

## JEWISH AND ARMENIAN POPULATION AT THE BASE OF IASI COUNTY DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** *Through this article I try to highlight the importance of Jewish and Armenian population which contributed to the development of Iasi County. They were a numerous population some centuries ago, contributing to commerce, being known as good merchants. Commerce was the base for establishing trade relations with foreign countries, therefore Armenians and Jewish helped in territorial and economic development of Iasi County. Also, they built churches, synagogues and schools for their community. Due to hard times, wars, discrimination, they had to leave the country for a better life, thus, their number decreased. As it is seen in the graphic and cartographic representations, the Jewish population decreased from 45,372 Jewish, in 1930, up to 257 Jewish, in 2011. As for the Armenian population, they decreased from 100 Armenian, in 1930, up to 14 Armenian, in 2011. Nowadays, they are not as numerous as they used to be, but they try to raise their visibility at local level through events on various occasions. I took into consideration the 1930-2011 censuses data from the National Institute of Statistics to observe the evolution of these two populations in Iasi County and how they diminished in time.*

**Keywords:** Jewish; Armenian; development; Iasi

**JEL Classification:** Z12; Z13

### Introduction

It is a well-known fact that many Jewish and Armenians were part of Iasi County many years ago. In 1776, when Ghica Voda was a ruler, there were listed guilds of craftsmen and tradesmen in the capital of Moldova, highlighting the Jewish and Armenian guilds. There are not historical sources to tell us from what times they established in Iasi, but from Ionita Sturza Voda time, the Jewish population seems to be more compact. Regarding the Jewish population in Iasi, there is evidence (due to fiscal reasons) that in 1755, there were registered a number of 60 Jews, while in 1774 there were registered 171 Jews. It is recorded that in 1803 there were 367 families of Jews, and another source mentions that in 1838, there were 6178 Jews living in Iasi (Cihodaru, Platon, 1980). After Bogdan (1997), in 1899 the Jews represented 50% of the Iasi County population, while 45.5% were orthodox and 4.5% were of other religions. In 1901, in “Marele dictionar geografic al Romaniei”, it was presented statistical data which showed that in Iasi County, there were 24,087 Romanians and 33,141 Jewish (Lahovari, 1901).

The Jews had occupations like selling trinkets, food and clothing, but also inkeeping, as well as money and commodities speculation. During the rule of Mihai Sturza, the Jewish population started to occupy the whole commercial area, and they become bankers, house owners and tenants of estates

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(Bogdan, 1997). In the 17th century they even had their own butchery. In the 18th century it is mentioned the existence of a Jewish public bath. In the Sarata suburb, in current Targu Cucu area, there was also a Jewish Synagogue. The Jewish population had a separate tax regime and they performed their duties to the “IRS” in a different manner (Cihodaru, Platon, 1980). All industrial and merchant occupations from Iasi, in the 19th century, passed into the hands of Jews. Because of this, there were always conflicts between Jews and local people (Bogdan, 1997). The Administrative State of Moldova, imposed in 1843 a law which stipulated that any Jew who had an occupation, business or assets should receive an identity ticket for the rest of his life. In 1871, it was founded the Reunion of Israeli Women which opened a school for women. In 1872, there was also founded a theatre entitled “La Pomul Verde”, but, after a while, the theatre caught fire, which nowadays is marked by an obelisk (Mitican, 2005). Mitican (2005) presents to us in his research a fragment from *Gazeta Moldovei* in which there were reported statistical data from 1904 about merchants and small industrialists in Iasi County, respectively: 1907 Jews and 174 Romanians. Braunstein (2003) presented similar statistics, which shows that in 1941 there were 3229 Jewish businesses, 1045 Romanian businesses and 71 of other nationalities.

After Cihodaru and Platon (1980), the Armenian people came around the 14th century and formed a settlement around a street called *Armeneasca*, near their current Armenian church. In the 18th century there was an Armenian elementary school, probably near the church. Bogdan (1997), in his research, presents us a census made in 1889 in which Armenians accounted for 136 people (64 men and 72 women).

The Armenian population was known as merchants, their occupations being diverse, such as: grocers, merchants of manufactured goods, drapers, importers of oriental objects, silversmiths etc. Iutis (2014) presents their economic activities, the majority consisting of bow making and trading, but they were also priests, deacons etc. In his opinion, they were a strong community, because they were shopkeepers, they had vineyards and cellars. They had some control over the trade market, having competitors like Turkish, Greeks, Jews, etc. After a while, they occupied jobs like owners of coffee shops, tailors, shoemakers, bakers etc. They had a whole neighbourhood between *Golia* and *Sfantul Sava Church*, *Royal Court* and *Beilic*, but also near *Calcaina creek*. They also had a cemetery in *Ticau* area, around 1830, but their current cemetery and a chapel are near *Spital Pascanu* area. They were not kindly seen by local people because of their religion (Bogdan, 1997).

Nowadays, the strongest evidence regarding the existence of the Armenian population is the Armenian Church “*Sfanta Maria*”, which was built in 1395, fact that is demonstrated by the date engraved into the stone which is situated above the church door (Balinisteanu, 2008). There was also

another church called “Grigore Luminatorul” around 1600, but eventually it was left in ruins in 1860 (Bogdan, 1997).

### 1. Method and Methodology

As methods of research, the current study was based on the following: analysing bibliographical resources, meetings with officials from Jewish and Armenian Community in Iasi, using as a qualitative research method the interview, which took into consideration the history of these minorities (in May 2015). Also, I used 1930-2011 census data concerning the religious and ethnic structure of the population in Iasi County, from National Institute of Statistics.

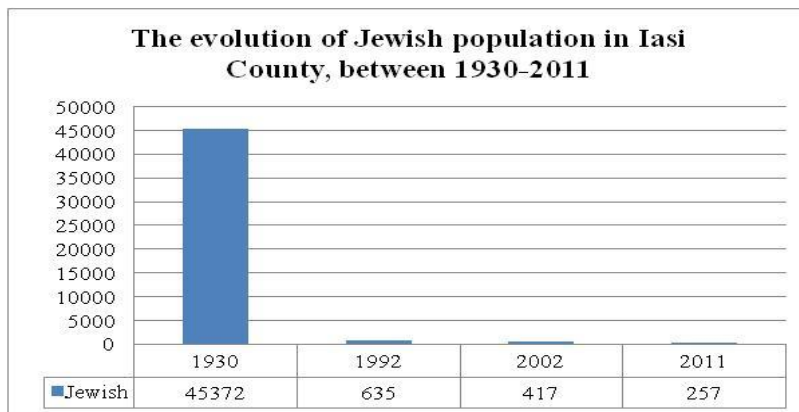
I did a dynamic analysis, trying to observe the evolution of these two populations, comparing the statistical data from 1930 census with the statistical data from 2011 census. The statistical data was processed in Microsoft Excel and Philcarto and afterward represented in graphics and cartographical materials regarding the evolution in time of Armenians and Jewish, but also their territorial distribution in Iasi County.

### 2. The evolution of Jewish and Armenian population in Iasi County, between 1930 and 2011

In this section of the research paper I will present the evolution of these 2 populations, which contributed to the development of Iasi County centuries ago, bringing their abilities of good merchants and traders to the benefit of our county’s economic progress.

#### 2.1. The evolution of Jewish population

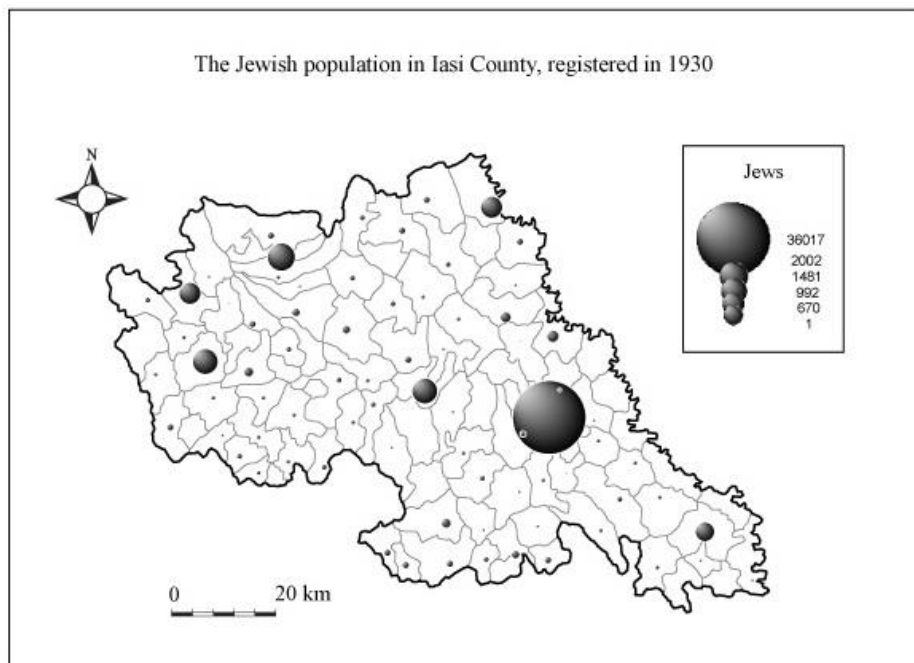
**Figure 1 – The evolution of Jewish population in Iasi County, between 1930 and 2011**



Source: National Institute of Statistics

As we can see in figure 1, the Jewish population was numerous in 1930, compared to 2011. If in 1930 there were 45,372 Jewish people, now there are only 257 people. Yet, after an interview held at the Jewish Community Centre of Iasi, in May 2015, they declared that there are 333 people in their community. It is easily noticeable the fact that in time, the Jewish population has met a significant decrease. This decrease may be due to World War II, when many of them decided to leave Romania, being affected by a wave of emigration (Mitican, 2005), or because of the pogrom.

**Figure 2 – The territorial distribution of Jewish population in Iasi County, registered in 1930**



Source: National Institute of Statistics

As it is presented in figure 2, in 1930, the most Jews were in Iasi City (36,017 Jews), followed by Harlau City (2,002 Jews), Podu Iloaiei City (1,601 Jews), Pascani City (1481 Jews) and Lespezi (1,049 Jews). In the rest of the county their numbers varied, from 992 Jewish in Bivolari, to 1 Jewish registered in Birnova. There were also regions where there are no registered Jews, like Goliaesti, Grozesti, Letcani, and Madarjac, etc. It is obvious that in 1930 the Jewish population was very present, representing 11% of the religious structure of the population in Iasi County.

**Table 1 – The territorial distribution of Jewish population in Iasi County, registered in 2011**

Area	Number of Jewish
Iasi City	249
Harlau City	3

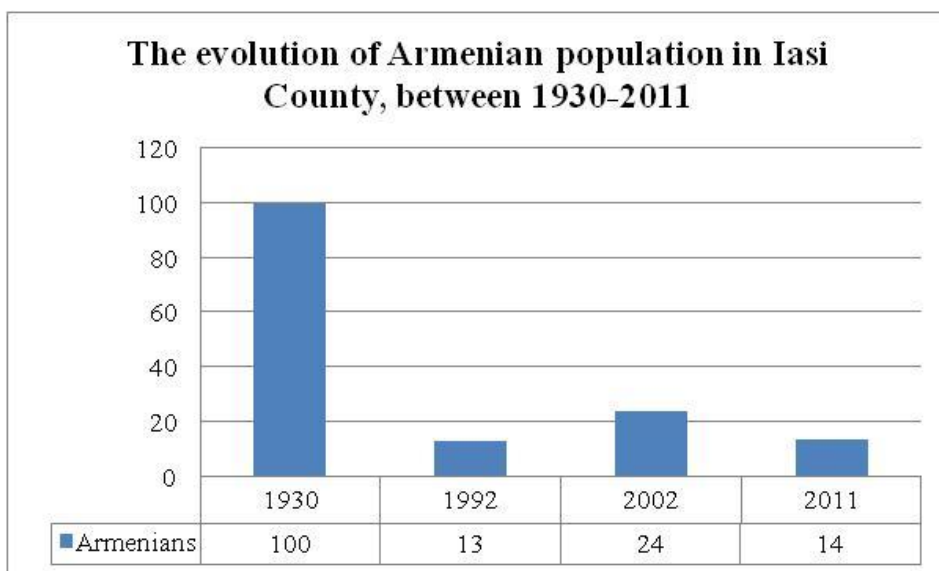
Pascani City	1
Podu Iloaiei City	3
Miroslava	1

Source: National Institute of Statistics

Nowadays, there are only 5 areas where we can find Jewish people, many of them being concentrated in the cities, mostly in Iasi, with a population of 249 Jewish. Even though there are not so many, they are a very active community, organizing and participating in all kinds of events, trying to preserve the spirit of Jewish culture and traditions in Iasi City.

**2.2. The evolution of Armenian population**

**Figure 3 – The evolution of Armenian population in Iasi County, between 1930 and 2011**



Source: National Institute of Statistics

From figure 3 we can observe that the Armenian population was not as numerous as the Jewish one in 1930. There were only 100 Armenians in 1930, while nowadays there are 14, as is it shown by the National Institute of Statistics data. This high decrease was surely due to World War II and by the waves of emigration.

**Table 2 -The territorial distribution of Armenian population in Iasi County, registered in 1930 and 2011**

Area	Number of Armenians (1930)	Area	Number of Armenians (2011)
Iasi City	98	Iasi City	12
Helesteni	1	Barnova	2
Strunga	1	-	-

Source: National Institute of Statistics

It is obvious from Table 2 that most of the Armenian population is concentrated in Iasi City in both cases, respectively, in 1930 there were 98 Armenians, while in 2011 there were only 12. In 1930 there were only 2 isolated Armenians in the rest of the Iasi County, 1 in Helesteni and 1 in Strunga, while in 2011 there are also 2 Armenians, both in Barnova according to the National Institute of Statistics data. Nevertheless, after an interview held at the Armenian Community from Iasi, in May 2015, they estimated a number of around 30 Armenian families living in Iasi County.

### Conclusions

In both cases, there is a discrepancy regarding the statistical data presented by the National Institute of Statistics and the ones presented by the Jewish and Armenian Communities. Nevertheless, the most important conclusion is that both of these communities are present in Iasi County by: organising various events and contests, developing partnerships with other institutions, trying to preserve the minorities in the region, raising their visibility at local level, as well as promoting their history and importance in the evolution and development of Iasi County.

Even if they are not so many as there were in the past, the present counts more through their actions and we have to understand their massive contribution to the development of, not only our county, but also of our country. As we know from our historians, they were good merchants, practicing trade with other countries, but also importing other goods in our country. It is a known fact that commerce helped in setting relations with foreign countries, but also to the economic development of cities and regions.

I presented only a few of the synagogues, Jewish schools, other organizations, and a short representation of the Jewish and Armenian community in Iasi County, but it would be necessary a deeper analysis, conducted for a longer period of time in this kind of research, as it is important to

know a part of our city history, as well as the manner in which the communities contributed economically to the development of our county.

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