовании неопубликованной информации, полученной в ходе полевых исследований, интервью и устных источников, которые дают комплексное представление об истории, культуре и пространстве, населенном бессарабскими евреями. Впервые комплексно рассмотрены еврейские общины Бессарабии в царский и межвоенный периоды с целью освещения этнокультурных аспектов, правовой системы, занятий, религиозных и образовательных учреждений бессарабских евреев.

Полученные результаты способствуют воссозданию картины жизни еврейских общин Бессарабии в XIX – сер. XX вв, освещая социальную, образовательную и культурную динамику, а также межкультурное взаимодействие.

Теоретическая значимость работы заключается в реконструкции исторической памяти и идентичности евреев Бессарабии на основе междисциплинарного подхода и комплексного исследования исторических, устных и материальных источников.

Прикладное значение диссертации выражается в возможности использования полученных результатов при разработке образовательных программ по еврейской истории, этнологии и культуре, а также в музейных и культурных проектах, направленных на сохранение и популяризацию еврейского культурного наследия в регионе.

Внедрение научных результатов включало доклады на национальных и международных научных конференциях, публикации в специализированных журналах и участие в культурных проектах: музей под открытым небом *Еврейская история Оницкан* (2022), музей под открытым небом *Кишинёвское еврейское кладбище*, аудиогиды *Кишинев. Откройте для себя еврейскую жизнь Кишинева* (2020), *Бессарабия. Откройте для себя еврейскую жизнь Бессарабии* (2021); проекты *Еврейские кладбища в учебных пособиях* (2020), *Каталог лучших практик по сохранению еврейских кладбищ* (2021), *Еврейские кладбища и развитие туризма* (2022), *Еврейские кладбища как объект посещения* (2023).

PALIHOVICI Iulii

JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF BESSARABIA: ETHNOCULTURAL ASPECTS

SPECIALTY: 612.01 – ETHNOLOGY

PhD in history thesis abstract

Approved for printing September 29, 2025 Paper size 60×84 1/16

Offset paper. Offset printing. Print run: 15 copies.

Printing sheets: 2.8 Order no.

Centrul Editorial-Poligrafic al USM

Str. Al. Mateevici, 60, Chișinău, MD-2009